EDITORIAL.

Good News for The Adirondacks

The June issue of a scientific journal called Environmental Science and Technology carries an article by the Darrin Fresh Water Institute's Sandra Nierzwicki-Bauer and Chuck Boylen about their long term study of the affects of acid rain on Adirondack lakes. Researchers have long known that acid rain can severely decrease the diversity of plant and animal communities in fresh water lakes and ponds. However, little was known about how microscopic bacteria, which form the foundation of freshwater ecosystems, respond to acidification. The Bolton Landing-based researchers evaluated acidity in 30 Adirondack lakes in order to determine how air pollution affects the fish, bacteria, phytoplankton and other aquatic life. They found a general link between increased acidity and decreased bacterial diversity. The researchers determined that a drop in one unit of pH corresponds with a loss of approximately four fish and plant species. Surprisingly to some, the researchers also found that lakes can start to recover as industrial emissions are reduced. That's why a recent announcement that the US Environmental Protection Agency has issued a new Clean Air Interstate Rule requiring deep cuts in sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxides from electric power plants in 31 midwestern states is such good news. According to the Adirondack Council, "these cuts are deep enough to halt most of the damage acid rain is causing in the Adirondack Park." The lakes studied by the researchers from the Darrin Fresh Water Institute have become less acidic as a result of the emission reductions mandated by the Clean Air Act. In at least one lake, fish have been re-introduced. As the full affects of the new rules are felt, we may see those fish mature and reproduce. That would be a 21st century Adirondack recovery; one as historically important as the reforestation of the park in the 19th and 20th centuries. Anyone who cares about the park should join the Adirondack Council in thanking the Obama Administration for advancing the new rules.

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Established 1880

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Published Weekly In Summer, Monthly Off-Season

Lake George Mirror • Lake Shore Drive
P.O.Box 589
Lake George,NY 12845
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www.lakegeorgemirror.com

Learning About the Japanese Tub Boat from Vermont Boat Builder Douglas Brooks

By Anthony F. Hall

Wooden boat builders are carpenters with degrees in philosophy. Douglas Brooks, who was the featured presenter last week at the Regional Boatbuilders Exhibit and Lecture Series at Hall's Boat Corp, might not take exception to that glib characterization, since he spoke (incomprehensibly, to me) about boat building techniques, tools and materials, but engagingly about the cultural context of the traditional skills he's mastered.

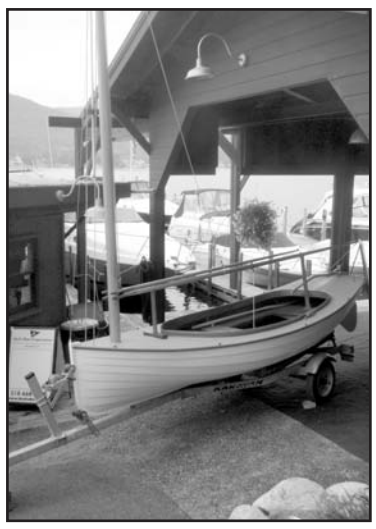
A graduate of Trinity College, Hartford, (where, in fact, he received a degree in philosophy) Brooks attended Williams-Mystic, the maritime studies program conducted by Williams College and Mystic Seaport, as well as the University of Oregon. Those interludes led him, serendipitously, to become the world's foremost authority on the taraibune, the tub-shaped vessel indigenous to an island in the Sea of Japan.

Ostensibly, though, Brooks came to Lake George from his home and shop in Vergennes, Vermont, to talk about the Rushton catboat he built for a client in New Hampshire.

Brooks described the boat, which was on display at Hall's from July 9 through 28, as "a husky rowboat."

Its hull is similar to a whitehall, the workhorse of 19th century rowboats.

His clients, Brooks said, wanted a boat that could be sailed in light winds but rowed when necessary.



He found the solution in a 1903 catalogue from the Canton, NY boat shop of J. H. Rushton, best known for his sailing canoes.

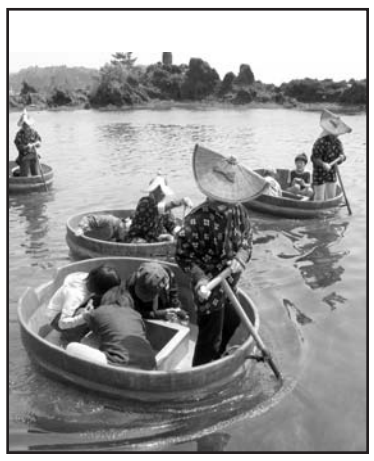
"I have no idea if his company ever built this particular design," said Brooks. "But I was convinced that this would be a forgiving sailboat that could also be comfortably rowed when the wind died: a perfect compromise."

The lapstrake boat is planked with marine plywood. Brooks glued the laps with epoxy to provide a stiff and watertight hull. Brooks covered the deck, which is also made from marine plywood, with a fabric called dynel which he said is a close approximation of the canvas 19th century builders used to cover canoes. To give the boat a more traditional appearance, he added steam bent locust frames. The spars are native Vermont spruce, while the thwarts, centerboard trunk and cockpit coaming are of Honduras mahogany.

"While using modern building techniques, I worked really hard to make the boat look old," he said.

The Rushton catboat, with sails and oars, can be purchased from Brooks for $18,000. He also makes a replica of a 19th century St. Lawrence skiff for $7,500.

Turning occasionally from the power point presentation on tools and glues, Brooks narrated the odyssey that took him from Hartford to the west coast, from the west coast to Japan and at last to the



Champlain Valley.

Travelling through Japan at the invitation of a friend he had met at the University of Oregon, he came upon a magazine photo of a woman paddling the tub boat, and made his way to the island where they were made and still used by fishermen.

After several visits, he was invited to become the first apprentice of the last man still building the boats. Upon his death, Brooks completed the master's unfinished boat, the only living boatbuilder capable of doing so.

In 1999, he began working with the Kodo Cultural Foundation to train successors and built two boats with a local carpenter. The foundation published Brooks' book, The Tub Boats of Sado Island; A Japanese Craftsman's Methods in English and Japanese, in 2003.

Thanks to the Vermont boatbuilder, the boat will remain a vital part of the island's social life and economy, rather than a museum piece.

Douglas Brooks, Cynde Smith, Reuben Smith, Nick Lamando