

The making of a Currach – a Celtic traditional skin boat

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Introduction..... 2
Making the frame 2
Coating the frame and its initial use..... 4
Postskript..... 5

Introduction

I have learnt quite a bit from the last currach/coracle/bullboat I made. On that one I did a lot of mistakes, most of which I managed to avoid this time. The website of [Boyne currach centre](#) also gave me a lot of inspiration.

First of all, what you need to get is a cow hide (or some other large animal). Making the frame takes about 1 day, but dehairing the hide in a stream takes substantially longer.

Making the frame

The frame is started by sticking a circle or semicircle of an equal number of rowan rods into the ground. They don't need to sit deep, but they should preferably be stuck to an angle outwards.



Figure 1: Starting the frame as a circle of rowan rods stuck to an angle outward

Next you start a special type of weaving where you bring in one and one rod so you get a type of diagonally overlapping weave. The Boyne currach site explains it better.



Figure 2: Weaving rods as a diagonally overlapping weave

The secondary weaving is done in the ordinary fashion with one round at the time before starting an opposite one.



Figure 3: A rope was used to keep the weaving tight during construction

Bend the withies down and pull 2 and 2 over each other. This will give the boat a slightly more rectangular or square appearance in the end. Tie the crosspoints with strong cordage or leather. There was in my case no need for it to be weighed down for the recommended 10 days.



Figure 4: Tying the withies together with leather straps

Coating the frame and its initial use

Take the dehaired hide and stretch it gently on. Use the longer parts, the legs and such for rope and tie it to the frame. I didn't bother to cut the protruding points and they made it easier to tie the hide to the frame.



Figure 5: The frame is coated by a raw cow hide without hairs



The currach ended up quite big and very stable. Here is a photo of two of the viking volunteers, Brage (14) and Gaute (12), rowing the currach with oars.

Postskript

The currach was made as an happening at Lofotr Viking Museum. Afterwards it was tied up with a string in he harbour next to the viking ships. It immediately became popular among the visiting kids . The currach was also adopted by local church. Celtic Christian spirutiallity is a topic by the reverent Frode Wigum in Borge kirke. Once a year he conduct a Celtic mass in the chefdom hall at the museum. The currach is used to illustrate how celtic monks spred early Christianity to Atlantic shores, and there is some more plans to use it further (moncks arriving in the currach at the Viking festival etc.). Misonay moncks was transported in skin boats by the currents and stranded ashore by the will of Good. The norske men might have experienced the currach some time during the Viking Age, however we have no archaeological prof what so ever of any currach use in Norway at the time.