

....and Sometimes They Even Named Their Boats: an epilogue

One of the most rewarding aspects of researching and writing these articles for the DLIA web site has been the feedback, as readers' memories are jogged and further anecdotal accounts are offered, as was most recently illustrated in the following description of a steel-hulled rowboat found and brought back to useful life by Mark Paddock's son Todd nearly 40 years ago.

In Part II of the "Even Named Their Boats" series, the tale of a steel-hulled rowboat belonging to the Paton family was recounted. According to the history, that boat, named "Mike," was given over to Harold Brill for disposal after it had become too rusted and had reached the end of its useful life. The ultimate fate of "Mike" was not known, however.

In his letter, Mark Paddock wondered if perhaps the "rumor" of "Mike's" demise might have been a tad premature:

"In about 1973 our son Todd, then in his early teens and an avid fisherman was without a row boat of his own. One day he came to me and told of a seemingly abandoned row boat stranded on shore near Sedge Point. We kept an eye on it for a week or two and no one claimed it. So we went there together and looked it over. After inspection, it was obvious why it was abandoned with no identification. It was ugly! A steel hull painted and repainted several times, the latest was green. The wood was rotting and it was really, really heavy, maybe 250-300 pounds. But it could be rowed after you overcame the inertia of all that weight and it did not leak. So Todd had his fishing boat. He named it "Bjorn" and used it regularly through his junior high, senior high, undergraduate and graduate school days when at the Biological Station."

Son Todd's account provides some additional details:

"I know we found it in North Fishtail Bay, but I am not sure whether it was at East Point, Hook Point, or Sedge Point.

One thing I do remember: it was indeed ugly when we found it! It was half-submerged, rotting wood, and multiple coats of paint that had cracked, blistered, peeled, and chipped and were painted over again. In addition, it did leak, but you simply had to bail it out once in a while. I was thrilled to have it!

I'm sure it was a true home-made boat. It was made of very heavy steel with wood gunwhales, had steel floatation tanks

with riveted and welded seams fitted in the bow and stern, lapped wooden decks over them, a heavy wood center seat, and a steel triangle welded over the front with a roller-wheel for the anchor rope. As dad said, it was very heavy (I'm sure it weighed 300 lbs and perhaps 350) and thus slow to get going with oars, but once going it stayed true to its course and seemed to row fairly easily. It was also very stable; one person could stand in the bow platform and the other in the stern platform and heave lures with almost no rocking. We used it for thousands of hours and liked it a lot.

It was actually painted blue when we found it. But after two seasons of use, a friend and I (with dad's help, I am sure) pulled it up on sawhorses, scraped and wire brushed off as much paint as we could, replaced the stern platform and most of the gunwhales, and painted the body with dark green, glossy marine paint and the gunwhales white. That's when we chose and stenciled on the name "Bjorn". The boat looked much better --- but we never did eliminate the leak."

And for roughly 15 additional years, the "Bjorn" plied the waters of Douglas Lake. Eventually, however, it needed to be reconditioned once again, and Todd didn't know of anyone willing to take it over. Todd's father Mark reveals the ultimate fate of the "Bjorn":

"Finally, about 1990 "Bjorn" was in terrible condition and even Todd, who could see little wrong with his boat, agreed to an honorable and appropriate death. We towed it out to the deepest part of South Fishtail Bay, let it fill with water and it sank quickly into 80 feet of Douglas Lake."

So were "Mike" and "Bjorn" one and the same boat? Possibly, maybe even probably. But whatever their actual relationship, the mystery merely adds to the rich history of Douglas Lake. Thank you Mark and Todd for sharing this story with us.