

Re: Kensington runestone in the Scandinavian press

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- *From:* Tom McDonald <tmcdonald2672@xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx>
 - *Date:* Sat, 11 Jun 2005 21:41:45 -0500
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cgjt wrote:

"Eric Stevens" <eric.stevens@xxxxxxxxxx> skrev i meddelandet
news:v15ialt2gschh5o0si27iqd4jc0epct4pf@xxxxxxxxxx

On Fri, 10 Jun 2005 05:27:07 +0200, Erik Hammerstad
<egeha.is.all.you.need@xxxxxxxxxx> wrote:

Eric Stevens wrote:

<snip>

They could easily have built their own boats. There are precedents for this.

Not easily and not shortly. And where and when sre the precedents?

I don't know about the norse but there are a number of examples around my part of the world ranging from sealers building small ships in case their mother ship came back to pick them up, ship wrecked dailors building both small craft and ships of 50'. An old man I knew, when he was young at the end of the 19th century, built a small boat every two weeks with his brother. These were 12' to 20' long and were used for fishing and general transport around the sounds on the South Island of New Zealand.

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Well, this may not be Norse but sure once used by the Norse during their trips to the East.

<http://www.qnet.fi/rus-project/Monoxyla.html>

And regarding the time to build one I may quote from:

<http://www.abo.fi/skargarden/2003-3/ruukel.htm>

' I byn Töramaa bodde de berömda äspingsmakarbröderna Aleksander och Jüri Olev, som ofta tingades till andra gårdar för att bygga äsping och som under goda år hann med 30 stycken, alla enligt sitt kännpaka vackra snitt. Bröderna Olevs äspingar var berömda för sin lätthet.'

Shortly, it say that two skilled brothers made 30 boats during a good year.

So with an axe to fell the tree, an adze to dig out the trunk, a drill and fire and water a few men can have a boat within a week or two.

The idea of expedient small river craft makes sense to me. However, if we are talking about area around the Nelson and Hayes Rivers, I wonder what would be available to make them. From the story on the stone, they did not dismantle their ship. A look at this map shows the northern limit of forest trees in the area in 1906, a period warmer than the mid-1300's:

<http://tinyurl.com/czd41>

The trees with northern limits close to the lower Nelson and Hayes rivers are:

Thuja occidentalis white cedar

Images of T. occidentalis:

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<http://tinyurl.com/bexet>

Populus balsamifera balsam poplar

Images of P. balsamifera:

<http://tinyurl.com/a4k8g> (site is in French)

Populus tremuloides aspen

Images of P. tremuloides:

<http://tinyurl.com/ayswt>

Betula papyrifera canoe birch

Images of Betula papyrifera:

<http://tinyurl.com/9nuu8>

P. banksiana Banksian pine

Images of Pinus banksiana:

<http://tinyurl.com/99ct9>

Abies balsamea balsam pine

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Images of Abies balsamea:

<http://tinyurl.com/828uk>

One needs to keep in mind that the form of the trees found that far north is likely to be quite stunted, and therefore one probably ought not judge the available wood from the larger, more southern versions of the trees.

None of these trees, IMHO, would have been likely sources of material for dugout canoes due to the relatively large size needed for such canoes. I have helped make, and have paddled, dugouts, and they are much trickier to make than merely burning and/or carving out all the bits that aren't a canoe.

The 'canoe birch' or paper birch might have worked to make canoes, if the Norse knew how to make the frames, harvest the bark, sew the bark together and then on to the frame, and pitch the seams. However, IMHO, the likely size of the paper birch available would be too small to make very good canoe material. The quality of the bark for canoe-making depends a great deal on the span of bark without knots or branches. Stunted trees, ISTM, would not be very useful on that basis.

In addition, harvesting the bark is not something that can be done easily (as would be necessary, one might imagine, for beginners such as the Norse) at just any time of year. In the cold weather, it breaks easily; in summer, it holds very tightly to the wood and tends to tear when trying to work the wooden spud under it to 'skin' it. Only in the spring, when the sap is running, is it relatively easy to remove the bark.

Here is a link to studies of northern hemisphere climate studies for the last 1000 years, including a graph showing temperatures adduced by various studies. Older studies are in blue; newer studies are in red. Studies in the last ca. century and a half are in black:

<http://tinyurl.com/cqzvn>

From the graph, it appears that the 1906 study of northern limits of forest trees is likely to show trees somewhat north of their 14th century limits. IOW, using the 1906 map to estimate the kinds of trees available to notional Norse small boat makers is being very, very generous.

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Tom McDonald

<http://ahwhatdoiknow.blogspot.com/>

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