

[Traditional Sailing Vessels around the Globe](#) Click the link for the you tube slides/video shows

March 7, 2011

Since setting sail, in 2005, on a sailing Circumnavigation from the US West Coast I have photographed and gathered information in a number of countries of their traditional sailing crafts.

1. VIETNAM- Basket Boats, *GheThùng Chài*, *Mandboot*, *Bateau Panier*, *Korbboot*



2. MADAGASCAR- Dhows and Outrigger Canoes



3. HOLLAND- the Working Boats and Traditional Yachts of the Zuider Zee



4. CROATIA: The Galeta Falkusa. Traditional Lateen rigged sail fishing boat from Dalmatian Islands and coast.



1) VIETNAM

The below is an article that I wrote last year in Vietnam and I had hoped to be considered for publication in, the most appropriate venue, Wooden Boat Magazine. But I ended up a month late and a dollar short to an excellent article on woven boats by Ken Preston that was published in the Sept/Oct 2010 issue.

Please, go to : <http://www.BoatsAndRice.com> for his story.

But instead of pouting about it I hope that you will enjoy my contribution. It covers aspects that were not covered in Ken's article and, vice versa, his article covers aspects of Vietnam's crafts that I have not covered.

First see the You Tube video-slide show at: [Traditional Sailing around the Globe](#)

Nhatrang, Vietnam

February 28, 2010

The winter monsoon trade wind is blowing into my beachfront hotel room. Hon Tre Island is off in the distance. A few fishermen are sculling their basket boats to the lobster traps.

This is my third visit to Vietnam. My love affair with this part of Asia started already in 1961 when I ended up living for a year and a half of my army draft in Saigon. In 2006 I made a stop in Hai Phong, Danang and Nhatrang on my around the world single handed voyage aboard my 30 foot Mahogany plywood sailboat. The difficulty in leaving the boat at a moorage, because of the bureaucracy here, made it impossible to see more of Vietnam. I decided to fly back for a closer look. There is no other country that I can think of that has more wooden boats than Vietnam. I have yet to see a fishing boat or river barge less than 40 foot in lengths built in anything other than wood. From the first time that I saw the Basket Boats along the Vietnam coast and in the harbors I have been intrigued by these unusual crafts.

BAMBOO BOATS

Yesterday, I finally managed to witness how the basket boats are made. Little is written about them in other than Vietnamese and French.

Moses was put up for adoption down the Nile in a basket boat. The Welsh Coracle and the Kouffa on the Tigris in Iraq are of a very similar vintage, design and application.

It is difficult to think of another truly renewable resource than Bamboo for boat building. This has been the material of choice for thousands of years in this country and it has not been challenged yet by any other material for most boats under 12 feet. Until about 60 years ago they used woven bamboo hulls for crafts like the "Ghe Nang" a three masted sailing vessels as long as 37 foot long, 11 foot beam. Instead of ballast these boats were outfitted with an 18 foot long 1 foot wide balance board supporting two or three crew members to keep the very light and nimble craft upright in upwind sailing. The below the water line hull was made of woven bamboo and planked in wood above the waterline. In his excellent book, "Voiliers d'Indochine", J.B. Piétri describes another 4 types of similar larger boats, from different parts of Vietnam. Made in all or part with a woven bamboo hull. This book was published in 1944 and is no longer in print. I am using some of Piétri's facts in this article. Other than the circular shaped basket boats I am showing pictures of a few other bamboo woven hulls commonly seen here. First of all a canoe type, approximately 12 foot long three foot beam with a raised bow that is used for inshore fishing, paddled or rowed, particularly on the central coast near Nhatrang and occasionally seen with a Marconi type mainsail. In Ha Long Bay I saw many small woven bamboo hull boats with inboard diesel engines, roughly 16 x 5 foot. On the Central and North Vietnamese rivers a very low draft low freeboard woven bamboo rowboat is used. The one big advantage that bamboo has over wood is that it is resistant to Teredo or similar salt water marine borers.

How do you make a bamboo boat watertight? I have watched the process now for new basket boats and also the regular maintenance coating. The outside and inside

are coated with a mixture of cow dung, water, resin and used motor oil. Leaving a transparent rough thick finish that resembles varnish. For maintenance the interiors are recoated with a similar concoction but the under waterline of the exterior is recoated with hot tar. I am not aware of any basket boats in the Mekong Delta. All that I have seen there on several visits are wood planked boats.

BASKET BOATS *GheThùng Chài*

I had never dreamed that I would ever see a boat without a stern or a bow. Everyone's first reaction to observing this unusual shape serving as a boat is that it must be hard to move in a straight line. But just like the Irish and Welsh in their Coracles they are usually sculled and for shorter distances paddled with a short oar or paddle.

The main use for the basket boats are to be brought along aboard the sea going trawlers and seiners to set nets out and also to fish from with jigs and poles. I saw some of the boats go out with as many as 10 of the larger size; stacked two high. The smaller ones are used for close to shore fishing and to go back and forth to the many fish, lobster and crab traps and as dinghies to get from the anchorage to shore. The diameters vary between 150 and 240 cms (5 foot and 8'), the depth is approximately 35 to 40 cms. (14 to 16 inches). Some of the larger sizes have an extra bamboo reinforcement framework; these retail in Nhatrang for around \$ 50.00. I was surprised to learn that the basket boats are not made in or near Nhatrang which has one of the largest fishing fleets on the coast, but in a smaller village about 90 miles north of Nha Trang. I took a train to Tuy Hoa, a coastal fishing and agricultural town, then the public bus for the last 20 miles to Tuy An. Right along the river where the bamboo grows I found two shops in the process of making the basket boats. The first one was making the smallest size and the other a larger one. The process is fairly simple. The bamboo is split and cut to precise dimensions. A large circular bamboo mat is woven. Then the mat is laid in a form dug in the earth and the rim is attached with heavy nylon fishing line. The nylon string is probably the only concession to the materials used over the last centuries.

WOODEN BOAT BUILDING

The common off shore fishing vessel compares with the European fishing boats of the early 20th century. They vary from 40 to 60 feet in length. But the sterns are wider and higher and the house takes up more space than the European fishing vessels because they carry whole families plus help. The catch is kept on ice in their deep holds. The inshore vessels are anywhere from 25 to 35 feet and they are built in a number of traditional uniform models.

The hulls are nearly all painted in blue with red trim with an occasional light green hull. Blue is the color of Independence and Red brings Good Luck There is one particular attractive 25 foot model with the hull finished in clear oil.

And then there are the evil eyes staring at you from the bow on the river barges. The Buddhist fishermen have a small altar in the bow with fresh flowers and I witnessed a young crew member, on his way out of Danang, waving his incense sticks on the bow and tearing up colored paper and throwing it into the bay followed with a hand full of rice, to assure the aid of his Gods to return safely with an ample catch.

The predominant specie of wood used in boatbuilding in Vietnam is **Dao** (Dipterocarpus) known in the trade in the Philippines as Apitong, from Malaysia as Keruing, in Thailand as Yang. It is strong and durable and (still) comes in long lengths. The domestic Dao was also planted by the French as shade trees in Saigon as well as exotic species like Honduras Mahogany and genuine Teak. But little of

those 100 year plus majestic shade trees remain in Saigon. Progress has converted the old colonial home sites with large gardens and magnificent trees into high rise office buildings and hotels. The former French botanical gardens are still a very worthwhile visit in Saigon and Hanoi. Yesterday, in the relatively back- country town of Tuy Hoa, I hiked up to the ancient Cham ruin and the gardens leading up to the hill top still had their trees and palms identified with the Vietnamese and Latin botanical names.

The progress that I have witnessed in the intervals of the three visits is dazzling and I wonder how many more years they will be able to afford wooden boats when their labor costs will follow the same trend as other developing Asian nations. When I sailed through the fishing fleets most fishermen had never seen another sail boat. Would I be a double anomaly the next time I sail the coast of Vietnam on a wooden sailboat?

For additional stories and slide shows about my 1 ½ years in Vietnam as a US Army private from end 1961 to 1963 and my visit on "Fleetwood" in 2006 and my winter 2009-2010 road trip of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia go to item 6) on my web site index or directly to: http://www.cometosea.us/?page_id=89

2) MADAGASCAR

I arrived here on my circumnavigation in October 2006. This is the perfect backdrop to stage a movie taking place at the turn of the 20th century.

Because little has changed since. The vintage automobiles could be compared to Havana but instead of Fords, Chevies and Chryslers they are 1960 era Renaults, Peugeot and Citroens. But the mode of transport along the coasts of Madagascar has not advanced much since the 19th century.

If the Vietnamese have rarely seen a boat under sail, the Malagashe have rarely seen an engine powered coastal trader or fishing boat.

Madagascar is one of the last corners of the world where sail is nearly exclusively the propulsion for fishing boats and coastal trading vessels.

There is a good reason for it. The country ranks 143 out of 179 on the world's income level. Or roughly in the lowest 20%.

The other reason is that the currents and wind direction make ideal conditions, especially for the fishermen to use sails.

In the early morning a long procession of Lateen rigged outrigger sailing canoes left Mahajanga a west coast port where I was anchored, propelled by a steady land wind and an outgoing current, in the late afternoon they all came back from their off shore fishing grounds on a westerly sea breeze and the flood tide.

They all walked their large lateen sails forward around the short mast to jibe near the spot where I was anchored. The trading vessels also used these steady and predictable winds in their large shallow draft broad beamed lateen rigged Dhows and the French inspired wooden twin masted cutters and schooners. They had no auxiliary power.

For my travel log of the visit to Madagascar go to: www.cometosea.us/albums/log-Madagascar.htm

3) HOLLAND

"Fleetwood" spent two years in Holland; from August 2009. I sailed back in to my roots. My grandfather made his living from the traditional sailing barges.

I have no narrative to give you, just a slide show in the above you tube albums, including a video of a windy day race in traditional Bidders in 2012.

You can read all about the Dutch visit in the blogs posted on my web site in the 2009/2010 period at www.cometosea.us

And do not forget to visit the web page for the “**Groote Beer**”. The Dutch Botter yacht, supposedly built for Herman Goering in the 2nd world war at www.cometosea.us/albums/GrooteBeer.htm

The “Groote Beer” became well known in the USA during her stay from 1953 till 2002 on both coasts. She is back in Holland where she underwent a thorough restoration at the Nieuwboer Botter yard in Holland. An article, I wrote, about the yard and the restoration appeared in the 2012 [Sept/Oct Wooden Boat Magazine](#)



Groote Beer in the USA in 1953 (picture taken by Stanley Rosenfeld). All other photographs are the property of Jack van Ommen.

4) CROATIA: Galeta Falkusa

A revival in replica building of the traditional lateen rigged fishing sail boat. See my blogs for my sail and observance of the start of the annual race at:

<https://cometosea.us/?p=3005>

And <https://cometosea.us/?p=2989>

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