

The Story Of A View, A Vision And A Venture

“The George Dyson Story” by John Doerksen, February 12th, 1998.

One of Belcarra’s most exciting and enterprising young adventurers around 1972 was George Dyson. At the age of sixteen he arrived at the Belcarra Bay area and promptly built a tiny temporary home for himself.

What an unusual home it was! Ninety feet up among the branches of a huge Douglas fir his “Tree-house” boasted a tiny wood stove for heat and cooking, a cot shorter than he was tall, and a small desk displaying two jars, one for flowers, the other for pencils.

Supplies were pulled-up by rope. His stairway was the branches of the tree which he climbed as nimbly as the flying squirrels and baby raccoons which he pestered unmercifully. Along with some scrounged windows and hardware the total cost of his unique dwelling was a bit over \$12.00.

George sought privacy, for he had a specific plan on which he focused unwaveringly. It ran no parallel with the plans of his father, Freeman Dyson the renowned physicist involved in space programs. The life-styles and aspirations of these two men, father and son, could not have been further apart.

It was in Belcarra, not Cape Canaveral, that George’s plans would take shape. In an old shed open to the weather his hands would produce the sleek smooth lines of his first kayak.



George Dyson's Baidarkas – Belcarra Bay

George was fascinated by the light, fast kayaks used by the Aleuts and Eskimos for hunting. The history of these little boats went back over several centuries. Built of skins stretched taut over thin strips of wood and bone, they performed perfectly but seldom lasted longer than a few seasons.

He learned that in 1799 the Russians had enslaved hundreds of Aleuts and a fleet of five hundred of these kayaks, called baidarkas by the Russians. In a few years the Russian 'Barnanof' and his Aleut slaves almost wiped-out the entire population of sea otters along the West Coast, from Alaska to San Francisco.

As the tree-house swayed in the wind, George continued to plan. The kayak must be light enough to be wind-driven or carried when desired; fast, to speed over rushing tides and currents. It must be strong, yet flexible to withstand variable tensile and compressive stresses. It must also stand the test of time.

A delightful book entitled "The Starship and the Canoe" by author Kenneth Brower refers to the space ships envisioned and designed by George's father, Freeman Dyson. The Canoe portion describes the wonderful adventures of George and his friends kayaking up and down British Columbia's scenic coastline in George's ensuing creations, kayaks with stations for multiple paddlers.

The Pacific coast, from Alert Bay to the southern tip of Vancouver Island, wherever George beached his kayak, was now his extended home. Visiting outlying camps and fishing villages often camping out alone, George found the harvest of forest and sea rich and plentiful enough to feed himself. Mother Nature was his supermarket.



The Mount Fairweather – George Dyson's 48-Foot Baidarka

From these humble beginnings new designs took shape: 16, 28 and 31-foot modes. Then came his ultimate 'Baidarka', the 48-foot *Mount Fairweather*, with stations for six paddlers, launched at Belcarra Park on June 21st, 1975. This rather cumbersome craft was later fitted with outriggers, a tiller and a one-piece sail.

Since then George Dyson moved to Bellingham, Washington, where he began his latest venture, a business called *Dyson, Baidarka and Company*. His revolutionary designs and kits for do-it-yourselfers have become increasingly popular. Local kayakers refer proudly to their crafts as being of "Dyson Design."

From a tiny perch atop a swaying fir tree, a young man with a vision breathed new life into an old concept. The vision has turned into a venture and a product enjoyed by many who love the stillness and solitude of the outdoors.

Editors Note:

Next time you walk the *Admiralty Point Trail*, pause a moment where you see the old "Bole" house. From the right vantage point you can still make out the tree house. It can also be seen from seaside. At the time of this writing (1998), several baidarkas rest on supports near the main house.