

FOLBOT KAYAK *ESCALANTE*
Grand Canyon Boats
Grand Canyon National Park
Grand Canyon Village
Coconino County
Arizona

HAER AZ-83
HAER AZ-83

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

FIELD RECORDS

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

FOLBOT KAYAK *ESCALANTE*

HAER No. AZ-83

Location: Grand Canyon National Park, Grand Canyon vicinity, Coconino County, Arizona

Folbot Kayak *Escalante* is located at latitude: 36.050189, longitude: -112.132891. The point represents the building housing the Grand Canyon National Park Museum Collection. It was obtained from Google Earth on April 22, 2021, and there is no restriction on its release to the public.

Date of Construction: Prior to 1941

Builder: Folbot Company, Charleston, South Carolina. Established by Jakob Kissner in Long Island City, New York, in 1935 and then moved to Charleston, South Carolina, in 1953, Folbot was known for its portable and folding kayaks. The company suspended operations in 2016 as part of a restructuring but as of 2021 had not resumed business.¹

Original Owner: Alexander E. “Zee” Grant, Jr.

Present Owner: National Park Service

Significance: Alexander E. “Zee” Grant, Jr. successfully ran his Folbot Kayak *Escalante* on the Colorado River from Lees Ferry to Diamond Creek through the Grand Canyon in July 1941. *Escalante* was the first kayak to complete the trip.

Description: Folbot Kayak *Escalante* is 16'-8 ⁵/₈" long with a 2'-9 ⁵/₈" beam; it weighs 60 pounds.² Custom built by Folbot Company to Grant’s specifications, it consists of a collapsible wood frame with rubberized fabric stretched over it. The design included sponsons allegedly made from New York City bus inner tubes that could be attached to the sides by canvas straps for the extra stability needed in the rapids of the Colorado River. Unlike modern kayaks, *Escalante* does not have a seat for the paddler, nor was it designed for the paddler to be able to brace themselves in the event the kayak flipped. The spare wooden paddle is extant.³

¹ “Folbot Shuttters Doors,” *Men’s Journal*, online <https://www.mensjournal.com/adventure/folbot-shuttters-doors/>, accessed April 2021.

² Folbot Kayak *Escalante* has been accessioned as Catalog Number GRCA 7604.

³ Tom Martin, “Chapter 8 1941 Escalante Kayak,” on Vimeo: <https://vimeo.com/489887672>, accessed April 2021.

History:

Alexander E. “Zee” Grant, Jr. of Dedham, Massachusetts, accompanied Norman Nevills and his two cataract boats, *Wen* and *Mexican Hat II*, on a run of the Colorado River from Lee’s Ferry to Diamond Creek from July 5-31, 1941. Grant was known as probably the best foldboat pilot in the United States at that time. The expedition was notable as the first time a kayak ran through the canyon, although Grant did have to portage around some of the larger rapids. In order to provide additional buoyancy, Grant filled the kayak with beach balls and attached sponsons. The trip was captured in an article entitled “Riding the Rapids of the Grand Canyon” by Weldon F. Heald and in “The Colorado Is Still Wild” published in the *Sierra Club Bulletin* of August 1942.⁴

The Utah Parks Association, who operated the North Rim Lodge at the time, had *Escalante* on display. At some point, the association decided to dispose of it. Gerald Terry, a National Park Service maintenance employee, found the kayak in a dump and alerted park staff. The kayak was stored in the attic of the Old Warehouse on the South Rim until December 2003 when it was moved, with assistance from Western Archeological and Conservation Center (WACC) conservator Brynn Bender, to the Science Center Warehouse for conservation as part of the “Save Our Boats” historic boat conservation project. Between October 2008 and December 2013, the boat was in storage at the Maintenance Warehouse. It was then moved as part of the park’s collection of historic boats to a new storage area in the Powell Building.

Sources:

The report is based on information from the Grand Canyon Museum Collection and the following additional sources.

“Folbot Shuttters Doors.” *Men’s Journal*. Available online at <https://www.mensjournal.com/adventure/folbot-shuttters-doors/>, accessed April 2021.

Martin, Thomas. “Chapter 8 1941 Escalante Kayak.” Available on Vimeo: <https://vimeo.com/489887672>, accessed April 2021.

Webb, Roy, ed. *High, Wide and Handsome: The River Journals of Norman D. Nevills*. Logan: Utah State University, 2005.

⁴ Roy Webb, ed., *High, Wide and Handsome: The River Journals of Norman D. Nevills* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2005), 273-274; Martin, “Chapter 8 1941 Escalante Kayak.”

**Project
Information:**

Folbot Kayak *Escalante* was documented as part of the Historic American Engineering Record's Maritime Recording Program. The Historic American Engineering Record (HAER) is part of Heritage Documentation Programs, a division of the National Park Service. Todd Croteau, HAER Architect, served as project manager. Ryan Pierce produced the measured drawings in 2012. Grand Canyon National Park staff provided written information for the historical report, which was formatted by Justine Christianson, HAER Historian, in 2021.

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Photos were taken in the collections warehouse at the park.

INDEX TO BLACK AND WHITE PHOTOGRAPHS

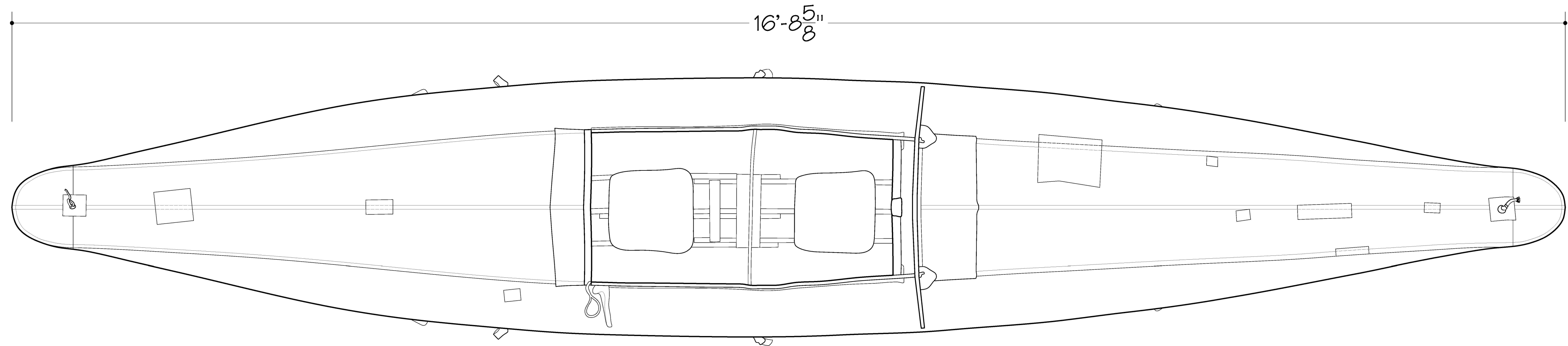
Michael C Quinn, photographer, 2012

AZ-83-1	Starboard side view.
AZ-83-2	Port side view.
AZ-83-3	3/4 view from the bow looking astern along the starboard side.
AZ-83-4	3/4 view from astern looking forward along the port side.
AZ-83-5	Detail of cockpit framing and sponson straps on the side.
AZ-83-6	Detail of cockpit framing.

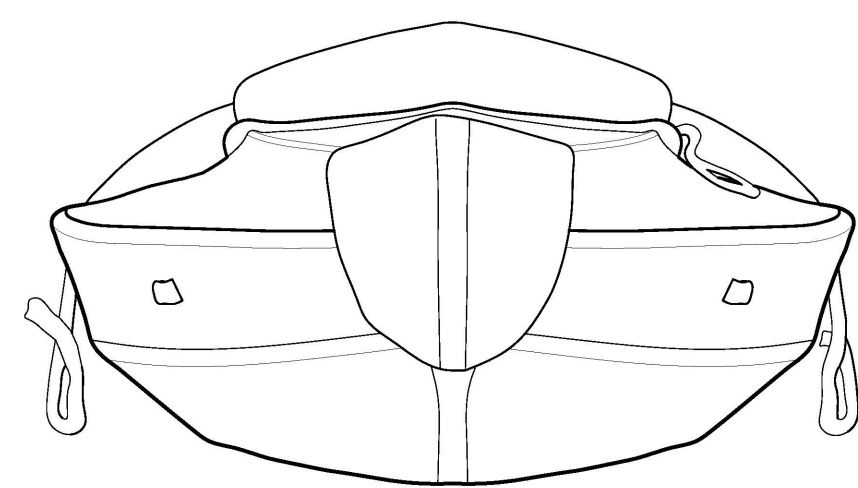
Folbot Kayak *Escalante*

Colorado River Boat

Plan/Elevations

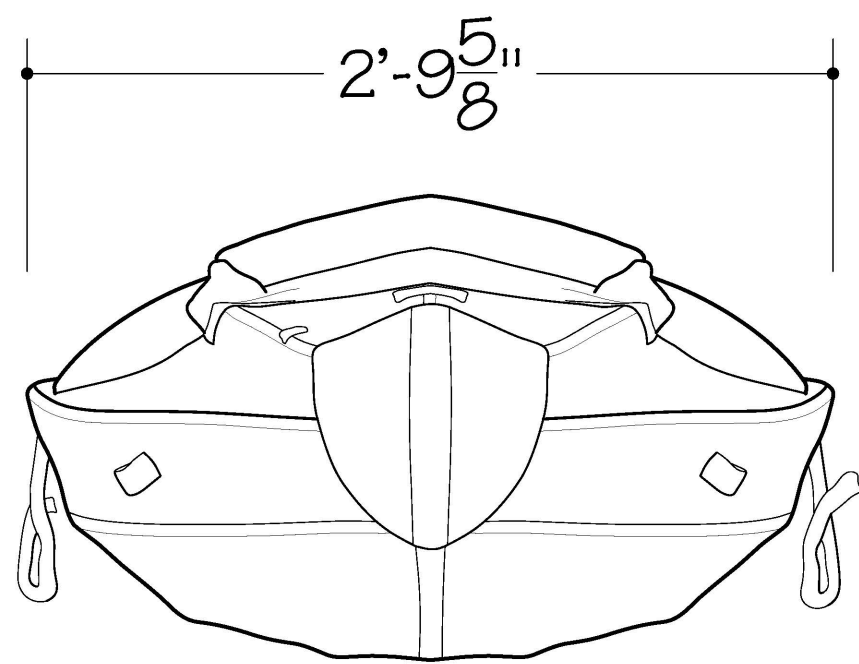


Plan

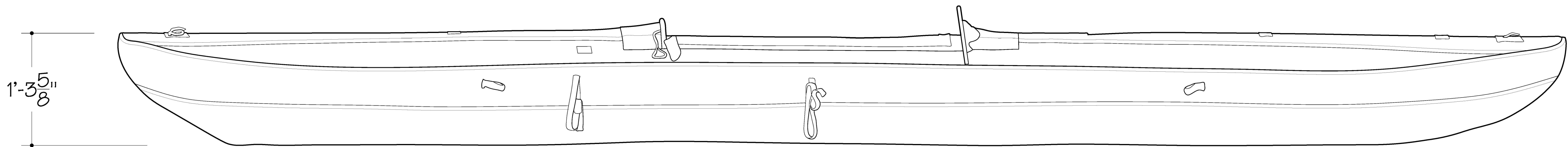


Stern Elevation

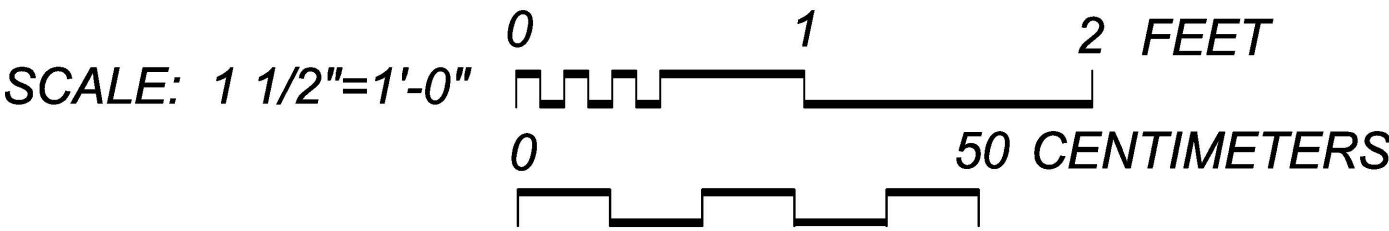
Canvas straps for
Sponson attachments



Bow Elevation



Starboard Elevation

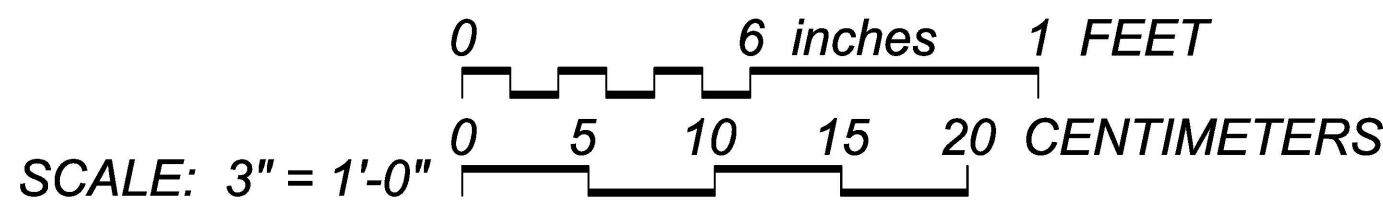
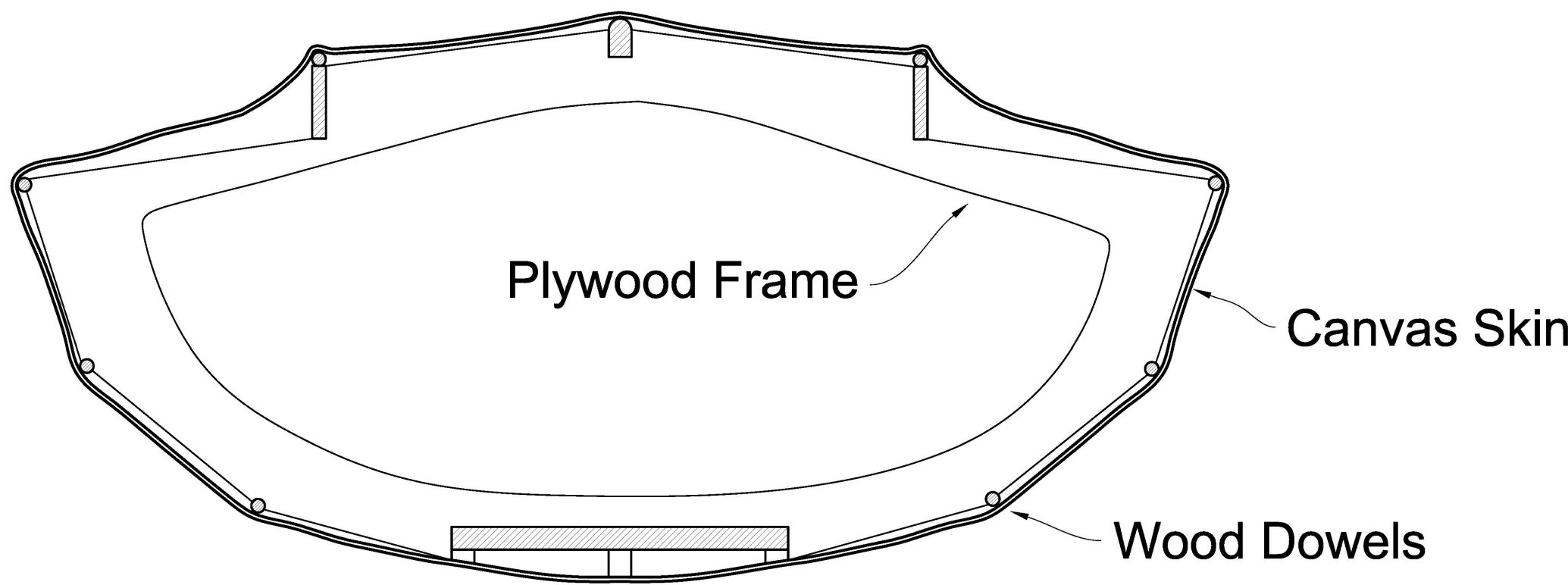
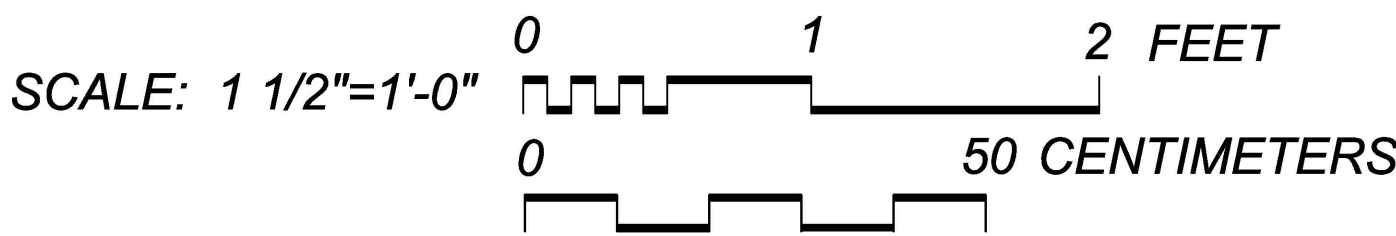
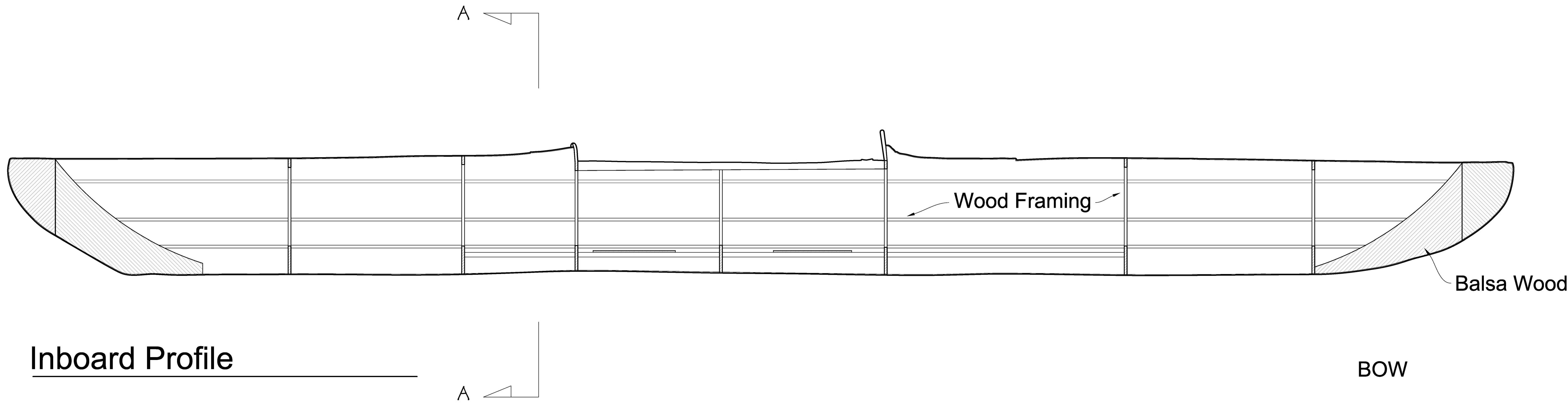


Note: The boat is constructed of canvas fabric over a wood framework and has been drawn based on existing conditions with deformations.

Folbot Kayak *Escalante*

Colorado River Boat

Inboard Profile/Section



Note: The boat is constructed of canvas fabric over a wood framework and has been drawn based on existing conditions with deformations.

