

**NOW in its sixth year!**

# KIDSMODEL

## *boat building*

by ROBERT AYLIFFE

Some days I think 30 years of involvement with small boats really has been a waste of life. Making toys for people, or, helping people make their own toys.

**W**hile others quietly occupy themselves as carers, medical researchers, fire-fighters ambulance drivers, cleaners, nurses, refugee advocates, volunteers. Truly useful people.

Around the end of May I was asked by the very brave Show Society's Judith Noble to 'do something interactive' in the 'Old Ram Pavilion' at the annual nine day Adelaide Show.

Friends provided numerous suggestions, most of which were unsuitable.

I had seen a kids model boat-building program in America, at the Port Townsend Wooden Boat Festival in 2006.

A whole pile of pre-made small hulls, and an even bigger pile of boat building accoutrements was on

offer, along with tables, chairs, hammers drills string rubber bands, sailcloth and more.

It was a right shebang, hammers thwacking away, parents and kids scrabbling for a piece of the action on each of the tables for pretty much all of the festival.

I recall thinking that that all seemed a bit of fun.

Judith liked the look, as well.

All slightly anarchic. Perfect.

I admit to not really having the time, and I admit to being worried whether other people would be as interested in it as my brilliant helper, Steve Davis, and I, had become. However I was seduced by the possibility, enhanced by meeting some of the other denizens of the shed. It did look like fun.

We had Phillipe Patacca put his new CNC cutter to the task of cutting out several hundred nifty hull shapes, a cross between Iain Oughtred's Eun Mara, or Commodore Monroe's 'Egret'.

(Imagination essential)

Then the acquisition of a zillion cut up bits of dowel for masts, hectares of sailcloth supplied by

Kids building boats in Port Townsend, 2006. (far right)

The great Deep in full Flight. (right)



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Binks and Alleghayter in Adelaide, rolls of contact coloured material from SignCraft and Kruger Signs.

In anticipation of many launchings, the good folk at 'Compass Tanks' in Mt Compass in South Australia (phone 08 8556 8544) provided us with an excellent low tank, soon to be known as 'The Great Deep'.

Judith had wangled several very sturdy old trestle tables, and 40 chairs. Anticipating a bit of a rush, and in fear of the load of nine 10 hour days on the trot, we had constructed a roster of kind friends. First of these on the scene were Trevor and Jenny Twigden from the South Australian Wooden Boat Association, and in far away Loganholme BoatCraft Pacific's Ian Phillips had caught the bug, and he was on his way to Adelaide to help us out too.

Thanks to all of you.

'Showtime' arrived with the terrifying speed of all things we think we can put off worrying about for a few weeks, and pretty soon Steve and I were unloading our stuff into the wondrous, history steeped 'Old Ram Pavilion'.

Steve had everything laid out on the tables. Japanese saws, racks of precut dowels. Packs of glue. String. Wire staples.

The backdrop was kindly provided by an excellent display by Rob Hylton of 'Clayton Bay Escapes', a wonderful low impact, low pressure sailing school set in the 'Norfolk Broads' of South Australia, the sheltered, gentle Alexandrina Waterways around Clayton Bay between Lake Alexandrina and the Coorong.

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Peter Furze had loaned us his gorgeous pocket cruiser 'Wee Seal', Ian McDonald had his big dinghy 'Shearwater' and Goolwa's Jesse and Mel Wagner completed the Arthur Ransome's ambience with their jewel like small boats.

The Old Ram Shed had become a real boat yard.

For the first hour people came through and looked at our nicely set up tables.

A couple of show staff wandered through. The cold feeling of unfolding embarrassment. Nothing happening.

Then it exploded. The first family stopped and bought their kit and started building. Suddenly all the tables were full, the staccato of hammering, the buzz of sharing tools, the creation of boats. Steve and the team were bouncing from table to table, making sure all was well. Within the first hour we had the first launching. We had a hunting horn which was blown each time a kid or family group finished heir boat, dozens of passers by would gather around the tank, we did speeches, we took photographs. The kids lowered their boats into the 'great deep' to much cheering and clapping.

We did this for EVERY launching.

After the launch, and ceremony the proud new builders were asked if they wanted to carry their new boat around while they went on the rides, or



Then it exploded! (above)

Steve's amazing table organisation. The training of the master chef is never forgotten. (below)

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would they like to leave them on the 'Great Wall of Honour', the capacious deck of the Wee Seal for all the other kids to see and collect them before heading home.

Oh, the Great wall Of Honour, please!

The rush never really stopped. Ian thought he was coming down to flog BoatCast Pacific products. He spent pretty much his whole time behind a bench, assembling model packs, from daylight to dark. A huge thankyou (not for the first time) to Ian for his generosity.

In the process, however, he just may have made



Volunteer Stuart helps kids building in front of 'The Great Wall of Honour'.

even more friends for his brand.

By the end of the third day we had run out of kits, and even though we could see it coming, we had to really twist poor Philippe's arms to get more cut and freighted overnight from Melbourne, and to get some cut at short notice locally at Lasercut Solutions. (Thanks Gary and Scott).

I think it was the fourth day. Can't remember who suggested it. Probably Steve. We stood back from the mayhem and looked over the tables.

There were maybe 20 families working away on their boats. Hammering, passing tools to other groups. Very small people holding and using cordless drills with amazing dexterity. It's quite



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Ian Phillips prepares another kit ... what a trouper!

hard drilling into dowel and these kids were doing it pretty much first time every time.

Girls and boys.

Amongst them were people from Indonesia with hijabs, a family alongside them recently arrived from China alongside them a family from Iran in traditional dress, a family of farming people from Keith and a family of Sikh people on the opposite side of the table.

Some of them shared amazing stories. Including stories of the boats.

What really was surprised us was the numbers who seemed to stay all day, seemingly forgetting about the hoopla and glittering rides out side. The pleasure of taking home something that they had made, instead of a bag of goodies simply bought. It also said something pretty nice about the parents who were happy to stay with them.

One young man (let's call him Anthony, not his real name), about 11, had a really special story.

He came in rather nervously asking, if he too could build a boat. He was obviously overweight, seemed very self conscious. His big gruff father told anyone who would listen that his son was hopeless and they were 'wasting their time here'.



The speed with which very young people got the hang of hand and small power tools amazed us all.



Kids Boat Building, 2011, Adelaide Show. Snapshot of modern Australia!

The mother and son seemed somewhat crushed, but persisted. Anthony started in on his first nail. Missed. The father said, told you so. The mother looked crestfallen. Anthony stared into space, still holding his hammer.

Steve suggested that the mum and dad go and have a look at some stuff for a while and let their boy get on with it with us, a notion firmly embraced by Anthony's mother.

As soon as they ticked off Anthony got about finessing his nailing. By the time his parents returned Anthony was on his way, with his finished boat, to the 'Great Deep'.

The launch ceremony was absolutely full throttle. The crowd was as big as we'd had. The look on Anthony's face as boat went into the water, and all the people cheered and clapped him was priceless. Father shuffled on his feet a bit and looked puzzled.

Mum beamed.

And, Oh. Yes. The Great Wall of Honour, please.

A letter arrived yesterday, three months after the show closed. The writer said she often sat in on our workshop towards the end of the day. She wrote to say that she loved the confidence and pride that she saw in the young people, as they left our workshop, and she hoped we would do it again.

Steve has terminal cancer. Was supposed to have left us several years ago. He was around here last week planning for making next year's show even better.

The kids will be pleased.

Thanks Steve, Ian, Wooden Boat Association of SA and our many helpers.

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