

Unlocking local skills and creativity: Workshop Projects
From Woodland to Water – building a skin-on-frame kayak.
Written by Chris Terrell – February 2020



Transition Stirling has just seen the completion and successful launch of a fine-looking skin-on-frame kayak, made in the wood reuse workshop by one of our volunteers. Chris Terrell rented the space in the workshop in order to get access to a large enough place in which to build it, as it would not have been possible with the space available at home. “I would have had to take the windows out to get it out of the house, which would not have impressed my landlord!” he said. “It would have been difficult, if not impossible, to have started this project without the help of Transition Stirling in enabling me to work in sufficient dry and well-lit space to build the boat, especially as this is my first build and I had to fit in the construction stages around a full-time job”.

Chris' kayak is designed by Brian Schulz of Cape Falcon Kayaks, in the USA, [www.capefalconkayaks.com] and consists of a lightweight wooden frame, covered with a skin of heavy-duty ballistic nylon, as used to be incorporated in “bullet-proof” vests. The skin is then waterproofed and sealed with a two-part urethane mix that makes for a tough and resilient coating. Although the boat design is very much a modern one, it has close links to construction methods used in traditional Greenland and Alaskan kayaks. Traditional elements on this design include durable harness-leather deck straps and carrying loops and frame construction methods that result in a resilient, remarkably light, boat.



The frame is made from locally-sourced green oak and red cedar from Scottish Wood and Central Scotland Sawmill.

“Getting materials from local and small, sustainable, sources as far as possible was an important element in my motivation for making this boat” said Chris, who has also made traditional Greenland-style paddles from local timber.



“My reasons for doing this are many, the labour involved in preparing and making is for me part of the enjoyment, not a cost, so when I look at the financial aspects, she is a good deal but this is about much more than trying to save money. It's about things like breaking out of the increasing dependency on highly technical and impersonal production methods and systems that reduce my involvement in the craft to entering a PIN number on a pad and making very minor adjustments. It's about having a more complete and deeper involvement in the origin and refinement of the boat as I find my own solutions to needs and problems. It's about learning to accept and adapt to the particular features and constraints of a boat without bulkheads and other built-in conveniences but that I can lift easily myself and in which I can still explore, adventure and develop my skills and share this with others. It's about taking a variety of raw materials and create something graceful and beautiful because her form follows her function.”



"I've decided to name the kayak Saoirse, which means *freedom*," said Chris. "It's freedom on several levels; I can now travel and explore on the water in a range of conditions and get to places inaccessible from the land, I have gained in skills and confidence and have increased my options without having to have a lot of financial resources available, I have discovered and got materials from a range of small-scale and local businesses, I've tried to do that in a way that reduces my harmful impact on the world ... Transition Stirling has enabled me to see it through, all that feels like a kind of freedom to me".

