



Bull Boats

Commonly associated with the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara, bull boats were necessary to cross rivers in the West. They transported loads of meat and firewood up and down rivers. These light vessels could drift as much as a mile during the crossing! Hair side facing out helped keep boats from spinning, and a tail served as an attachment point for towing. Weighing as little as thirty pounds and made from the hide of bison, they replaced canoes west of Grand Portage in a landscape where birch was scarce. A willow frame covered with fresh hide could be built in a day. The paddles were made from cottonwood, sometimes with a bison shoulder blade. Bull boats need to dry out periodically to prevent them from becoming waterlogged.

Bimishkaa (she or he paddles along)



