Utapananashk" - the Innu toboggan .

François Bellefleur, François Mestenapeo and Bruno Bellefleur on their way from Nitshiku-nipi to Pakashu-nipi, 1982

Utapan - a toboggan; automobile
utapaniapi - rope used to haul the toboggan
utapanashk[u] - a toboggan; snowmobile; he/she loads his toboggan
utapanikueu - he/she makes a toboggan; he loads someone's toboggan
utapatshimaushu - he/she pulls a child on a toboggan.
utapatshimeu - he/she pulls, tows someone
utapeu - he/she pulls, tows someone
utapeun - a tobaggon load (Lynn Drapeu. 1991. Dictionnaire Montagnais-Fran9ais. Montreal: Presses de l'Universite du Quebec. p.879).

Captain George Cartwright describes the utapanashk" (1786)

"The Mountaineer [Innu] method is the only one adapted for the interior parts of the country: their sleds are made of two thin boards of birch; each about six inches broad, a quarter of an inch thick, and six feet long: these are fastened parallel to each other by slight battens, sewed on with thongs of deer-skin; and the foremost end is curved up to rise over the inequalities of the snow. Each individual who is able to walk, is furnished with one of these; but those for the children are proportionately less. On them they stow all their goods, and also their infants; which they bundle up very warm in deer-skins. The two ends of a leather thong are tied to the corners of the sled; the bright or double part of which is placed against the breast, and in that manner it is drawn along. The men go first, relieving each other in the lead by turns; the women follow next, and the children, according to their strength, bring up the rear; and, as they all walk in rackets [snowshoes], the third or fourth person finds an excellent path to walk on, let the snow be ever so light." (Charles Wendell Townsend (ed.). 1911. Captain Cartwright and his Labrador Journal. Boston: Dana Estes & Company. Sixth Voyage, 1786. pp.357-358).

Steps involved in making a toboggan

As constructed by François Bellefleur of Uanamen-shipu
From the diary of Peter Armitage, Fall 1982

Tools used to make the toboggan included a hacksaw, pocket knife, crooked knife (mukutan), extremely sharp axe, small hand plane, pot for hot water, "brush" (split stick with old rag in end), holding wedge tool, a flat carpenter's pencil, screw-driver-push drill, and a "needle" made out of twisted snare wire.

22 November 1982. A few days ago, François spent a few hours in the woods just where the river meets the north section of Nitshik^{u}-nipi. He returned across the ice dragging two planks roped together. At 9:00 am today, he started shinning these planks down again. They had been roughly hewn out of one spruce trunk. The planks were each approximately 1 to 1 1/4 inches in thickness at the thickest part with little taper, 6 3/4 inches wide at the widest and 96 inches long. There are few knots in these plank: François is chopping each plank thinner using his super sharp axe which he resharpened this morning just before use. He stuck one end of the plank in between two trees beside the tent which are unusually close together.

When chopping the planks thinner, he either holds the plank vertical while chopping slowly, methodically, 6 inches of plank surface at a time, and pausing every so often to inspect the progress of his work in more detail. Or more usually, the plank is wedged between the two trees and he stands to chop, keeping his leg out of the way; or kneels, propping his right knee against the bottom of the plank on the opposite side of the surface being chopped. At times he risked chopping/splitting too large a portion off the plank. To prevent this from taking place, he would make a few chops just below the section being worked on.

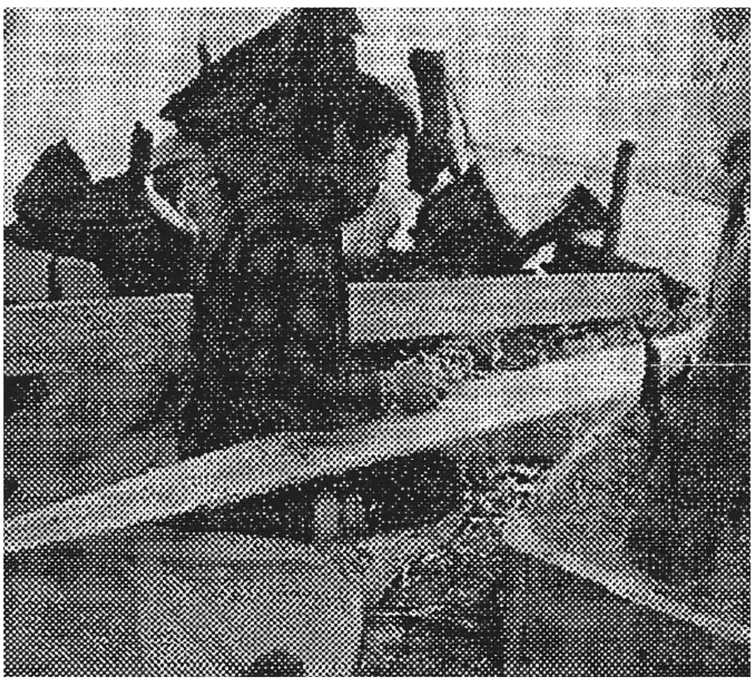
When he finished planing the surface with his axe, he trimmed the edge surface a bit, removing traces of bark, holding the plank vertically, one end on the ground. Upon completion of the first plank he put his eye to it to examine the slight warp by springing it up and down a couple of times; then placing it inside the tent. He immediately commenced chopping the second plank, but after 5 minutes took a 5 minute break to drink some cold tea. He finished the second plank at 10:25 am and brought this inside the tent as well.

Roughing out the planks from spruce wood (photo Peter Armitage, 1982).

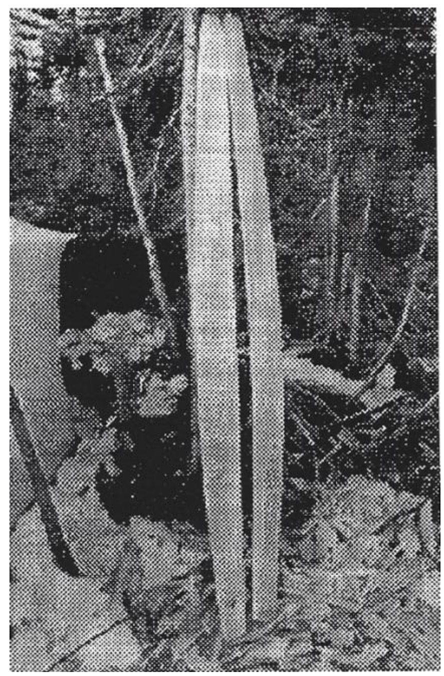
He then sharpened the blade of his small hand plane with a file and sat in his section of the tent planing a plank thinner. The thickness of the plank before planing is approximately 5/8 inch at the thickest part, but he had tapered the ends to perhaps 3/8 inch or ½ inch. One end of the plank is resting on the tent door sill while he works shaving the plank forward and outward towards the door.

François finished planing one plank at about 11:40 am. He made 2 pencil lines across one end and bent it a few times with his knee in the space between the pencil lines. He then went out to chop more wood off the other plank.

At 2:00 pm he had finished planing the two planks after intensive, non-stop labour. He may have paused for a few minutes to drink more tea, but that is all. He used his crooked knife (made by him) to scrape wood off the surface of the marked sections of the planks and tested the bend every so often. He planed the edges as well.

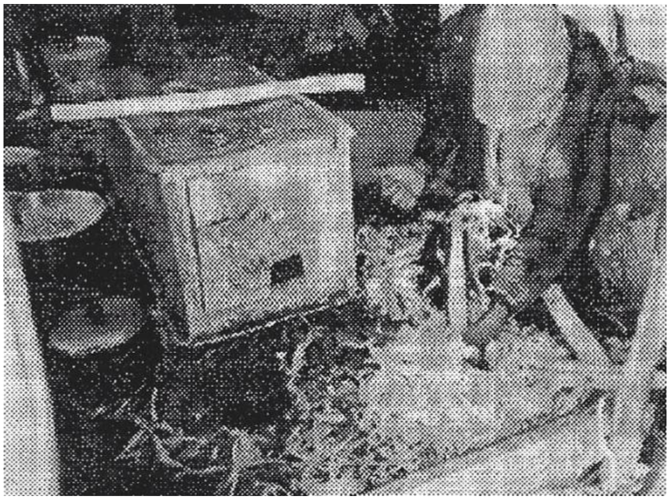


Shaving the planks with a hand planer (photo Peter Armitage, 1982).



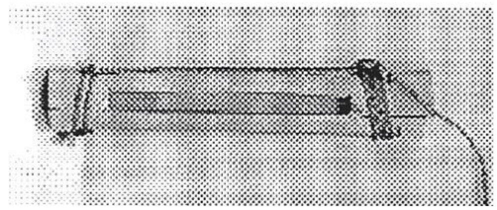
Two utapanashk^{u} planks ready for steaming and assembly (photo Peter Armitage, 1982).

3 November 1982. After about a 10 minute break yesterday afternoon, François departed into the woods close by outside the camp. He returned with 4-6 roughly hewn sticks about 2 x 2 x 18 inches in size. He then sat down in the tent and carved each of these sticks into cross braces for the toboggan. He left these under the stove over night, finishing this activity sometime around 3:45 pm, when he went out to help me fetch and saw firewood.



François carves cross-braces using his *mukutan* (crooked knife). (photo Peter Armitage, 1982)

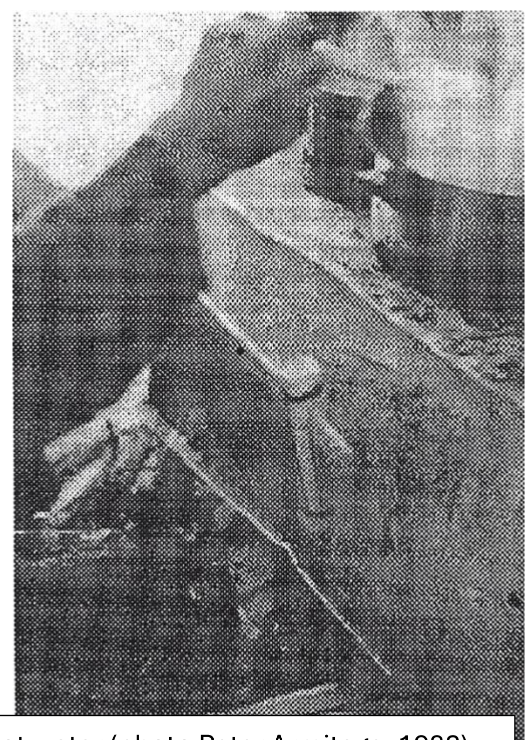
François resumed construction of the toboggan this morning at 7:30. He started off by making "brush" out of a stick, one end split springy open with a piece of rag in the split, with which to wash the section of the toboggan planks to be bent with hot water. He put water on to boil and made the tool shown below out of two pieces of wood strung tightly together..



At 8:IO am he started to apply boiling water to both sides of one of the planks in the area close to one end which he wished to bend. He had already placed the above tool over the end of the plank, sliding it securely, tightly down (wedged) over the plank. He used this tool partly as a hand-hold but perhaps more importantly as a vehicle for ensuring that the wood was pulled over at the same time all across the plank when being bent. After having applied boiling water to the plank, he held it about 3 to 4 inches away from the side of the hot stove, then carefully bent it, slowly around his right knee. He placed his knee in the area of two lines he had marked out previously to indicate the area of the bend. He applied water two to three times and bent after each application.

While bending the second plank, it started to crack about 8 inches from the top. This required a detour operation to prevent it from cracking any more. Two holes were immediately drilled around the splintering wood. François laced green twine through these holes using a piece of twisted snare wire as a needle and tied the crack up tightly.

At 8:30 am, he drilled two holes in each plank about 8 inches from the top, laced them with twine, and tied the two planks together. This operation was complete at 8:40 am whereupon two sticks were clamped about 2 feet down the planks using twine.



Preparing the bend in the planks using hot water (photo Peter Armitage, 1982).

8:45 am, Franc;;ois selected one of four support braces, marked out with a flat carpenter's pencil on the underside of the planks the future position of this brace. The braces were all used as templates to mark out their position on the underside the planks. He then drilled 12 holes on the underside across the two planks. Next, the loops of twine were threaded into the holes, always using the twisted snare wire as a needle. He later changed the drill bit because it was too small to take more than 1 thread of twine. Multi-bit screw-driver-push drill (bits stored in handle). He then held the cross brace to the planks and noted the correct width. He sawed it to length, and made notches on the underside using the hack saw again, a sharp pocket knife to chisel/split out the wood, and his crooked knife to polish off the cut. The brace was then inserted in place and the twine drawn tight and tied on the right side.

The four cross braces were all 16 inches long before being cut. At 9:05 am, two holes were drilled in the underside of the planks under the cross brace and two nails hammered in. At about 9:10, François marked out the location of the second cross brace and drilled 12 holes. He then cut grooves between the holes so that when the twine is put in place, the twine will be flush with the bottom of the toboggan and won't create unnecessary friction. He cut these grooves using his pocket knife.

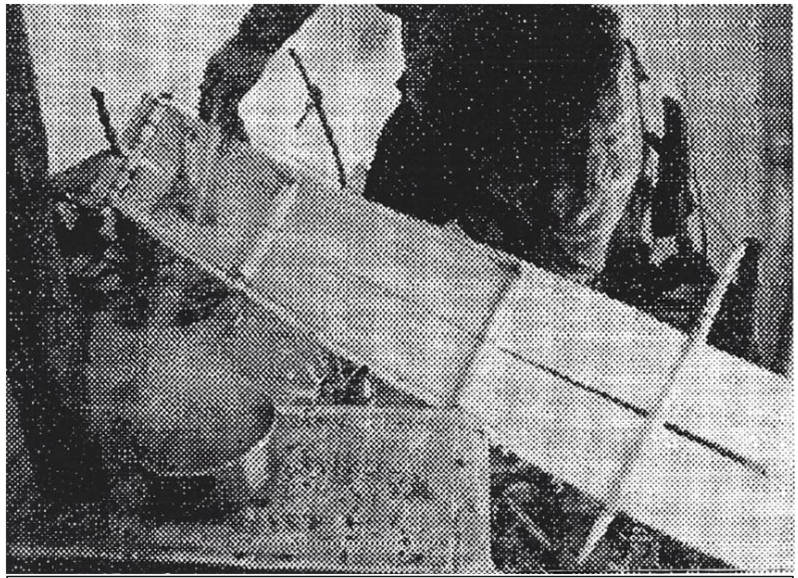
9:14 am the threading for the second cross brace was completed. The second brace was cut to length using the hacksaw and notches cut, chipped out and carved clean. He usually made all the cuts for the notches before cutting the ends off the brace. Before stringing this brace up tightly, he drilled two holes on the underside of the plank and hammered two nails into the plank; hammering over the nails because they stuck out about 1/2 inch. Except for one nail, all are hammered flat over the twine rigging for each brace. Notches on braces face down onto the surface of the toboggan.

9:27 am the third cross brace was started; its position worked out on the underside of the toboggan. This is the top brace. Six holes drilled in each plank. He tied the brace onto one side first and then the other plank second. He did not make the loops first as with other braces. This operation of securing the top brace was finished at 9:45.

9:48 am, François placed the toboggan down on the tent floor facing the back of the tent, knelt on it with his right knee and placed his left foot up against it where the bending would be done. Pulling on the top of the toboggan, he bent it around and tied it in this shape with twine (partly threaded previously) from the third to the second braces. Two double strings on each side to hold the curve in place.

Putting the bend in the planks using hot water and muscle-power (photo Peter Armitage, 1982).

Attaching cross-braces to the utapanashk^{u} planks (photo Peter Armitage, 1982)



Getting ready to make the final bend in the planks. The front of the utapanashk^{u} will be tied to the fourth brace shown on the right (photo Peter Armitage, 1982).

9:49 am, the ragged end of the toboggan was cut off using the hacksaw. 9:50 am, François put more hot water on both sides of the curve, the bottom of the toboggan sticking out the tent door, held the curve beside the hot stove momentarily to heat up more, then put the toboggan back on the floor, knelt on it in the previously described manner and pulled the bend round more. He did this by holding/pulling the top of the toboggan with his left hand while pulling on twine rigging with his right hand.

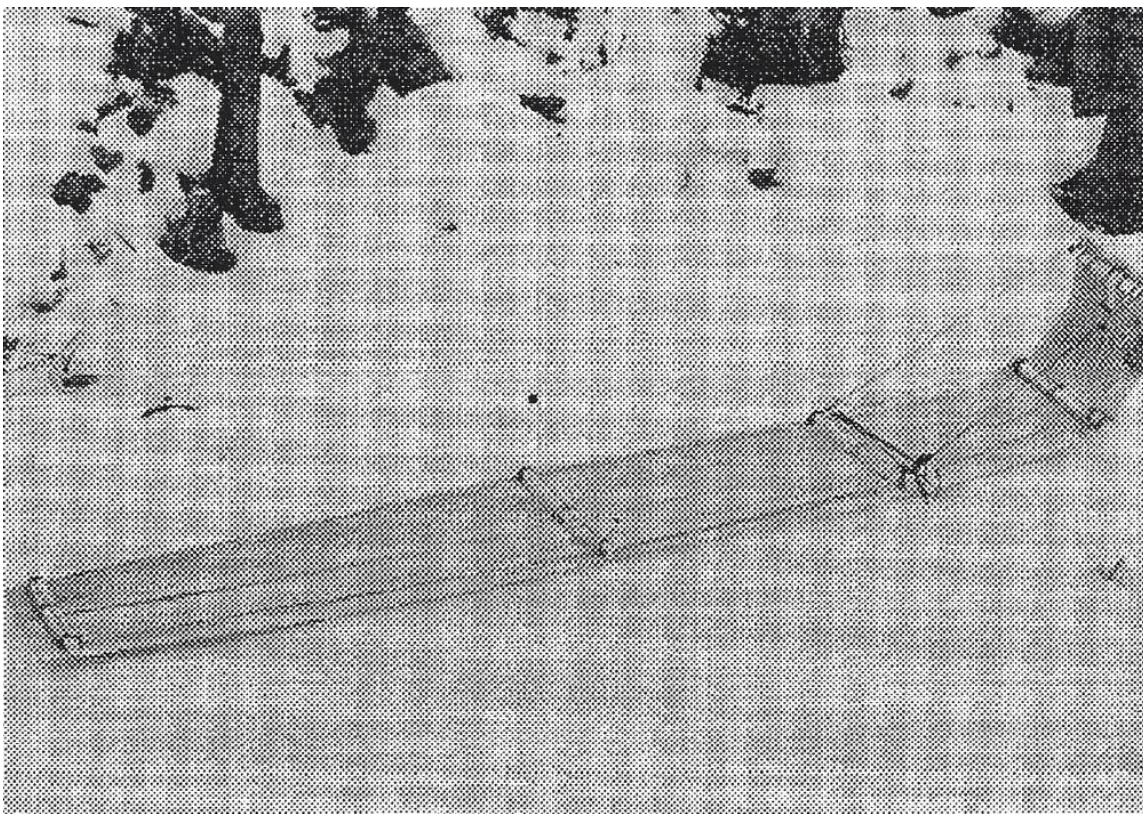
9:56 am, he let some of the tension out of the twine rigging, drilled 3-5 more holes in the area of the crack and tied more twine into it to hold it more securely. 10:01 am, the curved front of the toboggan has been pulled into its final shape. 10:02 am, François undid the working support braces (clamps) and tied these securely further down the toboggan. He then marked out the position of the fourth cross brace and drilled the 12 holes for this. He drilled holes from the underside using lines as a guide.

At 10:12 am, after a brief break to reload and light his pipe, he cut grooves between holes on the underside of the toboggan under the fourth cross brace; threaded loops, inserted brace, tightened. 10:28 am, the fourth cross brace was finished. Started marking out the fifth cross brace at the end of the toboggan. Drilled holes and then cut grooves on underside of the toboggan between these holes. He then threaded the loops for this brace. At 10:45 am, he cut notches in the fifth brace, inserted the brace in the loops, tightened up the twine and tied it securely. He then cut off the overhanging ends when finished mounting.

François then drilled holes in the underside of the toboggan for two nails in the fourth cross brace and two in the fifth one, then hammered in the nails and flattened them over on top of the twine rigging. 10:47 am, he cut off the rear end of the toboggan and drilled and tied up the crack again.

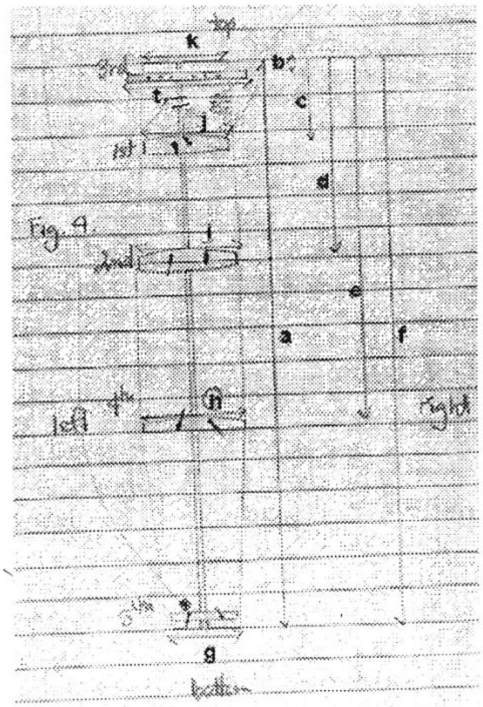
At 11:00 am, François obtained a length of yellow nylon cord from outside, set fire to an end of it to stop it from fraying more. He threaded this cord starting at the first brace, down under each subsequent brace (2nd, 4th and 5th) and back up to the first one again. Here, he pulled the cord tightly and tied it to the first brace. The cord runs through the notches in each cross brace. Thus, only the top brace lacks notches.

The toboggan was completed at 11:05 am and immediately placed outside up against a tree beside the tent.

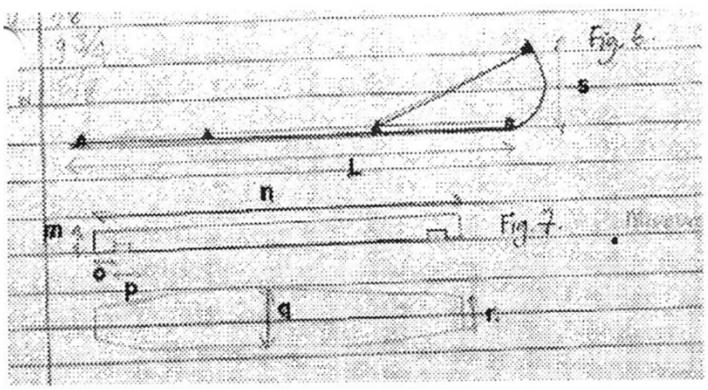


The finished product - one utapanashk^{u} (photo Peter Armitage, 1982).

Dimensions of the utanpanshk^{u}

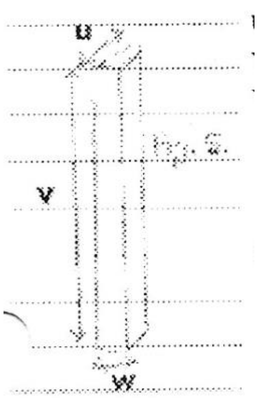


a - 92 ½ inches
b - 1
c - 12 1/2
d - 31 3/4
e - 56
f - 90
g - 8
h - 12 1/4
i - 12
j - 10 1/4
k - 7 1/2
t - 9 3/4



l - 75 inches
m - 7/8
n - 12 1/8
o - 3/8
p - 5/8
q - l 1/4
r - 5/8
s - 12 1/2

Measurements 'm' through 'r' were taken at cross brace 'h' in the previous diagram.



u - 7/8 inches
v - 9 3/4
w - 5/8

Support brace at top 'k'