

## Mudskipper

Eccentric people live on average three years longer than conformists, or so it is said. I suppose there is a stress in conformity that has a subtle effect on health. This may be of some comfort to me when I paddle out to my putt putt in the odd looking mud skipper.

When the Waterways Authority booted my motor boat, from its comfortable life on a running line to a mooring, I had a problem. Down the end of Baden Powell road at Brooklyn is a gravel boat ramp leading to a waterway appropriately called the Gut. I say appropriately, as, at anything below half tide one staggers from the water, through glutinous mud and silt, to get to the ramp. This was where my boat was to be moored.



I have already made the mistake of attempting to swim ashore from my new mooring. Unfortunately it happened to be low tide. All went well, until I got to the mud. My leg managed to drive its way so far into the mud that a tremendous suction resisted all further movement. The only option available was to plant the other foot in front, lean down hard and hope the other would release. After about twenty seconds the rear foot released suddenly from my sneaker and the mud, and I was face down with the front foot more firmly planted than ever. After a few goes at this, I managed to change to a crawl with my shins providing resistance to sinking at the rear and the container with my possessions floating the front half of my body. About ten minutes later I managed to make it to the gravel ramp covered in mud from head to foot. A lady in a nearby house observed this, regarded my appearance, and walked inside in disgust. I thought she might at least do the humane thing and hose me down, but no, such an incompetent wretch had got his just desserts.

**After a couple of hours of low tide, the mud's not so bad.  
(Broken glass, time to bring back bottle deposits.)**



I had seen something similar to this happen at English harbour in Antigua. A yachting enthusiast had staggered drunkenly out of the Admiral's inn to return to his yacht. Unfortunately Admiral Nelson had built a stone lined pit for seasoning masts across his path, and it was now heavily silted up. I arrived to find this chap had stumbled into the pit in the dark, and, was repeatedly falling face down into the black mud. There was a variation on this theme as he would occasionally and creatively fall sideways and even backwards so that his body was very evenly covered in the black stinking silt. He had a much more appreciative audience than I, as a group of dark skinned locals were holding their stomachs in mirth. I got the feeling they thought him a jolly fine chap. The victim eventually managed to climb out, almost invisibly black in the night. I last saw him stagger off into the dark muttering volubly to himself. For some people this is not a joke. For instance a rather heavy chap needed three people to rescue him from the mud in the gut, and a drunk friend of mine thought he was going to die on a cold winters night after he became stuck in the silt ("Stuck in the Mud") trying to retrieve his dinghy.

This was all food for thought. I had been spoiled. Now I had to acquire a tender. My Herreshoff rowboat was too big and valuable to use. A dinghy was a hassle to acquire and carry. It also needed oars, which would have to be secured against theft. A canoe needed a paddle and had to be acquired somehow. Aiding my thought process was a small canoe that I had hand paddled as an emergency tender on my trimaran. I had been thinking about a design like this for some time. An old mate "Moo" had observed once, that building a boat is ninety five percent thought and five percent action. Following this principle I spent the next month mulling over the basic requirements leading to its design.





Not far from the ramp sheltered under a forest of large malaleukas and resting on a fence lay twenty mouldy tenders. I must find a spot among these. So I lay down the following parameters:

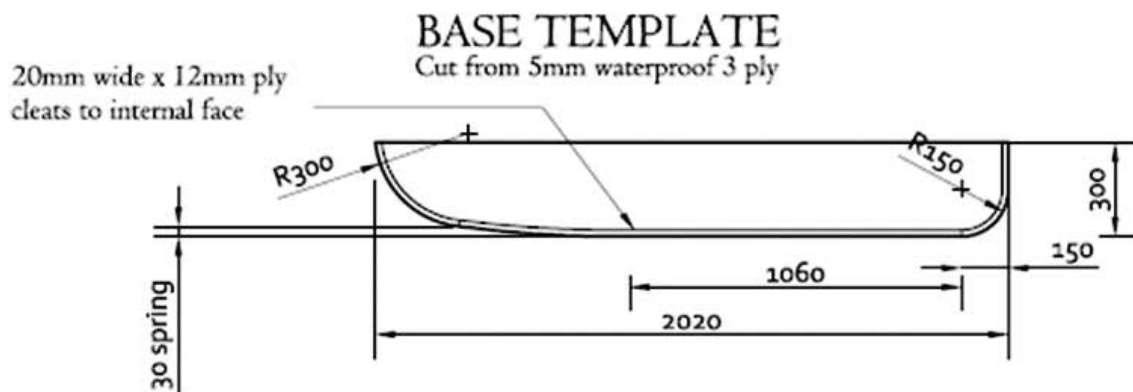
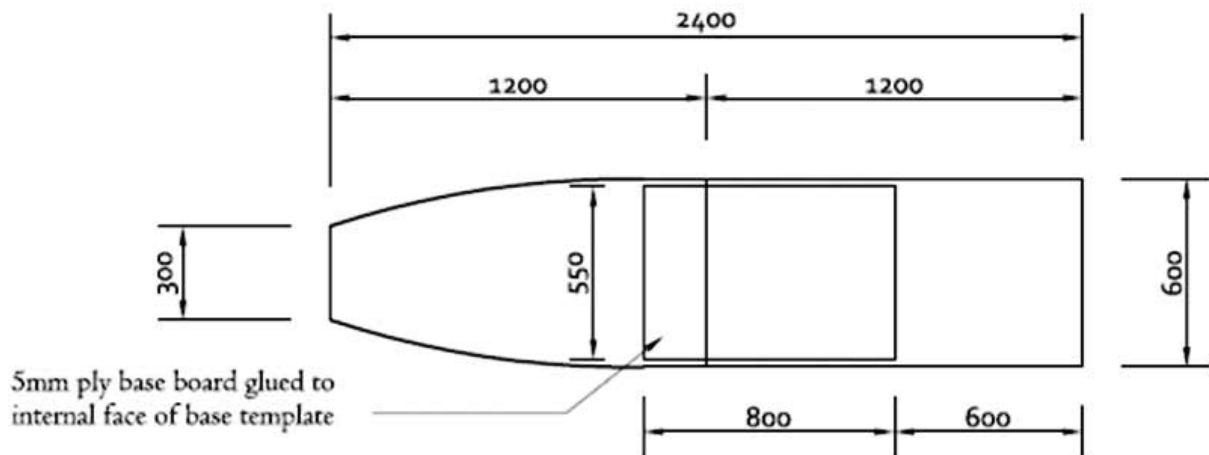
1. Must be small, light, and easily carried by one person.
2. Designed to load one person up to 100 Kg. (220 lbs.)
3. About two meters (2'7") long and use one sheet of 8'x4' ply.
4. Wide enough to be stable and carry a load but not too wide to hand paddle.
5. Flat bottom to skid over the mud and be stable when loading.

The design I set my sights on would be made out of three sixteenths ply, two meters long and be half a meter wide. But would it have enough buoyancy? This calculation thanks to the metric system I was able to do in my head. A litre is a cube with 10cm. (4") sides and each litre of water weighs one kilogram. The bottom area of the tender was to be 2m or 20dm (dm. is a decimetre or 10 cm.) by 0.5m or 5dm. Thus the bottom area would be 100 square dm (20dm x5dm). So if the tender were depressed 1dm. or four inches in the water it would displace 100 litres and support 100 kg. This seemed OK so off I went to buy a lump of waterproof 8' x 4' three ply 3/16" plywood.

The beauty and simplicity of this project would be that it dispensed with frames, stringers, seats, oarlocks and paddles. The front of the tender would be barge like with the ply curving up to the bow

and the same happening but more severely at the stern. The grain of the ply needed to run across the hull for stiffness and allow for easy bending at the ends. This meant cutting across the sheet and joining with butt strap in the middle. This join would provide extra stiffness at the sit. After some examination of shoulder widths and arm lengths I decided that the bottom of the tender could be 60cm. (2 ft.) wide. The sides of the craft sloped in at an angle of 10 degrees so that they would not interfere with the stroke. However I have found that the natural position of the arms during the stroke do not necessitate the slope. The following design uses vertical sides to slightly improve ease of manufacture, buoyancy and stability.

The basic design was as follows:



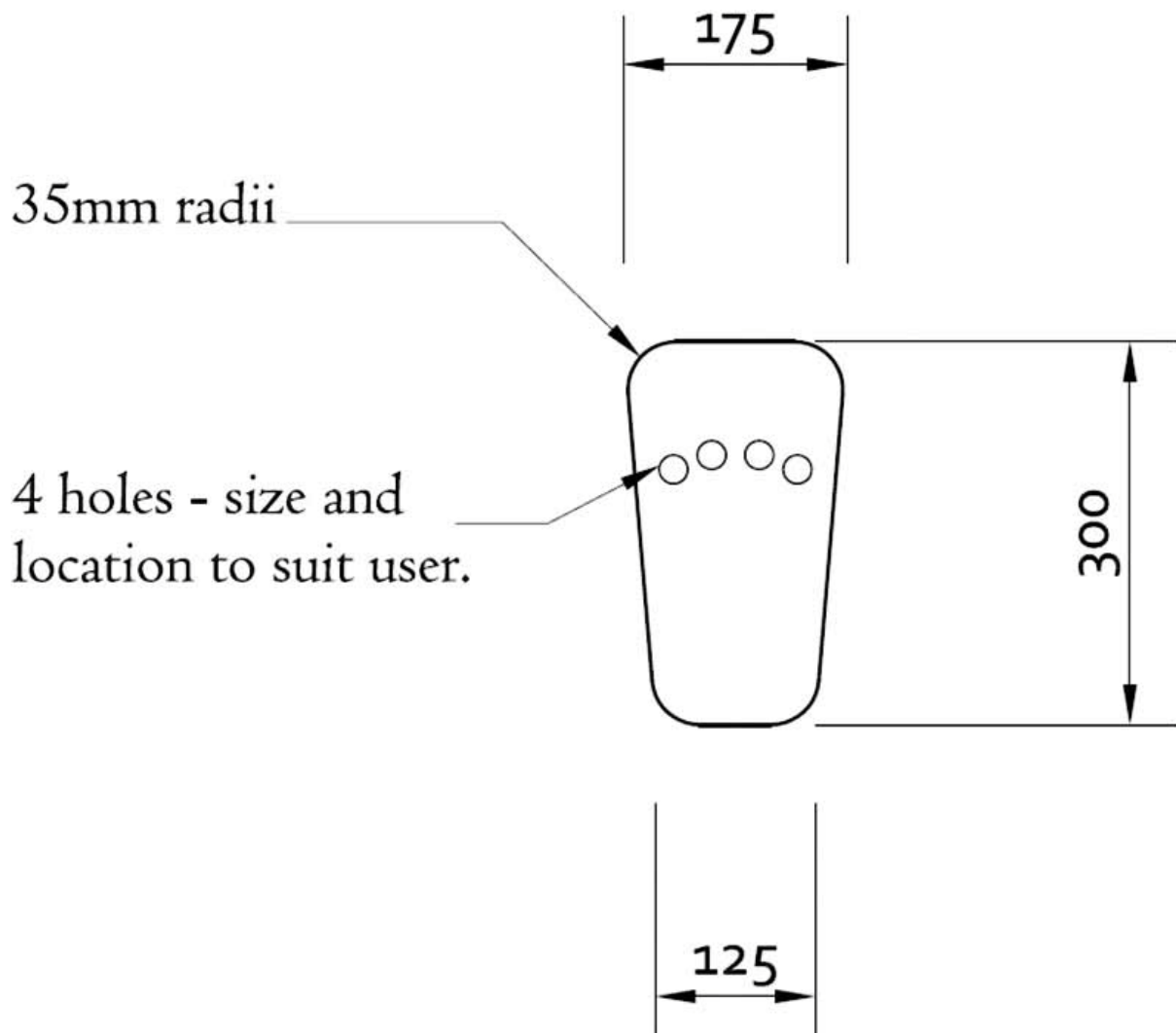
## THE MUDSKIPPER

So the craft was duly constructed. This was simply a matter of:

1. Cutting the ply to the correct dimensions, making sure the grain ran across the beam and making sure the grain was vertical in the sides.
2. Joining the two four foot bottom sections together with glue and butt straps and repeating this process with the two side sections.

3. Nailing and gluing 20 mm. cleats to the side sheets. Using ½" ply where the curved sections occur.
4. Attaching the sides at the appropriate point of the bottom with glue and screw.
5. Bending and attaching at the ends. This was aided by a loop of rope around the length of the hull. Clamps were used at the end till the glue set.
6. Finishing off by attaching 20 mm. gunwhales and gussets around the top of the hull
7. Fibreglassing using vinylester resin and light fibreglass cloth.

The craft was now put to the test. Yes, it was light enough to easily carry at nine kilograms and it was adequately stable, but, hand paddling was a bit inefficient so a set of hand paddles was made. Using two fingers in the paddles seemed to work quite well. A small fin was bolted to the rear side for directional stability but it made little difference. Directional stability was OK probably aided by the slab sides depressed into the water.



With a water line length of two meters, a displacement speed of 3.3 knots could be expected so very little power was need to utilise this. Some skill was needed to get into my little putt putt but a larger boat allows for the paddler to pull himself up quite easily. And yes, I was asking the same question, is



it seaworthy? Well it did survive the kilometre paddle to Dangar Is. and back braving the power boat washes and all the curious boating commuters who insisted on inspecting the strange craft. One lady towered over me, whilst asking me what I was up to. How do you explain that, in one sentence?

Now for the mud test. If successful I would no longer have to worry about the tide when going for a run. It was quite an expanse of mud to negotiate. Getting in was easy. Then with the fists pressing down and back off we went. Sandy mud is a bit sticky, so I altered course for the wetter and siltier mud and off we skidded down to the river's edge.





So far, many outings have been successfully concluded, the only problem being cleaning up, which has been effected by having a gallon of water on hand. It is a one man craft so the “Brunkenkunjekrub” must be fired up and guests picked up at the public wharf at Kangaroo point, or at the ramp on high tide. To tell the truth, I have become very fond of my little craft which fits into my concept of minimalism. So there you go, what do I call it? “Bathtub” or “Mudskipper”. No! now I’ve got it, from now on it is to be called “Minimal”. In fact I’m so pleased with it, I think I will make sure its name goes on the stern.

### **The Wreck of the Brunkenkunjekrub.**

I am often asked where I got the name for my wonderful single cylinder, hand start putt putt. Here follows the poem as recited to me by my friend who is known as the Count of no account. I have not been able to find the source of this poem but have seen it elsewhere with one verse missing.

*The brundub thunder snarched above  
The swissling biforous sea  
While drimble mugfrubs boofkuntunked  
And swunglers klunked in glee.*

*Twas the brunkenkunjekrub  
That shoddled in the blast  
The mugfrubs fierce had blooked the screw  
And swanglekranked the mast.*

*The fledged few that held the deck  
Were streely wheeled with fright  
For, Oh! The fearful Swankterbosh  
Came squirdling through the night.*

*They saw the unkterspronks at play  
Their souls in horror shrunk  
The unktersrponk, the swankterbosh  
The hootlejuptebunk.*

*And as the stykled ship went down  
The swankterbosh drew nigh  
And morgled them by twos and threes  
A glumbious way to die.*

*He slorpelgised the lot  
And then the hootlejuptebunk  
Came at him with a stirkrous yell  
And horched him with a krunk.*

It takes some time to learn and I would sometimes recite it to kids when I was on playground duty as a science teacher. After one recital a young girl asked me; "What was that about Mr. Murray?" I was so amused I did not respond. Damn! I should have, the young lady was revealing the beauty of her unpretentious innocence.