



CANADIAN OUTRIGGER HALL OF FAME

Mike Billy Sr (Lemxacha)



Summary

Mike Billy Sr is a hereditary chief from Squamish Nation and a seventh-generation canoe carver. Mike was one of the founding members of the Canadian Outrigger Racing Association in 1992. Mike was instrumental in having Coast Salish Paddling Club members regularly attend Canadian outrigger canoe racing events and international (IVF World Sprints; Catalina Channel Crossing; Queen Lili'uokalani; Molokai Hoe) since 1992. Mike Billy Sr has been the Lead on the Canoe Cultures Program since 2021 and has been a co-organizer of the Four Fires Festival since 2022.

Early Career

Mike Billy Sr is the son of Chief Michael Cedric Billy Sr, and has siblings Michelle 'Mitzi' Penelope Bob (Jeff), Cheryl Heather Martin (Alvin Sr), Craig Ian Cedric Billy, and Reno Patrick Natrall (Emma). Chief Michael Cedric Billy Sr was a woodworks man by trade. Cedric built over 200 homes for the Squamish Nation. Cedric was a master canoe builder and made beautiful carvings throughout his lifetime. Cedric had a special love for art. Cedric especially enjoyed boxing, having been a Golden Gloves Champion himself. He built the k'xwu7lh canoe for Squamish Nation. He was a great skipper and number one fan after his retirement from the North Vancouver Canoe Club (NVCC). Mike Billy Sr has recounted how words from his father were an introduction to the craft that he now continues as part of a long family tradition. *"My dad had tree logs delivered to the front of his house. He took me and my brothers out there, and he said, 'I'll show you once and once only, and if you get it, you probably will, but if you don't, you probably never will.'"* [111] [112]

Outrigger Canoeing Achievements

Mike Billy Sr would coach / mentor / steer North Van Canoe Club (NVCC) paddlers who would attend international outrigger canoeing events including 1992 Sacramento IVF World Sprints, 1994 Western Samoa IVF World Sprints, 1994 Catalina Channel Crossing (placing 3rd Overall), 2000 Townsville IVF World Sprints, 2003 Gibsons Iron (placing 1st Mixed), 2004 Hilo IVF World Sprints, 2008 Sacramento IVF World Sprints, 2012 Calgary IVF World Sprints, 2014 Rio IVF World Sprints, 2014 Queen Lili'uokalani, 2023 Queen Lili'uokalani, 2024 Catalina Channel Crossing, 2025 Catalina Channel Crossing, and 2025 Molokai Hoe. The Canadian Outrigger Racing Association (CORA) website results indicate that North Van Canoe Club (NVCC) with Mike Billy Sr had fielded crews in CORA sanctioned events and CORA Cup Series events over the course of many years.

Coach-Builder Achievements

North Van Canoe Club (NVCC) / Squamish Nation with Mike Billy Sr has hosted CORA Sanctioned Racing Events in 2007 / 2008 / 2009, namely the North Van Canoe Club (NVCC) Outrigger Canoeing Sprints. North Van Canoe Club (NVCC) / Squamish Nation has also hosted the Ambleside War (Indigenous) Canoe Races on the North Shore of the Burrard Inlet, with Singles / Doubles / Six Man / Eleven Man canoe events in mid-Summer for many years, with the North Van Canoe Club (NVCC) sponsoring various events. The oldest known social media mention of the Ambleside War (Indigenous) Canoe Races is from 1984. [121] [122] [123]

The ancient practice of war canoe racing is a significant component of Coast Salish culture and instrumental in building community, provides a means to socialize and gather, and is a tradition that dates back thousands of years. Official Indigenous canoe races had not been held in False Creek for over 100 years, but that changed when the Four Fires Festival canoe races were presented in September 2022 for a weekend of celebration. Canoe Cultures, an Indigenous-led non-profit that is dedicated to passing down canoe-building skills, brings together First Nations clubs from up and down the west coast of North America to compete in canoe races. The co-organizers of the Four Fires Festival are local canoe carvers Mike Billy Sr of Squamish Nation (North Vancouver Canoe Club), who is also a seventh-generation master carver, and Dickie Louis, from Musqueam Nation (Celtic Sunset Canoe Club). The 2023 edition of the Four Fires Festival returned in July to False Creek at Concord Community Park in Vancouver BC. The 2024 edition of the Four Fires Festival returned in September to False Creek at Concord Community Park in Vancouver BC for National Day of Truth And Reconciliation. [141] [142] [143] [144] [145] [146] [147] [148] [149] [150]

It is worth noting that Mike Billy Sr of the Squamish Nation collaborated with the Vancouver Fijian community and Ron Dickinson of Spirit Of Aloha Racing (SOAR) to have a cross-cultural exchange and canoe blessing at Ambleside in West Vancouver in the fall of 2003 of the 2 Fijian V6 canoes brought to Canada by Ron Dickinson after the World Outrigger Canoe Sprints in Fiji in 1998, as documented in the "*The Sunshine Coast Story*". [171] The CORA Town Hall Committee has been fortunate that so many individuals have been willing to step forward as Guest Speakers and showcase their public-speaking skills. Mike Billy Sr generously volunteered his time to speak at the CORA Town Hall (10 November 2024 4PM Pacific): *Not All Who Wander Are Lost*, as a Guest Speaker on behalf of Ron Dickinson. When Mike Billy Sr was booked on a flight to Japan that same day, his son Mike Billy Junior delivered a personal account of their life-time friendship, sharing insights on the character of Ron Dickinson that had contributed to his induction into the Canadian Outrigger Hall Of Fame. [172]

Mike has provided first-hand knowledge of people / places / events from the 1990s through the 2020s that have shaped the history of Canadian outrigger canoeing. Mike provided a wealth of photos / names / dates that has become part of the "*The Coast Salish Story*" (1974-2025). Mike then took it upon himself to conduct research to confirm events / dates / places / individuals and diligently proof-read several drafts until the content was factually / politically correct. [173]

Pioneering Achievements

Hugh Fisher had returned from New Zealand late 1991 and started Pemberton Canoe Association. FCRCC and Lotus and Pemberton were the only 3 "outrigger canoe" clubs in Canada at that time. IPCF had happened in 1984, 1986, 1988, and 1990. Canada had not participated in IPCF World Sprints as paddlers needed to be with a "member nation". Garry Mancell, David Boulding, and Hugh Fisher filed the CORA Incorporation documents in April 1992. The Articles of Incorporation that specified the Canadian Outrigger Racing Association mandate was submitted to the Government of Canada by those individuals who were on the original Board of Directors including Maria Bolman. Garry Mancell, Keith Hammond, Heather Johnson, Linda Daigle, Jeff Burns, and Mike Billy Sr. This first-ever participation by Team Canada in an IPCF / IVF World Sprints Championship event would set the stage for Team Canada to eventually become a major player at IVF World Sprints / Distance Championship events. [181]

Sometime around 1992, a Canadian Class Racer (CCR) OC6 started appearing at BC clubs - referred to as a "Calmar". The Canadian Class Racer (CCR) was designed with more flotation, a bumpy front nose to hold the covers, and more strength in the seats which resulted in a stiffer boat with more floatation in the rear. In the 1990s, there were several BC Lower Mainland outrigger canoe clubs with Calmar OC6s. North Vancouver Canoe Club (NVCC) would acquire one Calmar OC6 in 1992 and was the only Coast Salish Paddling Club to own an OC6 until Island Brave / Snuneymuxw Nation would acquire one Bradley Lightning OC6 in the mid-2010s.

As per "*The Malia in British Columbia*" (First publication on outrigger canoeing in Canada by Doug Mancell, it was Mike Billy Sr of North Vancouver Canoe Club (NVCC) who intervened to preserve a key artifact of Canadian outrigger canoeing history. "*The Malia mold was stored by Calmar Fiberglass throughout the 1990's until December of 2006 when Calmar, needing more space, asked for someone to pick it up from their site. Mike Billy, of the North Vancouver Canoe Club, brought this to the attention of the Canadian Outrigger Racing Association (CORA). Steve Palmier, from FCRCC, suggested that the mold should, if possible, be preserved for its historical value. CORA and the Lotus Sports Club agreed the mold would be stored at the Lotus clubhouse.*" [182]

Exemplary Achievements

Mike Billy Sr (hereditary name Lemxacha), with parents Cedric and Penny Billy, is a seventh-generation Skwxwú7meshskwxwu7mesh canoe carver who is creating a significant fleet of new dugout and cedar strip canoes for local First Nations, including the North Vancouver Canoe Club on Skwxwú7meshskwxwu7mesh Nation, while teaching apprentices, guests and visitors about the traditions, tools and techniques used. The projects serve as a multi-generational and multicultural opportunity for learning about traditional skwxwu7mesh ways regarding the canoe and its significance to the Squamish way of life. It forms the basis for reconciliation activities in that it allows non-First Nations people an opportunity to understand aspects of Indigenous traditions while concurrently helping to traditional skills to other Skwxwú7mesh members who have yet to be exposed to canoe carving. Canoe Cultures is an Indigenous led organization, dedicated to the art and culture of the canoe, and the artists who create them. As part of the Canoe Cultures Program, Lead Carver Mike Billy Sr addresses the cultural transmission of Indigenous knowledge from one generation to the next. By including Indigenous artists and Elders in the project, traditional artistic knowledge and expertise is preserved, while showcasing the vitality of Indigenous arts and culture. The experience of crafting a dugout from a massive single red cedar log or red cedar strip is a rare opportunity as there are few canoe carvers left in Canada to pass the knowledge on to their communities. [191] [192]

References

#	Note	Link
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[112]	Seventh-Generation Canoe Carver Mike Billy Sr Preserves Tradition At PNE	https://www.squamishchief.com/local-arts/seventh-generation-canoe-carver-mike-billy-sr-preserves-tradition-at-pne-9461542
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[122]	2008 NVCC / FCRCC Sprints V6 events	https://www.jerichooutrigger.com/races2008/NVCC-FCRCCSprints.html
[123]	2009 NVCC / FCRCC Sprints V6 events	https://www.jerichooutrigger.com/races2009.html
[131]	2016 War Canoe Race Schedule (NVan Jul-2)	https://salishseasentinel.ca/2016/07/canoe-races-more-than-just-the-sport/
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[133]	2023 Amalgamation Day Event	https://www.squamish.net/events-gatherings/amalgamation-day
[134]	2023 Canoe Races Kick Off Squamish Nation's Amalgamation Celebrations	https://www.nsnews.com/in-the-community/canoe-races-kick-off-squamish-nation-amalgamation-celebrations-7225738
[135]	2023 North Van War Canoe Races	https://www.todocanada.ca/city/vancouver/event/ambleside-canoe-races/
[136]	2024 North Van War Canoe Races	https://www.squamish.net/event/2024-ambleside-canoe-races/
[137]	2024 North Van War Canoe Races Flyer	https://www.squamish.net/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/2024_Canoe_Race_Flyer.pdf
[138]	2024 Ambleside Canoe Race hosted by Sk̓wxwú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish Nation)	https://www.instagram.com/p/C9DmANuN2CU/?hl=en
[139]	2025 War Canoe Race Schedule (NVan Jul-5)	https://sumasfirstnation.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Semath-Warriors-2-2.pdf
[141]	Four Fires Festival	https://fourfires.ca/
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[143]	Four Fires Festival About	https://fourfires.ca/about/
[144]	Four Fires Festival Video	https://globalnews.ca/video/9122028/four-fires-festival-ancient-sport-returns-to-false-creek
[145]	2022 Four Fires Festival	https://www.vancouverisawesome.com/sponsored/experience-the-excitement-of-Indigenous-war-canoe-racing-in-false-creek-7263762
[146]	2022 Four Fires Festival	https://vancouver.sun.com/news/local-news/Indigenous-war-canoes-to-race-on-false-creek-for-first-time-in-a-century
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