



GLI GLI *A Caribbean voyaging canoe*

Photographs by Alison Langley
Text by Matthew P. Murphy

GLI GLI, a 35' dugout canoe, was launched in 1996 from the Caribbean Island of Dominica. The boat was the result of a "total chance meeting on a bus with a Carib Indian," said Aragorn Dick Read, one of the project's originators. "We ended up talking canoes, and within a half hour we hatched a plan to build one." Jacob Frederick was the other man on the bus, and his godfather, Etien Charles, is a master canoe builder.

The Caribs are the indigenous culture of the islands of the southern Caribbean. They are descendants of immigrants from the Orinoco River Delta (in present-day Venezuela and Guyana), who gradually populated the Greater Antilles. These people moved extensively among the islands in canoes like GLI GLI—which have been built in this region for thousands of years. The arrival of Europeans devastated much of the Carib culture, but still it remains the largest indigenous tribe



in the Caribbean, numbering about 30,000 people. Dominica is its heartland; 4,000 Caribs live here on reserved land known as the Carib Territory. Despite outside influences on language and faith, fishing and farming are still the main occupations of Carib people. The idea behind the construction and voyaging of GLI GLI was both to reunite the Caribs with their ancestral Orinoco River homeland, and to celebrate

their endangered culture.

Etien Charles oversaw GLI GLI's construction. The project commenced on the full moon in early December 1995. The first phase involved the felling and carving (on site) of a gommier tree (*Dacryodes hexandra*). This took three weeks of work high up in the rain forest, using chainsaws and adzes. Then the canoe was "opened" by the application of heat (fire and sun) and weight



(rocks); the resulting warping of the wood added flare to the sides and rocker to the bottom (for definitions of these terms, see the supplement *Getting Started in Boats*, in this issue).

To complete the hull, planking, or so-called “board-age,” was added; this transformed GLI GLI from a low-profile carved and dug-out log into a hull with 4'-high sides and a maximum beam of about 6'. Work continued through the Caribbean summer, with the construction

of the rig, rudder, spars, seats, and a sail.

Upon being anointed with coconut water and gommier smoke, GLI GLI was launched in November 1996. She then made an expedition from Dominica to Guyana—a distance of some 800 miles. She was accompanied on that voyage by the 120' Dominican-built trading schooner CARMELLA. Last June, GLI GLI made another expedition with a crew of 12 Dominican Caribs. She sailed from Antigua to the Virgin Islands, via Nevis

and St. Kitts, St. Barths, St. Maarten/St. Martin, and Anguilla, and across the Anegada passage to Tortola. This voyage was both an extension of the trip she made 10 years ago, and a celebration of its anniversary.

Today, GLI GLI sits, in fine condition, under a purpose-built shed on the beach at Trellis Bay, Tortola. A few steps away is Aragorn's Studio, an arts center and gallery

operated by Aragorn Dick Read. It sells pottery, local crafts, and Aragorn's own copper and steel sculptures and woodcut prints—Carib-style motifs like the one on GLI GLI's sail. The sail's design was inspired by an ancient petroglyph of the sparrow hawk—a gli gli. This is the traditional totem of bravery for the Carib tribe.

