

JAMES RIVER BATTEAU FESTIVAL: JUNE 17-25, 2005

# Batteau construction

Batteau enthusiasts and fans will begin taking the trip from Lynchburg to Maiden's Landing on Saturday during the annual James River Batteau Festival. Here is a look what goes into building a batteau and a map showing the route participants will take on the river over the next week.



## Batteau history

➤ Batteau is the French word for boat. It came to signify any flat-bottomed, shallow-draft vessel that was pointed at both ends. The vessel was the mainstay of inland shipping.

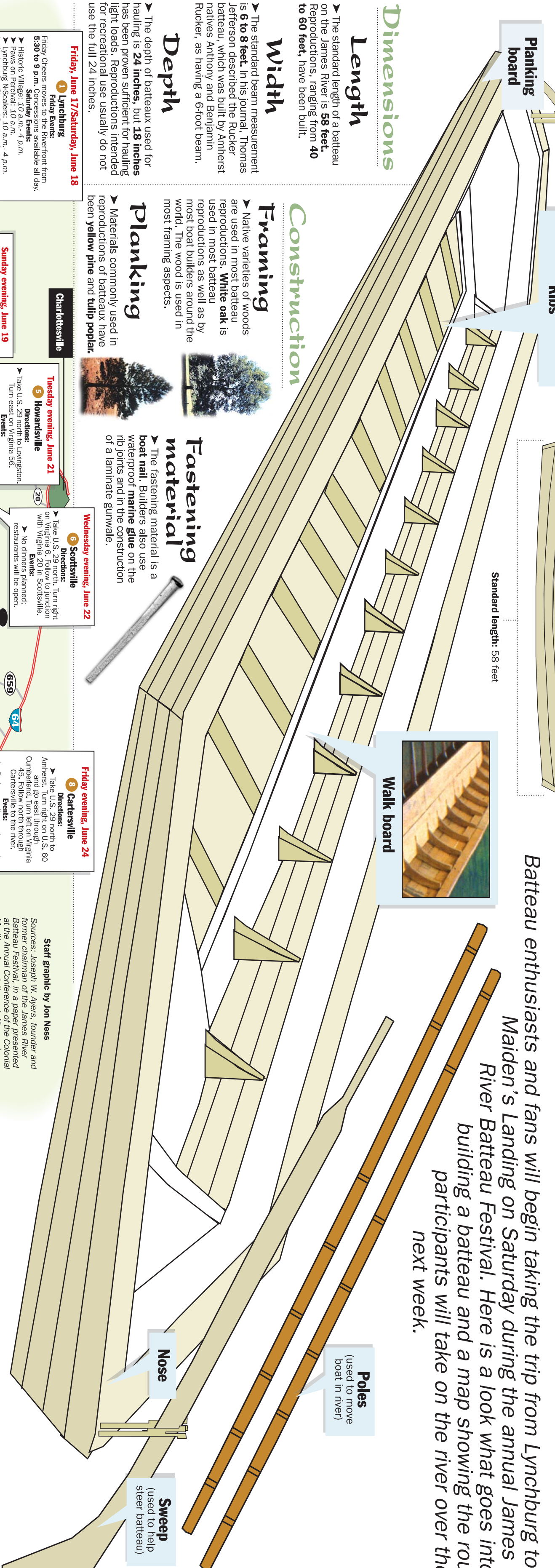
➤ The early batteaux weighed about 9,000 pounds and could carry 11 hogsheads, weighing 500 to 600 pounds.

➤ The vessel was pointed at both ends and was poled down the river. Few illustrations exist, but original batteaux were uncovered in a dig at Richmond's Great Basin, between 1983 and 1986.

➤ Tobacco was shipped from Lynchburg to Richmond once a year on batteaux. In the early spring when the James River was the deepest, in the barter economy, tobacco was cash.

➤ Batteaux were considered very valuable because they were such a heavy-duty craft. They could carry cargo over very rapid or very shallow water.

➤ Batteaux made runs on the river until the 1850s with the advent of the James River and the Kanawha Canal system. The railroad and the Civil War all but wiped out batteaux as well.



## Dimensions

### Length

➤ The standard length of a batteau on the James River is **58 feet**. Reproductions, ranging from **40 to 60 feet**, have been built.

### Width

➤ The standard beam measurement is **6 to 8 feet**. In his journal, Thomas Jefferson described the Rucker batteau, which was built by Amherst natives Anthony and Benjamin Rucker, as having a 6-foot beam.

### Depth

➤ The depth of batteaux used for hauling is **24 inches**, but **18 inches** has been proven sufficient for hauling light loads. Reproductions intended for recreational use usually do not use the full 24 inches.

## Construction

### Framing

➤ Native varieties of woods are used in most batteau reproductions. **White oak** is used in most batteau reproductions as well as by most boat builders around the world. The wood is used in most framing aspects.

### Planking

➤ Materials commonly used in reproductions of batteaux have been **yellow pine** and **tulip poplar**.

### Fastening material

➤ The fastening material is a **boat nail**. Builders also use **waterproof marine glue** on the rib joints and in the construction of a laminate gunwale.

