

Where is Alf Altmann's kayak now?



Alf Altmann's kayak shortly after it was retrieved from the sea on March 6, 1970, following his fateful attempt to cross Bass Strait. The kayak was in pristine condition, proving Alf's theory that it was unsinkable.

By Carol Altmann

In revisiting [Alf Altmann's fateful effort to cross Bass Strait solo](#) in his home-made kayak, one question inevitably arose: where is the boat now?

After Alf's death, it is understood that the kayak was stored first at the Warrnambool Ski Club and later at Alf's brother's property in Warrnambool before Alf's widow, Isobel, offered it to the new **Flagstaff Hill Maritime Village** (it opened in

1974).

Unfortunately, however, the kayak at that time was not considered historic enough for inclusion in the museum: after all, it had only been a few years since the Bass Strait crossing attempt.

Instead, the kayak apparently ended up on display at the now defunct **Lancaster's** marine, on Raglan Parade, before being donated to the **Warrnambool City Council** in the early 1980s, where it was stored at the council depot.

And that was pretty much the last anybody heard or saw of it...until now.



Alf Altmann during a test run with his home-made kayak, prior to setting off from Tasmania on February 25, 1970.

After being contacted by *Bluestone*, the WCC's communications manager, **Nick Higgins**, established that the kayak was no longer at the depot and may have been donated to the **Warrnambool Triton Woodworkers** club, housed in the old Fletcher Jones factory.

Bluestone called Triton club secretary **Louis Seater**, who used the opportunity of a club afternoon tea to spread the word and see if any members knew the whereabouts of the kayak. Despite his enthusiastic efforts, nobody did.

Just as the trail was about to run cold, Nick Higgins popped up again – not only with news, but a grainy photo of what looked like the kayak in storage at Flagstaff Hill.

And it was.



Showing the ravages of time: Alf Altmann's kayak as it is today.

Flagstaff Hill manager **Peter Abbott** kindly organised for the kayak to be taken out of storage for us to confirm its

heritage and to photograph it. Peter believes the kayak has been with the museum for at least the past 22 years, mainly for safekeeping, but that not a lot was known about its history.

Alf's second youngest son, Alan, joined us to see the kayak for the first time in at least 30 years and even though there are no immediate plans to put it on display (due to space), he was thrilled to know that at least something of his father's kayak remained.

The boat is in poor condition, probably due to being moved so much in those early days, with some pieces missing and others falling apart, but it remains a very visual and emotional reminder of Alf's extraordinary journey.

Perhaps the 50th anniversary of Alf's voyage – in 2020 – would be the perfect time to again reveal the “unsinkable” kayak and its story to the public.

For now, however, it is wonderful to know that what remains of the kayak is in safe hands.



Alan Altmann with his father's kayak that he had not seen for more than 30 years before it was traced to a store room in Flagstaff Hill Maritime Museum.