



History Junkies

As an undergrad, **John C. Muir** came across 19th century photos of Chinese junks sailing the San Francisco Bay. Curious about what these foreign vessels were doing in California, Muir dove into maritime research and was soon building a replica himself.

Muir learned that several immigrant Chinese shrimping communities settled in the San Francisco and San Pablo Bays between 1860 and 1910. Little remains of these villages, but the well-preserved remains of two redwood junks were discovered during low tide in the mudflats of China Camp State Park in Marin County.

Muir, now a curator of small craft at San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park, decided to recreate a traditional California-Chinese shrimp junk from the ground up. With Park Service approval he snowshoed through the mud to take photos and measurements, and enlisted the help of third-generation China Camp resident **Frank Quan** and a crew of mostly amateur boat-builders, who called themselves "Junkies."

To build the 42-foot replica, they used traditional techniques Muir learned from trips to boatyards in the

Guangdong province of China. The Junkies bent the redwood of the keel and planks over a fire, shaping them around a fulcrum while clamping or weighing the ends down with buckets of rocks, and constantly spraying the lumber with water, to prevent burning.

"At first fire-bending seemed counterintuitive," says Junkie **Inka Petersen**, "but it works instantaneously. Plus we got to have a bonfire on the beach every day."

When it was time to piece the vessel together, volunteer blacksmiths taught the Junkies to forge headless iron nails based on samples Muir brought from China. Headless nails are integral to the art of edge-nailing, which joins the planks to each other as well as to the main structure.

Six months later the junk was christened the *Grace Quan* after Frank's mother. The crew raised the hand-sewn and tanbark-dyed cotton canvas sail, perhaps the vessel's most stunning feature, and the *Grace Quan* set sail on San Francisco Bay.

—Audra Wolfmann

» Shrimp Junk Project: nps.gov/archive/safr/junk.html