

Akhiok students build kayak for exhibit

With just two days to go before the end of the 1989-1990 school year, the children of Akhiok School in the village of Akhiok (population 70) on Kodiak Island completed a school project which is being seen by visitors from around the world.

The students used traditional methods and materials to construct a 14-foot long kayak for the "Russian America: The Forgotten Frontier" exhibit which will be on view at the Anchorage Museum of History and Art, beginning Nov. 19.

Since January, 12 students ages 10-17 years from this school of only 24 students worked on this full-size replica of a traditional kayak — baidarka.

It started as something that parents and local interest groups thought



An icon from an Aleutian Islands church is part of the exhibit.

would be an interesting addition to the school's curriculum and something that, in a practical way, would help children rediscover their heritage.

A Danish museum provided draw-

ings of a Native vessel by the Frenchman La Perouse who visited Kodiak Island in the 18th century.

Parents and villagers both from Akhiok and Old Harbor studied the drawings and discussed construction methods and possible materials. An Eskimo couple from Nome was enlisted to teach the children how to sew skin.

"It has really been a community effort in terms of advice and support," said Steve Rounsaville, the teacher who coordinated the operation, "but the actual physical work was done almost entirely by the children. It was a magnificent effort. Not a single one of them, nor the staff, nor the parents involved, had ever done anything like this before."

When Barbara Sweetland Smith,

curator of the exhibit, approached the Kodiak Area Native Association for help in finding an example of a historic vessel from Kodiak Island for the exhibit, they immediately suggested Akhiok School. But it was not until the completion of the project that it was realized just how far the little boat would travel.

As the centerpiece of the "Hunters of the Sea" section of this 4,000-square foot exhibit, the kayak will be on view at the Anchorage museum through Feb. 10, 1991.

After Anchorage it will be on exhibit at the Alaska State Museum, Juneau, April 26-Sept. 22, 1991; the Oakland Museum, Oakland, Calif., Oct. 20, 1991-Jan. 12, 1992; and the Library of Congress, Feb. 15-April 20, 1992.