Stalking The Wild...

The Magazine of Outdoor Discovery

Euell Gibbons

1911 - 1975

"Stalking the Wild..."

The Magazine of Outdoor Discovery

Stalking the Wild... is published four times a year
*by **Stalking The Wild... Inc.***

For manuscript guidelines, or information
about Stalking The Wild...magazine call:
(256) 547-2453
or fax: (256) 974-
Email: info@Stalkingthewild.com
Mailing Address: P.O. Box 8481
Gadsden, AL 35902
http://www.stalkingthewild.com

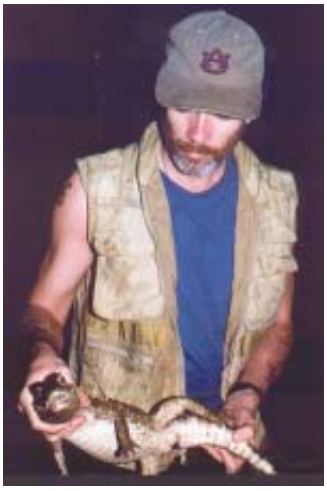
In This Issue

Stalking The Wild...
The Magazine of Outdoor Discovery is a quarterly publication dedicated to the preservation of the skills of our ancestors. Article submission is welcomed and encouraged.

please read our guidelines at http://w.stalkingthewild.com.

Welcome to Stalking The Wild...

The Magazine of Outdoor Discovery.



Could you live “off the land” during an emergency? Do you have the knowledge and skills skills to forage the woods for your meals and medicines? Do you have what it takes to “Go forth alone in to the Wilderness,” survive and prosper? Can you identify plants and animals during any season of the year which can feed you, heal your ailments and provide you with cordage, tools and other useful materials?

Modern man is so far removed from the land that the very idea of wandering into the deep, dark woods is a frightening and foreboding experience. Meat and vegetables come from anonymous mega farms wrapped in sterile plastic. Medicines are of course, synthetic and easily accesible. Nature is something enjoyed in a theme park in Florida with trips to the real wilderness consisting of an occasional day hike with the kids at a State Park. Finding yourself alone in the wilderness, even if only for a day is one in which terror becomes a constant companion. Every snapping twig confirming that some dangerous animal is waiting to pounce upon you.

To many of us in today’s world, nature is something to be feared, while to others, it brings forth the other major and often times deadly concept, the “Bambi” syndrome arising from too many Walt Disney movies where the animals dance with you, light on your hand and pose no threat at all. Both of these concepts are wrong. The natural world is neither lying in wait for us, nor is it going to welcome us with open arms. It is one in which the pragmatic philosophy “kill or be killed” plays out its natural order.

By trial and error, careful observation of the ebb and flow of nature, along with a certain amount of intuition, our ancestors developed an immense knowledge of the edible/medicinal plants and animal life in his environment. He had no WalMart to run to for tools and no McDonald’s for a quick bite to eat. His very existense and that of the family depended upon an ability to take what nature offered. Man had to have an intimate understanding of what woods would make the best bow, how to hunt and kill an animal, use every part possible and finally, discard only that which had absolutley no use.

In Stalking The Wild... we will show you how to rediscover these skills. In upcoming issues we will be bringing you articles on how to tan a deer hide using its own brains, knap arrowheads, travel for miles using a topo map and compass, forage edible / medicinal plants and make an informed decision about which type of backpack or gps unit is right for you. Oh, and by the way, we’ll even show you how to properly make knots and use ropes for climbing, sharpen a knife, and no less than a thousand other skills often overlooked by many magazines.

Stalking The Wild... is here to teach you skills. Our goal is to provide you with information which will allow you to walk into any part of the country and have the ability and confidence to take what nature offers and successfully blend yourself into the natural world.

Stalking The Wild... is a blend of both the primitive and modern. No matter what your level, we will give you PRACTICAL, TESTED information you will find useful in a real world situation. You won’t find dangerous fallacies here; no description of how to make a solar still which will not work; no ineffective information on traps and snares which won’t catch a thing. If you see something in this magazine, you can be assured that it has been tested in the field and the information is both correct and invaluable.

The staff of Stalking The Wild... has many years practical experience in a wide variety of skills. These range from hardcore adventuring in the Peruvian Amazon, primitive technology, orienteering, backpacking, canoeing and wildcrafting. We are out there practicing these skills on a daily basis. While no one person has the market cornered on all survival skills, we at Stalking The Wild... do have people on staff and others writing for us who have professional level abilities in just about every aspect of outdoor skill imaginable.

The bottom line is that we at Stalking The Wild... are here for you, our reader. For us to be successful, it is up to us to bring you interesting articles and for you to keep us pointed in that direction. Your feedback is invaluable to the success of this effort. Please let us know what you are interested in and how we can bring you articles which relate to you and your love of the outdoors.

SEE YOU IN THE WOODS,
Darryl Patton

Wing Bone Turkey Calls

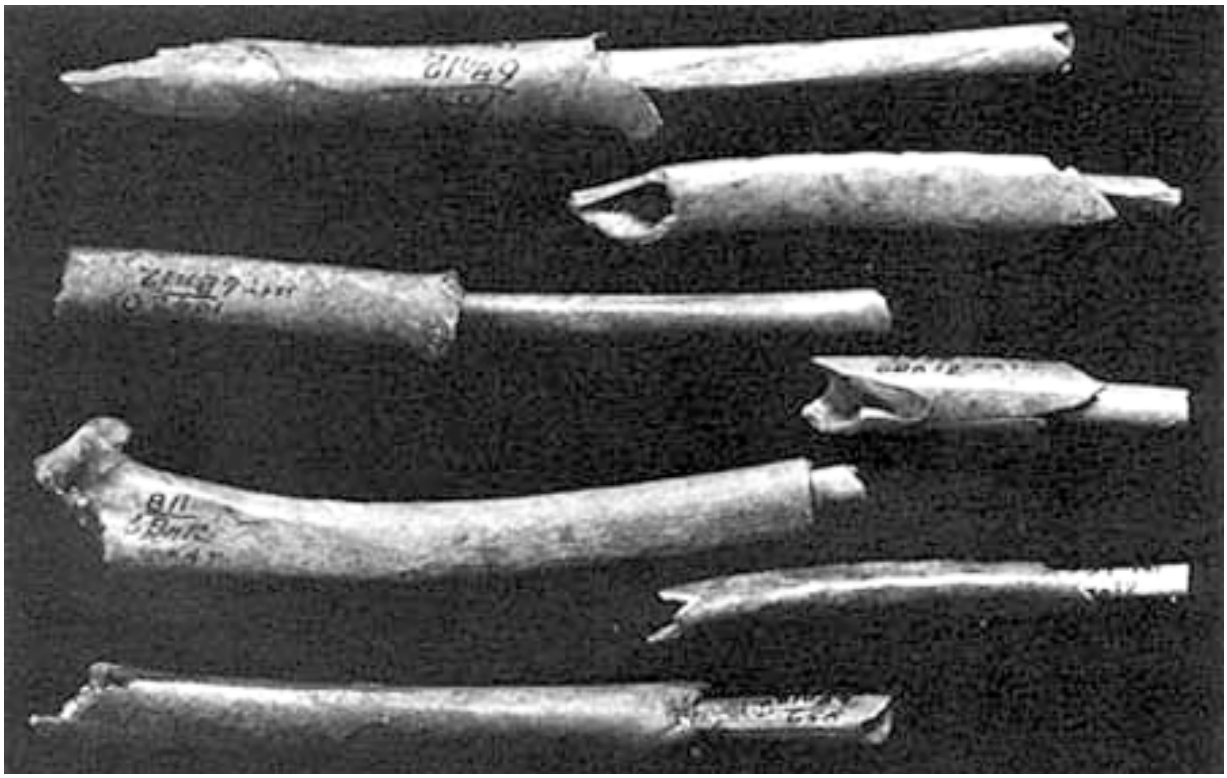
By Darryl Patton

The Indian of the Southern United States was a master of his environment. “Waste not, want not,” was his unspoken philosophy. His continued existence depended upon a keen eye to the ebb and flow of the world around him. Everything he gathered or killed had a use and a purpose; whether it was a deer, turkey, bear or a medicinal plant, he knew that his very life hung on that narrow thread of making the most out of every part of the animal or plant he was utilizing. The white tailed deer which fell to his atlatl or bow fed and clothed his family and provided the materials needed to produce the weapon with which to kill the next deer. Dogbane provided him with the cordage he needed for his bowstring, traps, snares and nets while the plant kingdom filled the empty bellies of his wife and child. By necessity, early man became the ultimate recycler, wasting nothing.

The same philosophy held true for the wild turkey common in the heavily forested hills and grassy plains of this region he called home. More than just a food source, it’s feathers fletched his arrows, it’s spurs used as projectile points and the quills used to decorate pottery. More importantly, it’s very bones could be used to fashion a call for luring other turkeys within arrow range.

In 1940, in what was to become Kentucky Lake in western Tennessee, archaeologists began excavating a massive Indian village which came to be known as the Eva site. Among the thousands of projectile points and pottery shards was a large amount of wild turkey bones which had obviously been cut and ground so as to fit together. These calls made from the radius and ulna were eventually dated back 6500 years.

Identical to modern calls of today, these calls from the Eva site gave modern hunter a glimpse into a hunting technique which has remained largely unchanged until now. With a little elbow grease, you too can make a wingbone call similar to the ones discovered at the Eva site.



Processing The Bones

The first challenge in making a turkey wingbone call is to get some bones from hunters or at your local store around Thanksgiving and Christmas. Contrary to a popular misconception, domestic turkey bones, while not quite as strong as those of the wild turkey, are not too fragile to use and can make some pretty good calls. In a pinch or if you prefer, you can use bones from other birds such as a large chicken, duck or goose. All will make an acceptable sound. If you do choose to use bones from local wild Turkeys, be sure to check into the legalities of using hen versus Tom

Turkey bones. In Alabama, it is illegal to kill a hen turkey.

Once you have located a suitable turkey, pull the feathers off and carefully separate the large bones at the joints. Try not to jerk and overly manipulate the bones at this point. They are fragile and easily snapped.

Once the bones have been removed, pull off as much fat and gristle as possible. Place a large handful of wood ashes and sand in a pot of hot water and use this to occasionally rinse the bones while working on them. This helps to remove a lot of the grease from the bones making cleaning a much easier process. If you don't want to mess with the ashes, you can simply use very hot water and constantly swish the bones in it.

When the bones have been thoroughly washed and the gristle from the end removed, turn your attention to the marrow and small bone-like partitions inside the bone. If you wish, you can remove the solid ends of each bone at this point. Take a bone awl and use it as a scraper/punch to gouge out a lot of the adhering marrow as well as breaking out the small pieces of bone like material. Your goal here is to completely clean the interior of the bone. The cleaner the interior, the better the quality of sound from the finished product. One word of caution - It is very easy to split the bone at this point so use your bone awl very carefully.

My preference is to use a bone awl for the wider parts and switch to a thin rivercane shoot and wet sand to finish reaming out the bone, removing as much of the marrow as possible. At the same time, occasionally blowing through the bone forces out tiny bits of marrow the awl or rivercane shoot has missed.

Next, repeat the cleaning process. You want to get absolutely all of the marrow and other gunk out of the bones in order to have a better, more clear sound.

After cleaning the bones, locate an ant hill. Here in the South we have no problem finding a nice fire ant mound for this part. A few days being worked over by these industrious insects should be more than enough to remove any final stubborn particles you may have missed. Be very cautious when using the anthill method to place a wire cage or slotted milk crate over the bones. If you forget to do this someone will walk off during the night with all of your hard work.

If you don't have access to a suitable anthill you can simply simmer the bones on the stove in water in which a squirt or two of Dawn dishwashing liquid has been added. Nothing beats Dawn for breaking up grease and cleaning the bones.

The final stage in preparing the bones is to lay them out in a sunny spot for a few days to bleach white. Again, if you choose you can soak the bones in hydrogen peroxide for several hours. This will whiten then to your satisfaction. Now you can do some more scraping and wet sanding the bones with a piece of sand stone. This is not necessary but serves to smooth and whiten the bones even further. Bees wax can be rubbed in to add luster and act as a moisturizer, thus lengthening the life of the call.

At this point you are ready to begin the actual process of constructing the wingbone call.

Making The Call

The actual construction of a wingbone call is a fairly easy process. All you need is a basic understanding of turkey anatomy and you are ready to begin.

Think of a turkey wing as being equal to the human arm. It has a radius, ulna and humerus just as we do. It is these three bones you will use to construct the call. The radius is the small bone, the ulna, the middle sized bone with the humerus being the largest bone.

Remove the ends of each bone section. This can be done with a piece of flint if you are going primitive or with a small saw otherwise.

Place the large end of the radius into the small end of the ulna and the large end of the ulna into the small end of the humerus. You will probably have to do a bit of trimming at this point to get everything to fit properly but it won't take much. These bones just seem to be made for each other. The ulna is usually the only bone which needs much abrading and this can be done with a piece of sandstone or sandpaper.

When you can fit the bones into each other to your satisfaction, being careful to keep them aligned along their curve, take some pine resin and smear the bones above and below each joint. Don't forget to fill in any gaps you find, particularly around where the ulna and

humerus join.

Next, begin twisting and wrapping your cordage around the bone. Pull the cordage tight while spiraling upwards. You can either wrap all the way up the bone covering both sets of joints or you may want to wrap the bone below and above the first joint, leave a gap and do the same with the second joint. I personally tend to do this since I think this is a bit more eye appealing. This gap can also be decorated or used as a point of attachment for a carrying thong.

Once the call has been completely wrapped, again smear pine resin over the cordage. Lastly, take a burning ember from the fire you started earlier with a hand drill and melt the pine resin. With your fingers, rub the hot resin thoroughly into the wrapping. When this cools, your wingbone call will be bound tightly together as well as being waterproofed.

There are a wide variety of native materials to choose from for wrapping the bone. I tend to use Dogbane (Indian Hemp), Milkweed and Palm fibers. You can also use thin strips of deer rawhide.

If you want to use a carrying thong, cut off a small round piece of the radius and slip it like a collar the call. A small buckskin thong can be used as a carrying strap.

methods used for carrying and blowing the call but this is the method I find the easiest to learn.

With just a little practice you will soon find yourself yelping and gobbling like a real turkey! The great thing about these calls is that they can be used not only for turkeys but also as a predator call and for Javelina out West. The small radius bone can be used by itself as a mouse squeaker for coyote and fox.

It is very important to remember that the tone and volume of a wingbone call is influenced by both the number of bones you use as well as how far the bones are inserted into each other. It is always a good idea to experiment for the best sound before gluing all of the bones together. A call made from the humerus or femur with make a louder sound with a deeper pitch.

Turkey hunters with a preference usually choose between a two and three bone call. Two bone and short three bone calls sounding more like a hen turkey while the larger three bone calls will mimic those large toms you are after.

Making a wingbone turkey call is a great project for the pimitive skills enthusiast as well as the seasoned hunter. They are relatively easy to make with stone tools and, with practice, simple to use. Standing behind a blind in the deep woods, blowing on a handmade call brings us a step closer to the ancestral hunter patiently waiting for nature to feed his family and then provide the tools to continue the cycle of hunting and gathering.

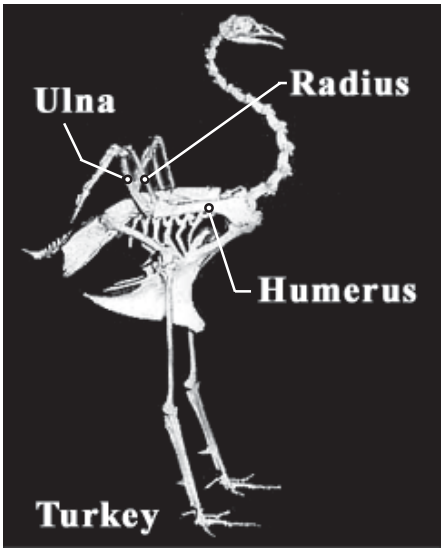
How to sound like a real turkey

So, you managed to make yourself an authentic Southern wingbone turkey call. Now all you have to do is figure out how to blow the danged thing.

Actually, managing to pass yourself off as hen or tom turkey really isn't all that difficult. A little attention to detail and a lot of practice will have you clucking like a pro in no time at all.

Grasp the call on its lower end in the fleshy area between your thumb and index finger. This will allow your ring and pinky fingers to fall naturally across the mouth of the call. Use your left hand to help support and steady the call.

Place your lips just over the mouthpiece and begin to suck (not blow) air as if you were making kissing noises with your lips. By varying the position of your fingers over the mouth of call you can adjust both the volume and tone of the sound. There are other



Euell Gibbons

The Man Who Taught America To Eat Hickory Nuts

"I cannot tell how my intense interest in nature began., for it was there as early as I can remember. At the age of five I originated my first wild food recipe, pounding together shelled hickory nuts and sweet hackberries to make a wild candy bar. My thirst for knowledge about nature was insatiable, and I picked the brains of every Indian, backwoodsman, and hillbilly I met. I had little formal schooling but became a gluttonous reader at an early age, and when not out in the fields and woods listening to what nature had to say, I was delving into books, learning what they had to teach about the wild things I loved." Euell Gibbons

1911-1975

By Darryl Patton

As a child, two books profoundly influenced my interest in nature and foraging. The first was a dog eared copy of a boy scout manual with it's drawings of some guys making fire with a bow drill, making knots and constructing ingenous shelters from tree branches. My imagination fired up, I immediately set out to duplicate these skills. More often failing without a teacher, success occasionally came my way allowing me to sit in my comfortable dirt lodge listening to the rain outside, feeling quite proud of myself as an eight year old kid.

In the mid 1960's I made the discovery of a lifetime at the library. A small book by some guy named Euell Gibbons called, "Stalking The Wild Asparagus" became available and I immediately sat down and began devouring every word in it. Written by what appeared to be a rugged outdoor type of guy, I read it cover to cover, returning many times to the library to sit and read chapters describing how to make fritters from Elderberry blooms, Chicory coffee, Acorn griddle cakes and even baked Possum to name only a few. To this day, the most prized book in my nature library is a copy of this book signed by Mr. Gibbons.

In the many years which have passed since first reading this book, along with my own knowledge of plants developed since then, I have noticed that just about all of the modern interest in identifying and utilizing "wild" edible plants and animals traces it's origins in one way or another back to Euell Gibbons. In fact, a lot of what passes for new information today is based in large part on his materials.

Without his influence, the foraging world would be nowhere near as popular today. Euell Gibbons got the interest of America turned towards wild foods even at the expense of being ridiculed by Hollywood as being something of a fanatic. Countless late night shows poked fun at the "weed eater" and his fascination with eating Pine trees and Hickory nuts. Rumor at his death was that he had passed away due to an ulcer developed from taking too many aspirin because of the wild foods.

One of the early environmentalists, Euell Gibbons was in many ways just as important and vital a figure as was Rachel Carson and "Silent Spring." While he believed in wild foods and loved to forage, the underlying theme to all that he did was respect for nature and the need to preserve it for future generations.

Euell Gibbons was born in September 8, 1911 in Texas. Born into extreme poverty, the necessity to forage wild plants and animals was the only thing which kept his family from starving to death during the hard days of the Depression. At one point, out of desperation he broke into an abandoned shed, found a sack of pinto beans and,

for weeks, the family managed to survive on these and a few wild plants. He said that eventually, the family became so tired of beans that the mere thought of eating them would make him vomit.

Eventually, at the age of 15, he struck out on his own, hoboing across the country, living where he could and all the while learning how other desperate people made do with what little they could scrounge or forage.

This, along with what he had learned from his grandmother, who herself had an intimate knoweldge of many wild plants, was to profoundly influence Euell Gibbons in later life.

During World War II, Gibbons worked as a civilian boatbuilder in Hawaii. After the war he attended the University of Hawaii and spent several years as a happy go lucky beachcomber, foraging the rich shores of Oahu, harvesting edible seaweeds, octopus and coconuts as well as a multitude of other "wild" offerings. These experiences would later become one of his books known as the Beachcombers Guide.

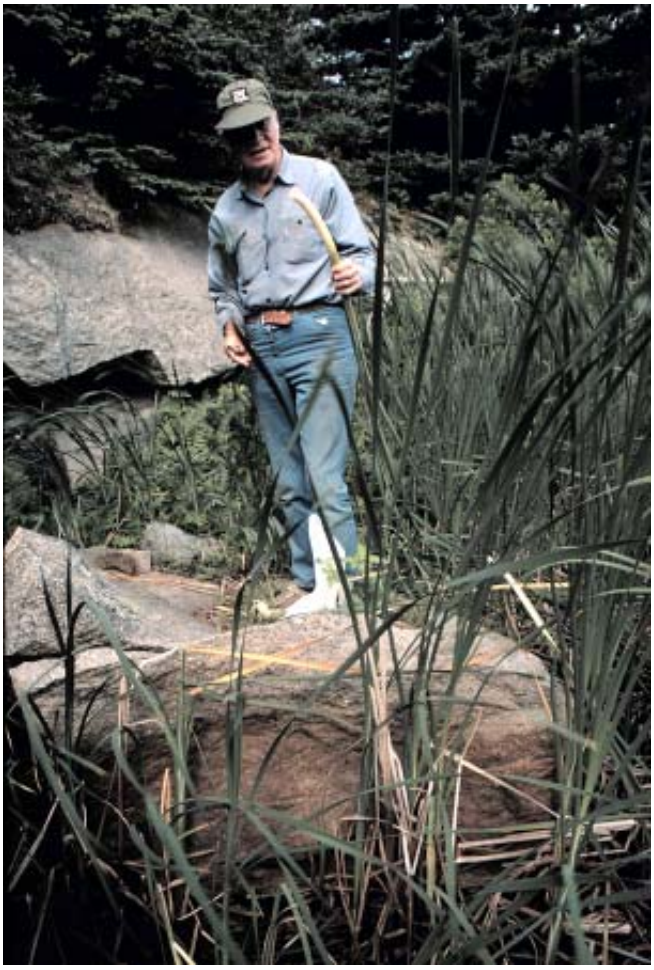
It was also during this period that Gibbons was to make one of his most important discoveries, that of meeting and marrying Freda Freyer. The soon to be Mrs. Gibbons was to have an influential role in promoting his future role as the father of the "Wild Edibles" movement.

In the mid fifties, Gibbons, a prolific writer of poetry, began on his great American Novel titled, Mr. Markle Retires. This work was rejected by his publisher with the suggestion that he re-work it into a book on plants instead. Re-written, it was to become the classic bestseller, "Stalking The Wild Asparagus." Published in 1962, this book was to pave the way to instant success for Gibbons.

Constantly in demand for public speaking appearances, he soon followed his first book with a Beachcombers Handbook, Feast on a Diabetic Diet, and Stalking The Healthful Herbs as well as a host of other articles for different publications such as Organic Gardening, National Geographic and Mother Earth News.

Fame did not change Euell Gibbons. He was just as likely to be found paddling the backwaters of the Canadian wilderness as to be seen on a commercial for Grape Nuts cereal. He believed that his mission in life was educating people in the joys of gathering and preparing gourmet meals from wild plants and animals. Even more so, behind this mission was another even greater mission - educating people to the necessity to preserve what he saw as a dwindling resource.

An early conservationist, he saw years ago the dangers of pollution and the devastation of habitat brought about by uncontrolled growth. Euell Gibbons actual time in the public's eye was relatively short. He gained fame with the publication of Stalking The Wild Asparagus in 1962 and died in 1975, a short thirteen year career. However, the years he did have with the



Euell Gibbons gathering cattails

American public were ones which were to profoundly influence several generations of back to the land enthusiasts. Very few people who gather wild foods have not been in some ways been guided by his unseen hand through his writings, many of which are to be found on their bookselves. It is because of his influence that Stalking The Wild Magazine is here. Hopefully, in some small way we will carry on the legacy of the greatest forager and conservationist of the 20th century.

Some of Euell Gibbons Books:

Stalking The Wild Asparagus
Stalking The Blue-Eyed Scallop
Stalking The Healthful Herbs
Euell Gibbons' Beachcomber's Handbook
Feast On A Diabetic Diet
Stalking The Good Life
Stalking The Faraway Places
Euell Gibbons'Handbook of Edible Wild Plants

Learn the ancient skills of your ancestors at Stalking the Wild's School of Outdoor Skills. Located near the Bankhead National Forest and Sipsey Wilderness, STW offers a wide range of classes in primitive and wilderness survival skills. Hosted by Wild Alabama Trading Post with lead instructors Darryl Patton and Lamar Marshall along with guest instructors, these custom classes range from one day seminars to week long intensive classes.

Call for Summer and Fall schedule or to arrange a class and date of your choice. Must have minimum of 6 people to make a class.

Basic Backpacking and Wilderness Impressions – Beginners
Call for dates. Cost $60.00

Basic Flint Knapping
Feb. 9th, Cost $75.00 (flint knapping kit extra)

Baskets and Other Natural Containers
April 13th, Cost $50.00

Brain Tanned Buckskin
June 8th, Cost $75.00

Cape San Blas Foraging Trip
August 24th & 25th, Cost $100.00

Edible, Medicinal, Utilitarian Plants
Feb. 23rd, March 9th & 16th, April 20th, May 11th & 25th, Cost: $50.00

Firemaking (Basic Level) Feb. 16th & July 13th, Cost $50.00

Primitive Pottery
June22, Cost $75.00

Primitive Skills Weekend
May 10th, 11th, 12th Cost $150.00

Orienteering - Maps & Compass
June 29th, July 6th, Cost $50.00

For More Information:
Stalking The Wild...
(205) 974-3166 (Lamar Marshall) or (256) 547-2453 (Darryl Patton)
http://www.stalkingthewild.com
darryl@stalkingthewild.com

Introduction To Basic Flint Knapping

By Tommie Clontz

When ancient man first saw that he could break or chip certain hard rocks with another rock, he found that this created a sharp cutting edge suitable for killing animals to feed his family. Thus, began a major milestone in his development of stone tools. Over thousands of years, he leaned which stones worked best and also how to heat treat his materials to make them chip better. Like the development of fire, the ability to work stone into useful tools made man even more the master of his environment.

Flintknapping is the art of making arrowheads, knives and other stone tools similar to those made by ancient man. The word "knap" originated from making gun flints.

To completely cover all aspects of flintknapping would take an enormous amount of space, so in this article I will briefly cover the basics, such as materials, tools, heat treating and the knapping proceedure itself along with safety concerns.

True flint comes from the chalk beds of England and other locations in Europe. What we know as flint in America is an impure form of the rock and is about 90 percent quartz. This "chert" is found in many different forms ranging from nodules which look somewhat like a ball in shape, to lens chert which is formed in large beds to bedded cherts which come in deposits similar to coal.

Obsidian, a form of volcanic glass formed by the rapid cooling of lava is also a popular knapping material. Found primarily out west, it is extremely sharp when worked and requires a lot of caution when working with it. Man made glass such as broken jar bottoms or plate glass 3/8 inches thick or so will work much like obsidian and is a good material for the beginner flintknapper.

Other materials such as fossilized wood and coral, jasper, agates and novaculite can be knapped also.

Very briefly I will explain a very critical aspect in working with stone known as heat treating. Some cherts are not as dense as other and heat treating them changes the structure of the material, making it more dense. This increases its chipping quality and also gives the materials a more lustrous and waxier color. Heat treating can be done in a kiln, oven or in a firepit such as ancient man would have used. I would recommend that you look deeper into the subject of heat treating as this can take rock which is normally hard to work with and make it a pleasure to knap.

TOOLS

The tools required to knap flint consist of a hammer stone or large deer/moose antler for percussiion flaking, a sharpened deer antler tine or bone for pressure flaking, an abrading stone and a leather pad to protect the hand while pressure flaking.

Some modern knappers are purists and will only work with stone, bone and antlers as did our ancestors.

Most knappers today however work with tools made of copper which is similar to bone and softer stone tools.

THE CONCHOIDAL FRACTURE

What makes flintknapping possible is something known as the conchoidal fracture. To illustrate this principle, take a BB gun and shoot into the bottom of a glass bottle or into a piece of thick glass. Be very careful when you do this as the BB or glass can fly around. The blowout will produce a cone of glass of about 100 degrees. Keeping this predictable fracture in mind, you can strike a piece of knappable stone on a prepared platform and determine the direction of the flakes that will be removed based upong this principle.

STEPS IN FLINTKNAPPING

The first step in knapping is to prepare the edge of a suitable piece of flint. This is an important and critical step you have to do before you even begin to take off your first thinning flakes as shown below.

If your piece of stone has a natural platform you can begin with this. If not, you will have to create a platform to work with.

A platform is a bevel on the edge of the stone. This platform is what you will strike in order to remove thinning flakes from the opposite side of the stone from where you are striking.

PERCUSSION FLAKING

Holding the piece of stone with the side next to your palm slightly higher than the outside of the piece, stike the edge of the stone coming straight down with the percussion flaker. You will repeat this process all around the rock. This will give the piece an oval or lens shape. Repeat this process on the other side. You can also make the piece more symetrical during this process. Thinning of the stone is always tricky for the beginner but gets easier with practice.

To thin the stone, you have to abrade the edges on one side where the platform will be below center line. At this point, you can hold your piece level or the platform slightly higher to chip off longer thinning flakes.

PRESSURE FLAKING

The final stage of flintknapping is to use your pressure flaker to sharpen the stone as well as continuing the thinning process. You will finally use the flaker to make the notches with which to haft the point to a handle or arrow.

A pressure flaker consists of a copper rod three sixteenths of an inch or so in diameter. This is inserted into a handle made of nylon or wood approximately six inches long. The copper rod is usually about four and a half inches long with about one half inch long protruding out of the handle with the tip of the rod slightly sharpened.

To pressure flake, put the leather pad in your palm for protection . Lightly abrade one complete side in the same manner as you did for percussion flaking. Place the point on the leather pad and hold the edge of the point with your finger tips. Starting at the point, gently press off flakes by pushing inward and downward with the flaker, giving a downward snap. As you work on up towards the base of the point, you can apply more pressure for longer flakes. Repeat this process on the other side.

NOTCHING THE POINT

After completing both faces of the point ini this manner you will be ready to notch the point. When you are notching you must remember to keep the tip of your pressure flaker sharp. Start notching with very short flakes to set up the notch platform and then abrade the notch with a waste flake. Turn the point over and press in and down on the platform to remove flakes for the notch. after repeating this process for both notches, gently abrade the notches and the base

of the point. Abrading the base prevents the edges from cutting the sinew when you lash the point on a shaft or handle.

A final word on safety is to wear safety glasses during the flintknapping process. Flying pieces of flint or obsidian are very dangerous. It is also a good idea to work outside when flintknapping. The small particles produced by the knapping process and the dust from abrading the point can cause knappers silicosis. A fan is good for blowing away dust during this process.

To learn more about flintknapping, you can attend a flint knap or contact www.stalkingthewild.com for information about classes.

Good luck with you new adventure into the art of ancient tool making.

Tips for Woods Runners

by George Hedgepeth

An active, agile, and adaptive brain is the most important tool for survival in any environment. It makes sense to exercise one's mind and keep it sharp. Here is a good tip to keep the mental edge keen.

Pick three or four everyday items that are at your desk, in your pockets, or in your vehicle and imagine all the ways these items could help in a survival situation. How could they protect you, signal for help, keep you warm, fed, and dry, or provide drinking water for you? Be creative. Look at the parts as well as the whole. Choose items that have little obvious utility, and stretch your thinking.

Do this exercise a couple of times each day and soon you will have trained your mind to view the world as a toolbox.

A piece of foil such as that found as a discarded gum wrapper can help make a bow drill fire. Cram the foil into the hole in the hand socket, and you have a durable, low-friction bearing block that will smoke less than the fire board!

With a properly hardened high carbon striker (above R-60), other things than flint will produce good, hot sparks for fire making. Various cherts, jaspers, agates, quartzites, and even old broken glass can work. Practice and experiment!

When foraging for food or medicine plants, remember that many useful "weeds" like to sprout in disturbed soils. They are pioneers, some of the first plants to colonize an area. Look for these plants near washed out creek banks, on sand bars, in the scars of blown down trees, in old burnt areas, and especially near areas of human activity.

When using pine needles, dead leaves, cattails, or other vegetation for bedding, use a layer of something water tight between your body and the makeshift mattress to act as a vapor barrier. Otherwise, moisture may steal as much heat as the cold ground. Large garbage bags are nice for this.

How to Make an Indian Pinch Pot

by Hector Baeza

Imagine taking something as simple as a lump of raw earth and making beautiful utilitarian containers for storage and cooking. Worldwide, all of our ancestors at one time or another discovered that they could take a piece of earth, add water and mold it unto something which, when fired, allowed them to cook their food more easily, transport grains and other materials and even act as long term storage containers.

For us modern abos, recreating this skill is one offering challenge as well as satisfaction. The challenge is to find, process, mold and fire clay. The satisfaction comes from the pride of the finished product which can still serve to make life easier as we strive to recreate the lives of our ancestors.

Where To Locate Clay

The first thing you need to do to make a simple pinch pot is to locate a suitable source of clay. Just because it is called clay doesn't mean that it will hold together when you try to mold something from it or that it will survive pit firing later.

Good clays can be found in a wide variety of places. Try looking along the banks of rivers and small streams. The clay in these bottom lands tends to be of high quality and is usually suitable for primitive pots. Another good place to look is where road crews have cut banks during highway construction. When scouting out clay, remember that many times the best material will be buried deeper, while that on the surface may be of lesser quality, mixed with more rocks and other debris which will have to be screened out later.

Is the Clay Plastic?

A major consideration in choosing a clay is it's plasticity. Many clays are "short," in that while they look good, the clay body itself will not bind together and the clay will crack while trying to mold the pot. This doesn't always mean you can't use a clay. You might be able to use a bit more water and mold a crude pot which will work in a survival situation, but it will never be as strong made from clay which has good plasticity.

To check the plasticity of your clay, take a small piece and remove any large pieces of debris. Add a little bit of water, roll out a cigar, then make a pretzel or wrap it around your finger. If it does either one without cracking, it is probably suitable for making a pot. If you find a great looking clay which shows poor plasticity, try leaving it soaking in a bucket for a month or two after adding a cup of vinegar. This rapidly ages the clay and may make the clay plastic enough to work with.

Processing The Clay

You don't usually find clay ready-made for pot construction. It will probably have to be processed somewhat. This can be done in one of two ways. Choose for yourself which you think is easier. I do it both ways, preferring the first.

1. Take the raw clay and pick out any obvious rocks and other pieces of debris. Spread the clay out in a thin layer and allow it to thoroughly dry. When dry, take a large rock and smash the clay into small pieces. Try and reduce the clay to an almost powder like consistency to make it easier to work with.

2. Take the raw clay and place it in a bucket; I use five gallon plastic pails. Fill with water and leave it for a week or so to completely soften. Next, mash the clay into a slurry and pour this through a screen to filter out the rocks. Add more water and repeat the process until all of the clay has been processed.

Constructing The Pinch Pot

1. Take a handful of clay about the size of a softball. Pound and work the clay to remove any air pockets which will cause the pot to explode when it is fired. Be careful to remove any small pieces of rock or other hard objects. These spell certain disaster for making a pot.

2. Roll the clay in your hands until it is shaped like a rounded ball.

3. Hold the clay ball in your left hand and press down with your other hand until you reach just a little past the center of the clay mass. Be careful to completely support the clay or it will rapidly become misshapen and harder to work with.

4. Turn the pot in your hands while at the same time pressing the clay with your thumb on the inside and your other fingers on the outside of the pot. You want to continue doing this until the pot is between 1/4 and ½ inches thick. With practice, you will be able to achieve a pretty uniform thickness. You can leave the bottom of the pot somewhat thicker that the sides but they need to be fairly uniform. Lots of variations in the wall thickness will cause problems with the pot as it dries and is then fired.

5. If you want your pot to be taller, pull up clay from inside the pot as you thin it. At this stage you can begin to shape the pot even more - drawing the clay in or out to change it's final shape.

6. If cracks develop, add a small amount of water to smooth and fill them. If the pot is become too thin, add a small pinch of clay and blend in.

7. When you have completed the pot, set it aside in the shade to slowly dry. You can wet some large leaves and place them around the pot. It is very important to SLOWLY dry the pot so that cracks don't develop.

8. The final construction stage is to take a knife and scrape the pot until it is smooth. At this time, or when it is in the leather stage (firm but slightly moist), you can use shell or bone tools to decorate the pot.

Firing The Pot

Your final step in making a primitive pinch pot is to fire it so that it will hold together later during cooking or rough handling. An unfired pot is not only delicate, it will fall apart if it gets wet.

Build a small fire on a day with as little wind as possible. Try and place your fire in a slight depression. This will help to keep the wind from making sudden shifts which can affect the temperature of the fire and cause the pots to explode.

Arrange your pots around the fire so that they can begin to dry and drive out all of the remaining moisture. This has to be done slowly or the pots will crack. As the fire burns continue adding fuel and slowly rotating the pots as you inch them closer to the fire.

The pots will begin to change color as the moisture is driven out. Eventually you will be able to let the fire die down to coals. At this time, carefully place the pots on top of the coals. You might even want to place some old pieces of pottery on the coals to set the pots on. Next, build up the fire again until the pots are fully engulfed. Allow the fire to completely burn to ashes.

After the fire has burned out and the ashes are cool to the touch you can fish the pots out. Hopefully, some of them will have survived the firing. Pick up a pot and carefully tap it with a finger. If it has fired well it should have a pleasant ring to it.

Depending upon the clay you used, your pot may be white, red (if there is a lot of iron oxide in the soil), orange, pink or any shade in between. Where the pot lay against the coals and the oxygen level had been extinguished, you will notice beautiful black fire clouds. These tend to lend the pot a touch of unique individuality. If you choose to produce a pot which is all black you can wait until the fire begins to die down and then smother it with wet leaves, pine straw etc. This will drive the carbon from the fire into the pot, producing an all black pot.

Final Thoughts

Working with clay is a satisfying link to our ancestors which is only limited by your imagination. Once you learn to construct a simple yet functional pinch pot, you can begin to experiment with the next level - the coiled pot. This technique will allow you to make even larger pots.

Finding clay, preparing clay, constructing the pot, decorating the pot and finally, firing the pot - a lot of work isn't it? Maybe so, but there is really one final part of this whole process - enjoying the pot! Primitive pottery is a relatively simple skill to learn but one which will bring you a lot of satisfaction, not only in it's construction but also in it's simple beauty and use.