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THE  
**BUSHCRAFT**  
JOURNAL  
EST 2014 ENHANCING YOUR JOURNEY IN THE NATURAL WORLD

**OUT & ABOUT  
THIS AUTUMN**

FUNGI, DEER & TREES  
WITH JOHN RHYDER

**HUNTING WITH  
BUSHMEN**

A TRIP TO THE NAMIBIA  
WITH RENÉ NAUTA

**FRICTION FIRE**

THE BOW DRILL  
WITH THIJMEN GELENS

**IN SEASON**

WILD EDIBLES IN OCT/NOV  
WITH FERGUS DRENNAN

**SURVIVAL  
TRAINING**

A FIRST LOOK AT A FORTHCOMING  
MANUAL FROM MORS KOCHANSKI



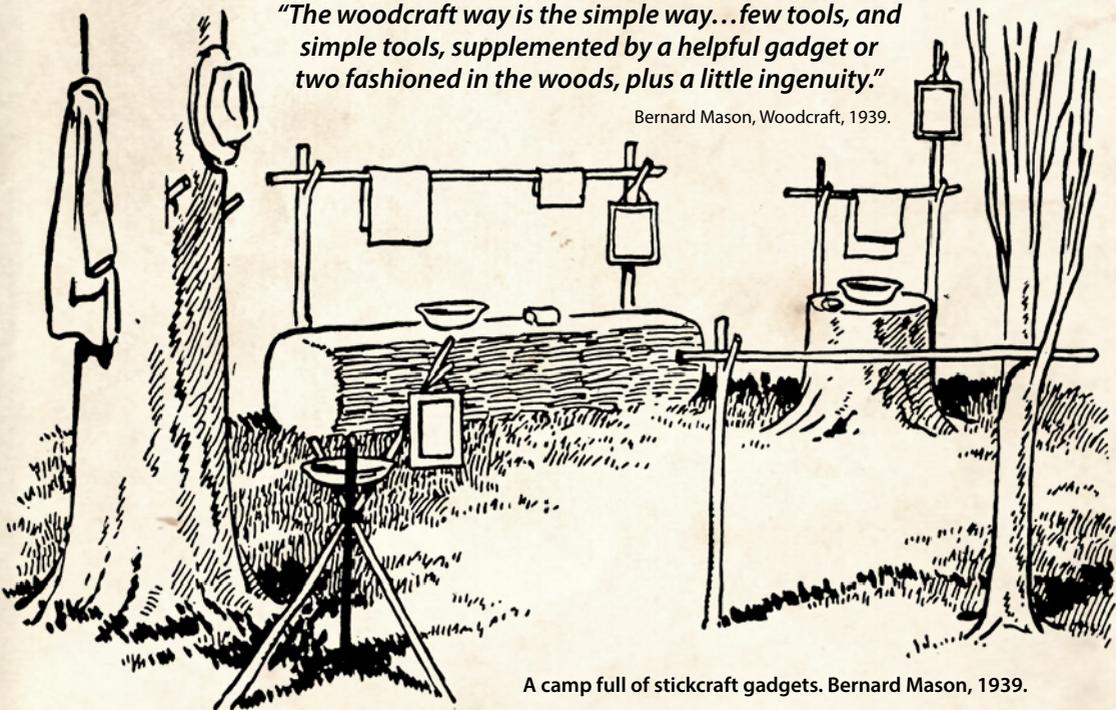
# PUTTING STICKS TO WORK IN THE CLASSIC CAMP

## Part 2 - From Try to Apply

FIND PART 1  
IN ISSUE 3

*"The woodcraft way is the simple way...few tools, and simple tools, supplemented by a helpful gadget or two fashioned in the woods, plus a little ingenuity."*

Bernard Mason, Woodcraft, 1939.



A camp full of stickcraft gadgets. Bernard Mason, 1939.



**By Steve Watts  
& David Wescott**  
Woodsmoke USA





A typical camp gadget that uses a simple forked stick and a single bail hook is the **pot tipper**. This gadget has been around for years, but is rarely shown for the genius of its simplicity and utility. This is a "must have" addition to any camp hearth.

**T**he purpose of the 'Try Stick' is to allow the practice and display of practical notches that one may regularly use in camp. Once practiced on the try-stick, the goal should be the application of the notches in the creation of a variety of camp gadgets. This practice piece is intended for more than just the creation of the piece itself – it should be more than a "sampler." Once the movement and techniques needed to

effortlessly create the notches are mastered, the woodcrafter should move on to find direct application for his new skills in the camp setting.

**Let's take a look at the typical stick project and use it to see where these notches can be applied in camp. It's time to put those tested skills to work and move from the "try" stick to "apply" stick.**



Typical "Try Stick" Samplers.

# Knife Projects Using Notches

## The Original Try Stick

*"The purpose of the try stick is to practice and demonstrate the skillful use of the knife as a wood carving tool, as well as to learn some of the practical operations that may be used in wilderness living. Some of the carving operations may be of very practical application, others are meant to tax the skill of the carver, and some may be used for decorative purposes."*

Mors Kochanski, Northern Bushcraft, 1986.

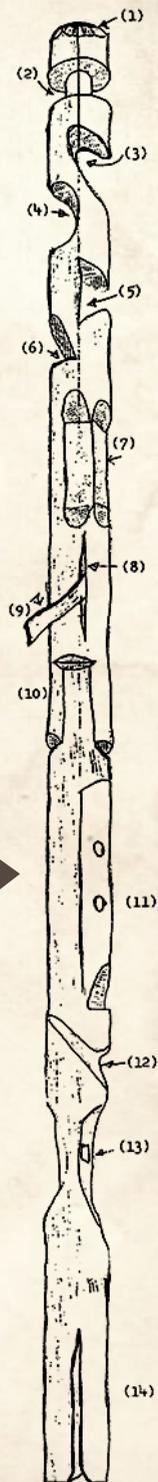
My friend Mors Kochanski has never taken credit for the creation of the 'try stick'. Instead he is currently on a mission to locate the source of his inspiration – what he thinks was an old Canadian Boy Scout magazine article. However, no one can argue the fact that Mors is responsible for the current infatuation with the scheme that we see in the world of woodcraft/ bushcraft today. Mors' original try stick, first illustrated in *Wilderness Arts and Recreation* (Vol. 2 No. 4, pp. 34-40) in the early 1980s has developed somewhat of a cult following.

"The prospective bride would do a sampler of all the embroidery stitches she knew how to do. This display was called a 'Try Piece', Mors tells us. His original try stick article listed about 20 notch options, all of which had real field applications. A follow-up sheet was created with a completed stick illustrated to the right of the page. This handout illustrated 15 notches and applications that a typical student should know. These are the most common notches repeated today." Mors tells us.

Mors' original Try Stick illustration identifying the 15 common notches and applications.

- (1) Trimmed end
- (2) Round Reduction – toggles, pack frame construction
- (3) Pot Hook
- (4) Saddle Notch - pack frame construction
- (5) Dovetail Notch - pack frame, cooking crane, deadfall trigger
- (6) 90° Latch - deadfall trigger
- (7) 90° Planed Edge - deadfall trigger
- (8) Split
- (9) Bark inserted in split
- (10) Hafting Notch
- (11) Flute or whistle
- (12) Bow Nock
- (13) Hole thru stick - bow-drill, Ojibway bird snare
- (14) Root Stripper
- (15) Peel bark for cord

In a recent video created by Randy Breeusma at Karamat Wilderness Ways - [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sS\\_IP18\\_nQ8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sS_IP18_nQ8) - Mors can be seen in action explaining and demonstrating the various try stick notches. The film was created for a winter camping symposium Mors was scheduled to attend, but had to cancel due to health issues.



# The Try Piece Sampler

Ten In Ten [10 notches in 10 minutes]

**Here is what Mors recommends as starter skills:**

- 1) Cut thru a stick.
- 2) Trim the end of the stick – taper, point or rounded .
- 3) Trim the end with thumb opposing blade.
- 4) Create a sphere or “Turk’s Head” on the end.

- 5) V-notch – width is equal to stick thickness.
- 6) Pot or Bail Hook – give it the swing test.
- 7) Reduce the thickness of the stick and remove feathers.
- 8) Hole thru a stick – 1/3 thickness.
- 9) Create a nock or hafting notch.
- 10) A series of saddle notches – round, square, butterfly.

Mors in action for the Winter Camping Symposium: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sS\\_IP18\\_nQ8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sS_IP18_nQ8)

*“My ideal camp is where everyone is cheery and busy, where the patrols are kept intact under all circumstances, and where every patrol leader and Scout takes a genuine pride in his camp and his gadgets.”*

Lord Robert Baden-Powell

Most of the stick illustrations one sees are based on Mors Kockanski's original design. So, just like Uncle Dan, let's share ideas on projects that can be created with the notches we already know and teach. (see below)

**How are they used in your camp?**

Send in your “postal cards” and let's share ideas on how to put our try stick knowledge to work in the field.



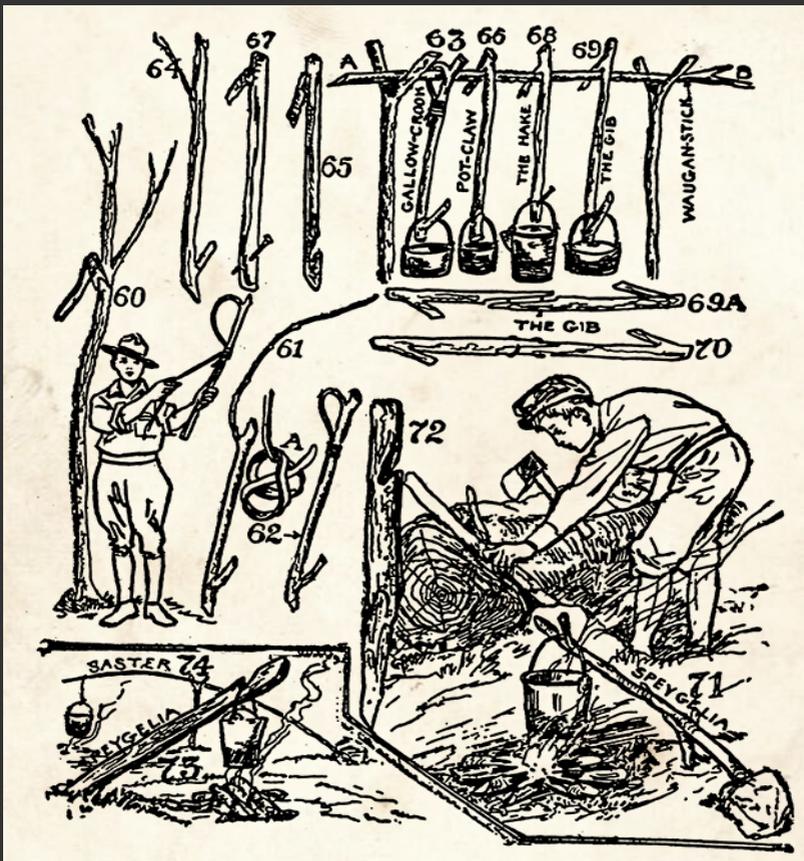
[www.facebook.com/thebushcraftjournal](http://www.facebook.com/thebushcraftjournal)

## More Hooks From Uncle Dan

After completing Part 1 of this article, another magazine article was found in *Boy's Life* (May 1915, pp. 18-19), an official publication of the United States of America. The article was called *Dan Beard Tells You How To Make Trammels For Campfire Use*. The article featured the same illustration found in Beard's later book, *Camplore and Woodcraft* (1920), but the illustration in the article is numbered differently than the one in the book (See illustration on next page). Also, there are no names listed for the various hooks; but he does explain the use of the tea stick – “a notched stick, driven diagonally, or as the boys would say, ‘slanting dickularwise.’ In fact, in the next paragraph, Uncle Dan tells us, “None of these trammels have any names, and they are all used by campers. We should have some name by which to designate each one. You can call them the Boone, Kenton, Lincoln, Washington, Crockett, etc, or you can call them after modern woodcrafters in our movement... But we want to decide upon a name for each one of these sticks, and we are going to leave it to the readers to name these sticks, so campers

*everywhere in the world will know them by the names you give them...I am not going to select a name for you...The main point is to get a move on and send the name in right away. Send in a postal card with the names you want for each of these sticks.”*

In the next months *Boy's Life* (June, 1915, pp. 19 & 39), Beard lists the winners of the contest. They range from the Boy Scout, the David Abercrombie, and the Adirondack Murray to the Handy Jack, and the Dan Beard. It's very interesting to note that none of the names quoted from Beard's book were in this original piece, but many of the names he added to his text were similar to or identical to names Kephart listed in *Camping and Woodcraft*. Coincidence? Could be, but this illustrates how names, once they are added to the literature, can migrate from place to place without reference to source or origin and get lost in time. Hopefully by reintroducing the names in Part 1, we can again lay claim to a camping heritage that is rich in tradition and history.



Camplore and Woodcraft, 1920.

## 5 Categories of Stick Tests

End Treatments, Shaft Reductions, Lap Joints, Notches and Holes.

*"Traditional crafts are more a personal discipline, a way of life, than a systematic technology. Technology breaks a process down to principles that can be widely applied, but crafts rely on distilled experience passed on by concrete example."*

The Edo Craftsmen.

### End Treatments - Round, Point, Taper, Notch, Split, Forked.

One of Mors' first challenges is to prepare the end of the stick in some manner. Some cuts are simply to prevent splitting - rounding the end - while others are to create specialized tools - root splitter, hafting notch, etc. Here are a few projects that can be created on the end of the stick.

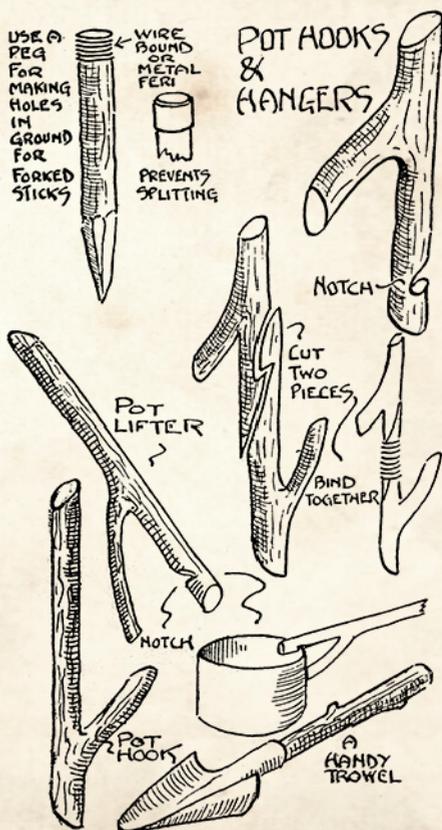
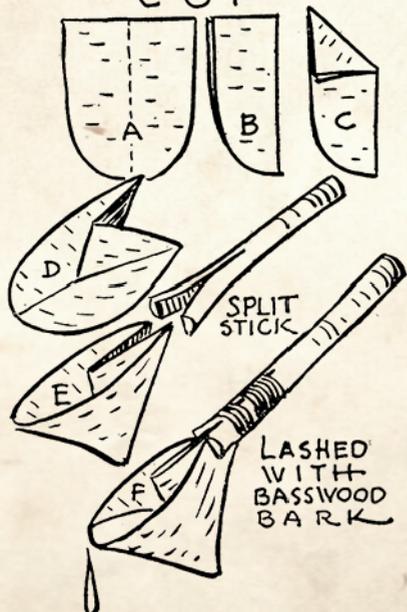
This illustration by Ellsworth Jaeger has been the inspiration for many variations of this same candle holder. A piece of tin can replace the birch wrapper and make it more fireproof.



Lower left:  
Another Jaeger project featuring the simple split stick.

Lower right:  
J.G. Cone uses a variety of simple notches and end treatments to create useful camp gadgets.

## OJIBWAY DRINKING CUP



**ROUND** - Toggle Tops, Turk's Head Knob, Round Tenon ends.

**SQUARE** - Square Tenon Ends, Propeller Shafts.

**POINTED** - Tent Stakes, Lug Pole Upright Ends.

**TAPERED/BEVELED** - Waugan Stick Ends, Digging Sticks, Thinning for Mortising Hole, Feather Sticks, Saster Tip for the Burtonsville Rig, Wedges, Tapered Hammer Handles, Propellers, Spatula, Butter Knife, Broom Binding End, Frying Pan Handle.

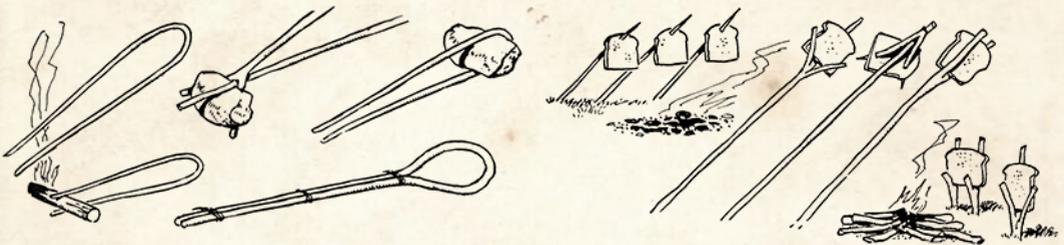
**HAFTING NOTCH** - Crane Upright Tops, Clothes Pin, Knife Handle, Arrow Point Haft.

**CONTROLLED SPLIT** - Hoko Knife, Twig Figures, Frog Gig, Candle Holder, Birch Cup Holder, Torch Fastener, Pitch Fork

**FORKED** - The Good Old Forked Stick as described in Outing Mag 1919 - Thumb Stick, Prop Sticks for tent lines, Sock Dryer, Cooking Forks, Tripod - Interlock tips, Hot Rock Forked Tongs, Dipper Fork - fasten can inside, Camp shovel - flatten can and fasten to forked stick.



A Turk's head knob added to a pin end.



Mason's great selection of useful options for the pointed, forked and bent stick.

*"Generally the correct sort of fork to select is one with a perfectly straight drive from the head to the toe and with the forked stick coming off at an angle. A fork which is to be driven into the ground must have the head beveled and the toe pointed."*

*Most beginners think that the wrong way will work out all right... everyone does... the first time; then you learn that it pays to spend five minutes finding the right shaped stake or fork, rather than trying to make do with a poorly selected stick.*

*This fork is correct - there is a perfectly straight drive from the beveled head right through to the toe. This fork will drive into the ground and stand securely.*

*Clothes pegs - Clothes pegs are quickly made by taking a number of half-green sticks, about 7" [17.5 cm] long, and splitting them, first binding the end so that they will not split right along their length. A better way is to use a forked stick, hooking the hook part on to a branch."*

Richard Graves, Bushcraft Handbooks

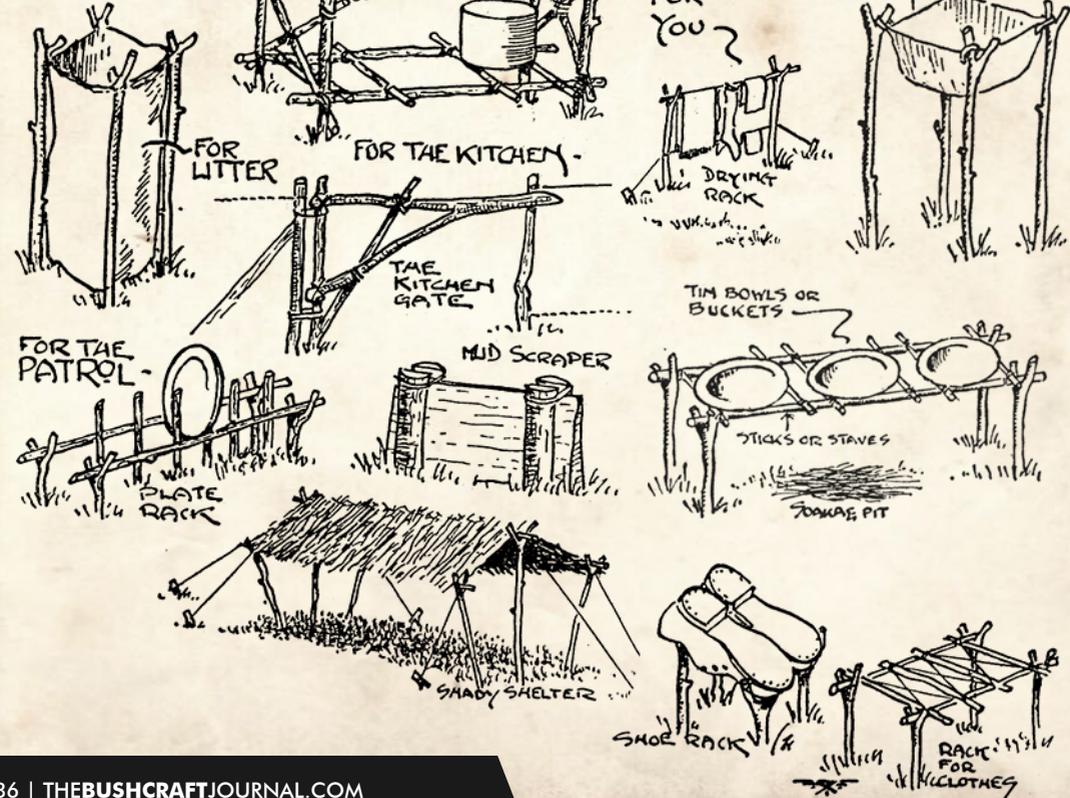


Cookin' with the simple pointed stick.

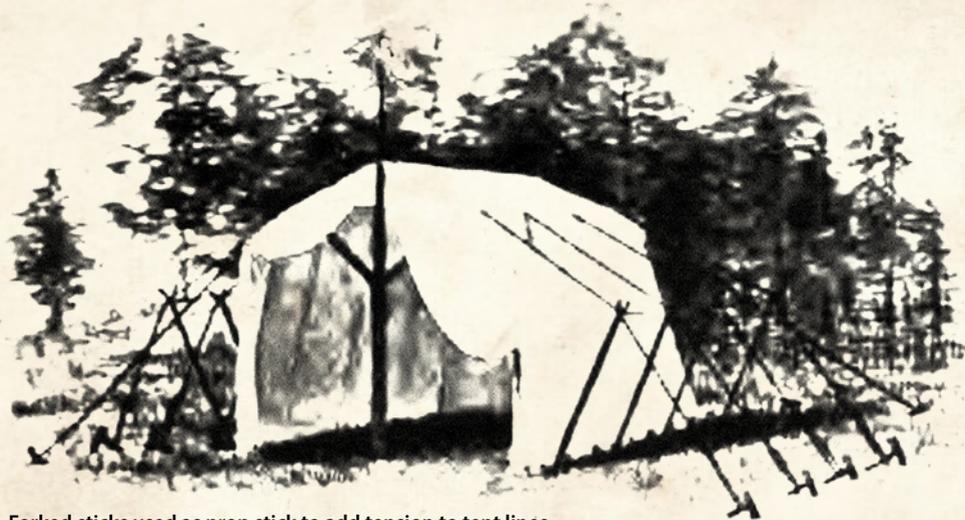


Photos - Jennifer Mancke

### GADGETS FOR THE CAMP IN GENERAL -



J.G. Cone illustrations of forked stick camp gadgetry.



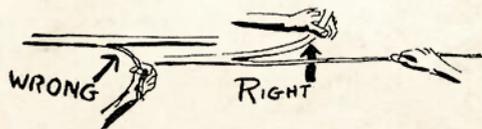
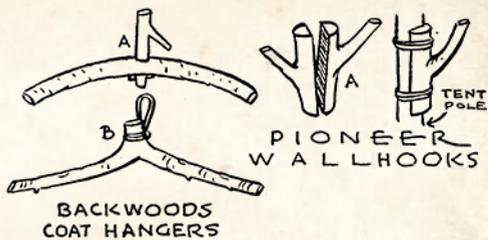
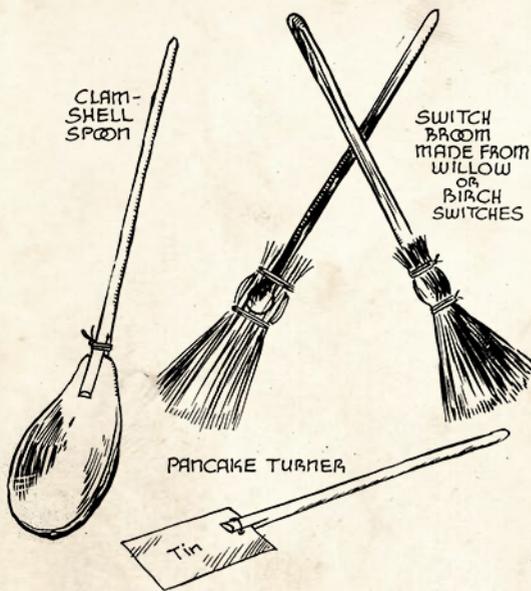
Forked sticks used as prop stick to add tension to tent lines.

## Controlled Splitting

Another great stick technique to learn and apply is the controlled split. Since not all woods split equally well, start off with a simple willow to gain mastery. Using your knife to safely initiate the split, the knife is gently pressed inward and wiggled as you go. Once the split starts, tilt the blade to open the split. When the split is open enough to use the fingers, put your knife away. Holding the stick away from you - so you can watch the split as it travels - gently start to pry the halves apart. At this point the tips of your fingers support the split while your thumbs apply outward pressure.

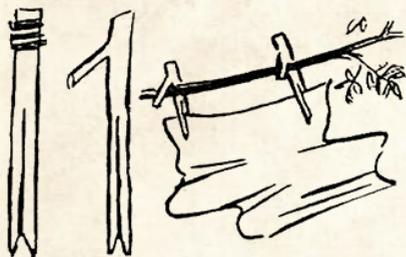
Now here's the trick - the split will naturally start to run to one side making the halves uneven. To correct this, ease up on the side that it is running to (the thinner side), and start to exert a bit more force on the fat side - bending it gently away while still supporting the split with the fingers. The split will start to return to the center. Even pressure should keep it there, but if it starts to wander again, simply remember to always bend the fat side away and the split will return to the center.





Pulling the split stick to the fat side of the split brings the split back to center and creates an even split.

The controlled split allows unlimited ways to fasten tools and materials together without sophisticated methods.



The hafting notch can also be used to create a wide split for functional clothes pins/pegs.



*"The great danger with rustic work is the temptation to which most builders yield, to make it too fancy and intricate in place of practical and simple...one can make them without incurring the danger of being overdone, too ornate, too fancy to be really appropriate."*

Daniel Carter Beard, Shelter, Shacks and Shanties, 1914

## Mid-shaft Reductions - Square, Round, Rectangular, Planed.

Many times a stick is perfect on the ends, but is too thick or the wrong shape in the middle. When this happens, reduction or shaping cuts need to be made to create a stick that meets your needs perfectly. On other occasions, a specific shape is needed in the middle of a twig to get the job done. Here are a few cases.

**SQUARE** - In order to carve a round branch straight - like for a fire spindle - the stick should be carved to a square first. It's easier for a beginner to see a straight line on a square stick than it is a round one. Squared cuts can also be made on the downward cuts used to make a spoon handle narrower.

**ROUND** - Toggle Center, Pack Frame Lash Points, Clothes Hanger - 1/2 round reduction for lashing the hook.

**RECTANGULAR** - Waugan Stick Ends.

**V REDUCTION** - 90° Planned Edge - Figure 4 Trap Trigger Post Stick, Whimmy Diddle.

**THINNED** - Fire Tong, Broilers, Club Head Wrap, Feather Sticks, Gypsy Flowers.

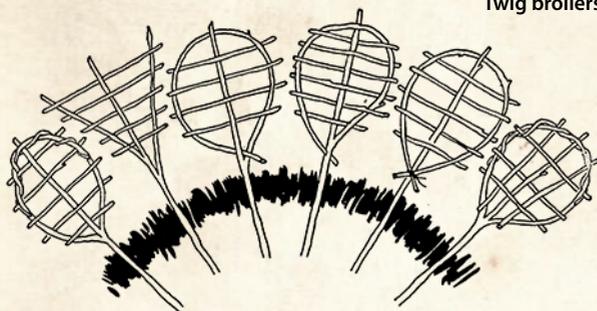
**FLATTENED** - Clothes Hook.



Mid-shaft reductions can be round or v-shaped to create toggles.

Illustration - Bernard Mason

Twig broilers



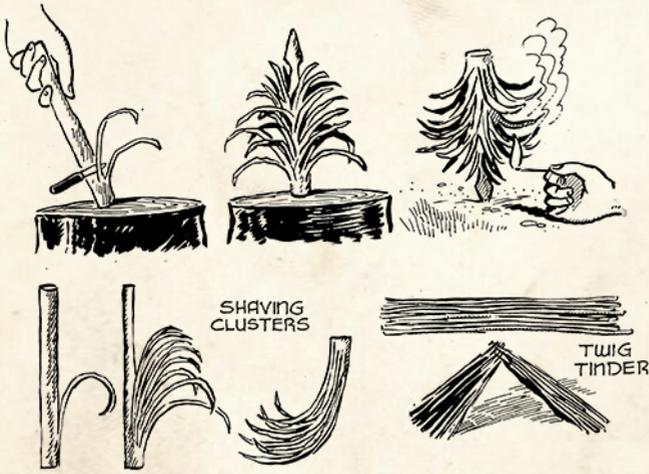
Branches can be thinned in places to be bent, then heated over the fire to make them more flexible.



Above:  
Mid-shaft thinning cuts are used to reduce the width of a spoon handle as well as produce feather sticks or Gypsy Flowers.

Left:  
Gypsy flowers created by shaving down a twig.





Bernard Mason's Fuzz Sticks.



The shaft of a twig coat hook is flattened on the back with round reductions top and bottom for a secure lashing point.



The Figure 4 trap trigger uses the 90° bevel to hook the bait stick in place. Latch notches and beveled tips create the other tension points on the trigger.



The haft notch and the rectangular shaft reduction combine to create this lug-pole attachment.

Photo - Jennifer Mancke

Photo - Jennifer Mancke

*"Perhaps it was Caesar who said, "Beware of Impedimenta." At any rate, it is good advice to follow in the out of doors. But do not be scornful of comfort, for a true woodsman does not rough it; he makes himself as comfortable as possible with the means he has at his command."*

Ellsworth Jaeger, Wildwood Wisdom, 1945

## Lap Joints, Lapped Splices – Tapered or Flat, Notched, Mitered, Friction.

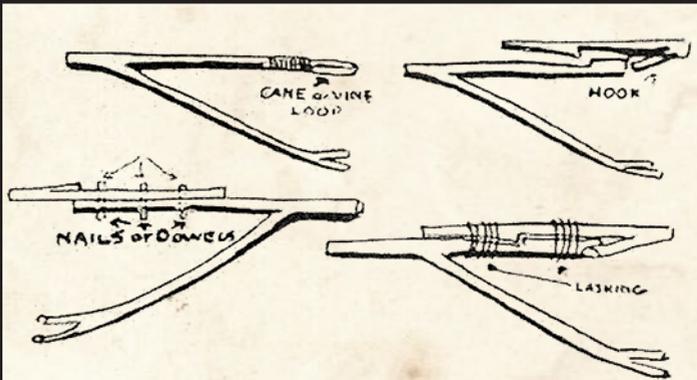
Lap joints are used to join two pieces without creating a thickened spot at the joint. This can be done to make sticks longer, to join 2 hooked ends to create a pot hook, or many other tasks requiring a strong joint.

**TAPERED OR FLAT** - Pot Hooks, Simple Bound Laps.

**NOTCHED** - Making a stick longer, Simple latch notch laps.

**MITERED LAPPED NOTCH** - Notch ends are angled. Shafts bound or pinned.

**FRICITION-PINNED** - Much like above, but a spacer is forced between the laps to create a friction fit that holds the splice together.



Richard Graves has invented many gadgets involving hooks, holes, bindings and more to take the "rough" out of roughing it. A trammel or gantry set-up.

*"If you were a real old-timer, a backwoodsman, pioneer, trapper – or yes, even an Indian – your dug-out or lone camp would not have metal tripods, folding chairs and tables, patent saucepan holders and primus-stoves.*

*I'll admit that many of these things may be an advantage when a whole Troop is camping, but these men of the woods knew how to improve and make all these things for themselves from only the resource available – the woods. A real Scout does the same."*

J.G. Cone, Make and Do the Woodcraft Way, 1940

## Notches – Latch, Bail Hook, Dovetail, Saddle, V, Butterfly, Whistle, Bow.

There is a world of possibility for the creation of camp gadgets by using just a few simple notches. Notches can be adapted for use in something as simple as a fishhook or as large as a log cabin. Notches are used to hold things fast under direct pressure or through the use of opposing forces.

**LATCH NOTCH** - 90 degree trigger latch, Fig 4 Deadfall Notch, Whistle Notch, Pot or Bail Notch for inclined tea sticks.

**POT/BAIL HOOK** - adjustable - Pot Hooks, Tent Stakes, Notched Hearth Sticks, Forked Billy Tipper.

**DOVETAIL NOTCH** - slide in - Lantern/Sign Holder, Pot Cooking Gantry.

**DOVETAIL SOCKET** - drop in - Allows sticks to be joined at right angles.

**SADDLE** - round - straight or diagonal - Roycroft Pack.

**SADDLE** - square - straight or diagonal - Lantern Holder, Clothes Hanger.

**V NOTCH** - Beveled Edge Cuts, Toggle Center, Whimmy Diddle.

**BUTTERFLY OR CROSS NOTCH** - Clothes Hanger - stops rotation.

**WHISTLE NOTCH** - Whistle/Flute.

**BOW NOCK** - Bow-drill Bow, Long Bow.



A simple branch can be turned into a hanging system that is always in demand in camp. A display of classic packs hangs on the Yellowstone Chapter Hut (Idaho), and multiple hooks provide a place to store ones kit close to the tent door where it's needed

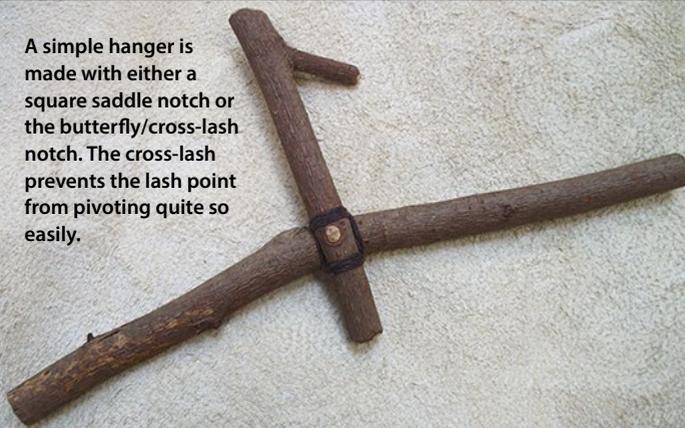




The Whimmy Diddle is a camp toy you can make for your kids or use to annoy your friends. The beveled edge and a series of v-notches are all it takes.

Read more about these here, including an animation: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gee-haw\\_whammy\\_diddle](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gee-haw_whammy_diddle)

A simple hanger is made with either a square saddle notch or the butterfly/cross-lash notch. The cross-lash prevents the lash point from pivoting quite so easily.



The same notches are used to create lash points for a lantern hanger.





Lantern hanger

This rig was cut with 2 diagonal square saddles and a dovetail pin notch at the top of the main post. The notches were so tight, the rack held together without any lashing – at least until it dried out and fell apart when it shrank.

A locking tent peg.  
Two stakes with  
latch notches are  
stacked so as to  
anchor the  
roped stake  
in place.



**Coat Hangers** - Usually in camp, one's travelling clothes become crushed and soiled. This can easily be prevented by making a simple coat and trousers hanger. If you take off your good clothes immediately you arrive in camp and put them on this coat-hanger, they will remain fresh and uncreased.

**Billy Hooks** - All of these methods of suspending billys over a fire are improved with the use of billy hooks, and these can be easily made by cutting a few hooked sticks about ½" in diameter, and varying in length from, say, 6" to 10" [15 to 25 cm]. At the end farthest from the hook, a single deep nick is cut into the wood, so that the direction of the cut is away from the hook. The wire handle of the billy will sit safely in this nick and the billy stick from which the billy hooks hang will be sufficiently far from the flames so that there will be little chance of it being burnt through. It is preferable to cut the nick on the side opposite to the hook.

Richard Graves, Bushcraft Handbooks



A proud saw owner. The frame is made from a combination of sticks and simple notches.

*"Woodcraft - the art of finding one's way in the wilderness and getting along well by utilizing Nature's storehouse...half of woodcraft, as of any other art, is in knowing what to avoid. Woodcraft is for those who travel light, in the wilderness, rove about a good deal, and sometimes scatter, every man for himself, with his life in his own hands."*

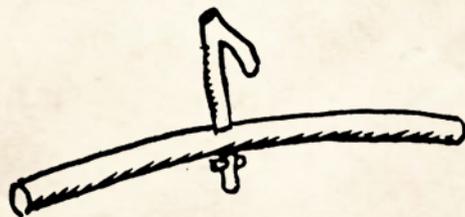
Horace Kephart, Woodcraft and Camping, 1917

## Holes - Knife Mortise, Dimples.

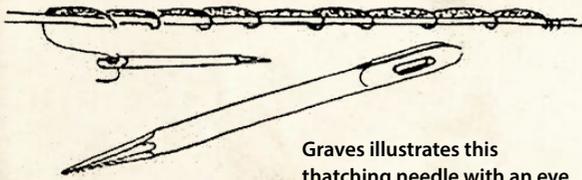
At some point the knife tip must be used to penetrate or create a depression in the stick. Holes clear through the stick are harder to make than a simple divot.

**KNIFE-TIP MORTISE** - Pins, Pegs, Propeller Shaft, Cord Lock, Thatch Needle Eye, Rope Hooks, Chip Pot Hook, Pegs for Hangers, Fishing Pole.

**KNIFE-TIP BORED DIMPLE** - Burtonsville Rig.



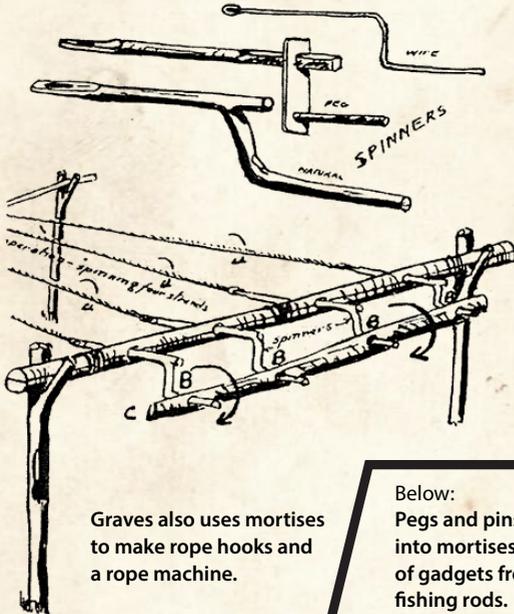
A hole through the hanger hook allows for a pin rather than a lash to hold the gadget together.



Graves illustrates this thatching needle with an eye made with a knife-tip mortise.



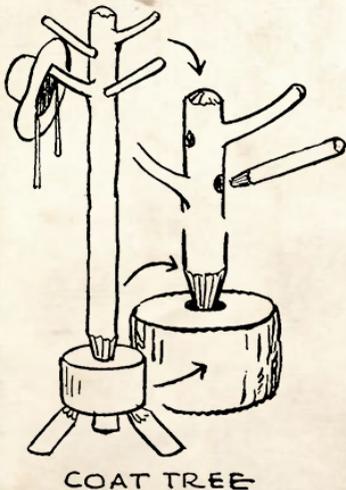
Sticks can be pierced or mortised to create pot hooks.



Graves also uses mortises to make rope hooks and a rope machine.

Below:  
Pegs and pins can be inserted into mortises to create a variety of gadgets from coat racks to fishing rods.

Below:  
The knife-tip dimple used to suspend a pot hook on a Burtonsville rig.



## THE ONE MINUTE RIG

Done as a test piece, this hook and tapered tip were made as quickly as possible – still paying attention to safe, efficient work. From the time the branch was cut, until the pot was ready to hang over the fire, the time elapsed was just over one minute. Try stick samplers are designed to help you master the notches that they teach. This practice creates speed and efficiency that can be applied in the field setting.

## PRIMITIVE APPLICATIONS

Stone age crafts can use the same techniques to create simple or compound tools. A controlled split – a stone flake was used to initiate the split – can be used to split a branch into which a Hoko knife can be hafted by wrapping withes in place. The basalt hammerhead is wrapped with a twig that was thinned at the top of the wrap and then heated to make it more flexible. Withes once again secure the stone in place. The pump-drill combines the hafting notch to attach the drill point, a drill-tip mortise to start the hole for the pump bar, and thinning and shaping strokes to make the shaft and pump bar.



Hoko knives, a hammer and pump-drill all made with stone tools, applying common try stick techniques.

## A FEW BASIC SKILLS

- Removal – Cuts trimming the stick from a bush, trimming twigs from the stick.
- Cut through the stick to make it the right length.
- Peeling – Remove the bark from the stick without cutting into the wood.
- Scraping – use a knife edge or cabinet scraper to clean the stick.
- Trim or taper the ends of the stick.
- Reduce the stick thickness by carving with the grain.
- Make a round stick square. It's easier to see if a stick is straight when it is square than when it is round.
- Split a stick its full length using only hand pressure.
- Make clean, crisp stop cuts across the grain and carve to them.
- Work towards efficiency first, then speed.
- Master knife grips and stokes and material holding positions.



Photo - Chris Noble

Steve gettin' excited 'bout sticks.

A simple branch can be harvested, trimmed and sharpened to a point. This can be a kitchen or toiletries stand that is always a great addition to camp and takes minimal effort to create.





Crafts can be simple or complex - they all use basic skills common to stickcraft



Whistles are a good way to practice making clean, crisp stop cuts for the whistle notch.

## A NOTE ABOUT TENT STAKES

*"Tent Stakes - A fork which is to be driven into the ground must have the head beveled and the toe pointed....Even a simple item like a tent stake or a peg must be cut properly, and if it is to be driven into the ground it must have the head beveled and the toe properly pointed."*

Richard Graves, Bush Campcraft

Efficiency of effort can be achieved by combining sizing and shaping cuts together. For example: when cutting a tent peg to length, the severing cuts can also be the point-sharpening cuts (on one end) and the crowning cuts (on the other). Practiced techniques applied to specific needs result in fewer strokes.

The carving of tent pegs (both the notched and forked varieties) is a good place to start the application of practiced knifecraft to real-world camp situations. With the use of these basic cuts, many other woody projects can be manufactured. A few additional cuts and notches then opens the door to the crafting of many more.

Kochanski stresses that when preparing the top of a tent stake, the top should be beveled in a way that leaves the center 1/3 of the stake end flat - bevel the edges only. This increases the chance of the stake being driven without the top mushrooming or splitting.



### Illustrations from:

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