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Indian Fiber Sandals

BY PAUL HOLMAN • PHOTOS BY PAUL HOLMAN • ILLUSTRATIONS BY C. MYERGES

The California Native Americans are famous for many of their crafts with one of the most integral of these being the fine art of weaving. Nearly every aspect of their life included some woven object. Cradle boards, seed beaters and collection baskets, nets, weirs, skirts and even footwear were created using naturally occurring vegetation. I learned this method from Christopher Nyerger of the School of Self Reliance in Los Angeles, California.

We started the day gathering some cattail stalks and leaves Christopher had cut a week earlier and had left in the field to dry. You may wish to use other stronger fibers with this technique for a more durable sandal. We then soaked the cuttings to make them pliable, stripping the leaves and stalks into long fibers.

Christopher explained and demonstrated this method of making the framework and twining detailed on the next page. As we twined our footpads, he pointed out the similarity of this paddle shape to the construction of cradle boards known to have been used by the local natives. After we had completed our footpads, we lunched under the oaks of Hahamunga on a wild greens salad and acorn pancakes using the cattail stalks as chop sticks.

I have worn my sandals in town and fording rocky streams, and although a little itchy where some fibers end in the twining they worked great in camp after a long hike or when lounging about making string for my nets. These sandals were very light and lasted about a month, although a pair made of Yucca might last longer.

In many ways, weaving is an important survival skill that can make a foul situation a little easier.

1. Collect your fibrous material and allow it to dry (usually about a week). Yucca or cattails work really well.
2. Re-hydrate until pliable, but not too soggy, and strip down to fibers.
3. Collect a hand full (about 1-1/2 inches thick) in each hand and fold one over the other roughly in the middle of the other bundle.
4. Bring the outer bundles down creating three distinct splines. This is

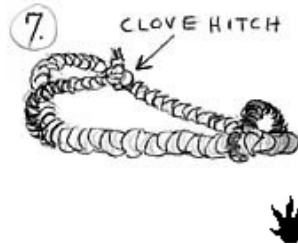
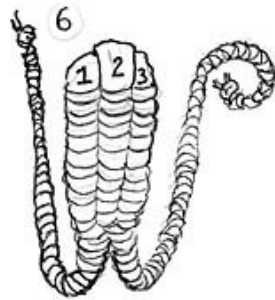
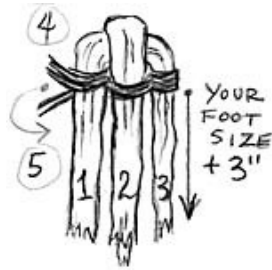
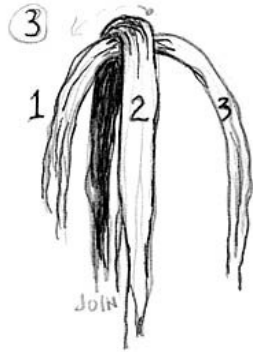


the framework of the sole and also the finishing tie downs.

5. Take up a new fiber group (two or three stalks if cattails are used) and begin twisting in a simple over/under maneuver starting either side depending on your dexterity. Turn back when you get to each side, adding fibers until you've woven a paddle a few inches longer than your foot.

6. As you approach the end of the paddle start to narrow the pad separating the three splines into two bunches. Tie off the paddle weave and start braiding or twining the splines until you have what look like two ropes coming out the back.

7. These ropes need to be two sizes, one 8 inches; the other maybe 16 inches (depending on your foot size) so you may need to add some fibers. These are then lashed around the ankle and the longer rope extended towards the toes into the footpad, over the toes and back into the pad.



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