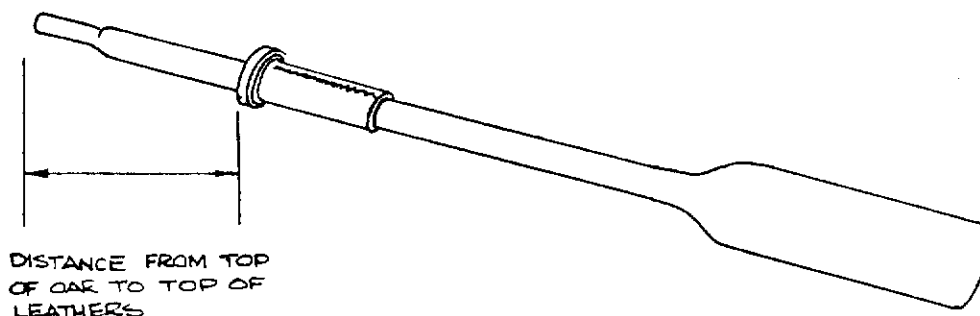


The longest lasting and sturdiest protection for your oars is provided by a properly mounted set of leathers. The construction and fitting of a pair of oar leathers is not particularly difficult, but it is time consuming and requires some special tools.

Before you begin it would be prudent to remember to finish off your oars completely. A thorough sanding followed by a coat of sealer will prepare the oars for whatever finish you prefer. A good spar varnish offers excellent protection and a degree of flexibility. Three coats are the minimum, and as many as six coats are recommended. This way you will know over the years that there is adequate protection under the leathers.

After the varnish has dried (try to resist the urge to hang your gleaming oars over the fireplace), gather the tools you'll need for the leathers. They include: (1) a roping palm, (2) at least 2 ounces of linen or polyester sail-maker's twine, (five strand is best), (3) two number 15 or 16 sail needles, (4) a cake of beeswax, (5) an awl or icepick, (6) a wooden mallet or light hammer, (7) a ruler, and (8) a piece of 3/4" ply for a work surface.

Measure the distance from the top of the oar to the point at which you wish to place the top of the leathers. Make sure the distance is comfortable for you when rowing. You can test this by putting a rag or some electrical tape around the oar, placing it in the oarlock and pulling a dozen or so strokes.



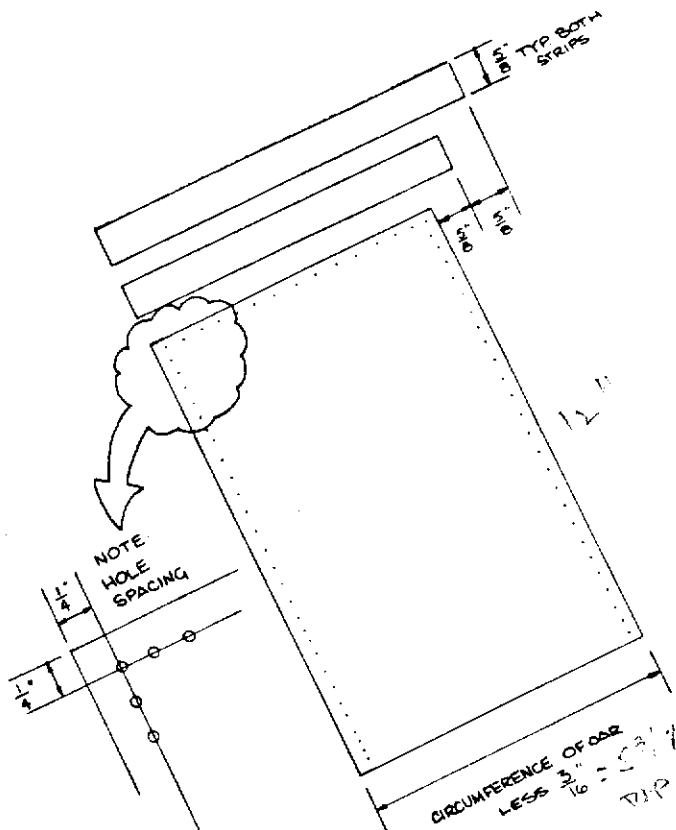
Measure the circumference of the oar with a bit of string or a cloth tape. If there is some taper in the oar you should allow for it in laying out the sides of the leather.

Normally we use a 12 inch by 15 inch sheet of heavy (1/8") oil-tanned leather. The term applied to it out here is latigo and one sheet will make two leathers and the collars.

After "truing up" the sides of the leather to make the corners square, lay out a distance which is equal to the circumference of the oar, less 3/16" to allow for the stretch in the leather when the stitches are drawn up. Usually the 12" length is used for the length of the leather, although the longer dimension can be used if longer leathers are desired. Cut two leathers to this dimension.

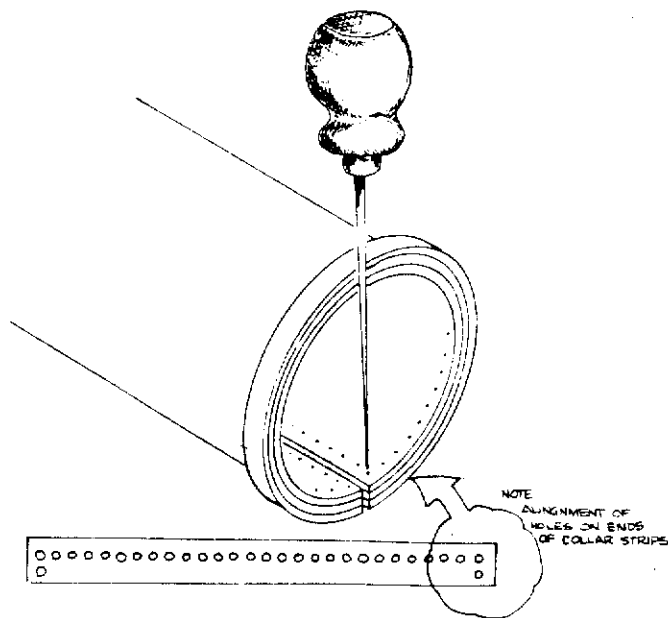
With the awl and mallet punch a series of holes along the top edge of the leathers 1/4" in from the edge and 1/4" apart. Continue the holes down both sides of the leathers. In order to preserve the finish on the dining room table, we suggest you do this operation on the plywood work surface.

With the piece remaining after the two leathers have been cut out, cut four 5/8" wide strips to make the collars. Two strips should be 5/8" longer than the leathers are wide, and the second pair 5/8" longer than the first. A pair of these strips (one short and one long) will be applied with one leather to each oar.



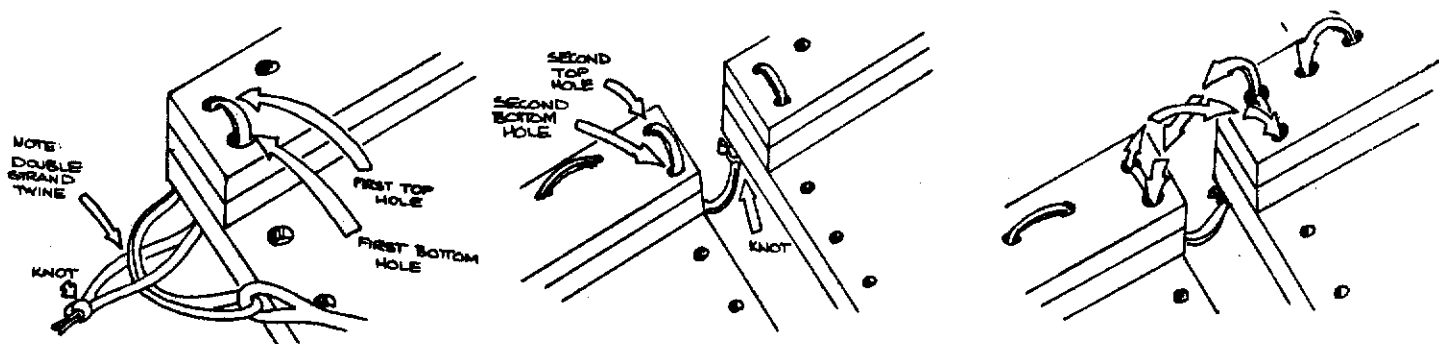
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BATTING

To make the collar fast to the leather, place one of the shorter strips on the top end of one of the leathers and then place a longer collar strip on top of the shorter one. Roll up this assembly until all the ends butt together and secure with a stout rubber band or reasonable facimile. Firmly hold the "sandwich" against the work surface and punch holes through all three pieces of leather from the inside (using the holes in the top edge of the leather as a guide). In order to get the awl through the two layers of the collar, a good whack with the mallet will be in order. Remove the rubber band and you'll be left with three pieces as shown.

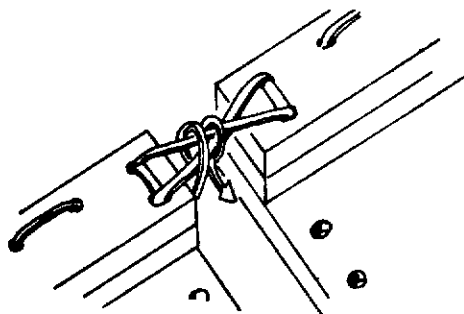


Take the roping palm in hand, thread an eight foot length of twine through the sail needle, double, and knot the end. Draw the twine over the cake of beeswax to lubricate and bind the two strands together.

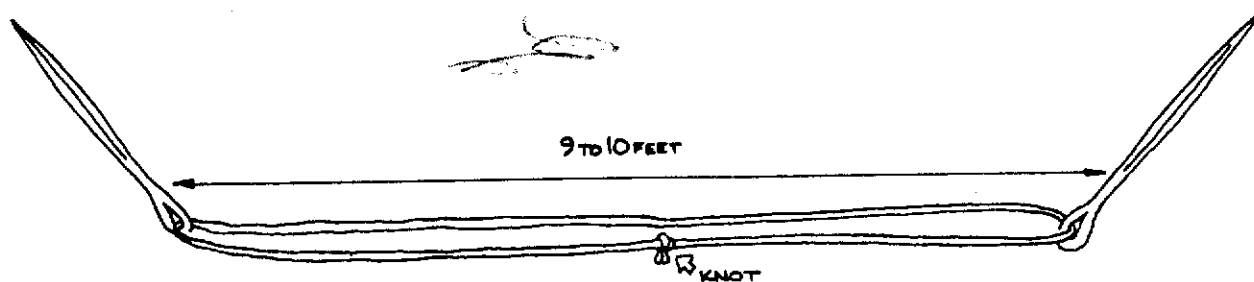
To fasten the collar, start underneath the leather and push the needle up and through the first bottom hole of all three pieces. Then proceed over the top of the collar to the first top hole and push the twine down through. Then double back to the first hole and pass the twine between the two strands of twine above the knot. This will secure or lock the stitch. Then, push the needle up through the bottom hole across the gap in the leather and move on to the top hole. Continue with a running stitch around the entire collar. Finish by crossing over the gap again in a crisscross fashion but do not tie it off yet.



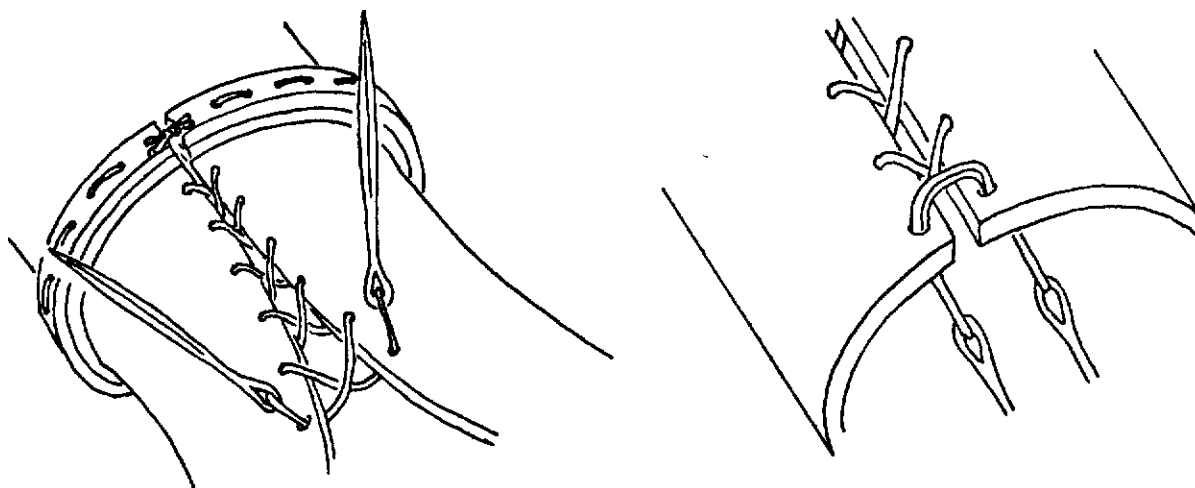
Take this assembly and slide it onto the oar. Position the leather exactly where you want it based on your earlier measurement. At this point you should decide where the stitching should run along the oar. Depending on how much feathering you do when you row, the stitching should be placed where it will receive the least amount of chafe. With your trusty awl in hand, proceed to work around the collar pulling each stitch tight. Eventually you will pull the whole assembly tight around the oar. It's important to pull this as tight as possible so that all three pieces butt up evenly. Tie the twine off with three or four frapping turns around the "X" passing the needle under each turn. Cut and bury the end.



You will now have what looks like an open fronted skirt tied firmly to your oar. You'll tie this closed by first measuring off 18 or 20 feet of twine and threading on both sail needles. Tie the ends of the twine together and position the knot between the two needles. You'll have a large loop of twine with a needle at each end.



Bring one needle up through the first hole on one side of the leather and the other up through the corresponding hole on the other side. Cross the needles, and like lacing a shoe, continue passing the needles up from underneath the leather. You'll notice that the leather will close up around the oar with great difficulty. Don't despair, we haven't steered you wrong. Continue this lacing until you reach the bottom of the leather.



Now, let the needles hang loose and pick up your awl. This is when the hard work begins. Starting back up at the top of the lacing, work the awl under each stitch and pull until the leather is drawn together. This may take considerable pulling, but its this tension that holds the leather in place. After you've pulled each stitch up tight, finish off by tying the ends in a couple of reef knots. You'll find that these knots will pull themselves up under the leather. Cut the ends off and bury them under the leather. Now stand back and admire your work, but not too much. After all, there's another oar over in the corner waiting its turn.

When you have completed both sets of leathers, a bit of tallow will help to preserve them and a bit of beer just might help to preserve you. Good Luck!

George Rodzon
Tom Herrera