



WHITTLIN' WHISTLES



HOW TO MAKE MUSIC
WITH YOUR
POCKET KNIFE



RICK WIEBE



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LINDEN PUBLISHING

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Introduction

I want to introduce you to an activity that can interest you for a lifetime. Whittlin' is enjoyed by people of all ages, and is a terrific hobby for kids and parents or kids and grandparents or all of the above to do together.

Whittlin' can be a part of so many things. You can listen to music, participate in a conversation, wait out a traffic jam, "speed up" a ferry ride, even study for an exam or build a relationship while making something with a knife. In fact, for fidgety young people, it can be a real help in having them slow down to listen and learn things that may be totally unrelated to the carving process.

I have been whittlin' for a long time—over 55 years. This is kind of frightening for me to contemplate, but that's the way it is. Often when I am whittlin', people stop and talk. They ask about the wood, comment on the sharpness of my knife and frequently say, "Makin' a whistle?" Often I am not, but the fact that they assume I am means that whistle making is just something that is expected of whittlers.

Kids love whistles, and why not? They make noise! And if there is one thing that kids love to do it is to make noise! I have made thousands of whistles for kids and they all love them. Their parents; maybe not so much! Even parents though, can get excited when kids are having fun and learning.

Making whistles, and similar articles, is not complicated, or expensive, and is the kind of thing that just goes with a lazy summer day by a stream, or a cold winter day by the fire for that matter! In this book you will get some help so that your whistle whittlin' efforts will be successful and fun!

There are some tips in here that will make all the difference between struggling and enjoying, and some ideas that may get the reader thinking in directions that could result in something totally new.

Let's get started.



Here is a selection of good
pocket knives.



Chapter 1: Whittlin’

Whittlin’ (I know, the “right” way to say and spell it is “whittling”, but somehow “whittlin’” just seems more appropriate), is what we call carving when the only, or at least the main, tool that is used is a knife.

Some modern adults freak out a bit when the word “knife” or “sharp” is used, and their children are going to be involved. However, whittlin’ is far safer than activities that kids do all the time. Yes, it is possible, even likely, that a whittler will cut themselves, but the injury will be minor compared to the kind of thing that can happen while say skiing, or cycling or swimming. I am unaware of anyone who has ever needed a lifeguard while whittlin’! No one has ever broken a bone in my class either.

Mostly when we say “knife” in conjunction with whittlin’, we mean a pocket knife. And what a wonderful device that is! It is practically a magic wand. With a pocket knife ordinary sticks can be transformed into wonderful and useful things. A pocket knife folds up and is safe in a pocket when it isn’t in use, but is there when a whittlin’ fit strikes. These fits strike me quite a lot, and if I didn’t have my knife with me I would be very frustrated.

It is important to have a good knife. A good knife will not be cheap. Pay the price. Call it an investment in mental health, because poor tools will drive you nuts! This is not to say the knife has to be really expensive. Knives that are excellent for the



This will give you a bit of an idea of the size of a good whittlin' knife.

projects in this book are available for \$25 or so.

Here are some knives that would be good for whittlin'. A few are antiques, some were made in the USA, one is from England and two are from China. All are excellent. The price range is \$35 to \$100.

Today, good knives are made in many countries, though the ones made here at home or in Europe tend to be on the more expensive side.

A good knife is not usually a big knife. The right knife will be large enough to grasp but not so large that it is clumsy. A two to four bladed knife is the way to go, with the smaller blades available for most of the work. A larger blade is useful when a little extra reach is needed,

or when cutting off branches. No knife is a good substitute for an axe or a machete, both of which are also useful to whittlers at times.

Avoid "multi-tools" for whittlin', and bulky, multi-purpose knives with corkscrews, unless you want blisters.

When you use the knife make sure it is sharp, since there is less force required working with a sharp knife than with a dull one. Always ask yourself "what happens when (not if), this knife slips when I am cutting this way?" If the answer is "I will bleed!" cut some other way! It is far better to take the time to turn the wood around so that you can cut in a safe direction than to take the time out—never mind the pain—to put on Band-Aids. **Do not cut down on your leg!** Cut down



An India stone is commonly used to sharpen a pocket knife.

on a board or log or something that doesn't matter if it gets nicked.

Consider getting a cut resistant glove for the hand that isn't holding the knife. They are available from carving suppliers that can be found on the Internet.

Think! Think safety. Keep thinking while you work.

Let's sharpen.

The world is full of dull knives, many of which could be made useful with a little work. Very few new knives are ready to use when you get them. So, you will have to learn how to sharpen which, today, is a fairly rare skill. It is not complicated, but you will have to practice and pay attention to detail.

It is essential that you have a sharp knife for making whistles.

"Clean as a whistle" refers not only to the fact that whistles should be sanitary, but also that the cuts that make a whistle work are clean and crisp. It is not possible to make cuts like that with a dull knife.

If you have a system for sharpening that is different from what follows, and it really works, use it and skip this part. If you would really like hair popping sharp blades though, maybe you should go over this material.

Unless you are already making shaving sharp edges, read the following carefully. Read all of it. Details are important here.

Forget about power sharpeners. There are many that work but if you are able to work one without ruining your knife, you don't need

instructions from me. A word of caution, do not take your good knife anywhere near a regular power grinder with a grey/black-grinding wheel. Anyone, who has the skill to use one of these to sharpen a knife, won't use them, because they know better. Seriously, if someone offers to sharpen your knife for you on one of these things, grab your knife and run! If someone does get your knife and grinds it, turning it blue with the heat, he has destroyed that knife and owes you a new one.

You will need a sharpening stone. Try to get one that is at least six to eight inches long. I use an "India Stone" which is a man-made stone that is fairly inexpensive (\$15–\$30) and works just as good as ones costing a lot more. Diamond hones work well but usually cost more. Japanese water stones work well but are a little on the expensive side too. It is possible to use emery paper, or wet/dry sandpaper, but after a while the sandpaper actually winds up costing more than the stone. A stone like this will last many years.

Some stones use water as a lubricant, some use oil, and some of us use stones dry. Follow the instructions that come with the

stone on this. Waterstones must be used with lots of water, those that come pre-filled with oil must have more oil applied during use, and aluminum oxide stones, usually an orange color, and sometimes called "India Stones" can be used dry, or with water or oil. You cannot switch back and forth except between water and dry. Using an oil stone dry, will cause problems. The best and least expensive oil for oilstones is kerosene or diesel fuel.

Put the stone on a table or workbench at a height that will enable you to work standing up. It is hard to learn to do this sitting down.

If using oil or water put some on the stone. Lay the knife blade flat on the stone, and then lift the back just a bit, so that the blade is at about a 10-degree angle to the stone. For most pocket knife blades, laying a nickel on the stone and lifting the back of the blade enough to just get the edge of the nickel under it should be about right. If your knife blade is smaller than about ½ inch wide, use a dime, if it is smaller than ¼ inch wide just lay it flat and lift the back a little bit. From this point on do not touch the blade to the stone at any angle steeper than that—ever.



A nickel makes a good spacer to establish the proper sharpening angle.



Feel for the wire edge like this, moving your finger only from tip to crease. Do not slide your finger along the edge!

I am fully aware that some literature, even documents that may accompany a new knife may tell you to use an angle of 20 or more degrees in sharpening. If you follow that advice you won't whittle much. Use 10-degrees, and absolutely no more than 15.

Now apply considerable pressure pushing the blade down on the stone and then move it back and forth on the stone. The abrasive particles that make up the stone will begin to grind away some of the steel of the blade. It makes absolutely no

difference whether you put pressure on the forward stroke, the backstroke or both. I just move it back and forth and keep the pressure on. Whether or not you go straight back and forth or use circular motions also makes no difference. There are people who firmly believe that these things do make a difference, and they are entitled to their opinion, but until their blades turn out sharper than mine, (which hasn't been demonstrated to me yet), I will continue to ignore them.



This blade has been honed to a 10 degree bevel.



This side shows the factory bevel before honing.

Do not turn the blade over and grind on the other side yet!

Work the first side until you can feel or see a little hook of steel forming on the side of the edge that is not in contact with the stone. Keep working until that little “hook”, called a “wire edge” forms all along the edge.

Read the next statement closely and understand it before you try to do it.

Feel the edge of the blade on the side that the stone has not just touched. Now move your finger across the edge—from fingertip to hand—away from the edge not toward it and not along it. If the wire

edge has formed you will now be able to feel it.

Do not try to speed this up. Getting this wire edge is the key to getting a really sharp knife.

The result of this activity is that you will create a wider bevel on the edge than the typical factory bevel.

Compare these next two pictures (above).

Here’s the 10-degree bevel that has just been put on this blade by honing. Honing is what sharpening on a stone is called.

And this is what the other side with the factory bevel looks like. This side has not been honed



Just reverse the grinding to properly bevel the other side of the blade.



Stropping is the finishing touch to make a blade really sharp.

yet. Look hard. You can see the difference. You will most certainly tell the difference in the ease of cutting when you are done—which isn't yet, just stay with me.

Once you have the wire edge along the entire side, including the tip and the base of the blade (resist the temptation to fudge this), then it is time to repeat the process on the other side of the blade. Put that factory bevel down on the stone, lift the back a nickel thickness, and repeat the process that was performed on the first side. Again, use considerable pressure and keep grinding at the nickel angle until

the wire edge forms all along the other side.

Now using the same nickel angle go back to the first side and use light pressure for a few strokes. Then do the other side for a few light strokes. Repeat this six to ten times. It should be hard to feel a wire edge on either side. It is still there, but it is now very small and difficult to feel.

Here comes the finishing bit, called stropping. An old belt of fairly stiff leather can be cut to about ten inches, glued to a flat stick and become a strop. Even fairly thin pieces of leather, such as that used on leather upholstery can be used. You



Stropping should be done at this angle.



In a pinch, use box board as a strop.

will need some buffing compound to put on the strop. This can be a bit difficult to get, but searching carving tool suppliers will turn up several different compounds most of which will work well. Sometimes hardware stores have buffing compounds available. Get white or green. Do not use red jeweller's rouge, because it is not designed to work with steel.

Apply the compound to the leather. It doesn't take a lot, just a light coating of the entire surface of the leather. Lay the knife on the coated leather, lift the back that same "nickel" amount, put a fair bit of pressure on the blade and pull the

blade with the edge trailing. Do not change the angle of the blade on the leather for the entire stroke and stop before running off the end of the leather. Pick up the blade and do it again, about 100 times. Then turn the blade over and do it 100 times on the other side. At the end of this procedure, you should have an edge capable of shaving, or better yet, whittling with minimal effort.

The picture above shows the correct stropping angle.

You will notice that the strop will get black as you use it. The blackness is the steel being worn off in microscopic particles as the edge



Do not give the blade a little flip like this at the end of the stropping stroke! If you do you will rub the edge off.

is being polished, and the remaining wire edge is removed.

This process will take some time, do not quit. I have taught hundreds of nine-year-olds to do this. You can do it too. The main thing that hinders success in this, and many other things, is giving up. If you carefully follow these instructions, that means reading the entire text and doing exactly what it says, you will not wreck the knife, but you will get it sharp. The more sharpening you do, the better you will get at it.

When your knife needs to be touched up, use the strop to restore the edge.

When the edge begins to lose its bite, 25 or so strokes per side on the strop will restore the edge again. When you only get five or so minutes of whittlin' before needing to strop again, it is time to use the stone, and raise those wire edges again.

If you can't make a strop or get the buffing compound, use a piece of cereal box material, or similar boxboard, as a strop and strop 200 times per side. There is enough abrasion in that boxboard to do the job and you will see it getting black as the steel is being worn off. The box material will wear out fairly



Sit with forearms inside knees.

quickly, but it is inexpensive to replace, and better than nothing.

That “nickel” angle must be held all the way to the end of the stroke. Do not turn the blade over at the end of each stroke and come back the other way. If you do, you will almost certainly lift the back of the blade as you anticipate the return stroke and in the process round the edge and make it duller not sharper. I have seen this happen many times.

Now let’s learn some basic cuts.

Look at the pictures and try to duplicate what you see.

Notice that I am sitting with my forearms on the inside of my knees. The wood and knife are well ahead of anything that will bleed. This is safe.

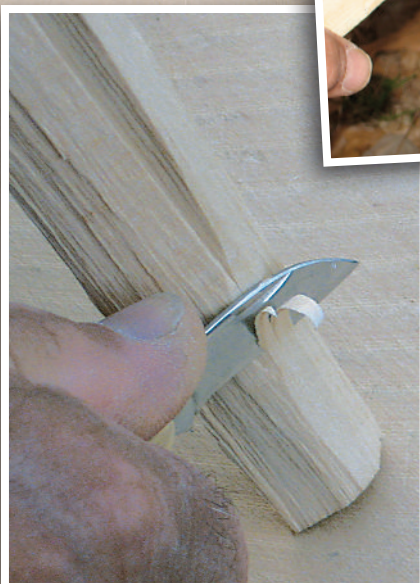
Here is how the knife is gripped for this cutting. Notice that there is no thumb on the back of the blade (it is hard to really put power to this cut if there is), and that the handle is almost totally in the hand.



Here is a picture of basic cutting—power cutting—for hogging off a lot of wood.



Grip the knife like this for power.



Always slice down on a board, not your leg, and not on the ground. The first is hard on your leg the second is hard on your knife.



This is the thumb push cut—very precise.

Use the thumb push for very precise cutting. In this cut all the power comes from the left thumb. The right hand only steadies the

knife and puts it into position. Notice that the thumbs are touching. Obviously, left-handed people will reverse their hands.



The potato peeler cut.



Here is how to grip the knife for the potato peeler cut.

When using the potato peeler cut, take tiny cuts and keep your thumb out of the way. Whittlers use this cut a lot.

Here is how to grip the knife for the potato peeler cut. All the fingers

are together. The index finger is behind the blade, and it is the second joint of that finger, not the tip, that is used. The power comes from just closing the hand.



This is the reverse grip.



Here is the pull cut.

The reverse grip is safe, powerful and fairly precise. It pays to learn this and get it right. Notice that the thumb of the knife hand is on the side of the handle of the knife. Both hands are braced against my body and the wrists stay in contact with the body throughout the cut.

The pull cut. When done correctly, this is safe, powerful, and precise. It looks dangerous, and could be if done incorrectly. Notice that the stick is braced against the sternum (chest), and that the left hand is nowhere near the edge. Also notice that my hand is positioned in such a way that it will hit my body before the blade will. This is important.



The grip for the pull cut.



Using this same basic knife grip, you can hold the knife hand firmly against your body, and without actually moving the knife, pull the wood away. This is very safe.



Pinch the handle of the knife between thumb and forefinger as shown.

Here is how to ensure that your hand will hit your body well before the blade can. Pinch the handle of the knife between thumb and forefinger as shown.

Without losing the “pinch” wrap the fingers around the handle. Put the end of the wood on your chest, with the other end of the wood in the non-knife hand. Bring the blade into position and do a practise cutting motion without actually cutting. This will confirm that your hand will hit your body before the knife. Now, without changing your position go ahead and make some small cuts.

Practise these cuts with some scraps of wood. Always remember to think about what happens when the knife slips. It will slip. If you have thought ahead you won't bleed.

Also, take small cuts. If you try to take big cuts, you will be applying a lot of pressure, and that leads to slips.

It is very likely that you will cut yourself at some point. If you have followed the above instructions, that cut will not likely be serious and can be treated with a Band-Aid. It is a good idea to have a few of these on hand.

Remember that the following projects can't all be done all the time or in every location. Some are

seasonable, and all are dependent on the availability of the appropriate materials. Hunting for and finding the right material for making these whistles and flutes is part of the fun though. In fact, scrounging up materials to whittle is an important skill for us whittlers. We are always on the lookout for branches that are about to be burned or chipped that we can “rescue” and use.

A hike or drive down a country road can yield a lot of branches that are growing right beside the roadway. In most places these are trimmed from time to time by the highways department, so if a whittler takes a few as needed nobody cares. It is good to check with your local road or highways department on this subject.

Often trees growing on power line rights of ways are available too.

Do not cut trees or saplings in parks.

Landowners often will give permission to take some saplings for whistle makers, but they need to be asked politely. Almost anyone with bamboo or cane growing on their place is happy to have some cut. However, they often want you to cut it all!

If you are friends with some farmers or landowners, you will have all the whistle materials you can handle.

Sometimes it is easier and less expensive to buy the material you need. It isn't nearly as much fun though.





I'm using an antique
pocketknife for this project,
because, well, it just
seems right.



Chapter 2: The Classic Slip Bark Whistle

Whenever I do whittling demonstrations and make these whistles, elderly people watch and then exclaim, “we used to make those when I was young.” Seventy years ago, I think most boys knew how, and if they didn’t, they had to turn in their boy papers and be a girl!

Of course the previous sentence is not true. Most of the girls knew how to make these whistles too.

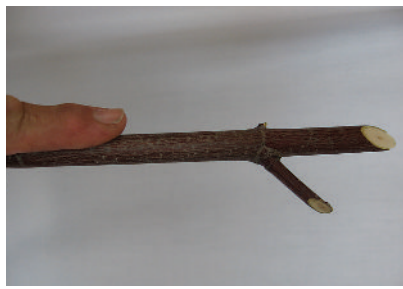
Here is how you can do it.

First you need a fresh sapling cut in the spring or early summer. This will not work in the winter except in tropical places, where it may work all year round. Willow is the traditional material, but I like to use a maple sapling or branch. Lots of different kinds of trees/bushes will work. Try some and use what works for you.

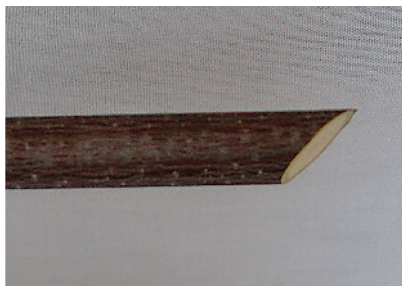
By fresh cut, I mean one that is cut just minutes before getting to work. Branches cannot be kept for days before doing this.

If, during the process described in the pictures and text following, you split or tear the bark, you will need to start again. Try to learn from your mistakes and keep at it. You will catch on if you keep trying.

It is important to work off the top of the stick, because all branches taper, and since we are going to take the bark off the branch, without slitting or splitting it, we have to come off the smaller end. Trying to take a small piece of bark off of a larger piece of wood will not work. On most bushes the branches and buds point up and that will help you get this right.



1. The finger is pointing to the top of the stick, so is the little branch.



2. With your sharp knife whittle the top end of the stick off on an angle like this.

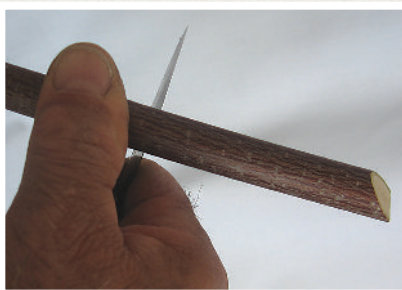


3. The mouthpiece.

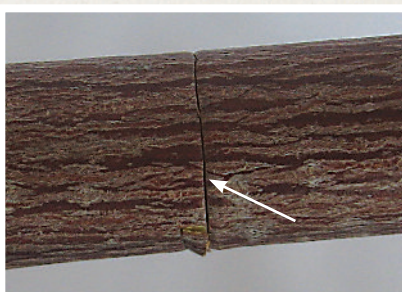
Of course it will be necessary to work between the branches and buds.

Whittle off the sharp end to make the mouthpiece as shown in Photo 3. The best way to do this is to put the stick down on a log and cut with little cuts from the outside of the stick towards the center. If you cut from the center out, you will pull the bark away from the wood and tear it. Then you will need to start again.

When cutting all around the bark as in Photo 4, you want this result (Photo 5). One cut that goes all the



4. Holding the knife and stick as shown, cut through the bark and into the wood, turning the top of the stick away from you so that the cut can be seen coming up.



5. You want this result.

way through the bark and into the wood, all around the stick. It is very important that you get right through the bark all the way around.

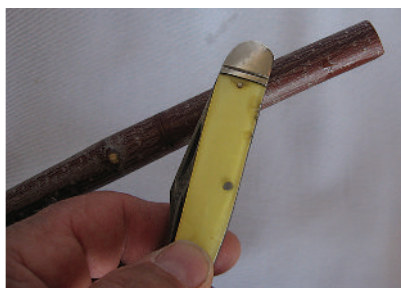


6. An incorrect cut.

You do not want this! (Photo 6) If you get this, it is possible to get the whistle to work, but it will be difficult. Take the time to learn to do it right.

Now close the knife and tap the bark all over between the mouthpiece and the cut you just made. All over, not just here and there. You can also rub the bark all over with a smooth knife handle or a stick with the bark peeled off. This has to be done hard enough to bruise the bark, but not hard enough to crush or split it. This is a tricky thing to explain. You just have to try.

Now grasp the stick tightly above the cut with one hand and below the cut with the other and twist. If you have tapped hard enough, and gripped hard enough, you should feel and maybe even hear the bark pop loose. When this happens, without



7. Tap the bark with the knife handle like this.



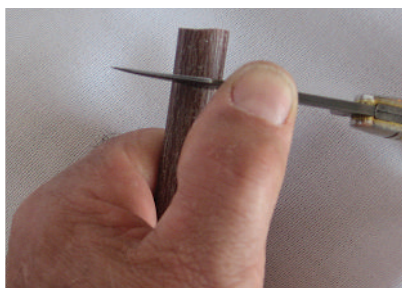
8. Twist the bark loose.

the bark tearing in any way, it is time for a little celebration, because, though there are several places where things could still go wrong, if you can get the bark loose, you can make a good whistle. Don't twirl it around the stick, because sticks are often not completely round and doing that could split the bark

To take the bark off to see this wonderful thing that you have done, ease it off with your thumb. If you



9. Replace the bark.



10. Cut straight down here.



11. Using a thumb push, cut up toward the stop cut made as shown in Photo 10, and make a nice clean (not ragged) notch going through the bark and into the wood just a bit.



12. Slide the bark off with your thumb and put it in a safe place.

just grab and pull, you may crush the bark. Be careful with it!

Put the bark carefully back exactly where it came from for the next step. You will feel it kind of click into place.

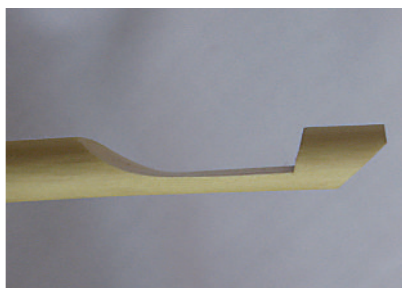
Then at a point about $\frac{3}{4}$ inch from the end of the mouthpiece, cut straight down through the bark and into the wood without moving the bark on the stick. Notice that my thumb is pushing down on the back of the blade to do this. You could also put the stick down on a firm but

not rough surface to do this. Do not use your leg as a support and do not place your palm beneath the wood.

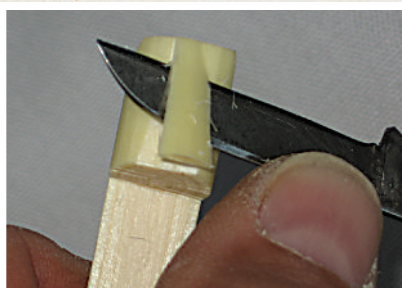
Using a careful thumb push cut, take out a nice clean notch, cutting from the bottom end of the stick on an angle to intersect with the first cut in the previous step. The result should look like this. A nice clean notch going through the bark and into the wood just a bit. Don't make this notch too big. Let Photo 11 be your guide.



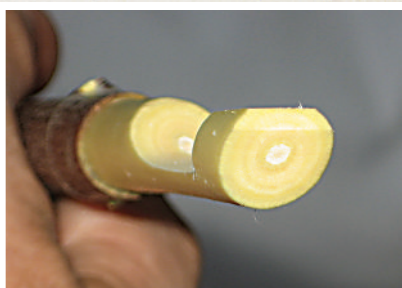
13. Whittle out the sound chamber.



14. Here is what it should look like when you have finished this part.



15. Take very little off the mouthpiece.



16. This is what it should look like when the little flat has been formed.

Use very careful, controlled cuts doing this. A slip will likely ruin it.

Whittle out the sound chamber using careful thumb push cuts. Notice how my left thumb is providing the power for the cutting. No power is coming from my right hand at all. Keep deepening the original vertical cut you made when you first cut right through the bark, and do not shorten the distance between it and the end of the mouthpiece.

This is what it should look like when you have finished whittling out the sound chamber (Photo 13). The larger that chamber is, the lower will be the tone of the whistle. Many beginners make this far too small. The whistle may be working, but only dogs can hear it and they will not tell.

Using carefully controlled cutting (see how the knife is being pushed by the thumb only), take a little bit off the top of the mouthpiece, so that air can enter the whistle when you blow.



17. Carefully whittle through the stick an inch or so beyond the cut at the end of the removable piece of bark. You now have a finished whistle.

The major mistake that beginners make is to take too much off at this point, so be careful. You can always take some more off if you don't get enough the first time, but you can't put any back if you take too much off.

The little end with the flat spot is called the "fipple."

Slip the bark back into position and blow! Make sure you don't put your lip or finger over the hole in the bark.

If it works—great! If it doesn't, try to figure out what went wrong or if you can fix anything. Sometimes a little more off the fipple helps. Sometimes you just need to start again, and try to do better. Some of my students have succeeded after about ten tries. Others have done it the first time!

Make some more right away, so you really learn how to do it and reinforce the lessons that you have learned.

Some added tricks:

When you can make a working whistle almost every time you try, you might want to attempt some variations.

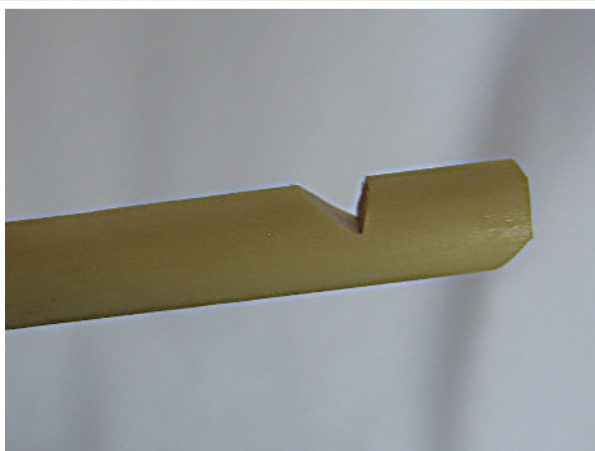
If you cut an extra notch through the bark over the area that will be whittled out to make the sound chamber—not too big—you can make a warbling whistle as you put your finger on and off the hole while blowing.

You can also make two whistles with different sized sound chambers so that they each have a different pitch. If you hold them together and

18. Cut the extra notch before carving out the sound chamber.



19. A deep notch.



blow them at the same time, it can have the effect of a train whistle.

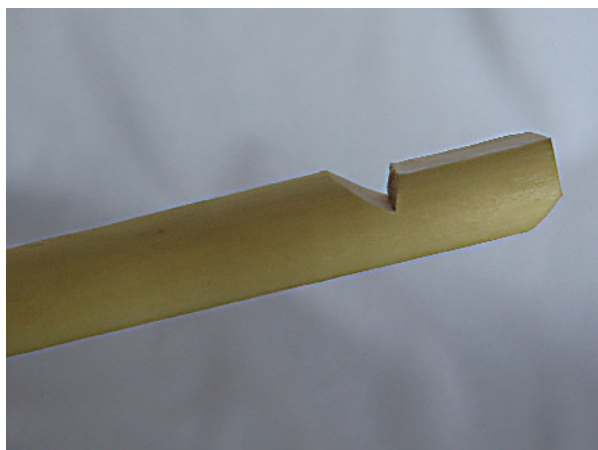
It is also possible to make a slip bark whistle that can play a tune.

Here's how.

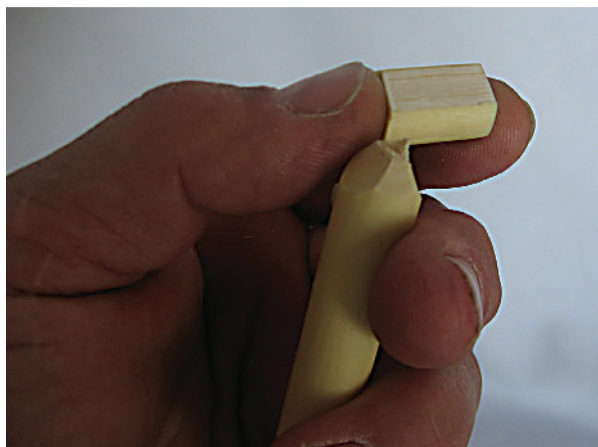
Get a branch with at least two inches of bud free area to work with.

Make the basic whistle, slipping the bark and cutting the notch through the bark as usual. At this point the procedure changes a bit.

Instead of whittling out the sound chamber, just whittle a deep notch as shown (Photo 19).



20. Then form the flat on the fipple.



21. Without damaging the fipple, whittle it right off the end of the stick.



22. Another inch or so down the stick whittle off your almost completed whistle.

23. This is the best grip for playing the slide whistle.



Now slip the whole business back together. If you make sure the fipple is in the correct position, and hold the very end of the stick as

shown with your thumb on the bark, you can vary the size of the sound chamber, and with a little practice, play some tunes. Really!





*Here is some cane I cut
in Mississippi.*



Chapter 3: Other Fipple Whistles

The slip bark whistle is a whistle made with a fipple; a plug at the mouthpiece end with a passage for air. The whole process of making the slip bark whistle kind of “simplifies” the construction of a whistle without glue and fine fitting being necessary. Honest. It really is easier to do a whistle that way, once you get the hang of it.

Whistles can be made out of anything that is a tube using the same principles as the slip bark whistle; except there is no slipping of the bark involved. Instead there is some fairly fine whittling and a bit of gluing required.

To make fipple whistles out of natural materials, you will need to find something that is, or can easily be made, into a tube.

Cane or bamboo grows wild in many places in North America. I have seen it in the Southeast and in Arizona and in California. It is perfect for making whistles and even flutes. All that really needs to be done to cane or bamboo is to cut it down and it is ready for whistle making.

Bamboo can be bought in sporting goods stores as fishing pole blanks, or sometimes in garden supply centers as supports for plants.

Elderberry is even more widespread. I have seen this plant in the rainforest of British Columbia and in the American South (Dixie), and in lots of places in between. It has a very large pith which can be drilled out with an easily whittled wooden drill.



1. A fine piece of elderberry.



2. A stick can be used as a drill to remove the pith.



3. The saw on a multi-tool is useful for cutting cane.



4. If you do saw the cane, or other tube material, it will leave some fibers that will need to be trimmed.

Use care to not apply so much pressure that you split the stalk. This is a great campfire activity. Just keep picking away until the pith is completely removed.

Then smooth out the insides with a stick and you are ready to make a whistle.

If you do have access to a drill, you could just drill out a block of wood to make your tube.

Of course with a piece of cane or bamboo, there is no pith to remove. Just cut a piece off.

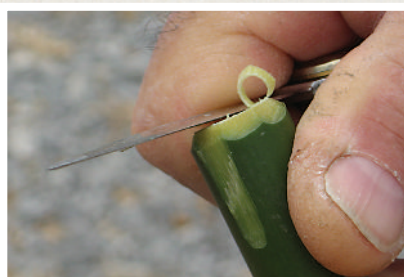


5. **Do not** cut from the center towards the outside as in this picture.

I am using the saw on a multi-tool for this, but you can just slice a diagonal cut with your knife and trim it up afterwards.



6. This is what you will get if you do.



7. Instead, carefully cut around the circle of the tube. Notice that my thumb is not in line with the blade while doing this.



8. Taper one end of the plug.



9. The narrow end goes in first.

There is a bit of webby material inside of the cane and bamboo, but it is easily cleaned out with a little stick.

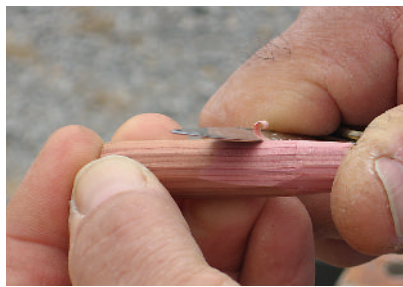
From now on the instructions are the same for elderberry, cane, bamboo and other tubes.

Get a small piece of dry wood, softwood is best, to make the fipple. If the fipple is not dry, it will shrink as it dries and let air in places where it shouldn't and the whistle won't work. To find dry wood in the forest, go to a standing dead tree or sapling of sufficient size. If it has been dead long enough that the bark has fallen off, it will be dry. I am using some eastern red cedar for the fipple so that it will be easier to see.

The fipple has to fit the inside of the tube almost perfectly, so it is necessary to whittle it very carefully with small cuts.

Start by whittling it almost small enough, but not quite. Then taper the end down so that it is a little too small.

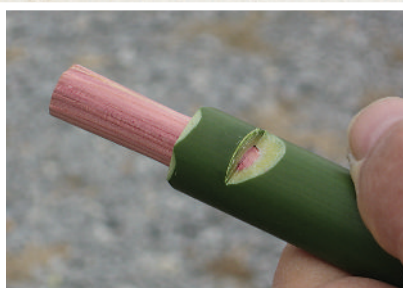
Carefully insert the too small end into the end of the tube that will be your mouthpiece, and with a bit of pressure, not enough to split your tube, rotate the tube, holding the stick still. Or, do it the other way



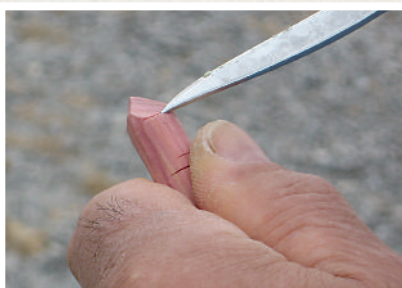
10. Use tiny cuts, and keep trying the stick to see how it fits.



11. Cut the notch as shown with **little** cuts. Keep going about this deep right into the fipple stick.



12. A complete notch.



13. You will need to trim the fipple stick right off at the point where the vertical cut for the notch in the tube cut down into it.

around. This will form a little mark that will tell you how small to make the fipple stick so that it will fit snugly into the tube.

Use tiny cuts, and keep trying the stick to see how it fits. Do not force it, or you will split the tube and then you will have to start again. Make sure it fits with no gaps.

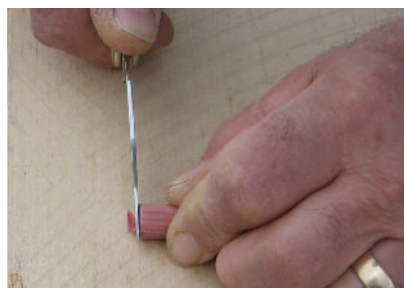
You will need about an inch, not counting the tapered too small end, that will fit into the tube snugly,

Put the fipple stick in as far as it will go.

The fipple stick is in deep so that as you carve the notch with your sharp knife, it will support the inside of the tube and result in clean, non-ragged cuts. Ragged cuts are the enemy of whistles. Avoid them.

Cut a little flat on the top of the fipple. Do not make this too big. It can always be made bigger later.

Make sure at this point that there is more fipple than will be needed.



14. Do it by carefully cutting down on a board.



15. Do not even think about doing this way.



16. Or this way.



17. Or this way. Believe it or not, I have seen people do all of these things. Do not be like them!



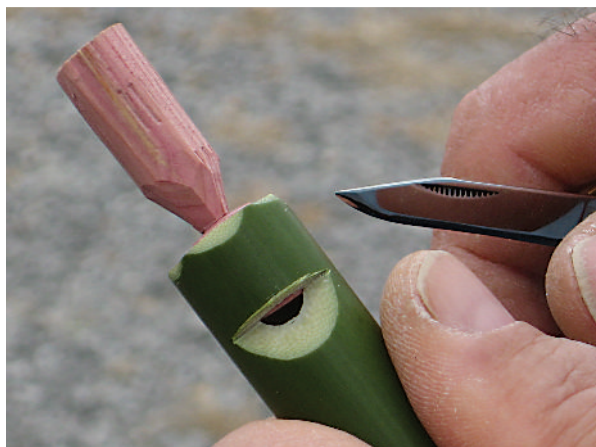
18. Cut a little flat on the top of the fipple.



19. Make sure at this point that there is more fipple than will be needed when the whistle is finished.



20. I am test blowing the whistle here.



21. When the glue is dry, carefully whittle the fipple off flush with the end of the tube.

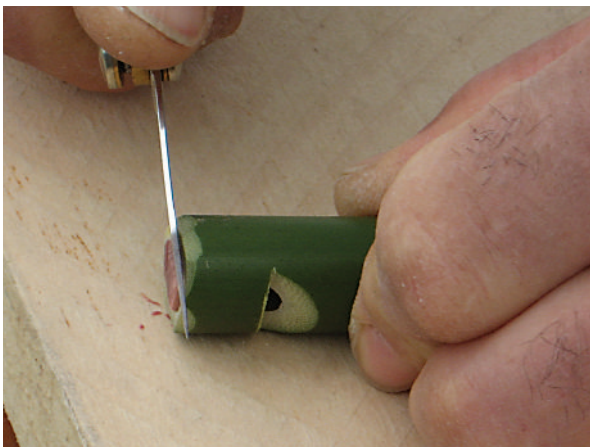
This gives you something to grab when you need to pull the fipple out for adjustments.

Now is when you can give it a blow and see if it works. You may need to adjust the finished depth of the fipple, or make the flat spot a little larger. If the flat spot needs to be smaller, you will need to make a new fipple. Did I mention that you

need to be careful and take little cuts? If your whistle is being made with a tube that is open at both ends, you will need to plug the open end with your finger as you blow.

When the sound is right, mark the depth of the fipple and glue it in place taking care not to get glue in the air passage. If you use crazy glue (Cyanoacrylate glue—often called

22. It is useful to have a board to whittle down on for this.



23. You can whittle a plug for the open end of your whistle, or just cover the end with a finger when you blow it.



CA glue), **do not put your mouth on the mouthpiece until the glue is fully dry!** If you touch your lips to the wet glue, you will instantly glue your lips to the whistle! And that is not fun.

Unlike the bark whistles that will stop working at times when the bark dries this kind of whistle should last for years.



Here is the knife I used
and the little piece of
white pine that became
the body of the call.



Chapter 4: Reed Whistles

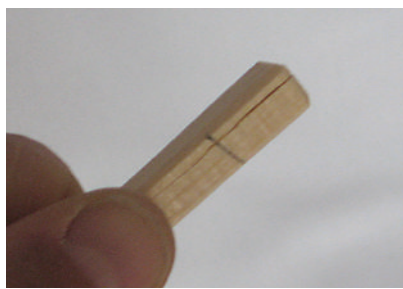
Reed whistles make their sound from the vibration of something called a “reed.” It might be a piece of reed, a strip of bark, a thin piece of wood or a blade of grass.

I once, (over 50 years ago), heard an Australian Aborigine play a hymn on a leaf that he held between his fingers, and he didn’t miss a note!

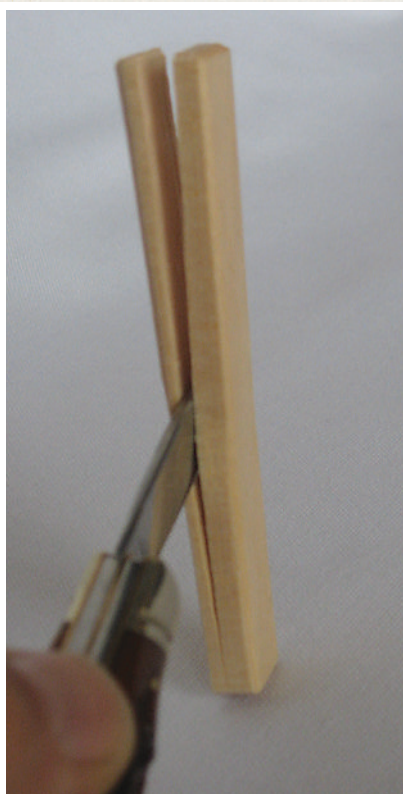
In this chapter I will describe making a deer or predator call using a rubber band as the reed. It is fun to try different things as reeds and see what kind of sounds they produce.

Any piece of straight grained wood could be used, even a twig or a branch.

The exact size is not very important, but if you make it much bigger than shown, it will be hard to blow. This piece is about $\frac{1}{4}$ inch thick, $\frac{3}{4}$ inch wide and about 3 inches long. Split the raw piece of wood out to a little bigger than this and then whittle it smooth and down to final size with bevelled edges.



1. Before you make the split it is a good idea to put a little pencil mark on the edge of the wood so that when the wood is split it will be easy to align the two pieces just like they were before the wood was split.



2. Split the blank with your knife.

Use your knife to split the wood edge to edge and all the way down. Put the wood down on some surface that will not be harmed by the knife when the split is completed.

Try to choose a piece of wood that will split reasonably straight. When you are first splitting the wood out for the blank, it will become evident whether or not you have a good piece.

Carefully whittle out a hollow on both sides of the split, so that when put back together there is a little opening in the middle as shown. I carved some notches for the lashing at the ends but that is not really necessary.

Put a rubber band around the ends and across the gap on one of the two halves. Keep the rubber flat without twisting. The exact size of the rubber band is not important, but different sizes will make different sounds, so try different sizes.

3. Here's another with no notches, and a smaller gap.



4. Put a flat rubber band around the ends and across the gap on one of the two halves.





5. Use some more rubber bands to tie the whole thing together.



6. Bite down and blow.

Photo 6 is not meant to frighten you! It does show how to hold the call when blowing it. Bite down on it and blow. You can see that I pulled the part of the rubber band that spans the gap in the call a little tighter, which left a little slack hanging down. I did this to raise the tone a bit.

This rubber band call when blown right gives off a soft bleat that whitetail does use to call their fawns. Every whitetail deer remembers its mama calling that way, and even if they are big bucks now, they will stop and pay attention, which will give you a better look at them.

If you tighten the rubber band a little more and blow harder, it

will imitate the cry of an injured rabbit, and that will bring coyotes and bobcats in for a look. Be a little careful with this, because you could call in a mountain lion (cougar) if there are any around, and that would not be a very good thing.

Here is another one of these calls that I made using a branch with the bark still on. I used a strip of birch bark split down thin for the reed, and some string I made out of the inner bark of the same tree that I got the branch from, (it was a Douglas Maple by the way), to lash the two halves together. Notice that I left the ends of the bark reed sticking out so that I could tighten it up if necessary for a different tone.



7. Another call made with the bark intact.





*A piece of cane used like
a bottle whistle.*



Chapter 5: Tube Whistles Without a Fipple

Almost everyone has used a bottle as a whistle, by just blowing over the end.

The same thing can be done with a piece of cane, bamboo, or other natural tube. Just make sure the end is plugged, either by leaving a joint of the cane on or holding a finger over

the open end. You can cut a bunch of tubes of cane, about the same diameter, with a joint left on one end to act as a plug. Then tune them to each other in a scale. Lash them together with some sticks and string to make a Pan Flute.



1. You may want to try cutting the mouthpiece end as shown.



2. This makes it a little easier to position the lips just right.

This will take quite a bit of time, and a good ear. Tone deaf people are going to have trouble with this. Some extra hands to help while the lashing is taking place are useful too. This makes a good project for a rainy day at camp. Waiting for fish to bite is a good time for this or other whistle projects too.

It is even possible to add a second row of tubes with sharps and flats tuned in. I have heard some really nice music played with a flute made this way.

The native people who live in the Andes make some very nice music using flutes made just like this.



3. I think that the Pan Flute is the best way to make a truly musical instrument out of natural materials.



Here is a flute made out
of a piece of dried bamboo
about 1 inch in diameter
and 18-20 inches long.



Chapter 6: Fipple Flute

Here is a flute made out of a piece of dried bamboo about 1 inch in diameter and 18–20 inches long.

Notice that there is a joint in the middle of this piece of bamboo. First a metal rod, or a strong, hard stick, needs to be used to knock the web out which would separate the two sections.

Once that is done a fipple and notch need to be made and installed at one end. Follow the instructions on making a fipple whistle for this. Plug the end with your finger and make sure that you have a working

whistle before proceeding further. Sometimes it is possible to make a good whistle without even plugging the end, and different tones can be produced by blowing softly at first and then with increasing force and then falling off. This can mimic the call of an elk, and can bring them in close at the right season.

About 6 inches down from the notch, I burned a hole about $\frac{1}{4}$ inch in diameter with a hot piece of steel and then burned more holes about an inch apart. I would suggest burning a progression of holes and trying them one after another.



1. The holes can be cut with your knife too as in this example.



2. Start by marking a place for the hole, and then whittling a little from one side with a controlled thumb push cut. Do not attempt to remove the chip.

Plan on **cutting** (not chewing!) square holes, a little smaller than $\frac{1}{4} \times \frac{1}{4}$ inch.

Mark the square with a pencil first.

3. Turn the piece end for end and using the same cut remove the chip, which will leave a nice flat spot for making the hole.



4. **Do not** jamb the knife in and twist! A ragged mess will be the result and this won't work well. Note the difference between a good hole and the messy one.



5. The difference between a clean hole and a messy one.





6. Then cut the two crosswise cuts.



7. After the crosswise cuts have been made, make the lengthwise cuts.

8. This will make for a much nicer finger hole.



It should be noted that if you want to make a flute of truly musical quality, some math is involved. There are Internet sites that will help those who want to make a musical instrument. This is a whittling project, not a math assignment. (Aren't you glad?)

You may have to tape up some holes and make new ones until you have all your measurements nailed down. It is exceptionally unlikely that you will be satisfied with your first few efforts. Keep trying different things and have fun!

You will be amazed at what you can do.





Georgia cane.



Chapter 7: The Kazoo

This is a weird sort of a noisemaker/instrument.

It has been used in serious music though, and it is fun to make and probably the easiest of all musical (?) instruments to make and play.

You need a tube. If you are blessed with a supply of cane or bamboo use that. People who have bamboo growing in their yards often wish that they didn't, or at least didn't have quite so much, so getting some from them isn't hard. A reed or a hollowed out piece of elderberry

will also work for this project.

As previously mentioned, elderberry stalks have a very large and soft pith that can be easily drilled out with a hardwood drill that you can whittle yourself.

I used a piece of cane that I cut in Georgia for this project. Just cut it off between the nodes so that you have a tube and clean out any webby bits with a stick. This is a fairly large piece, but those of smaller diameter work well too.



1. About 1½-2" from the end carefully whittle the beginnings of a hole.



2. Turn the cane around and using thumb push cuts, work towards the first cuts. Be careful and use small cuts!



3. Eventually, you will make a hole, which you can clean up a bit with the point of your knife. The size of this hole is not critical.

4. Using scissors or your knife on a board, cut a piece of plastic (from a bag such as you might get from a supermarket), big enough to overlap the hole on all sides by about $\frac{1}{2}$ inch.



5. Tape both ends of the plastic down to the cane, without getting tape over the hole at all.



There! You have a Kazoo. To play it, just kind of hum and blow at the same time in one end. Try it from both ends to see which end works best for you. Use any tune you know.

Kazoos can be a lot of fun with a group. A kazoo band can be easily formed. Camp songs can be

accompanied. You can experiment with different materials like tissue paper, cellophane, thicker or thinner plastic, other kinds of tubes, bigger or smaller, longer or shorter.

You can make one or a dozen of these. And I am pretty sure you can play one too, and have fun doing it.



*If you can get a piece
of cane this big you are
almost there already!*



Chapter 8: Wilderness Trumpet or Vuvuzela

It is said that some hunters many years ago would call their dogs or signal companions with a "Hunters' Trumpet." This instrument was nothing more than the barrel of the hunter's shotgun (unloaded for several obvious reasons!) blown like a trumpet. A trumpet or bugle amplifies the sound of vibrating lips to make its sound. I have tried the shotgun barrel, and it works well, but it is hard on the lips if used a lot.

More recently fans at sporting events have been sold plastic trumpets that work the same way but with better mouthpieces, and no need to unload the thing first! I am told that these plastic noisemakers were invented and first produced in South Africa for soccer fans there and were called Vuvuzelas.

It is not difficult to make your own out of cane or bamboo, and probably other tube plants.



1. This is a green cane Vuvuzela.



2. Carefully smooth the sharp edges off of the outside and inside of the mouthpiece end of the trumpet.

Make it about 18–24 inches long. Tap the partitions at the joints out of the inside of the cane, so that you have a tube that can be blown through easily. To do this, use a long piece of stiff metal. Rebar works well if available. This tapping has to be fairly enthusiastic, and continuous, but you'll get through after a bit.

Then holding your lips together (not too tightly) put them tight against the end and **blow!** Someone near you probably knows how to play or at least make a noise with a trumpet, bugle or tuba and can show you how to do this. It is the vibrating lips that make the sound that is amplified by the tube.

3. This piece of dried cane was too small to comfortably “trumpet blow” into, but it was still about 20 inches long and needed the partition rodded out.



4. A piece of hardwood, in this case birch, but other types will do, was used to whittle a mouthpiece.



It sounds kind of like a screaming elephant. I guess?

Exact dimensions are not important here. You need to make a little cup with a hole all the way through—a drill helps, though you could burn it through with a hot nail. Kids just love to burn wood with hot metal! They should not do it without

supervision and proper equipment like locking pliers and gloves.

Mom will probably want you to keep your vuvuzelaing (is that a word?!) outside. Waaay outside!

In fact, most of the projects in this book are “outside toys.” I know that for some people it is a strange idea, but it is possible to have fun, and even make noise without being



1. Whittle a wooden mouthpiece.



2. Fit it all together and even a smaller piece of cane or tube (even copper or plastic pipe), can become a Vuvuzela.

excessively annoying. Really. You should try it!

These whistles and flutes were designed to be made outside, sitting on a log, by a fire, near a lake or

stream maybe, with someone special like dad or grandpa, or a couple of grandchildren. This is not, after all, just about whittling whistles. It's about making memories.



About the Author

Rick Wiebe has been whittling for over 55 years, and still has a full complement of working fingers.

He carves many different kinds of projects, walking sticks with animal heads, human caricatures, and large log projects using chainsaws and more.

His pieces are in private collections worldwide.

Rick teaches whittling and carving to children aged nine and up and adults too, in many different venues including clubs, schools, homeschool groups, community recreation programs, and private sessions.

He and his wife of 43 years live in Westbank, BC and work with Mobile Missionary Assistance Program (mmap.org) in the southern US during the winter. He often gets to carve as part of this work too.

Rick and Helen sell carving tools at woodcarvingbiz.com where a gallery of some of his work can be seen.



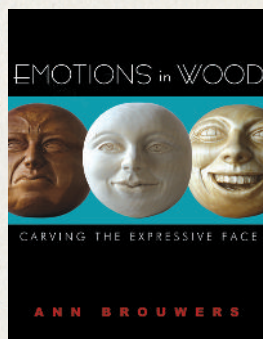
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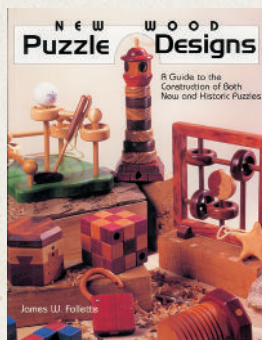
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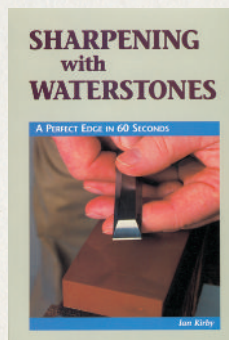
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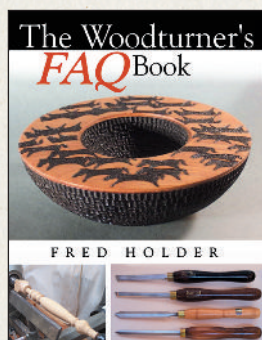
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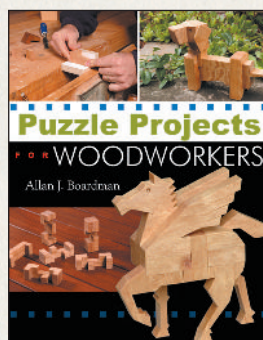
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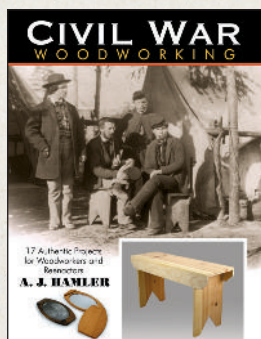


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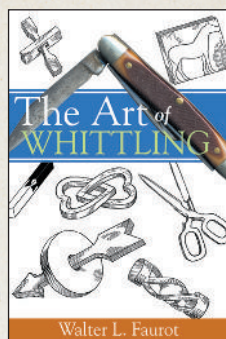
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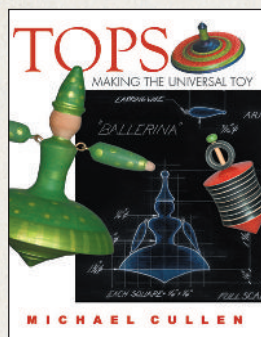
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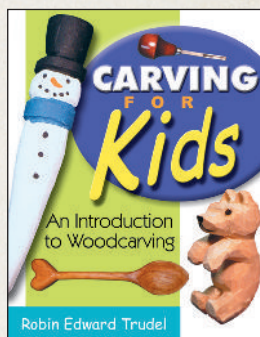
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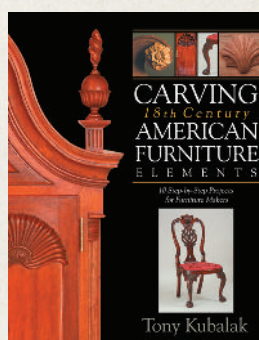
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