

Make Your Own Atlatl and Darts

For thousands of years before the bow and arrow was invented, people all over the world used a spear-thrower called an *atlatl*.

Archaeological evidence shows that people in the Great Basin may have been using atlatls as early as 8,000 years ago.

The atlatl uses leverage to let the user to throw a spear (also called a *dart*) faster and farther.



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The atlatl is a shaft of wood that is basically acts like an extension of the arm. The end of the dart rests against a hook on the end of the atlatl. To throw it, you fling the atlatl with your forearm and wrist, thrusting the dart forward.

A well-made atlatl, used with skill, can throw a dart 100 yards at speeds of nearly 100 miles per hour!



This is a replica of an atlatl found in Rasmussen Cave in Nine-Mile Canyon in Utah. The original is probably more than 3,000 years old.

This atlatl is just over 21 inches long. A rock weight in the middle added balance and mass to the atlatl. The deer hide strip might have helped stabilize the atlatl in use, or it might have been a charm or just a decoration.

This replica was made by Ray Thompson of Salt Lake City.

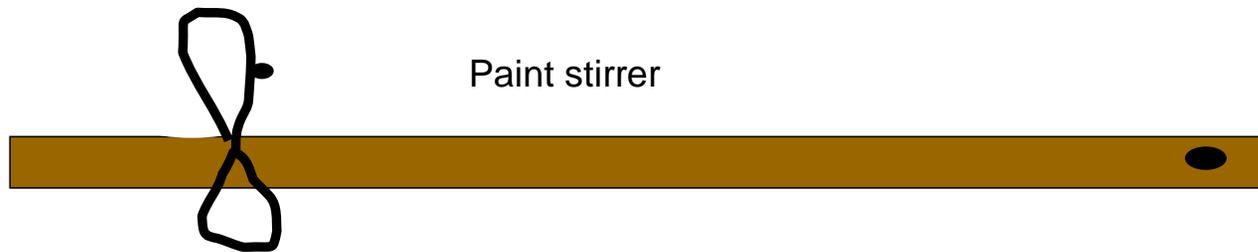
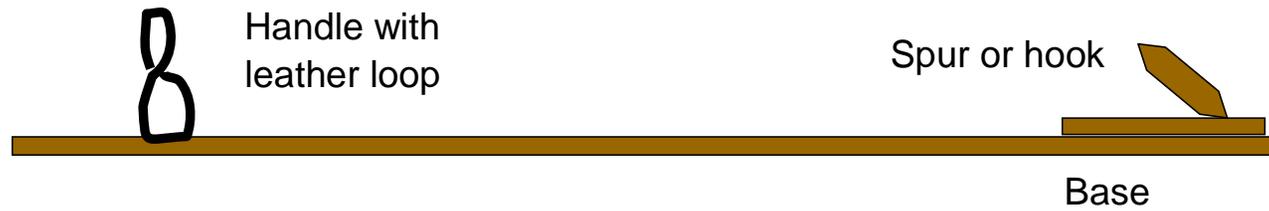
MAKING YOUR OWN ATLATL FROM A PAINT STIRRER

WHAT YOU WILL NEED:

1. An adult to help you
2. Paint stirrers (you can get these at most hardware stores)
3. A saw
4. Wood glue
5. A drill
6. Wood clamps
7. Heavy-duty duct tape
8. Leather straps (or leather shoe strings)
9. 3/8" x 48" wooden dowels. You'll need these for the atlatl and for the spears.
10. Pencil sharpener
11. Scissors



Side view and top view of the atlatl you will make:

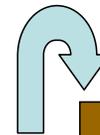




Take one of the paint stirrers and cut off one of the ends. This should measure about 1.5 inches square. Take this square and glue it to the end of one of the paint stirrers. Use a clamp to hold it in place and let it dry for a couple of hours.

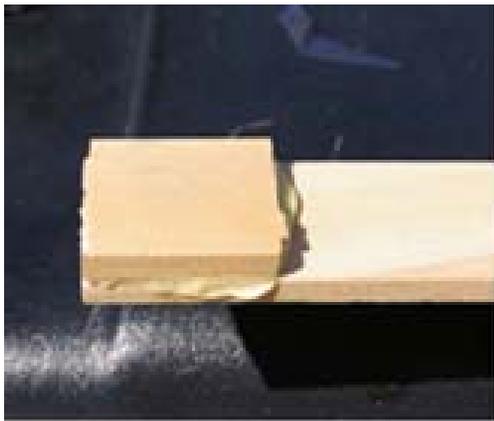


Glue square to this end



Handle

Paint Stirrer



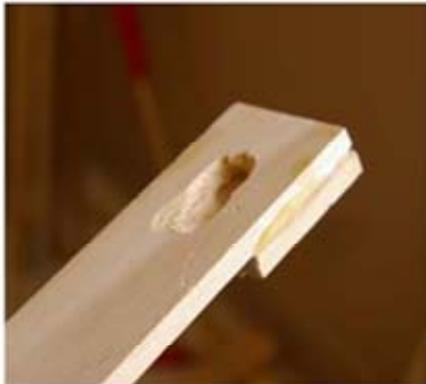
This is an important part of the atlatl. This is the end of the atlatl that will hold the spear in place.



Once the glue has dried, get a drill and drill an angled hole into the wood.



Get a dowel and cut off a piece measuring 1.5 to 2 inches long. Taper both ends as shown below using either a knife or a pencil sharpener. This is what we call the “spur” or “hook” for the atlatl.





Take this shaped wooden dowel and place it into the hole you drilled into the atlatl. This dowel will serve as the “spur” or “hook” for the atlatl and is very important.

It should sit at an angle as shown in the photograph. Use wood glue to secure it in the hole.



Let this dry for a couple of hours at least. It will be subjected to a lot of stress when we start using the atlatl.

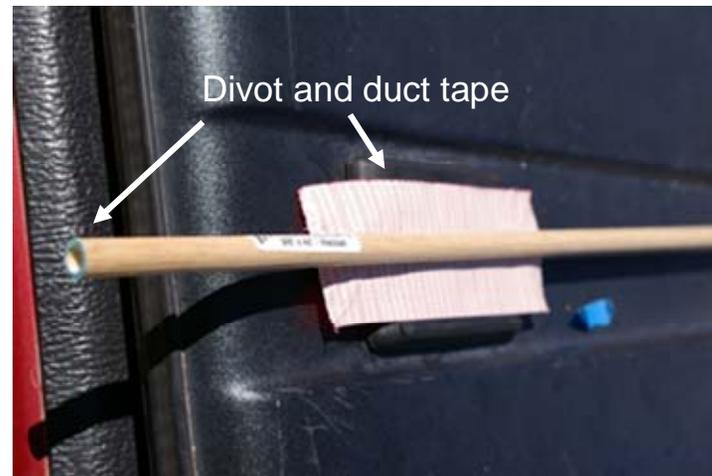


While the “spur” or “hook” is drying in place, it might be a good time to make a few spears.

Take your dowels (3/8” by 48”) and, using a drill, make a divot or hole in one end. This divot is important because it is what will connect the spear with the atlatl.

Take some duct tape (I like to use red) and cut a section about 3 to 5 inches in length. Lay one end of the dowel on the duct tape and secure it in place.

Then take a second piece of duct tape and place it over the first. Secure these together.





The duct tape will serve as “fletching” or feathers for the spear. Once you have both pieces secured, take scissors and trim it into a feather shape.



You can use a pencil sharpener to put a blunt point on the other end of the spear. You don't need to get it super sharp. And remember, be careful. The atlatl and spear are not toys to use without care and adult supervision.



Now, let's finish up the atlatl. Take a drill and drill a small hole just above the center of the handle on the paint stirrer.



Then, take a string or piece of leather like a leather shoe string and run it through the tiny hole you made. Tie it in a good knot.

This will serve as part of the handle for the atlatl.



Spur or hook on the atlatl.

To hold the atlatl, place it in your hand with the “spur” facing upward. Put your thumb and index finger through the leather loop and grasp the handle. You’ll use your thumb and index finger to hold the spear in place.



In these pictures you can see the proper way to hold the atlatl.

We are ready to use our new paint stirrer atlatl.

Take your atlatl and hold it putting your thumb and index finger through the leather loop and grasping the handle.

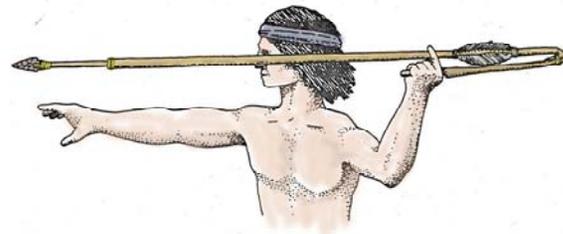
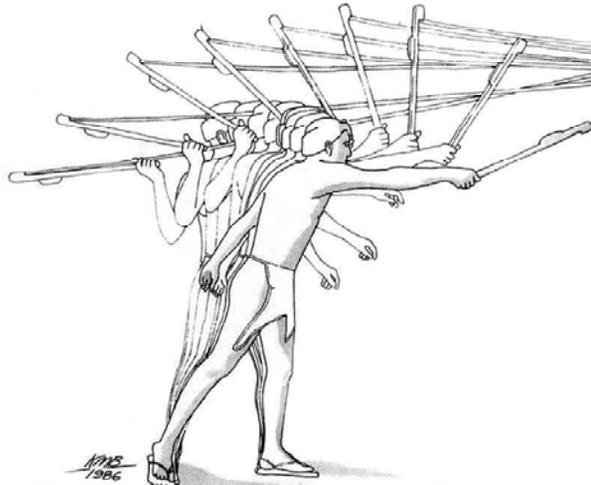
Take a spear and place the divot end on the "spur." Using your thumb and index finger, grasp the spear and hold it in a "pinching" manner.

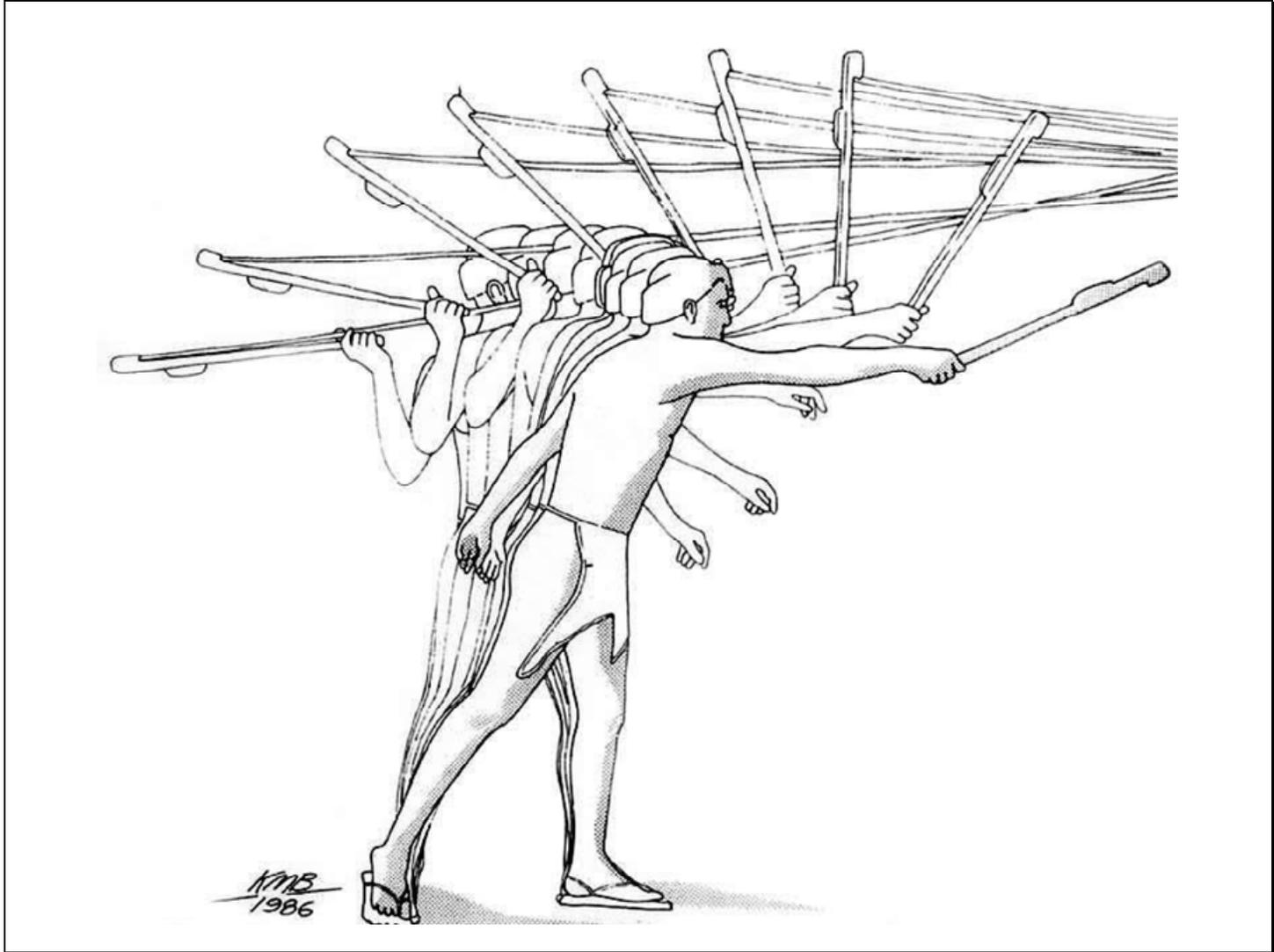


It will take some practice but be patient. You'll be good at this with a little time.

Hold the spear and the atlatl. Now, pick your target - -but be careful. Only throw your spear in a place that us safe—so that if you miss the target you won't hurt anything or anyone.

Now, go through the motions like you are casting a fishing pole.....at the top of your throw, release the







Successful hunters celebrate after using their paint stirrer atlatls.

For more information, see www.worldatlatl.org