

# Knot



# News

INTERNATIONAL GUILD OF KNOT TYERS - PACIFIC AMERICAS BRANCH

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Joseph Schmidbauer-Editor

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*From the Ditty Bag:*

## A Seam Rubber

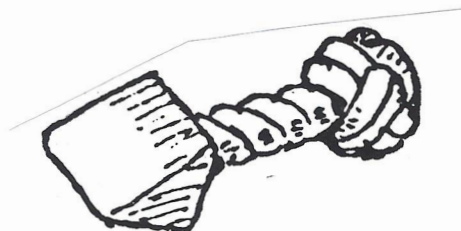
*by Roy Chapman*

If you sew much for your knotting projects you will find plenty of use for a good seam rubber.

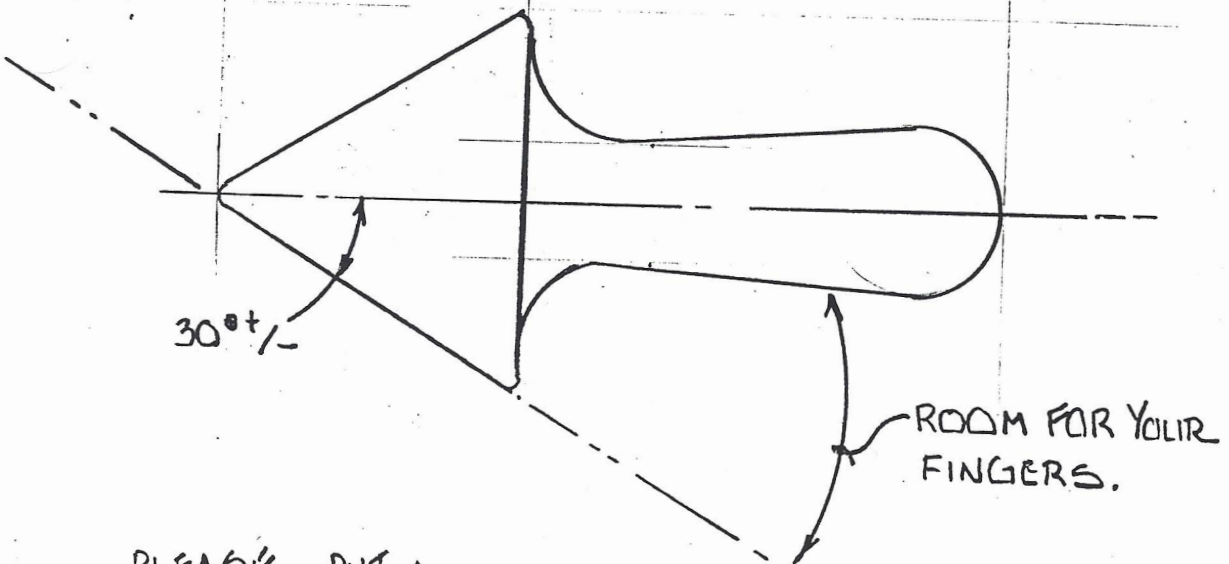
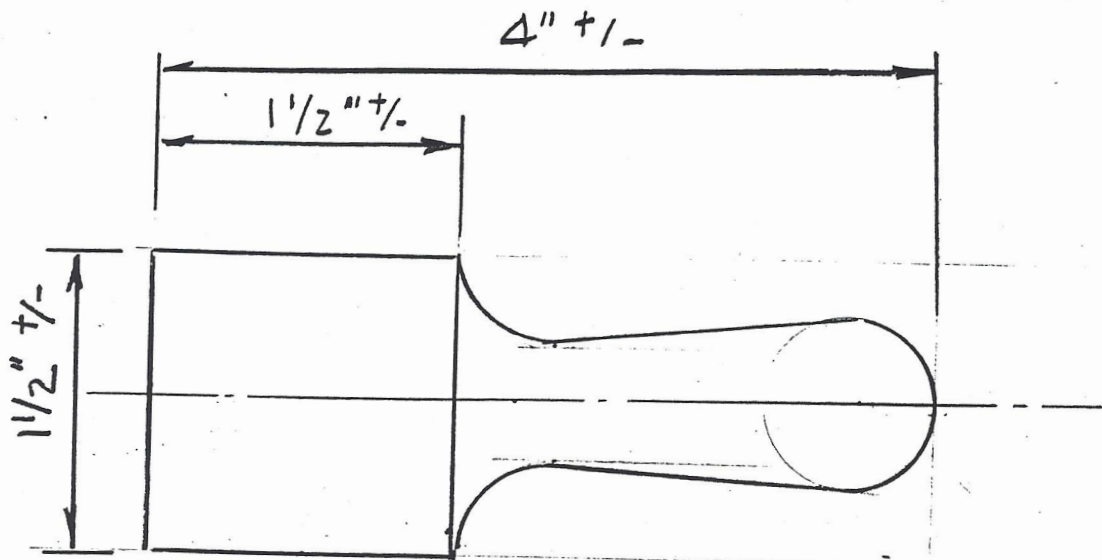
You will use it to form a crisp crease in canvas, leather, cotton sailcloth, linen and some synthetics. The crease will allow you to make very even hand-stitched seams in ditty bags, your clothing, sea chest covers and sails if you have a mind to make them. You might do the same task with a modern electric iron, an antique stove top iron or some other pressing device, but it would scarcely fit in your palm or ditty bag and would almost always be somewhere else when you sit down to work. You use the seam rubber like a little flat iron. Your body weight and arm strength will press a crease into the cloth. You can press against the deck (floor) or a sturdy bench or table. It helps to "get above" the work so you can press firmly. Make several passes, each more vigorous: make a good crease. Some material can be dampened to make the job easier and the crease last longer. I don't own an electric iron and on rare occasion have "pressed" my suit with a seam rubber. I "rub" my new pants hems when stitching them up.

A good seam rubber should be made from the hardest material that you are willing to work with. Nice, dense hardwood is good. Of course you could make one out of almost anything, but it might wear out pretty quickly if it were too soft (cheddar cheese?). I guess you could always

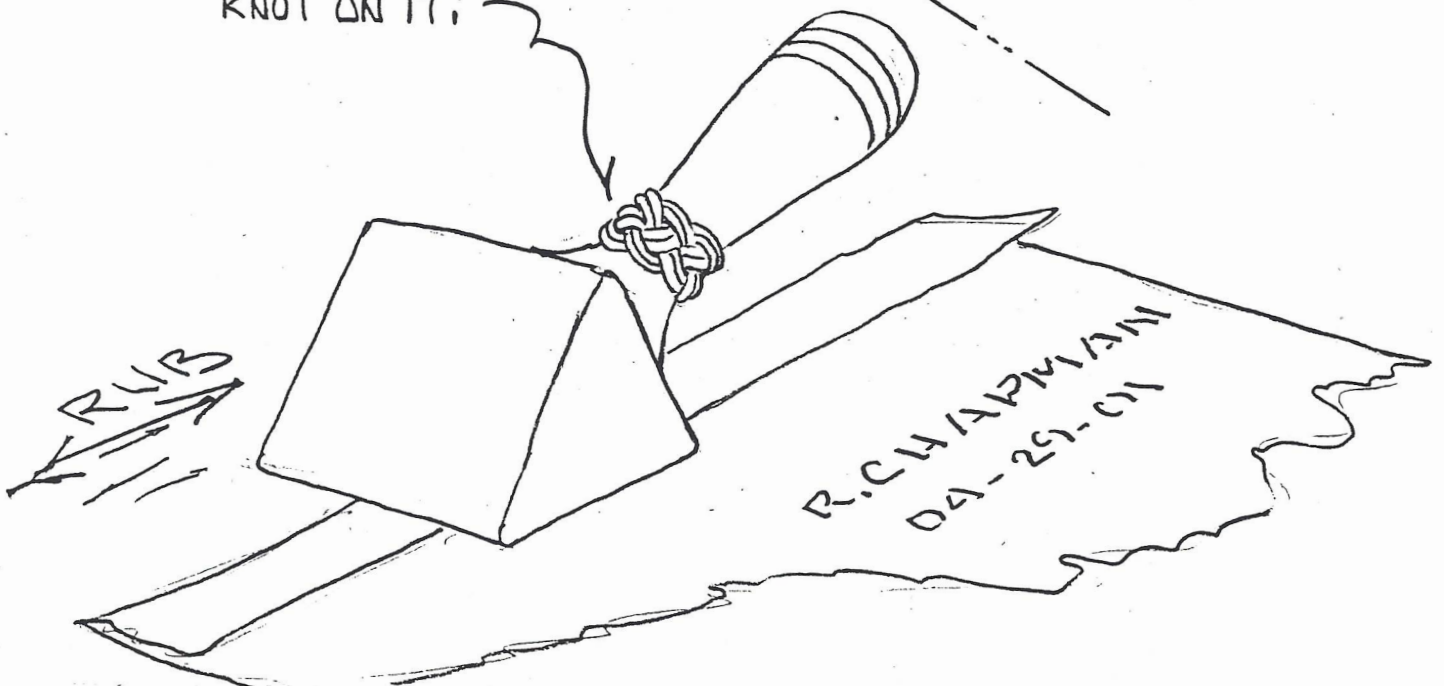
make another so why worry? I measured the photographs in ABOK when I made my first one, which worked well and since have found almost any shape will work. Here are some things to think about; if it is too wide you spread the weight out and won't get as nice a crease. If the wedge is too thin (too acute an angle) you won't have "knuckle clearance" and will only be working with the tip of the tool or with a different grip, which may not always be best. If you paint or varnish it you may soil your cloth with rubbed off finish before you even get started ... wax or nothing works best for me. Here is how to make one:



First, take an ordinary left-handed low-faring zincfeldt plate reamer and .... No, first mark out the rubber on your wood with pen, pencil, felt marker or scriber (awl, nail, knife point). Then either: saw, whittle, carve, rasp, file, sand, grind, chisel or chop away all the "extra". A coping saw is nice, but you don't need anything fancy. You may find it easier to leave your stock long enough to have a "handle" to hold while you work off the extra. It will all depend on your wood working tools and how much material you have to spare. Lapidary folks bond a handle



PLEASE, PUT A  
KNOT ON IT!





onto wee chips of stone, and then work the stone into cobochons. For us it might be best to start with a big enough piece of wood to be able to hold onto it. If you work with power tools please think hard about how to keep your fingers. Please do file, sand or scrape the working surfaces very smooth, so that you don't snag the fabric when you first use your seam rubber. After a decade or two of use it will be smoother than you would have time to make it at inception. You can "needle hitch" or add a nice "standing turkshead" to the handle. You can paint or varnish the handle, as that can't hurt the yard goods, but leave the working surfaces bare. Now, press on.

## Spanish Inquisition?

*by Bob Solon*

Okay, I admit it. I can talk the talk but I can't knot the knot. This was ever so forcefully thrust in my face this past weekend. I was volunteering at Perry's Victory and International Peace Memorial just east of fabulous Put-in-Bay, Ohio, the party capital of The Great North Coast.

I was flush with the success of thump mats [ABOK #2360] in the rotunda. Then the head ranger asks if I can decorate the handle of his linstock. (A linstock is sort of a cannoneer's roach-clip. It holds the slow fuse, which he uses to fire a carronade.) All on its own my big yap opens and out pops, "Sure I can. Nooo problem." And before I can suck those words back he says, "Great! I'll get it." (I felt like the guy that finds himself in hell, standing up to his neck in deep doo. Just as he thinks, "This isn't so bad," the Devil drives up in a Chris-Craft and yells, "Breaks over! Everyone back down on your knees!")

Hey wait! I've got a knot book – with pictures! Here it is: Spanish Hitching. Cooool. Saved again. Yeah, right. The pictures are the size of postage stamps, small postage stamps. But confidence is still high. Follow postage stamps. First cut out a bunch of vertical pieces. How long? Doesn't say. About that long I guess. How many? The stamp isn't talking. I love this knot stuff!

The picture says whip the pieces to the handle. Pretty simple, huh? But how to hold them in place while you are whipping? You'd think that a well-equipped maintenance building at a

national park would at least have rubber bands, wouldn't you? Wrong!

I finally got all the spaghetti in place. After that it was over and tuck, over and tuck, and more over and tuck for what seemed like forever. Hours later a couple of Turk's Heads mercifully hid the ends of the hitching. It looked like a farmer's field planted by a snake. Damned pictures lied!

What a disaster! I finally found the courage to show it to the head ranger. He was ecstatic! He was so excited he probably slept with it that night. Definitely not an IGKT candidate. And I still had one to do the following day.

Here's what I learned. A good Turk's Head covers many mistakes. It is easier to cut than to stretch. And, if Ashley & Company had it they would have used it.

The next morning's project was a decorative grip on the handle of a carronade sponge. Go with your strength, right? Spanish hitching again!

I coned the waitress at Frosty's out of five plastic coffee stirers/straws – about 3/16" wide. I cut these spacers. Forget the rubber bands. I wrapped the handle at the appropriate place with masking tape, sticky side up. (Yeah, I know, you purists would have used duct tape.)

Spanish hitching has vertical pieces (woom?) of small stuff that parallel the piece being decorated. Cut the pieces five times longer than the length of the planned hitching. Longer pieces make it easier to keep everything tight, right to the end.

For uniformity, I altered spacers and vertical pieces around the handle. After the very end is where the warp goes. (The warp is the long piece, which is still attached to the spool.) You end up with:

|last vertical|spacer|warp|first vertical|spacer|

Then I whipped spacers, rope and tape tightly to the handle and trimmed it with a knife. For variety I went under and over the long piece. Underhand Spanish Hitching [ABOK # 3554] gives a knobbier grip.

Did you ever notice that ABOK and a lot of other books portray the knotter as a solitary individual creatively combining functionality and beauty? The lone artisan? Let me 'splain something. It goes better, quicker and is a lot more fun with four hands, especially if the other two hands belong to a comely lass. Miss Madonna helped! We learned together. And this time the Turk's Heads were like whipped cream on Cookie's favorite desert.

## From the Mailbag

**Percy Blandford**, of England, the first President of the IGKT, took the time to send in these comments:

I was interested to see the reference to the Sampson eye splice. When both that type of rope and the splice were fairly new, I was in touch with the makers and they invited me to visit them at their office in Boston. We had a very large motor home. It was much bigger than I asked for, but the man we rented from greeted us with large smiles and said he was letting us have it at the same price as the smaller vehicle. I did not upset him by saying I would rather have the smaller one. It gave us some luxury, but I remember the difficulty of parking near the office in Boston. However, they were very helpful and I came away with information, tools and a useful piece of rope. I sat on a picnic table at a campground and made my first Sampson splice.

Some splices since then have tended to open slightly after use under load. They hold and are safe, but there are short gaps at the tucking. Have any of your members experienced this? If so, have they ideas for avoiding this effect on appearance? Maybe I am not so clever or it is the difference in the British version of the rope."

⌘

I was interested in the fid discussion, but I cannot imagine that precision in taper matters. To be awkward, my favorite fid has a hollow taper and bulges at the thick end into a rounded handle to fit the palm of my hand. The point is flattened to something like a screwdriver with a rounded end. I made this from boxwood on my lathe. It is a yellow wood not quite as hard as *lignum vitae*. I am unsure if it is found in Americas or what it might be called there.

I also have a large steel marlinespike with a similar point, for getting between the strands of heavier rope. During World War II I was in the RAF and spent some time in a unit training army glider pilots for the invasion. For towing the military gliders we had the last of a line of prewar biplanes and had to do the final assembly. Some of the control wires had to have an eye splice made in position. I was the only man who knew how to splice wire, and this was less than 1/8 inch 7 strand stuff.

I made a marlinespike from a piece of bracing wire about 1/4 inch in diameter from a crashed biplane and used the end connector as a handle. I ground a point with a groove in it, so a wire end could slide into place along the spike. I

must have made several hundred of those little splices. I still treasure that spike, but I hope no one asks me to splice more of that spring steel tiny wire rope.

⌘

**Willard Salmons** of

California wrote this:

I'd like to tell you about some of my unusual tools.

My pounding block is a 15" piece of anvil shaped railroad rail formed by a cutting torch and smoothed on an emery and buffing wheel. My regular and duck billed pliers along with my diagonals are copper plated. The tools don't work any better this way, but they sure look good with that fine bright sheen. I have various shaped needles, hand made, as well as a good supply of sail needles. Have some stainless steel rod that has been ground down to various shapes for my special uses. The rod makes good prickers, however nut picks seem to be the best for working Turk's Heads. On the end of my table or workbench is mounted a small vice which comes in handy for many knotting operations. Number 8 and number 10 galvanized wire makes fine wire loop buttoners. Also have tweezers, cement and a sewing palm for use in other projects.



Fig. 6.  
Cask Slung with Can Hooks.

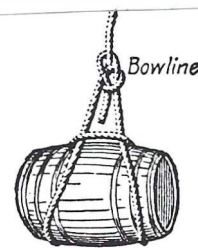


Fig. 5.  
Cask Slung with the End of a Single Whip.

*Farmers read and profit from school, college, government and state agricultural bulletins, and in late years the subject has received considerable attention in these publications. Moreover the farmer is the most interested of workman and anything of a mechanical nature generally appeals to him. Unlike the rigger, the sailor, the sailmaker and the weaver, knots are incidental to his labor, so that it is possible for an indifferent knot tyer to become a very good farmer, although he will be handicapped.*

Clifford Ashley  
*The Ashley Book of Knots*



## *Thinking of Knotting:*

### **Making fast, fast... but not half fast.**

*by Roy Chapman*

The time to learn working knots is when you aren't working. I guess that should be obvious but it so often happens that the person with the line in hand has no idea how to secure it and therefore makes a "ball up" of the job or lets something go adrift that should have been made fast. Or worse, makes it too fast. Time is often of the essence casting off as well as belaying. An acquaintance nearly lost his 40-foot boat because of a fouled line and a dull knife. But had the line not fouled the knife would have been irrelevant. The "fouling" could have been so easily prevented if the knot at hand hadn't been a masterful and mystical combination of twenty seven half hitches and clinches. And with due respect, it wasn't Crazy Lou who tied the mess but a volunteer "helper". I suggest learning your knots well. Carry your pocket full of 550 cord and practice, practice, practice. Practice when sick or well, angry or sad, hung over or happy, wet and frozen or sunburned and parched. Either that or stay in front of the Nintendo, where your need for good working knots is limited. I rather gather that most IGKT members are doers not sitters so it behooves us to learn our basic knots well. Other than tying up the rose bushes it will almost certainly matter some day. One of the things the BSA has right: be prepared. Or as I prefer to think of it: don't be half fast.

*It may seem unprofitable to resurrect such material, much of which is obsolete today. But knotting is merely the application of certain mechanical principles, and a principle itself can hardly become obsolete. As conditions change, new applications are bound to appear. The fact that something is not required today is no reason for believing that it will not be needed tomorrow."*

Clifford Ashley

*The Ashley Book of Knots*

### **Who is Roy Chapman and why is he writing all these knot articles?**

[The first issues of *Knot News* contained some biographical sketches of PAB members. New members follow this tradition occasionally and now Roy Chapman takes the time to tell us about himself]

Perhaps some personal background would be of interest to you. I was born in 1945 in upstate NY. Very rural. My step-grandfather was a multi-talented man. He taught me to splice rope (long, short, eye and back... sizes up to 1.5 inches in diameter) before I even went to school. When I did go to school it was to one room and damn cold. When the system (in infinite wisdom) consolidated the schools I found few peers who were interested in the things I was interested in. BSA was close. I was an indifferent Scout but a good assistant Scoutmaster (too much marching and uniforms). I loved the knotting and pioneer craft in scouts. I enlisted in the army at 18 (gonna be just like BSA, right?) and through the pre-induction physical found I had tuberculosis. This was when hospitalization was mandatory and long. I was 11 months in a hospital and 6 months more partially disabled (forbidden to work). ABOK saved my sanity (such as it is). In the hospital we were allowed a 2 cubic foot locker of personal things. Mine was full of cord and bits of wood and brass. I tied every knot in ABOK, save for the macramé and other fussy "jillion strand" work. I probably mastered 90% if not every hitch and bend, loop knot and multi-strand knot. I always started with ABOK "best for the purpose" and still remember many of those (though most of the rest have slipped away). Give an 18-year-old boy 24/7 enforced leisure and an ABOK and you might end up with some nice work. Make sure he has lots of material. Most of what I tied was simply untied or given away. We were poor and I had no money for materials so reused my cord. We were not allowed volatile compounds, shellac and the like inside, but I did some painted work when I could walk outside (late in my recovery) to paint. I also built balsa, pine, cedar and walnut models, when I could go outside to "glue up". I made skiffs and dories, tackle and whale craft. All this without ever having seen any of it "in the flesh" or knowing there were "kits". The first place I went, when well, was Mystic Seaport. Heaven on earth.

I paid my debt to Scouting by running the troupe for a couple of years. I let my knotting slack a bit during some decades because the pressures of living left little free time. Still, I knotted and prayed my way through every health crises (heart attacks and quad bypasses etc.) since that first hard time. I now consider knotting a very high priority in my "quality of life".



## Branch Bits

**Bob Solon** of Ohio has a suggestion for a project that you might enjoy giving a try:

**W**hat do you original thinkers do with your worn out jeans? Throw them away? Wrong! If you're not some longhaired hippy type (like our esteemed editor) [*Bob, you must be kidding-Ed.*] with ragged cuffs, why not cut off your old jeans at the knees and make ditty bags out of them. If you've got piano legs like me you really get your money's worth, especially from bib overalls. It might not be such a good idea for you younger fitter types.

Get out your sail needles and some heavy waxed thread and sew the bottom closed. I like to turn mine inside out to hide what I laughingly call stitchery. (Miss Madonna calls it butchery.) Straight across works or you can get fancy, depending on what goes inside. You might want to cut one of the pockets off the back and sew that on, too. It makes a good hidey-hole for that tool you use all the time.

To finish off the top I went to a store that sold camping supplies. They have all sorts of grommets. I chose blue plastic ones that snap together. They look neat and are almost foolproof. The simplest way is to put two of them in the top, fold the top over, sew it all around and string some ties. Braided nylon looks nice with a couple of two strand Diamond Knots at the end. Fray the ends to make it look salty.

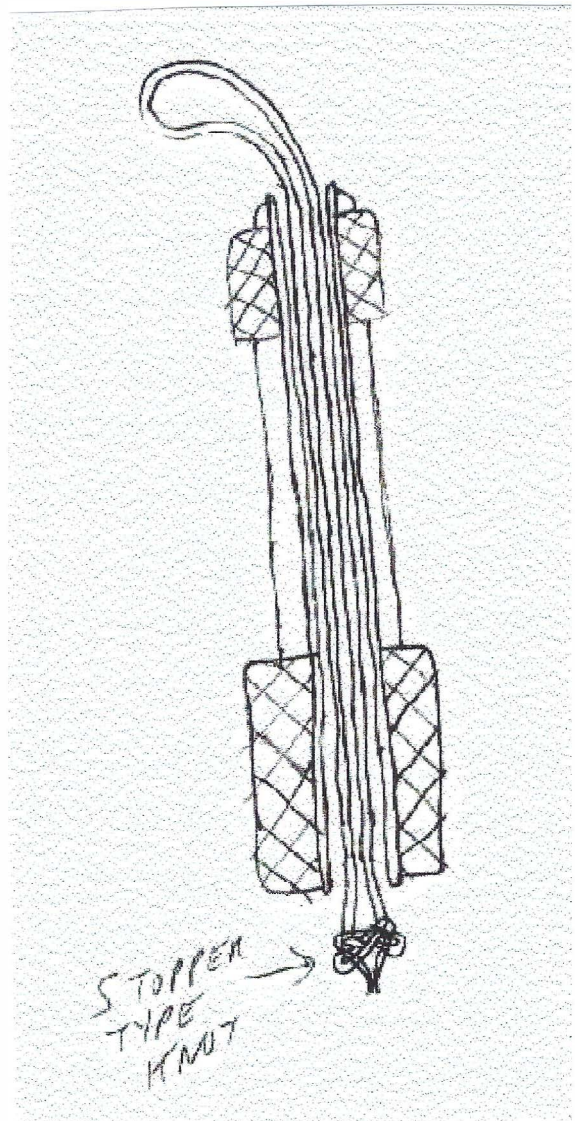
There are a lot of ways to make it yours. Monogrammed patches are always nice. I try to pick one up where ever I go. With a memory like mine, you need all the help you can to even remember where you've been, much less where you are going. Another method is to draw your initials with a ballpoint pen and cover the drawing with stitches of a contrasting color. Works for me. Your mileage may vary."

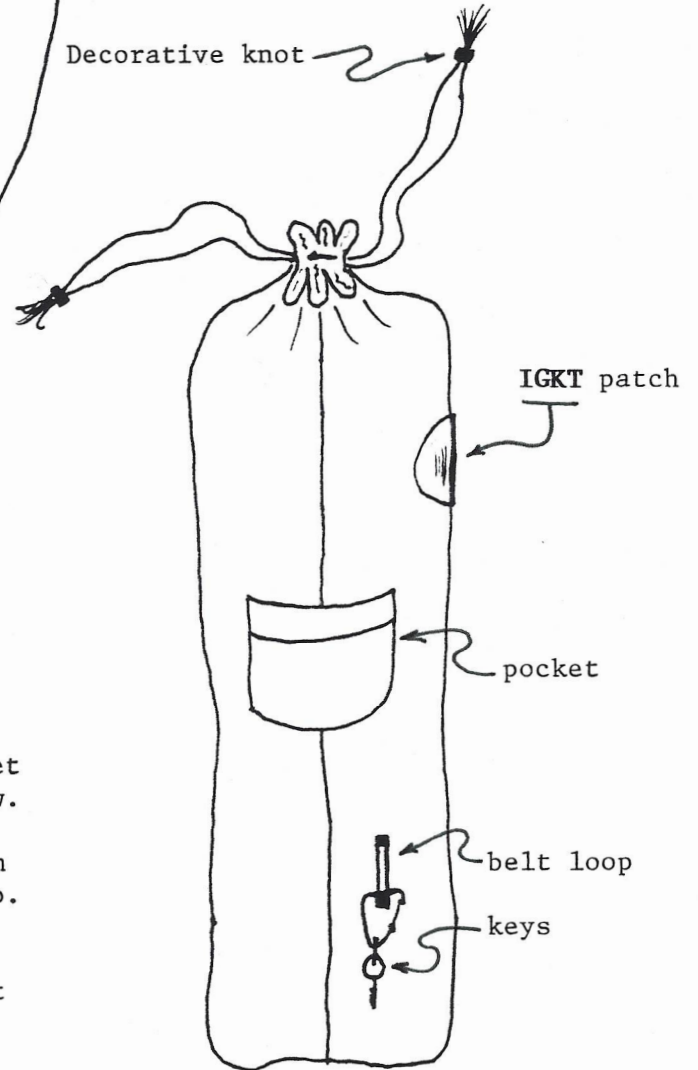
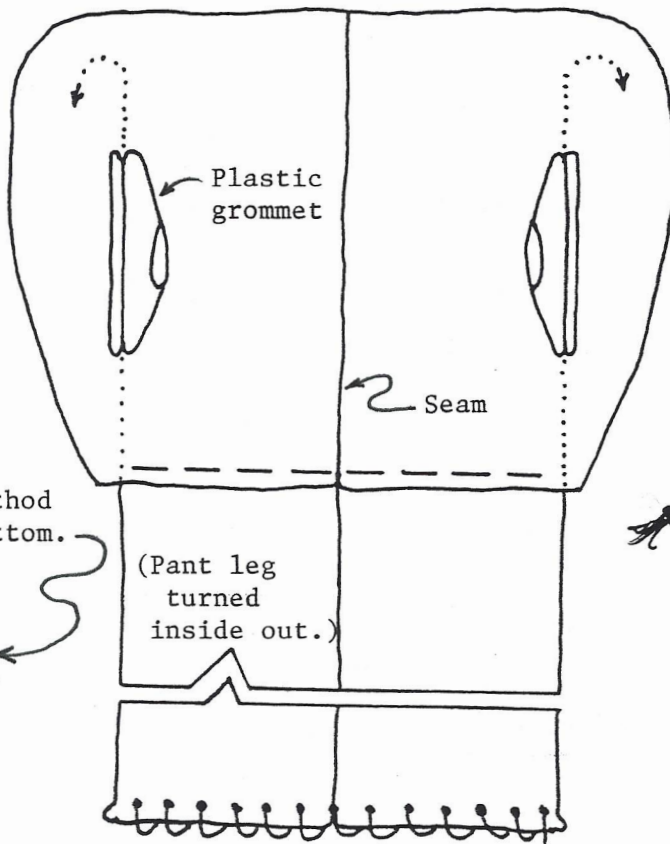


Here is another good idea from **Marty Combs** of Oregon:

**I** came across an example of a pretty ingenious way to construct a bell rope and also to attach it to the bell clapper. It was on one of the Sause Brothers Towboats here in The bell rope had no eye. It was constructed around a piece of copper tubing. The ends of the tube were not covered. This allowed it to be attached to the clapper by way of just running a piece of nylon cord through the eye on the clapper and then running the two ends down through the tube in the center of the bell rope. You can then

put a stopper knot on the end to keep the bell rope from sliding off. I've tried to draw out a diagram illustrating the method. I'm going to have a go at making a few like this. Now while this is a departure from the traditional way of constructing bell ropes with eyes, I don't think that they will replace the nautical look of a coxcomb hitches eye."





- 1) Cut off the pant leg a couple of inches longer than the depth of the bag. If you are going to sew on a patch, a pocket or a belt loop you may want to do it now.
- 2) Install grommets now. Leave enough room so that you can turn down the upper flap. Place the grommets along the crease facing outward. Cut hole with Exacto knife. If you are sure of the placement use super-glue on the grommet.
- 3) Turn pant leg inside out. Put draw-strings through the grommets. Fold the topper over the grommets and draw-strings and sew all around.
- 4) Sew cuff together, seam to seam.
- 5) Decorate the draw strings with knots.

I can hear some of you laughing at me for putting a belt loop on the outside of my bag. It's hard to leave your bag when the car keys are attached to it.

*Bob*

### Monthly Meeting Schedule - 2001

Our regular monthly meetings are held on the second Tuesday of the month at the Los Angeles Maritime Institute in San Pedro, California. This is right next door to the LA Maritime Museum and just down the street from Ports O'Call. The meetings are held in the evening from 7:00 to 9:00 PM. Volunteers are needed for lectures, show and tell, talks, demonstrations or displays.

Tuesday — September 11<sup>th</sup>

Tuesday — October 9<sup>th</sup>

Tuesday — November 13<sup>th</sup>

Tuesday — December 11<sup>th</sup>

Members are always encouraged to organize gatherings of knot tyers in their local area.



### *Knot News*

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