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The Constrictor Knot Revisited

by Pieter van de Griend

There's no hitch we can't untangle or talk out
B. Andersen and B. Ulvæs
Chess Album 1984

Prologue

Last time I wrote about the Constrictor Knot subject was to the late Lester Copestake in April 1992 [12]. Way back then I was in my default time-lacking mode and regrettably had to shortcut the monologue. However, over the past 15 years my urge to revisit the Constrictor Knot did not dwindle. Moreover, a number of less obvious aspects surfaced, which I'd like to present here. In the following I speak of the Constrictor Knot as a structure. Many feel it is a binding knot, but for my purposes it is irrelevant whether the structure is assigned hitch-, binding knot- or whatever other type of functionality.

I would further like to grasp this opportunity to word a few of my ideas on Knot Knowledge Management (KKM). However, let us first get the recorded Constrictor Knot facts in chronological order, enabling ourselves a foundation to build upon.

Early sources

Tom Bowling has a Gunner's Knot for which he only offers an ambiguous textual description. He writes:

The Gunner's knot (of which we do not give a diagram) only differs from the builder's knot, by the ends of the cords being simply knotted before being brought from under the loop which crosses them. [2, p8/fig.47/pl.1]

This comes from the 1866 edition in my collection. I own various other editions, but none of them appear to have undergone any form of revision. Sadly Bowling did not illustrate his intended structure. Such

action would have removed considerable ambiguity. Neither did he return to this Gunner's Knot in his 1871 *Scientific American* article [3].

There exist legion post-Bowling sources showing the Gunner's Knot and they all offer an idiosyncratic surprise. Alas, the most gratifying source never made it past the manuscript status. After considerable study of available knotting sources, Henry North Grant Bushby (1863-1926) of Wor., Herefordshire, undertook an effort to illustrate Bowling's famous words. Bushby refrained from offering any information on possible applications [4, I, p249], [14].

Gunner's Knot. (1863, 1864, 1865)



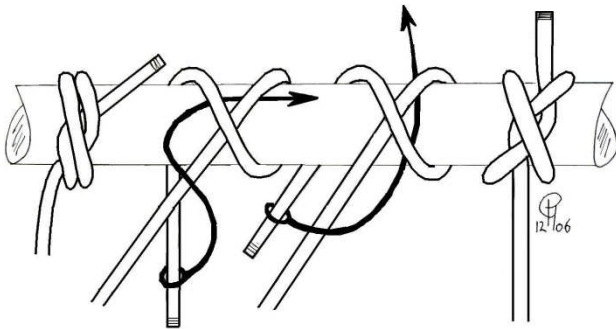
To make: Make an ordinary Clove Hitch & tie the two parts by an overhead under the right which crosses them both.

We must wait till 1916 when Hjalmar Öhrvall (1851-1929), without too much ambiguity, shows that he was aware of the Constrictor [8, p116]. However, in good old Bowling tradition, he too refrains from illustrating intent. That fact certainly contributed significantly to the Constrictor's anonymity in all Nordic countries, as many people go by drawings.

After having explained how to get a Strangle Knot, which Öhrvall calls an **Ålstek** (literally: Eel Knot), by tucking the wend in an LH oriented spiral around the stend (see illustration below), he writes:

Man kan också uppfatta den såsom uppkommen av två halvslag på det sättet, att man låter de båda fria parterna taga om varandra (= bilda ett halvstek) i själva krysset och åt samma håll som detta, innan de gå ut ur knuten. Göres detta halvstek åt motsatt håll, uppkommer en annan knut, som på somliga håll kallas *timmerknut*, ej att förväxla med *timmerstek*. (se detta!) Den torde vare säkrare än två halvslag, men knappast så säker som Ålsteket, i vilket parterna ligga bättre intill varandra och kunna fastare åtsamsas. [26, p78]

One can also consider it (*the Strangle*) as derived from the Clove Hitch in such a way that one lets both free ends grip around each other (form a Half Hitch/Knot) in the crossing itself with the same orientation, before they leave the knot. If this Half Hitch is made with a different orientation then a different knot emerges, sometimes called *Timber Knot* (compare it!), not to be confused with a *Timber Hitch*. It should be more secure than a Clove Hitch, but not near as secure as the Strangle Knot, in which the parts are better (closer) together and can be drawn tauter.



Hjalmar Öhrvall calls the knot **Timmerknut**, but gives no clue as to where he obtained the knowledge. To obscure matters more the word “timmerknut” nowadays seems only used in the Swedish language to denote an interlocking wood join for building block huts [30].

KKM Origins

Around the 1930's changes in the Anglo-Saxon knotting literature took place. In a way the entire knotting context changed, presentation formats were revised and knotting communications become visible. As a result of these changes the major pre-war knot monographs emerge.

This change process is seen to initialize the creation of a body of knowledge. Applications, topological connections and ethnographical aspects of knots become recorded. In broader terms knot knowledge is written down and presented in a more structural fashion. Format-wise there appear not only **structures**, but they are now, more than before, accompanied by **statements** on their attributes along with listings of previous **sources** mentioning them. Also the volume is seen to increase, because larger knot-assortments hit the monographs. Presentations are seemingly brought to the limit of artificial expansion, or collecting for collecting sake.

Tom Bowling's Knot Knowledge Management efforts were not appreciated by neither Clifford Ashley nor Cyrus Day [1,p11], [8, p206]. However, from any non-Mariner point of view Bowling is unduly criticised, because he was the first to record knot-knowledge. That placed him in the cross-hairs position, to be shot at by authorities. However, it is only fair to say that the knot knowledge collection process is a curious one, pestering researchers to this day and that Bowling probably did what he could.

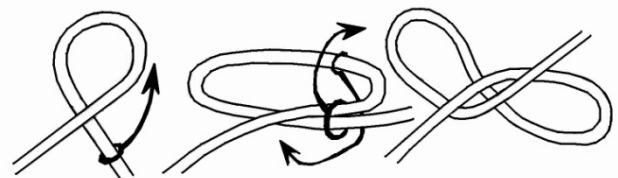
Against that changing KKM-background our Gunner's Knot comes into scope again and its entangling confusion with the Strangle Knot is continued. James Drew and Lester Griswold propagate this new line. You should read Cyrus Day's and Sten Johansson's words.

Drew does not mention this knot in his article “Some Knots and Splices” in *The Irrigation Age*; but in Lester Griswold's *Handicraft*, 1931, he mentions the Constrictor as a strangle knot. Later in his book *Ropework* published in 1936 and reprinted in 1942 and 1955, the knot is gone with the wind. [8, p116], [20]

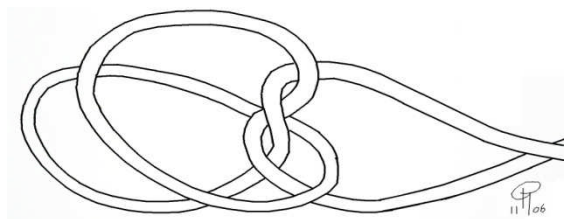
Griswold is ignorant about knots and leaves that to Drew's expertise. This couple sells us the Constrictor as:

another form of the strangle knot is made where it is not possible to use the ends of the rope [17, p389].

As this is, topologically, quite impossible he must be discussing a non-Strangle Knot. Close inspection of the minute diagrams shows a twirly fingertip method resulting in a Constrictor being presented. The method is illustrated below



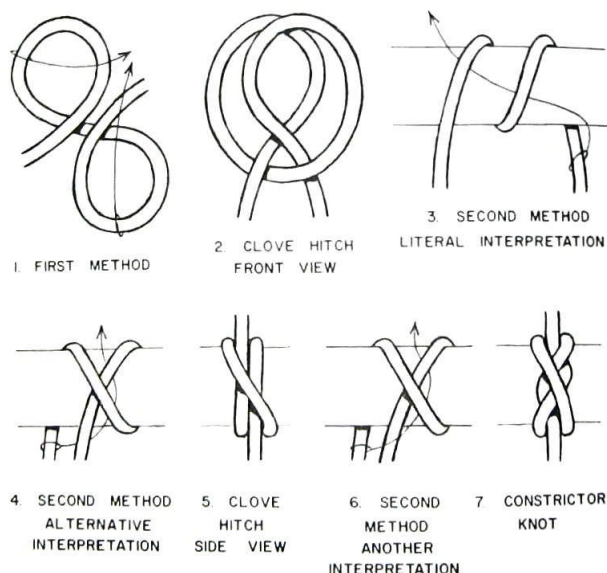
Note that there is no name other than Gunner's Knot yet. One thing, which has baffled me for years, was the alarmingly low Gunner's Knot concentration in Raoul Graumont and John Hensel's *Encyclopedia of Knots and Fancy Ropework (EKFR)* [11]. As it turned out the Constrictor does feature in that book, but is astonishingly hard to find! Dan Lehman wrote to tell me he found a start configuration to be displayed after all [11, p107, pl.51, Fig.385]. It is marketed as a sling shortener and named Stevedore's Twin Loops Knot.



We have to wait till 1944 when Clifford Ashley launched his claim of origination and a new name for this structure along with numerous application propositions. Simple statistical analysis performed across ABOK shows some 20+ references and claims [5].

Cyrus Lawrence Day (1900-1968) has written a few paragraphs about the Constrictor Knot [8, p116], [9, p110]. In his 1967 masterpiece *Quipus and Witches' Knots* he arrived at his discussion during an analysis of the *Nautikos Brokhos* among Oreibasius' Knots. There are some 2 points I would like to comment on. The first concerns his conclusion that the *Nautikos Brokhos* may be the Constrictor Knot. I want to compare that statement against Hjalmar Öhrvall's writings on the same knot. The second concerns Day's conclusions drawn from his correspondence with Martta Ropponen.

II. NAUTIKOS BROKHOS



Cyrus Day hints that Heraklas *may* have known the Constrictor Knot before 400 AD by suggesting that Oreibasius *may* have described it. Oreibasius lived around 325-400 and had copied a number of medical works by Heraklas into his books. Oreibasius' writings thus imply that Heraklas discussed the knots. Cyrus Day writes:

Heraklas's description of the way to tie the *nautikos brokhos* in situ (i.e while putting it round a patient's limb) is clear enough, but nonetheless unsatisfactory). Forming two loops round an object and then passing the end through both loops (see Fig.3) does not produce a clove hitch, or in fact any knot at all. Öhrvall, disturbed by the plural "loops", suggests that Heraklas "without doubt refers to the second loop".

My way out of difficulty is to assume that the second loop is laid over the first loop (see Fig.4). This solution to the problem salvages the plural "loops", but does not dispose of all possible doubts.

If the working end is passed over the standing part (Fig.6) instead of *under* it (Fig.4), the result is the constrictor knot instead of the clove hitch. I am not suggesting that the *nautikos brokhos* is the constrictor knot, but in view of the similarity between the technique of tying it and Heraklas's technique of tying the clove hitch (or at least my interpretation of his technique), it is interesting to speculate if the ancients were familiar with it. [9, p110]

Cyrus Day mentions Hjalmar Öhrvall's struggle with Oreibasius' *Nautikos Brokhos* text. I do not share his impression when reading Öhrvall's text whose translation from Greek to Swedish reads:

Sedan man anbringat bindan, fatter man med vänstra handen ändan på snöret och lägger med den öfriga, hängande delen af detsamma omkring den skadade lemman helt löst en första och en andra ögla [två halvslog]. Man sticker den fria ändan af snöret midt igenom bukten bakifrån framåt. [Detta senare afser utan tvivel utförandet af det andra halvsloget]. [27,p61]

After bandaging, one takes with the left hand the end of the bandage and makes, with the remaining hanging part makes around the damaged limb very loose a first and a second loop [2 round turns]. One takes the free end right through the bigths from the back to the front. [The latter refers without doubt to the creation of the second turn].

For starters, to me those actions may equally well result in a Strangle Knot. Another strange thing is the wend-position, to the left of the fixed stend, c.f. Cyrus Day's Fig.4 and Fig.6. Especially after stating, quite clearly, that the stend is held in the *left* hand. Another aspect, which Öhrvall's translation gives, but omitted by Day's, is the direction of the final tuck – from the back to the front. Finally Öhrvall does not hint at his Timmerknot. All in all I have the strong impression Cyrus Day would like to have read the Constrictor Knot into Oreibasius' writings, which is a fascinating thought, not impossible, but unsupported.

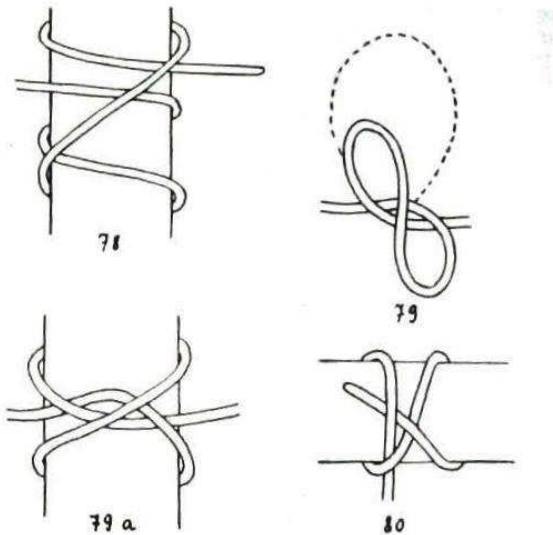
Cyrus Day elaborates on the history of the Constrictor Knot by offering insight in his correspondence with Martta Ropponen. She shows the Constrictor in her 1931 book *Solmukirja* (Book of Knots). He writes:

Modern users of knots are *not* generally familiar with it. Indeed it seems to have been utterly unknown in the English-speaking world until Clifford Ashley (who though he had originated it) taught it to the Portuguese swordfishermen of New Bedford, gave it the name "constrictor knot", and published it in *The Ashley Book of Knots* (1944). Since then, a great many people have become acquainted with it.

Ashley did not originate it, however, for Martta Ropponen, a Finnish Girl Scout leader, had already published it in her excellent handbook entitled *Solmukirja* (1931). She had never seen it in Finland, she wrote me in 1954, but had learned about it from a Spaniard named Raphael Gaston, who called it a whip knot, and told her it was used in the mountains of Spain by muleteers and herdsman.

We may take it for granted, I think, that it is a traditional knot, handed down generation to generation (in Spain, at least, if not elsewhere) ever since Roman times and earlier. Some day, I hope, it will turn up somewhere else- among the Arab fishermen of the Red Sea, perhaps, or on a Greek merchant vessel brought to the surface by a modern under-water archaeologist. [9, pp110-11]

To begin with the Constrictor is a remarkably rare guest in contemporary Spanish knotting literature. Martta Ropponen calls the Constrictor Knot *Ruoskasolmu* (Whip Knot) and writes:



Ruoskasolmu (kuva79a): Tehdään oikeanpuolinen puolipolvi, joka taivutetaan alaspäin ristikohtaan yli 8:n muotoiseksi kuvioksi (kuva 79). Näin muodostuneet ympyrät käännetään päällekkäin.

Tätä solmua käytetään samoin kuin kaksoispolvea, mutta se ei kiristy yhtä tasaisesti esineen ympärille kuin mainittu solmu. [23, fig.79 & 79a, p58]

Whip Knot (fig.79a): To do right-handed half knee [RH Loop fig.16, p24], this is bent downwards over the point where the rope crosses till it looks like an 8-shape. (figure 79) Having made 2 circles you turn them so they coincide.

This knot is used the same way as a double knee [Clove Hitch figs.74b-c, pp53-55], but it does not tighten up as evenly around an object as the first knot mentioned.

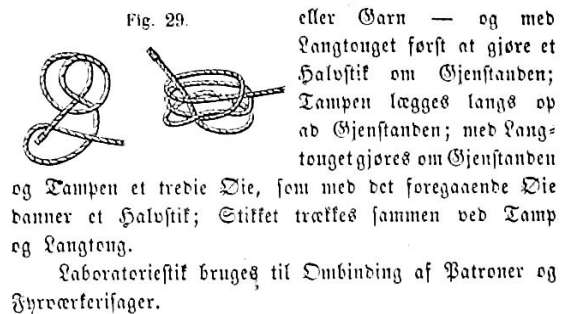
Her Fig.79 shows how to make it as a bight knot from a Figure of Eightish configuration, while Fig.79a shows it around a spar. I think her final remarks refer to one-sided loading of the Constrictor. By the way her book is a truly amazing one. It is perhaps of interest to note here that she lists Öhrvall and Hasluck in her bibliography, but no Bowling.

Let us leave Cyrus Day's KKM contributions and pick up Bowling's Gunner's Knot once again. Now we move into more explosive areas.

Labs, blasters and more fireworks

The Bowling description struck ardent knoter Lester Copestake as being the Constrictor Knot and this triggered a writing frenzy, which resulted in 2 *Knotting Matters* articles and letters about his find to other knotters [6], [21]. In the sequel to Lester Copestake's find Desmond Mandeville did a bit of research at "the museum" (Greenwich?). He persuaded the curator to open a case of old cartridge bags, which all were tied up with Constrictor Knots [7, p26].

There are a number of early sources, which dropped from the regular line of knot research, but which fall neatly into this line of research. Around 1868, in a Danish military context, one can find a structure which is called *laboratoriestik* [28, pp15-16].



25. Laboratory Knot. made, Fig.29, by holding the rope's bitter end in the left hand and the stend in the right hand - usually with thread or twine - and with the stend first make a Clove Hitch [sic] around the object; the bitter end up along the object; with the stend around the object and bitter end a third eye is made, which together with the foregoing eye constitutes a Clove Hitch; The knot is tensioned by pulling the bitter end and stend. The Laboratory Knot is used for binding cartridges and fireworks.

These drawings are also repeated in *Opfindelsernes Bog* of 1881, but no further data is provided [29, p507, figs.404, 405].

In Nordic writings the word “*laboratoriestik*” scarcely occurs. In the memoirs of the Danish-Norwegian mathematician Poul Heegaard (1871-1948) I found one solitary reference of limited usefulness:

Jeg sender ham [Rasmussen] stadig undertiden en venlig tanke, når jeg med et stykke hyssing binder et såkaldt “Laboratoriestik”. Det lærte han mig. [19]

Occasionally I send Rasmussen a friendly thought, when I tie a “laboratoriestik” in a piece of twine. He taught me the knot.

It is very clear that the “*laboratoriestik*” is **not** our Constrictor Knot. The drawings remove any ambiguity, but the reason I included this reference is because of its devilish clang in Danish. To me it sounds like a Bowling Danicism. i.e being a direct translation from Bowling's English to Danish. This gave me an even more daring idea, belonging to the department of unsupported speculations. Couldn't this Danish source indicate that there may have been a *meta-source* somewhere on the continent? Clifford Ashley seems to hint at it too [1, p11]. I reckon a rewarding clue lies in the French encyclopedias of the last century.

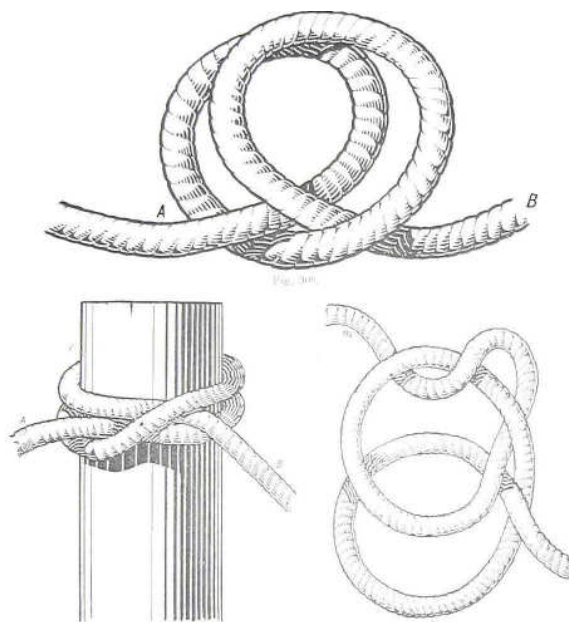
In Dutch there is the so-called “*Vuurwerkersteek*” – Fireworker Hitch. It is described and illustrated in a 1900 technical handbook for carpenters by de Groot. This source states:

De vuurwerkersteek verschilt hierin van de mastworp dat het korte eind B nog eenmaal over en door het eerste oog gestoken wordt [18, p25].

The Fireworker Hitch differs from the Clove Hitch in that the short end B is once more taken over and through the first eye.

The Dutch text is pretty straight forward, but it looks like the illustrator misunderstood the text. The author is explicit in that the “first eye” has to be used. Even letters are used to indicate intent. The illustrator, however, held a stubborn opinion on that count.

It is not entirely clear wherefrom de Groot got this particular knotting knowledge, but this source's statements seems to enforce the usage of the Constrictor Knot in the explosive professions.

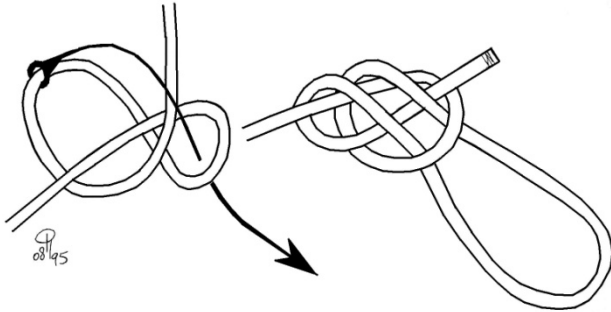


Obviously Constrictors are around to be caught by knot collectors. The big questions are *Where are they* and *What shapes these random encounters?* I have been studying and collecting knots for almost 4 decades. However, the times I chanced to encounter a Constrictor in the wild can be counted on the fingers of one hand – excluding the thumb. So, it must be a rare creature. How come? Only knotters and knot researchers seem to experience increased cardiac activity upon meeting a Constrictor or any other Empirically Less Frequently Encountered Knotstructure (**ELFEK**) for that matter. Most random knot-consumers do not seem to care. Occasionally they express an appreciation when shown the Constrictor, but there it stops. Few proceed to adopt it in their repertoire. If Survival of the Simplest does not kill its usage, then what does? Let us take a look at some guises of this structure.

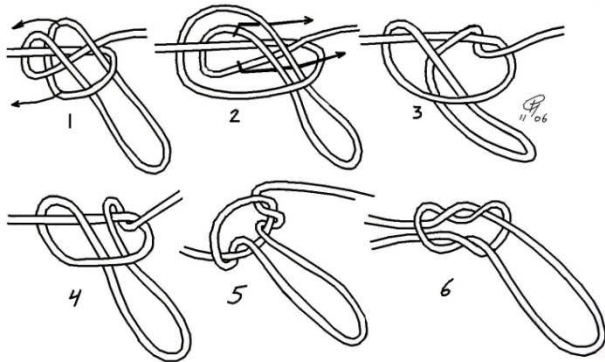
Loop Knot relations

The Constrictor is a simple structure, so you'd expect to find it related to other simple knots. And indeed it does show up in links ranging across the spectrum from loop knots to bends.

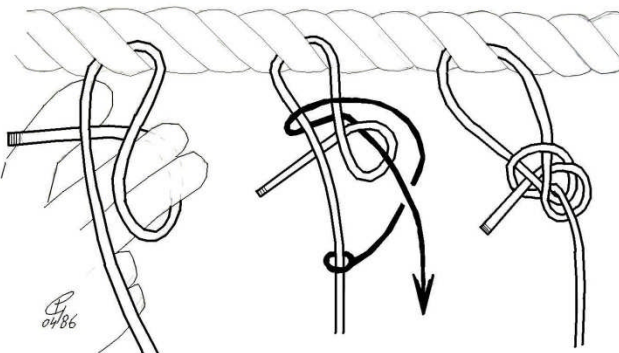
Clifford Ashley offers loop knots from a Constrictor Start Configuration. The illustration below shows how to make the Algonquin Bowline [24, p56, fig.74]. Symmetry permits you to pull any of either loops through the other.



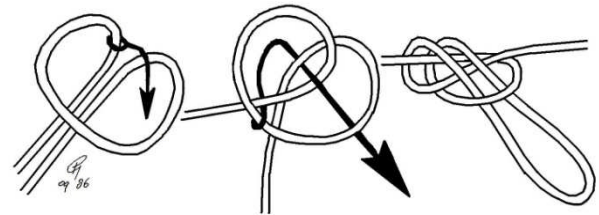
Ashley has references to this loop knot's stable form [1, #1045, #1059]. Virtually unknown is the fact that this loop knot also has a few instable forms. The illustrations below show how to arrive at them.



Ashley also illustrates one of these instable forms [1, #1044], but does not link it to the stable form. Hjalmar Öhrvall mentions the existence of the instable form and even offers a tying method, but no illustration [26, p71, fig.65, #2]. Once you know how the Slip Knot can be transformed into an Algonquin Bowline, there turn out to be many unrecorded tying methods indeed. Please note that this is not a theoretical thingy. I found this structure, in instable form, as a Ganging Knot in the Faroese long line fishing industry [15]. Below is a method I found in the Bacalao long line baiting shed in Tórshavn, leading to a stable Algonquin Bowline. For me these finds raised the chicken or egg question: *if you know that the Algonquin Bowline Structure will be a good Ganging Knot, then how did you stumble upon the Algonquin Bowline knowledge in the first place?*

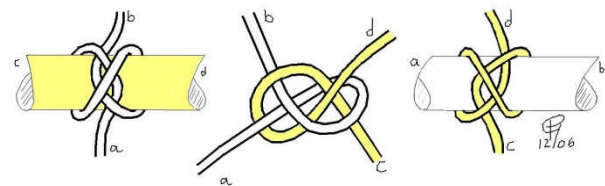


The Algonquin Bowline is a structure, which can be reached via many ways, very often leading to the inferior (instable) Algonquin Bowline version. One tying method, which I have not yet found in the literature, is given below. It is a Cow Hitch Start Configuration.

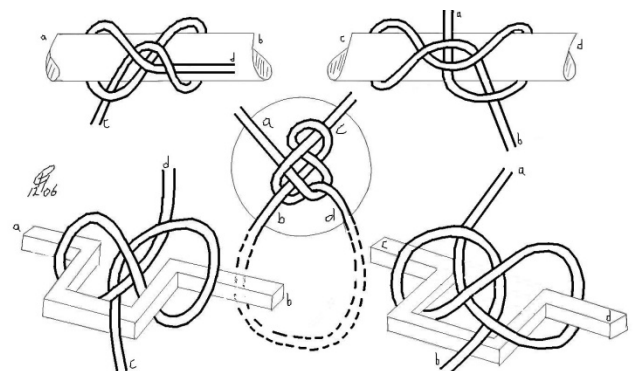


Buckled spar stuff

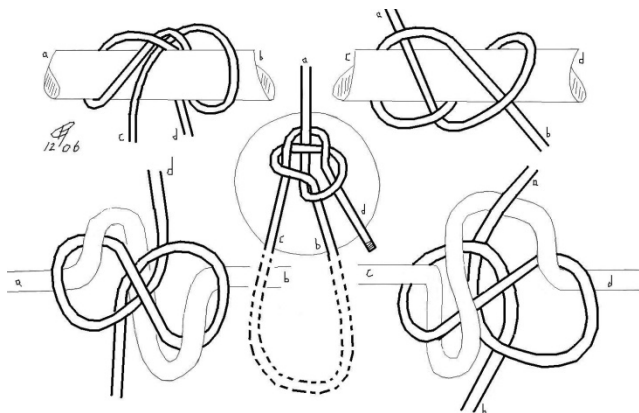
The strangling powers of a real Boa Constrictor enable it to buckle its prey to death. What does our Constrictor do? Well, hitch one around another piece of cordage and watch this conglomerate modify itself into an elegant Single Carrick Bend!



This exercise triggers a train of thoughts. Letting the Constrictor grip a flexible spar will lead to a Single Carrick Bend. Assume the spar follows some other trajectory through the Constrictor. Then what may one expect to find? In a previous *Knot News* article we have seen Constrictors of any handedness show up around a buckled spar springing from a Capstan Knot [4, I, p148], [13], [16].



Of course there are uncountable many of such observations to be made. Buckling the spar such that one of the Constrictor loops is traversed from a different direction offers a surprise. Here we meet the Samisen Structure [22].



This Samisen Structure is an interesting ELFEK. Already in 1908 Hjalmar Öhrvall mentioned how he found it posing as a guitar string knot on a Japanese Samisen [25, p102, fig.133], [26, p189, figs.224, 225]. Henry Bushby found it independently while studying some bends and hitches [4, IV, p42], [13]. In the reduced edition of his *Japan Encyclopedia of Knots* Kakuichi Fujiwara shows a Samisen and three Samisen Bends [10, p82]. Why does the Samisen Structure show up so evidently in the East and not in the West? Probably it is a matter of being sufficiently inconspicuous, rendering it an ELFEK in Western sources.

Epilogue

The goal of this paper was not so much to determine priority for the recording of the Constrictor Structure as to show that knot knowledge management is a complex process. Once you start researching topological relationships in the Constrictor Structure environ, it turns out to be surprisingly ubiquitous. It is connectable to many unexpected simple structures, moreover with noteworthy ease. Truly surprising is the fact that the structure shows up in various Loop Knot disguises in the literature. We showed that the Constrictor is a structure waiting to be discovered by anybody fiddling about with a piece of string.

The Constrictor Knot is a most gratifying research object. However, unless there is a spar to prevent the Constrictor, the structure itself ceases to exist when tension is exerted at both ends. Evaporating into thin air, like it never existed. And though it does not show up in early sources, it has probably always been around, everywhere.

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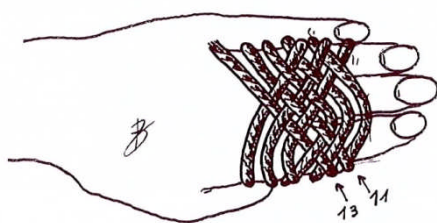
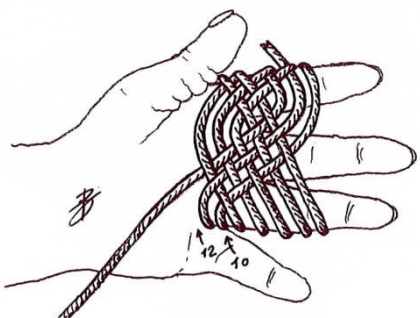
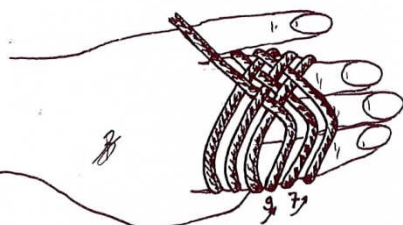
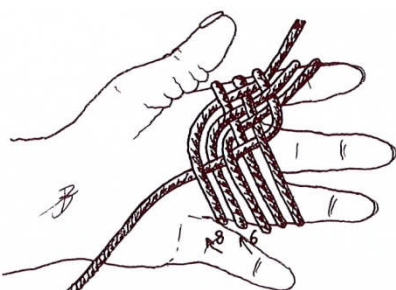
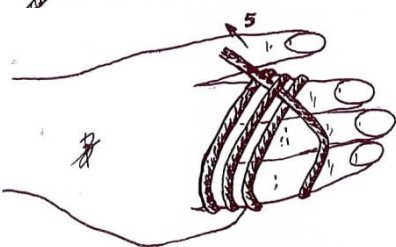
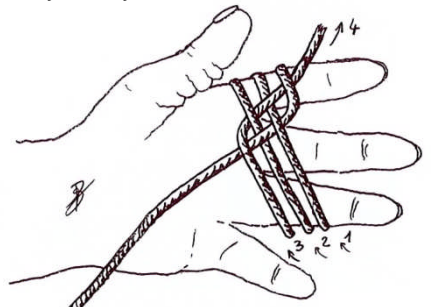
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Stiphout december 2006

Sphere Covering of 45 Faces

by Luc Prouveur, translated by Charles Hamel

This sphere covering, with a quite regular appearance, has the advantage of being rather quick and easy to throw directly on the hand. To cover the inner central ball in a satisfying way you will need to double the first pass. This will make for a little more time but the general result will be more satisfying. Dressing and tightening are relatively easily done.



With the thumb hold the standing part in the palm of your hand.

①Take a first round turn around your hand, the Running Part (Rpart) crossing over the Standing part (Spart).

②Lay a second round turn (towards the wrist, between thumb and first round turn) without crossing the first one, the Rpart going Under the Spart.

③Make a third round turn without crossing any of the turns already done, the Rpart going Over the Spart.

④As soon as the Spart has been crossed, come back towards the fingertips going Under the third laid turn, Over the second and Under the first. Your hand is now encircled by three turns whose Spart and Rpart are at the extremities of the spiral, crossing each other as in forming a half knot and alternatively cross Over and Under the spirals.

⑤Turn your hand so as to see the back of it. There are three parts, side by side and not crossing each other. Make the Rpart come back towards the wrist while going Over the first round turn, Under the second one and Over the third to finish the fourth round turn.

⑥&⑦Lay a fifth turn parallel to the preceding one, while inverting the order of Over-Under crossings so that the crossings thus made are in opposition to the already existing ones.

⑧&⑨Make a sixth turn in the same fashion, the crossings always in opposition.

⑩Having come back to the palm of the hand, without crossing the Spart, make the Rpart go towards the fingertips, the crossings being identical to those of the Spart you are following on a parallel course. The Rpart comes out from Under the first spiral.

⑪⑪On the back of the hand, come back towards the wrist alternating Over-Under crossings and going through the center of the half-knot formed by the first and the sixth spirals.

⑫⑫&⑬Finish the first passage by laying an eighth spiral parallel to the preceding one, the crossings being opposite to the one made previously so as to get a structure where all the crossings alternate Over-Under.

To be finished with it, there only remains to make the necessary numbers of passes (doubling, tripling), then take the slack out and dress carefully.

Letter from Ken Yalden, President IGKT
to
IGKT Pacific Americas Branch.

At the time your constitution was ratified, ten years ago, I was the Chairman of the IGKT Executive Council; therefore I very much feel I have been with you from the beginning. So, Congratulations to you all for a branch that has moved from strength to strength with what can only be described as a good eclectic mix of members.

I am doubly sorry that I am unable to join you in your celebrations because I would have liked to have met again the friends I made the last time I came to a meeting in San Pedro, California. Also as the President of the International Guild of Knot Tyers I am sorry that I shall not be there to support you. However, I am aware that some IGKT members who reside in England shall be attending your meeting.

With luck I will have already met up with some members from most of the US Branches at the Celebratory meeting in the UK this coming May.

In the Ten years since the PAB was formed communications across the whole world have changed with the World Wide Web touching all aspects of life, unfortunately not always for the good. The PAB news letter 'Knot News' has remained a stable method of contact, as well as a reliable source of information, including such items as the well crafted PAB Presidents letter by Lindsey Philpott to inspire thought and action by the PAC members.

I did note the implied suggestion of splitting from the "Guild in England". Well to be truthful, it is not 'England's Guild', because from its inception it has been **International** and what unites us as a Guild, is our interest in knot tying.

At the time of writing this, April 2007, we have members committed to attend the IGKT Silver Jubilee celebrations travelling from Japan, Sweden, Tasmania and California not to mention the Netherlands, Texas and Yorkshire.

England just happens to be the country the two Founder Members lived in, so while the membership is spread world wide, the management is based here in England. I wonder is the suggestion really because 'IGKT' has become a name on its own, as a meeting of Knot Tyers, and the 'I' for international has almost faded from memory.

It is good to see the range of countries the contributors of articles come from in the last copy of 'Knot News' issue 61. This all goes to show how the branch is supported by its International connections.

Please be careful you do not throw the baby out with the bath water. Instead, why not discuss and suggest how to spread the word about our Guild, and how we can pass our craft skills onto the next generation, which ever country they live in.

Attention all members of the International Guild of Knot Tyers **Pacific Americas Branch!**

Do you know who the officers of your Board of Directors are? Do you know who the other Board Members are? Their postal address? Their email address? Their phone number? Well, I know and I will share that information with you.

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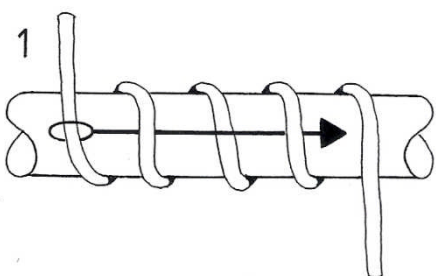
If you have an email address that we are not aware of, or if your email has changed, please send a message to me, secretary@igktpab.org, including your name so that I can update our records.



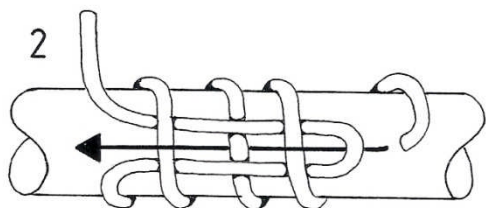
An Improbable 5L x 5B Turk's Head

by Geoffrey Budworth

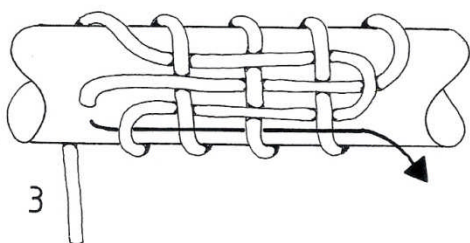
GKT member Brian Walsh of Ipswich in the English county of Suffolk discovered this knot around 1990. He was experimenting with a 4-lead TH but lost his way and ended up with this maverick, which appears to contradict the rule that it is impossible to tie a regular 5L x 5B TH with a single strand.



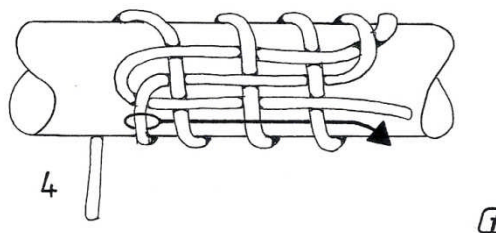
Wrap 4 turns and drag a bight, L to R, going U-O-U.



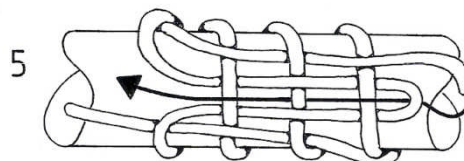
With the working end make a locking tuck, R to L, going U-O-U-O.



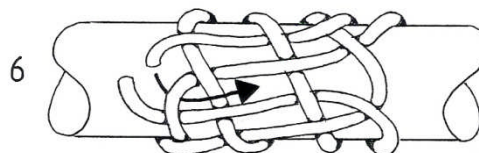
Return the same end, L to R, tucking U-O-U-O.



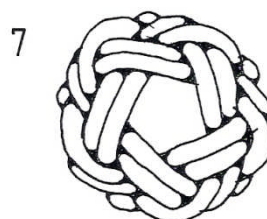
Slacken the LH turn and pull it into another bight, L to R, going U-O-U.



Tuck the working end in a second locking tuck, R to L, going U-O-U-O.

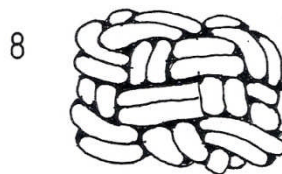


Insert the working end alongside the standing end to complete the knot.



top view

G



side view

Following around the original lead to create a two-ply knot.

When tightened, around a bead or ball of suitable size, the rim parts settle into a couple of neat pentagons; the sides are less regular, however, and no matter how carefully tightened they will always be somewhat inelegant. Still the knot has a lumpy character that is all its own, and whether or not you like it is a matter of personal penchant and preference.

For other TH derivations, I recommend the slim booklet *Turkshead Alternatives*, by Guild past-president Stuart E. Grainger, published (1991, enlarged second edition 1992) by the IGKT.

The Knot News

by Joe Schmidbauer

Much undeserved praise has come my way over the years about the great job I do with “my” newsletter. I believe this credit should go instead to the many contributors who, over the years, took the time to send in their thoughts in prose, poetry and pictures about all aspects of knots and knotting. I did nothing more than offer them an open forum, a blank page on which to write.

Things began slowly at first but the first “big break” was *The Sailor’s Traditional Ditty Bag* by Louie Bartos in KN #5. Many more great articles were to follow over time. Some of the highlights surely must include the extended discussion over several issues of the Headhunter’s Knot by Bryant Arrington; the (up till then) unpublished autobiography of John Hensel; the speech Brion Toss gave at our 1998 AGM; the many great Turk’s Head diagrams of Tom Hall; the wonderful *From the Ditty Bag* series of articles by Roy Chapman; and lastly the many pieces sent in to us from overseas by Geoffrey Budworth, Des Pawson and Pieter van de Griend.

My personal thanks go out to all the people both named above and unnamed (but not unsung) who over these ten years have helped to make the *Knot News* what it is: a place for people with the knotting mania to converse together and hopefully they will continue to do so here for the foreseeable future.

Easy To Make Tool

by Frank Brown

Some of the most useful items in my toolbox are the line needles. I call them by this name, as I am unaware of any other appellations. The equivalent in leatherwork is the lacing needle, usually known in this part of the world as a Life Eye Needle. In case the reader is still not sure what I am raving about, the line needle is a thin, round piece of metal, with a threaded hole in one end and a blunt point at the other. The cord, line, twine, string being employed to create some craft piece is attached by screwing a treated end into the threaded hole. Synthetic materials are heated and shaped to a point to facilitate attachment. The ends of natural fiber material may be treated with glue or wrapped with some suitable sticky tape to enable attachment.

I have a handful of these marvels in a range of sizes for line from one to four mm, accumulated from various sources. I have made a few by cutting a thread in the end of some brass tubing with a suitable bolt or screw, and shaping the other by use of solder, hammer and file. Cutting small diameter thread in the way described is not easy, for me at least, and small taps are expensive, so I had a little think about the problem. My solution was to utilize the incredibly simple gripfid concept, developed by the late master knotter, Stuart Grainger. So with some brass tubing of small diameter, I applied file and hammer to shape the gripping end then shaped the pointy end as described. One of my creations is shown in the accompanying pictures.





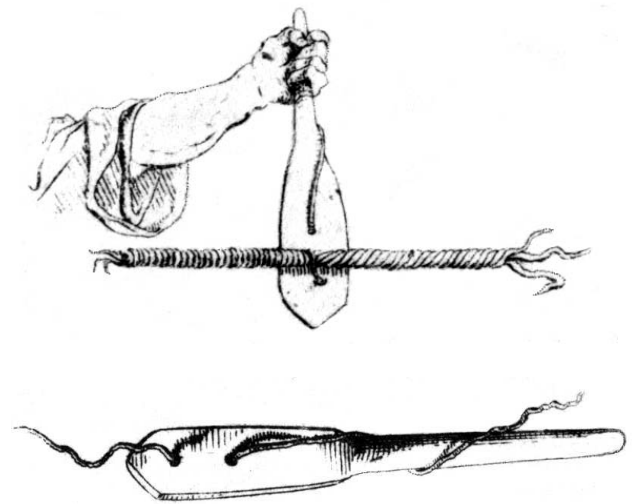
Serving Sticks

by Des Pawson

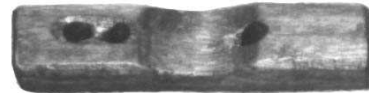
Liz and I were at “Sail Ipswich ‘97” demonstrating our craft and talking to all comers. “We don’t use serving mallets or serving boards on the barges, we just use a stick with some holes in it”, said young Kevin Finch, mate on a Thames sailing barge¹ working out of Maldon, Essex. “I would like to see what you mean”, said I. So the next day Kevin brought a couple of examples for me to see, one for standard work and another variation for serving round eyes.



As soon as I saw them I realized how obvious and simple these tools were. To make one all you needed was a piece of hardwood perhaps a foot long by 1 ¼ inch wide and ½ inch thick with a series of holes down its length, through which the marline was threaded to give the friction required when serving. I remembered that I had seen Floris Hin in Amsterdam use a similar tool. When I came to think about it, a slightly more sophisticated item was illustrated in *Skeps Byggerji* by Åke Classon Rålamb, published in 1691².



The tool Kevin used for serving round eyes was very much shorter, perhaps 4 inches long, ¾ inches square, with just three holes.



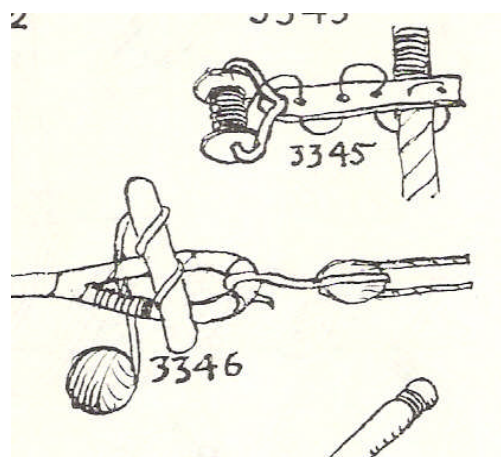
As soon as I could I made a copy of his basic serving stick and tried it out, I found out how well it worked. However, I discovered that for some jobs, if I made a notch on the end, I could see more easily that the marline was going on in just the right place. Soon I had an eye to serve and made up a copy of the very short version he used. This tool worked well. Now I have a number of versions of serving sticks, ranging from one about 2 ½ inches long in ¼ inch square rosewood (for serving very small eyes)...



...to one nearly 15 inches long to which I have attached a reel.



Ashley kind of hints at these sorts of tools with his #3345 brass strip with holes in it, whilst he also speaks of a serving stick for eyes #3346, but this does not have any holes in it at all.



The beauty of these tools is that they can be created from the most basic materials with nothing more than a knife and a drill of sorts. Indeed, since being first introduced to these tools, I have seen them used by other riggers, sometimes carved with a little decorative star or such carved at the hand end.

I still use serving mallets sometimes but more frequently now use one of my serving sticks. Give them a try and you will be pleasantly surprised.

© Des Pawson 10th April 2007

¹Sprit rigged flat bottom craft with leeboards that traded in and around the Thames estuary under sail right up till the 1960's, usually with a crew of a man and a boy.

²Ralamb, Ake Classon: Skeps Byggerji eller adelig ofnongs tionde torn. Original 1691, facsimile, Sjöhistoriska Museet, Malmo 1943. Plate M has possibly the earliest illustrations of rope and canvas working tools.



Knotted frame for a drawing of the Brig *Pilgrim*
made by Mr. Charlie Bell of California

Chinese Knotting

By Mrs. Tillie Easton

The evolution of Chinese Knotting has followed a long and elusive trail that leads back to remotest antiquity. Chinese culture and the numerous folk arts that thrive in this milieu reach to the dawn of recorded history and beyond.

The first hint of earliest Chinese knots dates back to the late Paleolithic age, seventy to one hundred thousand years ago.

Unfortunately, Chinese knotting, ancient as it may be, remains in the background, a marginal art often overlooked. The complexity of these knots and the ingenuity of their designs bespeak the culmination of a long, unbroken artistic tradition.

The decorative knotting tradition continued into the early days of the republic. But the flood of western science and technology in this century has changed our lifestyles. We seem to have ignored the traditional arts.

A decade ago, the only people who knew about traditional knotting were a handful of senior citizens and curio dealers. Then in 1976, a series of articles appeared in a craft magazine.

From this humble beginning, Chinese knotting has regained a precarious hold on life.

