

Survival Skills - How To Build a Spear With The Hoffman Harpoon

By Paul Scheiter

I firmly believe that wilderness survival is a gateway to appreciating the earth and life itself. To me, the process of learning these physical skills creates a greater intimacy between the survivalist and the elements while instilling a sense of responsibility to leave the earth in better condition than it was before. I mention this because of the small tree I harvested for the purpose of this article. As often as possible, I choose to make do with materials that are already dead so as to leave a minimal impact on the landscape. In the case of this spear, it was necessary to find a long and consistently thick green sapling. I gave my best effort to choose a tree that was struggling, and would likely not survive. This was my attempt to take from the earth in a way that actually helps it to live better.



The Right Sapling

We are looking for a tall, straight sapling, about two inches in diameter. As you can see in this picture, the tree I chose was competing with several mature vines in the root structure. Again, the idea here is take your materials in a way that prunes the landscape.



Chopping the Base

I used The Hoffman Harpoon XL to chop through the base of the sapling, and I was surprised by how quickly the knife accomplished this.



The Tree Comes Down

Now we have to remove the branches and isolate the longest and straightest section of wood.



The Prime Cut

Here the branches are gone and the top crown section has been cut off too. This will become the main shaft of the spear.



Clean it Up!

See the right side of the sapling? It is messy, uneven, and too sloppy for our needs. We are going to create a clean break here that will look just like the work of a saw, except we are only going to use a knife. To get started, press the blade firmly into the wood with a heavy log underneath that can act as an anvil. I like to brace the sapling with my foot.



Deepen the Cut

Now find a stout log and gently tap the back of the blade as you roll the sapling. This will create a nice even cut all the way around the wood.



Depth

Here you can see how deep the Hoffman Harpoon goes with some gentle tapping. It is important that you do not go buck wild with the log... if you pound the blade in too hard, it will dull the edge.



The Completed Circular Cut

This is the finished result after tapping and rotating the blade all around the sapling... Now the fun begins!



The All Important Slide-Cut

This is one of the most useful nuances of knife craft I know. The slide cut is performed by gently pushing the blade forward while giving it normal carving pressure. For the purpose of this spear, we are ONLY carving on the right side because we want to create a perfect ninety degree angle break.



The Results of the Slide-Cut

The area of wood to the left of our deep cut remains untouched. The area to the right has been carved away all around the circumference of the wood.



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A Perfect Break!

We weakened the sapling with pinpoint accuracy. This allowed for a perfect ninety degree break. It looks like the work of a saw, but nope, it was just this little knife!



Measure Up!

Now just place the Hoffman Harpoon over the end of the sapling to get an idea of how far back to make the shelf. In retrospect, I may have made this one too deep.... you'll see what I mean. Also, you may have noticed that I now switched to the regular size of the Hoffman Harpoon. Remember, either harpoon will work perfectly well for a spear point. The smaller one is better for fish, while the large one is ideal for heavy game.



Carve the Shelf

Now we are going to use the exact same technique as before for making a clean break. The only difference is that this time, we ONLY want to carve in half way. This will create an extremely stable platform for the Hoffman Harpoon to rest on when it is lashed in the final steps.



Stabilize for Chopping

Once the shelf carving has been started, we tilt it up vertically and stabilize the base on our log anvil. This secures the sapling so that we may chop our shelf more efficiently.



Mass Stock Removal

With the sapling now stabilized, begin chopping out the wood: be sure not to overboard. Remember, we are intending to remove exactly half of the wood.



After Initial Stock Removal

This is what it should look like after the first round of chopping. The left side still has a major hump to it, but the very far right is tapered down to almost exactly where we want it.



Final Trimming

Now just gently chop in the opposite direction. The blade will stop as it hits against the deep cut we made before. This part is particularly fun because the wood chips out very easily and leaves you with a very well manicured shelf.



Ready For Lashing!

The sapling is now ready for the spear to be attached. In this picture you can see that we have taken away half of the wood which creates a nice clean place for the Hoffman Harpoon to rest. The ninety degree shelf on the left side will give the butt of the Harpoon a surface to push against when it is thrust.



Parachute Cord

This is one hundred feet of "550 Parachute Cord". This is one of the best types of cordage for a survival kit as it is extremely strong, lightweight, and has a myriad of uses. Remember: for every technique that uses modern equipment, there is a primitive alternative that is superior in many cases. Ultimately you must strive to do with little or no help from your modern arsenal of tools, but the process of learning is sometimes better if you *gradually* wean yourself from amenities like parachute cord.



Tie It To a Tree

Tie the middle of the parachute cord to a tree with about twenty feet on one of the free ends. In this picture, the left strand is my twenty foot length, and the right strand goes to the remaining eighty feet or so. I did this because I didn't know exactly how much I would need. With this method, I can wrap the entire spear without

wasting any cord whatsoever. The mentality here is all about conserving your limited survival resources if you should need them later.



Fitting the Blade

Pass the very end of the cordage through the lanyard hole in the Hoffman Harpoon. Then begin wrapping towards the pointed end such that the cordage lies on top of itself. This makes the wrap self securing because the top layer keeps tension on the bottom layer. Also be sure to leave a short tail: this will be used to finish the wrap at the very end.



Super Tensioned Lashing

This is a little trick I've kept to myself for a long time. When you do a spiral wrap like this, you can only get the

cordage so tight using your arm strength alone. But for an extremely tight wrap, just lean your weight back and keep the cord between the spear and the tree taught. Now, roll the spear forward using two hands as you add one wrap at a time. Be very careful not to cut yourself. The result is a very high tension coil wrap that takes no physical exertion... again conservation of energy is paramount in survival. Always stay creative and ask yourself "How can I do this better AND more efficiently".



All The Way Up... And All The Way Back

Continue the tension coil wrap all the way to the top, and then begin coming all the way back down. You will have two layers of tightly wound parachute cord.



Half Hitches

Now that our wrapping is finished, we can secure it into place by throwing a couple of half hitches into the ending coils.



Square Knot Finish

Now finishes by tying the original tail with the long end using a square knot. Congratulations! Your spear is finished.



Conserve Your Cord

At this point you can either trim the cord off, or you may continue to wrap it around the length of the spear. This enhances the grip and allows you to keep your cord all in one piece without having to cut it up smaller and smaller.



See You Next Time!

I hope you enjoyed the article. Please let me know if there is anything that could be improved. You can drop me an email through my website, www.hedgehogleatherworks.com

Best always,
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