

Extract from notes on Bushman hunting in the /Gam-Gautscha area of Southwest Africa - Charles O. Handley, Jr., December, 1952.

Bow and arrow

1. Bow

a. Gathering materials

- (1) Wood. The bow is a simple and crude affair, and it is said that any wood will do for its construction. However, it is obvious that some kinds would last much longer than others. /Qui Hunter pointed out a bush in the Gautscha camp which is used when available. Bows made of this, he said, last up to four years. Other types sometimes don't last through a single season.
- (2) String.
- (3) Metal ornaments. I have seen a portion of the metal base of a shotgun shell used for decoration of a bow.

b. Preparation of materials

- (1) Wood. The wood is cut green; is usually seasoned for two or three days after shaping.
- (2) String. Seasoning plant fiber.

c. Construction

- (1) Shaping wood. The piece of wood chosen for the bow is a branch about the diameter of the finished bow. Not much shaping is required, except for removing the knots and tapering the ends. Either an adz or a knife is used for this purpose.
- (2) Making string. (Does wife ever contribute this, or must the hunter himself do it?)
- (3) Fastening string to bow - knotting, etc.
- (4) Applying ornaments to bow.
- (5) String bindings.

d. Carrying methods

- (1) In hand. It has been my impression that the bow is usually carried in the hand only when the Bushman

is actually hunting.

- (2) In sack. When traveling, or when proceeding to a hunting area, the bow is usually carried in a sack slung across the shoulder.

e.e. Methods of use.

- (1) Testing bow before hunt. The hunter almost invariably tests his bow by drawing it several times just before he commences to hunt. This takes two forms, with and without an arrow. Adjustment is made to the bowstring if necessary.
- (2) Repair. The Hunter frequently examines his bow in camp and always before the hunt, catching up frayed ends of bindings, etc.
- (3) Attack. (Various shooting attitudes, type of release, etc.)
- (4) Defense. Arrows are said to be sometimes shot in defense, but owing to the slow action of the poison and the fact that the arrow is not designed to kill from its own impact, the assegai and the knife are much more used for this purpose. I have seen the bow itself used as a warding weapon.

f. Disposition when not in use.

- (1) In werft. Day and night the bow and arrows are usually hung together in a tree near the skerm, or on the skerm.
- (2) In hunting and traveling camps. Hung on tree or bush by day; kept close beside hunter at night, presumably ready for instant use.

- g. When visiting foreign werfts. (Under what conditions and on what occasions is it left outside the werft, and how far?) On the one occasion that I saw weapons left outside the werft, they were hung in bushes about a mile away.

2. Arrow

a. Gathering materials

- (1) Metal for point. Traded from natives.
- (2) Bone shaft.

- (3) Grass shaft. At least two types of grass stems are used in this area. One is the tall reed found at Thinthuma and Kai Kai; the other is the tall grass commonly found on the sand plains. Wood is not used, for the hunting technique requires that the shaft be fragile and easily broken. The poisoned point section must remain embedded in the flesh of the victim, rather than being pulled out by passage of the animal through the brush.
- (4) Gum. A scale insect.
- (5) Poison. Our observations indicate that these Bushmen use only one type of poison: a combination of a beetle pupa, a bean, and juice from the inner bark of a tree. (The possibility of other types should not be overlooked. Use of Euphorbia juices and snake venoms have been mentioned in the literature.) Sources of poison elements are said to be communal property and not claimed by any individual. Bushmen say that the beetle pupae, which are found only around the bases of certain trees (we know of three in the Gautscha area), can be dug up at any season (which I doubt). If a man fails in his digging to find any, he asks at the werft if anyone will give him some. If none are available, he asks for directions to other trees where pupae may be sought. (With this line of questioning I tried to turn up a substitute poison but had no success.) If a man secures many pupae, he may distribute them among all who need them in the werft, or he may allow others to share the poison mixture he makes.
- (6) String binding.

b. Preparation of materials.

- (1) Shaping point. Most shaping is accomplished by pounding with metal against metal, but I have seen also a file used in the final stages.
- (2) Shaping of bone shaft.
- (3) Grass shaft - notching and application of fiber binding.
- (4) Gum. Scale insects are crushed en masse and kneaded between the fingers. The resulting black gum is

heated and twisted onto a stick.

(5) Poison. (Elizabeth has details of preparation.)

(6) String.

c. Construction.

(1) Assembly of component parts.

(2) Poisoning. (Elizabeth has details.)

d. Carrying methods. Arrows are normally carried in the quiver, some head up, some head down, and are only removed when game is sighted. Sometimes, however, the hunter removes three or four from his quiver at the beginning of a hunt and carries them loose in his hand, leaving the quiver behind. If the quiver is not full of arrows, slack space is filled with sticks and unprepared arrow shaft grass.

e. Methods of use.

(1) Testing before use. The hunter frequently tests his arrows, both in camp and just before the hunt. He examines them for straightness and for unity of component parts. Holding the arrow by the notched end he snaps it vigorously in the air to set it in vibration. He moistens frayed ends of fiber bindings and twists them tight again.

(2) Repair. The hunter is very conservative with his arrows. He recovers a large percentage of those he shoots and reuses undamaged parts in construction of new arrows. Normally the grass shaft is broken when the arrow is imbedded in a buck, but usually the point and bone shaft can be used again and again with very little repair. The average hunter carries a full set of repair materials with him everywhere he goes in his shoulder bag. The poison will remain effective indefinitely, as long as the arrow is kept dry. However, since the poison is water soluble, the arrow must be re-poisoned after each successful use.

(3) Attack. (Type of release, etc.) Bushmen say that the poisoned arrow is their only power; it is their offense and defense. Again: God gave the Hereros cattle; he gave the Bushmen poison.

(4) Defense.

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