

S I T K A

HOW TO MAKE

# A DEER HIDE COFFEE BAG



*"I believe that hunting and gathering lets me get as close as I can to the environment. I'm part of the natural community, and I'm more part of it if I use as much as possible."*



*with Timo Rova*

Stitching by hand with thread made of sinew, Timo Rova—as a young boy—made all kinds of useful things out of deer hide.

*“I want to use as much of the deer as I can,” he says. “I believe that hunting and gathering lets me get as close as I can to the environment. I’m part of the natural community, and I’m more part of it if I use as much as possible.”*

As an adult, Timo uses a sewing machine as he makes the same kind of utilitarian items for his own personal use or to give away as gifts. The sewing machine is a tool with which he gained a great deal of expertise during his career as a smokejumper.

*“I got really skilled at sewing because we sew all of our own jumpsuits, our harnesses, and our packs,” he says. “We sew everything except the parachute itself, and even then we do all our own repair. As a smokejumper for many years I spent a lot of time behind a sewing machine.”*

The items Timo sews from deer hide are no less practical than the ones he sewed in preparation for jumping into wildfires. He often makes deer hide rifle slings utilizing buttons carved from antler. Sometimes he uses deer hide to make book covers or diaries filled with handmade paper, fly wallets lined with sheepskin, vests, satchels and wool-lined chopper mitts.

His go-to creation now, though, is coffee bags to fill with coffee or wild rice that he gives away as gifts. A relative gave him one of these bags from his ancestral home in the Finnish Lapland. When he visited the place on his own, he saw the bags in use.

*“Everybody had these little rainproof leather coffee bags,” he says. “We’d go out and they’d have a fire and shake some coffee in and boil it up—you know, cowboy coffee—but up there in Scandinavia that’s what they do all the time. I was intrigued.”*

Now, the bags Timo has made are prized possessions for friends and family near and far.

#### TIMO’S DEER HIDE COFFEE BAG INSTRUCTIONS:

##### 1. Tan hide or have it professionally tanned.

Timo has tanned deer hides in the past, but now to save time he sends hides to be tanned. He often sends several at a time and receives them back about six months later. Each hide will have varying thicknesses that will be used in different parts of the process.

##### 2. Cut pieces using canning jar or other cylinder as pattern.

Timo often uses a pint canning jar as a template. The finished bag will be roughly the size and shape of the jar. For larger bags, use a thermos of something of similar shape. Trace and cut the round bottom from a thinner section of hide, like the belly or neck. Wrap thick hide around the cylinder, overlapping by ½ inch, and cut.

##### 3. Sew long edge of bag with smooth side out. Then attach bottom round with rough side out, pinching leather with fingers to make a tight, even stitch.

If sewing by hand, be sure to use a thimble and a lock stitch. If sewing with a machine, go slow.

##### 4. Turn finished piece inside out.

This gives the bag a smooth bottom, but also gives the inside of the bag smooth walls that prevent coffee grounds from sticking.

##### 5. Cut thinner section of hide into cord strip roughly 2/3 the height of the bag. Attach this strip to bag.

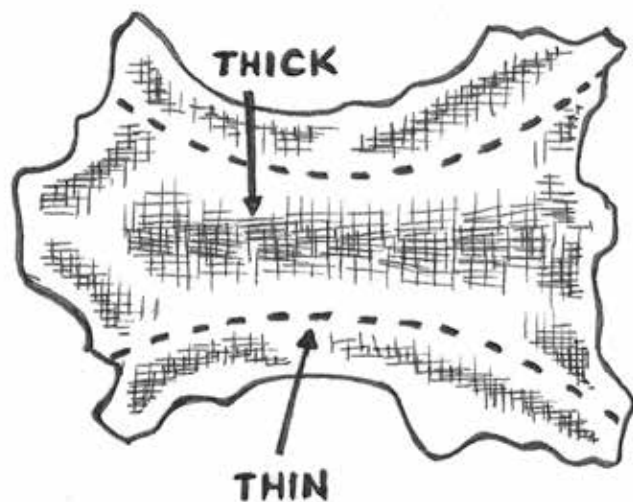
These thin sections of hide, typically the neck and belly, are flexible and are the best sections for the cord that will tie the bag closed.

##### 6. Put bag in smoker on low for 10-20 minutes.

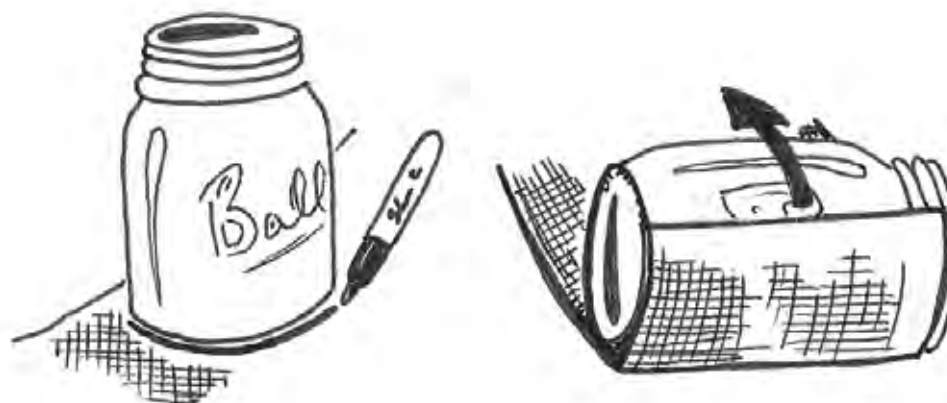
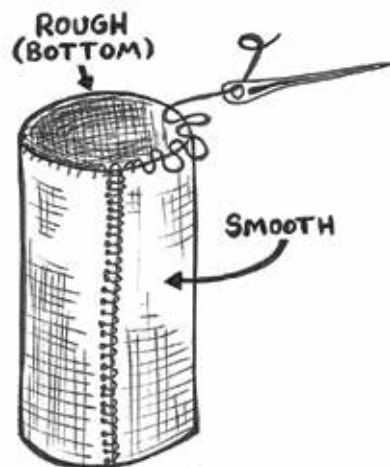
In addition to darkening the leather and giving each bag a wonderful smell, this process helps close the pores of the leather for waterproofing.

##### 7. Fill with ground coffee or wild rice and give as gifts.

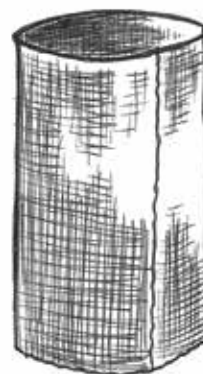
Timo loves giving these bags as gifts, because in today’s world where people already have everything they need, it’s nice to give something unique and handmade. Most people love the gifts, especially after hearing the backstory.

**1 TAN HIDE OR HAVE IT PROFESSIONALLY TANNED****2 CUT PIECES USING CANNING JAR OR OTHER CYLINDER AS PATTERN**

Trace and cut the round bottom from a thinner section of hide, like the belly or neck. Wrap thick hide around the cylinder, overlapping by ½ inch, and cut.

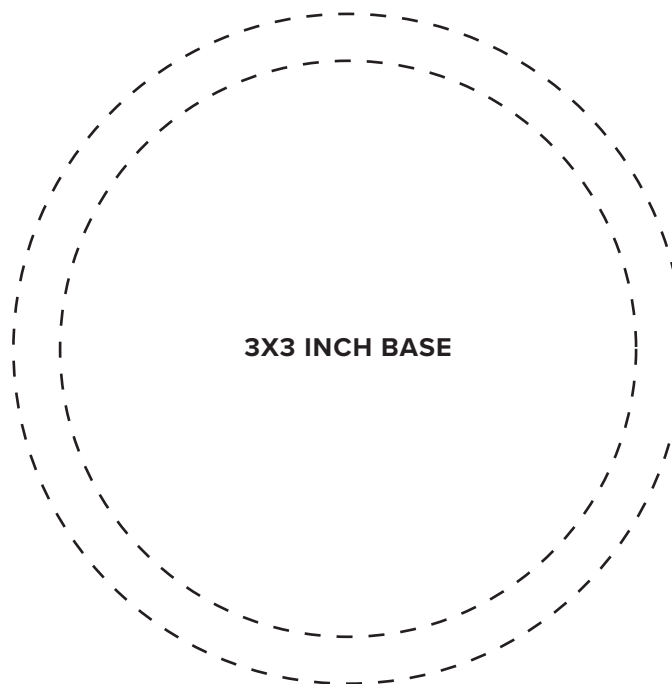
**3 SEW LONG EDGE OF BAG WITH SMOOTH SIDE OUT. THEN ATTACH BOTTOM ROUND WITH ROUGH SIDE OUT,****4 TURN FINISHED PIECE INSIDE OUT**

This gives the bag a smooth bottom, but also gives the inside of the bag smooth walls that prevent coffee grounds from sticking.

**5 CUT THINNER SECTION OF HIDE INTO CORD STRIP****6 PUT BAG IN SMOKER ON LOW FOR 10-20 MINUTES**

— — — CUT LINE

1. Cut hide as tall as you want
2. Roll bag into desired circumference and measure for base. Add  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch
3. Extend drawstring based on width of bag



DRAW STRING  $\frac{2}{3}$  LENGTH

## TIMO AT WORK



Timo Rova is a 30-year veteran wildland firefighter, including 18 years spent as a smokejumper. During his career, Timo honed life-saving skills of observation, self-reliance and connection to the natural world around him. Now, from his familial home next to the Boundary Waters wilderness in northern Minnesota, he continues to practice these life-giving skills and learns to live life in balance with the wild world around him.

## THE ORIGINAL DIAGRAM

