



## SURVIVAL PAPER #SP96-18

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# SILENT WEAPONS

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As evidenced by the many societies who still today effectively use silent, primitive weapons, the firearm is not the only method of defense or hunting.

Still, aren't all firearms better than any of the primitive weapons? The answer all depends on your perspective.

If you consider the relative inherent accuracy of most modern firearms, the relative ease of operation by someone unskilled, and their relative stopping or killing power, then firearms definitely rank superior to most all other weapons. Yet, there are several important reasons for investigating primitive, silent weapons as a part of your overall, long-term survival strategy.

The primitive weapons described here are silent, or nearly so. The value of silence in a survival situation is at least two-fold: You may not want to announce your whereabouts, and when hunting, you won't frighten away every animal in the vicinity after your first rifle blast. In most cases, maintenance of modern firearms requires a simple cleaning kit. But assumes you have a press and all of the needed accessories. By contrast, primitive weapons can be manufactured (assuming you possess the know-how and the skill) with very few tools and often using whatever is available in nature.

This is certainly not an argument against modern firearms in favor of primitive weapons. The knowledge of the manufacture and use of primitive weapons can fill that gap when your firearm is either unavailable or inappropriate. Also, many primitive weapons, such as the boomerang, blowgun, bow, and boladero, are great sport and recreation, testing your personal skills far more than a modern firearm.

## SLINGSHOT AND SLING

The slingshot is generally thought of as a child's toy, yet in certain circumstances it can be effective in capturing small game or birds. And the modern "wrist-rocket"-type slingshots truly make this a viable hunting tool.

Even in a wilderness setting, a crude slingshot can be made from a forked stick. Use heavy rubber bands, or rubber from your vehicle's tire, or possibly some elastic material from your clothing. Any round pebbles will work fine as ammo.

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The sling takes a bit more practice than the slingshot, but its potential speed and distance of the flying rock is greater. Basically, the sling is nothing more than a leather, canvas, or cotton strap into which a rock can be placed. You tie one end to a finger (usually the middle finger), put a pebble in the pouch, and then hold the other end between your thumb and index finger. You swing the strap around a few times to develop velocity, and then you release one end of the sling to release the rock.

The key is to develop a sense of timing so your release will send the rock straight to its target. That takes practice. The motion is somewhat akin to the release of a baseball that you throw.

David killed Goliath with such a simple weapon, and with a few hours or few weeks of practice, you may be able to capture rabbits for your stew pot.

## BOLADERO

Boladeros are fairly easy to manufacture in the wilderness. There are many variations, but they are all made from three to eight rocks, each tied to a piece of rope, and all the individual ropes secured together. The Argentine Gauchos used their boladeros to capture wild horses. They used two or three heavy rocks about three inches in diameter, each rock secured in a pouch made from an ostrich neck. Each pouch is attached to a braided rawhide rope. To use, one grasps the ropes where they are tied together, quickly whirls it around and then releases it in the direction of the target.

When the flying boladeros hit the horse, the individual rocks wrap themselves around the legs, immobilizing the animal.

Eskimos have used boladeros for capturing birds. When released accurately in the direction of the flock, the boladeros – consisting of about eight pebbles – will spread over a broad area, often bringing down several birds.

Boladeros can be made with a durable fabric and some twine or rope. This tool requires practice for proficiency, but target practice can be enjoyable. Wouldn't you rather practice with boladeros rather than throw a Frisbee?

## BOOMERANGS AND RABBIT STICKS

The boomerang is one of the most remarkable silent weapons. Commonly associated with the Australian aborigines, they vary in size, purpose, and motion. Boomerangs have been used in warfare, hunting, competition, and for amusement. Besides the well-known returning boomerang, there are sizes and shapes that can do figure 8's, spirals, bounce on the ground a few times before returning, and various other maneuvers. The various motions are a result of user-skill and the shape of the boomerang.

Boomerangs are traditionally made of hard wood bent into a curve over hot coals, or from a natural curve in the fork of a tree. The boomerangs measure from two to four feet across, flat on one side and rounded on the other, with a flat edge – known as an air-foil.

As long as you're aware of the simple principles involved, they are relatively easy to construct – you can make one with just a pocketknife. If you want to practice the throwing without building your own, simply purchase one at a sporting goods store. These "toys" can amaze you.

Skillful Australians are said to be able to cut a small animal in two with a boom' as far away as 400 feet!

Rabbit sticks are much simpler devices. Some of these resemble boomerangs, some don't. These are simply sticks about as long as the distance from your elbow to your finger tips which fly fairly accurately when thrown. They are not designed to return, but merely to stun or kill the animal it hits. You don't even need a pocketknife to make a rabbit stick. The woods are full of ready-to-use rabbit sticks.

## SPEAR

The spear -- next to the rock -- is probably the most instinctive, ancient weapon of mankind. If you think of the spear as a function rather than a specific thing, you'll see that canes, umbrellas, sticks, shovels, pipes, knives, bamboo poles, poker, car antennas, crutches, ad infinitum can all double as spears.

The spear can poke, protect, gouge, pierce, capture, or investigate. It can also be thrown, though a good throwing spear requires good balance and weight.

In a wilderness setting, the spear is often just a long stick, hardwood, whose end has been sharpened and hardened in the fire. Sometimes the end can be split into two teeth to facilitate capturing frogs, fish, lizards, and other small game.

## ATLATL

The atlatl works in conjunction with the spear. The atlatl is an extension of the spear, and is often simply called a spear caster. It is made from a stick about half the length of the spear (or shorter), and slightly curved. There must be a cup-like depression in one end, into which fits the spear. The opposite end of the atlatl is held and slung forward, propelling the spear forward at a speed much greater than you'd be able to achieve with just your hand alone. When you get good enough casting with the atlatl, you'll probably ask yourself, "Why didn't someone think of this before?" In fact, the atlatl is ancient, having been used throughout South America at the time of the European contact.

In the first afternoon I ever used an atlatl, I was able to throw the spear up to 80 yards. However, much practice is needed to be able to accurately hit a target.

## BOW

Archery today is a complex sport. The types of bows are numerous, such as the crossbow, recurve, and compound, and specialization and competition (and much debate) occurs with even the smallest components of the modern bow.

Archery is an enjoyable sport and I would encourage readers to learn more about the various archery products now on the market, and to investigate local archery clubs where you can practice alongside seasoned archers.

The primitive bows of the American Indians may seem like toys by today's standards, but they provided the Indians with food and protection. Indians routinely abandoned the

newfangled gun to the bow. After all, the bow was familiar as a tool they used all their lives. To operate the bow, all the needed tools and parts came from nature. However, replacement gun parts, the repair know-how, and ammunition were the reasons why they quickly reverted to their bows when the guns failed.

A rookie, however, attempting to make a useable bow in the wilderness may have more trouble than he expects. The bow itself is relatively easy to make, especially a “quickie.” But one needs a suitable fiber for the bowstring, and one needs the skill of archery, and one needs to know how to make arrows. In fact, a good straight arrow that flies straight is the single most important aspect of successfully using a primitive bow. Any bow can be quickly fashioned, but you’ve got to have straight arrows that fly to their targets. That means you need to know how to straighten arrows, perhaps how to make broadheads (arrowheads) out of stone, metal, or bone, and how to attach feathers to ensure a straight flight.

While it’s not impossible to make an effective bow and arrows from scratch in the wilderness, it probably won’t be your first choice unless you already have the background and know-how.

## BLOWGUN

If I had to choose one silent and simple weapon that was easy to make and use, accurate, and required little practice, the blowgun is probably my top choice. With no noise or recoil, a blowgun can deliver a muzzle velocity of nearly 250 fps.

The blowgun is the epitome of simplicity. It is simply a hollow tube through which a sharpened dart is blown. The tube is made from wood, metal, or plastic. The important factors are that the inside of the tube be as uniform and smooth as possible, that there is no (or very little) flexibility in the tube, and that the tube is at least four feet long. An inside diameter of ½ inch seems to be nearly ideal.

Natives of the Amazon made their hollow tubes by cutting open a long, fairly straight piece of wood. They’d smooth out the inside with sand, and then glue the two pieces of wood back together with resins.

Darts are made from pieces of piano wire, clothes hangers, shish-kebob sticks, or any other similar projectile. The important factor is that the tip be sharpened and that the end be weighted. The end must also make a good seal inside the tube. If it doesn’t, you need to add some sort of cottony wadding to seal around the end of the dart. Otherwise, the dart won’t go anywhere when you blow.

Glass beads – the ones that used to be hung in doorways in long strings – can be used as the weight for a dart. Simply pull a glass bead off the string, heat one end of your dart and carefully insert it halfway into the bead.

Experiment with different lengths of darts, and with different lengths of blowguns. You can add a mouthpiece so you get a better seal, and other additions to the tube so you can get a better grip. With a rubber stopper on the bottom and a few decorations, the blowgun makes an attractive and inconspicuous walking stick.

The weapon requires very little cash outlay in order to get started, and you can even practice in an apartment, or when someone is asleep in the next room.

Historically, the blowgun has been a most effective weapon for capturing small game. With the addition of poisoned darts, it becomes an effective weapon against another man armed with a gun.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

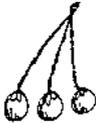
Outdoor Survival Skills, Larry Dean Olsen. This is a good primer on outdoor living in the rough, with good illustrated sections on primitive weapons.

Wildwood Wisdom, Ellsworth Jaegar. This is a treasure of outdoor lore. Lavishly illustrated, it includes a chapter on the many weapons used by North American Indians.

In the Footsteps of Our Ancestors: Guide to Wild Food, Christopher Nyerges. Though primarily a textbook of edible plants, there are sections which deal with useful plant fibers and poisons.

Survival Guns, Mel Tappan. Tappan's prejudice for modern firearms is quite clear. However, his comments in his short section on primitive weapons are useful.

**SILENT WEAPONS**

<b>WEAPON</b>	<b>ABILITY TO MANUFACTURE IN THE WILD</b>	<b>EASE OF OPERATION</b>	<b>NEED OF PRACTICE</b>	<b>DISTANCE</b>	<b>URBAN APPLICATION</b>	<b>COST</b>
<b>SLING</b> 	Since the sling is merely a leather or canvas strap, sling can be easily made if such is available in wilderness.	Relatively easy, once you get the feel of it.	Initial practice is necessary to learn how to swing and release the sling.	Possibly twice the distance of a slingshot; depends on the user's skill.		Under \$5
<b>SLINGSHOT</b> 	Can be made if you have a forked stick and rubber bands (or elastic material, such as a piece of clothing.)	Any child can quickly master this.	Minimal	Most effective under 20 yards.	Can be used to chase away dogs, pigeons, etc.	From \$1 to \$15
<b>BOLADEROS</b> 	May take a few hours, but can be done if suitable rock, leather or canvas (to hold rocks) can be found. Argentine Gauchos used rocks, ostrich necks for pouches, and leather twine. Rocks with holes would work well.	Fairly easy. The action is similar to the spinning and releasing of the sling.	Practice needed to be able to spin and release properly so bolas spread (without tangling), and hit its target.	Depends on overall weight and style of bola; generally will travel less than 25 yards.	Immobilizing stray dogs.	Approx. \$30.

<p><b>BOOMER- ANG</b></p> 	<p>Best would be to buy one at a sporting goods store. A true boomerang must be well-balanced, flat, and have a proper air foil. In the wild, one can easily make a crude non-returning "rabbit stick".</p>	<p>Relatively easy to use, but must be thrown NOT like a Frisbee, but overhead, vertically, with a snap of the wrist.</p>	<p>Practice required to use this tool for hunting. If unskilled, don't rely on this method for hunting.</p>	<p>Can be thrown at least 100 yards and return.</p>	<p>Sport and recreation at a local park (but be careful).</p>	<p>From \$3 to \$25.</p>
<p><b>SPEAR</b></p> 	<p>Can be quickly and easily made by fire-hardening a long, straight piece of wood.</p>	<p>Hitting a moving target with a primitive spear can be quite difficult.</p>	<p>Practice, strength, and coordination are all needed to effectively use a spear.</p>	<p>Depends on user and quality of spear. Don't expect much accuracy over 25 yards.</p>	<p>Walking stick.</p>	
<p><b>ATLANTL</b></p> 	<p>There are a variety of styles, but the atlatl is relatively simple to construct.</p>	<p>Acts as an extension of the arm and increases effectiveness of spear.</p>	<p>Much practice is needed in order to hit targets.</p>	<p>Perhaps doubles the range of a hand thrown spear.</p>		
<p><b>BOW</b></p> 	<p>Even a "quickie" bow would take about two days to make properly. Need straight shafts for arrows, fiber material, and some means to fasten feathers to arrow shafts (if use feathers.)</p>	<p>Depends on bow and person. Crossbows and compounds are far easier to use than homemade or recurves.</p>	<p>Requires at least a year of regular practice to be skillful for hunting big game. Less time for small game. Wilderness-made bows may be inherently ineffective.</p>	<p>Unless you are skilled, under 50 yards is your accuracy range.</p>	<p>If you have the space, practice in your backyard. Has potential as self-defense method where silence is needed.</p>	<p>From \$20 (for toys) to several hundred dollars.</p>
<p><b>BLOWGUN</b></p> 	<p>For the amateur, best to buy a hollow tube at the hardware store. In the wild, you'd need to hollow out a long straight branch, and you'd have to fabricate darts with available materials.</p>	<p>Amazingly simple. A hard blow through the tube (while aiming) is the procedure.</p>	<p>Practice improves your shot, but very little is needed to use the blowgun effectively.</p>	<p>Accuracy recorded up to 100 yards. A Cherokee blowgun has reached distances of 200 yards.</p>	<p>Use to stun stray dogs, coyotes, &amp; even rats. Potential as a self-defense tool &amp; doubles as a walking stick.</p>	<p>Make yourself for about \$5, or pay up to \$30.</p>

### NOTES ON THE CHART

This chart covers those silent weapons which have passed the test of time. Though most of the weapons on the chart have modern counterparts, each can be made in a wilderness setting with a minimum of tools (assuming you have the skill and knowledge).

Therefore, some primarily modern weapons, such as the air rifle, have been deliberately omitted.

Also, there are other means of capturing animals for food, such as traps, snares, poisons, etc. These, not being “weapons” in the strict sense of the word, are not addressed here.