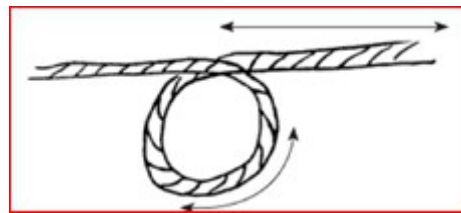
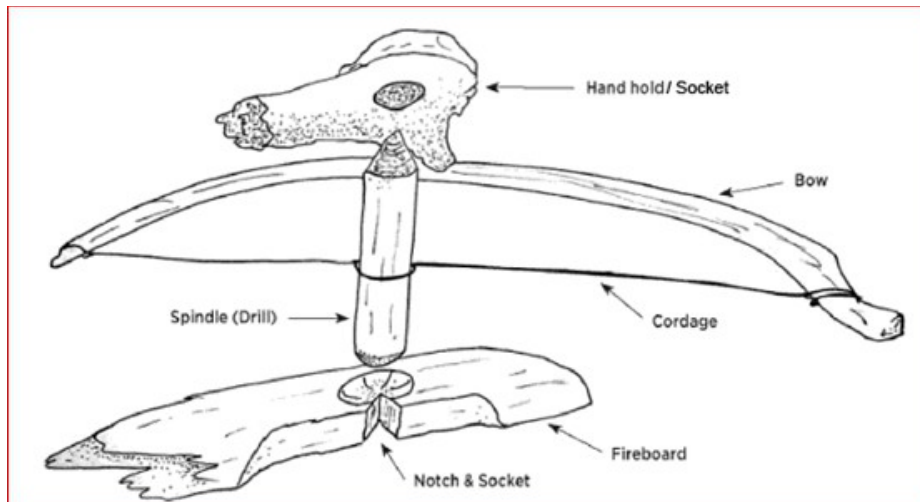


MAKING FIRE

By Oliver Cameron
with Ole Wik

One of the basic skills that you may never need, but that will give you confidence should you be caught out, is how to make a bow drill for starting a fire.



Bow drill for fire.

Images: <http://backyardwilds.com/?p=643>

You can't always find a stone with a depression in it to act as a handhold on the top for the spindle. If you're in some pretty good sized trees and have a pocket saw, you can cut a dead branch close to the tree. The underneath side of that branch will have some hardwood in it.

Cut a 4" block for your hand holder and make a hole in it for the top of your spindle. The hardwood will support the wear of that stick turning against it. You can get enough wood from the rest of the branch to make the bow.

I once inserted a coin into the hole in the hand holder, and drove a roofing nail into the top of the spindle. That gave me a metal-on-metal bearing.¹

You can make a fire with wood that's not completely dry. If you twirl your spindle in that notch, it will dry it out there. If it's just damp, you can build a fire even if it is not ideal. Those are things to know.

Why not ask Heidi about building fires outdoors? That's her specialty, and Sasha's too, as you well know.

Sasha demonstrated that one time when I was out with her. I can't remember the details, but she made a special fire and cooked something. I haven't thought about that in so long that I can't remember the details of what was going on.



Ole Wik and son Kalle enjoying Sasha's tin-can
goose soup at spring camp, Kobuk River, 1976.
Image: Sasha Wik

What about building an emergency fire—for example, after getting wet?

The biggest danger is a situation where your hands are so numb that you can't hold a match. I've been in that situation a few times, and expect you have too. That tells a person that he better have some matches in a container that he can get open when his fingers are numb.

But even more important than that is a lighter and a candle. If you have a short candle, you can get some twigs together, melt some wax onto them, and set the candle alongside. If it's a longer one, you can use your lighter to ignite those sticks that are covered with wax. Then you're on your way.



Marbles waterproof matchbox

<http://www.smkw.com/webapp/eCommerce/brands/Marbles+Outdoors/75.html>

What did you use as a base when you built a fire in the snow?

Well, there are two ways you can make a shelter for your fire. Put down a good stick and some sticks next to it, and start your fire underneath that. Usually I manage to hunch over it a little bit with the wind to my back.

The main thing is to get plenty of kindling ready first. I usually carry birch bark with me as fire starter. If you've got some of that, so much the better. That simplifies things a lot.

1) This essay stems from a series of telephone conversations that Ole Wik had with Oliver between December 2007 and February 2008. Highlighted text indicates remarks made by Ole.