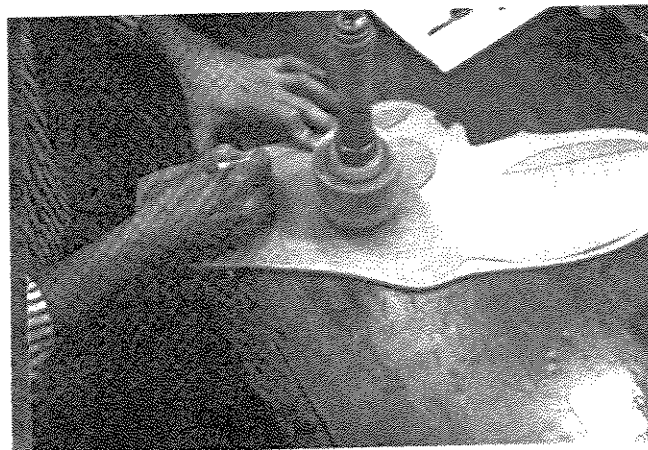


Gunleather: Cutting Out the Holster

by Will Ghormley

Last issue we got the pattern made for your smoke wagon. Now it's time to cut into that hide. Select the best portion of your hide to cut the holster from. Check it on both the skin side, (the part everyone will be seeing) and the flesh side. You don't want the back flesh side to be fuzzy. The flesh should be tightly grained so it won't wear or sluff off on your pistol when it's taken in and out of the holster. Look over both sides before you position the pattern. Scars on the hide can add character to the holster but they are a little harder to cut through and cause the knife to slice rapidly once you get through the scar. Be careful.



When you have the pattern placed on the hide put a weight on it to help hold it in place as you trace around it.

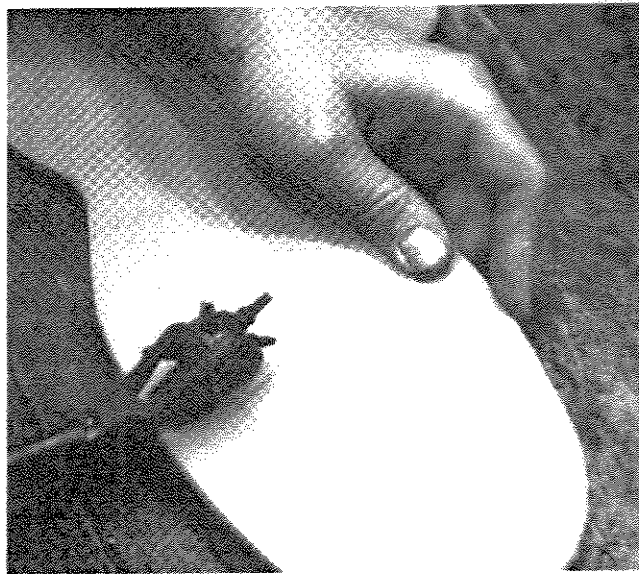


After you have traced the pattern, mark the ends of the loops by pressing an awl through the pattern where the outline of the holster and the loops intersect. Now you're ready to cut.

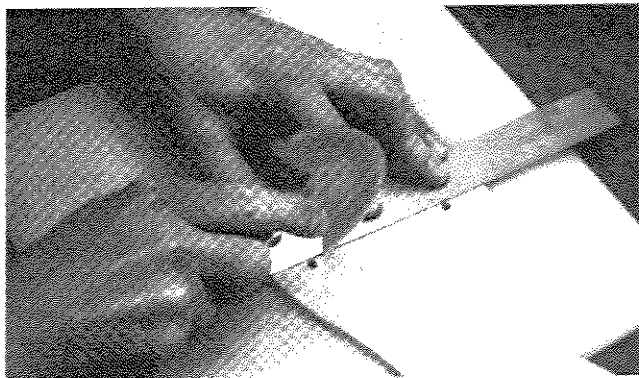
I spent about forty bucks on a round knife and it was never sharp enough to use. Doug Fulkerson makes a fine line of leather goods and last summer at the Nationals he and I were talking about round knives. He gave me a few tips. I did what he told me and my round knife is now the perfect leather cutting instrument. If you opted to buy a round knife, rather than a utility knife, you might want to call up Doug and get a few pointers on how to fine hone your blade. He would also caution you about safety tips while using a round knife, while you still have all of your finger tips. Here I will also caution you to have some rags and band-aids handy, just in case.



Cut your pattern out. Take your time and you are less likely to slip. If you are cutting with a round knife, you get a great deal of control by sticking one point of your knife in the cut board and gently rock the blade as you pull the leather through the knife.

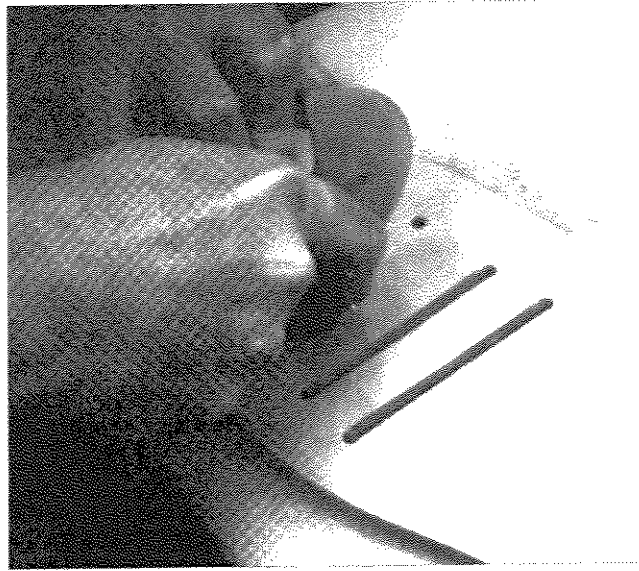


To start cutting out the loops, holes will be punched at each end of the slots. I use the #5 hole on the Osborne Rotary Punch. Punch the hole to the outside of the awl mark so your loops won't be narrower than your pattern. The edge of the punch ring should be right on the awl mark. This will make the loop slots slightly longer than the outline of the pouch.

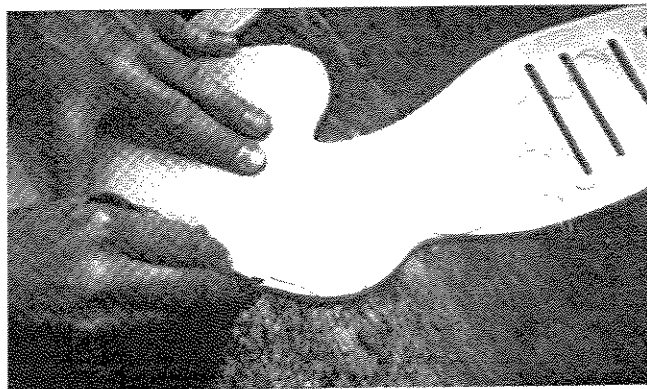


Lay a metal straight edge lining up the edges of each set of holes you have just punched. Connect the holes across from each other with

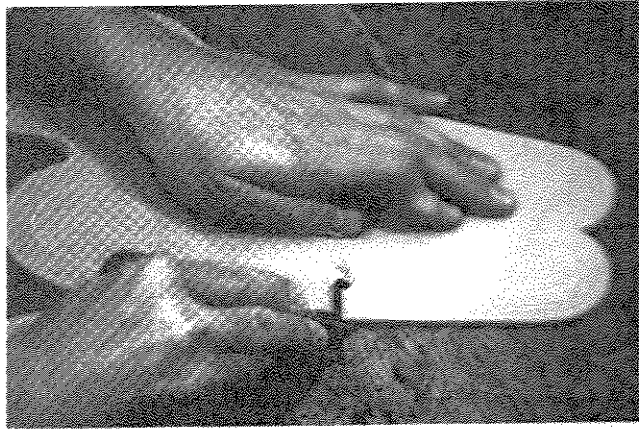
a cut. Stop cutting when you get close to the opposite hole. Cut back from that hole to the cut coming from the other hole. Now cut from the opposite sides of the holes the same way.



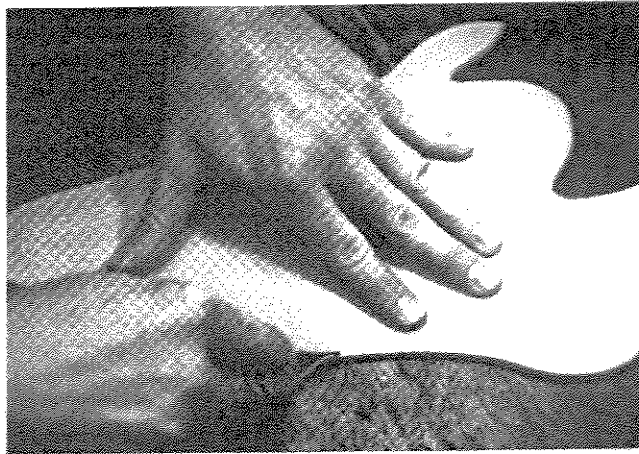
Cut all four sets of holes (if you are making two loops) the same way. If that is just too confusing to understand, look at the pictures.



The edge gouge takes out a thin gouge of leather leaving a shallow groove. This allows you to stitch in the groove so the thread won't take so much wear. It can also leave an ornamental groove to add accent to your holster. Set your edge gouge so it leaves a groove about 1/8" in from the edge. This will be the stitching groove. Run a groove all the way around the edge of the holster. I also like to run a groove along the edges of the loops in the skirt.



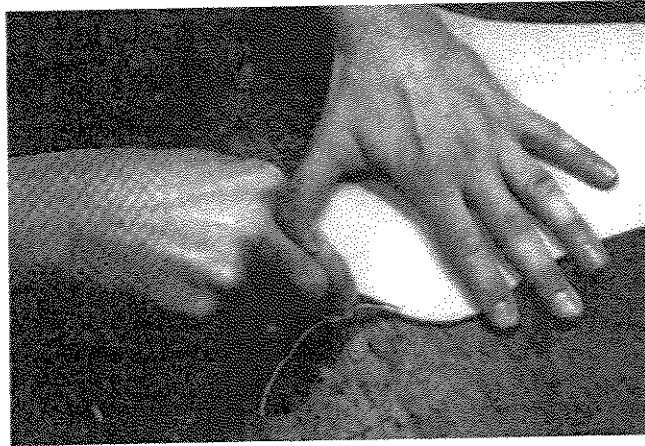
If you choose to, adjust the edge groover to put some decorative grooves in the interior of your holster.



With your #2 beveler you will round off the exterior edge of the holster to give it a more finished appearance. Starting at one point work your way around the holster. Then, bevel off the edges of the loops in the skirt.



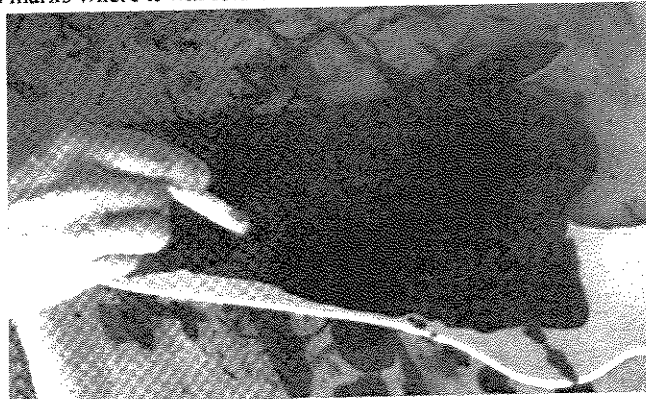
Fold the pouch over the way it will be sewn. Put a mark on the back side of the pouch where the recursive of the front of the pouch lines up with the edge.



Turning the holster over, bevel the back flesh side of the holster. Start with the recurve along the front of the pouch, around the skirt and ending at the mark you just made. Don't bevel down into the main stem of the pouch where it will be sewn together! You will have a gap in the finished holster that won't look nice if you do. Bevel off the back sides of the skirt loops too.

I'm not going to go into any detail about stamping or carving the holsters now. I will cover that when I have finished with making a basic plain holster. If you are interested in tooling holsters, write to George so I know if anyone even wants me to cover that aspect of holster making.

With water on a foam brush from the hardware store (they cost about 65 cents), wet down the skin side of the holster until it is evenly wet. Let it set about five minutes to soak in. Be careful when you are handling your leather now because you can leave marks in it easily. Gently fold the pouch over like it's going to be sewn. Put a light gradual crease in the fold. Doing this now while it is wet will keep it from possibly cracking later. Likewise, fold down the skirt behind the pouch so the loops line up on the pouch where you want them. This fold should be aggressively creased. This marks where it will fold over the belt. Unfold the leather and lay it flat to dry for several hours.



Now you are ready to dye the leather. I dye the back flesh side first. Get another foam brush and dip it in the dye. Working rapidly, cover the whole surface of the leather with dye. When everything has been dyed, start over and dye it again. I vary the brush strokes to get an even tone. I like to saturate the leather till it is even and not evaporating rapidly from the surface. Turn it over and dye the hide side the same way. Make sure the edges have some dye on them too. Set the leather on a clean brown paper bag without any printing on it. In a couple of hours it should be dry. Since this dye will stink up your house, you might want to do it outdoors. Don't do it in direct sunlight or leave it to dry in the sun. Make sure it's in the shade, but some place where birds won't mess on it or trees drip sap on it. I warn you of these things from experience.

Until our next step, see you on the range.

