



THE TRADITIONAL BUSTLE

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A key feature of the men's northern traditional dance outfit is the single swing or U-shaped bustle worn on the back of almost every dancer at the waist. Some dancers wear very simple small bustles that are almost round in shape, while others wear larger, more heavily decorated, "egg shaped" bustles. Tribal affiliation, personal style and choice of materials will determine the final look. Like any craft item, personal style allows each craftsman's work to be unique. This article outlines the construction of a simple, round bustle. It includes a basic material list, simple construction methods, and a few ideas to help you get started.

Supplies needed:

- turkey feathers: (40, 20 rights & 20 lefts)
- wooden dowel 3/16": (30 ft)
- wooden dowel 1/2": (1 ft)
- leather strips 1/4"x2": (40 pieces)
- shoe laces 36": (4)
- plywood 6"x 9"x 3/8": (1)
- wire (thick bailing wire) 2 ft piece: (1)
- embroidery thread / yarn / electrical tape
- trailer fabric (1/2 yd.)
- hot glue
- crazy glue
- belt
- tip decorations (horse hair/leather spots/fluffs/hackles / ribbon)

STEP 1

To start, make sure all of your feathers are the same length from the top to bottom. There should be 9 1/2" of feather showing, and 2 1/2" of bare quill left at the base, totaling 12" (Fig. 1). If your feathers are not the same length, you may have to trim them to the proper size. To do this strip away the excess part of the feather near the bottom, and then cut the quill to the desired length (Fig. 2). Repeat this for all your feathers.

Be sure:

- The length from the top to the bottom of the feathers is the same.
- The length from the top to the bottom of the bare quills is the same.
- The total length of your feathers is the same.

STEP 2 (Fig. 3)

- Measure down 1/2" from where the feather stops, and mark with a pen (m1).
- Measure down 1" from (m1) and mark with a pen (m2).
- You should have a measurement of 1 inch left at the bottom.
- Make a template to measure from, then mark all feathers.

STEP 3

- Cut the 3/16" wooden dowel into forty 9" sections.
- If the dowel is too big to fit inside the feather, you may need to carve it down slightly.
- Using your hot glue gun, shoot a small amount of glue into the bottom of the quill & push the wooden dowel inside the quill to the 1" mark (m2) (Fig. 4).
- With the dowels added, the new total length of the feather is 20".
- Make sure the (M1) marks still all line up evenly.

STEP 4

- Using the hot glue gun, attach a 2"x 1/4" leather strip to the bottom of the dowel in each feather creating a tight loop (Fig. 5). Repeat this on each feather.
- Take a piece of strong thread and wrap it several times around the leather loop to secure its placement.

STEP 5

- Using embroidery thread, wrap feathers from the leather loop, to your first mark near the top (m1) (Fig. 6). Be sure to knot and crazy glue the end of your thread to secure the wrappings.
- At this point you can decorate the tips of your feathers with a number of things (leather spots, horse hair, ribbon, fluffs, hackles, etc.). Tip decorations are not seen on all bustles.

STEP 6

OUTER BRIDLE

- Using an Exacto knife or filed down screwdriver, carefully cut a small slit through the quill of each feather in the ½" space above the (m1) mark (Fig. 6). Do this to all of your feathers.
- String a shoelace through the newly cut slot on half of the feathers (Fig. 7). To do this, take the shoelace and string it through all of the right side feathers. Be sure all feathers are facing the same way. Do the same to all of the left side feathers with another shoelace.
- String another shoelace through the bottom loops on the right side, then string the last shoelace through the bottom loops on the left side.

STEP 7

BACKBOARD – The backboard (Fig. 8) is a 3/8" thick piece of plywood that serves numerous functions:

1. It is the base to which the bridled feathers are attached.
2. It is where the wire "antennae" are secured. This is what the upper bridle is attached to.
3. It is what the trailers are attached to (at the bottom).
4. It is where the two large spike feathers that rise from the top of the bustle are attached (Fig 9).
5. It is where the belt that secures the bustle around your waist is attached.



Imitation eagle feather traditional bustle. Feathers were air-brushed at home by craftsman Mike Tippetts.

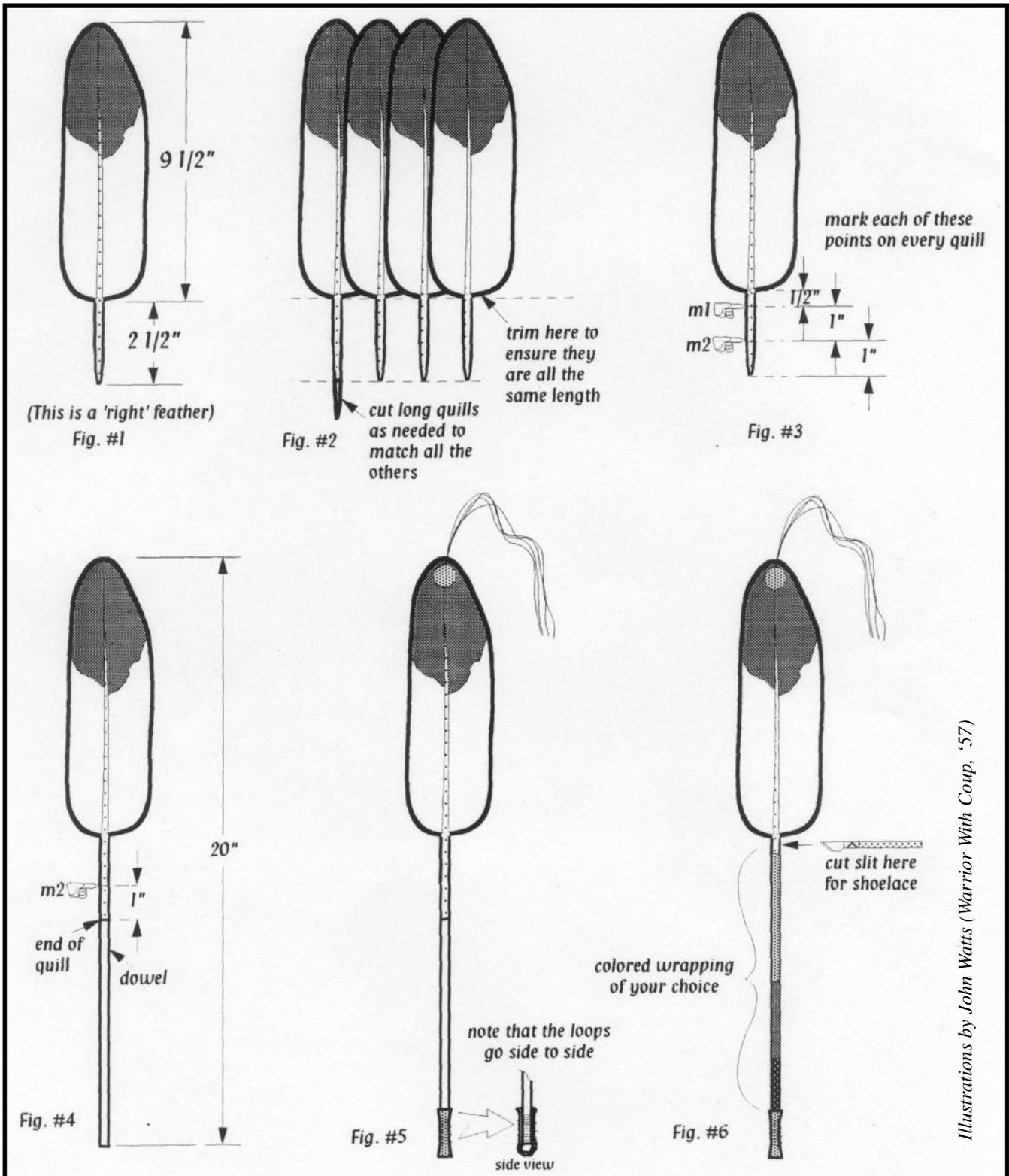
The bottom bridle is attached to the backboard through two holes in the top and the bottom. It may also be secured to the backboard on the sides, depending on how "loose" the wearer wants the bustle to be. The wire antennae which come from the top of the backboard are where the outer bridles are tied. The angle at which these wires are bent will determine much of the shape of the finished bustle.

SPIKE FEATHERS – Two large spike feathers, a left and a right, are attached to the top of the backboard. These are attached to a separate pair of wire antennae, which simply slide inside the hollow center of the feather. These feathers can be left plain, or decorated heavily with horse hair, otter fur, quill work, hawk bells, etc.

TRAILERS – Trailers (Fig. 10) are frequently attached to the bottom of the backboard. They are usually made from a 12" wide piece of wool which drops to about six inches above the floor. The trailer can be left plain or decorated with leather fringe, beadwork, featherwork, quillwork, etc.



Cover graphic from the 1966 Spring Ceremonial Program. Drawn by Larry Fisher, Medicine Man, 1966-67.



Editors note: While it is still legal for Native Americans to possess feathers and body parts of eagle and other predatory birds, it is not legal for non-Indians. Bald eagles have been protected by the Federal Migratory Bird Act since 1940 and golden eagles since 1962. The only legal way for non-Indians to possess eagle feathers is to have acquired them prior to the above mentioned dates and be able to prove it.

As supplies of feathers disappeared, creative efforts have been made to develop the best imitation eagle feathers possible. All imitation eagle feathers are made using white turkey feathers. Indian traders will sell these for between \$1.00 and \$6.50 per feather, depending on the quality. For the ambitious, reproduction eagle feathers can be produced at home. Plain white turkey feathers can be bought inexpensively at any craft or Indian supply store. Experts believe that a mixture of black and dark brown leather dyes most closely duplicates the eagle color. Air brushing is the best technique for applying the stain to achieve the light to dark highlighting seen on eagle feathers. An artist's brush

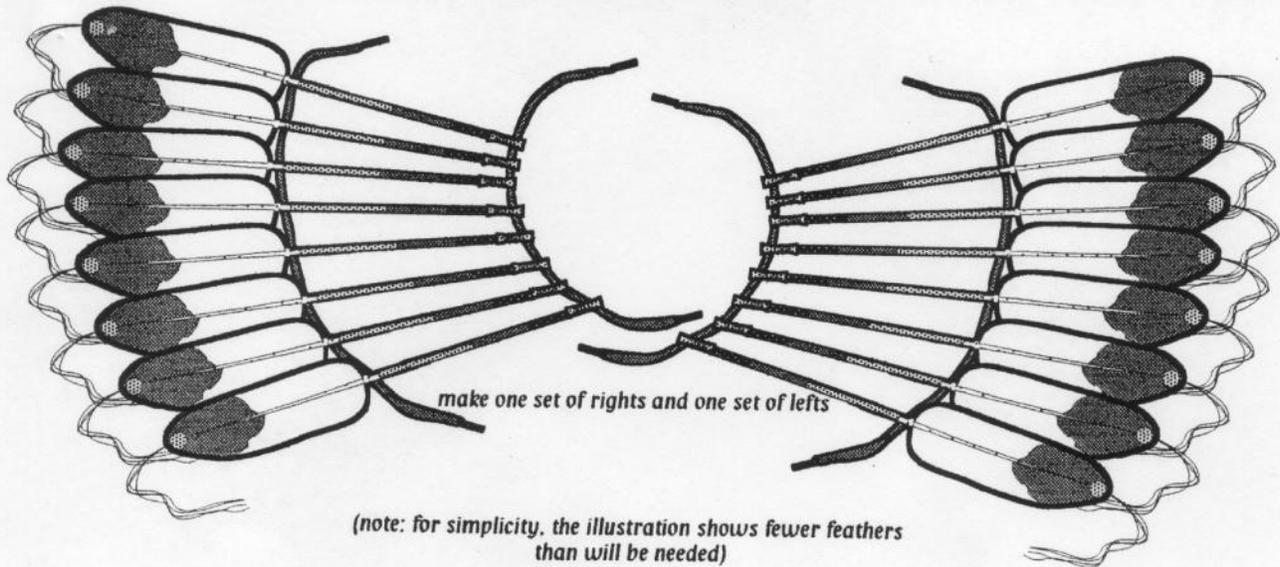


Fig. #7

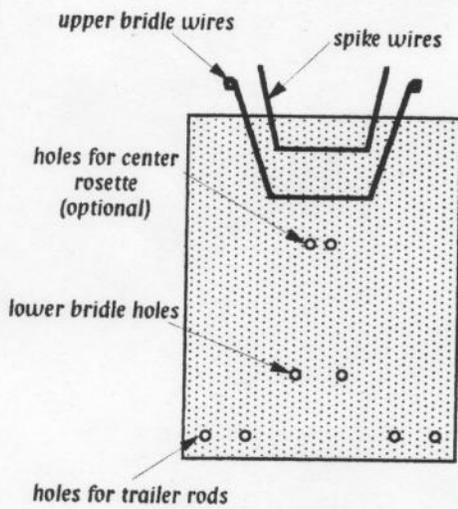


Fig. #8

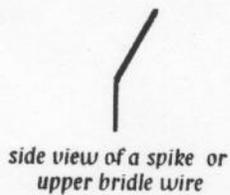


Fig. #9

The wire 'U' shape must lie flat on the backboard so they may be tied down tightly, to remain upright. Bend the wires as shown in this side view.

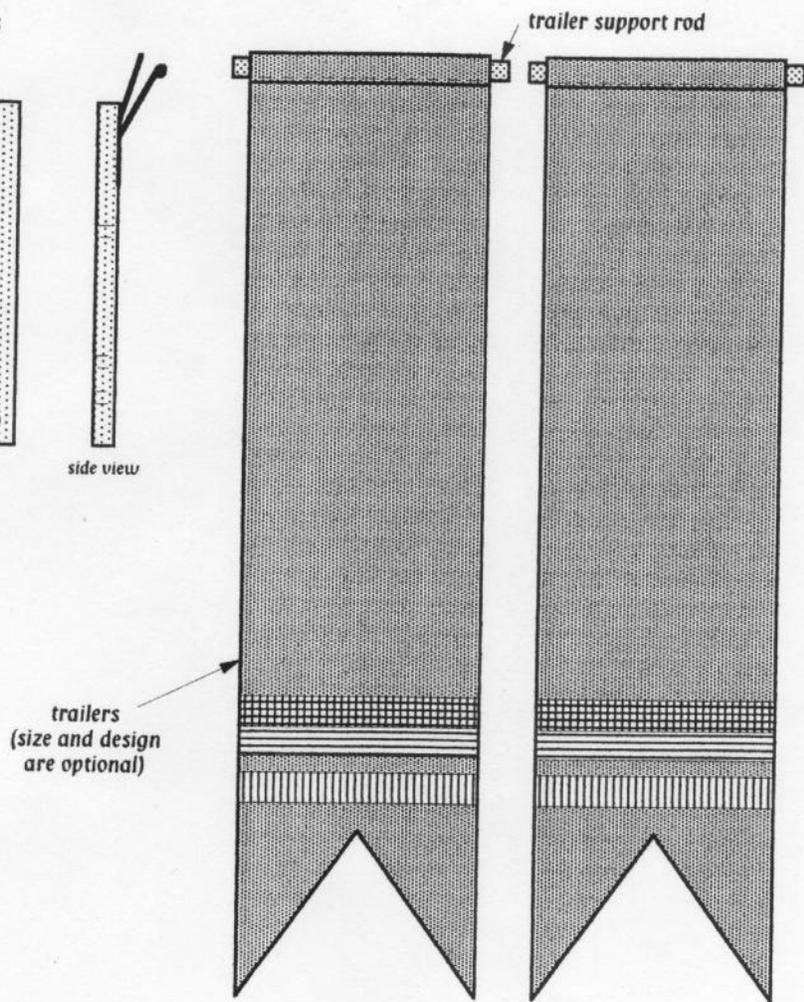


Fig. #10

is used to work the color into the feather. You will need to get some good photographs of real eagle feathers from museums or Indian powwows to use as a model for painting your feathers. This may seem like a lot of work to go to, but it could be fun and save you a lot of money on projects requiring large numbers of feathers.

Remember that there are some legal feathers such as wild turkey, goose, pheasant, mica, etc. that can be used on certain types of feather projects, but if it's the eagle look you want, you can have it within certain limits.