

# Dùts'ūm Edhó Ts'ètsi Yū Dän K'í



## How to Tan Hides in the Native Way

By GERTIE TOM

Whitehorse, Yukon: 1981

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## How to Tan Hides in the Native Way

Text in English and Northern Tutchone Athapaskan

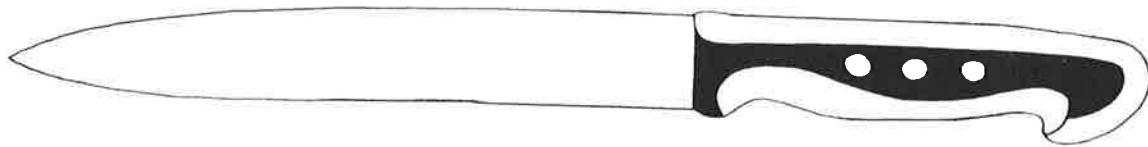
By GERTIE TOM

Drawings by SUSAN McCALLUM

Whitehorse, Yukon: 1981

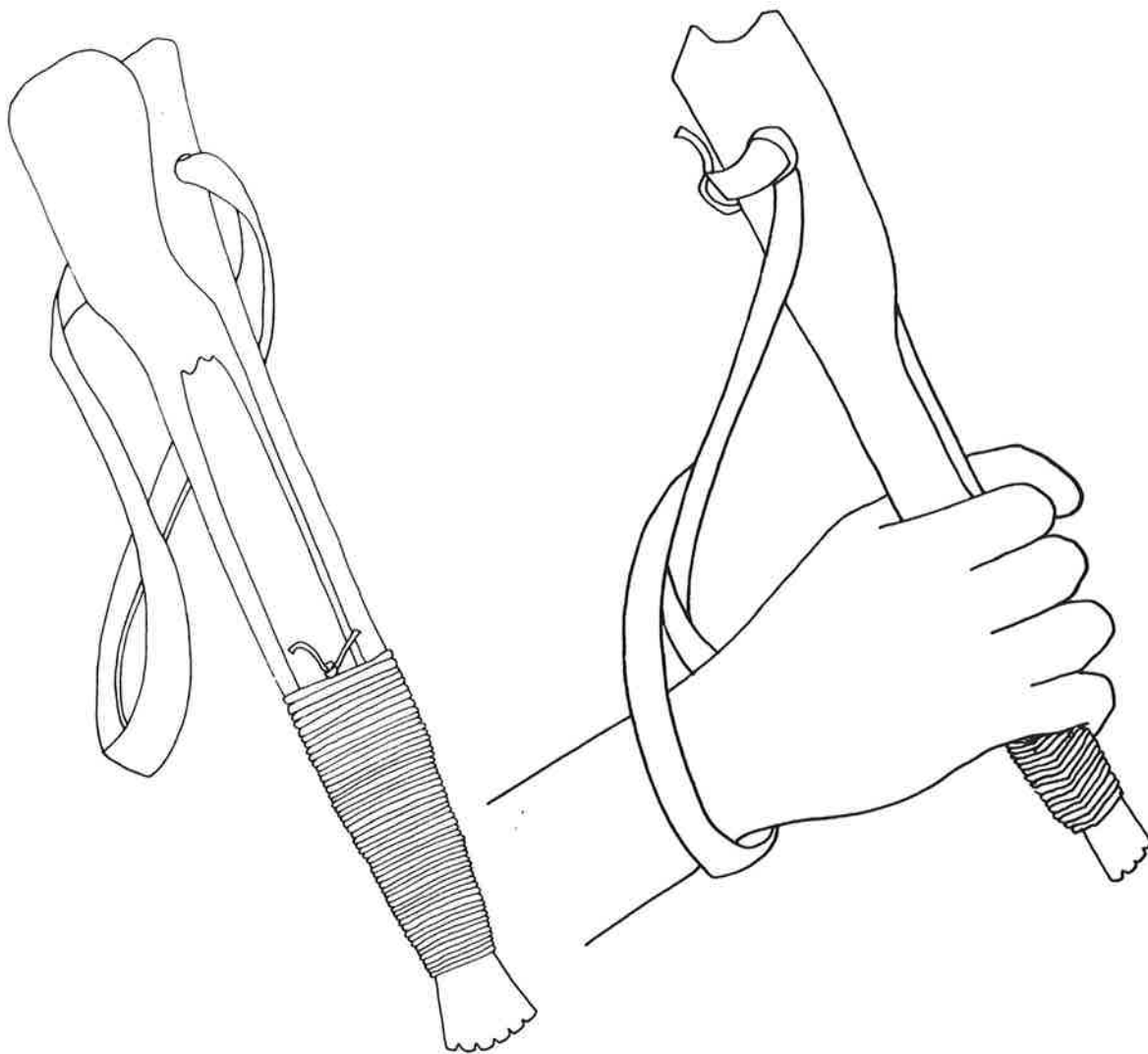


Hátthi edhó hande néts'et'á eyet yich'ō ts'è'in dechän udo lek'ets'enèkhel hék'i eyet dechän lek'ets'enèkhel eyet ka, uyé ts'än dats'echu. HéK'i mbra dét'ó eyet yí uyé háchō ch'ō háts'et'á. Lúmch'ō uka hùmtl'ro huts'ín háts'et'á.



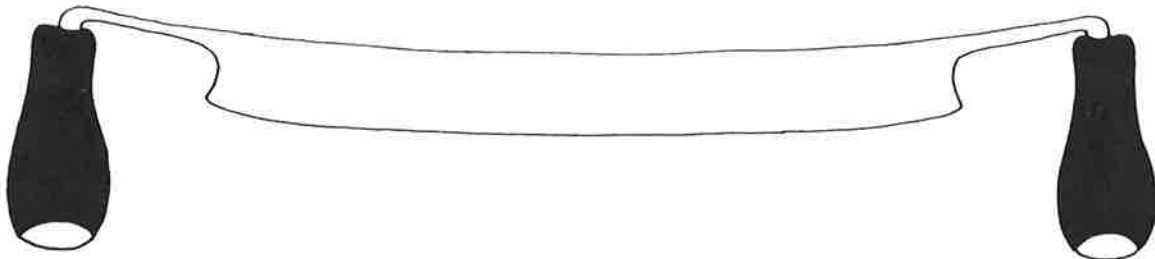
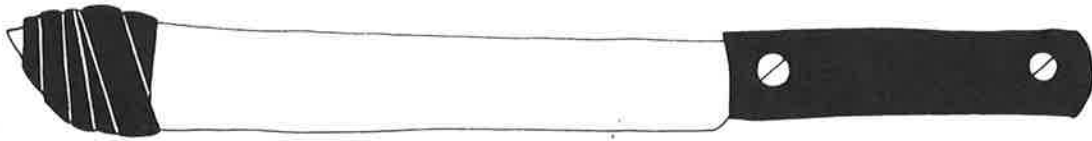
The first thing you do is cut off the moose skin. Then you cut a small tree (about five feet from the ground, like a stump) and you sharpen the end. Hang the skin on that, hair side up (so you can cut off the hair). You need to have a really sharp knife to do this. Shave the hair off with a knife until the whole skin is smooth on the hair side.

Eyet t'l'ák'ē t'l'áaläts'edèchu hék'i, utangél ts'an t'l'áaläts'edèchu k'ē eyet tāngwät yéts'enin uyí edhó táts'edeget yéts'enin, tāngwät yéts'enin, eyet yí táts'edeget háts'è'in táts'edeget ch'ō láki dzenú inlátāte uyí húmlin, eyet edhó táts'edeget ch'ō, dech'át né k'ē.

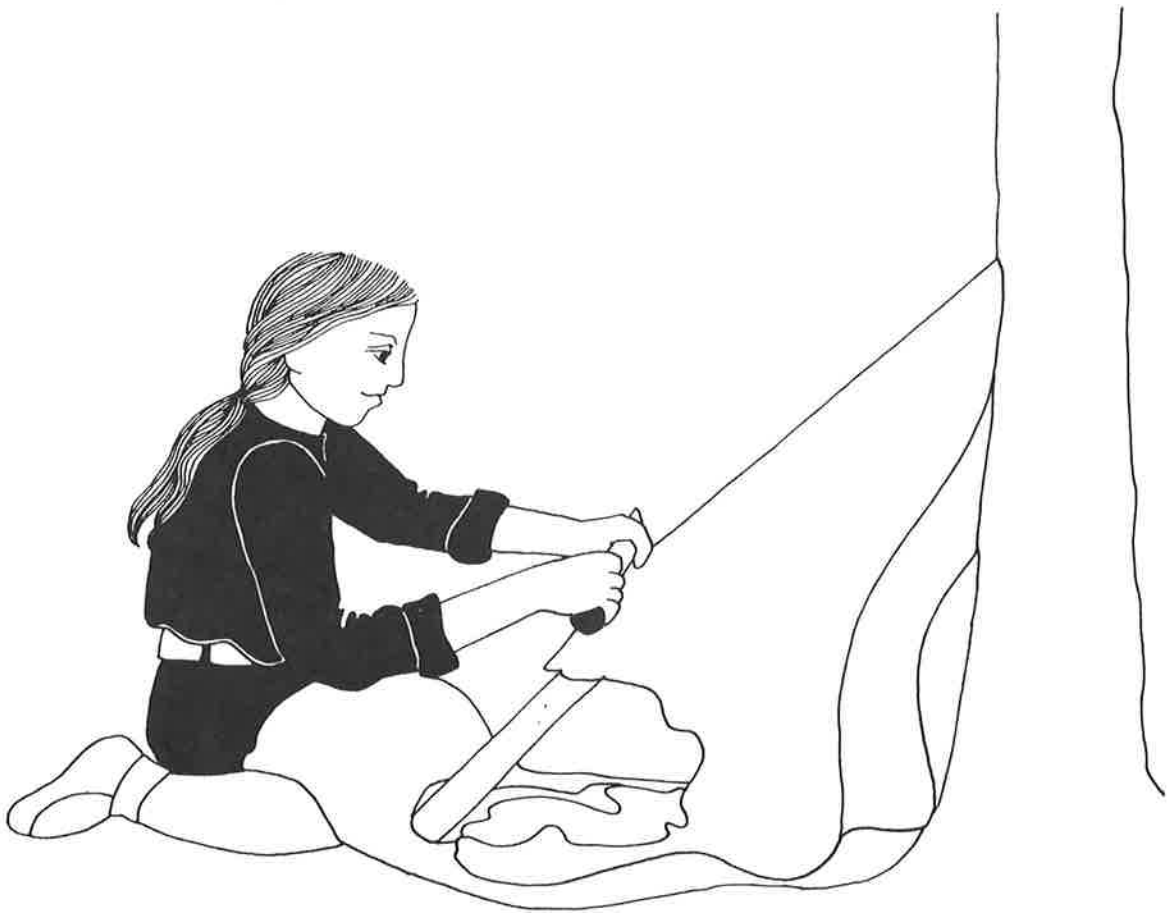


Then after you do that, you turn it over so that the meat is up. Now you need tools to scrape the flesh off. You use a *tāngwät* (a tool to scrape off the flesh) to scrape the meat. It takes about two days to clean the meat off if the skin is tough.

Tl'ákú háchō ch'ō táts'edeget, eyet tl'ák'ē dechän et'ándhât yéts'enin, dechän uka hùmtl'ro héech'i yéts'enin, et'ándhât yéts'enin, edhó uka ts'edeghá héech'i yéts'enin et'ándhât yéts'enin. Eyet ka hunētats'edechù k'e ts'edeghá, ts'edeghá sóothan mbra ts'intán k'ē ts'edeghá ech'i.



After it is completely fleshed, you take a smooth flat board used for thinning down the skin. The board is call an *et'ándhât*. (It has to be really smooth; if it is rough you might make holes in the skin.) You hang your skin over that *et'ándhât* and you thin it down. You have to hold your knife really carefully as you're thinning it down.



Eyet eju sóothän mbra intán ch'é k'ē mbra ninyę yū denùtth'et ch'é k'ē edhó yumt'á ch'é sóothän ch'ō mbra ts'intán k'ē, łumch'ō tth'uhudé'e k'ē ts'edeghá hék'i sóothän degá ech'i. Eyet tl'á tl'ákú ts'edeghá k'ē eyet nats'edeghá eyet tl'ák'ē edhó ugé ts'edenji, łeládedékát ke dūm jedekát yū héedluma uka ts'edeghá háts'è'in ch'ō ech'in edhó háchō ch'ō ts'edeghá.

Hūdän nindhän ch'é k'ē, edhó eyet héech'i edhó dútséla eyet ka hudinghá háninch'in ch'ō hūmdän hę hùts'ūm ijé hídän. Ène hùts'ūm ts'ech'in edhó ts'edeghá sénin, eyet edhó yaátsi k'ē ts'étláw ch'ō uyákhe hìde k'ē uk'ānìte, eyet ghá ìch'i edhó ìtsi yînjí.

If you don't hold your knife really well it could turn toward you and cut through the skin. You have to hold it really straight (with two hands) and bring it down really straight. You bring your knife down time after time. Then, you feel the skin with your hand to get it all down to the same thickness. If there is a little bump anywhere, smooth it down. Make it all even. (You mustn't do it too hard, just a little bit at a time until it's all the same thickness; otherwise you will make it too thin.)

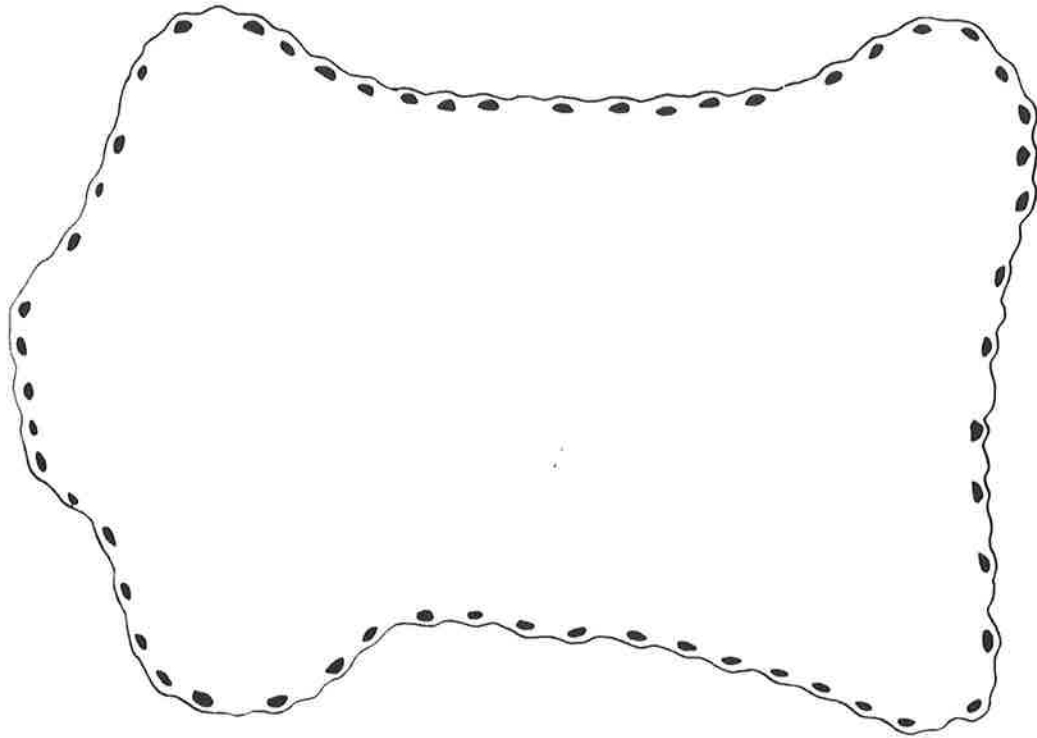
If you want to learn, you have to practise on a small skin. You need lots of practice to learn to make a skin. If you keep practising, you will learn how to do it. That's how I learned. I used to watch my mother when she made a skin. I sat right close to her and watched her. That's how I learned myself, just from watching her.



Tl'ákú háchō edhó ts'edeghá eyet tl'ák'ē leládedekát hék'i eyet tl'ák'ē umbé uyáts'et'á háchō ch'ō umbé, háchō ch'ō eyet umbé uyáts'et'á eyet yí ts'è'in nats'enégó eyet ke ts'è'in umbé uyáts'et'á.



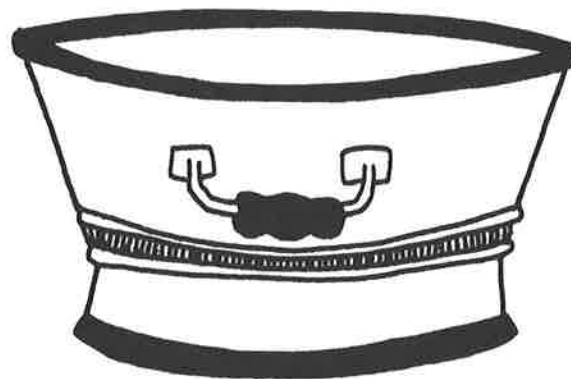
Now, when you're finished, the skin should be the same thickness all over. (You should feel it all over, checking it over carefully.) That's when you make holes all around the edge (not too big — maybe two inches). You do that to help wring it out.

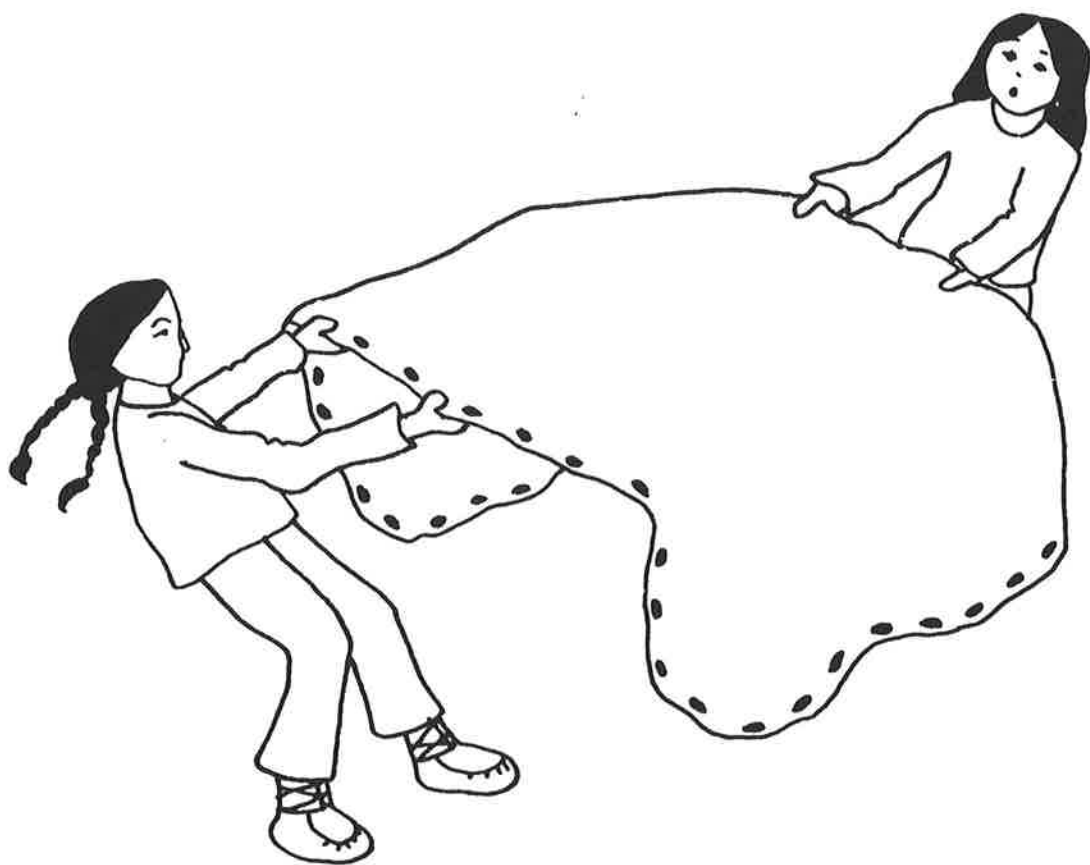


When you have made the holes, put the skin in water. (Work it like the old timers did when they washed their clothes by hand.) You do that so all the blood will come out of the skin. Keep changing the water. When the water is clear, then you can take it out. Then you have to wring it out. After you wring it out, then stretch it right open to take all the folds and wrinkles out. Pull it apart really hard with your hands. (If you can, have two people, one pulling on each side.) Then you can really straighten out that skin. After that, hang it over a pole until the skin is dry.

(Next you need a smokehouse for the skin.)

Tl'ákú umbé háchō ch'ō uyáts'et'á, eyet tl'ák'ē chu te chets'èchu, chu te chets'èchu k'ē háts'enegó eyet udāl ke, dāl huts'èchò elin ech'i eyet háts'è'in ch'ō yū uyę yeláts'enenji láts'e'in ch'ō, háchō ch'ō dāl uts'in hátl'ét ech'i, edhó. Eyet tl'ák'ē, eyet chu innáts'atl'ál dúk'i lúmch'ō chu enju dāl elin hék'i dúkhwán ts'è'in táts'èchu k'ē nats'enegó eyet tl'ák'é nats'enegó eyet tl'ák'ē nánts'ech'í sóothän eju létanuughäl eyet do nánts'ech'í hék'i, eyet tl'ák'ē tl'ák'ú srú ka dáts'èchu k'ē eyet srú ka egän.

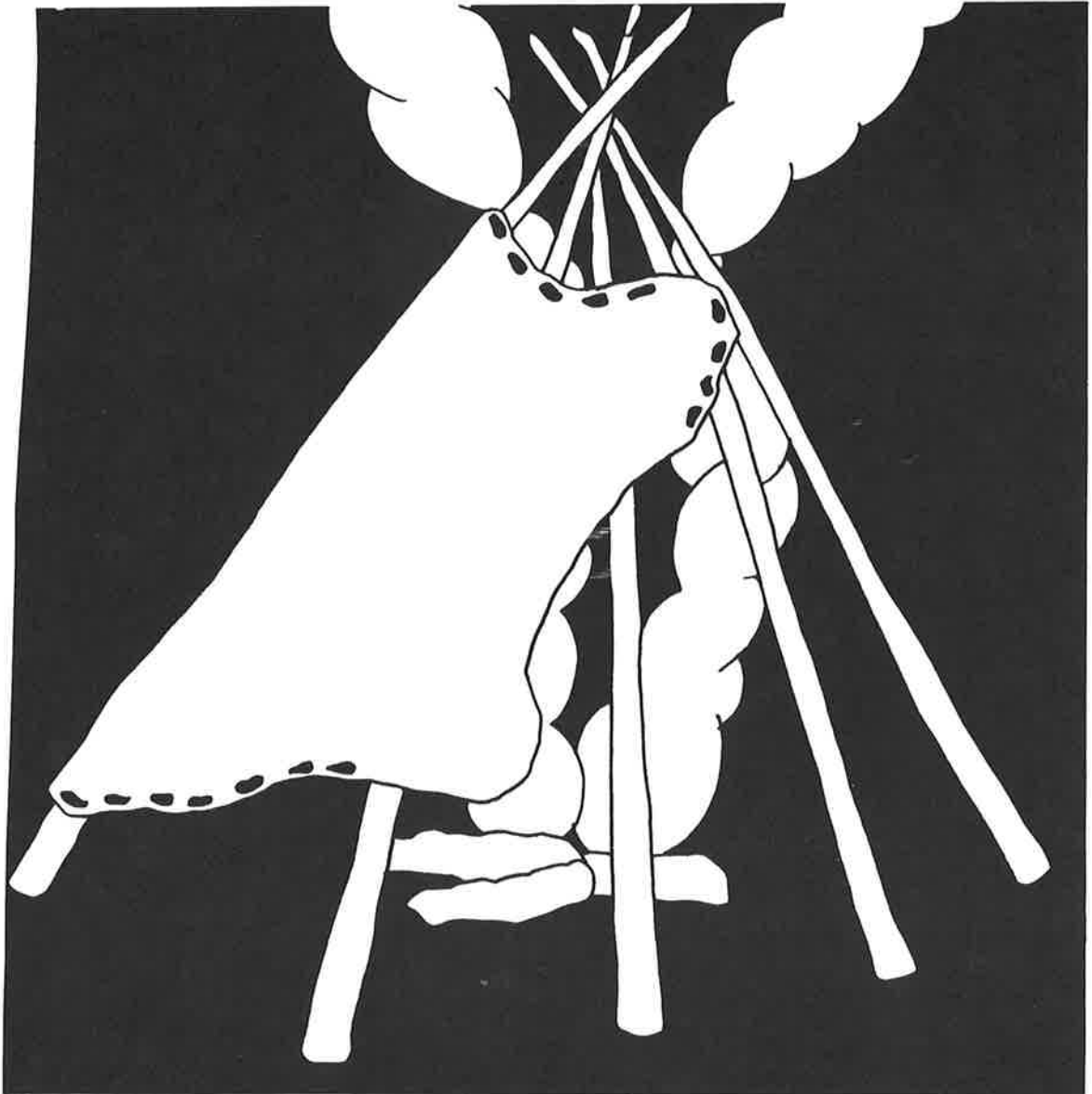




Sóothän egän hék'i ts'è'in udo dechän dàts'èlí eyet dechän udo dechän létats'enelí eyet edhó, edhó uka dàts'ùchu do. Edhó ut'át tats'edèkhè, edhó ut'át tats'edèkhé. Eyet udo, dechän udo, dechän létats'enèlí eyet ka ts'è'in edhó dàts'èchu k'è, ut'e tsän ninjät ts'edek'é, tso injät héech'i ts'è'in sóothän eju ut'e kwán húmlin k'è làts'í thānch'ō elin k'è háts'e'in ch'ō, uk'áts'enète edhó tadeyé léech'i k'è hék'i eyet tl'ák'è tl'áaläts'edèchu k'è lík'o chūm tats'edèkhe, sóothän tadeyé.

Eyet tl'ák'è ts'è'in tl'ákú chu héedluma udo ts'enèthel k'e, etthéyé ute chets'egó. Chu dek'al léech'i huts'in, eyet etthéyé udo chets'egó k'è eyet te chets'èchu edhó. Edhó natsäl k'è eyet tl'ák'e tl'ákú edhó natsäl k'è, sóothän nánts'ech'í, eyet tl'ák'è ts'ezru, ts'ezru háts'è'in lúmch'ō háchō ch'ō eyet edhó elin ts'úmch'ō, uka háchō ch'ō nánts'ech'í k'è edhó ts'ezru, ts'ezru ts'in ech'i edhó detro huts'in nányéts'ech'í.

After your skin is dry, gather up some poles and put them together like you would for a tipi. (You hang the skin over this.) You make a fire inside to smoke the skin. To smoke it, get really rotten wood that is falling apart. Make your fireplace underneath. When you make your fire under the skin, make sure there is no fire actually burning — just smoke to smoke the skin. You have to really watch it. When it's smoked on one side, turn it over and smoke the other side. (It takes all day to smoke a skin: half a day for each side.)

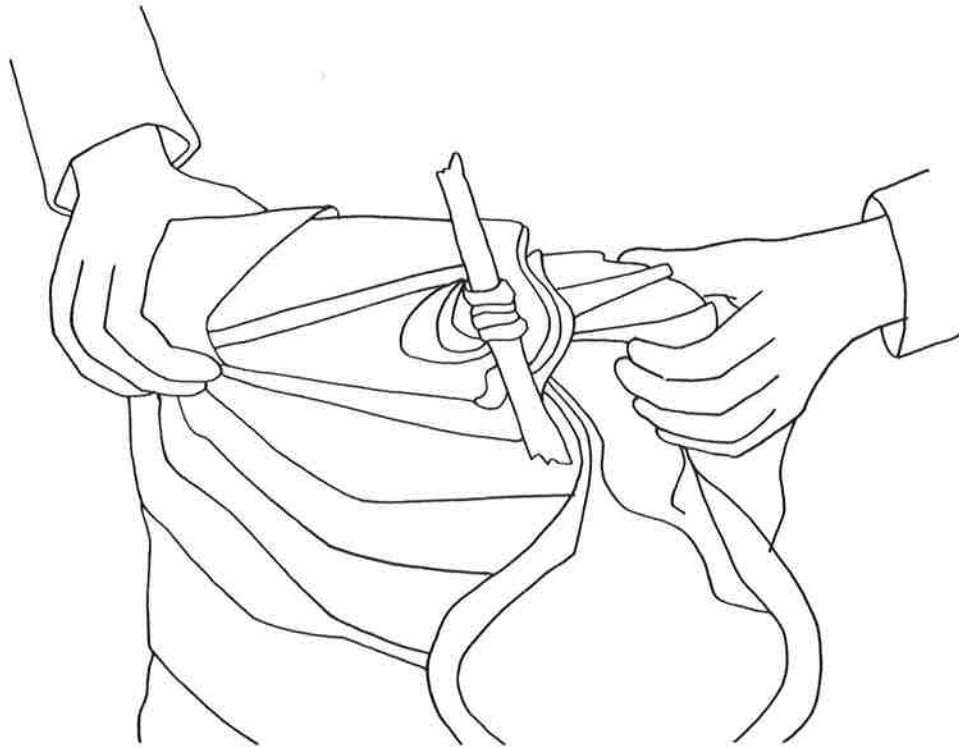




When it's smoked, you warm some water to lukewarm. You put in the rotten brains. (Put the brains in a sack and put the sack in the water.) Squeeze it into the water until the water looks white like milk. Then you put the skin in that brain water until the skin is soaked. When it is really soaked, start stretching it. Keep working it with your hands (just as though you were washing clothes). Stretch it all over, the whole thing. Keep doing that to the skin; don't leave any part. Stretch it, work it, until it starts to get soft. The more you stretch the skin, the softer it gets. After that, when you know the skin is all soaked, take it out of the water.

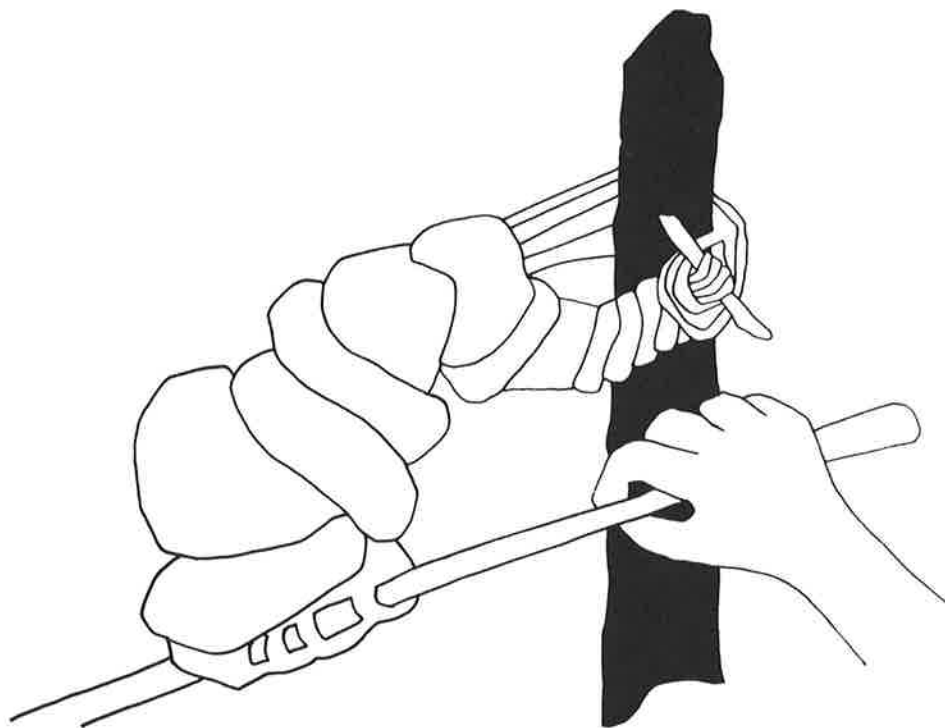




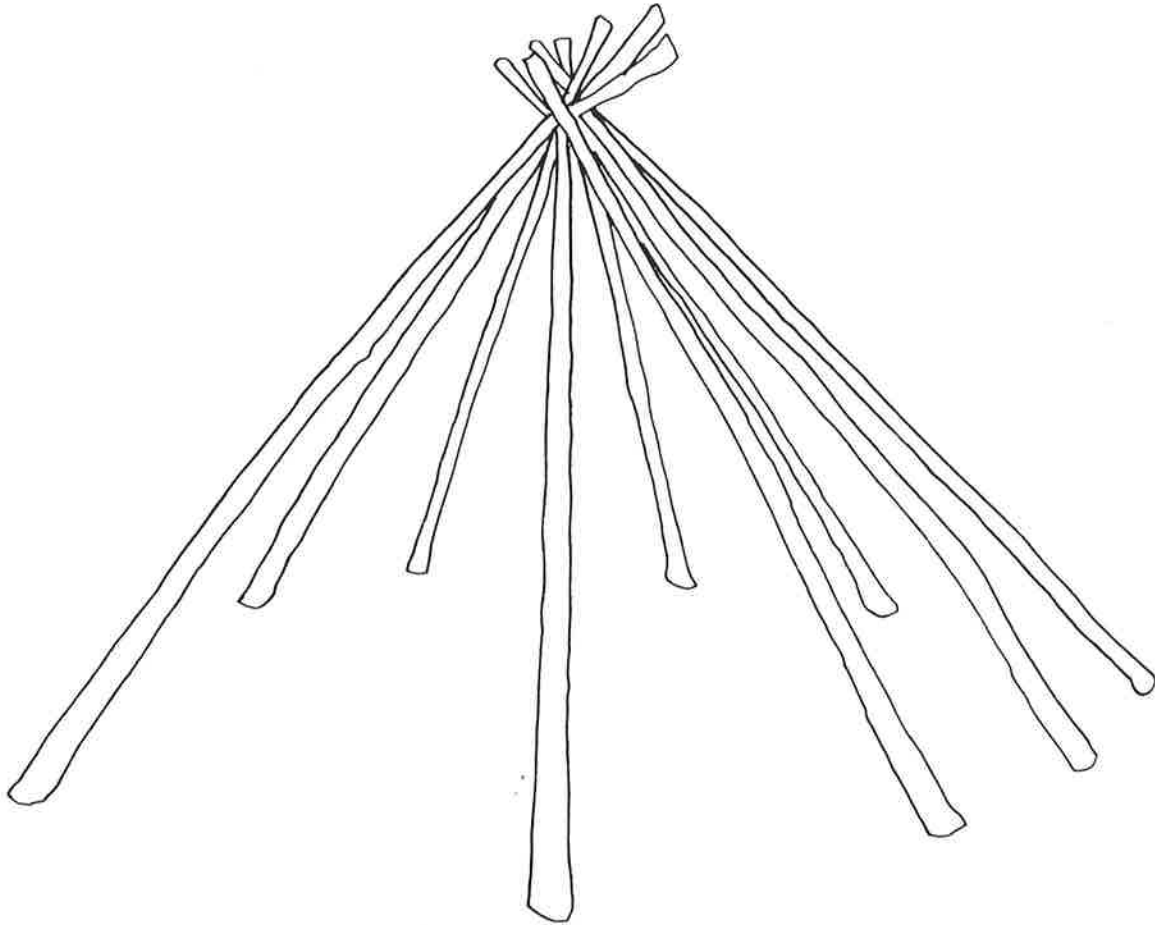


When you take it out of the water, take the little sticks call *int'ékael ts'edènji*. Using them, tuck the neck and the arm of the moose skin together through those little holes you made. That's why you made those little holes around the edge of the skin. It makes it easier to wring the skin out. On the rump side, you have another sharp pointed stick called *tó* (about five feet long), something like a walking stick so you can go through the holes. Then, after you tuck the skin together, you use the stump to wring out the skin. Peel the bark from the stump. Put the skin over the stump so you can wring it out. Now you start to wring out the skin. You have to do it really hard with all your strength. Wring the skin out and then stretch it open. After you twist it, let it stay there for a while and make sure all the water comes out. Then stretch it open and hang it over a pole. When it dries a little bit, you do the same thing again.

Tl'ákú sóothän chenëtsäl k'ë déchūm ch'ō, táats'èchu k'ë eyet edhó uyí int'ékael ts'edènji yéts'enin dechän dúk'wána yéts'enin. Eyet hande k'o la hande gámbát eyet la yí, eyet yí eyet uyáts'et'á ch'án húyū eyet yí, húyū ts'è'in int'ékael ts'edènji k'ë edhó uyí nats'enégó dinnts'an utl'é ts'an hék'ë tó eyet yí eyet ute ts'edeget eyet uyenat'a yū hék'i udo nùmchän sóothän kech'ūm ts'èkhél eyet ka hunēta ts'edechu k'ë, edhó uka nats'enégó, línach'ō náts'etsáda huts'in ch'ō edhó nats'enégó k'e, hék'i sáw ts'echo nánts'ech'í k'ë, sáw elin edhó. Eyet tl'ák'ë déchūm sóothän náninch'í, tl'ákú nanégó eyet tl'ák'ë chu uts'in detl'ét, ch'i k'ë eyet tl'ák'ë náninch'í, eyet tl'ák'ë déchūm ch'ō srú ka dehínchú ch'é k'ë srú ka dehínchú ch'é k'ë hegän ch'é k'ë.



Déchūm ch'ō uk'í ch'o háats'è'in déchūm netats'edèkhé. Udo dohuts'edēle, eyet ka edhó dāts'èchù k'ē, eyet ut'e lāts'í ts'edēk'án, eyet tsān ninjāt yéts'enin, eyet tso injāt eyet ts'in ts'edek'án. Eju kwán ut'e húmlin k'ē kwán edzā ech'i, kwán edhó k'edèlet eyet ke, eju kwán ut'e húmlin k'ē. Lāts'í thānch'ō ut'e húmlin k'ē sóothān uk'áts'enète tadeyé háts'è'in ch'ō huts'in háts'è'in ch'ō.



Then you begin to smoke it a little again (to soften it up). Put the skin over the smokehouse again and make a fire of rotten wood underneath. Don't have a flame under it, just smoke, or you will burn the skin. Keep the smoke going and look after it.

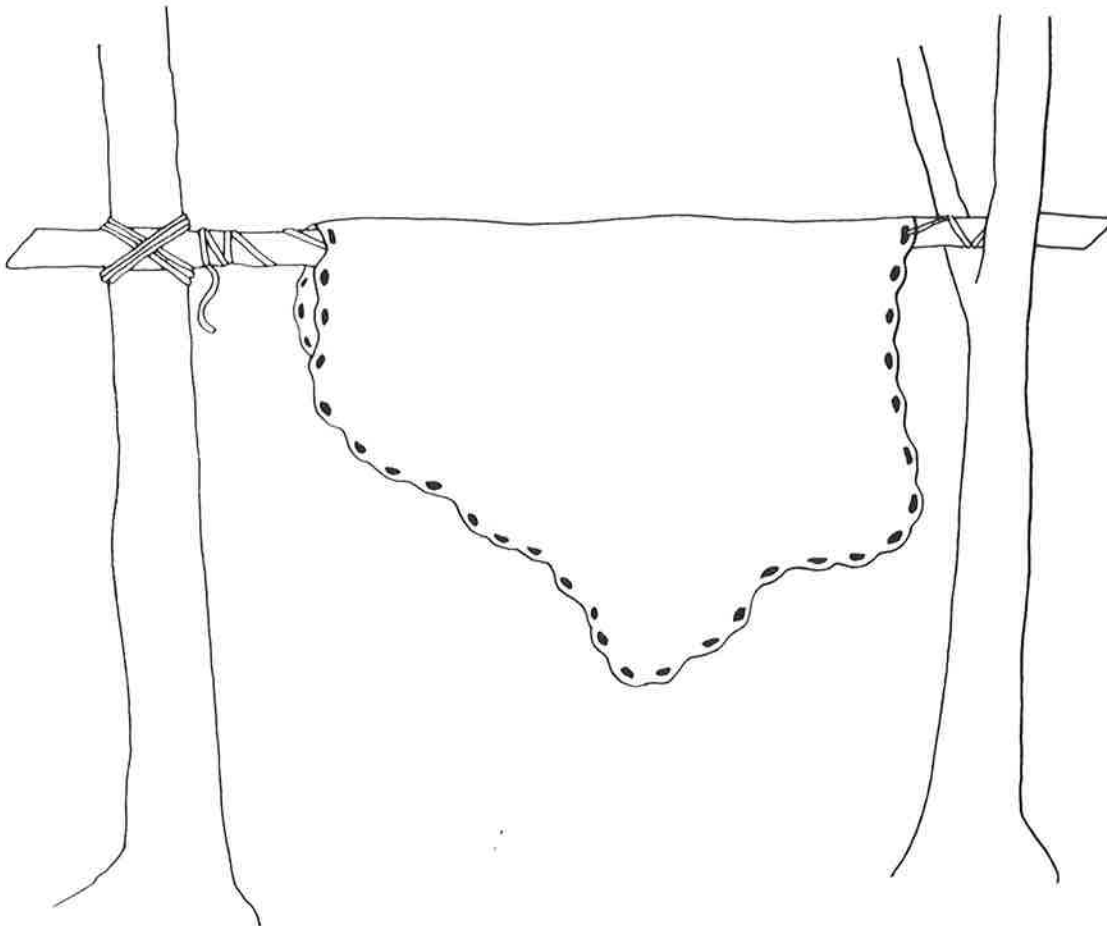
Dúch'ete edhó detro hék'i ts'è'in dúkwān t'l'ákú edhó detro k'ē, edhó detro k'ē ech'in, chets'èchu ch'ō háchō ch'ō edhó chenètsāl. HéK'i hetl'e t'l'ákú edhó detro k'ē ech'in, eyet t'l'ák'ē t'l'ákú daddho k'ē, hék'i chets'èchu k'ē háchōch'ō chenètsāl.

Déchūm ch'ō nánts'ech'í k'ē, ts'ezru ts'ezru nánts'ech'í, eyet t'l'ák'ē t'l'ákú sóothān ch'ō nats'enégó. Tlīnach'ō uts'ín náts'etsāt k'ē sáw edhó. Tl'ákú déchūm ch'ō, dechān ka dedzāts'edèchu k'ē, sóothān ch'ō nats'enégó. Lúmch'ō chu uts'ín háchōch'ō hóotl'ét huts'ín ch'ō ts'è'in. Hátthi, hátthi nats'enégó līnach'ō. Eyet t'l'ák'ē déchūm ch'ō t'l'áaānats'enégó k'ē, déchūm indūmts'ūm nats'enégó, eyet edhó dóhúch'i yéhedlāt yū, hut'élāts'elí hut'át huts'ín huyū nánugó do.

If you keep repeating that, your skin will finally turn soft. You can tell when your skin is soft this way: when you put your skin in the water and it *all* gets soaked, then your skin is soft enough. That's when you know the skin is ready to tan.

Again, stretch it open and work it with your hands (as though you were washing clothes). Then wring it out really hard. You have to wring it really hard to get all the water out. Again, hang it over the stick and wring it out really hard until all the water comes out. Then, turn it inside out and wring it again. Wherever there are wet spots, tuck them in and wring out.

Eyet t'ák'ē t'ákú hátl'é eyet yí tadech'ō ch'ō innāts'edengó. Tl'ákú hátl'é eyet yí innāts'edenegó k'ē, héedluma nats'enegó, eyet chu háchōch'ō utotl'ét do. Tl'ákú sóothän nanégó hék'i tl'ē, tl'ákú daddho hék'i ech'in. Tl'ákú daddhò k'ē, nánts'ech'í, eyet t'ák'ē, srú ka dāts'èchu k'e, dāts'enètl'ú hék'i ukágän héedluma ukágän huts'ín dats'èchú.



You wring it out three separate times (each time twist it a different way). Then the last time, wring it out just a little bit so the water will go back into the skin. Then it's ready to tan. Put it over a pole until it starts to dry a little bit.



Tl'ák'ē héedluma ukágän léenji k'ē, tthi, tthecháél eyet yí ts'edho, ts'edho. Tl'áaläts'edächu ts'edho, hádegän léech'i né k'ē. Chenégän léech'i né k'ē ts'ezru, ts'ezru háts'è'in ch'ō edhó háchōch'ō eddho ech'i. Tl'ákú deningän hék'i eju huts'èchò ts'edho héedluma ts'edho, ts'edho, tl'ákú sóothän egän k'ē, hék'i ts'è'in mezän tthecháél, ughú húmlin, eyet yí ts'edho. Eyet uka utrō háchōch'ō tats'edenūdho do. Utrō háchōch'ō uka hátl'ét k'ē. Eyet edhó uka lúmch'ō hùmtl'ro léech'i ech'i hék'i hùts'üm háts'è'in tl'ē hùts'üm ène hesindän k'í dìsin dándäl hùnday edhó yę hùts'üm tl'ē, uk'ánìte k'ē edhó sóothän ètsi ech'i né, eyet ghá ìch'in sùhum hìdan hesindän ech'i sóothan edhó ts'ètsi.

Tl'ákú edhó ts'edho. Tl'ákú edhó sóothän tats'edenèdho k'ē, hék'i íntl'ro léech'i k'ē, hék'i ts'è'in tl'ákú náts'echu k'ē umbé, umál sàts'enèt'á, umbé háchōch'ō sàts'enèt'á, eyet tl'ák'e inlets'edēlu k'ē, inlets'edēlu k'ē, tats'edenùthtu do.

When it starts to dry a little bit, then take the *tthecháél* — the flat tanning rocks. Keep turning it over, scraping it, working it as it starts to dry. When it starts to dry, scrape it a little with those *tthecháél* (tanning rocks) and with a special tool with steel teeth. As it softens up, fuzz will come out until the whole thing is really completely smooth. That's how my mother taught me and that's how I am telling you. I used to watch her really carefully. That's how I learned to make a good skin myself.

When all the fuzz comes out of the skin and it's smooth, take it down from the pole. Cut around the edge of the skin with scissors and cut the holes you have made. Then start sewing the sides together (from the armholes to the rump) so you can smoke it.



Metal hide scraper



Stone scraper (*tthecháèl*)



Sew old cloth, like canvas, around the bottom of the skin so you can keep it off the ground. On top, put two strings through the skin so that you can put a stick across to hold the skin open. You tie the skin to that stick in two places. Then, have another string from the top to tie that top pole which holds up the skin.

Then you start making a hole in the ground so you can smoke the skin there. All around the hole, you need to force in green willow sticks, about twelve of them. (They should not be too big. Sharpen the ends so you can put the skin over them.) You have those sticks at the bottom to hold the cloth so the skin will never get burned. They hold the skin open.

Now, make a fire in the hole before you put the skin over it. You need really old rotten wood. Mix it together with dry cones. This rotten wood and pine cones together makes the skin reddish. If you use only rotten wood, it makes the skin yellow. Don't put the skin over the hole until you have a really big smoke, just smoke alone, no fire. Then you put the skin over that hole.

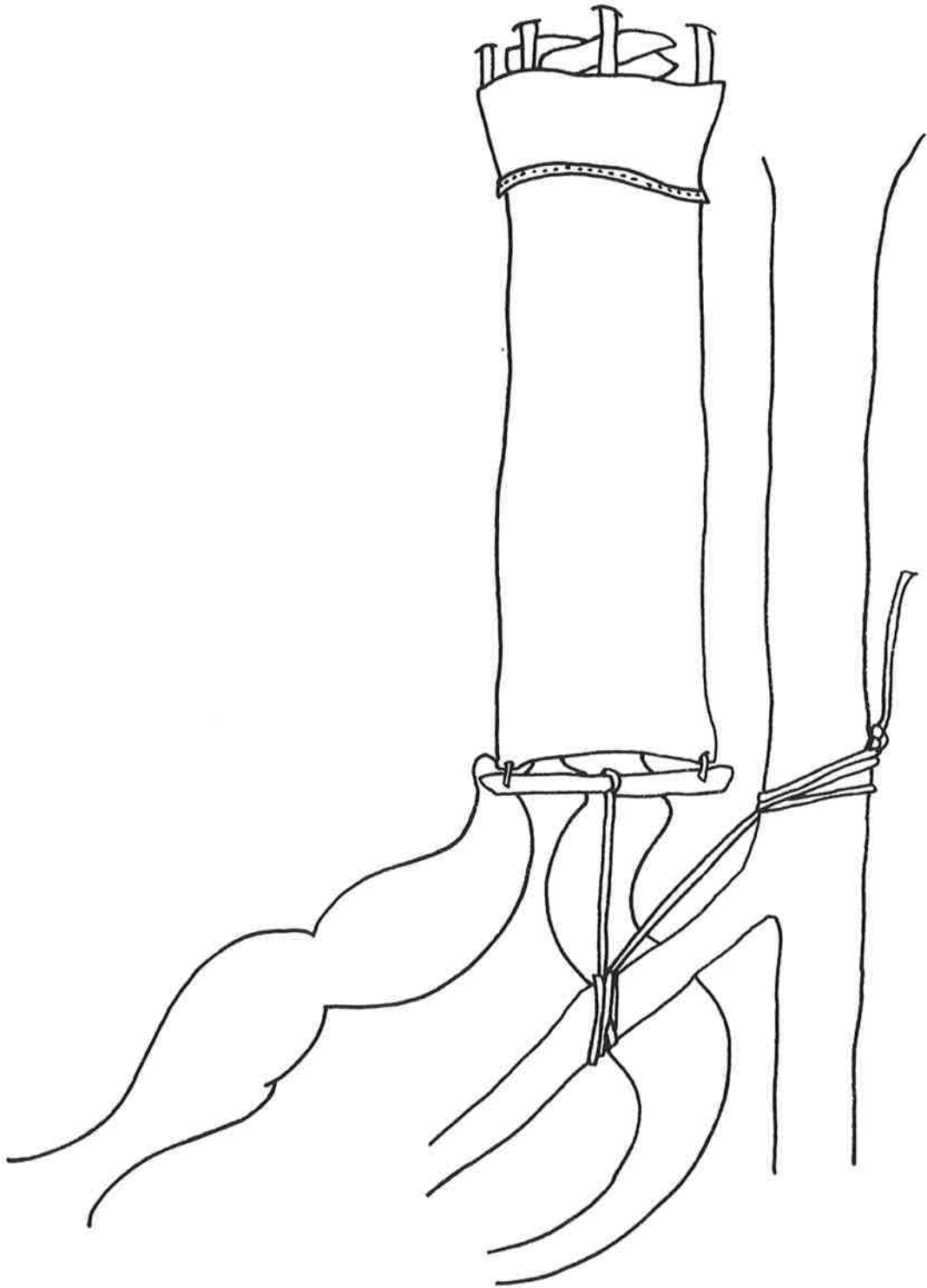
If you put the skin over before the smoke really gets going, the skin will get frosted (damp) inside and it will take long to smoke. That's the reason you want hot coals from rotten wood so there is lots of smoke before you put the skin over. When you have a good smoke going, the skin will brown quickly.

Tl'ákú sóothän inlets'edēlu k'ē, eyet tl'ák'ē, utl'a yū k'ē, ts'esē hets'edēlu huyū dāydúuch'í do, utthét'a yū k'ē, tl'el lāki uyats'edelu eyet dechän uka nehe'e ejadé, uyí dāynutl'ú do.

Eyet tl'ák'ē tl'ákú sóothän háts'eli k'ē udo hóhúts'eget udo hóhúts'eget nän ndrū, sóothän, eyet tl'ák'ē dechän umbé hundrū yats'edegét, eyet hóháajē eyet yande. Eyet edhó eju uk'edulet k'í, nán edhó uyí juuch'í do.

Eyet tl'ák'ē tso kwán ts'edek'ē tsän ninjät sóothän injät, eyet ts'è'in, dādžāl hegän, eyet yí letats'elí k'ē, edhó uts'in det'al léech'i ech'i. Tsän ninjät thānch'ō ech'i k'ē, háchōch'ō edhó utsin dettho eyet tl'ák'ē tl'ákú sóothän kwán sóothän hádetthi léenji, hék'i ts'è'in dúkhwän edhó hunēta ts'edèchu.

Eju sóothän dék'ē ch'ō, edhó hunēta ts'edèchu k'ē edhó ut'át dezò k'ē, eju jé tadeyé ech'i. Héech'i kē ts'è'in sóothän tthet ut'e ts'edelí eyet yí, tsän ninjät sóothän dék'ē k'ē lats'í ts'echó hék'i dúkhwän edhó hunēta ts'edèchu k'ē, eju hudedhèt ch'ō, edhó tats'edenētthu húch'i.



Eyet tl'ák'ē tl'ákú sóothän tadenētthù k'ē, uk'áts'enète, huyāhújē yū, k'wánnk'é uyí ts'èthó húyū, huyahújē eyū undrū uk'áts'enète k'ē tadeyé léech'i k'ē, sóothän hék'i dúkhwán náts'èchu k'ē, uts'in náts'èchu k'ē, eyet tl'ák'ē edhó inłatāte, intl'i ndāy ts'èchú héech'i ch'ō, létats'enèkhäl ts'in ch'ō, ts'èchú sóothän tadenūtthu do.

Eyet tl'ák'ē k'amé húmlin k'ē, eyet edhó lek'ets'enēch'el k'ē, chèch'e dāts'èchu eyet łats'í uts'in unji do. Łats'i huts'echo uts'in nátsät eyet ke tl'ákú sóothän chèch'e dāts'èchú héech'i k'ē hudedhet k'ē, łats'í uts'in enji. Héek'i dúkhwán ts'è'in, edhó ki ts'ètsi. Yi nindhän uyí nánumlu hē, eyet tl'ák'ē edhó hintsin ch'é k'ē.

Tl'ákú húch'i.

You keep looking at the skin through the holes where the moose has been shot and you can tell that way how much you want the skin to be smoked. When you think that it is smoked enough, then take it down. After that, you keep it overnight. Don't open it up. Roll the skin and leave it overnight so that more smoke will get into the skin.

In the morning, open up the skin and hang it outdoors so that the smoke will go away from it. When you smoke the skin, the smell is strong. That's why you've got to keep it hanging outdoors until all the smoke goes away from it. After that you can start cutting out whatever you feel like making (moccasins or anything else). It's all ready.

All the skin is finished now.

