

Archer's Thumb Ring

by Mike Richardson



Most westerners have never seen or heard about the thumb ring and draw used in Asian archery. The Turks, Koreans and Mongols still use a thumb ring to draw their bows. Actually it's the thumb, index and second fingers that draw the bow, with the thumb ring protecting the pad of the first thumb joint. The end of the thumb and ring acts as a second class lever with the joint being the fulcrum, like the wheel of a wheel barrow. The load is the bow string sitting against the ring, just past the joint, and the end of the thumb and ring is held with the index and second fingers, like the handles of the wheel barrow. The palm is held down and the release is like flicking a quarter. The thumb and two fingers are much stronger than the three finger draw. Palm down is a much more ergonomic hand position. It's very much like a modern mechanical release, but thousands of years old. Because the thumb release twists the bow string in the opposite direction to the three finger release, Asian archers place their arrows on the opposite side of the bow handle. A right handed Asian archer will put his arrow on the right side of the bow.

Being a western long bow shooter, I was not happy with the three finger draw. I was very interested in the advantages of a smoother, almost mechanical release that was comfortable with a heavy traditional 74 lbs. bow. I found that by ring hitching a loop of strong 4 mm cord around the bow string (just under the arrow) and placing my thumb and thumb ring into this loop, I would eliminate string twist. This method allowed me to use a thumb style draw on my western long bow. With this system, I could pull 74 lbs. at a 31 inches draw and still hold it longer than

most people can hold their breath (I'm 60-years-old). Now, my sons, wife and hunting buddy all shoot with a thumb ring. The draw back is that the thumb ring needs to be fitted to each user because everyone's thumb is a different size. It takes about a week to get used to this type of release. It's no problem to go back and forth between three finger and thumb draw release. Once you get used to the thumb draw, the advantages are hard to resist.

The first series of pictures show how to use the thumb ring with a loop on a bow string. The second series shows thumb rings made out of cow horn, bone, antler and ivory.





