

# What Knot to Use in a Primitive Situation

by Bill Scherer

It's been my observation that every practicing abo should have several knots memorized, ready to be used anytime. If you are making primitive cordage, then learn a few knots to go with it. Someone once asked me why one could not use the same knot in every situation. The answer is that different knots will fit different situations. A line may be tied onto its own cord, or a different line, onto a post, ring, fishhook, or animal. The strain may be steady, or intermittent, and from one angle or many. Sometimes the knot is only to hold for a short time, or it may be semi-permanent. Some knots are easily untied when wet, or with one hand. Some knots are stronger than others. The physical properties of the cord will also be a determining factor. Ease of untying may or may not be important. Many things should be considered when selecting a knot for a particular job.

What I would like to do here is list some of the knots that I have personally used while practicing primitive outdoor skills. Sometime the line is a homemade cord of natural fiber (flax, dogbane, New Zealand flax, cattail, etc), sometimes a strip of willow bark, or a piece of split pine root.



**Half hitch**



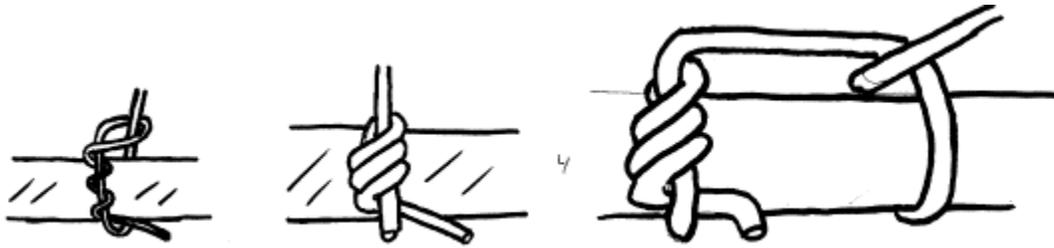
**Double half hitch**



**Slipped half hitch**

**Half hitch and double half hitch:** The half hitch can be used for hanging a rope from a branch or post. This is another knot that can be made to untie easily with the slipped version. I like to make mine a slipped version. For tethering animals there is a version known as the cow hitch/ lanyard hitch. The cow hitch is made of two single hitches on a post or ring.

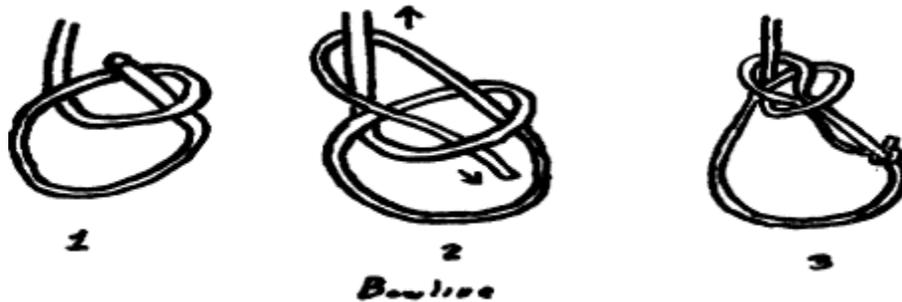
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**Timber hitch**

**Timber hitch with additional half hitch**

**Timber Hitch:** This is used traditionally for skidding logs, sometimes used with an additional half hitch. I use a timber hitch on one end of my longbow string.



**Bowline tied off with half hitch**

**Bowline:** This is a loop that won't slip, or come loose. It can be untied even under tension. It is used to attach a line to an object, such as a peg, or ring, or a person (rescue work). This is the knot remembered with "a rabbit comes out of the hole, goes around the tree, and back in the hole". It should not be used with a stiff line.

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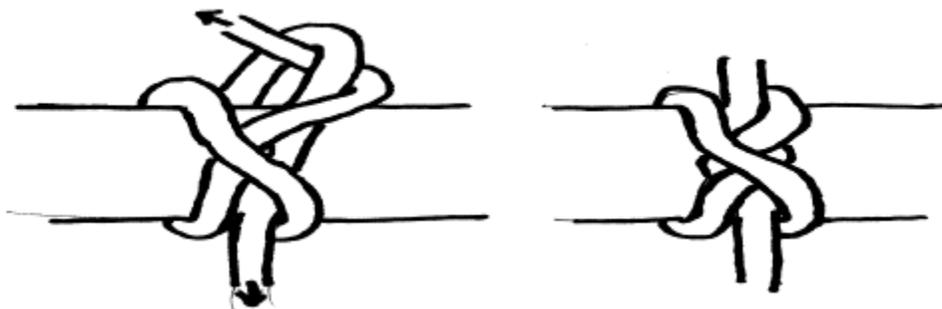


**Sheet Bend:** This is used to tie two lines together, to extend a line, or to tie a line to fabric. It is particularly useful for tying two lines of different diameters. A variation is the slipped sheet bend for ease of untying. Try this mnemonic "the rabbit comes out of the hole, around the tree, and under the exposed tree root".



**Overhand knot**

**Overhand Knot:** Used as a stopper knot or as a sewing knot. If you learn this knot you will have the basis of several other knots. The Overhand loop is the same knot with the line doubled over. Related knots not detailed here are the multiple overhand knot, the Carrick bend and the Hunters bend.



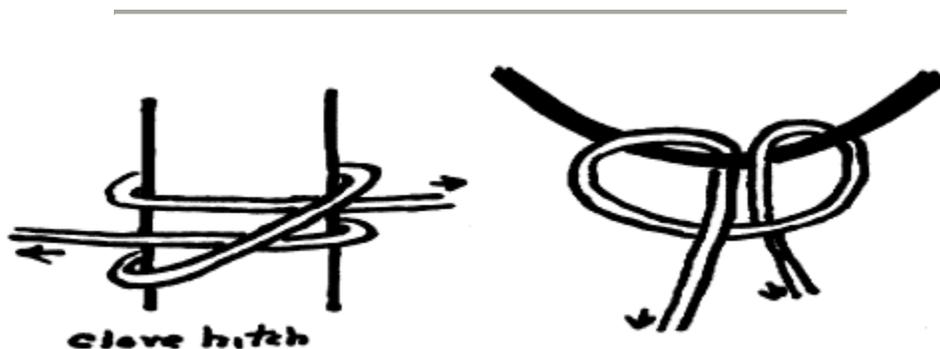
**Constrictor knot**

**Constrictor Knot:** The primitive equivalent to a twist tie. Used to close bags, or tie them onto a pole, or to bundle objects together. A good knot for the Egyptian bow drill spindle. This knot can be broken down as two overhand knots, the second over the first. Very similar to the clove hitch; and difficult to untie unless you make it a slipped version.



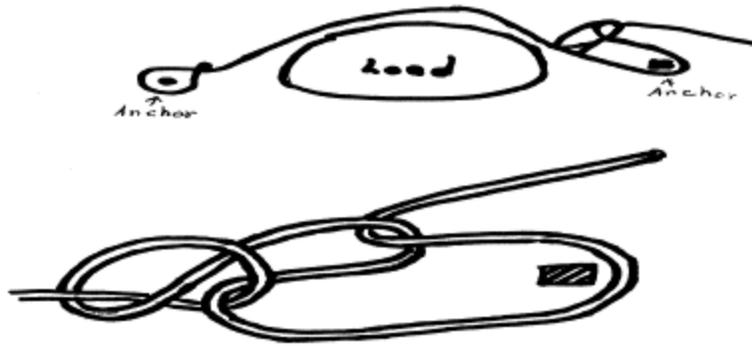
**Transom knot**

**Transom Knot:** Very similar to the constrictor knot. This is to tie perpendicular branches to each other. I have used this knot with willow bark cordage to build a primitive shelter frame.



**Clove Hitch, AKA peg knot or boatman's knot:** Used to fasten lines to a post or ring. It has been used on primitive fishing poles by attaching the line at intervals along the pole. Use this knot on tent pegs.

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**Trucker Hitch:** The primitive equivalent of cinch straps. This hitch will give a two to one mechanical advantage. This works well for strapping bundles onto a backpack frame or a pack animal's saddle. Once I impressed my coworkers by using this knot to strap down some cargo in a pickup truck box. Tie off the free end with a slipped double half hitch.



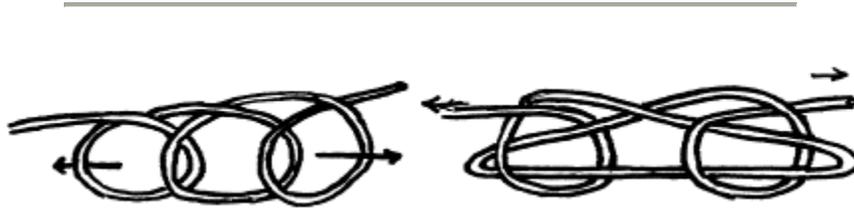
**Highwayman's hitch**

**Highwayman's Hitch:** This is a fun one. Used for tethering horses, or lowering loads. Its advantage is the quick release. Robbers use this knot to prep for a fast getaway. If you tether critters, learn this knot.



**Noose**

**Noose:** I have used this knot to hang deer from branches while field dressing and skinning. It can be used for snaring, although I don't know anyone who has used it successfully.



**Sheep shank**

**Sheep Shank:** This knot is used to shorten lines to the required length. If you have ever spent several hours twisting natural fibers in cordage by hand, cutting your precious cord is the last thing you wish to do. Another use is to bypass a damaged section of line.

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**Rope Locker, AKA Whipping:** This is used to keep your nice hand twisted rope end from unraveling. This is equivalent to plastic tape or melting synthetic rope ends. Plastic tape would look out of place on a primitive rope. I like to use a single thin strip of fiber to wrap the end of my cordage. I use whipping as the arrow nocking area of my bowstring.

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I have not included any fishing knots here because I have never done any angling with primitive gear. The only primitive fishing I have ever done is with a spear. If anyone has successfully used primitive angling gear, please let me know what knots and gear you were using.

Learning knots takes a bit of practice. It is one of the primitive skills that can be practiced practically anywhere, for any amount of time. I have passed hours of time in airplanes by practicing knots or a few minutes in my cubicle during lunch break. It is a skill that would serve you well in the Stone Age or the 21st century. If you are in a situation where the knot is needed right now, the time to learn was long before. It is my hope that this short piece will generate some correspondence about your favorite knots and their uses.

Knots are a large subject matter. There are probably hundreds of knots with a couple of variations on each of them, and a couple of names for each of them. The important thing is to select the right knot for the given situation.