

Buckskin (leather)

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Buckskin is the soft, pliable, porous preserved hide of an animal – usually deer – tanned in the same way as deerskin clothing worn by Native Americans. Some leather sold as "buckskin" may now be sheepskin tanned with modern chromate tanning chemicals and dyed to resemble real buckskin.

Buckskin is preserved with a dressing of some kind of lubricant, physically manipulated to make it soft and pliable, and usually smoked with woodsmoke. Smoking gives buckskin its typical dark honey color, and is highly recommended. Smoking prevents the tanned hide from becoming stiff if it gets wet, and deters insects from eating it as well. Unsmoked buckskin is lighter, even white, in color.

Buckskin is simply "the skin of a buck (deer)".^[1] Clothing made of buckskin is referred to as buckskins.



A deer skin at the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum, Glasgow, Scotland

Contents

- 1 Dry scrape method
- 2 Wet scrape method
- 3 Dressing
- 4 Stretching
- 5 Smoking
- 6 Care of buckskin
- 7 Notes

Dry scrape method

The dry-scrape method involves taking a wet deer hide and stretching it on a rack to dry flat. A scraping tool is then dragged perpendicular to the blade along the hair side, scraping off the epidermis and hair, including all the hair follicles. The flesh side should be scraped as well. When the entire hide is scraped, it is taken off the rack, rehydrated, and dressed.



Shirt for Chief's War Dress,
19th century, Sioux,
Brooklyn Museum

Wet scrape method

The wet-scrape method involves scraping the wet hide on a smooth downward-slanting log or fleshing beam with the upper end at stomach or sternum level. A steel blade or split leg bone can be used for a scraper. The hide is draped on the log, the person leans into it, holding the hide in place with their body and pushing the scraper away with both hands. The epidermis is scraped off the outside of the hide to achieve a soft finish. The membrane is scraped off the flesh side.

If the hide is more than a day or two old, it should be "bucked" first, via an alkali soaking process called bucking (from a Latin verb of the type **bucāre* "to steep in lye, wash clothes");^[2] The hide is soaked in a solution of wood ash lye or hydrated lime in water. This causes the grain layer (epidermis) to swell, making it easier to slip the hair and scrape off the grain.

Dressing

Once the hide has been scraped it must be dressed in a dressing solution. These can be made from any emulsified fat, such as egg yolks or the animal's brain mixed into water. Another option is an oil and a soap mixed in water.

Typically the wet hide is wrung out, then left in the dressing solution for 15 minutes or more, then wrung out and dressed again. Repeating this a third time ensures that the dressing reaches the middle of the hide.

Stretching

The next step is stretching/drying. This is time sensitive, and has to be done from start to finish without stopping. The drying hide is continuously pulled and stretched in all directions, which lubricates the fibers of the hide with the oil of the dressing, and ensures that the fibers stay lubricated. This may be done on a rack with a stretching tool, or by hand. Often the hide is stretched against a steel cable or a rounded steel or wooden blade (with care not to cut the hide). This must be done until the hide is completely dry and no longer cool to the touch or else the finished buckskin will be stiff, and will have to be dressed and stretched over again.

Smoking

The dry skin should now be completely supple and soft. If it gets wet at this stage it must be stretched again until dry, or it will revert to being a stiff piece of scraped rawhide. If this happens the hide must be redressed. To make it washable the hide must be smoked. Thus, a smoked hide can be washed, even with soap.

To smoke a buckskin it is folded in half and glued or sewn into a bag with an opening on one end. A pant leg or other cloth tube is attached to the opening of the buckskin bag. The smoking fire can either be in a wood stove or a hole in the earth. Regardless of how the bed of coals is prepared, the other end of the pant leg is roughly sealed over the opening of the smoker. The buckskin bag is suspended above the smoker, and sticks can be placed inside of it to prevent the sides of the bag from touching each other. A handful of dry, rotten ("punk") wood is thrown on the coals, and begins smoldering. Care is taken to prevent the cloth from catching fire, as the hide can be burned in seconds. Ideally most or all of the smoke is forced through the buckskin. All holes must

be sealed or taped to force the smoke through. The hide is smoked until the smoke color penetrates through to the other side, then the hide is turned inside out and it is smoked again until it reaches a desired color. Much care must be taken to ensure the fire is not burning, only smoldering, as flames or excessive heat will ruin the skin.

Care of buckskin

The finished buckskin will shrink slightly after the first washing, so it should be washed or at least wetted and dried before making clothing. Buckskin should be washed in cold water, and air dried. Hot water will destroy it. After drying it can be stretched or cabled for a short time to re-soften it.

Notes

1. *OED*, s.v. *buckskin*.
2. *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)*, s.v. *buck*, v.¹.

Retrieved from "[https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Buckskin_\(leather\)&oldid=749181116#Dressing](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Buckskin_(leather)&oldid=749181116#Dressing)"

Categories: Hides | Deer hunting | Leather

-
- This page was last modified on 12 November 2016, at 22:40.
 - Text is available under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike License; additional terms may apply. By using this site, you agree to the Terms of Use and Privacy Policy. Wikipedia® is a registered trademark of the Wikimedia Foundation, Inc., a non-profit organization.