

## The Atlatl

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### Straightening Georgia's World Record Setting Cane By Mark Bracken

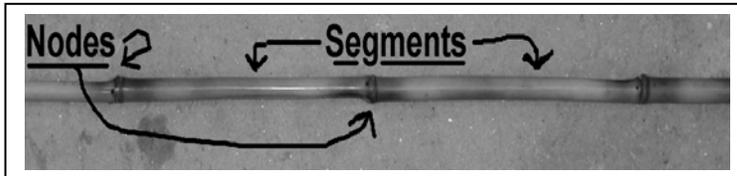
The first step is seasoning your cane. You can do this by storing the cane in tied bundles of twelve or so. In the winter, I dry my cane in the house where it is warm and dry. In the summer, the attic is the place of choice. Drying the cane should take about three to six months. In my opinion, it is best to **first fully** season the cane before attempting to straighten it. The method you use should not be one that uses extreme heat; this might crack the cane.

Once it has been seasoned, note that it may still have a green color to it, this is ok. Now that your cane is dry, sand or cut the little buds at each node, take great caution in removing the two or three buds from the skinny end. You should leave a little extra material on these. The reason is this is the area that is susceptible to breakage while straightening. Now... trust me on this... soak it in water for 12 hours, 24 hrs being max, to rehydrate it. If you try to heat and bend cane that is to dry it will scorch quickly or unexpectedly break. The added moisture will simply evaporate during the straightening process. You can soak your cane in a PVC pipe or a creek, pond or any other favorite wet spot that totally submerges it.

The next day, cane out of the water and while its still wet wipe it clean with a cloth. Use dry heat not steam to do your straightening. I use a propane burner, turned down very low, like you would use to boil a big pot of peanuts. {yum}.

This process is a five-step deal,

First doing every other space between the nodes, (look at the picture for my definitions of "nodes" and "segments") Then doing the rest of the spots between the nodes.



Step three is straightening every other node.

Step four is the remaining nodes.

Finally step five, fine tuning the dart and hitting those stubborn spots. The reason for this is to prevent yourself from working too close to an area still hot and disturbing your previous work.

Now lets get started. Start by working on the areas between the nodes. Lightly and evenly brown the crooked area with a twirling motion being careful not to burn it. The cane should take on a rubbery consistency when enough heat has been applied. Carefully bend it over your thigh, it's best to use a leather pad to prevent burns to you leg. I suggest you slightly roll the cane back and forth as you bend it to prevent kinking. You can slightly over bend it and return the section to straight; this prevents a finished dart from warping back to its original shape. Some bends are just too big to do this, use your best judgement.

Now getting back to where we were. Straighten between the nodes doing every other one; don't panic if it looks like a banana... It should.

The reason for doing every other node and segment is to prevent rebending the area already straightened. Another important tip is to work on three shafts simultaneously. This is to allow each section to cool. It is also important to work on the segments first. If you do the nodes first, they will tend to bend back as you straighten the adjacent segments. Trust me on this. Also as you reach step five you can test the dart on the floor by holding the nock end and rolling it, the dart is

finished when it rolls with good balance. How perfect you make it is up to you. But remember it must have balance.

Here are some more helpful hints. It is best to start on your worst piece of cane. If you break it, don't discard it. Keep on practicing on it to learn the material's limitations. Don't worry about small kinks in your finished darts, they won't affect performance. On huge bends that you are unable to get perfectly straight you can correct this by bending an area up or down from the bad area and still achieve a well-balanced dart. Don't scrape the natural waxy coating off the dart, it acts as a natural moisture barrier.

The exception to this is the area to be fletched. The best result I have achieved is to dip the nock end of the dart in a varnish or lacquer to help in the adhesion of the feathers. I use a four fletch jig that I designed to apply all four feathers at once. A good choice of cements to use is a product called Duco household cement. I purchased mine at K-Mart, it can be found at Wal-Mart also. It's less expensive than arrow fletching cements and dries faster.

Your new cane darts do not have to be foreshafted. I glue in my copper points with five-minute epoxy or "j-b weld". The points do not have to fall on a node to be strong! I like to use unwaxed dental floss for hafting points. I wrap them about 2 inches up the dart from the point, this prevents the shaft from cracking in the event you hit a concrete wall, automobile or mastodon skull. Finally I coat the hafting cordage with more five-min. Epoxy.

If you would like to contact me for any of my products or have any question or suggestions you can reach me at [crackinbracken@juno.com](mailto:crackinbracken@juno.com).

Thanks I hope this information will be a benefit to you!  
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