

Leggins

by Gene Hickman

Leggins are nothing more than tapered hollow tubes, held up by attached ties or straps to a belt or thong. Ordway has one of the few journal entries about the men making leggings ...the hunters killed Several Elk and Several Deer, nearly for the Skins to make LeaginsandC. (Moulton 1983).

Materials: Review website article on “Working Leather” and the February 2005 “Journal” newsletter, both found on the Lewis and Clark Honor Guard (LCHG) website: <http://www.corpsofdiscovery.org> . Then read through these directions and understand what you are doing before you start cutting leather.

- Two medium to large hides (deer or antelope preferred). Hides need to be big enough to go around your leg and long enough go from your waist to the ground. If they are not long enough part(s) from another hide can be sewn at the bottom to provide proper length.
- Glover’s needles and waxed thread or sinew.
- Scissors for cutting hide.

There are many styles of Indian leggings available. However, these leggings are not really Indian leggings, although they are patterned after the Western style leggin. Your leggings should be close in style to a uniform pant leg and not appear to be Indian. The LCHG have determined that a simple style that would look more like the leather pants leg would therefore be most appropriate.

When you are wearing your leggings over pants with your shirt out, it will probably appear that you are wearing leather pants. There is also a center seam style of leggin, but I do not recommend it, as the seam is really hard on the knees whenever you kneel.



Three options are common. Plain outer seam with no fringe or flap pieces is preferred. However, this outer seam may have blue wool added as a welt, imitating the blue outer-seam of the uniform pants. Small flap(s) of no more than about 2” of excess material left with uneven natural edge at the outer seam. Very short fringe about 1” –

2” on the outer seam. This is the least preferred method and is not recommended.

There are two methods to measure or make up a pattern for your leggings:

Method 1. Take a pair of old pants that fit you loosely and mark your leggings on the pants, then cut out or off the legs at the marks. Open seams (optional) and you’ll now have a pattern for your new leggings.
Method 2. Fold one hide in half lengthwise with rough sides out, wrap around the leg with open ends to outside, mark angle from crotch to top of hip, pinch shut and then mark where sewn seam will be. Do not make them too tight as you’ll probably be wearing them over other pants.

Procedure:

- · Cut out your leather leggin out.
- · Now is the time to sew up any bullet holes or cuts (See Feb. 2005 “Journal” newsletter).



- · If length of leggin leather was too short add the extra length now. A whipstitch would work well.
- · Cut and insert welt of either leather or blue wool, if desired, between leggin pieces along the stitch line. It is highly recommended that if you have thin hides, to add a welt, sandwiched between the leggin pieces. This will help insure that the hides won't tear at the sewn seam.
- · Sew the seams using a running stitch or whip stitch. Leggings are usually sewn. The use of thongs to lace sides together is a modern "Buckskinner" technique. Sew them. Remember you need the rough side out, so depending on how you do the stitch you may be sewing them wrong side out with wool welt protruding on the inside. A whipstitch is best if you have a welt. Either a whip stitch or running stitch without the welt. You may need to turn leggin right side out depending on how it was sewn. Welt or fringe will protrude and the seam will be concealed.
- · Trim welt to length or cut fringe.
- · This leather strip you are going to now cut and add, is used as a tie to hold the leggin to your belt at the waist.
- Pull on the leggin and mark where you want the strip/tie attached.
- Attach leather strip to upper outside edge of legging. This can be done by taking a piece of leather approximately 1 inch x 24 inches, fold it in half and cut to form two strips or ties. Sew it on the upper end of leggin.
- Place each tie of leather on opposite sides of the leggin. You'll have a sandwich of three layers with the strips on the outside and leggin in the middle. This will keep the strips or ties from pulling through the leggings as the pressure is all on the ties. Repeat procedure with other hide to complete second leggin. Remember to flip the pattern as this is the other-side.

Note: Many folks read leggings and they automatically think breechclout. However, Leggings on non- Indians in the west were usually not worn with a breechclout, but were more often worn over cloth pants for added warmth or to protect the cloth pants from wear, much like chaps. There is only one reference in one journal of the men wearing breechclouts, and this is while they were cordeling the boats. On April 11, 1805, Ordway says ...the day [was] verry warm. Some of the men worked naked. Only a breech cloth. CAUTION: If you are older, and not in the shape you were when you WERE young, you may want to try an option other than a breechclout. A lot of skin shows with breechclouts, and if you have excess skin, it REALLY shows. All through our Western history whites did not wear breechclouts. Whites preferred clothes patterned after "civilized" styles, so BE CAREFUL about overdoing the "Indian" look. More than one person in a breechclout at an event may be too many.