

Drying Seal Skins

Collector: Marie Marshall

Contributor: Kathleen O'Brien

Marie Marshall:

It's November 8, 2008, I'm here at Kathleen O'Brien's and she's gonna to demonstrate to me how to put a how to preserve seal skin to make boots. Okay Kathleen, go ahead please.

Kathleen O'Brien:

Okay, well first of all, Marie, the men has to go out and kill the seals. The seals would then be sculpt which separated the skin from the body of the seal. The seal skin would be put in the salt water to soak off the fat, people would fasten it to a wharf with line, to protect it from washing away with waves from the sea.

After this being done, they would fasten it to wooden frame, than they would put the seal skin including the frame into a pond. They would leave the seal skin in the pond for two or three months of summer. The purpose of this was to attempt the hair of the skin, and it's much easier to scrape when it's finished. It had to be still water and heated by the sun and summer temperatures. It wouldn't tint if they had it in a running brook, with the water running. The temperature, it's not so warm. When the skin is taken out it is scrapped to take the hair off.

Now they say the best tool to scrape the hair off with is the caribou leg. It is known not to punch a hole in the skin, while scraping. After the skin is scraped, it's put into the bark... ah... with the ingred...ingredients that you have boiled. With the birch rhine, and they had a cube of peyton bark, which also added to make the bark darker. The purpose of the barking the seal skin was to preserve it, so as the material for the boot would last longer.

The water has to be cooled to warm temperature before adding the seal skin. It would be left there for five or six hours, then the seal skin is taken out, put in a frame to have it stretched, so it will be thinner and more easily sewn. The purpose of stretching the seal skin is when you make your boot, you know it won't stretch anymore. It will be the correct size for foot. And you will have this ah...boiled bark ah... put into a barrel, or a big tub, for to put the seal skin in. And ah... if the seals were caught in the fall, they would preserve the skin by filling it with salt and folding the skin up and kept until the spring.

Marie Marhsall:

Okay, Kathleen, like what was the purpose for that? You said roll it in salt, and ...

Kathleen O'Brien:

Yeah, keep

Marie Marshall:

Put salt on it and roll it?

Kathleen O'Brien:

And keep it until the spring because they have to put it into a pond. In the still water...

Marie Marshall:

Okay.

Kathleen O'Brien:

.... and at a certain temperature, to tint the hair.

Marie Marshall:

Okay. And did you have a pattern for boots or you just done them on your own.

Kathleen O'Brien:

Some did it on their own, some had a pattern, some had the proper machine made....
Pleater for to do the toe with.

Marie Marshall:

Hmm.....hmmm. It sounds pretty detailed but one more question, did they have any particular kind of seal skin for the foot? The foot was bigger, thicker?

Kathleen O'Brien:

Well if they could get a harp, old harp seal skin, that's what they would make the
....make the foot from because it would last longer and it would wear longer.

Marie Marshall:

Okay. Very good Kathleen, this is a good detailed interview. Thank you very much.

Kathleen O'Brien:

You're welcome.

