



# COMANCHE TAB LEGGINGS

JOE SAMUEL HAYS

## INTRODUCTION

In the following study of Comanche tab leggings we will primarily focus on four pair housed in the Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum (PPHM) at Canyon, Texas. All of these leggings were made after 1900 and when contrasted to each other reflect a good variety of construction and decoration techniques. The degree of detail given here depends on the availability of the leggings for close examination. When supported with old photographs and leggings from other museums, a reasonably representative sample of legging traits is acquired for comparison.

## BACKGROUND AND HISTORY

Hide leggings are the traditional leg covering of the plains tribes. In the old days they were worn to protect the legs against brush and boulders while on horseback. Also, to protect and insulate one's self from the cold and to intensify the beauty of their clothes (Mails 1972). A description of Comanche leggings in 1852 by Alex B. Hasson, post surgeon at Fort Phantom Hill stated:

*"The dress of these Indians varied, but the men commonly wore moccasins of buckskin, and leggings which extended from the upper portion of the thigh to the foot. The seam of these leggings ran close in so that the garment was close-fitting. The border of the material*

*beyond the seam was left loose, presenting a wide margin of flapping buckskin. A breechclout of cloth or skin was worn, and if the weather was cold, a buffalo robe or blanket was thrown over the shoulders."* (Richardson 1933)

Wallace and Hoebel (1952) go on to say they are distinguished by their long fringes and were sometimes beaded, but were usually ornamented with bits of silver, or other metal, beads, shells, elk's teeth or anything that appealed to the wearer's fancy attached to the fringes.

It is possible that this description applies to what we call tab leggings, however, this description better fits the type of "flap and fringe" leggings discussed by Jerry Smith in *Moccasin Tracks*, November 1980, April 1981, May 1981, September 1983, and October 1983. The origin of the tab legging among the Comanches and other southern plains tribes was possibly from various prairie and eastern tribes who wore a similar legging with the seam in front. With the advance of these leggings to the plains tribes the seam was worn on the side as a convenience to the horseback riders (Koch 1977).

## LEGGING DESCRIPTIONS

The first pair of leggings to be examined are catalog #1510/11. The card on file at PPHM say's, "Kiowa man's leggings made in the



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Comanche style and pattern." They were acquired by the museum in 1959 from Mr. and Mrs. Howard Hampton. These leggings appear to be made of brain-tanned deer hide and are somewhat stiff. The hair side of the leather is the exterior of the leggings, as is the case with most southern plains clothing. The scraping marks from the tanning process are still visible through the mineral pigment used to color the leggings a chalk white color. The 1510/11 leggings have the following dimensions and are shown in figure 1. Inseam is 34 inches; top width folded flat, not including tabs is 9.6 inches; bottom width of leggin folded flat, excluding fringe is 5.7 inches; the foot loop or stirrup when folded flat is 2.5 inches with an additional .40 of an inch sewn to the inside of the legging on each side of the ankle; the two tie straps at the top of the leggings are each 27 inches long by .60 inch wide and are sewn to the legging with cotton thread. The tabs of these leggings are 1.8 inches wide at the top of the leggings. The tabs at

Photo 1 Titled, "Comanche Indians Performing their War Dance, Lawton Oklahoma". Some of their leggings appear to be made of a light colored cloth as evidenced by the lack of fringe and the way they wrinkle when worn. Catalog #2120/39.

Photo 2 Catalog #2120/32. Hoy Koy Bitty, Comanche.

Photo 3 Catalog #1277/2. Quanah Parker. Note sash tassel, flicker feathers, and blanket seam, in addition to his tab leggings.

Photo 4 Catalog #1976-77/9. Belo Cozad, Comanche.



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their widest point are 3.5 inches from legging tube to edge beadwork. The tabs are one inch wide where cut square at their bottoms. The measurement from end of tab to knee of legging is 8 inches. Tabs join the legging at 16.5 inches from the top of the legging.

Referring now to the construction of the 1510/11 leggings; the few holes in the hide were patched with semi-round patches slightly larger than the holes, sewn on the outside of the leggings. All knots are tied off on the outside of the leggings. (This surely done so knots won't irritate leg) The legging pattern is somewhat unusual in that it entailed more sewing than if the tabs had been cut out as a part of the legging. First of all, a tapered tube of buckskin was cut for each legging, then additional pieces the full inseam length were cut which consisted of a tab and a 1/4 inch wide strip extending from knee to ankle. Two of these tab pieces were then sewn to the margins of the legging tube. Next the legging was folded, wrong-side-out and sewn again from the bottom to the top of the legging. Next the legging was inverted (right-side-out) and folded flat and the fringe strung through holes punched in each of the 1/4 inch wide "flaps" sewn below the knee and twisted (see Fig. 2-A & B). The end effect was that no stitches are visible on the exterior of the legging and the legging below the knee was sewn and fringed. This construction method would not require as large a hide as if an entire legging were cut from a single piece of leather.

The twisted fringe for leggings is made by cutting a strip of buckskin one-eighth inch

FIGURE 1

DIMENSIONS OF #1510/11

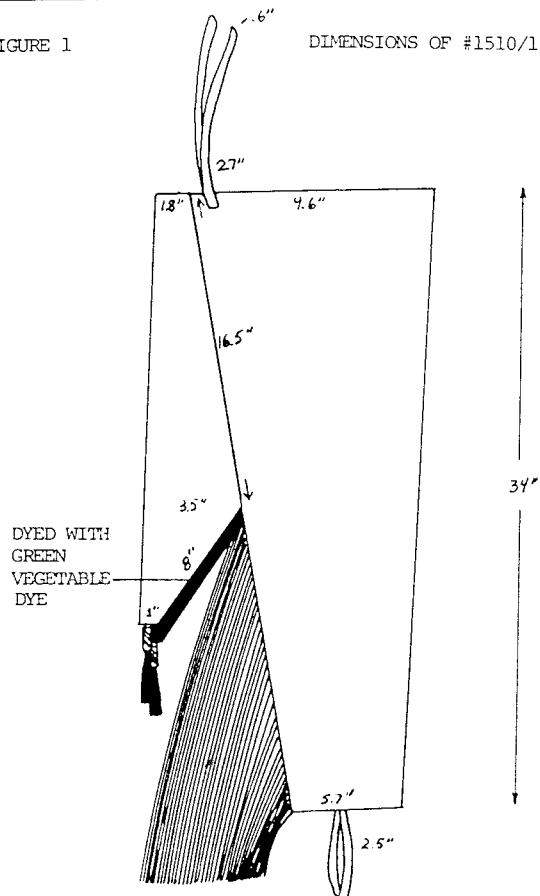
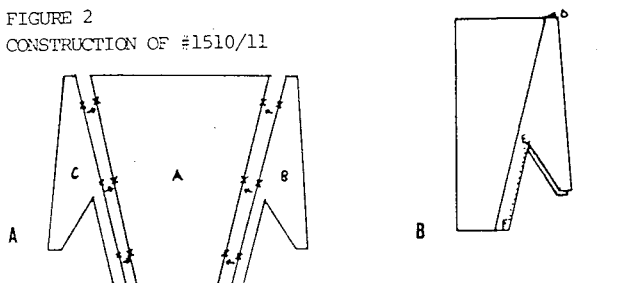




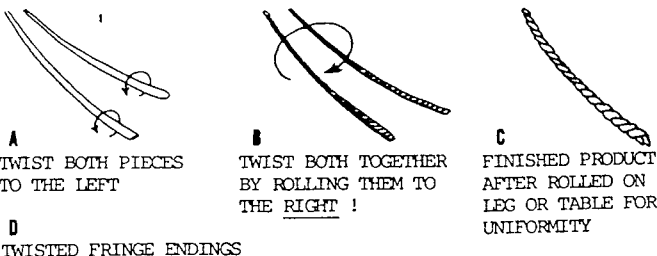
FIGURE 2  
CONSTRUCTION OF #1510/11



SEW B & C TO A

LEGGING WAS TURNED INSIDE-OUT  
SEWN FROM D TO F. TWISTED  
FRINGE ADDED E TO F AFTER  
TURNED RIGHT-SIDE-OUT.

FIGURE 3 MAKING TWISTED FRINGE

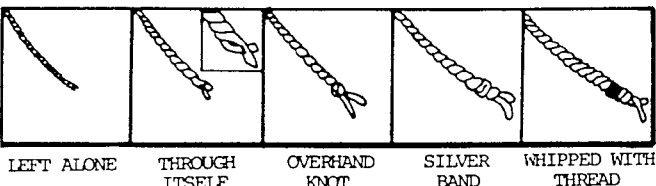


A TWIST BOTH PIECES  
TO THE LEFT

B TWIST BOTH TOGETHER  
BY ROLLING THEM TO  
THE RIGHT!

C FINISHED PRODUCT  
AFTER ROLLED ON  
LEG OR TABLE FOR  
UNIFORMITY

D TWISTED FRINGE ENDINGS



LEFT ALONE THROUGH ITSELF OVERHAND KNOT SILVER BAND WHIPPED WITH THREAD

wide or less, by at least twice the length of the desired fringe length. Then the buckskin thong is wet moderately with water, passed through the holes in the narrow flap and the ends evened up. Twist both thongs to the left equally until they "almost kink up", finally put the two ends together and twist back to the right (see Fig. 3). The fringe is spaced one-eighth inch apart. The fringes have been painted a white color and are somewhat stiff. The construction was completed with the addition of the tie straps and stirrups. Edge beadwork on all tabs was done using a one down, one up pattern with no fill-in bead. The 12/0 white bead is next to the leather and the single translucent red bead is up. A noticeable gap appears between the beads. The edge beadwork is not that great but neither are the beads. They are very irregular, probably "leftovers" or "rejects" from work requiring more uniform beads. Furthermore, a few opaque red beads have been mixed in. All beadwork is done with cotton thread. The tassels below the characteristically Comanche "squared-of tabs" are of fine, black horsehair; doubled, wrapped with cotton thread, covered with buckskin and finally beaded. Horsehair is 2.3 inches long

Photo 5 Tab Leggings #1510/11.

Photo 6 Tassel detail of the 1510/11 leggings.

Photo 7 Tab interior of 1510/11 leggings. Absence of green dye at edges showing that coloring was done after beadwork and sewing.

Photo 8 Stirrup at the bottom of the 1510/11 leggings.

out of the beadwork and is trimmed even on the ends. Diameter of the hair bundle is .40 of an inch. The tassel beadwork is very irregular due to nonuniformity and differences in the bead sizes. The 3-drop gourd stitched tassels are just over one inch long and their diameter is one-half inch. A kind of flaring "skirt" is formed at the base of each tassel using edge beadwork in a one down, one up sequence with a fill-in bead. 12/0 clear faceted beads were used on 12/0 opaque red. The tassel design is done in spiraling bands (barber pole) of green, translucent navy blue, pink, translucent red, and translucent medium blue in size 12/0 and 13/0 beads. Decoration was completed with the inside of the tabs being dyed green. The dye looks as if it were applied after the leggings were finished because of the unpainted line next to the edge beadwork on the flaps and stitches between the flaps. This is apparent in photo 7.

The second pair of Comanche tab leggings described here are the ones hanging in the Baldwin Parker tipi display. They have been assigned the catalog number 1510/48. These leggings belonged to Andrew Perdasoasby, of Faxon, Oklahoma, and were made for him by his wife. The museum acquired them from Mr. and Mrs. Howard Hampton in 1961. These leggings were viewed from about fifteen feet away, therefore notes are brief. The 1510/48 leggings are made of white hide, and also have a stirrup or foot loop at the bottom of the leggings. The fringe on this pair is made of twisted cotton string, not of leather. This twisted string is probably chalk line as is available at hardware stores. The chalk line is simply cut twice the length of the fringt, untwisted, one strand pulled through the legging, the ends matched and retwisted. The insides of the tabs are fully lined with purple satin or taffeta material. It has faded some. The edge beadwork was done with medium blue beads. These leggings show the typical Comanche stype "squared-off" tabs ending in horsehair tassels. The black horsehair tassels are beaded in red, white, and medium blue beads. Small red fluffs extend out of the bottom of the tassel beadwork. A single lane of red, white and medium blue lazy stitch was done just above the inch long fringe at the legging bottoms. Photo 9 shows these leggings as they are on display.

The third pair are numbered 1510/85, they belong to Oscar Yellowwolf, Comanche and were obtained by Mr. and Mrs. Howard Hampton from Mr. Yellowwolf's daughter, Mrs. Codopan. The museum acquired them from the Hamptons in 1962. These leggings are very representative of the style and show the finest craftsmanship of any Comanche leggings I have ever observed. The Yellowwolf leggings show a natural white color as do their fine twisted buckskin fringe which drags several inches on the floor. Only the fringe holds the leggings together below the knee, no sewing was done under the fringe. Narrow tie straps and stirrups are present on each legging. Each Yellowwolf legging was made out from one piece of hide, no splicing on of the tabs was done. It appears from photo 11 and manikin observation that a blind stitch was used to sew up the leggings above the knee so that no threads would be visible on the outside of the legging. The insides of the front tabs are lined with pinkish-red taffeta, the back ones are lined with dark blue taffeta. The edges of the tabs were than beaded with 13/0 beads with one light red bead down, then a white bead down and a single white bead up. A navy blue fill-in bead was then added. The tassels are beaded in 16/0 beads, with a very nice gourd stitched design. The colors used were translucent royal blue (pony trader blue), a translucent turquoise blue, navy blue, greasy yellow, white, orange, and pink. Like



the 1510/11 leggings, these tassels have been edge beaded just below the gourd stitch. The edge beaded "skirt" on these tassels consists of a three down pattern in 13/0 beads. At one time red fluffs or hackles protruded out from under this edge beaded "skirt". A narrow lazy stitched lane of red, white, and light blue 13/0 seed beads are around the bottom of the leggings above the inch long fringe at the legging cuffs.

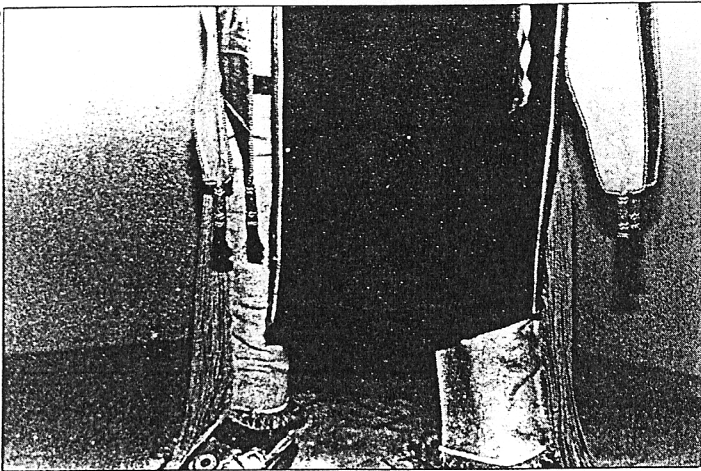
The fourth and final pair of Comanche tab leggings available for study at PPHM are numbered 1510/10 in their records. They are identified as Comanche boy's leggings and were donated to the museum by the Hampton's in 1959. Presently the leggings are exhibited on a boy manikin. These leggings appear to be of much earlier construction than the previous three pair described. They are of brain-tanned hide (deer?), colored yellow with ochre paint. The twisted fringe has been left its natural color and is relatively coarse. This fringe drags several inches when worn. The tabs have been added to these leggings by passing the closing thongs through the legging tube, the tabs then tying them off. The tabs are fairly wide, ending in a one inch wide flap at the legging top. These six closing thongs are spaced about two inches apart, with the two or three inch tails left hanging as decoration. The tabs are fully lined with a dark green wool cloth (trade cloth?). The twisted fringe is not finished in any way and has unraveled a few inches at the ends of some strands. The legging bottoms have been finished by a scalloped cutting design (see Fig. 4-A). Edge beadwork is two down, one up in 14/0 white. Tassels are beaded in 16/0 white, navy blue, translucent red, and translucent green. Red trimmed fluffs extend from under the gourd stitched tassels. The tassels are of fine, light brown hair, presumably horse.



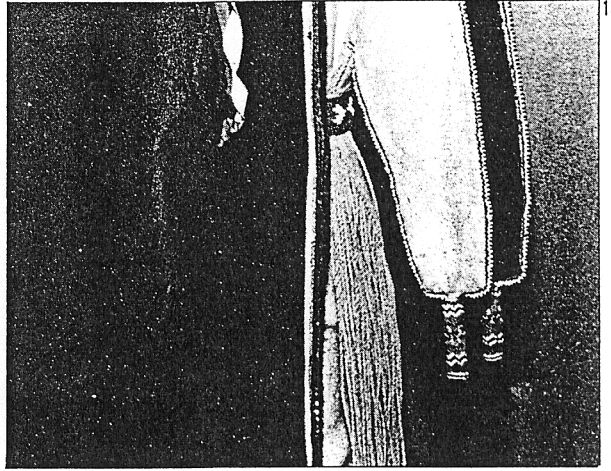
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CONSTRUCTION AND DECORATION VARIATIONS

Presented here is a summary of the traits of Comanche tab leggings as I have seen them. It is not my intention to present the limits of what is Comanche as defined by their legging makers, but only to offer these legging attributes as some of what is acceptable based on the sample of leggings available to me. I shall list first what the most desired methods are, lesser ones thereafter.

Legging material- Brain-tanned deer or elk hide, also commercially tanned deer, elk, or cow. Buffalo hide would be ideal, but is difficult to obtain these days.

Legging color-It appears that before about 1900 the ochre yellow or the natural smoked

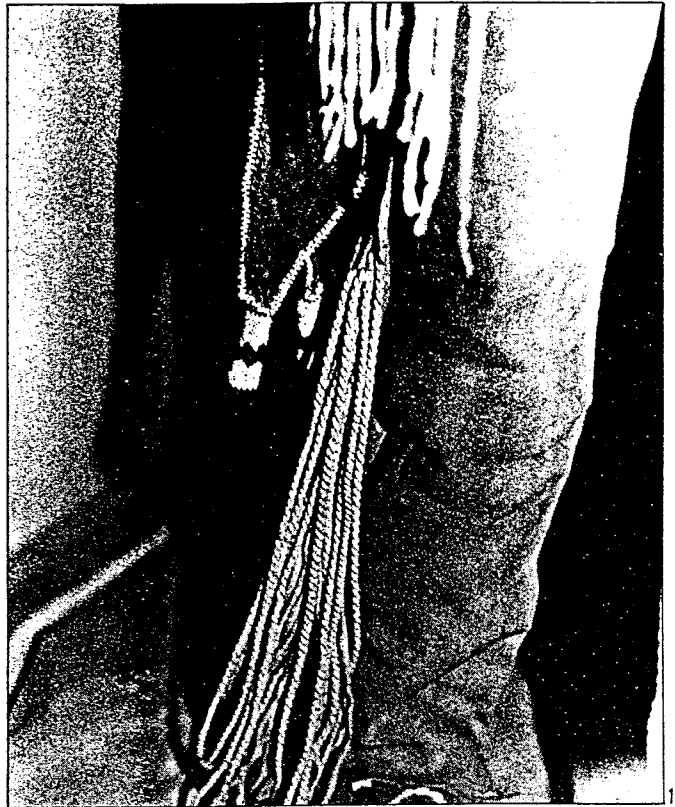
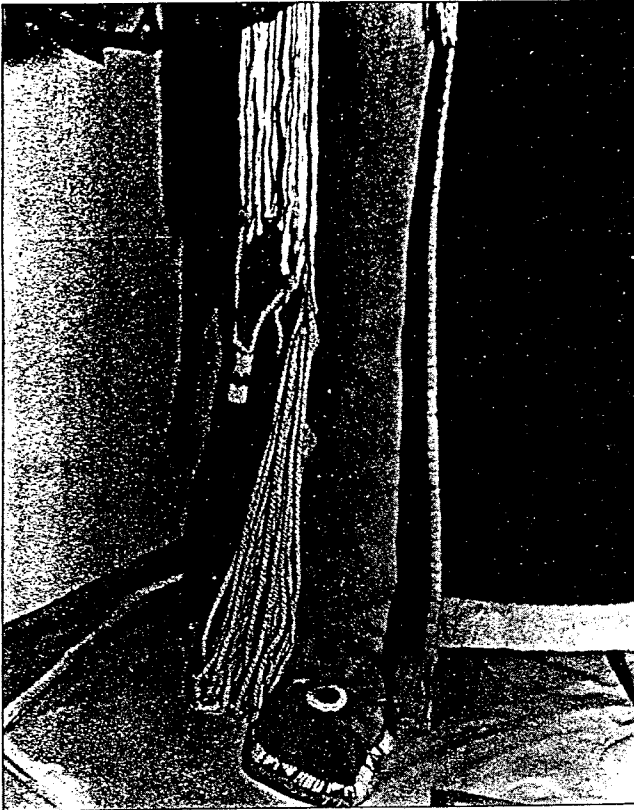
Photo 9 #1510/48 leggings in the Baldwin Parker tipi exhibit at PPHM.

Photo 10 Oscar Yellowwolf manikin at PPHM in Canyon, Texas.

Photo 11 Museum catalog #1510/85 for this photo, the Yellowwolf leggings.

Photo 12 The Yellowwolf leggings. Note breechcloth in relation to the leggings.

Photo 13 Tab and tassel detail of the Yellowwolf leggings.



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colors were most popular (perhaps that was all that was available). In later times as today the white color is common. If you want white leggings you should start with white leather, not a tan color or smoked hide. Smoked, tan and white colored leathers should dye easily. Always make a cloth or paper pattern of your leggings before cutting the leather and always experiment with your paint or dye on a scrap piece first.

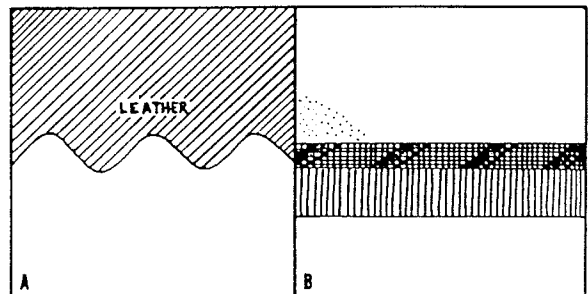
**Tabs**-Most important is the squared-off end of the tab above the tassel. Comanche leggings can often be distinguished from Kiowa based on this. Kiowa tabs most often come to a point where the tassel begins and often have a single lane of lazy stitch around the outside of the exterior of the tabs. Some of the early reservation period southern plains tab leggings show a very long, narrow tab, heavily decorated with beads and silver buttons, and hanging almost to the ground. A part of this narrow tab, at the top of the legging is a shaped flap of buckskin. This early style is shown in photo 16, a manikin from the Southern Plains Indian Museum in Anadarko, Oklahoma.

**Edge beadwork**-This is restricted to the tabs and sometimes the bottoms of the leggings when cut straight or scalloped. A common pattern is the two down, one up with a contrasting fill-in bead. Commonly done in 12/0 or 13/0 uncut beads (see Fig. 4-C & D).

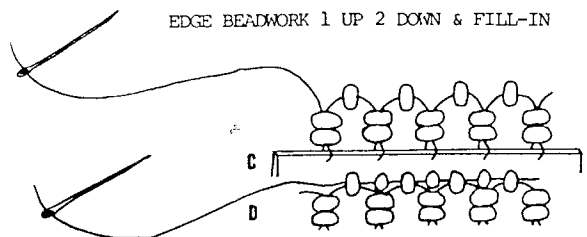
**Twisted fringe**-The finest is made from very thin deerskin cut into long strips 1/8" wide or less. Less expensive and less time consuming is the use of cotton chalk line. Part of the beauty of these leggings is the way the fringe is longest at the knee, shortest at the ankle, all ending about the same position below the legging bottom. Whether you choose to trim your legging fringes a couple of inches longer than the legging bottoms or let them drag four to eight inches on the ground is up to the maker. The super-long fringe is an older attribute and much prettier, but has the disadvantages

of getting dirty quickly and stepped on at dances. I'm sure in the old days when Comanches spent a great deal of time on horse back, very long legging and moccasin fringe didn't get in the way all that much. Although not done so on any of the PPHM leggings, twisted fringe can be decorated and the ends secured from unraveling in a variety of ways. An occasional mescal bean slid up to the top of the fringe looks good as do narrow silver bands crimped around the fringe at regular intervals. Ways to finish twisted fringe include whipping it with thread, punching a hole in one strand and running the other through it, tying an overhand knot in it or crimping with a silver band an inch or so from the end (see Fig. 3-D). Raveling is not that critical, as only two or three inches ever untwist if the fringe is twisted properly to begin with.

FIGURE 4 DECORATIONS #1510/10



EDGE BEADWORK 1 UP 2 DOWN & FILL-IN



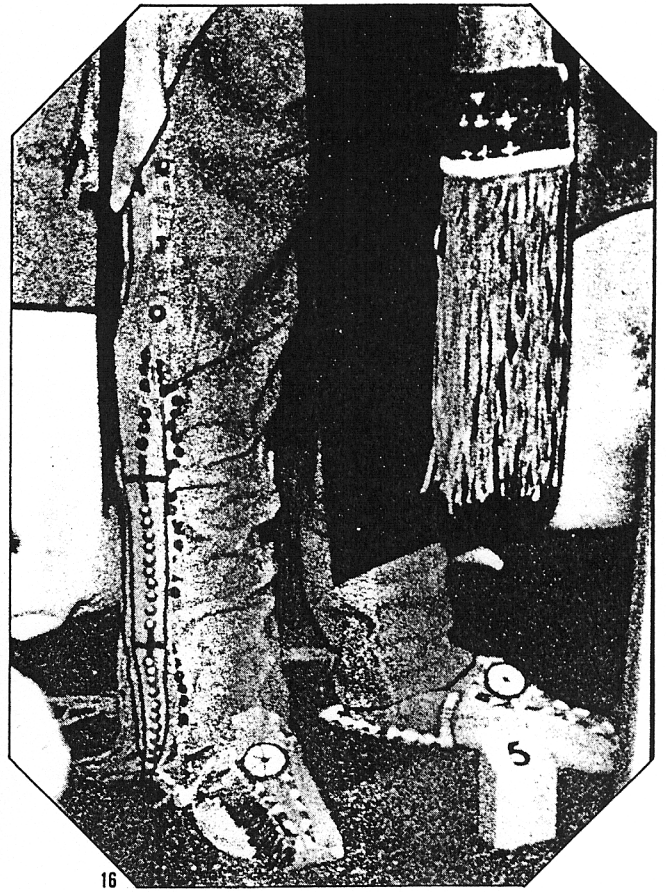
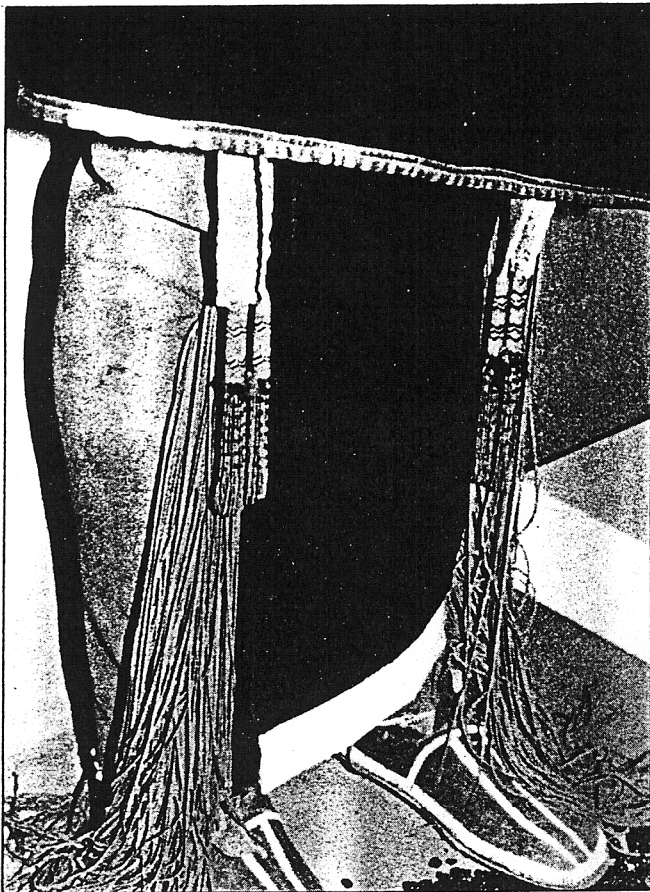
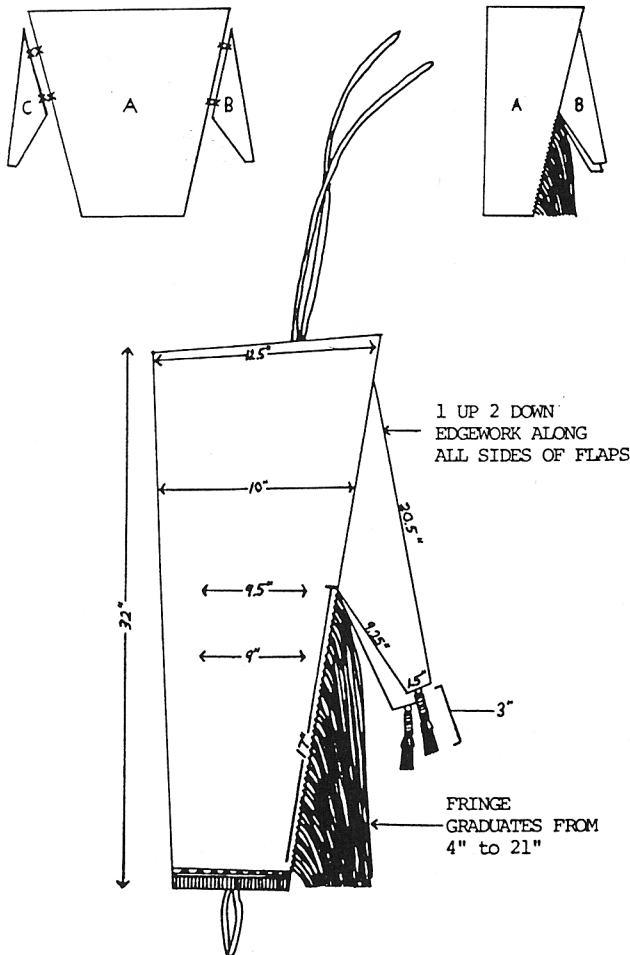


FIGURE 5



Tassels-Many Comanche leggings have tassels of dark horsehair and very fine (16/0) gourd stitched beadwork. The addition of a row of clipped fluffs out from under the tassel beadwork. A variation of the horsehair tassel is the twisted fringe tassel such as shown in photo 17, the Quanah Parker leggings at the Fort Sill Museum, Lawton, Oklahoma. Here again note the extremely fine twisted bands on the fringe. The leggings and their extremely long fringe are colored ochre yellow.

Tab linings-The two choices here are painting the insides of the tabs or lining them with cloth. I have seen taffeta, satin, trade cloth and velvet used in a wide range of colors. The traditional paint colors for southern plains clothing are ochre yellow, ochre red, green, and blue. All these colors give good contrast to either white or yellow leggings. The subject of leather painting will not be detailed here except to say that

- Photo 14 Comanche boy's tab leggings at PPHM. Catalog #1510/10. The untwisted fringe above tab is a part of the manikin shirt.
- Photo 15 Detail of the 1510/10 boy's leggings. Note tuft of red fluffs extending from bottom of tassel beadwork.
- Photo 16 Comanche leggings in the Southern Plains Indian Museum, Anadarko, Oklahoma, showing the early style of long, narrow tab.
- Photo 17 Quanah Parker manikin leggings at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. These are not the same leggings as he is wearing in photo 3, it is obvious those have hair tassels. Edge beadwork on these is all white, tassels are beaded in 16/0 beads on a pony trader blue background. Other colors are navy blue, white, and red.



for green, oxidized copper and vegetable dyes were common, red and yellow were acquired from various iron oxide ochre minerals. Today many commercial dyes, leather dyes, and acrylic paints can be used.

Bottom decoration-Figure 4-A & B shows scalloping without edge beadwork, also the short, straight fringe. This scalloping may be edge beaded if desired. The short fringe is usually accompanied by a narrow lane of beadwork five to ten beads wide above it. Legging bottoms can also be out straight and edge beaded.

Other decoration-Small, domed silver buttons were used on some older styles of leggings. The background and history section of the article suggests other fringe attachments used in the 19th century.

Making your leggings-If you are interested in making a pair of Comanche tab leggings for your straight dance, southern traditional, or Comanche dance clothes, any combination of the above mentioned variations are attractive and highly authentic. The bead colors I have given here are based on standard sample card colors from Crazy Crow Trading Post in Denison, Texas. Keep in mind that old bead colors vary from new ones and bead colors today may vary between batches. If you can acquire hides large enough to cut out the complete legging, do it. It is a lot of work splicing those tabs on. Make your leggings snug fitting as they will stretch some with use. Always make a pattern first, try it on and make sure you have enough leather. The twisted fringe takes a surprising amount of leather, for my pair an entire small, thin deer hide, cut into 1/8 inch strips was used. 100 fringes are on each legging, spaced 1/8 inch apart. With some careful folding and basting the cloth lining and edge beadwork can be sewn with the same thread. Try it!

aring your leggings-The only thing more important than making your leggings correctly is wearing them correctly. Position the seam to the side of your leg or slightly forward of this. A good way to check your legging is to place the seam in that notch on the outside of your kneecap. A long, narrow broadcloth breechclout and a black waist shawl will add to your Comanche clothes. Old photographs show several Comanche men wearing their leggings with beaded or yarn garters. By far most tabs are worn on the outside of the bells, hanging freely to sway, but it is not unheard of for the tabs to be tucked inside your dance bells by folding them against your leg then buckling on your bells.

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#### LIST OF FIGURES

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- Figure 2 Construction of the #1510/11 leggings. A Sew B and C together along lines marked with "x". B Turn Legging inside-out and sew together from D to F. Turn legging right-side-out and punch holes from E to F.
- Figure 3 Making twisted fringe. A After cutting the narrow strips twice the length desired and wetting it, place the ends together and twist both pieces of leather to the left. B Twist both pieces together by rolling them to the right. C The finished fringe can be rolled on the table or knee to give uniformity. D Various ways to finish fringe ends.
- Figure 4 Legging decoration. A Actual size and shape of scalloping along cuff of legging. B Fringe and lane of beadwork along legging cuff. C 2 down, 1 up edge beadwork. D Adding the fill-in bead.
- Figure 5 Author's leggings patterned after the 1510/85 Yellowwolf pair.

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