

Straight Dance Bandoliers

By Jerry Smith

Like the classic Mexican bandit with two ammunition belts slung crosswise over his chest, the straight dancer wears a bandolier over each shoulder and across his chest. A bandolier consists of one, two or three stands of beads, usually in combination with bone hair pipes. The strands are held together at the hip and the bandolier ends hang to the edge of the straight dance shirt. Over 50% of the dancers wear a matched pair of bandoliers. Other dancers vary the second bandolier using fewer strings or different bead combinations.

Beads and Hair Pipe

The most common and preferred beads are aurora borealis beads. All colors are used; however, they vary in size; a 9 mm or 10 mm seems to be the average. Brass beads (old style or new) and "silver" (nickle plated) beads are also quite common and popular. Brass or silver beads are sometimes used together with aurora borealis beads. When a dancer cannot afford aurora borealis beads (faceted crystal), he may purchase imitation beads of plastic.

Aurora borealis beads are almost without exception strung in combination with either long or short bone hair pipe. Imitation bone hair pipes are used if real bone cannot be obtained. If a bandolier consists of more than one string, each string is strung identically. See possible bead combinations enumerated later in the article to get an idea of the endless variety of bandoliers.

Spacers

When the bandolier consists of two or more strands, several heavy leather "spacers" must be used to keep the strands from tangling. All strands of the bandolier must pass through each spacer. Therefore, the spacer length will vary according to the number of strands and size of beads being used. To determine the spacer length, multiply the bead width by the number of strands, then add 1/4" to 3/8" to provide a little space between the beads. Spacer width also varies according to bead size from about 5/16" to 3/8". Leather thickness should not exceed 1/8".

Spacers are incorporated into the bandolier in two ways:

1. The strands pass through the entire spacer width via holes punched with an awl. See Fig. I.
2. The strands pass through the entire spacer via holes drilled using a very small bit. See Fig. II.

Method 1. shown in Fig. III is very common today, while method 2. shown in Fig. V is older but possibly more elegant. The leather used for the spacers is usually left natural, but some dye it black.

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Fig I

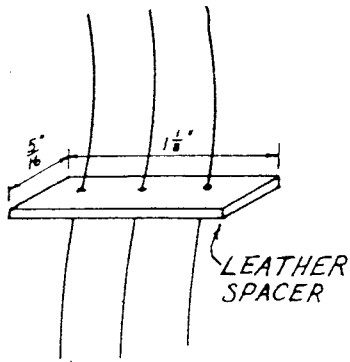


Fig III

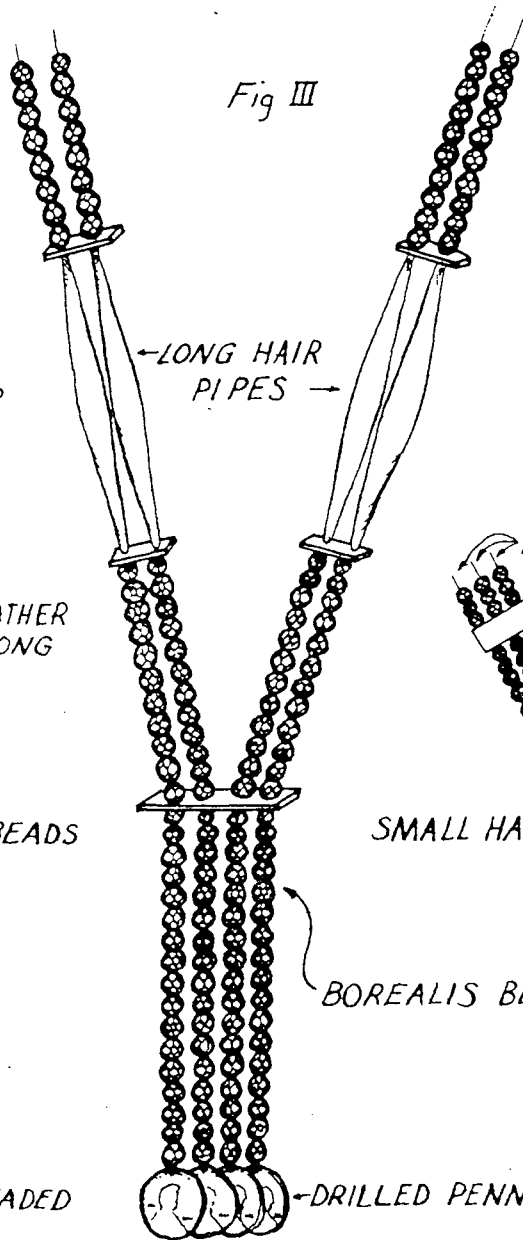


Fig II

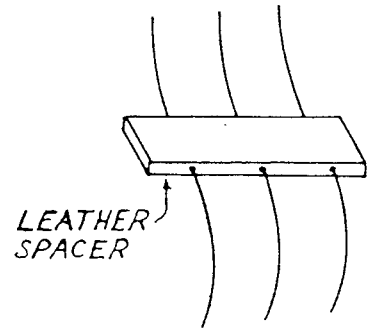


Fig IV

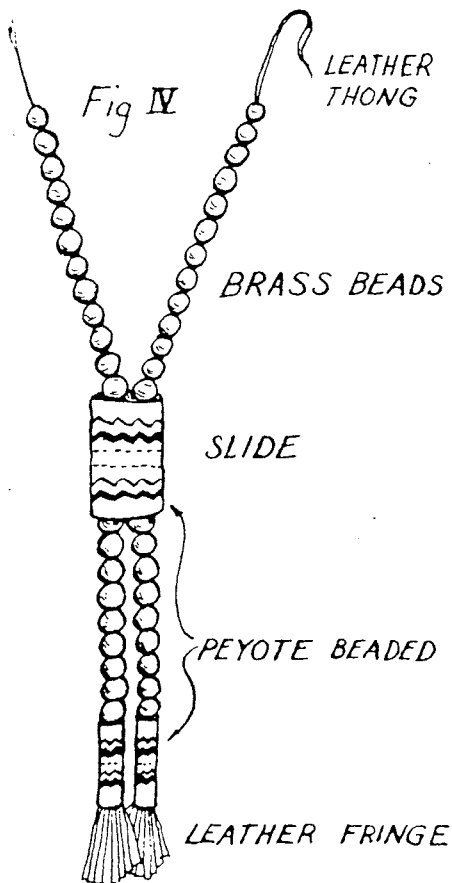
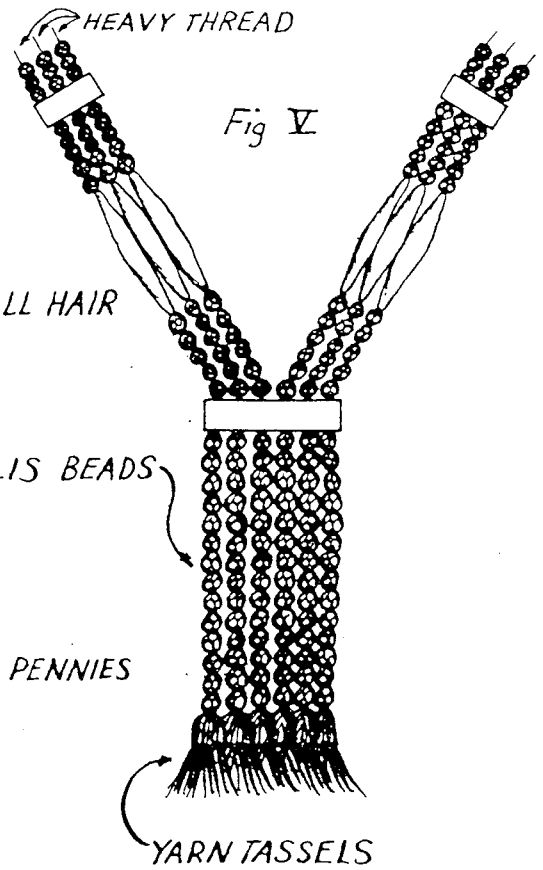


Fig V



Joining the Bandoliers

Each bandolier is joined at the hip by a single spacer (Fig. III) or by a peyote beaded slide. If a single spacer is used, it is twice as long as the regular spacer and each strand must pass through it twice. See Fig. IV and V for details. Fig. IV shows the beaded slide which is a strip of leather sewn end to end snugly around the beaded strands and covered with peyote beadwork. The leather used for the slide should be heavy enough to allow it to slide up and down the beads. The slide method is not recommended when using more than two strands.

Bandolier Ends

After joining the bandolier at the hip, its ends hang to the edge of the shirt. However, the bandolier will not end by just tying a knot to hold the beads on the string. This unsightly knot is usually hidden by one of the three methods shown in Figs. III, IV and V. Attention to details of this type tend to separate a standard outfit from a good one.

Chart of Bead Combinations

No. of Strands	"/" indicates a spacer. "//" using a spacer as in Fig. V. Beads are borealis unless otherwise designated
1	All brass beads.
1	All "silver" beads.
1	24 brass, hair pipe, 24 brass, hair pipe.
2	18 brass / small hairpipe / 18 brass / small hairpipe.
2	12 red / hairpipe / 12 blue / hairpipe / 12 red / hairpipe.
3	/ hairpipe / 2 red, 5 clear, 2 red / 2 red, 5 clear, 2 red / hairpipe /.
3	// 8 purple / hairpipe // 8 purple // hairpipe // 8 purple.
3	/ 1 silver, 5 blue, 1 silver, 5 blue, 1 silver / hairpipe /.
3	/ 12 brass / hairpipe / 12 brass / hairpipe.
3	// 1 brass, 8 red, 1 brass // short hairpipe // 1 brass, 8 red, 1 brass //.
3	/ 2 clear, 5 green, 2 clear / hairpipe / 2 clear, 5 green, 2 clear /.
3	// 12 black // hairpipe // 12 black // hairpipe.

It is possible to wear only one bandolier, but today this is a rare sight. One or two dancers out of 50 may wear bandoliers of 4 strands; therefore, this is the exception.

When selecting material to string the beads on, pick very strong and substantial string. Nylon, flax and fishing line are possibilities. Leather may be used for stringing brass or silver beads, but it is too thick for aurora borealis beads.

Remember, in constructing bandoliers, simplicity is important. Do not try to put everything in a simple pair of bandoliers.