WHITTLING IN THE ROUND TECHNIQUES

The instructions given in this handout assume the carver is right-handed.
If you are left-handed, reverse the directions.

Safety Rules

Use these rules when whittling:

- Keep the free hand behind the cutting edge.
- It is not advisable to whittle in your lap.
- The cutting edge of a cutting tool should be protected when not in use.
- Never get up from your seat with a knife in your hand.
- Wear protection on the nail and ball of your right thumb. Wrap a band-aid around the middle joint of the right index finger, which prevents the formation of blisters.

NOTES

See the
Incise Carving Techniques
handout for additional information

Whittler and Whittling

A **whittler** is a person who holds the block of wood with one hand while removing chips with a knife held in the other hand.

Whittling is in a sense sculpture in miniature. It differs in essential ways, first that it is executed with a knife rather than with mallet, chisels, and gouges. The other two differences are in scale, and in selection of material. The whittler works in soft wood while

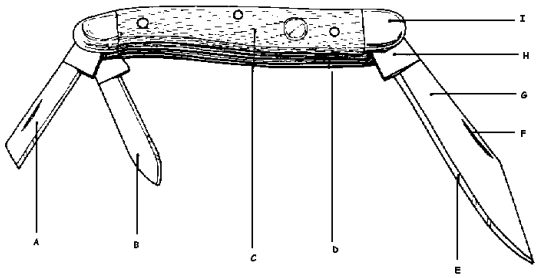

Figure 1
Whittler's Tool of Choice?

A- small blade B- small blade C- handle cover
D- lining or case E- cutting edge F- opening slot
G- master blade H- tang I- bolster

the sculptor selects massive hard woods for his artistry. The whittler most commonly permits the knife cuts t form the final surface whereas the sculptor may spend great amounts of time perfecting the detail.

The Rough Cut

The **rough cut** is used at the beginning while removing excess wood necessary to obtain the general shape of your project. The wood is held in the left hand which is always back of the blade. The tool hand is held firmly in the right hand with the thumb located underneath the handle or resting on the upper side of the blade (see figures 2 and 3)

Long, sweeping cuts are made with the grain. Thin slices of wood are removed with each cut. The blade must never become buried in the wood for a deep cut without guided direction will cause the wood to split. For short controlled rough cuts, the blade edge can face the body with the left hand holding the wood at the opposite end and remaining behind the blade (see figure 4).

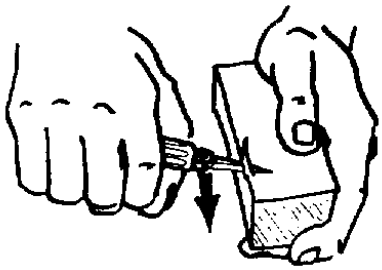

Figure 2
Rough Cut with Thumb Underneath

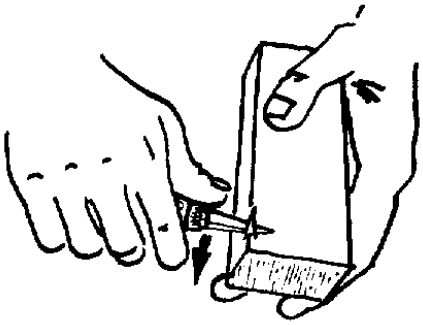

Figure 3
Rough Cut with Thumb on Top

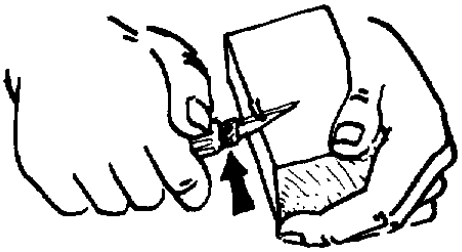

Figure 4
Rough Cut with Control

Right Thumb Action Cut

The **right thumb action cut** is sometimes referred to as the **paring cut**. It is the most important whittler's cut. The right thumb braces against the wood while the blade is drawn towards the thumb by squeezing the fingers towards the palm of the hand. This guided action cut is used for fine detailing (see figure 5).

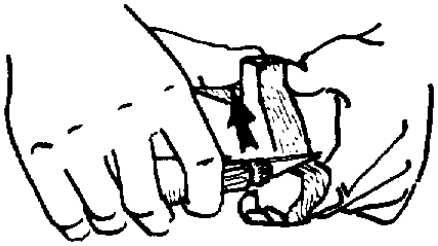

Figure 5
Right Thumb Action Cut

Left Thumb Push Cut

The left thumb push action cut for guided whittling combines maximum control and maximum safety. With the right hand holding the handle and the blade facing away from the body, the left thumb is placed on the back of the blade. The left thumb supplies the pressure and pushes the blade through the wood (see figure 6).

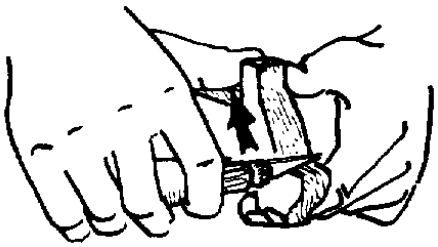

Figure 6
Left Thumb Push Cut

Basic Slicing and Angle Cuts

The **basic slicing cut** and **angle slicing cuts** are used to chip-out small pieces of wood. The tool handle is held with the index finger on top of the blade while the heel of the hand rests on the wood and serves as a support which gives good control throughout the slicing action.

First, the basic slicing cut is made, and then the two angel slicing cuts follow. This chips out the piece of wood. Care must be taken not to break the wood loose, but instead to cut out the piece (see figures 7 and 8).

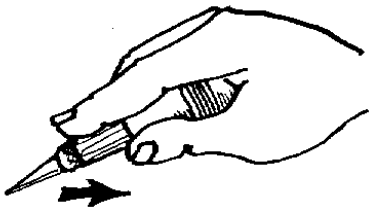

Figure 7
Basic Slicing Cut

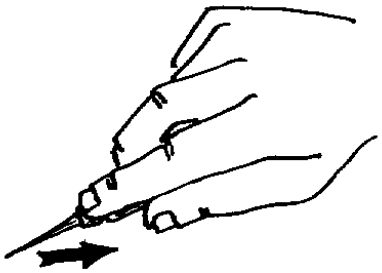

Figure 8
Angle Slicing Cut

"V"-Notching

"V" notching is used to remove wood when shaping necks of animals, cutting underneath the wings of birds, and initial cuts in separating legs.

Brace the project on a table or other sturdy flat surface, while the project is held in the left hand near the point to be cut. Use the left thumb push action to make the angle cut into the wood to the required depth. Then withdraw the blade and make a similar cut from the opposite direction. This forms a "V" notch which can later be pared down to the desired depth and finish (see figure 9). The "V" notch also can be made with the paring cut.

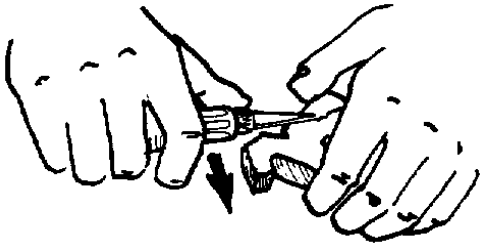

Figure 9
"V"-Notch Cut

Based on a handout by the National Carvers Museum and the Warren Tool Co., Inc., 1986

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