

The Brazos Jack Series

The
California
"Slim Jim" Holster

Detailed Instructions for Making and Lining the
7 1/2" California Slim Jim Holster.



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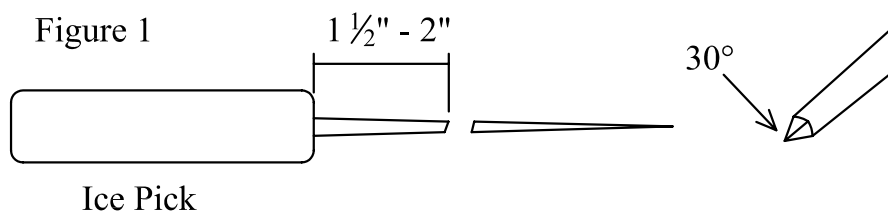


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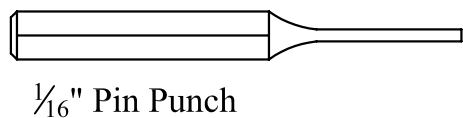
Jim's Leather Awl

Okay, let's talk about the Stabbing Awl that is used in the following tutorial. This is a design that I got from a fellow Tradesman some years back. The point is three sided and pierces the leather with ease.

There are two ways to go here, you can use an old (and I do mean OLD) ice pick. These were made with a quality high carbon steel whereas the new ones are made from a cheap alloy. Cut the shaft off to about 1 ½" to 2" long and then gently grind it down to just over ¼" in diameter. Using a small file, cut the three sided point at about a 30 degree angle, as shown in Figure 1.



Another and simpler way to go is to purchase a ¼" Pin Punch from Sears or other tool retailer, and then follow the same method as shown above.



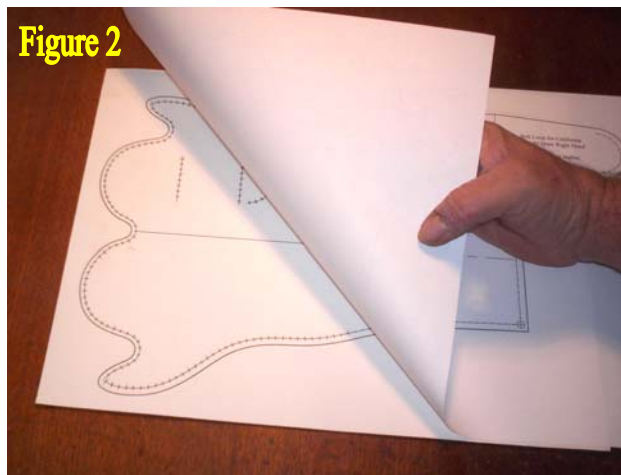
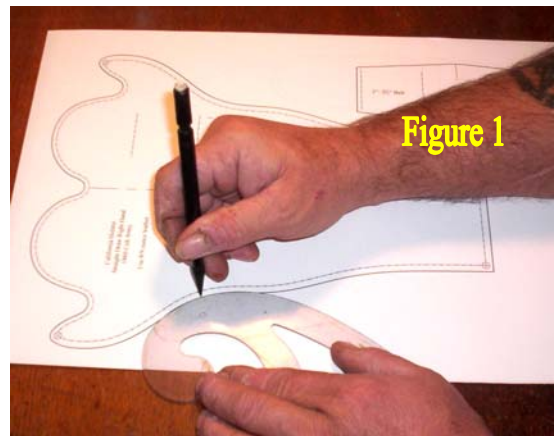
I want to take this opportunity to demonstrate how to make a Fully Lined California “Slim Jim” Holster using the same basic methods used in the Cowboy Holster Tutorial. The pattern templates included in this tutorial are tried and true so feel free to print them or have them printed at your local Printing Shop.

Notice that I said the following instructions will show the same “basic” methods. I say this because with this particular style holster, you have a choice of using one of two methods for stitching the Main Seam. The first of which is the usual “flat seam” which is to put the two sides together and sew either by hand or by machine. The second is using an Angled Stitch method that’s a little different than you may have seen before. I will go through the details step by step to give you a good overview of what’s involved so you can choose the desired method for your holster.

The method described here requires Pre-punched Stitch Placements, so they will have to be transferred to the leather from the Holster Template. The given Template will play an important part in this process, so be sure that everything is marked correctly once traced to the poster board. This is a relatively new concept and is not widely used, but not having to “punch and sew as you go” will save a lot of time and effort in the end.

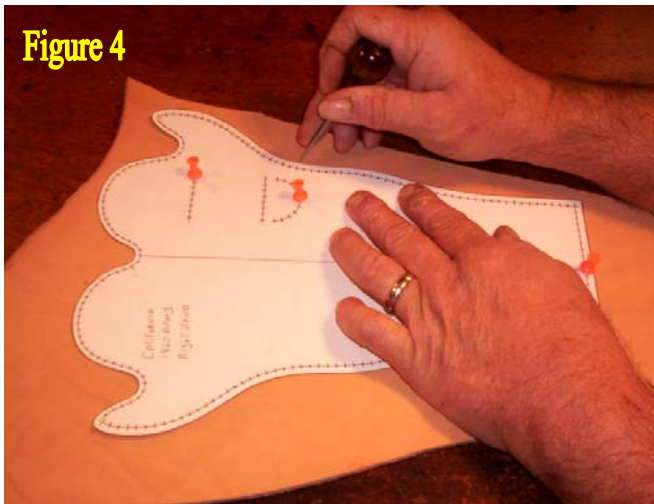
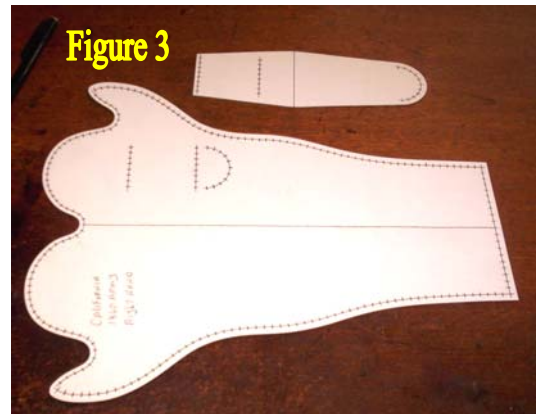
An important issue to consider when making gun leather is the use of Quality Materials. I highly recommend the heavier 8/9 ounce Vegetable Tanned Leather for the Holster, and I recommend using the lighter 2/3 ounce Vegetable Tanned Leather for the Liner. Hermann Oak Leather is my first choice for both.

To start with, let’s make a sturdy and reusable Holster Template. For this, you will need a sheet of 11" x 14" poster board, Carbon Paper, a Ruler, a French curve, Clear Tape, and a 5mm Pencil. Tape the Provided Pattern Sheet to the poster board in at least two places, and then place the Carbon Paper underneath making sure that it is under the entire holster outline. Begin by tracing the Pattern Center Line and then use a French curve to help trace the Outline as well as the Stitch Line of the Holster, as shown in Figure 1.



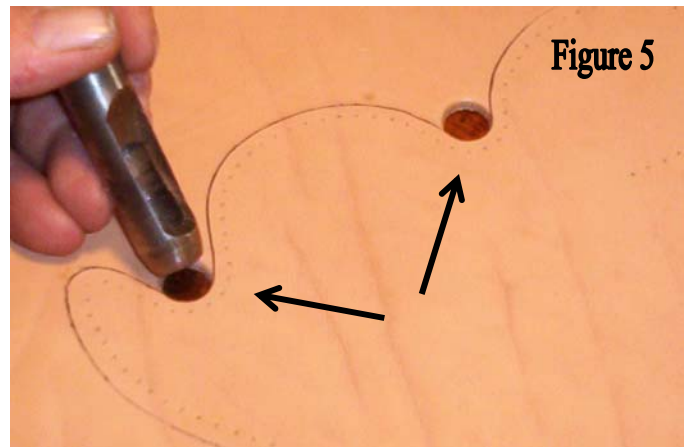
Some of the line may have to be traced freehand, so go slow in order to get a good smooth line. Be sure to trace the Stitch Placements all the way around the Holster Template. Once everything has been traced, lift one corner of the Pattern Sheet before removing it to be sure that everything has been traced, as shown in Figure 2.

Once you see that everything has been traced, remove the pattern sheet and carefully cut out the Holster and Belt Loop Templates keeping the edges smooth and even. The deep recess at the Trigger Guard is a little tight, so go slow when cutting this out with the scissors. Figure 3 shows the Holster and Belt Loop Templates.



the edge with the scratch awl, as shown in Figure 4.

Remember cutting out the deep recess in the trigger guard area in the Template? Well, realizing the potential for heartache, I designed the template so you can use a 1/2" Drive Punch to cut out the lower radius of the curve instead of using a knife. Simply align the Punch by centering it in the radius, and smack it with a mallet, as shown in Figure 5. Do this for the recess at the top center of the holster, as well.

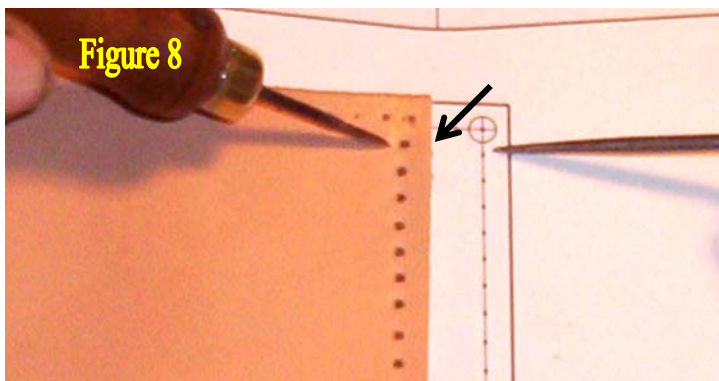
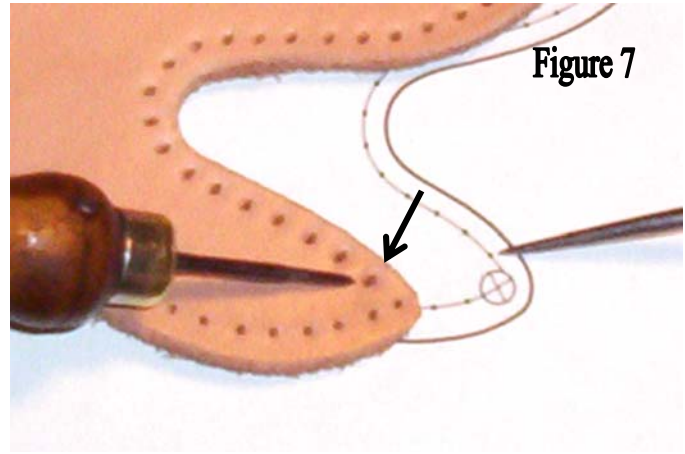


Then, use a utility knife to finish the cut by placing the blade flush with the inside of the cut out hole and then cut the leather along the line. Be sure to draw the blade AWAY from the hole on both sides to prevent cutting into the edge of the holster leather, as shown in Figure 6.

Note: Do not try to cut all the way through the leather at one time with the utility knife. Make an initial cut along the line and then make a couple more passes with the knife to finish the cut all the way through. This will ensure a good smooth edge.

Now, as I mentioned earlier there are two ways to go when you stitch the Main Seam. The following will demonstrate the how to punch the stitch holes for the Angled Seam. If you are making the holster with a Flat Seam, go ahead and pre-punch ALL stitch holes straight through.

For the Angled Seam, the Stitch Placements will be pre-punched in two different ways; straight through around the Top and at the Toe, then at an angle along the Main Seam. So, punch the stitch placements along the Top by starting at the **Second Hole** and pre-punch the holes straight through, as shown in Figure 7. Stop at the **Second Hole** from the Top on the other side.



As mentioned, the same goes for the Toe of the holster, as shown in Figure 8. Starting and stopping at the **Second Hole** from the ends, punch these straight through, as well. Are you confused yet? Well, so am I but the reason for this will be clear in a minute.

Okay, here's where the fun starts. The Stitch Placements along the Main Seam will be punched at an angle, so to get the feel of it, I recommend practicing this on a scrap piece of leather before doing it on the actual holster.

Now, starting at the Top Hole, set the point of your Stabbing Awl on the mark, then slant the Awl to about a 45 degree angle, and gently push it through the leather, as shown in Figure 9. The point of the Awl should exit just shy of the edge on the suede side. Again, practice this on some scrap leather first.

You will notice that my Awl is not one that is normally used. It was made from an old ice pick with a three sided point on the end much like one the Sewing Awl needles. An awl like this can be made with a 1/16" Pin Punch.



Continue this all the way down the side of the holster leather, as shown in Figure 10. Go slow and easy to make sure you keep the same angle all the way down. These stitch holes are for the Seam, Only whereas the ones along the top and the toe are for sewing the Liner Only. Now you see why the first holes at the top and bottom were not punched straight through.

Always pre-punch the Stitch Placements before dyeing the leather to eliminate the possibility of having “white spots” in the finished seam.

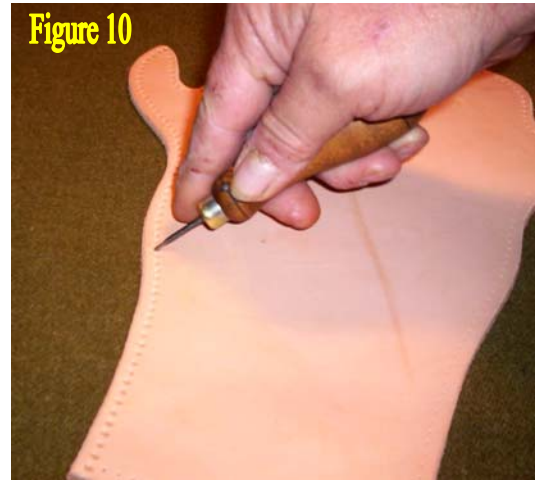
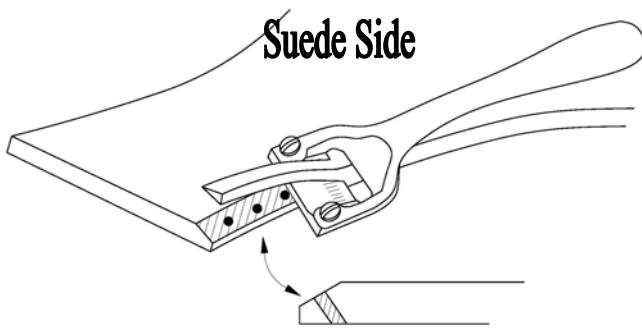


Figure 11



Now, showing the details of the next step in a photo proved to be impossible, so I drew a picture. Use a Super Skiver to trim the corner from the edge of the Suede Side of the leather, as shown in Figure 11. Keep in mind that you're only trimming off the very corner so when the two sides are sewn, they will butt tightly together at the correct angle.

Alrighty then, dye and finish the leather with Fiebing's Oil Dye and Resolene. Dye but Do Not finish the outer edge of the leather yet. This will be done after the Liner is sewn in place as shown later on.

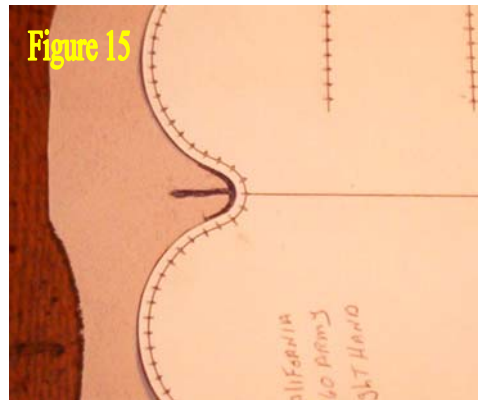
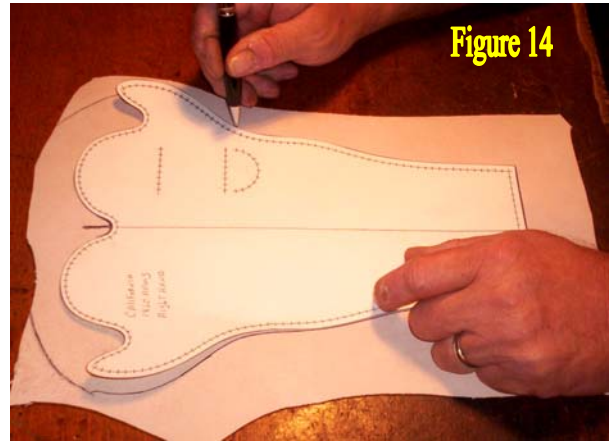
Notice in Figure 12 that the Belt Loop has been pre-folded. Do this while the Belt Loop is still wet with the dye to prevent the grain of the leather from cracking due to the tightness of the fold. Use the Belt Loop Template as a guide as to where to place the fold in the Loop.



The following steps will demonstrate the correct way to layout the Liner and Suede Side of the Holster to help make bonding the Liner to the Holster a lot easier. The first step is to mark a Center Line on the Suede Side of the Holster Leather by folding the Holster Template on the center line, match it up to one side of the holster leather, and then use it as a guide to draw the line on the leather, as shown in Figure 13.

Next, place the Holster Template on the 2/3 ounce Liner Leather and use it as a guide for the overall shape and size of the Liner. Cut the Liner leather at least 3/4" oversized all the way around to allow plenty of room. Trust me, you do not want to run out of leather during the lining process.

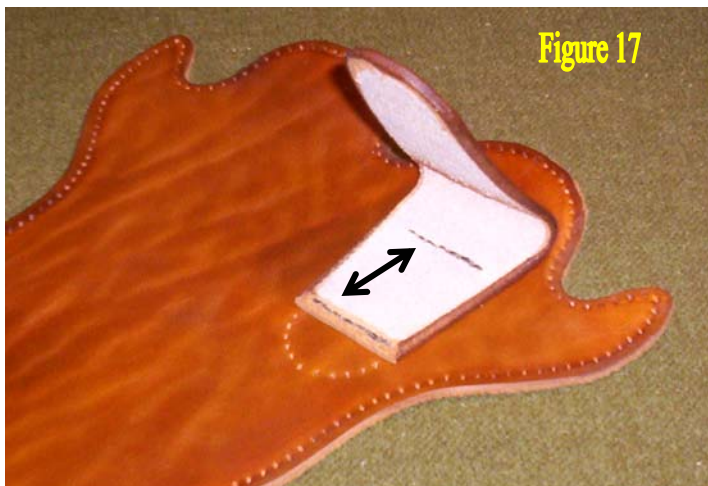
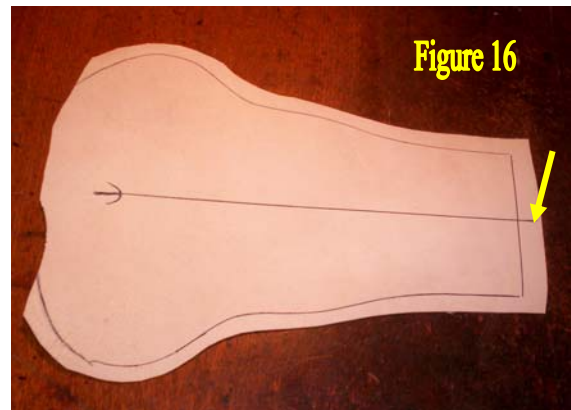
Use a pen to trace the outline of the Holster to the **Suede Side** of the Liner leather so that you will have a reference of how far out to apply the contact cement for maximum bonding, as shown in Figure 14.



Looking closely at Figure 15 you can see where I drew a center mark on the Liner Leather as a reference for the top center of the holster. This is so you will know how far to apply the contact cement on the center line of the Liner. Trim away some of the excess keeping about 1/2" from the reference lines along the sides, but leave the top sort of long for now.

The same center mark is made at the Toe and then a Center Line will be drawn all the way down for reference, as shown in Figure 16.

You can see the Center Line and the Holster Outline drawn on the Suede Side of the Liner Leather. The top edge of the holster is not traced because the cement will extend past this area on the liner.



Okay. Let's sew on the belt loop before we go any further. First off, match up the pre-punched stitch placements on the underside of the Loop to the ones on the Holster, and sew them in place using the Saddle Stitch, as shown in Figure 17.

The Belt Loop shown here is for a 2" belt. The belt loops for the wider belts will use the same stitch hole layout and the same methods.

Follow up by sewing the lower end of the belt loop to the holster as shown in Figure 18, and we are ready for the Liner. With that being said, you can wait until the Liner is in place to sew on the Belt Loop if you want to but I recommed this way to prevent unwanted wear and tear on the stitches if the pistol rubs against them.



The following steps will demonstrate how to bond the Liner in Three Stages so you will have better control over the process. It is very important that you do not rush this process, so take your time to ensure that the Liner gets bonded to the Holster Leather correctly.



Once all the reference lines are marked on the Holster and Liner Leather, apply the Contact Cement to the Center Lines only on the Holster and Liner, as shown in Figure 19. Trust me on this because you really don't want to bond the entire liner at one time.

Once the contact cement has set for a couple of minutes, match up the Center Lines and press the two pieces together, as shown in Figure 20. Once in place, flip the leather over and run your finger over the center of the Liner to make sure the two pieces are well bonded on the Center Line.



Now, pre-roll the Holster and Liner leather a bit so that it will have a slight curl to it, as shown in Figure 21. This will get the leather "pre-shaped" a bit so to make it easier to keep it that way when bonding the Liner to one side at a time.

Apply the contact cement to the one side of the Holster leather and one side of the Liner leather only, as shown in Figure 22. Go slow along Stitch Lines so not to get any cement on the Skived Area. When applying the cement along the outer edges, use One Way Strokes to keep the cement off the rim of the Holster leather. If some gets on there it scrapes off easily, so don't fret.



Figure 22

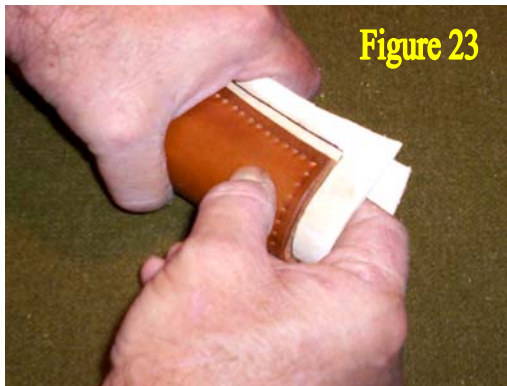


Figure 23

After the cement has set for a couple of minutes, hold the Holster in one hand so you can keep it rolled up a bit, and then [starting at the Toe,] use the other hand to press the Liner on, as shown in Figure 23.

While keeping the leather slightly rolled up, bond the rest of the Liner by running your hand on the inside to press the Liner onto the Holster leather from the center and then out to the edge, as shown in Figure 24. It's not easy to show this in a photograph, but believe me; when you get to this point, you will see what needs to be done to get the Liner bonded to the Holster leather.



Figure 24

Note: After the Liner is in place on the one side, you will notice that the Reference Line you drew on the Liner is now past the edge of the Holster leather. This is normal, so don't think that something went wrong.



Figure 25

Alrighty then, let's trim this bad boy up a little bit! Using a Scalpel Blade, very carefully insert the point through the Liner and then bring it right up against the rim of the Holster leather. Gently trim away the excess while keeping the blade flat with the edge so that it cuts straight with the edge of the Holster. The cut does not have to be perfect at this point because a final trim will be done after it's been sewn. Figure 25 shows the Liner cut away from the top of the holster.

Then, place the Holster on your Cutting Board so you can use a Utility Knife to trim the excess liner from the edge of the Holster. Be darn careful not to cut into the Holster leather while doing this. Trim all the way down and around to the Center of the Toe, as shown in Figure 26.



Figure 26

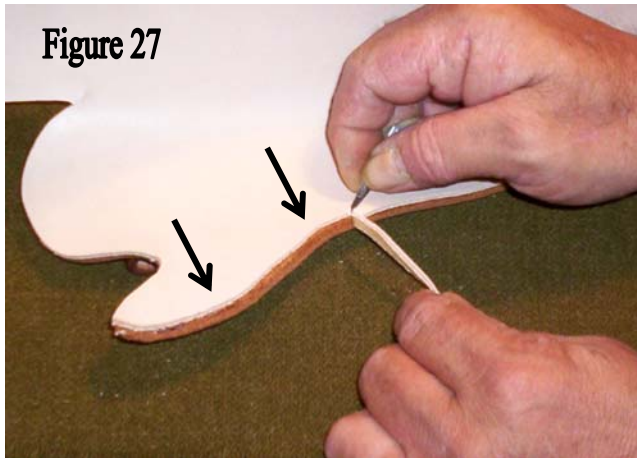


Figure 27

Now, this next step is a little tricky but is necessary. Use the scalpel blade to trim away the Liner from the edge in order to expose the Stitch Line, (the Skived Area.) Keep the strip pulled back so you can see the Stitch Line as you proceed, as shown in Figure 27. This cut does not have to be “right on” the edge of the skived area just as long as you clear the Liner away from the Stitch Line.

Figure 28 shows the inside of the Holster with the strip cut away from the Stitch Line. This is done so the Main Seam will come together neatly when sewn together and you won't have that excess Liner in the way while sewing.

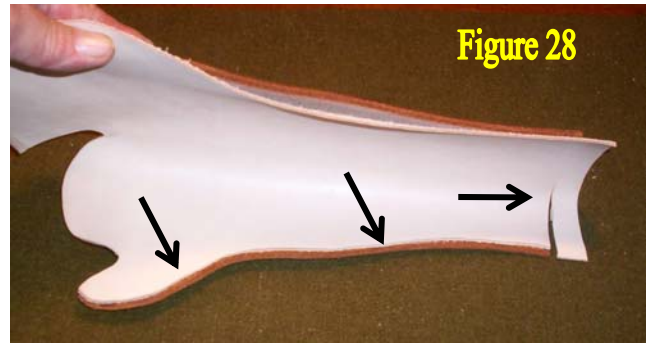


Figure 28

Once this side is completed, repeat the process on the other side. Because the Holster is pre-formed, it will be a little tight while trimming away the excess from the stitch line on that side, so take your time.

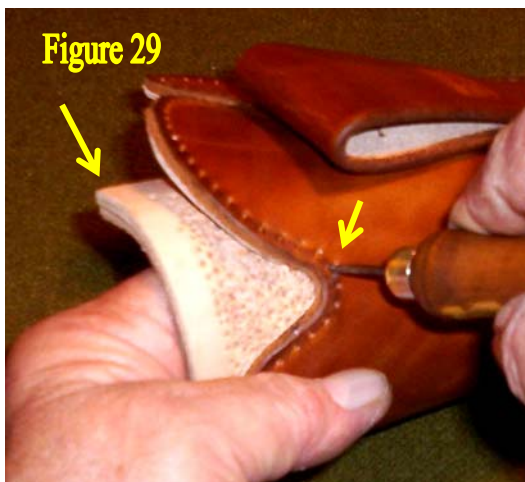


Figure 29

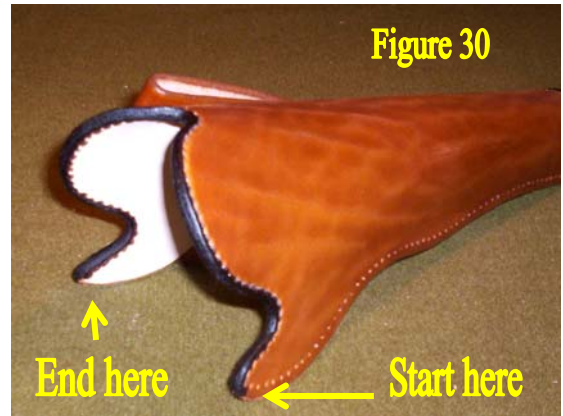
Now, take advantage of the flat surface of your workbench to punch the Stitch Holes through the Liner around the Top by running the Awl back through the pre-punched stitch holes along the edge. Okay, right about now you're saying to yourself, “Self, why don't I just wait and punch these all at once?” Well, there are two reasons for this. One is so that you can do away with the possibility of any “white spots” in the seam and the other is because you will need to use a Double-layered back-up to re-punch them around the Rolled Areas of the Holster, as shown in Figure 29.

You can make one of these Double Layered Back-ups by pre-curling two pieces of 8/9 ounce leather and bond them together with contact cement. This will allow you to place it in the rolled areas around the Holster, as well as the Toe.

When you begin stitching the around the Top and Toe of the Holster, start on the Front Side of the Holster, and then sew all the way around the Back Side. Start at the First Stitch Placement at the top of the stitch line on the front and stop at the First Stitch Placement top of the stitch line on the back-side, and then backstitch at least three times.

At this point, you should make a final trim on any high spots so the edges will be smooth and even, and then Dye and Finish the edges of the lined area at the top and at the toe only. Use a Wool Dauber and a very light touch to apply the Dye to the edge so the dye won't "dribble" down the sides and ruin your work. Then, finish with Resolene. Figure 30 shows the Sewn and Finished edge of the holster.

You will notice at this point that the Holster Pouch remains pre-formed. With the Angled Seam, this will make it pretty easy to sew together here in a minute.



Before you begin to sew the Main Seam, tie the two sides together in at least three places, as shown in Figure 31. Be sure to Count the Holes when tying it together so everything lines up the way it's supposed to!

Using the Saddle Stitch, start at the Top and sew down to the Last Stitch in the Seam, and then Backstitch at least three times. Once this is done, trim if necessary and finish the edge of the Seam by re-applying the Oil Dye with a dauber and finishing with Resolene. Smooth the edge with a slicker and you're all done. Figure 32 shows the finished holster.



Now, that wasn't so hard was it?

Here you see the finished holster with the 1860 Colt Army .44. As you see, this style holster is very sleek and attractive.

I hope you enjoy making the California Slim Jim Holster as much as I have. As historical recreations go, you can't do much better than this!



Until next time

The End
(or, is it?)