

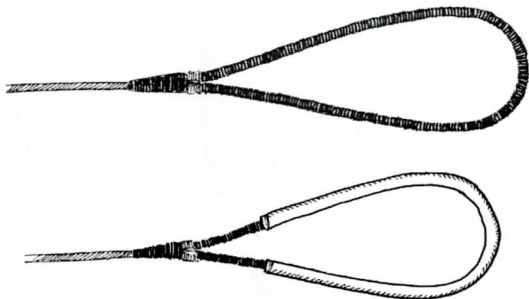
Marlinespike Seamanship

By Ted Walsh

Leathering for Rigging

Any place that you have a bight of standing rigging that is looped over a masthead, gaff, or boom, there is potential for compression on the outer surface and/or chafe on the spar, as well as on the service of the standing rigging. Good yearly treatment with "blacking"* for the service will help maintain the condition of the service on standing rigging, but it will do nothing to protect the spar from compression as tension caused by the working of the rig comes onto the spar.

The typical solution to this problem is to cover the service with leather. The leather spreads the load slightly over both the spar and the service on the rigging and acts as a chafe guard to protect varnish or paint on a spar.



You will need leather, line to stitch with, two sail makers needles (#14 or #16), some blue painters tape and I recommend a pair of surgical clamps (hemostats or needle drivers).

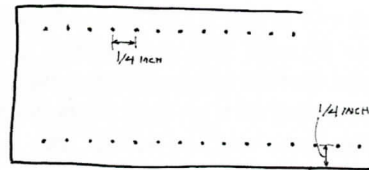
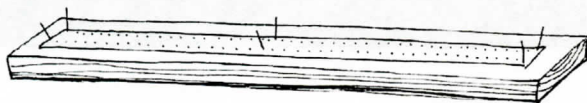
For leather, I recommend 3 oz, or 4 oz upholstery leather (you can use sail makers leather, but it will stretch a lot more and not last as long). Upholstery leather is usually sold in "hide" sections, a quarter hide should be enough to last you for a while.

To apply leather to a bight with service, follow these steps:

First measure the diameter of the wire and service to be covered. A good trick is to cut a scrap of leather and wrap it around the piece to be leathered.

Next, cut a strip of leather the length of the section to be leathered and slightly less wide than the diameter you have measured (you want to leave room for the leather to stretch while stitching).

Now tack the strip down to a piece of scrap wood so that it is stretched tight and smooth, but not so tight that it is distorted. Measure $\frac{1}{4}$ " in from each side of the leather and mark the length at $\frac{1}{4}$ " intervals.

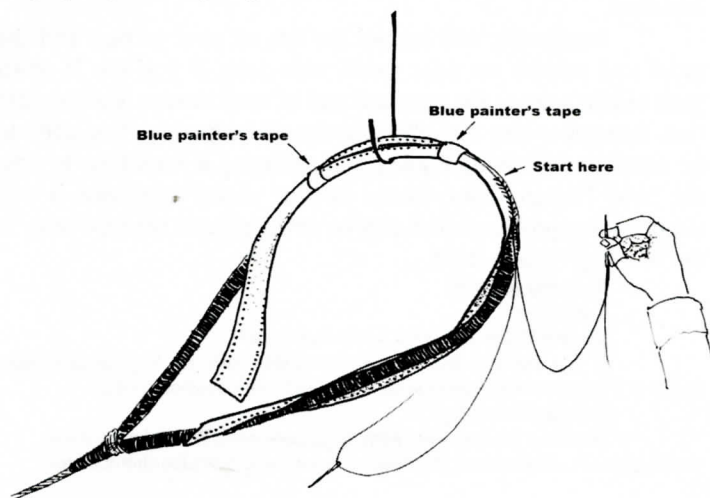


Take a nail, or awl, and punch holes everywhere you have made your marks (I prefer a long finish-nail and a hammer to do this).

You are now ready to stitch the leather onto the bight.

For a large bight, hang the bight you are going to work on at about head height from a branch or rafter. A smaller bight can be put in a vice or clamped to a table.

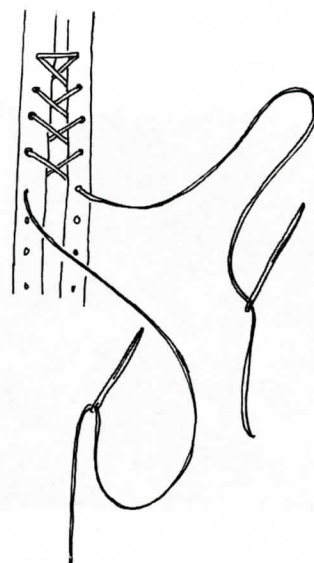
Place the leather where you want it to go on the bight with the seam facing the outside of the bight. You may want to use a couple of pieces of blue painters tape to hold the leather roughly in place as you get started.



The stitch used to attach the leather is a cross-stitch, or "baseball" stitch.

Cut a length of line (I find that two fathoms is the greatest length I can work with without getting a tangled mess). I recommend 45lb braided nylon squidding line for the stitching.

Thread a needle on both ends of the line, and then pass one end through two opposing holes in the leather, now alternate stitches as you would if you were replacing shoelaces in a shoe. Snug everything down every few stitches.



A couple of tips: one is that if you have a long piece to leather and you want to be sure that the finished piece sits symmetrically on the bight, start the stitching in the middle of the leather, work down one side and then go back to the middle and work down the other. You don't need to do this with a smaller bight.

Another tip is, that if you can get a couple of surgical clamps (hemostats) to use as clamps to hold the section you have just stitched, you will have less difficulty maintaining tension as you work.

One last thought: if you have a lot of leathers to do, make yourself finger guards for the joints of your index and smallest finger (you might want one for your thumb too— see how it goes). Just make up tubes of the same leather that fit snugly over the fingers mentioned. You will be able to snug the line down tightly without damaging your hands and you won't lose any dexterity. You can wear sailing gloves instead, but the finger guards will give you more dexterity and your hands will get less tired.

Leathering will extend the life of your service and the paint and varnish on your yards, especially if you rub it down with saddle soap at the start and end of each season. Having said that, remember also that all leathering is temporary. You need to be comfortable cutting it away and replacing it from time to time (In New England every three to four years) otherwise it will simply cover problems that may be developing in the service or in the standing rigging itself.

Material sources:

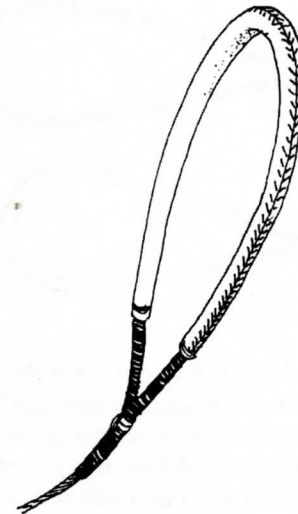
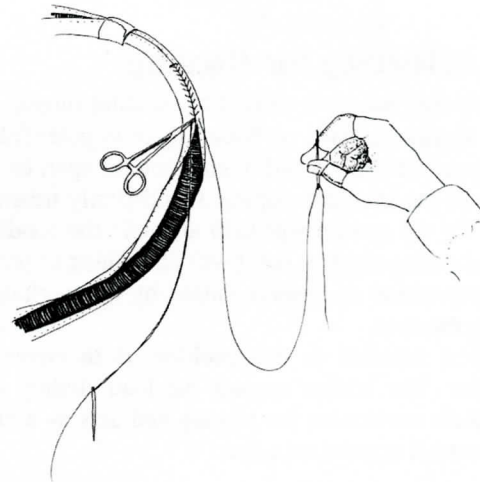
For leather:

Leather Unlimited www.leatherunltd.com

If you are on a budget they sometimes have 3lb bags of upholstery scraps at a very reasonable price, you just wont be able to choose colors.

For needles and line:

Hamilton Marine www.hamiltonmarine.com, West Marine www.westmarine.com, Jamestown Distributors, www.jamestowndistributors.com.



* For a "blacking recipe go to www.dovetails.wordpress.com and click on FSS Newsletters in the right hand column, look for the article on Boat Goop