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Investigator.

Interview with Pete Coffey
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Indian Arts and Craft

The aborigines of North America, before the dawn of civilization, have left behind them samples of their wonderful craftsmanship, made with very crude and very few tools and these tools also made by the Red man's hands. At the same time we have failed to find any correct duplicates of any of this Indian ware, although it has been attempted by the aid of machinery under the instructions of the most technical and skilled white mechanics.

The Indian kills the animal, cures and tans the hide, to make clothing and moccasins for the men, women and children of his tribe. In making the moccasins, they first made patterns for the different feet. Then the long and tedious task begins. They manufacture their own needles, make their thread from the ligaments of different animals, and they use this thread in sewing up the moccasins and for other clothing. Then the moccasins are finished off with beads which they make themselves.

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The squaw moccasins are long, extending almost to the knees. At the top, the leg of the moccasin laps down, say four inches, and they leave a buckskin thong fitting tightly around and just below the knee. There are more than a hundred small buckskin thongs which they twist in their fingers until it becomes very hard and which has the appearance of a linen thread, or cord. A row of silver conchos, beginning with conchos the size of a quarter, and graduating or diminishing in size down to a small concho at the bottom of the leg of the moccasins, are used as trimming. They are then painted or decorated in colors of red and yellow. The entire job is indeed a work of art and the moccasins are durable and beautiful.

The men's moccasins have draw-strings just above the ankles made of one of the stout buckskin thongs. These moccasins are usually covered with beads, with one or more Indian designs worked out in the beads. Silver bangles are usually quite in evidence too from the middle on top of the foot and extending down to the toe of the shoe. When dancing the men keep time with the tom-toms by the jingle of the spangles on their moccasins.

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A squaw dress requires approximately seven average sized deer hides. Great accuracy is required in cutting and measuring for a dress and it requires several months to finish and decorate a dress. Men and boys clothing, pants and coats, are all made out of buckskin or deer hides. Belts, bridles, tents and bedding were made from buffalo hides. The string to the Indian bow comes from the ligament from the top of the buffalo's neck. The bow is made from the bois d'arc tree, preferably. It comes in for its share of accuracy, It is shaped in such a way to give off different units of strength according to the amount of bend you give the bow before releasing the arrow.

The arrows are made of different wood, it requires skill also technical knowledge to manufacture the string, bows, and arrows, also the spikes on the arrows and when finished the arrow is accurate in operation and is a dreaded implement of war. The thong end of the arrow is fringed with three small split bird feathers, which helps to hold or balance the arrow while speeding through the wind. The spike end of the arrow could be the point of

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the wood highly seasoned and polished which is able to penetrate very readily. Oft times they use a steel point or a flint rock brought down to a very fine point that has barbs on the rear end, which makes it almost impossible to withdraw them when imbedded in the flesh or in other objects. These they use when killing big game such as antelope, deer and buffalo.

The craftsman has to be an expert as it is necessary to spike and balance these arrows to a very fine degree of accuracy. The thong or bow string must be a certain degree of tautness to time the speed that the arrow travels over a given distance to find the target aimed at.

Making spikes of flint rock is a lost art today, and has been for more than a century. The oldest Indians living today have no conception what tribe of Indians or in what period of time these arrow heads were made. Yet these and other flint implements, large spear heads, skinning knives and a number of other smaller pieces have been found in many places over the most of the United States. A number of bones have been picked

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up in recent years with these arrow spikes in them still intact. An old Indian told me one time that the "Great Spirit" drops the flint arrows around "already made" for us to find.

The different museums throughout the country will give you some idea from their display of Indian made articles of the craftsmanship of the Red man. Books and more books could be written at great length and then not cover entirely the subject of skill and craftsmanship of the American Indian.