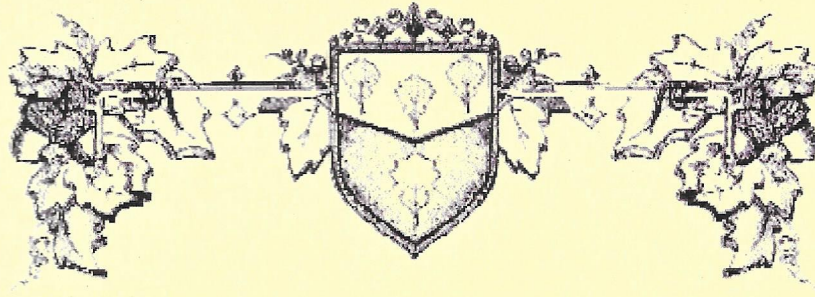


Spiffing up your Campsite...



On making a
Medieval Bed

and the case therefore:

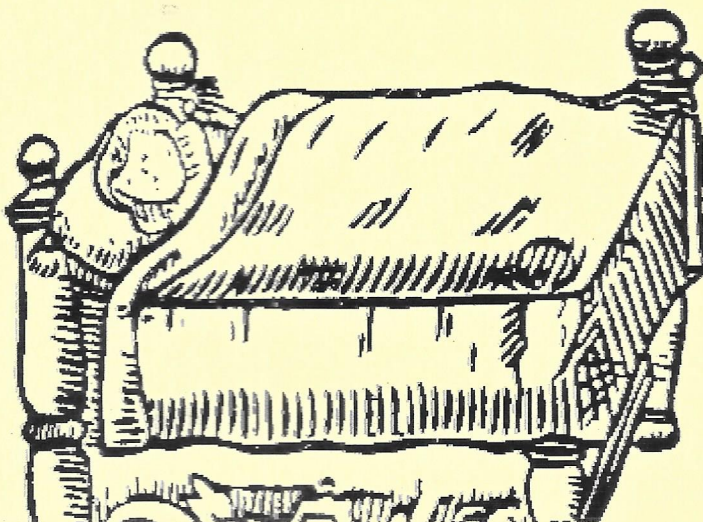
by

Ld. Chas. Oakley, Esq.

Are you tired of sleeping too close to the ground? Ya' say "Bed and Bath" is a phrase that is getting just a little too close to reality for your camping needs? Well, fear not camper for in the modern middle ages we have the ability to provide ourselves with something that our forebears might have considered an unheard of luxury... **a camp bed.**

William Harrison (1534 - 1593) wrote in his "*A Description of England, or a briefe rehearsal of the nature and qualities of the people of England and such comitatus as are to be found in the same*" (whew....),

"The furniture of our houses also exceede the, and is growne in maner even to passing delicacie; and herein I doo not speake of the nobilitie and gentrie onlie, but likewise of the lowest sort in most places of our south countrie... so, in times past, the costlie furniture stayed there (among the wealthy) whereas now it is descended yet lower, even unto the inferior artificers and manie farmers, who have learned also to garnish their cupbords with plate, their joined beds with tapisterie and silke hangings, and their tables with carpets and fine napery, whereby the wealth of our countrie doth infinitlie appear..."



This should be compared with his later observation regarding the state of sleeping facilities of his forefathers



Figure 3:466. *Memorial brass, in Boxford Church, Suffolk. Inscribed to the infant David Bird, February 1606. He lies in a low bedstead with four turned posts.*

"...and we ourselves have lien full oft upon straw pallets, covered onelie with a sheet, under coverlets made of dagswain or hopharlots (I use their own termes), and a good round log under their heads in steed of a bolster, or pillow. If it were so that our fathers or the good man of the house, had within seven years after his mariage purchased a mattress or flockebed, and thereto a sacke of chaffe to resh his head upon, he though himself to be as well lodged as the lord of the town, that peradventure laye seldome in a bed of downe or whole feathers; so well were they contended, and with such base kind of furniture..."

Well, we shall not indulge in logs for pillows or hopharlots for coverlets but shall undertake to make a reasonably useful platform bed for our camping purposes...

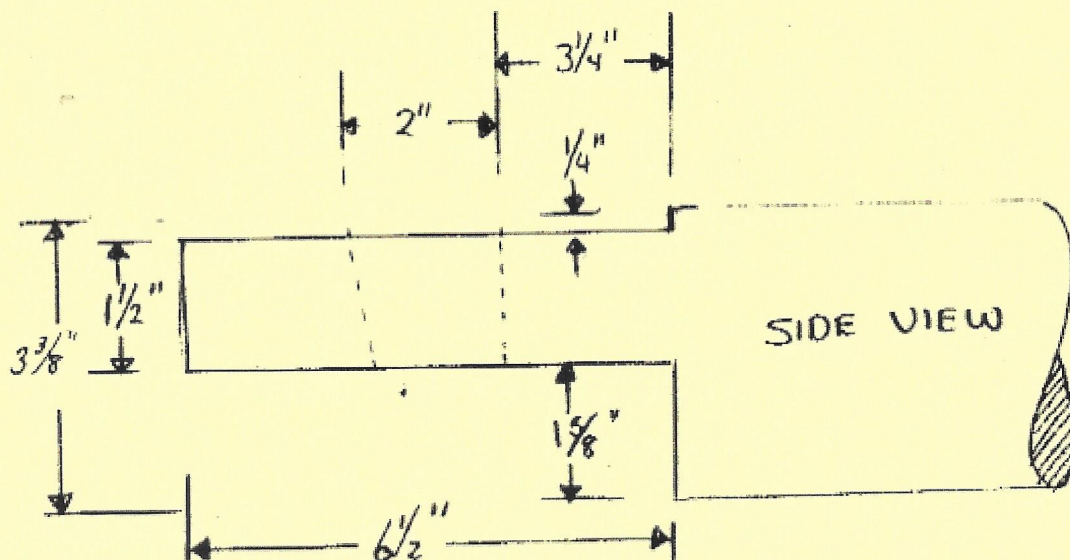
The Parts List...

- Four pieces of 4"x4" pine about 2 feet long. (These should be sound and unsplit.)
- Two 2"x4" pieces 7 feet long
- Two 2" x 4" pieces 5 feet long
- One piece of 2"x4" material 50" long
- One sheet of 3/8" plywood (preferably exterior grade...)

The Procedure...

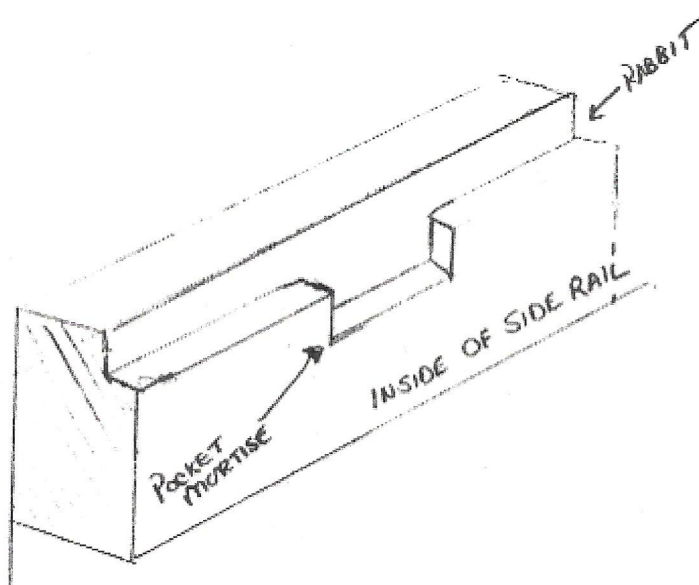
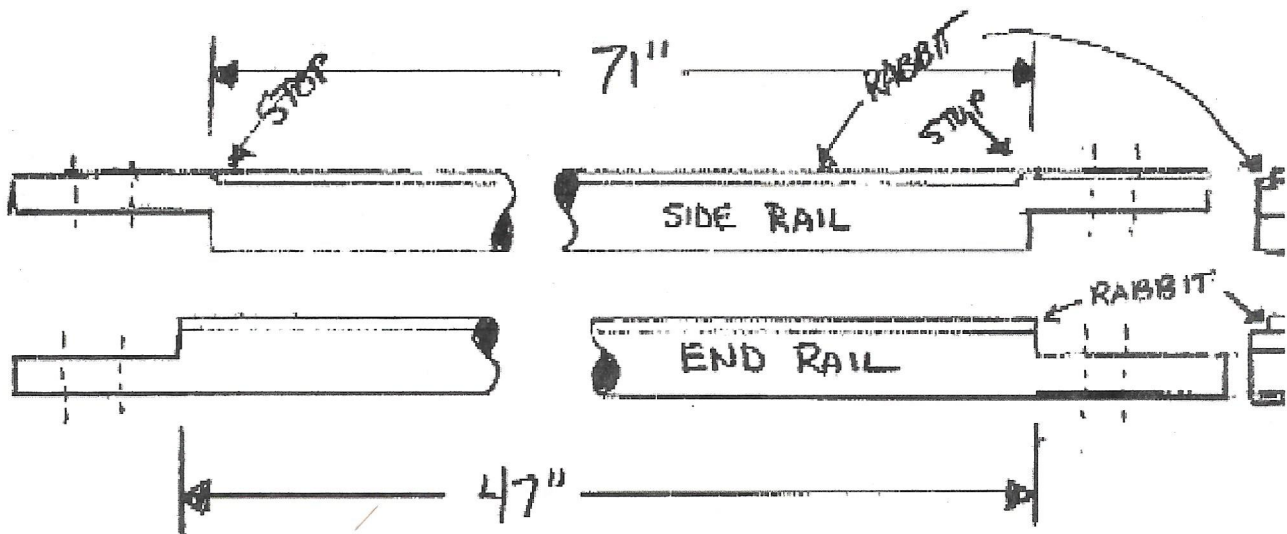
The first thing to do is to cut the tenons on the ends of each of the 2"x4" pieces (*The RAILS*) (except for the 50" piece....). To do this use a bandsaw, jigsaw or hand saw and make the cuts shown in Figure 1.

The next thing to do is to put the mortises in each tenon. Each mortise is 1/2" wide and 2" long (at the top) and extend completely through the tenons. You will note that the mortise (identified by the dotted lines) in Figure 1 shows a slant to one wall of the mortise. It is not necessary to do this. A straight wall is acceptable although it will be more wear and tear on the wedges you will be inserting into the mortise. If you choose to taper the mortise, the angle of the taper should be the same as the angle on the wedge. All mortises are cut the same.





The next step in preparing the rails is to use a router to route a rabbit (or rebate as it is termed in some books) along the inside edge of each of the rails. The rabbit is cut $\frac{3}{4}$ " deep and $\frac{1}{2}$ " wide and runs the entire length of the rail (less tenon). It is into this rabbit that the plywood will lay thus giving edge support on two of the four sides of the plywood. A third side will be supported by a cross member (or members... your choice). On the side rails (the long ones...) The rabbit is made with the tenon to the top of the 2"x4" piece... On the end rails the rabbit is made with the tenon on the bottom. Refer to Figure 2 for details.

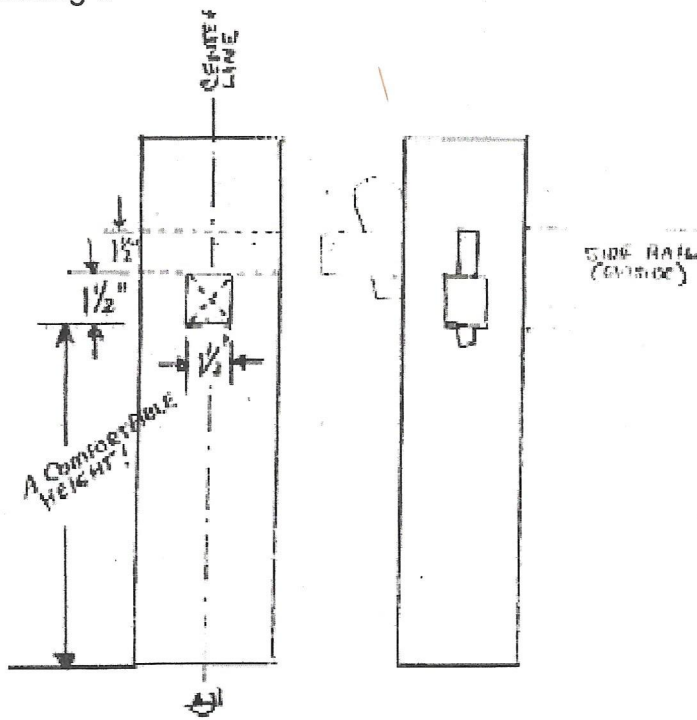


The next step is to make a pocket mortise for that 50" piece of 2"x4" material to set into. Using chisels, cut a pocket mortise into the side rail centered exactly $\frac{1}{2}$ of the distance of the length of the side rail. This mortise will be the size of the end of the 2"x4" and be $\frac{1}{2}$ " deep (as deep as the rabbit cut). The pocket mortise will be made on the same side of the side rail as the rabbit was made.

Figure 3 shows an illustration of how the pocket mortise should look when you are finished. The inside of each of the side rails should have a pocket mortise.

Note: The bed I use has a single stretcher (the 50" piece) across the center. If you don't feel secure with this little support you may add additional stretchers to your bed. I do recommend keeping one stretcher in the middle as this is a primary loading point. Add additional stretchers as you feel necessary.

Making the End Posts.



To make the legs or end-posts for your bed, take the four 4"x4" pieces and, following the guidelines in Figure 4., make two through mortises in each post.

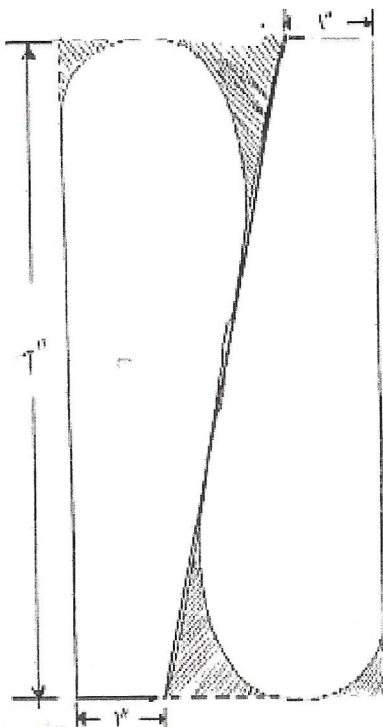
These mortises will be placed one atop each other in such a manner that the tenons on the side rails will pass over the tenons for the end rails when they are inserted into the end posts. If you have measured everything properly, the bottom of the side rails and the bottom of end rails should be very close to the same distance from the ground when the bed is assembled.

The easiest way I have found to make the through mortises is to use a 1½" spade bit to first bore a hole completely through the 4"x4" piece. Then, using chisels or a good quality jigsaw, cut away the corners to make the square mortise. *Note: do not make the mortise too tight or normal humidity can swell the wood and make the mortise and tenon joint almost impossible to take apart. A small degree of looseness is desirable. The wedges will remove any slack in the joint.*

These mortises need to be cut in all four end posts. All posts are cut exactly alike.

The Wedges: -

Take some scrap 2"x4" pieces... cut one piece that is 7" long. Then, lay out your material such that you can rip out 2 pieces that are ½" thick...

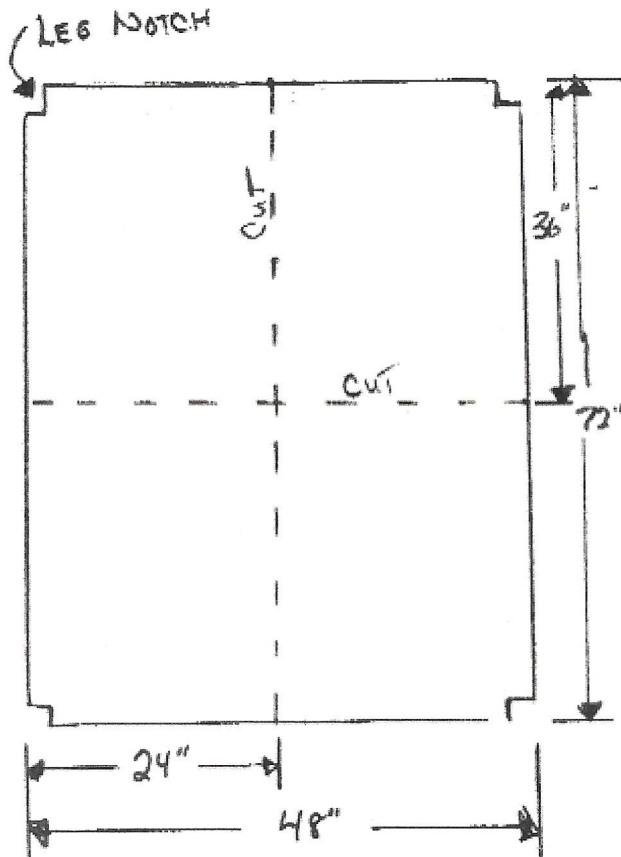


Once you have these pieces, used the pattern drawn in figure 5 to lay out the wedges.... Basically, draw a line from 1 inch from the upper right hand corner to a point 1 inch from the lower left hand corner.... Then lay out a pleasing curve around the top of the wedge and cut them out...

A note on the curve at the top of the wedges... at first look, it would seem that the rounded top of the wedges is a purely decorative element. In fact, there is a structural purpose to this design element. If you notice the grain of your material, it runs the *length* of the wedge.... This means that along one side of the wedge, where the wood is cut on an angle, the run of the grain is shorter near the top of the wedge. As the wedges are normally set with the use of a mallet of some sort, this short run of wood creates a weak area that, if struck, would shear away from the rest of the wedge... by rounding the top of the wedge, it insures that when the wedge is struck by a mallet, the force of the blow will run down the full length of the wedge and the shearing will not occur.

The Platform -

At this point you should assemble your bed and, just to make sure that nothing went too horribly wrong, measure take some measurements on the inside of the bed frame (include the depth of the rabbit). If all went reasonably well... and I figured it out correctly



myself, you should have a length of 72" and a width of 48".... now if your bed is assembled and the dimensions are larger or smaller than this... don't worry about it... It simply means that you have a larger (or smaller) bed...

Anyway... using these dimensions (whatever yours were...) Take the sheet of plywood and cut out a piece equal to that size plus an extra 1/8" on the length and the width (this will allow for the saw kerf).

At each corner, cut away enough material to allow the platform to slip into the rabbits without interference from the leg material.

Once you are sure that the platform will fit into the bed (ignoring, of course, the extra 1/8" on the material), quarter the plywood sheet as described in Figure 6.

When cut... the sheets should lie easily in the bed frame supported on two sides by the rabbit and on a third by the 2"x4" cross piece. This should give you adequate support. However... if it does not, install additional cross pieces.

Embellishments - At this time you might want to dress up the end posts. These can be turned, carved, painted... finials can be added... any number of things....I would strongly recommend at least applying some form of sealer (marine varnish or polyurethane) to ALL surfaces of the bed to help ensure against warpage and twisting of the wood during inclement weather.

Have fun...make stuff...

Chan Ockley, Esq.



A case for the use of beds

in medieval camping:

The above woodblock print was originally included in the great Cologne Bible of 1478-1480. The Cologne Bible was the first the printed bibles systematically illustrated with story telling pictures. The woodblock tells the tale of Judith, who according the story in the Book of Judith was a virtuous widow who was prepared to risk her honor to save her country. Holofernes (the guy missing his head inside of the pavilion) was the general who had laid siege to Judith's city. Judith made love to Holofernes in his pavilion and when he was 'filled with wine' took his sword and cut off his head. She put the head in a sack which her maid had brought with her and, under the pretense of going to prayer she made her way back to the city where she was hailed as a heroine.

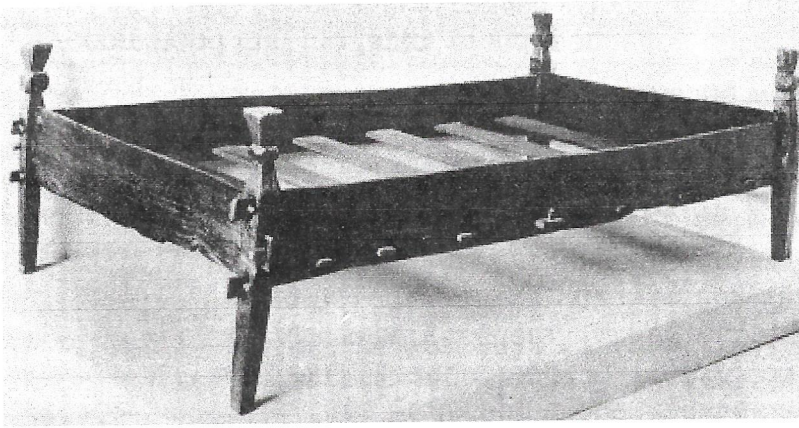
Now, I won't comment on the veracity of this heroic tale but will draw the reader's attention to several details in the above woodblock print.... note the bed contained within the pavilion. It is clearly a platform bed set up on legs and containing a frame. There is a bolster (pillow) on the bed and there are both under sheets and over sheets or blankets. Note also that there is a cloth laid-out on the ground where the poor deceased General had laid out his armor... however, his shield is stored within his pavilion and is set up against what appears to be an interior curtain.

While one can not make the case from the above evidence that the use of beds was necessarily commonplace, one can say with certainty that *it was not beyond imagination the artist who executed the above woodblock to place a bed within a pavilion*. As art relating to religious subjects was rather was required to meet certain rigid standards and conventions I am inclined to believe that, although the scene depicted is undoubtedly imaginary (lets face it... Judith didn't live during the time period depicted....) the scene in the illustration none the less depicts things that existed ... and the manner in which they existed... during or approximate to the time period in which the artist worked. If one accepts that artists draw from experience and life then a strong case can be made that, given the above woodblock print, at least in some cases beds were placed within pavilions.

source: Pictures from a Medieval Bible by James Strachan, Beacon Press, Boston, 1959

... and yet a further addendum...

The following bed has recently come to my attention:



In Marta Hofman's book *Cloth and Clothing in Medieval Europe*, the above bed, a 10th century bed discovered in the Gokstad barrow, is presented as having interior dimensions of 227 cm in length, 110 cm in width. It was made of beach wood and, if one studies the construction method closely, is constructed very similarly to the one presented in this pamphlet. The exceptions being the use of slats run through mortises on the side rails (note that the center slat is wedged in place to keep the side rail from spreading and the slats falling out.).

Hummm... if one were to hinge the side rail above and below the center slat....

You are customer 68 since I installed the counter