

Some Thoughts on Shooting a Longbow

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I am often asked – ‘what is the best way to shoot a longbow’? There are various publications which describe the traditional techniques; however who is to say that these antidotes are correct.

The following notes are not intended to be read as a ‘must do’ instructional manual but are some pointers based on my observations of other archers and on a few ideas that work for me.

It is important that the archer and arrows match the bow. By this I mean that the draw weight of the bow is appropriate and not too heavy. This will allow the archer to draw the bow to a comfortable draw length and continue to do so for longer. With a longbow the arrow rests on the bow about 12mm ($\frac{1}{2}$ inch) off centre and if the arrow is to fly true the spine must be a good ‘match’ to the bow’s draw weight. Similarly the draw length of the arrow needs to be long enough to protrude in front of the bow by no more than 25mm (1 inch). Why shoot arrows that are 50mm (2 inches) or more too long. The extra weight will mean that your point of aim will have to be higher leading to a greater chance of error especially if you are aiming off the boss at the longer distances. Some archers have their arrows cut so that they can feel the arrow point on the back of their knuckle. This provides a consistent draw length similar to using a ‘clicker’. Long feathers mean more drag and the arrows are more susceptible to drift in cross winds so why use long fletches?

I hold the bow loosely taking the pressure high up in the ‘V’ between the thumb and forefinger rather than dropping the wrist to grip the entire bow handle. For me the angle of the knuckle gives a more natural arrow rest and the arrow is less likely to roll off the bow particularly in cross winds.

Nock, stretch, loose was the medieval shooting command and there has been a great deal of debate ever since on the length of time that the bow should be held at full draw. The strongest argument appears to be that it is best to draw and loose in one smooth action. The

theory is that a bow held at full draw loses cast however I suspect that this is very little and consequently I hold my bow at full draw for a better sighting opportunity.

Choose a good reference point, one that can be easily felt and one that becomes second nature for you to do. I place the string next to the side of my nose with a finger knuckle touching the side of my mouth. Each to their own so what feels right for you, do it!

The 'loose' is most critical and one that if you get it right will give you lots of golds – get it wrong and misses will be all that you get! A smooth release of the string is all that is needed so don't be tempted to pluck the string as you release as this will result in the string moving off your reference point. The 1mm movement at string end can result in 30 – 50mm at the target end.

There is no hard and fast rule whether you sight with one eye closed or with both eyes open – personally I use both open. However the sighting of the arrow and getting the point of aim correct is a bit of trial and error. Get the cast (distance) correct first by shooting an arrow and then raise or lower the height of the bow hand for the next shot to compensate. Raising the bow hand will get a longer cast and lowering it will produce a shorter cast. This will set an approximate point of aim. Next I line up the arrow with the approximate point of aim and test loose to find the left / right location. I find that at full draw it is best to position the arrow as high as possible up on the face just below the eye which gives the nearest optical view of where the arrow will go. Next I line up the string with the arrow shaft and the (approximate) point of aim position and this 'string picture' will fix the left to right position. Finely adjust the point of aim to bring the left / right and the cast to bring the arrow closer to the gold.

Longbows and arrows are made from natural materials and need to be treated with respect. Always string your bow using a stringer or by using the balanced push and pull bracing technique. After use unstring your bow and store it flat in a dry, well ventilated location. Wet arrows should be allowed to dry naturally and if possible vertically to prevent warping.