

The ATLATL

MARCH 1992

VOL. 5, NO. 2

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE WORLD ATLATL ASSOCIATION, INC.
1390 SOUTH PARIS COURT, AURORA, COLORADO 80012, USA

AN EDITORIAL

Facts On File, Inc.
460 Park Avenue South
New York, NY 10016-7382
(212) 683-2244
January, 16, 1992

Dear Mr. Lilly:

Thank you for your inquiry concerning your "record" proposal to be included in "The Guinness Book of Records."

No further claims for "spear throwing" record will be considered. The 1990 edition was the last to feature this record.

Thank you for your interest in "The Guinness Book of Records."

Sincerely,

(SIGNED)
Mark C. Young
Editor, U.S. edition

The above letter was received by WAA in January 1992. It illustrates what can only be termed a CLOSED MIND. No explanations, no apologies, no nothing. Just a flat negative response to Charley's letter, which by the way, read:

Dear Sirs:

On August 5, 1991, I wrote to you about specifics for the category of "Spear Throwing" in the Guinness Book of World Records.

We have several of our 131 members who would like to officially compete with the modern atlatl spear thrower for a world record.

Would you please send information on the process of official record keeping? I appreciate your attention.

Sincerely,

Charles Lilly, Secretary

Here we are with a budding sport of the sort where records can be established and broken, but cannot be recognized by the publication which purports to credit record makers with their "moment" in the history books.

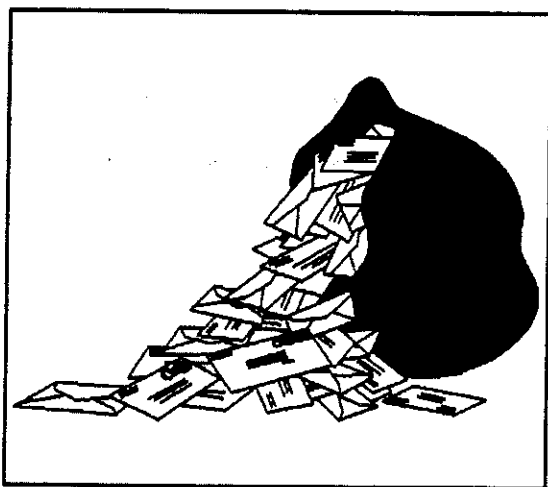
This publication identifies every stupid trick imaginable such as the worlds longest wedding engagement, to the maximum time aloft of a toy frisbee, but refuses to even give consideration to the achievements of such great atlatlists as Manuel White, with a witnessed cast of 476 feet, 5 inches (145.2 meters) on July 10, 1990, or Elaine Swancer who threw a dart 360 feet (109.7 meters), July 21, 1990 to set a ladies record. As of this writing, February 1, 1992, all of these records have been eclipsed by a newcomer to the distance throw event. Wayne Brian of Mesa, Arizona using light weight aluminum darts and a highly flexible and quite long atlatl, pushed the mark to 500 feet (152.4 meters). Actually, Wayne cast his dart 515 feet (157 meters) in one direction, and 485 feet (147.8 meters) in the other direction. Although his throws were not officially witnessed, Wayne plans to try for a formal record at the Valley of Fire Atlatl Contest in April this year. (See more from Wayne on this subject elsewhere in this issue.)

Yet, the Guinness book will forever report that the longest throw with a spear thrower is 326 feet, 6 inches.

The Guinness book's origin was in England where the Guinness Brewery put out a publication of sports achievements as an advertising gimmick. It grew from there and has now sunk to this new low.

GUESS HOW LONG IT WILL BE BEFORE I EVER BUY ANOTHER ISSUE OF THE GUINNESS BOOK OF RECORDS, OR FOR THAT MATTER, EVEN QUOTE FROM THAT "RECORD" BOOK?.....Bill Tate

Get even, die in debt.



FROM THE OLD MAIL BAG....

Dear WAA,
Enclosed please find my \$10 personal check for membership in the WAA. I have long been a bow hunter and am extremely interested in increasing the hunting challenge by including the atlatl in my repertoire of hunting weapons. I am soliciting permission from the Missouri Department of Conservation for permission to hunt with the atlatl during the regular archery season in Missouri. I will let you know the results. I have already been rabbit and other small game hunting with the atlatl, but haven't had any shots yet. I have "killed" several milk jugs, but they are difficult

to cook. My accuracy should improve with practice. I was introduced to the atlatl by my friends John Siebert and Bill Jacobson from Edwards, Mo. (Both members.) I am trying to build up enthusiasm for a local contest this next year. Thanks for providing a group of supporters this great "new" sport. DAVID K. TICKEMYER

Dear WAA,
Please send information regarding your group, membership, and newsletter. Too long have I hunted mammoths alone. Thanks, RICH McWHORTER, Mission Viejo, CA.

From The Archaeology of North America, by Dean R. Snow, 1989 submitted by Ada Bouril Jackson.

.....The bow and arrow were not yet Indian weapons, and were probably not used in the woodlands until after 1000 B.C. The spear-thrower, which had been used by the Paleo-Indians, was still the principal weapon. It worked well, as it had for thousands of years, but Archaic Indians added a new twist. Archaeologists have found evidence that stone weights were tied to the wooden shafts of spear-throwers. Some of the stone weights have holes drilled through them so that they could be slipped over the spear-thrower shafts. Experiments by archaeologists using modern reproductions have shown that there is only an advantage to weighting the spear-thrower, by whichever method, if its shaft is also

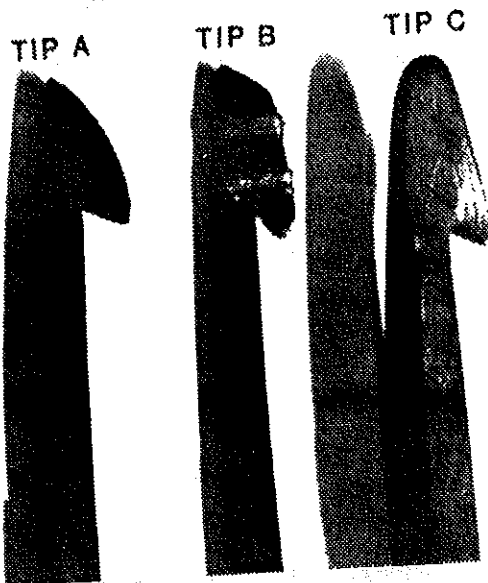
made of flexible material. In fact, the holes drilled in the weights are quite narrow, a sign that the spear-thrower shafts were so thin that any nonflexible material of that size available at the time would have snapped on the first throw. Therefore Archaic hunters must have discovered the advantage of flexible shafts that golfers and fishermen depend on today. If Paleo-Indian hunters could whip their rigid spear-throwers with the speed of a tennis racket, Archaic hunters could snap their flexible spear-throwers with even greater force. More than 2,000 years later, in ancient Mexico, where heavy spears were required to pierce an enemy's thick armor, the spear-thrower was still in use. In America north of Mexico, where hunting was more important than conquest, and warriors valued mobility more than armor, the bow and arrow would become the favored weapon.....

A BRIEF STUDY ON ATLATL SPUR ANGLES

C. Brian Holt

A freak hunting accident resulted in the destruction of the launch tip on one of my atlatls. While awaiting the arrival of a new one, I attempted to fabricate a new tip. The modification proved, at first, extremely disappointing. The new tip B showed a distinctly different set of launch characteristics than the original. Moreover, tip B required different launching behavior on the part of the thrower.

ATLATL SPUR TYPES



However, as I have used the modified atlatl, I have concluded that there can be certain advantages to the tip B profile under certain circumstances. Bear in mind that this is an unscientific study. Comments and criticisms would be most welcome.

Differences in Launch Characteristics between the standard A atlatl and the modified B.

■ There is a significant decrease in range with the type B.

■ There is a significant increase in the force of the dart's penetrating power, i.e., decrease in range equals increase in thrust.

■ Tip B shows a much flatter trajectory.

■ Since the launch point of tip B is more parallel to the center line of the atlatl proper, the follow through possible with tip A, cannot be achieved with tip B. As a result, the atlatlist must put more force into the throw

using both arm and wrist action, and avoid the long follow through.

■ The launch tip of type B must be more blunt than tip A thereby increasing the probability of misfires. To minimize this, I recommend a soft wood tip. This will have the effect of molding to the dart socket more easily, thus cutting down on misfires. However, use of soft wood also means the tip will have to be replaced more often.

■ Accuracy of tip B at close range is easier to achieve than with the standard tip A, however, accuracy of tip B tends to fall off considerably as an increase in range is attempted. Accuracy of the standard tip A is more consistent.

The modified tip appears to show a good compromise between the range we want with our atlatls and the thrust we associate with the Eskimo throwing boards (which are designed for power). In the thick pine and birch forests of central New Hampshire, where I live, the modified tip B atlatl is superb for small game hunting, while in more open spaces the standard, type A is a far better choice. This means of course, that I have to carry two atlatls with me, types A and B, and if I start fooling around with timing weights, I may wind up carrying half a dozen.....

The type C atlatl hook pictured above is my attempt to incorporate the advantages of the first two.

Superstition is foolish, childish, primitive and irrational, but..... how much does it cost to knock on wood?

ATLATLS BELOW ZERO

by Tim Boucher

It was nearly 7:00 AM in mid-January as I began to climb the east side of Rabbit Ears Pass in northern Colorado. I noticed an unusual lightness to the front end of my Toyota pick-up. At first I thought it was the icy and snow-packed conditions of the highway, but as I reached the summit, I remembered the three 5 gallon buckets and large crate I had packed the night before. One bucket was full of river cobbles, one full of obsidian nodules, and one of igneous, sedimentary and metamorphic rocks of all sorts. Then there was the box full of leather, antler billets, antler tines and books on flint knapping, atlatls, and prehistoric man. The rest of the back end was filled with atlatls and spears. No wonder I couldn't steer the thing!

I was to meet the Routt National Forest archaeologist and current president of the Colorado Archaeological Society, Sue Struthers, for a day of archaeology, flint knapping, and spear throwing at the Steamboat Springs High School. As I passed the clock tower, it read: TIME 7:40 AM, TEMPERATURE -14° F.

I met Sue just after eight, and we proceeded to unload all the stuff I had brought, carefully placing all rocks and flaking materials on a 20 X 20 foot tarp for the day's activities. A special room had been set up for us where we could effectively teach 20 to 30 students with enough area

around the perimeter of the room for others to drop by and just watch or to participate between classes.

Sue began with a talk about early Man., prehistoric technology, geology, archaeology and atlatls. She then turned the program over to me and I continued with the atlatl, showing different types of spears, foreshafts, hafting, fletching and throwing techniques. The temperature outside had risen to a cool -12° F, so we opted for flint knapping. Anything inside would work!

The buckets of rocks were poured out onto the tarp-- hammerstones, obsidian, chert, quartzite, antler billets, leather pads, gloves, antler tines, copper flaking tools and Band-Aids - plenty of Band-Aids!

We began. How to remove flakes from cores, how to remove flakes from flakes, how to remove flakes from smaller flakes. How to thin the material, how to prepare the striking platform, how to strike the stone. Everyone participated and slowly the Band-Aid pile began to shrink. We were having some fun now! Arrowheads and bifaces were being made and the students were learning from the experience. Me too.

A few hours had passed and through the noise of breaking rock and friendly chatter, I could hear someone say "atlatls," and another say "Let's go throw spears." Before I had a chance to think about it, and prepare for the

frigid temperature outside, people were throwing on sweaters, parkas, and boots and heading for the door. Everybody beat me out.

As we slipped and slid across the school parking lot, a colleague of Sue's, Whitley, who had brought atlatls and spears for the day's doings, pulled out some fluorescent orange flagging material and stated, "This is to tie onto the spears so we don't lose them in the snow." Just as I started to contemplate that idea, a spear rang out across the snow-covered field. It flew about 60 feet, and the crowd cheered and laughed. We almost lost that spear--no orange flagging. Whitley fixed the rest of the spears. The male students could not wait, and began to throw spears, one after another with no training, no practice, no idea whatsoever. And, they were doing great--20, 30, 40, even 50 yards at a crack. There weren't enough atlatls and spears in the state to satisfy the need.

The girls were a little more timid about the whole thing, but never-the-less, anxious to try it. After some basic instruction and safety rules, they began to throw as well as the boys and enjoyed every minute. Through all the heckling and laughter, and emotion of the day's activities we all seemed to forget that the snow we were trouncing through was well over five feet deep and the temperature 12 degrees below zero! What a fun day. Atlatls anytime--even below zero.

Many thanks to Sue and Whitley

of Routt National Forest for a job well done. You cannot believe the quality of public education going on in the Steamboat Springs area these days. Thanks again.

AS MOST OF YOU KNOW, TIM BOUCHER IS THE CURRENT PRESIDENT OF THE WORLD ATLATL ASSOCIATION. (EDITOR)

Always live within your means, even if you have to borrow to do so.

CRASHING THE BARRIER

I first met Bill Tate in St. George, Utah at the 1989 Utah Statewide Archaeological Society convention. I was demonstrating pottery making, and Bill the atlatl. I tested Bill's equipment that day, and actually hit the target a few times. I was smitten. I traded Bill some pottery for an atlatl and that was how a great friendship started, both with Bill and with the atlatl, as well. At the 1990 Rabbitstick, the primitive skills workshop held annually by Boulder Outdoor Survival School, I was in the company of Larry Dean Olson and a half dozen others as we watched Bob Perkins demonstrate the atlatl. The only two things that distinguished me from the others was, that I had my own atlatl, and I couldn't throw at all. You know how the dart slips off the hook just as you start forward. That happened repeatedly to me. I was glad they ignored me. I was embarrassed!

I came home and worked very hard and taught myself how to

throw. I liked to throw long. I worked at that. I won the long throw at the Valley of Fire contest in 1991. Not very long--375 feet I think, but I was making progress. Not long ago, I asked Bill Tate what the longest throw he knew of was. He told me it was 476 feet 5 inches, by Manuel White of Helena, Montana.

Well, that gave me something to shoot for. Even though Manuel is older, some seven or eight years my senior, I thought that at a young 61 years, I could possibly match him.

For the next few months, late 1991 and early 1992, I worked hard and was throwing 400 to 420 feet. Then I decided to build my own equipment. First I made new darts and I got out to 450 to 460 feet with that change. Then I built my own atlatl.

I was throwing on a football field and knew the distance from goalpost to goalpost was 360 feet--300 feet of playing field, plus 30 feet on each end to the goalposts. I then measured from there to the magic 500 foot mark, unreachable, but still a mark to measure back from.

Then one day, it happened. First 515 feet then 525 feet. Elated, I called Bill--my wife didn't seem to care. January 21, 1992; we marked it down, or Bill did anyway. No witnesses, but I did it. The more I thought about it the more curious I became. You know how you doubt an accomplishment. I measured the football field. You guessed

it. It was only about five yards, not ten from the ends of the field to the goalposts. OK, let's deduct 5 yards + 5 yards = 30 feet. So my longest throw was really 495 feet, not 525. I was really down. I called Bill and he consoled me and we decided I would reach 500 feet soon, anyway.

I continued to experiment. I added a sliding or adjustable counterbalance to the atlatl. I worked with darts, making them longer, shorter, thinner and tried different fletches. Then the day arrived, February 1st, 1992 at Dobson High athletic field in Mesa, Arizona. Five hundred fifty feet of level, manicured grass was spread out before me. It was a Saturday afternoon. On TV, they were golfing at Pebble Beach and I was bored, so I figured I'd throw a few darts. I was throwing around 470 to 480 feet. I had thrown my four new darts about half a dozen times. I was about to quit for the day when I got a strange feeling that if I threw once more, I could reach that "unreachable" 500 feet. The first one was the one. I knew it just as you know from the "feel" of a putt that you know is "in," or a strike has been made before the bowling ball leaves your hand. I just knew! I had measured the field, so I knew where the 500 foot mark was--9 yards from the back fence. The other three darts fell between 480 and 490 feet. When I walked up and saw the first one it was 5 yards from the fence. I got a lump in my throat and my eyes swelled a little. I was alone and I was humbled to know that my relentless effort

had payed off. I was glad I was alone with my maker at this time. Composing myself, I threw back--485 feet, then back again 515 feet. I remeasured the field. I had done it! I had 500 feet taking an average of casts from both directions.

Back home, I called Bill, but he wasn't home. I told my wife, and she told me to turn off the kitchen light. I had no one to tell that gave a hoot. Bill returned my call today, February 2nd, and I felt better. A true friend will share your joy.

I will be at Overton, Nevada for the World Atlatl Association's Second Annual meet at the Valley of Fire State Park. I can not promise 500 feet, but I feel I can promise a record throw, and just possibly, if conditions are right, 500 feet. Also, you can see my personally designed atlAtl. Those may or may not be reasons to show up, but I hope so.

May all your efforts be long and true....

Wayne Brian
Primitive Pottery Process

(Ed. Note: Wayne is a retired automobile tester for GM. He spent a great deal of his life performing tests and analyzing results. He knows that you try a thing, test it, try another, and test that. Test

after test resulted in his extraordinary results with the atlAtl. On February 22, Wayne surpassed all previous efforts with a 557 foot (169.8 meter) cast. Dedication, persistance and commitment has resulted in CRASHING THE BARRIER.)

**BIG LIMERICK
CONTEST**
WIN A WAA T-SHIRT

Two ways to win! Complete the partial limerick. Just make up a last line which must rhyme with Seattle and AtlAtl, or make up your own atlAtl limerick and mail to **Bill Tate, WAA Editor, 1390 South Paris Court, Aurora, CO 80012.** Include T-shirt size just in case your entry wins. One T-shirt to be awarded to best last line and one T-shirt will be awarded to best whole atlAtl limerick. Note, entries must be clean enough to print, as the best of the last lines and whole limericks will be published in a forthcoming issue of THE ATLATL. Judging will be done at the next Annual Board of Directors Meeting.

There once was a man from
Seattle
Who carved out his own atlAtl
But his aim was so bad
With the glasses he had,

(COMPLETE THIS LYMRICK)

**MAKE YOUR PLANS NOW TO ATTEND
THE BIG VALLEY OF FIRE ATLATL
CONTEST APR. 10-12, 1992.**

See flyers, prior issue of THE ATLATL, or contact Leni Clubb, WAA, P. O. Box 56, Ocotillo, CA 92259, phone (619) 358-7835 for atlAtl contest information. For information about Park facilities, contact the Valley of Fire State Park, P. O. Box 515, Overton, NV 89040, phone (702) 397-2088.

SEE YA THERE!!!!!!