



John Derrick

Interviewed by Tom Cowan

1. Where to find the white oak for splitting (01:51)

Derrick: Well the bigger your tree gets the pricklier your splits are gonna get. So you gotta hold down the size of your trees.

Cowan: Can't use great big ones....

Derrick: No, no, no. Because that gets prickly.

Cowan: What kind of, what kind of places do white oak trees grow best?

Derrick: In the Redland um, and most the time on slate rock land, if you find a tree on...with rocks, with slate rock on it, it'll split better. Or red, low Redland is most time you find good variety of white oak.

Cowan: Can you find them in the Sand hills?

Derrick: Not too much. It's some, its...there's white oak in the sandland but you can't do much work in white oak out of the sand because you have a grain in the white oak. And you get that white oak from the sand, you can't do nothing. It'll jump the grain on you if you try to split it. It'll run from one side to the other one, it's got a sand in it. Well this is, you can't see it much but it's got a grain in it, it's tough. That's what they call a cross grain in a piece of wood.

Cowan: Where, those little lines?

Derrick: Yea, where that little streak in there. See you split it with the grain, you don't split across the grain, you split it with the grain.

Cowan: How do you start splitting the log up?

Derrick: Take an ax and a mold like I got and you quarter it. When you first start with your piece of wood and quarter it. And you work from the piece of wood, from the quarter on down to the size you want to make you a basket out of and you make your rims and take, use your drum after you draw it down smoothly about the same size all the way through and that's why my baskets are sized up you see.

2. Derrick judges by the length of the wood what size to make a basket (00:38)

Cowan: This might be a hard question but how do you figure out what kinds of baskets to make?

Derrick: Well, your own self to the piece of wood, you judge your own self to your piece of wood you've got to work with. You can get you a piece of wood here and you say, "well I'll make a basket, so on and so on..." and you work from that. You figure out how big of, about how big of a piece of wood you've got and you work from your, the wood you got to make your basket out of through your size. If you've got a piece of wood used to make a big basket, go ahead and make you a big one out of it. And if you've got one to make a small one, figure a small basket out if it. Because you don't waste it, if you've got something to work you don't waste your piece of wood.

3. Derrick discusses how to make rims for baskets (01:02)

Cowan: How do you make your rims?

Derrick: Well you split, get you a piece of wood...like you said, make your rim according to the size of your basket. You draw it out, just like you'd draw out another piece of wood and split it out. Most the time I split a piece out and make two pieces..., see you can make two pieces. And you use the flat, to trim just with your knife. I rounded this all with my knife.

Cowan: So you made like a round, take a big square split and round it off?

Derrick: Well, almost like a piece of a quarter round...it's I'd call it, the rim was made out of you see. But I rounded all of it with my... pocketknife. Then you sew the rim on with a piece of wood, like I explained to him out there, with a piece of wire. Wet it green and let it dry on your base. You go back when that rim gets dry and take you a green white oak split and sew that rim on there. And the split dries, the green split, it dries tied on the rim too.

4. Why his baskets are unique (00:42)

Cowan: Do you think, how do you think your baskets are different, um, what is different about how you make your baskets from the way people did in old times?

Derrick: Well because I make mine, I smooth mine down and you know you didn't make..., we just cut the rough edges off of the form basket like I got out there at the shed. See, I not got it smoothed down like that because you don't need to smooth it down. You just have to cut the ridges off your...where you split it out. And put your basket up like that you can pull it just as tight, but see I make mine on this [motions at basket] where I like it to be smooth that's why I did the job on this basket...

5. Learning to spilt wood is the most difficult aspect of basket making (00:38)

Cowan: What's the hard..., what's the thing that takes the most patience to learn? Is it, is it learning how to...?

Derrick: Splitting your wood. Splitting your wood, that's one of the important things about making a basket, is knowing how to split your wood. But the day you get your wood split out, that's just about half your job done is when you get your wood split out. It's about half, you about half done then. Patience, I'd advise you not to start.

Cowan: (Laughs) What's, what's the hardest thing, What's the things you have to learn about splitting...

Derrick: Well, learn to grain your wood and how to divide your splits from that piece of wood. There's lots to a piece of wood that you have to learn before you start splitting.