

Atlatl Throwing

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The Ochlockonee River Stone Age & Primitive Arts Festival has an annual atlatl contest at the event. This contest consists of contestants throwing atlatl darts (spears) at a numbered target at set distances. The contestants get three throws at each distance. The contestant with the highest score wins the contest. Prizes are given for first, second and third place. There are novice and advance categories

Many people ask what an Atlatl is. An Atlatl is a throwing stick used to propel a dart (spear) through the air at great velocities. The Atlatl is a stick with a small spur or hook on one end of it. This stick acts as a lever extending the throwers arm, greatly enhancing the speed and accuracy in which a spear can be thrown. This tool gave hunters the ability to stand off and engage dangerous game from distance.



Before the atlatl was invented hunters would have to engage animals such as mammoth with thrusting spears. Picture yourself running up to an animal larger than a modern elephant and attacking it with a hand held spear. This is where the old saying came from. What is the

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squishy stuff between the Mammoth's toes? Slow running cavemen.

The atlatl gave the early hunters the ability to hunt game from a hide, and then have the time to escape if things were not going as planned. No one really knows when the atlatl first started being used. It is known that its use predated the use of the bow and arrow by thousands of years.

Atlatls were used on every continent except Antarctica and are still in use by hunters and gatherers in some of the South Pacific Islands. In some cultures, the Atlatl was preferred over the bow and arrow. The Incas of South America and Aborigines of Australia are good examples of this. The word Atlatl is an Aztec word. The Aztecs made good use of the Atlatl as well as the bow and arrow in their many wars with their neighbors as well as with the Spanish.



Some Spanish accounts say that the Aztecs could penetrate good Spanish armor with stone tipped atlatl darts. I suspect that they were referring to their chain mail armor. When an obsidian tipped dart would hit this it would fragment sending the sharp shrapnel through the chain mail into the Spanish soldier. To build a good bow takes a substantial amount of work and knowledge. An Atlatl is much more simple and easy to construct. Just about any old stick that could be used as a lever will suffice. This would explain why the atlatl was such a popular and well used weapon around the world.

Registration for this competition will take place onsite.