"SMOKE SIGINALS "
Blackpowder Muzzleloading
By; Andre (Graywolf) Reed
A Pilgrims Journey part 2

Beginners Guide to Flintlock Shooting

For two or three centuries the only type of firearm in use were matchlocks, wheel-locks, snaphaunce and miquelets. In Normandy a Frenchman named Martin le Bourgeoys, sometime between 1608 to 1610 presented King Louis XIII the first true flintlock and by 1630 it was well known throughout Europe. It was in use until the invention of the percussion system around 1830.
Today a large number of muzzle loaders enjoy shooting flintlocks, some will be more successful at it than others. In the same way a percussion firearm is more trouble to shoot than a modern breech loader, the flintlock is more trouble than the percussion. Whether one considers this as being more difficult is up to the individual. They require more attention to the little things. If you are the type of shooter who wants to just pick up their gear, load up and shoot, you may find them cantankerous and temperamental, for me that's part of the fun.
Flintlocks are as reliable as percussion, it does take some learning of the basic needs of this particular type of firearm, but there's no reason a flintlock shouldn't fire essentially every time the trigger is pulled.
Flintlock ignitions are available on many types of firearms, fusil, fowler, northwest gun, musket, single and double barrel shotguns and pistols.
A pleasant and easy way to develop the skills for shooting the flintlock well is to proceed through a series of steps, starting with dry firing. Since firing the gun with no powder in the pan, no load in the barrel still wears flint and frizzen, replace the flint with a whittled piece of hardwood the proper size and fire many times using that. When the sight picture doesn't change when the hammer falls, put the flint back in and prime the gun lightly, only, no load in the barrel. When the sight picture stays steady through

the flash of the prime, start loading the barrel, but with light charges. Work up to full charges gradually, and you will find that there's nothing magic or impossible about shooting a flintlock, it's just a learned skill. A flintlock ignition is slower than percussion but a well designed and properly set up lock, though, will give ignition fast enough to get the job done easily, and will seem barely slower then percussion to the shooter. This is true only if all factors are optimized, however. Dull flints, soft frizzens, weak springs, an over-primed pan or a touch hole that's too small or partially clogged will all slow ignition appreciably. Black British flints are highly thought of today, and many shooters prefer them.

A bit of trivia, archaeologically digs have shown that no flints of this type were used during the French and Indian (Seven Years) war, that only 50% of that type were during the war of 1812. The main type used instead was the tan coloured French flints, apparently the standard of the time.

French flints are available today at about four dollars each, compared to British flints at a buck and a half. Both work well. Also available today are sawed flints cut from agate many shooters dislike them. If you can select flints yourself from a shop or suttler. The longest lasting flints will be those with consistent solid colour throughout. A good flint can last through hundreds of shots. Correct installation of the flint into the lock also improves ignition, tightening the jaws of the cock directly onto the flint will rarely work, as the grip is poor. To improve the grip, something needs to be wrapped around the flint before it is inserted. Either leather or thin sheet lead can be used. Wrap it around the bottom, back and top of the flint, insert it into the cock and tighten down moderately. Move the cock and frizzen so the cutting edge of the flint is touching the frizzen, and is flush all across the frizzen face. Hold everything firmly right there and tighten the flint down well. The lock will determine if the flint is mounted bevel up or bevel down. It doesn't matter as long as it sparks well. Just as locks come in various sizes so do flints. The properly fitting flint will be one wide enough to fit from one side of the frizzen face to the other. One must be careful not to use too

large a flint, as the flint can strike and damage the breech area of the barrel. Measure the frizzen before ordering flints, and there will be no problem. Flints can be sharpened while in the lock, by a process of chipping, or knapping the edge. Using a small brass hammer peck at the edge of the flint chipping it away. Steel should not be used as this could create sparks and if the firearm is loaded discharge it.

Good priming increases the lock timing thus improving the guns accuracy. Once the flint has struck the frizzen and sparks have fallen into the priming powder, there is a flash as the powder burns. Best performance will come from having that flash be as fast as possible. Any powder can be used as priming powder. It is well known however that finer grained powers burns more quickly, so it is advisable to use them. A common mistake made by beginning shooters is to put too much priming powder in the pan, a big pile of powder may well block the touch-hole, and then the fire train must burn through that pile to reach the main charge. It's much better, much faster to have only the flash ignite the main charge, not a slower burning trail of powder. On most pans one third of a pan of priming powder or less will work best.

Brush the pan free of all residue from the last shot, using a pan brush. If residue remains wipe it out with a moistened cloth, then a dry one. Pick the touch hole to make certain it is clear; Place a few grains of priming powder into the pan, not more than 1/3 full. Close the frizzen cock and fire the firearm. If the flint edges are sharp the gun will fire every time.

Flintlocks are as safe as any other firearm and as dangerous. All customary safety precautions used with any other black powder arm should be followed. In addition it's possible to fire a flintlock by dropping the hammer on the frizzen, when the pan isn't primed. Consider your gun ready to fire anytime the cock is pulled back, primed or not. Debris in the form of sparks, slivers of steel, chips of flint and burning grains of priming powder can strike the shooter's face or eyes. Shooting glasses are recommended. Also be aware of the fact that your touch hole is a two-way street. Pressure

from ignition of the main charge causes hot gasses and debris to shoot out the touch hole travelling ten feet or more. Advise those around you to stay clear and use a flint shield.

Play safe and keep your powder dry.