

All Rewind Up for the Reef Knot

by Bill Chisamore

Of all the knots there are, there is one that is almost universally known. That knot is the Reef or Square knot.

This knot is probably the first proper knot that is taught to everyone in Scouting. It is the simplest knot to learn and is used by everyone for just about everything. It consists of two overhand knots tied together.

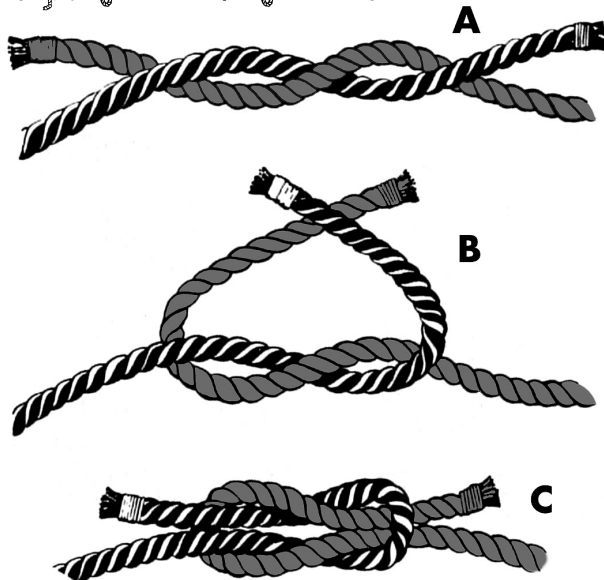
Lord Baden-Powell believed that every Scout ought to be able to tie knots. "To tie a knot seems to be a simple thing, and yet there are right ways and wrong ways of doing it, and Scouts ought to know the right way. Very often, it may happen that lives depend on a knot being tied properly." He went on to say, "a bad knot, which is called a granny [knot], is one which slips away when a pull comes on it, or gets jammed so tight that you cannot untie it."

When teaching the reef knot, most people are aware of the phrase, "right over left and then left over right" used to explain how to tie this knot. The illustration below should be all that's needed to understand how to tie this knot.

Making it Simple

I have found that many youth have varying degrees of difficulty remembering their lefts and rights. How often, when teaching knots, do you use the phrase, "it's the OTHER left"? A solution that really works for me is to take the concept of right and left completely out of the explanation. Instead, I use colour.

Steps for a Reef Knot



Did You Know?

- ☞ The reef knot has been adopted as the symbol of Scouting. You will find it in many of the world Scouting country's emblems.
- ☞ The reef knot is the knot used to tie our neckers. It's also commonly used to tie bandages, packages, and shoelaces.

To start, I buy a large length of rope. Lay it out, and at regular intervals (I use 2.4 metres or eight feet) put a piece of duct tape on the rope, alternating with blue and red colours. Continue until you have the number of pieces of rope you need. Then I simply cut the rope in the middle of the tape. The result should be a piece of rope with different colours on each end. This eliminates the need to whip or burn the ends, regardless of the type of rope you use.

Teaching with Colour

Hold the rope with an end in each hand; red in the right, blue in the left. Put the red end over and around the blue end. Then do it again — putting the red end over and around the blue end. Pull the knot tight.

Later on, after the youth have grasped the concept, you can show that you are always using the same end; in this case the red end is your working end, and the blue end is the standing end.

Caution should be used in the reef knot's application. This knot will collapse or disfigure and become a slip knot when an end is pulled in the opposite direction to which it lies. In fact, I use this very fact to untie stubborn reef knots. *— Now a leader with the 78th Ottawa Troop, Bill also works at the national office Scout Shop, and enjoys sharing his fascination with knots.*



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