

Interesting... but giving the wrong impression

The conversion of raw skins into leather, among the earliest of crafts, has now evolved into a sophisticated and technically developed industry. There are some historic remaining examples that provide an illustration of early practices and the following images show the most basic procedures that were probably typical in medieval times. Needless to say, this method is no longer practical in an industrial sense as even the most basic of modern tanning systems are so advanced in comparison. It does however still have a curiosity value and as such is now used to serve the

tourist industry, complete with guided tours and an opportunity to purchase leather goods produced from the leathers being made.

Unfortunately, these tours place a strong reliance on shocking the visitor with a smell of putrefaction, emphasis on the use of pigeon dung for softening the leather and people working in filthy and unhygienic conditions. They may provide significant revenue for some sections of a local economy but it is regrettable that any visitors may well be left with a totally wrong impression of an industry having a total disregard for the health and safety of its workforce

and the environment. These examples of 'shock tourism' continue regardless of any legislation that could be applied or without any attention been given to good and responsible practices that can be found within small-scale or ethnic leather making anywhere else let alone the high standards of the larger ones.

A perception is unfortunately generated that is clearly detrimental to progressive and responsible leather manufacture and all those involved. The footwear and leather industries, like farming itself, suffer relentless pressure and criticism from many environmentalist movements and



Goat skins are soaked for 10 days in lime solution. They are hauled out daily and re-immersed in the solution.



After liming, the hair is sufficiently loosened to be pushed from the grain using a blunt hand held scraping blade.



The alkali swollen flesh is then removed from the skins using a shaped flat bladed tool.



To neutralise the alkalinity, deswell and soften the skins they are immersed in a solution of pigeon dung. They are turned regularly as shown over a 15-day period.

organisations. They are also wilfully misrepresented by many sections of the media far too frequently such that the general public is only too willing to believe the worst and, unfortunately, it is all too ready to believe any scare stories the media elects to carry.

At least it would be helpful if the

tourist guides could explain this type of leather production is far removed from modern reality. They don't of course as they make money from shocking gullible tourists just as the media and other vested interests do in pursuit of their own agendas. At least we in the leather and footwear

industry know the truth of the matter and must constantly seek to refute unfair allegations and demonstrate the fact that we are a sophisticated modern industry using a sustainable raw material with safe and hygienic working conditions, and an environmentally friendly outlook. 



The next stage is a 20 day tanning period. Various natural tanning materials are used to provide colour, and the pits are covered to avoid bleaching by sunlight.



During the tanning period the skins are regularly removed from the solution, then re-immersed to minimise creasing.



Mostly the leathers are tanned as "natural" due to its versatility. After tanning they are washed then slowly hang-dried tension free.



Leather is placed over a beam and held in place by the operative's thigh pressure. The skin is extended by hand, and then scraped to soften using a wooded block or blade.



Skins are traded in the local markets, although some tanners also own small factories for the manufacture of leather goods.



The crust leathers are hand-finished in many vivid colours for a wide range of leather goods.