



**KITTERY TRADING POST®**

PO Box 904 • 301 US Route One • Kittery ME 03904  
Tel 888.587.6246 • [www.ktp.com](http://www.ktp.com)

## **Introduction to Archery** by Jason Dupuis

Archery is one of the fastest-growing sports in the United States today. Every year men, women, and families begin to find the pleasure involved with shooting bows. Whether it's an adventure into the woods in pursuit of wild game or enjoying a tournament at the local archery club, more people are finding that archery is not just a sport enjoyed by men anymore, but instead, an activity that can be enjoyed by the entire family.

Archery can be separated into two major categories: field archery, which consists of the pursuit of wild animals, and target archery, which consists of merely shooting for pleasure. The majority of the credit for the art of field archery must be given to Native Americans, who mastered the idea of "spot and stalk" hunting and made the majority of their harvests through the use of bows and arrows that they fashioned from the resources available in their area. Native Americans undoubtedly set the groundwork for field archery as we know it today.

The interest in target archery was brought to the United States by European settlers. The settlers brought not only their extensive knowledge of shooting but also their excellent bow-building skills. It was not long before tournaments were held and archery clubs were formed, and as more clubs were created, archery began to become quite a competitive international sport. Target archery debuted in the Olympics in 1900 in Paris, but it was soon removed (in 1920) due to the lack of international competition rules. This problem was fixed in the 1930s by a group of Polish archers who began the Federation Internationale de Tir à l'arc (FITA), the present governing body of international competitive shooting. With the founding of FITA, archery was reinstated in the Olympics in 1972. Of course, target archery is not only confined to the international level. In most rural areas, and even some urban areas, archery clubs exist that can provide a fun and friendly environment for enjoying archery and for competing in leagues as well as in local and regional tournaments. Even your own backyard can provide a safe and economical place to enjoy target archery with friends and family.

Getting started in archery is not overly difficult. It is, however, important that you try and make your purchases in a specialty shop to ensure that you are equipped with everything that you may need and that the equipment is properly sized.

The first decision that needs to be made is the type of bow you would like to use. There are three styles to choose from. The most technologically advanced choice would be the compound bow. A compound bow has an eccentric (off-center) pulley or cam mounted on each limb tip so that the energy required to draw the bow is greatest at midway draw and least at full draw. (This is what is known as let-off. All compound



PO Box 904 • 301 US Route One • Kittery ME 03904  
Tel 888.587.6246 • [www.ktp.com](http://www.ktp.com)

bows will have a let-off percentage that helps the shooter remain at full draw while aim is being taken.) Although this style of bow is not used at the international competitive level, there are many tournaments that allow the use of compounds in many of their shooter classes.

The second style is the longbow - the original bow - and it is comprised mainly of a piece of wood and a string that flexes the wood into a shape similar to the letter D. Although the longbow has seen a decline in its use over the last 100 years, it is still quite popular among traditional shooters who want to keep their equipment as basic as possible, as well as among those who enjoy a good challenge. The challenges lie in that the arrow lies just off-center, which must be compensated for when making the shot, and in the lack of leverage or cast when a longbow is drawn, which disallows the archer to remain at full draw for a long period of time.

The final type of bow would be the recurve bow. “Recurves” are constructed with a curve built into the tips that is inclined toward the back of the bow. Upon drawing a recurve, the limbs partially straighten out, and when they recover to the original C shape, it helps to increase the speed of the arrow. A recurve can be fashioned from wood or from machined aluminum and also provides a shelf for the arrow to rest on that is centered to provide truer arrow flight. The recurve is the bow of choice for those competing on the international level.

Although the draw length of the bow is not overly vital if your choice of equipment is a longbow or a recurve bow, it is definitely important if you choose a compound bow. “Compounds” are set specifically to a draw length to provide consistency when making the shot. In order to find out your draw length, it is best to go into an archery shop where they have the proper tools to measure your draw length. Along with your draw length, eye dominance is something an archery shop can check out for you as well. This is important to ensure the bow is set up to use the proper aiming eye. It is important to note that just because you are right-handed does not necessarily mean your right eye is dominant!

The draw weight of the bow is equally as important in all three bow styles. A weight that is comfortable for you to draw is definitely your best bet. If you can't draw the string smoothly and evenly, then the weight is not correct. Different weights should be tried out until the most comfortable one is found. In a general sense, a target archer is going to shoot no more than 30 to 40 pounds, whereas the field archer may exceed 70 pounds, depending on his or her hunting needs.

Selecting arrows to shoot is not too difficult of a task. There are three options to choose from. Most traditionalists who use longbows and recurves prefer to shoot a cedar arrow, but some may choose to shoot an aluminum or even a carbon composite arrow depending on their needs. Compound shooters may choose from either aluminum or



# KITTERY TRADING POST®

PO Box 904 • 301 US Route One • Kittery ME 03904  
Tel 888.587.6246 • [www.ktp.com](http://www.ktp.com)

carbon composite arrows; cedar arrows are dangerous to use with compound bows because the energy exerted from a compound is too much for a cedar arrow to support. Although traditional archers need to use a fletched (feathered) arrow, compound shooters may choose from either feathers or a plastic vane, again based solely on their needs. Since arrows come in a variety of styles and sizes, it is important that the arrow is properly fitted to the bow. Once again, your local retailer will be more than happy to assist you.

There are several accessories that can be used to help make things a little bit easier on yourself. You may choose to use a finger-tab or glove to protect the fingers of the hand you draw the string back with. Each is relatively inexpensive and will protect your fingers from being chaffed. An arm guard, which is worn on the arm you hold the bow with, is used to protect your forearm from being struck by the string. A mechanical release is an option for those shooting compounds. This is a mechanical device that clips to the string and helps with the drawing of the bow. Once the bow is at full draw, you press a trigger that releases the string. A mechanical release will increase consistency because the string is not being twisted by the shooter's fingers. Releases generally are not used by the traditional shooter but may be utilized by international competitors to improve their consistency.

Most compound bow shooters use a sight and an arrowrest. The sight is a device mounted to the bow to aid the shooter in adjusting for the different distances of shots. The traditionalists, for the most part, will shoot "instinctively," which basically means without the aid of an aiming device. Instead, they use practice and skill to place their shots. This is definitely quite a bit more challenging but definitely a lot of fun! Arrowrests are used mostly by compound shooters, but not exclusively. These devices just serve as a spot for the arrow to rest to increase consistency. Traditional shooters tend to shoot right from the shelf of the bow or the top of the hand if a shelf is not present. This can be done with compounds, but the better option is to add an arrowrest.

Choosing a target is as simple as buying some bales of hay at a feed store or purchasing a foam target from your local retailer. Bales of hay seem to work wonderfully for the backyard shooter who does not shoot competitively. I also recommend checking in your area for an archery club that provides a range for its members. These club ranges are usually a great way to meet new people and can also provide a wealth of information about the sport.

Archery is a fun and exciting sport that will undoubtedly challenge you. It is fun to shoot alone or to share the experience with your entire family. However you choose to do it, you can never beat the excitement of mastering the sport that has been around for thousands of years!