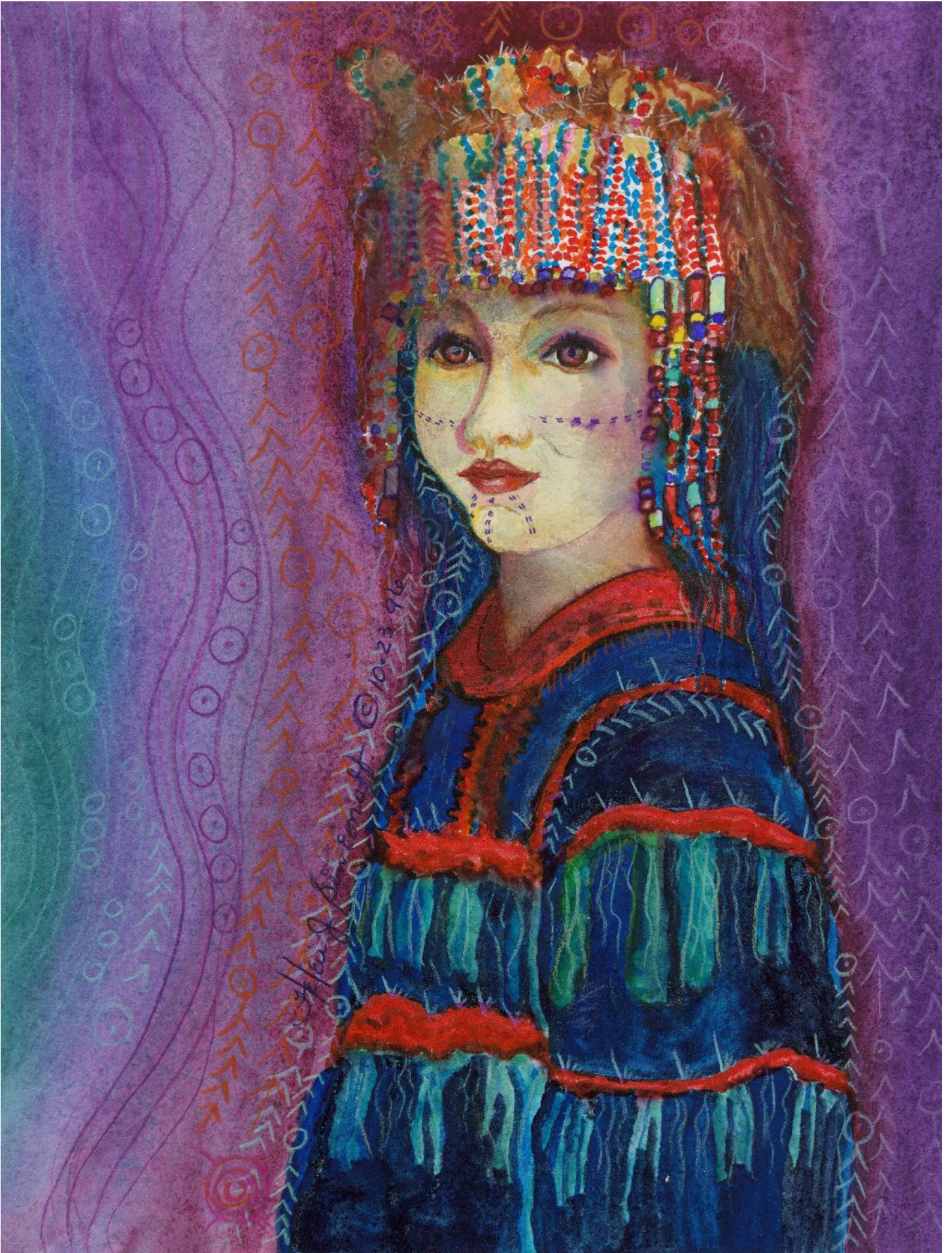


NACAQ

How to Make an Alutiq Beaded Headdress

Developed with assistance from
Kayla McDermott





Nacaq—Headdress

(pronunciation: nah-CHAHK)

Nacat were among the elaborate clothing worn at Alutiiq winter festivals. Participants in these events displayed their prosperity and honored the spirit world by wearing beautifully crafted garments. The materials and decorative elements used in these garments reflected their wearer's age, gender, and social position. Wealthy Alutiiq people wore elegantly decorated parkas of valuable sea otter, fox, or ground squirrel pelts. Nacat, jewelry, and tattoos added to the appearance of prestige conveyed by rich materials. The less affluent wore simple clothing of common materials like bird skins. Whatever your status, your clothes provided a link to the spiritual world. Every animal skin imparted the qualities of the animal to its wearer. Alutiiq people kept their garments clean, well repaired, and nicely decorated to show respect for the creatures that supported human life.

Women's nacat were typically made from hundreds of glass beads strung on sinew. Strands of small beads were tied into a tight-fitting cap with many dangling lengths attached to the sides and the back. These attachments often featured larger, heavier beads that swayed, glittered, and jingled as the wearer moved. In Prince William Sound, the daughters of Alutiiq chiefs wore nacat of beads and dentalium shells that extended far down their bodies, sometimes reaching their heels. Beaded nacat were often accompanied by matching earrings, chokers, necklaces, and belts. Teenage girls and young women wore these lavish ornaments to symbolize their passage into adulthood and availability for marriage.

TERMS

Nacaq (singular) – one headdress

Nacak (dual) – two headdresses

Nacat (plural) – three or more headdresses

The Nacaq Project

How can I make a headdress? Do you have instructions? Is there a class I can take? The Alutiiq Museum hears these questions often. Beading is popular across the Alutiiq world and many people want to make the iconic nacaq, the elaborate beaded cap worn by women for celebrations. The nacaq is the most beloved piece of Alutiiq beadwork, but it is also the most complicated. It takes thousands of beads and hours of careful counting, sewing, and knotting to create this garment.

To preserve and share the nacaq, the Alutiiq Museum partnered with artist Kayla McDermott. Kayla is an experienced beader and talented instructor.

In 2022, we filmed her making a nacaq and created video tutorials to take viewers through the entire manufacturing process. We also collaborated on this matching instruction booklet. Together the videos and written directions illustrate how to create a nacaq from start to finish. Now anyone can build a nacaq with the right supplies and a bit of patience.

Find a digital copy of these instructions and our video tutorials on the beading page of the Alutiiq Museum's website, at www.alutiiqmuseum.org.



Kayla McDermott beading a nacaq in the Alutiiq Museum, 2022.



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A four-part video series accompanies these instructions and can be found on the beading page of the museum's website alutiiqmuseum.org.

Supplies and Suppliers

FROM SHIPWRECK BEADS:
<https://www.shipwreckbeads.com>

Size 6 seed beads (72 strands of 180 beads)

Accent beads (500 beads)

John James three-piece leather needle set (FL281-L)

Nymo beading thread, size F, (50TN112-B) 1049 yards

FROM MOSCOW HIDE AND FUR:
<https://www.hideandfur.com/>

Brain-tanned deer hide (8"x24")

Tools

Scissors

Exacto Knife

Tape Measure

Pen

Disposable Lighter (Optional)

Plate or Tray (to hold beads)

Note: Nacag can be made in different lengths and with a variety of bead sizes. However, if you select beads different than those listed here, it will effect the measurements provided in these instructions.

INSTRUCTIONS

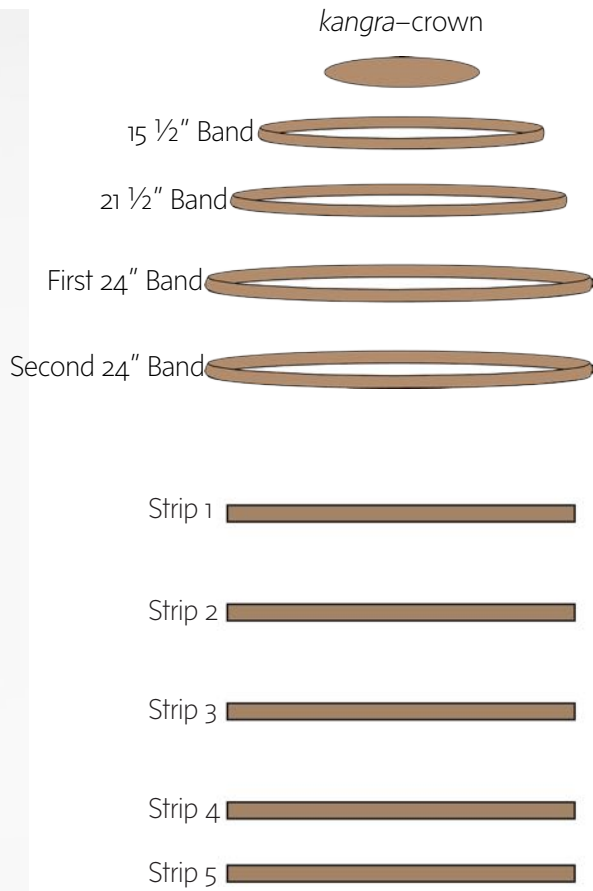
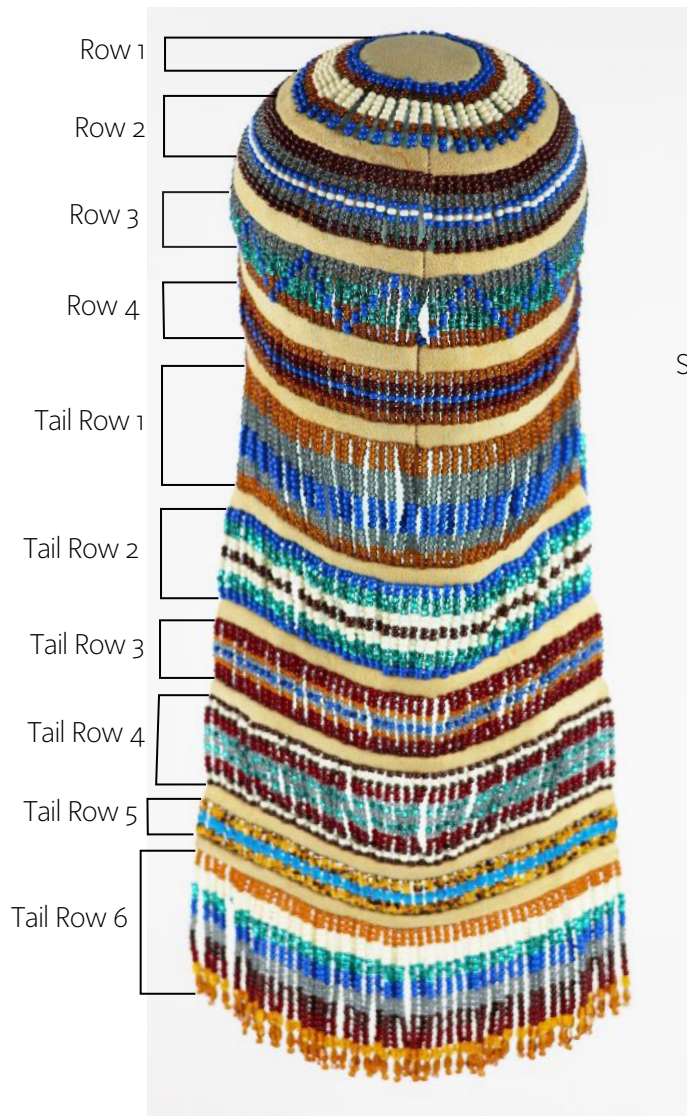
Part 1 – Getting Started

Nacaq Pieces

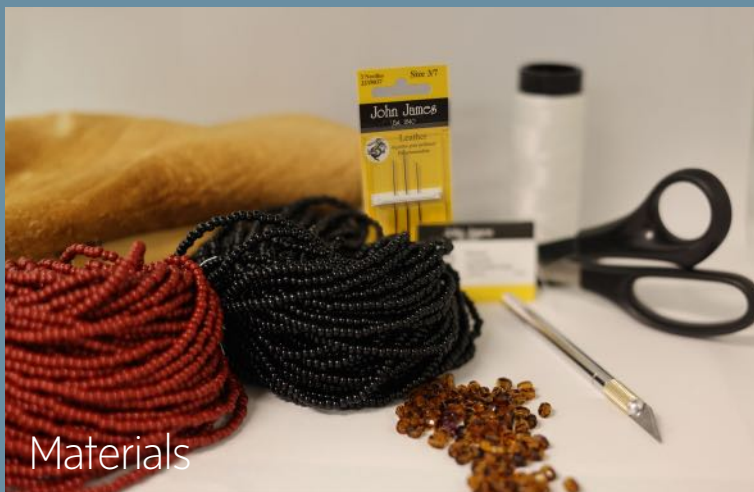


Teacher—*Litnauwista*, by Kayla McDermott

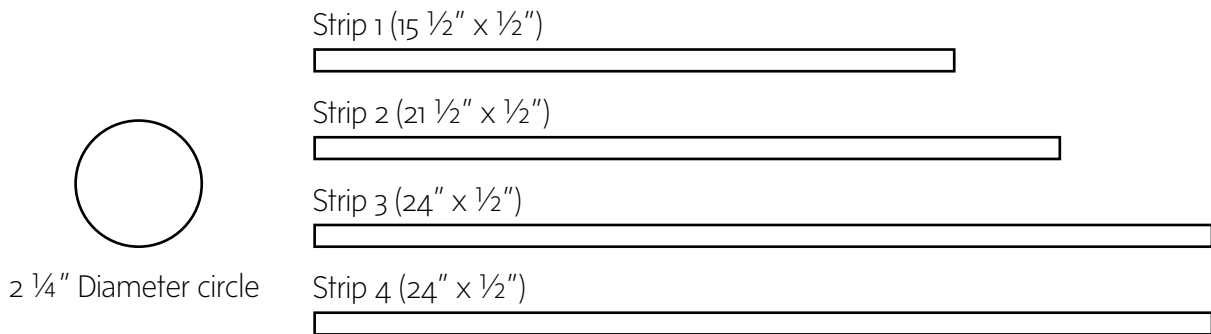
Layout of a Nacaq



Each row is made of vertically beaded strands



- 1.1 Prepare the leather pieces needed to make the cap. There will be a round leather piece for the top of the *kangra*—crown, and four leather strips that make up the cap. Measure out and draw these 5 pieces onto your leather.

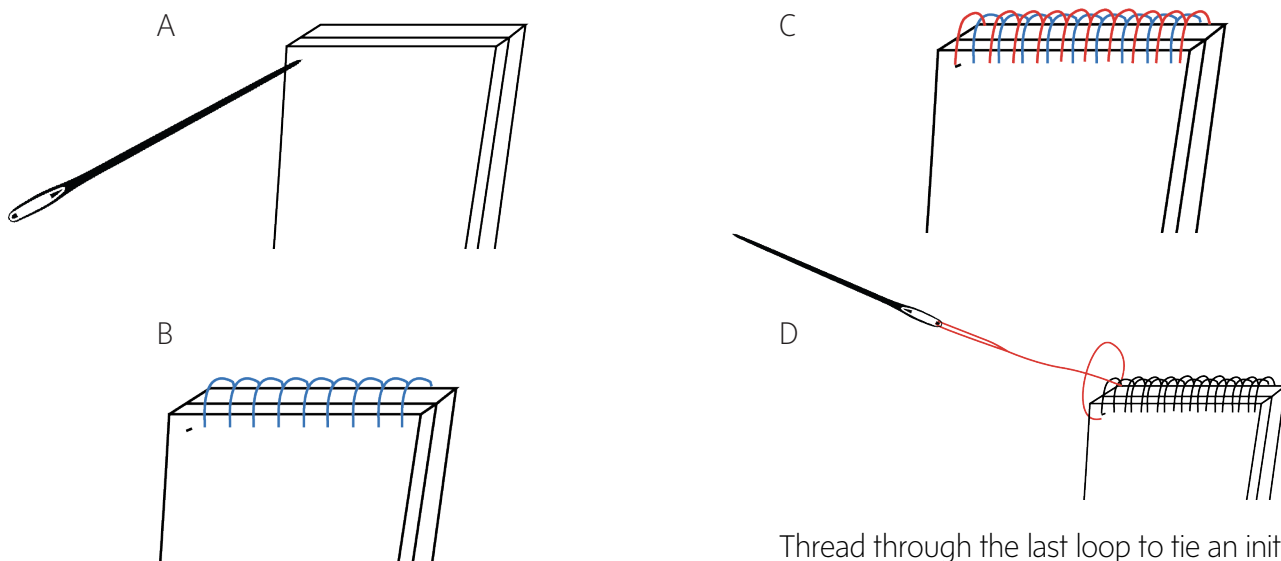


- 1.2 Cut out the leather circle and strips using an Exacto knife or scissors.

- 1.3 Sew the four strips into bands.

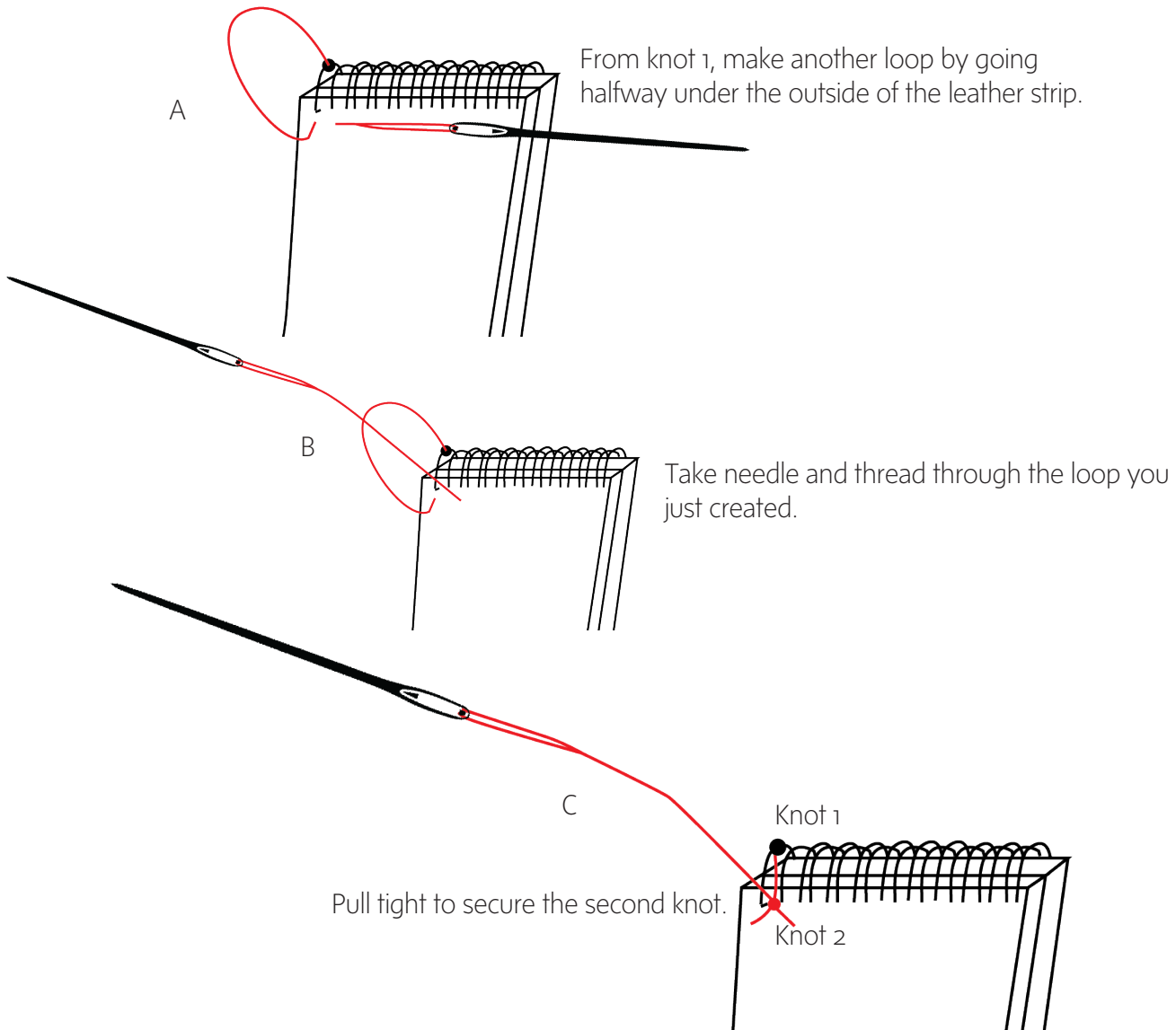
Start with Strip 1. Thread a leather needle using Nymo thread. You will need just enough thread to secure the two ends of the leather to make a band. Tie a knot at the end of the thread.

The leather has a smooth side and a rough side. The smooth side will be on the outside of the *nacaq*. The rough side will be on the inside. Put the ends of the strips together with the smooth side of the leather touching. You will work inside out so that the seams are hidden. Sew the ends together by stitching in one direction, then back again. Sew through the last loop to tie an initial knot. Then make another knot by following the instructions on page 7.

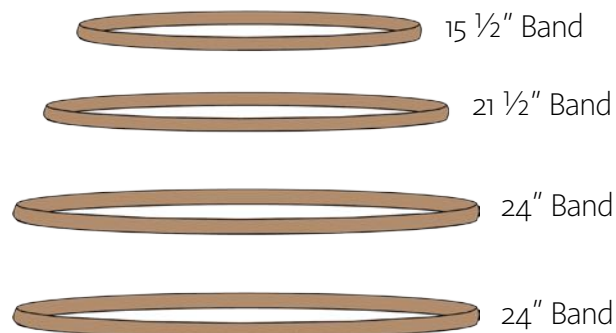


To tie a knot:

Tie a second knot by going halfway under the leather, make a small loop, and pull your needle back through the loop. Pull tight. Cut the excess thread and burn the ends with a lighter so they don't fray.



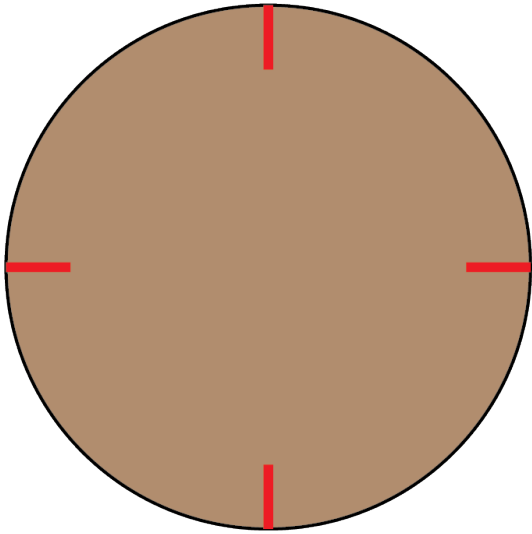
1.4 Repeat this process so that all four strips of leather form four separate bands.



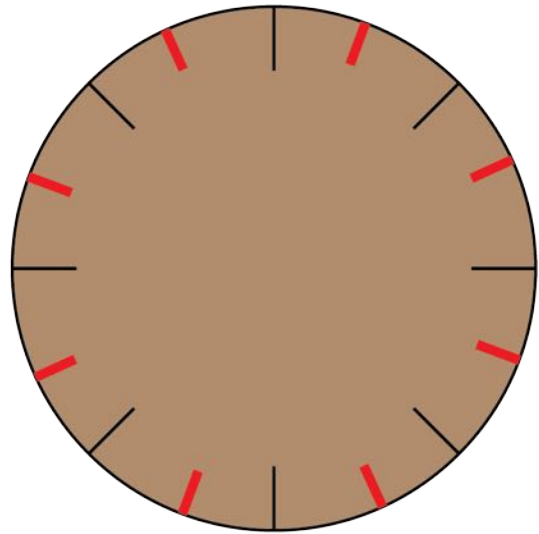
- 1.5 Mark the *kangra*-crown and cap leather pieces. These markings will help you space your bead strands evenly. First mark the circle crown piece.

Mark the 2 1/4" crown circle piece with 48 evenly spaced marks. The diagram below shows how to break down the spacing to keep the marks even. Start with the halves, quarters, and then eighths. Make your eighths a little bolder or longer, as they are important markers. Make a mark in the middle of the eighths, then two more marks between each space to make 48 evenly spaced marks.

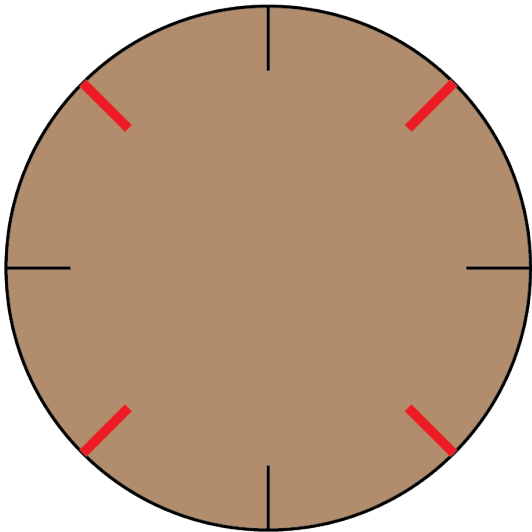
A



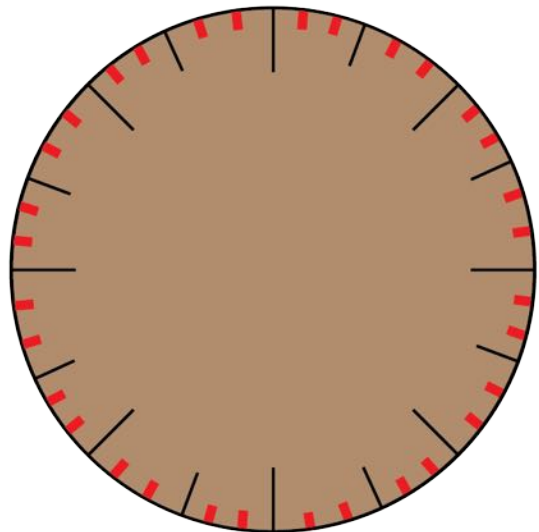
C



B



D

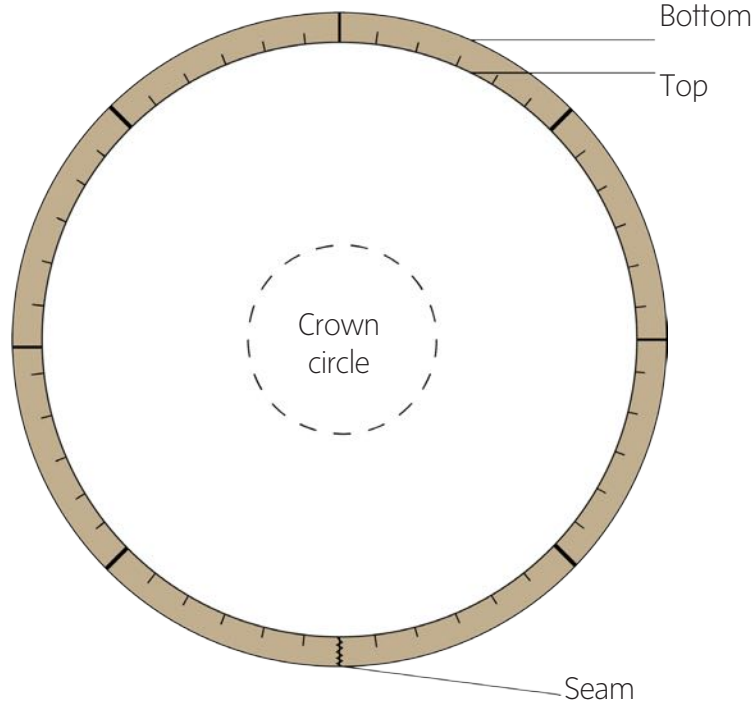


- 1.6 Mark the four bands. Each band will have a top and bottom with different numbers of marks. It is important to note which is the top and bottom. Start with strip 1, the 15 1/2" band.

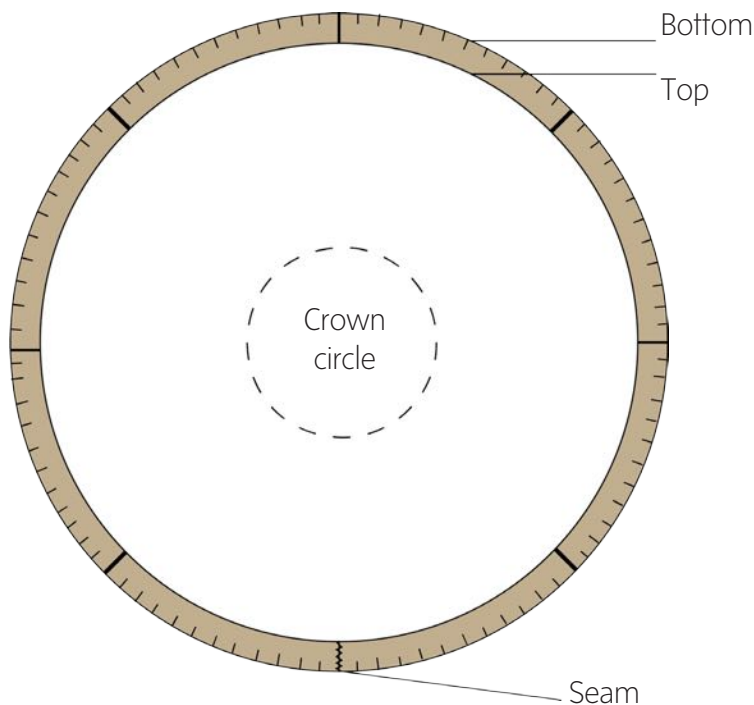
Strip 1 will have 48 marks on the top and 96 marks on the bottom.

Begin by marking the halves. The seam should be considered the first mark, and will be the back of the nacaq. Make quarter marks, then eighths. The eighths are important as they note the beginning and end of each section. Make 5 evenly spaced marks between the eighths to equal 48 marks at the top. Then mark the bottom. Make 11 marks between the eighths to equal 96 marks at the bottom.

48 Marks
on Top



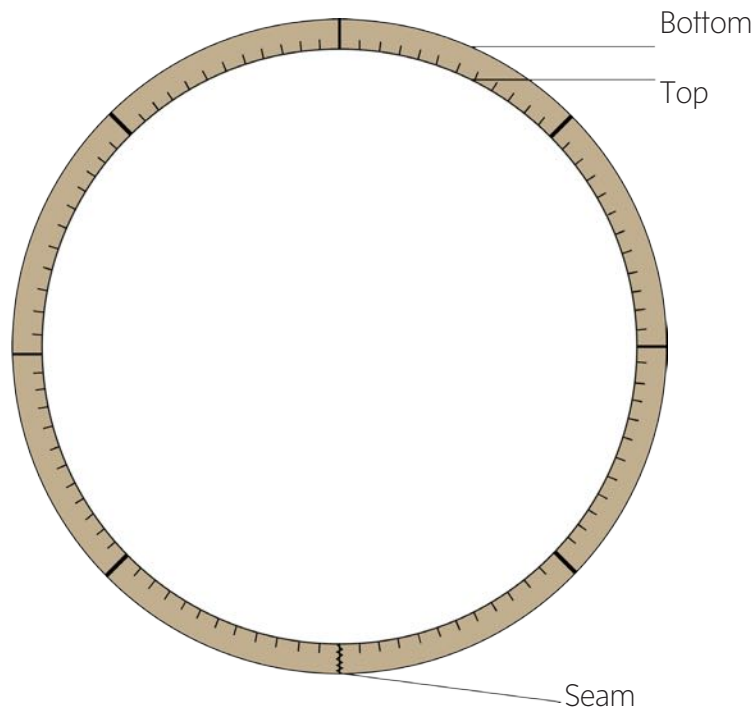
96 Marks
on Bottom



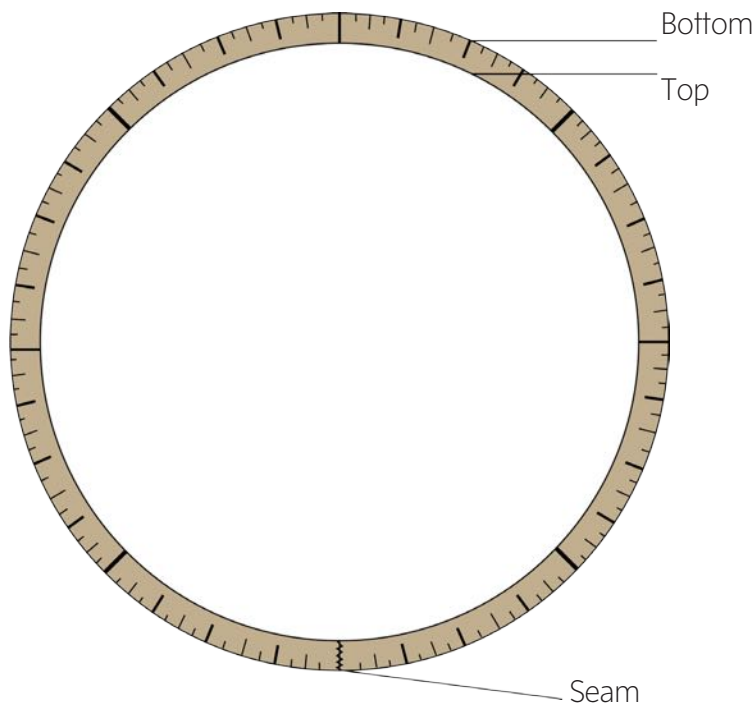
1.7 Mark strip 2. Strip 2, the 21 1/2" band, will have 96 marks on the top and 128 marks on the bottom.

Begin by marking the halves. Make quarter marks, then eighths. Make 11 evenly spaced marks between the eighths to equal 96 marks at the top. Then mark the bottom. Make 15 marks between the eighths to equal 128 marks at the bottom.

96 Marks
on Top



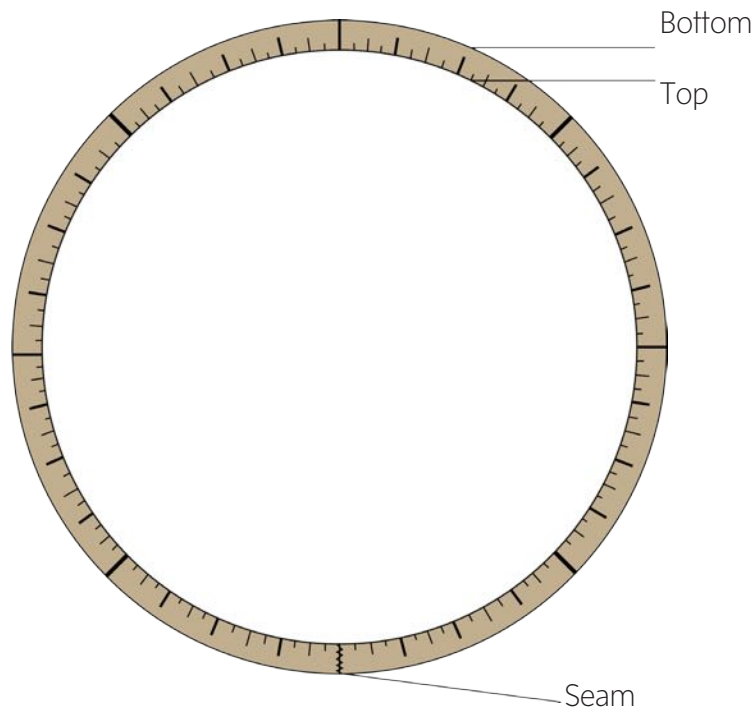
128 Marks
on Bottom



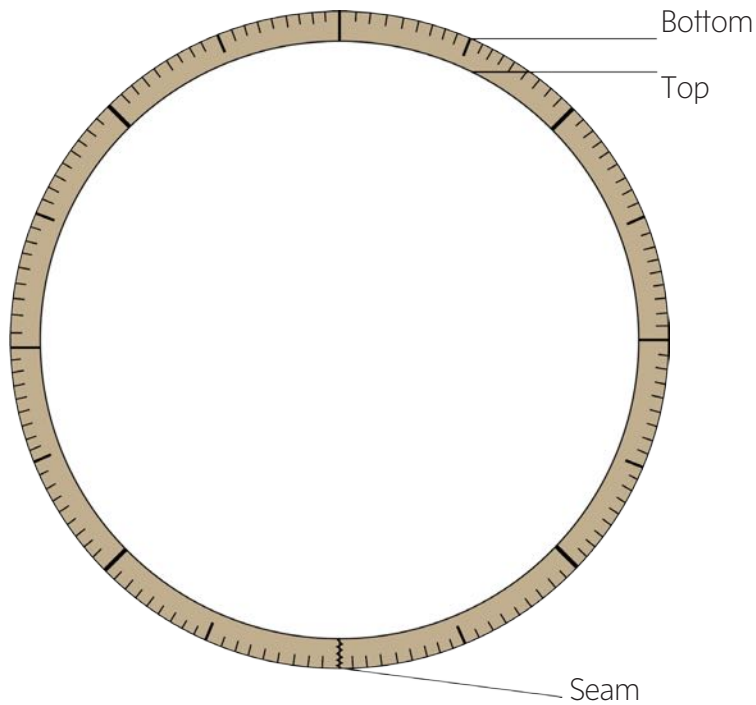
1.8 Mark strip 3. Strip 3, the first 24" band, will have 128 marks on the top and 144 marks on the bottom.

Begin by marking the halves, quarters, then eighths. Make 15 evenly spaced marks between the eighths to equal 128 marks at the top. Mark the bottom of strip 3. Make 17 marks between the eighths to equal 144 marks at the bottom.

128 Marks
on Top



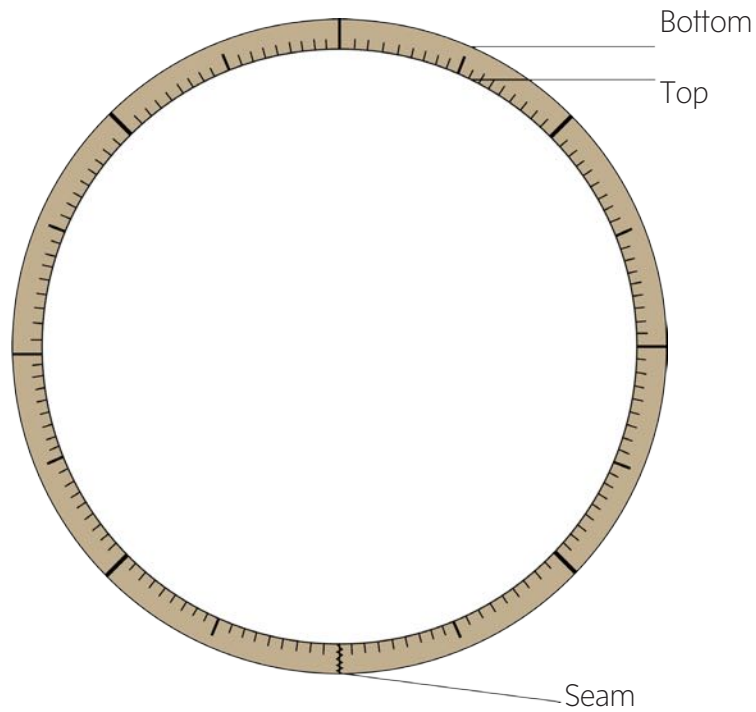
144 Marks
on Bottom



1.9 Mark strip 4. Strip 4, the second 24" band, will have 144 marks on the top and 144 marks on the bottom.

Begin by marking the halves, quarters, then eighths. Make 17 evenly spaced marks between the eighths to equal 144 marks at the top. Mark the bottom. Make 17 marks between the eighths to equal 144 marks at the bottom.

144 Marks
on Top



144 Marks
on Bottom

