



U.S Mail bag

by **Andersenleather** on August 7, 2015

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Intro: U.S Mail bag

The other bags that I have are not really practical If you want an easy accessible bag to bring with you all the time. I therefore wanted a new bag more like a traditional messenger bag. As always I searched the internet for inspiration. I came across an old "U.S mail bag" which fulfilled everything I wanted in a bag as well as looking really good. I searched the internet to find a pattern or tutorial on how to make this bag but came up empty handed. This was not much of a problem as I already have experience making bags and patterns. To avoid that you end up in the same situation as I did I made this tutorial.

The bag that I made is pretty basic but there are many ways in which you can add extra features.

This tutorial will not go into detail about burnishing, sewing or setting rivets.





Step 1: Materials and tools

Materials:

- 2 mm (5 oz) veg tan leather for most parts: 55cm x 90cm (I used shoulder)
- 1-1,2mm (2-3oz) leather for welts: 3cm x 90cm
- 2,8 (7 oz) mm leather for shoulder strap: 2cm x 120cm
- 2 x 20mm conway buckle
- 2 x 20mm d-ring
- 1 x 20 mm double buckle
- 10 x copper rivet+ washers 3 mm x 19 mm (10 Gauge x 3/4)
- Dye
- Contact cement
- Leather conditioner
- thread (I used white Lin Cable 432)

Tools:

- Pricking iron (around 7 spi)
- Mallet
- Awl
- Needles
- Stitching horse
- Knife
- hole punch
- Rulers
- edge beveler
- sandpaper
- Hammer
- Anvil
- Clippers
- rivet setter

Step 2: Making the pattern

When I made the pattern I experimented with different sizes and came up with one slightly smaller than what seems to be the norm. I use thin cardboard used to cover floors when painting. This very inexpensive material can be found in any hardware store in spools of 30 m which should last for a very long time.

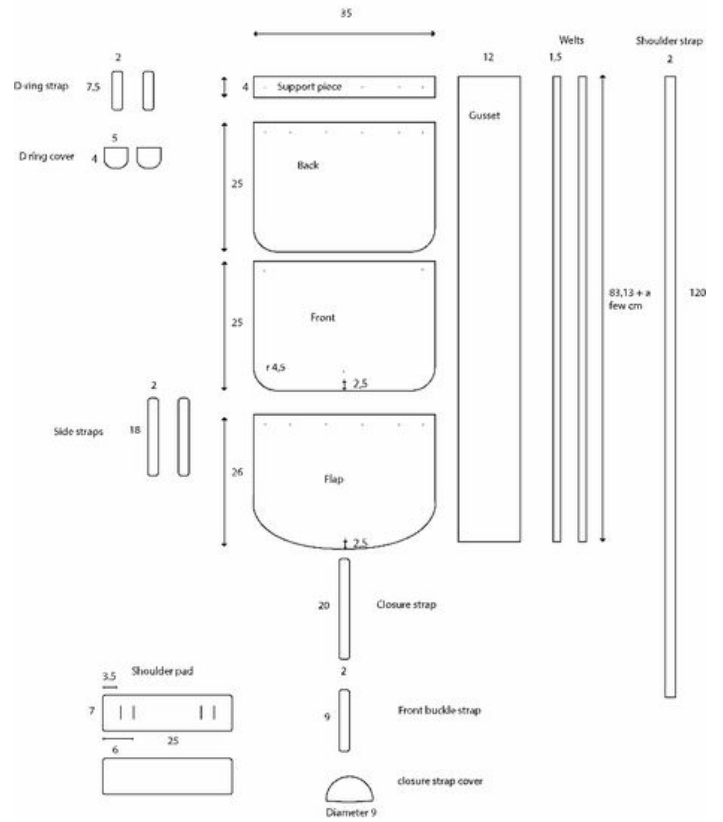
I join the cardboard with a small stapler which makes it easy to readjust the pattern.



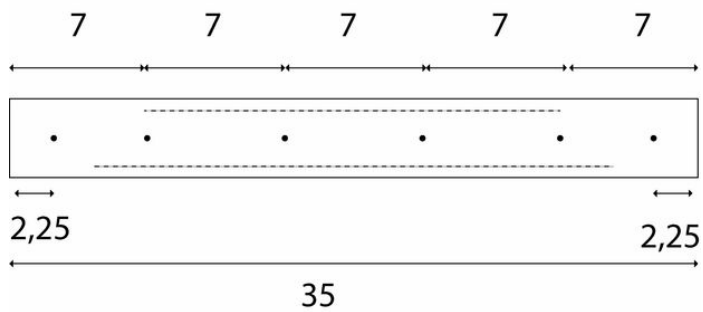


US mail bag pattern by Andersen leather

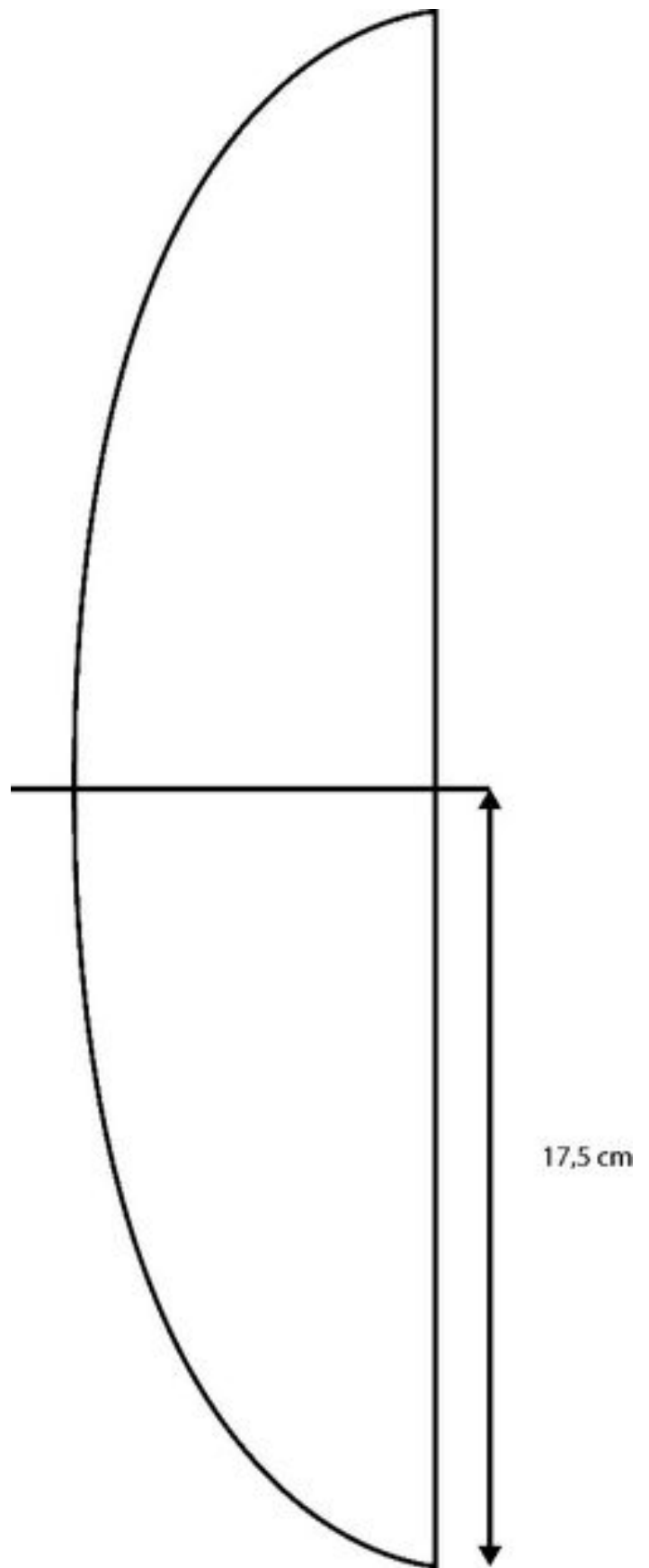
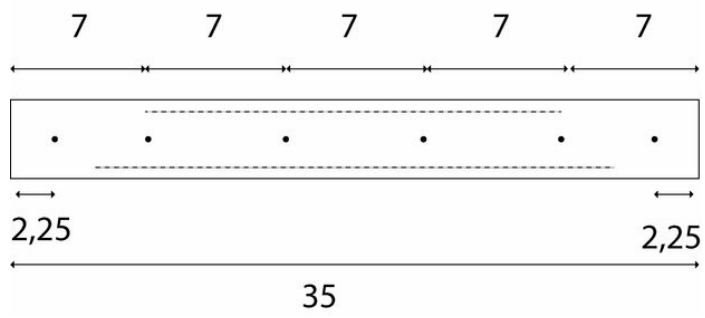
Measurements in cm. Leather thickness 2 mm (welt thickness 1-1,2mm)



Support piece



Support piece

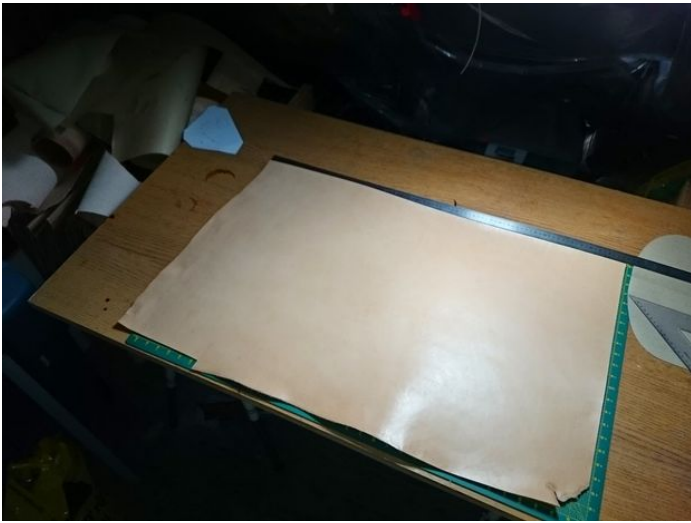


Step 3: Prepping the leather

Before the leather can be dyed it has to be cut to size. For this project you need a piece that is around 90cm x 55cm. I dye the leather before the cutting the pieces to avoid the warping that happens after the leather has dried.

To apply the dye I use a molotow marker with a wide head.

After dyeing the leather needs buffing to get rid of excess pigments. After the buffing I apply conditioner. The type I use needs to soak in so let it sit on the leather for several hours before removing whats left.



Step 4: Cutting the pieces

Now you can begin cutting the pieces according to the pattern.

All visible edges needs to be beveled and burnished.



Step 5: Welts

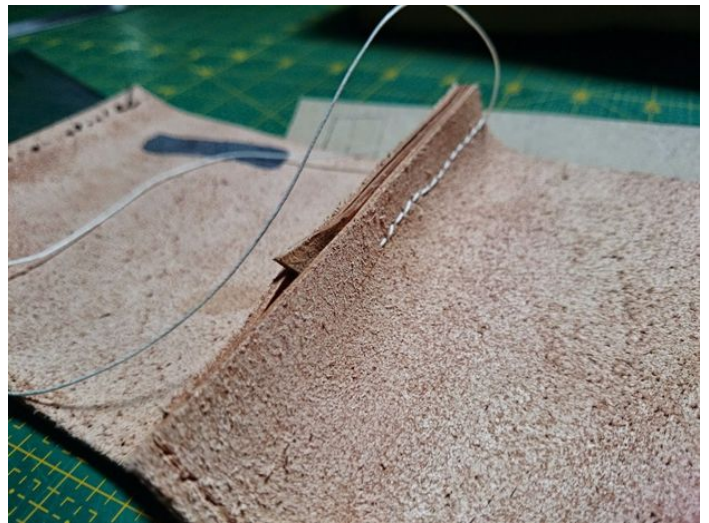
Most remakes of these bags does not seem to have welts. Most old ones however does. At first I decided not to have any welts but after talking to a salesman at my local leather store I changed my mind.

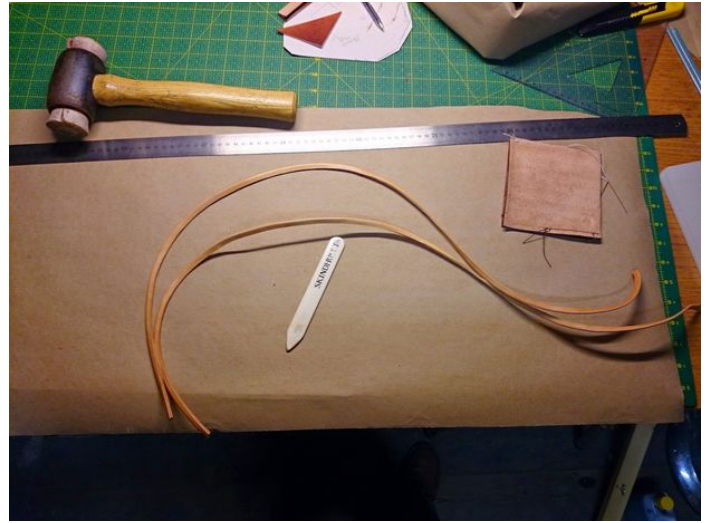
As welts was new to me I made some tests to determine the width and how far to place the stitches from the edge. The conclusion was to make 15 mm wide straps (before folding it) in 1-1,2 mm leather and stitch 4 mm from the edge

I chose not to dye the straps before folding as this typically makes the color of the leather appear lighter.

I applied contact cement on the flesh side and folded it in half. This is painstaking work but do not rush it.

After the cement has dried the welt can be dyed.





Step 6: Gluing on welts

Sand along the edge of the back piece as this will make a stronger bond. With this first weld I did not sand the welt itself. I should have done this as the cement was not holding as well as it could have.



Image Notes

1. scribing a line makes it easier to sand the edge as well applying contact cement



Step 7: Sewing flap and back piece together

Take the flap and the back piece and glue them together with a 4 cm overlap. Also glue the support piece to the inside of the back piece. I only made the first 4 holes as I at this point did not know how far to place them from the edge. You can go ahead and make all 6 holes.

Rivet the two middle holes to help hold everything together while stitching.

The stitching was marked on the outside of the bag. This resulted in the stitch line being too far from the edge on the inner support piece. Always "measure twice cut once"



Image Notes

1. The holes are a bit too big but I don't have a smaller hole punch. It worked out with no problems though.



Step 8: Attatch D-rings

The way the D-rings are attached are really nice and it is fairly easy to make. Having said that I did manage to mess it up but luckily it is not visible from the outside. You need to be really careful placing the the holes in the D-ring strap and cover so that you do not end up making the same mistake I did.





Step 9: Attach front strap

Attaching the front strap is pretty straight forward.



Step 10: Sew on gusset to back piece

With everything attached we are ready to sew on the gusset. I glued it on the and use small clamps to secure it. I then marked the holes with a pricking iron and sewn it.

You can see that the gusset is too long. You should leave it and don't cut it before the front has been sewn on. Trust me.. I know.





Step 11: Attach side straps

After sewing the gusset to the back you get an idea of how the welts will look. I think it looks really good. The square corners on the flaps really hurts my eyes. If you make this bag you should round the corners.

The side straps can now be riveted in place.



Step 12: Attach front buckle

Before sewing on the front piece the buckle has to be riveted on.



Step 13: Sewing gusset to front piece

Having learned from sewing on the back to the gusset I now knew exactly how to do it. First mark holes with the pricking iron on the front piece. Sand and apply glue to both the edge of the front piece and the welt. Glue the pieces together and sew.

You can see that I cut off the gusset before gluing on the front. I must have cut it with an angle because when I glued on the front piece I ran out of gusset. This was not good as there was nothing to do about it except trimming the top of the front piece.

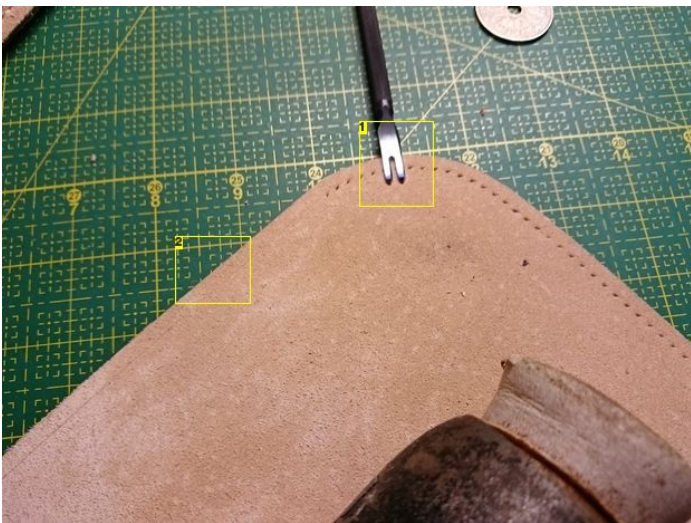


Image Notes

1. Using a 2 prong pricking iron is ideal when going around corners.
2. Scribe a line 4 mm from the edge

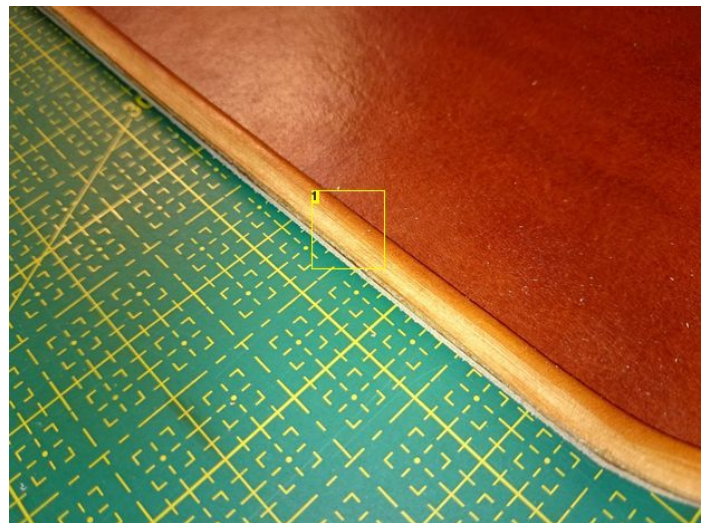


Image Notes

1. Sanded welts to ensure a better bond

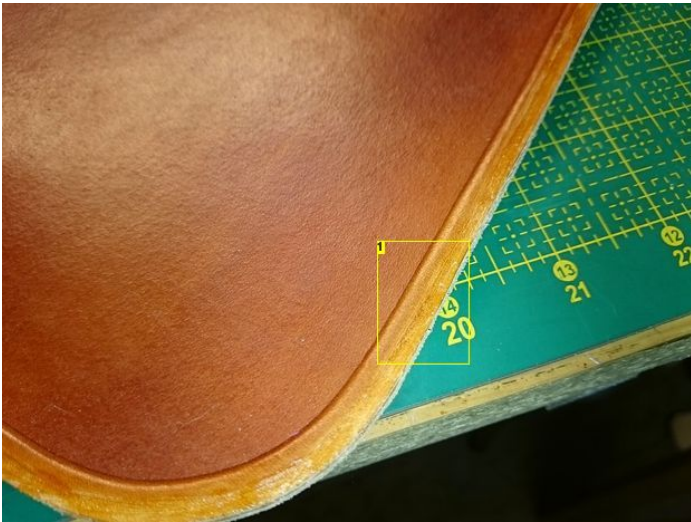


Image Notes
1. Welt with contact cement.

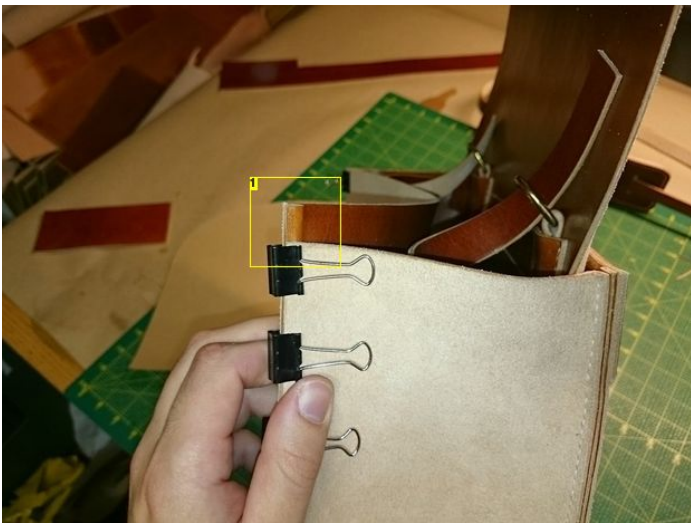
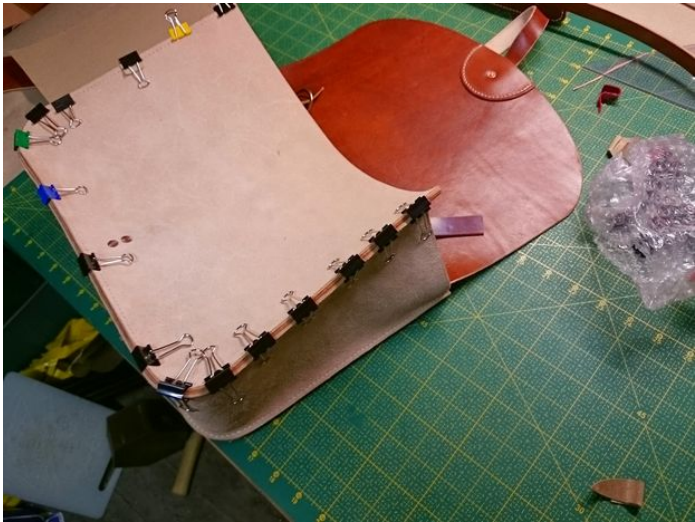


Image Notes
1. Ups. Learn from my mistake and dont do this



Image Notes
1. When changing thread use a sharp tool to cut of the thread so you avoid this!



Step 14: Turning the bag inside out

Now the part I was really looking forward to. Turning the inside out. The bag seemed pretty solid so I was not sure that it could be done without wetting the bag. I decided to make a video of the process as this was something I really would have liked to have seen before doing it myself. It was actually not that hard to do and I did not need to wet it.

Now the only thing left to do is rivet the side straps to the the front and making holes in the strap.



Step 15: Strap

The strap is very simple. It is just a strip of leather with some holes in it. The conway buckle makes it possible to adjust the length.

I chose to use 2,8 mm leather as this gives a more sturdy strap.



Step 16: Shoulder pad

The shoulder pad is made from 2 pieces of leather. The bottom is made of 4 mm leather I had from another project but you can use the same leather as the rest of the bag. The top part has 4 slots for the strap.

I glued the two pieces together leaving out the part where the straps goes through before sewing it together.



Step 17: Adding extra features

As I said earlier you can add features to the bag such as:

- Interior pockets
- Adjustable side straps
- Leaving out the D-rings and attach the shoulder strap directly to the bag

Make a google search to get more ideas or make the basic model as I did.



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"Royal Mail" Messenger Bag
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SelkeyMoonbeam



Duct Tape Messenger Bag for School by
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Custom Tooled Leather Briefcase / Messenger Bag
by Lederhart



Leather Messenger Bag/Brief case
by BARKing



All Leather iPad Messenger Bag (fig tree motif)
by Phiske

Comments