

# Cave Junction led the nation in wood arrow shaft manufacturing

By  
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One of the leading producers of wood arrow shafts in the United States started in June of 1953 in a small shed on Caves Highway about two miles outside of Cave Junction. Claude Reinoehl had worked in the timber industry for most of his life and, along with his wife Frances, decided to start this business because archery was rapidly growing in popularity and high quality wood arrow shafts were extremely difficult to get (2).

Neither knew anything about arrow manufacturing, and for that matter, didn't know much about archery as became evident when Claude almost took out his eye when a bow he was trying to string snapped back and hit him in the face causing a severe contusion of the nerve that controls movement of the eye (1).

The Reinoehls started their enterprise with a leased automatic lathe and a small mill outfit that was purchased along with other wood working tools. In seven days the Reinoehls were in operation and had turned out their first arrow shafts. The total capital investment to get production started was about \$200 (equivalent to \$1,700 in 2013) (4).

In a way, they had a corner on wood arrow shafts because the wood they were using was the Port Orford cedar, a tree that grows in a very small region, of which Cave Junction sits in the approximate center. The wood of this tree is considered ideal for arrow shafts because it is light weight and does not splinter. The wood can be handled all day by workers without the slightest danger of the handlers getting splinters in their hands (4).

The business grew so fast that it was necessary to move out of the small shed behind their home and into a building on Redwood Highway near the town of Kerby. The demand for arrow shafts was high and the new plant ran for 24 hours a day and produced about 200,000 shafts per month, of which 150,000 were number one grade and 50,000 were number twos. The factory was grossing between \$6,000 and \$8,000 per month (equivalent to \$48,000-\$65,000 in 2013) and used more than 300 cords of Port Orford cedar a year.

In August of 1956, a fire quickly spread through the building and, in the span of about 15 minutes, burned the structure to the ground

along with an estimated \$35,000 in equipment and stock. This included about 250,000 to 300,000 squares of Port Orford cedar stored in the drying room from which future orders were to be filled. The fire moved so quickly that the employees barely were able to escape before the flames engulfed the building.

At the time of the fire, unfilled orders would have kept the factory's ten workers busy for the remainder of 1956 year and all of 1957. The demand for arrow shafts was substantial so the Reinoehl's decided to build a new factory.

It is not surprising that plans for the new factory included making it out of fireproof materials to include concrete blocks and steel. They set out to be back in business in six months.

By the end of 1956, a new, 4,000 square foot building made of concrete blocks had been completed and equipment needed for making arrow shafts were being installed.

In June 1960 the business was sold to M.L. Bixler from Powers, Oregon. He had a similar enterprise of making arrow shafts and had been doing so for 20 years prior to purchasing the Southern Oregon Archery Plant and moving to Illinois Valley (5).

After 1960 it is uncertain what happened to the business but it is likely that two things contributed to the demise of this enterprise - aluminum arrow shafts and compound bows.

The Easton Aluminum company began experimenting with aluminum arrow shafts in the early 1940s and interest in them increased when they were used to win first place in a national archery contest. Archers soon discovered that aluminum arrows were more durable than wood as well as less expensive. The XX-75 aluminum arrow shaft design came out in 1958 and may have had a serious impact on the demand for wood

arrow shafts (7).

The compound bow was invented in 1966 and quickly became the bow of choice. These bows use pullys to increase the ease of pulling back the string and dramatically increase the speed of arrows when the string is released. Wooden arrows were not recommended for use with compound bows due to the higher overall forces that are applied to the arrow, which makes it more likely that the arrow will break, possibly driving parts of the broken arrow shaft into an archer's arm (6).

The cinderblock factory is still standing but is on private property and not accessible to the general public. You can see part of the building at the end of a driveway about 300 feet from Highway 199. It is currently a dark gray color.

## References

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- 6) Wikipedia, 2013. Compound Bow [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Compound\\_bow](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Compound_bow)
- 7) Brisse, Tom 2001. History of Archery. Strictly Bow Hunting [http://www.strictlybow-hunting.com/Anov01issue/history\\_of\\_archery.htm](http://www.strictlybow-hunting.com/Anov01issue/history_of_archery.htm)
- 8) Illinois Valley News, June 6, 1952. Val-



Frances Reinoehl working at an automatic lathe with one of the factory workers. Southern Oregon Arrow Factory, Cave Junction, Oregon. December 6, 1956, Illinois Valley News.

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Paul Cienfuegos will be at the Medford Library, Oct. 24th, 5 - 9pm, for his 'Community Rights Workshop'. We will be car polling. contact info. [cmec@cavenet.com](mailto:cmec@cavenet.com).

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