

# The bamboo

The spars of a traditional Thai kite are made from split bamboo and, as with the string, the material is prepared by hand in a slow, careful process.

Only one type of bamboo, the Si variety, meets the demands of Thai kite makers and has the necessary size, strength and flexibility. Even then it must be selected with care. It is important that the plant be mature – at least 10 years old – and it should be cut only some four or five months after the end of annual rains, around February or March. It is then split and stored away for 10 months to allow it to dry out completely.

Split bamboo, however carefully selected will never be perfectly straight and so, once it is thoroughly dry, it must be bent into shapes. This is done by heating each joint individually over a charcoal fire and bending the bamboo into line.

In fact the heating process serves a dual purpose as it also kills the white ant eggs that are embedded under the bamboo skin. If this were not done the little creatures would hatch out and reduce the pole to powder in a matter of three months.

Once dry and straightened the bamboo is ready to be shaped as required. The work is done with wood files and demands skills and precision. For example, the wing spar is something of a challenge in that this one piece of bamboo must be filed so that it runs in thickness from 3mm at either end to 15mm in the middle. Moreover, it must be perfectly straight and give a perfect bow.

Aside from the time needed to dry and straighten the bamboo, it takes many hours to shape the spars according to specification. It is work that cannot be hurried and even a skilled craftsman will need a month to build one kite.

