

Pitchin' Washers

Early on, cowboys took to pitchin' horseshoes at metal stakes to while away the hours. Roughnecks in early Texas oil fields did the same. But instead of horseshoes, they used what was handy: large steel washers pitched at a hole in the ground. Some say the game of pitchin' washers evolved from the tradition of tossing coins, especially silver dollars, into a hole or as close as possible to a wall. Either way, the pastime remains timeless and simple. What other game can you carry around in your pocket?

To play, take an even number (usually six or eight) of heavy machine washers two inches in diameter, half painted one color and half another color. Dig two holes 21 feet apart, approximately three inches deep and slightly larger than the washers. (For that special "ding" of a ringer, insert a short section of pipe or an empty metal can into the hole.) Play one on one or two against two, each side taking turns tossing its set of colored washers. A ringer (washer in the hole) score five points. A leaner (a washer hanging over the edge of the hole) earns three points, and closest to the hole gets one point. Knock a leaner into the hole and make it a ringer! Only one player scores per round. If both sides get the same number of ringers or leaners, for example, those points cancel each other out. You win by scoring exactly 21 points. Simple as that.

Simpler still, at least two Texas outlets offer pitchin' washers, complete with instructions and pitching techniques. The Texas Parks and Wildlife Collection catalog features a set of six "Armadillo Washers," goals, and rules (\$15, plus \$5.50 shipping), and suggests packing them along on campouts, picnics, and

beach outings. Send orders to Box 17308, Austin 78760-7308, or call 800/786-8644.

In Mt. Pleasant, Rex Allen had such fond boyhood memories of pitching washers outside East Texas general stores that he started promoting the game. His pitchin' set comes in a blue velvet bag with eight washers and rules (\$13.50, including shipping). Write to Trexx Enterprises, Box 2195, Mt. Pleasant 75456 (903/575-0070).

The Lions Club in Mt. Pleasant also gets in the pitch of things by hosting the annual World Championship Washer Pitching Contest during the city's WRanglerFEST the second weekend of June.