

## **Exercises for the Left Hand**

Originally I was going to write down a couple quick exercises to improve the strength and agility of the left Pinky, but it soon became obvious that the left hand fingers have to work together. So I expanded it to include the other fingers. While this is hardly a comprehensive set of left hand exercises, I think they address the major problems facing any intermediate level banjo player.

I don't suggest that anyone do these exercises too much, as they are hard on the muscles of the left hand. Take it easy at the start, just as you would with strength building exercises at the local spa. A few minutes a day, concentrating on those exercises that address your specific left hand problems, should be more than adequate.

### **1) The Banjo-less Finger Exercise**

Place the four fingers of your left hand on top of the desk in the proper position - lined up with the knuckles curved so each finger arches down to the surface exactly as it does on your banjo fingerboard.

If possible put the thumb under the surface as it is under the neck, but if your desk does not allow that, let it rest beside the fingers. keeping all the other fingers (and thumb) down, lift your index finger without losing the arch of your knuckles. Drop the index back to the desk and raise the middle finger, again keeping the arch. Bring it down and raise the ring finger. You will notice that this finger is much harder to move than the others. Drop it back to the desk and raise the pinky. Return the pinky to the desk and raise the ring finger again, followed by the middle then the index, middle, ring, pinky, ring, middle, etc.

When the exercise is beginning to work smoothly put a little upward force on each finger. You are trying to strengthen the muscles and stretch the tendons in your hand - particularly the single tendon that goes to both the ring finger and the pinky.

Besides building strength you are training your mind to control each finger independently, so once you as it becomes easier bump up the speed a little. You can get quite fast after a while.

I was given this exercise by a doctor, to combat a condition known (in the 1950s) as childhood arthritis. There were several other exercises too, but this is the only one that I ever adapted to playing an instrument.