

Knife and Axe

In camp the correct use of tools can make everything proceed more smoothly. It is important that everyone understands how and why to use the tools before they are let loose in camp however. The knife, axe and saw, while very useful tools, can be very dangerous and indeed deadly in the wrong hands.

Safety should always be paramount. No one should be allowed to handle these tools until they have proved themselves not only proficient in their use, but also sensible and able to follow the safety regulations. Once mastered, the knife, axe and saw can be put to a variety of uses in camp. From simply chopping firewood to creating complex gadgets and large shelters they can help transform your campsite.

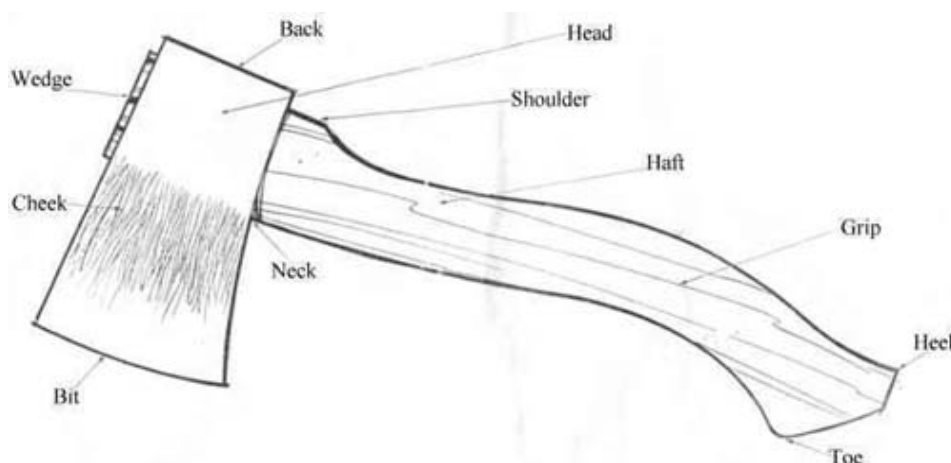
These sections aim to provide an introduction to the basics of the subject.

It is vital that you do not practice anything here unless in the presence of someone with proven competence with these tools.

They are tools, not toys.

Axe

There are two types of axe - Hand Axe & Felling Axe. An axe can be a very useful tool in camp. Note however that there are many different types of axe and they tend to be suitable for a limited range of work. In Scouting this should not present too much of a problem as we tend not to use the more 'specialist' types of axes.

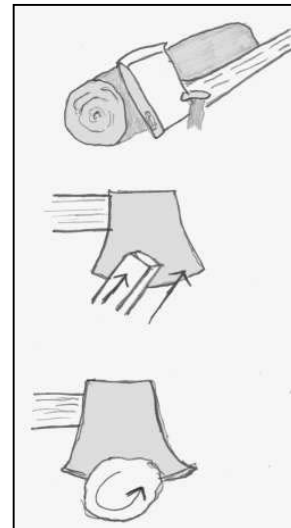
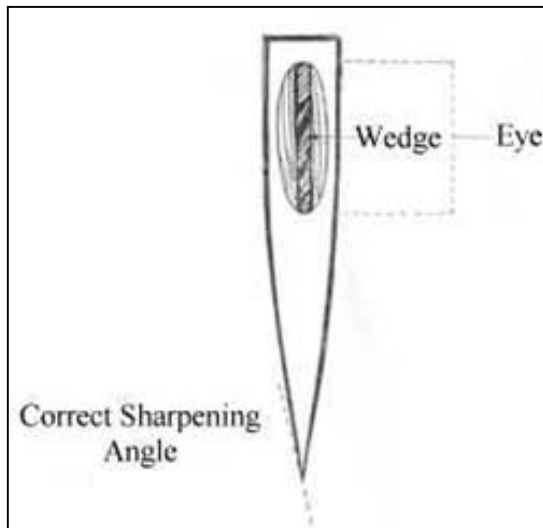


Sharpening an Axe

An axe with a blunt edge becomes no more than an inefficient hammer, and indeed a great deal more dangerous as you struggle to use it. Always keep your axe sharp. For large 'burrs' a file is probably your best bet. Make sure you use the file correctly though, it will only work in one direction, it works when pushed, not pulled.

To sharpen your axe, prop the axehead between a log and a peg driven into the ground. Always try to sharpen inwards from the cutting edge (to avoid producing any burrs). First use a file or rough stone to remove any burrs and rucks. Then finish with a smoother stone, using a circular motion. Don't drag the stone off the cutting edge, push on to the blade.

Turn the axe over and repeat the process, circling in the opposite direction.



Chopping Areas

When chopping wood at camp, you will need to create a specific chopping area. Choose a site that is fairly close to the fire and clear of any obstructions (not only on the ground. Ensure there are no overhead obstructions that could catch your axe as you swing). Make a circle that is at least 2m (6 ft) in radius (or at least 3 axe lengths). Rope this area off and ensure it is clearly marked. Make sure that everyone knows where the chopping area is. No loose clothing should be taken into the area, and no one should enter the area without strong shoes or boots (and of course checking it is safe to enter).

Using an Axe

Most people have a 'prime' hand and a natural swing. Always use the axe in a way that is comfortable to you, swinging in an arc that feels natural. Make sure you have a firm grip, and always swing AWAY from your body, hands, and legs. Ensure that if you miss your intended target and follow through, the axe will not strike you or anyone else. Never throw an axe on the ground, always sheath it or bury it in a log.

Splitting Logs

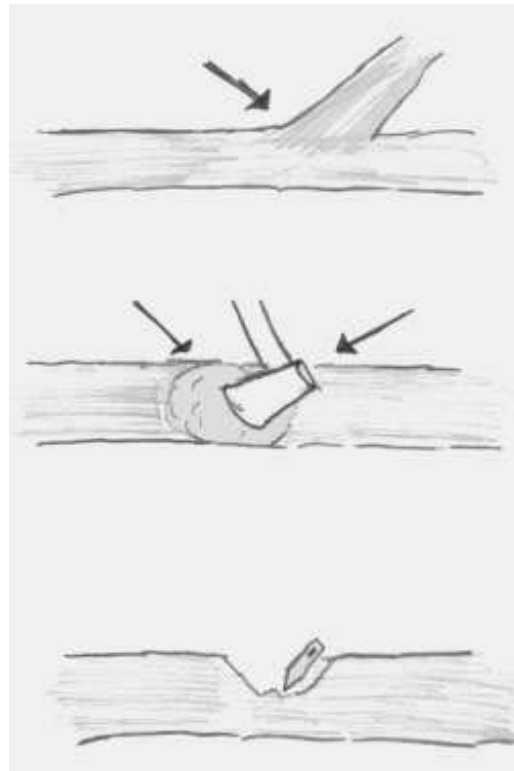
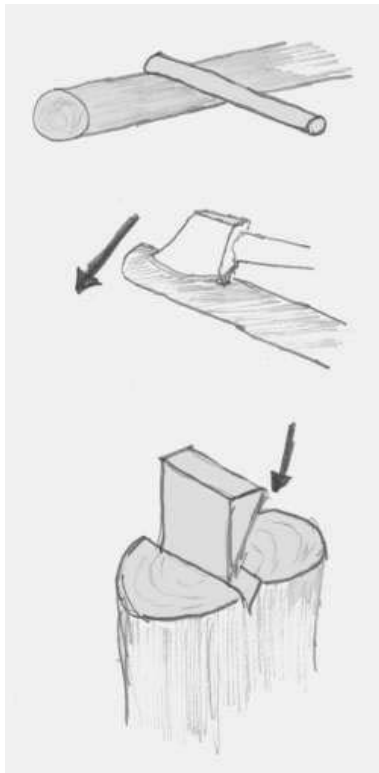
For a large log, as before, stand behind the log with your feet well apart. Swing down the cut the side away from you. Do not chop downwards. If you wish to split a smaller log, lay it against another log. Do not put your foot on it. There is an alternative to this though, hold the smaller log against the cutting edge and bring them both down together on to a larger log.

If in doubt, or if you have any difficulty, split larger logs with a wedge and a rock. Do not hold the wood upright in your hand and try to split with an axe.

Hitting Angle

When chopping branches from a large log, always stand on the side away from the axe. Always cut branches from the outside of the fork, not the inside.

...see diagrams below...



Carrying an Axe

Carry an axe by holding it just under the head. Point the blade down or away from you to minimise the chance you will fall on top of the blade if you trip.

Handing an Axe over

Hand an axe over axe-head first, holding it midway down the handle.

