

Training notes for leaders: Axe and Saw

Leaders should name the parts of an axe so that scouts have the words to build knowledge and discipline

Head, Back, Bit, Eye, Haft, Grip, Wedge (there's more but that's enough).

Safety notes

The younger scouts have not developed enough wrist power to control an adult hand axe. Aim for 0.5kg if possible (quite rare). A light axe in common use is 0.7kg. Avoid heavier axes (serious advice!).

Young people often suppose that they will intuitively know how to use an axe. A few do but many do not. Training is essential for all. They should see good axe-craft executed by a confident and practiced operator so that they have a model to emulate. Talking about the parts of an axe and the safety rules does not meet this part of the training.

Safe working

A scout must have been signed off by the leader after training and a demonstration of safe working by the scout before the scout can be allowed to use the axe (or saw) by themselves.

Axes must be sound and sharp. Especially check for head security.

Roped off chopping area. 2 axe length radius (axe length is tip of nose to extremity of axe-head with arm outstretched).

Secure chopping block. (Big enough and steady; anchor it if necessary).

Trainers and soft shoes are not allowed. Strong leather shoes to give protection to feet are essential.

No loose clothing. Long hair tied back.

No over-hanging branches to touch the scout or axe.

Chopping area out of bounds to casual visitors. Team members may enter but axe work must stop.

Stop using an axe or saw when tired. Coach the scouts to notice how their performance fades in fatigue. Tell them it's okay to get tired when swinging a heavy chunk of iron!

Safe masking, transfer and carrying

NEVER drive an axe into the ground.

Temporarily mask the axe in chopping block but ensure its bit is covered and the axe is secure.

Put axes away at night. Check each for soundness. (PLs can do this but they must be coached).

Always offer the heavy end (the head) to the person you are handing it to.

Carry the axe with the axe head nested in the hand, bit forward, arm straight at the side, with the haft next to the arm. (Maximum control and if scout tumbles, the bit goes to ground.)

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Axe in use

Get down to the chopping block, back fairly upright and generally get in control. Avoid stooping and over-reaching. Remember, axe work is a solitary task.

Demonstrate how ineffective the axe is when the cut is off the touch of the chopping block. This is a major lesson. Arrange that scouts place the part they wish to cut precisely on the touch of the block. The axe should aim to cut exactly on this spot. The energy available to cut is wasted if it is used to bend the work piece. When it is exactly on the chopping block all the energy is used to cut.

Many training texts advise cutting at 45 degrees, first one side and then the other. It is better advice to maintain the axe stroke within a narrower angle and use the support hand to lift and lower the work to achieve a V cut exactly on the block. The reason is that scouts, who are at the boundary of their strength to the control the axe, are safer when they are cutting mostly vertical. Also, coach the scouts in the sound of the cut and the reaction in the work piece: when the cut is good the sound is a dead 'shick' and there is practically no shock in the support hand. Teach this observation and make it a part of their training.

If the axe is blunt it will behave like a hammer and the work piece will be squashed and battered rather than cut. Apart from increasing the work, blunt axes are quite dangerous since they do not bite and penetrate but bounce and slide. The speed and momentum are such that the axe head can hit the foot, hand or knee quicker than the eye and brain can react. A blunt axe at speed will enter a scout's flesh very, very easily!

Tell the scouts that they should observe the axe and report bluntness or indeed any failing. The Group Quartermaster will arrange appropriate service. Always have a spare, serviceable axe. Tell the scouts to respect the axe. Leaders must keep to the rules and best practice.

Bow saw

The axe is really useful for timber up to the diameter of an adult wrist. Perhaps a little more. Beyond this, the amount of wood that must be cut in the V gets too much. The saw, however, can make short work of logs up to 300mm. Saws require the work piece to be firm and steady because if the saw deflects the branch while cutting, it can jam.

Modern saws are razor sharp. Have scouts carefully touch the points of the blade so they know the danger: one false stroke across the hand or leg could put them in hospital! Train scouts in the use of the saw with the same seriousness as the axe. Insist they get in control: proper body position and the work piece firm. Scouts may want to work in pairs where one holds the branch to be cut steady, the other does the sawing. rv

Axe and Saw Permit for scouts

(Print on card or spray-mount paper on to card. Cut and fold as shown to make a document that scouts can carry in their pockets or keep in their record books).

Fold

Cut

<p>Best Practice Reminder</p> <p>Do not use blunt axes. Work on a chopping block. Wear strong leather shoes. No loose clothes, scarves or hair. No overhanging branches. Work in marked off area. Stop chopping when approached. Axe-work is solitary! Match axe weight to arm strength. Give the axe head, not the haft. STOP when tired. (It's okay to tire). Mask axes properly. Never drive an axe into the ground. Carry the axe in hand, bit forward. Respect the axe (and saw).</p>	<p>Harpendscouts.org.uk serving Harpenden, Wheathampstead and Kimpton</p> <p style="text-align: right;">PERMIT</p> <p style="text-align: center;">This it to certify that</p> <p style="text-align: center;">.....</p> <p style="text-align: center;">of theTroop</p> <p style="text-align: center;">has completed training</p> <p>for the Axe and Saw, is familiar with the safety rules and has</p> <p style="text-align: center;">demonstrated competence in the use of both.</p> <p>Signed.....(Scout Leader)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Date</p>
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