

University of Idaho Extension Forestry Information Series

Wood Splitter's Secrets

Ron Mahoney

Have you ever approached some hulking "Paul Bunyan" type whacking uselessly on some tough old firewood round? Chances are if you stepped in and had a go at it you would look equally foolish. On the other hand, with just the right **"TWIST"** and **"AIM"** you can make an impressive showing. Besides showing off, these tips can help you split winter firewood with less time, fatigue, backstrain, and greater safety and enjoyment.

FIRST

TWIST your axe or splitting maul. Hold the tool as shown in Figure 1, with a slight angle of the blade to the direction of travel. Do not give in to the urge to swing in the direction of the angle - come straight down. As the split begins to open, the angle of the twist will exert greater splitting force than a directly vertical tool angle would, and the two pieces will split apart with less force.

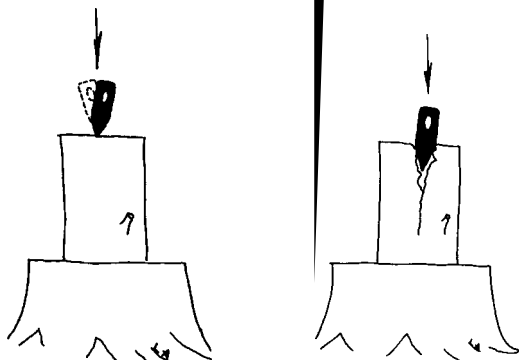


Figure 1

SECOND

AIM your eyes on a point 4-6 inches below the top of the piece to be split (Figure 2). This will help you follow through with your splitting stroke and resist the urge to "quit" the stroke on contact. Many times, a piece will split *in one stroke* if you aim this

way. Be sure to keep your eyes steady and your head still during the entire swing until the tool passes the point of aim. (If you play golf you know exactly what I mean!)

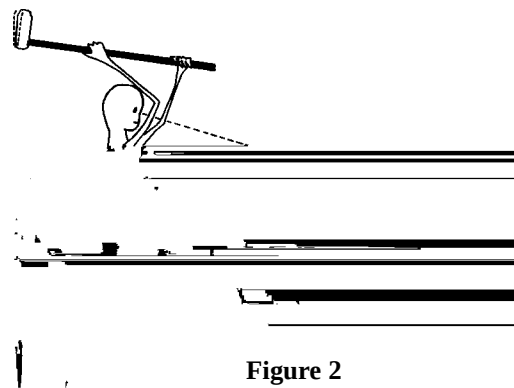


Figure 2

FINALLY

Keep **SAFETY** in mind. One of the most important safety fundamentals is to keep the handle horizontal once the splitting tool contacts wood (Figure 3). If the splitting tool head swings lower than your hands (Figure 4) you lose power and increase the risk of injury.

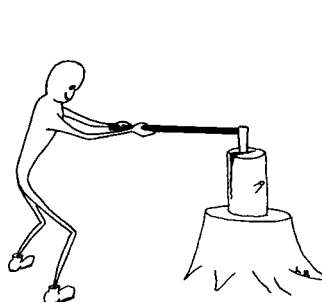


Figure 3

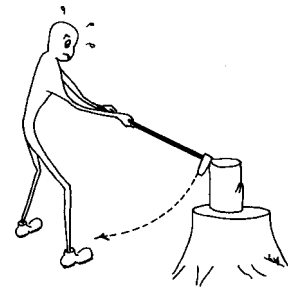


Figure 4

This information first appeared in Woodland NOTES, Vol 4, No. 1.

About the Author: Dr Ron Mahoney is an Extension Forester and Professor at the University of Idaho.