

# ON THE LAND

## SCIENCE OF THE AXE OR AXECRAFT AND BUSHCRAFT (Contributed.) SPLITTING.

For splitting the halves or quarters of the log into posts, rails, etc., After blasting, a maul, or better still if two are working together two mauls, a bar, wedges, and axes are indispensable. It is important that the wedges, especially the "leaders" which are first put in should taper finely at the point. When "double-banking" wedges in a stiff log, they will be less liable to rebound and "jump out" if the second one be so inserted as to take a very thin strip of wood between it and its fellow-wedge. When splitting timber which is inlocked in the grain the log should be "scored" with the axe throughout its whole length in the required direction, so as to assist the wedges by cutting instead of breaking the strands.

A really marvellous efficiency in splitting, little dreamed of by the tyros at the game, is attained by those who can strike blow for blow, alternately with each other with unerring precision, and work together hand to hand.

Each knows precisely what to do and does it deftly with that reciprocal ready and willing spirit that counts for so much.

For the bar, octagon steel about 1in or 1½in thick about 5ft or 5ft 6in long, chisel-pointed at one end and diamond-pointed at the other, is about the proper thing.

### THE MAUL AND HOW TO MAKE IT.

The size of the maul should be about 4½ins inside the rings and about 12ins long. Blue-veined dry rata is first-class stuff of which to make it. Titoki or N.Z. oak also does good service for this work, being sufficiently hard and tough when properly seasoned.

Those far removed from the native forests must, of necessity, rely on the blue-gum.

The piece of wood selected for this purpose should be sufficiently dry to be so hard that it will not show deeply-marked impressions of the wedges when in use, nor should it be so far gone that it will chip out instead of forming that indispensable burring up of the fibres in a circle around the edges of the rings which safeguards the rings from flying off, and effectually retains them in position.

When "breaking in" a new maul care must be exercised to strike with each end alternately till the "burring up" which secures the rings is accomplished. With this end in view, the centre of the maul should be but little wider than the ends—just that little which is necessary to prevent the rings from driving towards the handle too freely.

The hole for the handle, in the centre of the maul should not be larger than 1½ins in size. A larger hole increases the liability of splitting.

For durability, as well as to prevent jarring, the handle should possess spring and elasticity. Keep the maul dry: Wet softens the striking surface, causes the "burring" of the fibres to "rag out," and ruins the implement.

### SPLITTING METHODS SUITED TO NEEDS.

When splitting posts, rails, etc., the general principle is to keep on halving the log, starting invariably at one of the ends. When, however, we have got the junk down to the size that it will split but two posts or rails, etc., it is frequently necessary to start the junk in the centre to minimise the risk of one of the pieces running out completely, or tapering finely at one end.

Free-splitting and brittle timbers are especially liable to "run out."

Plying the axe and "scoring" are of great help when dealing with bluegums or other timbers which are generally inlocked on the outside.

### SHINGLES.

To split shingles, blocks are first sawn off the trunk about 13½ins long and are next split up into "billets" about 4½ins x 5ins.

A shingle knife about 8ins long in the blade, having a wooden handle which fits into a socket at one end of

the blade, and at right angles to it, is next brought into requisition.

A square cut scarf of convenient size is then cut into the large root of a tree or low lying log.

The splitter sits astride of the root or log and by using a "dolly" to drive the knife into the "billets" keeps on halving the wood till it is reduced to shingle thickness (about ¾in).

The "dolly" is a short wooden club of which the clubby part is somewhat elongated and sharpened to a tapering point at one end, the other being handle-shaped.

The tapering point is used, when necessary, to insert in the cleft and follow up the knife.

By inserting the billets in the scarfed notch a downward pressure may be exercised, the finely reduced billets turned upward or downward as required, and the shingles thus prevented from running out or becoming feather-edged at one end.

(To be continued.)



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