



## AXES

The first hand axes were made of stone. These axes had no handles. They were usually used for working wood. Handles began to appear during the Stone Age. Most handles were made from deer or elk horns. When people began to use metals, they made metal axes. First copper, then bronze and iron were used. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, steel provided the material for axe heads. Metal axe heads required handles. Beginning in the Bronze Age, all axes had handles.

European traders introduced axes with metal heads to North America. The first European axes contained broad blades and no poll. The poll is the blunt end of the axe head. These axes were good for hewing. Hewing is smoothing a tree into a square log or a board. These axes were not good for felling trees.

Huge forests covered North America. European colonists needed an axe that was easy to use for felling trees. They decided to change the axe.

Americans made three basic changes to the European axe. The first change was the addition of a heavy, square, blunt end opposite to the cutting edge. This is called the poll. It was designed so that the axe could be used to drive wedges or hammer spikes. The heavy poll also added weight that provided a counter balance and greater accuracy. The poll made the work of felling trees much easier.

The second change was the flattening of the sides of the axe head. This flattening provided a smoother surface on each side of the axe head. This made the blade wobble less during the swing. It also allowed the cutting edge to go deeper into the wood.

In the 1800s they began making axe blades out of hardened steel. Using steel allowed the blade to be thinner. That reduced the friction between the blade and the log. It also reduced the size and weight of the axe making it easier to use.

Prior to the 1920s, most axe users made and fitted the handles to their own axes. This practice of fitting axe handles to axe heads led to phrases in our common conversation that still exist today. Compliments like, "You handled that well," or "You handle yourself well," come from fitting axes and handles. The opposite is also true. "That was poorly handled," means that a poor job was done.

The modern American felling axe with a polished steel head and a solid hickory handle has become the standard for quality axes around the world.