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# A Basic Manual on Tomahawk Throwing

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## Tomahawk Throwing

People familiar with tomahawks and their use often refer to them as "hawks". Similarly, terms like pipe-tomahawk have been shortened to pipe-hawk. Tomahawk targets frames are usually called hawk-boards or hawk-blocks.



Fig. 1

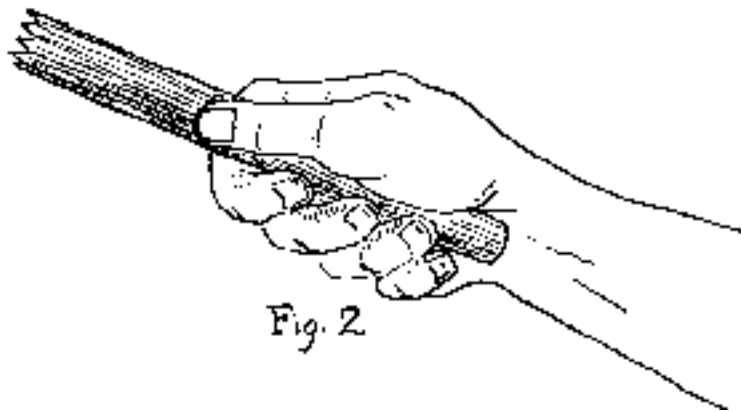
The average tomahawk has a blade up to 4 inches wide at the cutting edge and a handle from 14 to 20 inches long. (See Fig. 1) Weights run from half a pound to three pounds. The average throwing hawk weighs a little less than two pounds. A forged blade is preferred as it can be readily sharpened with a file and will take considerable abuse without breaking. Handles, however, are not as forgiving and should be considered, at least to some extent, expendable items. This is especially true during the learning period. The sides of the handle should be thinner. This helps in holding the hawk straight and in grasping it the same way every time. The handles on most good quality hawks are a drive fit down through the eye of the blade. The handle, therefore, should also be tapered to some degree. Some hawks are drilled and a pin is driven through the eye of the blade and the handle. This often tends to weaken the handle and encourage splitting. The best way to install a handle to a blade is to make sure the wood of the handle is as dry as possible when they are driven together. Normal moisture will cause the wood to swell slightly to make the fit all the more snug. The blade does tend to slide down the handle from time to time through usage. This usually occurs when the handle end of the hawk strikes the target first. When this happens, merely drive the blade back on the handle until it is snug again.

It is strongly recommended that if one happens to be fortunate enough to own a good pipe-hawk or other ceremonial type hawk, he refrain from throwing it for fear of damaging the frail, hollow or decorative handle.

Since most hawk throwing is done at a minimum distance of 12 feet, measure off that distance from a suitable target and then take one full step back.

## Stance

The suggested stance is feet comfortable side by side. The weight should be shifted to the right foot, assuming you're right handed, just before throwing. At the same time as the swing of the throwing arm, step forward with the left leg. The action of the feet is not unfamiliar to that of a man throwing a ball. Some people find it more natural to reverse the footwork and step forward with the right leg. Choose whichever is more comfortable and natural to you.



## Grip and Release

Take hold of your tomahawk as you would hold a tack hammer. The thumb should be at the side of the handle while the fingers are wrapped around the handle. (See Fig. 2) Point the hawk, cutting edge down, and the throwing arm fully extended towards the target. The throwing arm is then raised over the shoulder without fully bending the elbow. When the arm is brought down to a near horizontal position, (see Fig. 3) the fingers are opened for the release. At the moment of release, when the fingers are opened, the position of the hand is similar to the appearance of a hand being offered in a handshake. Be careful not to twist the wrist as this will make the hawk go somewhat sideways. Use mostly arm motion and a minimum of wrist action. Don't try to throw too hard. The average hawk, if sharp, will almost stick of it's own weight. Power, speed and more important, accuracy will come with time and practice.



## Making the Hawk Stick

Even if you're using a hawk with a spike, (see Fig. 4) we're only concerned with making the cutting edge stick in the target. If after throwing your hawk a half way each time, you can't get it to the hawk strikes the target first dozen times, the exact same stick, notice what part of the head of the hawk hits first, you are probably using too much wrist action. Try again releasing a little earlier and controlling your wrist action more. If the handle hits first, throw again in exactly the same way except back up six inches to a foot at a time until you get "blade" in the block. Once you get your distance, measure it and pace it off. Remember that distance. it is your "standard" throwing distance. Practice at that distance until you can consistently get at least ten throws in a row to stick in the block. Now you'll be looking for accuracy. From this point on it's practice and more practice.

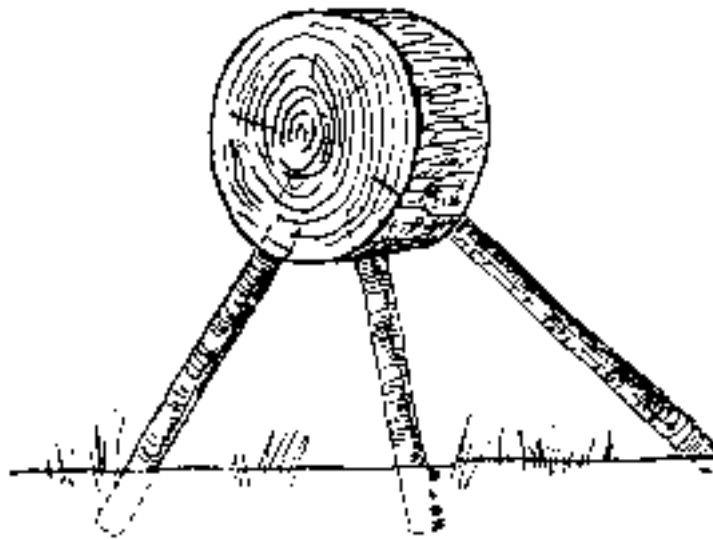


## Variations

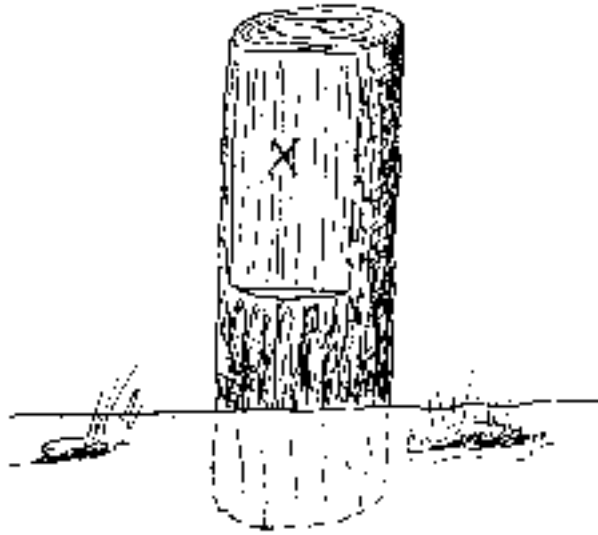
Once you get your "standard" throw down pat, you will want to experiment with variations of the basic throw. The standard throw causes the tomahawk to make one full revolution. By backing up about 9 or so feet, you can get the hawk to make two full turns and stick. By backing up about 5 feet from your standard distance, and holding the hawk cutting edge up, you can get your hawk to make one and a half turns and stick with the handle pointing up. As with your standard throw, you will have to experiment a bit to find your particular proper distances. As you get more and more proficient through practice, you will find that your distances no longer need be so exact as you will have developed better control of your throwing technique. Remember, it is more important to be very good at one distance than to be just fair at many distances.

You will want to be able to throw your hawk at a run. In doing so, try to run by your target rather than towards it. In doing so, your distance from the target will remain more constant. If necessary, run towards the target then cut to your left and throw to the side rather than to the front. Try to maintain as close as you can to your standard distance while running by the target. Here again, success follows practice.

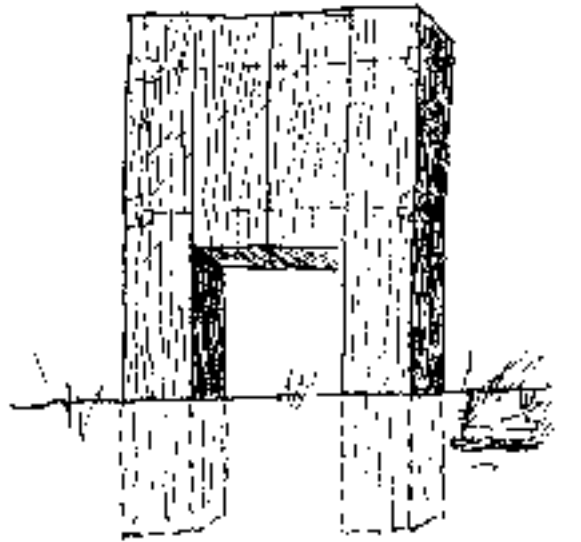
## Targets



A slice of soft wood one foot or more in diameter and 4 inches or so thick makes an excellent hawk-board. Bore 3 holes as illustrated to make a tripod stand. Use 2 inch diameter legs. The center of the slice should be about 4 feet from the ground.



A soft wood log one foot or so in diameter and six or seven feet long makes a good target also. The log should be buried a foot or so deep. The front should be blazed to form a flat target area. The log can be braced, if necessary.



A more formal target can be made by using 6 x 6's. Two 4 footers and two 8 footers are bolted together using half inch threaded rod. The rod ends are counter bored so that no metal is exposed. The long pieces are buried about 2 feet deep.

It is considered a bad practice to throw at live trees as the cuts in the tree can cause a heavy sap loss which can kill the tree.

Targets for an informal match or for practice purposes can be anything from a playing card to a piece of paper or bark stuck in the log. Scoring can be improvised accordingly.



Fig. 5

## Handles

Should replacement of a broken or split handle be necessary the choice of wood should be Hickory or Ash, in that order. Both woods are strong and springy. Oak and Birch are strong enough but don't have the "give" that is necessary for a good hawk handle. Maple makes a good decorative and ceremonial handle. Soft woods should be avoided except for temporary emergency purposes. The grain of the wood should run from poll to blade. The cross-section of the handle at the eye of the hawk should be tear-drop shaped so that it fits snugly into the eye of the hawk. (See Fig. 5) The cross-section at the bottom should be egg-shaped with the smaller diameter at the front. (See Fig. 6) This shape is conducive to a strong and comfortable handle. The length can run from 14 to 20 inches depending on the size of the head. The taper should be very gradual from top to bottom. Don't make your handle too smooth, this tends to make the handle slippery and hard to handle in wet weather. By the same token, don't leave it so rough as to get splinters in your hand. A good oil stain is all that is necessary to finish a functional tomahawk.



Fig. 6

## Uses

The type hawk I personally prefer and use is the forged type offered on the market as the "squaw-hawk". It has a 15 inch handle and a total weight of 3/4 pound. This hawk, because of its weight and size is an excellent one to carry. It is nowhere near as cumbersome as the larger ones and it can be thrown all day without "throwing your arm out".

As a man is familiar with the possibilities of his rifle, so should he be familiar with the possibilities of his tomahawk. It is a tool and he should seek as many uses as he can for it. If kept properly sharpened, one can easily field dress and skin a big game animal with a hawk. The pelvic bone problem is solved with a flip of the wrist. In skinning, a natural for the hawk, the poll is held in the hand with the handle sticking out on side or the other. (See Fig. 7) It's obvious use as a hatchet for chopping or splitting wood needs no explanation. The poll can be used, to some degree, as a hammer. My hawk poll is kept somewhat flat for that purpose. If you have a spike-hawk, you have a built-in pick. Of course, any hawk can be used as a digging tool in an emergency. Hawks have even been used as paddles. The many uses of the tomahawk are limited only to the user's imagination.

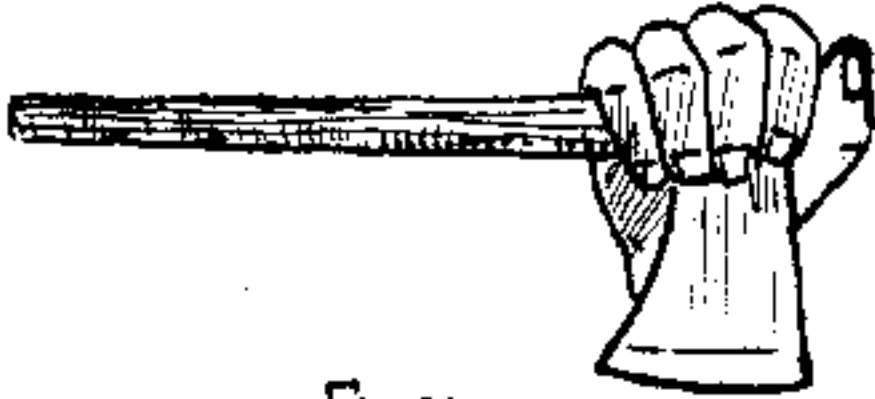


Fig 7

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