

# **Tools for Trails**

## ***Part 1***

### **“Adze Hoe”**

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*Note: This is Part 1 of a series of articles providing a brief history of the tools used today on the trail.*

**The Adze/Adz Hoe, Grub Hoe, or Hazel Hoe all has a synonymous relationship in the fact that the hoe is one of the oldest tools known to man. Early indications show that ancient worldwide civilizations of “hunter gatherers” slowly decreased their nomadic tendencies and began to settle into regions for domestic habitation. “The many demands of a settled way of life led to a higher degree of tool specialization; the identities of the ax, adz, chisel, and saw were clearly established more than 4,000 years ago.”<sup>1</sup> The celt, a smooth chisel-shaped tool head that formed either an ax or adz, dates from the establishment of agriculture and the domestication of animals. No particular region of the world can definitively lay claim to the invention of the hoe. Some researchers can attest that the African hoe evolved from a**

**pointed stick which primitive man used in an upward and downward stabbing motion. With the new tool, they began to grub the earth rather than stab it. Most worldwide archeological excavations have discovered some form of hoe was utilized. The Adze Hoe use varied from African woodcarving to prehistoric Maroi woodcarvings from New Zealand. African and Egyptian adzes were used for planing and carving. “It was made of a wooden handle, often fashioned from a branch cut at its ramification, to which a blade was fitted.”<sup>2</sup> Developing adzes were made from nephrite, also known as jade. Knapped flint adzes were made in central Europe in the late Mesolithic Period (8,000-2,700bc). “Polished adzes and axes made of ground stone, like amphibolites, basalt, or jadeite are typical for the Neolithic Period (last 10,000yrs). Shoe-last adzes or celts, named for their typical shape, are found in the Linearbandkeramic and Rossen cultures of the early Neolithic.”<sup>3</sup> Diorite or basalt stone, when ground created sharper edged adzes. Later meteoric iron were used and**

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<sup>1</sup> “Hand tool,” Encyclopedia Britannica. 2004. Premium Service. 29 Sept 2004  
<http://www.britannica.com/eb/article?tocid=3919>  
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<sup>2</sup> “Carpenters and their tools,” 28 Sep 2004.  
<http://www.nefertiti.iwebland.com/trades/carpenters.htm>

<sup>3</sup> “Adze,” Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia. 28 Sep 2004. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adze>

sharpened by grinding also. By Egyptian times, the adz had acquired a wooden haft (handle) with a copper or bronze blade set flat at the top of the haft to form a T. In this form but with a steel blade, it continued to be the prime hand tool for shaping and trimming wood. Egyptians used various sizes of adzes for different jobs. The larger adzes were used for removing bark, branches and in boat and house construction, smaller adzes for delicate carving and planing. "The adz was once an indispensable tool of general utility. In addition to surfacing, it was particularly useful for truing and otherwise leveling framework such as posts, beams, and rafters, in setting up the frames of wooden ships and in dressing ships' planking. For special purposes, the blade was round instead of flat, allowing the adz to cut hollows such as gutters. Dugout canoes, log coffins, and stock watering troughs, all cut from a whole log, were products of the adz. Short-handled adzes were used by coopers and makers of wooden bowls."<sup>4</sup>

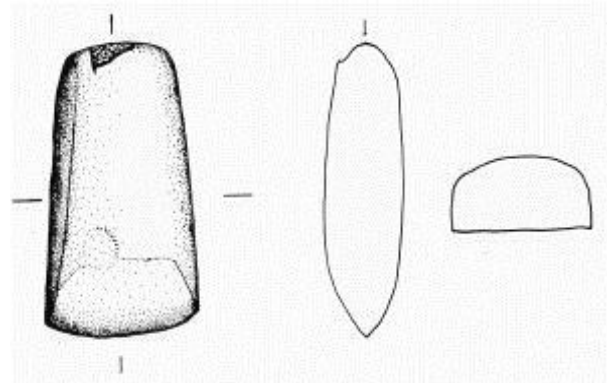
Today's adz hoe has largely been replaced by the sawmill and the power-planer, at least in

industrialized cultures. Adzes are also in current use by artists such as the American and Canadian Indian sculptors doing large pole carvings.

Adz hoes of various weights and sizes are available and are good for building and repairing trail tread and for digging trenches to hold turnpike logs and waterbars. They usually come with a 34-inch handle and a six-inch-wide blade set at an "adze angle" and are maintained and used like a mattock.

Adze hoes are some trail builders tool of choice and should be respected for their continued historical significance.

*Linearbandkeramic Shoe-last adze, amphibolites*



<sup>4</sup> "hand tool-European usage," Encyclopedia Britannica. 29 Sep 2004.  
<http://www.britannica.com/eb/print?tocId=39216>