

THE YOKE'S ON YOU



In the summer of 2010 at *Week in the Woods* we made traditional wooden shoulder yokes for humanoids to carry two buckets of something hanging off their shoulders. The design comes from pp. 178-9 in Drew Langsner's [Country Woodcraft](#), 1978, Rodale Press. We used one year-aged aspen logs to ease woodworking; birch is better but takes longer to shape because of its hardness. Our logs were 10-12" diameter, about 40" long, after debarking in the spring when the bark slips easily. (Coat the butt endgrain to prevent checking.)

We broadaxed several inches of wood thickness off the rounds to get a flat working surface. This left the natural rounded exterior of the log top to provide material for a deep shoulder cavity emulating a "Colonial"-style yoke.

For the layout we measured and marked centerlines, then used a template to mark the outlines. Techniques and tools used by students to do the rough wasting away on the top/bottom and front/back surfaces varied from sawing with a frame saw, to hatchet work to drawknifing.



Several hold-down systems admirably assisted us: sand-filled leather pillows to accommodate the rounded surfaces; a flat slab workbench low enough to sit on and thin enough to accept ratchet cargo straps, C- Wexler or wooden Jorgensen clamps; and a long, flat workbeam high enough to work standing up at complete with vertical pegs for wedging (a la John Manthei's design).



Draw knives, hand adzes and large gouges shaped the interiors of the neck and the shoulder hollow. A bent gouge was especially helpful. Keep 2" wall thickness above the rear shoulders.



Final shaping of the yoke was done with spokeshaves and scrapers. A pair of branches in the shape of a “Y” to make bucket hooks hung from cords completed this omelette.

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