

[Page 1 - Make Rope from Wood](#)ISSUE : [Issue 1](#)

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Making Rope from Wood There are very few men who know how to make rope from wood, and there are even fewer who would bother to try. Red Dan Smith of Jersey Cove, Victoria County, is one of those rare men who has had actual experience making and using wood rope, and continues to make it. "I call this curiosity work," Red Dan said, twisting wood strips into the beginnings of rope. "When father made it it was not made for curiosity as this is made. "I made a lot of it with father. Every Spring we made rope moorings for the nets. March and April. Ten, fifteen fathoms for the harbour. Outside, they made them twenty-five fathoms long." This seems to have been the one use for rope made from wood: as moorings to hold the nets, one end of the rope tied to a kellic, an anchor made of a heavy stone affixed into the fork of a tree. It looks quite simple, watching the rope being made. But that simplicity is deceptive. Still, we hope there will be those who will give it a try. Here's all you have to do: Go to the woods and find a perfect piece of yellow birch. The right one will be straight and without knots • about four feet long • and the grain will permit you to pull off long, thin strips of wood one right after the other • and they'll run off three to four feet long, and between an eighth and a thirty-second of an inch thick, and from three-eighths to an inch wide. Perhaps the hardest part of making rope is finding that tree. The old fellows used to sit with the birch across their knees and a pocketknife in their right hand, holding the wood steady at the center with their left. They'd use the knife to start the strip at one end, catch it with their fingers and draw it off to the center, exchange hands and let the right hand hold while the left pulled the strip off the other end. Dan Smith uses a vice to hold the wood and works standing up. You pull off one strip after another, and when you have a batch you bundle it together and tie it with a strip and put it aside. You can work a piece of yellow birch six or eight inches across down to perhaps one or two inches. When it got down that far, some men would start a broom, running the strips only two-thirds of the way along the wood and leaving them attached. Then they would turn them back and tie them. And many women still remember taking up one of those bundles of wood strips and using it with soft soap and salt to scruo a wood floor. But we're making rope. For equipment you'll need a sturdy bench to sit on, a piece of plank about a foot square to tie the beginnings of rope to and to hold firm with your foot, a bucket of water to soak your strips if they are dry, a piece of plastic to cover the wet strips which you sit on on the bench, pulling them out from under you as you work • and a piece of wood R perhaps three or four inches long and Ij whittled like this, to push through the "ends of the rope for "finishing." That's all it takes • that, and powerful hands. Because the trick is to twist and twist and twist • not turn but twist • keeping a firm grip at all times so that it does not unravel and watching every inch of the way so that you bury all loose ends in the center of the rope and maintain a constant thickness all the way along. You start making the rope by twisting together five or six strips •



really quite roughly • the idea being to have something you can tie around the board and leave an

CONTINUED ON PAGE 20 CAPE BRETON'S MAGAZINE, NUMBER ONE WRECK COVE,  
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