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How to Make an Axe Handle Dan Murdoch Morrison lives with his sister and brother in a lovely yellow farm? house set back from the road along the Cabot Trail. You know some very special, careful people live here: a large patch of potatoes, the fields clear and hay cut, the outbuildings painted and square, flowers around the house, the fences good. Everything the Morrises do they do beautifully. It is out of respect for a tradition of craftsmanship and self-reliance that they help keep alive on Cape Breton, that we asked Dan Murdoch to make an axe handle for Cape Breton's Magazine. (2) (3) Making a good axe handle begins months in advance when you select just the right tree to cut and make splits. Ash, maple and yellow birch seem to make the best handles. Dan Murdoch used a dry split of maple with a good, straight grain. Remove the bark and expose the sapwood of the split. This will be the back of the handle. Take a piece of lathe you know to be straight and draw lines top to bottom along the center of the sapwood and heartwood. (1) It's a good idea to dig out a little gouge in the chopping block to help hold the split while you work. You begin by holding one of the drawn lines facing you, chopping away at one of the rough sides. It is a small-scale job of hewing. You don't try to hack your way down from the top. Instead, start low on the handle, cutting in every few inches, scoring your way up. (2) Then cut back down, starting from the last score, each stroke a little bit longer and heavier, driving one chip into the next and forming one long piece that falls off at the bottom. (3) Look down from the top to see that the side is straight. Dan Murdoch's was. If yours is not straight, do it again, this time scoring much less deeply. Then turn the split and cut the other side in the same way. Take your working axe handle, place it against the side of the split and trace its shape. (4) Be sure to leave enough space at the top for the eye (the part that goes up through the eye of the axe head). Dan Murdoch worked with this tracing faced away from himself, but you might prefer seeing it while you work. Cut into the heartwood the shape that you've drawn, using the same hewing method • but this time