

[Page 16 - How to Bark Tan Hides and Skins / Tanning with Bark told by Wally Kendall](#)

ISSUE : [Issue 6](#)

Published by Ronald Caplan on 1973/12/1

D. J. MacDonald told us that years ago they would remove the wool from sheepskin by holding the skin stretched tightly over the mouth of a barrel containing boiling water, keeping the steam in. Usually this would be done in the spring, using salted skins of lambs killed the past fall. But D. J. thinks they were only interested in the wool for weaving, and no use was made of the skin. Mr. Kendall agrees that after the steam is removed the skin would probably be no good for tanning, and he offers this way for quickly removing wool from sheepskin you want later to tan: Don't wait for the skin to cool. Take it right off the sheep, make the flesh side wet with water and spread fine lime over it. Fold it up and put it in a bag and hang it somewhere for about three days • hang it up warm. Then wash it out well • all the lime must come out • if it gets dry with lime in it you can never tan it. After it is de-limed you salt it with a few handfuls. Now you can leave it for months. When you're ready, soak out some of the salt and bark tan. Tanning with Bark told by Wally Kendall You don't have to cut the tree. You can if you like. You'll get more bark but usually the heaviest bark is on the trunk of the tree. And you just go to a tree about 14, 16 inches through and you cut right around the tree with an axe or some sort of a knife, down near the roots then up so far • say four feet or something like that. And then you slit the tree down on both sides, right down through the bark, get underneath the bark with some kind of a sharp instrument, the blade of your axe or a peeling knife, something like that • and gradually peel that bark off and it'll come off intact, just like two pieces off the trunk. And it's quite thick. It would be anywhere from 3/8 to 5/8 of an inch. The outer layer of the bark is very thin. You take the bark and set it out in the sun for a few days. You can put it in at night under cover in case it would rain. But then set it out the next day again in the hot sun. That would be flesh side up. That's the inside. The sun will dry it out and after three or four days it gets hard and brittle. You have to dry it before you take it inside. Otherwise it would be no good. It would kind of mold and ferment. If you cut it right off a tree and took it inside a building and left it there you couldn't tan hides with it. You can break it into smaller pieces when it's dry. You can take a saw and cut it whichever size piece you want. And the way we used to grind it was to take a barrel and take an old-fashioned jack plane • you turn it bottom up and you set it coarse like • and it's sitting right on the mouth of the barrel and you just rub the bark over the plane and the grindings drop in the barrel. When it's ground it's in pieces just about the size of peas or even smaller. You take the hide from the animal and salt it. And after being in salt for a while if you want to tan it you take it and you soak it for a day in water. And then you get unslaked lime. You can buy it from the hardware stores, or you could anyway. Unslaked. This would be knobs, lumps of lime just like a stone. When you put it in water it slakes out. You take lime and put it in a barrel and put water on it and it will just boil. Then it'll start to slake out and it gets right hot. After it cools off • when the bubbles stop • you don't put the hide with it right away • but when it cools off you take the hide and put it right

in there. You stir it around and when it's in motion like that take the hide and drop it right in, move it up and down a few times. Use enough water to cover the hide. After three or four days you can take the hide and keep trying it, see if the hair will pull out. You don't have to stir it every day but you can if you like. After a few days you'll find that the hair will start to break loose, it will pull quite easily. And you take it out of the lime and put it on a pole, a round pole with no knots • set it up on two benches for working ease about three foot six or something like that. You just spread the hide over that, hair side up. And you take some sort of a drawing knife, the back of a drawing knite • something that won't cut • and you just pull it towards you. And you pull that hair off of the hide. It'll come off easy. You don't flesh the other side yet. After you get all the hair off of the hide you take it and you soak it and make sure all the lime and salt is out of the hide. Fresh water. Soak it for a few days and kind of work it so you're isure. When it's all out then it's ready for tanning. You put ground bark in the bottom of the vat. Just a layer. Then you lay the hide on that. It doesn't matter whether it's flesh side up or grain side up. Then you put another layer of bark over. Then you double it back again, and then you put an? other layer of bark. liF you had a big vat and could spread it right out with a layer of bark under it and a layer over it • it's the same thing. Put the bark in first. Then you put the water in to come up over the hide. You can put boards with a little weight on it to keep the hide down underneath the water. You keep it in tail for 5 or 6 days. First time. And then you take it out and put it on a pole, flesh side up-*.and you take a rough stone and you rough it off, take some of the film off it • it's a kind of forehide there. Then you put it back in the tan bark again but you use more new bark now • the second time you give it a, little more than Cape Breton's Ma'azin'/16