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Hatchets continued (3)

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- Gear reviews and tests - Edged tools - Axes and hatchets -



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Description :

Hatchets Part Three: Nordlund, Gransfors Wildlife and Small forest axe, Hults.

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The saga continues.....

I finally got the Norlund hatchet into shape and acquired a Gransfors Small Forest Axe to pit against the Hults re-handled hatchet..

The Norlund

Lets go back a bit with the Norlund.. I'd bought it as a head off ebay. I'm sure that the person selling it was thinking that he'd be in for some complaints from the buyer - if the buyer didn't read the specifications closely. The head arrived in a box that seemed empty. It's one tiny head! I was delighted - even with rust and dings - since I intended to grind on the head anyway...

And I ground and ground - and ground some more. I'd give it five minutes on the belt grinder every time I thought to do so. The steel is pretty hard and wear resistant! Eventually the time came when I couldn't stand it any more and went to the local hardware store looking for a handle to put on to try the hatchet. the most surprising thing is that the local hardware store had just one handle - and it was not only the correct size, but had vertical grain. That has to be some first!

The armchair expert - of which I am one sometimes - will quickly see the pitfall of the Hudson Bay hatchet head. That the handle only fits through about 1 1/2" of the head. What an easily loosened head - no lips extending out of the back of the head or any other devices to strengthen and lock the handle into place! It appears though, that there's a trick to these heads - at least the one I've tried so far. The hole for the handle on most axes, tapers from the back to the centre then widens considerably to make sure that the wedged front of the handle locks things into place. On these Norlund heads the taper is very little, so things are pretty rigid. The handle is pretty tightly held for the whole 1 1/2". There are also ridges and grooves running along the sides of the handle hole so that as you pound on the handle, everything locks into place very solidly. It locked so solidly that I was able to do a lot of cutting with an unwedged head! Normally I wouldn't risk such a thing, but it was clear from the outset that that head was not coming off without a real battle. That proved the case when I finally did remove the handle for trimming and wedging.

Once I'd set up the hatchet I found that I liked it a lot! I even prefer it to the Gransfors Wildlife hatchet, which is saying something. The narrow head allows the hatchet to be used as a cutting tool with the hand choked up on the head. The balance of the hatchet is superb too, for real chopping. Naturally I had to do a little chopping comparison against the Gransfors to see how close it would come - despite the fact hat I hadn't thinned the bevels enough. I was some surprised when it cut the GB by a wide margin! I'm sure a bunch of people are choking on their coffee on hearing that so I'll explain...

The Wildlife hatchet I got is nice in setup, but the edge left something to be desired. It didn't perform on slicing tests and push cutting tests as well as Cliff Stamp's hatchet. I polished up the edge a little to make it perform then left things be. I was pretty amazed at what I was able to chop and left it at that. It seems that the edge bevels had a few more defects than I had recognized. I'd done a fair job on the Norlund bevels so it worked great - but I was puzzled over what could be wrong with the GB bevels. Nothing reveals the actual state of affairs with bevels like polishing with a sanding pad and some fine emery cloth. The factory grinding lines can hide quite a bit. When you polish the bevels all small defects are revealed. I saw that the bevels and edge weren't quite straight and even. I solved that problem in short order with some quality time on the belt grinder and now the Norlund and WL hatchets perform about the same. There's nothing too surprising in this since they weigh exactly the same - 1lb 4oz.

Hatchets continued (3)

I'll be grinding down the Norlund head slowly over time, and when it's finished either bluing or browning the head to make it pretty. I really can't find anything to improve other than thinning the blade! I guess the total cost came out to about \$40 Canadian on that venture - about half the price of a GB. If you count the work though, it's no bargain. I guess it depends on whether you like tinkering!

Here's a few pictures - unfortunately taken at dusk with a flash. The cut lines on the chopped log are from cutting at a high angle to test the bite of the hatchet. It's also shown with a Wildlife hatchet and with a Wildlife and carving hatchet...

[image]



Eventually I'll get things toward completion and some better pictures..

The Hults and the Gransfors Small Forest axe:

I was feeling pretty happy with the re-handled Hults hatchet. It would far out cut the Gransfors Wildlife hatchet and despite weighing 2lb 2oz would handily fit into a small daypack. Then of course the sfa arrived...

I'd really wanted a small forest axe but no-one in Canada carried them. One morning being more awake than normal I decided to email the Lee Valley special orders dept. and got this reply..

"In Canada one can special order Gransfors through Lee Valley. Here's a reply I got to inquiry: "We have heard from our Special Orders department regarding your request for the 3lb Gransfors axe, small forest axe and a mini belt hatchet. The Mini belt hatchet is \$95.00 CDN (not including shipping or any applicable taxes) and takes 12 to 16 weeks for delivery since only one blacksmith at Gransfors makes that model.

Unfortunately, we no longer carry the Small Forest Axe (item # 48U0503) in our product line. However, we have 1 left in stock and I have placed it at my desk should you wish to order it. The cost of the Small Forest Axe is \$89.00 CDN and does not include any shipping or taxes.

We were unsure if the 3 Lb. Axe you were referring to was the Swedish Broad Axe that Gransfors makes. If you could verify this when responding to our e-mail we would appreciate it.

Please reply to this e-mail to let us know how we should proceed.

We trust this answers your question and we look forward to receiving your reply.

Regards,

Jason Craig

Internet Customer Service Representative"

It didn't take long to get the sfa on its way here..

The sfa is such a beautiful axe! I had the Scandinavian forest axe, which seems far more practical at only 10oz more and longer of handle - and of course I had the wildlife hatchet. A small axe that would fit into a daypack was also nothing new since I had the Hults. The sfa though is such a well balanced and proportioned axe and is far better profiled than the Hults to this point in time. It is simply astounding in use - the hatchet I'd always wanted. You could tackle just about anything with this tiny axe that you take out of a little daypack..

Well this is getting a bit big..



The sfa works well one handed as a hatchet or tool - but used two handed simply amazes me every time I use it. The cutting potential is beyond belief - a hatchet that will outdo many axes. Surprisingly for those who would like to believe that Gransfors has invented a new size of axe - axes or long hatchets like this were in use a long time ago.

" It was a dirty night. The roar of the wind could be heard out on the open river: inside the trees one could feel it a little and occasionally there would come the whirling thud of snow dislodged by the gentle movement of the branches. I chose two spruce about ten feet apart - more or less in line with the wind, and with an open space in front of them. I snow shooed around the camp site, sharply striking every overhanging tree twice with the back of the little axe: that fetched down any loose snow which would otherwise fall into camp or on to the fire, when the heat of the flames rose among the branches. Then I trimmed the two chosen spruce to a height of about six feet laying the small dead branches in a pile to serve as kindling. Next off came the snowshoes, and one of them was used as a shovel to dig down to ground level, banking the snow up all around, but especially behind the fireplace where it would serve as a reflector. Then I laid the kindling in the fireplace, together with a twist of birch bark from my pocket. A match was applied and the little pile burst into flame: I nursed it carefully, adding bigger twigs and then branches and then a log or two - anything I could reach until it became a fire..."

Just a teaser for RM Patterson's "Dangerous River pg 211... It's just a teaser because the rationalization for a light axe such as he was carrying was discussed in considering just what one can carry in the winter up in the Nahanni.

And the rest of the story of the construction of the camp is superb.

Conclusions:

A hatchet can mean anything from a short axe to a tiny one handed tool small enough to fit into a back pocket. More on that one later! A good one handed hatchet is the smallest tool that will provide firewood in any conditions. A large knife might be fine for cutting green wood but might become a lot less fun on hard seasoned wood as the chill soaks the last of the warmth out of you. Many people might not have considered a short axe in place of a hatchet. They are safer to use one handed as the longer handle braces on the forearm better. The better ones such as the sfa can handily be used as a tool, and in two handed use are a dramatic improvement in cutting potential over any one handed hatchet. All for 14oz more over a light hatchet such as the Wildlife. There are cheaper alternatives to the Gransfors - albeit at the expense of hours of tinkering...

More at [Hatchets continued \(4\)](#)

Post-scriptum :Original article at [OldJimbo's site](#).