

Noggin Carving

Traditionally in this country wooden cups were referred to as 'Noggins' and were made out of many types of wood, including Birch, Cherry and Lime to name but a few.

This is a pictorial tutorial of a Noggin I decided to make on the course as a Christmas present for my wife. She has always wanted a one carved for her so I thought it would be an ideal opportunity.

Noggin carving is a skill that has been practiced for millennia but due to modern industrial practices it is hard to find one in this country unless you make one yourself.



Here are a few of my earlier carvings.

The skill is practiced more widely today in Scandinavian countries where the Noggin would be known as a Kuksa by the indigenous Sami people of the Arctic areas or as a Kåsa in Sweden.

These cups in their true form are made from carved Birch burls. Traditionally the burl would be soaked in salt water for a number of weeks before it was carved to prevent it cracking. These burls are becoming harder to find so to make a true Kuksa is a rare thing indeed*.

In Scandinavia the cups are now made out of Birch wood as opposed to just burls and given away or bought as souvenirs.

The following pages are my tutorial of making a Noggin.

* Source – Online Wikipedia

Wood selection

For this Noggin I selected a green piece of Silver Birch that had no crack lines starting on either end.

The log had a few knots in it but looked quite easy to carve.



Splitting

I split the log on a stump with my axe and drew out the basic shape of my Noggin with a pencil.

My intention was to carve a shallow flat bottomed Noggin with steep sides.



Tools & the bowl

As the sides were to be steep I opted to use a curved wood chisel and a Mawl.

I carved out the bowl first for various reasons. These include:

- Finding any cracks deep in the bowl area quickly
- Working with the whole piece makes it more stable
- There is less chance of the side of the bowl cracking



Carving the bowl

To begin with I work my way around the edge of my bowl taking out small chippings.

I tap the chisel with the Mawl quite gently at this stage.

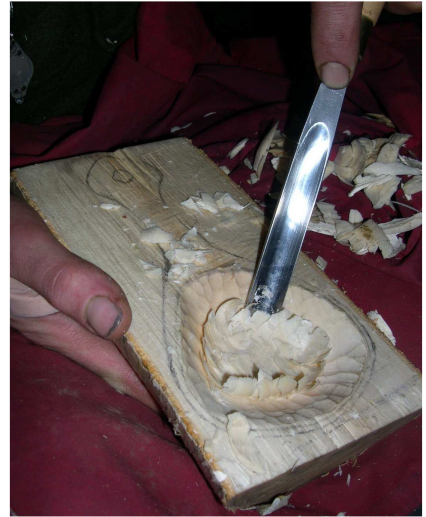
The work piece is placed on my lap with 3 thick layers protecting my legs. These were two jackets and a small day sack.



Going Deeper

Once the initial edge area was carved out I was able to use more force with the chisel.

This time I did not use the Mawl but cut into the wood by just pressing down with force on the chisel. This seems to work quicker than using the Mawl all the time.



Working my way around the bowl I was able to take out a lot of wood rapidly until I had the basic shape roughed out.



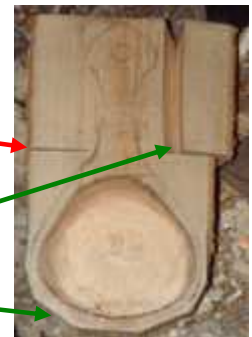
Axing out the basic shape

Once the bowl was created I needed to axe out the basic shape of the bowl.

I used the saw to make 'stop cuts' so that when I was using the axe I never cut out areas of wood I did not intend to.



Here you can see the two stop cuts coming in at either side of the work piece created by the saw.



I then used the axe to cut out the areas of wood I did not require.

Carving with the knife

I used the axe to blank out the basic shape of the Noggin then switched to using my Mora Sloyd knife.

This small knife is ideal for more detailed controlled carving.



As you can see here I am able to carve in a very controlled fashion.

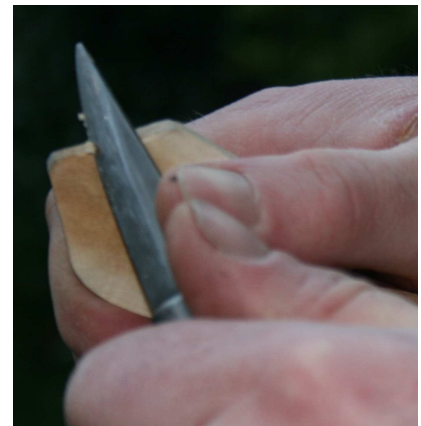
My thumbs pressing on the back of the blade together provide significant force but the hold allows me to make very fine cuts.



Work on the Noggin handle.



Then on the tip of the handle. Here I am chamfering the edges prior to sanding.



The Crook knife

When I had the outside of the Noggin ready for sanding I decided to use the Crook Knife on the bowl.



This was to take out as many of the small ridges produced by the chisel and also to try and flatten out the bottom of the bowl some more.

Here I am working on the bowl edges.



Here I am working on the bottom of the bowl.

You can quite clearly see the lighter areas of wood where I have carved on the bottom of the bowl. After carving these areas will dull over and take on a more sandy colour.

At this stage I left the Noggin in a paper bag to dry slowly over a two week period as it is easier to sand dry wood



Sanding the Noggin

The Noggin is now ready for sanding.



Starting with the handle I used a rough grit piece of sandpaper (80 grit) to begin with.

I sanded the tail edges and the top of the tail. I left the bottom of the tail rough.



The top of the tail roughly sanded.

Notice the edges have now lost their sharpness



Next was the bottom of the bowl. This took a considerable period of time as it was still quite bumpy.



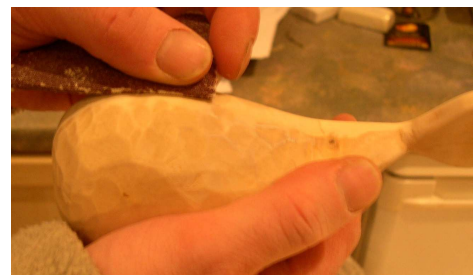
The sides of the Noggin were easier to sand as I was able to apply a lot more pressure.



On the underside I only sanded a small area flat so that the rest of the cup kept a rustic look



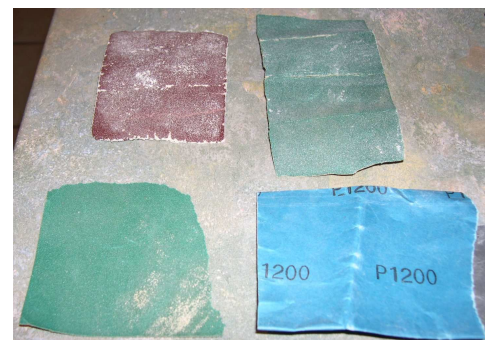
Finally I sanded around the rim to make it comfortable to drink out of.



The Noggin was now ready to be lightly sanded with a finer grit to make it smoother.

Here are the different types of sandpaper I used.

- Top left – 80 grit
- Top right – 150 grit
- Bottom left – 320 grit
- Bottom right – 1200 grit



Once the fine sanding was completed the next stage was to use the back of a spoon to really smooth the surface.

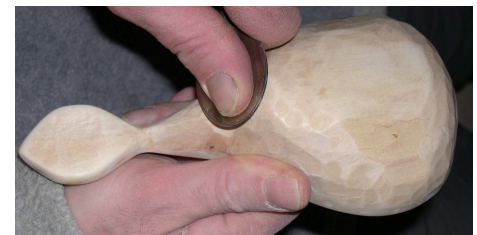
In the field a round pebble works just as well.

Spooning the Noggin

Starting with the inside of the Noggin I pressed the spoon very firmly over the wood and rubbed it until the wood started to shine.



Next was the outside of the Noggin



And finally a lot of time on the rim to make it really smooth.



The Noggin was now ready for oiling.

For this I just used vegetable oil. I rubbed in one coat and left it to dry then repeated the process 3 more times.



Lastly I carved a hole in the handle, fixed a leather loop and oiled it once again.

The Noggin is finally completed



