

# The Sport of Wood Chopping

Take man's oldest tool and combine it with his earliest instinct; add to that hundreds of years of woodsman culture and you have a competitive sport that combines danger, grace, power and camaraderie.

This is the world of competitive wood chopping. It grew from the land clearing, tree felling, pioneering spirit found in the lumberjack states of the US and Canada and in the down under lands of Australia and New Zealand.

Before a sellout crowd of thousands at the Sydney Easter Show this year, - it is the largest competition of its kind in the world and is known as the 'Wimbledon of Woodchopping' - some of the world's best axe men will stand on top of a fifteen inch log, and swing a razor sharp, high carbon steel axe into the timber to a depth of a hand, within inches of their feet.

Legend has it that the modern sport was created when two men in an Australian outback pub placed a \$25 bet on who could cut through a tree the fastest. New Zealand claims the bet was placed in the mighty Kauri stands, in Canada the venue was a lumberjacks camp and in the US, the giant Redwood forest

Whatever the truth, regardless of the relationship, neighbour against neighbour, brother against brother, father against son, when you step up to the block, money is still involved. You buy into each event, draw lots for logs and are handicapped on the basis of previous purses you have won. The wager remains.

Others climb tree-sized poles, cutting footholds as they go, in a race to sever the top off the tree. Husband and wife teams hand saw through the logs faster than a chainsaw.

Each event over in a matter of minutes. First fall of the log takes the prize. Hopefully, everyone keeps their toes.

In early times when the work was dangerous and families needed to be self-reliant to survive, neighbours were close friends, work-mates were brothers. Community gatherings were occasions to meet, gossip and test your skills. In isolated communities, this heartland sport still helps define the local culture



This one hour documentary explores the history of this unusual sport from tree to woodchips. Following competitors from across the world as they engage in one of the most dangerous, exacting and exciting professional sports. Speed, grace and skill combine as the chips fly, logs (and the occasional woodsman) tumble and the money claimed.

Wood chopping is practiced in regions where forestry is or has been an important part of the economy:

- In North America: in Canada and in the north of the United States
- In Europe: in Austria, the Czech Republic, Germany, Netherlands, Norway, Switzerland, England, Slovenia the Alpine region of France, the Basque Country, other parts of Spain (mainly in Asturias and Cantabria, but also in Castile and Madrid).
- In Australia and New Zealand.