

Carved hiking staffs

By STAN SAPERSTEIN

OVER the years, *Chip Chats* has shown many pictures and a few articles on walking sticks and canes, but none that I can remember on hiking staffs during the 27 years I have been a member of NWCA. Since I have been making hiking sticks or staffs for a good number of years, I thought it was time for an article about the differences between walking sticks and hiking staffs.

The main difference between the two is size and balance. There is also a difference in historic definition of walking sticks of the 18th and 19th century and today.

A walking stick of the 18th and 19th century was really a straight cane between 31 and 38 inches long, used for dress purposes and protection. It was not a device to assist in walking. Handled walking sticks were referred to as canes as they are today. They could be used for dress or to support a person as well as assist in walking.

Hiking staffs, or staves as they were called, were used ever since man stood upright. All people in mountainous areas carried five-foot staves to assist them going up and down hills. In Europe, the famous Alpine staff is the favorite. It is an oak staff with a ball on the top and a steel spike on the bottom. The ball balances the staff.

In the U.S., the Appalachian hills staff is popular among the hikers of the Appalachian Trail. This five- to seven-foot staff originated in the Blue Ridge and Smoky Mountain area of the Appalachians; it was carved from a branch or made from milled lumber. The top of the

staff had a carved head, (ball-in-cage and animals were popular) and two to four carved balls below the head for a sure grip going downhill. The extra length of a staff allows the hiker to reach out in front and plant the staff like a long extra third foot. When you step off a rock outcropping longer than an average step, the staff allows you to balance yourself so you can step down safely. Most injuries occur going downhill, and on a steep hill a staff is a necessity.

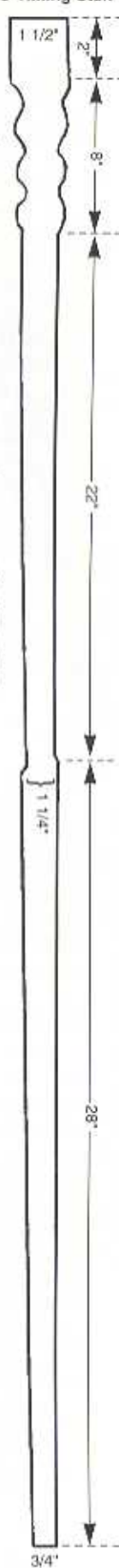
Walking sticks and staffs make nice gifts and can be sold to the large number of walking and hiking aficionados of today. They can be made from any straight-grained wood such as fir or spruce (strong, light and cheap, but not great carving wood) to cherry, walnut, oak, ash, or any of the exotics. The head can be carved directly into the shaft or a separate head can be carved and then attached.

The pictures included with this article will give you some ideas for staff decoration and the drawing is the basic design. A five-foot staff is adequate for someone from five foot six inches to five-ten; after that add two inches to the staff for each inch of a person's height. Keep in mind that all measurements given on the sketch are approximate and that the staff should be sized to the individual. ■

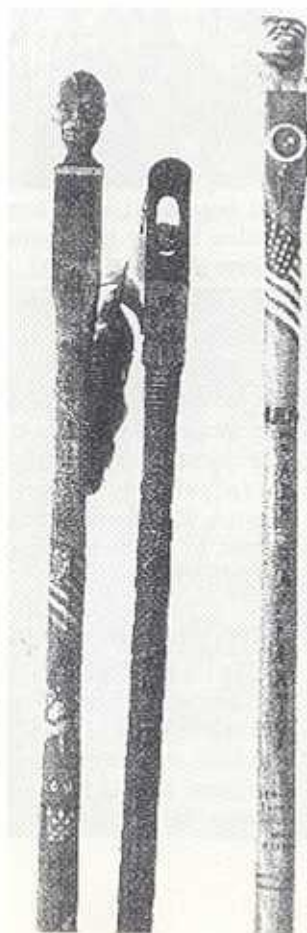


Glue to face of staff

5' Hiking Staff



Bear head for Appalachian hiking staff. Make ears of leather; if staff is used, ears will not break off if it is accidentally dropped.



Right: "Dream Shaman" Stan Saperstein made for Mayor Jack Rafferty of Hamilton Township.