



THE EMERSON KNIVES BATTLE AXE BRINGS THE LEGEND OF THE VIKING TO BEAR ON MODERN TIME

STORY AND PHOTOS BY JOSHUA SWANAGON

OLD SCHOOL COMBAT



It was a way of life and they lived it well.

I have had the distinct pleasure of speaking with Ernest Emerson on a few occasions about his collection of antique weapons—ranging as far back as the Neanderthal era—and it is apparent that he has a love of the Vikings and their weaponry. Not that it is a stretch to feel that way, as the Vikings were very adept at weapon and tool making, considering that their axes were the tools they depended on for war and farming alike.

With their recent addition to an already diverse line of edged weaponry—the Battle Axe—Emerson Knives has brought old school weaponry to the forefront with a design that harkens back, directly, to one of the more prolific warrior classes the world has known.

I recently got the opportunity to give one a run for the money and see how well it held up to the Viking name.

Above: The Battle Axe easily split some very hard, very knotty lilac wood.

Modern Meets Antiquity

On first glance it is easy to see that the design cues were taken from the Viking axes of history, but it is even more specific than that.

When designing the Battle Axe, Ernest decided that the perfection of the original Viking Axe heads needed no intervention and opted for a direct replication of an original Viking axe head he had in his collection. With some slight variations at the poll—to accommodate for the integral design—and a very minor variance at the beard, the Battle Axe perfectly mimics the original head. The 5.2-inch head has a 3.75-inch cutting edge with a 1.75-inch drop to the beard. The full 13.8-inch overall length of the Battle Axe is constructed of 0.375-inch thick CPM S7 tool steel and is hardened to 57-59 RC.

The integral haft is modeled after more modern axe handle designs because

Ernest felt comfortable in the working functionality of this style of haft, having grown up using them in the north woods of Wisconsin. The belly sweeps nicely down from the shoulder to provide a good purchase while choking up on the head, while the throat has a beautiful dovetail that really helps retain the Battle Axe in hand while swinging hard. Under the handle scales are five channels, cut out to place the weight forward, at the belly, for increased action at the head.

The haft features aggressively textured “Grip-Tite” G-10 handle scales for maximum grip. Although the texturing to the handle scales did provide for amazing retention, it did start to wear at the inside of my thumb and create a hot spot during testing. I think I personally would have opted for a slightly less aggressive texture in certain areas of the handle.

The Battle Axe comes with a heavy duty Kydex sheath, form fit for secure



Left: Although not designed for this type of work, the Battle Axe did a very nice job at creating a feather stick for fire building.

retention, with three holes in the center of the sheath for personalized attachment options. There are also eyelets around the circumference of the sheath, allowing for multiple options in configuring your Battle Axe to your rig.

Hacking All the Way

To say that I was looking forward to testing the Battle Axe would be a bit of an understatement. Sometimes you just need to get out and channel your inner Viking, and the Battle Axe was the perfect outlet for just that.

With a complete lack of combat zones in my little town of 850 people and considering the fact that combat was only a part of the typical use a Viking would put his axe through on a daily basis—also utilizing his axe for everything from boat and shelter building to farming and general camp chores—I felt that some woods-related tasks had to be a part of my testing.

I would like to preface this part of the testing by saying that I have never been comfortable with the idea of throwing my

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1:1
ACTUAL
SIZE

The head is 5.2 inches wide with a 3.75 inch cutting edge.

Up Close with Ernest Emerson

KI: We have spoken about your axe collection before. Do you mind telling us how big it is?

EE: I have about 20 to 24 axes, all the way from Neanderthal through Cro-Magnon to Neolithic and bronze age, iron age and Viking.

KI: How long have you been collecting historical axes?

EE: It has been over 20 years or more that I have collected a lot of that stuff.

KI: What got you started?

EE: I collect antiquities, which basically started with Roman coins and stuff like that. As I became involved in the search for Roman coins, I found that there were other items that interested me, like statues, artwork and other antiquities. Due to my taste for weapons, I became interested in antique weapons, like the shepherd's sling, Greek arrowheads, Neolithic flaked arrowheads and stone—and then, of course, knives and swords. In my collection, I have some very unique swords, such as a real Roman Gladius from about A.D. 144—from an area that became modern Bulgaria—and several medieval swords that are over a thousand years old, with one that is over 2,000 years old. Also, in the collection are several Crusader swords from the Levant region.

KI: The head of your new Battle Axe was modeled after an old Viking axe head you have in your collection. Where did the haft design come from? Is it historical in design as well?

EE: In regard to the haft, that came from my experience of growing up in the north woods of Northern Wisconsin and using axes from a young age—same period that I got my first Barlow knife. I was always working with my father around the farm and became familiar with what was comfortable and efficient for this type of tool. So, it is not a historical design, just from experience.

KI: What did you feel was the most important feature of the Viking Axe that you wanted to make sure to capture in the Battle Axe?

EE: The most important thing is the balance in the swing and the comfort in the hand. Much like a machete, people don't understand that taking one in your hand and swinging it a few times is not using a machete; you have to take it out and swing it for a couple hours, cutting through jungle. Same with an axe; you use it for an extended period of time. That is when you find what is most comfortable.

KI: Have you ever had the opportunity to travel to Norway and research the Vikings and their axe?

EE: No, I have not. That is on my bucket list, but it has not happened yet.

KI: Do you plan to release an instructional video on the Battle Axe into your DVD edged training library?

EE: I am thinking about it. I definitely want to, but it is a matter of time. I am very particular about my training systems, so I want to take my time and make sure that everything is applicable to functional combat. It has to work and has to be something that the average person can walk out the door and use.



Above: You can see the direct design influence between this original old Viking Axe—that was the basis of the design—and the Emerson Knives Battle Axe.

weapon, so I never practiced it or became adept at it. So, the following report on the ability of the Battle Axe as a throwing weapon is based on a novice approach, but it was still really fun.

I started my testing, throwing the Battle Axe at the end of a large tree that was cut down last year. For my first few throws I was finding that the haft was hitting but not the head—I am sure that those of you that are experienced at this know exactly why this was happening, and I am comfortable admitting that it was most likely user error. But after a few more throws and some adjustments to my release, I was able to get the Battle Axe to stick deep into the log very consistently. Which tells me that the balance of the Battle Axe is on the money and was good enough to help a complete novice get fairly consistent results. The only issue I had during this phase of the testing was that a couple of the screws came loose in the handle and one was lost.

+ SPECS

Blade Material: CPM S7
Blade Length: 3.75 inches
Head Width: 5.2 inches
Overall Length: 13.8 inches
Blade Thickness: 0.375 inch
Blade Finish: Combat Gray Cerakote
Handle Material: Black G-10
Weight: 34 ounces
MSRP: \$469.95

Next, since the Vikings were prolific boat makers, I decided to start carving out a channel in the end of the log to see how quickly it would hollow it out. I was actually a little surprised to find that I had dug out a 10-inch-long channel, approximately 3 inches deep in just about 5 minutes. I can easily see how a small team of Vikings could hollow out a log for an expedient boat in a short period of time.

Next, I wanted to put it to work on some basic camp chores and split up some very hard, very knotty seasoned lilac wood, about 5 inches in diameter. The Battle Axe had no issues splitting each piece and was easily able to power through some dense knots.

Although not designed for this type of use, I continued on the fire prep by choking up on the shoulder and giving a go at a feather stick. While it isn't as clean or feathery as if it had been done with a dedicated knife, I was actually a little surprised at how well it had turned out.

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After a few throws, I was able to get fairly consistent results while throwing the Battle Axe at this downed tree.

Right: It only took about 5 minutes to hollow out a 3-inch-deep, 10-inch-long trench into this log.



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By this stage of the testing however, all of the screws had come loose again and I lost a second one. I do recommend that you pull all the screws and add some Loctite thread locker when you receive yours, for good measure.

To test the edge retention on the Battle Axe, I broke out an old seasoned piece of very hard barn wood and proceeded to cut through. The wood had no effect on the edge of the Battle Axe, but the same cannot be said for how well the wood held up to the abuse.

For my final test I wanted to go full-on hard core and see what would happen if the Battle Axe was met with solid resistance, and I broke out a heavy-duty ammo can. I'll be honest, I kind of expected it to just dent the ammo can and dull the axe—nope. With each swing, the Battle Axe pierced right through the thick metal like a can opener.

After my testing was complete I was impressed to see that the edge is exactly how it came out of the box, still just as sharp and still just as whole—no chipping, rolling or deformation of any kind. Also, there was almost no visible effect to the coating on the blade, aside from a few minor scuff marks, that never penetrated down to the steel.

Historical Accuracy and Modern Know How

From the first time I saw the Emerson Knives Battle Axe I couldn't wait to get my hands on one and channel my inner Viking. The execution on this design beautifully combines historical accuracy and modern know how for an axe that is built to make itself at home on the battlefield or in the backwoods. Drawing on the combat and survival skills of the Vikings, the Battle Axe gets it right in all the right ways. This axe will easily make itself at home on any battle rattle or bug out bag, and it has now found its permanent place as a part of my truck kit. KI



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Above: This old, seasoned barn wood had zero effect on the edge of the Battle Axe.



Right: I was able to open the side of this ammo can like a can opener with no effect to the edge.

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