



Balcones Forge Dispatch

President's Corner

May 2015



Greetings!

Well, other than the heat, the humidity, the mud and the mosquitoes, James Helm put on a very informative demo. The rain had stopped and the water was receding when we got there as James was dealing with the water that ran into his shop. There

was a nice turnout, several trade items and all you had to do was absorb all the information that James was offering to the group. This was the meeting to learn all you ever needed to know about hardening and tempering. Great job, James, thank you!

The next meeting is in San Marcos on the square on May 16th. This will be the annual Swing Fest with all the old western and swing bands with music and songs from way back. We hope to have several forges and anvils there for this "open forge" meeting. Bring your rig if you are able. I don't think we can have too many. The trade item is: something made from a farrier's rasp. You probably need to get there by 8:30a if you need to unload anything. Don't miss it!

Thanks to those who filled out and returned the BF survey. This is the information that we need to make Balcones Forge what you want it to be. This is your chance to voice your opinion and be heard and you don't have to put your name on it if you chose not to. Your comments are always welcome and there is no such thing as negative feedback. The survey can be found in the April and May BFD.



Officers

President

Jerry Achterberg
treefarm@swbell.net
210/661-3293

Vice-President

Jerry Whitley
jerry.whitley@ymail.com
210/288-3961

Treasurer

Rudy Billings
Rudy@BalconesForge.org
512/461-7375

Secretary

Tim Tellander
ttellander@gtvc.com
830/980-2903



Editor

Vince Herod
spotteddogforge@yahoo.com
512/253-6045

MEETING DATE IS MAY 16

President's message continued on page 2.

President's message continued.

TABA and Balcones Forge have been supporting the Texas Folklife Festival in San Antonio for many years. TABA charter member Al Morgan was there in 1972 and joined later by Willie Calhoun, James Homig, Hollis Woolridge, Ellis Burger, Andy Quitner, Jim Galish, Tom Leining and many others. I have only been involved for the past 15 years. This is a fun event on the Institute of Texan Cultures grounds with lots of music, ethnic foods, dances and displays. We are looking for a few simths to join in the fun this year by making nails for the kids and showing off our forged items. See the attached flyer for more info and please contact me if you would like to help out.

Thanks, and I hope to see ya'll in San Marcos.

Jerry Achterberg
President Balcones Forge

APRIL SECRETARY'S REPORT



Saturday, April 25 was the Balcones Forge Meeting at the shop of James Helm in Elmendorf, Texas. I was up at 5am that morning anticipating the event but while drinking my coffee out on the patio, couldn't help but notice the brilliant streaks of lightning across the southern sky south of San Antonio. Oh my - gotta remember to take some rain gear! However, the drive toward Elmendorf revealed an ever clearing sky and the day turned out bright and beautiful. As always, our president Jerry Achterberg was already there, tailgate on his truck down and of course, ensuring the crowd was well entertained in his usual witty fashion. Jerry called the meeting to order about 0930. I counted about 25 people present and a few latecomers wandered in - great turnout and Jerry thanked everyone for coming.

He pointed out that the next meeting and open forge will be Saturday, May 16 at the San Marcos Swing Fest on the town square in downtown San Marcos. Set up for the Balcones Forge members will be on the west side of the square and there will be plenty of opportunities for buying and selling items as well as demonstrating blacksmith skills with plenty of soul filling country music. The trade item will be something made from a farrier's rasp.

A June venue is still undecided Jerry said, and



James Helm hosts the April meeting
photo by Jerry Whitley

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reminded the group that surveys are needed because comments from members definitely assist the board in making future decisions about meetings and blacksmith related demonstrations.

July and August are generally too hot for demo's but Jerry pointed out that feelers are out. A San Antonio Mission field trip is being explored by Jerry Whitley especially since there are a great many forged items on display that members can view. This venue date is pending and will be announced at a later date.

A show and tell item, handmade by Jerry was displayed and it's intricate design and forging technique was explained. The brand used in the 1700's on the Didaury ranch, north of Laredo was commissioned by The Institute of Texan Cultures. Interestingly, this is still a working ranch today even though it was sold in 1940. The brand was recently presented to Dr's. Brian Howard and Lupe Barrera. The recent Facebook photo depicts the recipients great pleasure in receiving the crafty blacksmith talents of Jerry Achterberg.

The trade item for today's event was something made from 1/2 inch square stock by 12 inches long. There were 8 participants and the scope of presentations were extraordinary. After the forged pieces were displayed (where else but the tailgate of a pickup), numbers were drawn from Whitley's new straw hat. I think he was just showing off but it certainly appeared everyone was pleased with the exchange. Job well done!

Daniel Harrington indicated that the extensive library is open for business and he has a pretty good selection available in his vehicle. He also said that the Balcones Forge website has a complete listing of the extensive books available for checkout. Volunteers and new books are always welcome, according to Daniel.

After the meeting, James Helm presented our group with a deluxe display of his beautiful and highly functional blades and tomahawks. His verbal description on how they are made included the three methods utilized which are forged, water jet,

and stock removal. Indicating that his knives are very functional, he prefers to leave a forge finish on them and they are highly sought out pieces especially by law enforcement and military. For quality assurance purposes, James does his own heat treatment and tempering which is the most vital aspect in a well made knife. The use of simple carbon steels, such as 1084 and 5160 are his favorites, but has recently started using 80CRV2 which is similar to 5160. James utilizes 4140 for tomahawks and wanted the group to know that he prefers to keep his bladesmithing simple, NOT to be confused with easy.

Mr. Helm discourages the use of scrap steel for blade making and the only quality scrap is found in certain leaf spring material. Importantly, the higher the carbon content the harder the blade but all blades must be properly heat treated. After forging, the blade is normalized just above the critical temp 3 times and cooled to a black heat each time. This is essential to minimize stress that occurs during the forging process and will prevent warpage when the steel is hardened.

The next step is profiling the blade on a grinder, and then the blade is quenched (hardened) in specific oils for specific steels. For example, canola oil makes a great quenching medium whereas commercial oil for the quench can be expensive as well as hard to find, not to mention that the quantity size available on the market comes in large quantities which increases the shipping cost.

Obtaining quality steel in consistent forging quality is very important and he has had the best result from supplier Aldo Bruno, The New Jersey Steel Baron. A website that individuals were referred to for basic as well as advanced bladesmithing is available and hosted by Kevin Cashen, Master Smith, American Bladesmith Society. Other sources are available, but James endorses Kevin's approach to making a great knife.

James then demonstrated full blade quench as well as edge quenching, but emphasized that differential heat treatment (spine of blade softer than the cutting edge) is of significant importance.

Drawing the temper on blades and tomahawks is done in a large kiln with different temperatures and varying time increments for specific steels. There are charts indicating time and temperature for the heat treatment of specific steels available on the internet and volumes of books on the subject. Nevertheless, James pointed out that he still tests his knives for hardness and sharpening ability on a regular basis.

The meeting was memorable for everyone and getting to see examples and quality of a James Helm blade was remarkable.

Tim Tellander
Secretary, Balcones Forge

FUTURE BALCONES FORGE MEETINGS

May 16, 2015- Swing Music Fest
San Marcos, TX

THE BALCONES FORGE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Tim Tellander, Secretary

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Daniel Harrington, Librarian & Co-Treasurer
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Vince Herod, Editor
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TRADE ITEM

The trade item for the May 16 meeting of Balcones Forge is.....something made from a ferrier's rasp.

You gotta make one to take one!

MEMBER'S SURVEY

Please take the time to fill out the survey on the next page. The leaders of the group rely on the input of members to keep the organization moving in the desired direction of the members.

You can return the survey to any member of the Balcones Board; just come to the next meeting!

LOST AND FOUND

Somebody left a pair of red ladies prescription eyeglasses in my shop. If you are missing yours, get in touch with me and I will mail them to you.

Someone left a navy folding chair. Thanks. I looks like it is just my size!

John Crouchet

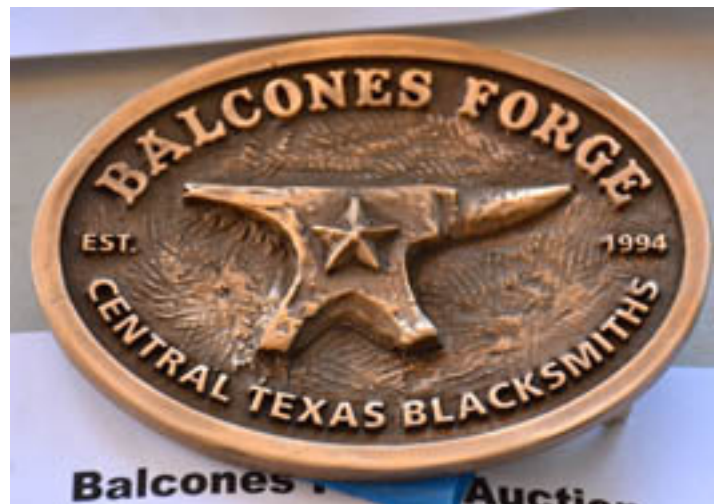


photo by Gerald Pollard



Balcones Forge Member Survey

The Balcones Forge Board, along with many wonderful volunteers, strive to make our organization the best possible, meeting our mission and the expectations of our members. With that in mind, the Board needs your assistance. Please take a few minutes to provide your input.

Thank you.

What was your favorite Balcones Forge meeting and why? _____

Would you be interested in having more hands-on workshops where we build something —like tongs or fireplace tools, etc.? _____ If we have such a meeting, would you come? _____ Suggestions? _____

Who do you think should be the next Bluebonnet Demonstrator? _____

Have you seen this person demonstrate? _____ What do they do? _____

Do you think that Balcones Forge charges too much for the Bluebonnet Demo? _____ What other ways could we make money if we were to let everyone into the Demo for free? _____

Would you like to see regular instructional classes for beginners held at Zilker Park? _____ Would you come? _____

Are you getting tired of those old farts running this organization? Name three people you think could take over and bring this club into the twenty-first century. _____

How many friends have you brought to Balcones meetings? _____

Where should we have our meetings? _____

Would you be willing to host a meeting? _____ If yes, name/phone _____

What type monthly demonstrations would you like to see? Blacksmith – bladesmith – other _____

Would you be willing to demo? _____ If yes, name/phone _____ What would you demo? _____

What "Trade Items" would you like to see? _____

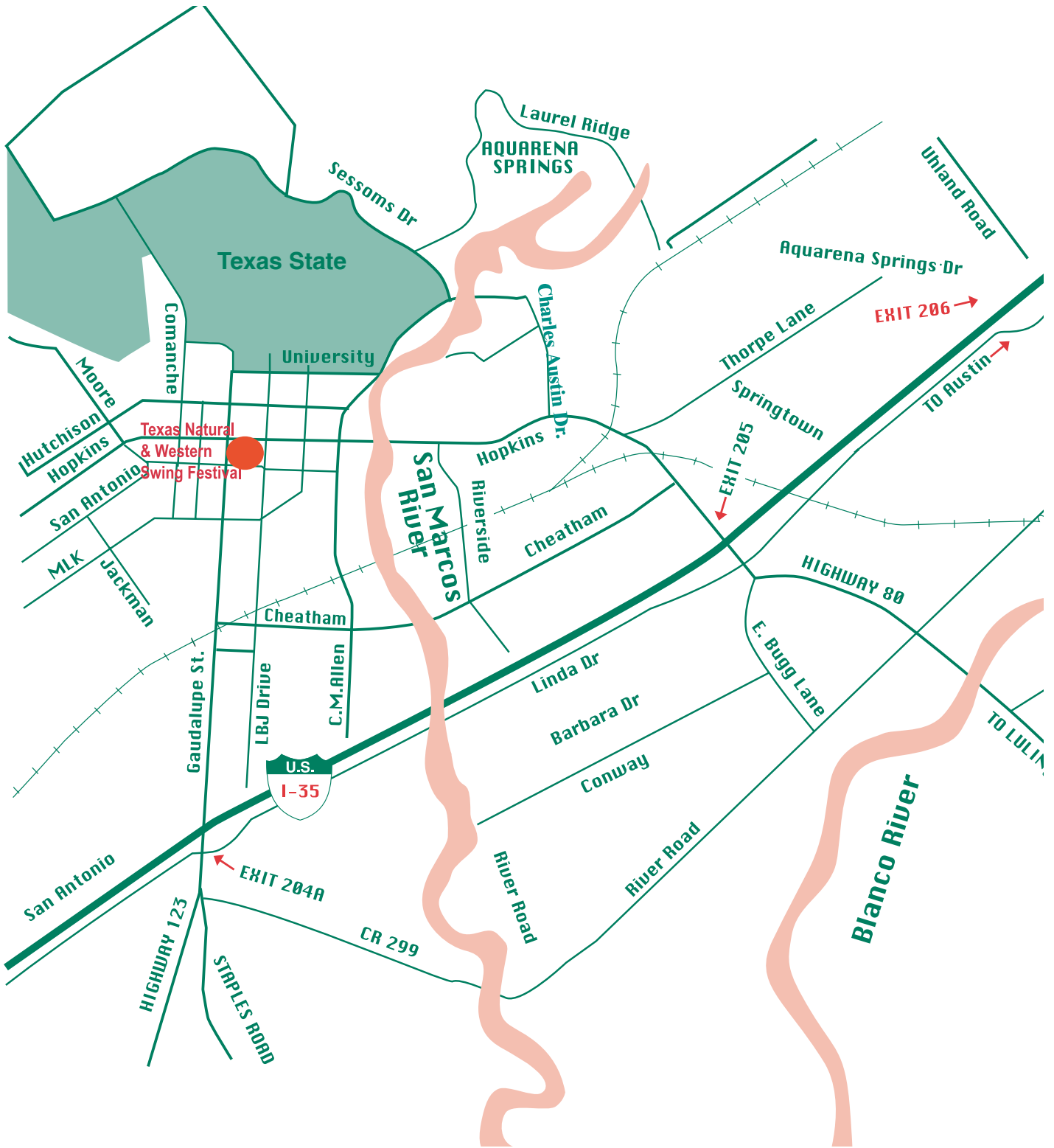
Regarding trade items, how can we get more participation? _____

Where is Balcones Forge falling short in service to the members / public? _____

Suggestions/Comments: _____



photos from the April meeting by Jerry Whitley



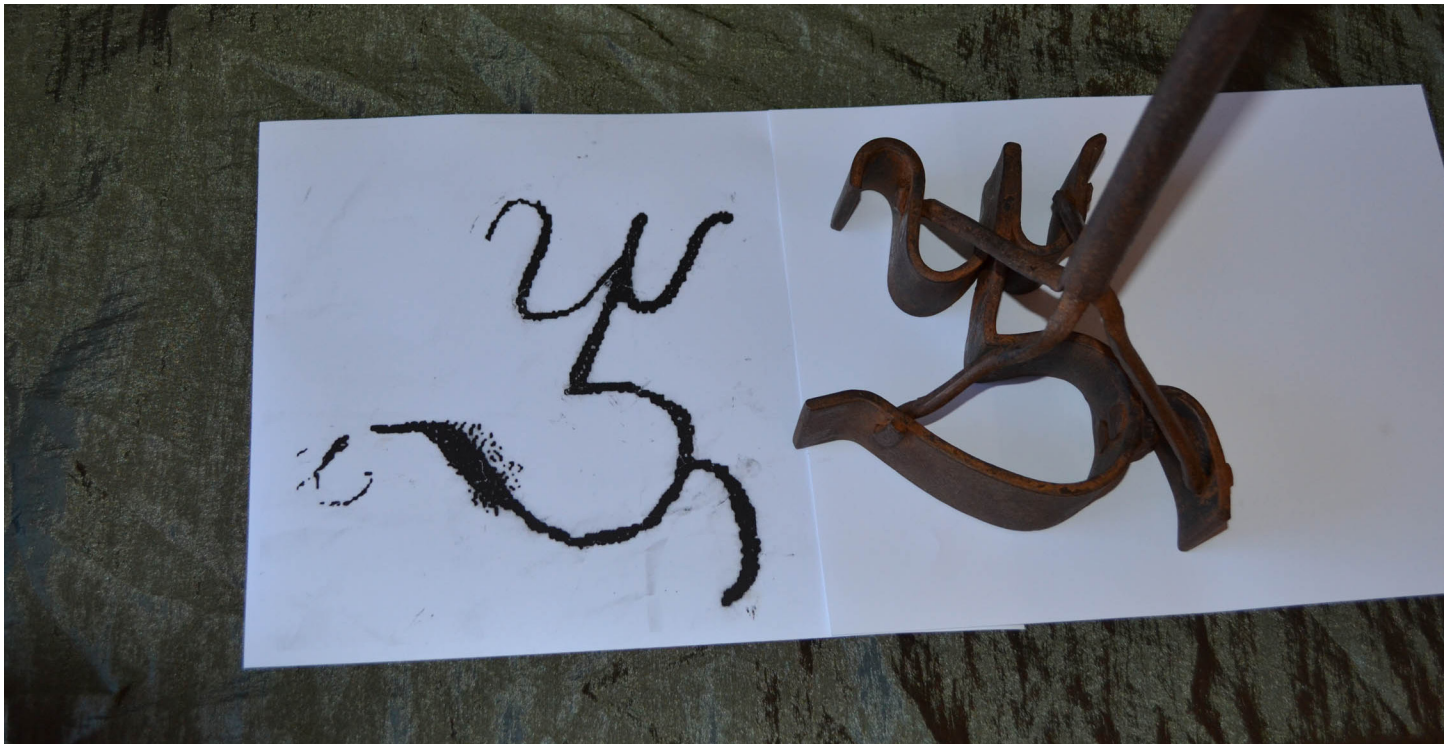
The May 16 meeting of Balcones Forge will be on the square in San Marcos, Texas.

CATTLE BRAND

by Jerry Achterberg

I was recently contracted by the UTSA Institute of Texan Cultures in San Antonio to reproduce a Spanish cattle brand from the Vidaurri ranch in south Texas that was founded in the early 1700's. The brand will be part of a new exhibit called Los Tejanos. This exhibit is a glimpse into the story of the Tejano legacy from the eighteenth century to the present day and will open on May 14th. The brand will be on permanent display and visitors will be able to pick it up and handle it. When the brand was completed I waved the fee and donated it to the ITC. It was very well received by two of the curators, Bryan Howard and Lupita Barrera who now have a renewed interest traditional blacksmithing. The ITC has always been one of my favorite places to visit and now it will be a place to take my grandchildren to see the things on display that grandpa made.

photos by Jerry Whitley





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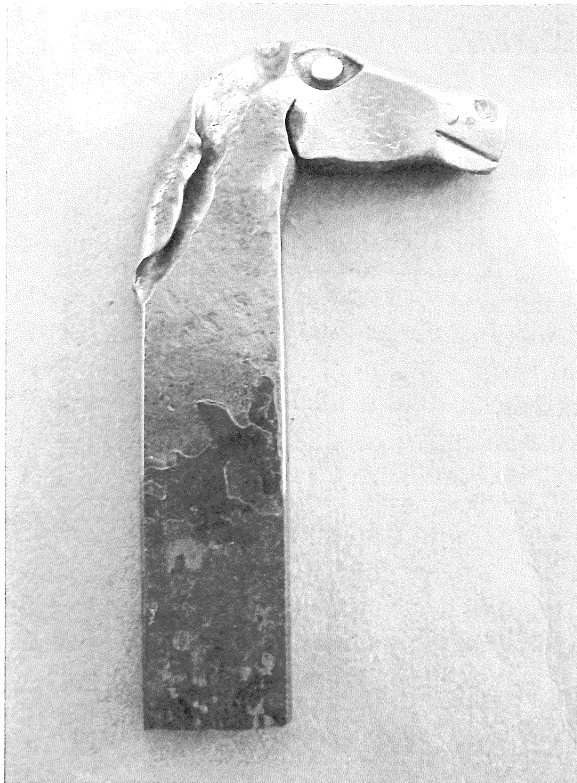
*There may be convenience fees for advance purchase at some locations and online.

TO ORDER TICKETS OR FOR MORE INFORMATION
TEXASFOLKLIFEFESTIVAL.ORG

Advance tickets are also available at **H-E-B** stores, Ft. Sam Houston, Lackland AFB,
Randolph AFB and the ITC Museum Store.

UTSA INSTITUTE OF TEXAN CULTURES

801 East César E. Chávez Blvd., Hemisfair, downtown San Antonio



Horse Head-

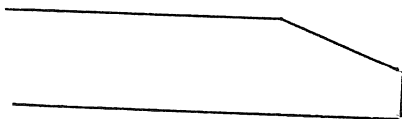
Article & photos by Steve Anderson,
a MABA member.

A good Summer demonstration project- any demo that transforms cold, hard steel into a life like form is an eye catcher. Making a leaf or a twist are great examples. My favorite 10 minute demo is forging a horse head as taught to me by Lud Lazarowicz.

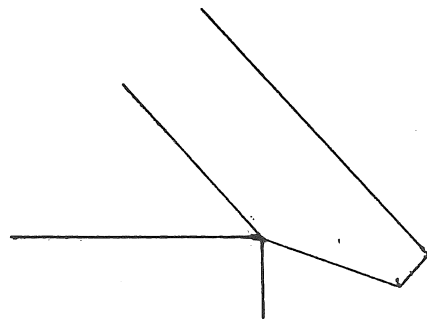
Lud also taught me the meaning of ingenuity and hard work, as well as the value of sharing and having blacksmiths as friends. *Thanks Lud.*

Material: 1/4" x 3/4"

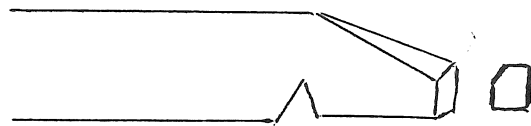
Forge a taper 1" long down to 1/3 of original height.



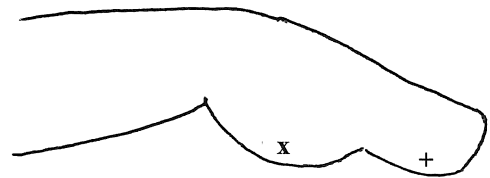
Turn stock upside down and forge the neck on the edge of the anvil about half way through.



Forge a taper along nose area.



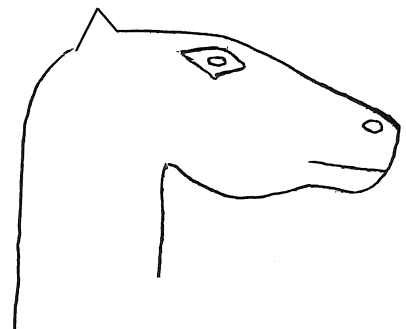
Use a small rounding hammer to round out the jaw (x) and nose (+). Then quench nose and place in pritchel hole to bend head to 90°.



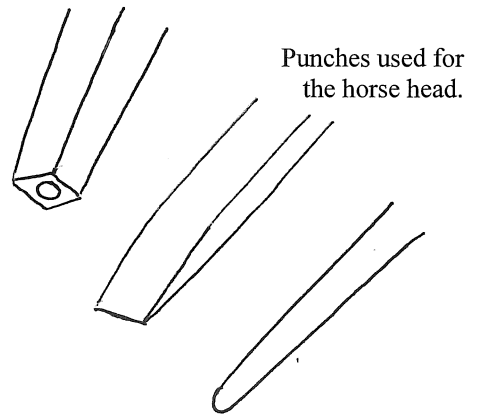
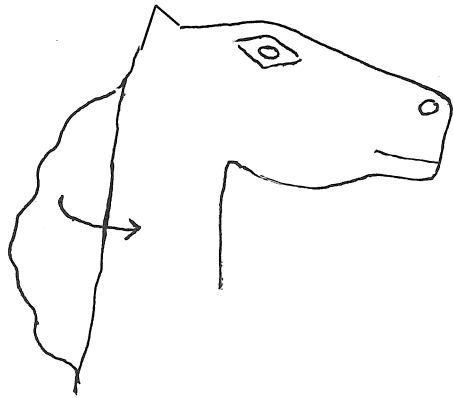
Punch the eye with the diamond eye punch. Then chisel the mouth.



Use a small ball punch to make nose and form the ear.

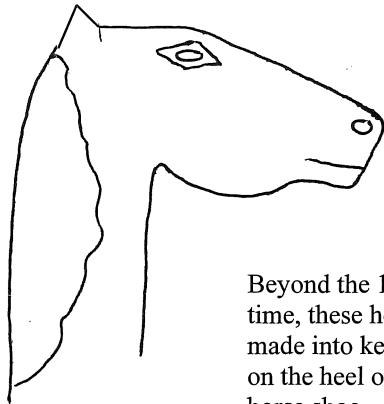


Using a small ball pein, forge out the mane.

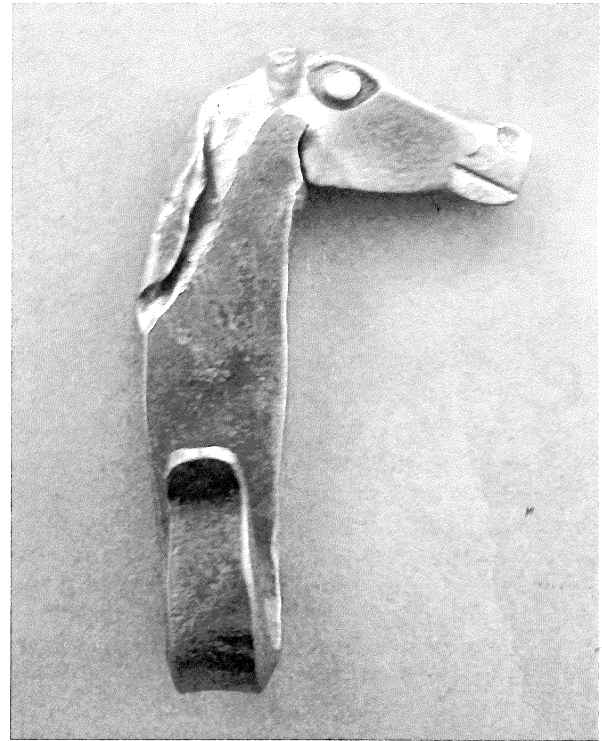


Punches used for the horse head.

Lay front of neck on the anvil and use the hammer to fold the mane around the neck.



Beyond the 10 minute demo time, these horse heads can be made into key chains, hooks or on the heel of a hand forged horse shoe.





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