

A BUSH IDIOT'S ADVENTURES IN THE AUSTRALIAN WILD



Knives

ILLUSTRATED

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**BUSH
CRAFT**

PLUS:

▪ **SURVIVE SUBURBIA**
with these backyard maneuvers

▪ **LOOK BOOK:**
Custom bushcraft beauties

▪ **The Truth About
Power Sharpeners**

REVIEWS

GIANT MOUSE
ACE GRAND

BENCHMADE
MEATCRAFTER

GERBER GEAR
STRONGARM

On the Rise Maker Profile:
Pearson Custom Knives

**BEST BUSHCRAFT
GEAR ROUNDUP**

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SEPT./OCT. 2020 • VOL. 34, NO. 5 • U.S. \$5.99 • DISPLAY UNTIL: 9/22/2020



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JANTZ CHEF BLADE



Perfect for the home or professional chef. Overall 12 1/4", blade 7 1/2", 1 5/8" wide. 3/32" thick with 3/16" handle holes. Blade stays extremely sharp. Knife shown with giraffe bone and decorative torx screws.

CAT.#	STEEL	FINISH	HRC	PRICE
J1208	440C	Satin	58-60	36.95

PATTERN 22 BLADE



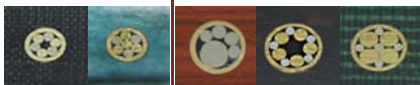
Flat ground hunter blade. Makes a good general purpose hunting and skinning knife. Overall 8 1/4", Blade 3 1/2", Width 1", Thickness 5/32". Bolster holes 1/8", Handle and Thong Holes 1/4". Cryogenically treated and razor sharp.

CAT.#	STEEL	FINISH	HRC	PRICE
J2208	440C	Satin	57-58	33.95
J2228	D2	Satin	59-61	33.95

MOSAIC PINS

1/8" x 12"

3/16" x 12"



#MP810 #MP820 #MP380 #MP300 #MP310

1/4" x 12"



#MP485 #MP480 #MP405 #MP400 #MP440

CAT.#	DESCRIPTION	PRICE
MP810	1/8" Black Eyed Sully	\$14.95
MP820	1/8" Morning Glory	\$18.95
MP380	3/16" Doberman	\$22.95
MP300	3/16" Morning Star	\$22.95
MP310	3/16" Lucky Clover	\$22.95
MP440	1/4" Silver Star	\$44.95
MP480	1/4" Lab	\$44.95
MP405	1/4" Circle Of Light	\$44.95
MP400	1/4" Pandora's Box	\$39.95
MP440	1/4" Meteorite	\$44.95

MOSAIC DESIGN PINS



Maker - Bill Kennedy
\$19.95 each
Size 1/4" x 2"
Made in the USA
at Jantz

Meticulously crafted with the knifemaker in mind to create a singular style for your knife. Each are available in four combinations of quality brass and nickel silver.

KNIFEMAKERS CENTER SCRIBE



Shown marking center in steel

Use this handy tool to scribe the center lines as a guide for grinding knife blades. Designed for accuracy, this scribe can be adjusted from 0-1/2" with 1/32" per revolution using the fine adjustment screw. Uses a Carbide tip. Replacement carbide tips available.

CAT.#	DESCRIPTION	PRICE
JS305	Center Scribe	\$39.95
JS307	Replacement Carbide Tip	\$9.95

HARDENED FILE GUIDE



This versatile tool can be used for holding your knife blades to do complex file work and filing slots for guards. Precision machined and ground from A-2 tool steel and hardened to 62RHC. Overall length 3.250", maximum blade width 2", each jaw is 3/8" x 3/4". Made in USA.

CAT.#	DESCRIPTION	PRICE
FG101	File Guide	\$49.95

KNIFE SHARPENING WHEELS



Used by professionals, this two wheel system allows the user to grind a fine edge then clean & polish to a sharp edge.

CAT.#	DESCRIPTION	PRICE
WKS750	Knife Sharpening Wheels	\$34.95

KYDEX MOLDING PRESS



Made in the USA. Featuring single hand closure, lock, and release. Allows you to walk away while the thermal molding foam sets your heated Kydex. Made with 3/16" steel plate. Included, two 8" x 12" x 1" thick high quality foam. 9 lbs/cf density, 225°F heat rating.

CAT.#	DESCRIPTION	PRICE
JS900	Molding Press	\$89.95
JS901	Replacement Foam (2 pcs)	\$12.95

KENNEDY SLIP JOINT FIXTURE



Perfectly adjust the rise and fall of all three positions of your slip joint folder blade to make it "walk and talk". When properly used, the spring will be in perfect height of liners with blade across all three positions. The ingenious spring retracting device allows you to quickly, easily, and safely remove the blade to make adjustments. Dial indicator allows you to set perfect spring tension and amount of material to remove on each axis of the blade for perfect fitting. Simplifies blade fitting to a higher degree of accuracy than rise and fall fixtures. No more guess work. Learn more about it online at knifemaking.com. Made in USA.

CAT.#	DESCRIPTION	PRICE
JS500	Slip Joint Fixture	\$795.00

Jantz Hollow Grinding Fixture



Allows you to grind straight or recurved blades quickly and accurately with your 2" wide belt grinder (some adjustments may be necessary to fit your machinery). To use simply replace your work rest with the angle bracket, set your initial grinding increment and move your blade through the fixed part by hand. The elevator raises or lowers the grinding center line for greater versatility. All sales final. No returns.

Choose the adapter arm to fit your grinder to complete your fixture.

CAT.#	DESCRIPTION	PRICE
JS260	Hollow Grinding Fixture	\$489.95
JS205	Wilton Adapter Arm	\$89.95
JS205	Bader Adapter Arm	\$89.95
JS205	Burr King Adapter Arm	\$89.95
JS205	KMG-1 Adapter Arm	\$89.95
JS205	Grizzly Adapter Arm	\$89.95



knifemaking.com
1-800-351-8900





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YOU'RE COOL BY US

I mentioned last issue that taking over as the editor here at *Knives Illustrated* was a dream job for me, and it very truly is. I love knives. I love the craftsmanship, the usefulness as man's first tool, and just the basic feeling you get from carrying a good knife on a daily basis. But I think what I like most about this hobby (for lack of a better word) and what has made it a true obsession is the community.

We've all been through some trying times here in 2020. Turn on any news channel or open any newspaper and a majority of what you'll see is people being horrible to each other. To the contrary, if you look at almost any knife-related hashtag on Instagram or check out any knife company's Facebook group, and you mostly see people just being awesome to one another.

Community Unity

This particularly struck me recently when Robert Carter, a very well-known custom maker, suffered an unfortunate accident and racked up some very hefty medical bills. No request for help was needed. The knife community at large leapt to his aid with numerous auctions and funding drives to help him out.



His previous customers were even donating \$2,000 knives, totally unasked, to more prominent YouTubers and Instagrammers to auction off for Rob's benefit. And the best part is... this isn't at all uncommon.

The 'Knife Guy' Demographic

When I first entered the "knife world", I admit that I was unsure as to how I'd be accepted. I didn't fit the usual "knife guy" demographic that I had in my mind. Well, it turns out that demographic doesn't exist. The general attitude I've seen among 90% of the community has been, "You like knives. You're cool by us, and we have your back."

I can't count the times that the knife community has come through for me in the last few years. Sometimes major things like way overpaying for a knife I auctioned off for a charitable cause, sometimes minor things like a viewer spending a couple of hours scouring the internet to find me that hard-to-get piece I mentioned that I was looking for—things like this happen on an almost weekly basis.

I've made lifelong friends from this world. Several of them are people I wouldn't have usually interacted with on a daily basis in my "normal" life. The knife community at large hasn't just opened my eyes to shiny new knives I want to own. It's also opened my eyes to the fact that, at some level, a common bond over one simple thing can unite anyone.

That Guy

Being that guy or gal in your office who everyone knows always has a knife on them can be a bit awkward at times. Some people will always consider you to be that person who is always "armed" rather than simply being that person who always has a basic tool in their pocket.

But no matter your race/color/creed/gender/politics, if you're reading this, I just want you to know... You're cool by us, and we have your back.

Bryan J. Ball, Editor

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BEST BUSHCRAFT GEAR OF 2020

TEXT BY TIM STETZER, PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE MANUFACTURERS

This is primarily a knife magazine, but a lot more gear is required to survive and thrive in the wilderness. Here are some of the best bits and bobs of 2020 that you should consider adding to your pack, kit, or pocket loadout.

1. Black Beard Firestarter

Whether it's for warmth, cooking, or signaling, fire is one of the most important aspects of survival. Even if you aren't in a survival situation, it's nice to have a fire to sit around when you're out in the woods. Getting that fire started can be a chore sometimes though, especially if it's wet out, and that's where bringing a good fire starter with you can make a difference. You can find a lot of fire-starting options out there, but I'm always on the prowl for new ones. Lately, the Black Beard rope has caught my eye.

The handmade Black Beard rope fire starter is just what it sounds like: a 5.5-inch long, 1-inch diameter hunk of cotton rope that is then infused with a mixture of nontoxic waxes and oils to create an odorless wind- and waterproof fire starter. Just cut off what you need and ignite it with matches, a lighter, or a ferro rod. Black Beard says you should be able to get about 50 fires from one rope. Just drop it in your pack and use as needed. There's no shelf life on the rope either, whether it's been opened or not, so it's perfect for long-term storage in a kit or at camp, too.



FEATURES:

- Wind and waterproof
- Good for 50 fires
- Only 68 grams, 5.5 inches long
- Handmade in USA of US materials

MSRP: \$12

(on sale for \$9.95 as of this writing)

BlackBeardFire.com





MSRP:
 \$49.99 (standard);
 \$39.99 (mini)
UCOGear.com

2. UCO Flatpack Grill

I'm a big fan of food. Though I'll admit I'm a lazy cook when I'm in the woods, it's nice to be able to prepare a warm meal, especially in cold weather. Using a wood fire has its advantages as you aren't reliant on fuel that you have to pack in and empty canisters that you have to pack out, but not everywhere you go allows ground fires, especially at certain times of the year. In situations like that, something like the UCO Flatpack Grill offers a perfect solution. The Flatpack Grill comes in two sizes, a 13.5 x 10 x 11-inch standard version and a 9.5 x 8 x 1.5-inch mini version. Both models fold up flat and store in a provided canvas pouch, making them easy to tuck into your ruck or day pack. The grills use all stainless-steel construction and set up in less than 30 seconds. You can use the grills with charcoal if you're at a basecamp or with whatever wood you find along the trail. In addition to cooking, they also work well for safe, portable fire pits.

3. Exotac fireROD

If you're familiar with Exotac, then you know the company is all about fire, whether it's in the form of heavy-duty match safes, lighters, or fire steels. Exotac just redid its fireROD, making an already good tool even better. The Exotac fireROD is designed to fit the fire steel loop provided with many bushcraft style knives. Where it differs from other fire steels is that the CNC-machined 6061 aluminum handle is actually a waterproof capsule that can hold tinder, so you have a complete fire-starting package contained on the steel itself. The other unique feature on the new fireROD is that the steel unscrews and is replaceable so that if you wear down the old rod, you don't have to pitch the whole steel. Simply buy a new rod and replace the worn one.



FEATURES:

- Anodized black, orange, gunmetal, or olive drab finish
- Waterproof tinder compartment in the handle
- Replaceable 5/16-inch ferro rod
- Made in USA
- Lifetime warranty

MSRP: \$29.95 for the complete fireROD and \$9.95 for replacement rods

Exotac.com



4. Grim Workshop's Cordage-Making Card

Cordage is one of the hardest things to make in the field, but the folks at Grim Workshop have you covered, and are helping you clean up the environment at the same time. Even in some of our most remote regions, you still find trash that folks who've come before you have left behind. With the

FEATURES:

- Made in the USA of USA-made materials
- Credit card sized—under 1 mm thick—perfect for a wallet, small tin, or small pocket
- Made from highly corrosion-resistant surgical-grade hardened stainless steel

MSRP: \$27.50

GrimWorkshop.com

Grim Cordage-Making Card, you can help clean up some of that trash and turn it into something useful. Grim's credit-card sized tool makes it easy to spiral cut plastic bottles into tough, useful cordage in no time flat. A 2-liter bottle can quickly be turned into 65 to 75 feet of cord suitable for lashing, fishing line, snares, gear repair, or anything else you'd use cordage for. While it's certainly small enough to take into the field with you, you can use it at home too, to make use of your recyclable plastic bottles.

The current credit card model goes for \$27.50, but a more streamlined 2.0 version—along with smaller dog tag and micro versions (see below)—are available for preorder as well. That's a pretty small investment for a take-anywhere tool that makes cordage out of trash. Plus, it helps clean up the planet.



5. Hill People Gear Umlindi V2 Pack

When you hit the trail for anything more than a quick walk, it's important to be able to take proper gear with you. Whether that's some basic foul-weather gear and first-aid and survival equipment, or a change of clothes, cooking gear, and some food, a good daypack can be just what you need. The folks at Hill People Gear are no strangers to what you need in the outdoors or the best way to carry them.

The company's new Umlindi V2 pack is a great example of a small pack that carries big with features refined from actual field use. The Umlindi V2 is a 30-liter 500-denier Cordura pack with 7075 aluminum stays and an HDPE frame sheet for rigidity. It features a large main pocket with a full height slot pocket on the inside that can be accessed via Velcro closures or a #10 zipper on the outside. It has side wand pockets big enough to hold two Nalgene bottles on either side, and it also has a hose port for use with an internal bladder. It uses an adjustable padded shoulder harness and has a number of compression straps and gear attachment points, making it an extremely versatile pack.



FEATURES:

- Parachute cord tool loop in back center
- **Weight:** 4 pounds
- **Dimensions:** 6.50 x 11.00 x 19.00 inches
- **Volume:** 2000 ci / 30 liters
- Made in USA of US materials

MSRP: \$270

HillPeopleGear.com



6. SMKW Case Knives/Dave Canterbury Leather Sheath and Firestarter

Although fixed blade knives tend to take center stage in bushcraft circles, a lot of folks still carry folders as either a primary tool or a backup or supplement to their fixed blade. If you're using a traditional design, then having a good belt pouch is still the easiest way to carry your folder. Smoky Mountain Knife Works has an exclusive pouch that's a collaboration between survival instructor and TV celebrity Dave Canterbury and Case Knives of Bradford, Pennsylvania. Dave's knife sheath is an all-leather affair with a full flap and snap closure to keep your knife secure, along with a leather fire steel loop on the side. The sheath is made in the USA of US materials and comes with a fire steel. It comes in two sizes, one for a Case Folding Hunter and one for a Case Trapper, but it would work equally

well for other folders of similar size. Smoky Mountain does carry Dave Canterbury limited edition Trappers and Folding Hunters if you want everything to match, and either of those would make a fine woods knife as well.

FEATURES:

- Leather pouch sheath with fire steel loop
- Dave Canterbury logo on flap
- Comes with a fire steel
- Made in USA

MSRP: \$16.99 for the larger Folding Hunter model, \$14.99 for the Trapper model

SMKW.com



7. Woodknot Gear Coffee Press

I'm a big fan of coffee, but making good coffee in the woods is sometimes a chore. Enter the folks from Woodknot Coffee Gear. The company has combined the French press with a titanium pot, which means you only have to carry one thing to make great coffee in the woods. The pot comes in 750 or 900 milliliter sizes and features measurement marks, a pour spout, double folding handles, and a bail handle, plus a vented lid with wooden knob. You can use the pot just like any other pot for cooking or boiling water, but it has the provided stainless steel lid that doubles as a French press. The whole package is compact, lightweight, and extremely durable. It will work on a camp stove, directly on the fire, or hanging over the fire by the bail. I love the idea of carrying only one item for cooking and coffee needs, and I love that it's titanium for weight reduction and durability. I missed Father's Day, but one of these is going on my birthday wishlist later this year.



FEATURES

- Ultra-light titanium construction
 - Compact 750- and 900 ml sizes
 - Measurement marks
 - Double folding handles & bail handle
 - Pour spout & vented lid
 - Coffee press
- MSRP:** \$65.00 (750 ml); \$73.00 (900 ml)
WoodknotGear.com

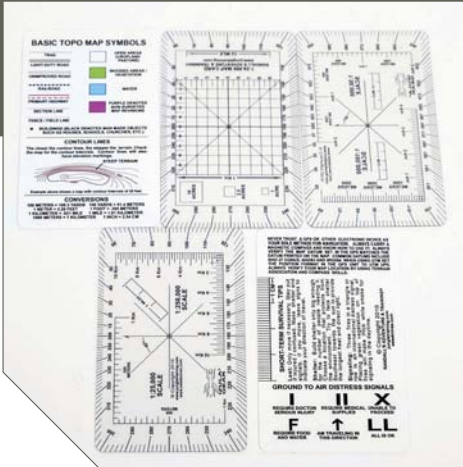


FEATURES

- Compass, Pocket Navigation, and Survival Cards
- Compact cards riveted together to prevent loss
- Waterproof

MSRP: Prices range between \$12.70 and \$15.36 depending on set

ESEESKnives.com



8. ESEE Survival and Navigation Cards

Let's face it: If you're serious about the outdoors, there are a lot of things you need to know, and sometimes we forget. I've had numerous survival and land navigation courses over the years in Boy Scouts, the Army, and in civilian life, but I'm not going to pretend I remember everything I was taught. Sometimes it's nice to have a refresher handy, especially if you do find yourself lost or in a survival situation where you might not be thinking as clearly as you usually would. Well, the folks at ESEE Knives have you covered with their series of pocket cards. The company offers three sets: Compass cards, Pocket Navigation

cards, and Survival cards. These cards are waterproof and small enough to pack just about anywhere. They contain a ton of information in a very small footprint. I like that they give you something to focus on, too, if you are lost, as sometimes just that time needed to sit and look things over will help you calm yourself down and put you on the path to making the right decisions to be found safely. The ESEE cards are just what you need to assist you in figuring out where you are and how to get back home, or how to survive if you're stuck for a while. Plus, they're compact enough that you can always have them on you when you hit the woods. **KI**

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as they discuss
everything from
current events to
their favorite hobbies



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REVIEW



BENCHMADE MEATCRAFTER

EQUALLY AT HOME IN THE FIELD OR IN THE KITCHEN

TEXT AND PHOTOS BY ZACH KERSEY



“THE MEATCRAFTER HAS THE PERFECT BLADE-TO-HANDLE RATIO AT AN OVERALL LENGTH OF 11.05 INCHES. MY FIRST IMPRESSION TAKING THIS KNIFE OUT OF THE SHEATH, I NOTED HOW COMFORTABLE IT WAS TO HANDLE WHILE BEING LIGHTWEIGHT AT ONLY 4.5 OUNCES.”

Above: The Meatcrafter's vacuum-formed Boltaron sheath looks great and holds the knife very securely.



Benchmade Knife Company has been building excellent hunting knives for years. Whether it's folding knives like the Crooked River or Grizzly Ridge, or fixed blades such as the Bushcrafter or Leuku, Benchmade's hunting and adventuring models have gained a stalwart reputation among outdoorsmen.

So, when the company began working with Meateater's Steven Rinella, it's safe to say that it had a reputation to uphold. Benchmade was looking to design the perfect knife that could be used in the field on your hunt and all the way back to your daily kitchen needs. Steven wanted to make sure this knife could be used for skinning, gutting, and boning.

"All while maintaining great edge retention, the perfect kind of flex and durability you could live with for years, like your favorite hunting knife," Steven says.

Above:
The Meatcrafter's handle is both elegant and functional.

A great partner for this knife, Steven is the star of the Netflix show *MeatEater* and the *MeatEater* podcast. He is also the author of six books about wildlife, cooking game, and bestseller "MeatEater Fish and Game Cookbook: Recipes and Techniques for Every Hunter and Angler." This is a great collaboration with Steven's hunting and cooking background.

The completed design meeting these high standards is the Benchmade Meatcrafter 15500-1. The Meatcrafter utilizes a trailing point style blade with a length just over 6 inches and a new premium steel for Benchmade, CPM-S45VN, a steel providing the perfect balance between a fine grain and sharp edge with engineered blade flex.

CPM-S45VN is a newer steel from Crucible designed to offer improved corrosion and wear resistance over CPM-S35VN. The rebalanced chemistry of CPM-

+ SPECS

**Benchmade
Meatcrafter 15500-1**

Blade Material: CPM-S45VN

Blade Length: 6.077"

Blade Thickness: 0.09"

Blade Angle: 14°

Blade Style: Plain Trailing Point

Handle Material:

Brown, ivory, and black G-10

Handle Thickness: 0.55"

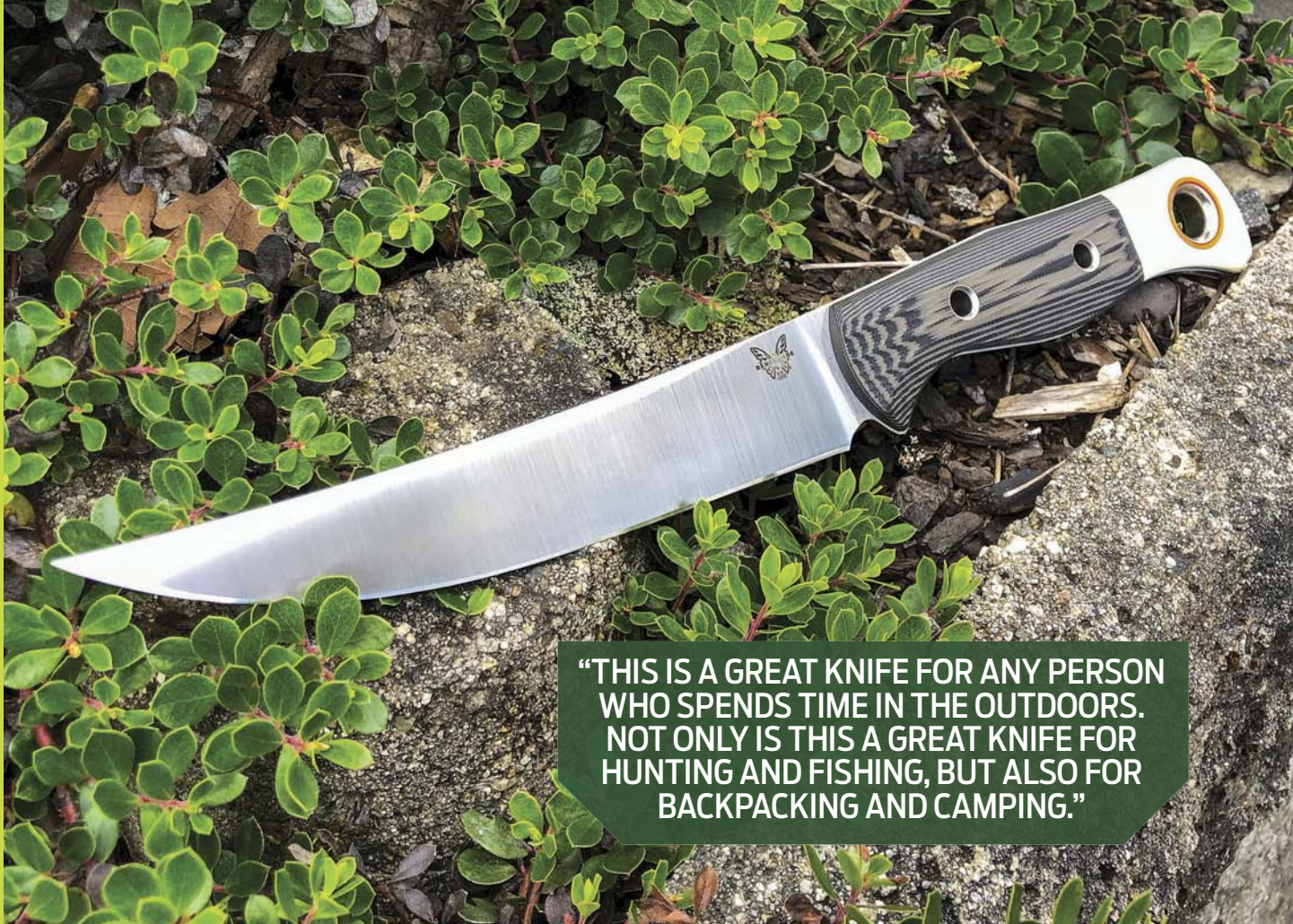
Overall Length: 11.059"

Weight: 4.52 oz

Sheath Weight: 2.15 oz

Sheath Material: Boltaron

MSRP: \$300



“THIS IS A GREAT KNIFE FOR ANY PERSON WHO SPENDS TIME IN THE OUTDOORS. NOT ONLY IS THIS A GREAT KNIFE FOR HUNTING AND FISHING, BUT ALSO FOR BACKPACKING AND CAMPING.”

S45VN (slightly more carbon and chromium than S35VN) produces an excellent combination of edge retention, wear resistance, corrosion resistance, and toughness.

The flex of the Meatcrafter is a great surprise to see from a Benchmade Hunt Class knife, which will now provide you with the versatility to do boning work and still be strong enough for tougher jobs without running the risk of snapping the blade. The blade is a simple drop point shape with very thin and slick blade stock of only 0.09 inch.

In addition to the premium steel and versatile blade profile, Benchmade introduced its Select Edge on the Meatcrafter's blade edge that provides a 14-degree fine, smooth edge to trim, debone, or slice your preferred cut of meat. Currently, the Select Edge is being used on fixed blade hunting knives, but Benchmade may just expand this use in the future.

Above:
The Meatcrafter in one of its two natural elements.

The handle features a beautiful blend of brown, ivory, and black G-10 with milling that allows you to keep a firm grip even when your hand is wet with fish guts or blood from your hunt. The handle fits nicely in your hand. There is room to be able to have a good grip on it for those harder more intense jobs. The lanyard hole is large enough to allow you to use your favorite lanyard material and still be able to hang the knife on a hook in your kitchen or garage. Around the lanyard hole you have an anodized orange ring, giving you that pop of color against the ivory G-10.

The Meatcrafter has the perfect blade-to-handle ratio at an overall length of 11.05 inches. My first impression taking this knife out of the sheath, I noted how comfortable it was to handle while being lightweight at only 4.5 ounces. The handle thickness is 0.55 inch and the blade thickness

comes in at 0.09 inch. This makes it a perfect knife for anyone to use, without worrying about the weight of the knife making your hand and wrist tired in those exciting and tiring moments of gutting and cleaning your latest kill.

The Boltaron sheath provided with the Benchmade Meatcrafter is a vacuum formed sheath allowing the perfect fit and retention for the knife. The outside of the sheath is leather, giving it a softer feel than a standard plastic or Kydex material. While eyelets secure the material on the side of the sheath, they also provide you with many options for mounting it onto your backpack, hunting gear, MOLLE compatible equipment, belt, or leg gear. The Meatcrafter is easy to quickly pull out of the sheath whether you are left- or right-handed. The knife fits securely, but I found it to be easy and safe to get out. The sheath can also stand up to the multiple



repetitive uses when cleaning your game. It will stand up to the weather, the dirty hands, and can be easily cleaned after your trips.

Benchmade and Steven worked on this knife for about 18 months, wanting to make sure they were able to create a great knife that worked well in the field and looked nice enough to have in the kitchen.

For the chef of the family, you can bring the knife home from a hunting trip or fishing expedition, pull it out of the Boltaron vacuumed shaped leather sheath, and continue its use in the kitchen. This Meatcrafter is so sleek and beautiful, nobody would ever know you just brought it in from your hunting or fishing trip. The knife is amazing for cutting steaks, chicken, fish, and large pieces of meat such as a roast with no sawing, only a smooth cut. Not only does this nicely cut meat, but it can also be used to chop up anything in the kitchen and can be used for your everyday cooking prep.

Above, Top: The Meatcrafter features a very ample lanyard hole.

Above, Bottom: This knife creates a striking profile whether in the hand or in its sheath.

CONTACT INFO

Benchmade Knife Co.

Website:
Benchmade.com

Steven Rinella

Website:
TheMeatEater.com

Another design advantage of using the Meatcrafter in the kitchen is the ability to use the knife in a standard pinch grip. Using your thumb and index finger in the pinch grip allows you the versatility to cut your food with the “low rock,” “high rock,” and “mincing” techniques, making the Meatcrafter’s place in the kitchen among your best knives.

I used this knife to cut up a large roast along with all the fixings with no problems at all and enjoyed the thinness of the edge, which made the cuts very clean, smooth, and easy. The blade and the handle felt great. It was easy to use and cut really well. I just cleaned up the knife with some soap and water after I was done, and it went back to looking as good as when I pulled it out of the box. I put it back in the sheath after it dried and now it is waiting for its next use.

This is a great knife for any person who spends time in the outdoors.

Not only is this a great knife for hunting and fishing, but also for backpacking and camping. You can use this knife to prepare your meals in camp and keep from having to pack multiple knives for meal prep.

So, if you are looking for a knife that can be used for all your outdoor and indoor food needs, the Meatcrafter is the knife to choose. Sourced from materials made in the USA, Benchmade makes all their knives in the USA out of its factory in Oregon City, Oregon.

Overall, the Meatcrafter is a wonderful addition to the Benchmade Hunt Class and one that makes the transition from the field to the kitchen with ease. With the engineered design and premium steel, I am excited to see where this will lead Benchmade’s Hunt Class and hope to see CPM-S45VN again soon on another Benchmade Knife. **KI**

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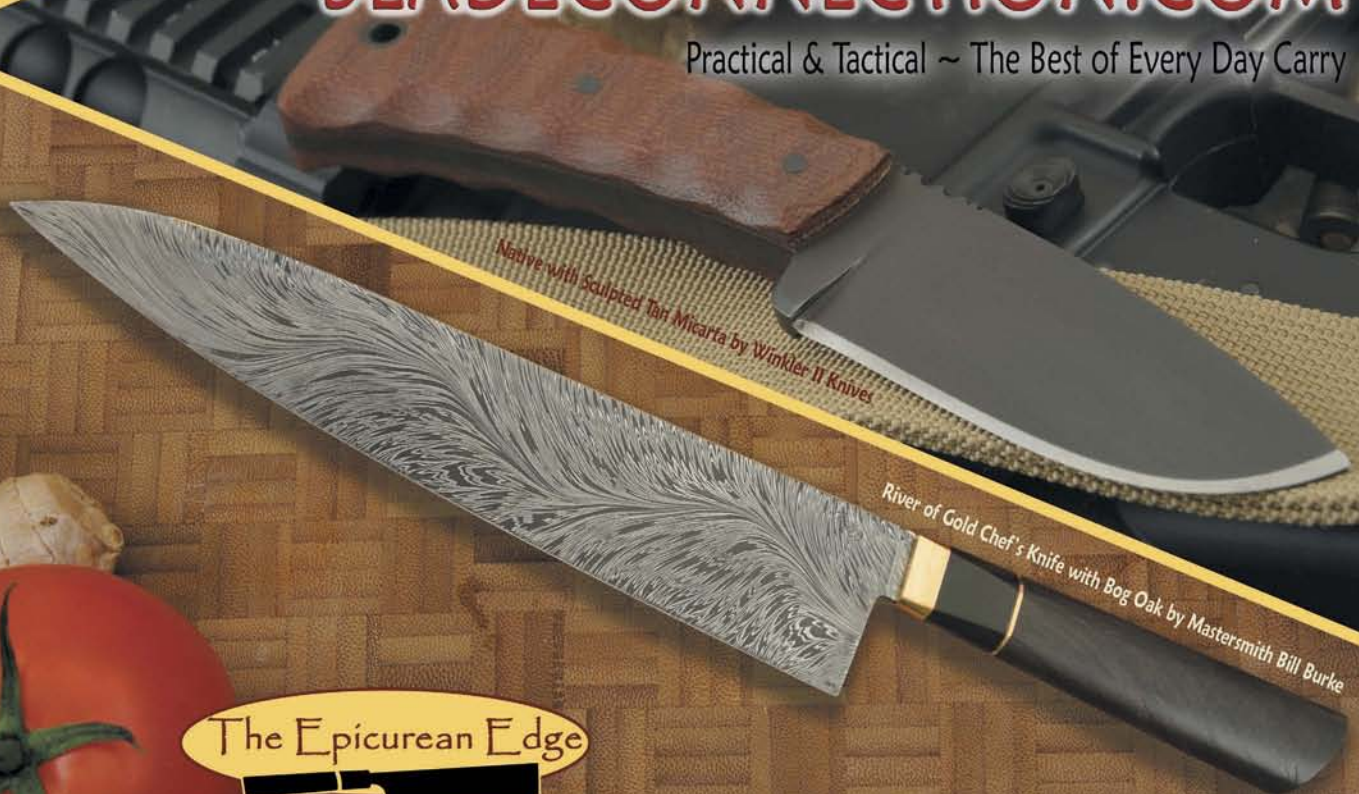


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REVIEW



PARTNERING WITH **POWER**

GERBER GEAR'S STRONGARM FLEXES
ITS MILITARY-STYLE MIGHT

TEXT AND PHOTOS BY MICHAEL D'ANGONA

NO. 06-1953
MFD: 06/1953



Right: The Strongarm in its "off the shelf" blister card.

"FORGET THE BELLS AND WHISTLES, DISCARD THE DECORATIVE, AND CARRY THIS BLADE WHEREVER YOUR ADVENTURES TAKE YOU."

Above: Gerber Gear's Strongarm features a full tang blade and a rubberized textured grip.



“FROM STEAMY RAIN FORESTS TO TREE-COVERED WOODLANDS TO SWAMPY BOGS TO THE CITY’S CONCRETE JUNGLE, THIS KNIFE OFFERS ALL-AROUND USE FOR A PLETHORA OF SURVIVAL, BUSHCRAFT, AND SELF-DEFENSE APPLICATIONS.”

A simple, yet practical design, a sure-grip handle, and always ready to enter the combat zone when needed or as a backwoods companion, the Strongarm knife from Gerber Gear is a civilian’s answer to a military man’s blade that still offers a lot of versatility.

The Strongarm, featuring a full tang blade and rubberized textured grip, is at home in nearly any environment. From steamy rain forests to tree-covered woodlands to swampy bogs to the city’s concrete jungle, this knife offers all-around use for a plethora of survival, bushcraft, and self-defense applications.

Not content with just believing blindly the descriptive words of the packaging, I took this military-style blade into the field, both in rural and urban settings, to test the metal and the mettle of this overall intriguing knife.

Above: The Strongarm is just as at home in a jungle environment as it is in an urban setting.

The Strongarm In Hand

Upon removing the knife from its packaged blister-card, I immediately noticed its simple stockiness. It felt solid in my hand with a no-frills feel. There were no issues with it fitting well within my grip, with my larger-than-average hand and fingers being able to position well on the rubber and not slipping off or squeezed to the point of uncomfortableness. The rubberized diamond texture of the handle “locked” the knife within my palm with an almost adhesive-like attachment.

The weight (7.20 ounces) of the Strongarm was neither too great nor too light. Like Goldilocks says, it was just right. Again, as mentioned earlier, it exhibited a stockiness that reinforced, even preliminarily before true testing, that this knife could be a reliable companion and get the job done. Due to the fact that I

+ SPECS

KI-STRONGARM-15

Steel Type: 420HC

Overall Length: 9.80"

Blade Length: 4.80"

Blade Thickness: 0.188"

Blade Coating: Ceramic

Weight: 7.20 oz

Handle Material: Rubberized diamond-texture

Sheath: Multi-Mount for placement versatility

MSRP: \$75



Left, Top: Three pieces of rubber matting was the obstacle for the Strongarm.

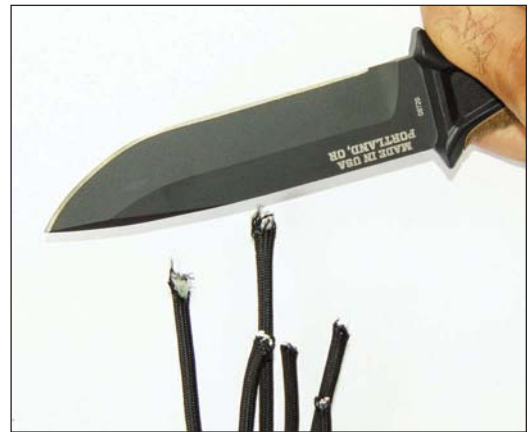
Left, Bottom: The knife penetrated all three chunks with ease.

Above: The tip, upon repeated strikes, punctured through the other side at least a full inch in length.



have tested numerous knives in the past, some just have a “feel” that, upon first handling, I already know that it won’t stand up to much punishment, or perhaps not even make it through the tests. The Strongarm had no such foreshadowing, and it was indeed quite the opposite.

Overall, the knife’s blade length just skirted below 5 inches, more than adequate for tactical, self-defense, and bushcrafting applications. It featured a drop-point straight blade with a very decent amount of cutting area. The handle exhibits dual guards that are meant to prevent a person’s hand from slipping forward onto the blade during a powerful thrust or cut (that will be tested), and the handle culminated in a slightly angled outward butt and a pre-drilled hole for adding cordage if wanted.



THE BASICS OF TACTICAL

Although it may be trite to test the Strongarm against some of the more common materials frequently used during a knife trial, I would still rather know that it works against what it may commonly be up against. For effectiveness while “in the field” it’s best to use the somewhat overused testing methods than to create new, yet unpractical tests for the sake of being different.

With that said and with the Strongarm being a tactical categorized knife, its ability to cut cordage, straps of all types, and its ability to hold up to repeated stabs that are frequently employed for both self-defense techniques and breaching applications are must-test scenarios.

CORDAGE CUTS

Cordage was the first obstacle in the Strongarm’s way. Needless

Above, Top: With one thrust, the Strongarm disappeared into the wood plank nearly three-quarters of an inch deep.

Above, Bottom Left: A clean cut through three lengths of cordage was attempted with the Strongarm knife.

Above, Bottom Right: The 550 paracord didn’t pose any issues when cut through with this powerful and sharp-out-of-the-package knife.

to say, given its impressive specs, the knife ripped through single, double, and triple lengths of paracord. Although this feat may not seem notable, bear in mind the cordage used was not only true 550 paracord, but it also featured tougher-than-normal “guts” inside including fishing line, tinder line, and most durable of all, snare wire.

BELTING IT OUT

The next challenge for the Strongarm was to easily slice through straps similar to those used in vehicle seat belts. The key word here is easily, for when lives are at stake, struggling and eventually splitting a belt in two needs to be accomplished fast and without any hesitation. Under tension the belts gave way to the cutting power of the Strongarm with no trouble. This is the ultimate want from a tactical knife such as this. With lower to nearly no tension on the belts, the Strongarm continued to prove its worthiness and sliced through the

wide straps using just a bit more force and its ultra-sharp 420HC steel blade. The tang construction enabled all the power from my arm to transfer to the cutting edge. This is a task that may not be easy for a knife with a partial tang or no tang construction, for it can “give” at the connection point between blade and handle. The Strongarm prevailed in this cutting test, which as mentioned earlier, is so very important because first responders to accidents and emergencies need a blade that acts and reacts fast.

GETTING PUNCHY

For the stabbing tests, materials such as stacks of cardboard, wooden planks, and rubberized materials were used to illustrate the variety of items that you with the knife might encounter under both normal and emergency conditions. Cardboard may appear flimsy and no challenge, yet it can not only dull a blade quickly, but it can actually create an almost vacuum effect

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and keep the knife firmly within the material. It's comparable to the suction a blade with no bloodline can create when it punctures and enters deep within the tissue and/or organs of an animal.

The knife dug deep into a stack of cardboard and with a quick pull upward, the blade was extracted from the pile with ease. Several more downward stabs were performed. The blade stood up to the cardboard repeatedly.

The wooden plank puncturing test illustrated the power of the Strongarm as the tip disappeared at least a half-inch or more into the wood. With a quick tug and a repeated strike, it dug even deeper. The handle was well suited for puncturing. My hand stayed firmly in place as the rubber provided a slip-free surface.

The rubber matting exhibited similar characteristics as the cardboard. It produced a suction effect when pierced. However, this didn't stop the Strongarm, not by a longshot. It penetrated the rubber

Above: A black and gray version of the Strongarm.

Below: All the components of the Strongarm and its highly versatile sheath.

“THIS SIMPLE, YET HIGHLY EFFECTIVE (NOT TO MENTION DURABLE-AS-HELL) KNIFE CAN BE YOUR GO-TO BLADE FOR JUST ABOUT ANYTHING.”



HANGING TOUGH

This knife's sheath adds versatility to its powerful companion



Above: The Strongarm, tucked firmly within its versatile sheath.

Like the Strongarm itself, its accompanying sheath provides versatility no matter how and where you like to wear your blade-carrying companion. With traditional drop-leg position, horizontal belt carry at the waist, and vertical MOLLE adaptation, no matter what you wear on a daily basis (or during emergency conditions) your Strongarm will only be a hand's length away.

The belt loops are completely detachable, making fastening and removal quick and easy without needing to undo your belt. In addition, the snap-in enclosure keeps the knife from rattling when you are on the move, and the MOLLE integration allow you to take the Strongarm knife on many types of "missions" due to its ability to attach to numerous types of vests, bags, and other compatible gear.

The material of the sheath is created from durable hard plastic with an equally tough strap attachment. Solid fasteners lock-in tight and snap back out with just the right amount of force.

Overall the sheath fits the Strongarm knife perfectly, both literally and in functionality.

Below, Left: Traditional, on-the-hip Strongarm placement.

Below, Center: MOLLE compatible

Below, Right: "Behind the back" carry



with little resistance and was extracted with similar results. With each strike I drove deeper into the synthetic material and it performed equally well each time. Cutting through rubber and some soft plastics can put up a surprisingly tough fight due to their flexible characteristics that move with a blade and "give" with even the slightest pressure to make cutting something without rigidity very difficult. This was definitely not the case with this test.

AN ALL-AROUND COMPANION

Although military in design and style, the Strongarm is well suited for nearly any task that it may face. Aside from the normal applications, this knife can be attached to a staff and be used to spear fish or thrown at terrestrial animals. It can shave tinder for a fire, fell small saplings, carve makeshift utensils, break glass during an emergency, used as defense against an attack, and numerous other uses. The truth is that this simple yet highly effective, not to mention durable-as-hell, knife can be your go-to blade for just about anything. Forget the bells and whistles, discard the decorative, and carry this blade (however you want due to its ingenious multi-function sheath) wherever your adventures take you, be it across the globe or in your own backyard.

THE STRONGARM AT YOUR SIDE

Tests unfortunately are just that, tests. To truly judge the Strongarm you need to have it by your side, and you need to use regularly throughout your day's travels. When ordinary tasks occur, you can apply its strengths and judge the results. However, when the unexpected occurs, that's where you separate the meek from the mighty. If it passes at a level acceptable for you, then this companion may have a home by your side that day and for years to come. **KI**

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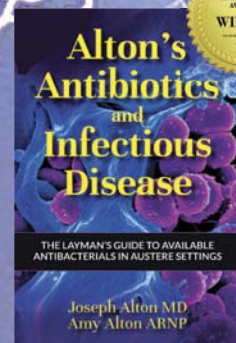
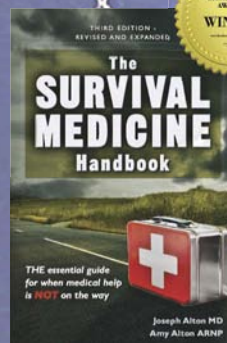
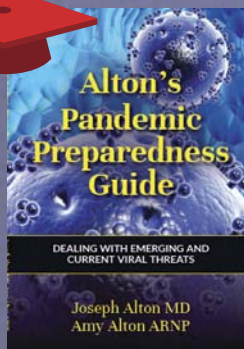


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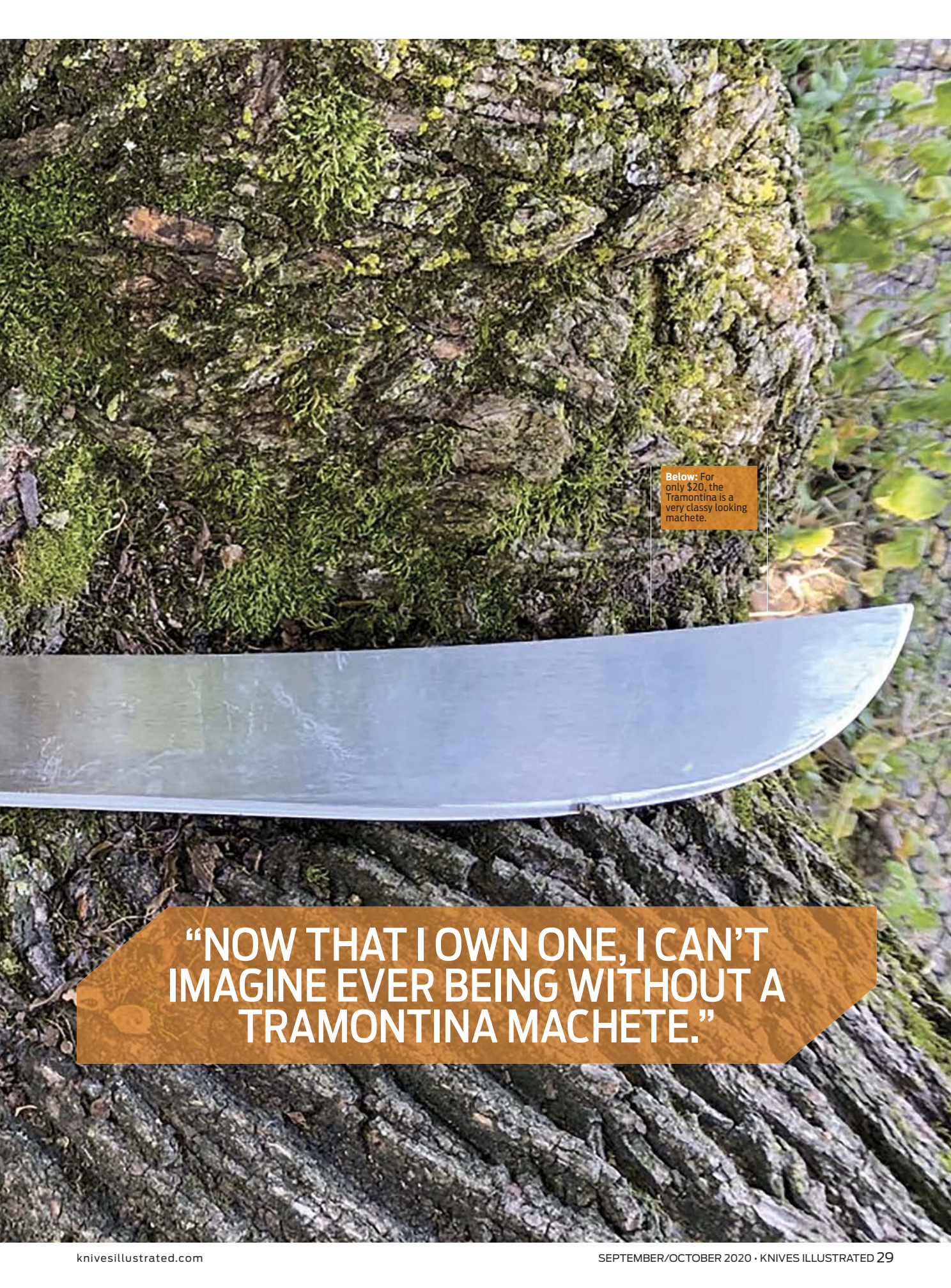
TEXT AND PHOTOS BY BRYAN J. BALL



The Tramontina machete is a bit of an enigma. It has an exotic-sounding name and is from Brazil. It also has a blade shape that reminds you of classic jungle-slashing tools you see in the movies. It has a nice-looking wooden handle. It comes with a pretty decent sheath. But you can buy it at your local big-box store for \$20. What?

Like most first-time Tramontina buyers, my purchase of this machete was mostly unplanned. I somehow managed to lose my faithful old Gerber machete (I know it's hard to lose a machete, but you've never seen the giant mess that is my garage) and needed another one pronto to do some yardwork. I went to Lowe's planning on buying another Gerber or something and saw this beauty for about a third of the price. I figured it was worth a shot. It was definitely worth more than that.

At first, I thought that "Tramontina" was the name of the style of machete or something. It sounds exotic enough to be. Turns out it's actually a huge company. Tramontina was founded by Italian immigrants to Brazil in 1911. It now makes just about every sort of cutlery you can imagine and has grown into one of the largest employers in the country.



Below: For only \$20, the Tramontina is a very classy looking machete.

“NOW THAT I OWN ONE, I CAN’T IMAGINE EVER BEING WITHOUT A TRAMONTINA MACHETE.”



You Get Way More Than You Pay For

The Tramontina is a pretty impressive package hanging on a hook in a store. The wooden handle is very well-finished, and the canvas sheath actually seems very sturdy and well made.

The edge out of the box (out of the sheath?) wasn't terribly impressive. It wasn't sharpened at all up near the tip. It probably would have been just fine for its given task, but I own a Work Sharp and am an edge snob, so I went at it. The sharpening job took me a good solid half hour, but once I was done, I had an edge that was still about 35 degrees, but it was almost as sharp as that on some of my pocketknives. Even with a lot of use the last couple of weeks, the Tramontina has held that edge well. This definitely isn't junk steel.

Above: The blade required a new edge from brand new, but it sharpened up quickly, and edge-retention seems to be more than acceptable.

The machete did have some sort of unidentified weird clear coating on the blade. It was almost like some sort of epoxy. I assume it is there to protect the carbon steel from corroding while it's hanging on the aforementioned hook in a store for who knows how long. Whatever it is, it didn't come off with alcohol, but it started wearing off after a few uses.

Destroyer of Yards, First of His Name

With a new edge, I went out to tackle the overgrown weeds (almost small trees by now) that had accumulated in my yard during my self-imposed lockdown staycation. "Hot knife through butter" is an overly used analogy in the knife world, but it applies here. The Tramontina made VERY quick work of all the weeds and brush of various types.

This machete actually made the task a joy to accomplish as well. The balance is obviously very blade heavy but gave just enough help with forward momentum without being unwieldy. I mostly wore gloves while using the machete, but even without them it was very comfortable in the hand.

After I was done tackling the weeds, general hooliganism ensued. Give a man a big, sturdy machete in a backyard for a while, and he's going to destroy some stuff. It can't be helped.

Chopping wood with a machete isn't something I'd want to do every day, but the Tramontina did it very well. I knocked down some large branches that had fallen over the winter into firewood.

That was easy. Huh... Wonder if I can split some of those old two-



Left: The provided sheath is very well made for the money.

Below: The Tramontina makes quick work of most tall weeds and brush.



“SOMEDAY, I’LL FIND MY OLD GERBER. AND THEN I WON’T USE IT AND I’LL LOSE IT AGAIN. IT COST ME THREE TIMES AS MUCH AS THE TRAMONTINA, BUT IT HAS BEEN REPLACED.”



+ SPECS

Tramontina 18" Machete

Overall Length: 23"

Blade Length: 18"

Blade Steel: Carbon Steel

Handle Material:
Wood (Unspecified)

Sheath: Reinforced Nylon

Price: Around \$20 with the sheath

You'll find videos with titles like, "The Ultimate Backpacking Machete" and "Tramontina Machete: Still the Best". After using the Tramontina for the last few weeks, I may be making a video with similar platitudes myself! Actually, I guess I'm accomplishing that task here.

If you shop around, you can find Tramontina machetes in a range of blade lengths and styles. Many experienced campers and bushcrafters own several. Some have even modified them to a specific task. It seems that having one of these can become a hobby within a hobby in and of itself. I may be joining that camp myself.

Getting my hands on this machete has truly been one of those "Where have you been all my life?" sort of moments. I think back to days at my old house that had a small bamboo thicket that was always driving me crazy. Or even more to when I was an avid mountain biker cutting trails with my friends. This would have been a great companion strapped to my Camelbak on those sweaty days of clearing bush.

Now that I own one, I can't imagine ever being without a Tramontina machete. Someday, I'll find my old Gerber. And then I won't use it and I'll lose it again. It cost me three times as much as the Tramontina, but it has been replaced. **KI**

by-four scraps into kindling. Yep! Whether chopping or batoning, this budget machete performed very well. By the way... I don't even own a wood stove or a fire pit. But hey... I have firewood now!

The sheath also works pretty well. It flopped and slapped around a little bit, but that could easily be fixed with an extra strap. A Velcro retention loop keeps it securely stowed, and the top loop is big enough for just about any belt. Even with the tip sharpened, it doesn't seem to be in any danger of cutting through the end of the sheath. And

Above: Chopping with a machete can take a bit of work and probably isn't the most efficient method, but it sure is fun!

let's face it... It feels cool having a large machete strapped to your hip. Much cooler than wielding an electric weed whacker.

Well-Deserved Cult Classic

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**AS A CONSUMER OF KNIVES, THE HEALTHIEST MANTRA
TO KEEP ON ALL KNIFE RELATED OCCASIONS ... IS THIS:
THESE TOOLS ARE TO MAKE MY LIFE MORE ENJOYABLE.**

A photograph showing a person's hands holding a large, weathered wooden log. The log is light brown with a rough, textured surface. The background is a dense thicket of green bushes and trees. The image is partially overlaid by a dark green rectangular area containing the title text.

AN IDIOT IN THE BUSH

TALES OF AN
EVERYDAY JOE
BUSHCRAFTING
THROUGH THE
AUSTRALIAN
WILD

TEXT AND PHOTOS BY
PETER COLLIGAN

Left: Peter Colligan
is the creator of the
wildly popular Cedric
and Ada Outdoors
YouTube Channel.



Left, Top: Whether you're an experienced bushcrafter or an idiot in the outback, you're going to need a lot of tools.

truly hope there is a proper bushcrafter contributing to this issue of *Knives Illustrated*. You, dear reader, deserve more than me. What a skilled bushman can offer you are tales of knifed conquests of adversity and triumphs of the minimalist ideal. A skilled bushman's reflections can give you something to aspire to. Abundant skilled voices are out there; at the forefront of my mind is Mike McQuarrie, a.k.a. MCQ Bushcraft on YouTube, whose well-filmed and calmly spoken films provide fuel and ambition for those who look at the bushcraft knife and feel an itch to really use it as a tool rather than to want it as an object.

“AM I THE ONLY KNIFE GUY WHO, WHEN I GO CAMPING IN A MORE TRADITIONAL SENSE, COMES AWAY THINKING, ‘IT WAS FUN, BUT I THOUGHT THERE’D BE MORE KNIFE!’”

I feel that same itch—the itch to escape the generic modern life and dirty my hands and blades in earnest rather than in theory. This article you're reading, however, is a true story of failure, of how every time I reach to scratch that itch, I find myself reminded of what all our mothers told us: that often scratching an itch makes it worse. Nonetheless, my account speaks in more general terms of some less conventional ways that people can enjoy a knife.

When it comes to bushcraft, I have no credentials, though I do have a YouTube channel. It is moderately successful for my very specific niche interest—a knife fan channel with steel discussion and occasional satire of the industry. It's successful to the point that when I stop making videos for a while, I get a few messages asking when my next video is.

But should you look to me about bushcraft? No, not as anything other than as a possible contemporary, a weekend warrior or average Joe being given a voice for a day to speak on my experiences and views. Or as a cautionary tale, if you like.



Left, Bottom: I thought there'd be more knife!



A big fixed blade is always good to have in the bush.

“LET’S TALK ABOUT CHOPPING WITH A KNIFE ... THE INITIALLY GRATIFYING CHUNKS OF OUTER BARK FLYING AWAY IN THE EXPECTED V NOTCH SOON GAVE WAY TO THE MERCILESS SHOCK OF THE SEEMINGLY KNIFE-BLADE-REPELLANT WOODEN INTERIOR.”



Chopping with a fixed blade may not be as much fun as you think.



Above: Bushcrafting breeds creativity, even if it may not always be a great idea.

The Preconceptions

The thing is, I went out into the Australian wilderness with my idea of what bushcraft was. Let's discuss where I built that preconception. In brutal hindsight, I would estimate my knowledge of and assumptions about bushcraft stemmed from two sources: First, I received smaller but fairly nutritious doses of information from a couple of fairly non-controversial well-regarded TV experts, Ray Mears and Cody Lundin.

The problem arises when I assess my second source of bushcraft nutrition: other Everyday Joes like me with YouTube channels, where you can watch endless videos where we perpetuate the same knife tests and, often without a shred of self-awareness, proclaim them to be bushcraft tests. You know the tests I mean—cross grain batoning, striking the spine of basically every knife, making fire boards and feather sticks. They're tests of steel, build quality, and capability for certain, but they ain't bushcraft. I know this now.

So, let's cue the dream sequence. Change the camera lens to sepia, slow acoustic guitar noodling between sounds of nature. The plan is to spend a night or two in the woods with minimal gear. People will exclaim to me, "That's all you are taking?" I smugly nod in reply. My knife will rarely leave my hand as I use it to fashion all nature of shelters and tools. All problems will be overcome with the splitting of wood and the shaving of sticks for an efficient fuel source. I will have the fabled Real-World Use on tap to make my eventual thoughts on the knife in question forged in the fires of credibility, backed up with video evidence, steeled against the arrows of the comment squad in the eventual filmed review I will assemble.

It will be perfect.

The Reality

The first lesson I learned was how time plays tricks when it is cold. The sun races away from you, and workable light for bushcraft activities vanishes with 30% of your camp-building tasks accomplished. But then when it is dark

and cold, the cold seems to catch the time and throttle it, and you sit in the cold darkness to ruminate on how cold and dark it is, and how many camp jobs you have left to do.

I did, however, fashion a staggeringly rubbish wooden branch camp bed with my test knife of choice: the Becker BK7. After a failed attempt at a from-memory A-frame type shelter, my hazy knowledge suggested two things: It's good to be off the ground, because the ground is where all the cold lives, and that I once watched somebody at one time or another build a wooden platform bed. Now to squash those ideas together and use only a knife to achieve them.

Let's talk about chopping with a knife. What an unpleasant task. As I took my 7-inch knife to Australian hardwood, I was reminded of the time my 7-year-old once tried to dig an Olympic swimming pool in our backyard with a garden trowel. Per-motion progress was made at a woefully inefficient cost. The initially gratifying chunks of outer



bark flying away in the expected V notch soon gave way to the merciless shock of the seemingly knife-blade-repellant wooden interior. But I kept chopping. And chopping. I continued my bicep workout for another seven or eight branches worth of wood, dragged the branches to camp and built from hazy memory a camp bed slash monument to my failings as an internet-led bushman.

With my excursion in bed-craft leaning heavily into failure territory, I found some solace in fire-craft. Telling myself I would feel better once I had a warm fire, I got to work feather-sticking, batoning large wood into small wood, and generally building what were a series of honestly fairly successful fires, providing fierce and somewhat overbearing warmth to whichever part of me was facing it.

It was as I sat, feeling like a piece of meat burnt on one side and raw on the other, that it began to dawn on me that the hard use knife review I was filming had truly

Above: When you try to learn a new skill via the internet, it's all about the execution.

evolved (devolved?) entirely from review and experience and into a piece of comedy.

A night spent on a camp bed with ergonomics inspired by the dungeon of a deviant medieval English lord was enough to permanently shelve that concept for future minimalist endeavors. Instead, on subsequent attempts, I used a burned-out tree stump with a bed of reeds and a sleeping trench with heat offset by a bed of buried coals and a nearby fire.

The Lessons

Failure is the ultimate teacher, and my conclusions are numerous. The desire to buy these fixed blade bushcraft knives naturally breeds a further desire to go forth and use them as the sales media encourages. Perhaps mine are tales of eyes being bigger than stomach, ambition outmatching capability.

The feeling of having a knife on your hip and wanting to will it into use is a part of the knife enthusiast experience. As Gus Johnson hilariously illustrates in his comedy

DICKHEAD SURVIVAL

Peter Colligan, creator of “Cedric and Ada Outdoors,” named his three minimalist bushcraft/survival projects, “Dickhead Survival.”

Check them out at
www.youtube.com/cedricada



short, “Your Friend Who Always Has a Knife,” (which I suggest you search and view) we knife people are consumed by the known capability we carry on our hips or in our pockets. We live in perpetual hope for the moments to occur when we get to be the person who had the thing nobody else had, save the day in a small way, and there then being much rejoicing.

My hurry to suddenly use my fixed blade knife for all the things may have been a case of cutting off my nose to spite my face. Am I the only knife guy who, when I go camping in a more traditional sense, comes away thinking, “It was fun, but I thought there’d be more knife!” Turns out rushing to ditch the gear to remedy that, without adequate training, made me feel like just a bit of a dickhead.

Bushcraft to me remains somewhat of a vague concept. I always remain safe when I go minimalist adventuring; despite being marooned to “commit to the bit,” home is within reach via phone. Plus I conduct my adventure with the assumption that, at best, I will end up with some filmed physical comedy, a good story, and some reaffirmation that these knives can have perfectly satisfying practical lives as foils for any endeavor, whether it be living your role of high level bushcrafter in earnest, or accompanying a casual dickhead like me on a more abstract series of self-teaching moments.

In Conclusion

As a consumer of knives, the healthiest mantra to keep on all knife related occasions,

Above, Left and Right: As I took my 7-inch knife to Australian hardwood, I was reminded of the time my 7-year-old once tried to dig an Olympic swimming pool in our backyard with a garden trowel.

whether balancing the books to justify a new purchase, having an enthusiastic discussion on an online forum, admiring your collection of safe queens, or simply hitching your choice of daily carry to the inside of your pocket or belt, is this: These tools are to make my life more enjoyable.

With that as a baseline to build from, whether you have the skills to play the role of professional knife user/bushcrafter/hunter or are just another dickhead like me, you’ll retire at the end of each day with a more positive outlook on the hobby. **KI**

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BUSHCRAFTING BEAUTIES

FORM MATCHES FUNCTION WITH THESE CUSTOM-MADE BLADES

BY KNIVES ILLUSTRATED STAFF, PHOTOS BY SHARPBYCOOP



+ SPECS

JOHN APRIL

Model: Mammoth Bone Chute Knife

Blade Length: 4.25"

Overall Length: 9"

Blade Material: CPM-154

Handle Material: Mammoth Bone with Pinned and Soldered Guard

Sheath: Wickett & Craig Leather

Contact: johnaprillknives@yahoo.com

There is no law that says your burly bushcrafting outdoor knife can't look good. What follows is irrefutable evidence of that. These knives look equally good at home, in a tree stand, at a remote camp site, or in a suit. Sit back and bask in the glory that is this photo gallery from Jim Cooper of SharpByCoop. Information on how to contact the makers is included in the Specs box on each page.

+ SPECS

DAVE ARMOUR

Model: Armour Cutlery Bowie

Blade Length: 10.5"

Overall Length: 15.75"

Blade Material: 1084

Handle Material: Stabilized Box Elder Burl
with Copper Bolster

Contact: ArmourCutlery.com



+ SPECS

KURT SWEARINGEN

Model: Buffalo Hunter

Blade Length: Varies

Overall Length: Varies

Blade Material: CPM-154

Handle Material: Stabilized
Natural Black Ash Pearl with 416SS Bolsters

Sheath: Leather

Contact: SwearingenKnife.com





KYLE
HANSON

+ SPECS

KYLE HANSON

Model: Kyle Hanson Knives Fixed Hunter

Blade Length: 4"

Overall Length: 8.5"

Blade Material: W2

Handle Material: Canvas Micarta

Sheath: Kenny Rowe Leather

Contact: kylehanson.wordpress.com



+ SPECS

JIM PERKINS

Model: Jim Perkins Knife and Leather Fixed Utility

Blade Length: 5"

Overall Length: 10.5"

Blade Material: CPM-154

Handle Material: White Camel Bone, Blue G10, Vulcanized Spacers with Stabilized Curly White Oak and Nickel Silver Bolsters

Contact: james.perkins@midweststats.com



+ SPECS

JIM PROVOST

Model: J.C. Provest Knives Drop Point

Blade Length: 3.5"

Blade Material: CPM-154

Handle Material:

Mammoth Molar with 416SS Bolsters

Sheath: Leather

Contact: JcProvest.com



+ SPECS

ROBERT ERICKSON

Model: Erickson Knife Works Terosaur

Blade Length: 6"


Overall Length: 12"

Blade Material: 416 SS

Handle Material: Stabilized Curly Koa

Sheath: Leather

Contact: EricksonKnifeWorks.com

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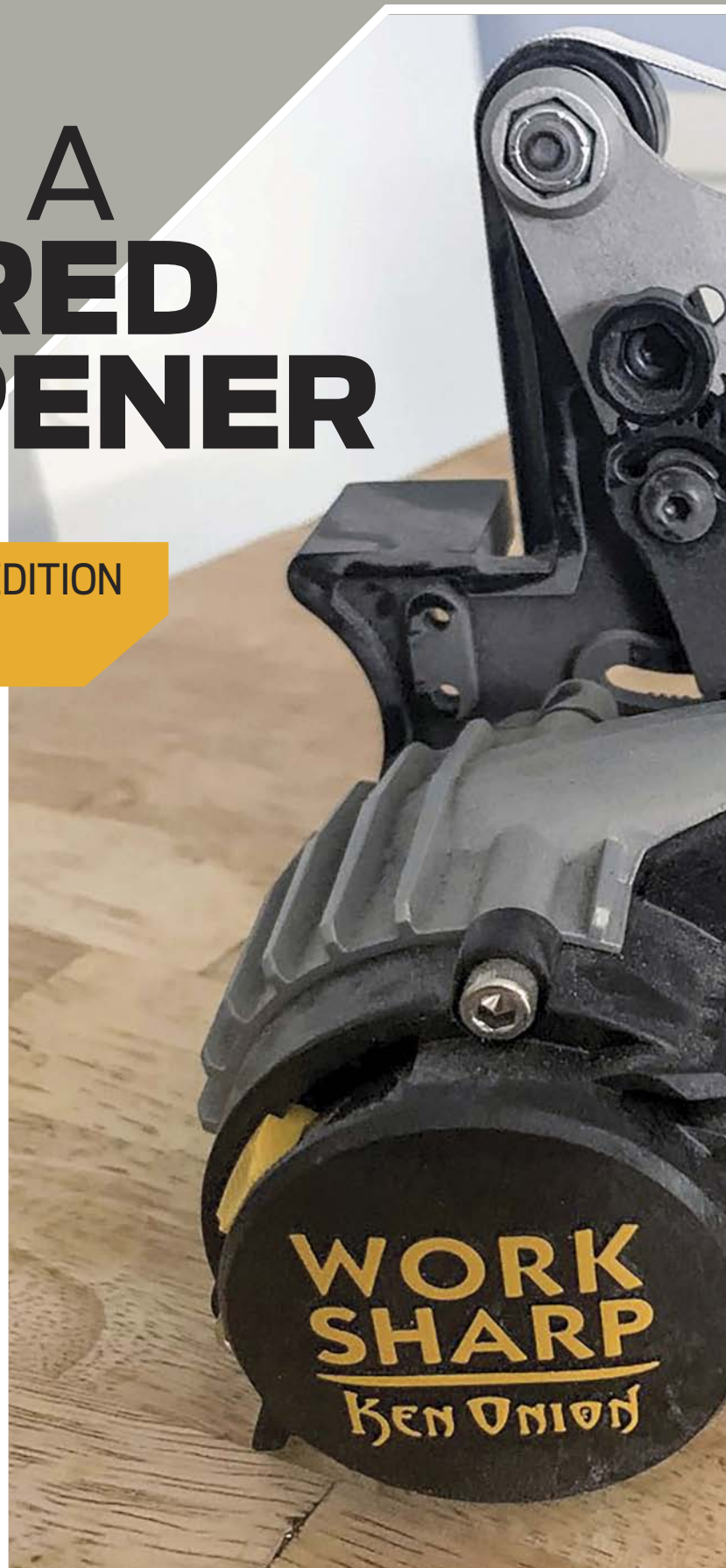
TEXT AND PHOTOS BY BRYAN J. BALL


One of the most intimidating aspects of the knife-collecting hobby for newer entrants is sharpening. From the outside looking in, it can seem like a mystical, dark art that can only be mastered by mysterious beings that seem to be able to speak to stones and metal as easily as if they were ordering a coffee. Of course, it isn't nearly that magical, but it can be hard to find out what system works best for you.

If you pop onto any knife forum on the internet, you'll mostly find suggestions for guided sharpening systems of many different kinds or calls to just jump to the much more advanced whetstone methods. One that's often overlooked (or even looked down on) is a powered sharpener. That's really a shame. A good powered sharpener such as the Work Sharp Ken Onion Edition can work more than fine for 90% of daily knife users and is by far the best option out there for some larger tools.

Enter Work Sharp

Work Sharp was kind enough to provide me with the full Ken Onion Edition, the optional Blade Grinding Attachment, and all the different belts that the company offers. The initial investment for the Ken Onion Edition is about \$130. This will probably work fine for most end users. If you want a little bit more adjustment and options for more custom edges, the Blade Grinding Attachment runs around \$80, and sets of new or optional belts are \$18.





**“I JUST TOOK A QUICK
‘MAN GLANCE’ AT THE EXCELLENT
PROVIDED INSTRUCTIONS AND
WAS UP AND RUNNING WITHIN
A HANDFUL OF MINUTES.”**

Above: The Work Sharp Ken Onion Edition Knife and Tool Sharpener is perfect for beginner or advanced knife sharpeners.

This is quite a chunk of change to be sure, but you can pick and choose which options you want. There's even a much less expensive model simply called the "Knife and Tool Sharpener" if you need something more basic.

The advantages of the Ken Onion Edition are the adjustable guide systems that allow you to more easily replicate the factory edge on your knife or tool or customize it to your wants and needs and replicate that angle every time. In stock form, the Ken Onion will guide you through angles of 15 to 30 degrees. If you opt for the Blade Grinding Attachment, you get more options and can easily switch between angles of 10 and 35 degrees, and you get some more belt options. The belts are also longer and wider so they should last longer.

CONTACT INFO

**Work Sharp
Sharpeners**

Address:
210 E Hersey St.
Ashland, OR 97520

Phone: 800-597-6170

Website:
WorkSharpTools.com

Below: More advanced sharpeners or people who have a wider variety of knives and tools to maintain may prefer the Blade Grinding Attachment.

Easy Peasy

This was my very first experience with a powered sharpener and I admit I had a bit of trepidation. This was totally unfounded.

As most men do, I just opened the boxes and started setting it up without even looking at the instructions. That was a bit of a mistake. It's easy to set up for sure, but not THAT easy. However, I didn't have to watch instructional videos or do any advanced reading. I just took a quick "man glance" at the excellent provided instructions and was up and running within a handful of minutes.

It took a bit more reading and some minor head scratching to figure out the individual angle settings, but it never reached the level of swearing. Once you get it, you get it and it couldn't be easier.

This rings true whether you're using the out-of-the-box setup or the grinding attachment.

In photos, I've always wondered if the Work Sharp would be stable on a tabletop. Short answer is yes, it is. It has just enough heft and grip that I never had an issue with it moving around on a working surface, even with the motor speed cranked up to maximum. This is especially true with the Blade Grinding Attachment in place.

The Results

The biggest complaint you'll hear from purists about powered systems is that you can't get as precise of an edge as you can from a guided system like a KME, Viper Sharp, or Wicked Edge. This is true to a point. However, in minutes you can get a great user edge that's 85% as nice as you can with hours on a guided





“THIS THING IS TRULY HARD TO BEAT FOR TOOLS AND KITCHEN KNIVES.”

system. And as we'll cover later, there are certain types of tools and larger knives that those systems just can't easily handle.

This is simply a byproduct of one simple factor best articulated by Jeremy Clarkson: **POWERRRRR!!!** The motor speed is variable on the Ken Onion Sharpener, and it's probably not a bad idea to start off at a sort of medium speed and work your way up. It's also a good idea to start with a less-expensive knife and more easily manipulated steel before you start grinding away at your expensive M390 or Maxamet knives.

I took it easy and started out with a couple of long-neglected budget folders in 14C28N and 9CR18MOV steels. Then I moved up to some D2 folders and then on to a few pricier knives in M390 and LC200N. Each jump only took me a few passes to get the feel and I was pleased with the results.

Even with the stropping belts that came with the Blade Grinding Attachment, I wasn't able to get that perfect mirror finish edge that I can on my Viper Sharp, but I could come within sight of it in just minutes instead of an hour and a half. And it must be said that not everyone wants that crazy mirror polish on their edges. When it comes to blades with recurves, the Work Sharp made life especially easy.

Both the Ken Onion and the Blade Grinding Attachment use variations

Above: The Work Sharp Ken Onion Edition Knife and Tool Sharpener truly excels at taking care of larger knives and tools.

Left: If you hard use your EDC pocketknives every day, the Work Sharp can be a real time saver.





on a set angle guide system. While the stock setup is a bit more intuitive and consistent, the Blade Grinding Attachment offers much more angle range, is adjustable in infinite increments, and still isn't very difficult to use.

I must also point out that the Work Sharp is going to give you a bit of a convex edge. That's just the nature of the beast with belt sharpeners. It doesn't bother me in the slightest, personally, but if you have some sort of religious principal against convex edges, this may not be for you.

The only other downside I found using the Work Sharp is that it does throw more than its fair share of dust. The supplied compound for the stropping belts also tends to make a bit of a mess.

Above: The basic configuration is very easy to set up and use and will be more than satisfactory for most users.

Emphasis on WORK

Where the Work Sharp powered systems truly shine is when sharpening tools. You can't easily sharpen an axe or a big machete on a fancy manual guided system. Traditional whetstones are always an option, but even your grandfathers knew that a big spinning wheel or a belt grinder were much better choices.

I used the Work Sharp on the Tramontina machete featured elsewhere in this issue. It definitely needed a good sharpening when I got it. Work Sharp's little machine worked a treat. I used the Blade Grinding Attachment to get a much steeper angle than I'd ever put on a pocketknife. Obviously, a pretty, shiny edge isn't a priority on what is (for me) primarily a yard tool.

Even with what amounted to a full re-profiling of the entire edge (especially at the tip), the job only took about half an hour. I started with the most aggressive belt P120 Extra Coarse belt and worked down to the X22 Medium, which was plenty good enough for my needs. I did wear through probably half the life of the P120, but I can't imagine how long this job would have taken on a set of whetstones.

After that, I got a bit cheeky and tackled my grandfather's old axe. The Ken Onion made quick work of that as well, although I did use it in a bit more of a freehand mode in that case.

After those two experiments, my wife reminded me that we had some very dull kitchen knives. The Work Sharp worked great on those, too,



with its ability to drop all the way down to 10 degrees.

I have no doubt that it would work equally well on all sorts of sharp-edged tools in your garage or shed. This thing is truly hard to beat for tools and kitchen knives.

If You're in a Hurry

Sometimes sharpening with manual systems, whether it be a guided system, free handing with stones, or using some of the less expensive set angle systems (that Work Sharp also makes), can be a more meditative, soulful experience than a powered system. There is no doubt about

that. I get more enjoyment out of it myself. And the results on a manual system used by a skilled sharpener are almost always going to be prettier and probably a bit sharper as well.

However, if you're someone who truly uses your knives on a daily basis, you may just not have time for that. Even if you're not looking for a pristine edge, what may take you 30 to 40 minutes once every week or two will take you 3 to 4 minutes on the Work Sharp. That time adds up. And in heavy daily use, I can't say with 100% conviction that you'd actually notice the difference. **KI**

Above, Top: Even the basic Work Sharp system offers a wide range of angle settings.

Above, Middle Right: The Blade Grinding Attachment gives an even wider range of edge angles and is still very easy to use.

Above, Bottom Left: Just a few of the wide variety of belts available for the Work Sharp.

+ SPECS

Model: Work Sharp Ken Onion Edition Knife & Tool Sharpener

Street Price: \$129.95

Model: Blade Grinding Attachment for Ken Onion Sharpener

Street Price: \$79.95

Included Belts: P120-Extra Coarse, X65-Coarse, X22-Medium, X4-Fine, and 12000 Extra Fine

Replacement Belts: \$15-\$18


TOPS IN THE JUNGLE!

SIZING UP THE YACARE 10.0 AND TANIMBOCA PUUKKO

TEXT AND PHOTOS BY REUBEN BOLIEU

I have been associated with TOPS Knives since 1999, when it had just premiered the Steel Eagle. I opted for the 111 model with an 11-inch blade. It was a beast—and the start of my collection. Before long, I read reviews of TOPS' knives by writer/photographer Jeff Randall, because he used TOPS knives in the Peruvian Amazon jungle. The reviews sparked a fire in me to buy more TOPS knives—and to also get into the “jungle” myself.

Through the years, TOPS Knives has not only been a knife company, but also a place to obtain survival gear and accessories for law enforcement, military and search-and-rescue personnel and, more recently, for campers and bushcraft enthusiasts. By bringing in new staff and collaborating with custom knifemakers and leading outdoorsmen, Leo Espinoza, the president of TOPS Knives, has upped the company's game—big time. TOPS' two new offerings prove its willingness to go far outside the norm for designs and influence.



Above:
The TOPS Yacare 10.0 (left) and the Tanimboca Puukko (right) are a formidable jungle combo.



**WITH ITS YACARE AND TANIMBOCA
PUUKKO, TOPS KNIVES HAS MADE TWO
HARD-WORKING TOOLS MEANT FOR REAL
USE AND NOT FOR TAKING UP SPACE IN A
“SAFE QUEEN” CASE.**



Left, Top: The TOPS Knives Yacare 10.0 is 15.5 inches overall with a full-tang, 10.25-inch-long blade made of 1095 carbon steel. It is a workhorse medium-heavy machete.



Left, Center: Holding the Yacare steady after it was stabbed into the stump, the author is drawing back sticks against the blade's edge to produce fuzz sticks for a fire.



Left, Bottom: TOPS uses its "go-to" 1095 high-carbon steel with a very attractive Acid Rain finish on the entire Yacare blade.

Yacare

Way back, in the days of the Woodsmaster series VHS instructional video tapes that starred Ron Hood, I was first exposed to the large knife/small fixed-blade combo for outdoor survival/utility. Ron always seemed to have the perfect "large chopper" for the heavy work while keeping a smaller, more practical knife for other tasks. Based on the videos I watched, most of the larger knives were from TOPS Knives.

TOPS' new large knife was influenced by some machetes that TOPS Knives General Manager Craig Powell saw on a recent trip to Costa Rica.

According to Craig, "I saw a bunch of guys carrying machetes, because they used them for work or were just used to carrying a machete. Most of them were the standard Latin American machetes, but I saw a couple that looked similar to the Yacare."

The next year, Craig went to South America on a jungle trip. That was when he realized he wanted to design the Yacare.

With a 10-inch blade, the Yacare falls into the medium-heavy machete or large knife category. The high grind and weight behind the 3/16-inch-thick blade stock gives it chopping and splitting power over a conventional thin-light machete, making it better suited for North American woods. TOPS uses its "go-to" 1095 high-carbon steel with a very attractive Acid Rain finish on the entire Yacare blade. The Yacare's overall length is 15.5 inches, and it weighs 25.4 ounces with sheath.

Like its name, "Yacare," which means "caiman" (a member of the alligator sub-family) in Spanish, it has a heck of a bite! Where I live in the summer, parts of the woods are covered with hanging vines full of water that is perfectly safe to drink. Needing a quick drink while working in the woods at my camp, I tried out the shearing power of the Yacare on some hanging vines. They were thick, woody and very coarse, with bark; yet, the Yacare chopped through, often with just two swings, because these weren't the soft, green vines found in the jungle.

I drank from the vines and then set them aside to drip into a metal container for later. Once the vines were depleted of water, I used the blade to scrape off as much dry bark as I could for a fire. The bark is stiff and fibrous, but not enough to catch a spark freely, so the bark was set aside for use as kindling.

I stabbed the Yacare into a wooden stump and drew some dry poplar sticks back against the edge to make fuzz sticks thin enough to be used as tinder and kindling. This technique is great

+

SPECS

YACARE 10.0

Overall length: 15.5"

Blade length: 10.25"

Blade thickness: 0.1875"

Blade steel: 1095 carbon steel with acid wash finish

Handle: Black canvas Micarta

Weight, knife only: 17.7 oz

Weight, knife and sheath: 25.4 oz

Sheath: Black ballistic nylon

MSRP: \$250



for making fine, thin, curly shavings with larger blades, because the lighter object is moved against the heavier object. Control and a light touch are needed for this, so the results outweigh the tendency of holding the blade to try to make fuzz sticks.

When it was time to ignite the tinder, I braced the Yacare blade over a piece of wood and placed the tinder underneath at a perfect striking distance to catch sparks from my ferrocerium rod. Again, moving the smaller and lighter of the two tools was the best way to do this: I drew the ferro rod back against the blade to shower sparks onto the tinder. This part of the large blade isn't used as much for fine detailed work, so any edge-dulling or -rolling wouldn't make any difference with a chopper.

I gathered some oak and maple branches about the thickness of my wrist or lower leg. I chopped with the Yacare and used a saw to get the ends flat enough to stand up on a stump for splitting. The weight of the Yacare split pretty well on sections no longer than the length of the blade. From there, it was easy to reduce some of the wood down to finger thickness.

Some large poplar branches were sectioned to feather with the Yacare in a reverse-draw-knife position, utilizing a section of the blade

near the handle. I pinched the top of the blade spine with my left hand and held the Yacare by the handle with my right. Then, I slowly feathered the light wood until I had some good curls on the stick. That is the best way to use a large blade for fine work.

REAL-WORLD TREATMENT

I spared no quarter with the Yacare. I rarely used the sheath, except when initially moving around the woods; but, much as in Latin America, machetes/large knives are carried in the hand and stored leaning up against a tree, safely out of the way.

Needless to say, the Yacare shows wear and tear marks from hard use and the elements (I left it outdoors for more than four months in humidity, rain, heat and moisture). I chopped vines low to the ground and trimmed some low vegetation, causing the blade to come in contact with stones, much as a machete in Latin America would.

I also used the forward edge to strike a ferrocerium rod up near the belly, where usually only impact from chopping is done. I know from experience that a nick here and there on a chopping blade isn't

Below:
TOPS' Yacare and
Tanimboca Puukko
are a perfect example
of a large knife/small
fixed-blade combo
for outdoor survival/
utility.

THROUGH THE YEARS, TOPS KNIVES HAS NOT ONLY BEEN A KNIFE COMPANY, BUT ALSO A PLACE TO OBTAIN SURVIVAL GEAR AND ACCESSORIES FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT, MILITARY AND SEARCH-AND-RESCUE PERSONNEL

going to hinder the usefulness or hurt anyone's feelings.

All in all, the Yacare proved itself every step of the way to be a hard-working tool and indifferent to being treated as such.



Tanimboca Puukko

This knife has a very interesting story and lineage. Knifemaker Goran Mihajlovic, born in Serbia, grew up in Germany and has been living in Colombia for the past 20 years. To add to the diversity of this knife's background, most of what he makes are Scandinavian-shaped Puukko knives.

TOPS collaborated with Mihajlovic to produce the Tanimboca Puukko. It is made with tan canvas Micarta scales with red liners, a bow drill divot, tumbled finish on the high-carbon 1095 steel blade and a brown leather sheath. Its overall length is approximately 7.75 inches, with 3.5 inches of cutting edge on the 0.130-inch-thick blade.

The classic Puukko blade shape has an almost completely flat spine with the edge trailing up to it at a very slight drop. The 90-degree spine is sharp and is

THE KNIFE [TANIMBOCA PUUKKO] FIT WELL AND PERFORMED FLAWLESSLY IN A CHEST-LEVER GRIP WHILE THE POMMEL WAS NESTLED IN MY PALM—COMFORT ONLY ACHIEVED WITH A ROUNDED OVAL, CROSS-SECTIONED HANDLE DESIGN.



Above: With design roots in Scandinavia and constructed for use in the Colombian jungle, the TOPS Tanimboca Puukko is named after the designer's nature sanctuary in Colombia.

Left: TOPS' Tanimboca Puukko is the perfect main bushcrafting blade or companion to a larger blade or axe. The 3.5-inch 1095 carbon steel blade is easy to control for finer, detailed wood work.

Right: The modified Scandinavian blade with secondary bevel carved wood extremely well and made some amazing fuzz sticks out of hard and soft woods.



a tool all by itself—for scraping soft wood for tinder and a ferrocerium rod for sparks. The bow drill divot works well and is one less component to make for a bow drill set.

Having spent three summers in Scandinavia, as well as having used various authentic Puukko knives over the years, I found the Tanimboca Puukko to be right at home in my hand ... and in my camp.

It is not a traditional Puukko with a stick or rat-tail tang, so the added weight of the full tang is noticeable. In addition, Micarta adds a bit more weight over the traditional birch scales. Design-wise, everything else is

very Scandinavian. I have yet to come across a Finnish-made Puukko that comes standard with a 90-degree spine, so TOPS is ahead in that regard.

THE FIRE-MAKER'S FRIEND

I went to work with this snazzy, little slicer and made tarp stakes, pot lifters, eating utensils, fuzz sticks and fires. As far as survival and wilderness living are concerned, fire is paramount. To get back to basics

+ SPECS

TANIMBOCA PUUKKO

Overall length: 7.75"

Blade length: 3.5"

Blade thickness: 0.1250"

Blade steel: 1095 carbon steel with tumble finish

Handle: Tan canvas Micarta

Weight, knife only: 5.2 oz

Weight, knife and sheath: 7.6 oz

Sheath: Brown leather

MSRP: \$150



Right, Top and Middle: The TOPS Tanimboca Puukko knife is a unique blend of Scandinavian design, 1095 carbon steel, tan canvas Micarta scales with Chicago screws and a tumbled blade finish.



Right, Bottom: This beautiful, brown leather sheath comes standard with the Tanimboca Puukko. It is perfectly crafted and includes a generously sized belt loop.





and primitive fire-making, I decided to make a bow drill set using the Puukko. The bow was made of dried witch hazel, but the rest was made from poplar wood. One continuous piece was used, and two spindles (drills) were harvested from the smaller branches.

I carved the two spindles, each side a little differently, like a pencil. Thicker parts were split for the hearth board. The Puukko's tip was used to dig out the wood before burning-in. After the

initial burn-in, I used a small saw to help create the notch. Additionally, the sharp, 90-degree spine scraped poplar to form a secondary line of tinder behind my jute twine nest. Fuzz sticks were made for kindling to help catch the next step (fuel) ablaze.

The Puukko had no problems fuzzing soft wood or hard northern red oak. The secondary bevel on the modified Scandinavian grind worked just as well as a zero-ground Scandinavian knife.

Above, Top: The TOPS Yacare is named after the South American caiman—and shares the same ability to bite. With an overall length of 15.5 inches, its blade is 1095 carbon steel and comes with a ballistic nylon sheath.

Above, Left: Making a bow drill set with the Tanimboca Puukko. The author used the handle of the knife for the socket. It came through as a real firecraft knife!

Above, Right: The ballistic nylon sheath included with the Yacare is simple; yet, it is perfect for a hard-use tool. It has several lashing points for packs and a generous belt loop.

For the handhold, I simply used the bow drill divot built into the Puukko's scales. I just added a dab of Carmex lip balm for lubrication inside the divot.

While the fire was roaring, I waited for a nice, glowing bed of coals while my water boiled. I also made a quick figure-four deadfall trap out of witch hazel with the Puukko. The knife fit well and performed flawlessly in a chest-lever grip while the pommel was nestled in my palm—comfort only achieved with a rounded oval, cross-sectioned handle design.

The Tanimboca Puukko was my most-used knife during the summer of 2017. Its size and blade geometry are well suited for the tasks described above—and many more.



SOURCES

TOPS Knives
(208) 542-0113
TOPSKnives.com

**EZE-LAP
Diamond
Products**
(800) 843-4815
Eze-Lap.com

REAL-USE OFFERINGS

Both offerings from TOPS Knives proved to be well designed for the environments they were meant for. The steel had minor surface rust, as would be expected in the humid

STAYING KEEN

Simple high-carbon steel (as is found on most TOPS Knives) is easier to keep sharp than most steels, especially stainless. An EZ-LAP double-sided diamond hone (coarse and fine) will work for almost every type of field sharpening. Working blades require working edges and regular sharpening.

Where most people go wrong when sharpening a blade is by using too much pressure. Lighter is better unless there is a major nick. A few light glances are better than 10 hard, grinding passes on a stone. No matter what the method might be—whether stropping on sandpaper or leather away from the edge or toward the edge on a stone—lighter is better!



Top, Left: Water vines were cut with the Yacare for hydration. Later, the bark was used for fire. Two slashes were all that was needed to obtain this precious resource.

Above, Center: Shaving wood down for kindling with the large Yacare is easy with the technique the author is using. The recurve part of the blade, combined with the belly of the blade, make for some nice curls.

Bottom, Left: The author was able to split some chunks of wood for a fire using the weight-forward design of the Yacare.

summer months in the Eastern woodlands. Sharpening was a matter of using a coarse/fine EZ-LAP diamond stone. I used the coarse surface for the dings in the Yacare and the fine surface for touching up the Puukko. The sheaths were perfect for each model ... but I would really like to see the Tanimboca Puukko sheath with a firesteel loop.

With its Yacare and Tanimboca Puukko, TOPS Knives has made two hard-working tools meant for real use and not for taking up space in a “safe queen” case. **KI**





STUDIES AND
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“WHAT I CALL BACKYARD BUSHCRAFT IS LOW-STAKES FUN WITH KNIVES DOING WORK THAT COULD BE DONE WITH OTHER TOOLS ... BUT IN THE DOING, YOU DISCOVER SKILLS, METHODS, AND ... SELF-RELIANCE YOU OTHERWISE WOULD NOT HAVE HAD.”



Left: Even a fairly basic pocket folder can be very useful around the yard.

BACKYARD BUSHCRAFT CRAFT

PUTTING YOUR BUSHCRAFT SKILLS TO USE AT HOME

TEXT AND PHOTOS BY BOB DEMARCO

I live in the suburbs. I work in an office. I have a tool chest full of luxury goods that I call my knife collection. I have grown accustomed to the lifestyle that only a little bit of age, experience, and savings can provide. I like to spend time outside, quality moments with my wife, running around with the kids, or throwing a summer barbecue. I love the great out-of-doors, but to be clear, I am no Daniel Boone. But I, like other men and women, have the simple need to protect my investment and keep nature at bay. I do it with knives.

Knife collecting has always been a thing for me, but only after getting hooked on the vicarious outdoor adventures of Nutnfancy's YouTube videos and cable survival shows did I get a sense for just how practical knives can be as all-around outdoor tools. Now you might quip that I have a "keen grasp of the obvious," but as a result of this revelation, I can now (after years) allow myself to have fun doing yard work. Everybody wins.

Real bushcrafters have real skills with knives. It's not nothing carving a wooden spoon from scratch or crafting a clever trap or a sturdy shelter. These are very handy skills that may, in some cases, save your life in the wilderness or at least make it easier to stir your pot. Recognizing that my lifestyle may be on the mild end



“[BACKYARD BUSHCRAFTING] IS A VERY PARTICULAR SET OF SKILLS THAT MAY SAVE YOU FROM AN INVASION OF VINES, A PARTY WITHOUT A FIRE PIT, OR A SUMMER WITH NOTHING TO DO.”

of things, I call what I do backyard bushcraft, a style honed for the suburban survival experience. It's a very particular set of skills that may save you from an invasion of vines, a party without a fire pit, or a summer with nothing to do.

Backyard bushcraft comprises several loose categories: vegetation abatement (or as I refer to it, fighting the Hydra), firepit prep, and special projects. This style of bushcraft may not be as hardcore as what you see on the survival shows, or do around your own campfire, but it keeps this place habitable and provides an excellent opportunity for my knives to prove their worth.

FIGHTING THE HYDRA

Grape vine. Virginia creeper. English ivy. Poison ivy. All of it. Everywhere. All the time. A literal web of vines undergirds the grass of our backyard. To pull on one is to pull on them all. Climbing the fence, slowly breaking it down, reaching for the house intent on destruction through attrition. Vines are the number one enemy. Cut one and seven more pop up in its place.

Above: Fire seems to inspire man's natural tendency to want to cut and build some stuff.

When I test out the capabilities of a new knife, cutting vines and ivy in the backyard is usually the first test I put it through. Vines are tough and fibrous and prove a great medium to test blade geometry, edge quality, and pivot strength. “Pivot strength?” you ask. “Shouldn't you be using a fixed blade for that?” Maybe so, but I'm not always up for carrying a belt knife when I'm out in my suburban Eden, and there are some spectacular folders that get the job done.

For years I was using an XL Cold Steel Vaquero for de-vining in the backyard. Its sinuous, 6-inch, serrated blade made short work of anything it came near and was especially useful in a pull-cut against a web of vines. Recently though, I have been branching out.

In addition to vines, we have these weird, wiry weed-trees that seem to pop up overnight right up next to the fence, where the Vaquero, due to its size, is not an option. I am very partial to serrations in fighting fibrous vegetations, so lately the task of cutting them at the root (as they are too deep to pull) has fallen on the diminutive Spyderco Delica Serrated Wharncliffe.

Yes, that's right, the wee little Delica, the polar opposite of the XL Vaquero, does the job about as well. The Spydie-Edge serration pattern is so perfectly aggressive that the 3-inch blade works perfectly in an edge-in pairing grip. Just grab the weed-tree between your thumb and the edge, pull and it's curtains for the weed-tree!

FIRE PIT

The family fire pit is a popular addition to many backyards these days. It allows cul-de-sac dwellers to experience the feelings of security, togetherness, and gratitude that come with a real campfire. The fire pit is also a last refuge of this suburban man's primal self. I cut wood, I gather family, I strike flint, I make fire, I prove my worth.

A task as critical as fire for my tribe cannot be left up to just any tool, and certainly not a hatchet. To get those store-bought, kiln-dried logs down to fire pit proportions, I baton knife through wood ... like a lumberjack.

The Cold Steel Trailmaster is my knife of choice for batoning wood. Sharp, tough, and big, the Trailmaster looks like a wedge in cross-section and has a shock-

ON THE WEB

Cold Steel
ColdSteel.com

Spyderco
Spyderco.com

SOG Specialty
Knives and Tools
SOGKnives.com

TOPS Knives
TOPSKnives.com

Ontario Knife
Company
OntarioKnife.com

absorbing craton handle. So, it may not be winning any beauty contests, but it's perfect for high-impact activities. Also, I'd be remiss if I didn't mention that it makes me feel safe having that big ole' bowie by my side when I cannot see beyond the firelight.

I've had my Trailmaster for about 24 years. In that time, it has seen a lot of action, because no matter what new knives come in, I always know I can thrash on the Trailmaster and it will keep coming back for more. But it's not an all-rounder; we all know the only legit way to light a fire is with a feather stick, and the Trailmaster is a little too much for that purpose, but fear not.

Meet the new SOG Aegis, newly redesigned, rebuilt, and rebranded. SOG recently took its classic bestsellers and completely changed tack, refining and enhancing the designs, and improving build and materials. When I got the new Aegis, I

Right: Even in the backyard versus the wilderness, a good fixed blade is a very useful tool.



Below: A good machete goes a very long way in anyone's backyard or beyond.



was admittedly rough with it, wanting to make sure the rebranding wasn't just window dressing. It was not.

The blade on the new Aegis is cryo treated D2, a very respectable upgrade from the AUS-8 steel the model used to sport. The blade stock is thin and fully flat-ground, making it an excellent slicer and a phenom at carving wispy ribbons of wood for a feather stick.

In profile, the Aegis blade looks like a mini chef's knife and would make an excellent food-prep knife for the campsite as well. The first test I put to the Aegis was slicing a block of cheddar and, yes, it's an excellent cheese knife, if you were wondering. In any case, the SOG Aegis is becoming invaluable in my backyard bushcraft panoply of blades. Now I just have to figure out how to ignite my feather sticks without a Bic!

SPECIAL PROJECTS

Inspired by the quarantine training videos of Filipino Martial Arts expert and Forged in Fire judge Doug Marcaida, my daughters and I made a bamboo dummy in the backyard to practice martial arts and fencing techniques. It's basically a cross with an extra leg to represent the body and arms of an opponent. To make it, we used the most highly proven of all my blades. But first, a little exposition...

To gather the bamboo for the dummy, we had to venture to a nearby swampy area where a vast and thick bamboo forest had overtaken the landscape. Cutting

bamboo is a machete's job, but where I live, one doesn't risk being seen wandering around with a machete, so I brought my TOPS Tex Creek to the bamboo forest. I love the Tex Creek. To me it is a perfect field knife, tough, sharp, and comfortable to use. Not too flashy but handsome and at home in a beautiful tan leather sheath.

With the lanyard looped over my thumb and across the back of my hand, I can "choke back" on the Tex Creek and get a snapping, percussive chop, leveraging all of the 4-inch blade and some of the handle too. Even still, it took four or five opposed-angle chops to fell the bamboo. Then, sliding the blade up and down the trunk, I stripped the branchlings. I repeated this process with a second shoot, this time a little wiser with my chopping. After a few very loud and indiscreet minutes in the bamboo forest (those hollow shoots reverberate), we emerged with two extra-long poles.

After an awkward walk home, we set up in the backyard and I grabbed the blade that has been with me since seventh grade, my US Military issue 18-inch Ontario Knife Co. machete. I got it after seeing the movie *Commando* and have had it ever since. The Ontario Knife Co. machete has actually reached legendary status in my mind. It is the blade I've had the longest and have done the greatest number of stupid things with, and yet, its 1095 steel blade and hard plastic handle are strong as ever.



Using the Aegis, I cut a notch at about shoulder-height on the “body pole” and then cut a notch in the middle of the “arm pole,” roughly two arm-lengths long. The flat ground blade of the Aegis made for some really nice controlled carving. Usually I am a stickler for an even blade-to-handle ratio on folders, but in the case of the Aegis the big handle/little blade recipe makes for a very controllable knife when carving.

I married up the notches, making the arm piece perpendicular to the body piece, and wrapped the joint with paracord. And now comes the weird part: pounding what now looks like a big cross into the backyard. Setting the sharp end of the main pole on the soft ground I gave it a few whacks with the flat of the machete blade, driving it into the earth like a large tent stake. There it stood, teetering, begging me to attack it. But before I did, I thought it wise to shore it up with an extra leg.

Above: Backyard bushcrafting with your children can be both fun and educational. Skill learned in the cul-de-sac could save their lives someday.



Below: Chopping wood with a big fixed blade may not be the most efficient way to get the job done. But it sure is fun.

STEP TO SELF-RELIANCE

I stepped back, took a look at my afternoon’s work, and thought for a minute. What I call backyard bushcraft is low-stakes fun with knives, doing work that could be done with other tools or perhaps needn’t be done at all. But in the doing you discover skills, methods, and most importantly, self-reliance you otherwise would not have had. Maybe that’s a little like real bushcraft.

With backyard bushcrafting, I created a way that I can train martial arts with my family while school and lessons are not an option. Self-reliance. I am in awe of those who possess the knowledge and confidence to go willingly into the unknown and test their self-reliance in a struggle against nature, and I don’t mean to minimize that. For me, this dummy was only a very small step toward self-reliance. Ultimately though, I believe the real study of bushcraft is the pursuit of ever-higher levels of self-reliance, which to me, is a virtue. **KI**

With my favorite backyard bushcraft knives, a vague plan and some 550 paracord, it was time to build this dummy. The girls had evaporated by this point, having had enough excitement from the getting of the bamboo itself.

First, I cut one of the large bamboo shoots to the size of a tall man, leaving a little extra to sharpen into a hypodermic tip to be pounded into the ground. Cutting the tip was fun and no problem, one angled swipe with the machete and the anchor side was done.

However, cutting bamboo straight across, which was how I wanted the “head” portion, was more difficult.

I found out that when you chop bamboo across the grain, you end up crushing the hollow shoot, not cutting it. So, to square off the top, I used the serrations and the curve of the XL Vaquero to cut just above a joint. The resulting trimmed and pointed bamboo shoot was the body of the training dummy. For the arms, I planned to get fancy—notched construction.

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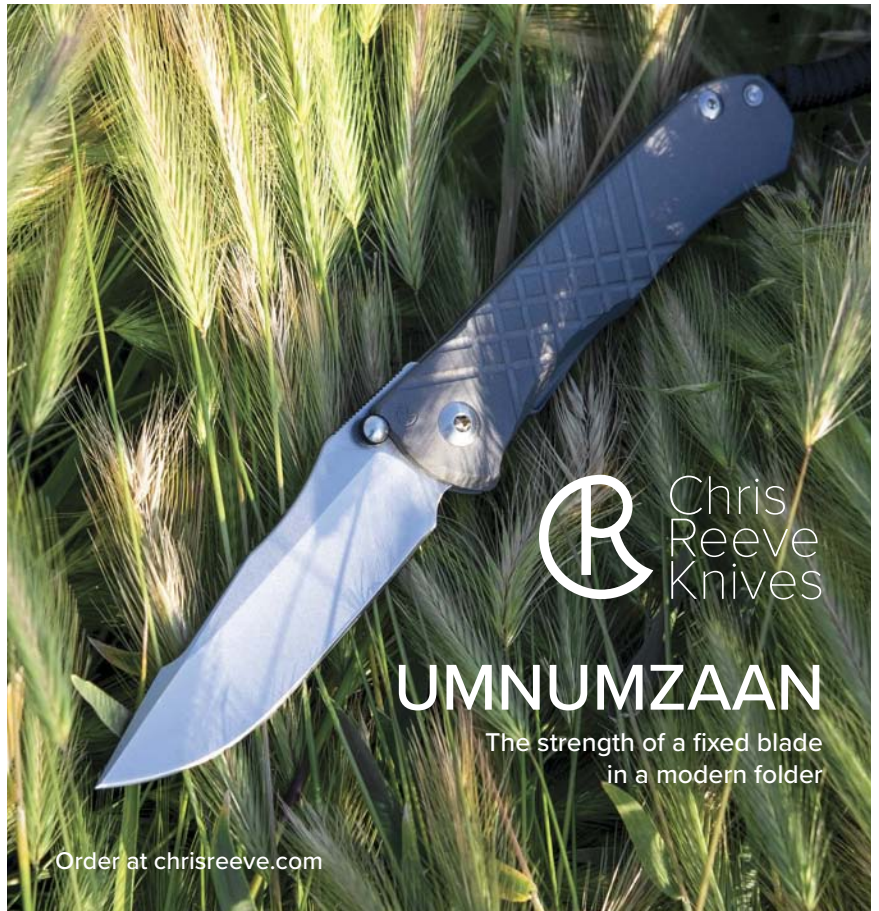
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Right: Like most Voxnaes and Anso designs, the Grand is extremely comfortable in the hand.

“THIS KNIFE IS A PERFECT ADDITION TO THE GIANT MOUSE LINEUP. LIKE ANY GOOD WRESTLING STABLE, THEY NEEDED A BIG ENFORCER.”

GIANT MOUSE ACE GRAND

FULL PRODUCTION UPDATE
TO A LEGEND

TEXT AND PHOTOS BY BRYAN J. BALL



Above: While the Grand is designed to be a worker, it's also a looker.



Giant Mouse is the wonderful lovechild of world-renowned knife designers and makers Jens Anso and Jesper Voxnaes. The collaboration came about when the two Danes were having a few cocktails with American entrepreneur Jim Wirth at a knife show. All three decided to combine forces to not only get some new designs out, but to also get Anso and Voxnaes' work out to a few more people.

Initially the emphasis was definitely on "a few" more people. Runs of standard Giant Mouse models are limited to 500 pieces and that's it.

Above, Left: The Grand currently only comes in this striking natural canvas Micarta version.

Above, Right: The Grand has a beautiful and perfectly flush bronzed titanium backspace.

Once they're gone, they're gone. Never to be seen again.

However, over the last couple of years, Giant Mouse has decided to feed the knife-collecting masses what they want by going into full production under the ACE name. Some are entirely new designs, and some are production versions of its more popular limited-run knives from the past. The new ACE Grand is one of the latter.

The Giant Mouse GM5 was designed to be a harder use/bushcrafting/hunting folder. It's become one of its more desirable designs on the secondary market. The ACE Grand

is a pretty true homage to the GM5 with different materials, a liner lock, and Italian production.

The Grand uses American made canvas Micarta scales, Uddeholm Elmax Superclean steel for the blade, a ball bearing pivot, and the wire clip, which has almost become a signature for the entire Giant Mouse ACE line. All that comes for a more than reasonable price of \$185.

This new knife is also a looker. It manages to combine a classic blade shape with modern touches very well. The Micarta scales blend very well with the bronzed backspacer and the wire clip looks right at home



“I TRULY GET THAT NOT EVERYONE LIKES WIRE POCKET CLIPS. YOU’RE ALL WRONG, BUT I GET IT.”



here. There’s a lanyard hole if you’re into that, but it doesn’t dominate the design in any way.

Blade stock on the Grand is a bit on the thick side for a modern folder at 0.16 inch, but it’s not what I would call extreme and fits the knife’s overall personality. It’s a mostly full flat grind that tapers down to a very reasonable 23 thousandths behind the edge. The clip point blade shape is a great choice for the Grand’s intended task. It gives a lot of cutting area while also providing a tip that’s accurate enough for detail work but isn’t so delicate that you’re likely to snap it off.

Top: Wire clips are pretty standard on Giant Mouse ACE designs, and this one is excellent.

Right: The Grand’s Uddeholm Elmax Superclean steel blade is a great shape for almost any task from outdoors to EDC.

CONTACT INFO

Giant Mouse

Website:
GiantMouse.com

The Elmax steel is also a great choice. It offers excellent corrosion resistance and very good edge retention. It definitely falls into the “super steel” category but isn’t nearly as difficult to sharpen as some other stills in this stratosphere can be.

I’ve always found any design that Jesper Voxnaes is involved with to be exceedingly comfortable in the hand, and the Grand is no exception. I’ve often jokingly called Voxnaes my “hand twin” because all of his designs fit my hand so well. In the case of the Grand, the thick and tall handle fills my hand very well and there is no hot

spot from the clip no matter how hard I grip it. The Micarta handles provide enough grip for most situations without being so rough that they’ll damage your pockets. The mid-blade jimping is sort of a trademark of Giant Mouse designs, and while it’s somewhat minimal, it’s perfectly placed for my longish fingers and really works well for detail work. Things like a crowned blade spine, a perfectly flush backspacer, and domed screws are also excellent touches.

For a knife designed for heavier duty use where it’s going to get dirty, pivot bearings were an interesting



⊕ SPECS

Giant Mouse ACE Grand

Blade Material:
Uddeholm Elmax Superclean

Blade Length: 3.4"

Overall Length: 8"

Blade Width:
1.5" at the tallest point

Blade Thickness: 0.16"

Blade Finish: Stonewash

Handle Material: American
Micarta, stainless steel liner lock

Weight: 4.73 oz

MSRP: \$185

Above, Left: The Grand has a blade tip that is fine enough for detail work, but not too delicate for piercing.

Above, Right: The Giant Mouse ACE Grand is perfectly at home in the outdoors or as your everyday EDC knife.

choice. I don't 100% buy into the whole "bearings are weak" mindset, but they can gather dirt and grit in some situations for sure. For 95% of potential customers, it probably won't matter.

Whether they're a potential weak point or not, they work very well. They run very smoothly and the detent on the liner lock is just about perfect. The Grand is very snappy and easy to deploy, whether you're using a conventional thumb flick or a reverse middle finger flick. It's also easy to slow roll with your thumb if you don't want to make a lot of noise or freak out Karen from HR. The deployment hole is also nicely chamfered and very comfortable to use. Access to the liner lock is above average but may be an issue when wearing really thick gloves.

I truly get that not everyone likes wire pocket clips. You're all wrong, but I get it. They're not particularly beautiful and you can potentially prang one if you catch it on something more easily than you can a more standard stamped clip. But ... they just work. They provide good retention, allow for deeper carry in the pocket and can be placed in many more locations on the handle than a conventional clip with three bolts can be.

The wire clip on the Grand is excellent. It lets the knife carry nice and low, retention is excellent, and it does allow for right-hand or left-hand carry. The Grand does carry a bit tall in the pocket just because it's a fairly bulky design, but the angle of clip does a great job of minimizing it. The weight of 4.73 ounces definitely doesn't make the Grand a lightweight, but it's more than acceptable for a knife like this.

This knife is a perfect addition to the Giant Mouse lineup. They have great lightweight and EDC options and even some very good gent's knives, but like any good wrestling stable, they needed a big enforcer. The Grand is going to fill that role very well indeed. Evidence can be seen by the fact that the first run sold out in just a couple of hours. Good news is that by the time you're reading this, they should be back in stock at many knife retailers. And you should definitely go check one out. The Giant Mouse ACE line isn't often considered when people are shopping for a new Spyderco or Benchmade or similar "mainstream" modern folder, but they definitely should be. **KI**

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PEARSON CUSTOM KNIVES

A NEW KNIFE MAKER GAINING A NAME

TEXT & PHOTOS BY BEN SUTTON



Ryan Pearson of Pearson Custom Knives is a master mechanic by day and an up-and-coming master knifemaker by night. His dreams of taking his knifemaking full time are quickly becoming a reality through his growing customer base and fan following within the knife community. This is due in large part to his popular models such as the Titan, Chief, Lil Chief, Scout, and Rhino. All his knives and sheaths are made out of his home shop by Ryan himself and the occasional family member who can pitch in a helping hand.

Ryan utilizes the same work ethic that made him a master mechanic in his trade as a knifemaker. His knives' quality, fit and finish, massive attention to detail, and customer service are second to none.

His easy-going nature and great personality are also beginning to garner a lot of customers.

+ SPECS

TITAN

Overall Length: 8.25"

Blade Length: 3.75"

Cutting Edge: 3.00"

Handle Length: 4.50"

Blade Steel: CPM 20CV

Blade Style:
Drop Point

Handle Material:
Carbon Fiber with Blue
G10 Liners

Weight: 4.40 oz

Sheath: Kydex with
Tek-Lok Attachment

TITAN

The Titan is a beautiful drop-point fixed blade with carbon fiber handle scales and blue G10 liners. The knife features a full tang blade made from CPM 20CV with a forward finger choil so the user can choke up for precision cutting. It comes with a Kydex sheath with a Tek-Lok belt attachment for easy carry.

CHIEF AND LIL CHIEF

The Chief and Lil Chief combo are fan favorites of Pearson Custom Knives. They come in various configurations based on the customer's preferences. The knives' standard configuration features Nitro V blade steel with a hand-rubbed satin finish, as well as minor, yet effective, jimping on the spine and all knives come with a Kydex sheath with loops that allows for the knives to be carried in the scout position.

However, like all Pearson models, the Chief and Lil Chief are available with many, many options. Stonewash finishes (as seen on the Chief pictured below), carbon fiber handles (as seen on the Lil Chief on following page) or G10 handles (as seen on the knives at right), and custom leather sheaths (like the one pictured with the Lil Chief on following page) are all available.



SPECS

CHIEF

Overall Length: 7.25"

Blade Length: 3.375"

Cutting Edge: 3.00"

Blade Steel:
Nitro V

Blade Style:
Drop Point

Handle Length:
3.875"

Handle Material:
Smooth G10

Weight: 3.60 oz

Sheath:
Kydex with Scout Loops



+ SPECS

LIL CHIEF

Overall Length: 6.25"

Blade Length: 2.75"

Cutting Edge: 2.375"

Blade Steel: Nitro V

Blade Style:
Drop Point

Handle Length: 3.50"

Handle Material:
Smooth G10

Weight: 3.10 oz

Sheath: Kydex with
Scout Loops



**“RYAN PEARSON
OF PEARSON
CUSTOM KNIVES
IS A MASTER
MECHANIC BY DAY
AND AN UP-AND-
COMING MASTER
KNIFEMAKER
BY NIGHT.”**



SPECS

SCOUT

Overall Length: 6.625"

Blade Length: 3.00"

Cutting Edge: 2.75"

Blade Steel: Nitro V

Blade Style: Drop Point

Handle Length: 3.625"

Handle Material:
Smooth G10/Kirinite

Weight: 2.60 oz

Sheath:
Kydex with Scout loops

SCOUT

The Scout is an elegant knife that can handle any task. These particular Scouts were made as a “his and hers” pair. The wife wanted handle scales in “Tiffany blue,” so Ryan used teal blue Kirinite, while the husband’s features smooth black G10 handle scales. Both knives feature a full tang Nitro V blade with a stonewash finish and minimal, yet very effective, jimping on the spine of the blade. Both knives come with a Kydex sheath with scout loops for easy carry. The specs for the Scout listed here are based on the black Scout. **KI**



ARE YOU A COLLECTOR, AN ENTHUSIAST, OR A USER?

THE COMMUNITY WEIGHS IN ON WHAT THESE HARD-TO-DEFINE CATEGORIES MEAN TO THEM

TEXT AND PHOTOS BY BRYAN J. BALL

As “knife people” we often seem to be obsessed with categorizing ourselves, finding ways to separate ourselves from the rest of the segment. Phrases like, “I’m not a collector, I use my knives,” or “You’re not a real collector until you start buying custom knives,” are pretty common on forums and other social media.

But what do these words mean? Are you a collector, enthusiast, or a user? Maybe a combo of all three? Is it based on the price of your “collection”? The rarity?

For example, while I personally own about 100 knives, I still consider myself an enthusiast more than a collector. None of them are safe queens. I will and do use almost all of my knives on occasion. I do have a handful that are pricey enough that I won’t HARD use them, but they still get used.

It’s hard to define, so we gathered some comments from a recent YouTube video on the subject and collated them for you here.

Dante Martin:

“I would consider myself all 3, although there is a fine line between them. I like folding knives for foldability, for appreciation of locks/materials/finishes etc., and for cutting. I got my first custom about 2 weeks ago. Yes, I’ve used it, although 6 months ago I wouldn’t have. I’ve realized that I buy things because I want them, not because I want more money if I decide to sell it. I remember getting my first guitar and treating it like it was glass. Now I look at it and its all dinged up, but I love it even more.”



Above: Some collectors focus only on one brand. In this case, Hinderers.

BIONICK:

“To me, I think everyone that buys a knife—be it an expensive one, to me that’s \$100+ or more budget friendly \$40-\$80—will use it at least once! That being said, I don’t buy knives over \$100 because I usually can’t afford them! If I could afford any knife, I would absolutely use it! I use my \$220 Stedemon ZKC C-01 in Blue Digicamo a lot! I have always considered myself a user, never a

collector, but now a little bit more of an enthusiast also!”

BigRedEDC:

“I don’t have any ‘safe queens’ so I really don’t consider myself a collector. I use knives at work every day so am definitely a user. I get just as excited about a \$15 Rough Ryder as I do about a \$450 CRK, so I think that makes me an enthusiast. Looks like I see myself as an enthusiast/user!”

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2020 FALL ISSUE

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Jay Strongbow:

"I know the world's greatest knife enthusiast. He always has that thing razor sharp, uses it daily (a lot), and I think it has had two new blades in 15 years as they were sharpened out. He owns one knife. He can take it apart, clean and lube it, reassemble it in about 15 minutes taking it easy. Used to be 154 and now it's s30v I think. One Benchmade Griptilian.

I have tons of knives, high end, Sprints, etc., but I consider him more of a knife enthusiast than me. I tried a full sized Griptilian a few months ago and was floored what a stone-cold killer of an EDC it was. Got an s90v coming from the custom shop.

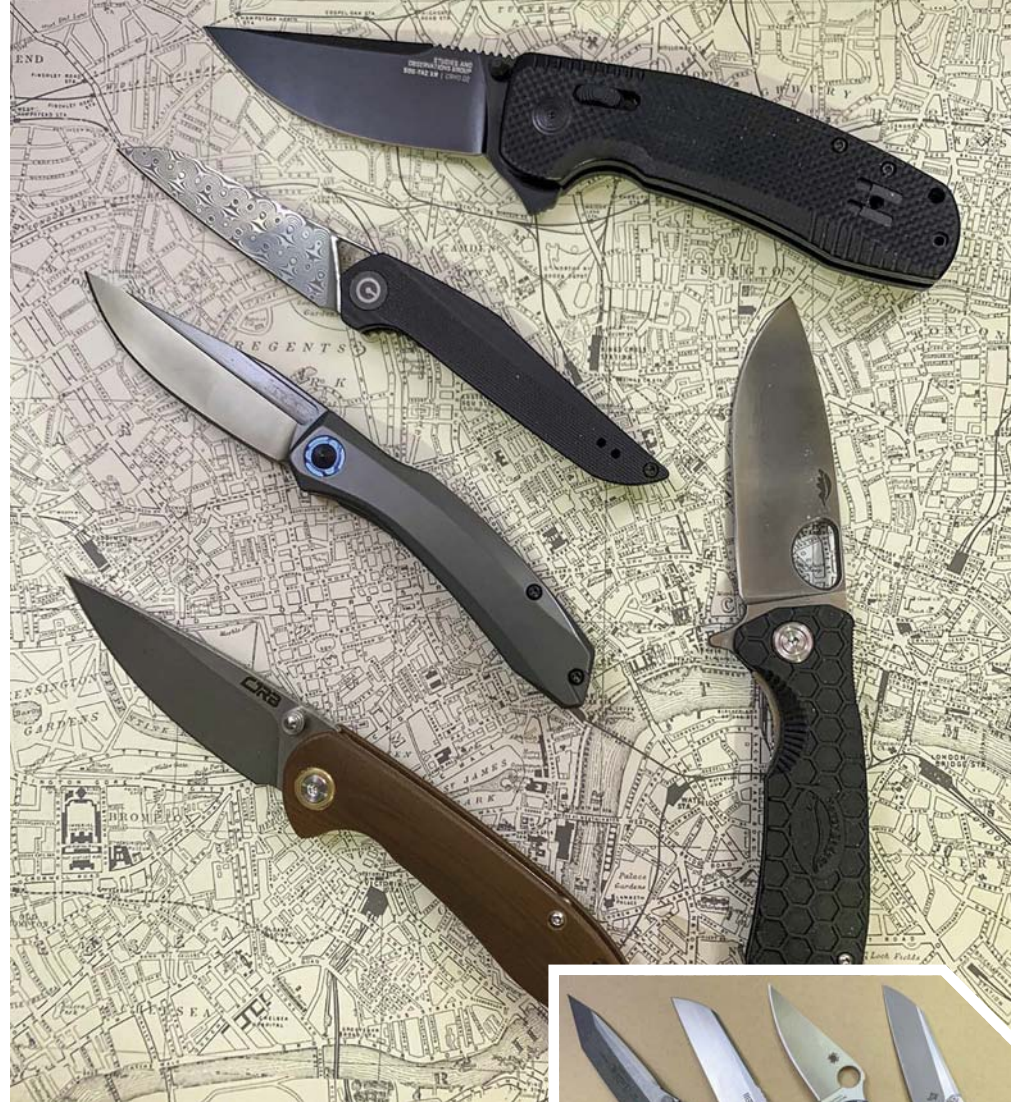
I'll show it to him when it arrives, and he will just shrug and go back to cutting things with his 15-year-old Grip. He is confused by my need for more than a knife. It's like the guy with one rifle or one trout rod: He is 99% of the time a better shot than the gun collector, and he is guaranteed to catch more fish."

Matt On Yak:

"In my experience, I have owned knives since I was a kid-teen-through college-and now as an adult. Having a knife has always been useful and fun. I consider myself a user with some impulses to be an enthusiast.

I would consider myself a user because every knife I own I consider and think about the why/when I can use it. Little consideration on blade steels and materials used for the handle. I mainly looked at functionality and feel. As I have looked into the world of knives and watching YouTube channels, I think I have become more of an enthusiast. I think that learning and understanding steels, locking mechanisms, handle materials, and paying attention to other details has made me more selective of my knives I use. I guess using my knives has made me become an enthusiast so I would say that an enthusiast is a person who begins to understand and see all the details that make a knife useful for a task vs. another whether that is for work or play. Collecting is not in my budget, in my opinion a collector focus is on a collection from a brand, custom knives, and is more likely to ignore the price or even let go of a knife for a price.

I use my knives, but I do baby them, mainly because I have not purchased a sharpening system to keep up, so my



use is very minimal. I use utility knives as an easy option when I need to go to work and this saves me from dulling my blades until I settle on a sharpener.

I could list the knives I have and use but simply put if I need a heavy-use knife or work knife, I use a utility knife. I carry and use a Benchmade Bugout for most out-and-about tasks, nothing serious. This knife is in my pocket every day and I have no problems using it. I have other knives that will get use as I have discovered I prefer the Spyderco brand a lot the PM2 and Shaman are really great knives, but still the Bugout is in my pocket."

Ian Sharpe:

"Oddly enough, I 'use' my expensive knives such as my large Inkosi more than any other knife. Now I have a total of 6 knives, including the Pm2, 940, and grip. I don't have much of an urge to purchase any other knife now that I've had this Inkosi for 8-ish months. Hefty cost but I find that it's the most comfortable to use out of my collection." KI

Above: You don't necessarily have to spend a lot of money to be a true knife collector.

Right: Are you a collector, an enthusiast, or a user? Or all three?



WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

Next month's
"Issue of the Issue" will be:

**"What's your favorite
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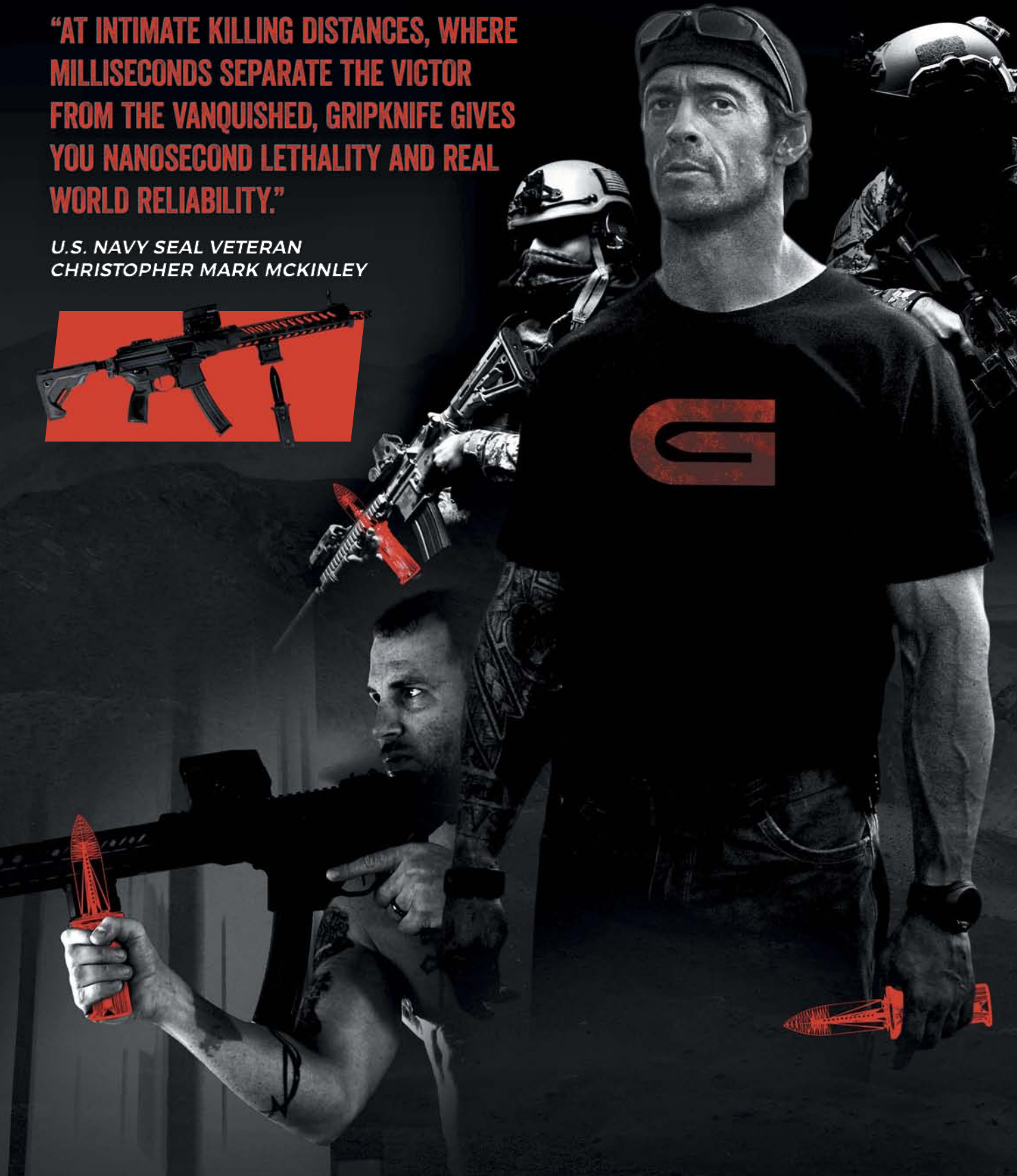
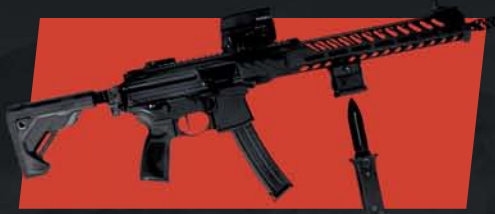
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