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Skookum Bush Tool by Rod Garcia

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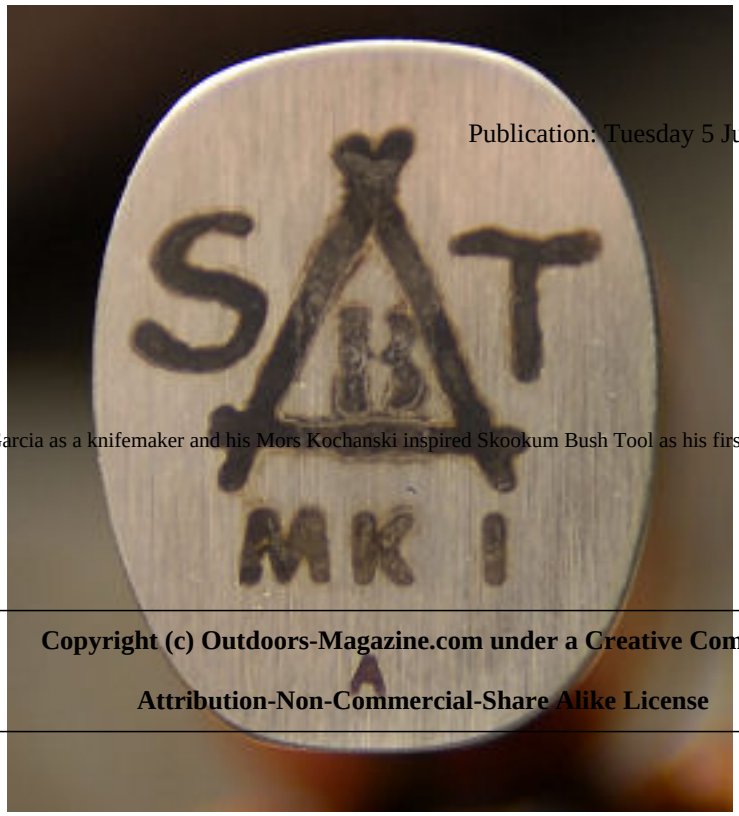

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Description :

This article introduces Rod Garcia as a knifemaker and his Mors Kochanski inspired Skookum Bush Tool as his first knife design.

Skookum Bush Tool Arrival day with incomplete baldric strap.

In this article I will quote the exact text from **Mors Kochanski's *Bushcraft*** concerning his ideas as to what makes a perfect bush knife.

Rod Garcia picked up a copy of Mors' book at a local grocery store in Montana and subsequently attended one of the courses offered by Mors. The book and the course resulted in Rod's creation of a knife as described by Mors.

All the text following in italics is quoted from my 1988 edition of ***Bushcraft, Outdoor Skills and Wilderness Survival*** , published by Lone Pine Publishing. In my opinion, this is a superb manual of outdoor skills that is far and away superior to any other available text.

Knifecraft

The knife is the smallest and most portable of all the cutting tools. Light and unobtrusive, the knife is readily available for hundreds of everyday tasks in bush living.

Skookum Bush Tool Filson Packer and mackinaw vest, Akubra Bushman hat...perfect companions.

The Bush Knife

The general-purpose bush knife should have a blade as long as the width of the palm, although blades half or twice this length are within acceptable limits. A blade five centimeters long would be an excellent survival knife except for being too small to fall and limb trees of wrist-thickness. A blade 10 to 15 centimeters long will do intricate work like carving a netting needle, yet be large enough to present a good target for a baton when cutting down small trees. A blade 20 centimeters long is a superior tool for heavy work, but awkward to use for fine work.

SBT Blade Width

All general-use knives should have the blade tip close to the profile centerline of the handle. The back of the handle and the back of the blade should be on the same line. The back of the blade should not be thinned down or sharpened so that a baton can be used more effectively without being cut up. There is no advantage to a two-edged blade in bush living.

The blade should be of a good quality carbon steel, from two and a half to three millimeters thick and about two to two and a half centimeters wide. This size of blade is light in weight, yet difficult to break. The steel should be soft enough to be maintained at a shaving edge with common sharpening tools, without frequent sharpening. Such steel is found in Mora (Sweden), Solingen (Germany) or Sheffield (England) knives. Carbon, unlike stainless steel, can be used as the striker in the flint and steel method of fire-lighting. Inexpensive stainless steels have had a bad reputation with respect to producing a keen edge let alone holding it. The Mora stainless steels however, are every bit as good as their carbon steels.

SBT Scandi Edge

The metal of the knife blade should extend for the full-length of the handle (a full tang) for strength.

SBT Top View

The handle should be a durable, water-resistant material that can be shaped to the user's hand if necessary.

SBT Red Linen Micarta Handle Handfilling complex ovoid shape

The knife should have a strong pommel that will protect the handle if the knife is driven tip first deep into wood.

SBT TIG welded buttplate

The curvature of the cutting edge should extend for the full-length of the blade. This cuts well and is one of the best shapes that quickly sharpens to a razor's edge. The knife blade should have a sharp enough point to penetrate deep into wood with a minimum of effort.

SBT A2 Blade Continuous curve

The knife handle should be about as long as the width of your palm. A handle that is too thick or too thin fatigues the hand and causes blisters. The cross-section of the handle should be an oval instead of round or rectangular. An oval handle provides an adequate indication of the direction of the cutting edge and raises fewer blisters than handles with angular or rounded corners.

SBT Handle Top View

A guard on a bush knife is in the way and detracts from many operations. It prevents the use of a simple, secure deep sheath. Some people prefer a guard for fear of slipping forward onto the knife edge, but unless the knife is used for stabbing, the hand should never slip in this way. In all my years of instructing I do not recall an injury due to the lack of a guard.

SBT in Sheath Deep, heavily waxed and secure sheath, can be set up for right or left hand access. Baldric braid not supplied.

As a test of strength, a good knife should not break when driven four centimeters into a standing tree at right-angles to the grain, and the handle bears your weight as you stand on it. (p109-111).

Additional Images and Author Observations

Rod supplies a sheath made in the traditional manner out of heavy cowhide. It is heavily beeswax/paraffin soaked and molded to the knife. A hanger is attached for your own neck cord, belt hanger, or baldric. I braided a baldric for mine (see related article cited below).

SBT sheath cord hanger detail

I have been using my SBT in both the kitchen and for limited outdoor tasks. It was delivered with an exceptionally sharp, fine Scandi ground edge...zero ground without any secondary bevel. This edge has been durable for light wood carving, kitchen tasks and some firebuilding prep. I have been stropping the edge flats on a slightly flexible loaded leather strop which will eventually just slightly convex the original edge.

Fuzz stick in cherry

The continuous blade curve makes it easy to direct the shavings making fuzz sticks. Any position on the edge bit instantly into this hard dry cherry wood and sliced off shavings quickly....sometimes so quickly that I sliced off all my earlier nest. This is likely the sharpest knife I own and certainly the sharpest ever received from any maker.

Fuzz sticks in cherry wood

The ovoid and contoured micarta handle is exceptionally comfortable in my hands. Rod left the micarta unpolished so it has a bit of tack, and wet, feels even more secure. No photograph can detail the complex shape of this handle. It has a wide flat top and a narrower rounder bottom, that coupled with the contours just works in my hands.

Rod has left the knife spine square and sharp to strike a firesteel. The three handle holes are specified by Mors to allow the knife to be easily tied to a stick for use gathering birchbark (not as a spear).

Authors Opinions

The Skookum Bush Tool represents Rod Garcia's first efforts as a knifemaker. His work is exceptionally well done when compared to long term makers...considering this is his first work as a knifemaker it is truly amazing. His grind lines are precise, handle fit excellent, sheath work very good and his ergonomics of the whole design are without parallel. This knife was also delivered sharp, something I greatly appreciate in a custom knife.

Rod is a maker with a strong future ahead, in my view. Taking the long thought out ideas of Mors Kochanski and producing a knife that carefully and closely follows those ideas was brilliant. His ability to combine Mors thoughts with excellent execution makes for a super bush tool...the Skookum Bush Tool.

SBT Specifications

Skookum Bush Tool Red Linen micarta, A2 steel, Schwert baldric on standard cowhide sheath

Overall length 8 9/16" (217mm)

Blade Length 4 5/16" (109mm)

Handle Length 4 1/4" (106mm)

Knife Weight 6.67 oz (189g)

Knife and Sheath Weight (w/o) braid hanger 9.95 oz (282g)

Blade Steel A2

Blade Thickness 1/8" (3mm)

Blade Width (widest point) 1 1/16" (26.5mm)

Rod is also offering the choice of O-1 at this time and may in the future offer S30V and CPM 3V steels. Green canvas micarta and orange G10 were also handle choices.

In answer to Marc's questions concerning heat treat and hardness, Rod provided this detail:

Heat treat process is done in a computerized Evenheat oven per Crucibles' formula for A2, O1 etc. Since A2 is an air quench steel, all blades are wrapped in stainless HT foil and then plate quenched between two aluminum plates. This brings the A2 up to 63-65 Rc before tempering. I've check this with an Rc hardness tester and the Crucible steel has been very consistent. It hits 64-65 Rc nearly every time. When the blades come down to room temp. from the plate quench they are immediately then tempered at 400-425deg.F (depending on steel thickness) three times for two hours each cycle. This puts final blade hardness ave. at 58.5-60 Rc.

For O1 the process is similar except O1 is an oil quench steel that is quenched in Brownells' Tough Quench oil. Again final hardness is left at about 59-60 Rc. These hardnesses are about optimum for tensile strength and edge

holding and yet not so hard to prevent easy sharpening with basic stones.

I haven't had a chance to skin anything with the knife yet (maybe this coming season) but it should do fine considering the basic concept has been around in hunting societies for a few centuries. **Rod Garcia, personal communication**

Skookum Bush Tool

Addenda...SBT Derivatives

Skookum Buttless and Carver SBT derivatives

Rod recently made these two SBT derivatives for me. First is his shorter and thinner Carver version. This one with Arctic Birch scales, 3/32" thick A2 steel and a 3.5" blade.

Next up, what I call the buttless version. A standard sized SBT but without the steel buttplate. Just over a 4" blade of A2 with the full-sized handle, this one in natural tan micarta.

The excellent contours of his original SBT handle are also found on these. Once again these arrived sharp, zero ground with very comfortable handles and excellent sheaths set up to be carried using a neck cord or loop dangler.

I will be doing a braided loop dangler hanger for both of these and if my images work out will post a tutorial for those simple braids.

SBT Derivatives Buttless and Carver

This is how the three knives compare in weight:

Birch Carver

184.3g total

116g knife alone

Buttless SBT

249.5g total

167g knife alone

The original SBT WITH baldric braid cord

302.7g total

189g knife alone

Resources

Rod now has a **website**.

He can also be reached via email at:

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or by mail at:

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USA

Baldric Braid article by Schwert

Dangler Loop Braid for Carver by Schwert

Skookum as defined by the wikipedia.

Bushcraft: Outdoor Skills & Wilderness Survival , Mors Kochanski, 1988, Lone Pine Publishing. Available from Amazon.com and well worth the price. This text should likely be on everyone's bookshelf. For a very reasonable $11, I consider it to be one of the absolute best outdoor skills manuals.

Post-scriptum :

Version 1.0 5/31/2007

Version 1.5 6/4/2007

Version 1.6 6/5/2007 HT and Rc info added, link to Amazon

Version 1.7 8/23/2007 Rod's website link added, corrected blade width error...thanks Piet.

Version 2.0 11/15/2007 Carver and Buttless SBT's added.