

Practical Outdoor Survival by Len McDougal

SURVIVAL KNIVES:

A strong knife is the survivor's best friend. Not all knives are created equal. Utility and strength are the hallmarks of any survival knife.

It MUST have a full tang; the portion of the blade that extends into the handle for maximum strength.

A knife with full tang has a blade that is one solid piece from the tip to the butt of the handle. The design is standard for all GI-issue knives as well as high-quality civilian models.

A survival knife also has saw-teeth cut into the back, or "spine" of the blade opposite the cutting edge. These are not designed to

saw through branches but to cut shallow, squared grooves into wood and bone.

A shallow groove cut into two sides of a sapling will prevent a tied rope from sliding along its length, and sharp sided notches are vital to the construction of quality snares and deadfall.

Its handle should ALWAYS be contoured to fit its user's hand and should ALWAYS have a grooved, checkered or knurled surface.

A smooth handle is slippery when wet or while the user is wearing gloves, making the knife hard to get a grip on and dangerous.

The knife should also have a wide finger-guard that extends beyond the blade in either direction. This will prevent the hand from sliding over the blade if a slip should occur.

Finger-guards on some newer survival knife have a flat and cross-point screwdriver tip ground into either end.

The butt end of the handle should terminate in a solid, heavy, and firmly attached butt cap. The butt cap is meant to be used as a hammer, and MUST be equal to the task.

One survival knife; the Imperial Schrade M-7S, has a unique buttcap that's squared on 3 sides for hammering and has a claw-type nail puller and ice claw on the forth.

It's important that the blade have a "false" or unsharpened edge running 2 or 3 inches along the spine and down to the tip. The false edge is not usually sharpened because its purpose is to penetrate rather than to cut.

Having a false edge makes the blade terminate in a needle-like

point, very useful for drilling holes in wood, bone or leather.

Before buying a survival knife, give some consideration to the type of ground edge it has. Sharpness at this point is not important, but the shape of the edge itself is.

THERE ARE 5 BASIC EDGE TYPES:

They are saber-ground, flat-ground, hollow-ground, semi-hollow ground and diamond-ground. The ground edge is what determine how strong the blade is and how sharp it can be made.

Until recently the saber ground edge was the standard for survival knives, military blades and bayonets and in general still is. But now the new US Army M (Field knife made by Buck) has a semi-hollow ground edge.

The saber-ground edge is shaped like a V, beginning about half way down the blade and ending in a point at the cutting edge.

It is difficult to sharpen because the entire surface of the ground edge MUST be honed down to make the point formed at the cutting edge sharp.

It also dulls rather quickly regardless of how hard the steel is because the V formed by the edge is wide. (The narrower the V, the sharper the edge.)

The advantage of the sabre-ground edge is that the maker need remove only a minimum amount of material from the blade, leaving fully half of it at full thickness.

The result is a blade that it can with practice & work, be made sharp enough to shave the hair off someone's arm while retaining

enough brute strength to withstand the abuse of being used a prybar, wedge, or climbing tool.

The legendary Marine Corps K-Bar Fighting knife and the USAF Pilot's survival knife have saber-ground edges.

The flat-ground edge is similar tooth V formed by the sabre-ground edge, except that it begins at the blade's spine and ends at the cutting edge giving the entire blade a sharp "V" shape.

A flat-ground blade is necessarily wide in comparison to its thickness but can be honed to razor sharpness with little trouble and retains a functional cutting edge very well.

It is not as strong as the sabre-ground edge because more steel is removed when the edge is formed, but many experienced woodsmen have been willing to make the sacrifice.

The Trailmaster, a large Bowie knife from the Cold Steel company, has a flat-ground edge, as do many folding knives.

The hollow-ground edge is the sharpest of them all. This is the edge found on straight razors and a few fillet knives.

It is formed by grinding a wide groove along the length of the blade on either side, beginning at the spine of the blade and ending at the cutting edge.

Unfortunately, so much metal is removed from the blade to form the edge that it becomes downright weak. Consequently, no companies are making a hollow-ground belt knife and it is just as well.

The semi-hollow ground edge is another matter. This edge has such

a strong following that is can be found on nearly every hunting knife ever made.

It is formed by grinding a groove length-wise along either side of the blade, much the same as the hollow-ground edge.

The difference is that the semi-hollow edge has a much smaller radius, beginning only halfway down the blade and ending at the cutting edge.

This leaves half the blade a full thickness to maximize the strength while narrowing the cutting edge into a sharp V that will take and hold a very keen honed edge.

Because of the advent of superior alloys and heat treating methods, this edge is gaining still more popularity among survivalists & professional woodsmen for whom a broken knife is

not just an inconvenience but a serious problem.

The Gerber BMF Survival knife, US Navy UDT knife and the Buck M9 Field knife have semi-hollow ground edges.

The last type or diamond-ground edge is unique to double-edges knives & daggers. Essentially a saber-ground edge that has been duplicated on what would otherwise be the spine of the blade, it produces a second cutting edge.

However this edge can not be made sharp and is inherently weak because so much metal is removed from the blade. Better to stay away from that type of knife is our advice.

BOWIE-TYPE SURVIVAL KNIFE:

The Rambo type has the characteristics that distinguish the Bowie

from other blades' types is its wide, thick blade, good balance, heavy finger-guard and a long false edge.

Today there are at least a dozen hollow-handle survival knives on the market, proof enough that the design has following among outdoorsmen.

At first glance it appears to be a wonderful idea to use the handle as a storage place for survival items, until one REMEMBERS that that's where the tang should be.

Hollow knives have no tang to speak of because the blade mounts to the handle rather than running through it. The design quite virtually takes the backbone out of the knife, making it prone to breakage during hard use.

I suggest that anyone in the market for a serious survival knife

that carries its own emergency items give some consideration to knives like the Imperial Schrade M-7S or Gerber BMF.

Both of these offer the strength of a full tang and come with sheath pouches containing compass, matches, wire-saw and fishing tackle.

Having said that, we recommend that anyone who still wants a hollow-handle knife purchase the Buckmaster made by Buck Knives.

The so-called "blood grooves" still found on many blades including the legendary K-Bar should be avoided.

Folded knives have little value as general duty survival knives because, like hollow-handle knives, they have no tang.

Still the folding knife has a place in the survivalist's kit. The

large size and brute strength of the general survival knife, so desirable for building shelters, butchering large animals, and a host of other heavy chores, work against its delicate tasks.

Fashioning wooden implements and sensitive snare triggers and filleting fish are best accomplished by smaller, thinner blades. For these and many other light duty chores, we recommend any good 3 blades stockman knife. Perronnaly I love the Swiss Army knife.

Choosing a survival knife with so much variety of brands, sizes and styles can be a confusing experience.

The following list is a list of what we feel are the 5 best survival knives on the market today based on hard experiences and not on specifications or manufacturer's claims.

They are listed in order of preference with their average retail

price even though this may change a lot as the years go by or by

countries.

Imperial Schrade M-7S = \$50.00

USAF Survival Knife = \$30.00

Buck M9 Field Knife = \$100.00

Gerber BMF = \$150.00

USMC Combat knife = \$40.00