

ROCK-STEADY STEEL

Rock Creek Knives

Sporting an 8 1/8-inch clip-point blade of quarter-inch-thick HWS-1K steel, the new Arapaho by Rock Creek Knives features a Sambar stag handle and a substantial through tang that terminates in a short thread at the butt. Overall length: 12 7/8 inches. MSRP: \$169. (CAS Hanwei photo)

CAS Hanwei

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Specialties: Fixed blades and folders for hunting, utility, tactical and survival uses

Blade Steels: Forged HWS-1K, ground HWS-2K and Sandvik 12C27

Handle Materials: Sambar stag, mother-of-pearl, abalone, rosewood and stacked leather; some of the latter stabilized, as well as some woods

Embellishments: Electroformed engraving

Rock Creek Peeks: Tentative plans for new slip joints and blades in damascus and stainless damascus

Designers: Paul Chen, Ron Lake and others

MSRPs: \$56-\$270



Though more famous for his swords, CAS Hanwei founder Paul Chen has extensive experience making custom knives.



A stacked-leather handle and 4.25-inch blade of HWS-1K steel complete the Nyala, which includes a bark-tanned leather, strap-and-snap sheath with stainless steel reinforcements at the wear points. MSRP: \$106. (CAS Hanwei photo)



Designed by its Blade Magazine Cutlery Hall-Of-Fame® member's namesake (inset), the Ron Lake Pearl interframe folder includes Lake's tab-lock on the butt. Closed length: 3 1/8 inches. MSRP: \$270. (CAS Hanwei photo)



Early last year, CAS Hanwei, the U.S. arm of the Hanwei Group, formally introduced Rock Creek Knives. Known to many *BLADE*® readers as a manufacturer of Japanese and European-style swords and armor, Hanwei also has been making knives for some time.

“Our knives were previously a mixed lot at best, and a couple of years ago we decided if we were going to be in the knife business, we needed to make a cohesive knife line,” said Barry Ross, CAS Hanwei president. “We looked at the market, decided on some themes and came up with Rock Creek Knives.”

The name derives from the location of CAS Hanwei’s distribution center in Sale Creek, Tennessee, which is close to Rock Creek, a tributary of the Tennessee River about 30 miles north of Chattanooga. The decision was also influenced by the fact that sword guru Paul Chen, founder of Hanwei and chairman of the Hanwei Group, also has copious experience making custom knives. “Paul has a lot of knifemaking friends”—Blade Magazine Cutlery Hall-Of-Fame® member Ron Lake among them—“and extensive knife-design talents,” Ross noted.

How does the company’s approach to knife design and production compare to its approach to swords? “The primary common factor with the swords is the blade forging,” Ross replied,



(Top) The Choctaw caper features a drop-point blade of HWS-1K, which Hanwei's Barry Ross said has stain resistance similar to D2 tool steel. Overall length: 7 5/8 inches. MSRP: \$208. (CAS Hanwei photo)

(Middle) The Mesa lockback folder comes with a drop-point blade in a choice of HWS-1K and HWS-2K steels, handle slabs of mother-of-pearl inlaid with a swatch of abalone, and bolsters embellished via electroformed engraving. Closed length: 3.75 inches. MSRP: \$270. (CAS Hanwei photo)

(Bottom) With a Rockwell hardness of 58-60 HRC, the spear-point blade of the Apache is forged HWS-1K steel. The handle is Sambar stag. Overall length: 12.25 inches. MSRP: \$169. (CAS Hanwei photo)

“and very few manufacturers are forging anymore. Given that we have the forging capabilities, it gave us a market niche when we decided to expand into a knife line.”

In addition to its forging capacity, the Hanwei manufacturing plant, which is in the port city of Dalian in northeast China, also produces its own steel. All the fixed blades and several of the folders are forged from the company's HWS-1K high-manganese, high-silicon steel, described by Ross as “having about the same stain resistance as D2.” The steel on the stock-removal utility folders is HWS-2K. “It's made by Hanwei and is comparable to 5Cr14MoV, a moly-vanadium stainless popular in the knife industry,” he observed.

The fixed blades are available in a variety of styles designed for hunting, utility, tactical and survival purposes, including a series of bowies. The straight knives are offered with stag or stacked-leather grips.

“Stacked leather is a proven handle material that has worked well for the better part of a century,” he noted. “[The style is] also disappearing and we wanted to keep it alive.” The actual stacking of the leather is done by hand and, combined with the forged blades, provides an attractive package, especially at Hanwei's affordable manufacturer's suggested retail prices (MSRPs).

For example, the Nyala stacked-leather-handle utility hunter with a 4.5-inch blade and stainless guard and pommel carries an MSRP of \$106, which includes a leather sheath with stainless furniture. The Eland, a survival/tactical knife with similar construction and a 6.75-inch blade of forged HWS-1K, has an MSRP of \$129.

The Apache and Arapaho bowies (MSRPs: \$169 each) have stainless butt plates carved to match the natural texture of their Sambar stag handles. A 3 1/8-inch-blade drop-point caper, the Choctaw (MSRP: \$190) and the 6.5-inch-blade Comanche hunter (MSRP: \$208)

sport stainless guards that are *electroformed*—an electrical metal deposition process—with scroll engraving, providing an elegant and rich-looking accent to the Sambar stag grips. Each blade has a Rockwell hardness of 58-60 HRC. Ross said the company is planning to further develop the bowie line and modify some older styles to bring them up to date.

Six Rock Creek lockbacks offer Hanwei's HWS-2K steel in various blade shapes and a hardness of 58 HRC. MSRPs: \$56 each. “The higher-end folders have forged blades, and the utility folders' blades are ground from forged stock,” Ross explained. The stabilized leather handles attached to the stainless frames of the utility folders caught my eye. I had not recalled seeing stabilized leather for grips and asked Ross about it. “We do a lot of work on stabilizing [stag, wood, etc.] and figured out how to stabilize leather,” he explained. “It looks good and handles well.” Similar lockback models (MSRPs: \$76 each) come in rosewood handles.

On the higher end are the polished-

frame Ron Lake Mother-Of-Pearl and Stag folders with matte-finished frames (MSRPs: \$270 each). The blades are Sandvik 12C27 stainless. The Acadia and Mesa (MSRPs: \$270 each) boast forged blades of HWS-1K and pearl/abalone handles highlighted by bolsters decorated with electroformed engraving.

Future plans involve extending the line by offering a selection of slip joints. "We're also working on new styles and have a lot of experience in producing damascus, stemming from the sword-making operation," Ross said. "Additionally, we have developed some stainless damascus we'd like to use in our folders, but at this point our knife production capability is somewhat limited and we're still building that end of the business."

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