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4 BIG BLADES TO GO!

CAMP KNIVES: THE ROMANCE LIVES ON
AND SO DOES THE STYLE



From left: the Citadel Ratanakiri, Condor Tool & Knife Locknessmuk, Ontario Knife Co. Woodsman and the ASH I by Busse Combat Knife Co.

Early on while Europeans were settling the North American continent, the common knife carried by the frontiersman was nothing more than a kitchen-style model. As trappers started moving inland and getting farther from settlements and people, they became more dependent on themselves. This was especially true when it came to self-defense. In the age of black powder, you had only one shot—maybe two—if you carried a pistol. After that, it was largely hand-to-hand.

The answer was the camp knife. It was large and handy for self-defense. Since every ounce counts, the camp knife often was employed to do more work, such as light chopping and such.

Today, the camp knife has more eye-candy appeal than a self-defense application. Nonetheless, the romance lives on and so does the style.

NEO-TRIBAL CLASS

Imported by CAS Iberia, the Citadel Ratanakiri is an excellent example of rural Asian-style knifemaking. It is 15.625 inches long with a 9.75-inch blade. Hammer marks on the flats give the blade the village-made/working-knife look. Forming the edge is a mid-height, slim convex



Chopping at an angle as with the Ratanakiri (above) allows for more penetration since you are “stacking the fibers” and not hitting them at a 90-degree angle.

grind polished to a mirror finish.

Why are so many tribal-style blades convex ground? When finishing a blade, it was common that the polisher would sit before a stone the village had been using for ages to sharpen knives. Over time, the stone would become dished. Since the villagers did not possess the means to true up and flatten the stone, the polishing work would follow the concaved shape. All day long, the worker would grind the knife on the stone while adding water for lubrication.

The Ratanakiri has a handmade-knife look. The extra length on the 5.75-inch handle provides room to slide your hand back, creating a longer radius on your

swing. Contour wise it is gentle and open so you do not jam the back of your hand on impact.

During chopping, the Ratanakiri's performance was excellent. Overall, it was very responsive with good, solid penetration. The more power I exerted the greater the result I got, which is not always the case with some knives. Edge retention was good. I used the Ratanakiri right out of the box and still haven't touched up the edge.

Unlike the standard aboriginal-style knives to which I'm accustomed, this model has full-tang construction. Handle material is a nice set of rosewood scales. Blade steel is high-carbon DNH7, reportedly similar in composition to 1075. Cita-

del uses a differential heat treat to provide a hard edge with a spring-like spine.

The Ratanakiri has a full-grain leather sheath. The closure system is a bone-button-and-cord setup—sheath the knife and wrap the cord around the button. It holds securely enough and for the most part was easy enough to undo, once I got a hold of the cord. It is not as fast as a snap system but you don't have to worry about clearing the snap flaps when sheathing the knife.

WHOLE LOTTA STEEL

Designed by Dan Maragni, the Bushcraft Woodsman is one of the latest installments in Ontario Knife Co.'s bushcraft



It is sometimes easier and safer to use a dynamic cutting style, in which you move the item being cut and not the blade. The tip of the Woodsman (left) is braced in a downed tree, with a stick drawn back on the edge like the bow on a cello. Condor provides an excellent quality sheath with the Locknessmuk (right). It is a right-side carry and the belt loop is mounted with a single pivot point so that if you lash it down it moves with your leg.