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Golok Kelapa

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- Gear reviews and tests - Edged tools - Long blades -



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Description :

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The [Golok](#) is a traditional knife of [Indonesia](#).

Firstly, you can't get one like mine any more. Now the handle shape is different.

The new model:



The handle that I have on mine is replaced with one similar to that found on the Survival Golok, and the false edge is gone. Both are improvements - as much as I love the handle on mine. The problem was that people with larger hands, had an uncomfortable grip when the blade was held upside down to use the false edge. We also didn't like the false edge very much as it prevented use with a baton, and is generally unnecessary. The flat back of the blade of something this heavy is more than sufficient to break off hemlock branches and other stuff that could wreck the edge of a blade.

Here's the handle on mine compared to the golok handle on top:

Golok Kelapa



The survival golok on top and the kelapa are far different in use than the picture would lead one to believe. Notice the much broader blade of the kelapa which brings the centre of mass close to the handle. The kelapa could well be used to open coconuts (its name), but I have a tendency to believe that it was traditionally used to remove coconuts (heads).. Think of the golok as more like a machete and the kelapa as something more related to a hatchet or cleaver in use and you have the idea.

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I like the looks of the wood in the survival golok better - but the kelapa sheath is pretty! And yes those facings and bands really are buffalo horn. At first I thought they had to be plastic for the price - but you can see they're horn if you look closely at a sheath in real life.

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The sheath is tucked under a belt, so the loop is on the front..



Ah but you are thinking that the handle on mine looks rather good.. Trust me, it feels good too! The fact is though, that the handle you are getting is better for the uses that this blade will serve for in North America or Europe. You simply do have to have the ability to properly use the back of the blade for breaking things. So I started here, to let everyone know that all is well in the world of the kelapa - and well - that Wandu listens to suggestions!

The Kelapa in Action:

I got the kelapa to see how a short blade would do against the golok - and because at the time I got them, I wanted some less expensive blades from Valiant to see what Jean-Marc was talking about with his incredible golok feats. The kelapa that I got was the same weight as the survival golok, so I believed I would learn a lot: I did too. The first thing I learned was that I was impressed by how much hand-done workmanship I got for under \$40 US. "Pity they won't last long!" I thought.. That was the second thing I learned - these blades are tough! I tested them out the fastest way I knew, because I was really busy at the time and to be quite honest I didn't believe the claims. Off I went right away to chop some alder - and they worked perfectly. "Yeah," I thought, "but even a machete could hold its edge on that!" I was impressed that the blades chopped so well, but still figured that there was no way that they could be really properly forged steel at that price - with the amount of work that had gone into the handle and sheath. There is one little test though that will quickly show how a knife edge will stand up, and the hemlocks were right next to the logging road....



If you want to see an edge destroyed - or a whole blade for that matter, all you have to do is to chop some hemlock branches where they meet the trunk. The siliceous deposits there are encased in lignin. Very few things, including hacking up cinder blocks will chew up a blade like this. People would think that you are a total greenhorn or crazy for trying to chop those - so I was careful to look for spectators...

And Here's what I had to write on knifeforums - a search on "kelapa" will quickly find the post.

"The blades worked out very well indeed. You didn't need to see a bunch of my swordsmanship on little alders - well just one! When you get these blades, the first notion is that they're too pretty to be real working knives. Damage from the hemlocks is incredibly minor on the edges - so I guess the knives are really forged and everything was well done. You sure wouldn't want to do that with your favorite blade! I could have used the sharp false edge on the survival golok - and later did to see how it worked. The handle on the Kelapa is too curved and the end nob too big to make this comfortable and totally secure for me - but it does work. It appears that the false edge on the sg is a very useful idea.

The balance is incredible - these knives feel light in the hand, and the grip is superb. You sure want to take care with body parts when starting out, the sg went through a 2" alder at 45' like it wasn't there.

All in all, things are working out so well with these cheap blades (well cheap before postage and customs..) that I'm waiting for something to go wrong. They aren't particularly good whittlers because the blade is one big convex grind. I think that I'll be able to profile close to the handle though, to make them so - that's not used for chopping anyway.

We'll see how they work out for chopping on seasoned wood tomorrow. I just did smaller stuff today.

Golok Kelapa

All in all the survival golok is the one to get first. If Chad's tests work out like singularity's and mine (so far) then I think we've come up with one incredible blade to add to the collection.

I'm still waiting to hear which ones to get next - now that I've started on these, a few more are called for."

Some people will be holding their thumb and finger 2" apart right now and getting doubtful. You have to remember that this was before I got into the technique of the drawing cut. Two inches is nothing compared to what came later... With the part about the hemlocks - well it's a totally stupid stunt. Probably only these blades lasted because I'm fairly experienced at chopping and so didn't twist the blade into the cut. Try the stunt with your latest 440A survival tool and you won't have any edge left. Try it with a high tech machete and you'll likely have two shorter blades to come home with. I'd think that between Cliff Stamp and myself, all the destructive tests have been done, that will ever be necessary. The fact of the matter is that blades have appropriate parts: you use the edge for chopping and the back to break off stuff like hemlock stubs.

The real interest of these blades involves just how well they chop - and the rest comes later. Here's a link to some chopping tests done by other people on 2x4s:

[Large Knife Chopping](#)

I showed a picture on the survival golok page of a chop into a hard 2x4 with the survival golok. The shorter kelapa concentrates force better so it's easier to find the sweet spot where the weight of the blade tip balances the grip on the handle. I didn't want to tell how many chops it takes a kelapa to get through a 2x4 because it might encourage people to compete and get silly. The fact is though, that it's just like we all tell, starting with Cliff Stamp: the chopping potential of these blades beats most other blades by a factor of many to one. Really it does.

That leads handily into just where and how I use this blade. Normally if I have bush to chop down a longer blade simply makes more sense - so I use one of the longer blades. This one sees a lot of use clearing trees leaning out over logging roads. It's far easier to use than an axe, and a saw could be a hazard with trees that are likely to split. Here's a picture of what happens when you chop into a leaning alder:



Well they don't chop like that when they season - but they still split though, often leading to horrific injuries.

Better gets Better Yet:

While my survival golok came with a decent edge, the kelapa really didn't. It was quite OK for getting started, but I wanted to see what it would be capable of with more uniform bevels. Then the fun began! It took a serious amount of work on a belt grinder to get the edges into shape. By this time, that was fine with me because I knew I had some great steel in a well designed blade. What I found when starting to grind the edge was that all went as expected - but as I ground deeper I suddenly noticed a change in the steel properties and metal removal slowed down remarkably! It took a fair amount of time to grind those bevels! Anyone who gets a blade that's pretty inconsistent in terms of grind is going to have some job to get things straightened out without power equipment! The best I could suggest would be large sheets of coarse emery cloth wrapped around a large sanding block. It is possible to keep to the convex profile that way - but it'll be tough going! While I don't believe that the steel is as hard as Jean-Marc believes it is, you certainly aren't going to be able to use a file as you would on some factory made golok or machete. This is another animal entirely! Lots of people have belt grinders for wood with 4" wide belts - and you could probably get the use of one of those. You just have to remember that sparks and wood dust lead to explosions! I was embarrassed to have that happen. At least I wasn't so unlucky as a man who was written up in a lee Valley Tools newsletter. His son had been using the belt grinder to grind some aluminum, and then he used it to clean up some rusty steel. Well aluminum plus iron oxide makes thermite which can be ignited by high temperature sparks! Thermite is used to weld railroad lines, so you can imagine the result.

The thing to remember is that you are getting some very good blades for a very low price! Of course the higher priced

blades are finished much better! If you have to have a kelapa that you receive in top shape then ask Wandi to get one ground to top notch specs. If I wanted this then I'd expect to pay more, and so should you. A cheap 1" belt grinder has sure ground a lot of blades for me though, and has been a lot of fun: maybe you should consider one...

Once the bevels were properly set up and the edge was true, then the long task of doing some chopping and then thinning the blade bevels to the point where I could sense that it would begin wedging with my hardest chopping efforts in what I usually chop. No-one can set up a blade that way for you, and is why I suggest a belt grinder. The fact is that the kelapa surprised me all over again when I saw what it was really capable of - sharpened for my uses. Basically I am left with a well balanced blade that will do most camp tasks so well that you'd need a very decent hatchet to compete. For cutting through green and hard seasoned wood, its only peers are the other Valiant blades. This is good, because up to now I didn't like knives in the 9" blade range very much!

Conclusions:

I believe that I'd urge people getting their first blade to stay with the survival golok. Its length gives it terrific advantages in being able to both clear small vegetation and chop hard stuff. The kelapa has its own advantages too, such as being able to fit inside a pack. As a combination of hatchet and large knife, it does very well indeed. I've come up with uses for it that it accomplishes better than anything else I have - such as chopping through small trees overhanging roads. A hatchet or axe is just too difficult and dangerous to use on these. I often carry it when going out just because it will fit into the pack and I don't expect to be doing any clearing. Certainly it's capable of far more chopping potential than the horn golok - so will get to dry wood about as easily as a hatchet. Once you have dry wood it'll make great shavings if you've reprofiled the part of the blade next to the handle.

As much as I love mine - all of the modifications make the new model far more practical. The blade is capable of such good chopping potential that it's easy to think that a baton would never be used. That is important though, to use the blade for precision cuts, if nothing else. The lack of false edge will also make the golok far more durable on breaking dead branches from conifers.

For sure you can polish the blade and etch out the hamon line with ferric chloride or other acid - just as with all the Valiant spring steel blades.

[Jimbo](#)

Post-scriptum :Original article at [OldJimbo's site](#).