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Goloks

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



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Description :

More goloks testing.

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

Thanks to Jimbo and Chad, I have the chance to put two very different, despite the fact that they share the same name, knives to the test. One is the Valiant Survival Golok, Large; the other is the British military issue jungle knife, manufactured by Martindale in England, called the Number 2 in their catalog; a golok by any other name or number designation. From here on we'll refer to them as the SGL and #2 for the sake of me not having to type out the entire name every time.

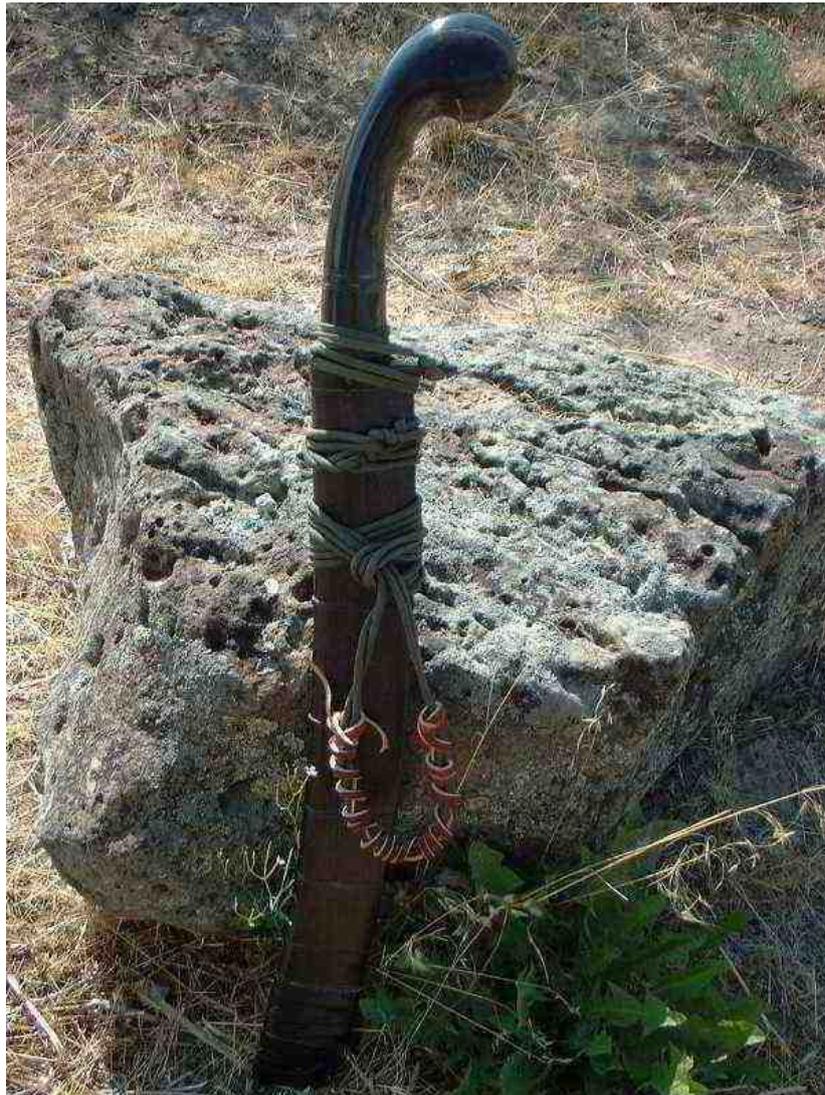
The Golok is an Indonesian bush knife/short sword that is used for just about every task in their native jungles. They chop wood, clear trails, prepare food stuffs and any other use a person might have need of for a large knife in a hostile environment. And due to their age-old design, they do it quite well.



The SGL is 21.5 inches OAL, with a blade length of 15.25. Given the fact that they're each made by hand the specs can vary, even within the same class of blades. On the other hand the #2 is entirely machine made, and will therefore be much more consistent, which is of paramount importance to the militaries of the world. The #2's OAL is 18.25 inches, with the blade being 13 inches long; of that, only 10.5 is actually sharpened. Both blades have a distal taper. That is, they're thicker towards the grip and thin out at the tip. The SGL is 1/4 inch at the base, and just under 1/8 at the tip. The #2 is 5/32 at the base and 3/32 at the tip. A distal taper has a number of benefits, among which are the fact that blade is lighter than if left the same thickness throughout, but there is still sufficient strength left for chopping. The most obvious benefit is lighter weight; a less obvious benefit of a distal taper is that when the tip of a blade is lighter than the base, the tip is moving much faster, due to both length and the thinner stock. A blade with a distal taper is a wicked chopper, as we will see later.

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The SGL has a water buffalo horn handle, with a large round end knob for retention, and well-formed finger grooves that also are a great aid in controlling the extremely sharp blade. The #2 has a hard wood handle that is left plain, with the exception of a "parrot's beak" pommel and a small, integral guard at the front of the handle that is formed from the blade and covered in wood as part of the grip. Both are comfortable in the hand, though the #2 can use a little help in order to improve retention of the blade during hard chopping. More on that later. But, the #2 does have a very nice feature in its grip configuration that any large chopper could benefit from: a large ricasso that allows one to choke up on the blade in order to perform more delicate or intricate work than one might assume such a large blade to be capable of. And the ability to use your main blade for small tasks such as whittling trap parts and cleaning game is a definite plus. Granted we all are likely to be carrying more than just one big chopping blade, but the overall utility of any blade, whether large or small, is a valid concern. And these goloks are very handy to have around.



The sheath a knife comes with is almost as important as the knife itself. After all, if the knife is awkward to carry, or unsafe due to a poorly designed sheath, we likely won't be carrying it when it's most needed. In this respect the SGL takes a commanding lead, as the wood and horn sheath is not only lovely to look at, but extremely functional as well. Retention could be better, but I found a nifty way to solve that minor problem; again, more on that later. The sheath on the #2 is a very good start, but unfortunately wasn't carried through to its logical conclusion. We start with a very heavy grade of canvas with a pocket to hold the (included) file for sharpening. But once this blade is given the edge it deserves, canvas, no matter how heavy, is easily cut through accidentally. To remedy this I added a Concealex liner

to the issue sheath. This will not only preclude the possibility of the knife cutting through the sheath, it also aids retention due to the molded liner keeping the knife in place.

As I said earlier, a knife must be easily and comfortably carried, or it will likely be left lying on a log back in camp, or be a hindrance while on the trail. And when we're talking about blades this long, there are really only 2 viable carry options. I suppose we could count belt carry as a third option, but with a blade over 10 inches long wearing it on the belt will quickly become an onerous chore, with the knife bumping against your leg constantly and snagging on brush as you walk. Also, it's no fun trying to crouch around the campfire when the tip of your sheath keeps hitting the ground.

The first option is to simply lash the sheath to your pack and be done with it. I don't care for that because it means that when you take your pack off, you also no longer have your main blade. And if one were to be forced to jettison their pack for whatever reason, the results would be even more disastrous. The best way I've found to carry blades in this class is to use a form of a "baldric". The baldric is an ancient means of carrying a large knife or sword. It consists of nothing more than a strap that goes over the shoulder, and from which hangs your blade. This allows the knife to hang comfortably at waist height, or at any point above or below that which the user finds most comfortable. Another good point about baldric carry is that it allows a left handed person to easily modify certain right-handed sheaths for carry in the field. Being a lefty, I have always tried to find ways to make right handed gear work for me. Some of these modifications work better than others, of course. But a baldric is almost always a great way to solve a sheath problem.

I used paracord to form a baldric for each of my goloks, and it works great. I used the same basic method on each golok, so I'll just use the SGL's baldric as an example. I took a piece of paracord about 4.5 feet long (or thereabouts, as I didn't really measure, just guesstimated the amount needed) and doubled it back on itself. I then tied the paracord loop to the SGL's sheath by using the horn belt hanger and the throat of the sheath itself as lashing points. It's hard to explain without showing how it's done in person, but you'll see how to do it once you start. Basically all you need to remember is that you want the paracord to be tightly tied to the sheath in such a way that it won't slip off. Using this method it was quite easy to turn a right-handed sheath into one perfectly suited for a southpaw.

Once the paracord was securely attached, I used a length of leather lacing to lash the 2 pieces of paracord loop together at the point where it will contact my shoulder. This serves the dual purpose of keeping the loop together so that it's easy to don the baldric, as well as the leather allowing enough friction to keep the knife from sliding around while wearing it.

When done the baldric allows the knife to hang at my side, with the pommel right at armpit level. This is a very comfortable way to carry such a long blade, as it rides high enough to not get tangled in undergrowth while on the trail, but still allows an easy removal of the knife from its scabbard. It also allows one to change the position of the knife while carrying it. When I don't need the blade I can slide it around until the pommel is riding against my right shoulder blade, and the tip of the sheath is just a few inches below my belt. If I need to use the knife, all I have to do is grasp the baldric and pull the sheath around until the grip is within reach, placing the pommel over my right chest area. This allows an easy extraction of the blade, and since I'm using both hands in order to withdraw and resheathe the knife, it's a very safe carry as well. And with a knife this sharp and this large, safety should be a paramount concern.

Speaking of safety, remember when I said that retention of the blade was the one fault of the SGL's sheath? Well, I found a nifty way to solve that problem. Normally the horn bands encircling the sheath would allow the user to adjust the tension by which the sheath grips the blade. Not so in the case of my SGL. Remember, we're talking handmade everything on these knives, so it's not surprising when some things work better than others do on different knives. I've heard from other users of Valiant goloks that the horn bands work fine to keep the knife in the scabbard, and

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some have used a small piece of leather, glued inside the top of the sheath, to improve friction and thereby aid retention.

But, since mine wasn't working quite as designed, I found another way around this minor glitch. I decided to add a lanyard to my SGL which solves both the problems of blade retention in the sheath as well as aiding control of the knife while chopping. And seeing as how the SGL was lacking a lanyard hole in the rear of the grip, I decided to take a page from Sargey's book and place the lanyard at the front of the grip instead of the normal position at the rear. This is a surprisingly handy place to put a lanyard, as it gives better control of the knife while chopping and choking up for fine work. I can also use the lanyard to wrap around the sheath's throat and under the horn projection at the front of the sheath in order to keep the knife in the scabbard.



As I said before, the ability of a big blade to do small chores can be very important, especially when the big blade might be your only blade, as is the case with lots of villagers too poor to own the plethora of knives we take for granted. But with a blade this long and heavy it's important to be able to choke up on the blade for better control. This serves two purposes. By moving your hand partway off the grip and onto the knife itself you change the balance point of the knife to a more neutral position. Also, it allows you to use your offhand thumb to push on the back of the blade, adding control and power to whittling and other fine tasks. Of course, if the edge is sharpened all the way to the grip, as was the case with my SGL, this method of gripping the blade will lead to a nasty cut on the fingers or palm. So I used my Dremel tool and files to provide me with a ricasso so that I can gain better control of the knife. I got the idea to do this from the #2, which already has a terrific ricasso built in. Also, some of the bigger knives on the market have this feature, and it's one I prefer whenever possible.

I used a file to dull the edge an inch in front of the grip, and then used my Dremel with the grinding wheel attachment to grind in a shallow crescent shaped choil for my forefinger. By keeping my middle, ring and pinky fingers on the grip itself, and placing my forefinger in the choil, I gain a lot of control as the blade is more neutrally balanced. It's still not

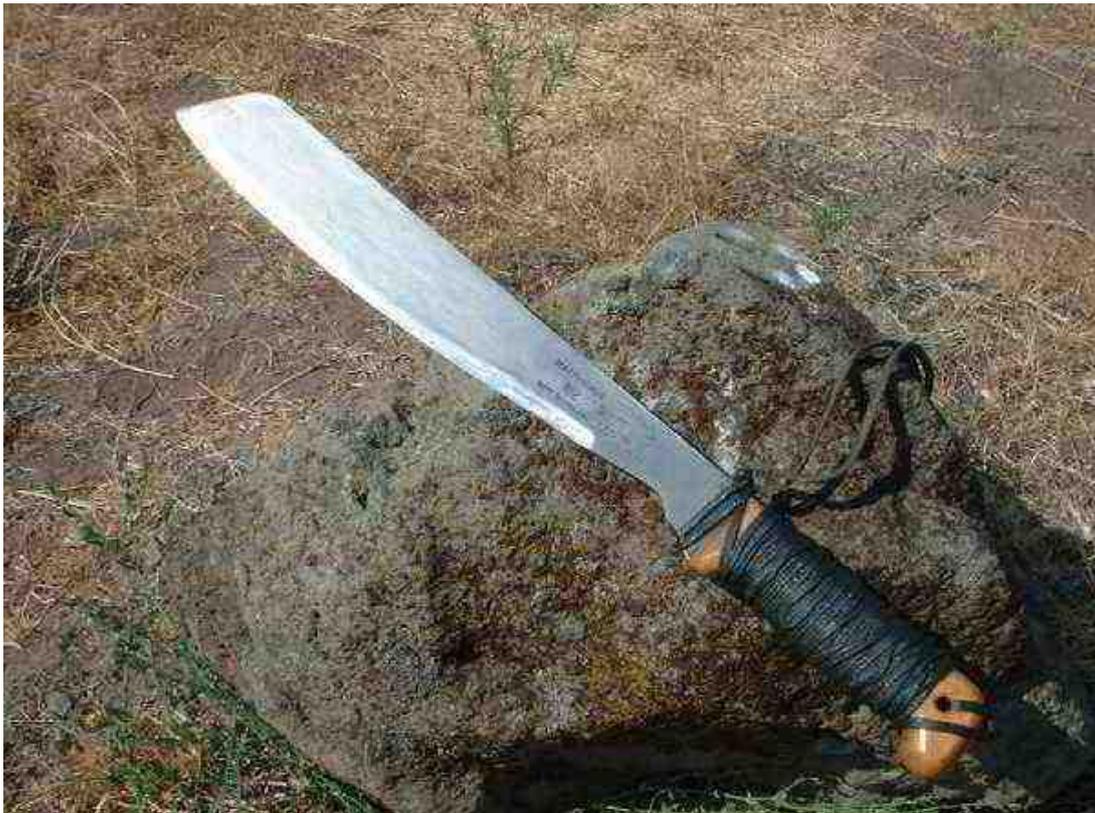
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quite as controllable as the #2 is when choking up, but that's due to the extra length of the blade. If one got one of the shorter Survival Goloks from Valiant this method would work even better; or, one could make the ricasso a bit larger, but this one works just fine. But even with the slightly longer blade of the SGL control is superb and this method allows one to whittle fuzz sticks or trap parts easily, whereas before it was quite a bit more difficult.

The only other thing needing to be done to the SGL to make it a nearly perfect woods blade is a minor modification to the sheath. The sheath tip, to be more precise.

Remember when I said that it's a pain to have your sheath tip bumping the ground? Well, it's not only inconvenient but could also cause damage to the sheath. To remedy this on the SGL I added a Concealex guard to the tip of the wood and horn sheath. While the horn inlay at the very tip of the sheath looks great, it doesn't add much protection to the wood against abrasion from rocks and dirt and the kind of rough treatment a field knife undergoes. But it was a simple matter to form a piece of Concealex over the tip of the sheath, which adds greatly to the sheath's integrity.

That pretty much covers the physical attributes and modification of the SGL, so now let's move onto the #2.





The handle of any knife is of paramount importance, as this is out "interface" with the blade. As such, it's a really good idea to make sure that not only is the handle secure, but also comfortable. To this end the first thing I did to the #2's handle was sand it down smooth with the blade's tang and the rivets holding it on. But even with the integral guard and parrot's beak pommel, the handle was too slick to be really safe during hard chopping. I've never had a knife fly out of my hand while chopping, and I don't want it to do so, especially not with blades in this size class. To provide more friction and a better fitting grip I whittled the wooden grip down into a more comfortable profile. I also made sure to make it slightly smaller than optimum so that I could add paracord to the handle. I took an approximately (again, I didn't really measure, just used what looked like the right amount) 30 inch piece of paracord and gutted it by removing the inner strands. This gave me a nice flat piece of material to work with. There are many methods of wrapping a knife's handle in cord, and I didn't use any of them; instead I just sort of "winged it" and it turned out quite well. Those of you with more experience doing cord wrap would likely end up with a slightly more aesthetically pleasing result, but my wrap does the intended job and that's all that I'm interested in. To keep the cord wrap in place as well as provide protection from the elements, I sprayed the wrapped handle with a spray lacquer that is a semi-gloss, clear finish. By applying thick coats, and reapplying the following 3 coats while the previous coat was still tacky, the lacquer turned into what is basically a plastic coating. This keeps the cord wrap from moving around, and also protects the wood from wet, humid weather and sweat. It also provides a hard finish that crud can't get under; this handle will easily last as long as the blade.

To finish off the handle wrap I made a lanyard similar to that on the SGL, so that both blades have similar handling characteristics. And the more I use a forward lanyard like this, the more sense it makes. They're easy to add, even to knives without lanyard holes, and would appear to be safer than a standard, rear mounted, lanyard. Thanks for the idea, Sargey. Your check's in the mail.

The liner was actually pretty easy to make, and if you've ever made a thermoplastic sheath before, then it's the same exact thing, except that this one is hidden so it doesn't need to be as pretty. I heated the Concealex sheath, after cutting it to the basic shape and size, then folded it in half around the blade. Once it had cooled, I drilled rivet holes

and set the rivets. I've found that if you get the basic shape of the sheath first, and then put the rivets in place, it makes the final shape of the sheath much easier to mold. When the rivets were set, I put the sheath back in the oven and reheated it. I then once more placed the golok blade in the hot plastic and did the final molding. After that all that was necessary was to use my Dremel to grind the edges down, and a final "polish" with some sandpaper so that there were no ragged edges to snag on the outer sheath. I used some rubber cement to bond the liner to the outer sheath, and was done.

The next step really isn't necessary, but since I like to be able to add a small kit to my knives whenever possible I removed the stitches that made the file pocket, opening up that small pocket into one that is a bit larger. It's still quite a flat pocket, but the extra width should make it possible to put an Altoids type kit in place. At the very least it should hold cordage and snare wire, two very important wilderness survival items.

Now that I have the sheath and handle up to snuff, it's time to turn our attention to the edge, which is, after all, the thing that really makes a knife a knife. The factory edge was sufficient, just barely, for cutting light, green, vegetation, but didn't "bite" at all into wood. It was also rather shallow and abrupt, two things that an edge should never be if you want it to cut well. I first used the provided file to raise the edge bevel up to 3/16 inch from the bottom of the blade. In the process this thinned the edge down quite a bit, which is also quite beneficial to good cutting. Next I used progressively finer grades of sandpaper on a dense foam block to slightly convex the edge, while further thinning and polishing it. The last step was a normal sharpening on my bench stones. The resulting edge was a profound improvement over the factory edge, though it still isn't quite as sharp as the SGL Still, it's sharp enough to work wood as well as chop it, and the performance on soft vegetation such as grasses and vines is drastically improved.

Now that both knives are as good as I can get them, and as close to each other in terms of raw ability as is possible to get them, it's time to put them to the test. And since chopping is always a large part of outdoors knife work, I used my Ghurka House Bhojpure khukuri as a benchmark. I've never been able to use hatchets and axes worth a darn, but this khuk has always chopped extremely well. In fact, it's become my favorite large knife, and with good reason. It's extremely well made, tough and its ten inch blade takes a tremendous edge. Needless to say, the goloks were up against some stiff competition. So how well did they do?

The first test was a "gimme" for the goloks: grasses and vines. Since these blades are generally regarded as machetes, and are much lighter and longer than the khukuri, they naturally excelled in this test. Now the khuk can chop grass and vines, but the blade shape and more importantly, weight, make it a tougher job than necessary. This is mainly due to the fact that one expends a lot of energy stopping the blade after the cut has been made; there's a lot of inertia stored in a ten inch long, 5/16 inch thick blade.

So while it was natural for the goloks to pull ahead in grass cutting, I expected the khukuri would pull ahead in chopping hardwood. And while this was the case, it wasn't to nearly the degree I had thought going into the test. Sure, the khuk chopped better than both goloks, and the SGL chopped better than the #2, but the SGL wasn't that far behind the khukuri in overall chopping efficiency. The SGL took only about 10% more chops to get through the same wood as the khukuri, while the #2 took about 25% more chops. I was using four and five inch Juniper logs from my woodpile for this test, and they were all quite dry. Juniper is a good wood to test against as it's a fairly hard, dense wood and also quite common in my area.

The next test was conducted on the hill out in back of my place. This hill is just covered in pine, Juniper and lots of low lying scrub; a perfect testing ground for these choppers. I took all three blades out one afternoon when it wasn't too hot, and learned quite a bit. While the khukuri was the undisputed winner of the dry wood chopping, the goloks pulled ahead at this point where the material being chopped was green branches still on the trees. Due to the thinner edge profiles of the goloks, and the longer blades giving a higher velocity, they just sailed through green branches.

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The khukuri put in a quite respectable showing for itself, but was clearly outclassed. The overall winner in branch cutting, though, was the SGL by quite a large margin.

Despite the hours of work I had put into the #2's edge, the SGL came from the forge with an edge that was much thinner than that of the #2. The SGL is also a full convex edge, and the chopping and slicing ability this type of edge gives is well documented.

The khukuri and the SGL are both constructed in a similar manner, with both being hand forged out of automotive leaf springs and differentially hardened, whereas the #2 is stamped out of a large sheet of steel and tempered all the way through. The superior construction of the khukuri and SGL really shone through on these tests.

So while the #2 didn't benefit from these advantages, it's still a fine blade and did quite well in the tests overall. But when we consider the extra labor I had to put into the edge to get it even close to the same cutting efficiency as the SGL, the less sophisticated heat treat, and the fact that the SGL is actually cheaper and comes with a better sheath, the #2 lags even further behind.

What was most interesting during this series of tests was that while the goloks didn't chop quite as well as the khukuri, they required less energy to do the chopping. So at the end of the day, while it took more chops to get through the same wood, the lighter weight and superior edges of the goloks (especially the SGL) resulted in less fatigue and elbow wear. And if one were to be doing a lot of chopping, as when building a shelter or gathering firewood, the lower fatigue index of the goloks would put them far ahead, despite their slightly lower overall performance. The lower weight also makes them more pleasant to carry in the bush.

So there it is. As much as I have always enjoyed the way my khuk handles and chops, the SGL from Valiant is a better woods tool. The only area where the SGL might lose to the khukuri is in overall durability, and that's something of a moot point as one would have to deliberately set out to destroy an SGL to really damage it. So while the khuk is almost indestructible, in the real world where we have to balance utility against weight, ease of use and comfort, the SGL's slightly less robust design is really not a valid consideration.

The #2 from Martindale is still a fine blade, and the handle design is excellent. In fact, the only way the SGL could be made better would be to incorporate the #2's handle design; more specifically, the ricasso. But even with the more versatile nature of the #2's handle, the blade doesn't stand up to the same level of excellence as exhibited by the SGL. With the modifications I've done the #2 can be made into quite a respectable tool, but it still doesn't stack up to the SGL in overall utility and comfort. And with the SGL actually costing less into the bargain, it's easy to pick a winner here. And even with all the time I've spent using my khukuri and getting to know it, the SGL is what's going to be going into the woods with me from now on.

Post-scriptum :

Please read this [safety warning](#) if you intend to use one.

Original article at [OldJimbo's site](#).