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Large Bolo Camp

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Description :

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The [Bolo](#) is a traditional knife of [Phillipines](#) and [Indonesia](#).

Please notice that the comments apply to the large 1.1kg model - and that a smaller model is available. Pictures to follow. Thanks.

I got one of these for some mixed reasons. I was very anxious to try a recurve blade in a larger size to see what the advantages and problems would be. I'd also recommended that 'Wandi make some Survival Goloks in larger sizes, so I wanted to see what heavier blades were capable of. The larger sizes of goloks became a reality at the time I ordered this blade, but having tried a parang, I wanted to see what this shape would offer.

the blade is found in the Hybrid Blades section of [Valiant Co](#)

The "out of box" experience with this blade was all that I expected and more. Whoever pounded this blade into shape did a wonderfully consistent job. The sheath, fittings and handle are also excellent. Cliff Stamp asked a very good question a while back as to why the bolos were more expensive than the goloks: the simple answer is that they're much harder to forge. Being a little more impertinent, I asked Wandi what the top end might be to these blades. The answer there was that the limit is what people are prepared to pay. Cliff's question was a good one because the answer led me to get one of these blades! My question was a poor one, because right on Wandi's site is an online article to "Empu Djeno of Java - Keris-Smith to the Sultan" . The point of bringing all this up, is that if you look at one of these blades, you'll be wondering how you got it for the price, not whether it was worth it. Most people will start with blades in the \$40 range and figure they got a great deal for their money. Once you go to blades that are in the \$80 range you get blades that take a lot more skill to make, either in terms of blade shape or materials.

This blade is listed under the hybrid blades section. It has a forged bevel - but a well defined bevel nonetheless - more in common with most factory blades than Valiant's usual full convex. The handle too, despite carving on the pommel, is more like western factory blades. Hide the carving and put it in a kydex sheath and it would look like one of the more tactical blades. I'd see a lot of people eying this blade as a big blade along the lines of a Becker Brute or Ontario Bolo, and figuring that getting a handforged blade for such a good price would be great. Reading the specifications, or better yet seeing one will soon show that this blade will dwarf the others. It makes my Fallkniven A1 survival blade look petite - which takes some doing. Anyway it's important to realize that this is one big dedicated chopping blade, that you sure won't be trimming your toenails with.

Then again, if you've always wanted to use the Paul Hogan/Crocodile Dundee line of "That's not a knife, THIS is a knife..." you really need this blade!

Specifications - in a more serious tone...:

The blade is 1lb 13oz alone or 2lb 4oz with sheath and the webbing I've got attached. The blade is 14 1/2" and the total length is about 21" on mine. It's 5/16 stock. So basically the same weight as a Gransfors small forest axe. You get a forged blade with the bevels being forged too, and the edge hardness on mine goes to the tip, rather than the tip being left softer as on the goloks. The blade is hidden tang with the tang being pushed hot into the horn handle. The handle has a brass ferrule to prevent any handle splitting. Whoever puts the handles on must be very skilled, because on all of the blades I have, everything is wonderfully in line, this one being no exception. The sheath is

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wood, well carved and substantial. Obviously there's no belt loop! I looped and tied some nylon webbing to the sheath, then adjusted to fit over my shoulder and sewed on some quick release buckles. The blade carries surprisingly well and comfortably in this fashion. The idea of going with the expedient webbing is that it's easily adjusted - to see what works best. Once I'm satisfied I'll make a leather frog for the sheath, and do things properly.

I do notice that my blade differs from the picture in having more of a concave recurve leading up to the tip - and so is more bolo like than the picture would lead one to believe. It works remarkably well, being a good balance of effectiveness and glancing potential. The more recurve you have, the more of both you have - simple as that.

If a person intends to actually use this blade for work, rather than a little casual chopping, they better be pretty strong. This is one heavy blade!

As I've remarked - overall I am very impressed with the workmanship that went into this blade. Some things like the forged bevels won't be apparent until you hone the blade, but anyone will be able to tell that an incredible amount of work went into this blade. The blade is available in carbon steel, and in pamor layered damascus. I got the carbon because I figured that people would likely risk \$80 to try this blade, but might be hesitant about spending \$120 - especially if they haven't seen and used the damascus. So - I wanted to be trying what most people are likely to get. Damascus does look spectacular in blades with lots of curves, such as this one, so it would certainly be a worthwhile investment, if you are sure that this is the design you want. I haven't been able to distinguish any real difference in using potential between the carbon and damascus blades, but I do find myself taking out the damascus blades to admire on dark winter days when I can't get out. I don't do that with other knives.



The Bolo Camp in Use:

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The first thing to mention is that a person should have strength, experience and caution, before deciding on this blade. Lack of any one of those will lead to trouble in a hurry as a bolo blade, kukri, parang - or any other sort of heavy tip blade is very hard to control and very likely to glance. Any sort of curved edge just increases this potential - just as it increases efficiency. If I go far out on the trails, clearing, then I'll certainly be wearing my kevlar chaps. the curvatures on this blade are more moderate, but efficiency is right up there, and so is glancing, if you aren't careful to have exact technique. It demands a great deal of strength to execute a draw cut with a blade this heavy, but it's certainly possible to happen by chance, with all of the dangers of a blade passing through material without slowing down. As I've come to repeat many times, getting a light golok first is pretty essential in more safely going through the learning process. Since they are a great deal too, it's the only logical way to proceed. Just about all of the Valiant blades are set up for the draw cut, including this one, but other blades aren't so most people will have no concept of its efficiency. A point well worth remembering is that this design is close to the Greek kopis (sword) which was designed for lopping off limbs and heads.

The blade worked well out of box for trimming even small twigs, but its strong point is having enough weight to work well on seasoned wood. The bevels are steeper on this blade, and so some efficiency is lost on softer woods. It will cleave through thicker saplings than the large Survival Golok, but it's heavier too, so that things balance out with no particular advantage to the bolo camp. Now that the XL survival golok is out with 1/4" stock, it will probably work with a single cut on saplings that require two or more cuts with the large SG. That will negate some of the advantages of the bolo camp for clearing thicker stuff. Where I was particularly surprised was with the performance of the Bolo Camp on hard seasoned wood. I'd expected the steeper bevels to decrease efficiency, but the blade bit in well and wedged out chips of a remarkable size. The end result looked as if someone had chopped with a larger axe. With such a tip heavy design, you can get in hits using the blade much closer to the tip. This gives a much greater radius of swing and so much greater velocity and impact. if a person has the strength to swing this blade fast, the results are very surprising. Another surprise was with devil's club. I was easily able to chop thick stems of 1 1/2" despite the fact that the outside is hard and the long stems are very springy.

Of particular note is that I spent some time chopping - comparing this blade to the parang which is also tip heavy. I was rather shocked to find that this blade is rather more flexible in use than the parang in terms of what it will cut for the energy expended. The parang is able to slice through larger material than the goloks I have - and when it goes through with a single slice, it's very efficient. This blade will actually outperform the parang for me on certain sizes and types of wood - especially harder tougher wood. I certainly have my work cut out learning about this! It may be just an effect of blade weight, but I'm not so sure.

I put in moderate work on the edge, just to make sure that I had the best edge possible - but following the bevels. The blade remained sharp through a great deal of cutting, and I was delighted with performance in that regard. I found that I was able to chop with most of the blade, rather than there being one small "sweet spot" so the blade was very flexible in use, and hits weren't concentrated on one part of the edge, blunting that part faster.

I've noticed that my technique with the blade must be improving. At first it didn't perform as well as the survival golok in terms of what was cut for the effort, but now I'm getting much more impressed. There's a good possibility that my arm strength is increasing, and also that I'm becoming more comfortable with the blade and hitting harder - using more of its potential. That's the main reason why I'm writing an article so soon after getting the blade. I consider this my log - and I'm sure I'll still be adding to it next year....

I can certainly see the selling point of well executed bevels, but I'm more impressed with the overall convex of the other Valiant blades. Despite the amount of work that went into forging in the bevels, I'm tempted to begin reprofiling them down. I bought the blade as a learning tool - and so it will be.

Conclusions:

This is a highly specialized blade, and so anyone looking for a general survival blade will be better to look at the goloks sold at Valiant. The latter will chop most of what a person needs to chop, and will be better for other functions. The Large Bolo Camp is simply too heavy to be used as a knife. There's nothing new and surprising to Wandu in this - he was pretty clear in warning me of the limitations of the blade. If you decide to get one after reading this, he'll be fast to warn you too! Anyone really desiring a Bolo Camp of course, can choose to get the smaller one which will be far less specialized.

In learning about chopping blades, one will have to get some experience with blades such as this one - if one is obsessive about learning. This might be a hybrid blade - but it comes from a good background, rather than being a sorry dreamed up thing. Bolos are a traditional style that has succeeded for a reason, and a person can only come to understand the reasoning behind the design after getting some experience. I fully intend to get one of the bolos from the Phillipines section of Valiant - but you'll notice that the design is slightly different - being a sweeping curve, rather than a recurve. I'm sure not running short of blade shapes to try!

A great deal more will be added as I get pictures, and in a while get to try the larger goloks. For now, the essence of this blade is that it provides some of the things asked for with the survival goloks. The tip is hard and the blade is well designed for use of the tip (With Care - both for the tip and body..). The blade has steeper bevels to deal with knots and hard wood -and necessarily has the weight, and especially tip weight and curvature to make steeper bevels work. If I had to remove a bunch of standing dead saplings, this blade would come into its own, being able to drop small hard stuff with one chop. It also works well on smaller softer material - better than one would expect - but is really too heavy to be efficient. There's usually a lot of this to be removed on the way to harder stuff, so it's fortunate that it works well, even if it is less efficient. With larger logs - it doesn't just lift chips in hard wood but sends them flying out of the notch - and it has more blade stiffness. It'll split wood very well, and works well with a baton, having no false edge on the back. Just be aware that splitting wood with a large blade is hazardous, unless a baton is used: the wilderness is no place for an accident. The steel is as good as it gets for a chopping blade. Steels like Carbon V which have proven to be a standard for cutting seem to not hold up as well in chopping as forged simple steels like this one. So, and for the last time - this blade is great if you have the strength and skill to use it, and know what situations to use it in: it's not a general purpose blade.

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