Nessmuk and his Tools

Schwert

- Gear reviews and tests - Edged tools - Axes and hatchets -

Description:
A look at three modern edged tools inspired by Nessmuk's book "Woodcraft". This article combines quotes from "Woodcraft" with an overview of the tools used in today's settings. Both Schwert and Elnath present their Nessmuk tool choices.

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Modern camping, backpacking, canoeing, or any other aspect of our wilderness environments has its roots in the recent past. Authors, who influenced, developed and popularized wilderness operations over the past 150 years or so are very interesting to read and study; looking back at some of these pioneers is a very interesting and enlightening experience. Their techniques, tools, and philosophy paved the way to our current state. One such author who has always interested me is George Washington Sears, more popularly known as Nessmuk.

Nessmuk, (1821-1890) could probably be considered a pioneer of the light-weight movement and a pioneer in the recreational use of our national lands. His letters in Forest and Stream magazine and particularly his Woodcraft book originally published in 1884 and reprinted many many times introduced his concepts, techniques, and experiences to a new class of the public. Those that did not have the spare money to spend on guides and resorts; but those that wanted to experience the outdoors on their own in a degree of comfort and style. Woodcraft or in more recent reprints Woodcraft and Camping is an excellent book even today to understand our wilderness beginnings. The techniques are dated of course, and our public lands, for the most part, can no longer be counted upon to provide the degree of resources he depended upon, but this text still illustrates a simpler time; a style integrated with, and dependent upon the woods. This is a style that in many ways instructs a more through understanding of the woods as an ecosystem. Since Nessmuk was dependent upon the plant and animal species to support his light-weight style of woodcraft, he had to understand the availability of these resources to him on each of his tramps through the woods. "Modern" backpacking, camping, or canoeing, generally (always) makes much less use of the forest resources and because of that "lower-impact" it can be in many way also end up being a "lower-understanding" trip.

Nessmuk was a major proponent of light weight camping. His kit was minimal and his canoes were nearly unbelievably light, (10 to 22 pounds). He drew upon the forest resources for shelter, light, heat, and food. His gear list was very straightforward and minimal. This article will look primarily at his sharp tool selections and discuss modern "equivalents" but first let us take a look at Nessmuk's defining statement on his style of going to the woods:

With a large majority of prospective tourists and outers, "camping out" is a leading factor in the summer vacation. And during the long winter months they are prone to collect in little knots and talk much of camps, fishing, hunting, and "roughing it." The last phrase is very popular and always cropping out in talks on matters pertaining to a vacation in the woods. I dislike the phrase. We do not go to the green woods and crystal waters to rough it, we go to smooth it. We get it rough enough at home; in towns and cities; in shops, offices, store, banks---anywhere that we may be placed—with the necessity always present of being on time and up to our work; of providing for the dependent ones; of keeping up; catching up; or getting left. "Alas for the life-long battle, whose bravest slogan is bread." Woodcraft, Chapter III

Anyone who is familiar with Nessmuk's writings will most likely easily recognize his woodcut of his tool choices. These three tools, a custom made double-bitted hand ax, a uniquely shaped, thin sheath-knife, and a two-bladed folding pocket knife are many times referred to as the Nessmuk Trilogy.
From Woodcraft and Camping, 1884

I will quote his complete text from Chapter II of *Woodcraft* concerning these tools. I will also present my modern day choices of his trilogy. Within *Woodcraft*, Nessmuk tells many stories where his hand-ax comes into its own. His camp setup and firecraft examples are numerous in the text and make full use of this little ax. His other sharps do not appear in the text much at all, so we have to imagine how he used them. So now, on to his introduction to cutting tools:

*The hatchet and knives shown in the engraving will be found to fill the bill satisfactorily so far as cutlery may be required. Each is good and useful of its kind, the hatchet especially, being the best model I have ever found for a "double-barreled" pocket-ax.* *Woodcraft, Chapter II*

The question that instantly entered my head when I first saw this illustration...probably sometime in the late 60's, was why the double-bit hand ax and why the oddly curved knife. I let these questions brew for many years until I recently found that modern derivatives of these two tools are readily available from custom makers. So, once these tools were in hand, it was easy to see if they performed in a manner that would have pleased Nessmuk. Now the 2-bladed slipjoint pocket knife was not something I decided to include as part of my modern Nessmuk trio. I have found a pocket knife that I much prefer...an untraditional one from Nessmuk's perspective, but one that I will discuss as part of my modern trilogy.

My "Nessmuk" tools.
My Nessmuk Trio Gene Ingram, Lee Reeves, Dale Chudzinski

First the quintessential hand ax. This ax hand-forged by Lee Reeves, is probably as close to the Nessmuk description as can be had. It has bits forged with differing taper angles, one edge thinner and "one edge thicker for cutting knots and other tough cutting chores" (Lee Reeves). In the traditional blacksmith manner, Lee forges hard carbon steel bits into the mild steel head. Overall this hand ax is 15" long; this version has a fiddleback maple helve and a hand-made quality leather sheath. This is a finely worked ax. The head is smoothly polished and perfectly convexed to very sharp edges. The helve is tightly fitted to the eye. It looks and feels like a precision instrument. As
we shall see in the following quote, this is highly appropriate to what Nessmuk's ax must have been like.

Lee Reeves Double Bit w Nessmuk edges

And just here let me digress for a little chat on the indispensable hatchet; for it is the most difficult piece of camp kit to obtain in perfection of which I have any knowledge. Before I was a dozen years old I came to realize that a light hatchet was a sine qua non in woodcraft, and I also found it a most difficult thing to get. I tried shingling hatchets, lathing hatchets, and the small hatchets found in country hardware stores, but none were satisfactory. I had quite a number made by blacksmiths who professed skill in making edge tools, and these were the worst of all, being like nothing on the earth or under it—murderous-looking, clumsy, and all too heavy, with no balance or proportion. I had hunted twelve years before I caught up with the pocket-ax I was looking for. It was made in Rochester, by a surgical instrument maker named Bushnell. It cost me time and money to get it. I worked one rainy Saturday fashioning the pattern in wood. Spoiled a day going to Rochester, waited a day for the blade, paid $3.00 for it, and lost a day coming home. Boat fare $1.00, and expenses $2.00, besides three days lost time, with another rainy Sunday for making the leather sheath and hickory handle.

My witty friends, always willing to help me out figuring the cost of my hunting and fishing gear, made the following business-like estimate, which they placed where I would be certain to see it first thing in the morning. Premising that of the five who assisted in that little joke, all stronger, bigger fellows than myself, four have gone "where they never see the sun," I will copy the statement as it stands today, on paper yellow with age. For I have kept it over forty years.

The getting up one limber-go-shiftless pocket axe:

Cost of blade.................................................................$3.00

Fare on boat.................................................................$1.00

Expenses for 3 days......................................................$3.00
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Three days lost time at $1.25 per day......................$3.75

Two days making model, handle and sheath, say......$2.00

Total............................................................................$12.75

Per contra, by actual value of axe.........................$2.00

Balance..........................................................$10.75

Then they raised a horse laugh, and the cost of that hatchet became a standing joke and a slur on my "business ability". What aggravated me most was, that the rascals were not so far out in their calculation. And was I so far wrong? That hatchet was my favorite for nearly thirty years. It has been "upset" twice by skilled workmen; and, if my friend "Bero" has not lost it, is still in service.

Would I have gone without it any year for one or two dollars? But I prefer the double blade. I want one thick, stunt edge for knots, deers' bones, etc., and a fine, keen edge for cutting clear timber. Woodcraft, Chapter II

Now for the sheath knife. This knife is hand forged by Dale Chudzinski, and is a slightly more modern rendition than Nessmuk's illustration, with a full, flat tang rather than the Nessmuk stick tang knife. Dale does his work in a very traditional manner, in a charcoal forge. His work is rustic and in many ways, time appropriate to Nessmuk's knife. This knife is thin, follows the Nessmuk edge curves, and is probably close in size. This one has curly birch burl scales and a custom hand-made leather sheath by Mike Bartol. This pattern can also be had from Dale in the traditional antler handled stick tang version and in several other blade lengths, again all forged in his traditional style.

Dale Chudzinski Nessmuk, Mike Bartol Sheath

A word as to knife, or knives. These are of prime necessity, and should be of the best, both as to shape and temper. The "bowies" and "hunting knives" usually kept on sale, are thick, clumsy affairs, with a sort of ridge along the middle of the blade, murderous-looking, but of little use; rather fitted to adorn a dime novel or the belt of "Billy the Kid," than the outfit of the hunter. The one shown in the cut is thin in the blade, and handy for skinning, cutting meat, or eating with.
And last the pocket knife. Here I have taken a radical departure from the Nessmuk trilogy and opted for a fixed-blade pocket knife rather than a two-bladed slipjoint. This departure is certain to surprise the Nessmuk traditionalists, but I have come to like this small knife far more than a slipjoint. I find it easier to use, safer, quicker to get to, far better made, and overall just handier than any slipjoint I own. So I present my version of the final part of my Nessmuk trio; a Gene Ingram pocket wharncliffe. It has a two inch blade, a well-shaped contoured Steller's SeaCow bone handle and a heavy leather pocket sheath.

Gene Ingram Pocket Wharncliffe

While Nessmuk's quote is not exactly fitting to my last piece, it completes his direct advice on his tool choices. A double-bladed pocket knife is indeed an excellent companion, but I believe my single-edged fixed pocket works better for me.

*The strong double-bladed pocket knife is the best model I have yet found, and, in connection with the sheath knife, is all sufficient for camp use. It is not necessary to take table cutlery into the woods.* Woodcraft, Chapter II

So how does it all work? Nessmuk chose these tools for his time, his skills, and his techniques. Are they even remotely useful in our time? A short answer, of course, is yes, but let's explore these tools a bit more. Let's take one (of the many) of Nessmuk's passages where his pocket ax plays a very significant role. Here he prepares a camp after running a bit late returning to his main camp. Again, we will all see a very high-impact, overnight bivouac, and while this sort of camp, in our day, is not utilized routinely, this scenario could be utilized by a benighted and minimally equipped lost hiker or hunter.
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Ingram and Chudzinski knives

The simplest and most primitive of all camps is the "Indian camp". It is easily and quickly made, is warm and comfortable, and stands a pretty heavy rain when properly put up. This is how it is made: Let us say you are out and have slightly missed your way. The coming gloom warns you that night is shutting down. You are no tenderfoot. You know that a place of rest is essential to health and comfort through the long, cold November night. You dive down the first little hollow until you strike a rill of water, for water is a prime necessity. As you draw your hatchet you take in the whole situation at a glance. The little stream is gurgling downward in a half chocked frozen way. There is a huge sodden hemlock lying across it. One clip of the hatchet shows it will peel. There is plenty of smaller timber standing around; long, slim poles, with a tuft of foliage on top. Five minutes suffice to drop one of these, cut a twelve-foot pole from it, sharpen the pole at each end, jam one end into the ground and the other into the rough back of a scraggy hemlock, and there is your ridge pole. Now go---with your hatchet---for the bushiest and most promising young hemlocks within reach. Drop them and draw them to camp rapidly. Next, you need a fire. There are fifty hard, resinous limbs sticking up from the prone hemlock; lop off a few of these, and split the largest into match timber; reduce the splinters to shavings, scrape the wet leaves from your prospective fireplace, and strike a match on the balloon part of your trousers. If you are a woodsman you will strike but one. Feed the fire slowly at first; it will gain fast. When you have a blaze ten feet high, look at your watch. It is 6 PM. You don't need to turn in before 10 o'clock, and you have four hours to kill before bed-time. Now, tackle the old hemlock; take off every dry limb, and then peel the bark and bring it to camp. You will find this takes an hour or more.

Next, strip every limb from your young hemlocks, and shingle them onto your ridge pole. This will make a sort of bear den, very well calculated to give you a comfortable night's rest. The bright fire will soon dry the ground that is to be your bed, and you will have plenty of time to drop another small hemlock and make a bed of browse a foot thick. You do it. Then you make your pillow. Now, this pillow is essential to comfort and very simple. It is a half yard of muslin, sewn up as a bag, and filled with moss or hemlock browse. You can empty it and put it in your pocket, where it takes up about as much room as a handkerchief. You have other little muslin bags—-an' you be wise. One holds a couple of ounces of good tea; another, sugar; another is kept to put your loose duffel in: money, matchsafe, pocket knife. You have a pat of butter and a bit of pork, with a liberal slice of brown bread; and before turning in you make a cup of tea, broil a slice of pork, and indulge in a lunch.

Ten o'clock comes. The time has not passed tediously. You are warm, dry and well-fed. Your old friends, the owls, come near the fire-light and salute you with their strange wild notes; a distant fox sets up for himself with his odd, barking cry and you turn in. Not ready to sleep just yet. Woodcraft, Chapter III
As you can see from his description the pocket ax is his most useful tool. His other cutting tools were probably only used to slice the bread and pork, and cut up his Navy plug for his pipe. I recently used my Lee Reeves double-bit to trim a 14 foot Christmas tree, a Grand Fir. The boughs were composted and the trunk is drying for a walking stick. While this is not of the same magnitude as his dropping several young hemlocks and trimming them for the shelter construction, it is essentially the same procedure. The ax of course performed perfectly in this role. The branches on this Fir were from a quarter inch to a half inch thick at the trunk and both edges of the ax were used to trim them off flush to the trunk. I preferred using the finer edge for this work. I can easily see this Reeves ax deployed in this aspect of Nessmuk's camp setup.
Firemaking is the other integral part of Nessmuk's camp construction. Careful reading of his book indicates he used matches for all his fire building. He prepared his wood and tinder with the ax and presumably his knives as needed. He used tamarack bark frequently and knew his available woods to prepare a fire appropriate to his needs; cooking, light, or heat. He frequently constructed backlog fires to reflect heat into his brush shelters or his shanty or lean-to tents. I frequently build my fires using a Swedish firesteel or actual flint and steel with matches as my third option. I have chosen to use these tools using a traditional flint and steel along with a western red cedar bark tinder nest.

First I split out some small wood using the ax, and prepared a couple of fuzz sticks using the thin edge of the ax or the Nessmuk knife. Then, I stripped some bark (off my chopping block actually) and pulled and sliced it into strips with the knife. Cedar bark is very easily stripped from a standing tree or stump and can also generally be found laying on the forest duff. It is usually wet on the outside and material from the forest floor can be saturated with water so finding mostly dry bark is required technique. Usually I shred and twist this bark with my fingers, and then pound with my ax poll to separate the fibers, but in this case I used a wood billet for the pounding, chopped it up some with the knife and hand rubbed it to a finer nest. The lack of an ax poll for this part of the process is one thing I miss.
Tinder, Cedar Bark Prep

Then I briskly rub the cedar fibers between my hands to frizz them up. This can also dry the bark if it is not too wet. Note that if I was actually making a complete fire with these steps I would rub up about twice as much bark for the tinder nest.

Rubbing up the Cedar bark

My next step is to prepare my flint and char cloth. I place the char around the flint edge and then strike the steel through the cloth.
Char cloth, flint, steel—strike

After catching a spark in the char, I blow on it to spread it and get an ember. I fold the char and then place it into my cedar tinder nest. Generally I lift this nest up above my head and blow the ember into flame, but to take the photos I blew this one up on the round of wood.

Spark caught in char
Ember and tinder bundle

Once I establish flame the nest can be placed in the prepared fire bed and fed with small fuzz sticks and splits.

Blown into flame

Passages where Nessmuk's pocket ax plays a starring role can be found throughout Woodcraft for camp shelter construction, fire-making, cooking device construction, and bed construction. This Nessmuk passage is typical of him using the pocket ax to collect firewood:

*For "night-wood", we cut a dozen birch and ash poles from four to six inches across, trimmed them to the tips, and dragged them to camp.* Woodcraft, Chapter IV
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Cutting trees from 4-6 inches in diameter would certainly not be impossible for this small hand ax, but if my camping style depended upon this much wood daily, I think I would have carried a larger ax. Nessmuk makes a very good point though about having this ax with him and relates a good story where the camping party depended upon a cache containing an ax along with the whisky which was never found. His pocket ax carries the week and saves the trip.

Nessmuk food preparation is covered well in *Woodcraft*. He discusses and gives recipes and advice on a number of foods including fish, squirrels, frogs, quail, duck, venison, potatoes, bread, and beans. I imagine his sheath knife played a predominant role in the large game dressing process and in most food preparation, cooking and eating. My Dale Chudzinski Nessmuk knife was forged in thin steel and has excellent ergonomics for use as a kitchen tool. It slices vegetables very well as there is essentially no resistance to the cut, it peels decently and slices both raw and cooked meats like a kitchen butcher knife. In these example images I had made garlic/cheese toast, a roast chicken, and then made chicken soup with the carcass and leftover meat pieces. In all aspects this knife handled very well and I can see why this knife configuration was recommended by Nessmuk.

First I prep some garlic. The wide blade makes smashing the cloves easy to both remove the skin and to prepare for chopping.

"Nessmuk" Garlic

Then chopped to be added to some soft butter, the blade shape rocks well on the cutting board.
"Nessmuk" chopped garlic

And finally the sliced bread, spread with garlic butter and sprinkled with Romano, ready for the broiler. The wide, thin blade works well scooping the chopped garlic, slicing crusty bread, and spreading butter. The oval handle is comfortable and sure in the hand in many positions.

"Nessmuk" Garlic Cheese Bread

The chicken was on the grill and I planned on making chicken stock with the carcass and then chicken soup with potatoes and onions with the leftover bits. So I sliced onions and cubed some Yukon Gold potatoes. Sweated the onions in olive oil, added pepper and salt, the potatoes and some water and gently boiled this for a while in preparation.
"Nessmuk" potatoes and onions

The chicken was actually brined overnight then roasted on a grill standing on a can half filled with beer and some ginger. It was covered with a spice rub prior to grilling. Here is a bit of Nessmuk's bird cookery:

"Nessmuk" roast chicken Now I know a beer can chicken is really pushing the envelop for "Nessmuk" cooking as is a gas grill, but it is fine eating.

Woodcock are to be plucked, but not drawn. Suspend the bird in a bright, clear heat, hang a ribbon of fat pork between the legs, and roast until well done: do not parboil them.

Ruffled grouse are excellent roasted in the same manner, but should first be parboiled. Mallards, teal, butterballs, all
edible ducks, are to be treated the same as grouse. If you are ever lucky enough to feast on a canvas-back roasted as above, you will be apt to borrow a leaf from Oliver Twist.

This grill roasted, beer can chicken has me apt to borrow a leaf from Oliver Twist (even though I am not absolutely sure what that may mean..."more please"?).

This one is ready for carving and serving along with the garlic toast and a salad. While not exactly following the Nessmuk recipe it is defiantly a bird done to a fine turn.

"Nessmuk" Beer Can Chicken Ready to carve and serve

After dinner I trimmed the carcass of meat scraps and cubed them into the potato/onion pot. The carcass was then pressure cooked for 15 minutes in a couple of cups of water. This rich chicken stock was then added to the potato/onion/chicken pot, seasoned and simmered for a while. A bit more meat was pulled from the bones and added to the soup.
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But I was describing a first day's camping out, the party being four young men and one old woodsman, the latter going along in a double character of invited guest and amateur guide. When the boys are through with their late dinner, they hustle the greasy frying-pans and demoralized tinware into a corner of the shanty, and get out their rods for an evening's fishing. They do it hurriedly, almost feverishly, as youngsters are apt to do as the start. The OW has taken no part in the dinner, and has said nothing save in response to direct questions, nor has he done anything to keep up his reputation as a woodsman, except to see that the shelter roof is properly put up and fastened. Having seen to this, he reverts to his favorite pastime, sitting on a log and smoking navy plug. *Woodcraft, Chapter VI*

This is a grand bit from Chapter VI, a lesson trip, and I imagine that the OW's pocket knife played a pretty good role in preparing that navy plug so that he could enjoyably hold that log down. The boy's return having *caught and dressed some three score of small brook trout* which are soon cooked and consumed, again the cookware haphazardly tossed unwashed into the shanty. More lessons the next day on camp techniques and skills and more navy plug reduced to ash.
...act coolly and rationally. So shall your outing be a delight in conception and fulfillment thereof; while the memory of it shall come back to you in pleasant dreams, when legs and shoulders are too stiff and old for knapsack and rifle.

That is me. That is why I sit her tonight---with the north wind and sleet rattling the one window of my little den---writing what I hope younger and stronger men will like to take into the woods with them, and read. Not that I am so very old. The youngsters are still not anxious to buck against the muzzleloader in off-hand shooting. But, in common with a thousand old graybeards, I feel the fire, the fervor, the steel, that once carried me over the trail dawn until dark, is dulled and deadened within me.

We had our day of youth and May; We may have grown a trifle sober; But life may reach a wintry way, And we are only in October.

Wherefore, let us be thankful that there are still thousands of cool, green nooks beside crystal springs, where the weary soul may hide for a time, away from debts, duns and deviltries, and while commune with nature in her undress.

And with kindness to all true woodsmen; and with malice toward none, save the trout-hog, the netter, the cruster and skin-butcher, let us

PREPARE TO TURN IN. Woodcraft, Chapter X

The Nessmuk Library
I have two editions of *Woodcraft*. The first a *Woodcraft, Cruising the Wilderness* also titled *Woodcraft, The Spirit of the Outdoors* on its title page; a 1936 paperback published by the Nessmuk Library, William A Bruette, New York. And a much more common abridged version titled *Woodcraft and Camping* published by Dover Publications, New York.

The Dover edition has a few missing illustrations (actually different but similar illustrations) and a few missing passages, the most noteworthy in Chapter X where the whole Nessmuk cabin discussion has been edited out.

Copies of the 1963 Dover edition (and later reprints) are commonly available at used bookstores and Amazon, at good prices, ($3-7). Older editions frequently appear on eBay and sell for a wide range of prices.

**Another Users Selections**

Elnath, a forum member and friend, has also put together his Nessmuk trio. In this case his sheath knife and ax choices were identical to mine, but he has followed a more traditional route for the pocket knife. The Northwoods Scagel two-bladed slipjoint fills in the third slot in Elnath's trio. The Reeves ax and Chudzinski Nessmuk knife were fitted with Osage Orange helve and scales. Elnath's Nessmuk knife is again a full-tang version of Dale's offerings. Elnath has kindly provided the following images of his tools and his woods.
Elnath's Nessmuk Trio Dale Chudzinski, Lee Reeves, Northwoods Scagel
Elnath's Reeves Nessmuk Ax Osage Orange helve

Elnath's Chudzinski Nessmuk Osage Orange, Full-Tang Nessmuk
Nessmuk and his Tools

Northwood’s Scagel

Elnath’s Trio
Elnath’s Ax, Woods and Pond
Concluding Remarks

Interestingly both of us find the Nessmuk trio an interesting historical discussion but neither of us would necessarily choose these 3 tools exclusively for trips in our respective areas.

I quote Elnath:

*I'm not really a big fan of the trio for tripping...I'd take my Hunter's Axe, a largish drop point fixed blade, and a bucksaw (which I find more efficient if I'm building a fire for long duration heat and not a quick cup of tea), with a SAK in the pocket. I guess that's a foursome, not a trio...so it doesn't count.*

I also find that my choices would likely not include this exceptional double bitted ax when I was going to build larger fires. Around here Western Red Cedar is common and wet woods are highly likely (see Jimbo's article cited at the end), so being able to prepare a large tinder nest of dry cedar bark, and splitting out dry center wood is my common practice for fire building. Like Elnath, having a polled hand ax like my GB Hunter's Ax or my GB Scandinavian Forest Ax along with a folding saw would be my preference. However this light double bit would be a very good choice for smaller lunch fires or Kelly Kettle boilups. The Nessmuk knife or a drop point hunter and Ingram Pocket are likely tools for me and many times a SAK sneaks into my pack or pocket also.

I am quite certain George Washington Sears would have proudly walked his woods and canoed his waters with these exceptional quality Nessmuk trio tools from Lee Reeves, Dale Chudzinski, Gene Ingram and Northwoods. We are very fortunate to live in times where such high quality tools are available for much better prices (relatively) than Nessmuk paid in his time.

Resources

[Lee Reeves site](#)
Lee Reeves has a short biography on his site that can be found [here](#). He lives and works in Shattuck, Oklahoma and has been a Blacksmith and Farrier all his life. His tools show the function and design of a hunter and camper. He knows how to forge a thin strong ax, handle it with a super helve and present it in a strong and well done sheath...the whole package is simply second to none; beautiful to hold and superb in use. His edge profiles are thin, sharp and properly supported.

[Editor Note: Address and site removed. Please read the article comments below the article about Dale Chudzinsky.]

Dale’s blades are all hand forged in a charcoal forge and finished with hand tools. He uses very few power tools in his work. This Nessmuk was done in 15n20 and is 3/32” thick...very thin in comparison to most modern knives but in keeping with the Nessmuk design. Dale’s natural material handles are nicely shaped, finished and comfortable. This curly birch handle is slightly oval and the sinuous hand-filling curve provides a very secure grip. Many of his knives can be had with antler handles, again selected with care for a secure and comfortable grip.

[Gene Ingram site](#)

Gene currently works exclusively with full-tang fixed blades. Nearly all of his designs and patterns can be classified as "modern but classic" hunter/utilities. His work is stock removal in several different steels; all but 4 of my knives from him are in D2. He offers a range of standard droppoints from 1” to 4” blades, several utility patterns, fixed pocket patterns and a host of other useful designs. He makes superb sheaths and takes on special designs at the drop of a hat. I have collaborated on one of his designs during the past year, lacing the leather handle material to one of his larger fixed pocket/neck knives. This pocket wharncliffe was made at my request, ground in 5/32” D2 and handled with Steller’s SeaCow bone scales. The sturdy sheath completed the package.

[Mike Bartol, Circle B Leatherworks](#) (email only)

Mike is a retired Navy man living in the mountains of Colorado. He hand makes leather sheaths primarily from veg-tanned cowhide but has worked in some exotic leathers also. This mountain-man inspired sheath for the Nessmuk was done in cowhide, fully lined and laced with a handcut Emu leather edge. He added the cut decorations to the sheath after being inspired by the knife design. His work is highly functional and represents excellent value.

Other reading

*About Nessmuk:*

This very site hosts the complete online version of [Woodcraft and Camping by Nessmuk](#) and [Woodcraft and Camping](#) (pdf).

This [Nessmuk site](#) has his letters to *Forest and Stream*, information and specifications for his five JH Rushton built canoes, plus a brief biography and photograph of Nessmuk. This site is an excellent compliment to Nessmuk’s books. Highly recommended.

*About other Nessmuk Knives:*

[Chad](#) has an article at OldJimbos. He reviews other Nessmuk knives by Dale Chudzinski, including his traditional antler handled model and a larger version, and covers these knives in a nice array of real world uses.
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SgtMike's art covers a modern rendition of Nessmuk's traditional two-bladed pocket knife. This Muskrat from Queen Cutlery looks to be an excellent component for a true Nessmuk trilogy.

On Hand-axes:

OldJimbo's The Tiny Pocket Hatchet is a superb resource that discusses the small hand ax, single-edged ones, but very useful regardless in modern day use settings. The capabilities of these small axes as outlined by Jimbo in this and other of his articles are the primary reasons that I first purchased one.

Also on this site are several other ax articles which are highly recommended for anyone considering adding a small hand-ax to their outdoor tool list.

Jimbo's Axes and hatchets

Jimbo's Gransfors hatchet

JM's Gränsfors Bruks Small Forest Axe VS Roselli Long Axe

Jimbo's Hatchets

JM's Wetterling long hunting axe VS Gränsfors Bruks small forest axe

FireMaking in the Rain:

Jimbo's excellent Fire making as rain starts article. His woods are wetter than mine and these conditions drive tool choices.

Post-scriptum:

Version 1.0 2/18/2005 draft

Version 1.5 4/4/2005 Elnath images

Version 1.7 4/25/2005 Final images

Version 1.71 5/25/2006 Mike Bartol email change

Version 1.72 17/01/2007 (James) add local pointers to woodcraft and camping.