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Red River knife - Cold Steel

OldJimbo

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



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Description :

A cheap and interesting Cold-Steel knife.

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I'm still going through my adventures of testing a whole bunch of 6" wooden handled Mora knives, trying handle shapes, and pounding the original sample through small trees and splitting dried wood. I still haven't broken that poor handle - or the blade, despite watching it develop temporary but extreme curves while splitting around knots in wood! I wanted something that I could compare against the Moras which is cheap, but offered good steel, and some advantages like a full tang handle. Considering that my cheap Schrades cannot compare in edge holding with the Mora knives, despite costing more, I figured this would be a tall order.

I ended up getting a Cold Steel "Red River Knife" for \$11.00 US from an auction on ebay. The money order and shipping ended up costing more than the knife. I guess that defines a cheap knife. I've used Cold Steel Knives, bought one for a friend, and sharpened them, but this is the first I've actually owned. I awaited its arrival with great anticipation because I had to see what a Cold Steel \$10.00 knife would be like!

When the knife arrived I removed it from its plastic and almost passed out. Unfortunately this was from the solvents degassing from the sheath. I immediately left the sheath on the dashboard of my ten year old truck for a few days to see if I could get that new vehicle sensation. While the truck has too many creaks being a hard used 4x4, that sheath will give a distinctive aroma to any enclosed space - I wonder what solvents are in it? The knife itself I stuck through my belt to bring inside while I carried stuff. This is the first time I've ever been able to do that, most of my knives being more likely to perform surgery. This knife was safely blunt as it arrived in totally new condition.

I realized that the worst was over when I took a diamond hone to the blade. It not only says Carbon V on the blade but it obviously really is, and is seriously tempered. The wooden slabs on the handle were well fitted but sharp on the edges, so I rounded them slightly to hold the knife while I decide how to shape the handle. Now being able to hold the knife comfortably, I was very impressed with it - to the point where I had to sit back and wonder why. I am impressed with what knives can do - not their looks, and I was wondering what was special in this case since I hadn't done any work with it to impress me. It soon came to me that this knife is very similar to the knife shown in Nessmuk's book from the turn of the century. I have spent some time considering his knife as he had some strange but significant ideas.

So let's see what this knife is all about:

The staining on the blade is just sap stuck to it from chopping through a few trees using a baton. It just shows that the blade could use some polishing work. It was easily rubbed off. I left it on to show that the etching doesn't rub off. The only modifications to the knife at this point were to smooth the handle edges and sharpen. There isn't a lot in the bush to really stain a carbon knife - if you want to see staining and erosion slice some tomatoes at home and forget to clean the blade.

[image]

The Sheath:

This is the classic "Mountain Man" sheath. That's good if you like classic stuff. The point here is that the design is for

the sheath to be inside the belt, and held in place by the slot on the side. This works fine for a belt holding a coat closed, but will be really uncomfortable for a belt tight enough to hold your pants up. Just putting the belt through the slot with the sheath dangling outside doesn't work so well. Nessmuk's method was to have his knife sheath attached to his "possibles bag" which hung around his neck. This knife while it looks like his has a full tang and is heavy. On the good side the sheath has an insert and is stiff and safe. The pouch design has a lot going for it. I'm not sure yet whether the sheath is real leather or not. The sheath is constructed using star rivets with no stitching. It is easy to drill out the backs of these rivets to disassemble the sheath and modify it. Brass rivets are available to make re-assembly easy (Lee Valley), or you could find some real copper rivets and peen them. Overall, this is the best sheath for a cheap knife I have seen yet.

[image]

The Blade:

The shape is an old design with that strange hump toward the tip. It'll either look totally ugly and useless, or pretty good - that depends on your use for blades. This is a skinning and utility blade and so is thin. The hump toward the tip is for control while unzipping hide. You use the lump to provide leverage while unzipping the hide in a ripping movement. If you don't hunt animals with thick hides, or have a tool like a Wyoming knife, this will be pretty obsolete. It does give good control for finer cuts with a finger along the back of the blade. The blade itself is smoothly tapered toward the tip - along its whole length: this is great for skinning but makes the knife handle heavy, and is poor for use with a baton. A slightly seasoned water birch baton did last easily through chopping down an 8" alder but got pretty chewed.

The blade might need a lot of sharpening work. I had not only to set bevels, but to remove metal to straighten the edge. I just used a large coarse carborundum stone for an hour or so while I was out having coffee in the bush and admiring the scenery. It then took another couple of hours to work down with finer stones. You might speed up the process by using a large sheet of glass and abrasives. I really can't see any alternatives unless you have access to a belt grinder. Working the blade with small stones or a Dremel tool won't straighten the edge and allow good future sharpening. Your mileage might differ - but you should be prepared for a lot of sharpening. Once the knife is sharp (with a straightened edge and good bevels), I don't think anyone will have problems with its edge holding.

Overall, it's a classic and great blade design. Thinness was a virtue with such a blade, as chopping was always handled by a hatchet or axe - and it still could be. It's certainly not a wood carving blade - but it will work well enough to cut triggers for traps, and handle all of the general wood cutting chores. It could become your most treasured kitchen knife if you like the work that carbon steel entails. I can't imagine finding a kitchen utility knife with this kind of steel at this price.

[image]

The Handle:

The beauty of this will be in the eye of the beholder. If you find yourself looking forward to hauling out the files, sandpaper and Dremel - then it's a handle with great possibilities. If you like a handle ready to go, then you'll probably be very disappointed. On the bright side - with just a sheet of sandpaper you could round off the blockiness, and be ready to go in minutes. Notice that the handle has a slightly oval shape which gives good grip as is, despite the lack of a guard.

[image]

[image]

Overall conclusions:

This is some awesome cheap knife. The blade easily outperforms Schrades and such in edge holding - but I can tell very little difference between it and Mora steel so far. This could well change as I hone back into steel not so affected by the final factory grinding. Since I've used it to chop down a few trees (with a baton) - it's certainly not lacking in durability.

This knife is already given away to my friend's nephew! Good choice Joey! He had to have this knife given the large size of his hands. For anyone with large hands, this is one excellent choice. If the handles are not large enough, then rivet some larger ones on!

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