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A review of

# Thai E-nep and Hmong knives

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



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## **Description :**

A review and test of 3 traditional "Asiatic" blades.

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### Thai e-nep, the original

In my continued search of traditional styles of blades that I have not encountered before, I came recently in touch with the e-nep, a traditional Thai jungle blade. The enep have straight handles, and a blade shape that reminds on the Nepalese kukri [\[1\]](#) or Filipino bolo.



#### Thai e-nep

These superb blades are differentially clay tempered. For the story, the friends from <http://thaiblades.com> wanted a quality e-nep, as the blades on the Thai market are a few dollars worth, but also of poor quality. They researched and got advise from well known US tribal maker Taigoo on how to do the differential clay temper, and gave the advise to a local maker, called Boonhome which lives in the province called Chaiyapoom. A sample was sent to Taigoo which approved.

It comes with a wooden scabbard made of hardwood, with traditional bamboo woven circlings. The wood of the handle is called Chinchang.

The blade, which measures 28 cm (11") tapers nicely and constantly toward the tip, it weights 462 grams, and the total with scabbard is 680. The handle measures 15 cm (6").

The mount is Japanese style, with a short pinned tang and a ferrule.



### **e-nep closer look**

It came sharp, but with an edge quite thick for my taste so I thinned a bit the edge profile, and took the occasion to reveal the temper line in ferric chloride etching. The temper line is superb, very clear, and runs evenly along the edge to stop at 3 cm of the handle. The 3 cm near the handle are not sharpened anyway.

These turn out to be priced around 100\$.

## **Thai e-nep, the low cost version**

I asked the friends to check for a lower cost version that we could probably import and sell more easily here, and here is what came out.



### larger e-nep

This model figures a fully tempered blade. The blade is more massive and the knife weights 564 grams, the total weight being 760 grams. The blade measures 29 cm (11 1/4 " ), and the gorgeous handle made of what seems to be maka wood measures 18 cm (7"). Again, the 3 cm near the handle are not sharpened. The handle is longer.

Even with a full temper, this blade is quite good, and the edge resists well.

## The Hmong knife



### Hmong knife

This knife has an amazing story !

My friend Johann (niglo on our forums) bought this one in a scrap sale for a mere 5 euro. He did some research and found out it is a [Hmong](#) knife, made by the immigrated Hmong community in [French Guiana](#). More research on the style, and we found that there is a maker in [Cacao, French Guiana](#), which made very similar Hmong style blades, he is old now (over 70 years old) and still produces some small blades, but is out of production, his name is Ya Saipa. [2 ]



### Loosing handle

The knife was already old, and it came to me rusted, and a loose handle.

So I took some time to refresh it, cleaned and mounted the handle in epoxy, repaired the edges, as the tip had suffered a lot of sharpening and abuse, and this came out :



### The Hmong knife from cacao

There is a superb differential temper line that runs all the way along the edge. The fittings are copper. it weights 318 grams, 466 grams with the scabbard, the blade is 25 cm (10 ") and the handle is 14 cm (5 1/2 "). This is an absolutely unique piece. The grind is a light convex and comes to a very thin edge.

The mount is japanese style short tang with a ferule, but no pin.

Thanks Johann, for this marvel !

## Comparison and handling

Here are some views of the 3 knives together:



### The 3 blades



### Thicknesses



These are very different knives. The smaller enep and the Hmong knife are lighter with thinner edge profiles, the thinner being the Hmong, When the big enep is heavier.

Taking the enep in hand is a pleasure, I specially like the big handle, which allow a lot of reach, or a very balanced handing, depending where the hand goes. Less pleasant is the fact that the handle being round, it is difficult to know when one handles the blade well with the edge perfectly down, and this proved to be a cause of glances.

Else than that, the few first centimetres of the blade are not sharpened, and I cannot decide if it is good or bad, because It is safer for the fingers, but it also removes the possibility for fine work.

The Hmong knife has a conical ovoid handle which is very nice. the small copper guard blocks the fingers without being obstructive. It is easy when handling the knife to know where the hand is, where the edge is. The handle is quite thin in the front, and this is very handy for precision work.

From what I have seen, this design may change from traditional Hmong knives, which are slightly different, as they have often a straighter back.

Having sharpened and profiled the 3 blades, I can tell they have quite good edges, the harder one being probably on the Hmong knife.

## Testing

I tested the blades in a few different ways, in order to evaluate penetration, power, ease of use and possibilities.

### Depth of cut

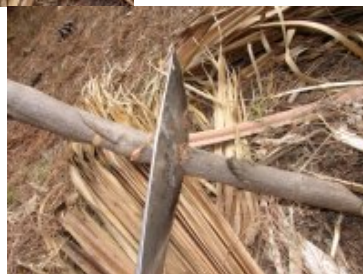


### biting: Hmong knife

In hard seasoned wood, amazingly, the thin hmong profile is very efficient, the two eneps follow close.



**biting: large enep**



**biting: enep**

## Power



## Chopping

The big enep is the more powerful, due to its hatchet class weight and long reach. It can cut quite heavy and big branches. All of these knives are happy if a draw cut is performed to increase the cutting power. The tip of the enep is particularly precise and efficient when cutting vegetation.

## Use as a plane



## enep as a plane

The Hmong knife excels thanks to its sharp thin edge, but the light enep is not that bad either.



**large enep as a plane**



**hmong as a plane**

**Use as knife**



**hmong knife use**

The Hmong knife is quite good at that, thank to a guard, the enep lack the few centimetre near handle being sharpened, but then as I said previously it may be safer for the fingers. One of the Hmong knife advantages is that it can easily be used sawing the material, which increases the cutting power.



**enep knife use**

**Planting a stake**



**making a stake**

The purpose is to sharpen a stake and plant it in the ground using forceful blows of the flat of the blade.



### **enep**

It seems the stake encountered a stone. The heavier enep is the best at it. I am happy It survived, even being a fully tempered blade. The hmong knife is not really heavy enough.



### **large enep**



### **hmong knife**

### **Tip of the blade**



### **drilling holes**

I used the tip of the blades to drill holes. The thin tip of the hmong knife does marvels , the lighter enep too, both were able to pierce. But the heavier enep lacks proper profile. One of the nice features of the Hmong knife for this is the centered tip.

### **Precision work**



## hmong precision work

The thinner profiles are again the winners, so the hmong knife comes first.



## large enep precision work



## enep precision work

## Coppa cutting



## enep and coppa

Cutting hard dried meat generally tells a lot on the edge. The hmong knife does well, the lighter enep does just ok.



## hmong and coppa

## Conclusion



No blade was less sharp after the test, they all shave on the full length of their edges.

One can wonder how these compare with other big blades. The Cacao Hmong knife and light enep are heavy camp knives, they compare with a Valiant golok potong or British army kukri. The heavier enep with the better reach provided by it's handle is rather like a Valiant Survival golok or a bigger tora kukri.

The eneps are nice blades. Like most asian blades, they are designed for the 3 finger and wrist handling. The biggest default of the enep are their straight handles. The blade forward curvature and the straight round handle with no blocking do not really advantage them, as it makes them prone to glances and deflections. To use these on a daily basis, I would engrave the handles in an asymmetric way in order to feel the position of the edge better. This said, they are amazing blades, made of very good steel. The lighter one is better at cutting, because I reprofiled it with a thinner profile, while I left a thicker one on the heavier model. I did not consider testing the original edge, which though sharp was rather thick and certainly not as performing. There is something in the design and balance that I like a lot about them, so I'll spend more time later to compare with a golok.

The Cacao Hmong knife is quite surprising, it cuts very well, provides a good pointy tip that is not fragile, is heavy enough for chopping and splitting light wood. The belly outline is interesting too, providing some curve and some flats, it is sharpened and hardened from tip to guard, and handling it is really nice, giving both power and precision control. This makes it a very good bushcraft knife, but I could do any task of day life, with only that knife, whether it is heavy work or fine work. I am really amazed by it, it one of the best large knives I ever had the luck to put my hands on. I am going to play a lot more with this one

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[1] check our other articles on kukri in this section

[2] [Link to related topic on our French forums.](#)