



## **BASIC KNIFE USE WITH A FIXED BLADE KNIFE**

### **SAFETY**

When using cutting tools of any description always ensure there is a 1<sup>st</sup> aid kit available to hand. However competent and experienced you are, accidents do happen and they're nearly always more difficult to deal with without proper 1<sup>st</sup> aid provisions.

When using a knife we need to consider not only our own safety but that of others and with others in mind we would always work with a safe working distance around us. The safe working distance, sometimes referred to as a 'blood bubble' is the distance of your outstretched arms plus the length of the knife. Any time that someone enters into someone's blood bubble, then the knife work should be stopped until it is safe to be continued. Anytime the knife is not being used it should be put back into its sheath to keep the blade covered.

Looking after ourselves is an equally important aspect of knife work and for that reason it's worth sticking to a few simple safety rules that could save your life! Knives are inherently sharp and even the most experienced people are prone to cutting themselves from time to time. The key here is remembering which parts of the body are most vulnerable to what I would call 'major bleeds' notably the main arteries. These blood vessels are the large ones that allow the heart to pump blood throughout our bodies. The main points of vulnerability are:

**The neck:** There is no reason why someone would feel the need to be using a knife anywhere near the head or neck but it's worth remembering as common sense isn't all that common.

**The inside of the wrists:** I have seen on an odd occasion people turning the knife around and attempting to carve towards their wrists. **DON'T EVER LET THIS HAPPEN.**

**The inner thighs:** The inside of the leg contains the femoral artery. As one of the bodies largest arteries if this is cut it is estimated that it would take 2 and a half to 3 minutes to bleed out. Only about 30 secs before you lose consciousness. **DEFINATELY DON'T LET THIS HAPPEN.**

### **Safe sitting position for whittling.**

There are two main positions that we use when whittling. The first and most commonly used is to sit on a flat stable log with you feet slightly apart and your elbows resting on your knees. This position helps to prevent any accidental injury to the femoral artery. Always keep a close eye on students to ensure their elbows or forearms don't start to creep back towards their hips and leave the knife in a potentially very dangerous position. Occasionally some people find this position uncomfortable and prefer to sit in a similar position but carving the wood to the side of them working with the knife on the outside of the leg. This way if you were to cut yourself on the leg you would be going into muscle rather than any major blood vessels.

## **Using a fixed blade knife for splitting**

Fixed blade knives can be used to split wood effectively so long as you don't try to split wood that has a diameter greater than  $\frac{3}{4}$  the length of the blade. The wood that you are attempting to split should also be as knot free as possible and preferably green. Wood that is knotty and/or seasoned can be very difficult to split and it's quite possible to get a blade stuck in a piece of wood and this can sometimes prove to be tricky/dangerous/impossible to remove. Please note when splitting, the knife should be held in the less dominant hand so the strongest hand can do the bashing.

When splitting a piece of wood you should be standing or kneeling at a log and place the wood that you are splitting end on to the log, as shown in the picture with the knife resting on top of the wood. Keep the knife blade parallel to your body so that you have got plenty of blade to hit and ensure that the handle part of the knife is up close to the wood. This way, once the knife has been sunk into the wood, there should still be excess blade sticking out to allow further bashing until the split is complete. If the knife starts to get stuck in a diagonal position, the handle of the knife can be gently tapped to bring it straight again.

## **How to use the knife for whittling**

The most basic and useful grip to hold a knife in is called the Punch Grip. This is where the fingers are wrapped around the handle and the thumb is wrapped the other way around as if making a fist. This may seem normal to most people but occasionally I get students that keep their thumb wrapped around the same side as the fingers which is a less secure grip.

Then, always keeping the blade pointing away from any part of the body, the knife can be angled to cut into the wood. If the blade is angled too steeply into the wood it is likely to get stuck or jammed in the wood likewise if it is not angled enough it is likely to just slide off without cutting in at all. It's a fine line but the majority of students pick it up pretty quickly.

## **Looking after your knife.**

Bushcraft knives are predominantly for cutting wood, so if the edge comes into contact with other harder materials such as bone, metal or stone, this will dull the blade. There is not enough space available to talk about sharpening knives but you can help prevent damaging or dulling the blade by not putting the blade into the ground where soil and stones may blunt it. Keep the blade clean and don't put away wet, (especially a carbon steel blade which will rust if stored wet).

## **DO'S AND DON'TS**

DO always carve away from you

DO ensure you have a safe working distance around you

DO always put the knife back in it's sheath when not in use

DO sign out knives and sign them back in to ensure there are no lost or stolen knives

DON'T walk around with the knife out of the sheath

DON'T use threatening or abusive language when using a knife