Minimal Wilderness Survival Kit

By Recycler

My Minimum Wilderness Survival Kit

We all train and prepare for as many emergency scenarios as possible, and I'm sure many of us have accumulated a sizable quantity of gear. One of the scenarios that I presently occupy my time with is long term wilderness survival with as little equipment as possible.

Now, some primitive skill enthusiasts may chastise me by saying that I should learn to survive with just the clothes on my back and NO equipment. The only reply I can make to that is that I know my limitations. I've tried learning flint-knapping and can't do it. For me that is a skill someone will have to teach me face to face. My cordage making skills are barely passable- light duty and short (I have problems with the splices that I'm still working on). Making fire with a bow drill is about 50-50. I want something that will get my fire going every time…

Because of the above problems, the kit I developed for myself is what I feel comfortable with in a minimum gear situation;

1. Fire kit and Arrow fixins' + ; This is a soft leather pouch that hangs around my neck and contains (mostly in a soap dish):

a. 1 Magnesium fire starter, 2 books of matches (matches in heat sealed plastic) and a small bic lighter.
b. 3 small pouches (3"x3") of dryer lint for tinder in heat sealed plastic,
c. 12 homemade arrow heads
d. Fletchings (enough for 12 arrows)
e. Bowstring
f. Binding material (I have a small spool of approx. 60' of fishing line)
g. 2 jigsaw blades
h. 1 small diamond sharpening stone
i. Small assortment of fishhooks and sinkers
j. A few Band-Aids and some ibuprofen
k. 2 large sewing needles

2. **Modified KA-Bar-** While I think that ultimately whatever knife you have with you will have to do, I would sure cry a river if I were parted from this knife. I modified it by grinding down the top half of the guard even with the handle. This way I could "choke up" on the blade. Next, I replaced the steel disc pommel with a larger and thicker machined one. It is square cornered and threads onto the tang and is heavy enough that I feel safe in using it as a hammer. I also removed the leather washer handle and cord wrapped (paracord) the handle until I got a grip that was comfortable for me.
3. **BArrow Tool-** This is a luxury item, at least until I can come up with a sheath that will hold this AND my KA-Bar. I made this tool so I don't have to abuse my knife any more than necessary. Whenever making primitive weaponry in the field, it seemed like I spent

more time sharpening the knife than building anything. A picture and instructions for making one of your own is farther down in this article.

4. **More Paracord-** Not much I can add to that. Personally, I can never have too much cordage…

Making Arrowheads, Fletches, and the BArrow tool

Arrowheads

I'm not a fan of expedient arrowheads and I'll avoid them if I can. Also, all of the manufactured 'heads that I've seen are just too bulky (IMO) and that might tempt you to carry only a couple. If you miss your target (hey, it happens) you can expect your arrow to locate, close with, and destroy itself on the nearest hard object. The following arrowheads are easy to make, light, and don't take up a lot of space, so I believe they are worth the effort.

I make mine out of used 7 1/4" and 10" saw blades that are beyond being resharpened. I think size is a matter of personal preference but from the 7 1/4" blades, I make small points for small game, and from the 10" blades I make broadheads for both large game and self-defense use against two-legged predators.

They are cut and shaped using a cut-off wheel and grinder, cleaned up with a file, lightly sanded to get rid of the rough edges and then sharpened. You can heat treat them (I do with the large ones) but the little ones get too brittle and you don't want them to break easily.

Fletches

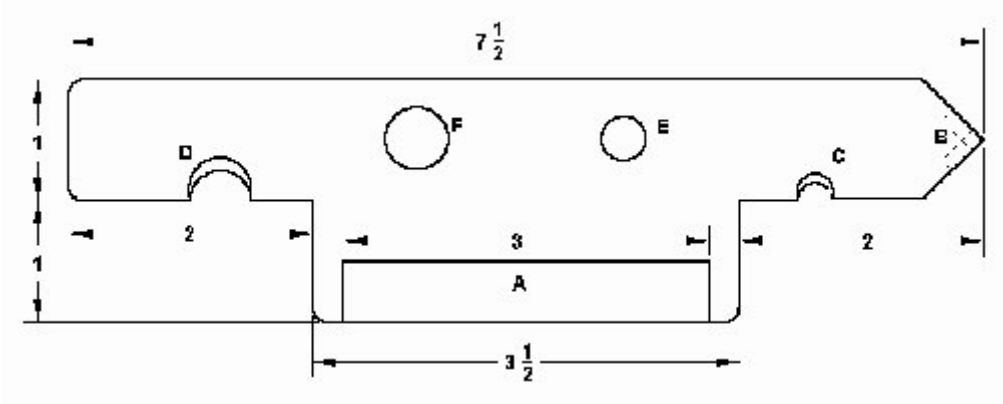
There are three ways to go about this. You can buy them, you can scrounge for feathers when you are in the field, or you can make them. I chose to make my own simply because I like making stuff and you can never be sure if you will be able to locate usable feathers in the field.

I made mine from empty 1-qt oil jugs. I always have a couple boxes of empties sitting around. Just cut the sides out with a knife, clean the oil off, then with scissors or a razor cut them to the shape you want.

Since I don't like slitting shafts I take the fletches and set the edge on a moderately hot piece of steel until it begins to form a thicker "bead" of plastic (like a feather quill). You can then trim it until you are able to bind it to the shaft, much like a feather.

The BArrow Tool

BArrow stands for **B**ow and **Arrow**… It is a multi-purpose device used to aid me in the construction of bows, throwers (atlatls), arrows, atlatl darts, and anything else that requires extensive scraping and shaping.



**Dimensions are in inches*

BArrow Tool Features

A. **Scraper/Drawknife-** This section is used for working and shaping bow staves and atlatls (among other things). The cutting edge is 3" wide and chisel ground (one side only).

   A1) Bevel for Scraper- Mine is flat ground at 20 degrees with a "micro-bevel" on the edge. I chose flat grinding over hollow grinding so that there was more "meat" behind the blade edge. You'll notice that there is a 1/4" safety zone on each side of the blade so that any sharp corners there don't injure you.

B. **Boring Tool-** While you can see only one side of the tool, both sides of the point have a steep bevel (on one side only). The bevel on the other side is on the top half of the point. It can be used to make shallow sockets on things such as atlatl darts and fireboards.
C. **Arrow Shaft Scraper-** I made mine 5/16" in diameter. This is used to help make arrows of a uniform size, which is important for consistent shooting. It has a steep bevel on one side.
D. **Dart Shaft Scraper-** For making uniform dart shafts. I made mine 1/2" and it also has a steep bevel on one side.
E. **Arrow Shaft Straightener-** Slide your arrow shaft through this hole to make sure that it is uniform in size down its entire length, and also use when bending/straightening them. The hole in mine is 3/8".
F. **Dart Shaft Straightener-** Same as above, except it's for atlatl darts and is 9/16" in diameter.

Bear in mind that the measurements and features described here aren't engraved in stone. These are just the sizes that I found work for me, that's all. If you want to make a similar tool for yourself and make changes, go for it! After all, a tool is no good if it doesn't do what **YOU** want (or need) it to do.

Other Options and Uses

The above is the tool at its most basic. I'm sure that you can think of other features that could be incorporated into the design. I am going to make another one and this time I plan to add:

1. A 6 1/2" ruler marked in 1/8" increments along the top edge;
2. A lanyard hole in the left handle; and
3. Clinometers- Warlord wrote about them in another article and about two weeks ago I found a copy of it (copyright 1988). The book is written by **Don Paul** and is titled **Everybody's Knife Bible**. This book describes the use of protractors (called clinometers) that he puts on his knife blades. With these engraved on your knife, the BArrow tool, or both, an amazing number of things can be accomplished. For example, they can tell you how much daylight is left, calculate heights and drops, and even help you to figure out river widths and where to cross! I definitely wish I had this book fifteen years ago…

Materials and Heat Treating

I made this from a piece of 3/16" thick **O-1** tool steel (annealed) although I'm sure that steel from leaf springs or thinner stock can be used as well. All holes (C, D, E, and F) were drilled before cutting/grinding to the shape I wanted. Make sure that the straightener holes are chamfered slightly on both sides before heat treating to prevent stress cracks. Once all the bevels were applied and I was satisfied with the way it looked, I fired up the forge and slowly brought the steel up to temperature.

The way I understand it (for O-1 & other carbon steels at least), by testing the steel with a magnet you can tell when the steel is ready for quenching. Once it reaches a nonmagnetic state, let it set for a minute or two longer (for thick pieces this will ensure that the critical temp is reached through the whole thickness) then quench in used oil. Do it outside and be wary of any fire that may occur during the process.

Leave in the oil until the tool has cooled enough to hold in your hand. The hardness of this piece will be approximately Rc 64-65. That's too hard to withstand any real stress so the piece needs to be tempered to approx. Rc 60-62. This is plenty hard enough to keep an edge and still be sharpenable, however, if you plan to use it as a pry bar then you will have to draw the temper down a little bit more (say Rc 58-60). To temper, first clean off **ALL** of the oil and scale and heat up your oven to 450 (475-500 for lower Rockwell) degrees. If all of the oil isn't off of your tool, you'll likely end up with a smoky mess in the kitchen and one ticked off wife. Once the oven has heated up, put your tool in there and let it set for about an hour and ten minutes. It should come out a nice straw color.

There is a lot more to heat treating steel than this but I'm still learning myself and tried to keep it simple and describe what *I* did. **PLEASE REMEMBER** to exercise good workshop habits when making the BArrow tool. Wear safety glasses or face shield, gloves and hearing protection.

I hope you have as much fun making and using your gear as I did!