Duncan Chandler is a bushcraft teacher, full-time parent, New Forest resident, and part-time toolmaker trading as Dorset Woodland Blades. Wanting to make a native American crooked knife, Duncan turned to the Bushcraft UK forum to glean information about these interesting tools. Robin Wood mentioned: ‘There is a superb site and downloadable book about these knives at mocotaugan#e-book.com.’ It is a great book with some beautiful knives to admire.

There are crooked knives throughout the world, and the true Native American knife is called a Mocotaugan (pronounced ‘mah-kuh-TAW-gan’). The knife is held with the palm of the hand facing upwards and you don’t need a shave horse. It is said that a birch bark canoe can be constructed with no more than an axe and this tool.

Making handles

I have often thought how useful it would be to have just one or two handles into which several blades could be fitted, thus saving room in your pack or tool bag. I decided to take this opportunity of trying out this concept. A nice block of walnut provided the base stock for a short handle which, inspired by the pictures in the Mocotaugan book, I shaped into a symbolic animal head shape which is known as a ‘fetish’. This embellishment takes over from pure function giving the tool some artistic merit and personal ownership.

The crooked knife is most likely to be used with rawhide or wire to stop it moving. It can handle logs up to 65cm diameter and has a 4.9m saw table with guide rails that can be extended in 1.2m steps. It doesn’t have a power feed, but has electric motors ranging from 4-8kw.

Details Find out more from Logosol UK at logosol.co.uk or by calling 01361 840389.

Logosol have launched a smaller version of their LM Pro band saw mobile sawmill. The LumberLite ML26 is available with petrol or electric motor. It can handle logs up to 65cm diameter and has a 4.9m saw table with guide rails that can be extended in 1.2m steps. It doesn’t have a power feed, but has electric motors ranging from 4-8kw.

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Wood-Mizer will be showing a small mill at Ligna in Hanover from 30 May - 3 June, plus a new industrial sawmill that can cut 1.5m diameter logs. The smallest mills are aimed at farmers and estate workers. Wood-Mizer’s mid-range, ‘workhorse’ mill now includes an optional edger, and at Ligna there’ll be an ‘orange’ semi-industrial mill with 42hp diesel engine. It only takes 10-15 minutes to set up on site. There will also be a twin vertical saw (TVS) for processing pallet wood, and Wood-Mizer’s new mill for coping with large logs up to 1.5m diameter. Wood-Mizer will be exhibiting its DoubleHard and SilverTip blades, as well as the new RazorTip ones.

Details Visit woodmizer.co.uk or call 01622 813210.

Rob Exton finds a new tool maker and learns how to put a handle on a blade

Putting a handle on the Sloyd blade (left) and the crooked carving blade one a longer handle for two-handed use (above)

Dorset Woodland Blades

Rob Exton finds a new tool maker and learns how to put a handle on a blade

The adze blade is also recessed into the handle (above), with two hex bolts into threaded inserts. Duncan is experimenting with spoon blades (right)

Putting a handle on the Sloyd blade (left) and the crooked carving blade one a longer handle for two-handed use (above)

Rob made a handle for a crooked blade from Duncan Chandler (top) and a Sloyd blade (above)

Giving the most ergonomic profile from wrist to cutting. Because Duncan had incorporated these angles into the blade manufacture I only had to fit the blade tang in a straight, mid axis, point of the handle. With a rebate cut for the tang to sit in, I drilled two 8mm-diameter holes to take M4 threaded inserts. (modelfixings.co.uk) which are fitted with any grain direction. They are also used to fix the crooked knife in the handle. Its shape means it can cope with any grain direction.
sharp and certainly proved the concept of the tool and the removable blade, however this blade was really designed by Robin to be used for the inside of carved bowls and to be used two-handed with a long handle (30-40cm). With the lower hand holding steady as a pivot point, the upper hand acts as a power source and movement controller.

A length of hawthorn, with a natural curve, lent itself perfectly to the required long handle with very little work needed. A fetch of an owl adorned the top and a hole at mid point allowed for securing a sheath or a neck strap. With a recess cut out, the M4 threaded inserts were glued in place and the blade bolted down. It cuts cleanly and is shaped to cope with any grain direction. It also does a fine job of finishing a flat board, working just as well as a traveller but with a different hand action.

Robin Wood uses these blades on his bowcarving courses and supplies them to students. “Duncan’s engineering background shows in his blades,” he says. “I have forgend my own tools for nearly 20 years and use them every day so I know what I want and what works. Duncan truly understands that a small difference can change a tool from one which is just OK to one which works really sweetly. Best of all, once he has refined the design he can repeat it so you know that each blade comes ready to use with the perfect profile, temper and razor sharp."

Other blades

A wizard with metal, Duncan is less confident as a woodworker, so supplies blades without handles. This means they are cheaper, but you have to put in some effort to get a tool that feels just right.

Spool knives, Skyd knives, adze heads and carving blades are on offer from Duncan either in a choice of shapes or as designed by you if you wish to commission a special. A collection of spool knives is on a pass-around via the bodgers forum (bodgers.org), for comment and refinement of shape and function. The sample I had was handled nicely by Duncan with a quicky angled tube inserted for a neck carry strap. It has an extended curve giving more options for cutting with only one tool. The Skyd Knife is made from a laser cut and hardened blank some 10x20mm plus the tang which is then shaped to any design you want and sharpened. The standard blade is some 45mm long, which I found good to use, especially the rounded short handle and is already bent at a sufficient angle that you can mount it at 80-90° to the shaft. I experimented with a natural ash branch but found the angle to be sharp and would suggest that the natural flare at the butt of a tree would be more appropriate for a handle. To get the best from an adze it needs to be right for your stature and swing and it may take some experimenting to get the angle right.

Verdict

Duncan Chandler is a solid tool maker, with nice quality blades, at a great price. If you enjoy the process of developing your own tools, putting the handles on is as much fun as using them afterwards. His Spoon blades cost £15, Skyd blade or derivatives £15, Mocotaugan or bowl blades £20; Axe £15. All prices include First Class UK mainland postage and there are quantity discounts available.

Details Contact Duncan at dorrinewoodandblades@gmail.com, and for bowcarving courses using these blades visit robin-wood.co.uk.