

THE ONE AND ONLY MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE



EUGENE 5160 CLUB – MARCH 2011



March Meeting will be Thursday the 3rd at 6pm at the Woodcraft store in Sheldon Plaza on Coburg Road, Eugene. Informal Steering Committee meets at McDonald's at the North end of Sheldon Plaza at 5pm.



Ron Lake, a pioneer of hand made folders and knife design, was our guest at the February meeting and shared some of the breadth and depth of his lifetime of making knives.

Ron started making knives in 1965. The attitude at the time was: factories made knives and that was that. Craftsmen who made knives by hand were so scarce that he didn't meet another knifemaker until 1971. Ron had been making fixed blades, but in 1970 he started making folders and never looked back. He holds a number of patents including locking mechanisms and the "interframe" handle design that does such an excellent job of showcasing special handle materials. Here's some examples of Ron's work at one web site: http://www.greatlakescustomknives.com/Makers/Lake_Ron/Ron_Lake.htm

In the early years Ron would set up his table at a gun show or trap shooting event and watch folks spend \$3,000 on a shotgun at the next table – but they'd balk at spending \$25-\$45 on a hand made knife!

In 1970 A.G. Russel got a bunch of knifemakers together to display at a gun show – they had a great time – and over the next year The Knifemakers' Guild was born: <http://www.knifemakersguild.com/>

Ron joined the Guild, started meeting other knife makers and went to the New Orleans Guild show. That's when things started to get moving for him. As he puts it "it only took 6 years to become an overnight sensation." And lots of work and dedication. Ron recalls working for three days and nights without sleep getting ready for a show – driving 300 miles – and still being so psyched up that he couldn't sleep the fourth night either.

But he cautions that if you think you are going to make a lot of money being an knifemaker, keep your day job!

Ron likes to make the knives, but not the sheaths. "There's always some part of knifemaking that you don't like – whether it's the grinding or the finishing or the sheath making." He remains devoted to folders, bringing in gold and platinum and titanium to the process. The precious/exotic metals each have their own challenges – random tips: use lamp oil to lubricate titanium; platinum will burn up carbide reamers; don't try to belt-sand gold past 400 grit – past that do hand sanding only.

It sounded to me like Ron does a lot more machining than grinding (which makes sense for folders). His

hint for getting clean, sharp bevels (after doing the inlay) is to make a solid turntable-mounting for the piece being beveled but I'm afraid I couldn't follow the description past that point. He shared that in the early years other folder makers would forbid people from opening the knives at the show because the metal would rub, causing circular scratches. Ron prevents this sort of contact by being careful that only the spine of the blade and top of the liner actually come into contact, using a scraper to carefully contour the surfaces so that the rest of the blade does not get scratched when opened and closed.

Ron had a number of tips for the folder-makers. When chamfering a pin hole do not just use a larger drill tip. That will be angled at something like 118°. Instead, use a much steeper (18°) angle, giving only a slight bevel to the hole. If you use a regular (118°) bit then when youpeen the pin it will not fill out to the edge of the hole and when you sand it all flat you will be left with a “halo” around the pin.

Ron mentioned cold drawn 1/8” or 3/32” wire for pins. He precision grinds pivot pins and bearings himself – and will make up a large batch. There will be minute variations within the batch, and with a large batch available, you can find one that works best for the folder you are assembling at the moment. Purchased “precision” bearings may not be precise enough for your folders.

Another hint: Do not lube before assembling the bolster and pins or the lube will get trapped in areas where you do not want it.

Ron mentioned using a push-stick/holder for controlling your pieces of metal against the belt grinder. I've tried that myself and did not like it – but I'm going to revisit the idea and make a more specialized jig – I'm getting tired of going through work gloves (and occasionally some skin).

Ron noted how minute errors in the various parts of a folder can magnify each other and create a big error in the finished piece. Ron and Wayne Goddard both emphasized that making folders is a whole other world than making fixed blades. Wayne talked about how he feels like he has to keep three knifemaker heads around: one for fixed blade work, one for folder work, and one for miniatures. If he is changing over

from making a fixed blade to making a folder he has to mentally unscrew his head and set it up on the shelf, and take down the “folders” head and bolt it on – and then it takes a couple of days for the folder mentality to take hold!

In fact, Wayne said that if you are a fixed blade maker and you want to get started on folders, forget making fixed blades for at least a year while you get your “folder head” screwed on straight.

Ron had some anecdotes about how your tools can be your best friend or worst enemy in folder making. It sounds like drill presses aren't as plumb and true as I would have thought. From Ron's stories – if you are having trouble with precise pin hole fittings etc. you'd do well to look into truing up your drill press.

For materials, Ron seems to favor O1, D2, A2 for blades – precious metals and exotic horn, bone, and stone for inlays and pins.

But back to his journey as a knife maker, I believe it was shortly after moving from fixed blades to folders – and the first big knifemakers' show – that Ron quit the day job and became a full-time knifemaker.

For about 2-1/2 years Ron was selling folders to A.G. Russel at 75% of retail. Lots of brass and Cocobolo was involved. Somewhere in there he found out that Russel had upped the retail price without bothering to pass any more of that back to Ron. I guess the knife business can be as cutthroat as any business.

Some other ups and downs along the way: Sending out blades to be professionally heat treated and ½ of them coming back warped on a regular basis; Hiring a business manager who “managed” not to properly manage the business; Articles in a couple of U.S. sporting magazines generated a lot of orders; An article in a French “Passion of Cutlery” magazine landed Ron at shows in Europe – he talked wistfully about going “over the mountains” to stay in an Italian castle during shows. Damn. That's gotta be rough.

He's also been to Japan a couple of times and to China. He talked about *how different* the Japanese handmade knife industry is. Apparently it is a popular hobby there... which makes me wonder if when you ban something (like traditional sword making in Japan

was banned for awhile) it winds up making it all the more popular in the long run. One Tokyo supplier sells to maybe 10,000 knifemakers. And in Japan, dealers run the show – literally and figuratively. I was not so fond of the descriptions of eating live snails and live lobster. Sushi is one thing – still twitching on the plate is another!

The China trip sounded like another world entirely. Ron and a small group went together and visited the factory of Paul Chen... which was a giant old chicken farm converted to knife factory. Scores of folks working without eye or ear protection using primitive machinery cranking out the work in rough conditions.

One side trip the group took was to the Eastern end of the Great Wall. A guide said it had be 15 years since the last Westerners had visited, partly I suppose because there's not much left to see. Locals have gleaned the wall's rock into local buildings leaving only a long mound. And it butts up against North Korea. Ron said that the interpreter made about \$100/month – which was three times what the factory workers made. His description of the group buying the interpreter a parting gift was something else. Oh – and back at the Korean border? What a surreal description Ron gave of the group standing on the Chinese side, looking across at a grassy field. When one group member defied the guide and snapped a couple of photos – N. Korean soldiers began appearing, standing up out of their nests in the grass and taking menacing poses. And here I thought China was N. Korea's “friend.”

So from details of folder-making through the journey of becoming an internationally acclaimed designer and maker to anecdotes from trips abroad – we had a great time and are indebted to Ron for *his* time.

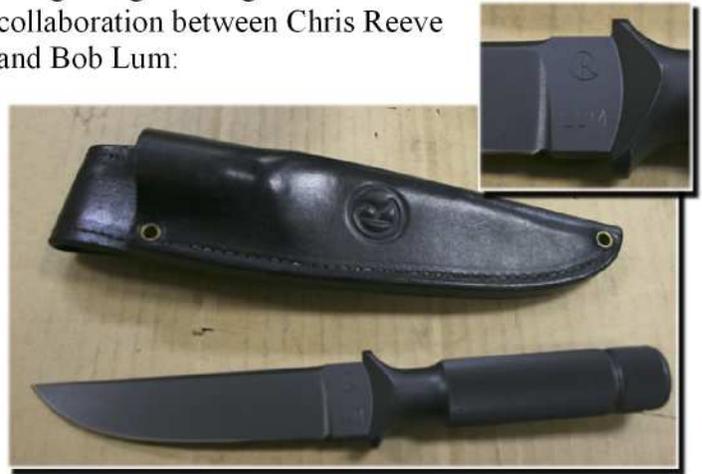
Thanks!!!



Apropos of the upcoming April show, Wayne suggested making a “show survival kit” with touch up and fix-it items such as steel wool, leather, mustard (if you use mustard finishing), spare parts for folders, polishing compound and cloth, files, wax, and some wet & dry sandpaper. All the supplies you need to

revive a knife from anything from greasy fingers to accidental scrapes and damage.

Craig Morgan brought in a survival knife that was a collaboration between Chris Reeve and Bob Lum:



Joel Purkerson brought in one of his latest works – a push dagger that has become his favorite blade – he's just sold on how handy it is for daily use:



MARCH 5160 CLUB MEETING

Bernard Levine, knife connoisseur, will be our guest at the March meeting. Bernard is an encyclopedia of information on knives, makers, and manufacturers. You can look forward to getting a glimpse into the knife world through the eyes of an international authority on appraising and collecting knives!

Wayne Goddard has been working on a write-up of his current experiments with curing wood (see “Wayne's World” below...) and will be sharing those findings at the meeting too.

The April meeting of 5160 would conflict with the annual OKCA pre-show social – so **we will skip the April 5160 Club meeting** – so UN-mark your calendars for April and we'll see you at the OKCA show in April – or at the regular meeting in May. I'll send out the next 5160 newsletter at the end of April so it'll be a reminder for the May meeting.

I'm preaching to the choir (strange phrase for a non-religious guy like me) – but just in case you've been living in a cave for a few decades, the OKCA annual show is not to be missed. It's second only to the Blade show in Atlanta, Georgia as far as number of tables. The range of knives and paraphernalia at the show is amazing. Be there or you are missing out! April 9th & 10th at the Lane County Convention Center (aka the County Fairgrounds):

<http://www.oregonknifeclub.com/okcashow.html>

Also - the **Northwest Blacksmith Association** is holding its 2011 Spring Conference in Mount Vernon, Washington – half way between Seattle and Canada. Featuring Blacksmith Wars!

<http://blacksmith.org/forums/threads/1021-SPRING-2011-MOUNT-VERNON>



We've talked about having a “classifieds” section at the end of the newsletter. I won't do anything fancy – if you send me a note I'll paste it in. I may only repeat it one or two months unless I hear from you that the deal is still on. These posting have no backing from me or anybody else in the 5160 Club other than the person posting the notice. We're hoping we are all honorable around here – but misunderstandings can still occur and it's up to the folks making the deal to check it out first.

Remember the Mighty Mike has access to a steady supply of used LARGE brake drums that can be welded up as bases for post vices, grinders, propane forges or whatever. Let him know: Mike Johnston 503 351-3104.

I got a notice in January from Andy Franco in Idaho that he has a Centaur Forge blower and motor (Baldor .2 HP) w/ variable speed. This is for a coal forge but will also work well on a gas forge. Andy Franco/

Calico Forge Knife Co./ 907 Sunny Lane/ Nampa, ID/ 83651/ (208)442-7110/ www.calicoforge.com



WAYNE'S WORLD

Experiments in Curing Wood

The old time wheelwrights would cut down oak trees when the sap was down in the wintertime. Experience had taught them that the finished products were stronger than wood cut when the sap was up.

The dogwood tree in our front yard was in serious need of work about the middle of February. After the pro did his work I saved a nice assortment of limbs to do some research on curing winter cut wood.

I have three experiments running. The first is to dry some of my winter cut wood in a paper grocery bag. The theory as told to me is that the atmosphere stays moist enough so that the wood will dry without molding or cracking.

The second experiment is a bunch of handle length, limb diameter pieces in a plastic grocery bag with wadded up newspaper in it. The theory here is that the paper will allow the wood to release its moisture slow enough so that it won't check. I got that idea from reading that loggers would wad up newspaper and stuff it in their wet boots to speed up the drying process.

The third experiment is a limb about eighteen inches long and near 2” diameter with newspaper wrapped around both ends.

I'll have a report at the March 3 meeting.

Wayne



So from your scribe & newsletter writer: That's all I wrote this time around and I didn't write no more. See you at the meeting!

Michael Kemp (Mossy Mike)