



EUGENE 5160 CLUB – JULY 2011



The July Meeting will be Thursday the 7th 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.



MARK YOUR CALENDAR

JULY 7TH ~ This Thursday **RAY RICHARD & ERIC BERGLAND** will be sharing their design skills and years of experience in **SHEATH MAKING** with us. It is an special treat to have these guys present to us. Both of these makers create beautiful sheaths to complement their masterful blades. Yah, I know, I'm laying it on kind of thick – but that's what I think of their work. Their sheath styles are Scandinavian in some cases and in other cases they've expressed unique styles of their own. You can find teasers photos on the web. Ray's site is <http://hawknknives.com/>. Some of Eric's work can be seen here:

<http://www.bladegallery.com/shopdisplayproducts.asp?id=405>.

JULY 16ND ~ **GENE MARTIN** will host a demo on making **MOKUME GANE** and other exotic layered metals at his place South of Grants Pass. We'll start at 10a.m. and continue as long as folks are standing ... and let's not stress Gene on this one – it is fantastic that he's sharing his knowledge and expertise – especially while healing up from back surgery. Gene says it's a 3 hour drive from Eugene (unless you drive faster than he does) – look at the end of this newsletter for driving directions. If Portland folks want a stop-over spot, I'm 30 minutes off I-5 SW of Eugene, but from here it's a “straight” shot South back onto I-5 @ Curtain. Give me a call or email if you want to stop over here Friday/Saturday nights (Michael Kemp 541-654-3444 michael@elementalforge.com).

AT SOME POINT we are hoping for another hammer-in at **JIM JORDAN'S** place just North of Eugene – but exact timing has not settled out yet – stay tuned for details.



JUNE 5160 CLUB MEETING

DENNIS ELLINGSEN allowed us what I consider a “bucket list” opportunity: viewing and, after some tutoring and under a watchful eye, handling several styles of sword from a various periods of Japanese bladesmithing.



Photos: Keith Johnson

Dennis prepared an informative evening for us. He started with a discussion of the styles and history of bladesmithing in Japan. From ancient times until 1868 sword making evolved into a high art. They may not have had modern tools for testing the chemistry and micro-structure of the materials they were working with – but through centuries of learning they evolved rituals to precisely guide the smelting, forging, and finishing of some of the finest swords the world has ever known.

Dennis shared that there are three National Treasures in Japan: the sacred mirror, jewel, and sword. [A little searching on the editor's part based on Dennis's prompting lead to this page: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Imperial_Regalia_of_Japan .] These items are part of the ritual to enthrone the Emperor of Japan – an example of how the sword is at the core of Japanese culture.

It is estimated that there were 13 to 20 thousand sword smiths throughout this first period. The first period itself is divided at the year 1467 – before which it was normal for smiths to make their own steel and after which smelting was taken over by specialists in that art.

The Samurai code of conduct – analogous to European Chivalry – was developed in this first period in the 1542-1616 time-frame.

But this chapter of the Japanese sword came to a close in 1868 when the imperial government under Emperor Meiji centralized control of the feudal estates and outlawed swords and the carrying of them – except for the military.

It should be noted that during the second period (1868-1945) there were around 200,000 ceremonial blades cranked out for the military – many in factory settings – and many that do not compare favorably as weapons to those made in the periods before or after. Although Dennis did note that collectors are beginning to show a heightened interest in these gunto (army sword) blades.

This period stretches to the defeat of Japan in 1945. Vast numbers of swords were then taken out of Japan as war booty. It is estimated that there were 1.5 million swords in Japan before WWII – 1/3 of which were Katana & Tachi. After the war maybe only 100,000 remained in Japan. For the next seven years the making of swords was banned.

Before the last of the bladesmiths were lost, sword making was revived in Japan. [For example, the editor's only book on the subject is “The Craft of the Japanese Sword” by Yoshindo Yoshihara and Leon & Hiroko Kapp – Yoshihara was born in 1943, just before the total outlawing of sword making, and was apprenticed into the art by his grandfather as

controls were lifted.] Dennis also recommends “The Samurai Sword Handbook” by John Yumoto.

Dennis related personal and family stories to explain how he and his family became captivated by the mystique of this amazing lineage of blades. There were hand-outs at the meeting too. Mine will go into my knife reference bookshelf.

A worthy tidbit from one handout lists how swords are classified by length (excluding the tang). The basic measure is the shaku which is just under 12”.

A Tachi blade has a pronounced curvature, is carried edge down, and is over 2 shaku.

A Katana has a slight curve (some are almost straight), is carried edge up and held two-handed, and is also over 2 shaku. This is the classic Samurai sword – to my way of thinking.

Dennis explained that the Wakizashi – which is essentially a short version of a Katana – was used as an “indoor” sword due to its more maneuverable length: between 1 and 2 shaku.

The shortest classification is the Tanto – under 1 shaku, and essentially a utility blade.

Another handout contained a photo of two Samurai with their Katana and Wakizashi – and other photos illustrating the parts and names of Japanese sword features.

And there was more – but *moving right along* from “inform” to “delight” – Dennis launched in to instructions for the handling of the Japanese blade. These are all high carbon steel (no chromium to speak of) and any skin contact with the blade can leave oils that cause corrosion. So beyond keeping your fingers off the blade so that they don't get cut – you keep them off to preserve the mirror finish that was painstakingly created by specialists in water stone polishing.

I guess this means that my favorite Kurosawa and Kitano films aren't that accurate when the hero sheathes his bloody Katana after a vigorous slice-n-dice session. What the hay – I still can't pass up a good Zatoichi flick.

Dennis had been working with Jack on the proper method of opening the saya (wooden scabbard) and called him up to show us how:



Photo: Keith Johnson

I believe that was the wood practice sword – but then came my “bucket list” moment. Under Dennis's watchful eye we were allowed to pick up, examine, and carefully open the blades he so generously brought that night.

It was awesome to hold these swords in my hands and admire the pattern of metalwork on the tsuba and kashira – and be allowed to crack open the saya and view the hamons. And I don't think I was the only one in hog heaven.



There was some question-and-answer at the meeting, and Dennis has gotten back to me with some follow-up info.

The skin of the ray (*same* in Japanese) is used as an under layer for the cord or leather wrap (called *ito*) on Japanese swords due to its hard, rough, skin texture which keeps the braided wrap from sliding on the handle during use. *Same* can be shark skin, manta ray, or sting ray. On most Japanese swords it is stingray.

There was a question on the use of cherry and chrysanthemum blossom designs – and the normal design on a gunto blade is the cherry blossom.

I would like to thank Dennis for placing some of his valued collection in our hands that night. There was some risk of damage to the swords in our handling them and some risk of lively conversation at home about his largesse. Not to mention his preparation work and the cleaning of blades when he got home. We much appreciate it.

Thank you Dennis!



DE-CLASSIFIEDS

Buy/sell/trade/etc. notices received by the editor. I'll repeat notes a few times then drop them unless I hear that the deal is still on. Postings are not backed by anyone other than the person who sent in the notice. We're a generally honorable group of people but still, misunderstandings can occur and it's up to the folks making a deal to check it out first.

Marty has a 6" jaw width post vise for sale. Also 1050 and 5160 steels, and anhydrous borax. Martin Brandt 541 954-2168

Wayne has an active free steel pile beside his driveway, and an ongoing tool sale. Call for an appointment: 541 689-8098.

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 if you are interested: Mike Johnston 503 351-3104.



MOKUME GANE DEMO

As mentioned above - **GENE MARTIN** will host a demo on mokume gane and other more exotic combinations of metals at his place on . We will start at 10a.m. Gene says:

Bring a lunch because there isn't much here in the way of eateries. We'll have coffee and water.

Travel time from Eugene is about 3 hours (about 160 miles), less if you drive faster than I do. When you get into the hills south of Myrtle Creek, OSP likes to work the down hills for speeders. They also work from the center divider near exit 86.

It's a beautiful drive, especially when you get out into the Applegate Valley, so sit back and enjoy the trip.

Directions:

Take I-5 southbound to exit 58 at Grants Pass. Proceed through Grants Pass on 6th St, the only thing you can do. After you cross the river and Hwy 199, continue straight. That's Hwy 238. It's only 21 more miles.

Continue on out into the sticks for about 13 miles until you find Water Gap Rd. Take Water Gap Rd for about 6 miles until you come to a stop sign. Turn right onto what is euphemistically called Williams Hwy.

Go about a mile, through beautiful downtown Williams, the follow the road as it goes to the right. That is the junction of Cedar Flat Rd and East Fork Rd. The right side is Cedar Flat Rd.

Go 1/2 mile and turn right into my driveway at 570 Cedar Flat Rd. I'll put a sign out front. I live on the backside of a blind curve, so you may miss the driveway. If you get to Kincaid Rd you went too far by 1/4 mile.

Should anyone get lost, my number is 541 846-6755. We'll be up at the barn, so just follow the driveway to the barn. Parking should not be any problem.

See all of you on the 16th - Gene

This is a rare opportunity to watch the maestro of melding metals do his mashups! Michael.



See you at the meeting Thursday - the presentation on sheath making – Scandinavian and beyond – is going to be an educational experience not to be missed.

Mossy Mike – signing off!

P.S. - since there's blank space left over, I'll paste in a photo of a blade I finished in December. It's rare that I actually get a blade *done* so here's “Hank's fantasy/fighter”:

