

# Big knife



## Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

It is interesting to watch the evolution of an outdoor person through their progression of knives used for outdoor purposes, the first knife not included in this list. The first knife is usually awarded to the kid at around eight years of age, with the famous statement, “don’t cut yourself.” The kid will immediately take the knife and sharpen it, thereby reducing the thickness of the blade to about half its original thickness. Next, he will whittle everything in sight, from firewood to furniture. Lastly, he will cut himself and be ceremoniously stripped of the knife to be given back to him at a “later date,” meaning sometime when he had kids of his own.

My first real knife came when I was about 17. I needed a big knife that I could use for hunting, fishing, camping and survival while in the mountains. Following with what seemed tradition for everyone who wanted an outdoor knife, I selected a Bowie knife, one made by Puma with stag handles and a blade you could shave with.

Most people have a Bowie knife somewhere in their distant past, and I bet many still carry one. The original Bowie (pronounced BOO-ee) was named after the famous pioneer, slave smuggler, and soldier James Bowie. Stories abound about this man, and even a few of them are true.

Bowie once killed the sheriff of Rapides Parish with a very large knife. This story, plus a few about a fight on a sandbar, in which Bowie killed several people with his big knife, led to the widespread popularity of the Bowie knife. If old Jim was alive today, he probably would not recognize what we now call a “Bowie knife.”

The original Bowie knife was built by Rezin Bowie in 1830. It was a large knife, possibly 18 inches long, with a clip point, and meant as a fighting knife and not a blade for hunting and fishing. The Bowie knives of today, including my Puma, look nothing like the original design.

There are a lot more stories of the famous Jim Bowie and his knife. These stories, and some legends, led to just about every mountain man carrying a Bowie style knife. Seems interesting to note that Jim Bowie died almost a decade after the famous sandbar incident, defending the Alamo, where he died in his bed while defending the fort. He was probably shot, which lends a certain truth to the old saying about not bringing a knife to a gun fight.



This knife set was made for me a decade ago, and has travelled on 3 continents so far. A good knife is a necessary piece of outdoor equipment, but bigger is not necessarily better. (Mark Rackay/Special to the MDP)

Another phase that changed the style of knife we carried around came from the Rambo movies, played by Sylvester Stallone, where he carried a large survival knife, we all called a Rambo knife. This knife was usually a foot long, with a six-to-eight-inch blade, that had a hidden compartment in the handle where you could carry survival equipment.

In the movie, ol’ Rambo carried everything from explosives, machine guns and ammo, snowshoes, fishing tackle, and more in his Hollywood version of the knife. Mine only held about three feet of paracord and two aspirin. I never really bought into the survival knife stuff, but they did, and still do, have a small place in outdoor survival.

I did jump into the large Bowie style of knives for a short while again, when I discovered

Randall Knives of Orlando, Florida. Bo Randall founded the company in 1938, building very high-quality knives of many different styles and designs, for everything from survival, fighting, fishing and hunting, to just plain beautiful custom knives to look at.

I was 50 when I finally could afford one of his knives. I thought it would make the ultimate outdoor knife for all my chosen activities. The blade I selected, the Model 14, came with a seven and a half-inch blade, and cost more than my first car.

So beautiful is this expensive knife, that I never carried it afield. The blade is just as pristine as the day I bought it. I never used it because I was afraid I might scratch it, and the insurance policy does not cover wear and tear, so it sits in the bank deposit box.

That left me without a suitable knife for woodcraft, hunting and fishing. I met up with Don Bolton, of Grand Junction, and explained my knifeless plight. Don explained that I don’t need a huge knife to lug around in the woods. Something small, handy, properly shaped and well-made would fill the bill.

A decade ago, Don made me a knife that is seven inches overall, three-inch blade, has a great handle and a blade of the highest quality steel. This knife handles all my woodcraft and camping needs, has cut steaks for me afield, skinned and process countless game animals, cleaned plenty of fish for countless shore lunches, and weighs very little, so it is always with me.

The Don Bolton knife was expensive, but well south of the Randall. I have carried this little knife on three conti-

nents, soon to be five, and it will serve me well, lest I lose it somewhere accidentally.

I learned that I don’t need a huge knife, just one big enough to efficiently, safely, and properly handle the task at hand. It is also nice not to have to lug around a knife that weighs more than a Buick and is as handy on your belt as a pair of water skis. The moral of the story is to carry just enough knife.

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# When in Portugal, try the wine



## Outdoors

By Bill Harris

As much as I enjoy visiting other places, I have rarely traveled outside of North America. The exceptions were a trip to Italy in 2001. Kathy and I joined a group cycling through Tuscany organized by long-time friend, John Carls. In 2019 we visited Belize and Guatemala – the focus of that trip was birding and exploring ancient Mayan cities. Both were wonderful, eye-opening experiences.

Back in late May of this year Kathy and I flew across the pond to visit Portugal. Once on the ground in Lisboa (Lisbon) we caught a taxi to our hotel in the heart of the city. First impressions – narrow, cobbled streets, steep hills, people everywhere, red-tiled roofs. We joined four of my siblings and their spouses along with another brother who has lived in Portugal since 2020.

Portugal just drips with history. The Moors occupied southern Portugal for hundreds of years before being run out of the country by AD 1249. Portugal as a modern nation harkens back to the 12th Century. It was ruled as a



Portugal’s Douro Valley wine country. (Contributed photo)

monarchy until 1910. In the late 15th Century, the Portuguese lead by Prince Henry the Navigator, Bartolomeu Dias, Vasco Da Gama, and others sailed to India and South America.

Commonly referred to as the Age of Discovery, the Portuguese used the technology left behind

by the Moors to explore beyond “the end of the world.” The spice and silk trade made Portugal a wealthy nation. Many of the country’s monuments are devoted to its heroes from the past.

Our group explored Lisboa for a few days before catching a speedy Alpha train to Porto. Por-

tugal has a modern mass transit system, like the rest of Europe. When we arrived in Porto, we were met by three drivers who shuttled us to our Airbnb in Foz, a neighborhood overlooking the mouth of the Douro River. Our first full day in Porto was spent touring the wine country of the Douro River.

The Douro Valley is famous for its Port wine but produces many other fine wines. The source of the Douro River is in Spain then flows west through the north of Portugal emptying into the Atlantic Ocean at Porto. The landscape consists of deeply incised hills that have been terraced so grape vines and olive trees can be grown.

Our intrepid group of ten rode in a small, sleek bus for over an hour to reach the first vineyard. Our guide was named Sara, a young Portuguese woman who did a great job explaining the history of wine in Portugal. In Portugal, farms, vineyards, and the like are called quintas. The word has its roots in the word for one fifth the amount that a farmer or wine grower could keep from the sale of his produce. The other four fifths went to the king, church, and other entities — and we complain about high taxes.

Our first stop was at Quinta Dos Castelares (Two Goats Farm) – a quint, modest vineyard that is hundreds of years old – some of the beams supporting the main floor are over 600 years old. We toured rooms filled with large granite basins where the grapes are stomped by human feet, and huge vats where the wine is aged. The wooden vats are hundreds of years old.

We tasted several wines produced at the quinta and they had excellent flavor. I am not much of

a wine drinker and Kathy sips a Margarita on a rare occasion, but “when in Rome ...” For Kathy, the best part of the tour was tasting the olive oil and honeys the quinta produces. We returned home with some of each.

I was able to get in a little birding during the tour, spotting ten species. All but one was a life bird. Most all my birding on the trip was on the fly since there were no other birders in our group. I ended up tallying 48 species, 43 were life birds.

After our tour of the quinta we had lunch at a small restaurant that was associated with a vineyard that specializes in Port wine. After lunch we were treated to a Port tasting. The young lady who was a Port wine expert, a sommelier, as they say, walked us through the finer points of drinking Port. Partnering Port wine with chocolate cake is especially tasty – take my word for it.

The tour bus driver, Miguel, then negotiated a steep, winding road down to the village of Pinhoa along the banks of the Douro River. We hopped on an authentic river boat for a short tour up the Douro River. After sipping wine, a big lunch, and fresh air most of us napped during the ride back to Porto.

Our days in Portugal flew by. There was never enough time to see it all, but we tried. It was the trip of a lifetime, and the best part is we did it with much of my family.