

**COMBINATION TOOL:  
CHISEL, SIDE CUTTING CHISEL, MACHETE, FROE AND DRAWKNIFE**

By Oliver Cameron  
with Ole Wik



Image: Heidi Dammann

In that little picture you sent me, there is a tool at the bottom right corner that looks like a snow knife. I made that out of the full length of a small chain saw bar, which wasn't real wide. It's a little over a foot long, I guess.

A chain saw bar has a groove on both sides where the links run. I used a little chisel to spread that groove out until one side broke off. That left the other edge exposed so that I could put it on the edge of the anvil and break it off as well.

Then I filed the tip square across and sharpened it from one side to make it into an ordinary chisel. The steel of the blade runs all the way through the handle, and the wood at the end of the handle tapers away from the end. That way I can drive on the steel with a club without damaging the handle.

When I'm splitting a log, I often have splinters that run one way. That edge is made to reach down into the split and cut those splinters loose.

I also sharpened the whole edge on one side, all the way back to the handle, to make it into a side-cutting chisel.

That tool is thick enough and has enough weight that I can also use the side edge as a machete for cutting small poles and the like. You can whack off a pole three or four inches wide as if you were using an axe, and then limb it in no time at all.



Another example of an improvised side-cutting chisel. Note the pounded edge on top, cutting edge on the bottom. This is a handy tool for cutting the top out of an oil drum.

Image: Curt Madison

I also use this tool as a froe for splitting small stuff. When a bush or a tree grows, it starts as a little sprout, and the grain ends at the end of the growing tip. Year by year it puts on layers all along the stem that makes it bigger in diameter. When you later cut the tree and split it, it's easier if you start from the butt end. The grain is such that it kind of tends to feed the split into the middle.

Say you're working with a willow. Once the split is started, usually with a knife, you hold the main stalk between the heels of your hand, with the tip down. Using your index finger and your thumb on each side, you pull them apart.

If the split starts to run out to one side, you pull the side you want to pull back into the center. I'm so used to doing it that I don't think about it, but I'd say that if it's running off to your right, you would leave the left hand side a little straighter, and pull mostly on the right side.

In the section on froes, I described how I made a simple frame for splitting things that are bigger than willows. Sometimes instead of using that, especially when I'm out, I'll find a couple of trees that are growing close together, or a tree with one set of roots and two tops. I stick the pole in there to hold the unsplit end. As I work, I pull the two parts apart horizontally, whereas with my frame I pull them vertically.

Either way, it's the same principle. As the work proceeds, you pull the stick out a little bit more, and if the split starts to run off center, you pull one side more than the other. You may have a corkscrew thing when you finish, but if it's not too long, you can guide it back on. I usually don't need to turn the pole over 180 degrees.

I start out with a stick that's a little extra big, and plan on whittling off the split sides to true them up. I've described how I use split willows to make thatch.

Notice that there's a hole up near the end of the tool. It's a bolt hole for attaching a handle that fits over the end, in the plane of the blade and at right angles to it. That's so I can use the tool like a drawknife. In some cases a draw knife works a little better than an axe blade.



Typical drawknife, often used to remove bark from logs or poles.

Image: Taryn Baker, <http://woolymossroots.blogspot.com/2013/04/making-life-little-bit-easier-skinning.html>. Used with permission.



Sasha Wik using a drawknife to peel poles for a sod iglu.  
Kobuk River, 1969. Image: Ole Wik

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1) This essay stems from a series of telephone conversations that Ole Wik had with Oliver between December 2007 and February 2008.