

SEWING KIT

By Oliver Cameron
With Ole Wik

I usually carry a little folder with needles and thread. It's made of two pieces of plastic with notches cut in the sides, and with a piece of leather in between them so that I can poke the needles into the ends.



Oliver's sewing kit¹

The brown thread in this picture is shoemaker's thread. The black thread at the bottom is some strong nylon thread. I bought it from a dealer in Fairbanks that sells sewing machines and things like that. I bought a whole roll of it. It stands about 5" high and originally about 3" in diameter, meaning that there's a heck of a lot of thread on it.

I keep several threaded needles stuck in the lower end. You can't see them in this photo, but you can see that the thread is wrapped around the shank of the folder. I don't want to have to try to thread a needle with cold fingers if I'm out and need to mend a dog harness or whatever.

I also have three or four needles—some of them glover's needles², some straight—and usually at least one kind of a small needle. You can see them sticking up out of the top end. These are extra needles that are not threaded.

There are inlets on each side of the folder so that I can stick a needle in the end of it, bring the thread down, and wrap it around and around one of those notches. There is also a little cut in one side. I can pull the end into that cut. You can see that the end of the brown colored thread is hanging kind of loose there. I don't remember exactly how that was, but I think it's been pulled through.

There are two layers of plastic held together by the wrapped-around threads. The edges are right close together. That little tip sticking out on each side has a slightly tapered edge so that I can pull a thread down between those two tips.

I think what's happened is on the far side that you don't see. That thread comes down to the lower edge of that tip, and then it's pulled up through it, so that the end you see is coming up from the bottom there. That is the tip that is pointing at the thimble.

Often I don't have a first aid kit with me, so I carry a curved needle in that little folder. When you buy sutures, some of them have a thread that's fastened right into the end of it, and when you've used that up, you discard it. But you can also get needles that are made that way, like glover's needles, with an eye. You can use a long hair from your or somebody's head if you really have to sew up yourself or a dog.

One time I laid an injured dog up on some kind of platform—a box or something. He just laid there, and I sewed up a gash in its side, about two inches or so. He got that way in a fight. If I need to sew up a dog, that's usually the reason.

Another time a neighbor came over to my place with a dog. She had been walking with the dog beside her, and she was swinging her arm with a sharp single-bit axe in her hand. She accidentally split the face of the dog open. That gap was maybe three inches long, and went all the way down to the bone.

I felt inside the gap to see if the bone was damaged. It didn't seem to be, so we sewed it up. It did get infected, but her husband had some antibiotics in his kit, and gave some to the dog. Eventually it recovered.

Another time they were helping me with a cache. They had used one of my double bit axes and left it sticking in something, with one blade sticking up. That's something that I don't do. She fell and cut quite a long gash across the base of her thumb, sort into the web.

We tried to sew that up. Dennis was doing it, but the skin on her hand was just too tough for the needles that we had. He was having a hard time, and was looking pale and frustrated, so I said just give it up. We pulled it together with butterfly bandages, and it healed all right. If you have a serious wound to sew up, you need to leave one end a little bit open to allow for drainage.

To continue, the gray cylinder behind the tape measure is a stick of hot melt glue.

Alongside the tape measure is a thimble. It's actually half of a thimble that's been cut in two. The piece of leather makes the other half of the thimble. I wanted something that would fit down in the pouch along with the sewing kit.

The nondescript brownish blob above the thimble is a piece of beeswax. In some situations I like to wax my thread. For example, the heavy nylon thread from the shoemaker is very strong, but it tends to fray easily, so quite often I use dental floss. It

ordinarily comes with some wax on it, but I like to put a little beeswax on it when I am using it double. Sometimes that works better.

To the extreme left you can see a cloth holster. That plastic folder fits down inside, along with the beeswax and the thimble. That green flap folds down over it and is held shut with a rubber band.



There's a couple of flat pieces of wood carved into shapes like small net needles.³ They make it easy to work with fine line. If you have small string or even heavy nylon thread, it's amazing how much they will hold.

I have an extra supply of that thread or fine nylon line wound around a piece of plastic. If I have to make a shelter, I can use that material to tie sticks together or whatever. I never have used it, but it's there in case I need it.

There is a lot of thread on the double-channel net needle on the right. One of the channels is wound with very strong nylon thread, and the other has a finer nylon thread that is used with small diameter needles. That is my extra supply of thread.

The other stick has different kinds of thread. That heavy nylon thread is hard to use and is hard to hang onto, but I use it for a lot of things. It's strong, and you can tie things together with it. I've used it to tie thatch onto little poles.

1) This essay stems from a series of telephone conversations that I had with Oliver between December 2007 and February 2008. By that time Oliver was pretty much bedridden and was living in Oregon. One of his caregivers likely took this image and the

one that follows. This was the only time we were able to work together from photographs. –Ole Wik

2) A glover's needle has a somewhat larger tip, with a triangular cross section. It makes a hole that is bigger than the main shaft of the needle, providing more room for the thread that is to follow.



Image: <http://www.handtools-uk.com/default.php?cPath=96>

3) This image shows one of Oliver's handmade net needles. The twine comes up toward the tip, winds around the peg, goes down over the notch at the bottom, comes back up from the other side, goes around the peg again, and so on.

