Why water stones?

Posted by Scott Sherman - 20 Oct 2012 08:42

I just recently became a devotee of self sharpening a couple of months ago. Before that, I thought only experts could sharpen my knives because there was such a dizzying array of methods and materials by which it could be done and until somewhat recently, it was all done freehand by craftsmen who probably learned at the hand of other experienced craftsmen.

Enter guided systems like WE (and others) which made expert results obtainable by inexperienced, unskilled knife collectors or someone with a collection of dull kitchen knives which is what got me started. So now I have bought into this WE system and decided to get a PP2. The PP2 was put together at a time when the 1200-1600 ceramic stone was not available due to some production problems (which now seem to have been resolved). This left a gap in the progression of abrasives between the 1000 grit diamond stone and the next available micro fine ceramic stone which shipped as part of the PP2.

Because of that gap, I began to consider the available options including the Chosera water stones made for the Wicked Edge guided rod system. The 2000-3000 and 5000 -10000 sets would very capably fill that gap but going from the proprietary (easy to use) WE stones to the Japanese water stones was messy and the stones have different dimensions making it more complicated to set the bevel etc.

However, having said all that, I have noticed among some here in this forum, there is a preference for using the water stones and I could not help but wonder why. So I would love to hear from those who prefer and use the water stones or who are considering buying them or perhaps you bought them to fill the gap and no longer use them because the 1200-1600 ceramic stone is now available. I would appreciate it if you could share your thoughts and experiences. What do you like about them? Do you regret getting them or if you did would you never consider using the diamond and ceramics. Perhaps you only use water stones, would you also get some of the diamond or ceramics now to supplement your water stones?

I know there is a different feedback and user experience with water stones , but to my untrained eye, you seem to be able to obtain about the same results with the dry, easier to use diamond and ceramic stones, or am I missing something? I am guessing that some here only used water stones freehand before the guided rods were introduced and liked being able to use them with the new rod system and just stuck with the water stones. If so, what is your feelings about diamond and ceramic stones vs water stones?

Thanks for your feedback and insight I am hoping others here are also curious and may learn something here.

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Re: Why water stones?
Posted by DAUG - 29 Oct 2012 09:06

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....because in post #6234 of this thread, I do use it as my natural progression that I go through (sometimes with stropping, most times without), so I didn't see the need to re-do that task again. Besides, I do state in my conclusion that I do have the range of grit size from 2k - 12k, to complete the polishing task, but I would still be curious to find out how any blade would turn out with just exclusively Naniwa's and/or Shapton's. Regardless the expense to do that would require me to save up some....but at least I know my current grit range will be enough for my needs.

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Re: Why water stones?
Posted by cbwx34 - 29 Oct 2012 09:33

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Ahhhh... thanks... didn't catch your earlier post.

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Re: Why water stones?
Posted by Scott Sherman - 29 Oct 2012 10:43

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I have another question regarding all this polishing and burnishing. I must qualify my question by saying that I am still in the very early stages of learning how to most effectively use my full set of stones.

I was finally able to get a very polished edge using my ceramics without even going to the leathers. What I mean by "very polished" is that without looking at the knife edge (shoulder) under magnification, I can put the knife edge on a piece of paper at an angle that allows me to see printed words in the reflection (on the shoulder of the edge) quite clearly. To the uninitiated, it looks for all the world like a mirror. Now, I know that under microscopic examination, there are scratches, but in practical terms, it is very, very polished and reflective.

Also, it only takes a few uses before visible scratching occurs and it needs to be worked on again to bring it back to the visibly clear unscratched finish. So this scratch free finish on my knife is a bit fragile at this point (I am using a s30v blade for reference)

I think my knives look beautiful with the mirror finish I have achieved and I totally get the pursuit of the mirror finish. But I am wondering if some of this conversation is driven by pursuit of a finish that can only be appreciated under extreme microscopic examination, or are you needing all the very high grit stones or very low grit pastes and sprays to get to an acceptable mirror finish (acceptable meaning visibly mirror like reflectivity as seen by the unaided naked eye) or are you seeking microscopic perfection.

Also, I find it interesting that when I achieve that mirror smooth finish and lightly run my finger or finger nail along the edge, it is also perfectly smooth to my touch. So it is not just the shoulder that is smooth and shiny, but the edge too. A very different cutting edge and one might argue not as practical in real world knife cutting terms.

I am in no way criticizing anyone trying to get to a "perfect edge". I get it. I am also trying to perfect my technique and appreciate all the great dialogue here. I'm just wondering if you folks are not able to get to the shiny mirror finish without using all these whetstones and extreme micro grit polishing sprays or are you seeking something more like a perfect mirror finish only detectible under a microscope? I guess what might be more accurately described as a scientifically perfect edge.

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Re: Why water stones?

Posted by PhilipPasteur - 29 Oct 2012 11:30

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I can't answer for anyone save myself. When I indulge my OCD (more of a rarity recently), I am aiming for that scientificaly perfect edge. The thinest edge that the steel will support, and no visible scratches under high magnification (Clay has gotten some blades so smooth that scratches are not detectable with 800X. That would do for me...)

Of course this kind of edge is not practical for most uses that a knife would be employed for in real life. It is typically fragile, and, as you noted, takes very little use before it becomes scratched.

In this case, the goal is simply being able to get there. The more you get into smaller and smaller abrasives, the more the laws of diminishing returns applies. Many times the cost in tools and time spent for a few percent "improvement" at the edge.

So why do I do it... you know the answer... Because I can..and want to.

I like carrying a super polished, hair popping,treetopping, HHT passing, pattern push cutting blade to show off... I get sharpening jobs that way

When I am going to take a knife into the field... or even my backyard, 1K to maybe 2K with 6 micron stropping, gets me where I want to be.

BTW, I intend to try the superfine ceramics (1200 or maybe 1600) for a microbevel after the 1K diamonds as Clay suggested to see how that works with no stropping... that may be my new "standard" if it works as well for me as it has for him.

I must admit though, most of my utility blade sharpening, and jobs where folks don't want to pay for the precision of the WEPS (and time that it takes)I do on a belt grinder. 240, 600, grit belts then HF1 and jewelers rouge on leather... well under 10 minutes and a very sharp knife.

If you are happy with the edges that you are getting, there is not much reason to buy more stuff..

Phil

Phil

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Re: Why water stones?

Posted by Scott Sherman - 29 Oct 2012 12:42

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I think you summed it up well Phil. It's a bit like the greyhound that catches the mechanical rabbit. Once they catch it they are not nearly as interested in chasing it.

I still love using the different stones to get different levels of refinement on my various blades. But as you say there is a rule of diminishing return where the cost and effort vs the appearance and utility of the cutting edge must be balanced.

I am not sure how many knives I will get out of my pastes. I think I read in a post by Clay somewhere that he estimated about 50 blades on one application before he had to re-apply more paste. I have new leather strops and they seem pretty smooth, so I think I may have to re-apply paste more often than that to get the desired effect. It seems to kind of wipe off when I polish my blades.

If I have to continuously order more pastes, the hassle and expense factor may make me less likely to do so. I think I can achieve a good mirror like finish going from micro fine to kangaroo with no paste for what I need.

Just sharing my thoughts here and would find yours interesting as well for discussion.

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Re: Why water stones?
Posted by PhilipPasteur - 29 Oct 2012 12:58

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Just a quick thought..

Don't use too much paste. I did at first...it just made a gummy mess and came off on the blades. A huge waste!!

In this case, less is more. Just a thin layer, thin enough to sort of see the leather through, is better.

You almost just want the abrasive in the pores of the leather. I put half the tube on the first time. A disaster. I had to resurface the strops to get rid of it and start over. Those syringes will last a very long time if you apply it right...

We are way off topic for a waterstones thread... you are wandering.

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Phil

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Re: Why water stones?
Posted by Scott Sherman - 29 Oct 2012 13:01

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You're right. I should have started a new thread, apologies.

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Re: Why water stones?
Posted by PhilipPasteur - 04 Nov 2012 22:50

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Scott asked the question either in this thread or eleswhere about "improvements" uisng the Choseras specifically 5K and 10K after the Ceramic WEPS Microfine stones.

I have a Spyderco Damascus Mule Team 07 that I just put a Goboon Ebony handle on..with grey liners...

very nice. So I wanted a real nice shiny edge. Having just got the 4 ceramis from WEPS a week or so ago, I wnted to try just using the diamonds and the 4 ceramic stones. I went through the progression and added about twice the number of strokes that I normally do. I ended up with a very nice sharp edge that was reflective enough to show phone book print pretty well. It just wasn't reflective enough though...comparing it to knives that I have done with the Choseras. I went back and started with the 2K/3K Choseras. About 50 strokes at each grit and the difference in reflectivity is truly amazing. The Choseras simply out polish the Ceramics. In addition after all of the extra strokes with the Ceramics. there was still a sort of mat background and easily visible with no magnification were lots of very fine scratches. I call it reflective, but not a mirror edge.

Scott, I can't say that the Choseras will make a knofe sharper than the Ceramics, but if you are looking for a pretty edge, as I was with the Mule, there is just not any comparison.It is all in the results that you want I guess.

BTW this was the second knife I tried this with . The Damascus has a VG1 core, I also did a Mule in BCTS-B75P...supposed to be similar to BG42. The results were very close to the same. I left the B75P knife with the Cermaics edge ...and stropped lightly with 6 micron paste on leather... A very nice cutting edge I think, but not nearly as shiny.

Phil

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Re: Why water stones?
Posted by Geocyclist - 05 Nov 2012 21:22

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Thanks Phil, this is what i am looking for. Interesting results.

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Re: Why water stones?
Posted by Scott Sherman - 05 Nov 2012 22:03

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Thanks Phil,

Very informative and helpful. I appreciate your sharing this info, even though it may wind up costing me a bunch more now. I see where the Chosera stones are now listed on the website among the top selling accessories.

By the way, you mention that you go back to the 2/3 K Chosera Stones, (presume before finishing them with the 5K/10K C Stones.

Could you do just as well after going through the diamond progression and then the ceramic progression with the added strokes and then to the 5/10 K C Stones or even just the 10 K C Stone since the micro fine ceramic is pretty close to what the 10 K grit is supposed to be? Or do you really need to go back to the 3 K C Stone and then move forward from there. Also, I guess if you do that why go all the way through the diamonds to ceramics and then to the Choseras. Why not just go from 1000 diamond to 3/4 K Chosera then 5/10 K?

Love the feedback available here. Great job.

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