

# IN THE FIELD

HOW TO CHOOSE THE RIGHT  
KNIFE FOR YOUR OUTDOOR TASKS

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PHOTOS BY JOSHUA SWANAGON  
AND COURTESY OF MANUFACTURERS

**There may be no "one knife to rule them all," but that doesn't mean you're without direction when the time comes to choose a blade.**

Picking a knife for the field is a very subjective process and there are as many variables to consider as there are knives in the world. You'll have to take some time to evaluate what you will be using it for, what knife will fit the ergonomics of your hand best, and so on. And meanwhile, here are some tips to get you started.

CRKT

CRKT HoodWork  
camp knife

**"IT'S A GOOD IDEA FOR  
BACKPACKING TRIPS TO KEEP A  
LARGER KNIFE WITH YOU FOR  
BIGGER JOBS ... PLUS A SMALLER  
KNIFE FOR LIGHTER  
BUSHCRAFTING JOBS."**

## STEEL SELECTION

### HIGH-CARBON

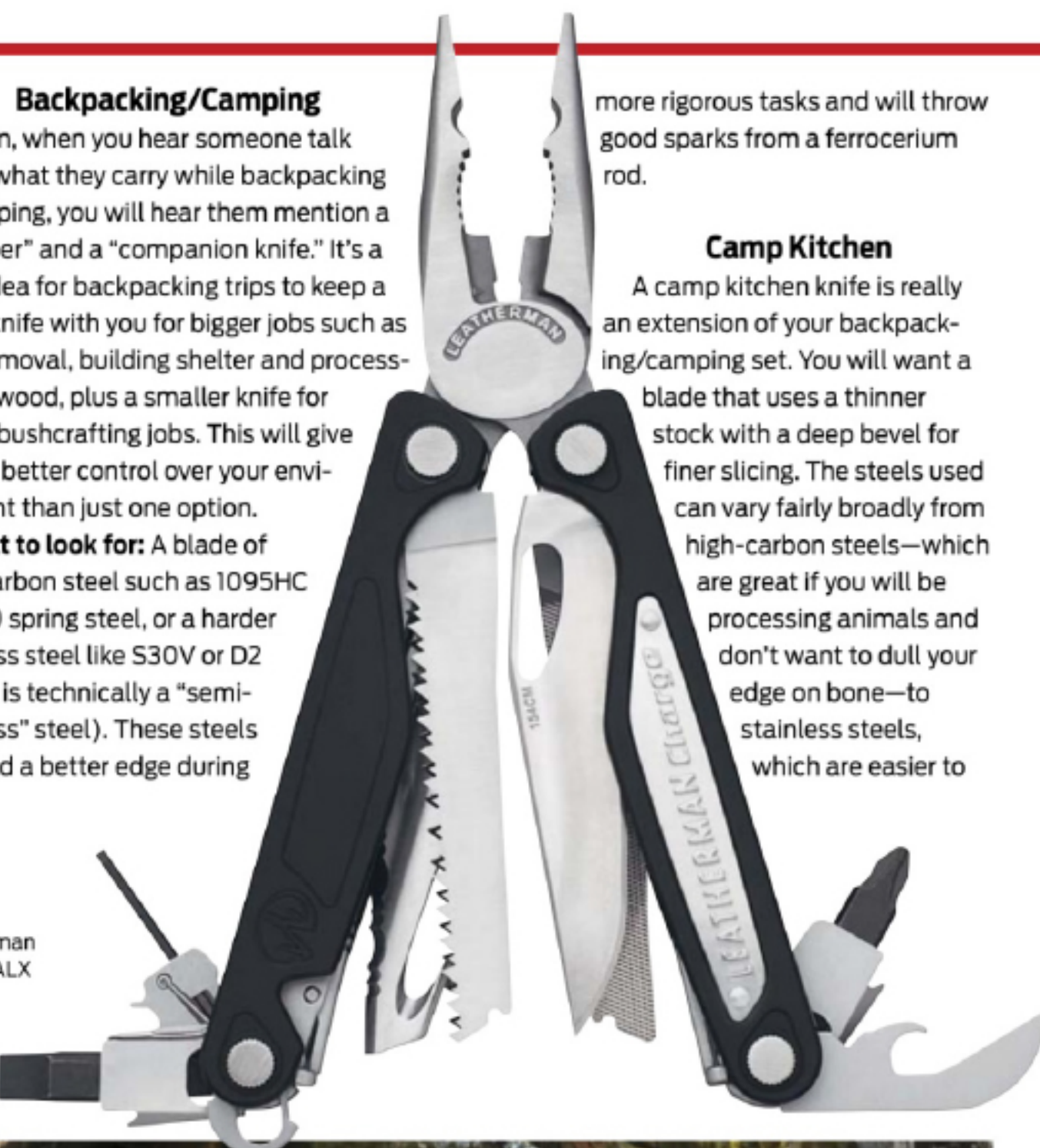
- Examples: 440, 1095, 5160
- Good for: Edge retention, versatility
- Weakness: Susceptible to rust and corrosion

### STAINLESS STEEL

- Examples: S30V, 410, D2
- Good for: Rust resistance, durability
- Weakness: May not be optimally sharp

### TITANIUM

- Good for: Rust resistance, durability
- Weakness: Dulls easily



Leatherman  
Charge ALX



Dogwood Knives  
fillet knife

**Backpacking/Camping**  
Often, when you hear someone talk about what they carry while backpacking or camping, you will hear them mention a “chopper” and a “companion knife.” It’s a good idea for backpacking trips to keep a larger knife with you for bigger jobs such as limb removal, building shelter and processing firewood, plus a smaller knife for lighter bushcrafting jobs. This will give you far better control over your environment than just one option.

**What to look for:** A blade of high-carbon steel such as 1095HC or 5160 spring steel, or a harder stainless steel like S30V or D2 (which is technically a “semi-stainless” steel). These steels will hold a better edge during

more rigorous tasks and will throw good sparks from a ferrocerium rod.

### Camp Kitchen

A camp kitchen knife is really an extension of your backpacking/camping set. You will want a blade that uses a thinner stock with a deep bevel for finer slicing. The steels used can vary fairly broadly from high-carbon steels—which are great if you will be processing animals and don’t want to dull your edge on bone—to stainless steels, which are easier to



CRKT HoodWork  
and HCK1

**“HIGH-CARBON STEEL OR HARDER STAINLESS STEELS WILL ALLOW BETTER EDGE RETENTION.”**



TOPS Knives  
Backwoods  
Skinner

## CONTACT

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**Fishing**  
Fishing is made easier with two tools. I like to have a multitool for the pliers, and it's also helpful to have a small gut hook to open your fish safely for cleaning. A good fillet knife is a good companion for cleaning and processing your fish.

**What to look for:** Stainless steel like S30V, 440C or 410HC—varieties that can withstand significant work in and around water without rusting. You may find your multitool options limited, as each tool tends to be a different steel type.

**Water Sports**  
For water-based activities, avoid high-carbon steel, which is susceptible to rust and corrosion. Particularly for diving or any activity that fully submerges a blade in saltwater for significant periods of time, you'll want something as rust- and corrosion-resistant as possible.

**What to look for:** Titanium is the most rust- and corrosion-resistant material you can get in a knife. It dulls fairly easily, but is equally easy to sharpen. Stainless steels are good as well. Other options include 440A or 440B but for fully submerged activities, avoid 440C. Softer steels will dull easily, but proper heat-treating will help your edge last a little longer. **KI**

sharpen and are very rust and corrosion resistant.

**What to look for:** High-carbon steels like 1095HC and 5160 spring steel, which will allow you to do more robust food prep and light wood prep for fire starting. Remember that high-carbon steels require regular oiling to prevent rust; I recommend using edible oils like olive or vegetable oil.

For lighter, simpler food processing, a softer or even flexible knife in a stainless

steel like S30V, 440C or 410HC would be a fine option.

### Hunting/Trapping

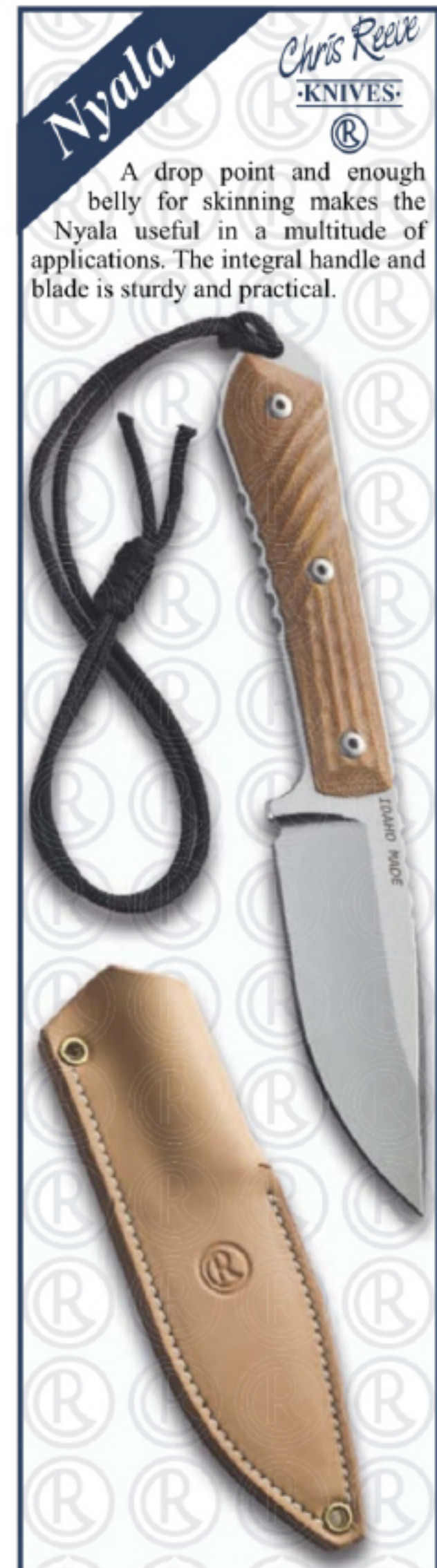
For hunting and trapping, you'll want a blade with more curve or belly in the profile for skinning chores. The Alaskan ulu is a great example of this, but many other blade shapes will accommodate this need as well. You'll want a robust steel like a high-carbon or S30V stainless—something that can handle processing a

lot of meat and bones, but also has potential to do some light bushcrafting for fire starting, trap preparation and other chores that are common in the field on the hunt.

**What to look for:** High-carbon steel or harder stainless steels. These will allow better edge retention while processing large quantities of meat and bones and light bushcrafting tasks. Consider a profile with a deeper belly for skinning tasks and meat processing.



CRKT Hood  
Camp Kitchen Knife



**Blade:** CPM S35VN  
**Blade Length:** 3.75"  
**Handles:** Brown Canvas Micarta  
**Sheath:** Leather, Made by Gfeller Casemakers

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Idaho Made



XS Scuba Knife