

The Mighty Jungle

THE AMAZON IS NO MATCH
FOR TOPS' MACHETE .170
AND SHANGO XL

STORY BY JOSHUA SWANAGON
PHOTOS BY JOSHUA SWANAGON, JOE FLOWERS
AND ANDY TRAN

WHEN I was invited to take an adventure deep into the Amazon jungle, I knew I'd need excellent blades by my side.

My friend Joe Flowers, of Bushcraft Global, was leading a trip to Colombia to teach survival skills. TOPS Knives, a sponsor and partner in this endeavor, provided a Machete .170 and Shango XL as a part of the package. We could hardly have asked for a better pairing.

"WITH THE FORWARD DEEP BELLY OF THE MACHETE .170, THE WEIGHT OF THE TIP CARRIED IT EASILY THROUGH EVERYTHING IT ENCOUNTERED."

Cultural Introduction

The machete is more than just the favored knife in Colombia; it's ingrained in their culture. So when our local guides—members of the Yakuna tribe who have spent their lives in the jungle—appreciated the TOPS Machete .170, we knew it was an excellent tool. Watching the guides use their machetes was like watching a conductor with a baton or a painter with a paintbrush; the machete was a part of them. It was inspiring as we began our own training.

One of the first things our group was taught was proper machete technique. Coming from North America, the land of the big choppers, we have a bit more of an aggressive technique when it comes to wielding a larger knife. However, in the jungle most of the work is more delicate and, done with a light flick of the wrist. This took a bit of getting used to, but after working daily with the Machete .170 to harvest materials or blaze trails it started to become second nature. When done properly you can glide right through 10 to 15 stalks of large pine leaves or through the entire trunk of a small pine tree. With the forward deep belly of the Machete .170, the weight of the tip carried it easily through everything it encountered.

Although most of what we found while blazing a trail or harvesting materials was softer and easy to slice right through, there were times when we had to harvest something far more dense, which will definitely put our machete's edge to the test. As I would typically choose a large chopper for

“THE 20-DEGREE GRIND OF THE SHANGO XL GAVE ENOUGH STRENGTH TO HANDLE THE TOUGH JOBS WHILE BEING NARROW ENOUGH TO GIVE IT A GOOD BITE.”

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Alberto, one of the Yakuna guides, demonstrates sharpening a machete with a file.



Joe Flowers of Bushcraft Global demonstrates how to sharpen a machete with sand from the jungle floor.

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chores like this, I quietly wondered how a machete would handle this kind of heavy-duty job. With its .125-inch thick, 1095 high-carbon blade, the Machete .170 handled it like a champ and came out looking for more.

Daring Design

When working in the jungle, sweaty hands, a humid climate and the loose whipping or snapping action of the wrist create conditions ripe for accidents. Our experienced guides had their fair share of scars on the shins, toes and forearms from machetes slipping from their hands. Fortunately, the Machete .170 features textured linen Micarta handle scales 7.25 inches long, which provide a solid grip.

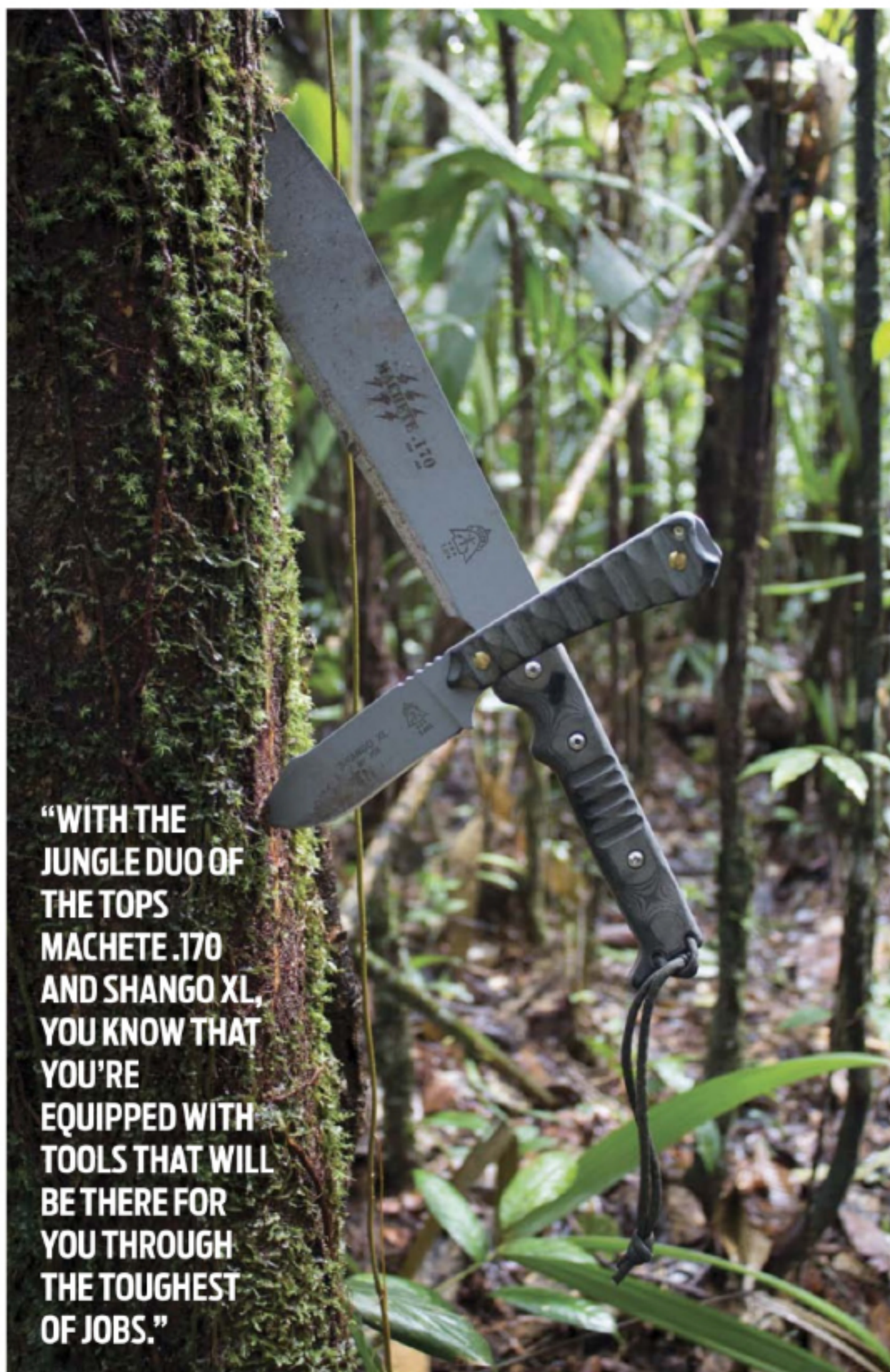
The design also allowed us to implement the most common machete technique: grabbing almost halfway up the blade to do finer work. Most traditional Colombian machetes are actually dull halfway up the blade to facilitate this grip. With the elongated choil on the Machete .170, we were able to achieve a grip high enough on the blade to almost replicate this same technique and found that a lot of our work utilized the choil in that way.

RITE OF PASSAGE

Many Colombians are four years old when they receive their first machete, which they use a daily basis. Some even have a "town" machete—a dulled machete that's part of their dress clothes for going into town.



Harvesting palm leaves for roofing. With the proper technique, the Machete .170 can go through half of these with one swing.



"WITH THE JUNGLE DUO OF THE TOPS MACHETE .170 AND SHANGO XL, YOU KNOW THAT YOU'RE EQUIPPED WITH TOOLS THAT WILL BE THERE FOR YOU THROUGH THE TOUGHEST OF JOBS."

The Machete .170 and Shango XL deep in the Amazon jungle.

MACHETE .170

OVERALL LENGTH: 17.25 inches
BLADE LENGTH: 10 inches
THICKNESS: 1/8 inch
STEEL: 1095 HC
HANDLE: Black linen Micarta
BLADE COLOR: Ash gray
SHEATH: Ballistic nylon
DESIGNERS: Leo Espinoza and Joe Flowers

SHANGO XL

OVERALL LENGTH: 9.25 inches
BLADE LENGTH: 4 inches
THICKNESS: 1/8 inch
STEEL: 440C
HANDLE: Micarta
BLADE COLOR: Ash gray
SHEATH: Ballistic nylon
DESIGNER: Joe Flowers

Capable Companion

While the Machete .170 did excellent work, it wasn't the only blade that came in handy while in the thick of the jungle.



The Machete .170 scraping a piece of walking palm for a Yakuna bow.

There was no shortage of things to do in the jungle to stay busy during down time in the evening. Some of our group found really nice pieces of blood wood and carved little figures, some kept a journal of the things we did that day, some went for walks in the jungle and some just

FAMILIAR FACE

The machete is such a staple in the culture of Leticia, Colombia, that you can find them in almost any store in town, including the grocery stores. You will never have to search far for a machete or a hammock.



The TOPS Machete .170 and Shango XL with the Yakuna blowgun constructed deep in the jungle.

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Machete .170



Shango XL

two types of palm and the bark of the chicken gut vine. First, we harvested the straightest piece of narrow palm we could find at about 6 feet in length. It has a hard bark and a fairly soft, meaty interior and to look at it you would almost think it was bamboo. Once we harvested the main bore for the blowgun, we used the Machete .170 to split it right down the middle, making sure that it stayed even all the way down. Then I went to work with the Shango XL to scrape all of the meat out of the dense bark, leaving two halves of a hollow bore.

With the grip of the Shango XL extending all the way into the finger choil, it was very easy for me to get a good grip on the blade itself by pinching it between my thumb and index finger, allowing me to maximize the level of control I needed to safely dig into the sides of the bore. I was

quite impressed with how natural and ergonomic the grip felt in my hand. My Shango XL had the Rocky Mountain Tread handle scales, which I felt that they really added a lot more grip—a necessity in the humid, sweaty hands of the Amazon jungle.

The 20-degree grind of the Shango XL gave enough strength to handle the tough jobs while being narrow enough to give it a good bite into my subject matter. This was very helpful when I was scraping out the bore, because I was able to push the edge in between the meat and the outer bark and just scrape towards the center

and pry it out. This made the process much faster and much safer.

Once the bore was cleaned out it was time to go to work on my mouthpiece. The mouthpiece was an hourglass shape, so after drawing a line where I wanted the narrow portion (just low of center for aesthetics) I then cut the line all the way around giving myself a guide to work towards. Then, using my thumb for strength and control, I was able to shave off pieces towards my guide cut with little effort. Every so often I would cut my guide deeper and keep working my way towards it until I had achieved the depth and overall shape I was looking for. Again the shape of the handle gave me great grip and excellent control over finer work.

Conclusion

Even in an environment where the machete is the dominant blade for most jobs in the jungle, the TOPS Machete .170 was a coveted piece of gear. But we can't downplay the Shango XL, which held its own and proved its uses for everything from whittling the end of a shaft to accept a spear tip for spear fishing to making traps and doing some heavy lifting on the creation of a Yakuna blowgun. It was a

FIXES IN THE FIELD

The TOPS Machete .170 comes with a factory grind of about 25 degrees, but also has a secondary bevel that acts as a great guide for getting the traditional grind (about 15 degrees) for the type of chores typical in the jungle. All you need to re-profile the edge in the field is a simple file, which does a quick job. However, once the edge has been re-profiled you can also use sand from the jungle floor to sharpen your machete and even change grits as you go for finer sharpening.



Heading out of the jungle safe and sound with Yakuna bow and blowgun in hand thanks to the TOPS Machete .170 and Shango XL. Photo Courtesy of Andy Tran



The Shango XL shaving a walking stick, something that can be very helpful in the jungle.



Shango XL carving the mouthpiece of my blowgun.

dependable companion for the TOPS Machete .170, which gave me the security of knowing that I had a solid piece of American steel that I could count on when I needed it most.



With the elongated choil it's easy to mimic the grip used in the jungle, even for chores here at home.

The jungle can be a dangerous place, and there's always work to be done to ensure survival, but with the jungle duo of the TOPS Machete .170 and Shango XL,

you know that you're equipped with tools that will be there for you through the toughest of jobs.

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