

Small Slice of a BIG HISTORY

THE BEAR & SON BABY BOWIE STANDS UP TO A
FORMIDABLE LEGACY



TEXT AND PHOTOS BY JOSHUA SWANAGON

No matter who you are or what your personal tastes when it comes to knives, you know what a Bowie is. It is perhaps one of the most well-known knives in the history of American knives.

With that being said, Bowies are known for being large, fighting-style knives. So the first time I saw a photo and specs for the Bear & Son Baby Bowie, I thought maybe there was a mistake. I thought that with an overall length of only 6.5 inches this had to be just a novelty knife; but once I got it, I could see immediately although it may not be a heavy user, it is anything but a novelty.



“IT HAS A TRADITIONALLY HIGH, HOLLOW GROUND, PRIMARY BEVEL THAT MEETS UP NICELY WITH THE SWEDGE ON THE SPINE OF THE CLIP POINT.”

Form

As is obvious by its name, the Baby Bowie is not what you are accustomed to seeing when you hear the name “Bowie.” Although it has the same classic stylings of a full-size Bowie knife, the Baby Bowie has an overall length of only 6.5 inches, with a 3-inch Damascus blade sporting the familiar clip point customary to the Bowie profile. Utilizing 0.14-inch stock, the blade is very stout and durable, with a 58-60 HRC. It has a traditionally high, hollow ground, primary bevel that meets up nicely with the swedge on the spine of the clip point.

The full-tang blade has genuine India Stag Bone handle scales that are separated from the blade by a 0.5-inch-thick polished brass guard which matches the brass pins nicely, giving the Baby Bowie a classy look. The handle is just under a half-inch thick at 0.47 inches and is a mere 3 inches long, making it a three-finger user, but surprisingly comfortable for its size.

Not to let the knife itself take all of the

limelight, the Baby Bowie comes in a very well-designed, high-quality leather sheath with some very nice tooling on the front, giving it a very old-school, almost Western, look. Utilizing very stout, 0.125-inch, double-stacked brown leather with single stitch and fold-over snap enclosure for retention, the sheath feels as durable as the Baby Bowie itself and will be around as long as your knife. The full-size belt loop will fit any style of belt comfortably.

Function

The Baby Bowie is obviously not designed for typical tasks, like those you would expect to perform with a traditional sized Bowie, but I was not deterred from testing it as I would any other knife. Its diminutive size makes it more of a small EDC or companion knife, while the Damascus steel gives it impressive durability and excellent aesthetics.

I started my testing with one of my usual methods for a smaller, companion



(top) The polished brass guard matches the brass pins and gives the Baby Bowie a refined look. (below) The Genuine India Stag bone handle scales look outstanding and also ensure that no two Baby Bowies look exactly alike. (opposite) The high-quality, tooled leather sheath is very solid and well built, with the potential to last the life of the blade, if properly cared for.



SPECIFICATIONS

Overall Length: 6.5 inches

Blade Length: 3 inches

Blade Material: High definition Damascus steel

Handle Material: Genuine India Stag Bone

Rockwell: 58-60 HRC

Sheath: Leather sheath

Weight: 2.5 ounces

MSRP: \$189.99

“THE HANDLE IS JUST UNDER A HALF-INCH THICK AT 0.47 INCHES AND IS A MERE 3 INCHES LONG, MAKING IT A THREE-FINGER USER, BUT SURPRISINGLY COMFORTABLE FOR ITS SIZE.”

blade—making a tent stake. I started by batoning the blade into the side of the stick at an angle to create the notch for lashing cord to. It took a little bit of work to get a deep enough groove so I could move on to the next angle cut and finally carve out the notch itself, but it was a non-issue. Due to the placement of the brass guard, carving the notch wasn't as comfortable as it could have been, but it did the job well.

Once I had the notch carved out, I moved on to carving the point. Due to its smaller profile, there is almost no real weight to it, so I was unable to use a chopping motion to do the heavy work

and had to carve it all by hand. It really wasn't too bad though; other than the guard being somewhat in the way for this kind of work, it went pretty fast. I wouldn't want to carve many of them, but for light carving or whittling, it wasn't as bad as it could have been.

Next, I figured I would give a feather stick a try. The first step in making my feather stick was to split a small diameter stick so I could work from an edge. Although it only has a 3-inch blade, the Baby Bowie had no difficulty making an approximately 1-inch-diameter stick that once was whole, into two sticks ripe for feathering.

Although I was able to get a serviceable tinder bundle, the Baby Bowie kept biting into the wood a little too much to get any nice feathery curls, so the feather stick didn't quite come out as a feather stick. However, I also like to make small tinder bundles during fire prep and the Baby Bowie was more than capable of tackling this chore. I generally do not like to sharpen a knife before review because I like to test it on its own merits right out of the box, but I do believe that, had I touched up the blade just a little, I could probably have gotten some very nice curls.

Finally, I finished out my testing with



The Baby Bowie made a very serviceable tent stake.



The Baby Bowie was a capable whittler while carving out my notch.

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While constructing a tent stake, I batoned into the side of an approximately 1-inch diameter stick to start my notch.

my rope test, as I like to do. Due to the nature of Damascus steel, with its strength being in slicing (because the layers of steel act as almost a micro saw blade on the edge) I opted to slice for this test instead of my typical press test. I was pleased to be able to slice through my half-inch climbing rope with no problems at all and performed the test three times for good measure. The Baby Bowie is a solid slicer. And just to prove that point to myself all the more, I did a few slices on a piece of paper to see how well it held up

after all testing was done, and I was able to get very clean, consistent slices along the entire edge of the blade; there were no catches or tears anywhere along the cuts.

Don't Be Fooled

While it is obvious that you will not be forging the wilderness, or making historical strides in the founding of a country with the Baby Bowie, don't let its small size fool you. The Baby Bowie has the ability to fit right in to your serious

cutlery collection, perform alongside any of your small companion knives and look good doing it. I have always been a fan of the old Bowie knives and was drawn to how well the Baby Bowie lived up to the form of the classic style we have all become accustomed to, while being a fun little knife to use. With its brass fittings, Damascus steel and genuine India Stag Bone handle scales, the Baby Bowie has style and swagger that will make you take a second look ... and a third ... and a fourth ... **KI**

BOWIE KNIFE 101

Perhaps one of the most widely known American-style knives is the Bowie knife.

Some of the history is a bit murky and varied, depending on which of Jim Bowie's brothers (and later, other relatives) tell the story. There is no real documentation from Jim Bowie himself, but what is known is that Jim Bowie presented his wooden prototype of a fighting knife to blacksmith James Black in Arkansas in 1830. This would go on to be the basis of many variations of the "Bowie knife" from that day on, due to Jim Bowie's notoriety as a knife fighter after the infamous Sandbar Fight in 1827.

In a historic twist, Jim Bowie did not use the later known "Bowie knife" in the Sandbar fight, as it happened three years prior. It is alleged that the knife used was that of his brother Rezin Bowie's design and crafted from an old file by blacksmith Jesse Clift, but this was contested by Jim's older brother who believed that the knife used was specifically made for him by a blacksmith named Snowden.

After his death at the Alamo, it was Jim Bowie's design that went on to be utilized in knife-fighting schools in the mid-19th Century and used from then on in American

conflicts, including many early wars, such as the Mexican War and Civil War, and in many historic occurrences, such as John Wilkes Booth dropping it on his escape from assassinating President Lincoln, and "Buffalo Bill" Cody scalping a sub-chief as revenge for Custer.

The Bowie design is still in military use today with the USMC Fighting Knife (made by various manufacturers, including Ka-Bar, Camillus and Ontario Knife Company). The Bowie knife is a piece of American history that will live on as long as knives are made.



The Baby Bowie was digging a bit deep to get any nice, feathery curls on a feather stick, but it would make an adequate tinder bundle.

CONTACT

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