

# The Care and Maintenance of Your Knife in Extreme Conditions

When venturing into an extreme environment or any environment for that matter, three areas of care and maintenance come to mind concerning the knives you choose to carry. First and foremost you should try to consider the circumstances you expect to encounter and pack accordingly. Secondly you should also consider lubrication and anticorrosion protection and lastly, the cutting edge of the knife you choose to carry is of utmost importance.

One key for the care of a knife in any environment is to make sure that you use it properly and not abuse it. You should make sure when preparing for a journey that you have the right knife for situations you expect to encounter. It is very important to use a knife for what it was designed. You can abuse knives very easily and destroy them prematurely or you can use them as intended and have a lifetime of service. Of course an exception to this line of thinking would be if you find yourself in a dire situation that merits you use your knife in any manner necessary for survival.

Extreme conditions often warrant improvising and not following the rules or intentions of a manufacturer and that is one reason that I am focusing on Swiss Army Knives in this article. They are second to none when it comes to versatility of use. Secondly, Swiss Army knives have been carried in every extreme condition you can think of including glacial mountaintops, jungles, deserts, the Polar Regions, and even into space. There are countless stories of how they have performed surgery, killed and dressed game, fixed equipment, cars, trucks, airplanes etc. And lastly I am focusing on SAKs because that is the type knife that I know most about. They are definitely my preference for being prepared for most any occasion but other knives would work better in certain environments given the time to plan and choose.

Swiss army knives with their multi-blades and tools each of which has multiple uses are not a substitute for every situation but can be used to improvise in most any situation when needed. For example, they can be used to skin a deer and dismember the skeleton but there are other knives that can do it better. They can be used as makeshift weapons but are no substitute for a tactical knife designed for killing. They can even be used as scalpels and a bone saws as doctors have had to do in the wild on occasion. They are useful utility knives that can enhance most any outdoor or urban trek under normal conditions or adverse ones when arising. In extreme environments a SAK would certainly be a knife to carry but perhaps only as a backup. Extreme conditions may warrant a fixed blade knife. Fixed blades, with no moving parts would solve some potential problems with grit in sandy environments, opening/closing in subzero temperatures, and corrosion of liners in marine environments making smooth movement impossible.

Given that, let's look at the next issue we should consider in the care of knives. Lubrication is important for fluid movement of parts and corrosion prevention. This is true even with the stainless steel or "Rostfrei" (rust free) Swiss Army Knives because the "alox" (an Aluminum alloy) liners will corrode in marine environments if not properly protected.

Granted, lubrication is a good thing for most occasions. However, excessive lubrication can trap sand would not be a good idea in a desert climate and you would want to keep it to a minimum. Neither would anything other than food-grade lubricants be good if you were using the knife for preparing lunch as well as cutting rope for a climb. Another thing you must consider is if the oil you are using freezes in sub zero temperatures. In this case you would perhaps have to consider a dry lubricant like silicon or a lubricant that remains fairly fluid throughout the temperature scale or again, reduce the amount of lubrication or possibly clean your knife well before setting out and use none at all. If your knife does "freeze up" the old trick of putting the knife under your arm between layers of clothing before use I hear is pretty effective.

Lastly, the cutting edge is something you must consider before trekking into extreme environments. It is the first thing to corrode on steel knives in a corrosive environment and as an old timer once told me, “you might as well “urate” on something as to try and cut it with a dull knife.” (Except, he was not quite as euphemistic with his words.) His point was well taken and it would especially apply in extreme environments where urgent need for a sharp edge may not be an option for survival. A sharpener should always be carried as part of your equipment so that a sharp edge can be maintained whether the edge suffers from corrosion or use.

I would like to give credit to many of the points found above to my fellow members of SOSAK. (Secret Order of Swiss Army Knives) This name may first seem a little “tongue in cheek” but we do have a pretty tightly knit group of enthusiasts and we always welcome new members. You can find all the links necessary to join SOSAK from the main page of my site, SAKcollector.com and there is no membership cost.

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