



# Blacksmiths of Central Texas

President's Corner

November 2010

Folks,

Here is an update from the meeting at Bob Phiel's in Llano:

Important announcements:

1. We have a deal with Brian Brazeal for a bang-up demo for next April. He will be bringing his new wife along and is delighted to come see us again. Get ready for some serious hammer work!
2. We have made an offer to Elizabeth Brim (2010 Bealer Award winner) to be our demonstrator for the 2012 Bluebonnet demo. I do not have a reply yet. I expect her to say "Yes" if at all possible. She wants to come to Texas.

Other business:

It was decided that a larger Board of Directors did NOT result in greater participation this year as expected. Consequently, we decided to shrink the Board of Directors to a smaller number by not electing any new Board members to replace the ones whose terms expired. We are interested in possibly shrinking the Board to only seven members so that a quorum would only need four Board members present. What are your thoughts?

The Board of Directors was unable to elect officers for the year because we did not have a quorum of Directors present. Directors present were John Crouchet, Tom Lupton, Rudy Billings, and Jim Elliott. We put forward and voted for the following slate of officers for this year:

President- Jerry Achterberg  
Vice-President - Jerry Whitley  
Treasurer - Rudy Billings  
Secretary -John Crouchet  
Editor - Vince Herod

As an addendum, I would like to point out that we are in the same fix we were in last year at this time which is that we do not have a President to take over and go with the program. In order to per-



## Officers

### President

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### Editor

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manently remedy this annual problem, I would like to propose that from now on the Vice-President will be designated "President-Elect". The next year, he automatically becomes President following the October meeting. Remember that among the Vice-President's duties is to help select venues and programs for upcoming meetings. This way, when he becomes President, he begins by presiding over meetings that he helped set up and he will also have a Bluebonnet Demonstrator that he helped select. Very tidy. And, his Vice-President will have the same advantage the next year.

Please give the Board some feedback.

John Crouchet, Secretary & Outgoing President

*Another item to consider is moving the election to the date of the Spring Demo as this is when we have the best attendance. The changes suggested will require an ammendment to the by-laws. Editor.*

## **OUTGOING**

### **SECRETARY'S REPORT**



October meeting 2010, Bob Pheil's shop, Llano, Texas.

President John Crouchet started the meeting with his re-announcement of impending Presidential retirement and the need of a replacement full of

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vim and vigor.

A motion by Joe Jelemensky to re-elect the Board of Directors (seconded by Ruth Carter) passed unanimously. Congratulations.

The trade item was a "twitch" and four good examples were presented. Where does Jerry Achterberg come up with these ideas?

The trade item for November is a flint striker knife. An instruction sheet and drawing of an example was handed out. *See meeting info for link to instructions.*

Next was Bob Pheil's excellent demonstration of a coal tong and his twisting method for both small and large material. A very good demo and very useful information. Bob is not only an excellent smith but ia an astute business person as well; what a great combination. Thanks Bob, the group appreciates your efforts.

November meeting at the Rockdale Train Station shop on the 27th. Bring your striker knife. We have to light the forge.

December meeting in Boerne; details soon.

January meeting in San Antonio at George Craig's shop.

February meeting: Lee brothers shop in Bryan.

Have a great and Happy Thanksgiving.

Jim Elliot, Outgoing Secretary

## MEETING INFO

November 27 - 9:30 AM

Rockdale Blacksmith Shop

The fine folks in Rockdale who restored the beautiful train depot have also built a well-equipped, extremely functional blacksmith shop. On the agenda, John Crouchet will demonstrate a skill we don't think about much these days, but it can come in handy -- filing and the proper use and care of files. John is a master at this and his information will be of great help when the hammer and anvil need a little extra assistance. After John's demo and some other business, it will be hands-on forging time for all. So come out, bring your hammer and learn something new or help someone else do the same. Also, don't forget to tour the train depot and the old train cars on the property.

Rockdale, Texas

Directions: Head east on Hwy 79 from Round Rock and travel to the heart of Rockdale. Once in the center of town, look to the right for the train depot. It is next to the railroad tracks of course. The blacksmith shop is behind the depot.

See you there!

## EDITOR'S SOAPBOX

If you have any ability to read between the lines, you can see that there is a bit of ongoing confusion as to the make up of the Board of Directors.

This is not a new problem for our organization but if you stop and think about how well the group is managed, then it is not too worrisome. This is an all VOLUNTEER organization and as such real life (and work) often gets in the way of our blacksmithing pursuits. I have had the pleasure of being a part of the leadership structure of this group for over a decade. In that time we have made several important changes to the structure of the group and these will continue as needed.

How do you influence the direction of Balcones Forge; step up and get involved. New blood is always welcome.

Write an article, take some pictures (send both to Editor) suggest a meeting topic; you decide what you want!

This month's issue will be a abbreviated edition. No pictures sent and only one report. We are all busy.

What can you do to help?

Vince Herod, Editor

## TRADE ITEM

The Trade Item this month is a Flint Stiker Knife -- handy and functional. Try your hand at creating one.

<http://www.anvilmag.com/smith/flintstr.htm>

SEE NEXT PAGE!

## The Flint Striker Knife

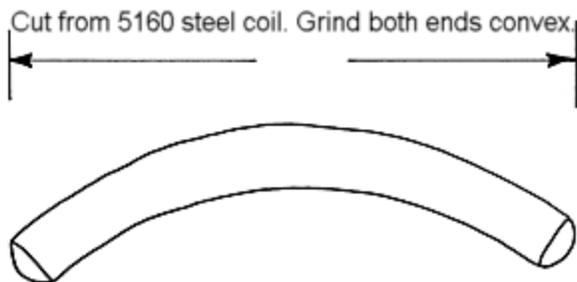
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There is one particular kind of knife that says, by its very nature, it was made by a blacksmith. It is forged from a single piece of 5160 spring steel. The knife has a blade, handle and finger guard made of one piece of steel. It is light, strong and fits the hand well.

I call it a flint striker knife because the design was used by some of those hardy Souls We call mountain men as a way of starting their fires. The handle portion of the knife was struck with a piece of flint and the resulting sparks aimed at a small handful of tinder. Its rustic good looks make it a welcome addition to a “possibles” bag, and a fine patch knife.

The first step is to locate the steel. GM uses 5160 in their coil springs and most scrap yards can supply one for a few dollars. I recommend buying a new spring, if you can afford one. Springs that have seen a few hundred-thousand miles of hard road can develop stress fractures that may only show tip after you have spent hours of forging, grinding and polishing. This will usually happen as the red-hot blade is quenched in the oil bath. The resulting ping! will ruin Your day.

I start with a section of a spring that is at least 1/2” in diameter. This will make a small knife, but I like to use 5/8” stock for a slightly wider blade. The billet is cut from the spring with an abrasive cutoff saw with the ends ground to a convex shape. This will prevent the edges of the billet folding inward as you forge the point of the blade and the tip of the handle.

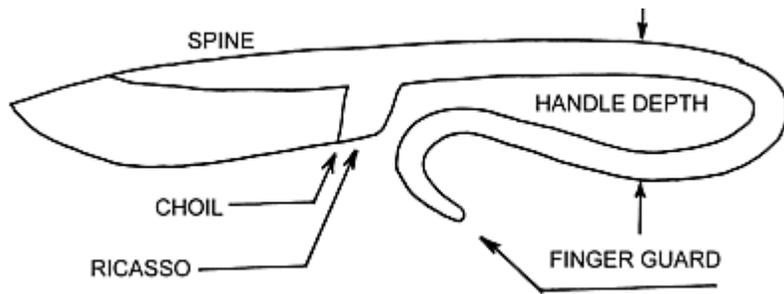


I start the blade by forging an obtuse point on one end. If the stock is forged flat first, the blade will tend to fold down the middle when the point is forged in.

Once the point is in place, the section that will be the blade is widened with blows from a cross-peen hammer. As the blade is widened, the point section is refined to its final shape. When the blade looks like it is nearly to the shape that I would like, I begin smoothing it with a finishing hammer.

Once the blade is shaped to my satisfaction the handle is drawn out. When I have a lot of heavy drawing to do I use a straight peen hammer for most of the work. Many smiths like to use the anvil horn for this work, but my Peter Wright rings in a minor key when struck hard on the horn and it drives me right up the wall. When the small piece of the original billet behind the blade section is fully drawn out, the overall length of the piece will be about 12 inches. The elongated tang section should have a graceful taper from the choil to its tip. I like to leave a small bulb at the tip so that it can be flattened into a smooth finger guard.

The blade is held at the edge of the anvil and the choil is defined with firm and accurate hammer blows. This is one area where hammer control is important. This transition of blade to handle should be clean and well defined.



I use a small swage die to round the top of the tang section so that it is more comfortable in the hand. If you are only making one or two knives or you don't want to make a special die, the back of the tang can be rounded on a grinder. This will leave deep scratches that need to be polished out, so I find a swage die to be a good and inexpensive alternative.

The small bulb at the tang is now flattened to form a smooth and comfortable place for the finger to rest, and hammered around the tip of the anvil's horn to form the finger guard. The whole tang is brought to a red heat and placed over the anvil's horn at the middle of the tang. With light, rapid hammer blows, it is wrapped around the tip of the horn to form the handle.

If we were looking at an old chart from the early days of world exploration, this part would be labeled: "Here there be dragons." Only experience or experiment will tell you where to make that bend. Let the blade cool to a black heat before you cool it in the slack tub. Test how well it fits the hand. Make sure there is enough room in the finger guard for a comfortable grip. If the grip is too deep, it will cause hand fatigue when dressing that trophy bull elk next year. It should not be so shallow that it can't be gripped firmly.

You now have a knife shape with a flat blade. The edge bevels can be ground into the blade or forged in place. If you decide to forge the bevels in, you should understand that it will change the shape of the blade as it is now. As the edge is hammered thinner, the opposite side of the blade will curl away from the hammer. You can place the spine of the blade on the anvil and tap it back into shape, or use the shape it has acquired, if you like it. Use an equal number of hammer blows on each side of the blade to avoid any forged-in stress.

When you feel that the piece has reached the level of refinement you desire, it should be annealed. In my shop, the piece is placed into the gas furnace and when it reaches the proper temperature, the furnace is shut down and allowed to cool. When removed from the furnace a few hours later, the knife is dead soft and can be ground and polished to the desired finish.

The knife is heat treated by bringing it to the critical temperature and quenching it in oil. The proper temperature is best gauged by testing it with a magnet. When the knife is no longer attracted to the magnet, it should be quenched. If you don't have heat-treating oil, ATF (automatic transmission fluid) should work fine. Be Sure to do a test of the quench medium on a piece of your steel before you trust Your hard work to it. The knife is now polished and checked for stress cracks and other imperfections. Look carefully for tiny cracks at the edge. If this happens, you may have ground the blade too thin before quenching. I like to leave the edge with at least 1/32" thickness when I heat treat to prevent this mini-disaster.

I temper 5160 by placing it in my kitchen oven at 450 degrees for about one hour. This leaves a blade that is tough, but holds a respectable edge.

## **“ABANA’S GREATEST HIT’S” 2010 CONFERENCE DVD’S NOW ON SALE**

We are proud to make available DVDs with high quality videos of 2010 Conference events and demonstrations.

For a brochure format with the table of contents listings of the 11 DVDs [Click Here](#).

The order form is here and has prices for current ABANA members and for non-members. Individual DVDs contain up to 2 hours of content and are \$15 for members and \$22.50 for non-members. Sets are available for as little as \$12.73 per DVD.

You can call the Central Office with your choices and they will take care of the rest.  
Phone (703) 680-1632.

To make ordering easier and to ensure accuracy, an order form is available [Click Here](#).

You can print the blank form, fill it out then mail it in or send it by fax (703) 680-6222

Or you can fill out the form on your computer and print it out then mail or fax the completed form. You can also e-mail or electronically submit the filled out form.

Note that it is generally thought unsafe to email a credit card number. So you can send the form electronically and follow up with the credit card information over the phone.

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## **ABANA 2010 BOARD ELECTION RESULTS**

The ABANA election closed on the original schedule. The ballots have been counted and the results certified by the elections committee chair George Mathews.

The successful candidates are:

Gerald Boggs  
Lance Davis  
Ray Nager  
Amy Pieh  
Linda Tanner

We want to thank all the candidates. We also want to thank the board members who are not continuing into 2011 - Len Ledet, Rome Hutchings and John Yust.

On behalf of the ABANA Board of Directors,

Paul Boulay

Ps. Ballot cards received late will still be entered in the election tool drawing - hint, hint.

## **LETTER TO ABANA MEMBERS ON THE RECENT ELECTION**

The ABANA Board election issue of the Anvil's Ring was handed to the Post Office on September 28. Some folks received it the following week -- for others it took over a month for the Post Office to get it to member's mailboxes. Our timing was unfortunate at best. We were in competition with the tons of catalogs from mail order companies and all the propaganda and other campaign ads associated with the mid-term elections. We are looking into filing a complaint because it seems as if we paid for 2nd class periodical mail but got 3rd class junk mail treatment.

As much as I'd like to, I can't pin 100% of the blame on the Post Office. I set the schedule to comply with the bylaws but it was tight. The tight schedule

was driven by the Board's desire to meet at least a week before Thanksgiving on one side and the publication schedule on the other.

The election schedule was based on it getting to the post office on September 21. The one week delay at the printers had several causes. There was delay caused by the extra time for an ad insert, for the ballot post card and waiting for the Hammer's Blow copy to show up. The Hammer's Blow was about a week later than the nominal schedule. Normally this is no big deal. But Rob Edwards and I both failed to pass on to Brian Gilbert that this issue was time sensitive.

We looked into creating an extension of the election. But the bylaws require election related matters go to the members either by a letter or in the regularly published magazine. When we looked into this there was still a chance that most all members would get the magazine on time. So in order to treat all the candidates equally we decided to stick to the published deadline.

At this point in time the ballots that have reached the Central Office have been counted and the election committee chair has certified the results. By the way the results are quite clear. We have separately tallied the ballots that came in late. They would not have changed the outcome at all.

Also if you haven't voted you can still participate in the voters raffle by sending in your ballots. We will hold that open until November 15.

The next question is what are we going to do to keep from having the same result next time. Several things:

1. Change the publication schedule to move it forward one week an issue so that we will end up 4 weeks sooner this time next year. This is something we should do anyway -- now the "Summer" issue gets to members mailbox in late October?? (We looked into doing a one time adjustment but apparently there are a bunch of librarians who would be upset at us so we have to sneak up on it.)

2. Move the election to the second rather than the third magazine of the year. We could do a separate mailing but that would add a \$3000 expense item that the budget won't support.

3. Change the election committee procedure to require 60 days from the publication date till ballots are due in the case where we use the magazine for the election. (No bylaws changes are needed for that.)

4. Change the bylaws to allow electronic balloting and electronic notification.

Finally, I apologize to those of you who were not able to exercise your right to have your say in the running of the organization. Hopefully you can see that there was no deep dark conspiracy to deprive those far from the mailing house of their vote. If you are looking for someone to blame, I'm your guy.

Sincerely,  
Paul Boulay  
ABANA President



[www.BalconesForge.org](http://www.BalconesForge.org)

Balcones Forge is a non-profit organization and an affiliate of the Artist-Blacksmith's Association of North America (ABANA). Our organization provides opportunities for its members to learn and grow through interaction with other professional and hobbyist blacksmiths, as well as access to an extensive library of books and videos. The organization also strives to educate the public about blacksmithing through demonstrations at many Central Texas events.

### *Come join us!*

Examples of events members have demonstrated at are Pioneer Days and Founders Day in Fredericksburg, the Wursthfest School Days event at Conservation Plaza and at the Folk Fest in New Braunfels, the Texas Natural and Western Swing Festival in San Marcos, various events at Zilker Botanical Garden in Austin, and at the Texas Folk Life Festival in San Antonio. Members also demonstrate at Mission Espada in San Antonio many weekends.

### *New Members Welcome!*

Balcones Forge has restored three historic blacksmith shops throughout Texas. Members rebuilt the stone forge at the Pioneer Museum's blacksmith shop in Fredericksburg. The era-authentic forge and bellows at Mission Espada in San Antonio were created. Most recently, the stone forge at the blacksmith shop at Zilker Botanical Garden in Austin was rebuilt, tools made, and new security gates created and installed.

Return Service Requested

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