Why water stones?

Posted by Scott Sherman - 20 Oct 2012 08:42

I just recently became a devotee of self sharpening a couple of months ago. Before that, I thought only experts could sharpen my knives because there was such a dizzying array of methods and materials by which it could be done and until somewhat recently, it was all done freehand by craftsmen who probably learned at the hand of other experienced craftsmen.

Enter guided systems like WE (and others) which made expert results obtainable by inexperienced, unskilled knife collectors or someone with a collection of dull kitchen knives which is what got me started. So now I have bought into this WE system and decided to get a PP2. The PP2 was put together at a time when the 1200-1600 ceramic stone was not available due to some production problems (which now seem to have been resolved). This left a gap in the progression of abrasives between the 1000 grit diamond stone and the next available micro fine ceramic stone which shipped as part of the PP2.

Because of that gap, I began to consider the available options including the Chosera water stones made for the Wicked Edge guided rod system. The 2000-3000 and 5000 -10000 sets would very capably fill that gap but going from the proprietary (easy to use) WE stones to the Japanese water stones was messy and the stones have different dimensions making it more complicated to set the bevel etc.

However, having said all that, I have noticed among some here in this forum, there is a preference for using the water stones and I could not help but wonder why. So I would love to hear from those who prefer and use the water stones or who are considering buying them or perhaps you bought them to fill the gap and no longer use them because the 1200-1600 ceramic stone is now available. I would appreciate it if you could share your thoughts and experiences. What do you like about them? Do you regret getting them or if you did would you never consider using the diamond and ceramics. Perhaps you only use water stones, would you also get some of the diamond or ceramics now to supplement your water stones?

I know there is a different feedback and user experience with water stones , but to my untrained eye, you seem to be able to obtain about the same results with the dry, easier to use diamond and ceramic stones, or am I missing something? I am guessing that some here only used water stones freehand before the guided rods were introduced and liked being able to use them with the new rod system and just stuck with the water stones. If so, what is your feelings about diamond and ceramic stones vs water stones?

Thanks for your feedback and insight I am hoping others here are also curious and may learn something here.

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Re: Why water stones?
Posted by jendeindustries - 16 Jan 2013 23:51

Very good question, Phillip!

When arguing semantics, mud can be considered a "more developed" slurry, but I think it is more a matter of how you use it rather than the proper name, as per my example about loaded up stones being finer.

I had this same thought in the past, and in my experiments, I've noticed differences between pastes and slurries. I did this with a 2K Chosera - first, I started off with a freshly lapped 2K (as usual), and worked it to develop a mud, which then polishes up the bevel to a light mirror on the macro level.

Then, I started a new knife with a freshly lapped stone (the same as usual) and used a 2K Chosera nagura to make a slurry of 2K. The feel of the stone changes - it's more aggressive for sure, and the paste does develop. On the bevel, there is a mirror, but not as clear as without the slurry. also, under the scope, the scratches are not as matte as without a slurry.

On harder abrasives like Aluminum Oxide, being loose from the matrix doesn't mean they readily break down - even though there may be polishing effects from the loosened matrix itself. In the case of more friable abrasives, you can probably eventually work the slurry enough to break down to more of paste (but this will take time and conflicts with my personal sharpening philosophy).

So again, I think it is more important to understand how one intends to use these different terms when they apply them to their sharpening. For example, if someone wants faster action, don't use mud, use slurry; and if one wants cleaner and "truer grit" edges, remove the swarf from the stone. However, if more refinement is wanted without changing stones, then using the paste or allowing the swarf to load the stone will work.

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Re: Why water stones?
Posted by Geocyclist - 17 Jan 2013 23:08

Hey Tom,

Thanks for your detailed write ups. How do you clean swarf off stones (ceramic and water stones)?

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Re: Why water stones?
Posted by jendeindustries - 18 Jan 2013 00:34

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I clean swarf off my Choseras and Shaptons with a spray bottle of water. Lapping after or before a session also helps get rid of any embedded swarf.

On the dry ceramics, some warm soapy water may help remove some of the deeper residue rather than just water alone.

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Re: Why water stones?
Posted by PhilipPasteur - 18 Jan 2013 08:50

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Geocyclist wrote:

Hey Tom,

Thanks for your detailed write ups. How do you clean swarf off stones (ceramic and water stones)?

I know that I am not Tom, but I will tell you what I do. I typically do not lap the stones before or after each use. I guess I am not that OCD about this aspect. I always rub the two stones of the same grit together under running water both right before and right after shapening with them. With the waterstones I find that this rubbing and maybe some rubbing with my fingers gets the stones clean enough for me. I then shake all of the water that I can off of thepaddles and stand them on end on a paper towel to dry. Typically I let them dry for a couple of hours before putting thenm back into their individual plasic bags for storage.

I have been using some kind of kitchen cleanser (whatever I have around) on ceramics used for sharpening or ceramic hones for years. That combined with a short bristle stiff brush of the kind that is typically used for cleaning finger nails, removes the bulk of the "swarf" and embedded metal dust. More recently I tried some Barkeepers Friend liquid per one of our members recomendation. I think it does do a slightly better job, in that it seems faster, than the typical "Comet" or generic cleansers. I have also read that Bon Ami cleanser is the choice of some folks. There is not a huge difference in effectiveness among the ones that I have tried.

Applying the cleanser with enough liquid to make a thick slurry, or maybe a mud, and then letting it sit for a minute or two, scrubbing with the brush briskly, then rinsing with lots of running water, seems to do the trick. Just make sure you get rid of all of the grit from the cleanser when rinsing, but you should

easily be able to feel when this is done.

I have never gotten the ceramic stones looking brand new, but if there is a performance degradation form the remaining embedded gray stains, it does not seem to be significant. So far, I have not had any of the WEPS cermic stones fall off the handles using this method... but I have only done this a couple of times over the two months or so that I have had them.

Phil

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Re: Why water stones?

Posted by mark76 - 18 Jan 2013 13:15

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I agree with Philip on the cleaning of the stones. I have also never been able to get the ceramics completely clean again, but well enough for them to work well.

There was another long thread on it, but I cannot find it back quickly.

It appeared that Barkeepers Friend works so well on the ceramics, because it contains oxalic acid. This stuff is also recommended agains rust stains.

In the same thread someone told that he used a much stronger acid (I forgot which one) and he was able to get the ceramic stones completely white again. I intended to try this myself, but never got to it. Strong acids are rather hard to get where I live.

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Re: Why water stones?

Posted by PhilipPasteur - 18 Jan 2013 20:40

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This is an excerpt from the Spyderco description of their Sharpmaker, which uses ceramic abrasives:

***To clean: scrub stones with a plastic scouring pad and powdered abrasive cleaner, let air-dry*.**

Sounds familiar.. maybe we are on the right track..

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Re: Why water stones?
Posted by Geocyclist - 18 Jan 2013 23:39

Thanks to all on answering the cleaning question. Didn't mean to only put it to Tom, just replying to his post. Next time I will make sure to open it up to all.

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Re: Why water stones?
Posted by jendeindustries - 18 Jan 2013 23:44

I don't know Phil... It seems to me that you are just as OCD about cleaning your ceramics as a I am about lapping my Choseras!

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Re: Why water stones?
Posted by PhilipPasteur - 19 Jan 2013 00:14

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wellllll..

OK

But, I have used them a couple of dozen times and done the cleaning twice... so almost as OCD..

Phil

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