

Knives and Scouting

Scout policy:

Knives should be considered as a tool and treated as such. Those who are going to use them should get training for their use, as you would for a saw or an axe. Knives are an offensive weapon so great care should be taken when dealing with them. When undertaking training at the Scout HQ, knives should be taken to and from Scouts by an adult. When taking a knife to camp, they should be securely stowed in the middle of the rucksack or bag.

If you consider a knife as a tool, then you should use the appropriate tool for the job. The vast majority of Scout use will only require the use of a pen or clasp knife, the cutting of string, cooking or whittling. Where you have a larger task, such as splitting wood, a larger knife such as a sheath knife may be appropriate. If you relate this to axes, you would not use a hand axe to fell a tree, nor a felling axe to split wood.

There is an issue with regard to clasp knives and lock knives. A lock knife is one where the blade stays open unless some mechanism is used to close the blade. In the eyes of the Law, this is more of an offensive weapon than a standard clasp knife because of this multiple action. From a safety point of view, a lock knife can not fold onto the users fingers and may be better.

The carriage of knives is also to be considered. If a knife is considered as a tool, you would only really carry the knife when there is an expectation to use the tool, after all, you wouldn't carry an axe around a campsite on the off chance of coming across some wood to chop. Therefore, knives when not being used should be stowed away until such time as they are needed. Legally, you are not allowed to carry a knife in a public place without lawful authority or reasonable excuse. A campsite, which may technically be private property as it is owned by a District or County, is considered as public property because of its use. Knives should not be carried unless they are going to be used, and should be put away when not in use.

Times article:

Scouts have been told to be slightly less prepared than usual. Penknives may have formed as much part of the scouting experience as badges and campfires, but according to advice from the Scout Association they must no longer be brought on camping trips, except when there is a "specific" need.

Modern Britain's knife culture, including the rise in fatal stabbings, has been cited by troop leaders — although some have countered that the code contradicts the tradition that Scouts are to be trusted for their honour.

The advice, published in the official in-house magazine, *Scouting*, says that confusion over the legality of carrying a knife in public has made it necessary to revise the rules.

Dave Budd, who trains Scouts on the safe use of a knife, said that the rise in knife crime — up by 50 per cent in just one year — had made "clarification" of the guidance necessary.

He wrote: "Scouts often have the need for a good knife, and in the early days every Scout was actively encouraged to put a knife on their belt. Sadly, there is now confusion about when a Scout is allowed to carry a knife.

"The series of high-profile fatal stabbings highlighted a growing knife culture in the UK. I think it is safest to assume that knives of any sort should not be carried by anybody to a Scout meeting or camp, unless there is likely to be a specific need for one. In that case, they should be kept by the Scout leaders and handed out as required."

The Scout Association has defended its position, arguing that even those who pledge to do their duty for God and country cannot be immune from Britain's contemporary knife culture.

Under the Criminal Justice Act 1988, anyone can legally carry fold-up knives with blades that are shorter than three inches.

It is illegal to sell knives to anyone under 18 in England and Wales, and anyone under 16 in Scotland.

The Scout Association, which begins a new season with a recently crowned Chief Scout, Bear Grylls, has now supplemented that with its own advice. It includes recommendations that knives should be carried to and from meetings by an adult, and must not be carried around campsites, which are considered public places.

Scouts were at one point allowed to carry a sheath knife on their belt as part of their uniform, but in another change to the traditions originated by Lord Baden-Powell a century ago the advice also states that knives must not be worn with uniform, except for reasons of religion.

"Scouts by law are allowed to have Swiss army knives. I think this is going too far — you just don't know when a Scout will need a knife."

Ms Burgin also argued that the advice went against the spirit of the Scout code of honour.

"The first Scout Law is 'The Scout is to be trusted,' " she said. "Scouts love having knives and using them properly. If you teach children to use a knife properly, they won't abuse it. If someone wants to cause harm, they will do it anyway. It is a real shame it has come to this."

However, a Scouts spokesman insisted that young people could still learn important skills without penknives. "The Scout Association plays a key role in helping young people develop the confidence, maturity and self-esteem they need to play active and responsible roles in their communities, and to resist the peer pressure that may attract them into local gang culture," he said.

"We believe that young people need more places to go after school and at weekends, where they can experience adventure without the threat of violence or bullying and the need to carry weapons. Scouting helps to prepare young people with valuable life-skills, while keeping them safe by not carrying knives."

Which knives are legal in a public place and which are not?

It is an offence for any person, without lawful authority or good reason, to have with him in a public place, any article which has a blade or is sharply pointed except for a folding pocket-knife which has a cutting edge to its blade not exceeding 3 inches. The burden of proving the lawful authority lies with the defendant. A knife which is capable through manufacture to be locked open or has a fixed blade is thus deemed illegal in a public place.

Advice on Transporting Knives, Axes and Saws

On foot in a public place

Bottom of rucksack – not in lid or at the top
Not on belt or around neck

By car

Not in glove compartment
Not within reach from seats where driver or passengers are sitting – treat knives like firearms

By train and bus

Bottom of rucksack – not in lid or at the top
Not on belt or around neck

What can you do to stay within the law?

- a. Try not to carry a knife, saw or axe at all.
- b. Remember that 'just in case I need it' is not an excuse that will work in a court of law.
- c. Reasonable and practicable cause to carry.
- d. Carry a knife that is not aggressive looking.
- e. Ensure you have permission to carry a knife if you are on private property.
- f. Try to have proof that you need /needed to carry the knife i.e. written permission to use land for bushcraft and survival purposes
- g. Whilst in a public place, if you have the need to carry a sharp object, make it as inaccessible as possible.
- h. Do not hide the knife under your shirt.
- i. If you are under 18, don't carry a knife in public at all. Use it in situ with an adult supervising.
- j. Use a knife that is relevant to the activity you wish to carry out. A machete is not great to take on a fishing trip.

What will happen if we ignore the law?

At the moment there are constabularies working a zero tolerance policy.

This will become a nationwide policy soon.

If knife law is flouted it may become illegal to own some knives and this may include knives traditionally used for bushcraft.

The writing is already on the wall for lock-knives – a few more stabbings and that might be it. As a hobby or way of life, bushcraft and all its practitioners should set a good example to the rest of the public.

It only needs a few incidents to make the purchase of knives very difficult.

Although 'most' stabbings on the news involve kitchen knives – politicians and law makers only see a sharp blade and a handle.

The future of bushcraft is in educating children. Perhaps if we act responsibly they will be

permitted to have knives. A situation where it is illegal for people under 18 to own, carry or use a knife is not to big a step away.

Common sense applies to the carriage and use of bladed articles. If in doubt ASK. Every local constabulary has a website that can help.