

THE MARTIALIST: YEAR FOUR, ISSUE THREE

Victorinox SwissChamp Survival Kit

Review by Phil Elmore

One of the most vivid memories of my childhood is of my father's Swiss Army Knife. He was never without the big SwissChamp®, Victorinox's deluxe, large model with all its bells and whistles. While he went through more than one that I recall -- he switched from the traditional red plastic handles to a classy-looking black-handled Swiss-Champ -- my father never went anywhere without that knife in his pocket. On more Christmas mornings than I can count, he used the smaller blade of the knife to open taped packages and cut toys free from their molded plastic prisons. On more summer days than I can remember, he used the knife's tweezers (and sometimes that little blade) to remove splinters from my hands. An engineer by trade and a manager of necessity, my father knew the value of a "multitool" for years before multitools (in the folding-pplier pattern) became popular, and long before I ever saw the first incarnation of a Leatherman tool.



Photo by Phil Elmore

Recently, I was at the office when a fellow employee complained of a splinter buried deep in his finger. I went

and got a small Swiss Army Knife that I keep in my desk, using its tiny blade and tweezers to pry the splinter free without cutting my coworker deeply enough to make him bleed. I realized, as I did it, that I was carrying on some sort of family tradition -- for in my messenger bag was a full SwissChamp survival kit.



Photo by Phil Elmore

The SwissChamp Kit takes an already useful item (the knife contains tools ranging from saws, a magnifying glass, tweezers, and a ball-point pen to pliers, scissors, and blades) and tucks it into a leather case containing a sharpening rod, compass, writing paper, pencil, bandages, thread, safety pins, matches, string, signal mirror, level, and more.



Photo by Phil Elmore

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I didn't perform any special evaluations while writing up this review, because to be honest I've been evaluating the SwissChamp for years. Mine was the first multitool I ever owned, something I had long before I'd ever heard of the original Leatherman. My first Victorinox served me well for at least 20 years. Over those years of use I've come to admire the SwissChamp not just for what it can do, but for the reassuring feeling of having it with me just in case.

SwissChamp Official Tool List

- Large blade
- Small blade
- Can opener with small screwdriver
- Bottle opener with large screwdriver & wire stripper
- Scissors
- Pliers with wire cutter
- Wood saw
- Fish scaler with hook disgorging & ruler
- Metal saw with metal file & nail file
- Magnifying glass
- Reamer with sewing eye
- Phillips screwdriver
- Corkscrew
- Hook
- Wood chisel
- Fine screwdriver
- Mini screwdriver
- Ball point pen
- Straight pin
- Toothpick
- Tweezers
- Key Ring

Fit and finish of the knife are first rate, and every Victorinox I've ever handled exhibits this high quality (immediately setting apart brand-name Swiss Army Knives from cheap imitations). Over

time, the plastic handles will scar from use and contact with other items, but that is to be expected.

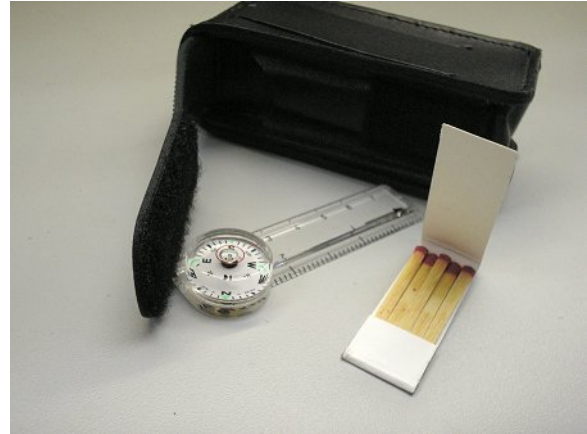


Photo by Phil Elmore

Lock-up of the slip-joint tools in the SwissChamp is excellent, while the tools may be opened without too much difficulty. I've always found the sharp little awl a bit jarring to open with a thumbnail, but other than that I have no complaints. I've never used the fishing tools, nor have I used the corkscrew, but the little patented eyeglass screwdriver that fits inside the corkscrew has served me well many times. The Phillips screwdriver is among the most-used tools on my SwissChamp, as are the other screwdriver blades. My favorite, however, is the precise, extremely sharp little spring-loaded pair of scissors. These are very well executed and this is true of any Swiss Army Knife I've handled that had a pair of them.

The tweezers set in the Victorinox' handle are also nice and precise, perfect for removing splinters or errant hairs. The magnifying glass works, though I've never been thrilled that its housing is plastic. The spring-loaded pliers are great for small jobs, but I've never really found them strong enough for the types of heavy jobs a

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Leatherman or Victorinox SwissTool can handle.



Photo by Phil Elmore

The SwissChamp includes a vicious saw with two sets of offset teeth that works very quickly and can rival larger saw blades when cutting wood or plastic. I've used it to chew through both materials in the field and at home and it has always amazed me.



Photo by Phil Elmore

The emergency pen does work and I've had to resort to it once or twice. Even the plastic toothpick makes a good probe for fine work, such as when prying open the back of a watch to change the battery.

Adding the SwissChamp to a leather pouch allows Victorinox to pack in a few other items for day-to-day survival and utility. There is nothing particularly remarkable about these things, but they're invaluable when you need them. How many times have you wished you had a safety pin, or just some string?

SwissChamp S.O.S. Set with Pouch

- SwissChamp knife, red
- Sharpening stone
- Pressure pencil
- Writing paper
- Three bandage strips
- Sewing thread (black and white)
- Two sewing needles
- Five matches
- Two safety pins
- Nylon string
- Signal mirror
- Ruler (in)
- Ruler (cm)
- Compass
- Spirit level

The compass and level are combined (there is a bubble in the compass that corresponds to a circle on the compass face) and are part of a cute little clear plastic ruler. A tiny matchbook is included, as is a signal mirror of plastic (it will reflect light but affords only a distorted reflection for grooming and such). The sharpening stone is more than adequate, coarse enough but not too coarse, with curved and straight surfaces. The mechanical pencil is also a thoughtful complement to the ink pen, as is the emergency paper. The whole kit comes with instructions and a list of the contents, too.

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Photo by Phil Elmore

The entire kit, once in its pouch, is perhaps a little more bulky than some would prefer for belt carry. I carry mine with my work bag day-to-day, but for other occasions I wouldn't mind carrying it on my belt for peace of mind.

The SwissChamp constitutes a great deal of preparation in a small package. There are plenty of multitools on the market you could choose, but you would be well-served by this Victorinox classic. I have used, carried, and kept one for many years. That tells me there is a lot of value in this not-so-little pocket knife. ♠