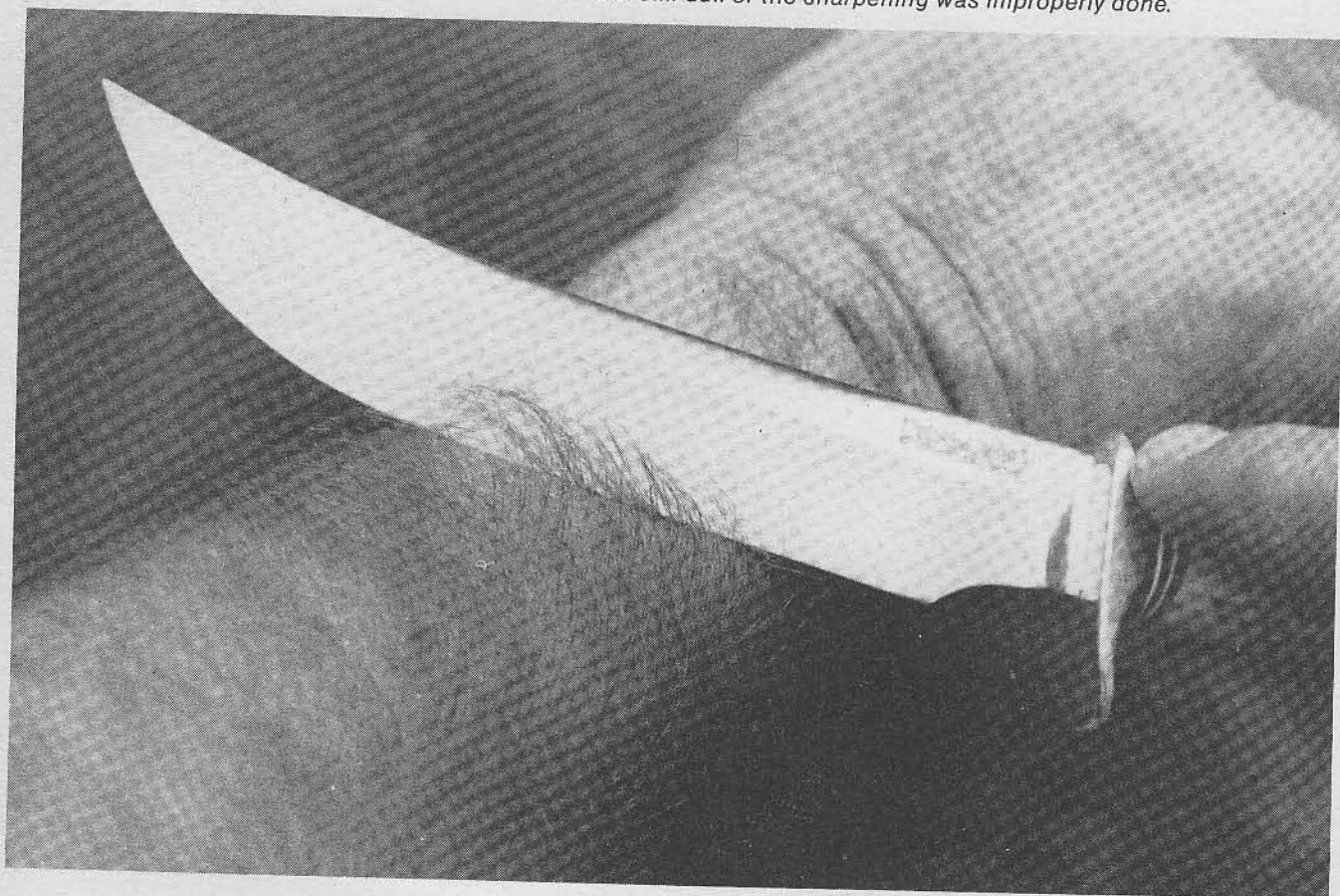


Chapter 12

OF STICK & STONES

*Sharpening Of Tools And Knives Requires
The Proper Stones And A Degree Of Knowledge*

When it is sharpened properly, the edge of a knife should be capable of shaving hair from the arm. If this cannot be accomplished, the author contends that the knife is still dull or the sharpening was improperly done.



ONE OF THE most pleasant parts of any successful hunting trip is when the game finally is bagged and hung for skinning. But it helps when the keen edge of the skinning knife unhesitatingly goes about its work of removing the pelt or hide.

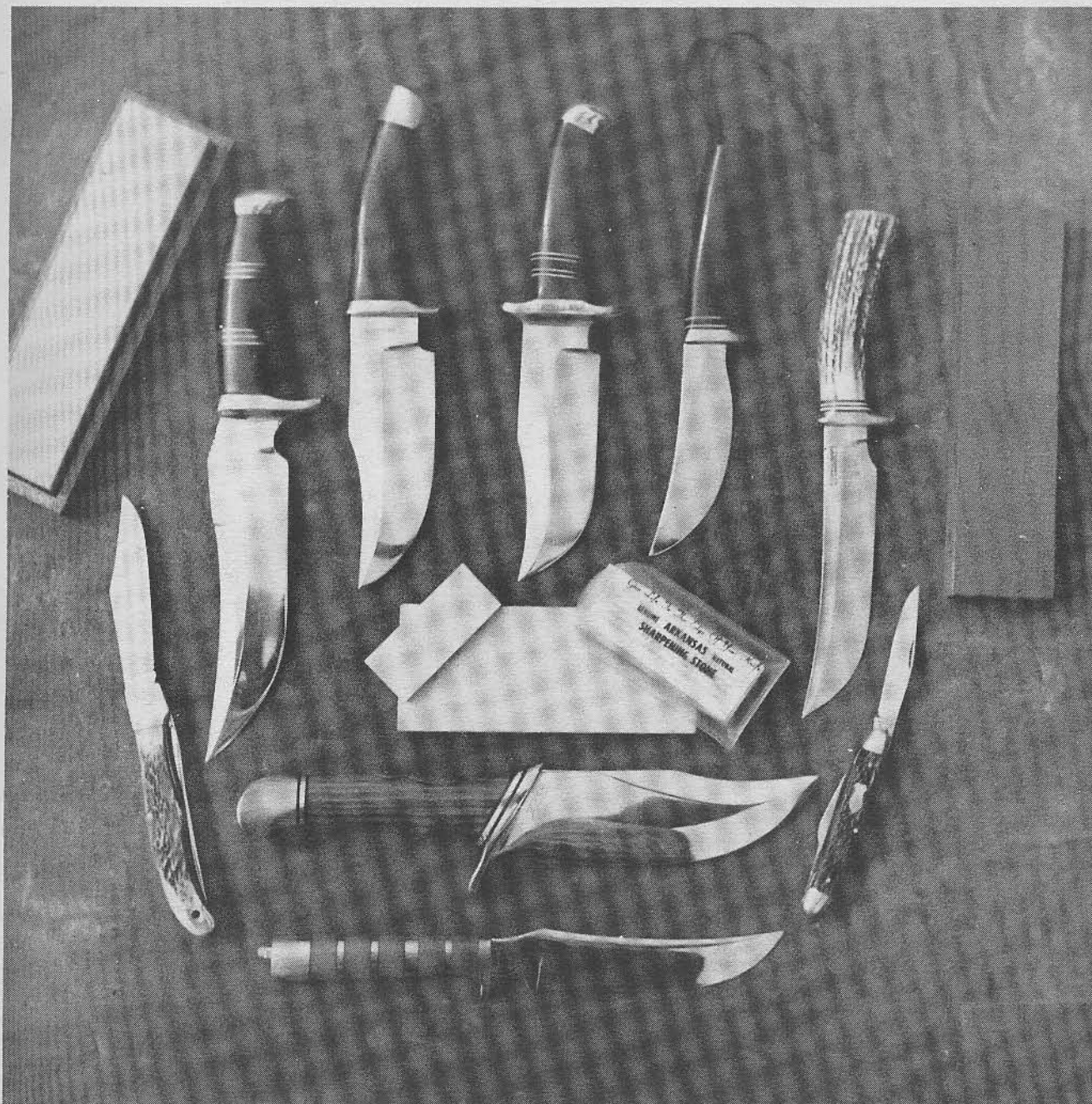
On the other hand, nothing can make for a short temper faster than to have to use an unkempt knife so dull it won't cut whipped cream!

In this day of modern technologies in cutlery steels, there is no excuse for any edged tool being dull, whether a

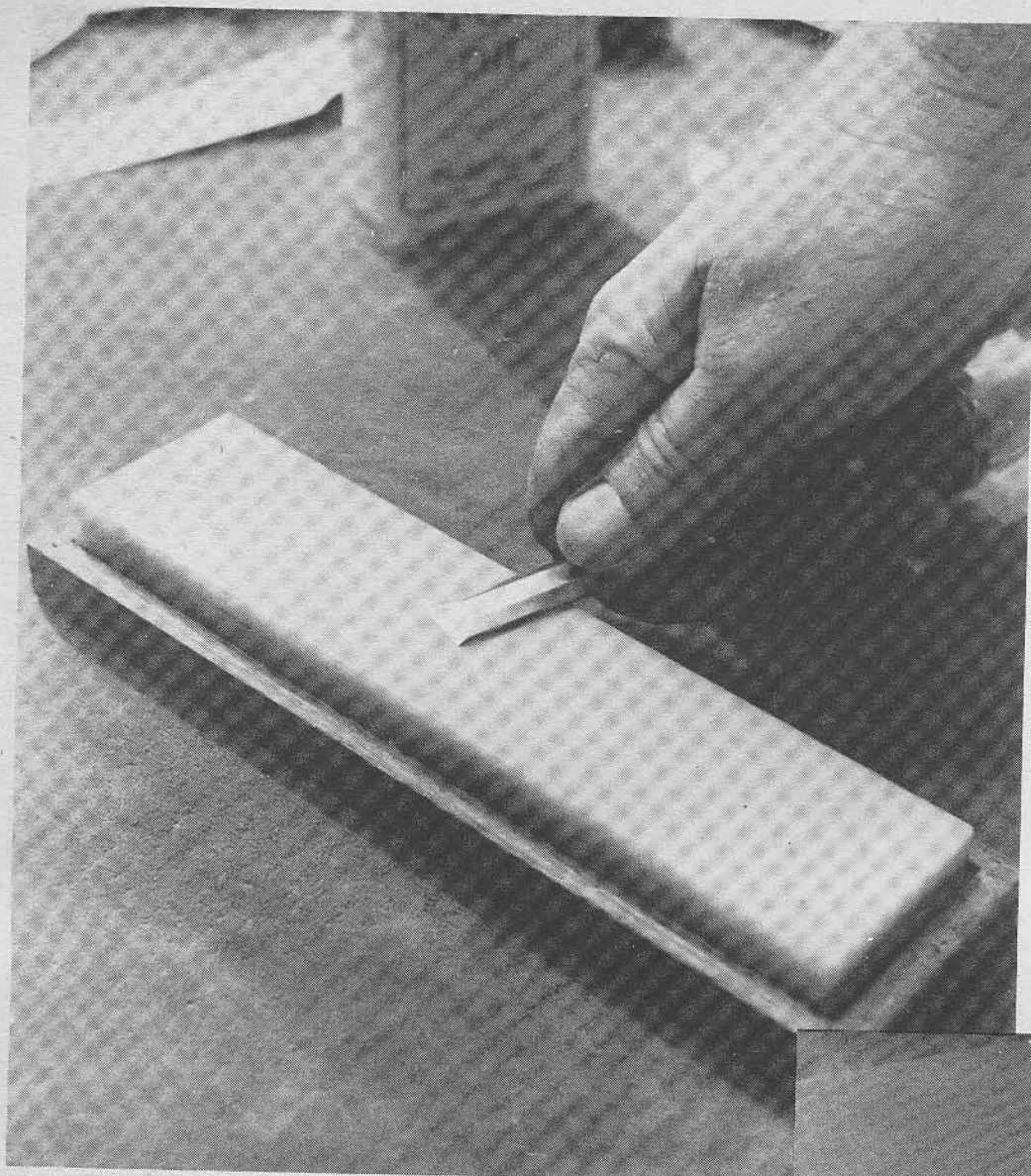
hunting or skinning knife, a camp ax or the various edged tools found on your workbench. Good Arkansas abrasive oil stones are neither scarce nor expensive these days.

Those who have spent considerable time in hunting country, at times depending on the land and its wildlife for their sustenance, know the value of a sharp knife and a good oil stone. Those of us who have spent countless hours over a hot workbench, turning out a self-built custom sporting rifle, or making our own hunting knives, know the full value of tools that are sharpened properly.

The first consideration in attaining a keen edge is to



A fine variety of custom-made cutlery is available today; all of the various styles, models deserve the proper care.

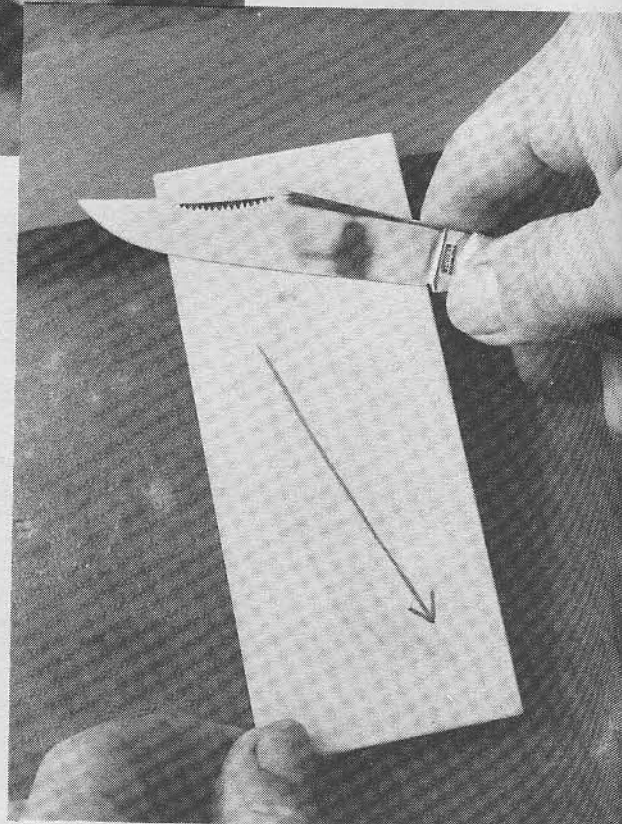


In resharpening gunsmithing chisels, once the edge has been brought to ultimate keenness, it should be touched up lightly on the stone to remove any minute burring.

determine whether that particular knife or tool is capable of taking such an edge, then holding it after prolonged use. There are some highly touted pocket and hunting knives, as well as tools, on the market today that cannot be sharpened on a good stone simply because of the inferior steels used or improper tempering. How often have most of us tried to sharpen a knife only to watch the seemingly sharp edge roll over and crack off of the blade completely? Any good, properly tempered piece of cutlery steel will take and hold a good edge, provided it is honed properly for the job that is intended.

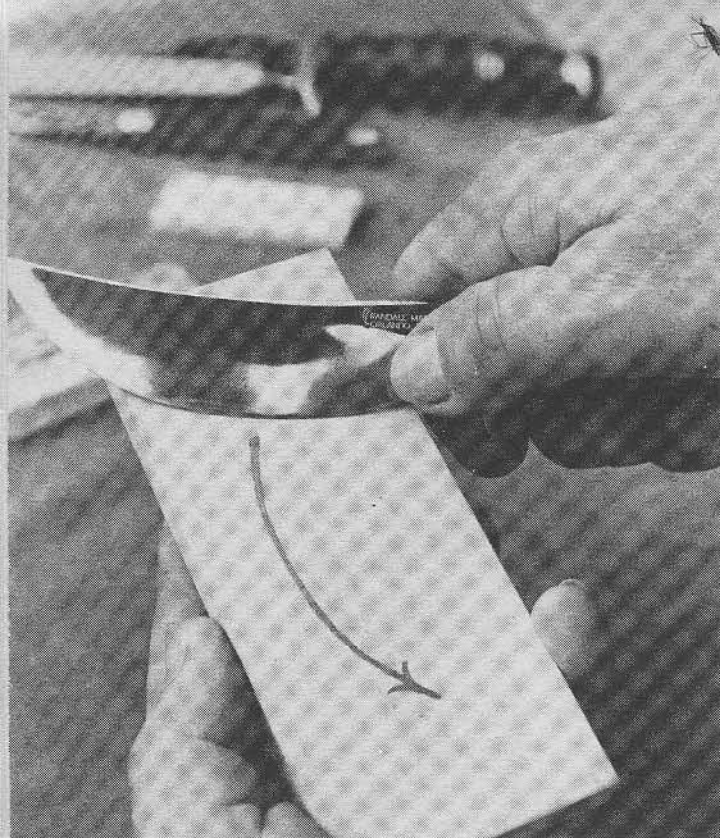
A knife meant strictly for game skinning purposes will have a different angle to the cutting edge than will a knife meant for hacking tent stakes or cutting firewood. For most purposes, a cutting edge of about twenty degrees will serve

Below: Pocketknives are easy to keep sharp. The blade is brought across face of stone in a continuous swipe (note arrow), making certain blade is swept in a rocking motion across stone toward the point.





Necessities for maintaining an edge on any cutting tool should include an array of good oil stones and a can of honing oil, although even saliva can be used in lieu of oil in an emergency. There are numerous manufacturers.



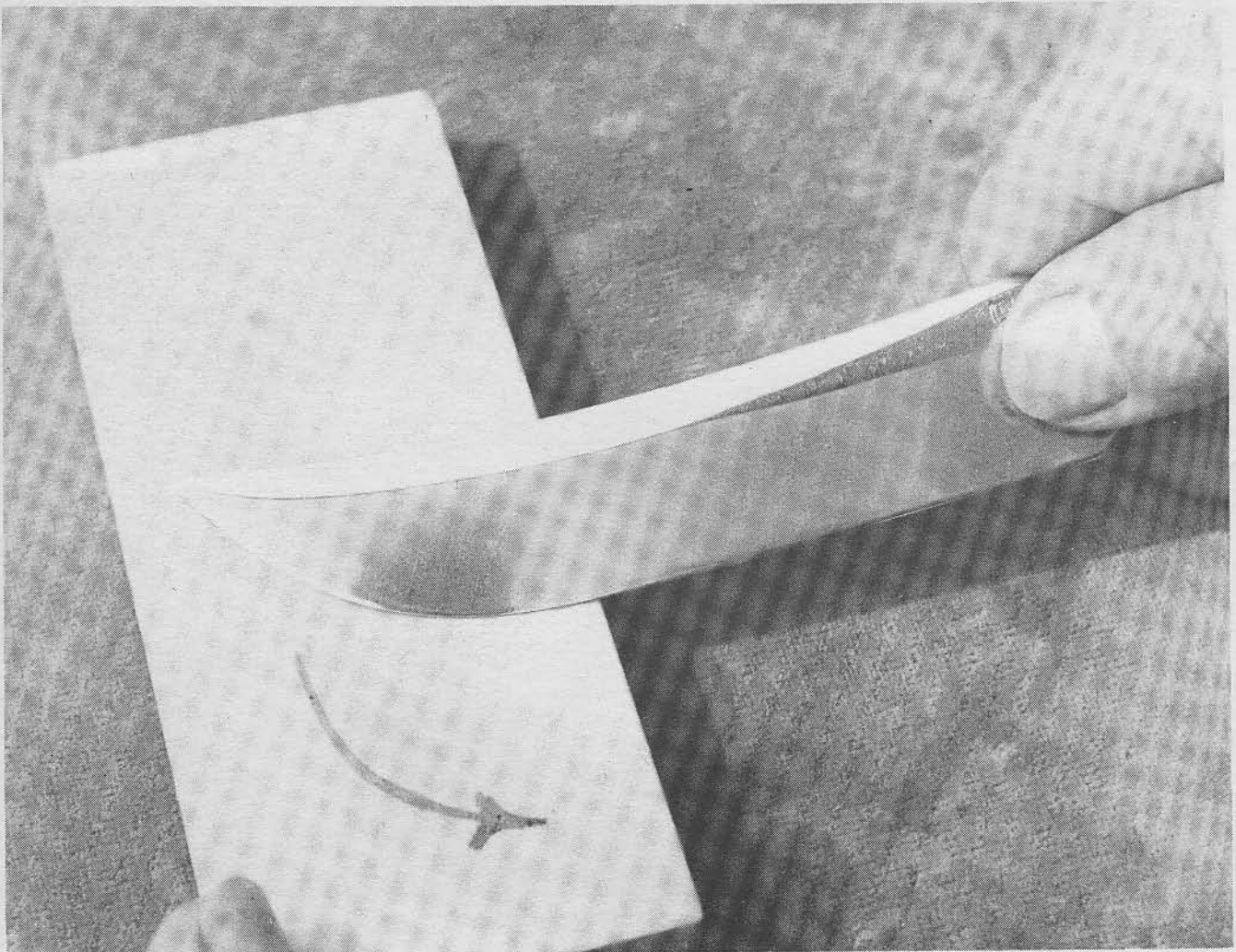
equally for skinning and all-around camp use. The so-called thin, razor-sharp edge may serve on a skinning knife, but will dull rapidly under all-around use.

The next consideration is the abrasive oil stone itself. While there are any number and types of such stones under various trade names, some of the best I've ever used were those that originate in the state of Arkansas and naturally are known as Arkansas sharpening stones.

Among the best of the Arkansas stones are those available from most gunsmith supply houses. These are available in all sizes needed for gun work, from pocket and pack stones, up to large bench and workshop stones up to a foot in length by 2½ inches in width and an inch in thickness.

Let's consider the knife that has seen long neglect and is dog-dull. A blade in this condition must be worked across the stone considerably longer than one that has merely lost

Left: The sharply curved edge of a skinning knife must be drawn across the stone in a continuous sweeping motion. This is repeated on both sides of the blade. (Below) Abruptly curved points of skinners require special treatment to assure a keen edge. It is this section of the blade that receives the greatest use.



its keenness under normal use. Each side of the blade must be given an equal number of strokes across the stone to maintain a perfect edge.

This is best accomplished with the use of a Washita soft Arkansas stone, pressing the blade firmly to the stone's surface during the initial stages of honing, then lightening the pressure as the edge is formed on each side of the blade. Finally, the blade is drawn lightly, in an even number of strokes, across the stone until it attains an edge that is sharp.

It is all important that a twenty-degree angle be maintained on the cutting edge of the blade during the entire stoning operation. Maintain this angle from the point of the blade all the way back to the rearmost portion of the cutting edge and on both sides of the blade. Sharpened in this manner, the blade should require only minor touching up with a few licks on the stone during the course of most skinning jobs on medium and big game. However, if you want your knife to maintain a keen edge, never attempt to hack through heavy bone. This is a job best left to the camp ax.

Basically, the same procedure outlined above will serve equally well on most folding pocket knives. There are any number of custom-made knives available to the sportsman today that can be sharpened to the point that the blades will skin out several head of medium or big game without needing a touch-up on a stone. And many of these makers furnish fine oil stones with each knife. Regardless of how good

it might be, any knife should and must be touched up occasionally on a good Arkansas oil stone.

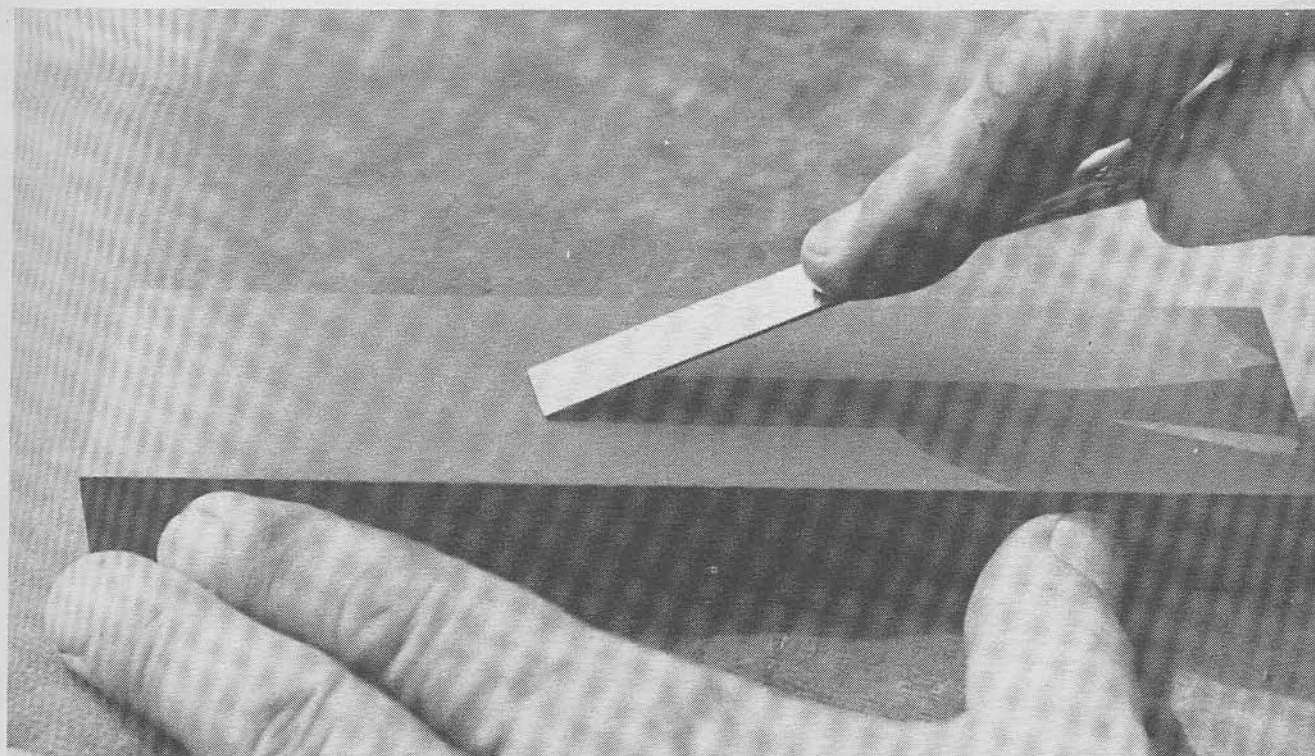
Important to the sportsmen, who repair or even build part of their outdoor gear, are the various cutting tools, such as wood chisels, planes, gouges and other edged tools used regularly in their home workshops. Tools of this type are especially important to those who build or rebuild sporting rifles as a hobby.

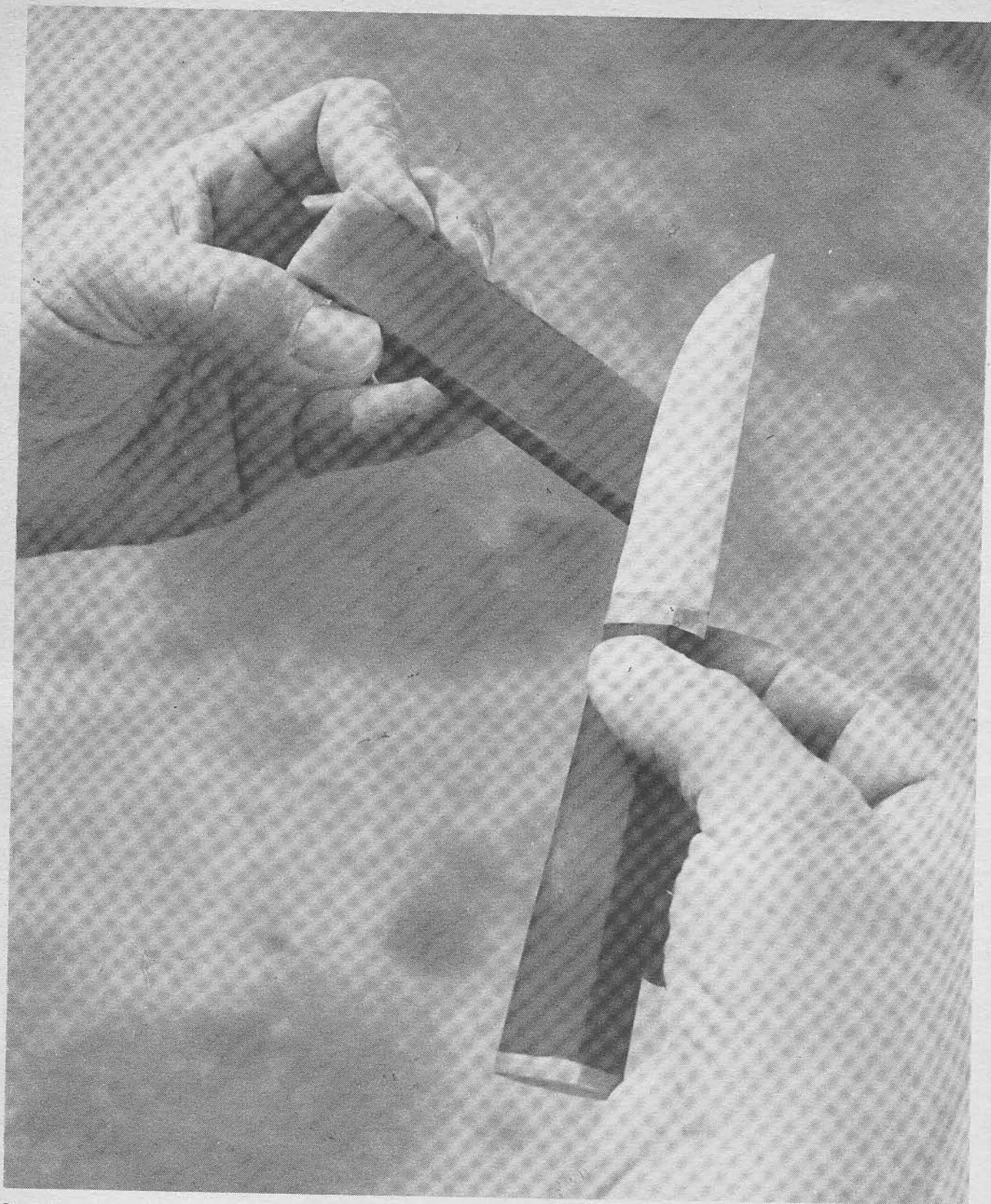
The inletting of a rifle action into a semi-finished stock is one of the most exacting chores in building a custom rifle. With the proper tools, this same job can be done quickly and easily by anyone familiar with the procedure. However, if those same tools — chisels, in this instance — are dull, this job can be one that will turn hair gray and cause no small amount of perspiration to drip and flow! Sharp inletting chisels do a beautiful job, while dull ones can cobble the stock into something fit only for firewood!

The basic procedure of knife sharpening is used on any flat chisel — with two exceptions. First, the cutting edge of the chisel must be kept perfectly straight, while the original degree of angle of the sloping edge, as factory ground, must be maintained.

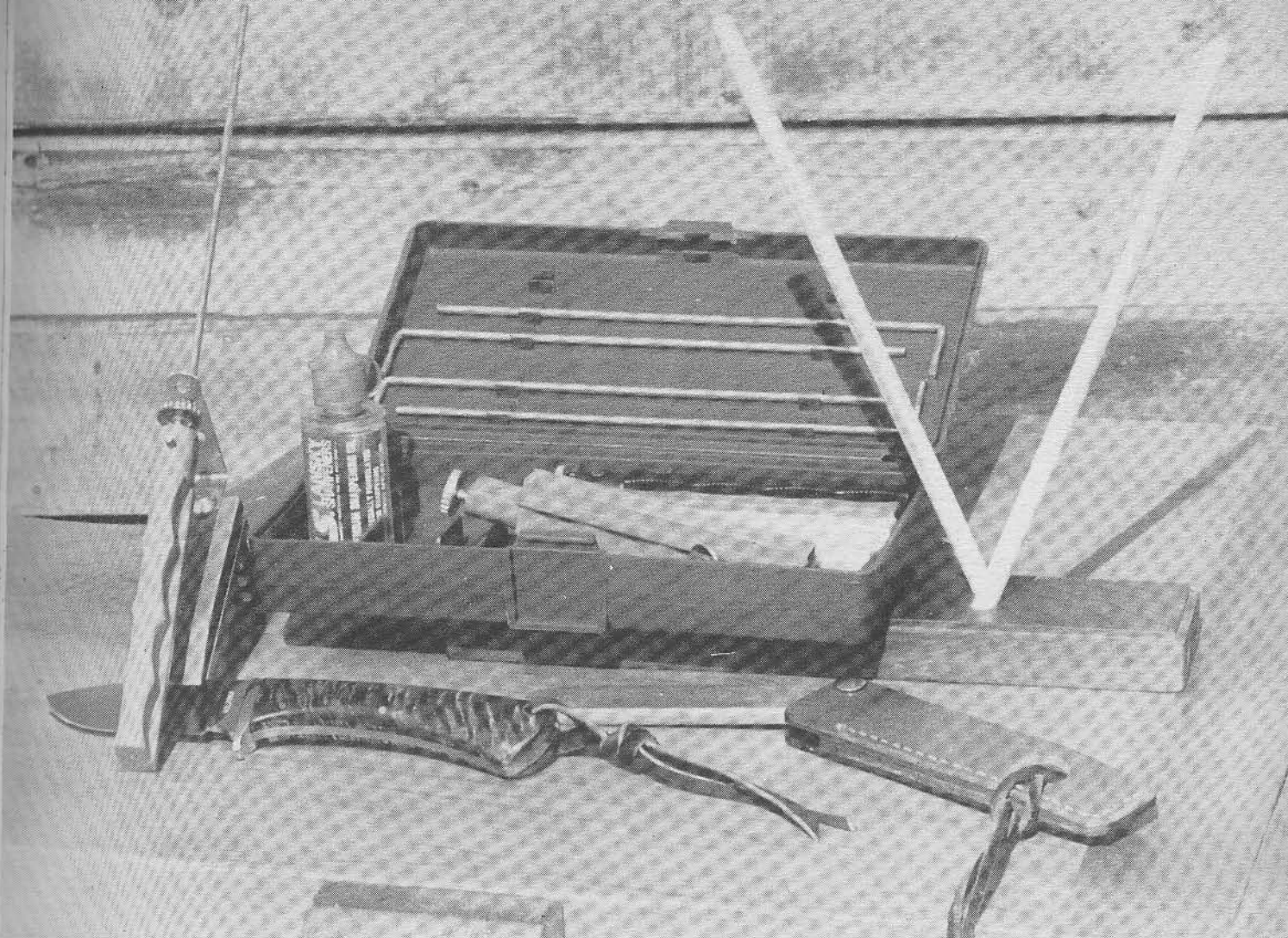
The sloping edge of the chisel is placed on the stone at the correct angle, then the cutting edge is pushed the length of the stone in one continuous motion. This is repeated until any minor nicks and roughness are removed from the edge. Then the pressure on the chisel is lessened to assure a

The author has discovered that a good wood chisel can be kept sharp by honing the beveled edge at a correct angle.





Once the desired edge has been attained on the blade, a finer grit stone can be used to remove roughness or burrs.



Manufactured today is a wide variety of sharpening tools. At right are Crock Sticks, made of ceramics, providing the correct angle for sharpening both sides of blade. At bottom is folding sharpening steel offered by Gerber Blades. The rather complex kit is from Lansky Sharpeners, which offers stones in various grits and jig for holding angle.

perfect, flawless cutting edge. The last step is to turn the chisel over, lay the flat surface of the chisel blade onto the stone and lightly work the cutting edge in a sideways motion to remove even the most minute burrs. The final touch-up on the chisel is made with an Arkansas hard stone to assure a super, razor-sharp cutting edge. The blades of wood planes are sharpened in exactly the same manner.

Any new knife — unless it is custom built and honed — must be stone sharpened the minute it is purchased, if complete satisfaction is expected.

It is best never to skimp on price where a knife is concerned and this applies to shop tools, too! But the most important thing to remember when buying a knife is also to have a good oil stone with which to sharpen it.

In addition to Arkansas oil stones, there also are excellent oil stones produced under the name of Carborundum and Norton Abrasives. But regardless of the name, a good quality oil stone should be in the tool kit of any gun craftsman and with the sportsman in the field.

In recent years, there have been some new gimmicks introduced specifically for knife sharpening. One is the so-called crock stick, which is made of ceramic. It usually is furnished with a block with holes drilled in it at a precise angle. The ceramic rods are inserted in these holes and this gives the preferred twenty-degree angle for sharpening. It can be effective, if used properly and the person doing the sharpening is careful to maintain the required angle.

Arthur Lansky has come up with a sharpening unit that is somewhat more complicated. It features a small vise for holding the blade in a fixed position, then rods attached to stones are inserted in a series of holes that give one a specific angle ranging from seventeen to twenty-five degrees. But one has to know at what angle the knife was sharpened originally for best results.

Most of today's major cutlery manufacturers, including Buck Knives, Western Cutlery, Gerber Legendary Blades and Camillus Cutlery also market knife sharpening kits of one kind or another.