

Swiss Army Knife

Answer these questions before reading the text to see what you know about the topic:

- 1 Did you ever hold a Swiss Army knife in your hand?
- 2 Why are Swiss Army knives so popular?
- 3 In what country were they first made?
- 4 Why is it called an “army” knife?



If you are going on an expedition you will run into different situations where you will need to have a few tools with you. Do you have something to open the cans of beans that you will eat for supper? Do you have something to cut a cord that is too long? Did you bring a pen? Did you bring **tweezers** to remove a **splinter** in your foot?

If you can only bring one tool, it is a good idea to buy a multi-purpose knife before you leave.

A Swiss Army knife (SAK) is a great pocketknife or multi-tool. It has a blade as well as various tools, such as a **screwdriver** and a can opener. These attachments are inside the handle of the knife. The handle is usually red, with a white cross on it, the emblem of Switzerland. The knife that is actually used by the Swiss Army has a handle, a **blade**, a **reamer** and a bottle-opener/screwdriver. It originated in Switzerland in 1897.

Eventually, U.S. soldiers began calling the tool “Swiss Army knife” because they could not pronounce the original name, “Offiziersmesser,” which means “Officer’s knife.”

Many models of Swiss Army knives exist, with different tool combinations for specific tasks. Some models offer a second blade, tweezers, toothpick, corkscrew, can opener, bottle opener, screwdriver, nail file, scissors, saw, file, hook, magnifying glass, ballpoint pen, a fish scaler, pliers and key chain. The new models include a USB flash memory, a digital clock, a laser pointer, and an MP3 player.

The standard Swiss Army knife is approximately nine centimetres long and two centimetres wide. There are also smaller models that are about six centimetres long and 1.5 centimetres wide. Swiss Army knives are usually red but you can also get them in black, blue, white, phosphorescent yellow, various camouflage patterns and other colours.

Smart

Words

tweezer =

a small instrument to pluck out hair and pick up small objects

splinter =

a small, thin and sharp piece of wood or glass stuck in the skin

screwdriver =

a tool for turning screws

blade = the flat part of a knife

reamer =

a tool for widening or finishing drilled holes

owner =

a proprietor

supply =

to furnish, to provide

Origins

In 1891, Karl Elsener, **owner** of a company that made surgical equipment, discovered with great surprise that the pocketknives given to the Swiss Army were made in Germany and not in Switzerland! He then decided to found the Association of Swiss Master Cutlers. His goal was simple. He wanted Swiss knives for the Swiss Army. The original model had a wooden handle, and featured a blade, a screwdriver, and a can opener. Later, Elsener put many other features on the knife and he added a second blade and a corkscrew. Today, the Swiss Army knife company **supplies** about 50 000 knives to the Swiss Army each year. The rest of production is for exports, mostly to the United States. The company has also made a \$1200 Swiss Army knife model.

When are you going to get yours?