

Get it Together

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“Get it Together” was the title of an intermediate blacksmithing course I took at the John C. Campell School. My attendance at this course was made possible by a stipend I received as part of the 2007 Rookie of the Year award.

The objective of the course was to practice forge welding, learn how to make tenons and rivet them, as well as the making collars. Our instructor, Dale Morse, is an accomplished blacksmith who owns and operates the Clay Hill Forge in Charlottesville, VA. He received some of his training in Germany and some of his work is featured in the book *Lives Shaped by Steel* by Nancy Zastrow. He gave us a choice of an architectural piece or a trivet which he designed himself and which takes 8 welds and 6 tenons, three of them made off a lap weld. I chose the trivet. I spent the first day turning fine iron into scrap metal as I have not had a lot of practice at forge welding. Getting tired of cold-bending the outer ring, I asked Dale to have a look at what I was doing wrong. Based on his feedback and a few more practice welds, I was off to welding. Another skill that I learned was bending. While the outer circle of the trivet was alright, getting the trefoil to be symmetric was another story. The open hearts that fill the trefoil were easier, but getting each side to be symmetric to the other and then getting the adjoining hearts to be symmetric to each other is a serious challenge. To top it off, I attempted to line up the weld lines at the bottom of the hearts with the opposing weld line of the trefoil. Don Neuenschwander’s “Quit while you’re ahead.” kept on ringing in my head, until I finally took his advice.



You will notice that the legs have beads inlaid. My wife joined me for the trip and she took a course on glass bead making. Very early on, we decided to combine our efforts, and she made a couple of glass beads for me.

We had five students in our class, see the image below, from left to right, they are: Daniel from Illinois, myself, Ed from Kansas (and yes, that is a flower in his pants,) Paul from North Carolina and our instructor Dale. One of the students was a work student and was absent when we took pictures.



The blacksmith shop is very well equipped and the set-up is well thought out. It has some nice touches too, like the water tubs made from beer kegs. Working there helped me select the next set of tools to make and purchase and it opened my eyes to things to consider when setting up my own shop. I encourage folks who are thinking about building their own shop to go down and visit – better yet, take a course there, their web-site is: www.folkschool.org

The work of the blacksmith shop is present wherever you go on the large school grounds, from railings, light posts and chandeliers to hooks and towel racks in the rooms and studios. It was a pleasure to meet and talk with the resident blacksmith, Paul Garrett. He had a rather inventive anvil stand, made from 2x12. The pieces are staggered so that every other piece created a tool rest. See http://www.anvilfire.com/iForge/tutor/jd_stand/ for plans.

The Campbell Folk School is well worth a visit and I highly recommend that you stay on their grounds. We enjoyed the company of our fellow craftsmen and women and made some new friends. I particularly enjoyed visiting the other shops, as many of them either gave special presentations in the evening or simply stayed open for students to work on their projects.

I would like to thank the IBA for the Scholarship that supported this trip. My wife and I had a good time and we plan to be back soon.