

Gear junkie: Company does for ink pens, what Leatherman did to pliers
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GEAR JUNKIE

In a former life, Greg Adelman designed optical instrumentation for Scripps Institution of Oceanography and worked on engineering projects for the U.S. military and NATO.

Now, he's dabbling in writing utensils.

"I want to do to pens what Leatherman did to pliers," says Adelman, who is president and founder of the Boulder, Colo.-based Inka Corp.

The company's namesake product - the Inka pen - is one of the few available writing utensils specifically designed for use in the outdoors. It weighs a miniscule 0.6 ounces and has a pressurized ink cartridge that will put up with almost any condition and environment an outdoors person may throw at it.

The pen writes in wet conditions, below-zero weather and scorching desert sun. It writes at any altitude and works when held upside down for extended periods. For scuba divers, it even writes underwater.

Inka Corp. plans to market the pen to mountaineers, hikers, orienteers, scuba divers, fishermen and pilots. I'd add adventure racers to that list, as they have to work with maps and chart courses in all types of conditions.

I tested the Inka pen in a handful of harsh conditions over the past two months, subjecting it to frozen air in a Minnesota forest during a day-long winter excursion and using it to mark up maps at two orienteering meets in northern Missouri's bluff country. I even held it underwater and scrawled some hazy doodles on a slip of coated paper.

On all fronts, the pen did its job and the ink flowed freely whenever I needed it. The pen's convenient design, which includes a stainless steel case fixed with a key ring, allowed me to wear the pen on a cord around my neck or clip it to a carabineer for quick access.

The compact pen measures 2.75 inches long. This stubby form is fine for jotting quick notes, but it quickly becomes uncomfortable writing anything longer than a sentence or two.

But Inka was on top of this. The pen can be converted to a full-size writing utensil: Just unscrew the end cap and thread the stainless steel case onto the pen body. This setup creates a comfortable, 5-inch-long pen that will make short work of that requisite fireside journal entry at the end of a long day on the trail.

Price: \$25 (comes with one ink cartridge); replacement ink cartridge, \$4.