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From the Editor

Welcome to the first edition for 2020 where we hit the field running as Sam Garro shares a trophy tale from the Top End, Anthony Puddicombe enjoys a hunting holiday in the Snowy Mountains with family and friends, Don Caswell calls up elusive wild dogs, Rod Williams flies into wintry Alaska in a breathtaking search for brown bears, Chris Wardrop takes aim at feral goats, Chris Redlich and son make the most out of stags and Michel Durand takes to the skies for some contemporary pig hunting with the use of a drone.

We also take an in-depth look through the eyes of the cunning red fox, profile the premium performance of wildcat cartridges, cover all the bases by sighting in prior to a hunt, highlight the many benefits of the .277 bore, explore the vast world of shotgun shells, find the right rifle/shotgun combination with the Savage Model 24 and say 'hola' to the competitive B14 Hunter rifle from Bergara.

Furthermore, discover how to be a campfire cooking legend with the handy RotaBBQ, tune in to MyOutdoor TV for some global hunting adventures, follow blood trails with a Primos headlamp and

fine-tune bowhunting with the Burris Oracle Sight. Check out stylish and practical products from Bush Edge and Braken Wear, along with a first look at the new Ridgeline W2020 range of innovative outdoor apparel. We highlight the many pertinent features of the versatile Leatherman Charge multi-tool, turn an old drop knife to a clip point in a few easy steps and look at some decisive factors for determining overall knife quality.

Acclaimed author and food aficionado PJ Booth details the many tantalising options you have with duck. Our mouth-watering smoky goat leg recipe further tickles the tastebuds. And who says you shouldn't eat stag? See how to turn that 'tough old venison' into some good eating. We also put the Polyscience 300 cryovac machine through its paces for diverse game meat prosperity.

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Thomas Cook
Editor



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A hunting eye in the sky

Michel (Jimmy) Durand



Shearers' quarters from above.

When it comes to hunting, where do drones enter the equation? Some say drones are the future of hunting. Drone capabilities have expanded exponentially over recent years yet their prices have never been more affordable. Now compact enough to throw in your backpack for a hunting trip, are they an

asset or just an expensive toy? I'll let you be the judge.

Only 10 years ago the drone scene was very different. Battery flight time lasted just 10 minutes, a maximum flying distance of 300-500m with average quality cameras and basic potential. Yet today we enjoy a battery life which can exceed 30 minutes flight time, 4k high definition cameras (the Mavic 2 Pro

carries a Hasselblad lens, the same used on the cameras for the Apollo 11 mission landing on the Moon) and a 5km range with a price tag of \$2500. As you will discover, we utilised the DJI Mavic 2 Enterprise Dual.

A quick google search suggests an RRP of around \$4200 but its arsenal includes a dual 4k high definition camera, supported by a low-res thermal camera. Interchangeable

The Mavic 2 Enterprise dual drone.



The station formed an oasis in the drought.



speakers and spotlights can be used for identification and security with low noise propellers. There are 360-degree collision avoidance sensors to miss trees and 5km range at a top speed of 60kmh. A handy option in its own right yet small enough to hold in your hand.

So, with our equivalent of Han Solo's Millennium Falcon and old school

equipment, we headed to a cattle station south of Quilpie in Outback Queensland.

The team consisted of Johno, Dave and myself (Jimmy). We all bring individual skills to the team but they have both been covering the skies for many years. They are quick to state it was an acquired skill from zero experience in the beginning.

When hunting pigs we prefer our mid-60s

built Winchester .30-30 lever actions topped with red dot sights. We have found the red dot set-up supports solid peripheral vision when the pigs are on the run with fellow hunters in the vicinity. To mount the red dots (due to the top ejection) we had to source some special Picatinny rails from a fellow in Colorado. My rifle was handed down to me from my uncle



A hunting eye in the sky



Skirting the river by motorbike.

and is actually older than I am. And for ammunition the three of us opt for the PPU 150-grain soft-points. They are effective rounds at a friendly price. Probably not the best going around but our firearms seem to shoot them well, so we are reluctant to try anything else.

We arrived at the station just after noon and met with the property owner. I am always humbled by the true grit these individuals possess under the difficult circumstances they encounter on the land. But he is the first to say he loves the life on the farm. We headed to the shearers' quarters to unpack as quickly as we could. Having hunted on this station last year, we had achieved a tally of 14 pigs in two days. The trick this time was to use the drone effectively without being a distraction while on motorbikes and in utes.

So exactly how do you use a drone to hunt pigs? Our general plan is to ride three abreast on the motorbikes and always maintain visibility on the centre rider. Rifles are nestled in grips on the handlebars and we turn to Garmin Rino 750 hand-held radio/Global Positioning System (GPS) units for communication and locating each other. "Pig, pig, pig" is our sophisticated radio call to alert each other that one of us is onto the pigs. As the lignum trees and bushes become thicker, we tighten up and as the terrain opens, we spread out. Simple, right? But anyone who hunts invariably knows, the best laid plans are always subject to change.

We had about two hours of daylight left and the decision was made to hit the spot we had most success with on the previous trip. This channel country had seen rain several months prior, so the scrub was pretty

tight in spots. However, quickly you would enter open areas with 200m-plus visibility. After about an hour of riding in 36C heat we deployed the drone for the really tight scrub, which is not bike country at all. When you're on foot and poking around scrub, it chews up time like nothing else.

Johnno can unpack the drone from his backpack and be set to launch within three minutes. So in anticipation of pushing some bacon out into the open, the drone was deployed and patrolled further afield. We repositioned on the bikes and were no longer in sight of Johnno, having left him behind. A little logistically challenging at first, but you find the groove quickly. The heart started pumping, with minimum chatter on the radio and eyes peeled. You just don't know where the action will come from. Johnno suddenly sent over the radio the call



Transiting the station by ute.

we are waiting to hear... "Pigs are in the open at your 1 o'clock, 100 metres!"

Dave and I hammered the throttles in that zone. With eyes scanning and the adrenalin pumping, we worked our way through the low branches and lignum. We broke out of the scrub into a vast open vista that provided us with 300m visibility yet dotted with small patches of scrub. Dave was the first to spot the three mid-sized black pigs tearing across out front. In support, I swung wide and back a little to position for the second push should it be needed.

Dave managed to position himself as close as he could and jumped on the anchor to pull up the bike. With his trusty old .30-30 settling into his shoulder the rookie of the team fired the initial shot of the trip. He took out the first pig with a solid engine room hit at about 50m. More shots rang out

and the second pig was winged and cart-wheeled to a stop. The third pig changed its path and headed right towards me. So at this point, I have to say, I missed some plum shots. The angry hog swung back in the direction of Dave and for some unknown reason pulled to a halt. Obviously confused, but a misguided decision as Dave sent another round downrange with success.

Johno had been in pursuit after recovering the drone and hearing all the shots fired. He operated the Garmin to locate our position and found us dragging the three pigs together. After much banter regarding my inability to hit the side of a barn, photos were taken and we headed to camp as the sun set to prepare for an evening of night-time hunting.

Using the drone at night is a pretty daunting task. But the boys have been doing this

professionally for a while and use all the assets available in these high-tech units. GPS tracking, live thermal footage and spotlights mounted on top for the high definition camera collectively assist to create an 'eye in the sky'.

We set out in the ute with all the gear for a night's spotlighting. The Mavic drone was ready to launch with four batteries charged, which provide 30 minutes of flight time each. Our plan was to employ the drone when we could not access particular areas with the vehicle. Or to check the other side of creeks or escarpments to evaluate if it was worth heading over to search.

We don't ditch the .30-30s at night, as they are always in the ute. These days we have replaced the old spotlights, whose cords seem to tangle on every little lever or switch in the car. We now

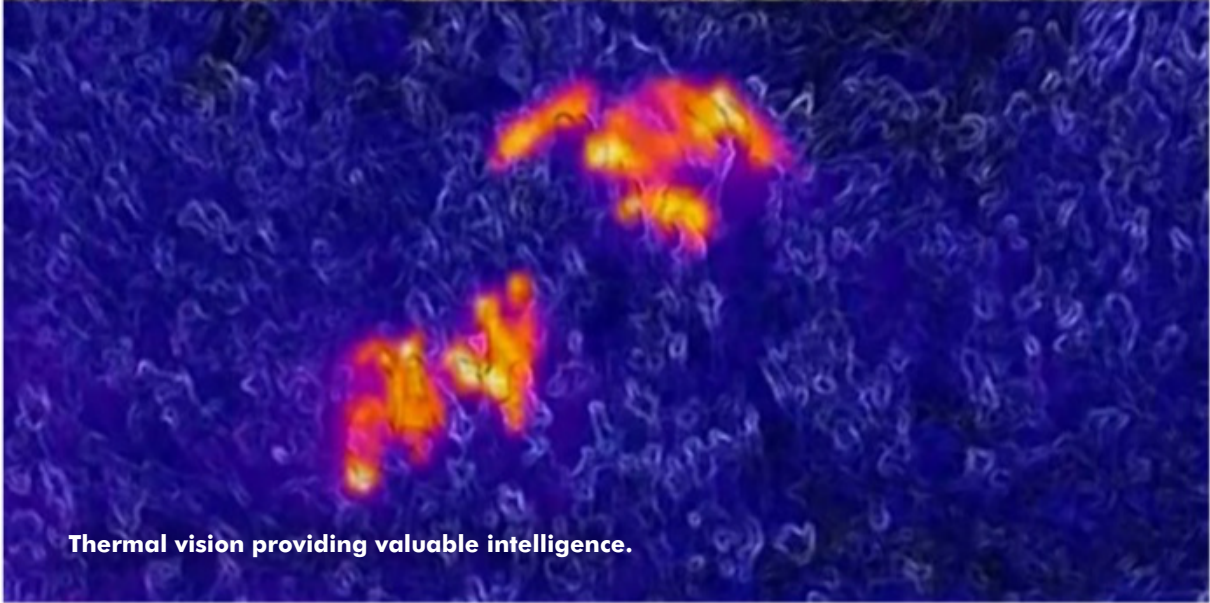
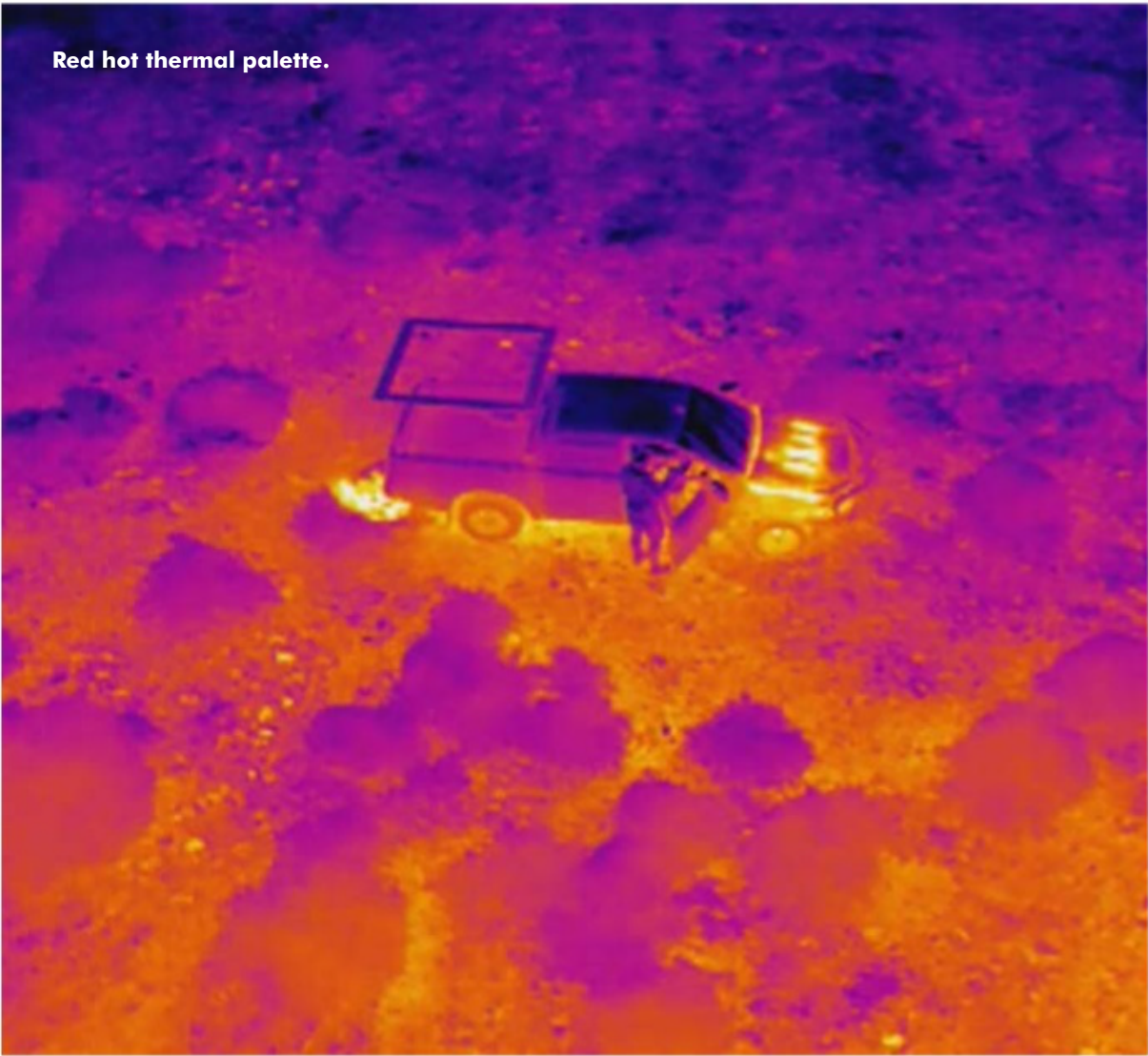


A hunting eye in the sky

run a hand-held Klarus XTR30 LED hunting torch. With a realistic distance of 350m, it is ample for us. Spare batteries are recharged constantly from the car charger. For night-time shooting I prefer my .243 Win Haenel Jaeger topped with a bargain basement Bushnell scope. I run the Buffalo River 87-grain polymer tipped Hornady V-Max rounds. I have taken pigs out at 200m with this rifle and never been disappointed. Backing that up is my Howa .223 REM. This time sporting a budget Vortex scope. The Howa prefers Australian Outback 55gr Sierra BlitzKing rounds and is effective on cats and foxes without the percussion blast effect of the slightly larger calibre.

On this occasion the Mavic drone again proved its worth but not how you would think. The beauty of pig hunting at night is they tend to take off more slowly than during the day, until you start shooting that is. But it provides you with some crucial extra seconds to prepare the shot.

The temperature was still in the low 30s



Using the DJI Smart Controller to check baiting stations.

but fortunately there was a slight breeze to blow away the dust generated by the vehicle. There is nothing worse than trying to look through a scope at night with the spotlight on the target and all you can see is dust.

After 20 minutes cramped in the HiLux cabin we stumbled across a small mob of pigs. I jumped out and leant across the bonnet to take aim. A couple of shots were fired, with one pig down but the mob split. At this point we had to make the call as to which direction they had scattered. What a

A hunting eye in the sky

perfect time to send up the thermal drone. We quickly found the pigs only 150m away but moving steadily into the scrub. A quick assessment indicated that we physically could not navigate the trees and tight scrub

in the dark. It was not worth wasting any more time on this mob. So we moved on.

What we have learnt from these experiences is that ultimately the drone isn't necessarily about 'finding' the pigs (or

deer, wild dogs) as it is in saving us hours of wasted time searching for what is no longer there.

Every trip is time-critical and this means moments saved deliver an extra opportunity to cover more ground. The trip concluded with a tally of seven pigs, three cats and one unlucky rabbit.

When it comes to drones and hunting, possibly a more holistic approach is required. They cannot serve as a 'total solution'. But used in conjunction with fundamental hunting skills, drones have the ability to enhance opportunities in the field. They are also great fun.

Thank you to Jeff at CR Kennedy in Melbourne who provided the Mavic drone for this trip. His constant support in the hunting and pest management field is second to none. ■



Johno deploys the Mavic 2 drone.



Mike's three pigs found by the drone.

A stag (dinner) party

Chris Redlich



The trophy meat stag where it came to rest by a tree.

I could not recall the last time I had watched the weather with so much anticipation leading up to a roar. With loads of work at home, I was really keen to be away with my son for our annual red deer roar hunt.

Seven months had passed since our last hunt together and it was definitely a good excuse to replenish our venison stocks. Regardless of stag or hind, I am not as fussy as some hunters are for my choice of meat animal. I have mates who refuse to take a rutting stag as they believe the meat is too gamey and tastes awful. However, prepared correctly a rutting red stag can be just as nice to eat as a hind. Although a hind would ultimately be the preferred source of meat, a hunt is a hunt and I don't complain either way.

Queensland had been in the grip of a drought for an extended period but a large amount of rain driven by an unseasonal cyclone was pelting the south-east corner. This presented a slight inconvenience to our hunting plans but a welcome relief for a parched land.

The rain threatened to dampen our camp but it wasn't going to diminish our excitement. As expected, the wet track to the property in the mountains was a little slippery and the HiLux pulling the bike trailer was given a decent workout in low range.

A break in the weather enabled us to set up camp with minimal fuss and thankfully we had the tarp erected by the time the first wave of storms rolled over. My son Carl wasn't about to let a bit



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CARTRIDGES

A stag (dinner) party

of rain spoil the fun and began motivating me for an afternoon hunt. We prepared our rifles, donned the packs and departed camp on our bikes for a look around.

Not far from camp it didn't take long before our afternoon 'look see' turned into an adventure. The hills were muddy and our motorbikes and riding skills were put to the test as the terrain threw everything at us. With our first little challenge over, we parked the bikes after some wild dog prints in the wet soil caught our attention. Ever so quietly we attempted to find the wild dog that was roaming the area. With the dog eluding us and some more rain overhead we rode across the treacherous hills back to camp and settled in for a wet night.

Next day we departed the dryness of camp to check for sign. Although a tad early in the rut to hear a roar, the stags had left their mark with rubs on various small trees. This gave us a boost of confidence that success may come close to camp but, until the rain passed, we would have to be patient.

Later that afternoon as a storm rolled in overhead, Carl grabbed my attention. "Dad, dogs!" Not far from our base

a pair of wild dogs appeared out of the scrub oblivious to us and our camp. They were making their way up the hill just above a steep gully and I wasted no time in readying for a shot. I left the shelter of the tarp with my .284 and sat in the rain. Shouldering the rifle, the lightning and trees obscured my view of the dogs. I gave a sharp howl and caught their attention. I howled again and one of the dogs turned and trotted slowly towards us. With my sight picture still blocked I howled once more and he came into view.

At about 80m I shot the curious dog. As if the carpet had been pulled from under his feet, he was bowled into the steep lantana choked gully. The other dog bolted, never to return and Carl gave me the thumbs up. Unfortunately, the terrain was steep and thick with lantana. Disappointedly, we were unable to retrieve the wild dog for a photo but happy that a potential stock killer had been eliminated. That night, in between the showers of rain, the deceased wild dog's partner howled eerily from a safe distance down the valley, making the hairs on the back of our necks stand up.



A tree rub indicates a stag close by.



A wallow surrounded by beautiful scenery.



Working together to winch the stag in.

After a poor attempt at a good night's sleep, we made use of the fine dawn and prepared for an early morning hunt. Looking to the east, the rain had shifted off the coast and by the sound of things, the roar had commenced. Stags were becoming vocal and we only had two more days of hunting left. Carefully picking our way through the wet scrub we edged closer to the sound of a red stag working a gully. As we approached all fell silent, and apart from some faint roars a distance away, we were out of luck. Or so it seemed.

The morning had drawn on and we decided to carefully make our way back to camp, eyes peeled and ears pricked. Reaching the top of the ridge, a stag's roar close by had our full attention. He wasn't giving too much away as the roars were intermittent. Although the time was nearing 9am it's not uncommon to hear a stag

roar late in the morning. We crested the ridge to go a little closer and Carl saw a flash of red scampering through the bush. A stag was working three hinds and heading straight for us.

All of a sudden, a siren-like roar made us jump. I believed at that stage he was only a young stag and I decided I was just going to take a hind when they came into view. We stayed put, too cautious to move and took a rest against a tree. At a distance of no more than 50m, three hinds blazed into view, one by one, between a gap in the trees. They were moving fast and a shot didn't present itself as the last one disappeared down the mountain.

Then came the stag, bounding through the bush on the same path as his girls. At a quick glance he was a mature stag. I took up a sight picture once again through the gap in the trees and to my surprise he

stopped momentarily for a broadside shot. Instinctively I fired and the stag burst from the scene, dropping dead on the side of the mountain. He slid to rest against a tree before falling off a steep ledge. The single 150-grain Nosler from my .284 Win had nailed him easily.

Carl and I made our way quickly down the hill to inspect him but had to be careful as this was steep country and a trip could result in a bone-breaking fall. The stag was a big fella with heavy timber and the largest coronets of any animal that I had shot before. Although he was a 3x4, he had extremely symmetrical trez-tines and main beams. In my opinion he was trophy worthy and his meat was not going to waste. After an awkward photo session and balancing act we made plans to bring the HiLux back to retrieve the stag by winch.



A stag (dinner) party

The ledge he was resting on was way too precarious to risk moving until the stag is secured by a strap. We manoeuvred the HiLux as close as possible and ran the winch cable out to full extension. An additional 30m of recovery strap was required to reach the stag. I felt relieved once we secured a shackle and strap to the rear leg of the stag, as any slight move on the mountain would have seen him disappear into the gully below. Using our two-way radios to communicate, Carl and I worked together to winch the stag to the safety of flat ground. All this might sound like a lot of hard work but for us it's all part of the adventure and I wasn't about to let him go to waste.

Midday was beginning to roll around and hunger pains reminded us of this. On the flat ground we promptly removed as much meat as possible and the head for a European-style mount. Camp was a welcome sight and we prepared the fire



Making time to take in the view during an afternoon hunt.



Camp cooking the fresh venison fillets over the fire.

A stag (dinner) party



Beginning the all-important meat retrieval.



Carl removed the head for a European-style skull mount.

for cooking. I use an old 9kg gas bottle as my campfire cooker and after lightly coating some venison backstrap fillets in olive oil we slowly grilled them. Straight from the bush to our plates, Carl and I enjoyed eating the fillets as an addition to our much-anticipated lunch. The fillets had a lovely smoky flavour enhanced by some cypress kindling I had added to the fire. After lunch I skinned the stag skull out and placed it in a safe spot away from a marauding goanna with devious intentions.

Next morning, we awoke to the sound of a mature stag not far from camp. Carl had remarked that this hunt was his and we began to close in. The stag's deep roar drew us in and the further we climbed down into a valley, the further the stag appeared to keep his distance. At one stage I thought we were right on top of the ol' boy but because of the thick bush, we never caught a glimpse of him. Mature stags grow old for a reason and he taught us a lesson at the expense of our legs.

A little disappointed, we climbed back to camp. The rest of the afternoon was spent exploring another part of the property by motorbike. The rain had left the tracks a little greasy but we made the most of our last day absorbing the beautiful surrounds and views the property has to offer. A young double-five stag stopped long enough for us to take a peep at him until he decided his good looks weren't to be exploited. Satisfied with observing him, it was a great way to end our annual roar hunt.

Upon arrival back home I boiled and cleaned the skull and prepared the meat for cold storage. My in-laws aren't hunters but were highly receptive to the offer of some venison. My mother-in-law in particular, loves cooking and experimenting. I told her that the venison was from a stag and may taste a little gamey but she wasn't deterred and prepared some cuts for a meal. We enjoyed a lovely braised venison dinner and you would be forgiven for thinking that we were eating meat from a hind. She explained to me the simple



A lovely braised venison steak meal.

preparation which included the following steps:

- 1) To tenderise the meat mix $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon of bicarbonate soda with $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of water. Pour over 1 kg of venison and place in fridge for 3-4 hours or overnight.
- 2) Mix together:
 - 1 medium onion chopped,
 - 3 cloves garlic,
 - 140g tomato sauce,
 - 70g sweet chilli sauce,
 - 80mls soy sauce,
 - 125mls bourbon,
 - 80g honey.
- 3) Mix with the meat and then cook in a moderately slow oven for three hours. If the meat starts to dry out, add a little water. The sauce should be thick but moist when cooked.

A hunt in the bush is always a pleasure when you are fortunate to have access to a wonderful property. The area I hunt can be extremely challenging due to the nature of the heavily timbered and steep terrain, but the tops offer amazing views and just seeing a deer there is always a bonus.

Being conscious of this makes harvesting an animal rewarding. When a deer, regardless if it is a hind or stag, is taken its death is not wasted. This trip yielded both meat and a trophy and the mount of the stag on our wall is a constant reminder of our successful hunt in a special part of the Queensland bush. ■

Burris Oracle Rangefinding Bow Sight

Foresight at your fingertips

Adam McCulloch



It is time to come out from living under a rock if you haven't noticed the new technology in bow sights that appeared on the market a little more than a year ago.

I'm talking about the Burris Oracle bow sight, that calculates the distance while at full draw with the press of a button. You draw your bow, line up your target using the 20-yard pin then hit the switch. Instantly the Oracle estimates the target and the sight displays the correct light-emitting diode (LED) to shoot that distance.

Fixed pin shooters are all too familiar with 'gap' shooting or holding over or under when distances don't suit their practice marks. This means evenly splitting a set 30- and 40-yard pin to shoot a distance of 35 yards. The Oracle takes care of that - one LED lights up for the 35-yard shot.

Moveable single pin shooters aren't without disadvantages either. First, having to measure a target and adjust the sight to move 35 yards. To then lift their head to discover the game animal has moved and forcing a reassessment and correction of

use hold over or under. The Oracle will continue to gauge at the press of a button and to amend for the changing distance while you're still at full draw.

Any extra movement in those certain scenarios can be a make or break situation for a bowhunter at close quarters.

The Oracle way

You're within a comfortable shooting distance and the animal is positioned correctly for an ethical shot. You draw your bow, range the animal with the press of a button, put the exact aiming point displayed on the sight on the vitals and execute the shot. Forget the guesswork of distance - even if it is uphill or downhill, the Oracle has it covered.

The Burris Oracle came well packaged and inside was the bow sight, set-up laser, small battery, instructions, laser alignment target and all the necessary hardware to attach and prepare it on the bow.

After studying the sight for a short time it was clear to me that this item wasn't just thrown together and put on the market. The Oracle has been well thought out and

the tool less micro-adjustable elevation and windage are a couple of its great features.

It also comes with second and third axis adjustment to modify left and right while shooting steep ascending or downwards shots. The instructions are straightforward and definitely should be read and followed as it will save you time in the initial set-up.

As I was preparing the sight on my bow I noticed that it comes with a rear peep sight. This attaches to the back of the sight and it's an extremely critical component to enable the accurate rangefinding capabilities of the sight, whether the bow is full drawn or not. A compound bow is easily torqued (twisted) at full draw and the rear peep facilitates a more consistent grip, which also enhances the accuracy of the rangefinder and archer.

This bow sight is not light, coming in at about 480g. It is about twice the weight of a normal fixed pin sight. Keep in mind a hand-held rangefinder plus a set of fixed or moveable sights would be about the same weight. It is well built and solid with no protruding parts capable of catching on things as you hunt.

I can't stress enough to follow the provided instructions for a fuss free set-up.

In the field

A fresh, wet dirt smell greeted my nose as I left the vehicle at around 5am. The overnight rain would assist me in tracking the movements of the resident fallow deer herd. The property I was hunting is close to home and I had been studying the habits of the fallow deer for a couple of months. I took special note of feeding areas and travel routes as I've found hunting them in these areas doesn't affect their day to day habits like tracking a bedding area would.

It didn't take long before I spotted the first four fallow deer which consisted of two mature does, a young buck and a yearling. I had an idea where they were heading so I used the lay of the land and some sparse cover to hopefully intercept them.

When I first laid eyes on them the Oracle clocked them at 54 yards. I kept low and crept closer as they fed over a small rise, so I guessed I'd be around 35 yards next time I saw them. A quick flick of the wind direction and all I heard was their hooves pounding the granite soil as they left with haste.



The wind played its tricks again and again over the course of the morning and no shots were taken.

I did use the Oracle constantly though. I would employ the rear peep sight and line up a deer with the 20-yard LED, press the button and an accurate distance would return time and time again. I calculated the deer out to 93 yards.

Just like any laser rangefinder, a clear line of sight is a must. Thick fog and heavy rain

will also affect the laser's capabilities. Bear in mind the sight is water-resistant, not waterproof.

In conclusion

The sight is solidly built without having a glass lens to break, fog, scratch or make dirty and conveniently suits both left and right-handed bows. The Burris forever warranty also includes electronics.

Users must acclimatise to using the button and the extra draw time involved with ranging, then acquiring a target. Ranging first using the 20-yard pin then raising the bow arm to shoot longer distances might not suit archers who currently come down onto the target with their sight.

With the failsafe 20-yard fixed pin, third axis adjustment and tool less micro-adjustable elevation and windage, the sight is easy to operate. Not having to guess distance and being able to store two different ballistic trajectory curves (eg, a lighter, faster arrow for deer and a heavier, slower arrow for feral pigs) provides a huge advantage.

I suggest maybe carrying a spare CR123 battery for lengthy hunts as activation maxes out at about 2000 button presses.

You can pick up a Burris Oracle from Beretta Australia distributors for \$1499. ■





A blast from the past to the present. Early full brass and aluminum hulls and waxed paper cases with brass and more modern plastic and brass-based shotgun shells.

Shotgun shells explained *a case study*

Paul Miller

The shotgun shell as we know it today has evolved since its invention around the 1860s into a sophisticated and effective cartridge that covers a whole world of uses at relatively short range. Originally they looked much like a brass rifle or pistol case with straight walls and various methods of holding the overshot wad in place to keep the lead pellets securely in the cartridge.

Somewhere around 1880 paper hulls started to replace full brass shotgun shells mainly because of economy, and this method of construction with a brass head

to accommodate the primer was popular right up until the late 1960s worldwide.

In the early days felt wads were used to separate the powder in the base of the shell from the lead shot payload. The shell was finished off with a cardboard over shot wad and the shell roll crimped to keep the shot in place. As time progressed these paper shells were elongated and the forward section beyond the payload crimped and roll finished to replace the older methods of sealing the shell.

In the late 1970s there was a short-lived trend in shotshell construction with a move

to all plastic cases with a small brass ring moulded in the primer area to provide support for the primer. Today almost all cartridges are plastic constructed but with low or higher brass bases. Putting it simply, low brass suggests lower pressure loads and high brass for higher pressure loads.

While high brass supporting the plastic case does not actually provide much more strength, it does allow shooters to easily differentiate between cartridges. There is also a little hype in this or perhaps a confidence factor, with high brass shells invariably used in manufacturers' >



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Shotgun shells explained

more expensive higher performance loads. I'm generalising here but I'm sure you understand what I mean.

Just because a shell has a high brass case doesn't mean it is any more powerful than one with a lower brass base. The height of the brass has nothing to contribute nowadays to the power of the shell or the speed of the payload. There are some field loads, especially in England, which are still loaded in paper and brass cases with felt wads for biodegradability but the majority of shells nowadays are plastic and brass with plastic wads.

The problem with felt wads is that they don't protect the shot as it travels up the barrel, damaging the outer layer of pellets in contact with the much harder steel barrel until the payload leaves the barrel. This results in wider patterns compared to the shot being protected inside a plastic wad cup and never coming in contact with the barrel. This means less damage to the shot column and this reduced deformation means tighter patterns because round shot fly much more true than damaged non round shot.

Shotgun shells are measured by gauge, which is the weight in fractions of a pound of a pure lead ball that is the same diameter as the internal diameter of the barrel. A 12-gauge shotgun which we mostly use in Australia is measured by a pure lead



Four 70mm-long 12-gauge shells with different wads and payloads from small number 7½ steel pellets to large lead BBs for hunting.

sphere that just fits inside the barrel and weighs 1/12th of a pound. Hence the name '12-gauge'. A 20-gauge has a smaller diameter barrel and requires 20 pure lead balls of the diameter of a 20-gauge barrel to weigh 1 lb. Even lighter shotshells like the 28-gauge follow the same principle. The .410 'snake gun' we often refer to affectionately in Australia is not a gauge but is measured by diameter of the barrel ie, .410 of an inch.

Shotgun shells nowadays, as we've already noted, are mostly made up of a plastic and brass case and a payload. They

require a primer to set off the powder and today we mostly have plastic wads that contain the lead shot and provide an excellent gas seal. This allows the powder to burn effectively and create the explosion and expansion that almost instantaneously forces the payload to accelerate up the barrel.

The wad separates the powder from the shot and the middle bit of the wad is called the cushion. This acts like a shock absorber both in terms of recoil and protecting the shot from deformation by slowing fractionally the effects of the powder exploding and accelerating the wad and shot up the barrel. When the wad exits the barrel, there are usually four slits in the plastic shot cup that help the petals to open and this causes the wad to quickly fall away as the shot goes on its way to the intended target.

Modern shotgun shells are used for a great many purposes but for the intent of this article let's stick with hunting and clay target shooting.

The target dictates the size of the shot. For skeet shooting at clay targets we usually use 70mm (2¾") long 12-gauge shells with 24- or 28-gram loads of very small 8 or 9



Components of a clay target load. Hull with primer, powder charge and 24 grams of steel shot.

Shotgun shells explained

shot. These are most popular because they have a huge number of tiny pellets, which when combined with open chokes, fill out a wide pattern and increase your chances of breaking these fast, closer range targets. The 20-gauge are also popular for clay shooting but their payload rarely exceeds 24 grams, with the occasional 28-gram load available.

For longer crossing or departing clay targets we usually use 28 grams of 7.5 or 7 shot through tighter chokes. These individual pellets hit much harder but there are a lot less pellets in a load of 7s compared to 9s. It is about (290) 7s compared with (585) 9s in a typical 28-gram target load. I tend to mainly use 7.5s or 8s for all my clay shooting so have about (350) 7.5s or (410) 8s in my shells. These deal emphatically with any clay thrown within sensible shotgun range, subject only to clever manipulation of choke constriction and putting the pellets in the right spot to break the target.

With shotshells used for hunting we see many fewer larger pellets in 28-gram loads and so the tendency is to use bigger gauges and payloads. An example of this

would be the use of longer 12-gauge shells with 76mm (3") long cases and payloads varying from 32 to 42 grams. These are what are referred to as magnum loads and should only be fired in 12-gauge shotguns with 3" chambers. These cartridges have a lot more recoil because they are pushing much more shot up the barrel at similar speeds to the lighter clay target loads.

Typical hunting loads may vary from one

Shotgun shells come in all shapes, sizes and gauges for different purposes - from the .410 on the left through to 20-gauge and the 12-gauge.

solid rifled slug for pigs or deer to classics like 00SG buckshot with nine copper-plated lead pellets in a 2¾" load or 12 of the same pellets in a 3" case. Winchester makes these loads available in Australia as well as the traditional Buckshot which has 18 smaller pellets in a 2¾" case. These are potent shells shot through tighter chokes at closer ranges that keep sufficient pellets in the pattern to do the job on bigger game that you would otherwise use a substantial centrefire rifle to take humanely.

In more recent years, especially in the US, laws have been passed where shells must be loaded with steel pellets initially for hunting, especially over swamps. Game birds are said to pick up lead pellets on the bottom of the pond or waterway when they are feeding and thus suffer lead poisoning if enough pellets are ingested. This trend has also entered the clay shooting world in some countries, where steel loaded shotshells are mandated for all shotgun shooting. This is seen as a more environmentally friendly alternative to lead.

There is still much debate about this because of the different ballistics between these two pellet materials. Lead is heavier per pellet and so more ballistically efficient and harder hitting on the



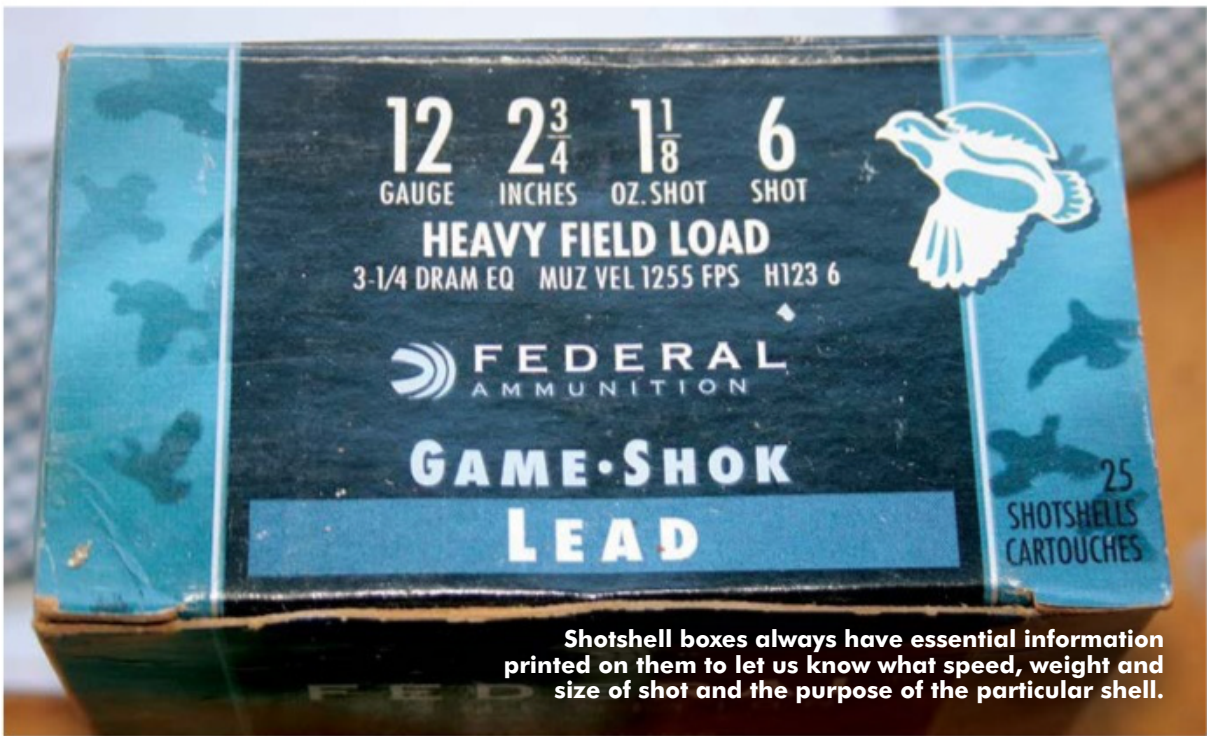
Very early metallic shotgun cartridges compared to modern plastic shells and their different crimps to retain the shot until firing.

Shotgun shells explained

target than the same size steel pellet. This means that to obtain the same killing power with steel shot you need to use larger pellet sizes and this means a lot less pellets per comparable load when using steel shot. This in turn means less dense patterns and the possibility of game slipping through the thinner pattern or just being wounded because the game bird, rabbit or fox is not hit by sufficient pellets to ensure a clean and merciful despatch.

The other alternative is to use a larger space to accommodate a lot more steel pellets to equal the same weight of the lead load. Sometimes there is not sufficient space in a standard 2¾" or 3" case to end up with steel loads that match comparable lead shot loads. A lot of work has been done in this area to make steel loads as effective as lead but for many the jury is still out.

The other issue with steel shot is the need to ensure your shotgun is steel proofed. This means the manufacturer has used a high-quality steel in their barrels that is harder and compatible with steel shot. Chokes also behave differently with



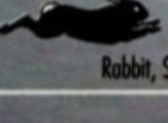
steel shot and the usual recommendation is to restrict yourself to a maximum choke constriction of half/modified choke, even if the gun is steel proofed. Because the pellets are much harder, they tend to pattern tighter at reasonable shotgun ranges but the other thing to remember is that their hardness also leaves them more prone to ricochet off hard surfaces. The other drawback with steel versus lead is cost. Steel shot is a lot more expensive to produce

and this is reflected in the considerably higher cost of steel loads.

I've always been interested in reloading shotgun shells to achieve particular objectives. In recent years I have given up reloading competition clay target shells because they can be bought in bulk at prices about comparable or less than reloading. When you factor in all the equipment and components and time required to reload large numbers of shells for clay target shooting it's not worth the effort. Unless of course you enjoy the process and delight in breaking clays convincingly with shells you have loaded yourself.

The cost of field loads on the other hand are expensive and if you do a bit of game shooting it is not so hard to rationalise reloading these shells with heavier loads of fewer larger pellets for whatever particular game you are hunting.

When I started reloading I noticed there were different powders available for different purposes. Faster burning powders like Hercules Red Dot were recommended for clay target loads, especially as you used less quick burning powder than slower powders to achieve the same result. This was something of an economy when shooting hundreds or thousands of shells a year.

SELECTING THE RIGHT SHOTSHELL				
	GAUGE	DISTANCE	CHOKE	LEAD SHOT SIZES
 Turkey	10, 12, 20	20-30 YD	F	4, 5, 6
	10, 12	30+	F/EF	4, 5, 6
 Pheasant, Prairie Grouse	12, 16, 20, 28	20-30	IC/M	4, 5, 6, 7½
	12, 16, 20	30+	M/F	4, 5, 6
 Ruffed Grouse, Partridge	12, 16, 20, 28	20-30	SK/IC/M	6, 7½, 8, 9
	12, 16, 20	30+	IC/M	5, 6, 7½
 Quail, Dove	12, 16, 20, 28	20-30	SK/IC/M	7½, 8, 9
	12, 16, 20	30+	IC/M	7½, 8
 Woodcock, Rail Snipe	12, 16, 20, 28	20-30	SK/IC/M	7½, 8, 9
	12, 16, 20	30+	IC/M	7½, 8
 Rabbit, Squirrel	12, 16, 20, 28, .410	20-30	IC/M	4, 5, 6, 7½
	12, 16, 20	30+	IC/M/F	4, 5, 6

Federal recommends patterning your gun to determine the optimum choke.
EF = Extra Full F = Full M = Modified IC = Improved Cylinder SK = Skeet

Federal field shotshell boxes have a useful table on the back indicating most suitable gauge, choke and shot sizes for various game birds and animals.

In my day the standard load for Trap and Skeet was 32 grams or 1 1/8oz. These loads could be bought with speeds anywhere from about 1150fps to 1400fps and the faster ones really booted. A day shooting these and you felt like your teeth were going to fall out. An end of day headache and sore shoulder were inevitable.

Slower burning powders like Hercules Blue Dot were available for magnum field loads, which meant more shot could be moved along but with reasonable levels of recoil. The fact is that you don't normally shoot as many loads field shooting in a day as you do clay target shooting. Therefore recoil is often not noticed in the excitement of the hunt or where only a few shots are taken on the day.

In my early days I thought it would be great to have a clay target load that was fast but didn't kick. This seemed like an impossible dream until I did some research in American and English publications and reloading manuals (no internet at that stage) and developed some loads that were not available in Australia 20 or so years ago.

I achieved this by loading 28-gram (1 oz) loads using 8 shot rather than 7s because my research revealed that I had almost exactly the same number of 8s in a 28-gram load as I did 7s in a 32-gram load. The 28-gram load was fully 1350fps compared to the 1250fps of the 32-gram load.



Old Eley Grand Prix 12-gauge waxed paper cased loads with a card overshoot wad and rolled crimp.



High-end clay target competition shells in number 7½ steel and antimony lead shot.

I also found that by using the slightly slower Green Dot powder of the time rather than Red Dot that the shells recoiled even less and had a smoother feel about them.

For closer targets I applied the same theory and used the same 1 oz wads I'd managed to source to create 24-gram loads. I used 9s and had a heap more pellets in these even lighter loads than the 28-gram 8s. They smoked Skeet targets and closer sporting clays and were every bit as fast and even easier on the shoulder. Today all these loads are available commercially but it was an enjoyable learning curve and I shot some of my best scores ever with my reloaded 24- and 28-gram loads.

The humble shotgun shell is actually a clever type of ammunition designed for close-range work on any game animal or clay target competition known to man. It's just a matter of picking the right factory load or loading responsibly to gain exactly what you want for field or competition use. In combination with intelligent choke selection the modern shotgun shell is up to any task.

Today you can walk into a well-stocked gunshop and buy factory loaded shotshells

for any purpose. There are bulk buys for slabs of 250 competition shells and any number of hunting loads in boxes of 25 cartridges. There are specialised hunting loads including solid slugs with rifling built into the projectile in packets of five or six and these are the most expensive of all per shell.

For the reloading enthusiast there are all the components including primers, powder, wads and shot of all sizes to suit your purpose.

You will need to invest a considerable amount to buy quality reloading equipment and study up on safe reloading practices to produce shells that provide a huge amount of satisfaction when shot successfully. You will also have the benefit of increasing your knowledge of shotgunning enormously by taking this route.

This article barely scratches the surface of the world of shotgunning but clay and field shooting has provided me with half a lifetime of incredible enjoyment that I've shared with my like-minded mates. Long may it continue for all of us who are proud to be responsible shooters whether it be with shotgun or rifle. ■

Open in case of emergency

the Leatherman Charge

Damien Edwards



As regular readers will be aware, I like my Leathermans. Here's why. . . I recall receiving a Swiss Army-type 'thing' for Christmas of about 1987 and even at my young age (at the time) I remember thinking what an overloaded contraption it was. Too much stuff. Way too much. And all of it almost too small to be of practical use.

Sure, it was a cool novelty because I was a kid, but it was still just that - a novelty.

For use around the farm or on overnight boating trips with my father to Rainbow Beach or on Moreton Bay, it proved to be less than useful. Fiddly, thin little blades which could barely gut a guppy, let alone process the hares I'd frequently despatch with my Brno Model 2. A corkscrew with

an end so blunt and a spiral so tight it was like dad was trying to push a solid billet of steel into wood.

I have no idea what happened to that thing, but I'm glad I owned it. It gave me a real appreciation of what a good multi-tool should be. So in my late teens by the mid-1990s, when I encountered my first Leatherman PST (Pocket Survival Tool), I

Open in case of emergency - the Leatherman Charge

could really appreciate the innovation which went into its design. I've been following Leatherman trends ever since.

The Leatherman Charge can be thought of as an improved Leatherman Wave. The Wave was introduced in 1998 and discontinued in 2004 when Leatherman replaced it with the 'new' Wave. The changes to the Wave's design in 2004 introduced all locking tools and a new scissor design as well as the interchangeable bit driver system. The Charge has significantly better materials. Both the Wave and the Charge have been the top sellers for Leatherman for many years. Hence, they have spawned many variants.

The original and first Charge was also introduced in 2004 and has undergone numerous changes throughout its production history. There has been the original, now discontinued Ti and XTi featuring titanium scales, the current TTi with titanium scales, the AL version with aluminium scales and an ALX version with black oxide finish. Even rare limited production camouflage titanium scaled versions are available.

A contemporary version of the Charge is the TTi-Plus which has titanium scales and interchangeable wire cutters. The TTi and TTi-Plus can be thought of as the



Razor sharp blade and diamond coated file of the TTi-Plus version. Note the aftermarket pocket clip.

premium version of the Charge line-up. It is the Charge TTi-Plus which forms the basis of this review. What I write here can be applied to the regular TTi version as well, the only difference between the two is that the Plus version features interchangeable wire cutters. Apart from that, both models are identical.

The Charge TTi-Plus can be thought of as the ultimate refinement of the Charge

line-up. It's made with titanium scales offering strength and a weight saving. The straight blade is made out of S30V, a true premium blade steel and the serrated blade also comprises a gut hook.

Like the Surge, the straight blade is smooth along the spine and the serrated blade features a small amount of spine jimping so you can tell which blade to deploy if in darkness. Unfolding the tool is almost as smooth as operating a Wingman. It's simple and straightforward, unlike opening a Surge or Skeletool whereby you're fighting it the entire time. The other two outside accessible tools are a double-sided file, rough cross-hatch on one side, diamond coated on the other and an effective saw blade. All four outside tools feature liner locking mechanisms.

The tools within the handles are certainly useful. One side features three tools - a large flat head screwdriver, which would work well as a pry bar and an ingenious small interchangeable screwdriver with both flat head and Phillips head ends. It's small and able to work for the tiny screws found on eyeglasses. As a glasses wearer, I love that. It's held in place by leaf spring pressure and is easily removed. The third tool is a



The saw and gut hook are innovative features for a multi-tool and would be well at home in a hunter's pack. Internal lanyard ring is deployed in this instance.

Open in case of emergency - the Leatherman Charge

diminutive but functional pair of scissors which operate under spring pressure. On this same side is the little lanyard loop as well.

There are two tools on the other side - a larger bit driver, again with an interchangeable bit, one flat end and one Phillips. This bit driver is (like with the Surge) pretty well centred, so you won't go spiralling out of control when attempting twists while using it. The final tool is the often-seen bottle opener, can opener and wire stripper found on other models of Leatherman. All of these tools lock and can be closed again by actuating a little rocker button found on the inside of the handle when the tool is open. Each of these handle tools has a little nail ridge milled into it so it can be easily caught with a fingernail to help ease them open. There is a ruler featuring both metric and imperial on the outside of the handles of the open Charge. This also serves to afford a little more grip when operating the pliers.

These are needle-nose, which is fine. There is a built-in electrical crimper followed by deeper serrations for helping to shift lug nuts. Further down are the wire cutters and finally the hard wire cutters at the base of the pliers. As mentioned, on the Plus model these are interchangeable.

This is a true high end multi-tool comprising the titanium scales and that gorgeous S30V knife blade. These are two of the best materials for ensuring strength and longevity. The actual ergonomics are good. You won't hurt your hands using this model for extended periods. In my experience, no other multi-tool, Leatherman or otherwise, can touch the Charge in terms of pure functionality, aesthetics and comfort. It truly is a real top shelf, supreme level multi-tool for the serious user. All locks and hinges are perfect in operation.

Like the Surge, when the tool is opened the two knife blades are locked, so they can't accidentally come apart while using the pliers. Leatherman do market a full bit kit of interchangeable driver parts for most models and these suit the Charge as well, as does their bit kit extender tool, so you'll receive full support there if you opt to go that route.

Some 'bundle' deals available offer this model with either full or partial bit kit, additional lanyard ring, which is larger than the integral one and a pocket clip. Both the extra ring and pocket clip can be inserted and removed via the rocker button. The finish on the scales is sort of a chipped stone style that's pleasing to the eye.

Who is this tool aimed at? Well, anyone and everyone. Its design is so smart that it will appeal to almost all users needing a multi-tool. It basically comprises everything you'd need and nothing you wouldn't. A few multi-tools, Leathermans included, feature tools like awls or two different types of flathead drivers. There seems to be a redundancy built into some of them. Really, how often do you actually use an awl? Not often.

A hole for the awl eye could be milled into the bottle opener to serve a similar purpose. But that opener function could be used as a makeshift awl anyway. I'm not really a file guy. I actually use a file pretty rarely, but I do understand that on those rare occasions where I actually do need one, nothing else will do, so I'm happy to have one on the Charge.

Leatherman designed the Charge with only the most popular tools being included, which gives it mass appeal. It's a well-built, solid example of great craftsmanship which is easy to carry around, strong as an ox and fit for any purpose. It's a top contender for the best multi-tool on the market, perhaps even beating out my beloved Surge.

This tool would easily suit any hunter, angler, farmer, kayaker, soldier, mechanic, carpenter or outdoorsman. It features a 25-year warranty, but in close to 25 years of playing with various Leatherman models, I've yet to take advantage of that pledge. Given the quality of construction of the Charge, it's definitely the 'Winchester Model 70' of multi-tools. It could well be the first... and last multi-tool you'll ever need. ■



At a glance

Model: Leatherman Charge TTi-Plus

Closed length: 10cm (4")

Open length: 15.8cm (6¼")

Weight: 235 grams

Material: 420 high carbon, S30V straight knife blade, titanium scales

Production: 2004-present

Approx retail: \$230-\$270

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Buffalo trophies of a lifetime

Sam Garro

If you have ever hunted game in the Northern Territory such as feral pigs, scrub bulls and in particular our big-bodied Asiatic water buffaloes, it's on the cards you will want to go again, at least one more time.

It's just different in every way - with the wildlife, scenery, culture and untouched land. That's why we often refer to it as the Last Frontier, and it truly is, having experienced it myself on three separate guided hunts. The memories are everlasting.

My good friends Alex, Ray and Bill recently returned from a three-day epic buffalo hunt in the Northern Territory with Shane, of Watts Safaris. This is the account of an extraordinary buffalo adventure. The three avid hunters had previously experienced successful Arnhem Land buffalo hunts at varying NT locations and have never lost passion and enthusiasm to return for more of the same.

Alex had more than fulfilled his desire for trophy buffaloes and tagged along for the

camaraderie, to assist around camp and in unison with Shane, act as a back-up or support shooter for Bill and Ray. Time allowing, Alex was content chasing tusky feral pigs around the waterholes and pandanus scrub. Bill was interested in a trophy buffalo if it was larger than his existing one procured on a previous trip, but he was also happy to be in the company of friends and part of the hunt. Ray, on the other hand, was keen to procure a decent-sized buffalo and a scrub bull.

As always, there was plenty of planning



and anticipation leading up to the trip before they eventually jumped on the plane in Melbourne and headed for Darwin. After checking in at the hotel, they were driven to the Mindil Beach Market to catch up with Shane. As a responsible guide wanting to ensure the best outcome for his clients, Shane had already devoted a lot of time over the previous three months searching the plains and scrub for potential trophy bulls that met expectations.

Although he had not seen any sizeable specimens himself, he spoke enthusiastically about some big bulls a property owner had observed that were wreaking havoc on his fences. They needed to go. As Shane hadn't crossed them himself, the boys were a little sceptical of encountering them during their stay, but nevertheless remained hopeful and excited at the prospect.

Shane picked up the group early the next morning and they were soon out of telephone reception range and into the heart

of the untamed bush. As they were heading into some pretty remote locations, both Bill and Ray carried sat-phones in case of an emergency. While Shane came prepared to handle most emergencies, you can never have too much safety or backup gear. They arrived at Shane's campsite beside a fair-sized billabong just on dusk.

On the way in, some 50 buffaloes, comprised predominately of cows and calves had already been sighted, lifting their spirits even further. Camp was set up in no time.



Buffalo trophies of a lifetime

Accommodation comprised of a sturdy, well-constructed tent with stretcher, swag and linen for each, a battery/solar powered shower, food and all basic essentials.

After a couple of hours they found themselves seated around camp and enjoying a great meal cooked by 'chef' Shane. They were in true wilderness surroundings, taking in the bird sounds and the evening ambiance as the distant low glow of the setting sun gave way to darkness and an unexpected sudden drop in temperature to 10C. They were grateful to be in their warm swags and slept soundly before rising the following morning.

After a good breakfast, a few shots were cycled through the rifles to ensure they were on target. It's always prudent to test fire rifles after any lengthy travel in the event a scope has been offset or moved from a hard knock. As it turned out, Ray's Winchester Model 70 .375 H&H needed a bit of tweaking, Alex's .45-70 Govt Marlin was on the button and Shane kindly checked Bill's Winchester Model 70 .416 Rem Mag. Shane sported a .450 Rigby and was already good to go.

In the spirit of mateship, it was agreed Ray was to shoot first. However, in the event a really big buff presented itself then



Shane, left, and Ray glassing for potential bull buffs.

Bill would have first go, as Ray was not as fussy in the size category. Bill settled back and started to relax, enjoying the hunt without the stress of having to shoot first and never expecting to actually see any monsters.

They set out in Shane's LandCruiser that's purpose-built as a safari vehicle to spot buffs and pigs. After an hour or so, a buffalo herd was encountered with a good

bull off in the distance. As they were travelling upwind, Shane drove a kilometre or so past the herd for a different approach but by the time they stalked to the position, they found the herd had already moved on. A tempting boar had Alex on alert but he passed up the opportunity so as not to spook any potential buffaloes in the area.

They stalked another half an hour or so but the buffalo only widened the distance so they turned back to the LandCruiser for a picnic-style lunch before heading out again. After travelling many more kilometres on the dusty tracks, a cattle herd was sighted with a good scrub bull, a grey ghost-like figure in the shimmering distance, standing alone on his own and looking in their direction as if in defiance. Exactly what Ray was looking for! However, such huge scrub bulls don't exist or attain their size simply through grazing out in the plains without a care or caution. They are wily, keep their distance and are evasive to man's ways, hence difficult to hunt.

As quickly as the vehicle came to a sudden stop, the cattle and bull took off at speed. Shane wheeled the vehicle around and tried to drive ahead of the group. The vehicle pulled up again and the hunt started on foot. As luck would have it, the herd turned in



A picnic-style lunch under the shade of the trees.



Ray, left, and Alex admiring Ray's 115 DP buff.



Guide Shane, left, and Ray with his 115 DP buffalo and Winchester Model 70 .375 H&H with a Swarovski 3-10 power scope.

their direction and Ray fired a well-placed Woodleigh 300gn heavy duty RN bullet from his Winchester Model 70 .375 H&H into the vitals for the count. After taking photos, Shane retrieved the head for Ray for later mounting the skull and horns.

As the day progressed, more buffalo cows and calves were spotted, but no bulls. Another great day ended with a hearty evening meal followed by a good night's sleep. Laying back in their swags watching the brilliant cluster of stars and constellations, they soon fell asleep. The days were around 33C and the humidity associated with such temperature was reasonably low, making it pleasant to hunt. From October onwards, the heat and heavy humidity can

prove physically and mentally demanding, and very uncomfortable. Hence May/June through to September are regarded the better months to hunt the Top End.

The following morning was much of the same; numerous buffaloes sighted, but disappointingly, once again no bulls. After lunch they travelled to a billabong that big buffs had been known to frequent to drink. They positioned themselves accordingly in a nearby stand of trees but it was to no avail. A second big day had passed without result, even though some 100 buffaloes had been sighted overall, and more than 200km of tracks travelled, Shane was working hard and feeling the pressure to deliver. With a vast expanse of thick scrub, a buffalo can be

obscured or remain hidden behind cover as close as 50m and not be detected.

It was their last hunt day. Having unsuccessfully covered the flats and on Shane's reckoning that buffs in cold mornings like to frequent the hills to warm themselves, the boys trusted his judgment and proceeded to the higher ground. Still no luck with the buffs. Time for lunch and one last look at that big billabong now 40km away.

As they neared with the billabong in sight, Ray said: "Bill, if we see a really big one it's your shot." The tension started to rise, not so much as time was running out and it would be their last chance before heading back to Darwin and home, but rushing thoughts "the big buffs couldn't be



The lagoon, a drinking hole frequented by the buffaloes.

Buffalo trophies of a lifetime

there - could they?' And then a small herd of buffs appeared. Expletives were uttered under the hunters' breaths followed by "it's the biggest buff I have ever seen, and not just one."

Shane drove past. Bill jumped off the vehicle and ran to a group of trees. Shane whispered urgently: "Bill, take a rest." The herd was onto the hunters and moving. "Which one?" Bill asked. "The one on the right, at about 80 yards," replied Shane. A clear shot presented itself so Bill didn't hesitate and let loose a Woodleigh 400gn SN from his .416 Rem Mag that went right into the vital triangle through the top of the heart. But while absolutely fatal, a big buffalo can run a long way before succumbing - so it's imperative to adhere to the guide's directive or instructions.

There was no movement from the downed massive bull buff that only travelled 30 to 40 yards before dropping, as the other buffs curiously milled around him. In the meantime Ray was onto another giant buff and rattled off two Woodleigh 300gn HD SNs, putting it down and resting only 20 yards from Bill's. As quick as the action was, it was all over in an instant. A huge relief and shaky elation washed over the hunters. The buffs were on the ground. Walking up to their prized trophies of a



Bill, left, with Win Model 70 .416 Win Mag rifle fitted with Leupold 1-6 power scope, and mate Alex.

lifetime, they all took a long hard look at the magnificent specimens. The symmetrically shaped, outstretching solid horns on both buffaloes were even bigger than estimated. They were truly epically large.

Bill's animal measured 62" across, scoring 124 Douglas Points (DP). Ray's beast had a more curved set, 49" across and 116 DP. Anything in the 90 DP range is good but Bill's and Ray's are exceptional. There are good buffs to be had throughout the

Northern Territory but high-scoring ones are the exception with hunters often booking return trips in the hope of scoring such a specimen. They happened to be at the right place at the right time.

After another great meal that evening, Shane worked to 3am cleaning the buffalo skulls. Bill, Ray and Alex expressed their sincere thanks and appreciation for not only delivering, but for the friendship and another wonderful and memorable experience. The hunt result couldn't have been scripted any better. Alex didn't score any boars but it didn't matter as he shared in a lifetime experience with his mates.

Anyone contemplating a buffalo hunt in the NT should ensure that they book with a fully licensed and accredited Professional Outfitter. Ensure that corporate licences are in place and that all relevant land use and access agreements and permissions are in order. Do not hesitate to ask for the above details and past hunting client references when researching safari operators for your hunting trip of a lifetime. All operators with integrity and transparency will have relevant documentation and references at hand for your perusal and will happily help you in making the right choices. ■



Bill, left, Shane and Ray with two trophy buffaloes.

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Braken Wear

take hunting in their stride

Steve Bain

Eagle Eye Hunting Gear, national distributors of Braken Wear, kindly sent a Scorcher top and a pair of Mountain Rea pants to **Australian Hunter** for evaluation as hunting clothing.

As a regular hunter in south-east Queensland, I judged the Mountain Rea pants to be well suited to our state's cooler mid-year conditions when often a cold morning is followed by a sunny day.

The side zips of the Mountain Rea pants allow heat to escape while you are being active. I would wear them from autumn through winter to spring. Incidentally, on my top half, my choice would be the typical widely promoted and popular layered approach consisting of a blaze orange fleece jacket over a blaze coloured t-shirt.

The Scorcher top is made from a fabric with micro-hole perforations. I typically wear this type of lighter grade shirt/top in warmer conditions. It ideally suits me as an all-round upper body garment for a wide range of Queensland/New South Wales border country climates and habitats, from spring through summer to autumn. In fact, the material style is about as good as it gets for hot weather summer hunting.

There are a few hunting situations where wearing full camouflage is considered de rigueur these days. Although I've had foxes run straight up to me when I've been wearing blaze orange camo quite a few times, I do subscribe to the theory that foxes may be spooked by bright clothing.

Accordingly, when whistling or wandering looking for Reynards, I will dress to the trend and often wear camo on my upper

half. Generically, apparently foxes as well as dogs, see some colour though not much. It is touted often enough so that we hunters believe that patterns of dark and light camo serve to break up and mask our outlines and make us less obvious to our quarry as a threatening human.

Hence, I would wear the Scorcher top in such conditions. I would also happily wear it as casual clothing. I spend a lot of time in the US and wearing camouflage coloured casual clothing is also the norm. Accordingly, I'm not put off by wearing camo to a barbecue and/or when meeting property owners in Australia. That is, I will opt for camo on casual occasions but not a matchy-matchy top and bottom set; maybe blue jeans and a camo shirt.

Back to the Scorcher top, with its collar, good-looking fabric and smart cut appearance, this top is a class above the basic level.

Mountain Rea camouflage pants

Of utmost importance to my clothing selection criteria, especially with regard to what I wear on my lower half, is its comfort, practicality and durability. The Braken Wear Mountain Rea pants have criteria that grabbed my attention the first time that I wore them. On subsequent outings these qualities continued to impress.

The smooth surfaced yet silent 100 per cent polyester outer shell fabric is resistant to burr, spear grass and cobbler's pegs. This shrugging off of clinging weed seeds and grass is a welcome treat. I have to admit that I've had enough of wearing military



The Braken Wear pants (full length view).

issue fatigues through long grass. Once covered in seeds and other wild plants, cotton trousers are pretty much unwearable until they see the inside of a washing machine after the hunt.

After wearing these trousers as much as practical over a six-month period, I can attest to their durability. The set of pants still look close to new and there have been no failures of fabric or zips.

The cut allows room and movement in all of the appropriate places and the material's stretch allows that bit of extra give, with comfort, when you push angles and activity levels just that little bit further and harder.

Featuring four zippered, mesh-lined pockets for quick access, two at the front - one on each hip, and two on the rear. In the pursuit of silence Braken Wear use cord pull toggles on all of their pants with silent-slide YKK brand zippers. Over the years I've broken a lot of metal zipper handles; I prefer this style of cord 'pull'. Being mesh lined these pockets also allow heat to escape if you leave them open.

Additional zips can be found, one on each outside of the upper leg. These

Braken Wear take hunting in their stride

zippered side mesh-lined air vents along the thighs can be opened up when your activity levels generate excess heat. These zippers are the trump card that make these pants work as outdoor garments where you will be actively covering ground one moment (generating heat that you are happy to release when the zippers are open). Then you will be sitting in wait, with the zippers closed, retaining warmth. These large side ventilation zippers allow cool air to flow in and keep the temperature down, as well as enabling moisture laden hot air to escape to improve wearer comfort.

Belt loops offer the opportunity to incorporate a belt to which you can attach a small knife and/or other accessories such as an ammunition pouch. Cuff tensioners at the bottom of the legs mean that you can cinch the bottoms closed around the top of your boots to keep vegetation and insects out of your pants.

Scorcher top

The Scorcher top is a true summer-weight item with long sleeves and collar, both for sun protection. The lightweight polyester stretch material features Braken Wear's Airflux technology – micro perforations that allow moisture to escape and concurrently allow cooling air to flow across the wearer's body.

The result is a 'breathable' garment that weighs little and dries quickly. My in-the-field experience negotiating difficult terrain showed that the airflow through the garment

A thumb loop at the wrist cuff.



The impressive Braken Wear top.

is excellent. The top features durable flat lock stitching, plus a YKK 'silent-slide' half-length front centre-line zipper for increased temperature regulating comfort.

Thumb loops incorporated in the cuffs can be used to keep the full-length sleeves in place. The cut of the garment is designed for active outdoors persons and combined with the stretch fabric provides ideal fit and comfort. This allows freedom of movement for either the bowhunter's full draw, a butcher's knifework strokes and/or a shooter's rifle

shot/shoot sequence while offering protection from the environment.

There is a zippered pocket high on the upper left front shoulder. Such a pocket gives the impression that the shirt is designed for a right-handed rifle shooter.

The Scorcher retails in Australia for \$99 and the Mountain Rea pants \$149. For more information, including stockists, check out Braken Wear on Eagle Eye Hunting Gear's website at eagleeyehg.com ■



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Live life with Bush Edge

Thomas Cook

Founded in Australia, Bush Edge offer high-quality universal outdoor products that are built tough for our conditions.

Specifically for the hunter, the all-weather Bush Edge Ultimate rifle cover has been designed to allow quick access thanks to the slimline elastic soft shell. The cover accommodates just about any rifle or shotgun and is compatible with rifle scopes, muzzle brakes and bipods. The durable brushed fabric, lined coating and end guards mean your firearm is well protected at all times from damage and elements like water and dust. Suitable for the range and when out hunting, it's appropriate with quad and motorbikes and folds down nicely when not in use.

Specifications

Length: Fits rifles scoped or unscoped 101cm to 139cm (40" to 55")

Weight: 330 grams (11.64oz)

Fabric: Brushed tricot with PVC inner lining. 600D Condura rear and barrel guard.

Bush Edge have put together a great video on their Ultimate all-weather rifle cover. Check it out at [youtube.com/watch?v=aTIPaRUcEBU&t=1s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aTIPaRUcEBU&t=1s)

The Bush Edge outdoor attire collection includes striking hand-drawn animal designs on charcoal and army green t-shirts. These 100 per cent durable and breathable cotton tees are created and printed in Australia for the outdoors and are stylish enough to wear when out and about in jeans or shorts. They come in an array of sizes and are pre-shrunk to minimise shrinking.

Visit bushedge.com to view their full selection of gear, that includes Merino wool head and neck wear, along with an assortment of hunting-related books. ■



The funky hand-drawn t-shirts feature various animals and can be worn anytime.



The high-quality Ultimate cover from Bush Edge will keep your firearm in top condition.



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Each piece of brass is completely prepped and ready to load. The case mouths have been chamfered and deburred. The flash holes are deburred and then checked for proper alignment. Each piece of brass is visually inspected at the factory and sealed in the box until you open them. Together, Nosler bullets and brass are the ingredients for the perfect load.



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Nosler Ballistic Tip Varmint Bullets deliver the accuracy, consistency and down-range punch required for clean kills in all situations. These flat-shooting, wind-defying bullets utilise ballistic-designed boat-tails and polymer tips to increase long-range efficiency and protect against tip damage in the magazine. Unique tapered jacket provides controlled expansion at all practical ranges and velocities.



BALLISTIC TIP VARMINT BULLETS

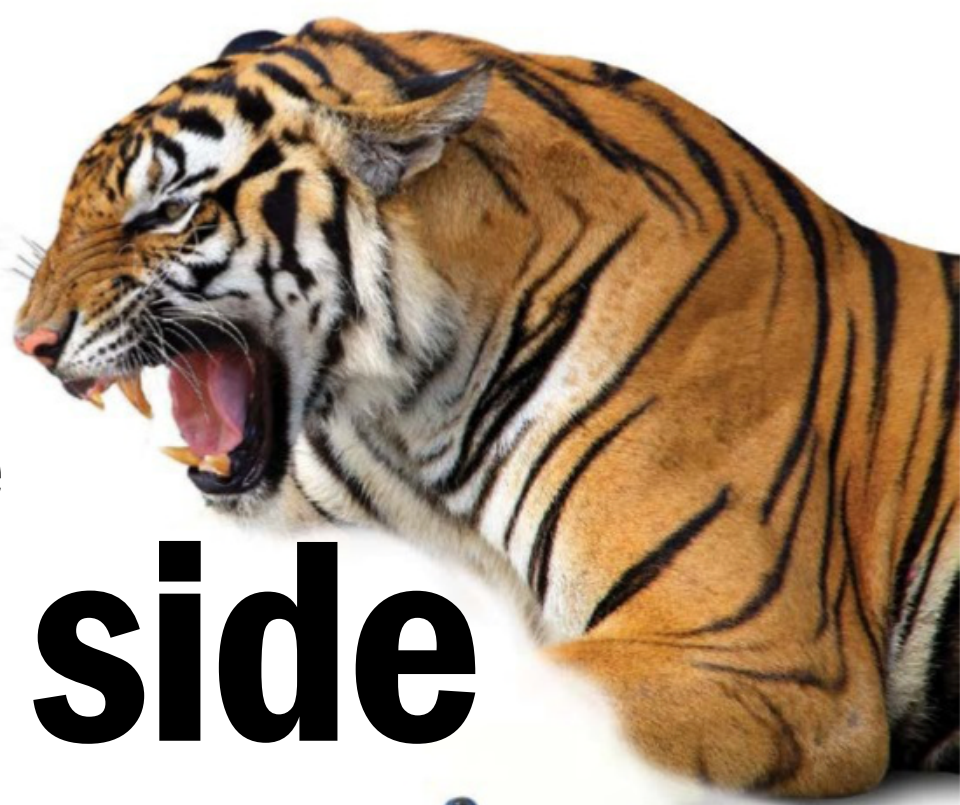
Nosler Ballistic Tip Varmint bullets thrive on ultra-high velocity loads, yet will go the distance with spectacular results all the way down to the lowest practical velocity levels. Fast or slow, near or far, no matter what rifle/cartridge combination you're shooting or what varmint you're shooting at, Nosler Ballistic Tip[®] delivers match-grade accuracy with all the performance characteristics serious varmint hunters are looking for.



ACCUBOND BULLETS

Through an exclusive bonding process that eliminates voids in the bullet core, AccuBond[®] couples Nosler's proven copper-alloy jacket with its special lead-alloy core. The result is a bullet that flies true, penetrates deep and retains its weight, without causing extensive barrel fouling. The unique white polymer tip resists deforming and initiates expansion on impact. Nosler's Solid Base[®] at the rear of the bullet acts as a platform for large diameter mushrooms.

Take a walk on the **WILDCAT** side



Thomas Tabor



(L-R): .22-250 and .22-250 Ackley Improved, .250/3000 Savage and .250/3000 Ackley Improved, .257 Roberts and .257 Ackley Improved, and .280 Remington and .280 Ackley Improved.

As long as shooters have been squeezing triggers there has been a desire to achieve a higher level of performance from their firearms. After World War Two and especially during the 1960s there was a great deal of work devoted to modifying cartridges largely in an effort to increase velocities.

During that time many wildcat cartridges were developed, a few of which ultimately wound up being 'legitimised' by the ammo and firearms companies who adopted those designs for production. However, many other models didn't achieve that same level

of accreditation, but are in their own rights no less impressive.

P.O. Ackley's improved designs

During that heyday of wildcatting the name P.O. Ackley became almost synonymous with the concept of improved cartridge designs. To create these new items it became necessary to fire the production cartridges inside the chamber of a rifle which had been dimensionally modified. Mostly those dimensional changes included straighter case walls and a sharper shoulder angle, which resulted in

increasing the powder capacity of the cartridge. Once that had been accomplished those cases could be handloaded using a set of the dies possessing the new Ackley Improved dimensions.

Some people believe Ackley's most successful modification is the .280 Ackley Improved. They base that belief largely on the fact Nosler eventually decided to take its dimensions to SAAMI (Sporting Arms and Ammunition Manufacturers' Institute) for testing, documentation and approval so it could be marketed as a true factory round.

But while the .280 Ackley Improved is



(Above) Once you have fire-formed your cartridge cases you must have a set of dies possessing the new dimensions, in this case a set of .30-06 Ackley Improved dies.

(Below) Redding produces some of the highest quality and has the largest selection of wildcat reloading dies.



To take advantage of the benefits of wildcat cartridges, including the improved versions, you must handload.

certainly a good cartridge, there are many others that are equally creditable and noteworthy.

.30-06 Ackley Improved

I am often amazed at how prolific Ackley really was, redesigning and improving the factory produced cartridges. Almost any cartridge of the Ackley era seems to have an Ackley Improved version counterpart associated with it, but one of my own personal favourites is the .30-06 Ackley Improved.

This is a very efficient round which possesses about nine per cent greater powder capacity over that of the standard .30-06. That additional powder capacity is capable of generating an increase in muzzle velocity

of about 150fps. Even though that speed falls a little short of the performance of most .30 calibre Magnums, it comes reasonably close to many of them and certainly is a substantial improvement to the standard .30-06 Springfield.

It is true that many bolt-action .30-06 chambered rifles could be rechambered to .300 Winchester Magnum, which would produce slightly higher velocities. I've owned a couple of rifles which have been coveted in this manner and still possess one. But unlike the conversion to .30-06 Ackley Improved, which only usually requires the rechambering of the rifle chamber, there is additional work associated with making the jump to the .300 WinMag.

It would also be necessary for a modification of the bolt face in order to accept the belted Magnum head.

And in at least a few examples the bolt face may not be large enough to handle that modification. There is also a chance of feeding problems occurring, which don't seem to be as prevalent with the .30-06 Ackley Improved. Another downside to the .300 WinMag is that some shooters do not like its short neck, believing it is not capable of holding the bullets as securely as they would prefer. While I don't personally support those concerns, the much longer neck of the .30-06 Ackley Improved is certainly an asset worthy of consideration.



Take a walk on the wildcat side

The simple process of conversion

One of the biggest advantages in converting a rifle over to an improved design is the ease at which it can be accomplished. As mentioned earlier, all that is usually necessary is to have a gunsmith cut the chamber to the new specifications.

The bore diameter of the rifle would stay the same so there are no worries associated with having to replace the barrel. The cartridge case head also remains the same, so again, no worries there either. However, you would have to purchase a set of reloading dies that possess the new dimensions. Making the cartridge cases is as easy as firing the standard calibre cartridges in the new chamber in order to fire-form them, then running them through your normal reloading processes.

Unlike most other wildcat designs, in most if not all instances, a rifle possessing an improved chamber can safely fire either the standard production calibre cartridges or the new improved shells.

Did the Weatherby designs influence Ackley?

I'm not sure how much of an influence the Weatherby line of cartridges had on Ackley's thinking, but both include similarly straight case walls and sharp shoulder angles, frequently about 40 degrees. While Weatherby obviously was and still is today heavily vested in large case capacities, Ackley seemed to prefer more moderate



Thomas used his .17 Mach IV rifle on this coyote, killing him at about 150m with a single shot.

increases, which results in making the rounds considerably more efficient, but still capable of getting the job done.

Other noteworthy wildcats

In addition to the improved version wildcats, I would be remiss if I didn't talk about the other style of wildcats. While a conversion to one of these will likely be

more costly, they are nevertheless worth consideration.

Prior to Remington finally coming out with their .17 Fireball, I had a custom rifle built in a similar but wildcat version called the .17 Mach IV. To make the brass for this rifle you begin with new .221 Remington Fireball cartridge cases. Those must then undergo a two-step case forming process in order to squeeze the necks down from .22 to .17 calibre.

That takes the cases down close enough to the dimensions of the new chamber for them to be run through the normal resizing die prior to loading and fire-forming. The result is a great cartridge which is best suited for small to middle-sized varmints or the same size of game species.

Another similar and great wildcat, the .20 VarTarg, also utilises the case of the .221 Remington Fireball, but is loaded with the slightly larger .20 calibre bullet.

The basis behind many wildcat cartridges is a desire to increase velocities, but in a few



In order to form the case for the .17 Mach IV, two dies are necessary in addition to the normal reloading dies.

Thomas used his .30-06 Ackley Improved on many of his hunts.



instances there have been other concerns at work. One classic example lies in the .338-06 wildcat, which sacrifices speed for the sake of shooting a larger diameter and heavier bullet. In this case the standard .30-06's neck is enlarged from .308 to .338. The straighter walls and sharper shoulder of the new case results in a slight increase in powder capacity which helps move heavier weight bullets like the 225 and 250-grainers out of the barrel at a reasonable speed.

My personal experience on the .338-06 came from a hunting acquaintance living in an area where his shots at bears and deer seldom exceed 100 yards. In this case the hunter wasn't so concerned with the longer range trajectory drop; he was looking for the benefits associated with a higher level of bullet energy.

I was honoured a while back to be a part of a development and testing project involving a series of new wildcat cartridges earmarked as the Garin SureStrike System. This unique venture involved the necking

down of .30 calibre Carbine cases to accept an array of bullet diameters, which included: .17, .20, .22, .25 and .30 calibres. Due to my own personal time constraints I was only available to do the initial loading and testing of the three smallest calibres, but was able to develop the first of the loading data. Those cartridges were developed by a man named Paul Garin who now operates a website supplying virtually everything needed for these wildcats. On that site you can purchase the formed cartridge cases, reloading dies, chamber reamers, bullets and even chambered rifles in any of those five calibres. That website is: **surestrike-system.com**

A few wildcat points to consider

- Sometimes when substantially squeezing down the neck diameter of a cartridge case it can increase the thickness of the brass to a point that it will be necessary to reduce that thickness. A step down from say .308 to .270 may not add enough

thickness to worry about, but if you are thinking of squeezing down a .338 sized neck to .243 or smaller, you will likely need to turn that thickness down.

- When squeezing down neck diameters it may require the use of forming dies, and when major changes are necessary it might need to be done incrementally.
- Remember, wildcat cartridges will always show the identification of the parent case. Because of this, precautions are necessary to ensure those cartridges do not become mixed up with other ammo.
- On occasions it will take some digging to locate wildcat loading data. I have frequently found the older reloading manuals to be useful and the internet to be a great source as well. But while the internet can be helpful in this endeavour, you must be careful to ensure that it comes from credible and reliable sources. Also, P.O. Ackley's own book *Handbook for Shooters & Reloaders Volume 1* is a great base for handloading data

Take a walk on the wildcat side



The Garin SureStrike System family of wildcats all utilise .30 calibre Carbine brass for their parent cases.

and also background information on his many wildcat cartridges.

- If you do decide to take a walk on the wildcat side, you will need a set of reloading dies and in some cases forming dies. While many handloading companies carry wildcat dies, Redding possibly has the largest selection. Their website can be found at: redding-reloading.com

The way I see it

Being a person looking to make whatever I use a bit better, I have always been drawn to wildcat cartridges. Just because the manufacturers choose to ignore the benefits associated with a higher degree of performance, doesn't mean you have to.

If you choose to move into the area of wildcatting you can be assured it will cost you more money to do so than simply shooting a production calibre, but for those of us that have crossed those lines, the benefits and rewards in my opinion outweigh the expenses. ■

(Above) To make the cases for the .17 March IV, the neck must be squeezed down step by step prior to being tweaked with the normal resizing die.



Top: Thomas found his Cooper Firearms of Montana wildcat .20 VarTarg rifle shot great off the bench as well as for varmints in the field;





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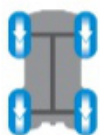
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CONTROL



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SYSTEM & ACTIVE
DESCENT CONTROL
(ADC)

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Super Snowy

Anthony Puddicombe



The electronic caller wailed loudly in the valley above the river, the rabbit distress call echoed around the hills. My new Howa .223 was ready with the bipod legs fully extended in the sitting position. On its second cycle I spotted a flash of red to my left, as I swivelled my body and rifle to face the incoming Reynard. It saw me, then turned and bolted - was it going to do a 'look back'?

I was at my cabin on the banks of the Snowy River. As a family we are here once every 18 months as it is 2100km from home. The cabin has no neighbours, rain-water tanks and a generator for night-time lighting, plus a fuel stove to warm the cabin as we regularly suffer -6 degrees Centigrade overnight temperatures.

I tracked the fox in my Zeiss scope. He was about 140m out and heading for the thick bush that he came from. As I had hoped, he did prop for the 'last look back'

with the cross-hairs centred on his chest just as I squeezed the trigger. The 55gr Hornady handload dropped him on the spot. I walked over to find the male fox, who was in prime condition and tipped the scales at 6.4kg. One less lamb and native wildlife killer to worry about.

My mission for this trip was to remove as many foxes and feral cats as possible, while also bagging some rabbits for us to eat and feed our pets. So at least I had opened the account.

In the coming days we had a mob of goats visit the bank on the other side of the river. I spied a large-bodied billy with impressive horns. Looking through the scope, I guessed them easily over 30". I did not have the right gun for the job, so I passed him up and hoped he would return. The mob were back the next day so I grabbed my Remington BDL in .243 Ackley Improved and scanned them, but my billy was nowhere to be seen. Would I come across him again?

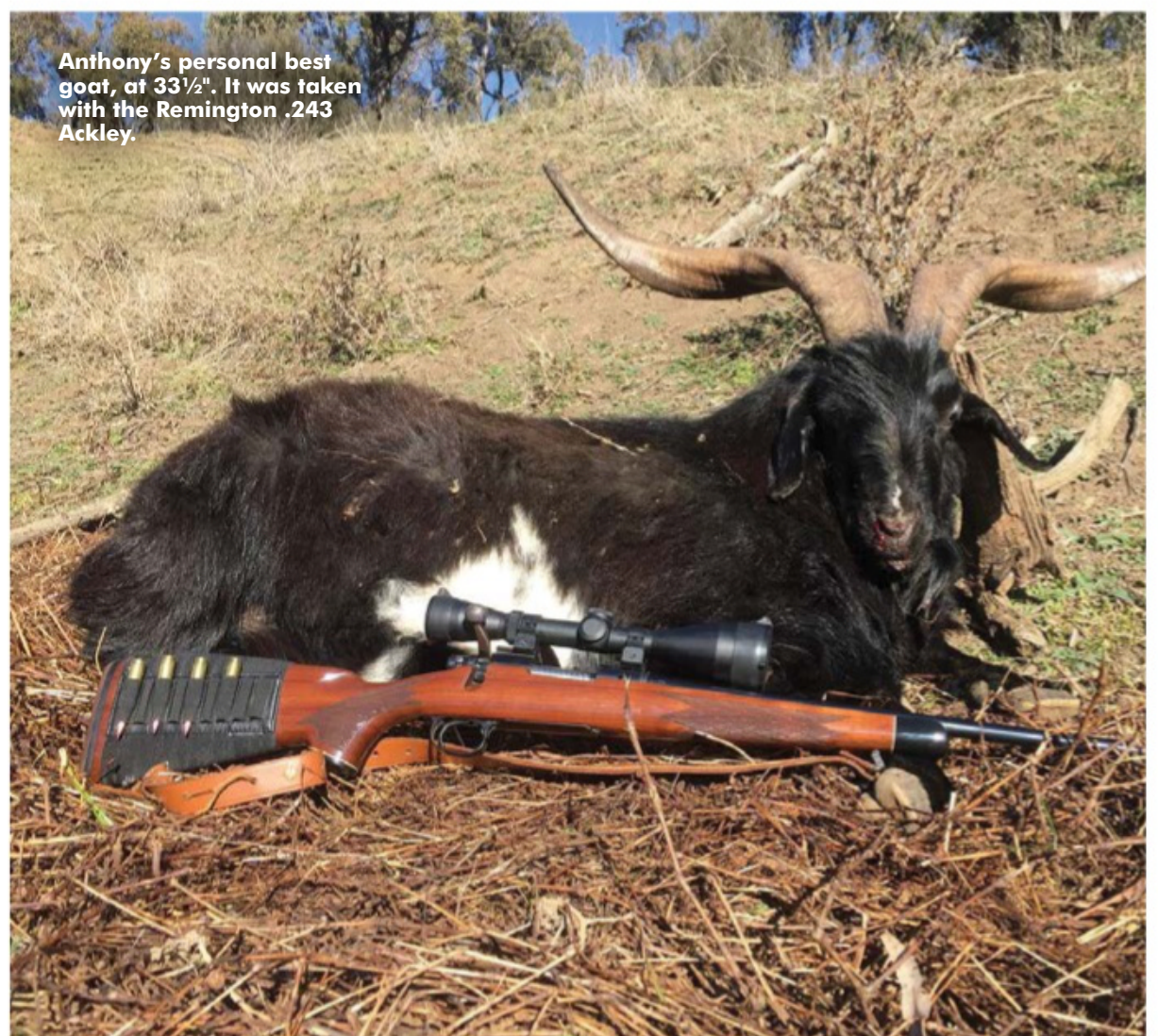
On day three in mid-morning, I heard the bleating of a kid across the river, so I quickly grabbed the Ackley and set up to scan and find the billy. After about five minutes of looking everywhere he suddenly stepped out from nowhere. Although he was in the open, he was a fair distance from me. I was running 95gr Nosler Ballistic Tips which I have chronographed at 3200fps. I have also range tested these loads so I know where they land out to 300m. I realised the projectile would drop about 6". I wound the Leupold up to its highest magnification of 12, put the cross-hairs high on his shoulder and carefully squeezed off the shot. It took a while for the projectile to cover the distance, but it hit with a solid 'whack'. The billy dropped on the spot, rolled down the hill several metres then laid still at the bottom.

But it was on the other side of the river, which now I had to cross, to take my prize. Did I mention it was the middle of winter



- the water is cold! I set off with my rifle, Dewey knife and camera and went looking for a place to cross. To cut a long walk short, I ended up having to strip down to my jocks and walk across. The depth wasn't too bad but by the time I reached the other side, my feet were just rubbery blobs on the end of my legs that I couldn't feel. Once I was there, I was keen to see how the Nosler Ballistic Tip had performed; it had entered low on the shoulder, expanded nicely, destroyed the top of the heart/ bottom of the lungs and then disintegrated on the far shoulder. I took some photos and when I was back in the cabin I ran the tape measure over the horns. They were 33½" - another prize for the pool room.

One afternoon I took the .223 for a stroll to a spot where there are plenty of rabbits and the plan was to test my skills at head shooting them at different distances. As I approached the rabbit warren from about 200m out I noticed at least



Super Snowy

30 rabbits all sitting bolt upright and very nervous. They had not spotted me so I was puzzled as to what was going on. Then I noticed a feral cat among them, occasionally stopping and entering a rabbit hole, then appearing 30 seconds later and moving onto the next one. So when he was down a hole, I put down the legs of the Harris bipod and waited for him to reappear. Sure enough out he came. I dropped him stone cold with the Howa .223. When I went over to grab some photos I noticed a pile of feathers from one of our native birds not 10m from where I shot him. No more wildlife for him.

A couple of mornings later my wife

spotted a fox chewing on the billy that I'd shot across the river, so again I grabbed the .243 Ackley and set up for the shot. Aiming at the top of its chest I slowly squeezed the trigger. The shot was true and fox number two never moved again.

The following day my sister, brother-in-law Michael and their two teenage children arrived. Michael and his son Will were keen to be among the ferals, but first some practice for Will. Once he was proficient, we went for a walk over to 'rabbit hill'. The spot we use looks out over a rabbit warren where the bunnies range from 40m to 200m so we took the .22LR, 22 Magnum and Michael's Howa

.223. We were really keen for Will to bag his first rabbit, so we quietly approached the spot and set the rifles on their bipods. Unfortunately, the rabbits were pretty nervous, so there were no close ones for the .22. But luckily for Will I brought my .22 Magnum. The nearest bunny was about 70m away so this was going to test him out. We told him to take his time, then let him do the rest. Bang - rabbit down. Will was grinning from ear to ear, it was a special moment and I was glad to be a part of it. Will took another rabbit that afternoon and Michael had one with the .223, once the close ones had gone to ground.

That night after tea we wheeled the Prado out with its twin Lightforce spotlights and headed for the hunting ground. Will bagged himself some more rabbits then we saw the unmistakable red glow of fox eyes on a distant hill. We turned the engine off and I fired up the electronic caller that was cable tied to the bullbar. The fox came tearing down the hill and I told Michael to follow it in his scope and shoot when he was ready. The fox came to about 150m and Michael took his shot, but missed. The fox hightailed it, so we continued on.

Not five minutes later, I spotted one on my side veering away from us. I told Michael to hit the caller and I followed it in the Zeiss scope on my .223. As soon as the rabbit distress call went out the fox stopped, faced us and sat on its haunches. At 90m it was an easy shot, but you take them as they come.

We kept cruising around. Will was having a ball shooting rabbits, before we finally spotted another set of fox eyes. So off with the motor and on with caller. It was a good 400m out, as the caller took its attention. But we could not bring it closer. We tried different calls, but no luck. Michael could see the fox in the scope and it had decided to lie down and just look at us. It was too far out for a shot so we had to try something different. Luckily we were parked on a hill too, so I slipped the car into neutral and we closed the gap to within shooting range. Michael said the fox was still lying down and



he could only see its head. I said to aim for its eye (aim small, miss small). The shot was successful and Michael had his first fox. It was a difficult one but patience paid off.

As our visitors left, they were replaced by our long-term friends from our home town. They had a teenage son Lachlan, who is left-handed, so none of my thumb-hole Howas were suitable. Instead, I familiarised him with my .22 Magnum and the .243 Ackley. These are still right-handed, but can be used left-handed.

He was keen for a spotlight, so we set out for rabbit hill. Myself and his dad were in the front with the twin spotlights and the Howa .223. Lachlan took the backseat with the .22 Magnum. As soon as we arrived, I spotted the tell-tale green eyes of a feral cat, but it was too far away. We closed the gap and fired up the caller. This had the cat interested. I readied the .223, as it sat in the hollow of a tree, centred the cross-hairs on its chest and squeezed the trigger. There was a click, but nothing. For some reason, the handload did not ignite, then to make things worse, the case would not eject.

The cat slinked away, so Greg and Lachlan kept an eye on it, while I tried to clear the rifle. No luck, so the bolt was removed and the rifle bagged. We followed the cat to the side of a hill, where it had



Michael's first fox after a difficult shot, but patience, experience and an accurate rifle paid off.

gone into some fallen timber. The cat was located resting on a fallen log, seeming not to care about what we were up to. It was going to be a tricky shot - at least 100m away and only its head and part of its back-side were visible. We decided that I would take the shot with the .22 Magnum. So I folded out the bipod legs and lined up its head in the cross-hairs. The shot was good and the cat fell off the log.

After the photo session we headed back

to the cabin to grab a replacement rifle. My Howa Varmint .22-250 was selected and we headed back to 'rabbit hill'. I spotted another set of green eyes, but the cat was on the move. I had the .22-250 ready and the caller was activated. The cat kept walking, so I continued to track it with the Nightforce scope. When the cat thought it was far enough away, it stopped to look back. But he wasn't far enough away for the .22-250. The 60gr Nosler Ballistic Tip did the rest. This was becoming an awesome trip.

I decided to weigh that third cat as it was the biggest so far. It was 4.5kg, which is a solid cat. I am particularly concerned about feral cats in Australia. I have been coming down to this place for more than 40 years. We never saw feral cats, but we did used to see the eastern quoll, a unique Australian marsupial. Then in the early 2000s we started seeing feral cats and I have not seen a quoll since. Coincidence? I think not.

The following morning we had a rather unique experience as a fox came down to sniff the dead billy goat on the other side of the river. So we set up Lachlan with a chair and the .243 Ackley and he proceeded to shoot the fox. This was no mean feat as it was a solid 300m from the deck to the fox.



The solid 4.5kg cat that thought he was out of range of the Howa .22-250.

Super Snowy

Then another fox came sniffing around the goat carcass. So out came the Ackley and Lachlan shot that one as well. Two foxes down while cooking breakfast and shot from the deck of the cabin.

The trip was coming to a close, but we decided to try our luck spotlighting again. The Prado was set up and off we went to 'rabbit hill'. Lachlan was in the front with the

new favourite fox rifle, the Remington .243 Ackley. A fox was spotted, but it was not having any of our caller antics and it slipped over the hill. I knew where it was headed, so we let it go.

What happened next is something I will never forget. The sky suddenly lit up brighter than daylight, with the paddocks illuminated green and we witnessed, as

was later confirmed on the news channels, a meteorite entering the atmosphere. It was quite low in the sky and seemed really close. It was quite incredible and something my fellow passengers and I were very lucky to see.

After we calmed down, I decided to find if that fox was still around. I drove over to where I thought it would be when it bobbed up no more than 15m away and on Lachlan's side. He was having trouble finding it in the Leupold scope (as it was so close) but he did and the Ackley spoke again. At that distance, the Nosler Ballistic Tip was quite emphatic. This victim was later called the 'green comet fox'.

Our guests had left and it was time to pack up. We were due to leave the following morning for the long drive north, so I gave all the rifles a clean, bagged them, removed the bolts and the ammunition was packed away. Later that afternoon, my wife Karen called out that she could see a fox chewing on the goat carcass. I had a look and sure enough, there was a redcoat vigorously chomping on the two-week-old carcass.

So I made the mad dash to the back room for the rifle, out to the shed for the bolt and to the car for the ammunition, then back to the deck to take the shot. As I wound the scope up to 12 power, he was gnawing madly. I watched him through the scope, but he didn't seem to be in a hurry, so I slowly waited, lined up the cross-hairs high on his chest and gently squeezed the lightened trigger. The projectile travelled true and dropped him on the spot. Time for another river crossing, because you know what they say - grab a photo or it didn't happen. The fox was photographed where he lay.

The next day we made the long journey home. That was a great family holiday and between all our guests and myself we made a big dent in the feral population, which will hopefully help out the local farmers and the native fauna. ■



Young Will bagged some rabbits.



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PolyScience 300 cryovac machine seals the deal

Paul Barker



Various cuts of venison making their way through the PolyScience 300.

It would be a pretty fair assumption that every hunter has their own personal incentive to pursue his or her quest.

That said, one of the main motivations apart from just being out in the country having a well-earned break from city life, would be to bring home quantities of game meat in one form or another for later consumption as a fabulous meal.

There can be a great deal of effort involved to field dress the harvested animal and perhaps break it down into more manageable sized components for the

return trip to your house. Once back, the next stage is how best to store the meat to maintain its freshness over time?

Many people carefully further condense the meat into its respective pieces. Then place these into plastic bags for the freezer.

When it comes to preservation of meat and other food types for longer periods, say three or four months, vacuum packaging is certainly the way to go. You may at some point have had the butcher cryovac your meat portions to take on a forthcoming hunting trip. I had never really given much

thought in terms of home cryovacing meat, particularly when making a bulk purchase of steak or other cuts.

However, some months ago I began to embrace the sous vide (pronounced soo vee) style of cooking. Sous vide in French, translates to 'under vacuum'. After watching numerous videos on the subject it soon became obvious that to obtain the best results from sous vide, some type of vacuum machine was required.

What followed was taking a look at the options on offer in terms of appliances and



The clamp grips the bag firmly during the vacuuming process.



Now the real work begins, dressing out one of the deer.

the pros and cons of the different types. One option was a smallish food saver-style benchtop machine that sucks the air from bags with minute channels in them and then heat seals the bag once the air is removed.

While this type of contraption is quite portable and relatively inexpensive, an issue is that evacuating bags containing liquids such as soups can be sucked into the machine along with the air as the bag capacity is reduced, causing a problem with the instrument. This snag can be avoided somewhat with careful handling but could still remain a worry. The second concern was the bags are reasonably expensive.

After much research I settled on the chamber vacuum-style machine. These are

the type of units you have probably seen in butchers' shops. Compared to the food saver machines these are fairly large and heavy and not something you would want to be moving too frequently.

I decided on the PolyScience Series 300 Chamber Vacuum Sealer. The chamber capacity is more than ample. Its footprint of 47cm long x 35.6cm wide x 36.8cm high means it will handle bags up to 30.5cm and weighs in at 23kg. The chamber dimensions are 35cm long, 30.5cm wide and 11cm high. It is powered by a heavy-duty dry piston vacuum pump, which means frequent oil changes are not required as with other devices of this type.

The machine can be placed in a

convenient spot in the kitchen with plenty of drawer space to store bags of different sizes and ample bench area to allow room when processing large amounts of food.

The PolyScience Series 300 has a number of great features. These include an array of vacuum settings and three pre-set buttons that cover most vacuum options. It can be user programmed if required, along with an agenda for efficiently marinating food prior to vacuuming and sealing the bag plus an external vacuum port with an extension connection tube.

So what are the pluses for the hunter in having an efficient vacuuming machine? One would have to be the ability to process game meats to perfection in terms of



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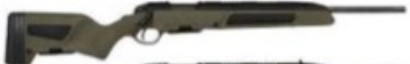
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PolyScience 300 cryovac machine

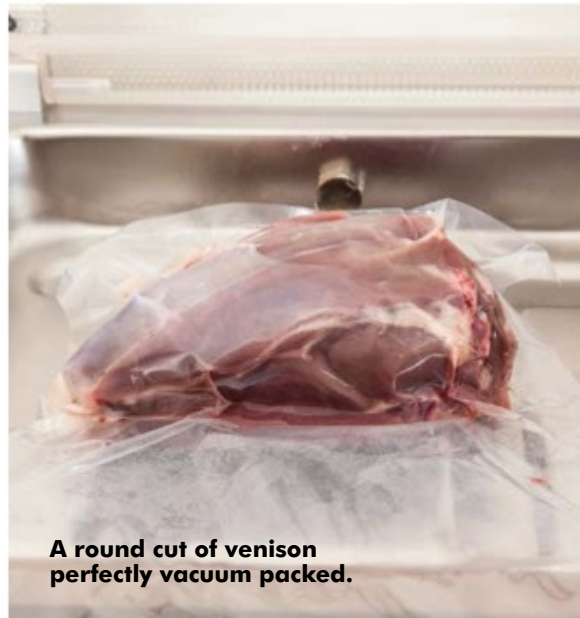
long-term stability and freshness. Long gone are the days where a selection of meat is defrosted only to find a serious degree of freezer burn. This is not a good look. If a portion of meat will be consumed within a few weeks it can simply be placed in the refrigerator at normal fridge temperature. However, there are varying thoughts on how long meat, fish and poultry can be kept this way.

As mentioned, you can marinate your chosen meat cuts prior to sealing so they are good-to-go regardless of how you choose to cook them. This saves preparation time. Prior to going on a hunting and camping trip, your produce can be vacuum sealed which obviates the need to keep them frozen over the duration of the trek. This in turn saves precious battery power as the fridge does not consume extra energy to keep the freezer compartment down to a suitable temperature.

It did not take too long once the machine arrived to justify its cost, as barely a day goes by without it being put to work. The machine is easy to use even with soft vegetables - the three pre-sets make it a two-button process and if further fine-tuning is required there are vacuum settings to handle any task.

Returning home after a successful hunt with four fallow deer to process seemed a daunting task, that said though, the many hours work flowed smoothly with the Polyscience 300 doing a very capable job of vacuum packing the many kilos of venison.

In all, the PolyScience Series 300 Vacuum



A round cut of venison perfectly vacuum packed.



A selection of vacuum sealed food ready for an imminent hunting trip.

Sealer turned out to be a great asset in the kitchen, for general food preservation and preparing a multitude of tasty meals to be cooked sous vide-style. Once in use, you'll wonder how you ever managed without a vacuum sealer.

Moving away from the food aspect, I can see the machine finding some use in the reloading department. When you think about where vacuum sealing can be employed, there are any number of ideas that come to mind. The machine is a bit pricy, coming in at \$1049 including delivery. But in my opinion it is worth every cent of the price tag.

The item was purchased from Sous Vide Chef, a company based in Victoria. They were great people to deal with and my order was processed quickly. The gear arrived incredibly well packed within 48 hours of the directive being placed. Check the website at sousvidechef.com.au ■



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The pair of marauding wild dogs taken with the .257 Weatherby Magnum.



Call of the wild dogs

Don Caswell

Hunters need patience for targeting any game. This is particularly true for those on the trail of wild dogs. A recent experience drove that point home clearly to me. Most times, when calling wild dogs, they seem to appear just as you are in the process of abandoning that position and moving to another. The number of times that wild dogs turn up almost immediately to a call is, unfortunately, in the minority.

A nearby farmer phoned me to say that a few of his calves were missing and others had bite wounds. Son and hunting buddy Ryan was visiting, so this was a great opportunity for an outing together that would not interfere with a gathering of family for a special event. The property was only a few minutes from home. We could easily be there for daybreak and still be home for breakfast with the rest of the crew.

The first morning, our efforts were nullified by a heavy mist. We were able to enjoy a fabulous sunrise over the scenic splendour of the northern wet tropics, but there was

no chance of seeing any dogs that were more than 50m away. The next morning was clear and cold. We slowly stalked the kilometre or so to the dense jungle boundary where the grazing land met the great wall of virgin forest.

After calling our way to the treeline, we began to retrace our steps to the vehicle. I continued to scan the country to either side with my binoculars. Just over 700m away, next to a bush out in the pasture, I spied what looked like a dog. I called and was pleased to see a large black dog stand up and stare in our direction. After a time, I gave another call. The dog turned and headed back into the thick bordering jungle.

The dog did not appear to be alarmed and there was nothing to be gained, and much to be lost, from any direct approach. The dog had been sitting comfortably on the elevated edge of a gully that ran across the broad expanse of pasture. The spot was out of the wind, offered a good view across a wide tract of land and was catching the early morning sun coming up in



Call of the wild dogs

the east. Those were three good reasons to think that it might be a favoured site for that wild dog on an early winter's morning. After a discussion with Ryan, we decided that the best option was to return early the next day and focus on the area.

The next morning, we snuck in at first light to be a bit closer to where we had seen the dog. We stopped at the fenceline to that paddock and used the big timber post of a farm gate to give us cover. Within seconds, I noticed the black wild dog once more, in nearly the same place as last time. I used the rangefinder to determine that it was nearly 550m away.

I called and the dog was on alert, changing position to stare in our direction. It trotted down and crossed the gully to emerge in plain view, about 500m from us. Even better, a slightly smaller red wild dog joined the black dog. They were interested but had no intention of coming closer. I tried a few different calls and even

The gate post and the view to the distant gully where the wild dogs were.



Vast densely-jungled national parks harbour wild dog packs that attack stock.





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Call of the wild dogs

waved a rag tied to the end of my hiking stick. They seemed to be fascinated but stayed put.

The .257 Weatherby Magnum with its Swarovski z6i 2.5-15x56 scope has a ballistic turret tuned to the 110-grain Nosler Accubond load I use. It is sighted out to 500m. Ryan is a good shot – better than me – but 500m across an open, wind-swept paddock was marginal. And the chance of downing the second dog was almost zero.

From my experience I was confident that the wild dogs would eventually come to investigate our situation. We were well-secreted, sitting behind a big gate post and the wind was in our favour. We worked out a couple of possible stalking routes that would take us closer, but we would have to cross a few hundred metres in plain view and the dogs were looking right at us. The only option was to sit tight and wait.

After half an hour, as if to some signal, both dogs stood up and began to head towards us. The red dog took the lead and made a beeline for us. The black wild dog was more wary and held back, quartering to and fro in its approach. I whispered to Ryan to shoot the furthest dog first. The front dog would pick up the smack of the bullet before it heard the shot and that would drive it nearer to us.

However, with the black dog lingering behind some grass more than 200m away, we were obliged to shoot the red dog as it trotted straight on. When it was about 70m away, I gave a little whistle and as soon as it stopped and put its head up, Ryan fired. We kept our focus on the red dog for a few seconds until it was obvious that it was out for the count. The black dog was sprinting for the forest.

I tried a couple of calls to make it stop briefly but to no avail. The black dog maintained its lope until Ryan's second shot surprised me, but not as much as seeing that fleeing black dog tumble. I congratulated my hunting partner on some exceptional shooting. Ryan said he had given it a good lead and aimed a smidge high. We walked to the



Attempting to call wild dogs out of the sheltering jungle.

red dog and then made our way towards the more distant black dog. We would have no trouble finding it in the pasture as the cattle had gathered to sniff and push at their dead enemy.

On arriving at the dead black dog, I

took out my rangefinder and scanned the big post we had fired from. It was 358m away. The accurate and flat shooting .257 Weatherby Magnum had enabled the long shot. Together with patience and perseverance, that had finally paid off big-time. ■

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The Savage Model 24 combination

Torry Gromball



The Savage Model 24S-D with side barrel release and fully joined barrels in .22 Magnum over 20-gauge.

Opinions differ but the combination rifle/shotgun was born in 1938 or 1939, created by the then Stevens Company, which was later purchased by Savage. It then became the Savage Model 24 in 1950.

Originally chambered in .22 Long Rifle over .410 Shotshell with a barrel length of 24" (61cm), it opened with a top lever and sported an exposed hammer with a barrel selector comprising a button that was pushed up or down on the right side of the frame. It was adopted by the US Air Force in the 1950s in .22 Hornet over .410 with a shortened barrel and this design is still in existence today (with a legal length barrel) as the Springfield Armory M6 Scout.

In 1950 the little Stevens .22-410 disappeared and became the Savage Model 24. Over the years it was produced in at least 12 different formats, with a staggering amount of choice for rifle cartridge

chambers over three shotshell chambers. As expected it went through a similar amount of design changes. I will not bore you with the specifications of each and every model but will note the major revamps that developed into the superb firearm we see today.

Initially the Model 24 was manufactured with joined barrels the entire length, rifle sights, top tang barrel release lever, rebounding hammer, hammer mounted barrel selector and 60cm barrels. The hammer mounted barrel selector is simple to operate and elegant in design. Push forward for the top rifle barrel or backwards for the bottom shotgun barrel.

The next model, the 24S, moved to a side barrel release lever which proved unpopular and was later dropped in favour of the original top tang release lever. Then came the model 24C (C denoting Camper) which had 20" (51cm) separated barrels

and all versions from then retained the separate barrel configuration.

Some later types had a barrel release sliding block just forward of the triggerguard but this again was quickly dropped in favour of the more traditional top tang lever. Much later in the 1990s, Savage introduced a cross-bolt safety on the Model 24F as well as a factory removable choke system so that you could screw in the desired choke for your own particular hunting scenario.

These chokes use the older style Winchoke thread which is also compatible with the Browning Invector series of chokes (not the Invector-Plus). Chokes on all modes prior to the 24F were fixed and mainly full choked except for the Camper series which were cylinder bored. The 24F was also drilled and tapped for scope mounting and was the last of the Model 24s manufactured by Savage, which was discontinued in 2010.



The Savage Model 24F chambered in .22 Hornet over 12-gauge.

The Savage Model 24 combination

The only model not manufactured by Savage was the 2400. This was made by Valmet for Savage and was the first to feature a shotgun barrel over the rifle barrel. This gun differed from the normal line with the barrel selector being a small button sliding left to right on the upper part of the trigger and was only chambered in .222 or .308 under a 70mm shotgun barrel. It was the only combo not to feature a 3" (76mm) chamber.

Depending on the style, these guns were chambered in the following configurations:

- .22 Long Rifle over .410-gauge
- .22 Long Rifle, .22 Magnum, 17HMR, .22 Hornet, .222, .223, .30-30, .357 Magnum, .357 Maximum over 20-gauge
- .22 Hornet, .222, .223, .30-30, .308 over 12-gauge

All shotgun barrels were chambered for 3" (76mm) Magnum shells.

So no matter what game you hunt, there is a combination to suit your exact need.

How do they perform out in the field?

That is the question I am most often asked. If you match the chambering to the game you are hunting, then they perform admirably. For small game such as rabbits, foxes and such I carry my model 24S-D in .22 Magnum over 20-gauge. With the open sights I can despatch these pests out to 100m from a steady rest and have no issue with fast moving rabbits out to 30m using the 20-gauge barrel, which in the



The Model 24S-D showing the side release lever which proved unpopular.

standard 70mm cartridge length launches a full ounce (28-gram) of shot. Unfortunately it is near impossible to find 20-gauge 3" (76mm) shells in Australia.

The .22 Magnum barrel shoots better than some of the .22 Magnum bolt guns I have owned. I find the side release lever on the 24S so much quicker to activate than the top tang release lever as you can open the gun with a simple flick of your thumb rather than the grab, twist motion. For larger game the .30-30 over 20- or

12-gauge may be the best choice and that is exactly the beauty of the Savage series as you are given the option.

The second most asked question is: Should I mount a scope? This indeed is a quandary. If the gun is chambered in a varmint round such as a .222 or .223 then the addition of a scope allows the advantage of the cartridge's superior ballistics out to 300m but then you lose the quick reaction of the shotgun barrel for fast moving close-in prey. I find it near



The range of cartridges chambered in the Savage Model 24. From left to right, .22 Short, .22 Long Rifle, .17HMR, .22 Magnum, .22 Hornet, .357 Magnum, .222, .223, .30-30, .308, .410-gauge, 20-gauge, 12-gauge.



The Savage Model 24 combination

impossible to move onto a running rabbit with a scope attached.

The early guns had ineffective mounting systems and came with a warning on the barrel not to fire the shotgun barrel while a scope was attached. In my opinion, leave the scope off and stalk the prey to a distance where you can effectively use the issued iron sights. My Model 24F is chambered in .22 Hornet over 12-gauge and again, from a steady rest the Hornet performs admirably with open sights out to 150m while the 12-gauge despatches all within its 40m range.

The .410 and 20-gauge guns are smaller framed than the 12-gauge guns and therefore much lighter to carry at around 2.5kg while the Model 24F in 12-gauge is a heavy brute coming in a good kilo more.

A word on chokes. As I previously mentioned, most of the fixed chokes are full except for the Camper model which is cylinder bored. You can determine what restriction the choke is as Savage used a numbering system just forward of the breech on the underside of the shotgun barrel. A four was full choke, three modified, two improved cylinder and one cylinder. The early models used a * symbol. Four stars for full, three for modified, two for improved cylinder and one for cylinder.



Close-up of the simple yet elegant hammer mounted barrel selector. Push forward for the rifle barrel and back for the shotgun barrel.

The Model 24F with traditional top tang release lever, communal extractors and hammer mounted barrel selector.



The Model 24 was unfortunately discontinued in 2010 but secondhand firearms appear regularly on the used guns websites such as ssaagunsales.com, which is where I picked up my two guns and they are available at quite modest prices.

Current production is the Model 42, an all-plastic affair chambered in either .22 Long Rifle or .22 Magnum over .410-gauge. In 2016 Savage introduced the takedown version and it comes with an Uncle Mike's nylon go-bag. The gun breaks down into two parts and fits in the bag. The gun is short at 90cm with 20cm barrels. The polymer rear sight is adjustable for elevation and may be removed and replaced with a rail for mounting optics. The buttstock is injection moulded and has gripping grooves in the pistol grip. This gun carries on the tradition of the Savage Model 24 with modern styling and materials. ■



The separate extractors mounted on the earlier models. Note the rifle barrel extractor is a simple spring-driven affair.



The current production Savage Model 42.

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Robert Dewey



A Dewey Army knife has quality credentials.

My Macquarie dictionary defines quality as having a distinguishing feature or attribute with a degree of excellence.

Within the cutlery industry and in the Australian military survival training group, it is accepted that this distinguishing feature in a knife is the ability to hold an edge.

Additionally, the dictionary defines sharp as having a thin cutting edge or fine point, and blunt as having an obtuse, thick or dull edge. None of those definitions are helpful in deciding that a knife is a quality article.

However, if we proceed to conduct a slicing test to produce a decision, we would need to elect the number of cuts needed before the knife changes from being sharp to being blunt. To reach unanimous agreement as to this change point would be difficult to achieve.

This discussion is built around decisions related to the indestructible item of the recommended three-knife kit for hunters. It assumes that the knife to be tested comes with a full tang, a lanyard opening, wooden scales, glued and pinned, carries no other artefact and has acceptable heft and balance.

It should be clear that the starting point will be different when selecting a filleting/skinning knife for its quality status.

Concentrating on how to use the term 'holding an edge,' we need to see if we can find a suitable definition of this attribute.

We know that every knife is at its sharpest when the bevels are ground to meet at

a point of zero thickness. At this juncture every blade is at an equal level of sharpness and can be accepted as sharp. So at this stage we have no evidence of the blade's ability to hold an edge.

This instant also matches the start of what should happen with an unknown knife. If we want to know how good a knife is we must start cutting something.

For the results to be of value and allow comparison with others, the 'something' we use must be reproducible, consistent in every way, including shape, density, weight and must be universally available.

One suggestion given to me was the use of a specific shaped piece of balsa wood. How the test cuts are made would also need an agreed definition.

Clearly, there will be better ways to do this cutting test but this may help the discussion along. Alternately, we could use known data of wear down rates where knife steels are ranked between one and 10. However, it is not clear where on that listing a blade becomes a candidate for acceptance as a quality knife.

An approach to finding a suitable system could be to select a benchmark knife that has universal acceptance – a daunting prospect. Or perhaps select a point, say 4 on the edge retention index, and give the name quality to all steels that meet or surpass this level. Although selecting the level 4 is of itself an opinion but it at least provides a benchmark.

It also accepts that hardening and

tempering procedures were professionally performed. Defending this selection would provide ample scope for discussion. If the point 4 is selected, we could take a knife made from 440C and conduct a cutting test. A range of cutting strokes should be considered acceptable as to when the knife went from sharp to blunt.

None of this allows for a simple decision to be reached when attempting to determine when a knife is a quality knife. The use of the term 'holding its edge' is neither a simple or precise way to make this verdict. However, nothing is seen to be more important to the hunter or military person than that the blade remains sharp for a long period of time.

The most likely system will come from using the known 'wear down rate' tabulation and attempt to reach a majority acceptance level.

Conclusion

We should persevere with trying to find a way to set a standard for quality around the concept of holding an edge.

It would simplify matters if we could agree to accept that a knife can match or improve upon the test results of a 440C blade.

It should not be difficult to find a suitable cutting test balsa piece or a simple way to conduct a wear down rate test. Perhaps computers will play a future part in such decisions? ■

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Pre-hunt sighting for success

John Denman



Dangerous game needs precision shooting.

I know it's probably pretty much commonsense, but a hunting rifle needs to be sighted properly before you take it into the bush. There have been plenty of well-planned hunting trips ruined simply due to the rifle not being correctly sighted in before leaving home.

Even if you have sighted the rifle well previously, it's worth checking again. It's a busy world we live in and many people may only have time to hunt once or twice a year. All your other preparation can be undone by having a rifle that doesn't shoot where you need it to. Then that long-awaited hunt is off to a very bad start.

To begin with I'd suggest that many of

the stories you hear about people doing a running shot at 700m successfully are mostly rot. Distances are extremely difficult to estimate for the majority without the aid of a rangefinder. Besides all that, there are few shooters who can consistently hit a vital spot at that sort of span anyway. Hunting is not about long-range shooting, it's all about going as close as you can.

The further out your target is, the more influence things like wind and atmospheric conditions can take effect. Forget about the snipers you see in the movies, in real life a sniper will fire thousands of rounds a year in practice and have gear and training that most recreational shooters can only dream about.

The other consideration is respect for your quarry. The longer the range, the greater the chance of wounding rather than a clean kill. This is something ethical hunters should always aspire to. Not only that but if you didn't score a clean kill, the longer range means that the wounded animal has a good start on you to follow up.

My self-imposed hunting distance is 200m. I know there will be some sniggering about that in certain quarters, but look at it this way. If a bow hunter can move within 35m, a rifle shooter should at least try to aim within 200m. Range practice is more than simply making sure you hit the paper. It also gives you some



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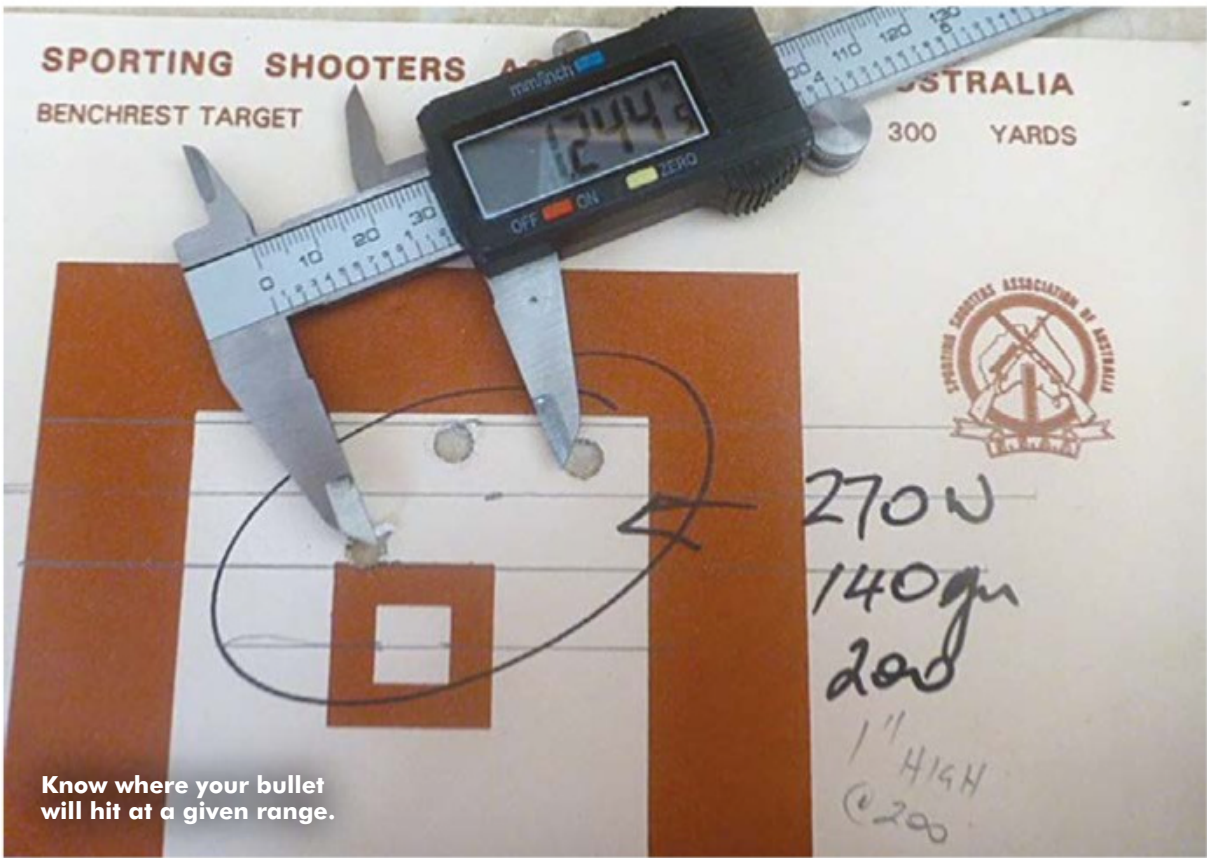
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Pre-hunt sighting for success

perspective on how far a particular distance may be.

I fully realise too that there are some instances where a long-range shot is the only option. Hunting tahrs in New Zealand is one that comes to mind where 300m shots are not uncommon. But if you have carried out your preparation correctly, 300m is doable. Past that and you significantly reduce the chance of success. Most modern rifles are capable of shooting three shots into one inch at 100m. At 200m that may go out to 2", but on the other hand it may blow out to 4". These are not heavy barrelled target rifles, all they need to do is penetrate hide and reach into a vital area, and even 4" will do that. Once again as the range opens out so do your chances of missing that vital area.

I've shot paper targets out to 1000m, but more at 300m and 500m. Even 300m can be a challenge in some conditions. Cross gully shots can be at the mercy of wind and mirage. Often the wind may



swirl, creating air currents that are impossible to read. At least on a range there are wind flags.

There are few if any hunting rounds that cannot be affected by wind, even things like .300 Winchester Magnums will be at the

mercy of wind and other factors. My longest shot on a game animal was about 300m. I say 'about' because I paced it out. The shot was on a wild pig, and rifle was a .270 Winchester. I knew the capability of the rifle and I took a rest over the bonnet of the car.



Sight in from a steady rest.

Always take a rest where you can.

So back to the range. You need to know where your bullet will impact at a given distance and the controlled environment of a SSAA rifle range is about as good as it gets. First off, I don't see any point in firing more than three shot groups in a hunting rifle. It's enough to give you a good idea of where the centre of the group is at a given distance, but more importantly, hunting rifles have light barrels, more than three shots and the barrel can warm up enough to cause a flyer.

So if you decide that your maximum range is 200m, make sure you know exactly where the shot will print at that distance. You also need to know the impact point at 100m. For most of today's hunting rifles an inch-and-a-half high at 100m

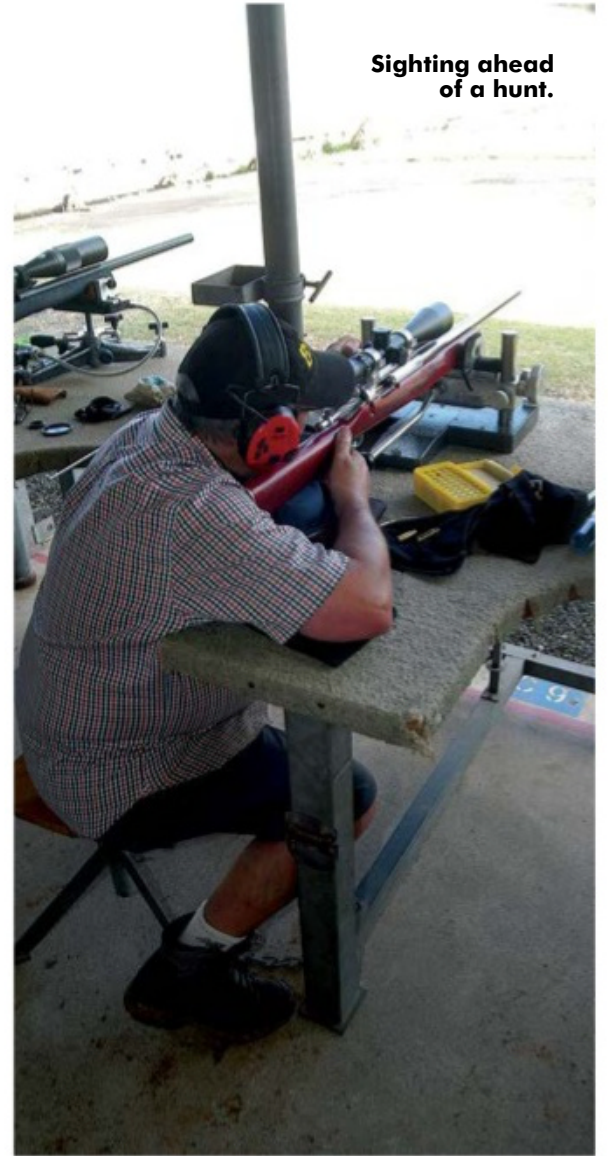
should be dead-on at 200m. If your range extends to 300m you should see how much the bullet will drop from the 200m zero. This can all take time, but it's time well spent. Knowing everything about your rifle and its ammunition will build confidence, and confidence builds success.

The longer the range, the greater the chance of wounding rather than a clean kill. This is something ethical hunters should always aspire to.

Another factor is the cold barrel. It's important to know where the first shot out of a cold barrel will print. Some people opt to fire a couple of warming shots just before they hunt, but

I don't like it. The whole idea is for you to be in complete sync with your rifle. If you know that the first shot from a cold barrel will be say, one inch up and a little to the left, you will know how to compensate if it's required. There are two main reasons why I don't like firing shots where I plan to hunt. One is that

Sighting ahead
of a hunt.



One-shot kills are important
to ethical hunters.

it may frighten game that could be close to your camp, and the other one is that if you hunt in a State Forest in NSW it's not permitted.

Another factor is recoil. You may be surprised at how many seasoned hunters who aren't range regulars develop a bad flinch. Range time will help you become used to muzzle blast and recoil, and lessen the tendency to baulk. Flinching is not really a matter of being scared of the rifle. It's simply a subconscious reaction to muzzle blast and recoil.

For the most part the recoil is minimal, unless you insist on using a super magnum of some sort. When it's all boiled down, recoil from a hunting rifle is nowhere near what other types of impact can impart. I've seen big blokes who played football develop a bad flinch from shooting a .243W. The same fellas who experienced big hits on the field, turn shy with a rifle that has a loud bark but a baby kiss where recoil is concerned. It's all in the mind. ➤

Pre-hunt sighting for success

Concentrate on the sight picture and trigger squeeze, and the rest will take care of itself.

Then there's the ammo. If you are a handloader, then it's assumed that you care enough to make sure you have your ammo loaded exactly the same as the rounds you shot with at the range. If your hunting rifle was sighted in using a certain weight of powder and a specific bullet, then that's what you have to make sure you carry on your hunt.

It may sound basic, but handloaders like to experiment and having some trial stuff mixed up with your hunting loads is more common than you may think. Don't go changing things unless you know precisely how it will perform, and if you have experimental loads keep them clearly marked and well away from the hunting ammo.

For users of factory ammo, this is less of a problem. However, it's not unknown for the ammo you sighted the rifle with to be unavailable when it's time to hunt. So make sure you keep a sufficient supply of hunting ammo and ensure the contents of the box are all the same. I heard of one hunt that went really bad because the hunter



Some hunting rifles are capable of outstanding accuracy.

hadn't packed his hunting ammo and had to buy some along the way. Unfortunately the brand he had used was out of stock and even the bullet weight was different. Apparently his first shot was a complete miss. Sometimes a hunt can be fairly expensive.

You may be paying a guide, there could be airfares involved among a host of other things. Messing up a hunting trip, regardless of the expense is also time you won't gain back. So cover all the bases and have a successful hunt. ■



Even close-range shot accuracy is important with dangerous game.



This deer carcass has unspoiled meat due to accurate shot placement.

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A SSAA member advantage



Bergara's B14 Hunter rifle

'perfecto' for Aussie game

Don Caswell



The Bergara B14 Hunter rifle.

Bergara is a Spanish company respected for their barrels, which are used by other riflemakers. Bergara also produce a small range of rifles. *Australian Hunter* was given the opportunity to review the Bergara B14 Hunter rifle in 6.5 Creedmoor. Herron Security & Sport are the Australian agents and provided the rifle along with ammunition to test.

First impressions

Out of the box, sans sights and unloaded with the bolt in place, I measured a rifle weight of 3.08kg (6.8lb). Overall length was 105.5cm (41.5"). The rifle felt well-balanced and pointy. The stock was comfortable and a good fit.

The barrel

The B14 comes in two barrel lengths, 22" in the short action and 24" in the long action. The barrels are sporter weight and profile with a muzzle diameter of 17mm. There is one exception to that in the hefty 9.3x62 which has a 19mm muzzle. Barrels are finished in matte black. The steel used is 4140 chrome-moly alloy. Open sights are available as an optional extra. The barrel of this 6.5 Creedmoor offering was 22" in length and had a 1:8 twist rate which is adequate for stabilising heavier projectiles.

The receiver and bolt

I agree with others that the Bergara B14 action is essentially an improved Remington 700 action, with a number of issues

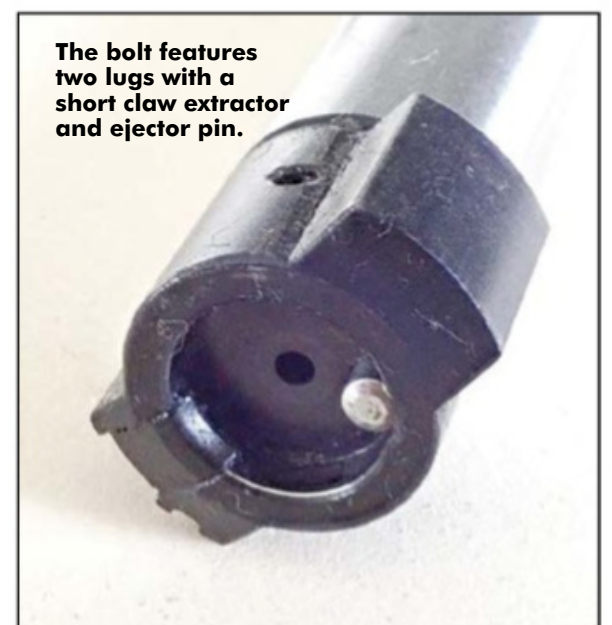
addressed. The bolt is twin-lugged with a large claw extractor, a plunger ejector and a coned bolt face, all of which contribute to smooth and reliable chambering and extraction. The action is profiled and drilled to accept Remington 700 bases and rings. The bolt is a compact short action. A red-coloured indicator pin at the rear of the bolt provides a clear signal as to whether the rifle is cocked, or not.

The trigger and safety

The trigger looks to be a close, if not exact, copy of the Rem 700. It is adjustable for weight and pull, but Bergara recommends that any such work be done by a gunsmith. Being a Rem 700 clone, this also allows easy customisation for anybody wanting an



A compact Sightron 3-9x42 scope complemented the rifle.



The bolt features two lugs with a short claw extractor and ejector pin.

Bergara's B14 Hunter rifle

aftermarket trigger. The factory trigger had negligible creep and a consistent and crisp 2lb release, which I thought was ideal for a hunting rifle of this style.

The safety features a large knurled knob. It is a simple two-position safety which toggles positively between 'safe' and 'fire' positions. In 'safe' position the bolt is still free to move, allowing secure unloading if you chose to cycle the bolt for that.

The magazine

The B14 can be had with a magazine as either an internal floorplate or detachable box type. The box magazine holds one less round than does the floorplate option. That is typically 4 versus 3, except for the two Magnum offerings which are 3 and 2. The box magazine is a single-stack type moulded from polymer. It was easy to load and use. The test rifle had a hinged floorplate style of magazine.

The stock

The stock is a classical straight comb style. It is moulded from glass-reinforced polymer and has a Soft Touch coating for improved grip, especially in cold climates. Steel pillars are integrally moulded in with the stock, providing an excellent stable bedding platform for the action. The user manual instructed that the action screws be tightened to 7N-m (5.1 6ft-lb) of torque. The barrel channel provides full free-floating for the barrel. I measured the length of pull at 13³/₈" (340mm). The stock was olive



The recessed muzzle of the Bergara B14.



The action and trigger of the Bergara B14.

green coloured with dots of fine cream and charcoal coloured specks. The recoil pad was a crush zone model that was effective and comfortable to use. The stock has QD studs, fore and aft.

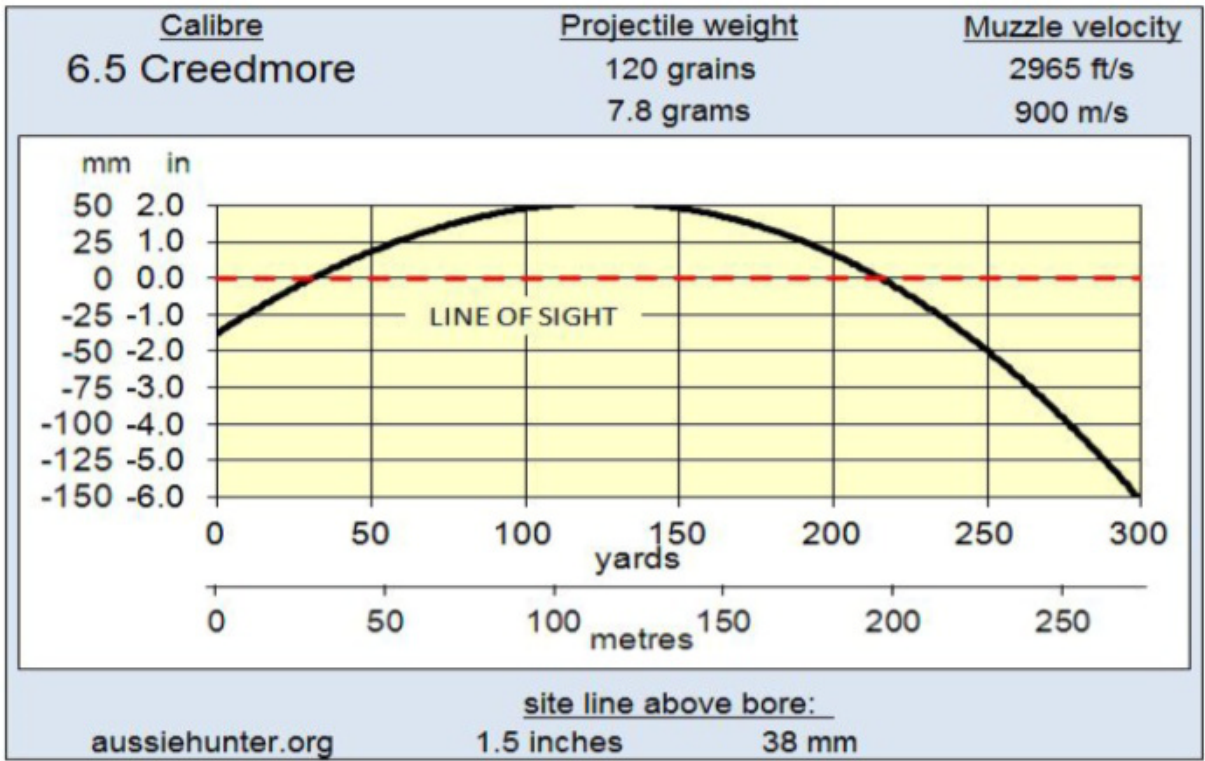
The scope

The rifle was fitted with a Sightron 3-9x42 scope. The optics were sharp and all

adjustments precise. It only took three shots at 25m to have the rifle sighted for 100m. The combination of scope and rifle allowed me to shoot a batch of sub-MOA groups, which is everything you could ask for.

Off the bench

The 6.5 Creedmoor is a popular calibre at the present time. It is not



The trajectory of the 6.5 Creedmoor.

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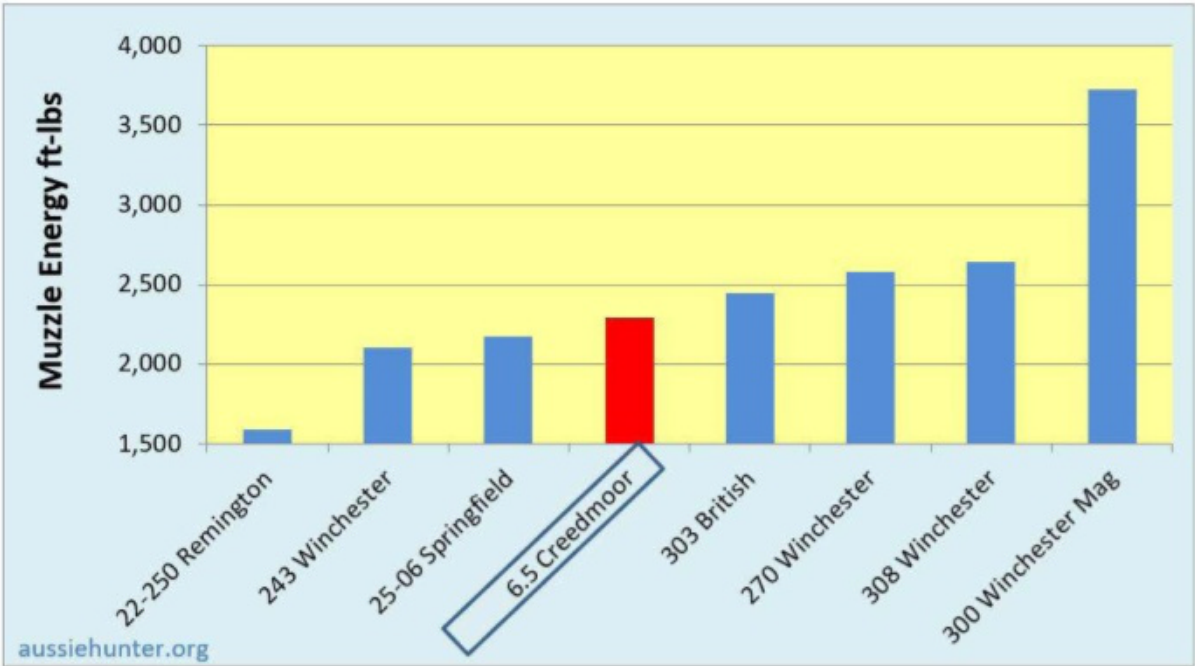
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Bergara’s B14 Hunter rifle

hard to see why. It sits mid-scale in the list of .264 calibres, is mild to shoot and known for inherent accuracy. It can handle projectile weights from 95-grain (at about 3300fps) through to 142-grainers (at about 2700fps). Its mid-range projectile of 120-grains, at a muzzle velocity of close to 3000fps is pretty much ideal for all but the largest game animals. Bergara state that their B14 models will deliver 1 MOA, or better, using match grade factory ammo.

Apart from a broad selection of ammunition supplied by Herron Security & Sport, I also had an array of ammunition from Nioa. This enabled extensive accuracy testing, with a wide variety of factory ammo, over a series of visits to my local SSAA range. The results of that testing are shown in the table.

Bergara recommends a shooting-in process for their barrels, which I followed. That was, shoot one and clean for the first five shots, then clean every 10 shots for the next 50 rounds. After that, clean as required.



Comparing muzzle energy of the 6.5 Creedmoor to similar popular calibres.

Overall

The 6.5 Creedmoor falls pretty much midway between the .243 Winchester and the .308 Winchester in terms of muzzle/recoil energy. For anybody wanting a bit more authority than the .243 Win, but wishing to avoid the recoil of the .308 Win, the 6.5 Creedmoor looks a good choice. It

would be a great performer on all but the largest Australian game.

The Bergara B14 Hunter is a well-built sporter rifle that handles and functions well. More importantly, it is inherently accurate and mild to shoot. At a retail price of about \$1300, it represents good value indeed. ■

Factory ammunition accuracy results

Ammunition	MOA
Hornady American Gunner 140-grain BTHP	0.6
Sellier & Bellot 140-grain FMJ	0.8
Hornady Match 120-grain ELD	0.9
Hornady Precision Hunter 143-grain ELD-X	1.1
American Eagle 120-grain Open Tip Match	1.2
Federal 140-grain SP	1.3
Hornady American Whitetail 129-grain Interlock	1.4
Fusion 140-grain	1.5
Hornady 140-grain SP	1.7



Specifications

Calibre: 6.5 Creedmore
Weight: 3.1kg
Length: 105cm
Floorplate capacity: 4+1
Magazine Capacity: 3+1
Barrel length: 22"
Barrel twist: 1:8
Muzzle diameter: 17mm

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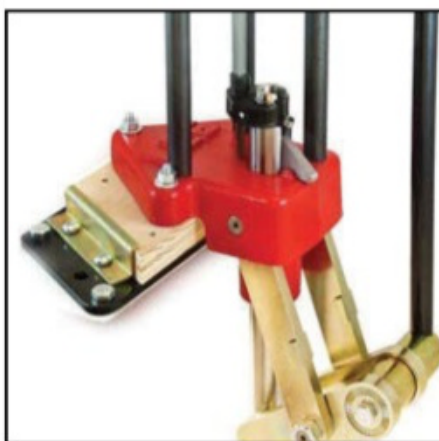
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Come and goat it!

Firing 165-grain Nosler AccuBonds at 2600fps resulted in instant kills and some meat loss.

Chris Wardrop

The sun was beginning to sink below the opposing ridgeline as we stalked to within comfortable shooting range of two goats. It was late autumn and Rob had invited me to join him on a reconnaissance of a property he had regular access to.

He had been eager to take his teenage son out looking for deer sign. Within minutes of reaching the property the young man had accounted for a good size fox, but an hour or two later we had yet to spot any trace of deer.

Rob was the first to observe two light shapes, sky-lining themselves, on a spur to our north. There was a moment of debate - were they sheep or goats? Once I had trained the binoculars on them it was plainly obvious, I was looking at a pair of goats.

We approached the duo by moving up a gully, which ran parallel to the spur they were grazing on. While we stalked into position the goats had continued feeding and moved off the ridgeline. Eventually, once we were standing where they had initially been, we spotted them either side of a shrub in the next gully.

Rob then informed me neither he nor the rest of his family eat goat, offering me an opportunity at both of them. My first thought was to try and convince him of his foolhardiness, my second was of a nearly empty freezer at home.

So it was with the mental image of a full freezer that I carefully closed the distance to 200m and took up a prone position. The angles offered by both animals were far from ideal, I was above them and they

were both quartering away. While I had no concerns about quick ethical kills, I felt over-gunned for goats at 200m. I could see no way to avoid significant meat loss.

For the moment I put the thoughts of roasts, chops and sausages out of my mind and concentrated on my breathing. The billy fell instantly to a shot that entered high behind the left shoulder and exited low in his chest. To my surprise the nanny did not bolt at the report of the rifle and sudden death of her mate. Instead she stood her ground gawking. I cycled the bolt, shifted my body ever so slightly to the left, exhaled slowly and gently squeezed the trigger. The nanny fell to a shot placement almost the mirror image of her mate.

Having done most of my hunting in the Top End, opportunities to enjoy wild goat



Goats prefer hilly or rocky country within range of water.

had been few and far between. As such I was eager to explore the culinary possibilities these two animals presented. Goat is reportedly the most consumed protein in the world and I had certainly eaten plenty of it in the Middle East, bringing curries flavoured with cumin, cardamom and cooked ghee to mind.

On the other hand my family had never eaten goat and are far more accustomed to the flavours Australians associate with lamb. With these two competing flavour palates in mind I settled on smoked leg of goat with Turkish-style accompaniments for my family's first meal of feral goat.

The feral goat in Australia

Domestic goats were introduced with the arrival of the First Fleet in 1788. Their escaped, or deliberately released, descendants have since spread to cover almost a third of the continent. The goats' ability to eat most vegetation, combined with early sexual maturity and high fertility (goats breed twice a year, with twins and triplets being common) has resulted in major

impacts on native vegetation and pastoral land. The gender of goat offspring is close to 50/50 and their only significant predators are dingoes, wild dogs and humans. With female goats typically weighing about 45kg and males reaching about 60kg, even a small mob can have significant effects on vegetation, water and soil.

While the effective management of goats is difficult, and complicated by the fact they hold some commercial value, they are an excellent target species for recreational hunters looking to put quality meat on the table. Any calibre matching, or bettering, the terminal performance of the .22-250 Remington is suitable for humane kills at appropriate distances.

When setting out to find goats, the game trails to and from permanent water sources are a great place to start. The size of a herd and its home range are dictated by the availability of food and especially water. The area of the home range is smaller in zones of abundant food and water, anywhere from one to 13.5 sq km and significantly larger in semi-arid regions, from 14 to 460

sq km. When water is abundant, herd sizes are usually small; when water is scarce, herd size increases, and in times of drought herds made up of hundreds of goats will congregate near permanent water.

The goats' preferred habitat is hilly or rocky country, enabling them to find shelter, and elevation for security from predators, in the hills and water in the gullies and valley floors. Goats tend to have a preference for weeds and can often be found grazing on blackberries, thistle and briar. This makes weed-choked gullies about halfway up ranges another logical place to start looking.

Actual feral goat distribution maps vary over time and between state government departments. What they all have in common is a high density in Outback Queensland, New South Wales and South Australia, plus the adjoining areas of western Victoria. If the distribution maps do not show feral goats close to you, do not be too disheartened. I have personally seen a few small mobs in NSW State Forests that are not covered by the latest Department of Primary Industries distribution map.

Come and goat it!

Smoked leg of goat

Most of the time I use an upright, bullet-type smoker, with a water pan, but this recipe would work just as well on an offset smoker. Despite the fact I have grown up in the decimal age and have to reach for a calculator to convert Fahrenheit to Celsius, I'm much more comfortable smoking food using temperatures in Fahrenheit. This is almost certainly because the vast majority of television shows, cookbooks and recipes on the subject are American.

Ingredients

Goat

Upper leg of goat bone-in
2 tablespoons freshly cracked pepper
(reduce this by half if you don't like things a little spicy)
2 tablespoons coarse sea salt
4 cloves garlic
2 heaped tablespoons fresh rosemary
Olive oil
1 lemon
Mesquite woodchips soaked in water
2 onions
4 long chillies (mix of red and green)

Salad

Rocket
Tomatoes
Olive oil
Lemon juice
Sea salt flakes

Garlic Sauce

2 cups sunflower oil
4 garlic cloves very finely chopped,
or grated
¼ cup lemon juice
¼ cup cold water
Sea salt (fine or flakes)

Method

Make a rub by crushing the coarse salt, pepper, garlic and rosemary in a mortar and pestle. Add a tablespoon or two of olive oil and mix well. Rub the mixture all over the goat leg, being sure to work it into all of the gaps between the muscles. Set the meat aside, at room temperature, to take on the flavours of the marinade while you prepare your smoker.

Soak a good couple of handfuls of woodchips in water. I used mesquite for this recipe. I aim to have the smoker stable at 200 degrees Fahrenheit (93 degrees Celsius), with the water pan three-quarters full. To achieve this quickly, and to avoid a dramatic drop in temperature, I use a chimney to start the charcoal and once white hot, I pour it into the smoker's charcoal tray, and then add hot water to the water pan. Once the smoker has reached a stable 200-220 degrees Fahrenheit you're ready to add the meat.

Immediately before putting the goat leg on the smoker, zest a lemon or two over the meat. Put the goat on the top rack of your smoker, and add a handful of woodchips to the charcoal. With the smoker at 200-220 degrees Fahrenheit, it should take about three hours to cook, but the size of the leg and amount of fat and connective tissue will vary this time. It's best to use a meat thermometer to judge how cooked the meat is. With a smoker you really want to avoid constantly lifting the lid to check the temperature, so a remote probe-type thermometer is a must.

An internal temperature of 140 degrees Fahrenheit (60 degrees Celsius) will result in meat cooked to a medium doneness, 150 degrees Fahrenheit (65.5 Celsius) equates to well done and anything five degrees past that will be well done. The average sized upper leg of goat will probably take about three hours to cook to medium. Continue to add woodchips throughout the cooking process to ensure a good flow of smoke.

While the meat smokes, finely chop four cloves of garlic. Using a small food processor or stick blender, slowly trickle the sunflower oil into a bowl with the garlic. Just like mayonnaise, or a hollandaise sauce, you are trying to make an emulsion. Too much oil, too quickly and the emulsion will split. Once all the oil is added you should have a thick mayonnaise-type sauce. Slowly add the lemon juice as you whisk. Then if the emulsion is still too thick, slowly add ice-cold water until you have the desired consistency. Add salt to taste, pour into a container and set aside in the fridge.

Once the internal temperature of the meat has reached 140 degrees Fahrenheit, remove the meat from the smoker and set aside covered to rest for 20 minutes. While the meat rests make a salad of rocket and sliced tomatoes, dressed with olive oil, lemon juice and salt. Grill onions and long chillies over a hot grill.

Finally, warm some Lebanese flat bread and carve the meat from the bone. Serve the sliced goat, topped with char-grilled onions and chillies, with the salad and flat bread.

Come and goat it!



After about three hours on the smoker, this piece of goat has reached medium.



Serve the meat, bread and sides so everyone can construct their own delicious wraps.



All aboard for an Alaskan brown bear hunt

Rod Williams

Photographs by
Jeff Berg and
Rod Williams

As I stepped from the dock onto the float plane, my Alaskan brown bear hunt had begun. An hour later the Alaska Peninsula greeted us with towering sea cliffs and a snow-capped volcano. Soon we were on a lake, in the middle of nowhere, unloading our gear.

We weren't long into our first full day of hunting when Jeff spotted a big bear about two miles out, on the side of a mountain. Jeff reckoned that it was a boar and definitely worth climbing for. I agreed but

Loading up in Homer on the Kenai Peninsula. The de Havilland Beaver aircraft is a workhorse of the Canadian and Alaskan bush and was the transport for the trip.



before we could pack up, we saw another bear making its way over a snow patch towards our animal. This bear turned out to be a sow and she was soon socialising with the boar. We waited and watched. Eventually both bears settled and lay down on a rocky outcrop. So we headed off to climb a mountain.

Jeff led and eventually we broke through the last of the scrub and found ourselves right where we wanted to be for the start of our ascent. Time was of the essence and we wanted to reach a point that would

hopefully overlook the area where the bears were laid up. We pushed on until we were just short of our destination. There we paused briefly and readied ourselves before crawling forward. We expected to find two brown bears, but instead found fresh bear tracks in the snow. We followed those tracks to the summit and after a considerable amount of glassing, had to accept that we were unlikely to see those bears again that day.

We found our next big bear two days later. He was a couple of miles out and

moving in what appeared, to us, as an aimless stroll. That bear was huge. But, for the present, he was unobtainable. We continued to glass for others and at the same time kept a close watch on our big, restless bear.

It seemed to us that that bear had no intention of laying down for a sleep but he appeared to have a regular beat. Jeff and I discussed our chances of putting in a successful stalk. That bear wasn't coming to us, so with a few hours of daylight left we decided to go to him. A couple of hours later we were closing in. We had the odd



All aboard for an Alaskan brown bear hunt

tantalising glimpse of that wandering bear. We were so close. However, it was too far for a shot and there always seemed to be either a deep creek or a swamp between us and the bear, which complicated the stalk.

With less than 15 minutes of light left we stood on a slight rise and caught fading glimpses of our bear as he wandered about, protected from us by swamp and the obligatory alders. I was near spent and I knew that my hunt for that day was over. Right on dark that beast finally lay down.

Well, we had another decision to make. Our options were to call it a day and walk back to camp. Or we could spend the night where we were and continue the hunt in the morning. Neither sleeping rough or tackling trackless alders in the dark was appealing but the resolution was made we would continue the hunt at first light. We set up a fire, donned every piece of clothing that we had, including waders, and settled in for a cold but character-building night under the stars of the Big Dipper.

Eventually the sun rose. Those first rays offered little relief from the cold but they illuminated the surrounding hills and allowed us to recommence our hunt. By mid-morning we were again warm but we couldn't find our bear. Reluctantly, we finally admitted defeat and plotted a course for camp.

On our last day of hunting we were up early and out glassing just after dawn. The day rolled on. No bears had been seen and things weren't looking promising. Around mid-afternoon Jeff spied one. It looked like the bear was sleeping in a small open patch, on a steep alder-clad slope. Jeff kept his spotter trained on that bear and we waited for him to move.

Eventually it happened. For less than a minute the bear was up and about. Just long enough for Jeff to declare it a boar and a shooter. And then it lay down, in almost the same spot, and went back to sleep.

It was a case of now or never. The stalk would be difficult and we were going to need a smidgen of luck and plenty of

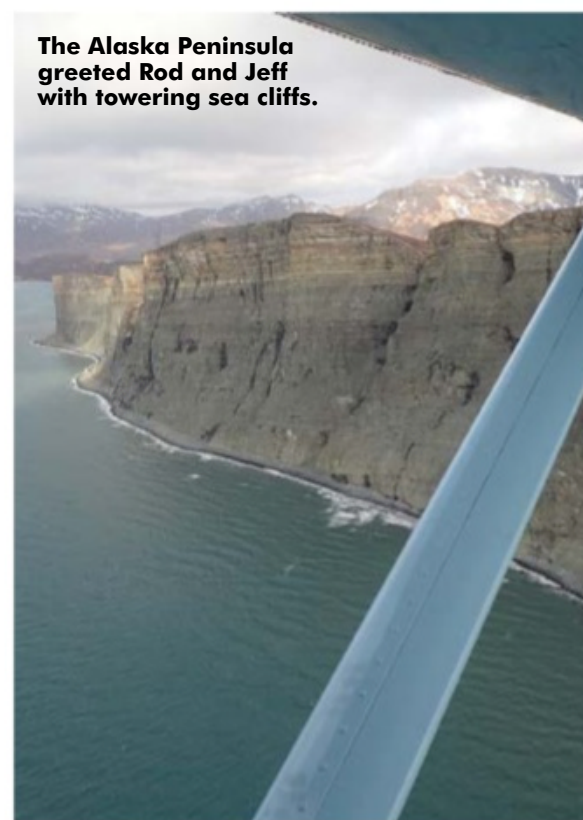
determination to pull it off. We pushed off through the alders. We were men on a mission. Jeff set a blistering pace. The success of the stalk depended on it and we both knew it. We didn't stop for a break until we strode free of the alders a fair way up the hill, on a hard rocky ridge.

We still had a good climb ahead of us to reach a position from where we hoped we may see the boar, assuming of course he hadn't moved. We dropped our packs near a prominent rock and Jeff gave the area a once over with his binoculars. Free of packs, the climbing began and we made good progress. By the time I reached our intended look-out I was in need of a breather. Jeff had beaten me to the site by a few minutes and had spent that time glassing. His news wasn't good... there was no bear to be found.

We were pretty sure that we were overlooking the right bald spot on the face where we had seen the bear. But, were we? Yep, we were in the right location, but that bear had gone for a walk. Jeff's guess was that he was in the alders close by, within 100 yards or so. The problem was from where we were it was impossible to see into that tangle of scrub.

What to do? That face was steep. It was covered in alders which are almost impossible to move quietly through. There weren't a lot of alternatives to consider. But in whispers Jeff explained what he had in mind. It sounded kind of crazy and desperate. But it was the only option which offered any chance.

There was a slender, finger-like opening in the scrub protruding from the rocky ridge upon which we were standing. It wormed its way through the alders in the general direction of where we had last seen the bear. Jeff pointed to it and more importantly to the small pillar of rock near the end of it. "We're going to get you up on there and, when you're ready for a shot, I'm going to do a distressed rabbit call and we'll see what happens," he said. I nodded >



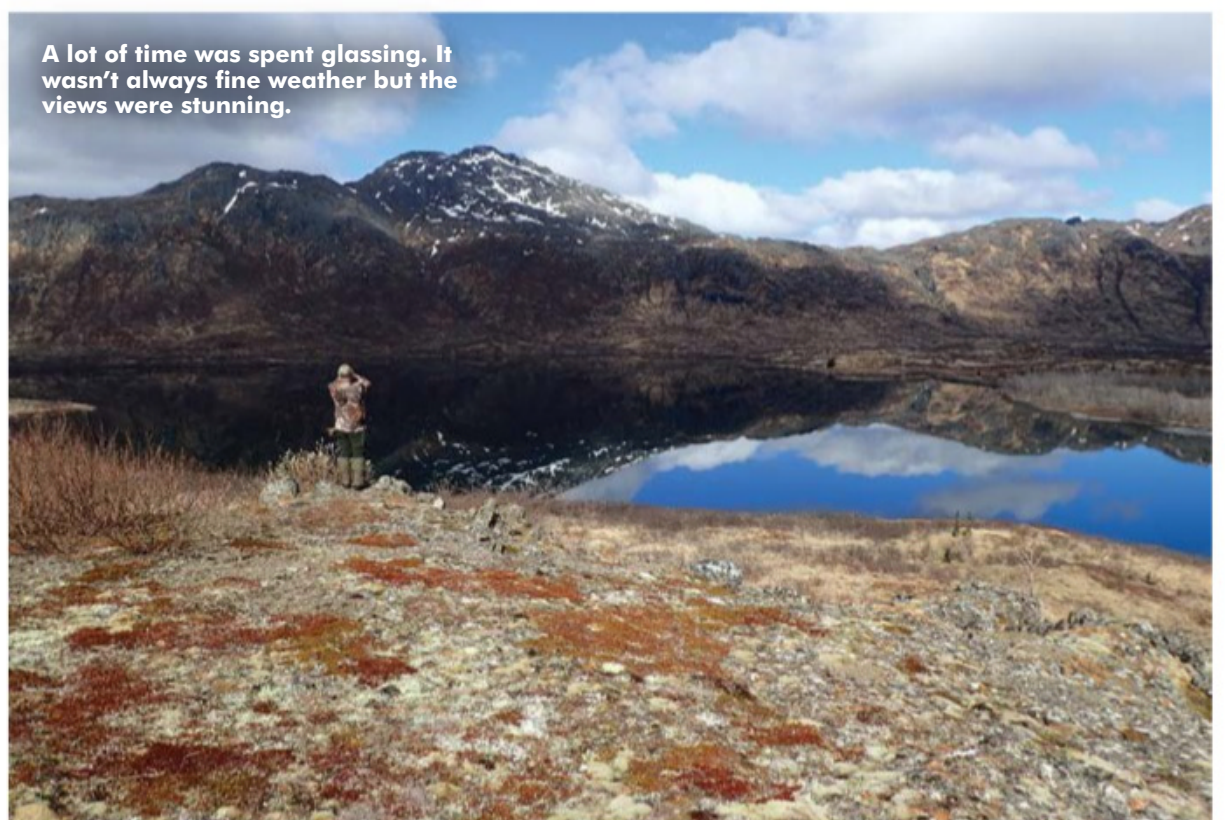
The Alaska Peninsula greeted Rod and Jeff with towering sea cliffs.



Jeff doing what he does best...
glassing for game.



Wolves were heard during the trip
and this one was harassing a few
moose late one afternoon.



A lot of time was spent glassing. It
wasn't always fine weather but the
views were stunning.

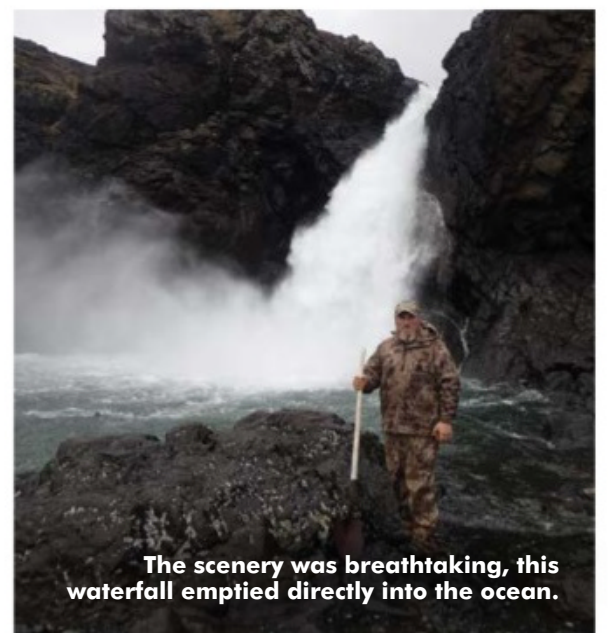
All aboard for an Alaskan brown bear hunt



Rod with his brown bear boar.



Rod and Jeff left the area just ahead of a severe weather front and were lucky to escape.



The scenery was breathtaking, this waterfall emptied directly into the ocean.

in agreement and then we both readied our rifles. Jeff was carrying a CZ 550 in .416 Rigby and I had my Blaser R8 in 9.3x62.

This time I led. One step and we were into the alders, enjoying 'pea soup' visibility but I could still feel the breeze on my face. We moved on to reach the rock that I was to climb. Jeff held the Blaser while I crawled to the top and as I stood upright I was indeed surprised. That rock had barely enough room to accommodate both of my boots. But it was solid, offered reasonably sure footing and I could see every square inch of the baldy patch that had contained the sleeping bear.

Jeff handed up the R8. I cast my eyes about and took note of other openings that were visible from my rocky perch. If a shot was to present itself, it would be within 60 yards. I was as comfortable as I was going to be. I checked that the scope was on three-power and then closed the bolt on a chambered cartridge. I glanced at Jeff and nodded; I was ready. Almost immediately I heard his 'call' upon the wind. A few seconds passed and I hadn't seen or heard anything to indicate that we had an interested

bear nearby. A call or two later and nothing had changed. I glanced down towards Jeff and he too had seen and heard as little as me. Oh, well... it was worth a try.

Then we both saw the bear in close, under 20 yards, slightly to my front and downhill. He was in some thick stuff - there was no opportunity for a shot. Then he barked and started to push off through the brush. He zipped along a small opening and I had my first up-close, full view of him, for less than a second. I heard Jeff calmly say: "If you get a good shot, take it!" I kept my eyes on the bear, who was in cover. I could see him, colour and movement, in among the alders. It was exciting, my senses were on overload.

Then I saw that he was just short of an opening, about 40 or 50 yards out. I was ready, calm and seeing everything in slow motion. Without command I heard my mind going through the checklist-rifle shouldered, cross-hairs on his chest, finger on the trigger. The bear entered the open ground and paused. Everything was perfectly aligned. The trigger broke cleanly and a 286-grain Norma factory loading projectile was on its

way. I didn't see the impact, but I heard the solid 'thud' of a bullet striking flesh.

The scope settled back onto the target and I could see the bear was down. My eyes stayed fixed on the bear. I was pretty sure he was dead, lying no more than a couple of metres from where he had been shot. From atop the rock, I tried to regain an air of composure. But I have to admit that I was riding high on adrenalin from the intense action, which was fast and furious. "Rather Western," was how Jeff described it and I had to agree.

We watched over that bear for a while then bashed and crawled our way across. A final check was made to ensure he was indeed truly dead and then I sat down beside him. Free from the rush of adrenalin, I tried to take it all in. It had been a long rollercoaster of a day. Jeff soon reminded me that we had a bit of work to do before we walked off that mountain. When the sun was just about gone we hoisted heavy packs and headed off into the alders. My bear hunt was over. ■

Licence to grill

24/7 BBQ... *Rota* BBQ

Matthew Godson



You have finished hunting or fishing for the day and it's time to relax around the campfire. The sun is dropping towards the horizon and the air is beginning to chill. It's comfortable next to the flames and you just don't want to move away from that radiating heat. Certainly not for the length of time necessary to cook a hearty meal.

Welcome to a new era of campsite cooking in the RotaBBQ. You can sit and enjoy the warmth and comradery of the fire with your mates while cooking up your day's quarry.

Offering a versatile stainless steel grill, the RotaBBQ works well over any campfire type or location. Be it on the beach, next to the river or even on uneven ground. The simple yet flexible design allows users to set up a level cooking surface on a large circular grill that can be easily adjusted to a desired height above the fire at any stage. This is extremely handy when it's time to increase or decrease heat. A level surface is important because the last thing you need is your sausages rolling off into the dirt or sand.

The circular grill sits on the specially designed Rota arm that allows you to swing the grill away from direct heat at any time to stop the cooking process, keep food warm or for easy serving. The grill and Rota arm are securely held in position by

a sturdy stainless steel stake that is strong enough to hold plenty of food weight on the grill or even a heavy billy kettle hanging from the Rota arm itself.

The starter pack is three-piece (grill, Rota arm and stake) and it comes with a handy storage bag. There are packages that include a light pole assembly with USB rechargeable torch catering for night-time cooking with a flood of light from above. Also, a firepit attachment option that allows you to create and keep a fire above ground which is especially handy if on the beach or you want to protect your lawn from heat damage.

The set-up process is straightforward and all you really need is the skills to hammer a stake into the ground without hurting yourself. Working out the best placement of the stake is achieved by retaining the end of the Rota arm over the midpoint of the fire (best to do before lighting if you can) and then positioning the stake where the Rota arm will attach to it.

It is recommended to angle the stake slightly away from the fire so when the grill and Rota arm is attached, the stake will bend slightly back towards the fire to become plumb and make the grill level. The Rota arm can swing around 360 degrees and be kept well away from the fire when not in use. The circular grill itself

can also spin 360 degrees on the end of the Rota arm. This allows you to cook and keep foods warm at the same time.

The whole manoeuvrability of the RotaBBQ is very functional and you can certainly escape cooking dinner with the hairs on your hands still intact. I actually can't wait to show this grill off to more of my friends the next time I go camping.

Packs can be purchased via **rotabbq.com.au** with free shipping. Items can also be purchased individually.

Pack pricing:

Starter pack \$155 - 3-piece RotaBBQ + bag

Nightlife pack \$210 - 3-piece RotaBBQ + bag + light pole kit

Recreation pack \$280 - 3-piece RotaBBQ + bag + firepit ■

Specifications

Material: 304 stainless steel

Weight: 4.5kg

Dimensions

Stake: 18mm diameter x 1000mm length

Rota arm: 25mm diameter tube x 675mm length

Grill: 600mm diameter

Clip point to drop point

Ben Unten

As many of us can attest, we sometimes make decisions in our formative years which in hindsight we realise were wrong. In my late teens I received a gift voucher for a clothing/sporting goods shop which was going out of business (and is now long gone).

Upon arriving in the store, the shelves and clothing racks were already looking pretty bare. A quick check confirmed that the clothing left was suitable only for the characters in *Gulliver's Travels*, ie, for little people or giants.

With dismay I walked to the front counter which looked as barren as my bank account after Christmas, where I saw a shiny, Kershaw folding knife, sporting an attractive looking clip point under the glass counter-top. It featured a 90mm blade, weighed 120 grams and came with a nylon belt-sheath. It was terribly overpriced but was approximately the budget of my gift voucher so I bought it.

Over the next couple of years it saw little use and languished in a cupboard drawer, until I started taking rabbits for the pot. I was then seeking a small folding knife to clean the rabbits. The blade appeared to be of a reasonable quality and kept its edge well, but I found the clip point in my unskilled hands meant I was prone to stabbing myself. So

I replaced it with a drop point knife which better suited my needs. It once again languished in a cupboard drawer.

Fast forward to many years later and I was using a Stockman knife which lived in a fixed, horizontal leather pouch on my everyday-wear Stockman belt to clean rabbits shot on my property. This knife also featured a clip point and once again I found that it was quite good at sticking holes in me (some people never learn), and I was reminded of my old Kershaw.

As a tradie I've acquired a reasonable collection of tools and perhaps some know-how along the way (rabbit cleaning skills notwithstanding), and I came up with an idea to 'FF' the knife, ('Fix it' or 'Flick it') once and for all. I set about marking the blade with a sharpie where I thought I wanted the clip point to be and began the process of reshaping it on my bench grinder.

As long as I repeatedly dipped the blade in water to stop it from overheating, it was actually quite a simple process. The accompanying photos show that the change was subtle but has resulted in less band-aids being required through its use. I then set about doing the same thing to my Stockman knife, which was also a success.

Now I'm not entering into the debate regarding the pros and cons of the various knife configurations and I'm sure there are a

group of cutlers out there who would consider what I have done to be disrespectful to the makers of these knives. But for me I was able to put two knives which previously saw nothing but the inside of a drawer into regular, useful service.

I guess that's one of the fortunate things about accumulating a few years under your belt; you can recognise some of the errors made in your youth, but if you're lucky, you can accumulate enough smarts to remedy them. ■



Marking the drop point; and the blade after grinding.



The finished product.

Tune in to MyOutdoorTV

Chris Wardrop

Scrolling through social media I noticed an advertisement for a streaming service called MyOutdoorTV, commonly abbreviated to MOTV. Having watched all of the episodes of 'MeatEater' available on Netflix repeatedly and given the scarcity of hunting options on Australian television, I capitalised on the offer of a seven-day free trial. Be wary though, the free trial automatically converts to a month-by-month subscription unless you take action to suspend or cancel your account.

The content delivered via MyOutdoorTV is drawn from US pay television channels Outdoor Channel, Sportsman Channel and World Fishing Network. MyOutdoorTV advertises thousands of hunting, fishing and shooting outings.

The vast majority of these feature North American settings with a focus on hunting and fishing for species we simply do not have in Australia. This may limit the service's appeal to most Australian hunters. Nevertheless, persistent browsing or using the search function involving key words like Australia, Tasmania, NT, Down Under and New Zealand, uncovers a couple of dozen instalments from shows featuring our part of the world. Quite a lot of these look at water buffalo hunting and had me yearning to move back to the Top End.

Searching for series of interest highlights that the MyOutdoorTV user interface is not as polished and seamless as we have come to expect from services like Netflix. I have had an equivalent user experience via web

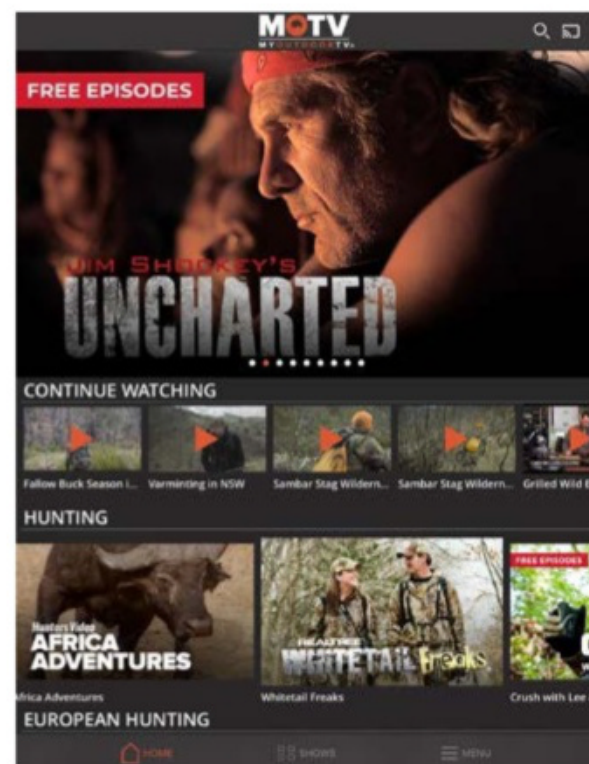
browsers, the iPad app and the latest generation AppleTV. I can only assume Google Play and Xbox are similarly clunky.

I've been using the service on and off for a couple months and have found a good selection of content to hold my interest. Conversely a few shows were too contrived or over the top to endure.

The shows I personally lapped up the most included a mix of North American and international hunting. I found both 'Jim Shockey's Hunting Adventures' and 'Jim Shockey's Uncharted' to be enjoyable. Shockey's style is as much about the adventure as the hunt and he documents some excellent fair-chase hunts. As well as North American, African and European destinations he also visits Australia, New Zealand and Papua New Guinea.

'The Boddington Experience' follows Craig Boddington on international hunting adventures including a New Zealand deer hunt and an Australian water buffalo expedition. 'Petersen's Hunting Adventures' is also co-hosted by Boddington and covers some African destinations as well as New Zealand and the Top End.

'Hunt Masters' with Gregg Ritz mostly takes part in North America, with at least one episode in New Zealand and another in Australia. In season six of 'Dropped', a minimalist survival type show, the Keefer brothers are dropped into the New Zealand back country to live off the land. They take little more than a raft, fishing equipment, a rifle and a bow with them. Amid lots of constructed tension 'Dropped'



The iPad app interface looks good, but at times is a little slow.

was entertaining and illustrated New Zealand's spectacular terrain.

The American pay television business model is a little different to Australian commercial channels. The producers of the television series generally have to purchase the air time for the broadcast of the programs. They fund this through sponsorship and product placement within the programs themselves.

As a result many of the episodes contain deliberate product placement and are interrupted by obtrusive advertisements for items with grating catchphrases and triple-barrel mottos. Initially this detracted from my enjoyment, but I eventually became used to it.

The line-up on MyOutdoorTV will not suit everyone, particularly those who have no interest in hunting overseas. Nevertheless, there is sufficient variety to attract most Australian hunters for a short while at least.

After the seven-day free trial, the service costs \$14.49 per month or \$139.99 for an annual subscription. That is comparative pricing to a Netflix subscription but with niche content. Visit **myoutdoortv.com** ■



A close-up of the fox's front line defences – ears, eyes and nose.

Know your enemy:

How to outfox the wily red fox

Peter d’Plesse

Stalking slowly through long grass beside a river channel, the foxes launched themselves from under a log. One went left and the other to the right. The first touch of the Brno's rear trigger delivered a load of SG towards the first.

The same trigger caught the second with a 7mm bullet as it hesitated on the edge of the channel. The Brno combination performed as intended, snap shooting feral game in thick cover.

While I respect the abilities of feral game, their environmental impact must be controlled. Hunting provides an effective management strategy without the ethical issues of trapping and poisoning. Understanding

the abilities of feral game helps give the hunter an edge. It can also explain why particular hunting tactics have proved effective over time.

Foxes are superb hunters with finely tuned senses to detect and catch prey. With good visual acuity at short range they move rapidly and silently through bush at considerable speed. At longer distance they can identify shapes like a hunter on the horizon but not so well against a low contrast background such as vegetation. I've glassed a prowling fox that seemed to walk past a rabbit crouching against a bush. Research suggests their visual system has low resolution, making the detection of small, stationary prey difficult in the absence of sound or scent.

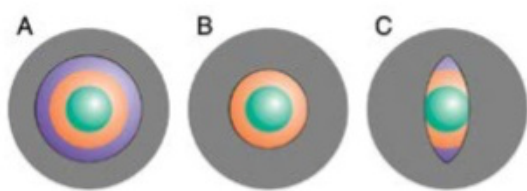
In 1964, Finnish biologist Henrik Österholm published a paper in which he assessed the role played by the fox's various senses during hunting. He concluded that vision is a key factor in finding food during daylight. It is less important at dusk and at night, when hearing is more vital. He concluded that hearing is the most significant sense, followed by vision and then smell.

Light is essential to the visual process and no animals can see in total darkness. Foxes have particular adaptations that allow them to be active at any time. They have vertically slit pupils that can be closed more tightly than round ones. Combined with eyelids that close horizontally, their eyes precisely adjust the amount of light entering

Know your enemy: How to outfox the wily red fox

their multi-focus eye, assisting hunting in a variety of light conditions.

The vertically slit pupil may help in identifying horizontal movement and improve the quality of vision in conditions of bright light. In a multi-focus eye, various colours of light are focused on different parts of the retina. A vertically slit pupil allows all the various zones to be used, even with the pupil reduced in size. Some colour perception is still possible in very bright light. This colour information may be used to interpret details in an image.



Significance of a slit pupil over a circular one. When a vertically (or horizontally) slit pupil contracts, light entering the eye is reduced but all wavelengths remain. (Diagram originally published in a 2006 paper by Tim Malmström and Ronald Kröger).

While the fox's eye is an advantage in hunting, it's also a weakness. The iris of the adult fox glows bright yellow under a spot-light due to a pigment called lipochrome. Spotlighting is a traditional and effective culling strategy. Humans lack a tapetum so in a flash photograph the light is reflected back by blood in the retina. This causes the 'red-eye' seen in many indoor photos.

Eyes contain rods and cones. Rod cells are sensitive to light and several rods can act together to stimulate a single neuron to send an electrical signal to the brain, which is used to build an image. However, the brain can't tell which of the cells in the 'rod bundle' was stimulated, so it can't interpret the exact size or shape of the object being looked at. Rods become saturated in light levels brighter than that produced by a 20-watt bulb. The rod system is a high sensitivity but low acuity system. It's superb for letting the animal pick out objects in lowlight but the picture the animal sees lacks colour and detail.

Cones work in bright light and contain pigments that allow the perception of colour. Cone cells are less sensitive to light



Emerging from good cover, this fox suspects all is not right.

than rods, so more light photons must hit them before they are stimulated to send a message to the brain. They need relatively bright light to function, making them less useful at twilight or at night. They pick up more detail and detect rapid or subtle changes in an image that rods would miss.

Animals active during the day and night have a retina with a mix of rod and cone cells. The systems swap over as light levels rise and fall. The swap only takes seconds when cones take over from rods when moving from darkness to bright light. It is much slower when rods take over from cones when a light is turned off at night. The large number of rods along with the tapetum, give foxes much better night vision than humans have. They also have sufficient cone cells and a strictly controlled pupil that allow hunting during the daytime, even if the picture is less detailed or colourful than what we see.

Red foxes have a field of view spanning roughly 260 degrees, with a blind-spot covering about 100 degrees directly behind their head. Observations indicate foxes are short-sighted. They can easily run through vegetation but will approach stationary objects to within a few metres unless another sense alerts them to danger or the object moves.

In his book *Town Fox, Country Fox* Brian Vesey-Fitzgerald noted that fox eyes lack a macula lutea. This is the highly sensitive central part of the retina, responsible for our perception of detail. This implies that foxes are unable to focus on stationary objects for more than a few seconds, again rendering them short-sighted. Foxes have some binocular vision, less than humans but more than rabbits. This is useful for scaling fences and chasing down prey.

The optic axis of the fox (the angle the eyes look out relative to a line



Know your enemy: How to outfox the wily red fox

drawn down the middle of the body) is about 15 degrees. This means their eyes have difficulty converging on a near object as well as humans as our optical axis is 5 degrees. It's been intimated that foxes use their eyes to avoid objects rather than recognise them.

Fox ears are very sensitive to low frequency sounds such as the rustling made by prey. There are two measures related to hearing that are important, the audible frequencies and the minimum audible angle (MAA).

Audible frequencies are the sounds that an animal can hear. Sound travels through the air in waves that peak and trough in a similar manner to waves on water, with one peak and trough considered a 'cycle'. Sound is described based on the number of cycles per second.

Under ideal conditions, humans tend to be able to distinguish sounds moving by a single degree either side of them, while foxes have MAAs of about 14 degrees. In other words, humans can tell a sound is no longer 'dead ahead' when it moves to either side by only one degree, while the sound must move 14 degrees to either side before a fox would know it was no longer straight in front of them.

Foxes are often 'called' in from considerable distance using lures. This confirms the importance of sound to the hunting fox. Foxes also communicate over long and short distances with sound and use it to recognise possible danger. Vesey-Fitzgerald considered foxes to have better hearing than domestic dogs.

Behavioural experiments and field observations hint foxes have a keen sense of smell. We know that scent plays a crucial social function, being used to identify individual foxes and mark out territory boundaries. Additionally, authors have described how foxes have dug up carcasses of livestock buried several inches below the surface or covered by deep snow.



A well matched rifle and scope can prove deadly for the wily fox.

Population control of foxes uses various methods. 1080 baits can give cost effective results. While foxes are susceptible to this toxin, native Australian mammals are less so as it occurs naturally in some Australian plants. There is a downside. A reduction in fox numbers can result in increased feral cats. While cats are also susceptible to 1080 they rarely take baits. For some species, cats are just as significant a threat as foxes, or more so.

Fencing can exclude foxes from high-value areas such as nature reserves, although the investment needed to protect large tracts is significant. Livestock guardian dogs, such as the Maremma sheepdog, have proved useful in guarding livestock from predators such as foxes. They have also been used to keep foxes away from seabird colonies in southern Victoria.

There is evidence that dingoes can reduce populations of both foxes and feral cats, without eating the kill. This could be pure malice or maybe they are just fussy eaters. Whatever the reason, foxes and cats avoid dingoes, so where there are dingoes, foxes are less common.

To have the best effect on population size, trapping and shooting (including calling) are best done intensively in well-defined

areas where rates of re-invasion are low. The foxes' highly developed senses can also be managed by the hunter. Hearing can be negated by staying quiet. Working the wind can cancel out their sense of smell. Hides and camouflage assist in countering their vision. There doesn't seem much point though, in dressing in the latest camo outfit while leaving hands or a face uncovered. To any animal, prey or predator, areas of skin flash a warning like a beacon.

It pays to understand the fox. Their senses will pick up the slightest mistake made by a hunter. ■



Rotten logs provide excellent cover for a fox den.

There will be blood

The Primos Bloodhunter headlamp

Don Caswell

You've been deerstalking all day... The sun is nearly setting as you begin to check out the last heavily forested gully for the outing.

Up ahead, you spot a few grazing deer. Ever so carefully, you close in for a shot.

By the time you are in position and have waited for your chosen animal to give you an opportunity, the sun has gone down and dusk is rapidly settling on the landscape. You squeeze off the shot, confident that it is right on the point of the shoulder. You lose sight of the deer as the rifle recoils. The smack of a well-placed shot adds to your confidence. You take a few bearings on prominent trees then set off to cross the creek and find your prize.

By the time you reach the spot, there is no carcass to be seen. You know the beast lies dead somewhere within a 30m radius. It must have made the short, mad dash that heart-shot animals sometimes do.

In the declining light, you see a dash of blood on a fern. Alas, the daylight is all but finished and you cannot follow the blood trail any further. The light from your mobile phone does not help either. You know there would be a good blood trail leading to the fallen deer, but you lack the means to see it.

The Primos Bloodhunter HD headlamp has been designed for just this scenario. Nioa is the Australian agent for this

device and provided one for review by *Australian Hunter*. The Australian retail price is about \$80 depending on where you shop.

The Bloodhunter HD uses ultra-bright LEDs with an optical filter that highlights blood trails in all terrains. In blood trailing mode, the filtered light mutes natural earthy colours and enhances the red of the blood, making it much easier to follow what you are looking for at night.

The headlamp is adjustable for the angle of projection. It works in either of two settings – blood trailing mode and a white light status for general camp use. The headlamp operates on three AAA batteries. In white light mode you can expect to collect about 14 hours of run time from a new set of batteries. The blood tracking option is more energy intensive and four hours run time is the norm. Light output is 200 lumens.

At times a blood trail can be tricky enough to pick up in daylight, with the

task made worse after dark. That is where the Primos Bloodhunter headlamp excels. While the majority of hunters plan on being back in camp by dark, sometimes you become caught out. The Primos Bloodhunter is a compact device and features a white light means that would be unobtrusive and useful in any backpack. ■

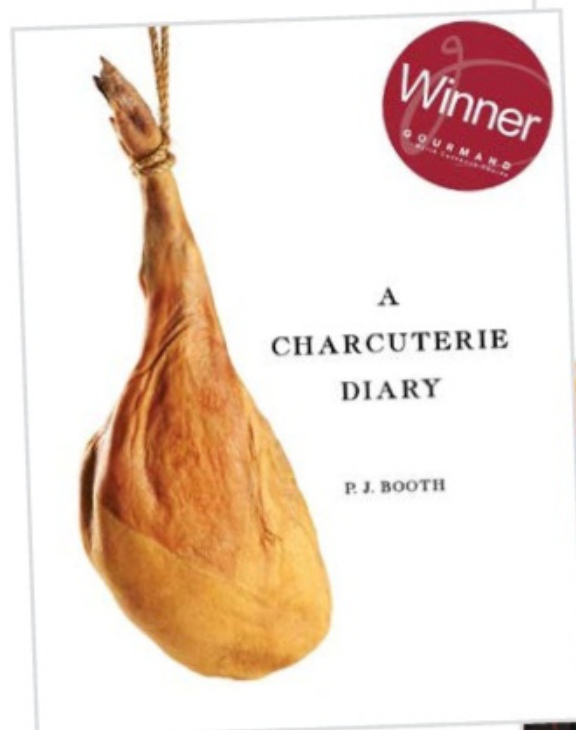


Sometimes a blood trail can be difficult enough to spot in daylight, let alone at night.



The headlamp is easily adjustable and sits comfortably.

Take one duck...



Melbourne lawyer P.J. Booth is also an esteemed cooking writer whose two landmark recipe books *A Charcuterie Diary* and *Feathered* have been featured in *Australian Hunter*. Here the author discusses how to dish up a delectable duck treat.

One day you will have a nice duck but you will not know what to do with that duck. It may or may not be frozen. It does not matter. You may or may not have adult supervision. I rarely do. It will speak to you (perhaps not literally) but you will be perhaps at a loss to know what to do with it.

There is not a lot of meat on a duck; one roasted duck is a fine meal for two people. Simply roast the duck, cut it in half and serve. Easy. If you need to feed more than two people, the trouble begins. Ducks are like that. Allow me to assist when that (inevitable) day arrives.

I should observe that duck is indeed the source of foie gras, from the engorged liver of the duck (sometimes also from goose). I acknowledge that there are critics

of the method of production, not really of the product. However, it is a good thing, although not the subject here. British cookery writer Elizabeth David was fond of foie gras:

'The foie gras, a slice or two of the whole goose liver, studded with truffles, or else a pate or a terrine, is served very cold as an hors-d'oeuvre, in solitary splendour, and is very expensive even in its home town of Strasbourg. The rest of the meal will be composed with an eye to the continued service of white Alsatian wines,' she said.

I digress, let me return to the duck. A duck can be a source of so much more, for example:

Joint the bird and braise for a ragu.

Remove the breast meat. Barbecue it with the skin on, glaze with some pomegranate molasses.

Remove the legs. Braise them slowly as a pasta sauce.

Make confit with the legs.

Carefully separate the neck from the duck, stuff the neck with good sausage meat and chopped porcini mushrooms. Roast and slice, serve with porcini mushrooms, pasta or mash.

Use the duck bones remaining to make a broth. Flavour with shitake and enoki mushrooms, parsley and soba noodles.

Do some or all of the above and you have a generous meal for four people.

Who said a duck is a meal for just two people?

I am a river to my people.

On that background, allow me to introduce duck prosciutto.

Duck prosciutto

There is no reason why duck cannot be treated like pork and thereby create a fantastic cured meat. Prosciutto is, after all, the result of curing in rich, flavoursome, fatty meat. It happens to be pork but there is no reason why duck, or goose for that matter, will not work just as well. In fact, I can share with you, it does.

The wonderful thing about this is that you do not have to wait for a year. It is ready in a much shorter time. It can be prepared using leg, but the traditional cut for prosciutto is breast, which I think is easier. The reason that it is easier to use duck breast is that the meat is more accessible, slices easier and has a nice fat layer just like pork leg meat.

The recipes for this are scant and somewhat imprecise. The variations are regional and various. This is a simple version technique which works.

Ingredients:

1 duck (goose) breast (boneless, skin on)
Salt – sufficient to immerse and cover the meat
Curing salt No. 2 – 0.3 per cent (by weight of meat)
1/4 cup white sugar
2 tbs garlic powder
1 tbs ground white pepper
1 tbs thyme (dried or fresh, chopped)
1 tsp fennel powder

Method:

Mix all the ingredients together except the curing salt. Mix the curing salt with an equal quantity of salt and rub well into the meat. Layer some spice/salt mix on the bottom of a non-reactive container. Place the meat on top. Cover the meat completely with the remaining salt/spice mixture. Pack the salt well onto the meat. Place in the refrigerator (covered) overnight. The meat can be left in the refrigerator for up to three days but it will get saltier. Overnight is a good start. If you prefer the end result to be saltier, then leave it longer in the salt.

Thereafter remove the meat from the salt and brush it off well. Rinse lightly and dry well with kitchen paper. Return to the refrigerator on a rack or kitchen paper and allow to dry for a few hours. Remove from the refrigerator. Make a hole in one end of the meat and tie a string loop.

Wrap the meat tightly in muslin and tie into a good shape. Hang to air dry and complete the cure. This should be done in a dark(ish) place with moderate temperature and humidity.

The parameters for air drying are between 10C-16C and 60-80 per cent Relative Humidity. These are optional conditions, you will need to do the best that you can. However, whatever you do, do not put the meat into the refrigerator. It will become dry and inedible within a few days; the conditions are too dry and cold.

The meat will be good to go when it has lost about 30 per cent of its wet weight. Accordingly, you need to weigh it after it comes out of the salt cure.

This is an easy introduction to charcuterie. Try it.

NOTE: If the meat is drying out too quickly it will be hard outside and not properly cured inside. This is hard to gauge but you will know once you slice it whether it has occurred. Sorry but there is no way to tell in advance. If this happens or you are worried about it, there is a method to slow the drying process. Cover the exposed side of the meat with lard. Work it in well until the meat is covered.

NOTE: Duck is an expensive and much coveted meat. You may not want to use duck for this. I can understand that. Nonetheless you owe it to yourself to try this once. It is a product worthy of significant culinary accolades. It is a rival to the best jamon or prosciutto. The only problem is that there is not much of it, unlike a leg of pork. ■



The .277 bore a good option for targeting game

David Duffy

The .270 Winchester has certainly stood the test of time. It's one of our most popular big game rounds and with good reason.

Coming out in 1925 at a time when the .30-06 was generally considered the best all-round big game cartridge, the .270 was off to a slow start.

Popularity increased in the 1940s after Monroe Goode, of *Sports Afield*, Townsend Whelen, writing for *Guns and Ammo* and then Jack O'Connor, writing for *Outdoor Life*, started to praise it. They argued that it allowed most hunters to place their shots at distant game better than the .30-06 because of a milder recoil and flatter trajectory.

The .270 Winchester hasn't been without controversy. Other gunwriters such as Elmer Keith derided the .270. He found that the projectiles of the time came apart on game such as elks and mule deer when using the .270 and many of his guided clients lost a lot of elks when using it. This wasn't really a fault of the .270 Winchester but rather bullet technology of the time (as with most calibres).

Keith was a big fan of the .33 calibre,

using at least 250-grain projectiles for elks and mule deer. He liked the shoulder shot whereas O'Connor preferred to go through the ribs into the lungs. With significant improvements in technology, bullet failure is far less nowadays.

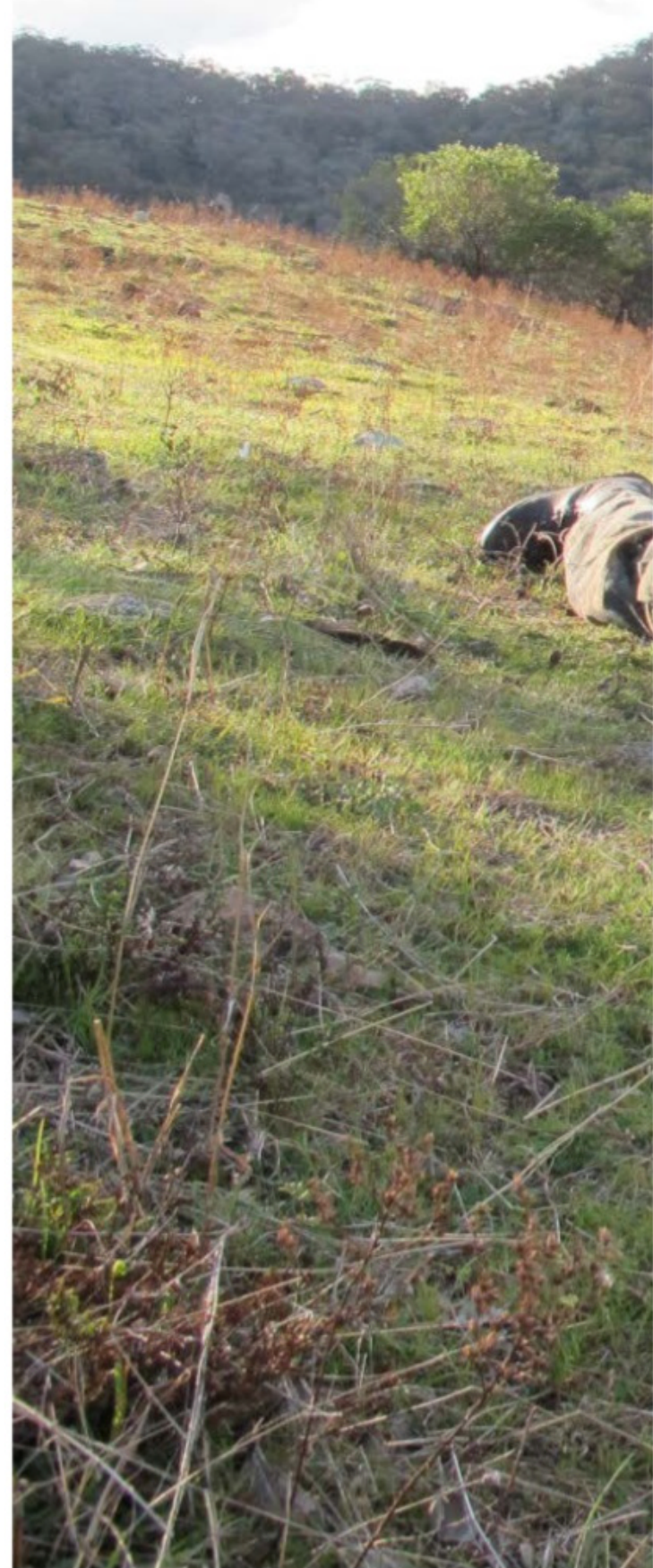
When Winchester brought out the .270 it was a new bore diameter. The 7x57 was already well established and popular in Europe and the 7mm (.284/.285") projectile could have been used in the .30-06 case (.280 didn't come out until 1957).

It has been contended that Americans would not readily accept the 7mm calibre because of conflicts such as the Spanish-American War of 1898 where their enemy used the 7x57. By making the bore slightly smaller at .277" (virtually a true 7mm bullet diameter) old rifles in 7x57 could not be rechambered to .270 Winchester without expensive rebarrelling. This helped make the .270 a commercial success as more new rifles would be sold and also for safety reasons as the old rifles may have blown up had they been rechambered to the more powerful cartridge.

The .277 bore sits right between the 6.5mm and 7mm bores. Having 10 per

cent more cross-sectional area than the 6.5mm, the .270 projectiles have proved to be a perfect diameter for average size big game. For general hunting, the bore has been served with a good array of projectiles, especially between 110 to 150 grains.

A criticism has been few heavy-for-calibre .277 bullets. For those who want a high ballistic coefficient hunting bullet, Berger





The .270 Dakota is excellent on long-range goats with 150gr Berger Hunting VLDs.

now offer a 170gr EOL Elite Hunter with a Ballistic Coefficient (BC) of 0.662 that requires a one in 8.7" (or faster) twist barrel and Matrix do a 165g projectile with a BC of .650 that requires a one in 9" twist. For closer-range sambar, elks, elands and moose, the 180gr Woodleighs can work in the standard one in 10" twist barrel provided the starting velocity is reasonable.

Hunting bullets with high BCs that work well in a standard twist barrel include the 150g Long Range AccuBond, 140gr AccuBond, Sierra 140gr GameChanger, 140g Berger Classic Hunter, 145gr ELD-X and bonded 136gr Federal Edge TLR. At the lighter end, there are some great projectiles of 110 grains and less, due mainly to the 6.8 SPC.

Here are the .277 bore cartridges that I have had experience with:

.270 Winchester

I've used a Steyr Mannlicher .270 for more than 30 years on pigs, goats and antelopes but what I really like it on is deer. The .270 Win is ideal for our local species: hog, fallow, chital, rusa and red. For sambar >

The .277 bore a good option for targeting game



This .270 WSM is built on a Remington 700 short action and weighs a light 3.2kg inclusive of scope.

I prefer a .338, but loaded with 150-grain Woodleighs the .270 is adequate.

I've used the 130-grain Barnes X, TSX and Sierra GameKings mostly in my .270 Win and my favourite load is 59.5 grains of AR2213SC at 3020fps, which is more accurate in my rifle than AR2209 or RL17. I've used the Sierra 110s (and heard good reports of the 110 TTSX when driven fast) and 150s in the .270 Win but keep going back to 130-grain projectiles.

My two favourite projectiles in the .270 Win are the 130-grain Sierra GameKing and 130-grain Swift Scirocco. The Sierras are highly exact and have always performed well on game I've shot. The bonded Sciroccos, although usually requiring a lot of load development, if you find that accurate load, mushroom nicely and retain most of their mass. They also have a good BC for their weight of .450, making them great for longer shots with cross-winds.

.270 Redding

The .270 Redding uses a blown-out .243 case with a reasonably long neck and a 30-degree shoulder. The velocity I obtain out of the 23" barrel is marginally less than what I manage out of my .270 Win. I use 50 grains of AR2209 with the 130-grain Sierra GameKing in fireformed Winchester .243 parent brass at around 3015fps.

The main advantage of the .270 Redding is that it fits in a short action which means the rifle can be shorter, lighter and more rigid. My Sako All is .34kg lighter than my .270 Win and holds five rounds in the internal magazine. The .270 Redding is milder to shoot than the .270 WSM, uses a lot less powder and feeds better but not quite as smooth as the .270 Win with its narrower 17½-degree shoulder. I use mine mainly for goats, pigs and local deer such as fallow stags.

6.8 SPC II

The 6.8 SPC II is perfect for medium-size game such as pigs, goats and meat deer (eg, fallow hinds) and reduced loads for smaller game. The Spec II chamber has more free-bore than the standard chamber

factory rifles came out with and can take higher loads. The long free-bore allows me to seat 110-grain ProHunters and TSXs out to 2.37" to comfortably fit into the five-round magazine of the extra-short action Sako S491. These are my two favourite projectiles for this round, but the 110-grain AccuBond and the 120-grain SST also perform well.

The 110-grain Sierra ProHunters are sighted in 2¼" high at 100 yards for a 200-yard zero at 2820fps using AR2219. The 130-grain projectiles clock just over 2600fps with Benchmark 2 but the 110s work so well, that I just stick with them. This is an excellent pig round especially with the 110-grain TSXs. However, if I was specifically after a decent size stag, I'd use a more powerful gun such as the .270 Win/Redding.

.270 WSM

The .270 WSM is a good cartridge for a mountain rifle where shots can easily be 350 yards or more. It fits in a short action so you can have a light relatively short rifle that doesn't recoil excessively, yet is powerful enough to cleanly kill at longer ranges any of the species of wild goats, antelopes or sheep that inhabit mountains.

My .270 WSM is built on a Remington 700 short action, has a thin cerakoted 25" stainless barrel, Wyatt extended magazine well so that I can seat the projectiles out to 2.91", aluminium bolt shroud and scope rings, McMillan Edge stock and weighs 3.2kg with 3-10 Swarovski scope.

I use 130-grain AccuBonds with 66.5 grains AR2213SC to gain about 3190fps. At the higher velocities of the .270 WSM I prefer a bonded bullet. Despite extensive testing, the 140 AccuBonds wouldn't group as tight as the 130s in my rifle and even though the 140s have a much better BC, I couldn't make them go as fast as I would like.

The .270 WSM does recoil more than the .270 Win and in some rifles doesn't feed that well, I'm not a fan of rebated rims and most rifles only hold three rounds in the magazine as opposed to five in my .270 Win. When reloading I always have to

The .277 bore a good option for targeting game

bump the shoulder back. Nevertheless its advantages, especially in a mountain rifle, often outweigh those disadvantages.

.270 Dakota

This round uses the .404 Jeffery case and holds around four grains more powder than the belted .270 Weatherby, and is similar to the proposed 27 Nosler, but doesn't have a rebated rim.

My rifle has a 27" heavy barrel built on a Remington 700 long action and a Jewell trigger set at 16oz. and weighs 5.3kg inclusive of scope. I took this rifle to Wyoming and shot a pronghorn antelope at 348 yards, but otherwise use it mainly on pigs and goats past 300 yards.

The biggest pig I've ever shot was at 346 yards using this rifle. I've had excellent results using the 150-grain Berger Hunting VLDs at 3300fps with 79.5 grains of AR2214, but AR2217 will be used when I run out of AR2214. As my rifle has a one in 10" twist barrel I can't use the 170-grain Bergers which require a faster twist.

The 150-grain Bergers group five shots into 0.6" at 100 yards in my rifle and their terminal performance on goats and pigs at all ranges has been outstanding. The 140-grain AccuBonds work well on pigs in the .270 Dakota but the 150-grain Long Range AccuBonds would probably work better on goats as they are softer.

For medium size game up to average size big game, the .277 bore has plenty to offer. ■



A chital stag taken with .270 Win and 130-grain projectiles.



The .270 WSM makes a great mountain rifle for tahrs and chamois in the Southern Alps of New Zealand.

Exciting new W2020 Performance offerings from Ridgeline

Sam Garro



The hooded Monsoon anorak longer length jacket and shorts, with fabric leggings.

Man's quest to successfully stalk game stems back to the Stone Age hunter, as depicted by drawings or etchings on cave walls portraying the person draped in a bovine hide and moving forward in a stooped position to be closer to the quarry.

Even today there exist certain indigenous tribes in remote jungles and forests of the world that regularly hunt game to survive, wearing facial and body paint, shrubbery or leafed branches and grasses to break up their outline and blend in with the surroundings. Their disguises often imitate nature itself or its wildlife such as predatory jungle cats with their spots and stripes or antelopes with similar designs.

Camouflage pattern was first adopted by defence forces to protect and obscure assets from opposing ranks. Later the idea of concealing clothing became a part of the hunting scene.

Since then we have seen marked changes and improvements in the development of hunting apparel, accessories and related products. Ridgeline strives to continue the trend by providing and assisting hunters with innovative and evolving products.

The Ridgeline brand has been synonymous with quality hunting attire since its inception 25 years ago. Created to handle the rigours and extremities of the challenging environment, it continues to win favour with hunters and outdoors enthusiasts like

myself and I attended the Melbourne launch of their exciting new catalogue.

Through progressive thinking and their focus to remain at the forefront of development and innovation, Ridgeline has brought in fresh gear for both men and women branded W2020 Performance Range. The collection has been specifically moulded for the younger or more athletically inclined individual that is seeking to hunt, stalk and climb with greater dexterity and stealth. Just as exciting, the apparel and footwear bears the revolutionary Realtree Escape camouflage pattern that better blends in with surrounding landscape and importantly breaks up the body outline. For Ridgeline, it represents the biggest development shift in



Nature Green Excape camouflage and Evolution anorak gear in a challenging environment.



The Realtree Excape camouflage hooded Ascent softshell jacket; and the cartridge holding compartment inside it.

more than two decades of operation.

While Ridgeline's present logo will continue for its existing popular Classic Ridgeline variety, a refreshed logo has been designated to identify with the new series.

W2020 Performance Range Development

The W2020 Performance Range has been achieved through design, consultation with industry experts, sourcing and utilising technically developed fabrics and materials with improved breathability and water resistance qualities. This included field testing under varying climatic conditions and terrain. Importantly, the shift has also been prompted as a result of Ridgeline stockists

and user feedback. The company envisages this can only foster greater outdoor participation across a diverse group of outdoor followers from the hunter to the wildlife observer, bird photographer, nature field workers and others wanting to become closer to the subject matter.

Where in the past camouflage apparel and related wears has catered more for the male hunter, the new array appropriately delivers for men and women. The women's wear also varies in lay-out and fit with stylish presentation.

In the 1940s, ground shooters employed by the New Zealand Government to cull a rapidly escalating deer population, went out into the harsh environment of the

snow-capped alpine country wearing heavy duty boots, knee high gaiters, shorts and an over extended or hanging top garment or coat. Obviously fitness was a major factor in coping with the elements, but the clothing gave them freedom of movement, especially up steep inclines, albeit somewhat exposed to the cold.

Within the choice, the Realtree Excape camo garb, apart from its unique camouflage disguise qualities and weather proofing, has been developed with a similar emphasis on body freedom through fabric flexibility or elasticity and closer body fit, lessening restraint on working body parts such as the legs and knees when walking or climbing.





The hooded Monsoon anorak longer length jacket and shorts, with fabric leggings.



Decked out in Realtree Escape camouflage gear, scanning the alpine slopes for game; Descending down a steep slope with greater body freedom and ease in the Realtree Escape camouflage hooded Ascent softshell jacket and stealth pants; Wading across a fast flowing stream in Ridgeline traditional gear.

The garment wear also extends to clothing with smart looking, solid plain colours such as heather brown, olive, moss, black and earth which can also be worn as casual gear.

Unique Realtree Escape Camouflage Pattern

While camo clothing of varying patterns and design in the marketplace endeavour to camouflage or hide the appearance of the hunter, if the outline is still apparent, even if slight or in part, wildlife can distinguish the presence of a figure. Similarly when hunting we look for what doesn't belong or stands out in the bush such as animal form, colour or shape. Animals do

this better due to their higher sense of awareness and survival instinct.

As such, Realtree Escape camouflage gear has been purposely designed to blend in and assimilate with the terrain and significantly to appear unstructured. In Ridgeline's words: 'Clothing made to be unseen.'

The following is explained to better understand and appreciate some of the technical description of the fabrics and materials used in the manufacture of the garments:

Water resistance – The higher the mm rating the more water resistant the material. Ridgeline's new Evolution anorak has a fabric that has been bonded with a membrane that has a rating of 15,000mm which means that it can withstand a lot of rain.

Breathability – This is a measure of the fabric's ability to allow water vapour, or specifically sweat, to pass through to the surface of the fabric and evaporate. If you have a low breathability you quickly start to feel sweaty and wet on the inside of your jacket. This is measured by the MVTR (moisture vapour transmission rate).

Tried and tested - In line with Ridgeline's practice, the Performance Range with its unique features has been extensively and successfully field tested by the company's proactive staff and hunt ambassadors in New Zealand, Australia and other locations. The W2020 Performance Range is available now. Check out **ridgelineclothing.com.au** ■

SSAA Victoria Conservation & Pest Management

THE SSAA VICTORIA Conservation & Pest Management program is an initiative started in conjunction with Parks Victoria operating under a Memorandum of Understanding. Accredited SSAA members volunteer to control pest species and problem species in national parks, state forests and on private holdings. The CPM provides accredited members the opportunity to participate in conservation, whereby effective methods are adopted to achieve real and positive conservation outcomes. To participate, you must be a member of the SSAA, then participate in an accreditation course with a written test and practical shoot.

For further information, write to SSAA Vic CPM at Unit 2, 26 Ellingworth Pde, Box Hill, Vic 3128, phone 03 8892 2777, email cpm@ssaavic.com.au or visit ssaavic.com.au

SSAA SA Conservation & Wildlife Management

SSAA SA Conservation & Wildlife Management contributes to the preservation of South Australia's natural heritage through the humane removal of feral and pest animals that threaten the survival of our native flora and fauna. Activities are undertaken in conjunction with government departments, non-government organisations, private landholders and universities.

Membership is open to SSAA members. To participate in field activities, you must successfully complete our accreditation course (theory) and safe firearms handling and marksmanship competency (practical). Activities are run throughout the year, ranging in duration from one to eight days, often involving camping out. As well as undertaking animal control activities, members are involved in wildlife monitoring and working bees.

For further information or to attend a quarterly meeting or range day, write to Conservation & Wildlife Management (SA) Inc, C/O Secretary, PO Box 188, Kent Town, SA 5071, email secretary@conservation-wildlife.asn.au or visit conservation-wildlife.asn.au

SSAA WA Conservation & Wildlife Management

SSAA WA has six individual branches that undertake Conservation & Wildlife Management activities throughout the state.

All participants must be full members of SSAA WA. Prior to taking part in sanctioned field activities, members must complete accuracy and safety tests, as well as a written assessment covering navigation, bushcraft and hunting ethics. In addition to formal programs, the branches conduct a range of social and training activities.

Our branches are involved in a variety of conservation-based activities in cooperation with private property managers, local municipalities and state government agencies. We work closely with other conservation organisations. Projects cover a wide range of feral and pest species, as well as agricultural protection.

For further information or membership inquiries, phone the State Coordinator on 0429 847 590 or email conservation@ssaawa.org.au

SSAA NT Conservation & Pest Management

SSAA NT CONSERVATION & Pest Management operates in the north of NT as part of the SSAA Conservation and Wildlife Management group, providing a free community service to government, pastoral properties and traditional landowners to assist with eradication of feral pest animals.

Membership is open to NT residents who successfully complete a theory and practical assessment. All field activities comply with NT Parks guidelines for the destruction of pest animals, the Model Code of Practice for the Welfare of Animals and the Model Code of Practice for the Destruction of Feral Animals.

Each year there are six to nine one-week field operations on remote pastoral properties and National Parks, involving four to five members.

Meetings to plan and coordinate activities are held as required at the SSAA Darwin Branch Range at Micket Creek Shooting Complex in Berrimah. Further details, including membership forms, can be located within the Darwin Branch clubhouse or through the contacts below.

For more information, write to CPM (NT), PO Box 90, Karama, NT 0813, email pduff@iinet.net.au or cscousins64@gmail.com

SSAA Qld Conservation & Wildlife Management

THE SSAA QLD Conservation & Wildlife Management Branch aims to assist in the protection and restoration of Australian biotic communities by developing feral animal control programs in conjunction with landholders, government departments and community-based groups.

Membership is open to SSAA members. Members must pass a written test and a marksmanship test before attending field activities. We conduct quarterly training and information weekends, covering a wide range of topics for members and prospective members. Among other things, training weekends cover conservation, hunter ethics, teamwork, bushcraft, navigation, first-aid, marksmanship and hunting techniques.

Durations range from one day or night to 10 days and usually involve camping on a property. Activities include hunting, shooting and trapping pest species (typically cats, pigs, foxes, wild dogs, feral cattle, deer and goats), and monitoring endangered species by data collection and radio tracking.

For further information, email cwm@ssaaqld.org.au or visit cwm.ssaaqld.org.au



- Supporting conservation activities
- Supporting research activities
- Supporting sustainability and wise use

Help us understand and manage our wildlife and natural environments





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Shop now for exclusive SSAA products, including clothing, camping, accessories, knives, books and more.

SSAA shotgun vest

The new SSAA shotgun vest is made to our usual high standards and now comes with upgraded features such as the ability to insert additional padding in the shoulders to absorb recoil.

The vest comes with lots of pockets, has front and rear leather trim and Velcro adjuster, while the back sections are mesh for added breathability.

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FOR SSAA
MEMBERS**



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Back

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SSAA MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

ABN 95 050 209 688

SSAA Membership Office, PO Box 282, Plumpton, NSW 2761

Phone 02 8805 3900 Fax 02 9832 9377 Email mem@ssaa.org.au

Membership No.

NEW ☐ RENEWAL ☐ Have you been a member before? Yes/No

--	--	--	--	--	--



Title (PLEASE CIRCLE) Mr Miss Ms Mrs or Preferred SSAA Branch

First name

Middle name

Last name

Residential address

Town/suburb State Postcode

Postal address

Town/suburb State Postcode

(IF DIFFERENT FROM ABOVE)

Phone (Mobile) (Home)

Email

Date of birth Male ☐ Female ☐

Member referral number if applicable

☐ Tick to subscribe to the FREE SSAA National E-newsletter via email

MEMBERSHIP CATEGORIES AND SPECIAL OFFERS

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☐ \$70 ☐ \$100

☐ \$105 ☐ \$135

☐ \$70 ☐ \$100

☐ \$105 ☐ \$135

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☐ \$27 ☐ \$57

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Includes \$35 insurance premium for SSAA Member Firearms Insurance for 12 months, valid until next membership renewal.

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Includes \$35 insurance premium for SSAA Member Firearms Insurance for 12 months, valid until next membership renewal.

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Includes \$35 insurance premium for SSAA Member Firearms Insurance for 12 months, valid until next membership renewal.

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Member for Life Contact SSAA for firearms insurance information.

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Supporting Adult member No.

SIGN UP ONLINE

ssaa.org.au



PLEASE READ AND SIGN

This application is made in full recognition of the Association's requirement for responsible and ethical behaviour. I undertake to do all in my power to preserve the good image of the sport and the Association. I understand that members breaking the Code of Conduct may be subject to suspension or expulsion. The Code can be found at ssaa.org.au/code

SIGNATURE.....

DATE:.....

Refund Policy: Subject to Australian law, membership fees are not refundable, nor can they be transferred.

SSAA Inc collects personal information of members. The information you provide on this form will be disclosed to the state or territory branch of the SSAA to which your membership application relates. A copy of SSAA Inc's privacy policy can be found at ssaa.org.au/privacy. You can obtain access to your personal information by writing to: SSAA, PO Box 2520, Unley SA 5061.

ATTENTION NSW & ACT MEMBERS

Complete this section ONLY if you wish to use your membership of the SSAA to support your Genuine Reason for having a firearms licence. Register your SSAA activities by marking one or more of the following boxes:

- ☐ TARGET SHOOTING (longarms only)
- ☐ HUNTING (club membership)
- ☐ COLLECTING
- ☐ HUNTING OTHER (R licence, property owner/permission)

Choose the insurance offer

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Want to know more?

Call us at SSAA



02 8805 3900



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Card number

Expiry date Signature.....

Cheques payable to the Sporting Shooters' Association of Australia Inc.

I also wish to donate the following amount to the SSAA \$.....

Competitions

For your chance to win one of these competitions, write your name, address and phone number on a piece of paper and place it inside an envelope, and write the name of the competition on the front of the envelope, and send it to:

Australian Hunter 72
PO Box 2520, Unley SA 5061

Or enter online at ssaa.org.au/win

Competitions close May 31, 2020

(Name of competition)
Australian Hunter 72
PO Box 2520
Unley SA 5061

Enter online at ssaa.org.au/win

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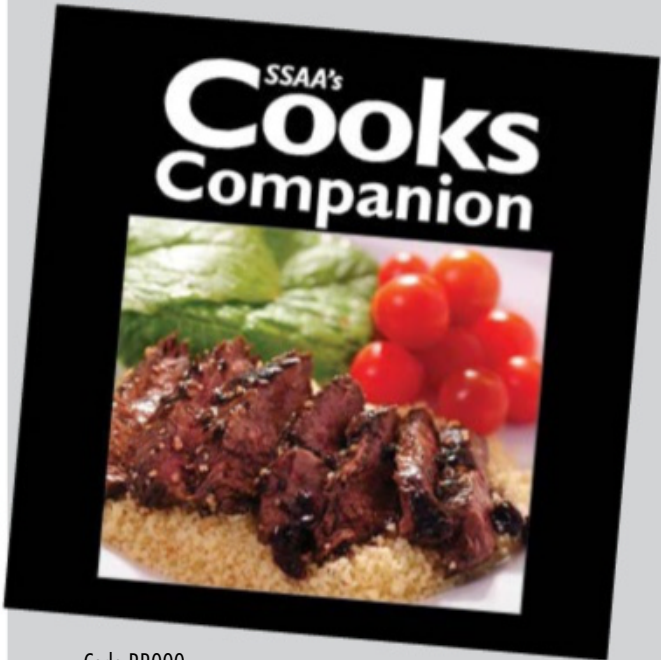


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SSAA's Cooks Companion

This book features the best 50 recipes from SSAA members. It includes recipes for rabbit, kangaroo, pork, venison, seafood, duck and quail, as well as camp favourites such as damper.



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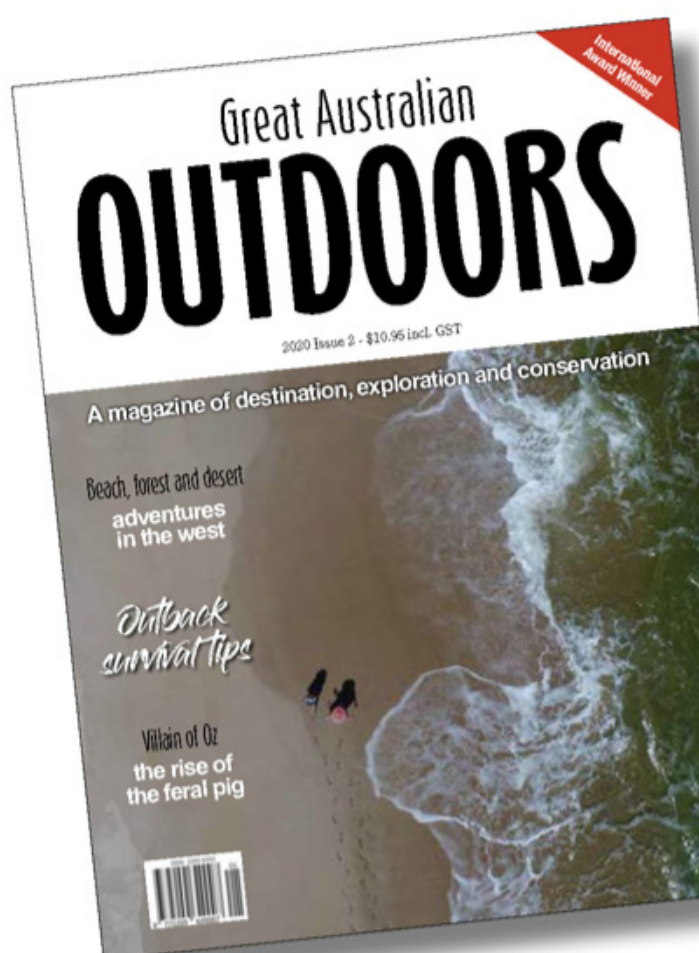


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