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GAME ON – How to prepare for the hunt!

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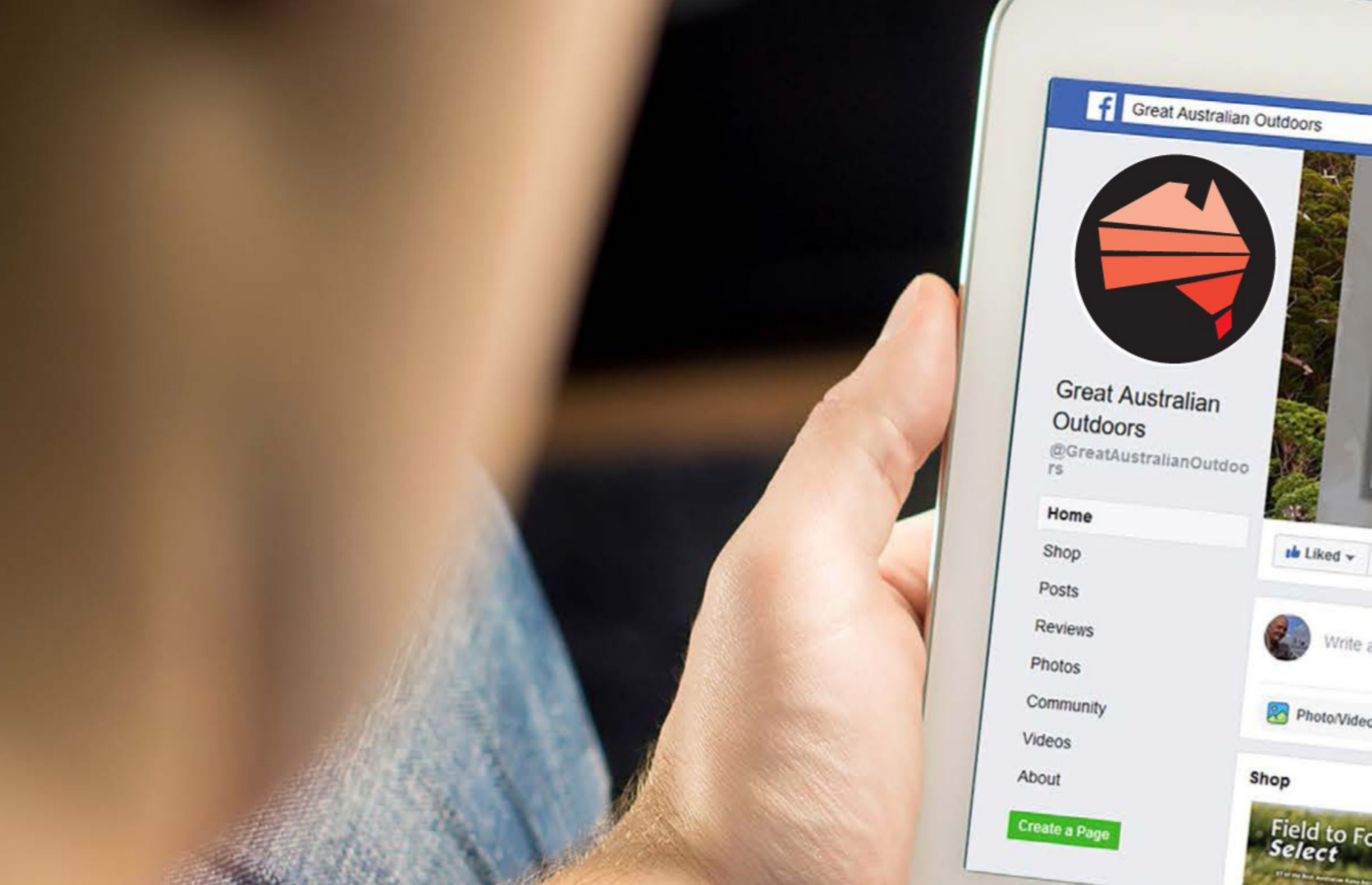
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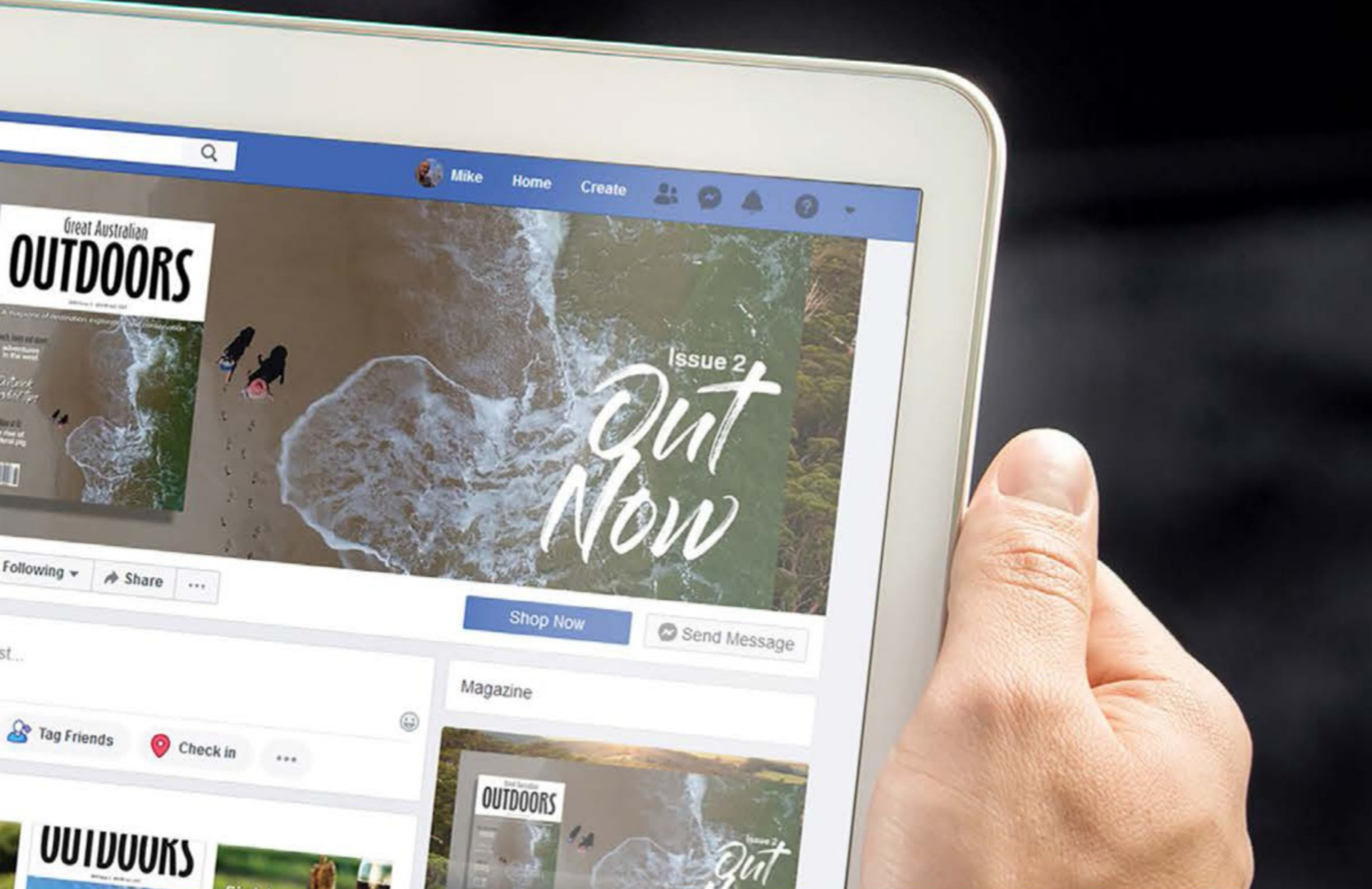
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From the Editor

Warwick Armstrong paves the way for Aussies to share his experiences hunting in Africa, Anthony Puddicombe helps out a farming mate whose calves are easy targets for wild dogs, Brad Allen soaks up a buffalo hunt adventure in the Top End, Ben Unten gets going to grab goats, Peter d'Plesse shows why the humble rabbit still earns top honours for all hunters, Perry Magowan heads out in search of deer and Don Caswell flushes out some predatory pigs.

Ever wondered how to go about buying and installing a gun safe? We take you through what to look for when securing your firearms, fire nine noteworthy bolt-action rifles, offer a wonderful insight into a seasoned hunter selecting the Merkel K3 as his last rifle, find a nifty solution to refilling PCP airguns, enjoy a picturesque hunt with the camera, put barrel cleaning to the test and revisit sighting-in your rifle prior to a hunt for those able to attend a SSAA range.

On the review front we step out in the oddly named but right fitting Greywacke boots, test HD thermal imaging products from Leupold, harness up the clever Badlands Bino XR, look at a simple yet

effective blind, show you why the portable electric SSAA Knife + Tool Sharpener is a must-have on hunting trips, pack light with Spika gear and take aim from the steady Stukeys Shooting Bench.

We also slice through the kitchen knife block to determine what's really required... and what really isn't and wrap our fingers around the Browning Long Haul fixed blade knife, which could just be that entry-level knife many are seeking.

Back to the worthy rabbit, which of course still deserves its spot on the Australian dinner plate, so we've added a touch of European taste to serve up a delectable Tuscan rabbit dish that's bouncing in flavour.

Furthermore, we stake our claim as to why venison belongs as a staple on the household menu, which we follow by cooking up a tasty stir-fry. To top it all off, we utilise offcuts and leftover game meat for succulent Swedish meatballs.

Thomas Cook
Editor



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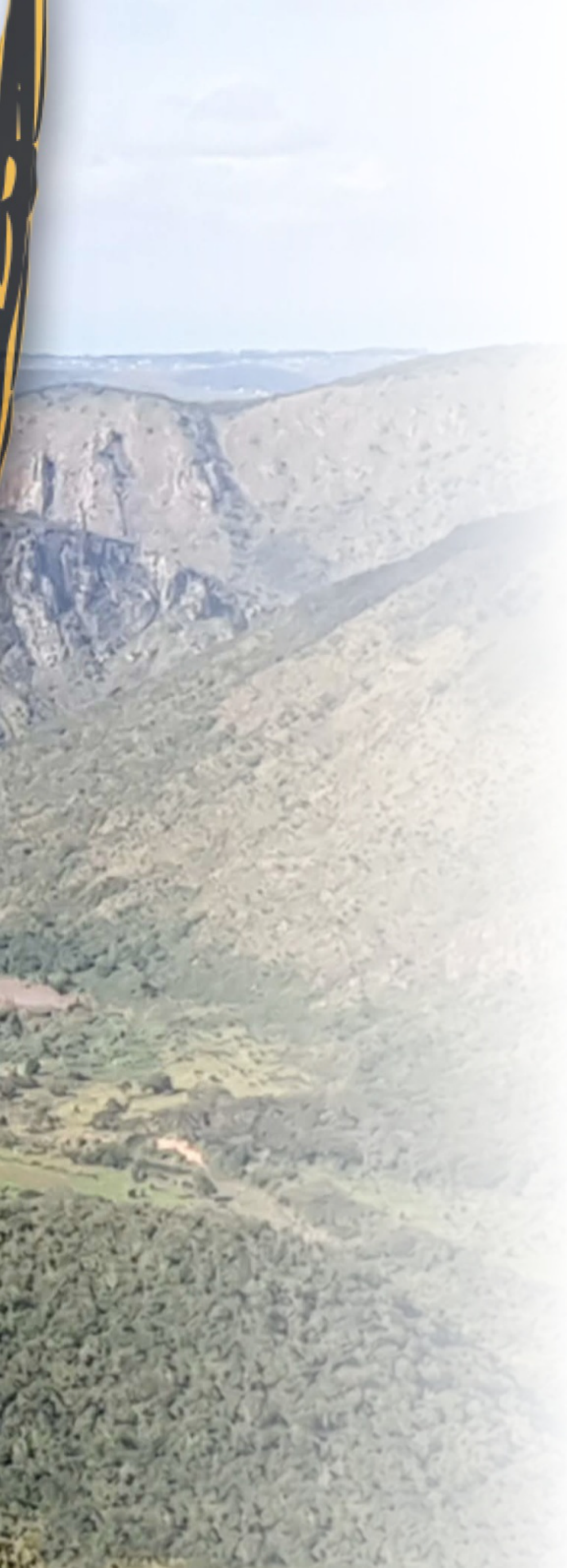
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Aussies in Africa

Warwick Armstrong

A vantage point along the Kei River
from the Outspan Safaris property.



Growing up and discovering my love for shooting and hunting I pawed over all the magazines I could put my hands on. These were mostly referring to Australian hunting but the occasional article was set in 'The Dark Continent'. I dreamed about hunting lions and elephants but the rest was beyond a boy's comprehension.

Well, fast forward to adulthood and the reality of such, when even the dream seemed out of reach. Then one night my wife Nikki and I received a call from her biological mother reaching out from South Africa. As you can imagine it was quite an emotional link-up, but it was decided we would head over to meet mum and her family.

I was put on the phone to talk to the husband and these words I will never forget: "When you come over here you *must* shoot a kudu." To which I excitedly responded that I would. After the appropriate time discussing this momentous event in my wife's life, I made a beeline to the Encyclopedia Britannica to find out what I would be hunting. And so this was the beginning of an addiction and an aching heart.



The Outspan Safaris hunting lodge on the Kei River on the Eastern Cape of South Africa.

Aussies in Africa

I won't bore you with details of taking a young family over there on a wage below minimum (working for dad) but it was a hell of an adventure. The trip was an eye-opener and I did down my kudu - which was non trophy but all I could afford. Since then I've been back seven times.

The place is geared for tourism - we've seen the 'Big Five' game animals, walked in the Cango Caves, the children have bottle fed lion cubs, patted cheetahs and bungee jumped off a 1000ft bridge. The people are incredibly friendly and with the exchange rate, since 2012 we have feasted like kings. My wife, youngest daughter and I also drove 1200km to meet our World Vision child we were sponsoring, which was a humbling and rewarding experience. Imagine, if you can, the look of horror on my fussy 14-year-old's

face, when as guests of honour in a thatched roofed hut we were served pap, which is mashed up maize and beans.

Now I've hunted all over the place, with most of the outings being rushed affairs put together by my cousin-in-law Tim. However, there have also been some awesome adventures like a five-day ballot-drawn cull in Oviston Nature Reserve, covering 16,000 hectares on the banks of South Africa's largest man-made lake, the Gariep Dam.

While there, we spent a whole day scoping out suitable black wildebeests over a distance of 70km along one side of the lake. We lunched under the bridge to the Orange Free State where I showed the locals how we cook Aussie-style on a shovel. We both had to shoot one each of

black wildebeest, hartebeest, blesbok and springbok. This was a lovely plains game hunt that tested my stalking ability and we managed some reasonable long-range shooting. After it all, we packed up 500kg of meat, the whole lot sold back in Port Elizabeth except for 22kg of springbok that we feasted on for three weeks.

Fed up of farming and becoming aware of my mortality, I decided to sell my farm and move closer to my daughters to see and do all that there is. I put the farm on the market in 2016. Following an extended dry spell and despairing at watching the paddocks deteriorating, my beautiful wife put me on a plane back to South Africa.

At short notice my cousin-in-law booked three days at Tyityaba Nature Reserve, a 100,000-acre farm that has returned to

Warwick in Queenstown with a Barbary sheep that turned out to be a 'Barbara' sheep.



natural vegetation. This is a truly remarkable property some of which hasn't been accessed for 15 years. I had a lot of 'to dos' on my list, including a proper kudu. This is the real deal, hunting in heavy country, thorn bush gullies and cliffs with so many places for the 'Grey Ghost of the Bush' to hide.

We put in the work, leaving camp before light and driving home in the dark. Along with a common reebok, we finally glassed a kudu bull way out in the distance. After discussing how to go about things, we set off on what would be an epic task. The next two hours were spent winding our way around ridge lines, along gullies and squeezing through holes in thorn bushes, all while trying not to make a sound. This is hard when you are coming to terms with not being as fit as you thought. We moved

into position and after five minutes pondering where the animal had gone, we set up the sticks and waited for him to step out for a clear shot.

This was my first trip over with my 'Africa rifle', a Browning Maral straight pull .30-06 topped with 4-16x56 Nightforce scope. Finally the shot presented itself and with a 'thump' the 180-grain hit its mark. The tail went up and the big boy took off, crashing through the dense scrub down out of sight into a tight gully.

About 30 minutes later we had made our way to where we thought the beast should have been but we could not pick up any blood or anything. The question was asked: "Did you hit it clean?" I was positive and replied: "It was a heart shot, you saw how it took off." After an eternity and some more

questions about my prowess, we found him with one through the engine room, still looking majestic a short way up the opposing, steep slope. After the pics were done (with me being, in my opinion, positioned too far behind), the real fun started.

Five hours of hacking out a path with panga machetes followed, which saw five of us involved. I was lifting the head, hoisting the creature up the hill. Now the client helping to carry the game isn't the norm over there but although more expensive than I had become used to, my Professional Hunter was under-resourced. "Building character," my dad would have said and the experience added to being my most memorable hunt to that date. It was also how I came to meet Andrew, Deb and Laura Brill from Outspan Safaris.

Warwick's Professional Hunter positioned him well behind this kudu on the Kei River but its 50" horns are impressive nonetheless.



Aussies in Africa

On the three-hour drive from Port Elizabeth, Tim told me that Tyityaba could not accommodate us but we were staying at a 'lekker' place built on the edge of a cliff (lekker is an Afrikaans word meaning superb). He said he had stayed there before and I'd love it. When we arrived, I was blown away. The set-up was like nothing I had ever seen.

We were greeted by a very professional young lady, Laura, but I did not meet Andrew until that night. Now the people who know me in the pistol shooting community in Western Australia are used to the diversity of folk in our sport and would say I'm unique. But everywhere I've hunted in South Africa, I have been the first Australian they have hosted. So that night upon

returning from a hard day's hunt, the initial sighting of their Aussie client was a long-haired, barefoot dishevelled man dressed only in jeans and singlet who was in dire need of a beer, running through the lodge to the bar. I hurried straight past them and their other multi-national guests, who were all neatly dressed in full camo. The owner didn't seem to be warming to me. So I brought him a beer from his own bar and that did the trick.

We found common ground, both coming from the land and with our mutual easygoing demeanour. We've become firm friends ever since. Over the two weeks I stayed with them we talked at length about how the industry worked and what we could do to help other Australian hunters to discover how accessible Africa is. And so, 'Aussies in Africa' was born.

Outspan Safaris is a beautifully undulating heavy scrub property situated about 45 minutes from East London on the banks of the Kei River. Although it is not a huge estate, game is plentiful. There are kudus, nyalas, blue wildebeests, waterbucks and impalas just to name a few. All up there's about 150,000 hectares of land available to hunt with access to almost any game species you want, including Cape buffaloes.

The accommodation is world-class and the catering is spot on and very homely. I ended up calling Deb 'mum' partly because I'm terrible with names. We ate our meals with the family and were made to feel like welcome friends. They are lovely people. They really looked after me. ■



Warwick took this old 800kg eland with 39" horns at 180m with his .30-06.

Outspan Safaris offer unique options

- Your hunting and accommodation all-inclusive payment made to them by you in Australian dollars is about 30 per cent cheaper than the normal international rate when booked through me. No payments are made to myself.
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- Being met at the airport by VIP services, who will collect your firearms and complete most of the paperwork for you in advance.
- Organise taxidermy at Hunters & Collectors in Port Elizabeth.
- Advise on other activities.
- Tour contacts in areas like whale watching, Addo Elephant Reserve, cage diving, canopy zip line and even bungee jumping from a 1000ft bridge.
- Accommodation in Port Elizabeth.
- A dentist, optometrist and tattooist.

This isn't a business as such, more of a hobby at this stage. I don't charge anything and I'm not receiving payment from anyone. Don't get me wrong - I hope to receive a discounted price from some of those businesses that I'm using regularly myself and generally supplementing my hunting addiction. But my real motivation is that I've been treated really well by these people over there. So beyond that, business and economy of scale can benefit everyone.

Contact Warwick Armstrong through aussiesinafrica.com.au

Aussies In Africa proudly welcomes you to Outspan Safaris and Private Game Reserve, South Africa's passport to quality hunting and wild African Safari, located on the Eastern Cape of South Africa.

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A photograph of a man, Don Caswell, sitting on the ground under a large tree. He is wearing a wide-brimmed hat, a patterned orange and black shirt, and brown boots. He is holding a rifle mounted on a tripod, aiming it towards the right. The background shows a grassy field and more trees under a bright sky.

My last rifle - the Merkel K3

Don Caswell

I recently bought my last rifle. I realised that day would eventually come, but it still surprised me. I've known for a long time what that rifle would be, as well.

Some folks call it an old man's rifle and, I guess, that is a fair description. Being halfway through my seventh decade, I hope I have another 10 years or so of hunting left in me. Over the past year I have sold off my reloading gear and various other rifles on the journey towards owning only a single, last rifle.

So, what is this rifle and why have I chosen it? The rifle is a Merkel Kipplauf K3 Stutzen. That is German for a break-action, single-shot hunting rifle with a full wood stock. I have always admired single-shot rifles and enjoyed using a number of different styles and calibres. But, it was the Kipplauf Stutzen style that always appealed most to me.

The Germans and Austrians have perfected the Kipplauf rifle for mountain hunting.

A number of manufacturers produce these rifles, which are similar in appearance. The break-action style allows for a short overall length and lightweight rifle.

Additionally, the Kipplauf style of action locking system is extremely tough, hardwearing and inherently accurate. The result is the perfect rifle for the discerning hunter in the mountains. The rifle is light, pointy and well balanced and also robustly built with minimum moving parts. It is designed for ease of carry in rough, steep terrain and is capable of taking some harsh treatment.

My K3 is chambered in .243 Winchester. I gave the calibre choice a lot of thought, as I tried lots of different rifles and chamberings. I seriously considered heavier calibres, but in the end concluded that the .243 Winchester had sufficient velocity, bullet weight and accuracy for all my hunting.

Another major consideration was factory ammunition. There is a great range

of choice in .243 Win factory ammo. It is readily available in gunshops everywhere. I was confident of finding factory ammo that delivered the accuracy and terminal ballistics I required. My hunting requirements would only be for about 20 to 30 rounds a year. That would allow me to dispense with handloading and be confident of buying my ammo from local gunshops.

Barrel

The barrel on the Merkel K3 Stutzen is 500mm (19.7"). The .243 Win chambering has a one in 10 barrel twist. Removable, driven-hunt open sights are fitted. The chamber area of the barrel is machined to take Suhl tilt-up mounts. An option is to order the rifle machined to take Weaver rails as well. Barrels are available off the shelf in 7x57R, 7x65R, .243 Win, .270 Win, .308 Win, .30-06 Spring and 8x57 IRS but other calibres are offered on request.



A lightweight accurate single-shot stalking rifle.

Action

The K3 has a shotgun style break-action. However, there is more to it than a simple boxlock. The action of the K3 is made of alloy (steel actions are available on request), but all the wear and tear of usage and the pressure of fired shots is totally contained within steel.

A floating, gold-plated, steel puck (Jaeger tilted block locking) moves up into a recess in the barrel as the action is closed, containing the cartridge entirely within a steel chamber and face. The K3 does not cock on opening/closing and does not eject spent shells either.

I opted for a plain black working rifle. However, for those with deeper appreciation (and pockets) extensive engraving with hunting scenes is an optional extra.

Scope mounts

I chose to fit Merkel K3 H15 tilt-up mounts

to my K3 and mounted a Swarovski Z8i 1.7-13.3x42 scope. I saw two advantages of the tilt-up mounts. The primary one was to enjoy full advantage of the compact take-down design of the K3. A lesser, but still useful aspect, was being able to take the scope off on those occasions when I am hunting pigs in thick jungle.

Trigger and safety

The K3 offers a direct trigger with a small lever on the side of the triggerguard that enables the shooter to select three separate weights of pull with a simple flick of the lever. The trigger has three positions at approximately 400g, 600g and 800g (0.8, 1.3 and 1.8lb). The trigger is crisp with no discernible creep.

The safety is actually a cocking lever. So, on placing a cartridge in the chamber and closing the action, the rifle remains uncocked until the safety switch is pushed forward. The

rifle can be uncocked by pushing the safety further forward and letting it retract, or by simply opening the action.

Stock

The stock is walnut and comes standard with grade 4 timber. Higher grades of timber and exquisite chequering are available on request. The stock is similar to a shotgun with separate front and buttpieces. The Stutzen adds a third piece to this to complete the full-wood furniture with a tulip-finished tip. The butt features palm-swell grip, a hog's back comb and Bavarian cheekpiece. There is a soft rubber recoil pad. Options include a left-handed stock, lady-DS stock, engraved pistol grip caps or even full custom stock making.

Off the bench

The Merkel K3 lived up to its reputation for being an inherently accurate rifle. There

My last rifle - the Merkel K3

was little to choose accuracy-wise between the different brands of factory ammo. All shot acceptably around the 1 MOA mark. My experience with previous single-shot rifles paid dividends here.

Break-action and falling-block single-shot rifles have a few idiosyncrasies compared to bolt-action rifles. Like many other single-shot rifles, the K3 did not like a warm barrel. With barrel lugs for hanging the fore-end or attaching other parts of the rifle, a warming of the barrel causes varying tension on the barrel which can affect accuracy. However, in a rifle designed and intended for the occasional single shot from a cold barrel, that is of no concern other than when sighting-in off the bench.

European cartridges are manufactured to a CIP standard whereas US ammo is to SAAMI. The ammo is interchangeable but there is a tendency for European factory ammo to shoot a smidge more accurately in European-made rifles and vice-versa. Although, I must say, I found that difference was nit-picking in reality.



I would happily use any of the factory ammo I tested in the K3. At the range, having chosen my hunting load, I sighted it in to be 40mm high at 100 yards. I also checked the open sights, making a tweak to achieve point of impact (POI) at 25m.

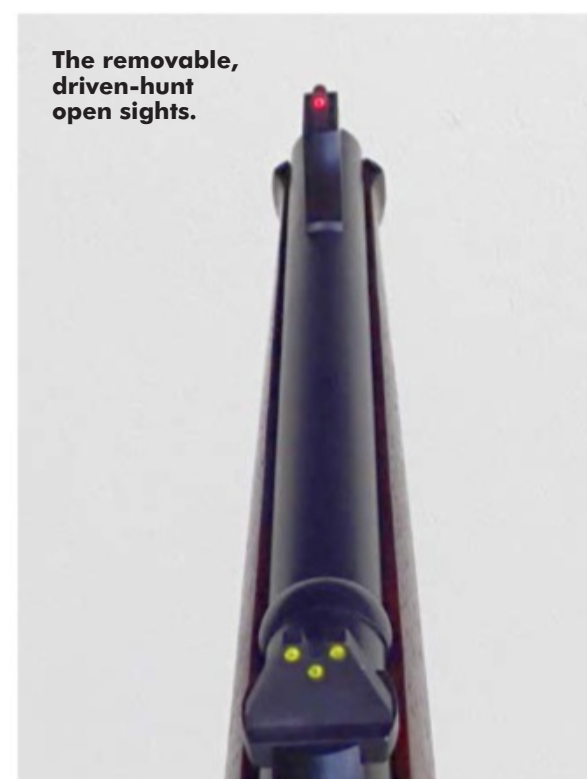
Overall

The Merkel K3 Stutzen is a dainty little rifle. At 910mm and 2.8kg bare weight it is light, pointy and beautifully balanced. Fitted with mounts and Swarovski Z8i scope my K3 still only weighs in at 3.2kg.

Superbly accurate, it leaps effortlessly to your shoulder and comes straight on target. A crisp, light trigger ensures good shot

release. The action operates with a silky, smooth rigidity. It is a joy to carry afield and to hunt with.

There can be a lead-in time of nearly 12 months when ordering one of these out of Germany. They are not available off the shelf and pricing fluctuates according to currency exchange rates. At the time of writing the retail pricing was \$5900 for the K3 and \$715 for the Merkel H15 tilt-up mounts. Herron Security & Sport are the Australian importers and any enquiries should be addressed to them via your local gunshop. ■



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New versions with enhanced product features for more precision and intuitive handling

The new Zeiss Conquest V4 models are packed with features well above their price class, updated deliver exceptional performance in a lighter-weight package. The new configurations support the long-range hunter and shooter more than ever. Regardless of just how challenging that shot is, the new riflescopes will help you deliver precise and accurate hits on the most challenging of targets.

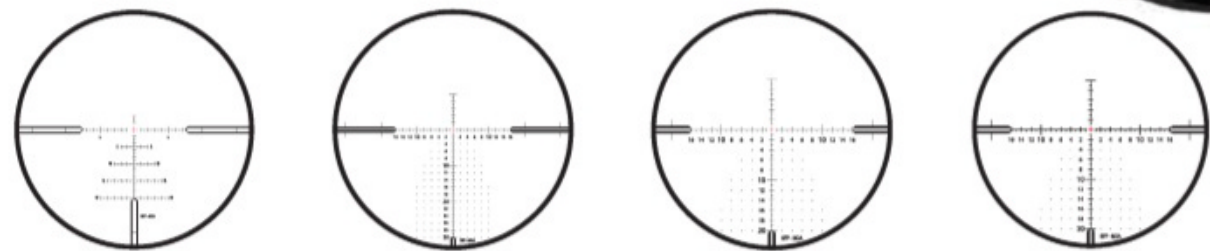


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For the utmost in accuracy, repeatability, and extreme precision, ZEISS will also debut two new Second Focal Plane (SFP) reticles. The ZMOAi-20 and the ZBi illuminated reticles are Minute of Angle (MOA) based smart reticle designs. Each incorporate fast and easy reference marks along the main horizontal and vertical lines of the reticle. When the reticles are combined with the all-new External Locking Windage Turret, the ZEISS Ballistic Stop Elevation turret, and legendary ZEISS optics, they create a package that delivers the payload at any range, in any condition. The ZEISS Conquest V4 represents the very best of best-in-class.

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Seeing beyond





The boots are cut high enough to offer excellent ankle support.

Striding out in Greywacke boots

John Denman

It's an odd name for a hunting boot, unless of course you come from New Zealand. They have a treacherous surface in the mountains over there called Greywacke, pronounced grey wacky. Apparently, it can be hell on ankles and anyone who has hunted hilly or mountain

country will attest to that. With or without this New Zealand rock slide.

I've had a bit of a problem with my right ankle due to an ill-advised episode on roller skates some time back, so I tend to gravitate to any boot that can minimise my chances of turning my ankle into a right

angle. Like any good boot these Stoney Creek Greywacke live up to expectations. I'm usually a bit shy about ordering boots online, but these came via The Hunt Shop in Albury. They sent a sizing chart so my correct measurement could be selected and it worked.

I like a boot that allows me to feel the contour of the ground underfoot

The boots fitted right out of the box. I probably could have worn them straight out into the bush, but I prefer to become used to them a bit first. But once in the bush hunting around the hills near Glen Innes the boots proved why you should only buy from a reputable supplier. Don't expect cheap boots to perform as well as the more expensive option.

Going downhill is one way to discover the shortcomings of any boots and I'm pleased to say the lacing system and the general fit of the boot did not disappoint. Likewise going up a steep slope will soon tell you if blisters are on the way. Once again, the fit of the boots never gave any inclination of discomfort. Vibram soles seem to be the ones that all others are judged by, and the soles on these boots allowed excellent grip on worn river boulders, even if they were a bit wet. They are also quiet, most important when you're trying to out-smart an old stag.

The boots are mostly New Zealand leather uppers with a good-sized rubber rand around the sides to protect the leather from rocks. The design is Kiwi but the boots are made in China, obviously to contain costs. These boots are not as expensive as most of the European boots, but I can't fault them for the quality of the build. I imagine



that had they been made in NZ it would have added considerably to the price.

I like a boot that allows me to feel the contour of the ground underfoot, and while these are no barefoot experience, the construction of the boot coupled with the Vibram soles means you would be hard pressed to find footwear to beat them in terms of sensitivity without compromising traction.

I've worn them for nearly two years now and while I don't consider them every day footwear, they have still had a pretty good flogging through streams, rocks, long

wet grass and all the other adventures you can subject a hunting boot to. The tongue of the boot has a lot to do with comfort too, and this one has the bellows-like fitting that extends almost to the top of the boot, making shallow streams a dry feet experience.

Lacing is quick and easy even in the cold pre-dawn light. A row of four hooks on each side make lacing something that can be smoothly done by feel, and the soft leather used in the bellows section folds down with no lumps to give you problems. You can do them up tight and they'll stay

Striding out in Greywacke boots

that way. Again, a reflection of the thought that has gone into their design.

These boots are not fashioned as summer footwear. They work well in colder weather, but can become a little hot on summer days. However, most hunters have at least two pairs of boots so I don't see that as a problem. For a high cut boot with solid construction the Greywackes are reasonably light too, just 635 grams each. The boots come in a neat box with a small jar of leather preserver, and in my mind are well worth the money.

The full name for these is the Stoney Creek Rusa Greywacke II. Having read some reviews regarding the Greywacke One boot, the predecessor of this, I found a lot of negative comments. However, Stoney Creek appear to have rectified any shortcomings of the previous boot, so I reckon I have a pair of boots that will be on my feet for quite a few more seasons.

RRP is \$399 – email sales@huntshop.com.au or call 02 6021 6200. ■



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Pitfalls to avoid when installing your gun safe

Thomas Tabor

When I first began looking for a gun safe I quickly discovered it wasn't going to be as easy a proposition as I thought it would be. Even the capacity turned out to be a bit problematic. For example, just because the manufacturer indicates their safe has room for a certain amount of guns, that certainly doesn't mean it would actually hold that number of 'normal' type firearms.

Most double-barrelled shotguns are considerably bulkier than other sorts. And if you happen to collect the older side-by-sides

like I do, you will quickly find those ol' dog-legged stocks of yesteryear will eat up space in a hurry. So my best advice is to add at least 25 to 30 per cent more capacity than you think you will need. Even if you don't completely fill the safe up, that additional space will provide easier access inside.

What features to look for

There are a few safes that are designed with key locks or key and dial combination locks but these are fairly rare. Much more common are the dial-style combination or electronic locks. Many safe companies

provide you with a choice of either type of locking system. For my own purchase I chose the electronic-style lock simply because of the ease at which access could be obtained, but either style should provide you with the protection you are looking for.

For the best security the hinges should be hidden and out of sight when the door is closed and with little or no gap between the door and the walls of the safe. The overall steel construction should be high carbon steel plate and of course be sandwiched on all sides, including the top and bottom with a high degree of fire-retardant insulation.

Pitfalls to avoid when installing your gun safe



Gun safes are available in a wide variety of sizes and internal configurations.
Photos: The Cannon Safe Company

Fire protection

Most, but not all fire protected safes are insulated with layers of gypsum board, frequently called sheetrock. That's right, the same stuff that the inside walls of your house are likely made of. Aside from being a fairly cheap insulation, gypsum comes with the added advantage of releasing water vapour when the temperature reaches 262 degrees C and above. In the event of a fire this helps to provide a cooling effect inside. Some companies use other types of materials for insulation and usually claim those products offer an even higher degree

of protection, but gypsum seems to be the standard for most gun safes.

Trying to figure out the right level of fire protection can be both challenging and confusing. That problem is further complicated by the fact that there are no universal standards associated with the fire testing procedures or the ratings. Each manufacturer tests its own products at different laboratories based on varying standards and conditions. Furnace ramp-up times, thermocouple placement and the use of shields all can skew the data to make it seem like one product provides better protection than another.

When I first started looking for my safe I assumed, like a lot of others, that a fire rating of say 816 degrees C for 30 minutes meant that the contents would remain secure as long as that temperature didn't last more than 30 minutes. At the time that seemed to be a logical assumption, but it isn't that simple.

No fire starts out at a temperature of that level. Instead it begins at a low temperature then escalates to a peak before falling back to a lower level. Most fire ratings have been established around this latter concept. Typically but not necessarily universally, a

Pitfalls to avoid when installing your gun safe



The electronic style safe locks systems are convenient and easy to use.

Thomas chose a combination of a typical ship's wheel-style handle and an electronic locking system for his safe.

Some safes come equipped with the more traditional dial locks.



rating like this would mean that the temperature inside the safe would not exceed 177 degrees C if the outside temperature of 260 degrees C is reached in that 30 minute time span. I know this concept is confusing, but nevertheless that is how misleading fire ratings can be.

In order to apply a fire rating to your protection needs, it is important to also have a basic understanding of how much heat is typically generated in a house fire. In my own investigation on this topic I found a diversity of opinions. One source indicated that a house fire temperature might only reach 649 degrees C before cooling down in a matter of 20 minutes while others felt 926 degrees C could occur over an hour of burning. And I found another source that gave a 593 degrees C estimate occurring in about 30 minutes. Of course the temperatures will vary based on many different factors and parameters, such as the

A gun safe can weigh up to about a ton and that can pose a substantial challenge

construction and layout of your house and where in the house the safe will be located.

How much heat can you stand?

Locating the position of your safe is an important consideration when it comes to fire protection. The lower levels of your house will always be the coolest in a fire and for that reason it is best to locate your safe on the first floor or in the basement whenever possible. It is also good to position it against, or as close to an outside wall and up against a concrete basement wall is even better.

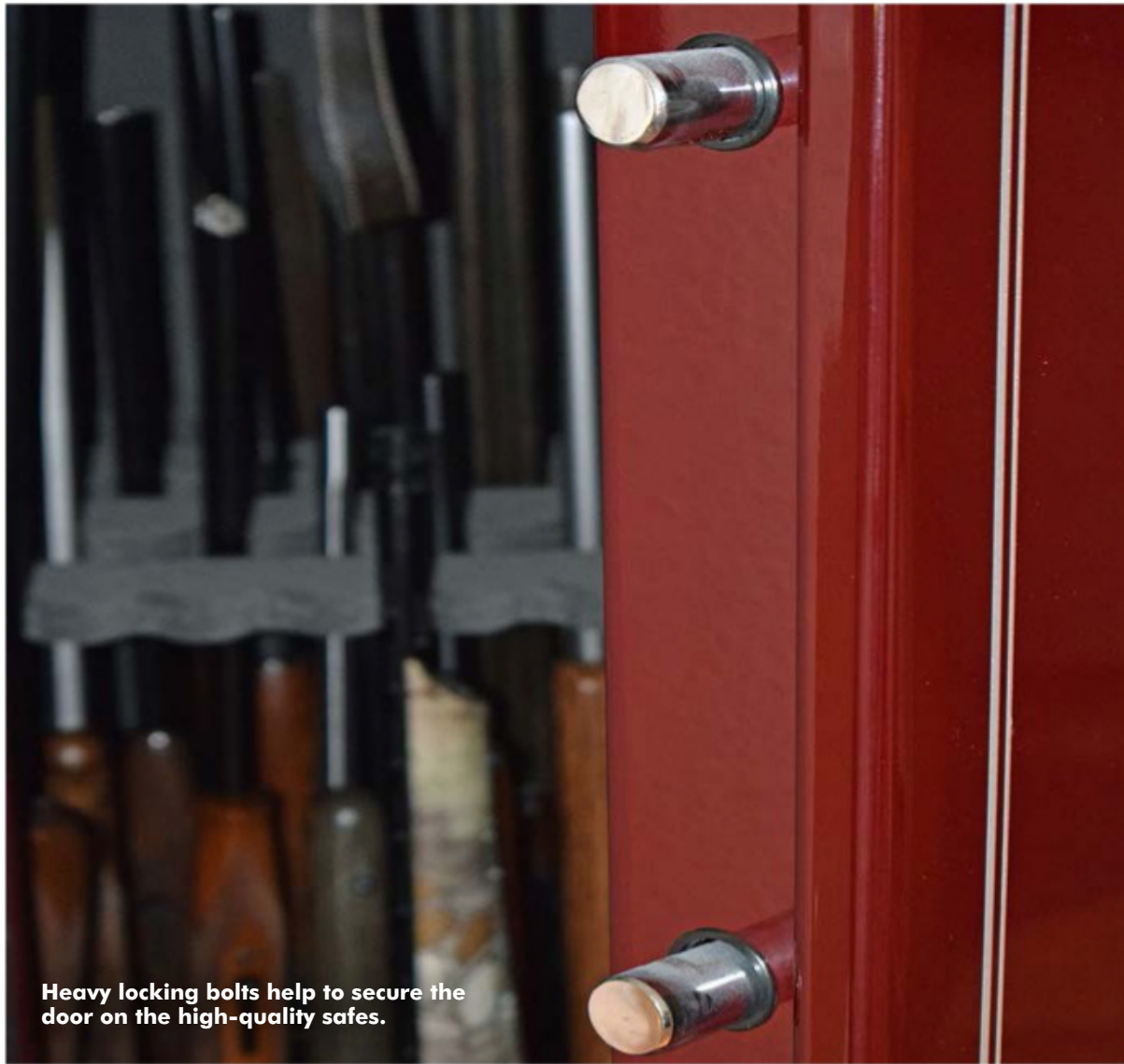
Something else to keep in mind when deciding on a location for your safe is the fact that frequently floors collapse in house fires and heavy objects like a gun safe can fall through if located on an upper floor. If this should happen it could result in damaging those items inside even if the temperature does not.

Getting your safe home and moved in

Moving a safe into your house can be problematic simply because of their bulk and weight. A gun safe can typically weigh anywhere from several hundred kilograms to approaching a ton and that can pose a substantial challenge to moving it home and inside your house.

You could always invite a bunch of your mates over for a beer fest and moving party, but even so you would likely still need to have some heavy-duty moving dollies and/or hand-trucks. I think a much better

Pitfalls to avoid when installing your gun safe



Heavy locking bolts help to secure the door on the high-quality safes.

idea might be to simply hire the services of a moving company to pick up your safe at the store, bring it home to you and place it precisely where you want it.

A few last tips

One of the main objectives of owning a gun safe is being able to protect your property from thieves. Most safes are heavy which makes the possibility of some bloke absconding with it in its entirety unlikely, but that does happen sometimes.

In order to provide a secondary level of protection you might consider the option of bolting the safe down either to the studs in the wall or to the floor, which can be a legal requirement if the safe is on the lighter side. Many safes come with the appropriate hardware specifically for that purpose.

The ultimate guide is *Secure Your Gun*, *Secure Your Sport* which you can download for free at ssaa.org.au/publications/secure-your-gun-secure-your-sport ■



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Distinct tone shows the limited amount of dingo colour left in these wild dogs.

Pursuit pays off *as hefty wild dog is downed*

Anthony Puddicombe

The phone rang and my mate Lindsay barked: "Wild dogs have killed our first and only calf." He was not impressed and wanted to know when I could come and thin them out.

I know wild dogs kill calves all the time throughout Queensland and beyond. But Lindsay had just bought his first farm and these were his initial lot of breeding cows, so this calf was a little special to him. As Lindsay lives six hours away, I wasn't keen on a weekender. But I was leaving on a

family holiday, so I changed the route to include a diversion to Monto in Central Western Queensland.

We arrived in the afternoon and while my wife and kids checked into the caravan park, I packed my swag, shooting gear and rifle into Lindsay's HiLux and headed for his property. We arrived too late to have a scout around, so the decision was made to have a spotlight that night and see if we could find any dogs ahead of an early morning hunt. Hopefully we could put an end to this pack that had taken a liking to calves

there and on neighbouring properties.

As we scanned his property that night, I saw one set of eyes, very briefly, that could have been a wild dog. But it was in a hurry and wasn't stopping, despite my best efforts with the caller to try to pull it up. So it was a late night with no results, but that's wild dog hunting.

Lindsay and I were up before daybreak, as I was really keen to explore the hot spots of his property and try the caller where his place backs onto some timbered country, which looked a typical wild dog hideout.

Pursuit pays off as hefty wild dog is downed



The print of the larger male that Anthony was tracking.

The rifles were made ready, mine a Howa in .22-250 while Lindsay was carrying his Weatherby in .243. We made the short stroll to the timbered country area, found a spot that gave us a good view and put the wind in our faces. I set up the Icotec caller away from us, readied the rifles and let the instrument do its thing. The calls carried well in the crisp morning air and it seemed like at any minute the pack of dogs would burst out of the timber and look for the cause of the noise. I tried every trick in the book with the caller, but with no luck



This gives you an indication of the dog's size as Anthony is 175cm tall.

Pursuit pays off as hefty wild dog is downed

that morning. We packed up the caller and decided to hike the dirt tracks that criss-cross through the property, trying to keep the light breeze in our faces. The plan was to end up near a dam that was close to where the calf was killed. On one of the dirt tracks we picked up the spoor of at least one big dog and maybe one or two smaller dogs. The prints were fresh over the top of our tyre tracks from the night before - this was more like it.

Lindsay and I hatched a quick plan that we would stride side by side, scanning and listening. The road was quiet to walk on, so we decided to follow it and hopefully locate the dogs. Every now and then we found rakings from probably the dominant male dog, which really kept us on our toes. This was extremely exciting hunting. We were still following them, but we didn't know how far behind them we were.

The track came to a rise that allowed us to look out over a paddock down to the dam, which was about 500m away. Lindsay spotted them first - there were three dogs snooping around the edge of the dam. One dog was clearly larger than the others and he appeared to be the ringleader. The two younger dogs were busy mucking around like teenagers, which would work to our favour.

Just as Lindsay and I were planning our stalk, he noticed that there was a mob of his cattle bedded down in between us and the dogs. This was a real problem as in my experience if livestock become startled by someone stalking, they charge off in a



The skull, next to the .22-250 handload. Check out the fangs of Anthony's biggest specimen to date.



The rakings that were found while following the wild dogs.

mad rush and send every feral packing. The other hitch we noticed was that the dogs were moving towards some timbered country to the right and once they reached there, we would not see them again. Things were certainly working against us.

So we set off at an angle to hopefully not alert the cows but work towards the direction of the dogs, yet not allow our scent to travel to them. Then luck swung our way as the cattle were relaxed and didn't bolt or scatter. The two younger dogs were still messing around which was holding up the bigger male dog. So we covered the 350m doubled over as quick as possible, trying to move close enough before the dogs vanished into the timber.

At about 150m out, we came across a tree big enough that would allow support for a standing shot (years of SSAA Field Rifle was about to pay off). The big male had rounded up the two other dogs and they were on a mission to make cover; the sun was well and truly up so time was running out.

Leaning into the tree as hard as I dared, I tracked the big male through the Nightforce scope, hoping he would slow up or stop for a sniff of something. Just as I thought I would have to try a moving shot, he propped to look back at the other two. That was enough as I squeezed the lightened trigger and the 60gn Nosler Ballistic Tip did the rest. Big dog down. Lindsay stepped up for a crack at the other two as they briefly appeared among the timber but no connections were made.

We briskly walked up to the downed dog and immediately noticed how big he was. It was a perfect chest shot and the projectile from my .22-250 had mashed its vitals. It looked to be the biggest wild dog I have shot and later when I preserved his skull it was bigger than any others I had in my collection. Lindsay and I were pretty happy with ourselves as for a while I thought we were going away empty-handed. We had taken the male dominant dog and hopefully that would give future calves a better chance of survival. ■



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Game changers

Leupold LTO-Tracker 2 HD and LTO-Quest HD

Don Caswell



Thermal imaging technology continues to improve and be of great use to hunters. Leupold make the LTO series Quest HD and Tracker 2 HD thermal scanners.

As thermal imaging technology has advanced, and prices decreased, this expertise has rolled out of military-only usage to become available to recreational consumers. It allows wildlife to be ambiently detected in the dark of night without the need for visible or infrared flashlights. The device detects the thermal radiation of whatever it is pointed at and represents that as an image to the viewer.

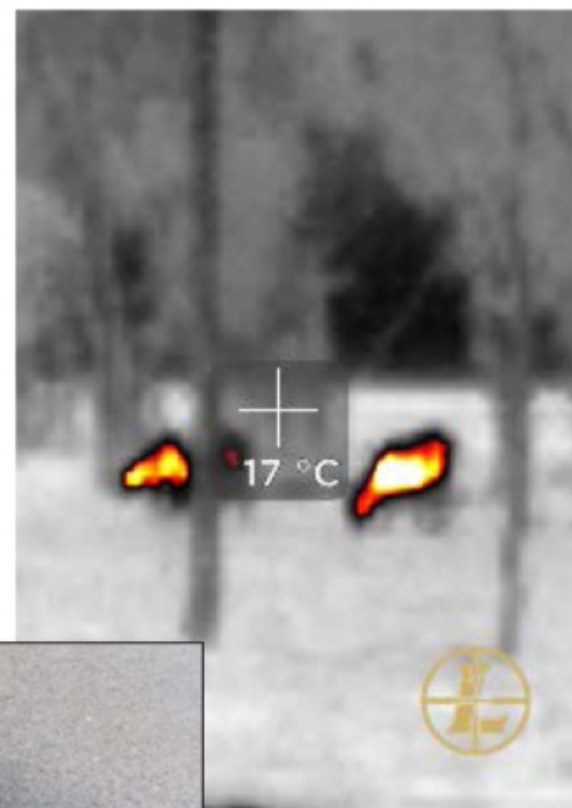
The gadgets are tuned to particularly highlight typical mammalian body temperatures in the mid- to high-30C range. It needs to be said that these tools can also be used in daylight. However, a hot summer day in the high 30s can obviously pose a few detection challenges when everything is at that temperature.

The earlier models of thermal imaging contraptions were designed for northern hemisphere conditions where that posed



no problems. An animal with 37C body temperature stood out clearly in an environment that rarely rose above 25C and which was at most times much cooler than that. However, southern parts of the US see summer temperatures akin to those in Australia and feedback led to further development of the sensors to improve animal detection in hotter terrain. The Tracker 2 HD unit is such a modified device.

Apart from detecting prey animals that are not apparent to the eye, either at night or in cover during daylight, thermal detectors offer the opportunity to find downed animals that might otherwise be lost. As more hunters move to thermal imaging scopes to allow night hunting, they also will find great value in these small handheld



An image from the Quest HD showing cattle grazing at night 100m distant.

Leupold's LTO Quest HD compact, handheld thermal scanner.

scanners. The reason for that should be obvious, in that it is much easier and safer to scan your surrounds with a small handheld apparatus than it is to do so swinging the rifle-mounted scope about.

Leupold Thermal Optic Quest HD

A compact piece of equipment that fits easily in the hand. Apart from detecting the thermal signature of game out to a maximum of 750 yards (686m), it also incorporates a dual-mode 300 lumens flashlight. Additionally, you can record images of the thermal scans you take. The camera has an inbuilt capacity to store in excess of 2000 such images.

The controls could not be simpler. There are four buttons. One powers the unit up,

Leupold LTO-Tracker 2HD and LTO-Quest HD

while the buttons on either side are used for navigating the menu, changing the optical zoom (up to 4x) and recording thermal images of interest. The fourth button, on the side of the device, activates the flashlight. A USB-micro cable allows both charging of the incorporated battery and downloading of images.

The flashlight does not interfere with the operation of the thermal scanner and both can be used at the same time. Ergonomically, the contrivance worked best for me when held horizontally at waist height, looking down at the display screen.

Leupold LTO-Tracker 2 HD

Slightly longer than the Quest HD and cylindrical. It is compact and fits easily in the hand. It shares the 750-yard maximum detection distance of the Quest. The information on the packaging says that a typical deer detection distance is about 300 yards.

The unit is controlled with the three side-by-side buttons on top of the objective



lens. The display provides the simple menu options activated by the buttons and is easily intuitive, although the rather small text size I found a challenge to read at night.

Ergonomically, I found the device needs to be held about 300mm from the eye for

clear viewing, similar to a pistol scope. It is not of the monocular design that is held up against the eye. This piece also comes with a flip-open lens cover and a protective pull-on coat.

In the field

I tested both Leupold LTO gadgets side by side on a couple of hunting trips. During daylight, they detected cattle and game well, albeit with a lot of similar temperature background signals that required some concentration from the user.

About an hour after sunset though, as the terrain rapidly cooled, the detection of animals was much easier as they stood out clearly against the darker, chillier background on the scanner images. In winter daylight and on any night, these items are in their element. For folks who hunt at night, and want the advantage of minimal or nil use of visible spotlights, these scanners offer great benefits. With retail pricing through Nioa under \$2000 they will be tempting to many. ■

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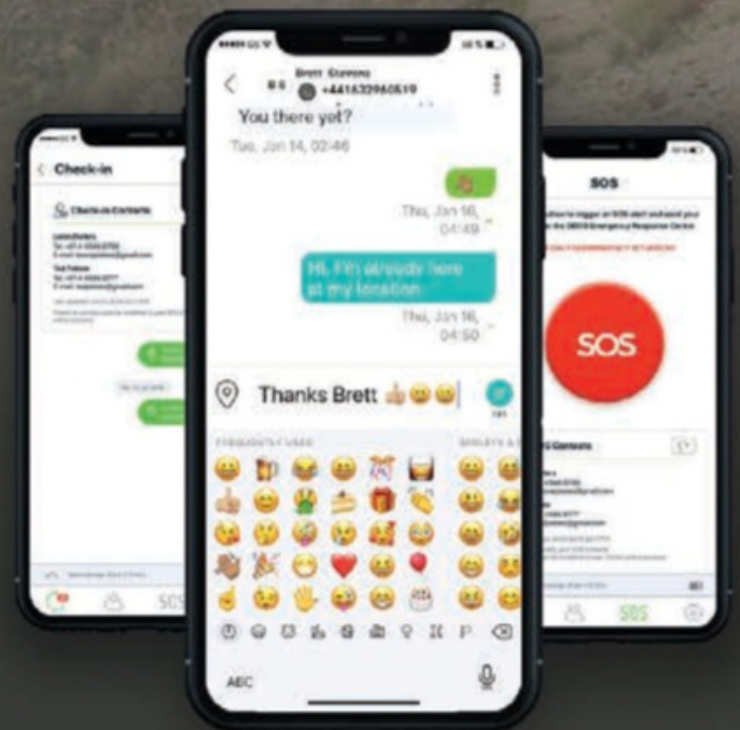


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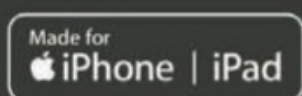


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Brad with the first buffalo of the hunt, taken with his CZ .416 Rigby.

Top End buffalo hunt

Brad Allen

As I drove into Darwin just before midnight, I felt a great sense of relief after my 3200km journey from South East Queensland. It had been more than four years since my last sojourn in the Top End to hunt buffaloes. I was mighty glad to be back after several attempted trips in the preceding two years had fallen through. The best laid plans of mice and men... Two days later, after a well-earned rest and the necessary grocery shopping done, my

hunting mate Paul and I were on the road to Arnhem Land.

Early October is the start of the 'Build Up' at the end of the 'Dry' in the Top End and under the relentless tropical heat and clear blue skies, the flood plains had dried up and browned off significantly. Apart from a few shallow scattered muddy holes, there were only two large permanent billabongs in our hunting area and accordingly we needed to concentrate our hunting efforts around those zones.

We caught up with Paul's good mate Norman, one of the Traditional Owners (TOs) who hunted with us on my last visit. He filled us in on local buffalo movement and placed an order for a leg or two, as at that time there were many visiting Arnhem Land locals in the community, involved in family and cultural activities so some additional meat would be well received tucker.

By the time we had squared our kit away in the air-conditioned lodgings with



The red coloured yearling provided many kilos of tender meat.



Paul with his 'little rifle' and his injured and bandaged right hand.

brings rewards

yet another of Paul's mates, it was mid-afternoon and time to head out for a recce. As it was still relatively warm (37C), we skirted the flood plain in the Prado and headed towards one of the permanent waterholes. Here we ran into an elder and his family heading into community from his remote homelands. We stopped for a quick yarn and he told us that he had just seen a buffalo cross the track and head down the gully, some 500m back. We thanked him for the information and drove to the gully

where we observed a buffalo pad covered in fresh spoor, crossing the track.

I loaded up my CZ .416 Rigby and Paul his old Brno 602 .458 Lott then we quietly headed along the pad into the light breeze. We had only gone about 400 yards when I noticed a slight movement, the flick of an ear, 60 yards ahead. Through the Leupold 1.5-5 scope, the dark shape of a buffalo quartering front on, materialised under the light scrub. As we were primarily after meat, she would do nicely so I placed the cross-hairs on the

point of her shoulder and squeezed off the shot. The 400-grain soft-point hit her with a resounding slap, driving into the shoulder and back through the boiler room, causing her to shudder momentarily before crashing to the ground. I immediately reloaded, but a follow-up shot wasn't necessary.

Despite the dry conditions, the cow was in reasonable condition and after some careful driving, we had the vehicle close enough to snig the beast into a position where the legs and back straps were removed.

Top End buffalo hunt brings rewards



One of the many family groups of buffaloes encountered, heading to water.



Although we were in the middle of nowhere in the Arnhem Land bush, another two vehicles stopped to see what we were up to. When Paul provided both families with legs of fresh meat, there were smiles all round and an impromptu barbecue began only 50 yards from the kill.

The following afternoon saw Paul and I again slowly driving around the edge of the same flood plain, checking out buffalo pads where they came out of the pandanus and paperbark scrub. There had been some movement on the pads, but it appeared that the buffaloes were only coming out of the heavy cover, either just on, or after dark.

Paul and his old friend Jack, one of the Traditional Owners.

As the shadows lengthened, we back-tracked towards a spot where several buffalo pads converged onto the flood plain and after careful consideration, we parked the vehicle back a couple of hundred yards. Our plan was to sit quietly behind some cover and wait until dark to see if anything wandered out. It was going dark as Paul said: "We might as well head back, it doesn't look like anything's coming out." However, as he stood up to move back to the car, I gently took hold of his arm as I caught movement on the pad and whispered: "Paul, stop, there's a buff calf heading our way."

At 30 yards, the calf propped as Paul steadied for a shot with his grandfather's old .303. The shot was true and the calf

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Top End buffalo hunt brings rewards

staggered only a few yards before going down. Being only the size of a red deer hind, I easily attended to the butchering as Paul walked back to bring up the vehicle.

The next morning somewhat changed the course of the hunt, as we attended to some mechanical work, pulling the gearbox out of an old LandCruiser. One slip of a spanner and my medical skills were put to the test, as Paul had a deep cut to his right hand. A trip to the clinic ended with a tetanus injection, six sutures and a bandaged hand, with Paul being incapable of shooting a large calibre rifle.

Firing his .458 Lott was definitely out of the question, as there was every likelihood that the heavy recoil would result in busted stitches. Not to be deterred, as we were primarily after meat size animals, Paul resolved to hunt with his 'little rifle', a Zastava .30-06. Using the tried and proven 220-grain Remington Core-Lokt soft-point rounds, Paul and many other Territorians have taken countless buffaloes and other large game.

That afternoon we picked up one of the TOs from his remote homelands, who guided us through some new country, that we had not previously hunted. Buffalo sign was everywhere and increased markedly the closer we went to one of the permanent waterholes. It was late afternoon before the oppressive tropical heat started to abate, when we parked the Prado about a kilometre downwind of a waterhole and slowly made our way forward through the semi open pandanis.

Buffalo pads and tracks were thick on the ground and we could hear two different mobs approaching the water through the bush. The closest group, consisting of several older cows, some yearlings and calves, stopped in the relative safety of the bush, about 100 yards from the water. After surveying the area for any danger, they literally ran to the water to quench their thirst.

This was the opportunity we needed. While the mob was busy watering, we closed in at a crouched walk, using what little cover there was between us. A reddish

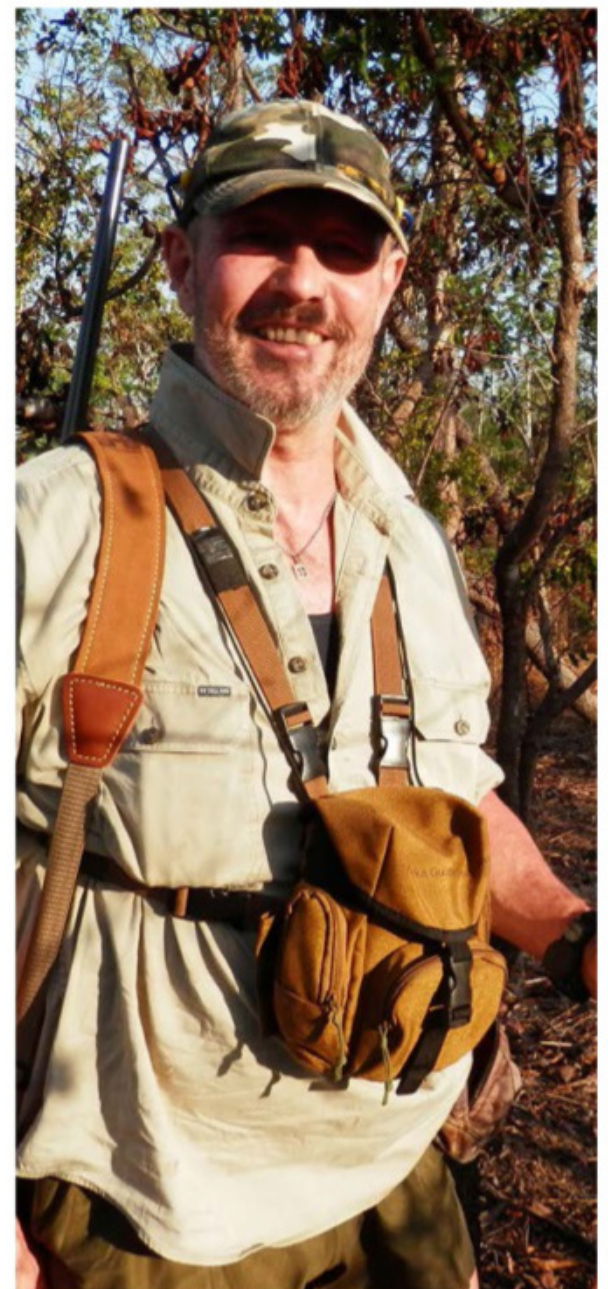


coloured yearling bringing up the rear of the mob as they headed back into the bush looked to be the best meat animal in the mob, so I carefully placed the .416 up onto the shooting sticks. At 80 yards, the yearling stopped, facing me, offering a narrow shot between two trees. I didn't hesitate and squeezed the trigger.

Since using heavy kicking rifles in my teens, I have shot with both eyes open whether using scopes or open sights, so that I could employ peripheral vision under recoil, to see the result of my shots. Under the big push of the Rigby, I was still able to see the yearling buckle backwards before making a few slow yards and going down.

An autopsy during the butchering process revealed that the shot had exploded the animal's heart, leading to a rapid and humane death. When we'd finished, there wasn't much of the yearling left on the ground and all of the meat was gratefully received by the TOs and their families.

The following morning, just on daylight, as we slept soundly in our air-conditioned accommodation on the edge of the community, I was awoken to unusual sounds coming from just outside my bedroom window. 'There's something out there,' I thought to myself, 'there it is again.'



Hunting buffaloes in the Top End - it doesn't come much better than this.

Top End buffalo hunt brings rewards

I quietly rose from my bed and tiptoed to the window and parted the curtains to investigate. There before me, no more than three yards away, was a full-grown buffalo bull feeding on the short green grass under the eaves of the house. We had neglected to close the gates to the 2m high chain wire fence the evening before and the bull had just wandered in looking for a free feed of fresh green grass.

My footsteps through the house to advise Paul were enough to alert the bull and as we walked onto the rear deck of the house, the bull ran at the back fence with head down and never broke stride as his massive body squeezed under the chain wire fence, back into the Arnhem Land bush.

With our last opportunity to hunt that afternoon, we headed to another permanent waterhole and parked downwind. As the shadows lengthened, we carefully approached the water through the pandanus. Paul was first to notice a mob of

buffaloes moving towards the water and as luck would have it, the light breeze was in our favour.

It was Paul's turn for a shot and at 70 yards, as a cow turned side on, he let her have a 220-grain Core-Lokt in the boiler room. She was hard hit and as she staggered backwards, Paul had reloaded and sent another 220-grain bullet from his .30-06 into the vitals of a young bull standing beside her. Both animals made only a few yards before going down for keeps, testament to the effectiveness of Remington Core-Lokt projectiles.

Although we hadn't taken any big-horned old trophy bulls, the trip had still been a resounding success, as by sharing the spoils of our meat hunts, we had made many new friends in Arnhem Land. We experienced the privilege of hunting Australia's largest game and now had enough meat in our eskies for buffalo curries and pies for many months to come. But we're already making plans for our next buffalo hunt. ■



Back in air-conditioned comfort, boning out a calf leg.



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Scuba do

Don Caswell clears the air on refilling PCP airguns



This stamp on Don's scuba tank saves him effort when it comes to refilling his airgun.



Utilising a scuba tank is the most efficient way to refill PCP airguns.

Those of us who shoot PCP air rifles have the additional need for a source of highly-compressed air. That can be resolved with a manual pump, or one of the newer powered versions. However, the most convenient way to obtain assured dry high-quality air is to use a scuba tank. Over the past few years that exercise of having the scuba bottle filled became more difficult for me, until I finally worked out the correct approach.

The filling of scuba tanks is, quite rightly, a highly regulated procedure. Diver safety requires that the scuba bottle is structurally sound and the air filling station delivers clean dry air suitable for breathing. The scuba tank must be certified on an annual basis in order to be filled by a registered scuba air provider. That is a small extra cost, and of varying inconvenience, depending on where you happen to live. For me, in a rural area to the south-west of Cairns, that requires a trip to town and the hope it can all be done that day.

Similarly, the filling of the scuba tank. I initially bought my scuba tank secondhand from one of the Cairns dive shops. The fellow who sold it to me understood that I was not using the air for breathing but only for my air rifle and was happy to recharge it for me. However, in time, he moved on and the young staff who took his place were insistent that I have a divers' card, which I do not. I tried a variety of local and

distant diver shops and kept meeting the same roadblock. During that process, my tank certification expired. The dive shops said they could send it off to be checked and recertified, but they still wanted me to have a divers' card. It was becoming frustrating until I had the sense to ask the dive shop who did their scuba tank maintenance and certification. For me, that happened to be Cairns Scuba Air. A short conversation with the staff there solved my problem quickly and neatly. They were familiar with the need for 'shop air'.

After the scuba tank was checked and certified, my scuba bottle was stamped 'not for scuba use'. With a scuba bottle devoted to shop air only, the certification process dropped from annual to five-yearly. The top-up in pressure costs about \$7 and the re-certification \$34. PCP users need a bottle with 120-220 bar pressure, as we do not empty the bottle like a diver would.

My scuba bottle recharging has become easy and cost-effective. I should also be able to buy another scuba tank secondhand privately which is out of certification for under \$100. That way, I will always have a minimum of one fully charged bottle on hand.

So, for PCP shooters, seek out the company that provides scuba tank servicing and certification for your local dive shops. Unlike the dive shop staff, they should be totally familiar with shop air as opposed to scuba air and able to provide a five-year certification on that basis. ■



Neat fix

to nagging problem

Bino XR from Badlands

Ben Unten

Many hunters, particularly 'spot and stalk' practitioners, would agree that binoculars are an indispensable piece of kit.

The problem for me has always been carrying them on a hunt.

I found putting them in a backpack made them too hard to reach quickly, while lugging them using the neck strap meant they flopped around too much, especially when bending over to move under a low branch or something similar.

For years I used one of those elasticised-type harnesses. These were pretty good, but I discovered that for longer periods of glassing, it felt like I was fighting against the harness as it was doing what it was designed to, which is pull binoculars downwards towards my chest while I tried to lift them up to my eyes.

Then there was the problem that they weren't protected while I was carrying



The harness is worn on the chest.



Binos are securely stored.

them, so I had to dig out the case for them before I put them in for a while or stash them away after a trip.

Then I discovered the new generation of bino harnesses. The Badlands Bino XR Optics Protection is the latest offering. This style of harness is designed to be worn on the chest. It comes with its own shoulder strap or it can be attached to your pack.

The unit is made from something called KXO-32 Fabric which is claimed by the Badlands website to be: 'One of the strongest, quietest and most waterproof materials you could ever hope to take into the field.'

The component weighs only 620g including the shoulder straps. Its approximate dimensions are: 200mm wide x 250mm high x 150mm deep. It comes in an attractive camo pattern.

There are some major plusses:

- Much greater comfort for longer glassing sessions
- Protection for your optics
- Adequate space for a rangefinder
- Additional storage capabilities via side pockets

The unit also has a built-in rain cover.

The flaps for the compartments are accessed via poly-covered rope handles and are secured by magnets - so no more 'unzipping' noise to frighten off your quarry.

The top compartment holds your binos. It has a two-stage flap-lid, meaning you can unfold just the top for discreet access or fold it completely down for full contact. Inside this compartment there is a cleaning cloth on an elastic lanyard and there are two more elasticised lanyards with openable steel rings on the ends to secure your binos if you wish. These items can all be neatly tucked away in a mesh pocket if not in use.

The bottom section drops down allowing you to access your rangefinder. This sector also contains a single, elasticised lanyard to secure your gear.

But here's the real genius of this piece - the 'shelf' between the top and bottom portions is adjustable. It is secured by Velcro to the internal back and sides so it can be moved up or down to accommodate your particular bino/rangefinder combination.

There are also two, smaller side pockets for additional gear: ammo, batteries, snacks and so on. The rain cover is located in a zippered pocket at the rear and there is a final flat pocket between the mesh harness and the back for things like topographic maps/phone etc. There are also two molle-type straps over the arms of the harness to secure additional gear or drinking tube from a water bladder if required. The harness is fully adjustable and vented for comfort.

Neat fix to nagging problem



Lower section for your rangefinder.



The harness can comfortably be worn while shooting.

In the field

This item does have some bulk to it (despite being lightweight). But I found in the field that I became used to this quickly and the convenience of having your binos 'right there' more than made up for the inconvenience.

Even in extreme heat and high humidity in Far North Queensland where I managed to snap-shoot a nice boar estimated at 70kg on the run, as well as take my pack on and off, the unit was not fouled whatsoever.

The other hunters in camp liked it so much, that they were all talking about upgrading their current bino harnesses to the Bino XR.

There is little not to like about this product. Some may find that the size of the part takes a little getting used to and care needs to be exercised when accessing your rangefinder just to make sure that you don't drop it. Although the manufacturer has thought of this by having the bottom flap form as more of a 'shelf' rather than a 'trapdoor' when opened, and if you use the lanyard it can't fall far. Perhaps the rangefinder lanyard could be a fraction longer.

Overall, I found the Bino XR to be so well thought out in terms of design that I loved using it. A final bonus is that I was able to do away with the rubberised eyecup protectors and the neck strap for my binos which I found constantly became tangled, caught on things and were a pain to take off and on. The same goes for the wrist/neck strap for my rangefinder. In fact, after using this Wild Game Australia offering I found I was too fond of it to send it back so I set about acquiring it.

Due to the dust resistance of this vessel, my binos and rangefinder now permanently live in the Bino XR as it is a great way to protect, carry and store these optics out in the bush and back at home.

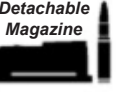
There are multiple elements in the options from Badlands. You can check them all out under the 'Products' heading at **wildgame.net.au** which also contains a dealer locator to help you find the store closest to you. The Badlands Bino XR retails for \$249. ■



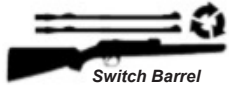
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Hide and seek

Don Caswell



The Ameristep 4-Spur Blind comes in a lightweight, compact form with carry strap.

The majority of my hunting is done by slow stalking and sitting in ambush at promising locations. Most times, I try to use a convenient tree or patch of bushes to disguise my presence.

Given that in these hunting areas, I need to position myself relative to the wind and expected approach of predators to carrion, sometimes the best ambush point is not ideal cover-wise.

I prefer to carry a minimum on these hunts but decided that I would, at times, need to include a portable, folding hide.

Cattle are very inquisitive and I long ago learned that it was a waste of time building hides. Despite giving every indication of a total lack of interest in your presence and activities, cattle will wait until you leave and

then congregate to sniff and trample anything you have put up.

I played about with homemade versions of a portable hide, but they lacked the ease of deployment I wanted. A search of gunshops both near and far did not unearth what I was looking for either.

So I resorted to the internet and eventually found the Ameristep 4-Spur Blind with Realtree camo on Amazon and had it delivered for less than \$40. It comes as a bundle 84cm long and 5cm diameter, weighing 0.45kg with a convenient shoulder strap.

The Ameristep 4-Spur Blind is composed of three lightweight polyester fabric panels in Realtree green camo. The hide can be set up as a 2400cm long hide screen that can contain several hunters, or as a three-sided wrap-around square of 81cm for a single

hunter. It can be put together in seconds.

The height of the blind panels is 68cm.

There are four integral carbon fibre poles and wind tie-downs. On a calm day I do not bother using the wind straps.

While I still try to employ natural features of the landscape as a background, or foreground, the portable Ameristep 4-Spur Blind has greatly improved my cover whether those features are present or not.

The blind effectively conceals the hands and legs, which are more prone to revealing movements than the upper torso and head.

For wary predators with great eyesight, like wild dogs, foxes and feral cats, your hunting success will escalate if you make every effort to conceal the human presence. I imagine that it would also be useful for duck hunters. ■

An advertisement for NYATI Hunting Supplies. The top section features a bull's head with large horns and the text "OPEN 7 DAYS" in yellow. Below this is the website "www.nyati.com.au". The main logo "NYATI Hunting Supplies" is in large, stylized letters. Below the logo, contact information is provided: "Sporty's Warehouse, 32 Strathaird Rd Bundall QLD p: (07) 5531 6511 fax: (07) 5504 5357 email: sales@nyati.com.au". The bottom section displays various hunting equipment, including a rifle, a shotgun, a bow, a flashlight, a GPS device, a knife, and a pair of boots. An Instagram logo is also present with the text "follow us @nyati_hunting_supplies".

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HUNTER EDITION

Snap decision

Adrian Kenney leaves the rifle behind for an afternoon hunt with the camera

The alarm calls of birds signalled the approach of this fox to the whistle.

The customary metallic rattle of the gate chain opened access to the property and signalled the beginning of my afternoon outing with the camera. Leaving the vehicle, I headed off trying to adjust into the pace needed for a hunter with a camera. The wind quartered across me, lifting up from the blackberry bushes that choked the creek bed below. I sat down, settled in behind the camera tripod and pulled the face net up as the button whistle sounded its tune.

Small birds called with alarm from across the gully as I looked to see a fox streaking down the opposite slope of green grass and blackberry clumps. Squirming into position the whistle called again before I prepared the camera for action. Silence would

hopefully slow the vixen's pace as she remained unsure of my exact location.

Twenty yards below me, the yellowy coloured fox paused while looking in my direction as I zoomed in and released the shutter. She moved onwards and upwards circling to be downwind as I again adjusted my position while she was out of sight behind the trunks of trees and scrub.

Edging out from behind a large boulder she slowed, much closer than before and the camera clicked before she caught my movement and bolted down the hill. Checking the photos, I was happy with what I had. Further squeals failed to entice another fox so I moved over the main ridge and into a gully choked with blackberries.

Camping kangaroos were gradually pressured from my intended calling location so

as not to disturb the area any more than necessary. They ambled off from the cover that may have held further foxes. Yet still, it was all in vain as my whistles were only met by the appearance of rabbits as they sneaked into bush and burrow.

At the base of a spur I was met by fresh sambar beds nestled amid manuka and stringy barks while long urine trails marked the direction of the departing deer prints. Clearly I had spooked the bedded sambar with my previous attempt at calling foxes.

The opposite side of the creek was lush and thick with cover as I again sat with a whistle to my lips and a finger on the cameras zoom lens control. The whistle wailed before all hell broke loose. A mature sambar hind burst from cover about 60 yards away and headed up into the open



It's times like this when game is close that hunters appreciate wearing camouflage.

forest to my left. Twisting around to follow her progress I was amazed to see another sambar follow her out of cover and onto the hillside of timber.

After the initial hind came two calves, another hind and two young stags. One after another they ran out before stopping higher up out of view. Then I saw a more mature stag about 100 yards further down the hill slipping off on his own through the forest. Forgetting the foxes I quickly grabbed the camera with its attached tripod and eased around to gain a better view of the hillside that now held sambar.

Slim manuka branches waved with the afternoon wind as I scanned the hillside with wishful eyes. A sambar calf walked forward coming to a stop next to a small tree before turning to look over its shoulder back to the

other deer and kangaroos. A couple more photos were taken and I was beginning to become excited at the prospect of the deer gradually walking into more open ground as they moved towards the grassy hillside.

Spotting a young stag further back in the forest, the camera's shutter clicked away as he peered intensely straight at my camouflaged form on the opposite face. Kangaroos hopped slowly through the dry forest heading downwards and across below me. The deer could be seen walking slowly and stopping here and there as I scrambled for a better view.

Straining my eyes still deeper into the forest in the direction of the young sambar's gaze I spotted a slightly bigger and darker bodied young stag standing motionless. His right antler was twice as long as the

opposite spike and protruded outwards. At a distance of about 80 yards I took a couple of photos before easing down behind the screen of manuka to edge further around the hill and closer to the stag. I was caught between the desire to be fast before the opportunity was lost, and the need to be slow so as not to scare the young stag and the others I knew were still nearby.

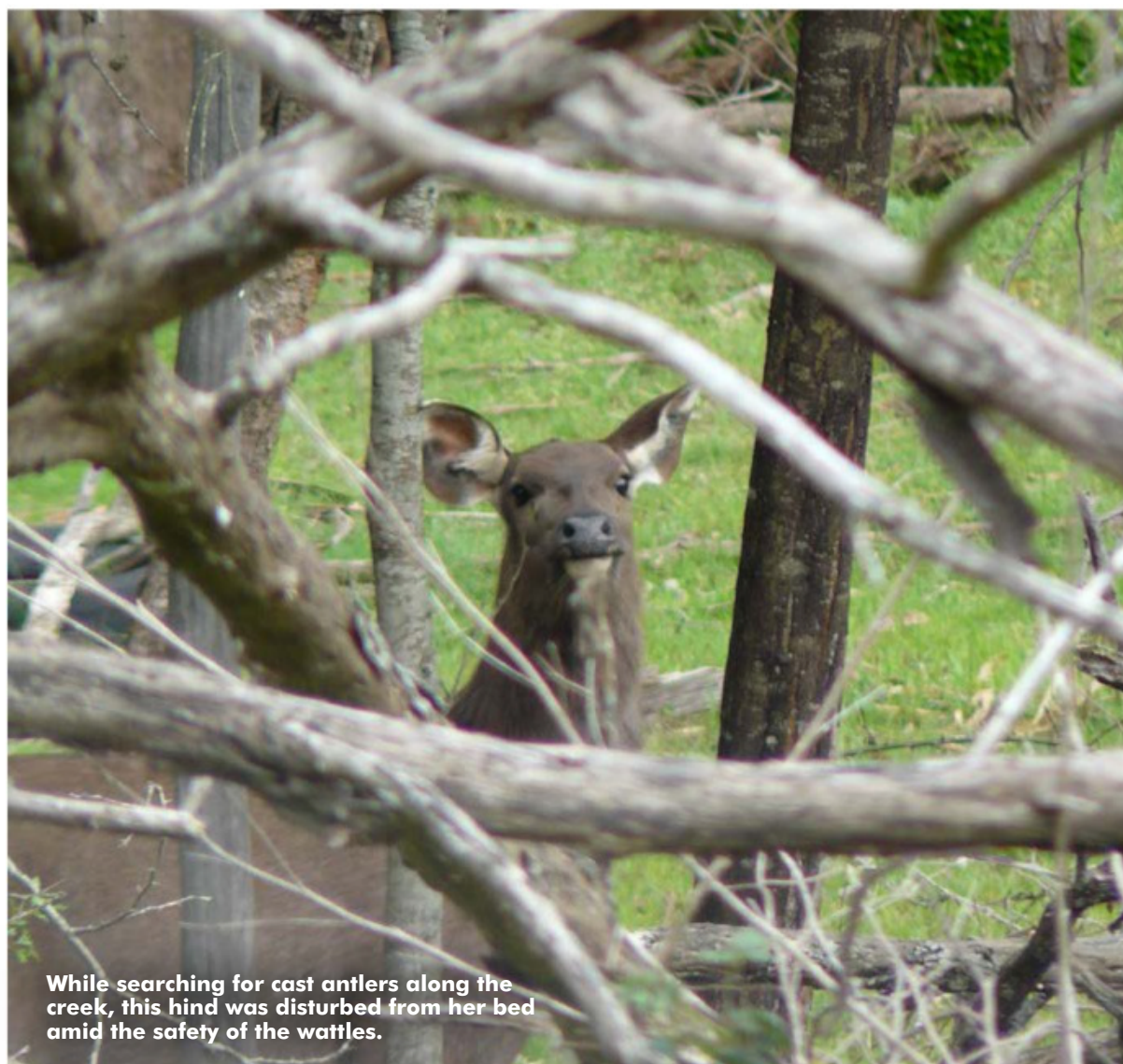
Eventually I made it to a better position closer to the stag as he stood pondering the source of all that commotion that had interrupted his rest. I focused on the trees closest to the stag as concentrating on the stag wasn't possible amid the timber.

Just as things were starting to look promising somebody revved their car engine on a neighbouring property and a stampede of roos and sambar swept

Snap decision



This young stag spotted Adrian's movement as he released the shutter on a couple of frames.



While searching for cast antlers along the creek, this hind was disturbed from her bed amid the safety of the wattles.

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across the hillside - one sambar, then two, three, four, five and six. The two young stags were last to leave the trees as the kangaroos and deer bolted for the high ridge and the cover of another section of the creek below it. Running up the gully I hoped one or two would prop at the top before cresting the ridge, but no such luck. Just a couple of kangaroos remained – my chance had gone.

I picked up my backpack and sat to check the photos. Cold water from the drink bottle washed down my throat as I took time to again settle before starting over. Across the creek a large dog fox mooched about as I scrambled for my camera and button whistle. With my scent blowing straight to him I wasn't too hopeful and instead of coming into the whistle he was gone in an instant.

Shouldering the pack I headed upstream along the creek back in the direction the group of deer had gone and close to where I'd photographed the fox. Deer sign was prolific along the creek as my camera hunt turned into a cast antler searching session. Straight in front of me a mature hind propped trying to smell the source of the disturbance that had awakened her from her snooze amid the wattles.

No time for tripods here as I tried to snap off a couple of frames at a distance of about 10 to 15 yards. Dead wattle branches framed her face causing the auto focus to centre on the branches rather than the hind. She'd had enough, and was off up the hill as a couple of blurred photos snapped after her until she was frustratingly lost from sight. While checking the free hand frames I had taken, another hind honked with volume from across the creek before heading for cover.

For the next hour or so I searched along the creek for cast antlers without any luck. Now, it was time to just chill out and sit in the hope of snapping a photo or two on some of the resident rabbits. Sitting beside the dying trunk of a grub-riddled wattle tree with tripod and camera at the ready I waited for the late afternoon shift of feeding bunnies.



These two rabbits 'posed' for photos after Adrian rustled some dry blackberry canes with his boot.

Sure enough, it took a good half-hour before any emerged. The rabbits were few and far between and skittish until the area became peaceful with the passing of time. As the afternoon progressed, kangaroos slowly turned back to bed down in the sunshine and it went from hardly a rabbit in sight to them being all around me.

They had come out of burrows, brush and blackberries with their heads nodding slowly as they fed upon the lush growth of early spring. Some ran in circles chasing each other across the yellow hillside of flowering capeweed while others lay sunbaking as if taking a break from those annoying kittens.

Numerous photos were taken of the closest candidates as I slowly tilted the camera this way and that upon the tripod. Wattlebirds and mickey birds were numerous in this gully of scattered timber, shrubs, blackberries and open grassland. The bird

calls were as prolific as the rabbits as I crawled down between clumps of cover towards a small group of bunnies feeding out from some blackberries.

Photographs were taken at every stop as I slid closer towards them. Eventually I pushed my luck too far and with a thump of a foot only one remained. Another rabbit returned and I snapped away at the pair as they grazed upon the grass.

Using my boot I brushed it across dry blackberry canes, causing the rabbits to rise to attention and 'pose' for a few photos. I spent the remaining time sitting on the opposite side of the gully snapping photos of feeding kitten rabbits before deciding to call it a day. It wasn't dark, but I was more than pleased with my hunt. I climbed up the hill back to the vehicle with the clack of a chain on a closed gate signalling the end of my afternoon. ■

Stay sharp!

SSAA Knife + Tool Sharpener a cut above the rest

Thomas Cook



Sharpening a hatchet and other tools has never been so quick and easy.

A few seconds on either blade side had this multi-purpose knife razor-sharp.



There's a famous quote that goes something like: "If I had eight hours to chop down a tree, I would spend six of those sharpening my axe." For effective cutting, like anything really, preparation is the key. But you don't need six hours to sharpen your blade - the SSAA Knife + Tool Sharpener does it in less than a minute.

When it comes to sharpening a cutting edge, there's obviously a bevy of options with different set-ups and materials, most of which are suitable, some of which are expensive. Generally speaking, knives only need a decent sharpening a few times a year.

However, those of us hunting and butchering will want our knives sharpened prior to being put in use. This is where the cordless SSAA Knife + Tool Sharpener comes into play. Being able to take it to camp and in the field with you is a real plus. Powered by a rechargeable Li-ion 1.5 Ah battery it is a convenient and light little unit that will sharpen the edge of your kitchen, hunting, fishing knives and tool quickly.

I've used it to sharpen my knives and hatchet and it can be used in the field or around the home on items like axes, hoes, diggers, pruners, shears and even lawnmower blades. With a lot of these, of course, a bench vice or similar is required. The nifty device can also be used for light grinding, polishing and deburring on tubing, metal, plastic and so on. Be mindful this will wear your belts out more rapidly (replacement belts are available through the SSAA Online Shop).

The unit itself comes in blue with soft black rubber for gripping the handle. Underneath where your index finger rests is where the 3-position power switch is conveniently



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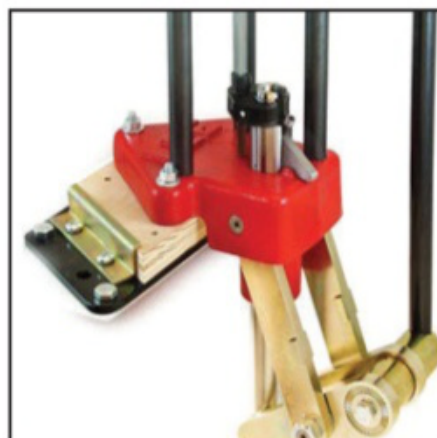
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SSAA Knife + Tool Sharpener a cut above the rest

located. Up is for continuous running and back is for a pulse. The off position is between the two.

The 'sharpening cassette' clicks on to the right-hand side of the unit, with the release button at the unit's front. On the cassette you have a quick lock-belt tensioner and belt-tracking adjustment knob. To place on the cassette for sharpening you choose either an 80, 180 and 240 grit belt, with spares of each being supplied.

Each grit is clearly marked on the inside of the belt to avoid any confusion. In addition to this comes the outdoor knife guide and kitchen knife guide. Also there's the charger, which is black, with the cord offering considerable reach – much longer than your average iPhone cord and the like.

Setting up the sharpener is a breeze. Simply click the cassette into place and it can be effortlessly rotated into a sharpening or grinding position. Next is to install the belt. The coarse belt is 80 grit and ideal for sharpening and grinding most tools; the medium

180 grit is for knife and scissors and the fine 240 grit is best for honing knives. To obtain your desired belt simply push the tensioner down and ¼ turn to the right to lock into place. The belt is then centred on all three pulleys and the tensioner ¼ turned back to the left to tighten the belt.

To sharpen a knife for instance, utilise the 80-180 grit to mend damage and reshape or the 180-240 grit to resharpen. Simply ensure the cassette is locked into place in position A and place the appropriate guide (outdoor or kitchen knife) so the blade's side is firmly against the outside edge of the slot.

You then insert the blade all the way to the finger guard. Once in place just flick on the power switch with your index finger and pull the knife steadily through the guide and out. Now just repeat the process using the left side of the guide. Repeat the whole process for a total of 10 strokes, which should last just a couple of seconds each. The next step is to use your freshly sharpened knife.

The sharpener comes fully charged out of

the box and lasts about 1.5 hours (1.5 Ah) but takes about four hours to charge once the battery has depleted, so I recommend fully charging prior to use whenever possible.

The user manual offers assistance on sharpening different equipment and has a handy guide on the anatomy of a knife to correspond with this, along with the obligatory safety and warranty info.

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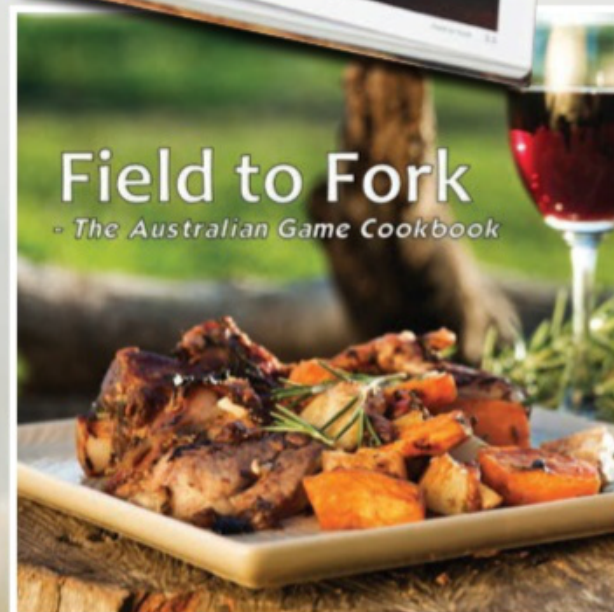
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On cloud nine!

David Duffy fires his favourite bolt-action hunting rifles



Many hunters tend to develop a fondness for a particular brand or model of hunting rifle which has certain traits.

Some will favour accuracy over anything else, some prefer ruggedness and low cost, others mechanical reliability in feeding and extraction and some want light weight so they can hunt all day over hills and down gullies without adding to their fatigue by carrying a heavy firearm.

There are so many different brands and models of new and secondhand options on the market today (check out **ssaa.gun-sales.com**) that you can usually acquire most of the facets that you want in the hunting rifle if you choose carefully. Here are some of the attributes of my top nine bolt-action hunting rifles.

A water buffalo taken with Winchester Model 70 .338 Win Mag loaded with 250-grain Barnes X.



The Remington 700 is a heavy barrelled varmint rifle chambered in .220 Swift.



Ruger Hawkeye in stainless synthetic is rugged, short and the ideal weight for a .338 RCM.

Winchester Model 70

One of the most iconic of all hunting rifles is the pre-64 Winchester Model 70. Dubbed the 'rifleman's rifle', features include a large claw extractor which helps remove blown or sticky cartridges. There is a blade ejector which doesn't rely on a spring, controlled-round feed for reliable insertion from the magazine into the chamber and singular round feeding in critical situations. A coned breech helps to guide the round into the chamber, there is a recoil lug to minimise movement under recoil and all-steel construction.

These qualities add to machining time and cost which has traditionally meant that Model 70s are more expensive to buy than, say, a Remington Model 700. The 'short' action is really an intermediate length action and is ideal for cartridges such as the 6mm Remington and .257 Roberts when using

long, heavy projectiles. They can reach their full potential when the chamber is long-throated.

Belted cartridges such as the .338 Win Mag stack well in the hinged floorplate internal magazine of the long action, which is much deeper at the rear than the front. A small modification to the internal magazine wall allows me to fit four .338 Win Mag rounds in the magazine and the length enables me to long-throat the chamber for a 3.52" overall length. The Winchester Model 70s are not short rifles and the actions do weigh more than a Model 700 action. For a medium weight hunting rifle, the Model 70 is a good choice.

Remington Model 700

Many custom rifle builders have traditionally embraced the Remington 700 action to build a moderately priced accurate hunting

rifle. Even though the recoil lug is not integral to the receiver, but held in place by screwing the barrel into the receiver, this doesn't seem to make any difference to its accuracy.

The Model 700 recessed bolt face completely surrounds the case head and the front end of the bolt locks up inside the counter-bored breech of the barrel and is then surrounded by the receiver, resulting in the 'three rings of steel' making for a strong action. The minimal extractor in a custom build is sometimes replaced with a bigger Sako-style one.

The Model 700 action is strong and conducive to fine accuracy and can be set up easier than many actions, which makes it ideal for a heavy barrelled varmint-type rifle. Also the short action version is relatively light, making it ideal to build a nimble mountain rifle that is highly accurate. There

On cloud nine!

are probably more quality after-market parts available for the Remington Model 700 than any other action.

Sako AI and All

The extra-short Sako AI and medium (.308) length All actions are both later versions of the L461 and L579 actions respectively and have two lugs on the bolt rather than the three which are now common. The AI fits the little .222 round perfectly and you can squeeze seven into the internal magazine. The All holds five in the internal magazine which is one more round than the Remington 700.

I like the hinged floorplate design rather than a detachable magazine. Both the AI and All are easy to load from the ejection port either into the magazine or direct into the chamber. The Sako has a good extractor, integral recoil lug and the Monte Carlo stock with cheekpiece is aesthetically pleasing and fits me better than any other factory stock.

The integral tapered dovetail is probably a better design than a straight dovetail for scope mounts. This is due to a tendency for the mounts to tighten under recoil if the scope mounts for some reason aren't as tight as they should be.

I am partial to the one-piece Sako ring mounts for simplicity with their plastic



From left: Steyr, Remington, Sako, Kimber, Winchester and CZ bolts.



The coned breech with extractor cut-out of the Winchester Model 70, right, compared to the Sako barrel on the left.



This fox was taken with the Sako AI in .222.

inserts, which protect the scope, whereas some prefer the Sako two-piece mounts. The AI in .222 weighs 3.06kg and my All with an after-market stainless fluted 23" barrel weighs 3.03kg, making it 3.51 kg with scope, which is also perfect for the .7-08/.308/.270 Redding cartridges.

The Sako rifles are quality and other than a bedding job, there is usually nothing more that needs doing to them.

Steyr Mannlicher Model M Professional

This older model has an extremely smooth bolt with six rear locking lugs resulting in a short bolt lift. Although it is a long action chambered in .270 Win in my rifle, by having the locking lugs at the rear the length



The Sako AI action shows integral recoil lug and tapered dovetail for scope mount.

of the rifle is not much more than a short action rifle.

The hammer forged barrel is accurate and lasts a long time. The twist rate is one in 9" which is better for the long-for-calibre high Ballistic Coefficient (BC) bullets that are now coming out in .270 calibre.

The parkerised finish is more durable, weather resistant and has less glare than most blued finishes and the Cylolac stock is tough, aesthetically pleasing and feels right. If the plastic triggerguard/magazine well is replaced with a custom-made steel piece as I have done, you have an excellent rifle.

Kimber 84M

If you are seeking a light rifle for the mountains or just for long days of trekking in remote areas, the Kimber 84M medium length (.308 size) action is ideal. There are various versions with synthetic stocks, such as the Mountain Ascent which weighs under 2.26kg and the Montana which is just over 2.26kg. These hold four rounds in the internal magazine, have a Mauser-type claw extractor and controlled round feed.

The recoil lug is attached similar to the Remington 700 but is cleverly hidden from view. The wooden stocked versions are

still light at just under 2.72kg and hold five rounds in the magazine and come in an array of grades with the SuperAmerica having a AAA-grade walnut stock.

Ruger Hawkeye

The stainless synthetic versions of the Ruger Hawkeye are robust and sold at a reasonable price. The stock is almost indestructible but is reasonably light and stiff at the forearm, so pressure doesn't result in the stock touching the barrel should you decide to free-float the barrel and bed the action.

I find the Hawkeye stock more aesthetically pleasing than some previous models that had the boat-paddle type stock. The bolt has controlled round feed and the scope mounts that come with the rifle fit onto the integral dovetail on the receiver. My Hawkeye in .338 RCM shoots five rounds into an inch at 100 yards out of the 20" barrel, which is good for a large calibre rifle. I've modified the hinged floorplate of the bottom metal so that the internal magazine holds four of the RCM rounds.

Due to the design and angle of the recoil lug, the ultra-light McMillan Edge stocks are not made for the Hawkeye. However, its synthetic stock is reasonably light at 850g.



Steyr Mannlicher Model M Professional with rear-locking lugs is not much longer than a short action rifle but is chambered in .270 Win.

This is a great rifle for sambar hunting as it is short and light (for a .338) weighing 3.60kg with a Kahles 2-7 scope and it is rugged.

CZ 527 and 550 Magnum

If you want a factory-made rifle for hunting heavy dangerous game chambered in big bore cartridges such as the .416 Rigby, then you can buy an exquisitely crafted but more expensive Rigby Big Game rifle with a top-grade walnut stock or you can opt for a reasonably priced CZ 550 Magnum. The Rigby uses a Mauser 98 barrelled action based on the model produced from 1899, keeping many of the original features and the CZ design has incorporated many of the Mauser 98 characteristics.

The large non-rotating Mauser claw extractor gives controlled-round feed which is highly desirable for dangerous game. The integral dovetailed double-square bridge receiver provides a good base for scope mounts, with a recoil lug and all-steel construction. I like the 25" barrel on a Magnum, although many favour a shorter barrel which can easily be done.

The weight of the CZ 550 Magnum is around 4.16kg and with a 1.5-4.5 scope and modifications is 4.76kg. Although you can buy this rifle in .375 H&H, I feel that



Kimber 84M SuperAmerica has a wood stock but weighs only 3.21kg with scope, steel magazine follower and 23" barrel in 6 SLR.

On cloud nine!

this weight is a little heavy for a medium bore and is more suited to the .416 Rigby and .458 Lott.

Many go for a heavier rifle for the big bores so as to absorb more of the recoil (the double square bridge Rigby is 0.34kg heavier), but I find that 4.76kg is the maximum I want to carry on my shoulder for long days on safari.

I've added a barrel band sling swivel, cross-bolt to strengthen the stock and a deepened magazine well to hold four of the large .450 Rigby rounds. CZ now make higher grade Safari Classics II with some of these features incorporated and a higher-grade walnut stock and non-reflective blueing makes for an attractive rifle.

The CZ 527 is the scaled down extra-short action for cartridges around .223 length. The five-round detachable metal magazine is useful for high-volume varminting as a loaded clip can be kept in your pocket, though I still would choose a hinged floorplate design.



The large Mauser claw gives controlled-round feed and good extraction of tight cases. Although not recommended, rounds can be hand fed into the chamber with the claw slipping over the rim. The factory scope mounts are high and they suit a large objective lens and a medium heavy barrel.

The trigger can be adjusted to a light

weight in the set mode (eg, 16oz) for precision shooting by pushing forward and the normal mode can be adjusted to 3lb for walking around – a useful feature.

This is only a small selection of the many good hunting rifles available with features that you might find appealing. ■

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A kitchen knife lockdown

Robert Dewey



The useful 8" cook's (c/w German bolster and forged) knife.

Stuck in lockdown, I found myself looking at our extensive range of food preparation knives and wondering why are there so many? Nestled into two wooden knife blocks are 19 knives. All are examples of knives we made and sold to customers over the years.

I started to rank them in terms of the most useful, sales volume, customer preferences and thought about what I would do if they were lost in a fire or from some other disaster.

In starting again after a total loss and with the aim of keeping costs to a minimum, I would purchase three knives – a parer, heavy duty meat and general purpose plus a bread knife.

Of all the different shapes and styles of parers available, I would choose a sheepfoot design. I have made and sold hundreds of

these and the knife has been well received. It is successful for a number of reasons:

- aesthetically pleasing;
- fits well in the hand;
- wonderfully versatile;
- holds its edge brilliantly;
- easy to keep sharp.

Being of 1.5mm blade thickness, a half-dozen strokes with a hand-held diamond sharpener will maintain its cutting edge.

The knife steel used is 1.4116 and is hardened and tempered to an HRC in the range 54-56. The knife has a partial tang and a jarrah wood handle.

I suggest that it fits into the 'wear down rate' tabulation between 4 and 6. That is better than 440C but not as good as D2 - a very successful design.

My choice of the second knife would be a 6" semi-curved boner, using 3-3.5mm

material thickness and of the same steel as the parer, and again, hardened and tempered to an HRC in the range 54-56.

This knife will deal with all the heavy-duty tasks in the kitchen – trim and cube meat, cut pumpkin, prune vegetables and take heads off your fish catch.

The curve in the blade makes it more versatile than a conventional straight back boner. However, it is difficult to find in retail outlets.

It takes more work to keep sharp than the parer but I try to persuade users to employ a diamond sharpener. This is merely my preference, vis-a-vis pull through sharpeners.

My German cutlery contacts suggest that if a household, for whatever reason, can only afford one knife in the kitchen, then this boner should be your choice.



This 6" semi-curved boner is perfect for heavy-duty kitchen use.

A kitchen knife lockdown

As my wife Reni and I bake a large proportion of our bread needs; a 10" wavy edge bread knife is essential. With practice it can substitute as a carver. If a household uses only sliced bread, it need just to make an immediate purchase of two knives.

At this stage of our lives, for Reni and myself, these three knives would cover over 90 per cent of our food preparation needs.

However, I recognise that 10 years ago, life would not have been worth living without a quality filleting knife to deal with the fish that we caught.

As circumstances allow, I would include additional special purpose knives. Firstly, I would add an 8" or 10" cook's knife. After that, I would bring in a 10" slicer, two carvers (one for meat, the other for birds) and a 10" knife for dealing with whole rump steaks.

Also I would increase the choice of parers from one to three (the sheepsfoot and two with spear points of two different blade lengths). Then and finally, a bird's beak for peeling fruit and de-veining prawns.

Among my 19 knives are six parers ranging from a 6" forged and bolstered unit and a 3" full tang unit. Five of these have spear points and one a sheepsfoot.

With sampling techniques, I found that the sheepsfoot was used in eight out of every 10 occasions that a parer was involved, a clear indication of its versatility.

The professional food preparation personnel would, I believe, automatically choose, as their general-purpose knife, an 8" or 10" cook's knife for all their work with vegetables. What would a TV cook show do without it?

It is an alternative to the semi-curved boner and, if chosen wisely, will give several lifetimes of use.



Robert prefers a 'sheepsfoot' design parer.

As an example of how good the right knife can be, Reni and I gave a 10" Ern brand, forged, bolstered, full tang cook's knife as a wedding present to close friends. They have used this knife, most days, for the past 58 years. It is only in the last few weeks that we have found it necessary to remove the shoulders that had formed after many uses of a fine grade butcher's steel and, in the last several years, use of a hand-held diamond sharpener of 600 grit size. Such a cook's knife is not cheap but what more could you ask of a knife?

In my view, Europeans, including from the UK, have mastered the art of making quality knives and, whenever asked for advice, I suggest staying with this group, recognising that quality levels match the price. A \$19 knife kit just cannot be a valued unit. Let the buyer beware.

I recognise seven different handle materials and methods of construction in my collection. Wood dominates and they vary from beech, jarrah and my favourite Australian desert timber, dead finish. They are mostly fitted to partial tangs and fastened with aluminium cutlery rivets. Several received antler, one on a through tang and others on full tangs. The latter was glued and fastened with tobin bronze pins and then riveted.

Absent from my kitchen, but at times past, I have used Asiatic buffalo horn and several were fitted with black coral handles.

Polypropylene is my choice on the full tang cook's knives, fastened with the same rivets as wood. Several are injection moulded polypropylene handles, where needed, to meet health department requirements for the blade to be fully encapsulated.

The wide array was developed over a number of years, mainly aimed at impressing customers and a personal need to be occasionally different.

There is space on both knife blocks for a 10" diamond rod. Also loose in the block is a fine, 600 grit and a super fine 1200 grit hand-held sharpener. All three sharpeners receive a lot of use and with a total loss, initially at least, one of the three should be replaced.

Again, it is certain that a future kitchen kit will, in my case, never exceed eight knives and could, with little difficulty, find five will handle all the food preparation requirements of the average household.

Readers will realise that more than half of the 19 knives in the two blocks are simply gathering dust. But I did have a lot of fun making them. ■



A 10" wavy edged knife is ideal for those who make bread at home.

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Simultaneous shooting proved successful in landing these two billies.

Rushing for goats

Ben Unten

We spotted the goats on the ridge before we'd even finished unpacking the ute. The block we were on sees comparatively little hunting pressure, so the animals were not overly worried by our presence. But I don't seem to be able to stop myself from rushing things when I first arrive on a trip.

My hunting mate Thommo and I dumped the gear into the well-appointed cabin and hurriedly threw on camos, grabbed packs and rifles and discussed a strategy. We both carried Tikka rifles in .30-06 calibre. Mine was a T3 and Thommo had a T3x.

The goats were north of our position and well above us at the top of an open paddock which offered no cover. The wind was blowing from the east, across us from right to left. We reckoned that our only real option was to head directly left to keep the wind in our favour. Once we reached the scrub line, we would climb until we were slightly above or level with the goats. We would then cut across the hill towards the goats, keeping the wind in our faces. It sounds so simple.

The climb was steep but the footing was good. One of the slightly unnerving things about pursuing animals you've lost sight of is

that nagging worry that they will have disappeared and you'll be left staring at flora. This always makes me want to rush that bit more. Luckily my rigorous fitness regime which consists of watching hunting videos online, talking to people about hunting and doing website research about hunting related products made me feel completely ready for a hunt in the hills. Sadly the message didn't seem to have spread to my legs and lungs.

By the time we reached the height where we thought the goats would be, we were blowing smoke like a steam engine burning green timber. We took a brief

Rushing for goats

moment to catch our breath before we ever so slowly traversed the hill towards where we hoped the goats would be. However, when we left the scrub, the goats were nowhere to be seen. With that slightly sinking feeling we gradually moved forward in the half-crouch position.

I felt Thommo tug on my shirt and I instinctively dropped. Sure enough, the goats were still there. They had continued to feed into the wind so had begun to go over the eastern face of the hill. We crawled forward and saw a mob of around a dozen goats which we ranged at 185m. As we unslung rifles, we discussed a 'simultaneous shot' strategy. As I was to Thommo's left, I picked a billy towards the left edge of the mob, and Thommo selected one to the right. We began our countdown from five, with the, "three, two, one, fire!" ticked off silently in our heads.

Both rifles boomed almost simultaneously and two goats staggered briefly before falling. We set up for the obligatory

'modelling' session and once that was done we took the guts out of the animals and propped their chest cavities open with sticks to aid cooling. Despite what you hear, you absolutely can eat stinky old billy goat. We then continued to head north to see what else might be around.

After around an hour or so we spied some 'white' movement through the scrub. It was Thommo's turn for a shot, but in the difficult conditions we both set up looking for a shooting opportunity. The scrub was thick enough that we weren't sure how many were in the mob let alone which 'glimpse of white' belonged to what part of an individual animal.

With no ethical shot on offer, we decided to move in closer. This made the goats aware of our presence and they started to move away. We followed the mob hoping for a shooting opportunity. Just as I was thinking it might be time to give it away, the goats turned to the west and began to head uphill. As we realised that they were trying

to gain access to a hole under the fence, we rushed to find a position. Thommo patiently waited for a small, tasty looking billy in the mob to walk into the line of fire and present a broadside shot. His .30-06 boomed and all bar one of the goats vanished under the fence to safety. We grabbed another handful of happy snaps before quartering the animal and packing out what meat we could.

We hiked back to camp to jump in the ute and drove and picked up the first two goats. This is one of the advantages of shooting in an open paddock.

With the meat finally field dressed and packed into eskies, it was time to put thoughts of rushing anything well behind us and enjoy a refreshing beverage on a cool evening in front of the fire.

I reflected that when I first arrive on a hunting trip, I do feel a slight sense of urgency and a tendency to want to hurry things along. Thankfully nature has the ability to unwind you, whether you fight it or not. ■



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Pre-hunt sighting for success - part 2

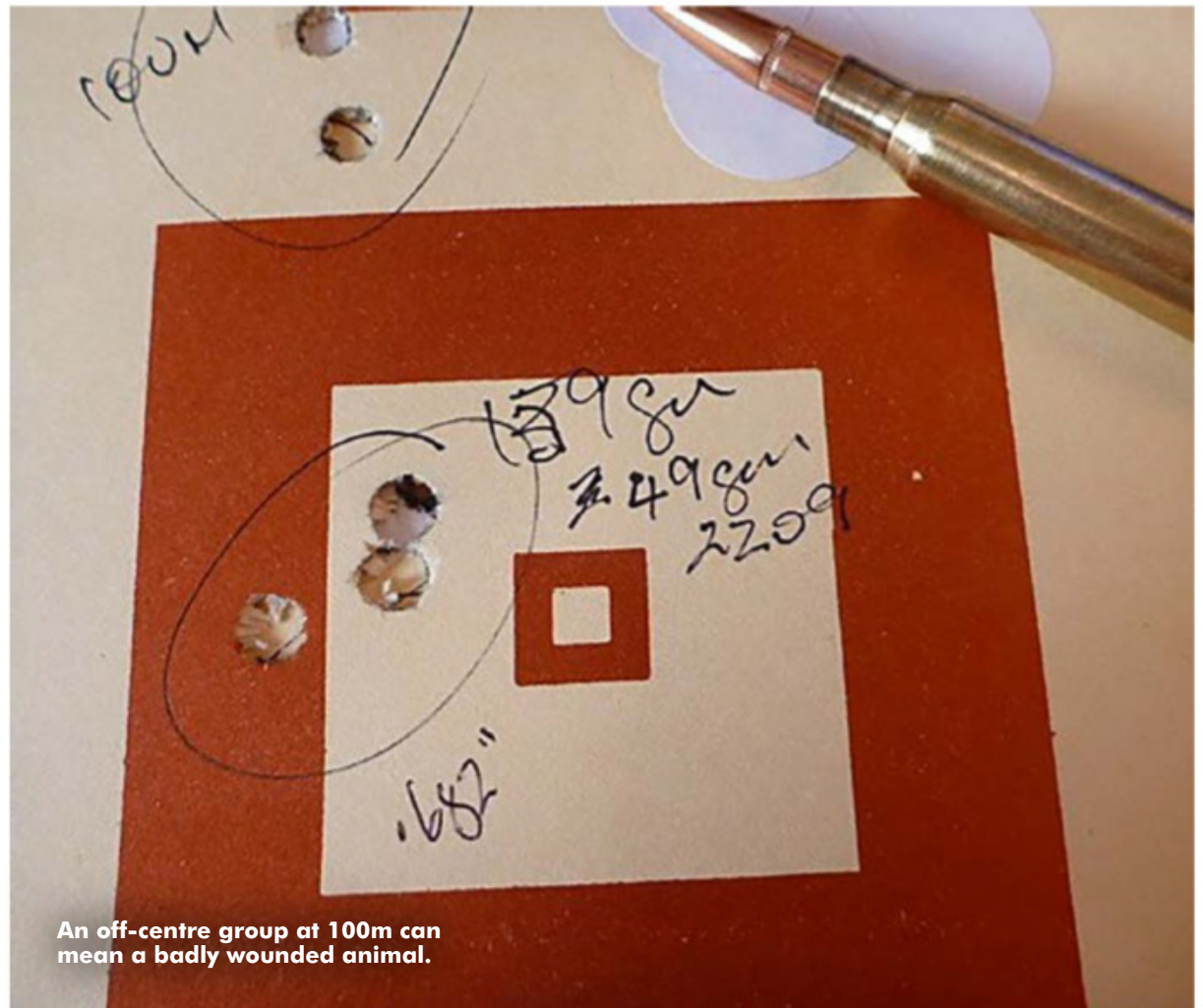
John Denman encourages a refresh at your local SSAA range

As many shooters emerge from the major part of the COVID-19 pandemic, there's a feeling of how much we have missed out on. It's a sensation of having been in a form of hibernation, that can only be assuaged by recoil and the scent of burnt propellant. As SSAA branches reopen the ranges, life as we know it and prefer it is welcomed back.

But that's not all. Hunting is returning to the agenda and with the money that hunters bring with them, regional centres will gain an additional boost and gunshop owners can press on with running their businesses. Hunters are not born to be confined. We seek the further horizon, the warmth of a crackling fire at the end of the day and that special feeling you enjoy by being part of the adventure.

In *Australian Hunter* Edition 72, I wrote about the need to prepare well for the hunt. This time I have no doubt planning has been underway almost since the beginning of lockdown. The colder months are the hunter's favourite time, in particular those of us after some fresh venison. We've had this time of

A welcoming sight at the SSAA range.



enforced idleness to check the camping gear and the hunting car, and if you're like me you've tinkered with a rifle or two. Even if it's only to look down the bore and check for spiders.

But as things open up it's undoubtedly a good time to visit your local SSAA range to check that the hunting rifle is still pointing where you need it to. Just because it was fine last time you hunted doesn't mean it still is. Sighting-in means that the rifle will not only hit what you aim at, it signifies that it will do so with specific ammunition.

It's all too easy to allow ammunition to become a little out of order. Make sure that there are no mix-ups in the secure area where your ammo is stored. Most shooters will have experimented over time with what results they can manage from different loads. This includes factory ammo as well as any handloads you may have assembled. I still see blokes coming to the range with an assorted bag of rounds in all sorts of containers, when there are so many good ammo boxes available. Your cartridges should be kept in a decent box designed for

the purpose and clearly labelled with bullet weight, powder charge and primer.

Never combine different breeds of brass either and if you have various brands of factory ammo, don't allow them to be jumbled. There are plenty of fine plastic ammo storage boxes, all designed for specific cartridges, and most under \$10. Use these rather than old cardboard factory boxes that can lead to problems in the field.

**Enforced idleness
for a hunter,
can be a useful
time to sort
your ammo,
check supplies
and make sure
everything is
ready to go**

I like to have my rifles dead-on at 200m for a cartridge like the .243, .270, .308 types. This usually means it's around 1 1/2" high at 100m. Of course this is my preference, because I try never to shoot any game past 200m. Even so, if you sight your hunting rifle like this you still should check the drop out to 300m. Bear in mind that the further you shoot at game, the greater the chance of not achieving a clean kill. If you adhere to the moral responsibility to follow up a wounded animal, you don't want it to have a 300m start on you.

If you are sighting in your hunting rifle at the range, it's good to know how it will group at a given distance. For this I'd suggest you fire no more than three rounds and make it from a cold barrel. The reason for this is that firstly you should always know where the initial shot from a cold barrel will hit. Secondly, hunting rifles tend to have slender barrels, which means they heat up faster, often resulting in a loss of accuracy. Thirdly, if you need more than three shots to kill an animal, you're either a terrible shot or you have trouble with the rifle or scope.

Pre-hunt sighting for success - part 2



Hunting rifles with peep sights need regular checking.

Scope mounts can work loose, the screws holding the stock to the action can lose tension too. These things need to be checked if the rifle has been stored for a while. Timber stocks have been known to warp as well, so checking the tension on all these screws is of utmost importance.

Most hunting rifles have what is known as a free-floated barrel. This means that the action is bedded into the stock, but the barrel forward of the receiver is not in contact with the fore-end of the stock. Once again a timber stock may warp slightly, sometimes just enough to lightly touch the barrel.

Check this by finding a sheet of paper and running it under the barrel from the tip of the fore-end to the receiver. If the paper is stopped at any point it means the barrel is touching the stock. The only remedy for this



Carry your ammo well-sorted in a case designed for the job.

Utilise a SSAA range to check out your rifle.

is to mark the spot and remove the barrel and action from the stock. Sometimes a little time with sandpaper will fix it, but in other cases you will need to remove more wood from that spot.

Enforced idleness for a hunter, while irksome, can be a useful time to sort your ammo, check supplies and make sure everything is ready to go. To the handload-ing hunter, this is also a time of great activity. Loads are assembled, and as time is not such an issue, it's almost certain that you will perhaps take a bit more care to make sure every case is prepared and loaded accordingly. You will also check that those carefully loaded rounds will feed from the magazine reliably.

Depending on where you hunt, the opening of our ranges may not coincide with your destination. If on private land a call to the landowner checking that he's okay with your visit is essential, regardless of COVID-19 problems. Calling ahead is just good manners. Victorian hunters who hunt public land



should make sure these places are open and that your game licence is current.

Although we are told that the word 'lockdown' is not entirely accurate, our

frustrations at being unable to pursue our sport have been irksome, to say the least. We know that it's been an essential part of dealing with this virus. While the pandemic



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The SSAA's shooting competitions, commonly referred to as 'disciplines', are the backbone of the Association and include the use of many types of firearms such as shotguns, pistols and revolvers and rimfire, centrefire, air and black powder rifles, depending on the discipline and competition concerned. With over **20 disciplines to choose from** there is something for everyone! See it all on our website.

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View all of our clubs on offer with the interactive map on our website and find what's near you. Check their facilities and see the disciplines they offer to decide which will best suit your style of shooting and/or collecting. Alternatively you can view each club and see what they have to offer.

ssaawa.org.au

Interested in conservation?

Our Conservation & Wildlife Management branch members use their shooting skills to assist in the conservation of native animals and the management or eradication of feral species. We actively assist farmers, landholders and various state and national bodies in reducing the impact of feral animals on Australia's unique fauna and flora. **[Become a SSAA member and join us!](#)**

Pre-hunt sighting for success - part 2

is not completely over, we are at least allowed to go out and enjoy our lifestyle. Operating as we do in small groups, or even alone, it's highly unlikely we will endanger ourselves or anyone else. We still need to be careful though.

I am President of the SSAA Northern Rivers Branch, and in line with SSAA NSW policy our Committee decided to re-open our range just outside Casino on July 4. Social distancing is taken very seriously and we followed the correct steps to re-open. Only those who occupy a bench are permitted in the shooting area and kept well apart. Others who attend must wait outside the shooting area until a bench is made available.

The stint each shooter can occupy a bench is limited. When the opportunity comes to sign in and pay fees only one person at a time is allowed. Hand sanitiser is constantly provided. Visit ssaa.org.au and get in touch with your local range for up-to-date information. ■



SSAA ACT inc

ssaaact.org.au



Majura Shooting Complex

50 Hector McIntosh Grove, Majura, ACT

Call the Range Office
02 6241 7313

Mon - Fri 9:00am - 4:00pm
Sunday 9:00am - 12:00 noon

General Enquiries

Email: secretary.ssaa.act@gmail.com
Mobile 0424 292 115
or through the contact form on website

See our website for more information on

- The Majura Shooting Complex
- Safety courses
- Calendar and Events
- Discipline info and contacts

With many shooting disciplines to choose from there is something for everyone!

ssaaact.org.au



The humble rabbit

worthy game for young and old

Peter d’Plesse



The humble rabbit and its close relation the hare have introduced generations of youngsters to hunting. They have provided the basis of countless meals shared for centuries. The rabbit can be a pest but also a useful food resource. This is one game animal that deserves appreciation as well as active control.

The common rabbit originated from Spain and south-west France. They were brought to England in the 12th century by the Normans and kept in captivity as a source of meat and fur. Some escaped and became so common that farming them was no longer economic. They bred rapidly with little persecution from predators. Although favouring a warmer, drier climate, they quickly established themselves in the wilds of Britain.

Following colonisation in 1788, rabbits became rife in Australia. What started as an opportunity for sport and a source of food soon became a scourge. Their rate of spread in Australia is believed to be the

fastest of any colonising mammal in the world. They were in Western Australia and the Northern Territory by 1900. Expansion was aided by existing native animal burrows and habitat modification for farming, as well as further deliberate introductions for meat and hunting. In the 1950s myxomatosis was instituted to curb their numbers. Other infectious controls have been used but rabbits managed to survive and are once again a reasonably common feral game animal.

There are seven different genera in the family classified as rabbits. These include the European rabbit (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*), Cottontail rabbit (genus *Sylvilagus*; 13 species) and the Amami rabbit (*Pentalagus furnessi*), an endangered species in Japan. There are many other species and along with pikas and hares, make up the order Lagomorpha. All breeds of domestic rabbit originate from the European version.

The male is called a buck and the female a doe. Rabbits generally measure 400-450mm in length with ears about 85mm long. They have compact bodies with long,

powerful hind legs. Rabbit fur is usually long and soft, grey/brown in colour with white underparts and a short tail. Long ears are an adaptation for detecting predators. The smallest is the pygmy rabbit (*Brachylagus idahoensis*), 200mm in length and 0.4kg in weight. The largest rabbits grow to 500mm and more than 2kg. Wild rabbits are fairly uniform in body proportion and size. In Australia, adults are usually 1-2.25kg in weight and 350 to 450mm in length.

Rabbits live in environments covering desert, tropical forest and wetland, including urban and coastal areas. They are abundant in grassland zones where the soil allows them to make extensive, well-drained burrows. They also like hedges or patches of woodland that offer shelter and cover. As herbivores they feed on grass and leafy weeds. They prefer low vegetation, deep sandy soils and refuge such as scrub, blackberries or fallen logs. Large warrens are constructed up to 3m deep and 45m long. These complexes are generally larger in more open country. Warrens provide

The humble rabbit - worthy game for young and old

cover and protection from predators and extreme temperatures. They allow rabbits to live in open grasslands, grazed pasture and arid land.

Where there is abundant surface cover, rabbits may live above ground. They eat all vegetable matter and will gnaw tree bark in winter months. A secret to survival is that they re-swallow up to 80 per cent of their faeces to use food more efficiently in a procedure known as refection.

As part of their digestive process rabbits drop two types of faecal pellets, soft and hard. The soft pellets, produced mainly during the day, are eaten directly from the anus. This is called coprophagy. It allows the extraction of remaining protein and moisture from food and more efficient digestion of fibrous plant material. It assists survival with minimal free water. Hard pellets seen on the ground are the end result of this digestion practice and are usually dropped during late afternoon and night.

As herbivores, rabbits eat a wide variety of plants including crops, roots, pastures and young trees and vines, preferring short, succulent plants. Nine rabbits equate to about one sheep. They feed rapidly for the first half-hour of grazing, usually late afternoon, followed by about half an hour of more selective feeding. During this period they will excrete many hard faecal pellets that won't be re-ingested. In a low threat environment they may stay outdoors for hours to continue grazing.

They use regular trails, which are scent marked with faecal pellets. Most rabbits are solitary and sometimes territorial, coming together only to breed or forage in small groups. They are active throughout the year with no species known to hibernate. They are generally nocturnal and relatively silent. Other than loud screams when frightened or caught by a predator, the only sound signal is a loud foot thump made to indicate alarm or aggression.

Scent plays an important role in contact. They possess well-developed glands throughout their body and rub them on fixed objects to indicate group identity,

sex, age, social and reproductive status and territorial ownership. Urine is also used in chemical communication. When danger threatens, they generally freeze and hide under cover. If chased by a predator, they engage in quick, irregular movement intended for evasion and confusion rather than to outdistance a pursuer. This behaviour often makes a shotgun more effective than a rifle.

Rabbits have a visual field of almost 360 degrees. They are blind in a 10-degree arc directly in front and have a binocular overlap of about 20 degrees. They are good at spotting foxes and hunters sneaking up on them but not so good at judging how far away the danger is. Humans see objects across an arc of about 180 degrees directly in front without moving our eyes or head. About 140 degrees of this field is binocular overlap, allowing us to judge distance quite well.

Rabbits generally breed at a young age with litters of up to seven. They breed four or five times a year as the gestation period is only 28 to 31 days. Newborn rabbits are naked, blind and helpless. Mothers are almost absentee parents, being remarkably inattentive. They commonly nurse their young only once a day for just a few minutes. This lack of attention is balanced by the fact that rabbit milk is highly nutritious and among the richest of all mammals'. The young grow rapidly and are weaned in about a month. They emerge from the

warren at about 18 days and leave the nest after 23-25 days.

Survival of young rabbits varies with seasonal conditions and the incidence of disease. The average lifespan of wild rabbits is about six to nine years. Females can become pregnant four days after the birth of kittens, hence the saying 'breeding like rabbits'. If sufficient feed is available females breed at any time of the year. Breeding is determined by rainfall and the early growth of high-protein plants. During this time, territorial groups are formed, containing one to three males and seven to 10 females, led by a dominant pair. In less favourable conditions they still produce one or two litters each year.

Warrens or other shelter are essential for survival so destruction of these may reduce the local rabbit population. Rabbits are susceptible to predators and disease. In Australia, the most significant predators include feral cats, foxes and dingoes. Two of the most deadly diseases to rabbits are myxomatosis and rabbit haemorrhagic disease known as calicivirus. However, the variable virulence of different virus strains and increased genetic resistance reduced their effectiveness as biological controls. When each virus was first released rabbit populations were reduced by up to 98 per cent in some areas. Both diseases are transmitted by insect vectors such as flies, mosquitoes and fleas.

The only animal in Australia that could



Two classic Boys' rifles that taught generations of youngsters about firearm safety while hunting small game. Top is a Winchester Model 1902 (post-1914) and a Remington No. 6, both in .22 Short and Long Rifle.

The humble rabbit - worthy game for young and old

be confused with the rabbit is the hare (*Lepus capensis*). It has longer, black-tipped ears, longer legs and a loping gait. Hares are surface dwellers and don't construct warrens. Rabbit droppings can be similar to the hare, depending on the food eaten. Scrapes, dung heaps, burrows and warrens are evident when rabbits are present. Very young rabbits, 20 to 60 days old, are more likely to disperse than older rabbits. Adult rabbits rarely disperse. Most dispersal is from warrens with a high rabbit density to warrens with a low density or to adjacent social groups. Rabbits don't usually travel vast distances, but movements in excess of 20km have been recorded.

Apart from human control strategies, natural mortality does not suppress a rabbit population. Kitten mortality in the wild is extremely high, with up to 80 per cent dying before they reach three months of age. However, in a favourable year 85 per cent mortality is needed to suppress a tenfold population increase. Predation can account for substantial losses of both healthy and starving rabbits. Besides the fox, dingo, cat and dog there are a number of avian species that prey on the rabbit in Australia. Wedge-tailed eagles are probably the most effective, followed by goshawks, falcons and barn owls. Ravens, goannas and snakes can also prey on kittens.

Rabbits inhabit 70 per cent of Australia and are widespread throughout most locations where they are found. They affect 75 Commonwealth listed threatened plant species and five endangered ecological communities. In spite of their small size, rabbits are Australia's most costly pest vertebrate animal. Australian native vegetation is highly sensitive to rabbit damage. Forestry and tree plantations also suffer extensive losses due to grazing rabbits.

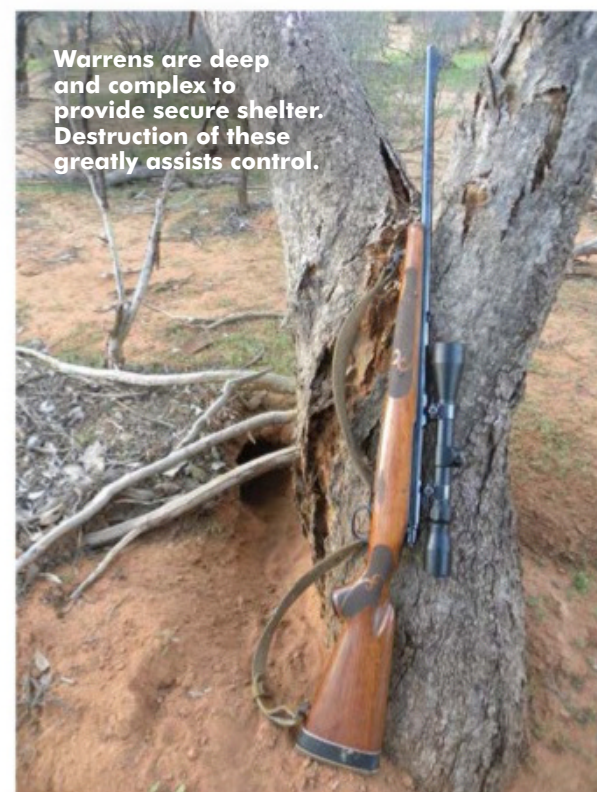
Erosion caused by denuded vegetation from rabbit grazing has a significant impact on dam catchments, water supplies and topsoil. Burrowing can undermine roads, culverts, buildings and sites of cultural significance. Rabbits compete with native wildlife for food and shelter. They also affect native

plants by ring barking, grazing and by preventing regeneration of seedlings. Digging and browsing leads to a loss of vegetation cover, which in turn results in slope instability and erosion.

Rabbits compete with livestock for pasture. This may result in running fewer livestock, lower wool clips, breaks in the wool, lower reproduction rates, lower weight gains and perhaps early deaths during drought. Reduced lambing rates may occur due to higher fox numbers encouraged by an elevated rabbit population. Rabbits may have played a role in the extinction of native species. There have been no known native mammal extinctions north of the range of the rabbit since European settlement. Most of the extinctions within the rabbits' range occurred after the bunnies arrived but before the onset of the fox. Rabbits may not have been the main cause of extinction for these species but are strongly implicated.

Recreational hunters can play a useful role in rabbit control over local areas. Spotting, walking up over a shotgun, sniping at short or long range with an airgun, rimfire or centrefire, trapping, ferreting or incidental shooting while seeking other game are rewarded by gaining the basis of a good meal. Given the importance of scent to the rabbit in detecting threats, working the wind greatly assists the hunter. Vision is also important to the rabbit. Slow movement by a hunter with pauses to study the landscape can reduce detection. With its weakness in judging distance, careful stalking can put a hunter into .22 rimfire or .410 shotgun range. Other calibres and gauges are even more effective but the main two have delivered many meals to landowner families.

The rabbit even played a small part in the development of the breechloading rifle by Captain Patrick Ferguson. The design incorporated a flintlock rifle using an interrupted screw thread operated by a rotating triggerguard. One turn lowered a breech plug to allow loading of ball and powder. Compared with the famous Kentucky



Warrens are deep and complex to provide secure shelter. Destruction of these greatly assists control.

rifle, his version could deliver six times the volume of fire every minute with accuracy out to 200 yards.

This was at a time when the Brown Bess musket might hit a man-sized target with one of every three shots at 50 yards. To test his design Ferguson recruited 10 militiamen, mostly his father's employees, and trained them in handling his new rifle to hunt rabbits. The squad could deliver more than 70 shots a minute. Following that field test Ferguson's last doubts were cast aside. He took the rifle to the American War of Independence - but that's another story.

In a different era, hunting small game such as the rabbit encouraged manufacturers to market reduced scale firearms referred to as Boys' rifles. Children were taught safe firearm handling to help feed the families of people on the land. It also instilled in them responsibility and self-discipline.

Times change but the rabbit is still a worthy target for older hunters aiming to stay active after years of chasing bigger game. The rabbit appeals to all age groups and should be valued while being controlled. Stalking the humble rabbit teaches and sharpens hunting skills, keeps us active, results in a fine meal and controls a feral animal in a way that is environmentally sensitive.

Enjoy the hunt. ■



Tuscan rabbit

Alison Purdon and Peter d’Plesse

Italy has a long and proud history of producing fine sports cars and shotguns with great aesthetic appeal. They possess the elusive X-factor that stems from the Italian lifestyle and culture. This carries through to their cuisine. Food is to be savoured, not just eaten.

The Tuscan region is known for its rich game such as wild boars, hares, fallow deer, roe deer and pheasants. The flavours of this recipe capture the essence of Tuscany. Enjoy with crusty bread and a glass of good red wine.

Ingredients

- 1 whole rabbit, jointed (approximately 1.5kg)
- 2 tablespoons plain flour, seasoned with salt and pepper to preference
- ¼ cup (60ml) olive oil (3 tablespoons)
- 1 teaspoon fennel seeds
- 2 onions, chopped fine
- 3 slices long cut bacon, diced with rind removed
- 4 garlic cloves, chopped
- 1 cup (250ml) white wine
- 1/3 cup (80ml) balsamic vinegar
- 400g can diced tomatoes
- 400g can cherry tomatoes
- 2 tablespoons of low salt chicken stock powder
- ¼ cup of sliced black olives
- 2 sprigs of rosemary, leaves chopped fine
- 2 tablespoons brown sugar
- 4 tablespoons chopped flat leaf parsley

Method

Joint rabbit and dust in seasoned flour, shaking off excess (use a plastic bag to ease clean-up).

Heat 2 tablespoons oil in a pan over medium heat and brown rabbit until golden all over.

Place to one side.

Heat remaining 1 tablespoon of oil in the pan used to brown the rabbit and cook fennel, onion, bacon and garlic, stirring until soft and golden.

Add wine and half the vinegar, simmer for 3-4 minutes until reduced by half.

Add tomatoes, rosemary, olives and chicken stock powder and bring to the boil.

Add rabbit pieces, cover and simmer slowly for 1 ¼ hours or until rabbit is tender.

Stir in remaining vinegar, parsley and 2 tablespoons of brown sugar.

Add any further salt and pepper to taste.

Scatter with extra chopped parsley and sliced olives to garnish.

Serve with rice or mashed potato and warm, crusty bread.



The finished dish, garnished and served up for a succulent treat.



If you like to compete, plink, target shoot, need to sight in a firearm, or just want to Try Shooting, then come for a visit - your first is free.

From the wilds to the wok

venison Asian style

David Hughes helps deer hunters infiltrate the household menu



This nice Tasmanian fallow doe represents an ideal source of venison for the wok.

An hour or two after darkness falls, the intrepid deer hunter returns to the expectant household – the rest of the family are already halfway through their dinner. Lifting their gaze from their chicken and chips, the hunter of the house presents as a dirty, rugged figure, yet with a beaming smile and proudly raising a bag of hard-won venison for the family.

The long-suffering cook rolls their eyes to heaven in anticipation of the blood-oozing treasure about to challenge the suburban refrigerator. From prior experience they can already picture the unrecognisable lumps of deep crimson meat, swimming in red exudate and with a few coarse dark hairs thrown in for good measure. Confusion arises about what to do with this culinary blessing.

This scenario clearly plays out with increasing frequency in Australian households. In recent years, the proliferation of deer and deer hunting guarantees that the traditional household menu is under threat from venison. To boot, the eating of red meat is ever-increasingly portrayed as some sort of barbarian rite, and since venison is a dark red meat, it is understandably a little bit beyond the comfort zone for the average Aussie home cook.

This article is aimed squarely at making the hunter's hard-won treasure readily acceptable to a sceptical culinary audience. This is a two-stage strategy to win the hearts of the unconverted. The first stage overcomes the modern household's dogma that meat must be presented in convenient

hygienic packages, free of bloody drip-loss and inconvenient contaminating hairs. The second stage provides an easy recipe that the erstwhile hunter can prepare as the crowning glory to their hunter-gatherer endeavours.

Stage one addresses the presentation of the venison. Ideally venison should first be aged under refrigeration for up to a week to allow the meat to naturally tenderise. The muscles should then be separated into meal-sized portions according to the intended cooking method – roast, steaks or whatever.

Most silver skin and sinew should be removed, along with any bruising or other blemishes. Using a small cryovac machine (readily available from department stores), the venison cuts can be hygienically refrigerated and then frozen. Venison can be stored in this fashion for long periods; certainly more than a year. The vacuum packaging eliminates freezer-burn and the absence of air also reduces development of rancidity due to the slow oxidation of any fat that is present.

Having transformed the wild-caught meat into a form that is more presentable, and hence recognisable as potential fare for the family, the next step is to generate a tasty meal. This cunning plan will anchor future support for venison to appear on the menu more regularly.

The following recipe is one that I cook routinely at home. It passes the 'wife test' – and let me tell you this is no small feat, as my wife is a fantastic cook (whereas I never progressed much beyond 'meat and three veg').



Starting the transformation of wild-caught meat into a form that is recognisable as potential fare for the family. A full hind leg may be a challenge to the uninitiated.



Removing the femur opens up the leg, revealing the structure of the main muscles.



The leg muscles can be easily separated along the natural lines of membrane and sinew.



The leg muscles separated into user friendly portions ready for hygienic vacuum packaging.



Presentation of venison cuts needs to match the expectations of the modern household cook. Shrink wrapping under vacuum does the trick.



Venison stir-fry

Ingredients (serves two)

- A piece of venison (250-400 grams), preferably from tender yearling animal – backstrap, silverside, girello and topside all work well. Trim off any residual silver skin or sinew. Slice into pieces about 1 cm thick and 4 cm long.
- Black pepper.
- Light soy sauce.
- Sesame oil.
- Canola or peanut oil.
- One heaped teaspoon of cornflour, slurred in about 50 ml cold water.
- Small clove of garlic, peeled and finely chopped.
- One fresh chilli, finely chopped.
- Small knob of ginger, finely chopped.
- 1-2 spring onions, sliced.
- 2-3 bunches bok choy – separate tops and stalks, large slices.
- ½ capsicum, sliced according to taste.
- Generous handful of snow peas, or similar amount of sliced green beans.
- 1 zucchini, thinly sliced.
- 1 carrot, thinly sliced.
- Half cup of water.

Method

Sprinkle venison liberally with freshly ground black pepper and light soy sauce.

Allow to marinate for a minimum of half an hour.

Heat oil in the wok until smoking (refer also to tips for wok cooking outlined below).

Add about a third of the garlic, ginger and chilli.

Stir with a wok spatula (aka wok chan) until spices are lightly browned and the oil infused with flavour.

Add the meat slowly, and stir slowly for 1-1 ½ minutes until sealed.

Remove the meat from the wok and set aside.

Repeat the infused oil steps, then add vegetables in the order of their required cooking times - first carrot and bok choy/choy sum stems. Allow one minute.

Add capsicum, zucchini and peas. Allow another minute.

Add tops of green vegetables.

Immediately add half cup of water around the inside of the wok above the food, then put a lid on for one minute to steam all the vegetables.

From the wilds to the wok - venison Asian style

Reduce heat, stir in 2 tablespoons of soy sauce and 6-10 drops of sesame oil.

Add venison, the rest of the fresh chilli, ginger and garlic, then stir to combine.

Make a well in the middle of the wok and pour in the cornflower suspension.

Stir the cornflower through until it thickens and creates a glossy sheen all over the vegetables and meat.

Avoid over-cooking at this stage – the steps post-steaming should take no more than a couple of minutes.

Pour the contents of the wok onto a warmed platter, call the troops to order, and place it in the centre of the table for immediate serving.

Serve with steamed rice.

The quality of the outcome is heavily dependent on the ability to deliver plenty of heat to the wok at the right time. Gas is the only real option for stir-frying, especially for bigger quantities of food. Burners are

available for both LPG and natural gas. LPG has a higher pressure compared to natural (town) gas. Wok burners using the latter have a bigger diameter jet to compensate for the lower pressure and hence deliver about the same calorific output.

The average wok burner on a free-standing barbecue is rated at 12-14 Mega Joule/hour heat capacity - roughly equivalent to the same number of kilo-British thermal unit (kBTU) for those imperial-minded folk. However, for professional-quality stir-frying, you need several times this heat capacity. Admittedly, a standard barbecue wok burner can be made to work, but only if you are cooking for two people and you are adding room temperature meat very slowly.

In fact I persevered in that fashion for some years. However, more often than not stewed and tough meat is the result of inadequate heating capability. If you want to seriously stir-fry, consider a rig that is rated at 50MJ/hour or more.

Even though I am not much of a cook, I could easily see the difference after I upgraded to the Rambo wok burner. My venison slices would be lightly browned in under two minutes and no matter how many vegetables were dumped in together, it would furiously sizzle rather than stew away in laboured fashion.

With the right equipment and a little practice, deer hunters who were formerly a bit frightened to take charge in the kitchen can be stir-frying like contestants on 'Iron Chef'. With familiarity, other vegetables can be substituted according to seasonal availability, or what just happens to be in the fridge. Rehydrated shitake mushrooms, bean sprouts, celery and various Chinese greens can all supplement the ingredients previously mentioned. Pretty soon, converts to venison stir-fry will be clamouring for more. Imagine family pressure to do MORE hunting. Maybe it's not a dream? ■



The transition from the wilds to the wok is complete. A tasty dish by any standard.



Steady as she goes

the Stukeys Shooting Bench

Michael Arnold

I have fired rifles and handguns from many portable rests. It would be inaccurate to call any of them 'solid'. In particular, when I need to see how well a firearm can perform, all such rests could not provide the stability I needed.

Enter the Stukeys Shooting Bench, which is portable but incredibly solid. I decided that one way to test the stability would be to run a simultaneous comparison with the fixed, concrete benches at my local shooting club. I also wanted to carry out

an analysis that included widely-differing firearms.

I decided to use two rifles: my synthetic-stocked, Model 700 Remington chambered to 7mm Remington Magnum; and my wooden-stocked .35 Whelen Improved. The Model 700 fired from 100-400 yards, the .35 Whelen fired from 100 yards and 200 yards. Each of the rifle x distance combinations would be fired from the Stukeys Bench and a concrete bench.

The ammunition for my test was 200-grain Spire Point loads for the .35-calibre and 162-grain ELD-X cartridges for the 7mm. I also used an Armageddon Gear Waxed Canvas Optimized Game Changer for supporting the buttstock of the two rifles. This is what I refer to as my 'retro forearm support system' ie, sandbags; and a Vortex Razor HD 22-48x65 (Angled) spotting scope. The scope was critical for quickly calling impact points and adjusting trajectories at the longest distances.



Steady as she goes - the Stukeys Shooting Bench

The bench and legs are not a spindly, lightweight (table top + legs = 32.5kg) unit. However, both the bench top and one leg have welded handles that make them easier to move around. The legs are bundled into a caddy. They can be carried by the handle provided. The weight and the specially-designed leg socket and nut plate increase the solidity of the Stukeys Bench.

The stool provided in the 'Expert Package' is also heavy and sturdy. It has a firm cushion and heavy base that prevents wobble. The bench top is a dense wood laminate covered with polyurea. The coating is resistant to abrasions and moisture.

Shooting trial

After assembly came the range work with the two rifles, from the Stukeys and fixed concrete bench. Though both are bolt-action firearms chambered to heavier calibres, the similarity pretty much ends there.

The .35 Whelen Improved has a walnut stock while the 7mm Remington Magnum wears a synthetic frame. Likewise, though both types of ammunition yielded approximately 2900fps at the muzzle, the ballistics are radically different, with a much flatter trajectory provided by the lighter 7mm bullet.

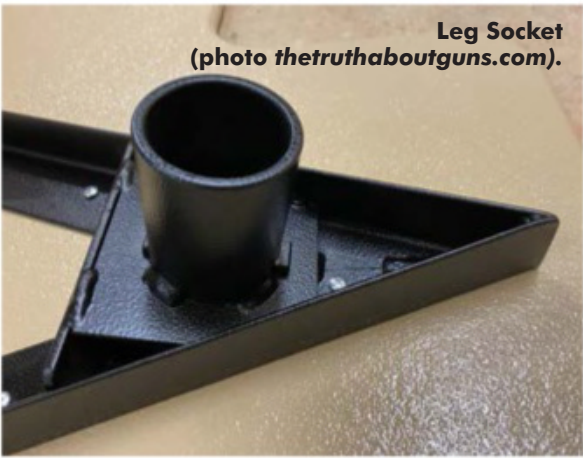
It was clear from the first shot that the Stukeys Bench was going to work well. There was absolutely no wobble from the bench or the stool. The ground I was on was not smooth, or perfectly level. Yet in spite of the tough terrain, the portable bench was stable, even during the 7mm



Remington Magnum's recoil. The weight and solidity of the leg attachments seem to have been the key.

The 47 and 23 cartridges were fired through the 7mm and .35-calibre respectively. These included sight-in rounds at 100 yards and then additional rounds for the 7mm at 300 yards and 400 yards. The targets pictured show the results from the Stukeys rest for a 100-yard group from the .35 Whelen Improved (left) and 400-yard group from the 7mm Remington Magnum.

The two graphs illustrate the data gathered at each distance, off the concrete bench and the Stukeys Bench. Excepting the 300-yard distance (I have no idea why I shot so poorly off the concrete bench), the results for the 7mm Remington Magnum



suggest a slight increase in accuracy off the concrete bench, compared to the Stukeys.

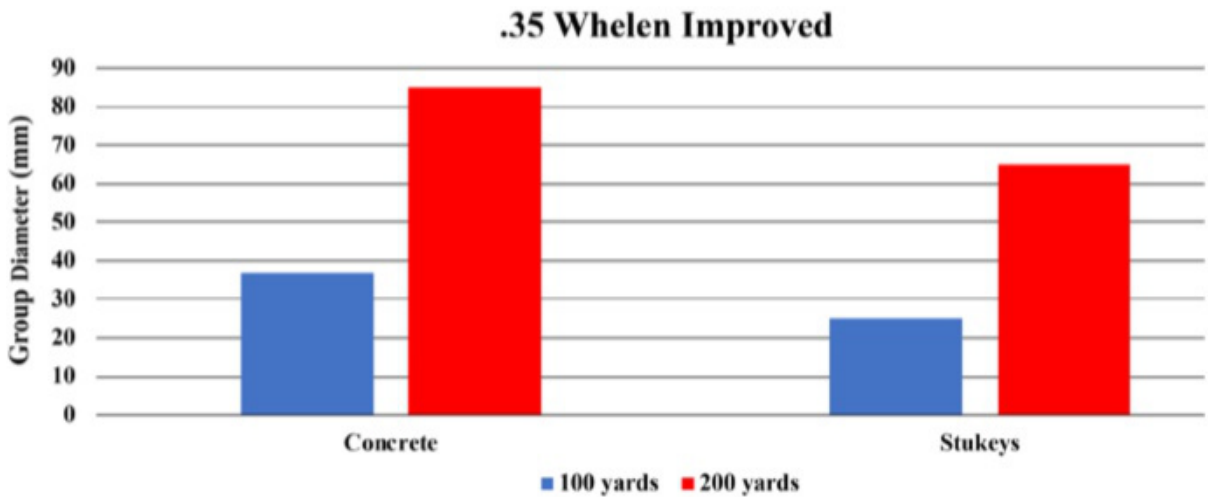
However, both rest types – even the aberrant 300-yard data from the concrete platform – resulted in sub-MOA groups.

In contrast to the 7mm results, the accuracy of the .35-calibre when shooting from the Stukeys Shooting Bench was markedly better than when I fired from the concrete stand. My sample sizes are not large enough to state that there is a statistically significant difference in accuracy, but the only sub-MOA result was from the Stukeys platform (at the 100-yard distance).

Conclusions

It is clear to me that I have discovered the portable bench that will fill the need for a shooting platform for the shooting range and certain hunting applications.

These will include blinds for either calling in predators or shooting pest species, such



Graph - Stukeys versus concrete - .35 Whelen Improved accuracy data.

Steady as she goes - the Stukeys Shooting Bench

as rabbits. Regardless of the application, the Stukeys Shooting Bench will provide a stable platform without requiring smooth, perfectly-level terrain.

Visit ssaa.org.au to view my SSAA TV video showing assembly of the bench and its steadiness during the 7mm Remington Magnum's recoil. ■



Specifications:

Height: 90cm

Bench top: 2cm, 13 Laminate solid birch; coated with polyurea

Width of bench top (widest): 80cm

Width of bench top ('neck'): 44.5cm

Distance between legs on ground (front-to-back): 112cm

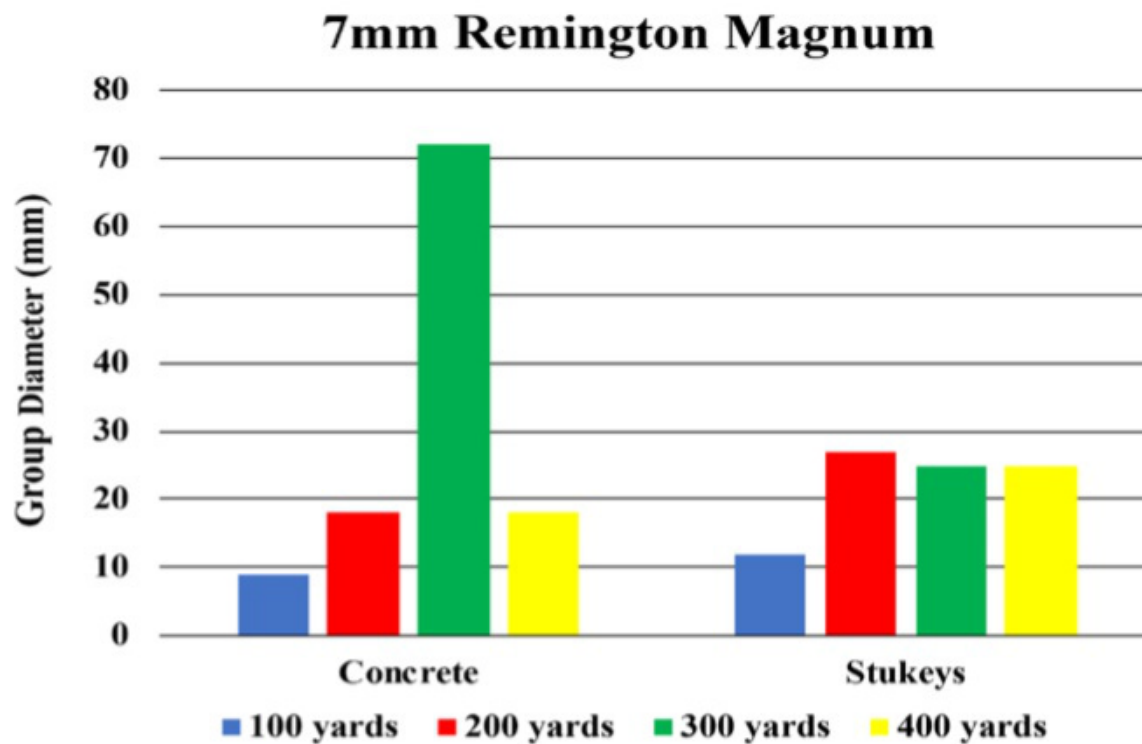
Distance between legs on ground (side-to-side): 90cm

Legs: 4cm Bare Handrail Schedule 40 steel

Nut plates: 4140 CNC steel

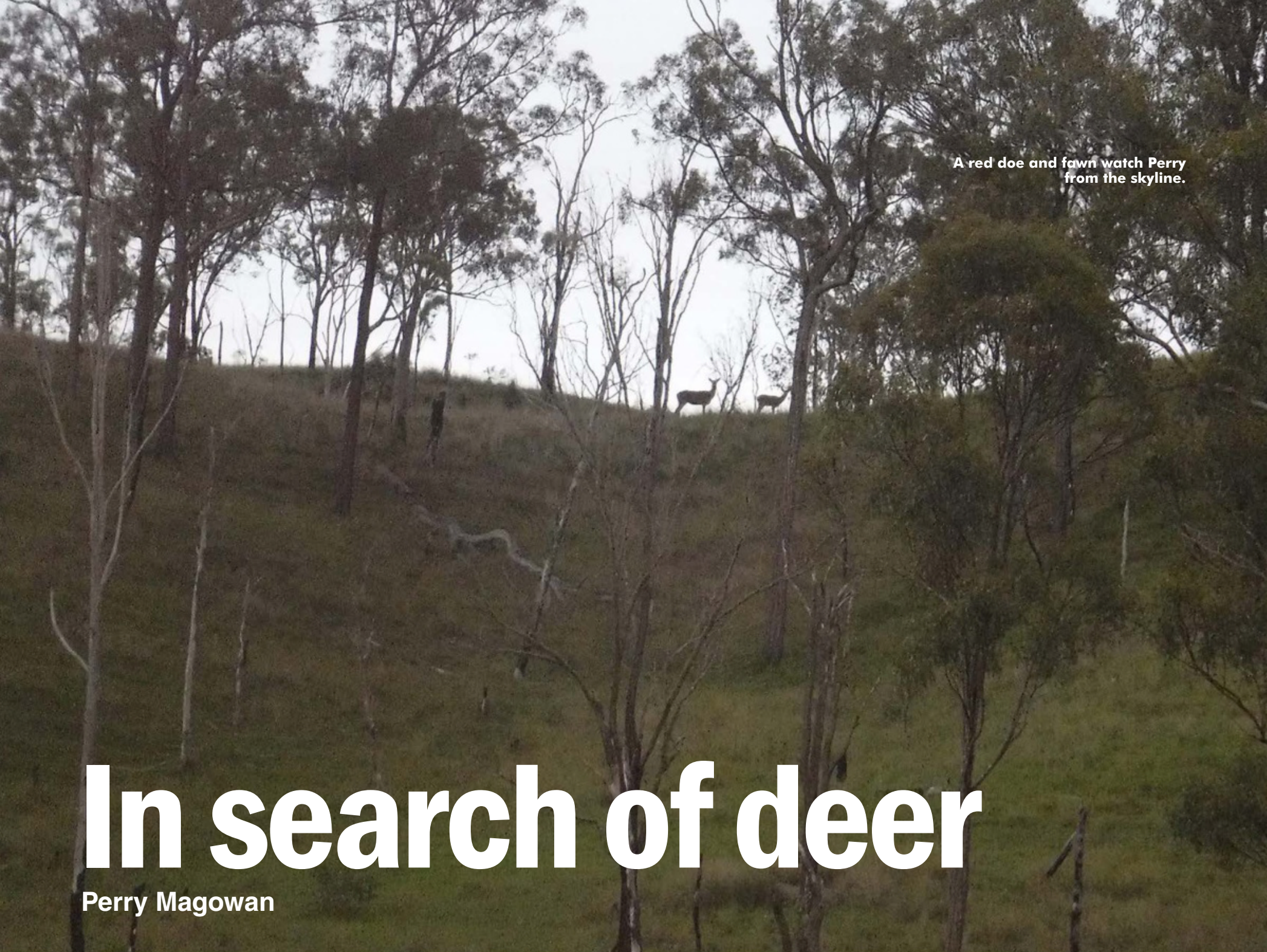
Manufacturer's suggested retail price (MSRP): \$2629 (Expert Shooter Package, includes leg caddy and premium seat)

Order from: stukeysbenches.com



Graph - Stukeys versus concrete - 7mm Remington Magnum accuracy data.





A red doe and fawn watch Perry from the skyline.

In search of deer

Perry Magowan

The south-east Queensland landscape looked dismal. When I put my trail camera out to catch photos of what was about, the dam that I like to set up on was bone dry. It's the first time I have ever seen that dam dry. The property owner told me later that it's the third time it has been dry since it was built some 60-odd years ago.

There was little to no grass on a barren landscape and the west branch of the Brisbane River was all but dried up, as were a lot of cattle dams. A spring feed gully was as rare as hen's teeth. With that said, I found a place to put my camera.

As I was driving out of the property four red does and one last year fawn were standing some 180m away on the top of a small ridge. Stopping the car and stepping out, I leant my rifle over the bonnet for a steady prop and took a shot at the fawn,

who dropped to the ground. The hardest part was walking up the hill, gutting him and carrying him back to the car. What a tasty meat animal he would turn out to be.

My brother Darcy and I returned a month later so I could retrieve my trail camera and see what might be around. What a miraculous change to the landscape, as the area had seen a few good showers in the meantime, with 100mm high green grass covering the land. Good feed for cattle and deer alike, but still no water in the dams or river. We went to the hut and unloaded our gear, then retrieved the trail cam.

I have to say I was disappointed with the photos on the trail camera. Only a small group of does and a handful of small stags seemed to be in the area. Even so, we decided to have an afternoon hunt, camp the night in the hut and go out again the next morning. The humidity was extreme

and took its toll on both of us. Darcy noticed two deer in the distance about 1500m away. Through the riflescope, one looked to be a stag so with only an hour and a half of sunlight left we set off.

Moving as fast as we could without slipping, sliding and falling over on the steep terrain, we reached within 350m from where we had last spotted the deer. Luckily, we could see the ground through the short green grass. Normally, at this time of the year the grass is thick, knee to waist deep and much more difficult to travel through quickly, with hidden dangers everywhere.

At 150m uphill and to our right, the doe moved first with the stag not far behind her. They had gone further into the timber than we had expected. I pointed out to Darcy a fork in an ironbark tree. "Put your rifle through here and shoot," I said. Because of the high humidity and sweating, his



riflescope fogged up instantly. By the time he had taken out his hankie and wiped the scope and sighted the deer again, they were off through the timber, never to be seen again.

By then we were both spent, with a 1.5km uphill walk in broken rough country to the car in the dark. But that's deer hunting. The stags still hadn't started to roar yet. We had a sleep-in the next morning then packed up and headed home.

Two-and-half weeks later I returned for one more try. This time I took my wife Lorraine and dog Piper with me for three days. My lady loves camping and is a good shot too, just quietly.

After setting up the hut and settling her in, I jumped into the car and headed off for an afternoon hunt. I had in mind where I'd seen a mob of 17 does on the previous trip, which was a good place to start. Slowly

walking through the country for close to two hours, I hadn't seen a deer or any fresh sign either.

Crossing over into a different gully system is when things started to change almost straight away - was that a roar? Ten minutes later, yes! It was a stag roaring. I had to travel 500m around on the contour of the ridge to manage a peek at him. About 20 minutes after that, I was gazing across a narrow gully into timber and thick grass trees where the stag was roaring from.

No matter how hard and carefully I peered through the binoculars, I could not see him. Another stag's roar caught my attention 1200m to the south-east out in the open country. He was a big darkish brown beast holding six does. To approach him was impossible with the time left and cattle feeding in all areas between him and me. The stag in front of me must have seen

or scented me, as he disappeared. With 10 minutes of light left, I called it quits.

Deciding to walk up a gully, the shortest way back to the car, I spooked a doe and her fawn who ran up onto the top of the ridge before stopping on the skyline to look at me. This gave me time to take a photo of them before they trotted off. It was a long walk back to the car and I didn't reach the hut until after 8pm.

Kookaburras woke me up around 5am the next morning. Opening my eyes it seemed like it was going to be a great day, just perfect for deer hunting in the roar. I drove the 1.5km to the main road and headed to the far side of the property. After passing through a boundary gate I stopped and listened for 10 minutes. Not a sound.

Driving back I decided to stop near the property owner's memorial rock and pay my respects to his memory. As I

In seach of deer

approached the site, I took a photo and said: "Hi, old fella, how are things with you? Have you heard any stags roaring this morning?" Seconds later a stag roared about 350m down the same gully. I said to him: "There's one just down there, I'm going now to get him, I'll see you later."

Slowly making my way along the contour of the ridge leading into the gully and after travelling 180m or so, I sat down and checked the other side of the gully with the binoculars. There he was standing side-on at 300m or so. A dark brown beast with good main beam antlers, but it was too far of a shot for me.

Making my way 50m closer put me in an open spot with no trees around or any other cover. The stag had moved, so I sat down to watch and wait. One doe caught my eye then another. Four does in all was his group. He roared on top of the ridge 200m above the does and in light timber. I saw him go down the ridge line and vanish behind a small clump of scrub.



Perry's wife Lorraine keeps her eye in with the .22LR.



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A view from the firing line at the new range.



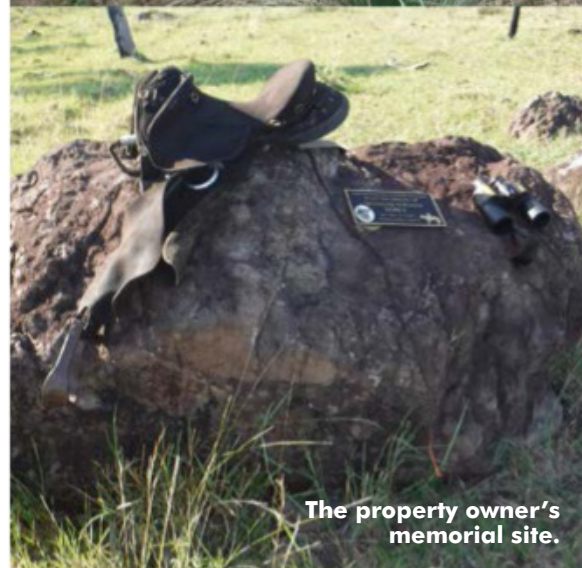
Stump removal in progress at the site.



Not hard to see where the deer are feeding in the fresh pick.



The dry cattle dam where Perry usually sets his trail camera.



The property owner's memorial site.



Perry's double four red stag.

For 15 minutes I searched with the binoculars, heard and saw nothing. The stag was standing with the does. It was at least 240m across the gully, so leaning my elbows on my knees it was now or never. He was standing side-on staring straight at me.

Squeezing off the shot through the light timber, I found him 20m uphill from the gully bottom. He was a nice double four. About 10 minutes later while I was taking

meat off him, I heard deer moving back up the gully on the other side. One doe and her fawn followed by a young double two stag stopped opposite, giving me time to take some photos before they carried on.

Walking back to the car took quite some time and lots of spells. We packed up and returned home that afternoon, wondering what the next hunt will bring. ■

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ADDITIONAL BELTS AVAILABLE

Barrel cleaning

putting conjecture to the test

Don Caswell



I rarely let my rifles go more than 20 or 30 shots without cleaning the barrel. On the odd occasion when I have fired more shots without cleaning, I have never detected any deterioration in accuracy. And, of course at the range you will hear folks talk of never, or rarely, cleaning their centrefire rifles.

That led me to wonder just how many shots you could fire before a loss of accuracy could be measured. Tasco Sales Australia supplied the Fiocchi ammunition I used at my local SSAA range to test just what happened to accuracy when the barrel was not cleaned.

I used my Weatherby Vanguard HSP in .223 Rem for the testing with the Fiocchi factory ammo. I fired both the 55-grain polymer tipped EPN rounds and the 55-grain soft-points. Both shoot sub-MOA in my rifle but it is the soft-points that perform a smidge more accurately and are what the rifle is zeroed for. At 100 yards, the 55-grain EPN polymer tips shoot about 20mm to the left of the soft-points. All groups were shot on the 100-yard line.

I started with a well-cleaned barrel. I fired

three-shot groups and measured the group size as well as the group centre. Typically, the first shot from a clean barrel would shoot a bit high and left. The group size is the smallest circle that can be drawn to include the centre-points of all three holes in the group. I took the centre of that circle as the point of impact (POI) of the group. It is a long story, but to do that precisely turned out to be a challenging mathematical problem and led me to develop a computer program for assessing the data.

I plotted each group's size and the POI variation versus the number of rounds fired without cleaning the barrel. The POI variation is how far each group centre is from the average group centre over the first 30 rounds. That is based on the presumption that the POI might wander as barrel fouling increases out past the 30 rounds fired mark and is arbitrary really.

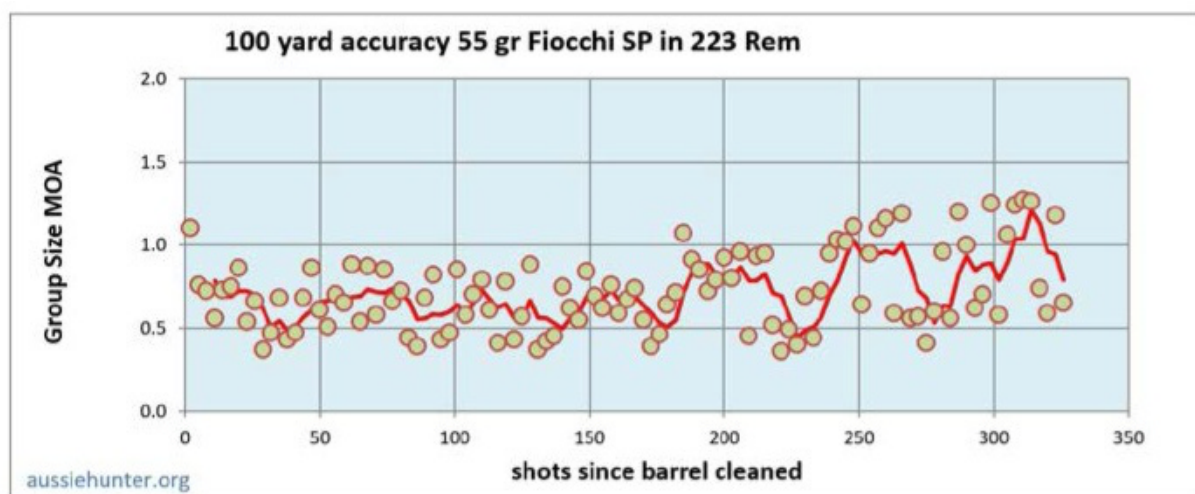
Initially, you can see that the average group size (the red line) was consistent. Likewise, the POI variation average (again, a red line). Evidence of a loss of accuracy (group size and POI variation) would be an obvious sustained trend away from those

initial values. I continued to visit the SSAA range, firing around 20-30 groups on each occasion. I was careful to avoid letting the barrel become too hot at these sessions because sometimes a hot barrel can influence accuracy. Once I thought the barrel was feeling too warm, I would retire the rifle to the rack and shoot another rifle. The weather did not cooperate much either. There was no rain but some blustery winds to contend with. How that affected results is hard to say, but not that much I feel.

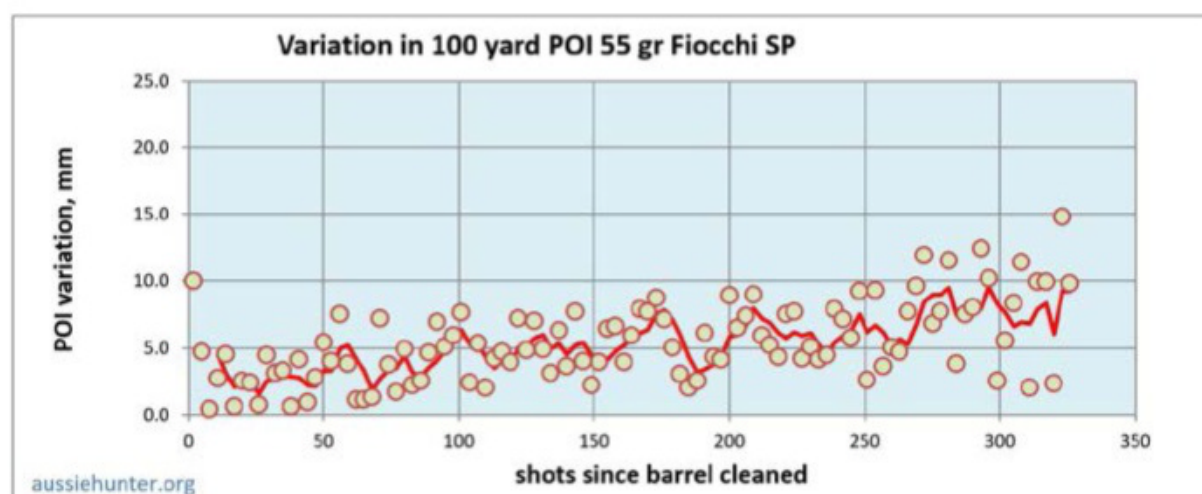
I shot soft-points and polymer tips separately, as well as both together in one combined sequence. The end result was quite interesting. Apart from the slight inherent accuracy difference, the graphs of results demonstrated the same story for all the ammo I tested. From a hunting perspective, you can see that the claim of barrel fouling not affecting accuracy is largely true.

However, there was a slight but noticeable drift off in accuracy (group size and POI) out past about 150 shots, for my rifle and ammo. On the numbers, it does not appear much but from the graphs you can see an increasing number of fliers pulling the

Barrel cleaning - putting conjecture to the test



Group size, three-shot groups, Fiochi 55-grain SP 223 Rem in a Weatherby Vanguard HSP.



Group centre, three-shot groups, Fiochi 55-grain SP 223 Rem in a Weatherby Vanguard HSP.

POI about. That sort of slight drift should be of concern to a varmint hunter while not being of much consequence to a hunter of larger game out to reasonable ranges.

I did not take the testing of a non-cleaned barrel out past 350 rounds as I was starting to feel guilty about that and beginning to worry about how much cleaning was ahead of me. The cleaning surprised me though. With about twice the effort I would expend on cleaning a rifle after 30 rounds, I was seeing clean patches on my 300-plus round fouled barrels. So that was another interesting learning outcome from the whole exercise.

It seems that, for hunters at least, the particular range myth about barrel cleaning is right. You can fire a lot of rounds without worrying about significant loss of accuracy due to barrel fouling. However, I will not be changing my habits and will continue to clean my barrel every 20 or 30 shots regardless. It is one of those routines, like polishing your shoes, that is just a worthwhile thing to do, I reckon. ■

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Gamey Swedish meatballs

Lynn Bain



Any game meat works well in meatballs.

Swedish meatballs are an excellent way to use the trim and offcuts from game animal butchery. Chopped or ground finely, this is a great means to eat recently hunted meats as any tenderness issues can be addressed by the mincing process.

To cook this recipe, instead of a camp-fire, I plugged a Tefal brand portable induction hotplate into a 240-volt outlet. Any pan or pot that is magnetic can be used on such a hob.

In Scandinavia, tinned/canned reindeer meatballs are available ('Joika' is one of the sales names). Historically, in the far north of Scandinavia meats such as reindeer and other game meals have been important elements of the local diet. Sometime, a few hundred years ago the dish Swedish meatballs originated.

Many traditional Nordic dishes employ simple, contrasting flavours. One such



Use longlife cream if possible. Yoghurt or sour cream are other options.

procedure is meatballs in a brown coloured sauce with the option of a tart tasting jam similar to cranberry jelly. Swedish meatballs are cooked in a rich, roux-based, creamy gravy made with beef or bone broth and sour cream. Apparently, Swedish meatballs are actually based on a recipe King Charles XII, of Sweden, brought home from Turkey in the early 18th century.

Ingredients

- 1 tablespoon cooking oil
- 18 (or so) prepared meatballs
- ¼ cup butter
- ¼ cup plain flour
- 2 cups beef stock
- 1 cup cream
- 1 tablespoon soy sauce (or Worcestershire sauce)
- 2 teaspoons prepared mustard freshly ground black pepper

Method

Heat the cooking oil in a fry pan over medium heat. Add the prepared meatballs to the pan and cook, occasionally shaking the pan to prevent the meatballs from sticking to it. When cooked through, remove the meatballs from the pan and place them to one side.

Next, melt the butter in the fry pan in which you cooked the meatballs. Once the butter has melted, sprinkle the plain flour evenly over it in the pan.

Stir the flour into the melted butter to form a roux, ensuring there are no lumps. Allow this mixture to simmer over a low heat for a few minutes to make sure the flour is cooked and there is no residual floury taste.

Pour the beef stock into the roux in the pan. Stir well to incorporate the stock into the roux.

Now add the cream to the stock mixture in the pan and stir thoroughly. Gently stir in the soy sauce (or Worcestershire sauce), mustard and a good grinding of black pepper.

Place the meatballs back into the fry pan. Poach the already cooked meatballs in the sauce over a low heat for approximately five to 10 minutes.

The completed Swedish meatballs and delicious sauce accompanied by pre-cooked noodles/pasta. Serve the meatballs with a generous helping of sauce. ■

Handy Hint

Worcestershire sauce is the traditional ingredient, but there are many dark sauces that will work well to colour the sauce brown (albeit with different flavours). On this occasion I've used a dark soy sauce.

Light and breezy

Spika Pack-Lite knife and Airflux cams

Ben Unten



I do not like the heat and yet here I was heading to far north Queensland in February, chasing chital deer.

Having previously sworn off summer hunts after a horribly hot New Year's Eve outing in cheap cotton cams, I had no lightweight camouflage clothing suitable for the trip. Spika provided their most casual set of Horizon camo pants and shirt along with a pack-lite skeleton knife.

According to the specifications, 'Airflux' refers to the mesh fabric used to make the clothing. The material is extremely lightweight at 90gsm and is quick-drying and highly breathable. It is engineered to allow maximum breathability while still remaining strong and durable.

It has been designed to allow moisture to evaporate through the materials, which is intended to keep you dry and cool. The outside of the fabric is soft and quiet.

Pants

The Horizon pants feature dual side pockets with YKK zippers and are a relaxed fit which is comfortable to move about in and entail Realtree Xtra camo print.

Shirt

The shirt has similar specifications to the pants but sports a chest pocket with a YKK zipper and a drop-tail cut (which means longer in the back) to increase coverage. The camo print is also Realtree Xtra.

Cap

The five-panel cap is lightweight and is adjustable via Velcro fastening at the back. It is designed to allow heat to be released from the top and sides of the head while permitting wind and air to pass through its camo exterior.

Pack-Lite knife

As we would be hiking large distances (we covered almost 15km on the first day), keeping pack-weight down, without having to 'go without' was a real priority.

In terms of blade ware, we were all hoping to take venison and a cape home with us.

Cue the new Spika Pack-Lite knife we got a peek at in the previous edition of *Australian Hunter*. It weighs only 37 grams and is 3.5mm thick with a 9.5cm long handle and 6.3cm long blade. It is 440 steel and has jimping (a blunt serrated section) on the back of the blade plus a curved, finger recess underneath to allow for better grip.

It comes with a snug-fitting plastic sheath to prevent it from damaging your pack or any of the other gear in it and is finished in a rust-resistant coating which is available in black, silver or orange (supplied).

Spika Pack-Lite knife and Airflux cams



The handy knee pad section on the pants.

The knife was sharp straight out of the box, but the first thing I do is put my own edge on all blade ware as this can take some time and is better done before you go, rather than in the field. I found that it did take a little longer to reshape the edge, which is often an indication that it will hold for longer. The handle can be wrapped in paracord for a more cushioned grip.

In the field

I stepped off the plane in Townsville and straight into what felt like a fan-forced oven, perfect conditions to test this gear out. The humidity seemed to be sitting just under one million per cent as I changed into the cams in preparation for the first hunt.

The gear was a comfortable fit and for comparatively large perforations in the mesh it allowed for modesty as it was not see-through. By chance, two of the other

hunters on this trip had also bought Spika Airflux hunting gear and they were equally happy with the performance of the clothing. Although on the first morning when we emerged from our rooms and stood together, I couldn't help thinking that we must have looked like the world's least talented, but best-fed boy band.

We started walking and I began to 'lightly perspire' and by 'lightly perspire' I mean sweat like a celebrity at an awards show hosted by Ricky Gervais. I paid attention to the light breeze blowing as we were spot-and-stalk hunting on foot so the wind direction was critical and even though the breeze was warm, the clothing absolutely allowed the draught to pass through the material and cool me down*.

In fact, the extreme heat and humidity were bearable to the point where I could ignore them enough to be able to concentrate on the main reason we were there - hunting.

At the end of the day I was lucky enough to shoot a chital stag with 28.3" (720mm) antlers with nice shape. It was a lovely representative head. Once the modelling

The Spika Pack-Lite knife is available in a range of colours.



session was over, the real work started as I wanted a chest or pedestal mount for this animal so the caping began.

The Spika Pack-Lite knife was brought out and I was in business. The knife was capable of performing all the basic cuts in the caping process, albeit slowly due to its compact size, but this was a real advantage when the more delicate work was required.

This was when I discovered that the knife seemed to be extra effective when you put your first finger to the jimping down the back of the blade and moved your second finger forward to the curved recess underneath. The flat section at the end of the handle helps to provide a more comfortable contact point in the heel of the hand.

We removed the head with the cape and returned to camp where the field knives were swapped for scalpel-bladed knives for the intricate areas of skin removal around the head. Eventually we finished up and enjoyed some well-earned fluid replacement.

In summary

I was extremely happy with the performance of the clothing. The increased air

Spika Pack-Lite knife and Airflux cams

flow means it is much more comfortable than cotton cams. The pants cope well with burrs and crawling on hands and knees does not damage the material.

This is due to a separate knee section of the pants which function like a knee pad would - without the padding.

Perhaps the only thing to be aware of is that it is possible to catch a little sun through the mesh (which is understandable). So the judicious application of sunscreen to areas like the tops of your shoulders - and perhaps your head if you are a little 'thin up top' would be well advised.

A blaze orange clothing option would be great to increase safety and maybe a broad-brimmed addition to the selection would be a plus to increase sun protection.

The knife is not what you'd call an 'all-rounder', it isn't meant to be. It is a compact, extremely lightweight blade which will perform a variety of field dressing tasks but is obviously better suited to the more detailed work in the field. It would make



Utilising the 'choked' grip.



Taking the cape was easy enough.

an ideal second knife in your pack. It would also be excellent as an 'everyday carry.'

Even though it was hellishly hot and humid, the trip was a fantastic success and we all had a great time. It was enough to convince me to do more summer hunts.

The Airflux Horizon pants retail for \$84.95. The shirt has an RRP of \$74.95 and the cap is \$29.95. The Pack-Lite knife costs \$35.

These items can be purchased at your local Spika stockists. For more information go to spika.com.au

*Footnote

The effectiveness of this clothing was greatly improved by using a backpack with a light-weight aluminium frame to allow air flow between the pack and the lower back. The cooling breeze can best be described as 'heavenly' in hot and humid conditions. ■

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A SSAA member advantage



Setting up a trail camera.

Pig out

Don Caswell

My farmer host suggested that since wild dogs were hard to come by, I better start shooting some pigs. I was happy to do so. At one favourite location, the trail cameras were showing the pigs were becoming regulars in the mid-afternoon.

The next day I had to pick up some spare parts from the roadhouse and figured I would combine a quick pig hunt with that job. My normal hours when chasing dogs are early morning and sunset. Walking into my spot in broad afternoon daylight seemed a bit weird. Also, I was carrying two rifles. I had my Sauer XT 101 in .243 Win and Ruger American in .22LR.

The plan, based on experience, was to wait for the adult pigs to start nosing around the dead cow that was on the ground, then shoot the sows and the boar if he hung around long enough. Then I would swap rifles and shoot as many of the little suckers that would mill about longer than the big pigs. If the pigs were on time, I would still

Boar, sow and piglets visit the carrion.



be able to make the roadhouse before the service centre closed at 5pm. I sat on the ground about 40m from the remains of the beast. She had been there for more than a week and the tropical climate had not been kind to her. I selected my position a bit to the side of the prevailing breeze, but every now and then the wind eddied and gave me a good whiff. I had about 45 minutes before I needed to hike back to the car and head for the roadhouse.

The appointed time passed without any sign of hogs. I could hear the gentle burbling of the creek and plentiful bird calls. Occasionally there was a vigorous rustling of the rainforest canopy on the other side of the creek. I reckoned it had to be tree kangaroos. All very interesting, but I was running short for time. Where were the pigs? I kept scanning. To my left there was a gap in the deep grass and a well-used game path up out of the creek bed that the pigs normally used to access the carcass. Something caught my eye in the creek bed about 50m away.

There was a long brown line that had not been there before. I was sure it was the back of the ginger boar that hung about with the sows. I had not heard anything at all and the line was not moving. I trained my 10x25 stalking binoculars on the object and could see the bristles on the boar's back. I even caught a glimpse of his tail a couple of times when he gave it a good wiggle. I figured the sows and piglets could not be too far away and carefully scanned to the more open creek bank to my left. When I looked back there was no sign of the boar. I had heard no sound of an alarmed boar crashing off into the jungle and figured he had just moved a little and taken himself out of sight.

Suddenly I just thought about standing up and sneaking over to the creek bank. I was confident I could do that and make a killing shot, but did not want the problem of trying to drag the dead boar out of the creek and up onto the bank. Better to stick to Plan A.

That was to sit tight and wait for him to walk up the game trail and into broad,

unhindered daylight. I waited and waited. No pig. I was going to miss my parts pick-up if some hogs did not show up soon. Finally, I saw a pair of big ginger ears. With excruciating slowness, the boar ever so gradually emerged from the creek's long grass. He was wet from the creek and looked quite chubby and content. He was certainly in no hurry to be anywhere.

Plan A had been to let him reach the carcass and the sows to appear before I shot. However, with time becoming tight, there was no sign of any other pigs. So I figured I would bop him as soon as he was fully into the open. When he finally took that last step and paused to look about again, I gave a little whistle to gain his attention. The Sauer was rock-steady on its bipod, the Zeiss 3-9x40 scope dialled into 3x. All I had to do was flick the safety to 'fire'. I shot him dead centre in the forehead with a Fiocchi 100-grain soft-point and the boar flopped where he stood.

Pandemonium broke loose. I could hear the splashing and crashing as at least three or four large pigs tore off into the jungle from the long grass right behind the dead cow. I could see grass and vegetation being

agitated, but not a hair on the hide of those pigs. Then a swarm of piglets erupted towards me. There must have been 20 representing three different size ranges from ankle-high newborns to older pigs nearly knee high. Suddenly being presented with so many darting targets at point-blank range was disconcerting. I did drop four with the .22LR before the rest disappeared across the creek and into the jungle, but felt that I should have done better under the circumstances. I can't account for being unaware of so many pigs so close to me. I had not heard or seen a sign of their presence and can only assume they were all just snoozing in the long creek bank grass the whole time.

After ensuring I had not left any wounded pigs, I made haste back to the car. There was no phone reception in that valley so I had to drive a half-kilometre up the ridge before I had a signal. I called the workshop and said I was going to be a bit late. The manager is a hunter as well and said he had to lock up and do some paperwork before he left for the night. If I could arrive there pronto, he had my parts and wanted to hear about my pig hunt. ■



The ginger boar.

The Browning Long Haul fixed blade knife

Damien Edwards



Full-length view of the Long Haul. Evident is the textured grip and titanium blade coating.

A knife is most assuredly one of the more useful and personal items in a hunter's pack. I think we can all concur with that. In a consumer's world where we have never been more spoiled for choice, the array of knives available is truly staggering.

It can be easily understood that the novice may feel more than just a bit overwhelmed when looking at the knife display in even a camping store, let alone the million for sale on Amazon or eBay. For those of you who are new to the knife world, wishing to 'dip your toes' into obtaining knives for specific applications, please permit me to offer a few recommendations on the Browning Long Haul fixed blade knife.

I can state from the onset that this particular knife is absolutely affordable, retailing for approximately \$70 through Winchester Australia. For your money you receive a knife of well thought out construction. The blade length is 4½" or just shy of 12cm and features a milled fuller. That's ample length for 90 per cent of bushcrafting applications as well as field dressing work. The blade is a hollow ground clip point. Blades of this style excel at skinning due to their beautiful gently curved bellies. The blade is given a grey titanium coating to help with prevention of corrosion.

The steel used in the composition of this knife is 7Cr. This is a Chinese composite steel comprised of roughly 18 per cent chromium, 1 per cent manganese and 0.75 per cent carbon. It is hardened

to a Rockwell of between 56-58. That's a pretty broad scale. What it basically means for the user is that this steel has reasonable corrosion resistance (this is elevated by the application of titanium) and sharpening the knife is a snap.

The handle is made from injection moulded black polymer with contrasting yellow accents. No way will you lose this thing if you put it down in the bush. It is ergonomically comfortable to grip and offers an amazing non-slip finish which is an absolutely invaluable feature. When dressing deer, feral pigs or cleaning scales off a bass or barramundi, a sure grip on your knife when your hands start to become wet is always appreciated.

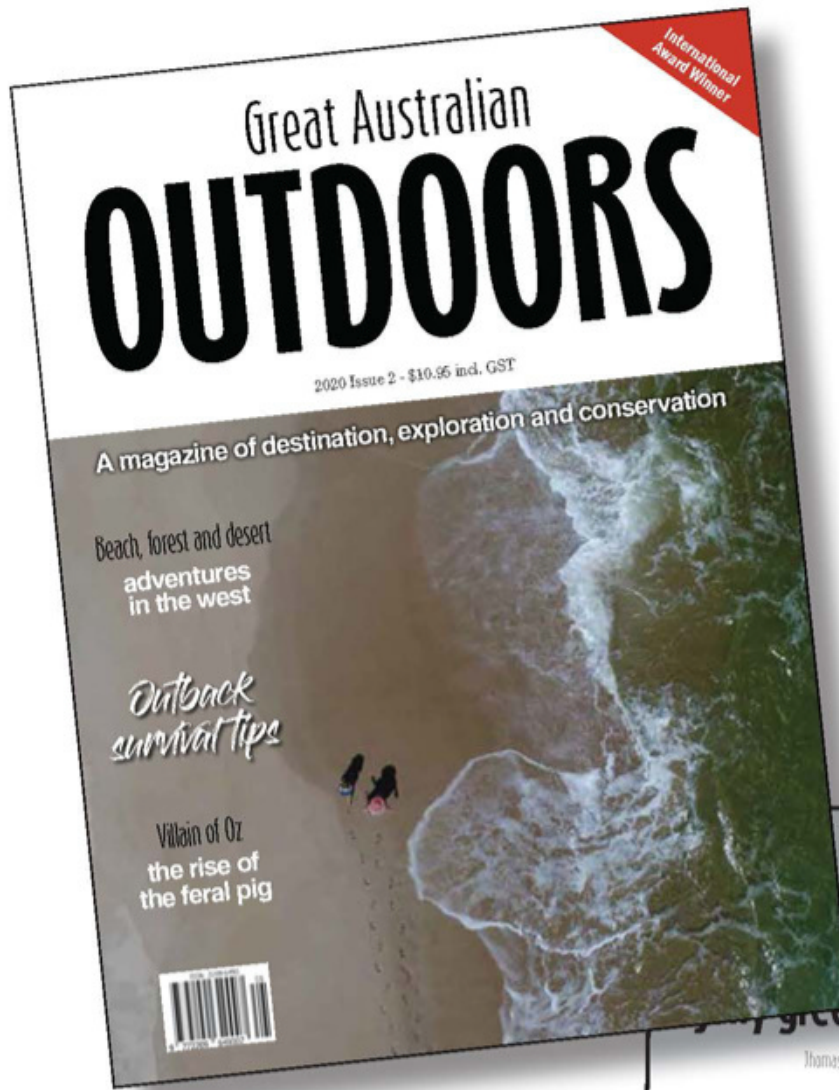
The knife is made in China. But the build quality and features incorporated into it are impressive for its price point. There is also a lanyard eyelet integrated into the rear of the handle for holding a ferro rod, whistle, sharpener, paracord or whatever else you like.

The sheath is an interesting one. It features an easy release buckle. The top of the sheath is then folded back and a stud is unfastened so the knife can be pulled out. This is one secure set-up.

The sheath material is a well-padded nylon which not only offers pretty fast drying, but a cushioning for the contents. There's even a small front pocket built into it for carrying the extras.

Here's the best bit - the rear of the sheath is molle compatible. As a former

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The Browning Long Haul fixed blade knife

I can state from the onset that this particular knife is absolutely affordable, retailing for approximately \$70



The sheath incorporates a buckle and a snap for secure storage. The little Velcro pocket is an added innovative feature.



The sheath is molle compatible. It easily attaches to Damien's 5.11 Rush 24 daypack.

soldier, don't get me started on molle, because I love the stuff. It's a truly excellent way to attach extra pouches and more to your molle backpack. The sheath is indeed long, but it's absolutely one of the best arranged ones I've come across in a long time. It will be perfectly at home attached to the shoulder straps of your hunting or daypack for easy access.

Or the top of the sheath can be fed through your belt. There are two small eyelets at the bottom of the sheath through which to run a leather cord to tie around your leg above the knee for this exact purpose.

All in all, the Long Haul represents excellent value for money. It is built well, has many user-friendly features for a knife of its price and the sheath is hard to beat. For those of you just starting out or on a budget, I can absolutely recommend the Browning Long Haul. With care it will certainly last you through many years of heavy hunting. ■

At a glance

- Blade length:** 4½" (11.5cm)
- Overall length:** 10" (25cm)
- Handle material:** Rubberised black polymer
- Blade steel:** 7Cr
- Price:** Approximately \$70
- Sheath supplied**

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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.ssaqld.org.au



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Senator
Bridget **McKENZIE**
NATIONALS SENATOR FOR VICTORIA

Authorised by Bridget McKenzie, National Party of Australia, 172 High Street, Wodonga VIC 3690.

CONTACT ME ANY TIME

- ☎ 02 6024 2560
- 🏠 172 High Street Wodonga VIC 3690
- ✉ senator.mckenzie@aph.gov.au
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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 membership@ssaa.org.au

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

Membership No.

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Title (PLEASE CIRCLE)	Mr Miss Ms Mrs or	Preferred SSAA Branch	
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Date of birth		Male ☐ Female ☐	Member referral number if applicable

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.

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Australian Hunter 74
PO Box 2520, Unley SA 5061

Or enter online at ssaa.org.au/win
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(Name of competition)
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Unley SA 5061

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The Sporting Shooters' Association of Australia (SSAA), along with its states and members, has introduced many beneficial and long-lasting conservation and wildlife projects in Australia, including:



- a **KOALA** habitat in Queensland
- the reintroduction of the **WESTERN QUOLL** and the protection of the **YELLOW-FOOTED ROCK-WALLABY** in South Australia



- assisting with a **TASMANIAN DEVIL** breeding program in New South Wales



- **DEER** research in multiple states
- raising community awareness about **PEST ANIMALS** in Western Australia
- ongoing removal of **CAMELS, DONKEYS** and **WILD PIGS** in the NT

We have worked alone and in collaboration with government and environmental organisations for decades - all in the name of conserving Australia's rich and varied wildlife.



SSAA