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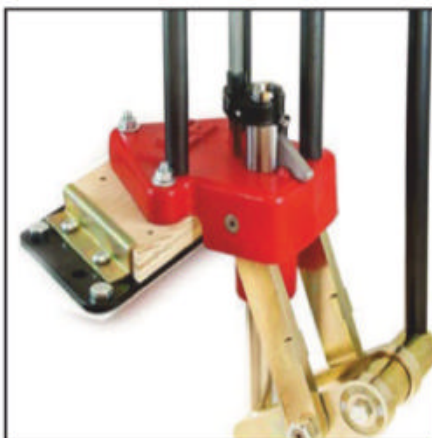
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From the Editor

Australian Hunter magazine is celebrating its 75th issue after being started back in 2000 at the turn of the second millennium by (then) Managing Editor Tim Bannister. It's been a pleasure taking the reins of Australia's favourite hunting magazine and thank you for joining us in our diamond anniversary edition marked by a bevy of amazing prizes (see pg. 97).

In the field Davey Hughes takes an incredible global journey covering his favourite hunts outside of Australia, Chris Redlich and crew land impressive stags during the rut, Ben Unten endures the heat for venison to then be burned by an airline, Peter d'Plesse documents the uniqueness of Australia's Outback camels and serves up an exotic dish, Gary Hall finds himself knee-deep in crocodile country as he bags porkers and an unexpected snowy buffalo while Ben Smith despatches a haul of fat ferals.

We reflect on the importance of sharing priceless hunting knowledge, advocate a quick kill on game as a good result, explore bullet design and function to see if your projectiles are doing excess damage, keep tabs on predators with well-placed game cameras, hunt with a collection of fine English shotguns and provide expert advice for single-shot rifles.

Our cutting-edge knife reviews look at Morakniv offerings that provide more than enough for less cost, we go big with

the impressive Buck model 124 and also slash and burn with the Browning Ignite. We have first-aid rolled up with the nifty Rescue Swag that caters for all emergencies including converting to a sling or splint, look at utilising night vision for hunting with a compact unit from Bushnell, slide into stylish all-rounder hunting footwear from The Original Muck Boot Company, take aim from the 4 Stable Sticks Sit Stick, view game camera footage on-the-spot thanks to Stealth Cam, invest in bulk American Gunner Ammo to find it delivers the goods, get back to the basics with a Winchester 1894 Sporter rifle and focus on Meopta MeoStar binoculars that offer European optics at a more affordable price.

See our tips for quick and easy campfire cooking followed by recipes of hearty game meat stew, Aussie damper scones and rustic vegetables in duck fat. Speaking of which, we reckon there's not a problem in the world that can't be tackled sitting by flames as they lick the night sky after a hunt so we welcome in our new segment 'Around the campfire with John Denman.'

Enjoy all this and have a Merry and safe Christmas and a Happy New Year!

Thomas Cook
Editor



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A post-roar obsession

Chris Redlich

I consider myself to be in the enviable position of having access to plenty of deer hunting properties. A good mate of mine, Terry, has been hunting on an acreage for many seasons and now that our boys are growing older, he has asked Carl and me to accompany them on a couple of occasions.

The latest invitation didn't take much for an acceptance and before long we were sitting by the campfire exchanging yarns with plenty of banter. The howls of wild dogs could be heard within a few hundred metres from camp and drew the boys' attention.

They didn't waste any time nagging us to go for a foot-mounted spotlight session. Taking the Brno .22 out under our supervision and using a bright torch, Terry's son Daniel shot a hare. The boys' enthusiasm

was infectious and brought back memories of when I was 13.

We were only a few weeks out from the roar and Terry had told me of his mate's son, Lane, who had been pursuing a large and even double-five stag during the roar. The stag had been sighted on and off for the past few seasons. He was captured by video, with footage of him fighting rival stags. This year he presented himself long enough to entice a sight picture through the scope, only to be out of reach for a clear shot.

Subsequent follow-up stalks, disappointingly for Lane, yielded nothing. The vision of the stag had left an impression on Lane's mind that had become almost an obsession. Terry informed me that Lane was coming on the weekend to have another crack at the big old boy.

Success came our way on the next morning's hunt when I was fortunate to photograph some red deer, oblivious to our presence, more than half a kilometre away. I set up the Variable Phone Adaptor (VPA) to my Swarovski spotter and from a long distance obtained multiple images of the deer going about their business.

Lane and his partner had reached camp by the time we arrived back from our hunt. Wasting no time to track the old stag down, Lane was geared up and off for a hunt. His father had sighted the stag briefly, post-roar while checking water points and was able to provide Lane with advice on his whereabouts.

We were enjoying our extended brunch break when the sound of Lane's quad could be heard. He returned a little disappointed after not seeing the stag but was



On the look-out for Carl's stag.



A young stag caught on camera more than half a kilometre away.

more than determined to keep hunting later on. The clouds that had been threatening in the west had halted our immediate plans. The rain was set in for a few hours and soaked the dry ground but it didn't dampen our excitement. By mid-afternoon the clouds lifted and we made plans for a late hunt. Terry, myself and the boys were to cover a higher part of the property while Lane would concentrate on another zone for the stag.

With cautious excitement but with realistic expectations, Lane departed camp on his quad to see what the remaining few hours of hunting light might deliver. We drove our way up the track shadowing the treeline. Terry was kicking himself for not making me pull up earlier as suddenly our vehicle spooked a mob of deer.

We had just crested a hill and rounded



Daniel, left, and Carl embark on a brief spotlight session.

A post-roar obsession

a bend when a few hinds sprinted for cover. The last of them disappeared out of sight before we could begin a stalk. As we jumped out of the car and grabbed our rifles, a stag in hot pursuit of the hinds also made a break for it through the trees and down the other side of the hill. Although disappointed with startling the deer, it highlighted how important it is to maintain a high level of awareness and noise discipline when hunting these skittish creatures.

Terry identified the disturbed stag as a mature double-four that he had sighted on previous occasions but not the big fella that Lane was chasing. In vain, we hunted the hill hoping to find the spooked deer again, but they had vanished to a safe hiding place.

A change of plan and utilising a favourable

wind direction had us working another side of the ridge that's known for holding strong numbers of deer. Up and down the gullies we made our descent further from the vehicle. Both Daniel and Carl were loving the hunt regardless of the long walk and the smiles on their faces confirmed this.

Our path took us past the carcass of Daniel's nice old, even double-four stag that he had shot with his father earlier in the roar and by now it was showing signs of strong decomposition. The afternoon was dragging on when the sound of a shot erupted. An excited look and a cheesy grin at me from Terry said it all. The echo of a second shot confirmed what I was thinking. We both were hoping that it was Lane's Remington 700 in .270 Win, shooting the

stag. Later we confirmed with Lane that he had secured his big double-five stag.

Totally unshaken by the sound of the shots a couple of valleys away, some hinds fed their way into view. We were well concealed by the trees and with the wind in our favour had the advantage of surprise. Terry said to me if I wanted a deer, "now's the time, as we don't have much daylight left". In the high country the sun disappears fast as the hills mask the fading light.

Taking this into consideration, we needed to get cracking. I asked Carl did he want a shot at a hind or wait for the possibility of the double-four stag in the morning? He decided to delay for the stag and told me to shoot the hind. Terry, Daniel and Carl stayed and watched as I moved in



The hind taken in fading light by the trusty Brno .284 Win.

on the unsuspecting red deer hinds.

Tree by tree, I closed the gap to 160m. I noticed that the hinds were starting to become edgy so I decided to stay put and take a rest behind a log. A hind in beautiful condition presented itself between a gap in the trees. The reticle of my Swarovski scope settled on her chest and I fired. The hind leapt in the air and kicked her back legs before lunging forward a few metres and hitting the ground dead. It was a classic heart shot thanks to the performance of the 150-grain Nosler Ballistic Tip from my .284 Win and added another to my list of one-shot kills from the custom Brno.

With little daylight remaining we retrieved the hind for a photo and returned to the vehicle. After a bumpy drive in the dark back to the position of the downed hind, we began the hard work of meat retrieval. The hind had a beautiful coat and I decided to skin it for tanning. As they say “many hands make light work” and we all pitched in to see the job done.



Young Daniel and his even red stag taken during the rut.

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A post-roar obsession

I salvaged what remained of the Ballistic Tip projectile under the skin on the off side and was surprised how much of it was still intact after travelling through both shoulders. Arriving back at camp we found one happy young hunter eagerly caping his much-deserved prize trophy. Lane had never caped a deer before and was now experiencing some on the job training.

Over a few well-earned beers we all helped Lane cape his stag. Inch by inch we carefully removed the cape and skull cap. I was in awe of how heavy the stag's antlers were and I must admit graciously suffered a tad of trophy envy. I had shot a double-six a few years ago but Lane's double-five was much heavier, indicating the stag's maturity. Very symmetrical timber with the coronets measuring nine inches reinforced how the selective deer culling efforts by Lane's father were paying off. For years they have been actively removing stags with dodgy heads from the gene pool and the results speak for themselves. The big stag's body condition though was poor, indicating a busy rut period. Not concerned about state of the cape, Lane was happy to be the proud owner of a hard-won trophy.

Careful not to forget my own skin, I hung it to cool and then bagged it for the freezer. We all sat down for a feed that night around the fire with the trophy antlers in view as a reminder of the day's excitement.

Our weekend's hunt wasn't over as the next morning's 5am alarm sounded. This was to be our last outing for the trip with hopefully a stag for Carl. Lane departed that morning, with his job complete and headed for home eagerly with his stag to be dropped off to the taxidermist on the way.

Apart from a spooked mob of fallow deer not far from camp we didn't see any others that morning. Disappointedly for Carl his opportunity to shoot a stag didn't arise but there is always next time. Packing up camp always seems to be a chore but before we left the property, we drove to the top of a mountain to take in the views and enjoy the scenery. A fine end to a great weekend hunt. ■





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Mick will never forget the moment his grandson took his first stag.

Money can't buy that

Mick Chapman

My hunting journey began some 50-odd years ago, like many who cut their teeth chasing the ubiquitous rabbit in briar patches in Warrandyte and the Dandenong Ranges east of Melbourne. Sometimes with a rifle, other times with ferrets.

In 1971 I found myself in Townsville serving with the 2nd Battalion. The Vietnam War was about to reach its finale for Australians in December of 1972. While serving in the Royal Australian Regiment (2RAR) a few likeminded men and I would occasionally go roo shooting for a week-end's recreation. Not particularly my cup of tea but it helped to whet my appetite for feral pig hunting.

Fortunately for me, my wife's father hunted pigs and introduced me to a world that I could only have imagined existed. It was through my father-in-law, Ron Cran, I met the late Graham Skinner, a renowned shooter, hunter and bushman. Not long afterwards Graham bought the house next door and took me under his wing to some degree, teaching me how to shoot and hunt pigs and brumbies.

Around the same time I ran into Col Mingay. Col served in the RAAF and for the next 20 years we hunted regularly - often travelling long distances, due to our varied posting locations. We hunted rabbits in Wagga Wagga, pigs in Queensland, donkeys and buffaloes in the Territory, gaining a vast experience of the wider hunting world.

It wasn't until I moved to South East Queensland I had the opportunity to hunt deer with Col. It was Col, in the 70s, who opened up the arena of ballistics and reloading. Col, a true firearms buff, taught me much of what I know regarding firearms.

While serving at Richmond RAAF during the mid-80s I met Dave Toohey, a Taswegian, as he would prefer to be known, a keen deer hunter and fisherman.

Dave's help was a huge relief to a young man who was having difficulty breaking into deer hunting. Though my perseverance eventually paid off. During a hunt with Dave I had my first opportunity to take a sambar stag, but blew it. This encounter only served to increase my resolve to hunt deer.

Not long after this I was with Dave when he shot his second sambar stag, no world beater by today's standards but a hard-won trophy. We were miles from the vehicle and it was about 10pm when we arrived after recovering all the meat. Shortly after this I was discharged from the RAAF and eventually moved to South East Queensland.

On my arrival in the mecca for red deer in Queensland, I crossed paths with Markus Michalowicz, a soon to be taxidermist and professional hunter. I spent the first couple of years in the area looking for red deer to no avail. Frustrated but not ready to throw in the towel, Markus suggested I hunt with him. My irritation soon vanished as he showed me the ropes of red deer hunting and the areas to search for permission to hunt. It was during those years I vowed when I cracked the secret code of deer hunting I would share my knowledge by becoming a deer hunting educator or mentor.

In the early days of Markus' foray into the realms of professional hunting, I began guiding for him. It was quite astonishing to be in the bush with a client keen to learn about deer hunting. They often chose to employ a professional hunter, because mates wouldn't show them the ropes. It was also while working for Markus I learnt how rewarding watching and showing somebody new to deer hunting was. Their sheer excitement is the purest form of a contagion.

Since those days it has been my objective to assist as many new hunters as I can to become familiar with the hunting sports. It was while serving as secretary of the local branch of the ADA that I met Tobias Turner. Tobias was president of the branch. We discussed ways we could go about introducing new members to hunting without the annoyance we had had to endure.

From this conversation a mentoring program was organised and many new members who were fortunate enough to participate took their first deer. Once again while serving as a mentor on this program I received as much of a kick out of watching



Col Mingay and his son Mathew join Mick with a buffalo cow taken for meat.

a new hunter shoot their first deer as they did. It truly is one of the most rewarding pursuits a hunter can experience.

While Tobias served as branch president we developed a friendship. It was through this link I found out Tobias had never shot a red stag. I invited him out to a place I hunted and while there Tobias took the best red deer stag to be shot on the property over the 10 years I hunted it.

It was not long after Tobias's venture into the realms of red deer stag hunting that I met Tobias' father, John. Tobias and I were



William and Xavier with their first red deer stags.

Money can't buy that

attending a function in Toowoomba. At the time Tobias lived in Bundaberg and I was near Gympie, some five hours drive for Tobias and three for me. Tobias arranged for us to stay at his father's home. During an evening meal John and I realised we had gone to school together in Victoria and had lived a short distance from each other.

John had been interested in deer hunting but as a self-employed contractor, opportunities had been scarce. John accepted an invitation to hunt on the property where Tobias had shot his deer. Once started we were chasing roars until eventually John took a great double-four. It was an excellent hunt and a real thrill for me as I had now been able to help both father and son fulfil a dream.

During this course of events Tobias had been blessed with a son, Angus. He was all of a couple of weeks old when I met him, wrapped in a baby blanket in the proud arms of dad. I have watched Tobias' family grow up, spending time with them in the bush as dad and children hunted. As Angus grew, you could see the need to hunt becoming stronger, though in a young body the stamina wasn't quite there.

As with most of us, hunting doesn't just happen. It grows steadily until it becomes a passion or some may even say, an obsession. Well young Angus, though only a couple of years into double digits in age, might already have reached the obsession stage.

During one roar, which was badly affected by the drought, hinds were obviously down on condition, preventing them from cycling. Consequently stags weren't roaring during daylight hours, though were loud throughout the night but stopped, as though the switch had been flicked at daybreak.

We stalked the hills looking or listening for the sounds of forlorn stags serenading the local gals, all to no avail. The morning of our last day of the hunt came all too quickly, yet we hadn't heard a call all night. Having chased an elusive stag on the property next door and thinking it best to go where we



The third generation of the one family Mick has had the privilege of mentoring. Angus is always keen to hunt.



William, Mick's eldest grandson, learning how to cape a deer.



Markus Michalowitz, professional hunter and taxidermist.

knew there was a stag, we headed to the lair. As we stepped from the vehicle a roar bellowed out from the hill above, not more than 150m away. From the sound of the roar, it was mostly likely the same stag we had chased on several occasions that week.

This time we thought we could cut off his retreat if we headed west along the creek

before climbing the precipitous hill, enabling us to mount a challenge. Tobias set the pace, which was not for the faint-hearted. I am sure it was purely the excitement of hearing the stag roar that had Angus' little legs pumping like pistons while keeping pace with dad. Along the creek we travelled with the stag roaring above us, all the while

paralleling the deer as he moved through the bush. We only stopped when we found a suitable venue for the showdown.

Though the country was in drought, enough rain had fallen for the grass to be at least waist-high, prohibiting a prone shot. During the previous evening Tobias had fashioned, from a sleeping mat, a rifle rest to



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Money can't buy that

fit his camera tripod. With tripod extended, the fore-end of his rifle was on the rest, waiting for the deer to make its first mistake.

As the stag climbed we had glimpses of its silhouetted form, vaguely disguised by the tangled undergrowth, moving through the scrub. Occasionally he would roar his dominance to the world. Without offering a clear shot, we moved stealthily to a more open lane of fire. Our quarry proceeded to a rocky outcrop, standing statuesque for seconds, mirroring the painting of the Monarch of the Glen, before roaring his final serenade. One well-placed shot saw the stag poleaxed by the 6.5mm. Young Angus' reaction was priceless.

He turned to dad and without a thought blurted out: "Wow, dad, did you see that." Angus threw his arms around his dad, waist hugging him with all the enthusiasm the young fellow could garner. If that was to be the last deer I see shot, it was worth it just to monitor the young fellow's reaction. It wasn't until sometime after that I realised I had been involved on three generations of one family helping to introduce them to deer hunting. Money can't buy that.

I have been mentored and been a mentor and I can, from experience, be certain there is no better experience than to watch somebody take their first deer. If we want this magnificent pastime of ours to continue for generations to come, we need to encourage the next wave of hunters, by guiding them. Teach them how to hunt but most of all how to enjoy the hunt. To me there is nothing more rewarding than being in the bush with children. To observe their innocence of discovery, is like capturing moments from your own childhood when you learned something for the first time.

Don't just tutor children, as some of my best friendships have developed from sharing my knowledge of deer with adults. Hunting is not about killing; it is about the whole experience. The joys of a gut-busting carry-out seem far away while you're undertaking the task. But those hard times soon turn into some of the best memories forming the foundations for everlasting friendships. ■



Mick's son with his first kill back in the 1980s.



John Turner, father to Tobias and old school mate of Mick, with his red stag.



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Get more with a Morakniv

Jan Kaptein



From left: Mora Companion F, Mora Pro S, Mora Rope.



producers that can be traced back to 1891. The company has traded under its current Morakniv AB name since 2016, but many of their knives have been around much longer. I've used various models that all carried Mora in their name for more than 20 years and can buy most of them new today in seemingly unaltered form and shape.

Of the three I use most two are regular blades, one is part-serrated. Given their accessible prices and the different applications of the knives, a comparison between them is appropriate. The versions in this article are the Mora Pro S (12242), Mora Rope (12245) and the Mora Companion F Stainless (11824). Each comes in an assortment of colours, while serial numbers vary accordingly, but the name of the knife remains the same.

The three knives share key characteristics. They are all stainless steel and have a Scandi grind. The Pro S and Companion F Stainless are listed as having a Sandvik 12c27 blade. For the Rope, no specification is given other than 'stainless', but the look of the material is identical to that of the other two blades. The same can be said for how it handles, the ease with which it takes an

Every hunter carries at least one, many of us a few on each outing. Knives are an essential tool in any hunter's kit. From skinning and boning out animals to feathering a stick to start a fire, without a knife, the life of a hunter would be complicated to say the least.

Given the need, it is not surprising that debates on what makes a good knife can become rather heated. What works for one person may not apply for another. In addition to this, what suits boning out an animal will not suffice for batoning wood or cutting a length of paracord to tie off a tarp.

On day trips or when light travel is essential, I often carry only one main blade,

but I supplement it with a back-up, do-everything knife. The characteristics of this supplementary knife are that it needs to be affordable, hard-wearing, easy to sharpen and dispensable. These attributes make for appealing knives for international travel too. Not much is lost and they can be easily replaced if and when they are stolen or confiscated in transit.

This is where Morakniv comes in. As the name implies, these are knives come from Mora in Sweden. The town prides itself on the fact that knives have been created there for more than 400 years. The current Morakniv company, which is now the main manufacturer, is the result of various mergers and takeovers of individual knife

edge and its resistance to corrosion.

So, if it is not the exact same steel, it is at least something similar and it will serve you well. All three knives come with plastic sheaths included, each of them has a clip that allows the user to securely carry the knife. The Pro S and Rope model have an additional feature, which is that the sheaths can be attached to each other.

At first I was not convinced this made sense, but given the low weight of the knives it is actually handy at times to carry the knives stacked as muscle memory will guide your hand to where they are, rather than having to find the second knife in another spot or a bag. Detailed specifications can be found in the table below.

In my kit, each of these knives has its own range of applications. The Pro S is generally a back-up to my main knife and a blade I use for applications that may cause the knife to become damaged. Things like cutting in or along bone, cutting other materials that can unduly dull or chip, batoning a few sticks or something as bad as tightening a screw or opening a tin when in a pinch.

The Rope comes into its own as a short diving and swimming knife, when cutting through tendons and cartilage or even thick hides and skins. Its sheath attaches to that of the Pro S, so they are easy to carry together.

Finally comes the Companion F Stainless. This is a knife I first took as sort of a joke. It has a fluorescent orange sheath and depending on the exact version, fluorescent details on the handle or an entirely orange one. Quirky as this looks, we've all been there. Back in camp after a long track through the bush, ready to quickly cut

some bread, meat or something else. But the knife has magically gone missing. It just disappeared. Well, not so with the bright orange version with its slightly longer blade. It's easy to find and hard to leave behind in the bush. I almost always carry one when on overnight trips. It attaches to the guide ropes of my hammock with its clip and is always there when I need it.

With these respective applications in mind, I typically only carry the Rope, in addition to a custom blade or a solid folding knife when I'm just out for the day. On an overnight trip, I will often throw all three of these knives in my bag. Once on location, they stay in camp while I scout the area and spend time not hunting.

When on the move pursuing animals for meat, I often throw the Rope in my pack as I like to take legs and shanks of boar and deer. Severing them is a breeze with the serrated edge of the Rope. When I duck into a river or other waterway, I often clip it to my swimmers, it's always good to have something on you in case you run into discarded floating fishing lines or other unpleasant surprises.

Each of these knives is readily available from a number of sources and highly affordable. They make great and versatile tools. All models discussed are in stainless steel, but Morakniv also has a wide array of carbon steel knives for those who are interested. My experience with those is that they are a few dollars cheaper and pretty much indestructible. However, they are prone to oxidation, particularly when they come into contact with animal blood, salt-water and other corrosives.

In addition, the blades are thicker and

heavier, which for me defeats the purpose in a low maintenance, lightweight knife. The main reason I would have a carbon steel version is because they are easy to sharpen. The Sandvik 12c27 is straightforward enough though, so I recommend that.

With regard to sharpening, bear in mind that a good knife is a sharp knife. A knife with a proper edge will give you more pleasure in use. It is also safer. Less force is required for the same cut which makes mishaps less likely.

On a final note, I would not replace my main blade with any of the knives discussed in this review. Not because the knives are not up to the task, but because I like my other knives too much and because they are 'better'. However, this comes at a rather disproportionate increase in price.

Perhaps the better question would be whether I would be comfortable with a Morakniv as my only blade if I had no others. The answer is yes. And if I had to pick one of the three as my only knife, I would probably go with the Rope. What it lacks in length it more than makes up for by the versatility offered by the serrated section of the blade.

Either way, you will not go wrong with any of the three knives and I highly recommend having a look at one next time you want to pick up a cheap but solid tool. Check online; **knifeshopaustralia.com.au** and **zenimports.com.au** are a good start. Expect to pay between \$25-\$60 depending on model, blade material and colour. Morakniv also has a wide assortment of fancier and more expensive knives. ■

Knife	Companion F	Pro S	Rope (Pro)
Steel type	Sandvik 12c27	Sandvik 12c27	Stainless, prob Sandvik 12c27
Blade shape	Straight	Straight	Straight, part-serrated
Total length	233mm	206mm	206mm
Blade length	104mm	91mm	91mm
Blade thickness	2.5mm	2mm	2mm
Fire steel compatible	No	No	No
Sheath	Polymer	Polymer, stackable	Polymer, stackable
Grip material	TPE rubber	TPE rubber	TPE rubber





The outside pocket contains a torch and instructions.



The Rescue Swag is designed to be modular.

First aid rolled up

John Denman

There would not be too many travellers these days who don't pack some sort of first-aid kit. After all, it's like insurance; you hope you don't need it but it's great to know it's there. But the more 'traditional' kits are often done up in boxes and can be a bit hard to pack. For some this may mean leaving it behind in favour of a few band-aids in the glove box.

Tracy Beikoff lives in Far North Queensland and likes to ride horses and go fishing with her husband. Over the years the 37-year-old had seen her share of accidents in the bush, and knew that there was a need for something more portable.

After a lot of head scratching, the Rescue Swag was born. An appearance on the TV show *Shark Tank* resulted in some financing,

and by 2015 the project was under way.

The Swag is designed in a trio of separate modules that target three distinct emergencies. They are all clearly marked with one being for snake bites, burns and scalds, another for patching up minor injuries, and the last catering to major injuries.

To assist the user, an app is available for your mobile phone that will 'read' the QR code on each module to assist in the correct selection of the contents. Once downloaded, you do not need any signal for the app to work.

Nothing is wasted in the Rescue Swag. The safety yellow roll has more than one use, becoming a sling for a broken arm, or a splint to immobilise a leg injury. Should it be needed you can even carry water in it. The Swag rolls up into a compact 35cm

long by 17cm diameter, and there are two locking hooks that can secure the Swag to any handy location.

It's ideal to hook onto the cargo guard in your 4WD. That bright yellow poly swag cover will also keep everything inside nice and dry too. There's a heavy-duty zip around three sides and each of the modules are sealed with zippers as well.

It's important any of the contents of the modules that are used are replaced. To this end Tracy has you covered - just a phone call or email will give you the correct items replaced quickly. You can order the Rescue Swag online by going to rescueswag.com.au or phoning 1300 289 849. The one pictured is the \$99 Adventurer + B waterproof kit. It was born in the bush and that's where it does its best work. ■

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The quick and the dead

David Duffy



A shoulder shot with a well-constructed 500gr projectile from a .450 Rigby at about 2300fps secured this banteng.

After smokeless powder replaced black powder and the velocity of projectiles increased and their size and weight decreased, a few theories developed. One of these was that if you hit an animal with one of those high velocity projectiles, the hydrostatic shock would kill it even if not hit in a vital area.

American legend Roy Weatherby wanted to examine this theory and took several of his rifles chambered in Weatherby calibres to Africa in 1948 and tested them on a large number and variety of game. He found that game still had to be shot in a vital area such as around the heart, lungs or brain for a quick kill.

Other experienced hunters reported similar results and so it generally became accepted that shot placement was the most important factor for quick kills on game. Today, it's not uncommon to hear a hunter say: "It's all about shot placement."

However, not all agree shot placement

is the only thing that matters. Other factors such as bullet weight and construction, calibre size and velocity are also important to varying degrees. Even though you may be a capable shot and that you try to gain good shot placement, it doesn't always work out that way.

So let's have a look at some of these other factors to see how important they are in addition to good shot placement.

If you try to shoot a lightly constructed bullet through the shoulder of large game, there is a reasonable chance that the projectile will not penetrate past the thick bone into the vitals. Conversely, if you aim behind the shoulder through the ribs with a projectile that's too stoutly constructed the projectile may not expand sufficiently to quickly stop the animal. This is not what hunting is all about and can even result in having to track the animal some distance, in which case you may not find it, especially in thick cover.

A large free-range 12-point red stag I shot through the left side front brisket required a second shot as the stoutly constructed copper projectile failed to expand and travelled the whole length of the animal and exited out the right rear quarter near the tail.

There's always debate around whether a projectile that holds together and mushrooms and exits the body is superior to a projectile that dumps all its energy into the animal by coming to rest say just under the skin on the far side of the animal. Alternatively, it could come apart inside the animal with shrapnel destroying organs and blood vessels that aren't in line with the main wound channel. There are merits in the opposing views.

I tend to think that the bigger the animal, the better it is to have a projectile that retains most of its weight. A large exit wound helps tracking if that needs to be done. However, often projectiles that come

apart inside the animal result in emphatic kills with vitals being pulverised. The main risk with projectiles that come apart is that if they hit heavy bone before reaching the vitals, the shrapnel may not contact the critical organs.

Occasionally, a bonded projectile that usually mushrooms correctly and retains most of its weight will not perform as expected. It may, when hitting hard bone, pancake and not have enough sectional density to penetrate through the bone, yet on other similar shots performs superbly. This seems to happen less the heavier the projectile is.

If you prefer behind the shoulder shots into the ribs, which aren't as tough as shoulder joints, a problem can be encountered if the angle of the shot is too acute. A stag I shot with a 6mm that was facing away from me at an acute angle had the projectile skim along the ribs until it lodged behind the shoulder. In this scenario, a shot behind the ribs through the paunch angling up into the vitals would have been better – but for this a heavy projectile, in say .338, would possibly have been needed.

Sometimes a neck shot for example on a pig may be the best option if the cartridge being used is barely adequate. In some limited situations a brain shot is the most desirable but this is a small target and is easy to miss.

For example, if rabbits are for the pot, or you are a professional kangaroo shooter or



This pig dropped instantly with a neck shot.

on two of the Dangerous Seven of Africa the brain shot is preferred. A cartridge that the hunter can shoot precisely at a small target may be better for brain shots in some circumstances. The 7x57 with 173-grain solids was used successfully by Scottish adventurer 'Karamojo' Bell on many elephants back in the days of the legal ivory trade. This was one of the few situations where a solid was better than a mushrooming projectile.

One of the measures frequently used to determine the effective killing power of a projectile is its energy. The formula used to determine kinetic energy is $\frac{1}{2} \times \text{mass} \times \text{velocity}^2$. This in my view gives undue emphasis to velocity.

Irish big game hunter John 'Pondoro' Taylor developed a formula for killing power which uses momentum (mass x velocity)

and bullet diameter. Although his formula has its critics, I tend to prefer it to a measure based on kinetic energy.

Two of my favourite medium game cartridges are the 6SLR and 6.8 SPC. The .243 diameter 90-grain projectile chronographs at 3120 and the .277 diameter 110-grain at around 2822fps. Both have the same kinetic energy of 2632 joules at the chronograph. However, the slower 110-grain projectile has 10.5 per cent more momentum and 30 per cent more cross-sectional area. At longer distances the flatter trajectory of the 6SLR has an advantage on smaller game but at short to medium ranges the 6.8 seems to work more consistently better on bigger game – though much of the time there is no discernible difference.

Excluding cross-sectional area, when using the same cartridge, a slightly heavier



Good shot placement plus a fast 42gr 22LR projectile dropped this fox with a shoulder shot.



The flat trajectory of the .17-222 and 12 power scope with ultra-fine cross-hairs is excellent for head shots on game.

The quick and the dead



projectile at a slower speed is usually more reliable in killing game that are tough. For example, while a 225-grain projectile out of a .338 WM may be ideal for large game, for heavy dangerous game such as buffaloes and scrub bulls a 250 to 300-grain projectile could be relied on more to give complete penetration.

There isn't much difference in killing power when using calibres about the same diameter with cases of similar capacity. For example, whether you chose a 6.5 Rem Mag, .270 Win, .280 Rem or even a .7-08 or 7 x 57 on slightly smaller cases will on most occasions make no noticeable difference.

However, there is a noticeable difference between say a .223 and a .270, also between a .270 and a .375. Even on heavy dangerous game, the .500s are claimed by those hardened riflemen that have used both, to have a slight edge on the .450s (with a corresponding increase in recoil) and the .577 NE for those few that can handle it is a step up again.

Although we talk about bullet diameter, the real difference in calibre size is the variety in cross-sectional area as this is the size of the wound channel. The formula for the cross-sectional area of a projectile is $\pi \times \text{radius}^2$. The squaring of the radius of the bullet results in a bigger percentage difference than just measuring differences in diameter. I've used both the .270 and .308 on pigs, and they work on them.

After a buffalo hunt in Arnhem Land, I used my .338 Win Mag with 250-grain projectiles on five large boars that were around a billabong. The .338 killed them all emphatically – as good as the .270 and .308 were on pigs, the .338 was noticeably better. To soak up some of the extra recoil of the medium bores (.338 to .375) a heavier rifle is needed and most will prefer to carry a lighter rifle in a lighter calibre, except when needed, such as on big tough game.

It's not always the case that you put in perfect shot placement all of the time even though you try to. The animal may move just as you squeeze the trigger or be moving. Wind drift with long shots, thumping heart and heavy breathing after a stalk in hilly terrain, partial coverage of the game as it moves through thick scrub, or simply a difficult shot can also result in less than perfect shot placement.

Most hunters generally shoot milder calibres more accurately than magnum calibres, but for those that can shoot a slightly bigger calibre with a heavier projectile as accurately as they can a milder cartridge, the bigger calibre may help slightly if things go wrong. However, poor shot placement with a larger calibre is no substitute for good shot placement with a milder calibre.

Although shot placement is critical, there are other factors as well that have importance for quick kills on game. ■



The 90gr 6mm projectile at 3120fps (left) and 110gr 6.8 projectile at 2822fps have the same energy, but the 110gr projectile has more momentum and cross-sectional area.



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Bullet design and function

are your projectiles doing excess damage to small game?

Paul Miller

These goats were shot using the remarkable .204 Ruger with explosive 39gr Sierra BlitzKing projectiles.



The subject of bullet construction and what is the right projectile to use for different purposes is one on which many books have been written. Let's look at the basics of what a bullet is and how they differ in their formation and performance.

The word 'bullet' is derived from the French word 'boulette' which roughly translated into English means 'little ball'. The earliest muzzleloading rifles fired a round lead ball that was wrapped in a loose cotton patch and then rammed down against the previously loaded charge of powder.

The barrels were originally smooth bore like a shotgun but with time rifling was invented when it became recognised that stabilising a projectile by making it spin improved its execution. Shooting with muzzleloading rifles is still popular worldwide and is a great connection with the history of our sport.

With the advent of the metallic cartridge and the single-shot breech-loading rifle, the world opened up to the design of shapely lead cast bullets. Varying their shape occurred as a better understanding of ballistics developed. It was soon discovered that a bullet with a pointed profile was more efficient than one with a round nose. This happened in 1832 in England with Army Captain John Norton's design of a conical bullet.

It was followed closely by English gunsmith William Greener honing a bullet with a wooden plug in its base which expanded on firing and forced the slug to fit the rifling.

Moving on, in 1847 the soft lead Minie

ball was perfected by French Army Captain Claude-Etienne Minie. It was conical in shape with a hollow cavity in the rear which had a small iron cap installed in the base rather than a wooden plug. On firing, this cap also pushed forward in the cavity of the bullet and forced the projectile to expand and contact the rifling. In 1855, the British adopted the Minie ball into their Enfield rifles.

The next important change in bullet design and construction occurred in 1882 when Director of the Swiss Army Laboratory, Lt Colonel Eduard Rubin, devised the copper jacketed bullet. This pellet was elongated and featured a lead core in a copper jacket. It was a profoundly important progression because lead bullets were historically only able to be fired at lower velocities. This was because the surface of the lead bullet, in contact with the hot gases of the powder burn at the rear and with the rifling on its way down the barrel, would melt at higher velocities. The advantage of a copper jacket was that copper is harder and has a higher melting point, so bullets constructed in this way were now able to be fired at greater velocities.

So to summarise, bullets for muzzle-loading firearms were round and mostly moulded from pure lead. This worked well because they were fired at velocities less than about 1450fps. Then later, moulded bullets manufactured with a combination of lead and tin fired well in more modern firearms with rifling in their barrels at slightly higher velocities. Copper jacketed bullets with a lead core were developed and are the most commonly used worldwide because of their ability to withstand much higher velocities and be designed and constructed for different purposes.

Today we have a large number of manufacturers producing an incredible array of highly sophisticated bullets designed specifically for every conceivable use from military to target, and of course, hunting. When you consider the evolution of the bullet and how relatively quickly this transpired in



Deadly in bush environments: .25-06 and .30-06 projectiles for hunting larger game. Soft-point, ballistic tip and Speer 220gr Hot-Cor round-nose soft-point hunting projectile.

recent history it is quite mind-boggling.

We can now choose bullets that are lightly constructed and therefore explosive when driven at high velocity for small game shooting. The same can be said for larger game in Australia like feral pigs. Here we can choose a more stoutly constructed bullet that holds together better for penetration through a mud encrusted hide and then mercifully kills the animal by wrecking its lungs or heart.

When we move further up the scale to larger deer or all the way through to buffaloes in the Top End, heavier and even more stoutly constructed bullets become appropriate. For the biggest of game animals, solid or monolith construction bullets are employed to transfer energy and retain their weight to push through to the vitals and again ensure a merciful despatch. That is what every ethical hunter should always aim for when choosing their bullets for their particular cartridge and game animal.

Stepping back to small game we have copper jacketed bullets that can be driven at speeds in excess of 4000fps and still hold together in cartridges like the 17 Remington, .220 Swift, .204 Ruger and .22-250 Remington. If a small game hunter wants to shoot foxes for their skins then bullet construction in combination with velocity becomes important. Foxes are lightly built animals and not difficult to kill. The issue is more the preservation of their skin.

A great deal of work has gone into



Soft-point, ballistic tip varmint projectile and round nose soft-point hunting slug for controlled expansion, deep penetration and less likelihood of deflection in heavily timbered terrain.



Two plastic-tipped .204 Ruger varmint projectiles. Sako .243 Win soft-point hunting ammunition and Lapua .308W Scenar top of the line target load and projectile.

Bullet design and function

developing projectiles by manufacturers like Nosler, Hornady and Sierra that are copper jacketed but with thin jackets and fine hollow-points or plastic ballistic-style tips. This is to enhance aerodynamic qualities and increase explosiveness when the bullet hits a fox or other small fur-bearing animal.

Ideally the bullet fragments completely then stay inside the animal. It is an expanded bullet exiting that causes the damage to fox pelts. Alternatively, shooters can use a solid or more stoutly constructed bullet at lower velocity that passes through the fox with minimal exit damage. The problem here is knowing where that solid bullet ends up after it exits the fox and whether it does a good job of killing it humanely because it expands so little on the way through.

If you are shooting rabbits for the pot you really need to head shoot them, otherwise they will be completely ruined by the highly frangible projectiles in these hyper velocity smaller bore cartridges. The alternative of course is to use a smaller rimfire cartridge with a hollow-point or plastic-tipped projectile at a distance where you can be sure of head shooting them as well.

Bullet design is now so sophisticated that manufacturers can vary the thickness of the bullet jacket and the shape of the bullet as well as the internal structure of the lead core. This makes the bullet explosive or hold together for penetration and achieve the mushroom effect that bigger game hunters look for to shift energy to the animal and create a greater wound channel to aid in a caring kill.

There has always been the argument as to whether a bullet should be designed to mushroom but still pass through a big game animal to generate a blood trail for tracking or whether the bullet should mushroom sufficiently to remain inside the animal. The latter imparts all energy to the animal rather than only part of the energy with the rest spent on the bullet exiting and travelling off downrange. I favour the 'stay in the animal' camp and using up all the energy on a humane despatch, but the debate will

continue to fuel ever more sophisticated bullet designs to potentially achieve the best of both worlds.

How do you choose the perfect bullet for your purposes? You look at what the manufacturers recommend on their factory boxes of ammunition. You talk to your reputable gun dealer. You ask your experienced mates. You buy a quality manual like the Nosler or Hornady reloading guides. These are essential if you plan to reload but are also hugely useful for learning about bullet construction and the ballistics of various bullet shapes and construction. For the shooting enthusiast these high-quality books provide a wealth of information to allow you to choose the right projectiles and powder combinations to achieve exactly

what you want in terms of bullet speed and results on target.

The internet is a huge resource with Wikipedia, Google Search, YouTube and various shooting forums helpful with questions and answers about what bullets you should you use for different purposes.

Taking the time to do this research is really enjoyable and will make you more knowledgeable and successful at the range or in the field. There is also no substitute for being out there, having a go and learning from your experiences at the range or with hunting both small and larger game. As if we need an excuse to do more shooting! Good luck. ■



This fox and rabbits were cleanly taken with a .22 Magnum shooting fast expanding CCI 30gr V-Max bullets. Ideal for smaller game at closer ranges.



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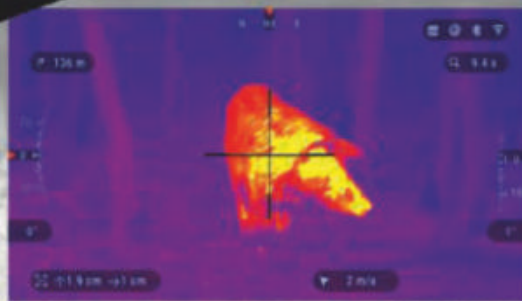
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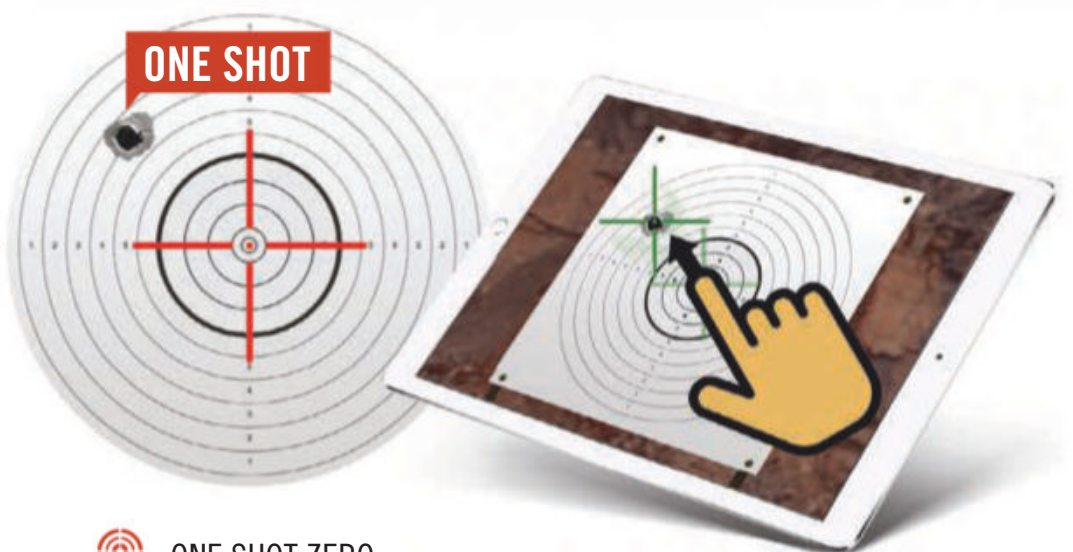
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Don was able to view these wallabies on a pitch-black, moonless night.

Seeing the light with Bushnell night vision

Don Caswell

There are three types of night vision devices. Firstly, there is optical image intensification of visible light, followed by digital image intensification of visible and infrared light and lastly, thermal imaging.

As light conditions become darker, optical night vision begins to struggle as visible light declines. As it turns out, it is much easier to intensify electrons than photons (optical light which includes infrared) and that is how digital image intensifying night vision devices work.

The incoming light (photons) is converted into electrons which are then intensified and the resultant digital image is shown on a small liquid-crystal display (LCD) screen in the device. Thermal imaging uses a different approach by detecting the heat of the object rather than light. These devices have great range, but are much more expensive.

At the present time, digital imaging presents an affordable and effective technology for hunting, wildlife observation and security.

In Australia, the Bushnell 6x50mm Z2 digital imaging night vision device is distributed by Nioa, who provided the Z2 for review. It came with a protective pouch, a wrist strap and warranty paperwork.

The first thing to do was look up the product on the **bushnell.com** website, in the menu for night vision products. There are an array of Z2 monoculars, so you need to pick the right one as identified by the label. For the 6x50mm Z2 model, the number is #260250. Like most products these days, there is no printed copy of the user guide provided with the item. However, the latest version is easily accessed from the website.

Before leaving the website, I followed the link for instructions on how to update the

operating software. That proved easy as the steps were clear. In doing that, you will need to have a formatted micro SD card for the transfer of software update to the Z2.

The Z2 is one of the more powerful digital intensifying devices and that is reflected in its dimensions and weight. It is 215mm long, 95mm wide and 55mm in depth, weighing in at 729 grams with 4xAA batteries included. The large objective lens and the integral, generously-sized, powerful IR flashlight contribute to the size and weight.

The wrist strap is useful and there is a tripod mount which I reckon is essential for recording images and video. Focusing is manual. It is recommended the display screen be focused first, using the eyepiece dioptre ring to obtain the displayed lettering nice and sharp. For a single user that is a one-off and thereafter focus is achieved with the objective lens.

Seeing the light with Bushnell night vision



The device can be used single-handedly.

The controls are intuitive for anybody who has become used to using similar electronic gadgets. The Z2 can, at a button push, take digital images or video of what you see in the viewfinder. Similarly, the menu system displayed in the eyepiece viewing screen is simple to use as well. The comprehensive user guide covers all the features and controls of the Z2 in detail. If needed, the IR flashlight can be activated and will illuminate the scene as watched on the LCD display, allowing viewing even in totally dark conditions.

Specifically, the Z2 takes incoming natural light through the objective lens and forms that into an image. That image is processed through a digital complementary metal-oxide-semiconductor (CMOS) sensor module and displayed on the micro LCD. Images viewed on the LCD can be magnified up to six times. The sensors on the Z2 are extremely sensitive and the unit should never be pointed directly at the sun or other intense light sources. In fact, if using the unit in daylight conditions, the lens cap should be left in place over the objective

lens. There is a tiny pinhole in the lens cover that will allow through all the light that the unit needs to produce a clear image.

The Bushnell 6x50mm Z2 is an effective bit of gear that will prove especially useful for hunting wary pests that have developed an aversion to visible spotlights. Animals such as wild dogs, foxes and pigs can be

detected and tracked until in position for a shot. The absence of any visible light means that such critters will be unaware of the hunter's presence.

Available from gunshops and optical stores, the Bushnell 6x50mm Z2 retail price starts from about \$650. ■



A large objective lens and a powerful IR flashlight.

The best hunting on the **planet**

Davey Hughes, the founder and hands-on creative director of Swazi Outdoor Clothing, has become a familiar figure in the hunting world. In this feature we discover Davey's top three international hunts and what essential kit he recommends packing.



A grizzly roars his warning.

When people ask me to select my favourite hunt, I typically answer: "My next one!" The allure of an adventure in truly wild, remote places, along with the animals and people who inhabit them, has always been a passion which ignites my wanderlust to travel and hunt.

Over the years I've often posed myself the question: If there were just three hunting trips I could go on, which would they be? It's not an easy one to answer. There are places I haven't been to yet, so how could I faithfully give a straightforward and honest opinion?

My solution to this problem was to make a mug of tea, sit down in front of an open fire and then whittle a long list down to a mere three. Here they are then, in no particular order. They are my personal choices. Some may agree with them, while others will dutifully point out I've missed the best hunt of all time. So be it.

Cape buffalo

Much has been written about hunting the mbogo (Cape buffalo) by far more celebrated writers than me. My experience so far has been in four countries, with each hunt different in its own way. I've hunted herd bulls and I've hunted dagga boys - those grumpy old bulls who live either by themselves or in small bachelor groups. Both hunts have their merits. Hunting the herd, in some ways, is less taxing on the nerves. You see plenty of animals and will have some up front and close encounters should you ensconce yourself in the middle of the herd.

Dagga boys, on the other hand, are an entirely different story. Here, the skills of your tracker will astound you as hour after hour you follow the prints of one particular bull. When tracking buffaloes, it's amazing how you become a poo expert, gently scraping your boot across the still-wet pile, studying the thickness of the semi-dry skin on top and making a guess at just how close you are to your quarry. It's quite revealing how

excited grown men can become over dung.

The other benefit of hunting lone bulls is the array of species you interact with while tracking. For pure adrenalin, nothing comes close to following an animal classified as the most dangerous of all game through narrow tunnels of elephant grass where at any moment you could be outmanoeuvred, ambushed or blown off.

The trophy is the hunt with dagga boys. Horn measurement does not even come into consideration. An old bull, well past his breeding life, carrying horns worn off to his boss, can be considered the ultimate trophy of a lifetime.

It's important to choose the best period. Going in the wet season means you will be spending a lot of time extracting vehicles out of a bog, so avoid going at that time of year at all costs. As for gear, obviously it's going to be hot, so shorts and a tough cotton shirt will be your main wear. A set of puttees or ankle guards are a must, as is a wide brimmed hat. You're not climbing Kilimanjaro, so boots don't need to

A solitary, alert Cape buffalo.



The best hunting on the planet

be of the alpine variety but do need to be comfortable.

Don't leave it to the last moment to choose a pair. Break them in at least three months prior and wear them as often as you can in the months leading up to your hunt. Mornings can be deceptively cold, so pack a windproof fleece and even a balaclava, as often you'll spend a few hours on the back of a vehicle heading out to where the hunt will begin.

Two boxes of ammo should suffice. Big calibre rifles aren't the nicest of beasts on the range, but again, this is not a muntjac hunt. Learn to know your rifle and what it's capable of. Then shoot it as often as you can. In fact, take it on your muntjac or fallow hunt. You'll not regret it. I tend to leave my sling behind and just carry my rifle, a Rigby Big Game in .416. It is definitely one of my favourite guns. Yes, it's heavy, but for all the right reasons. If you must, grab a Kifaru GunBearer attachment for your day bag. It supports the rifle and can have it in your hands surprisingly fast.

Himalayan tahr

As I write this, the New Zealand government is undertaking a tahr eradication program of huge proportions. It's a crime. The tahr is one of the most majestic game animals on the planet. For sure, we have abundant numbers, but rather than shoot them out of helicopter gunships the government could do better by actively encouraging more people to hunt tahr. That said, there will always be tahrs in the mountains. They'll just be harder to find.

What makes this one of my top three animals? It could well be their range that inspires me. The lofty peaks and huge river valleys that sprawl below you when perched high on a mountain are incredibly stimulating. You feel alive in a way I cannot compare. It's tiger country though, not a place for the tyro on their first excursion, not at least without a guide to help you ford rivers and traverse glaciers. Even in summer months, the backcountry can be treacherous to the uninitiated.



A herd of Cape buffaloes off to drink at the watering hole.



Davey Hughes takes a mbogo, using a Rigby Big Game in .416.



Davey with a tahr in New Zealand's southern Alps.

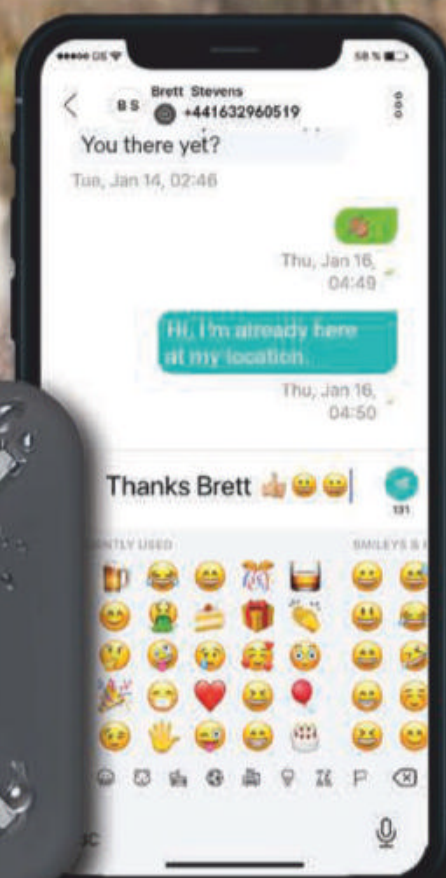


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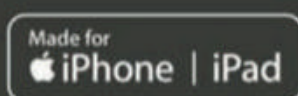
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Of course, it could be the animal itself. To watch a mature bull, his lion-like mane flowing as he easily descends 1000 feet at breakneck speed, never ceases to hold me in awe.

In this modern world time is the enemy, so many of my tahr hunts involve the use of a helicopter to fly me into the mountains, saving a two to three-day hike. My best time on the calendar to hunt tahrs in New Zealand generally falls in the winter months because in that part of the year the mane on the bulls is dark as ebony. That's the trophy. I don't measure horns or antlers – never have, never will – so a mature bull with a huge mane is to me the ultimate of our game in New Zealand.

Of course, winter presents its own challenges. Nasty weather for a start. Packing the right gear is not just a matter of comfort, it's survival. Good base layers that breathe, a set to wear and a dry set for camp, coupled with thermal mid layers and

a shell are a must. I look at my clothing as a system rather than individual items.

My rifle of choice is a lightweight (3.28kg) .300WSM. Calibres, like religion and politics, can make for lengthy heated campfire discussions. Needless to say, my choice of gun is one which I use on many continents for hunting moose, mountain goats and black bears. It's simply a gun I've become used to and know how to employ.

Good optics are a given. If you can't see it, you can't hunt it. Over the past decade I've swung towards the Leica brand. My binos are Leica Geovids in 10x42, my spotting scope a Leica Televid 65 and my rifle-scope also a Leica ER 2.5-10x42.

Decent alpine boots are a must. They should be well broken in with plenty of ankle support. I'll also throw in crampons and an ice axe, though nowadays (you can read that as now I'm older and less bold) if I need crampons I'm probably hunting in the wrong area. I always pack a PLB (personal

locator beacon) and on longer trips where rescue may not be so forthcoming, a satellite phone. It's hard to ask a doctor for medical advice on re-setting a dislocated shoulder with a PLB.

Brown bear

Ursus Arctos Horribilis. Brown bear and grizzly are the same beast. It's actually where they live and what they eat that determines which is which. Generally, brown bears live near the coast and will be bigger due to more abundance of food. Grizzlies live inland, where their diet consists of grass and berries along with whatever meat they can kill or scavenge, including moose, caribou and sheep. I've always found grizzlies to be more aggressive, although brown bears have also given me a few dicey moments on more than one occasion.

When hunting brown bears in Alaska, there are basically two seasons – autumn



A striking male Himalayan tahr, with his lion-like mane.

and spring. Each has its own merits. Autumn is when salmon are spawning and the bears will be congregating around rivers and streams, fishing at pools as they gorge themselves in preparation for hibernation. Hunting these Pacific giants can present some close encounters, especially in smaller streams and rivers. I once shot a brown bear during autumn, just before dark, at six-and-a-half yards, standing absolutely still while the bear walked straight down the stream towards me.

Spring heralds the end of five to seven months of hibernation and the bears leave their dens in search of food and a mate. It's this latter pre-occupation that often can give away the presence of the boar, or male brown bear. If you observe a female bear hurtling along, cubs in tow, down a beach or mountain side, be ready. More than likely there will be a male bear in hot pursuit.

One drawback of the spring hunt can be



When salmon spawn in autumn, brown bears are often found around rivers and streams in Alaska.

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VICTORIAN SHOOTER

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timing. If the winter is longer than expected then bears leave the dens late, and you've arrived too early to see much action. Leave your hunt too late and the bears will be rubbing hair off their hides. I've seen bears that more resemble poodles at that time of year. It really is a hit-and-miss scenario, though I still favour spring over autumn. Hang on... what about the salmon fishing you'll miss by going in spring? I guess you'll have to make up your own mind on seasons.

One thing is certain. The coastal weather of Alaska is wet. It's going to rain and rain. And then some more. In spring, snow is also a big possibility. Good base layers that dry quickly, mid layers that trap air and a good long raincoat to keep your derriere protected are a must. In autumn I also take along a pair of overtrousers, as you'll be in and out of salmon spawning streams that are full of decaying fish.

Again, good (preferably great) optics may play a huge part in the success of your hunt. Don't scrimp at this stage, especially given the overall cost of the hunt. As for choice of calibre, anything from .30-06 should enable the job to be done. I usually take the Ruark approach of enough gun and will opt for either my .375, or as the occasion on Kodiak Island pictured below, my Rigby .416, shooting 340gr Woodleighs.

That's my list of three great hunts. Notwithstanding, all hunting excites me.

Red stags in the rut, wild boar... they all start my juices going. In this ever-changing world, with the pressure on hunting as a chosen pastime, you cannot be certain those choices will be around forever. I'm glad I've had the opportunity to travel to each location and participate in what in every instance has been a life-changing pursuit of game in its natural habitat. It has been a privilege. Long may it last.

For further information about Swazi, visit

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Three men are standing in a forest. The man on the left is older with grey hair, wearing a blue and white checkered shirt. The man in the middle is younger, wearing a light blue button-down shirt. The man on the right is wearing a white cowboy hat and a blue and white checkered shirt. The man in the middle is pointing his right index finger towards the camera.

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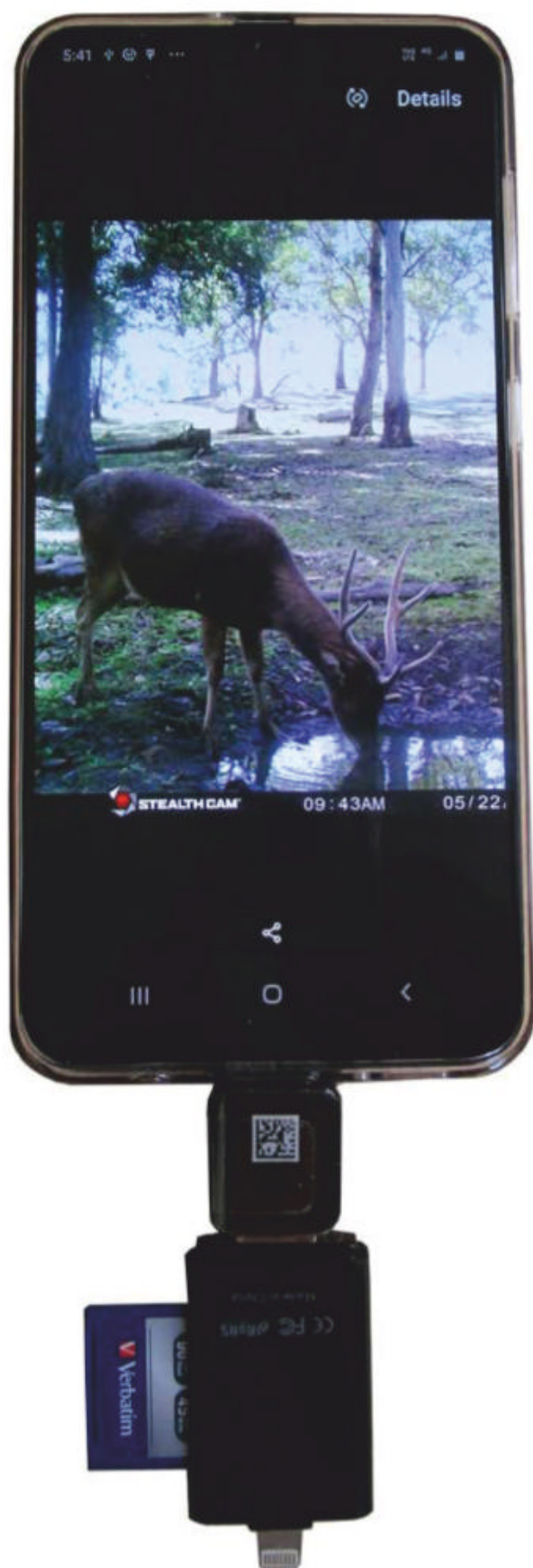
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Play your cards right

Steve Bain has an ace up his sleeve when out in the field



To link with the Samsung Galaxy A50, an extra adapter was required. Steve obtained his from the local Samsung store free-of-charge.

The Stealth Cam Tri Card Reader W/Adapter is a great little option for most Samsung and other Android users. However, let's shift the caveat out of the way first.

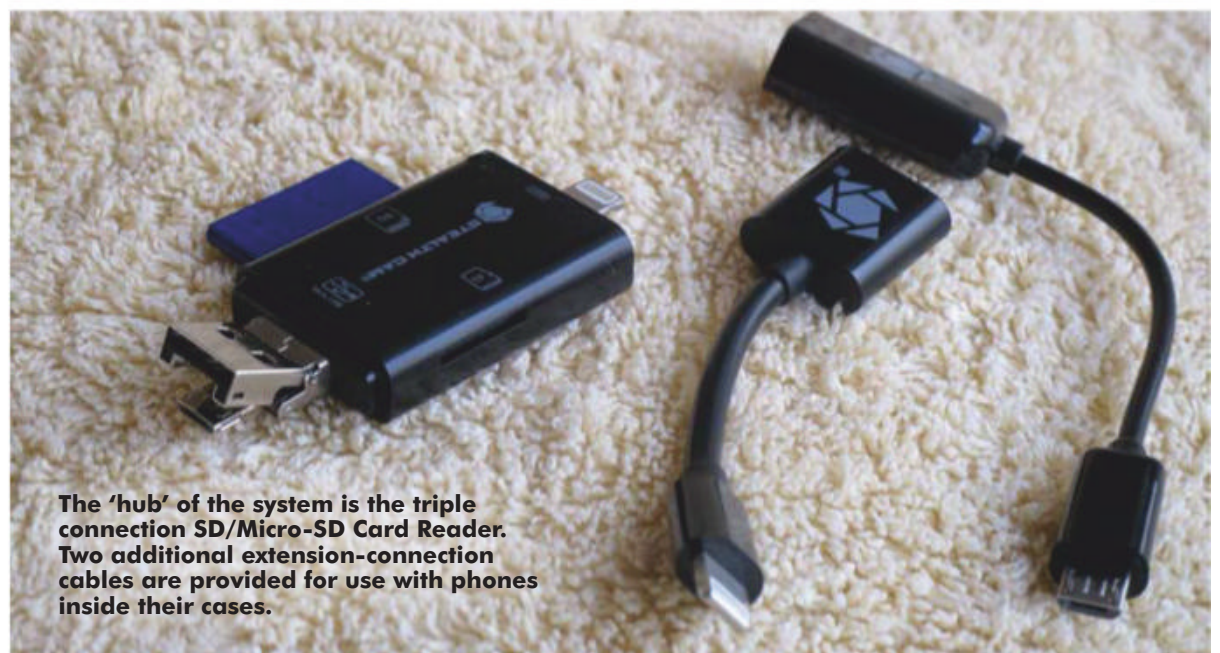
Although it is promoted as a 'dual device' (meaning both iOS and Android), my limited experience (limited success) and advice from multiple Apple stores suggests that iPhone users may find any third-party non-Apple products, especially those using third-party apps, to be problematic at times. Examples include support to the required third-party app to have been either changed or curtailed. We have a number of iPhones in the family. Over the past three years I've concluded that sometimes the card reader doesn't always function fully. Other times it requires a new app.

I received the card reader some time ago from TSA (Tasco Sales Australia) and have used it regularly with success on three Samsung devices. They are my five-year-old phone, my 2018 Galaxy Tab A tablet and my newer Galaxy A50 smartphone. On the first two devices, the card reader worked straight out of the box. Because the

Galaxy A50 has a different charging port, this phone required an adapter that the local Samsung store was happy to supply free-of-charge as well as trialling it fully to confirm that it worked.

I used to take a laptop into the field to read my SD cards when I pulled them from my trail cameras. I'd pull out the cards, swap them for new cards, then bring the 'old' cards back to camp and use the laptop to view the pictures. Alas many of my laptops did not like the hot, dusty (and sometimes wet and/or humid) environment. Keyboard keys would stick and cease to function. I killed quite a few laptops and decided that there had to be a better way.

The Stealth Cam Tri Card Reader solves the problem. It provides you with the means to view still images and MOV video format. This card reader plugs into the charging port on your phone or tablet and in the case of the Samsung, the images either flash up on the screen immediately or are accessible via the existing software with no apps required. The beauty of using a phone/tablet is that you have a touch-screen, which means there are no moving



The 'hub' of the system is the triple connection SD/Micro-SD Card Reader. Two additional extension-connection cables are provided for use with phones inside their cases.

Play your cards right

exposed parts such as keyboard keys for dust and grit to find its way into or under.

Such a set-up allows you to check a few test photos from your game camera before you restart the camera and walk away to let it do its thing for a few weeks or more. Back at camp I keep a topped-up pocket-sized power bank so that I have the means to recharge my phone after I've been out checking the cameras. Even the cheapest chain store power bank models are able to charge your phone a couple of times.

For sure, a large computer screen back at home will allow you to scroll through photos quicker than a small screen. However the pocket-sized option provided by your phone is ideal for certain situations. One of the biggest failings when using game cameras for scientific studies is that the technicians often fail to correctly initiate the camera (not all cameras have an easy, obvious and intuitive off/on switch).

Another common fault is being a few critical degrees out when aligning the



camera's lens towards the likely target area. Being able to review a few test images in the field using your mobile phone allows you to test and adjust the framing as well as confirming you have the initiation sequence squared away. Because it is common to carry your phone on you most of the time, the only extra that you need to take is the lightweight card reader.

Additionally, when you come back a couple of weeks later to check your game camera, you can use your phone and card reader combo to quickly skim through the images on your screen to see if the location

is a hot spot or not.

This information may even sway your decision to leave your game camera to continue as it is, or make adjustments to software programming and/or the physical set-up. It is efficient and commonsense from a scent management perspective to do this without having to come back later to either move or reprogram a camera.

A card reader for your phone is a great inclusion in any game camera kit and for about \$30 this one has proved itself perfect for the task. Head to **stealthcam.com** for their array of card reader products. ■





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A photograph of a large, tawny wild dog standing in a dry, grassy field. To its left lies a dead animal carcass, partially obscured by the tall grass. The background shows a clear blue sky and a few distant trees.

This big, strong wild dog made a mid-morning visit to continue eating out of the rear end of the carcass.

On the right trail with cameras

Don Caswell

In my pursuit of wild dogs, I rely on trail cameras to find out if and when my quarry is moving about. At times I place my cameras over well-used pathways emerging from heavy rainforest. But, mostly I place them over dead animals.

In my prowling about looking for dog sign, I am always on the watch for dead cattle. If there is a suitable tree or fence post close to the animal, I position the trail camera there. Fence posts can be risky unless the paddock is clear of stock. Cattle are very inquisitive and will sniff, lick and nuzzle at a trail camera placed too low. I secure my cameras as high as I can reach.

In the tropics, carcasses go off really fast.

The flies arrive first, in their millions. By the second day the body is swelling and starting to smell bad. That becomes progressively worse with each day. Wild dogs are early callers and sniff about the carcass. Occasionally, they will chew off the ears and tear at the face. But mostly, they go for the other end. That is where the feral pigs concentrate their efforts as well.

The pigs will continue to visit a carcass for weeks, long after the flesh has turned to rancid goop. It is not the fluid they are after but rather to slurp up the enormous crop of wriggling maggots. Wild dogs will occasionally stop to have a wistful sniff about, but that is more like the ever-hopeful Wile

E. Coyote cartoon character and they do not eat anything. The timing of these arrivals varies greatly, from the dead of the night to the middle of the day.

I find the best period is sunset, followed by early morning. However, if there is a bit of competition for the resource, or the animals have become wary of the hunting pressure, they can show up in the middle of the day. Often, I have a series of cameras placed around my local area. That way, I can stalk a carcass and spend half an hour to maybe an hour watching it at the most likely moment for a visit. Before leaving the spot, I swap over the camera cards. Some days, I view three different carcasses at dawn, late

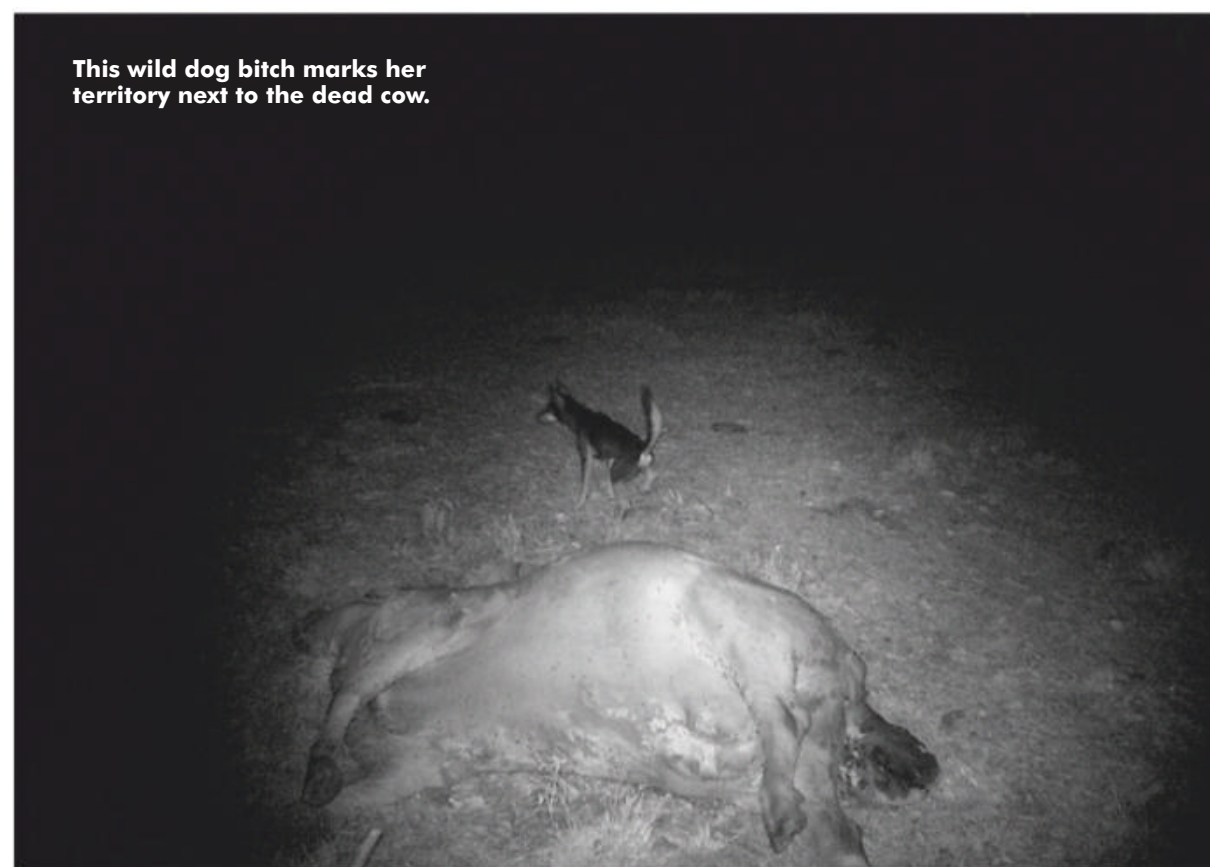
On the right trail with cameras

morning and sunset respectively. Between those instances I can be busy with my normal daily activities.

There is of course no certainty. Wild animals are highly variable and the fact that they turned up at a set time during the past few days is no guarantee they will repeat that. I have been both disappointed and delighted at the vagaries of fate in that regard. A good example was a recent afternoon.

My trail camera had shown a lot of hog activity on a dead cow I had discovered. There had also been interest from a black wild dog bitch. All this motion had taken place post-sunset. The previous night the dog had sniffed about the carcass and then marked her territory with a pee before heading off into the evening. With the carcass now opened up by pigs, I suspected she might come earlier to gain a good seat at the table, as it were.

I stalked the carcass about half an hour before sunset, intending to sit there until dark. From the camera I did not expect anything to be there then. I wanted plenty of leeway to find a tree close to the carcass that was my ambush point. The wind would be favourable and the sinking sun was behind me. I wanted to set up my DSLR camera on its tripod and try to obtain



This wild dog bitch marks her territory next to the dead cow.

some video of whatever might come to the carcass.

As I entered the paddock, I noted one apparently large black calf among the growing creche of new-born young ones. I figured that big black calf must have come through the fence from a neighbouring paddock. The enclosure held about 50 cows, all pregnant or newly calved. The danger was that the attentions of wild dogs and boars might not be limited to carrion. They will sometimes attack the birthing mothers



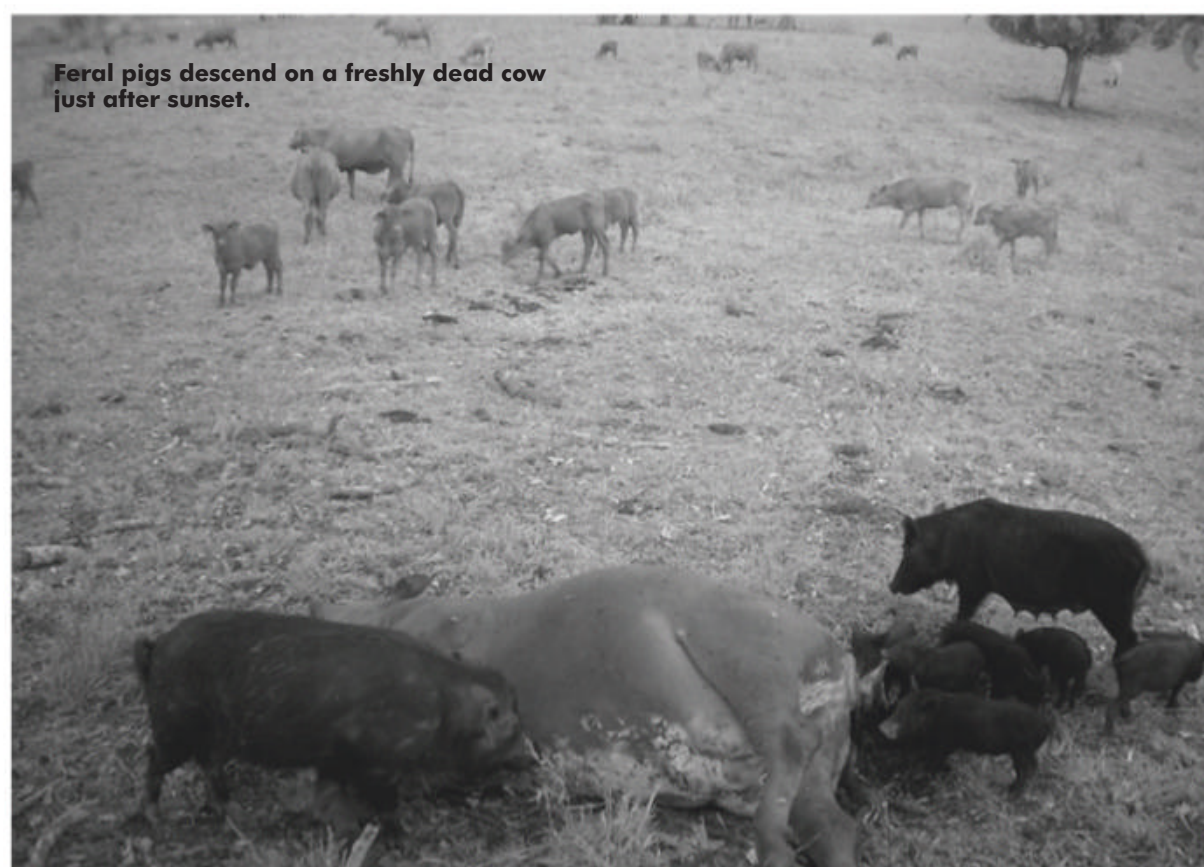
A jaunty pair of wild dogs at a carcass.

and their emerging babies. With a start I realised that I was not looking at a calf but rather a large black boar boldly strutting through the herd.

He was making a beeline for the carcass and would arrive there before I could reach my cover. That tree was the only one close to where the body lay. But there was no need to panic. The wind was in my favour and pigs do not have very good sight. I kept my tree between us as he zeroed in on the carcass, using his nose more than his eyes.

The boar did not waste any time. He must have been hungry. He marched up to the carcass and stuck his head deep into the rear end. As he tugged and munched away, I had arrived at my tree. It was about 70m from the boar at the carrion.

He wasn't going anywhere in a hurry, so I slipped off my rifle and backpack. I placed my DSLR camera on its tripod and had



Feral pigs descend on a freshly dead cow just after sunset.

it all set to record some video. I flipped down the bipod legs on my Vanguard .257 Weatherby Magnum, adjusted the Swarovski Z8i scope to my liking and then chambered a round. I was firing hand-loaded 110-grain Nosler AccuBonds. I activated 'record' on my camera and then settled the rifle into my shoulder and lined up on the hog. He was vigorously working at the carcass. I waited a few seconds until he paused for a breather and then shot him behind the point of the shoulder. He flopped to an emphatic and instant kill.

Pulling on some disposable surgical gloves, I dragged him a short distance from his gruesome handiwork for a photo. I took a photo on my phone and texted the farmer, who replied appreciatively immediately. I had been expecting a dog but was happy with a boar. In the meantime, I would be keeping a constant and close eye on my trail cameras, looking for any opportunities to account for the feral predators that threaten the calves and cows. ■



These pigs are still interested in the cow which has been dead for two weeks.



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Feeling the

Ben Unten

I do not like the heat but in a moment of weakness I found myself committing to a January hunt in Townsville.

It had been a decade almost to the day since hunting with my mate, Grant 'Country' Thomson. That all changed when I bumped into another mate, Dodge at a SSAA Shot Expo. "You ever hunted chital?" Dodge, who acts as a guide, asked. I replied that I hadn't but had always wanted to. To cut a long story short, six months later

Country and I were on a flight heading north.

When we first stepped out of the air-conditioned comfort of the plane, we sampled the tarmac, which seemed to be melting. Nevertheless we met up with Dodge, loaded up on last minute supplies and headed to the hunting accommodation.

The next morning we were up early and set off. My Spika Airflux hunting cams performed extremely well and even a light

breeze allowed airflow, which was cooling.

Unfortunately the wind was not our friend that morning. No matter what we did, it was always at our backs. We had no alternative but to keep trying to work around it and have it at least blowing sideways. This meant a lot of walking.

We saw good numbers of chital but without a shooting opportunity. Unexpectedly we came across two Brahman cows stuck in quicksand at the bottom of a dry creek



Success on the first afternoon.

The young doe prior to skinning.

bed. We tried unsuccessfully to pull them out with paracord. So we hatched a plan to return to camp to enlist help with the Ranger side-by-side vehicle and a snatch strap. After a lot of mucking about we managed to drag both animals out. One found its feet and trotted off which made it all worthwhile. The other cow was in worse shape so we left it in the shade to later let the farmer know its location and condition. We returned to camp hot but satisfied.

The afternoon was hotter and even more humid. But this time the wind was consistent and we were able to use it to our advantage. The terrain was sparser than I was used to but beautiful and green after some decent rain following a long period of drought.

We saw several mobs of does with one small spiker. At around 5pm Dodge picked up his binos and said: "There's a stag 480m away." Country and I grabbed our binos

and sure enough there was a stag feeding just beyond the tree line on the far side of the clearing. Dodge thought he was worth a look, so we grabbed our gear, discussed our stalk strategy and set off.

The wind was blowing across us. There wasn't a lot of cover but we used what we could and managed to move within 220m, eventually dropping our packs and crawling to our final shooting position behind a small shrub.

Feeling the heat

Dodge confirmed that the animal was a shooter, the distance was 120m and he was still unaware of our presence. I settled my Tikka .30-06 into the 'V' on top of the bog pod. After a short wait, the stag turned almost fully broadside and I squeezed the trigger. The stag dropped where he stood.

We waited a few minutes just to make sure and then approached the animal. The tape measure later revealed him to be 28.3" (720mm) with a nice shape and even balance. It was a good, representative head and I was extremely happy with the result. Then, the real work began. Country and I assisted Dodge as he started caping and removed the head.

They left to retrieve the quad and I took out the guts and propped the cavity open with a stick to assist with cooling. When I say 'cooling' it is a comparative phrase as it was still stinking hot with searing humidity and two billion flies. But I wanted to retrieve as much meat as possible to take home.

Eventually Country and Dodge returned with the quad, we loaded the stag and drove off. Once back, Dodge continued with the caping while Country and I harvested the useable cuts of meat - sharing some with another hunter in camp.

We were up early again the next morning and set off in single file with Country ahead of me as it was his turn to shoot. He took advantage by nabbing a boar on the ride in.

The next several hours passed without incident until we came across five more cows stuck in the mud in a different creek



bed. With no way to gain vehicular access and judging by their severely weakened condition we made the tough decision to abide by the farmer's wishes and do the humane thing to euthanise them.

This was sad to witness and made worse by the fact that when we returned to camp that evening and reported our findings and actions to the farmer, he told us that he'd had to despatch the other cow from the previous day. He went on to say that he'd lost more cows due to the recent rains than he had in the previous drought. It was heartbreaking.

The next morning was mercifully slightly cooler and we spotted a chital stag with a cracking head, but he moved away.

The afternoon hunt was back to full heat. About an hour before dusk Dodge spotted

a mob of does approximately 350m away. We glassed for 15 minutes before confirming that the mob held at least three spikers and four does. We slowly stalked to within 165m, when Dodge eyed a better-looking stag lying down.

After glassing for another 10 minutes, Country made the decision that although he was no beauty, it was nearly the end of our second last day and he decided to take a shot. Dodge talked him through the placement as it was a little tricky with the stag lying facing away from us.

The rifle boomed, the stag twitched once and lay still, never even regaining his feet. With the photo session done, we began taking the hide for a flat skin and the skull for a Euro mount. It was well after dark so this task was completed under headlight torch.



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We loaded as much meat as we could carry - both back legs went into my pack and we began hauling the meat the 2km back to the quad. It felt longer than that to my legs, shoulders and back but eventually we made it, loaded everything onto the quad and returned to camp. We dressed out the meat, cryovaced it and dropped it into the chest freezer.

On our final hunting day, we set off to a new corner of the 160,000ha property. The bush was thick enough to require 'still-hunting' which I enjoy. Suddenly a pig flushed from cover. I called the guide safely out of the way before loading the rifle, and when the pig reappeared at a full run about 25m away I fired the .30-06.

The offhand shot had thankfully been a good one and the 150gr Core-Lokt

projectile had taken out the heart. The obligatory modelling session followed and we took the head for mounting and continued on our way. What happened next surprised even our guide.

We stopped on top of a rocky knoll which had a great vantage point over some open terrain. I made the comment that this was exactly the sort of spot where I could spend several hours glassing and waiting to see what came by. The other members of my hunting party scoffed at me, saying that it was not worth the time.

But they were left with egg on their faces when I sighted a huge-bodied deer walking past at 250m away. Dodge noticed some does trailing the big stag about 120m away. Country was in a better shooting location so he moved into position. Dodge made a

squeaking sound and stopped the animals. Country pulled the trigger and a young doe fell. We threw some paracord over a low branch and hoisted the animal by a rear leg and fell into the now familiar routine of skinning.

It was just after this when Country and I stopped for a photo where I copped some flak due to my shooting sticks supposedly looking like Gandalf's staff from the *Lord of the Rings* films. I explained that this was because it allowed me to quickly place my binos into the 'V' on top of the sticks, which reduces arm fatigue, but also provides an extremely steady rest which enables me to see much more detail when glassing. Once the "None shall pass" quotes stopped, Dodge tried his binos in his shooting sticks and was an instant convert. The reason I have the sticks so long is that they clear my binos harness and mean I can have the binos at eye height which reduces neck strain.

We weren't really hunting during the 1km stroll to the quad, we were chatting loudly and walking quickly. We had just arrived at the quad when Dodge and I spotted what I thought were a couple of does about 200m away.

Glassing revealed they were actually spikers and Dodge said that I was able to shoot one as a substitute for a doe as part of my



Feeling the heat

package. Then I spied the top of a pair of antlers protruding from a gully behind the spikers. He looked good to me with a great rounded shape but I wanted to check with Dodge as he was still in velvet, which was deceptive.

Dodge stated he was definitely a little longer than my other stag, but closer inspection revealed that the inners were short and one inner was extremely petite. If I was going to spend \$1000 on another stag, it would have to be much better than the one I already had. So I decided to pass and concentrate on the spiker.

We closed the distance to 150m. I held on that spiker for what felt like forever, but there were branches or foliage covering the vitals. With the wind blowing slightly towards the pair of deer, I definitely felt time-pressured. Dodge and I had discussed aiming for the heart, as opposed to my strategy of the exit wound. Finally the spiker fed into the open and was quartering towards us with its front legs slightly higher than his rear legs.

Taking Dodge's advice into consideration I aimed for where I imagined the heart to be and pulled the trigger. Closer

examination showed that with the front leg covering the heart, the shot had entered and then left the front leg before finding the chest cavity and pulverising the heart. Photos taken, we hoisted, caped and field-dressed the animal.

Back at camp we processed the meat and even though both Country and I had another doe included in our package we decided to pass. We had all the meat that the airline weight restrictions would allow and we both had a trophy and a flat skin to remember the trip. So we skipped the afternoon hunt and started to pack our gear.

We departed early the next morning. We said goodbye at the airport, but unfortunately the low point of the trip was about to occur.

With regards to our baggage, we shared a double gun case containing one rifle each which weighed 21kg and a suitcase at 22kg plus our hunting backpacks as carry-on. As soon as we had phone service, I called the Virgin Australia help desk and paid for an additional 23kg of excess baggage. We repacked and check-weighed the venison in a lidded plastic container prior to heading in.

At the check-in desk we were told that

the gun case was classified as 'restricted baggage' and would have to be taken to a special handling section. This surprised us as we were able to check it in as per normal on the flight up which was with another airline.

So Country went to do that and I placed the plastic container on the scales. The check-in person asked me what was in it. I said: "Meat." I was then asked: "What kind?" "Frozen, cryovaced venison," I answered truthfully. "So no antlers or skins?" "No," I again answered truthfully though somewhat confused as to why that would matter.

The check-in person then spoke to a manager. After some discussion, the manager approached me and politely said: "I'm sorry but you can't fly with that." "Why not?" I asked stunned, as I have mates who regularly, legally fly with all sorts of meat products. "Because it has to be in an insulated and sealed container."

I respectfully stated that it was in a sealed container and that the meat was frozen and cryovaced, but to no avail.

To the manager's credit she said she would ask at one of the eateries within the airport for a polystyrene box which apparently is permissible. She tried, but struck out. I had no alternative but to cut the cable ties securing the lid, and put 21kg of prime, free-range, hard-won venison into a garbage bag to be thrown into an industrial rubbish bin. I couldn't even reclaim a credit on the \$55 I'd paid for the excess baggage.

Now fair enough, rules are rules so I did not blow up as the matter had been politely handled by both parties. In hindsight I should have checked with the airline ahead of time and discovered the flying conditions, but my guide has had dozens of clients fly home with venison in the exact manner that I was attempting to do the same, just not with this airline.

Further research later revealed that Virgin International was one of the first airlines to ban the import of animal trophies. Closer inspection of the Virgin Australia website reveals that it states: 'Virgin Australia does not support the transportation of hunting trophies,



Ben with the last animal of the trip.

endangered species or shark fins and therefore does not transport these items.'

It was fortunate that Country did not innocently attempt to transport his animal trophy in his check-in baggage.

I am not being critical of the airline in any way. I am merely suggesting readers should give serious consideration to their choice of air-carrier prior to booking a trip so they do not become caught in the same situation.

However this did not diminish the overall hunting experience. Despite the heat and humidity it was a cracking hunt. Our guide, Dodge, is a mate of mine, but we paid full freight for this hunt and were not given any special treatment because of our friendship.

I would have no hesitation recommending Accurate Hunts as a professional guiding organisation. More information can be found at **accuratehunts.com**

Country and I vowed not to wait so long before our next trip, but perhaps we'll schedule it during a beautiful, freezing winter... ■



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.



Our unique Outback camels

Peter d’Plesse

Perception is an interesting thing. What our eyes detect is processed by the brain and often subject to the influence of a judgmental mind. On the open plains of south-west Queensland I didn’t dare stalk closer. The pig was feeding on grassland under the watchful corvine eyes resting high in the scattered trees on sentry duty.

Along with a pair of brolgas gracing the landscape, further movement would be announced far and wide. Beyond the pig I spotted a shape among some scrub under

a tree, a large goat I judged. It provided a useful guide to estimate range while finding a steady rest for my Winchester .270 on the branch of a fallen tree.

Gentle pressure on the trigger blasted a shot across the quiet landscape. The pig raised its head, looked around casually and nosed the ground tentatively before moving off behind some bushes. The ‘large goat’ took a few steps to reveal itself as a small camel. From behind other bushes, mother grabbed its attention with a snappy bellow. The wayward child answered the call and

moved off after ruining my range estimation.

As there’s a bit of difference between a large goat and a small camel, my bullet buried itself into the red dirt well short of its target. What I perceived as a small to medium pig at extreme point-blank range was in fact a large pig a lot further away, all because of a camel.

Camels? They’re unexpected in this part of Queensland but not unusual in much of Outback Australia.

Camels aren’t native to Australia but adapted to a landscape with many



Dromedaries are distinguished by having one hump on their back. The bactrian breed has two.

similarities to their initial homelands. Camels are related to llamas and alpacas. They originated in the New World and crossed over the Bering land bridge to Asia. Australia's camel population consists of two species. Dromedaries (*Camelus dromedarius*) are Arabian camels with one hump and are most common but there are also bactrian camels (*Camelus bactrianus*) from Central and East Asia distinguished by two humps. They were imported from British India and Afghanistan during the 19th century for transport and

construction in the central and western parts of Australia.

The first suggestion to import camels was made in 1822 by Danish-French geographer and journalist Conrad Malte-Brun. In 1839, Lieutenant Colonel George Gawler, second Governor of South Australia, also suggested that camels should be brought in to work in the semi-arid regions of Australia. The first camel duly arrived in 1840, ordered from the Canary Islands by the Phillips brothers, of Adelaide.

All but one of the camels died on the

voyage. The surviving camel was named Harry. He was used for inland exploration by pastoralist and explorer John Ainsworth Horrocks on his ill-fated 1846 expedition into the arid South Australian interior near Lake Torrens in a search for new agricultural land.

Australia's first major inland expedition to use camels as a main form of transport was the Burke and Wills expedition in 1860. The Victorian Government imported 24 camels for this trek. The first Muslim cameleers arrived on June 9, 1860 at

Our unique Outback camels



Feral camels in Outback Queensland.

Port Melbourne from Kurrachee to participate in the Burke and Wills expedition. As explained by the Victorian Exploration Expedition Committee, “camels would be comparatively useless unless accompanied by native drivers”.

The cameleers on the expedition included 45-year-old Dost Mahomed who was bitten by a bull camel, losing permanent use of his right arm and Esa (Hassan) Khan from Kalat, who fell ill near Swan Hill. They proved their worth by caring for the camels, loading and unloading equipment and provisions and locating water on the expedition.

From the 1860s small groups of cameleers were shipped in and out of Australia at three-year intervals to service South Australia's inland pastoral industry. Carting goods and transporting wool bales by camel was a lucrative livelihood for the cameleers. As their knowledge of the Australian Outback and economy increased, Muslim cameleers began their own businesses, importing camels and running camel trains.

By 1890 the camel business was

dominated by Muslim merchants and brokers, commonly referred to as 'Afghans' or 'Ghans', despite their origin often being British India. At least 15,000 camels and their handlers came to Australia between 1870 and 1900. Most of these camels were dromedaries from India, including the bikaneri war camel from Rajasthan as a riding camel, as well as lowland Indian camels for heavy work. Other dromedaries included the bis-hari riding camel of North Africa and Arabia.

A bull camel could be expected to carry up to 600kg (1300lb) and camel trains could cover more than 40km per day. They were ideally suited to the conditions of Outback Australia. This was demonstrated in 1895 when a prospector rode a camel to a world distance record without water for more than 900km.

Camel studs were set up in 1866 by Sir Thomas Elder and Samuel Stuckey at Beltana and Umberatana Stations in South Australia. There was also a government stud camel farm near Coolgardie in Western Australia, established in 1894. These studs operated for about 50 years

and provided high-class breeding camels for the Australian camel trade.

Camels continued to be used for inland exploration by Peter Warburton in 1873, William Christie Gosse in 1873, Ernest Giles in 1875-76, David Lindsay in 1885-1886, Thomas Elder in 1891-1892, the Calvert Expedition in 1896-97 and by Cecil Madigan in 1939. Camels were also employed in the construction of the Overland Telegraph Line and carried pipe sections for the Goldfields Water Supply Scheme to Kalgoorlie. Eventually, the Immigration Restriction Act of 1901 and the 'unofficial' White Australia policy made it more difficult for cameleers to enter Australia.

As Muslim cameleers increasingly travelled through the inland, they encountered various Aboriginal groups. An exchange of skills, knowledge and goods soon developed. Cameleers assisted Aboriginal people by carrying traditional trade cargos, including red ochre or the narcotic plant pituri along ancient trade routes such as the Birdsville Track. The cameleers also brought

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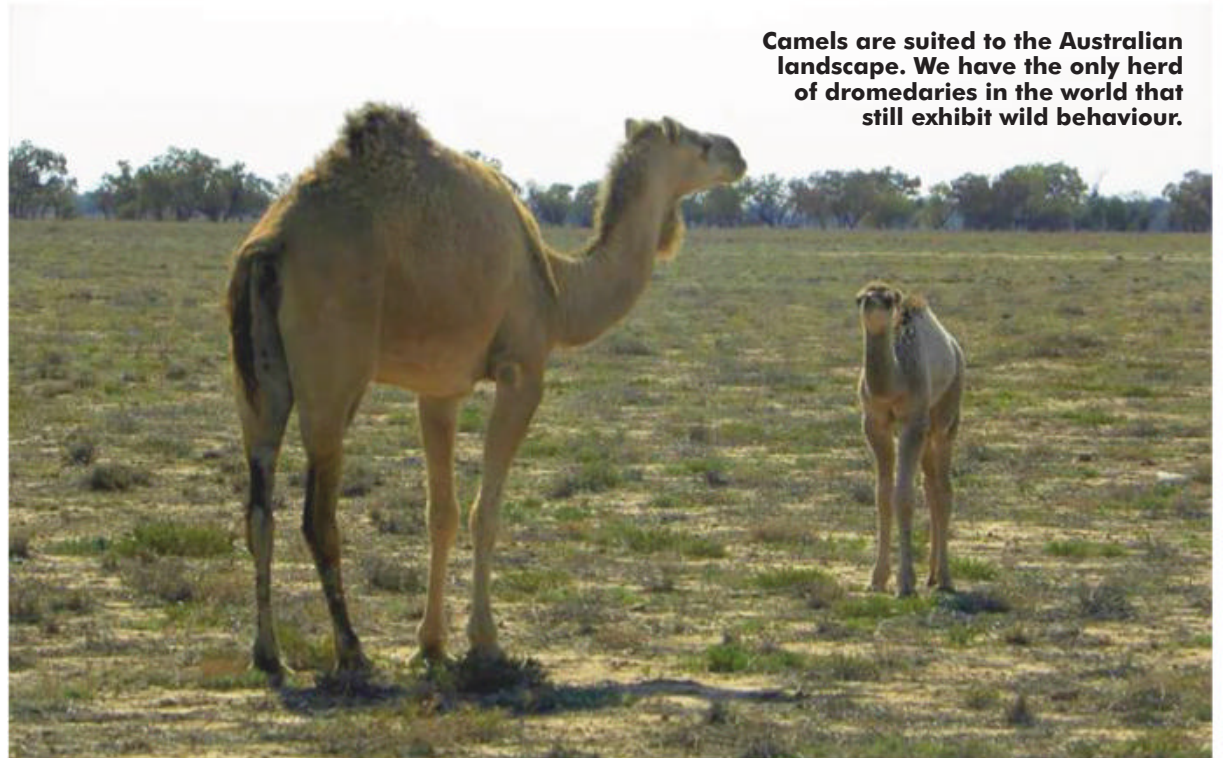
new commodities such as sugar, tea, tobacco, clothing and metal tools to remote Aboriginal groups. Aboriginal people incorporated camel hair into their traditional string artifacts and provided information on desert waters and plant resources. Some cameleers employed Aboriginal men and women to assist on their long desert treks.

From 1928 to 1933, the missionary Ernest Kramer undertook camel safaris in Central Australia with the aim of spreading the gospel. The first of his trips was to the Musgrave Ranges and Mann Ranges. This was sponsored by the Aborigines Friends Association who sought a report on Indigenous living conditions. According to Kramer's biography, as the men travelled through the desert and encountered local people, they handed out boiled lollies, tea and sugar and played 'Jesus Loves Me' on the gramophone.

At night, Kramer used a magic lantern projector to show slides of Christmas and the life of Christ. This was their first experience of Christmas and established a link between camels, gifts and Christianity that was not merely symbolic but had material reality.

By the 1930s motor transport displaced the cameleers but an opportunity arose for Aboriginal people. They learnt camel handling skills and acquired animals to extend their mobility and independence in a rapidly changing frontier society. After motorised transport became more common camels were released into the wild, resulting in a healthy feral population. Well suited to the arid conditions of Central Australia, they became the source of today's feral camel population. As a result, Australia has the largest population of feral camels and the only herd of dromedary (one-humped) camels exhibiting wild behaviour in the world.

Although their impact on the environment is not as severe as some other pests introduced into Australia, camels ingest more than 80 per cent of the plant species available. Research indicates that environmental degradation occurs when



densities exceed two animals per square kilometre. Traditional food plants harvested by Aboriginal people in these areas can be seriously affected by camel browsing. While having soft-padded feet makes soil erosion less of an issue, they can still destabilise dune crests and contribute to erosion. They have a noticeable impact on salt lake ecosystems and have been found to foul waterholes.

By 2008 the camel population had grown to about one million and was projected to double every eight to 10 years. This had potential to become a serious conservation issue due to their effect on local environments and cultural sites. A management program was funded in 2009 and by 2013 the feral population was estimated to have been reduced to around 300,000.

The culling program faced criticism from the Australian camel industry who wanted to see the feral population harvested for meat processing, the pet meat market or live export. It was argued that it would reduce waste and create jobs. Poor animal condition, high freight costs, lack of infrastructure in remote locations and difficulty in gaining necessary permissions on Aboriginal land were some of the challenges faced by the camel industry.

Australia's first commercial scale camel dairy, the Australian Wild Camel Corporation, was established in 2015 in

Clarendon, Queensland. Additional small-scale camel dairies have been set up around Australia. Live camels are occasionally exported to Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Brunei and Malaysia, where disease-free wild camels are prized as a delicacy. Australia's camels are also exported as breeding stock for Arab camel racing stables and for use in tourist venues in places such as the United States.

In early 2020 up to 10,000 camels were shot on Aboriginal land in Central Australia. This could be seen as a missed opportunity to develop a potentially valuable industry and a new way to manage the overabundant species. Early proactive management is far better than a short-term reactive response to the environmental problem posed by camels. Australia does have a camel problem, but management actions need to be ongoing or the population will breed up again.

A lesson in the management of wildlife can be learned from some African countries. Putting a dollar value on game species can generate employment, revenue and deliver long-term environmental benefits. Building a profitable camel hunting and meat industry would be a sustainable way of controlling the camel population with flow-on benefits to the environment and Indigenous employment.

Australia is predominately an arid land

Our unique Outback camels

and we should be taking full advantage of a parched animal. Camel meat is highly valued in the Middle East and North Africa. Within Australia it could find an increasing customer base through Halal butcher shops. Small abattoirs could be established at Kalgoorlie and Alice Springs to further develop the camel meat industry. Distance is a major factor in promoting any inland business in Australia so support infrastructure must be developed close to where the camel populations are. As the old saying goes: "If you build it, they will come."

Camel hunting opportunities are offered by an array of outfitters in Australia. They provide a good opportunity to hunt a feral animal to deliver sustainable environmental benefits under 'free range' conditions.

This is a different proposition to some safari hunting in Africa that takes place on fenced tracts of land. The cost will depend on the length of the hunt, the number of hunters in a group, presence of non-hunting partners and whether any other species are

nominated as part of the hunt. The hunting season for camels in Australia runs from the beginning of February to the end of August. The best time for hunting is during the dry season, before the wet season and the onset of summer heat.

Experienced hunters will be familiar with the best aiming points for a clean kill. With a rear view, the poll position requires aiming at the back of the head at the intersection of the skull and the neck. From the side, the temporal position is a sideways shot so that the bullet enters the skull midway between the eye and the base of the ear. With a chest shot the aim point is slightly behind and below the shoulder immediately behind the elbow. This shot needs to be angled forward at about 45 degrees to the camel's body to hit the heart.

Consideration of suitable rifles involves decisions about cartridges and bullets. Bullet choice is probably more important than the cartridge. In general terms, a calibre of .270 Winchester and above matched with

a suitable bullet offering the best balance of expansion and penetration will allow a clean cull. Some 6.5mm calibres would potentially be suitable given their ability to deliver long, heavy carry for calibre projectiles offering deep penetration. It is always necessary to check any relevant state and territory hunting regulations and as all hunters know, good bullet placement is more important than calibre.

The camel is an animal well suited to Australia's environmental conditions. While they add a certain appeal to our landscape, numbers must be controlled to ensure this charm doesn't cause excessive environmental damage. Controlled hunting can provide this management if done correctly. It would also allow the development of a sustainable industry fitting in well to Outback Australia. Its effectiveness and flow-on benefits is a political question subject to the competing agendas of all the stakeholders who would claim involvement.

If you gain the chance, enjoy the hunt. ■



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Middle Eastern camel casserole

Alison Purdon and Peter d’Plesse



Enjoy the camel casserole with a glass of good red wine.

While similar to beef, a meal of camel meat creates exotic expectations. It can sometimes be tough, depending on age, conditions and how it was harvested. Just like its native desert habitat, camel meat needs at least several hours of moist heat to temper gaminess and soften its texture. Slow cooking with this recipe delivers a sweet taste similar to veal that fits well with a flavour developed with bold spices.

Ingredients

- 750g camel cut into 3-4cm cubes
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 onion, peeled and chopped
- Small bunch of fresh coriander, stalks chopped
- 1 400g can chickpeas, drained
- 1 400g can cherry tomatoes
- 1 ½ tablespoons of beef stock powder
- 2 cups water
- 400g butternut pumpkin, chopped into 50mm chunks
- 120g pitted prunes
- 2 tablespoons brown sugar
- 2 tablespoons sliced almonds, lightly toasted

Spice rub

- 1 tablespoon Moroccan spice mix
- 1 tablespoon ground cumin
- 1 tablespoon ground cinnamon
- 1 tablespoon sweet paprika
- 1 tablespoon ground ginger

Yoghurt topping

Combine and mix thoroughly 200g natural Greek yoghurt, 1 tablespoon Hoyts Moroccan spice and 1 tablespoon chopped coriander leaves.

Instructions

1. Mix all the spice rub ingredients together in a small bowl. Put the meat in a sealable plastic bag and add the spice mix. Mix thoroughly to coat the meat and place in the fridge for a couple of hours (ideally overnight) to allow the spices to penetrate and flavour the meat.

2. Add the olive oil in a casserole pan and fry the meat over a medium heat for 5 minutes or until lightly browned. The meat may soak up the olive oil so be prepared to add a touch more as required.

3. Add chopped onion and coriander stalks and fry for another 5 minutes.

4. Add the chickpeas, tomatoes and beef stock and stir. Bring to the boil, then put the lid on the pan or cover with foil and simmer for 1 ½ hours. If using an oven, cook at 160 degrees (fan forced oven) or 180 degrees (conventional oven) for the same time.

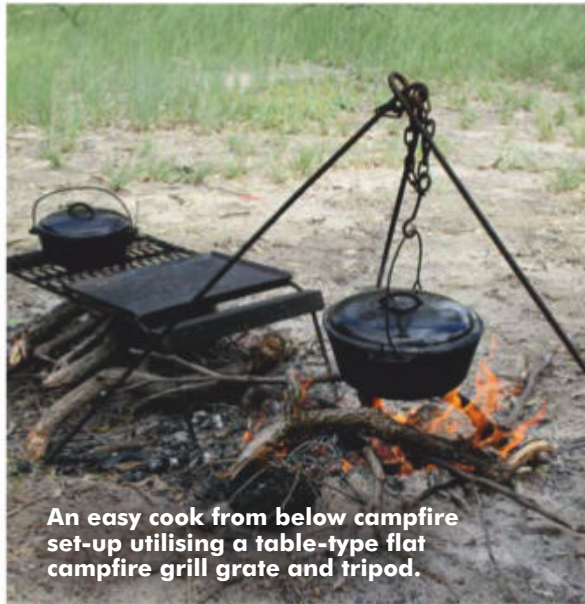
5. Add the pumpkin, brown sugar and prunes. Give everything a gentle stir, then replace the lid and continue cooking for another 30 minutes. Add a little water if needed.

6. Remove the lid and check consistency. If it seems too runny, simmer for a further 5 to 10 minutes with the lid off. The meat should be tender. Season to taste.

7. Serve with mashed potato or rice. Top with the yoghurt mix, chopped coriander leaves and almonds. ■

Campfire fast food

Lynn Bain cooks three recipes over the campfire simultaneously and they come together in a great combination. The trio of recipes can stand alone too.



An easy cook from below campfire set-up utilising a table-type flat campfire grill grate and tripod.

My husband Steve and I travel through the Outback, often stopping for just one night as we move around properties to hunt. In this situation we need our cooking to be quicker than the traditional slow-cook over-the-coals approach to campfire meals

This fast-cooking methodology makes good use of swift burning and smaller pieces of deadfall/branches you can gather up, often near camp, without back-breaking effort.

The heat you need for cooking is quick to get going with this type of wood - none of the 'waiting' for the fire and timbers to die down or abate to coals.

These recipes and techniques are designed to reduce the cooking time. As well, they offer less risk of error because the cooking methods are set up to handle high heat as well as variations in heat. In the case of the damper, you can even keep an eye on it directly because it is cooked in the open on a hotplate.

Additionally, the methods are a slight

twist to those that are often recommended for cast iron camp oven campfire cooking. To highlight a major difference in contrast to campfire folklore, the recipe methods include using camp ovens with nary any legged-cast-iron-camp-ovens, nor lipped-lids-with-coals-on-top, in sight.

Legs and lips (pros and cons)

Sure, lips and legs are definitely desirable attributes in your camp oven for certain recipes. This is particularly so if you are using the 'stacking' method of slow cooking with multiple camp ovens. However, 'stacking' is a procedural discussion for another time.

Incidentally, those who favour camp ovens that come fitted with legs claim that the elevation provided permits the coals underneath to gain more oxygen/air flow and so provide better heating.

In contrast, some users feel the legs' greatest downfall is that they are in the way (especially when packing or transporting the camp ovens) and that you are better off with the oven sitting flat on a bed of coals.

However, what is important with respect to techniques, is that a lipped lid can foul on the oven's lifting handle when the handle is upright as it is when the cast iron camp oven is suspended on a tripod. So, the lid can be difficult to remove and it is difficult to put the lid back on.

When using coals from a fire, a traditional camp oven slow-cooked large roast may take three to four hours in a cast iron camp oven. You can't unburn food so slow and steady is the go. If the cooking site is located close to the main fire, then, in many cases you will also have to rotate the camp oven



The completed meal consisting of savoury minced game meat stew, roast vegetables and damper scones.

between 120 and 180 degrees every 30 minutes or so in order to reduce the risk of burning the food on the side of the pot closest to the fire. Unfortunately, you don't always have the luxury of time.

The approach used in this campfire method is a time and effort saver. Often, you'll hardly have to tend the food at all. Okay, maybe an occasional stir of the pot with a wooden spoon, but in reality, that's just an excuse to check on how things are going, particularly the fluid levels. We find that we can cook these recipes while concurrently setting up our camp.

Top tips for Campfire fast food

Cooking in liquid and convection

Cooking in a liquid has advantages. The liquid surrounds the main items to be cooked and when heated (from below) convection currents are established.

The motion of simmering liquid in a pot is a good example of convection. Because convection circulates heat, it accelerates the

Campfire fast food

cooking process. Using a liquid to cook in is a strategy for minimising burnt food stuck on the bottom of your cast iron cookware. If you need to, towards the end of the cooking time, in order to contend with any excess liquid, take the lid off the pot. This lets the heat from below simmer the contents to evaporate away some of the liquid. This 'thickens' the liquid/sauce.

In some cases, you may not wish to reduce the mix at all, especially if you desire a more soup-like consistency to your presentation.

Dutch ovens above the fire

Instead of slow cooking in a camp oven (with coals on the lid) - we are using a quick cook from below deal. Rather than digging a pit, the effort is put into quickly clearing an area around the fire location.

There are three main types of appliances that you can use to suspend your camp oven above the fire. These are the table-type flat campfire grill grate, the swivel campfire grill grate and the tripod.

Table-type campfire grill grate/AKA grid

The table-type campfire grill grates typically consist of a rectangular grilling surface supported by collapsible (either straight or outward angled) legs. These legs keep some distance between the fire and the cooking surface.

A folding 'fire-grid' with collapsible legs allows you to build a fire above the ground (no need to dig a fire pit). The fire grid provides cooking surface(s) - often a grid as well as a hotplate and also delivers a spot for frypans, cast iron ovens and saucepans. In most cases the height, or the clearance, of the grid over the fire is not easily adjustable.

Swivel campfire grill grates

The swivel campfire grills, AKA 'stake' grill, are essentially portable adjustable campfire grills that are centred around an upright post, star picket or stake (see our RotaBBQ review in Issue 72).

This heavy-duty post is hammered into the ground and one or more grilling grates are slid up and down the post in order to set the grilling plates at the desired distance from the fire source.

Often these grill plates have an adjustable locking mechanism to hold them firmly in position at your chosen height. The food is then placed on one or more of the plates to cook.

Tripod

A lightweight version of a tripod is ideal for small camp ovens (weight support wise). The tripod legs and hanging chain can also be adjusted in order to alter the height that the pot/food is suspended above the heat.

A tripod can be set up to hang your Dutch oven directly over your campfire. You may adjust the height the pot is hung above the fire; closer to the fire if you're using high heat for frying, or raise the pot if you are low heat simmering.

Take it even further away if you are simply keeping the food warm. It's important to make sure that the tripod's legs are set up evenly over your campfire. This will help distribute the weight of the pot and prevent any accidental spills.

A word of caution to avoid spills, a large capacity heavy camp oven full of food may be too heavy and could bend the legs of a lightweight tripod (especially once the fire heats the legs).

Small is better

Small food cooks quicker. For example, minced meat will cook more swiftly than a roast. You may even tailor the food or recipes to match up to faster cooking techniques (such as deep or shallow frying).

Small is better II

Multiple mini or mid-size pots can arguably be better than one large XOS pot. With multiple pots you can have different pots on various heat settings (fire intensity).

As a bonus, small cast iron cooking receptacles are easier to handle around camp and they are also better to pack.

Having a variety of pot sizes in your kitchen kit allows you to put a mini-pot inside a larger pot. Multiple pots inside each other (separated by padding) can then be packed inside the same crate. So, space is saved.

Not having legs on the small pots has a great packing benefit too - legs can be an added complication when separating cast iron items and lids to stop them rubbing against each other. Cast iron is brittle and can crack if the pots or lids bump together during transportation.

Courtesy of a free fall landing after jumping out of a burning building, I now have, among other breaks and injuries, a back that has double figures of broken vertebrae. Sure, a 6-quart camp oven, or larger has advantages such as its ability to encapsulate a whole chicken for roasting.

However, for anyone with a bad back or who is getting on in years, a small 2.5-quart camp oven weighs a lot less and is the ideal capacity for two people. Yep, you may have to cut the chicken into Marylands, or even quarter it into smaller pieces, but you can make it fit.

Also, you may need a second camp oven for your side dishes and vegetables, but the point is that each of the two small camp ovens will weigh less and be easier to carry than one XOS model.

A 10-quart cast iron camp oven will weigh about 13kg but add a few extra kilograms when it has food in it. It is often quoted that an 8-quart or more camp oven is required for a family or group of six or more people. However, you will find that three or four 2.5-quart models (or 2x 2.5qt + 1x 4-4.5qt) will also do the trick.

Watch the wind

Because it adds oxygen to the cooking environment, wind causes coals to burn faster and hotter. Also, though, wind may blow the fire's flame away from a suspended cooking pot. So, you may need to use some sort of safe wind break around your cooking fire in blustery conditions.

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Hearty game meat stew



game meat (such as venison) then the more pork fat to include in the ratio, say 30/70 lean venison to pork respectively. A caveat on this is if the pork is too fatty, apply your commonsense and use less pork. You want just enough fat, but not too much.

Place the lid on the camp oven and cook, in this case suspended from a tripod, until the meat has cooked through. Lift the lid and stir, with a wooden spoon, from time to time.

To thicken the game mince stew to your preference, reduce the liquid in the stew by continuing the cooking over a low heat. But this time with the lid off in order to allow some of the moisture to evaporate away.

This is a one-pot meal that is designed to cook quickly over high(ish) heat without burning the ingredients.



- 2-3 teaspoons harissa powder
- 1 tablespoon ras el hanout (use curry powder as an alternative option)
- 1 teaspoon cumin seeds
- 1 tablespoon tomato sauce
- 400g tin chopped tomatoes
- green capsicum (optional)
- 1 cup water

Handy Hint: Use a variety of meat minces in this recipe - particularly pork and goat in roughly a 50/50 ratio. The leaner the

Brown the minced pork and goat (lamb is an alternative to goat). The pork has been pre-seasoned with ground pepper. As an option I've included some of the bones in the mix. An alternative to the leg bones could have been to toss the goat's neck into the pot.

Place the ingredients into the camp oven, then stir together:

- 750g game mince(s)
- 2 onions, chopped
- handful fresh herbs, roughly chopped (optional)



Aussie damper scones



These are the carbohydrate constituent of this balanced meal. Carbohydrates are a source of energy for the long walks that hunters often pursue. This damper recipe and cooking technique are for a flat scone.

The secret to competent carbo cooking is to watch and test your grill in order to know where the hottest parts are as well as the coolest areas of the hot plate. You are working with fire and it can become seriously hot – it is not uncommon for some parts of the grill to reach higher than 500 degrees Celsius. Cooking with this amount of heat is dramatically different to working with a normal grill at home.

This level of heat is great for sealing and searing. However, if you attempt to cook through at these high temperatures, most often the outcome will be scones burnt to a black crisp on the outside. So, the solution is to aim for a lower heat with lesser quality firewoods.

You may even need to adjust the fire (away) from under the grill to modify the heat to allow the food to cook through gently and evenly. Obviously, any wind will move the flames and this may shift the heat.

Ingredients

- 4 cups self-raising flour
- 2 tablespoons dried milk powder
- generous pinch of salt
- 3-4 chopped sundried tomatoes
- 1/2 cup grated cheese
- 2 cups(ish) water

Alternatively you can use a combination of plain flour and baking powder instead of self-raising flour. Use 2 teaspoons of baking powder added to each cup of plain flour.

Also, you can swap the sundried tomatoes for your preferred spices or herbs.

Add the water to the grated cheese, self-raising flour, milk powder, salt, semi sundried tomatoes (the type stored in olive oil) and mix by hand until the mixture just comes together.

Using the damper mix to make 'flat scones' means that you can cook them on a hot plate in 10-15 minutes. This is rather than as a round loaf in a camp oven which may take 30 to 40 minutes.

Flip the scones regularly to avoid the risk of burning and flatten them gently in the process. Once the cheese has started to melt, it helps to bind them together.

When ready, your damper scones will sound hollow when tapped. Dampers can go stale rapidly, so only make enough biscuits for the immediate meal sitting. After all, they are quick to make and quick to cook.

Blown the scone? At this stage, if they end up hard, call them sugarless rock cakes; if they end up a little soft in the middle you can call them dumplings.



Rustic vegetables in duck fat

This is a 'recipe' for roasting vegetables on a camp oven placed directly on top of a 'fire-grid'. It's good to choose vegetables that will cook at approximately the same rate - potatoes and pumpkin, or sweet potatoes and onions. Also to ensure that the vegetables are all cut to about the same size. I use duck fat in the following recipe but any cooking oil will suffice with perhaps a tablespoon or two of butter added.

Place the sweet potatoes and brown onions (both in their skins) into a pot that has ample duck fat in the bottom. Sweet potato is a great campfire vegetable because it cooks (softens) quickly and cooks at about the same rate as an onion. Place the lid on the Dutch oven and put the

Dutch oven on top of the fire grid/grill. The lid is positioned on the pot to create an oven-like atmosphere in which to roast the vegetables. Cook over a low to medium

heat. The sweet potatoes and onions are deemed cooked when you don't feel any resistance as you poke them with a skewer or the tip of a knife or tines of a fork. ■



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Hornady American Gunner ammo delivers in bulk

Chris Redlich

**Fantastic accuracy at 600m
reinforcing long-range credentials.**

It had been years since purchasing factory centrefire ammo of any description after enjoying success with handloads in my hunting rifles. I recently acquired a new Sauer 100 Classic in 6.5 Creedmoor, with the sole purpose of using only factory ammo, although I bought various boxes of different load and projectile weight combinations to trial.

Seduced by the lure of economy, I couldn't pass up the affordable price of Hornady American Gunner ammunition in containers of 200. The retailer explained if I ever changed my mind about using factory ammo and decided to reload, it would be cheaper for me to purchase the box of 200 rounds, fire once and reload the case as opposed to buying brand new brass cases.

I purchased a single box of 200 Hornady American Gunner 140-grain BTHP (boat-tail hollow-point) in 6.5 Creedmoor. I was comforted by their long history and strong reputation. The Hornady company is based

in Nebraska and are heavyweights when it comes to ammunition manufacturing and are renowned for some of the world's best and reliable performing lines.

According to Hornady, the American Gunner line-up of ammunition is a collection of tried and proven, versatile loads that are popular with shooters for small to medium game hunting and target shooting.

For the purpose of review I am focusing on testing my own American Gunner in 6.5 Creedmoor. Initially I thought that the long, sleek hollow-point projectiles would be suited for target use only. However, not to be misled by appearances, the ammunition has achieved a fair amount of success with North American deer and coyote hunters.

The bulk container of 200

Buying ammo in bulk is cost effective and if you plan on putting many rounds down-range you can't afford to go past Hornady's offer of American Gunner in boxed 200

rounds. When you compare the price between 200 with a packet of 20 or 50, it is surprising how much you save per round by buying the larger amount.

The 200 rounds of ammunition is packaged and sealed in a clear plastic bag within the container itself and when all cartridges are spent the box is handy for reuse, containing any brass cases awaiting the afterlife of future handloading.

The cartridge

Drawing dimensional DNA from the .308 Winchester and developed specifically for long-range target shooting by Hornady in 2007, the 6.5 Creedmoor is fast becoming a favourite Australian chambering for good reason.

It almost duplicates the ballistics of the respected 6.5x55 Swede and the .260 Remington, both of which have accounted for their fair share of game across Europe, the US and Australia. Casting my mind

Hornady American Gunner ammo delivers in bulk

back, 12 years ago my brother shot his first red deer easily with a single shot from a converted ex-military Husqvarna M96 in 6.5x55 Swede and handloaded 140-grain projectile. The 6.5 Creedmoor by all reports delivers comparative performance to the 6.5x55 Swede with 140-grain projectiles but importantly, in a more efficient, short-action case design with an overall length (OAL) of 71.8mm (or 2.827").

Manufactured with premium components in the US, American Gunner ammunition combines years of ballistics development and technology. Hornady claims that all components have been carefully chosen to help maintain their high standard of reliable feeding and ability to withstand high chamber pressures.

After enjoying years of success with brass components for handloads in other



The plastic ammo box showing the 200 rounds can be recycled for further use.

cartridges it appears they haven't dropped their guard for high-quality manufacture. The spent brass cases from 6.5 Creedmoor should be able to handle multiple rebirths as handloads. My concern with any brand of factory ammo has always been fluctuating velocities resulting in inconsistent accuracy. However, this new ammo, although essentially budget range, is loaded to tight tolerances to ensure shot for shot accuracy using non-corrosive primers and powder.

Hornady is reluctant to divulge any information on propellant used, including the burning rate, but claim the 140-grain BTHP leaves the muzzle at a modest 2690fps from a 24" barrel, as listed on the container. As expected from my Sauer 22" barrel, a slight reduction in velocity to an average of 2640fps was confirmed with the aid of my shooting chrony. To satisfy my curiosity, I





The massive trophy hog, smoothly taken.

pulled a single projectile from a case and weighed the powder. The short-cut style, stick propellant weighed 41.2 grains. The powder weight matches my handload data and is consistent with my own testing.

As with most 6.5mm bullets the 140-grain BTHPs have a high BC (ballistic coefficient) of .580. It's a match grade projectile designed to be accurate, deliver excellent hitting power and superior long-range ballistic performance. With my research on the ammunition complete I couldn't wait to chamber a few rounds and test them for myself.

Range testing

From the word go the new ammo lived up to the hype. Honestly, when I first took the retailer's advice and purchased the container of 200, I hoped I hadn't made a big mistake buying so many rounds and thought what a waste it would've been if they were a flop.

It's not that I doubted Hornady's ammunition. But whether or not my rifle suited that ammunition. At the range I was pleasantly surprised when my initial group produced outstanding results. The first

group was a tidy 3-shot sub-MOA followed by another similar one during the barrel running-in process. Subsequent follow-up sessions have all yielded tight groups.

Recently while reviewing a Swarovski Optik Z8i riflescope, I naturally used the American Gunner ammo for testing. Not only did I discover how accurate the rifle was at long ranges but how consistent the ammo really was. From 100m, all the way out to 600m, Hornady's projectiles smashed the scores with repeated tight groups at all intervals.

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Hornady American Gunner ammo delivers in bulk

A one-off 5-shot group at 400m yielded an impressive 2.99" or .65 MOA and more recently a 4" group at 600m gives me confidence to dial up the scope and comfortably kill wild dogs at long ranges. Shot for shot consistency is what handloaders strive for and Hornady have achieved this. My experience so far is proof they are serious about manufacturing to tight tolerances and quality control. Accuracy and bullet performance is paramount when taking that vital kill shot on a trophy deer or meat animal. Now satisfied with the important results achieved on paper, I was keen to test American Gunner's hunting credentials.

Hunting

Back at my usual hunting patch in south-east Queensland, my daughter and I searched high and low for the elusive mountain

reds. It appeared that the savage bushfires months earlier had impacted the deer population but before we lost faith in finding something a pair of hinds appeared, feeding upwind and totally oblivious of our presence.

Equipped with the Sauer 100 Classic and a magazine of American Gunner ammo, we were moments away from experiencing the terminal performance of the 140-grain BTHP projectile. Under my guidance, I positioned Rachel for the shot. The hinds fed down and disappeared into a gully before reappearing at 80m and well within range to shoot. With a clear sight picture, she fired and the hind leapt into a death run. Although not necessary, Rachel instinctively reloaded and fired again. The hind was dead before it hit the ground and any prior doubts of the ammo's hunting abilities had dissolved,

reinforcing its reason for rising popularity with American deer hunters.

The projectile performed flawlessly and the first shot had smashed through both shoulders taking out the heart and leaving a gaping exit wound. We had just taken Rachel's first deer and our initial meat animal for the year.

More recently the claims of terminal hunting performance for the ammo was backed up again by downing a large trophy boar on a western trip. In fading light, I allowed the massive lone boar to walk towards me until I felt comfortable taking the shot. Closing the gap to approximately 70m, I fired and the boar dropped on the spot from the single bullet, as if hit by lightning. There was no visible exit wound from the heavily armoured pig, but further proof of the Hornady projectile's hunting performance lay at my feet.

Conclusion

Hornady have restored my faith in budget-priced factory ammo. American Gunner bought in bulk packs of 200 are by far the best alternative to handloading for the hunter who enjoys testing their skills, expending numerous rounds on the range or smashing ferals.

Satisfied with the performance while field testing, I have no hesitation in recommending this ammo on Australian game including deer, feral pigs and wild dogs. Alternatively, the ammo would suit the target shooter looking for consistent shot for shot accuracy at long range.

Retail price at the time of writing was \$235 for the bulk container of 200 in 6.5 Creedmoor and in my opinion, it is an absolute bargain. It is important to enquire with your local gunstore for current pricing. Other calibres available in bulk 200 containers are .300 Blackout and undoubtedly, Australia's two most popular hunting cartridges the .223 Rem and .308 Win. For more information visit the Australian distributors, Outdoor Sporting Agencies at osaaustralia.com.au or Hornady's website at hornady.com ■



A clean kill on a red hind.

Gary, left, congratulating Toby on a job well done.

A white buffalo in croc country

Gary Hall

We arrived at camp in the early evening where our good friends already had tea on the go and handed out a couple of coldies to us.

A few beers and a good feed later, the talk turned to the colourful history of Toby's recently purchased Brno .375. The previous owner, Hilton Graham (a good friend of Toby's) had been a buffalo guide in the late 70s and early 80s for Nimrod Safaris on the La Belle Station adjacent to Stapleton Station in the Northern Territory.

As a buffalo guide Hilton had many a close call, one of which was reported in the *Northern Territory News* (April 15, 1981) when he was attacked by a four-metre saltwater crocodile and only survived the encounter due the heroic actions of a

13-year-old girl, Peta Lynne Mann. In the aftermath on October 6, 1982 Peta Lynne received the Royal Humane Society's Gold Medal for bravery from the Queen.

After all this chat, the following morning, bright and early we headed off in the two Honda Pioneers to a large expanse of wetlands. At the first drop-off point, my dogs bolted from their box on our vehicle into the swamp and the barking started a short time later.

Almost instantly Toby and I realised we'd made a big mistake and were running into a crocodile haven and our thoughts quickly turned to the previous night's campfire topic of conversation with fears of 'crocodile attack'.

"Toby I'll get the pig, you watch my back and keep an eye out for crocs," I said. At



The swamp crocodile attack that made the *Northern Territory News* in 1981.

only a short distance into the water and mud we were already knee deep. By just about 200m in we had hit an almost impenetrable wall of dense, three-and-a-half metre high reeds. What were we thinking?

A white buffalo in croc country

By the time we reached the dogs I'd almost blown a heart gasket. It was hard going running through the narrow channels in the reeds that we were now hoping had been made by pigs, not crocs. No sooner did we take our pig with a solid shot from the double-barrel coach gun than we quickly u-turned back to dry land. No wonder the lads from down south had decided not to get their feet wet.

Later, Toby said the incident had "put the bloody wind up him". As he had worked in Africa on the Rhino Protection Programme where the poachers shoot back and done a stint of guiding there, that was saying something about the precarious position we had put ourselves in.

So not wanting to tempt fate, even though we saw heaps of pigs in the churned up black mud and wet stuff, the rest of the morning the canine cavalry stayed in the Honda's dog-box. Much to their disgust. We did manage to nail a couple of pigs for the day, but in a different postcode to the wetlands.

A couple of days later, Toby and I were back in the mighty Honda side-by-side in search of a pig or two and had just traversed an eroded high-sided, dry riverbank heading towards open country.

Suddenly a large white buffalo, supporting a reasonable rack, stepped from the shadows of some light timber. It should have just



A few trophies at Gary's home.

legged it, as those few seconds of indecision would ultimately prove costly. In those precious moments Toby shouldered the .375, worked the action, took a sight-picture on the majestic creature's head and squeezed the trigger. The force of the impact jolted the solid bovine backwards, its front legs buckled and it hit the ground hard and stayed there.

Toby was ecstatic. Although not in the unicorn or dodo league, shooting a trophy white buffalo was up there. Now the hard work started, after fishing out a couple of celebratory apple ciders from the ice-box to make room for the backstraps. The time-consuming cape removal process began. What a top day. ■



Gary's mates with a prized pig.



Buffalo snags are a trophy for the tastebuds.



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Iconic John Rigby & Co
doubles. From left: 12ga
hammered mid-1880s, BLE
12ga, SLE 12ga and BLNE
.350 Nitro.

Best of British hunting with iconic shotguns

Sam Garro

Within the entire group of sporting shooters and hunters we have owners, collectors and users with a passion or interest in certain areas. These are diverse, stemming from the ownership of varying calibre rifles or shotguns, shooting black powder bore guns to the acquisition and restoration of vintage firearms and cartridge collecting. The list goes on.

During the past couple of years, I have had the pleasure to make the acquaintance of Stephen Barnes from the Kimberley region of Western Australia. He's a fellow sporting shooter and hunter who has had an appreciation for fine English and

continental rifles over a lifetime. In recent times, he has specifically favoured English 12-gauge side by side shotguns.

He recalls back in 1969 as a youngster aged 10, accompanying his father on duck and geese hunts in the Darwin region and his introduction to a firearm. The following year, under his father's supervision and guidance, he became the proud owner of a Brno 2 .22LR which he still has today.

When 19, he purchased a beautiful Westley Richards 12-gauge side by side, single bite lockup shotgun. So began a life-time journey of not only collecting specific firearms but hunting with each. He describes the firearms as a conduit to his hunting.

At the time Stephen's interest in firearms started, he was greatly influenced in particular by two knowledgeable and expert firearms hunters. One was Dave Lindner, an authority on firearms and field ballistics since the '60s and a true conservationist. He was a ranger with the NT Conservation Department, culling destructive feral pigs and buffaloes in the Alligator River region and Cobourg Peninsula.

The other person was Vic Pedersen, an experienced gunsmith/gun dealer, still active in Darwin today. According to Stephen, both appreciated an assortment of quality rifles and shotguns. They were avid hunters and importantly were instrumental in

the resurgence of old proprietary guns and obsolete calibres. Their knowledge and experience had a profound effect on Stephen who holds them in high regard and they have become close friends.

To explain it further, the 1970s was a time when large calibre firearms were being used in the Top End to despatch feral animals and bulky game such as feral pigs, donkeys, brumbies, scrub bulls and in particular, harvesting water buffaloes and crocodiles for their skins.

A number of these hard-hitting calibre firearms such as a .505 Gibbs, .416 Rigby, .465 H&H and .500 Nitro, plus other obsolete calibres, were coming across from England and India. A .505 Gibbs bullet in 1980, for example, cost \$25, a lot of money for the time. The other issue was that often the bullets didn't group properly, requiring the barrels to be regulated.

Vic at one point travelled to England specifically to learn how to regulate such barrels and address related problems.



While primers and powder were more readily available, sourcing suitable projectiles and case brass was difficult or restrictive and expensive - primarily as they were imported from overseas.

In this regard, when Geoff McDonald, founder and owner of Woodleigh Bullets, and big game hunter here and abroad, began to tool up for the development of suitable projectiles for these firearms, both

Dave and Vic were instrumental in their field testing and providing valuable ballistic data and related information.

Their combined efforts ultimately resulted in hunters and shooters gaining access to locally manufactured projectiles at a much more reasonable price and with greater certainty of supply.

Some of the original large calibre thin walled brass cases were not suitable for



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Best of British



Stephen Barnes, preparing for a WW Greener week's hunting with 12ga doubles. From left: FH50, Empire E17, Blue Rock Special, James Rosier Grade 1 Facile Principes and DH33 with tang safety.



Rolf Bachnick, a highly skilled gunsmith who has attended to various firearms restorations.

reloading, hence they were dispensed with after the initial firing. Also at the time, Bruce Bertram, of Bertram Brass, found there was a niche market in the production of the elusive large calibre brass cases, including obsolete and wildcat, making it further possible to reload cases.

Stephen's goal to achieve a collection of shotguns by specific British makers by age

60 was realised recently. It would not just be an assortment he could admire and be proud of but actually use each separately in the field on all manner of game over the pursuing months.

This included quail and ducks as well as heavier game such as feral pigs, feral donkeys, scrub bulls, camels and buffaloes, using double-barrel shotguns and recording

their overall performance relative to the cartridges used and conditions hunted. In essence, a diary or record to refer and fondly reflect on, accompanied by photos.

His understanding and wide knowledge of English shotguns has been derived from books, fellow hunters, shooters and collectors, as well as extensively searching through the internet. Those English doubles, 100 to 150 years old in particular, hold a special attraction for him. He admires their quality-build as they have withstood the test of time and are harder to come by - most are no longer produced. Importantly, there is history attached to them.

He explained there were three types of side by side shotguns - smoothbore, shot and ball paradox which has partial rifling towards the end of the barrel, and fully rifled bore guns. Side by side break-action, smooth bore shotguns have been around since the mid to late 1800s, changing in configuration from double hammer under-lever break-action to straight break-action cross bolt or boxlock with extractors or ejectors.

They later came with paradox or full rifling to handle solid slugs or lead balls for large game. Some were simplistic in appearance while others had intricate and beautiful metal engraving and motifs on the sideplates and metal surface, also at greater



Stephen with an NT Asiatic water buffalo taken with a Westley Richards Explora double 12ga using Vic Pedersen's 730gr loads.

expense. To better understand some abbreviations: BLE - boxlock ejector, BLNE - boxlock non-ejector, SLE - sidelock ejector and SLNE - sidelock non-ejector.

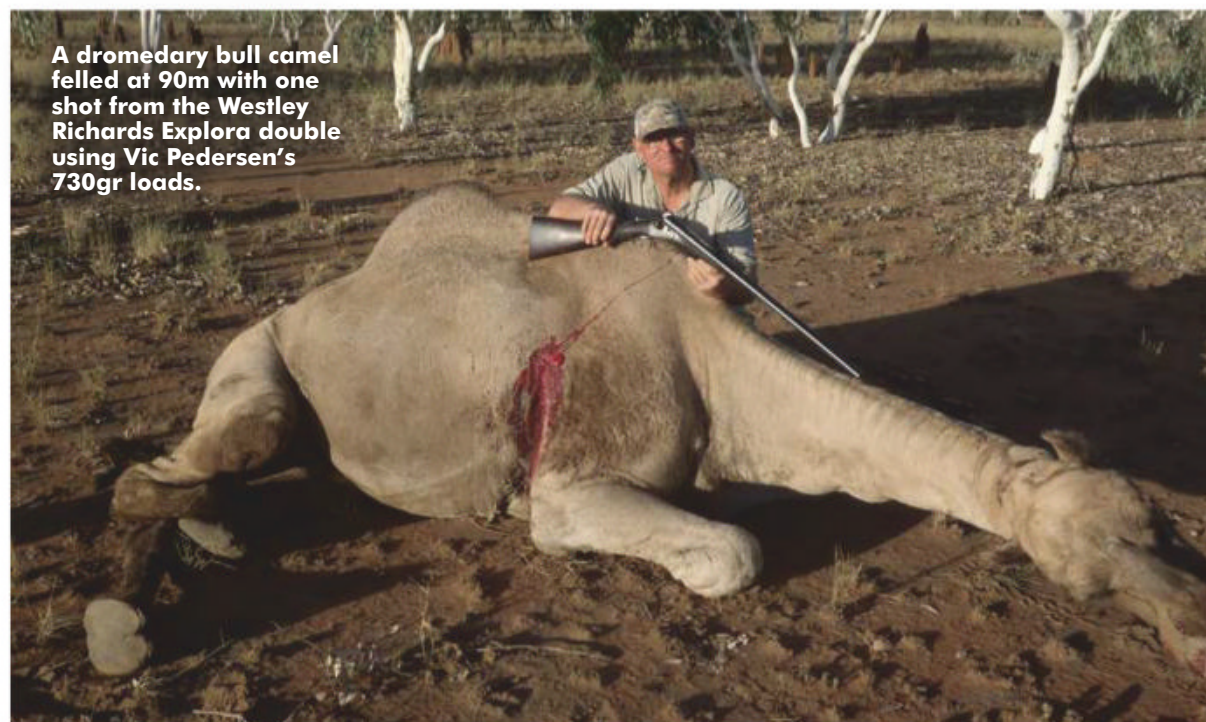
They were predominately made for use on feathered game such as quail, snipes, pheasants, grouse, doves, pigeons, ducks and small game such as rabbits and hares, plus feral pests such as foxes. These working, quality-built firearms were not only carried in the field in the English countryside but shipped to the British colonies of India and British East Africa for use on the prolific bird life such as sandgrouse, guineafowl and francolin. They were also exported throughout the world.

Apart from providing food for the table, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries they were also used in live pigeon shooting events, which were later replaced with clay targets. Our own Donald Mackintosh won Australia's first Olympic gold medal in the 1900 Paris Olympics pigeon shooting events.

Stephen's collection comprises of varying English makers such as Boswell, James Purdey & Sons, Westley Richards and WW Greener to name a few. The break-action side by side 12-gauge shotguns vary in configuration from vintage double-hammer underlevers to the more modern break-actions, and one or two vintage pinfire actions in the mix. Depending on the particular shotgun, cartridge chambers may also vary from 2½", 2¾" or 3".

While the mentioned British makers impress and their fine guns are associated with high monetary value, not all models were as expensive, especially working guns made more affordable for those of more modest means. Such English shotguns today in their fine or near original condition still attract a handsome price.

The collection process has meant for Stephen a lot of patience, searching and perseverance. Sourcing each was affected by attending gun shows, keeping in touch with gun dealers, viewing websites such as ssaagunsales.com, maintaining open communication with firearms enthusiasts and collectors, plus keeping an eye out for



A dromedary bull camel felled at 90m with one shot from the Westley Richards Explora double using Vic Pedersen's 730gr loads.

such hidden jewels when travelling within Australia or abroad.

Many have been acquired gradually over time at a reduced or affordable price due to their average to poor condition. However in each case, Stephen saw the potential in their restoration and had the confidence in his experienced gunsmiths to deliver. The restoration cost to return a piece to a satisfactory and shootable state has often been

more than the price of the firearm itself.

This is apart from the more obvious and labour intensive issues such as barrel bluing, minimising or removing metal pitting and stock refurbishment. There are also missing or broken parts that are not readily available or too difficult to source, particularly for vintage shotguns, which require handmaking by a skilled and experienced gunsmith.



Stephen with a goat bagged by a Charles Boswell 12ga double using Federal No. 4 buckshot.

Best of British

As an example of one such restoration, while Stephen was travelling through East Gippsland some years ago he met a farmer who had a 150-year-old C. Williamson hammer, Jones underlever, cape gun chambered in 12-gauge and .577 Snider which had been used around the property on vermin.

Essentially it is a combination gun comprised of one rifled barrel and one smooth-bore barrel that is used with shot or shotgun slug. Stephen's interest was captured immediately and he felt it was too fine a piece not to salvage. After a bit of bartering, a mutual agreement was reached with the farmer ending up possessing a modern and more practical shotgun for its intended use. It seemed a fair exchange.

The firearm later went to Rolf Bachnick, a highly skilled gunsmith Stephen had previously used for restoration. Before Rolf's retirement, he initially worked for John Saunders of Century Firearms, Melbourne and later from home, applying his skills to all manner of firearms. These included fine

brand name double rifles such as Holland & Holland and Manton, several imported from India and procured by enthusiastic collectors, Professional Hunters and general hunters.

After many hours' work, the cape gun was transformed into an aesthetically pleasing and practical working firearm, beyond Stephen's expectations. For Stephen, each restoration brings with it deep satisfaction, knowing that they will continue to operate for many years to come and down the line hopefully end up in the hands of another proud owner who will appreciate them as much as he did.

In the end, there is a fascination in the history of each firearm, where it originated from, the maker, its passage over time, the stories it could tell, let alone the pleasure it has provided to the holder over time. With a caring collector and hunter like Stephen Barnes, the longevity of these treasured firearms is assured.

While Stephen has hunted all his life on a vast cross-section of game animals and



A feral cat stopped by a Thomas Wild 3" chambered, hammered double, using RC Professional No. 5 shot.

birds, travelled far and wide to procure them, and is satisfied with his fine collection of English shotguns, there is always room for one more.

He now looks forward even more to hunting on a regular basis with each shotgun on separate outings in the Outback wilderness country of Western Australia where he lives and shares the chase and game bounty with his Indigenous friends. ■



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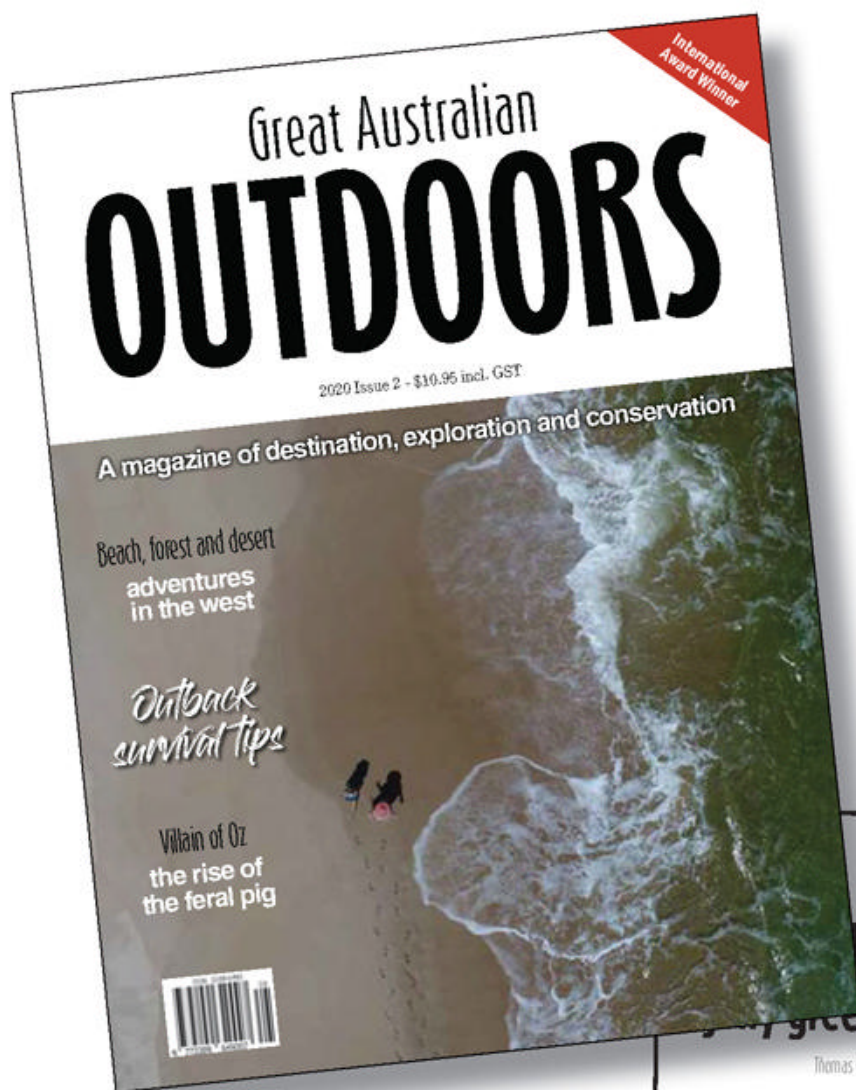
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Solid tread adds to compact all-round hunting boots.

Bet your boots on the Summit

Thomas Cook

Hunting isn't just loading your firearm, aiming at prey and firing. Reloading your firearm, aiming at another animal, firing again and so on. Hunting takes into consideration a number of factors like seasons, weather, quarry and terrain.

Most hunts here in Terra Australis involve considerable amounts of trekking. A few hours of 'hiking' is common to just reach or spot potential quarry and this means lugging around your firearm, ammo, binos, backpack, knife, canteen and so on. Comfortable and practical clothing are a major factor. Winter, summer, breathable, layers for warmth – all important. But it's your boots that must endure and provide comfort and practicality, taking the load. Only coming off when back at home or camp or even when it's time to hit the hay.

Your hunting boots are as important a piece of kit as your firearm. You're not wearing your sneakers on a hunt, much like you're not carrying a water gun to shoot with. But what constitutes a good hunting boot? It's a hiking boot, including the necessity to keep your feet dry and often warm along with preventing injury like a rolled ankle and (hopefully) snake bite. And when you have a couple of dodgy ankles like me, stability on uneven and ever-changing terrain is of utmost importance. Spending more days in the office than out in the field means I like an all-rounder in my solitary pair of hunting/hiking boots. My 'go to' boots must be reliable, comfortable and practical but a bit of style never goes astray.

The Original Muck Boot Company have been producing high-performance outdoor footwear for more than two decades.

Priding themselves on style and substance, they cater for even the harshest conditions around the world. Their men's Summit lace-up boots offer top-notch shock absorption for hunting conditions and I find them to be great on a track and even better on uneven ground in the field.

Normally traversing loose rocks in somewhere like a river bed is panic stations for me but these boots keep everything in check. This includes unstable ground uphill and more importantly for me, downhill. Before I knew it with these boots, trekking various terrain, I was actually breathing too, not holding my breath in fear of that all too-common inverted rolling and subsequent sprain.

The PU (polyurethane) insole most certainly adds to all this with its flexibility and extra compression. The durable rubber

The men's Summit boots are well put together and stylish in brown. Protective spray helps keep them that way.



High-laced ankles provide added support and protection.



outsole provides great traction in the dry and wet and the right amount of flexibility and stability. They are quiet too.

An added bonus is they are remarkably comfortable straight out of the box and feel worn-in after just a little while. The light-weight EVA (ethylene vinyl acetate) midsole adds the appreciated superior cushioning. The eyelets and top loops are strong and lacing is a breeze at all times, even pre-dawn before that much-needed first hit of caffeine for the day.

The stickiness of the PU (polyurethane) insole helps prevent slipping within the shoe but if you have a chance to try the boot on before purchase, do so with the socks you'll likely be wearing on a hunt. If not, they do lend themselves well to thicker socks so don't worry too much. I'm not huge on the thick woollen socks but those hunting

in colder climates might be. The Summit boots actually offer considerable warmth to help cover those bases. It's still worthwhile to wear the boots in a little if you get the chance. Whack them on when you're working out the back or even on an actual walk or hike and they'll be good to go in no time.

Try to look after your hunting boots like you do your hunting firearm... to a certain extent, anyhow. You don't put your firearm away wet and muddy when back from a hunt and boots also benefit from a quick clean and drying out. Prevention is better than cure too. Whenever I obtain a new pair of shoes I always give them a few rounds of protective spray. The boots are 100 per cent waterproof but the spray will prolong the life and smart look by helping to prevent damage and wear. A worthwhile investment for under \$10 and the spray lasts a fair while.

I have the 8" brown Summit boots and they also come in other colours and in a higher 10" boot which provides that extra bit of leg protection from the elements and critters. Those of you who face such added challenges regularly may want to consider the additional protection. Check out **muckbootcompany.com** for more information, where you'll find their variety of hunting boots.

Retailing online for about \$250 and just a tad extra for the higher ankle option, these all-rounder boots are good value for money. ■



The big pig stands on the left.

Big pigs, five foxes and a **fat cat**

Ben Smith

I felt like I had just blinked and the first half of the year had flown by. I'd already had a successful deer rut, taking my best red stag to date (later scored at 352DS and the Australian Deer Association's current number 9) plus managing to gain access to several new properties in the same region.

During that time my good friend John had suggested we catch up for a hunt down his neck of the woods in winter. Next to deer hunting my next favourite species to hunt is pigs. The bonus is both can be found in great numbers on John's properties in central New South Wales.

The game plan was to hunt a block he has access to which is quite rocky and covered in bush. This is one of my favourite

zones to hunt as I have had a long-running battle with a mature boar. To cut a long story short I have been to this location a number of times and this is one of the biggest boars I have ever seen in more than 25 years of hunting.

This huge boar has managed to give us the slip on every occasion. The one time I thought we would have him he managed to escape when an American hunter, who had come over to join us, decided to use his wind puffer at under 100m instead of shooting him when the boar was looking straight at us.

Anyway, John and I parked halfway up the hill where the old track finished. This is the best spot to minimise spooking any game. A bulldozer had recently cleaned

the old tracks up the slope, which made it easier to navigate and see what animals had been walking over the freshly turned soil.

It was pretty clear that fallow and red deer had been active plus there was a lot of pig sign even though it was quite dry. After about one hour of slowly moving uphill we reached the top, which suddenly became flat. From the ridge line you could see down either side of the valley and straight ahead for about 200-300m.

Again, as we filtered through the bush, we kept our eyes open to see what was about. The wind changed and we pushed a small mob of young fallow that were originally unseen at 20m to 50m. They weren't worried about our presence as the wind was still in our favour and

Big pigs, five foxes and a fat cat

continued playing and prancing around.

We managed to grab a great series of photos before both groups moved our separate ways. Sometimes I find it's good to just observe your target game animals to better understand them and their behaviour. Plus, by the time these fallows were in a position to fire a shot they had crossed onto the neighbour's property.

Continuing our way along we kept up the same pattern of slow movement and just watching, listening and even checking the breeze for any quarry. We found a good spot where John had some trail cameras and while he checked them, we decided to stop for a morning tea break as we had been on the move for around three hours.

As we were quietly chatting away John started taking photos of a wedge-tailed eagle that was circling overhead. Our attention then turned to the farmland below. Scanning for likely ferals we saw a mob of 11 pigs around 20-30kg in size. They were gradually making their way towards the thick scrub from the sector below.

We both spotted a huge pig surrounded by some other decent-sized pigs. These all looked to be boars feeding high up on a



John sits behind the biggest boar for scale.



Ben with one of the pigs taken in the crop.

Big pigs, five foxes and a fat cat

bench close to a boundary fence. A quick plan was devised and we grabbed our gear and started working our way along.

We had to be careful on this walk/stalk because if anything startled these pigs, they only had to move 100m further and they would be over another neighbour's fence and into thick dogwood country.

After about 40 minutes of walking we spied a few sows feeding a couple of hundred metres ahead, which must have been on the outer edge of these bigger pigs (most likely boars). We literally stopped to take a quick photo when we felt the breeze swing from our face to our necks.

It was game over, as all the pigs we could see took off and we heard a whole lot more go running into the steep dogwood country.

Not giving up we pushed further on to even try to gain a glimpse of the 'big pig'. John almost trod in a massive pile of pig poo so we knew these hefty porkers felt safe here and wouldn't go far.

Moving closer to the location we last saw the 'big pig' we ran out of vegetation so decided to just wing it and cover the ground as quickly as possible. We only managed to see the back end of an old spotty boar that was going into the valley bottom.

After a few uneventful hours we were heading back home when John spotted a small mob of pigs in the open in a crop. There must have been a sow on heat because three of the bigger pigs were circling her. We knew pigs have bad eyesight so we kept driving past and stopped further down the road. It just happened to be one of John's client's crops, so he called them and was given the green light.

Grabbing our guns and some extra ammo we made our way down the fence line. Using it as cover we moved to within 100m of the pigs. We honestly thought they were young small pigs because the crop didn't look very high.

On the count of three we fired and pigs went everywhere. John hit one boar in the boiler room but unknowingly I also swung onto it and dropped him. We both emptied

Ben with one of the foxes taken on the run.



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Big pigs, five foxes and a fat cat

our magazines and our tally was six pigs out of nine.

Dragging the pigs out of the crop we realised they weren't small pigs at all with the biggest about 60kg. Not bad...

The next morning, we were up at 4am to be at a new property by daybreak. We were taking John's Polaris off-road buggy to cover as much area as possible. The action pretty much started straight away with John spotting a fox and I shot it with my .270 on the run at 200m.

Foxes were on the cards today and we ended up with five for the morning but didn't see one pig. We had pretty much covered all the crop and flat country with a plan to hunt the hills in the mid to late afternoon.

After having a break for a couple of hours we jumped back into the Polaris buggy and started driving up and down the hills. I was on gate duty because I was the passenger - I swear every secondhand ancient gate in the country had been installed on this farm.

After driving for hours, there was no fresh pig sign to be seen. Feeling disappointed, we went to a spot which is a natural lookout to glass over the crop country we had been in during the morning and maybe turn up a sole boar or at least a mob of pigs.

Just as we were a few hundred metres from the lookout, there was one lone tree with a big broken branch hanging down. I thought to myself that surely nothing was around as the entire area was so bare.

About 10 seconds later as we edged closer to the broken branch all hell erupted. About six pigs took off in a cloud of dust in the opposite direction to us. Without saying a word John went into *Man from Snowy River* mode and drove the buggy off the rocky hillside, following the exact route the escaping pigs took.

I held onto my rifle and the buggy at the same time as we closed the gap, I thought we would have four flat tyres because of how bad the terrain was. The pigs were running in single file, as we caught up to them, I smoked a boar closest to me.

We both decamped the Polaris and

picked our targets. I shot the biggest boar as I had the safest, clear lane to shoot. John had three other pigs split up on his side so he let rip.

The remaining two bigger boars turned 90 degrees away from the Polaris and ran down a nearby fence line. By this time John and I had to re-load and started taking shots at them. John dropped one at 300m and I put a telling shot into the second boar as he was quartering away.

We jumped back in the Polaris and took off down the fence line to recover the pigs. The buggy came in handy as we loaded each of the boars into and onto it. The biggest of the pigs was my boar at approximately the 90kg mark.

We were home around dinner time and unloaded all the gear and John was showing me his new torch he bought when we spotted a set of eyes in the creek 50m from us.

John ran inside to grab his CZ .22 rifle while I kept the torch on the feral cat. He came out with his rifle and lined up on the cat, which must have been blinded by the brightness of this new torch.

One shot later and it was down. Crossing the dry creek bed we discovered the hefty size of the cat. One thing I have noticed with cats is, no matter how bad a drought, they are always in healthy condition preying on our native wildlife.

As always this trip came to an end just as it felt it had started. ■



John holds up the big feral cat taken with the help of his new torch.



Expert tips

for single-shot rifles

Don Caswell

Single-shot rifles appeal to many hunters; more, in fact, than actually shoot them. I was always drawn to single-shot rifles, but it was decade or two before I owned my first one. Since then I have enjoyed using a variety, from the .22 Hornet through to .458 Win Mag.

To me, a single-shot rifle encapsulates everything that hunting should be. The careful stalk, choosing the target animal, the well-placed shot, a feeling of satisfaction with the quarry cleanly despatched. For any considering, or just entering, single-shot hunting there are a few things I have learnt that are worth sharing.

The cold barrel

Single-shot, break-action or falling-block

actions are capable of superb accuracy. In setting up your new single-shot rifle, there are some important differences compared to bolt-actions.

Single-shots do not like warm barrels. This should be fairly obvious in a rifle designed and intended for the occasional single shot from a cold barrel. The rifles generally have lugs on the barrel for attaching the front stock and sometimes the spring for the ejection mechanism. As a barrel warms up with repeated shots, these attachment points can exert varying pressure on the barrel due to metal expansion and accuracy can suffer.

Unlike a well-floated and bedded bolt-action rifle, that can handle five or 10 shots in close succession without any change in

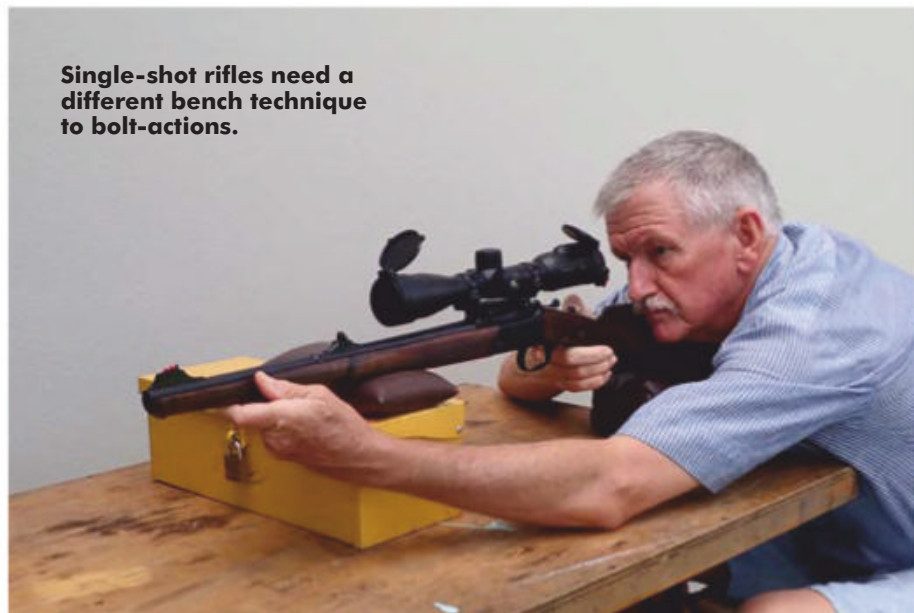
accuracy, your single-shot will not like that one bit. A common theme in the single-shots fired off the bench is that you can often expect the first three shots to clover-leaf, but keep shooting and that group will begin to wander as the barrel heats up.

Treat your single-shot rifle as it was designed and intended for - shoot your groups with well-spaced shots from a cold barrel. Under those conditions, most will register tight little groups.

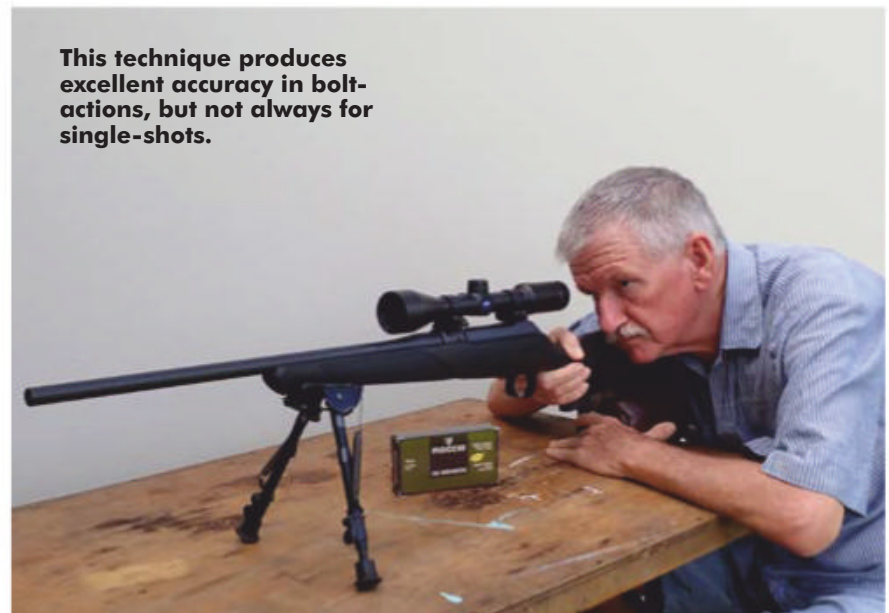
Bench technique

Another difference in shooting off the bench is that most single-shots shoot better when their fore-end is held firmly. With bolt-actions this is not the case and my technique with those is for my left hand to hold

Expert tips for single-shot rifles



Single-shot rifles need a different bench technique to bolt-actions.



This technique produces excellent accuracy in bolt-actions, but not always for single-shots.

the sandbag under the butt while my right hand does the trigger pull.

My bolt-action rifles I shoot off a short bipod. Single-shot rifles require a small sandbag placed on one of my metal ammo boxes. Holding the fore-end of a rifle when shooting off the bench is a bit awkward, so the fore-end sandbag needs to be on the left side to make room for the left arm.

Triggers

Most single-shot rifles have pretty good triggers. The only exception I have encountered so far was with my Browning 1885 Low Wall in .223 Rem. I loved everything about the rifle except its exceptionally heavy trigger.

I turned to the internet for some advice on that. I found a wealth of comments bemoaning the trigger and the fact that there was no after-market option available and the trigger itself defied any attempts to hone it.



Good shooting technique and firing each shot from a cold barrel shows just what accuracy a single-shot is capable of.

One wag said that clearly the Browning's trigger had been designed by a committee of litigation lawyers. With perseverance, I found an old gunsmith, about to retire, who worked on the trigger for me. The result was an improvement, but still short of what I desired.

On my Ruger No. 1 RSI in 7x57, I sourced and had fitted a Kepplinger after-market trigger. Not that the rifle really needed a better trigger than the factory one. The Kepplinger was a superb, crisp, light trigger I must say, and enhanced that lovely little rifle. Ruger No. 1 rifles are one of the most popular single-shots and these days there is some choice in after-market triggers, if you think you need one.

Barrel cleaning

Another revelation for me, was the aspect of cleaning the bore. With nearly 60 years of ingrained habit, it was hard to accept a change in that behaviour. I was taught from a young age the importance of thoroughly cleaning the bore of my rifles after use.

However, I am aware that some leading long-distance shooters and a number of high-end and custom riflemakers recommend that barrels not be cleaned at all. I tested this myself with my .223 Rem varmint rifle. Starting with a scrupulously cleaned barrel, over a period of a month, I fired more than 300 rounds through that rifle without cleaning it. There was negligible change to the accuracy of the rifle.

In discussing this cleaning aspect with

representatives of German rifle manufacturers I was told that, for German-made rifles at least, the barrel should not be cleaned. In fact, the barrel could be expected to shoot better as it built up a layer of copper fouling with use. That advice may be specific to



Carrying a spare round between your fingers, cigarette fashion, works a treat.

Expert tips for single-shot rifles

the metallurgy and manufacturing process of German barrels. However, I consider it worth trying with any rifle. You will soon see if it works or not.

Taking advice from the German representatives, I now only patch the barrel out with Birchwood Casey Barricade. The exterior metal surfaces can be wiped over with a cloth dampened with Barricade as well. That seems to be good advice and, so far, everything is working out fine and has greatly simplified my rifle care and maintenance. And, I am more than happy with my single-shot rifle's accuracy.

Hunting

I find using my single-shot rifle to be the most satisfying form of hunting. This is not the rifle you choose for a big day on the hogs or going after a pack of marauding wild dogs. I take my single-shot afield when I am intent on bagging a lone animal.

To that end, I only pack a few rounds in a small belt pouch. When I lived in Arnhem

Land, and was regularly hunting buffaloes with my Ruger No. 1 African in .458 Win Mag, I had three cartridge loops on the left breast of my shirt, in the great white hunter style. I also often carried a couple of rounds

between the fingers of my left hand, like cigarettes, another great white hunter habit. That trick works for any calibre, not just big game rounds. ■



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A photograph of a Browning Ignite knife set. The knife has a dark, textured handle and a silver-colored blade. It is lying on a piece of rough, cracked bark. Next to it is a dark, cylindrical ferrocerium rod with a black cord. A brown leather sheath with a small embossed logo is also visible. The background is a dense green forest floor.

The Browning Ignite, sheath and striking rod. Note the chequering and attractive spacers.

Drop it like it's hot

Damien Edwards

Now, here's a knife that performs far better than expected for the price. The Browning Ignite is, as the name suggests, a knife which can double as a fire starter. Included with it is a small but highly functional Ferrocerium rod.

This is a pyrophoric alloy which produces hot sparks. It occurs by fragmenting and having those tiny slivers exposed to oxygen. It is a brilliant way of obtaining heat enough to start a fire even in wet conditions if you have dry tinder.

Gas cigarette lighters can run out of fuel or become wet, as can matches, but this

rod will continue to provide sparks and heat enough to kindle your fire going when out in the field. It's a great idea to have it included in the sale of this knife.

The knife itself features grooves along the blade spine with which to facilitate the striking of the rod. The blade is of handy drop point design. This knife comes in many guises and styles including those offered in orange or black injection moulded handles and oxide-coated blades. Partially serrated and titanium coated blades are also available. Sheaths are offered in injection moulded polymer, or leather.

The example featured here has a handle

made of wood and a mirror polished blade. The wood features chequering for a sturdy grip in wet conditions. The blade length is 4" and the knife has an overall length of 9". The blade material is stated as being 7Cr. This is a lower end Chinese steel of similar composition to 440A, which itself is a reasonably decent stainless steel.

Of course, there are better steels out there, but for this price point, you can't complain. The steel as stated by Browning has a Rockwell hardness of 56-58. That's a pretty broad window, in my book. It's certainly easy enough to put an edge on, but the retention of that edge isn't brilliant, so

reasonably frequent sharpening is required. So far, corrosion resistance is good.

The fit and finish on the model I received from Winchester Australia is pretty much perfect. The knife features spacers for an attractive visual appeal. When running my fingernail over the joins, it barely even caught, if at all. That's some good quality control. The serrations for the striking of the rod double act as a non-slip grip for your thumb when using this knife for skinning purposes.

The length of the handle itself is generous. I have large hands and there is ample space remaining when I grip it. A small but still ergonomic finger guard is offered and the pommel also has a tiny flared section or bird's head. A hole has been milled through the pommel to facilitate use of a lanyard, if so desired. This knife is of the rat tail tag design. This means that the blade steel tapers abruptly past the small finger guard and extends through the handle where it is attached to the pommel. It's certainly a rigid design.

The sheath is brown leather with high-quality, machine stitching and embossed with the Browning deer's head logo. A small additional section fits the rod snugly inside. A loop is present for attaching the sheath to your belt. Yes, the top of the handle does indeed protrude higher than your belt while carrying it, but not really enough to be in your way. I prefer belt sheaths to lay pretty much flush to the top of the knife (meaning the bottom or pommel when carried tip down). This sheath just gets away with it.

Note that there is no way offered with the leather sheath to secure either the knife or the rod. Both are held in by friction alone. They are a good snug fit and are carried in such a way that gravity is on your side. However, I'd be mindful that this is not an enclosed sheath style.

The polymer sheaths available in the other guises mentioned incorporate a rubber flap which extends over the pommel while being carried. This is a much more secure option. Or, if you're one of



The knife and rod in the sheath. This illustrates how deeply the knife sits in the cover.

those folks who actually enjoys retrofitting or customising your gear, it would be no hard task to thread a lanyard through both pommel and belt loop to ensure it is kept there securely.

All in all, I'll state that I'm impressed by this knife, its features, visual appeal and price point. The drop point blade style (my personal favourite) is an excellent all-rounder type of blade for skinning and dressing deer or other fur bearing animals and works just fine for gutting fish.

Again, those spine serrations come in even handier for scaling your catch. This is a knife which would be just as at home in the fishing gear box as it would in the hunter's pack. I'd recommend it to anyone wishing to acquire a taste for the wonderful world of knives. You could certainly do a lot worse than this Browning. ■



At a glance

Blade length: 4" or 11cm
Overall length: 9" or 23cm
Handle material: Wood, polymer available
Blade steel: 7Cr, Rockwell hardness of 56-58
Weight: Approximately 190 grams
Price: Approximately \$50-\$60
Sheath and rod included

Back to basics with the 94 Sporter

John Denman



The cartridge is ejected to the side.

In these times of red dot sights, and thermal imaging, along with what often seems to be a preoccupation with velocity and telescopic sights of Hubble dimensions, it's far too easy to lose track of why we hunt. I guess the bow hunters have never forgotten those roots, but sometimes everything new seems to have replaced, or at least put the basics on some sort of back burner.

So I went and bought a Winchester Model 1894. Nothing new about that you might say, there's plenty to be had on used gun pages like ssaagunsales.com. You can call it a mid-life crisis if you like, but at 74 years old it's probably a bit late for that. My idea was sparked to a large extent by a chance remark by hunting mate Fraser. "We should get back to the basics of hunting," he reckoned one frosty night when the hardwood logs crackled in the modest fire we shared.

Later, I had noticed that Winchester had bought out a Model 94 called the Sporter. It

has a 24" barrel with a half-hexagon extending from the receiver. Made by Miroku in Japan, all the parts like the loading gate and receiver are milled, not stamped. The stock is of American black walnut with wraparound chequering on the fore-end, and on the straight butt. That fore-end also sports a nicely blued steel cap which adds to the rifle's visual appeal. There is no rubber pad on the butt, just a beautifully finished crescent-shaped steel plate. In short, they took a look at the pre-1964 Model 94 and probably made it better. So the die was cast.

It's not a cheap rifle; you don't retain much change out of \$2000, but to someone who can appreciate dedication to fine workmanship it's worth it. The rifle also bucks another trend, particularly in lever-action rifles, and that is the tendency to 20" barrels. Personally, I prefer a decent barrel length, and even in close scrub have never found the longer barrel a hindrance.

The rifle is also available in other calibres but I opted for the .30-30. It has proved

itself as a game getter for more years than I can count on two hands. The cartridge is made by just about anyone who produces ammo, and I never heard of anybody who wore out a barrel. The sights are a bead front sight and a buckhorn rear. I have no intention of fitting a scope to this rifle, even though it has what Winchester calls angle eject. But the buckhorn has already been replaced by a Williams receiver peep sight, often known as a 'ghost ring'.

Seeing as how this rifle is the first lever gun I have ever owned, there was going to be a learning curve. The 94 is well endowed with safety items for starters. There's a sliding safety on the tang at the rear of the action, plus a rebounding hammer, designed to stop an accidental discharge should the rifle be dropped. The other barrier to misadventure is the small button under the lever. This has to be depressed with the lever before the rifle can be fired. It's all a little distracting, and makes you wonder how many lawyers were involved in the design.

Back to basics with the 94 Sporter

The 94 Sporter is just a nice rifle to look at.



Also included in the box is a knurled knob that can be screwed into the hammer via a convenient hole drilled and tapped for the purpose. Being angle eject, a scope can be fitted, and the location either end of the action has been drilled and tapped for this. My previously mentioned Williams Receiver sight fits right on the rear mounting holes, so there's no need for any further drilling and tapping.

Like I said ammo is in good supply for the .30-30, and while I may scoff at the latest advances in hunting technology, I don't entirely want to go completely Pony Express. Hornady now make what they call LEVERevolution ammunition that gives the old deer rifle a bit of a leg up. For starters there's the bullet design. Hornady are no strangers to polymer tips, but this one serves two purposes. It gives the bullet a better ballistic coefficient, and just as important it takes away the worry of pointy bullets bumping the next cartridge in the tube magazine, and setting the primer off.

So I bought some of this new ammo. I also bought a set of Lee dies with their excellent crimp die. You need to crimp in

tube mags due to the possibility of the bullet being shunted back into the powder room during recoil, with more disastrous results. There can be little doubt about seating depth here. The bullet is seated so the canelure is right at the top of the cartridge case neck. Failure to do this will result in the rifle not feeding properly.

The .30-30 is never going to be a long-range cartridge, which is fine by me. I try to avoid shooting at any game past my self-imposed limit of 200 yards, and regardless of the improvements in bullet design and better propellants, the .30-30 remains a 150-yard cartridge, particularly using iron sights. Some gun writers have written of the new Hornady ammo making the .30-30 a 300-yard proposition. I disagree wholeheartedly. It's my humble opinion that should you wish to shoot animals at 300 yards, go for a bolt-action rifle with a scope. Or learn to stalk.

Off the bench the rifle is mild mannered. And regardless of the steel buttplate that harkens back to earlier times, I didn't feel any discomfort. Maybe the old people knew a thing or two about rifle design, because

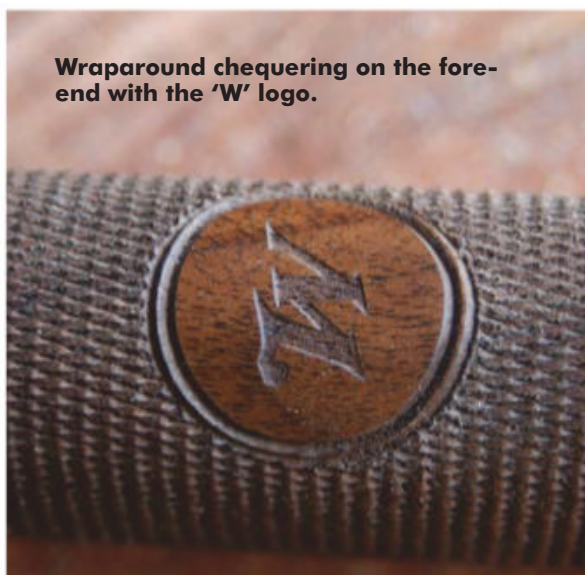
that buttplate snugs in nice and tight to the shoulder. Hornady are not known for loading lightly, and advertise the muzzle velocity of the 160gn load at 2400fps. That's out of a 24" barrel by the way. This is a good 100fps faster than just about any other load, including those with lighter bullets.

We in Australia simply don't have access to the variety of propellants available in the US. Our prices are dearer too, which is odd considering we sell a lot of our powder to companies like Hodgdon, who repackage them. One of these powders is our ADI 2208, known everywhere else under the Hodgdon banner as Varget. Looking at my ADI load book it seemed the 2208 was a pretty good powder for the .30-30.

You can purchase some of the powders used in the US, even the LEVERevolution brand, but they are damned expensive, like around \$80 per 500 grams, plus I have my doubts about continuity of supply. So while we are unlikely to land the 2400fps Hornady claim, it really doesn't matter, because we never did set out to re-birth the .30-30 as a long-range deer getter.

I worked my load up with great care,

Wraparound chequering on the fore-end with the 'W' logo.



Crescent-shaped buttplate fits well into the shoulder.



Back to basics with the 94 Sporter



and while the load shown in the ADI book is as always a little conservative, it can be improved upon. I found that even with iron sights one inch at 50m was easily achieved while 2½ to 3 inches at 100m did okay as well. You can't expect genuine MOA accuracy from any lever gun, so it should be remembered that this is about basics and that means going as close as you can.

It may be appropriate here to inject a word on aperture sights. People often get

them all wrong by thinking they can keep the aperture in focus as well as the blade front sight. This is nonsense of course because nobody has eyes that will do that. Aperture sights are often called 'ghost rings' because used correctly the fore sight is in focus, but the 'ring' of the aperture is blurred. Hence the term 'ghost.' The idea of this type of iron sight is to disregard the aperture and allow the eye to focus on the front sight. Your eyes are naturally drawn to

the bead or blade of the fore sight, which leads it to be central in the aperture. So don't fight it.

To sum up, the Model 94 Sporter is probably going to become a classic, because it's built the way a rifle like this should be built. Winchester had brought out rifles for every conceivable Centenary, or Wild West hero, and I found them a bit tiresome. The 94 Sporter has returned Winchester lever guns to what they are meant to be. ■

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Czech your focus

Meopta MeoStar B1.1 8x32

Jan Kaptein

Binoculars have been part of my hunting kit as long as I remember. Growing up in Europe, where many hunts are stake-outs for a specific animal at first and last light, it is hard to go without them.

Though I've long used Swarovski and Leica binoculars, last year saw me switch to Meopta MeoStar B1.1 in 8x32 as my primary 'compact' pair.

My 8x42 Zeiss Ultravid HD has accompanied me on almost all my hunts during the past few years. The weight never bothered me on surveillance and the light-gathering capabilities of the larger lenses is fantastic.

However, as the number of stalked hunts increased due to the fact that I moved to an area where this is both permitted and more effective, I wanted something lighter. In response, I had a look at compact binoculars with 20 and 25mm lenses.

After testing many of them, I concluded they did not work for me. With the reduced size comes a significant drop in their light-gathering ability, which was an issue at dusk and dawn. So, I altered

my search criteria. The ideal optic for the intended purpose had to be roof prism binoculars. They had to be in the 8x30 to 8x32 bracket and needed to be able to stand up to the abuse of being used in harsh environments, from dusty plains to frozen blizzard landscapes.

Unable to make up my mind, I checked out the latest from the three big brands. Trying them together, they were all great, each with their strengths and niggles, but none of them were perfect. Wondering what I was missing, my focus shifted to the Meopta MeoStar B1.1 in 8x32, which I ended up taking home in favour of the alternatives.

Meopta is not a name you contemplate when thinking about 'alpha' binoculars. The likes of Swarovski, Zeiss and Leica dominate this market, generally for good reasons. Personally, I have opted for many of their top of the range binoculars and though I find them a joy to use, the prices can be somewhat hard to stomach.

Still, we want superlative optics, waterproof, nitrogen-purged housings and modern coatings. This, to me, is

where Meopta comes in. Meopta is a Czechoslovakian company that has functioned under the current name since the middle of the past century, but started operations a few decades before. It first exclusively produced military optics, but added consumer products fairly early on. Needless to say, in what amounts to almost a century of optical expertise, they are capable of delivering high-quality items.

Some reviews will have you believe the MeoStar is the 'silver bullet', pretty much as good as the best from the alpha brands at a significantly lower price. Under perfectly bright daylight conditions or in a laboratory setting, who knows? And frankly, who cares? In real life under less than optimal conditions, to my eye, they are good binoculars, but fall short of the likes of the Leica Ultravid HD, Swarovski EL and Zeiss Victory SF.

The same goes for build quality. That said, I still suggest you seriously consider them. The argument is similar to what I would recommend to someone who asks about whether their rifle is accurate enough. You want your rifle to shoot straight and consistent, but you don't need a single hole group out to 200m. Something within 1 MOA will allow you to despatch your quarry swiftly and with certainty.

The same is true for a pair of binoculars. You need to be able to locate your target and properly identify it prior to considering a shot, not count the hairs on its head. Over the years, I have met several hunters who argued cheap binoculars were all they needed because they could 'spot a tick on a hog' with their wonderful scope.

Growing up in a part of the world that is densely populated and with strict hunting regulations, I would strongly advise against this practice. Never point a firearm at something unless you are absolutely certain you want to shoot it. Go for a better pair of binoculars instead so you are never tempted.

The MeoStar B1.1 8x32 fulfils my needs at an interesting price point. So what is there to like? The binoculars are relatively

Czech your focus - Meopta MeoStar B1.1x8x32

compact, rugged and have thumb rests that are perfect for my hands even though the body is on the smaller side. Unless you have large hands, I imagine you will not have any problem. The MeoStar is fully waterproof and nitrogen-purged, so you are good to go out in adverse weather without any issues.

As with most brands, Meopta has made significant progress and has both MeoBright 5501 and MeoShield coatings. The former suppresses reflections and has a light transmission of 99.8 per cent, the latter improves the scratch resistance. The focusing wheel is large and centered and incredibly smooth on the sample I own.

In use, the MeoStar is robust and will just fit into a large pocket in my jacket or on the leg of my cargo pants. The provided case is not bad, the fact that the neck strap has clips that detach from the binoculars and onto the carrying case is a fine feature. However, I do not bother with the case and either carry my binoculars around my neck, ready for use, or in my pocket.

The close focusing ability of the MeoStar allows me to look at butterflies and small warblers and wrens in the garden, which is enjoyable. The field of view at 1000m is a respectable 138m, which is acceptable when scanning a large swathe of land or

brush for animals. I notice some fall-off in sharpness towards the edges but nothing that would worry you in the field. The eye-cups have three positions and firmly click into place, meaning you can rely on them to be where you left them if you grab your binoculars to quickly acquire a target.

When I compare the MeoStar side-by-side to my Leica Ultravid HD 8x42, I notice that they are not as bright. The solid housing, though perfectly good, seems as hardy, just not as precisely applied as the one on my Leica. The rain guard that covers the rear objectives is much superior than the one on the Leica. Unfortunately, the same can not be said for the front lens covers. The Meostar ones feel flimsy and I ended up replacing them because the vacuum created when putting them on often led to me pulling them off entirely when wanting to quickly look at something.

The weight of the MeoStar is noticeable for binoculars of the size at nearly 600 grams, but significantly less than that of the larger Leica. Though it will be a matter of taste, I would have preferred the hinge of the MeoStar to be a bit stiffer - I find it moves a bit at times. This has a lot to do with me carrying it in the pocket of my cargo pants though, under normal use or when carried on a strap, it is fine.

To sum up, the MeoStar B1.1 8x32 ticks the right boxes for me, particularly when I consider its price of about \$1500. A short minimum focus distance, relatively large field of view and a resilient build combine with extremely good optics to make them my preferred binoculars for stalking. At the time of writing, the outgoing B1 and newer B1.1 model are offered for sale. I use both and there is hardly anything between them.

The B1.1 has one additional metre of field of view at 1000m, is said to have updated coatings and a locking diopter and different texture on the focusing knob. The neck strap on the B1.1 is 'ergonomic' or rather, bulkier. I prefer the one on the B1. Other than that they appear almost identical. I have tested them together and could not discern any difference in performance.



The black Meopta B1 with strap.

Both are available on ebay or through Australian distributors like Queensland Gun Exchange and Winchester, so shop around for the most attractive price. ■



The binoculars are pocketable for easy transportation.

Specifications:

Dimensions as listed (height x width x depth): 128x122x46mm

Weight: 598g

Close focus: 1.7m or less

Field of view: 7.92 degrees, 138m at 1000m

Eye relief: 15.5mm

Transmission: daylight/twilight 88 per cent, 82 per cent

Warranty: 10 years, extended to 30 years transferable if registered online

In the box: binoculars, rain guard, tethered objective covers, neoprene strap, nylon case

Go big or go home the Buck model 124

Damien Edwards



From left to right, a burgundy micarta handle from roughly 1981, a black phenolic from roughly 1974 and a modern black micarta 124 with 2018 date stamp. Note the subtle differences in clip points over the years.



Full tang construction gives the 124 supreme strength.

When it comes to hunting knives, everyone has their favourites. There's no such thing as one size fits all. Just because I love them so much, I'll often take two and sometimes three blades even when I'm on weekend trips.

I'll usually include a small knife, either fixed blade or folder, for cleaning fish or tiny animals like ducks or hares. Then I'll require a larger, tougher knife for camp chores. A heavy-duty knife capable of splitting branches for firewood, creating makeshift tent pegs or breaking down larger animals like water buffaloes, camels or some of the nightmare-sized feral pigs to be found up Cape York way.

I've always had a soft spot for larger hunting knives. Not oversized Bowie-style, but something a bit bigger than a fillet or

pocket-sized knife. And I prefer my knives to be as sturdy and as strong as possible, just in case they need use for occasional harder tasks. The Buck model 124 is a hefty, well-made and above all strong fixed blade knife for serious work, so ticks the right boxes.

This beast from Buck, often referred to by the designation 'Frontiersman' is a substantial step up from the model 119 which I covered in *Australian Hunter* 69. It is a true full tang knife. The blade and tang are milled from a solid piece of 420HC steel. Buck, in conjunction with the Paul Bos heat treatment have helped elevate this steel to a Rockwell hardness of 58. This is Buck's standard blade material. Its wear resistance approaches that of higher carbon alloys while delivering the increased corrosion resistance of chromium stainless steel.

While it's true that 420HC falls short of some of the more premium steels such as S30V, 154CM and S35VN, when teamed with their fine heat treatment as well as the supreme blade thickness evident in 124 manufacture, you still have a knife of incredible durability and strength. Above all, this is a steel which holds a reasonable edge and is easy to sharpen.

The 124 is a knife which you can work hard. The build quality is second to none. Buck scores an absolute 10 out of 10 on this one. It features a full man-sized handle and is worth every cent on looks, fit, finish and feel alone. For such a large knife, the balance is on point. The handle material is micarta and is pinned to the tang. This is a deviation from the usual black phenolic found on a lot of fixed blade models from Buck.

Go big or go home - the Buck model 124

The handle features finger grooves for a truer grip and comfort. Both the pommel and handguard are aluminium. Relax, it can't be manipulated like the aluminium in drink cans. This stuff is thick. The 124 features a slightly modified clip point with a minor swedge towards the tip. This helps keep its old school styling.

Running my fingernail along this knife, I can't even make it to catch where handguard meets handle, handle meets pommel or where the handles contact the tang. In your hands it weighs 337 grams. I like that weight. Blade length is 6¼" or just shy of 16cm. This thing isn't for picking your teeth with. In case you're wondering, the blade on this masterpiece is 3/16ths of an inch, that's 4.7mm thick.

The top of the blade is a straight edge while the actual blade itself is straight for approximately 4½" before it begins sweeping up to its point. It comes backed by Buck's forever warranty, but you won't need it. I've been using Bucks of various models for more than 30 years and own quite a few from the 1960s but I'm yet to need to send one for repair.

The sheath is made of thick leather and has a double retainer feature whereby it



As the 124 changed over the years, so did the sheath.

wraps around the handle to secure it. It's what you may call a classic-style sheath, no molle or holes on it for attaching fire starters, small torches, multi-tools or anything like that. Given the size and weight of the 124, that's probably a good thing. A belt loop is provided to encourage the owner to carry it on their person.

So, what is it for then? Anything and

everything on a larger scale. For heavier camp tasks such as prepping firewood, it excels. Due to its full tang design, batoning with the 124 is an easy task. Due to the sheer size of the 124, it's not conducive to finesse work. For cleaning bass or skinning foxes you'll need something smaller. For cutting down and packing out a water buffalo, you won't need anything bigger.

A hunter must invest in good quality knives which stand up to use in a variety of field conditions and different seasons. A solid dependable fixed blade knife is truly a must for any hunter, camper, angler or outdoors enthusiast. I think the 124 fits that bill perfectly.

Visit buckknives.com ■



The big 124 compared to two of Buck's other popular offerings, a 1990 vintage model 102 and a 110 folder two-dot from 1977.

At a glance

Blade length: 6¼" or 16cm
Overall length: 11¾" or 30cm
Handle material: Black micarta
Blade steel: 420HC
Weight: 377 grams
Price: Approximately \$320
Sheath supplied

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.

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

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

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



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

Help us understand and manage our wildlife and natural environments



4 Stable Sticks' Sit Stick

Michael Arnold

A while back I conveyed a wish to Lilian Camalet of 4 Stable Sticks for them to make “a rest to use when sitting on the ground.”

The variety of hunting applications globally surely called for it.

At the time I made my suggestion, Lilian and his colleagues were already past the design stage for a such a rest. Fast forward to the Dallas Safari Club convention in January 2020, where Lilian demonstrated the just-released ‘Sit Stick’ and asked me to review this new model.

One of the species I plan to soon hunt in Mozambique is Cape buffalo, which will involve crawling up to herds located in the swamps; most likely shooting from a sitting position.

I need to be very solid when I take my first-ever shot at a dangerous game animal. Hence, I wanted to review the Sit Stick to see how it, and I, performed together.

Range analyses – Cape buffalo and beyond

I tested the Sit Stick by firing the rifle I will be taking to Mozambique – the Ultralight rifle chambered in .416 Taylor. I shot the .416 Taylor at a 100-yard target. Visit **ssaa.org.au** to view the SSAA TV video which shows a few of my shots from the Sit Stick. Needless to say, the performance of rest, rifle and shooter was comforting.

As with all of the 4 Stable Sticks rests I’ve used, the Sit Stick prevented any horizontal wobble by locking the butt of the rifle into the V-shaped rest. The shooter needs only to lean forwards or backwards to bring the optics onto the target. The Sit Stick is a valuable addition to my fieldrests. For me, the price of about \$120 for the Sit Stick is not much to pay for a solid rest from which to fire at game animals, especially a Cape buffalo.



Michael firing with the Sit Stick.

Basic dimensions:

71 cm in length when fully-collapsed and folded.

107 cm in height when extended completely, but folded.

47 cm in height for the rifle rest at the shortest length (suitable for children).

75 cm is the height of the rest when fully extended.

Visit **4stablestick.com** for more info, including shipping costs to Australia. ■



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A view from the firing line at the new range.



Stump removal in progress at the site.

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Date of birth		Male ☐ Female ☐	Member referral number if applicable

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Australian Hunter 75
PO Box 2520, Unley SA 5061

Or enter online at ssaa.org.au/win
Competitions close February 28, 2021

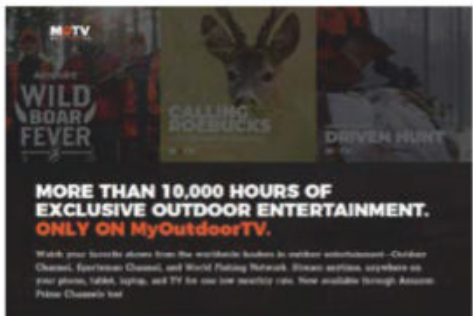
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Around the campfire

with John Denman

In case anyone hadn't noticed there are a lot of the world's problems that can be solved around a campfire. It doesn't have to be so big you can't be near it to cook something. It just has to be the right size to provide a little warmth on a cold bush night, and have the right sort of ambience that allows some fertile thoughts to bubble to the surface.

After a day out hunting, regardless of the ratio of success, the campfire is that holiest of places for a tired hunter to park his/her backside and stare into the coals. After all, it's not known as the bush television for nothing. I have a preference for simple camping, but a fire is right up there in terms of importance. During the last drought we couldn't have one, but that's just commonsense. Yet a campsite isn't really complete without that cheery little blaze.

It occurred to me once that if you had the world's leaders sit down around a fire there could be some real progress made. The trouble with that is few of them would be hunters and so their thought processes would spear off in different directions to what ours generally do. There would undoubtedly be complaints about the primitive conditions anyway, so I'll leave that idea alone.

When you are out on the hunt, all sorts of thoughts run through your mind. More so if you happen to be hunting on your own. At the end of that day of slugging it out in a variety of terrain, you may arrive back at camp tired and in a somewhat reflective mood. You see, I believe that

being out there is more important than the tally. I call it an armed bush walk.

So back at camp, you unload the rifle, dump your pack and maybe think about the cold beer which has been on your mind for the past hour or so. However, before that you need to scrape together some kindling and light the fire. If you've done it right, the flames will catch onto larger wood which may increase in size until the desired result is achieved. The general aim being a good bed of coals you can cook over. After that a few more lumps of wood will help warm you until the time the swag beckons.

Being a hunter should mean that you have and continue to gain knowledge of all those small details of what goes on around you. Most hunters will familiarise themselves with the tracks their quarry leave on the ground, what the animal's droppings look like, where they sip their water, maybe even where they bed down during the day. But you should also have some idea about the sort of wood you use for the fire.

If it's a quick billy fire, it matters little. Just a swift hot burn enough to brew some tea. But if you want to cook on it you generally need coals, and coals mean the right sort of wood. The one flash and its ash stuff is no good to you here. But we are fortunate that there's a wide array of good Australian hardwoods on offer.

Iron bark burns hot, but generally doesn't leave a good bed of coals. For that, and depending on your location, other hardwoods are better. Out west of the eastern

seaboard is gidgee. You can always count on that stuff to leave a good bed of coals, but further closer to the coast is stringybark and red gum along with yellow box and blue gum. In the high-country mountain ash is good and there are parts of Victoria and South Australia where mallee is supreme. If you've ever had a fire from mallee roots, you'll never forget it. Just don't try to split it.

Having that warming fire brings with it a few responsibilities though, and commonsense figures largely here. If it's windy, keep your fire reasonably small and clear all around it. Putting rocks to circle it may look neat but some rocks can shatter creating shrapnel that can inflict serious harm. Digging a shallow pit is better. That way, after the fire is out you can shovel the soil back over the remains of the flames. But throwing sand or soil over live coals is an invitation to trouble. An animal could put a foot on the thin layer of dirt and go right through into the coals.

I had a mate once who had pyromaniac tendencies. He was a tree surgeon, so he had plenty of chainsaws. Not for him the gathering of sticks off the ground. No, he would disappear down the track to where he'd seen a promising dead tree. It would be snigged into the camp on a chain behind his LandCruiser, then he'd cut it up. There would be a stump sliced for each person in the group, the rest being cut and split. You could probably have seen the glow in the sky for miles. But as the wood supply dwindled, your seat would also end up on the fire. ■

What does the SSAA do for the environment?

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