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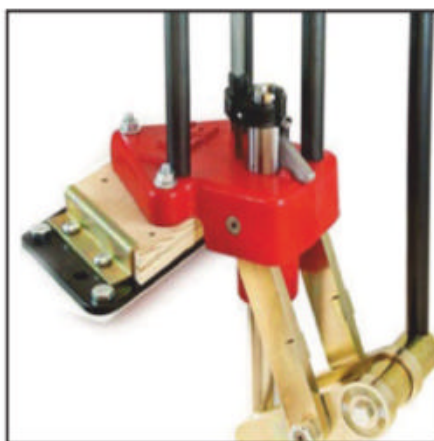
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From the Editor

The same great content of Australia's favourite hunting magazine rolls on with a fresh new look in Issue 78 to see Ben Smith's mate rejoice as he secures his first ever deer, Gary Hall and his four-legged boar bailer knocked about in the Outback, Brad Allen hit the heights of NZ for trophy tahr, Mark van den Boogaart cover his Brisbane Valley stag pursuit here and on SSAA TV, Scott Heiman joyously hunt with the whole family, Don Caswell receive the call up from a local farmer to despatch menacing wild dogs, Chris Redlich hassled taking down a hefty hog and John Kiely make the most of a duck season that almost never was.

We provide a reminder to keep on top of your game, feature the ultimate tips for hammocking which may just convert you when hunting out bush, ponder whether the 'good old days' were really that good, share lessons learnt with riflescopes, delve into the relevance of a well-placed shot versus powerful gear, look back at reloading and cover a range of products for the handloader.

We also put our hands on a respectable pair of PUMA knives and the Cold Steel Finn Bear all-rounder, attach the tried and tested sturdy Top End Campgear gas bottle holder to a 4WD, explore safely with Garmin's Montana 700i GPS, appreciate clever simplicity from Blackfoot Designs, target pests with a CZ 557 in .308 and fire a few rounds with Norma ammunition.

For the tastebuds we catch delicious cherabin in the tropics – it's easy and they're massive, then we dish up mouth-watering recipes for venison, pork ribs and magpie goose. Our amazing array of prizes include the portable windproof Wooshka wood-fire stove we reviewed in Issue 77 along with a heavy-duty carry bag for outdoor use, a mighty Odin Turbo Torch from Olight and a comprehensive Winchester prize pack – don't miss out!

Thomas Cook
Editor



Dan looks pleased with himself after taking his first deer.

A first for Dan

Ben Smith recounts how patience paid off as his delighted friend finally got that first deer

I met Dan through a mutual acquaintance a few years ago. It was with a group of friends who are all into four-wheel drives, camping, outdoors and firearms.

Dan asked if I could help him with building his house and we started chatting about construction. After I grew to know him a bit more, I decided to take him hunting to a property in northern NSW where I had just gained access.

The farmer had issues with deer, pigs and goats coming from the surrounding bush and causing problems on his land. They

had wrecked fencing and were competing with the livestock for feed he had been putting out.

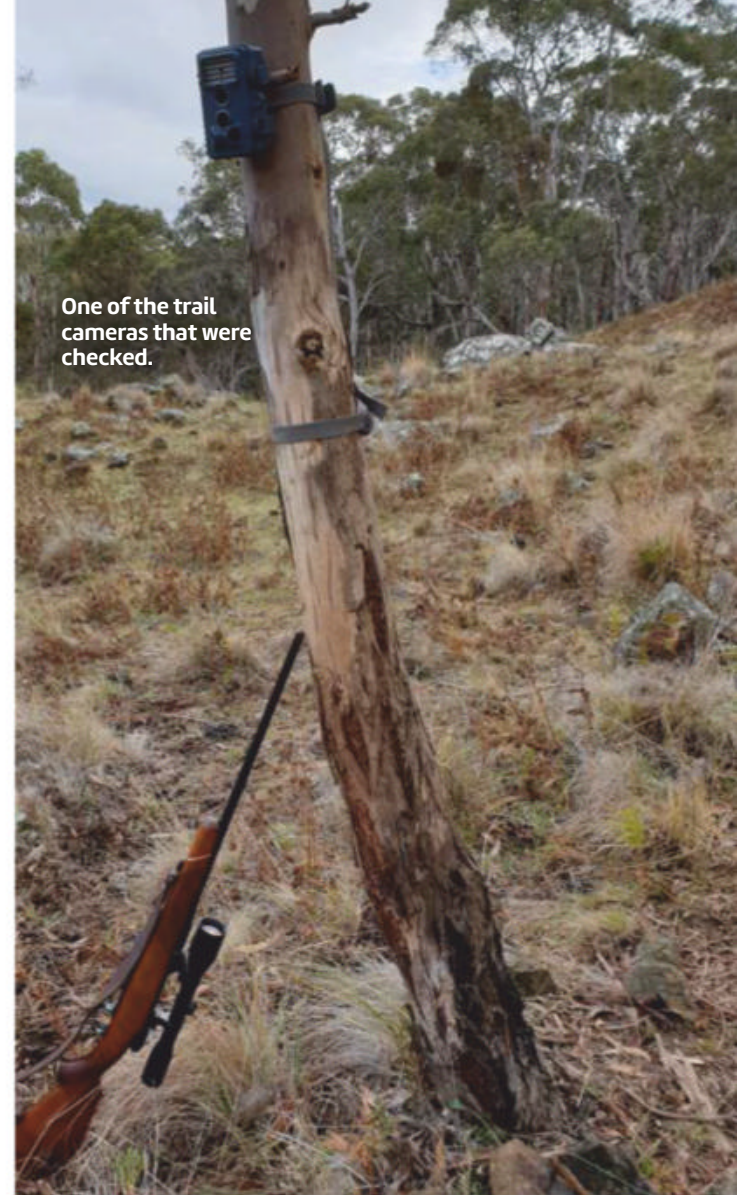
We drove down on a Friday night after work and set up camp in one of the back paddocks. The wind was blowing an absolute freezing gale, but we still managed to prepare our swags and have a campfire.

My alarm was set for 5am to allow enough time for us to be ready before sunrise. There was no rush as the camp was right next to our hunting location for the morning. The wind had died down and was at least consistent, which is rare.

Shooting light came and we started hunting, heading straight into the wind as we sidled around the rolling hills. Stopping at every fold in the ground, I put my binoculars up to scan ahead, looking for any deer.

I knew to keep an eye out for kangaroos and wallabies as the deer seem to use them as lookouts if danger is coming. The first few gullies were quiet and we took wide berths around any of the local grey kangaroo population when we came across them.

About halfway through our stalk we



One of the trail cameras that were checked.



The rough camp set-up saw Ben and Dan through the cold nights.



Ben's 4WD on the farm tracks.



Skinning some rabbits by the campfire.

found a large open gully system which led into a neighbouring property that was full of uncleared bushland. We sat behind a fallen log and used it for cover while we scanned the area.

I spotted two fallow deer feeding in the gully bottom and opposite face. I asked Dan if he wanted to use my rifle, a .270, as the shot was well over 200m and he had only brought his Marlin .45-70 lever gun. He responsibly replied he "couldn't confidently take the shot."

I needed the meat so moved into position while he filmed me taking the shot to

fell the deer.

We butchered it out and carried it back to camp. It was a bit of a mission in these hills but we did the job because my freezer was low.

Later that day I tried coaxing Dan onto a few more fallow deer but wind either busted us or he couldn't see them soon enough before they ran away.

Redemption came about six months later as Dan's wife warmly suggested he have a weekend off from building his house. We loaded up my car and headed down to another property in a similar area

to where we went the first time.

Setting up another rough camp, we quickly put our hunting gear together and headed out to check some trail cameras I had put out previously. After I changed all the SD cards and batteries, we reviewed the photos back in camp and could see a few deer and pigs had been moving about, so the omens were good for this hunt.

The next day we decided to hunt another neighbouring property which usually holds good numbers of fallow deer.

Parking the 4WD about 1km from where we wanted to hunt, we made our way along

A first for Dan



Ben's trail camera image of a young fallow buck.

a ridge top with our aim to drop into a gully system in the thickest part of the bush on this property. We made it to the start of the bush, which was a clearing with improved pasture.

Surprisingly there were not even kangaroos on it. Maybe we were too early? It was after the fallow deer rut but the bucks

were still hanging around close to the does.

We moved around the edge of the clearing to a 4WD track which contoured down to some open country below us. The wind was in our favour and our movement became deliberate and slow.

This whole area just felt like perfect

deer territory – the ideal mix of bush with improved pasture above and below it, plus plenty of valleys in between. We had walked no further than 50m down the track when we heard the breaking of branches and sound of hooves running up the opposite side of the gully.

I signalled to Dan to be ready because it was only a matter of time until one of the deer walked into a gap and gave us a chance. A few seconds later I noticed Dan put his .45-70 up. He said he could see three deer and one had antlers. I said to shoot the one with antlers.

The report of the .45-70 boomed and echoed in the surrounding hills. It was that loud I couldn't even hear a hit. I asked Dan: "Did you hit it?" He smiled because from his spot he could see it all unfold.

Skipping across the gully as quick as we could, we found his fallow buck and first deer. The bullet had hit the boiler room and exited through the off-side shoulder.

Dan had the biggest smile on his face. I set him and the deer up and we had enough photos for future memories. We took all the salvageable meat we could and hiked our way back to the car.

For the rest of the weekend we ate fresh venison and hunted rabbits night and day. ■



A trail camera image of livestock in the snow.

Moroccan-style tagine venison... yes shanks!

Served with lemon zested couscous



Don Caswell

Venison shanks are an often-overlooked item by hunters. They are easy to remove and can be prepared in a number of tasty ways. One of my favourites is to make a Moroccan-style tagine. It has a long list of ingredients, but do not let that deter you. It is a relatively simple recipe and makes for a memorable meal.

Ingredients

- 2 venison shanks
- flour, seasoned to dust meat
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 onions (finely chopped)
- 3 cloves garlic (finely chopped)
- 1 tablespoon freshly grated ginger
- 1 stick celery chopped
- ½ red capsicum, chopped
- ⅛ teaspoon ground cloves
- ½ teaspoon cardamom
- ½ teaspoon cinnamon
- ¼ teaspoon nutmeg

- 1 teaspoon ground coriander
- 1 teaspoon cumin
- 1 teaspoon turmeric
- 1 teaspoon dried parsley (or use fresh)
- ½ teaspoon ground black pepper
- salt to taste
- 130g dried apricots (cut in half)
- 100g pitted prunes (cut in half)
- 250g pumpkin (peeled and cut into cubes)
- 1 x 440g tin chickpeas
- 1 litre beef stock (may not need all of this)
- 1 tin diced tomatoes
- wedges of one lemon (for garnish)
- chopped coriander (for garnish)

Method

Preheat oven to 160C.

Dust the shanks with the seasoned flour, then brown in olive oil in a large Dutch oven.

Remove browned shanks to a dish. Add a little more oil to the pan and fry the onions, garlic, ginger, celery, capsicum and

spices. Add pumpkin, apricots and prunes and stir well.

Add the tomatoes and about half of the stock.

Replace the shanks into this mixture. Season to taste with more salt and pepper if desired.

Place lid on the pan and put into the oven for one hour. Turn the shanks every now and then and add more stock if required. Reduce the oven heat to 120C and cook for a further hour or two. You can add the chickpeas at this point.

Remove from oven and let stand for 15 minutes. Remove meat from the shank leg bones, discard bones. Stir meat into mix and serve.

Serving

Serve with steamed rice or lemon zested couscous. Sprinkle with lots of fresh coriander leaves. Fresh-baked, unleavened pita bread goes really well with this dish too. ■



Top bush tucker

You'll have to pinch yourself after catching tropical cherabin... here's **Dick Eussen's** top tips!

There is no need to eat beef at every meal during a hunting trip as fish and crustaceans abound in most rivers, lakes and billabongs, especially in the tropics.

"But I am not a fishing person," some might say. So, what? It's not hard to catch a feed on the end of a line and baited hook in most streams and billabongs. In fact, a line and hook should be in your survival kit. But I am going off the track here. There are other fishy things in most of our waters, like freshwater lobsters, commonly called crayfish or redclaw, or their close relatives – depending where you hunt. They are easy to catch in pots containing suitable baits.

But, in the tropics we have both redclaw in the Gulf country streams and our very own freshwater prawn of the northern tropical rivers, creeks and billabongs. It is

more commonly known as cherabin. It's a giant super prawn that grows over 30cm in length. It's not only a great food prawn but also a favourite bait for barramundi. Indigenous people absolutely love it and will brave crocodiles to lance it in the shallows at night armed with nothing but a torch and a fish spear. I was on a fishing and hunting trip north of Pormpuraaw on Cape York's rugged west coast sometime back. We had cherabin pots in and enjoyed a great rate of success. The traditional owners dropped in for a visit. A lady saw the cherabin and asked if she could have some. Who were we to say no? She took half a dozen of the biggest and headed down to the creek pool where she used our tasty cherabin to catch sooty grunter. What a waste, the fish can be caught all day on a piece of red meat or lures.

Cherabin larvae develop into complete miniature copies of the parents. Recent studies suggest that they breed in the wet season in freshwater and lay the eggs there, which hatch. The 2mm larvae must reach saltwater within seven days if they hope to survive. They are rapidly carried downstream by floods in the wet season and deposited into the estuarine environments. When the floods are over the young walk back upstream, a journey that may be over 400km in length. No doubt it's done in stages until they mature and need to breed.

Cherabin are omnivorous. They feed on a wide variety of food – aquatic worms, insects, fish, molluscs, crustaceans, flesh from fish and land animals, offal, grain, nuts, fruits, algae, leaves and aquatic plants. Cheese and even pure velvet soap

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Top bush tucker

can be used as bait, as can animal food pellets. But in my experience, they prefer flesh and in pots a big one will often kill and eat a smaller one.

The normal method is to catch cherabin in pots designed for redclaw. Pot regulations vary in Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory. Pots are designed to prevent freshwater turtles and platypus from entering the traps. Bag limits also vary in the different states and the NT, so ensure that you know the local regulations and that your pots are compliant.

A word of warning that most tropical rivers, creeks, swamps and billabongs have both fresh and saltwater crocodiles. The freshies are relatively harmless unless cornered and provoked, but their saltwater cousins will have you for dinner if you lose caution and forget where you are. They are miss-named and happily live in freshwater all their lives.

When camping in croc country, base yourself well away from the water. Set your



The folding Opera House pot is ideal for catching tasty freshwater crustaceans.

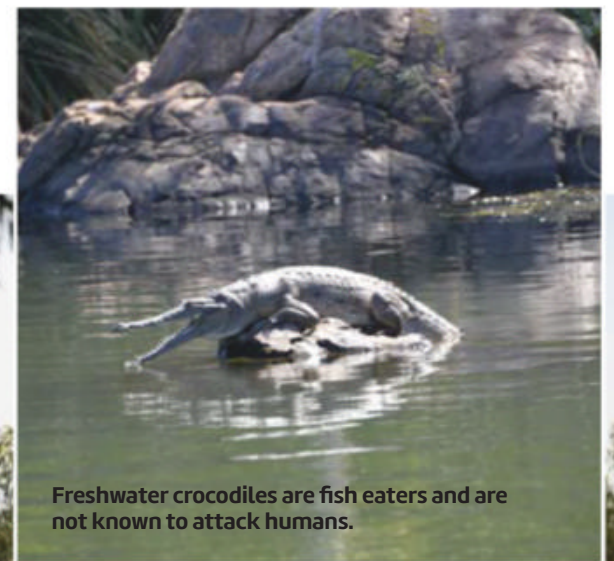


Both cherabin and redclaw can be caught in some streams.

traps where you don't become confined between high banks and water and be highly alert when fishing in murky water and hunting in swamps. Also, be aware that the panic-stricken attempts by cherabin to free themselves attracts both species of crocodile.

Apart from that little distraction, catching cherabin is easy – you are not required to be a fishing person. Cherabin or redclaw

pots are simple and collapsible and easy to transport. Take a couple of pots, bait them and set them in a nearby waterhole or billabong connected to a river or creek system in the wet season by floods and you will catch cherabin or redclaw where they



Freshwater crocodiles are fish eaters and are not known to attack humans.



Redclaw lobsters can be caught in the same pots using meaty bait. They are cooked in a similar way as cherabin.

Tropical rivers are rich in bush tucker – and crocodiles.



occur. They also live in brackish water and freshwater streams.

Baits can be fish, red meat, chicken or vegetables – for instance part-boiled potatoes or melon skin. Many trappers prefer vegetables as fish don't eat them, so they will not enter the trap. My own preference centres on 25mm strips or cubes of red meat. The bait is inserted into a bag that sits inside the centre of the pot. Ensure that the bait bag is secured to the centre struts as cherabin are armed with long pincers they use to pull the bait bag towards the trap tunnel breach, where they cut it open and eat the bait without entering the trap.

The pincers are razor sharp and akin to a cut with a razor blade. They are sharp enough to cut the thin nylon bag that holds the bait. After a while the bag is useless. You can either make your own bags from bird wire or shade cloth or use small cable ties to secure the bait to the trap frame. But ensure you don't litter our pristine streams with used cable ties. Take them home.

I set my traps in both shallow and deep water. When fishing from a tinnie I set them in deep water along timbered or weed edges. When working from a bank I drop pots in both deep and shallow water, though not in rapids or swift-flowing sections of a river. In actual practice you can check the traps on the hour if you like. In deep water the pots work all day, but in the shallows, they are best left overnight.

When caretaking on a northern Gulf country station I spent a lot of time catching cherabin in the river. The bait came from a big foul-smelling boar that I shot,



but the cherabin loved it. I checked the pots twice daily while hunting and caught enough for a couple of meals.

Deep pools produce the biggest cherabin, though that is not always true. Cherabin are aggressive and will prevent others from entering a pot when one is trapped inside it, though again on some days you may find two or more smaller species in a trap.

My normal method in removing cherabin from a pot is to open it and tip the catch into a bucket. Be aware that they will flip out of a shallow bucket and can move at speed back into the water. Catch

an escapee at your own peril, because the flexible nippers will cut your hand. After checking your pots place cherabin in an esky or fridge and they will go to sleep.

Cherabin are excellent eating and lobster-like in texture when cooked, fried or barbecued. I have some favourite methods of cooking the freshwater prawn and the similar redclaw lobster. One is by bringing water to the boil in a large pot, adding a handful of natural salt (the amount depends how many prawns you are cooking). When the water is boiling properly, drop in the prawns. The water will go off the boil. Wait until the water comes

Top bush tucker

back on the boil and remove the now-red prawns after about two minutes depending how big they are. Drop them in cold or ice water to prevent internal steaming, cool, peel and eat with condiments of your choice.

My other method is to place the whole prawns on a well-oiled barbecue hot plate. Fry them for a few minutes and turn only once. They don't take long and it's very much a learning process to obtain the right texture for the flesh. If you cook them too long, the flesh will be tough.

Deep frying peeled bodies is another tasty method. Cherabin are easily peeled – just twist the head off and push their armour-cladding from the bodies with your thumb. Some have blue flesh, but that's natural. I butterfly the bodies and remove the gut. Next, they are placed on a board or plate and salted with natural salt and pepper to taste. Splash an egg in a soup plate, scramble it, drag the prawn through it and roll it in panko (Japanese rice bread-crumbs available from Asian food outlets) and fry in garlic butter.

Garlic butter is heated in a frypan, you need about 2–4mm of depth depending how many prawns you are cooking. When the butter is melted and hot, place the prawns in the pan, fry and turn only once. They don't take long with my normal



The combined effort of this group made for a bonzer catch of cherabin and redclaw.

method being to wait until the rice crumbs turn brown on one side. Turn and do the other side, remove and allow to drain on paper or a rack. Keep heat low or you will burn the panko.

They can be cooked whole in campfire ashes, Aboriginal-style, or peeled and along with onions, tomatoes, garlic, pepper and salt, wrapped in alfoil and cooked in hot ashes.

My other method is to peel the prawns, remove the gut tube and cut the bodies into bite-sized chunks, dose with salt, pepper and garlic to taste and cook in a frypan or wok in virgin olive oil or garlic

butter. Add tomatoes, onions and capsicum and cook Asian-style. Add soy sauce to taste and if you wish to spoil the flavour of your good cooking add chilli if you are into it.

No matter which way cherabin is cooked, it's delicious. Next time out take a couple of pots and catch your own crustaceans, be it tropical cherabin or inland redclaw. The latter are prepared and cooked in a similar manner as cherabin. It's the best bush tucker ever. ■



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Blackfoot Designs KEEP IT SIMPLE

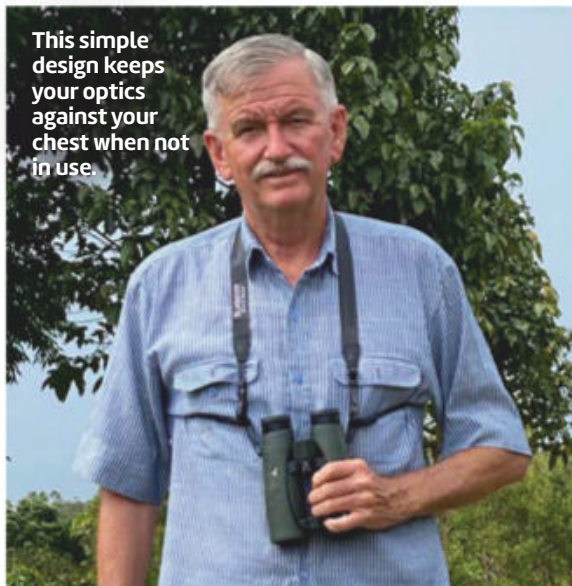
Don Caswell

This face veil, that hangs off the Bush Hat, is essential when hunting wary animals.



Blackfoot Silent Sling, on the right, compared to a neoprene version.

This simple design keeps your optics against your chest when not in use.



Like most hunters, I am on a never-ending quest to simplify my kit down to some essential, minimal items. *Australian Hunter* was given the opportunity to review a number of such products made by the small, Australian company Blackfoot Designs. Known for their excellent camo clothing, they also offer other useful accessories for hunters.

While I am 'old school' with a preference for blued steel, timber and leather in my shooting gear, I have to say that leather slings have proved to

be problematic over the years. I found leather slings prone to slipping off my shoulder, especially when I was wearing a backpack. Living in the tropics also means having to constantly address mould on leatherwork.

I moved on to neoprene slings and, while they offered a better grip than leather, the problem of slippage still remained, albeit to a lesser degree. And, like leather slings, there were adjusting buckles that were inclined to click and clack against things and, in some cases, bright metal reflected sunlight.

Extraneous noise and reflections are the arch enemy of the serious stalker. You have to eliminate all sources of such give-away fittings.

Blackfoot Designs' Silent Sling seems to have accomplished this nicely. The sling is made from a single piece of strong, dark webbing, without any adjusting buckle. Obviously, you need to specify just what length you require when ordering your sling. A short length of rubberised gripping material is sewn onto the sling where it sits on your shoulder. This Silent Sling has proved itself to me in sitting firmly on my shoulder, with or without a backpack, when afield. Better yet, there are no tell-tale images or noises to betray my presence while stalking game.

Another useful bit of kit is their Binocular Harness. This holds the eyepieces against your chest and eliminates the annoying swing that unrestrained binoculars develop when a hunter is moving about. A stretch strap allows the optics to be lifted to eye level for use, but pulls them back against the chest when released.

When sitting in ambush for wild dogs, where a close encounter is to be expected, I have for years made use of a light mesh balaclava-style face mask. It concealed my face well, but the close fit against my skin often proved to be irritating in the tropical heat. I have now adopted the Blackfoot Blaze Bush Hat with a matching light veil.

The veil attaches via Velcro to the hat rim, hanging a couple of inches in front of my face, and is much cooler to wear without sacrificing anything in the way of effective concealment. When not required I simply tuck the veil up under the crown of the hat, out of the way until needed. Visit blackfoot.com.au for pricing and their array of products. ■



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Hammocking 101

When it comes to sleeping in the bush, **Jan Kaptein** has done it all and finds the simple hammock the best

Most of my mates chuckle as they see me pull out my hammock when we go camping. While we all spend a good part of our time in the bush, I know of few others who use a hammock as their preferred shelter for overnight or longer trips.

Some hunters sleep in a simple swag with a tarp, others use stretchers, tents or doze in their ute while the younger ones take pride in 'roughing it', just sleeping on the ground. And I will be honest – I've done all, except sleep in the car because I am growing older and it was just never comfortable.

After going through all sorts of sleeping arrangements out bush, I have settled on

a hammock as my go-to shelter. I have a light tent in the back of the car for emergencies or in case I do not find any posts to put up my hammock, but I hardly ever use it because I only need one post or tree.

That's because the other hammock strap handily attaches to the bull bars of the ute when in a pinch. After trying out various models, I have engaged a Hennessy Deep Jungle Zip XL. It is large enough to be comfortable for taller people, has an integrated mosquito net that even keeps sandflies out and packs away compactly.

Oddly enough, not a single person I have camped with over the years, who did not already use a hammock, has become a convert. We take cues from each other on almost everything else, from clothing,

knives, ammunition, optics, rifles and even camping gear, but sleeping in a hammock seems to have a barrier to entry.

Quite frankly, I am not sure why. The only reasons I can think of are the childhood memories of back pain after a stint in grandmother's hammock on the porch and the hassle to properly hang one. While I can not magically make the youthful recollections disappear, I can assure you that a modern hammock, when correctly hung, has absolutely nothing in common with granny's contraption. I will attempt to give a few pointers that will make hanging your hammock a breeze, particularly once you have done so a few times.

Hammocks have the big advantage that they are light and pack compactly. So



Out bush. You do not want to use a thinner tree than the left one.



The Hennessy Deep Jungle XL is shaped asymmetrically.



Heavy-duty zippers on the integrated mosquito netting of the Hennessy Deep Jungle XL.

what is in my bag? The aforementioned Hennessy hammock, snakeskins, webbing straps, two carabiners and a tarp with paracord lines, elastic and a few pegs. All done and dusted, in a light, waterproof duffle.

I arrived at the Deep Jungle Zip XL by doing research and trying a few alternatives. The hammock is marketed as suitable for 'the buggiest of jungles on the planet' and from my experience in the wet tropics, I am inclined to accept this bold claim. The hammock itself is a 'gathered end' item and weighs in at 1400 grams, mosquito netting included. It measures 335cm by 150cm and will sleep a person up to 213cm and 136kg. I am 187cm and comfortable in it.

The hammock is made of a double layer

of 30d Nylon 66 with spectra reinforced ripstop. The integrated mosquito netting is 20d polyester 'No-See-Um' netting. Contrary to the suggestion that you cannot see through it, the term refers to the mesh being midge proof. And it actually is. I've camped out in sandfly infested spots and never had a single bite while in the hammock.

Zippers are YKK. I use a 'monsoon' type rainfly by Hennessy. It adds 'blast panels' that enable you to close the front and rear in extreme conditions. It is asymmetrically shaped and also has additional reinforced corners (three on each side, six in total) to secure it in bad weather. I use snakeskins to quickly and securely pack the hammock. These are essentially just fabric tubes that

slide over the hammock to encapsulate it. The added benefit is that they help to swiftly put up and take down the hammock and keep it clean.

Once you put all the gear in your pack and head out, it is time to find a good spot to hang your hammock. There are basic safety measures to keep in mind that apply to all forms of camping. These vary from ensuring you do not set up camp in areas prone to flooding, lightning strikes, unwanted visits by dangerous animals and so on. Use your commonsense and you ought to be fine. However, there are a few things to look out for that apply specifically to hammocking.

Most have to do with the fact that you will typically use trees to hang your

Hammocking 101

hammock. When looking for suitable trees, avoid selecting the tallest trees in a stand, make sure there are no dead or broken branches overhead and keep in mind that the trees need to support the horizontal or sheer force of your weight.

So when in doubt, thicker trees and those angled slightly away from the hammock are always better than thin ones or trees tilting towards the hammock. I will not go into too much detail, but the angle of the suspension lines plays a huge role when it comes to the sheer force. Many inexperienced hammock campers are inclined to hang their hammock way too tight. But as a rough rule of thumb, aim for a 30-degree angle of the suspension lines.

At this slant the sheer force will be roughly equal to the load of the camper. In contrast, hang at 5 degrees and that will be well over five times the load. For most commercially available hammocks, the ideal distance between your trees will be around 4 to 5m. For this, you want to attach the straps about 180cm off the ground. Angled around 30 degrees, this provides you with a comfortable height to go in and out with enough ground clearance. Using a ridgeline on your hammock makes sure it is not stretched too tight or too slack. This line, which is attached to either end of the hammock, also doubles as a convenient aid to hang a gear organiser, knife, flash-light or other small utensils.

Once you have hung a hammock a few



times, you will be able to spot a suitable position to camp in wooded areas. When trees are in scarce supply, you will need to become creative and use alternate points to hang your hammock. I sometimes use the bull bars on the ute, but have on one occasion hung my hammock between two parked road trains. There are many ways to hang a hammock, but a few stand out in simplicity. I will briefly discuss three.

1. Traditional suspension lines: These are what most people go with when they start to use hammocks. Obviously, the lines should be strong enough to carry the load and sufficiently abrasion resistant to avoid fraying when used on coarse surfaces like tree bark. Paracord in a suitable diameter is a good choice.



While this method is lightweight and fairly easy to install if you know your knots, it is not ideal. Any slippage means you need to re-tie and sorting the knots out in the morning can be a pain, particularly if it has rained or if you are not a featherweight.

In addition to this, you risk damaging the trees, which should be avoided. One way to prevent damage is to use a piece of webbing strap around the tree. This also ensures less slippage, so I would recommend its use. Having loops at either end will make tying off easier. That said, traditional lines might be your only viable option. They are easy to find almost anywhere, they are cheap and lightweight, so when alternatives are not available, they are the way to go.

2. Webbing straps: With only a small weight-penalty, I would recommend these over traditional lines in almost any situation. Traditional straps have loops at either





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Hammocking 101

end and are long enough to wrap around almost any tree. Once wrapped around a tree you could theoretically tie your suspension lines to the loops as per option 1.

However, there is a much quicker and easier alternative. Instead of using lines, you attach carabiners to the tied ends of the hammock and simply hook into the loops. This will be a lot quicker, both to set up and when you pack up in the morning.

Do make sure to use proper carabiners, not the ones you can grab at Woolies for a dollar each. I use lightweight climbing carabiners that will carry my weight many times over. Sure, they cost significantly more, but at least they close properly and I know they will never snap.

Now, to make hanging your hammock even easier, there is the option of modified webbing straps. There are straps that, instead of just having loops at either end, have evenly spaced small loops on part or all of the strap. This makes hanging a breeze and it is what I personally go with.

You do not have to be specific about how you wrap your straps around the trees to have the ideal length to hang your hammock. You wrap the straps around the trees and simply hook into the loops that give you an ideal angle. If anything moves ever so slightly, you can always just hook into the next loop. This is not possible with the straps that just have loops at the ends. They require a careful wrap to make sure you hang at an appropriate angle or the use of paracord or other extenders to obtain the right angle. Whichever strap you use, you are much more likely to leave the tree undamaged, which is good.

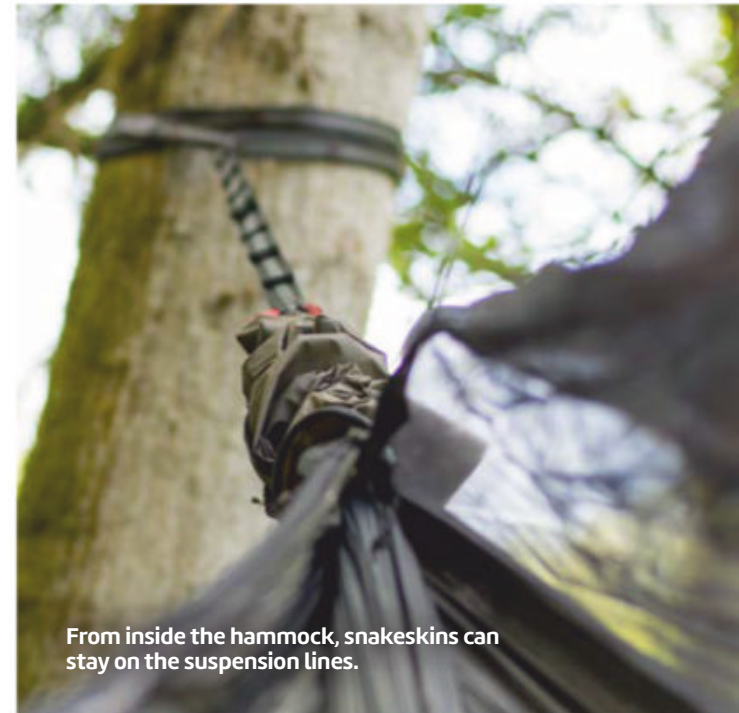


Looped straps will save you a lot of time.

3. Toggles. This is sort of a middle ground. The principle is simple. You pass a toggle on one end through a loop on the other and you are done. Just like closing an old greatcoat with loops and toggles. What has surprised me is that many websites and people using them suggest using the loop where the hammock is gathered, attaching a toggle to the strap or suspension line that is fastened to the tree at either end.

While pragmatic, it means you once again need to be careful about the length of the suspension lines or straps once attached to the trees. So, I suggest you attach a toggle at either end of the hammock instead.

Next you grab a webbing strap that is long enough to securely wrap around the typical tree you are likely to find. To the loop at the end, you attach a length of paracord with loops every 10 or so centimetres. This allows you to wrap the



From inside the hammock, snakeskins can stay on the suspension lines.

webbing strap around the tree, after which you put your toggle through whichever loop gives you the ideal hang.

The advantage of this method over the carabiner is that you switch out part of the webbing strap for some paracord, so saving some weight. Furthermore, you can always make a toggle with anything that will withstand the sheer pressure. I suggest using a solid old nail with the sharp end filed off, a sufficiently thick piece of hardwood or whatever you can find.

You will not need carabiners or anything else you will not be able to find or source almost anywhere in the bush. The benefit of this technique over the traditional suspension lines discussed under option 1 is that there are no knots and it is easy to hang your hammock at the appropriate angle.

Hammocks can be hung over surfaces that would be unpleasant to camp on with a tent – rocks, coarse vegetation and even puddles of water after a downpour. While you will sleep just as well over any of these as you will a soft patch of grass, hanging your hammock becomes a challenge.

Having it drag through the mud or risking a tear on prickly bushes or rocks are not ideal. This is where snakeskins come in. Designed to facilitate easy packing and storing of your hammock, they are also great when you hang or take it down. With the tubes protecting the hammock itself from contact with mud or sharp objects, you no longer need to worry about it



Hammocks are easy to hang with looped straps.



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touching the ground.

I highly recommend using them. If you cannot be bothered spending money on them, just grab some waterproof fabric and sew two tubes just over half the length of your hammock. Slide these over either end so one covers the other for about 20cm and you are good to go. Putting in a bit of sturdy material so the sliding end stays open makes putting them on even easier. I would probably just grab some ends of thick nylon from a brush cutter.

One aspect that is often overlooked is insulation. In a hammock, you hang in the wind and as a result, you can cool down quickly in colder climates. Anywhere outside the tropics or on summer nights, I recommend using some form of insulation.

For me, a combination of a silk liner with a light sleeping bag does the trick, but your mileage may vary. The most common forms of insulation are 'mats' and 'quilts'. The Hennessy allows you to put an insulation mat between the layers of fabric. While I do not use one every trip, I have one in the back of the car, just in case. Even on a tropical summer night, a stiff breeze can cool you down. Personally, I have not used quilts, opting for heavier (modular) sleeping bags inside the hammock instead. However, if you camp in winter or colder climates, you will want to use one. They are essentially an insulating cocoon that wraps around the outside of your hammock, providing protection from the cold.

While all this covers the basics, there are various accessories that will make your hammocking experience more comfortable or easier. As an example, Hennessy sells 'AutoMagic Water Collectors'. These are nothing more than small funnels to attach at the corners of your rainfly. When

it rains, they collect water as it runs down.

The nifty trick is that they are threaded to allow standard bottles to be screwed in. As a result, the rain fills the attached bottles, effectively tensioning the rainfly. You could also use them to collect rainwater for some basic cooking when needed. Another item that will make life in your hammock easier is an organiser that you can hang from the ridgeline to help keep some small items in order.

With your hammock all set up and ready to go, there is one final, but crucial, aspect worth mentioning. How do you get in and out of your hammock and how do you position yourself inside? By far the easiest way in is to approach the hammock as if it were a hanging chair. You simply sit on the edge, ease yourself backwards and swing in your legs.

To be out, sit in the middle of your hammock, put your legs over the edge and move up as if you were rising up from a chair. Once inside, a common mistake people make is to try to lie lengthwise. This is not the way to sleep in one. It is uncomfortable and unstable. You will not lie flat, but like a banana. Instead, modern hammocks, like the Hennessy Deep Jungle XL, are designed so you can lie diagonally. Doing so gives you a flat or almost flat position and sideways movements do not translate into the hammock swinging too much.

Speaking of swinging, I use pegs on my hammock to prevent it from swinging in the wind. The added benefit is that it keeps the hammock somewhat spread, making it easy to toss your gear inside and go in yourself.

All these pointers are to a large extent based on my personal experience and

preferences. There is no 'best' or correct way that will work for everyone. What is comfortable for me, may not work for you.

However, the safety and basic technical pointers are fairly universal. Simple things like using looped straps, not hanging the hammock too tight or lying in your hammock diagonally will make for a much more pleasant experience.

As you set about using your hammock, I am sure you will develop your own preferences and style. I have a friend who often camps with his wife and they hang their hammocks over each other like bunk beds. How she makes it into the top hammock, I can only imagine, but it is something I would never consider doing.

Another mate swears by using a quilt under his hammock and limiting what he has inside to prevent feeling cramped. My suggestion is to just rely on a basic hammock and play around with it to see what works for you. Do this prior to heading into the bush for that three-week hunt. If you are unsure you will find trees to hang your hammock from, a back-up swag or tent is never a bad idea.

This also applies when you travel to unknown areas. That said, if you camp in areas with vegetation, you should be fine. In all my years of sleeping in hammocks, I have only once found it impossible to hang it because I was unconvinced by the thickness of the available posts.

Adopting hammocking is not expensive either. There are plenty of options available. For those who decide it works for them, I can highly recommend Hennessy products and the Hennessy Deep Jungle Zip (XL) in particular. ■





Gary, Rocky and the boar after a triumphant outing.

Hog wild!

Gary Hall gets more than he bargained for bailing boars

Our first boar of the year certainly caused some damage and as a result my main dog Ace, a light-framed bailer with plenty of experience and runs on the board, spent a long weekend at the local vet. And I spent most of Sunday watching the cricket with my right hand in ice. In all my years of hunting with dogs, this was my first trip to the vet for a pig related injury.

The day had started well, just a typical Saturday morning spent walking an eroded creek line with my good mate Neil and the dogs looking for pigs. However, our chosen lifestyle can be a dangerous passion as things can and do go wrong in a hurry.

As usual we were in good spirits and why wouldn't we be? Out in the great outdoors, enjoying a walk while following my four bailers. We had almost strolled into

another postcode when the barking started further up the creek line.

The boar wasn't that big, probably only 70kg, but it was all muscle and uncurbed aggression. Almost instantly, by his movements we could tell the boar had attacked Ace, but we didn't know much more.

Suddenly, a quick sidestep saw the boar evade the barking dogs and charge. With its head down and at full pelt, it covered the short gap in a number of long, powerful strides and was on me before I'd even shouldered the compact coach gun.

Then everything seemed to happen at lightning speed. The boar's momentum ran it up the barrel and as the front sight disappeared into the side of its mouth an instinctive one-handed shot wiped the mean expression of its face and put a painful one on mine. I wasn't sure if the violent

jolt was the boar's solid impact or the coach gun going off.

But of more concern was Ace's condition. The boar had bitten parts off Ace's right foot and had a chomp on the rest.

I'm pleased to say Katherine Vet Care did an excellent job, with a special thanks to little Pete, putting Ace well on the road to recovery and regaining his status as main dog.

You reap what you sow

With Ace out of action, Neil and I ventured out again to do battle with the Top End's heat in search of a portly porker.

Today, Mate (Ace's mum) would don the tracking collar and as such the coveted status of main dog. Also on the 'hairy-legged team' was 'old girl' Dash (Ace's grandmother) and last, but not least Rocky.

Hog wild!

Twenty minutes after leaving the Honda Pioneer in the shade, the bailers went into full-on barking mode. A quick sprint had Neil and I adjacent to the fiery stand-off. The dogs may have had the numbers in their favour, but the solid, powerfully built boar was fighting in a different weight division. His impressive lethal set of well-honed ivory also helped to give him plenty of home ground advantage.

Undeterred, Rocky, a Jack Russell with

attitude, had ambitiously placed his 4kg frame a short distance from the boar's laughing gear (not that he was currently in the mood for a chuckle). With a snarling, impulsive, over-confident, quick-moving terrier in its face, a safe shot was impossible.

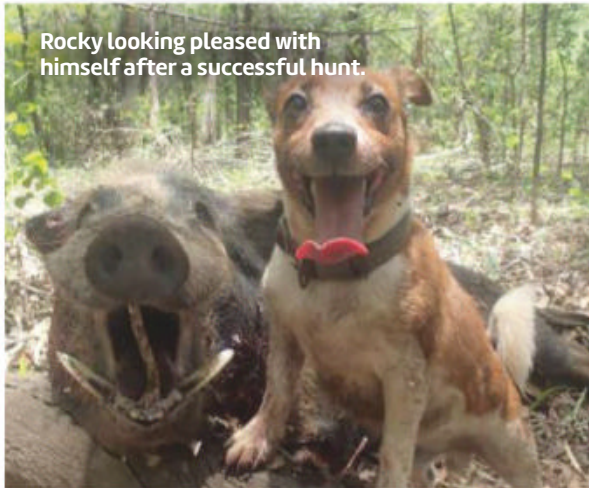
A split second after lowering the coach gun the cranky boar broke the bail and made a run for it. For a big fella he could certainly put the foot down and cover

some ground. After travelling further than I do on holidays, the barking trio finally had its measure and its undivided attention.

Boom! Boom! The coach guns fired almost in stereo and the boar hit the deck and stayed there. After the dogs were handed the thumbs-up (no injuries), we gave them a drink at the creek line before returning for a few pics. As usual Rocky, the 'little gladiator' showed he definitely wasn't camera shy. ■



Ace's right foot is missing a couple of digits after being chomped by the wild boar.



Rocky looking pleased with himself after a successful hunt.



Gary's swollen right hand after dealing with the boar at close range.

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A pair of PUMAs

Mark van den Boogaart revisits a classic brand



Good-quality gear costs, but the price is well worth it.

It was more than 30 years ago that I started to outfit myself with trusted gear. It took a lot of saving and self-discipline but over time I bought myself some great fitting Italian hiking boots, a top-notch backpack, lightweight tent and sleeping bag, plus a PUMA hunting knife.

Most of the kit lasted well. I still have the pack, with the tent and sleeping bag only recently replaced. However, not long after I bought the PUMA knife, it was stolen out of my 4WD ute.

I never replaced the PUMA. Now I don't mean I didn't buy another knife, it's just I found something else. Maybe it was nostalgia, perhaps it was just the right moment but recently I decided to revisit PUMA knives.

Founded in 1769, PUMA is truly a famous cutlery brand known for its wonderful German-made knives. PUMA now offers knives manufactured in a number of countries.

PUMA branded knives, or Classic knives are still German-made. On the other hand, PUMA IP (International Production) knives are turned out under contract in Spain

while PUMA TEC are generally of Chinese origin.

So, what makes a German PUMA knife so special? Well, it's a couple of things. One is the tradition. PUMA has a long connection to hunting and its knives reflect that. The other is the quality. German-made PUMA knives are meticulously put together and purchasing one is an investment in an esteemed product.

With that in mind, I decided to look into the PUMA Classic range. I eventually picked two knives – the PUMA Jagdmesser 1, a stag handled folder and the highly-regarded PUMA Jagdnicker nach Frevert, a stag handled fixed blade.

By way of explanation, Jagdmesser translates to hunting knife, while Jagdnicker is a little more complicated. The name refers to an age-old technique of humanely despatching an animal. Specifically, it refers to the Nicker (from the word nicken, to nod) which is the vertebra directly under the skull. Traditionally, a Jagdnicker was driven under the vertebra so as to sever the nerves and kill the game animal.

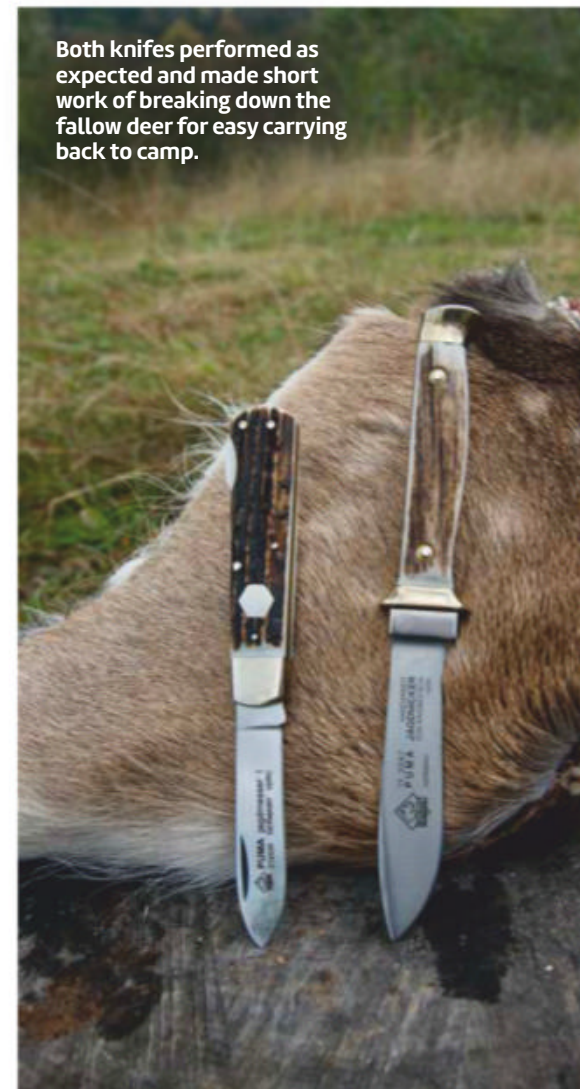
As you can imagine a Jagdnicker is more

akin to a stabbing blade, but the design of the PUMA Jagdnicker nach Frevert is a more modern interpretation. Utilising a thin drop point-style blade, it initially was released by PUMA in the 1950s and attributed to Walter Frevert, hence the name Jagdnicker nach Frevert.

So, to the knives. First off, the '1' in Jagdmesser 1 refers to the number of blades. For instance, my purchased Jagdmesser 1 folding knife has a single blade, the Jagdmesser 2 has two and finally, the Jagdmesser 3, has three blades.

As a folding knife the Jagdmesser 1 is compact and easily fits in your pocket or belt pouch. Its traditional, angular design is enhanced by the textured finish to the stag scales, while the nickel silver bolsters, spacers and brass pins all add to the appeal.

With a closed length of 92mm and weighing just 92 grams it is a small knife, though comfortable in the hand. The blade is held firm by a lock back mechanism that has a raised release, rather than a button or lever flush with the scales. I believe the format is to help closing the knife when you are wearing winter gloves.



The flat ground, 440A stainless steel blade is 76mm long, 3mm thick with a slow taper that ends in a drop point. As with all German-made PUMA knives, the Jagdmesser 1 has been Rockwell tested to 55–57 HRC.

Printed on the high gloss blade is a lot of information including name, model number, place and date of manufacture, with mine being a 2012 build – which is pretty old for a new knife. Overall, the Jagdmesser 1 is a well made, and finished folding knife with a classic hunting feel and appearance.

The second knife, the PUMA Jagdnicker nach Frevert is a small, fixed hunting knife. It is regarded as a true PUMA classic, possibly in part due to its namesake. Oberforstmeister Walter Frevert was, and remains to this day, a controversial figure.

On the one hand he was a man recognised for his significant contribution to European hunting, and species management. Yet, he was also a Nazi party member, accused of committing war crimes in Poland.

With that in mind, let's have a look at the knife. At a total length of just more

than 200mm the Jagdnicker nach Frevert has a 100mm long, 4mm thick drop point-style blade.

As with the Jagdmesser 1, the Jagdnicker brings together stag antler scales, brass pins, nickel silver bolsters and a high-gloss, Rockwell rated (55–57 HRC) 440A stainless steel blade in a traditional hunting knife.

Interestingly the rear bolster has a pronounced flair that is well suited to a four-finger grip, while the front bolster's symmetrical design allows you to change clasp slightly so as to bring your thumb into play in guiding the knife while cutting and skinning.

Again, like the Jagdmesser 1, the face of the Jagdnicker blade provides a lot of detail including name, model number, place and date of manufacture (2019) while on the reverse side of the blade there is a small punch mark, a visible outcome of the Rockwell testing.

The Jagdnicker is supplied with a green, tanned leather belt sheath with two separate press clips, one attached to the belt loop that secures the end of the knife, the other at the front bolster.

In looking over the Jagdnicker, there is

little doubt it is highly presentable, traditional fixed blade hunting knife.

So, as I had purchased two hunting knives, the next step was to take them hunting. With a fallow deer hunt coming up I made sure the knives were in my kit for their first outing.

Over three days we managed to take a number of fallow, which gave me the opportunity to use both knives. As expected, the Jagdnicker 1 and Jagdnicker nach Frevert worked just as they had been designed to do, making short work of breaking down game for transportation and further processing back at camp.

While I preferred to carry the Jagdnicker nach Frevert in my pack, I kept the Jagdmesser in a belt pouch for the entirety of the trip and continue to do so whenever I'm out hunting.

In an age where there is always something new to look at, the PUMA Jagdnicker nach Frevert and Jagdmesser 1 provide a more tangible link to hunting tradition. If you are looking for something special to complement your kit, it would be well worth your while to spend some time exploring the PUMA knife selection. ■

Top End tough gas bottle holders

Scott Heiman

Since the loss of Holden, there's been renewed market interest in Aussie owned, made and designed products. Even more, many of us in the hunting, camping and 4x4 markets are actively looking for products that are created by users – for users. And that's exactly what you get with the newly released range of gas bottle holders by Top End Campgear.

Co-owner of Top End Campgear, Jim Crawford, was a professional truck driver for more than 45 years in the Northern Territory, a recreational shooter and four-wheel driver. So he's seen his fair share of corrugations and back-tracks, knowing the toll they can take on our rigs and accessories. He's also come across lousy options, poor-quality imports and quick fixes. So with a gap in the market squarely in his sights, he set himself the task of developing a range of Tonka-tough gas bottle holders.

Most gas bottle holders on the market are earmarked to be fitted on a caravan chassis A-frame. They are usually made of thin alloy metal and are fine for bitumen sealed highways. But their flimsy welds are no match for rough road conditions. Meanwhile, other restraints with their flimsy ratchet strap fastenings mean that any thief with a steak knife can easily make off with your bottle.

By contrast, Top End Campgear's array of gas bottle holders are built tough for local conditions out of 3mm thick Australian-made BlueScope Tru-Spec HA250 steel. Blanks are then cut out, folded and welded before being powder coated in Hammertone Aztec Silver (other colours are available at additional cost).

The gas bottle holders can be base or rear mounted and come in 2kg, 4kg and 9kg variants. Understanding the market as



he does, Jim has even developed a line of 2kg and 4kg holders that can mount under a ute tray. All this makes a brew-stop or a sausage sizzle next to the dam in the back paddock or even a camp shower so much easier.

The securing strap has a thick rubber moulding and the latch is reversible to make the most out of your fitting locations and for lefties. The latch is also lockable to stop theft. To mount the holders, all you need are four marine grade bolts and lock-nuts, washers and you're in business.

I recently fitted a 2kg holder to my HiLux's racks and took off like a banshee on a quick 3500km tour of Outback NSW looking for new properties. The Top End Campgear gas bottle mount came through with flying colours and is now a permanent fixture on the rig for cook-ups on the back tracks. A 4kg model is on order to free-up the storage space in the camper.



Verdict: Heavy duty and Aussie-as
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Frank with his 12½" bull tahr.

Tahr thanks!

Size really does matter for **Brad Allen** in the lofty New Zealand alps

Ever since reading stories in hunting magazines as a teenager, I had eagerly anticipated the time when I would have the chance to hunt the Himalayan tahr. Some years ago, after seeing a wonderful 14"-plus mounted specimen taken by my good mate Warren McKay, I knew that the majestic bull tahr was an animal that I definitely had to hunt.

Tahrs are threatened in their home range in the Himalayas, so there are really only two other places in the world that they can be legally hunted – Texas and the South Island of New Zealand.

Several of our mates had hunted tahrs in recent years with Dave Campbell from Outback Hunting New Zealand and had given him the two thumbs up. In NZ,

tahrs, like deer, have continued to spread throughout the alps of the South Island and have been subject to Department of Conservation (DOC) controlled shooting programs. Dave spent many years hunting and shooting tahrs all over the South Island for the DOC, gaining invaluable experience and a deep understanding of tahrs' behaviour and habits.

It was a no-brainer that we would also use Dave as our guide to hunt these monarchs of the mountains. My nephew and hunting mate Frank and I subsequently booked with Dave for an early spring tahr hunt, where we were reasonably sure that the bulls would still be sporting their long winter pelage.

By late morning on our first day in NZ,

Dave had driven us to the foot of the range that we would be hunting and to save my ageing knees and four hard hours of back-packing, we opted for a three-minute taxi ride into the hunting block in a Hughes 500 chopper, which also enabled us to take a few more luxuries along to make the camp a bit more comfortable.

By early afternoon we had set up camp in a sheltered valley next to a cool, clear mountain stream (where we placed the beers to stay cold) and started glassing the open mountain tops for tahrs. It was a good sign when Dave spotted a group of nannies and kids feeding around a ridge top, high above camp and several pigs could also be heard squabbling a few hundred yards away in the scrub on a nearby crest.



The Hughes 500 on the 'helipad' waiting to be loaded for the trip in.

Frank and Dave during the 24C 'heatwave' conditions.

By 3pm we were heading up the valley on a rough track through the tangle of scrub, en route to the open tops where the tahrs would come out to feed. I won the toss and was first up for a shot, which meant that I had to carry the rifle. Although I had hunted red deer in Brisbane Valley earlier in the year and thought I was reasonable fit, I was soon gasping for breath amid the steep, slippery terrain. Frank on the other hand, who had been training for a marathon that he ran two weeks earlier, bounded up the mountain after Dave as if on flat ground. And New Zealand mountains are steep.

An hour or so later, saw us at the lower elevations of the open landscape, where we sat and glassed likely areas all round.



Tahr thanks!



Frank with his bull, where it came to rest on the mountain.



Dave doing what he does best, finding and assessing trophy bull tahrs.

The tahrs were just starting to move about and we spotted several young bulls feeding, but we needed to gain more altitude to be in a better position to glass the surrounding areas, so once again we started climbing slowly skywards.

Upon reaching the top of a narrow rocky ridge, still a long way from the peak, we again stopped to glass areas where the tahrs would most likely be feeding. But with no trophy bulls sighted, we continued the slog to the very top of the rim. At this point Dave started to locate some respectable bulls but they were all on the opposite mountain faces and too far away to consider a stalk.

Another hour or so along the rise saw us gain quite a bit more elevation, where we

then headed a short distance down a spur that gave us clear vision of some prime tahr feeding areas. Over the next 45 minutes we spotted several groups of bulls. However the close ones were all too young and not trophy quality, being under the 12" benchmark.

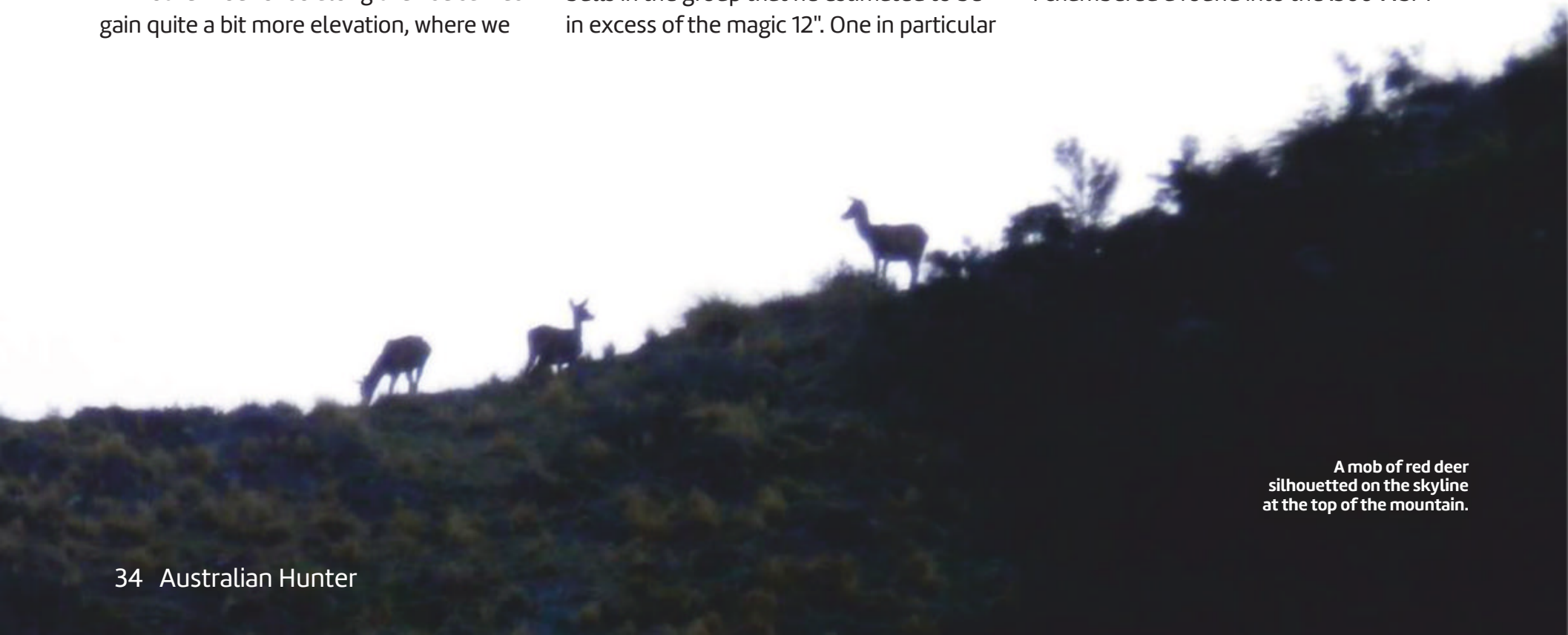
As clouds blew in and blocked out the sun's warmth and the breeze picked up, I was glad that I'd brought my Ridgeline hunting jacket with me as my sweat soaked hunting shirt turned icy on my back.

As usual, it was Dave who located a mob of 12 tahrs feeding on one of the open faces below us, that we had traversed on our climb to the top. There were several bulls in the group that he estimated to be in excess of the magic 12". One in particular

also still had a nice cape. The decision was made to go after him and we carefully made our way back to the top of the chine, at all times mindful of the breeze and the many sets of scanning tahr eyes.

It was much easier going back down than the walk up and in short order Dave had us directly above the animals where we started our stalk down onto them. At this point, I fitted the suppressor to the barrel of Dave's Tikka T3 .300 WSM. As the mob fed out of sight into a shallow gully and with the breeze in our favour, we seized the opportunity and quietly moved forward down the incline.

As the mob fed out of the gully into view, I chambered a round into the .300 WSM



A mob of red deer silhouetted on the skyline at the top of the mountain.

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Tahr thanks!

and acquired a steady rest against a handy rock. Dave scanned the throng with his Swarovskis, locating the big bull feeding behind a scrub bush only 115 yards away. "He's the last one, wait until he moves out from behind the bush," said Dave. As the bull walked a couple more steps, I was given the go-ahead. "Okay, now," was Dave's directive. With that, I put the crosshairs on the bull's neck as he slowly moved forward and squeezed the 2lb trigger.

The suppressor cut the recoil of the .300 WSM to .243 levels and the noise to that of a High Velocity .22LR, so the smack of the 165gr Hornady hitting the bull was almost as loud as the shot. My next view of the bull was his four hoofs in the air as he rolled into the gully.

At that point, my tired legs found new energy as we walked down to inspect the bull and Dave measured him at an even 12 $\frac{7}{8}$ ", a highly respectable trophy. After the obligatory photo session, Dave caped the bull and as it was now 7.30pm but still

daylight, it was time to head down off the mountain to camp.

By the time we arrived back at camp, the twilight had given way to the night and my energy reserves were spent. It had been a tiring but productive day.

The next morning Frank slept as Dave and I sat in comfortable camp chairs solving the world's problems. Glancing over my shoulder, Dave said: "There's a pig – quick, grab the rifle and shoot him. I need the meat." I took the Tikka and with a handy rest on a tree, shot the pig as he slowly wandered up the ridge, 80 yards behind camp. Frank quickly woke up wondering what the hell was going on. I simply said: "Mate, you snooze, you lose."

As the day began, Frank would be carrying the rifle as it was his turn to hunt a bull. When we walked out of camp in the early afternoon amid the 24C 'heatwave', Dave was complaining and had stripped down to a singlet. If only we could hunt red deer in 24C temperatures during the rut in



Brad with his bull and the Tikka .300 WSM, with suppressor fitted.

Queensland, I would be a happy man.

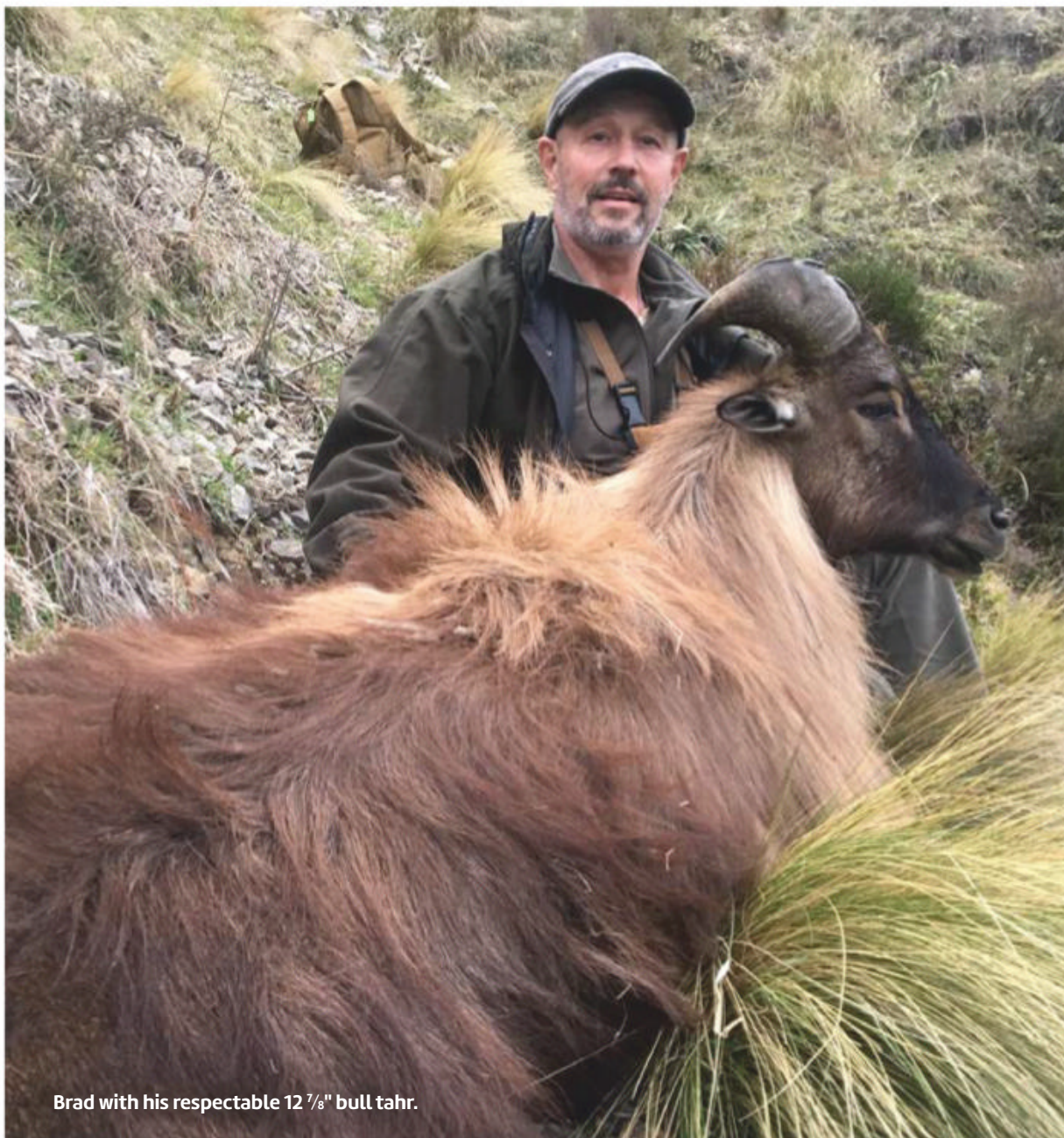
Wearing short pants and with a staff that I had cut to assist me with stability in the steep conditions, I found it much easier to traverse the slopes. Not having to carry the rifle also helped immensely.

Taking the same track through the scrub to the heights as the day before, we topped out into the open terrain where we hoped to find tahrs feeding. And tahrs we found. In the same gully where I shot my bull the day before, was a mob of eight that contained three good bulls which Dave estimated to be over 12". We lay watching the mob from a 'knife edge' rocky outcrop until they all fed into the next gully. This was our opportunity and we quickly moved 400 yards up the ridge, to where they had crossed over.

As Dave and Frank slowly eased over the top, they could clearly see the mob feeding, just over 200 yards away. Dave identified the biggest of the three bulls as the one on the far right, that was feeding behind one of the few bushes on the hillside.

Frank took his pack off and eased it forward as a rest, before loading the Tikka. From a stable prone position, Frank waited until the bull cleared the bush and stood side-on before squeezing off the shot. The bull was hit hard through the lungs as it ran 30 short yards downhill, before going down for keeps.

It had been an exhausting, enjoyable and learning experience. "Character building," as Dave would say in the steep South Island mountains. After a few beers that evening, plans were already being made for Frank and I to return next year and try for a chamois. ■



Brad with his respectable 12 $\frac{7}{8}$ " bull tahr.



A risky reality

Don Caswell is reminded of the importance of caution, not complacency, when out hunting

I am lucky to live in a game rich area with hunting opportunities right on my doorstep. I take advantage of that and, depending on the weather, I hunt multiple times in any week.

It is convenient and easy being able to conduct quick half-hour hunts at dawn or dusk while having the rest of my day clear for other activities. Being in such constant and close contact with my hunting locations, it would be easy to slip into a sense of complacency as to the ever-present risks involved in my undertakings.

The most obvious risk, and one that I am well aware of, is snake bites. Our area has an abundance of snakes, both harmless and deadly, and I encounter them

regularly. For years now, when out in the bush, I have worn knee-high, heavy-duty gaiters. I also carry a small emergency kit with a pressure bandage and a personal safety beacon. Most of the places I hunt offer no mobile phone coverage, so there is usually not a chance of calling the cavalry in the event of a mishap.

One week, in the space of two days, I was graphically reminded of some of the other risks that can arise, for any hunter. I had walked into a spot where I planned to try and call in the area's pair of alpha wild dogs. There had been a series of attacks on calves on this and the neighbouring properties. The farmers, and myself, had sighted a pair of large wild dogs. I secreted

myself in among a fallen tree, after checking for snakes, spiders and scorpions, then began to call.

Almost immediately, a pair of wild dogs appeared and headed in my direction from a few hundred metres away. There was a red male dog and a smaller black bitch. I did not need to call again as they had read the bearing of my call perfectly. Slowly, I chambered a round in my .243 Win rifle and raised it to the shooting position on my Primos Trigger Stick. The dogs had not seen me and continued to close in. As has often happened, the female then slowed and held position about 200m away while the male jogged on straight towards me.

When he was within 100m and in an open

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The sow and two youngsters Don was photographing.

patch of pasture I gave a little yelp. He stopped and lifted his head to investigate. My 100-grain Nosler Partition killed him instantly with a front-on chest shot.

The female bolted at speed for the heavy jungle a few hundred metres away. I gave a few calls, hoping to stop her before she moved too far away, to no avail. I have noted that most fleeing dogs will briefly halt for a quick look before they enter cover. I prepared for a long shot and gave a strident howl. On the edge of the jungle, she slowed and stopped to look back. She was a fair way off but it was a dead calm early morning. I only ever take long shots at dogs with an adequate calibre. I held about 300mm above her chest and squeezed off a shot. The bullet took a noticeable time to cover the distance. There was the smack of a solid hit as she took off into the jungle.

I set off, detouring past the male to confirm he was dead. I made my way to where she had been when I shot her. I found a blood trail and made ready to go after her

in the thick tropical jungle. I was a little apprehensive about that. I had not brought either my compass or GPS as I was not expecting to leave the pasture and this was the edge of an enormous swathe of rough country cloaked in the heaviest jungle. It would be easy to become lost.

I took note of the sun's position before entering the thick stuff and figured that would guide me. Plus, the blood trail was copious. I expected the dog would have bled out in a few seconds and should not be too far into the undergrowth. After the shot at her companion, I reckoned her adrenalin was high and that had enabled the dash into cover.

The vegetation was of lawyer cane, wait-a-while and heavily thorn-encrusted small palms, that filled the understory below the larger trees. I was pleased to find that the sun, seen dimly through the heavy leaf canopy above, was indicating a steady south-west direction. It was slow going, staying on her trail, constantly fighting the clawing vegetation and trying to keep track

of where I was.

After slowly tracking through and fighting the thorny scrub I found the bitch dead. She had already begun to stiffen, having died within seconds of my shot. Distance wise, she had not gone too far and would have covered that much quicker than my slow going. I looked up. In the meantime, clouds had rolled in and I had lost sight of the sun. However, I thought I knew the direction needed to backtrack directly to the nearest area of farmland. I figured that should not take long at all, now I was freed from tracking the dog and only had to contend with the undergrowth.

After half an hour, I was in even heavier jungle and much more rugged terrain than I had passed through earlier. There was no denying it, I was bushwhacked. A time-out was required to think carefully through my situation and the best response to it. In seeking to gain my way down to a steep gully's floor, to grab a drink of water, a combination of my foot slipping in leaf mulch and a tripping creeper sent me



Don tracked the bitch deep into the jungle and became lost.

crashing down. Luckily, the only thing broken was my Primos Trigger Stick, but I did add a few more abrasions and bruises to my growing collection.

I had a thermos cup that I had brought my coffee in with. In the trickle of water running along the gully floor, I rinsed the cup then had a big drink. It had been a strenuous effort and stressful. I was a lather of sweat and needed to guard against dehydration and the confusion that comes with that. I refilled the flask and put that in my small daypack for later need. I sat and focused on my breathing and went through a mental relaxation routine. When I felt that I was calm, I took stock of what I had.

I had my emergency beacon which I reckoned I would activate by mid-afternoon, if I was still lost at that stage. There was no signal on the phone, but that was expected. The phone did have a compass but, having previously found it to sometimes to be badly in error, I was not willing to use it. I did remember sending a satellite

photo of this area to the farmer, showing him where I had only recently shot a big boar. I pulled that photo up and studied it. I realised my mental vision of the terrain was a bit out. Clearly, I had been tracking slowly away from the farm and deeper into the jungle. Distance wise, I would be no more than a couple of hundred metres from the farm boundary.

As if on cue, a feeble sunbeam lit on me. The clouds had cleared a little. It was now mid-morning and, allowing for that and direction of the sun at that time and season, I estimated I only needed to walk towards the sun to find my way back. I deliberately took my time, carefully placing every step. Straining an ankle or breaking a leg would be disastrous. I was never so pleased to see the open pastures that I had left a couple of hours earlier. I had 'dodged a bullet' on that one as they say.

Two days later, I was back on the horse, as it were, in pretty much the same location. I had a multitude of scratches, leech bites and few good bruises as souvenirs

from my previous trip. In addition, I carried a raft of strict admonishments from my wife and family about staying on the pasture, no matter what, and being home by a set time.

It was a late afternoon and I was hoping to see, and shoot, a particularly large boar reported by the farmer at that time and location. I had only just sat down and become organised when I saw a good-sized sow and two half-grown pigs, a few hundred metres away. I watched them for a while, taking photos and hoping they would be joined by the big boar.

With my allotted time frame starting to narrow, I decided to sneak closer for some better photos, then shoot whatever pigs were available and head home. It was an easy stalk into the wind to be within 100m. I sat on the ground, rifle in my lap with the bolt half-open, taking photos. However, the sow was busy feeding and most of the time her head was obscured by grass and weeds. I wanted to grab a few photos of her with her head up.

A risky reality

I was carrying a pig squealer which invariably gains the attention of feral pigs. I thought I would give that a toot and then manage plenty of photos while she looked about in response. I gave the squealer a toot and the sow launched instantly into a flat-out charge towards me, grunting angrily with all her hackles up. I dropped my expensive camera unceremoniously in the dirt, snatched up the rifle, slammed the bolt home and aimed at the pig hurtling toward me. Click! In my haste, I had not chambered a round. Luckily, the sow stopped to huff and puff only 30m to 40m distant. I hurriedly chambered another round and shot her between the eyes.

In my entire hunting career, of more than 50 years, I have never been seriously charged by anything, so this was a first. When I lived in the Territory, I shot hundreds of buffaloes, wild cattle and some big boars. A few times, some of the buffaloes and bulls looked like they might be considering a charge, but I was able to



Some essential items to carry on any hunt – compass, GPS, beacon, knife and emergency aid kit.

ballistically persuade them otherwise.

If I had been photographing a scrub bull or a buffalo, I would have made sure my rifle was ready to shoot before playing with

the camera. The takeaway lesson was that all wild animals are potentially dangerous to the hunter and it is wise to treat them all with respect and due caution. ■



The male dog where he fell, with the wall of jungle behind where the bitch fled.

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Garmin guidance with Montana 700i GPS

Don Caswell

Garmin have long been a leading and trusted player in the GPS market, both for professional and recreational users. In late 2020 Garmin released their next generation – the 700/750 series which gave the opportunity for *Australian Hunter* to review the Montana 700i GPS.

GPS technology has been readily available for more than 30 years. So now GPS location tracking is built into many everyday devices, like your smartphone, or camera (if you don't simply use the camera in your phone).

But anyway, in brief, GPS stands for Global Positioning System, which is a swarm of satellites in near-Earth orbit. These satellites, which are all synchronised to a super-precise atomic clock, each broadcast a signal. Your GPS receiver picks up the available satellites that it can see and, once it locks on to three or more, it can use slight differences in the received time stamp to determine the distance to each visible broadcasting satellite. Then, by triangulation of that data, it works out, with great accuracy, just where it is on the planet.

Over the past decade or so, other nations have added their own GPS satellite swarms to the skies and the USA no longer has the monopoly. China, Russia and the European Union have installed their systems. Galileo is the name of the European GPS version. It went live in 2016. The rapid determination of location demonstrated by the Garmin Montana 700i is enabled by its ability to lock onto both the original US GPS satellites as well as the newer Galileo system.

There are many attractive new features adding to the appeal of the Montana 700i, in addition to its inherent strength and functionality. Garmin have made these units larger in moving from a 100mm to a 125mm screen, a policy I applaud. The dimensions of the 700i are 180mm long, 90mm wide and 30mm deep. The aerial housing adds 23mm to what would have

been a 157mm length in its absence.

Similarly, the SOS button augments 5mm to what is otherwise an 85mm width. The unit weighs 410 grams, reflecting the robustness and is a solid bit of gear. It is encased in a rubberised skin and, with a largely flat back, will likely stay put on the dash of a vehicle and retain its position when placed on a rock or log in

the field. All in all, this device is built for wilderness use and extreme conditions.

An outstanding selling point to me is the integration of an emergency beacon SOS alarm into the Montana 700i. Most outdoors folk see the value in emergency beacons but not many take the next step and acquire one.

By incorporating the SOS function into the design, Garmin have ensured a greater adoption of this vital, life-saving





technology. As with all emergency beacons, you need to activate the service and provide your personal details. The Garmin inReach subscription does that and, by accessing the Iridium satellite network (independent of the mobile phone network), enables location sharing, two-way text messaging and weather monitoring, making the Montana 700i a powerful and comprehensive safety asset.

The inReach payment plans are tailored to both recreational and professional users. Different contribution options are available and, one ideal option for recreational users, is the ability to subscribe for a month at a time, as needed if you do not require an annual subscription. Search 'inReach' at **garmin.com** for the full service option details.

The 700i is a touchscreen GPS operated via a series of menu options. The system is intuitively easy and offers the ability to customise the icons shown to those most useful to your application. There are only two buttons – power and SOS.

Interestingly, the touchscreen can be enabled for gloved use, something

especially useful for anybody in cold environments. The unit is waterproof and ruggedised. The chargeable Li-ion battery locks securely into place, with a twist latch, on the rear side. A micro-SD card is located behind the battery.

Battery life was fine, the unit still had plenty of power at the end of a long day in the bush. Topographical and street maps for Australia are pre-loaded. Birdseye satellite imagery can also be downloaded. Barometer and altimeter function is standard. The 700i is also compatible with the Garmin Explore and Connect apps. ANT+ incorporation allows the 700i to share information with other Garmin GPS units. The 700i locked onto satellites and located itself faster than any GPS I have previously used. It was so quick.

The Montana 700i has a high degree of interconnectivity with other electronic devices, like smartphones. There are a host of activities you can link to and display, such as dog tracking, fitness, health and geocaching.

Software and map updates can be accessed and downloaded as required.

A weather-sealed micro-USB is also provided for charging and data transfer. Likewise, a sealed external Iridium and GNSS antenna port is available. The 700i is both Wi-Fi and Bluetooth enabled. The 700i features a bright LED flashlight too.

While the device is primarily designed for terrestrial use, boaties are not totally forgotten and a number of marine-specific functions, like man overboard, are incorporated. The back side of the case has mounting points to allow the unit to be attached to an array of different vehicle bases. There is also an eyelet for fitting a safety lanyard.

A comprehensive, 34-page owner's manual can be downloaded from Garmin's user-friendly website.

The Garmin Montana series is readily available in Australia and can be found in major electronic retailers and gunshops. Retail pricing on the 700i appears to start at about \$1000 and, as always, it pays to shop around. ■

Small block adventures

Mark van den Boogaart documents his pursuit for a Brisbane Valley stag

It started over a beer. Looking across the crop, we spoke about hunting in Brisbane Valley. It seemed that we knew a few of the same people and places.

A little later came an offer to visit the family property and after a few calls, a date was arranged. When I arrived at the estate, I made my introductions and had a good chat with the owner, a genuinely nice bloke. A little while later I jumped back in the truck and drove over to the block.

I. Early days

That first visit was really just an armed walk, more habit than expectation. In doing so I began to build a mental picture of the near boundary as well as consider how I would approach it next time.

Geographically, it was a small block, something that could be comfortably covered in a few hours. However, it was

surrounded by much larger properties and with a promising mix of open paddock and rough, scrubby hill country I felt it held real promise.

More importantly it was close to home, in fact it was the closest hunting block I had ever lucked on to and I was the only one with access.

Returning two weeks later, the afternoon heat meant sticking to the shade, so taking it easy I headed towards the far boundary fence.

I then found myself at the base of a typical Brisbane Valley hill. Steep, heavily treed, littered with noisy foliage and rutted with a multitude of run-out drains that emptied in the creek near the fence.

With the wind constantly switching direction I sat for a minute. Not long after, I heard the sound. Something moving, crashing, sometimes close, sometimes moving away. My resting point provided

me with cover, but it also limited my view. My curiosity gained the better of me and I decided to investigate.

It happened fast; a boar appeared very close. On reflex I cycled the action, shouldered the Scout and fired. The hog was put down and it was a lump of a pig, so my immediate thought was how was I going to haul it out?

I've never shot a tonner and without scales I can't for sure say that I have. That aside, it is the biggest pig I've managed to drop and after seeking advice from two experienced studies on the subject they called it a tonner, so I'm happy to agree.

II. So close

A school holiday road trip cut into my time on the block during the roar and I didn't get to put a boot on the ground until the end of April.

However, I was able to commit a full day



Top left: The cause of all the noise.

Top right: A big lump of Brisbane Valley bacon.

Right: One strange-looking 'deer'.

to the visits. Leaving home one morning just after 4.30am I arrived at a property striped with bands of fog. My hope was the fog would hold the sounds of roaring stags. Of course, they weren't. The prevailing wind dictated I move towards the east and soon after I spotted deer in the gloom. There was no shot in it but every chance I would bump another that I couldn't see, so I went to ground and waited.

The fog eventually lifted and I was on the move again. Soon I saw more hinds in plain view. So why didn't I take a shot? The reason was simple – the deer were, and would frustratingly continue to be, on the wrong side of the wire. Something I began to refer to as small block blues.

That afternoon I returned to the eastern boundary and found the deer still on the other side. This time I also spied a stag, which looked a double-three. The hinds were on the ground. However, the stag





An impressive stag rub spotted during the later stage of the roar.

was up and watching him I heard my first roar, from way up high on an opposing hill. Deciding to join in, I gave a call. Responding with typical stag bravado, he closed on my position and started a prancing display.

By now I had named him Scrappy, and to be honest I really wasn't interested in shooting him. However, I did want to bring the hinds closer and so continued the conversation. It had the opposite effect, with the hinds staying put, while Scrappy edged ever closer. With the light fading I took my chance and backed out, leaving Scrappy to his role of King of the Hill.

III. Hell of a day

The day started badly and didn't become much better. Deciding to hit the block early I arrived before dawn. The problem was the deer were waiting and as I swung into the front paddock, they bolted and disappeared into the pre-dawn light.

There wasn't much for it but to try to find them. I initially considered following, but I eventually thought better of the idea and turned east. Hitting the boundary line, I decided to head uphill towards the high boundary point.

The area was dominated by a confusing concentration of old and newly strung wire running along a water course. Over the years the flow of water had deviated and subsequent fencing repairs had tried to compensate for the fickle flow of storm water.

The outcome was that at times I didn't really know where I was standing so I tended to approach and back out with some caution so as to avoid ending up on the wrong block.

Nearing the junction, I heard a series of shots. They were some distance away, but still I wasn't expecting them, so I just went to ground behind a large tree. Soon I caught movement as a mob of reds came crashing down and leaping fences. Truth be told, I couldn't figure out what was fair game or foul, so I held fire. However, after the red deer had passed through, a lone hind appeared.

Moving slowly, I wondered if it had been shot or just hurt in the pandemonium so I shouldered my rifle. The chance didn't play my way and as I followed the hind it stayed just off my block, though it was a close call.

After my early morning mistake and the boundary line stampede, the deer dried up and I didn't set eyes on another for the rest of the day.

Later on I headed towards a well-travelled game trail. I really wanted to gauge an idea of animal movement and hoped a camera would provide me with some information.

IV. Back at it

As the angle of the sun changed through the months of April, May and into June, I experienced first-hand the end of the rut, the shortening of the days, the drop in



The trail camera monitors the daytime sighting of a hind.

The background of the advertisement is a collage of five images showing different Polaris RZR models in various off-road environments. Top left: A black RZR with orange accents driving on a dirt trail. Top right: A black RZR with a white roof rack driving on a grassy hill. Middle left: A white RZR with black and green accents driving on a dirt trail. Middle right: A black RZR with blue accents driving on a dirt trail. Bottom left: A black RZR driving on a dirt trail. Bottom center: A black RZR driving on a dirt trail. Bottom right: A black RZR driving on a dirt trail.

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Small block adventures

morning temperature and the slow movement of deer.

Experience told me mornings were my best chance, so I regularly arrived before dawn to be ready for first light. However, fog could throw a spanner into the works. Catching a glimpse of shapes in the soupy mess, I would often stop and scan the surrounds the best I could with my binoculars. I had no doubt there were deer, but the chance of bumping them in the fog meant the percentage play was to stay low and stay put.

One late autumn morning I waited for the fog to lift and in response to the prevailing breeze headed east. It felt like that fence line was becoming an albatross around my neck. With the likely concentration of deer against the eastern boundary, my hunting was compressed from a small block to a tiny patch of grass and creek line. Combined with the wind I was nearly always behind the deer and looking into the sun.

Even with the odds against me, time and again I found myself in a good shooting position and within range of deer. This morning was no different and from a great position of cover I watched a young stag emerge from the fog about 40m beyond



the fence line.

There were more deer in the fog and they appeared to be heading slowly towards the wire, so I moved back and opened up my field of view. It was a good plan, but they didn't cross and teasingly moved along the

fence line for a couple of hundred metres before peeling away again.

With that I decided to retrieve the trail camera and keep hunting. The day followed like most others, a lot of time of foot, but little sign of deer.



V. Success

It was the second week of winter. Arriving before dawn I had picked a clear, cold morning with the temperature hovering around 2C. It was my first experience of winter on the block and stepping out of the car the air was crisp and still. Even better, every so often the slightest push of air favoured a western approach.

As soon as I was able, I made my way towards the first ridge. Between me and the high ridge was a drop onto an open paddock of frosted grass. While in the bottom of the bowl, I sensed movement up ahead.

It was deer, with a couple of hinds on the track that followed the ridge line. With little in the way of standing cover I went to ground in the grass. Up high and following the hinds emerged the classic profile of a stag.

I ranged him at 236m. With visible tops I searched through the binoculars for more detail and guessed he was either a clean double-five, or six.

For the first time I was seeing deer move onto the block, so taking my time I went prone and shouldered the Scout. The stag slowly contoured up and across the open face of the ridge. If he kept on his path, soon he would be directly in front of me.

For whatever reason he stopped, giving me a broadside shot. I fired and as the hinds bolted down, the stag stumbled across the track and fell into the long grass.

My confidence was high. I slowed right down and followed the track up, eventually reaching the point where I had seen the stag drop.

I now stood high on the ridge, exposed to the western side of the block. Below me I saw lots of deer moving fast in response to my sky-lined profile. Just for a second, I wondered if my stag was among them, then looking down I saw him crumpled up on the reverse face of the ridge.

With that I checked my watch and realised it was only just past 7am. Taking that stag had somehow compressed three months of hunting into a little under 30 minutes, and about two minutes behind the rifle.

It had also brought to a close the first



Some fine Brisbane Valley red.



From paddock to plate...

season of my small block adventures, and opened the opportunity to begin, after a fallow deer hunt in New South Wales, a new campaign upon my return.

Follow all five episodes of 'Small block adventures' at ssaa.org.au/ssaa-tv ■





FINN and BEAR it

Jan Kaptein is impressed with this cut-priced knife from Cold Steel

Years ago, I stumbled across Cold Steel branded knives while I was in search of a more affordable alternative for a custom blade I was looking to replace. Though they are fairly widely available, I had not heard of the brand prior to that.

In the end, I did not go with a Cold Steel knife to replace my custom knife, but I took home their medium-sized Finn Bear. These days, I use two Cold Steel models on a regular basis. The Finn Bear, the subject of this review, and a Master Hunter, which is a much larger knife.

At some stage, I owned another one of their options, the SRK (Search and Rescue Knife), but it was stolen from my car. Of the three, the Finn Bear is the smallest and cheapest blade, but it is highly versatile. It is a semi-compact fixed blade knife, which is surprisingly impressive given its price. It is marketed as a knife with a Finnish heritage, though the connection is lost on me.

Yes, with some imagination, the blade is shaped somewhat like a Finnish Puukko knife, but I own a few of those and in

practice the resemblance is marginal. That said, I like the shape of the blade, which has a solid tip that invites you to test it by opening a tin or wedging a nail from your punctured tyre. The rounded belly of the blade lends itself for skinning too. Besides that it does what any medium-sized blade does, from slashing rope to cutting the ingredients for your campfire dinner.

Cold Steel is an American company that operates out of Texas. It was founded in 1980. Their broad array of products include anything from knives to bat-leaxes, swords, bladed tools, blowguns and training items. Production is listed as taking place 'worldwide'. Cold Steel describes itself as a company that is 'dedicated to making the strongest, sharpest knives in the world'.

Though they may not cater to all tastes, some of their marketing videos are quite amusing. These commercials are billed as 'proof' and involve various characters abusing their products to illustrate strength and edge retention. Whether on purpose or not, the absurd nature of some of the videos suggests that a fairly

significant proportion of their products are in the lower and medium price zones, which they are. That said, they also boast some premium products. From my experience with a limited number of their knives, they provide good value for money.

The Finn Bear, which, as mentioned, I reckon has limited Finnish heritage beyond the shape of the blade, is a compact knife to carry on hikes. The original version I received came in some sort of Cordura sheath, which I much prefer over the polymer sheath that arrived with the second one I purchased more recently.

The Finn Bear weighs 79 grams and has a blade of cryo-quenched German (Krupp) 4116 stainless steel with a hardness of 56-57 HRC. This type is a lower-end high carbon martensitic stainless steel that is also used for many kitchen knives. The blade is 102mm long, 24mm wide and 2.5mm thick. It is hollow ground with a straight edge at 18 degrees. The handle is 114mm long and the overall length is 216mm. The handle is ribbed polypropylene and specified as 'diamond'

shaped. In practice, this means it is virtually squared off. The knife is not full tang but my guess is that the tang is moulded a fair way into the synthetic grip.

Is the Finn Bear the strongest, sharpest blade in the world? No, obviously not. However, it is surprisingly strong for a knife in this price bracket and keeps its edge. I have two of them, one that I keep in my toolbox and the other I use in the field. One of the knives has seen significant mistreatment. It was what I had at hand when I needed to work on gutters and down-pipes. Since then, I have used it for all kinds of chores I would normally never employ a knife for and it has stood the test of time.

Prior to that, it was a knife I used interchangeably out in the field. When hunting, I like it best for processing birds of all kinds. Without being able to point out any specific reason why it operates so perfectly for this, I realise that perhaps the reason is that there is nothing in the procedure it does not do. It is light enough to help when plucking, sharp enough to cut out fillets and stays sharp, even when I cut through joints or small bones.

Occasionally, I use the knife to skin larger animals or cut out back fillets on deer. While a little narrow, skinning with it goes fine due to the smooth rounded belly of the blade. The knife stands up to a surprising amount of abuse and holds its bite, particularly considering the relatively soft steel.

So far, mine have not rusted, even when neglected for a while. That said, I do not leave blood on any metal surfaces. Around the camp the Finn Bear is easy for basic chores and due to the relatively thin blade it serves as a multi-purpose dinner knife.

The handle looks a bit odd at first and is fairly small, but provides sufficient grip for safe usage. The edges of the blade are angular enough to use a firesteel if you are so inclined. At times, I carry the Finn Bear as a back-up knife in my day-pack, but always in the Cordura sheath that came with the first of the two knives. In that sheath, the knife packs flatter because there is no clip on the back of the sheath.

To sum up, I really like the Finn Bear. It is not a fancy knife and it is certainly not the strongest and sharpest instrument in the world. However, it is surprisingly strong for an item in this price range and stays sharp with some regular care and attention.

Neither of the two knives I own has ever shown signs of oxidation and the relatively soft steel used for the blade means it will not chip easily either. The original Cordura sheath may look a bit cheap, but has served me for years. The only thing to note is it has a belt loop instead of a clip. Though clips are convenient, I would pick the old sheath over the polypropylene sheath that came with my second knife any time.

There is nothing wrong with the new sheath and it does come with a belt clip, but it makes too much noise when stalking and feels fairly flimsy.

The one aspect I do not care much about is the handle. It is on the smallish side which means it will probably not

fit well for those with larger hands. The design choice to make it almost ribbed in order for it to have more grip was a bad idea for a hunting knife. Yes, it provides plenty of grip, even when wet, but it also makes the knife much harder to clean. Particularly in the field where water may be scarce. Blood, grease and other contaminants are prone to stick between the grooves and are difficult to extract once they dry up. If you even see them on the black grip in the black grooves to start with.

That said, the Finn Bear, despite a few minor niggles, is a knife I repurchased when my first one went into the toolbox. So yes, I recommend it as an affordable multi-purpose hunting blade. It is becoming increasingly difficult to purchase in Australia due to its low price point. At the time of writing, it was available from Queensland's cleaverfirearms.com for \$22.99. ■



Cold Steel Finn Bear Specifications

Style	Fixed blade
Overall length	216mm
Blade dimensions	102mm(l) x 24mm(w) x 2.5mm(thick)
Blade shape	Straight, marketed as Finnish Puukko
Type of blade steel	German (Krupp) 4116 Stainless
Hardness	56-57 HRC
Edge	Straight
Material handle	Polypropylene
Weight	79 grams
Right or left-handed	Ambidextrous

Get a load out of this

North American correspondent Thomas Tabor looks at some must-have products



Lyman's Brass Smith 8-Station Turret Press is capable of holding up to eight reloading dies.

Handloading your own ammunition is a great way to expand your shooting experiences and it can even save you money in the process. But one of the downsides of reloading your own cartridges is that it can be a time-consuming hobby.

The good news is that manufacturers of reloading equipment are always coming up with innovative devices, tools and supplies that make things easier, quicker and

even more fun. The following are a few examples of those products which I found particularly useful.

Redding handloading dies

For many decades Redding has been a supplier of handloading products. In my opinion Redding makes the best reloading dies on the market. The dies are available in basic standard model versions with a choice of either full-length resizing or

The .22 Nosler has become popular with many shooters and Redding offers reloading dies in several different choices for that cartridge.



A handy item for deburring and chamfering the inside of brass necks is the Redding Model 15P Precision Neck Chamfering Tool.

For quick and easy weighing Lyman's Pocket Touch 1500 Digital Scale may be the perfect choice.

The Lyman Bleacher Block is a superior design that allows easier access to the cartridges being handloaded than the older flat style blocks.



neck sizing dies as well as competition and match grade sets.

Redding also has a vast array of wildcat choices. There is growing interest in the .22 Nosler and Redding offers a complete line of dies in that calibre as well as the many other cartridges like the .33 Nosler, 6mm Creedmoor, .300 Norma Magnum, 6.5 Grendel and others.

Sometimes a company introduces a product that leaves you wondering why you didn't think of it first. That is precisely how I felt when I first saw Redding's Model 15P Precision Neck Chamfering Tool. This simple little tool addresses a problem commonly associated with deburring and chamfering. A properly produced chamfer reduces the force needed to correctly seat the bullet, allows the bullet to align better with the case and reduces the possibility of damage occurring to the jacket of the bullet.

On occasions, hand-chamfering tools have a tendency to rock or wobble back and forth as the user rolls it between their thumb and forefinger. The result is a chamfer that is often inconsistent and uneven. But by virtue of the unique design of the Redding Model 15P Precision Neck Chamfering Tool, that worry is eliminated.

That is accomplished by a built-in pilot pin which aligns with the primer flash-hole of the resized/deprimed case. Each Redding Model 15P Precision Chamfering Tool comes with the cutting head Allen wrench for pilot shaft depth adjustment and a plastic handle. The 15P is a universal tool that can be used for both small or large flash-hole cases and nearly all calibres from .22 up to .475.

redding-reloading.com

Lyman

Occasionally good things come about by chance and that is what happened in the development of Lyman's Bleacher Blocks. While the company officials were designing a new handloading cartridge block, which handloaders use to securely hold their cartridges in an upright position, a mistake in the programming occurred.

When the image of the block appeared on the computer screen, it was in a stair-step manner rather than the anticipated flat layout. Apparently that had the folks at Lyman talking and soon the Bleacher Block came into being. Just as a stadium bleacher is stair-stepped so people have better access to the action, the Bleacher Block is stair-stepped to provide easier entry to the

cartridge cases.

This design is so much better than the traditional flat layout that it makes me wonder why it took a mistake to discover it. Made of tough moulded polymer, the Bleacher Blocks come in three sizes to accommodate virtually every cartridge.

Sometimes handloaders need a quick weight assessment of a powder charge or a bullet, possibly for verification purposes. That is where Lyman's Pocket Touch 1500 Digital Scale Set is a great tool. This compact unit, measuring only 2¼" x 4¼" x ¾" (57mm x 108mm x 19mm), has a weighing capacity of 1500-grains and comes with touch screen controls. Included is a universal funnel pan, a built-in hinged dust cover, a 100-gram calibration weight and it is capable of displaying the weights in either grains or grams.

Lyman has made single stage reloading presses for decades. My very first metallic cartridge reloading press was one that I received as a hand-me-down from my brother back in the 1960s. Today there is the Lyman Brass Smith 8-Station Turret Press. This features a frame and turret made of heavy duty cast iron and a unique ability to hold up to eight reloading dies (either two complete 4-die or four 2-die sets).

Get a load out of this



MEC entered the metallic cartridge reloading world with its Marksman single stage press.

It has a straight-line primer feed with tubes sized for either large or small primers and for added safety those primer feeds have been encased with a heavy steel shield. The Brass Smith is available either as a stand-alone product or can be purchased as a kit.

lymanproducts.com

MEC

MEC entered the world of metallic handloading in a big way with the MEC Marksman press. This is a single stage press made from ductile cast iron to ensure a high level of strength and durability.

The Marksman uses the company's patent-pending shell holders which self-centres each cartridge through the stages of the loading processes. The Marksman accepts all standard 7/8-14 thread dies and is capable of reloading centrefire cartridges from .22 Hornet up to and including the big .416 Rigby.

mecoutdoors.com

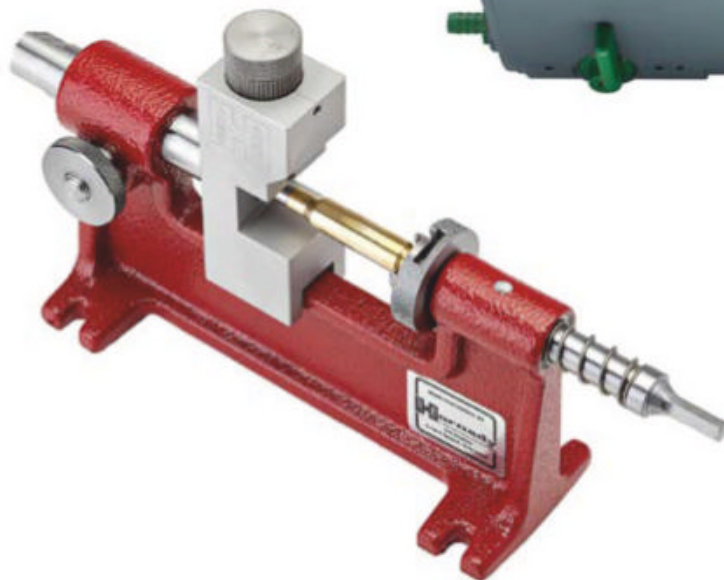
RCBS

RCBS has significantly improved the process of cleaning cartridge cases and

RCBS's Ultrasonic Case Cleaner-2 is much larger than the company's previous model.



When precision is needed, Hornady's Neck Turn Tool is a great asset to the reloading bench.



For quick and easy precise metering out of powder, Hornady's Vibratory Trickler provides a real service.



even gun parts with the Ultrasonic Case Cleaner-2. This cleaner has a large capacity of 6.3 quarts (5.96 litres) which is 100 per cent larger than RCBS's previous model. It comes with a stainless steel parts basket and a smaller stainless steel parts tub. The LED display is easily programmable with a timer being set for up to 30 minutes of continuous cleaning and for ease of draining the unit a drain hose is included. The RCBS Ultrasonic Case Cleaner-2 is available in either a 120 VAC or a 240 VAC EU/UK/AUS compliant model.

rcbs.com

Hornady

Hornady's Vibratory Trickler can take powder measuring to a new level. This unit is powered by two AAA batteries, with variable settings to accommodate all kinds of powers. It features a LED light-up screen, a no-slip base and is weighted for stability.

The Hornady Neck Turn Tool allows the use of a drill to make neck turning faster and easier while providing a high degree of consistency and surface finish. The adjustment knob enables the user to choose detents for .0005" (0.0127mm) adjustment

increments, or no detents for infinite adjustment. Mandrels for four popular calibres (.22, 6mm, 6.5mm and .30) are included with the tool, but far more calibres are available for purchase separately.

Many handloaders have moved away from the more traditional abrasive polishing methods for their cartridge cases in lieu of using one of the new electronic case cleaners. The electronic methods come with the advantage of not only polishing the outside of the cases but also the inside and even the primer pockets of the brass. Nevertheless, there is one problem – the cases come out wet and must be thoroughly dried before they can be reloaded.

That is where Hornady's Lock-n-Load Case and Parts Dryer becomes a valuable tool. Appearing similar to some food hydrators, this dryer can speed up the drying process substantially over having to lay out the brass to air dry. The unit comes with three drying trays for a total drying capacity of 375 .223 Remington cases (125 cases/tray) or up to 240 .308 Winchester cases (80 cases/tray). Drying time in either case is about two to two-and-a-half hours.

hornady.com

Nosler

Nosler sells premium unprepped brass in bulk form, including the .22 Hornet, .204 Ruger, .223 Remington, .222 Remington Magnum, .22 Nosler and .300 AAC Blackout. Nosler also has some choices in the Custom Brass line, like the .22 Nosler.

The Nosler Ballistic Tip bullets have a good reputation when it comes to shooting accuracy and are intended for use on thin-skinned game such as deer.

Within that line there's a 220-grain .30-calibre bullet. And the company has a variety in the Nosler AccuBond Long Range bullet line. This particular bullet is a high-performance boat-tail design available in a diverse selection, including a 168-grain .30-calibre and a 265-grain .338-calibre bullet.

nosler.com



The Nosler Ballistic Tips have a good reputation for accuracy, including the 220-grain .30-calibre bullet.



Nosler's AccuBond Long Range line includes a 168-grain .30-calibre and a 265-grain .338-calibre bullet.

Alliant powder

Whether you are handloading for shot-gun, rifle or pistol there will likely be several powders available from Alliant to perfectly match those shooting needs. Alliant's Reloder 16 is ideal for such rifle

calibres as the .30-06 Springfield and .270 Winchester, but it is also a great choice for 6.5mm target loads and tactical applications.

Fluctuations in ambient temperature can frequently have a negative effect on shooting performance. Reloder 16 addresses that issue by providing a high degree of stability needed when facing temperature variations or extremes. Reloder 16 utilises TZ technology which manipulates the response of the propellant and resists the natural tendency to generate more pressure at higher temperatures and less pressure at lower temperatures. This powder has excellent lot-to-lot consistency and contains a proprietary de-coppering additive without any DNT or DBP.

alliantpowder.com ■



After working on your brass cases with an electronic cleaner, the brass must be thoroughly dried before reloading. Hornady's Lock-n-Load Case and Parts Dryer is perfect for that purpose.

Each of the three trays in the Hornady Lock-n-Load Case and Parts Dryer holds up to 125 .223 cartridge cases or 80 .308 Winchester cases.



Alliant's Reloder 16 powder is ideal for loading .30-06 Springfield and .270 Winchester ammo, but it can also be a great choice for 6.5mm target loads.



THIS MONTH'S SPECIALS

While stocks last. Prices subject to change.



Tikka T3x Deals



Tikka T3x Laminate Stainless .25-06 Was \$1895 **\$1395**



Tikka T3x Lite Green Available in: .243, .30-06, and 300 win mag only at this price. Was \$1400 **\$1195**



Tikka T3x Supervarmint Adjustable cheek piece, picatinny rail included Available in: .308 win 20" TB **\$1795** .300 win mag 1/10 23.7" **\$1795** 338 win mag 23.7" **\$1749** .300WSM 23.7" **\$1695**



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In stock now and reduced to clear



Sako TRG 22 308 26" Desert Tan **\$7395**

Sako TRG 22 308 26" Desert Tan Floding (N/A in NSW) **\$9475**

Sako TRG 22 308 26" Green with brake and picatinny rail **\$7855**

Sako TRG 22 Stealth 308 26" **\$7395**
Sako TRG 22 Stealth 6.5cm with picatinny rail **\$7740**

Sako TRG 42 Black 338 Lap with muzzle brake **\$7740**
Sako TRG 42 Green 338 Lap with muzzle brake **\$8995**
Sako TRG 42 Stealth 338 Lap with muzzle brake **\$8995**

Sako A7 Deal



Sako A7 Synthetic .30-06 Was \$1710 **\$1195**



The family that hunts together

For **Scott Heiman** and co, it's the simple pleasures that bring the most joy

When my dad Jim called to discuss his upcoming 70th birthday, it was no surprise when he told me he didn't want a party. Instead, his wish was to have the whole family together at one location for a spot of hunting. While his needs would be easy for most of us to satisfy due to living in South-East Queensland, I've put down roots at the bottom end of the country.

Anyway, I'd expected that dad's preferred hunting location would be near Tenterfield. Here there's a property where the family has regularly hunted over the years; busting bunnies, targeting foxes before lambing and chasing goats up the hills. The location is also in NSW, so it

alleviates some of the tyranny of distance for me. I was surprised when dad told me he wanted to meet up at Surat.

"Where the hell is that dad? And why?" was my immediate reaction. His response was that the property is where my nephew, sister and her husband work. Besides, he obviously thought there was game to be found. "The owner's having problems with pigs and wild dogs, so I thought we'd give him a hand."

This last bit of information was definitely no surprise to me. Our family's hunting experiences over the years have usually involved helping out property owners. For example, I remember (back in the 1980s) that my school holidays were full of hunting expeditions to Inverell. We would

spend the first part of our stay finding out where the goats were, bow-hunting what we needed (trophy, meat), before heading back out with a rifle to fill the farmer's freezer and then spending time mustering or boundary riding on the property's dirt bikes.

During these outings, our family developed a hunting practice that we continue today. Specifically, we always create a predator dam. This involves dragging the carcass from each hunt behind a ute to a central location, which generates multiple scent trails all leading to one place. Cats, foxes, dogs and pigs simply follow the trail and become an easy target for spotlighting. This is a particularly useful way to concentrate game on bigger properties in arid



The targets are in the air for father and son.



Bags of potential for hunting trips to come.

areas. Back then, I looked at these efforts as our family's way of simply assisting a farmer. These days, I'm an Environmental Scientist and know that activities like this can make a valuable contribution to land managers' vertebrate pest management strategies.

Getting on with it

So, back to dad's birthday plans. My wife Kath wouldn't be able to make the shindig on account of work commitments. Which meant that our 10-year-old daughter Scout and I would be taking a three-day road trip to cover the 1000km that stood between us and his birthday cake. To make it worthwhile, we'd planned for at least five days' hunting at Surat before driving all

the way home again. And to kill a few birds with one stone, our trip would involve two nights among Moree's artesian hot pools where we'd catch up with my mum, and a layover with army mates at Orange. So, that was the itinerary sorted. What about a gift?

This was a good question. After a few phone calls it sounded like dad had planted some seeds of his own. As an avid reloader, he'd been talking to my sister about needing brass for his .243. He had also mentioned to my brother that he needed wads for his 12-gauge. So, we agreed that I would make up a group gift of the things dad wanted and they could fix me up later. What followed was a good excuse to stop at nearly every gunshop between the ACT and Queensland, picking

up brass and wads for the calibres dad had spoken about, as well as in .22 Hornet for my step-mum's rifle, and in .222 for dad's other favourite firearm. While I was at it, I also slipped in a few bags of .22-250 brass, my favourite calibre. With a few extra bags of brass in hand, I knew dad would return the favour by reloading the casings and giving them back to me at Christmas.

Paddock bashing

We arrived at the property's gate on a searing 43-degree day. Little did we know that the temperature gauge would soar above 40 degrees every day for the following week. Regardless, after pleasantries with the family and receiving the good oil from the property owner, it was time to

The family that hunts together

think about hunting. We had come too far to fold under the sun's relentless rays.

Despite our resolve, we knew from the outset that we'd be up against the odds. It doesn't matter what kind of animal you are, with heat like we were facing, it was obvious our quarry would be hunkered down in the middle of the day with minimal forays at dusk and dawn to find water. So, while we were eager to hunt, we weren't in the business of futile efforts that would achieve nothing except placing our own bodies under unnecessary stress.

Instead, we took a quick dip in a nearby creek and checked for sign on the banks. Then, by mid-afternoon we were kitted out and ready to go while camp followers prepared to stay at the homestead and cook up a storm with a Brisbane Valley red deer they had brought with them. Once the hunters were split into two groups with

clearly defined boundaries, CB channels allocated, and timings agreed, off we went.

Dad and I set out to check several dams while the other group made a beeline for the river at the far western boundary. To be honest, this is my favourite part of hunting. Because I don't see dad and the crew often, it was nice to sit in the ute and chat as we made our way between waterholes. Sure, we were both scanning for movement and looking for sign, but we were also catching up on the year that's been while snacking on dad's home-made venison jerky. And this kind of family time beats a phone call any day of the week.

While the chatter continued as we drove along the property's back tracks, it was a sure bet that it would stop once we'd pulled up the vehicle to close the final distance between us and a dam on foot. As the engine stopped, so did all noise.

We've been doing this long enough that it happens by instinct. There's no need for 'shhhh' or risk that doors will be slammed. As decades of hunting and military service take over, communication resorts to head nods, hand signals and eye gestures.

That bloke Murphy

Despite our efforts, we found no game that day. In fact, we found little sign of anything except cattle and roos. Returning to camp, it was the same story for the other hunting group. Indeed, it continued this way for the next couple of days. It was clear that the heat had made everything go to ground. But we were still having fun. Between morning and afternoon hunts, we were swimming and skeet shooting in the heat of the day.

There's a real joy to be had in going back to basics with a family group like this.

The Nindigully pub is the longest continually licensed venue in Queensland.





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The family that hunts together

Remote from our home bases, and without the distractions of work or mobile reception, life takes on a level of simplicity that's becoming increasingly hard to find.

Out on the hunt our patience paid dividends. On the fourth day of our visit, a pig finally fell to the kinetic energy held by a quickly expanding projectile. With this, my brother-in-law Roy baited a bunch of pig traps along the creek line and multiplied our chances for further success.

Meanwhile, dad and I found a small mob of goats. In this case, the farmer had asked us to leave the goats alone. So, as we eyed off the main billy, with a set of horns that would have looked nice as a shoulder mount, we agreed he was one of the luckiest animals on Earth that day. With our arrows remaining firmly in our quivers and cartridges in the magazine, all we could do was to note down the mob's location so we could inform the property owner later that day.

Then, just a few hours later, we had pigs in our sights. Returning to the ute after circling one of the dams on foot, we walked on to a mob of four wild pigs. Now, you'd expect that with a couple of experienced hunters involved, something would have



In the heat of the day there was a trip into town to visit the Cobb & Co museum.

come of this, right? The trouble was that, standing firmly behind the pigs and directly in my line of aim was an unescapable obstacle. Namely, my HiLux. The Mexican stand-off between two humans and a little mob of pigs lasted a while, but eventually they spooked and ran into the thicket. Thwarted again...

The endgame

But all was not lost. While the feral animals were in no hurry to be close to us, we continued to forge ties among one another. For one, I enjoyed the opportunity to play 'old bull' to my teenage nephew Tyler. While he'd check out the creek line with a bow, I backed him up with a .22-250. After all, no-one should hunt alone. Agreeing that he'd shoot first while I'd take the

Local history

Before going on a hunt, I like to research the area I'm visiting. This includes collecting satellite imagery of the property and finding a decent map. I have these tucked away in my pocket to help navigate the ground when I'm hunting, as well as to deal with possible unwelcome scenarios if someone becomes separated or lost.

For the trip to Surat, I discovered that in April 1846 explorer Major Thomas Mitchell camped on the river that forms the hunting property's western boundary. The same property also served as a changing station for Cobb & Co coaches.

Meanwhile, on August 14, 1924, the very last coach trip for Cobb & Co travelled between Yuleba and Surat, a town just north of the property. These facts alone fuelled a bunch of great fireside stories during our family get-together.



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The family that hunts together

second-chance shots, we worked our way quietly along the water's edge.

After a week on the property, it was time to start packing away. But not before our hunting party had one more success. In this case, it was a feral dog taken by Tyler's brother Casey. While we'd had a frustrating time at the dams, Casey's luck had been better. With a dirt bike to take him around, he'd moved up close to the dam and I had been scoping days earlier and despatched a feral dog.

And that's hunting... sometimes you can do everything right and still come home with nothing. Indeed, there are statistics from the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife which show that, regardless of whether you prefer to hunt with a rifle, shotgun, muzzleloader or bow, only one person among you and your 10 mates is likely to be having any luck.

In all, our hunting party left Surat with little to show in the ice-box but plenty gained in other ways. Ultimately, the five pigs, three goats and two dogs we encountered were the backdrop against which a family reconnected. The food was great,



dad smiled – a lot – and my young daughter was spoilt rotten.

Sure, we would have been even happier with a camera full of 'look at me' shots and freezer full of wild harvest, but our minor achievements on the hunting front simply generates an incentive to get back

together again and do better next time.

Besides, after we left the property the rains broke. And apparently Roy's baited pig traps worked a treat. While we weren't there to see the results ourselves, we know we were directly responsible for some timely vertebrate pest management and a dose of farmer's gratitude.

With the return of the pigs, so too it was with the dogs. Which gives us even more reasons to go back. ■



Traditional Burmese pork ribs

Alison Purdon and Peter d’Plesse combine to add a touch of class to a rack of ribs



Pan fried pork rack marinated in Burmese curry.



Ingredients for Burmese curry flavoured pork rack.

This recipe will turn a rack of pork ribs into a meal to be savoured using the flavours of a Burmese curry.

Myanmar (Burma) is bordered by Bangladesh and India to its north-west, China to the north-east, Laos and Thailand to its east and south-east and the Andaman Sea and the Bay of Bengal to the south and south-west. Burmese cuisine encompasses diverse regional culinary traditions developed through longstanding agricultural practices, centuries of socio-political and economic change, plus cross-cultural contact and trade with neighbouring countries.

This Burmese curry will add a touch of class to a rack of pork ribs. The predominant flavour comes from generous quantities of garlic and ginger. These spices are used by Burmese to preserve their meat. Vinegar is also added for flavour and preserving but has been replaced by dry white wine to tenderise the pork while also acting as a preservative.

Method

Place the following ingredients in a bowl and blend:

- 1 red chilli, deseeded
- 1 tbsp garlic paste
- 2 tbsp ginger paste
- ½–1 onion, depending on size

Once blended, stir in:

- 1 tsp turmeric powder
- ¼–½ tsp chilli powder
- 1 tbsp white vinegar

Use the curry mixture to marinate 1–1½kg pork rack cut into 4 rib pieces.

Refrigerate for a minimum of 1 hour or overnight.

Place the marinated ribs into a slow cooker with:

- 1 tbsp peanut oil
- 200ml of water

Cook on low for 5 hours or until tender.

Take out the ribs and refrigerate. Put the liquid into a bowl and place in a refrigerator or freezer and allow to set.

Remove excess fat and reheat the liquid.

Add:

- 1 tbsp of ginger paste
- 2 tsp low salt chicken stock
- 1 tsp lemon juice
- 2 tsp brown sugar, or more
- Add pepper and salt
- Add some diced spring onion.

Thicken with cornflour. Mix the cornflour in a ¼-cup of cooled sauce until smooth. Add gradually to the sauce over heat until the desired consistency is achieved.

Barbecue the pork rack pieces or fry in a griddle pan to caramelise for some extra crunch.

Serve with rice or potato mash with a topping of the sauce.

For extra zing, top with finely sliced green chilli if desired. ■

Norma ammunition

Norma is a Swedish company that has been manufacturing ammunition for 120 years. Its original customer base has expanded from the Scandinavian countries to include greater Europe and eventually a global market. Norma ammunition is imported and distributed in Australia by Winchester Australia. Norma soft-point ammunition is available for a great array of calibres, covering small game to dangerous big game, from the .222 Rem through to the .505 Gibbs Magnum.

I sourced a packet of 100-grain Norma .243 Winchester soft-points and conducted range testing with my Sauer XT 101. I did a series of 3-shot groups and was pleased to discover a consistent sub-MOA accuracy. My chronograph, positioned

4m from the bench, returned an average measured velocity of 2783fps within a variation of 10fps.

In .243 Win, Norma offers five loadings, varying from the 58-grain V-MAX through to the 100-grain soft-point. One issue to be aware of is that in Europe, only Scotland permits using the .243 Win on game larger than roe deer.

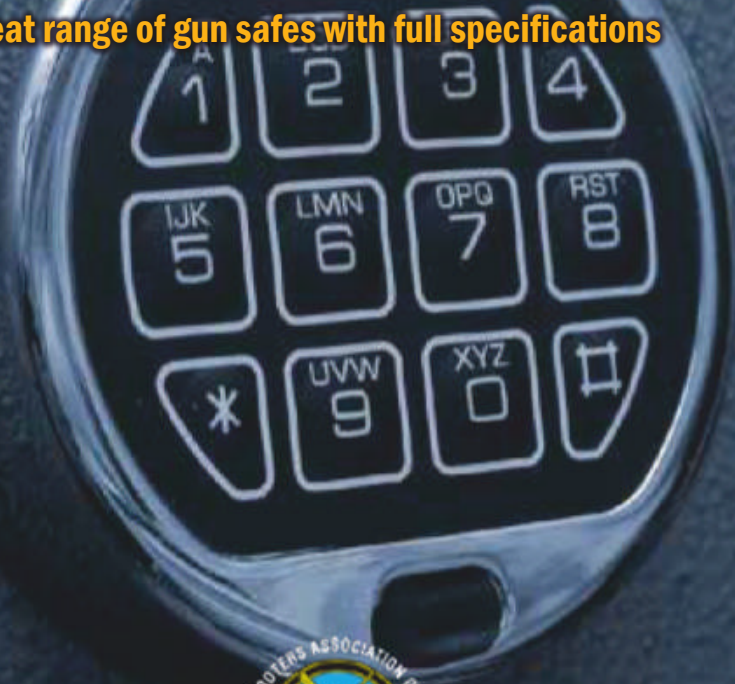
Comments have been made that some European factory loadings of soft-point .243 Win tend to be a bit soft, being designed for use on small game. I have not heard of Norma being referred to in that regard and in my field testing, I was completely happy with the .243 Win 100-grain Norma soft-point on pigs.

Norma .243 Win 100-grain soft-point ammunition consistently shot sub-MOA.



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The CZ Predator makes for a good pest control rifle.

Predator finds its prey

Jan Kaptein returns for round two with a CZ 557 in .308

The Ceska zbrojovka (CZ) 557 stable of rifles encompasses many models in a huge selection of calibres. Differences in fit and finish aside, they all use a modernised mini-Mauser barrelled action with a short extractor and a spring-loaded ejector.

The CZ 557 Predator stock is based on that of the CZ 557 Synthetic model, with the main variance being that a soft touch camouflage coating has been applied. It is available in .308 and .30-06. Both have a hinged floorplate-style magazine.

In .308 it holds five rounds (including the chamber). The barrel is cold hammer forged with a one in 10" twist rate and factory threaded to M14x1 for attachment of moderators, suppressors or other accessories where legally permitted. Factory specifications list the rifle weight at 3.2kg with a barrel length of 52cm and an overall

length of 104cm.

The rifle in this review is the second CZ 557 I've owned, having purchased and hunted with one in Australia some years back, which I eventually sold. Even though I much prefer wooden stocks over synthetics, I negotiated a great deal in Europe so ended up taking this second one home. It is mostly used when I go out for pigs in bad weather or for other pest species like wild dogs, foxes, goats and so on.

The barrel

The blueing on my rifle is well done and without any blemishes. The barrel seems to ship with either a plain metal ring to protect the threading or with a moderator. I was unable to ascertain what model is available where, but mine came with the plain metal ring.

The receiver and bolt

The receiver is CNC machined from a single block of billet steel with integral 19mm dovetail scope bases. For those who use a single scope on a rifle, rings with integrated bases are offered by various companies.

Personally, I switch between a red dot sight and a higher-powered scope and have found it easier to use a Weaver/Picatinny conversion. This adds some height, which I am generally not a fan of, but for the Predator it comes in handy as it creates space between the bolt and the eyepiece of the scope.

The bolt reminds me of that of a Remington 700 I had in the past. It has two lugs, a short extractor and modified (plunger) ejector in a recessed bolt face. When the bolt is closed, the firing pin cocks and an indicator pops out on the rear of the bolt sleeve. To remove the bolt,

Predator finds its prey

press down on the release button of the bolt stop. This takes some getting used to as it is small and barely protrudes.

It is worth mentioning that the action is perhaps the most contested upgrade CZ introduced when they moved from the CZ 550 to the CZ 557. The Predator, like the other models in the CZ 557 bracket, uses a new action that was designed by CZ engineers. This is no longer the tried and trusted controlled round-feed modified Mauser 98 action that was famous for its reliability, particularly among dangerous game hunters.

Instead, the update to this modernised mini-Mauser push-feed bolt design seems to in part be driven by the ever-increased hype of having a sub-MOA rifle out of the box. It also tailors to smaller calibres used for other types of hunting because it is more compact and weighs less.

That said, there seems to be a divide between CZ shooters who either love the innovation and supposed increase in accuracy and those who worry about reliability. Considering the new CZ action is in many ways similar to that used in the Winchester Model 70 and Remington 700, it should provide some peace of mind as both of these are sold in large quantities and have stood the test of time.

The trigger and safety

The triggers on CZ 557 rifle models are marketed as fully adjustable for travel, pull, overtravel and take-up. The Predator is no exception. The trigger on my rifle was set at just over 3lb. While I question too light a trigger for hunting purposes as it poses a potential hazard in the field, I felt the factory setting was a bit heavy, so I adjusted it to 2lb. With that done, I took the rifle to the range and am glad to report



The overall profile of the Predator.



The adjustable trigger with steel guard.



The two-stage safety.



The CZ 557 bolt.



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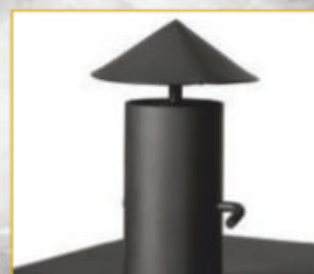
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Predator finds its prey

that the trigger has a crisp and consistent break. I have not noticed any creep worth mentioning. While adjusting a trigger is not too taxing, I would advise asking a local gunsmith for help if you have not worked on one before.

The safety is a simple two-position mechanism that features a switch which turns the safety on and off. Pulled back-wards, it engages. To disengage, push forward and you are good to go. Though I am not a huge fan of safety mechanisms that do not lock the firing pin, I was happy to notice that when the safety on the CZ 557 is engaged, it is still possible to lift the bolt, which makes it possible to safely unload the rifle without taking the safety off.

The stock and magazine

The CZ 557 Predator features a synthetic stock, covered with a soft touch camouflage coating. Where many rifles with synthetic stocks are fairly light, this is not the case with the Predator, which weighs in at 3.2kg.

The shape of the stock is fine, the coating provides sufficient grip, even in wet conditions. That said, I prefer wood and will swap the synthetic one for a wooden stock once the coating starts to wear off. So far, it has proved resistant though, so that may take a couple of years.

There is no detachable magazine, as the rifle features a hinged floorplate instead. It is easy to open and closes securely, while the base-plate is made out of metal.

Range and field testing

The .308 has become one of my 'go to' calibres for medium-sized game like pigs, deer, goats and a variety of other pest animals. Ammunition is easy to find in a wide variety of loads and projectiles. Where lighter and faster bullets will typically



The metal magazine door and release button.

have a flatter trajectory and lower recoil, I favour mid- to heavyweight projectiles for hunting.

At the range, I ran numerous loads through the rifle. Projectiles varied from 123 grains to 200-grain subsonics. While the points of impact differed, I was surprised at how well the rifle grouped, pretty much regardless of the type of ammunition I used. In the end, I settled on Lapua Mega factory loads. These are 185-grain brass jacketed soft-point bullets that consistently grouped at well under 1 MOA at 100m. Muzzle velocity was consistent too, just over 2500fps.

With almost all my shooting at under 150m, the Lapua bullets have been able to hit hard in the field. Large boars and deer generally just drop on the spot with a single well-placed shot. Smaller animals like roe deer, goats and foxes either slump as if they were electrified or take a few steps because the jacketed bullet passes through them without dispensing all its energy.

Rain and long hikes through the brush have not been a problem and the rifle continues to operate as required. The rifle is easy to load, the bolt can sit in a slightly raised position in which the firing pin is not

primed. This is a sound design choice as it is much safer to me than the two-position safety that does not lock the firing pin. I use both in instances where I move about with a chambered round, but generally make a point of carrying the gun unloaded until I am ready to shoot.

Final observations and recommendation

It has taken me a while to decide how I feel about the CZ 557 Predator in .308. The calibre is fine, has low recoil yet delivers sufficient punch for most hunting I do. My particular sample of the rifle has turned out to be surprisingly accurate, straight from of the box.

And not just with one load. It will happily shoot almost all factory loads I tested well within what I deem sufficiently accurate for hunting applications. That said, it cycled rather poorly when I first tried it, which greatly improved once I did some polishing work on the internals.

The bolt now cycles as smooth as those on my Sauer rifles, which is pleasing. Even so, the feed is not as effortless as it ought to be. Particularly with a fully stacked magazine, the gun can be fussy and require some 'convincing' to chamber the next round. If I routinely had a need to have



The floating barrel design (not glass bedded).



How the safety pin looks when armed.



Bolt release can be a fiddly operation.

more than two or three bullets loaded, it might have swayed me to do more work in the rifle or look for an alternative. However, I do not and often only load two rounds – one that does the business and a second one, just in case. This avoids the feed issue altogether. However, unlike my other rifles, which I know will have the next round ready to go when I need it, the possibility of the CZ 557 not properly feeding the next round lingers.

Something to also take into account is the bolt lift. With a trend towards scopes with larger diameter eye boxes, clearance can be an issue. As previously mentioned, the stock is not my favourite, but it has been hard-wearing and there are plenty of after-market alternatives available for the CZ 557. The trigger works just fine too.

So would I buy the rifle again? Possibly. At the price I paid, I probably would. However, I would insist on being allowed to return it if the feed was not to my liking. I would take it to the range and rather than loading a single round at the time, I would fill the magazine to capacity and see whether things work as they should.

You may be hard pressed to find this exact model here in Australia so speak with your local gunshop about your options. Given the similarities between the various CZ 557 versions, I would suggest seeking a model that is closest to what you look for in a rifle. Study stock options, detachable magazine or floorplate, iron sight or not, pre-installed Picatinny rail or 19mm CZ/Brno dovetail mounts, threaded or

unthreaded barrel, and so on.

At the end of the day, the CZ 557 Predator was significantly more accurate than I had expected, has a decent trigger and it seems to be solidly built and up to whatever you encounter in hunting situations. If it had not been for the feed issue on my sample, I would have highly recommended it. ■

Specifications

Style Bolt-action centrefire rifle

Overall length 104cm

Barrel 52cm cold hammer forged, one in 10 twist rate, M14x1 thread

Action Modernised mini-Mauser

Trigger Adjustable

Magazine Floorplate, four-round capacity (plus one in chamber) in .308

Scope mounts Integrated 19mm CZ dovetail

Stock Synthetic, soft touch camouflage coating

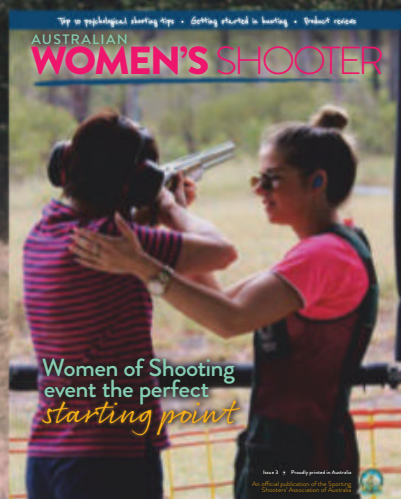
Weight 3.2kg

CZ distributor Winchester Australia

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A man wearing a yellow and black patterned shirt, khaki pants, and brown boots stands in a rural landscape. He is holding binoculars and looking towards the right. In the background, there are trees and a wooden fence. A rifle is leaning against the fence behind him.

Dog day afternoon

A local farmer and **Don Caswell** make the right call on canines

A nearby farmer called to say he had begun losing newborn calves. He had just sighted a wild dog in the same paddock and, more than likely, it was the culprit.

Additionally, one of his cows had died earlier that morning and, from experience, that would also attract wild dogs and feral pigs. I have been hunting this particular property for about five years and, in that time, I have shot close to 30 marauding dogs.

The property is of 1000 acres, approximately rectangular and shares three boundaries with vast areas of dense tropical jungle national park. The tropical rainforest is a haven for wild dogs and

feral pigs that emerge to raid the bordering farmland.

If these feral predators limited themselves to eating just the afterbirth and occasional dead beast, they would be providing a useful service and there would not be a problem. However, more often than not, their attentions turn to the birthing cattle and the newborn calves. Easy pickings such as that allow the dogs and pigs to have greater breeding success than they would otherwise enjoy.

The increased numbers of both pigs and wild dogs then put pressure on the natural habitat and native wildlife in addition to the suffering and losses of livestock. While not all dead livestock is the result of kills by

wild dogs, a goodly proportion is.

The aftermath of a wild dog attack on livestock can be harrowing. Similar to other pack-hunting canines and pride felines like cheetahs and lions, wild dogs often begin to eat their prey before it is dead. You won't see that on a wildlife documentary but is nevertheless a common practice among group-connected predators. Often too, animals are just savaged and then left.

More often than I would wish, distressed farmers have asked me to put down cows and calves staggering about with their innards hanging out and their face and ears torn off. For anybody, that is a most distressing thing to witness and have to deal with. But, as much as it might offend our



Above and left: The trail camera reveals wild dogs visiting the carcass of a dead cow.

Opposite: The loading ramp at a set of derelict cattle yards made a good ambush spot.

sensitivities, it is natural behaviour among wild predators and always has been. Nature is brutally pragmatic and viewing such conduct from predators as depraved, vicious and cruel is purely a human perspective. Nature, they say, is a harsh mistress.

Responding to the farmer's call, I wasted no time in paying a visit. I am more than familiar with the paddocks where the breeding cows are and have a good feel from where the wild dogs would be coming. The cow had died in the corner of a set of derelict cattle yards. I asked the farmer to leave it there and then set about putting some trail cameras over it.

The next morning, I stalked the carcass at first light, hoping to spot any visiting wild

dogs. On entering the old yards, I could see that the wild dogs had been and begun work on the head and rear end of the carcass. After swapping trail cam cards, I took up position at the old yard's loading ramp.

I scanned the jungle edge, some 500m away, paying particular attention to where it rose gently from a small, spring fed creek, to a prominent ridge about 700m further on. Up on the ridge I spotted a large black dog accompanied by a smaller red dog. I gave a call and they both pricked up their ears and looked my way. I refrained from calling again and watched the pair. After a few minutes they trotted off into the sheltering jungle. At the edge of forest, I caught a glimpse of one or two other dogs

joining them before they disappeared.

I waited and waited. I gave another call but had no response. I had expected the pack to make their way through the jungle, down the slope to meet the small creek and then follow that to the yards where I was waiting.

After an hour, with a tropical storm threatening heavy rain, I made haste for the vehicle, eager to go home and see what the trail cam photos would reveal. With a coffee in hand and a heavy tropical downpour hammering the roof, I worked through many photos. The dead cow had seen plenty of visitors, both day and night. There were lone dogs, pairs and larger sets. I could differentiate at least a dozen



different wild dogs.

That probably accounted for the lack of response to my calling. I suspect that when there is a high density of wild dogs, especially present in packs of three or more, they are unlikely to come to a call in case they encounter a rival pack and receive a flogging for their temerity. Lone wild dogs and pairs are more likely to come to a call when the area is not hosting so many other canines.

The big black dog and its pals showed

up on the trail cam in the late afternoon. Working on the principle that the larger gang presented the most risk to the stock, I decided to target them. The next afternoon I again stalked in to the old yards. I took a devious route, keeping a few large trees in the paddock between myself and the ridge where I expected the dogs to be stationed. It was wise that I did.

When I finally snuck up to the old loading ramp and took a cautious look at the ridge, I could see six wild dogs lolling

about. They were unaware of my presence, so I settled in and prepared for their arrival. The pack would make their way from one patch of shade to another, beneath the few scattered large trees in the paddock. There, they would frolic a little and socialise before taking a little nap. There was always one dog on lookout as the other five slept. With no chance of closing the distance, I had to wait for them to come to me. That took three hours.

My patience paid off though. I had plenty

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One from a few years back. Rob and I will be hunting this spot again later this month. Hopefully we will get similar results to previous trips.



of time to identify the alpha dog leading the way. He was a tall, rangy black dog with a greying muzzle indicating an experienced old campaigner. The horde drifted closer to my location. They were in no hurry at all. Finally, when they were within 100m and in a clear patch between intervening patches of weedy bushes, I decided to open proceedings.

I gave a little yelp. The dogs all stopped and took notice. I shot the alpha dog through the heart with a 100-grain FIOCCHI soft-point from my Sauer XT101 in .243 Winchester. He flopped to the shot. In the leaderless few seconds that followed, I dropped two more of the dogs with quick shots apiece.

The surviving three dogs took off for the shelter of the jungle. They disappeared briefly as they crossed the creek but then had a large expanse of open field to cover in full view of my position. I dropped two more of the fleeing dogs. The rifle only holds five rounds in the magazine, so I had to scramble to reload a couple.

But, by then the lone survivor was

nearing the distant jungle at speed and made good its escape. The first three dogs all lay within 50m of each other. I collected them together, took a photo on my iPhone and sent that to the farmer who was probably wondering about the unusual number of shots he had heard.

Then I spent some time seeking the other two who were further away and not easy to find in the grass. When I arrived back at my vehicle the farmer was waiting for me. To say he was overjoyed at my afternoon's efforts is an understatement. ■

Opposite: In open country, with no natural rests, shooting sticks allow precise shooting.

Opposite inset: A happy-looking wild dog trots past the trail cam with a calf leg in its mouth.

Above: Three of the pack of six wild dogs.

Right: Another wild dog that came into a call.





A lightweight 3-9 on a .270 is a good choice even from a tree-stand.

Into perspective

David Duffy shares his lessons learnt with hunting riflescopes

It was a warm summer afternoon in the hills of Central West NSW. I had climbed two-thirds up the last rise towards the summit with my long heavy-barrelled Remington 700 chambered in .270 Dakota, hoping to put in some shots at mountain pigs. I was thinking of the previous day, when I had shot two goats on the opposite face of a hill across a wide gully in which a creek flowed through the middle.

Suddenly there was an explosion of pigs just in front of me. They had been resting, well-camouflaged underneath a low tree and I had unknowingly disturbed them, on my way up the incline. My thoughts returned to the present and soon I had a round chambered with the rifle aiming at a fleeing pig and the scope on 12x. I fired.

And missed.

A second round was chambered and I made the decision that saving a few seconds at a quickly fleeing pig was more critical than turning the scope magnification to its lowest setting of 6x. I missed again and the pig was gone. Another fleeing pig about 120 yards away was ascending a rise and this time the magnification was hastily turned down to 6x. I sat on the slope and rested my elbows on the inside of my knees and carefully aimed at the snout of the moving brindle-coloured pig with my last round from the magazine in the chamber. This time the shot was good and he succumbed to the 150-grain Berger Hunting VLD.

Now I keep the scope on 6x when walking to and from where I intend to set up. When I have a nice rest in the prone

position, I wind the scope up to 18x for distant shots. If using the bipod from the sitting position I usually opt for 12x as this stance isn't quite as stable with the bipod legs fully extended.

On a subsequent hunt, when I had the excellent Kahles 8x scope on my Sako .222, I missed an offhand shot at a running fox that had seen me first. An 8x scope was again too much magnification for running game. Now the Sako .222 wears a 3-9x42 Kahles and I usually leave it on 4x when walking around and if using a rest, then the magnification is increased. The 42mm objective lens is a little better than a 36mm lens as it becomes dark.

For a heavy-barrelled varmint rifle or for long-range shooting, a large objective lens and main tube and high magnification



The 3-9 Swarovski on this Winchester Model 70 Supergrade in .338WM helps keep the weight down.



The Rapid Z varmint reticle on the 5-25 Zeiss helps with the long shots past 400 yards with the .220 Swift.



The 3-9 on this Anschütz .22LR was no better than a fixed 4x.

are desirable. However, for a rifle that you shoot mainly offhand a big, heavy scope is often a disadvantage. Not only do you have to carry that extra weight but the weight is high on the rifle, which affects its handling more so than being low down. A large objective lens sticks out and is more prone to being bumped, especially in a fall or slide. I find a smaller slim scope allows better alignment of the rifle to the game just prior to when I focus through the scope.

My preference for walkaround rifles are small, light scopes with 1" tubes and magnification such as 2-7, 3-9 and for the longer shots 3-10. European hunters often operate from a Hochsitz in poor light conditions or at driven game such as boars or moose. The large scopes they use are ideal for that type of stationery hunting as they perform

better in low light and have large fields of view.

It doesn't seem to bother them that the scopes are often mounted very high. Many Australian hunters like their scopes mounted as close to the barrel as possible so that a consistent rest of the cheek on the stock can be repeated with each shot, minimising parallax aiming problems and also for better handling.

On my Anschütz 1416 .22LR, replacing the Pecar 4x with a Kahles 3-9x42 did not result in any greater success ratio. So ultimately, I put the Pecar 4x back on the rifle. A good 4x on a .22LR I feel is about ideal. When shooting at small vermin with a centrefire at distances way past 100 yards, a variable is an advantage when using a rest for more precise shot placement on a

Into perspective

higher magnification.

The scope I have used more than any other for nearly 40 years when pig hunting with various rifles/calibres is the lightweight Swarovski 3–9x36. I wind it down from 4x to 3x when in close-range pig country. Many years ago, a hunting mate who had a Zeiss 3–9x36 and I did a comparison as it became dark as to which of the two scopes was better. We both agreed there was no difference that we could see. However, I think the Kahles 2–7 may be even better for pigs in thick cover because of the ability to wind it down to 2.3 power.

On my heavy-barrelled .220 Swift I used a fixed 12x Schmidt & Bender for a long time with ultra-fine cross-hairs. However, once I started to shoot at rabbits and crows well beyond 400 yards I found that I needed a reticle with stadia lines on the 6 o'clock post as the trajectory of the bullet had too much fall at those distances to easily determine the amount of holdover.

As a secondary consideration, 12x magnification at those distances on a rabbit or crow was marginal. I replaced the S & B with a Zeiss 5–25 with a Rapid Z Varmint reticle. My hit ratio increased due mainly to the



The Kahles 8x56 on this CZ .222 is great from a rest and in poor light but not so good offhand at running game



A Swarovski 3–10 on 4x helped take this boar

reticle which, by using the Zeiss computer program, had distances corresponding to each stadia line calculated. The 25x magnification helped a little over the 12x of the fixed power scope, but not as much as the reticle. In the heat of the day, especially when targeting crows in summer, the heat shimmer may require the scope to be zoomed down to 8 power.

On both the .270 and .338 Win Mag, I find that for big game a 3–9x36 is ideal and I usually keep it on 4x and zoom up to 9x for a long shot from a rest, or 6x for a medium-range shot from a rest. The Swarovski 3–9x36 weighs about 12oz and this helps keep the weight of the rifle down, which is a consideration if carrying long distances or in steep terrain. If the expected distances are beyond 300 yards a lightweight 3–10x42 is slightly better, such as on a .270 WSM mountain rifle.

Dangerous game are a different matter and the wrong scope can land you in trouble. I probably would have been just as happy with a good quality fixed power



For pigs a 2-7 is possibly better than the 3-9 that is on this Sako 6.8 SPC.



On long shots with the .270 Dakota using the bipod from the seated position David uses 12x and 18x from the more stable prone berth.



The Kahles 2-7 on this Ruger .338 RCM is ideal for sambar deer.

scope of 2½ times (or slightly less) as with the 1" Zeiss 1.5-4.5 I put on my .450 Rigby. However, none were being made so I didn't have much choice, unless I tried to pick up one second-hand. I leave the variable on 2.5x except when checking the zero at 100 yards in which case I wind it up to 4.5x or down to 1.5 in thick cover, such as in the pandanus palms in Arnhem Land. I like to sight this rifle in to be zero at 100 yards which also makes it zero at 50 yards.

If you use a variable that has a high top-end magnification, there is always a risk that you might have it on 6 or 8 power when it needs to be on 1 or 2 power. That's not as ridiculous as it may seem as under stress mistakes such as squeezing the trigger when there is no round in the chamber or the safety is on are occasionally made.

The low powered thin straight-tubed variables which don't bell out at the objective lens are better at pointing at a



The 2-7 Kahles weighs 12.2oz.

close-range animal as you can look down the barrel, and they are more conducive to a quick handling firearm. The low powered variables around 1-4x with a 30mm tube are possibly stronger, have a slightly bigger field of view and slightly better light gathering properties than the smaller 1" scopes I prefer.

The scopes that I have mentioned are the ones I have used extensively, but there are other good brands/models available that

have a loyal following. Some old-timers that are still around prefer fixed power scopes of low magnitude such as 2½x for their big game rifle.

Many of these have a lot of experience under their belt, so their views should not be discounted too lightly. Sometimes I wonder whether there will be a trend towards lighter, smaller and more rugged hunting riflescopes. ■

A look back at reloading

Perry Magowan



Super Simplex reloading press, a .243W, 7mm-08 Rem and a .338WM.



Weighing gunpowder out for loading bullet cases.

When my brother Darcy was 19 years old, he bought a Tikka .243W from the local gunshop and electrical store in the main street of Toogoolawah. The price of a box of 20 bullets was quite expensive.

George Rollins, the shop owner, suggested that Darcy should reload his own bullets as it was much cheaper than buying new boxes. He had a reloading jig and a set of gunpowder scales set up in his workroom at the back of the shop.

It had all you needed to make them – new bullet cases, large rifle primes, projectiles and gunpowder. The initial outlay is the biggest thing but in the long run it is much cheaper by far to make your own per bullet than buy new ones.

At that time, the average wage was about \$45 per week. You could make a .243W bullet for 10 cents a go, compared to new factory-made bullet at 40 cents each. So, Darcy and I jumped on board. I was 15 years old and a year later dad let me buy my first centrefire rifle for deer shooting. It was an American W11 M17 bolt-action .30-06 converted to a sporting design, mounted with a telescope sight. The reticle was a pointed picket post.

It cost me about 12 cents every time to make my own bullets, compared to 85 cents a time for factory versions. The biggest problem back then was that all gunpowder was made in the USA or Europe and types were always changing or being discontinued. This meant when you went in to buy a fresh can of gunpowder it was unavailable, so you had to purchase a new brand or a different burning rated powder and resight your rifle in again to the replacement load.

Thank goodness they make gunpowder in Australia now and it is almost always available. Things are quite more technical these days when it comes to reloading. I have not bothered to keep up with all the modern gear or technical stuff.

What worked years ago for me still works now, so call me a relic. My rifle still shoots true and the deer still fall over onto the ground and do not get up again.

If you have thought about reloading, have a go. Really, it is not that hard to pick up and quite rewarding. Sometimes it is the only way to make a hunting rifle shoot straight and to obtain a good, tight shooting group. Some rifles are fussy – what bullet weight and powder loads might work in three or four rifles may not be any good in another. Some gunpowders suit a certain barrel twist and length and others do not.

I will stress though if you decide to have a go at this procedure on your own, always follow what the reloading book says on gunpowder weights. NEVER put more gunpowder in your shell case than what the guidelines advise. After all, your life might depend on it. Not all rifles are built to take hot loads. An overloaded rifle bullet can cost the hunter's life as well as the targeted game.

I made that mistake once in my life and I will never do it again. When I was 18, I thought I was bulletproof. Thank God he was watching out for me. However, my hunting rifle was not so lucky. I had to throw it in the rubbish bin after that lapse and buy a new one. I wish you all the best and good shooting. ■

Early mornings and late afternoons before and after work glassing for game.



A darkly beast

Wild howling in the night haunts **Chris Redlich** as he triumphs after hours

The western winter sun began to fade through the trees of the creek line as I made my way back to the ute, signalling my final moments working away on a remote cattle property.

An hour earlier I had discovered a myriad of pig and wild dog prints in the sandy creek bed that caught my attention. I had reached the property boundary and although my sense of adventure was yanking on my shirt tails to continue in a different direction, I listened to the 'little man' sitting on my shoulder and returned to camp before being stranded in unfamiliar territory.

The smell of a rotting beast carcass

killed by wild dogs in the creek bed hit my nose before it came into view. I had crossed paths with it earlier and I knew the vehicle was less than half a kilometre away. Amid the stench, I breathed a sigh of relief but a rush of adrenaline immediately engulfed my senses. Approximately 100m to my front, a lone, large black shape was making his way towards me. I took a knee by the carcass, not phased by the stink, raised the rifle and a monster wild boar filled the objective on my scope.

Over the years I have been fortunate to have numerous invitations to hunt properties that I had previously worked on. Some close to town and some way out west. On this most recent occasion, I was heading

back out to an estate to complete the final stage of a house renovation and decided to pack the rifle. My clients, knowing that I dabbled in hunting, expressed a desire for me to help them out with a problem wild dog population.

With only a few weeks before their biannual baiting program, they said that now would be a good time to hunt them by rifle. My aim was to complete the project on time, to their satisfaction and if I could sneak in a hunt around work hours I would.

I hauled my camper trailer and tools the four and a bit hours trip west and set up camp at some fully self-contained cattle yards, a few kilometres from the main property homestead. This was ideal for

A darkly beast

me as I prefer to have my personal space before and after hours.

The position of camp had me surrounded by an amphitheatre of rocky outcrops with scenery, not fully appreciated until the morning sun highlighted the coloured rockfaces. The daily beauty of my surroundings became almost a place of concern by night as the howls of wild dogs, sharpened by the frosty air, bounced off the cliffs and echoed all around me. By the sound of it my clients did have a wild dog problem and it would be fair to say I slept with one eye open and a hand on the rifle. My pet dog Buck, although good company, doesn't offer much personal protection. The howls sounded so close that while on the phone to my wife she could hear them in the background. Morning would reveal a

fresh set of footprints over my tyre tracks by the camp, highlighting my need to stay vigilant.

I arose every morning before first light and would hunt the creek lines, gullies and lower hills, glassing every shadow that beckoned a closer look. Although I found a ridiculous amount of fresh sign, including footprints and scat, the wily dogs that would taunt me by night were eluding me by day.

After work I would venture off on my trail bike to explore water points on the property's outer reaches and once again return to camp empty-handed. The frustration of little yield for my efforts was softened by the property's natural beauty. The landscape had its fair share of kangaroo infestation but I found nothing of game value

worth hunting. The dusty drive back and forth to the job from camp wound its way through various creek crossings holding potential sighting opportunities for feral pigs and wild dogs, and as a result my rifle shared the front seat, at the ready.

For this trip, I had with me, my Sauer 100 Classic in 6.5 Creedmoor. This particular rifle and chambering had proved itself on recent deer hunts and I had full confidence, if something of game status did appear, the Sauer would do the job.

With every morning and afternoon hunt, all indications were hinting that I would eventually cross paths with a pig or wild dog. My dilemma was the project was nearing completion and my inevitable departure for home loomed. If I didn't find anything by the end of the day after



Chris takes up the firing position beside the rotting beast.

packing up work for the last time, I would be going back with nothing. However, as it unfolded, the property was saving its best for last and my fortunes were about to change.

All the fresh sign of the afternoon's hunt led me to an opportunity of harvesting the largest boar I have ever seen in the wild and there I was, watching him through the Swarovski Z8i at last light walking straight towards me. Solid and imposing, he thundered down the sandy creek bed with each step drawing closer. Appearing cranky, he snapped his jaws as he walked and the sound of clattering ivory was loud.

The heavy footprints spotted earlier were deep but never did I imagine him to be this large. He had walked to within 80m and I was ready to take the shot. My heart

rate was high but remained steady in the kneeling position undeterred by the smell of the dead beast that lay beside me. The reticle rested between his eyes as I took up the trigger pressure and the instant thud indicated a solid hit as he fell dead on the spot.

Any available daylight was all but gone and there was nobody around to celebrate the victory except my dog. Left by the ute to supervise, Buck was happy upon my return. In low gear with trailer hitched, the ute weaved its way up and down and around the various dry creek crossings until I reached where the boar lay.

My Makita work lamps came in handy for the photograph session, but all the while taking photos, I felt like we were being watched. The surrounding 3m creek banks

became cause for concern as Buck gave an alert with a growl and sharp alarm barks. I thought my adrenalin was high when taking the boar, but my senses were now on full guard.

The sound of rushing through the grass above me turned closer until I clapped my hands, when it disappeared. I can only assume that with the amount of positive sign around, I had managed to attract an audience and opportunity for fresh food for the resident wild dogs. It's a bit unsettling when you can't see them although I remained cautious.

Upon closer inspection the boar displayed all the signs of an old warhorse including a large concertinaed nose around 80mm in diameter, two-inch thick, gristly shoulder pads and a hefty set of tusks.



Pig and wild dog prints found in abundance, deep in the soft sand.

A darkly beast

What stood out the most was the condition of his ears as they were completely torn to shreds. He had obviously won many fights for pig territory and managed to shrug off numerous encounters. Even his tail was damaged with half of it attached by only hairs and the tip so encrusted with mud, it looked and swung like a tassel. I admired the old boy and his battle for survival and removed the jaws in preparation for a trophy shield mount.

To be honest, I couldn't wait until I was out of the creek bed and back at camp safe to enjoy a wash and feed. My wife was expecting me home later that night but there was a delay as I decided the safer option was to leave the following morning.

The opportunity to shoot a feral had literally come down to the wire and thankfully, I didn't waste it. Happy customers are the best ones and my friends on the property invited to me return for hunting in the future, extending the invitation to other blocks in the area. This time had come to an end for now but I felt comfortable knowing it won't be my last. ■



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SCAN AND ORDER

Shot placement or enough gun?

Mick Chapman



Range practice helps to know how to deal with recoil.

Many years ago I sat through a lecture by a celebrated deer hunter who advocated a minimum calibre for sambar to be .458 Win Mag. This is a calibre renowned for killing at both ends that would frighten most potential hunters out of participating in one of the world's greatest forms of recreation.

New hunters enter the sport with little perception of what rifle calibre combination is relevant to the hunting they intend to pursue. They are totally reliant on information gleaned from the people introducing them to hunting. These can be folk who often know only marginally more than our novice. They can be subjective in their opinions, believing because of their experiences with a such and such calibre, it should be the choice for our greenhorn. They give no thought to shooting technique or physical attributes of the neophyte.

If our new shooter is built like a Greek God, it doesn't necessarily mean they will be able to absorb recoil. Similarly, the shooter who is a bit of a beanstalk may handle recoil well. Technique and the riflestock have more to do with absorbing recoil than body shape.

Each state and territory has a minimum calibre requirement for the hunting of game, so before any new hunter settles on a calibre they should check with their region's SSAA office. They can then try to shoot the calibre they are thinking of purchasing, preferably in the same make and model of rifle they intend to buy. Attending a SSAA rifle range, politely talking to the Range Officer or officials is a step in the right direction. Tell them you are thinking

Shot placement or enough gun?

of acquiring a firearm to go hunting with. Ask the official if there are any ‘club guns’ to shoot in suitable calibres that you may be able to fire to see if you like them or not.

Mingle with shooters at the range, tell them why you are there. Often, someone will be generous enough to offer a shot from their firearm. If there are 10 shooters at the range you will probably have close to 10 different rifles and calibres to choose from. Once you have been granted the

opportunity to shoot, listen and do what you are asked.

One of the best ways to gain the feel for a calibre is to shoot it off the bench. By doing this, you will have a good idea of what the felt recoil of that particular calibre is. If the shooter can absorb the recoil while sitting, they certainly shouldn’t have too much trouble with the same calibre when shooting in any of the field positions. By the way, don’t forget to offer to pay for the

ammunition used.

The ability to withstand recoil is something akin to weightlifting – to grow stronger, the more weight you need to lift. So, the more you shoot, the more you will harden to recoil. Many new shooters turn up at the range with a flash new rifle and simply splatter a few shots all over the target. Then they blame the rifle for being inaccurate. But really it is their technique or flinching from the expected muzzle blast and recoil that causes the problem.

To harden yourself to recoil is time-consuming and an expensive exercise. But it is not as costly as buying a new rifle, finding out you can’t deal with the recoil and being forced to sell it. If you are considering buying a larger calibre, which could be anything above a .308 Win, find someone you know who has one and shoot theirs. If you can shoot a 50mm group at 100m on different days you may not be recoil shy.

Recoil can cause injuries to the face of people whose eye is too close to the optic lens of a scope, when firing the rifle. A scope with a 100mm eye relief is a real advantage to the hunter who uses standard or heavy calibres. When shooting uphill or downhill, shooters sometimes creep the stock. This means their eye edges closer to the optical bell of the scope. Under recoil the scope periphery edge slams into their eyebrow, cutting the skin to the bone, known colloquially as a Weatherby eye.



Practice makes perfect. If you can go to a SSAA range and are close to rabbit hunting locations, that’s a great way to learn how to master your rifle.



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Many years ago a fellow I met in Townsville who had crept his stock, on recoil wore the scope above his eye. Unfortunately for him, it had cracked his skull. Unbeknown to him at the time, brain fluid was leaking down through his sinuses triggering a runny nose which at first he thought nothing of. As the day wore on his head began to pound so he took himself to a local doctor who immediately recognised the symptoms, ordering a Flying Doctor plane to rush him to the nearest hospital.

Purchasing a first or even a replacement hunting rifle sounds a simple enough exercise, but it can be fraught with hidden perils. Proceed slowly and ponder some of the following before setting your mind on XY calibre. Consideration of the animal's welfare should be utmost in any hunter's mind. Understand that the intention of the hunter is to humanely take their prey. Preferably this should be with one shot.

A .22 Rimfire bullet placed correctly can floor an elephant, if all circumstances favour the shooter. Unfortunately, we live in a world of impediments and the perfect shot for any calibre, let alone a .22 Rimfire, seldom arises. In the perpetual words of Robert Ruark "use enough gun" on big game and good shot placement will hold the key.

Calibres suitable for hunting should be substantial enough to penetrate deeply into the animal, destroying multiple vital



Mick's two grandsons graduated to using a centrefire. Here Will and Xca, on a deer hunt, are carrying between them his .25-06.



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Shot placement or enough gun?

organs. But for any calibre able to kill quickly and humanely, the shot must firstly be placed correctly. If the shooter is using a calibre that recoils savagely the shooter may anticipate recoil and develop a flinch, ensuring a miss, or worse, wound the animal and lose it. A well-placed shot from a lesser calibre would be better than a badly placed shot from a behemoth.

The majority of animals are taken at under 50m. It could be argued that a larger, slow calibre with softer recoil would be adequate. That said, there can be any number of obstacles that may and will interfere with a well-placed shot. The hunter might need to shoot through heavy layers of foliage and here lies a conundrum.

We hear of heavy but slow brush bucking calibres yet there is no such thing. Some calibres do handle foliage slightly better than others. But this not due to their velocity but the bullet coefficient (BC) and sectional density (SD). Remember, all calibres'

accuracy can be affected if the bullet hits a twig.

Animals seldom offer a true broadside shot. When seemingly standing broadside the creature is in fact slightly off the position. When the trigger is squeezed the shot hits the animal at an angle, taking a path different from what the shooter planned. So it misses the vital organ the hunter aimed for. What I consider to be a correct calibre is one stout enough to exit the animal being hunted. Should the creature be able to escape wounded, the flow of blood passing out leaves a good trail to follow.

I mentioned that the shot differed from the 'planned shot'. So any hunter should know the anatomy of the animals they target. When the hunter aims a shot with the knowledge of where the vital organs are, they can visualise the path of the bullet. This allows the hunter to aim for multiple vital organs.

Range practice is the only real place many hunters learn to shoot. If you do attend the range don't just sit at the bench and fire away. Use field positions such as leaning off a post or tree, sitting or kneeling. I never shoot from the prone position in the bush as the grasses where I frequent are too tall. But I do use this position at a range just to keep myself familiar with shooting prone.

For those more fortunate, living where rabbits abound, hunting/shooting practice could be found in the local bunny population. Rabbit shooting is one of the best ways to learn accuracy, firstly sitting over a warren, dealing with them as they appear. As you become proficient, graduate to walking them up a long creek or gully system, shooting them on the run.

Optics are the most important part of your rig. There is much to learn when looking at scopes, light transmission, field of view, magnification, fixed or variable and the size of the optical lens plus the scope's

The first rusa deer Mick ever shot was about this size.



weight. "If you can't see 'em, you can't shoot 'em," is an often-heard maxim in hunting circles and it is so true.

Though most animals are shot during daylight the most productive hours are dawn and dusk. When light is limited, a quality scope will help you see things hidden in the darkened shadows that otherwise are invisible to the naked eye. Though dawn and dusk last approximately 10 or so minutes in Australia, it could be deemed appropriate for the hunter to pay a little extra for their scope for these benefits.

When purchasing your scope keep in mind the terrain you will do most of your shooting over. If the country is close, you would need low magnification, starting at 1 but no more than 4. This gives the widest field of view and enables easier target acquisition.

Higher magnifications are used for longer distances, enabling the hunter to place a shot more accurately. None of us hunt the same patch all the time, so adding versatility to the rig on a variable scope is advised. This allows the flexibility for hunting close territory as well as open country, assisting us to be a better and more successful hunter.

So what is more important – 'shot placement or enough gun'? A rifle you can comfortably and frequently shoot accurately in an appropriate calibre that will humanely despatch the deer you hunt is what I would choose. Happy hunting... ■



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Reedy dams are a great place to find black ducks.

For table and trophy

John Kiely makes the most of a scarce 2021 duck season

To me, duck season means more than shooting ducks. It takes in so much. It involves cooking game meat, photography, taxidermy and working with wood. It is a combination of all these elements which holds my interest.

The lead-up to the 2021 Victoria duck season had created a lot of discussion, to say the least. At first, when the truly

short 20-day campaign was announced I felt little enthusiasm. Such a short spell seemed a waste of time.

Yet I was determined to make the most of it. I saw no value in sitting around feeling sorry for myself. Instead of hunting the bigger swamps I decided to check out a lot of dams to which I had access to locally.

I made a few phone calls and all was set to head out about 8am on opening day.

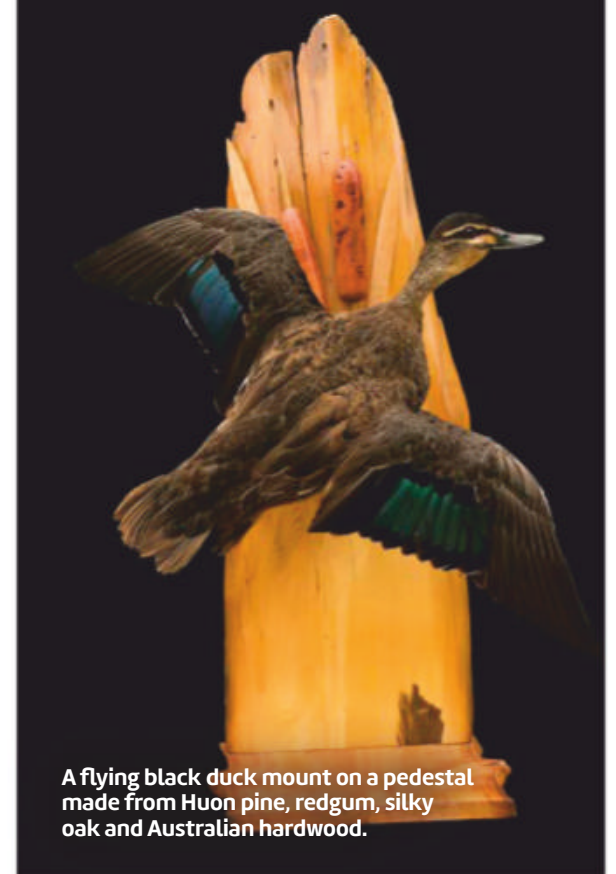
There was no real rush but I was hopeful to fill my bag of five.

Taxidermy and woodwork

I have a love of collecting and displaying trophies from my hunts and ducks are no exception. I also have a passion for working with wood and combine the two by making pedestal bases on which to show off my trophies.



A beautiful black duck taken with the Beretta Silver Pigeon kept for mounting on a homemade pedestal base.



A flying black duck mount on a pedestal made from Huon pine, redgum, silky oak and Australian hardwood.



A wood duck mount on a pedestal made from Oregon and redgum.



A teal mount on a pedestal made from redgum.

Last year I had four ducks mounted on bases I had made specifically for the job. I was hoping to bag some nice specimens this year to expand my collection, but I was after something different for the bases.

A few months prior to duck season opening I scoured a few properties looking for interesting shaped tree roots which I hoped I could turn into pedestal bases for any future duck mounts. I find myself

always on the lookout for curious pieces of wood when hunting but this time I made a specific trip searching for just the right pieces.

After a day in the bush, I returned with 12 noteworthy pieces I thought had potential to display any ducks at their best.

It was a big job but after four days' work, I had some appealing pieces which would fit the bill. In fact, I had far too many so no

doubt some will be given away. All I had to do now was take the ducks.

Duck opening

As I drove to the property I was hunting, I kept an eye on dams as they passed by. Not many ducks at all.

Dams have their own challenges. Some are difficult to go near without scaring any ducks. Others are not too bad with high

For table and trophy

banks or vegetation to hide your approach.

The first two dams I checked were a disappointment. I moved onto the third and advanced as best I could with the bank between myself and the water. As I peered over the top a mob of woodies burst into the air. Two shots with the number-2 steel and I had my first two birds down. I quickly made my way back to the ute to collect my waders and the birds were soon on the bank.

One was a beautiful specimen and perfect for my trophy room. I then cut the leg from a pair of pantyhose and slid this duck in to protect its plumage from damage while in the field. The other I quickly plucked, washed and bagged and it went into the fridge.

Photography

I have had a keen interest in photography



A beautiful flying mountain duck mount by Samantha Cervinski, of Animal Art Taxidermy.

for decades and had made the progression from film to digital some years ago. With my hunting photos I always try to show any

animal or bird in the best possible way.

I look for an interesting clutter-free background and try to pose the animal in a position which brings out its best. I take multiple photographs from different angles and review them in the screen to make sure I have what I want.

The next dam

The next dam I checked had tall reeds around one side so my approach was determined. I slipped two number-4 shot into my Beretta as I thought I would be able to move in a bit closer. As I approached, a pair of blackies took me by surprise when they burst from the water. One shot left, one shot right and these two birds fell into the dam.

It was back to the ute to find the waders and the camera. I discovered a sound spot to take some photographs of the birds, brew a cup of coffee and have a leisurely sit in the sun.

I must admit, I was starting to nod off when I realised I had yet to pluck the ducks. With the job soon done, these birds were washed, bagged and put into the fridge with the others.

Moving on, I checked another five or six dams with no result. I was beginning to think that would be it for the day when I came across a dam tucked away at the bottom of a gully. Sneaking up with some thistles for cover I failed to see a lone woodie sitting out to the side of the dam. It took off and with him another six or seven



A pair of grey teals taken for the pot.

lifted. It was too far for a shot but was still good to see some ducks.

The final dam

Well, I had one more dam to check for the day and it was a large body of water with plenty of cover. I sneaked in quietly and viewed with my binoculars. Only one lone teal was to be seen. What a disappointment. I chambered two number-2 shot cartridges and moved to a position where I thought I might manage a shot. The teal lifted and with two quick shots it was down. There was a little wind blowing and it was not long before the duck had drifted into the bank.

It was a beautiful specimen and destined to be taken to the taxidermist along with the woodie. I had my bag limit, so it was back home.

Once there, I removed the two ducks from the pantyhose and wrapped them ready for the freezer and the taxidermist. The others I finished plucking and gave them a good clean and into the fridge.

The shortest duck season ever

With the ups and downs of COVID restrictions, eight days out of the incredibly short 20-day season did not leave much time to stand around, so I went out another day. But things were noticeably quiet. Barely a duck was to be seen on any of the dams I checked.

As I approached one dam, hunched over, a lone blackie lifted and with two shots he was down. Again, the waders came in handy and this was another beautiful specimen to be kept for the taxidermist.

A short drive to the next dam found a



A pedestal made from redgum root with a carved base, destined to be the base for a duck mount.

mob of blackies milling about but they were flighty and lifted early. I took a shot away and one fell into the water. I collected the bird without becoming wet and found a sunny spot to sit and pluck it before I moved off to check two more dams. The very last dam produced two nice teals for the table.

I did manage to fit in two more hunts to another property which had about 15 dams. It was great to be out having a look after the lockdown, but ducks were scarce.

I managed to bag one nice woodie and that was it for the 2021 duck season. Anyway, I think myself one of the lucky ones. I landed 10 birds for the season, seven for the table and three for my trophy room. Yes, incredibly lucky indeed.

For the table

Not every duck hunter is interested in

photography, taxidermy and woodwork but most are taken in eating game meat and I am no exception. I gain great enjoyment from cooking and eating a variety of game meat and wild duck is at the top of the list.

While I only managed 10 ducks for the season, each will be a feast. I could not wait to have a taste and two nice ducks went into the slow cooker. My father-in-law had this saying: "If you spend all that time and money in getting the ducks don't skimp on the cost in cooking them." He always cooked his in butter.

So, two ducks went into the slow cooker with 250 grams of butter for about eight hours. The meat was falling off the bone, they were tender and juicy. With a few vegetables and gravy, it was a feast to behold.

I doubt the few ducks I have left will last all that long. Anyway, there is always next year. ■



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Crispy sticky magpie goose

Chris Wardrop conjures up a meal that will rarely see any leftovers!

Magpie goose, either fresh from the field or out of the freezer, was consumed almost weekly while my family enjoyed living in the Top End. Admittedly my first attempts at cooking with the waterfowl were more miss than hit, and the meals received pretty dim reviews.

Things took a turn for the better when I started treating the meat more like beef or lamb and less like poultry. This particular dish, inspired by the smells and flavours of the many Asian food stalls at the Mindil Beach Markets, became a firm favourite.

This recipe should yield sufficient quantity to satisfy 4–6 people, especially if served with rice or noodles and some Asian

greens, but it's honestly that good there are rarely any leftovers when served to only four.

I can normally have this on the table in less than 40 minutes, but I suggest taking your time and allocating at least an hour so that you're not too rushed.

Ingredients

- 4 magpie goose breasts
- ½ cup corn flour
- garlic salt or steak spice
- 1 onion
- 1 capsicum
- 2 cloves garlic
- ½ thumb-sized piece of ginger
- 3–4 spring onions
- 1 tablespoon sesame seeds

- 1–1½ cups vegetable or canola oil
- 1 tablespoon peanut oil

Sauce

- ½ cup hoisin sauce
- ¼ cup light soy sauce
- ¼ cup honey
- ¼ cup oyster sauce
- 2 tablespoons water
- 2 tablespoons Chinese cooking wine
- 1 tablespoon rice wine vinegar
- ½ tablespoon sesame oil
- ½ tablespoon chicken stock powder
- 1 piece palm sugar, crushed

Slurry to thicken sauce

- 2 tablespoons corn flour
- 2 tablespoons water



Magpie goose breasts are usually dark red and have a robust flavour.



Prepare everything before you start cooking.

This recipe should yield sufficient quantity to satisfy 4–6 people

Method

To create strips of meat that are genuinely crispy on the outside and tender in the middle, you will need to deep fry the meat and then stir fry the rest of the ingredients prior to combining everything with the sauce. This is best done in a steel wok over high heat.

Start by preparing the strips of goose meat. I run a sharp filleting knife horizontally along the length of each breast, to create two fillets of half the original thickness. Then slice each fillet into strips about half a centimetre wide. Once you have cut all of the breast meat, spread it evenly across the cutting board and season liberally with either garlic salt or steak spice. Then place the meat in a bowl and toss through half a cup of corn flour, coating each piece evenly. You can leave the meat in the bowl, but I like to lay it out in a single layer to prevent it sticking together.

Slice the onion, capsicum, garlic, ginger, chilli and spring onions and set aside. With

that done, place the sesame seeds in the wok over a low-medium heat and gently toast them. While the sesame seeds are toasting, you can prepare the sauce by combining all of the ingredients (except the corn flour and additional water) into a small bowl.

In a separate bowl make a slurry from two tablespoons of corn flour and the same amount of water and set that aside too. Keep an eye on the sesame seeds while you do this and make sure to remove them from the wok as soon as they start to lightly brown. Now all of the ingredients should be prepared and within easy reach of your wok. This means you can have the cooking done as quickly as possible and serve the dish while it is still hot and crispy.

Add 1 to 1½ cups of oil to the wok and warm over a high heat. Once the oil starts to simmer, add a piece of meat if it bubbles immediately, the oil is hot enough to start cooking. Fry the meat in batches of 10 or so pieces, but don't crowd the wok.

Fry to golden brown and set aside on a plate lined with a paper towel.

Once all of the meat is cooked, carefully discard the oil. Add a tablespoon of peanut oil to the wok and toss the onion and capsicum constantly for a minute, then add the garlic, ginger and spring onion, being careful to not let the garlic stick and burn.

You should be aiming for onion and capsicum that is cooked but still retains a firm texture. Once the vegetables are cooked sufficiently, remove them from the wok. Add the sauce to the wok and stir it around to ensure all of the palm sugar is dissolved. As soon as the sauce starts to bubble, add the corn flour slurry.

Boil for just a moment until the sauce begins to thicken and then turn off the heat. Return the vegetables and the meat, toss well to combine. Serve immediately into individual bowls, or a large share plate, garnish with sesame seeds, chilli and additional spring onion. ■

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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 SA Conservation and Wildlife Management

SSAA SA Conservation & Wildlife Management contributes to the preservation of South Australia's natural heritage through the humane removal of pest animals that impact and 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 and often involve camping out. As well as undertaking pest animal control activities, members are involved in wildlife monitoring, undertake working-bees at key sites and can attend regular range days throughout the year.

For further information or to attend a quarterly meeting or range day, please visit cwmsa.com.au, contact us via email on secretary@cwmsa.com.au or via post to Conservation & Wildlife Management (SA) Inc., C/O Secretary, P.O. Box 188, Kent Town, SA 5071

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 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.ssaqld.org.au



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Around the campfire with John Denman

Human beings have some curious habits. We have a tendency to look back a lot, wondering if things in the 'old days' were better than what they are today. I tend to doubt that, but it still doesn't stop me from pondering what earlier times were like.

For instance, my grandfather hunted water buffaloes from horseback in the early 1900s. I recall as a 10-year-old listening to his stories about how he would ride up beside a galloping buff and put the rifle barrel practically in the animal's ear.

His firearm at the time was a Winchester .44-40. Most of us today would never consider using such an old cartridge for hunting buffaloes. But back in the 'old days' you used what you had available. Later on, a lot of buffaloes were shot using army surplus .303 rifles. In fact, there have probably been more buffaloes shot using so-called inadequate cartridges than any other. Looking back can sometimes give us a fair bit of perspective.

Grandpa camped under a tarpaulin, with the wind and often the rain, blowing in one side and out the other. Today we have tents that might cost more than a good rifle. Once, a swag was just a simple sheet of canvas with a couple of blankets in it and a pocket at one end for your spare clothes and to use as a pillow. Old drovers have told me that if your swag couldn't fit through the spokes of the wagonette, you didn't land a job in a packhorse droving camp.

Today swags are bigger than some tents

and are more like tents than swags. I won't bemoan these things, but it does make me think that those 'good old days' were not as great in retrospect as some would have us believe.

Hunting is something we do today not because we have to but because we want to. It also has nothing to do with being a blood sport. Well, at least not so for those of us who consider ourselves ethical hunters. The methods of the hunters of old are today mostly thought undesirable and we consider a one-shot kill to be of critical importance, and it is. Back in those earlier times you might have thought the animal was only brought to the ground by the sheer weight of lead it had absorbed.

Having said all that, the hunters of today still embrace some older, more traditional arms to hunt. Black powder muzzleloaders are popular in the United States and some areas stipulate that muzzleloading guns are all that are permitted. The same can be said for bow hunters and while I hunt with neither, I can appreciate the dedication required to hunt in this way, with the satisfaction achieved after a successful outing.

I recently bought myself a Winchester lever-action rifle in .30-30. It's well removed from a bow and arrows, and certainly a far cry from a muzzleloader. But I still wanted a chance to take deer from a shorter distance than most centrefire rifles are generally used at. Moving close to your quarry should still be an important part of every hunter's ethos.

So how far have we really progressed? You still need to find your quarry and, in these times, finding deer is not such a huge problem. A modern rifle can kill an animal cleanly if it is in the right hands, at ranges unthought of in years gone by. But how much power is really needed to anchor say, a fallow deer? I know of competent hunters that can use a .223, or even a .222 for the job and do it reliably.

Others may consider just about anything and among sambar hunters I've heard of everything up to and including .375 H&H, even a .404 Jeffery. Sometimes it comes down to the matter of if you happen to own a certain rifle you then need to dream up a reason to use it. Victoria stipulates the minimum for sambar as being a .270 Winchester using a 130gr bullet. That may be fine but like most laws it's based on the lowest common denominator, or skill level. The fact is you can lug an elephant gun into the Victorian High Country, but if you don't hit a vital spot you still won't kill cleanly.

Years back I have hunted with a .303, I've also relied on the .303-25 which used to be popular, but back then nobody told us we could or couldn't use it on any particular species. It just happened to be what we owned and carried at the time and what we learned to use to good effect. I still believe that knowing your rifle and moving as close as possible are two of the most important factors in hunting. In that case, things haven't changed a lot in all these years. ■

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