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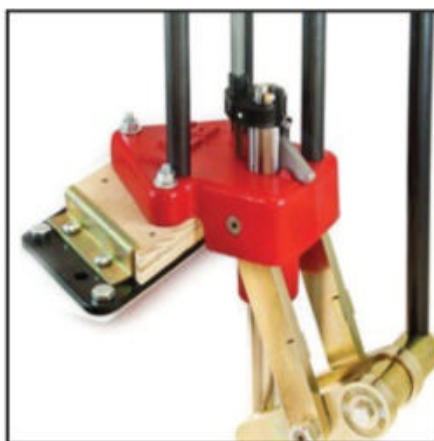
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In this ISSUE

In search of game

- 6 A soggy ambush
Don Caswell slogs it out in the wet to take home some
prime chital deer meat
- 16 The longest stalk
A sudden decision to check wild dog tracks turns into a
testing expedition for Peter d'Plesse
- 26 Javelinas in the Trans-Pecos
David Duffy treks Texas for 'skunk pigs' in the mountainous
Chihuahuan Desert
- 32 Crocodile escapades
Dick Eussen reflects on the hunting days of yesteryear
along with incidents and present-day dangers
- 38 Release the hounds
Teamwork leads to boars and a buff for Gary Hall
- 40 Debut deer feat
A proud Chris Redlich shares a definitive hunting moment
with his diligent daughter
- 48 Fowl call
Adrian Kenney finds some solace among a daft 2021
Victorian duck season
- 50 Rabbits and rugrats
Ben Smith and his wife take the kids out bush for a
cherished hunting adventure
- 76 Near and deer
As Brad Allen attests, there's nothing quite like the pursuit
of roaring reds



6



32



40



62

Practical hunting

- 12 The benefits of reloading
- 62 Outback survival and the hunter
Experienced Army veteran and Environmental Scientist
Scott Heiman shares some pointers that may just save
your life
- 84 What not to pack for an African safari



Edgeware

- 58 The cutting edge
- 68 Take it ESEE
- 90 Return to the fold

Reviews

- 15 Made in Australia
- 20 Victure this
- 24 Sellier & Bellot ammunition
- 30 The right balance
- 44 Seamless stalking
- 56 The Outlaw
- 72 The rise and rise of drones
- 80 Increase those night-time odds

Camp kitchen

- 10 Soul-warming venison stew
- 74 Relish the flavour
- 88 The campfire combo

Hunters world

- 93 SSAA CWM branches
- 94 SSAA membership form
- 95 Competitions
- 96 SSAA Online Shop
- 98 Around the campfire with John Denman

From the Editor

Our final edition for 2021 features Peter d’Plesse hot on the trail of a crafty wild dog, Ben Smith and family on a camping and bunny busting adventure, Gary Hall and his canine crew secure a buffalo and a bunch of boars, David Duffy tour mountainous desert in Texas for ‘skunk pigs’, Adrian Kenney land his share of ducks as he ponders nonsensical restrictions, Dick Eussen report on Top End crocodiles and three unique deer hunting experiences that see Don Caswell slog it out for an ambush in the wet, Chris Redlich share a ‘deer’ moment with his daughter and Brad Allen solidify the satisfaction of pursuing roaring reds.

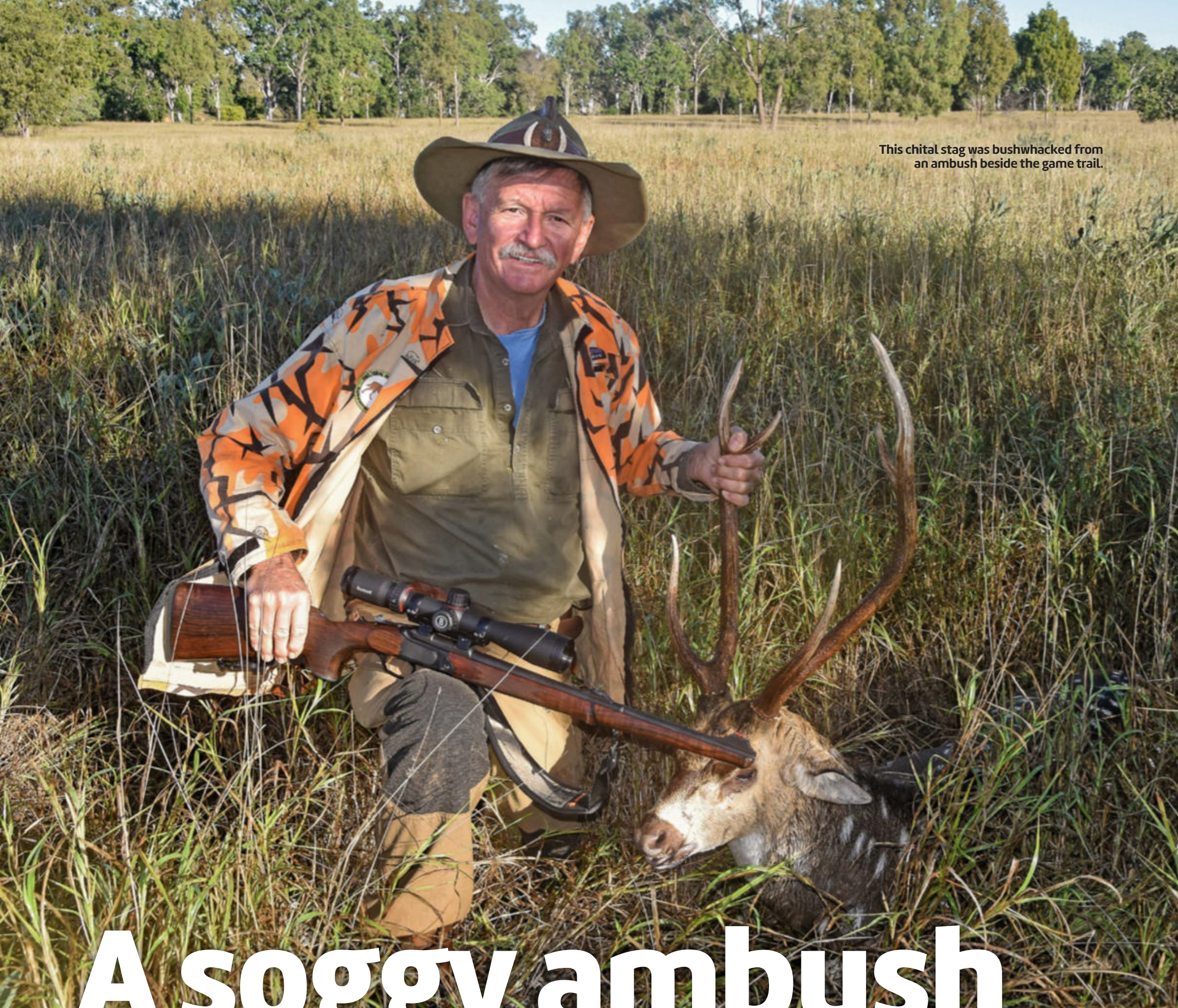
We cover the pluses of reloading your own ammunition no matter what, provide an extensive Outback survival guide that could make all the difference, discuss the devastation of wild dogs and on a lighter note reflect on what *not* to pack for an African safari.

With edgeware and reviews we make the most of the ESEE Model 4 all-rounder, unfold the Ruike P801 and handcraft our own trusty knives from commonly discarded old saw blades, weigh up the Hornady Auto Charge Pro powder dispenser, hit the air for game with a DJI Mini-2 drone and utilise air to shoot with the Diana Outlaw PCP rifle, open up hunting 24/7 possibilities thanks to the impressive Burris Thermal Handheld 35, fire Sellier & Bellot ammo, appreciate quality Australian goods from RMK Leather Works, set-up the Victure HC300 trail camera and get tactical with the Leupold VX-5HD 1-5x24 CDS-ZL2 scope.

For the tastebuds there’s hearty venison stew, delightful cevapi with ajvar and a tasty campfire combo of coal-smoked chilli and crusty bread, along with terrific prizes of a Winchester pack, GlowShot gong and plate hanger plus a Kizlyar Supreme Legion knife.

Wishing you a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year filled with bountiful hunting!

Thomas Cook
Editor



This chital stag was bushwhacked from an ambush beside the game trail.

A soggy ambush

Don Caswell slogs it out in the wet to take home some prime chital deer meat

After prolonged bouts of wet season weather and then the COVID-19 restrictions, any plans to replenish our stock of venison had been significantly delayed.

So, at the earliest opportunity, my wife Kathy and I packed our car and set off for a couple of days camping and hunting at one of our favourite locations. It was a basic camp with only the essentials. We had cooked and frozen a few one-pot meals so that we could concentrate on the hunting.

As we set up our camp in mid-afternoon, it was pleasing to see a lot of tracks left by chital deer, pigs and wild dogs. There were even a few weathered deer bones underfoot from one of our previous hunts. Over the years, we had shot a couple of dozen deer all within a few hundred metres of where our tent was pitched.

With an hour to sunset we set off to stalk the low, stony ridge next to our camp. We worked our way slowly into a favourable light breeze. The usual game trails were

still there and showed fresh sign. Along the way we paused to put up a couple of trail cameras on trees close by where the meandering game trail passed. They would tell us what was going by, and when.

Knowing that information would allow us to set an ambush for the deer. In mounting the trail cameras, I now just use some light gauge wire and self-tapping screws. It is much quicker and easier than employing the straps that come with such cameras. And if you are putting up your cameras in

an area where there is the risk of theft, wire mounting them is more discreet.

First light the next morning saw us stalking a well-used game trail a few kilometres from camp. The property had been largely destocked and that had left a good growth of grass untouched. As a result, the grass was thick and varied from knee to waist high. That unusually thick growth of grass worked in our favour, as it transpired. We had stalked this particular game trail on previous occasions. It led along the edge of a narrow band of thick scrub that fringed the bank of a river. The chital moved there at first light to camp during the day. Initially, on cold mornings in winter they would lie out in the sun for a couple of hours until they warmed up, then shift into the shade of the bush until late afternoon.

The deep grass was wet with dew. That muffled the sound of our passage and made for excellent stalking. However, it also meant that we were soon saturated from the waist down. That poses no problem in summer, but with the morning temperatures falling closer and closer to a frost, it proved too uncomfortable around sunrise. The plan was to look well ahead and spot the deer before they saw us, if possible.

That is more easily said than done with chital, who are blessed with excellent senses and a sharp wariness. My wife and hunting buddy is a competitive lady and takes great joy out of spying game before I do. On this occasion, we both saw the tell-tale flicker of an ear at the same time.

Over 150m away there were a small group of chital. They had risen from their bed in the grass and were looking our way, alert but not yet alarmed.

We figured they might remain for a little while before moving. Or more likely they would head across the broad expanse of open grass to seek the shelter of the extensive forest. Sometimes, they will just disappear into the narrow band of riverside scrub but, on being approached, they would then break across the open paddock.

I unclipped my Primos Trigger Stick. On this occasion I was carrying the long version in anticipation of having to shoot over deep grass. I have rigged a detachable clip that allows me to carry my trigger sticks hands-free but ready for instant



A young chital stag comes prancing by the trail camera at sunrise.



Placing a trail camera on a tree beside a game trail.



Don uses light wire and screws to quickly mount trail cameras.

A soggy ambush



deployment. The trigger stick was set up in seconds. I settled the stock of my Sauer XT 101 into the yolk as I studied the mob for a shooting opportunity.

They were all partially masked by some intervening bush. A doe with a yearling at heel broke from her companions and started across the heavily grassed paddock. In all our previous hunts here, the deer would do that unhindered and at speed. On this occasion though, the grass was so thick and deep the doe was obliged to bound high in a series of leaps, not unlike a roo. It greatly slowed down her passage across the paddock.

The rest of the mob had begun to melt into the riverside scrub, so the doe was my

target. I had to wait while she transitioned a low spot where I could only see her ears when she bounded. However, soon she emerged into view. I then used my Ezy-Axis game call and gave the short bleat of a doe chital. She and her yearling immediately stopped and looked in our direction, as they will most times when this is done. I chambered a round of Sellier & Bellot factory ammo with the 100-grain Nosler Partition loading. She was close to 200m away and standing side-on. The trajectory would be pretty much on point of aim at that range, so I put the cross-hairs of the Zeiss 3-9x40 scope on the point of her shoulder and squeezed off the shot. The Nosler Partition went true to aim, entered



one shoulder and exited the other, taking out the heart on the way through. The doe flopped into the grass. I kept my eyes on that spot for a few seconds trying to memorise her location. Finding downed animals in a sea of thick grass, especially at that distance, can be a real problem.

The other deer now broke cover and made their way across the paddock to the safety of the forest. We watched them go. We had our quarry for the morning. Maintaining close attention to where the doe fell paid off. It is so easy to be distracted by other animals in that situation and then have great difficulty finding the downed deer. I ploughed my way across the 200m of deep, wet grass. Even though I knew where to look, it was not until I was almost standing on her that I found the carcass. Another useful trick I have adapted here is to tie a fluoro ribbon to my trigger stick and place that over the carcass. It is a huge help when you bring the vehicle into that spot.

In our walking around the paddock we found a particularly well-used game trail. That allowed a more comfortable morning hunt. We just put ourselves in position close to where that path entered the forest and waited for the deer to come to us. After our chilly stalk through the deep, wet grass we were looking for an easier option with the next animal.

On this occasion I was armed with my lightweight Merkel K3 single-shot rifle.

Field butchering a chital deer.



Completing the skinning and boning in the comfort of camp.

It too uses the S&B 100-grain Nosler Partition loading. The rifle was topped with a Bushnell Nitro 3-12x44 scope.

Just after sunrise, we were approached by a stag leading a group of does. Again, I used the Ezy-Axis doe call to halt their progress without alarming them. I would have preferred one of the does, but the

stag offered the best shot and it never pays to dilly-dally in these situations. He had turned side-on and, like the earlier doe, the projectile traversed both shoulders and the heart. Even though he was physically a much bigger animal, the bullet did the job and exited.

Luckily, we had only a short distance to carry the meat from the stag as it weighed a lot more than the venison from the doe. Back in camp, I hung the rear legs from a tree and completed the skinning and boning out. With a load of prime venison from our self-imposed bag limit of two deer, we happily broke camp and headed home. ■

Soul-warming venison stew

Don Caswell utilises meat offcuts to enjoy a hearty meal on a cold winter's night

When separating venison rib fillets and rumps, I square them up and trim off the end bits before slicing into steaks. The odd-shaped end pieces of fillet and rump are too good to just mince for sausages and hamburger patties.

My choice for these trimmings is a hearty stew, an ideal option for a cold winter's night. Following is my approach to that. As always, this is not a carved-in-stone recipe. Treat it as a guide, adjusted to your own taste.

Ingredients

1kg of venison fillet and rump trimmings – cubed

2 or 3 sticks of celery – peeled and chopped

3 large onions – diced

3 large carrots – diced

3 cloves garlic – crushed

1 piece of pumpkin – chopped small

1 litre of beef stock

Pinch of mixed dried herbs, or fresh if you have them

Parsley – chopped for stew and a garnish at serving

Pepper and salt to taste

Flour – dust the meat before browning

Gravox – for thickening

Dash of rice bran oil (or similar high smoke point oil) for browning meat and vegetables

Small bowl of hot chillies (optional)



Tasty venison stew, served with hot, buttered bread in front of a winter fire – amazing!

Method

- Brown the flour-dusted venison pieces briefly in a hot skillet, then set aside.
- Brown onions, garlic, carrots, pumpkin.
- Combine the browned meat and browned vegetables in a deep pot.
- Add the beef stock and bring to boil.
- Add herbs and seasoning.
- Reduce to a simmer and cook for one hour.
- Add a little Gravox to thicken, if desired.
- Add a little more water, if needed.

Serve

Serve with vegetables of your choice. Steamed potatoes and sautéed mushrooms are delicious when added to the stew at serving, then garnishing with chopped parsley and having with fresh baked, buttered crusty bread. If you have a taste for chilli, popping a small bird's eye chilli with each mouthful of stew is the go. ■



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The 6SLR (left) and .270 Redding (right) are well-designed wildcat rounds made from readily available .243 brass (centre).

The benefits of reloading

David Duffy

Whether to reload or buy factory-loaded cartridges depends on a person's individual circumstances, attitude to hunting, what stage they are at in their hunting and other factors.

If you reload, the per unit cost of ammunition, taking into account cases, powder, primers and projectiles is usually considerably cheaper than buying loaded rifle rounds. However, when you consider the cost of reloading equipment such as presses, dies, scales, calipers, case length trimmers, funnels, reloading blocks as well as the reloading components, then it's going to be a while before you break even. And this will depend a lot upon how many rounds you shoot.

Plus, you will probably have to spend a reasonable amount of time reloading the cases and going to the range and testing those loads. If you only go hunting a few times a year and you're just not interested in eating up the time reloading, or you are simply too busy, then it may be best to buy your ammunition factory-loaded.

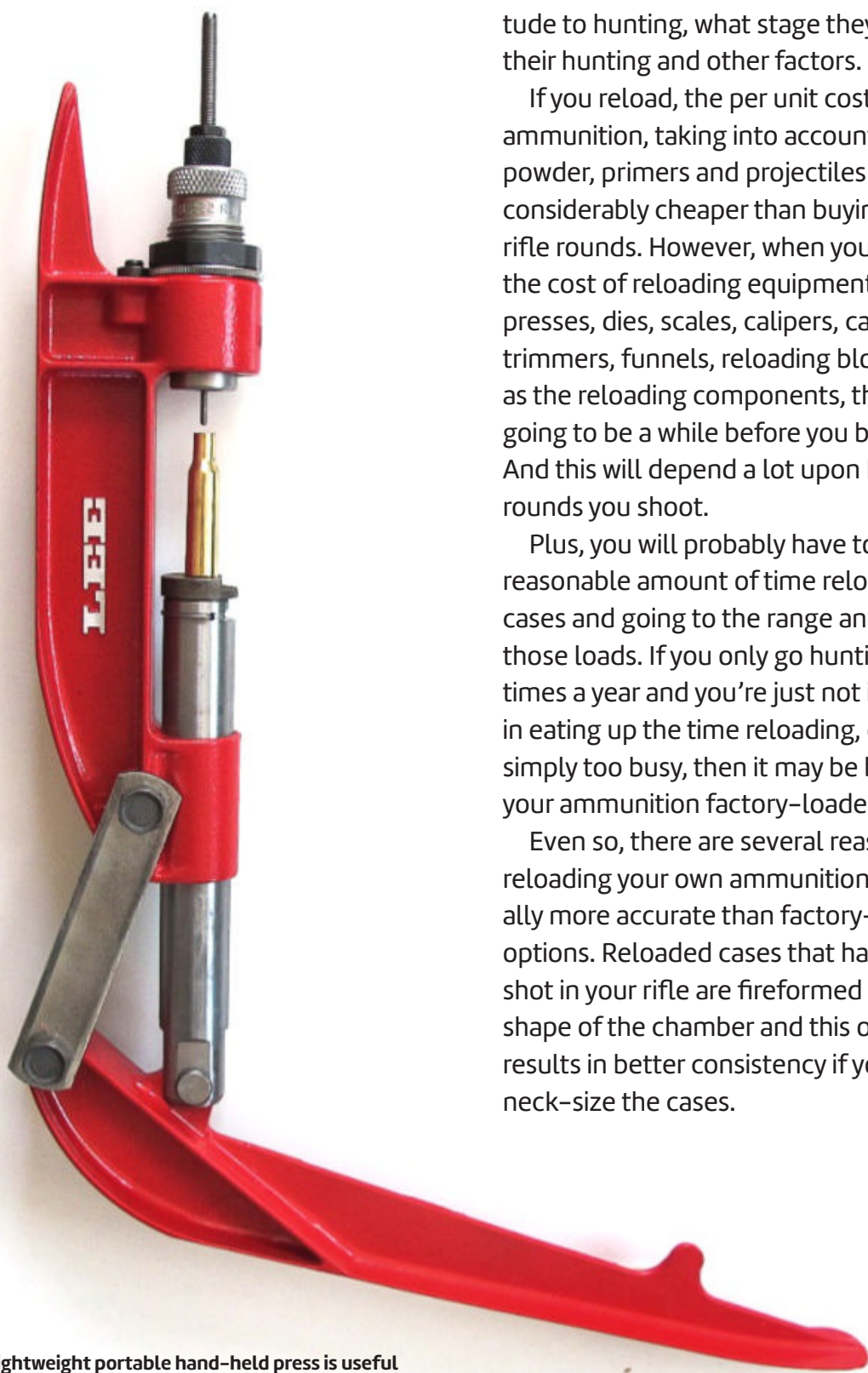
Even so, there are several reasons why reloading your own ammunition is usually more accurate than factory-loaded options. Reloaded cases that have been shot in your rifle are fireformed to the shape of the chamber and this often results in better consistency if you just neck-size the cases.

With my .220 Swift I keep the fireformed reloads for the long shots and the new unfireformed cases for closer shots as there is a slight difference in accuracy between the two, although not enough to be relevant shooting larger game at usual hunting distances.

Different rifles, even of the same manufacturer, have slightly varying distances at which the projectile engages the lands, and this increases for any rifle the more it is shot. The optimum bullet seating depth for best accuracy varies from rifle to rifle. Some rifles shoot better with different powders or primers, or amounts of the same powder or projectiles, than other rifles chambered for the exact same cartridge. This may be sometimes due to the harmonics of the particular barrel.

An accurate load with good velocity in one rifle may show pressure signs in another. When you handload and test those loads, you can tailor the ammunition to suit your particular rifle. There are times when a brand of factory-loaded ammunition happens to be just right for your particular rifle, and on other occasions it may be satisfactory for your needs.

A seasoned hunter should have sound stalking skills and be able to move close to the game they hunt. They should also have quality marksmanship to accurately and humanely shoot game, even when the shots are not easy. The way to develop marksmanship is shooting a lot, either at game or targets. Having the necessary skills does not necessarily mean that you are going to shoot game at extreme distances. It may be that you still impose limits on when you will shoot or pass up the shot. Suitable marksmanship helps to



This lightweight portable hand-held press is useful if you need to do some reloading away from home.

secure game at moderate distances with accurate bullet placement.

It may be argued that you can become a worthy marksman by just buying factory ammunition and going to a SSAA range and shooting that ammo. It is possible to do this, but the high cost of factory ammunition compared to the cost of just the projectiles, powder, primers and cases that last several firings, will probably cause you to be hesitant in the number of rounds you shoot and the frequency of your practice.

You could think you are not that great a shot on target, but you are an outstanding shot on game. The well-respected big game hunter and writer, Colonel Townsend Whelen felt that this was a myth. He believed that if you can't shoot well at a target then you're not going to be skilled at shooting game precisely. He also reasoned that accomplished riflemen are made, not born that way.

Perhaps you do go down the route of buying factory ammunition for some testing or practice at the range. Let's say that ammunition groups three shots in 1½" at 100 yards in your rifle. This may be because that is the limit of the accuracy of the rifle, the ammunition, the shooter or a combination of any of these issues.

You will probably think that's sufficient enough for hunting and leave it at that. Now if you reloaded your ammunition, you may decide to reduce the load by half a grain. So you would go home and make the change to the amount of powder in the cases and come back again perhaps a week later and find that the new load shoots into an inch at 100 yards.

Handloads enable the seating depth of these long Sierra .270 140gr Tipped GameKings to be out as far as the magazine length will allow to move closer to the lands.



It's a good idea to save brass from your factory-loaded ammunition fired from your rifle in case you move into reloading.

Before your next range session, you could opt to alter the seating depth of the projectiles slightly and test the results. By doing this, you are trying to have the groups as small as possible and at the same time, you are improving your shooting skills. You are also enabling your rifle and ammunition to shoot as best as possible. It may turn out that what you could only shoot into 1" some time ago, can drop to say 0.5" with more refinement of your loads and also practice.

As you practise more with your reloads because they are not as expensive to shoot and are probably more accurate, you start to learn more about your rifle and improve your shooting technique. All of this directly



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The benefits of reloading

translates into better shot placement on game. Rather than look upon reloading and testing or practice as a chore, a better approach is to consider it a preliminary part of your hunting.

Another point to remember is to do your reloading when you wouldn't be hunting, so that hunting time is not spent reloading or at the range. It's never been the case that reloading has interfered with my hunting. Even if you were to hunt nearly every day, you can still reload at night or on those occasions when the weather isn't conducive to hunting, and you would probably need to reload anyway to keep your costs down.

Suppose your ammo box holds 50 rounds. Don't wait until you empty the box and need to go hunting before you reload. Say you shoot off 20, reload these well

before your next hunting trip so that you have 50 rounds available.

For those who never intend to handload, you really need to buy a rifle chambered for a cartridge that is readily available now but also (hopefully) in 10 or 20 years' time or for how long you plan to keep that rifle. Centrefire cartridges such as .223, .243, .270 Win, 7-08, 7mm Rem Mag, .308, .30-06 and .375 H&H would probably be your best prospects. This really restricts your choice. New cartridges come out all the time and often they are not a commercial success even though they are superior in design to older, more established cartridges.

Most of these will still be able to be reloaded well after the factory loads disappear from the shelves of the gunshops. Several hundred empty cases could be

purchased when you buy the rifle if you think the cartridge may quickly fade into obscurity.

Alternatively, there are many older cartridges and some of these are wildcats which are superior to current offerings or simply better meet your needs. With many of these, brass is still available or can be made out of another similar case well after they become less popular with virtually no supply of factory-loaded cartridges. With factory-loaded ammo, even if they do stock the cartridge your rifle uses, it may not be the brand you like or the projectile might not be the weight you seek or the type you want.

Perhaps you're retired and not able to hunt as regularly as you would desire. Reloading is an enjoyable hobby in itself and not a bad way to pass away an hour or so... a bit like tying flies if you're a fly fisherman. Firing those less expensive reloads at the range is also pleasurable and keeps your eye in.

If you don't wish to go into reloading just yet, save the brass cases from your factory ammunition you have shot. These can be used later if you change your mind. They will save you money on one of the components of reloading and are already fire-formed to your rifle's chamber. ■



A variety of useful reloading equipment.



Accurate reloads helped secure this pronghorn antelope at 348 yards using a .270 Dakota (similar to 27 Nosler).

Made in Australia

Don Caswell discovers RMK Leather Works fits a perfect niche

Combining leather accessories with blued steel and timber, as in a classic rifle, really rings my bell.

I have for many years carried a few spare rounds on my belt in custom-made leather pouches. Growing wear and tear on that gear, and the need for some other leather carry pouches, prompted me to look for an Aussie-based leather craftsman.

I am happy to support local craftsmen and don't mind a small premium for true quality and a personal connection. I grow frustrated with Chinese-made produce that has replaced so many, formerly reliable, everyday items.

These days, my search took me straight to the computer and the internet. I had already seen some promising posts for Australian-made leather gear on Instagram. I searched on an array of appropriate #tags and followed links back to websites. I also browsed the posts, comments and reviews of happy customers.

It did not take long to find what I was looking for and that turned out to be RMK Leather Works Australia based on the Sunshine Coast of southern Queensland. Their website is rmkleatherworks.com and RMK is also quite active on Instagram as [@rmkleatherworks](https://www.instagram.com/rmkleatherworks) where they present examples of their handiwork with good quality photos and descriptions.

The adjustable RMK Leather Works ammo pouch looks good and holds eight rounds snugly.

RMK Leather Works specialise in minimalist everyday carry solutions, which is one of my favourite themes. My immediate attention was drawn to the ammo pouches and other bush carry pockets. They do the side-ways mounted knife retention sheaths for a number of knives and carry out custom jobs on request.

Their concise pouches that hold a handful of useful carry items, like folding blades and mini torches, stood out to me. Urban usage is also catered for with wallets, multi-purpose pouches, belts and car organisers, among other things. All the leather is high-quality and the workmanship first-class with perfect stitching and excellent embossed designs. Not only are RMK Leather Works' products extremely utilitarian and useful to the road or weekend warrior, they are also eye-catching accessories in their own right.

RMK Leather Works is a family outfit. Matt Keillor is the creator. Himself a keen shooter, he was inspired by some shooting accessories produced by his hobbyist leather-working father. That led to the formation of the company, which now employs other members of the family.

RMK strives for continuous improvement and is constantly looking to expand their product range with innovative adaptable options. They



The flexible stud and foam block caters for ammo from .222 to .30-06.

use a mix of Australian and internationally sourced leathers to make practical, minimalist carry solutions for the tools we love to cart about with us. As the expanding family workforce take over more the day-to-day production, Matt will be freed-up to develop new accessories.

First in line there will be a larger cartridge pouch that can handle longer big bore calibres. Also in the pipeline are cartridge loop belts, bolt pouches and simple, Rhodesian-style rifle slings.

I bought their eight-round ammo pouch and a Leatherman holster. The ammo pouch features an adjustable stud that allows this current version to cater for centrefire ammo in the .222 to .30-06 size range. Inside the pouch is a foam block that holds the rounds securely. Like the Leatherman pouch, there is a strong metal clip, rather than a simple belt loop, that allows it to be attached and removed without needing to unbuckle your belt. The full range of products is shown on their website. The logo is a pop culture reference that viewers of *The Simpsons* will notice resembles Grandpa Simpson's WWII tattoo. ■

Special Australian Hunter offer

RMK Leather Works is offering a 15 per cent discount to *Australian Hunter* readers until December 31, 2022. The promo code for that is **HUNTER15** and it covers belts, ammo pouches, holsters and pouches, patches and tags.



A dog print in front of where a trail camera had been located.

The longest stalk

A sudden decision to check wild dog tracks turns into a testing expedition for **Peter d’Plesse**

The ability to compromise helps a relationship to survive long term. It’s also a useful quality for the hunter. Things don’t always pan out the way we expect. Planning, preparation and effort may yield nothing until the unexpected happens. When the right moment arrives, a snap decision must be made – take the opportunity or let it slip.

During a previous trip, three wild dogs were hunted down over three weeks with

three shots. Perseverance, luck and swift resolve resulted in them being despatched so goats could return for harvesting. Three months later it was a different story. Vegetation growth promoted by bursts of summer rain was still green along the river and channels. It was September and no rain had fallen since March. Pigs were scarce but birdlife were taking the opportunity to use the pools of water that still lay about. Wild dogs were the target but over three weeks only one set of tracks was found, 10 days into the hunt.

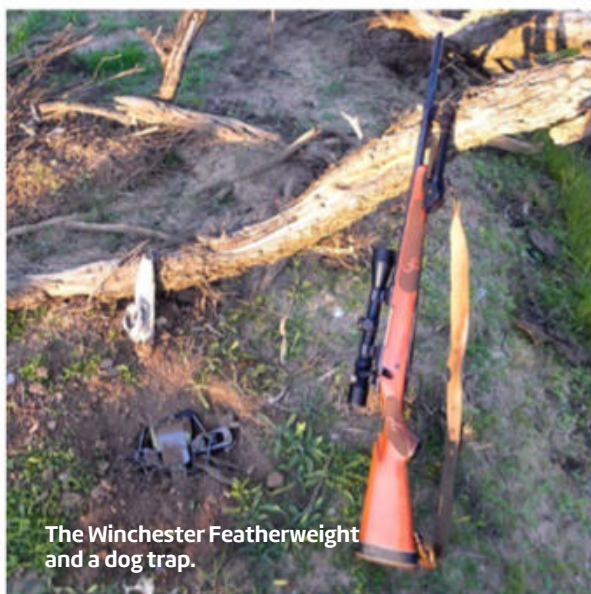
A fence run washed away in March was being repaired using the remains of three old fences that had surrendered to past floods. Property owners sometimes come across dogs while undertaking normal rounds. The plan was that working on the fence would replicate normal station activity. Maybe a dog would come to investigate.

A camera was set up at a T-junction where two fence lines met, one east-west and the other north-south. After nine days with no sign of dogs the camera was relocated. Then

Murphy’s law struck. The next morning tracks were found in the red dirt. A dog had checked out the worksite and moved on. The tracks were followed down the east-west fence past the previous camera location, over to a channel. It was the only dog sign seen and demanded attention.

The Winchester Featherweight was slung over a shoulder with five rounds in the magazine, a GPS tucked into a pocket and compact 8x25 binoculars slipped into another. It would be a quick visit. Some water was gulped down and the bottle tossed back into the Jeep. A few moments were allowed to settle thoughts and get into the right mental zone. Tracking demands total focus with a mind clear of distractions.

In the soft red dirt the tracks were plainly visible. As the ground became harder, rays of slanting light from the steadily rising sun kept the tracks evident. Every slight disturbance of the ground was highlighted. The dog had maintained a steady pace along the channel, skirting dead fallen timber and scrub, taking the easiest route as many



The Winchester Featherweight and a dog trap.

animals choose to do. Old cattle trails provided that path with the softer red dirt receptive to any imprint. At one point the tracks turned suddenly right. Something had caught the dog's attention to demand close inspection, then the tracks turned back to follow the channel.

As the sun climbed in the sky the golden light faded away to make tracking more demanding. Eyes scanned for every faint disturbance left by the dog's paws. Each shred of evidence was searched for – a rolled pebble, a turned leaf or dislodged sticks allowed the tracking to continue until all sign was finally lost.

The last confirmed spore was marked and the area scouted. No sign was found in the expected line of movement. In the bottom of the channel, soft sand between pools of water showed evidence of the dog's path. It had crossed over the channel but was still heading east.

Tracking continued along the north side of the channel. The rising sun meant the 'golden glow' of early morning was just a memory. Increasing glare needed sharp eyes and intense concentration to detect any disturbance to the red soil. Time was running out.

A gravel road dissecting the property was crossed and the sign lost again – a curse but also a bonus. Concentration was relaxed to allow random thoughts of thirst, weary legs and prickly grass seeds to be considered and disposed of either mentally or physically. While making use of the break from the mental demands of tracking, a search forward from the last sign picked up the trail again.

It continued along the channel, heading east towards the river that still held water. It filled the main channel north and south for a few kilometres in this area. A sudden decision to check the dog tracks had turned into a stalk entering its third hour.

Among clumps of grass and herb-age, tracks and disturbance could still be found. Finally the thicker tree line along the river came into view just as the channel turned sharply north. The tracks were lost again. Had it followed the channel or cut across to the river?

If the dog had headed to the river, it had some choices – go north, south, stay put or try dog paddle. The ground had become hard black soil with no discernable sign.

But then a clear print was found with dislodged sticks, leaves and grass showing where the dog had scrambled up the shallow bank. A check on the GPS showed the sign to be almost due east of where the trail had been lost. It had to be the same dog. It was out of season but a howl was launched through cupped hands over the land. It was a poor imitation of a dog but another howl was thrown out as the binoculars scanned the river banks.

Something moved among the shadows across the river. Suddenly a dog was standing in silhouette, head up with ears erect. My howl had grabbed its attention. The rifle was rested on a branch, scope turned to nine power and the cross-hairs settled on the dark outline. The butt was locked into the shoulder against the tree.

Range estimation in the field is always problematic. It seemed a fair way, more than 200m but less than 300. A .270

Winchester should handle that easily. The trigger was caressed and the rifle boomed to slam back in recoil. The shadow dropped into a dark untidy pile under the trees on the opposite river bank. No movement indicated a clean kill. Managing a photograph would turn into a major expedition.

That seemed like the longest stalk I had ever undertaken. Perseverance, luck and a carefully chosen zero resulted in success. The shot was the result of a series of compromises about the rifle, cartridge, bullet and zero being used.

Keeping track of firearms

I ended up with a .270 by default. It was chambered in a Winchester Model 70 Featherweight on a dealer's rack that couldn't be resisted. It's a highly regarded production rifle with a light 560mm barrel that can be expected to shoot progressively higher after a rapid string of shots. Intended as a hunting rifle where only the first shot would count, that was a compromise that could be lived with.

The calibre is noted for long-range ability. People tend to shoot it better than a .30-06, perhaps because of a perception or the real effect of less recoil. The cartridge is a respected performer on most game with the right bullet. It was another acceptable compromise.

The .270 Winchester first appeared back in 1925. It's been referred to as a beltless Magnum with an unusual bore size of .277 (6.8mm). This falls midway between the common 7mm medium game cartridges and the versatile 6.5mm. Experience in Iraq and Afghanistan indicated that the 60-year-old 7.62x39 Russian cartridge was more effective than the 5.56x45 American military round. The .277 calibre was selected by two ex-soldiers as the basis for a special purpose cartridge intended to improve the combat effectiveness of short barrelled (16.5"/420mm) M4 carbines.

Their research showed that bullets in .277 calibre demonstrated the best balance of velocity, accuracy and terminal performance. The bullet was loaded into the vintage .30 Remington cartridge because the M16 family of firearms could be easily adapted to its case head dimensions. While not officially adopted, the designers may



The fence line being repaired replicated station activity.

The longest stalk



Peter's Winchester is ideal for carrying on stalks.

have been onto something. The Chinese used the same .277 bullet size for the experimental 6.8x57 military round. Maybe they were just reacting to American experiments. Perhaps they came to similar conclusions and were covering their bases.

These weren't the only attempts at introducing this calibre as a military round. The British experimented with the .276 Enfield in 1909 that was similar to the Canadian Ross .280 cartridge. The .276 was issued for troop trials but wasn't taken up due to the onset of World War One. The Americans toyed with the .276 Pedersen between 1923 and 1932 in a number of variations.

The T2 cartridge with the same rim and head dimensions as the .30-06 was tested in the early Garand. General McArthur (then Army Chief of Staff) disapproved of any change given the quantity of .30-06 in store.

After the second instalment of war the British had a .280 round for their short bullpup EM-2 rifle but the politics of NATO killed that initiative. As a result the 7.62mm (.308) became the standard military round. It would seem that bad timing, expediency and politics all intervened to eliminate a calibre that special force experience showed to be ideal for combat.

Fortunately, the calibre survived that combination of forces to become a major player in the hunting field. The .270 must be a well-balanced design as the cartridge has been relatively ignored by wildcatters. An added advantage is that bullets of 110, 130 and 150 grains impact close together out to about 200 yards with minimal variations in vertical distribution. The 130-grain projectile at 3060-3150ft/sec makes it fairly easy to place hits at a distance with flat trajectory, high velocity and mild recoil to deliver a long point-blank range (PBR).

PBR is an interesting concept. It's commonly defined as the distance at which

a projectile rises or falls no more than 3" (76mm) above or below the line of sight. Big game hunters sometimes use 4" (100mm) as the definition, at the cost of a higher mid-range trajectory (MRT).

That would make game such as a close rabbit an interesting challenge. A high MRT can be compensated for by aiming low at closer ranges or adjusting the scope up or down to suit the intended conditions. There's room for mishaps in that, like forgetting which way it was adjusted on the previous hunt. Let's stick with the former definition. At 100 yards (90m) that 130-grain bullet would be 3" (76mm) high at 100 yards (90m), on target at about 280 yards (260m), about 2" (50mm) low at 300 yards (275m) and deliver a PBR of about 350 yards (320m).

These figures depend on variables such as powder, primers, cases and projectiles but are a useful guide. It's an impressive performance for a 'non-Magnum' cartridge. A 7mm Remington Magnum would offer a bit more PBR at the cost of burning more powder in a longer barrel to produce a louder bang and bigger kick.

It's a fine cartridge that delivers effective ballistics with a heavier projectile that would suit long-range, big game situations. That was understood when compromising on the .270 Winchester. There are times when the search for 'more' may not justify overlooking the 'good'.

My chosen zero for the .270 is another compromise, being 2.7" (68mm) high at 100 yards (91m), about 1.5" (38mm) high at 200 yards (183m) and around 2" (50mm) low at 300 yards (274m) with a PBR of some 325 yards (297m). Experience has shown that

a hit on a rabbit is achievable at close field ranges by holding a little low, as well as on any pig that can be seen between the short scrub and grass of Outback Australia. Two hundred yards (183m) in the field is a long way. The likelihood of putting a shot at any further distance is dictated by the amount of vegetation.

The key to maximising the probability of a clean hit is having a solid rest. At long range, the slightest sight wobble caused by breathing or a pounding heart, on top of a gentle crosswind, can result in a clean miss at best, or at worst a wounded animal. The accuracy potential of a rifle may be less important than the ability to stalk in close or find ways to steady the aim. Hunting ethics demand that the best possible rest be taken before firing.

In Africa, crossed sticks are commonly used. In Australia, the rifle sling, trees or sitting and prone shooting positions can deliver the same accuracy.

Meanwhile, this dog had tested tracking skills beyond my previous experience. When perseverance finally delivered an opportunity to take the shot, compromises on rifle, scope, cartridge and zero, as well as use of a stable rest, delivered the desired result. Every hunting situation is the culmination of a similar set of developments. Best results are delivered when a hunter is aware of this and makes the necessary decisions after careful thought.

After the shot, it was going to be a long walk back under a climbing sun and rising temperatures. The Featherweight tag of this Winchester's model name was going to be put to a final test. ■



The longest stalk ever undertaken by Peter resulted in a clean despatch of this wild dog.



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Victure this

Jan Kaptein snaps up the budget HC300 trail camera... so how does it perform?

It would be difficult to name a day on which I have not spent at least some time observing wildlife or its habitat. Even when I need to be in town, I drive past a paddock and will notice the trail in the wet grass where a fox has crossed or I scan for tracks along steep escarpments to see if deer, pigs or other animals have regular paths they follow.

When I find promising signs or tracks, I often return at various hours of the day, until I physically see the animal that leaves the tracks. Well, in theory. Some species, like chital deer, are skittish in the open. Some avoid being spotted altogether by only moving after dusk.

If you know the area well, you may be able to 'catch' them at night with a flashlight, but the odds are stacked against you. If you are still keen to know what moves about the area then trail cameras, like the Victure HC300, are your best bet.

Personally, I have always liked to photograph wildlife with traditional cameras. I somehow held off on trail cameras for a long time. My arguments were that image quality was not up to scratch, batteries would run flat and that they would be a hassle to install. And to an extent these arguments are all valid.

However, once one of my hunting buddies started to use them, I quickly came to appreciate their value. Not as a tool that will capture the image to make you 'wildlife photographer of the year', but as an item that will allow any hunter to consistently catalogue which species move on a certain trail, at what time and in what weather conditions.



The HC300 is well camouflaged in the bush.

Trail cameras come in many different types, varying from the simplest of snap-pers that will only take a low-resolution picture of an animal during daytime to models that record high resolution pictures as well as videos, with or without sound during day or night, sending the footage to your phone or computer in real time.

As a keen wildlife photographer, my dream is to have a trail camera that will capture images of the same quality as my regular cameras do. So, I started my search. I tried a fair few models, among which

were some of the ones that had promising specifications or rave reviews.

While quality did differ significantly between them, not a single one managed to produce images that were anywhere near the worth I had hoped for. Daytime photos veer from good enough to identify individual animals, gender and some additional details to mediocre, allowing recognition of the species but not much more.

Night-time footage has been black and white in all models I have used, but results varied even more. From really quite good



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Victure this

and detailed to so fuzzy you would have trouble to tell the difference between a curious cow and a wallaby.

While the mediocre image quality initially put me off, it did not take me too long to change my mind about what I wanted from a trail camera. I let go of my search for one that made 'the best' pictures and came up with an entirely different list of requirements.

Images have to be sufficiently detailed to identify individual animals, both during the day and at night. The delay between the motion sensor being triggered and the camera taking a picture has to be as short as possible. And the weatherproofing needs to allow use in monsoonal as well as hot and cold conditions, while battery life needs to be at least a week or two. This made finding the right trail camera much easier. Particularly now they have become more widely available.

Today, I use a number of them, most for different purposes and in various locations. On my private properties and in remote areas, I use a few fancier models, but on public land or in places that have other hunters on them, I tend to go with models that do the job, but which will not break the bank if they go missing. One of these models that has worked well for me is the Victure HC300.

Most likely, you have never heard of Victure. Neither had I. Their website (govicture.com) is not great and all I gather from clicking around on it is that they produce budget electronics and are about 'smart life, just for you'.

The camera itself comes in camouflage print, is rated IP66 and takes 1080p video (avi, 15fps) as well as 20 megapixel still images. It is powered by eight AA batteries or an external power source via the integrated jack. Footage is recorded on a standard SD memory card.

In the box comes the camera, a strap and a threaded perch to mount the camera. The trigger delay is 0.3 seconds and it uses 38 no-glow infrared light-emitting diodes (LEDs, 940nm). It records time, date and temperature, which you can have added to the footage if you want. It is possible to select video or still capture as well as time-lapses. For video and still images you can choose how long it records, how many images it captures when triggered and for photos you can select lower resolutions too.

In use, the Victure HC300 does what it says on the box. It takes quite decent photographs of animals, during daylight and in the dark. If animals move quickly, the shutter speed is not high enough to capture them in detail, but you will be able to identify the species without a problem.

For animals that travel at a normal pace, it is easy to identify specific traits such as gender, fur patterns and things like the number of points on antlers and so on. The motion sensor is quite sensitive, as I have captured images of small critters at night.

To save memory space, I never really use the video function, but a few tests yielded similar results. Resolution and frame rates are sufficient to identify the animal. Do not expect David Attenborough quality footage though.

The eight AA batteries keep the camera going for a good while. I have noticed a rather disconcerting drop from full to about 60 per cent, but from there, the camera just maintains this charge level well, dropping slowly. I often have the Victure HC300 out for two or three weeks at a time, during which it routinely captures in excess of 500 images.

So far, I have never had the batteries die. There is an option to hook the camera up to an external power source, which makes little sense to me unless you set it up to watch your front yard. This sounds like an odd application for a trail camera, but in the box you will find a little ball head mount that you can attach to a fence post with a few screws.

In the field, you will probably opt for the strap that goes through two loops on the back of the camera body. This allows you to fix it to a tree or any other support you find in the bush.



The battery compartment is at the bottom of the camera.



The forward-facing preview screen makes installing it easier.

All in all, the camera works well for a budget device. However, a few things are less than ideal. The camouflage pattern is greenish and blends in well if you hunt in more humid and wooded areas. In arid and dry places, the colour is 'off'.

Animals will generally not care, but it makes the camera easy to spot for other people. Another thing is that even though the night-time LEDs are advertised to be invisible, they do not seem to be for all animals. Personally, I cannot see them if I trigger the camera at night. My dog seems to be perfectly oblivious of them too.

Pigs and deer have not yet reacted to them in any of the photos I have captured. However, foxes can certainly detect them. As can be seen in the night-time picture of the fox, the animal is clearly startled. This was not a one-off occurrence. Foxes in different areas responded in the same way. Finally, the mounting strap and loops only allow you to fasten the camera at the top end of the body. This is fine if you find a straight tree or other support. Out in the bush, where no tree goes straight it can make installing the camera tedious and I much prefer straps at the top and bottom like some of my other cameras have. This allows me to level the camera body or point it in the desired direction with a stick or rock behind it before fastening the second strap.

The bottom line is that if you are looking for a trail camera with decent image quality and battery life that does not break the bank, the Victure HC300 is certainly worth consideration at about \$120. I am pleased with the results obtained from mine and do not feel uneasy when I install it on remote properties or on public land where it could become lost.

The camera has proved itself to withstand both heat and torrential rains and with a forward-facing preview screen, it is easy to ensure proper orientation. The catch is that you may struggle to keep it pointed there due to the single strap attachment, but I have sorted this by screwing the ball head mounting perch that came in the box to a wooden stick. I just drive this into the ground or tie it to whatever post I can find and mount the camera if I do not find a suitable support.

One thing to keep in mind is to seek permission of the property owner or manager if you decide to put up cameras. People can be taken aback or feel their privacy being invaded if they happen upon an unexpected camera. So far, no one I have asked has objected to me using them and the Victure HC300 has taught me a lot about what animals are present in the area I put it up in, as well as their habits. ■



Specifications:

Dimensions as measured (height x width x depth): 140x106x68mm

Weight with (8 high capacity rechargeable) batteries: 506g

Detection angle: 90 degrees

Trigger delay: 0.3 seconds, 3 consecutive shots

Resolution (photo/video): 20 megapixels/1080P at 15fps

Power source: Eight AA batteries or external

Waterproof: Yes, IP66

Warranty: 12 months



Jan uses a stick to angle the unit down.

Sellier & Bellot ammunition

Sellier & Bellot is a Czechoslovakian company established in 1825, making it one of the world's longest existing manufacturers of sporting and military ammunition. The company has spread its reach throughout Europe and now exports globally. Sellier & Bellot is distributed in Australia by Herron Security & Sport.

In centrefire, Sellier & Bellot hunting rifle ammunition is available from 17 Hornet up to .45-70 Government. There is a good choice of projectile loadings in the Sellier & Bellot line. Apart from a variety of in-house soft-points, hollow-points, FMJ and monolithic copper, they also load premium projectiles from Nosler, Hornady and Sierra.

These days I am shooting .243 Winchester, so I sourced a quantity of that loaded with the 100-grain Nosler Partition. I am a great fan of the Nosler Partition and have used it in many calibres from .224 to .458. Sellier & Bellot quote a muzzle velocity of 2840 feet per second with this loading. In my Sauer XT 101 with its 22" barrel, I measured an average muzzle velocity of 2815fps. A surprise came when I tested this ammo in my 20" barrelled Merkel K3. Averaged over a couple of dozen rounds, the measured muzzle velocity was 2890fps.

Accuracy was fine from both rifles with a consistent 1 MOA achieved. With its controlled expansion, the Nosler Partition offers the best of both worlds – shock and penetration – maximising the effectiveness of any calibre it is used in.

Being a premium projectile, the Sellier & Bellot loading of the Nosler Partition carries a cost premium as well. Unless you are particularly well-heeled, this is not the sort of ammo to buy in bulk for a major culling exercise. However, for a discerning hunter who does not handload and wants to use the Nosler Partition to raise the chances of success on a few hunts each year, this is an ideal choice. ■

Sellier & Bellot .243 Win 100-grain Nosler Partition loading.



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#Industry Data 2021

Javelinas in the Trans-Pecos

David Duffy treks Texas for 'skunk pigs' in the mountainous Chihuahuan Desert

The days were mild and very pleasant even though it was the middle of winter in the Chihuahuan Desert. I had a cardboard target in one hand, a sandbag in the other and my rifle on my shoulder, looking for a suitable place to check the zero on my scope early in the morning of the first day of my five-day hunt. The desert vegetation came up close to the cabin that I was staying in. The cook had emptied the kitchen scraps about 30 paces from the rear corner of the cabin and there, eating those morsels, was the first javelina that I had even seen. This was a good sign. Just as I laid eyes on him, he was off. The hunt was in the arid Trans-Pecos region in West Texas, close to the Mexican border. I was after javelinas and free-range aoudads (as they are called in Texas) or Barbary sheep, as they are known in New Mexico.

I often try to arrange some pig hunting for the remainder of a hunt if I am successful with the primary species sought. I've done this for water buffaloes, bantengs, scrub bulls and also several deer species. That way I'm not spending several days filling in time at the camp or cabin if I have success with the main species early in the hunt.



Javelina hoofprints in the mud.

Javelinas are not really pigs, despite looking like pigs. Sometimes they are referred to as skunk pigs because of a large scent gland located on their back which gives them a strong musky odour. Javelinas don't have the outer dewclaw on the rear leg which a feral pig has. Some sources describe them as 'New World' pigs, whereas feral pigs are dubbed as 'Old World' pigs. Together they make up the suborder, Suina. The javelina, which is Spanish and pronounced 'havelina', is usually of the collared peccary variety which

have a white band of coarse hair around their neck. There's also the white-lipped peccary of Central and South America, the chacoan peccary of Paraguay, Bolivia and Argentina and the giant peccary of Brazil.

The legendary hunter and outdoor writer Jack O'Connor, had a great deal of praise for the javelinas which he hunted in Arizona and Sonora. In an article in *Outdoor Life*, published in 1943, he said of them: 'Pound for pound he is the toughest and most dangerous game animal in America and he is one of the few that will attack a human

Low desert vegetation provides good cover for javelinas in the Chihuahuan Desert.

being unprovoked.' Later in the article he explains that some of the 'attacks' are because of their poor eyesight, which is similar to some of the 'charges' by feral pigs when trying to escape a threat. In thick bush country he said that they are one of the hardest animals to kill but paradoxically they are one of the easiest to kill in open country, if the wind is right.

When Colonel Townsend Whelen was stationed in Panama to help guard the newly constructed Panama Canal, he often hunted both the collared peccary and the white-lipped peccary for food. He also considered them to be dangerous and said the scent gland on their back must be cut out as soon as they are shot to avoid tainting the meat.

If you like hunting pigs and admire the ivory tusks of a feral pig, which stick up from the bottom jaw, you probably would appreciate a javelina, which has similar length tusks protruding from both the top of their mouths and their lower jaw in opposite directions. A good size javelina boar would equate roughly to the size of a small to medium feral boar in Australia.

The javelinas thrive in the desert where the prickly low vegetation gives them a lot of cover. They obtain moisture from eating prickly pear and cholla, types of cactus. The Chihuahuan Desert vegetation where I was hunting was lower and sparser than the Sonoran Desert foliage, which was often well above head height and included mesquite trees. In the Chihuahuan Desert, there were lots of thigh high creosote bushes and ocotillo which is a tall spiky plant, prickly pear plus other cactuses. The creosote bush provides excellent cover for the javelinas, which are just as flighty as feral hogs.

The Barbary sheep (which are neither a true sheep nor a true goat) were transplanted to New Mexico and Texas in the 1950s (originally from Africa) following the extirpation of bighorn sheep in the area in the 1940s. These have spread rapidly to the Chinati Range, which was where I was hunting, and many other ranges in the area, as well as into Mexico. Apparently, ranchers wanted large game to hunt in the desert and the Barbary sheep were more disease resistant, coped with drought and bred more prolifically than bighorn sheep. The javelinas I saw were occupying the flats and like feral pigs, often in mobs. Although their eyesight is poor like feral pigs, their sense of smell and hearing are excellent.

The predators of the javelinas are mainly mountain lions, bobcats and coyotes. I didn't see any coyotes and this may account for the strong presence of grey foxes on the property that I was on. Grey foxes are smaller than our red foxes and coyotes kill them. The javelinas are low to the ground and when attacked by coyotes can use their long tusks to puncture or rip open the underside of a coyote (or wild dog). The javelinas also sometimes kill rattlesnakes by biting through them.



A javelina boar that David shot in the Trans-Pecos region of West Texas.

Javelinas in the Trans-Pecos

There was a mountain lion (cougar) in the area that had recently been causing quite a few problems. Two foals had been taken by the lion from the yards next to the Mexican-style cabin I was staying in. The cat had also killed a few rams in the mountains.

We were doing a lot of glassing on this hunt for most of the day using a Swarovski spotting scope, looking into the mountains from the flats or foothills for a good ram. The distances were way too far for my 8x30 binoculars to identify a ram with horns in excess of 30". Often the rams were a couple of kilometres away. Once a possible good ram was spotted, we would traverse the flats and take a closer look from the lower foothills.

On the flats were mule deer, something that was lacking in the area where I hunted in Sonora. Also on the property were the very localised Carmen deer which are claimed to be a sub-species of whitetail deer. These were discovered in the Sierra Del Carmen range in Coahuila, Mexico during 1940. The numbers of these deer on the property are not large enough to hunt at present and like all the other game, are completely free-range.



The Chinati Range, where David hunted Barbary sheep, while he sought javelinas on the flats.

It was late afternoon on the first day of my hunt and we were approaching the foothills to gain a closer look at a ram when I spotted a mob of about 10 javelinas in the cover of the creosote bushes, about 50 paces away. I tapped the guide on the shoulder, who was looking towards the hills, and pointed to the group of javelinas. I carefully stalked up to 30 paces, but they were onto me as the wind was wrong and they started to move off. Near the end of the mob was a large boar and he was still

munching on cholla cactus. He looked to be the biggest skunk pig in the mob, as far as I could tell with the thick cover. His shoulder was obscured by cactus.

The 3-10 scope on my lightweight Remington .270 WSM was on 4-power, which is what I leave it on when walking, so I quickly turned the dial to 3-power. I had the choice of shooting him in the rear part of his body or through the cholla cactus to where his shoulder would be. I aimed at where I determined his shoulder

Mule deer well camouflaged in the desert vegetation.



was behind the cactus and squeezed the trigger. The 130-grain Nosler AccuBond, which was powered by 66.5 grains of AR2213SC, found its mark and the javelina dropped right on the spot. He was a very nice-sized boar.

The .270 WSM was unnecessarily powerful for javelinas, but it was a calibre suitable for the tough aoudad rams in the mountains, where shots are often over 300m. Jack O'Connor said that the javelina is a big game animal and should be shot with a big game rifle. He describes shooting them with a .30-06. I believe that he would also have been happy to use one of his .270 Win rifles when hunting javelinas.

Bullet technology has improved dramatically since 1943. I consider that a minimum calibre of .243 with well-constructed projectiles of around 90 grains, such as the Nosler AccuBond or the Swift Scirocco (one in 9" twist barrel required) would be excellent for javelinas. Finding any javelinas in the low desert vegetation after the shot may be difficult if a smaller calibre is used. The big game calibres will often kill more emphatically, but many hunters can place their shots better with a slightly less powerful calibre.

I've often wondered whether the .17 Javelina Wildcat (necked down .222 case shortened with shoulder pushed back) which was developed in 1958 by Paul Marquart, of A & M Gunshop in Prescott, Arizona, would be too small for javelinas. Stoutly constructed .17

calibre 30-grain projectiles are not readily available, while the lighter 20-grain and 25-grain projectiles are not designed for deep penetration and controlled expansion in medium size game. Javelinas move fast once disturbed and the low-lying desert vegetation may make good shot placement difficult in certain situations. As such, I would strongly advise against a .17 Javelina or similar cartridge.

The next decade will be challenging for javelinas in West Texas. The feral pig population in the Lone Star state is exploding despite vast amounts of money being spent on aerial culling. There were recent sightings of feral pigs within 21km of where I was hunting. The property owner was concerned that feral pigs may have already reached his property and were frequenting a natural spring. I suggested that he always take his beat-up Mossberg .30-30 lever-action rifle with iron sights with him whenever he checked the spring. Hopefully, the javelinas won't be too adversely affected by the feral pig invasion.

A couple of nights later, my roasted javelina was served for dinner. The javelinas don't taste as good as feral pork, possibly due to the large scent gland on their back. However, as Jack O'Connor said: 'They do not need to be good eating to be fine game animals. They are hard to get, their heads make fine trophies, and they are brave and fearless.' ■



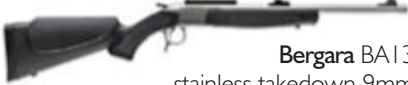
Javelinas have nice tusks from both their upper and lower jaw.



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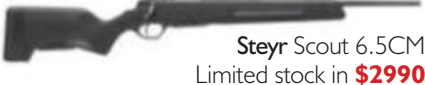
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The right balance

The Hornady Auto Charge Pro powder dispenser certainly pulls its weight for **Matthew Cameron**

I must state that I normally do not use a powder dispenser as such. And the reason is simple. Usually, when loading up cases in a particular calibre to test ammunition for velocity and groups there is a maximum of 10 cases. Therefore, it is not worth the effort to use a powder dispenser for such a small number with the requirement to then change powders, often several times, when reloading.

However, coincidentally when asked to review the Hornady Auto Charge Pro I did need to load up some 6.5x55 cases for hunting as my new supply of 160gr projectiles had arrived. In addition, there were some .243 Winchester cases to load as I had recently finished load development, utilising a new barrel. Furthermore, my supply of .22-250 Remington ammunition for

various light-skinned game needed to be replaced. This all fitted in perfectly with the dispenser review. Powders to be used were AR2213SC, AR2208 and AR2206H.

The unit supplied by OSA Australia was well packed with all of the extra bits contained in a single box, while the enclosed instruction leaflet is only six pages in length, easy to read and clear in intent.

On each occasion of use I followed Hornady's instructions and allowed the unit to warm up for 15 minutes, then calibrated it according to the manual. It always indicated a pass. Personally, I found this process was useful and gave confidence. Initial impressions were good and I liked the levelling bubble and two finger grips on the powder pan. It seemed all straightforward, so it was time to put the unit to work.

The first powder used was AR2206H. If a mistake is made entering the powder load, you just hit zero and start again. The box advertises that the dispensed weight will be within +/- one tenth of a grain, which proved correct. I loaded 50x.22-250 Remington cases and at

Matthew successfully experimented with different powders and times.





The large capacity powder hopper is simple to empty.



The tidy red Hornady dispenser on Matthew's bench.

random throughout the process I checked the dispensed load on an independent, accurate electronic scale.

The expected load was 35.5gr and eight loads were exactly this. Two showed 35.6gr on the check scale. In addition, one load was 35.7gr and the machine correctly called it as an overload. These were rare and usually associated with stick powders.

Next up was AR2208, in this case a 38.8gr load was programmed into the dispenser – the cases .243 Winchester. Again, I checked the weights on a different electronic scale at random. Odd loads were +/- one-tenth of a grain and the rest exact. The residual powder, AR 2208, drained from the hopper easily, assisted by light tapping. To clean the barrel out you just hit the dispense button.

The loading with AR2213SC more or less mirrored the AR2208, in that only odd loads on the alternative electronic scale showed a difference of one-tenth of a grain under the dispensed figure of 46gr. With both AR2208 and AR2213SC I followed the Hornady advice and ran the machine on the slower dispense setting for more accuracy. This worked best on a setting of 3 or less. On this setting and filling other cases with the same powder, a random sample of 15 cases checked on the external electronic scale showed an exact dispensed load of 44gr. Even on this setting it's much faster than manually weighing powder.



Check weights, as you should calibrate the dispenser each time it is to be used.

Overall, the unit dispensed powder with a high degree of precision. Other than the powders mentioned, I used AR2225, AR2217, RE25 and RE26, experimenting with settings, times and higher powder loads.

The manual was correct – the slower the setting the better the exactness. When it made a mistake and threw an excessive charge outside the +/- one-tenth of a grain limit, it displayed the error. Just dump the overload back in the hopper and press enter to continue. The unit did not throw a charge that was less than one-tenth of a grain from the nominated figure.

Emptying the powder hopper was easy and pressing the dispense button cleared the dispensing tube, while the supplied

brush took care of any stray kernels of powder. Light tapping also helped. I did not become caught but just ensure to return the powder drain spout to the vertical position before pouring in the next lot, or it could be embarrassing.

The unit is available wherever Hornady products are sold across Australia at a recommended retail price of \$639 – visit osaaustralia.com.au for your local outlet.

As mentioned, I do not in the normal course of events have a need for a dispenser, but it's difficult to pass up on the Hornady unit. It worked as advertised. In short, I could not fault it. Equivalent dispensers appear to retail for about \$1000 so the Auto Charge Pro proves good value for money. ■



Estuarine or saltwater crocodiles are misnamed. Many never leave the freshwater billabong and river reaches they are born in. Their colour is darker than those that live in saltwater environments.

Crocodile escapades

Dick Eussen reflects on the hunting days of yesteryear along with incidents and present-day dangers

Crocodiles are the world's largest reptiles, some like the saltwater variety, having been recorded in modern times to 8m in length.

The late Mrs Kris Pawlowski shot an 8.3m monster in the Norman River, below Karumba, in 1957. Our family were good friends with the Pawlowski clan. She once told me that she had shot more than 3000 crocodiles in the Gulf Country.

Armed with a Winchester Model 70 rifle in .270 Winchester calibre, topped with a Pecar 4x12 scope and loaded with 130-grain Winchester Silvertip ammunition, she stalked the sleeping giant and killed it with one shot.

Her husband Ron, a respected freelance outdoor writer and wildlife film producer, had three frames left on his 35mm Nikon camera and used them before an incoming tide forced the couple to leave the carcass.

They tied it up to a mangrove tree and returned at low tide to find that the rope had broken, and the carcass had vanished.

Ron, who submitted photographs to international photo agencies, sent the three 35mm Kodachrome slides off to London and New York but never heard what happened to them. Some unkind people said that the crocodile was a hoax, but I knew locals who lived in Karumba at the time and the big saurian was a regular sighting when it drifted in and out with the tides past Karumba Point. Some were downright angry with the couple for shooting it.

But others used to aim at it with .22 Rimfire and .303 Lee-Enfield rifles, but not one ever hit it until Kris killed it, something she told me she always regretted.

The Pawlowskis hailed from Poland and settled in Karumba on the shores of the Gulf of Carpentaria to make a career as



Mrs Kris Pawlowski was credited with shooting the largest crocodile in Australia.

crocodile hunters. They formed the first commercial crocodile farm in Australia on their five-acre block at The Point in 1965. But many were hostile to the venture. One day the couple returned from a crocodile hunting expedition to find that someone had poured sump oil in the pens and killed most of the reptiles. Disheartened, they left the fishing village and settled in Mount Isa before retiring in Mareeba. Both have since passed on.



Crocodile farming is all the go. Once established, it can mean big money from skins and other products.



A creche of Tomkinson River crocodiles. This photo was taken in July, which means that some crocodiles breed late in the season.

Farming

Nowadays crocodile farming is part of the northern scene. Operating costs are huge before any money from skins can be made as it takes about six years before a croc is large enough to be killed and skinned. The meat is also used, with restaurants being the main buyers.

Commercial crocodile hunting was big in the old days. Shooting began just after World War Two and continued until 1974 when the Federal Labor Government stopped all crocodile product exports, making them valueless overnight. Western Australia, Queensland and the Northern Territory declared all crocodiles protected. The tropical wetlands fell silent as the skin hunters packed up and looked for other means of income. It was perhaps timely as they had almost eliminated the reptiles.

Later, people like Dr Graeme Gow, a crocodile researcher in the NT, saw value in farming crocodiles and crocodile farms

were becoming established in the tropics. Many have visiting hours where tourists may view the feeding of the saurians, while wildlife parks also have crocodile shows to lure visitors.

In the mid-1970s, my brother-in-law Cal Wilson, Geoff Ladbrook and I caught freshwater crocodiles in the Gregory River and Lawn Hill Creek to stock a private zoo in Mount Isa, owned by Kevin Price.

Our method was to work as a team during dark nights. One bloke operated the outboard, another a Dolphin torch, and the catcher would grab a light-blinded croc by the neck and haul it on board. This meant laying across the bow and using both hands for a good hold.

While not too dangerous, it could be if the grip went wrong. A big one would give us some curry before we managed to hoist it on board and tie it up. Old mate, the late Harry Butler of the popular ABC TV show *In the Wild with Harry Butler*, was ripped in the

Lawn Hill Gorge by a big freshie when he grabbed it by the snout and it twisted in his hand. The injury required several stitches. Harry let me do the catching after that.

In the 1960/70s it was rare to see a freshwater crocodile in the Gulf Country streams, while spotting a saltwater croc was akin to winning the Lotto. Shooting, barramundi netting and other forms of hunting, had all but eliminated them. Only the Top End had pockets of crocodiles, but in my years in Kakadu, during the whole of the 1980s, I only saw a handful of salties in the first couple of years, but just enough to make me wary and take care.

However, these days Australia's tropical north has crocodiles to spare. Their recovery has been amazing and there are no tropical streams or beaches that are safe due to their presence.

Attacks

Crocodile attacks are not uncommon. Rarely does a build-up season go by without a fatality, normally somebody swimming in known crocodile habitat. A few years ago, a bloke, dared by his mates, swam across the Mary River Bridge Lagoon, east from Darwin. No problems, so he tried to swim back but paid the price.

Also, a fisherman jagged his lure in the Adelaide River. He swam out to recover it, but there were more than barramundis on the bite.

Campers sometimes become the hunted. A family set up on the shores of Cape Melville National Park on the Cape York Peninsula had an unwelcome visitor during the night. It grabbed a man, who was asleep in a lean-to with his wife and baby and tried to pull him into the water. His mother-in-law came to the rescue and bravely jumped on its back, but the croc grabbed her by the arm, rolled her over and broke it.

Her son was sleeping nearby. An avid pistol club shooter, en route to Weipa for a competition, he grabbed his 9mm pistol and entered the fray. He shot the croc twice in the head and killed it. But the nightmare had only just started for the family, the wounded having to suffer hours of bad roads to reach the Rinyirru Ranger Station for a medivac evacuation.

Crocodile escapades



The croc hunters were paid big money for their skins. Many made it a full-time career.

Payback

Peter Pan Quee, born on the banks of the mighty Daly River to an Aboriginal mother and Chinese father, was a living legend in the Top End. I met Peter in my Jabiru days when he was the manager at the CSIRO Kapalga buffalo research station, where his expertise and knowhow of buffaloes and crocodiles were utilised by researchers. Peter had the distinction of being one of the last buffalo hide shooters, a risky career. He also shot crocodiles.

One day I was caretaking at the height of the wet season on a remote northern Gulf cattle station, west from Chillagoe. All about were black-blue clouds, alive with lightning and thunderous skies that opened every evening and dropped flooding rain, marooning me 35km from the nearest neighbour.

After tea, I switched on the TV, which is delivered by satellite. ABC News reported that another Top End legend, Peter Pan Quee had gone to that great billabong in the sky.

I had caught up with Peter on and off over the years and we shared many a yarn

about hunting and fishing. He said that he had an old Land Rover and timber dinghy in the early days.

"I always shot at night with a torch light to pick out the eyes," he said. "Once shot you would roll the croc into the boat, but if you had a big one it needed to be pulled up the bank and you had better make sure you got the skin off or by morning it would stink to high heaven and be useless."

Peter was married to Lena and they had seven children. I ran into him years later when the couple had retired to Darwin. He had a strange tale to tell as he reckoned that the crocs put a curse on him as punishment for shooting their kin.

"Only joking," he said, "but you never can tell. We were camped on the Daly, me, Lena, our son, Peter, Kathy, his daughter, and our two grandchildren, Brett and Mark. We put the tent near the river, which was shared by the kids and us."

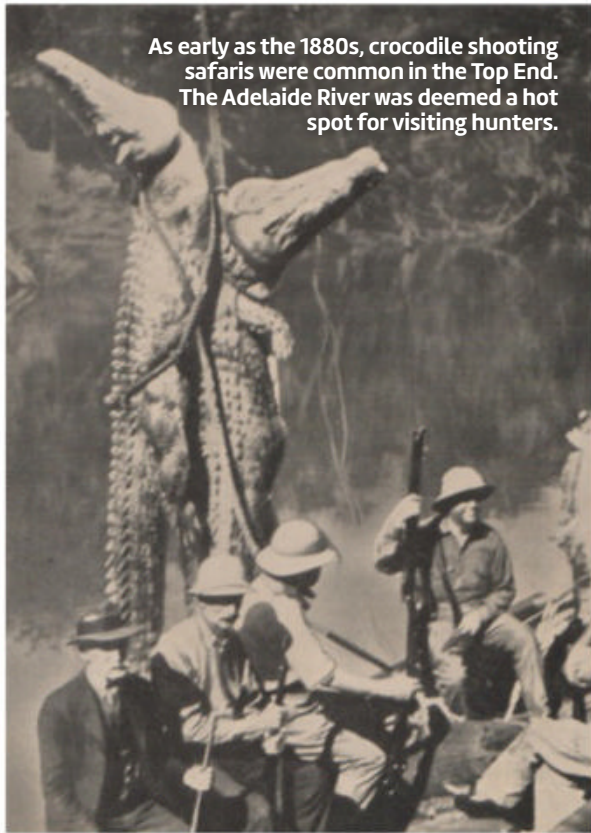
During the night, a crocodile attacked and grabbed Lena. Young Peter rushed to her aid and grabbed the croc by the snout and put pressure on its eyes with both thumbs. It let go and fled, but Peter Senior reminisced

that they were lucky it did not roll, because being trapped inside the tent, its occupants would have drowned in the river.

"The croc would have too," he added seriously. "Lena was hurt badly with both sides of her rib cage crushed and her arms



Noted outdoor writer Ron Pawlowski with the skin of a crocodile that he and his wife cured themselves.



As early as the 1880s, crocodile shooting safaris were common in the Top End. The Adelaide River was deemed a hot spot for visiting hunters.

and body covered in teeth marks. Her liver was lacerated. She later said that she thought a wallaby was scratching nearby, but it was that croc sneaking up on us.”

Lena was taken by an Air Ambulance to Darwin Hospital where she made a full recovery. The crocodile got away.

Close encounters

My own adventures with crocodiles have also been memorable at times. In 1986, I had a close call when a small crocodile tried to follow a hooked barra over the top of the tinnie’s bow. I had Cal Wilson weld a high rail over the bow and grab rails on the sides for extra security and height.

By mid-morning, after a successful barra foray at the mouth of Magela Creek, we dropped the ‘plonk’ (a lead weight) over the side and moored midstream. A heavy plonk is ideal for muddy bottoms because they do not collect mud, keeping your tinnie clean.

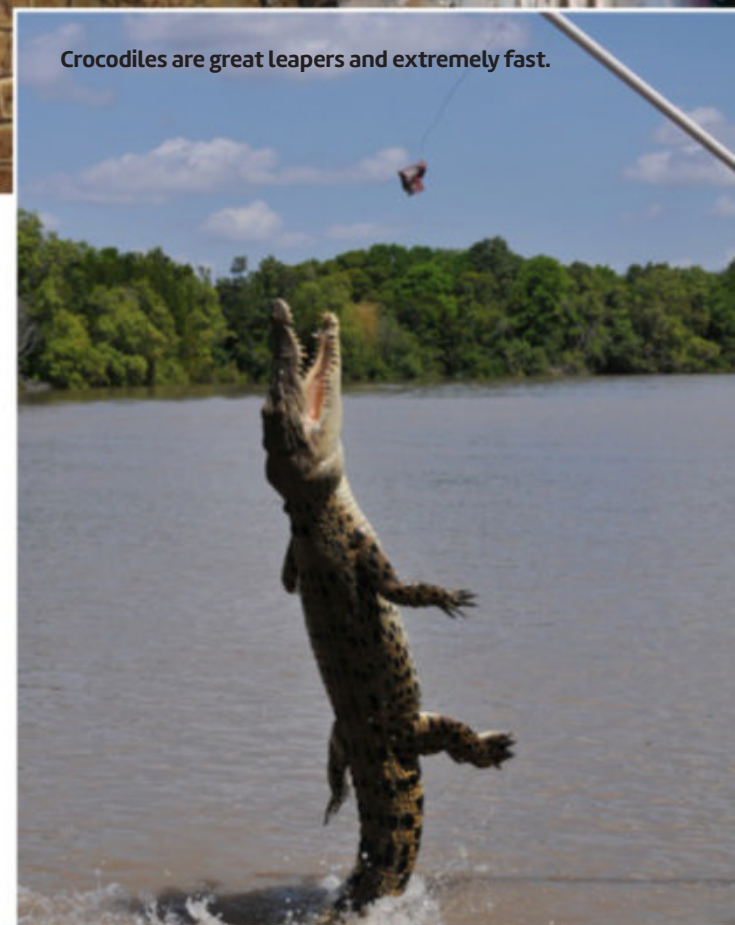
We had an early lunch waiting for the tide to turn as we needed high water to carry us over mud bars and the rock bar below the boat ramp upstream. A couple of icy beers from the esky for lunch, followed by a nap, was the plan. My companion Craig leaned back against the new bow rail, his elbows on the rail. I propped myself against the outboard and slumbered off. Sun and beers are a deadly combination...



The Adelaide River is the only place in the country where it is legal to feed wild crocodiles. This is Brutus, a 5m-plus monster.

I woke up with a start, the hair on the back of my neck on edge, my body in alert mode. I could sense something moving behind me, a rush of air perhaps, or spray forced ahead of it. There was no hesitation, I pushed myself forward with speed and hit the floor of the boat. There was a huge crash that rocked the tinnie, almost turning it over. I saw Craig’s eyes open wide...

I stood up, an oar in my hand, and spied a 4m crocodile behind the outboard, preparing itself for the next assault. But it just looked at me for a second and dived before coming to the surface about 20m away. That was too close and the only reason that it did not follow its first assault



Crocodiles are great leapers and extremely fast.

Crocodile escapades

was that when I stood up it was faced with large, instead of small, prey.

Craige thought that it had hit me on my shoulder and slammed me forward onto the floor, as he had woken when I suddenly moved. “No, it hit the motor and the back of the boat,” I said.

Crocodiles are opportunistic hunters and this one was no exception. We had observed it while fishing around the rocks. It was swimming about 100m away, vanishing for a few minutes and resurfacing, generally about 20m from its dive, a typical curious crocodile habit and common in the Top End. But when we relaxed, ignored it and dropped our guard, it attacked.

Another time I was filleting barra on a hard-muddy bank near the Magela Creek overflow, about 8m from the tinnie, its bow pushed into the mud. A mate was fishing from the shore on the other side of it. A huge croc silently surfaced about 5m away between the tinnie and me. Startled, I jumped up, tossed a barra frame at it and ran up the bank. At the same time my mate hooked a nice barra, almost behind the tinnie.

It leaped and tail walked and confused the croc. The reptile quickly reversed back in the water and swam behind the tinnie. I jumped in the tinnie and bashed its sides with an oar, the noise making the saurian

dive. I yelled to my mate to get back in the boat. He did and landed the barra, but the croc watched it all from about 15m away. That was one scary episode and it stopped me from filleting barra on the banks of muddy rivers forever.

In the past I have shot a few crocodiles of both species. The freshie is not bad eating when roasted over coals, tasting like fish, though salties taste according to what they eat. When they live in rivers they seem like fish, but those in freshwater swamps taste

like strong gamy chicken, or a mix of both, probably because their diet consists of waterfowl and the odd wallaby.

There is little sport in croc shooting for a good marksman as basking crocodiles are easily shot during the day, while spotlighting at night is just murder. Nowadays they enjoy protection and can't be hunted, but the roles are reversed and instead we, once the hunter, have become the hunted – and we are not protected. Be careful out there... ■



Rock art in many Arnhem Land locations features crocodile paintings, proof that they played an important and often dangerous role in the daily lives of the first people.



Cahills Crossing is a popular fishing spot but also a magnet for crocodiles attracted there by bountiful sea mullets and barramundi.

The notorious Cahills Crossing on the East Alligator River has the dubious distinction of being the most dangerous river roadway in Australia.

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Gary and Rocky with a couple of small pigs taken by the coach-gun.

Release the hounds

Teamwork leads to boars and a buff for Gary Hall

As we rounded a tight bend in the narrow track, a large dark shape caught our attention as it moved slowly through the light scrub that hugged the recently graded firebreak.

The big bovine flattened a track in the head-high perennial grass, while I gently eased off the Honda's pedal, killed the motor and rolled to a stop. In the passenger seat my good mate, Neil, had shouldered his mighty .300, worked the action and was patiently waiting for a clear shot.

A couple of tense seconds and a few steps later saw the solid creature standing motionless at the edge of the track, contemplating its next move. Those seconds of indecision worked in our favour and presented Neil with a perfect side-on shot.

Boom... for a few seconds the thunderous explosion seemed to reverberate in the confined space of the Honda Pioneer's cab. It was absolutely deafening, but the

ringing in our ears was quickly forgotten as we watched the buffalo's front legs buckle as it slumped to the ground and stayed there. Lights out.

After taking a great photo of Rocky, 'the canine's answer to Brad Pitt', for his many fans and the best you could hope for of Neil, we removed the buff's backstraps and whatever else we could fit in the icebox and continued on.

The swamp was large and well frequented, but if you took anything, you earned it. The walk was a long, hard slog through an ankle-deep combination of mud, slush and water. If that wasn't bad enough, some of the stands of paperbark were as thick as an electrician's wallet and almost as impenetrable.

After 20 minutes of non-stop black slop, it was only the keenness of the four energetic bailers that kept Neil and I from pulling the pin and doing a U-turn back to the

Honda. Then up ahead, the hairy-legged team went into barking mode, breaking the swamp's eerie morning silence.

I had only just unshouldered the hard-hitting coach-gun when a panicked porker, in full stride, head down and bum up, intent on escaping the hounds ran across our path. A quick instinctive shot had 'Speedy Gonzales' packing its suitcases for hog heaven before it even skidded to a stop.

In the sunlight deprived, streaked, shadowy gloom in a dense thicket of scrub and paperbark a well-fed boar had taken its last stand, backed in tight against a wall of timber. As it received an unbridled ear-bashing from the bailing dogs, I moved in closer. After ducking under an entanglement of low branches and stepping over a small blockade of fallen decaying timber I was finally within range. Moments later, the broad-shouldered swine head-butted a solid slug and hit the deck.

The instant the mob saw Neil and I they scattered in all directions. A short time later, the barking started, but in two directions. As Neil legged it left, I headed downhill towards the creek line and the distinctive, low guttural 'hound dog' bark of Mate, my female kelpie-cross.

As soon as Mate's nuggety little boar took a solid to the noggin, Mate hightailed it left towards the distant commotion. On the short walk back to the Honda I spotted a smallish, black porker playing hide and seek, but not very well, in the long grass and the double-barrel poleaxed another.

I'd just stopped for a quick drink break, rested my firearm against a tree and unslung my CamelBak when the loud boom of Neil's shotgun echoed in another postcode. Neil's pig must have been training for the Olympic Track and Field team.

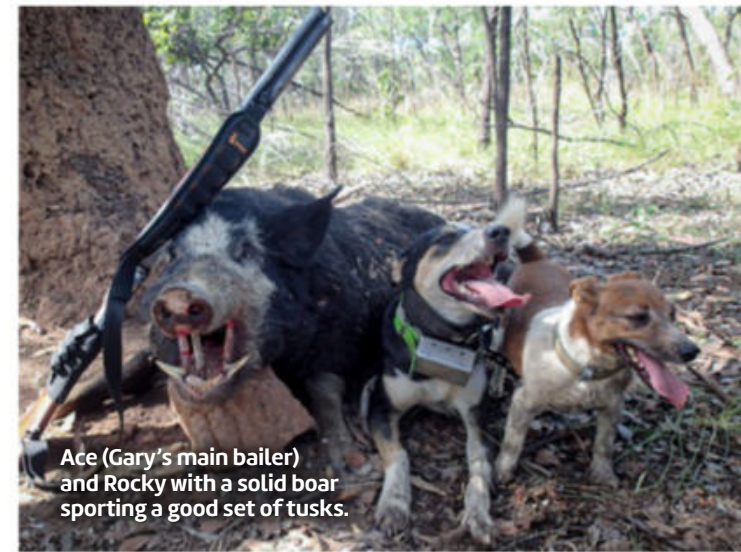
The following weekend Ace, my main dog, was back on the run-on side after eight weeks sitting on the bench due to injury. After a number of long walks with nothing to show for our efforts, we decided to give the legs a break and circumnavigate

a large expanse of wetlands in the side-by-side. The abundant fresh pig sign looked promising, but the lunar landscape of old digging and dried wallows made it a rough, bone-rattling ride.

Suddenly, an unseen, powerfully built, white-faced boar torpedoed out of the long grass at the water's edge. For a hundred kilos of pork he could really put the foot down and it was already in top gear as we swung open the dogbox doors and released the hounds.

After two months sitting at home, Ace was firing on all cylinders and emerged like a rocket. Neil's new pup, Rusty, a kelpie/border collie still on his pigging L plates, but showing plenty of promise, enthusiasm and speed seemed to revel in the thrill of the chase.

Although the dogs had the numbers, the big fella's attitude to take no prisoners certainly scored the points in the first round. The second round might have gone the same way, if the coach-gun hadn't knocked him out him before the bell. ■



Ace (Gary's main bailer) and Rocky with a solid boar sporting a good set of tusks.



The dogs enjoying a cool break and a drink after bailing a few pigs.



Neil and Rocky (the little gladiator) with a freezer-filler buffalo.



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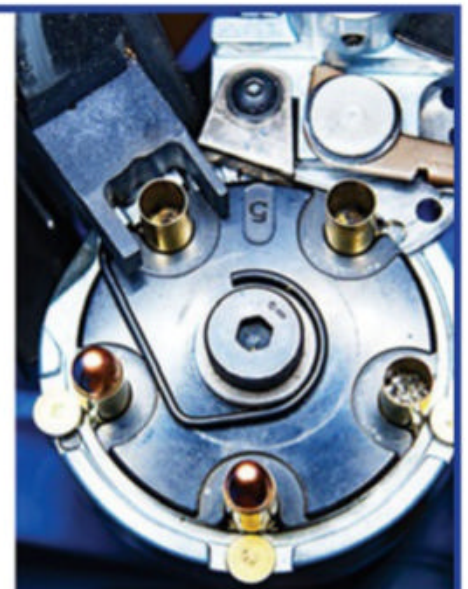
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Debut deer feat

A proud **Chris Redlich** shares a definitive hunting moment with his diligent daughter

The sound of the birds' pre-dawn calls and the soft cool breeze over the hilltops offered a tempting reminder to be out on the hunting trail. I was on a mission to hunt deer with my daughter and going home empty-handed was not a preferred option.

Having just arrived at our destination, the decision was made to go to our usual patch in the hills. With the alarm sounding at 1am, I could have throttled the clock radio. However, with not much more than two hours slumber, the pain of sleep deprivation was overtaken by the excitement of a deer hunt with Rachel. She didn't need much stirring and leapt from bed with overwhelming anticipation. It's amazing what a cup of coffee can do to a tired man's morale but whatever the ingredients, it worked and

before long we departed from home at 2am and made for the hills.

Upon arrival it was evident the deer had been around with the amount of wallows and rubs sighted on the way in, although too early for the roar. If we were to have a chance of seeing anything, we had to have our wits about us.

It was about 4.45am when the first sign of light began to ignite the ghostly figures of large eucalypts swaying from side to side in an eerie dance. With packs on and rifles made safe, we headed for a ridge line known for deer activity at the top of the mountain layout.

The recently charred ground from bushfires was now a thick carpet of new grass and weeds thanks to heavy rain over the previous weeks. This lush vegetation

meant tough going as we did our best to wade through waist-high broadleaf regrowth, slowly and steadily, moving for an open area to gain a glassing spot for other open features.

All of a sudden, my adrenalin soared as something sprung from its bed no more than 20m away. It crashed and thumped its way to safety through the bush and as with every other incident like this, the noise just stopped cold. I can only assume it was a hind due to the heavy sound of hoofs and fresh tracks speckled with distinct droppings. Rachel and I looked at each other dismayed but not disappointed, as this was deer hunting and a true wild deer won't stop to exchange pleasantries.

Unable to find a clear glassing spot due to the thick vegetation, we stood scanning



Proud father and daughter moment.



Rachel and her first deer.

Debut deer feat



the hills until the conclusion was unanimous of no deer in close proximity. Two hours had already passed unnoticed and the verdict was taken to head back to the vehicle.

You never know what may have crossed your original path, so we kept our guard upon our return. By this stage the lack of sleep was really making me tired and we drove to the valley floor to set up a temporary camp for brunch. However, no amount of coffee could keep me conscious anymore so I fell asleep to the beautiful, cracking sound of whipbirds and bellbirds amid the surrounding hills.

Following a pleasant dose of much needed rest, we felt energised to take on a solid afternoon of deer hunting. We broke camp and drove to a new area of the property known for deer activity.

The washed-out creek bed tested the capability of my ute's suspension but we managed the crossing. We wound our way carefully through the mountainous property, gaining altitude towards the northern end boundary. As we drove nearing the crest of another rise, deer were spotted in the distance unaware of our presence

and we had the stiff, upwind breeze masking our smell and vehicle noise. Needless to say, I halted the ute and turned off the engine promptly. Now we had deer, a plan for a stalk was in due process.

Taking advantage of our fortunate position we stalked carefully to a position for an ambush hunt. The deer went in and out of sight as they moved up and down and we edged closer, using trees for cover. I became anxious every time we lost sight of the deer but was relatively confident they hadn't been spooked.

Closing the gap to about 80m, I sat Rachel in a spot that provided a comfortable shooting position and clear firing lane. The two hinds feeding, albeit being hyper vigilant with ears pricked and scanning side to side, proceeded ever so slowly in our direction. I whispered to Rachel that once she had a clear sight picture to take up the trigger pressure on the one that she could see the clearest.

Although the light conditions weren't bright and vegetation quite thick, she had a perfect view through the Swarovski Z8 scope. The deer disappeared once again

down a small gully but reappeared with the larger of the two hinds presenting first. Rachel fired and the hind was hit. It sprang into a death leap and went down. To say I was proud a father would be an understatement, as I had just witnessed my 15-year-old daughter take her first deer cleanly and professionally. She was excited and we enjoyed the moment with hugs and high fives.

Rachel has accompanied me on many shooting trips since she was a toddler, sitting in a booster seat beside me in the front of my old ute while spotlighting ferals and on foot hunts looking for pigs and wild dogs. I guess it proves that her brain was a little sponge absorbing everything that she saw and reinforces how important it is to teach correct and ethical procedures.

All these things learnt were stored away and, combined with natural ability, led to success and the evidence was now laid at our feet. We enjoyed the next hour recounting what had just unfolded and took many photos for the album.

Once the initial 'high' began to wear off, the reality of hard work began to set in. The



Rachel clearing the path for vehicle access.

sun disappears faster in the mountains, so we made use of the remaining light and salvaged as much meat from the hind as possible, with valuable time spent introducing Rachel to basic knife skills while retrieving venison.

We carried the meat back to the vehicle and packed it into the old Engel and esky with no room to spare. The freshwater creek on the valley floor enabled us to clean our gear and freshen up before departing.

Our adventure had drawn to a close and the brief trip away that day was a resounding success. We had managed a hunt and most importantly guided my daughter to her first deer, which secured enough venison for the next few months.

The rough exit from the property didn't go without its fair share of challenging four-wheel driving and track clearing of fallen debris, adding to the excitement Rachel and I enjoyed together. The day would have to rate highly as one of the most memorable hunts I have experienced and I am positive it won't be the last. ■



Crystal clear creek water offered a refreshing chance to clean up and cool off.

Seamless stalking

Don Caswell raises his glass to Leupold's VX-5HD 1-5x24 CDS-ZL2 scope

About 30 years ago, I bought a Leupold VX-III 1.5-5x20 scope and fitted it to my .458 Winchester Magnum. After an initial sighting-in at the SSAA range, I never had to tweak that scope again.

I fired more than 1000 full-powered rounds while I owned it, hunting buffaloes, scrub cattle and pigs. Plus, it was regularly bounced about in 4WD vehicles, ATVs and boats along the way when it was not being dragged through thick scrub, swamps

and across harsh rocky ridges. To say I was impressed and had a soft spot for that scope is no exaggeration.

So, when *Australian Hunter* was given the opportunity to review a Leupold VX-5HD 1-5x24 CDS-ZL2 I waved my hand



The Leupold VX-5HD 1-5x24 CDS-ZL2 is a perfect choice for stalking rifles.

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ARL 4545 Compleat Angler - Darwin

SA

Sportsfishing Scene - Cavan

TAS

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Seamless stalking

vigorously. This scope is the pedigreed descendent of my original VX-III from all those years ago. This new Leupold offers everything that its ancestor did and a whole lot more. Nioa is the Australian distributor and supplied the VX-5 for review.

The Leupold VX-5HD 1-5x24 CDS-ZL2 is a specialist hunting scope but would make a great choice for a tactical option as well. The latest military rifles are fitted with similar optics – a 1-4 variable with an illuminated centre dot. However, my

interest was purely for hunting and I had the perfect firearm to test the Leupold scope on – my Merkel K3 stalking rifle in .243 Win.

A common theme I see at the range is rookie shooters sighting-in their new rifle. Typically, that is a heavy, long-barrelled firearm with a tactical stock and a big variable scope of 6-18, or greater, magnification.

When the opportunity allows, I ask if they are into varmint shooting. Most times the answer is no, they are hunting

pigs and deer. Now, depending how they hunt those critters, that could be a great choice, set up on a vantage point overlooking a prime spot.

But, for old school hunters, like me, who enjoy prowling through the bush and stalking in close to their quarry, such a rifle would be a handicap. A short, light, fast-handling rifle with a low-powered scope is what is required.

It seems counter-intuitive to new hunters, but a low-powered variable scope is just what is needed for hunting medium to large game in the bush. And, most importantly, always keep your scope dialled to its lowest power. If game pops up unexpectedly at close range, the hunter will find their target much faster at low power than they will at high magnification.

It is surprising how many prey animals are missed at close range. I would guess that most times the hunter's scope is on too high a power. If the animal is a long way off there will be time to crank up some more magnification on your variable scope, if needed. Not so, when an animal breaks from close by and the scope is set to maximum power.

For hunting game like deer, goats and pigs out to about 250m, a medium magnification of 4, 5 or 6 is more than adequate for accurately placing a shot.

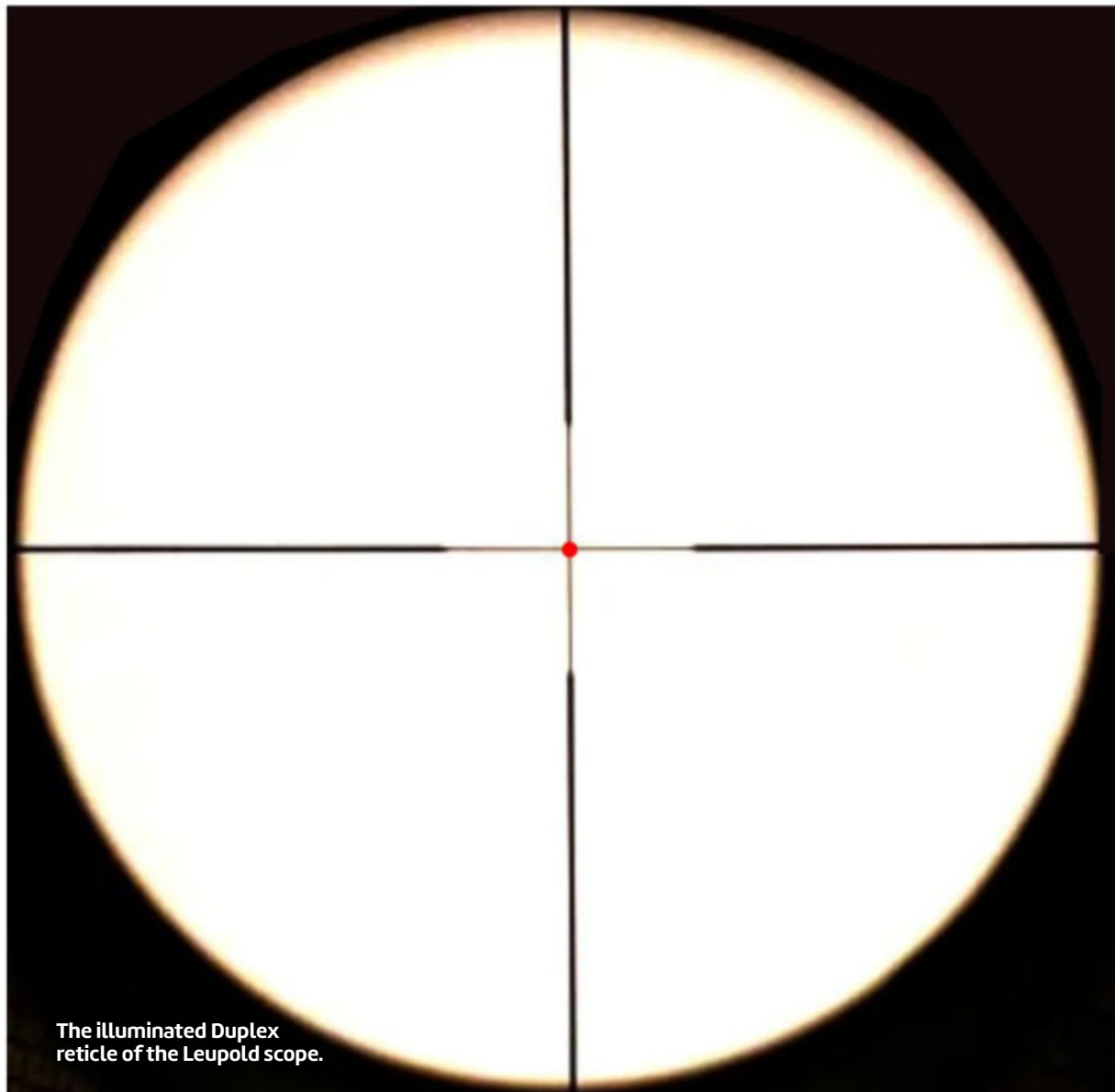
At that power setting, the hunter enjoys a wide field of view, enabling any other animals at that range to be seen and sighted. I have seen hunting buddies take a shot with their big variable scope at maximum zoom and then be unable to find other targets in time for another shot due to the narrow field of view.

I long ago reached the conclusion that for stalking middling game within 250m, a good variable scope set to minimum magnification greatly enhanced my chances of success. So, anyway, that is why I was eager to try the Leupold VX-5HD 1-5x24 CDS-ZL2 and give it a run on my light stalking rifle.

The VX-5HD scope series is in the stable of more recent developments at Leupold. The VX refers the variable magnification, the 5 is for the span of magnification of scopes in the series and HD relates to Leupold's latest glass technology. There are six scopes in the VX-5HD



The central control turret.



family, ranging from the 1-6x24 through to the 7-35x56 model. VX-5 is therefore self-explanatory.

The HD glass technology incorporates a number of features. Leupold's Professional-Grade Optical System is said to offer unmatched light transmission designed for the most challenging lighting conditions, delivering industry-leading glare reduction for a clear image in harsh, direct light with resolution and clarity.

Guard-ion is Leupold's hydrophobic lens coating. It sheds dirt and water for a maintenance-free, clear, crisp image in wet or dusty environments. These features are behind Leupold's high-definition lenses, which provide unparalleled clarity, colour and image quality from edge to edge of the field of view.

The ZL2 refers to Leupold's ZeroLock 2 on the elevation turret. The 30mm tube enables two full revolutions of elevation adjustment. The push-button ZeroLock system on the elevation dial ensures the settings cannot be accidentally adjusted. The CDS is Leupold's award-winning

Custom Dial System, which allows shooters to order a laser-marked bullet-drop dial to match their exact ballistics and conditions.

The left side turret on the central control housing is for parallax adjustment as well as a battery holder for the illuminated central dot in the reticle. In the 1-5x24 model I tested, there is only the battery holder as parallax adjustment on a 1-5x scope is superfluous.

The battery is a CR2032 Lithium button style. The reticle is the Duplex style, which I consider ideal. The central cross-hairs are also reasonably prominent, which further aids target acquisition. Then there is the illuminated central dot at the intersection of the cross-hairs which provides outstanding aiming in twilight or heavy forest shadow.

Pushing the button on the left-hand turret activates the illuminated centre dot. Further blips of the button take the dot through its array of brightness settings. The centre dot flashes a few times to indicate either the highest or lowest brightness setting before continuing. It is quick and easy

to use. The scope incorporates Leupold's Motion Sensor Technology (MST). This extends battery life by automatically deactivating the illuminated reticle after five minutes of inactivity, but reactivates instantly as soon as movement is detected.

Specifically, the 1.5-5x24 model I tested is 270mm in length and weighs 423 grams. As indicated by the x24, there is not the larger objective lens you typically see on riflescopes. The 1.5-5x24 is a straight tube. This does not restrict its light gathering ability at all and I was impressed by how well the scope enhanced my hunting at first light and dusk.

And, as I said, it has a 30mm tube. I am an unabashed fan of scopes like this and the Leupold VX-5HD 1-5x24 CDS-ZL2 is best in class with razor-sharp optics and an illuminated reticle it does not get any better. At the time of writing, Nioa was pending further supplies from Leupold USA, so shop around at your local gunshops. Retail pricing in Australia seems to start at about \$1350. Visit nioa.com.au for more info. ■

Fowl call

Adrian Kenney finds some solace among a daft 2021 Victorian duck season

What a crazy Victorian duck season. Firstly, a solid dose of anti-hunting bias conjured up a restrictive and miserable campaign. Then, came a COVID outbreak that either halved or finished the duck outings depending on your location, after only two days of hunting.

Plus, add a substantial flooding event in the east of the state and we have the most insane duck season in my memory. All this, compiled into a spell of only two weeks and six days duration. Mind you, there was some great duck hunting too.

The initial arrangements for the 2021 season were a two week and six day window beginning on May 26, with a two-bird limit per day. There was no teal hunting in the top half of the state which just happens to be the area most city-based hunters go, with this species being one of the most common hunted.

Then, oddly and inconveniently the season opened on a Wednesday when most hunters are working. Instead of just making a late opening time on the first morning, which has become expected these days, there were four more days with no shooting allowed before 8am. That only leaves two weeks of so-called normal duck hunting, with a two-bird limit and no teals in the northern half of the state in areas such as Kerang.

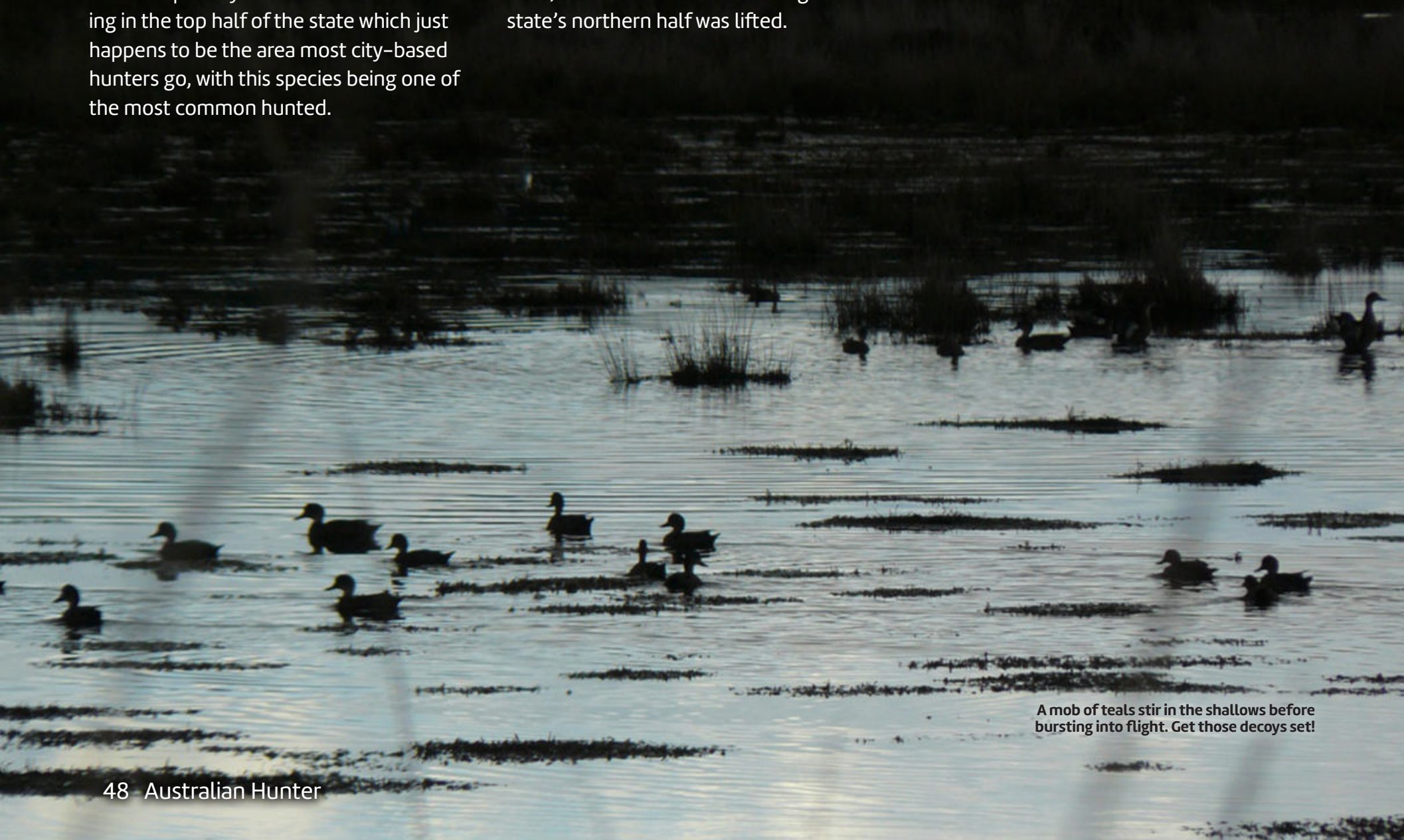
After considerable backlash to the Victorian duck season arrangements for 2021, suddenly belated information received of higher duck numbers in the state saw an increased bag to five birds per day, which is still only half the usual 10 birds, and the ban on teal hunting in the state's northern half was lifted.



Hayden with a nice feed of ducks from an afternoon hunt with Adrian.

Keep in mind that a normal Victorian duck season starts from mid to late March and goes through to mid June with a 10-bird limit per day and only the opening morning has a late start time. To suggest duck numbers were so low to substantiate the restrictions imposed came as an insult to hunters, who knew there was a lack of science behind it.

After the opening day on the Wednesday hunters were hit with another COVID outbreak and subsequent lockdown for the entire state beginning at midnight on Thursday. Hunters based in greater Melbourne were prevented from hunting for the remainder of the ridiculously short season while country-based hunters were allowed to after a week.



A mob of teals stir in the shallows before bursting into flight. Get those decoys set!

With only a week and a bit left of the season, country Victorian duck hunters made hay while the sun shone, as the saying goes. Many hunted at every opportunity, on weekdays and weekends and if we couldn't hunt in the mornings we went out in the afternoons. Several hunters shot their bag regularly – surely contradicting those low duck numbers?

So, on wetlands across the state, shot-guns boomed and popped in the distance. Gundogs of various breeds retrieved from dams, swamps and creeks to release those prized birds into the hands of happy hunters while decoy patterns moved peacefully in the breeze. We experienced those still and frosty mornings when the fog hangs low across the wetlands and raucous black duck calls can be heard from the cumbungi reeds.

We hunted those afternoons when the wind was wild and strong and the clouds dark with rain. We hunted those mornings when nothing went right and our gun belt of empty cases was a terrible sight. We watched cormorants fly in to land on their overnight trees and listened to the black swans chatter as they flew against a strong afternoon breeze. We saw the bulrushes



Retrieving dogs like Skye were busy on wetlands across Victoria hunting waterfowl.

sway this way and that and caught the drifting scent of burnt gun smoke as empty cases were ejected and gundogs splashed out to do their work.

We picked the mountain ducks call from way up high before they descended wildly on cupped wings from the sky. We heard the wood ducks meow as we eased over dam banks before a flurry of wing beats and the booming of barrels.

Grandfathers saw grandsons shoot their first duck and helped show the youngsters how to clean and pluck. Campfires

flickered beneath starlit skies while duck hunting memories drifted behind contented eyes. The wetlands provided the backdrop hunters like to come across.

The rustle of cane reeds were moving in the wind as the frogs and crickets called beneath. The sound of contented teals cackling through the night brought pleasure to the ears and confidence for the hunt at first light. We saw sunrises and sunsets and everything in between so when we say we're duck hunters, this is what we mean. ■



Hunched over in your hide with loyal gundog by your side, the teals cackle and flare until two crumple to your gun.

If you're already licensed but haven't been hunting much, go more often – there's nothing quite like a full bag of ducks.

Rabbits and rugrats

Ben Smith and his wife take the kids out bush for a cherished hunting adventure

My wife Emily and I had hunted various game animals during the early stages of our relationship. Fast forwarding several years brought marriage and three kids. Suddenly we struggled to go hunting together due to our commitments.

I had more recently bought Emily a 12-gauge shotgun but it just sat securely in the safe. The shotgun came with a 'junior' stock and 'adult' stock, which gave me flexibility fitting it.

Eventually, we decided to have a family camping/hunting trip at a property I had been on for the past three years. I had door-knocked and gained access to this estate, which holds everything from deer through to rabbits.

Packing the vehicle turned into one giant Tetris game. We had to squeeze the three children in, plus their car seats, then add all the hunting and camping gear to last for three days. The LandCruiser literally did not have one more spare space within the boot and the rear seat area.

The drive south was uneventful, apart from the obligatory food stops at shops along the way and our children asking: "Are we there yet?"

After a few hours in the car, we finally arrived at the farm and drove down to my usual camping spot. It was close to dark and I had a lot of work to do – cutting firewood, setting up the campsite and helping make the kids dinner before we put them to bed.

I had lit the fire earlier and the kids sat around it in their own camp chairs. It was marshmallows time and the youngsters were excited.

The night did turn cool but there were no issues. The valley we camp in does not gain direct morning sun until about 9am, so we all jumped into the car for a drive to check my trail cameras and see what was about.

As we were driving along, we started spotting rabbits waiting for the morning sun to hit their warrens.

I grabbed Emily's Ruger American rimfire rifle, loaded up the magazine and handed it to her in the passenger seat. The next warren we came to at a big patch of

blackberry bushes there were two unsuspecting rabbits. At the report of the subsonic round, one rabbit fell over and the other bolted to the safety of its warren.

I hopped out of the LandCruiser and picked up the dead rabbit. My son wanted me to butcher and cook up this bunny for



Emily's Ruger rimfire rifle.



The children all rugged up.

Rabbits and rugrats

later but the shot had entered the chest and exited diagonally through the hind quarters, which is not what you want.

Crawling along slowly in the vehicle with a bunch of noisy kids in the back was less than ideal but we managed to see some more rabbits and knock a pair over with the Ruger .22LR. We returned to camp shortly after and cooked some breakfast before planning the afternoon hunt.

Around midday I pulled Emily's 'new' shotgun out and put it together. Earlier I had set up a couple of empty cans roughly 15m away, for Emily to practise on and have a feel for her 12-gauge.

I also put my Winchester 101 20-gauge shotgun together, which has a smaller shell than the 12-gauge, to see if this would suit her better.

I had grabbed a variety of clay target shells from home, including factory ammunition plus some handloads I had made when I was 16 years old under adult supervision. The old handloads were super smooth when compared to modern factory ammo. I had used them at the old Geelong Clay Target Club during competitions and practice.

With the cans so close I selected open chokes for Emily's shotgun. This gives a beginner a bit more of a chance to hit the target. The initial shot went over the top, which is standard for first time shotgunners, so we discussed her putting the bead slightly under the target, which did the trick.

The kids and I cheered and clapped as the can was blasted into oblivion. Emily learnt about how the second barrel works and I provided some coaching on foot position and stance while using a shotgun. It was all foreign to her as she is more familiar with rifles. After firing both the 12-gauge and the 20-gauge we came to the conclusion the 12-gauge was a better fit and had less felt recoil than the poor fitting 20-gauge, which had a longer length stock to suit me.

At the time of year, the sun goes down just before 6pm, so I loaded the car up with kids and gear and headed off to some known rabbit warrens. All our young ones have earmuffs, including our six-month-old daughter. I learnt the hard way in the past about not wearing any hearing

Emily displays her first rabbit with her shotgun.



Ben's 1974-built Winchester 101 20-gauge shotgun.

protection and now must live with permanent tinnitus, which is not fun.

We crept along in the LandCruiser but soon realised the rabbits were onto us well before we moved into shotgun range. I made the call and decided to send Emily off walking with some shotgun shells along a known rabbit 'hot spot'.

I drove the LandCruiser up onto the high ground for a good view of the action. It was not long before we heard the big 'boom' of the shotgun report. Emily held up her first rabbit with the shotgun. I ran down to grab a quick photo and the kids were excited.

I gave her another four shotgun shells and said: "Look for structure and you'll find the rabbits." Rather than walking the open field, she took my advice and headed straight towards a pile of blackberry bushes.

It was not long before I heard the familiar report of the shotgun and another rabbit fell. Things were starting to click with the 'new' shotgun and my purchase was beginning to pay off.

I drove to the top of what appeared to be a giant amphitheatre and parked waiting for Emily to appear. We could hear the occasional 'boom' of the shotgun so she must have been doing well or at least giving the local rabbit population the hurry-up.

After 20 minutes we caught up at the car. The kids were excited mummy had managed to bag another four rabbits. We made a plan to head back towards the original gate we entered the paddock through and see what could be flushed out.

The kids and I had to cross a wet creek in low range, which made their day, and drive another kilometre before waiting at



Ben's old handloaded shotgun shells.



One of the dams on the property.



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Rabbits and rugrats

the gate again for Emily. There was not much structure on the walk back, so only a couple of rabbits copped the shotgun.

When we reached camp, I cooked dinner for the kids. There was still enough light left for a quick walk up the hill with the 20-gauge and a pocketful of shells. This time I took the heavier field loads in No. 4 and No. 6 shot sizes.

A bunny bolted across the track in front of me but I was slow, happily walking along and enjoying the bird calls at the end of the day. This quickly snapped me to attention though and I told myself to be ready for the next rabbit.

It didn't take me long and another cotton tail did a half hop in front of a blackberry bush so I gave it a load of No. 4s from the bottom barrel. It was game over – I took a quick photo and continued on my way.

I was easily distracted as the full moon was beginning to rise and I knew time was

against me, but it was just me and the peace and quiet for the moment.

I slowly headed back downhill to camp, hoping for a silly cotton tail to risk its life by bolting back in front of me. No such luck. The walk was good and now it was feeding time at the zoo with the kids, before we rugged them up for bed.

The sun had disappeared quickly and the temperature plummeted just as fast. It was nothing a couple of warming drinks by the fireside could not fix, along with some barbecued venison I had hunted on another trip to this property.

It was a good thing I had cut up a large amount of deadfall timber because the night felt colder than the first. We had bagged more than 20 rabbits in total and tomorrow was home time. For the moment the fire was raging, the kids were sound asleep and everything was peaceful – where else would you rather be? ■



Marshmallow time around the campfire.



The full moon begins to rise over the rabbit paddocks.



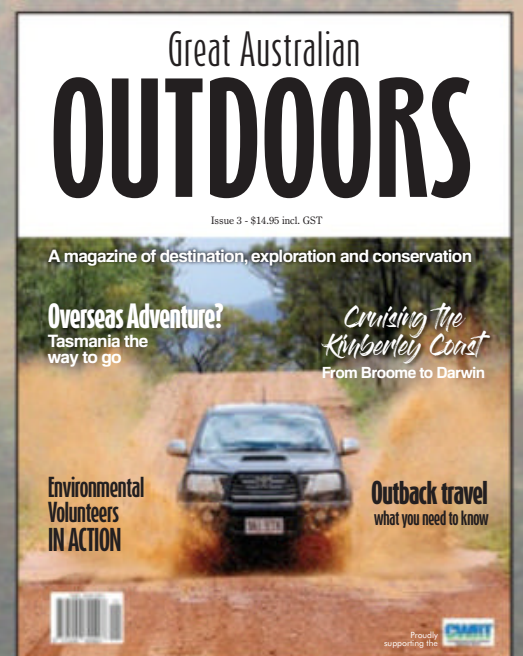
The family campsite for a few nights.

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SCAN AND ORDER

The Outlaw

The compact lines and style of the Diana Outlaw regulated PCP air rifle.



Don Caswell pleads his case for Diana's discontinued PCP air rifle

Diana have been in business for more than a century. In recent years they've led the charge in producing less expensive pre-charged pneumatic (PCP) air rifles.

PCP models have a reservoir of high-pressure air, rather than the familiar compression spring. The reservoir must be charged with a special high-pressure pump, or from a scuba diving bottle. Such airguns are typically powerful and accurate.

The Diana Outlaw is a regulated PCP air rifle, which further enhances the inherent accuracy. Alas, sales have regrettably been discontinued in Australia but second-hand versions pop up online so keep your eyes open.

The barrel and reservoir

The barrel is 475mm (18.7") in length. The barrel proper is a slim tube shrouded by a larger diameter tube that provides a more aesthetic look to the rifle. It is bare of open sights; this rifle is built for scope sights only.

Below the barrel is the compressed air reservoir that holds 210ml of compressed air, which when fully charged (to 250 bar/3600psi) is sufficient for as many as 50 full-power shots. There is a pressure gauge situated on the end of the reservoir. A really good innovation is that the filling port is protected by a sprung, retractable end piece.



The side-lever action.

If you will be doing a lot of shooting, then a scuba tank and filling connection is worth considering. A second-hand scuba tank and the filler will cost you about \$500. A cheaper alternative is to use a manual, three-stage pump to charge the rifle's reservoir. These can be had for about \$225.

Receiver and bolt

The cocking mechanism is a side lever with a rolling grip at right angles to the lever. That makes for faster and easier chambering of pellets compared to the dinky little bolts on some repeater PCP air rifles. The rifle cycles pellets from the rotary magazine without fault. The mechanism is a little gritty but its functionality is fine and reliable. The action has an 11mm dovetail for fitting scope mounts.

Scope and mounts

The Leupold VX-Freedom 3-9x33 EFR scope is an ideal companion for this rifle and makes for a well-balanced outfit. It has a fine duplex reticle that sees precise shot placement a breeze.

And, the cross-hairs are not so fine that you cannot see well enough to place your shots precisely in the gathering dusk after sunset, as a number of bunnies have discovered to their detriment. The Leupold VX-Freedom features side focusing parallax (essential on air rifle scopes), providing adjustment from infinity down to 10m.

Whatever scope you choose to fit, you will need medium or higher mounts. There is not enough clearance to allow the rotary magazine to be fitted when low mounts are involved. Another point to note for anybody who might want to use a scope with a large side focus wheel is to be aware that this will block access to placing the magazine, which fits in from the left side.

The trigger and safety

The trigger is two-stage. The first provides some resistance and gives the impression of a single-stage trigger. I measured the trigger release and found a consistent 1.2lb weight of pull, albeit not a super-crisp release.

But it is a good trigger and I actually don't mind the bit of creep as it gives good feedback to the release point. The trigger is adjustable via holes in the triggerguard, using Allen keys. The trigger pull length and sear engagement can be altered. I left the trigger as received and it certainly contributed to some excellent accuracy on the 25m targets.

The safety is a cross-bolt type situated at the top of the trigger, right up against the stock, where some wood has been removed to improve access. While quite effective, I initially found it rather small and fiddly to activate. However, operation became easier with familiarity and use.

Engaging the safety effectively blocks the trigger from being pulled. It has a red indicator to show when the rifle is ready to fire. The safety functions positively and I have no issues with it, especially when poking around farm sheds at dusk whacking rabbits.



An adjustable trigger and trigger-mounted safety catch.

The magazine

The magazine is a small disc-shaped device made of plastic. It holds 11 pellets in .22 calibre. The .177 version holds 13 pellets, while the .25 calibre model holds nine. The magazine slides easily from the left side of the rifle and is held in place by a magnetic clip.

Scope mounts need to be of medium height, or more, as the magazine will not fit under a low-mounted scope. The magazine is of an intricate structure and easy to load. To seat pellets in the magazine, a small screwdriver, or similar tool, is required to push the pellet a few millimetres home.

The magazine has enough depth to hold the new, longer, cone-tipped pellets. There are opposing slight flat spots on the edge of a rotating magazine disc that line up vertically when the magazine is empty. It is not easy to see and I think it is more a function of the design than specifically a deliberate visual indicator. Alternately, there is single-shot tray to make such shooting easier.

The stock

The stock is made of beech with a grain. The finish is smooth with laser-cut chequering that is more a visual aspect. The design is simple and ergonomic. The stock comes down in front of the triggerguard, an interesting and unusual feature.

Side-on, it belies the slim lines of the stock which is not as bulky as it looks. In fact, I like the reasonably narrow cross-section that makes it easy to grasp and handle. The flat bottom of the fore-end

sits stably on sandbags to enable accurate target shooting.

There is a pronounced Monte Carlo butt with a soft, thick recoil pad that makes the rifle comfortable to shoot. Being a PCP, there is negligible recoil. The buttstock features an unusual scalloped shape.

Off the bench

This is the most accurate air rifle I have used. Among the first few pellets I tested were the JSB Exact Jumbo Diabolo 15.9-grain and the H&N Baracuda Hunter 18.2-grain. I initially thought that maybe I had just fluked a couple of tiny groups, but repeated test shooting with those pellets kept delivering the same small, one-hole groups at 25m.

I could not be happier with the H&N Baracuda Hunters shooting so well as they are my preferred hunting pellet, with excellent expansion and terminal ballistics.

I have tested a few more pellet types, which all shot reasonably well, but was so pleased with the accuracy of the JSB and H&N pellets I figured I would stop right there.



A manual pressure pump enables the rifle pressure reservoir to be pumped up.

In the field

I have taken the Diana Outlaw on a few hunts around farm sheds. Using my preferred H&N Baracuda Hunters, I had no trouble bowling over a few bunnies and a couple of incautious myna birds. With its fine accuracy, light weight and pointiness, the rifle makes the most of 29ft-lb muzzle energy and is highly effective.

Overall

The Diana Outlaw is a tidy, good-handling PCP air rifle. At just under 1m (950mm or 37.4"), and weighing at 2.9kg (6.4lb) bare weight, it is a light, well-balanced outfit that is easy to carry and shoot.

With a good trigger and comfortable stock design, it shoots exceptionally well off the bench and in the field. Being a regulated PCP, that extra complexity of the firing mechanism means you're likely to pay a little more than its unregulated PCP sibling, the Stormrider.

It was well-priced new in gunshops at under \$1000 before being taken off the Australian market, so do yourself a favour and browse ssaagunsales.com - hopefully you will be able to pick up a bargain. ■



A reservoir pressure gauge is located on the end of the cylinder.

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The cutting edge

John Denman hand-crafts quality knives with some discarded circular saw blades and a lot of patience

A good knife is something every hunter cherishes. Most of us have more than one – there are skinning knives, gutting knives and boning knives just to name a few.

But from time to time some of us think about making our own. Using a knife that you have created gives you that little extra feeling of independence if you like, an extra contact with the ideal of self-sufficiency. Maybe you just want to do it because you like a bit of tinkering.

It can be a bit daunting when you see the gear turned out by professional knifemakers. The craftsmanship and attention to detail is often amazing. But when it's all boiled down, what is a knife anyway? It's a tool. Fine bone handles and intricate blade designs may look great in a display case, but out in the bush, covered in blood and guts, does all that count? Not really.

I began making knives a while back and realised I was never going to construct anything fancy. Nor was I going to start from scratch with a forge and some of the other things that the really top knifemakers use. The most important part of any knife is the blade, and I've always been partial to blades made from carbon steel. Yes it rusts, but looking after your gear is part and parcel of what we do, so I don't believe that stainless steel is completely necessary. In fact, often good carbon steel will hold an edge better than most stainless.

For the blades I seek out old circular saw blades, not always those that come from a sawmill, but the ones used by builders and plumbers, often known as demo saws.

John has come up with a variety of designs.

‘Demo’ is short for demolition, and these saws are often used for cutting through concrete. They don’t become sharpened once they lose their edge, they are just discarded. So, you’ll often find old demo saw blades in builders’ or brickies’ yards. Usually, the blokes who used them are happy for you to take them away.

The steel in these blades is pretty hard, so to cut through it you’ll need some good quality cutting discs for your angle grinder. I prefer a cordless grinder for this because there’s no cord to be in the way, or be cut off by accident. I have a number of different shapes I’ve come up with and made templates out of thin plywood.

Then all you have to do is trace the design on the steel with a marking pen and cut around it. This sounds simple, but the steel has to be clamped down on something solid like a bench. Cutting into steel produces sparks, lots of them, and your eyesight is more important than the knife.

Some demo saw blades have holes in them. If you can position your template so those holes line up with where the handle will be, that will save you some drilling



Ear and eye protection are essential when cutting out the design.

later. Cutting out the knife shape can be a bit hard. An angle grinder is not a precision instrument, so don’t be afraid to cut a bit outside the lines you have marked on the steel.

There is an old saying in woodwork and metal work that you can always cut a bit off but it’s not so easy putting it back on. In

other words, you can tidy up with a grinding disc after the initial cut is made. Don’t worry about the heat of the grinder changing the temper of the steel either. It has to become a lot hotter to do that. Once you have the outline done, trim off any excess from your cut.

The next step is to put an edge on the blade. This will be more like shaping than sharpening. The design of the knife will dictate the sort of edge you will want. Most hunting knives are better with a flat grind that tapers slowly to the final edge. This is the sort of edge you need for slicing and skinning.

It’s comparatively easy to damage, or ‘notch’ than a more chisel style edge, but then the knife is not designed to hack through bone, and most good hunting knives are ground this way.

I’m not much of a fan of the Bowie-style knife, particularly when the tip of the blade is pointed up. This shape may be okay for skinning, but certainly not for the belly cut because there’s far too much chance of the point digging into the gut bag.

I prefer a ‘drop point’. This style allows you to run the knife up the belly using the flat upper surface of the blade to skim over the gut. Few hunters carry just one knife, but there may be times when the one knife is all you have, and you need to be able to use it for more than a specific task.

There are a few tools you’ll need to make knives. Obviously an angle grinder is



Old cut-off wheels make great knife blades.

The cutting edge



one, and you can do a significant amount of work using a 10cm grinder. There is a wide range of attachments for sanding, cleaning up a surface and even a degree of polishing available.

Other tools I've found useful are some fine grade files, a Dremel tool, and if you are really keen, a bench grinder that includes a finishing belt. You'll also need a good electric drill with some metal drill bits.



It's not hard to be a bit impatient to see your finished product, but patience in this sort of work is essential. As you progress as a knifemaker, your skills will improve and you'll come up with a variety of designs you can work on. We are not talking about a money-making business here, just a hobby that fits in nicely with your hunting passion.

I tend to give away a few of my knives, mainly to friends who hunt, or have an appreciation for something handmade. There are plenty of knifemakers around, many of them professional, so I doubt that most who are reading this will be wanting to seek their fortune in knifemaking.

Make sure that the blade has been cleaned up as much as possible and the edge is close to finished before you are started on the handle, or scales. It's also time to drill a couple of holes in the tang if

no suitable ones were already there. I use a 6.5mm metal drill for this and always make a smaller pilot hole beforehand.

Final work on the edge should be done using a sharpening stone. Knife handles are traditionally made of wood, and we are blessed in this country with some excellent hardwood for the job. I specify hardwood because it's mostly close grained, and this is important for the finished product. Although I've also found that camphor laurel can be good and often has a fine grain.

You can obtain your knife handle wood from all sorts of places. I've been known to raid the firewood stack from time to time, and found iron bark is excellent wood for scales. The problem sometimes is to find old wood that hasn't too many cracks in it. Sometimes the rough outer part of the wood can be used to leave a bit of texture, and old weathered wood can have some interesting features on it, or 'character'.

Cut your wood along the grain, because if you slice across the grain the wood is likely to snap off during cutting or shaping. I use a drop saw to cut down the length and find it leaves a clean finish. This is the side of the wood that goes up against the tang, so you don't want any gaps between steel and wood.



Once you've cut the wood for the scales, the knife tang can be laid on the wood and the outline traced on it. Remember to mark each one as left or right side, because they are not usually interchangeable. I cut the outline out by hand using a coping saw. If you have access to a bench jigsaw, that may be easier, but never forget that this is being done as a hobby, and speed is definitely not of the essence.

There's no need to do any final shaping at this point, just have the first side of the handle fitted to the tang. The easiest way to do this is find yourself some Araldite 5 Minute epoxy. This stuff is amazingly strong, so make sure you have it placed correctly because once it dries nothing will shift it. Even though the epoxy will hold the scales on, I like to put a couple of rivets through the handle. I use 6.5mm brass rod for this.

Once you're happy that the first side of the handle is well secured, you can drill the holes for the rivets. Then you can epoxy the other side and drill all the way through when that's set. Fitting the rivets and drilling the holes should always be done before any final shaping of the scales.

The initial shaping can be done using your angle grinder again, but with a sanding disc fitted. The rivets receive a dose of epoxy too to hold them in place, then final shaping is done. Avoid any gaps

between wood and metal, because that's where some stray matter can lodge. The whole surface of the handles, once sanded smooth, obtains at least two coats of marine grade polyurethane.

The final sharpening should be with a quality stone. While there are plenty of 'easy' sharpening tools on the market,

for someone wanting to become a knife-maker, the ability to use a stone should be learnt. Finally, bear in mind that the steel you are using is carbon steel and will rust if it's not protected. I use a product called Renaissance Wax. It will fill the tiny pores of metal, leather and timber to safeguard the surface. ■



Use a good sharpening stone to finish off the edge.

A short bladed skinning knife handmade by John.

A 6.5mm brass rod is used to rivet the handles, or scales.





Outback survival and the hunter

Experienced Army veteran and Environmental Scientist **Scott Heiman** shares some pointers that may just save your life

There's an old phrase that Australia rides on the sheep's back. It's a saying that recalls the colonial era when Europeans began to clear land to generate the pastures on which sheep flourished, wool was shorn, mutton was eaten and money was made.

Indeed, the sheep trade predominated the Australian economy all the way up to the 'wool boom' in the early 1950s due to

the American demand for wool generated by the Korean War.

Throughout this period, it's safe to say that the Australian psyche was well attuned to our connection to, and reliance on, the land around us. But this situation has radically changed in more recent years. While in the early 1930s, nearly 37.5 per cent of the Australian population lived in rural areas, by 1976 less than 14 per cent

was classified as rural. Today, more than 90 per cent of the population lives within 100km of the eastern seaboard – from Melbourne to Rockhampton. Moreover, more than 65 per cent of Australians reside in our capital cities' greater metropolitan areas. In these circumstances, it's inevitable that the majority of our population is losing (or has lost) its connection to the land. The bad news for hunters is that we're



When hunting, your first-aid kit should cover stings, bites, sprains and burns.



It's better to be embarrassed by helicopter extraction than to be dead.

not immune from this collective separation from our bush heritage.

It's true that many of us regard ourselves as independent outdoorsmen and women. However, our 'woodsman', our 'she'll be right' and our 'it won't happen to me' mindsets merge to make us more vulnerable in the scrub than we may care to admit. The combined effects of infrequent exposure, knowledge loss and reliance on technology can put us in trouble.

Just take a look at the national news headlines. Often one or more of our police jurisdictions are on the lookout for a lost soul in the bush. While many of these people are tourists, some are also hunters. Indeed, throughout the Western world,



There is a lot of ground out there in which to become geographically challenged.

Outback survival and the hunter

hunters have a tendency to become 'geographically challenged' so we're one of the 11 internationally recognised categories of missing persons.

And our classification as known 'missing persons' is based just on those instances when we come to the attention of search and rescue assets. It doesn't include the multitude of near misses and unreported accounts of individuals who go missing but are recovered by their hunting party. These stories linger on in campfire camaraderie rather than in the news bulletins.

When the shoe fits

When search and rescue agencies are tasked to locate missing persons, there are certain lost person behaviour (LPB) profiles that are used to assist the effort.

So what's the LPB for hunters world-wide? While some individual behaviour will inevitably fall 'outside the box', several common traits of lost hunters are revealed by the studies. These are:

- Game focused, which tends to contribute to being lost.
- Will not acknowledge when actually lost.
- Following targets leads to deadfall areas, boulder fields, underbrush or dense forest.
- Will go to great lengths to self-help.
- Will sometimes avoid searchers for fear of embarrassment.
- Rely on GPS, radios and mobile phones.
- Usually mobile and responsive.
- Tend to travel at night and will follow linear features.
- Will take easy routes, ridge lines, cross-country.
- Will make shelter and fire where possible.

Stats and facts

These behavioural characteristics of lost hunters are quite telling. Many of them reveal a sound understanding of basic survival principles. For example, we tend to seek shelter and make a fire. Which is great as these measures will contribute to a number of survival priorities. Further, the fact that we can light a fire will assist



in search and rescue efforts. Whether it's the obvious smoke that's seen by a rescue team, or the fire's heat being detected by a rescue helicopter fitted with forward looking infrared (FLIR) cameras.

The statistics also show that the majority of us (52 per cent) are found next to a road. This indicates that we have the state of mind and foresight to stop near a man-made structure, thereby increasing our chances of being saved. Similarly,

9 per cent of us will be near a building of sorts. However, only 17 per cent of us will be located near a water source and this is discouraging, because water is life. That leaves 22 per cent of us simply stranded in the middle of nowhere without water and a reduced probability of being discovered.

Another questionable habit is our tendency to walk... a long way. Studies indicate that 25 per cent of us will be found about 0.96km from our last known position (LKP).

A hi-viz survival blanket can be used as a ground-to-air location aid.



A survival blanket can be made into a shelter.



Below: A purpose designed survival blanket fits in your pocket or thigh rig easily.



The next 25 per cent will be located, on average, 2.09km from our LKP. The next subdivision of us will be located 4.82km from our LKP. However, the final 25 per cent of us will be a staggering 17.2km from our LKP. And they are just the averages. Imagine what the high end of the stats looks like.

Among the dicey behaviours hunters demonstrate, riskiest of all is our inclination to make a bad situation worse by refusing to accept we're lost in the first place. The associated tendency to avoid search and rescue services for fear of embarrassment beggars belief.

Setting ourselves up for success

When lost and facing a survival or emergency situation, our likelihood of living to tell the story improves significantly if we follow the priorities of survival. These principles are known via the mnemonic 'Please Remember What's First', simplified as PRWF. This stands for Protection, Rescue, Water, Food.

Protection starts with removing yourself from danger, risk of infection or bleeding-out from an injury. It then moves on to protection from the elements and the environment around you. It means that you need to have the knowledge and equipment on you to conduct first aid, erect a shelter and start a fire. It doesn't mean you have to carry the ginormous first-aid kit from the car or erect a shelter that's fit for a pharaoh. That said, it does mean having a commitment to not putting your life (and that of your hunting party) at risk through reliance on minimalism and cheap trinkets.

Rescue means you need to put yourself in the best possible position to be located and evacuated. You need to stop walking in the first place, unless it materially increases your chance of being detected or finding water and shelter. The next thing to do is to set out passive rescue aids.

These are bright shiny things – like blaze orange survey tape or aluminium (even an empty chip packet turned inside out). Hanging off a tree swaying in the wind, the



The venerable cups canteen never turns old and Gerber have released a high-quality version.

Outback survival and the hunter

‘tinsel tree’ you make from these items will draw the attention of ground-based searchers. Consider too the needs of aerial searchers. If you have a purpose-designed lightweight survival blanket, its orange side will act as a ground-to-air signal blanket – visible for miles.

Water: You need to be carrying some in the first place. Then remember that the more you move the more you are going to need. It’s invaluable to have knowledge of how to find water within the environment you’re hunting, including how to purify it.

Carrying something to boil it in is the next major plus. With the invention of backpack bladders, people these days seldom carry a cups canteen or other vessel in which to boil water (the tin your survival kit is in perhaps). Drinking contaminated water can make you vomit and give you a bad case of diarrhoea, which will deplete your body of water.

Food: There’s the old adage that you can last three days without water and three weeks without food. So finding food is a lower priority than other survival

responses. Yes, you’re a hunter. But hunting takes energy – and energy, like water, is one thing you don’t want to be losing. Always carry snacks for your day hunt, even if you don’t use them they’re there for an emergency. Consider adding a couple of multi-vitamins, a tea bag or a packet of Sustagen to your survival kit. Then work on your bush tucker identification.

Gadgets and doodads

Don’t be the guy with ‘all the gear and no idea’. Actually think through what you need to carry on a hunt; be it an afternoon of bunny busting or an overnight backcountry sambar slog.

On a hunt, your basic everyday carry (EDC) belt gear should, at minimum, include a water bottle with cup, your Skinner, a multi-tool, torch, survival kit, survival blanket, a snake bite/stab wound first-aid kit, whistle and a back-up way of making fire. Around your wrist, a parachute cord bracelet should be included.

With the whistle, its sound will travel further than your own voice. Just think of being able to hear the referee’s whistle over a roaring crowd. So try to find a whistle that emits an ear-piercing 100-decibel signal or louder – that’s a noise level higher than a nightclub. When you’re in trouble, give three blasts with a second’s pause between. This is one of the internationally recognised distress signals. ■



Power banks with a torch and solar recharger are good technology to have out scrub.

Power up

These days we’re spoilt for choice when it comes to technology. But there are several issues that should give you pause for thought.

Over-reliance on technology makes us forget the ‘old ways’. For instance, electricity and water are not good bedfellows. And batteries go flat.

Now think of your torch, handheld CB, GPS, phone etc. How do you plan to cope if they fail? Do you have the skills and resilience to be out of trouble when your fancy bits of technology are drowned, lost, broken or out of juice?

And when you’re planning to carry equipment needing power, consider how you can extract the best performance from them. For example,

where possible, try to ensure that all of your gadgets use the same type of batteries. That way you can switch batteries around to your priority device in your time of need. Then research how to start a fire with a simple AA battery.

Alternatively, choose items that all recharge from a USB and then carry a power pack that incorporates solar recharging and a torch. This way you’ll reduce your load and increase your capacity to generate power on the go. Consider too that some CBs incorporate GPS – a handy feature when you’re heading scrub.

Then remember that everything you carry into the bush should have two or more uses.



One for the belt, one for the backpack and another for the car.

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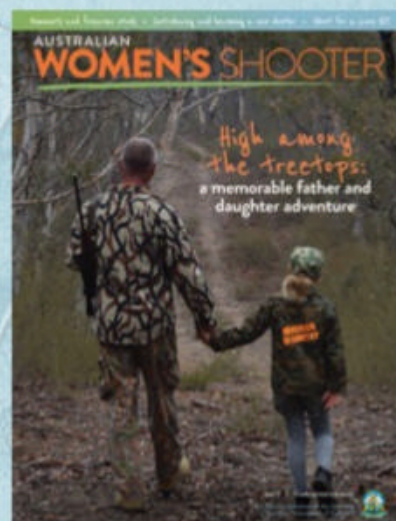


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Take it ESEE

Jan Kaptein heads bush with the weighty workhorse Model 4 Serrated knife

Talk to someone who has even a modest interest in knives and they will in all likelihood have at least heard about the ESEE brand.

Though primarily marketed as survival and bushcraft blades, an increasing number of hunters also use them. After seeing their products at an expo years ago, I reckoned they were adequate, but did not do much for me at first sight.

Fast forward a couple of years and I bought an ESEE-3 at a garage sale. I did not use it a great deal and ended up swapping it for the knife in this review – the ESEE-4 Serrated with an orange handle and olive-green coating.

By now, the knife has been in my collection for more than three years and I have taken it out on a number of hunts and camping trips. On all occasions, it has been a good knife that was up to whatever was thrown at it.

A couple of my buddies swear by ESEE blades and having put it through its paces, I can understand why. Even so, I personally prefer lighter knives and as a result my ESEE-4 does not see the use

it arguably deserves. However, if you are in the market for a solid knife and intend to use it fairly intensively, the ESEE-4 is worth your consideration.

ESEE Knives is the name of the sister company of Randall's Adventure, Training & Equipment Group. They started the production of field grade knives and gear a couple of years after the mother company began operations in 1997. The firm's website explains that ESEE is the acronym for Escuela de Supervivencia (School of Survival), Escape and Evasion. It refers to the long-running jungle survival school that the mother authority continues to run in the Peruvian jungle. The company philosophy is to 'treat the customer with respect, keep the prices fair, provide the best in quality and never teach a skill or provide a piece of gear that hasn't been tested in the real world'. Production takes place in the United States.

The ESEE-4 Serrated knife is sold as the 'ES4SKOOD', which means 'ESEE-4 Serrated Knife Only Olive Drab'. In plain English it signifies an ESEE Model 4 with a serrated edge and olive drab coating. This denotes



The bright handle helps to avoid losing the ESEE-4 in the field.



The weighty ESEE-4 with its serrated edge is well-suited to breaking joints.

that the knife ships without a sheath and it comes sealed in a transparent plastic bag in a cardboard box with some promotional material. 'No frills' best describes it.

Other versions are available and ship with a variety of sheaths and accessories. Sheaths are available in all sorts, sizes and shapes with the most common being the Kydex version offered by ESEE themselves. The knife is full-tang and is made of 1095 carbon steel, which has a hardness of 55-57 HRC. The blade is drop-point shaped with a powder coating and straight edge. Though I am generally not a fan of powder coatings, it makes sense on a knife that is marketed as a survival and hunting option made out of 1095 carbon steel, because of its proneness to oxidation.

The handle is florescent orange and made out of G10, which is a glass-based epoxy resin laminate. Both the blade and the handle are each about 114mm (4.5") and the overall length of the ESEE-4 is approximately 229mm (9"). The blade is 4.8mm (.188") thick. Without a sheath, the ESEE-4 comes in at 227 grams.

Out in the field, you will have to come up with a sheath before you go anywhere. Though the ESEE-4 is available in combination with all sorts of sheaths, clips, MOLLE backs and so on, the standard package includes just the knife. A separate sheath out of Kydex retails from \$60 and up, without so much as a belt clip.

When you find a deal on a combined package, I would recommend to run with it if you want an ESEE sheath. Personally, I found the pricing rather elevated and acquired a custom leather sheath for less. This is great in dry places, but in humid



The ESEE-4 knife with Jan's custom leather sheath.

climates it is not optimal as you combine a sheath that does not dry quickly with a knife made out of an oxidation-prone steel. Anyway, once you have put your hands on a sheath, it is time to go out there and do some hunting and camping.

The knife has some heft to it and in the field, you will notice the additional weight. This is particularly so on long hikes and when handling the knife for prolonged periods of time. The bulk of the knife is good if you want to do some quick chopping or other survival-type chores, but for things like skinning and boning out game, you do not need it.

That said, it is more of a survival-oriented knife, so no drama. Around the camp and when doing work on larger animals, the knife has proved to be a sound tool. The part-serrated edge is great for cutting through

cartilage and tendons as well as rope.

If you encounter vines on a hike or when retrieving an animal, the ESEE-4 is a useful mini machete too. And if necessary it could easily finish off an angry pig. It really is that solid.

So far, I have not had issues with rust, but I have only had the knife out in monsoon conditions a few times and took care to dry it once back at camp. You may laugh at my makeshift solution to prevent the edge from oxidising, but I carry a ChapStick around when out with rust prone knives.

A quick coat to the edge of the blade once dried and you will not have to worry about rust. It works on larger surfaces too if you have an uncoated knife or once the coating wears off your ESEE blade. And it will. If you use a firesteel, you will have to remove some of the coating on the back of the blade.



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Take it ESEE

In use, the sharp edge is easy to maintain and is unlikely to chip due to the softness of the steel. The grip is well executed and does not have any sharp edges. The G10 material offers sufficient grip and is impervious to whatever water or blood lands on it. However, the grip is quite short, even a bit too short. I wear a size 9 glove and my hand only just about fits the handle. As a result of this, it's tempting to grab the knife further down, which works well because of the choil and knurling on the spine of the blade.

And this, unless my previous ESEE-3 and current ESEE-4 are exceptions, is where you run a fairly real risk of incurring a nasty cut on your index finger. This is the result of the edge of the knife being sharp to the edge of the choil, which, while sufficiently large to place your finger if it is not too big, is not very generous.

Under normal use, the sharp corner will tend to pull away from the finger, but when boning out an animal or doing something else that could cause forward pressure on your hand, this design choice is risky. It is easily solved by removing the sharp corner, which is what I did.

To sum up, the ESEE-4 is one of those knives that I find hard to love, but easy enough to like. Its fit and finish are sound, it feels like a solid tool and is backed by a lifetime transferable guarantee. If it breaks,

it is replaced. I have not tested this, but with the legal hassles an American manufacturer would have for not honouring such a claim, I am pretty sure they will do as advertised.

The knife maintains an edge fairly well under normal use and is easy to sharpen, even in the field. The coating has done a good job in preventing oxidation and the handle material provides enough grip and resists humidity, blood and grease well. It makes short work of heavier tasks and easily cuts through joints and tendons.

However, it's quite weighty and the handle is a little short. Combined with the sharp edge at the blade side of the choil and the choice of 1095 for the blade leave me with mixed feelings. Which brings us back to the manufacturer's claim to offer the best product at a fair price. In the United States ESEE products are priced much lower than here. At the price point of the ESEE-4 and the accessories in Australia, I would expect a more premium

type of blade steel and some sort of basic sheath. As a result, I feel a bit ambiguous about the ESEE-4 Serrated knife. There are so many alternatives available at this price point and when I go out hunting, I prefer more corrosion resistant types of steel. Particularly for anything that involves highly corrosive substances like blood. Despite this, the ESEE-4 is without a doubt a solid knife and in more general camping and survival situations where it is the only knife you carry, I can see it being worth its weight in proverbial gold after you remove the sharp edge of the choil.

So let me leave it at this. If you do not mind the weight or even prefer heavier blades in an easy to sharpen steel, work mostly on larger animals and spend a lot of your time camping, the ESEE-4 is a dependable knife. They are easily available in Australia so ask your local distributor or jump online.

Check out eseeknives.com for more information. ■



Specifications:

Style:	Fixed blade
Overall length:	228.6mm
Blade dimensions:	114mm long / 4.8mm thick
Blade shape:	Drop point
Type of blade steel:	1095 Carbon Steel
Hardness:	55-57 HRC
Style and grind:	Plain edge, flat grind
Material handle:	G10, available in micarta too
Weight:	227 grams (knife only)
Price knife only/with sheath:	Around \$225 - \$275



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This DJI Mini-2 drone uses your smartphone or tablet for control.

The rise and rise of drones

Don Caswell

The world of drones just keeps getting better and better. Drone size is reducing, battery power lasts much longer, range is out to kilometres and the on-board smarts are outstanding. Now, you can pick up a feature-packed drone for less than \$1000. My wife Kathy and I do a lot of photography and we had been thinking about acquiring a drone for some time. When the price dropped below the \$1000 mark, we bought a DJI Mini-2 from a local stockist.

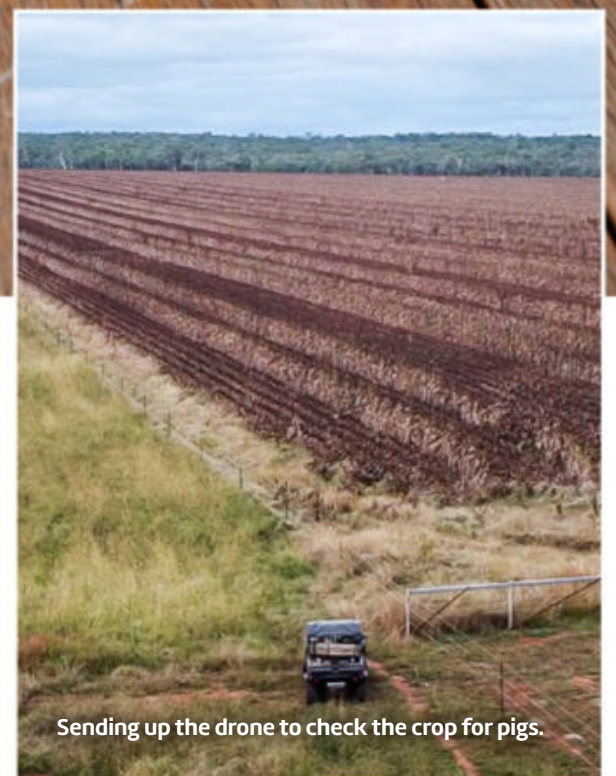
While Kathy was solely concerned in more outstanding landscape perspectives than can be had on foot, I was interested in using it for hunting. My hunting buddy had recently secured a drone and I was impressed by what it could do. But before we explore that, a brief look at the legalities is required.

As with any rapidly evolving technical gadget, the law has been slow to catch up. But, where there were no restrictions when drones first became available, there is now a growing raft of rules and

regulations to be aware of. That should not pose a problem to firearm owners as, these days, we have to be well versed in law and compliance.

Commonsense would indicate that flying your drone over a crowd of people is an unwise risk. Likewise, anywhere aircraft are likely to be operating, especially airports. The new drones have built-in virtual GPS walls that will not allow them to enter the declared no-fly zone surrounding an airport. The law states a 5.5km margin. Similarly, drones now have a height restriction that keeps them to a limit of 140m above the ground.

Nevertheless, as hunters visiting rural properties, we need to be extra mindful of light aircraft and helicopter movements that most likely are not included in the built-in no-fly zones. In areas where crop-dusters may be operating, your drone could pose a great threat to fast-flying croppies zooming in across a field only a metre above the ground.



Sending up the drone to check the crop for pigs.

A few years ago, there was a rumour, hopefully not true, that a crop-dusting pilot had died after he hit an animal-activist's drone illegally filming farm activities. Yet, it is a highly plausible scenario.

Another thing to be aware of is that it is illegal to use a drone to film any emergency services activities. That includes police, paramedics and firefighters. You can, for example, film a bushfire from your drone so long as you do not pick up any emergency services in the shot. Some national park areas also forbid drone use. Most times nowadays such information is readily available from websites and, if in doubt, make direct contact.

There are a number of government websites devoted to the do's and don'ts of flying a drone. These two CASA websites are a great place to gain more information: casa.gov.au/knowyourdrone casa.gov.au/droneapp

It is worth having a good look at these sites to familiarise yourself with the current requirements for recreational drone use, especially as the rules and regulations are still evolving.

Apart from great shots and video of your hunting locations, camps and activities, drones can be useful for scouting. Before approaching a crop, waterhole, or dead beast, where feral pigs or wild dogs may be present, a drone will allow you to discreetly scout the area and plan the best approach.

On the internet, there are videos by some pig hunters who, with the requisite amount of practice and experience, even use their drone to muster wild pigs on vast wetlands and push them within reach of the hunters.

Flying a drone is actually straightforward. It is nothing like trying to operate a remote-controlled model aircraft or helicopter. The powerful computer programs built into the drone take care of all that. With the joystick controls, you simply tell the drone to go left, right, up and down.

Release the control and it obediently holds position perfectly, adjusting for variance in the wind, awaiting further instructions. A great feature of the control



The drone is a compact unit.

systems is 'home'. Even if you have sent the drone far away and lost visual contact, it knows precisely where it, and you, are. At the command 'home' it will fly directly back to you, to within a metre of where it launched. It will also do this automatically once it detects its battery power is becoming too low.

Another apocryphal drone tale concerns a gadget-loving chap who bought one of the first drones. He felt no need to study the instruction manual before attempting his initial flight. After sending it out of sight, he hit the 'home' button and waited for his drone to reappear. However, the drone was never to be seen again. Our hero anxiously opened the manual where one of the first

entries, in large print, stated that the user must first override the default home location, which in his case was Seattle, USA. No fear of that anymore.

The controls for drones are based around using your smartphone, or tablet, as the screen. Your device clips into the control cradle and, using whatever drone app is appropriate, manoeuvring the drone is quite simple. So long as your drone weighs less than 250 grams, as most recreation models do, no licence is required.

Drones do come in much larger, and expensive, sizes. Typically, these are for specialist photography-video or are deploying other sensors for agricultural, forestry and mining activities. These larger drones require the operator to be licensed. It is worth noting that any commercial activity, regardless of drone size, requires licensing as well.

A weight limit of 250 grams might seem tiny, but drones of this size are fully functional and pack HD video and photography capability. Do not let the small size trick you. Another advantage is that these drones fold neatly away into a small carry bag that is easy to fit in a backpack, or a vehicle. There are many makes and models to choose from.

If you are thinking of opting for a drone then browse the internet, YouTube in particular, to look up reviews and demonstrations. Drones open a whole new avenue for hunting reconnaissance and photography. ■



Even when far from an airport, be wary of agricultural aircraft activities.

Relish the flavour

Lynn Bain wraps up ajvar and cevapi for a delicious campfire snack



Ajvar is simple to make.

Ajvar is a capsicum-based condiment originating in the Balkan Peninsula region that's traditionally partnered with cevapi, which are like skinless sausages or skinny rissoles.

Ingredients for ajvar

- 2 large red capsicums
- 1 small eggplant
- 1 clove garlic, crushed
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 tablespoon white wine vinegar (or apple cider vinegar)
- 1 teaspoon freshly ground salt
- generous amount freshly ground black pepper

Method for making ajvar

Heat your grill to a medium high or preheat your oven to 220C. Cook the capsicums and eggplant until the capsicums are charred and softened and the eggplant is blistered and soft. The timings may be different for the capsicum and eggplants so remove accordingly.

Once grilled, put the charred capsicum into a bowl and cover with either a lid or some plastic wrap. Doing this will seal in the moisture and steam the capsicums, which makes the skin easier to remove. Place the eggplant to one side until cool enough to handle.

When you are ready to peel the capsicums, remove them from the bowl and simply peel the charred skin off. Don't worry if there are a few charred bits sticking to the capsicum flesh. Then remove and discard the capsicum stem and seeds. Cut the eggplant into half and scoop out the softened flesh. Place the capsicum pieces, eggplant flesh, garlic, olive oil, vinegar, salt and pepper into a food processor and whisk until smooth(ish).

Spoon the ajvar into a clean jar and refrigerate until heading out bush. ■



Saute the cevapi on all four sides then serve on hot bread with a generous dollop of ajvar. *Note – cevapi can be substituted by any game meat or even traditional Aussie snags.

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Near and deer

As **Brad Allen** attests, there's nothing quite like the pursuit of roaring reds



A sea of early morning mist rising from the valley

It was a long two years since I'd had the opportunity to hunt roaring red stags, as the drought and COVID-19 played havoc with the plans of many hunters in 2020, of which I was one.

On our previous hunt we had seen a lot of immature stags, but there were a few that showed some real promise. However,

this year with the drought broken, I had a good feeling about our chances and the possibility of finding something special.

My eldest son Bill and I managed a visit to our hunting property prior to the rut for a quick recce, observing the abundance of feed throughout the bush and pastures, with many fat deer but no stags.

One month on, my nephew and regular hunting partner, Frank, and I again headed into deer country. At this time the bush stags were still mobbed up together and running with does and yearlings. One mob of 13 deer we observed comprised of five young stags with eight hinds and yearlings. The older stags were elusive, still holed up wherever it is that the big boys hide.

Another two weeks on, Frank and I had managed to arrange more time off so we headed back to the bush for another look. On arrival, the property owner confirmed that the roar had kicked off properly a few days earlier. It looked like our luck might finally be in and with high hopes, we headed up the range to see what was happening.

We parked the Prado in our usual spot, and as we geared up, we were treated to the sounds of three different stags bellowing their challenges. Focusing on the closest roar, we quietly headed towards the top of the range. We'd only gone 150 yards when we alerted an unseen mob of deer that moved off through the bush. Luckily for us, they had only heard but not seen or smelt us, so didn't seem too worried. A few hundred metres further on, the stag roared again, much closer to our position than we first thought. I noticed the reddish-brown back line of a deer through the long grass on top of the ridge.

Glassing the area, we spotted several more feeding hinds before we saw a reasonable set of antlers moving through the long grass. The stag stepped forward a few paces before once again laying his head back and bellowing another deep, throaty challenge. I could clearly see his antlers now and counted eight symmetrical points. He appeared to be a reasonably young animal with obvious potential for the future but as he didn't meet our minimum requirement of 5x5, we quietly backed away and let them be.

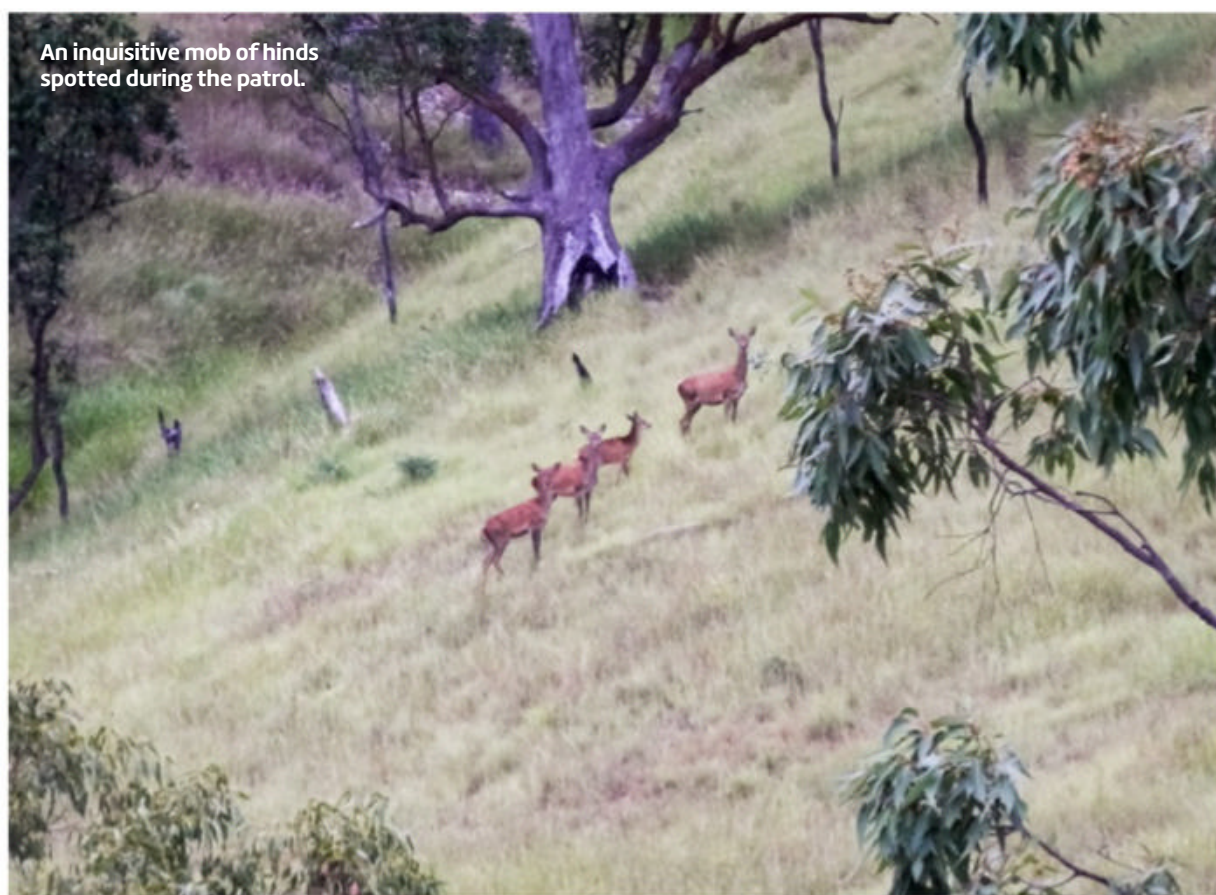
Another stag roared and with a light breeze in our face, we headed for a look. Quietly creeping around the hill, we peered down and observed a young stag holding four hinds. He was only sporting a thin head of 3x4, so we again left him to deal with business.

As the day was drawing to a close, more stags were becoming vocal, some near and some much further away. With limited daylight left, we opted to check out the next closest stag, that turned out to be another promising 4x4, but with no hinds in tow.

Shooting light faded quickly and it was well and truly dark by the time we arrived back at the vehicle, where we could hear two stags roaring in the valley behind our parking spot. They would surely be worth



Brad's son Bill glassing on their pre-rut recce.



An inquisitive mob of hinds spotted during the patrol.

a look so a hunt plan was formulated for the morning.

Shortly after 4am we rose with mist hanging in the valleys and by 5am we were again parked at the top of the range, where we heard a stag roaring in the same valley as the evening before. The light breeze was in our favour, so we quietly headed off in his direction.

As we drew level, we dropped down into his valley through the lantana and thin scrub. The roars were coming from low down on the opposite face and as we slowly moved and scanned, Frank spotted a feeding hind. With binoculars out, we continued scanning as more hinds materialised from the bush and as the stag roared again, we both spied him low in the valley where he was moving around between his hinds.

Near and deer



Two of the five young stags mobbed up with hinds just prior to the rut.



Prime South East Queensland red deer country.

He was a large bodied, obviously mature animal and even without binoculars, we could see his heavy timber. It is always difficult to count tines on a stag's head, but as he walked into a clearing and roared, we could distinctly tell he was exactly what we had been looking for. His antlers were heavy with five tines on one side and six on the other, so he was definitely a shooter. "I'll have him," said Frank, as we then attempted to move into a position for a shot. The stag kept moving slowly up the valley, roaring

intermittently and eventually crossing over to our side.

I could see the stag approaching and I tried to signal this to Frank who was 15 yards lower down the hill than me, with his earplugs in, and wasn't aware. As it burst through the lantana only 35 yards in front of us, Frank was caught off guard and as he lifted his .270 for a shot, the stag saw the movement and wheeled back into the scrub, heading up the valley at a great rate of knots.

Disappointment hung heavily in the cool morning air as we hunted back along the ridge. The 5x6 had stopped roaring, so we headed back to the top of the escarpment. It was now mid-morning and as the roaring had diminished with only a few far-off stags making noise, we made for camp.

Not wanting to spook the big stag any further, we opted to give him some space that afternoon to let him settle down. We decided to hunt the northern part of our area and have a look at some country we hadn't seen for a while. This vicinity was steep and the only way to traverse most of it was by walking a rough track that follows the spine of a ridge. This in itself wasn't a problem, as being up high put us in a good position to listen for roaring stags. Several roars were heard coming from the far side of the valley, but try as we might, we were unable to locate the source of the noise.

Further on Frank and I were surprised when an unseen stag roared less than 100 yards along, where the track dropped off the ridge. A second close roar stood the hairs up on the back of our necks. With the breeze in our favour, we pussyfooted down to a flat bench where the strong smell of a rutting stag hung thick in the air. We waited patiently for an encore when a lazy, throaty roar echoed up from the valley.

We moved forward and glassed the creek flats where Frank was the first to spot a small mob of hinds, then the stag as he roared again. He was quite a respectable head and we each counted 10 long tines on his antlers, five per side. "He's a nice head and he'll do me," said Frank as we edged down the ridge in an attempt to secure a position for a shot.

With my Leica Geovids, I ranged the stag at just over 200 yards but he kept enough light scrub between him and us to make a shot impossible. Just on last light, he moved his harem up the range where they were swallowed by one of the many folds of the hill. Hoping that he wouldn't stray too far from that spot overnight, we had already started making plans to have another crack at him, first thing in the morning.

The breeze was in our faces as we quietly moved along the ridge towards the 5x5's last known position in the morning darkness. As luck would have it, the 5x6

from the previous morning roared within 300 yards of us as we traversed the ridge towards the 5x5.

“Okay, which one do you want to go after?” I whispered to Frank. “They are both good heads,” was the reply, “But I want the 5x5, his tines are longer.” Fair enough I thought as we walked past the 5x6, to the end of the ridge.

When we finally reached where we thought he would be, we sat, waited and

listened, but nothing. We were considering heading back to the 5x6 who was still roaring, when a lethargic, croaky roar resonated up from the valley.

“That’s his roar all right,” said Frank and we slowly made our way down through the bush. We moved quietly, until we spotted hinds feeding on the opposite face.

After 10 minutes, we finally located the stag halfway up the opposite slope. Picking a clear path through the trees was difficult

but Frank finally assumed a stable sitting position over the shooting sticks. As the monarch turned side on at 220 yards, Frank gave him the good news with the .270. The old boy collapsed upon impact and rolled down the steep slope for about 60 yards before being hooked by his antlers on a thin tree. “Did I hit him?” asked Frank. “You smoked him mate, great shot!” I replied.

A full 20 minutes later, we had made it down through the lantana and up the sheer wall that was the other side of the valley, to where Frank’s stag lay. However, he wasn’t the 5x5 we thought he was, with an extra tine on his right antler that we hadn’t spotted with the binoculars. He was another respectable 5x6. Sometimes, with a little bit of luck, all the hard work finally comes together. There’s nothing like hunting reds during the roar... ■



Frank displays his 5x6 trophy.



A happy Frank, with his hard-won 5x6 red stag.



A 4x4 'dead head' picked up for a garden ornament.

Increase those night-time odds



Mark van den Boogaart takes a look at the impressive Burris Thermal Handheld 35

Showing my age, when I think thermal technology, I think *Predator*. You know, the 1987 sci-fi action movie where Arnold Schwarzenegger battles against a predatory, trophy hunting alien. With its thermal vision, there was no hiding for Arnie and the crew.

Moving on from the 80s and sci-fi action flicks, like so many things, thermal technology has continued to develop and improve. Possibly the most significant refinement has been the overall reduction in cost, to the point where thermal optics are becoming an everyday option for the recreational hunter.

Burris, it seems, has gone all out and released a wide selection of thermal optic options including handheld, clip-on and fixed rifle mount units.

In considering which one to test, I decided on a handheld unit as I usually hunt on foot and on the move with both rifle and shotgun. The Burris handheld

bracket includes the BTH 25, BTH 35 and BTH 50 models. BTH stands for Burris Thermal Handheld, while the model number refers to the size, in mm, of the front objective. In picking a review model, I went middle of the road and chose the 35.

While all units in the range share a 400x300 resolution rating, a pixel size of 17µm and a frame rate of 50Hz, there are some marked differences between models. For instance, the BTH 25 has a zoom of x1.7 to x6.8, the BTH 35 (tested) a zoom range of x2.3 to x9.2, with the BTH 50 possessing the greatest magnification range of a x3.3 to x13.2.

Physically, the BTH 50 is 214mm x 65mm x 69mm in length, with a weight of 540 grams, while the BTH 35 comes in at 192mm x 65mm x 71mm and 485 grams. The BTH 25 has the same physical dimensions as the BTH 35, though is 15 grams lighter.

Spec wise, all models have a five-colour palette option, Stadiametric Ranging, Hot

Track, Manual and auto Non-Uniformity Compensation (auto recalibration and image refresh), Adjustable contrast, Adjustable brightness, App connectivity and an IP66 shock rating. Unit power is provided by a built-in battery that is rechargeable via a USB-C connection.

Out of the box, what you find from Burris is a light and compact thermal monocular. Incorporating a polymer housing, the unit has a solid feel and the rubberised controls add to the overall rugged design. You also obtain the necessary charging leads, a neoprene protective pouch, instruction book and carrying lanyard.

After a quick once over, I checked out the control layout. It's ambidextrous and as a leftie that deserves a big tick from me.

Next, I set the unit to my eye. Using the front manual focus ring in combination with the rear eyepiece diopter I was able to fine-tune the unit to a high level of clarity, though as it is manual focus you do have to

adjust the focal ring to keep a sharp image if it doesn't do it for you.

Wanting to gain a better understanding of looking at the world through a thermal optic, I decided on a test bench experiment.

Using two small, brass deer figurines, I placed them on the floor. Leaving one at room temperature, I heated the other by cupping it in my hands. The difference between the two objects through a thermal optic is remarkable.

Checking out the capability of the BTH 35, frequently used features are accessible via a dedicated button on the control panel. These include a stand by-style on/off mode that turns off the screen, while the unit remains powered up. There is also Instant calibration, Image enhancement, Zoom, Colour palette selection plus Still and Video image recording.

In considering these features it is worth talking about the Colour palette selection and Image capturing capability in more detail.

Firstly, to the Colour palette. The BTH offers Black Hot, White Hot, Red Hot, Blue Hot and Iron. The colour refers to the representative heat signature, for instance in White Hot, heat is represented by white intensity, while the rest of the image is represented in black. During testing I found having a Colour palette option useful, as different situations are better suited to specific Colour palettes than others.

Turning to the in-built Video and Still image option it is important to state that the BTH 35 is not a camera. It is better described as a thermal optic with Video and Still image capture capability. As a still camera, its electronic shutter speed is a little slow, while as a video camera it doesn't have image stabilisation.

Images offer a higher level of clarity with the unit mounted on a tripod via the incorporated screw fitting. Screen shots taken from video recorded on the move, without tripod support, in the field provide less clarity.

The other, more customisable features of the BTH 35 are accessible through the comprehensive on-board menu which is divided into two broad categories – Quick start settings and more Advanced options.

Quick start settings

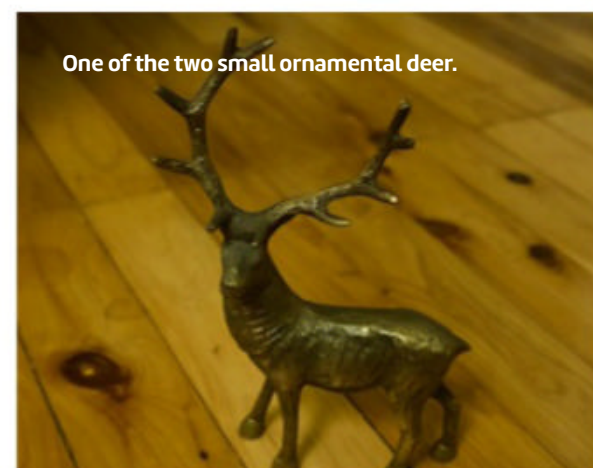
- PIP – A picture in picture function.
- Screen Bri – A screen brightness setting.
- Stradiametric Ranging – An in-built target range estimation tool.
- Hot Track – A function that allows you to automatically track movement via a positive heat signature.
- A Super Energy Saver mode – Allows you to gain a few more minutes operation out of a nearly depleted battery charge.

Advanced options

- Image Quality Adjustments – A whole raft of options to fine-tune image clarity and quality.
- Calibration Mode – While the unit automatically calibrates, this function allows control when unit calibration/image refresh occurs.
- Wi-Fi – Allows you to pair the BTH 35 with your smartphone, giving you another whole new choice of options.
- Power Saving Settings helps gain the longest run out of a single charge.
- Indication Settings are all about customising the display.
- General Settings deals with setting up the time, date, date stamp and similar options.
- Other Settings is for fine-tuning the range finding function.

To find out how to move about the individual functions of the BTH range, check out the Burris produced 'How to

use a Handheld Thermal Optic' video on YouTube. It is a good outlet with lots of detailed information.



One of the two small ornamental deer.



The warmed companion piece, as viewed through the BTH 35.

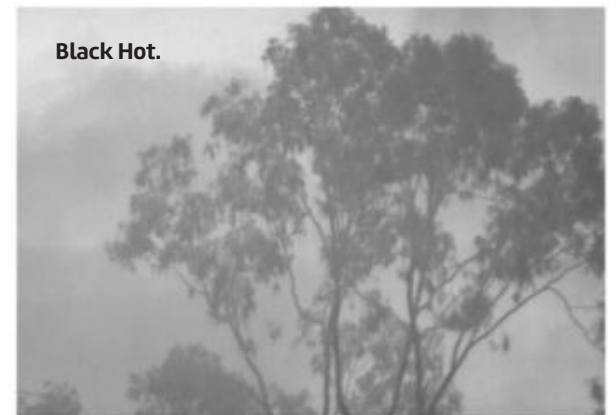
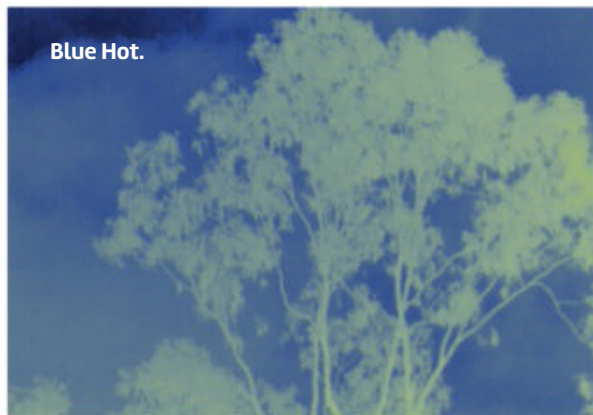


Both in the same shot, the difference in heat signature is obvious.



Fallow deer through the BTH 35.

Increase those night-time odds



After a couple of days testing the unit around the house and local scrubland, my initial impressions of the BTH 35 were that it is a good consumer level thermal optic. With that, it was time to field test the BTH 35. Luckily, I had a deer hunt coming up.

On our first day hunting, we ventured out after dark to see what the Burris was really like. What became apparent was the game changing nature of thermal optics.

It can be a little hard to explain, but thermal optics don't help you see better at night. What they do is completely change the spectrum in which you view the world. Light no longer matters as you are now seeing heat. Trees, rocks, fallen timber and of course animals of all shapes and sizes produce, retain and radiate heat, and it is this heat signature that you view.

A darkened field is no longer dark, it's dotted with intense, moving and stationary heat signatures. On our first night of testing, we observed cattle, birds, kangaroos, deer and pigs, both at close range and at distance.

On our second night we again ventured out and followed the movement of cattle and game animals. What really caught our eyes were the pigs, so for our final night we hatched a plan to switch from observing, to actively hunting with the BTH 35.

We would focus on the pigs and due to the proximity of cattle, we could close the distance and take them with a shotgun. Now, while the theory was sound, on that last evening the pigs didn't show. Not wanting to waste the opportunity, we switched to deer. With the help of the BTH 35 we were successfully able to close within shotgun range, though did not fire a shot.

In considering the outcome of the test bench and field work, the fact is the BTH 35 delivers. For the recreational hunter the BTH 35 gives customisable, thermal

optic technology in a lightweight, practical, functional package at a competitive price.

Looking more broadly across the entire stable, if you like to hunt on the go, the BTH 25 and BTH 35 are ideal choices and if you like to observe game at longer distance from a stationary position, the BTH 50 would be the better option.

With that done, I wanted to field test the unit and with a winter hunting trip to NSW coming up I had the perfect opportunity. The idea was to try out the Burris as part of my normal hunting kit in both day and night time situations.

For daytime use we wanted to use the Burris to follow up on blood trails but didn't need it, so we pivoted to after dark and lowlight testing. Over the course of three nights, we left camp to find game under thermal power.

The reality was, it was so easy. It's difficult to explain how well Burris thermal opens up the night. It's not so much you can see more clearly, it's that you now view specific heat signatures. That being the case, light no longer matters – you are truly observing game in a different way.

Even things like vehicle tracks and exposed earth carry heat, and along with animals they jump out of the dark and are clearly visible and easily definable to your eye.

On the first evening while observing game at distance, I decided to look behind me. Immediately three fallow appeared, at close range.

They were comfortable and I watched as one bedded down 80m away. Throughout the evening I experimented with the Zoom and Colour palette.





Depending on the setting, either the White or Black Hot produced the best viewing results and responded the most to fine adjustment.

During our second night out, we observed a whole paddock full of animals. Cattle, roos, small birds and deer were all clearly visible. We also spotted pigs.

On our third and final night we changed things up a little. We again decided to see if we could take a pig under thermal power with a shotgun. It proved a useful test of

the Burris and while we didn't observe any pigs, we were able to close the gap on a number of deer.

So much so that we moved within comfortable shotgun range and could have easily taken an animal had we chosen to do so.

Over those three nights one thing became abundantly clear – the Burris Thermal Handheld 35 is a real game changer for those who hunt in the night.

If you are considering thermal optics, then have a look at the Burris series – the truth of the matter is they work.

Just as importantly, if you have been put off by the price of thermal optics, Burris now provides a more affordable collection of units that you can set up to suit your personal approach to hunting.

The BTH 35 used throughout this review was supplied by Beretta Australia and retailed for \$3090 at the time of writing. Check berettaaustralia.com.au for availability – the models are listed as H25, H35 and H50. Check out my video review on SSAA TV ■



Burris Thermal

H-Series: Handheld



BTH range spec sheet (supplied by Beretta Australia).

Data Sheet

	Burris H25	Burris H35	Burris H50
Frame rate	50Hz	50Hz	50Hz
Size	192x65x71	192x65x71	214x65x71
Lens size	25mm	35mm	50mm
Field of View	15.4x11.6	11.1x8.3	7.8x5.8
Manual Focus	Yes	Yes	Yes
Digital Zoom	1-4x	1-4x	1-4x
Recording function	Yes	Yes	Yes
Streaming Video function	Yes	Yes	Yes
Weight	470g	485g	535g
Pitch	17um	17um	17um
Detector Type	VOx	VOx	VOx
NETD	</= 50mK	</= 50mK	</= 50mK
Detector Resolution	400x300	400x300	400x300
Display Resolution	1280x960	1280x960	1280x960
Display Color	yes	yes	yes
Adjustable diopter	yes	yes	yes
WiFi	yes	yes	yes
video-out cable option	Micro HDMI	Micro HDMI	Micro HDMI
Internal Battery life (rechargeable)	~5 hours	~5 hours	~5 hours
Includes charger for battery	yes	yes	yes
Electronic Boresight	no	no	no
Picture in Picture	yes	yes	yes
Hot Spot Tracking	Yes	Yes	Yes
Stadiometric Ranging	yes	yes	yes
Temp Range	-10 - +50 C	-10 - +50 C	-10 - +50 C
Detection Range	700m	1000m	1400m
Magnification range	1.7-6.8x	2.3x9.2x	3.3-13.2x

What not to pack for an African safari

Michael Arnold

The loud thuds of every footfall made me wince. My PH's glance back said it all – “What the heck were you thinking wearing those boots?” I wish loud boots were the only thing I ever regretted bringing on safari...

Cumbersome boots are ill-suited to the testing terrain of the African landscape.



suffered various misadventures on my earliest African safaris. So, fellow African hunters, please learn from my poor choices. If I can save just one of you from packing the wrong things and overpacking the right things, I will feel satisfied.

I want to leave you with some principles to guide your choices; principles that I should have followed but, sadly, did not.

Boot-the-boots

'Loud', sums up the eight days on my first safari. On that initial outing I ran into trees and tripped over nearly every obstruction on the ground – including tiny roots. When wearing the equivalent of Herman Munster boots – heavy, thick, hard-soled and insulated – my movement through the bush sounded more like a startled Cape buffalo than a stealthy hunter.

I had read multiple books and watched videos that extolled the need for quiet-soled boots for African hunting. But I

procrastinated because of the high cost. I was already stretching my budget to near breaking, so I kept hesitating until, suddenly, I was out of time – it was too late to buy a pair and break them in sufficiently. In the back of my mind, I thought maybe I could find some deftness and copy legendary explorer Frederick Selous while on safari. Apparently, if you believe my professional hunter and tracker, I fell short of that.

I corrected this error for my second safari, purchasing a pair of Zimbabwean-made Courteney boots. All-natural materials make up this footwear. Designed by a British shoemaker with a serious love for Africa, these boots cushion the foot inside and out and eliminate the Frankenstein-esque noises emanating from the ground.

PHs on more recent safaris mentioned that I am relatively quiet on stalks. The softness of the Courteney soles – compared to the heavy-duty tyre treads on my insulated hunting boots – allows me to feel

sticks, rocks and other impending noise-makers before I break, roll, or kick them down the track. Even I can tell that there is a significant reduction in clumping coming from my size 11½ feet.

Being seen is not okay

Another admonition from my PH on my first safari was: "Stop moving your head so much!" I thought that a broad-brimmed, khaki coloured hat would protect me from the scorching South African sun and also help hide me from the watchful eyes of our prey.

Though the khaki hat did a good job of keeping me from serious sunburn on my ears and face, it was a terrible choice for blending into the largely dark green Eastern Cape vegetation. The hat, like a lighthouse beacon, was visible from extreme distances and twice affected our hunt for the pygmy antelope known as a bush duiker.



Duikers prefer dense undercover, where they can detect the presence of hunters before hunters see them.

What not to pack for an African safari



Michael managed to take this duiker despite his light-coloured hat clashing with the green vegetation.

The first time, my PH and I were standing on a hillside overlooking a broad, brush-choked valley. We were able to watch for animals approaching from hundreds of yards. My PH used a calling technique to entice the antelopes, rather than us tracking them.

On this particular sunny afternoon, I crouched into the Cape vegetation, thinking myself well hidden. I kept my head in a constant, slow swivel from left to right. After only 10 minutes, we could see a male duiker coming closer from our front. I continued my scanning. At 400 yards, the duiker looked up our slope, froze, then turned and bolted in the opposite direction. My PH looked at me and through clenched teeth growled: "Stop moving your head!"

The second time netted me my trophy duiker, although it almost didn't. Again, we were on a hillside with a valley laid out before us. When my PH began his duiker call, we immediately heard a crashing in the brush as a beautiful male with huge

horns broke from cover. I dipped my head to look through the scope of my rifle – and the duiker halted. "He's seen that hat!" my PH hissed, "Shoot him!" Fortunately, I was able to fire the shot before this trophy buck turned tail and ran.

For my subsequent safaris, I replaced my khaki-coloured beacon with olive-green dullness. Since my PHs have not yelled at me again, I assume I made the right choice.

Swinging in the wind

On my first safari, I followed the advice of African hunting experts and purchased a beautiful (and expensive) set of wooden tripod sticks. Such sticks, though solid, only support the forearm of the rifle while the butt swings in the wind. I practised off this rest for months prior to my safari, shooting several hundred rounds through the two rifles that I was taking. Because of the significant horizontal wobble that accompanies this type of shooting rest I never was able to be accurate much over 100 yards.

Upon arriving in Africa, my PH took one look at my swanky sticks and said: "Why don't you use my 4 stable sticks rest?" I'll be honest, I took my first look at his so-called Stable Sticks and doubted their ability. They only had two points of contact with the ground. My wooden sticks had three. Surely, I would be wobbling even worse when resting over this weird-looking device. I didn't comprehend that the butt of my rifle was also the butt of the joke – I could not keep it from swinging to-and-fro using my equipment. My beautiful wooden sticks now act as a decoration in my office/trophy room.

On subsequent safaris, I replaced the wooden tripod with two 4 Stable Sticks models – the sitting version and the standing rest. This enabled me to take multiple plains game animals.

The sound of nylon

Taking a nylon backpack to a brush country hunt might have been my poorest choice

of all. Imagine the amount of noise ripstop nylon material can make when shoving through dense vegetation that looks and feels like Texas Hill Country cedar trees. If you don't know that sound, just imagine fingernails on coarse sandpaper. If I thought the PH on my first safari was frustrated with my choice of footwear, it paled to his disgust when he continually heard my pack screeching through the underbrush.

One day we were in the brush hunting for an Eastern Cape kudu. I was carrying a pack that was caterwauling its way through the interlocking branches. Ultimately, we found kudus, but alerted by my racket, they were already hundreds of yards away, belting through the brush.

The dire effects from my pack-noise-maker were also sadly evident when we tried to sneak up on a trophy mountain reedbuck. We came through the brush line and saw only rapidly retreating hindquarters – they had been only 100 yards away when we entered the narrow band of trees and bushes but were now at 400 yards. I looked at my PH and tried to grin, quietly saying: “Maybe they heard my pack?” His return look, I'm pretty sure, said it all.

On my next safaris, I took a soft-fabric camouflage daypack to carry while hunting. This pack was an old friend from my whitetail, elk and black bear hunts, which I had bought mainly because of its quietness in dense forests. Why I didn't think to bring it on my first safari, I'll never know.

More is not necessarily better

Not only can you pack wrong on safari, I've learned the hard way that you can also pack too much, whether it's in clothing or equipment – or both. I am not someone who worries about paying extra for baggage that exceeds the required maximum weight if it's necessary, but I do care about those charges if it's due to my poor planning. More importantly, to me at least, is the strong desire to avoid the torture of dragging or pushing hugely overweight baggage through multiple airports.

As professional hunter, journalist and adventurer Craig Boddington – and numerous others – have repeatedly informed us African-hunter wannabees: “The staff in an African safari camp do laundry every day.”

So, even though unmentionables for the layovers on the way to and from camp are necessary, don't pack a wad of cotton in your bag.

Do yourself a favour by not adding extra clothing to have to dig through, and store, when in camp. Four pairs of items like socks or underwear are likely too many, but it is reasonable.

A walking battery barn

I'll never forget, or live down, the time I injured myself on a safari – by overpacking. I strained my back by repeatedly lifting my overloaded backpack. The irony is most of the weight didn't even need to be in there. A good portion of what was in the backpack was necessary: camera equipment, binocular-rangefinder, electronic earplugs, computer, cords for the electronics, paperwork for airport and customs officials, etc.

Included in the 'etc' were the batteries needed to keep the headlamp, camera equipment, optics and hearing protection functioning. You're not allowed to put any lithium batteries into checked baggage, as spontaneous ignition can occur, so I carried the batteries on my back. However, I should not have been carrying 7kg of batteries, reflecting literally 10 times the number of batteries needed for each piece of equipment.

The most egregious example was including 16 AAA batteries for my headlamp. The three new batteries I had installed before leaving never ran down. I could have taken six spare AAAs and had six too many. A ridiculous overpopulation of the numerous other types of batteries also weighed down my backpack, but you see the point.

Adapt to the situation

From batteries we move to electrical adaptors. I have spent 20 years travelling internationally – up to 15 weeks per year, mainly for business. I've learned that I need chargers for phone, electronic reader, computer and camera batteries. I also need the proper adaptors to fit the wall sockets in various countries.

Again, this is essential equipment needed to read, write, take photographs and use my mobile phone. This may sound like a lot of necessary electronics, but really, at most I would need to recharge four items at once. It begs the question as to why I ended up in multiple safari camps with more than 10 individual adaptors.

Even conceding that adaptors do occasionally die and need replacement, in all my travels I've never had more than one go bad on a trip. Yet I failed to learn my lesson from safari one and carried even more adaptor deadweight on safari two. My back hurts just thinking about it. ■



The campfire combo

Ben Unten whips up a delectable duo of camp oven chilli with crusty bread

Coal-smoked chilli

This is an incredibly simple recipe, perfect for the quieter periods during the day when you are on a camp hunt. Using a tripod makes regulating the temperature so much easier.

Ingredients

- 1 tablespoon oil
- 500g of venison mince
- 2 cans diced tomatoes
- Your choice of 2 cans of drained beans, either: red kidney beans, borlotti beans, or butter beans or even 2 cans of four-bean mix
- 1 small onion – chopped
- 2 cloves garlic – finely diced
- ½ teaspoon pepper
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon ground chilli – to taste
- Optional toppings: shredded cheese, sour cream

Method

- Heat oil in a camp oven.
- Add the onion and garlic and cook until onion is translucent.
- Add the mince and cook until brown.
- Add the (drained) beans, tomatoes and combine well.
- Bring to a boil, then reduce heat to medium-low.
- Put the lid on and gently cook. How long? Anything from two–six hours. The longer the better! (Remove or crack the lid for the last half-hour of cooking if the chilli has too much liquid).
- Serve with additional toppings – grated cheese and a generous dollop of sour cream.



Tasty chilli topped with sour cream.



Beans are added to the chilli during cooking.

Bread that rises to the occasion

We all know about damper, that great Australian traditional tucker made using flour and water. I've baked hundreds of them and some of my best results have come out so dense that the loaf would sink if you threw it overboard.

I've made dessert damper, which was sweeter and we used it as a chopping block to split logs on, and I've prepared a breakfast damper, which had the consistency of wet rock, but tasted of salty goodness.

This recipe is something different. It's not quite bread and it's not quite damper, so I've dubbed it 'breadamper'.

Homemade bread is difficult to craft light and airy but this is a fine combination. It's not quite as light as bread, but much less dense than damper, and definitely tasty.

Ingredients

- Bread making packet mix – Laucke make a good one
- 315ml lukewarm water

Method

- Combine the flour and yeast sachet from the packet in a bowl – make sure you leave some flour in the packet.
- Add the water to the mix as per the instructions on the packet to make the dough.
- Sprinkle some flour on a chopping board, bench or camp table, remove the dough from the bowl and begin kneading for 5–10 minutes.
- Put back in the bowl, cover with a paper towel, tea towel or cling wrap and place in a warm spot out of the wind for 45 minutes to let it rise.
- This process can be repeated several

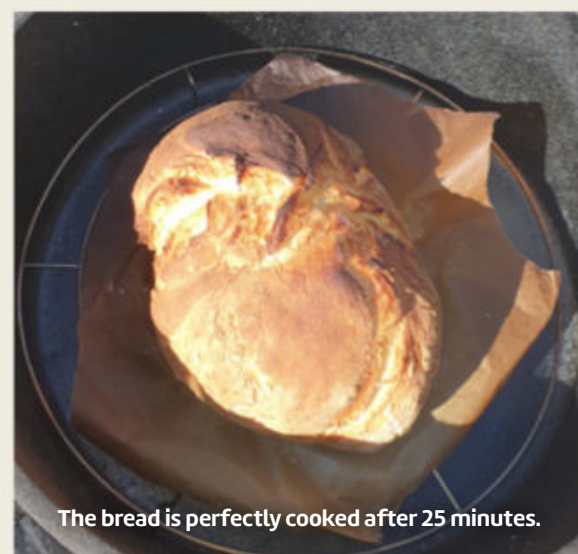
- times for a lighter, fluffier loaf.
- Place a piece of baking paper on a trivet in a pre-warmed camp oven and position the dough on top.
- Put the lid on and cover with coals.
- Cook for approximately 25 minutes

(check after 15–20 minutes depending on the heat of your camp oven).

- Serve warm alongside your chilli.
- Any leftover bread can be enjoyed with lots of butter and honey or jam for brekky the next morning. ■



Place dough on baking paper on a roasting trivet.



The bread is perfectly cooked after 25 minutes.



Leftover bread smothered in butter and honey the next morning – delicious!

Return to the fold

Jan Kaptein finds a neat alternative in the Ruike P801 knife

A little while ago, I was in town to purchase some hunting supplies. This invariably includes a trip to the local knife shop. Not because I need another knife, but it is always good to see whether something new and exciting is available.

A local country town hardware store may not have a wide selection of blades available, but this particular outlet happens to stock Ruike knives, which are among my favourites when it comes to affordable folders. Over the years, I have owned a number of them and as described in my Ruike P108 folder review in Issue 76 of *Australian Hunter*, my experience is that they are well made and stand up to a disproportionate amount of abuse.

On this particular occasion, a knife that is not too dissimilar from the P108 caught my eye. It was the Ruike P801-SF folding knife. To date, I have not been able to ascertain what the 'SF' suffix means. If I ventured a guess, it would be Stainless Folder or something along those lines.

In the scheme of keeping things simple I do not see the point of the apparent trend that seems to have many producers adding all sorts of codes and letters to items, even if there are no variations available. Fortunately, the knife itself does not have any additions that are not required. Well, almost none as we will find in the review.

In essence, the P801 is a basic knife that just does what a knife is supposed to do. The benefits of folding knives such as

unobtrusive carry, low weight and compact size have been addressed in other reviews. Disadvantages compared to full-tang fixed blades such as structural integrity and so on are also known, so I will not dwell on them.

While in the shop, not needing another knife, I was adamant that I would walk out without one. However, when the owner told me he had a new knife, in a box that had been crushed, at a steep discount, I just had to buy it. And I am glad I did as the P801 improves on a few minor niggles I have with my P108.

Let's do a brief recap of the brand itself. Ruike is the knife brand of flashlight producer Fenix. The Ruike brand dates back to 1998 when its founder, Mr Leung, started providing design and manufacturing



The Ruike P801 folding knife is sleek yet sturdy.

services to other knife producers. Ruike only started selling knives under its own brand name in 2016. The majority of the options are folding knives, though they also have a few fixed blade products.

Over the past few months, I have put the P801 through its paces. In many ways, I have found it to be an improvement over the P108 and to me it is an almost ideal blade. Handle and blade materials are fairly standard across the Ruike folder range and like the P108, the handle of the P801 is made from stonewashed 420 stainless steel.

The blade is Sandvik 14c28n steel, which is the latest in the Sandvik line. It is easy to sharpen and keeps its edge well. Corrosion resistance is also good, though I have found the blade of the P801 to be prone to superficial oxidation near the joint, which is odd and merits further investigation.

Opened, the knife is 200mm long, closed it measures 114mm. The blade is drop point shaped, 86mm long and 3mm thick. Hardness is specified as 58–60 HRC and the grind is an easy to maintain western flat format at 20 degrees.

The opening mechanism is a bit of a mystery to me. There is a regular ‘flipper’ as well as a thumb stud. The P801 makes use of ball bearing washers, which break in quickly and make operation smooth. When opened, the blade locks in place with a traditional frame-lock. Like the P108, the P801 is easily serviceable as it is put together with torx screws and can be taken apart for cleaning.

So, what makes me consider the P801 an improvement over the P108? Interestingly, it’s the things that are not there that I consider the biggest upgrades. The design is simpler and as a result easier to keep clean.

First of all, there is no secondary locking mechanism. The ‘Beta Plus’ lock of the P108 is omitted. I never use it on my P108 and the mechanism is prone to collecting dust and grime. In addition to this, the P801 is held together by studs instead of a lined backing. This open design is used by various brands and also makes the knife easier to clean. I routinely rinse the knife and if I want it dry, I simply leave it in the sun or pass a strip of cloth or a tissue through it.

The fact that the handle has no cut-outs on the inside means the surfaces are smooth except for the liner lock, making cleaning and drying even easier. This is appealing because of what to me is a third improvement. The blade has slightly more belly, making the P801 a competent skinning blade. This means blood and grease land on the knife. Both are best removed as soon as possible due to the corrosive nature of blood in particular.

A final improvement to me is the belt clip. Gone is the more elaborate clip that has a stud which cuts into the fabric of your clothes. Instead, there is a basic blue anodised clip with properly rounded edges.

In the field, the P801 works soundly. It is compact, does not weigh too much and is well constructed. For normal use, the studs holding the knife together are at least as solid as the metal-lined backing used in the P108. Around camp, the knife works well for light chores. However, where the P801 really comes into its own is when out hunting for meat. The blade has sufficient belly to work well as a skinning blade and



The clip on the P801 does not damage your clothes.

Return to the fold

cutting out a backstrap on an average sized deer or pig is not a problem either.

The knife is almost as easy to wipe down as a fixed blade due to the open and simple design. When travelling, I like it as an everyday carry. The fact that it opens manually and has a fairly compact blade means it is legal in most places I go to, but do make sure to check local laws and regulations. The Sandvik 14c28n is easy to sharpen and keeps its edge well enough too.

How I wish the P801 did not have downsides. It would mean I could finally stop looking for the ideal folding knife. Unfortunately, there is a combined design choice that really baffles me, which is so glaringly obvious it should never have made it past the initial concept.

The first part of the design that just does not make sense is the thumb stud. It is too small and located too close to the joint to ever allow you to open the blade. Push as hard as you like, all you will accomplish is

breaking your skin. Where fancier knives have threaded thumb posts, the P801 does not, so you are stuck with it unless you want to take your Dremel to it and grind it off.

However, I could live with an ‘ornamental’ stud. If only it did not sit right above the sharpened edge of the blade. It impedes easy sharpening on a stone because you have to angle the knife away to sharpen the last part of the edge. To add insult to injury, the corner of the handle juts out far enough to coincide with the final part of the edge too. Forget just angling your knife at 90 degrees to the sharpening stone. Both the thumb stud and handle are in the way. Why, oh why?

So, where does that leave us? Could have been, would have been comes to mind. The P801 could have so easily been an almost ideal folding knife for me. However, I sharpen on stones and the design choice to include an ‘ornamental’ stud and have the handle jut out just a bit too far makes me cringe.

That said, neither impedes with day-to-day use and I still very much enjoy the knife. The superficial oxidation on the blade near the joint seems to have been caused by a humid ball bearing washer. I discovered and sorted that when I pulled the knife apart to investigate.

The fact that I could just do so and that a knife in this price range is easy to service is wonderful. Would I buy the P801 again knowing what I know now? Yes, I would. By the time you read this, I will have ground off the thumb stud and have a near ideal folding knife for my uses that include anything from skinning game, camp chores and everyday carry. Should you go for it? If you can live with the design defect and are looking for an affordable, easy to service folder, yes. If not, I would suggest the P108 instead. Visit ruikeknives.com for their full array of knives.

Check out your local outlets or jump online to purchase. ■



Specifications:

Dimensions opened/closed	200mm/114mm
Blade dimensions	86mm long and 3mm thick
Type of blade steel	Sandvik 14c28n
Hardness	58-60 HRC
Style and grind	Plain edge, flat grind at 20 degrees
Blade shape	Drop point
Material handle	420 stainless, stonewashed
Opening system	Flipper and thumb stud
Lock	Frame-lock
Pocket clip	Yes, tip-up (right)
Weight	120 grams
Price	About \$55

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



- Supporting conservation activities
- Supporting research activities
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Membership No.

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The SSAA Card Holder is a slim, lightweight and stylish leather-look wallet, it features four licensed-sized card holder slots, two large slots and a clear slot.

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SSAA Magnum Shooting Glasses

Comes with three interchangeable lenses, visit our Online Shop for all the details.

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Christmas Special



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Ladies' Polos

The SSAA Ladies Polo has a feminine styled 'V' neck with contrasting piping panels. The easy care fabric is 160gm 100% DriWear polyester with moisture removal and mini-waffle knit.

Wear the SSAA logo with pride!

The polos comes in sizes ranging from 8 to 26.

\$42.00

Cobb Premier Outdoor Oven

This great little oven cooks with just a couple of barbecue heat beads. Simply light the heat beads, fill the moat tray with water (so the meat doesn't dry out) and come back later for a delicious roast. Once the roast is done, cook a damper for dessert.

You can use the Cobb as a barbecue, smoker or stove.

Comes with carry-bag.

\$229.95



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Free SSAA's Cooks
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Small \$44.95 Large \$69.95



SSAA Caps

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SSAA Bush Kettle

These custom-made bush kettles run on a few twigs and leaves and will boil water in less than 10 minutes. Simply take a handful of twigs/leaves and kindling then place under the kettle and light it - the clever design directs heat into the kettle to boil the water.

The kettle can be used with gas stoves and has a stainless construction.

\$84.95

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Around the campfire with John Denman

Of all the animals we hunt, there is a sliding scale of those we detest the most. This probably comes from how the individual beast affects our senses; how we judge the consequences an animal has on our lives and obviously livelihoods. To many, wild dogs are top of the heap. Cats do enormous damage to native species, but dogs always seem more obvious as far as the results of their depredations.

We don't always see the tiny marsupial mouse or eastern rosella that a cat has chewed the life from, but anyone who has witnessed sheep literally torn apart and partly eaten while still alive can only feel anger and revulsion at the dogs. Recently, one of my neighbours told me about a newly-born calf he found. Little had been eaten and the calf was still barely alive. Having seen the same thing myself, you begin to wonder how someone's pet dog could evolve so easily into such a callous killer.

The answer is probably quite simple. A dog, no matter how docile and friendly it may be as the family pet, still retains a certain amount of the wild in its make-up to revert to that state within a surprisingly short time. Given the choice between starvation and some sort of food, it will opt in the majority of cases for survival.

Not all wild dogs are of the Alsatian/ridgeback type either. I've seen a kelpie complete with collar in the company of wild dogs. It's probably safe to say that few poodles or sausage dogs go wild, but marauders will prey on pet dogs if the mood takes them. It's not unknown for humans to be attacked either. So that makes them a danger, especially to children.

Living in a rural area, I've seen the results of wild dog attacks. There was a pack of six in the valley below where I live, along with a few pups. Over a period, myself and a couple of others winnowed the population down by 10 dogs, all by shooting. We didn't see or hear any sign of dogs for a couple of years after that. But just recently, howling has been heard at night and that calf I mentioned earlier has been killed.

I'm a dog lover. I have had a number of good dogs, mainly blue heelers, kelpies and a mongrel. I keep my dogs yarded to protect them from the ferals and to stop them being a nuisance to the neighbours. But if I find a wild dog anywhere near, and I have a rifle handy, I'll shoot it.

Trapping dogs is a specialist job. Only a good dogger knows the right techniques to be successful. I discussed this once with a dogger in Western Australia. He said that cattle producers had just as much to concern them from dogs as do the sheep

farmers. He told me of seeing dogs pulling at a calf that was being born, of teats being ripped from cows and other habits the wild dogs have.

His ratio of trapping to shooting was roughly 50/50. He didn't call the dogs, although there are some doggers who do and are good at it. He relied on his other methods and had an impressive bunch of scalps drying in the sun to prove it. If he set a trap, only he or his target species would find it. He would always sprinkle some urine soaks in the dirt that he scooped up when his own dog, a kelpie bitch, urinated.

So, if you want to be a dog hunter, there's a bit of a learning curve. Sometimes you happen upon a pack, or just one dog. On other occasions spotlighting will turn some up near stock. I'm pretty sure a dog will respond to a fox whistle, even if it's just from curiosity. The best dog rifle is whatever you have in your hands at the time, but my preference is my .222 Remington. A 50gr V-Max out of that will cancel a dog's ticket smartly. Heavier calibres are fine, but a lot of dogs are found not far from human habitation, so remember the safety aspect. ■

What does the SSAA do for the environment?

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



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



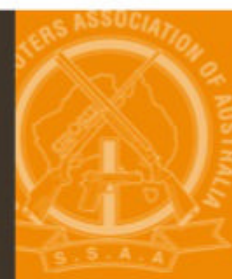
- assisting with a **TASMANIAN DEVIL** breeding program in New South Wales
- **DEER** research in multiple states
- raising community awareness about **PEST ANIMALS** in Western Australia
- ongoing removal of **CAMELS, DONKEYS** and **WILD PIGS** in the NT



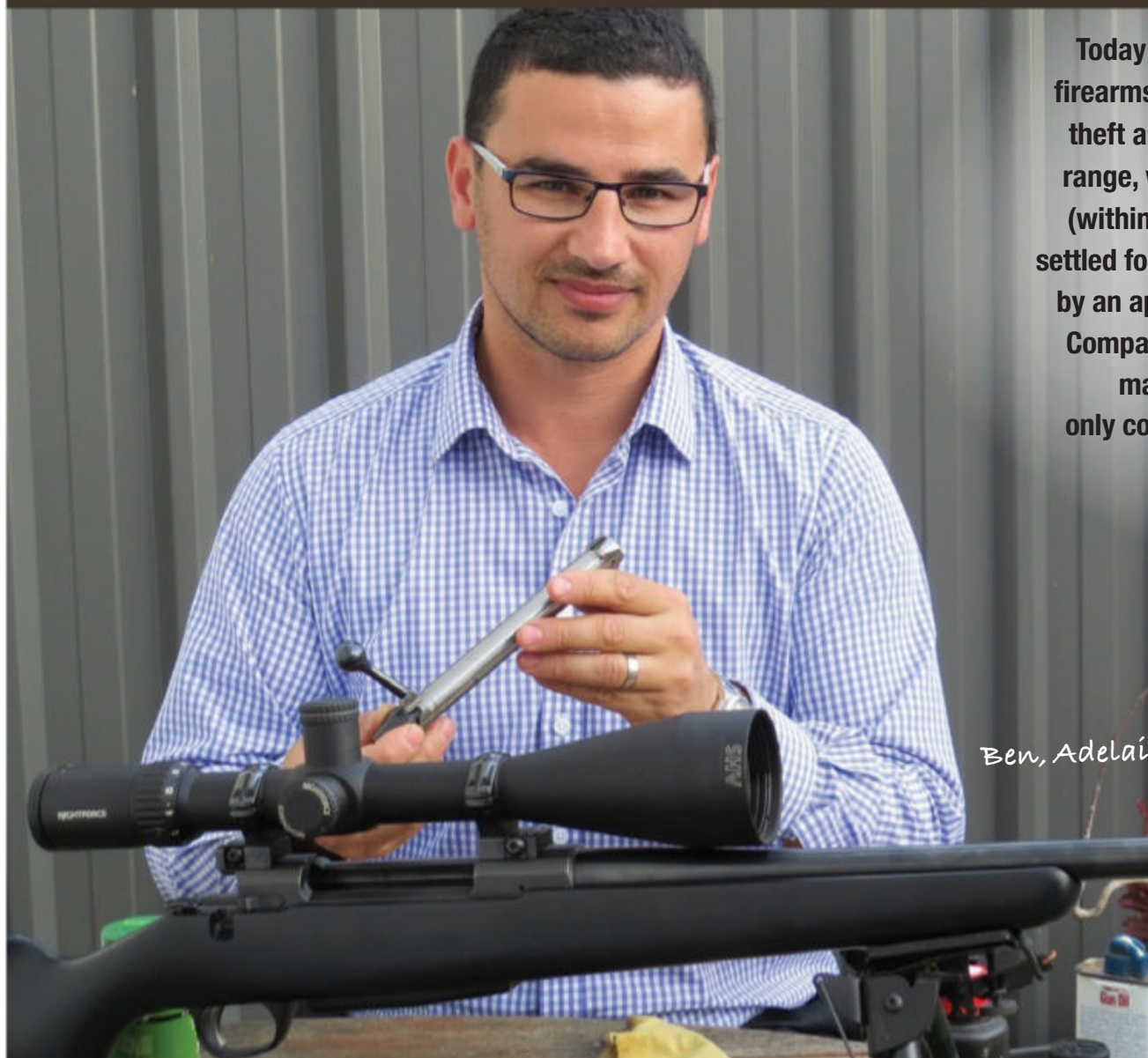
We have worked alone and in collaboration with government and environmental organisations for decades - all in the name of conserving Australia's rich and varied wildlife.

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Ben says his claim was paid quickly.



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