

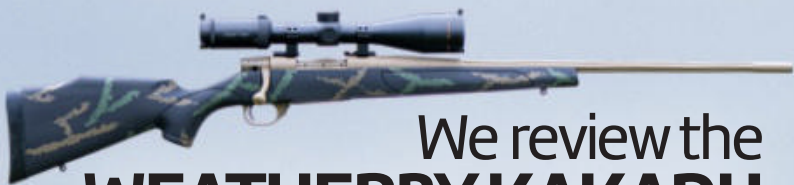
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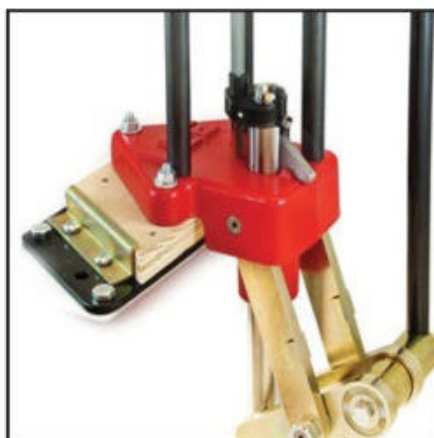
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From the Editor

Welcome to our first edition for 2022 featuring four unique deer hunting experiences ahead of this year's roar where Ben Unten capitalises on a rare opportunity, Sam Garro hits sambar high country to ultimately assist a local farmer, David Hughes relieves some lockdown stress on a Tassie escape and Wayne Kampe demonstrates how it's done with the rigours of a bow and arrows.

On top of this Gary Hall and his canine bailing buddies show hogs in the Top End who is boss, Don Caswell gets in touch with nature to despatch wily wild dogs, Brad Allen highlights the ongoing relationship between mankind and hunting, Scott Heiman hits the vineyards to take care of feathered troublemakers and Steven Fine covers Africa's most dangerous species.

We look at a great Australian outdoors program recognising and supporting Aussie diggers, explore the quest for ultimate accuracy, ponder the progression of our sport, bring quail season back from the brink in South Australia, fire the best varmint-ending cartridges and provide a blueprint in hunting preparation.

We've given the latest Weatherby Vanguard rifle to hit our shores a mighty test run to find the Kakadu a perfect match for Aussie hunters, while further reviews cover the Pulsar Thermion XM50 riflescope, Racken Rest II, Olight S2 Baton torch, classic 9.3x62 cartridge, Nirey KE-500 Knife Sharpener, Lapua ammo and the Fox 40 Sharx Emergency Whistle, as we highlight the importance of this simple emergency tool.

Edgeware covers a traditional custom-handmade puukko knife crafted by an expert Finnish blacksmith, a folding all-rounder from Victorinox and everything you need to know about bladed camping tools.

We'll have you further pining for the roar with our mouth-watering venison recipes consisting of a trio of pulled shoulder delights, wholesome homemade snags and delightful almond-coated schnitzels.

We've doubled the prizes for this issue so check out our bevvly of competitions on page 95 – good luck!

Thomas Cook
Editor

A Tassie escape

An interstate hunting trip between lockdowns helps **David Hughes** reduce the stresses of confinement

Melbournians have suffered the most from COVID lockdowns and the various interstate travel restrictions. The hunting fraternity was rendered particularly miserable by stay-at-home constraints, since not many of us had the luxury of chasing game in our own backyards.

March is the Tasmanian season for taking fallow deer stags and diehard Victorian deer hunters religiously head to the Apple Isle at this time. The 2021 season was in the lap of the gods. From the tail-end of the 2020 campaign until February 2021, Melbourne had endured seemingly perpetual lockdown, and also the unpredictability of the types of restrictions imposed, with the lack of advance notice.

Hence it was with high spirits and great optimism that my long-time hunting buddy Zeke and I drove off the Spirit of Tasmania ferry with me in the passenger seat in late March, 2021. It was wonderful to be back in Tassie, enjoying the crisp, clean air, the abundant wildlife and the amazing variability of the weather.

We felt eternally grateful to Diana, the Roman goddess of the hunt, since she was clearly looking out for us. Our belief in the goddess was doubly confirmed as we sighted plenty of deer when driving from the front gate of our destination property to the hut that would be home base for the next week.

Our first morning dawned fine and clear. We spotted deer within 'cooee' of the hut and tried to stalk a stag seen briefly before the sun came up. At some 350m, it looked well-endowed in the antler department, but alas, when we reached the cover of a big tree which we thought would offer a better vantage point, it was nowhere to be seen. The accompanying does continued grazing unconcernedly, so we had not messed up our approach. But it was disappointing.



One hunting strategy was to sit in ambush looking over a likely location.

If the weather was misty and drizzling, it was an option to walk undetected to a good vantage point, perhaps under a decent tree, then hope for an ambush or stalking opportunity.



Thick, dank mist greeted us on the next day and thereafter, it was heavy and overcast, with drizzle and rain intermittently keeping us company for the rest of our stay. Depending on our inclination and the weather, sometimes we would sit in ambush on a potential hot spot, and at other times walk until we spotted something, then stalk. If we were driving to hunt another area some distance from the hut, there was always a fair chance we would see something along the way as well.

On one such occasion, a doe and a fawn had been mildly startled by our vehicle and halted under a gum with low hanging boughs. They stood maybe 150m off, broadside-on and checking us out long enough for me to put the tripod on the bonnet and draw a bead on the fawn, which was partially obscured by a stout horizontal

branch. I aimed just under the branch, where the fawn's shoulders were visible. At the shot it wheeled off in crazy fashion and immediately hit the deck. In the fading light I emptied the innards and noted the 150gr .30-06 bullet had perforated the centre of the heart. It was a satisfying one-shot kill.

Over the next few days, we hunted morning, noon and night. Zeke also bowled over a meat animal early in the piece. The place was swarming with deer, but finding good stags was akin to the proverbial needle in a haystack. Only a few of the big guys had started hanging out with the herds. On our fourth day, Zeke received Diana's blessing – with compound interest – when he rolled a super stag. The beast was about as good as they come in Australia in terms of wild-bred fallow. For myself, the quest continued.

When the alarm went off at 5.15am on our final hunting day, rain was beating on the roof of the hut. The heavy pitter-patter on the corrugated iron was a good excuse to luxuriate in the sleeping bag for a while longer. By the time we got our act together and ventured out on foot it was well after 6am. By then the rain had given way to light mist, but the heavy overcast conditions meant that it was still only half-light and pretty good for stalking.

We were headed for a little shallow valley which had bracken fern banks and tea tree thickets around its head and flanks. Downhill, the valley opened out into pasture with scattered large trees. It often held deer, especially during crook weather blowing up from the south. To reach it we needed to traverse maybe a kilometre of lightly timbered undulating terrain.

Populations of fallow in Tasmania are increasing all the time. A major challenge in stag season is avoiding the doe herds.



Nothing better for the pot than a large fawn. The shoulder, slow-roasted whole, is a taste sensation.



A Tassie escape

Within 10 or 15 minutes of slow walking, we bumped into a small group of deer which stood looking at us long enough for me to lie down and draw a bead on the leader, a young stag. They decided to flee the instant before my cross-hairs assumed a stable position.

Luckily, they bolted away from our intended destination. Perhaps it was just as well, because the sound of the shot would likely have spooked any decent stags in the vicinity. As we progressed, we ducked and weaved around a couple of other groups, constantly conflicted between maintaining 'stag discipline' and belting a few meat animals.

Nearing the valley, we moved slowly and carefully, stopping to glass the first fern banks as they came into view. No deer in sight, but there were plenty of Bennett's wallabies, which annoyingly thumped off in the direction that we intended to hunt. Eventually we eased over the ridge into the tea tree thicket edging the gully.

Finding a viewing window through the brush, I spied a fair looking black stag on the top of the opposite side. He had a bunch of does with him. They were all quietly grazing and thankfully hadn't been spooked by the wallabies. I ranged the distance as 330m, which was a bit far for me to be sure of the shot, and in any event, I had no decent place to shoot from a prone position.

Studying the landscape for a while, I figured out a line of stalk that meant I would be able to use the tea tree for cover until I was behind the massive trunk of a solitary towering gum, situated right in the middle of the valley floor. Beyond the tree there was a bit of a hummock up the slope which would offer cover if I crawled from there to a big fallen log. I estimated the range from there to be under 100m.

By the time I left the cover of the tea tree, the does had conveniently started to feed off over the top of the gully and out of sight. The stag thrashed its antlers about in a fern bank nearly on the skyline before bedding down. In typically cunning fashion

it would have the wind behind it and a good view of the valley below. I could only see its antlers and a bit of its head poking up above the fern.

I reached the fallen log. My stalk had been executed perfectly and Lady Luck was with me, it seemed. The last of the accompanying deer had drifted out of sight while my stag was ensconced in the thigh-high bracken. I lay like that for maybe 15 minutes, waiting to see if the stag was going to shift position and give me a shot. On my radio I called Zeke in subdued tones. He was stationed higher up than me and on the opposite slope, so had a better view of the stag. I asked him to wait a long minute, then give a yell.

With my cross-hairs about where I predicted the deer's chest would be after standing up, I waited and waited. In due course, a faint yodel came wafting across the valley. Although not loud, it was enough to make the stag uneasy. It dutifully stood up to see what the funny noise was. It was more or less facing me and presenting its left shoulder.



The first light of a new day washed the countryside with a beautiful golden glow.

Without delay I squeezed the final pressure on the trigger of my Winchester Model 70. I saw and heard the strike of the Winchester Deer Season factory ammo. It hit with a resounding thud. The stag bolted across the slope and slightly downhill before piling up behind some timber.

What an exciting finish to the hunt! It was the last day and I had finally bagged a decent stag. I hadn't been able to check out his antlers thoroughly earlier but had decided even before the stalk that he was nothing fantastic. Uncharacteristically, on this occasion it was a case of 'ground

expansion' – meaning it was actually better on the deck than I had estimated from afar. A nice head for a skull mount.

Our Tassie adventure proved a fantastic break from the drudgery of COVID restrictions. The beautiful fresh air and the mercurial weather were immensely therapeutic to our hunters' souls. Seeing the native animals going about their business while out in the field added to the experience – whether in the form of wombats out foraging, or pademelons and wallabies bounding across the road in our headlights during the evening.

The calls of green rosellas and yellow wattletails provided our music during the day in lieu of our urban electronic entertainment. Spending numerous days embedded in natural surroundings can only be beneficial in beating the COVID blues. ■



After a copybook stalk, David bagged this fine black fallow stag.



These representative antlers were David's reward for a week of hunting.



The skull mount of David's stag will be a permanent reminder of his COVID escape.

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Homemade venison snags

David Hughes' wholesome sure-fire bet to feed the family and keep on hunting

Sometimes deer hunters are lucky, with the result being an embarrassment of venison descending upon our households. The increasing numbers of deer all over the country are contributing to this 'good-quality problem'. After bagging a young sambar stag in alpine Victoria, hot on the heels of despatching five young fallow in Tasmania, I had the freezer choc-a-bloc. What to do?

Having claimed to my wife Di for years that the main justification for my hunting was to provide food for the family, I badly needed to see the freezer space emptying as quickly as it had been filled. From a practical as well as from a political standpoint, I had to find more avenues for using-up my stock of frozen venison.

Venison might be lean and tasty, but the recipes for its use are limited in comparison with other meats. The family was okay with venison schnitzel and with stir-fry. Venison could also be minced and used in quite a few dishes such as bolognese sauce or lasagna, especially if blended with other minced meats. However, I needed more options. The hunter dreads the mealtime pause when the kids test a tiny mouthful of what has been offered, only to squeak: "This tastes funny. I don't want it."

Other than store-bought junk food, one of the least contentious forms of meat to challenge the diet of typical Aussie families is sausages. Surely, the humble snag would have broader appeal than the other limited options of venison recipes? The more I thought about it, the faster I could see the freezer's contents ebbing. Dreams of new hunting adventures seemed to depend upon rapid investment in advanced, high-throughput sausage production.

A quick check revealed that my hunting mate Zeke already had an electric household mincer with decent capacity. We also found a hand-cranked filler on



The tasty cooked product on the table.



Plenty of tender venison destined for the sausage grinder.

the web that would give us more control over the filling speed than the fixed speed pick available on the mincer. Some internet searching readily revealed many venison sausage recipes. We arrived at a couple of our own experimental recipes by combining some of the commonly used ingredients.

All the snag recipes added some type of pork fat to the venison. Because venison is such a lean meat, it won't make a palatable sausage on its own. We tried fatty pork shoulder in our first batch, but found the sausages were too dry. We then used pure pork fat and it was much better. It

can be ordered from some butchers, but it can take a few days to accumulate a batch of 5–10kg because the fat is only a by-product of trimming pig carcasses for the regular butchery trade.

We also investigated the various sausage casings available. There were three main types – natural, synthetic collagen and fibrous (cellulose). The latter were ruled out because they are the inedible sort used for salamis. Synthetic collagen casings are a more modern invention and apparently, the best ones are difficult to tell from natural casings in terms of eating quality.

Since they are made from the reconstituted collagen from animal hides and other cartilaginous tissues, these casings are arguably ‘sort-of natural’, despite being called synthetic. They have better consistency in terms of wall thickness and strength, so are therefore favoured by many large commercial sausage manufacturers. This type of casing is supplied as a long, dry tube threaded onto a stick, and is ready for use without soaking.

Natural casings are the cleaned-up intestine walls from sheep, pigs or cattle. They are the traditional type and still appear to be most favoured by DIY makers. They are sold in a wet, salted form and can be stored refrigerated or frozen. We decided to use the natural casings, as they were readily available from a conveniently located retail smallgoods supplier. They were labelled ‘Salted Shorts Hog 20 metre 28/32’. We found that one of these packets was enough to generate about 10–12kg of sausage. Before being used, natural casings need to be rinsed well to remove the salt.



Di working hard, blending the spices into the meat and fat.

Method

- Thaw the venison, then cut into large cubes.
- Cube the pork fat in the same fashion.
- Mince the venison and fat (we did them separately).
- Combine the spices in a bowl and mix with the cold water.
- On a clean kitchen bench, make a mound of the minced meat and fat.
- Form a crater in the middle of the mound.
- Pour the spice/water suspension into the crater, then mix thoroughly using your hands (this requires a fair bit of effort as the cold fat and meat are quite resilient).
- Load the filler chamber with the sausage mix.
- Thread the entire washed casing onto the filler spout; tie the free end.
- One person works the hand crank of the filler, while another supports the tube of newly filled sausage and monitors any problems, such as split casings or inconsistent filling.
- Coil up the long, single sausage for tying-off into individual units of the desired length (this takes a bit of practice – we looked up some YouTube videos to give us guidance).



Zeke busy mincing the pork fat.

Homemade venison snags

The keeping quality of the finished product depends on just two factors – the temperature during manufacture and subsequent storage, and the extent of bacterial contamination during the process. Hence, it is important to keep the raw materials as cold as is practicable.

The meat and fat should be processed straight from the refrigerator and holding times at room temperature for the work-in-progress and finished snags held to a minimum. Temperature awareness is the reason that the recipes call for ice-cold water.

Bacterial contamination can come from the meat itself and from exposure to surfaces during the processing. Hygienic harvesting in the field is obviously a key starting point. Additionally, the mincer should be scrupulously cleaned prior to use.

It is preferable to use pre-sterilised disposable gloves through the process. However, even using the best hygienic practices, sausages are inherently more prone to bacterial spoilage. Mincing massively increases the surface area of meat, all of which is subject to environmental contamination. The finished product needs to be back into the refrigerator (preferably the freezer) immediately.

A small cryovac machine is invaluable for frozen storage. These machines and

their rolls of bagging plastic are readily available in department stores. The cryovac sucks out the air from the bag then seals it with a heating bar. In the absence of air, the growth of bacteria and the oxidation of fats is inhibited, meaning that the sausage stays tasting fresher for longer.

After all this effort, it is important that the finished snags be cooked to perfection. I found that just chucking them on the barbecue was not the best. Too much heat may cause the natural casings to split, which spoils their appearance for the table. Additionally, in pursuit of a well-cooked sausage, it is easy to render out all the fat, leaving the shrunken result both dry and unappetizing.

Here is my sure-fire bet method for cooking the humble venison snag. Firstly, pop the sausages into a saucepan and just cover them with cold water. Turn on the stove to a medium-high heat and let the water come to simmering temperature, which should take six to eight minutes.

This will pretty much cook the snags right through. Take them out of the water and onto a hot barbecue plate to brown up the outside. After a brief searing, the snags are lovely and brown, yet much plumper than if cooked from scratch on the plate. Yum, ready for the table...



Tying off the snags. It is an easily acquired skill.

The saying goes that ‘the proof of the pudding is in the eating’, and happily it came to pass that our venison sausages were a big success when put to this test of the table. People who would knock back offers of venison would happily carry off a packet or two of the snags and try them. Now I had a way to deplete the freezer by many kilos every time I made a batch. In addition, and all importantly, space in the freezer meant ‘game on’ for another hunting trip.

Recipe 1

Spicy venison sausage

- Venison: 1kg
 - Pork fat: 0.7kg
 - Red pepper flakes: 5.4g
 - Salt: 37.6g
 - Ground sage: 0.7g
 - Black pepper medium ground: 7.7g
 - Powdered garlic: 7.2g
 - Ice-cold water: 0.2 litres
- = 1.9kg finished sausage

Recipe 2

Mild venison sausage

- Venison: 1kg
 - Pork fat : 0.7kg
 - Mace: 2.6kg
 - Salt: 12.5g
 - Ground sage: 0.5g
 - Powdered garlic: 4.8g
 - Ice-cold water: 0.2 litres
- = 1.9kg finished sausage ■



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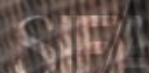
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Take a load off

Shooting angles vary depending on the make of vehicles.

Chris Wardrop leans on the Racken Rest II as a dependable solution for spotlighting solo

A Land Rover Discovery 4 is far from the typical spotlighting rig, but that is what I drive everywhere, and at times I spotlight from it too.

Spotlighting with a buddy or two has never posed a problem. But going out solo, or with my young children as observers, has always been a challenge. Consequently, I have missed plenty of opportunities at both small and large game while bringing the rifle into a position to shoot.

About four years ago a Racken Rest at my local gunstore caught my attention. Unfortunately, the base of the device was 63cm long and as such would sit on the electric window and mirror controls in my Discovery, presenting an unnecessary and potentially expensive risk. While I toyed with the idea of shortening the device, it ultimately remained on the shelf for someone else to buy.

In mid-2020 Eagleye Hunting Gear released the Racken Rest II as part of their SmartRest category of products. The Racken Rest II made some evolutionary improvements over the original model, which had been on the market since 2015. Most notably the double swivel mount was no longer an optional accessory, but instead included as standard.

What really piqued my interest in the Racken Rest II is that it came in both a long (63cm) and short (45cm) version. While the short variety is designed for older HiLux and LandCruiser vehicles with short windowsills, it also alleviated any contact with the electronic controls in my Land Rover.

My initial order through Tough Gear Hunting in Queanbeyan was subject to a recall by Eagleye Hunting Gear. Michael, the owner of Eagleye Hunting Gear and inventor of the SmartRest products, explained to

me that the manufacturer had used inferior injection moulded swivel assemblies rather than the machined stainless steel of his prototypes and test models.

Once he discovered this, he ceased sale of the Racken Rest II until the swivel assemblies were replaced with the correct specification parts, and recalled those already sold. This does serve to highlight some of quality control difficulties involved with manufacture in China.



'Ball point locators' hold the swivel mechanism firmly when the rifle is not in use, allowing the driver two hands free for the steering wheel and to operate a spotlight.

Although basing production in China does ensure an affordable price, it may deter some people from buying one at all. Any fears about quality are almost certainly unfounded though. Eagleye Hunting Gear has sold thousands of the Racken Rest options over the past five years and warrants against failure as long as the purchase has not been abused or misused. In fact, they are so confident with the quality of the Racken Rest II that there is no explicit time limitations on that warranty, except for gas struts which are warranted for 12 months.

Eventually I received a Racken Rest II short base model. The package includes clear and concise instructions, with initial assembly only taking a few minutes. Fine-tuning the fit to my car took a little while longer, and I ultimately decided to cut 4–5cm off the ‘leg’ of a Y mount to afford more adjustment in elevation and depression without the bottom of the mount impacting the exterior door panel or internal trim. With the Racken Rest II fitted to the windowsill, installing a rifle is as simple as looping an elastic strap over the butt and another through the front sling swivel.

On my first trip out with the Racken Rest II, I was immediately impressed by its stability as a shooting platform. While fields

of fire are somewhat restricted, despite the double swivel base, this is largely overcome by the ability to comfortably shoot with the non-master hand. In fact, I have taken more shots from the driver’s seat left-handed than I have right-handed, something that I would be reluctant to do with other rifle rests.

The first night I used the SmartRest II, I was shooting a Lithgow LA102 equipped with a Leupold VX-3i 4.5–14x50mm and Olight Javelot – a set-up that weighs nearly 5kg, with the centre of gravity well forward of the trigger.

The heavy barrel and accessories contributed to the barrel dipping down to the full extent of the rest’s depression whenever I would take my hands off the gun. Clearly this was not ideal. Nor was I happy with the placement of the front gas strut. It was about 10mm too long to fit properly, so as a result it was angled slightly rearward and the strut lock assembly could not be used.

This was contributing to more roll or lateral movement in the base of the rest than I was comfortable with. The excessive width of the Land Rover windowsill also added to the lateral movement of the base, as the outside edge of the base rests on the interior of the windowsill and not the exterior.

Eagleye Hunting Gear had ready-made solutions for both of my problems available on their website. Firstly, a small gas balance strut to aid in holding heavy barrelled rifles horizontal in the rest. Secondly, three different length gas struts for attaching to the front of the rest. I placed my order late one evening and received a phone call from Michael at Eagleye Hunting Gear the next morning, as he wanted to confirm the exact distance from windowsill to doorframe. This was to ensure he sent the best fitting strut, as they had made an extension for the small version to close the gap between it and the medium version.

With the balance strut fitted, the heavy Lithgow no longer dipped down at the barrel when I took my hands off it. The shorter front gas strut was a better fit and permitted the use of the lock assembly, which together greatly reduced lateral movement and made the rest feel much more secure.

For my second outing with the Racken Rest II, I opted to use a Weatherby Vanguard. Although not substantially lighter than the Lithgow set-up, the centre of gravity is much more rearward. The balance strut was not really necessary with this rifle, and in fact the barrel would rise ever so slightly when I took my hands off the stock. This has not been a problem – in fact I’ve found it much more desirable than the barrel dropping.

A small incident on that second outing illustrates the stability of the Racken Rest II when properly fitted to a vehicle. I had spotted some pigs making their way into a creek line, and in an effort to move into a position to ambush them I was driving a little too quickly through a paddock and paying too much attention to the creek line, and too little to my path.

With one hand on the steering wheel and another on the spotlight, my front left wheel dropped into a deep unseen hole at a more than sensible speed. The car bounced wildly and the rear wheel found the same hole. The rifle butt slammed violently into the elbow of my spotlighting arm. Despite the powerful jolt, the Racken Rest II did not budge and the rifle stayed firmly in its cradle. Sadly, the mob of pigs escaped.



Chris found the Lithgow fits best with the Y mounts installed in reverse, having the large at the rear.

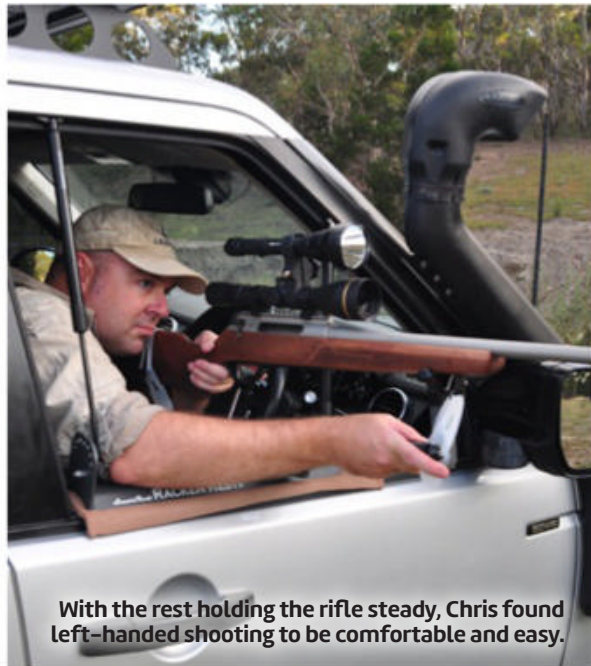
Take a load off

Earlier I mentioned the restricted fields of fire imposed by this type of rest. Personally, I do not see this downside as outweighing the benefits when out spotlighting solo. The Racken Rest II allows the rifle to be held securely at the windowsill ready to be brought into action at any moment.

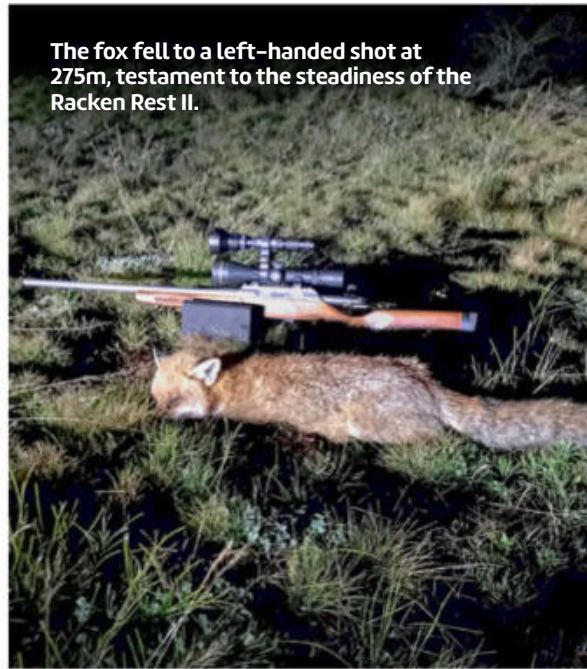
Effective shooting angles can usually be achieved by carefully positioning the vehicle. When that is not achievable I often

shoot left-handed, or when the target is directly in front of the car I open the door, step out of the car and take a standing shot. The Racken Rest II makes a superbly solid shooting platform from an open car door. Overall, the pros outweigh the cons and I have had far fewer animals escape from under the spotlight since using the Racken Rest II.

The Eagleye Hunting Gear website has an extensive list of retailers all around the country and an online store – visit eagleyeHg.com.au ■



With the rest holding the rifle steady, Chris found left-handed shooting to be comfortable and easy.



The fox fell to a left-handed shot at 275m, testament to the steadiness of the Racken Rest II.



Specifications:

Price: \$299

Weight: Approximately 4kg

Length: 63cm long base, 43cm short base

Accessories:

Balance Strut: \$25

Racken Strut: \$25

- Long 52cm

- Medium 24cm

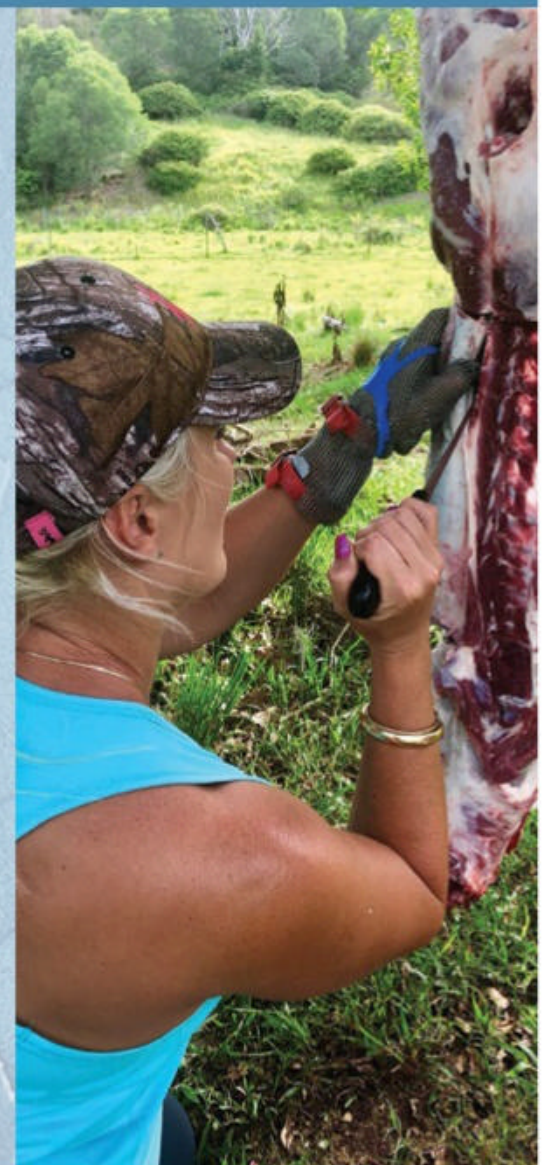
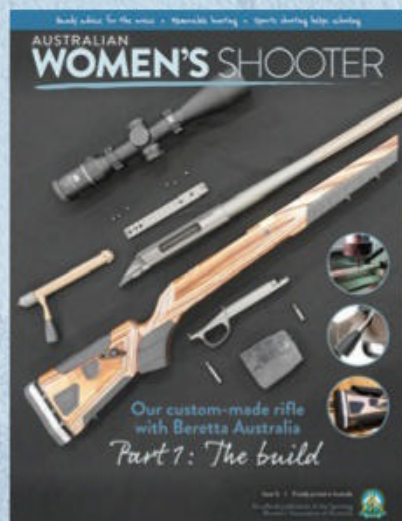
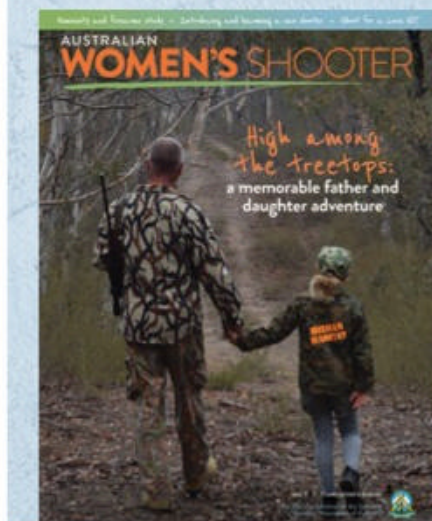
- Short 12cm

Off Set Arms: \$30

AUSTRALIAN WOMEN'S SHOOTER

Australian Women's Shooter is a quarterly magazine filled with product reviews, expert knowledge and tips, profiles, and prizes covering all things women's shooting and hunting. AWS features a regular column from three-time Commonwealth Games gold medallist Laetisha Scanlan and practical pieces from professional shooter Gemma Dunn.

ssaa.org.au/women



Lapua ammunition

Lapua .243 Win 100-grain soft-point loading shot around the desired 1 MOA mark.



Lapua is renowned in Australia and abroad as a manufacturer of choice reloading components and ammunition. To quote the Lapua website, the company is devoted to 'premium quality small calibre ammunition for target shooters, hunters and law enforcement authorities'.

They have passion for precision – a policy that they clearly embrace and put into their products. More correctly, Lapua is Nammo Lapua Oy and Nammo Schönebeck, which is part of the larger corporate Nammo Group. Nammo Lapua is located in, and named after, the town of Lapua in Finland. The Australian distributor for Lapua is Nioa, who kindly supplied some ammo for testing.

These days, I have given up handloading and use factory ammo for my shooting and hunting. So it was that I headed off to the SSAA range to test the 100-grain soft-point Lapua .243 Winchester factory loading. The Lapua fact sheet states a muzzle velocity of 2691fps for this round.

As with other Scandinavian ammunition manufacturers, the .243 Winchester hunting ammo is targeted at birds and medium game. That infers a softer lead projectile designed for quick expansion on medium game. It's suitable for use on wild dogs, pigs, goats and smaller deer species but not so much full-grown stags and large boars. I fired a series of three-shot groups and, to no surprise, the grouping was consistent and around the 1 MOA benchmark.

Naturally, Lapua offer a lot more than just .243 Winchester. Their larger calibre hunting loads are specifically aimed at bigger game such as moose, bears and musk oxen. Lapua offer three types of projectile loadings – sport, hunting and tactical – in 17 popular rifle calibres ranging from .222 Rem up to 9.3x62 and including, of course, the .338 Lapua Magnum.

Most of their popular hunting calibres consist of FMJ, conventional soft-point and their Naturalis pure copper polymer-tip. In long-range calibres there is a greater array, with a selection of boat-tailed projectiles in hollow-point and FMJ options. ■



Aiming a Remington 700
.220 Swift at rabbits.

Say your prayers varmint

There's a lot to take in as **David Duffy** dissects the top culling cartridges

Whether you like walking around hunting varmints or shooting them from a distance using a rest or bipod, there's quite a selection of cartridges, both factory and wildcat rounds, to do the job.

Due to the volume of shooting varmint hunters usually do compared to pursuers of big game, sometimes factors such as availability of good quality brass if you're a reloader, or obtainability and cost of rimfire and factory loaded centrefire ammunition will determine what cartridge is most suitable for your needs.

Rimfires

My first rimfire was an Anschutz .22 Magnum. For a new shooter this is a top choice because the .22 Magnum is good on foxes, cats and devastating on rabbits. The Anschutz was accurate but I would have preferred a five-round clip rather than four with a spare holding eight-10 rounds as it's easy to empty a magazine on a colony of rabbits.

Then I bought a Sako .222 and found this even more accurate, far more powerful with greater limit and reloads were not much more expensive. When offered an excellent price for the Anschutz, I sold it.

Both the .22 Magnum and the .222 mangled the rabbits, as frequently they would be shot in the body rather than the head. I acquired a .22LR and eventually settled on Winchester 40gr Power-Points as its fodder. These gave good results and even with body shots, most of the rabbits could be salvaged for the pot.

This is the feature I like most about the .22LR – less meat wastage on small game but also it is quieter than nearly all other cartridges, especially when using subsonics in a 23" barrel, and it's cheap to run. When the 42gr Power-Points came out, these made the .22LR more suitable for close-range foxes with good shot placement as not only are they heavier, but also travel slightly faster.

The CCI Velocitors are quite good on small game as well. Eventually I bought an Anschutz 1416 .22LR and a spare 10-round clip to use with the five-round magazine, replacing the plain-stocked 1451.



This fox was shot with a 50gr BlitzKing from a Sako .222 just before dark.

I was tempted to go for a .17HMR as they are accurate and have far more span than a .22LR. The cost of ammunition is high though and the cases are prone to cracking. I can reload my .17-222 and .222 for roughly the same cost and they are even more accurate and have greater range and power. The .17HMR is a lot more powerful than the .17 Mach II and usually has the edge in accuracy over the more powerful .17WSM, so the .17HMR is my second choice for a rimfire after the .22LR.

Centrefire .17s

The length of the .17-222 is perfect for most extra-short actions and it feeds better in some rifles than the efficient and shorter .17 Mach IV and similar .17 Fireball. It is faster than the .17 Mach IV/Fireball and just as accurate and it doesn't have a rim like the less powerful .17 Hornet.

I also like the .17 Remington which is marginally faster than the .17-222, but if you can't source .17 Remington brass, using .223 brass gives too short a neck so the best option is using .204 Ruger brass. The availability of good quality .222 parent cases plus using the .222 made me choose the .17-222 over the .17 Rem.



CZ 527 and 12x Schmidt & Bender with ultra-fine cross-hairs in .17-222 (top), CZ 527 and Kahles 8x with heavy duplex cross-hairs in .222 (bottom).

I run weight sorted Winchester .222 brass through the full-length sizing die and the cases are formed. If you wish to use high-quality Lapua brass, then you would need to neck-down in two stages, say to .20-222 then to .17-222. The .17-222 using 25gr V-Max projectiles sighted 1.2" high at 100 yards is good for 300 yards on rabbits, crows, foxes and feral cats. The Pac-Nor stainless 3 groove 9 twist barrel doesn't foul as quickly as some .17 calibre barrels do and is highly accurate.

Terrific twenties

I prefer the .20-222 over the excellent shorter .20 VarTarg for the same reasons

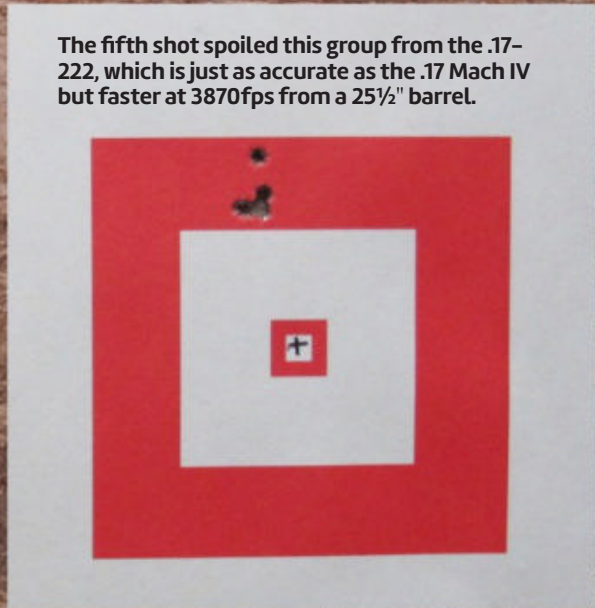
I like the .17-222 over the .17 Mach IV. However, I think the best .20 round uses readily available high-quality Lapua .223 brass and pushes the shoulder back with a 30-degree angle and slightly blows out the case.

This round is called the .20 Tactical and is a better design than the easier to form straight neck-down of the .223 case. It is faster than the .20-222. If you buy factory loaded ammunition, the high velocity .204 Ruger is an excellent choice.

Twenty-two calibre

The .223 has a slight range, wind-drift and power advantage over the .222 and

The high BC 90gr projectiles from a 6mm are ideal for wild dogs when running or at a distance.



The fifth shot spoiled this group from the .17-222, which is just as accurate as the .17 Mach IV but faster at 3870fps from a 25½" barrel.

Say your prayers varmint

top-quality brass is easily available, as are factory rifles and loaded rounds. The .222 is still thought to be more inherently accurate, has marginally less recoil and longer barrel life and high-quality brass is also available for it. Both are good medium distance varmint cartridges.

My preference goes to the .222, but the .223 is better if you don't reload. The .22 PPC and .22 BR are believed to be even more accurate than the .222 and have more velocity but they don't feed as well from a magazine, and magazine capacity is also reduced. I think the best designed .22 case around .222/.223 capacity for use in a magazine is the .22 Tactical using readily available .223 brass.

Way before the .22 Nosler and .224 Valkyrie were designed, there were similar varmint cartridges such as the .22 Rimless Lindahl Chucker and .220-25 Original Donaldson Wasp, developed between 1935 to 1940 using the .25 Remington case. These cartridges are a step up in performance over the .222/.223, feed well from a magazine and do magnificently at 250-350 yards, and can be housed in an extra-short action with medium heavy 24-26" barrel, in a portable weight rifle.

The Chucker, Wasp and Valkyrie do not have rebated rims, which is good. It is hard to source alternative brass to make .22 Nosler cases because of the length of the case. I like the idea of using 53gr V-Max projectiles in a one in 12 twist barrel with cases of this capacity and would prefer a case length midway between the .224 Valkyrie and .22 Nosler that can be made from 6.8 SPC brass if need be. The parent case of the 6.8 SPC is the .25 or .30 Remington.

In terms of long-range .22s, the .220 Swift has about 100fps advantage over the popular .22-250, but both cases stretch a fair amount. The .220 Wilson Arrow has a flatter shoulder and this reduces stretching of the Swift case. My next barrel on the Swift will probably be a one in 8 twist so I can use high ballistic coefficient (BC) projectiles such as 75gr Hornady ELD-M. Either an extended magazine well for my short-action Remington 700 or a reamer with a short throat would be needed as these projectiles stick out a lot more when seating close to the lands.

The .22-250 AI case doesn't stretch as much and gives velocities marginally higher than the Swift, holding about one more grain of powder. However, the .22-250 AI (the 40-degree version) doesn't feed well from a magazine and requires fireforming to make the cases, which uses up barrel life and is time-consuming.

The .22 Creedmoor is similar to the .22-250 AI but feeds better from a magazine because of its 30-degree shoulder and doesn't require fireforming. Reports are that it is also very accurate. The .22 Creedmoor is probably the best of the longer range .22s, but I still like the Swift.

Larger cases such as .22-243 and .22-6mm have shorter barrel life, more recoil/blast and can be less accurate than a smaller case.

The 6mm and larger

The .243 is excellent as a walkaround rifle for larger varmints like wild dogs or feral pigs and also medium size game such as goats and small deer. I appreciate the 6SLR, which has a 30-degree shoulder and a longer neck and is formed from the .243 case by simply running it through the 6SLR full-length die.

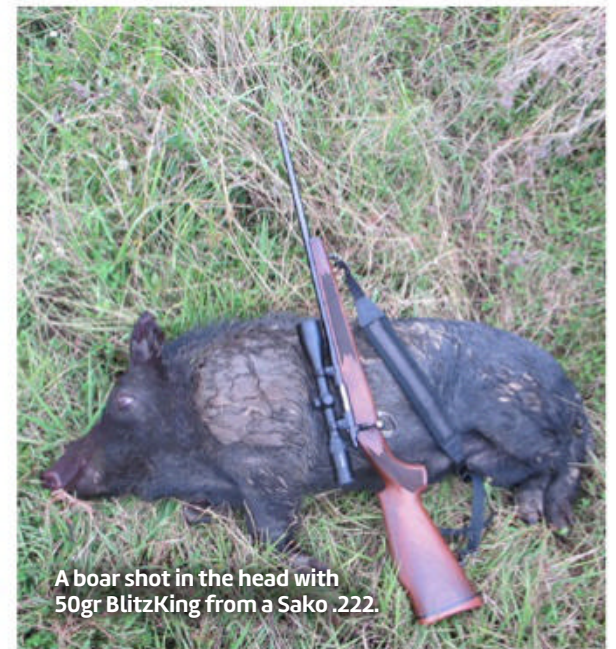
When you're not sure what you might come across, the 6mm and .257 calibres are a good dual-purpose choice. The .257 calibre has an advantage with bigger game, as heavier projectiles can be used.

For longer shots, the 6mm projectiles have better BCs than the .257 calibre which are restricted by the slow twist barrels. Nevertheless, the .25-06 has a loyal

following and those who use it speak highly of it for longer range varmints.

I use a .240 PSP, which is an improved 6mm Remington with a 28-degree shoulder and a long neck. The .240 PSP shoots the 90gr Swift Scirocco at 3350fps with 53gr AR2213SC out of the 24¼" barrel – about 50fps less than the .240 Weatherby using 55gr AR2213SC maximum load.

For extreme long-range varmint shooting, cartridges that use long, heavy but high BC projectiles such as the 6mm Creedmoor, 6.5 Creedmoor and 6.5 PRC are not out of place. The 6.5 PRC has greater case capacity for extreme ranges, yet not so much that recoil/blast becomes a big issue. ■



A boar shot in the head with 50gr BlitzKing from a Sako .222.

David uses these varmint cartridges: .22LR, .17-222, .222, .220 Swift, 6SLR, .240 PSP.



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Deer trip truly blessed

Ben Unten makes the most of a rare opportunity filled with diverse rewards

Our trip had been planned months ahead, but at the last minute access to the organised hunting grounds got spoiled as the farmer had mixed up his dates and was stripping crops that weekend. We were still welcome, but the chance of success would be minimal with all the additional people and noisy machinery.

So I made a last-ditch call to another mate and asked if he was intending to head out to his property that weekend. It turned out that he wasn't, but he granted me right of entry, which I later found out was the first time he had done that in more than 10 years of owning the block. I stretched the friendship even further by asking if I could have a hunting partner join me, as I prefer not to hunt alone for many reasons – safety being one and having to laugh at my own jokes another. Permission was again approved. So, my mate Thommo joined me.

We stopped by the cocky's house in town to pick up the keys and I was again reminded that our unaccompanied admission was a bit special. I reassured him that I was truly honoured by the privilege and that if somehow I let him down on this trip, it would be the first time in 25 years of hunting.

We arrived at the cottage and unloaded everything from the ute except our rifles and packs. We changed into cams and

hiking boots and drove for about 20 minutes before parking up and setting off. The plan was to walk down the valley, allowing the cool afternoon/evening air to descend and therefore be in our favour, to 'deer gully' as I'd dubbed it. We fell into that fabulous 'deer-stalking' zone – slow walking with all senses on alert, both thoroughly immersed in the experience.

As we gradually rounded the bottom of 'deer gully' we saw two fallow does and dropped to our haunches. The rangefinder said they were about 450m away. We whispered a basic hunt outline, which was to climb up the back side of one of the ridges that flanked the gully and sneak over the top for a closer shot. We slid around the ridge and were able to pick up the pace as we were downwind, out of sight and the going was fairly easy.

When climbing I glanced behind me (something I am learning to do more and more while hunting) and saw a mob of



Thommo's 'ear-ringing' doe.

pigs on top of a ridge on the opposite side of the main valley. I pointed them out to Thommo, who had rights to the first shot via our complicated allotment system (which even I don't fully understand), to see what he wanted to do. I then noticed a white 'blob' way off in the distance further down the valley.

Looking through the binoculars I could see that it was a white fallow buck. Now the cocky had asked us to spare this buck and there was no way I was going to break my promise, but I then saw that it was actually part of a bachelor mob. Talk about being spoiled for choice... so Thommo now had to choose between a fallow doe – which was a



A doe secured while spotlighting.

Thommo with a rewarding buck.



likely outcome, pigs on a ridge – a medium chance outcome, or a mob of distant bucks – outcome unknown. He mulled it over before saying, “Let’s go after a buck.”

We set off down the valley. The bachelor mob was milling around behind some reasonably heavy cover and a breeze was blowing across us, so the going was comparatively good. Eventually we lessened our pace and began the stalk in earnest. There were eight bucks in the bachelor mob. Through the thick cover it was tricky to distinguish what was what, so we observed for what felt like another hour, but was probably 10 minutes, when I spotted what looked like a pretty decent head through the scrub. It took some explaining and repositioning on Thommo’s part but he managed to have it lined up through a small shooting channel.

The buck was standing front-on and Thommo made the decision to shoot it when its head was down, which is not ideal as it makes shot placement tricky. However, if the buck had taken half a step in either direction it would have disappeared and the opportunity would have been lost. The .30-06 boomed and the buck dropped from view. Another seven or eight previously unseen deer erupted from elsewhere behind the scrub and vanished over the hill behind. We crossed the dry creek bed and easily located the downed animal. It was a big-bodied buck with a good head for this part of the country and the outcome of an absolutely marvellous hunt.

I was as elated as Thommo was. After capturing some happy snaps, we removed the guts and propped the chest cavity open while we walked back to retrieve the ute with our full butchering kits, including my rope block and tackle with gambrel. During butchering, the projectile was retrieved from near the left shoulder. I was still somewhat surprised that the 150gr bullet had failed to exit, as fallow are comparatively lightly-framed, but the round had done extensive damage to the internals.

By the time the main cuts had been harvested and put on ice, it was well after dark so we mounted the spotlight for a swing. After an hour, a fallow doe was spotted. I was on shooting duty and despatched the animal at a range of 120m. This practice is currently legal in NSW due to changes in regulations. It was a completely matter-of-fact emotional reaction to culling an animal at night as opposed to the elation of the afternoon hunt. This meat was added to the Engel fridge and we decided to call it a night.

The next morning Thommo was up early, banging around on the front deck. I woke to see what all the commotion was and found him lying prone on the deck, bipoded rifle to his shoulder, looking to the south. I followed the line of the barrel and spotted a couple of fallow does feeding less than 200m from the cottage.

I went inside, grabbed my rangefinder and gauged the deer at 195m. Thommo’s shot rang out and my brain felt like someone

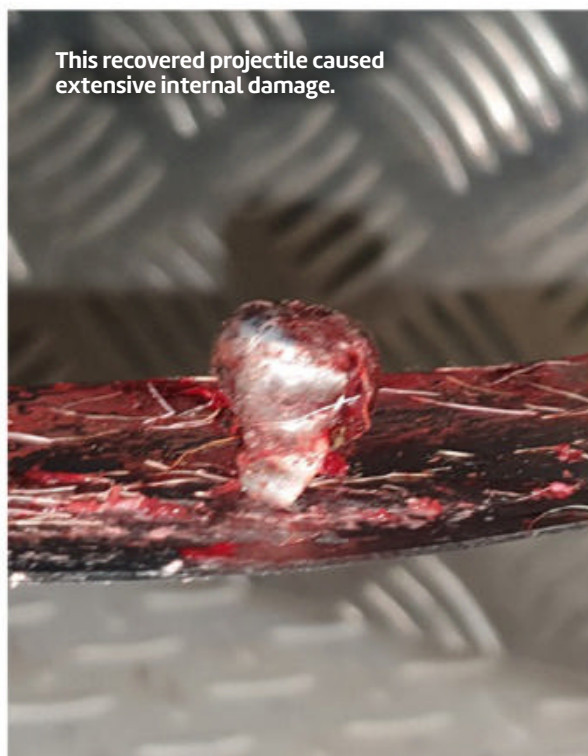
had thunder-clapped me from inside my skull, as in my morning haze I had failed to grasp any earplugs when I had grabbed the rangefinder. The animal staggered several metres before falling to the ground clutching its ears – yes that was me, the doe made even less distance. Thommo helped me back up and we pulled on boots and knife belts to begin the butchering process while I grumbled about the lack of caffeine and the high-pitched squeal inside my head.

Eventually breakfast, with the life-giving coffee, was consumed and we discussed plans. We decided to do some more meat preparation during the middle of the day, when things were quiet, then go for a final afternoon stalk.

We had been leisurely hunting for 90 minutes, with the sun just beginning to set, when we spotted a lone fallow doe. We dropped to the ground and slowly approached until we were approximately 180m away. With my Tikka resting on the wobble sticks and the cross-hairs centred on the shoulder ball, I sent a 150gr pill on its way. The deer expired with grass still in her mouth.

It was the perfect finish to an excellent hunt at the end of a cracking trip. We were loaded up with free-range venison and weighed down with stories to share in the future. ■

This recovered projectile caused extensive internal damage.



Butchering the big fella.



Pull the other one!

Ben Unten puts together three easy yet delicious meals from pulled venison shoulder

I'm embarrassed to think about how many venison shoulders I left in the field in my earlier days.

I used to think it was too much effort to bone them out for mincing, with too little yield. But I learnt over the years that they are genuinely one of the simplest and most rewarding cuts to cook.

Meaty gravy rolls

This recipe is without doubt one of the easiest venison recipes of all time, with absolute maximum deliciousness.

Ingredients

- 1 front deer shoulder
- 1 large chicken or beef stock
- 6 bread rolls
- 1-2 gravy pouches – there is a wide selection to choose from
- Butter or margarine

Method

- Pour the beef or chicken stock into your slow cooker and turn to high to preheat.
- Trim any excess fat/silver skin off the shoulder.
- Remove the shanks with a bone saw/hacksaw/recipro saw and either include in this recipe or keep separate for shanks.
- You can use the whole shoulder or



Gravy adds to the mix.



So deliciously simple.



Grab it while it's hot.

cut it into 2-3 pieces depending on the size of the deer (and to access the flavour of the marrow).

- Place meat into slow cooker. Cooking time will depend on the size of the deer, but about five hours on high or 10-12 hours on low is sufficient. It should pull away from the bone with a fork when it's ready.
- Remove meat and place on a chopping board, then shred it with a pair of tongs or forks into a bowl.
- Snip corner of gravy pouch and heat as per instructions.
- Add gravy to pulled venison – approximately one gravy pouch per 500g of pulled venison. You want the meat to be well coated.
- Spoon mixture onto buttered rolls and serve.

It's that simple. For the more adventurous you can toast the buns under the griller, and even make pulled venison hamburgers by adding cheese, tomato, beetroot, lettuce, relish and more.

Bountiful burritos

This is the second easiest venison recipe of all time.

Ingredients:

- 1 front deer shoulder
- 1 large beef or chicken stock
- 1 burrito kit
- 1 can drained Mexe beans (or substitute any beans)
- 1 avocado
- Sour cream
- Coriander – finely chopped
- Grated cheese
- Jalapenos (optional)

Method

- Pour beef or chicken stock into your slow cooker and turn to high to preheat.
- Trim any excess fat/silver skin off the shoulder.
- Remove the shanks with a knife/bone saw/hacksaw/recipro saw and keep them separate.
- You can use the whole shoulder or



cut it into 2–3 pieces depending on the size of the deer (and to access the flavour of the marrow).

- Place meat into slow cooker. Cooking time will depend on the size of the deer, but about five hours on high or 10–12 hours on low works. It should pull away from the bone with a fork when it's ready.
- Remove meat and place on a chopping board then shred it with a pair of tongs or forks into a bowl.
- Spoon in just enough cooking stock to make sure the meat is well coated.
- Add the dry mix sachet to the meat and blend well.
- Put one burrito on a plate and add some grated cheese and the drained beans, then heat in the microwave for 40 seconds.
- Add the meat, salsa, sour cream, avocado, coriander and jalapenos, roll it up and tuck in.

Meat and three veg

This recipe is more involved than the other two but is still pretty easy and offers a greater depth of flavour.

Ingredients

- 1 venison shoulder – bone in
- 500g mushrooms – halved
- 250g coarsely chopped carrot
- 350g potatoes – cut in half
- 1 onion coarsely chopped
- 2–3 middle rashers bacon
- 4 cloves garlic
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- Pepper
- Salt
- 1.5 large beef or chicken stock
- Small bunch sage (or one tablespoon of dried)
- Small bunch thyme (or one tablespoon of dried)
- Small bunch rosemary (or one tablespoon of dried)

- Small bunch basil (or one tablespoon of dried)
- Splash of red wine
- Smokey barbecue sauce
- 2 tbsp olive oil

Method

- Pour beef or chicken stock into your slow cooker and turn to high to preheat.
- Trim any excess fat/silver skin off the shoulder.
- Remove the shanks with a bone saw/hacksaw/recipro saw and either include in this recipe or keep separate for shanks.
- You can use the whole shoulder or cut it into 2–3 pieces depending on the size of the deer (and to access the flavour of the marrow).
- Add oil to medium frypan and fry off onion and bacon for about five minutes, then add to slow cooker.
- Apply generous amount of salt and paper to venison shoulder and brown in hot oil in the same pan for five minutes per side.
- Put browned shoulder into slow cooker, adding remaining ingredients except for mushrooms, carrot and potatoes. Cooking time will depend on the size of the deer, but about five hours on high or 10–12 hours on low will do the trick. It should pull away from the bone with a fork when it is ready.
- Add the carrots, potatoes and mushrooms with one hour of cooking to go.
- Remove meat and place on a chopping board and shred it with a pair of tongs or a fork into a bowl.
- Add 2 tbsp liquid from the slow cooker to the pulled venison and add enough smoky barbecue sauce to thoroughly coat the meat.
- Plate up with the vegetables and enjoy.

Tip: *Definitely* strain and freeze the left-over stock. You will now have your own game stock ready to go for next time. ■

In the fold



Jan Kaptein finds the Victorinox Hunter Pro M Alox to be around the mark as a solid all-rounder

The beefy but slick Victorinox Hunter Pro M Alox folder.

Once every so often, you come across a knife you just have to try. For me, having spent most of my childhood in Europe, something with the Victorinox name on it has an irrational draw.

The quintessential pocket knives they produce are known to almost every boy with an interest in knives. Yet for me, even as a kid, the appeal of their pocket knives quickly waned once I took one into the bush. Refined and noteworthy in an urban environment, it was simply not made for the sort of use a knife sees when out

hunting. However, with a name like the Hunter Pro M Alox and a description of it being ‘perfect for everyday adventures in the great outdoors or the city’, Victorinox sounded like it was onto something.

A glance at the specifications also makes the knife look intriguing. It has about the right-sized blade and an all-metal construction. So, I obtained one and put it through its paces.

The Hunter Pro M Alox is a far cry from the traditional Victorinox pocket knives you might be familiar with. The Victorinox company came into existence in Switzerland in

1884 when Karl Elsener opened a cutlery workshop. He started to supply the military with knives in 1891, creating the Swiss Army knife known the world over today. By now, the product options have been expanded to include a wide array of other edgeware, watches and even fragrances. Most manufacturing is said to take place in Switzerland, though it is not specified what does or does not originate there.

When unboxing the knife, I was immediately struck by its dimensions. While quite appealing on paper, it was pretty heavy in the flesh. Not to an extent that the knife is unwieldy, but on the heavier end of what I had expected.

The plain aluminum scales of the knife are chequered in a manner similar to a rifle stock. Deep enough to provide grip, shallow enough to be easy to clean. A paracord pendant comes as a standard extra in the box.

The blade opens smoothly, but I do not quite understand the design choice of having a hole in it instead of a flipper on the back or a stud. The knife was semi-sharp out of the box, but it takes an edge easily. If I were to sum up my first impressions, the Hunter Pro M Alox strikes me as a Swiss Army knife on steroids.

It weighs in at a fairly hefty 186 grams, has an overall length of 233mm open and 136mm closed. The blade has a spearpoint shape and measures 98 by 30 by 2.7mm. Oddly enough, the type of steel is not



The carry pocket clip is considerably deep.

specified on the knife or the Victorinox website. However, it is EN 1.4419 with an HRC of 55.5, similar to the steel used for their army knives.

The blade has a satin finish and a straight western grind at 20 degrees; fairly standard, easy to maintain. The blade is secured by a basic back-lock, and the pocket clip is a deep carry affair on the back of the knife. That is where you will also find a lanyard hole. Like everything else on the knife, it is rather large and I imagine it would double well as a pommel to smash a car window in case of emergency. The handle scales are made out of aluminum, embraced by steel liners. Everything is held together by three rivets.

And how does the Hunter Pro M Alox hold its own in the field? It can be a bit of a struggle. Yes, it takes a good edge, is fairly easy to clean and works as advertised. However, I somehow never seem to find an ideal use for it as a hunting knife. The spearpoint blade does not lend itself particularly well to skinning game because it lacks sufficient ‘belly’.

It is not a knife for heavy chores either because it is riveted instead of put together with torx or other screws normally found on knives in the price bracket. This design choice is even more baffling considering the dimensions of the knife, which suggest it would be suited to heavy-duty applications. The Hunter Pro M Alox works well enough when pulling the fillets off a deer or pig. When in a pinch, you can skin with it too, but it is a bit tedious.

Around camp, the knife feels more at home. It is great for meal preparation and lighter duty applications. However, I favour other knives for this because they cost and

weigh much less or are more solid. So now the knife lives in the car. And that is where it serves me well. I use it to peel apples, do final trimming jobs on meat I bring back and open packages. I am confident that it would cut my seatbelt and smash my windshield in case of emergency too.

Before doing this review, I had another look around on the Victorinox and retailer websites. I was looking for confirmation that the Hunter Pro M Alox is in fact not targeted at hunters. However, just like there is no information on the blade steel, there is not much there. We mostly have the name to go by. One that is in my opinion at least a bit misleading.

Yes, the overall fit and finish of the knife is fine, the back-lock works well and the blade opens smoothly. On top of this the materials are corrosion resistant and easy to clean. I cannot fault the workmanship either. Yet, the weight of the knife, the shape of the blade and the fact that a knife of this size and at this price is riveted together make me struggle to recommend it as a hunting knife for field use.

To conclude, for me, the Hunter Pro M Alox has proved to be one of those products that pretty much made true on its first impressions. A Swiss Army knife on steroids. It is just as well made, but unfortunately not put together any more solidly. As a result, I would not want to rely on it out in the bush. Not as my first knife, not even as my back-up because of the weight penalty.

I am not sure what the ‘everyday adventures in the great outdoors’ in the product description are, but I image they are family picnics or the weekend spent in a tent with food brought from home. Fond as my memories of such ‘adventures’ are, they are a far cry from the reality we face when out hunting in the bush where your knife is an essential tool. However, if you are after a well-finished, beefy blade with a pedigree that will serve you well on family occasions, this knife is worth your consideration. Do keep an eye open for specials or clearance sales, as they regularly sell at significant discounts.

Visit victorinox.com.au ■



Features include a cut-out thumbhole and a lanyard hole that doubles as pommel.



The handsome Hunter Pro M Alox with supplied paracord attached.

Specifications:

Dimensions closed/open	136mm/233mm
Material handle	Aluminum
Steel group	1.4419
Hardness	55.5(+/-1)HRC
Style and grind	Western, flat grind at 20 degrees
Blade shape	Spearpoint with thumbhole
Blade dimensions (l x h x w)	98mm x 30mm x 2.7mm
Opening system	Thumbhole
Lock	Back-lock
Pocket clip	Yes, on back
Weight	186 grams
Price	\$160-260



Top: Geared up and taking aim in the great outdoors.

Bottom: Glassing the terrain for potential game.

Supporting our diggers

Don Caswell highlights the fantastic ‘boots on the ground’ initiative of Veteran Hunts Australia

Those of us in civilian life have little grasp of the intensity of military service and the lingering impact of that on the men and women who serve.

While frontline combat roles carry an additional impact on those so engaged, there is no doubt that both combat and support personnel share the stresses and concerns of being deployed on active service in strange and hostile foreign lands, far from the support of family and friends.

The military long ago realised that to function effectively on deployment they must forge a uniform, tight, introspective focus on the mission and maintaining battle readiness. Everybody on placement needs to keep busy, working towards the assignment’s goals. Sitting about, moping for home, is a counterproductive luxury that can sap the effectiveness of any unit.

After serving in such an intense atmosphere, most returning veterans suffer the shock of the sudden vacuum they find themselves in back home. Sadly, for too long, there was little or no effort from the powers-that-be to provide either recognition or assistance for this issue.

While in recent times that is slowly changing, there is still a need to provide more support to our returning veterans. Activities based in the great outdoors, that demand a degree of planning and preparedness, focus and goal-setting, have a lot to offer veterans seeking to transition from active service back into life at home, or who are still currently serving their country in one of the armed forces. Readers will immediately recognise how well hunting matches a large amount of the skill sets already ingrained in ex- and current serving personnel.



Nigel, an ex-serving combat engineer, who also has been actively involved in hunting conservation for more than 50 years, and his wife Lana, generously funded the kick-starting of the Veteran Hunts Australia program. With the assistance of similar, like-minded individuals, Nigel and his veteran administration have set up Veteran Hunts Australia to introduce and provide suitable training to men and women veterans looking to take up hunting, or to continue their previous interest in hunting.

VHA is open to all veterans from any country, whether they are currently serving or ex-serving. The group’s public image is displayed via their Instagram profile **veteranhuntsaustralia_vha** and enables them to integrate with the general public and hunters alike.

In addition, they run a private Facebook group for members only where they

educate, discuss hunting options and organise trips away. VHA is not limited to Australia either, and they have members working professionally in wildlife conservation and management in other parts of the world.

In fact, they have veterans currently involved from eight countries and it continues to grow. These international affiliates add a variety of opportunities for members to travel and experience a wide array of hunting experiences, and likewise for our overseas contingent to come here and do the same. VHA has a solid base of experienced hunters in its ranks who provide field training and advice to newcomers on hunting related licensing, private firearm ownership and how to become started in the lifestyle of conservation hunting.

Veteran Hunts Australia is self-funded by its members and receives some logistical support from veteran groups and businesses. Given the membership, and their backgrounds, VHA is understandably highly self-sufficient plus a little reclusive and protective of the identities of its members.

That notwithstanding, VHA is delivering effective wildlife management and conservation efforts while providing our veterans with a healthy and meaningful outlet to build on their military backgrounds. It's a great initiative that deserves our recognition and support.

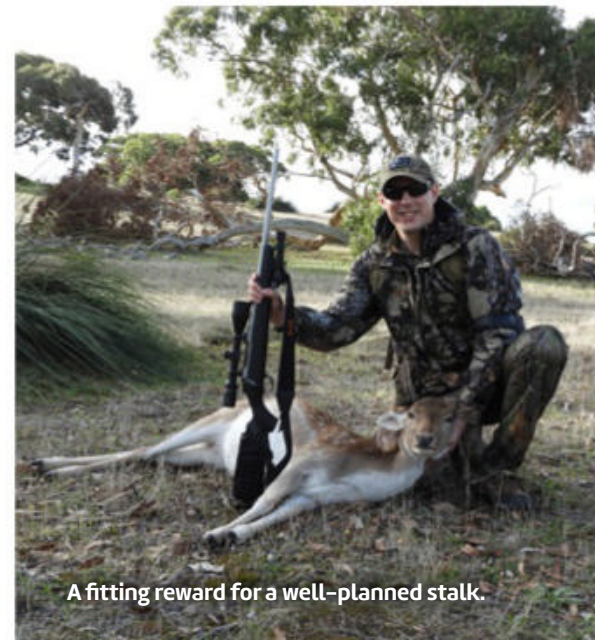
Though Veteran Hunts Australia is currently a self-funded operation, they would gladly welcome financial support from the public, private corporations or businesses. They have no cash backing at this stage from government or any other sources. They maintain the program as a very much 'boots on the ground operation' where the work needs to be done.

All organisational and field work currently is undertaken by its small and dedicated group of veteran administrators. The program has always been focused on veteran health and every cent they have or generate goes directly into helping veterans out into bush. That focus is designed to improve the lifestyle of the individual by offering involvement and education in the rewarding area of conservation, which

covers wildlife management, protection of habitat and defence of our native species.

Therein is the basis for the VHA mandate and ethos: 'Veterans' health is our priority; conservation hunting is our passion.'

If you would like to engage with Veteran Hunts Australia, please go to their social media pages. Alternately, if you are keen to support in any way, email veteranhuntsaustralia@gmail.com ■



A fitting reward for a well-planned stalk.



Now the next task begins...

A photograph of a savanna landscape. In the background, a herd of African buffaloes with large, curved horns stands in tall, dry grass. In the foreground, a leopard is seen from the side, its body angled towards the right, looking towards the buffaloes. The scene is set in a hazy, natural environment.

Tooth, tusk, horn and claw

Steven Fine reflects on Africa's most dangerous species

Whenever I climbed from my car outside Dave's place, I always became excited. He was a taxidermist, working from home and was constantly busy.

Although he lived in a Johannesburg suburb, his sterling workmanship brought back memories of when I was a young boy growing up in the South African city of Durban.

After school, instead of burrowing into my homework I used to visit Ivy's Curio Shop. Here I would walk around gazing at the beautiful skins, rugs and mounts that adorned the walls, floor and counters.

I recall one time when Dave opened the door with a warm greeting and I followed him to the small round table in his kitchen.

"Wait, first come and see the leopard," he said. I caressed the full mount of a female leopard. "Not a big leopard," I commented.

However, a client was due to arrive shortly to take the leopard mount. "He's coming with a driver in his van to fetch his leopard," said Dave. "You see, this little leopard worked him over before his son shot her. He limps badly, his arm is limp. The cat nearly killed him about six months ago."

Soon a vehicle pulled up and the two visitors entered Dave's house. After introductions, they made straight for the full mounted leopard.

The customer had a limp and hanging arm. I noticed scars all over his neck and face. With a slight slur to his speech, he

began the tale of how on his farm in the Northern Province a leopard had been killing some of his cattle's calves. Not being a hunter, he used a borrowed gin trap and one of his workmen came shouting that an 'ingwe' (leopard) was caught.

He approached the leopard with his son, who was armed with a .30-06 rifle. They were about 30m from the leopard when it tore loose minus a paw and was onto the farmer in an instant. The son could not shoot immediately for fear of hitting his father, and in the many seconds that it mauled him he still could not shoot. The farmer was shouting for his son to shoot and believed that this aggravated the animal even more.

Then his father fell over and the leopard chewed his leg and his arm high up, biting with molars. In the pandemonium the leopard grabbed his neck, before the son put the barrel almost against the cat's head from the side and fired.

The farmer smiled briefly, continuing to describe his experience. He said his son drove quickly to the house, which was a couple of minutes away. Luckily, his wife was at home. She was a retired nurse and treated him in the back of their old LandCruiser while the son drove swiftly to the hospital. It was a harrowing story.

Dave and I helped to load the small leopard into the van and the visitors left. I told Dave that the farmer was lucky the leopard was not a mature male with a dewlap hanging like a hammock. The episode had me

thinking about some of the killer animals that live on the African continent.

Wounded buffaloes and elephants probably kill more hunters in Africa than any other animal but I've decided to bring facts to perspective and straighten some misconstrued ideas. Here I am talking about attacks on rangers, village folk, farmers, nature guides and tourists.

Once it was mentioned by a misguided wildlife narrator that hippos kill more people in Africa than any other animal. The same gentleman also said the lion's favourite food is the warthog.

I have witnessed many live lion kills but none were on a warthog. And, I've studied and recorded African animal attacks on people for many decades, which intensified during my hunting days and when I was a safari operator, professional guide and honorary ranger of Kruger National Park. I spoke to village chiefs, rangers, farmers, hunters and lodge managers to name a few.

Of course lions eat warthogs but top of Simba's menu is anything that he or she can catch, which includes humans.

I've stalked many lions on foot for photographic purposes and stumbled on others by accident – they all ran away as fast as they could, except one. The difference being it was during the day, whereas at night lions change in nature and turn highly dangerous, especially when their stomachs rumble with hunger.

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Tooth, tusk, horn and claw

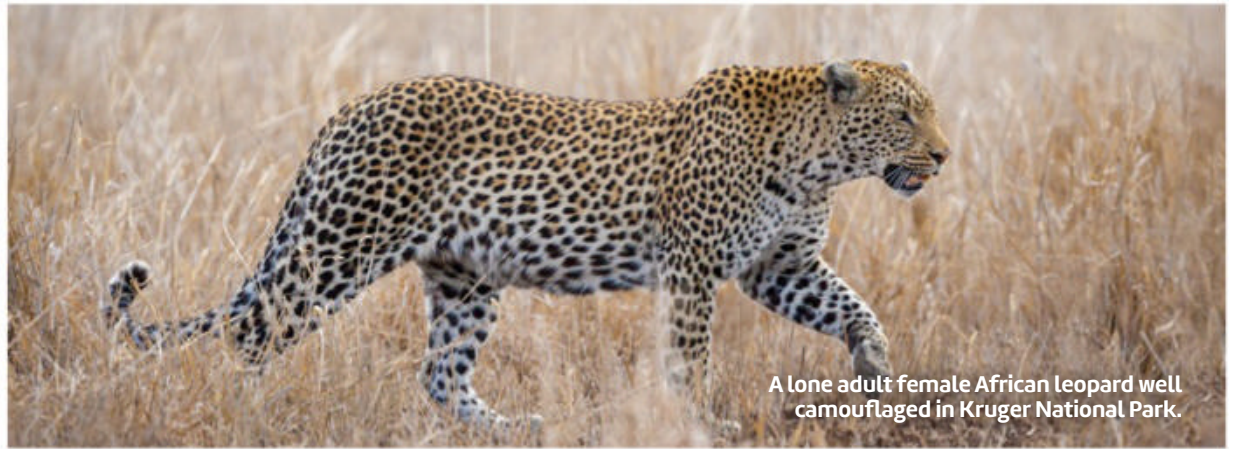
Let's examine Kruger National Park as an example. In 1898 Paul Kruger created the Sabie Game Reserve after his attention was brought to diminishing wildlife. Up north a second initiative was established, known as the Shingwedzi Reserve.

In 1927 the national park was opened to tourists after both reserves were joined and some 70 private farms were purchased by the government, forming Kruger National Park.

The instances of lion attacks are well chronicled. In 1903 a mother and her African child were eaten by a lion and the following year ranger Harry Wolhuter was pulled off his horse by a lion while on patrol. Thankfully, his knife was still in his holster and while being dragged off he managed to stab the predator in the heart a couple of times. Harry climbed a tree and strapped himself to a branch. Part of the pride returned but Harry's faithful dog and staff saved him.

Another employee's wife was killed by a lion in these early years, among others. There were also some lucky survivors, even though they had been savaged by lions. One employee died from a black mamba bite, while two were taken by crocodiles. Buffaloes injured three people, with one being treated for weeks in hospital. Plenty of poachers crossing into Kruger paid the price, many killed by elephants but a huge number were also the victims of lions.

In 1998 guide Charles Swart was killed by a leopard on a night drive while stopping for a smoke break. Then employee Mongwe was killed and eaten by a leopard. Kotie de Beer lived in the ranger village by Skukuza. She loved her walks in the



unfenced area. One afternoon a leopard watched, stalked and killed her. The leopard was subsequently hunted and shot.

Faithful guard Thomas Rihlamfu went to bed at the Shingwedzi gate in a small cemented room. The tiny window was high up but a leopard entered during the night, killed him and ate him.

Then a domestic worker was killed by a buffalo, while a conservation official survived being tossed, also by a buffalo. In contrast, hippos in the area have killed just three people in more than 120 years.

Refugees crossing from Mozambique, one of the poorest countries in the world, into South Africa via the Kruger have been attacked, killed and eaten by lions in their hundreds between 1960 and the present day. Some believe this figure goes into the thousands. You must remember that two million people crossed into Kruger during that period.

Now, if you examine the man-eating lions of Ubena, Njombe and Tsavo, we are talking about deaths to the tune of well over 2000 people killed and eaten. Tanzania has counted more than 1000 people, mostly tribal folk, killed by lions from 1990.

Elsewhere, dangerous snakes in Africa are responsible for 400–500 bites per 100,000 population and again this is mainly tribal and village inhabitants.

Reputable books written by hunters such as *White Hunters* by Brian Herne refer to only one injury by hippos. However, Herne points to plenty of people who have succumbed to the Big Five (lion, leopard, elephant, buffalo and rhino).

In John Pondoro Taylor's book *Maneaters and Marauders*, there is no reference to hippos, but the cats (lions and leopards) appear responsible for many deaths.

Maneaters by the late Peter Hathaway Capstick has no link to hippos but in another book he does mention that they can be dangerous.

Hippo habitat requires water, yet only a handful of African countries boast water quantity and healthy hippo populations.

Yes, indeed deaths have resulted from hippos, especially in Zambia and the Okavango in northern Botswana where many locals use mokoros (dug-out wooden canoes) for transport.

The well-researched book *Southern African Mammals* by Gus Mills and Lex Hes states: 'In places such as St Lucia, hippos have become used to humans and pose little threat to craft – there have been very few incidents in the past 40 years.'

Buffalo related deaths are plenty but most occur due to hunting. A wounded buffalo will kill you, unless you kill the animal first.

In the Timbavati area, which is part of Greater Kruger National Park, I know of several deaths – with the crown going to the lion, followed by elephant, snake bite from a black mamba and even one from a hyena not too long ago.



In the past four or five years, numerous attacks were confirmed in Africa but many more go unreported. I must point out that any hand-reared lion that is returned to the wild will adapt and kill animals for meat just like any other. A lion that has had close human contact loses its fear of people and this can be the most dangerous scenario.

Certain private lodges that allow so-called tame lion walks with people and lion patting are risking lives, as these lions become a problem.

I know of other cases where hand-reared lions were successfully reintroduced to the wild only to kill people a year or two later. One resulted in a lawsuit against a lodge in Zululand and saw an American win the case.

Yes, of the Big Five, the lion is responsible for killing more people than all the other members of the grouping, which means hundreds of times more than hippos. Strangely, the number one killer of people in Africa is something very small that even beats the lion, and that my friends is the Anopheles malaria mosquito. This insect is

responsible for the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people every year.

The World Health Organization states on average 410,000 die annually from malaria in Africa, while Medecins Sans Frontières say the figure is closer to one million. UNICEF claims it is even more than a million. Nigeria and the DRC (Democratic Republic of the Congo) are by far the worst and it is children, the elderly and pregnant women who are the highest risk. Sadly, there is not enough education or preventative measures to reduce this.

Tourists to Africa and hunters who listen to their doctors, safari guides and professional hunters and take anti-malarial drugs have a lot less to fear. Bear in mind not all areas have malaria and the disease is much more active in summer.

Human-animal conflict is intensifying, as there is competition for land and water, with wildlife losing out. Elephants are a major threat to agriculture, as they raid crops while trees succumb to bark-stripping and die.

Then there is excessive poaching throughout Africa, with cruel wire snares killing or maiming wildlife. In Kruger National Park, visitors are reporting sights of snared animals by the hundreds but what is not seen is far worse.

Africa needs intensive management strategies and modern equipment. Conservation education is paramount in schools, villages and elsewhere. Time is running out for action.

Last but not least, education is also imperative with regards to sustainable hunting and the massive benefits that come with it. However, this must be directed not only in the poor schools, villages and elsewhere but to students in wealthy schools, colleges and universities worldwide.

They need to know that controlled hunting increases employment and wildlife benefits where money is ploughed back into conservation. ■

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The Weatherby report

Don Caswell finds the Kakadu rifle top-notch for hunting under the Southern Cross

Weatherby Vanguards have been a best-selling rifle in Australia since they were introduced. The latest version to cross our shores is sure to build on that popularity. This is the Kakadu model, a Weatherby with a distinct Aussie flavour.

TSA Outdoors are Australian distributors for Weatherby and they provided *Australian Hunter* with a new Kakadu rifle in 6.5 Creedmoor for testing, along with a selection of Fiocchi ammunition.

Rifle

Without scope, fittings, ammo or sling, the Weatherby Kakadu weighs 3.23kg and is 1120mm in length. This barrel is a fluted, slimline sporter profile and the stock is synthetic.

The stock features an earthy green two-tone camo pattern, and the metal-work is all Cerakoted in what looks like a desert tan. The floorplate includes a distinctive Southern Cross surrounding the Weatherby logo.

The Weatherby Kakadu is available in various popular calibres, from .223 Rem

to .300 Win Mag. It is manufactured for Weatherby by Howa, in Japan.

Barrel

The fluted sporter weight barrel is of cold hammer-forged steel. From bolt face to crown it is 24". The rate of twist for the 6.5 Creedmoor is one in 8" – enough to stabilise projectiles of 140 grains, which is fine for a hunting rifle.

Receiver and bolt

The bolt is fluted and Cerakoted, which adds to the visual appeal while saving some weight. Bolt lift is 90 degrees. The bolt features two big, opposed locking lugs and

a large claw extractor. Extraction of fired cases is positive. The bolt face is recessed within a surrounding shroud – a feature that adds another layer of protective strength and provides one of the ‘three rings of steel’ incorporated in the Weatherby design. The bolt also has three vent escape holes to direct any hot gases resulting from a blown primer. A distinctive cocking indicator is prominent at the rear bottom of the bolt. The bolt cycles smoothly in operation.

The receiver is machined from a one-piece forged block of steel. The hinged one-piece floorplate is of aluminium, Cerakoted to match the barrel and receiver. The prominent Southern Cross surrounds the Weatherby logo on the floorplate. The floorplate release is



The bolt is shrouded, with a large claw extractor, twin lugs and ample gas venting.



The Weatherby Kakadu matched to a ZeroTech scope make a good-looking combo.

Below: The adjustable match trigger and integral recoil lug of the Kakadu action.



Above: The Kakadu floorplate is Cerakoted and features the Southern Cross.



Above: The fore-end of the Kakadu stock.



Above: The action area of the stock.



Above: A thick recoil pad adds to shooter comfort.



Above: The pistol grip shows the Weatherby logo.

situated in the front of the triggerguard. The magazine well holds four cartridges of 6.5 Creedmoor. On the left side, opposite the safety, is the bolt release.

When I reassembled the rifle, I took care to set all the screws to recommended values. For the action screws in a synthetic stock, that is 35 inch-pounds. The scope bases I tightened to 20-25 in-lb while I set the ring screws to 17 in-lb. This is an important step I follow with every rifle I shoot. Incorrect torque settings can be the undiagnosed cause of puzzling inaccuracy at times.

Trigger and safety

The trigger on the Vanguard is match quality two-stage, adjustable down to a nominal minimum of about 2½lb. As received, the trigger pull was 2.7lb. The action needs to be removed to access the trigger pull adjustment screw. Trigger release is consistent and creep free.

The 3-position safety is located on the right side adjacent to the bolt. Pulled to the rear the safety locks both bolt and trigger; midway blocks the trigger only so that

the bolt can be cycled; forward is fire berth. The safety is positive and definite.

Stock

The synthetic stock is of a two-tone, earthy-green, camo pattern. It looks quite eye-catching while ensuring an unobtrusive presence when out hunting. The high, forward sloping comb of the Monte Carlo is typical of Weatherby rifles and maximises shooter comfort during recoil. Metal to stock fit is good and the stock is flush with the barrel over the full length.

The internal structure of the stock is ribbed for greater strength without sacrificing any weight benefits. The integral action recoil lug fits snugly against a large, flat, bearing surface within the stock. The stock is finished off with a thick, soft recoil pad.

Length of pull is a comfortable 13³/₈" (340mm). QD swivel studs are mounted fore and aft. There is a second forestock stud mounting point, not visible from the outside, that could be used to fit a second QD stud up front.

The Weatherby report

Scope

TSA Outdoors matched the Kakadu with a ZeroTech 2.5–15x50 Thrive HD scope, which ensured maximum extractable accuracy. It is a big scope that, complete with rings and alloy lens covers, weighs in at 938 grams. That took the all-up rifle weight, unloaded, to 4.17kg.

The scope features the PHR II reticle which has a floating centre dot for an ultra-refined point of aim as well as a finer 6 o'clock post, enabling even more precise elevation hold over for long shots. The finer bottom post has hold-over gaps at 1.1, 2.5, 5 and bars at 10, 15, 20 and 25 MOA. The reticle made for precise shot placement at the range and the hold-over points let me move on from paper to consistently ding the metal plates out past 200m.

The weather-shielded ZeroTech Thrive scope has High Definition glass and delivers crystal-clear precision optics. Among a long list of top features are the 30mm tube, 92 per cent light transmission, etched HR II SFP reticle and the flip-up alloy lens covers. Retail pricing for this scope is about \$800.



Typical excellent accuracy from the Weatherby Kakadu in 6.5 Creedmoor.

MOA guarantee with factory ammo

The Vanguard comes with an MOA guarantee. That is, using Weatherby or other quality brand ammunition, and a rifle with a clean cold barrel, you can expect to put three shots into MOA. I set off to a SSAA range with a variety of factory ammo to test that out and was not disappointed.

Off the bench

The rifle is comfortable to shoot off the bench. The high raked comb of the pronounced Monte Carlo cheekpiece and the thick recoil pad tamed the mild-mannered 6.5 Creedmoor. The 6.5 Creedmoor is a great choice for Aussie hunting, especially for those seeking a bit more grunt than offered by the venerable .243 Win, without going as far as the more powerful 7mm and .30 calibres.

The Kakadu met its MOA obligation with the array of factory ammo I had at hand. That included Fiocchi 129-grain poly-tipped SSTs, and 129-grain Interlock FB rounds along with 140-grain Hornady BTHP and Federal Premium 130-grain Hybrid open tip match rounds.

These all shot the 1 MOA mark. Curiously, the most consistently accurate round was the Fiocchi 129-grain Interlock FB, at a smidge under 1 MOA, rather than the match ammo. Not that there was much in it. Those Fiocchi 129-grain Interlocks FBs are an ideal choice for hunting deer and boar.

In summary

The Weatherby Vanguard Kakadu is a stylish rifle, with its calibre range from .223 Rem to .300 Win Mag. Retail price is between \$1500–\$1600. Visit tsaoutdoors.com.au for your local stockist. ■



The ZeroTech 2.5–15x50 Thrive HD scope has a PHR II reticle.

ZeroTech 2.5–15x50 Thrive HD scope with alloy flip-up lens covers.



SA quail hunting back from the brink

Matt Godson, Wildlife Biologist, SSAA National

For the past two years South Australia has not had a quail season, the reason being the Environment Minister didn't want to make a declaration with no abundance data. Hunters have been pulling their hair out at the fact the Minister wouldn't declare a season for a species known to be highly abundant and with low hunting pressure (across SA stubble quail have roughly 70 million hectares of habitat they can call home).

After discussions with the Environment Department throughout early and mid-2021 on the need to gather data for the Minister to reboot quail hunting in SA, it became clear to those involved that the Department was dragging its feet. It was as if the Minister's own department didn't feel extra data was needed and they were happy to rely on their own surrogate information based purely on climate conditions.

By October a group of representatives from various hunting organisations (Conservation and Hunting Alliance of South Australia) had come to the conclusion that if we depended on the Department to collate data, we'd be screwed over yet again and, for the third year running, be denied a quail season. This became a 'line in the sand moment' as we decided to get out there and gather the data ourselves.

I set about doing some research into different survey methods to estimate quail abundance and, after a few 'virtual' online meetings, we agreed on a couple of methods. With those methods established I quickly put together survey instructions and data sheets ready to be distributed, and then followed a concerted team effort by the group to make contact with as many landholders as we could to identify willing participants to conduct surveys.

'Drive counts' were mainly conducted by volunteers, with or without gundogs, walking paddocks and taking note of the area (ha) covered to allow for density calculations. Harvest counts were conducted when paddocks were being stripped and harvester operators would count flushing quail. This particular method provided an exhaustive census of a known area of habitat/paddock.

With the SA duck and quail season-setting meetings fast approaching, I scrambled to enter the incoming data into spreadsheets ready for analysis. With harvest season held up due to weather conditions it was clear I'd only have time to prepare a preliminary report for the meeting, then complete a final report early in the new year.

With limited lead-up time the group was able to collate quail abundance data from more than 100 private properties, a truly commendable effort from all involved. While I was awaiting that data to flow

through, I set about writing as much as I could for a report before any results were available and included a review of the current status of stubble quail and their diet and habitat use. I obtained recent information about habitat and climatic conditions then prepared sections on quail presence and abundance in SA (what we found), and estimating quail populations and hunting risk.

When I finally decided to pause data entry, we had survey returns from 108 private properties covering 8333 hectares. A total of 16,024 birds were counted, which provided an average statewide density of 1.35 quail per hectare. This allowed us to estimate the stubble quail population to be between 6-17 million ($\bar{x}$ =12,002,606, 95%CI) in South Australia's agricultural areas alone. With an annual average recreational harvest of around 5000 quail in SA, this represents only about 0.04 per cent of the population. Internationally accepted sustainable harvest rates range from 10-20 per cent of the population and if that's not sustainable hunting then I'm not sure what is!

But all this work paid off and we've dragged quail hunting in South Australia back from the brink. Hunters are now able to enjoy a return to quail hunting with a 20-bird bag thanks to the hard work of a determined few who drew that line in the sand.

The 2022 SA season runs from April 30 - July 31. ■

Tricks of the trade

Wayne Kampe shares his extensive experience hunting deer with a bow and arrows

Back in the day, I regarded bow-hunting deer as maybe bordering on impossible but still a hunting challenge I could not resist. True, in 1998 when I first carried a bow into the Brisbane Valley ranges, success seemed a long way away.

Admittedly, I worked my butt off before taking that first red stag and now, after many years of bowhunting both red and fallow deer, I can confidently state that it's not really much easier. But it can be done.

All that aside, the tactics and strategies I've learned could well be of real value to deer hunters of all persuasions. The point is that if these tactics have seen me get within arrow range of deer, they surely must assist both bow *and* rifle hunters.

Telling it as it is

Where I walk the hills in Queensland there's very steep going and not many deer either. But an advantage comes with lots of little timbered gullies to quietly sneak around in. To move within 40m of totally free-range deer takes a lot more than sheer good luck and simply walking off into the wind. So, let's look at a few things that can make it happen.

It's a given that the rut is *the* time to at least locate stags and while it's reassuring to hear the ranges ring with reds' roars or the frog-like croaking of fallow stags, one of the first real issues comes about when a stag has scored some company. Yes, those does are a big, big, issue.

Prodded, herded and driven this way and that by the boss just to keep them together always makes them mighty cranky and highly alert. In any group there is always one relentless set of eyes watching or ears scanning for a sound. Nearly every failed stalk I've had was because a hind sounded the alarm with a nasty foot stamp or a resonant bark.

The ambush

So, yes, the rut is good. Stags are locatable, which makes assessing antlers far easier. And I've probably put the binoculars over enough stags to fill a double deck cattle truck during the two decades and more of hunting with the bow. But for me, the period just prior to the rut can be even better if the timing is right.

In the case of red deer, full-on roaring will often be precluded by a few grunts as early as a fortnight ahead of the main rut because, at this time, a lot of stags are walking around seriously searching for hinds.

Some copycat grunts mimicking a hind call, clashing of cast antlers or even whacks on a tree with a stick can often bring a stag in close enough to seriously elevate the hunter's heart rate.

The clue is to ensure the right spot is chosen for this tactic. You see, a stag can pinpoint any noise with radar-like accuracy, so the plan is to select the ambush site extremely carefully. The idea is to coax the stag in without him realising there is actually no deer where the

attractive sounds are coming from. And trust me, he sure will be looking intently to see what is going on.

Tucking into cover just over a ridge, or behind some really thick stuff, is the trick to bring him in so long as he's coming downwind, but never when he has the breeze in his nostrils.

Use those ears

However, concealment is a two-edged sword. The hunter is not going to be seeing a lot either, so it comes down to remaining quite still and listening intently for any unusual noise – maybe rustling or cracking of twigs. Remember, deer are heavy animals and do not walk silently. Red stags tend to walk in, fallow sometimes run in, so being prepared is everything.

How long to wait? If I'm certain deer are in the area, I give it 20 minutes and if it's a no-show I move to another location, chosen equally as well. Know this though: when this pays off and a stag comes in it's a mighty big buzz to think you've just outsmarted the smart.



Wayne waits for a stag called up with a few grunts. The camouflage outfit even includes a face mask.



This small stag was called up with a perfect ambush technique, employing grunts and a few cast antler clashes.

Tricks of the trade

Cattle

When deer share habitat with cattle, they watch them relentlessly because anything drawing the attention of cattle is out of the usual, and likely has potential threat capability. Running cattle are the pits but even when one is just standing still and looking at the hunter it means – especially with reds – those deer will exit quick smart.

So, no matter how good the stag sounds or looks, if cattle are between the hunter and quarry, every one of those cattle must be quietly bypassed or it's game over.

Outwitting their senses

Sense of smell, hearing and eyesight are what deer survive on so camouflage gear is essential, as is always slowly walking upwind as quietly as possible. With clothing, beware of UV brighteners in the washing machine – these products cause blue/white fluorescence which deer can easily see. Washing hunting clothing in a neutraliser from a gunshop is the clue but a useful alternative in a hunting camp is to wash clothing with bicarbonate of soda.

Love those windy days

A hunter moving slowly and with as much caution as possible can be assured that foliage waving about will make things several degrees easier. Deer home in on any new movement, so when things are being blown about it makes their task somewhat more difficult.



Don't those red stags just love to wallow. Captured by a game camera, this fellow was never seen again during the hunts in the area.

Wind gusts also help drown out foot-steps so when I'm fortunate enough to be closing in, I try to move forward when a breeze is stirring things up a bit.

That's all fine but if there's no wind at the time it's going to be so much harder to sneak close to a potential trophy to assess its worth. At such times it's better to be a rifle hunter.

Footwear must be as silent as possible, with joggers or Dunlop Volleys always my personal choice. But if circumstances dictate this style of footwear is not possible for you, always go for the softest, most pliable footwear available. When stalking it's vital to feel something likely to crack under your feet prior to the full weight of the foot, always placed down heel first, coming down and emitting an awful noise. With those tips in mind, let's move on.

Bowhunting 2021's stag

Early preparations saw game cameras set up strategically from mid-February. The country is a mix of fairly heavily timbered hills interspersed with gullies, with patches of scrub and lantana also prevalent. Because deer regularly use certain pads or trails, those thoughtfully placed game cameras will reveal just what's going on in an area.

Camera checks in mid-March turned up interesting scenarios, with SD cards revealing a cat, a fox, even a small pig, plus five good stags and therein lies a story. When

hunting there later, from first grunts to the roar proper, not one of the stags starring on the SD cards were again seen. Clearly, they were only passing through with agendas elsewhere. And most activity was nocturnal – as per usual.

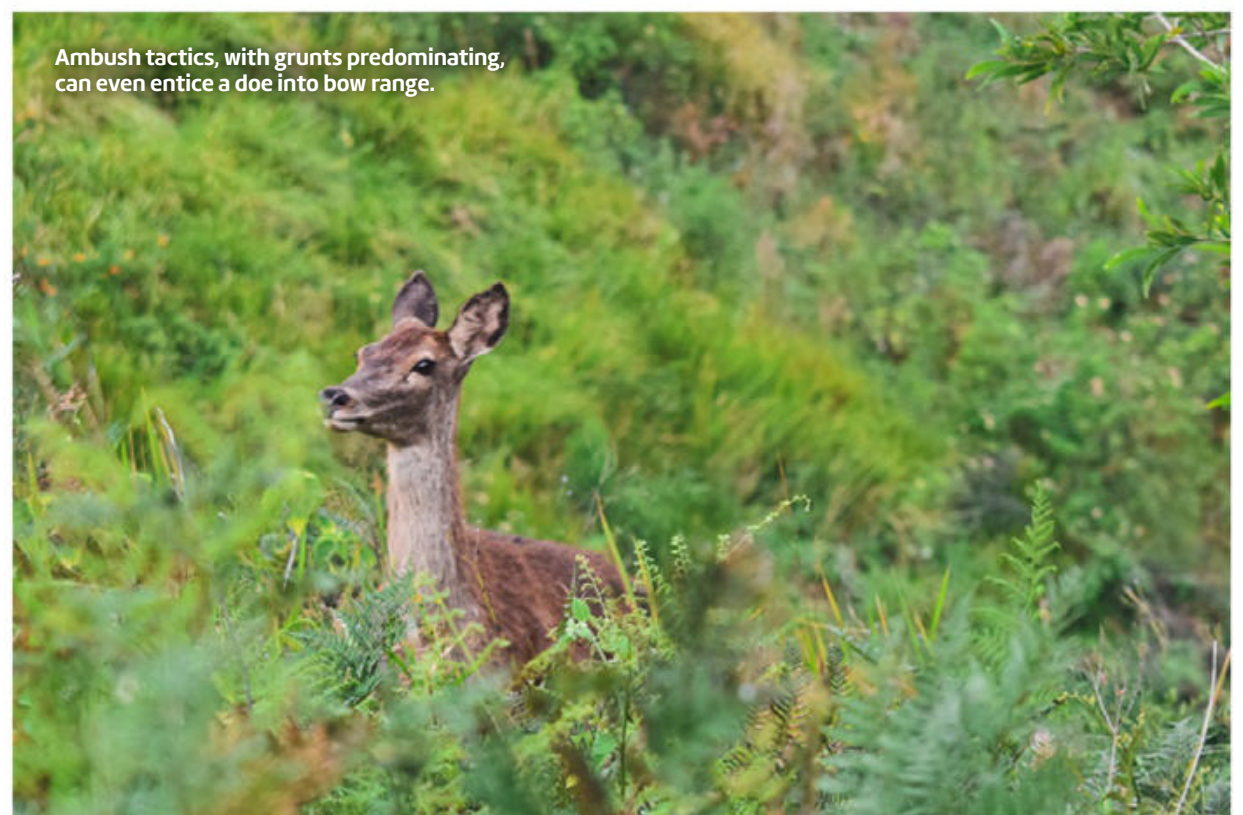
Camp was set up on the creek a fortnight prior to Easter and it just rained and rained. However, some scouting around the nearby hills revealed an exciting degree of activity. The fresh scuff marks under fences, some serious wallowing in a couple of muddy puddles and a scattering of fresh rubbed trees all triggered the familiar feelings of excitement.

I'm not a dedicated trophy hunter – as the stalk is really the juice – so I happily pass up lesser stags, reaching for the camera to enjoy savouring the memories later. After several days I knew where a couple of groups of does were hanging out and was lucky enough to crawl, slither or slide through grass within camera range to record some goings-on. Great fun, but there were just spikers.

One for the old boy

Day six of the hunt was special. A damp, slightly overcast morning always suits rutting deer and there was an orchestra of roaring from several directions, with one deep-voiced stag close enough to warrant first attention.

It had all started at 3am and two hours later I was on the move upwards, planning



Ambush tactics, with grunts predominating, can even entice a doe into bow range.

to be looking for Mr Noisy on the adjacent ridge come daylight. The wind was near perfect and doggedly slogging up the incline with video camera on the belt and backpack loaded with a digital camera, water, knife and steel, plus tucker, and the Mathews bow in hand, I fleetingly wished I was a bit younger. But hey, hunting stags at 74 sure makes me feel privileged.

Cresting the hilltop, I stopped for a breather behind some flowering lantana and carefully surveyed the plateau ahead. So far, so good... just as I reached down to despatch a pesky meat ant from my leg, a loud guttural roar somewhere to the right drew my attention. That was close – mighty close. And then a movement.

Whipping up the 10x50 Leupolds, I saw three hinds run across the narrow plateau closely followed by a large stag – about 100m away – and in seconds they were down and into the valley on the left. As I cheerfully walked forward through the thigh-high wet grass in their direction, the stag began a roaring session with another stag off to the north-west somewhere. With the wind still friendly, I headed down

towards the ruckus, easily picking up their distinctive trails through the damp grass.

A big tree, half-dead from a lightning strike, made a perfect place to jettison the backpack. Having once misplaced it in the excitement of a stalk, I always look for landmarks these days. With only negligible breeze, I eased slowly forward and down, relying on each roar to hide any clumsiness on my part and was soon glassing a 5x5 stag with those hawk-eyed hinds nearby.

At a ranged 63m distance, he was beyond my personal bow reach, but I knocked (loaded, basically) an arrow nonetheless because experience has shown scenarios can change quickly. Which was exactly what happened.

A spiker materialised from a lantana patch to the north and foolishly tried to cut a doe out of the group by running at them. Screaming with rage, the double-five wheeled and raced at the spiker, sending him bolting in my direction as he tried to stab him with an antler on the run.

In full flight the spiker passed me, maybe 10m away, but on seeing my indecisive shape, and then having a nose full

of my scent, he reared up on his back legs – eyes wide as egg cups – came down hard and shot up and over the ridge, grunting furiously in alarm.

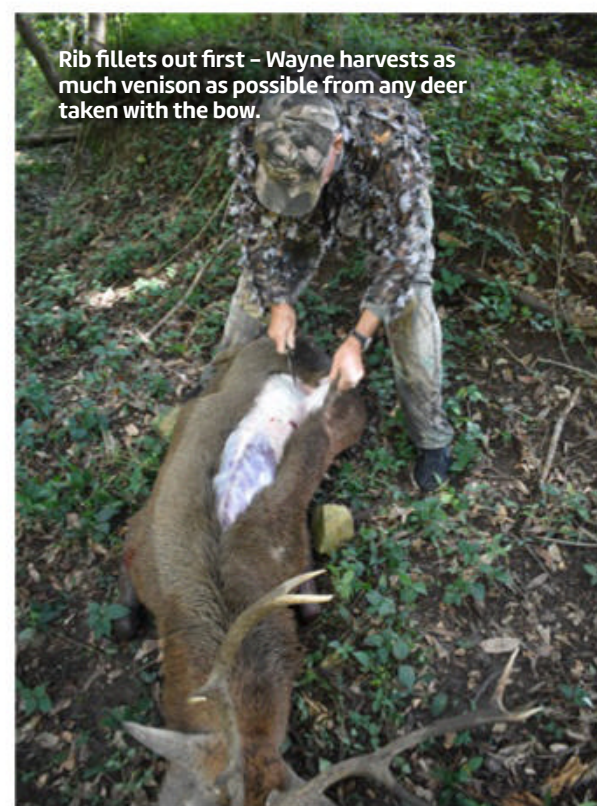
The grunts stopped the double-five in his tracks and he stood side-on just 28m away, looking upwards. Standing half behind a small tree I drew the bow and settled the sight pin just behind his front leg and touched the trigger release. On the arrow's impact he half-jumped before falling down into a steep gully.

Reminiscing

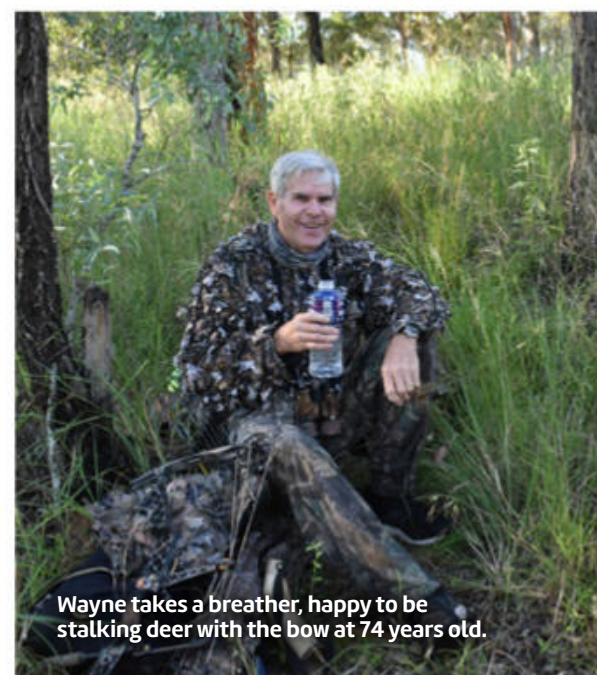
In truth that stag was one of the easy ones, but I still savour the memories and enjoyed his venison. Eat a rutting stag? Certainly. Any deer I arrow is always eaten, never left as carrion. ■



No giant head, but Wayne's 5x5 stag was a pretty good one.



Rib fillets out first – Wayne harvests as much venison as possible from any deer taken with the bow.



Wayne takes a breather, happy to be stalking deer with the bow at 74 years old.

Stay in sight

Don Caswell remains on target with the Pulsar Thermion XM50 riflescope

My hunting buddy Peter and I devote a fair bit of time into hunting the wild dogs in our area. These dogs wreak havoc on farm livestock and native fauna alike.

Not content with eating carrion, or their own kills, they regularly go on slaughter sprees to slay and maim anything they can catch. That includes a lot of cows, calves, pademelons, wallabies, tree-kangaroos and cassowary chicks.

In trying to catch up with and deal with these predators we make extensive use of trail cameras. These are a wonderful asset for determining just what predators are about and when they are raiding the farms and wildlife refuges.

However, the trail camera video and images are often frustrating as well, in that they show the most troublesome alpha dogs and large feral boars are conducting their raids at night. Peter and I have tried



The package includes this handy carry bag.

spotlighting, but the prime offenders are well educated and know what a spotlight is and the danger it poses to them. After kicking the idea around for a year or so, and doing plenty of research, Peter committed to setting up a thermal night shooting rig.

Spring Loaded Gun Shop in Mareeba came good with an excellent deal and Peter ordered a Pulsar Thermion XM50 and a new Sako A7 to go with it. The Thermion is mounted in QD rings on a Picatinny rail that allows it to be rolled off and replaced with

a QD-mounted optical sight for daytime use, if desired.

There was a slight delay in the arrival of the Sako A7 so, in the interim, we mounted the XM50 on my Sauer XT 101. Pleasingly, after a succession of swaps between the Pulsar Thermion and my Zeiss 3-9x40 scope, both came back to exactly on point of aim each time.

After a lot of thought, Peter opted for .243 Winchester as his choice of calibre. A series of visits to the local SSAA range were made, with an optical sight on the Sako A7, to test a wide array of factory ammo and shoot-in the new rifle. That confirmed the heavier projectiles were the right choice, as we later nailed some hefty jungle boars using the 100-grain Fiocchi soft-points that shoot well in the Sako.

The Pulsar Thermion XM50 looks like a conventional optical scope in its design. However, it is purely a thermal imaging device and the sight picture you see is displayed on a small screen within the viewfinder. The XM50 has image and video capture capability with the simple press of a button. There is internal 16GB storage for video and images.



Sako A7 night shooting rig with Pulsar Thermion XM50.



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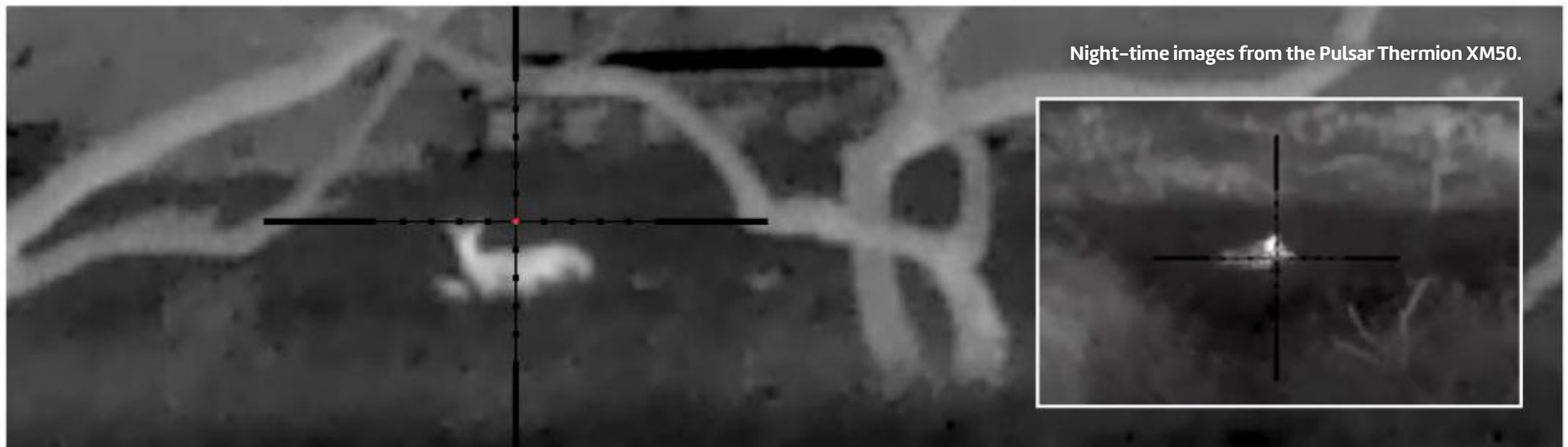
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Even better, it is Wi-Fi capable to share the sight picture to an adjacent smartphone with real time streaming. In the pitch-black night you can follow exactly what your hunting mate is seeing through the scope. Apart from being able to record and share images and video of your hunting, it can be quite educational too. After an unexpected miss, the shot can be scrutinised on the video to discover why that was so.

The Pulsar Thermion XM50 is a physically large scope. Total length is 400mm and it weighs in at 900 grams. The objective lens is 50mm in diameter. The scope is rated to IPX7 water and fog proofing, which is more than enough to handle use in rainy conditions. Being in the style of an optical sight, it can be mounted to a rifle using standard 30mm rings. The scope is appraised for recoil up to .375 H&H calibre level.

The XM50 has a magnification range of 5.5 to 22X. The display screen is AMOLED 1024x768 pixel. This thermal imaging device has a range of 2.3km. In the country we hunt, the terrain only allows a clear line of sight out to a bit over a kilometre. The performance of the XM50 was outstanding at that distance and we could clearly identify small, rabbit-sized game and birds. The XM50 has an integral Lithium-ion rechargeable battery of 3200 mAh capacity.

There is also a removable, rechargeable 2000 mAh battery easily accessed within the top turret. The scope automatically switches between batteries as required and indicates which one is in use. For a long night out, you can buy a few extra batteries to extend the operating time. We found that with fairly constant use we managed about three hours from the combined internal and removable batteries.

The XM50 powers up and off quickly. The controls are minimal and intuitive. A well-designed menu system gives easy access to the scope's broad features and options. Single shot zeroing is a useful alternative which allows the aim point to be adjusted to match the point of impact on the target. There are three pre-set terrain picks for forest, bare rocky ground and foggy/smoky conditions. There is also a fourth custom setting to allow the user to define their own settings.

There are various reticle types that can be chosen as well as a selection of eight colour pallets for the image. One feature I particularly liked was the ability to save

the sighting for different rifles. That allows a QD mounted XM50 to be rolled off one rifle and onto another, then sighted immediately by simply selecting the rifle preset.

I have only covered the basic features briefly here. For detailed information refer to the multi-lingual guide that can be found at pulsar-nv.com

Thermal imaging scopes are game-changers for the eradication of pests at night, when they are most active. Image processing continues to improve and the XM50 proved capable of clearly differentiating our game from the surrounding terrain as night fell. Australian retail pricing for the Pulsar Thermion XM50 starts at about \$6000. ■



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Custom puukko perfection



Custom puukko and sheath by Saku Honkilahti.

Jan Kaptein ardently grasps a fine handmade knife wrapped in Finnish tradition

Combine a penchant for Scandinavian knives with a desire to have a blade that is ‘just right’, and you will at some stage be on the search for a blacksmith. So, after going through my fair share of factory blades from the various Scandinavian producers, I found myself scouring the internet for someone who would be able to create a custom puukko-style knife.

After talking to a couple of blacksmiths, I decided to ask Saku Honkilahti to make me a knife about a decade ago. Available pictures of his work looked impressive, he was pleasant to communicate with, does all parts of the knife in his own workshop and uses quality materials. And yes, that is all parts – even the leather sheaths that are custom-made for each knife are done by Saku.



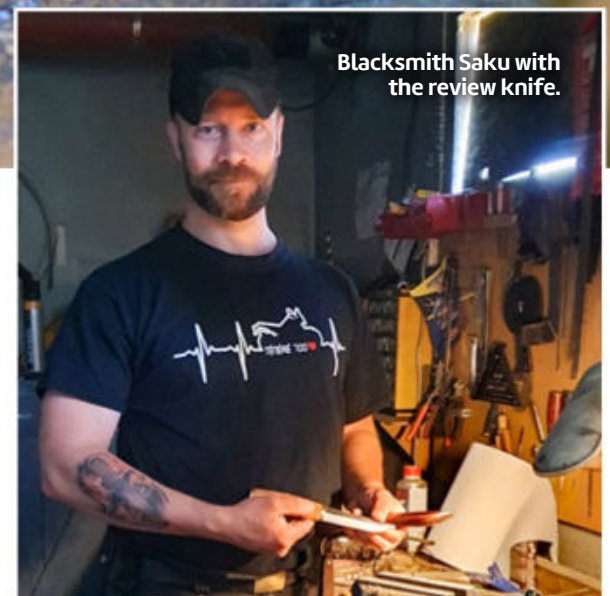
Puukko blades by Saku Honkilahti.

After communication to discuss design, size and materials, I settled on a slightly longer and thicker blade than Saku’s average format because I intended to also use my knife to finish off some pigs and wanted it to be ‘extra strong’. After extensive use, I can attest to the build quality of the knife and the sheath. It has seen fairly intensive use in the field as a general hunting knife and still looks great.

When I contacted Saku more recently to ask if he would mind me doing a review, he reckoned it was a wonderful idea and suggested to do a version of a puukko with a stabilised curly birch handle. This seemed like a fitting way to showcase the difference between a traditional birch bark handle and a curly birch one. It also allowed Saku to forge a knife of a size and style he reckons works best, so I gladly agreed.

And so, the wait began. Custom knives take a bit of time to make. How long depends on the type and complexity of the blade and the amount of work the knifemaker has already lined up. Count on a few months on average. Long story short, when the review knife arrived, I was highly impressed.

Having field tested it, I am anxiously postponing boxing it and sticking on the return label. I had promised myself I did not need another knife and I really do not. My own puukko will likely last me a lifetime with some care and attention. But that



Blacksmith Saku with the review knife.

curly birch looks so lovely. Perhaps I need to buy only one more knife, just in case.

Saku hails from Finland, ‘home of the puukko’. He has worked as a bladesmith for over 15 years in the small town of Jalasjärvi. Driven by a strong desire to preserve the Finnish puukko heritage and traditions, his philosophy is that a good knife can only be made from good materials and workmanship.

In line with this, he only uses quality steel, traditional handle materials and tanned leathers for his sheaths. In order to gain the best results, he takes full control over the entire production process and does all the heat treatment, grinding and even the hand-stitching of the sheath himself. No knife leaves his workshop unless he is happy with it and from the knives I have seen in person, I can confirm that his attention to detail and workmanship are well beyond what you would find if you were to buy a knife that came off a production line.

Saku will cater to his customer's requests and requirements when it comes to size, style and materials used. If you (like me) want something that he thinks does not necessarily make sense, he will tell you so and explain why. My own puukko is a case in point. When I wanted a bigger and thicker blade, he dissuaded me and I am glad he did. As is, my knife is plenty big and thick and after field testing the review sample, I am sure that even with a thinner blade, his knives will stand up to whatever normal use you have for them. Many examples of his work can be found on his Instagram and website links.

The custom puukko under review is a fine example of this traditional Scandinavian knife. The blade is hand-forged and hammered from a bar of ThyssenKrupp 80CrV2 steel tempered to a hardness of around 60 HRC. 80CrV2 is a traditionally cast, tough high-carbon steel with terrific edge retention characteristics. While it does not contain a sufficient amount of chromium to classify as a true 'stainless steel', the right production process makes it quite resistant to oxidation.

The blade measures 102x22x3.4mm, which Saku considers an ideal size for this style of knife. The blade has concave (hollow) bevels and features a flat 23-degree secondary micro bevel edge. The tang runs all the way to the pommel but is narrower at the back than at the end of the blade. It is used to secure the brass bolsters and stabilised curly birch handle. The overall length of the knife is 213mm and it tips the scales at 143 grams. The sheath is hand-made from vegetable tanned leather with a birch wood insert. This provides additional rigidity to the sheath and protects the knife and the user from injury.

Based on extensive use of my own puukko, I could tell from the moment I pulled it from the box that the review knife would work well. It also made me realise why, a decade ago, I should have listened and gone with a slightly more compact knife with a thinner blade.

The review puukko balances really well and the size and shape of the handle are just right for me. I have average size hands, gloves size 9. The curly birch grip



The review blade and block of curly birch for the handle, (right).



Inserts for the custom sheath are made to measure.



Curly birch for the handle.



Stabilising the handle after fitting and shaping with raw material for the custom sheath.

is comfortable to the touch and does not become too hot or cold in extreme weather. Because it has been stabilised, I have had no issues with humidity or long exposure to the harsh tropical sun.

The leather sheath is custom-made for the knife and this shows. The knife seats easily and will never fall out. Over time, the leather might stain or wear a bit, but my

other sheath has done its job for a decade and besides some grease once in a blue moon it has been hassle free, so I imagine this one will be no different.

Because the knife balances so well, it can be used for a wide variety of tasks, including more delicate ones. I like to use it as a general-purpose knife for processing a kill. It has enough belly to skin larger animals

Custom puukko perfection

and is more than strong enough to butcher a deer or a pig. It will also deal with much larger animals like buffaloes or a scrub bull if needed, though you may want a longer blade for that.

While processing animals, you will hit a bone every once in a while, but this has not been a problem. The knife has not chipped and keeps an edge. Because of the straight micro bevel layout, it is easy enough to sharpen on a stone and I have not had any trouble with oxidation, which could theoretically occur on a blade out of 80CrV2. That said, I do wash my blades after processing animals as blood is particularly corrosive and if things turn wet, I tend to leave them out of their sheaths so they can dry once I arrive back at camp. Being as well-balanced as it is, the puukko proved to be good for just about any campsite chore.

I used it for things like feathering a stick and cutting some webbing straps to tie something up, after which I wiped it down and used it to prepare the ingredients for a simple meal. That done, I employed it as a table knife. After a quick touch-up on the stone I carry on camping trips, I used it two days later to pull the backstraps and legs off a pig.

Of course, there are some minor drawbacks to this knife, as there are to any blade. If I am picky, the blade steel can and will rust if you do not maintain it properly. The leather sheath with wooden inserts, pleasant as it is, is prone to absorb

humidity. If not dried properly, this means the knife sits in a pretty much hermetically closed wet sheath. Not ideal, particularly given the blade steel. However, the sheath does not become slack or deformed when it is wet. Mine has been soaked and has kept its shape well.

Being a stickler, I care a lot about how I carry my knives. Ideally, close to my body on a belt-clip that is easy to attach and detach without needing to take off my belt and which features a rotating sheath that clicks into various positions. On top of this it should not have any play, so the knife does not swing around. The custom puukko sheath comes on a leather loop and as a result it requires you undoing your belt to take it off. It also swings around a bit.

Truth be told, I considered opting for another sheath for the knife, but I value the tradition and well-made products, so I use the original leather sheath. By now, it has sort of grown on me and I actually like it. Where my original sheath has a folded edge where the knife goes in, the review sample had a tapered edge. Whether this will stand the test of time as well remains to be seen. I have had no issues with it during a couple of months of field testing.

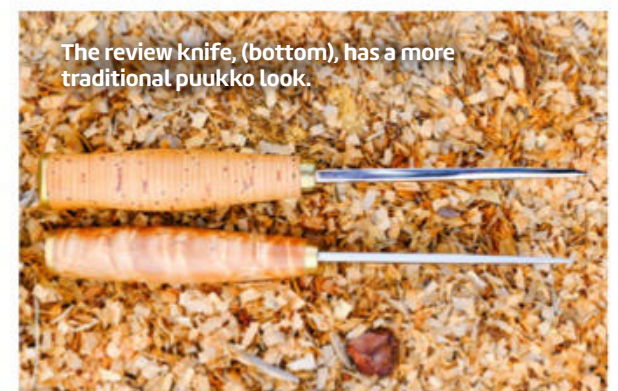
Finally, there is the handle material. The curly birch handle seems impervious from stains and has remained stable, but when extremely wet, I could see it turn a little slippery. It does not have any form of finger guard, which makes for a potentially nasty

cut if it slips. The traditional birch bark grip on my own knife has a slight knurl that makes it slightly more ergonomic and the material provides ample grip. However, it does stain when you have blood or grease on it. Nothing a quick touch-up with a bit of sandpaper has not sorted for me, but worth considering.

So, is a puukko by Saku Honkilahti really the 'perfect' knife? It's as close as they come, because perfection is subjective and depends on your preferred style of knife. Puukko-style knives have a long and deep-rooted tradition in Finland and they work really well as general purpose outdoor and hunting instruments.

If I could only have one knife, a puukko would possibly be it. However, in today's world, I can appreciate the fact that some hunters may prefer specialised knives for specialised tasks. I know I skin faster with a wider blade with more belly, I fillet quicker with a narrower and flexible blade and cutting through fibrous vegetation and tendons is easier with a serrated edge. However, if you are looking for a beautiful knife that is custom-made to your specifications and will do most things without shifting in your way, I have found few models that beat the puukko style.

Saku makes a fantastic puukko and he does it from scratch, taking control of every step of the process. For this, I have the utmost respect. The idea that by purchasing one of his knives, I do not only



support him, but also help to preserve the cultural heritage for the next generation, makes owning one of his knives all the more satisfying.

For those interested in his work, many examples are available on his Instagram. Saku speaks English well and will gladly discuss options with you. Prices for a typical puukko knife with an 80CrV2 blade, pressed birch bark handle and custom leather sheath are currently AU\$425 plus shipping.

Contact details:

Saku Honkilahti

Email: saku.honkilahti@netikka.fi

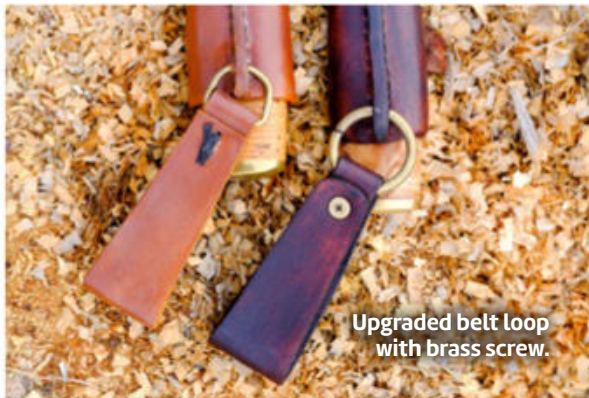
[instagram.com/sakuhonkilahti](https://www.instagram.com/sakuhonkilahti) ■



Jan's own knife and sheath, (top), plus the review knife.

Specifications:

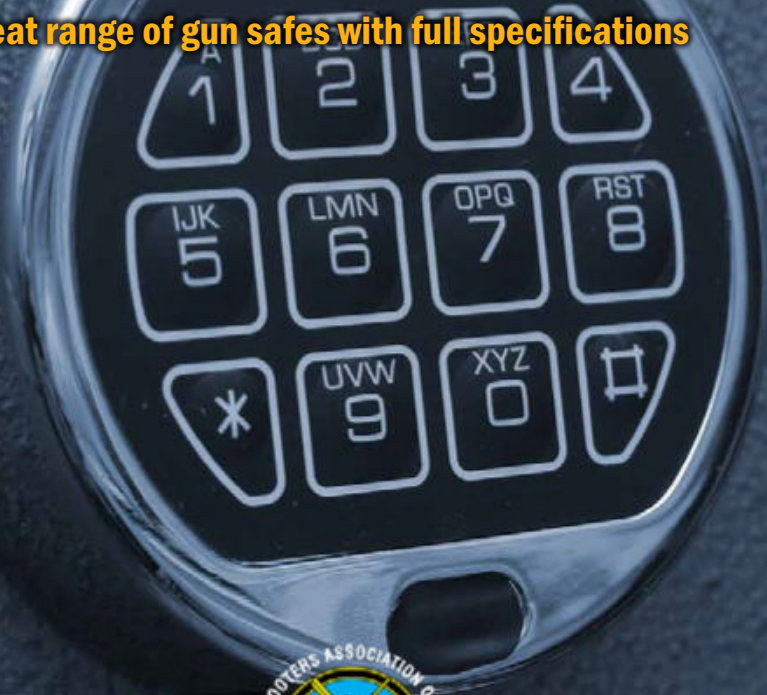
Style	Fixed blade
Overall length	213mm
Blade dimensions (l x h x w)	102mm x 22mm x 3.4mm
Blade shape	Straight, puukko
Type of blade steel	ThyssenKrupp 80CrV2 Carbon steel
Hardness	60 HRC
Grind/Edge	Concave/Straight, 23-degree grind
Material handle	Stabilised curly birch
Weight	143 grams
Right or left-handed	Ambidextrous
Sheath	Custom, vegetable tanned leather
Price	From \$425



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Classic cartridge 9.3x62

The African connection

John Denman



This bull was felled by the 9.3's nemesis, the .375 H&H.

To a lot of people this cartridge is probably not on their radar. It was, after all, specifically designed for Africa. More specifically for the German settlers there, most of whom could not afford the expensive rifles carried by well-heeled sporting types who hunted big game in the earlier part of the 20th Century. It's actually been touted as being the definitive African cartridge.

German cartridge designer Otto Bock was a realist who knew the plight of the struggling farmers populating much of German East Africa in those days. He realised that there was a great need for a cartridge that would be able to anchor big game that many of these farmers shot for meat, or just to keep them away from the crops they were trying to tease out of the hard ground. Those folks could shoot too. They had to, even in the interests of economy.

So, the 9.3x62 ended up taking an assortment of African game, many of which it would not be allowed to in these more enlightened times. Another factor that made this cartridge popular was that it

fitted well in the standard-length Mauser 98 action, which were plentiful at the time. It offered reasonable cost, coupled with substantial energy, and was easy to acquire.

It fell into disuse around World War Two but has experienced a resurgence of interest in more recent times. Its nearest 'competitor' would be the .35 Whelen, which has been popular in the US for some time, although the 9.3x62 will better the Whelen cartridge in the big game stakes. This is one reason why a lot of shooters in the US are turning to the 9.3 as a viable alternative.

As far as muzzle energy is concerned, it ranks just short of the .375 H&H, but enough to be lacking as a 'stopping cartridge.' Shooting cranky Cape buffaloes with this cartridge was something of an each-way bet. If you shot them in the right spot and they dropped you were okay, but if you messed it up and confronted one crankier than usual, you might be in a bit of bother. Writer Robert Ruark has said that the Cape buffalo looks at you as if you owe him money. Our water buffalo can develop a similar disposition.



We have probably all heard about the freakish accuracy of WDM Bell and his exploits with elephants using small calibre rifles. Well, not too many are in his class, which is why most of those who go after big game start thinking anything less than a .400 calibre to be way too small.

There's no doubt though that the 9.3x62 did take a lot of the bigger African species, and in some parts of the continent it's still legal to use it on buffaloes. But is it advisable? I doubt it.

There are all sorts of stories about people shooting plains game in Africa at 300m, but to my way of thinking there are far better cartridges for that job. The 9.3



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Stock: Polymer w/Soft grip inlays. Removable recoil pad w/storage compartment

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Bolt: 3 locking-lug action

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Magazine : 5 shot flush fitting double stack magazine 5+1 (4+1 Magnum)

Surface Finish: Stainless



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Classic cartridge 9.3x62 – the African connection

calibre is classed as a medium bore and that means it's not a long-range proposition. It does its best work inside 200m and the shorter the range, the better. Muzzle energy is just that; at the muzzle, and bullets for the 9.3 are not known for high ballistic coefficient. In other words, velocity drops off fairly smartly.

I never chronographed my loads but my Woodleigh loading manual tells me that those 286gr Woodleigh Protected Point bullets were leaving the barrel at around 2350fps. That's a rather stately speed by many of today's standards. In fact, my loads may well have been going a little slower, due to the short barrel. Regardless, the cartridge is best used for what it's good at – a heavy calibre bullet that will penetrate at short to medium range.

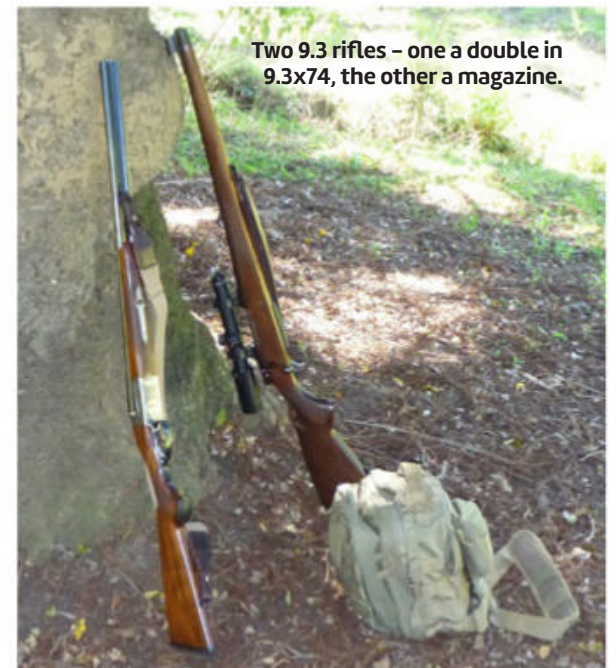
I did a little water buffalo hunting a while back and bought a nice CZ 550 in 9.3x62 for the job. It killed a few buffaloes, but I found it lacking for reliable head shots on these tough animals. Its forte was the heart-lung shot loaded with Woodleigh 286gr Protected Point bullets. These had the penetration ability to ensure the job was done, but then I had also killed a couple of buffaloes using a .308 Winchester on the same target area.

The rifle had a full wood stock, 22" barrel and a 1–4 power Bushnell scope. It pointed like a good shotgun and was light and easy to carry. The Mauser style action that CZ use fed rounds as reliably as sunshine, and it was incredibly accurate, although using this rifle off the bench was a bit punishing. I ended up selling the rifle, even though I loved both the rifle and the cartridge. I wasn't keen on keeping something I wasn't using anymore.

The 9.3 calibre is still popular in Europe and can be had in a cartridge called the 9.3x72 Rimmed, which is usually chambered in drillings and double rifles. This latter cartridge has a longer case than the 9.3x62 but has less powder capacity due to its long-tapered design.

This also means it has less power, but once again it's mainly a European choice and used on moose and wild boars. There is also a rimless 9.3x64 Brenneke, and this one actually can be loaded up to rival the .375 H&H. However, some alterations to the magazine may be required to operate the longer cartridge.

This cartridge is almost certainly best utilised as a handloading proposition. Because while factory ammo is still available, much of it tends to be a bit under-loaded, in deference to some older rifles that may still be around. I found that ADI 2208 was an ideal powder and used Norma brass, although Sellier & Bellot is much cheaper. I didn't need a lot of brass as this is not a cartridge that you'll be firing off extensively at targets.



So, I went for the better-quality stuff. Three-shot groups are definitely the go here. As I said, my bullet choice was the excellent Woodleigh 285gr Protected Point. It features a decent cannelure and crimping on this cartridge is a sensible idea.

Some writers have stated that you can neck up and trim .30–06 cases, but I'd rather not. There is a tiny difference in the original design which often means the rim is slightly larger than the .30–06. I've sometimes found this to be true of some 7x57 cases too, where the case simply will not fit into a standard .308 size shell-holder. Using the standard case is a better option.

So, while I'd still be confident in hunting water buffaloes with this cartridge, what else can you point it at? Some folks swear by it as a sambar round, others like it for pigs, but the fact is those animals can be easily killed with something less expensive to shoot and with less recoil. Even so, many of us are fascinated by certain cartridges and will always find a reason to use the one we prefer. And in any case, using any cartridge with this sort of ancestry may be reason enough. ■

A Woodleigh 286gr Protected Point (left) beside a 6mm V-Max.





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A tough nut to crack

Sam Garro penetrates a walnut plantation on a weekend hunt for hardy sambar deer in the high country

For the past two years I have kept in touch with my friend Derek, who resides in Sambar high country, hoping to fit in a weekend hunt on a possible stag and a meat animal for my hunting companion Alex.

Once dates were set, the weather forecast for the region predicted cold mornings with mild sunny days, which was welcomed. The high country in autumn is stunning, with pine tree plantations populating the

slopes and the colour changing foliage of deciduous trees along the roadside.

The white, icy blanketed grass had just thawed out when we reached the property. With greetings exchanged after a long absence, Derek introduced us to Dean, the property owner, who welcomed us to share his living quarters rather than tent it. We were truly grateful as it would have been pretty cold, even in his sizeable work shed.

Local knowledge

Derek and Dean took us reconnoitring in the field to check out the numerous deer trails descending through the gum and tea-tree shrub covered slopes, tree scraps and muddy wallows in preparation for the afternoon's hunt.

In some places fresh deer droppings were intermingled with those of wombats, recognisable by their squarish shape. The deep-burrowing wombat holes, some



Sam with a sambar hind, an excellent meat animal, shot at night.

large enough for a small person to crawl in, were prevalent throughout the forest and farm paddocks – a potential hazard for livestock and the unwary hunter.

Studying the signs and taking note of the vegetation they browsed on, including the tips of certain tallish shrubs like the prickly coprosma, gave me a better appreciation and understanding of the movements and habits of the deer, thanks to Derek and Dean sharing their local knowledge.

While fresh signs may evidence their recent presence, locating them during a stalk or even waiting for them in a tree-stand, or sitting concealed near a frequented wallow, can be a whole different matter. The slightest noise, change of wind direction or movement, and they are onto you, before vanishing like ghosts.

The smartest of their species

Dean is a reputable former hunting guide both within Australia and abroad, who has hunted a variety of deer from hog to elk. He considers the tough, hardy sambar as the most wary and smartest of the species.

That makes sense when considering they originated from the jungles of Sri Lanka or India where it was pursued by the stealthy tiger and had to develop strong instincts to survive. They can remain perfectly still for a long period, often concealed behind a bush or tree with their head slightly tilted to the side or have one eye peering between the fork of a tree to maintain a guarded lookout. Then when it decides to depart, it utters a honk from its mystery location and exits without you even seeing a hair of it.

Afternoon's hunt

With a wide-ranging area to hunt, Alex paired off with Dean and I went with Derek to another densely forested section that overlooked open gullies. Our movements were slow and the stalking quiet, taking care not to snap twigs underfoot and scanning the open areas and the boundaries of the bush.

After a while of sticking to defined deer trails that contoured around the hillsides, for the most part in a parallel fashion, we climbed further, heading towards the summit of the highest peak to view the next valley. On the way up we crossed a couple of



From left: Dean, Sam and Derek overlooking some wallows used by sambar deer.



Sam checks out wallows frequented by sambar deer.

old, partly overgrown fire access tracks and took short breaks to catch our breath.

Eventually, we reached a clearing at the top where we entered a section of densely packed tea-tree shrub, weaving our way through defined low passages created by deer and wombats. It was here, surrounded by the thick growth, that we initially heard the slightest rustling of bush ahead of us followed shortly after by a deep guttural honk from a stag, and again the briefest of bush rustling.

Not more than 50m or so down the slope towards the direction of the honk, we crossed its hoof marks in the soggy ground and where it passed a downed fence flattened by a fallen tree.

With less than an hour's daylight remaining, we started our descent down the slippery dew-gathering ground, encountering more deer trails and nearly stepping into a wombat hole partly obscured by a large willowing grass tussock.

A tough nut to crack

Assisting a farmer

When we regrouped that evening neither party had had any luck with the deer, but we still enjoyed the stalk in some picturesque and scenic country.

The stag honk certainly had the adrenalin going. Derek, who is known among some of the local farmers for his hunting skills, is at times called upon to assist with despatching invasive or damaging feral animals from rabbits to wild dogs and the occasional deer.

That evening, one farmer who had deer raiding his walnut plantation, rang Derek to advise he had just observed deer in the plantation from afar and if he could attend as a matter of urgency. As country folk tend to take care of one another in times of need, Derek didn't hesitate to oblige but asked if his trusted friends and licensed shooters with the appropriate game licences could tag along to assist. The farmer had no objection.

Before participating, the farmer's written permission was obtained as required by law for any spotlighting or use of thermal visual aids on private property.

Sambar in the walnut plantation

On arrival at the plantation, the developing fog wasn't going to make matters easy but Dean and Derek, using their thermal monocular, soon picked up the distant images, a group of five to six deer – mainly sambar hinds and a spiker.

Initially, I tried to use my Sako A111 .30-06 Springfield rifle mounted with a Leupold VX-3 3.5-10x40mm but as soon as I turned on the Jetbeam torch mounted to the scope, the strong light beam just bounced off the fog, making it impossible to see anything.

Derek kindly offered his Lithgow .308 rifle with Luth-AR tactical stock and Night Tech MS-42 thermal scope. With all lights off, we stalked quietly forward under the light of a partial moon to within shooting range. The deer tended to move short distances, stop momentarily and then move again as if toying with us. Eventually, the opportunity on a hind at approximately 140m presented itself, its white frame sharply contrasted in the dark. The trunk of a walnut tree served to steady the rifle and settle the fine red cross-hair of the thermal scope just behind the shoulder, before

squeezing the trigger. The thud that followed and the shallow white form on the ground confirmed a clean kill.

Similarly, Alex dropped a spiker a little closer in and then Paul, Dean's close friend who also participated, took two other hinds in succession using the same outfit. Watching the action through Dean's thermal monocular, I was surprised to witness how one distant hind stood behind a small trunked walnut tree as if trying to conceal itself, while peering around it to see in our direction.

Back home, curious to understand the deer's behaviour, it was interesting to learn deer actually have excellent night vision due to their oval pupils that act similar to the aperture of a camera and layers of tissues that perform as mirrors, hence why their eyes glow when a light is shone at them.

The remaining deer fled from the area and are unlikely to return any time soon. While the thermal scopes have been around for a while, it was my first experience with the use of one, which proved effective and certainly an asset when it comes to despatching numbers of intrusive or damaging pests.



Team effort

As we reached each expired animal, an incision to the throat region was made to bleed-out any toxins as a result of lactic acid build-up in the bloodstream from running or adrenalin kicking in, and to improve the quality of the venison.

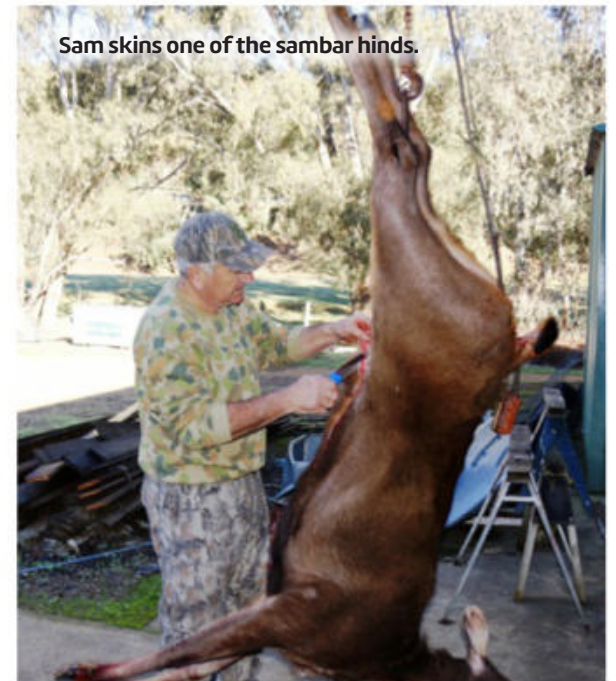
Normally, the backstraps and back legs of a deer are taken but as sambar meat is excellent eating and, in this case, easily accessible by vehicle, it was decided to load them whole into the back of Dean's ute tray. I was surprised how large and heavy even the hinds were compared to other species like the red deer.

We all pitched in with the less pleasant work of gutting and heaving the animals onto the ute. By the time we finished with the final one, we were well spent and looked forward to heading back to the house for a clean-up and a cuppa.

The deer were left in the back of the ute to chill overnight in cold mountain air. It had been a team effort and a rewarding result for both the farmer and the hunters.

Meat retrieval

While the next day was designated for a continued hunt in the hills, we knew the butchering task before us had priority and would take some time to process.



Sam skins one of the sambar hinds.



Deer taken whole for meat retrieval the next day.

Derek's Lithgow .308 rifle with tactical stock and Night Tech MS-42 thermal scope enabled the hunters to penetrate the fog and harvest the deer.



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A tough nut to crack

Between the five of us, most of the day was devoted to skinning, retrieving the meat, bagging the cuts and stowing it all away in the fridge/freezers.

We all shared in the bountiful venison, including the farmer, who popped around later in the afternoon for some choice cuts for his own consumption and offcuts for his dog. Dean and Paul also minced a fair quantity of prime cuts for sausage making and other uses.

Not so long ago, in the Grampians and certain targeted areas of the high country where the concentration of deer had been a problem for farmers and property owners, aerial culling by Parks Victoria saw the demise of a considerable number of sambar and red deer. Sadly, the carcasses remain where felled without making use of the fine resource.

In the future

With any hunt, I've learnt to go with minimal expectation and that it can take more than one trip to succeed as changing circumstances beyond your control decide the outcome. The lure of deer country and a magnificent antlered sambar stag still awaits this hunter.

Homeward bound

Our stay, although brief as we had to head home early the next morning, had been full-on and far more than we had planned or expected. The local knowledge imparted on us was invaluable and will further our experience when next pursuing sambar. But, best of all, it was the company shared and the welcoming hospitality extended to us by Dean and Derek that was most appreciated. ■



From left: Paul, with the assistance of Alex and Dean, salting a sambar skin to later turn into a rug.



Sam steadies the deer carcass while Derek removes the backstraps.



Dean minces the tender meat for sausage making and other uses.



Tender sambar cuts for schnitzels.

Almond-coated venison schnitzels

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Serves 3–4

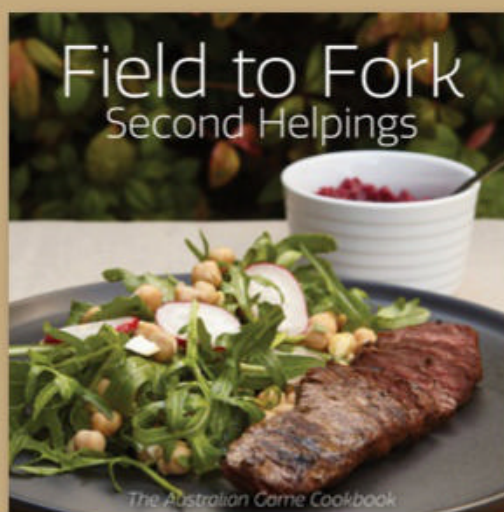
500g venison steaks
1½ cups almond meal
½ teaspoon dried sage
1 egg
½ cup plain flour
½ cup vegetable oil
Gravy
Potato salad or sweet potato mash

1. Use a meat tenderiser or mallet to soften the venison steaks.
2. In a shallow bowl, combine almond meal, sage and season with salt and pepper. In a separate bowl, whisk the egg. On a plate, spread out the flour.
3. One schnitzel at a time, coat the venison in the flour, shaking off the excess. Dip into the egg. Then dip into the almond meal mix, ensuring an even coating each time.
4. Heat half of the vegetable oil in a large non-stick frypan over medium-high heat. When oil is very hot, add half the schnitzels and cook for 2–3 minutes per side, until golden brown. Transfer schnitzels to a plate lined with paper towel to drain. Repeat with the remaining schnitzels.
5. Serve schnitzels with gravy and potato salad or sweet potato mash on the side.

Tip:

Try using 1 tablespoon of finely chopped fresh sage leaves to add more flavour and texture to the coating. ■

To cook in the oven, place schnitzels on a lined baking tray into a preheated 220C oven for about 15–20 minutes, until browned.



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Whistle while you wait

Scott Heiman highlights the simplest of survival tools as he applies his 'go-to' for emergencies

What's the one thing we always carry as campers, hunters, bushwalkers, bird-watchers or fishers? The answer for most is a set of car keys. But if you've left your vehicle in the carpark and find yourself 'geographically embarrassed' in the great outdoors, these keys are unlikely to be much use to you (unless you're a MacGyver).

At a time like this, you may find yourself instead scrabbling through your pockets and backpack to locate something else to help bring a rescue party to your aid.

Depending on who you are, and what you do outside, what you have available will vary. Many people attach a small button LED torch to their key fob – as an emergency signal for help at night, to guide their way around camp – or simply to find the keyhole in the front door at home. But a torch won't be much use in the daytime. Others are prepared with shortwave radios for remote communication. That's great, but CBs need batteries – and these go flat; sometimes when you're relying on them most.

It is less common to find individuals who carry a simple whistle to attract attention. Except of course, if you're a member

of the SES or the military. Remember the last time you saw a news report of search and rescue personnel looking for a missing person? They're generally blowing whistles. The same applies to armies across the globe when they really want to gain someone's attention (like on a gunnery range). And when you think about it, it's no surprise. Whistles are small, light and can really punch above their weight.

The reality is that whistles are an under-rated safety and survival device that are simply much louder than the human voice. In fact, as a rule of thumb, a whistle's sound will carry up to three times further than a really loud human yelp for help.

And consider too: if you're in an emergency situation – and particularly if you're panicking a little – your voice may turn rusty, and it will certainly go hoarse quickly. Whistles take far less energy than yelling. Best of all, they can penetrate background noise, making your calls for attention more likely to be heard by rescuers, regardless of your location.

If you find yourself needing to use a whistle, remember that there are internationally recognised distress signals for whistle blasts that can help you to be found more quickly

by campmates, or by a professional search and rescue team. So, it's a good idea to know these before you step off.

International whistle signalling code:

1 whistle blast = "Where are you?"

2 whistle blasts = "Come to me"

3 whistle blasts = "Help me!"

- Each whistle blast should last three seconds with one second in between blasts.

- Wait 30 seconds or longer to hear a reply and then repeat the signal. If you hear a reply, respond with one solid blast to help your searcher home in on your position.

So, think about it. Wouldn't it be a good idea to pop a whistle on your key chain – just in case? Then add one to your quiver or backpack for extra peace of mind. Better still, take one for each member of your family and travel party. In a country as big as ours, it doesn't take much to find yourself off the beaten track and spatially dislocated.

With whistles on hand for backup, we can spend less time trying to keep everyone within range and safe – and more time doing the things we really enjoy in the great Australian outdoors.

Fox 40 Sharx emergency whistle

This is designed specifically for the outdoors. It is made from durable polycarbonate and co-moulded elastomer which makes it easy to handle, slip resistant and adaptive to outdoor conditions, including temperature variations from -20 to 80 Degrees Centigrade. It's also pea-less (no moving parts) which means it's unlikely to freeze, jam or deteriorate.

The whistle blast makes a screaming noise with a dual frequency tone that claims 120 decibels (dB). The *Guinness Book of Records*' summit for the loudest scream ever recorded is 129dB, but the normal level is about 90dB. At that rate, the Fox 40 Sharx emergency whistle should be louder than almost any ambient noise you encounter – whether it's breaking waves, gale-force winds, a waterfall, or the sound of your 4WD's engine. And we can attest that a simple, sharp one-second blow from a five-year-old is enough to have your ears ringing.

The promotional material says it can be heard more than a mile away (1.6km), so we put it to the test. As a general standard, manufacturers check whistles in a controlled environment using a statistical formula of frequency, loudness, atmospheric pressure and humidity which (by applying formulaic fairy-dust) equals distance.

Whatever. What really matters is what happens when you go out scrub. So that's what we did. We tested the whistle at 1km, 800m and 500m in:

- The open, in 'line of sight' with still air.
- The open, in 'line of sight' with slight crosswind.
- Lightly forested conditions, along a dirt road, in 'line of sight' with wind assist (ie, with the listening party downwind).



As a result, we found that the distance calculated under test-tube conditions is not the same as the distance achieved when you are actually in the bush. The best result we had from the Fox 40 was 800m in the open in still air, or in lightly forested conditions with a tail wind – which is half the manufacturer's claims.

Even in the open, a slight crosswind swallowed the noise and the whistle's maximum distance was 500m. So, it would be fair to treat the manufacturer's claims with a pinch of salt – whether you are looking at the Fox 40 Sharx or any other whistle..

Even so, 800m is a good effort. The only louder whistle we could find was a World War Two artillery pea-whistle that is intended to be heard over the sound of military ordnance. These traditional whistles are great, but they have their limitations when compared to the Fox 40. For one, this newer turns louder the harder you blow it. And this is unusual. Whistles with peas can be 'over-blown' – at which point the whistle simply stops making a noise.

It's the same if the pea becomes wet. Being without a pea, the Fox 40 Sharx doesn't have this problem. Also, the Fox 40 is made up of twin double chambers that are designed to self-clear if submerged in water. And we reckon this could be a handy feature in many emergency scenarios. Add the Hi-Viz orange colouring, and the Fox 40 Sharx emergency whistle has the credentials to make it a top choice for search and rescue, outdoor and personal safety. It's widely available from Aussie outlets for about \$20-\$25. ■



How loud is loud?

Humans can hear sounds between 0 and 140dB. Yet 0dB does not mean that there is no sound, but merely that we cannot hear it. That is the same for over 140dB.

Audible

- 40dB** Whispering
- 60dB** Normal conversation
- 70dB** Street traffic
- 85dB** Beginning of hearing damage range (earplugs should be worn)

Extremely unpleasant

- 90dB** Screaming
- 95dB** Legal limit for exhaust noise

Extremely loud

- 100dB** Emergency/police siren
- 110dB** Thunder/chainsaw
- 120dB** Front row at a rock concert
- 130-140dB** Jet engine at take-off 100m away

Permanent damage to hearing

- 150dB-plus** Fireworks, firearms, rockets and spacecraft



Stalking kit – rifle, shooting sticks, staff and backpack.

Getting organised for the hunt

Don Caswell

I try to be a minimalist and not carry too much kit when out hunting. So, I am constantly refining and altering what I lug when on foot. What I cart depends on the location and the game. At the barest minimum, for a short-notice mission, I will involve only my rifle and a few rounds of ammo. However, normally I try to include a bit of kit. Rather than convey everything I might need, I pack what is specific to my essentials on the day. To do this successfully requires a degree of organisation.

Being able to hunt within a few minutes' drive of my home led me to becoming a little complacent and I started to bring less and less with me. Then, in the space of a few days I received two timely and valuable reminders about sensible kit and preparedness.

The first occurred when I was conducting an early morning hunt for wild dogs, with no intention of leaving the open paddock I know like the back of my hand. I called in a pair of marauding wild dogs and shot the male. The female bolted for distant dense cover. As they often do, she paused briefly on the edge of the jungle.

I took the shot and she tumbled into the thick jungle, but I could not find her in the thorny undergrowth for some time. Meanwhile, the sun had become obscured by clouds and I was without a GPS, leaving me bushwhacked for a tense couple of hours until I found my way out.

Only days later, I received my second warning from a sow who launched into a flat-out charge towards me. In my haste, I closed the half-open bolt without chambering a round and hastily reloaded to drop her just in time. I should have made sure my rifle was ready to fire and been with a Bowie knife, my last line of pig defence for decades.

I returned home determined to lift my game. My wife kindly sewed a number of small bags for me. On these I wrote what they would contain. One bag is bright orange. It carries my emergency gear and the intention is that it will always be in whatever backpack I choose to wear out hunting. My emergency bag contains a personal locator beacon (PLB), compass, military sterile field dressing, headlamp and mini-survival kit. The mini kit holds a space

blanket, pressure bandage, pocket knife, matches, whistle, signal mirror, some strong paracetamol and 10 metres of light cord.



The orange emergency bag goes in whatever backpack Don wears.



Don's navigation bag with two GPS units, compass and Google map of the area.

The other bags I carry depend on what I intend to be hunting. Most times, my camera and iPhone video cable are with me. Ditto my Nav bag which holds two GPS units, a compass and a map of the area I am hunting. I print these specific location maps from Google Earth along with latitude and longitude scaling so I can work out precisely where I am. Other bags hold camo gear in the form of a face mask, tactical mitts and an army soft hat. There are also bags for holding my various game callers, specific to dogs, pigs and deer.

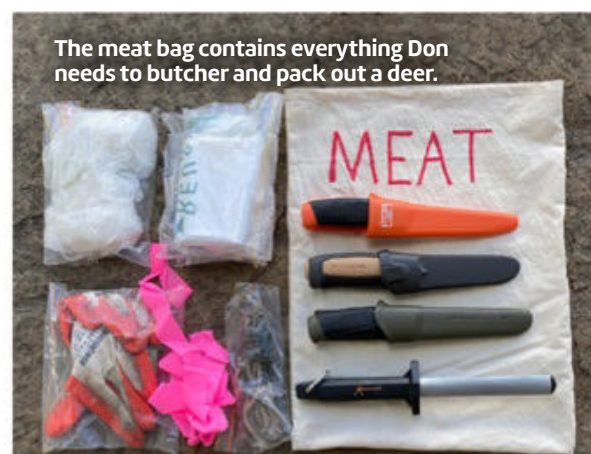
My meat bag has what I need to butcher a deer. There are three colour-coded knives – one for skinning, the next for cutting through leg joints and gristle, and another for boning out the meat. I also have a short sharpening steel, a bag of disposable surgical gloves I use for boning out the meat and a pair of heavy-duty gardening gloves I employ for positioning the carcass, dusting the hide down and then skinning. There's also a hook with a short length of cord I implement to suspend the thighs from an overhead branch while I bone them out. I carry three packs of compressed plastic bags into which the boned-out meat goes to protect it from dust and flies. Lastly, is a metre of bright fluoro tape that I use to mark the location should I decide to walk out and bring a vehicle to the kill, rather than backpack the meat out.

For a stalk where I do not expect to be sitting in wait for long, or at all, I turn to my small daypack and my lightweight 10x25 stalking binoculars. For a pre-dawn start where I intend to sit and call for an hour or two, I will rely on the larger backpack with a folding tripod stool and a canteen

of water. The stool is useful when the grass starts to grow long, or it has been raining and I wish to avoid sitting in the mud. On these lowlight hunts I carry my larger 10x42 binoculars.

Two other items I look to are a Primos Trigger Stick and a walking staff. The trigger stick I sling from a bandolier around my neck. That leaves my hands free for using my binoculars and handling my rifle. The trigger stick is one of those items I wish I had discovered years earlier. It makes the placing of long shots so much easier and certain. With the trigger stick, I now take long shots at wild dogs that I would previously have passed up.

And, for game like pigs and deer, it makes for precise bullet placement out to 200-plus metres. My walking staff is useful for negotiating rough and sometimes slippery steep terrain. I apply it a lot, poking and tapping ahead of myself when negotiating deep summer grass in the hope it will move any hidden dangerous snakes out of my way. I have also fitted a sling to the staff. That allows me to hang it over my shoulder and have both hands free for my rifle when in thick cover close to wild pigs.

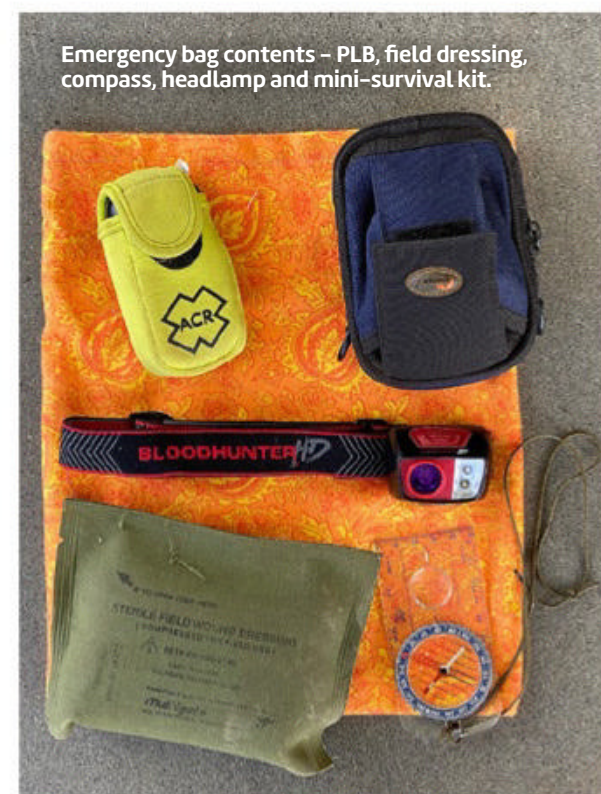


The meat bag contains everything Don needs to butcher and pack out a deer.

Obviously, what and how you carry your hunting kit is a personal decision. In detailing my items, the intention is to encourage you to consider what you should have available and how to organise that, rather than duplicate my approach.

The other aspect of compartmentalising your gear is maintaining the discipline to sort it back to where it belongs after each hunting trip. That includes replacing any articles consumed, cleaning and sharpening knives and making sure your batteries are carrying a decent charge.

Sure, for a walk about in an open paddock in broad daylight you don't need most of that. You save such kit for those occasions where, despite your best intentions, you find yourself in rough country, possibly in the dark as well. Under those circumstances those trappings are worth their weight in gold. ■



Emergency bag contents – PLB, field dressing, compass, headlamp and mini-survival kit.

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The evolution of hunters

Brad Allen emphasises that hunting is ingrained into humans and will remain so for many years to come



Morgan contently glassing a young fallow buck feeding in the morning mist.

Contrary to the ‘politically correct’, but ‘totally incorrect’ doctrine of vocal vegans and animal liberation factions, even in these modern times, man as a species is still a hunter, as we have been for eons.

The vast majority of us exhibit at least some of those hunter characteristics that come from deeply ingrained hunter instincts, which have been moulded over thousands of years of evolution.

The truth is, that it has only been over the past 200 or so years that Western humans have not had to hunt to live, a mere blink in time. As we continue to evolve in our modern world, scientists agree that humans will still exhibit these hunting traits for at least the next 5000 years. That’s something for the vegans to reflect upon.

These people choose to totally deny the origins of our species and our evolution, and the fact that human beings are omnivores. Yes, we are meant to eat meat as a source of protein.

Consequently, I’m in total agreement with the great Greek philosopher Aristotle who reportedly said: “Tolerance and apathy are the last virtues of a dying society.”

My mate’s wife is a small country town schoolteacher in South East Queensland. Recently he related a tale about a new,

first-year teacher from Brisbane posted to his wife’s school. When she met her new class, she proudly announced to them all that she was a vegan. Well, these country kids saw her vegan status for what it really was and started to tease her about it at every opportunity.



Young Beck out for a morning hunt with her father, Geoff.



Brad and Frank hunting fish, with a catch and release cod.



Brad with a fallow doe harvested for meat.

Consequently, within a few short weeks, she announced to her class that she was no longer a vegan and had begun to eat meat and go to country barbecues. I believe that veganism, like most new fad ideas, loses its appeal when everyone they tell doesn't shower them with the accolades they seek. Enough said.

The undeniable urge to hunt is a biologically correct human behaviour, whether that be animals or fish (yes, fishing is also hunting).

It involves a great many humans, both male and female, and in recent times there has been an obvious and pleasing increase in the numbers of ladies participating in hunting and fishing. Make no mistake, once the ladies make up their minds to go hunting, they invariably do well at it. I have happily witnessed many instances of ladies learning to shoot, donning the camo and heading bush, usually with their dads, but sometimes with their mums, to hunt.

A good mate of mine was born into a family that didn't hunt. Consequently, there were no role models for him who hunted, or anyone in the family to possibly influence his behaviour or teach him to become a hunter. However, as a young boy growing up in a semi-rural area, he noticed that there were rabbits around and he developed an urge to hunt them. This he did by fashioning a spear (one of man's oldest hunting tools) and he began stalking rabbits.

From all reports, he was unsuccessful in his quest, but this failure only strengthened his resolve to hunt those fluffy bunnies. As he grew older, he formed an interest in firearms and eventually taught himself to hunt and shoot, becoming a successful deer hunter and excelling in trophy hunting internationally.

Now in his 70s, he still has a healthy link to firearms and hunting in general. The only explanation as to how he evolved into a seasoned hunter, is that his ingrained push to hunt surfacing was nothing more than a human behaviour.

My father was a hunter, for meat, who supplemented the family protein supply with ducks and hares as there were no rabbits around our area in those days. I remember going hunting with him from the time I was about 4 years of age, and being present when he dressed those kills for our table. As I grew, my own desire to hunt increased dramatically.



An enjoyable autumn hunt produced this fat sow for Macen.

The evolution of hunters

Consequently, I developed a great love of firearms and knives and in my early teens, also embraced trophy hunting, fostered by my uncle who was a deer hunter.

From my earliest memories, the urge to hunt has always been there and it has only grown stronger over the intervening years. I have also tried and enjoyed bowhunting, but was only ever moderately successful, owing to the limited available time I had to practise.

I just can't imagine my life without hunting, as the will to do so is still as strong now as ever. Accordingly, I continue to foster a deep interest in the instruments that I use to achieve my goals, especially firearms and knives.

My own sons all exhibit the hunter instinct, with a liking for bows, guns, knives and fishing equipment. Indeed, my youngest son Morgan and nephew Frank have even gravitated towards bowhunting as a 'purer' form of hunting.

To self-impose conditions on the hunt that clearly tip the scales in favour of the animal, demonstrates just how strong the drive to hunt can become. With the need to substantially close the distance to the prey over what can be achieved with a firearm, clearly to bowhunters the hunt is far more important than the kill. The fact is that Morgan and Frank are both excellent rifle shots and frequently hunt with their firearms, but given the opportunity, they opt to operate with the bow.

As I've stated earlier, it is not just firearms and bows that hunters have a liking for. Probably the most basic tool any hunter uses is the knife. I have a fondness for good knives. This fascination is also shared by my boys, who, like me, have many of them. From the time that Morgan was 12 years old, he was keen to make his own hunting implements. These meant bows and arrows to spears and hunting boomerangs (or Morg-a-rangs, as we called his) and eventually to knives.

YouTube can be a wonderful teacher and after watching hours of knifemaking videos, he eventually created his first knife from a suitable piece of carbon steel using a drill, hacksaw and file, then tempered the blade himself. He still has that knife, which holds pride of place in his collection.



Knives made for hunting by Morgan (his first knife, left, and latest, centre) with Bill's (right)



Frank and Bill with a bow-shot billy goat.

Since that time, Morgan has made many great hunting knives, both to use and to sell, each new one a little better than the last. I am currently using one that he made for me, which quickly became my favourite hunting knife.

My eldest son Bill also makes good knives and excellent fishing lures as well. These behaviours and their desire to manufacture knives and other hunting items, I believe, are nothing more than the boys following their natural instincts.



Frank eagerly learning how to process our naturally harvested protein bounty.

I won't be around in 5000 years to see if the scientists were right about the hunter impulse, but I do know that right here and right now, the hunter compulsion in humans remains strong, as it is a biologically correct behaviour and something that we should all be proud of. ■

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Have the edge on

Anthony Puddicombe runs his array of blades through the nifty Nirey KE-500 Electric Knife Sharpener

My fascination with knives started at an early age – my father gave me a Swiss Army knife when I was still in primary school and it was my favourite possession for many years. It accompanied me on every Cub Scouts trip, camping holiday and fishing venture. However, a lesson learned the hard way was about the need for lockback knives when pushing the blade into something.

As years passed and with more experiences of fishing and hunting, the importance of having sharp blades grew. It is easy to become slightly obsessed with keeping knives as sharp as possible at all times.

For many years I persisted with an oil-stone, which did the job okay. But it relies on good hand-eye coordination (perhaps not everybody's strong point) to ensure consistent angles on the blade. It was hard to be fully confident and happy with the result.

A couple of years ago I purchased a Lansky sharpening kit that uses guides to keep a consistent angle. It was a game changer and the knives were really sharp and held their edge for longer. But it is a very slow task and it takes a lot of time and elbow grease to bring a dull knife back into shape.

I had all but resigned myself to this, until I heard about the Nirey collection of

electric knife sharpeners from a skipper on a fishing charter. He fillets a lot of fish, day in day out, and swore by it as a quick and effective tool for keeping his knives sharp.

So, after a fair bit of online research, including reviews, plus talking to a local butcher's supply shop, came my purchase of a Nirey Electric Knife Sharpener. The Nirey models cater for nearly every budget and degree of use. I wanted one that was able to sharpen at different angles (depending on the type of blade and use) and had a robust motor that could handle

a lot of use. In the end the top-of-the-line KE-500 fitted my brief. What sets it apart from the other models is:

1. Two different angle guides.
2. Large motor, to handle extended use.
3. The quietest gearing.
4. Drum design allows sharpening right up close to the handle (this is lacking in the lesser models).
5. Dust catch trays under each drum.

Even though it was the dearest option, it is better to pay extra so you obtain what you need and don't have to buy twice.



The unit with the second guide.



A sample of Anthony's blades.

The sharpener comes in a sturdy cardboard box, with fairly detailed instructions and the two interchangeable guide blocks (15 degrees and 25 degrees). A small brush is included for cleaning the dust generated by sharpening your knives. The machine itself is fitted with the fine aluminium oxide belts that sit snugly over the cushioned drums. The fine belts are suitable for knives that have correct angles but need a sharpen.

You can also purchase coarse and medium grade belts that would detach more metal if you needed to correct poor angles or remove chips in the blade. But most of my knives were in good to great condition already, so the fine belts were adequate. In terms of the instructions, you could become competent using just the printed instructions, but the videos online are far better in my opinion for gaining an understanding on how to use the machine.

Every knife (and butchering tomahawk) found in the house, the boat, my hunting gear and even my kids' pocket knives were collected and then it was down to my reloading bench to see what the sharpener could do. This produced a broad spectrum of knives with different sharpening angles and thickness of blades. The instructions and the online videos show that the wheels sharpen one side of the blade at a time. You need to maintain a constant downward pressure on the blade and keep the blade parallel with the machine as you are drawing it back. It sounds like a lot but you get the hang of it quickly.

However, sitting while trying to do it produced two problems. One, you couldn't see properly whether you had the blade hard up against the guide and two, you are a bit restricted in your movement to have your grip and pressure correct on the blade.



The dust tray with the metal dust from a knife.

Once stood up and looking directly down over the machine, you are able to correct those two issues.

With the number one guide (15 degrees), it went through and sharpened all of my filleting and kitchen knives that had a thin spine, plus filleting knives that only needed between two and three passes before they were razor sharp.

The kitchen knives, which are abused by my wife on a daily basis, took some more work. Their angles were correct but most of them were dull. So, they ranged between six and 10 passes before they passed the tomato chop test.

Next, came more robust hunting and camping knives including the butchering tomahawk. The number two guide was swapped over, which is a swift process of just unscrewing the bolt with a wing nut head, swapping guides and screwing the bolt back in.

These knives need that 25-degree angle and this machine did an admirable job. The larger USMC Ka-Bar, Gerber pig sticker, Dewey camp knife and even the Dewey tomahawk were treated. The Nirey did a great job in a short time. The only knife that could not be sharpened was a military-style Gerber dagger, which has a 7mm thick

spine and a shallow blade. It just wouldn't fit into the guide. But out of the 32 knives tried, the machine sharpened all but one. This was impressive.

At the end of this sharpening session, the dust trays had considerable dust in them, which was fine like talcum powder. One side of both drums had worn smooth, but it is easy to flip them over and you would manage another 32 knives out of them before the belts needed replacing. These belts cost about \$20 for the pair and it's a simple job, described in the instructions.

As with all new devices, you learn techniques along the way. One thing (apart from standing versus sitting) is that if you use a slightly relaxed grip on the handle, it allows the blade to settle in better against the guide and sanding drums, so you gain a better edge, rather than fighting it and not keeping the knife parallel.

The Nirey KE-500 is not a cheap unit, as prices vary from \$500-\$580 depending on where you buy it. But with the largest motor, I believe this will be with me for a long time. Any obsession with sharp blades is now satisfied.

The KE-500 is readily available, with **totalknifecare.com.au** offering the full Nirey stable of sharpeners. ■



Shotguns and Shiraz

Scott Heiman blends the best of both worlds to pursue feathered pests in magnificent Mudgee

One day my phone rang. And, on the other end of the line was a young lady I'd recently met on an Army promotions course. "I was thinking of going to Mudgee to visit the vineyards, would you like to come?" said the voice. I had recently been up that way and knew a few people in the industry, so I replied: "Yeah sure. Should be fun."

And it was. Among the most memorable parts was dropping in at one of my favourite vineyards in the area, Lowe Family Wines. Sitting at the table, the owner David Lowe led us through a wine tasting, all the while entertaining us with humorous tales of the business. But the conversation was by no means one-way. He took a keen interest in our backgrounds too. In our early 30s and in the Army Reserve, David was interested to find out what made us tick, including my credentials as an environmental scientist and hunter.

As things transpired, that weekend wine tour made a lasting impression. A few years later, the young lady who had invited me became my wife. And for the past 18 years, we have been enjoying visiting cellar doors together when travelling the highways and byways of this great country.

We have also made a point of pairing our wine varietals properly with our wild harvests, ensuring we complement their respective flavours to the fullest. Red wine with red meat is always an excellent rule of thumb to follow. But this is just the start. Think Pinot Noir with duck, Zinfandel with venison, Pinot Grigio with rabbit, Sangiovese with wild boar, Grenache with goat. The list goes on.

Moreover, the chance meeting with David in 2004 has taken on a whole life of its own. Since then, we have continued to catch up with him at wine tasting events. In 2013 we were meandering home south from a hunting trip at Tenterfield, busting bunnies and chasing goats with my dad. Passing through Mudgee, it was a no-brainer that we'd drop in at Lowes.

As the sun set over the vineyard, David joined us at the tasting table and we sampled recent vintages, cheese and olives. Having achieved certification as a fully organic vineyard, there was plenty to discuss about his approach to pest eradication – whether creepy crawly, fungal, feathered or furry.

Eventually, we motioned to leave – telling David that we would need to find a place to set up camp for the night. "What are you doing tomorrow, mate?" he asked. "Just driving home," I replied. Well, instantly, David offered that we could camp in a grove of shade trees right below the cellar door. And a half-hour later, as he said his goodbyes before heading home for the night, David dropped by our camp with a couple of half-empty tasting bottles and a box of .22LR. "Do you think you could get rid of a few rabbits for me?" he asked, grinning. "I can do that," I replied, smiling like a Cheshire cat.

Next afternoon, I managed a short hunt before the sun set, and then was up early the following day while the mist was still blanketing the property. In the couple of hours that I'd spent patrolling the rows of vines I'd bagged six rabbits, which I happily showed David when I handed back his spare ammo later in the morning.

And I have to say it's unexpected moments like these that really put a smile on your face. The gratitude I felt for the



This introduced pest costs the agricultural industry millions each year.



In the vineyard there are rows upon rows to navigate.

generosity and trust that David showed us that day has stayed with me. Kath and I have remained active members of his wine club, have watched his progress in the industry with satisfaction and his bottles have been our drinking partners at some of the most significant events of our lives together. So, when a recent road trip promised to take us back through the Mudgee region again, I picked up the phone. “David, Kath and I will be popping by. Thought we’d stop in and say hi,” said I. “Excellent. The starlings are everywhere up here assaulting my vines. Do you reckon you could do something about them while you’re here?” replied David. “Sure thing, mate. I’ll pack a shotgun and see you in a couple of weeks.”

So it was, after a road trip through the Central West – taking in sites like Wellington Caves, Siding Spring Observatory and the Warrumbungles, we arrived at Mudgee. Following a night of fellowship at the house of an old Army mate, we arrived at Lowe Family Wines to enjoy some time around the tasting table chatting with David about his new vintages, then to see what needed to be done about the starlings.

From our vantage point looking down over the vineyard, I could spy two flocks – of a couple of hundred birds each



Scott and wife Kath toasting another successful outing.

– and both sets appeared pretty skittish. However, what caught my eye most was the way the birds reacted to the several tour groups that were meandering through the vines, learning about the ripening and picking process. As soon as the groups walked within 50m of the main flock, 2–3 outlying birds – 30m from the main flock – would fly off, tweeting an alarm sound. This would trigger the entire flock to take to the skies.

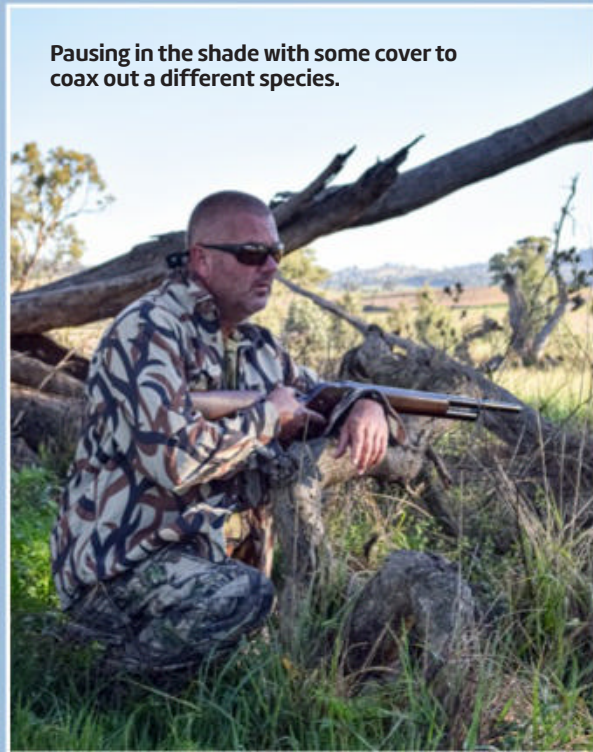
Interesting... this told me that the flock had posted sentries to alert them to intruders. It meant that – as a hunter – I was never going to move within ‘cooee’ of the flock, regardless of how stealthily I stalked. But there was something else I noticed too. When the flock took flight, they always flew in an anti-clockwise direction – regardless of the direction of the incoming intruder. As they did this, they completed a semi-circle – no higher than 10m off the ground – before most birds landed somewhere about 100–150m away. Simultaneously, roughly 20 birds in the flock would venture further afield to a dead tree where they would roost with a clear vantage point over the broader environment. I learned from this that my best approach towards the flock would be from the west. That way, when they took off they would actually come closer to me – which would mean I’d have a chance to take them on the flank.

The tasting was coming to a close. But before David excused himself to entertain other guests, he and I took a walk down to the vines to talk about when would be best for me to return with a firearm to remove some of these pests. The cellar door was open between 10am and 5pm, so we agreed that I’d steer clear during the day. Instead, our little family would spend some time sightseeing in the local vicinity.



David explains where the flock comes in from every day.

Shotguns and Shiraz



Pausing in the shade with some cover to coax out a different species.

With the 19th century gold rush town Gulgong 20 minutes up the road, and Australia's 'oldest surviving gold mining town', Sofala, just an hour's drive from Mudgee, there's no shortage of history in these parts. And Mudgee's swimming pool is one of the best council-run pools we know. These attractions – and the vineyards of course – are just some of the reasons that the Mudgee region is such a tourism drawcard. So, we set off with a promise to return to Lowes before the cellar door closed, giving time for us all to enjoy an antipasto platter – and for Kath to imbibe a late afternoon drop of Mudgee liquid magic.

As you picture all this, you may begin to wonder whether there's something a little incongruous about shotgunning starlings on a vineyard. However, wine-making remains simply another form of agriculture, afflicted with its own array of challenges, including those that are posed by pest animals. Hares, rabbits and even deer can threaten the viability of crops, and foxes will use vineyards as a refuge from which to stalk lambs or chickens in adjacent fields.

So, off I went with my Australian International Arms Chisholm Trail reproduction of the Winchester 1887 12-gauge lever-action shotgun. As the birds were flying anti-clockwise, I headed to the western edge of the vineyard with the intention to walk in from there. And, you know what – the tactic worked. As I approached along one of the rows, a flock took off ahead of me. They wheeled in the sky – going north in the first instance and then circling back towards me. With one shot aimed directly at them, I dropped two birds as they flew past. A shot from behind dropped another three. The remainder of the flock circled back and landed in the vines at the other end of the row.

True to form, a small group of them perched on the old dead tree. It was closer to me than the flock, so I approached them directly. From under the branches, I took aim at the birds above who seemed strangely unconcerned by my presence. Boom! Two more feathered pests fell from the heavens. Regrettably, the rest of the flock circled deeper into the vineyard.

It was about this time that I learned the true obstacle to hunting in a vineyard is

the vineyard itself. The vines are arranged in 'blocks' which are square to rectangular in shape, and here the rows were 100m long. Each block comprises rows, with the vines grown on a fence, supported by many strands of high tensile wire to hold the heavy bunches of grapes.

So, every time the birds took off, I needed to walk well over a kilometre to attempt to edge close enough again to reengage them. It wasn't long before I felt like I was chasing my own tail around the vineyard.

Over the following half-hour, I bagged only two more birds – and these were at the carpark as I exited the vineyard. Still, I always enjoy a challenge, so we delayed our return home so that I could spend a few more days on the hunt. In the mornings, I would arrive early with a fox whistle, while in the afternoon I focused solely on the starlings. And then a strange thing happened.

On day three, as I started my afternoon hunt and approached the restaurant's garden with my daughter in tow, the flock took off. But this time they didn't circle. Instead, they picked up and went deeper into the vineyard. And every other time I approached them that same day, they again flew directly away from me.

And so it was that I learned another thing, which is that starlings are highly adaptive to intrusion. Which gives me something to reflect on before I head out again next time. Perhaps I'll need to return to the property with a posse and move in an extended line through the blocks, 50m apart. Perhaps indeed. After all, when your quarry adjusts to your tactics and changes its behaviour, it pays to have a Plan B.

Passing it on – Scott with daughter Scout.

Introducing the European starling

Sturnus vulgaris – commonly known as the European, English, or common starling – was introduced into Australia in the 1850s through to the 1880s. This act of environmental vandalism was committed by acclimatisation societies and landed gentry



in the vain hope that they might destroy insect pests to crops. Native to Eurasia and northern Africa, the starling is now a global species – indeed, it's a global pest breed.

When breeding, they nest in tree hollows and the like, to the point that they'll even nest in the cracks in old fenceposts. The birds are aggressive when competing for nesting sites and readily drive out our native species.

When not breeding, starlings can congregate in large groups of up to 20,000 birds. At nighttime, they roost in dense foliage for cover. At sunrise, they disperse in smaller flocks and head to a variety of feeding areas.

Breeding season peaks between August and September but can last up to January. A clutch of eggs can have 4–8 eggs. Starlings can breed twice in a season. So, if you want to hunt them to support a land manager's vertebrate pest management strategy, stalk them on crops in late summer through winter before they breed.

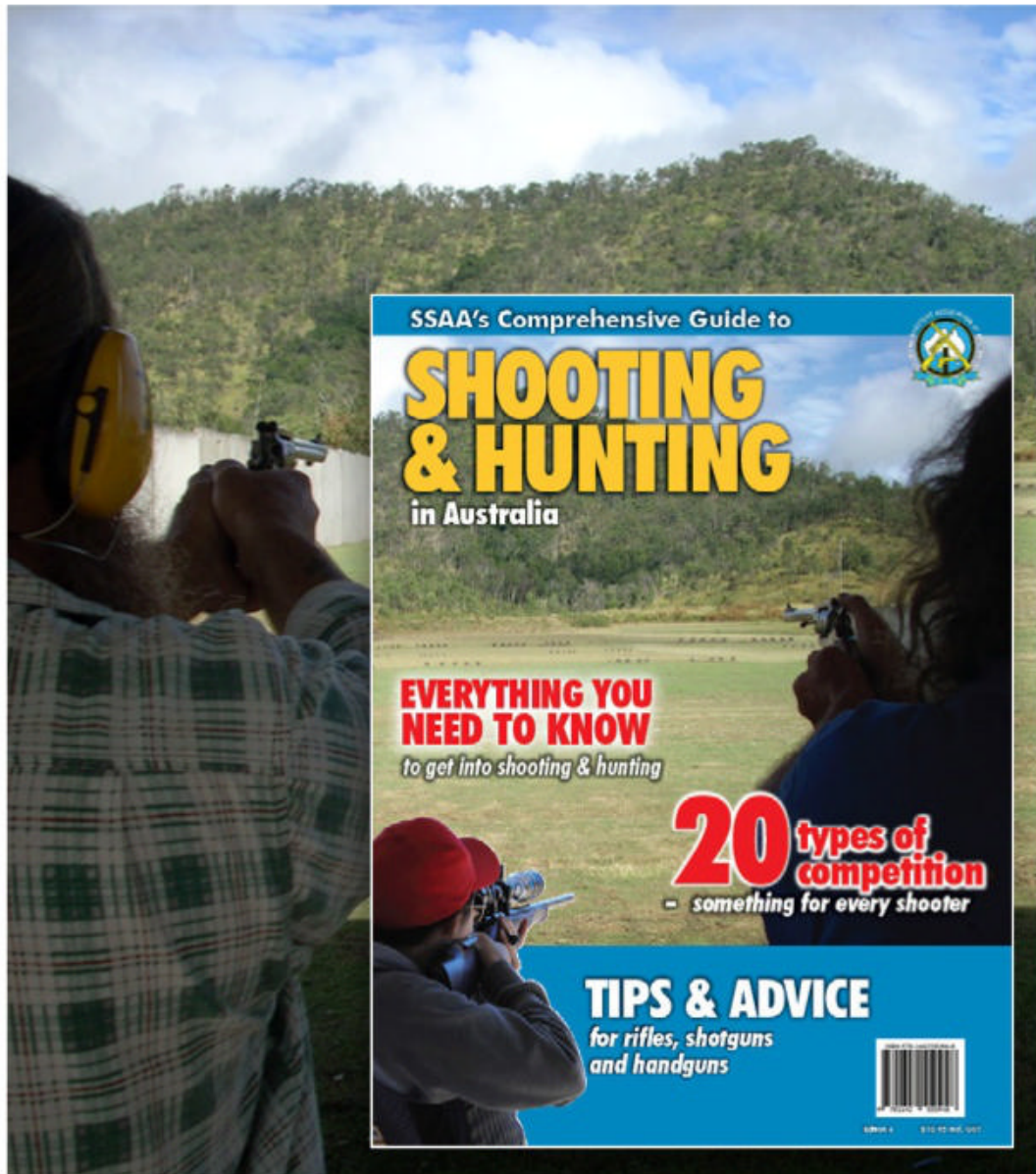
Since their introduction to Australia, starlings have spread across 30 per cent of

the continent, where they have a considerable and negative impact on agriculture and the environment.

Soft fruits, especially cherries, peaches and apricots, as well as all varieties of grapes, are particularly susceptible to damage from starlings. Accumulation of their faeces at roost sites provides a breeding ground for many germs that can cause illness in people and can affect the health of the roost tree itself. Their faeces can also contaminate grain in silos and livestock feed lots.

Across primary industries, the average level of crop loss attributed to starlings is as high as 15 per cent and some growers have reported 100 per cent. In economic terms, starlings cost horticulture and agricultural industries almost \$300 million a year, making them by far the worst and most costly of introduced birds.

Further, they compete with native hollow-nesting species – such as parrots and cockatoos, owls, treecreepers, martins and pardalotes – which adversely affects Australia's biodiversity. ■



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- Specific tips and advice for rifle shooting, shotgunning and handgunning.
- We go through the 20 types of shooting disciplines within the SSAA in detail and outline how you can get involved. There is something for every shooter and taste.





Clean cut!

Dick Eussen covers everything you need to know about knives for the campsite

The Lansky Quick-Fix pocket sharpener is excellent for touching up a blunt blade and is better than a honing steel for the job.

While most bushmen are loath to leave home without their trusty pocket folding knife, basic camping cutlery and edged tools are largely ignored by campers.

A shame really, as we are gifted with more knives than ever, but the realities are that they are just a natural evolution of blade and handle styles that have evolved since the Stone Age. But every so often a 'new' knife stands out, something that manufacturers dream about because it means we buy it.

Many hunters use their hunting knives as camp kitchen tools. During a hunt, an old mate removed a set of boar tusks with a rusty, blunt PUMA Skinner knife. Back at camp, while preparing tea, he was cutting up vegetables with the same blade. It was still covered in pig blood and hair. I hate bad health habits in the bush. I tossed the stuff out, unfolded my kitchen knife pouch and finished the job. In the background, he told me that he always used his hunting knife in the camp, had never been ill from eating food – and that he never bothered to clean it.

But it is best to have knives for specific jobs for meal prepping, as you not only need proper blades, but also a clean workplace, tools and utensils. Most of my bush, fishing and hunting trips involve eating barramundi, crustaceans, crabs, lobsters, cherabin and oysters. They are true bush tuckers, calling for purpose blades. The days of eating baked beans out of can are long gone as we now have ice boxes and bush fridges to keep food fresh and drinks cold.

Knives

Besides table cutlery, you will need the following knives – boner, chef, fillet and a bread knife. A cleaver is useful, as are game shears. There are many reasonable priced kitchen sets available that are ideal for the camp. Chef-style knives have a rigid, triangular blade with a slightly curved edge designed to chop or dice vegetables. Blade lengths of 7.5 to 10cm are ideal for mincing herbs and peeling but 15 to 20cm blades are best for vegetables. Longer 25 to 30cm



Knives are important tools in bush camps for preparing meals and more.

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1134KG TOWING
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ELECTRONIC POWER
STEERING



SEAT BELT
INTERLOCK



DUMP BOX
CAPACITY - 680kg

Clean cut!

blades, or a cleaver, are perfect for pumpkins, cabbages and similar.

A boning knife has a fine pointed razor-sharp tip and a slender blade of about 15 to 20cm in length. Most of the work is done with the tip of the knife during the boning process. Slicing knives are used for cold meats and have a stiff, long narrow blade about 25cm long, designed to cut meat without dragging, but still flexible enough to bend when carving poultry or fish.

A carver knife is similar to a slicing knife, but it has a sharp tip and a thin stiff blade. It's designed for hot, slippery meats, but I also use a Swibo 32cm blade carver for skinning large fish fillets. A butcher knife has a 20cm scimitar-like stiff blade and a sharp point for cutting meats. The initial cut is made with the point and the blade is then sliced through the meat. On top of that I have a couple of fish filleting knives in the knife pouch.

Serrated knives are used for cutting bread, damper, cakes, scones plus fruits and designed to cut without squashing soft fruits. Short-blade models have a tip sharp enough to pierce the soft skin of a tomato for commencing the cut. Blade lengths range from about 7.5 to 10cm. The serrated bread knife has a blade length of about 25 to 30cm and a blunt tip.

Keen blades

Purpose camping, hunting, fishing and survival knives are suitable and much stronger for rugged outdoor use. They come in sheaths that protect the blade, which makes storage and transport simple. I often use hunting, fishing and survival knives almost exclusively about our day camp, as it saves doubling up on carrying extra gear. They are also the strongest knives made and will last a lifetime.

Ensure that butcher and filleting knives have a comfortable non-slip grip and a base that prevents the hand from slipping onto the blade when cutting tough, slippery meats. The choice of steel is another consideration, though unless they are also used in the home kitchen, budget priced camp knives that see little use are okay.

Stainless steel is hard and does not sharpen easy for the novice, while carbon steel is much softer and easier to maintain



an edge – but it will rust. The best method for protecting knife blades before long-term storage – including stainless steel blades – is by smearing a thin film of gun oil over them. It coagulates on metal, forming a semi-permanent film easily removed by washing. Do not store them in leather pouches or they will rust, even stainless-steel blades. Keep sharp knives away from other cutlery and wash them separately, not only for your own safety, but to protect the edges as contact with other metal blunts and chips edges, leaving unsightly and damaging gaps.

The quality of good knives is based on the price you pay for them. Some brand names are frightfully expensive and too prohibitive for camp use. Many knives – for hunting and fishing – do double duty in the camp kitchen and plenty of campers do exactly that. Pack sharp knives on their own, either in purpose pouches with individual pockets, or wrap each knife a couple of turns into an old towel, add another and repeat, and so on. Wrap and tie off, to prevent the towel from unravelling when picked up.



Sharpening knives

Sharp knives are safe – only blunt blades slip, because the blade won't dig in. Even new knives are not sharp. The maker's edge – which is on all new knives – must be honed before use. There are many excellent tools available on the market to sharpen knives. Some are easy to use and will keep blades tuned. At home, an electric sharpener, like the Nirey, does a good job and can be used in camp if you have a generator.

Generally, my camp sharpening is on a whetstone, available in several materials – carborundum, Arkansas, Washita, diamond, ceramic and coated abrasive. I use synthetic, both carborundum and Arkansas, a natural occurring stone that has exceptional abrasive qualities. If I have



a really blunt blade, I hone it first on the carborundum and finish the edge on an Arkansas stone. Blades that are relatively sharp and require a tweak are honed on an Arkansas stone. Some stones have a coarse side and a fine side.

Use proper honing oil, though water, saliva and light machine oil is okay if nothing else is available, but they fail to float the metal filings cut from the blade during the honing process that in time clog the stone pores and prevents grinding.

When sharpening a knife, keep the blade at an angle of 25 degrees – the less the angle, the sharper the edge will be. Keeping the correct angle on a blade is not hard and with practice it becomes second nature. It's recommended that chefs, paring and boning knives have a 30-degree angle, and butcher, filleting and carving knives a 15 to 25-degree angle. There are tools available – such as the Lansky Sharpener – that clamps the blade at the angle of choice.

When sharpening, push the blade at the chosen angle across the stone – as if cutting a thin slice from it. Do five strokes forward away from you on one side, turn the blade over and 'slice' five strokes towards you, remembering that you are 'cutting' a slice from the whetstone – and keep it at the right angle. Never drag the blade when you turn it over – always push or pull it. Always begin the stroke with the tip of the blade and guide it across the stone to the handle with a firm, slicing motion.

In most cases – depending on the surface quality of the stone – about 10 strokes does the job on each side. If not, you have a blunt blade or are not doing it right. If the blade is blunt and has unsightly gaps, hone it on the coarse side of a carborundum stone and grind the gaps away, or use a fine file before honing.

Honing and correct angles all sounds complicated, but it is a relatively straightforward chore easily learned by anyone. An electric Nirey Sharpener makes it simple and it's a worthwhile addition. Always keep in mind that you are using a sharp instrument that cuts. Stones can slip. Secure them in a vice, or proper bracket. When in camp, place the stone on a rough surface like a hessian sack.

The butcher steel

Butcher steels are abrasive rods designed to straighten the blade and rid it of small gaps that appear in it after use – not to sharpen it. There are several types available, ranging from professional butcher to folding field steels for outdoor use. One thing to remember is when using steel, if the blade is dull, no amount of steeling will put a sharp edge on it. You must first sharpen the blade; the steel is only used to maintain the edge until it becomes too worn and blunt and needs honing.

As in honing, the blade must be kept at the same angle on the steel when stroking it. The stroke should be slow and deliberate. Don't try and copy the local butcher – while some do it right, most struggle

for eight hours a day trying to keep the blade keen with the steel. Buy a steel with a smooth finish because after honing the knife on a fine whetstone, you spoil it by stropping it on roughly surfaced steel.

The entire purpose of steeling is two-fold – it applies a fine professional finish – ing edge on the blade and maintains and extends the life of the working edge. The rule is, buy a smooth steel, start with a sharp edge, and only stroke it lightly on the steel when it begins to lose its keenness.

Sharpening rods

Ceramic and diamond honing rods look like butcher steels and are used in a similar fashion. According to some pundits, they will sharpen your knives better than other methods. Again, it's a matter of choice, as both rods are expensive and fragile.

Use it like a butcher's steel – hold the rod in one hand and point it away from you. Bring the knife edge along the blade starting with the rod tip at about a 20-degree angle with the edge facing towards you, then draw it diagonally across the rod towards you in a continuous stroke.

At the end of the stroke, the point of the knife should be about halfway up the rod. Next, position the knife under the rod at the same angle and draw it towards you the same way as the first one. Repeat it until the edge is sharp. Always stroke slightly, much lighter in fact than on a whetstone, as the rod, or butcher steel, require little pressure. ■



Dick's knife pouch keeps his cast-off kitchen knives secure and safe.



All you need for a camp kitchen are a set of Kleva-Cut Master Series kitchen knives, which cost about \$100.

Gary and Ace with a solid hog claimed by the Rossi double-barrel coach gun after being bailed in a dry creek bed.

Top End territoriality

Scorching heat and angry boars are no match for Gary Hall and his four-legged bailers

It was build-up weather in the Top End. Another scorcher of a day with no chance of rain and even the wind felt like it could blister paint, it was that hot. So short walks and long drives were the order of the day. My face was already two shades redder than the Honda and I hadn't even done anything.

We had just rolled the Honda Pioneer 700 to a stop, near a narrow, shaded expanse of water when a large set of pointy ears caught our attention. It looked like a big wingnut and if the ears weren't impressive enough, the boar attached to them having a midday nap was an absolute ripper.

A quick whisper and a nod towards the rifle, started round one. Three minutes later, the gun bag was ahead on points as my mate Neil struggled in vain to conquer the zips. It was hard to watch a grown man having so much difficulty. "Maybe you could open it from the inside," was one jibe.

Suddenly, the boar stood to its feet and for a few seconds I wasn't sure if it was going to trot over and save Neil any further embarrassment by unzipping his gun bag or whether he would bolt. Unfortunately, it did the latter and the chase was on.

Luckily, what Neil lacked in dexterity, the bailing dogs made up for with speed and they soon had the solid boar riveted to the spot. The coach gun, firing solid slugs, did the rest.

A couple of days later saw us back in the mighty Honda in search of a pig or two. Just as we approached our intended destination, which was an isolated, small green pool of stagnant water, a good boar put the foot down and did a runner. A few, long powerful strides and the quick-moving creature was lost from sight in the thick scrub that hugged the edges of the now semi-dry river corridor.



Gary with Rocky and Ace after flushing out this good boar from the creek line.

No sooner had the Honda's motor been killed, I grabbed the compact, double-barrel from its snug position in the rifle rack and Neil raised the passenger-side dog box door and released the hounds. Instantly, Ace and Mate, two light-framed, running machines with plenty of speed, stamina and experience hit the ground at a rate of knots. Also making up the hairy-legged trio (but not as streamlined or as fast) was Rocky the Jack Russell, small in stature but big in courage and personality.

By the time we reached the commotion, the boar was backed up, worked up and nasty. As the irate boar eyeballed the barking dogs a few paces from its laughing gear, I moved in close, shouldered the hard-hitting coach gun, thumbed back the hammer and waited for a safe shot. Seconds later, the boar head-butted a solid and was out for the count.

An agonising three days without a hunt later, Neil, the dogs and I headed out to a likely spot in an effort to increase our progressive pig tally. We hadn't even walked a good five-iron distance from the vehicle when a solid boar broke swiftly from the creek line. A few strides back, like heat-seeking missiles, Ace and Mate had locked on and were quickly closing the gap. Not far behind, but doing it tough in the long grass, the tenacious pocket-sized dog was barking non-stop... go Rocky.

A nanosecond before the boar crossed our path, I raised the coach gun, gave it a bit of lead and squeezed the trigger. On impact, the portly porker's front legs folded and it nosedived into the dirt, skidding to a halt. I think the dogs were disappointed they didn't have a chance to stir the big fella up. Especially Rocky who likes nothing more than being in the face of a feisty boar, flexing his muscles and baring his teeth.



Neil, Rocky, Ace and Mate with another ripper Top End boar.



Gary and Rocky with a solid boar nailed by the coach gun, after being bailed by the hard-working dogs.

Further up the creek line, another well-fed swine in prime condition was added to the total after failing miserably to outrun the hounds.

The following weekend, after a chat with our good friends at the homestead we rolled the Honda off the trailer and headed out. At a likely spot we pulled up in some shade and continued on foot.

Almost immediately, the amount of fresh pig sign in the thick stands of

pandanus flicked the dogs' switch from having an enjoyable walk to combat mode. The barking started a short time later.

With the boar totally mesmerised by the bailing trio's vocal performance, Neil was able to approach within range and unleash his recently purchased double-barrel. A solid slug to the noggin and it was game, set and match. Same thing for our hog hunt... until next time. ■



Gary walking in on a bailed boar, waiting for a safe shot.

Is size a problem?

Matthew Cameron ponders where you draw the line when it comes to achieving supreme accuracy

This benchrest group would not win any prizes – three at the top and two below.

The question of group size and the number of shots that are used to shoot any group opens up veritable minefields of opinion, folklore and plain misinformation. Everyone has a correct evaluation.

Group size really came under pressure following the formation of the Benchrest Association in the USA on a formal basis in 1947. Some of the shooters of the day simply refused to accept convention and set out to improve rifle accuracy. When you look at today's groups, I think it is fair to suggest they have succeeded beyond their wildest dreams. Along the way they have forced rifle manufacturers to lift their standards.

Exactly just when Minute of Angle (MOA) became the holy grail of rifle shooters I am unable to say, but after many years it has reached a stage whereby achieving such a status in any rifle has forgotten logic and practicality.

Indeed, in some rifles the effort to shoot MOA may be an exercise in futility and an unachievable goal. So, we must look at

what the rifle is to be used for. Do we need MOA capability for a .45-70 cartridge in a lever-actioned rifle whose sole use is to shoot pigs in the swamps at ranges under 100 yards? I would suggest that the practical answer is no, we do not.

Do we need MOA capability for a big game rifle to shoot large animals? Many years ago, Townsend Whelen, an American rifleman and writer, said that only accurate rifles are interesting. Perhaps, but like a lot of other issues in shooting, where do you draw the line?

If we do decide that whatever the use of our rifle it must meet the MOA criteria, are you aware that it could be mechanically impossible? The associated ammunition and telescopic sights may render the required result unattainable no matter how good the intent, rifle or ammunition.

The accuracy of any number of hunting rifles worldwide is constantly debatable.

The problem is that hunting rarely provides the perfect shot for the person pulling the trigger. Animals on the run are a further problem. Under such a situation I suggest that precise aiming is almost impossible. So, the question is for this type of shooting is do we need a rifle capable of shooting MOA?

The counter argument might be that unless the rifle/cartridge combination has some accuracy you will miss anyway. But the whole point is that if the accuracy of a rifle is only 1.5 MOA you are going to be within three inches at 200 yards.

A hit on any reasonable sized animal within this range will cause enough damage to stop such a creature almost instantly, no matter where the projectile strikes and hopefully expands. But I would agree that in the worst-case scenario it may only slow the animal down.

Another issue in the rifleman's favour within perhaps the past 15 years or so is the

Matthew's one and only benchrest rifle, which would put five shots in one ragged hole if he did his part.



HUNTSMAN OPTICS THUNDER

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The Thunder is designed as a multi use device. You can use it as a permanent scope on your rifle, a Clipon to your existing scope (additional Lens System required) or as a monocular.

The THunder thermal imaging scope can capture snapshots, record videos, and set parameters via the **HIKMICRO Sight App** once connected to your phone via hotspot. Search **HIKMICRO Sight App** on the App Store(iOS System) or Google Play™ (Android System) to download.

SPECIFICATIONS

MODEL	SENSOR	FOCAL	MAG	FOV	RANGE	MEMORY	BATTERY	WEIGHT
TQ50	640 × 512, 12 μm, NETD < 35mK	50mm, F1.0	2.6 - 20.8, x8	8.7° × 7.0°	2600m	16GB (460,000)	Up to 4h	390g
TH35	384 × 288, 17 μm, NETD < 35mK	35mm, F1.0	2.08 - 16.64, x8	10.0° × 8.0°	1200m			
TH25		25mm, F1.0	1.5 - 12.0, x8	14.9° × 11.2°	900m			
TE25	256 × 192, 12μm, NETD < 35mK	25mm, F1.0	3.25 - 26, x8	7.0° × 5.2°	1200m			
TE19C		19mm, F1.0	2.47 - 19.76, x8	9.2° × 6.9°	900m			

FEATURES

Pixel interval: 12 μm
 Detector sensitivity: 35 mK
 50HZ refresh rate
 High Shock resistance 750 g/lms
 Digital zoom: 1x, 2x, 4x, 8x
 F1.0 Aperture
 Capture Snapshots & store on thermal
 Capture videos & store on thermal

Wi-Fi - Hotspot - real time sharing or transfer videos/Images
 IP67 protection
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 Static target ranging system
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OCULAR LENS

An OLED display (1024×768 resolution) gives a great view, massively enhancing user experience.



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Is size a problem?

accuracy of modern-day rifles. Computer-controlled machinery that makes the rifles is much better than previously – indeed the same applies to factory ammunition. It is not so long ago that one American gun scribe suggested that MOA rifles in the main were figments of imagination and mainly shot on a keyboard. All I can say is that he was not trying hard to attain this standard.

Personal experience within the family has seen the addition of a few new rifles in the past 10 years or so. The addition of a .25-06 Remington came as a package deal that suited my eldest son's budget together with a 6x telescopic sight, certainly an entry level rifle. Load development centred around two projectiles – 117gr Hornady SST and a 100gr Custom protector point. Sometimes it will shoot MOA with either load but normally it is an honest 1.25 MOA rifle. This accuracy is more than adequate out to at least 400 yards and more than suitable for the task.

The same applies to my 6.5x55mm cartridge in a Tikka T3 rifle. We needed another hunting rifle. True, we already had a .270 Winchester and a .30-06 in the family gun safe, but the thought was perhaps it was time for something different. The 6.5x55mm fitted our requirements admirably. Known to be accurate since its release some 120 years earlier, the long, slim projectiles seemed to have good penetration.

We did a lot of research and decided to concentrate on Custom 140gr and 160gr projectile weights using the protector point design. We had used this projectile in other calibres; it has never let us down. The result of load development was a pleasant surprise – AR2209 propelled the 140gr

projectiles and AR2217 produced the best accuracy with the 160-grainers. Both loads were sub-MOA and continue to be so.

Away from the paper targets, under hunting conditions, the projectiles in either weight work efficiently on game animals. None have escaped the first shot. In this case while the sub-MOA accuracy was a bonus in terms of performance, when we consider the normal range of use if the rifle had only grouped around 1.5 MOA, in terms of accuracy, it would still be in the acceptable bracket.

Americans have a fascination with 6.5 calibre projectiles. They have been available

for a long time, as has the 6.5x55mm cartridge which incidentally will do everything and more than the current crop of 6.5mm cartridges in a same quality rifle.

When load developing any cartridge, accuracy coupled with reasonable velocity is the first requirement.

A rarely talked about issue is that you may have an accurate rifle but, under the prevailing conditions, are you capable of using that accuracy? Often hunters must take shots from less-than-ideal conditions or refuse the shot entirely. Good accuracy is a requirement as long shots may be the only ones available due to terrain.



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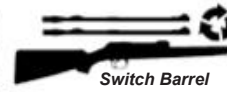
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89B action.



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Pic. Artemis
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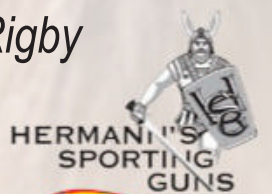
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Is size a problem?

The accuracy requirements of the long-range varmint or target shooter are another matter entirely. I often hear the phrase: "That a particular rifle has more accuracy than you can use." Try telling that to a benchrest shooter or the long-range varmint hunter. For the benchrest rifleman, often the winning margin is measured in thousands of an inch.

There is a reason why long-range varmint hunters have adopted the benchrest shooters' techniques when producing ammunition – stated simply, they work. So, for the target or the long-range varmint shooter we need a rifle with the best grouping capability we can attain. End of story.

As mentioned, accuracy is not a singular issue. It is always the summation of many separate items that are all brought together in the one package which allows the best accuracy to be attained. However, the other associated matter is exactly how you shoot the rifle. Do you set the rifle up, hold it and shoot the same for each shot?

I will admit that when a rifle is shot off bags with a steady rest and there is a shot out of the group, the shooter no longer



merely blames a random event. Usually there is a reasonable explanation. If confident the hold was correct, and the trigger was not pulled instead of squeezed, the next most likely issue was a velocity variation. Such happenings are tough to eliminate, as you can take the utmost care with

ammunition preparation and they will still occur. But I suggest, to a lesser frequency. Almost invariably if there is a velocity variation, it is that shot which is most distant from the group centre.

A ½" group at 100 yards is a 2½" group at 500 yards while a 1" group at 100 yards is 5" in size at 500 yards, which is enough to miss a rabbit entirely. So, you can see the advantage of the smaller group.

We have always been fussy about brass and how it is prepared for long-range shooting. We believe that while time-consuming, it is time well spent. Weighing of brass and projectiles are controversial subjects; it is up to you to carry out your own research as to what works and what is myth. Personally, our family weigh and always have. The same applies to case annealing, as we anneal every time brass crosses our reloading bench.

Finally, yes group size does matter and one-shot kills are essential for hunters but, you have to be realistic and flexible enough to match the group size attained to the type of hunting and expected ranges involved. You should also be aware that some cartridges, such as the .308/.243 Winchester, group and others are flexible and will shoot a wide array of components accurately. Other cases may be less forgiving. ■



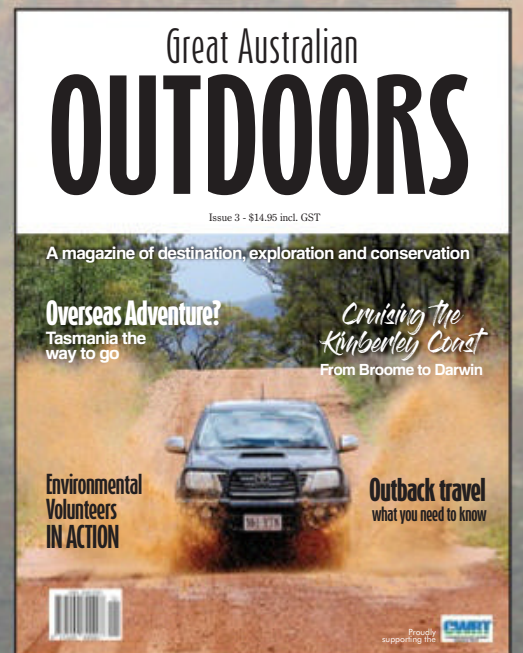
Well-crafted ammunition will assist in producing smaller groups.

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SCAN AND ORDER

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See the light

Jan Kaptein illuminates the compact Olight S2 Baton torch

There was a time when I reckoned a Maglite flashlight was the bee's knees when it came to torches. And in all fairness, perhaps it was, back in the day.

However, both battery and light emitting diode (LED) technology have made big strides in recent years, as have interfaces. Who would have ever thought you would consider the interface a topic of discussion when talking about a flashlight? In past years, I had my preference for switch placement and I looked long and hard at battery life and availability, but that was about it.

Only after doing some research for a battery powered light for a bicycle did I realise how much had changed. This was more than a decade ago, but things have progressed at lightning speed since then. There are a number of brands that will keep popping up when you do a search. One of these is Olight. Though their products may seem expensive compared to your flashlight from Target or Woolies, prices are actually competitive when compared to other premium flashlight brands.

So, I acquired one of their torches back then and at some stage picked up a few more as my requirements changed and technology advanced. Of the Olight flashlights I have, there are three I use on a regular basis, but the one that sees most use is

without doubt the S2 Baton. It is a compact light powered by a single 18650 battery that puts out a whopping 950 lumens in turbo mode. At lower intensities, the battery life is great, which is one of the reasons I often carry it on hunting trips.



TIR lens on the S2 Baton.

When I think back to the time I turned to my Maglite, I realise I really only used it when needed. To light my way, for a quick run between the hammock and the car, to prepare some food in the dark or to quickly organise my gear. One reason for the sparse use of my flashlight was that I was doing what I could to conserve power. The other was that my eyes would fairly quickly grow tired of the yellowish light.

Then, once I started using my modern lights, things changed. The S2 Baton has a switch on the side that operates a fairly simple yet useful interface that lets me select the intensity of the beam. From a moonlight mode that casts a mere 0.5 lumens (for 60 days!), all the way up to a turbo style that puts out 950 lumens (2 minutes plus 2 hours and 50 minutes in stepped down mode). In between are low (144 hours), medium (19 hours) and high (4 hours and 5 minutes) levels at 8, 80 and 400 lumens respectively. The LED used to generate this amount of light is a Cree XM-L2 U3. The maximum range is 142m with a peak beam intensity of 5000 candela (CD).

Just to be complete, I ought to mention that several special modes are available. I must admit, I never use them, but they include strobe, SOS and timed brackets. The light uses a total internal reflection (TIR) lens. Books have been written about the specifics, but all you really need to know is that the use of this TIR technology ensures a smooth and homogenous light output.

The single 18650 battery is easy to source these days. When in a pinch, you can also use two CR123A cells, available in most hardware stores. Maximum output (duration) and battery life will be lower when using those, so I would not bother unless you have no charged 18650 handy.

From the specifications, expect run times to be about 35 per cent shorter. The S2 Baton is rated IPX-8, which means it ought to be waterproof to 2m below the surface, more than any torrential rain will ever soak it. At 103mmx23mm and 50.5 grams (without battery), the light is both compact and lightweight. Impact resistance is rated at 1.5m. The light comes with a clip and an inbuilt strong magnet.

So, what does all this boil down to in practical use when hunting and camping? A versatile little light that has good battery life and is easy to carry. I am surprised how much use the moonlight mode is given. I use it in my hammock to organise things and to sort through bags and the car in the dark. You never quite realise how big a difference there is between no light and very little light. The two main benefits of this low intensity light are that it hardly consumes any power and your eyes remain used to the dark.

When I am on the move in the dark or need to go from A to B, I typically use a low setting to brighten my way. This gives me enough light to prevent stepping on snakes or tripping over branches. I also use the low mode when processing meat in the dark or when doing things in camp. For this, I carry a baseball cap with a stiff visor to which the light easily clips. Your regular hat will work too, but over time it will make a mess of the brim, so keep that in mind.



The S2 is aptly waterproof.



Clipped to a cap, the S2 doubles as a headlamp at night.

See the light



The high mode can quickly scan more distant tree lines or fields, but I do not use it a lot as it also messes up your night sight. Speaking of which, NEVER look directly into the light and certainly not when it is switched on at higher intensities. These modern lights are not playthings and will result in damage to your eyes.

So yes, there is that turbo mode. Well, I hardly ever use it. It drains the battery in a hurry and does little that the high mode doesn't already embrace. The difference in light on paper is much larger than the difference you will perceive. That said, I have used it to light up a pig for a mate for an otherwise impossible shot. It's good for spotting crocodiles in the river too if you take the boat out at night, but why would you?

In use, I have had the S2 Baton be thoroughly soaked and never had an issue. I have also inadvertently done the 'drop test' on various occasions and while it has damaged the black coating a bit, the light still works great. The clip retains sufficient springiness to attach onto things after years of use and it can be removed if desired.

The magnet that is installed in the tailcap may seem like a gimmick, but in practice, it is actually useful to have. It makes it easy to pull out the battery, but more importantly, it is sufficiently powerful for the light to stick to most metallic surfaces. This leaves you with your hands free to do other things. Your mileage may vary, but I have noticed it will not stick well on some entirely smooth vertical surfaces, like car doors.

There are differences though. While the light will stick to the tailgate of a Mazda BT-50, it will not attach to the door of a Toyota LandCruiser. Whether this has to do with the composition of the metal, the paint used or something else, I do not know. Either way, it works on inclined surfaces and hanging vertically down as well.

While I'm quite pleased with the light, there are a few minor things to keep in mind. If you are stepping up from a Maglite or similar, the interface may seem fantastic. However, while it is good, I have grown to appreciate lights that offer seamlessly adjustable intensities.

The special modes, while there, to me are more of a gimmick than a practical implementation of something useful. They are all operated with the one switch, which means there is a bit of a learning curve in case you would want to use them.

Finally, the S2 Baton does not incorporate a charging interface. Yes, you can have a version of the light that can charge the 18650 battery inside – it is the S2R Baton. However, it requires the dedicated Olight charging cable. It's a magnetic interface that works well enough, but I would have much preferred to just be able to use a readily available Universal Serial Bus (USB) cable.

However, these are just minor niggles. At the end of the day, I would not hesitate to recommend the S2 (or S2R) Baton. It's a good product at a reasonable price and from experience I can tell you it stands up well to use in the field.

The popularity of these compact units can make them difficult to find so you may need to shop around. Visit olightstore.com.au for their full range of products.

Modern flashlights are not toys

Directly shining into a person's eyes can and will result in damage. Secondly, flashlights like the S2 Baton are sold to be used with protected 18650 button top cells. The benefits of the protected cells are that they are not prone to dangers such as over-charge or discharge, short-circuiting, over current and overheating.

Most manufacturers will advocate their use as a precautionary measure and many torches are designed so they will simply not make contact unless there is a button-top (protected) cell in it. The S2 Baton works a charm with unprotected high discharge cells.

To the initiated, there are some benefits to their use and they will be savvy enough not to over-charge or drain the cell, over-heat it or let it short-circuit. Depending on what you do, you will either damage the cell of your flashlight or run a risk of burns or explosion. So, while the unprotected battery may seem to just be a cheaper alternative to the protected one, use the latter unless you are disciplined and up to speed on battery technology. ■



Specifications:

Dimensions as measured (height x width): 103x23mm

Weight without batteries: 50.5g

Power: 1 x 18650 or 2 x CR123A

Switch: Side-switch

Light diode: Cree XM-L2 U3

Output settings: 950, 400, 80, 8, 0.5 lumens plus special modes

Peak beam distance/intensity: 142m/5000 CD

Waterproof: Yes, IPX-8 (up to 2m)

Price: Around \$65





Wild dogs sometimes stalk a carcass and can surprise the hunter.

Have a dog in the hunt

Don Caswell follows nature's subtle signs to despatch crafty canines

Over the past decade I have devoted considerable effort into hunting wild dogs. In the northern tropics, wild dogs are increasing in numbers and take a heavy toll on livestock and native fauna.

When I was first targeting wild dogs, I gathered a valuable starter's kit of recommendations and guidance from my old friend Robbie, a full-time professional dogger. Since then, I have built on that knowledge, as a recent successful wild dog hunt demonstrates.

A local grazier called to say he was missing a few calves and his breeding herd was gathered into the topmost part of the paddock. He had not seen any wild dogs, but the evidence pointed to their unwelcome presence. My hunting buddy, Peter, and I have taken numerous wild dogs from this property and are welcome to hunt there anytime we wish. Our host told us where to find the key to a locked entry gate and said he would tell his neighbours that we were active there again and they might hear a shot or two.

With a tropical wet season in full swing, we had experienced plenty of rain, and the grass in the paddocks was exceptionally deep and thick. Normally, we would hunt this location on foot, but the depth of grass was a challenge that called for the use of Pete's 4WD hunting buggy. We took a circuitous route, enabling an approach into the top quarter of the paddock with the wind in our face. Unusually, with monsoonal weather activity, it was a direct easterly breeze. The waft carried with it the smell of death. Somewhere in front of us were the remains of at least one of the missing calves.

We did not want to approach any closer for a few reasons. Pete had found a small mound to park the ATV that greatly improved our view over the deep grass for a 360-degree sweep of the property.



When covering a large open pasture, let birds be your warning for wild dogs.

More importantly, we did not want to disturb the scene of the kill with our scent and disruption to the grass around the carcass. If and when the wild dogs arrived, we wanted them to be as relaxed as possible. We would have limited opportunities for a shot. The next step was to locate the remains of the calf.

We both scanned the area before us with our binoculars. Pete picked up a subtle clue and pointed out what he had noticed. About 70m ahead of us, a small patch of the lush green grass had a slightly darker shade to it. Through our optically sharp Leica and Swarovski binoculars we could identify the stain on the grass was due to a huge gathering of blowflies and flies on the grass stems above the carrion. So, now we knew exactly where the dogs would be coming to.

Not long after noticing the flies, while admiring the spectacular view, I picked up a fleeting glimpse of a large, black wild dog crossing a gap between patches of jungle. He was a long way off, 600m or more, and straight behind the kill from us. However, he was not coming our way, but heading off at right angles to that line of approach. We reasoned that, if he was a wary old

campaigner, he would be circling right around to approach the kill into the wind, rather than approach it directly with the wind blowing from behind him.

With Pete keeping a watch ahead of us, I spent most of my time carefully monitoring the country all around us. The breeder paddock featured a long central spur, about 700m long, running from the commanding ridge at the top end, down to a river flood plain. The cows and their new calves had drawn some courage from our presence and began feeding down the top of the spur, towards the flood plain.

Cattle, sometimes, are great indicators of the presence of wild dogs. I have enjoyed some good success by interpreting their response to these predators, before I laid eyes on them myself.

The mob of cows and calves were a bit over 150m from us, lower down the slope of the spur. They all seemed fairly placid and were just grazing about slowly. Some of the bigger calves were frolicking among their mothers. I was looking well past them, to the lower bottom of the spur, hoping to see a pair of black ears among the long grass.

Suddenly, my eyes were drawn back to the mob of cattle. With a jolt, I realised that a black dog was now amid the cattle. He was not hunting as such, but was testing the defences, as it were, seeking to push a calf to the outside of the group. The cows seemed fairly unconcerned with the dog's presence but were nevertheless keeping their calves in close check.

I alerted Pete and paused while he moved into position with his .308 Sako. I also had to wait for the dog to give me a clear shot. Luckily, he stayed on the top of the spur where the grass was eaten down somewhat. After a little while, he decided to examine something of interest in the grass and, with a clear shot posing no risk to the cattle, I squeezed off a 100-grain Fiocchi soft-point from my Merkel K3 in .243 Winchester. There was the satisfying whop of a solid hit and the dog folded up into the grass. The cattle, far from being alarmed, came over to inspect and sniff the dead wild dog.

With the dog accounted for, and no other wild dogs apparent, we unloaded our rifles and went to check on the mutt. However, I had my rifle slung over my shoulder and kept a good lookout. Dogs are curious critters and, at this very spot a couple of months earlier, the surviving fourth member of a pack showed up as we were dragging its three dead companions in for a photo.

I would rate cattle at about 50/50 indicators to the presence of wild dogs. Sometimes they will react like you see in the best wildlife documentaries and form a defensive circle with their calves in the centre. At other times, despite recent attacks, they show virtually no response to lurking wild dogs.

However, when cattle do react, it is in your interest to pay attention. At times, I have been able to track the approach of wild dogs from the cattle's behaviour and attention, until the dogs finally revealed themselves and offered me a shot. Wallabies and roos are also good indicators for wild dogs and when you see these native animals go on alert, or run, you need to look for the cause.

At other times, birds have proved to be reliable pointers for wild dogs. As any



The wild dog that took a long, circuitous detour to approach into the wind.

Have a dog in the hunt

farmer would tell you, wild dogs often take a heavy toll on domestic poultry. That behaviour extends to wild birds as well. I witnessed wild dogs taking curlews and brolgas. I have also seen them try for ducks and egrets.

A farmer, who I have shot wild dogs for, called me one day and told me I should come see what he had found harvesting a crop. It was only a short drive to his farm. I joined him on the tractor and he showed me 30 piles of grey-blue feathers scattered along a couple of hundred metres of crop stubble. These were the remains of brolgas killed by wild dogs.

The dogs sneak in to the border between cultivation and forest. From there, they charge out to attack the brolgas that have unwisely come too close to the border. Being a large, heavy bird, it takes brolgas a distance to become airborne and many are snatched out of the air as they try to gain elevation and height.

Lapwings, known to most as spur-winged plovers, are a ground nesting bird with a noisy and aggressive response to anything they see as a potential threat. These birds are a great gauge of wild dog presence. They will loudly become airborne

and swoop any dog that enters their territory, providing plenty of warning.

Likewise if there is a carcass out there with a collection of egrets, or crows and kites around it. The white egrets eat the many bugs drawn to the carrion while the kites and crows feed on the carcass itself. Their presence at a kill tells you that there are no wild dogs present. Should that collection of birds suddenly take flight, you better shift your attention back to the area of the carcass.

When checking a large expanse of pasture, any bird that suddenly takes to the air is worth investigating. Even paddocks with short grass can produce surprises. Wild

dogs are pretty close to the ground. Gentle undulations in the terrain, and patches of grass, can effectively hide their approach.

On numerous occasions I have seen dogs materialise, as if out of nowhere, and rush a flock of birds. I suspect that the dogs have seen the birds from a long way off and probably stalked them, keeping low and with ears laid back.

So, when glassing a wide expanse of pasture, I concentrate on looking for ears above the grass and just maintain an awareness of those areas with birds foraging on the ground. The birds will alarm and scatter, giving warning of any wild dogs in their immediate vicinity. ■



Crows and other birds will scatter from a carcass when wild dogs approach.



Egrets gather around carrion to feed on insects, but will flee upon the arrival of wild dogs.

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.ssaaqld.org.au



- Supporting conservation activities
- Supporting research activities
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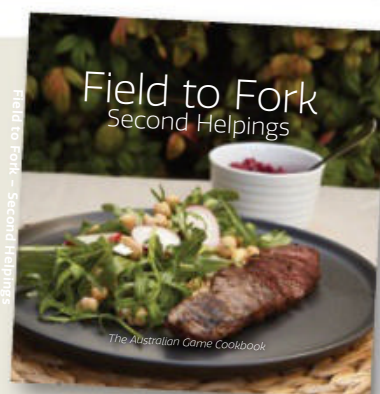
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Trigg the Koala

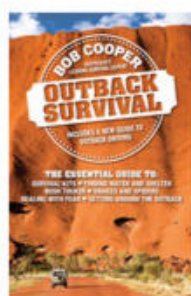
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The SSAA Card Holder is a slim, lightweight and stylish leather-look wallet, it features four licensed-sized card holder slots, two large slots and a clear slot.



Outback Survival by Bob Cooper

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

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Around the campfire with John Denman

I've been pretty busy gathering up the years lately. It seems at times that most people I know are younger than me. Don't get me wrong, I still have a couple of safes full of rifles that need to be fed and exercised. As for hunting, well you just have to work smarter rather than harder. The thing is, I realised the other day that I have a lot more to look back on than it appears I have going forward. Not only that, but there's quite a few of us out there.

I began hunting in the traditional way, that is with a .22 rifle. They used to call them 'pea rifles' for some reason I could never understand. But they were then and still are a heap of fun. I joined the SSAA around 1963 in the Sydney branch and we had a range out at Baulkham Hills then. It was in a gully, and you had to lug all your gear down the hill then across a suspension bridge that had some unnerving habits.

The range was good practice for my future career as a soldier, because moving out to the longest target involved jumping over a creek and bashing through a rough track. We couldn't manage a full 300m because of a big rock wall. I think it was about 285m or so. I don't recall anyone complaining about the range or the difficulty in reaching it, we were just having a great time. But then civilisation took over and we moved to Silverdale.

Hunting though was my main reason for existence. You didn't need any licences in those days and nobody locked their guns away. Mine were in a rack in my bedroom. My old mate Gordon and I used to hunt pigs mainly out around Nyngan and

Coonamble. A property owner would normally welcome you with open arms back then. Nobody I knew hunted deer. We were aware of some being about but it seemed pretty secretive stuff.

Goats were always fair game too but we never tried eating any. They used to call them 'stinkers' and stink they did. Once again it was mostly out around Nyngan and Bourke where we found goats. We came across some piglets once and thought they would be okay for a feed. We guessed wrong, as they had to be penned up and fed grain if you wanted to have a meal off one, but we didn't have a clue about that.

I used to lap up the words penned by the writers of the day, especially Vic McCristal. Vic had a way with prose that could transport a young nimrod into believing anything was possible. Colin Shadbolt was another fine writer. One of my hunting mates, Col Allison, ended up being pretty good at it too eventually.

I don't suppose it's much different today for younger hunters. Friday comes too slowly but instead of the old FC Holden we drove, most today will have a 4WD. But the anticipation is still the same and the talk around the fire probably hasn't changed much either. There's undoubtedly a greater awareness of the responsibility of the hunter these days. Firearms may have improved a bit although companies keep bringing out new cartridges that mostly often aren't really new, just different.

Camping out in the bush has seen the comfort level rise too. There's now a term called 'glamping' where you come close to

transporting half your gear from home to the bush. We had swags back in those days, but they were more like a rolled-up cigarette than the bulky things we use today. I'm not complaining though, as there's nothing wrong with a good night's sleep in the bush.

Yes, things have progressed a lot at least as far as the hunting and enjoyment of the bush is concerned. The roads are better, the cars are faster and safer, and the guns? How dead do you need to kill something? It's not like we used flintlocks back then. Let's not forget that some pretty handy cartridges were about. The .243 Winchester was gaining rapid popularity, along with the .223 and the .308 of course. Basically, the fine cartridges were always there, but propellants and bullets have come along that simply made good cartridges better. Although my .22-250 was still a wildcat.

Just so we're clear about this, I'm not harping on about the good old days. But being able to look back over all those years and seeing the changes – some good, some not so good – is often interesting. I never saw anyone with a plastic rifle stock or a stainless steel barrel or action. If the rifle became wet, you would just dry it out and oil it.

Optics are far better too, although my old Bausch & Lomb scope could be used to drive nails. But it was all steel tube and pretty heavy. Lighter weight is all the go today and once again there's nothing wrong with that.

Are we better off than we were back in the 1960s, or worse off? I reckon things were pretty good back then, but times change and if we want to keep our sport going, we have to change with them. ■

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