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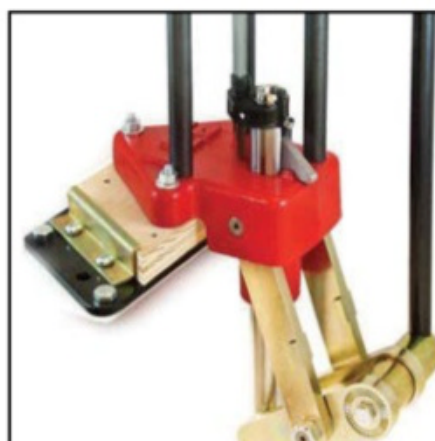
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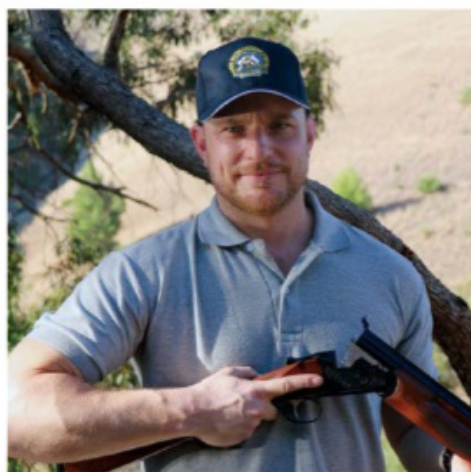
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From the Editor

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Do you see what I see? The animals you are hunting certainly don't so we help keep you hidden in our extensive look at camouflage, wrap up our two-part series to confidently take game as a bowhunter, validate hunting quail in South Australia, run you through home taxidermy via a small game bird, present our case for upgrading your projectiles to get the absolute most from your rifle and put a new spin on the saying 'it's like riding a bike' as we deck out a deadly treadly for hunting.

You can be king of the campsite thanks to our stove and barbecue treatment, while other reviews cover the .308 rifle and why we still love it as a go-to all-rounder, milestone Federal Ammunition, the handiest of accessories in the Spika Drover Bino Pack, the new and improved Quad Rest II from SmartRest, top-notch Leupold Alumnia flip-back scope covers, the Spyderco Tenacious folding knife that gets a lot right and Jelinek Custom Blades, who passionately craft knives to behold.

In the Camp Kitchen we serve up succulent venison, quality campfire quail and spicy buffalo meatballs... and what can we say, our own Australian game cookbook, *Field to Fork – Second Helpings*, has landed a Best in the World gong – check it out!

Thomas Cook
Editor

Looking back

Matthew Cameron reminisces about hunting 'the real Australia' over two decades

Sometimes we come across issues in life that have a permanent effect on our lifestyle, although it may not be evident at the time. The year was 1980, when me and a mate were looking for an Outback property to shoot on, so nothing unusual about that.

We pooled our resources and success came when I remembered that a friend of my father came from an Outback area. Did he still have any contacts there? The result was a couple of names associated with large estates.

Travelling to such places 40 years ago was not to be taken lightly. The hard-topped roads disappeared just over the border and weather was a continual consideration, as an inch of rain could stop you for literally weeks. We plotted and planned and eventually came up with an idea. Two vehicles with trailers, as we had to be totally self-sufficient.

Firearms wise, there were several .22 Long Rifles. Personally, I had a Midland bolt-action rifle in .243 Winchester which I had handloaded for. My mates had shotguns, the inevitable .22LR and if I remember correctly a .303 British. Another member borrowed a lever-action .243 Winchester from within his family.

It was a long full day trip and dark when we drove into the station yard. Introducing myself to the owner, I mentioned my father's mate who had given us his details and that we were just looking for a place to shoot. Quickly we were given instructions as to where we could set up camp. It was the beginning of a 20-year association. We had the distinct impression that he was glad to have someone to attack the feral animals, mainly pigs. At the time we were just unaware of what the floating population was in terms of numbers.



The .45-70 strikes again.

We awoke the next morning in a different world. It was dry, dusty and basically flat. We worked hard that week and our pig tally was about half-a-dozen spread between the four of us. It was a large property and the variation was immense. The first item of interest was the vast tracts of lignum, hundreds of acres in area, so thick that only a match or a tank could penetrate. There were enormous plains that



A harsh lesson for city drivers – it's easy to become caught.

were inundated with thousands of kangaroos. Further out were sandhills while the sparse lignum contained untold hordes of rabbits. We ran out of .22LR ammunition long before the week was over. A short session with the spotlight showed up many foxes, so it was a shooter's paradise.

We explored every day and, on each occasion, we discovered something new. There were isolated dams scattered throughout the property, another haven for pigs in the late afternoon. We talked a lot on the trip home about what we were lucky to find. The first lesson was that pigs can carry lead, depending on just where they were hit, sometimes considerable amounts. The first item was to upgrade the firearm calibres. We commenced a long love affair with the .270 Winchester cartridge, which was and still is a good pig round.

Subsequent trips increased the pig tally. Usually for a week it was not difficult to eliminate at least 50 of them. Sitting on any one of the many isolated dams from late in the afternoon became a favourite pastime and continued until after dark.

Most nights were spent spotlighting along the station tracks, the man with a self-loading .22 rifle was paired with something heavier on the back of the truck, usually a .243 Winchester or a .303-25 for the foxes we came across.

On one trip in the mid-1980s a mate took 40 foxes in a week, spotlighting with his .303-25. Oddly enough over the 20 years we shot there, the number of pigs in the light at night was minimal while spotlighting. Off the dams it was another matter entirely, as in the hotter months they just had to have water and kept coming back.

When it was cool enough, we walked the swamps, both wet and dry, for pigs. Again, in the cooler months I became fascinated

with shooting the untold numbers of rabbits at long range, initially with the .243 Winchester which was quickly followed by a .22-250 Remington. There were so many targets it was necessary to limit your rate of fire to keep the barrel temperature in reasonable limits.

Associated with all of this was an increasing amount of handloading to feed the rifles. Both with the handloading and the game it was a continual learning curve that continues to the present day. The numbers of rabbits dropped dramatically, mainly due to a drought in the mid to late 1980s. The

Vast lignum swamp.



The group's first portable bench, useful for testing ammo and long-range hunting, was very stable.



The plains were immense, with the vehicle specifically for shooting back in the day.



Looking back



pigs seemed to survive but we noticed that the layer of fat they normally carried around the rib area soon disappeared.

At about this time another mate and I decided it was time to introduce our sons to the real Australia. We left the city behind early and arrived at the station about mid-afternoon, with the boys itching to shoot. We took them down to a patch of rabbits on the edge of the lignum. They bailed out pronto, two with self-loading .22s and the third with a pump-action shotgun. Within minutes all were calling for more ammunition. Us dads knew what it would be like before we arrived there. Oddly enough there were no pigs taken on that trip, but we did see a couple. Naturally, all the sons wanted to know when the next visit would be and my two hunt with me to this day.

The hunting on the property varied considerably. The day usually opened with a discussion over breakfast as to exactly where we would shoot in the cool of the morning. We would split into two groups,



with each tackling a different swamp or patch of walkable lignum. It was unusual not to bag a few animals in each location.

The same followed after lunch in another area, as there were plenty to choose from. If the weather was warm enough, a decision to sit on a remote dam until after dark always produced more pigs. Because of the ranges involved, we tended to favour heavier calibres when dam sitting.

Certainly the .270 Winchester cartridge was a personal preference coupled with a

130gr soft-point projectile. Another mate used his .303-25 with good effect under the same conditions, then much later a straight .303 in a Jungle Carbine rifle was also productive. Over time many other suitable calibres were used.

For a bit of variety after leisurely dinner at night there was spotlighting for rabbits and foxes, plus the occasional pig. Oddly enough in the 20 years we shot the property almost invariably we despatched at least one feral cat per trip, even in this very remote area. It was noticeable that the canine teeth on all of these animals were longer than in the domestic cat.



For the rabbits the preferred rifle was a self-loading Ruger 10/22 with a 10-shot magazine. We kept a loaded spare in someone's shorts pocket. No matter how much .22LR ammunition accompanied us on the trip we still had to ration ourselves each night.

Our most memorable treks in terms of numbers occurred after the property was unshootable for some eight months. An unusual amount of rain had isolated large portions of the station and many of the local access roads were also shut, as they were simply impassable. When we finally gained access again there were large areas which we could not penetrate except on foot.

Shooting under such conditions required much wet walking in the low-lying swamp areas. The reward was there were literally pigs everywhere and we took 17 the first morning before lunch. It quickly became evident that this was no ordinary outing. In one swamp at the sound of the first shot another 12 or so heads popped up. It was unbelievable.



An isolated dam – always worth sitting on at dusk and beyond in hot weather.

Although we were more or less gentlemen shooters with a laidback attitude and limited in shooting area compared to what was normally available, we did despatch some 97 animals in a single week, without really trying.

Drought decimated the property over time and the rabbits were virtually wiped out with both the drought and the virus that was released by the government at the time. We actually reached the stage

where the sighting of a single animal was commented on, in an area where in the past there were thousands. But the pigs were still there.

Our pig education began on that first trip and continued over the 20 years. We are indebted to the owner and his family who always made us welcome. The property was sold in the year 2000 and we lost our shooting paradise, but the memories linger on. ■



A fine boar on the lignum edge – cartridge is .45-70.



The porkers love a green pick.



Is this thick enough? Almost impossible to hunt in.

The Drover

Don Caswell holds it together with this handy Spika Bino Pack

Like most hunters, I am on a never-ending quest to simplify and minimise the gear I carry when stalking game. When *Australian Hunter* was given the opportunity to review the Spika Drover Bino Pack I had been looking into binoculars harnesses and packs, so the timing was perfect.

It is good to have your binos close at hand and for a long time I relied just on the straps that came with them. The binos could not have been any closer at hand, but there were a few other less appealing aspects.

Dangling around my neck, they impeded my progress through the many barbed wire fences I have to negotiate on a hunt. When leaning forward to examine game tracks, or inspect a dead animal, they similarly were in the way. That was especially so when butchering a deer. That mostly seemed to be in long grass and the binos had to be taken off and placed next to my pack as I worked on the animal. I have never left my binos behind in the field, but it would be an easy thing to do, and I know hunters who have.

I have had many binoculars over the years and, invariably, whether cheap or premium, the protective eyepiece covers

eventually break or just fall off. Also, such covers represent another action required before you can bring your binos into use. For simplicity, I have long adopted the habit of removing the eyepiece covers. This is a problem if it is raining, or you are hunting in dusty environments, so a large part of Australia qualifies here.

A binocular pack solves these problems neatly and Spika have designed a version, the Drover Bino Pack, which does all that and offers other benefits as well. It has a chest harness that is easily adjusted to hold it snugly against the wearer's chest. This harness is mounted via four snap-lock buckles. It is quick and easy to fit and remove. There is plenty of adjustment in the four straps, more than enough to cater for larger-bodied folks.

Two short straps with smaller snap-lock attachments hold the binoculars to the harness. These short straps are long enough to allow the binos to be brought

up to the eye for viewing. If required, the binos can be freed of these two small buckles in a second.

The Drover Bino Pack also has small pouches on the front and rear on both sides. These are large enough to carry smaller essential items. For me, that is my iPhone 11 that fits snugly in the front pouch. In the side pouches there is room for my Garmin mini-GPS (Global Positioning System), a PLB (Personal Locator Beacon) and my reading glasses. Really, you are limited only by your imagination in what small bits of kit you could carry here. What I particularly like is that the items I do carry in the Drover Bino Pack are those that are most of the time deep in various pockets of my clothing and awkward to access in a hurry.

Of course, the main duty of the pack is to keep your binoculars securely protected but ready for instant use, and the Drover Bino Pack does that perfectly. A



large, fold-over flap covers and protects the binoculars inside the pack. The flap is held firmly closed by a magnetic latch that can be flipped open in an instant.

The camo on my pack is Spika's Biarri pattern and it also comes in Olive. The pack is robustly made with high-quality construction and fittings. Here is a bit of kit that will take a beating for a lifetime. Over the years it will develop that well-used look while remaining perfectly functional. The RRP of the Spika Drover Bino Pack is \$129.95.

The Spika website states that the Drover Bino Pack is made from brushed tricot over a 1000 denier (D) nylon base. The clips are Duraflex and YKK zippers are used. The pack is also DWR treated for weather resistance.

This bino pack from Spika is only one item from an extensive array of backpacks, daypacks and more in their Drover series. All are made to the same standards of quality using the best available materials and fittings.

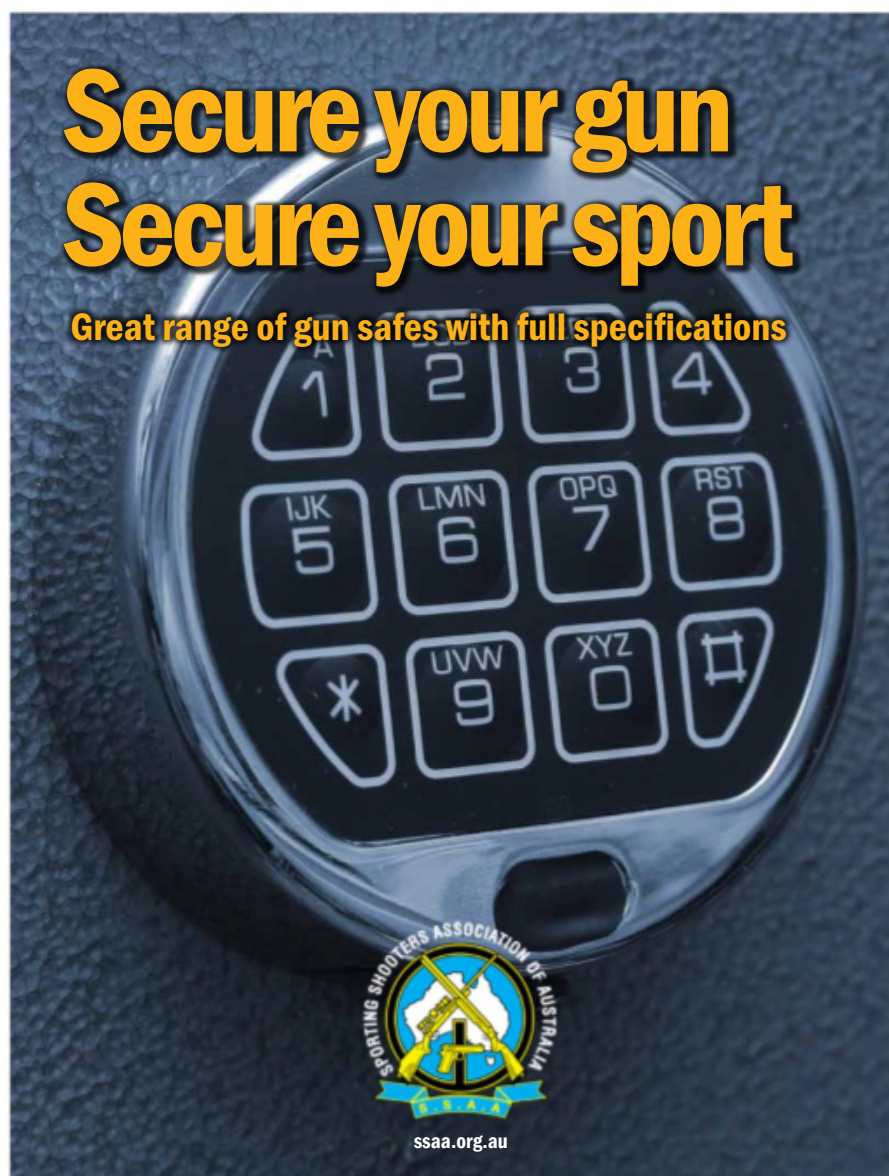
Spika have a wide collection of other outdoor gear, gun safes and accessories. Their website spika.com.au is well worth browsing. Spika gear is available from their online store and from a wide gamut of Aussie retail outlets. ■

The covering flap flips open to allow quick access to the binoculars.



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Nearest and dearest

Ben Smith and his mate maximise their frosty getaway to land a bounty of fresh venison

Trying to get two people to line their work/life schedules up is like trying to win Lotto sometimes, especially when both own businesses.

This is what happens most times when I try to hunt with my mate Warrick. We grew up as teenagers together in Victoria, shooting at the local clay target club.

However, our planned visit to a property for some venison actually panned out. We decided to include two Ruger M77s – a .22 WMR and .17 HMR – for some small game hunting, should the deer action be slow.

We made the long journey to the property knowing the forecast on this trip was to be -3°C with wind chill on top of that.

We arrived at our camp spot and greeted the farmer. The first task was to gather firewood. There had been a lot of rain during the previous days and my chainsaw had decided not to work, even though it had been serviced the week before.

After an hour of pulling it apart and copious amounts of swearing, we concluded the new fuel filter had been blocked from the start – we were not impressed.

Once the chainsaw was running, I went like a madman and didn't stop until we had a pile of wood that would last at least a couple of nights. The wood was still damp, so Warrick showed me a trick with half a Coke can and some petrol.

He placed the can in the middle of the fireplace then filled it with petrol almost to the top. Next, we put all the wet timber over the top of the can, then carefully lit the petrol. It proceeded to burn like a candle as only so much oxygen could reach the flame. It also created a concentrated flame so the wet timber dried out fast. We had the fire roaring in no time implementing this handy trick and I will be sure not to forget it.

At early afternoon it was time to quickly check the zero on both the Ruger rimfires, before attaching the scope-mounted torches for an evening mission. I quickly worked out my .22 WMR liked the Hornady 30gr V-Max ammo and the 45gr CCI hollow points.

The rimfires were sighted-in and the sun was starting to get low in the sky. We grabbed our deer hunting gear and went for a walk. Working the fringe of the bush, it wasn't long before I spotted a mob of fallow deer feeding in front of us. The hunt was on!

The wind was working from our left and the deer were feeding up into the wind. Our aim was to close the gap from plus 800m down to something under 300m and maximise the number of animals we could drop before they bolted out of sight.

There was 500m of cleared paddock to cross with some long grass patches. I made sure we used these patches to our advantage, keeping the one stand of trees in between us and where the fallow deer were heading towards.



The frosty grass as the sun rose.

We made it undetected to our stand of trees. I ranged the clearing where the deer were to just over 200m. Our heart rates were up due to the intensity of the stalk and amount of ground we had to cover in such a short space of time.

On this hunt, Warrick had his Sauer in .243 Win and I had my .264 Win Mag. Gunsmith Allan Swan had recently rebarrelled my Winchester Model 70 that was a .300 Win Mag down to the .264 Win Mag and I was keen to see how it would perform in the semi-open country.

I put Warrick into position and backed him up. At his shot deer went everywhere. In the chaos I could only acquire one clear shot. We waited before heading over to see what was on the ground.

After a short mission, we found two deer down. We couldn't tell who shot which, but it was better than going home empty-handed. We butchered the deer under headlamps and walked a few kilometres back to camp with smiles on our faces. It's always good to have runs on the board on the first day so the pressure is off for the remaining days.

On the walk back, a not-so-smart hare stopped and propped in the middle of the track under Warrick's headlamp. At 100m, I lined up my .264 Win Mag and after the noise and smoke cleared the hare had been despatched.

That night on a walk with Ruger rimfires, I shot a fox and eight rabbits while Warrick took a bag of rabbits, all within a few hundred metres of camp. The grass had already started freezing and it wasn't long before we retired to our swags for the night.



Ben's .264 Win Mag rifle worked precisely to land fallow deer.



Ben's Ruger .22 WMR took a rabbit late in the trip.

Nearest and dearest

Early to rise, we awoke to a frozen landscape. After a hot coffee we headed back down to a similar area where we had seen the deer the previous afternoon. I purposely made sure we were walking slowly through the cold shadows and glassing up into the sunny country.

After about an hour's slow stalking through the frosty grass, I spotted the legs of several deer as they stood under a low tree branch in the sun. I could tell they were nervous and knew something wasn't right. Their body language looked like they were about to bolt at any instant.

Then for a split second I felt the lightest breeze upon my neck. While looking through my binoculars, the fallow deer all tensed up and took off in the opposite direction. I knew which way they were headed and thought I may be able to intercept them by going up and around the nearest hill.

Over 30 minutes had elapsed as Warrick and I climbed for elevation. We arrived at the spot where I thought some of the deer might be hiding. It worked as I spotted a smaller mob getting ready to bed down in the morning sun and ward off any chills from the night.

I took my rangefinder out and measured the distance. It was just over 500m. Again, wanting to maximise our chances, we edged slowly downhill to a rocky outcrop which was 300m from the bedded deer.

This cold morning, Warrick had left his Sauer .243 Win in camp and brought along his Austrian Strasser in .270 Win. The Strasser was new to him and he was keen to 'blood it' on some deer.

We made a quick plan, realising there were more deer bedded under the trees than we had first seen. Warrick was going to head to my left and attempt to intercept any deer that came past him at the sound of my shot. It was a small, open valley which was perfect for an ambush.

I could see a big-bodied fallow buck scraping away at the base of a large tree. My binoculars showed his antlers to be below par and non-typical. But he was in good condition and the best presented for a shot out of all the deer.



Warrick with one of his fallow does taken in the frosty conditions.

My berth on the rocky outcrop afforded me a good view of the deer plus any escape routes they may take at the sound of my shot. I rested the Winchester on my daypack, adjusted the magnification of the Zeiss scope to 12 power and took a breath.

I closed my eyes for a second and when I opened them the cross-hairs were placed perfectly on the fallow buck's heart/lung area. Squeezing the crisp trigger, I felt it break and the shot went off. The shot felt good and indeed it was.

The buck lurched forwards and hit the ground, with minimal struggle he was down. At this point, deer were running every which way. I reloaded my rifle and spotted through my scope a younger doe staring at my downed fallow buck. Boom! Down she went.

Suddenly a small mob of eight fallow deer bolted up the track in the valley below me. They were no further than 80m away and I still had my scope wound up to 12x magnification. I quickly wriggled sideways and turned the scope down to whatever magnification I could find.



It's a good feeling knowing your freezer is about to be filled with tasty venison.

Working the action one more time, the deer skidded to a halt, hearing the mechanical clank through the still morning air. This was the perfect opportunity for me and I picked a plump young fallow doe and let fly with my last round in the magazine.

The doe collapsed while the remainder of the mob all turned in the opposite direction and bolted down towards where Warrick had headed. Fingers crossed...

I BROUGHT SOME FRIENDS WITH ME.



HOPE YOU DON'T MIND.

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Unleash the Wolves. The standout Lupo transforms with the new camo and wood models. Two new camouflage patterns in Benelli's **GORE OPTIFADE, Open Country** (◆) and **Elevated II** (▲), both finished with a corrosion-resistant, new matte BE.S.T. Or take it to the next level with the Lupo **Wood** (■), a Monte Carlo profile, rich walnut stock with a durable satin finish perfectly complementing the BE.S.T. glossy finish on the barreled receiver.

Benelli Lupo. All models \$2,899 RRP.

Nearest and deerest

Within seconds Warrick had fired multiple shots from his Strasser at the deer. I hoped he had managed to take one, with all the commotion I just heard. I waited for a couple of minutes and picked up my rifle and daypack to head down towards him.

I found my fallow doe lying in the frost covered grass below a stand of trees. At least with these temperatures there wasn't too much of a worry about the meat going off.

I spotted Warrick 300m away dragging a large fallow doe downhill to a shady patch of grass. The morning sun was beginning to rise above the trees, but everything was still so cold from the night before.

Warrick had managed to shoot three fallow does. We well and truly had the freezer filled and our work cut out for the rest of the morning. I made a quick phone call to the farmer and explained the situation, as we had left our buggy back in camp at his request due to how wet the paddocks were.

We walked all the way back to our camp and met the farmer, who was sat waiting on his quad bike with a big grin on his face. Grabbing the buggy keys, we went down the tracks towards where the first deer had been shot.

Warrick's deer were easy to find but mine were down in a big patch of deadfall timber, which made for an interesting time trying to gain access to the animals for butchering. We took all the prime cuts and by the time we arrived back at camp with all the meat, some given to the farmer, we were absolutely exhausted.

We had a quiet one that night and shot a few more rabbits near camp, packed up early in the morning and headed our respective ways – eskies filled with fresh, free-range venison. ■



Ben was pleased to be back out hunting with his mate for fallow deer.



Warrick under the full moon with his Ruger M77.

More awards for Field to Fork!



Named as one of the **top two meat cookbooks in the 2022 Gourmand World Cookbook Awards** and the **winner of the 2021 Best Meat Cookbook** – Australia award, *Field to Fork – Second Helpings* is the perfect addition to your cooking library.

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Roasted rabbit legs with bacon and almonds

Page 15

OVER 50 RECIPES



When hunting venison for the table, it's great to have a choice.

Venison with a French twist

Paul Barker gets experimental with his game meat and the result is simply delicious

During a lengthy drive home from a successful hunt, ample time gave rise to some thoughts on how to prepare and cook some of the venison that filled the car fridge freezer. It had been quite a bit of time since I was last able to hunt deer, due to COVID lockdowns and unseasonable wet weather. So, it is great to once again have a good quantity of venison cuts to cook and experiment with new ideas and break away from the other staple recipes to see what I come up with.

Enter the French connection where the sous vide (under vacuum) method of cooking is one that I have built up some experience with in preparing beef and lamb. Now, with a good supply of venison, it's time to put previous experiences to the test with game meat.

In a nutshell, sous vide cooking boils down to placing a cut of seasoned/marinated meat into a plastic bag and removing all of the air from within. A tabletop food saver machine or cryovac chamber type device is the preferred routine for this job.

With the meat prepped and vacuum packed, it's time for the actual process. There are many models of sous vide machines on the market, but they all work on the same principle in that the food is immersed in a strictly temperature-controlled water bath for the required time.

For the first venture into this style with venison, I chose a section of backstrap. Other cuts would work well too, but thicker pieces require longer preparation times.

Ingredients

- A section of backstrap sufficient for the number of folk dining
- Virgin olive oil spray
- Fresh ground black pepper
- Salt of your choice
- Garlic powder
- Thyme leaves, fresh or dried
- Vegetable oil (for cooking)

Method

The preparation for this dish is fairly simple and straightforward. First up, remove any of the silver tissue from the backstrap. This will prevent the meat from going banana shaped as it cooks.

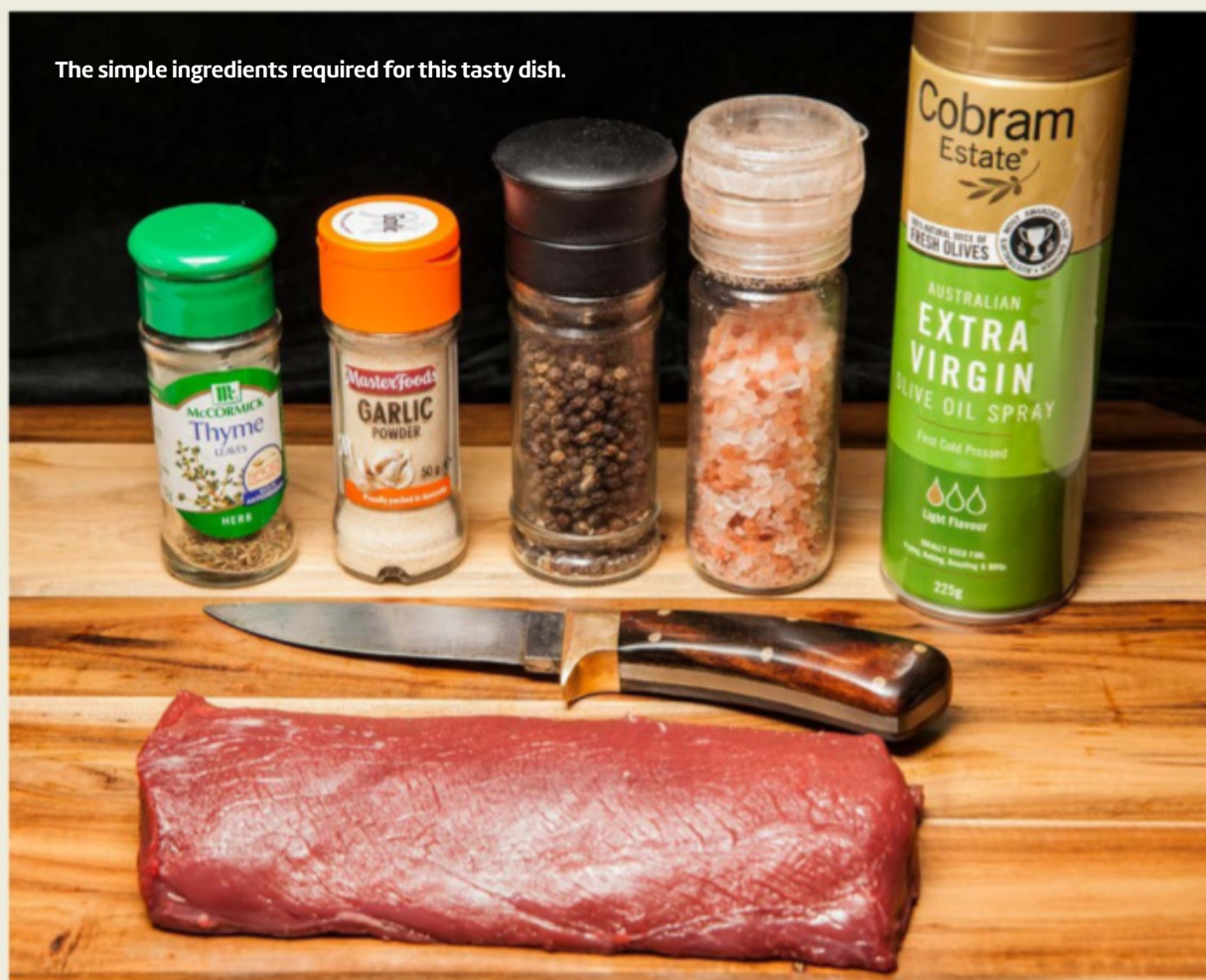
Next, apply a light coating of the olive oil to all surfaces of the meat to help bind the dry ingredients, preventing them from dropping off.

For taste, smear the black pepper, salt, garlic powder and thyme leaves to all surfaces and gently rub them into the meat.

For the first attempt at this dish, it could be wise to go easy on all but the salt when adding the spices.

Now it's time to place the meat in a suitable bag for the type of vac machine you have and remove the air. It's a good idea to allow the meat to come up to room temperature before starting the cooking phase. This will also allow the seasoning a bit of time to work its magic.

The simple ingredients required for this tasty dish.





Prime venison backstrap with a modest coating of the spice rub.



The seasoned backstrap vacuum sealed ready.

Setting the appropriate temperature and time duration to achieve the desired doneness is the key to a perfectly cooked piece of meat using the sous vide mode.

I looked to my previous results with beef eye fillet as a starting point. The sous vide was programmed to 58 degrees Centigrade and the timer set for 50 minutes. Once the desired temperature is reached, it is a simple matter of placing the bag into the water and activating the timer.

When the allotted time has elapsed, the bag is taken from the machine and the meat removed then allowed to rest for approximately 10 minutes. It's a good practice to pat the meat dry with a paper towel prior to the last phase in the process – searing.

Sous vide meat, when removed from the bag, can look a little anaemic but don't be put off by this as the searing stage will change that appearance to an appetising, almost charred, exterior.

While the venison is resting, it's time to heat up a heavy cast iron or similar pan. The key here is to have the pan smoking hot before adding a small amount of vegetable oil. Canola oil is a good choice, as olive oil has too low a flash point for searing as it will catch fire.

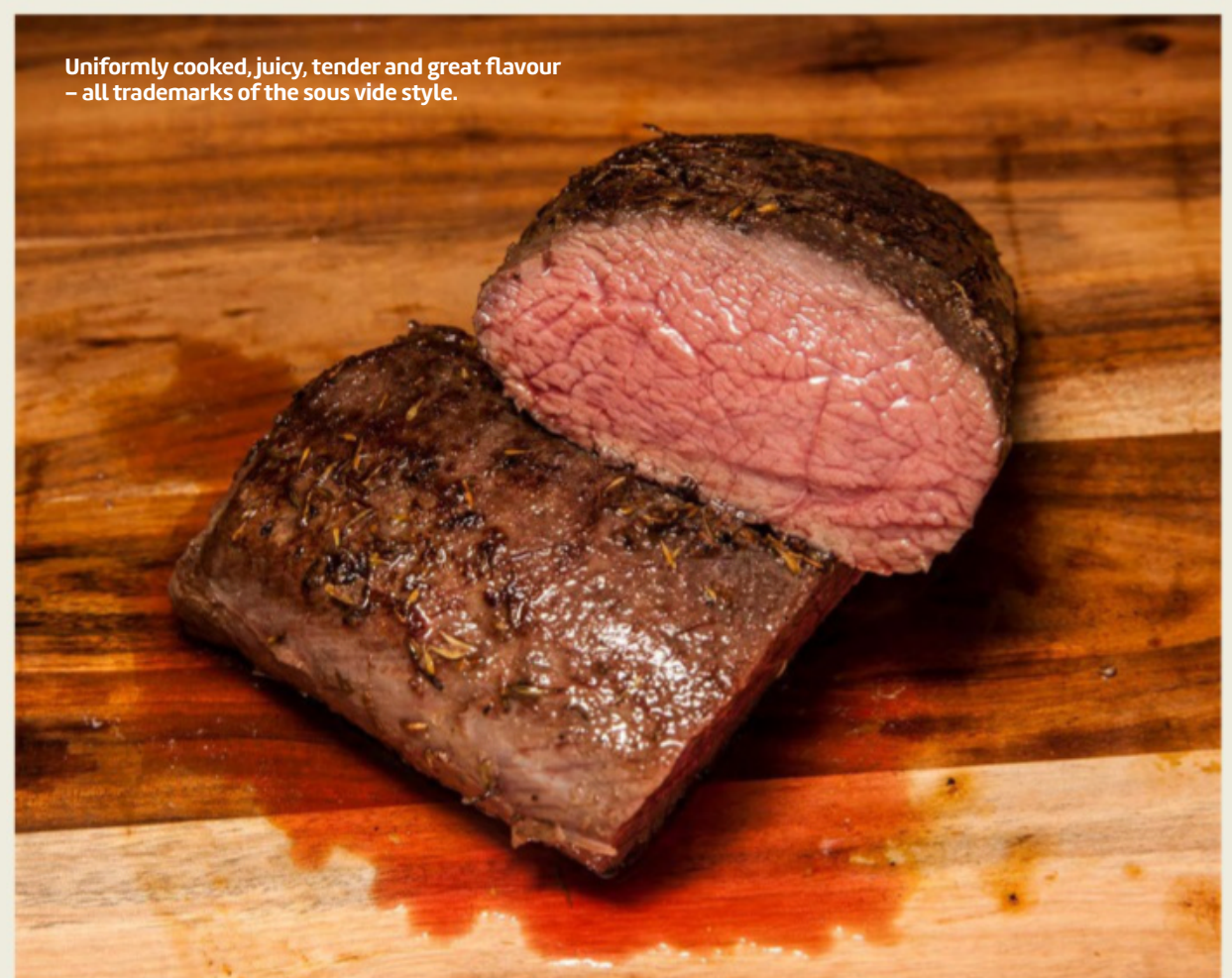
With the pan and oil smoking, add the venison and sear top, bottom and sides for about 30 seconds on each. The aim is to create an attractive dark brown finish about a millimetre or two thick to bring out the Maillard reaction, without further cooking the meat.

To say I was pleased about my first attempt with sous vide venison would be an under-statement. It came out perfectly. Beginner's luck, maybe? The result was tender and juicy with a great flavour. The level of doneness was a tad on the rare side of medium rare.

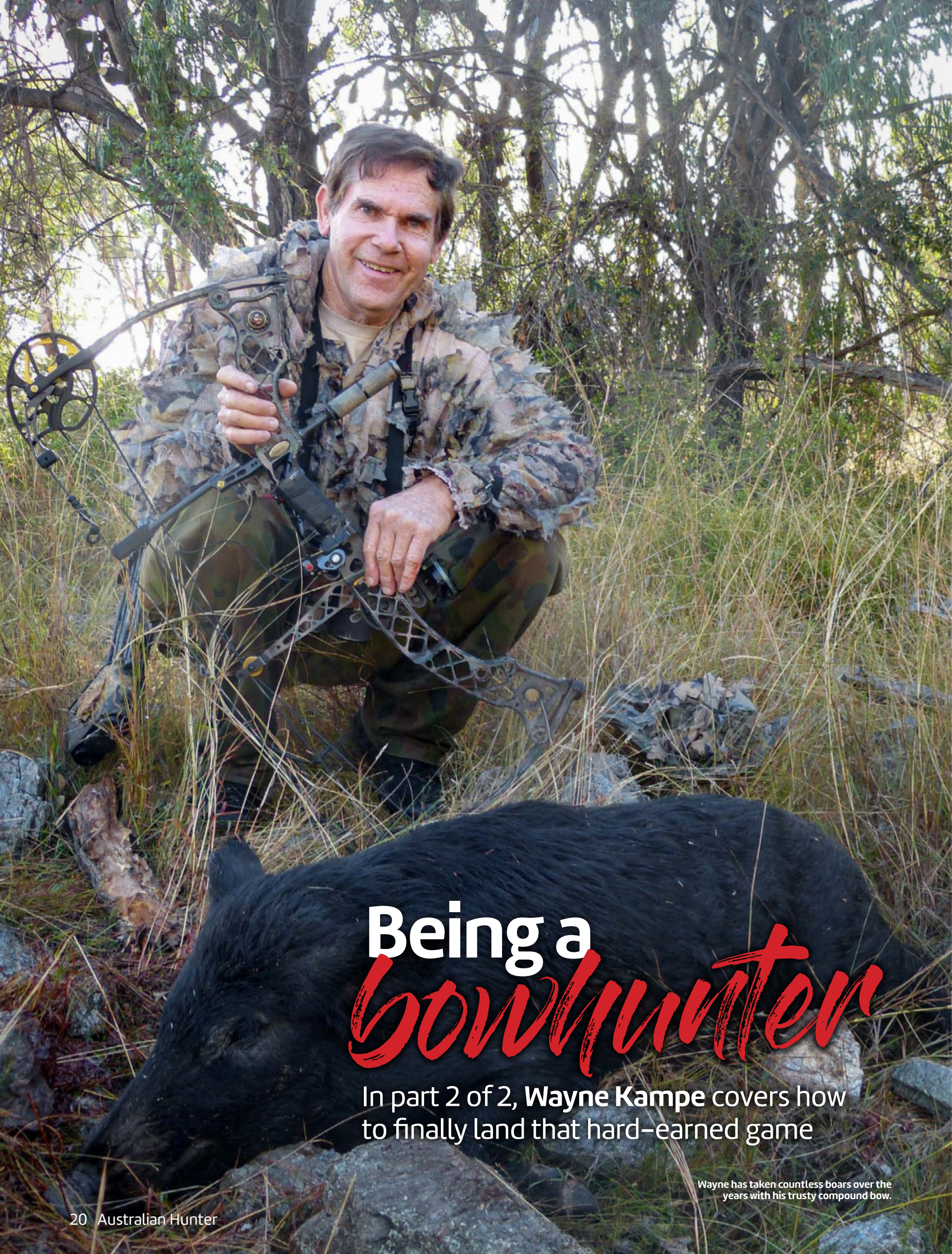
This all might read as a testimonial to the sous vide style of precision cooking, but it certainly opens up new possibilities for game meats. The great thing about this technique is it's 100 per cent repeatable once you establish the temperature and time for your desired degree of doneness. It means no more guesswork and overdone or undercooked meat and with minimal hands-on attention. ■



Extremely hot rapid searing to create the Maillard reaction adds another layer of flavour to the venison.



Uniformly cooked, juicy, tender and great flavour – all trademarks of the sous vide style.



Being a *bowhunter*

In part 2 of 2, **Wayne Kampe** covers how to finally land that hard-earned game

Wayne has taken countless boars over the years with his trusty compound bow.

Starting at the beginning is always good. Hopefully you will have read how to get started in issue 81 of *Australian Hunter* and have a bow, tight target groups, sharpened broadheads to shaving status and now figure it's time to think seriously about hunting.

But before putting on the backpack and gently walking off into the grass, let's look at a few things. As always, a landowner's permission to hunt is mandatory. Next, we can only hunt feral animals. Native animals and birds are taboo but deer, wild goats and pigs are fair game, as are buffaloes and bantengs.

A quick recap on hunting deer

There are currently no seasonal regulations governing deer hunting in New South Wales. An R-licence applies if hunting public land, although a permit is not required on private property. In Victoria, a permit to hunt is required – with no closed season except for hog deer – while all hunting bows must have a 50lb draw weight. Queensland's deer hunters require only a landowner's permission. All bow-hunting is banned in Tasmania. No matter your state or territory, if in doubt, check with authorities first.

The degrees of difficulty

Prior to lining up the sights on a feral animal we need to be within our own



A stag will usually visit fallow scrapes around mid-morning.

comfortable bow range, the distance where an accurate shot can be taken with some certainty. For the experts among us it can be as far off as 50 or more metres. However, most bowhunters will be content with somewhere between 20m and 40m as their norm. The only fly in the ointment is that few animals willingly allow us to approach so closely, which is why learning how to narrow the gap is vital

And it's no good just talking about stalking as this is a serious business. We all understand that animals rely on all three senses to detect danger, so we walk as silently as possible into the breeze wearing camo apparel but there's another

aspect maybe not all are aware of. Virtually every game animal has some degree of awareness of other creatures – plus birds – in their vicinity to assist in survival. If something nearby suddenly hops, trots or squawks – lots of the ferals sense danger.

Interestingly, the situational awareness varies greatly according to the species involved but deer are the absolute masters of this craft. A total lack of domestication makes them far more switched on than pigs and goats – which are generationally removed farm animals turned feral – resulting in alertness levels being consequently higher. This makes taking one with a bow so much more difficult and involved.



Older rubbed trees – the stag has likely left this paddock.



A fallow deer pad – when new to an area, checking out the fences will soon reveal if deer are about.

Being a bowhunter

Thinking laterally, if a bowhunter can bag a deer, other feral animals should come easier, so let's take a closer look at the tactical side of deer stalking and transfer the tactics to other game animals along the way.

Animal traits

To successfully hunt with bow and arrow there must be good cover. How else might we move within arrow range of our quarry? However, with deer, it's a fact that they prefer to be in areas of cover so it's a win/win all-round.

Goats also like cover, but pigs can be different. Often right out in an open area at first light, they will head to cover to bed after sunrise, so if the wind's good the canny hunter will be waiting with the bow ready.

After early morning feeding many animals will bed for a spell. Pigs can go very early, goats sometimes later after having a drink first, but deer like to sit around mid-morning or a little earlier.

Surprisingly, deer often bed looking downwind and while it's a bit disconcerting moving towards an animal that seems to be looking in your direction, the trick is to watch the head. Nodding a bit? Dozing off? The clue is to go in close by moving slowly

and using cover and just wait (and then wait more) until it stands for the shot. It's difficult to successfully drive an arrow into the boiler room of a bedded animal.

Finding game

When hunting deer in particular, one of the hardest aspects is actually understanding they are in a given area, especially if the block is new to the hunter. Goats are noisy, pigs can make an almighty mess of things but while deer are discreet, checking out a fence line will usually indicate their presence. Damp areas will reveal tracks, too. During the rut those rubbed trees, a red stag's wallows and scrapes from feisty fallow bucks are promising signs as well.

Knowing where to look for game animals usually comes with acquired knowledge of the local terrain. Generally, deer in the hills prefer feeding in southern sides of gullies where herbage is sweetest, yet on cold winter mornings they will gravitate towards the sunny side of an area. That's great as we hunters like the warmth too. Goats feed where it suits them, as do pigs, so it comes down to walk and stalk, plus staying alert.

In the timbered hills and valleys, binoculars are vital to check out surroundings

before moving forward. With deer, quite often one won't be seen in entirety – maybe just a glimpse such as a flicking ear or tail, or a bit of colour that was not there an instant previously. Further scrutiny is then vital.

Pigs and noisy goats are easy enough to find because of their colouring but where deer are concerned, what you see is often not the whole picture, especially in heavy cover. A stag – except during the rut – might be by himself but mobs of hinds can spread over a fair area. It certainly pays to have the wind right and be thorough in working out where all animals are before committing to a stalk.

The height advantage

In hilly country, deer seldom look upwards unless a careless foot fall cracks a stick to alert them, so it pays to maintain height advantage according to wind direction.





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Being a bowhunter

Goats can be similarly hunted, too, and when either animals are discovered feeding below, it's time to slide down on the backside through the grass or behind whatever cover is there to move within accurate bow range.

At this stage it's arguably more important to see where the next footstep will finish up to avoid noise rather than watching the quarry. When close it's also worth spending time carefully seeing which animals are lifting their heads and looking around for movement, then going forward only when all heads are down.

Note that if a slow movement is detected, so long as the breeze holds good and there's no noise involved, the alerted animal might lose interest in a few minutes after just

standing and watching, so long as the hunter can keep still. There are no guarantees.

Stealth mode has you close

Plan every stalk carefully. Crackly leaves and the like must be avoided, even if it means extensive detours. It's a given that any other animals, including livestock, must also be avoided at all costs lest they move suddenly and ruin the stalk. Goats and pigs will bolt at seeing frightened roos or wallabies taking off but seldom go too far. On the other hand, alerted deer will simply run until they put a ridge behind them. Birds, particularly butcherbirds, will perch above a hunter in full camo gear and set up strident alarm calls with a vengeance. Patience is needed and the birds

will eventually lose interest so long as the hunter again keeps quite still.

Something I've learned over the years is to always have an arrow on the string when about to top a ridge or move out of a gully or creek bed to survey previously obscured terrain. Keeping the wind good and making every effort to ensure the approach is as smooth and as quiet as possible will often mean that game is suddenly within range and totally unaware of the hunter.

Hunting the rut

The rut is a prime time to hunt deer and if bushcraft has been worked on beforehand, it's by no means impossible to take a stag. Learned tactics such as moving slowly without sound, wearing full camo (with face mask), both having been pre-washed in UV nullifier, and watching to carefully assess a situation can all lead to an opportunity for a shot.

Admittedly, a stag holding hinds can be a tough stalking proposition but if he hears what might be other stags fighting – usually it's over a doe – he's odds-on to come for a quick look to see if he might pinch that doe while the stoush is on. Clashing cast antlers can do the trick to coax one in within arrow range but the hunter must be concealed well and an arrow pre-nocked as both reds and fallow can move astonishingly quick during the rut.

When a stag is roaring well a stalk approach can be successful if the hunter moves forward during each roar. Hinds cannot hear much over that ruckus so it's possible to even move quite quickly if out of sight and the breeze is friendly. Sneaking past those hinds can then be an issue but stags will often move unexpectedly, especially when chasing a reluctant doe or an interloper. That's when a chance can occur.



Scott Kampe took his first red stag with a bow and arrow when he was 15.



Bows and boars are a great combination.

Wait for the shot

When the stalk has been successful, don't let elation push in the way of making a perfect killing shot. Do not make the mistake of trying an 'iffy' shot. That arrow must take out both lungs (and the heart as well if possible) so waiting for the right opportunity, when the quarry is side-on or slightly quartering away, is vital. Goats and deer arrowed just behind the front leg, in the lower half of the body, are never going far.

Immense penetration damage and laceration to the lungs or heart will see a rapid and ethical kill. It's then best to wait a short while to allow the animal to expire in dignity. By all means go to look for the arrow, or the start of the blood trail if necessary. But do so discreetly. Rushing forward might cause a virtually finished animal to make a panicked last-gasp move into impenetrable terrain or the neighbour's land.

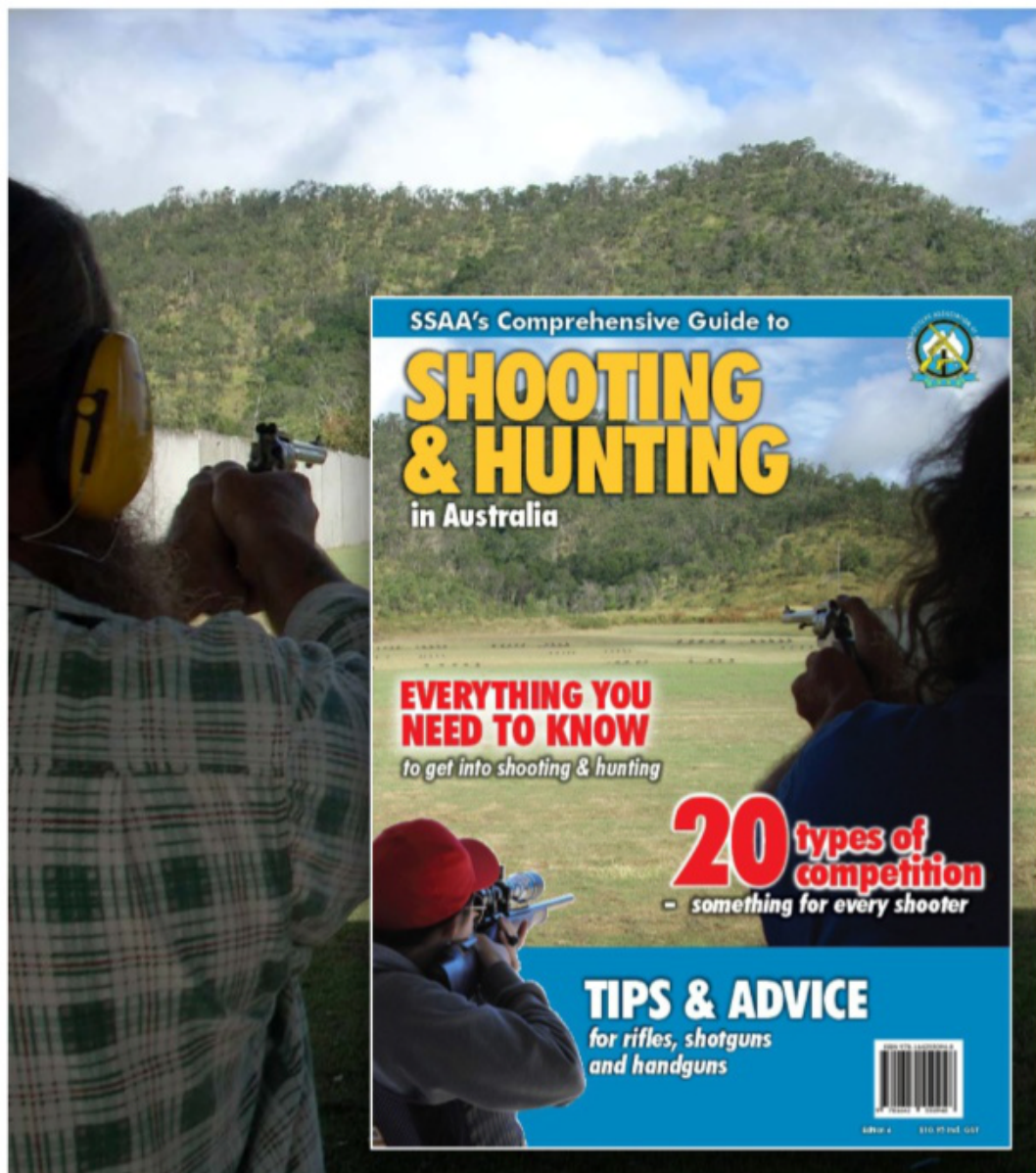
Pigs are somewhat different. They have lungs and heart located behind the front shoulder so the arrow needs to be equipped with a sharp broadhead and delivered side-on through the shoulder for best effect.



Scott Kampe developed his bowhunting skills from a young age.

Arrows penetrating side-on are certain killers. Never chance things and attempt a front-on shot because breast bones can deflect broadheads. It is the same as hitting a tiny twig en route to the animal.

So those are some of the tactics involved in the making of a successful bowhunter. Like all hunting endeavours a bit of luck sure can carry the day but the better you become at stalking and assessing animal behaviour, the luckier you will become. ■



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Landmark for Federal Ammunition

Federal Ammunition recently celebrated their centenary. The company was established in 1922 in Anoka, Minnesota. Since then, the group has grown and innovated to become one of the world's largest manufacturers of sporting ammunition. Federal produces rimfire, centrefire rifle, shotshells and pistol ammunition. In Australia, Federal is distributed by Nioa, who provided a selection for testing.

My interest was in Federal rifle ammunition specifically for hunting but Federal offer a huge choice, over many calibres, for hunters and sport shooters. They have more than 70 calibres, varying from .17 Hornet up to .500 Nitro Express, including a number of European calibres as well.

Apart from their own projectiles, Federal offer premium projectiles for hunting and target shooting. Recognised brands include Barnes, Berger, Buckmaster, Hornady, Nosler, Sierra, Speer, Swift, Trophy and Woodleigh.

Over the years I have tried quite a few Federal factory ammunition options in a variety of calibres. In all those, invariably I was able to achieve MOA performance, or better. Currently, in my bolt-action .243 Win rifle, that I use for hunting wild dogs, I have settled on the Federal Fusion 95-grain loading. The reason I chose the Fusion is that, apart from MOA accuracy, the chemical bonding of core to jacket assures the projectile has high weight retention and good penetration for any boar I might encounter while chasing dogs.

If I was solely chasing pests up to the size of wild dogs, I would unhesitatingly opt for the Federal 80-grain soft-point loading in .243 Win, which I found shoots sub-MOA in my rifle. There is also a 100-grain soft-point offering in .243 Win which would be



Don uses Federal Fusions in .243 Win for hunting wild dogs and boars.

These standard Federal soft-point loadings in .243 Win shot well for Don.



ideal for pigs, goats and deer. These standard factory soft-point loadings offer top-notch accuracy and results at a modest price compared to the more expensive premium projectiles. The packets of these soft-point loadings handily show silhouettes of the game they are suited for.

American Eagle has proved to be a sub-MOA performer for Don in a variety of calibres.



Another Federal loading that performed excellently for me is their American Eagle hollow-point in .308 Win and 6.5 Creedmoor. Like I said, in my testing I have invariably been happy with the various projectile types and calibres. Federal ammo can be found on the shelves of gunshops everywhere. ■



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It's *Tenacious*



Jan Kaptein can't keep his hands off this folding knife from Spyderco

Some say you can never have enough knives. I wholeheartedly agree, albeit with a little voice in the back of my head asking me when I expect to use them all.

This rings particularly true for a number of the specialised meat processing and hunting knives I own and only take out on rare occasions. However, I carry folding knives almost everywhere I go, provided it is legal to do so. Among my favourite folders are Rukie knives, like the Rukie P108, reviewed in issue 76 of *Australian Hunter*. Many of my other knives are considerably more expensive and have fancier steels or names that are better known.

These include my Spyderco knives. Even if you have never heard of the name itself, there is a good chance you will have seen one in your local shop. The way to identify Spyderco folders is the big thumb hole in the blade that is used to open them. Well, that or the eight-legged critter that appears on their products. To me it looks like a tick.

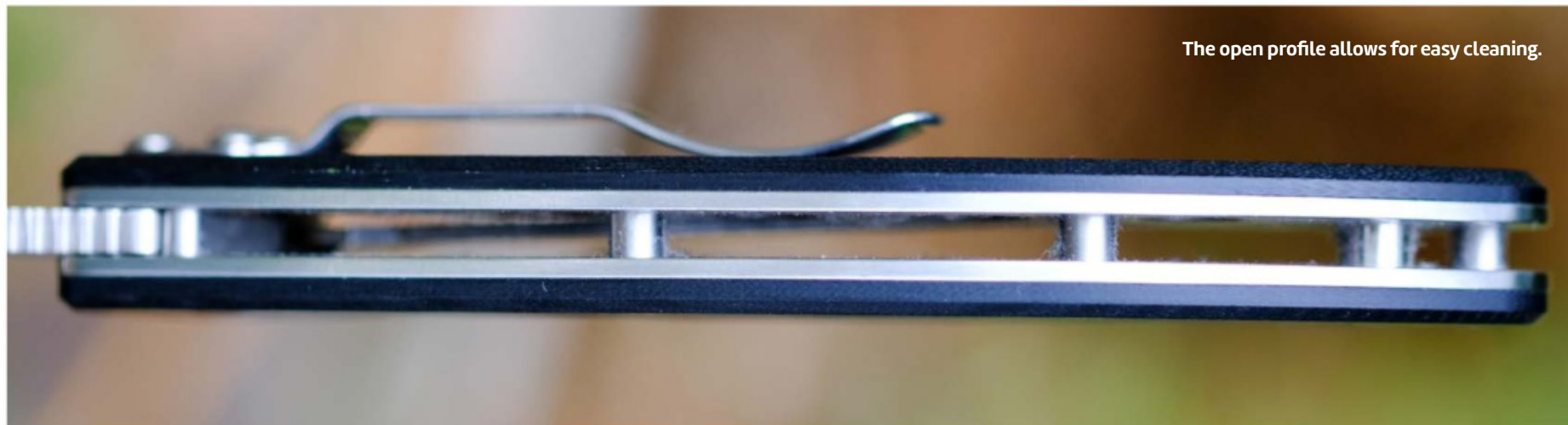
While many of their models are made in the United States and priced accordingly, they have a few entry level models that are outsourced to China and use cheaper blade steels. One of these is the Tenacious. This is a medium-sized folder that to all intents and purposes looks much like its fancier

brethren. If, like myself, you are willing to look past the 'China' that is engraved on one side of the blade, it is a knife that is certainly worth your consideration.

For more than 40 years, Spyderco has operated out of Golden, Colorado. The company was founded in 1976 and introduced its first folding knife in 1981. Since that time, they have focused on manufacturing innovative products. Their catalogue includes a wide array of knives, tools and accessories. Spyderco offers a limited lifetime warranty that 'covers the owner of a genuine Spyderco product for the life of the product.' While the life of a product is somewhat subjective, I have never had an issue

The belt clip and round hole.





The open profile allows for easy cleaning.

with any of my Spyderco knives and expect that you will not have any trouble having things sorted if your knife is defective.

The Spyderco Tenacious comes in a variety of styles. You can obtain the knife in different colours as well as plain, completely or partly serrated versions. My particular knife has a plain edge and black G10 handles. The model reference for the knife in this review is C122GP. I picked it up at a trade show a couple of years back because the fit and finish were pretty much on par with many of their American-made models, but at a significantly lower price.

The biggest difference is the blade steel used. The Tenacious has a blade made of 8Cr13MoV steel. This is a lower end Chinese-made stainless steel, similar to Japanese AUS 8. It has a sheepsfoot (drop point) shape and measures 86mm by 32mm. Width across the spine is 3.1mm and the grind is flat, with a straight edge. Hardness is specified at 59 HRC. The overall length of the knife is 197mm when opened and 113mm closed.

The blade is easy to open using its round hole and when open it is secured in place by a liner lock. There's some jimping on the back of the blade and the belt clip can be used in four positions. The knife comes in at 117 grams, which is about average for this size. Everything is held together with Torx screws and it is not too complicated to disassemble the knife for cleaning or to change the handles.

At first sight, little gives the Tenacious away as one of the budget products in the Spyderco line-up. Upon close inspection, you will notice a few things. First off, there's the engraving. The blade steel is cheaper and the opposite side of the blade sports 'China'. Besides that, the G10 scales

on the handle do not quite align with the metal edge of the frame, but there are no sharp or uncomfortable edges.

Out of the box, my knife was reasonably sharp, so I quickly touched it up on a stone. While 8Cr13MoV may not have the greatest edge retention qualities, it is easy to sharpen, further facilitated by the fact that the Tenacious has a straight edge. There was no play in the blade, the liner lock does a great job at securing the blade and the belt clip came installed for right-handed use with the tip down. Just the way I like it as I am right-handed and carrying the knife tip-down reduces the risk of injury.

I did not expect the Tenacious to find a place in my pack and pocket as often as it does. Somehow, the design stays out of your way and the knife just works. When out hunting, I mainly use it to skin animals and prepare meals. Due to the blade shape, I do not use it a great deal when processing meat as I prefer narrower and often slightly longer blades for that.

The straight grind makes the blade nice to slice and dice potatoes or peel an apple while the round thumb hole, which arguably looks somewhat odd, works really well. I do have to admit that I mostly carry the Tenacious on single day or overnight trips. For longer trips or forays into more remote areas, I prefer fixed blades in general, or at least knives that use blade steels with better edge retention.

Of course, you can easily touch up the Tenacious, but it is a pain when you are skinning a large animal to have to wipe down and sharpen your knife while flies are buzzing all around you and your meat. Besides regular use in the field, I also employ the knife as an everyday carry (EDC). With the compact blade, the



Looking sharp.

It's Tenacious

Tenacious is legal in most countries and it is affordable enough to toss in your checked luggage without worrying about it disappearing.

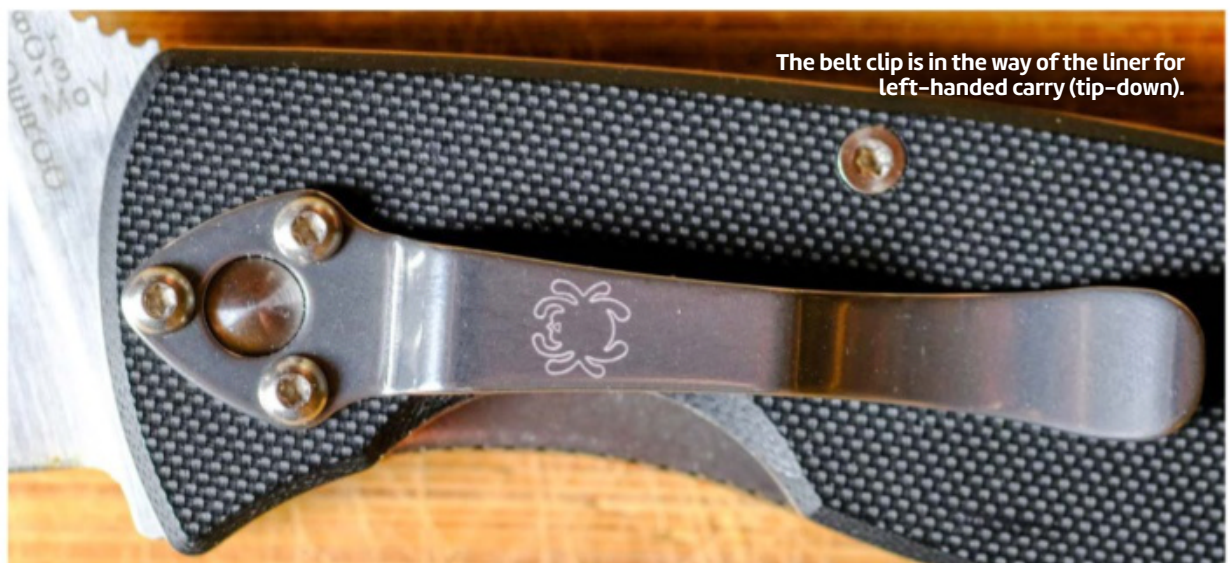
If you are not a leftie and don't ever disassemble the Tenacious, there is a fairly good chance you will never find a difference between it and the more premium Spyderco knives (besides the steel used). However, if you are left-handed or disassemble your knives, there are a few things that you will discover. If you like to carry your knife on a pocket clip with the tip down, you will fault the design of the Tenacious (and some other Spyderco knives for that matter). The clip attaches just fine, but it will impede the full use of the cut-out that lets you put your finger on the liner to disengage the blade lock. There is enough room to unlock the blade, but repeated use may become uncomfortable.

Disassembly is revealing too. Machining on the frame and insides of the handle scales is mediocre at best, it does not seem like any effort has been made to hide this either. There are burrs, blemishes and uneven machining over most of the parts. The phosphor bronze washers are thin (two on either side).

The studs that hold the frame together are of different kinds – some screws seem to have a dab of Loctite, others do not, and so forth. Is this a problem? Realistically, no. However, if you like well-made products with attention to detail like I do, it is a shame. That said, screw everything back together and things look just peachy again.

Now where does all this leave us? As mentioned, I really do like my Spyderco Tenacious and use it a lot more than I had anticipated. Particularly on daytrips and for general camping or everyday carry, it is a compact knife that is easy to keep sharp.

My personal niggles with the machining will go unnoticed as long as you do not disassemble the knife and have so far in no way impeded its use. The pocket clip being in the way of the liner lock for the lefties who like to carry their knife tip-down is not likely to affect many hunters and as said, the lock can still be disengaged. You just don't have full access to it, so no drama.



Does that mean you ought to forego the fancier offerings by Spyderco and just go with the Tenacious? If you intend to throw your knife in your checked luggage or only use it for relatively light chores, I do not really see a reason not to.

If you, like myself, spend longer periods of time away from home or process animals in the field, their more upmarket knives are certainly worth consideration, if only for the better edge retention of the blade steels used. All up, I would not hesitate to recommend the Spyderco Tenacious, it's a useful knife at an accessible price, particularly when on sale.

Visit [spyderco.com](https://www.spyderco.com) or a local supplier like [knifesupplies.com.au](https://www.knifesupplies.com.au) for Spyderco's range of products, pricing and availability. ■

Specifications:

Dimensions closed/open:

113mm/197mm

Type of blade steel: 8Cr13MoV

Hardness: 59 HRC

Style and grind: Plain edge, flat grind

Blade shape: Sheepfoot (drop point)

Blade dimensions: 86mm x 32mm x 3.1mm

Opening system: Thumb hole

Lock: Liner lock

Material handle: G10

Pocket clip: Yes, tip-up and down (left and right)

Weight: 117 grams

Price: Upwards of \$90



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Arapawa rams



This ram was taken because it had an attractive fleece as well as good horns.



Mick Chapman returns from The Land of the Long White Cloud with majestic trophies and everlasting friendships

The global pandemic threw travel plans out of the window for many hunters. But for me, out of the blue, my mate Scottie Dempster phoned. He had been in contact with an outfitter who could arrange a hunt for red deer stags across the ditch in the Land of the Long White Cloud's South Island. Was I interested? I quickly agreed to the venture.

We discussed the details, setting our plans for the middle of the year. We had also been told that there were some good fallow in the area. Topping the whole deal off, if time permitted, we would hunt an Arapawa ram each.

The vagaries of international border restrictions meant that the trip was delayed. We eventually arrived in Queenstown with a day spare for sight-seeing. Then we travelled to Glen Dene Hunting & Fishing. Glen Dene is positioned on approximately a 4km wide and 30km long land mass, separating Lake Hawea and Lake Wanaka. Roughly 1km depth of land is private land, with the rest public land. Providing a picturesque but rugged hunting area, it requires the landowners' consent before accessing public land.

Our hosts at Glen Dene were Richard and Sarah Burdon, who made us feel welcome and appreciated. The head guide, an expat South African, Raynardt van der Merwe, was ably assisted by Will Pinckney, a young local extremely keen on hunting.

Though I love deer hunting, the real intrigue for me would be the chasing of a feral recognised worldwide as a game animal, the Arapawa ram. It is a breed of sheep thought to have been placed on the Arapawa Island 200 years ago as a food source for whalers. Derived from a strain of Merino sheep, it was probably bred in Australia. However, there have been suggestions the species may have been introduced from the Middle East.

Lighter and leaner than domestic sheep with longer legs, a shoulder height for a ram is about 780mm, with weight around 60kg. With the classic Arapawa ram trophy supporting 1-1.5 horn curl, it is not unusual to see two full twists. It is an extremely active breed of sheep adapting to new mountainous surrounds exceptionally well.

Talking with friends who had hunted Arapawa rams, I was warned that they were tough. It is hard to imagine, as they look so

Will sits in the warm morning sun glassing the surrounds for signs of an Arapawa ram.



Driving along, Will spotted a beautiful ram.

Rugged Arapawa rams

much like domestic sheep, but these little blighters have a tenacity that will absolutely dumbfound many hunters.

Scottie and I had soon each taken a quality red stag. But side hilling proved difficult for me while hunting as I had an injured ankle.

Scott was hunting fallow bucks with Raynardt while Will guided me for Arapawa rams. We had driven some 20km from our lodgings before turning off the main road, through locked gates to the boundary of the property near the mountain's foothills.

As we arrived, rays of sunlight were dispersing the darkness. The cold climate ensured trees were basically nonexistent, so a mob of red deer which had a young stag in its midst was spotted. We stalked to some rocks then photographed what could be a future monarch.

Without warning, an inconsequential zephyr tickled the naps of our necks, as the deer were off. Satisfied and entertained for a few minutes, we began glassing the mountains in front of us. In the early morning quiet the bleating of goats drifted down from the snowy tops.

We had become extremely comfortable wallowing in the warming sun. After a quick reality check, we stood up and began retreating to our vehicle, disturbing a mob of red deer that had also been savouring the comforting sun. Startled by our presence they quickly disappeared across the ridge line.



Scottie shows off his trophy

We proceeded to an area Will had previously seen rams, but after glassing for some time there were none. Without warning the head of a ram, sunning himself, was seen, bedded slightly over the opposite ridge line. With no cover we bunkered down, playing the waiting game. Continuing to glass, we found sheep dotted over the hill in front of us.

Time was our ally, with binoculars raised scanning for trophy quality animals but also admiring the spectacular views, looking down to the turquoise blue lake. An hour had slipped by, as the sheep began to rise and feed. Our chosen ram, which was a dark brown mature animal with

heavy horns, stood up. While lining him up, another previously unseen brown and white-faced ram appeared.

I asked Will his thoughts on the ram, now presenting a shot. We both came to the same conclusion – it was a fine animal but the first one would score better. Not



Glen Dene is a spectacular place to hunt.

interested in scoring, I made my decision. The white-faced ram would be the one. Obliging, the ram accommodated me by standing broadside. Ranging the distance at 300m, I adjusted the scope for a point of impact.

With reticule resting on the point of the shoulder and gently squeezing my shot off, the ram jumped and disappeared from sight down the ridge line. Quickly gathering our gear, we headed for where we last saw the ram.

Nearing a 70m cliff and unable to see the ram, I began speculating he may have tumbled over the edge. Finally topping the last mound before the drop, we spotted the brown wool of my ram, less than half a metre from the precipice.

After dragging him away it became obvious the ram was not young and sorely in need of a clipping. The years of roaming the mountains with an extremely heavy coat were now over.

Eager to establish where my bullet hit, we were unable to uncover the entry hole due to the amount of wool. Once back at camp Will applied his knife skills removing the cape. With cape removed we could see my shot had been true, taking out a lung and a large chunk of heart.

Not long after my return from the ram hunt, Scott walked into our lodgings smiling. He had taken a magnificent fallow buck. We were soon in the salt room looking at his glorious fallow. It was then I decided space could be made in my trophy room for another fallow. With some expert guidance, my fallow hunt also ended successfully.

A couple of days later Scott hunted for an Arapawa ram, searching high and low. My ankle was impairing my progress, so I sat on the side of the mountain and watched the hunters. The group disappeared then reappeared a half hour later. With camera in hand, I photographed the

hunting party and beautiful lake below. Abruptly Will broke from the hunters, heading directly toward me. As he approached, he explained we were moving to a designated meeting point. While driving down the bush track, a good ram appeared. Unable to make radio contact, we waited until we had a visual contact with the hunters.

We made fools of ourselves by hand-signalling the ram's presence, but they could see it. Our hunters' return hand signals left us in no doubt they wanted us to move away. Driving to our rendezvous area we watched the hunt unfold. One well-placed shot by Scott anchored another trophy.

Our hunt had been successful and highly enjoyable. We came home having developed some new Kiwi friendships. There is no doubt, should the opportunity arise again, I will go back to The Land of the Long White Cloud. ■



On ya bike!



All set for a week of camping, biking and kayaking out West.

What has two legs, two arms, two eyes, two rifles and two wheels? **Don Caswell** does...

Sometimes my projects take a while to see the light of day. This one had been in the back of my mind for about 30 years, so it was about time that I did something. Like all good projects, I did not rush into it but decided to start with a proof-of-concept.

That meant spending a modest amount of money and time to test how well the vision met the basic goals. If that worked out, then I would spend more time and money on achieving the full project dream.

The trigger for finally starting was the intention to spend more time hunting wild

dogs on large, mostly flat Western properties. The past decade I have been hunting the steep ridges and gullies of tropical North Queensland. That area was hunted either on foot or from an ATV. These vehicles are great for moving about, looking for game. However, the noise of the motor alarms any wary game within a kilometre. I can see the electrically-powered ATVs gaining enormous popularity now the vehicle weight and price are reducing, along with lithium-ion technology developments (check out the Polaris Ranger EV review in issue 76).

For hunting in the West, what I wanted was a relatively low-priced, lightweight vehicle capable of travelling between one- and three-times walking speed. I also wanted an unhindered 360-degree view as I travelled silently along grazing property tracks, looking for undisturbed game and pests. One solution was the new e-bikes.

These are robust mountain-style bicycles with light but powerful lithium-ion batteries to provide mechanical assistance to the pedalling effort. The e-bikes enable much greater distances to be ridden compared to conventional bicycles, along



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On ya bike!

with easier travel uphill and through soft country. Given the price of e-bikes, and the need for two of them (for my wife as well), I was anxious not to hurry in and commit a substantial amount on what was an unproven idea.

A starting point was to go on Gumtree and source a reasonable second-hand mountain bike. That was accomplished in no time, and I soon had a gent's mountain bike complete with the bonus of necessary luggage rack and pannier carriers front and back. The bike was in good nick, having been recently serviced and fitted with new tyres.

The owner pointed out that the higher gears were a little worn from use. That did not worry me at all. I expected to spend most of my time in the lower gears anyway. The bike cost me \$150, which I thought was a good price. In hindsight, I made one mistake and should have gone for a lady's bike instead of a gent's, for reasons that will soon become obvious.

I intended travelling light, much as I do when walking, so the challenge was how to accomplish that on a bicycle. First and foremost was working out how to carry my rifle on the bike. I planned to be wearing my hunting backpack and that would not allow cross-slinging the rifle across my back.

Now that I had the bike, I could see that my imagined solution to carrying the rifle was not going to work. I would have to rig a scabbard to the rear wheel pannier frame. Additionally, the scabbard would need to suit either of my two rifles. That required a snug fit for my bolt-action Sauer XT 101 with its large Swarovski scope. My single-shot Merkel K3, a smaller rifle with a Leupold scope, has a much more compact shape.

Ideally, a quick-detachable leather scabbard for each rifle made sense. However, I was reluctant to spend a couple of hundred dollars on something that might not prove useful. I dug out some remnant pieces of plywood, rubber padding and paint and soon had a temporary rifle scabbard ready to fit.

It would have to be mounted in a near-vertical configuration on the rear frame. But, before doing that, I needed to consider two other bits of kit that also needed to be carried in that area. The next vital piece of



gear was my Primos Trigger Stick shooting tripod. It would have to be set up in a way that allowed it to be slid out of its carrier for instant use.

Additionally, I wanted to be able to use it off the bike as well, without removing it from its carrier. That required it to be in a

near upright position as well. Before proceeding to fitting the rifle and tripod, I had to consider my third essential item – my Nikon D500 camera and its telephoto lens. I wanted a padded box to transport the camera and that would have to fit between the rifle and the tripod.



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On ya bike!

Using a few cable-ties, I temporarily rigged up my rifle scabbard and a length of PVC pipe that held the Primos Trigger Stick snugly. It suddenly became apparent that the necessity to mount the rifle and tripod vertically behind me would prevent me swinging my leg over the bicycle. In hindsight, I realised that a lady's step-through frame would have been ideal for my purpose. Anyway, that was a minor annoyance and not a showstopper.

In my yard at home, the bike and its cargo seemed to function nicely, as I intended, albeit mounting and dismounting the bike was a bit awkward. I had not ridden a bike in 50 years, so the first 100m was a bit wobbly, but I never fell off and soon it all came back to me. The seat was a lot harder than I remembered as a kid and pedalling about the yard used muscles that I had forgotten I owned. Over the space of a couple of weeks, I did more and more laps of the yard and soon I felt ready for putting the hunting bike to the test.

Next, a field trial was required. We were due to go camping and needed to replenish our venison supply, so there was a

golden opportunity. I bought a bike carrier from Repco and also an accessory plate from Main Roads to hang on that, given the bike rack would mask the vehicle number plate. Our campsite, an old favourite on private property, was river-flats country, ideal for biking. Plus, there were chital deer, a few feral pigs and occasional wild dogs. The owners were happy for us to camp close to the river and hunt some of their feral animals. We chucked the kayaks up on the roof rack as well. Between times we would indulge in some paddling on the river, photographing and fishing.

The opening morning, we put the bikes to the test at first light. That involved a leisurely ride along the farm track, keeping an eye open for deer and any other game and checking the dust for fresh tracks. It was easy to peddle along at two to three times the speed of walking. We looked about as we rode, but also stopped every couple of hundred metres to glass the country around us.

There were numerous close encounters with birds and game. I can only say that riding about on a mountain bike proved to

be an outstanding success. The travelling was physically easy, and the only noise was the slight crunching sound made by the tyres on the dirt track. Best of all, it did prove highly effective at finding undisturbed game.

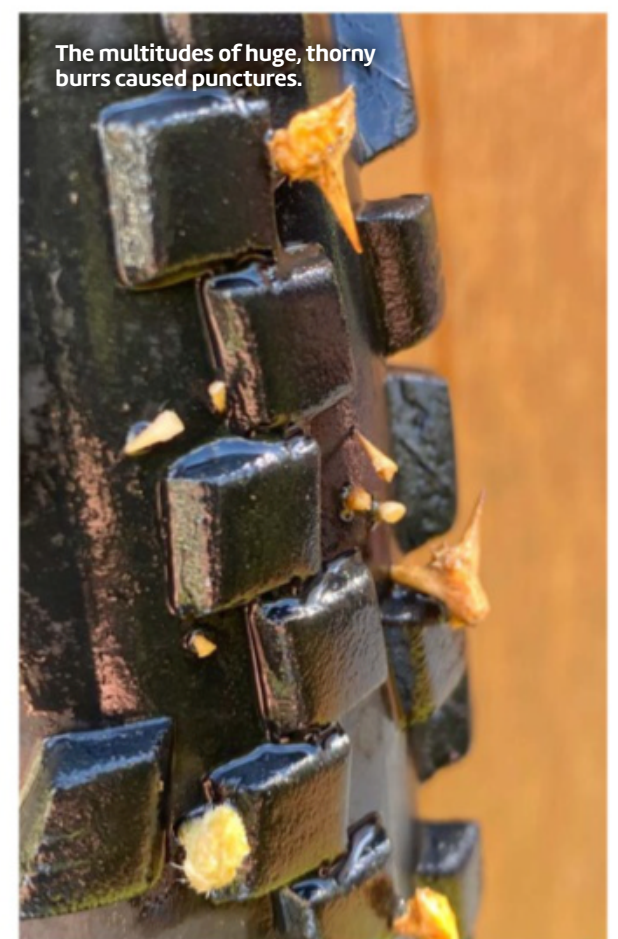
However, a major problem arose in the form of the prolific burrs of Western Queensland. In no time my supply of patches, and my patience, had been exhausted. I had expected and prepared for a few punctures, but nothing like the volume I encountered. On returning home, I investigated options for puncture-proof tyres. Solid rubber tyres can be had for bikes. However, my local bike shop recommended a protective sleeve that fits between the tube and the tyre. The cost of that would be about \$100 for the pair of wheels on a standard bike.

In the short time we were puncture-free, we proved the worth of bikes in quietly covering dirt tracks at a good speed and approaching game undetected. There are some more tests ahead, chasing wild dogs, but from what I have experienced, I am confident I am on the right track.

Time will tell, but a clear next step will be e-bikes, with suitably puncture-proofed tyres. Also, I will commission a couple of QD leather scabbards for each rifle. That is something to think about going forward. ■



Biking along the property tracks was easy and rewarding with game sightings.



The multitudes of huge, thorny burrs caused punctures.

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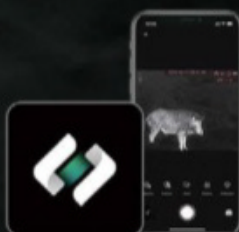
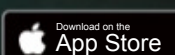
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Frame Rate	50 Hz
Aperture	F1.2
Display	1024 × 768, 0.39 inch, OLED
Image Mode	Day, Night
Capture Snapshot	Yes
Audio Recording	Yes
Storage	Built-in EMMC (64 GB)
PIP	Yes
Reticle	Yes
Freeze Zeroing	Yes
Wi-Fi Hotspot	Yes, HIKMICRO Sight APP
Battery Operating Time	13 hours continuous running (@25°C, Wi-Fi off)

HIKMICRO SIGHT



Everyone loves a campfire but they are not always the best option when cooking out bush...

Light it up

Get your tasty game meat cooking in no time with these campsite stove and barbecue pointers from **Dick Eussen**

Who does not love the smell of their hard-earned game meat cooking on a barbecue plate placed on top of a campfire? But the realities are that most likely

we opt for the easy way out and cook a quick meal on a camp stove. There is also the factor that in many parts of Australia having a campfire is banned due to the risk of starting a bushfire.

Visit a good camping store and you will find a fine array of cooking stoves that fit the bill and the needs. Here is some handy advice what may suit your desires.

Butane gas

Arguably the most popular camping stove these days is the single-burner butane gas stove. They cost about \$20 and last forever. They have a low, controlled heat output of 7500 BTU/h, have Piezo ignition, are affordable and simple to use. No wind shield is supplied but you can use the container box as one. However, make sure that it is far enough from the heat, or it may melt.

They were withdrawn from the market not that long ago after reports that they blew up under certain circumstances. And they did, as I have seen a mate's stove do that but luckily the gas can was almost empty and it did little damage.

It happened because my mate was using a big, wide pot. The flame was spreading up under it and heating the whole stove



A five-star dinner in a Gulf country fishing camp – barramundi, chips and salad.



A cooked meal in even a small boat is simple with a butane stove.

bottom and reflecting heat to the can underneath it. At least that was our findings. The official version was found to be a faulty safety-release mechanism designed to eject the can when it overheats. Because it is directly fitted next to the burner, overheating can happen, especially when using an oversized pan or pot that directs the heat back down onto the canister.

After cooking, avoid any problems with it and wait for the stove to cool down before packing it away. Always remove the canister during transport as there is a danger it may ignite due to static electricity and metal sparks.

Now the butane stove is back, having been redesigned and made safer by extra heat protection of the canister and a redesigned safety device. I have a new one and an old model – it cooks faster. The trick behind these is to use pans that only cover the burning plate, which allows direct contact of the flame. Wider pans spread the flame and may heat the can up, a reason to play it safe.



A great way to start the day.

Recently I purchased a twin-burner Dune 4WD butane stove. It cost just under \$100 and saves carrying two single-burners. Butane gas canisters are cheap, with special packs of five selling for \$10. Generally, a canister will last two to three days when cooking for two people. That is good value.

The butane stove is an asset when on the road and you want to pull up and have a cuppa under a shady place. It only takes a few minutes to boil the billy, much quicker and safer than making a fire. You have a choice of Gasmate, Campmaster, Furno, MSR, Dune, Spinifex and Oztrail butane stoves.

LPG stoves

These stoves have a high heat output of 25,000 BTU/h. The problem is having to carry a gas bottle in a place where it is safe. It needs to be secured or it may roll about and explode. It does happen at times. Gas is volatile and transporting it is not without danger.

The gas bottle is filled with liquified petroleum gas (LPG), a combination of butane and propane. It's a great fuel that is relatively cheap and is available at fuel stations, hardware, camping stores and gas depots, either as an exchangeable bottle or a refill. Bottles range from 1kg to 25kg for camping use. They have a lifespan of 10 years and are inspected before a refill or exchange is given. If it's out of date or is damaged, you must buy another one.

Bottles are useful because from it you can run camp lights, or a portable three-way fridge/freezer. A problem is that if you run out you need another bottle. The reason that two small bottles are better than one large one is because you will always have a spare.

The LPG gas stove is available in many models from one to four-burner types, including stainless steel construction. Two-burner stoves are the most popular. Connection to the bottle is by a length of hose. If you did not spend extra money on a stand, you will need a table to cook on. Cooking on the ground is a hassle. The two-burner stove has been around for a



Preparing dinner on a purpose-camp kitchen. Set-ups like this are easily made when based on LPG gas.



The Drifta Camp Kitchen is a great cooking platform when matched with a two-burner LPG stove.



This much-loved Companion stove has given years of service on hunting trips.

long time and has seen little change. It's contained in a handy metal or plastic case and when set up the lid acts as windshield. Modern LPG stoves have Piezo ignition.

No matter how many burners you have, the LPG stove is an amazing camp stove that cooks perfect meals the same as at home. Cost varies from \$45 to \$120 for basic models. Larger models cost more and are better suited for large camps. But for most camps that have up to four people the two-burner is enough. Some require a separate regulator, though most models have one built in. Coleman, Jackaroo, Companion and Zempire are popular with a selection of gas stoves,

frypans and single burners that fit directly onto a gas bottle available.

Not to be ignored when it comes to value for money and robust construction are the framed one to four burner stands and so-called wok burners. All you need is an LPG gas bottle and a hose fitted with a regulator. I have a one and a three-burner unit that see much use when I am cooking mud crabs and for large fishing camps.

Gas cookers

Others

There is a good array of small personal canister camp stoves available from most makers with a choice of disposable canisters and other fuel sources. Butane, propane, isobutane, a mixture of these fuels, when matched with a suitable stove, will cook a meal for one person at a time. Some models have a burner that connects to the canister with a hose, others screw or punch into the bottle.

Liquid fuel stoves

I don't hike and camp out in the bush these days, preferring the comforts of a well set-up camp instead. Somewhere among my no-longer-in-use gear is an aluminum Trangia camp stove, a lightweight simple liquid fuel stove and pan kit that cooks a great meat with a little practice. I used it a lot of decades ago when canoeing rivers and hiking into backcountry in search of remote fishing.

All liquid stoves burn white gas, a pure form of petroleum, but they can also be operated with kerosene, diesel, unleaded petrol (ULP), methylated spirits and other petroleum liquids. This means you can obtain fuel anywhere for it.

For cold conditions a canister stove may not operate, so you need a liquid fuel stove. Many hikers and campers prefer them to gas stoves and again there are some good models available. It includes large camp models and hiking models. They are simple in operation and provide good heat.

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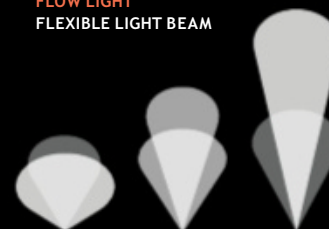
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Light it up

Natural fuel stoves

These use just about anything that can be burned in them, whether timber twigs, alcohol or solid fuel tablets. They are great for hiking because you don't have to carry fuel and just use what is available on the spot.

But that may be a problem in snow country or when it is raining, and everything is damp. But this can be overcome by using solid fuel tablets, which are made from hexamine. They are light and efficient as a fuel source.

There are no moving parts in natural fuel stoves and while they don't burn as

hot as other prescribed stoves, they are well worth considering if you camp out while foot hunting. Because they have no inbuilt wind buffers, you need to cook in a protected place. Check out the SSAA Bush Kettle on the Online Shop at ssaa.org.au if you need a quick cup of tea or coffee when on the road.

Barbecues

Barbecue and griddle plates are available as accessories for both butane and LPG stoves. Most are lightweight aluminum, which is a good heat conductor. Some say that

aluminum causes health problems and has a taste. Others prefer iron plates. Unless you are cooking high acid food, like tomatoes, you will never tell the difference.

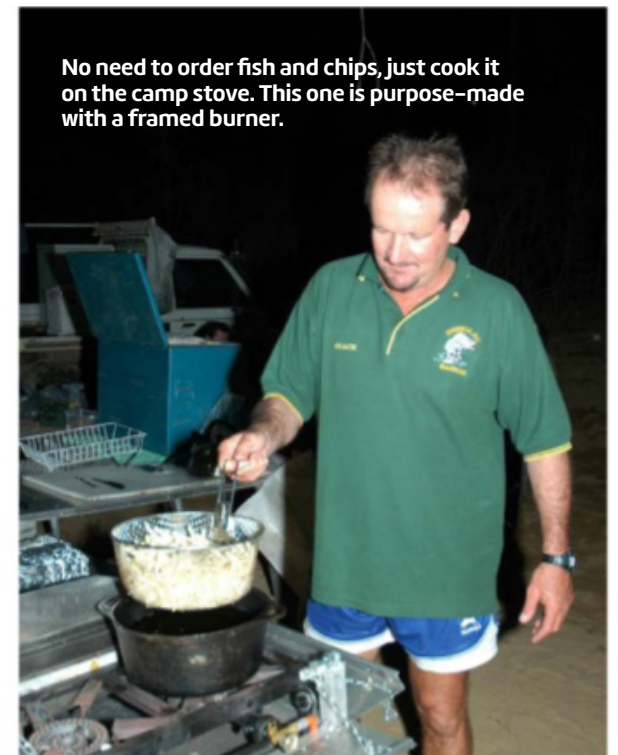
My wife presented me with a Weber Baby Q sometime back for my birthday. It is LPG operated and ideal for a camp kitchen. With it I can cook delicious meals, barbecue fish, meats and vegetables, fry eggs, roast meats and cook anything I eat at home. It's a marvellous barbecue/stove that makes camp life simple and is more versatile and quicker in use than a camp oven, apart from boiling.

While a little bulky, it packs away in a purpose bag and is quickly set up on a table or an accessory stand. When coupled to a butane burner stove, it is all I need to make life easy in the bush.

One thing to remember is don't worry if you can't cook – when you light a barbecue you will find that your mates, none who ever cook at home, are all experts and will take over the chef's duties. ■



Cooking in a cattle station's hut on the amazing Weber Baby Q.



No need to order fish and chips, just cook it on the camp stove. This one is purpose-made with a framed burner.



Iron frypans produce a great steak when used over a camp stove.



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An indistinct endeavour

There are ups and downs for **Perry Magowan** as he confirms there's no real guarantees with a red deer roar

Well, it had been a reasonably good period, with plenty of tall green grass, but not a lot of water in dams or through gully systems. That being the case, I thought I would put my trail camera out on my favourite cattle dam to see if there were many deer about.

The property owner gave me permission to go on and put the camera on the remote dam in the back paddock and to take a meat animal if I wished. That would be a bonus for me.

What a difference to the rough boundary track in 12 months. In some places the wheel tracks were so deep from being washed out with rainwater that my car was bottoming out. In other spots I had to straddle the track just to get back to the further parts of the property.

Parking the car some 380m away from the dam, I set the camera up on the same grass tree I have been using for about a decade

The dam was almost dry, yet a few years back it had been overflowing with water. The worst drought in Brisbane Valley's history since records have been kept had just been broken.

After talking to several property owners in Brisbane Valley about this, they all were saying the same thing. That they had never seen so many feral deer die in a drought like this one before. Hundreds



of them did not survive. Others said that when they had checked any dam that still held some water, they often found several deer bogged in the dam edges alongside bogged cattle. All the owners could do was shoot them and drag their dead bodies out of the dams with a tractor or 4WD.

With the trail camera set up, I went for a short walk around the area to see if I could find a deer to shoot for meat. But not a thing was seen.

Driving slowly back downhill on the rough boundary track, movement to the right caught my eye. What a surprise, as there were three deer. I had never seen deer in this particular spot. Three young red stags were moving through the lantana on the contour of the opposite gully side to me, some 275 yards away.

They all stopped to look at the car, standing side-on to me, strung out about 20m apart between them. Without thinking I grabbed the rifle and jumped out of the car and loaded it. Resting the rifle on top of a cattle fence post, I took a steady lean and found the stag with the largest set of antlers. I thought to myself, I can make this shot.

The 7mm-08 roared and the young stag bucked into the air and was swallowed up into the gully out of sight. So now I had better go find him. But I suddenly realised my predicament and made myself a promise never to take a meat animal in such a bad spot ever again.

After walking the 350 yards downhill and finding him in the bottom of the gully, I realised that I was not going to be able to carry all the meat I wanted back uphill. It was just too hot and humid and I am just too fat, too old and out of condition to handle such a hard job. So, I carried what I could. Recovering back at the car for some time, I packed up and slowly headed off for home via Nanango. At least that animal proved a tasty bit of deer to nibble on.

Nine weeks went by before I could go back to the property to retrieve my trail camera. It was late April by then and the roar was just about done. Arriving early Monday morning up at the west branch of the Brisbane River, I was not able to see more than 50m distance in the thick fog. But I still heard two different stags roaring,



This five-week-old tree rub was a disappointing sign.

too far away to go after. I was there for five days, so I would catch up with them later, I thought to myself. What a big mistake that turned out to be. The roar was done in that place, as it turned out. That afternoon confirmed it all.

I drove up that bad track once more to retrieve my trail camera and to have an afternoon hunt at the back end of the property. The track seemed worse than the first time, as I steered slowly. I found out why when I reached the dam later. I was expecting the dam to be just a wallow hole for stags by now or even bone dry. To my surprise it had twice as much water in it than when I had first set the camera up. I was told later that there had been two good storms in that area a fortnight prior. No wonder the track was in worse condition.



This rub was an astonishing seven feet high up the tree.

An indistinct endeavour

After retrieving my trail camera off the cattle dam, I was disappointed to find only 55 photos on it. The signs I found told me that the roar was all over. The freshest rub tree I had found was at least five weeks old. No matter which direction I walked, I could not smell fresh deer scent or even the smell of death.

As there are other hunters that use this property as well, I did not see a deer of any

sort. But more disturbingly than that I did not see a whiptail wallaby, grey kangaroo, cattle or any other animals.

Thinking to myself I should just pack up and go home, I unexpectedly met other hunters. They were two really great blokes who invited me to stay with them and share their camp overnight.

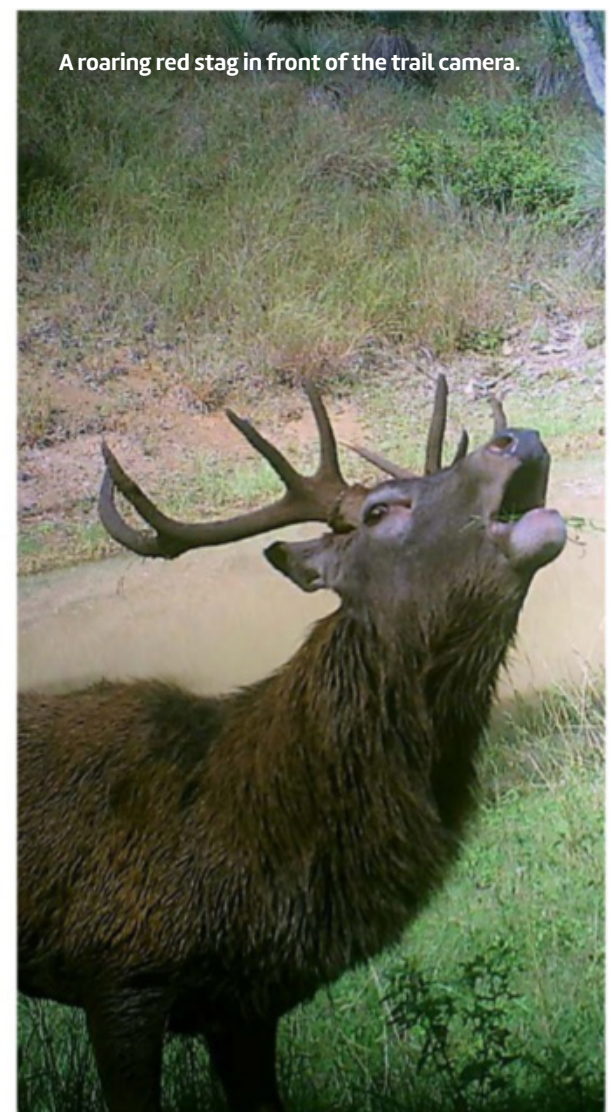
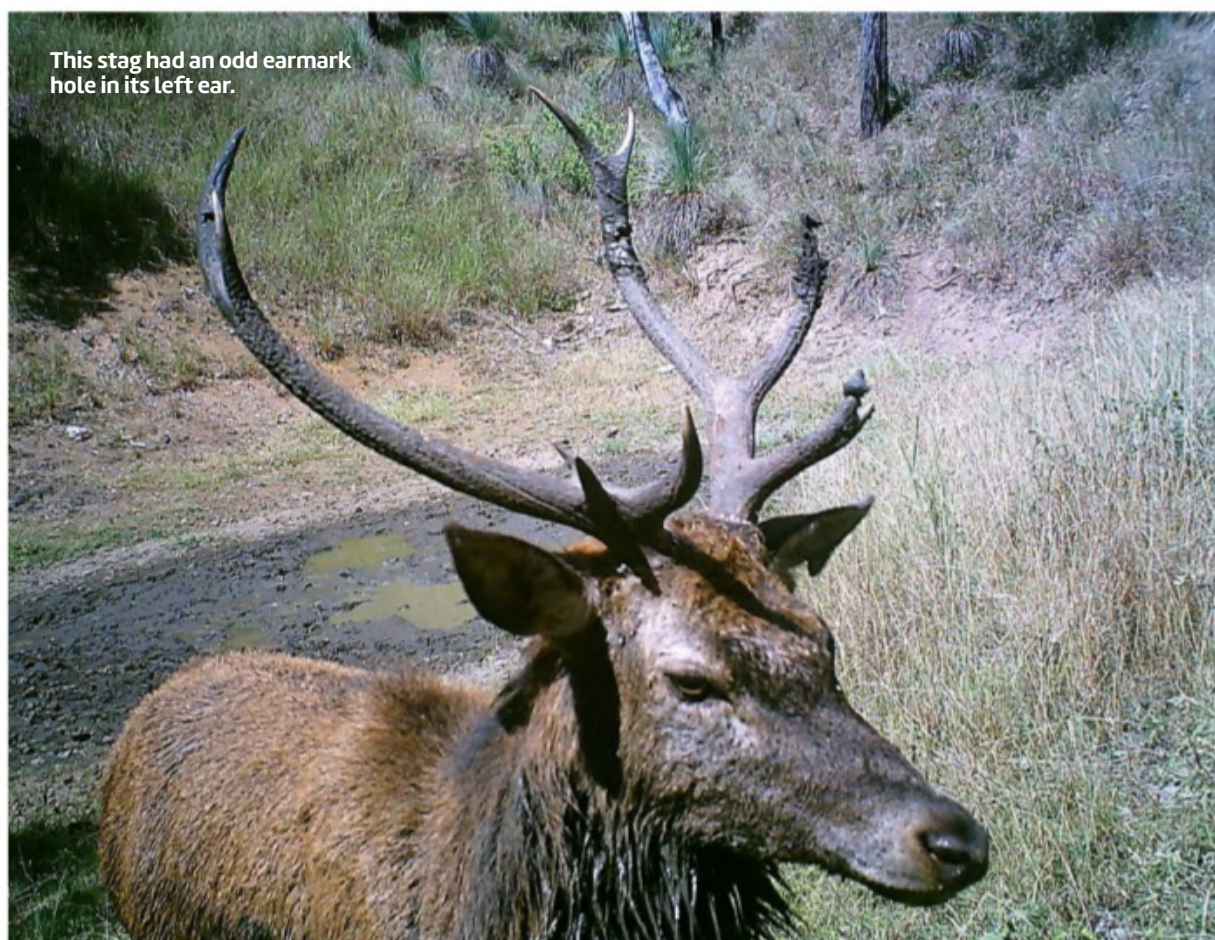
What a great night it turned out to be. We talked about everything and I enjoyed

myself along with a really good feed. It made me feel a little sad though, as I have hunted on my own for so long now. I had forgotten what it was like to have company at night in camp to share experiences with. It was strange but pleasing at the same time. Thanks to both of you, Jimmy and Steve, for your campfire hospitality and friendship.

We went our separate ways the next morning for our respective hunts in hope of seeing something worthwhile to take home for the pot. However, we had all concluded that there was not much around in the way of deer for us to shoot.

I picked a spot and drove there, parked the car and walked a bush track looking into gully heads in the hope of seeing a deer. I did eventually spot a doe and her fawn. But alas, it was on the wrong side of the cattle fence for me. I returned to my camp, packed up my gear and headed off downstream towards Linville.

Stopping for a can of drink, I met an old school mate I had not seen in years. He has been a deer hunter for a long time. We reminisced about the days when deer were more bountiful and it was great to catch up, marking a fitting end to this adventure. ■



All clear!

Don Caswell and Leupold Alumina flip-back scope covers hit the mark

A misting of rain droplets, or a haze of fine dust, can ruin your hunting opportunity by blurring your optics at the critical moment. An obvious solution is to fit flip-back scope covers to the objective and eyepiece ends of your riflescope.

I was a late adopter of flip-back scope covers but eventually saw the necessity of fitting them to my rifles. In the space of a few weeks, I lost several hard-won openings on the wild dogs I was hunting. The first occasion was when three dogs approached my position with the setting sun behind them.

The rifle was fitted with first-class optics that could have enabled a shot had the lens been clean. However, an accumulation of fine dust on the lens caught the sunlight and just flared-out the image. By the time I had affected some hasty lens cleaning my moment was gone.

On a subsequent hunt at dawn, a misty drizzle had set in. I howled in a big wild dog to less than 100m and was already congratulating myself as I raised the rifle for what should have been an easy shot. However, the droplets had blurred my optics and I lost another chance.

I may be a slow learner, but I remember on packing up that morning I was determined that the first thing to do when I returned home was to order some flip-back scope covers. Since then, I have bought a variety of these for different scopes. These were all the moulded plastic variety and ranged from a cheap no-brand Chinese version to better quality recognised brands.

It quickly became obvious that the cheap ones were a waste of money, and it was better to stick to the established options.



Ready for action in the field with the flip-back covers sitting flush on the scope.

One drawback of the plastic flip-back scope covers is that they just push on over the scope tube and slightly change the profile of the scope. For a knockabout bush rifle that should be of no consequence. However, on a more elegant rifle, that can be an issue for those folks who want to maintain the visual appeal.

Another minor issue is that if the eyepiece of the scope needs its focus adjusted, then the flip-back cover likewise moves. With a large focus adjustment, that can see the rear flip-up cover upside down and in a position where it no longer functions correctly. Of course, the cover can be pulled off and realigned back onto the eyepiece, but that can be an awkward distraction if you are trying to put a shot away.

Luckily, for Leupold scope owners, there is a 'Rolls-Royce' option for flip-back covers. This is Leupold's Alumina model flip-back lens covers. As the name implies, they are machined from aero-grade 6061-T6 aluminium. These flip-back covers are designed to fit post-2004 model Leupold scopes.

They are as low-profile as they can be, being designed to screw into the threaded ends of the scope tube rather than push over the exterior. Apart from a secure fit, with triple O-rings that keep out water and dust, the functionality is excellent as well. Once positioned on the scope, the cover rotates independently of the scope, meaning that it can be easily aligned to account for any focusing moves of the eyepiece.



Leupold Alumina flip-back scope covers are the answer for Don.

The flip-back cover is held in place by neodymium magnetic closures. These also mean that there is silent closure. Pressing the flip-back button releases the cover instantly and easily. The covers flip open like a conventional cover but can then be pushed right back against the scope tube, maintaining the lowest possible profile. The flip-back cover is rubber-damped for silent operation.

While it was these functionality benefits that drew me to the Leupold Alumina flip-back scope covers, there was also a strong aesthetic attraction as well. I had just moved to a Leupold VX-5HD 1-5x24 CDS-ZL2 scope on my Merkel K3 stalking rifle, feeling that it was the ideal combination. Apart from being nicely balanced for hunting, I must say that I loved the lines of that rifle with its Leupold 1-5x24 scope.

On a wet morning, when game appears suddenly at close range, I can silently pop up the Leupold Alumina scope covers and be ready for an unhindered shot with clear optics. Leupold products are distributed in Australia by Nioa and can be purchased through most gunshops. Retail pricing varies with the size of the matching scope, starting from about \$140. ■

Time for a trophy bull



A happy Ben with his first trophy bull.

For Ben Unten, 0800 means more than just a 24-hour time call

For those in the know, 0800 – ‘Oh eight hundred’ – is a 24-hour time call, meaning 8am, but it’s also the postcode for Darwin.

To backtrack, I recently celebrated a birthday and my wife asked me what I’d like to do. “Just a family dinner,” I replied. “And a buff hunt with two close mates.”



The vegetation was taller than the hunters.

The meal was great, which left me with two phone calls to make. Both my long-time hunting mates, ‘Country’ and ‘Dodge’, took little persuasion.

A buffalo hunt has been on my bucket list since I started hunting. Flicking through the pages of my grandad’s hunting magazines as a teenager I almost didn’t believe such a game animal existed in Australia. But three decades later, you could say that maintaining interest in buff hunting eventually paid off, as here I was co-ordinating a buffalo hunt.

Dodge had previously taken a buffalo bull but was hoping for a larger animal and also wanted a scrub bull, whereas Country was keen on the prospect of just bagging a buffalo bull.

Dodge is a hunting guide and as a result has a lot of contacts in the industry. When he recommended Alex from Big Country Safaris, Country and I had no hesitation.

After a bumper wet season, following several years of drought, I was slightly concerned about the timing of an early season hunt. Would the ground be dry enough? Would the vegetation be too high? Or would it be too hot? However, all fears proved largely unfounded – well, except for the heat. It was around 34 degrees during the day, dropping down to the low 20s overnight. But the humidity was bearable.

For this trip we were all taking two of our own firearms. Country had a Tikka .30-06 plus a Remington pump in .308 for pigs. Dodge took his .375 Ruger plus his .416 Rigby Hawkeye – shooting 400gr Hornady DGX pills. I took my Remington .243 pump for any close pig work and I’d recently had my Tikka .30-06 fitted with a muzzle brake. However, I could only pick it up the day before departure so with about 40 minutes until dark I managed a quick 50m zero with some 180gr Remington Core-Lokts and had it printing around 70mm high at 100m.

Now I was worried that Country and I might be under-gunned with the .30-06s. However, with Dodge’s reassurance and with Country brilliantly sourcing enough Remington 220gr Core-Lokts for both of us, we completed all the necessary paperwork allowing us to fly with the ammo and we were all set. In my view, I have always found Qantas to be the best air carrier for firearms. Just make sure to check the conditions.

We arrived in Darwin in the small hours and were picked up the next morning at, you guessed it, 0800 (8am). After a quick round of introductions, we loaded all our gear into Alex’s HiLux and began our six-hour trip to the lodge and hunting grounds.

We were shown to our accommodation, where we unpacked and headed to the



Not bad hooks for this part of the world.

range to check zero. Dodge and Country were spot-on at 80m. I settled behind my Tikka and squeezed the trigger. The round thudded into the backstop without even grazing the target. I fired again, for another miss. I moved into 50m and test fired – but missed again. I closed into 25m and clipped the edge of the target. My rifle was 50cm out at 25m! I adjusted the scope back to centre of target, moved back to 80m and made some final adjustments. ‘Minute of buff’ was achieved and we were off in search of ‘em. Apparently, it was my turn to shoot first and I was asked by Alex what quality of animal I was after. I replied that any representative head would be just fine.

We piled into Alex’s 4WD Suzuki hunting vehicle. We saw a few buffaloes that afternoon. They looked almost surreal and very big to me, but apparently not trophy worthy.

We were up early and after a hearty country breakfast we set off. I was riding up front with Dodge and Country was in the back. We stopped and glassed a handful of buffaloes and were given a crash-course in what to look for to separate bulls from cows, and how to assess trophy potential.

We also spotted a couple of scrub bulls. I found that despite the termite mounds, getting your ‘game eye’ in for buffaloes/scrubbies wasn’t perhaps as difficult as some other species I’d hunted, mostly due to their substantial size.

We did have some other factors in our favour, namely that as it was an early season hunt, so the game were less skittish than they were likely to be later on. The downside was the heat and the height of some of the weeds and grasses – often over 180cm.

As luck would have it, we came across a couple of feral pigs who were in the process of making more feral pigs. Dodge shot and dropped the boar and the sow ran off. Once deemed safe, Country jumped down and ran a short distance into the bush and shot the sow. A quick modelling session followed, and we were on our way.

We had been driving for about an hour when Dodge tapped on the roof to bring the vehicle to a stop. “A monster” was all I heard and Alex sounded like he agreed. We quietly alighted and I checked the wind, which was blowing across us. Alex instructed us to maintain single-file and we made our way towards the closer of two tiny stands of trees in a large clearing.

Once we reached to within about 200m the fellas hung back, allowing Alex and I to stalk the last part on foot. We made it to the final trees and the decision was made to take the shot. The animal was facing front-on at 140m. I steadied the



Country landed himself a decent buffalo.

Time for a trophy bull

cross-hairs, squeezed the trigger and registered a solid hit.

The animal soon rolled over. I could hardly believe it. We approached the downed bull from behind and found that it was stone-dead and never even twitched.

As I did not have a reference point for the horns, I was admiring the bulk of the body, but Alex and Dodge could barely contain their excitement and finally gave in and grabbed the tape measure. My buffalo ended up going 100.5" in the old scale (255cm). I was extremely pleased, but measurements aren't my top priority when hunting. Dodge and I wanted meat for home, so we took backstraps and then we all helped with the head and cape.

The next morning, we again spotted multiple animals before finally spying trophy potential about 950m away. We parked up and cut through the thicker stuff just off the edge of a large clearing and skirted a couple of smaller buffaloes to avoid spooking the ones we were after. There, Alex excitedly motioned to Country and identified the best bull of the group.

Country dropped to one knee and plugged the bull through the chest at a distance of 90m. The animal barely moved before rolling over, never to move again. There were hearty congratulations all round, with the bull going 91". More

modelling, more meat taken, and Alex voiced his approval at the performance of the 220gr Core-Lokt ammo.

Next, we faced the 1km lug back to the ute. Although the ground was fairly level, it was not flat. You had to constantly be aware of where you put your feet to avoid rolling an ankle in the ragged old wallows, which had been churned up by buffalo hooves in the wet season and then baked hard in the dry.

Country and I made two trips – the first to drop off packs while the boys started taking the head and cape. The second trek saw Alex and I share the cape by draping it across a branch and hoisting it over one shoulder each, while Country drew the short straw to muscle the horns back to the ute.

With everything packed away it came to Dodge's turn. After spotting and passing up many animals, Dodge finally selected a big, black scrub bull. Country held back as Dodge and Alex completed the stalk and I followed with the camera. We were in position; I had the camera rolling and Dodge pulled the trigger. I was immediately 'thunder-clapped' up the side of the head thanks to Dodge's .375 with muzzle brake fitted.

Dodge fired again and the animal went down not long after. The sunlight

highlighted a patch of orange hair on top of the bull, so we nicknamed him 'Donald'.

Driving home, Dodge spotted a bull across the river. We threw out the anchors and stalked in. Between us and the bull was a fairly fast-flowing river. Wading through wasn't overly appealing as we were worried about going head over apex and getting our gear wet.

Fortunately, we found a paperbark tree with an overhanging branch which allowed us to make it across safely. Dodge and Alex went ahead and I did my best to video the whole thing, but a breakdown in communication, which wasn't helped by my new-found deafness, meant that I couldn't see the buffalo when Dodge took the shot. But I was told that he went straight down.

The bull later measured 92". We took photos, meat, horns and cape and were discussing how best to return across the river when Alex waltzed straight in carrying the bull's head across his shoulders. We managed to lug everything back across without any further incident.

As we were driving home, Alex spotted a mob of pigs. We drove on a little way, and quietly got out. Country and I got into position and at a coordinated moment, fired. We cleaned up three nice pigs out of the mob.

Later we were enjoying a cold drink on our last night and I took the opportunity



'Donald' the scrub bull with his orange hair on top.

to reflect on the trip. Although the hunts themselves were perhaps not as difficult as some others I'd been on, the challenges faced lay in other areas: flying with firearms and ammunition, having to mask-up in airports and on flights, high vegetation, warm weather, the logistics involved in having meat and trophies processed and transported, manhandling trophies of this size and being attacked by every sticky, sharp, annoying burr on the planet.

We all agreed that it had been a fantastic trip. The accommodation and food were great, the animals were abundant and our guide was a top bloke and very accommodating.

We set off at, you guessed it, 0800 the next morning, for the six-hour haul back to Darwin. We said our goodbyes at the airport and made our way back to our respective corners of the country. I couldn't have scripted a better way to realise my most long-awaited trophy.

To book or to find out more information, contact:

Alex Jagers - 0429 398 704

E: bigcountrysafaris@outlook.com

Website: bigcountrysafaris.com ■



Time for a trophy bull



Three fewer pigs in the mob.

No fear of falling or coming across crocodiles.

Great balls of FIRE

Go BIG with your choice of sauces.

Ben Unten has a simple recipe for buffalo meatballs that'll knock your socks off

Following my recent once-in-a-lifetime trip to the Northern Territory chasing bull buffaloes, my freezer was packed with mince. I love mince as it is just so versatile. Buff mince is especially easy to work with as the taste could possibly best be described as slightly stronger beef.

However, after lightly frying some thinly-sliced, mature buffalo backstrap, I can tell you that although the flavour is excellent, without additional treatment it is tougher than a shearer's handshake.

The key to this recipe is the horseradish cream and going big with your choice of condiments. Seriously BIG!

Ingredients

- 600g buffalo mince
- 1½ cup breadcrumbs
- 2 eggs
- 2-3 onions – grated

- 1½ tablespoon barbecue sauce
- 1½ tablespoon tomato sauce
- 1½ tablespoon Worcestershire sauce
- 2-3 cloves garlic – grated
- 1 teaspoon pepper
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 1½ tablespoon horseradish
- ½ cup of chopped parsley (or 1 tablespoon parsley paste from the tube or dried parsley)
- Hot chilli paste – 1 teaspoon is mild, 1 tablespoon is medium/hot, 2 tablespoons will knock your socks off!
- 2 tablespoons of cooking oil (olive, sunflower)

Dipping sauces

Your choice of: tomato, barbecue, sweet chilli, mayonnaise, smokey barbecue, tomato chutney or top with caramelised onions.

Method

- Put the mince in a large mixing bowl and combine with the breadcrumbs.
- Add all other ingredients and mix well.
- Take a tablespoon of the mixture and roll it into a ball and put on an oiled baking tray.
- Continue until the mince is used up. Beware the expanding meatball – the longer you roll these little suckers the bigger they seem to become. Try to keep them uniform to ensure they cook evenly.
- Preheat a barbecue hotplate to a minimum 250 degrees Celsius.
- Gently place the meatballs on the hotplate and close the lid.
- Cook for 4 minutes per side – turning once. Remove and serve with your choice of sauces. ■

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What does he see when
he looks at you?

And the *eyes* have it

There's more to staying 'camouflaged' than you might think as **Scott Heiman** covers the art of concealment



I have been obsessed with camo since I was a youngster. To the point that, for a high school art project I made a camo t-shirt. Initially I dyed the shirt brown using onion skins as a base colour. Then I tie-dyed it with a light khaki derived from green vegetables before I embossed the shirt with brown prints from a bracken fern.

The sense of accomplishment I had from making it myself, then busting bunnies while wearing it, gave me a real incentive to strive for more.

Now, as a 28-year Army veteran, I'm still playing around with different camo patterns and colours for hunting. While my old Army issued cams may work well during warfare, they don't function as effectively as you would think for hunting.

And it doesn't take long in the field to know there's a problem. Many times, I've been on Army patrols wearing Auscam trying to be as quiet as possible – only to have birds call out with their predator alarm. A few incidents like this and a curious mind starts wondering...

I'm a scientist, so I know that birds are tetrachromats – they see four colours. These are ultraviolet (UV), blue, green and red. By contrast, humans are trichromats and can only see three colours: blue, green and red. Interestingly, humans see different wavelengths of blue, green and red than do our feathered friends. And the capacity to see UV is something that humans simply don't have.

Top 10 camo tips

1. Natural fibres when possible (or as close to it).
2. Camo with the same percentage of green in it that matches your environment.
3. Break up your outline, hide your shape/silhouette.
4. Limit plastics and vinyls to essentials – and then try to cover them up.
5. Use patterns with both vertical and horizontal lines to mimic nature.
6. Test your camo under a UV disco blue light; some colours will turn grey and some fabrics and dyes glow. Meanwhile some shades disappear altogether. This is how most animals we hunt see it.
7. Think macro. Micro patterns will be wasted on some game as they will blend together.
8. Contrasting colours.
9. Experiment for yourself.
10. Gucci cam is meant for the catwalk.

Knowing this, I started to speculate about what makes humans so obvious to birds. I considered whether it was the additives in my laundry detergent. Did the products that touted 'whiter than white' results have UV brighteners in their chemistry that the birds were responding to? It didn't seem to be the case with my Disruptive Pattern Camouflage Uniform (DPCU).

I would change laundry detergents numerous times, and wash in cold water, but it didn't seem to make a blind bit of difference. The birds still sang out. So, if it wasn't the detergent that was to blame with my DPCU, then maybe it was the chemicals in the dye or the fabric of my clothes that were making me obvious...

I clearly looked scary enough that they were happy to alert all their buddies and any other animal within earshot. Then again, perhaps the problem was more basic. After all, I've been 6ft 3" (190.5cm) since I was a

teen and I'm a biped with two forward facing eyes. So, I fit all the indicators of a predator. It was time to do some further research.

Glow in the dark

So, let's look at the issue of ultraviolet. A 2014 paper published in *Proceedings of the Royal Society B* recorded the results of a study conducted into 38 different mammals; the purpose being to determine if they could see UV light and its reflections.

The paper's conclusions indicated that it's not just birds that can see UV light. Indeed, most mammals can – including dogs, cats and deer. Unlike humans, these mammals have lenses that allow UV light to pass through. While they don't have a specialised UV-sensitive photoreceptor cone in their retina, the other three kinds of colour receptors combine to make up for it. This finding came as a surprise to some contemporary vision specialists.



Camo doesn't have to look fashionable.

Interesting too are recent results from European studies in Sweden and Hungary that suggest dogs have an infrared sensor in the tip of their nose. These sensors enable them to detect minute changes in temperature, such as when other animals are nearby. So, it's not only snakes, bats, frogs and blood-sucking insects that have infrared perception. Some mammals have this ability too.

If our quarry can see UV (or near UV), and some also have an infrared sensory capability, what does this tell us about what we need to be wearing when we hunt? What we need for hunting and sun protection is loosely woven material that is thick and made from natural, not



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And the eyes have it



A contrast of camo and differing materials under visible light.



A comparison of camo and differing materials under blue and near UV light.



Micro patterning like this is wasted on pigs, who have spectral vision.

synthetic, fabrics. Items made from vinyl, plastic or metal can alert animals because they reflect light. Think of the shine from a blued gun barrel or a bow limb. It's not the colour of the barrel/limb that alerts the game, but rather the geometric symmetry of its silhouette and the UV and IR light it reflects. Head out in vegetable-dyed hemp and you start increasing your odds of a successful hunt.

Oxford Dictionary definition

Camouflage: *n.* **1 a** the disguising of military vehicles, aircraft, ships, artillery, and installations by painting them or covering them to make them blend with their surroundings. **b** such a disguise. **2** the natural colouring of an animal which enables it to blend in with its surroundings. **3** a misleading or evasive precaution or expedient. *u.t.r* hide or disguise by means of camouflage [F *f. camoufler* disguise *f.lt. camuffare* disguise, deceive]

Colour blind

When thinking about how to conceal ourselves from game, it pays to consider what colours they can actually see. When we hunt animals like deer, many of us know to wear blaze orange to make ourselves obvious to other humans, while not alerting the game to our position.

It all comes down to rods and cones, and we're not talking about fishing or ice creams! Photoreceptors within the eye are classified into two groups: rods which have a high sensitivity to light and detect motion; and cones which have a low sensitivity to light and are responsible for colour vision/perception.

Deer are crepuscular animals which are primarily active during twilight (ie, dusk and dawn). Rats, rabbits, pigs, cats, dogs and some farm animals are also more comfortable in low light. These kinds of animals all have more rods and less cones than we do. In fact, they have so few cones that they have dichromatic colour perception, meaning they can only discern two of the three primary colours.

What animals like these lack in cones, they compensate for with more rods in order to see better in lowlight. The presence in their eyes of cones that are sensitive to two types of wavelengths within the blue and darker green frequencies leads us to believe that such animals have a certain capacity for colour perception. But they experience a type of red-green colour blindness termed deuteranopia and as such they may not 'see' colours as we do.

For example, studies of the anatomy of a deer's eye indicate that light green, orange and red appear to them as shades of grey. So, wearing camo in the red-through-brown-through-light-green continuum is essentially a waste of time, unless your clothing has clear lines of contrast to enhance different grey tones. If not, you need to focus on breaking up your outline and applying other tenets of field craft. But remember, deer sense colours towards the violet end of the light spectrum. So, this means they can see middle green wavelengths through to short blue wavelengths and they also perceive UV light.

It's important to understand what colours our quarry see. It's also helpful to know 'how' they perceive colours. For example, a human eye can perceive contrasts between colours because of the inhibiting effects of stimulated receptors in the retina on their neighbouring nerve

cells. By contrast, in a pig's eye this inhibitory effect is much weaker so that boundaries between light and dark areas blur into each other.

The same phenomenon affects colour sensitivity. Where humans see sharp boundaries between two contrasting

Camo dos and don'ts

- As most washing powders have a UV brightener in them, you should never wash your hunting clothes in detergents that contain it.
- Always cold wash, not hot wash, your gear. Cold-water washing means your clothing is less likely to fade and ruin your cam. Hot water also sets-in blood stains and blood can be seen in the UV spectrum.
 - Loose is better than tight fitting.
- Wash and dry clothing inside-out so the colours don't fade. By minimising the pattern's contact with moving parts, you will prevent abrasion of the material and removal of the inks used.
 - Air dry - don't use the clothes dryer because added heat will breakdown scent killers and UV absorbers. If possible, don't dry garments in direct sunlight.
- Most camouflage clothing comes with instructional labels and/or booklets. Read them if you want to make the most out of your purchase and to ensure the longevity of your investment.

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And the eyes have it

colour fields, pigs perceive the whole spectrum of hues leading from one field into the other. This is what we call spectral vision. The result is that pigs tend to see solid objects merely as flat planes of single colours if the hues are too closely related. Unless colour fields form a sharp contrasting borderline of two distinctive colours, the pig cannot perceive a difference. For example, the soft blurring and gradation of the colours in a rainbow makes it invisible for the pig's vision.

On the other hand, goats can perceive light in the blue/violet spectrum as well as the green to yellow/orange spectrum. Out of all the colours that goats can see, they are able to distinguish the colour orange best while they are the worst at distinguishing the colour blue. So tan, green and brown camo, matched to the local fauna, will work best when stalking goats in temperate zones. Here, blaze orange sticks out like a sore thumb. By contrast, orange blends in well out West with the red sand and ochre bluffs.

While goats can't see in the UV spectrum, they're still able to see in the twilight better than humans, thanks to the design of their eye pupils. We have round pupils whereas the pupils in a goat's eyes are horizontal and shaped like a rectangle. Much as our pupils dilate to allow more light in, the same applies to goats – but more effectively.

Conversely, in the day, the pupils shrink, creating a slit, much like a polarising lens. This helps goats to avoid being blinded by the sun during the brightest part of the day. The takeaway message for this is that it's best to hunt goats around mid-morning and mid-afternoon so they don't have the visual advantage.

Humans and many other animals do not look at a scene in a state of fixed steadiness. Instead, our eyes move around, unconsciously, locating interesting parts of the scene and building up a mental, three-dimensional 'map' corresponding to the scene.

This so-called saccade eye movement helps us to acquire, fix and track visual stimuli. In particular, by moving the eye so that small parts of a scene can be sensed with greater resolution, the brain calculates

the distance to multiple objects. Combine our game's acute peripheral vision and field of vision with its saccadic eye movements and I'm sure you'll appreciate why it can be difficult to close the distance between hunter and prey.

Camo conclusion

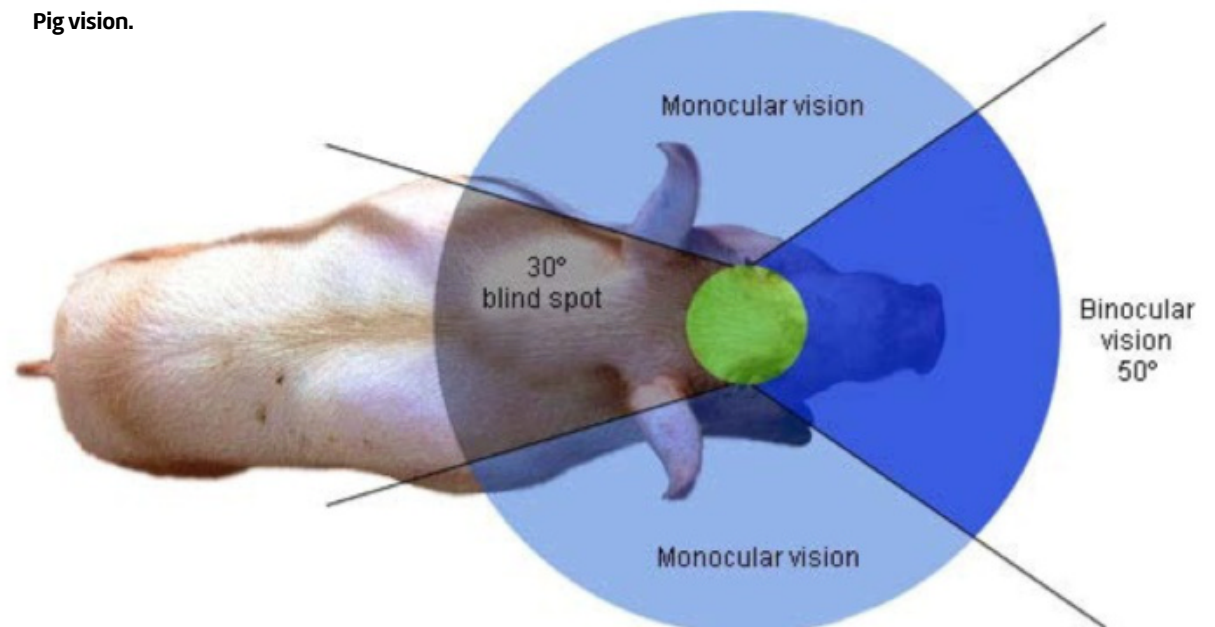
During the past couple of decades, there's been a tremendous increase in the number and variety of camo patterns and materials available to hunters. This has occurred despite the paucity of scientific knowledge about what game animals 'actually' see.

So, is the camo we buy useful? After all, most camo is designed and advertised in glossy photos on how well it blends into the surrounds. But all this really tells us is that the clothing is designed to fool HUMANS.

Interesting feral facts

- Goats have approximately one-third the visual acuity for distance that humans do; but their field of vision is approximately 320 degrees, with binocular vision of around 60 degrees.
- Rabbits' eyes are placed high and to the sides of the skull, allowing them to see nearly 360 degrees, but they have a binocular overlap of only about 20 degrees.
 - Pigs have a panoramic vision of 310 degrees and binocular vision of 35–50 degrees.
- Foxes have a field of vision of approximately 260 degrees and a binocular vision of 40 degrees.
- Deer have a field of vision of 310 degrees and binocular vision of around 65 degrees.
- Humans have a field of vision of about 180 degrees but 140 degrees of that is binocular overlap.

Pig vision.



When we're hunting, there's no question that scent and movement are far more determinative of success than the colour of our clothing. And any camouflage pattern or combination of clothing and equipment that has bold, contrasting colours (like tan vs. green hues) and breaks up your outline will help conceal your location.

However, paying heed to the other relevant elements of true camouflage will never go astray. That is: 'know your enemy' and adapt your clothing and equipment to suit the season, weather and terrain. Importantly, acknowledge the differences between prey species and why things are seen. ■



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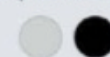
Stock colour:

White, Green, Black, Mocca, Timber



Magazine colour:

Silver, Black



Two **BIG** beasts



Rocky and Gary.

A beautiful buffalo, barking bailing dogs and a brute of a boar result in a great day for **Gary Hall**

After catching up with our close friends at the homestead for a brew and a good chat, Neil and I rolled the mighty Honda Pioneer 700 off the trailer. We then conducted our usual quick inventory check – icebox, rifles, ammo, GPS, camera, tracking collars, first-aid/survival kit and bailing dogs.

A short time later, I eased the side-by-side to a stop as a perfect ‘meat eater’ buffalo moved cautiously in the light scrub to our left, contemplating its next move. That split second of hesitation gave Neil the chance to shoulder his hard hitting .300, take a sight picture through the scope and squeeze the trigger.

The thunderous sound of the .300 going off in the confined space of the Honda’s cab was absolutely deafening. My ears were still ringing as we walked towards some of the ingredients for another one of my wife Gina’s famous slow-cooked curries.

We removed its good-sized backstraps and whatever else we could force into the icebox. Neil is a qualified butcher by trade and makes everything look easy with his extremely sharp butchering knives.

As we navigated a tricky, dry, eroded creek crossing in the Honda, the revving engine spooked a powerfully built scrub bull from its cool, shady refuge. Even standing still, there’s something about their confident, self-assured arrogance that makes them look intimidating and when riled they can be a deadly force to be reckoned with.

Luckily for the big guy, he was a lover not a fighter who quickly took off across a large expanse of open ground towards a different postcode. Next item on the list was to head back to the main creek line and give the bailing dogs a bit of a run on a couple of pigs.

The Honda did bump a small family of buffaloes from a patch of chest high,



The bailing dogs in motion.

dried perennial grass but with the icebox full we just took a few close-up pics of the extremely fortunate bovines and continued on.

The water course had stopped flowing months ago, but still held a few isolated, small pockets and as this was a scarce commodity, we decided we had little option but to go for a long, hot walk. Alas, the deep sand and blistering heat dampened our enthusiasm and with pig sign hard to find we almost pulled the pin.

However, just short of an hour later, the dogs picked it up a notch and all thoughts of a well-earned cold beer and a rissole and pickle sandwich back at the Honda faded. As the bailers went into hunt mode, we also lengthened our stride. At the same time the adrenalin rush kicked in and had my skinny 64-year-old legs pumping.

The barking started in the tree line a short distance away, then all went quiet, but a few seconds later the dogs fired up again closer to us, then nothing. There was just a deathly silence. A few 'on the run' barks had us U-turning back towards the semi-dry creek line.

A quick sprint down a well-used game trail saw me standing in the riverbed a short distance from the stand-off, as the five bailers were giving it an absolute mouthful. As usual, Rocky was leading the charge and had taken a front row seat a short distance from the boar's impressive ivory.

Although it was a fair lump of a boar, its biggest standout feature was the size of its tusks. Up relatively close, they looked huge and certainly worthy of respect, not that the canine cavalry was giving him any. A few paces back, a budding Steven Spielberg was recording the action as I moved in to take the shot.

With the 40-year-old coach-gun snug against my shoulder I cocked the right-hand side hammer and waited for a safe shot. When that came, I squeezed the trigger. From this close the hard-hitting solid projectiles are devastating and take no prisoners. The impact dropped the dogs' number one nemesis on the spot. The old coach-gun has killed more pork than I can count.

After an inspection of the dogs, a drink break and a heap of pics, we started the long trek back to the Honda. ■



A cracker of a boar with a lethal set of tusks.



Boom! The coach-gun explodes into action.

Back to the

.308

A Haenel Jaeger 9 (top) weighs 2.72kg with scope and the Remington 700 3.27kg scoped – both in .308 with 22" barrels.

David Duffy determines to look no further than the .308 for that elusive all-in-one rifle

It's doubtful whether there's a better pig cartridge in a bolt-action rifle than the .308 Winchester. I used the .308 almost exclusively on pigs in the 1980s, before moving on to the longer legged .270. Recently, my interest in the .308 has been rekindled. You can have a light, short rifle and use relatively inexpensive 150-grain projectiles and easily take the largest boars.

In thick lignum at close range or at difficult angles, cartridges such as the .338 Federal and .358 Winchester might stop the larger ones faster on some occasions, but the .308 will be better at ensuring multiple shots off at running pigs or when trying to shoot several in a mob. The .308 projectiles will also usually be considerably cheaper.

The other cartridge I really like on pigs is the 6.8 SPC in a Spec II chamber. On the larger boars such as in Cape York or Arnhem Land, I load the 110-grain 6.8 TSXs, but the 150-grain Speers in the .308 are about a third of the price, and the brass is cheaper and more readily available.

With the .308 there's plenty of margin in that you don't need to get maximum velocity and use premium projectiles. Old factory ADI loads I've had for 30 years clock about 2732fps in the 22" barrel and work superbly. For a pig rifle, I like the internal magazine to hold five rounds. After you shoot the first one in a mob, the rest start running and by the time you are onto your third pig it could be some distance away in top gear.

The .308 makes a great light mountain rifle. My Remington 700 at 3.27kg with scope is about as light as I like to go with a .308 using full-power loads. The problem I find if I go much lighter than that is controlling the recoil so that I can shoot the rifle accurately. Offhand a light rifle floats around more. I have a Haenel Jaeger 9 tilting-block single-shot in .308 with a



A 125gr Sierra Pro-Hunter, 150gr Speer Mag Tip, 165gr Woodleigh PPSN, 185gr Lapua Scenar and .308 Win.

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Back to the .308

22" barrel. After modifications, it weighs an ultra-light 2.72kg inclusive of scope. Full power loads are a handful but with a mild load for scouting in the hills it's fine. A scoped weight of about 3.62kg is ideal for those not accustomed to the recoil of a .308 in a light rifle.

A good short to medium range deer rifle for the hills or in bush can be had using the .308. A 150-grain Speer flat-nose projectile worked superbly on a red stag I shot through the shoulder in the hills when looking for pigs.

On fallow deer, the 150-grain Spitzers work well. If using a .308 on sambar, load up 165-grain Woodleigh PPSNs. Although not as good at anchoring a sambar on an angle as a 225 or 250-grain Woodleigh out of a .338 RCM, because of the .308's moderate recoil, you can have a light and short rifle for sambar in an adequate cartridge when using 165-grain projectiles.

For deer in open country, a .308 150-grain Spitzer projectile from a 22" barrel is fine for shots up to about 220m without holding high if you sight your .308 in to 2¼" above point of aim at 90m. This gives a good short to medium range trajectory and covers the vast majority of shooting situations. A 3" high point of impact at 90m is

better for longer shots up to 270m, but this may cause shooting over the top of smaller game in long grass at around 117m.

A light 3-9x36 scope such as the Swarovski is a good choice for a mountain rifle in .308. That's what I have on the Haenel Jaeger 9. For a short to medium range pig or woods rifle a 2-7, such as the discontinued Kahles, is a good option due to being able to wind the magnification down to 2.3 power. I currently have a 3-10x42 Swarovski on my Remington as I find 10 power slightly better for load testing.

The .308 is often compared to the .30-06. When the .30-06 became popular after WWI with returning American servicemen, the round was loaded to around 2700fps using 150-grain projectiles and 2550fps with 180-grain projectiles. After WWII, the 150-grain load was increased to about 2825fps. By that time the .30-06 had gained its reputation as the best all-around hunting cartridge. These loads are easily attainable in a .308. With modern powders the .30-06 has gained more performance and has roughly a 150fps advantage over the .308. This makes the .30-06 a little better at reaching game further out. It was with the heavier bullet weights such as 180 and 220-grains that the .30-06 gained a

great reputation on large game such as elk, moose, brown and grizzly bears.

But for those heavy loads for large game a rifle chambered in .30-06 really needs to weigh more to cope with the added recoil and does better with a 24" barrel to burn the large amounts of slow burning powder, such as AR2213SC. The .308 can be packaged in a lighter, short-action with shorter barrel using 125 to 165-grain bullets and medium burning powders, such as AR2206H and AR2208, on game that aren't too large. I see the .308 as having a different application to the .30-06.

The other cartridge the .308 is often compared to is the 7-08. Generally, 140-grain 7mm projectiles have a higher ballistic coefficient (BC) as well as better sectional density than the .308 150-grain pills. A .308 can push its 150-grain projectile at a similar muzzle velocity as the 140-grain 7-08 projectile using the same length barrel.



The Winchester Featherweight barrel (left) heats up quicker than the heavier Remington SPS barrel.



David likes the .308 (left) on pigs and at shorter range, and the .270 for longer shots. Both have similar recoil.



Testing light loads using 125gr Pro-Hunter and AR2206H.

At close range, the .308 has the slight advantage due to bullet weight and cross-sectional area. At longer ranges the 7-08 has the edge, as it starts to shoot flatter with its higher BC 140-grain projectiles and penetration is marginally better.

In the field you probably won't notice the difference between these two. Cartridges such as the 6.5 PRC, .270 Redding, .270 Win, .284 and .280 Rem with a longer barrel are better choices than either the .308 or 7-08 with a 22" barrel for open country. This is because there is a strong likelihood that shots on deer-size animals will be approaching 270m or slightly more.

The 22" barrel on my Remington measures .66" at the muzzle after cutting it down from 24" and a 22" Winchester Featherweight barrel I have is only .56" at the muzzle, which is too light. It doesn't take much for a .308 barrel to become hot, then accuracy goes out the window.

With relatively inexpensive 150-grain projectiles and cases, long barrel life and inherent accuracy of the cartridge, the Remington with its thicker barrel is good for practice at the range. Match projectiles (I currently use 185-grain Lapua Scenars on paper targets) can be employed at the SSAA range should you wish to test your precision shooting skills.

For new shooters or those that have a problem with the recoil of normal .308 loads, a good light load uses the 125-grain Sierra Pro-Hunter with 38 grains of AR2206H for a velocity of 2350fps. Although designed as a varmint projectile at high .308 velocities, when slowed down to around 2350fps the 125-grain Pro-Hunter projectiles perform well on

By shortening the legs on the magazine follower as shown on the right, the Remington 700 SA will hold five .308 rounds in the magazine.

medium game, provided shot placement is good (such as just behind the shoulder) and the distances aren't too far.

If you use normal 150-grain projectiles at a much lower velocity than what they are designed for, getting suitable expansion from them may be a problem. Using this really light load is an alternative to buying a .243 and then wanting a bit more knock-down power once you get used to shooting it. For light loads such as those detailed, only use AR2206H powder as it has been thoroughly tested to be safe with loads as low as 60 per cent of the maximum ADI reloading manual values.

My accurate 150-grain load uses AR2206H in ADI cases at 2728fps out

of a 22" barrel. This is a mild load in my Remington as it has a long throat, which gives lower velocities when using book loads than with a normal-length throat.

Alternatively, the maximum book load of AR2208 gives only 2690fps and isn't as accurate in my rifle as AR2206H.

Winchester cases hold slightly more powder if you want to squeeze more velocity out of a .308. There's also a good variety of factory loaded ammunition readily available for those who don't reload their .308s.

A .308 in a light handy short-action rifle with a 22" barrel performs the roles of an excellent pig rifle, short to medium range mountain rifle, woods rifle and practice rifle all in one. ■



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The SSAA National-led survey has proven hunting poses no risk to the future of the species.

On the trail for quail

Rachael Oxborrow discusses a ground-breaking study that validates hunting the game bird in South Australia

A SSAA National-led wildlife survey involving more than 17,000 documented quail sightings from across South Australia has effectively proven quail hunting poses no risk to the future of the species. The grassroots effort to prove widespread and abundant quail population – the first time the game bird has been monitored in this way since the 1980s – projected a quail population of between 6.2 and 17.7 million birds. The study's release prompted authorities to declare a quail hunting season in South Australia for the first time since 2019.

SSAA National Wildlife Programs Leader Matthew Godson said a lack of scientific interest in quail, a species which doesn't fit the endangered or pest narrative that typically attracts attention and funding, had left it virtually ignored for decades. "The SA Minister for Environment blamed lack of

data on quail populations for why he didn't declare 2020–21 quail seasons and from here it became clear we'd need to produce this information if we were ever to have a quail season again," Godson said.

"Within the hunting community there's an appetite to collect data to show hunting is no risk to statewide stubble quail populations and that hunters can continue to sustainably harvest quail within a regulated environment. Any ban or closure of the regulated hunting season has the potential to drive the activity underground, where there would be no conservation benefits."

Quail presence and abundance

Through a partnership between a federation of likeminded hunters and conservationist groups known as the Conservation and Hunting Alliance of South Australia (CHASA) and SSAA National, a network of volunteers was created to inform the study. Using two methods to count quail, the network was able to collect data on their numbers across a portion of SA's 70 million hectares of available quail habitat. Surveys were conducted on 124 properties on the Eyre Peninsula, Mid North, Kangaroo Island, Yorke Peninsula, Murraylands, Coorong and Mallee with 16,024 birds counted in an area of 11,828 hectares, which included canola, lentil, barley, wheat and hay crops. Data was collected by farmers harvesting crops

and on drive counts with walking observers and trained dogs during November and December 2021.

"During data collection and through ongoing conversations with landholders we were able to gather significant population counts and also include observations of habitat, movements and sightings of quail breeding," Godson said, adding this type of data hadn't been widely researched previously, whereas stubble quail diet had historically been covered extensively. "We know from quail diet research the birds mainly eat seeds and green leaf material that can include pasture plants and weeds," he said.

"Meanwhile, insect and larvae are more important for hatchlings and are more of a secondary source of food for adults. This type of information complements our data surveys to help us deduce quail move across the landscape to source food and a substantial population is living across South Australia's 70 million hectares of potential habitat."

Observations of the data indicate areas with more rainfall and in higher cropping production zones correlate with higher density quail populations. For example, Godson estimates about 600,000 quail to have been present across the Yorke Peninsula region on cropping land in densities ranging from 0.03 to 3.33 birds per hectare, while observations in the Upper Murraylands region



All smiles – SA offers 70M hectares of quail habitat, where only a small percentage is hunted.

where the South Australian, Victorian and New South Wales borders meet showed lower population densities of around 0.02 birds per hectare. To compare rainfall for these two regions there's a mean annual figure of 251.7 millimetres at Renmark and 370.2mm at Moonta. Crop estimates for the Upper Murraylands for 2021 were 0.8 tonnes per hectare compared to 3.3 t/ha on Yorke Peninsula.

Population and hunting risk

Godson said traditionally hunters preferred higher rainfall areas of the state for hunting as this often correlates with more chance of bird sightings and take. "With a historical average statewide harvest of 5091 individual quail per year and an estimated 2087 bagged from the Yorke Peninsula region alone, it's clear quail hunting has an insignificant impact on populations found and poses no risk to their existence," he said. "Internationally accepted harvest rates sit at 10–20 per cent of a quail population and we come in at around 0.04 per cent. For the Yorke Peninsula region, the area traditionally

most visited by quail hunters, data indicates a harvest rate of around 0.23 per cent."

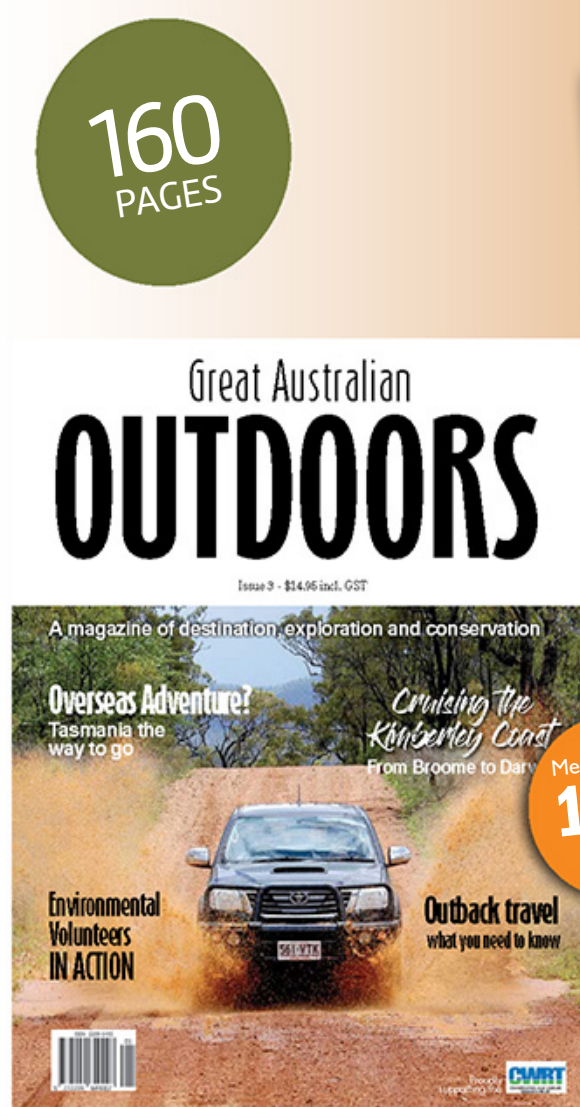
Hunting sustainably and research

Godson said the sheer level of volunteer involvement in this survey illustrated a community willing to protect quail populations while allowing for sustainable hunting seasons. He said the work across the surveyed areas of SA's landscape showed significant numbers of quail in varying densities. "For those who doubt the sustainability of hunting, this is another example that Australia's oldest land use is sustainable and through regulation and seasons there are opportunities to learn more about this species," he said.

"The numbers speak for themselves. There are literally millions of stubble quail in farmers' paddocks and those wanting to enjoy the hunt with family and friends to bring home a prized game meat for a unique meal can do so without having a negative impact on quail populations."



SSAA National began quail research in 2011, initially analysing head and wing samples sent in by hunters to inform the age and sex of harvested birds. This work was conducted over several years to provide insight into the structure of quail populations, breeding timing, preferred habitats and movements. The 2021 study has the potential to continue providing opportunities to map quail population changes over time while also supporting the case for an ongoing hunting season. Godson said this was a valuable research path for both the hunting community and wildlife managers across the country. ■



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SCAN AND ORDER

Campfire quail

Jan Kaptein shares his fondness for cooking tasty game birds in the great outdoors

Cooking camp quail is easy.

When I think back to memorable camping trips, a wide variety of places, friends and events come to mind. Yet, there is one thing many of these outings have in common. They involved great food, prepared over a campfire.



Getting ready to cook.

These days, electric coolers, vacuum sealers and other innovations have made it easy to bring food for an entire week, but where is the fun in that? Growing up, the basic idea was to pack some emergency staples and shoot or fish for protein. And what better protein than game birds? What beats spending a few intense hours, with or without your dog, looking for something that is a challenge to shoot and makes for great eating?

While there are a variety of birds that can be had, quail has always been one of my favourites. Not just because they are fun to hunt, but they are easy to clean and cook and taste wonderful. There are dozens of ways to prepare them and little that can go wrong. Sure, you can go to town and have a fancy de-boned quail dish with a tasty sauce and some poached eggs on the side. However, to me no quail tastes as good as one cooked over an open fire while camping.

The two main ways I learned to cook them over an open fire are 'on a stick' or in a skillet. I will leave the 'quail on a stick' recipe for the reader to figure out. Suffice to say it

involves a quail or two per person, skewered on a stick and if at all possible, with the legs and wings trussed or clipped so they do not burn. The focus here is on 'camp quail', the way I was taught to cook them.

Prior to preparing the actual recipe, there's a trick that may come in handy when cleaning quail without using water. While the skin crisps up nicely and is delicious, it is rather fragile. If you do not want feathers all over the place, there is an easy way to take the feathers off. Clip the wings and feet off at the joint (not the upper part of the wings and the legs that have meat). Proceed to make a little tear on the chest and from there, you can basically 'peel' the skin off like a coat, removing all the feathers in the process.

I like to leave the head on and pull down on the skin, which can be removed afterwards. While this is a great way to quickly and cleanly take the feathers off the bird if you plan to cook them following this recipe, don't do this if you intend to roast them, as the skin is needed to keep moisture in.

What you will need is extremely basic. In terms of equipment grab a skillet, a lid or



some tin foil to cover, a splash of oil (a bit of molten lard will also do), some water and if you drink in camp, a slosh of wine. For the seasoning, I like to use cloves of garlic and a pinch of salt. Depending on availability and your luck while out on the hunt, I would recommend two quails per person.

Method

- Heat your skillet and put in a splash of oil once hot.
- When the oil is very hot, put in the quail and turn them a few times to sear all sides.
- With all birds nicely browned on all sides, add between 5–10mm of water.
- Add at least two or three unpeeled cloves of garlic, or more to taste.
- Optionally, you can add a slosh of (white) wine to the cooking liquid.
- Put the lid on the skillet or cover with tin foil.
- Cook for about 15–20 minutes, turning the birds every five minutes so all sides are properly cooked.
- Remove the birds and reduce the cooking liquid.

If nearly all the water evaporates at any stage during the cooking, top it up. The steam helps evenly cook the birds and prevents them from drying out. If you have no way to cover the skillet while cooking, no worries. You will need some more water to compensate for the evaporation and it's best to give the birds one more turn and cook them for about 25–30 minutes.

Once the birds are cooked, you can put them in tin foil or keep them on the side. Now put the skillet back on high heat and reduce the cooking liquid to a few spoonfuls. Remove the cloves of garlic, which should be soft on the inside and can be squeezed from the skins. The remaining cooking liquid makes for a great sauce to go with the birds. In theory, you are now good to tuck in. Plate the birds and put the sauce on them. Serve with a few cloves of garlic for those who enjoy the 'garlic paste'.

To refine the dish a bit, add a knob of butter to the reduced cooking liquid to make a beautiful sauce. After removing it, wipe the skillet down, add a bit of oil and re-heat. Return the birds, giving them a quick sear on either side to crisp them up. As before, plate them up with a few cloves of the cooked garlic, putting the sauce over them.

Variations to this recipe are endless. When not out camping, I often cook quail at home, using pretty much this exact method. In the comfort of a proper kitchen and running water, I pluck birds rather than pulling the skin off with the feathers and I have experimented with no end of seasonings and ways to make more sophisticated sauces. One constant is that I always use the reduced cooking liquid as a base. Happy hunting and enjoy your quail. ■

SmartRest

double down

Straight shooter **Ben Unten** is impressed with the advanced Quad Rest II

After reviewing SmartRest's inaugural Quad Rest, I was so impressed that I purchased a unit and mounted it on my quad. So, it should come as no surprise that I was super-excited when I received the Quad Rest II for review.

The versatility and inbuilt features make this an extremely successful way of securing a rifle to a quad, ATV, side-by-side or 4WD. The usual method of securing a firearm to a quad is either via fixed 'Vs' or via lockable, clamp-style 'Vs'. They both work, but to remove the firearm to shoot involves either undoing front and rear straps or unlocking the clamps, which often requires both hands on each clamp.

The big advantage with the Quad Rest II is, not only is your firearm held securely when riding around, but the gas-assisted struts hold it extremely steady when standing and shooting. If you want to remove the rifle from the rest for any reason, you simply undo the front and rear straps so you're not any worse off.

Upgrades

The Quad Rest II comes with twin mounting brackets suitable for a round or square bar from 16mm-46mm. The unit can be mounted via a flat plate mounting system or straight onto flat board such as ply.

A locking plate replaces the previous rubber strap used to lock the unit in the 'down' position. This is quicker and easier for both locking and lifting when shooting, and there is no loose rubber strap to keep track of.

The double swivel allows for greater range of movement.

The featured double swivel mount allows for a far greater range of up and down and side-to-side movement (approximately 180 degrees side-to-side.)

This even accommodates shooting with your opposite hand (left-handed for a right-handed shooter and vice-versa). This is far easier than you would imagine. I am flat out scratching myself with my left hand, but I found that shooting left-handed was no big deal because the rifle is held so steady in the rest.

After a brief period of practice, I found I was able to swivel the rifle, change hands and shoot effectively. I also discovered that with the unit mounted on my quad bike, I could move off the bike, walk around to the front and shoot rearwards with the rifle supported. This allowed for virtually 360 degrees of shooting angle.

Another upgrade is the gooseneck-type offset in the horizontal bar, which means there is much less chance of the rifle fouling when swinging through the various shooting positions.

In the field

With safety precautions in place, I rode as fast as I dared around our property – much of it over reasonably rocky terrain. There is some movement of the cradle itself, which is initially disconcerting, but the rifle remained securely held in position.

The locking plate was stiff to use to begin with, but I'm sure that would 'wear-in' over time. Once off the bike, it is far quicker to release, raise and shoot. I took aim at a bunch of field targets in virtually every awkward shooting position I could think of and found that in addition to far greater range of movement, the swinging motion appeared to be a little smoother on the new model. In a nutshell, the Quad Rest II passed everything I threw at it.

There's little not to like about the Quad Rest II. It does take some practice and familiarisation to become comfortable with the sequence and technique to unlock and raise the rifle and swivel to the correct shooting positions.

It requires time initially to ensure that you have the mounting location correct. I found that by securing a safe rifle in the rest, I could then position the base so that



any rifle overhang was 'centred' across the front of the quad. Other than that, if you liked the Quad Rest I, then the Quad Rest II is simply more of a good thing.

Purchase info

There are a huge array of accessories available for the Quad Rest II, including a counterweight balance kit if your rifle has a tendency to tilt forward in the rest, as well as offset arms available to allow the use of large capacity magazines, plus many more.

The Quad Rest II retails for \$365 and is available through various stockists or Eagleye Hunting Gear via eagleye.com.au

au ■



The *chital* challenge



Brad Allen with a prime hind taken for meat.

Glassing a mob of hinds and yearlings from the dry creek bed.

A plan comes together as **Brad Allen** secures a desirable trophy and more

For many trophy deer hunters around Australia, the thought of taking representative heads from all of our deer species crosses the mind at some point in our hunting career.

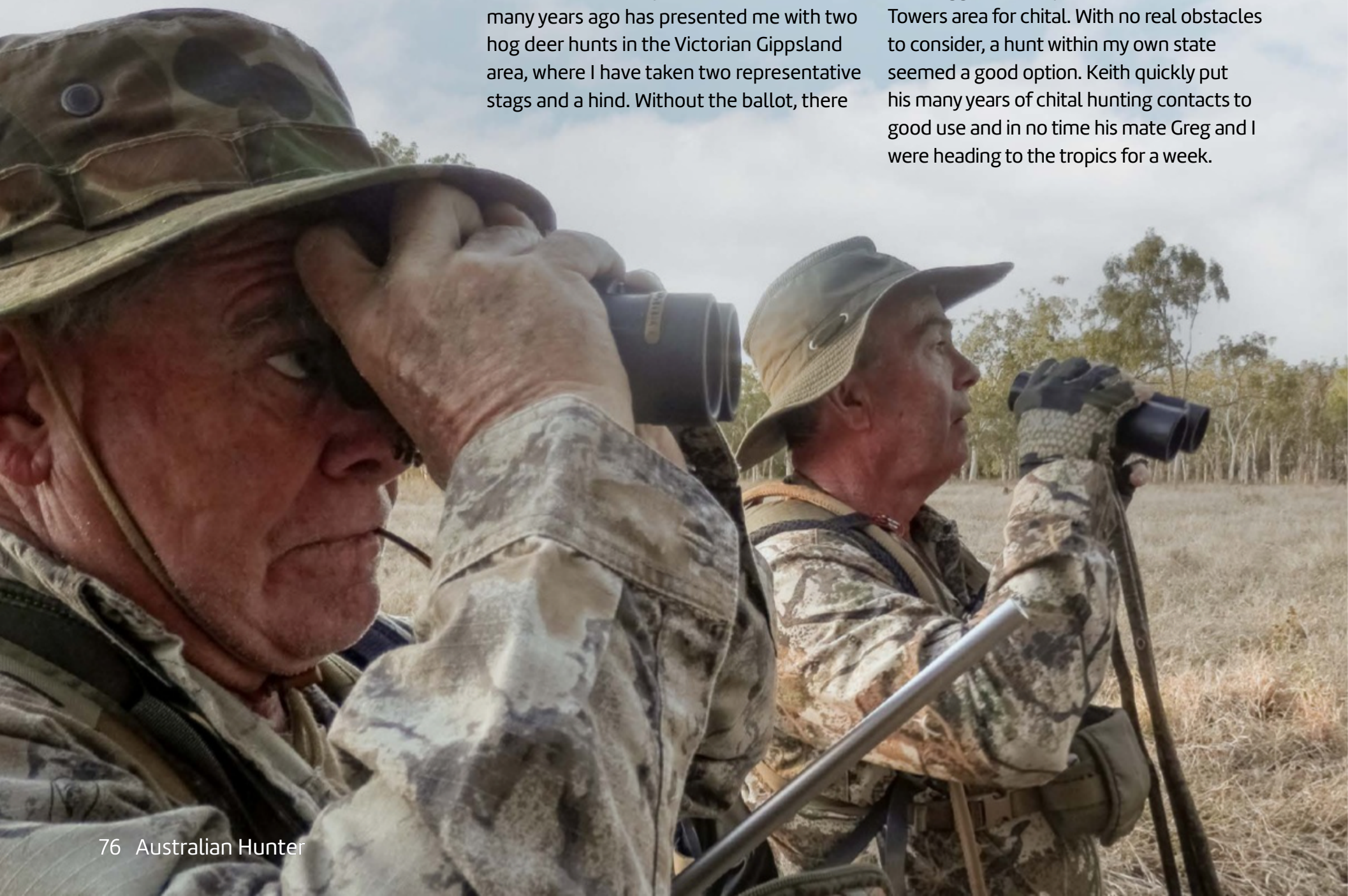
Red, fallow, hog, chital, rusa and sambar deer are dispersed all over our country and opportunities to hunt them are far greater now than ever. I had been hunting Queensland red deer for many years and taken several representative stags before the opportunity to hunt fallow deer even-tuated and sometime after that, I took my first representative fallow buck.

My introduction to the Blond Bay Hog Deer Advisory Group (BBHDAG) ballot many years ago has presented me with two hog deer hunts in the Victorian Gippsland area, where I have taken two representative stags and a hind. Without the ballot, there

is no way that I would have ever been in a position to hunt these beautiful little deer.

When I headed down to Victoria for my first hoggie hunt, I met many dedicated deer hunters and was invited back to hunt the mighty sambar. A couple of trips later, I am still yet to locate and take a representative sambar stag. Technically, I have collected a sambar stag, although it was only a spiker for meat.

As a Queenslander, I haven't had the chance or ability to again head south and hunt for that elusive sambar stag. But recently, I weighed up my opportunities while talking to my old hunting mate Keith, who suggested a trip north to the Charters Towers area for chital. With no real obstacles to consider, a hunt within my own state seemed a good option. Keith quickly put his many years of chital hunting contacts to good use and in no time his mate Greg and I were heading to the tropics for a week.



We met another Brad, our host and guide in Charters Towers, before the drive out to the property where several small bands of chital were observed as we cruised into the homestead of the large cattle property. It's a common fact that chital congregate fairly close to areas of human habitation (usually property homesteads) within their recognised range. The thinking is that the deer feel safer when nearer to the homesteads as predators are less likely to bother them there.

After hunting red and fallow stags/bucks during their annual ruts, it was unusual and surprising to see chital stags in all stages of antler growth running in the same mob. From freshly shed, to just starting velvet growth, to full grown velvet heads almost ready to rub out and stags in hard antler, all at the same time. And what's more, stags roaring throughout the year. As we headed out early the next morning, Greg won the toss and would have first shot at any prospective stag. The country was different from anything any of us had ever hunted before, with low basalt ridges

(walls) running east-west right through the entire chital habitat, spring fed creeks and swampy expanses adjacent and open flat eucalypt forest intersected with shallow, dry creek beds.

The evening before, we had seen a large herd of deer filtering through the open forest, out onto the property's airstrip. In the morning, Brad parked the LandCruiser in a shallow dry creek bed and with the wind in our faces, we slowly headed along the depression, using the shallow sides as cover, to where our host knew the deer would be returning to bed.

Several groups of hinds, yearlings and fawns fed slowly back into the timber as we crept along. It was then that a bachelor group of young stags was spotted feeding off to our right and as we glassed their trophy potential, another group of hinds and yearlings fed into view over the edge of the creek bank. We all froze for the next 15 minutes as inquisitive eyes scanned for potential danger before finally feeding off towards their bedding areas. With the morning heating up and most of the deer



Chital stags generate scrapes similar to fallow bucks.

now bedded, we decided to head back to the homestead for brunch.

Come 3pm, Brad checked the wind and we were off in the LandCruiser to the far side of a large island in the middle of two dry creek beds. As we parked the vehicle, we immediately heard a stag roaring on the far side of the island. With the light breeze in our faces, we quietly moved through the long grass, putting up several wallabies and a spikey that luckily all moved away.

After some careful stalking, the roaring stag and several others were finally observed feeding through the open forest towards their night-time grazing paddocks. With nothing of any size among them, we continued on, dropping into another dry creek bed, and skirted around their position. Groups of hinds and yearlings were scattered through the bush, feeding into the light breeze, when another stag roared



Spring fed creeks create swampy conditions and well watered feeding areas.



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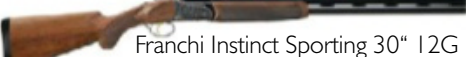
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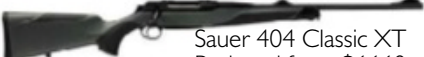


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The chital challenge

no more than 400 yards ahead. The sun had dipped below the horizon and the light was fading fast when Brad and Greg finally spied him, holding several hinds.

Dipping back below the creek bank, we edged forward another 300 yards or so, where Brad and Greg moved into a position for a shot. With barely enough light left, Greg lined up the stag with his Sako .270 and squeezed the trigger. The pleasing 'thump' of a solid hit echoed back as the representative stag bit the dust. By the time congratulations were made, photos taken and the cape, backstraps and back legs removed, it was dark and we were all ready for a rest.

As first light broke the next morning, we were on a basalt wall overlooking an expansive swampy plain. Pigs fed among the reeds and several mobs of deer were scattered about. From a distance of over 500 yards, we glassed one group of deer that contained several large hard antlered stags and two even larger ones in velvet. At this point, a magnificent hard antlered stag materialised

from a fold in the plain. He was obviously the largest on view and had classic lyre-shaped antlers. He had my attention!

Brad and I moved out onto the plain, using the reeds of the swampy ground as cover. At 165 yards by my Leica Geovids, the mob continued to feed towards cover as I put my old Ruger .270 up onto the shooting sticks. The large mob of over 30 deer fed and moved continually, blocking any potential shot, with hinds in front of the stag, and when there weren't hinds, he was concealed by long swamp grass or the folds in the land. No clear shot presented and they all fed off to their bedding area.

Brad agreed that he was indeed a fine trophy and suggested that we adjourn to the homestead and come back later that afternoon, as he would most likely feed back out onto the plain near where he had gone into the bedding area.

A weather change blew through early afternoon, putting the wind exactly in the right position for our proposed stalk. The pigs were out feeding as we crested the

basalt wall and glassed towards the area where Brad suspected the stag and his harem would be. Several groups of deer entered the plain from the basalt ridge we had come in on, all moving into the breeze, towards where we reckoned our stag would be feeding. As the sun sunk below the horizon, the breeze grew in intensity, keeping the deer feeding in sheltered pockets.

With Brad's expert knowledge of the deer and the property, he was confident that the mob would stay close to the protective fingers of tea tree that protruded out onto the swampy plain. We made sure there were no eyes on us as we made a beeline for a large rubber vine bush on the crest of a low rise, overlooking a protected pocket. Our luck was in, as we could see the mob feeding in the pocket no more than 80 yards away, and no sooner were we stationed behind the bush than my stag walked out onto the feeding area.

Light was fading fast as I carefully set up the shooting sticks at the edge of the bush and moved the .270 into position, waiting for the stag to present a clear shot. With over 20 deer feeding in the small area, several hinds were standing in front of big boy. After a long wait, he finally stepped into the clear, surveying his harem. With no time to waste, I held steady and squeezed off the shot. Deer scattered in all directions, but the monarch only took a couple of steps before going down for good. I was elated that I had scored a fine chital trophy. As our guide Brad said: "I love it when a plan comes together." ■

Brad Allen with his lyre-shaped trophy chital stag.



Greg with his chital stag taken at last light.

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Jelinek Custom Blades

Damien Edwards speaks with a keen outdoorsman offering a personal touch to your revered hunting knife

I like nice rifles. Really nice rifles. For instance, a Model 70 Winchester 7mm-08 with gorgeous custom timber for red deer work. Then there is a Brno ZG47 .30-06 with a 65-year-old story to tell which I carry for water buffaloes. Another Brno ZKW 465 in .22 Hornet with set trigger is for hares, goats and other pests. Also, a Beretta Silver Pigeon, which points like a dream on quail. These are tools.



A 7" feather Damascus with fuller, Tasmanian blackwood and hand guard with brass spacer and pin, plus custom leather sheath.

They are made with steel and wood. Warm, classic, elegant firearms which are a privilege to own and beautiful to hunt with. Something to cherish, care for and hand down to the next generation when my 'custodianship' ends. Memorable hunts, camp oven cooking, wet boots and cold coffee are memories associated with them.

Tools (and recollections) of this pedigree deserve a companion blade befitting them. After all, a fine knife is just as personal a tool as a fine rifle. A knife shares your hunting and fishing sojourns into the mountains, forests, deserts or swamps. It processes your harvest. It helps feed you. A knife, and a good one at that, deserves no less consideration than your choice in good firearms.

Marty Jelinek is a maker of custom bespoke knives. As a long-time outdoorsman himself, he has a unique appreciation of the needs of hunters (and anglers) for a good blade. But he doesn't just stop there. His heirloom quality work is not only beautiful, but functional quality which is built to last. And his eye for detail is evident in each piece he creates. Marty shares my passion for custom work.

"As the maker, I encourage the end user to be a part of the design and creation of my custom knives," he explains. "Steel selection, blade shape, handle material choices and sheath options can all be customised to suit the individual and their preferred use.

"I want the blades I make to be highly cherished by the people who own them. To be an item they use with pride and look after as a family heirloom."



Marty Jelinek, custom bladesmith.

Marty's cheerful disposition and easy-going nature assist him greatly in building the special rapport with customers that a creator of fine custom work (regardless of the actual item itself) should strive towards. "When I'm asked to make a custom knife, I try to get to know what the end custodian is into. How they hunt, what they like about being out in nature, what sort of firearm or bow they love and use, as well as the terrain and climate they mostly frequent, that way I can *really* match the blade to them *and* their conditions."

What started Marty in his knifemaking journey? Like most things, necessity was the mother of invention. Following a request from his son years ago to make him a knife, this artist realised a talent which had previously not been evident. This talent has now become a full-blown passion. It became immediately apparent that the 'one size fits all' philosophy of high production knifemaking simply can't cut it in the individually tailored world of the custom creator.

A well-made custom knife just works better. The reasons are twofold. The first is due to ergonomics. How it feels in the hand. How that handle and its weight fill your palm, grip texture of the material and your own manual dexterity. If you have size 12 feet, you don't buy size 9 shoes. The second reason is steel and its composition.

As regular readers will be aware from previous articles printed in *Australian Hunter*, I've spoken at length in regard to steel and its behaviours. Through employing steel which has the correct chemical composition for the task at hand, virtues such as edge retention and corrosion resistance can be seen to increase. Different knives are designed with differing blade lengths, styles, profiles and thicknesses for diverse tasks.

For this reason, a flexible fish filleting knife for example, which needs good corrosion resistance, a bendy blade and the ability to take an edge quickly, requires a completely different type of steel than, let's say, a hatchet. Both are cutting and slicing tools, but their applications are vastly unlike. It is Marty's inherent comprehension of steel which helps put his knives a cut above.

He enjoys working with 10-series steels (1075, 1084 and 1095), yet is also proficient with 15N20, W2, 26C3, 80CrV2 and one of my personal favourites, 5160, a high carbon and chromium spring steel which offers not only an excellent level of ductility and toughness but also a great measure of resistance to fatigue.



Mosaic explosion Damascus comprised of heritage wrought iron, brass liners with black G10 fibreglass laminate and two-tone ebony. The sheath is made from both bovine and ostrich leather.



A 4" deep belly drop point skinner in 1095 with handle from mallee root burl with black micarta bolsters, carbon fibre pins, lanyard liner and custom 45-degree right-handed sheath.

The 5160 certainly lists highly on my own preferred steel for knife blades. Marty also indulges stainless steels too, in the form of Bohler N690, 12C17, 440C and 14C28N. Like all of us, Marty has his favourites and rates 1095 as one of his preferred steels to work with.

"1095 mono steel is my preferred for hunting knives," he tells me. "I just love the way it can be used in both Damascus and San Mai (a knife which has hard steel forming the blade's edge with iron or stainless steel forming a jacket on both sides).

"It holds and retains an incredible edge, gets a brilliant hamon (a visible line of delineation between material states) and it is cost effective."

He also enjoys the painstaking pleasure of crafting custom leather sheaths for his blades and he even built his own forge and hydraulic press.

In today's world of plastic stocked hunting rifles and \$19.95 fishing shop knives, it's refreshing to find a creator who understands the 'personal touch' side of equipment for the outdoorsman. Not everything today is made to be handed down. But something as personal as a highly revered hunting rifle, scope and knife combination, which have served their owner during memorable times with close family and friends, epic hunts in amazing locations, used on freezer fillers, trophy heads and camp meals alike, well, that's a hand-me-down to be treasured.

Naturally, contingent upon style, most knife and sheath combinations involve roughly 50 hours of work and attract an estimated two to three months lead time from order placement.

Marty Jelinek can be contacted by email at marty.jelinek@yahoo.com.au or via his Facebook page 'Jelinek Custom Blades'. ■



A 4.5" trailing clip point with large dagger-style swedge boasts a nine-layer San Mai blade with 1095 steel as the core, 15N20 pure nickel and 1074 cladding with Damascus half hand guard featuring a copper spacer and inland rosewood handle, with a left-hand sheath.

The ginger boar is no more

Don was a happy man after downing the large ginger boar.



A ginger offspring caught on trail cam

After years of spotting a hefty hog, **Don Caswell** finally gets the opportunity to bring his .257 Weatherby Magnum into play

With pigs too plentiful on my hunting grounds, I had temporarily switched attention from wild dogs to feral porkers. The trail cameras were showing lots of daytime pig activity on a dead cow, so hunting buddy Pete and I decided to sit over the carcass late one afternoon.

Only a week or so previously I had shot a smallish ginger boar there using the same approach. The trail cams were indicating that the sows had overcome their fright and resumed business as usual, with a new black-coloured boyfriend in tow.

The plan was to wait until we had a swarm of pigs at the carcass and then open fire with the intention of dropping the breeding sows as a priority, before turning our interest to any boar still in the vicinity. To put a dent in the burgeoning feral pig population we needed to take out the big breeding sows. Boars were a dime a dozen and quickly replaced, as recently seen. Even though good-sized boars rarely had decent hooks in this country.

We sat on the face of a steep spur overlooking the site of the carrion that was about 150m below us. We had both fitted

bipods to our rifles. Pete had his .308 Win and I set up my .257 Weatherby Magnum. Apart from wanting plenty of firepower for some hasty shooting on the hogs, I could also keep my eye on a jungle clearing where sometimes wild dogs came out in the late afternoon. A wild dog would take priority over any pigs. It would be a long shot but something the .257 had proved itself capable of in previous hunts from this exact position.

The pasture was thick, so we had no problem finding a comfortable location to sit on the ground and have the rifles ready. With a light breeze in our faces and the sun sliding lower in the sky behind us, we had a prime spot to shoot from. Time drifted along and I was concentrating on the distant clearing where I hoped to spot the wild dogs, while Pete scanned the creek flat below us. A hushed "pig, to the left," from Pete snapped my focus back to the front. A hefty ginger boar had poked up out of the creek and stood scenting the air carefully before moving on towards the carrion.



The 'can opener' about to demonstrate why he was given the nickname.

"Well I never..." I whispered to Pete. "That's the last pig I expected to see here this afternoon. It's the can opener." There was no hurry, we could sit and watch the hog for a while. I went on to explain that over the past four or five years I had amassed hundreds of trail cam photos and videos of this boar gnawing at carrion. In all that time the few daylight photos of him were at first light only. He did not share his food and shooed away any pigs or dogs with the temerity to think they could have a snack while he was in residence on a carcass. He was also the first pig to open up a bloated carcass, invariably from the rear end. I had a host of gruesome images of him doing just that. I had nicknamed him the 'can opener' for such behaviour.

We had a brief discussion. The idea had been to wait for the sows to join the boar that we had been expecting and then start shooting. With this crusty old boy unlikely to welcome company for dinner, here was a golden opportunity to take out the alpha boar in the area. Many of the younger boars I had seen and shot were ginger as well

and their patterns painted a remarkable resemblance to this veteran. I would take the shot and at any hint the boar was not anchored, Pete was ready to hit him again with the .308 Win.

The boar, with much testing of the wind, would walk a slow few metres and stand for a while. I whispered to Pete: "There's a bit of weed between us. When he moves clear of that and stops, I'll whack him." It took a while but eventually the boar pottered for a few steps and stopped obligingly. I squeezed off a 110-grain Nosler AccuBond at 3310fps muzzle velocity.

Even over the booming echo of the Magnum you could hear the solid smack of the impact, right behind the point of his shoulder. He flopped and kicked a few times and that was it. Pete maintained a sight on the boar just in case he leapt up, while he also checked around for any opportunities presented by fleeing pigs or dogs. Nothing else appeared so we emptied the chambers and shouldered our rifles.

Up close the boar was bulkier than he looked in photos, a hefty old-timer indeed.

He had a big, long head and was greying around the muzzle and face. His hooks were worn right down and splintered. Both those aspects of his appearance seemed to indicate a good age on him. Having him show up in daylight had been a real bonus. It was time for a change of bloodlines in the local feral pig population. ■

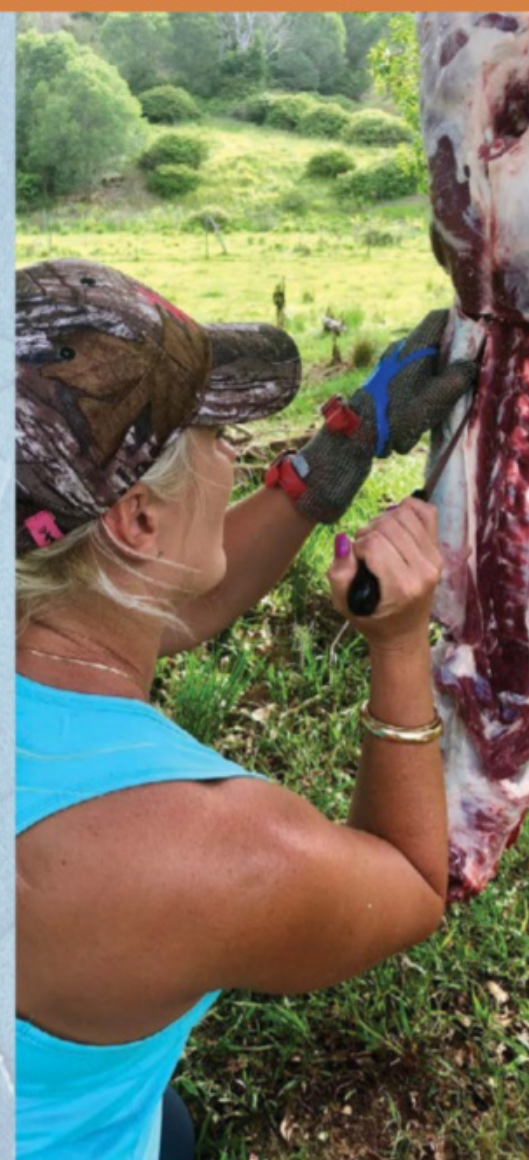
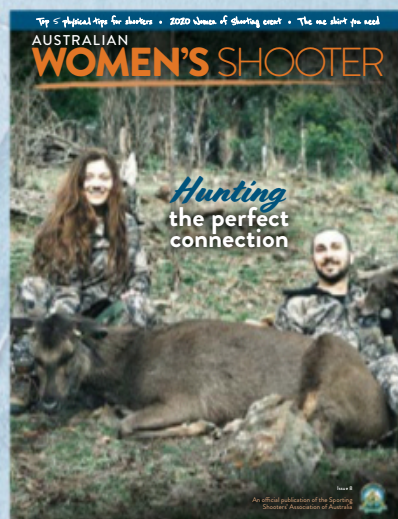


Pete shows off the old ginger boar.

AUSTRALIAN WOMEN'S SHOOTER

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Game bird taxidermy 101



Jan Kaptein provides a comprehensive home D.I.Y guide to get you started

Any hunter has his or her reason to chase their animal of choice in conditions that are often far from comfortable. For me, the main reason is to put meat on the table, followed by a strong urge to be out in the bush, close to nature.

The fact that I shoot to feed myself and my family means little goes to waste. However, over the years, I increasingly find myself out and about shooting pests for farmers. This is something that was always 'part of the deal.' In exchange for access to properties, I would control pig, dog, goat and other populations.

Whether it is stricter gun laws, changing sentiment, lack of time, or something else, I do not know, but where a decade and longer ago, most property owners would have a rifle or shotgun to despatch pests, an increasing number of properties I hunt on no longer actively control pests themselves. Instead, they rely on hunters to do so for them.

Of course, you will not hear me complain that this provides opportunities to shoot, but it does make me feel a little ambiguous. Yes, the pests need to go and fortunately, many of the species I shoot make for good eating. However, there are a few species that I do not eat. In order to not let the despatched animals go to waste, I decided to see what use I could make of them. This led me to taxidermy. Not because I necessarily want to mount entire animals, but to

preserve useful parts of them or to mount them for educational purposes.

While at it, you learn more about the anatomy of the animals you work with. For those interested in the basics, this 101 will provide some insights. To start easy, I will focus on the skinning, cleaning and mounting of small birds. This requires little prior knowledge or experience. Chemicals used are also less toxic than those employed in most mammals and other animals with thicker and greasier skins.

Prior to going to work on (small) birds, there are a few prerequisites that have to be met. In random order:

- Make sure that it is legal to obtain and own any animal you work on. Pest birds are generally not an issue, but many of our native species require Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) documentation. This also applies if you only intend to use the preserved animal or its parts for personal projects.
- Wear latex gloves when handling dead animals, just in case. If the animal you work on was not raised in a controlled environment, freezing it prior to processing is a good idea as it will kill many of the bacteria, viruses and small insects it may carry.
- The bird you want to work on needs to be fresh. It is always best to work on a freshly killed animal or one that was

frozen immediately after it died and thawed out right before you work on it. To check for freshness, gently rub the skin around the beak. If the top layer rubs off, leaving a shiny surface underneath, discard the animal. Alternatively, part the feathers on the belly and gently rub. Again, if the top layer of the skin easily comes off, exposing the shiny skin underneath, the bird is likely not to be sufficiently fresh.

- Have a clean workplace with your tools and chemicals clearly marked and within reach. Also, make sure you have a container to dispose of any animal and chemical remains in a safe manner.
- When using chemicals for tanning and other purposes ALWAYS make sure to wear nitrile gloves and ensure your workplace has a sufficient flow of fresh air. Masks or respirators are not needed for the chemicals I turn to for small birds but use your common-sense and remember that being safe is always better than being sorry.



For small birds, the materials required are fairly basic. In a nutshell, you need the following tools to skin the bird: scalpel, tweezers, needles, small pointy pair of scissors, small brush, paper towels and latex or nitrile gloves. To gain an easier grip on slippery skins, a sprinkle of fine sawdust, corn starch or similar powder can help. I like to work on a tray because it keeps things tidy and together, but this is optional.

Other materials needed to stuff and mount the bird are: Polyurethane (PU) body, (cotton) wool, glass eyes, critter clay, foam for neck, glue gun, metal wire, wire-cutters, pliers, suture needle and thread, pins and a mounting board or perch as well as a hairdryer and toothbrush.

Chemicals used are limited but for a small bird, you will need tanning solution (pre-mixed liquids are available, most are based on Eucalan), borax salt and regular kitchen detergent.

Once you have all these sorted and you have defrosted the bird you intend to work on, you are good to go. To avoid becoming lost in the details, I will stick to some main steps with pointers for each. Practice makes perfect, but if needed, information is available online to help you out.

Once you start, it is important to prevent the skin from drying out, so if you stop for more than a few minutes, you can always use a plant spray bottle to apply some moisture or wrap the skin in a wet towel. This will not damage your work and buys you time.

1. Starting off, gently pull the neck and legs of the bird to reduce stiffness of the animal. This will make it easier to work.

Once done, you will make the first cut. For this use a scalpel to cut through the skin, but no deeper.

The incision will be roughly from the base of the throat (feel for the bump of the breastbone) down to between the legs. The cut is no exact science, but make sure not to cut too deep and to stop before the cloaca which you do not want to rupture.

With the cut made, use the back of your scalpel or tweezers to ease the skin off the muscles. Bird skins are often frail, so do not pull hard or use the sharp edge of the scalpel as you risk damaging it. Once you have a start, it is often possible to use a finger to separate the skin from the body. Proceed with this until you reach the bases of the wings and legs. Use kitchen towels to remove liquids or blood as you go along.

The top of the leg musculature will be visible at this stage and you gently work around the bottom side to free the skin, which you can push back towards the knees. Once this is done, cut off the legs at the knee joint. This is an easy cut through the joint (do not cut the bone above or below it). Once cut, you can easily skin down to the tail. You will encounter the cloaca, which you will need to cut. You can put a small plug of paper in it, so it does not leak when you sever it from the intestine.

Once you reach the tail, skin around the rear end of the body and cut the small bones. I like to use a pair of scissors to prevent the risk of damaging the skin. This is a tedious process as most birds also have two glands at the base of the tail. These look like little blobs of grease (which they are) and they need to be removed. If you avoid damaging them this is fairly easy,

otherwise, you will need more time to remove the grease that is bound to spread.

With this done, you can now skin up the back of the bird, right up to the wings. Once you reach them, gently free the skin around the shoulders and cut the joint. For many birds, you can now proceed to skin to the base of the neck, after which the skin is easily removed by gently pulling it over the head (the skin will be inside out). If it becomes stuck at any point use your nails or the back of a scalpel to help ease it off. However, some birds have a head that is much wider than the neck to put the skin over. This applies to ducklings, like the one in the images, as well as many parrots.

If you do not need the secondary cut, proceed to push the skin over the head using your nails or the back of your scalpel. Once you reach the ears, use a pair of tweezers to pull them out by holding the skin and gently pulling to free it. Continue skinning to the eyes.

Here some caution is required as you do not want to damage them. If you gently pull, you ought to be able to cut underneath them through the transparent layer (retina). With the eyes cleared, loosen the skin to the base of the beak. Once I reach this stage, I like to apply tanning liquid with a brush. This is done on the inside. Make sure to cover the entire skin.

2. This is an optional step and describes the neck cut. Cut on the top of the skull from between the eyes, down to the base of the skull at the back. Once done, separate the skin, free the ears and eyelids as previously described and skin around the skull. Cut the neck close to the body. You



Game bird taxidermy 101

can now easily pull the (flexible) neck through the hole you made.

3. The head can be a bit tricky to clean, but in general, I remove the eyes first. They easily come out without rupturing if you use a pair of tweezers that you wiggle underneath prior to popping them out.

Next, remove the meat and tongue from the bottom of the beak and cut the neck close to the base of the skull. You will now need to cut (I like to use scissors) around the base of the neck to be able to remove the brain. Follow the bone at the back of the skull and cut around and pull the last neck bone free with whatever else comes out.

Now remove the brain and as much meat as you can from the skull. In general, the cleaner the better. However, do leave the small tendons that join the top and bottom part of the beak intact, as this will make mounting much easier.

4. With the skull freed, apply some tanning liquid with a brush and proceed to go over the skin to remove any remaining meat and grease. Also, remove the meat on the upper legs that you cut earlier. The cleaner they are, the better. Once you are happy that you have the skin and skull as clean as you can, it needs to be washed.

This is done in lukewarm water with some common detergent. Put the skin in the water and gently move it around from time to time. In all, you will need to wash it for about five minutes, making sure to remove any blood or other stains that may remain on the feathers. Once you take the skin from the soapy water, rinse it under

a gently running tap. Proceed to dry it between some kitchen towels and do not worry at how sad your bird now looks.

When dry you can apply another coat of tanning liquid to the inside of the skin, skull and bones. This will prevent damage by insects and other problems. An alternative to this is to mix some tanning liquid in lukewarm water and put the skin in that for about 10 minutes after rinsing it. While it will preserve the skin just fine, some tanning agents leave residues on the feathers that may impede their natural lustre. As a final step, take the dry skin and sprinkle some borax salt on it and inside the skull.

5. You are now ready to either sew up the bird skin or mount it. Supposedly, you went through all this trouble because you would like to mount it. Modelling PU bodies, necks and other parts is beyond the scope of this article, so I will assume that pre-made parts will be used. These are available for sale.

The first step is to measure the width and length of the neck and cut a piece of foam of the right diameter and length. This is threaded on a metal wire after which you double the end with a pair of pliers to make a small loop. If you made a secondary neck cut, the neck will not be inside out, so pass the foam neck through the neck skin prior to gluing it to the skull.

Proceed to make sure the inside of the skull is dry and fill it with hot glue from the glue-gun, inserting the eyelet at the end of the wire as deeply into the skull as possible with the (foam) neck protruding at a correct angle. Pass the other end of the neck

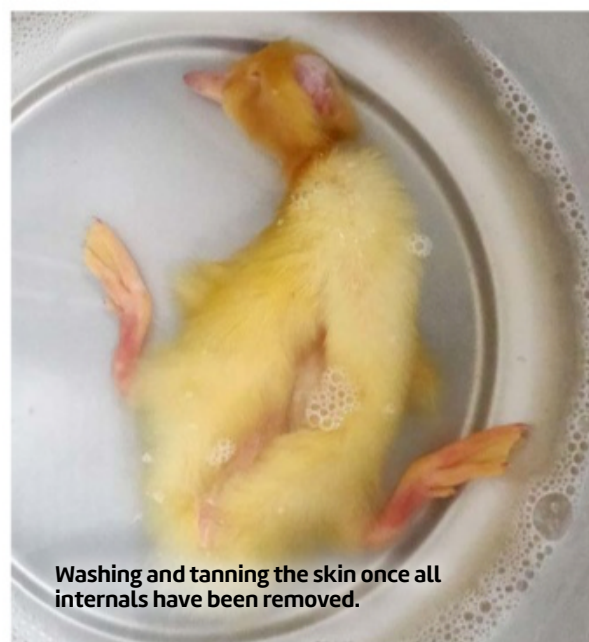


wire through the PU body and cut it, leaving sufficient wire to push it back into the foam to anchor it securely.

Take some critter clay (or other non-shrinking clay) and fill the eye sockets. Pull the skin back over the head and mark in the clay where the eyes should be located (centre of the eyelids with the skin in place), after which you pull the skin off again.

Glass eyes come as two blobs of glass on either end of a metal wire, so cut either side, leaving about 5mm of wire and push them in. Now you can ease the skin back over the skull and make sure the eyes are correctly placed. If you need to move the skin about, be careful not to push or rub the feathers out. Gently ease the skin back further. If there is too much space at the back of the head, you can use some dry-wall filler, applied with a syringe. With the skin passed over this, you can model the head if required. Now pull the skin over the PU body and ensure it fits correctly.

6. For small birds, I will assume that will mean a mount with closed wings, so no wires need to be passed through the wings. They are simply pinned into position once the bird is mounted and will stay in place once the skin dries. For the legs, pass wires from underneath the feet at the back.



The wire needs to run under the skin. It helps to cut a point so they are easier to pass along the joint, which can be tricky. Patience is your friend here, so wiggle gently and take your time. You do not want to puncture the skin. Once done, wrap the upper leg (tibia) with some cotton wool to shape the upper legs.

To prevent them drying out the skin too quickly, give the wool a quick brush with some tanning liquid. Pass the wires through the PU body and cut them on the opposite side, anchoring them by folding them back into the foam like you did with the neck.

Model the skin over the body, neck and legs. Many birds will benefit from some stuffing near the tail end. If so, apply some filler and fix the tail in place by running a narrow metal wire through it and into the PU body.

7. Now you can stitch up the bird. Use a thread that is not too thin and ideally in an unobtrusive colour. I stitch from the inside of the skin to the inside on the opposite side, leaving about 5mm between stitches. Do so close to the edges but leaving enough skin so it will not tear.

If you made a neck cut, start at the top of the head and stitch down to the base. For the body, start at the cloaca, stitching upwards. With the body halfway closed, use wool to fill the chest if required. If the beak is too hollow, apply some filler there too.

8. With the bird closed, you can use a hairdryer and toothbrush to dry the chest where you made the cut. Make sure to only blow and brush in the direction of the feathers and do not put the dryer too close as it will heat the bird up. Once done, move the bird into the desired position, marking the perch or mounting plate where the leg wires protrude.

Drill the mount and pass the wires through, folding and anchoring them at the bottom. You can make final adjustments to your bird's posture and pin the wings in place. Push the pins through small pieces of cardboard to evenly press them in place.

For birds with webbed feet, you may want to pin the toes down as they otherwise typically warp while drying. Arrange the feathers in their natural position, which

will camouflage the stitches. All that remains is to remove the pins once your bird is fully dry. Do not just pull them out but twist them gently until they are loose and remove them.

This procedure will work on most small birds, but each species has its own anatomy and peculiarities. Personally, I often preserve skins and forego mounting entire specimens. If you do want to mount, make sure to keep the body and parts you remove for reference and size.

It also helps to search the internet for images prior to starting the project. This will give you ideas about the desired way to mount as well as natural poses of the bird in question. All in all, taxidermy is an interesting hobby that allows us to know our animals better as well as preserving them for educational purposes. Whatever your objectives are, please make sure to comply with laws and regulations and ensure proper care and protection when working with dead animals and chemicals. ■



Wires inserted in the legs and attached to the PU body.



Mounted duckling with pins to ensure it dries in the desired posture.



The finished product. Next up for Jan is larger game.

A case for upgrading

Matthew Cameron
explores taking your rifle
to the next level by using
different projectiles

It would be nice if you could have a singular rifle for each hunting situation irrespective of the game involved. Unfortunately, there is the small matter of finance which normally limits the number of rifles that you might own.

However, I suggest that in the modern world under the right circumstances you are able to take your rifles to a higher level of performance simply by upgrading to a different type of projectile.

Secondly, another situation has occurred with many calibres having heavier than normal projectiles progressively available for the first time. Unfortunately, there is a real problem in that most barrels from older rifles are not fast enough in twist to stabilise the new offerings. It's not a new problem and it has existed for many years.

When I started reloading in 1982 it was to cater for pigs and mainly rabbits. The property we had gained access to contained both in large numbers, with a morning on a hill crammed with rabbits requiring paced shots to prevent excessive barrel heating. In addition, we spotlighted most nights, mainly for rabbits and foxes.

Varmint calibres: .222 Remington, .22-250 Remington, .220 Swift and .243 Winchester

I started out using conventional projectiles with these rifles, including offerings from Sierra, Speer and Nosler, mainly soft-points and occasionally hollow-points, seeking the best accuracy. In the mid-1990s a shooting mate introduced me to Gary Little in Brisbane. He produces projectiles in many calibres up to and including those in .510.

As a reloader I started experimenting with other projectiles early in the process.

From a varminting point of view every bit helps and I was rapidly becoming interested in long-range action. The use of JLK Low Drag projectiles was as early as October 1995, with the Ballistic Coefficient and their nose slightly better than normal soft-points. When it was possible to do so, we imported many JLK projectiles legally, and we still have some available.

Once you go over about 300 yards/metres the better Ballistic Coefficients begin to become effective both in terms of speed and retained energy. Once again you can improve the downrange performance just by selecting the projectile with a balance between velocity and accuracy, sometimes a fine line between the two. The same applied to a .220 Swift my son owned, which was a solid long-range performer.

The other projectile, often overlooked, is the partition type. These are not a new idea, as RWS released the H-Mantel projectile in 1934 with a soft tip and a much harder base. The tip breaks up and the rear core penetrates. One US writer said that he had never recovered a rear core from a partition projectile, so you gain the best of



The .243 case, (left), will not stabilise this 115gr Little custom protector point in a 1:10 barrel but is accurate in the .243 Ackley in a 1:7 barrel.



Ballistic Tips in a variety of calibres and weights.

both worlds. Thus, he is suggesting that a 60gr Nosler Partition in .224 calibre is well on the way to compare with some .243 calibre projectiles.

If we equate these figures to a .243 calibre 58gr Hornady V-MAX at 3650fps the Hornady is 2.23" flatter at 400 yards, is 257fps faster and the retained energy is 96ft-lb higher. But while the Hornady has the mushrooming tip, it does not have the rear portion penetration. I would argue that under many circumstances the Partition may be a better projectile to use.

Often it takes considerable time and effort to find a balanced load between accuracy and velocity but in the long term for a varmint rifle it is necessary, unless you are going to limit your range. For the long-range afflicted like me, this is not acceptable.

Certainly, at the longer ranges the JLK Low Drag nose works. There was some chatter at one stage about the effectiveness of the nose, but they expand okay in my opinion at all ranges.



Nosler AccuBonds will upgrade the performance of any cartridge.



A happy trio of hunters.



Proof of the pudding – the cartridge is 9.3x62.

Hunting calibres: .243 Winchester, 6.5x55 mm, .270 Winchester and .30-06

There were some others, but I experimented with these various projectiles to improve the result.

The other problem is the vast array of designs. It is impossible to use them all and you can only write about personal experiences. While a good, accurate varmint round, I consider the .243 Winchester to be almost a minimum for pigs of all sizes. Some would disagree, but there are reasons for the decision. Mainly where we shot pigs initially there was thick cover available and unless you anchored the animal with the first shot, you would not manage another. However, this has changed over time with a new property to shoot on.

Hence the trend to turn to heavier calibres initially. We did use the cartridge a lot for dam shooting when we could rely on a carefully aimed shot over open country, mainly with 100gr Speer Spitzers. Usually these were propelled by a load of AR2209 at an average of 2890fps. Like the .270 Winchester, the rifle has recently had a new barrel.

New load development includes 100gr Little protector points and 55gr Nosler Ballistic Tips. I had not used the Gary Little design previously simply because I had large numbers of Speer projectiles available.

The 6.5x55mm is a Tikka T3 and has only used Gary Little protector points in either 140- or 160-grain weights. Both combinations are effective.

Initially, I started out using the standard 130gr soft-point on pigs with a .270

Winchester Husqvana rifle. The standard load became 54gr of AR2209 powder and 130gr Gary Little protector points, which quickly evolved. We used this for many years and I would not even guess how many pigs this load has despatched. We did a lot of shooting over dams at night in the early days with a spotlight, with the .270 effective on longer shots. We had similar results with 150gr Ballistic Tips.

Our records show that we loaded up the first H-Mantels in May 2015, in the .270 Winchester. While we soon had an accurate load, there is no evidence that we ever fired the rounds on pigs. This cartridge combination did take my first and probably only deer under a spotlight, which was merely a meat gathering exercise. It took out a palm-sized hole in the animal's neck. With a new barrel recently fitted to the rifle load, development is well underway again. Initially, it is interesting to note that it did not like the 54gr AR2209 Little 130gr soft-point load at all.

With the .30-06 I have tested numbers of different projectiles over time. Early in 1997 we tried Nosler 220gr Partitions on pigs but found them overly hard. Whereas 165gr soft-points were more effective. It is a load that the rifle seems comfortable with. Hornady 165gr GMX provided good accuracy when the load developed but we have yet to use them on pigs.

The other projectile developed in .257, .270, 7mm and .308 but not personally used to date on any live game is the Nosler AccuBond, released in the USA in 2003.

Initially used on pigs by another in our group in a .308 Winchester cartridge, it was obviously achieving good results from personal observation. However, the drought interrupted our normal shooting regime.

It might be suggested by some that when you are attempting to compare the ballistics effectiveness of one projectile against another, you are merely playing with the numbers. Oddly enough, I would agree simply because we are not looking at just how different projectile types perform depending on design. Based on experience of shooting pigs over nearly 40 years we have formed a reasonable summation.

If we use the basic soft-point as a base round, I would rate the Little protector point and/or the Remington Cor-Lokt design on par with any of the plastic-tipped unbonded projectiles and suggest that both are worth at least another half a calibre in value.

Further, the Nosler AccuBond is worth perhaps $\frac{3}{4}$ of a calibre valued at least a full calibre above any base figure irrespective of the calibre concerned.

The other unspoken issue is one of sighting. A set shot as such with a solid rest is totally different to attempting a long shot and using a tree trunk for some support. The set shot coupled with a good projectile may be entirely adequate, while using the tree trunk might need a cartridge with a bit more clout to allow for sighting errors.

Sometime soon we will obtain Nosler Partitions in .224 and 6mm calibres, hopefully in 60gr and 95gr weights respectively and load development in .22-250 Remington and .243 Ackley cases ready for when the pigs return. We will be quite happy to use either over baits or perhaps with electronic calls. With the accuracy of either, the pigs will not like it at all. ■

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Flying farmyard ferals

Adrian Kenney enjoys his conservation work slugging starlings and Indian mynas

With the wide distribution of both game and pest species across Australia, we as hunters are often spoilt for choice. Many opt to seek the pigs and goats of the red dirt plains and Pilliga Scrub or the big sambar deer of those rugged mountains high. Even more love hunting bunnies via every method. A mostly untapped resource by the majority of the hunting minded would have to be starlings and Indian mynas.

When you consider the vast habitat in which they live and the amount of food resources they consume, it is rather confronting to imagine the number of native birds they have wiped from our landscape. They would be native birds that previously landed in those trees and fed on that ground but now, their calls are silenced and we have another sound – of starlings and Indian mynas.

While other game and pest species may take priority as they provide food or fur, it's often a pleasant change of pace to rest the centrefire or rimfire in the gun safe and reach for the air rifle for some different conservation work, that also happens to be satisfying.

Both starlings and Indian mynas are far from stupid or easy to hunt. Their extremely keen eyesight and gregarious nature makes sneaking up on them to within airgun range a challenge to say the least. Fortunately, they love to frequent farmhouse yards, taking advantage of left-over chook feed and pet food then resting in the surrounding trees.

Although these areas provide food and shelter for the birds, they also deliver great cover for the airgun hunter to knock them off their perch.

I recently made arrangements with a local farmer for an afternoon of airgun hunting. This gave me the farmyard to myself, allowing for safe shooting and less disturbance to the birds. I stepped out of my vehicle as eager as a beagle on a fox hunt and filled my Air Arms S410 with air from the dive bottle to the required pressure.

Starlings would first land on the power lines before flying down to the trees near the cattle yard.



A dive bottle makes easy work of filling pneumatic air rifles to desired pressure.



Thanks to the local farmer, Adrian was able to utilise the shed's central location in the yard to shoot from.

Loaded with shooting sticks, pellet pouch, rifle and seat, I snuck into the work shed and out of the sunlight. The shed offered the perfect shooting spot as it was centrally located and had openings facing in the two main directions of likely bird activity. Best of all, it had a clear shooting lane to the roof of the chook pen and fruit tree behind.

I was in the middle of setting up my seat and shooting sticks when the chatter of Indian mynas in the tree outside captured my attention. Clearly it was siesta time as the colourful birds sat preening themselves peacefully in a tree only 20 yards away. Easing in behind the walnut stock of the Air Arms, the fattest most frontal target filled the scope, with the cross-hairs quartering its brown chest feathers. There was a 'twang' then a 'thwack' with a puff of feathers followed by a burst of wings and alarm calls as his companions pulled stumps on siesta time.

About 70 yards out in the paddock stood a large gum tree in which they sat with heads tilting amid questioning looks as to what had happened. Convinced of an emphatic kill, I stayed in the shed and settled into my shooting position with sticks facing the chook pen roof. They would be back.



Indian mynas are intelligent wary birds with keen eyesight, ensuring challenging but satisfying hunting for the airgunner.

There was nothing in the branches over the shipping container to my right, just the lazy sound of hens ambling around the farmyard garden. Then, with a burst of calls and wing beats the mynas were back, this time landing among the branches of the fruit tree which meant I struggled to distinguish their subtle movements.

Then, one chose to be accommodating and landed out on the fringe of the tree where its body was visible to me. Not

as confident as before as it was a side-on shot, I took careful aim and put pressure on the trigger. A limp feathered form duly dropped through the branches as the other mynas exited with apparent eagerness.

That's number two I thought to myself as I worked the bolt, pushing a third pellet into the barrel before placing the rifle's fore-end back into the shooting sticks. Periodically I'd sneak out to the open front of the shed and pop my head out to check

Flying farmyard ferals



for starlings that frequented the trees around the cattle yards. Often, they were there. Those greasy lice-infested flying rats sat chirping in the afternoon sun as I snuck over with my gun. Every time I tried to approach by sneaking hunched over, they would immediately take flight.

So, I began just ambling out of the shed slowly with head down as if not even aware of their presence or interested in it. On reaching the gate post I'd simply lift the rifle gradually to form a steady rest and raise my head until those mongrel starlings came into scope vision. Several times I made that same amble out with tension and hope in my mind that when I got there and finally looked up, they'd still be there, and most times they were. Lesson learned.

On the other hand, the Indian mynas were wising up fast and made frustratingly

few visits. Back in the shed, I noticed an Indian myna land high in a tree at the end of the house. I inched over towards the shed wall to take a rest with the rifle. The airgun's pellet impacted with an extra thud this time as the projectile punched through the myna's back. He dropped like a feathered golf ball, deflecting from branch to branch as he fell as if caught in nature's pinball machine.

The chatter of Indian mynas could be heard on several occasions throughout the afternoon from the front of the house. Each time I headed down to try for a shot they would see me before I would see them and all I would get was an alarm call and a flurry of wings.

Later in the day as the afternoon shadows lengthened and the orange tinge of a setting sun settled upon the farm sheds

surrounding me, things were quietening down and I tried a few longer shots out into the gum tree in the paddock.

For some reason the Indian mynas had reached the conclusion it was a preferential perch and indeed it was for both my shots missed and landed harmlessly in the paddock. With that I packed up my gear and went for a stroll around to see what birds I could find for a photo. Unfortunately, with the long grass and debris around the base of trees and sheds I only found seven of the 11 I had shot.

Amazed and a bit disappointed that I couldn't find birds that had dropped like lifeless stones, I packed up and headed off. But I will be back, because slugging starlings and Indian mynas off their high rests is too much fun not to. ■

Best in the World title for *Field to Fork – Second Helpings*

SSAA National's latest cookbook has received one of the highest honours in food culture by being named in the top two meat cookbooks in the world

This latest accolade for the Field to Fork franchise was announced at the 27th Gourmand World Cookbook Awards in Umea, Sweden in early June 2022.

It marks the third time a Field to Fork publication has been recognised on the international stage. *Field to Fork – Second Helpings* was named Australia's Best Meat Cookbook in the 2021 Gourmand World Cookbook Awards and the first instalment in the series, *Field to Fork – The Australian Game Cookbook*, was named as Best First Cookbook – Australia in 2012.

The Field to Fork cooking movement is a celebration of Australia's unique flora and fauna and the important connection people feel to their food and its origins. It has featured a wide range of game meats including camel, snapper, crocodile and venison to illustrate a grassroots approach to sustainably sourcing and cooking food.

SSAA National is proud to have created a cookbook that is celebrated on an international scale and highlighting Australia's fishers, recreational hunters and producers for their ethical harvesting of clean, green and delicious food.

The Gourmand World Cookbook Awards was founded by Edouard Cointreau in 1995. The annual awards are the world's largest international competition in the food sector. Entries from 227 countries were received for this year's awards in one of the largest and most competitive fields of nominees in the history of the initiative.

To secure your copy of the two-time award-winning *Field to Fork – Second Helpings* hardback cookbook for \$49.95 delivered, visit our Online Shop at ssaa.org.au ■

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SSAA WA Conservation & Wildlife Management

SSAA WA has six individual branches that undertake Conservation & Wildlife Management activities throughout the state.

All participants must be full members of SSAA WA. Prior to taking part in sanctioned field activities, members must complete accuracy and safety tests, as well as a written assessment covering navigation, bushcraft and hunting ethics. In addition to formal programs, the branches conduct a range of social and training activities.

Our branches are involved in a variety of conservation-based activities in cooperation with private property managers, local municipalities and state government agencies. We work closely with other conservation organisations. Projects cover a wide range of feral and pest species, as well as agricultural protection.

For further information or membership inquiries, phone the State Coordinator on 0429 847 590 or email conservation@ssaawa.org.au

SSAA NT Conservation & Pest Management

SSAA NT Conservation & Pest Management operates in the north of NT as part of the SSAA Conservation and Wildlife Management group, providing a free community service to government, pastoral properties and traditional landowners to assist with eradication of feral pest animals.

Membership is open to NT residents who successfully complete a theory and practical assessment. All field activities comply with NT Parks guidelines for the destruction of pest animals, the Model Code of Practice for the Welfare of Animals and the Model Code of Practice for the Destruction of Feral Animals.

Each year there are six to nine one-week field operations on remote pastoral properties and National Parks, involving four to five members.

Meetings to plan and coordinate activities are held as required at the SSAA Darwin Branch Range at Micket Creek Shooting Complex in Berrimah. Further details, including membership forms, can be located within the Darwin Branch clubhouse or through the contacts below.

For more information, write to CPM (NT), PO Box 90, Karama, NT 0813, email pduff@inet.net.au or cscousins64@gmail.com

SSAA SA Conservation & Wildlife Management

SSAA SA Conservation & Wildlife Management contributes to the preservation of South Australia's natural heritage through the humane removal of 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



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Around the campfire with John Denman

As I write this, the rain is coming down in sheets. Rivers are rising all along the east coast, and a few further inland streams have experienced some minor flooding. Now, it's no fun to be out camping in the bush and being rained on, but it happens. That we have no control over the weather goes without saying, so we learn to live with it. It's times like this that you are grateful for prior preparation. When you wisely decided not to camp in your swag, but took the time to put up a tent, or at least a good tarp.

Like most of those who choose to enjoy a recreation involving the outdoors, weather is a constant factor. For hunters, droughts are not much good as the game often dies off or heads to wherever it can find food and water. The ground is parched and cracked, while walking over dead leaves is like trying to stalk an animal in a field of corn flakes.

Rain tends to fix all that. The ground becomes softer, making your footfall quieter, and feed is more abundant. Game requires three basics in life – water, food and shelter. If any of those elements are missing life turns harder for both the hunted and the hunter. In regard to the previous mention of swags, I still like to camp in one, but prefer to hedge my bets by putting up a tarp. I now rise off the ground by using a folding stretcher. This way I can lie snug in that swag and listen to some rain on the tarp and sleep well, knowing that the ground will be soft in the morning.

Of course, there's always the chance that the rain may not stop. Hunting in the rain is something I'd rather avoid. If it pours while I'm out away from camp then I'll cop it. If my rifle is wet, I'll cop that too. I suppose this is why a lot of people have gravitated to stainless steel metal and poly stocks. I must admit to having been tempted, but still stubbornly stay with blued steel and walnut for my hunting rifles.

If they become wet, I dry them and then apply some oil. There's a product that everyone should have, called Renaissance Wax. It comes in a white can with a screw-top lid and is used in all sorts of places, including the British Museum. It seeps into the pores of metal and wood and minimises deterioration from moisture and other nasty things. Just rub it on all the surfaces you want to protect, then rub it off with a soft cloth.

Life would be a lot easier all-round if we could accurately predict the weather. Many years ago, I asked a meteorologist why the weather reports were so often wrong. He replied that it's an inexact science. I thought to myself that science is supposed to be about precise things but didn't mention my view to the met man.

Having said that, weather prediction really is on the improve. It simply seems a lot of humans have convinced themselves that the forecasting people are still tossing darts at the map, when the reality is a lot different. Often hunters will go forth steadfast in their own infallible ability to handle anything that arises, up to and

including weather predictions, because the weather people "always get it wrong." Not so, I'm afraid. These days weather forecasting is far more accurate than it used to be, but that's not to say there's not the occasional unexpected wrinkle.

A mate and I were camped out on the Dumaresq River west of Tenterfield some time back and we'd seen a black and threatening cloud mass approaching from the west. In fact, it was rapidly looming so time was of the essence. I immediately began kindling up a good fire. Phil asked why, so I replied we were going to need some warmth after this event passes. Anyway, it struck us hard and the tent ripped to shreds. Phil, who is not a big bloke, was hanging on the tarp. Considering Phil's size, and the way the tarp was going, I had visions of my mate doing a Mary Poppins and flying off with it. So I grabbed the tarp as well and we hung on until the storm passed.

After it was all over, that good fire was still going so we stood around it, steaming gently. We rearranged the tent and bailed it out, had a couple of rums and crawled into the wreckage. What else would you do? At least the ground was soft the next morning. ■

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