

Rifle Loony News

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www.riflesandrecipes.com

What's Up?

The Trouble with Being Indecisive

EC



I'll admit it. It wasn't a sudden and brilliant inspiration but sheer embarrassment that finally got me off the fence. What am I talking about? My .308, that lovely, perfectly custom-fit rifle that Serengeti Rifles made for me to take to South Africa in 2008 which has become a very pretty but very lazy Safe Queen through no fault of her own. As we've mentioned in passing before, I was getting recoil headaches: the first un-ignorable one from my little 20 gauge BL-3. We were hunting sharptails in Eastern Montana, and our Labra-Setter, Gideon, flushed a big fat bird from some buffalo berries. I shot, and in the instant before I blacked out, saw the bird bounce off the ground. When I regained consciousness, I was on my knees and John was asking where the bird was. I pointed, he picked it up and then he looked at me and realized I wasn't right. From then on I shot a 28 gauge except for geese and ducks, where I again ran into trouble.

We were up in Alberta Canada on an evening hunt for whatever would come into our decoys. They didn't, until the last few minutes of legal light, and then reams of ducks came in like kids to an ice cream truck. This was the fifth hunt in 3 days, but I still got away with the first 3 or 4 shots from the 12 gauge, gas-operated, custom fitted Urika. We'd been testing various 3-inch 12 gauge loads, with high density non-toxic shot, and as the ducks poured

in I was in agony. First I had to give up shooting. Then, unable to stand the sound of John's shotgun right by my ear anymore, I staggered out of the blind and fell to the ground. And still they came.

By now even the dim late afternoon light was burning my eyes, so lying flat on my back in the muddy stubble, I covered them with one arm as I brandished my shotgun overhead with the other yelling, "Kill the ducks, John. Kill the bastards!" By now the sky was dark with ducks setting their wings and tumbling into our decoys apparently mesmerized by my impersonation, however crude, of a Robo-Duck.

Not far away, our friend Nick Frederick was watching the ducks come in and wondering what the heck new calling technique I was using lying out there in the open. It sure as heck was working.

That day made it clear this recoil problem wasn't a two-time thing, and I started getting serious about reducing the recoil. Before our goose hunt last fall, I test shot a bunch of loads in my Browning Gold, another gas-operated shotgun we'd modified to fit me better. Some old 3-inch, 1 1/8 ounce of #4 Bismuth shot we'd hoarded worked best for me: it not only didn't trigger the headaches, but also dropped both geese and ducks cleanly. It's discontinued now, but I'll find something for next year.

But then there were rifles, and specifically there was the .308 Artemis that Serengeti (now Kilimanjaro Rifles) had built for me. Gene Gordner, their Kalispell gun smith had personally fit the gun (that's him in the photo upper left, adjusting my Artemis at my second fitting). I'd taken it to Africa a few weeks later with no problem shooting 150 gr Nosler E-Tips with 46 brains of Varget powder for about 2800fps, but that had to change now. Sighting in, I could shoot 1 or 2 rounds of the 150's but that was all. I could feel the sharp and heavy pain start immediately, spreading millimeter by millimeter throughout my brain pan faster and sharper with each successive shot.

Load it down some more? Why then a .308? John and I agreed that it was a total waste of the caliber to not take advantage of its full range of bullet weights. Serengeti and gun smith Gene Gordner offered to rebarrel the gun to anything I wanted, but I couldn't decide. The more we talked, the less I knew, so into the safe it went.

Well, I knew some things. Whatever I chose had

to be a caliber that was common enough to find ammo for--easily--wherever I was hunting, just in case I ran out, or forgot it in the first place. (On a gopher hunting trip 2 years earlier John had taken 3 rifles, a .22 Hornet, a .22 rimfire rifle, .221 Fireball, but forgotten his ammo box on the front porch. Luckily, we were meeting friends in a small town, and it had a general market. Unluckily they only had ammo for one of his rifles: the .22. It's a lesson I didn't forget.) So for an entire hunting season, every small town we drove through, we'd stop and see what ammo was available. Pretty consistently, it was .223 Rem, 22-250, .243 Win, .270 Win, 7 Mag, .308 Win, .30-30 Win, 30-06 Springfield, and .300 Win Mag.

Second, because I get excited as well as mildly dyslexic, it had to be something that shot flat for long distances, so I wouldn't have to be messing with how many apples to hold over the back of the buck at 200 yards.

Most important, it had to be possible. My .308 was built off a donor .243 Kimber, a short action. So whatever I chose had to be a short action, as well as a flat shooting, mild recoiling caliber with a wide range of bullet weights. Easy. So it sat in the safe a little longer.

Everyone but me had a very sure opinion about what to re-barrel it to. Gun shows were particularly rife with opinions from wildcats to traditional lady's calibers. But I had a perfectly good .243, a Husqvarna from the '60's that was not only light weight but fit me only a bit less well than the Serengeti, and was very accurate. (And of course, by then I'd already had the metal work engraved by our friend, Brian Gouse.)

The .257 was another one that came up often munching Polish dogs at the gun show concession stand. But I had an even more accurate .257 already in my arsenal. My .257 Roberts New Ultra Light Arms was the most accurate gun in my closet. In fact, when either of us buys a new scope, we put it on a NULA to run the first box of ammo through it. Why? Rule #1 of sighting in, never put a new scope on a new rifle--or an undependable one, for that matter. The straight stock doesn't fit me as well as it fits John, or the Serengeti and Husqvarna fit me, but when it's getting late in the season and the freezer needs meat, it's the one I reach for.

So those two calibers, while perfect in every other way, were non-starters. I was not going to get rid of either and the thought of turning the .308 into a duplicate of a gun I already loved, seemed insane. I'd had duplicates before: a Browning A-Bolt .270 and an Ultralight Arms .270. As much as I had loved the A-Bolt for its accuracy and detachable magazine, once I had the ULA it never got to go out and play.

Eventually, the choice seemed to be settle on a 6.5 of some sort, and over several months, John gave me the graduate seminar on the many variations of the 6.5 and their pros and cons. They sounded wonderful, and eventually I settled on a Creedmoor, but didn't settle hard enough to call Gene Gordner. Then came hunting season, and we checked out all the little shops in little towns on our hunting adventures, and never once found ammo for the 6.5 Creedmoor on the shelves. There was no going back to the drawing board: we'd swept it too many times already. The poor little .308

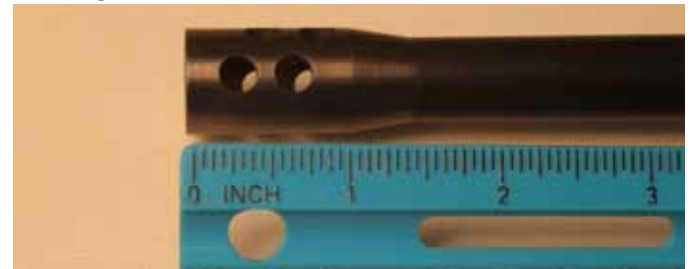
was languishing. Something had to happen. It fit me too well to give up and sell it. But short of that, What?

What became obvious at the Bozeman Gun Show last July. We had a table, and during breaks in the action, I walked around looking at everyone else's wares, visited with friends, and availed myself of the gourmet ice cream stand. (Eventually I tried all six flavors, from Salted Caramel Twist to Chocolate Caramel Fudge.)

But two buildings from ours, there was a young man with a table. John McLaughlin is a gunsmith, who lives in Helena, MT, just 35 miles from us. His table was tastefully sparse with a couple of very nicely stocked rifles and some metal components, several of which were muzzle brakes. Ah, I said. I'd resisted the thought of a muzzle brake for the extra noise, but also because they're visually unappealing to me. (Remember, when you're bored, that nicely configured gun stock may be all you have to distract yourself?) But John's muzzle brakes were rather graceful looking. So we talked. Then I dragged Johnny B over and the three of us talked. Johnny B pointed out that as little powder as I was using in the .308 there wouldn't be much difference in recoil reduction between the longer and shorter muzzle brakes. John McL asked what load I was using, and what calibers and loads I could shoot with no problem and finally said, "I can get that .308 to recoil about the same as your .243. Would that be enough?" I said yes, but it was still 10 more months before I decided that this was the best choice.

So, this spring, years of languishing in the safe, the .308 is sporting a cute little muzzle brake with no holes in the bottom to blow dust in my eyes. (A special forces veteran had been involved in the preliminary design testing and suggested that.) John McL handed me the gun, and the balance is still the same. He also offered to either take it off completely and cap the muzzle if I didn't like it, or exchange my shorter brake for a longer one, which would provide a bit more reduction. It doesn't seem to be necessary. I'm back to practicing with my .308 and testing loads, and so far, the 130's are working. (45 grains of IMR4895 powder at 2850 fps)

This year should be a good one for elk, and I'm looking forward to taking this sweet little rifle for a long walk in the woods. She deserves it. It's been eight years too long.



Here's the muzzle brake, at 1½ inches, that John McLaughlin fitted to the Artemis. I'm hoping it's enough, but if it's not, John McL makes several variations on the theme. And yes, he designed and machines them himself at his shop in Helena: no website yet, but check out <https://www.facebook.com/JHMcLaughlinFirearms>. (406)422-0867

Good Eats

Venison Stroganoff

EC



Serves 4-6

Stroganoff is one of my favorite dinner party dishes. It was also my first. Years ago, as a college freshman, I spent New Year's Eve at a friend's house. She made Stroganoff that night and it was my first adult, without parents, dinner ever. I remember the Stroganoff as if it were yesterday. She made it with red wine. And it was wonderful. When I started making my own, eventually I switched from red wine to white. But these days Cognac seems to be the alcohol of choice for Stroganoff and I used it the last time I made it. It's a delicious variation. But the real change I've made to this recipe is to brine the sliced meat overnight. It makes this wild Stroganoff cook up in under 30 minutes, and lusciously tender. That's always a good choice. Oh, and this is a recipe from my new cookbook, tentatively titled *Tender is the Wild: Marinades, Brines and Rubs*, coming Christmas 2016.

The Brine Ingredients

18-24 hours ahead

- 1 pound venison steaks, sliced 1/8 to 1/4 inch thick
- 4 cups water
- 2 tablespoons kosher salt
- 2 tablespoons brown sugar
- 1/5 ounce dehydrated shiitake mushrooms (a good handful)

The Rest of the Ingredients

- 2 tablespoons sour cream
- 1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
- 1/4 cup heavy cream
- 4 cups uncooked pasta*
- 3 tablespoons oil
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 1 yellow onion, sliced
- 1 cup canned beef broth
- 1/4 cup Cognac**
- 2 green onions, chopped

Preparation

1. Drain the brine liquid off the meat and mushrooms. Let the meat sit in a sieve over a bowl in the sink, for a few minutes to let more liquid drain off. While it drains,

pluck the mushrooms from the brine bag, dry them with paper towels, and dice them. Set aside. Then dry the meat with paper towels and set that aside.

2. Combine the sour cream, Dijon mustard and heavy cream. Stir and set aside. Start the pasta. When it's done, drain and keep it warm.

Cooking

1. In a large, heavy-bottomed skillet, heat the oil over medium-high heat until the oil just starts to smoke. Brown both sides of the meat in the oil, about 7-10 minutes for each batch. Transfer it to a large bowl. Add the butter, and when it starts to sizzle, add the onion and diced mushrooms. Sauté them until the onions soften and start to color. About 4-5 minutes.

2. Add the broth and then the Cognac. (Please don't reverse the order: pouring distilled spirits into a hot pan can backfire on you--literally. The flames can ride back up the stream and blow the bottle up in your hand. So broth first to cool the pan, then Cognac.) Let that simmer at medium heat until the liquid thickens and just coats the onions, 12 to 14 minutes.

3. Stir in the sour cream/mustard/cream mixture. When the onions are coated, stir the meat into the onions and sauce. Let that simmer 3-4 minutes, or until the meat is hot again, add 1/8 to 1/4 teaspoon of coarse ground black pepper--to taste--and serve hot over the pasta with a sprinkling of green onion.

**With thick creamy sauces like this, I prefer to use pasta that has angles and pockets to catch the sauce. So instead of the more commonly used egg noodles which do nothing to hold sauce, I prefer rotini or radiatore so the sauce ends up in every bite.*

***Since the recipe only uses 1/4 cup of Cognac, it's not expensive. (One of those 50 ml airplane-sized mini bottles holds exactly 1/4 cup. No need to buy the \$40 and up fifth.) My state liquor store had only one brand in mini bottles, Hennessy, a VS cognac (Very Special) which is not nearly as good as VSOP (Very Special Old Pale) or even XO (Extra Old). But it worked very nicely, thank you, in this recipe.*

Cookie Corner

My Gooder Gorp

EC

Makes 6 cups of gorp

Aside from taste and texture, the great part of this recipe is that it's infinitely expandable. Equal amounts of everything can be anything from a teaspoon to a ton. Many afternoons I just grab a handful of each and toss it in a plastic cup to munch on while working at the computer. For a big batch, since we buy almonds and raisins in bulk, this version begins with the fixed size of the bag of chocolate chips.

Ingredients

- 2 cups whole unsalted almonds
- 2 cups raisins (dried cranberries)
- 2 cups Hershey's milk chocolate chips (11.5 ounce bag)

Preparation

Combine all three ingredients in a gallon-sized re-sealable plastic bag. Store in the cupboard; no need to refrigerate. When you're ready to go into the woods, or lake, fill a sandwich-sized bag. For long walks, take two.

Good Stuff



The O'Connor Grub Box

We've had a request for more info on the duplicate O'Connor's Grub Box that I won at auction a couple of years ago. The picture above is the original--spice cans, cod liver oil, fingerprints and all. It fit in the back of their vehicle, or on a picnic table, though it has removable legs--you can see the yellow and white checkered dish cloth hanging on a leg at right. Standing on its own legs is the most useful way to use it, given that there is a drop down shelf on both front and back and the drawers open both front and back, so two people could be working at the same time without getting in each other's way.

Buttoned up the box is about 40" long, 13" deep and 13" tall, and constructed of 1/2" plywood. They painted it yellow inside and green outside. (Were they Packer fans?) Opened, each drop-down prep surface is 11" deep, wide enough to hold a good-sized mixing bowl, or washing up bowl.

As you can see in the photo, there are several drawers of different sizes, and the smaller drawer box has a runner at top. (You can see it in the photo of my repro Grub Box below.) Each drawer pull is screwed in.

You'll notice that cubby hole at right front isn't the



depth of the box. There's a matching cubby on the other side, so tall bottles or bags of things have more structure to keep upright more easily, and sorted according to type.

It's a very simple but smart design, unlike all the electronic gear that weighs us down these days. The latch



for the drop-down counter, at left, works with one finger, and the legs, instead of being some finger-pinching metal bumper-shoot type contraption is just 3 pieces: 2 legs and a curved receptacle. I'd bet Eleanor sewed a canvas bag to hold the legs, and perhaps Jack kept a screwdriver in one of those drawers in case anything started to unravel.

My dupe box uses all the same screws for everything, and I'm guessing so did Eleanor and Jack's original. So I'd also bet there was a little pill bottle of screws tucked in the drawer with the screwdriver.

Partly because of the size, but also because of the weight, the Grub Box is a two-person carry, which is why the dupe has a sturdy carry handle on each end. Oddly the original doesn't have that. Perhaps people were tougher in the old days. It seems Jack and Eleanor were.



See the original at The Jack O'Connor Center:
www.jack-oconnor.org/

Where Else Are They Now?

John is now rifle columnist at *Sports Afield*, is in every issue of *Guns, Handloader, Rifle*; frequently in *American Rifleman*, and logs onto the 'ask the gunwriters' forum at www.24hourcampfire.com often. *The Hunter's Guide to Handloading Smokeless Rifle Cartridges* (renamed *The Big Book of Gun Gack* since it's so much more than handloading data) is about to go for the third printing.

Eileen is now working on her newest cookbook on marinades, brines and rubs which will be ready at Christmas. Check out all of John and Eileen's books at www.riflesandrecipes.com

Rifle Loony Lit

National Review article on Australian Gun Laws

JB

Normally we review books on shooting and hunting, but with a presidential and other national elections coming up soon, I'd like to mention an article that appeared in 2015 in *National Review*, a monthly magazine. The article's about the Australian gun law passed in 1996, after a mass murder left 35 dead, and it's been cited as an ideal law for America by Barack Obama, and more recently by Hillary Clinton, the "presumptive 2016 presidential nominee."

The major feature of the law was a confiscation of somewhere between 20% and 33% of privately owned firearms. The confiscation is usually called a "buy-back program" by anti-gun Americans, because a small amount was paid for each gun, usually far less than they were worth. The law also required Australians to prove to the government that they actually had a need for certain types of still-legal firearms, or they couldn't keep or buy them.

Anti-gunners, including Obama and Clinton, use a simple statistic to "prove" the law reduced both firearms homicides and suicides: The rates for both dropped after 1996. According to them, this makes the law a "common sense solution" to firearms violence in America.

However, the Australian firearms homicide rate had already been dropping at basically the same overall rate since 1980. The firearms suicide rate similarly dropped, but since the late 1970's (long before the law was passed) the non-firearms suicide rate had been RISING. The non-firearms suicide rate peaked in 1997 and has been dropping since, but has always far out-numbered firearms suicides. (If you want to take a closer look at the *National Review* article, go to <http://www.nationalreview.com/article/425021/australia-gun-control-obama-america> to find it.) The magazine article, however, doesn't mention another statistic, easily available through FBI crime reports on-line, that there isn't any "epidemic" of firearms homicides in the U.S., as so many anti-gunners claim.

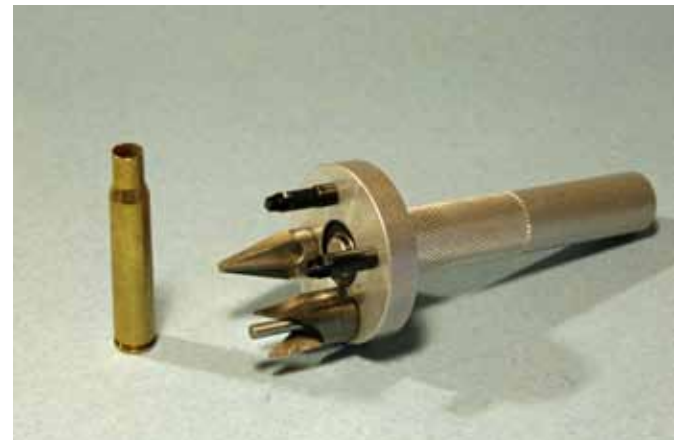
"Epidemic" implies an increasing problem, but instead of rising, firearms homicides have been dropping since the 1980's. Recently they've been at their lowest rate since about 1950, the dip between the Prohibition-era gun violence of the 1930's and the drug-related gun violence of the 1970's. In fact, over the past 25 years, firearms homicide rates dropped at just about exactly the same rate in the U.S. as in Australia—when private firearms ownership was RISING here.

Which is exactly why several major studies in Australia and elsewhere, have concluded the Australian law had no effect on firearms homicides—and a

similar law would have no effect on firearms homicides in the U.S. But many U.S. voters will believe what anti-gun candidates claim about the "common sense" Australian law, including implying that the confiscation was a benign "buy back." (Did the Aussie government sell the guns to its citizens in the first place? No, it did not, so how can it buy them *back*?)

Also, Australians do not have the right to keep and bear arms, the reason so many of theirs could be confiscated. Americans have that right and, until the Second Amendment of the Constitution is repealed or crippled, any Australian-type gun law will be illegal. Obama knows that, and so does Hillary Clinton, but they keep telling anti-gunners what they want to hear. We need to inform other voters of their false statistics.

Good Stuff



Little Crow Prep Tool

JB

Chamfering case mouths is slow and laborious with the standard two-ended tool used by most hand-loaders, that has to be turned 180 degrees to switch from inside to outside chamfering.

Lately I've Little Crow Gunworks' Precision Prep Tool, with a spinning turret-head mounted on ball bearings, that holds up to four tool-heads, which really speeds up chamfering. The other tools shown are primer-pocket reamers, handy on both military brass with crimped primer pockets, and some commercial brass—especially European—where the pocket edge is too sharp for easy primer seating. At \$29.95 it's a real bargain for those of us who reload a lot of ammo. (Little Crow Gunworks LLC; 6593 113th Ave. NE, Suite C; Spicer, MN 56288, 320-796-0530, www.littlecrowgunworks.com.)

Down the Barrel

What is "Good Brass"?

JB

A few years ago I traded some big game bullets to a competitive benchrest shooter for some 68-grain 6mm bullets made by a couple of one-man shops, and some Lapua and Norma 6mm PPC brass. The guy warned me to use the Norma brass only for varmint shooting, as it was "junk" compared to the Lapua cases.

I was hoping the spiffy benchrest bullets would be more accurate in my 6mm PPC benchrest rifle than the 65-grain Berger Target hollow-points that averaged .18" for 5-shot groups at 100 yards. The smaller groups didn't happen, perhaps because the guy shipped 'em to me rolling around loose in half-empty boxes, while the Bergers came tightly packed in foam rubber so they wouldn't bounce around. (I didn't bother telling the guy why he shouldn't "pack" accurate bullets like that—or that they didn't beat mass-produced Bergers shot from Norma brass that I'd previously weight-sorted and uniformed before making our trade.)

So what is "good" brass? Some handloaders rate cases by how many times they can be reloaded before primer pockets open up or the necks split, while others look at dimensional uniformity, including weight, the width and depth of primer pockets, and the thickness of case necks.

Let's look at case life first. Brass of any sort is copper alloyed with zinc, though trace amounts of other stuff are usually added for various purposes. The basic hardness depends on the percentage of zinc, with the softest brass only containing about 10% zinc. (In the shooting industry this low-zinc brass is known as "gilding metal," the most common material used for centerfire bullet jackets, but in the costume jewelry business it's called "Abyssinian gold.")

Most sources list cartridge brass at 70% copper and 30% zinc, but an X-ray fluorescence spectrometry test of several brands of commercial cartridge cases showed a variation anywhere from 62% copper/38% zinc to 80% copper/20% zinc. Those percentages actually take brass out of the metals industry "cartridge brass" designation into high-zinc Muntz brass and the low-zinc version called (not so oddly) low brass.

These differences are one reason handloaders sometimes complain about soft brass—especially handloaders who like to exceed published data, since the primer pockets of softer brass often open up after fewer loadings. However, I've also run into too-soft brass when using comparatively mild loads. Even +P .257 Roberts

data is only 58,000 PSI, compared to 60,000-65,000 for most other modern rimless cartridges, but a few years ago some brand-new Remington cases resulted in very hard extraction when loaded with +P data in Eileen's NULA .257. Older Remington .257 brass never showed a problem with the same load, so I'm assuming the new brass had a lower zinc content.

It would be reasonable to assume that the metal content of cartridge brass varies depending on demand, plus the going market price for copper and zinc. Quite a few handloaders noticed softer brass after Obama's reelection raised demand for all firearms and ammunition products to levels never seen before in America—and softer brass also makes it easier to quickly produce cartridge cases. It would be understandable for companies to use a softer alloy in such "emergencies," especially when most cases were being used in factory ammo, not sold as component cases. Non-handloaders don't really care if brass is com-

paratively soft—and softer brass really doesn't matter in lower-pressure rounds like the .30-30 Winchester. But in the spectrometry test, two lots of Lapua 6mm PPC brass had considerably different copper/zinc ratios, so even cases considered among the best can vary.

Hardness also varies due to how much the cases are "worked" during manufacture. Cases are made by pressing them into a series of dies, and each die work-hardens the brass, the reason the

neck/shoulder area of cases is annealed after final forming. Softer brass alloys can be formed more easily, and perhaps quickly, another reason some companies might use softer brass when demand rises.

Using harder brass doesn't necessarily increase case life. No doubt it prevents primer pockets from opening up at higher pressures, but it also results in brittle case necks, which tend to split after fewer loadings. This is why many handloaders keep track of how often cases are fired and reloaded, so they can anneal necks before they split.

Making cases dimensionally similar requires replacing forming dies more often. As the dies wear, the cases vary more. This is the reason my friend Melvin Forbes of New Ultra Light Arms didn't recommend the .284 Winchester in his rifles for a while unless the owner was an experienced handloader. Demand for the .284 was so low Winchester didn't replace the forming dies very often, as they did for high-demand cases like the .270 Winchester. Consequently Winchester .284 brass often wasn't very uniform, and it had to be worked over considerably



to allow the very accurate Ultra Light rifles to shoot well. So for a while Melvin recommended the far more popular 7mm-08 Remington instead, even though velocities are about 100 fps slower than from the .284, because 7mm-08 brass was usually much more uniform.

However, today at least four companies offer very good 6.5/.284 brass, which can be easily necked up to .284 if somebody wants to order a New Ultra Light Arms Model 20 in .284 Winchester. Recently Norma even started making occasional runs of .284 brass, and Melvin reports about one in 15 orders for a new NULA is now for a .284.

Very uniform brass, however, doesn't guarantee better accuracy unless the rifle is put together with tighter tolerances. An extreme example would be typical "short-range" benchrest rifles, built for shooting tiny groups, these days almost always chambered for the 6mm PPC. Chambers are so tight the necks of new brass must be turned down to precisely the right thickness, and though the rest of the chamber is also minimal the rifle usually won't shoot as accurately as possible until the cases are fire-formed to fit individual chambers exactly—and then only very slightly neck-sized for the rest of their lives. Essentially, the precisely uniformed cases are a part of the chamber, rather than apart from it, ensuring bullets are started precisely in the same way for every shot.



A typical factory rifle has a much looser chamber, because it must be able to use a wide variety of ammunition. While shooting industry organizations agree on cartridge and chamber dimensions, the dimensions are plus or minus, normally about .007", in order to allow rounds to chamber easily. As a result of this looseness, even if we fire-form and neck-size very uniform cases, there'll still be enough margin in the chamber neck to allow for variations in case-neck thickness. Using very uniform Lapua brass in our .30-06 may improve accuracy slightly over using "ordinary" brass, but it may not.

So what is good brass? To a certain extent, the definition depends on its use. A benchrest shooter demands the finest accuracy possible, and since each case will be neck-turned and then shot dozens of times, it makes sense to pay for very uniform cases made of tough brass. They'll essentially last forever since only their necks are resized minimally, and usually annealed after every

shot. As a result, even expensive brass becomes cheap in terms of "uniforming" time and cost per shot.

But a typical deer hunter, who never shoots his .308 Winchester factory rifle over 300 yards, doesn't require the same "goodness" of brass. His rifle won't benefit from extremely uniform cases, and how many times would we reload 100 cases in our lifetimes? Even if we live in a state where we can legally shoot a deer a day, most of us don't shoot more than 10 deer a season. At four firings per case before the necks start to split, 100 will last at least 25 years, even after allowing for a few misses, or tweaking the scope adjustments now and then. It doesn't make economic or shooting sense to buy benchrest-quality brass, especially since a few cases may be lost in the woods. Average brass is plenty good, and a lot cheaper.

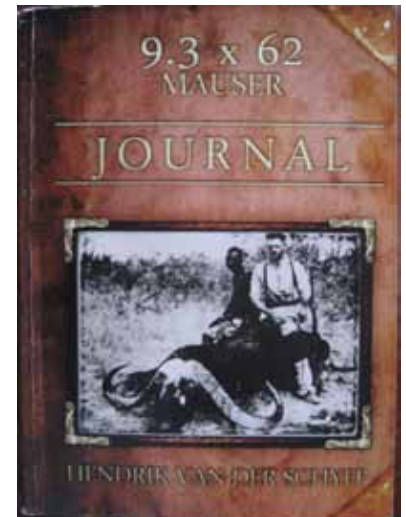
Loony Lit Update

9.3x62 Mauser Journal

By Hendrik van der Skyff (softcover, 129 pages)

EC

Since so many people had problems ordering this book off the South African website, we made an attempt to bulk order them. Mr. van der Skyff kindly offered to send us the last 10 copies of the first edition, and we now have 5 copies left. If you'd like one, call 406-521-0273 or email eileen@riflesandrecipes.com. They are \$20. News is that Hendrick is working on a second, all English, edition. We'll let you know when we know more about it. Below is a tidbit of the review John did in the last RLN:



"This very interesting book is actually a collection of writings on the 9.3x62 Mauser, with many reprints of old articles or book chapters, though several are by the South African author/editor, Hendrik van der Skyff.

For me, the most interesting reprint is "A 1930's Safari with 9.3x62," by the wife of W.F. Steenkamp, a doctor and senator from South Africa. It's a condensed version of part of Steenkamp's book, *I Conclude*, published in 1947, about a safari the Steenkamps made in what was then Portuguese East Africa and is now Mozambique, guided by a professional hunter of Swiss extraction named Guex. Aside from plenty of stories about hunting with the 9.3x62, there's also information on its history and handloading, which includes interesting comments on bullets...."

Honest Guns

Rifles That Stay Sighted-In

∇B

Perhaps the basic test of rifle honesty is staying sighted-in. This used to be pretty easy before telescopic sights became nearly standard, at least with really rugged "iron" sights—the reason most of my rifles that stay sighted-in, year after year, don't have scopes. On the list are a .22 rimfire Winchester 62A pump, 6mm Lee-Navy sporter, .25-35 WCF Model 1894 Winchester, 7.5x55 Schmidt-Rubin K31, 9.3x74R German double rifle, .416 Rigby CZ 550 Magnum and .45-70 "trap door" 1884 Springfield. Oh, and several handguns, from the .22 Long Rifle Colt Frontier Scout my father bought in the 1950's to my .45 Colt Ruger Bisley Blackhawk.

Even some of those guns, however, must be shot with exactly the same load, because other ammo doesn't land in the same place. Before Obama's reelection in November of 2012, I used to just shoot Winchester Power Points in all my hunting rimfires chambered for the .22 Long Rifle. The Power Points were usually the most accurate hollow-points in any rifle or handgun, and knocked the spot out of everything from ground squirrels to jackrabbits.

But after Obama Panic II, rimfire ammunition almost disappeared from stores—and Power Points totally disappeared. While they've occasionally showed up in the years since, they're not what they used to be.

I do have a couple bricks of the old ammo left, but now only use it in the Frontier Scout (which has the traditional "trough" rear sight on the backstrap) and a superbly accurate Ruger Mark II "slabside." In .22 rifles I've found other hollow-points that shoot well, but this means keeping a wider variety of ammo on hand. Luckily, the 62A shot Armscor high-velocity hollow-points to the same place as Power Points, so I didn't have to adjust the sights.

Some of the centerfire iron-sighted rifles, however, shoot just about any kind of ammo to the same place. The 9.3x74R double rifle puts handloads with 270-grain Speer Hot Cors into the same group as 286-grain Nosler Partitions, unusual in a double, and the trapdoor Springfield does the same thing with ammo shooting bullets in the 400-grain range at around 1300 fps, the standard black powder velocity.

However, even iron-sighted rifles can go haywire now and then. My "sporterized" Lee-Enfield (my late Uncle Larry's primary hunting rifle for many years) went crazy during testing of several handloads a couple of years ago. The problem turned out to be the solder holding the front sight band in place, which finally let go after 70-some years. I re-attached the sight with Brownells Acra-Glas Gel, which I've found stronger than solder for attaching any sort of band to barrels, including barrel-mounted sling-swivel studs, and has

the additional advantage of not heating up the barrel to melt solder, which sometimes doesn't do rifling any good.

Any open-sighted rifle with a spring-steel rear sight where elevation's adjusted by pushing a "ladder" back and forth can be knocked out of alignment pretty easily, either from a relatively mild blow to the side, or inadvertent movement of the ladder—or even losing the damn thing. A couple years ago in Texas I shot an eating-size feral pig with a guide's 94 Winchester .30-30 carbine, because the high-tech scope on "my" rifle (handed to me on arrival by the rifle company hosting the hunt) had gone bonkers.

The rear sight on the 94 was missing the elevation ladder, and apparently guide couldn't be bothered to replace it. He said the rifle shot "a little low," so I aimed at

the top of the pig's shoulder at 30-35 yards and hit the heart. But at least the rifle always shot low, which might be considered a form of honesty.

Around 2000 I accompanied a couple of guys on a ranch bison hunt—actually more like a bison shoot—where they both used black powder cartridge rifles. The first guy used an expensive reproduction Sharps, and his shot hit a bull too far

back at around 100 yards.

It turned out the front sight had loosened in its dovetail slot, and moved to the right. He noticed this before going after the wounded bison, and tapped the sight back to center before his second shot. The second bullet went through both lungs, just behind the shoulder, ending the rodeo promptly.

No, iron sights are not infallible, but I have a much harder time keeping scoped rifles sighted-in, partly because I somehow attract bad scopes. In April 2016 the 17th different brand of scope went bonkers on one of my rifles. That's BRANDS, not individual scopes.

Now, I've been shooting scoped rifles for around 50 years, and the last 40 have shot them a lot, so yeah, some scopes will fail. However, one joke among a few insiders in the gun writing business is if a scope company wants to improve quality-control, they should pick a new scope at random and send it to Barsness, removing at least one defective scope from that day's production.

Part of this reputation comes from several other industry-sponsored hunts, where a single scope on the rifles assigned to writers went bad. In every instance, the scope was on my rifle. In fact, the hunt in Texas where I borrowed the low-shooting .30-30 was the first industry hunt where more than one writer's scope went bad—but it was just *one*.

Admittedly, many of my rifles would stay sighted-in indefinitely if I left the same scope on 'em, and shot the same ammo all the time. But being a gun writer means



testing lots of stuff. Many scopes get replaced, and widely varying handloads and factory loads must be tried.

Still, some rifles do stay sighted-in. One of these is the Ruger No. 1B .22 Hornet I ordered directly from the factory in 2003. One of the first 3-9x Burris Fullfield II's made in the Philippines had recently shown up, and its Ballistic Plex reticle seemed like a good fit for varmint shooting with Hornet. That scope has remained on the rifle ever since, and the 1B is one of those rifles that shoots just about any ammo to the same place. Consequently I've never even had the caps off the adjustment turrets since the initial sight-in. Even after developing a .22 Long Rifle equivalent load with 43-grain cast bullets, I discovered that with the scope set on 6x, the bullets landed right at the tip of the bottom post in the Ballistic Plex at 50 yards.

My Heym SR-21 in .300 Winchester Magnum is my most frequently used scope-test "platform," since it's super-accurate and kicks hard enough to reveal the flaws in any scope. But I also grew weary of sighting it in all over again after mounting test scopes.

So I screwed on some Talley detachable bases, Acra-Glassing them to the receiver to make sure they stayed in place, then mounted a 6x42 Leupold M8. The M8's had the friction adjustments many shooters don't like, but also had the virtue of holding onto zero as tightly as a Vermont farmer onto a dollar. Then I sighted in with my favorite all-around .300 Winchester load, a 165-168 grain bullet with 72.0 grains of Reloder 19.

When a test scope comes along I put the rifle in my bench vise, stick an old Bushnell collimator in the muzzle, and make a note of where the crosshairs of the 6x42 sit on the collimator's grid. Then I loosen the Talley rings and remove the 6x42, put the test scope inside Talley rings and mount it on the rifle, twisting the adjustments until the crosshairs are in the same place on the grid. After the testing's done, I remove the test scope and put the 6x42 back on—and the rifle always shoots to the same place.

Another solution is to use mounts that make it difficult to replace the scope. I purchased my Sauer 16x16/6.5x57R drilling from Bruce Cunningham, a drilling loony friend from Nevada. Bruce buys, sells and hunts with drillings like "standard" rifle loonies buy, sell and hunt with bolt rifles. During one of his periodic purges I ended up with the Sauer and some other stuff, including 100+ rounds of Hirtenberger factory ammo loaded with 120-grain Sierra ProHunters. (A lot of European ammo companies load American bullets.)

The Sierras shot just over the top of the post in the German #4 reticle in the 4x Hensoldt scope, right where they shot for Bruce, so there was no need to adjust the scope. Eileen and I took two deer with the ammo before I decided to work up a handload using a tougher bullet, for hunting in the local mountains where elk are abundant. I chose the 125 Nosler Partition, hoping to match the point of impact of the Hirtenberger ammo, and that turned out to be easy with H4350.

The scope's in typical German "claw" mounts, attached to a rail on the bottom of the scope. Claw mounts

make taking off and replacing a scope dead-reliable and easy, and this one's been on and off several times. In fact, I took off the scope and used the drilling for all my upland bird hunting last fall—though the open sights also remain sighted-in, just in case I ran into an elk when grouse hunting. The rear sight, typical of drillings, flips up when a button on the tang is pushed forward, switching the front trigger to shoot the rifle barrel.

Many bolt-action rifles don't stay sighted-in because of the stock. Even epoxy-bedding and free-floating a walnut stock don't guarantee impact won't shift, because the rest of the stock can squirm around some. This can happen even with laminated stocks, though it depends on the individual stock.

My Serengeti Rifles (now Kilimanjaro Rifles) 7x57 stayed sighted-in with a 4x33 Leupold for several years after it arrived in 2007, thanks to the very stable walnut laminate, which looks so little like a laminated stock the seams must be pointed out to most people. During those years I stuck to a load of 46.0 grains of H4350 and bullets in the 160-grain range, as the rifle shoots them all to the same point of impact. Then I started changing scopes and loads. Now a 4x33 Leupold M8 is again on the rifle, but I've switched to bullets in the 140-grain range.

However, my CZ 9.3x62 also has a Kilimanjaro stock, and the slim Schnabel-tipped forend warped in the first couple years, and had to be rebedded in Acra-Glas. But it's stayed sighted-in during the five years since then.

My custom 6.5x55, based on a commercial FN Mauser action, has a Fajen Classic "California English" semi-inletted stock that I finished and checkered myself. The stock had aged for a while at the factory, and then hung for a year in my shop before I got around to the job. The action's bedded in Acra-Glas and the Lilja barrel floated, and after settling a 6x36 Leupold FX-I in Talley Lightweight rings, with a load using the 140 Nosler Partition and Ramshot Magnum, the rifle has stayed sighted-in two inches high at 100 yards for several years. In the fall of 2014 I loaned it to the daughter of a friend during the fall of 2014, but in 2015 I loaned her a "new to me" semi-custom 7mm-08 on a tang-safety Ruger 77 action, bringing the 6.5x55 home. The 6.5x55 still shot to the same place—and no, the stock isn't pillar-bedded.

Some synthetic stocks can move around a little, especially the injection-molded stocks used on many factory rifles, even when epoxy-bedded and floated. Those with integral bedding blocks are much more stable, however. I've yet to experience one of my Ruger American Rifles or T/C Ventures changing point of impact—except, of course, when I switch scopes.

Among the most stable rifles in our collection have been New Ultra Light Arms rifles, with stocks made with Kevlar and graphite fibers running the length of the stocks—as long as the scopes hold up. A couple of scopes have gone bad over the years, surprisingly both on Eileen's rifles. The first was a 2-7x Bausch & Lomb Compact that lasted a decade on her NULA Model 24 .270 Winchester, and the second a 3.5-10x40 Leupold VX-III on her Model 20 .257 Roberts. Apparently honest scopes are harder to come by than honest guns!

The Back Burner

Things That Go Bump—or Silent—In The Night

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Like many hunters, I've spent considerable time in tents, and have sometimes slept under lean-tos or even nothing but the sky, often in country where certain wild animals can cause humans bodily harm. This hasn't happened, but sometimes I wonder why.

The noisiest nights were spent in a camp along the banks of a small river in Botswana's Okavango Delta, one of the wildest parts of southern Africa. It was August, the peak of the dry season—when the Okavango's rivers and lakes reach their highest levels. This contradiction is caused by the months required for rainy-season floodwaters to flow south from much higher elevations in Angola.

Botswana's a long way from the rainfall produced by the Atlantic Ocean to the west and the Indian Ocean to the east, and the northern portion is a desert depression like the Great Basin of the western United States, where rivers don't flow into any sea, instead sinking into desert sands or Salt Lake. After the Okavango rivers flow slowly through the Delta, they sink into the desert—but not before they provide a lot of water to the Okavango's wildlife, at precisely the time of year when it's needed most.

Humans need water too, the reason the camp sat alongside the river—which of course attracted wildlife. The first clue that the camp might be equally attractive to wild animals occurred the morning after my arrival in professional hunter Russell Tarr's Toyota Land Cruiser. A dozen Cape buffalo appeared at the other end of the little airstrip used by safari clients to avoid bouncing in a Land Cruiser over sand trails for most of a day.

During several of the 11 nights spent in the Okavango camp, I heard elephants breaking tree branches next to my tent. And after my hunting partner Dave and I each killed Cape buffalo on the same day, a pride of lions roared very loudly over on the other side of camp, where the bones and other buffalo parts were discarded. But I slept right through the most serious threat.

That day Russell and I had driven over 100 kilometers from camp, according to the Land Cruiser's odom-

eter, looking for kudu. This meant a round-trip of well over 100 miles at an average speed of less than 10 miles per hour, so between driving and hunting it was a very long day. I managed to kill a good kudu bull not long before sunset, and we got back to camp late. After staying up another hour to eat and celebrate a little, I fell asleep quickly and hard.

The next morning Dave and I were awakened, as usual, by women bringing coffee to our tents, just about the time the paleness of dawn appeared in the east. I got dressed and took my cup out to the chairs arranged around an open fire, where Dave soon arrived with his own cup. He asked if I'd heard anything during the night, and when I said no, he said both the leopard and I had made plenty of noise.

Leopard?

Dave stood and motioned me to follow him. He stopped in the strip of sand between our tents, pointing to an irregular trail of big leopard tracks, obviously made during the night, since the camp staff raked the fallen leaves off the sand every day.

"Your snoring apparently sounded like another leopard. He started snarling and spitting, right here, so I got up and loaded my rifle. He heard me moving and started walking around my tent, snarling even louder, and kept it up for a couple hours." Leopards sometimes invade tents (and even hard-sided houses) and cause considerable havoc, but eventually this leopard appar-

ently got bored by my snoring, or his surge of testosterone and adrenalin wore off, and he wandered away. I slept right through the show.

You don't even have to visit "wild Africa," where large, dangerous animals still wander freely, to hear its night-sounds. The opposite could be called "tame Africa," ranch and farm country where there are only a very few free-roaming leopards and no larger dangerous game, because lions, buffalo and elephants do too much damage to livestock and crops.

But there are plenty of game-fenced parks and ranches. On a hunt in Namibia the rancher/outfitter/PH kept a couple of male lions inside a 100-acre enclosure,



where they often roared during the night, and a lodge in South Africa sat inside the fenced boundaries of a game-viewing park that included lions, elephants and even a rhino—until one of the younger bull elephants got peeved at the rhino and gored it to death with his tusks. We could hear the lions roaring and, once, an elephant trumpeting, though the most common night sound from elephants is the branch-cracking heard in Botswana, as they tear apart trees while feeding.

In North America it's common to hear coyotes and, in some areas, wolves howling at night, and I've heard a mountain lion scream a couple of times, but none of those animals are much threat to humans. The most dangerous wild animal in North America is the grizzly bear, but they don't roar much. In fact I've spent most of my life in grizzly country and the only sort of vocalization heard from grizzlies was the harsh "whuffs" made by females with cubs during bluff charges. But in a really dumb moment I once almost asked grizzlies to visit my tent at night—though when a couple did, once again I slept right through, because unlike Dave's leopard, they never made a sound.

It happened on a horseback hunt in the big chunk of wild Rockies called the Bob Marshall Complex, here in Montana. The biggest chunk of the complex is the Bob Marshall Wilderness Area, established in 1964, but in the 1970's a pair of smaller wilderness areas were established along the Bob's northern and southern borders. The hunting camp sat almost exactly on the border of the Great Bear Wilderness, and the "Great Bear" in the name is, of course, the grizzly.

I'd done a little guiding for outfitter Richard Jackson on summer packtrips, and as a result he'd invited me on his first big game trip of the fall. Unlike many western Montana outfitters, Jackson specialized more in mule deer than elk, and on the first day I got lucky and killed the largest mule deer of my life, in both antler and body size. The buck was as big as many cow elk, so we needed to return to camp to get a packhorse for the quarters.

It was too far to return the same day, so we rough-caped the head, leaving the skull inside the skin. I carried it in front of me on the saddle-horn during the ride back to camp, where we finished caping the skull, then sawed off the top. After salting the cape, we rolled up the hide and put it in an empty oat-bag, then hung the bag on the meat-pole, a dead lodgepole pine nailed horizontally to two live quaking aspens, far above where any grizzly could possibly reach.

But I put the antlered skull-cap in my tent, on top of the duffel bag at the foot of my cot.

The next morning there were two sets of grizzly tracks going around the outside of the tent, one set from a mid-sized bear and the other much larger—but they weren't from a near-grown cub and its mother. The hobbled horses had spooked during the night, and only

the larger tracks followed their hoofprints up the canyon, while the smaller tracks headed downstream.

After that night I hung the deer rack on the meat-pole, but to this day my eyes sometimes suddenly open just as I'm falling asleep, on odd occasions when I remember sleeping in grizzly country with deer antlers attached to a bloody skull-cap at my feet. And nobody ever heard a sound, even though grizzly tracks showed up on a couple other mornings during the rest of the hunt.

Montana had just killed their grizzly hunting season, so most bears had never encountered a grizzly hunter in their lifetime—the reason that pair weren't afraid to roam around our camp at night. But if grizzlies haven't been hunted in generations, they're far bolder.

In 2002 I hunted moose and elk in a part of northern British Columbia where grizzlies hadn't been legal game for years, and a bear constantly tried to tear into the crude meat shack on the edge of the main camp. The outfitter had also built several small log cabins, used for



spike camps, within a day's ride of the main camp, and grizzlies often broke in and tore up anything they could.

In fact, another hunter and I spent our first afternoon at one of the spike camps helping our guides rebuild the door and replace the Plexiglas windows the bear had punched out. The

foam-rubber mattress where I spread my sleeping bag had a long set of deep and widely-spaced claw marks, perhaps from the same grizzly that spooked our horses while my guide and I quartered my moose a mile downstream.

When we left the spike camp a couple days later, the pack trail passed within 100 yards of where I'd killed my bull, and a big grizzly was sitting next to what little remained. Except for watching us ride by, he never showed the slightest reaction to being so close to four humans.

A few years later I hunted grizzlies in Alaska (where grizzly hunting has never ceased since early Americans trekked across the Bering Strait) from a drop camp consisting of two backpacking tents for my hunting partner and our guide. We were dropped off by a Super Cub, with a food supply that included fresh moose steaks, and the guide stored all the food under the rain-flies of the tents.

A well-worn bear trail passed within 50 yards of camp, and we never saw fresh tracks on the trail, or anywhere within a half-mile of camp, even though a sow and a cub had been feeding on a nearby mountainside when we landed in camp. After the first night I slept pretty well, even with moose meat three feet from my head.

The eeriest night sounds heard when camped outside hard walls occurred on a backpacking trip many years ago, into the southern unit of Theodore Roosevelt National Park in North Dakota, near where the future president ranched in the 1880's. A magazine had given me a tentative go-ahead (not an assignment) to find and photograph the bighorn sheep in the park, where a few had been planted in the 1950's to replace the badlands bighorns Roosevelt and others had hunted into extinction. (An early taxonomist declared them a subspecies of mountain bighorns, naming them *Ovis canadensis auduboni*, after John James Audubon, who hunted the region in the 1840's and, along with a bunch of the birds he painted, shot some bighorns. This was back when every different color of grizzly was declared a subspecies, but recent research indicates "Audubon" sheep were exactly the same wild bighorns as those living in mountain ranges from the Rockies to the Black Hills of South Dakota.)

My first wife, a couple of her brothers, and one brother's wife decided this sounded like a fun trip, so we all hiked several miles into the badlands on the Petrified Forest Trail. It was a very warm September day, but the Park Service had sunk pipes into several springs along the trail, providing a flow of clear, cool water to refill our canteens. The area around each spring was covered with bison hoof-prints, since they also roam freely in the park.

Our destination was a plateau where, according to people at the park headquarters, bighorns often hung out. We located a spring surrounded by small trees on the eastern edge of the plateau, and decided to camp there, but only had one tent, barely large enough for four people. Since there wasn't any threat of rain, my wife's unmarried brother and I decided to sleep outside, though we unrolled our sleeping bags in a grassy clearing inside some wild roses and chokecherry bushes, well off any trail. From all the sign, including clumps of curly brown hair hanging from tree branches along the trails, bison used the spring frequently, and while I've been dumb enough to sleep with bloody deer antlers in grizzly country, I wasn't dumb enough to sleep on a buffalo trail.

After setting up camp we hiked north along the eastern edge of the plateau. By then the sun was only a hand's width above the horizon, and the heat was starting to leave the dry earth. In each shadowed dip in the trail the temperature fell several degrees, a welcome relief.

After half a mile we stood on the steepest edge of the plateau, where I glassed the badlands below—finding a small herd of bighorns, including a couple of mature rams. There wasn't enough daylight left to get closer, so



I took photos with a telephoto lens until the light in the shadowed badlands grew too dim. We headed back to camp as the sun set, eating a couple sandwiches around a campfire before heading to our sleeping bags.

About midnight I woke to what sounded like bones being crunched, and not very far away. I sat up, listening, and then my brother-in-law woke up too. "What the heck is that?" he whispered, rather nervously.

"I dunno." A small flashlight was in one of the pockets of my backpack, but I couldn't remember exactly which pocket, and while feeling through each the crunching came closer and closer. The only "weapon" we had was my pocket-knife—in my jeans, rolled up as a pillow. I unwound the jeans and quickly opened the "big" blade on the knife, but by the time I found the flashlight the crunching sound was only a few feet away.

I switched it on, my pocketknife in my other hand in case of a charge, and in the white beam sat a big raccoon, stuffing chokecherries into its mouth. The "bones" were the hard pits of the chokecherries, cracking in his teeth. Like grizzlies in unhunted country, the raccoon wasn't at all alarmed by humans, and in fact took advantage of the flashlight's beam to stand and reach up higher for more chokecherries. Eventually he fed away into the night, and since no buffalo visited the spring we finally managed to get some sleep.

What's Next?

Our next issue is August 2016. By then I'll be about done, I hope, writing and testing recipes. The title? *Tender is the Wild: Marinades, Brines and Rubs*. Or *Love Me Tender*. Or *Marinades, Brines and Rubs, Oh My!* It's been interesting since there are just so many things with enough acid to tenderize meat. From coffee and sodas to soy sauce, Worcestershire, and plain old salt to pineapple and honeydew melons. And let's not forget milk, sour cream and buttermilk. And then there's brining with those every-kitchen staples, water, salt and brown sugar. With all that on your shelves, why would you ever eat a tough steak? Some of these marinade agents I've used for a long time, but others are new to the repertoire—like honeydew melon.

It was fun developing the marinades, more fun figuring out what dish would suit them best, and even more fun eating it all. Right now there are two goose sauerbratens in the fridge marinating, and next week as it warms up I'll be doing venison roasts à la Southern Barbecue-style.

In the meantime, John is starting to work on the next Big Book, but instead of Volume Two of Gun Gack, this will be *The Big Book of Big Game Hunting*. When he's done with *BBBGH*, he'll start ruminating on Gack 2.

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