



North American Hunting Expedition 2009

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Caribou Camp
White Wolf Lake
28th August

Last night Frank told me that Carlos would collect me at 8.00, and we would fly immediately to the caribou camp. By 8.00 I'm up and ready, as ordered, waiting in the hotel lounge. Then Carlos arrives and informs me that, due to unforeseen circumstances, my plane can't leave until noon. I am not surprised by this; so far, nothing has gone according to plan. I go back to my room, and then go out to a nearby fast-food restaurant for breakfast.

I'm waiting for 12.00 to come.

The time finally arrives. The phone rings, and we set off. I am sitting in the minibus with two archers: Jake Ensign and Richard Longoria. During the next few days they will bear witness to all my triumphs and failures. Carlos drives us to the float-plane airport, which is run by some big company; right now, there are three large Cessnas floating on the water. They can carry at least ten people; they are twin-engined Cessna giants. Our bags are placed on wooden pallets and a buggy takes them off to be weighed. They are quite heavy; all three of us have brought as much as we possibly can. The pilot frowns at first, but then relents. Two more passengers arrive, a middle-aged gentleman and a young boy, father and son. We don't know yet, what they are doing here.

The runway is simply a stretch of Great Slave Lake. The planes are tethered in a small bay, and we have to taxi out from here. Our bags take up a large part of the cabin - there's a lot to carry. I can see that, besides our equipment, we are taking a lot of provisions. Boxes are even placed in the hollow sections of the floats, and the loaders carefully utilise every bit of space. After packing and securing all the bags in the cabin, they then try to find room for the seats, which are screwed into place.

Slowly we get ready to take off...

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I get in; I can't stretch my legs because of all the bags - space is very tight. The pilot starts the engine and, slowly and smoothly, we glide across the lake. We look for a suitable wind. The pilot opens the throttle, the huge machine races across the lake like a motor-boat, and suddenly we are airborne. We sweep through the sky over Yellowknife, and fly over Frame Lake. This is the lake I walked around during my enforced vacation, when I first arrived. We pass over the now-familiar tundra, with all its many lakes and marshes, for more than an hour. I'm starting to get a little bored of all this flying, so I sleep for most of the journey. Yellowknife is 175 miles behind us, when we suddenly come down to land on a quite sizeable lake. I can't see any harbour or pier. We approach the shore, the pilot reverses the plane, and the floats are smoothly beached on the sandy shore.

We seem to have arrived.

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The bags and boxes are passed from one hand to another as we quickly unload the plane. The name of our camp is White Wolf Lake Caribou Camp. As the name suggests, the lake is called White Wolf Lake.

There is even a sign up, proudly displaying its name and emblem. It is slightly reminiscent of Kavik Camp, but more run-down and less well-equipped. Nothing is produced here; we are entirely reliant on our supplies. There is even an ATV - or honda, as the Inuits say - which is used to carry things around the camp. There are four boats on the shore, two with engines, ready for use.

We are staying in a strange combination of a tent and a wooden cabin. There is a temporary structure of canvas stretched over wooden frames, which make up the walls, and inside are hard, wooden beds with mattresses, on a plank floor. We three hunters are to occupy this single barrack, and there is even a desk, which I claim at once (the others aren't keeping diaries).

In theory there is electricity, as the generator is humming away, but we have not been able to switch on the solitary lightbulb. It's doubtful if I'll be able to recharge any of my batteries, and showers, and any other form of washing, will have to be indefinitely postponed. The camp is half-full, and there are several other cabins which are not yet completed - they haven't even put up the canvas. No-one is living in them, but we don't know why. After we have unpacked and settled in, Pat, the director of the camp, with his head guide, give us a short briefing in the dining area. I've been told that he will be my guide, which I'm quite pleased about. He is a mature man, of about 60, apparently a very experienced guide, who, amongst other things, has guided the founder of Cabela's, the great Jim Cabela, when he came to this part of the country. He tells us that yesterday there were several hundred caribou in the vicinity, but that a week ago there were several thousand. Soon after we arrived, using the spotting scope provided by the camp, we had already seen one cow, despite the fact that, on our canvas wall, there was an indignant message from a previous occupant saying that, even though he had paid out \$6000, he had managed to bag nothing more than a local bird during his stay. He was not a happy man, as was made clear to the reader by his use of several rather rude English expressions. But Pat, however, is optimistic. He says that nearby caribou do not migrate from one place to another, as is normal, but instead walk around in a vast circle, which they hardly ever leave.

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As I left the hotel, Carlos handed me an envelope, saying that it contained the permits and the tag for my second caribou. I'm now catching up with my paperwork, so I open the envelope. To my surprise, I find that it contains a permit to shoot a wolf. I'm completely mystified, as I will not shoot wolves. Even if there was one lying on my doorstep, I still wouldn't hurt it. I wrote to Frank at the start, telling him to remove wolves from all my hunts; if I'm not going to shoot them, why should I buy a permit? I know that he did so, as I can see in the accounts on my computer that wolves, and the charges for their permits, have been removed. But I still have this permit. I've never heard of a hunter getting more permits than he paid for. What are things coming to! Pat also mentions that if any of us had intended taking away the lower jawbone of a caribou, we must forget it at once, as these must all be handed in to the authorities. Scientists are carrying out various analyses of caribou and require this part of their anatomy to make them. I couldn't care less; all I want to take are the antlers, and they are welcome to analyse whatever is left.



An unfortunate event occurs that disturbs our hunting preparations. The middle-aged man who flew in with us - we still don't know why - wants to try out Ricardo's bow. There's a little problem: he wants to do it right here in the tent. A bigger problem is that he knows nothing about bows. And the biggest problem is that he pretends that he does. He draws the bow, and then, using the wrong technique, and without an arrow, he releases the string. There's an awful cracking sound and something snaps off the bow, flying across the room like a bullet, barely missing our heads. Ricardo is flabbergasted.

The bow is now unusable.

In a moment the man has destroyed a weapon that cost \$2000, and was made to order. It can be repaired, but until then it is unusable. Ricardo accepts the loss with unbelievable calmness, and without showing any emotion, produces another bow from his bag.

This is his spare; if anything happens to this one, his hunting is over.

I think I might keep my Peli bag locked from now on. With people like this on the loose, all guns

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and weapons could become rather dangerous.

Behind the camp stands a pole, called the rifle-range, with some tattered old targets hanging from it. It's all I need, and I decide to test my gun immediately. We rig up a new target holder and put a fresh target on it. With my laser I measure out 100 meters (330 ft.), and place the target there. This makes the range usable not only for those who like yards, but also for people who prefer the metric system. I set the sight, put on my earmuffs, and start shooting!

I take one shot, and can't believe my eyes.

I aimed at the lower part of the bulls-eye, just as I did at Kavik. The bullet should have hit the ten-mark. Over a range of 100m. you have to adjust your aim to compensate for the bullet's flight. But, in fact, the bullet has hit the very top of the sheet: I'm barely on the target. And, what is especially annoying, is that I am 2cm, nearly an inch, to the right. I take two more test shots, and the holes are still in the same place. In the words of an old beer advert: it's time to think. I'm certain that I was shooting correctly. My gun-rest was perfect, and I was in a comfortable sitting position when firing. The fault must be with the sight settings. But how, and when, could the sight have been altered? It couldn't have happened while it was in the case. I do remember bumping it once or twice when I was in Alaska, but I never thought it would have any serious consequences. But, after these three shots, I must reassess what's been happening, and that includes my missed musk ox-shot. When I bagged my first musk ox, my initial shot also went too high. If I accept that over 100m. the bullet deviates by 10cm - and judging by the results, that's a conservative estimate - then over 300m. (1000ft) it is bound to miss the target. Even if it is a big ox, that is too much deviation. Disregarding all this, it wasn't a very well set up shot; but, without trying to minimise my own shortcomings, I just want to establish what other factors might have led to the mistake. I adjust the setting, and finally my shots start going where I want them to. After two more confirmatory shots I start to relax; but I have used up eight bullets. I have three more boxes of ammunition sitting in Anchorage, but I shan't be back there for a while. I have just one box with me for the two caribou here, and the antelope hunt in Montana.

It will have to do.

At least, I hope it will...

After my test shots, Pat calls me over to the spotting scope. I can see ten caribou moving about, but today I'm not allowed to hunt any of them. The rule that there is no hunting on your day of arrival applies here too. Interestingly, up with the Inuits, they either didn't have this law, or just ignored it. So I can do nothing but drool over the sight of a particularly fine stag. I can't judge its antlers, but according to Pat, it is a mature, shootable animal.

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For dinner, Pat roasts some meat, with three types of garnish, and makes an isotonic drink from some powder. After this, we all devour a huge cake. We will have lots of energy for tomorrow's hunt.

We take in the sunset.

A pump-action Mossberg shotgun is leaning against the door of the barracks. Whoever has to answer the call of nature during the night must only do so with this gun in his hands. Bears!

White Wolf Lake Caribou Camp
29th August

I know that I have already mentioned how large the American North is several times, but, from time to time, I shall return to the subject as the distances up here are quite astonishing. For someone from Hungary it is almost impossible to comprehend how large these vast, almost uninhabited wastes really are. Back in Hungary, if I started by car from Budapest, I could reach even the most distant little village within a maximum of three hours, even keeping to the speed limit. But here we can fly by float-plane for an hour, and, looking at the map, we appear to have hardly moved. I can't understand how those people managed to cover such huge distances on foot during the gold-rush.



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The loneliness and isolation out here make me feel very strange. I don't feel bad, I just find it hard to come to grips with the fact that the nearest trace of civilization is several hundred miles away. I've never experienced anything like it. Nowadays such isolation holds little danger for hunters, though it is nevertheless a long flight to the nearest hospital, and these can easily be disrupted by bad weather. But what can those first pioneers have felt, walking for years to get here, and knowing that, just to find the nearest hotel, they would have to walk all the way back? How did Robert Falcon Scott and his team, setting out to explore the Antarctic, cope with the thought that, should they get into trouble - which they did - there was no help available whatsoever? What were Neil Armstrong's thoughts as the Eagle began its descent to the lunar surface, knowing that NASA - despite the almost obligatory optimism - only gave him and Buzz Aldrin a 50% chance of a successful lift-off from the moon? How will those heroes who, in the foreseeable future of the next 2 - 3 decades, making a journey of 34.5 million miles to Mars, avoid the possibility of going insane?

To be an explorer requires a discipline and strength of spirit that few people possess. But let's have a look at exactly what the term "North" means here.

The territory of Alaska, as I've said before, covers more or less 580,000 sq. miles. To this we can add the province of Yukon as, though the border is visible on the map, in the wilderness it doesn't exist. This gives another 186,500 sq.miles. Continuing east we come to the NWT, with its 533,000 sq. miles, and then Nunavut with a further 772,000 sq. miles. We have now reached the figure of 2 million sq. miles, an area that is 58 times the size of Hungary. And in this we have been very strict, not including the more southerly Canadian provinces, which are also not well known for being small places.

And how many people live in this vast area?

Alaska has the largest population: 626,000. Yukon has 30,800. The NWT has 41,000. Nunavut: 27,000. This gives the North a population of 724,800! That's less than half the population of Budapest!

These people live their lives in a way quite unfamiliar to us in Hungary. The state is unable to, and has no intention of, individually helping each inhabitant. The saying "God helps those who help themselves" could well have originated here. It is true to say that all the people I've met up here are very adept at solving their own problems. There is no such thing as a lost cause for them; and this attitude is not a special virtue, but a part of their everyday life. They have no choice in the matter. Whatever problems arise in these desolate places, they must cope with them on their own. When help is needed, they don't stand around moaning, waiting for the problem to solve itself, but, instead, turn to their community. And the community always helps those who need it. If someone gets lost in the wilderness, then the entire community will be out

trying to find them. The feeling of solidarity is very strong, and almost instinctive: they couldn't imagine their lives any other way.

Some might consider them to be unfriendly, living in isolated groups, where strangers are unwelcome. Well, that is simply not true. I can personally say that since I have been here I have met nobody who is not friendly and open. If you ask anyone a question, the first thing they'll do, before replying, is to give you a smile. If you need to ask directions, take care! They will give you such accurate, clear and detailed information that you won't have the time to wait for them to finish.

Breakfast was very big, which meant that I was in a good mood to start the day. Pat fried up a lot of eggs and bacon, and, as well as that, I had some tinned fruit, muesli, and bread and jam, all washed down with several liters of orange juice and cocoa.

The role of the man who damaged the bow has now come to light: he is a guide and, what's more, he is the archers' guide. The three of them get into a boat, together with a young man who is the guide's son. Why he is here, is still a mystery. Our rucksacks are placed in another boat, each one containing our lunches, which in my case is only two sandwiches I made myself. If I just have a good breakfast, I can keep going all day.

The boats set off onto White Wolf Lake.

Pat and I are in front, and the archers follow behind in our wake. This Wolf is meandering and shallow, with several inlets running off. Up until now I've mistakenly held the belief that if a lake is big, it must also be deep. In the case of the Wolf, it is certainly not true; on several occasions we had to raise the engine to prevent it hitting the rocks on the bottom. Diving in head first would definitely not be advisable here, and not just because of the low temperature. Our plan is to sail up and down the lake, and if we spot a bull mature enough to shoot, to go ashore and start the hunt. We shall go ashore at certain times, even if we haven't seen anything, and do a bit of stalking.

A simple enough plan, and not too difficult to grasp.

We have been sailing for an hour, and have spotted lots of caribou, both nearby and far off, some are even lying down on the shore. They are sunbathing, enjoying the brief summer. We have only seen a few bulls, but they were weak, puny specimens. Both boats are moored together on the shore, and we all climb up a 30ft. hill and start looking through our sights. I load my gun even though we have only gone 150ft. from the boats. Out here it really feels like the Wild West: nobody makes a move without their gun. Everyone is worried about bears, which is why we

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always carry them. But, I've now been told not to load my gun with ball-cartridges, even when ashore, to prevent accidents. In vain do I explain to Pat how the R93 works, that I can keep ammunition in the barrel without the needle-spring being stretched. It doesn't matter: he won't let me. Perhaps he has not heard of that well-known fact that if you are carrying a gun for self-protection, and it isn't loaded, then there's no point in having it. Those people who have arrived at this conclusion are better-known in the gun world than this Canadian guide. Still, I don't feel that I am particularly in danger; I would have been quite happy to leave my gun in the boat. But there's absolutely no point in having to carry it about everywhere, while being forbidden to load it. So, the most I could do with it is to use it as a club. When we are in the boat even the magazine must be empty, just in case the blazer loads, cocks and fires itself. These are the three steps required before the bullet can fly down the barrel. Perhaps, when I'm back in Hungary, I shall suggest to police and soldiers that they try going into action with unloaded guns. Then, when they've seen the target, they should ask their commander for permission to load, and beg the enemy to be patient until they're ready.

There have been times in my life when I have not handled a gun correctly. Once, I leaned one against a tree, ready cocked, because I was so pleased with what I had just shot, that I completely forgot the basic rules of safety. There could have been a tragedy, but fortunately there wasn't. Somebody was very alert and warned me. This had two results: one, it ruined my day. I'd never have believed I could do something like that. I've always thought of myself as a gun-loving man, who uses them frequently and carefully. The second was that I have trained myself to carry out a certain action obsessively, several dozen times during a hunt. I touch the safety catch, constantly checking its position. So I am checking my gun, not only on the usual occasions, but almost all the time.

I regret to say that there are some hunt organizers and guides who are reluctant to take firm action against irresponsible hunters, and who fail to enforce proper security measures. I have personally witnessed several such cases. I read every Hungarian hunting magazine, and once saw an article asking why we are reluctant to criticize our more famous colleagues, if we see them violating the rules.

It's impossible to over-emphasize the rules of gun safety. However, I can't stand the type who constantly devises new rules, just to prove his expertise. I once came across a man of such great experience that he even warned me against pointing the empty barrel that had been taken off the blaser. (I hadn't actually done that, but he didn't care). He might as well have told me not to point

the cartridge I'm holding in my hand at him, in case it goes off. But, I don't want to argue with Pat, as this is his home territory, and it's all his responsibility; and anyway, I don't argue over trivia. It's just that the constant loading and unloading of the magazine is tiresome, and is not good for the ammunition, either.

The spotting-scope is produced and the six of us use it to look in seven different directions. Without doubt, there are a lot of caribou. The only cause for concern is that, knowing their behaviour, it's not certain that they will be here tomorrow. It also means that there might be ten times the amount. We talk a lot about what shape of antler each of us would like to take home. Everyone's ideal varies. Some prefer them smaller, but broader, while others want them larger, even if they don't have so many branches. Personally, I'm not really fussy which group my prospective caribou falls into. I tell Pat that whatever bull he chooses, if he says it's a beauty, and shootable, that's good enough for me. But, even so, if I do have a choice, I will go for the one with the bigger antlers; the number of branches is less important. I judge my trophies according to Hungarian hunting values, which say that size and weight are preferable. It's worth mentioning that Hungarian deer do not have such a wide variety of antlers as caribou. While I'm on the subject, I'd like to talk about the way the locals use particular words. In English, just as in Hungarian, the words horn and antler are both used differently, but here everything is referred to as a horn. If they spot an animal with anything growing on its head, they'll talk about its horns. All my guides in Alaska, and most of the American hunters that I've met, use this term. I've no idea why. When I ask them, they can all explain the difference between horns and antlers, and afterwards use the terms quite correctly.

We return to the boats: the stalk will continue on water. The sun is shining brightly, it's getting warmer and warmer, and even the wind has dropped a bit. We are quietly gliding over the water on a low throttle, parallel to the shore; at each inlet we slow right down. Suddenly, we spot a cow on the shore. This, in itself, is not very extraordinary, as we have already seen several since we set out; to myself, I have even named the area the "Hunting Park". But, just 150ft. from the cow, is a huge pair of horns - I should say antlers - sticking out of a thicket. It's as if there is a solitary trophy mounted on the top of the bushes; nothing can be seen of the head, or any other part of the animal.

There is a bull lying in the undergrowth.

It is very close, and promises to be an easy stalk and shot, just right for the archers. They have already begun the necessary maneuvers, and are approaching the shore. We make an about-turn, and steer the prow of our boat towards the nearby opposite shore. We want to moor there so that we can observe the archers' technique through our binoculars and cameras. We are just

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setting up our equipment when we see that the bull has stood up, and, at a leisurely pace, is walking out of range of the archers, who are about 300ft. away from it. Perhaps it has seen them. It would be an easy shot with a gun, but it's an impossible distance for an arrow. For an archer there is no such thing as an easy bag. We jump back in the boat: now it's time for the guns! The caribou has escaped the archers, so we try to intercept it. We reach a hill, where we wait for the bull to pass in front of us. We look around, staring; it's nowhere to be seen.

It has got away.

We decide not to return to the archers, which must be a relief to them. The methods and requirements for their type of hunting are so different from those of gun-users, that a joint hunt is virtually impossible.

We are sailing and sunbathing.

No stress.

Shootable bulls appear in front of us, one after the other. We watch and appraise them through the spotting-scope and binoculars. None of them are absolutely outstanding, but each is beautiful, a worthy example of its species. I can't decide on any of them, and Pat does not urge me to do so. This is only our first day, so we still have time. We agree that the first one should be a so-called "safety" caribou. I am not insisting on a royal stag. If I get my "safety" caribou, at least I shan't leave Canada empty-handed. Once I've done that there will still be enough time for a second one on my final day.

We moor the boat on the shore, climb up a small hill, and, sitting at the base of a boulder, get out our grub.

The weather is so pleasantly warm that I feel like taking a nap. As we eat we hardly speak, preferring to look through our binoculars; beneath us, the cows trot past our hill. Taking our time, we make our way back to the boats, where I start to have terrible misgivings.

I'm not carrying my permit. I've left it behind in the camp.

I check all my pockets, but I can't find it. I give Pat the bad news. The thing is, unfortunately, that the hunter must have the permit on his person at all times during the hunt, and, also, must attach the aluminum tag on the stag's antlers immediately after the kill. We can be checked on at any time, and the authorities have both planes and helicopters with which to do it. It's not worth taking the risk: the permit is not valid unless the hunter has it on his person, and breaking this rule can result in being banned from hunting in Canada for years.

That is the law.

The gun itself is not a problem as everyone here walks around with one. The mere fact that I am carrying a blaser does not make me a hunter, that is, I don't need a permit. There's no time to go back to the camp: it would mean travelling 8 miles by boat, so I will have to spend today just

looking.

I honestly can not understand how I keep forgetting about that damned permit. It's not as if we have to go through some complicated, multi-level, illogical, bureaucratic process every morning before we set out, during which I could easily forget one part. The process we must go through has only a single element: put the permit in your pocket. (Or rather, never take it out.) Despite all this, I have forgotten it again, just as I did in Alaska, and in doing so have created a problem for myself and for Pat.

We sail into one of the bays. To our right, on the shore, a stag appears, bearing a beautiful set of broad, very impressive antlers. I'm drooling as I watch it. Of course, such a magnificent animal would only turn up when I'm not allowed to shoot it.

Pat is merciful, and we make a deal.

I can shoot at the bull, but if there are any problems, he will deny knowing that I wasn't carrying my permit. I give a big sigh of relief, let's go!

The bull stands thinking for a moment, and then leaps into the water. He's going to swim to the opposite shore, right in front of us. We can't shoot it in the water, and, anyway, what kind of sportsman would want to? Using the engine, Pat turns the boat through 90 degrees, and then, at full throttle, we head to the shore, travelling parallel to the swimming stag. The important question is: who will get there first?

We do!

I jump out of the boat, loading my blaser at the same time. There's a small hill in front of us; even though we can't yet see it, the bull will have to come up here. Pat sends me on ahead; I must run as if I've been fired from a cannon, or the bull will escape! I finally finish loading and rush up the side of the hill, desperately looking for safe footholds among the small shrubs. I reach the top of the hill at exactly the same time as the bull, which is about 240ft away from me!

We have been racing each other!

He has made up for his swimming handicap in a matter of seconds!

By the time I have slowed down and taken the gun off my shoulder, he is far away!

There's no time for earmuffs; gun to the shoulder; I'm on target... The caribou is running like the wind, but I can still see it in the reticle... I aim well in front of it... Bang!

Just above it to the front; there's a puff of dust from a rock; I quickly fire again... I got it, but what's going on now? It hasn't collapsed and there's no definite sign of a hit, except that the altered rhythm of its steps shows that it has been shot. I shoot again, but I needn't have bothered as all I can see now is its rear disappearing away, and, of course, I miss. But now it suddenly stops... My magazine is empty, as I had only loaded three bullets, and I had no time to put one in the barrel.

Finally, I manage to stuff two bullets in the magazine. The bull is now standing side-on to me. I want to fire, but Pat - who, in the meanwhile, has caught up with me - won't allow it. The bull's head constantly droops to the side away from us, and Pat is worried that if the bullet passes right through the body, it could hit the antlers and damage them. I watch it through the riflescope; I can't see any evidence of a wound, although I'm looking at the side that - if all is correct - must be the side that I hit. I can see that blood is dripping, quite heavily, from its other flank, but where is the entry wound? Eventually, the bull stares ahead, the target is clear; I hit it in the shoulder and it collapses.

I'm very curious to examine it.

I take a look: I've never seen anything like this before. My second shot, taken as I was running, hits its eye socket, which is why I couldn't see an entry wound on the body.

Bizarre.

When a bullet hits the eye socket, it should cause death instantly, as the brain lies right behind it. I can hardly believe that a bullet from this gun would not be powerful enough to reach the brain cavity.

What could have happened?

I stare at the wound trying to unravel the mystery. Behind the wound is an easily-seen strip of missing hair.

I'm not a crime scene investigator, nor yet a criminologist or pathologist, but this strip must have been caused, if not by the whole bullet, at least by a part of it. I imagine that, at the very moment of the shot, the bull turned its head so that the bullet, instead of hitting straight on, hit the eye socket from behind, and in doing so scraped away that line of hair. I can't think of any other explanation; all the evidence supports it. This type of bullet is very fast, so I don't need to aim too far in front over a distance of 240ft.

This is the fifth game I've shot, and not one of them has been similar to the type of shot I'm used to taking at home. A well-supported gun, an ideal distance, a stationary animal, enough time for a careful aim... in Hungary these usually all occur at the same time - during a hide hunt, or out stalking, for example - but here, never.

One or another of them is always missing. I shot the Dall sheep from 1000ft. and the Alaskan caribou by awkwardly wriggling about on my stomach. I fired at my first ox from 850ft. The second can't have been closer than 700ft. either, and I was on my stomach for that too; but, after all the previous shots, I was pleased to finally have such an easy one, under such pleasant conditions. And now there is this shot. I was only able to get my earmuffs on by the fourth bullet, and had no time to take off the life-vest, which is compulsory to wear in the boat.

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I have actually shot a stag, while wearing a life-vest!
I shan't forget it until the day I die.



Stalking in Hungary, even for wild boar, isn't so complicated, because there, it's not allowed to chase after the animal, or fire while you are on the move. If you did so, you would be banned from any further hunting immediately, and if that was the worst consequence of such behaviour, we would think that the sinner had got off quite lightly. I would like to emphasize that all of the shots I have taken while on my trip have been strictly in accordance with local laws and customs, and the ethics that apply over here. Not one of the people here considers me to be an adventurer, or an irresponsible hunter, who shoots randomly. Here this is the norm. Otherwise, you will never succeed!

Anyone who comes here must be prepared to do the same.

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He should accustom himself to these unfamiliar hunting situations, because, if he intends to return home with a trophy, he'll have no other choice.

My caribou has beautiful, broad antlers, and will definitely do as my "safety" caribou. The poor thing still has its velvet; according to Pat the stags will start rubbing it off over the next six weeks. Though it is uncertain that all the stags will start to do it at the same time. Like everything else up here in the north, this is also unpredictable.

Pat cuts up the carcass, without gutting it, in exactly the same way that Randy did in Alaska. We put the meat into a backpack, I carry the head on my shoulders, holding it by the antlers, and we return to the boat.

We reach our camp after 6.00, and Pat orders me to produce the permit and tag the moment we get out of the boat. Remarkably, I find it at once - I'm quite surprised by this - and then we take the head to the tent used for storage. I'm no longer a poacher.

It's 7.00 already, and there's no sign on the horizon of the archers or their boat.

There is a very simple regulation: by 7.00 everyone must be back at the camp. Anyone who is not back by then will be declared missing by the camp commander - namely Pat - who will then start searching for them.

So, as it's 7.00, Pat decides to start the search. He leaves me alone in the camp. I've already mentioned that there's a Mossberg shotgun loaded with Brenneke slugs in our tent, and Pat now gives a precise explanation on the gun's use and its purpose.

This morning a huge grizzly was seen near the camp. Before leaving, we examined its tracks; I saw them myself. And we have now brought fresh, bloody meat into our storeroom. According to Pat, this is not an amusing combination.

If the grizzly comes into the camp, I must shoot it. Right away, without any thought or further consideration.

We do have bear -alarms. The storeroom is encircled by wires, which look like an electric fence.

If the bear breaks the wire, that breaks the circuit and the alarm goes off. If I hear the alarm, I must start shooting. He lets me decide which gun I want to use - the shotgun or the blaser - but he emphasizes one point: if the grizzly arrives, the worst thing I can do is to think about what's best to do. The only answer is in my hands and has the name Mossberg on it. He asks how and where I will spend my time while he's away. I will write up my diary on my netbook, as I do every day. He thinks that's a good idea, but I must have the gun leaning against the table. The tent entrance is not the right place to leave it. If the grizzly does arrive, the six feet to the tent entrance is exactly six feet more than I'll have time to cover. The gun is now here, on my right.



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Pat has a history of several decades as a hunting guide. He is an experienced veteran, an old fox who knows this area well. Before lunch, he told me never to leave my gun out of arm's reach. They take bears very seriously here.

Neither here, nor in Alaska, have I ever been told not to walk around with my gun, whether I'm in the camp, or outside it. But, I have been told off several times for putting the blaser down, and going into the undergrowth without it.

Pat gets back after 8.00; he has managed to speak to the archer' guide by radio. They are all fine, and did not give any reason for their delay, but Pat isn't interested in it anyway. I think he's slightly over-reacting. Three adults and a teenager, all experienced hunters, equipped with bows and guns, two satellite phones, a radio walkie-talkie, and food, have not arrived back exactly on time.

They must have been busy; I can't see why he's making such a fuss.

29th August
Night

The squadron of archers returns after 9.00.

They had shot two beautiful stags; this was real man's work. The second stag received its fatal arrow after 6.00, which is why they couldn't get back on time. Pat is still over-reacting to the situation. When they get back he makes some provocative remarks to the archers, and then doesn't say another word to anyone for the rest of the night. He just glares aggressively, and is almost in a sulk. Acting like this does nothing to help the situation, and ruins the general bonhomie among the hunters.

We ignore him; instead, we drink our secret stash of whisky.

White Wolf Lake
Caribou Camp
30th August

Last night we were drinking and talking until late, which, for us, is all part of the program too. Pat has scheduled breakfast for 7.00, but, of course, at 7.00 we are still tucked up in our sleeping bags. Pat is starting to lose it; to get us all up he switches on the bear-alarm. On hearing it, Ricardo leaps out of his sleeping bag, opens the tent flap and yells out. The essential part of his speech is that if the alarm isn't silenced fast, he will go and shoot the bear himself. He also

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includes a familiar four-letter English swear-word several times, in case anyone thinks he was joking. Jake and I laugh helplessly for 10 minutes, lying on our camp beds. I am actually crying with laughter.

Even though it is quite unplanned, we each arrive for breakfast 30 minutes late. We have sabotaged the schedule. At times like this, I just can't help laughing, and I almost choke on my tin of preserved fruit. Just when I've almost stopped, I glance up at the two main saboteurs, who give me a wink, which sets me off again. All this is too much for Pat, who now refuses to say a word to us. If I wasn't in such a good mood, I would say that the atmosphere is decidedly icy.

We really don't get Pat.

Of course, he is responsible for us all, and has to look after everything, but we haven't joined the French Foreign Legion: it's only a hunting camp. We are guests here. And, what's more, it makes no difference if we set out 30 minutes late; our chances of a successful hunt remain the same all day. And if by chance, we decide not to go out at all today, but just sit around picking our noses and breakfasting at noon, we should be able to.

After breakfast, Pat dramatically announces that he has to cut up the meat from yesterday's hunt to a portable size, and that to do this he will require our assistance. I don't want any meat at all.

That's all I need: to drag a cool-box around with me, over half of America. Generously, I donate my stag to the public, so that I do not have to exert myself with all the chopping. My attitude to it all is: the needs of others outweigh mine. So I'll let them do all the work.

Somehow, today the devil is in me, and I start making loud comments to Pat, giving him advice as he works. When they hear me, the archers are forced to retire to have a good laugh, but discrete one. The huge chunks of meat are placed in grease-proof paper, and then put in the freezer, which is powered by a generator. By the time all three stags have been done, the freezer is completely full.

After we'd finished I have a chat with Jake about yesterday's gun testing.

I think my gun is OK now, but I'm not absolutely certain. Jake suggests I take another test shot as I'm still not 100% sure. I don't really want to waste any more ammunition from my meagre reserve; but equally, I don't want to test Pat's nerves any further, so I admit that he's right. I'd rather waste a couple of bullets than miss the world record caribou through an error. And, what's more, if I do make a bad shot, I'll have to repeat it anyway, so I'll still use the same amount of ammunition. So, I prepare myself thoroughly for the shot. I try out all my clothes to see which makes the best gun-rest. I finally devise a rest which supports the gun on two points. The conditions are just as good as at the rifle range at Nagytétény. I set up the automatic target once

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again, which, just out of habit, I had taken down yesterday. It is usually attached with a staple-gun; Pat, however, is in such a foul mood that I decide to ask another guide for it.



I wait a little for my pulse to settle down, and set up the gun on my clothes. I fire... On a horizontal level, it's dead-on, but just a little bit high. I slightly correct the setting of the sight... fire again... that's it! That's exactly the result I wanted to see on the target! I shall feel much more confident when I am next in the boat, on a new caribou hunt. Now I know that I have done everything possible to ensure the success of my coming shot.

I say goodbye to the ever-cheerful archers, complete masters of their weapons. I've watched them shoot: what these guys cannot hit with their bows, I would never be able to hit with my gun. They don't usually shoot from more than 120ft. Not because they're afraid of missing, but because the arrow - unlike a bullet - travels slower than the speed of sound. If they shoot over too

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great a distance, the sound of the arrow will reach the animal first, giving it the opportunity to move. Nevertheless, they would still probably hit it, but might only wound it, and, in the ethics of archery, this is unacceptable.

Pat and I continue to hunt in the same way that we did yesterday.

We are in the boat all day. Sometimes we moor it, take a look at a particular caribou, I vaguely belittle it, and then we set off again.

I have to admit that recently I have become rather choosy.

Just the day before yesterday I would have given anything to shoot a bull which now I would pull a face at. Now that I consider myself to be a great caribou hunter, I am more picky - this one isn't quite right; that one's antlers are too close together; and the other is OK, but why isn't it three times the size?... I manage to find something wrong with each one.

At one of our moorings a sub-standard bull appears right in front of us. He stares at us for a long time, thinking; its brain is so slow, it's uncertain what's going on. Pat holds his arms above his head, in the shape of antlers. The caribou reacts at once, coming towards us; with its weak eyesight it can't tell that we are a different species. He should be able to smell us as the wind is blowing towards him. What is the point of this creature having such a keen sense of smell if he has no fear of man and his scent? For him it's all new information; he doesn't know whether to be worried, or not. He's only 60ft. from us when he realises he has made a mistake. Slowly, he turns and walks away, as if he's just remembered something he had to do, and doesn't want his fellow caribou to see how dumb he's been.

Pat and I have barely exchanged more than ten sentences all day. I don't want to censure him; his knowledge of game and the hunting grounds is quite extraordinary, and, in the end, that is what he is here for. However, for me, having a good relationship with the people around me is an important part of the whole experience. But I just can't get on well with him. He is an impatient, unfriendly and bitter man. It can't be easy going through life with no sense of humor whatsoever. It's hard to get to know someone who doesn't want to talk. So I decide to involve myself with my camera and the beautiful landscape.

There's not a bush in sight, and the ground cover grows no higher than 12 -15ins. Game has nowhere to hide, but, as far as I can see, they aren't particularly bothered by it. They are more surprised than frightened as they watch our boat approach, and they don't run away. They've never seen anything like it.

There are lots of caribou about.

During the day, we've seen at least fifty, and we only left the boat a couple of times to use our spotting scopes. The bulls stand alone or in small groups. I'm a bit worried that if I'm too choosy, I

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might blow the hunt completely. If, by some chance, I don't see any at all tomorrow, then I'll have only myself to blame for returning home with just one trophy.

We moor the boat again. Looking through my binoculars, I can see a boat appear, far away. Pat has seen it too, and is on the radio at once - if he's not on the radio to the other boat every half-hour, he feels deprived - and learns that they are just fishing.

They are just fishing.

Well, they can't have much to worry about.

We join them and all go back to the camp together. Jake has shot his second bull, and it's even better than his first. It is a really beautiful specimen, and even more beautiful is this shared joy of hunting!

My antlers are behaving very strangely - they've started to grow. More and more people have come up to me to say that they think these are huge antlers. They are the biggest of the four that have been bagged so far. I'm delighted to hear it, and, as I look at them, they just seem to get bigger and bigger. No doubt about it, I'm a lucky guy.

We discover that there used to be a shower in the camp, but some evil bear destroyed it. So whoever has a burning desire to have a really thorough wash can only do it in the Wolf. Needless to say, there are no lines forming on the shore.





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It's very stinky inside the tent.

The combined smells of old socks, drying boots, and unwashed bodies is a normal part of every expedition camp, and is nothing new to me. And anyway, as mountaineers say: "Where it is stinky, it's warm". But the smell inside this tent is too much, even for me. It's as if someone has crapped in here. Attempts to air it are in vain, and only bring a momentary relief.

For dinner we have freshly-caught fish and caribou.

Jake brings out his whisky; his reserve has still not run out, it seems. We start drinking again.

White Wolf Lake
Caribou Camp
31st August
Afternoon

Yesterday's nice weather has now vanished.

The rain began last night, and has continued since then, though with varying intensity.

This morning Jake and Ricardo were 1 1/2hrs late for breakfast. I was relatively well-behaved, and arrived at a mere 60 minutes past 7.00. Pat had been hammering at the door, but nobody bothered to answer.

Because of the weather, the plan for today's hunt has been re-written. Pat thinks we can still go out on the now-rough waters of White Wolf Lake, but if the wind strengthens any more we'll have to come back, because it's always safety first. These two words, since the archers' memorable late arrival, have become a catchphrase between us. The safety first argument is how Pat justified his irritation with the archers' unpunctuality. Last night, as I was about to go down to the lake to brush my teeth, Ricardo handed me a life-vest, saying:

- Safety first! Be careful you don't drown in the lake as you're brushing your teeth! In windy weather a lot of water gets into the boat, so I have decided to wear my waterproof clothing. By the time I've finished putting it all on, Pat comes into the tent to say that the weather has become so unpredictable that we are staying off the water and will go stalking instead. I take it all off.

Jake, who is one of the most famous and experienced hunting archers in the world, and I agree that the low-growing thickets will still be very wet, so, at the very least, I should wear my waterproof pants.

I put them back on.



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My rucksack is packed, so I'm ready to go; but then, fresh news arrives: the weather has become so bad that, for the time being, we will stay in the camp, and not go anywhere.

Yet again, I undress.

We gather in the kitchen tent to discuss possible plans for the day. Maybe I should have shot one of my caribou yesterday after all. Jake has no such problems; he already has his two bulls, so he needs no longer worry about the weather and the movement of game. But being the gentleman that he is, he is more concerned about my success over the last few days, than he has been for himself.

We can never be sure that we are making the right decision.

If the weather had been good today and if, after some picking and choosing, I had shot a bull with magnificent antlers, everyone would say how wise I had been not to be too eager yesterday. But now I might not be successful, and they'll all say: why was I so picky yesterday?

31st August
Evening

We finally set out at 11.00 am. The rain has stopped - for the moment, anyway - so there are no longer any excuses for lazing about.

We load up.

We all go off in the same direction. Guides and hunters, carrying bows and guns, setting out to track down the caribou. We don't have to walk far, as, just a few hundred feet from the camp, we spot our first deer. I can tell that Jake is the most experienced hunter among us, and that includes our guides. He is the first to spot the bulls, and quickly assesses them. I am starting to rely on him, as Pat is still not very talkative. I'm glad that I'm hunting with the archers. In the hunting world Jake's name is famous; it took him just six months to complete the Grand Slam of American ram hunters, and not using a gun, either. That entails the bagging of four different rams ... Ricardo is also not quite your average hunter; right now, he is considered to be the second most successful archer in the world. His name is linked with several world records, and he has over a hundred trophies that are rated up in the top ten category of game. I consider myself very privileged to be hunting with them.

We walk for nearly a mile, staring at the horizon, frequently using our binoculars, and putting up with the weather. It has become very cold, and the wind is getting stronger. We wade through marshes, praying, with each step, that we won't sink in. We cross a shallow little lake, climb up a hill, but still can't see any big bulls. I can see bushes growing about three feet high, but that seems to be the total extent of the jungle in this desolate landscape.

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We stop to think. Shall we go on together, or try our luck separately? Shall we turn right, towards White Wolf Lake, or go left? We agree to go our separate ways.

Pat and I head back to the camp. Almost two hours after setting out we are back among the tents. The bear alarm is going as we arrive. Pat stops me going any further, and looks for signs of a bear. It finally turns out to be a false alarm. Somehow, the wind has damaged the wires, which has broken the circuit, and that is what set it off. We change our clothes once more, have a bite to eat, and then we are off again. We will be stalking all day, as the wind is stopping us from going on the lake. Pat even has a machine to measure windspeed, which is registering 18.5mph. There are big waves on the Wolf again.

The two of us set off towards a small hill.

On the summit we start our interminable scans with the binoculars and spotting scope. We don't speak at all. We are no longer pals; our friendship has degenerated to a rather chilly working relationship.

Among the numerous caribou I suddenly spot a bull that looks quite big. I suggest stalking it.

We approach it, sneaking up, crouched down in the bushes. The wind is not favorable for us, but I've stopped worrying. We are now watching two bulls, as one of his friends has turned up. Both are strong, shootable specimens; it's up to me which I want to bag. But... the bulls have noticed something ... uh-oh ...with a couple of leaps they disappear from sight. When I next see them, the laser shows a distance of over 2000ft. Pat is seething with rage; he thinks the bulls spotted me.

Why he thinks they saw me, and not him, I can't imagine. I was never more than 12ft. behind him, and I always did just what he did. I really can not understand why he's so irritated. I think if anyone should be irritable, it should be me. However, I feel quite relaxed; we are bound to find another bull.

The general mood does not improve.

He won't tell me what strategy to use and when, and I am not a mind-reader. He says almost nothing, and when he does, I can't make out a word of it. When I tell him, I haven't understood what he said, he merely repeats it again, in exactly the same words. Now, I'm not particularly anxious to talk either, and the next time that we use our binoculars, I sit down several feet away from him. This is not going to work. If Ricardo is successful today, his guide will be available, and I'll ask if I can go with him.

We go on.

It is getting colder and colder, and I am enjoying the hunt less and less. I cannot get on with this man. What I'd really like to do, is go back to the camp and come back later with the other guide. I can't come up with an ideal solution, but the current state of affairs is no good for me.

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I am simmering away when, in front of me, Pat suddenly stiffens. I creep up closer, but I can't see anything from here, apart from the side of some damned ditch. I crawl up beside him... bulls!

There are many cows in the herd, along with two, big, strong bulls.

One is on the left side, with huge antlers, though they don't have many branches. The other, on the right, has smaller antlers, but the shape of the branches more than compensates for their reduced size.

As I already have a trophy of large antlers, I pick the second one.

I must shoot quickly because, as they graze, they are moving farther and farther away, and caribou can move quite fast, even when they are eating. I sit down and rest my elbows on my knees; I aim with the laser... 12ft.! Something is in the way... I crawl nearer. The ground is clear here, with no obstructions to my shot; the laser is on it... 495ft. Perfect. It's a shame I can't fire. Although the bull is at the correct angle, there are two cows blocking the whole target area. They all begin to move, and now I can only see its rear; they continue in the same direction. Slowly they move away, occasionally glancing around.



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Suddenly, they stop again. Even though the two cows have got out of the way, there is still nothing to shoot at as the bull's rear is all I can see. He might turn at any minute, so I keep the sight on him ... meanwhile, I measure the distance... exactly 600ft. Now it's turning; now it's in the cross hairs - there won't be a better opportunity than this.

My caribou hunt is over.

The shot hits him close to the heart, but he is still alive when we get there.

I put him out of his misery with a single shot; I don't like to watch an animal dying.

I've now shot my second caribou here, which is the third bull I've shot during my whole trip. My Canadian trip has been a 100% success; I've shot everything I intended to!

I'm overwhelmed by feelings of satisfaction and achievement. It will all make a nice little caribou collection when I get home! But, even more important to me, every shot I've taken during my expedition has been a memorable one.

Pat starts cutting up the carcass. He asks me to go to the top of the hill with my gun, and keep watch through my binoculars. He's worried about the grizzly which has been roaming around the neighborhood for days. Hunters rarely incur fatal, or even serious, bear attacks as they always have their guns with them. But cutting up the game is a dangerous time because then the hunter is concentrating on his task, often with his gun out of reach, giving the grizzly an advantage. I can't remember the exact percentage that Pat quoted, but the majority of fatal attacks occur during this time. I am doing my best, when, after ten minutes of keeping watch, I spot ... the archers! They must have heard my shot, as they are heading right towards us, probably to check out the result. I come down off the hill to meet them, and none too soon, as it was very cold up there. On the top of the hill there's no protection from the wind or the rain, which has just started falling again.

Pat doesn't have much to do; the shots have damaged a lot of the meat, and the unusable parts will just be left here. He finds the bullet recovered and unexpectedly throws it over to me. He takes me by surprise; I try to catch it, but miss. This little scene perfectly sums up the incompatibility between us. Our whole relationship has been defined by mutual incomprehension, talking at, rather than to, each other, along with constant misunderstandings. I have to rummage around in the moss before I manage to find it. The Interlock ring has prevented the bullet from disintegration, but it got separated. This fragment might have come from my mercy-shot, which I took quite close up, and maybe the lead came off because of the bullet's high speed. The killing-power of the bullet is unquestionable, but I need further experience with it, before I can judge the stability of its lead core accurately.

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The archers are true sportsmen. They each praise my trophy without a trace of envy, and give me lengthy handshakes. Jake, the expert, explains the growth patterns on the antlers. It's really good that these two globe-trotting hunters are here to share my joy in my lovely bull.

Meanwhile, Pat puts the meat into a bag, but I must carry the trophy. I toss the head onto my rucksack, balancing it with both hands, and Pat carries the bag. We both set off home. The archers decide to stay and wander around the neighborhood: we arrange to meet again on the top of yet another hill. But, by the time Pat and I get to the summit, we feel almost crippled. For Pat, especially, the situation is hard, as he is carrying the greater weight. We decide to leave our bags on the top and he will come and collect them with the ATV. I must keep going with my trophy as, if I leave it, the grizzly might damage it. Good old Pat! Despite our personal differences, he still showed me where to find the best bulls in the NWT. That's the most important thing.

Once back at camp we turn up the oil stove to full blast. Its iron frame starts to glow. We got back just in time, as a huge windstorm, such as I have never seen during this whole trip, is approaching. Hopefully the wind will not blow this patchwork camp away. And the rain pours down. Soon the archers' guide arrives, bringing my now sodden bag, which I left on the top of the hill.

Everyone begins drying out their things; the air in the barracks starts to get very muggy...

In the pleasant warmth of the tent, its inmates go about their favorite occupations. Jake is dozing, and Ricardo and I are fiddling with our computers. This peaceful scene is interrupted by one of the guides suddenly rushing in, almost knocking the door off its hinges.

- Bulls! There are two bulls right next to the camp! Quick! - he yells.

Ricardo - because this message is for him - is still fully dressed; he has only to put on his boots, grab his bow, and run out into the storm. I'm not so lucky; I'm sitting at the only desk in the tent in my underwear. I put on a jacket and run out after them. Ricardo stops to take a quick look through his binoculars ... there are indeed two bulls, and only 600ft. away! And how good they look! He still has one permit left, and really ought to convert it into a trophy! I'm able to watch what's going on for a few moments, but then I have to go back to get dressed, as in a few more seconds I'd freeze to death. I get dressed in a flash, and run back outside. Ricardo and his guide have disappeared into the undergrowth. They must be crawling on their stomachs, otherwise we would be able to see them. Even Jake can't tell where they are: the camouflage clothing is impossible to spot. But we can, however, see the two bulls, and the two hunters must be heading towards them. But... now a third bull has arrived...

Time to concentrate; the wind is so strong that I can hardly hold the Swaro steadily to my eye. It's



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difficult to see anything in these conditions.

Jake spots the hunters walking back, and goes to meet them. He points at the third bull, the new arrival. I can follow the conversation through my binoculars; they are using theirs to examine the bull ... it's no good, they don't want him.

In just a couple of minutes they are back at the camp. Ricardo missed his target. He shot from 150ft. away, which is the maximum range for a bow. He says he took the wind into account, and corrected his aim accordingly, but, over this short distance, a sudden gust drove the arrow 15ft. off course. That type of arrow is not suitable for these conditions, it is too light, he explains. He demonstrates this by throwing an arrow up into the air: it falls 15ft. away. None of us expected such strong winds.

After this adventure, the residents of White Wolf Lake Caribou Camp retire for the night.

White Wolf Lake
Caribou Camp
1st September

We just can't get the heating stove to work properly. It's either on full blast - which heats the room to 86 F. - or it doesn't work at all and we almost freeze. It doesn't seem to like any settings in between. Today I am going to examine exactly how it works as I don't want to wake up to the cold again.

This is the second night that Ricardo and I have been tortured by some unknown insect. Each of us has been bitten on the inside of the lower part of the arm by the little pest. Our symptoms are identical. It must be some sort of pervert insect, only being interested in the inside of the lower arm. I spray my sleeping bag with insect repellent; it might help.

Perhaps, eventually, we'll get fleas.

In the morning Jake hangs around the door, watching the horizon. The bulls are back, close to the camp, but Ricardo isn't interested. The wind is still strong, and he doesn't want to shoot at a difficult target in such weather. The weather - of which I write so much, it being a key factor of northern hunts - has, contrary to the forecasts, not improved. The night was supposed to be windy, which it was, but it was meant to die down by morning. (Unfortunately, this hasn't happened.) Ricardo is perfectly relaxed, even though he's the only one of us not to have got his second bull.

It's the 1st September!

Back in Hungary, the season starts today! I wonder when the troating will begin? Today is only Tuesday, so it could begin this week, though I don't know what the weather is like in Hungary.

Since I've been here, at the lake, I've had no internet connection. Robi and his fellow hunters must be getting ready to go hunting by now. In Csákvár there are no large bulls. You hardly ever see one with antlers weighing more than 17.5lbs, and whoever is looking for a set of royal antlers - 26.5lbs. or so - won't find them at the foot of Mt.Vértes. But, that aside, some of my most enjoyable hunts have been in the Csákvár region. It's a varied, exciting forest, which constantly produces something interesting, and I'm always happy to go there.

At 10.00 Pat starts to prepare the trophy from my smaller bull. He removes the remaining velvet, and then gets out his saw. He cuts them still attached to the skull, just as I wished. Now I would have expected him to start boiling the antlers, but here - just as with the cutting up of the meat - they do things differently. We take the antlers down to the lake. Pat ties a long string to the branch of one antler, and then I, with a strong swing, hurl them into the Wolf. Pat wades a few feet out into the lake - he is wearing waterproof boots, so he doesn't have to stand on the shore to do it - and throws them again. The antlers fly even further out, until they are completely submerged. Each set of antlers will spend at least a day in the lake so that all the blood is washed off.

We have finished the antler -throwing when, back in the processing tent, the son of the archers' guide runs in: bulls! And, once more, they're right next to the camp!

Someone calls Ricardo - he's in a constant state of readiness, sitting fully dressed in the barrack - and he's off after the caribou in a moment. We follow events through our binoculars, and this time we can see Ricardo and the bulls very well. Once more, there is no hide - that's normal for the region - and the herd begins to move, but only 150ft. They begin to graze again, and Ricardo continues his approach ... they spot him again, and this time they run quite far off.

Archery is a difficult craft.

Back in the barracks I look at an archer's unique hunting career, distilled into pictures on his laptop. Photos of a bongo, a thick-maned lion, an elephant, and a rhino appear on the screen.

Then comes the polar bear which he killed, not with a modern helical bow, but in the traditional manner, with a longbow. Then there's the bateng, killed in Australia, which has set a world record, and not only for archers: there has not been a better one bagged with a gun! While some people, perhaps getting ready to go shooting in Africa, debate which animal out of the Dangerous Five is the most dangerous, and what magnum bullet is most appropriate for each, Ricardo just goes out and shoots his game from 90ft. with his noiseless weapon .

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The morning passes uneventfully.

We are waiting for the weather to improve. The antlers have been put in the lake, one by one, but, at the moment, it is raining so heavily that they might just as well have been left on land.

They'd get just as clean in a day. I force myself to clean my gun. I should have done it ages ago, as over the last few days the gun and the optics have got very wet. We sit in the tent and spend the time talking.

I nod off, and when I wake, the weather has brightened up. The archers are already getting dressed, setting out on their afternoon's deployment. Pat comes in, mumbles something, and leaves. Ricardo interprets and I learn that we're going fishing. Apparently, I have a permit for that too. The camp is rather dull without my two fellow hunters, so I'm quite happy with this plan.

Before leaving I sew a button back on my pants. Clothes wear out very quickly here.

We push the motor-boat out into the water. We whizz along over the waves cheerfully, in our stable little craft. Our first journey is to a tiny island. Pat produces some garbage bags, and pours the contents, caribou heads and pieces of skin, onto the ground. If the grizzly wants it, it will have to swim a long way, but at least it won't be going through the camp.

We move to another mooring, this time on a larger island. All the boats are made of aluminum and are treated fairly roughly. The technique for mooring is that Pat just drives the boat up on the shore, no matter how inhospitable it is. When the boat is grounded, the person sitting in the bow jumps out and drags it as high as he can up the beach. The aluminum screeches out in protest as it grinds over the stones. Each time we moor, I'm convinced that we'll hole the boat and will have to swim back home. Pat climbs to the top of a hill to take a look with his spotting-scope, and I remain behind with the young Native-American boy. We take out the fishing-rods. I haven't yet found out what we're going to fish for, or what method we'll be using, but I have already noticed a blinker tied to the end of a line. This means we are after predators, and will be spinning. The last time I went spinning was at Lake Balaton when I was around ten or twelve, and caught a couple of bream; but unfortunately that was quite a long time ago. I start to remember the old method, which is to cover an area by several casts. So that is what I do: I cast to the right, to the left, and almost throw the entire rod into the water in my enthusiasm; but with no result. The young boy soon gets bored and reels in his line, but I still carry on. But this time patience is not rewarded, and in the end, all I have in my hands is my fishing-rod. It has the word "Shakespeare" written on it.

We return to the camp. We arrive at the same time as the archers, who did not bag anything again today. Tomorrow will be our last full day for hunting, but Ricardo doesn't seem worried.

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Pat starts preparing dinner.

Andy Morrison, the organizer of my first ten days hunting, knows a lot of guides in the north. He warned me in advance that not all of them would be very friendly. They are under a lot of pressure, and must produce results. If a hunting company does not enable its clients to have a successful season, that fact will soon get around. The competition is huge; many companies would like to be in the business of hunt organizers, but only the top few manage to survive at it.

The whole tourism industry in Alaska is on a downturn because of the economic crisis, and hunting is no exception. There are fewer and fewer clients and they don't want to travel these distances just for a walk in the woods. If a company is working with Cabela's, expectations are high. Obviously, they are not going to be pleased if their client returns empty-handed. The final resting place for this burden of responsibility is on the shoulders of the guide. There are many people involved in the organization of a hunt, but, at the end of the day, it all comes down to the guide. However good the team working behind him might be, they can't help him score the final goal.

How one copes with this burden depends on the person and their personality. The Inuits did it with constant good humor and friendliness. Greg and Striker, the great experts at Brooks Range, treated me with endless patience, even though I couldn't understand any of the local slang. Pat is a man who keeps his distance. There are some, no doubt, for whom he is the perfect guide; people who come here to listen to the silence or to be engrossed in the study of nature, will not find a better guide than him. But I'm not one of them. Being very outgoing, I love chatting to everyone, and like to laugh with them at silly little jokes. Pat is not the guide for me. Though I have shot two bulls with him, he is not the person I shall remember most fondly.

The freezer has its own generator, but we can't take any power from it. Our supply depends on a separate generator, and is the only way of recharging our batteries; but Pat alone knows when it will come on. We can only tell if there is power if the light comes on in the barracks, and then we all grab our chargers and take turns recharging out batteries. The other guys are generous; they know I'm keeping a diary, and so my notebook always gets priority.

The residents of the camp can be divided into two parts: the guides are one and us hunters the other. We don't go into each other's tents, or socialize. I remember Greg once saying that large get-togethers of hunters and guides are not a Canadian thing. I don't mean by this that Canadians are not friendly people, or that the guides are not good at their profession. A single hunt is not really enough to make a judgement, and I honestly think that Pat, and the archers' guide, are competent professionals. But nothing more. They are not sociable people. I think that the



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Alaskans were much more easy-going. Of course, I don't really know how typical this behavior is, but I do feel there is a difference in their attitude.

I hadn't realised how fond I am of tinned fruit. I can easily demolish a pack of four cans in a day, and the only reason I don't eat more is that I must make our supply last for the next few days.

Jake brings out his excellent whisky again, and now we drink it the way he likes it: with hot water. I'm past caring whether we take it with or without water, either hot or cold; just as long as it's there!

White Wolf Lake
Caribou Camp
2nd September
Morning

The morning starts with major re-organization.

According to my itinerary, the caribou hunt should have run from 29th August to 5th September, and I was to fly to Montana on the 6th. However, the musk-ox hunt ended so quickly, that, despite the memorable mix-up over the plane ticket, I arrived here on the 28th August. And tomorrow, the 3rd Sept. we are to return to Yellowknife. So, by my calculations, whatever happens, I shall lose one night. The point is, it means that I will end up spending three nights (3rd, 4th, 5th Sept) in Yellowknife; but, if this happens, my life and my trip will come to an abrupt end, as by the second night I will have slit my wrists through boredom.

Yesterday, I asked Pat to give Cabela's a call today. At the time, he promised to do it, but this morning he has hanged his mind, and tries to persuade me to sort the problem out with Boyd Warner, the outfitter. (Just like the musk-ox hunt, this was also organized by Boyd's company.)

He doesn't understand that I really have nothing to say to Boyd - I don't actually know who he is, and I'm not particularly interested. I have no business connection with him whatsoever; I have not directly paid him a cent, and I'm not about to start. My contract is with Cabela's; they represent me in situations like this. Pat finally realises that it is useless trying to make me call Boyd: it's not going to happen. So we call Frank on the satellite phone.

Frank and Jen grasp the situation immediately, and we all agree that I must get to Billings, the capital of Montana, as soon as possible. Jen is already booking the plane ticket, so I stand a good chance of getting there the day after tomorrow. They even give me the option of going on to the Montana hunting camp earlier than previously arranged, without any extra charge, but I decline the offer. I have several things to do in Billings: for instance, I would like to buy some

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new clothes, as I'm starting to look like a refugee from a war zone. There must also be some emails waiting for me, and I won't be able to answer them from the Chateau Nova Hotel as, for some reason, I cannot reach my Hungarian mail server from there. But, given the quality of the hotel, I would actually have been surprised if I had been able to. So complete is my trust in Cabela's that I have already transferred the payment for my trip, including the tips for the guides, in advance. The tips are usually 10 - 15%, but for expensive hunts, such as ram hunts, they are often lower. As I was going to be hunting in so many different places during my trip, it did not seem a good idea to carry all the money for tips with me in cash, which is why I included it in the transfer. I arranged with Frank that, after each hunt, I would send an email confirming the payment of the tip, if I felt so inclined. Pat knows very well that the tip is with Cabela's, and reminds me to mention it when I speak to Frank. I am, by nature, a patient man, but I feel this is somewhat impertinent. At least he hasn't asked me to sign an IOU. Interestingly, he takes it for granted that he will receive something. He's in for a big surprise.





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He's going fishing today, but I have decided to remain in the camp. I'm going to watch archery DVDs on Jake's notebook. I began watching one yesterday: it's really amazing what these archers do. They'll climb a tree, using various straps and bands, and just hang there until the game appears. How they are able to maintain such a position for such a long time, I have no idea. In another film a heavily camouflaged archer shot down a moose the size of a small truck from only 30ft. away.

The weather is nice again and - what a surprise - the wind has stopped!
There is dead calm!

We are witnessing a unique natural phenomenon, and I even film it, as otherwise no one would believe me. We rush out into the open air to fully appreciate this paranormal experience. Ricardo makes good use of his last day of hunting. After breakfast he grabs his bow and, accompanied by Jake, he sets off. I wish them good luck, and sincerely hope that they'll return bearing a huge trophy!

2nd September
Evening

I've already mentioned several times that the local caribou seem to treat humans with great naivety. It's a condition that, in certain instances, can make the hunt both simpler and easier. There have been times when, on spotting us, the caribou have bolted, but that is not usual. And, even if they do run away, they generally don't go very far. Mostly, what we have noticed in them, is curiosity. When I was alone in the camp I started to scan the neighborhood with my binoculars, and could see two cows, quite close to the camp. I decided to test their courage. I marched straight towards the nearest, whistling loudly; I wanted to see how long it would be before it ran off. Well, I got within 150ft. before it decided to move, but even then it only went 30 - 60ft. I kept heading for her, and then I started clapping. She stared at me in puzzlement, and let me get within 90ft. But you can't always guarantee such behavior when you're hunting, as Ricardo - who, as a hunting archer, has infinitely greater experience with camouflage and stalking than I have - has tried in vain to get within shooting range on two occasions. Murphy's hunting laws apply here too: if you see a nice bull, it is bound to be shy and timid.

Reading old hunting books set in Africa at the end of the 19th century, I could never comprehend how it was possible to bag, in an open landscape, several dozen animals, including one or two

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rhinos and elephants, in a single day. But if those animals were just half as trusting as the local caribou here, such figures become understandable.

At around 3.00 in the afternoon, sitting in the barracks, I hear the distant sound of an approaching motor. Is it a plane? No, the sound is different ... it's a helicopter! A helicopter is coming over White Wolf Lake! I step outside, in front of the tent so that I am clearly visible, and watch it through my binoculars. They circle the camp and land 90ft. away from my tent.

The pilot and two uniformed men get out.

Hunting Inspectors!

That Pat is always around until you really need him.

I can see badges on the arms of their shirts: the polar bear emblem of the NWT and the words Environment and Natural Resources.

I have no option but to be the host. They ask me a few questions: how many of us are there, and how many are hunters? Why aren't I hunting, and where is my guide? I answer each one, and show them the cold-storage unit. They are calculating the number of dead caribou from the body parts, but the figures don't add up. We've shot five caribou, but there is far less meat in storage.

They can't work it out; none of us can.



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What an idiot I am: yesterday we cut up a carcass and the meat is still in the freezer! They peer into the freezer, and there's the meat. We drag the antlers out of the lake, and they take down the tag numbers and my details. By the time they have finished, Pat arrives. The inspectors can see that all is in order, and the atmosphere relaxes. They've never come across a Hungarian hunter, or many other European ones, either. They ask if they can take a photo of me. I agree, but only if they will let me be photographed with them. We talk for a few more minutes, and they laugh when they hear my itinerary. Finally, they give me their cards, and say to call them if I have any problems! That's how well this inspection ended.

The archers get home a few minutes before 7.00.

We can hear the boat's engine as it approaches, and I excitedly get out my binoculars ... Unfortunately, I can't see a trophy with them. There weren't any big bulls where they were hunting. Ricardo took a shot at one caribou, but missed it. It was nearly 165ft. away. That was the final result of his best bow being broken on the first day. He is unable to shoot so far, or so accurately, with his spare. It is most exemplary how this hunter accepts failure. He is not upset about the original accident, though he has every right to be. When I ask him if he is disappointed with his lack of success, he just shakes his head and smiles. "You know," he says, "it's as if you missed your target from 1500ft. with a gun you'd never used over such a distance." Anyway, the caribou he shot at was smaller than the one he already has in storage, ready to take home.

The archers retire for a rest; they must have had an exhausting day.

For dinner Pat is cooking a soup made from some freshly caught fish. Even though it has nothing in common with Hungarian fish soup, it is still delicious. I must admit that Pat is a very good cook, though he could use a little more salt.

After dinner we go fishing.

Davin, the young Native American, is our guide, and Jake and I are the anglers. We use the blinkers again, but this time we choose a simpler method of fishing. We throw in the two blinkers, Davin sets the boat at its lowest speed, and we tow the bait behind us. I think this type of fishing is banned in Hungary, but it is quite legal here. Suddenly, my rod jerks violently, and in my surprise I almost drop it. I slowly play the fish, but we have no landing-net, so Davin lifts it into the boat with his bare hands. I don't know what kind of a fish this is, only that it is a greenish color. I can only recognize two types of fish with certainty: the one is carp, and the other is white shark.

This must be a third kind. Jake catches three more of these fish, and I get another two, though we manage to lose some others as we play them. We release all of them, as we are not going to eat them. We spend an hour out on the lake.

In the distance small points of light begin to glitter: they are the lamps of the White Wolf Lake



Caribou Camp, powered by a small generator.

Room 313
Chateau Nova Hotel
Yellowknife
3rd September

We must leave the camp today.

Now it's time to pack. If there's anything I dislike about long journeys, it's the constant packing. After I've finally locked my bag, I always find some clothes or other things that I've forgotten, and for which I have no room anyway. I can never understand how it all fitted in before, but won't now.

The much-loathed task of packing is made even harder by the presence of Ricardo. He is constantly telling jokes, reducing me to fits of helpless laughter every minute. Before Jake Ensign packs up his bow, I ask to take a look at it. He says that if I can draw it, I can have a go with it.

I can't even string it.

I have three tries, before I manage to do it, but I can't draw it. It uses the muscles in a completely different way to how I use them in my shooting practice. I tell the boys that once I'm back home I'm going to buy myself a bow. I'd like to take the archery exam for hunters, as this is a really exciting way to hunt. Ricardo promises to email me a list of recommended bows and accessories. I doubt if I'll ever be a truly dedicated archer, as I love guns too much, but it's quite possible that I will happily go hunting with a bow, if I can learn to use it properly. They tell us our plane will land after 3.00 pm. Just to be sure, I call Frank to check that they have managed to book the hotel and re-book the plane ticket. I'm using Ricardo's satellite phone, because yesterday, when I asked to borrow Pat's phone, he made an awful face, as if I was sending him off to the condemned cell.

We are lying in the barracks with our bags all packed. The hours go by. Occasionally, we doze off and then wake up and chat for a while. There is nothing to do. I'm about to nod off again, just before 3.00, when Jake comes in:

- We can't fly today! There's thick fog over Yellowknife and the plane doesn't have the equipment necessary to fly in such weather. The pilot refuses to take off.

I'm not surprised. I must call Cabela's quickly, to tell them to re-book my plane ticket and hotel room. But Jake and Ricardo, meanwhile, have gone down to the shore. We've already put our bags on the beach, and they want to get their sleeping bags out. I follow after them as I need to borrow Ricardo's satellite phone again. It has all been going so well, and then we suddenly have this setback. It would be so nice if, for once, everything went as planned.

I'm just about to dig out my sleeping bag when there's a sudden, loud guffaw. They've fooled me!

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The archers have conned me again!

I try to push Jake into the lake, but he's ready for me and jumps away. They've got me once more! It goes to show how relative happiness is. I had already accepted the bad news, and now, hearing it's all been a joke, I am just so relieved.

The plane arrives around 4.30, bringing a new group of three hunters. Their clothes are clean and they look relaxed. Whereas we are so dirty that all our clothes feel sticky, and when I hit my pants, clouds of dust rise up. Ricardo and Jake do look rather bedraggled, but, to be honest, I probably look the same.

The huge Cessna float-plane moves across the lake for a long time before it finally turns and heads towards our old camp. Because of the favorable wind, this is the best direction for take-off. We gather speed and lift off from the Wolf, just before the shore. I cast a farewell glance at the camp. I think I can see Pat, standing in front of the tents, watching us. I can see the barracks, which have been my home for several nights, and now belong to the new hunters. They don't yet know that there are little blood-suckers waiting to get them, or at least their lower arms. We never managed to trap one of the little devils in the act, so I don't actually know what sort of an insect they were. We are now flying almost exactly over the spot where I bagged my second caribou. I look down and can see a flock of birds, possibly dividing up the remains amongst themselves.

I say goodbye to Caribou Camp, where I have had a very enjoyable time, mainly due to the presence of these two rascally archers, who I've got on so well with. I can't even remember when I last laughed so much. There've been a couple of moments that I'll remember for the rest of my life. It has been an excellent hunt, really successful!

When we reach Yellowknife, we have to sort out some official matters. We throw our bags and trophies onto the trailer behind Carlos' minibus, and head to the office, where we must register all the game we have shot. When we get there, we rush in and Carlos goes off on other business.

The nice lady asks for my permit ... which, needless to say, I don't have on me.

I left it in the minibus. We manage to explain it to her, she looks up my details on a list, and I swear that I am definitely Gábor Katona. In the meantime, two men arrive from the company that will export the trophies, and I explain what I want done with them: nothing. Móni Tóth will contact them, and I will have the work done in Hungary. All the administration, including the paperwork, takes about 20 minutes despite the missing permit, and that's for all three of us. I expected something much more involved than this.

By the time we get to the hotel, it's 7.00. I find a letter from Jenn waiting there. My plane tickets and hotel reservations are confirmed, and tomorrow I will travel to Billings. I shall spend an extra

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two nights there. Jenn encloses her letter to Boyd Warner, in which, to avoid any future misunderstanding, she plainly states that the cost of these nights will be born by Boyd. It's such relief that I don't have to deal with any of this. I'd hate to get into an argument all the time with my outfitters.

I meet up with the boys at 8.00 and we set off for The Black Knight pub. Ice-cold beer and a huge hamburger covered in half a bottle of red Tabasco sauce ... This is what I've been waiting for!

I must say goodbye to the two archers: the famous, great hunters. Tomorrow we are going to fly off in three different planes, in three different directions. Each of us going his own separate way.

A difficult moment.

Jake Ensign is a real gentleman, with a wide knowledge on all topics. He's a generous, well-mannered, helpful hunter. Much is explained about his skills and experience by that famous Grand Slam...

Ricardo Longoria is a bit of a rogue, and is constantly planning his next prank. He is also someone you can always rely on, whatever the circumstances; even though there are very few people above him on the SCI list, he has not a shred of pride or arrogance in his character. Both are superb hunters, quite probably the best I've ever met. Their attitude and standard of preparation far exceed those of the average hunter. They are true sportsmen, and I could not have asked for finer companions than them. I'm really glad I had the chance to meet them, and I hope that one day, somewhere in this great, wide world, we will again have the opportunity to hunt together.

So, tomorrow I will be off to Montana. Once more, my whole day will be spent on airplanes, or at airports. This constant flying is beginning to get on my nerves.

