



North American Hunting Expedition 2009

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Room 322
Hilton Garden Inn
2465 Grand Road 59102
Billings
MontanaUSA
4th September

I've booked an alarm call for 5.20 am, and within an hour I'm waiting for my plane to take off from Yellowknife airport. From here I go to Edmonton, Canada, where I will change and catch one going to Denver. After Denver I'll have one more change and then I'll arrive in Billings, Montana.

In accordance with my travel arrangements, the man at the First Air desk, the company I'm using to leave Yellowknife, checks in all my baggage to my final destination, Billings. This means I won't have to chase after it during the next two changes, but will be reunited with it at my journey's end. This is normal procedure for trips involving several changes, so that travellers don't need to worry about collecting their bags and re-checking them in at each stage of the journey.

It's also convenient for the airlines, as they don't have to keep taking the cases to baggage reclaim, which simplifies all the logistics.

My situation is slightly complicated by the fact that I am entering US territory once more, meaning that, yet again, I must register the entry of my gun into the US. None of this can be done at Billings, my final destination, because I will go through US Immigration in Edmonton. The US maintains a desk there, which means that one can technically enter the US while actually in Edmonton, and then not have to go through these formalities at the other end. Because of this, the First Air representative suggested I collect my gun in Edmonton, declare it there to the US Customs, and then check it in again.

From the very beginning I didn't quite understand this plan, but I let them persuade me. I would have thought that if I checked my bags in to go straight to Billings, I would not be able to collect my gun at Edmonton. At no point in my journey will I be able to get my hands on my luggage again. I didn't want to push the point, as I assumed the airline representative knew how to deal with my case. A further twist in the story was that, in Yellowknife, they could not give me boarding-passes for my flights to Denver and Billings, meaning that I could not get on these flights, even though I had a ticket. Apparently, I will be given them in Edmonton.

Come what may, I set off.

If you've been reading this diary so far, you'll know that I've become rather good at coping with any situation that comes up in these madhouse airports; I only need to remind you of what happened previously with my Fairbanks - Deadhorse flight. I only mention it because I don't want



anyone to think that the following nightmare was the result of any foolishness or incompetence on my part.

I arrived in Edmonton after a journey of nearly 1000 mi. At that point I was still unaware that my trip was in any danger or that I was coming close to violating US laws on the importation of firearms.

In Edmonton I began to sort things out by approaching the first person I saw wearing a United Airlines badge - this was the airline that was to take me on, first to Denver and then to Billings - and asked him what to do. He looked at his computer, called over a colleague, and they stared at the monitor together. That's when they found out that, though they both worked for United Airlines, neither of them could answer my question. I should go to the Denver flight check-in desk where the young lady will certainly know what to do. So that is what I did.

The young woman, however, hadn't got the faintest idea what I was supposed to do. Much telephoning and radioing ensued: more and more United Airlines personnel came to the desk: and the line behind me grew longer and longer. The airline staff then formed into three parties:

the first explained that I had to get my boarding pass before I could collect my gun; the second said that was impossible as, once I had the boarding-pass, the computer would not let me collect the gun. And the third said that I didn't have to collect the gun at all, because if the Americans wanted to see the gun, they'd ask. I thought the third solution sounded a bit suspect, as I couldn't imagine US Customs not being interested in someone bringing a gun on to US territory. For over an hour they sent me round and round the airport, from one place to another, dragging my hand-baggage, which weighed over 20 lbs., with me, before they finally realised that it wasn't their responsibility: it was First Air's, as it was they who originally checked-in my bags. But First Air thought differently: they had only undertaken to carry my bags as far as Edmonton: having done this it was no longer their responsibility.

Time is running out.

The departure of the Denver flight is getting very near.

I'm looking at their faces, listening to their voices, and I realize that nobody understands what's going on. I'm beginning to lose my patience. I've done everything required by the law and regulations; all my documents are in order; and now these two damned airline companies have, between them, lost my luggage, and in such a way that, even if it could be found, they don't know what I should do with it. This is the worst moment I've had today.

I've just realized that I am surrounded by idiots.

Finally, they come to a decision: I must appear before a US Customs officer, who will decide whether he wants to see the gun, or not. I approach the desk with a heavy heart...

Unsurprisingly, he would like to see the gun, and is amazed that, despite all the passenger-control systems in place, I have managed to reach his desk still without the gun that I am supposed to show him. Of course, he won't let me go any further, and he strongly disapproves of what has happened so far. He takes my passport, the gun documents, and all my official papers, and shows me to the Customs Office waiting room. I'm not actually in custody, but he asks me not to leave the room. Briefly, he explains the state of affairs.

These are unbelievably difficult moments.

I could easily be accused of trying to smuggle a gun into the US. On the wall right in front of me is a poster stating that, under US Federal Law, such an attempt is punishable by 10 years imprisonment, or a fine of \$1million, or both. This means that even the attempt is a crime, and, what's more, a serious one. Surely the customs officer realizes that I didn't do it deliberately, that I have only been following the airline company's instructions. But the law is the law. If he's feeling generous, I might just get away with being banned from entering the US.

I can't even begin to describe my state of mind. My thoughts are completely dominated by feelings of hopelessness and despair, as well as an overwhelming anger towards the two damned airline companies. I can only put my trust in the American Customs officers.

My fate is now in their hands.

There's no phone here, so I can't contact the airline companies, and so the customs officers do it for me. The one in charge of my case is very interested in what has happened.

Time is running out.

The departure time of the Denver flight is getting very near.

The customs officers come up and try to console me; they're just doing their job. They have checked all my papers, but it hasn't helped. I've turned up at Customs and tried to enter US territory without actually having my gun on me. That is a fact.

The chief officer asks to see the senior local representatives of the two airlines. They're very lucky that I can't leave this room, and can only see them from a distance. I'm generally a placid kind of guy, but even my patience has its limits, and these two men, and their teams, have definitely exceeded those limits. I can see there is a chance that I could get into serious trouble because of them. First of all, the officer tries to find out exactly where my gun is right now. If he can locate it, it will be brought here, and it will be as if I had just turned up and declared it to him.

He tells the airline companies to produce the gun.

Time is running out.

The departure time of the Denver flight is getting very near.

I've never been in such a predicament in my life.

I am staring at the airline executives, these two so-called leaders of the pack, as they blunder about, hopelessly pressing the buttons on their cell phones and radios. Occasionally they shrug. I hate them. I have very evil thoughts about them.

Time is running out.

The departure time of the Denver flight is getting very near.

I have been in this room for 1 1/2 hrs. Finally, we learn that the gun has been loaded into the hold of the Denver plane. These two miserable idiots have just spent the last 1 1/2 hrs. trying to prevent that from happening. I have absolutely had it.

And now even the customs chief loses his temper. Now he can see that, out of the whole damned airport at Edmonton, the only people capable of thinking clearly are the US Customs Officers, and the only people he can rely on are his own colleagues. He calls me over.

His position is this: from the documents he already has, and the computer records and plane tickets, he can see that I originally brought the gun into America quite legally when I arrived at Chicago. He can find no trace of my having returned home in the meantime, or having used a different gun to hunt with in Canada. And, as he can't find any evidence of me buying a new gun in Canada, he comes to the conclusion that the gun I want to bring in is the same one that I was permitted to bring in before. Because of all this, he can't see any reason for not letting me and my gun back into the US.

I can go!

From now on, if I ever hear someone bad-mouthing US Customs and Immigration, they'll catch it from me!

As I rush to the plane I see the hated United Airlines executive. I go up to him, show him my passport and tell him I'm ready to board. He ignores me, goes to the tannoy, and makes an announcement demanding that I board immediately. What an impertinent, insolent man! I jump on to the plane at the last possible moment and they close the door behind me at once.

With huge relief I fall into my seat.

At Denver, United Airlines, which I have re-named "The Most Stupid Airline In the World", has yet another trick up its sleeve. To reassure myself, just for safety's sake, I want to be absolutely certain that my two bags, one of which is the gun, were really put on the plane, and have arrived in Denver. I go to the information desk and ask.

They have no idea at all where my bags are!!!

Once again, more blank faces and helpless looks; more phone calls; more people with stupid expressions, all bent over the computer, pressing the keys and talking on radios ... Honestly, I just can't understand how a company can function like this. It is a fact, and one of the risks of flying,

that luggage occasionally gets lost. Mistakes can occur in every system, and they can't be prevented. But if United Airlines logistics are incapable of tracking the journey of a piece of luggage, then exactly what are they there for? - and then, if the employees in charge cannot use an inefficient computer register ... then it is all too much. I swear loudly, but only in Hungarian, as I don't want to get into more trouble for abusing a bunch of lunatics.

I board the plane to Billings hoping for the best. (The final straw was that the damned airline company issued me a boarding-pass with no seat number, so that it was only after some energetic elbowing that I managed to get myself a seat. Some passengers, who had similar passes, got stuck in Denver.)

It is going to be a tough 1 1/2 hrs. until we get to Denver.

And at Billings airport ... there are my bags! I've never been so pleased to see my Peli case ... but what's happened? Three of the four straps are undone, and only the padlocks are keeping the case closed.

I peer through the gap in the case; how easy is it to reach the gun ... it's virtually impossible. Without doubt, this case has been very well designed. Even without the straps the gun is still well protected.

I have been waiting for 20 minutes in front of the airport for the Hilton minibus, listening to the Montana night. The crickets chirp so loudly, it sounds as if they are using an amplifier. It's very hot; they're having a heatwave. After just spending five weeks in the north, I am not used to this climate. At last the bus arrives. We drive for 1/2 hr. to the hotel, where, thanks to Jennifer's efficiency, my room is waiting for me. I don't even unpack; the first thing I do is open the Peli ... everything seems fine, there's no sign of any damage to the gun. I'll try a test shot anyway, and if anyone has managed to tamper with the sight through that small gap it will be obvious immediately. I'm just about to replace the gun when I notice a piece of paper in the case. It is the TSA certificate. (The Transportation Security Administration, the organization in charge of flight security, who screen all checked-in bags, including guns.) It seems that the customs officers asked the TSA to insert this certificate into the case to make it completely legal. That must be why three of the four straps are undone. The TSA officers probably didn't do them up properly.

The customs officers at Edmonton will have my eternal gratitude. They were so helpful! I would never have expected it. They worked for hours to find a way to let me enter their country legally.

I splash into the jacuzzi and open a can of beer.



After this exhausting, anxious, nerve-racking day it feels good to finally relax. I think back over the last few weeks, and of my adventures yet to come, as the bubbles and hot jets of water gently massage my body. I decide that, in this universe, the third planet from the sun is quite a good place to be. Actually, out of all planets, this must be the best one. It has many types of game on it, which adventurous sportsmen can hunt as they learn more and more about this lonely blue planet, before they eventually return to their distant countries with all their new experiences.

Room 322
Hilton Garden Inn
Billings
5th September

I'm still not quite over the events of yesterday, so today I plan to do just what I feel like: nothing. Or, at least, not much. I shall still write down what I'm doing right now.

Montana is the 41st state of the US. Its central and western territories are comprised of mountains, which is how it derives its name: montana means "mountain" in Spanish. It's the fourth largest state, though its population is only the 44th largest. The home of my friend, Randy is one of the almost-completely uninhabited US states. It is basically agricultural, with many farmers raising animals; another successful part of the economy is timber. Although Billings is not the official capital, it is where most of the population reside. Out of the state's 902,000 inhabitants, 104,000 live in this city. Like most American cities, Billings is quite young, having been founded in 1877. The settlement, located in the Yellowstone Valley, became important during the construction of the North Pacific Railway in the 1880's. One of its first inhabitants was the president of the railway company, Frederick H. Billings (1823 - 1890), whose name the city later adopted.

The state flag went unchanged for many decades. It came into use in 1905, but the name "Montana" was not added until 1981. The history of the emblem on the blue background dates back further, to 1865. It depicts the waterfalls of the Missouri River, and the Rocky Mountains. The plough, pick-axe and spade are all symbols of the state's agricultural and mining industries.

I wander down to breakfast, and systematically eat my way through everything on the menu. I have only one plan for today - to soothe my ruffled nerves - I'm going shopping. Cabela's opened their store here on 14th May this year, and visiting it is a must for every hunter coming to this town. I get into a taxi and we set off.

Billings' taxis operate on an ingenious system. The city is divided into zones, and tariffs are calculated depending on which zone you are in and which you go to. That means that taxis do not need meters. When I got in, the driver told the dispatcher, over the radio, where I wanted to go, and he replied, which I could hear, that the fare would be \$15.00. I checked it on Google and the distance between the hotel and Cabela's is 28 mi. so the price is completely fair. The system is simple and clear, the passenger knows exactly what to expect, and there is no chance of being ripped-off.



In the middle of a field stands a huge, red-brick building, bearing the familiar yellow sign written in cursive script: CABELA'S. Inside is a real hunter's heaven: an unlimited selection of everything a man can possibly think of. What they don't have here, simply doesn't exist. The shop assistants are always smiling, you can try out everything on the shelves, and there is always someone to help you find your way amongst the plethora of goods. In one part of the store a huge diorama shows all the big game found in North America. It's a magnificent work, a superb example of taxidermy. In front of it is a notice telling the public that, in the last century, many American species came close to extinction, but effective protection has now saved these animals from dying out. The permits bought by hunters, the taxes paid on equipment, and the money raised in general by hunting, have all contributed to saving these animals.

Here, in just ten lines, they have set out an argument which those people who disapprove of

hunting cannot dispute. These are not vague hints on how to retain hunting traditions or how to maintain levels of game stock, which the average person who doesn't hunt won't understand anyway. Financial arguments are useful because it is very difficult to dispute them. Surely hunting would be more acceptable in Hungary if the general public were told just how much hunters pay into the country's budget, money which can then be used for nature protection projects and national parks.

Once I am in one of Cabela's shops, I can hardly tear myself away from it; I've been hanging around the aisles, with my basket, for hours. The assistants are beginning to recognise me, like some wandering ghost. I buy a new pair of pants, which are too long, but that doesn't matter as there is a small tailor's shop here, and they will shorten them for me. Then I start to get into my stride, and my basket begins to fill up. I can see that I will soon have another box to send home. I also buy a trail camera to watch game with; I hope that Robi and the other hunters will be able to make good use of it back in Csákvár. I've been meaning to install such equipment for a long time. It is actually a digital camera linked to a motion –a sensor that operates either in daylight, or by using infra-red light at night. It has an infra-red flash, which will not disturb the game. It is installed on a tree and, if an animal passes in front of it, it will automatically, and silently, take a picture. Thus we will gain an accurate idea of the number, quality, and sex of the animals in the area it covers.

In the shop I spend a long time playing The Big Bulls Hunter video game. You have to take shots at various types of US game animals, in various situations. I choose deer, but can't get a high score. Although you are not supposed to fire at the cows, I shoot at anything on the screen that moves. The machine punishes me severely.

In the afternoon I walk over to the Big Bear Sports Center, just a couple of hundred feet from the hotel. It is a general sports store, and its hunter's corner has only a small selection; but, as it is so near, it was worth the visit.

I read in some guidebook that trying the local cuisine is an essential part of getting to know a country. It must be true, as books like that are always written by experienced travellers; so I take its advice. I run across the avenue and go into a real American restaurant. It's called Macdonalds. I eat probably the 1000th Big Mac of my life, accompanied with about half a gallon of Coca-Cola, hoping, in the meantime, that should this diary eventually become a book, it won't fall into the hands of my personal trainer. If Kelly Kutasi finds out that I eat in fast-food restaurants, she will cut my head off...

I send all my clothes to the laundry, and sit in the jacuzzi.



Room 322
Hilton Garden Inn
Billings
6th September

Late summer is raging in Montana.

As the crow flies, I am 1175 ml. from Yellowknife, directly due south. This is enough of a distance for the temperature to be 33 degrees higher. According to Google Earth right now, it is 50F. in Yellowknife, while it is 83 F. here. And, a not insignificant detail, the sun is shining full blast. Its heartwarming beams fill the Montana sky, and exorcise the memories of all the cold, windy, rainy northern weather. Summer has cheered me up, and any bad memories of my journey so far, evaporate in the heat. Now I'm starting to regret that I sent my shorts home in one of my parcels. This is real beach weather.

I haven't travelled east or west, so there is no need to reset my watch. That is an additional pleasure.

I spend the day in and around the hotel. I do my emails, file my photographs, and watch the Hungarian news on the internet. I don't hear much good news...

I give my sleeping bag a thorough shaking, and, for safety's sake, do it out in the corridor, far away from my room. I still don't know what it was that bit me so badly. The spots on my lower arm just won't go, though they seem a little bit fainter today. It would not be good if my undiscovered torturers moved into my sleeping bag permanently.

I'm getting ready to travel tomorrow. If all goes according to plan, Babsie Bishop, my outfitter, will pick me up at the hotel and drive me out to the new hunting ground.

I'm about to hunt pronghorn.

The famous pronghorn, (*Antilocapra americana*), is a familiar prairie animal and a special prize. Unlike other horned deer, the pronghorn sheds its antlers every year, and then grows a new set. It spends its life in a sort of schizophrenia, as, while actually being an antelope, it behaves as if it were a deer. It has few enemies, but is still able to run at speeds of up to 50mph. over short distances. Even the females have horns, but they rarely grow much longer than their ears, a useful bit of information when trying to tell the sexes apart. Its horns are extraordinarily beautiful. Many mountain hunters might disagree with me, but I think that the horns, which bend inward and back, give the trophy a special beauty, which the indiscriminately spiralling horns of the ram can never achieve.

Like several of its unfortunate fellow species, the pronghorn was almost extinct by the first quarter of the 20th century; the population, previously estimated at 30 m. declined to 20,000. Whoever

blames that on hunting is either misinformed or malicious. Although guns were responsible for the reduction of the species, those people were not hunters in the modern sense.

Not everyone who carries a gun is a hunter.

The "hunters" of the time carried out the mass slaughter of the antelopes primarily for their meat. They didn't know, because they couldn't know, just what damage they were doing to the population. Individual hunters had no idea of the changes they were causing to the numbers of animals. To each hunter the apparently limitless herds must have seemed inexhaustible. I don't think it fair for posterity, using hindsight, to judge the hunters and events of so many decades ago.

However, by being declared a protected species, the antelopes managed to evade extinction, and now there are over 1 m. roaming over America, mainly in the mid-western states. Today's stalkers and conservationists, descendants of those early hunters, have learned that nowhere in the world is there such a thing as an inexhaustible supply of animals.

The pronghorn is highly esteemed by Americans. We might reasonably expect that the front cover of the SCI record book dealing with North American animals would bear the image of one of the legendary game species, like the brown bear, or the moose; but, in fact, on the cover we can see Tom Mansaranez' photo entitled "Evening Light", showing a beautifully photographed pronghorn antelope, gazing over the prairie at twilight.

The average weight of this species, which is indigenous to the US, and often referred to as a "goat" by locals, rarely exceeds 130lbs. and the height, to its withers, is a maximum of 3ft. Its brown, or reddish-brown color is broken by bands and dots of white on its stomach, undertail, chest and head. The undertail serves as an alarm signal to its fellows: when it flashes out over the prairie, everybody has to start running. Males can easily be distinguished by their black masks, which are absent in the females. Their eyes are almost the size of a horse's, giving it the largest eyes, relative to body size, of any mammal. It has an odd habit of having no special time to rest or feed. If it's hungry, it eats, and if it's tired, it rests. This is not good news for hunters, as it makes its behavior totally unpredictable. Apart from that, it is considered one of the easiest types of big game to hunt. Its habitat provides few opportunities for it to hide, so tracking it is not a difficult task. It has adapted well to a dry climate, and can survive for days without water: during these times it can only obtain water from its food, but it manages well. According to the books, stalking it is very like hunting roe deer on the Great Hungarian Plain.

And this time I must be prepared to take some long-distance shots, though I feel I've already started to get used to them.

It has five separate sub-species, but fortunately the record books do not require us to distinguish between them. The record size for a left horn is 17.87 ins. and that for a right, 17.75 ins. but the final evaluation must also take the diameter of the base of the horn into consideration.

This animal is the prime reason for my visit to Montana; that's why I'm here. If, however, I manage to bag a male with nice horns quite quickly, - and I stand a good chance - then I'll have some time left for a traditional pheasant hunt. Today is the 6th, we go to the hunting ground on the 7th, so I hope the pronghorn hunt will start on the 8th at the latest. My plane ticket back to Alaska is booked for the 11th.

According to Frank the pronghorn are very plentiful, so I could be successful in just two days. If all goes well, I should be holding a shotgun in my hands on the 12th. I'm not taking my own gun, so I will have to ask Babsie if I can borrow one of his for the hunt. I'm not worried that it will be a problem. I've met several hunters, each with a minimum of 10 guns - one of them actually had 30.

This excursion looks as if it will be good fun, though the pheasants don't really have anything to worry about. Despite my long use of a rifle, I have very little experience with a shotgun. I've always hunted big game, and have hardly ever been to the Great Hungarian Plain to shoot pheasants in the bushes; and I've never been on a proper pheasant hunt. Bearing all this in mind, I just want to point out that it is unlikely that I will achieve any spectacular scores on my pheasant hunt. But one thing's for certain: this hunt, in the pleasant summer heat, will be a welcome change from all those hunts up in the polar regions, like the Arctic Circle.

I'm really looking forward to it!

In the evening I drink lots of beers, though I have to employ various tricks to get them.

If there's one thing I don't like about America, it's that in many places it is very difficult to get hold of alcohol. Here, you can't say "I'm just popping out to the shop to buy some beer". That's not how it works here. In the average supermarket there's either no beer - which is most frequent - or there's beer but no spirits. Spirits are only sold in special shops, of which there are very few, and which never seem to be open when I'm there (that's why Jake Ensign, my fellow tippler, told me not to forget to buy some at the airport duty-free shop. But, because of that damned United Airlines I was in such a state of nervous collapse I completely forgot.) Whoever goes hunting in the US should take several hip-flasks with him. There are some states where they don't even sell beer at the gas stations! All these prohibition rules drive me nuts. For instance, you are not allowed to drink in the street.

Insane!



Tomorrow I shall have to discuss it with my guide. We will have to sort it out, as I'm not looking forward to the next few days being completely dry.

Babsie Bishop's House
The Town of Malta
Montana
7th September

This morning, after exchanging various messages and phone calls, we decided that Patti, Babsie's sister, is going to be my driver. She's due to arrive at 12.00, so my morning is free, giving me time to visit the Big Bear Sport Center again, where this time I manage to exercise some self-restraint, and don't buy anything. I'm down in the hotel lounge at noon. Patti arrives right on time in her mega-size Ford 150 pickup. We load up and set off.

This small truck is quite comfortable, and all my luggage is close at hand so, finally, I need not worry that some airline is going to lose it. Patti has brought along her delightful little daughter who (to me) speaks English so cutely that it is a pleasure to listen to her. We fill up the tank on the outskirts of Billings, where we also pop into a Macdonalds, and afterwards - for safety's sake - I pick up a pack of Millar beer. There's a long journey ahead.

Babsie Bishop lives in Malta, 200 mi. from Billings. We quickly leave the town and get on the road. There is no highway, at least it's a good road.

I can't get enough of the scenery; this is a very enjoyable car journey. It makes a pleasant change to see all the colors of nature. Montana is a real "Western" state. The endless prairie, the distant mountains, the scattered ranches along the road and the sparse sedge bushes are all straight out of a Clint Eastwood movie. I can see cattle dotted over the landscape, but no sign of any buildings. They must be reared in the open air all year round. Nothing blocks the view, we can see for miles in the clear air. Occasionally a little island of green appears, where - who knows why - just like an oasis, there are a few trees. The sky is blue, the sunlight sparkles and country music is coming from the radio, though not for long, as we travel out of range of the station's signal, and Patti has to change to a satellite channel.

Life is slow in Montana.

For 200 miles we have not passed another car, nor has anyone overtaken us. The road runs as straight as an arrow. Half-way through the journey we stop at a run-down gas station, where the derelict building seems to be held together by nothing more than the threads of time. There's a small restaurant adjoining the shop, but I wouldn't fancy eating there. Inside there are hunters

sitting around, dressed in flamboyant orange vests and caps. For a while, I considered wearing these highly visible colors while out hunting a sort of American fad. I used to think they weren't necessary to hunt safely. Even Széchenyi inveighed against these unnatural colors for hunting. But as the years passed, and hunting accidents in Hungary increased, the popularity of the blaze orange vests and clothes slowly grew. After hearing of so many accidents, my opinion has changed: today there is no way I would participate in a group hunt without at least wearing a brightly-colored cap. I'm still not very keen on it, and I'm not very pleased that these clothes are now part of the basic hunting uniform. Unfortunately, it says a lot about the type of people who turn up carrying guns in our forests. The rule, however, is very simple: don't take a shot until you know what you're aiming at. You must not shoot at noises, movement, colors, hunches and who knows what other elusive things. If every hunter learned this, then there might never be another hunting accident in the world.

That is to say: guns themselves are not dangerous.

There are few safer and more predictable things in the world than firearms. To prove this, an American gun enthusiast carried out a very interesting and informative experiment, with indisputable results. He took a loaded revolver and placed it on a table with the safety-catch off. Via a webcam above the table, the life of the revolver could be viewed 24hrs. a day. This went on for days, perhaps even weeks. Not once did the revolver jump up and start firing! With this experiment he refuted, once and for all, the argument that guns are dangerous.

It is the man behind the gun, who is dangerous.

In the distance, mountains start to appear. I ask their name, but it is unnecessary, really: they are the Rocky Mountains. Whenever you see a mountain in America, you can be pretty sure that, if it isn't the Rockies, it's a spur, branch or whatever of them. It's easy to learn geography this way... We've been driving through the deserted landscape for four hours, before we reach Malta. We drive around a small settlement of 1500 people, before stopping in front of a wood-framed house: this is where I shall be spending the next few nights, the home of the Bishop family and headquarters of the pronghorn hunt.

Babsie Bishop is a 54-year-old, wiry man, with a ramrod-straight back and short white hair, who welcomes me with a broad smile to his unusually-furnished house. My host's enthusiasm for Coca-Cola is obvious. Throughout the house there are advertisements and objects bearing the Coca-Cola logo; these make up most of the decoration. The emblem is hanging on the walls, it's what you see on top of the wardrobes, and there is even a glass case for coke memorabilia. I myself am partial to this drink, but, even to me, this seems a bit over-the-top. There are a few

cases of coke lying around the floor, but they are purely decorative, and, as they compliment the general decor, you're not allowed to touch them. Despite this peculiarity, the house feels cosy, and I shall be sleeping downstairs. I have an excellent room, on my own, and share a bathroom with my fellow hunters. We have a variety of soaps, toothpastes and other accessories to choose from: I can't complain about the accommodation. Tomorrow I begin the hunt with two other hunters. The others don't drink beer - I'm generally slightly suspicious of the teetotaler tribe. I should remember the names of the others I have met, but sadly, I can't. I hope that, during the short time I will be spending here, I'll learn at least some of their names. My thoughtful host has left a book on pronghorns, and another on pheasant shooting, on my bedside table. I will study them this evening. We share the house with the family, and I can see that our hosts manage to achieve a good balance between the guests' comfort and a family atmosphere. I arrange with Babsie to take some test shots before the hunt. Toni Bishop is making a Mexican version of a lasagne for dinner. It is delicious.

Babsie Bishop's House
The Town of Malta
8th September

We hunters are woken up at 5.45 in the morning. After a quick breakfast we pour out into the street, where Babsie places the hunters with their respective guides. Everybody is milling around with their gun-cases, rucksacks, and cool-boxes the size of bathtubs. The general atmosphere is excellent, and we are all looking forward to the day's hunting. Babsie raises our spirits even higher by saying that today there will be at least one antelope less on the plains of Montana. I am under his guidance, but each hunter has his own guide and car. Each vehicle is towing a trailer carrying a very strange vehicle. The last time I saw something like this was in "Mad Max 3". They look like a cross between oversized ATVs, cross-country golf buggies, and extra-large dodgems, but which also has a roof. They are made by Polaris, and Babsie assures that these fancy machines will be able to take us to where the antelope are. The convoy, with much reversing, maneuvering and shouting, slowly sets off. Babsie leads, and the others follow behind us. We haven't been going for long, when we stop at the edge of town to fill up with gas and complete the permits. From this I learn that we are going to be hunting in an Indian reserve, and that, once more, I must always keep the permit on me. As we already know, this is not something I'm very good at, so I zip it into one of my jacket pockets

immediately. I can't believe I'll need my jacket, but Babsie tells me to bring it with me: we are already in our shirtsleeves.

The group starts to split up, each going in a different direction to search for antelope. This way we will not disturb each other, as well as being safer. A bullet will travel a long way over flat ground. Babsie says we won't need our orange clothes for this hunt, and I must confess, I shan't miss them. An area of almost 50 by 50 sq. miles is available to us; there must be enough room for us all.

We travel for 20 ml.

The road is fenced on either side. We are in cattle country, and fences protect both the cattle and the cars. This is where any antelope that turn up are considered unwanted guests, and we shall have to hunt trying to avoid the cows, unless I decide to shoot one as a last resort.



We haven't gone far along the road before we see our first herd of antelope. Babsie says that the horns of the bucks - that's what the males are called here - are too small, but we still stop for a quick look through our binoculars. I've never seen a pronghorn before and I'd like to study them for a while. They are lightfooted, fast animals. When we get out of the car they run off at an unbelievable speed, jumping vigorously, with no apparent effort. According to my guide, this is typical behavior. They are used to the sight of a moving car, but if it stops they run away at once. It's not difficult to spot them. The white stripe on their sides stands out from the background, and we can easily see a new herd, even without binoculars. The pronghorn can move very fast, even if it is not trying to escape a predator. It looks as if it has built-in springs, so quickly does it disappear over the horizon.

We suddenly turn off the road, and here we are, at the hunting ground. We stop; it is time to unload the Polaris. Babsie reverses off the trailer and I get in at once. My gun is placed in a rack above our heads, strapped in and easily accessible, after I have taken a few test shots, and made some largely unnecessary adjustments to the sight.

This "Mad Max" Polaris is a wonderful machine. It's fast and maneuverable, just like a pronghorn. Its suspension copes confidently with the uneven ground. During the first 10 minutes there were some moments when, as we went over a sandhill, I was convinced it would overturn; but it always remained stable, and we always got away with it.

We haven't had to drive for far - I'm enjoying the journey - before we spot our first couple of bucks. They are probably just over a mile from us, but they have already seen us and automatically sprint away. It's not worth trying to chase after them. The prairie is so vast that we would never find them, even on the Polaris.

The plain is completely flat, though at one point it changes into steep hills. We leave the well-worn track and Babsie drives the machine up the side of the nearest hill. The vehicle moans once or twice, but still crawls up the hillside, which is almost as steep as a wall. At the top Babsie jumps off...

He points to the ground, and I quickly fall on my stomach, and crawl up beside him. Beneath us, at the bottom of the valley, stands a beautiful buck looking at the little brook flowing down the middle. I crawl forward... I can barely stifle a cry of pain.

I've put my hand on a cactus.

The sneaky little plant is growing underneath a clump of grass. I can't keep crawling as I have to remove the spikes. I get rid of most of them and we continue crawling... the buck is looking around... the target is not properly visible and there is grass in front of the gun, which is resting on

my rucksack... another 6ft. ... I read 510ft. on my laser. It's a big shootable buck, and Babsie tells me to shoot...

The antelope looks towards us again... and with five leaps disappears behind a curve of the hill. I missed my chance.

I was simply not prepared for such a fast reaction, or that it could move so energetically. I stare after it with my mouth agape. I know it's a fast-moving animal, but that fast? Babsie slaps me on the back with a laugh; mine isn't the first open mouth he's seen among novice antelope hunters. I just can't understand what the buck saw. This hunt is not going to be as easy as I thought.

We get back into the Polaris and go on, swallowing dust. Every five or ten minutes we see more nice bucks, either alone, or in groups. We can't get any closer as we have no cover whatsoever. It's like trying to stalk on a football field. At one point I measure the distance to a herd: they are 2400ft. from us. We approach another 150ft. but they are already running away. I don't know what the plan is, but I don't think we're going to succeed like this. The solution can be found in the unevenness of the ground. We try to get off the plain, into the hills. The only problem with this is that it makes it more difficult for us to spot them. Suddenly, on coming around the curve of the hill, Babsie spots two more bucks, looking away from us. We quickly reverse and get out. We climb up the hill, crouched right down. If we can get up the hill unnoticed, we might get a chance to shoot. My guide is carrying something, but I only realise what it is when we reach the top.

It is a decoy pronghorn.

It's an instant pronghorn, made of folding sheets of plastic, devised to wickedly deceive the antelope. We are planning an ambush. Babsie unfolds the decoy, and we crawl another 300ft. hiding behind it - I try to avoid the cactuses. We have been on the hilltop for a while, but the ground is so bushy that I can't find a suitable shooting position. Babsie keeps an eye on the animals, I try to make a shooting stand. There is no shooting-rest or usable protrusion, no nothing. I rearrange my rucksack until I can see the target, more or less. It's far from ideal, but, right here and now, there's nothing better. Even a bad gun-rest is better than no gun-rest at all. I can see the bucks and one is definitely bigger, which is my choice ... laser ... 30ft. Grass again.

There's no point in shooting over long distances if there is something in front of the barrel. I signal to Babsie that I can't take the shot. He understands the situation, and beckons me to crawl further. As we approach the other side of the hill, the ground starts to descend and I can see above the undergrowth. We drag the rucksack forward again ... the bucks are alerted ... all I see are their undertails flashing.

If I said that we'd ruffled three blades of grass I'd be exaggerating.

The Dall sheep is virtually blind compared to this creature. What eyesight!

Back in the Polaris we hold a council of war. Babsie says we have to stick to this method, which is to stick close to the high points of the terrain, using them to try to get within rifle range. This is the only possible way; this, or me shooting from 3000ft.

I think it's better to go for the first option.

We go for about a mile along another dusty stretch of road, until we see a promising pronghorn. From this distance we can't judge the size of the horns. We leave the vehicle and, under cover of the hill, we start the operation. We go for 1/2 ml. like this, and, during this time, we can't see the buck, but he can't see us either. We climb a small hill, crouching down as we go up. I'm right behind Babsie so that we show the smallest possible area to the antelope. I finally get a good view of the target, but I can't measure the distance while on my stomach. It is still a long way off, out of shooting range, but we need to know just how far. Carefully, inch by inch, I get to my knees; laser ... there are three horizontal lines on the screen. That means it is further than 3000ft., beyond the measuring capability of the device. Cautiously, I start to lie down ... the buck is already off.

What can I say?

It can see us from over 3000ft., even though I am moving very slowly.

Back to the Polaris.

We start to drive around again, while I try to come up with a plan. First of all we must forget all this creeping and crouching, and shooting while sitting or kneeling. It hasn't worked so far, and isn't going to. We must crawl all the time, and shoot while lying down. If this is impossible because of the type of vegetation, then we must just accept that the antelope can't be shot. Here comes another chance. We get out and, in spite of what we have just decided, move forward crouching. We can do it as we are completely hidden by a hill. For safety's sake we start to lie down at the bottom of the slope, and I put my gun across my back, like a hussar.

We crawl up.

Approaching the top of the hill we completely flatten ourselves. So far we have been on our elbows, but now we are absolutely flat. Our heads never rise above the top of the grass. We avoid the larger plants in case their movement betrays our presence. We go forward like two shadows. If it can spot us like this, there's nothing else I can do.

We get to the top, but can see nothing but grass. I don't dare to raise my head. We must find a gap. Babsie crawls forward, slowly pushing the rucksack in front of him. I stay behind; until I need to get into a shooting position, I'm not going to risk moving. Babsie is now 30ft. ahead of me, and has put the rucksack in the correct position. He signals with his finger that I can come forward.

My face is almost brushing the ground. I worry that the buck will see the gun barrel wobbling on my back.

Babsie risks getting up on his elbows, but he is still half-covered. There is a bush between him and the buck and he can watch it under the lower branches. I reach him, but I'm afraid to look up. With his open palm Babsie indicates that I must not move. The buck is already looking! The seconds slowly pass; I stare at the ground, aware only of the smell of the grass. I haven't been able to take one glance at the antelope. When we first saw it only its horns were visible above the grass. They were what made Babsie decide it was worth stalking. Still crawling, I sidle up behind the rucksack, after being hidden by it for the last 9ft. My guide helps me with the rifle strap. He can risk a little more movement than I can.

I slide the gun onto the rucksack.

I slowly raise the visor on my cap to the level of the gunsight...

I remove the lens cover...

Now I can see it...

It looks in our direction ... it isn't running yet, but it must be suspicious. Motionless, it keeps looking towards us. I can see its chest... 855ft. I can either risk a shot now, or wait for it to turn side-on. But, usually, if a pronghorn moves, it starts to run. Then I'll have no chance at all, specially from this distance.

What shall I do?

It's my decision now, Babsie's done all he can. The reticle is focused on its chest, the gun is cocked, I start to pull the trigger. Just a couple of millimeters to go before the gun fires. I wait in this position. It might have heard or seen something because, very slowly, it turns to its left. No, it's still far from being side-on, but I do have a better view.

I fire immediately.

A hit; Babsie gives a shout ... but it hasn't fallen. It wasn't exactly on target. It runs down the hill and we follow, waiting for it to collapse. Babsie runs back to the Polaris and I wait, not going any closer. I don't want to frighten it. When the vehicle has arrived we'll try to intercept it; Babsie thinks he knows, where it is heading, if it has the strength to struggle on. We get closer, but, once more, all we can see are the horns ... We are now only 90ft. away so I reduce the magnification of the riflescope. Babsie whistles to me to shoot, and as it stands up slowly, BANGG!!! The blaser knocks it over, this time for good.

PRONGHORN!

Here is the antelope right in front of me!

I give a loud yell, and all the tension is gone!

We finally got it! We managed to outwit it! We outfoxed those famous eyes! Our cunning plan worked! I touch the beautiful, curved horns with indescribable pleasure. I acquaint myself with this remarkable head ornament, I've never seen anything like it before. It is a very special animal with a beautiful coat. In my mind it's more suited to the African savannah. We take lots of photos, using a still camera and a video, while we discuss the events over and over. My mood remains high; patiently Babsie takes what is probably the 100th picture.



Then he starts to gut it.

He specifically shows me the heart; it is well worth a look. Compared to the size of the animal, it is huge. So this is the secret of its speed and stamina! A huge motor to pump the blood to the muscles, to provide the much needed oxygen. When the work is finished we open the cool-box standing on the Polaris' rack. One after the other the coke cans are opened, and I start to eat

Toni's excellent lunch. It is hot and we are hungry and thirsty from our great hunt. The antelope is put on the loading space. I ask Babsie if I can have a go driving this machine for a while. He agrees, and I take the wheel. I step on the gas and the prairie flies by! But what's that up ahead in the grass? A stone, but it doesn't matter, we'll go over it.

No, we won't.

There's a sharp sound of grating metal, and the Polaris half-pulls the rock out of the ground. We almost go through the windshield. Babsie is enjoying it so much that he is crying with laughter and beating his knees. He's the type of guy who thinks life is basically funny. There's nothing in which he couldn't find something to laugh at. I love hunting with people like this! He isn't angry with me, and says a good machine should be able to put up with a certain amount of rough use. He does not even want to take over the wheel.

We are driving back to the car. Suddenly, some birds rise up in front of us...

Hungarian partridge - that's what Babsie calls them!

Honest. Here, exactly 5117mi. from my home, I meet some Hungarian birds! This bird (Rotes Rebhuhn) is officially known as the Hungarian partridge over here. Babsie wasn't just using this name out of politeness to me. Flying ambassadors of the Hungarian hunt, right here in Montana! I am almost bursting with pride! Yes, at this time of year, if someone here is looking for birds to shoot, their choice will mainly be Hungarian partridge! (And sharptail. The information about the pheasant hunt was wrong: it is not the season.)

We quickly take a 20 caliber, plastic-butted, pump-action shotgun from the gun-rack, and try to follow the birds. We're actually equipped for an antelope hunt, but, even though we don't have a dog with us, why not take a walk around the area as we are already here. I move away from Babsie - he's not hunting and the wind is coming from his direction. If a bird rises it will fly towards me. I'm in a good position; six partridge fly up in front of me. I take a shot... one falls.

We search and search, but cannot find it. It glided down; it was a bad shot. This is when we need a dog; we'll never find it.

A couple of hundred feet away more birds rise. I empty the whole magazine, and Babsie gives a yell with every shot; the birds are happy too: not one has been hit. I don't really care - I feel as if we are related. We come to the banks of a small creek, where the vegetation is lush; if we can't find birds here, we won't find them anywhere. They rise in front of Babsie and fly towards me. The shotgun roars, a flight is broken, and the Hungarian lands 30ft. away from me. I'm staring at my dead relative and I hope it isn't too upset that I've shot it so far from its original home. Now my



success in America is complete - even with a shotgun! The weather is great, my companion is excellent, and I've shot both fowl and big game... ! What more do I need?

This is what I call, a good day's hunting!

Slowly we return to the jeep and trailer. We leave the Polaris behind as Babsie's brother is going to use it next. We head for home; our long hunt is over. When we arrive, we leave the game at the house of a friend of my guide; he will look after it from now on. His name is Tony, but he's not at home. His house is wide open; only a lazy black cat is guarding the valuables.

Back at Babsie's house , our headquarters, we collect the latest parcel to send back home - the result of my shopping trip to Cabela's in Billings... - and drive to the post-office. The woman at the post-office bursts out laughing: I'm still wearing the earmuffs up on my forehead. I'm so used to them, I don't notice them anymore. We manage to send the parcel in 30 minutes. This sleepy, small-town post-office is quite excited at having to send a parcel to Hungary. They've never done anything like this before. We study the tariffs and forms together. On the way back we drop in at the local hunting shop; Babsie knows everybody here. Eventually we get home.

The shower at Babsie's is so complicated that it takes me 15 minutes to work it out. There are six shower-heads, out of which water may, or may not come. There are three levers, two of which have three settings. The combined setting of these levers determines which shower-heads work and the temperature of the water. By the time I've managed to get warm water to come from the top, the lower ones run cold. When I get the lower shower-heads to produce warm water, I get nothing from the top. When I manage to get warm water from the upper part again, the side ones start spouting boiling water at me. This requires an engineer, not an internet expert...

Babsie Bishop's House
Malta
9th September

I always consider a hunting diary in which everything goes smoothly to be rather suspicious. A story in which the game is bagged one after the other, there are no unnecessary detours and the author never goes home empty-handed, is somewhat unlikely. In my experience hunting is not like this. To be able to bag an animal requires a favorable combination of many factors, and that doesn't always happen. Quite often hunting sucks. There are many banana skins to slip on.

When re-reading my diary, or just running through it in my mind, I can see that during this expedition I have always been successful on the very first day of every hunt. Any animal that I shot on a following day was always the second example of the species I was hunting. (Such was my second musk-ox and the caribou in Canada.)

How could I be so lucky?

I don't have such good results even on my familiar Hungarian hunting grounds. There's no guaranteed formula for bagging anywhere, unless it is "canned-hunting", where it's not so easy to make a mistake, but even then things do not always go well on the first day. I don't think this good fortune is down to me. The reason for it will be found in the expertise and experience of my guides. I can confidently state about all my guides that they were never guessing at the movement of the game: they knew it. That's what makes the difference. Good guides can be distinguished from bad ones by the fact that, amongst other things, they spend time, money and energy in studying the game stock in their hunting grounds. They do not wander about aimlessly, just hoping to come across something, but take their clients directly to the place where the game is most likely to be. Their clients have just two things to do: the first is to follow their guides' instructions, even if they don't agree with them. I never try to outsmart a local hunter. And the second is that he should grab every opportunity offered by his guide to shoot game. That's down to him; the guide can't help him in that, or at least, in the better organizations, they won't. I think the client has to focus solely on these two factors. If he can do that, he'll have done enough to put another foreign trophy on his wall.

After the usual alarm-call just before 6.00, and then breakfast, we drive back to the reserve. I've packed up my gun and have only brought my camera, my video-camera and my binoculars. We have a new companion, Herb, also here to hunt antelope. The main task for today is for Herb to successfully "kill" a pronghorn. (In American English they use the term kill, instead of bag as we do in Hungarian. In talking about my journey with local people I often say sentences such as this: "In Alaska I killed a Dall sheep and two caribou and then in Canada I killed two musk-ox and two more caribou." What a massacre!)

Herb sits in front, I'm in the back, listening to the conversation going on in front of me. Herb is 65, and a real American cowboy. These American pensioners look very young. He's hunting in jeans, a camouflage shirt and a baseball cap: a cheerful, contented man. I hope I'm like him when I get to that age. To my great sorrow, we have to use the car. We are temporarily without the Polaris. Herb calmly watches the game and, as usual, Babsie laughs all the way. After driving for 30 minutes, we reach my beloved Polaris: we have definitely been missing each other. It hasn't been forgotten how much I like to drive it, so I'm allowed back into the driving seat. I drive for just 10

minutes before handing the wheel to Babsie. The success of a hunt depends seriously on who is driving the machine. You have to know when to start off, how fast, and which direction to go, what route to take if you need to overtake a herd of animals, and where the cover that shields a vehicle from sharp eyes ends... All this is just a part of what makes the Polaris such an effective tool in the hands of an experienced antelope hunter. I don't want to risk reducing Herb's chances by my driving.

Babsie soon spots a beautiful buck and we approach it under the cover of a bench. They both head for the top of the hill, I stay in my seat and follow them through my binoculars. An old hunter once said to me that, in stalking, even one man is too many. If you include the guide, who is indispensable, it becomes obvious why I stayed in the Polaris. I've been given a walkie-talkie and Babsie will call me if they need a lift or my help. He must trust me as he leaves me in charge of the expensive Polaris all the time.

They are getting further away.

They seem to be whispering intently. They are gesticulating and explaining and don't seem to be able to reach an agreement. Finally, they return to the vehicle. They have spotted an even better buck than the one that originally roused their interest. It's in a very inconvenient position, so we will now try to ambush it. Our guide produces his decoy antelope once more and climbs on to the roof of the Polaris. He unfolds it and starts moving back and forth, trying to imitate the movement of a pronghorn. We hope it will encourage the pronghorn to come closer.

Unfortunately, it's too clever for that.

The hunt continues by car. Sitting in the back seat, I don't really have anything to worry about - my trophy is safely in storage - but I cross my fingers that Herb will be lucky on his first day out hunting. Because then we can continue the bird hunt that we started yesterday, as well as trying a so-called varmint hunt. This is a typical American pastime, though it is found in other parts of the world too; but the true experts and masters are only to be found in the New World. The essence of this type of hunt is that the millions of vermin living out on the prairie are reduced by bullets rather than poison. It is good for everyone except the vermin. It is a good opportunity for the hunter to practice his aim, it is a good source of income for the organizers and it is also, unlike poison, environmentally friendly. If only we can get that antelope soon!

We want to take advantage of all the undulations in the terrain. The hills on the margin of the prairie have been chosen for our stalking today, we are not even going to attempt to do it in an exposed area. Although we could well give it a try, as some antelope behave very strangely. A normal, healthy pronghorn will run off if it so much as spots a man even a mile away, but

apparently there are retarded, backward bucks too. They will wait for us to get within 150-300ft., staring blankly at the Polaris. We almost run them down. The only reason for their survival is that they have small, low-quality horns, and so are not of any interest to an ambitious hunter.

We carefully approach the brim of the hill... but Babsie suddenly slams the Polaris into reverse.

Below us the antelope are swarming!

He's going to get the decoy pronghorn from the trunk... it's not there. In our great rush we have left it behind somewhere. He asks me to drive back along our track to see if I can find it, while they try to get within shooting range without it. So I set off back. I'm unable to go further than 1800ft. as after that I can't see our tracks clearly. I haven't brought a GPS with me and I don't want to get lost on the Montana prairie. While I'm driving, I think how difficult it must be to navigate in a landscape with hardly any features. Once I read a story about the problems of orientation in the desert for the Foreign Legion. In certain areas they were forced to build metal towers to provide landmarks. Sand is constantly moving and among the wandering dunes only a tall structure would remain a permanent landmark. Local tribes, however, drive their camels right across the desert, once a year, to be sold at market. In order that the unsold camels have food on the return journey, from time to time, they leave behind a bale of fodder as they travel. On the way back, on each trip, they are able to find the bales, despite having no instruments for navigation, or, as it is daylight, being able to use the stars for guidance. The Legion has never been able to utilize this ability, although it is quite possible - this is my personal opinion - that the tribesmen just didn't want to teach them. In African hunting tales there are almost always trackers whose unbelievable prowess at orientation is continually mentioned by the author. It's an interesting question as to whether this knowledge is the result of study and experience from early childhood, or whether people living close to nature have retained these indefinable and unquantifiable abilities, which in "civilized" societies seem to have died out. As I've said previously, in the case of the wolf Nicolai, there is a huge difference between the brains of dogs and wolves. Brain functions that dogs no longer required slowly disappeared; this can be seen by comparing the brain size. I must learn more about this.

I'll soon be back at the point where we split up... but where exactly was it... I stop as I am uncertain. I have a radio, but I don't want to use it as they are still stalking. I wouldn't want to ruin their hunt by chirping over the radio... I climb up on top the Polaris to take a look around... and, guess what? There's the decoy! It is very lucky that I didn't lose it somewhere. Herb and Babsie return without having fired a shot. With his unshakeable good humor, Babsie learns that he had left the decoy on the Polaris.

Now we are all in good spirits.

We descend into a sheltered valley from where they intend to climb up the hill. Once more I'm left alone. I'm taking photographs and videoing my surroundings, happy to be on my own. I listen to the grasshoppers. Every time I take a step, clouds of grasshoppers rise about me. I have never seen so many in one single place. Their wings make them sound like little helicopters. I can only guess at what they are doing, all these millions here together.

The sun is getting higher and higher. The air is getting warmer, and soon it will be hot. Each time we stop, we open up the cool-box and drink some coke or mineral water. I've just realised that I have a companion. In preparation for some bird shooting, Babsie has brought along one of his dogs. He is sitting in a portable kennel, on the platform at the back, looking out sadly. I don't dare let him out, so, instead, I stroke him through the bars.

There's a distant bang...

I press the buttons on the Motorola radio to find out the result. Herb's shot has hit its mark! A successful "kill". I congratulate him from afar, start up the Polaris, and try to find my way to my companions. I drive up to the top of the hill; the valley suddenly opens up in front of me. The bare hills embrace the green valley in a great circle, like a crater. The inner slopes are steep, like a precipice: I can't see any way down, but this is where I have to go. Down, in the depths, I can see Babsie waving and I wave back, but it doesn't help me to get any closer. Over the radio I tell Babsie that I need his advice, as I have run out of ideas. He can't see any solution either, so they decide to walk up to me. They leave the antelope behind as neither want to carry it up in this heat, which is quite understandable. Babsie then takes over the driving as we expect to do some difficult manoeuvres in the Polaris. Searching for a way down, we return to the grove-like valley with the little river dividing it in two. We have to cross, but cannot see a safe place to ford it. The river bed is not firm and stony, but muddy and soft, and does not hold out much hope for us.

Driver Babsie decides to risk it.

He hits the gas pedal and the engine roars. We three members of the crew hold on (with both hands) to whatever we can, and yell at the top of our lungs, as if we are on a rollercoaster. And so we try to spur on the Polaris, our brave little jeep, to an even greater effort. However, all this encouragement proves to be in vain. The water floods in over the floor - I barely have time to raise my boots - and the wheels sink up to their axles in the river: we are stuck. The chassis itself is resting on the river bed. This unexpected turn of events is greeted by howls of laughter for several minutes, and we recount our versions of the story to each other with loud guffaws. It is only when all this is over that the rescue operation begins. Babsie unwinds the cable from the

winch and fixes it to a boulder in front of us. Herb operates the winch by remote control, as, from the very beginning of all this, I told them that I am no longer a hunter, but a camera man, and must not be relied on to help. I switch on my Sony videocam, as this scene has to be immortalised for posterity. Slowly, the electric motor pulls the jeep, but we are not out of trouble quite yet. We need to be winched a little bit further, but cannot find a suitable place to attach the cable. Our guide finds a dry piece of wood in the undergrowth, stamps it into the ground, like a peg, and then loops the cable around it. It doesn't look a very stable arrangement, but it seems to work. The wheels reach the stony bank, and from then on there are no more obstacles, and the machine can be driven out.



To celebrate our success Babsie releases his dog. He runs around, enjoying his freedom. There's one more slope to come, which I would take great care on, even if I was descending it by foot. Babsie, however, recklessly drives the vehicle straight down an almost vertical drop. I can not over-praise the Polaris. I don't understand why it isn't widely known in Hungary. It could

be used from early spring through to late autumn, and would be better suited to the hunting conditions than ordinary jeeps. It has no doors, so you don't have to worry about closing them, and you can leap out with your gun at any time. It gives you a clear view of all the surroundings, and can get to inaccessible areas which it would be impossible to reach by car. It also goes over all ditches and bumps smoothly. There is a special place to hold the guns, so that they are always close to hand. It's so practical that even hunting with it for an entire day is not uncomfortable. There's enough room for four people, their guns, and whatever game is bagged, as well.

We reach the pronghorn.

It is a nice trophy, but it won't set any records, even though it is a fine example of the species. Innumerable photos are taken, and afterwards we have our sandwiches for lunch. The cans of coke hiss loudly as they are opened.

Now the bird hunt can start!

I pick up the caliber I used yesterday, and Herb takes his automatic shotgun. They must be well used to each other, as Herb has been using this very gun for pheasant shooting for the last 55(!) years. He was given it at the age of ten, and is so satisfied with it that he wouldn't dream of changing it. We two hunters stay with the vehicle while Babsie and the dog go down into the valley. The poor thing is wearing an electric belt around his body. If he misbehaves, his master can assert his authority by giving him a mild electric shock; this is how he disciplines it.

While there is almost no vegetation on the hills and plains, down here in the valley, with the creeks running through it, and protected from the wind, there are large bushes as well as trees.

It's an ideal place for small game to hide. We will watch out for any birds that are raised by Babsie and his dog, and then drive in the Polaris to wherever they land.

Let's get started!

Our system works with varying degrees of success. The undergrowth is so dense, that when we finally get to the place where we think the birds have landed, we can never be absolutely sure that it really is the right spot.

"Did they land here, or was it in that other thicket?" "Are you asking me? How would I know?" - This is how our conversation runs. Still, we manage to shoot five Hungarian Partridges, and, by sheer chance, one of them is mine. I have shot my second bird in Montana! (I'm not going to tell you how much ammunition it took to get it. A lot,)



We switch to varmint hunting. A prairie dog appears in the reticle.

These little pests live in holes they dig in the ground, each one looking like a large mole-hill. They are cunning little creatures, and never venture far from the entrance to the burrow. And that is where you have to shoot them. If you make a mistake they will just dive back underground. I, frankly, don't have enough ammunition to waste on all this fun, but there are several guns to hand of Babsie's. For shooting varmints he uses .223 caliber Remington bullets and a Remington 700 rifle with a 4x12 magnification Leupold sight. He has brought this with him, along with a box of fifty bullets. I am happy with this arrangement; the Remington is a much better rifle than people realise. I have a 700 myself, and am completely satisfied with it. Leupold is one of the two usable makes of American sights (the other is NightForce). But shooting with this particular gun ... at first, I thought that there was a fault with the safety catch, that I hadn't released it. But no, that is normal for this gun. If there's any gun with a stiff trigger, it's this one. And that is the least of its problems. The major one is that it has not been tested. I only discover that after my third shot. I know that with a correctly adjusted gun I would have hit the target. I hand it over to Herb and



Babsie, but neither of them can shoot accurately with it either. The bullets are going above, or to the right of the target.

They start to adjust the riflescope.

Well, trying to adjust a riflescope, during a hunt, while out in the middle of the prairie, is unlikely to end happily. The situation just gets worse and worse. Even from 90ft. away I'm off target - and not by a small amount. We're just banging away uselessly, so we soon stop.

We head back to the highway in our motorised "cart".

The other hunters have had a good day too, and the number of bucks on the plains is rapidly diminishing. We all have nice, healthy tans from the strong sun, and my arms have even got sunburnt. There are huge differences between my hunt here in Montana and my previous one up north. The weather, the style, the terrain and the vegetation ... all were completely new to me, but I'm finally getting used to them. I'm sad that I'll be leaving this state the day after tomorrow. I feel good here; the atmosphere and company are excellent.

My Under Armor jacket has fallen out of the Polaris, somewhere. We were using it as a gun rest during our varmint hunt, and it was left on the open-air platform of the Polaris, where the wind must have blown it off as we were driving. I'm really upset about it, as it's become my favorite item of clothing from The Big Cabela's Box that I had sent to Anchorage. I hadn't taken it off for weeks: we were bound together by dirt and time. I could buy myself another, identical, one, but it won't feel the same. I tell Babsie the cause of my grief, and he immediately gives me some hope: no-one else has been out there since us, so it must still be there. We go back to look for it.

Suddenly Babsie cries out: there's the jacket! This is possibly the only item of clothing I have that is not camouflage, but black, which is very lucky, as trying to spot a camouflage jacket lying on the ground would not have been easy.

We have roast turkey for dinner.

Babsie Bishop's House
The Town of Malta
10th September

Every hunter has got all his antelope trophies, so now we are going to concentrate on upland hunting. This is the name Americans use for what is a typical Hungarian woodland hunt. Our guides combine forces and equipment, and we all set off together to find the birds. One jeep is towing a Polaris on its trailer and the other tows one carrying an aluminum kennel containing the dogs, each in its own separate compartment. They will be our main assistants for the hunt today.

here are five of them, all so excited that they can barely contain themselves.

We set off in convoy, and this time we do not stop for gas but speed toward the bird hunting grounds. We are not going to the same place we hunted antelope, as our chances there would not be good. Apart from the already mentioned Hungarian partridges, we hope to bag another huntable species, the sharptail; and, to boost our expectations, we already spot our first three sharptails while on the way to the prairie. We stop at once, as these birds are not so plentiful that we can afford to ignore any that we come across. Our permits allow us to shoot three birds each per day. We stride over the stubble towards them, all in a line, because this time we have no blockers. This is probably because we are only five, so there aren't enough of us for that. We are not expecting to be successful, which is sensible of us, as then we will not be disappointed. The birds fly in the opposite direction, then two head towards the road. We follow after these, but can't get within range.

Finally, we get to the official starting place of our upland hunt. The land here is uncultivated, and, over the tens of thousands of hectares, nothing is growing except for coarse grass, about a foot high. This is where the birds are hiding. We leave the cars behind and, once more, the Polaris gets the starring role. We attach to it the trailer carrying the kennel; this contains everything that the dogs need. The Polaris will only take four people, and there are six of us. One guide stands on the platform, and I sit on a box on the trailer. I can't stand it for long because of all the dust and exhaust fumes, so I climb over to the platform as we go along. That's not much of an improvement, so I get up onto the roof. Finally, I return to the trailer, and get onto its roof. Here I can view the world from a height of 7ft., though when we go over some of the larger bumps in the track I'm almost thrown off my perch. I'll stay here, like a stunt double, climbing about and showing off, until I'm finally thrown off...

The method of beating we use in Hungary does not work over here. There are no areas of cultivation, no obvious borders, nowhere to position the line. The method we use is to place the Polaris in the middle of the line, like a flagship, and the dogs then fan out around us. When they raise a flock, we watch them with our binoculars until they land. They don't fly so far that we lose sight of them. Babsie then calls back the dogs, and we drive to their landing place on the vehicle.



When we get there we all jump off - some from seats, others from the top of the trailer - load our guns, and form a line. This is how we stake out the landing area. The dogs are well trained; they know exactly what they have to do, and work as a team, rather than just chasing about together. Between us, we carry a variety of guns. There is a Ruger Bock, two semi-automatic Brownings, and my 20 Remington. Nobody is using a strap on his gun. I read somewhere, perhaps in the writings of the great András Montagh, that, when pheasant hunting, a strap is superfluous to the hunter. This black gun of mine is a light weapon, and has very little recoil. Its four-cartridge magazine is quite big enough; I've never needed more. Its only serious defect is that the choke isn't firmly fixed, it has too much play, and my worry is that it will fall of in the bushes while I'm shooting. I take a better look; it is made by Charles Daly, part of the KBI Group, and manufactured in Turkey. I fire off a couple of cartridges with no result - sometimes I'm loading the gun when I should be shooting, and sometimes I'm so surprised by a bird that I forget to shoot - but I do finally get the hang of it. I even manage to hit three sharptails, two in quick succession. A cloud of feathers floats in the air. This shotgun hunt is pretty good fun, especially in such great company. After each successful shot the line breaks, and laughing, we go and shake hands and

congratulate the lucky hunter.

I'm by far the youngest here, so according to custom, I have the privilege of going into the thickest undergrowth and climbing the steepest hills. Nobody wishes to challenge this privilege of mine. I ford creeks, play with the mischievous dogs, and grab every opportunity to take a shot. Once, just in hope, I even fire at a bird flying over 1800ft. away, but from that distance I can't even scratch it.

I can't deny that I love to shoot.

What I really mean is that I like shooting period, even without a reason or a target. Babsie encourages me with loud whoops, though it is his ammunition that is rapidly decreasing. Out here, in the middle of the uninhabited Montana prairie, everyone can fire off as many cartridges as they like. Back in Hungary I'm not allowed to do this, but here the gun-loving Americans don't mind in the least. I manage to bag some dried-up weeds as well, which I'm tempted to take back to Hungary as another trophy.

The dogs work in shifts. After a while they change over, and the tired ones retire to the kennel for a rest and to prepare for their next tour of duty. If one of them feels he has been working too long, he goes on strike. He won't go scouting anymore, and, instead, returns and runs beside the trailer, staring up reproachfully at his master.

Well, yesterday we weren't very successful hunting prairie dogs. (It's a misleading name, as they have nothing at all to do with dogs!) Babsie has taken it into his head that I must not leave Montana without a dog. So, later in the afternoon, we get into a jeep and go off to find the nearest colony. I'm using the same gun as yesterday, but weather conditions have deteriorated even more since then. Now, a crosswind is making even a well aimed shot difficult; it is so strong I can barely hold the Swaro steady. If we point ourselves in a direction where the wind is either in front of us, or coming from behind, you can be sure there won't be a prairie dog in sight. Babsie produces a three-legged gun rest, and we have to shoot using that. I don't like it, because I feel that if you shoot from a hard base the bullet goes in a completely different direction than if you had used a rucksack. We put the stand on the hood of the jeep, and this is how we make our search for any of the local inhabitants of the area. The Remington sits there like a mounted machine gun. Babsie is so considerate that he even aims the gun for me; all I have to do is pull the trigger. And I keep pulling it, but in vain, as the gun's accuracy has not improved since yesterday. I effortlessly miss the first four pests, but then I start noting where the bullets hit. It's not too difficult, as huge clouds of dust rise where the bullets land. To be honest, I was quite tired

yesterday, and so didn't have the patience to carefully observe the shots. However, today I'm beginning to work out just how far off target the bullets are landing.



I aim the fifth and sixth shots at a rock, for a test, and then, with my seventh, the prairie dog keels over! Everyone has been supporting me, just like a Formula 1 racing team: one loaded my gun, another searched with binoculars for a dog, and the third handed me my drinks. Everybody hollers! Even the hunting dogs start to bark: they don't want to be left out of the general racket. It's a good shoulder shot. When aiming, I also had to take the wind into account, as, overall, the bullets were drifting at least 8ins. to the left of the target, though some of that was down to the inaccuracy of the gun. No one is particularly keen to carry on, so we head for home. But ... here is another colony of prairie dogs!

The rifle is not to hand, but there are several shotguns near. And one of the dogs isn't that far off

The rest of the guys urge me on! I don't think the .20 will be enough, so I ask for the Bock. At my request its owner sets the gun so that it will first fire with the full choke barrel. I get ready, take good aim, and then a cloud of shot blasts away the nasty, burrow-living little pest. There is a positive storm of applause and congratulations. Hunting is such a pleasure when with such friendly, cheerful companions!

My arms have got burnt again in the strong sun.

By tomorrow night I shall be back in Alaska.

