



North American Hunting Expedition 2009

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Room 1130
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The new page on the calendar tells me it is October.

I left Hungary in the middle of summer, and now it's almost the middle of autumn. I'm getting used to this hunting/travelling existence. As time has gone on, I have got accustomed to the daily life of the expedition. Re-reading my diaries, and browsing through the photos, bring back all my adventures. I'm a lucky man to have been able to do all this at such a young age. It will give me something to look back on when I'm getting a bit over the hill.

The hotel is right in the center of downtown Denver. Close by is the 16th Street Mall, which is both a shopping area and pedestrian street. How strange it is to suddenly see so many smartly-dressed people! In Alaska, even in the cities, people usually wear waterproof mountaineering clothes, sometimes camouflage, and boots and rucksacks. There they live much closer to nature, and you don't see many normal, limousine-type cars. Generally, their vehicles are Range Rovers, pickups, and various types of 4-wheel drives. Whereas, Denver is an average American metropolis, with the usual complement of eccentric characters found in such places. And there are definitely a lot of crazy people here.

This morning I slept late, partly because I was tired, and partly because I should have set my Fortis watch two hours ahead. I almost missed my breakfast, which would have put me in a bad mood for the rest of the day. I go and sort out some money matters, and then return to the hotel.

In the afternoon I take a long walk to a sports store; the hotel staff tell me that it is the only place in the neighborhood that sells hunting equipment. The selection is poor, but I do buy a cap. In the nearby Taco Bell restaurant I devour a huge plate of Mexican food that is as hot as hell; the next part of my schedule is the long-awaited, and much-deserved, appointment with the jacuzzi. Tomorrow I'm moving on.



International Airport
Denver
2nd October
Morning

I've missed my plane.

Today, I have to get to Laramie, in Wyoming. My plane left at 10.30am, but minus me. As always, it was a strange sequence of coincidences that resulted in me being temporarily stranded in Denver.

I got up in plenty of time this morning, and had a quick breakfast. I thought I had enough time to do a little browsing on the Internet. I didn't realise how fast the time was passing, and at 9.00am I rushed down to the hotel lobby to arrange a ride to the airport. The receptionist recommended the hotel limo, and I got to the airport 50mins. before my departure. But Fate had cursed me with one of the slowest check-in clerks working for Great Lakes Airlines; he had no idea what to do if a hunter wanted to travel with his gun. His leisurely movements and rambling manner of speech were a real test of my patience. He was pushing the trolley carrying my gun towards the TSA office so slowly that, half-way there, I took over, forcing him to run to keep up with me. He had already given me my boarding pass, but I hadn't examined it properly. I'd never had such a basic boarding pass before. It was printed on very thin paper, the type used in Hungary for shopping receipts. The box for the boarding gate was left blank, so I had no idea which one my plane was leaving from.

For 15mins. I was running around madly, carting my heavy hand luggage with me. I rushed here and there, shouting "Excuse me " all the time, but still couldn't find the Laramie flight anywhere. There was more bad luck: the person at the information desk went off to answer a call of nature, just as I was running towards him, so there was no-one there I could ask for help. He eventually returned, but didn't give me any good news: I had to get right to the other end of the terminal. I was pouring with sweat, leaping down the escalator... they closed the gate in front of my face. All my pleading was in vain: they wouldn't let me board. I asked to see the supervisor, a somewhat unsympathetic woman - though, of course, in these situations everyone seems unsympathetic - and, together, we called Cabela's to find out what to do. My ticket was changed to an afternoon flight, and Cabela's called the outfitter to tell him not to meet the early plane, and that I would arrive on a later one.

So, that's how things are. There's nothing else to do but wait, and hope that the outfitter can meet me later this afternoon. Well, there is another problem: it isn't clear where my luggage is. Is it on the original flight - the one I should have been on - or is it still in Denver? They think it wasn't put

on the early flight, but they are all so ill-informed that I can't get a definite answer. If I'd left just 5mins. earlier, if the check-in clerk hadn't been working at a snail's pace, if they had printed the information clearly on the boarding pass, if the man at the information desk had gone to relieve himself two minutes later... then I would now be on that plane.

When these things happen, there's no point in getting worked up. You can't change anything, so it is better just to accept it. What's the worst that could happen? That my luggage doesn't arrive on time? I'll survive it. And, anyway, it's quite possible that it will all be found today. There is Wi-Fi at the airport, so I won't be bored. I've received an email from the SCI Ethical Committee. They have sent me two forms, to be completed and returned. Then they will start to investigate the Bob Adams affair.

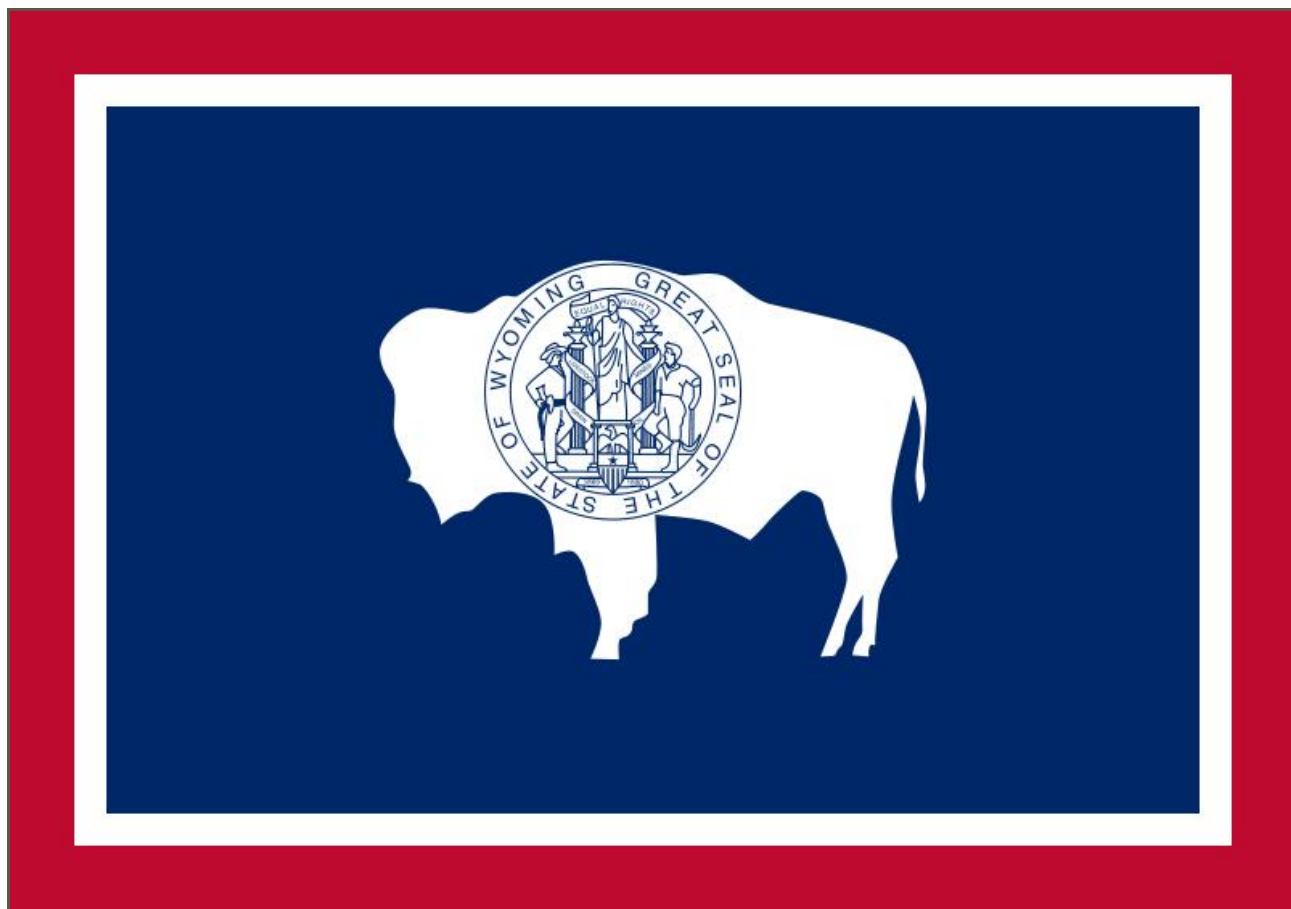
I've all the time in the world, so let's take a look at where I'm going, and why! Wyoming is the 44th state of the US. Covering 97,818 square miles, it is the 10th largest. It is twice the size of Hungary, with a population of only 515,000. Its boundaries appear to have been drawn with a rule, and much of its territory is taken up by the famous Rocky Mountains, which stretch for 29,825mi. from British Columbia, in Canada, down to New Mexico. The state itself can be looked at as something of a high-altitude training camp, as an altimeter records an average of 8,858ft. above sea-level. You can't get lower than 3,123ft. in Wyoming. The state's name means "Big River Plain", and originally did not refer to the state (it being not so much plain, as mountain), but was borrowed from the Wyoming Valley in Pennsylvania.

It is here that we find the world's first, and best known, National Park, the home of Yogi Bear, the famous Yellowstone National Park. Only 4% of its 3,468 square miles stretch into the neighboring states of Montana and Idaho.

One of the most attractive things about Wyoming is that there is no income tax. None at all. There's not even a tax on company profits, and, as well as that, they don't tax pensions paid to residents by other states. And the sales tax is - wait for it - only 4%. It is something of a mystery how the state raises the funds to maintain itself. It must be very difficult to commit tax fraud here, and tax advisors probably end up starving to death.

It is a real wild-west state, as can be seen from its flag. The flag has a red border. This symbolises the blood shed during its history; but, exactly whose blood it was, depends on who you ask: Native Americans, or the settlers' descendants. As far as I know, the official view - a decision that even Solomon might have envied - is that it represents the blood of both parties. Within the red border is a white one, which, as in every flag, represents purity. The blue field, the largest area, has several meanings: virility, faithfulness, justice, as well as suggesting the mountains, the rivers and the sky. The buffalo on the blue denotes the fauna. It is, of course

branded: the cattle-breeding lobby is strong here. The "brand" is particularly interesting: it is the State Seal, and has, within it, three figures. In the center is a woman, in front of a banner bearing the state's motto: "Equal Rights", referring to one of America's most traditional values, Democracy. You never find a woman without a man, and this is no exception, only here there are two, on either side of her. One stands for mining, the other for ranching. The lamps suggest the light of knowledge.



I am going after two different species of deer here.

In his wonderful book Széchenyi mentioned the confusion over the name of the American Elk, or Wapiti Deer (*Cervus elaphus ssp*). Although the information in Széchenyi's book, **Tracking Deer**, was written some time ago, it is still the most authoritative book in Hungarian on deer species of the world. It should be compulsory reading for any deer hunter. Since its publication there have been even more misunderstandings about the name.

According to the SCI book, this deer is known in many parts of the world as the maral; but, in Hungary, and the rest of Europe, that refers to a type of Asian deer. It might be explained by the

fact that the elk, or wapiti, or maral - which is even known in some places as the white deer (not to be confused with the white-tail...) - originally came from Asia, though that was a long time ago. Many other species migrated from Asia, but they all received appropriate names in the New World.

There is also total confusion over the elk's family tree, and its many names have resulted from this. From its Latin name (*Cervus elaphus ssp*) we can conclude that it is related to what is called the red deer (*Cervus elaphus*) throughout America. (This common sense is typical of Americans: they name something after its color.) For a while many scientists insisted that the two species were the same, but, fortunately, there were some others who believed them to be separate species.

Today, there is no question that they are two distinct species.

In Asia, the habitats of the elk and red deer overlap, so it is quite possible that they interbred. The red deer is now found in Europe, Asia and - allegedly - North Africa, and the elk in North America and Asia - where, in the latter area, it is called maral, and is a separate sub-species. In Asia there are deer with characteristics of both the maral and the red deer, but that is a problem for hunters in Asia to sort out when they categorize the game they've bagged.

My argument might have been too long and a bit boring, splitting too many hairs, but my feeling is that, if we go hunting, we should at least know what the animal is called.

The elk - and I'm going to stick to its most commonly used name - is the second largest deer in North America; only the moose is bigger. The question, which American deer has the most beautiful antlers, is a matter of taste. We could start a debate about it, but it is not really worth the effort. Personally, I think the elk's antlers are the best, because they are very similar to those of the Hungarian red deer.

It won't be a surprise to any Hungarian hunters, but American deer lovers find the fact that the elk has "eye" teeth, unlike other types of deer, a real curiosity. Sadly, in the first half of the twentieth century, it was almost hunted to extinction, just for its teeth, not its antlers. Indian women wore the teeth as lucky charms, and the crazy fad spread all over the continent. An organization called The Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks successfully saved it from dying out, and the reason we are able to hunt it today is mainly due to the efforts of that group.

There are two extinct and four living sub-species of elk registered in North America. The latter are:

- Rocky Mountain Elk (*Cervus elaphus nelsoni*)
- Roosevelt Elk (*Cervus elaphus roosevelti*)

- Tule Elk (*Cervus elaphus nannodes*)
- Manitoba Elk (*Cervus elaphus manitobensis*)

Over the next few days - but only if I get to Laramie - I am going to hunt Rocky Mountain Elk; because it has the most evocative name, it has become my favorite. The bulls, 62ins. to their withers, and weighing around 700lbs. are smaller than the Roosevelt elk, and weigh less than the similarly-sized Manitoba elk. It is the most common sub-species, has many variations, and is the favorite of most hunters. Hunting it, you sometimes have to go high up into the mountains, so elk hunters tend to be very fit. Another thing about mountain hunts is that you often have to shoot over long distances, and when elk hunting that can mean 850 - 1500ft. And you must remember that, when deciding on the right type of bullet, as the elk - unlike the moose - is a tough creature, and over those distances you can only get a good result using top-class bullets. But, neither here, nor on any other hunt, will a top-class bullet, or the latest caliber Magnum, be any substitute for an accurate shot. This was well-illustrated by Mark's case, when, during my first Alaskan hunt in Brooks Range, using his .375 HH Magnum, he shot a grizzly in the neck, which is probably still in the best of health, even now. My favorite author, László Kovács, has written about this sort of thing many times, and, unfortunately, I did once experience it myself, during an otherwise pleasantly memorable winter hunt.

We are now back in Csákvár, the scene of my most exciting Hungarian hunt; it is the end of February, this year.

It is the final week of the hunting season.

I have been trying out the Blaser I bought for my US trip for several weeks, and have it with me now. We've been in the sledge for 6hrs. and in the 14F temperature we are slowly freezing as hard as a pile of mountaineer's crap. The time is around 2.00pm, and, on our silent mode of transport, we have started to head for home. This is just as well, as it is going to take at least 40mins. to get back to the hunting lodge. In the evening we still intend to go and sit in the hide, but, before then, we have to defrost, and it wouldn't hurt to eat something, either. A small ram and a ewe are already lying in the bottom of the sledge. It is a particularly precious quarry, as this area lies at the foot of Mt. Vértes, where wild sheep are infrequent visitors. It only leaves the forest if there is heavy snow or it is very cold.

My companion whispers a warning to me that there, on the road ahead of us, are two rams, watching us with curiosity. I jump off the sledge - it is illegal to shoot from it - and get down on one knee. I like this shooting position; if there isn't a lot of undergrowth, it is almost always suitable, and provides a much steadier aim than having no support beneath your elbow. (Recently, I switched to a sitting position for shooting, which can give better support, but does

mean that I'm lower than when kneeling.) Robi tells me that, if I can manage it, I should try not to shoot the horses, so I move several feet in front of the sledge. The rams, by now, have become terribly interested in these maneuvers, and are watching the scene unfold. All obstacles are finally removed; we agree that both rams are about the same size, about 16ins. so either will do. The wild sheep (mouflons) have now decided that they've seen enough of these strange goings on, and move towards the forest. This way they present an even larger target, as when they were watching us, we could only see their chests. Csinos (Pretty), one of the horses, trembles at the sound of the .300WM's report, and the ram gives a shudder, too. After the shot I point the laser at a nearby bush and it registers 492ft.; it is not so far, so there shouldn't have been a problem... But there is.

There is a lot of blood on the ground, where I shot it, so we can easily follow its escape tracks over the snow. It is a strange phenomenon, but the traces of blood are close to the hoof prints... and it is also odd that we search for it in vain: we can't find the carcass.

If an animal the size of this mouflon has been hit by a bullet of this size, and is still able to run more than 300ft. then it's very suspicious. It doesn't give any grounds for optimism. And, aware of this, we run faster and faster on its trail. Robi makes a diversion; he knows the area very well, and will try to intercept it. I keep on going through the undergrowth. I'm not very good at tracking, but it would be impossible not to be able to follow this trail: red on white is easily seen. I soon meet up with Robi, but the mouflon wasn't in between us; it has moved into the forestry land. We start making arrangements by phone, as we are not allowed to enter this area without permission; we would be considered to be poachers. Robi soon gets approval from an official: there's no hunt going on anywhere nearby, so we can continue the chase. However, we do not have a completely free rein: we are only allowed to go 600 - 900ft. into the protected area. If we can't find it there, we have to go back.

And that's exactly what happens.

The trail of blood has got fainter, along with our hopes. Apparently, the ram is feeling so good that it has managed to outmaneuver us. It retraced its steps for a while, and then changed direction. All this makes it very difficult for me to read the tracks, but Robi sees what's been going on in a second. But even he can do nothing about a bad shot. Because that shot was not good. That is the simple truth; I could look for excuses, or blame the hardware, but it is really the fault of the software. Robi works out that it was hit in the foot, and thinks that, not only will the ram recover, but it is probably standing on one of Mt. Vértes' peaks right now, laughing at the incompetent hunter, who, despite the over-sized caliber and top-class sight, still couldn't manage to wound him fatally. There are lessons to be learnt from this. They are, that in the case of a bad shot, a bullet fired from a fast-caliber Magnum can be just as ineffective as one fired from a lower caliber.

And, quite simply, you have to know how to shoot with accuracy; even in the age of magnums, that basic rule still applies.

The SCI assesses both regular and non-regular elk antlers. The world record was found in the mysteriously-named Collbran area of Colorado, where, in September 2004, the absolute king of all deer was shot.

Besides elk, I'd like to see a mule deer in my reticle.

From descriptions I've given previously, it can be seen that categorizing American deer species is not an easy task, even if you're a qualified researcher. And hunters need to constantly keep up with the latest scientific research. It could easily turn out that a deer bagged decades ago is no longer considered to be the same species it was then... The story of the Mule Deer is far more complex than any of the others, so I have to ask my dear Reader to be patient, as it's not going to be simple.

As with all deer species, the mule deer included, the best place to start is by opening Széchenyi's book: **"Tracking Deer"**. The subject of my next hunt is found in the chapter titled: **"The Mule Deer, or Long-eared American Deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*)"**. Széchenyi says that the species known as the Mule Deer throughout America is also called the Black-tailed Deer in many parts of the country, but that this is incorrect, as the latter is a separate species called *Odocoileus columbianus* in the scientific world. He describes it in a later chapter titled **"The Black-tailed Deer"**, and spends some time describing the difference between the two species. Whoever reads the two chapters one after the other, will easily understand the differences between them.

Széchenyi points them out so clearly that any reasonable person will see immediately that we are talking about two species.

Things have changed a lot since then, as it has turned out - listen to this! - that the two species are now considered identical!

Crazy!

So, if, in what will follow, I happen to write that mule deer and the Nile crocodile are of the same species, you shouldn't necessarily believe it's true. It would merely show that I have gone completely insane trying to solve all the contradictions found in the professional literature while getting to the truth. I just hope that no Hungarian zoologist ever comes across this diary, as that would undoubtedly result in yet another definition of these deer.

In 1981 - many decades after Széchenyi had written *"Tracking Deer"*, Walmo categorised no less than nine sub-species of mule and black-tailed deer, that are now considered to be identical. In a supposedly clever decision he named some of the sub-species mule deer and the remainder black-tailed deer. That way everybody was right, and hunters had the warm feeling that, well,

well, their theory was proved to be correct, and that of their fellows was complete garbage. However, the SCI then decided to add yet another twist to the story. If anybody has managed to understand the logic of the categorization so far - and I'm not among the lucky few - they will, from here on, definitely lose track.

The SCI, based on a seemingly arbitrary theory, not detailed in their Record Book so I am unable to fully work it out, categorize these miserable animals into four groups. For those with strong nerves, I will now set down the current SCI position concerning mule and black-tailed deer!

- Rocky Mountain Mule Deer (*Odocoileus hemionus hemionus*, including the californicus sub-species).
- Desert Mule Deer (*Odocoileus hemionus crooki* including the *cerrosensis*, *fuliginosus*, *peninsulae* and *sheldoni* sub-species).
- Columbia Black-tailed Deer (*Odocoileus hemionus columbianus*).
- Sitka Black-tailed Deer (*Odocoileus hemionus sitkensis*)

I hope I've got it right!

Geographically, the habitat of the Rocky Mountain mule deer covers the largest territory, giving the hunter his best chance of success. Apart from in the southern and eastern states, it is found everywhere, even in the southern provinces of Canada.

With a height of 40ins. and a weight between 175 - 200lbs. it is not a large deer. Its most characteristic feature, as with the other sub-species, is its huge, shovel-like ears, similar to those of a mule, and which give it its name. The tip of the tail is black, though, as we now know, it is not the black-tailed deer... I mean, it is...

It has beautifully-formed antlers, which I find very attractive. They usually develop ten branches, though they can have more. Their mating season is called troating here, too, and the sound they make is similar to the belling of the Fallow Deer.

The trophy is really wonderful, and generally easier to get than that of the tricky white-tailed deer, which likes to live in dense woods - at least, that is what people who hunt white-tailed deer say. In places where black-tailed, or mule deer, are found, the hunters say the opposite. When hunting it, it is the stalking that gives the most satisfaction; it is hardly ever hunted from a hide. Among deer, they are one of the best swimmers. Their hearing, as the size of their ears might suggest, is excellent, along with their sense of smell. They can be found as high up as 7,900ft. but anyone who chooses to hunt them there, must be prepared to cope with all the difficulties usually associated with mountain hunts. Their natural enemies are the puma and the coyote, for which they are the main source of food.



Because of indiscriminate hunting at the beginning of the last century, their numbers fell to 500,000, but they have now recovered to a safe figure of 1.5m. The SCI record was shot in Idaho, in November 1996.

Deer Hunt Camp
2nd October
Evening

I was hanging around at the airport for 51/2hrs. before the next flight finally took off. The journey wasn't long, and 45mins. later we landed at Laramie. The weather is sunny, but windy, and there are mountains in the distance.

This city is in the middle of a desert, which is slightly confusing. When we talk about great heights above sea-level, most people, quite naturally, think of mountains. However, in Wyoming, even the plains are high up, and, consequently, are far colder than if they were at sea-level. At the airport it's not hard to spot my guide; there's only one person, leaning against the wall, and he's wearing green forest-hunting clothes. He is Cenni Burnell, one of the guides, who has come to meet me for the second time today, hoping that I will actually be on this plane. Part of my luggage arrived on the earlier plane, and the rest has come with me. We collect everything from those in charge, every bag and gun case is put in the back of the huge Toyota pickup, and we then start on our journey of about 60mi. Driving through the prairie the road makes a bee-line for the foot of the mountains, where we go on to a steep, winding road. It snowed several days ago, and there are still traces of it in the mountains; we ascend higher and higher into a true winter landscape. I guess that it isn't too warm outside as one or two of the small mountain lakes are frozen. We cross the mountain to the city of Saratoga, with its population of only 1700. We want to test my gun at the local rifle range.

Occasionally mule deer actually wander into this wild-west town!

Here and there we have to drive around deer standing about on the road; they graze on the grass in front of the houses, quite relaxed. Why they are so keen on city grass, I have no idea. They have the whole prairie to themselves, but still choose the town. Urbanised deer! Perhaps at some point they'll decide to break into a stable to spend the winter. In the town no-one is allowed to harm them; they are something of an attraction.

At the range there is no manager, attendant, or any other sort of factotum. The shooters run it all themselves, and everyone helps everyone else. Two boys are in the middle of a shooting session, and we join them at the 100yds. station. My Blaser is shooting high, but that's no surprise. When I last tested it, I was at sea-level, in heavy, damp air. Here, the conditions are different: the air is thinner. I adjust it quickly, and, as I have enough spare ammunition, I take a few extra shots. I try out Cenni's .243 Winchester Short Magnum Caliber gun. He fills the shells himself, at home, and the gun is no more than a re-drilled AR-15. I've been wanting to try one of these self-loading carbines for a long time, and now my chance has arrived. He has fitted it with a NightForce sight; I turn the magnification up to full and take three shots.

I can hardly believe my eyes.

The first two hit in exactly the same place and the third is only 1/4in. away. To be honest, I am getting better dispersion with this gun than I do with my Blaser. Who could say that the AR-15 is not an accurate gun, and that you can't get close dispersion with a semi-automatic!

We bid goodbye to the local gun enthusiasts, and go on our way. The Blaser does not go back into the 1750 Peli case; I'm holding it between my legs. It's perfectly legal to do that here: not even the police would disapprove of it. Cenni has advised me to be on the lookout as we will soon be at the hunting grounds; it is just becoming dusk, so who knows what might appear in front of us. He tells me that the gun I have just tried out is his main source of income. He hunts professionally the whole year round, and, unlike most other guides and outfitters, he has no other job when the season ends. For him the season lasts all year: he hunts coyote. He shoots between 400-500 of them a year, and is paid by the state for doing so. He makes extra cash by selling their skins. He doesn't live very affluently, but it doesn't worry him; he's doing what he enjoys and that's what is most important. I completely agree with him. His gun needs to be so accurate because he can't afford any mistakes. Every shot must count: there's no money in wasted ammunition, and no time to find another coyote to replace the one he's missed. It is almost 8.00pm when we turn down a beaten-earth road, then onto a track made by a bulldozer, and then, there we are among the tents.

This is the camp - Cenni tells me, in case I'm a complete idiot.

There's a fire burning in the center, and sitting around it talking are the hunters and their guides. Before anyone else gets a chance, a big black labrador, the ten year old Samantha, otherwise known as Sam, or Sammy, rushes up to greet us; also here is my outfitter, Jim Blocker. He's a good friend of Frank Cole; each year he hopes that they will finally get to go hunting together, but Frank is always too involved with Cabela's affairs.

The camp comprises several tents, made winter-proof by installing wood-burning stoves, and some caravans that must have been towed here. I'm in one of the latter. I move in immediately. It

is already dark so I can't have a thorough look around. Inside there is one single bed and one bunk bed, but I have it all to myself. Although in prisons the lower bunk is always the most prestigious, here I go for the upper one, as it will be the warmest. A gas-heater supplies the warmth, but as there is no chimney, the waste gases have nowhere to escape. I open a slit in the window and, by winding a handle I open the skylight: I want a through draught. I don't want to croak during the night.

We are given a really excellent dinner; there is an unending supply of cans of coke available and, something that has been missing from all my camps so far, a choice of two types of beer. And we don't have to sneak it from under the counter: anyone can take as much as they like. On the table in the dining-tent are three different brands of whisky, ready and waiting for anyone who wants to celebrate a successful hunt. After dinner I sign all the usual forms, and retire to my sleeping accommodation.

I'm a bit worried about that gas heater.

Deer Hunting Camp 3rd October

We get up at 5.00am, like real hunters should. My day starts with some good news: I have survived the night, and did not succumb to the gas fumes.

At breakfast we discuss the schedule for today and the days following. We will be going out this early every morning because these deer - just like their Hungarian cousins - move around mostly during the dawn twilight. At the hunting ground we shall use horses to get about.

I have to admit that this development is a bit of a surprise to me.

I've hardly had a riding lesson in my life. I got as far as trotting around in a circle; I didn't know that a hunt on horseback is quite normal here. If I had, I would have taken a few lessons this summer. Jim reassures me that I won't be galloping about on some half-broken-in mustang, but will be out on the prairie on placid, well-trained steeds, used to carrying dilettante clients. There's a hard frost.

I put on all my warm clothes, but I'm still in no danger of heat-stroke. While I'm getting ready, Jim brings up the horses; there are three of them. Another of the guides, Jeff, is coming with us. They ask me if I have an orange, high-visibility vest or cap, because there will be no hunting without them. I haven't got such things - I mean, I don't have them with me - so they lend them to me. I pluck up all my courage and get into the saddle. My gun is put in the saddle-bag. Our camp is on the border of the prairie and the mountains. This is considered to be the best

territory for elk, and our chances have been improved by the recent snowfall. In the mountains; if the snow-line moves lower, then the elk move down with it. It is more difficult for them to find food under the snow.

These old nags are very clever animals. Mine is called Baldy. They can spot the frozen puddles from a distance, and knowing that they are not safe to walk on, they avoid them. Baldy is treading so carefully on the rocky ground that I am sure he knows I'm an amateur. I don't need to bother much about directing him.

I can tell that Jim's horse is a great friend of Baldy's, as well as being his mentor and spiritual guide: wherever he goes, Baldy follows. Unfortunately, he takes after him in naughtiness, too, so whenever Jim's horse has a temporary fit of insanity, which happens every ten minutes, Baldy starts prancing about too. When he does this, I have to hold on with both hands to anything that's available, as well as trying to check out the ground beneath me to see where I'm going to fall. But then Baldy is suddenly overwhelmed with shame for his irresponsible behavior, and returns to his normal, sedate pace. I tell him off loudly each time it happens; maybe I get through to him. Jim and Jeff spot an elk on the hillside.



I can't see it because Baldy has decided to face the opposite direction. However much I try, he won't turn around. By the time I've managed to persuade him to turn, the bull, and with him the entire herd, have gone into the cover. We have to go around the mountain, as the herd will now be on the other side, resting and enjoying the final rays of sunshine of the year. We can get there after a 20min. ride, and from there on we will continue the stalk on foot.

The big question is: how will we manage to do it?

The elk herd is standing on the hill, as predicted. Between us and the hill is a stretch of *open country* for about a mile. We need to make a plan: we can't just walk towards them.

We hold a council of war.

My guides are worried about several things. One is the lack of undergrowth, which means we will have no cover. But that's just our smallest problem. The biggest is that, about 30ft. from us, there's a line of stakes driven into the ground. Beyond them is a neighboring ranch. We are not allowed to cross this boundary, or to shoot on the land beyond it. The herd is about 150 - 200ft. away from the stakes. Which means that, if they start to move, they might cross over into the Forbidden Zone.

The first 900ft. is not a problem. The ground is covered by thickets about 4 1/2ft. high, so if we crouch low enough, they won't see us; and the wind is with us, too. Then there is a further 600ft. that we'll just have to manage, somehow. We'll have to pray for some luck, because the vegetation won't hide us there. Then there is a small valley, filled with trees and bushes. Beyond the valley lies the most difficult part, for about 2500 - 3000ft. We will have to cross 1800 - 2100ft. to get within shooting range. The bushes there are about 35ins. high, but they won't be much help as, by then, the deer will be above us, not in front of us. The bushes won't be enough; the deer will be able to see us through the branches. 750 - 900ft. from the herd are some stunted trees surrounded by bushes, which would be perfect for a shot. So, once we've started out on this final open stretch there will be no chance of stopping in the middle, say 1200ft. away from the herd, as there is nothing to rest a gun on and, having gone that far, we might as well keep going to the trees.

The first phase.

Bending low, we do our best to move forward quickly. We follow the line of the stakes; we are on the very edge of our hunting grounds. I don't look to the left or the right, forward or back. I just keep my eyes on Jeff's boots; he is walking in front of me and I stay right behind him, at the same height, all the way. We cover the distance at a quick sprint, and make it. We get to the end of the thickets and get down on our stomachs. Now comes that 600ft: we'll need help from Diana,

goddess of the hunt for this. Illegal or not, I remove my bright vest. I might as well be carrying a flashing light and a siren.

The second phase.

The bushes reach up to our ankles. We are crouched down, though it's not much use. There is nothing at all to hide behind. I don't dare raise my head. I only know that they haven't spotted us yet, as, in front of me, Jeff keeps going on. We still have 300ft. to go to the valley. The top of a tree growing in the valley might provide some cover, and Jeff sidles behind it. I'm right behind him, less than 1 1/2ft. and Jim is behind me. It is still another 150ft. to the valley, and then we will have done it. There are more and more trees to help us here, and we cover the last 60ft. almost standing, running until we slide down into the valley. Here we can ease up a bit. We look through our binoculars and talk in whispers.

There are no new ideas. After this there is no cover at all. Just for the sake of it, Jim asks me if I'd consider a shot from 3000ft. but I just give him a weak smile. We have to go on: that's all there is to it.

The third phase.

We agree once again that, come what may, we won't stop to fire in the middle of the open land, an area full of disadvantages. Our goal is to reach the stunted trees at the bottom of the hill. That is where we have to go.

Jeff gets on to all fours.

We start to crawl towards the trees. The trees are our only hope. We've got to succeed. Occasionally, Jeff glances up at the deer. We progress very slowly. My gun is lying across my back. I'm getting hotter and hotter, but we daren't stop to take off any clothes. The trees are still far off. We are crawling over hard, frozen, rocky ground. With every move something sticks into my knees. After 600ft. I'm sure we are going to fail. We are not even half-way, and already my knees feel raw. I try to use the scattered patches of snow, which at least are soft. We cross another 300ft, Jeff stops cautiously... they haven't seen us yet. All three of us are sweating heavily. My knees are hurting, but we must go on because that stag is really beautiful.

We'll never reach those trees. I didn't think that a couple of hundred feet could be so far. Jeff is crawling on steadily. I follow him. Another 300ft. The trees are right in front of us, and there's even a bush! We could not have asked for more. Sweat runs into my eyes... we're there. We've made it!

We have cover again, and the herd can't be more than 900ft away! I slip off my gun... Jim sighs softly... the elks must have seen something! One after the other, they are crossing the boundary line! Right now I can only see cows in the Forbidden Zone, I don't know where the stag is... I load

my gun, and check the distance, using a cow that is just crossing over the line... 726ft. There's no gun rest. The bushes prevent me using my rucksack, and anyway, I have to aim upwards. I move to the side, get into the kneeling position, my left elbow is on my knee, I press the back of my hand against a tree... it's far from ideal, but there's nothing better.

I measure the distance again... *the laser isn't working!*

I don't understand: has the battery run out? I switch it on and off a few times: nothing. The built-in laser is as dead as the rock which I've just managed to kneel on. Can I remember the figure correctly? 726ft.? Did I measure it properly? Another try, nothing...

Where is the stag?

The cows are stepping over the boundary line, into safety, one after the other. My hands are getting tired; I've been aiming for 2mins.

Where is the stag?

Jim doesn't know, either; he can't see it anywhere; perhaps it will be the last one...

I have forgotten to remove the lens cover, so now I snap it off softly... in my field of vision are lots of cows and the line of stakes...



Where is the stag?

Look - he's just stepping forward! - says Jim.

I shoot immediately.

It hit, repeat! - says Jim.

The stag turns, the Blaser hisses for the second time!

Another hit, repeat once more!

A third shot... I can't see anything anymore.

Good, it has collapsed.

I ask several times if it is really dead, because I can't tell if there's any body movement through my riflescope. Jim is certain that all three shots hit... I stop holding my breath...

I reload my gun.

Jeff catches up with us, he heard the shots and saw the stag fall. They can't both be wrong... We walk up to it; I am in front. At times like this 750ft can seem like a long, long way. We finally get there, and I can view my stag!

Great, great relief!

It is a really beautiful trophy, much better than the average! Now the tension is over, I am congratulated over and over by my guides.

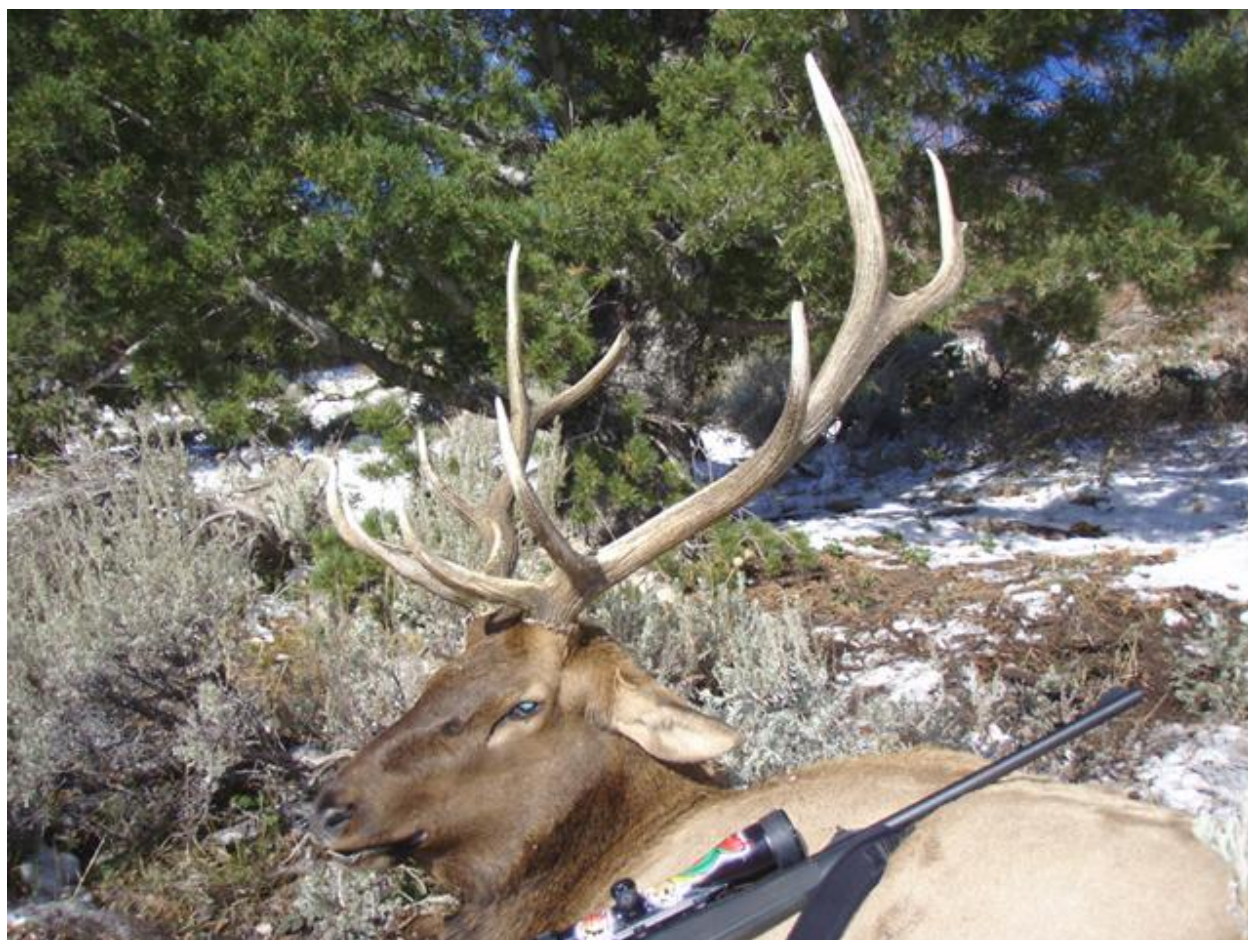
It has a big body, at least 1/3 larger than the Hungarian maral. We roll it over; it was indeed hit by all three shots, although it is true that only two would have caused a quick death. The third hit far back, in the thigh. But, by then, it was no longer standing. The important thing is that two shots were in the right place.

Looking at the entry wounds, I can't understand how it could remain standing for so long. Jim says that the elk is the toughest animal in America, which is why he kept telling me to repeat the shot. Many hunters have been surprised to find that they've had to track an elk that they thought had been well shot, for half a day. One SST went straight through the body, even from this distance, only stopping at the skin. We dig it out. The mushrooming was completely regular. The Interlock got cracked, but was able to keep the core in one piece, so it didn't disintegrate. The lead remained in place. Flawless deformation.

Jim and Jeff begin to cut up the usable parts of the meat. I'm no longer surprised to see that the animal is not gutted. I know now it is not only a northern habit, they do it like this all over America. They sever the antlers, and we walk back to the horses. We leave everything right there; we can't carry anything with us. Now that we can stand upright, we can move quickly. I study the tracks we

left as we approached. It is the longest crawl I've had to make on this trip, as yet. I hardly dared to hope for success, but my guides are good. I thought my chances were so bad that, if it had been up to me, I would not have even started on this stalk. We are all very cheerful; we're a good team.

Baldy has been behaving himself while we've been away, so I give him a pat.



We head for camp.

I'm getting the hang of riding, more and more: all those exercises I learnt so long ago, are coming back. Only the sides of my knees hurt from sitting in the saddle. I must improve my posture. Going home, we see some promising mule deer stags, but we don't stalk them. I still have plenty of time left; Jim says it is not worth trying to do it hastily.

Back in camp the first thing we do is have lunch, as we'd missed it because of the great hunt. I'm pleased to see they have a Polaris here, too. The only difference is that this is a two-seater, and is called a Yamaha Rhino.

I go on and on to Jim about what a wonderful Polaris driver I have become, courtesy of Babsie Bishop in Montana, and that if he wants to be sure that his machine is in good hands, he should leave it with me. Jim listens to me and promises I can have a drive. Jeff, meanwhile, ties up the horses in a line, one behind the other, putting large bags behind each saddle. Jim and I speed off in the Yamaha; we'll take it as far as we can. He doesn't like the engine noise to cause too much disturbance as there are other hunters coming later in the season. We can't quite get to the spot the stag was shot. I stop the machine about a 10min. ride away, and 15min. later Jeff and the horses have caught up with us. I get into the saddle again.



Three cowboys, riding over the prairie to their prey.

Once we've arrived, Jim starts packing up the meat into the saddle-bags. The antlers are soon tied on, as well. With all the meat on the horses there is no room for the rider, so my guides have to lead their animals back. They were kind enough not to load up Baldy, so there is still a saddle for me. On our return to the Yamaha, we load everything into the back, and, with my foot hard on the gas, we whizz back to camp. I manage to take a few wrong turns, so Jim has to redirect me. In camp I indulge in some post-hunt pleasures. I tell everyone the story of our stalk, over and over again, and we admire the antlers. The company is good, the guides are good, and the hunters are successful.

We're all in an excellent mood.





Deer Hunt Camp
4th October

At night, in my caravan, the gas in my heater runs out. So - just for a change - I wake up feeling cold. Breakfast is at 5.30am again, and afterwards the hunters will disperse, each seeking a species they have not yet bagged.

Today I'll be on something called Greeny, and not on Baldy.

As to its breed, Greeny is a Chevrolet, it is 25 years old and bigger than an M-1 Abrams tank. It got its name from its green color, and is the no.1 hunting vehicle in the camp. It is huge inside, you could play soccer in its trunk. When hunting for mule deer, a car is more efficient than a horse. While the elk is very sensitive to engine noise, and will run off at once, the mule deer isn't really bothered by it. We are certain to find a buck - that is what they call a male mule deer here - as we can cover a much larger area with Greeny than on the noble Baldy.

We reach the hunting grounds with our lights off.

Today my guide is Cenni; he's the one who met me at the airport. Another guide, Roger, is driving a jeep in front of us; his hunter is also after mule deer. They spotted some beautiful bucks last night, so we will check out that area first. We drive slowly, jolting over the rocky ground, and start chatting. Cenni helps the state keep the coyote population down. They don't use poison, but the basic numbers have to be kept under control, so professional hunters are allowed to use any means they like to shoot as many as possible. They are even provided with planes to help them. This is one of the most dangerous ways of hunting coyote; many of Cenni's colleagues have been involved in accidents, or even fatal crashes. The way it is done is to fly above a coyote, and then start to dive.

The hunter uses a self-loading gun - usually a Benellik - has three shots at the coyote, and must hit with at least one of them. At about 30 - 45ft. from the ground, the plane pulls out of the dive. If the maneuver is not carried out correctly, the plane can slam into the ground. The most dangerous place to use these tactics is where the prairie meets the mountains: there the plane can go straight into the side of the hill. There are some coyote hunters employed full-time by the state, and they do this dangerous job almost every day of the year. They average 10 - 15 coyotes a day. In winter, in a snowy landscape, there are very few places to hide; it is easier to spot the animals in a white environment, so then the hunter might bag up to 100 per day.

Cenni uses other methods, as well.

On Greeny's front seat is an electric coyote-caller. He says it is a very effective way of attracting them. It has a remote control, and there are over 200 different calls stored in its memory. Cenni gets it from the factory for free, as there are several calls on it that he himself recorded, and the



manufacturer uses them in every caller sold. On the back seat is the caller's big brother: it has bigger speakers, and can be heard for miles. I try out the small one, and, inside the car, with the volume turned right down, I listen to the blood-curdling howls and shrieks.

Cenni loves guns. He doesn't know exactly how many he has. He thinks between 40 - 50, and doesn't feel that is excessive. He's 38 at the moment, has been collecting them since he was a child, and has no intention of giving up his habit of buying two or three a year.

We drive up a huge hill, and spend 1 1/2hr. on the top looking through binoculars. The bucks we saw yesterday should be around somewhere. Cenni spots three bucks; they are grazing on a neighboring hill. Roger's client is given priority, partly because this is his last day of hunting, and partly because they saw them first, when they were out yesterday. I follow them, as it is possible that, after the first shots, if the other animals do not run off, I can have a try, if the antlers look suitable. We go down into the valley between the two hills, and up onto an elevation. From its top it is possible to shoot at the deer, even though it is a long way. Roger's client lies down and aims his .300 WSM caliber Sarko rain gun. I wait behind with Cenni, wearing my ear-defenders. We get the details: the trio is 780ft away; that is the distance my companion has to shoot over. The Sarko roars loudly, and a second shot quickly follows... and here's the result: a hit! The first shot hit well, but the second missed, as the animal had begun to move. The mule deer runs down the hill and disappears into the trees below.

Cenni crawls forward and beckons me to come up quickly. There's no rucksack so I grab one, and place it on the ground in front of me. I'm lying down flat. I can see the two remaining bucks, but they are starting to move away. 990ft. - the laser has started to work again - but I can't decide which to go for. Cenni advises me, I'm on target, and start to pull the trigger... at the last moment, Cenni stops me. He isn't sure if the buck is mature enough to merit a bullet. I don't really mind. We can't see the wounded buck from above because of the dense undergrowth in the valley. We are on the border of the Forbidden Zone again, and Cenni is worried that the wounded buck will cross onto the neighbor's land. Apparently, there is some animosity between the two landowners, so it must be prevented. Our little band of commandos splits in two: Roger and his client go down to the valley to search for the buck, while Cenni and I remain on the peak to keep watch from there. My job is: to stop the wounded buck if it leaves the thickets and heads for the next ranch. I measure the distance to the boundary: 900ft exactly. The edge of the thickets is 150ft. from the line of stakes, and the time it takes to cross it is all I will have to make the shot. Cenni scans the area with binoculars, and I watch the places the buck might appear through my riflescope. 10min. go by.

Cenni stops the operation. If the buck can move, it would have left the thickets long ago. There's no need to keep watching. He goes to get the jeep, and I go after Roger and his client. It doesn't take me long to find them. The buck is lying on the ground, it was a good shoulder shot so we can't understand how it managed to get so far. It is a really beautiful trophy. The stems are not long, but they have many branches. The hunter is happy, and begins to gut it. I see yet another new method: he cuts the abdomen, but not the breast-bone. He puts on long gloves, reaching up to his elbows, to remove the internal organs.

I help drag the carcass to a place that can be reached by the jeep. Meanwhile, a heavy sleet is falling - just what we need: I haven't got soaked for a long time - and we go back to Greeny. The hunt continues by car, but now it's just Cenni and me. The best time for hunting is over; like elk, these deer behave like Hungarian ones: they move around mainly at twilight.

Cenni has better eyesight than any of my previous guides. He can spot a deer over impossible distances, even though their grayish fur completely blends into their surroundings. He once spotted a buck with his naked eyes that I hadn't seen with my binoculars. We see one, about 600ft. away, but it is standing between two trees, in such a way that they obscure its antlers. So I don't take a shot. By the time we're able to assess it, it will have taken to its heels. We go to another hilltop, where, for a while, we will stop our morning drive. A deer hunt is not a very eventful type of hunt over here. Now, all we can do is scan the landscape; but the deer have gone to cover. Waking up early has its repercussions, and I'm starting to feel a bit tired, so I suggest following the example of the mule deer. There's not enough time to go back to camp - we're quite a distance from it - and, anyway, we don't want to, so we take a snooze in Greeny. There's enough room, I don't have to worry about getting stiff legs.

I lie across the back seat, and fall asleep at once.

Our noon-time rest lasts 1 1/2hrs.

After a few coughs, Greeny is back in action - as I said, he's not so young anymore - and we drive on. Suddenly, Cenni spots a mule deer we haven't seen before. It is a distinguished looking trophy, one of the best. The animal is two hills away from us. I put on my ear-defenders, grab my gun, and ask the usual question:

- *What's the plan?*

The plan is to get one hill closer, using Greeny, and from there we will stalk it on foot. However, the buck will not stay in one place; it is constantly moving. From my original shooting position I can now only see its disappearing backside. We carry on - in a rush - down into a valley; the deer is now up on a peak. We'll never catch up with it, I have to shoot it now. Cenni throws down a rucksack, I lie down, look through the riflescope, but can't see it. This morning Cenni told me that

many people think the mule deer is a bit stupid: it isn't. It knows perfectly well that if it doesn't move, it is very hard to find. Our buck has chosen this strategy. It must have seen us; it knows what's going on. Even so, its camouflaged fur can't hide it from Cenni's keen eyes. The problem is that I'm the one who has to shoot. And I still can't see it.

Cenni is explaining where it is, when it suddenly moves, and then starts to run... I take my distance from a bush near it, 1200ft.! Far above us the buck is running away, I can only see its undertail... Cenni tells me to shoot, I pull the trigger... I am suddenly in excruciating pain.

The riflescope has smashed into my forehead.

Blood is literally pouring from me. The riflescope, the gun, my jacket, my hand holding the butt, and the ground beneath me are all covered in blood. It runs into my eyes. I was hit so hard that for a moment I don't even know where I am, but I stagger up on to my knees. Cenni has seen what has happened, but the first-aid kit is in the car. Neither of us knows what has happened to the deer. My guide says it gave a jump when I shot, but that is just his obligatory optimism. I'm certain I missed it. We have to get to the car immediately and bandage my wound. I need a few moments to recover as I am still very dizzy. Between us, we haven't even got a tissue to press on the injury. I'm not too worried as, before I left Hungary, I took a first-aid and resuscitation course. I learned that there is a large network of blood vessels covering the head, which make even relatively small cuts bleed heavily. But still, it must be bandaged, there's no question about it. We head for the jeep, me leaving a trail of blood behind, just like a young boar that has been shot in the heart by a .416 Weatherby Magnum. Back in the car, the first thing I do is find a roll of toilet paper - unused, thankfully - tear some off, and press it against the cut. Cenni gets out the first-aid kit, but the bleeding is still so heavy that I haven't yet dared remove this, fortunately, extremely absorbent paper. I sit down beside Cenni, and keep pressing the wound. After 5mins. I take a look at it in the rear-view mirror.

Well; to those Dear Members of the Crescent Club - I have just joined you! (This is the name of one of the most unexclusive clubs in the world. Anyone who has a crescent-shaped scar on their forehead, made by a riflescope, is eligible to join. There are more and more of us, and several members are quite famous!) Slowly the bleeding lessens. Cenni disinfects it and puts on a temporary dressing.

I pull myself together and check what has happened to the riflescope. Well, it seems that I'm quite hard-headed. The focus-adjustment ring of the Zeiss has a rubber covering to give some protection against exactly this sort of accident. The blow was so strong that my forehead has pressed the rubber hard against the ring. There's quite a big dent in the rubber now. My scar, and this dent, will be permanent reminders to me of this stupid shot.

We climb back up the hill, while I consider the events of the last 1/4hr.

Technically, it was a very badly executed shot. There's no point trying to excuse it, the bandage on my forehead is proof enough. In the heat of the moment, because of the lack of time, I did not prepare myself adequately. When aiming uphill the natural body posture changes, putting the riflescope nearer to the eye. So then, you have to hold your head back, even if you can't see the whole field of vision. This does not affect accuracy. You also have to press the gun harder into your shoulder, especially if it has a barrel chosen for large capacity ammunition, with its increased recoil. That is the theory which I did not manage to put into practice.

The punishment was swift.

That shot, however, does raise some safety and ethical issues.

As Pat, my unfriendly Canadian guide would have said: Safety first! According to Hungarian safety regulations, you are never allowed to shoot up a hill. The reason is that, if a bullet flies over the ridge, you do not know where it is going to land, so you can't judge if the direction of the bullet is safe, or not.

In the parts of America that I have been to so far, they either hadn't heard of this rule, or, they had heard of it and thought it a strange European custom, which doesn't apply here. I have written several times about what vast and empty areas there are in America. That is not only true of the north, but also of Montana and Wyoming, and probably of many other states, which I have not been lucky enough to visit. In this particular region there is only one inhabited place, Saratoga, but even that is at least 25mi. from here, and in the opposite direction of the shot. You can go for several hundred miles in the direction of the shot without seeing a sign of civilization. This is the Wild West.

And it is limitless.

That shot would have been considered completely reckless and irresponsible in the Bakony Mountains, but here there is no safety risk at all.

And now for the ethical question.

The constant antagonism between American and European hunting culture. In Hungary, if I told them that I wanted to shoot at the backside of a stag, running away from me, what would my fellow hunters say? I don't think I'd be the most popular man at the table. Also, I don't think I'd want to hear that sort of story myself. Hungarian, and European, ethics have developed into what they are now from the limits imposed by local hunting opportunities.

But this is not Europe. This is America.

Here there are different laws, different customs, and different ways of hunting. Ethics are different, too. As I mentioned after my Alaskan hunt, they are neither better nor worse. Just

different.

What would we say if some indignant foreign hunter lectured us about how unethical it is to shoot a belling stag? We might just pack him off home. According to Texans, a backside shot - if taken with the right caliber bullet - causes death instantaneously. They have even given it a name: the Texas Heart Shot. They don't differentiate between a fatal shot to the heart, from the side, or an equally fatal shot, that destroys the internal organs, taken from behind. They are so keen on it that many local hunters consider it to be one of the safest shots. They believe that the chance of just wounding an animal is considerably smaller than from a side shot, which might hardly touch the entrails, or just wound it in the leg. If you miss with a backside shot, the game has a good chance of remaining uninjured, but that is certainly not true of shots taken from the side. According to local norms, this is not in the least unethical. I don't want to encourage anyone to take such shots, but we have to consider the possibility that a question might have several answers.

The big question is whether a European hunter should follow American or European standards while he is hunting in the New World.

It all depends on whether he wants to have a successful hunt or not.

If he wants to go home with a trophy, he will have to adopt the American way. But an important part of the American norms is that Americans are very good shots. These two things - local ethics and proficient shooting - are quite inseparable. They can not be judged individually. In some cases American ethics are more relaxed simply because the hunters are better shots. And they are all better shots because, growing up in these communities, if they don't shoot well, they won't be good hunters. That's the truth.

Naturally, a hunter from Europe - Hungary - may well decide to stick to the ethics and customs he learned at home, even when in North America. He won't shoot at running stags, will only shoot when the game is side-on, and he won't fire if the target is over 450ft. away. And such a hunter will, unfortunately, return home without a trophy.

Everybody has to make their own decisions about what matters to them.

In Hungary there are those who think that Hungarian hunting ethics should always be maintained, even when hunting abroad. But it is one thing to declare your opinions on an Internet forum, or in a hunting journal, or just sitting around the table, and quite another to put them into practice when you are actually on the spot. Or when you have spent a lot of money for an expedition, and the game you are after will only be bagged by ignoring them. On my trip, so far, I have not taken one shot that would be completely acceptable by Hungarian standards. Hunting is an activity that has to be done in practice, not in theory. There's a huge difference between the two. Fine speeches,

deep thoughts, and wise philosophical concepts often have nothing to do with reality. Especially if you happen to be on the Alaskan taiga, rather than in the Hungarian woods.

As I've already said, local ethics are different in the US because if American hunters used European norms, no hunt would ever be a success. Here, you don't see the same bucks every day. There are no clearings, or raised hides. No-one ever says the words: *There's a beautiful buck that comes here regularly. He always arrives after 8.00!*

It is a wilderness here. The conditions produce a totally different type of hunter compared to those from the Old World.

Excellent hunters.

Hunters who can confidently shoot 1000ft. Who are not fazed if a day's hunting lasts longer than 12hrs. Who consider ceaseless walking, constant crawling and climbing, struggles through thickets, adverse weather and a spartan camp life, to be a normal part of hunting. Because that is what the American hunting culture is all about! We must not forget this when we form our opinions about American hunters!

If a Hungarian hunter manages to disregard the following issues (which I consider completely superfluous): why do Americans wear camouflage clothing, why do they shoot with military-like guns, and why they can't just behave like us Europeans, well, then he will make some very good hunting friends when overseas. Friends who will respect this hunter who has come from many thousands of miles to hunt in their great country. Friends who, without a second thought, will lend him their expensive gun, or anything else that he happens to need. Friends that he can go to with any problem, and who will certainly help him. We should not look for the differences between the two continents - because there are so many - but, instead, look for the similarities. Such as the love of the hunt, which creates a common bond, uniting us with those living in foreign lands who hold different principles.

Needless to say, my mule deer was never found. There are few people in the world who could shoot accurately under such circumstances. And, unfortunately, I'm not one of them. I would only need several million practice shots to be able to do it... There's no evidence that I hit it. There is a strip of snow on the ridge, so we would have noticed any bleeding. It is very likely that the buck only jumped out of fear, and is quite unhurt. That isn't bad news; it still leaves me another chance to shoot a mule deer. Over here, wounding counts as bagging.

We go back to Greeny.

We've only been driving for 15 - 20mins. when Cenni spots some new bucks on a hill to our right. There's no time to waste, as the herd is moving as it grazes. Cenni assesses them quickly... and, yes... there's a good buck among them. I should shoot that! I have no time to build a makeshift

gun rest on Greeny's hood out of rucksacks, so I shall shoot from the car. I'm not happy about doing this, it is over the limits of what I consider acceptable. I do it because there is no alternative.

Now starts the "Which is the buck I should shoot" game, just like in Alaska. We are dealing with a species I'm completely unfamiliar with; I've only ever seen them in photographs or videos. On that basis, I'm not qualified to judge them, I need my guide's help. So, patiently, he explains what the chosen buck is doing. I can see four possibilities, but none of them seem to be doing what Cenni is describing.

Cenni and I are out of sync.

I find the right buck, but Cenni tells me not to shoot yet. He has made many hunting videos, and he'd like to record this bagging. He is unfamiliar with my camera, and needs time to set it. I still don't dare to get out as the order to shoot might come at any moment.

Finally, everything is ready. I'm on target with my gun, as is Cenni with my camera; but how am I to shoot? The buck is way above us, and I can't rest the gun on the window frame to stabilize it.

The deer is too high for that. In a moment of inspiration, I put my right foot out of the window and rest the gun on my boot. By moving my foot I can aim higher or lower. I've never done this before, or heard of, or seen it being done; but it makes a very stable gun rest.

756ft.

I'm feeling confident about this shot. I know I'll be successful before I even pull the trigger. The mule deer, shot through the heart, tumbles down the hillside. And it's all on video, too!

Yet another rewarding hunt!

After the riflescope hit me on the head, I was worried about its settings. I don't think they've changed, or, if they have, not by enough to affect my accuracy.

We make a note of where the buck is and, - to my surprise - it has been gutted in the Hungarian way. A couple of years ago, Roger left his client behind with his bagged game. Being bored, the client went for a walk, and Roger, returning in the car, managed to drive over the antlers. They were broken into bits, but the taxidermist, performing miracles, was able to reconstruct them completely using photos taken just after the bagging. We do not run over my deer, but load it into the trunk instead, and drive home in the twilight. There's a huge storm brewing, and lightning is striking so close to the camp that I decide to leave my gun and camera tripod in the car. I don't want to be a living lightning conductor.



The whole camp is getting ready for a major surgical operation.

I prepare myself for the procedure by drinking a couple of glasses of whisky. Cenni is going to change my bandage, and wants to take a thorough look at the wound. He will be the head doctor. A newly-arrived hunter, Burke, and Jeff, my guide from yesterday, will assist. First-aid kits are produced, and the contents searched through for the appropriate medicine. There is too much choice: all kinds of remedies, bandages and other paraphernalia are lying on the table. They eventually agree on what to use, and how to use it, and, finally, the operation is over. They all agree that it looks as if I'll pull through!

We celebrate the happy outcome with another drink, and have dinner.

For me, these are the best moments of the hunt. A large company round the table, merriment, and lots of chat over dinner.

Yesterday, an elk, and today, a mule deer.

That's how we hunt in Wyoming.
In a laid-back way.



Deer Hunt Camp
5th October
Noon

After our early breakfast, I remain in camp.

I have shot my deer, and have no permits for anything else. Yesterday, Cenni offered to take me with him today on a coyote hunt. That was a welcome suggestion, I like the sound of it. It looks as if it will be an interesting hunt, and I'll learn all the tricks direct from one of the masters. No permits are needed, anyone can shoot as many as they want, or are able to.

Regrettably, the weather is still windy, so we won't be going out at present. Wind is a big disadvantage in this type of hunt. You have to shoot over long distances at a small target, so the

chances of making mistakes are greater. I know I have more than enough ammunition left, so I'm quite happy to waste a couple of shells on this hunt, and I'd like to try out Cenni's guns, too.

I don't know why I like shooting so much.

Whenever I think back on all the game I've bagged here, it is always the actual shot that comes to mind first. What I did well, what I did badly, what lessons I might have learnt, how I could be a better shooter, and so a better hunter. This is equally true of all the game I have shot in Hungary. Throughout my hunting career I do not think there have been many baggings where I can't remember what gun, what bullets, and what shells I used, and what sort of a shot I had to make to achieve my success. I do not need a diary to do this: I have a picture of each shot stored in my memory. There is nothing that soothes and calms me more than the act of shooting. If a hunt is a failure, and I have seen nothing in my sights, I am not a happy man. Not because I am going home empty handed, but because I never had the chance to pull the trigger. On those occasions I'd be perfectly happy just to set up a target and empty my magazine into it. I can never get too much information about shells, and I'm never bored talking about the subject, if I can find someone to talk to. I know many excellent Hungarian hunters who are not particularly interested in their guns, or the shells that go in them. They see the gun just as a necessary piece of equipment, indispensable for a hunt. They have been using the same guns and ammunition for who knows how long. I belong to a different group. I could never have too many guns, or shoot so frequently that I'd get bored by it. I go home from the rifle range because I'm tired, not because I'm tired of shooting. I'm sorry to say that in Hungary there is no journal devoted solely to guns and ammunition. If one ever appears, I shall be its first subscriber. And the Hungarian book market is equally poor on the subject of bullets and shells for hunting guns.

There are very few good Hungarian authors on the topic, as well.

When I talk about myself, I deliberately mix the terms hunter and shooter. I am both. I could not differentiate between the two, even if I wished to. What I have learnt as a shooter, I can use as a hunter. And my hunting adventures show me what aspects of my shooting I am able to improve. Learning is a continuous process, and I believe that the better you can shoot, the less suffering you will cause the game. And whoever causes less suffering, becomes a better hunter. When I am stalking or searching for game, then I am a hunter. But when I raise my gun, I become, even if briefly, a shooter. I measure distance, note wind direction, and adjust the trajectory accordingly. These are clearly shooting tasks; though I'm still not able to behave as cool-headedly as I would at a rifle range. The shooter and hunter are mingled within me. And the hunter side of me will not let me view the game just as a target to be overcome. That is why I love hunting. The intense

excitement preceding a shoot cannot be compared to anything else. The hunting fever that almost stopped me from bagging the Dall sheep is the best evidence that, in me, the shooter will

never dominate the hunter. But the moment I pull the trigger, my first thoughts are of the quality of the shot, not what the trophy is going to look like. As I walk towards the dead game, I am again only a shooter, assessing his performance. Then I'm back to being a hunter, admiring my prey.

At noon, the hunters who arrived yesterday, return. They didn't find anything; this windy weather is not conducive to deer hunting. In the warmth of the stove-heated tent, they eat the sandwich they were given for lunch.

5th October
Evening

At 2.00pm we drive to the nearby town of Sinclair.

Every pickup I've seen so far is a dwarf compared to Jeff's 10-cylinder Ford F-250. Cenni, not the owner, is in charge of the machine at present. In the back are the carcasses of two mule deer, their skulls, and the elk meat. We are heading to the local taxidermist's and the game meat processing factory.

You can find any meat product you want there, ready for consumption. They mainly offer sausages and other red-meat products. I don't buy anything; quite frankly, I don't have any more space, not even for sausages.

While the paperwork is being done, we look around the trophy room. It is here that they display all the uncollected antlers and horns. There are some that have been waiting here to be collected for ten years. The taxidermist says that the brave hunters sometimes forget all about their trophies. I can't imagine doing that. Someone comes here, pays a significant sum of money to bag an elk, and then goes home and forgets about the whole thing? As if he'd never been to Wyoming! Or does he say: I don't need that trophy, a photo will do just as well! One or two cases might be explained by the hunter dying; or having unexpected health problems, which make him forget his trophies.



But there are many hanging on the wall here. Maybe they feel they have outwitted the taxidermist, as his work will go unpaid. We see several interesting trophies, and one makes me burst out laughing. This miserable creature was once a mule deer, but the taxidermist working here in the 1930s did a very bad job on it. It is hanging there as an example of how not to do it. It has bulging eyes like ET, giving the whole head an idiotic, cartoon-like expression. It's hard to live without a sense of humor, and the owner here knows it. Among all the top-class work are modestly hanging two or three plastic dinosaur heads, bought for peanuts in local toyshops.



.I love these outings. I learn more about the everyday life of my guides and observe new things. Why sit around in the tent when there are better things to do?

On our return, Cenni asks me if I feel like hunting coyote. I've been waiting for this moment. Cenni is a good hunter, and if there is anyone who can teach me anything, it will be him. Hunting coyote is so different from anything I've ever done in Hungary, that this afternoon is bound to be a big adventure.

And I'm here to hunt, not to lounge about in a sleeping bag.

Let's take a look at what guns a professional takes with him to the hunting grounds. Cenni has two, a shotgun - that one is for me - and a rifle. The shotgun is a Benelli, painted in camouflage colors, and Cenni has also asked me to wear my camouflage clothes. For this sort of hunting being difficult to see is very important. He thinks that the advantage of a Benelli over a Remington is that, when he has emptied the gun chamber, it will not automatically reload from the

magazine. Remingtons work in a different way. With them you have to do something special to stop them reloading automatically. There are days when you need to empty the gun chamber 20 - 30 times, so that little difference can be quite important.

The Benelli is a left-handed gun, which means that the cartridge case is ejected on the left side. That is important because when shooting from a plane, Cenni has to sit on the left, and if he used a right-handed gun, the cartridge cases would be rolling around in the cockpit, possibly interfering with the pilot. The gun has a long magazine, which swallows up all the cartridges, one after the other. The first cartridge is 70mm long, filled with BB-sized lead shot. Cenni thinks it is effective up to 135ft. The others contain a smaller diameter steel shot filling, but are 76mm long. He says that for the wider diameter of the lead shot, 76mm is too long. It would travel too fast just after it is fired, and, as a first shot, would do too much damage to the skin. For steel shot ammunition, 76mm is the optimum length, and the spread is greater.

If the coyote is further than 135ft. and it is not possible to entice it any closer, Cenni will use his main work gun, a Remington 700, which has several modifications and alterations. He has painted the stainless steel barrel himself, in desert camouflage colors, and changed the original butt to a matt, sand-colored Kevlar one, made by H-S Precision. The ammunition is kept in a Blackhawk cartridge case, again in camouflage colors, which can be hooked to the butt; it also holds the coyote-caller too.

There is also a fork -shaped stand, which can be attached to the rifle. The Harris bipod, famous the world over, doesn't come up to Cenni's expectations. He thinks it is too heavy, and too complicated when being set for an ideal shooting height. And on a coyote hunt you have to get into your shooting position in seconds.

The barrel is a special caliber, specifically made for him. The ammunition is a non-standard caliber, known as wildcat. It is called this because it is not made by any manufacturer, so - when the law permits it - the hunter must make the entire thing, including the outer casing, himself, at home. In America, wildcat has been, and still is, very fashionable. Some home-made cartridges are so effective that large manufacturers have even started producing them themselves, which means that the wildcat then becomes standard ammunition. A good example of this is the 7mm - 08 Remington cartridge. The trouble with wildcat ammunition is that - as it isn't standard size - it is almost impossible to buy a ready-made gun already barrelled for it. So the shooter - or hunter - must have a barrel made in a specialist workshop, thus increasing the price. Getting them made is not a problem here; there are countless workshops about, all making barrels. According to Cenni the main advantage of home-made, reloadable ammunition is not that it has a faster muzzle speed than factory-made ammunition. If you need greater speed, you can buy a

gun designed for stronger and faster cartridges. Its real value is that the starting speed of each individual cartridge is almost always consistent. There's no point in discussing accuracy until you have established that the starting speed is always the same, as it is this factor that fundamentally determines the trajectory. Once, at the Keszthely rifle range, as an experiment, we measured the speed of a box of .308 Norma Oryx ammunition, and found, within that box, a variation of 15%. We carried out the experiment using two separate measuring devices at the same time, so, though the possibility of error cannot be excluded, it is not very likely. For everyday hunting activities it shouldn't cause problems; for example in the case of a wild boar shot from 600ft. the killing effect is not much affected if the shot strikes 1/2 - 1 1/2ins higher or lower.

However, coyote hunting is different.

A shell that works well in other types of hunting could be useless in a varmint hunt. I should also mention that the Oryx is one of the most efficient cartridges on the market, and many consider that the Norma ammunition made for competitive purposes is the best in the world. I'm absolutely certain that Norma competition ammo does not have such a wide variation in muzzle speed. But, irrespective of all that, Cenni only trusts the cartridges that he has filled himself. With these the speed variation is a maximum of 2%.

On our hunt this evening, we will take Sam, the dog, along with us. She has got a bit lazy living in the camp, and is starting to forget that she is a hunting dog. It's time she got some exercise. She will have two main tasks.

The first is that, with her excellent sense of smell, she will detect any coyote approaching our electronic bait, even if we can't see it because of all the undergrowth. The second will be for her to actually engage in a fight with the coyote. If the coyotes have cubs, and the dog gets too close, then, without a thought for themselves, the coyotes will attack her. It gives us a chance to shoot, though it is not without risks. When a coyote is fighting with a dog, it is not an easy target, and we must take care of Samy's safety. I haven't much experience using a shotgun, and just as I would not want to shoot at a fox being chased by a dog, I wouldn't dare to take a shot at a coyote if Samy is close by.

Our first cover is a gully, which we use as a trench. We lie on its gently sloping bank and look out over undergrowth from there. We don't need Samy at the moment so we leave her in Greeny. She stares out, looking rather offended.

If a coyote gets close enough, I will shoot with the Benelli.

If it stays at a distance, Cenni will use the Remington.

We switch on the caller. Awful moans, groans, screams, death-rattles and howls fill the valley. We have to watch every direction, but it is essential we remain still. It is virtually just our eyes that we

can move. If a coyote comes near, then, shoot, shoot, shoot! Those are my instructions. We listen attentively to the horrible noises roaring from the speaker.



Cenni points to the left behind us: here they come! There are three, but the wind is bad! Cenni turns with his gun, aims quickly... they stop... bang! One falls. Bang! That one runs away. We measure the distance with the laser: 1380ft., and there's a crosswind... I make no comment, but Cenni openly admits it: it was a very lucky shot. Because of the wind, he deliberately aimed one coyote-length wide, and made a hit. The second shot was just a simple failure. No more than that. He does not agonize over it.

We gather everything up, and set off in the jeep. We can only stay in the same place for a maximum of 20mins. If a coyote doesn't appear within that time, we must go somewhere else. We try two more places before dusk, but they are failures, even with Samy's help.



Deer Hunt Camp
6th October
Afternoon

Today we are going to continue the exciting new type of hunting I was learning about yesterday. Our first location is at the base of a tree standing on the edge of a huge field. Picking the right cover is vitally important, and Cenni always studies the landscape thoroughly. Wind direction can also determine which places are suitable, or not. We chose the tree for several reasons. The sun is rising behind us, which will blind the coyotes, helping us to stay hidden. Even pilots in the 1st World War knew this tactic, and, when possible, attacked enemy aircraft with the sun behind them. Also, if the sun is behind us, then the tree's shadow will lie in the direction we expect to see the coyotes; that will help to hide us. And, finally, if we want to screen ourselves well, we must be close to a natural landmark, which, in this case, is the tree. It is very difficult to be invisible in a completely open area.

We lie on our stomachs, with our caps pulled down over our eyes, resting on our elbows, watching the field. Earlier, Cenni showed me how to change from this position into a shooting one, making the fewest number of movements.

We see nothing, so we take no shots, but, even so, I have learnt a lot. Before, I assumed that all that was needed for a varmint hunt was an accurate gun and a good riflescope. That was incorrect. Because this type of hunting has its own tricks and secrets, just like any big game hunt. Experience and preparation are required. Technique helps, but won't, in itself, solve any problems.

The other cover produces no results, either.

On the way home we see three coyotes in a field, but by the time I get out of Greeny, they are long gone. I don't mind; I would have missed them, anyway. I haven't checked with Cenni what distances the cross hairs in the reticle represent. If I had fired, I would just have raised some dust in front of the creature.

Back in camp my wound is re-bandaged. When we clean off the dried blood, we can see that Zeiss gave me quite a kiss.

That is what can happen to a stupid shooter.



6th October
Evening

In the afternoon we try again to find some varmints.

We return to the place where I saw some disappear as I was getting out of Greeny. As we approach, Cenni suddenly spots a skunk in the middle of the grassy prairie. He slams on the brakes, and hands me the Remington: - shoot it!

I leap out, and lay the gun across the hood. There's no gun rest, and the distance must be at least 600ft. But the skunk will not do me the favor of standing still. Cenni whistles at him several times, and tries various other sounds to make him stop, but in vain. The skunk eventually finds the only tree in the whole field, and hides behind it. There are even a few bushes around to help him. Cenni gives me the Benelli, and I start running down the hillside. I pick up a lot of speed, jumping over bushes and ditches in my rush towards it. The skunk has nowhere to go; apart from the tree, there is no place to hide. It is not a fast-moving creature, and if it cannot hide, it is quite

easy to keep up with. I come from behind; by the time it prepares to run, the Benelli is on my shoulder. The first cloud of shot blows him away; the second was probably not necessary.

I have shot a skunk in Wyoming!

Cenni is shouting something, but I can't hear what. I want a good photo of this bag, so I take out my camera, point at it, and wave for him to come down! He keeps shouting, but I still can't make out what he's saying. If he doesn't come down, I'll take the pictures myself.

I've just made a terrible mistake.

I lay the gun down beside the skunk - if I can't be in the photo, then at least the gun will. I click away merrily, pick up the gun, and, immediately, I can feel it... so, that is what Cenni was shouting about.

A penetrating, sickening stink fills the air.

In his last moments, the skunk sprayed the entire area, emptying the contents of his scent glands. I have never smelt anything like it in my life. Such a stench just cannot exist. It is not simply a smell, it is a biological weapon. You could torture somebody with this smell. I can't breathe. And, as long as this stink is around, I don't want to. Walking back to Cenni, I feel there might be one or two problems. Cenni is grinning, he can see the faces I am making. Then we get in the jeep.

The smell is unbearable. I'm absolutely serious: it is quite intolerable. We put down all the windows, and stick our heads out. Such a stench... We can't even talk; it is almost corroding our noses. It is a huge relief to get to the site of the morning's coyote hunt, and get out. I take deep breaths of the fresh air. We lie down on the side of a ditch and enjoy the breeze. We have no success here, so we must go on, but that means getting back in the car... meanwhile, we are almost retching. I ask him how long the smell will last. He thinks about five days. The gun is so smelly that I nearly throw up when I touch it. My boots got most of it, so either they, or I, will have to spend the night outside my caravan. I have got to find a gas mask somewhere. Even Samy would hold her nose if she could.

At last we can get out again: I won't say that in the open air the Skunk's Revenge is not noticeable, but at least the crystal-clear Wyoming air slightly reduces the effects of that chemical weapon attack. It is almost completely dark, but we still switch on the coyote-caller. The fake coyotes howl away frighteningly; it makes my hair stand on end. I can't see any further than the end of my nose, but then Cenni nudges me: there's a coyote, shoot it! I have no idea what he's looking at. I can only see darkness, and, in the dark, some black spots. These are rocks. My guide tells me one of them is a coyote. I have no idea which one he means. Perhaps it's the second from the left. Yes, that's the one; I should fire. I won't shoot at anything if I don't know

what it is, but now the rock starts to move. It really does look as if it is a coyote... It is quite far off, but Cenni urges me, so I shoot at it. The rock starts to run, and Cenni yells at me to fire again. I don't need any more encouragement, I keep pulling the Benelli's trigger, watching the flashes from the gun... but, finally, the magazine is empty.

Cenni says I must have hit it.

But, according to the coyote, I haven't. And he's the one that's right.

We can't look for it in the pitch dark, so we put Samy into action. She, however, shows very little interest in the job. She's an excellent retriever, but she's not a bloodhound. I try to spur her on, but in vain, she won't show any interest in the trail for very long. I even threaten that I won't let her hunt any more, but that doesn't work, either. She wags her tail, looks around, trying to see what she's supposed to bring back, but won't do anything else. I tell her off.

Back in camp, the stench trails after me like a comet's tail. In the dining tent even the lovely smell of dinner can't smother the Skunk's Revenge. It provides an inexhaustible subject for discussion, with one coarse joke following another. Just like the cans of beer.

We're all in such a good mood that no-one wants to go to bed.



Deer Hunt Camp
7th October

We spend the morning in the camp.

To run such a camp, so far from a town, and civilization in general, requires a lot of machinery and other equipment. There's always something that needs to be repaired. This needs its battery changed, that needs to be refilled, and, in the dining tent, the stove's chimney is blocked. There is a thick wall of smoke, rather like what you see at a European soccer match.



The repairs are carried out efficiently; our guides always manage to find a solution. Hunters, meanwhile, return from the hunting grounds, and one by one, the deer carcasses are taken off the metal stands used to carry game on the vehicles.

The cameras are clicking away.

Most of the hunters want a head trophy, and the skinning has begun. I lend my knife to one, to give him the chance, for once, of working with a quality tool.

Before I left Hungary, I assembled my clothes and equipment with the greatest care. Whatever piece of equipment I look at, I will see the reassuring logo of a well-known manufacturer. I chose it all very carefully because, if there is one thing I've learnt from my trips in the mountains, it is that it pays to set out with only the best equipment.

There are no other options.

Mediocre, or cheap, products will, if you're lucky, only spoil, or lessen the enjoyment of your anticipated trip. A head flash-light that falls apart, underclothing that never dries out, boots which leak, or hurt your feet, rucksack straps that tear, sunglasses that lose their lenses, waterproof jackets that aren't, and develop leaks fast, overweight sleeping bags which aren't warm, and tents that can't be assembled, or, if they can, collapse all the time: these are just a few of the useless pieces of equipment I have managed to come across. And, if you are not lucky, by trying to save money, or just making a bad choice, you can put your health at risk, or, in an extreme case, your life. If you've never experienced it, you will not know how enjoyable an expedition can be when you don't have to repair, fix, or mend things, or don't need to take extra care because of some unreliable accessory.

I feel a special pride and pleasure that on the handle of my knife, which I selected most carefully, you can read the words: Hand-Made In Hungary.

Because the best hunting knives in the world are made in Hungary.

The knife-maker Sanyi "Sharpblade" Hegyes is not a household name; you won't see many of his advertisements in hunting magazines. But, nevertheless, he has such full order-books that any hunter who has been fortunate enough to hear about him on the forest grapevine, will only acquire one of his extremely desirable knives after a wait of several months. I've known Sanyi for a long time, and have the privilege of owning several of his knives, each bearing that reliable sign of quality, his Butterfly emblem.

In my view, Sharpblade is way above any other knife-maker because he is constantly and untiringly searching for the perfect design for a knife for its given task, and to achieve this, uniquely in knife-making, he combines the latest hi-tech steels with the most traditional materials for the handles, all assembled with the utmost craftsmanship. He learnt all about knife-making, starting with the basics, completely on his own, so he has not been influenced by the methods of his fellow knife-makers. What has made Sharpblade so well-known so quickly in his profession are: his profound understanding of the components of various steels, and their behaviour; his

knowledge of the wide range of uses blades are put to; the selection of the materials for handles, and their shape; and the incredibly clever design of the hand-made scabbard. But, for me, Sanyi's best quality is his absolute precision. He has now reached such a high level of hand-made engineering that it would seem impossible to get any better. I put Sanyi's knives on the same level as those other, regrettably rare, examples of exportable hand-made Hungarian products, like Zsolnay ceramics. I truly respect his work and attitude.

There are many excellent knives produced throughout the world, but - as in every field - there's only room at the top for one: and right now that is Sharpblade.

Master Roger has returned with fresh supplies. Yesterday, I begged him to bring some Gatorade and cans of coke. He has just unloaded everything, and there is enough of my favorite drinks to bathe in.

There are some guides who concentrate solely on the hunting, and work towards getting their clients' trophies of the right quality, size or even weight, but no more. And then there are others who have realised that most hunters - myself included - are after a more complete experience. These guides will do everything to make their hunters have a good time. Jim and his team fall into this category. We are more like hunting partners than paying client and service provider. This is the sort of environment I feel most at home in. The bill, of course, must always be paid, and for that amount of money the hunting service must be provided, but there are a lot of different ways of doing it. It can be a simple business relationship, or one based on friendship. I go for the second one.

All the other hunters left in the afternoon, so now the camp is empty.

Hunters, who come here from distant parts, usually want to hunt mule deer and elk. Those hunts generally last three, maximum four days. Some arrived after I did, shot the game they wanted, and are now on their way home. Apart from the staff, I'm the only person here. There are no new clients arriving for a while, so it's a chance for everyone to relax.

And, for a Wyoming hunting guide, relaxing means target practice.

So I'm happy; it's just what I like to do!

First, as a preliminary, they produce a couple of .22 caliber Long Rifle Revolvers. One belongs to Roger, but he's not certain why he carries it around in his car. Guns are so normal here in the US, so much a part of everyday life, that there's no point in asking what they are all for, or why they bought them. Though, if you have over forty guns in the gun room, then there seems to be little sense in buying a forty-fourth. But the history of this country has been written with guns. It is a fundamental part of the constitution that people are allowed to bear arms. If a politician, either

at a local or federal level, starts to attack this right, or tries to restrict the carrying of guns, he will lose his next election.

This society could not, and will not, disarm itself.

The other .22 revolver belongs to Cenni. At least I know what this one is for: he uses it to execute trapped coyotes. It is a well-maintained, silver-colored Smith&Wesson gun. Behind the camp I throw an empty plastic water bottle as far as I can, and my rifle range is ready. I start with Roger's revolver. By the time I have emptied the magazine, I am learning just how far off-target the battered old thing shoots. As I empty the magazine for the second time, one of the shells, instead of making a little bang, gives a tired whistle. I open the cartridge drum, remove the bullets, and we look down the barrel. Yes, the bullet has got jammed. You must be careful in these cases - if the hunter repeats a shot the barrel could explode. The gun-sticks are to hand, but are too wide for the tiny bore. So Roger puts the useless lump of metal away. I empty a couple of more magazines with Cenni's gun, but I already have my eye on some of the others. Roger then brings out two more revolvers from the depths of the jeep. Both are .44 caliber Magnums. One is a light-build S&W model, like the one my friend Randy has, and which I shot with in Brooks Range. The other is a long-barrelled, heavy-duty one, which is the easiest to shoot with. I use only one magazine for each; revolvers are not very dear to me. Roger's jeep is a mobile arsenal. Now, out comes a Brazilian-made, Springfield automatic pistol. Yes, it is the good old Colt 1911- A1 model. This gun is part of American culture, and an indispensable item in the national costume. I doubt if there's any gun enthusiast in the country who would not have at least one of these pistols. The ammunition for the lazy .45 ACP has huge stopping power, or so I've read in the literature about it. I empty one magazine with this as well. We collect all the spent cartridge cases; every one of them was filled at home. I am admiring Roger's .25-06 Winchester when - take note of this! - he gets out his sixth gun! It is an AR - 15 rifle. I tried Cenni's at the Saratoga rifle range, on the way here, but this is a different model. It has black insulating tape wound round the barrel for camouflage, and the caliber is .223 Remington. It is less than 3ft. long, and is easy to carry through undergrowth.

I've filled the magazine, so let's go! There is not much left of the water bottle.

This gun, the AR-15, is a very good invention. It is an obedient, well-balanced, accurate rifle, easy to handle, and a pleasure to shoot with.

In the evening we go for another coyote hunt.

I wheedle Roger into lending me his AR; I'd like to shoot my first coyote with it. As I'm getting into the vehicle, Cenni turns to me and asks if I want to shoot a buffalo! I don't understand; I have no permit for one, and I didn't even know there were buffalo here. He smiles slyly: leave it to him;

today, he will ensure that I shoot a buffalo. Does he mean a cow? We can see enough of them, but they are not buffalo, and are not quite a typical game animal. Well, come what may, we move off in Greeny. We've been driving less than 10mins. when Cenni points out a hill: there is the buffalo! I look up... and, yes, there is a buffalo!

It is made of a sheet of metal, and supported 2ft. off the ground on iron bars. It is a favorite target for local hunters. You can shoot from any distance you like, providing you get no closer than 900ft. When you hit it, there is a metallic ring, though the eagle-eyed can even see the dust rising from the surface of the metal.

Behind the hill is a mountain, which acts as a bullet shield.



We walk down and across the plain, and measure the distance: 2100ft. I fit a bipod to the AR, aim 4 1/2ft. above the target, and a little to the right, because of the wind, and fire. I don't hit it, so I alter my aim and take another shot, again with no result. I don't continue; I can't work out how the gun has been set. Cenni has brought his 7mm Remington Magnum caliber. On the Leupold riflescope there is a customised tower, something I've seen a few times since I've been here. He

only needs to set it to the right distance, and he can shoot. He doesn't have to count the clicks. The Remington hits with the first and second shot. It is very loud; it has a compensator. Now it's my turn, and I shoot the buffalo, too. The tower works excellently.

We should really get on with the hunting!

We take up our positions quite a distance from each other so that we can scan a greater area, giving us a better chance of success. The caller is switched on. Cenni knows how to use the equipment very skillfully; he deliberately alternates the sound between a coyote and its prey. Only experience can tell you what sounds to use, how long to play them, and at what volume. Coyote hunters hold competitions among themselves, in which my guide is usually very successful. He has won several times through his clever use of the caller.

A beast appears on the ridge.

I move my gun, take aim,,, and miss. I feel irritated, I don't know what went wrong. After that shot we leave the caller on for a while, but nothing else comes near. Afterwards, I run up to the ridge, but can see no trail. Cenni tries to calm me down, saying that the short-barrelled AR was not designed for precision shooting over 700ft.

We go to another cover, looking down a valley, in the deepening twilight. The caller howls for 15mins. Cenni is now sitting beside me, and asks, in a whisper: Can you see it?

What?

What can be seen with the naked eye in this black night? He thinks the coyote is only 150ft. in front of us, but I can't see a thing. The guy must have infra-red cameras in his eyes, I'm sure of it. No normal person could see anything here. I'm not an owl! Cenni is getting impatient, why don't I shoot! But where am I supposed to shoot; should I just fire randomly into the night? I open my eyes even wider, scrutinizing the area he's pointing at, inch by inch. All in vain. Either I'm blind, or he's playing some sort of joke. It's not the first time that the person I'm hunting with has spotted the game before I did. Professional hunters spend most of their lives on the hunting grounds, know them well, and know where to look and what for; so it's hardly surprising if they spot the game before the hunter, who might be there for the first time. However, up to now, I've always been able to see the game I'm trying to bag.

But I can't see a thing here, and don't understand how anyone else can. If it was our first hunt together, I'd swear he was trying to fool me. I don't know what to do; I feel like some half-wit. Moving as slowly as possible, I pass him the AR; he can shoot instead of me. And then I stare into the inky blackness, trying to see what he will aim at. I have the Benelli... he bends close to me again... can I see that paler patch?

Does he mean there's some light black in the dark black? What is he talking about?

I try once more... and, yes, it is as if the night was slightly less dense in one spot. I've checked out that area, at least four times, and then it was still twilight, we weren't sitting in ink. Can that be the coyote? I aim at it, with the full choke on my Benelli... Cenni makes an approving noise...

Bang!

He says I have hit it.

I'll never understand this night as long as I live. That there can be such a difference between two people's sight... But I'd just like to say, my eyes are not weak, and I'm not short-sighted. I can see perfectly well, and for long distances. Some sort of night-vision device is the only explanation...

But I have my coyote!



And that's what matters! Here it is, with its thick, soft fur, lying in front of me. He is a big one, one of the largest. So this is the renowned coyote! The camera flashes, and we shake hands. I'd like my trophy's skull to be boiled clean, and I explain this to Cenni. There's lots of time for that, so now we will head for home as it's getting late. The meat - like any predator's - is worthless, so we don't need to hurry with the gutting. We carry everything back to the jeep, with lots of laughing

about the evening.

How strange! The coyote almost bumped into me, but I still couldn't see it...

Greeny won't start.

Cenni checks the dashboard. In theory, everything is OK, so it should go. He lets the battery rest for a while, in case it runs down from overuse of the starter...

Greeny won't start.

The minutes pass slowly. It is not the time for a client to start asking stupid questions, so I just keep quiet. Greeny won't start.

Cenni gets out his cellphone. He might get a signal, or he might not. If he can, then a rescue team will come from the camp.

The cellphone has run down.

It doesn't even have enough power to send a text. We wait a few more minutes to see if the phone's battery will perk up, or if Greeny will change his mind. One more try with the starter, one more try with the phone...

Greeny won't start and the phone has completely run down.

That's it.

There's no point in keeping on trying. We just have to accept it and get on. We must decide what we'll do. One option is to stay here. Sooner or later they'll discover we're missing. Jeff and Roger know the area well, and are aware of the direction we set out. Even though the prairie is somewhat bigger than the City Park in Budapest, they won't bother to go to the areas where there are deer, because we were hunting coyote. That was the arrangement, as they don't like to disturb the deer with unnecessary noise. But, if we stay, we can expect a long, cold night. The other option is to walk. It will be a long one. The camp is far behind us, but we do know the way back. We discuss it, and go for the second option. We only have one head flashlight between us, as I didn't bring anything with me. I was prepared for a hunt by car, not a survival trip. We leave our guns behind, and only take the S&W revolver. I hold my Fortis watch in front of a headlight, to charge up its luminosity. We are going to walk briskly. We will not stop until we reach the camp. It would not be a good idea to spend the night half-way.

Let's look on the bright side.

The weather is good. Not too cold, there's no precipitation, and, unusually, there is no wind either. Both of us have excellent boots, and good socks, as well. We are both fit, and can put up with a few difficulties. We have one light, which is better than none at all. That is something. There are



no particularly dangerous animals around. Pumas - or mountain lions, as they are known locally - are not uncommon; we've seen their trails several times. Even though there are some puma attacks every year, they are rare, and hardly ever prove fatal. And if a puma did decide to attack us now, we would empty the entire magazine of the turkey-chaser revolver into it, and then start to fight it with our bare hands. That's the plan.

We are walking across the pitch dark prairie. The deep Wyoming night covers us.

With the Milky Way, far above, stretching over us.

We are making quite swift progress, at least 3 - 4mph. The terrain is easy, there are no gradients, and the track is almost flat. We just have to watch out for coyote holes, which lie there sneakily, waiting to break our ankles.

We don't talk, but not because we are in a bad mood. We have to focus on our path, and do not want to slacken our speed. We must keep up our pace.

Distances here are enormous. In Hungary, the basic rule is that, if you get lost up in the mountains, you must walk downhill for 2hrs. or so, keeping to the same direction. If you can do that, you are bound to come to some sign of habitation, or at least be close to one, irrespective of wherever you started. But here you could walk for two months without seeing another human being. We hope that our journey won't last that long.

We take no rests, not wanting to waste the time. We just keep walking.

We get back to camp late at night, just as the rescue team is about to leave. The jeeps' engines are already running. I pounce on a bottle of Gatorade, and down it in one gulp. The other residents of the camp gather round - at least, those who are still up, or have been woken by the general bustle - they want all the details of our adventure. In a kind gesture, Jim, the outfitter, presents me with a beautiful coyote skin, as a souvenir of the day.



Deer Hunt Camp
8th October

Yesterday was a long day, so this morning, as a treat, we get up late, at 6.00am.

After breakfast we discuss the agenda for the day. Cenni thinks that Greeny simply ran out of gas. Even though the gauge showed a different reading, that's what the symptoms suggest. Greeny is an old warrior, and so are his instruments. So, what they indicate is not necessarily true. We fill up a canister from the camp's hand-operated gas pump and throw it in the back of the jeep. There are four of us in the vehicle, and we set off to where we left Greeny.

The Greeny Rescue Team - that's what we named ourselves yesterday - saves the brave automobile from its dire predicament. After that we even have a quick hunt, employing the usual methods. We are so well equipped with various precision guns, semi-automatic shotguns, and AR-15 rifles, that the coyotes lie low, too afraid to come out.

In the afternoon we drive over to Jim's house, near Saratoga. I had my last bath a week ago, when I was in Denver, a fact that would be obvious to anyone standing too close to me. It is high time I had a thorough wash. There is a shower in the camp, the water heated by gas from a cylinder. It is a clever piece of apparatus, but this morning is rather cool, there has even been a little snow, so - call me a wimp, if you like - I'd rather have my wash at Jim's house. It is also a little suspicious that, since I've been here, I have not seen anyone using the shower.

Wyoming is a deceptive, somewhat confusing, place.

Here we are, driving over an endless plain, yet we are 6600ft. above sea-level. If you climb up even a small mountain, you will be above 9000ft.. I'm not sure if an R22 helicopter - the type I tried out in Alaska - would be able to fly in this thin air. It might be too high for a small engine. Nothing shows that we are at such a great height, unless it's the fact that the sky seems so close. Even the small, fluffy clouds look as if they are within arm's length. And we can watch the storm clouds being born right in front of our eyes. We speed along in the clear sunshine. We catch up with a cloud, driving right into its center, and then, instantly, the temperature drops 50F. It is actually snowing at the bottom of the cloud, though it doesn't last for long. We soon pass through it, and the sunshine is back.

During the afternoon, sitting in the dining tent, I write my diary. I have put a lot of wood in the stove. (Since the chimney has been unblocked there has been no more smoke in the tent.) There are cheeseburgers for dinner.

I pour half a bottle of Tabasco over mine, and I don't spare the cans of beer, either.



Jeff the Guide's Daughter's House
Laramie
9th October

To show how easily standards can slip in hunting circles, let me give you this example.

I know a gentleman who considers himself to be a True Hunter. His hunting clothes and equipment are the most traditional that you can find. For him to wear camouflage, or use a gun with a plastic butt, would be unthinkable, to such a degree that, whenever he sees something like that, he feels obliged to give a lecture to the hunter who has gone so far astray. After bagging something, he always sticks to the correct procedures in the most exemplary way. If a Hungarian hunter uses current hunting terms, instead of the old-fashioned, traditional ones, then he will reprimand him; and he will wear in his hat, for 24hrs., a leaf dipped in the blood of the game he has shot. But, despite all that, he will still sit outside his hide using a night-vision sight, which is

absolutely illegal. I imagine many of you have come across similar hunters, haven't you? As the appetite for more and more baggings increases, people allow each other, and themselves especially, far greater flexibility in their behavior. And if other hunting topics crop up, perhaps not directly linked to successful shooting, many of us feel that we are the source of all wisdom on the subject, though, of course, all those thousands of other Hungarian hunters are free to have their own opinions, as long as they are the same as ours.

I try not to make this mistake, and the experiences I've had during my American trip have helped me a lot.

I've met so many hunters. All have been real individuals, with their own diverse views on hunting. The evening conversations were almost always made up of contrasting opinions. Caliber, optics, clothes, equipment... all are fields where there is never just one option. Because there's always more than one way of getting there. To achieve success - in an ethical way - there are always several routes. Here in the US, if a hunter is using methods that are different to ours, we do not berate him on why our ways are the best, and we don't try to convince him, by any means possible, that he should adopt them. Here, nobody is bothered about educating his fellows. This is an important outlook, and one in which the Americans are way ahead of us Hungarians. In this respect they have a lot to teach us.

You won't find divisive views published in American hunting journals. No irresponsible, groundless denunciations. They do not talk about poor or rich hunters, and you won't guess someone's social status from their behavior. And that is important. I once was speaking to a fellow hunter for days, in the most informal way, before finally discovering that his family owned a chain of banks, famous throughout the US.

Here there is no difference between those who use Magnums, and those who use basic calibers. We don't read about who wears camouflage, or who wears traditional clothes. It is a widely held belief that in such minor matters the final decision rests with the individual. They will not be ruled by their peers: the freedom of the individual is paramount. The end result of all this is that - and I do mean this - I have never heard one argument between hunters in any of the camps I've been in. And that always makes for a good atmosphere.

Another issue that can divide the hunting community is the use of tools, equipment, or items that have a military origin or appearance. There are many who would like to draw a distinct line between hunting and military engineering. This aim is, quite rightly, I think, supported by the argument that there should be no room in hunting for anything reminding us of the horrors of war, and that the bagging of game should not degenerate into a mere killing process, something that has defined warfare since the beginning of time.

But on this subject, also, everyone should be free to choose his own way. And the best one is generally somewhere in the middle. To completely ignore any military-inspired devices is not really feasible.

At the dawn of history there was no soldier or hunter.

Our ancestors hacked each other to pieces, and hunted for survival, using the same weapons. They would be most baffled if, using a time machine, we were to travel back and lecture them on the moral difference between the two activities. As there was no substantial difference between hunter and warrior at that time, it means that, from a modern perspective, any attempt to differentiate between them would be pointless. As to why things were like that, we must ask the historians, though the reason seems quite clear to me: man is part of earth's biosphere, and his body structure, and physiology are very similar to those of the creatures he hunts. In pre-historical times if someone wanted to kill a man, he would use the same weapons that had already proved their worth in hunting; and that idea works both ways.



In our modern times a hunter and a soldier are not necessarily identical, though we know that many talented hunters were also soldiers - remember Colonel Patterson, the killer of the Tsavo man-eaters at the beginning of my diary. They often went hunting with their military hardware. Since the dawn of time weapons used for both hunting and warfare have evolved side by side, and now they are inseparable.

Whether we like it or not, we hunt with tools that have military origins.

However we try and camouflage the fact, dress it up in new clothes, re-wrap it, or disguise it with a nicely carved gun-butt, it doesn't change the reality. It was the arms industry that was able to finance the research that led to better and more effective guns. The father of modern repeaters, the Mauser M 98, would not have been created without the designers in the arms industry, or the profit the manufacturers expected to make. Today, anyone holding a complex, richly engraved Mauser, considered throughout Europe to be the ultimate hunting gun, cannot ignore the fact that hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions, of people all over the world have been killed with this

gun.

It is a fact.

And it is also a fact that, when the designers were developing the ammunition, such as the 30-06 Springfield, the 8 x 55 Mauser, the .308 Winchester and the 6.5 x 55 Swedish, all beloved by so many of us, animal hunting would not have been foremost in their minds. They wanted to design a bullet that would be most effective in killing a fellow human being, because that is what war is all about. All these bullets were originally designed for military purposes. Of course, we can, hypocritically, ignore these historical facts, but they are still the facts.

And we may be certain that the need for the riflescope, the laser sight, and modern hi-tech clothing were first spotted by the arms industry. These products all proved their worth on the battlefield before the manufacturers, modifying them slightly for hunting use, but retaining their basic functions, made them available to civilians.

But this relationship has worked both ways.

Many hunters, during times of war, made very good marksmen and scouts. Our hunting forefathers gained much valuable knowledge while observing game and studying the landscape out in the wilds, information that was of great importance to warring parties.

Even so, by accepting and acknowledging the input of the arms industry, to a certain degree, it does not mean that tomorrow we are going to set off to our hide carrying rocket-propelled grenade launchers on our shoulders. And I do not think we should go hunting in combat helmets. (Although, if the number of hunting accidents caused by irresponsible behavior does not decrease, I might consider it.)

We must just accept that, for each hunter, the happy medium lies in a different place. There are some who would never use an AR - 15 when hunting coyote. There are others who would never wear camouflage clothing, even if it was specifically made for hunting, and had no military connotations. Presumably, they would never swap their nice hunting hat for a baseball cap. And there are others who are more than happy to take advantage of any newly developed gadgets. They are the ones who are the first to use the equipment, tools and other items devised by the military, providing the laws of their country permit them to do so.

As for me, I'm not against new attitudes in hunting, and I feel that there is no such thing as unethical equipment. Only the hunter can be unethical in his use of it, abusing the power of technology.

Hungarian law does not allow any hunting with the weapon that appeared in camp this morning. It is in a black case, which is so heavy that I can barely lift it. It is a gun that has little to do with

hunting. It is a make that everybody has heard of, but which few Hungarians will have used. We know it from literature, and have only ever seen its image in magazines and videos. Some lucky ones might have seen it at exhibitions abroad. In Hungary it is illegal merely to own it. It is a gun which has a capacity closer to a cannon than what Hungarian hunters think of as a gun. There is nothing in the world able to resist the brutal energy released from its barrel.

It is not just a gun: it is a Legend.

It is the Bushmaster Marksmen Gun.

Or, as it is better known: The Destroyer.

Caliber: .50 BMG

This monster is used by specially trained marksmen, for specific tasks. There is nowhere to hide from its terrifying capacity bullets. Any form of shelter is pointless: this bullet will penetrate anything. If a live target tries to hide behind a wall made of brick, or even re-inforced concrete, hundreds of feet away, he might feel that he is safe. Out of harm's way. And, if the marksmen hunting him are using the usual .308 Winchester, or a .338 Lapua Magnum, he would be right. But, if one of them is carrying a .50BMG then there is no chance of escape. The target is a dead man, he just doesn't know it. Because, within seconds of hearing a clap of thunder, like a bomb exploding, a large, heavy, red-hot bullet will start its murderous journey, piercing the re-inforced concrete in moments. It will pass through brick, and light armor; the strongest bullet-proof vests will not even momentarily slow down this flying death. Today on the 8th October 2009, through the generosity of its owner, I will have the never-to-be-repeated opportunity to try out the Destroyer! I never thought I'd ever get the chance.

I can hardly wait for the hunters to return. I have stayed in camp, staring at the case of the Destroyer. It is here in the tent just 1 1/2ft. from me. Sometimes I pick it up, when there's no-one looking. I don't dare to open it, though I'd love to examine it, to hold it in my hands.

.50 BMG!

A ruthless gun.

My .300 Winchester Magnum is considered by many to be too powerful for Hungarian hunting conditions. But, compared to the Destroyer, it is a silly little toy, an airgun you'd use at a fairground stall. It comes nowhere near it; seriously: not even close. In case this diary is ever read by a non-hunting person, someone who has no idea about guns, I'll give them a comparison. Assume my gun is a very powerful BMW. That would then make the Destroyer a nuclear-powered Nimitz-class aircraft carrier.

There isn't now, and never has been on this earth, an animal that would require this beast.

There's no reasonable argument to justify its use. The owner is a gun collector, who normally only uses it at a rifle range, but one day he would like to hunt with it, namely for pronghorn. If ever

the Hungarian saying "To hunt a sparrow with a cannon" can be said to be literally true, it is in this case.

They finally get back.

I'm on tenterhooks; I quickly give my congratulations for the bagged mule deer, and nervously wait to set off. Apart from the owner, it's going to be Cenni, Jeff, Roger, and myself who are going to be lucky enough to have one shot each with this beast. We form a little group of wise men, deciding where we are going to fire it.

We have two concerns: the first is over the exceptionally loud noise it makes, which might disturb the game, and the second is the potential danger that the bullet flying from the barrel might present. For the .50BMG the usual safety measures are inadequate. A special rifle range is required for its use. We have to find a place with a solid bullet shield behind it, where the bullet is not going to cause any problems if the shooter misses his target. Jim, as leader of the camp, makes his decision, and we eventually set off.

There are huge mounds of gravel standing on our temporary rifle range. If the bullet can get through one of those - and none of us actually knows what this gun is capable of - there is then an open area in every direction of several miles, where we can see no sign of movement, even after scanning it with our binoculars. But if the bullet does manage to get that far, it will then be blocked by the surrounding semi-circle of mountains. We think we've found the right place. We laugh and joke, but underneath we are all very on edge. I quickly announce that I wish to be the last one to shoot. They assemble the gun and Cenni will have the first shot. Because I'm expecting an enormous explosion of noise, I'm wearing ear plugs as well as my ear-defenders. Also, I'm nervous about the gases released by the compensator, so I stand well behind Cenni. If it all goes according to plan, nothing is going to come in this direction. But, if anything does go wrong... if the barrel were to explode... then it's goodbye for all of us.

He is getting ready... taking aim ... and the gun makes such a roar, such a great roar, that I can feel the sound vibrating through my body. Cenni is smiling away behind the riflescope, and nobody has been injured. We are all grinning from ear to ear, everyone likes this monster. Supposedly it doesn't have a big kick. We are going one after the other, but I'm still just watching. I want to know what to expect. But the waiting is over; now it is my turn. I load it, but do not close the bolt far enough, so the owner gives me a hand. I see a MIL-DOT reticule. I hold my head back as far as I can, so I can only see the target through a small circle. The trigger is stiff... I pull it... it is a noise I could never get used to. It really didn't give me much of a kick, but, even so, the recoil was far greater than with any other gun I've ever fired.

I feel rather sad when I have to hand it back; I wouldn't mind a few more shots with it.

What a gun!

I can't actually say it was fun shooting with it, but it was certainly a unique experience. I shall keep the ejected cartridge case - the size of a frankfurter - as a souvenir. I'll never forget this day, that's for sure.

I have shot with a BMG!



In camp Jim gives me some bad news: there's a snowstorm heading for Wyoming.

I'm supposed to travel tomorrow, but if I get stuck here, my travel plans will collapse. My plane leaves Laramie at 8.30am on the 10th October, and I have to be on it. We had thought that leaving at 4.30am would give me adequate time to get there, but now, with this new forecast, Jim doesn't think it's a good idea any more. When the storm arrives, all the highways will be closed.

This afternoon, as soon as possible, we must leave.

The news is a complete surprise. I'd have liked to spend one more night in the caravan. I would have liked to have one more hunt with these big-hearted cowboys.

But I have to go.

And, once again, there are the sad moments. Packing the bags, the sound of the zips - to me, these always signal the end of a hunt - putting on my street clothes, packing my gun away... I don't like these times. Just 1/2hr. later my bags are stowed in Jeff's minivan. We try to keep the farewells brief. Some rather awkward jokes, handshakes... no-one seems pleased that we're all parting. In a way, it's a good feeling, as I only like to hunt with other people who also feel sad when we split up. There is a little comfort in the fact that one day I will come back here. There are still some species here that make my mouth water, but for which the season is now closed. We leave the camp.

The majority of roads in Wyoming are of beaten earth. In a jeep it is easy to drive at 60mph on these hard earth roads. We are driving over a completely deserted plain, using a different route to the one I arrived on. This way is shorter, apparently. I ask Jeff if people ever disappear on the prairie. If the car was to break down here, who would ever find us, and when?

Jeff says disappearances are rare. Whenever somebody sets out, he will always alert the place he is travelling to. Then, if he doesn't arrive on time, they don't hang around, but send out a search party immediately. The one rule you must never break is: do not leave the road! By the time we reach the highway, the snow has started falling. When we get to Laramie it is 18ins. deep. The temperature has dropped 50F within a couple of hours. It is now 14F. and there is a strong wind. Jeff says this kind of weather is unusual right now; normally it comes a month later. We have time for a little quick shopping, so Jeff drives me around town. To make sure that I don't forget that this really is the wild west, he takes me to see the old jail, now out of use. For a while two of the most famous train robbers in the whole of the wild west were locked up here: Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid.

We have dinner in a grill restaurant. Jeff also invited his daughter and her husband, and his younger son and his girlfriend. We spend the early evening drinking lots of beer, and chatting non-stop. Later we drive to his daughter's house because they have refused to let me stay in a hotel. There, I quickly log on to the internet: what I see there confirms that we made the right decision today. On the map around Laramie are black exclamation points; every road, in and out, has been closed. The town is cut off from the outside world. If we'd left at dawn, tomorrow we wouldn't even have got as far as the highway. Well, it's always wise to do what the locals say. I'm going to be sleeping on a comfortable mattress, inflated by a motor; meanwhile I'm being asked rapid questions about my journey so far. They are nice, friendly people. Although they hardly know me they have offered their house to stay in, without being asked. In the evening we continue drinking at a nearby bar, with some family friends.