

Rifles

By Ron Spomer

The last bull nearly got us, rising from behind the sort of scrawny brush you'd swear couldn't hide the world's largest land mammal. The beast thundered down on us with a pair of yellow-stained tusks thick enough to put a manhole through your middle. I was just fast enough to put a .40 caliber thumbhole through his brain first.

That cleansing altercation would have been adrenaline rush enough for one hunt, but it followed attacks from two other bulls. The first bore down on my guide and me from 30 yards. No sooner had a 400-grain solid through the brain stopped it than its partner came in a full charge from our right. There was no time to duck, let alone think. I spun, flung the gun up in self-defense and probably jerked the second trigger. The bullet found the bull's brain anyway. This bull hadn't even hit the ground before my guide, retired-Navy SEAL Doug Pritchard, was shouting "Reload, reload!"

I followed orders. Good thing. That third elephant leaped from the cedars no more than ten yards away, towering a dozen feet overhead. I slammed the action shut and snapshot him like a surprise quail. In less time than it has taken you to read this, 32,000 pounds of crop-marauding mayhem lay in gray heaps around us.

If at any time over the past 40 years you had told this wild-eyed country boy he'd someday face down three

An exciting new course in Texas prepares you for close-up shots at charging buffalo, elephants and other dicey encounters you might expect on safari.



A pair of Heym 88B Professional Hunter doubles with .450/400 3-inch cartridges. One rifle is chambered .470 N.E.

bull elephants in Texas, I'd have laughed it off. First, I couldn't afford an elephant hunt. Second, they don't hunt elephants in Texas. Or so I thought.

"Sure we shoot elephants," Tim Fallon told us at the Reno SCI convention. "Buffalo too. You like facing down charging Cape buffalo?"

"I don't know. I never tried it," I answered.

"You want to?"

"I do!" my 5-foot, 2-inch bride volunteered.

Fellas, what husband would argue with that? We booked the trip to Tim Fallon's FTW ranch in Texas where we would take the SAAM (Sportsmen's All-Weather, All-Terrain Marksmanship) Safari course. In it we would learn how to handle dangerous game with large bore double rifles, the kind everyone has heard about but few have seen, let alone fired. The .375 H&H Magnum was just a starter caliber here. Think classic, rimmed big bores like .450-400, .450 NE and .470 N.E. Big thumpers for big critters. The kind you want to stop before they stop you.

Now for somewhat deflating news: These weren't real buffalo and elephants.

But as life-sized photo targets go, they were effectively realistic because they truly did pop out of nowhere,

unannounced, and charge. FTW has them cleverly mounted on frames that swing out on levers, race toward

you on cables or run broadside. These animated effects aren't enough to drain your adrenaline reserves, but they surely get them flowing. And that's just what one needs when learning how to handle a big double rifle without becoming all thumbs.

Double rifles represent the mechanical romance of African exploration and hunting. Side-by-sides were first adopted by commercial ivory hunters as the quickest two-shots in the business. Big, powerful shots. They

represented more ivory in the bag and a longer life in which to spend it. Reloading a single-shot rifle has gotten more than one old hunter squashed.

After 1898 bolt-action repeaters promised three, sometimes four shots, but they could jam and that bolt took an amazingly long time to run back and forth to cycle four-inch-long cartridges. When large quantities of buffalo-tough hide, bone and muscle come blowing snot and spittle, every eighth-of-an-inch matters.

The big double offers two shots

as fast as you can pull the triggers. In addition, two barrels, locks and triggers mean redundancy. You carry two independently functional rifles on one stock. If the first shot fails, you have a backup. When a bolt-action fails or jams, you're reduced to running and dodging.

As guest instructor and African PH Ivan Carter explained, safari clients don't really need the insurance of a redundant double. They're backed up by their PHs. So they can get by with bolt-actions. But anyone who wants the ultimate African big game experience wants it over a pair of barrels, side-by-side, with big holes in their muzzles. And that requires learning a bunch of new handling and shooting tactics unfamiliar to shooters of scoped, bolt-action rifles.

"Forget all the niceties you've been using with your sub-MOA rifles," FTW instructor Pritchard told us our first morning at the Hill Country ranch. "You're not picking off prairie dogs at five-hundred yards with these." He hoisted a massive Heym .470 Nitro Express. "You're shooting big targets at close range. Gun handling is more important than micro-accuracy."

PH Carter backed up that statement and then joined Pritchard and Heym Public Relations Manager Chris Sells on the range to demonstrate.

"You have a bull bearing down on you, looking like you owe him money and you don't need to cluster five bullets into a one-inch circle inside his brain – you just need to hit any part of the brain," Carter said. "Quickly. Like this."

He then flung up the Heym 88B Professional Hunter double and plunked two Hornady 400-grain DGS bullets into the paper-thin brainpan of a buffalo target. Then Sells took over and replicated the feat, but added a reload and two more brain shots faster than most of us can put four aimed shots down a familiar bolt-action. Then it was our turn to learn.

There truly are new tricks and handling tactics needed to run a double smoothly, everything from where to store backup cartridges for instant access, where to keep the butt for

Hunt Dangerous Game?...
You Won't Want To Miss This!

Stopping Rifle Clinic
April 16-17, 2011 Hosted By 

See us at:
SCI booth #1157
DSC booth #1404

- Personal instruction from dangerous game experts
- What is right for you? Bolt action or double rifle
- Recoil management, sighting systems & bullet placement
- Shoot a variety of guns in helping you choose caliber / bullet selection
- Travel tips for hunting around the world
- Luxury lodging & accommodations
- Customize your trip with wingshooting or spring black bear hunting

Contact Flying B Ranch
1-800-472-1945
www.flyingbranch.com
info@flyingbranch.com

"A wealth of valuable information for planning a safari and becoming more proficient with stopping rifles".
Chris Sells, HEYM USA

photo by: Ron Spooner

Harvey King
 32170 Hwy K 4
 Alta Vista, KS 66834
 785-499-5207

www.harveykingknives.com
kingscustomknives@hotmail.com

maximum leverage while breaking the action, how to tip the barrels to facilitate getting two new rounds into the chambers and much more. All was introduced point-by-point, gradually, as we began learning new muscle skills. We even learned how to stop, turn and stand to maximize control of heavy recoil.

All this took many more shots than most sane individuals wish to endure from a big bore, so most of the rounds we shot were reduced-power specials from Hornady. FTW provides bolt-action rifles in .223 Rem. with express sights for students wishing to train with a bolt rifle. Pritchard started my wife out with a .410 side-by-side shooting slugs. But she eventually graduated to full-house .375 H&H loads and took a few pokes with the .450/400 Nitro Express 3-inch. And was ready for more. As a long-time emergency helicopter nurse and kayaker, she thrives on challenge and adrenaline.

Due to time constraints, we were forced to squeeze the four-day course into two days, but even with this abbreviated training, we were putting our first shot into the 6- to 12-inch heart or brain circles at 30 yards, then the second shot to the same targets as they charged. And then (I wouldn't have believed this possible before taking the class), we were able to reload and put two more rounds into the brain before the targets stopped a few feet in front of us.

What we didn't have time to indulge were lion targets that walked through openings in the brush, leopards that popped onto branches over hanging baits, crocodile and hippo head targets in the water and various plains game targets out to 300 yards.

The FTW SAAM Safari course teaches everything from ballistics and gun function to safety and proper etiquette in a blind so the novice will actually be functional and prepared for a first African safari, which, given the cost of today's hunts, makes this course a wise investment indeed. For details call (830) 234-4366 or visit www.ftwoutfitters.com.

For more information about Heym double guns, call (214) 606-2566 or visit www.heymsusa.com.

CENTER POINT
 HUNTING & OUTDOORS

TAG
 TRAJECTORY
 AIMING GUIDE

**ONE SCOPE
 ONE RETICLE**
 with a WIDE RANGE OF
 BULLET/LOAD COMBINATIONS!

By matching ammunition ballistics to placement of the crosshairs on the reticle, the need for estimation is eliminated. TAG reticles accommodate distances from 100 yards to 600 yards.

centerpointoptics.com