

Jack O'Connor

2013 Newsletter 3rd Quarter

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CHAIRMAN'S REPORT CARD



By MARK YOCHUM, CO-CHAIRMAN

"Build it and they will come."

So it would seem the famous line from the Kevin Costner movie "Field of Dreams" is indeed a truism. The last week of May proved as much at the Jack O'Connor Center as our staff and volunteers joined together to host our first ever JOC week. Our goal was to have a week-long festive event leading up to our anniversary and annual custom rifle raffle drawing.

The week was launched with an evening of movies and popcorn at the museum for the visitors staying in Hells Gate

State Park (our generous landlord) and culminated with a very entertaining jet boat trip into Hells Canyon ramrodded by Captain Butch and the fine folks at River Quest excursions. We are still talking about the BBQ lunch at Garden Creek Ranch.

We advertised the "week" to the general public but sent out RSVP invitations for a private meet-and-greet on the Friday night before the drawing. We had a full house that enjoyed complimentary hors d'ouerves and great wine tasting from Clearwater Cellars Winery as well as cold frothy beers from Riverport Brewery.

Noted outdoor journalist Wayne Van Zwoll was our featured speaker and set the stage for a small but entertaining live auction which did very well as a fund raiser. Our guests were given the opportunity to make donation pledges to the Center and many did. Thanks go out to all who helped and to all who participated through their generosity. Saturday of course was our 2nd annual "Free Gun Show and Shine." It was an opportunity to see some quality fire arms and visit with those who share our passion. Special treats were book signings by Wayne Van Zwoll and John Barsness offering many of their writings inscribed with personal enhancements.

That afternoon we had our drawing. This year we had three prizes, a JOC replicated camp box, Leupold binoculars and, of course, the beautiful Biesen

Custom .375 H&H which was won by Bill Strange of Lewiston (one of our gun show exhibitors).



This year's ticket sales were the second highest ever.

Our visitation for the month of May was the best since the Center opened. We built it and you came. The week-long event revenues will go a long way toward funding our operations and youth

challenge programs in the coming year. As chairman, "Thanks to all of you" for helping to keep Jack's memory and ideals alive.

About the Co-Chair: Mark Yochum is currently the co-chairman of the JOCHHEC. He is a Life member of the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation and Safari Club International, an NRA member and a supporter of Ducks Unlimited and The National Wild Turkey Federation. He is a United States Army veteran, lives in Lewiston, Idaho and works as a Real Estate Broker.

From the Director's Chair



By MIKE BUTLER, DIRECTOR

"Jack O'Connor Days"

Just to briefly reiterate Mark Yochum's comments from above, the week of May 25th through June 1st was designated "Jack O'Connor Days" here at the Jack O'Connor Center and Hells Gate State Park, in Lewiston, Idaho. The week-long event culminated with a small

gathering of Jack O'Connor enthusiasts for an evening social function with Wayne van Zwoll, well-known outdoor writer and lecturer, as guest speaker followed by silent and live auctions and a pitch for new members and support. I gotta tell ya, I was blown over by the amount of support and enthusiasm that was shown at our first event.

The following day we had a gun show and shine and as a wrap-up, we raffled off our 1st in a series of 3 rifles; a Roger Biesen, African Series, 375 H&H magnum in a Winchester pre-64 Model 70 barreled action, stocked in beautifully grained French walnut and artistically engraved by Paula Biesen-Malicki. The number of tickets sold this year well exceeded previous year's offerings.

Interest in what is happening with the Jack O'Connor Hunting Heritage and Education Center is visibly increasing. With that said, none of this would be possible without our members taking an active interest in our programs. I now challenge you to become an even more active participant and engage our forum users on our website and share your wealth of hunting, firearms and shooting information each of us have condensed into our noggins. All of us are walking encyclopedias when it comes to this stuff but it is not doing anyone else any good by hoarding it up and not sharing.

A forum area is a great place to brain dump information and then encourage our younger shooter- hunter types to engage one another in the forum areas.

From what I can see, younger shooters readily engage forum areas for information, and love to share good ideas or thoughts. They take to it like ducks to water. We older types might be somewhat intimidated by it but none of this is rocket science. So....make it a mind set to share your years of outdoor knowledge with the next generation....and by the way.... show the website and forum area to some hunting/shooting friends, young and old, to get them engaged in the discussions. The website location is: www.jack-oconnor.org The forum area and newsletters are located within.

Good Hunting.....

MB

About the Director: Mike Butler started his wildlife career in 1975 with the Missouri Department of Conservation. Mike recently completed a 30 year stint with the Federal Government as a wildlife biologist, mainly focused on wildlife habitat restoration. He is an Endowment member of the NRA, a Life member of the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, a supporter of Ducks Unlimited and The National Wild Turkey Federation and is also an NRA certified Range Officer. He is an avid turkey and elk hunter, and enjoys Alaska salmon fishing at least once a year.

Tech Corner



“Thoughts on Optics”

By ALLAN JONES

Volunteer Host, Jack O'Connor Hunting Heritage and Education Center

I recently had cataract surgery and now have 20/20 vision for the first time in my life. I can once again use both tubes of my binoculars and look through a riflescope without seeing six sets of crosshairs! This made me reflect on how our optics use has evolved. It also helped me recall how Jack O'Connor's practicality helped me learn how to use them.

Before I start, I'll share an O'Connor story that started with optics. While I was supervising the Tech Support section of CCI-Speer, a caller asked me if I'd met Jack O'Connor. I replied that, sadly, I did not arrive in Lewiston until nine years after his passing.

The caller said he had talked to Jack on the phone years before. He saw Jack's review of first-generation compact

binoculars and liked Jack's recommendation of a European model. He had money to buy the expensive binocs, but could not find any in the US. After calling dealers, distributors and importers from California to Maine, he finally got Jack's phone number and called Lewiston—Jack picked up the phone.

The man related his story, asking Jack if he knew how to lay hands on a pair of those binoculars. Jack mentioned a distributor and an importer that the man had already called without success. Jack suggested that he probably had a pre-production model and our caller would have to wait for production units to arrive in the US.

Then Jack paused. “You know, I ended up with two pair of that model but can't use but one at a time. I'll send you the spare pair. If you like them, mail me a check. I'll put a note in the box with the price and my address.”

The caller was dazed but accepted the offer and, sure enough, a week later he got a heavy box from Lewiston. He said he opened the box, got out the note and wrote a check first thing. And he still had the binocs and note when I talked to him in the early 1990s. He'd never met Jack before the call and, years later, was still impressed with Jack's generosity and trust.

I think Jack would be pleased with the selection of quality compact binoculars we have today. Only three decades ago I was using a pair of binocs almost as big as my Dad's Navy-surplus Zeiss 7x50s from WW2. Today I use a pair of Weaver 8x42 compacts with long eye relief. Now that my eyes are good, I'll

consider an even smaller format; the long eye relief is not so important now that I don't have to wear glasses.

Binoculars are indispensable tools for any rifle hunting. Glassing the countryside is much easier with binocs and much safer than the highly questionable practice of using a riflescope as a spotting scope. Binocs afford you a sense of the third dimension, making it easier to pick out landmarks and their position relative to your target. That lets you find the critter faster when you pick up the rifle.

Although binoculars are simple, take time to get familiar with a new pair before the hunt. Determine what focus settings work for you. If your binocs have adjustable eyepieces and you need to set one eye differently from the other, consider marking that eyepiece position with a witness mark of light-colored paint so you can quickly tell if the settings have moved. You should be familiar enough that you do not have to look down to see where the controls are hiding. That could cause you losing track of the animal you want to glass.

Figure out how you want to carry the binocs beforehand. The harness systems that put the binocs on your chest are very convenient. Select one that doesn't interfere with your shooting style, and make certain security and convenience don't cause a noise problem.

A friend had a homemade rig that held the binocs to a chest pad with Velcro; he used it for exactly one hunt. He was eyeballing a conference of about a dozen whitetail including three nice bucks when he pulled up the binocs.

That familiar "zzziiipp" sound of Velcro letting go seemed to go on for days! When he got the 8x42s to his eyes, all he saw were the north ends of a bunch of south-bound deer getting smaller by the second.

When Jack's time here ended in 1978, variable-power riflescopes were still on the teething ring. I think Jack would have found fault with most. There were two problems with early variable riflescopes:

- They could not be zoomed without the reticle getting larger. At 9-power, the vertical crosshair could be wider than a prairie dog.
- Point-of impact (POI) could change with the zoom setting.

The first issue would require a huge change in technology that had yet to be developed. Without the benefit of future technology, the only variable that handled the reticle size problem was the respected Bausch & Lomb BalVar 8, a 2.5-8X zoom range model.

B&L cleverly adopted a reticle pattern previously unseen. It consisted of four narrow black wedges, wider at the edge but tapering to a very fine point in the center. The reticle still grew as you zoomed, but the tapering made it almost imperceptible and its thin points allowed you to see small targets at high power.

Later, improved understanding of the problem led to moving the reticle to the erector tube. Laser-cut metal reticle inserts that could not be made by traditional means also allowed thinner and more complex reticle patterns.

The second problem, POI changing with zooming, could only be cured by better manufacturing tolerances and improved internal support systems. Unfortunately you may still find this today in some bargain-bin variable scopes. It's easy to detect at the range—here's how.

Using the example of a 3-9X variable scope, mount the scope normally and select a load that has proved accurate in your rifle. At a steady shooting bench (a 200-300 yard shooting distance will work better than 100 for this test) set the scope on 3-power and shoot a three-to five-shot group. Now zoom to 5-power and repeat on the same target. Then do the same at 7X and 9X.

If the zoom is good, all the shots should still look like a group. If the scope is deficient in this department, the groups

will trail away along a curve, sometimes called "comet-tailing."

40 years ago I would have never considered a variable-power rifle scope. Today, that's my "go to" design. I also think Jack would find the higher-grade variables we have today to his liking. We've come a long way!

About the Author: Allan Jones had a 16-year career as a forensic firearms examiner before moving to Lewiston ID and taking over the roles of data developer and technical editor for Speer Bullets. He produced Speer Reloading Manuals 12, 13, and 14. He retired in 2007 and now volunteers at the Jack O'Connor Center and writes a monthly ballistics column for Shooting Times magazine.

Growing Up O'Connor



“Generous Jack”

By CAROLINE O'CONNOR

My father grew up poor. His mother, divorced and mostly snubbed by her prosperous family for having married an irresponsible Irishman, made do as well as she could. There was no welfare in those days. She had to divorce her husband because he left her with two small children, and in those days, incredibly, women couldn't teach if they

were married. She was studying to get a certificate to teach, so that she could make an adequate living. In any case, she struggled and managed to feed the three of them.

They had a cow named Bossy for their milk, and among other ways to make a little money, my grandmother took in washing. She also made tamales, which my father pulled around in a little wagon over the boardwalks of Tempe to sell. They were apparently delicious, as my dad had little trouble selling them to the rough fellows hanging out in the saloons. The preparation of these tamales was tedious and time-consuming, and the Mexican spices filling the house with wonderful odors drove my father nearly mad because he was always hungry and they were not for his consumption.

My grandmother had a half tent constructed for them to live in until she could afford to build a real house on the property she owned near her parents' house. It had a wood floor and half walls and a canvas covering. It must have been chilly in the winter and raging hot in the Arizona summers. I hope you all understand how creative this homely pioneer woman was, to have raised two intelligent children with wonderful values, with so few resources or complaints but such courage. Do they make such people anymore?

You must read about all of this time in his life in his autobiography, "Horse and Buggy West" to learn the rest of it: the recipe for the tamales, the tent, and

Bossy, the nymphomaniac cow, tipping over outdoor toilets on Halloween, pasting pubic hair on the female statue in the library, etc.

Anyway, my point is that such adversity made Jack O'Connor, not stingy or clever with money, but generous to an extreme. He loved and admired his mother for all her life but was embarrassed by her unattractive thrift.

He had some exposure to Phoenix rich kids because he was charming, self-confident, had an innate sense of classy clothing, and was a good tennis player.

He longed to have the ease and apparent beauty of their lives, and that made him the expansive, check-grabbing person I adored.

When I was growing up in Tucson during The War there was little money on a professor's salary, yet we lived well. My mother was a wonderful cook.

She and my dad hunted deer in Arizona and Mexico and were often able to bring back meat. My brothers went out in the desert around Tucson and brought back quail and jack rabbits. Our table always was loaded with delicious food, often game. We went out weekly to El Charro, a Mexican restaurant which is still well-known and loved in the Tucson area, and I think still owned by the same family after all these years. It was a splurge. I still remember the black velvet paintings of Senoritas swooning in the saddles of handsome vaqueros and the used Black Jack chewing gum planted on the underside of a table, which I once plucked and popped into

my mouth to my mother's horror; we were not permitted chewing gum at any time as she thought it was coarse and thuggish. I thought it was a real treat.

By the time we moved to Idaho, our fortunes had blossomed. My dad was writing full-time for Outdoor Life Magazine, he was writing one book after another, and the money was rolling in.

We were living in the house of his dreams: a colonial-style house on Prospect Avenue. He was terribly proud of this house and thought it very handsome, though, in fact, it was very modest by today's standards. They lived in it for the rest of their lives. It still stands at 725 Prospect Avenue, looking much as it did when they bought it in 1948. Drive past it and give it a look.

So: the evolution of Jack O'Connor's generosity of spirit. He wrote weekly to his mother, even long after she was so demented that she probably couldn't understand; he helped her financially; he paid for her rare but precious plane trips to Lewiston; he paid for a visit to Lewiston by my mother's sister after her husband's death. He was unstintingly generous to his children, even long after they were independent adults. He loved doing it. He called his adult

children several times a week. He wrote them letters of great love and concern when things weren't going right. During high school when we went out to dinner it would take just one Jack Daniels old fashioned for him to play the "president game." He'd ask my sister and me, "Who's on a five dollar bill?" Who's on a twenty? Who's on a fifty? Only one time did he ask, "Who's on a hundred dollar bill?" I won. Benjamin Franklin. I can't believe he did that. At expensive restaurants his big paw would swoop down and snatch the check from the offering hands of wealthy friends. I know it gave him great pleasure to be able to do it, and I still love him for it.

He was a man of enormous capacity to love and give. I love and miss him still.

About the Author: Caroline O'Connor McCullam, Jack O'Connor's youngest child, lives on Mercer Island, Washington, and works in Seattle as a registered nurse. She has 3 sons, all of whom live in the area, and 8 grandchildren. Her hobbies are traveling, doing watercolors (badly), learning languages, cooking, music, and reading good stuff.

Guest Writers

“Gift of God wapiti”

By ALEX SHARIF

Gift of God wapiti



I will never forget the first time I saw a bull elk, albeit it was a Red Stag, the brethren of our North American elk, populating parts of Europe and Asia. There were in a group of seven, all feeding in a small patch of flat pasture high in the densely covered Elburz mountains of Northern Persia where I was born. It was early October, 1971 to be exact, and we could hear their roar from where we were standing (with my late dad and uncle) across the canyon, oh some 2 miles away. That roar which echoed across the canyon resembling that of a Simba is etched in my memory forever.

Since my exodus from the US to Calgary Alberta; temporarily in 1993 and then permanently in 2002, I have hunted for Elk pretty much every year. There is

something magical about pursuing this magnificent member of the bovid family that once inhabited the plains of the North American continent and has since been pushed to the foothills and the mountains. No wonder every fall sportsmen in the West become sleepless in early September, hoping to bring home an Elk during the bow or the rifle season.

This year by the time Elk season arrived in my back forty, I had already had a terrific season; harvesting a fine Pronghorn buck in Alberta's prairie country and a superb old Billy Goat in the southeastern mountains of British Columbia. The count of the latter is slated to appear in the 2013 summer issue of Wild Sheep. A glimpse of the Pronghorn story was briefly mentioned in the fall 2012 issue of this newsletter.

Now to my elk story:

It was a snowy cold day on Oct 25th, the opening day of the general Elk season when my pal Hank & I drove to a new spot to try our chances. This was to be a small stop on our day's agenda to check this new area before we headed to our usual spot. It was only a half section of land nested amongst rolling hills and was heavily forested. We figured it would take us no more than an hour to walk in, glass and scope the area before we head down to our usual spot.



We loaded our X2 packs and rifle at hand, started climbing to vantage points. Cautiously, we would stop frequently to peak at the small openings in between the Poplar clumps and the tall Spruce trees which were now decorated with fresh snow. The whole landscape had a magical feeling to it with large October snowflakes floating in front of us like Swan feathers in every direction.

Our glassing yielded a couple of white tails feeding on what they could paw away in the side slopes. We saw no tracks of elk or anything else for that matter. We then poked thru the trees and came up to a knoll from which we could see the end of the property where we had permission to hunt. There were higher hills in front of us with patches of forest. This was a good place to park our packs, lay down and scope out the landscape around us. Since the wind was in our face, we would not be sending our scents towards anything coming our way. We also figured since it was the season opener, we should just sit tight at the saddle where we were and see if any elk is pushed out of the bush by other hunters. I find this strategy very effective when nothing is moving; sit tight, have a snack and just wait.

It was cold as we moved our binocs from side to side. Some 300 yards out, I noticed a Coyote coming my way, itching to get dispatched. Although they do major damage to our dwindling native upland population, I opted not to break the silence and let him see another sunrise.



After about a 30 minute wait, we noticed a few heads of elk with at least one bull amongst them bolt out of the trees at skyline. They were over a mile away and were barreling down the hill thru the poplar patches. My hunch was that they would come further down, then jump the fence to their south and disappear. I immediately engineered a plan to close the distance and intercept them before they jump the fence and asked my buddy Hank to put it in high gear. As we were meandering thru the tall Spruces that resembled a Christmas postcard, we moved towards them, closing the distance but could not see them. Up over a knoll and down the next, all of a sudden, something in my side vision caught my attention. I immediately dropped to my knees, so did my pal Hank who was right behind me. It appeared to be a brown tree stump, but somehow, didn't belong to the landscape. I decided to look at it thru my lenses and golly, it was a huge bull elk

that was clearly worn out by the pressures of the rut and was just laying down.

I slowly and deliberately worked the bolt of my custom 300WSM (Nick named "El Gordo") that was armed with some spiced up (3,400 fps) 168 TTSX hand loads and tried to get a round in the chamber. Murphy just joined the scene and I could not get a live round in the chamber. The bull which was partially blocked by the poplars and was only 70 yards away sensed something and got up. I then tried to slowly hand feed a single round in the chamber and was still unsuccessful. Just as I was reaching for Hank's 06, I mozied a round in the chamber, slowly raised my rifle and sent a round towards the bull's shoulder. Upon the report, he did not twitch what so ever and just stood there. I opened the bolt, hand fed another round and this time, aimed a bit further back at his lungs. Boom, he just stood there. As I was working the bolt again, he took two steps backward and did the drunken crash on his back. I cannot explain the feeling of the moment. The first thing I did was to give my buddy Hank a big hand shake and with a round in the chamber, approached the bull. He was stone dead and steam was coming out of his mouth.

After the blessing of the trophy which I always remember to administer after harvesting any game animal and the handful of pictures, we stated skinning and quartering the bull. My pal Hank worked in a butcher shop as a kid and is splendid with a knife. Between the two of us, the bull was skinned, quartered and deboned in the front shoulders in just two hours. We filled our X2 day packs to the brim, each weighing close

to 120 lbs and started the 2 mile walk back to the truck. The snow was knee deep and the load was cumbersome, but there was a big joy in my heart. It was the kind of load I would carry all day and still wear a smile on my face.



Upon arrival at the truck, we had some tea and went back for the second installment. This time, we also had to carry the head which made for an awkward walking position as we side stepped the trail. In total, it took us just over 6 hours to get the entire meat/rack back to the truck and we were homebound by 4:00 p.m.



I think by reading the above lines you now realize why I called him "Gift of God Wapiti". To have a herd bull all by himself in a small half section of land, to have him upwind from us with snow

damping our footsteps and to finally not have him bolt away while I fiddled with getting a round in my rifle is nothing but divine intervention in my opinion.

All in all, this was a true classic Canadian elk hunt in winter wonderland and as my pal Rich Machholz at Sierra bullets beautifully put it:



“The only thing that would have made this hunt even more classic is if you had taken him with an 1894 30-30”.

Amen

About the Author: Alexander Sharif is a principal structural engineer by trade working for Fluor Corporation but with great passion for anything to do with the outdoors and everything that involves a projectile. He lives in Calgary, Alberta and enjoys a modest 220 plus days in the great Canadian outdoors, hiking, biking, xc/bc skiing, fishing, shooting and of course hunting big game and upland. He loves sharing his passions with his brethren thru his weekly pictorial slideshows.

“The Ambler Experience”

By JIM COX



Every trip afield provides its own tale.

The experience is always different because with each outing there are new events, new faces, new terrain, new game, or simply variations of the familiar which makes each hunt unique in some way.

My caribou hunt near Ambler provided such a plethora of "new" that it is difficult to recount or separate one impression from another. The sights, smells, sounds, people and events are kaleidoscopic in my memory. The village and its people, our host Gardner Gentemenn, the scenery of the arctic tundra, the magnificence of the caribou and the thrill of the hunt - each deserves a story of its own. But, I haven't got time for that here. So, I'll do my best to

tell the story, but in the telling I fear that much of the essence of what I saw, and did, and felt will be lost. I doubt my ability to capture these things and to put them down in such a way that you can relate to them like the vivid memory that for me has become The Ambler Experience.

I take no credit for the planning of this hunt. All was neatly arranged by my friend and neighbor, Jon Henkel. I had no time to prepare and had Jon not been the prime mover, the hunt would not have taken place. Two days after returning from hunting mountain goats, I was off again. This time my destination was the Eskimo village of Ambler. Forty miles north of the arctic circle, Ambler is on the Kobuk River about 100 miles east of Kotzebue. The village numbers about 250 souls, of which all but a dozen or so are natives.

Ambler is a subsistence village with no viable economic base. The people receive income primarily from social and welfare programs administered by state and federal agencies. There are few paying jobs. So, the native population subsist off the land in much the same manner as their forefathers but aided by the products of modern technology: ATVs, snow machines, high powered rifles, etc.

Native art and craft items made in this area, show up for sale in the larger cities where they are eagerly snatched up by tourists. In Ambler, however, tourists are rare with the exception of a handful of hunters who come in the fall to take

caribou. These normally stay at the Kobuk River Lodge which I'll describe in some detail later.

Ambler is not pretty in the manner of Small Town, USA. Neatly trimmed lawns bordered by white picket fences are not to be found there. The few roads are unpaved ATV trails. The clutter of empty fuel cans, broken machinery, and buildings in disrepair give the place an air of neglect. Most dwellings have indoor plumbing, a recent upgrade, and all have locally generated electricity. The two churches are in rundown clapboard buildings. The churches and school are centers of social life in the community. The school is for all grades, kindergarten through high school. It is small, as to be expected, but modern. The gym is kept open in the evenings for everyone to use.

Besides the Kobuk River Lodge which has a small general store and short-order cafe, there are no commercial establishments in the village.

Transportation to Ambler is by puddle-jumper airlines or by riverboat from Kotzebue. Food, clothing, and all other of life's necessities are ordered from Kotzebue and shipped by air to Ambler. The general store is very limited in its stocks and terribly expensive by our standards: a gallon of milk \$7.50; a loaf of bread \$3.00 - when available.

Big orders and bulk fuel are brought up river by barge in the spring when the water is high. It is by this means that

building materials, vehicles, appliances, etc, find their way to Ambler.

It is a fishing village. The people fish to subsist, primarily, although I'm told that some of the catch is sold. How they could transport the catch to Kotzebue and still show a profit escapes me. Regardless, the town is full-up with fish drying racks, each loaded to capacity with many hundreds of salmon and shellfish. These are not smoked, but merely air dried, and the village exudes a distinct odor of fish.

Every house has a basic issue of dogs, probably outnumbering people in Ambler by five to one. At various times throughout the day and night the dogs get stirred up for some unknown reason and raise an awful clamor. Then too, the presence of so many dogs adds its own odor to the place. I suppose that some of the natives still use dogs as work animals, but from the number of snow machines around I doubt that many really do this. I suspect that the dogs are simply part of their lives, culture and tradition, not used much anymore.

Hunting is the main occupation once the fish stop running. When the caribou come through, everyone big enough to carry a rifle can be found strung out along the ATV trail that bisects the migration route. There the natives wait, chatting in small groups and exchanging gossip until a herd is spotted moving toward them. Then, everybody spreads out and crouches behind a bush until the animals are in range. When they

come to within 100 yards, the shooting begins. The legal limit is five caribou per person per day. They don't harvest nearly that many.

Jon and I sat for hours, waiting for the caribou to show. They just weren't moving through our little piece of tundra, or anywhere else since we had an unobstructed view for several miles. We had each taken respectable bulls the day before and were amenable to taking a couple of animals for meat, but hopeful that a real trophy might come our way.

About noon a small band showed up. No big bulls were in the group. We hid and waited for them. Jon wanted to get a caribou with his black powder rifle and wouldn't risk a shot beyond 100 yards. It looked like he might get his chance with this herd, but they passed farther out.

"Jon, you want a meat kill? Here, take my rifle," I said. I watched through the binos while the first shot rang out, focused on the largest bull in the group. The others were out of my field of view. At the shot, the bull startled and ran a few steps, but was not hit. "Shoot again, Jon, you missed," I said.

Again the rifle barked, but the bull remained untouched. I looked at Jon. How could he miss? Maybe the scope got banged up or something. He wore an expression that I mistook as dejection. I said nothing. I was puzzled. I know him to be an excellent

marksman. "Here," Jon said while handing me the rifle, "you shoot one."

So, I put the crosshairs behind the bull's shoulder. Pow! Right in the old boiler room. The bull lunged forward two steps, then dropped. I turned to Jon with a "that's how it's supposed to be done" sort of sneer, then we walked out to where the bull lay. "So, Jon, how the hell could you miss? They were only 130 yards away," I said.



"Waddaya mean miss?" says he.

"You know, MISS. You shot twice and missed. Nothing fell!" Jon stopped amid stride.

"Waddaya mean nothing fell?", he said with a tortured look on his face. We proceeded a few steps farther.

Suddenly, Jon shouts, "Miss my ass! What do you call that," pointing to a very dead caribou, "And that!," he said, pointing to yet another.

I was flabbergasted! There lay two caribou, each with a neat .30 caliber hole right behind its ear. Jon had picked smaller animals while I had focused on

the largest. I never saw them fall. With three caribou down, we had a lot of work to do.

"Yeah, you dumb-ass," he said. "And all the time you're telling me shoot again, shoot again. Hell, I didn't see 'em fall either from the recoil. Couldn't see how I could have missed though."

We travelled to Kotzebue on a twin engine US Army Reserve C-12 military aircraft. Limited to only 30 pounds of baggage apiece, we took little else but our rifles, a spotting scope and pair of binos to share, our backpacks, food, and an extra set of clothing. From Kotzebue we flew commercially via Baker little biddy airlines to Ambler. In Ambler we stayed with Gardner and Shirley Gentemenn at the Kobuk River Lodge and General Store.

Gardner is the brother of Lieutenant Colonel Michor Gentemenn, an acquaintance from Fort Richardson. It was through him that we learned of the fabulous caribou hunting at Ambler and of the lodge owned by his brother. Gardner and Shirley purchased the unfinished lodge in 1980.

Their first few years were touch and go. They literally lived off of the game that Gardner shot while building and improving upon the lodge and living quarters. Long-time residents of Alaska, they really are pioneers of sorts. Gardner pretty much made his living as a hunter and trapper, so did Shirley. Both have taken polar bear and walrus, before the Marine Mammal Protection

Act of 1974. Shirley used to assist in polar bear research, sometimes as the designated shooter in case the critter got hostile when being handled while drugged.

Gardner would rather hunt than most anything else, a woodsman through and through, an enigma in modern times being born about a hundred years too late, and nearly stone deaf, which leads to some interesting conversations carried on at the top of lung power.

They sound more like heated arguments than innocent banter. But, the man is full of life, good humor and quick wit, a pleasure to be around once accustomed to vocalizing yourself at mega-amplification. Hailing from Missoula, Montana, they left many years ago. It was just too congested and besides, the hunting seasons were too short.

The lodge, general store, burger counter, storage areas, and living quarters are all housed in a single building. The bedrooms and sitting area that is the lodge is merely an extension of the family living area. The living area is separated from the store and cafe by a staircase. The storage area is similarly separated from the store by a staircase leading to the basement. So, when I say that we stayed in the lodge, understand that we really stayed as house guests in the extra bedrooms of the Gentemenn family residence, above their place of business. All very tidy that way.

On the day that we arrived Gardner took us out using ATVs to show us the lay of the land and to advise us where to go to hunt caribou. Since the natives hunt for subsistence, they don't take kindly to outside competition. Gardner advised us to hunt the more remote areas, seven or eight miles from town. To do this, we rented a large Honda three-wheeler at a cost of \$50 per day, which happens to be the same rate to rent one in Anchorage, a very worthwhile investment.

Hunting caribou is unlike any hunting that I've done before. The object is to spot them at great distance, determine their route, and then move laterally to intercept them and set up an ambush. You cannot stalk moving caribou, and since we were hunting them during the migration, the beasts were constantly moving. Caribou move FAST. A band of caribou moving at a leisurely pace across tundra, feeding as they go, move faster than a man can run across the same terrain. This is not an exaggeration. Their legs are like pistons in constant rapid motion. A herd literally sweeps across the tundra. They feed on the move, snatching a bite enroute.

Caribou are herd animals. Their safety is in the collective senses of the herd. They react to danger as a herd. They don't go off by themselves and they don't react as individuals. The composition of a herd is very predictable. In nearly every case a cow was in the lead, followed by other cows,

calves, and young bulls. The largest bulls were almost always in the rear.

When presented with danger the herd does not react immediately. Individual animals may run a few feet, then stop while the herd gathers its collective wits, then they all head out together. If they are confused as to the source of the danger, they don't go far before stopping to reassess the situation. They may mull around for a minute or so before proceeding, and may head out in yet another direction.

This indecisiveness in the face of danger often works to the hunter's advantage by providing the opportunity for a follow-up shot if the first was ineffective. When the animals are really confused, they scurry around doing figure-eights without ever leaving the kill zone. Eventually, they panic and split off into smaller groups.

I do not mean to cast dispersions on the caribou. They are magnificent creatures, wonderfully adapted to survival in one of the world's most inhospitable environments. But, hunting them is not like trying to outsmart a paranoid whitetail. Hunting caribou requires different skills, especially patience.

On our first day of hunting, Jon and I left before dawn, arriving at the hunting area at first light. It was foggy and visibility was limited to less than 100 yards. We sat for hours, hearing nothing, seeing nothing in the chill damp tundra.

Shortly after noon the fog lifted. After a little while we spotted a small herd bedded down about a thousand yards away, uncommon in that they were not moving. We decided to try a stalk across the shallow valley that separated us from the animals. Using what little cover there was, we set out rapidly.

The valley turned out to be a swamp through which a small stream coursed. Through this the going was slow. Three-fourths of the way there, the caribou got up and moved out. I believe that they spotted our movement. While we paused to catch our breath and decide what to do, Jon gets all wide-eyed and points back the way we had come. In the distance our three-wheeler stood out sharply in the now bright sunlight - surrounded by at least a hundred caribou! Following in their tracks perhaps a half mile behind was another herd of fifty or more, and behind them yet another herd was following.

We blasted out of there on a dead run, barely intercepting the tag end of the second herd on its way through. I connected with a respectable bull at about 200 yards, but they were out of range for Jon's smokepole. I gave him my rifle for an unsuccessful attempt at a running shot at about 250.

We learned a lot that morning that it is better to 1.) Let the caribou come to you rather than to try to go to them. 2.) They move too fast to try to catch up with and they follow a pattern. 3.) When you see one herd move through an area, mosey on over there because another herd is

likely to use the same route soon. 4) Caribou pay no attention to stationary objects even if they are completely out of place in the wild (the three-wheeler), but can spot and will react to the slightest movement (the blown stalk). and 5.) Be Patient! If we'd have just stayed-put the critters would have walked over us.

We learned these lessons well. As proof, while I ferried my bull back to the lodge, Jon tagged a nice bull. While Jon transported his bull back, I popped another. We got back after dark that evening with three very nice bulls on the meatpole. All together, we took seven during the course of the hunt and could have taken many times that number. But, to do it we had to play by the rules. Wandering around searching for game and attempting to stalk is not the way to connect with migrating caribou.

Caribou are impressive animals in every way. They are larger than the largest mule deer or whitetail, but not as big as elk. While I'd not advocate the .243/6mm as prime caribou cartridges, I'm sure that they'd do nicely if placed properly. Any of the .30 caliber cartridges commonly used for deer, or similar high powered stuff is certainly adequate.

One thing I did notice and must assume to be characteristic is that if you shoot poorly and wound an animal, expect him to stay with the herd and keep on truckin'. I saw this happen a couple of times in incidents involving the natives, one of which I described earlier. And,

on one of my animals I did a piss-poor job on my first shot, gut shot behind the rib cage. This animal showed no sign of being hit at all. This is important, and points out the absolute necessity to select your target, shoot accurately, and stay with him. Do not assume that because the animal showed no sign of being hit, that you have missed. Shoot again, focusing your attention on the same animal.

The probability is high that you did not miss and you cannot risk the terrible consequences of letting a wounded animal escape. It just ain't kosher despite the native's approach to the same. This is not as easy as it may sound. When you are popping a bull out of a herd that may number a hundred or more, it's easy to get distracted by other animals, losing sight of your bull. After your first shot, your bull may be screened by other animals. Stay on him! Wait until you get an opening. Then, thread your next shot through and paste him in the boiler room. To do less is nothing short of criminal.

If you do your job right on the first shot by putting the slug into the heart-lung area, the critter will go down pronto. As I said, caribou are neat animals. Their racks are way out of proportion to their size - very impressive. Their white manes and chocolate coats are beautiful. Both Jon and I brought back hides to be tanned. We hunted in early September, before the bulls go into rut, and the meat is excellent, some of the finest venison I've ever tasted. Taken

during the rut, however, they can be so rank as to not be fit to eat.

The natives do a curious thing that adds immensely to the olfactory assault one experiences in the village. They bring in the heads of their caribou and leave them scattered about their houses where they rot and stink. Some houses have a fence of caribou heads and horns all around like a hedge. Some roofs are covered up with caribou racks, skulls attached, these, being constructed of this year's harvest and the harvests of many previous years. To say that the village is a big bone yard would not be inaccurate.

To return to Anchorage via Kotzebue, we were obliged to charter an aircraft which added considerably to our expenses. Then too, we had to ship the meat from Kotzebue by air freight. Altogether, my share of the costs came to about \$850, a tidy sum, but well worth it.

While the village and hunting ethic of its occupants are not pretty, you take it for what it is and enjoy the experience. Things are not always as they first appear. The olfactory assault and boneyard clutter I've described is based on a contemporary upbringing and environment, which makes me a poor commentator on a culture completely foreign to my experience. To me it is

offensive to have dogs howling in the night, caribou heads in the yard, and the place smelling of dried fish and decomposing animal matter. To the Eskimo, these are the sights, sounds, and smells of success and security. Different strokes for different folks, the saying goes.

The caribou are truly wonderful animals; I'm honored to have had the privilege to hunt them. I intend to do so again soon. Next time, however, I'll take greater care in my shooting. We didn't wound any animals and have them escape, but I'd be less than honest if I were to say that I am satisfied with my marksmanship performance. As hunters we have a moral obligation to shoot carefully and accurately. I need more work, because next time I'm going for a really big one, a real wall hanger, and I want to be ready for him. We didn't see any monsters on this trip, but they're out there. A guy just needs a little luck and a whole lot of patience to find them.

About the Author: Jim Cox has hunted extensively in North America and Europe, including caribou, Dall sheep, grizzlies and black bears in Alaska, whitetail deer on the East Coast, deer and pronghorns in Wyoming and chamoix and red deer in Europe. He retired from the Army in 2000 with the rank of colonel. He lives in Lacey, Washington with his wife Peggy.

Classic O'Connor

"Wood for Gunstocks"

By Jack O'Connor - June 1969

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Walnut is the traditional wood for gun and rifle stocks. It is about the right weight to make a gun or rifle balance nicely. Very heavy wood tends to make rifle or shotgun butt-heavy and muzzle-light, and light wood results in....

To read more about "Wood for Gunstocks" please refer to our Jack O'Connor Archives within our website location!!!!

About the Author: Jack O'Connor's first love, besides his family, was the outdoors and writing about hunting,



firearms, and the natural history of big game animals. As the longtime firearms editor for Outdoor Life magazine, O'Connor hunted and collected trophies throughout the world, and introduced millions of readers to hunting and firearms. He is still considered the undisputed dean of outdoor writing and journalism. Please visit our website at www.jack-oconnor.org to learn more about Jack, his family life, career, and conservation legacy.

Miscellany

At the Jack O'Connor Hunting Heritage and Education Center:

- **A copy of Jack O'Connor's .375H& H rifle, currently on display as the 2014 raffle gun of the year, will be raffled off**

to some lucky individual. This rifle, made by Roger and Paula Biesen, is the 2nd of three rifles to be built in the "African" series. The drawing will be held on June 7th, 2014 at the Jack

O'Connor Center. Be sure to come out on that day!

- **The Winchester "Show and Shine" and Jack O'Connor Days event for 2013 was a great success. Outdoor writers Wayne Van Zwoll, John Barsness, Eileen Clarke, and Bradford O'Connor attended, sold copies of their books and did book signings. We had a great turnout at our Friday evening event and folks were generous with their donations. So now the planning begins for 2014.**
- **The Winchester Model 70 Jack O'Connor Tribute Rifles are still on the street and supplies are drying up. If you are lucky enough to own one of these "limited run" rifles be sure to order your gun case from the Center. Please read the accompanying paperwork that came with your rifle for ordering details.**

In our next newsletter:

- **Allan Jones, an O'Connor fan, will discuss one of his favorite topics in the next Tech Corner.**
- **Long Range Shooting will be discussed by some experts. Is it ethical or just a temporary mania?**
- **Plus, another great article from the Jack O'Connor collection.**

