



The bare necessities



How much kit do you actually need to go hunting? Andrew Venables has the answers – even if you might not like them

Running WMS Firearms Training means I have seen, studied and shot with some amazing people. I've also seen just about every new rifle, calibre, scope, binocular, ballistic solution, weather meter, stick, bag, bipod, gadget and widget on the market. But how much kit do you really need and, more to the point, how much can you actually take hunting?

The training days we provide can accommodate lots of kit because we are not hunting our steel targets. We are shooting them, from an endless variety of ranges and positions. They don't walk off, graze or move randomly. If we want to try out lots of kit, we can. If we don't want to walk far we don't have to, and if it all gets too much, there is always the truck or the ATV.

I have seen clients turn up with a scoped hunting rifle in a gun slip, a pair of binoculars and 60 rounds of ammunition. Other clients have arrived with several tactical rifles and scopes in completely stuffed drag bags and a large rucksack full of every helpful shooting solution they have accumulated. Who do you think is more effective in the field?

As your guide or professional hunter whispers "Take him now," your mind needs to be on the job with all

your focus on the sight picture, the animal you are about to shoot and how to do it calmly and well. If you are juggling with any combination of shooting sticks, a bipod, rangefinding binoculars, an anemometer, your iPhone, a set of ballistic charts, the scope zoom, parallax or turret adjustments, we are back to the question: are you hunting, or just shooting?

The moments leading up to the shot are for considering safety, the animal's movements, bullet placement, the range, the wind and prevailing conditions and the effect they will have on the bullet's path. If you are hunting alone, the task is even harder. So what do we really need to make the shot?

If you are stalking deer or hunting game in cover, the precise range and wind are unlikely to need too much consideration as shots are generally less than 130 metres, unless it's so windy you are being physically blown about. If you zero the average mid-calibre rifle to 100 metres, it will only be 3-4cm low at 130 metres. A 16kph side wind will only move your bullet 3-4cm left or right. If your quarry has a 15cm kill zone and your shooting and position are good, things will go well. This is the reason most authorities on stalking in the



Stalking: Kit

UK recommend shots are taken within 130 metres or 150 yards.

The same conditions have a different effect on our shot at 250 metres in open country. When zeroed as above, the bullet will now drop 30cm low and be blown off aim point by 18cm. We are now sorely in need of solutions to both these issues. In my mind, sufficient experience and practice to be able to visualise confidently how to make the shot are far more useful than a pile of kit that you may not have time to use in the heat of the moment. So, what to do? You have four choices:

- 1) Don't take the shot, get closer;
- 2) Aim off, high and to the side to compensate for the range and any wind;
- 3) Use a scope with a proven ballistic drop compensating reticle, allowing measured aim off;
- 4) Set the scope for the prevailing range and wind using a proven ballistic chart or solution, aiming on the kill zone, using your new, temporary zero for range X.

If you choose the first solution, congratulations! You are really hunting and you accept you may not be successful but you will be humane and sporting.

If you choose the second, you are probably winging it and beyond your effective, humane shooting abilities. I

strongly suggest you set the safety catch and seek training before you consider shooting anything with a pulse much over 150 metres.

If you choose the third solution, you have thought about this for a while and have bought one of the scopes offering a shooting solution in the reticle. You need to know if the scope's reticle is in the first or second focal plane. If it is in the first then the values of any mil dots or holdover lines will remain constant throughout the zoom range. You will need to know what ranges these work at for your rifle and ammunition. If the reticle is etched with actual ranges like 200, 300 and 400m, they will typically work for only one calibre, bullet weight and ballistic value.

If the reticle is in the second focal plane, all the values for holdover and windage will alter as you zoom in and out. It will only work for your particular rifle at one zoom setting. If this is, say, 13x and you zoom in to 20x for the shot, you will shoot too low. If you zoom out to 6x you will shoot too high. This feature can be used to adjust the reticle to suit your particular rifle at one particular zoom setting. I will expand on this next month.

If you choose the fourth solution, you have crossed the line from hunting proper to seeking a tactical solution for a problem, which would not exist if you had got closer to your quarry. We live in a strange world

where the marketplace promises theoretical technical solutions with tactical telescopic sights, target turrets, ballistic phone apps, charts, watches and anemometers with built in Horus ballistics and, lately, digital scopes linked to iPads operated by folks some way away. When it goes well, the results can look spectacular as seen on YouTube – but in these videos, are you seeing take one or take 27?

The use of solutions three and four are acceptable if they are proven to work nine times out of ten at the distance required and in the prevailing conditions. But to get there you have to practice. Lots. Conversely, solutions that require masses of additional kit are the most likely to fail when the pressure's on. For instance, you need to know the exact wind speed and direction at the moment you fire, not two minutes earlier – and elevation and windage adjustments can easily be forgotten or misdialled between shots.

The main reason professional hunters smile when a client arrives with a well-worn rifle, a simple scope and the 60 rounds left from the 1,000 they practised with is because simple solutions really are better in the field. There is no substitute for experience and you can't buy skill.■

For more information about WMS Firearms Training, contact Andrew Venables on 01974 831869 or visit www.wmsfirearmstraining.com.■



This is shooting. Hunting lacks benches, gadgets and all the time you need