



# Change your tactics



Returning from a cull hunt in South Africa, Andrew Venables reports on why you shouldn't go hunting with 'tactical rifles and solutions'

If you put phrases like “long range hunting” and “long shot on a...” into Google you will be bombarded with videos of a variety of game animals apparently being instantly and humanely ‘dropped’ at ranges between 500-1,000m and occasionally further.

At WMS Firearms Training we occasionally have clients who want to know if these apparent feats can be replicated on their own hunts with similar tactical kit. As many of you know I have spent a lot of time working on the subject of long range shooting and believe passionately that this should not become long range hunting if our sport is to remain humane, effective, supportable and ultimately lawful.

Putting my own sensitivities on the subject aside, I recently joined a client on a cull hunt at Limpopo Safaris’ fantastic 60,000-hectare wilderness in north-eastern South Africa. The client was keen to use a Steyr SSG 08 rifle in .300WM topped with a Schmidt & Bender PMII 5-25 tactical scope and home loaded ammo. He also carried a range finder and Kestrel applied ballistic

solution. I took a Blaser Professional Success rifle in .300WM with a Leica ERi 3-12x50 scope, Leica HD-B rangefinding binoculars and Hornady .300WM Custom ammo, which is so good it makes hand-loading look like a quaint hobby. I had a pair of Bushnell Fusion 1 Mile ARC rangefinding binoculars, a 511 tactical watch and my own Kestrel Horus. You could say we had the solutions.

The Leica HD-Bs and the Kestrels automatically take the temperature, altitude/atmospheric pressure and incline into account and use the information to correct the ballistics given for the range. The 511 watch and Kestrels, subject to manual and automatic input, will also work out the windage and elevation for a given shot and the incline cosine. Confused? Just wait.

When we walk up our Welsh hills at WMS and start considering the far distant targets and the prevailing conditions life is already difficult. Now let’s think about the cull hunt. The high ground, from which longer range shots would invariably be taken, were jagged, boulder strewn pink granite kopjes without shade or respite from the baking sun – and we were there in winter.

I mentioned my client’s choice of rifle was tactical, the make is not so important as the weight, the balance and the bipod. Finding anything like a decent shooting position on the harsh African ground was a challenge. The fact that the targets were fit and aware large mammals – waterbuck, kudu, wildebeest or impala – which lurk in the shade at odd angles, stand motionless in the wrong position for hours then suddenly and without warning, move off was another. Such animals can jump at a sound, kick at a fly and disappear in a second.



## Training: Rifle

We took the first day to check zeroes and ballistics. This was just as well because, after zero checks, we were both shooting 20cm high at 350m and 35cm high at 500m despite the information available from all our ballistic charts and solutions. Why? I believe it was because the ammunition was generally hotter than the ambient air temperature, as were the rifle barrels. We reset the Kestrels and the 511 watch to account for this by raising the velocity/ballistic coefficient until the solutions matched the actual drops.

I wanted to hunt. Hunting is when you use field craft to get within a reasonable distance (this will vary from person to person) from the quarry and then give it your best shot. But you do need capacity in reserve for when it (and it will at some point) goes wrong. Hunting is sweaty, visceral, exciting and, in my opinion, the real deal. I did hunt a few animals and the rate of success for stalks on impala was about 4:1. That is one shooting opportunity for every four times we stalked. Ranges were 50-200m, shooting was off sticks and the experience was brilliant.

Back to the tactical kit and we spent more hours than I care to dwell on spotting game from kopjes. I insisted the ranges were kept at 400m and under, despite the Steyr, bipod and solutions having theoretical prowess to 800m and beyond. I took the role of backup shooter and was in demand. The combined hardships of sweat in your eyes, mopane flies up your nose, jagged rocks digging



Spotting, waiting and walking. It's what African hunting is really all about

into your ribs and hips, extreme difficulty in finding solid positions, animal movements, hours of waiting and nerves meant that perhaps one in 10 animals spotted within range were engaged. The results were not what my client had imagined.

Heavy tactical rifles, bipods, butt pods, back bags, high magnification scopes, wind metres and mathematics are as much help on an African hunt as a bicycle is to a migrating salmon. Planning to take long shots in lieu of hunting is neither hunting nor sport. At best it has a place in the economics of culling when needs must and it is a job. I have culled thousands of large mammals and it is a bloody though necessary business, occasionally involving hunting, but never involving 'sport'.

I took a rifle and scope that were designed for hunting and were fast handling and well balanced. Most sporting rifles of sensible weight are capable of hitting kill-zone sized targets to 400m and further – if you know how. My set up allowed me to hunt and offered the security blanket of making long shots achievable to sort any ensuing



No amount of kit can replace the effect of a well placed shot

problems out, rather than creating problems at the limits of my abilities.

The actual shot is the briefest part of the hunting experience. The kill, if properly achieved, may be the culmination of a long hunt but it is a few seconds out of hours, days or weeks of effort. After all, a rifle barrel does 7.76 seconds' work per 10,000 shots.

Is your sport about travel, field craft, incredible places and getting close to the animals we harvest? Or, is it about trying to be clever, using technical kit and solutions to shoot at extreme range, gambling for bragging rights? You might as well hide in a bunker and call in an air strike. Remember the videos I mentioned at the start? Were they 'Take 1' or 'Take 27'? Did the animal go down, only to limp off while the hero was driving the 1,000m to try to find it? We will never know.

What I do know is my client will be taking a hunting rifle on his next hunt. As for me I will be even more forthright in my absolute separation of target shooting and hunting. ■

For more information about WMS Firearms Training, contact Andrew Venables on 01974 831869 or visit [www.wmsfirearmstraining.com](http://www.wmsfirearmstraining.com).



Don't be 'tempted by tactical'. Stick to sensible stalking kit and you'll be rewarded