

THIS MONTH: A rifle shooter's wish list

# ALL I WANT FOR CHRISTMAS

Andrew drops some heavy hints (are you reading carefully, Helena?) in this hunting-themed Christmas wish list; it makes an amusing change from the usual woolly socks and sweaters!



PICTURES: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

**T**he festive season beckons. While I studiously avoid any practical Christmas preparations until mid

December the old grey matter started whirring when someone recently asked me, "What do you want for Christmas?"

I started to realise that life, after several hiccups and setbacks, was in good order when WMS clients began to say, "I can't believe you actually get paid for doing this," or "I wish this was my office..." as they look out into the 10,000-odd acres we have the privilege of calling our shooting area. We live and work in a safe, friendly, green oasis in Mid Wales, far from the madding crowd. So do I need more? Let's see.

My first wish on the Christmas list is for more time. Time to actually finish the long list of things to do around our home and garden is a priority, time to get in more fishing and sailing, time to explore the Elan Valley's roads and tracks, and time to take up the kind invitations I receive to stalk and hunt around the UK and further afield. Time, I realise, is a »

"I'D LIKE TO SPEND TIME IN WILD PLACES, SHARING IN THE SORT OF HUNTING THAT PUTS FOOD ON THE TABLE"

« present only I can give to myself. The problem with being self-employed is that my boss is rather demanding!

Next, and unsurprisingly, I would like a rifle; well, three actually. Now, this is where many people will splutter and cough out the words: "Don't you have enough already?!" Well, yes, but sometimes I need something else, a foil to my usual kit that makes me work and think harder. Mostly, I use modern rifles with moderators, telescopic sights and all the mod cons. Those who know me will know I have a fondness for an old WJ Jeffery 6.5x54, and it was this particular rifle that got me thinking about historical military rifles.

The thinking led to a growing urge to own something different that would offer an insight into the past. So, the three rifles I have on my Christmas list are:

■ An Enfield No 4 in .303 with battle and flip-up ladder sights and the addition of a pig-sticker Second World War bayonet. I started my full-bore shooting career with this rifle and want to revisit the skills and technique I honed as a 15-year-old cadet.

■ A Mauser K98 in 8x57 JS. Why? Well, this is the alter ego of the Enfield. It was the rifle that owners of Enfields looked down the barrel of. Which would I prefer to have carried,

should I have needed to defend my country and way of life? I want to find out and report back in 2017.

■ A Mosin Nagent in 7.62x54 R, which is the longest-serving military rifle in history. Commissioned in 1882, they were still being used in the 1990s in conflicts around the world. Blériot flew the first plane, the X1, across the channel in 1909; just imagine if his plane was still being used commercially and militarily in 1990! I intend to add the Russian battle rifle to the experiment for further balance – and also because I just want one!

Interestingly, these three rifles all offer the benefits of being inexpensive, using cheap ammunition, being simple and reliable, and offering a shooting challenge – as well as possessing that taste of history and historical context.

The challenge of shooting well with plain and simple rifles, such as these, is a great aid to general shooting ability. Open sights, the lack of bipods and the need to really focus on technique, position, sight picture and release are all aids to improvement. It works. I write this after spending a day with clients who were shooting open-sighted rifles successfully at 200, 300 and 500m;

Härkila's Coldfront shirt is made from a merino wool blend.



ABOVE: A merino base layer provides warmth even when wet and dries quickly

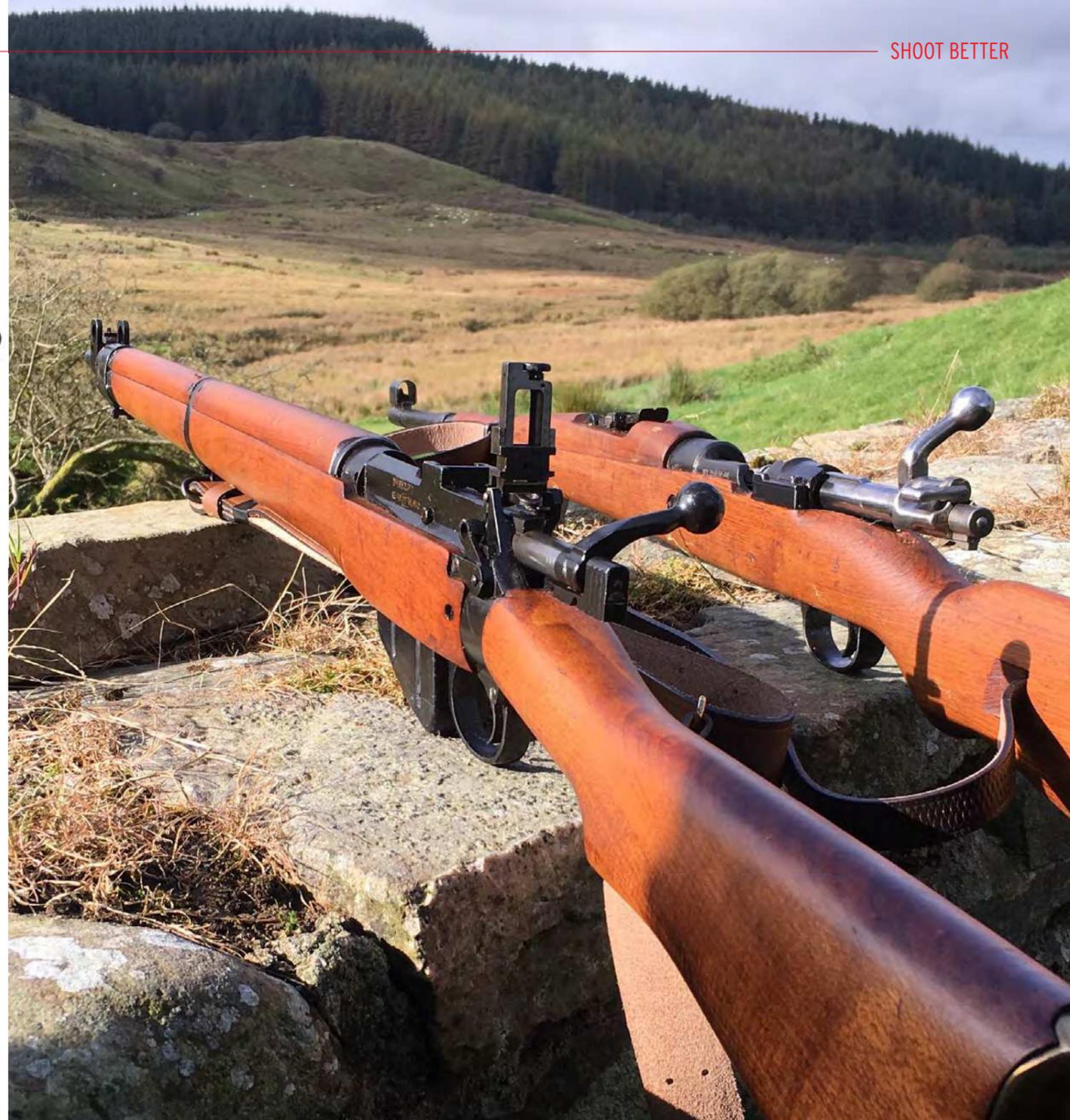
BELOW: Andrew hopes he has time for a spot of wild boar hunting next year

successful being defined by first round hits in 25cm and then 50cm discs at the respective distances.

Aside from time and some historical rifles, what else do I need, or want? Well, I love to hunt ethically, and also love to dine on the fruits of my labours. In 2017, I'd like to spend time in wild places absorbing the scenery and culture and sharing in the sort of hunting that puts food on the table, and perhaps also helps protect



PICTURE: HANS BULLER / HÄRKILA (ABOVE) / ANDREW VENABLES (OPPOSITE PAGE)



“THE CHALLENGE OF SHOOTING WELL WITH SIMPLE RIFLES IS A GREAT AID TO GENERAL SHOOTING ABILITY”

« indigenous species from feral threats. Destinations such as Australia's North Western territories, New Zealand's Fiordland and, closer to home, anywhere with muntjac, wild boar and grey squirrels appeals to me. I'll have to find time and the money for the first two. The local option is available as and when I make the time, and will be my first choice in the aftermath of Christmas. In the interim I'll be putting some trail cams and salt blocks out on our shooting area to further investigate wildlife locally.

Switching subject a bit, how many knives do you have? I have about five fixed-blade or sheath knives of note, and perhaps six folding or pocketknives, including the supremely cost-effective Opinel (funny how you never lose a cheap knife, only an expensive one!). Then I have three Swiss army knives and a 'too frightened to take out of the house' Japanese Hatori. Oh, and the Frost knives I generally use when stalking. So I obviously don't need another knife, right? Wrong. I've always hankered after a Cold Steel Trail Master, the one with San Mai steel

**RIGHT: While Andrew saves up for some hunting trips abroad he'll be keeping an eye on the local wildlife**



PICTURES: REBECCA GREEN / GOLD STEEL (BELOW)

## "I'LL BE PUTTING SOME TRAIL CAMS AND SALT BLOCKS OUT TO FURTHER INVESTIGATE WILDLIFE LOCALLY"

made by Japanese blade masters. Why? Well, life is about superlatives, and this is one amazing blade. Do I need one? Probably not. But I've always wanted one and while another Christmas will likely pass without one, it is still on the list, and maybe this time someone will take the hint. Moreover, I'm a bloke, and this is a bloke thing that extends to bigger blades too. Last birthday my daughters asked me what I wanted, and I replied: "A good-quality axe and a machete please." I received both; thanks girls, much better than Marks and Spencer's vouchers or socks.

Breaking away from the whimsical and heading straight for the practical, I certainly need some more merino wool base layers this winter. If you haven't discovered this miracle product you're missing out. Living 1,000 feet up a Welsh hill and working even further up, layers of clothing are the thing, and there is nothing to beat a thin layer or two of merino wool next to your skin. Forget

cotton and polywhatsitsname man-made stuff, and use this incredible natural and breathable insulator. You stay warm, it works even when wet, dries rapidly, wicks away perspiration, and seems to refuse to smell unwholesome even after days of active wear. Don't bother with blends; get 100% merino, and never look back.

Time, hunting, guns, knives and underwear are all on the Christmas list. Hopefully, I'm successfully avoiding the age-related slide into over-wrapped socks, slippers, vouchers for retailers who don't exist in our part of Wales, and ridiculous seasonal woolly jumpers. The odd bottle of malt whisky or port is of course welcome, notably to quaff with friends while reliving a hunting

or fishing trip, or planning the next one. On that note, cheers, and I wish you all a very happy Christmas and a healthy and spiritually prosperous New Year. Thank you for your support and I look forward to sharing 2017 with you through these pages. **RS**

**RIGHT: A much-coveted object in the Venables household**



Visit [www.coldsteel-uk.com](http://www.coldsteel-uk.com)