

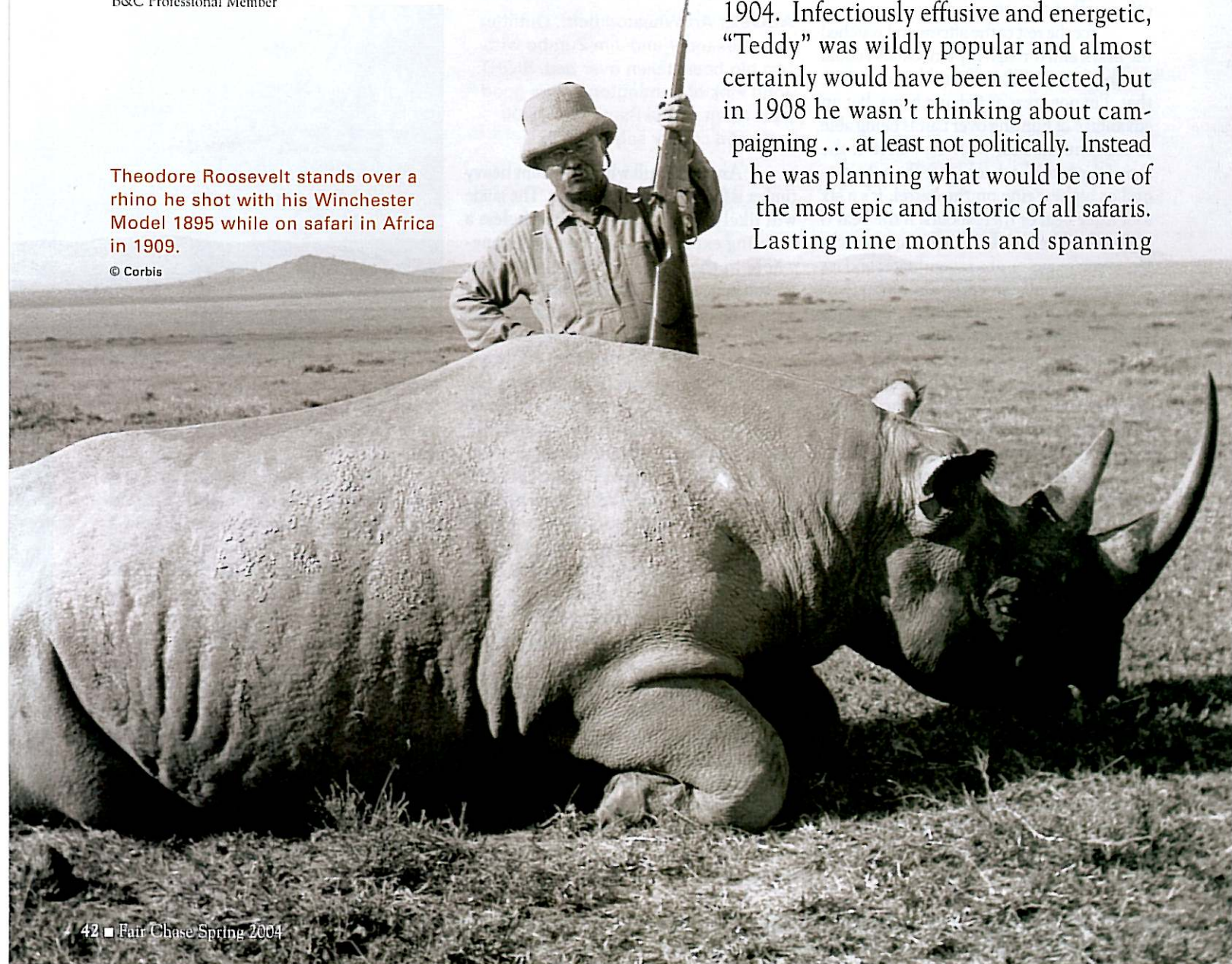
# The Winchester '95 Theodore Roosevelt's "Lion Medicine"

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Theodore Roosevelt stands over a rhino he shot with his Winchester Model 1895 while on safari in Africa in 1909.

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1908 was an election year. As Vice President, Theodore Roosevelt took office when President McKinley was assassinated in 1901, then was elected in 1904. Infectiously effusive and energetic, "Teddy" was wildly popular and almost certainly would have been reelected, but in 1908 he wasn't thinking about campaigning . . . at least not politically. Instead he was planning what would be one of the most epic and historic of all safaris. Lasting nine months and spanning



from 1909 into 1910, Theodore Roosevelt and his son, Kermit, roamed by rail and foot across thousands of miles of Africa, hunting their way across Kenya, on up through Sudan, eventually by boat down the Nile to Egypt.

The age of exploration in Africa wasn't quite over by 1909, nor had all the tribes yet submitted to European will. Even so, the Roosevelt safari, embarked upon partly for sport and partly for science, is considered the first modern safari. It is unlikely that any of the thousands of sportsmen and naturalists who have followed the Roosevelt party in the last 95 years have matched their safari in scale, but the Roosevelts established safari traditions that still persist in some corners of Africa.

By today's standards the shooting they did was prodigious, if not profligate! Arriving by steamer in Mombassa, Kenya Colony, the Roosevelts' kit included thousands of rounds of ammunition but relatively few rifles, all chosen with care. The three rifles that comprised Theodore's primary battery have all become an important part of history. Which is the most famous perhaps depends upon your personal interests. In planning the safari, Roosevelt consulted with Frederick Courtenay Selous, almost certainly the greatest African hunter of all time. On the eve of the safari Selous and a group of fellow Englishmen presented Roosevelt with a Holland & Holland Royal double in .500/.450 Nitro Express, almost certainly the most famous of all double rifles and certainly the most valuable (demonstrated by the price it has commanded when sold).

The "light rifle" was a 1903 Springfield in .30-06. The Springfield would remain America's service rifle until the middle of World War II, and clear into the 1960s was perhaps the most common sporting rifle action in America. The .30-06 cartridge became, and still remains, the most popular hunting cartridge in North America. But in 1909 both rifle and cartridge were relatively untried, and it's quite likely that it took Presidential pull to shake loose the rifles used on the safari.

And then there was Roosevelt's "lion medicine," a Winchester Model '95 in .405 Winchester. Roosevelt admired his Holland and Holland very much, but he didn't care for its recoil and used it very sparingly. Both the Springfield and the '95, however, saw use almost daily—the former primarily for the wide range of antelope; the latter not only for lion, but also for buffalo and rhino. All three rifles became part of the Roosevelt legend, but certainly none more so than the Model 1895 in .405

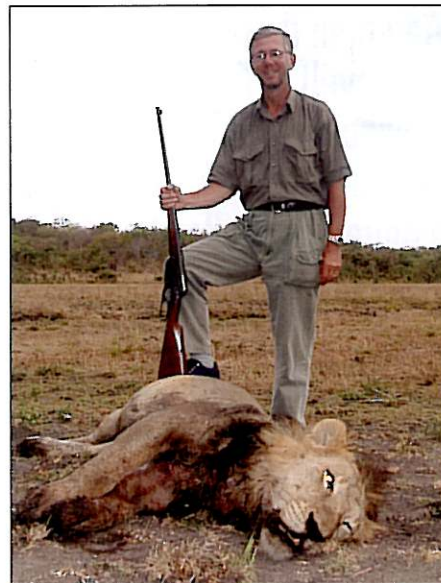
Winchester. As Roosevelt wrote "... the Winchester .405 is, at least for me personally, the 'medicine gun'..."

The Winchester Model 1895 was first marketed in 1896, with production ceasing in the mid-1930s, at the height of the Depression. During its time the lever action was the most popular rifle action in America, with the vast majority of that popularity falling to tubular-magazine lever actions from Winchester and Marlin. The '95 was different. It was not only longer and stronger and able to house more powerful cartridges than its lever action peers; it also had a box magazine under the bolt. Since tubular magazines carry cartridges with the bullet of one pressed against the primer of the one in front of it, extremely blunt-nosed (if not flat-nosed) bullets are required to prevent possible detonation under recoil. The box magazine of the Model 95 enabled it to use more aerodynamic spitzer bullets that were just coming into vogue as the nineteenth century turned to the twentieth.

The .405 Winchester cartridge, introduced in 1904, was designed specifically for the Winchester Model 1895. Historically, it was the most powerful cartridge ever housed in a lever action: 300-grain bullet at 2,200 feet per second, yielding 3220 foot-pounds of energy. It stacks up quite well even today. The .450 Marlin exceeds it in muzzle energy, but at 100 yards the old .405 takes the lead in retained energy. Only the Browning BLR in its modern magnum chamberings clearly exceeds the power of the .405 Winchester.

The .405 was actually just one of many chamberings for the '95 Winchester. The complete list includes .38-72 and .40-72, holdovers from the blackpowder era; and .30-40 Krag, .303 British, .30-03 Springfield, .30-06 Springfield, 7.62 Russian, .35 Winchester, and the .405. In truth, its rear-locking action is just barely strong enough to house .30-06 pressures. It was probably at its best with cartridges of slightly lower pressures (which all the rest produce), and most reliable with rimmed cartridges (which all except the .30-06 and its predecessor, the .30-03, are).

Theodore Roosevelt's strong endorsement of the .405 made it legendary, but it was very far from the most popular chambering for the Model 1895. Hoped-for U.S. military sales really never happened, but there were some foreign sales (in 7.62 Russian and .303 British). Some number of police departments also bought '95's, including the Texas Rangers. Their



Theodore Roosevelt had it right: The .405 Winchester was, is, and always will be great lion medicine. Larry Potterfield of Midway Arms used his original '95 in .405 to take this superb lion in Tanzania with a 300-grain Woodleigh bullet.

'95's were chambered to .30-40 Krag, by far the most common chambering.

Considering Roosevelt's use of and praise for the '95 in .405, it isn't the least bit odd that the .405 is the most famous of the '95's, but, in truth relatively few '95's were so chambered, and originals today are very rare birds. Partly this was because its genuine utility was limited. By 1904 the bison and big bears had vanished from most of the western U.S. In those days few sportsmen ventured into the wilderness of Canada and Alaska, and far fewer journeyed to Africa, so the genuine need for a .405 was limited.

Of course, then as today there were a lot of us who enjoy big guns! I have an autobiography of a Texas Ranger. Describing one of the many shootouts along the Rio Grande in the Roaring Twenties, the author tells about an "elephant gun" being used to keep the bad guys' heads down. It was a Winchester '95 in .405, not quite an elephant gun but a whole lot more gun than was needed in a gun fight!

The .405 saw legitimate, if limited, use in Alaska, and in the early years of the 20th Century it was a standard part of the battery of the few Americans who ventured to Africa. On the Roosevelt safari Kermit Roosevelt was armed almost the same as his father: .30-06 Springfield, Winchester '95 in .405, and a big double (his was a Rigby in .450 3-1/4" Nitro Express). A few years later Steward Edward White, a popular

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and prolific writer, relied heavily on a Winchester '95 in .405. So did pioneer filmmakers Martin and Osa Johnson, and the list goes on.

Although relatively powerful the .405 was not perfect. Its standard 300-grain bullet is very light in caliber for its .411-inch diameter, with a fairly low sectional density of .254. Combine this with its round-nosed shape and it sheds velocity fairly quickly. This is not particularly important; nobody ever suggested that the .405 was a long-range cartridge. More significant, however, is that bullets that are light for caliber are limited in penetrating capabilities. This was undoubtedly exacerbated by the simple expanding bullets available back then, drawn copper jackets with exposed lead tips to initiate expansion. Expand they did! Theodore Roosevelt definitely had it right: the .405 Winchester was (and is) ideal for soft-skinned dangerous game like lion, but questionable for thick-skinned dangerous game like buffalo and rhino. Heavier .411 bullets were (and are) available; the .400 Jeffery, a popular double rifle cartridge, used a 400-grain bullet of like diameter. The problem is the .405's 2.583-inch case with its 300-grain bullet maxes out the magazine length of the Model 95.

In addition to the Winchester lever action a number of single shots were so chambered, and once in a while you run across an English double rifle in .405. It was popular enough that the British firm of Kynoch loaded .405 ammunition, and of course with Winchester now offering new 1895's in .405 Hornady has reintroduced factory loads and Ruger now chambers their Number One single shot to .405. In a strong single shot it is possible to load heavier bullets at increased velocities, but all factory loads have always featured 300-grain bullets at about 2,200 fps (Hornady's new load has a bit of bonus at 2,225 fps).

No African hunter can carry a rifle suited for only one type of game. The .405 with its original bullets may have been perfect for lion, but it was used on a tremendous variety of game. Over time the word started to get out that its penetration was inadequate for thick-skinned game. Eventually it became obsolete, surpassed by faster, more versatile cartridges with heavier-for-caliber bullets like the .375 H&H and .416 Rigby. Some old-timers clung to it, of course. One of the last recorded uses of original .405's with original ammo was in 1940. Old Charles Cottar, an Oklahoma lawman turned African professional hunter, clung to his .405. In those days there were plenty of black rhino. It was very easy to get them to charge, so a standard trick to get some exciting film was to locate a rhino, set up the camera, give it a whiff of human scent, and grind away with the camera until the last second. Cottar was fearless and had done this before, but this time he waited a split-second too long to grab his trusty .405. He killed the rhino, but it ran over him and crushed his femoral artery. He was gone in a few seconds.

Today, thanks to much better bullets, the .405 Winchester is actually much more effective than it was back then. The modern 1895 Winchesters are still restricted to the 300-grain bullets, but modern softpoints like Hornady's 300-grain flat-point and Woodleigh's 300-grain Weld-Core bullet will penetrate far better than the original primitive softpoints. It remains great lion medicine and not bad for big bears, and it still isn't ideal for buffalo—but it can handle such game much more effectively with today's better bullets. Just recently my old friend Larry Potterfield used an original '95 in .405 with 300-grain Woodleigh bullets to take both lion and buffalo (with no problems). Many others have duplicated his feat with the new 1895's. So the old classic is back, and I'm sure Theodore Roosevelt is smiling. ■

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Tribute, Pride, Honor, Remembrance, Collectable... all words commonly used to describe a special item associated with someone held in the highest regard. Unquestionably, the name, Theodore Roosevelt, holds a special meaning to a vast number of people around the world. Writer, explorer, sportsman, visionary, activist, public servant, President, and founder... all words used to describe this man of history.

Of his countless accomplishments, none is held in higher regard by the sporting community than his founding of the Boone and Crockett Club, and no one organization has a closer kinship to his legacy. This is why, in its 116-year history, the Boone and Crockett Club is proud to announce the availability of its first-ever commemorative firearm honoring its founder, Theodore Roosevelt.

It is well documented that of all of the sporting arms of his time, the Winchester 1895 was one of Roosevelt's favorites. From the Dark Continent of Africa, to the plains of the Old West, this .405 Winchester helped Roosevelt forge a unique understanding of all things wild – an understanding and commitment that is arguably the reason why we have, and can enjoy wild places and wild things in the country today.

Roosevelt's legacy left us many things. More important to him than what he drew from his scabbard were the practices of ethical, sportsmen-like conduct, the public's stewardship over its wild game resources, and conservation policies backed by science. Each of these core values are depicted in this one-of-a-kind commemorative firearm; fair chase hunting as promulgated by Roosevelt and the Boone and Crockett Club; records keeping to raise the level of public awareness about the excellence of trophies; and wise use without waste of our natural resources.

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