



The Guns of the Boone and Crockett Club

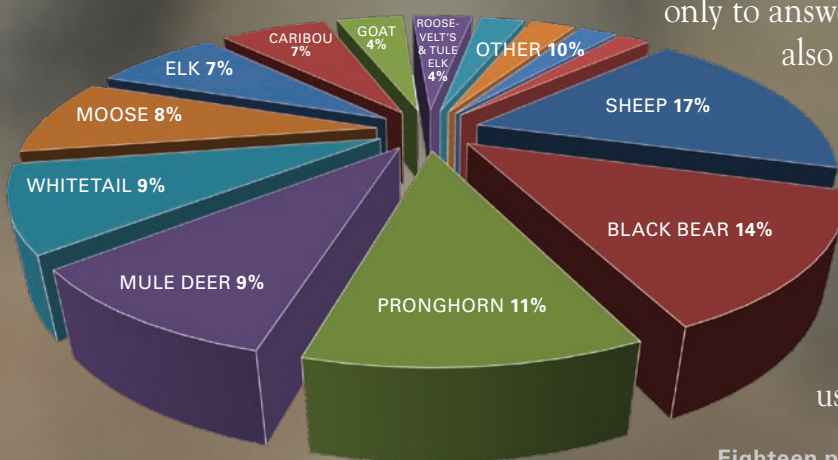
Data from "B&C's" 27th Awards shows some surprises!

Ever wonder what the hunters used who took the highest scoring North American trophies? For more than 80 years now the Boone and Crockett Club has been compiling *Records of North American Big Game*, with the top North American trophies honored at a triennial awards presentation.

**By Craig Boddington with
Keith Balfour and Justin Spring**

2010 is the year for the 27th Big Game Awards Program Banquet, recognizing outstanding trophies accepted between 2007 and 2009. Currently in its 12th Edition, the B&C records book is a treasure trove of information. It serves as the ultimate reference not

only to answer the question, "How big do they get?" but also where they come from, both historically and in recent years. It also contains fantastic historical snippets, with great trophies taken by famous hunters like Theodore Roosevelt and Admiral Peary still listed. Missing from the general database, however, is what rifles, cartridges, shotguns, handguns, bows, and muzzleloaders were used to take those great trophies.



Eighteen percent of the trophies in our dataset were harvested with a .300, making it the top group used by hunters. The categories that make up that 18% are numerous, however the percentage of sheep entries taken with a .300 sits at the top of the list. The chart to the left shows the breakdown of trophies taken with a .300 Magnum.

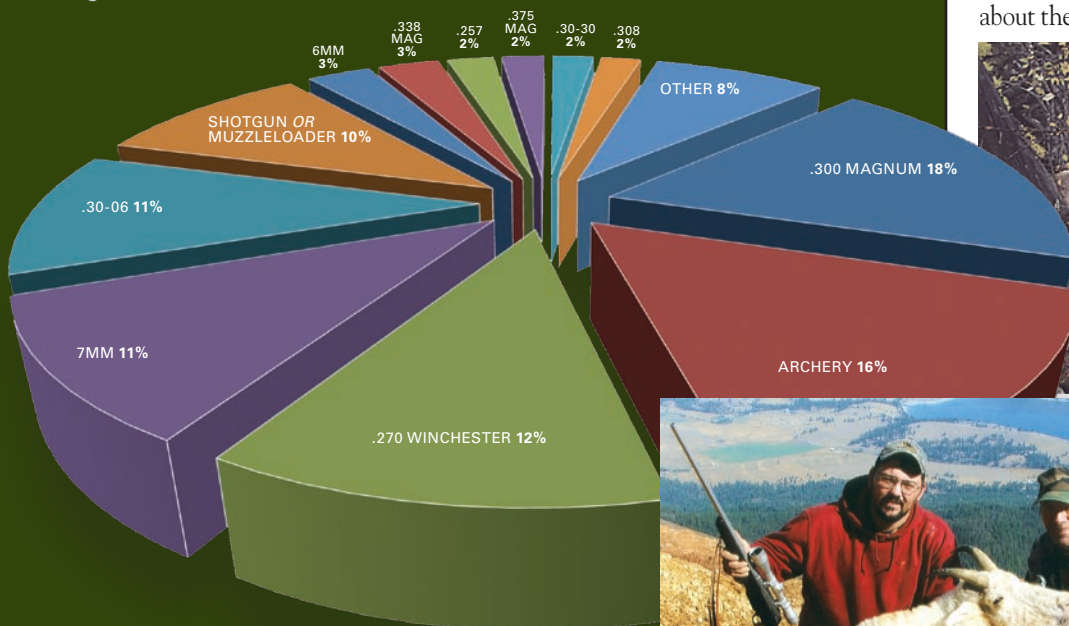
METHOD OF HARVEST BREAKDOWN

We have created 12 categories made up by archery, muzzleloaders, shotguns, and most common calibers. One of the biggest misconceptions about the records book is that we only accept trophies taken by a rifle. While our records are not separated by method of harvest in our publications, we do have separate classifications for internal use.



More entries with method of harvest data were taken with a .300 than any other method (18%). The bighorn sheep pictured above was taken with a .300 Magnum by Jeffery D. Watkins in Granite County, Montana. The ram scores 182-5/8 points. The second most recorded method was archery at 16%. Joel D. Eggers harvested this typical whitetail deer during the 2007 season.

From the past year's entries, we have rounded up 1,204 entries that have sufficient method of harvest data. The chart below shows the breakdown of entries received in the last year that supplied adequate method of harvest data, which is not required for entry and thus is not a complete data set. The "other" category includes calibers such as the .35 Whelen, .280 Remington, and the 7mm-08 Remington. Beginning with the 28th Big Game Awards Period, the categories will be expanded to include nearly 100 calibers and other methods of take.



RIGHT: Just prior to his move from Oregon to Montana, co-author Justin Spring (left) harvested this fantastic Rocky Mountain goat in Wallowa Co., Oregon. He used a Tikka in .300 WSM, a cartridge that is well-represented in the records database.



In some cases we know. The stories of World's Record trophies are well-documented, and we pretty much know what rifles and cartridges Theodore Roosevelt used. Most, unfortunately, are lost to time—but just recently, and going forward, equipment used is now part of the Boone and Crockett Club's records database. The Club's Assistant Director of Big Game Records, Justin Spring, has worked tirelessly to include the "guns and loads of Boone and Crockett trophies" to the database—and you'll find some surprises!

Spring does most of the "grunt work" in compiling the data, so it's only fair to start with his thoughts: "I work with our network of Official Measurers and trophy owners confirming information and processing over 1,600 entries for the records book every year. Being a bit of a caliber nut myself, including this data with trophy entries helps to break up the daily routine of G2s, abnormalities, and eighths or sixteenths. When your desk is covered with files on some of the most outstanding trophies harvested across North America, it is fascinating to see what firearms, or in many cases archery gear, are used today to take such fine trophies. With a few rare exceptions, hunters are using what you would expect, matching caliber to the species and conditions for quick, clean kills." Spring doesn't just sit at his desk. His Rocky Mountain goat, scoring 48-2/8, taken in 2008 in Wallowa County, Oregon, is represented in the data and the 27th Awards. He used a Tikka T3 Lite in .300 Winchester Short Magnum to take this great trophy.

One of the biggest misconceptions about the records book is that we only accept



ABOVE: Co-author Keith Balfour with a fine Montana bighorn, taken in 2004 with his "over the counter" Remington Model 700 in 7mm Remington Magnum. Even though the .300 magnums edged the 7mms, the "fast sevens" remain very popular.

trophies taken with a rifle. While our records are not separated by method of harvest in our publications, we do have separate classifications for internal use. Having played around briefly with our numbers we decided to try to answer the basic question: What calibers are being used to take the biggest trophies? As with most loyal followers of outdoor magazines, you have probably read numerous articles on why you should shoot a prairie dog with the latest howitzer just to make sure that it is taken humanely, or that if you load this much of a certain powder and shoot this size bullet you can take down a buffalo with a .14 Bee as long as it's not raining.

What follows isn't our personal choices of arm for a particular species, though we couldn't resist a comment here or there. It is a breakdown of entries received in the last year that supplied adequate firearm data, which is not required for entry and thus is not a complete data set. From the past year's data, we have rounded up 1,204 entries that have sufficient data, and what follows is a summary that can be extrapolated to give an overall picture of what hunters are using for different categories at this time.

We have broken down different calibers into 12 major categories. The .25 calibers include .257 Roberts, .257 Weatherby Magnum, and .25-06 Remington. Also included are the new .25 Winchester Super Short Magnum and the Savage .250-3000, although within the last 12-18 months, few trophies have been taken by the relatively new super short or the original hot-shooting big game caliber, the .250 Savage. The second category includes the 6mm and .243. From there we move to the .270 Winchester and the .270 Winchester Short Magnum. As a stand-alone big game rifle, this one is quite impressive, though we will get into that a bit later. The .30-30 Winchester, with its historic value to both hunting and the West, deserves its own category. The .308 Winchester and .30-06 Springfield also represent their own category.

Less popular cartridges such as .338-06 A-Square, 7mm-08 Remington, .338-.378 and .30-.378 Weatherby Magnum, and other uncommon or hybrid calibers are all represented in another category. While all these calibers, as well as the Lazzeroni, Ackley Improved's caliber, and others do come across our desk, they will not be separated individually for the purpose of this article. The "7mm Magnum" category includes both the Winchester Magnum and the Weatherby Magnum. The .338 gets its own group and the .375 category also includes the .378 Weatherby Magnum. At this point,

some significant grouping took place in the .300s. They include the Savage, Weatherby Magnum, Winchester Magnum, Winchester Short Magnum, and while it is a stretch, the .300 Remington Ultra Magnum (RUM) is also included. Before you claim foul combining .300 Savage with a .300 RUM, neither of these classifications had more than one or two entries, and they were middle of the road for distance and conditions—whitetail at 200 yards or a mule deer at 300 yards. In our data set, only a couple of moose were taken with a .300 RUM, so we felt it appropriate to include them all together in a .300 category.

For purposes of the database, these are the "equipment categories" we are working with: .30-06, .243/6mm, .300s, .25s, .338, 7mm, .375, .270, .30-30, .308, muzzleloader/shotgun, and archery

The first thing that jumps out while perusing this data is that the .30-06 has lost its crown as the most popular cartridge. While it has taken every species, other cartridges are appearing at the top of the heap. The first aspect worth mentioning is that the total number of entries in the past year has a significant number of bow, shotgun, and muzzleloader entries. The data on these entries is not complete enough at this time for an in-depth analysis between traditional archery equipment or crossbow, draw weights,

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muzzleloader calibers, or shotgun gauge totals. These aspects will be improved in future data collection. It will have to suffice that fully 26 percent of our recent sample of 1,204 entries were taken by short-range arms.

The 6mm/.243 caliber makes up around three percent of entries and as one would expect, has the majority of its numbers on smaller game or close-range situations, namely cougar and bear, which one can assume would be the result of close shots typical to the hunting of these species with dogs. All the different deer categories have 6mm/.243 representation, though whitetails are the highest with 13 of 394.

The .25's surprised us a little since fast .25s like the .25-06 Remington or .257 Weatherby Magnum may be considered ideal for pronghorns. A look at the sample reveals that



A selection of some of the more popular cartridges being used by today's hunters. From left: .308, .257 Weatherby Magnum, 300 WSM, .338 Winchester Magnum, .25-06 Remington, .375 Holland & Holland Magnum, (front from left) another .300 WSM, 7mm Weatherby Magnum, and another .257 Weatherby Magnum. Data collection on a much grander scale will begin with the 28th Awards Period.



The .270 isn't just for sheep. A full 12% of entries in our dataset were taken with a .270 Winchester. The majority of those were whitetail deer followed by black bear. The typical Coues' whitetail shown at left was harvested by John D. Todd with a .270 Winchester. The buck, which scores 107-4/8 points, was taken in Sonora, Mexico, in 2004.

.25s were used for only 13 of the 111 pronghorn trophies represented. The book shows it has taken only two percent of all category entries. This is tied for the lowest with the .30-30, .375, and the classic .308 Winchester. It became clear to us that some of the more well-known calibers and our old favorites simply aren't used much by the hunters taking trophies that are being entered into Boone and Crockett Club records!

The 7mm category makes up 11 percent of our sample size with representation in all categories except cougar and grizzly/brown bear. This is somewhat misleading since we know of grizzly bear entries that were taken with a 7mm magnum but were either not accepted or were not included in this data set. Even though the bullet is just .284-inch, apparently there is enough powder to take any North American trophy with the 7mm magnums. Back in 2004, B&C Director of Marketing Keith Balfour was fortunate to take a fantastic bighorn in his home state of Montana. Having used it to take everything from elk to pronghorn, a 7mm Remington Magnum has been his "go to" workhorse, so when he drew that once-in-a-lifetime Montana bighorn tag, there was no doubt which rifle was going to be pressed into service. Balfour notes, "It's not pretty or anything more special than an out-of-the-box Model 700, but it's lights out with bullets from 140 grains all the way up to 175. I took this ram with a 160-grain Nosler Custom Accu-Bond at 30 yards. No tracking required."

Whether it can be attributed to the love of the .270 still shared by the millions of Jack O'Connor followers or the comfort and convenience of shooting the .270, it still sits high at 12 percent of all entries and is

well represented across the board except for the big bears and bison. It has the most whitetail entries at 53, though sits in third place among sheep trophies at 10. It also has the second-most pronghorn entries at 19. The .270 WSM has been making appearances on trophy records, though has not yet been separated in data collection. Considering the relatively recent introduction of the short magnums, the frequency with which both

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the .270 WSM and the .300 WSM are appearing on entries suggests that the next breakdown should separate each into its own category with excellent representation. Our guess is these two calibers will not be quickly forgotten, as both are now taking big trophies at an amazing rate. But so did the .30-30 for many years, and now it has almost vanished from the database.

The .30-30 category has a few odd entries though almost half are made up of whitetails (11). Add the 10 bear and cougar entries, again assuming these were taken behind hounds, and these two groups account for 21 of the 25 .30-30 entries.

The .308 is worth mentioning again, though it's not by any means at the top of the list with only two percent of entries, the largest representation being six whitetails.

This past year has not been impressive for the .308—but there are exceptions. Denny Austad used a .308 Austad II, a cartridge he developed, to take one of the top trophies of the 27th Awards Program, the new World's Record non-typical American elk!

The .30-06 has long been called the most versatile cartridge: If you are going to buy just one rifle, make it the '06. What the numbers say now is that perhaps the .300 magnums could be the more versatile choice. The .30-06 has 11 percent of entries while the .300s have 18 percent. The .30-06 sits at the number two spot for whitetails with 43 entries while .300s have a measly 19. But in every other category except bear, the .300s have twice as many entries as the '06. For bears, the .300s still edge out the '06 by one entry (29 and 28 respectively).

The final two categories are the .338 and .375. These are the common big guns used for moose and grizzly, but not even the elk category has a significant number of entries taken by either of the two big guns. The .338 has three percent of entries; the .375 only two percent. While the big guns are fun and unquestionably effective, even the moose category has more entries from the .300s (10 for .338 and 18 for .300)

If you want one gun to hunt it all, the .300 has shown itself to be the new .30-06. While comparing the numbers and considering the most common rifle cartridges used, the .300 obviously stands alone. Since our ".300 category" represents several cartridges, it is worth mentioning that the lion's share of entries was taken with either the .300 Winchester Magnum or the .300 Winchester Short Magnum. Beginning in 2010, we will be updating our data to include a few of the newer cartridges. The WSMs will be separated as well as the .30-.378, since it is probably the most common of the calibers we classified as "other." It will be fun to watch this database grow in years to come. Right now, though, if you're looking for a great North American cartridge, consider that more than 50 percent of our 1,204 entries were taken with .270s, 7mm magnums, .300 magnums, and the great old .30-06! ■