

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Long Range Shooting and Stalking

A STEP BACKWARD?

Reference the article in the Winter 1998 issue of *Fair Chase* "Long Range Shooting." I feel obligated to question the inclusion of this article in Boone and Crockett Club's official publication. Since the Boone and Crockett Club has been the recognized authority on hunting ethics, this article seems to sanction the ultra long range shooting at big game animals that I feel is contrary to ethical hunting practices. First let me explain that my training in hunting and hunting ethics was thanks to the hunter-safety training I received while stationed in Germany. Jack O'Connor's books and articles provided the remaining foundation of my knowledge base.

The German school forbids shooting at big game animals at greater than 200 meters, as I recall. Jack O'Connor pointed out that 300 yards was about the limit of effective shooting range. Bullet drop, energy loss and the increased risk of wounding and losing an animal were the primary reasons. Thus for the last 25 years, as a hunter safety instructor, I have been emphasizing to my classes that 300 yards was the ethical limit. Following a shot, after a 15 minute "death watch," the Germans require that the hunter proceed to the spot where the animal was standing and check for signs of a hit. Yet how many Americans will walk 400 to 600 yards, following a long range shot, to check for blood signs.

In my opinion, very few Americans will go to the extremes in reloading and preparation he described. But there will be plenty that will shoot at an elk or pronghorn at 500 yards because they read where somebody said it was no problem. And when the gut shot animal fails to drop in its tracks, they will walk away and find a new live target to shoot.

Ethics and good moral standards have been found so lacking in cadets selected for the U.S. Air Force Academy that the school had to establish an entire department to literally teach new cadets the principles of good moral conduct. This, in itself, is testimony to the deterioration in our national ethical and moral standards. Because you provide the foundation of our hunting morals and ethics it seems fitting that you should stress the necessity of an adequate stalk to a reasonable range to ensure a clean one-shot humane kill.

I commend you for your excellent magazine. But I feel that the subject article was a step backward in hunting ethics. Its message will help hasten the day when hunting is finally outlawed because cruelty and wanton waste that such long range shooting perpetuates.

JOHN LOWERY - ASSOCIATE

THE STALK IS EVERYTHING

Per my usual routine I read the Winter 1998 issue from cover to cover. Mr. Thomas' article interested me little initially. Then, like the recoil from my .338 Mag., the meaning exploded within me. "The stalk is everything -- The shot is nothing." This struck near to my heart and delineated my feelings for the hunt accurately and succinctly. It is this stalk, successful or not, that allows us a proximity to our quarry enabling one to learn about and from the animals we so revere. It is this fragile, fleeting period of time in close quarters with game that time stands still. Tension runs high. The slightest mischievous breeze or an unfamiliar sound can end this golden time that we all endeavor to preserve indefinitely.

Two days later, the breeze blew and the pebble clattered down the rock slide. I read "Long Range Shooting" by Mr. Miller. I struggled early and often with contents of this article. The stalk had been taken from the field and placed on the rifle range and in the ballistic charts. My perception is that the hunt is denigrated. Is this but a point on the continuum of the philosophy of "a trophy at all costs." Technology will force us to further define "fair chase."

A defining moment for my 1998

big game hunting involved a trophy whitetail buck at four yards while I was ten feet above in a tree, bow in hand. The mental image is seared in my mind as the buck became suspicious of the fact that his environment had been penetrated. There is no hope for a 6-20x scope at 600 yards to duplicate the detail or the thrill of this experience for the marksman.

While we will undoubtedly struggle with the fair chase concept through our days, just as Mr. Roosevelt and his colleagues did. For me, the stalk is everything!

MARK B. STEFFEN M.D. - LIFETIME ASSOCIATE & OFFICIAL MEASURER

EDITOR'S COMMENTS

The articles written by Jack Thomas and David Miller in the Winter 1998 issue of *Fair Chase* do indeed present two very different hunting approaches. Ethical hunters stalk an animal to the point where they are comfortable that they can make a lethal shot with the weapon with which they are hunting. Additional factors such as terrain, big game species, hunter ability, etc., all enter into this scenario. Regardless of the weapon used, some hunters do not make ethical choices when they shoot at game. With the recent proliferation of "long range ultra-magnums" and laser rangefinders, many hunters have been led to believe they can kill game animals at extreme range by simply having a rifle which will deliver a bullet to that range with sufficient energy to kill the animal in question.

When afield, those hunters who choose to shoot at game at extreme ranges MUST give a great deal of thought to the level of skill, precision, and care which is required to do so. These elements of care and ethics are left out of the magazine ads which promote such gear.

I specifically asked David Miller to write his article in order to point out the difficulty and "level of care" required to consistently make ethical, lethal shots on big game at long range. Ethical long range shooting is very difficult and should be considered only by those hunters who are fully prepared to make this choice. Unfortunately, we have a lot of hunters afield who consistently take shots at animals under less than optimal conditions, situations under which ethical hunters like David Miller would never think of shooting much less take such a shot.



CORRECTION

The Spring 1999 issue of *Fair Chase* included a photograph of Blaine Sidler, of Duncansville, PA, with a Nevada mule deer on page 53. The photo included in the article was of a mule deer Blaine took on a guided hunt. The photo above is the photo which should have been used in the article. This mule deer was taken by Blaine on a self-guided hunt in Nevada.