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PROFESSIONAL MEMBER

PHOTOS COURTESY OF AUTHOR



TRAVELING WITH GUNS



A common scene, Boddington at the San Luis Obispo airport, ready to travel—somewhere—with duffel, gun case, and carry-on.

Surveys consistently indicate that most American hunters rarely hunt beyond their home states. I am a proud American, but it's also a fact that we Americans are among the least-traveled Western societies, with one of the lowest percentages of passport holders.

In part, this is because ours is a large country. As the slogan goes, "See America First," and we have much to see. Thanks to our North American Model of Wildlife Conservation, we (and our Canadian neighbors) also have more hunting opportunities than any other society on Earth, with reasonably unfettered access to millions of acres of public land.

Many American hunters are satisfied with their backyard whitetails, and many Canadians are happy with their annual moose. If I lived in Alaska, Alberta, British Columbia, Montana, or Wyoming, maybe I wouldn't travel so much. We North Americans are the world's largest hunting society. Some of us—collectively, many of us—dream of hunting different animals in far places. It doesn't matter if it's just across our state line, to the opposite end of our continent, or another country or continent. To make those dreams come true, we must travel. Depending on where and for what, maybe we can make a road trip, but that often means getting on an airplane.

Even the thought is daunting enough for folks who don't travel much, but now we must contemplate traveling with firearms, which is not hassle-free nor always possible. Bows and crossbows are generally not a problem. Firearms and ammunition are subject to specific Federal Aviation Administration (FAA)



LEFT: When possible, bolts should be removed and padded separately in the gun case. When disassembly isn't possible, Boddington packs with action open, and adds a trigger lock or cable lock...just to keep inspectors very happy. **RIGHT:** Bolt actions are probably the easiest to disassemble and pack. Boddington wraps the bolt separately and pads it, then adds a cable lock through the action, just to make inspectors extra happy.

rules. Within the continental United States, long guns are usually simple. Handguns can be, but there are jurisdictions (such as New Jersey and New York City) where even transit with a handgun is unlawful.

HARD CASES

It all starts with a secure, lockable, properly padded hard case. The baggage smashers are aggressive; I go through a hard case every three years, so I've had many. In the last few years, I've used Pelican polymer cases, generous enough to nestle two scoped rifles with plenty of foam padding. You can trace and cut out the shape of your rifle. Bow cases can be even larger and may exceed airline dimensions, so they might be checked as oversize baggage.

The primary operative word is "secure." Cases wear out. Hinges and corners can break. Inspect your case carefully; the TSA folks can reject a case that cannot be properly locked. A newer rule: All lock holes need a lock. Mine requires four. I use "TSA" locks so that, theoretically, the agents have a master key if they need to open it. This doesn't always pan out; I've had agents break locks. I pack

a couple of spare locks with same key or combination.

On bolt-action rifles, I remove bolts and wrap them separately in the case because the bolt handle creates a nasty projection that can lead to damage if the case is dropped. With other action types, I pack with the action open for the easiest inspection. I also add a trigger lock or cable lock through the action to make inspectors happy and comfortable.

ROAD TRAVEL

Rules vary widely among jurisdictions; it's our job to know the rules. Most of us travel freely to ranges and for local hunting with unloaded firearms in soft cases. However, it is best to have unloaded firearms in the secure, locked hard case for longer trips across state lines. In many jurisdictions, this is the law!

On longer road trips, the real problem isn't starting but stopping. I keep gun cases out of sight. Even for brief stops, always lock the car. If you stop for the night, haul your gun cases into the hotel. I know too many people who have had their cars burglarized in parking lots.

BASIC AIR TRAVEL RULES

Within the United States, there are two sets of rules: FAA and individual airline rules. Generally, they are the same. However, some carriers no longer transport firearms. Some domestic and most international carriers require advance notification when traveling with firearms. Systems vary widely, from simple to complicated. Check the airline website, and if you have any questions, get on the

phone. For travel with firearms, avoid cut-rate internet travel sites. At a minimum, book direct with the airlines. Use a hunting and gun-savvy travel agent, especially if you are inexperienced. Avoid tight connections. Two hours is comfortable within the U.S. Three to four hours is safer for international transfers.

The basic FAA allowance for ammunition is a maximum of five kilograms (eleven pounds) in original



Boddington's son-in-law, Brad Jannenga, arrowed this fine desert sheep in Mexico. It's always essential to check but, nearly worldwide, archery equipment is subject to much fewer travel restrictions than firearms.

BELOW: A firearms declaration, attesting the firearms are unloaded, is signed at the ticket counter, then inserted into the case.



factory containers. Technically, this means that the handy plastic ammo containers we handloaders all use are unsatisfactory.

How ammunition gets carried is ambiguous. In the U.S., some airlines allow it to be in the gun case; others want it in another checked bag. Outside the U.S., requiring ammo to be checked separately in its lockable container is common. If so, there is usually no separate charge for the ammo box. On the other hand, additional handling charges are increasingly common for gun cases. This is now normal all over Europe and for internal flights in Africa.

When traveling with firearms, I double-check when packing to ensure chambers are clear and no cartridges lurk in magazines. With ammo, I hedge my bets. I put it in a lockable plastic box. I've used plastic tackle boxes, but now I have a blaze orange box like a G.I. ammo can. I put locks inside with

the ammo. I don't lock it. If TSA needs to inspect it, they'll cut the lock. Then, I put it in my checked duffel or suitcase.

Airline ticket agents are not gun experts. They usually don't know their own rules. Be friendly, confident, and know the rules. Understand that you can't argue with these folks. If you run into a snag, keep smiling, and ask for a supervisor.

When traveling with firearms and ammunition, here's how I do it. I arrive plenty early, march up to the counter with a locked gun case, hand over my ID, and say, "I have firearm(s) in this locked case. I also have ammunition in this (other) bag, less than five kilos in original factory containers." From there, I generally have no problems. You will sign a small form that certifies the firearms are unloaded. You'll have to unlock the case to slip it in. Typically, you will then lock it. In the U.S. today, most commonly, it goes straight onto the belt and to TSA somewhere in the bowels of the airport. Alternatively, an airline employee will accompany you to TSA.

What happens next depends on TSA equipment. Good scanners allow them to see that the firearm is unloaded. If the picture isn't clear enough, they'll need to open the gun case. Always, I hang around the ticket counter or the TSA office for 15 minutes or so in case they need my keys or combination. Someone will tell you when you are cleared to go through security if this is required. The ammo usually goes on through with no further comment. Do not have any cartridges or firearms parts in your carry-on! Sanitize your backpack and other carry-on bags as often as needed to be certain.

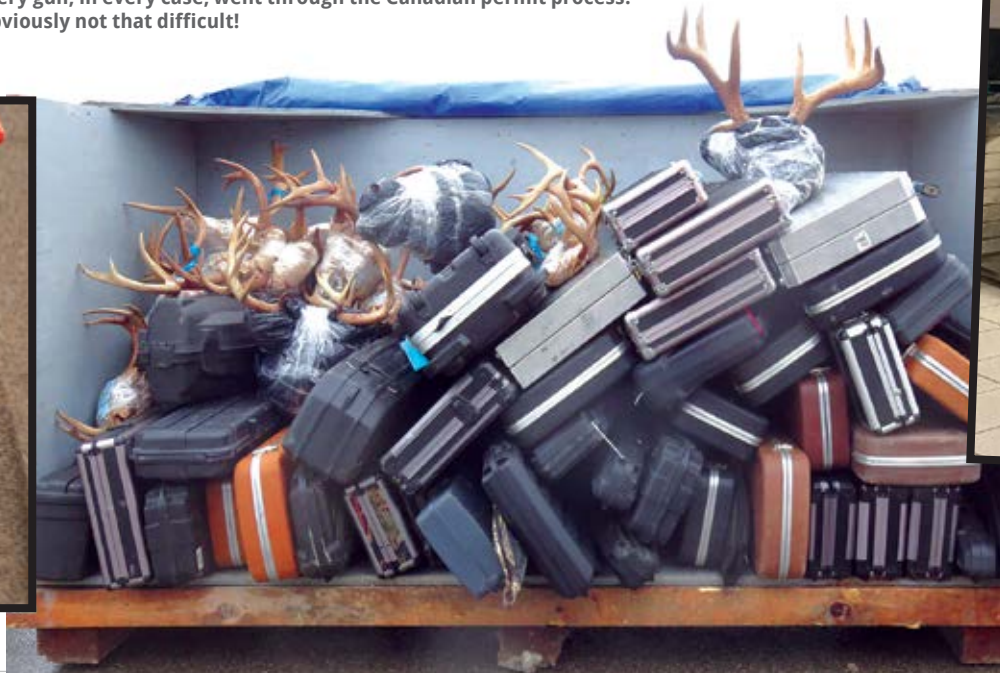
Once at your destination, it's a bit of a grab-bag, depending on the airport and airline. In theory, gun cases are hand-carried to the baggage office, with ID required. They may go to oversize baggage or bounce down the carousel with all other bags. Ask an airline employee, and keep an eye out. The good news is that because firearms are hand-carried, losses are exceedingly rare.

DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY U.S. Customs and Border Protection		U.S. CUSTOMS AND BORDER PROTECTION 148
CERTIFICATE OF REGISTRATION FOR PERSONAL EFFECTS TAKEN ABROAD 19 CFR 148.1		
Name of Owner CRAIG T. BODDINGTON	Address of Owner [REDACTED]	Number [REDACTED]
Description of Articles 1-BLASTER R B ACTION. SN. RROO 1-.300 WEATHERBY MAG. BARREL SN. R		
I certify that the information shown herein is true and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief.		
Port 3392	Date 03/24/2017	Signature of CBP Officer [Signature]

ABOVE: US Customs form, 4457 is a critical document for American hunters traveling abroad. Customs keep no record of it, but it serves worldwide as a "US firearms permit," plus is almost mandatory to re-enter the US with firearms taken out of country.



LEFT: Boddington puts his ammo in a blaze orange "ammo can" in his duffel with unlocked locks, that way he can lock it and check it separately as international rules often require. Although small, he figures the blaze orange box is hard to lose and easy to describe. BELOW: Quebec's Anticosti Island probably hosts the world's largest groups of hunters. Every gun, in every case, went through the Canadian permit process. Obviously not that difficult!



BORDER CROSSINGS

In almost all countries, some type of temporary firearms permit or police clearance is required. This varies from simple to draconian, and there are some great hunting destinations where it's either impossible or too complex to bring firearms. You will borrow or rent from your outfitter or local buddy in such cases. Interestingly, although a U.S. state, Hawaii is one of these! "Bring or borrow" will be the subject of a future column. The decision depends on what and where you are hunting, what firearm(s) you can use, and how much it means to you to use your own.

Note that it is easier for U.S. citizens to travel abroad with firearms than vice versa. We make it difficult, complex, and time-consuming. Foreign nationals coming to hunt in the U.S., even our neighbors from Canada and Mexico, usually avoid the paperwork hassle and borrow firearms on-site.

For U.S. citizens, the first step is U.S. Customs Form 4457. It's obtainable from any U.S. Customs office. It's simply a "proof of ownership" form for items of value to be taken

abroad, avoiding import duty on return. However, since we don't have firearms registration per se, the 4457 is universally accepted as a U.S. "gun permit." Some destinations, most notably South Africa, now require a 4457 dated within the year of travel.

For sporting rifles and shotguns (no handguns), Canada is easy. You're looking for their Non Resident Firearms Declaration Form (RCMP GRC 5589). It takes ten minutes to fill it out: Action type, make, model, serial number, caliber/gauge, barrel length. Upon arrival, take your gun case to the customs office, hand them the form, open the case when directed, and pay \$25 Canadian. You will then have a 60-day temporary permit, good anywhere in Canada.

Mexico is more complicated and adds a language barrier for non-Spanish speakers. Today, all hunting in Mexico is through an outfitter, who will assist you with the gun permit. The process depends largely on where you are going. Northern Mexico sees the most hunters and has most big game hunting. With your outfitter (or representative) there to assist, Mexican

authorities at most border crossings, and in Hermosillo and Loreto, are accustomed to visitors with guns. Problems are rare; just make sure your serial numbers are correct on the form.

Elsewhere in Mexico, including Yucatan, connecting flights through Mexico City are almost unavoidable. The gun case goes to the police office in the airport for onward clearance. The process is tedious, time-consuming, and nerve-wracking. In Mexico, I've always taken my preferred firearms for Coues deer, mule deer, and desert sheep and never had a problem. I have also taken firearms through Mexico City to Yucatan and never had a problem. However, most hunting in the Yucatan jungle is done with shotguns, and Mexican outfitters have suitable firearms. I've often hunted in Yucatan for brocket deer, ocellated turkey, and other jungle game. The last three years, I've simply borrowed camp shotguns. I always prefer using my own much-loved firearms on any hunt, but one simple fact is unavoidable: Travel is much simpler without firearms! ■



To make some hunting dreams come true, we must travel. Depending on where and for what, maybe we can make a road trip, but that often means getting on an airplane. Even the thought is daunting enough for folks who don't travel much, but now we must contemplate traveling with firearms, which is not hassle-free nor always possible.



Every country has different rules, some more difficult than others. This is the police firearms office at South Africa's OR Tambo airport, clearing house for Africa's greatest number of hunters, and one of the world's simplest destinations for clearing firearms.



Boddington's best Dall ram was taken in Yukon with a Lazzeroni .308 Warbird. Despite hassles, Boddington finds it almost unimaginable to do a mountain hunt without a much-trusted rifle. Fortunately, bringing sporting arms into Canada is quick and easy.