

Our Love Affair

It seems an arbitrary number.

Why have 30-caliber rifles dominated game fields?

Should they?

These 22 .30-bore hunting cartridges, 1892 to present, don't include the foreign-born, or wildcats!



With .30s

It may not be true that if you haven't hunted with a .30-30 rifle, or a .30-06 or a .300 Winchester Magnum, you're still learning to tie your shoes. Some souls so deprived reach adulthood, though mothers have long known .30s are good for you. Hunters born before there were .30s have all died.

The British beat us to .30. Early in the 1870s they came up with the .300 Rook. This cartridge had a .295 bore and used .300 bullets, unlike our .30s with .300 bores rifled to .308 (groove diameter) for .308 bullets. In the Old Country, a rook is a crow. Rook rifles of various types and chamberings came along in the twilight years of black powder to control pests. The .300's 80-grain lead bullet left at 1,100 fps, with 215 of energy. Rooks took notice; deer did not. Some rook cartridges made the jump to

smokeless powder. The long-lived .300 was factory-loaded until the 1960s.

Stateside, Remington developed the .32-40-150 in 1871. It was oddly named, as bullets were .309 in diameter. A .30 with a pseudonym! Its rimmed, steeply tapered hull merged to a parallel neck. Sending 150-grain bullets at 1,350 fps from Rolling Block rifles, this .32-40 no doubt killed deer. But it gave way at market to the .32-40 Ballard, introduced in 1884 for Ballard rifles with a 165-grain .320



bullet clocking 1,440 fps. Lever rifles by Winchester and Marlin chambered the .32-40 Ballard, which survived into the '40s, outliving a spate of black-powder .32s, bullet diameters .312 to .320. Remington stopped loading its .32-40 in 1910.

Frank Wesson, brother to Daniel B. Wesson of Smith & Wesson fame, came up with a .30-bore cartridge around 1880. The .30-30 Wesson sent 165-grain lead bullets, commonly paper-patched, at 1,250 fps. Muzzle energy: 572 foot-pounds. Frank had designed and built single-shot rifles from the early 1860s, and by 1870 was a recognized, if small, manufacturer. He developed several cartridges. Winchester briefly loaded the .30-30 Wesson. It has little in common with the later .30 WCF and evidently did not inspire it.

Frank Wesson also experimented with a bottle-necked .30-40. It didn't pan out and faded during the 1880s. Collectors prize it.

The advent of smokeless powder in the early 1890s paved the path for small-bore, high-velocity cartridges. The .30-40 Krag, developed for the Norwegian-designed, American-refined Krag-Jorgensen bolt rifle, was our first smokeless round. Adopted for military use in 1892, it became the .30 U.S. Army. Remington offered it in Rolling Block rifles, Winchester in its 1885 single-shots and 1895 lever-actions. Loaded to 40,000 psi for the Krag rifle, the .30-40 hurls 180-grain bullets to 2,470 fps. Given its strong case, handloads in stout rifles can add considerable punch. Don Allen, who founded Dakota Arms, had a lovely Model 10 in .30-40 and stoked it to snort like a .30-06.

On Hardscrabble Mountain the last week of a 1967 hunt, Paul Muehlbauer and his two sons rose early to climb a frosted trail to a plateau. Topping out at dawn, Paul came upon an enormous mule deer. A shot from his Winchester staggered the animal. His sons' missed it on the run. After tracking the buck, the three hunters found it dead. Its antlers set a state record that stood for five years—during which time both Colorado's top-listed deer and elk had been taken by the .30-40 Krag! The elk had fallen to John Plute, a Slovenian miner living in Crested Butte, while he was hunting for meat in 1899.

In 1892 Arthur Savage, age 35, patented a hammerless lever rifle. When the U.S. Army chose the Krag, Savage refined his repeater for hunters and in 1894 established Savage Arms Company. The Model 1895 rifle in .303 Savage fired a 190-grain .308 bullet at 2,100 fps, impressing hunters. One claimed 18 kills, including two grizzlies, with a Savage in .303 to shoot tigers. W.T. Hornaday wrote of killing a bull moose at 350 yards with his.

Meanwhile, Winchester developed the .30

WCF (Winchester Center Fire), later known as the .30-30. It and the .25-35 became the first smokeless chamberings in Winchester's Model 1894 rifle, joining the black-powder .32-40 and .38-55 in August 1895 as the firm introduced nickel-steel barrels. Savage chambered its 1895 and later 1899 rifles in .30-30. So did Marlin, in a Model 1893 engineered by Lewis Hepburn. He'd joined the company in 1886 after 15 years at Remington and contributed to many Marlins.

The Winchester 94 and Marlin's 1893 progeny, the Model 336, came to define "deer rifle." When Winchester shuttered its old New Haven plant in March 2006, it had produced more than 7 million 1894s and 94s, most in .30-30.

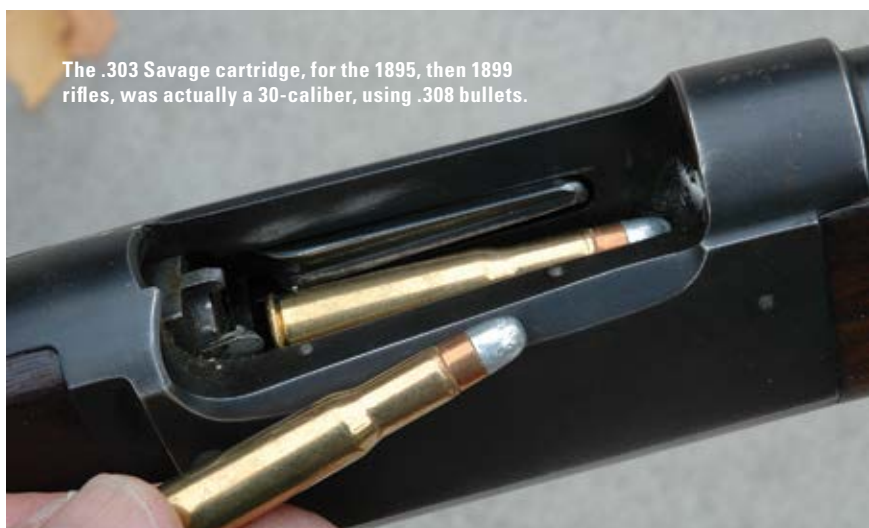
Introduced with a 160-grain bullet at 1,970 fps, the .30-30 got friskier with age. Hornady now has a 160-grain FTX load whose pointed poly-tip bullet exits at 2,400 fps and carries 1,300 ft-lbs, 200 yards.

A slim lever gun feels—heck, it even looks—eager to hunt. Early Winchester, Marlin and Savage carbines all but jump into your hands. I've used a few and despite their range limitations, prefer them for many tasks—mostly with iron sights—to scoped bolt rifles.

The .30-40 Krag, our first smokeless round, started the .30-bore trend in 1892, in the U.S. Army.



The .303 Savage cartridge, for the 1895, then 1899 rifles, was actually a 30-caliber, using .308 bullets.



The morning of October 14, 1972, Mike Blehm and a friend saddled up for a hunt in Colorado's Soapstone Hills. Climbing, they spied a fine buck looking their way. Mike slid off his horse, grabbed his 94 and took quick aim. His .30-30 bullet felled the deer instantly. A huge animal, it had antlers to match. A score of 195 put them high on Boone and Crockett's list.

A 94 was in the crook of my arm when a blacktail buck rocketed from underfoot. The close, thick brush doubled his apparent speed. My first two shots missed in front. Snugging the lead, I called hits on the next pair, as saplings swallowed the deer. It fell short yards farther on. Fifty-percent shooting deserves no plaudits; but a quick rifle in tight places can salvage abysmal marksmanship!

Years later, Marlin in hand, I struggled up a steep, timbered hill, spurred by an elk's hoarse bray. Then antlers winked between trees. I dropped prone as the bull burst clear. He spun at the shot and lunged into second-growth as I flicked the .30-30's lever. Then: silence. Cheek to comb, I waited, waited ... and bellied sideways. A patch of rib appeared. My shot brought another look. I fired again. He toppled, an old, heavy bull with thick beams.

The .30-06 was conceived in 1900, when engineers at Springfield Armory began work on a rifle to replace the .30-40 Krag-Jorgensen. A prototype emerged in 1901, and two years later the Springfield, Model 1903. A 220-grain bullet at 2,300 fps—100 fps faster than the Krag's—made the .30-03 a ballistic match for Germany's 8x57 with a 236-grain bullet at 2,125.

In 1904 Germany adopted a 154-grain spitzer at 2,800 fps. The U.S. pivoted to the "Ball Cartridge, Caliber .30,

Model 1906" with a 150-grain bullet at 2,700. After the case was shortened .07, to 2.494, all .30-03 rifles were recalled for re-chambering. Bullets in issued ammo were changed twice more before WWII.

Winchester's Model 1895 was among early sporting rifles in .30-06. Cartridges stacked vertically in its box magazine allowed use of pointed bullets. Announced in June, 1896, the '95 was first offered in .30-40 Krag, .38-72-275 and .40-72-330. The .303 British, .35 and .405 Winchester came next, the .30-03 in 1905, the .30-06 in 1908. Bolt-action rifles—surplus Springfields and Enfields, the Remington 30S and Winchester 54, custom sporters by the likes of Griffin & Howe—carried the '06 through the Depression. Winchester's Model 70 arrived in 1937. Over the 27 years before its infamous 1963 overhaul, it would sell in 18 chamberings. Of 581,471 Model 70s built during that period, 208,218 were .30-06s.

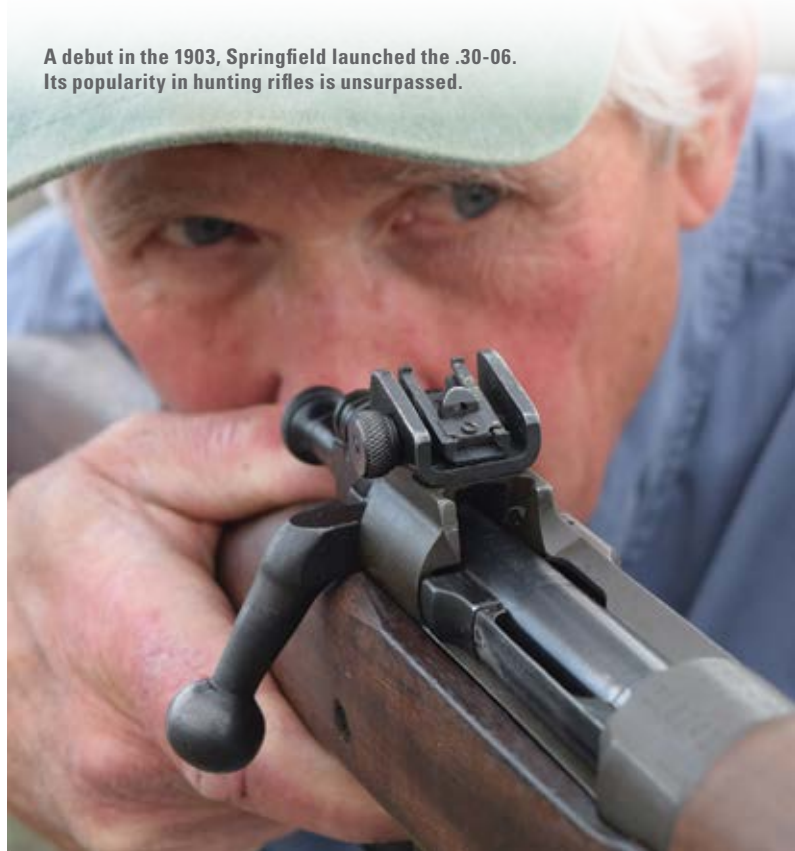
Gun scribes from Townsend Whelen to Jack O'Connor and Warren Page

hailed the .30-06 long after .30 magnums jostled for headlines. You can buy ought-six ammo in remote outposts from Canada's North to sub-Saharan Africa. The frothiest .30-06 loads match

heavy-bullet options in the 7mm Remington Magnum.

Bolt rifles didn't immediately tug whitetail hunters from the .30-30. Remington took note. In 1912 it announced the .30 Remington, a ballistic

A debut in the 1903, Springfield launched the .30-06. Its popularity in hunting rifles is unsurpassed.



Wayne downed this buck with a Remington AWR in .30-06, still the all-around big game cartridge.

twin with a rimless hull for its slide-action Model 14. A handy “R” carbine listed for \$16.25. Appearing in later rifles too, the .30 Remington has since served pump, lever, bolt and autoloading mechanisms.

The first big .30 came from New York inventor Charles Newton. Called the .30 Adolph Express for collaborating gunmaker Fred Adolph, the rimless round sent 180-grain bullets at 2,880 fps—lightning speed in 1913. Alas, Newton’s .30 had no home except his own rifles. Western stopped loading it in 1938.

Newton also worked on the .300 Savage, a square-shouldered, 1.87-inch cartridge with the short neck of a street brawler. Announced in 1920, it drives 150-grain bullets at 2,670 fps, 180s at 2,370. The spool magazine of the Model 1899 (in 1920 changed to Model 99) encourages use of pointed bullets. The .300 Savage has been chambered in Remington 760 pump and 722 bolt guns, even a few Winchester 70s. I’ve used iron-sighted .300 Savage lever rifles on deer, pronghorns and caribou.

In 1925 Western Cartridge added the .300 Holland & Holland to its roster. A leggy belted round based on the .375 H&H and designed for Cordite powder, the .300 H&H, or “Super .30,” matched the .30 Newton ballistically. Custom rifles on magnum-length actions sustained it until Winchester so chambered its Model 70 in ‘37, two years after Ben Comfort won Camp Perry’s 1,000-yard Wimbledon Match with a re-worked 1917 Enfield in .300 H&H. Factory loads sent 180-grain bullets at around 2,900 fps to bring a ton of energy 350 yards. The .300 H&H would sire most of the belted magnums to follow.

Once upon a time, Winchester stamped .300 H&H barrels “300 Magnum,” because there were no others.

Roy Weatherby blew out the Super .30’s shoulder to fashion his .300 Magnum in 1945; but it was initially offered only in Weatherby rifles.

The .308 appeared in 1952, two years before its military twin, the U.S. T-65 (later, the 7.62x51 NATO). The .308 case holds 20 percent less powder than a .30-06, but 40 percent more than a .30-30. In factory loads, the .308 falls 100 fps shy of matching the .30-06, but beats the .300 Savage by twice that. I’ve clocked 180-grain .308 handloads at 2,700 fps, long standard speed for 180s from a .30-06. The most widely chambered hunting cartridge in the world, the .308 works in pumps, self-loaders and front-locking lever rifles as well as short-action bolt guns. Firing one of Kenny Jarrett’s .308 hunting rifles on his range, I drilled a .2-inch group. “Addicted yet?” Kenny grinned. I conceded the truth: His rifle and loads might shoot like that all day. “But I can’t always hold on a pencil eraser.”

Magnum cartridges on the .300 H&H case shortened to fit .30-06-length actions became the rage after Winchester’s .458 in 1956. Oddly, the first such .30 hailed from Norma in Sweden. Similar but not identical to the wildcat .30-338, the .308 Norma Magnum was first sold only as empty cases, blunting its 1961 debut. Browning alone, among U.S. gunmakers, chambered a rifle for it.

Winchester’s long-awaited .300 Magnum appeared in 1963. A short-necked cartridge with a 2.62-inch hull, it kicked 180-grain bullets at 3,100 fps and triggered a tsunami of frothy .30s. Young hunters were convinced they needed magnums. But a list of cartridges used by 2,285 elk hunters

responding to a 1939 Washington Department of Game survey showed a preference for milder .30s:

During the 1990s I asked Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation members to name their elk cartridges.

Cartridge	Number Used	Percentage of Total
.30-30 (and .30)	613	27%
.30-06	491	21%
.30-40 Krag	268	12%
.300	123	5%
.35	119	5%

Sadly, there’s no clarification of “30” (presumably the .30 Remington) or “.300.” (Savage’s .300 was older, much more common than the .300 H&H). The top listings come as no surprise. In 1940 Jack O’Connor conceded the limitations of the .30-30, but then pointed out that most of the (then) two million-odd .30-30s “floating around North America” were still in use “shooting polar bears and caribou in the Arctic, moose in Canada, deer all over.... [During Mexico’s 1929] revolution I met a [man] in the United States to buy and smuggle rifles ... in just two calibers – the .30-30 and .30-06.”

The .30-06 consistently edged the 7mm Remington Magnum in popularity. The .270 and .300 Winchester Magnum finished third and fourth, ahead of the .338 Winchester and .300 Weatherby magnums. That decade, I also guided elk hunters and noted the chamberings of over 200 rifles in camps. The .30-06 was a predictable favorite. But none of those rifles were .30-30s or .30 Remingtons, none .30-40 Krag or .35 Remingtons!

In the late 1980s, Don Allen developed rimless magnums on .404 Jeffery brass. The .300 Dakota came in 1992. Its 2.54-inch hull holds more fuel than the .300 Winchester’s. You get a performance edge.



The .300 H&H (left) sired the “short belted” .308 Norma and .300 Win. Magnums, and many others.

In 1996 Weatherby necked the .378 Weatherby case—longer and greater in diameter than the .300 H&H—to take .308 bullets. The .30-378 launches them at over 3,400 fps, bringing a ton of energy to 500 yards. The Mark V plant in Maine was soon working at full throttle to fill orders. Ballistically the .30-378 is matched only by John Lazzeroni's rimless 7.82 Warbird, announced a year earlier.

Remington joined the long-magnum race in 1998, with its .300 Ultra Mag, on the .404. The case is slightly rebated to fit bolt faces for the .532 head common to most belted rounds. Though the Ultra Mag has 13 percent more capacity than the .300 Weatherby, both rounds (as loaded by Remington and Norma, respectively) hurl 180-grain Nosler Partitions at about 3,250 fps.

"Short" magnum got new meaning in 2000 with the debut of the .300 WSM (Winchester Short Magnum), followed within a year by Remington's SAUM (Short Action Ultra Mag) and in 2008 by the .300 RCM (Ruger Compact Magnum, by Hornady). All use rimless hulls with .532-.535 heads and "fat" bodies that fit .308-length rifle actions. Performance? Think .300 H&H to .300 Winchester. I shot perhaps the first elk taken with the .300 SAUM, later killed elk with the .300 WSM, a moose with the .300 RCM. Proprietary powders enabled Hornady to "compress" pressure curves so the .300 RCM sheds 40 percent less velocity than other magnums when fired in carbine (20-inch) barrels.

The .30 T/C, introduced in 2007, is a short-action .30 with the "standard" .473 case head of the .308. It may have been too much like the .308 to gain the market traction that's blessed its offspring, the 6.5 Creedmoor.

Hornady's .308 Marlin Express (ME) also arrived in '07, giving Marlin's 336 the punch of a .308 bolt rifle. At 300 yards FTX bullets clock 2,000 fps, deliver 1,450 foot-pounds. In close New Mexico cover, I used an iron-sighted .308 ME to down a bull elk. This cartridge has out-sold Winchester's similar .307, introduced in 1982 for a beefed-up 94 rifle—partly because for most of the .307's life, factory loads carried only blunt bullets. Hornady LeverEvolution loads have pointed bullets with compressible polymer tips safe to stack nose-to-primer in tube magazines.

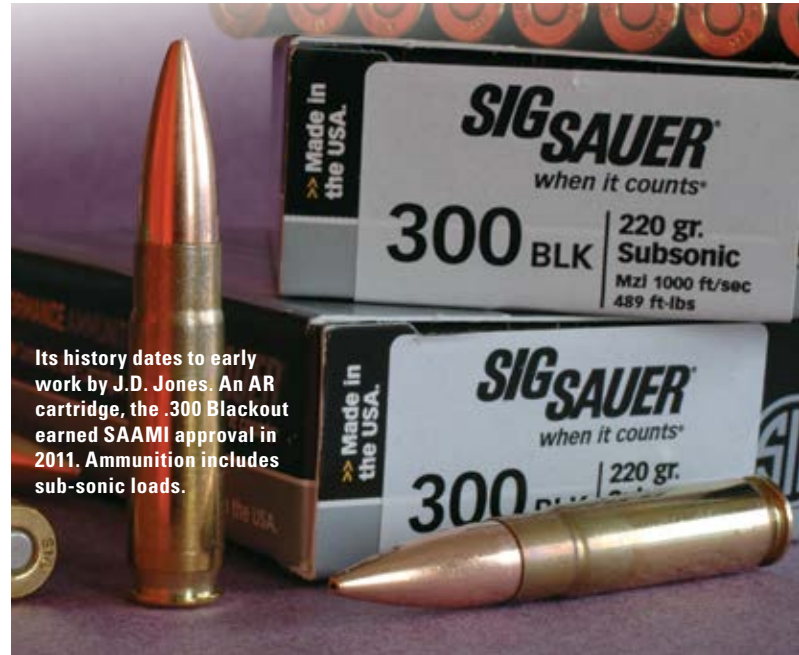
The popularity of AR-15 rifles has prompted new cartridges to fit. The fat, stubby .30 Remington AR, a 2008 arrival, edges the .30-30 ballistically. The .300 Blackout, in both supersonic and subsonic form, earned SAAMI's blessing in 2011. Bill Wilson commercially loads his 7.62x40 for top-tier Wilson Combat ARs. I've used this .223-based round on Texas hogs. It has deer-hunting credentials.

Change can be hard. Start a pleasant routine, and

it becomes habit. Ditto if you become hooked on a brand: Ford, Apple, Nike. The .30-40 Krag, .30 WCF and .30-06 carved a rut in a nascent smokeless market. Manufacturing efficiencies deepened it. Barrels drilled to .300 could be bored for a selection of cartridges. Bullets designed for the .30 WCF worked in a .30 Remington, those for the .30-06 in a .308. A range of flat-flying .308-diameter

bullets comprised weights suitable for just about any big game. Sales of existing .30s funded new rifles, more 30-caliber loads.

Like steering wheels on the left side, fireworks on the Fourth and keyboards with the @ symbol on the number 2 key, the .308 bullet is distinctly, if not uniquely, American. Our .30-bore habit is unlikely to change anytime soon. ■



Its history dates to early work by J.D. Jones. An AR cartridge, the .300 Blackout earned SAAMI approval in 2011. Ammunition includes sub-sonic loads.



This moose fell to one shot from Wayne's Ruger in .300 RCM, "an excellent short-action round!"