

TRAIL AND CAMP GUNS

Tim Sundles

FOR ANIMAL DEFENSE IN NORTH AMERICA

The year was probably 1971, I was 13. My parents had taken their camping trailer, our dirt bikes, the dog and me camping in the Red River area of Idaho for 2 weeks. Most days my dad and I would go trail riding and my mom would stay around camp to hike with the dog, cook, soak her feet in the river and enjoy Idaho. However, that year we had a problem in camp. A large boar black bear would come into camp looking for

food. This bear was bold, aggressive and would chase our dog. He even chased my mother into the trailer one morning after my dad and I had left camp for a day of trail rides. Even at age 13, I was protective of my mother and the incident, as my mother related it, angered me. I imagined what would have happened to her if the bear had caught her when she was too far from the safety of the trailer. The consequences were unthinkable!

This bear seemed to understand if he waited for my dad and me to leave for the day, it was safe for him to raid our camp. In those days my father carried a Colt Trooper MK111, .357 Mag on his hip while we rode and hung around camp. I carried an S&W Model 10, .38 Special loaded with some heavy hand loads my father had taught me to craft (yes, I was loading my own ammo by age 13). One day, a forest ranger came into camp and said he was looking to kill the aggressive bear since he had several complaints from other campers in the area and he was certain the bear would eventually harm a human. My father refused to move our camp several miles to get away from the bear and he stated leaving the bear to harass or harm others would be irresponsible on our part. Those were the days when common sense was still common and the political correctness that currently plagues our society was not yet prevalent, so the ranger, looking at the revolvers on our belts, said

“if you see that darn bear, go ahead and kill him and then contact the ranger station.”

Wow, the ranger had just given me a “green light!” My plan was to build a campfire and then pour a large can of baked beans and a pint of my mother’s precious honey on the coals and wait for Mr. Bear to come in to the irresistible odor. My mother, who suffered through the Great Depression as a child, had a hard time letting go of her honey, but my enthusiasm convinced her and the game was on. At dusk, after pouring Van de Camps beans and honey on the coals and watching the smoke billow, it took less than 15 minutes for the bear to wander in. Dad and I hid on the edge of some bushes. The bear was a scant 10’ away, focused on the honey and beans. My .38 roared, followed a millisecond by my father’s .357 and yet again my .38 let go, all in about 1 second. The bear had soaked up three lung hits and ran a short distance and expired. The bear would never again endanger my mom.

Little did my father know these types of experiences would form me into a person who would seek out remote wilderness all across the Rockies and in seeking out rugged wilderness, I would also spend a life time seeking the game animals who live there.

Real Life Reality

At the time of this writing I have killed dozens of bears, both black and grizzly. I’ve guided hunters to dozens more. Most of these bears were killed while hunting them, but some were killed because of random unpredictable aggressive behavior, meaning they attacked or were acting as if they were about to. Other wildlife has tried to do me harm over the years as well. Once, in the Selway Bitterroot wilderness, I used a .500 Linebaugh revolver to kill a bull moose that was either trying to stomp me or breed me — I’ll never know which, but neither was acceptable. I’ve also had a pack of federally dumped Canadian wolves try to kill my pack string of horses deep in the



Tim's currently used trail/camp rifles: From left, .338-06 with Leupold 2.5x8 scope, Winchester Timber Carbine chambered in .444 Marlin, Marlin .45-70, Marlin XLR .45-70 customized by Dave Clay, Marlin .45-70 and .50 Alaskan, built on a Marlin XLR .45-70 by Dave Clay. The longest barrel on any of these is 20". Ammo cuffs on the buttstock make certain you'll have spare ammo any time you pick up your rifle. All of the lever rifles feature large aperture sights by Skinner or XS for fast target acquisition.

Idaho wilderness and when I got between the wolves and their dinner, the alpha male attacked my wife and I. He died to a well-placed .45-70 bullet at just a few feet. Point being, if you spend a lot of time in the wilderness, away from noisy logging machinery, generators and other manmade sounds, you'll discover many animals show themselves and are dangerous — much more so than we are generally taught to believe.

We live in a time when our various game agencies are inhabited by politically correct tree huggers who graduated college with a wildlife biology degree and theoretical — not practical — knowledge. They will tell you wild animals rarely attack humans and if they do, it is the human's fault. Of course if they ever got their ass out of their chair, they would know better. For example, in 2011 in Montana, there were 7 documented grizzly attacks on humans. This is all the more alarming when you consider that only about 25 per-

cent of the land mass in Montana has grizzlies. Who knows how many unreported black bear and grizzly bear attacks occurred in Montana the same year, where the human was prepared and armed and simply killed the bear and did not want the trouble that comes from reporting/documenting it. As earlier stated, I've experienced multiple black bears who have acted aggressively, but I've been told many times, black bears are not aggressive. Those bears probably did this to me because I lack a degree in wildlife biology.

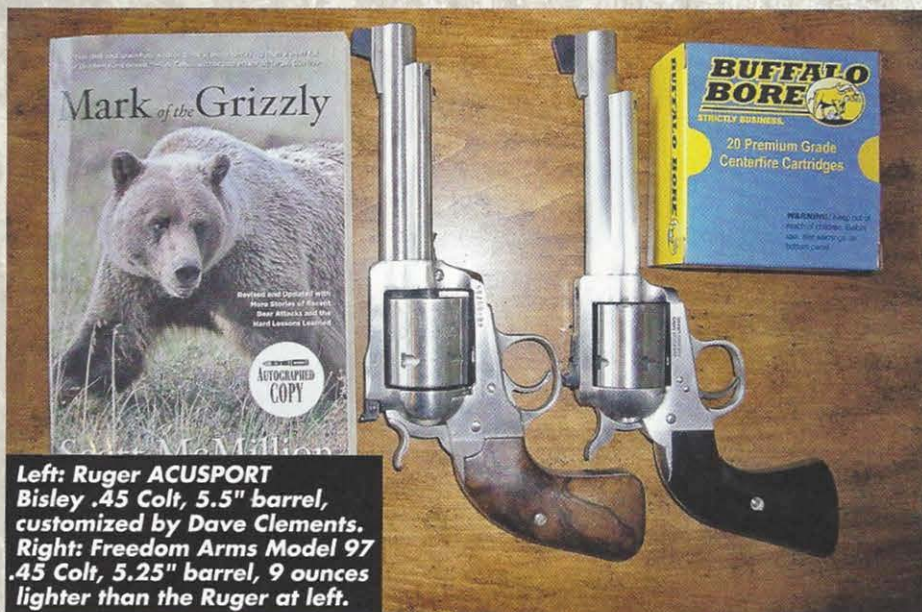
Your Best Weapon

Your best defensive weapon, if used properly, will always be your mind, but even if you stay aware of your surroundings and are thoughtful, animals can show up in an instant. Plus, other people may not be mentally engaged and may find themselves in a deadly situation and their only hope of survival may be you. I carry an assortment of firearms while I travel in

the wilderness. Even in campgrounds and at trail heads, I'm carrying. Since I live in the heart of grizzly country in NW Montana, most of my summer and fall wilderness excursions include firearms capable of killing grizzlies, but I also find myself in other states where there are no grizzlies in most or all of their area. I normally choose my firearms according to the need I anticipate, which is determined by the animals in a particular area. This is a list of wildlife in no particular order who can and do take human life in North America:

- Moose
- Bison
- Grizzly bear
- Black bear
- Wolves
- Mountain lion
- Feral dogs
- Buck deer

First, let's focus on moose, grizzly and bison, which require very powerful cartridges to dispatch; any cartridge capable of stopping them



Left: Ruger ACUSPORT Bisley .45 Colt, 5.5" barrel, customized by Dave Clements. Right: Freedom Arms Model 97 .45 Colt, 5.25" barrel, 9 ounces lighter than the Ruger at left.

will obviously work on smaller species. When I am on the trail in grizzly/moose/bison country, there is a powerful revolver attached to my body at all times. I normally carry them in shoulder holsters, as hip holsters can interfere with the use of a backpack, and hip holsters often expose the gun to getting banged around. My horse will generally carry a powerful scabbard rifle as well. Following is a list of the guns I carry and the ammo I load

them with while in grizzly country. No matter how large or powerful the cartridge, the gun is less effective if your ammunition isn't chosen for the task at hand. Ammunition selection is paramount to your success in protecting yourself and loved ones.

.500 Linebaugh

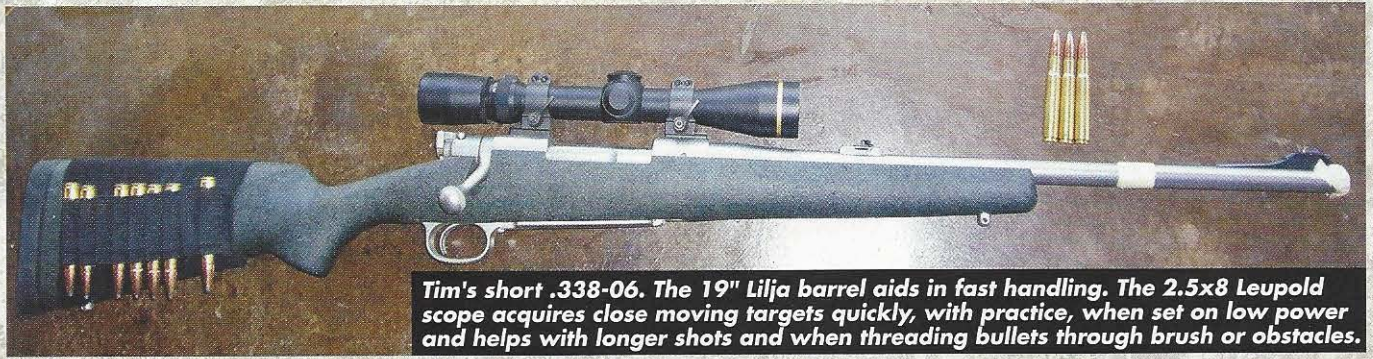
Of all revolvers I carry in the grizzly woods, I use the .500 Linebaugh the most. Normally I carry one

of three different stainless .500 Linebaugh revolvers I own. I use the .500 Linebaugh cartridge because it works and also because it is housed in packable revolvers. Bigger, more powerful revolver cartridges such as the .500 S&W are not useful to me, as they are housed in enormously framed revolvers — too bulky and heavy. I won't be carrying such a monstrosity on a 15-mile hike in the Rockies.

Stopping a bear/moose/bison attack is far different than hunting them. When hunting, you get to choose your shot at your leisure, without the critter often knowing you are around. So when hunting, you can use small calibers and make up for smaller calibers with carefully timed and placed shots. However, when you are under attack, you have no time to think or to plan. The animal and you are both adrenaline charged. You have to take the shot offered by circumstance and if you make a poor hit, you'll be glad to have a lot of power on hand to make up for the lack of perfect bullet placement. In all three of my stainless .500s, I carry Buffalo Bore item 1B, which is a 440-grain hardcast flatnose bullet, traveling around 1,350 fps out of a 6" barrel. These loads will break both shoulders on a large grizzly or they will easily pierce his skull, coming and going.

Suzie Sundles deep in the Madison Mountain range of Montana, in the heart of grizzly and moose country. Her horse is carrying a Marlin Guide Gun .45-70 and since she is too small to fire super powerful handguns, a J frame 3 S&W chambered in .357 Mag is on her belt.





Tim's short .338-06. The 19" Lilja barrel aids in fast handling. The 2.5x8 Leupold scope acquires close moving targets quickly, with practice, when set on low power and helps with longer shots and when threading bullets through brush or obstacles.

Using expanding bullets out of a relatively low-velocity handgun is a recipe for insufficient penetration. Sure, the expanding bullet will make a larger diameter hole, but if you don't get the penetration needed to destroy organs tucked behind fur, fat, muscle and large bones, you may not stop the animal in time to save yourself. Firing expanding bullets from a high-velocity rifle is a much different scenario than the limited velocity we get from handguns.

.475 Linebaugh

I only own two stainless .475 revolvers. Both are Freedom Arms Model 83s. They are packable, strong, accurate and high quality. The .475 Linebaugh cartridge is an excellent choice in grizzly/moose/bison

country and I'd use the .475 more if the .500 did not work so well. I load these revolvers with either Buffalo Bore item 2B (420-grain hardcast flatnose at 1,350 fps out of a 6" barrel) or item 2E (440-grain hardcast extra-wide flatnose at 1,300 fps out of a 6" barrel). Lately, I leave my beautiful blue .475s at home where they will not become rust chankored by my extended exposure to the elements.

.454 Cassul

Again, packability is a necessity to me, so I carry a Freedom Arms Model 83 and a Jack Hunting modified Red Hawk, which was originally a .45 Colt. Bigger/bulkier revolvers chambered in .454, such as the Ruger Super Red Hawk and Taurus Raging Bull, are not packable in very steep

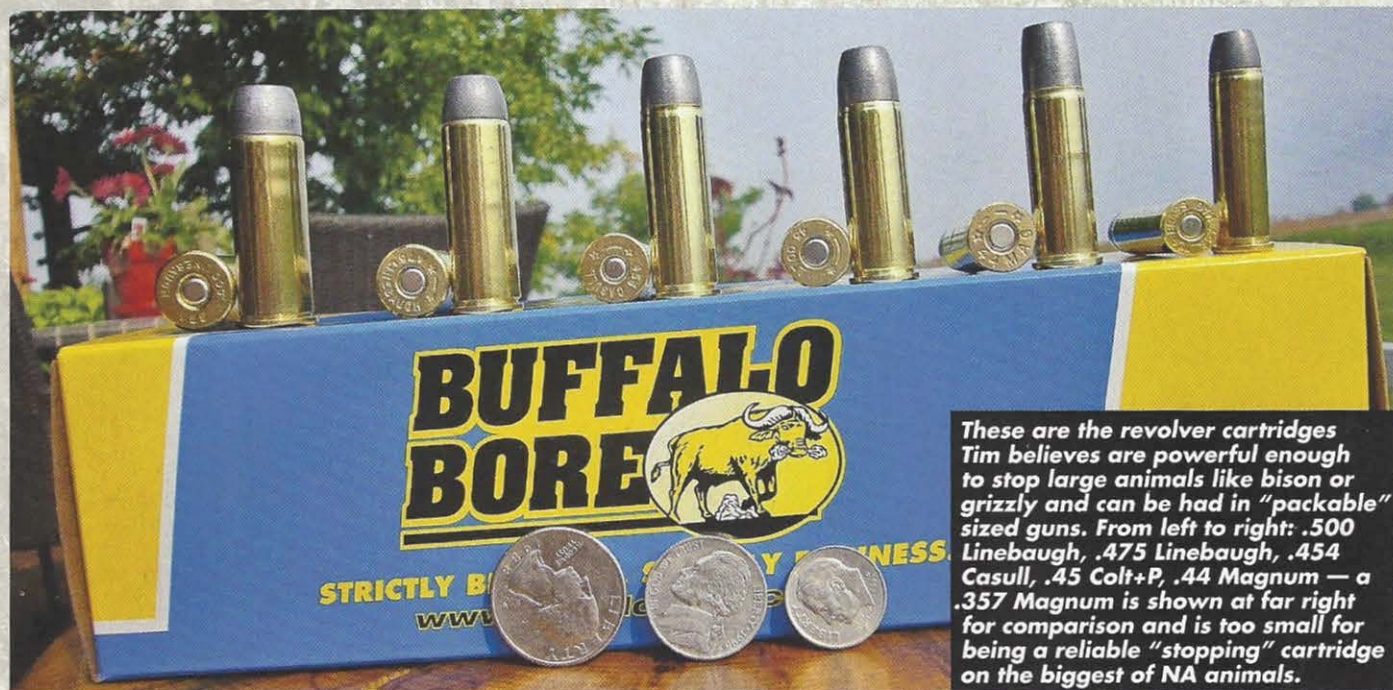
and rugged country where many miles need to be covered. The .454 with proper ammunition is also an excellent stopper. I use Buffalo Bore item 7A (325-grain hardcast flatnose at 1,525 fps out of a 6" barrel) or item 7C (360-grain hardcast flatnose at 1,425 fps out of a 6" barrel).

.45 Colt+P

The only advantage I can find to carrying a .45 Colt is carrying it in the very small, lightweight/packable Freedom Arms Model 97. At a nifty 36 ounces it's a true powerhouse with proper ammo. I hand-load a long-nosed 325-grain hardcast bullet at 1,300 fps from its 5.5" barrel. To keep the overall length of the cartridge short enough for the Model 97's short cylinder, I load these long bullets in



Tim just a few hundred yards off the continental divide in the Bitterroot mountain range, set up as he normally travels remote wilderness with horses. The horse is carrying a .50 Alaskan rifle and he is carrying a .500 Linebaugh revolver in a shoulder holster.



These are the revolver cartridges Tim believes are powerful enough to stop large animals like bison or grizzly and can be had in "packable" sized guns. From left to right: .500 Linebaugh, .475 Linebaugh, .454 Casull, .45 Colt+P, .44 Magnum — a .357 Magnum is shown at far right for comparison and is too small for being a reliable "stopping" cartridge on the biggest of NA animals.

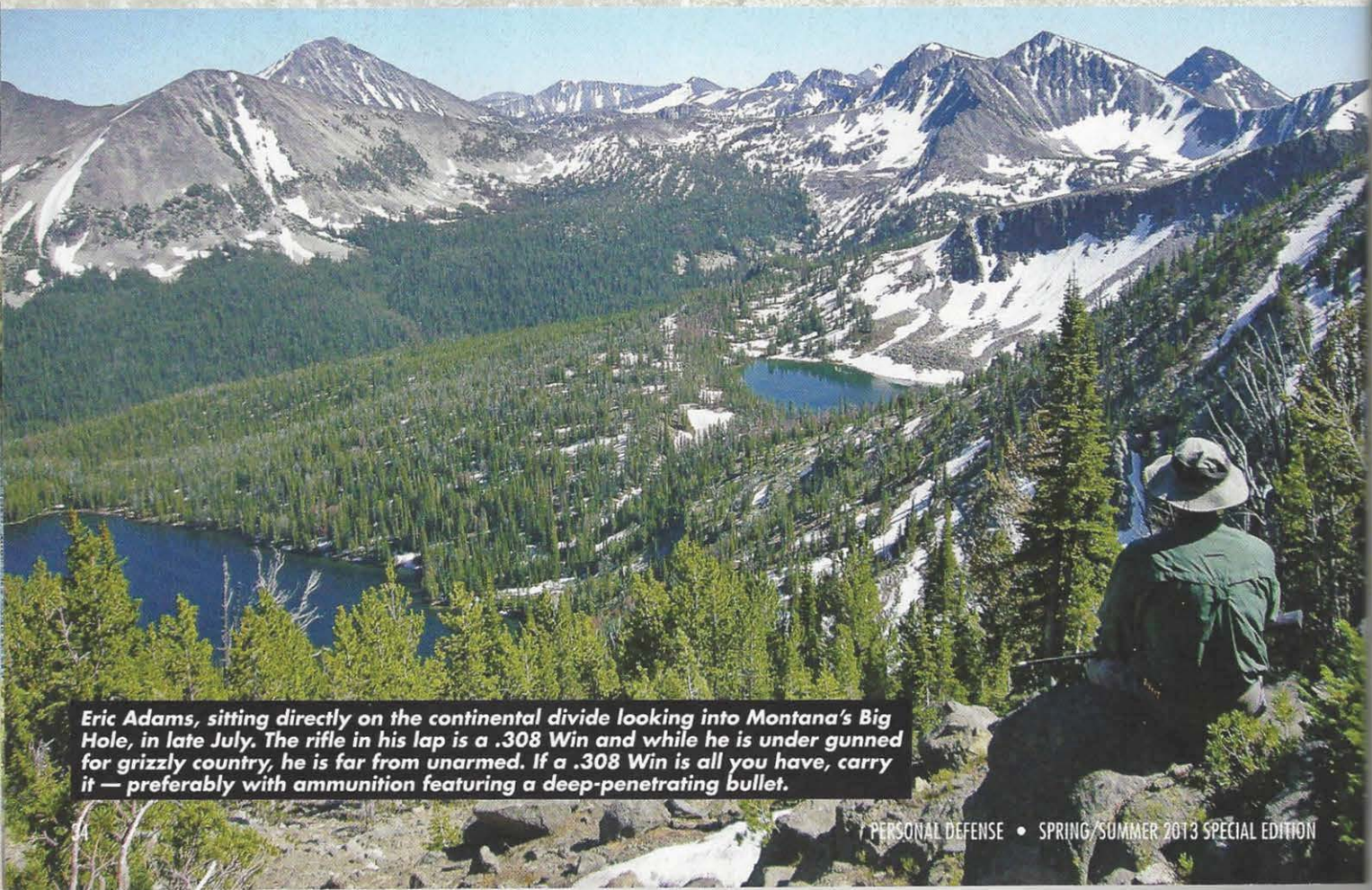
shorter 45 Schofield brass. If I do carry a large-frame Ruger 45 Colt, I use Buffalo Bore item 3A (325-grain hardcast flatnose at 1,325 fps out of a 6" barrel).

.44 Remington Magnum

As we begin to discuss smaller, less powerful cartridges for defensive use against large and dangerous animals, the ammunition choices get

even more critical. Without proper ammo, the .44 Magnum is a very "weak limb" to be climbing on when bison-sized animals are in the mix. In large-frame-only Ruger revolvers, I use Buffalo Bore Item 4D (340-grain hardcast flatnose at 1,425 fps out of a 6" inch barrel) In all other .44 Magnum revolvers, I use Buffalo Bore Item 4A (305-grain hardcast flatnose at 1,325 fps out of a 6" barrel).

There are a few rifles I normally carry on my horse. I have been known to carry a rifle in my hands if I get a bad feeling. When not on the horse, the rifle is sitting around camp. Rifles offer an advantage as they are much more powerful than handguns; being shoulder mounted, they are much easier to shoot with accuracy. However, they keep your hands full and can be a hassle when you need to use



Eric Adams, sitting directly on the continental divide looking into Montana's Big Hole, in late July. The rifle in his lap is a .308 Win and while he is under gunned for grizzly country, he is far from unarmed. If a .308 Win is all you have, carry it — preferably with ammunition featuring a deep-penetrating bullet.

your hands, which is pretty much all of the time. These are the rifles I carry afield when I need to worry about the biggest of wild animals.

.50 Alaskan

My favorite .50 AK rifle was built by Dave Clay on a Marlin XLR in order to have an all stainless, low-maintenance rifle for long excursions in bad conditions. It features a 20" barrel (short barrels come out of a rifle scabbard quickly). Dave also slimmed down the forearm and installed a much stronger magazine tube and magazine tube hanger. Iron-sighted lever-action rifles are flat, handy, simple and fast. The .50 Alaskan cartridge is much more powerful than needed for any critter in North America. I carry Buffalo Bore item 15B (500-grain expanding JFN at 1,850 fps) and item 15C (450-grain hardcast flatnose at 2,100 fps). This particular rifle shoots both loads to the same point of impact, so I can simply mix the two loads if I care to.

.45-70+P

While less powerful than the .50 AK, the .45-70+P cartridge as loaded by Buffalo Bore supplies enough power to easily dispatch any animal in North America, and I prefer it over the .50 Alaskan for the cost of ammo, availability of ammo and the cost and availability of the rifle. I carry Buffalo Bore item 8A (430-grain hardcast flatnose at 1,925 fps) or item 8B (405-grain expanding JFN at 2,000 fps).

.444 Marlin

With proper ammo, this cartridge will supply ample power to take on any menacing animal in North America. All three of my .444s get little use these days as they are blued steel and I hate to watch them rust. When I carry them in the woods, they are stoked with Buffalo Bore item 9A (335-grain hardcast flatnose at 2,025 fps).

.338-06

I often find that having a scoped rifle can be an advantage when I want a defensive rifle to cross over as a hunting rifle for predators such as wolves or coyotes. Ever since our federal government illegally dumped Canadian wolves in the lower 48, wolves have been on my "list" and my killing of them is not usually defensive. The scope can help make longer shots and is a big advantage in threading bullets between branches and obstacles. Since I use scoped rifles all year, every year, I find that scopes, set on low magnification can acquire close moving targets just as fast as iron sights, but this is a matter



This large boar black bear charged Tim, with no warning, while deep in the wilderness on a deer/elk hunting trip and was killed at about 20" with a .340 Weatherby. He was hit head-on in the chest.

of training. This is my most carried rifle these days on summer excursions.

The .338-06, loaded with 225-grain Barnes TSX bullets at 2,600 fps, is the minimum bolt-action cartridge I trust for stopping grizzly and bison. Mine sports a short 19" barrel for ease of handling and quick removal from a saddle scabbard. The narrow 06 case gives me a total capacity of six. If I were to use a belted magnum,

or a short magnum cartridge, my capacity would be four. Even though this cartridge is based on the 06 case necked up to .338, it is far more deadly than any 06 load I can craft, as bullet diameter matters! Similar cartridges such as the .35 Whelen, .338 Federal and .358 Winchester would be equally suitable assuming proper ammo.

These are the handguns and rifles I use in the wilderness where the biggest



A brace of Glocks is what Tim carries when he is not in grizzly, moose or bison country.

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and hardest-to-stop animals can be encountered. As mentioned, any cartridge capable of stopping North America's biggest animals will work well on the lesser species, but when I am in areas where only those lesser species live, such as black bear, wolves, or mountain lion, I feel well-armed carrying almost any centerfire cartridge.

Animal Mindset

This is a good place to point out the distinct differences between the black bear and grizzly bear mindset. Unlike grizzlies, who attack out of territorial and dominance issues and are very difficult to dissuade, black bears generally attack because they see humans as a source of food; black bears can normally be dissuaded easily by hurting them — you don't need to kill them, so any reasonably powerful handgun cartridge, such as a good stiff 9mm load that penetrates deeply (see Buffalo Bore item 24F) will discourage them and probably kill them anyway, if properly hit. Wolves and mountain lions are also easily "turned" if you hurt them severely. Mountain lions, with their stealth, agility, claws and fangs, possess more deadly tools than all other North American predators, but they have a fragile body and a fragile mindset. Once you hurt them, they cease and desist instantly. Buffalo Bore makes non-expanding, deep-penetrating loads for typical handgun calibers such as .357 Mag (item 19A), .38 Special (item 20H), .38 Super (item 33C), .40 S&W (item 23C) and .45 ACP+P (items 45230 FMJ or 45255). These loads are designed just for "woods" use when protecting yourself against black bear, wolves or mountain lions. Since many folks who frequent the woods already own a good 9mm or .38 Special, they can choose proper ammo and be well armed for whatever Mother Nature throws at them in the form of these lesser, yet potentially deadly, species.

Training

You should obviously train your mind and body for proper use of your chosen firearm. For instance, my wife knows if any threat causes me to bring my gun to bear, she needs to not get between my target and me. She also understands not to back into me, bump me or touch me in any way as that will definitely inhibit my ability to hit what I am shooting in the split second I may have. We have discussed and drilled these issues. I also find casual and

fun shooting drills really pay dividends. Tossing sticks into fast moving water and then shooting at them is fabulous practice at hitting moving items and it's very fun. Everyone loves this drill and it will keep people practicing for hours, if you can afford the ammo. A remote-control toy car, with an inflated balloon tied to its antenna as the target, also makes for hours of fun, until someone accidentally hits the car.

I am at a loss as to why anyone would practice with cheap ammo, then load their gun with serious ammo and go afield without first checking for zero and general function. All guns have ammo preferences and most guns will not fire one type of ammo to the same point of aim as another type of ammo. Some guns won't even fire some ammo, period! If your loved ones are going to depend on you, you really should go to the effort of sorting these issues out long before you think you'll be relying on any gun/ammo combination.

Learning to acquire your sights in low light with the aid of a flashlight is something best learned before you need it. When my horses spook at night in a remote wilderness filled with grizzlies, wolves, black bear and mountain lions, I always exit the tent with a flashlight and firearm. This happened just last week in Montana's Mission Mountains and I already knew what my sights looked like and how to acquire them (quickly) in this situation. Carrying your firearm inside a backpack is about as handy as carrying your car gun in the trunk. Your firearms should be instantly accessible.

I carry all my firearms with a round in the chamber. Whether they are carried on a horse, in my holster or are lying in the tent, they have a round chambered and I have trained my gun handling accordingly. While I am not suggesting you do the same, I am suggesting you train yourself to handle your firearms proficiently, safely and quickly. If you choose not to carry a round in the chamber, then please learn to chamber quickly and pray you have both hands available when the time comes. This is not an issue with revolvers.

There is no need to fear the beautiful wild places or the animals that live there, if you are prepared. If you choose to be a protector of your family and self, knowledge and preparation are required and just might keep your wonderful time with nature from turning tragic. ↘

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