

Safari Rifles II





The author with his Botswana elephant, taken in April 2008.

Safari Rifles II

Doubles, Magazine Rifles, and Cartridges for
African Hunting

by
Craig T. Boddington



Safari Press

CAUTION!

Common sense needs to be used when handling and discharging a firearm. Keep the following principles of safety in mind so as to provide a safe environment for everyone: 1) Always point a firearm in a safe direction. 2) Never point a firearm at another person. 3) Treat all firearms as though they are loaded. 4) Wear eye and hearing protection at all times when handling firearms.

Do not attempt to handload your own ammunition using the bullet velocities and or loads listed on these pages. Your firearm may not be able to withstand the pressures generated by the loads and velocities listed in this book. If you aren't sure about your gun, consult a competent gunsmith.

The handloading of ammunition and the discharging of a firearm should never be attempted without the supervision of an adult experienced in both handloading and firearms. Do not attempt to handload ammunition without knowing how to read signs of (excessive) pressure in both guns and ammunition.

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DEDICATION

*This one is for Donna,
a great hunting partner . . . and partner*

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Author's Introduction to the Revised Edition

As impossible as it seems, eighteen years have passed since I put the finishing touches on *Safari Rifles*. I was much younger then, not nearly forty, and in the way of younger people I undoubtedly thought I knew more than I really did. Even back then, however, I had sense enough to understand that a book lasts a long time, and if I made a fool of myself in its writing, I would look a fool for many years. So *Safari Rifles* was a daunting task, treading on the heels of classics such as John “Pondoro” Taylor’s *African Rifles and Cartridges*. Come to think of it, if you must know the truth, I’m not entirely certain *Safari Rifles* was even my idea. My longtime publisher and friend Ludo Wurf Bain is a much better idea man than I am, and he was also a lot younger back in the late 1980s . . .

No book on a subject like this can be written without the help of good friends. Pondoro Taylor had depth of experience that I can never approach, but he drew heavily upon the experience of Fletcher Jamieson and others. In *Safari Rifles* I drew upon all the classic literature, and the experience of friends and mentors. I also had the prescience to conduct a survey of licensed African professional hunters. Well, OK, that probably wasn’t my idea, either, but the response was overwhelming, and I have always believed that the data my respondents provided are the most valuable part of the book. (After all, my rule in African hunting is no different now than it was thirty years ago: When in doubt, trust your PH!)

Whether the book actually contained valuable information or, through blind luck, had fortuitous timing, since its actual publication in 1990 I have been both bemused and delighted by its acceptance. To date it is the most enduring, the best- and longest-selling, of my now twenty-odd books. Amazing, at least to me, is the fact that in total copies sold it closely rivals John Taylor’s masterwork, which appeared clear back in 1948.

As stated, I will never have Taylor’s experience with the dangerous game, nor do I consider myself as good a storyteller as he. However, I think several important factors influenced the success of *Safari Rifles*—most of which are related to timing. Taylor’s book was (and is) comprehensive, but it focuses heavily on the thick-skinned game, primarily elephant, and naturally so because Taylor was a genuine ivory hunter.

Big-bore cartridges fascinate hunters and shooters alike, but by 1990 the landscape of the African safari had changed. The industry had moved south, average hunts had grown shorter, and the most common safari had become the plains-game safari. Although I endeavored to avoid giving short shrift to the dangerous game, I recognized this and attempted to present evenly the entire spectrum of rifles and cartridges for African hunting.

Too, Taylor’s timing was unfortunate. In 1948 the British Nitro Express cartridges were at the top of the African food chain, but Taylor couldn’t know that within a decade Kynoch would discontinue loading so many of the great old cartridges he wrote about.

And because he was based in remote Africa, he could not have extensive knowledge of American developments—or predict that during the 1950s and continuing to this day, American clientele would dominate the safari industry. But that doesn't make his information wrong, just outdated. So I still frequently refer to *African Rifles and Cartridges*, and recommend you do as well. Some of the cartridges he discusses have enjoyed a rebirth, but all are more or less available, some readily and others only with great effort. Most of the hunting bullets he discusses are obsolete, and today we understand better the critical importance of the hunting bullet. But the main problem is that anything developed after 1948 is missing.

Sadly, this is now the situation with the original *Safari Rifles*. There has been much development in rifles, bullets, cartridges, and optics since 1990. Many of you, and certainly my publisher, have been gently suggesting for some years that *Safari Rifles* needed to be updated. I have resisted. My excuse to my publisher, which he will confirm, is that the original was still selling steadily, so why compete with oneself?

My real reason, however, has been that although I really enjoy sitting down and writing a book, rehashing my own material sounded much more like work than fun! Note, please, that almost all of my books have been written “from scratch.” I've never claimed to be a good writer, but I like writing, and I've never had a shortage of material. So, with the exceptions of *Fair Chase in North America*, which was always intended to be a collection of material from the Boone and Crockett Club's *Fair Chase* magazine, and *African Experience*, which was always intended to be a collected series of articles from *Safari* magazine, none of my books contain material adapted from magazine articles.

Nor, until today, have I ever set out to revise a previous work. Like writing one, this, too, is a daunting task! In any project some chapters will be much easier than others, so I avoid spoiling myself by tackling the easy ones first. I start a book with a tight chapter outline, and then I write it start to finish. Mind you, the outline usually morphs along the way, but I always have a plan. In this case the plan is the original chapter outline of *Safari Rifles*.

I must admit that until this project became inevitable, I hadn't actually studied *Safari Rifles* for a long time. I was totally shocked at its breadth and scope. Knowing my age and actual experience at the time I wrote it, I must say that Ludo (who has always provided invaluable input) and I reached far beyond ourselves. Over the years many of you have suggested that a “new” *Safari Rifles* should include various things such as discussion of scopes, expanding bullets, and solids. So I had notes to myself. Oddly, virtually all these suggested subjects were actually already right there on the table of contents and within the pages of the original book. I can only say that it's a big book, probably most often read in pieces rather than start to finish. And of course the additions cover subjects that have changed radically since 1990.

So this present volume is a true revision, top to bottom, page by page. I will keep that which is totally valid, update what I feel is missing, and add new chapters as required. From the objectivity of nearly twenty years, I can truthfully say that the original is pretty darn complete—but is clearly missing many new developments.

I was probably at the midpoint of writing *Safari Rifles* when Federal brought out .416 Rigby and .470 Nitro Express factory ammo. About the same time Remington introduced its .416 Remington Magnum and Weatherby its .416 Weatherby Magnum. But at publication in 1990 it wasn't clear that the .416s would become as popular as they have, almost sweeping from the field other "lower .40s" like the .404 Jeffery, .411 KDF, and .425 Express. Nor could I have envisioned the amazing revival of the double rifle. And, of course, there have been many other developments up and down the caliber scale.

No author can have a crystal ball, so it's likely that within my lifetime this volume, too, will become outdated. But there's another factor—the fundamental law that "you don't know what you don't know." By the late 1980s I had done a great deal of African hunting, but I had no idea that within another twenty years I would treble my experience. Back then I had plenty of basic experience, but no experience in specialized areas such as the forest, or the mountains of Ethiopia and the deserts of Chad. In the 1980s, too, I had relatively little experience with elephant. This didn't seem to matter at the time because it appeared almost certain that elephant, and the hunting of elephant, would follow the path of the black rhino. Times change. The herds have rebuilt (to the point of gross overpopulation in some southern countries), and the elephant is again an important part of African hunting. For that matter, even black rhino are now on very limited quota in South Africa and Namibia, and I never thought I would see this. So African hunting has continued to change, and my own knowledge of it has continued to expand. It's easy to add new rifles and cartridges to the text, but reflecting these factors will probably require the most work.

Having resisted—in fact, truly dreaded—this necessary project, I am now excited and ready to go to work. I know that I will be extremely embarrassed by some of the things I wrote twenty years ago, not having known any better. I will keep the good and excise the bad, and I believe the result will be of equal use to owners of the original volume and our next generation of African hunters.

Craig Boddington
Tafika Camp
Zambezi Valley, Zimbabwe
May 2007

Author's Note on Cartridge Nomenclature

This book will discuss capabilities and utility of many cartridges of American, British, and European origin. Each region has its distinct conventions and protocols for cartridge identification. However, just like the English language, especially in the case of British and American cartridges there are more exceptions than there are rules! Most Americans who grew up with the American system(s) probably understand them; likewise citizens of the Commonwealth grasp British cartridges while the rest of the world comprehend the metric system. But it is a confusing mess, so the publisher and I thought a bit of discussion on the subject might be in order.

American cartridges: Modern American cartridges are generally identified by bore or bullet diameter, usually expressed in hundredths (two digits, as in “.30”) or thousands of an inch (three digits, as in “.257”). This information is customarily followed by the name of firm that introduced the cartridge. The bullet diameter given may be exact as in “.308 Winchester,” or it may be approximate as in “.250 Savage” (which uses a .257-inch bullet) or “.30 Thompson/Center” (another .308-inch bore). Obvious exceptions in numbering occur when American manufacturers chose to use metric designations. This is inconsistent. For instance, .284 Winchester, 7mm Winchester Short Magnum, .280 Remington, and 7mm Remington Magnum are all 7mm (.284-inch bullet diameter) cartridges.

Cartridges that originated “off market” as wildcat or nonstandard cartridges but are later adopted by a manufacturer are often named in honor of the designer. Good examples are the .257 Roberts (named after designer Ned Roberts) and the .35 Whelen (named in honor of gunwriter Col. Townsend Whelen, who may or may not have actually had anything to do with the cartridge's design). The 7mm Shooting Times Westerner (STW) was designed by gunwriter Layne Simpson, who is a longtime contributor to Shooting Times magazine.

Some cartridges like the .220 Swift and .219 Zipper are identified with “buzzwords” rather than the name of the manufacturer, and as we've already seen the names of many cartridges are further modified, such as the “.308 Marlin Express” and “.300 Winchester Magnum.” Today these words may help identify a cartridge, but guys in my business have long suspected they are added primarily for hype. At one time, however, both “express” and “magnum” had specific meaning. In the 1870s the British created bottleneck cartridges that pushed light-for-caliber bullets ahead of heavy charges of black powder, considerably increasing the velocity. These were called “express” loads, taken from the fastest thing they knew at the time, the express train.

Similarly, the British took the word “magnum” from an extra-large bottle of champagne and applied it to an extra-large cartridge case in the same caliber as another cartridge offered by the same company. Serious gun nuts who study this stuff thus take a modern “magnum” and wonder what, exactly, it is supposed to be a magnum version of. Winchester could argue that the .338 Winchester Magnum is definitely a magnum version of the old .33 Winchester Center Fire. Remington could argue that their 7mm Remington Magnum is a magnum version of their .280 Remington. Both firms, respectively, might have a little trouble explaining exactly what the .458 Winchester Magnum or the 8mm Remington Magnum cartridges are magnum versions of, however!

To make things even more confusing, hyphenated cartridge designations aren't uncommon—and can have significantly different meanings. In the black-powder era the second number in a hyphenated cartridge, as in “.45-70,” denoted the charge weight. This was often further hyphenated to include the bullet weight, as in “.45-70-405.” The convention of including the charge weight carried over to a number of early smokeless powder cartridges, including the .30-40 Krag, .25-35 Winchester, and .30-30 Winchester. By the way, not a few cartridges have more than one name. As denoted by the roll mark on early Winchester rifles so chambered, the .30-30 was originally called “.30 WCF” (for Winchester Center Fire).

Other hyphenations mean something altogether different. The “06” in “.30-06” is actually an abbreviation for the year of its design, the proper title being “.30 U.S. Government, Model of 1906.” On the other hand, the “08” in 7mm-08 Remington doesn't stand for the year at all. Instead, it's an abbreviation for the parent case, which is the .308 Winchester. This hyphenation is not uncommon in nonstandard (wildcat) cartridges as in “6.5mm-06,” a .30-06 case necked down to take a 6.5mm (.264-inch) bullet, and is also seen in Norma's 6.5mm-.284 Norma, the .284 Winchester case necked down to 6.5mm.

British Cartridges: As with American cartridges, the British cartridges loosely follow several different systems. Perhaps the most common is exactly the same as the American system: a two- or three-digit caliber designation, followed by the name of the maker, and perhaps with buzzwords added. Many, like the .375 Holland & Holland Magnum and .416 Rigby, are extremely straightforward. The .375 H&H uses a .375-inch bullet in a case designed by Holland & Holland, and it is definitely a larger and more powerful version of an earlier Holland & Holland .375. The .416 Rigby uses a .416-inch bullet and was designed by John Rigby. It was never designated a magnum because neither Rigby nor anyone else ever before used a .416-inch bullet.

Even with this simple and understandable system there are random anomalies. Americans tend to approximate bullet diameters, sometimes rounding up (the .460 Weatherby is actually a .458) and sometimes down (the .260 Remington is actually a .264). The British go a big step farther. There are two diameters in a rifle barrel, the larger groove diameter, which is approximately the same as the bullet diameter, and the land diameter, the distance between the raised portions between the grooves. Many British cartridges are named by the smaller land diameter rather than the larger groove diameter. For instance, the .318 Westley Richards uses a .330-inch bullet. The .404 Jeffery uses a .423-inch bullet. This would be understandable if it were consistent, at least in the offerings from a given firm—but the .333 Jeffery uses a .333-inch bullet.

At least to Americans, the most confusing nomenclature of British cartridges is for those that were based on an existing parent case necked down. In British parlance, the parent case is given first, followed by the bullet diameter of the actual cartridge. So a “.500/.465” is a .500 case necked down to take a (nominally) .465-inch bullet. This is also not consistently applied. Several cartridges had multiple versions, usually differing by case length. So case length is often appended, as in “.450/.400-3-inch” and “.450/.400-3¼-inch.” Although rim diameters aren’t identical, both cartridges are based on a .450 case necked down to take a (nominally) .40-caliber bullet. As is the case with American cartridges, however, nothing is applied consistently. Like the .500/.465, the .470 Nitro Express is based on a .500 case—but it was named, simply, the .470 even though it uses a .475-inch bullet!

“Nitro Express,” by the way, although catchy, actually has meaning. It denotes a cartridge designed for smokeless (nitrocellulose) propellant, and it certainly had a lot more velocity than its black-powder predecessors.

As we delved into the editing and proofreading of this volume, my publisher, Ludo Wurfbain, and I had a heated discussion over how the “style” of these cartridges should be handled. At some point undoubtedly the British had a consistent style for writing these designations, but in the past hundred years this has been corrupted to the point where almost no references display any consistency. Sometimes the “.450/.400” designation is written with hyphens (.450-.400) rather than a slash (.450/.400), and some references use decimal points and some do not (450-400 or .450-400). We noted with some dismay that there were inconsistencies in the original *Safari Rifles* as well! In this volume we have attempted to make the style consistent with decimal points and a slash, as in “.450/.400.” This is because the numerals do refer to an actual caliber designation, first the parent case, and then the actual cartridge. I prefer the slash, because many Nitro Express cartridges are further modified with case length, as in “.450/.400-3¼-inch.”

In many cases there were both rimless and rimmed versions of the same cartridge, the former for bolt actions and the latter for double rifles and single shots. The British designation for a rimmed cartridge is “flanged,” as in “.375 Holland & Holland Flanged Magnum.”

European Cartridges: Although we Americans have a terrible time wrapping our hands around the metric system, this is by far the world’s simplest and most descriptive system of cartridge identification. The proper name for almost every European cartridge uses the bullet diameter in millimeters followed by the case length in millimeters. So, a 7x57mm cartridge uses a 7mm bullet in a case 57mm in length. Simple. A 7x64mm cartridge also uses a 7mm bullet, but clearly has a longer case. To this is usually added the name of the original designer, as in 7x57mm Mauser or 6.5x54 Mannlicher-Schoenauer.

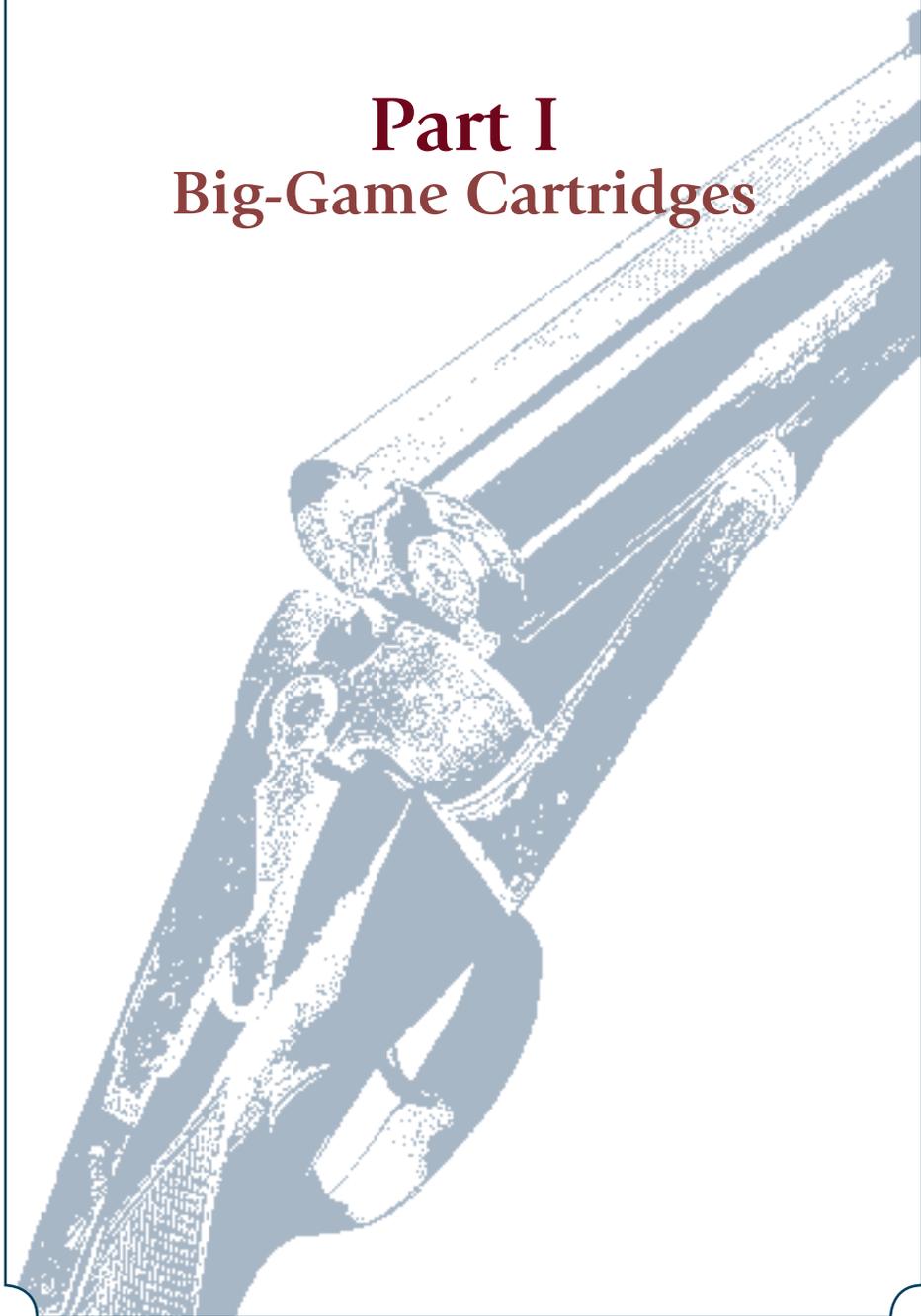
Oh, yes, the exceptions. There aren’t many, but there are a few. The original 8x57mm Mauser, often correctly referred to as a “7.9mm,” used a .318-inch bullet. The cartridge was later redesigned to take a .323-inch bullet, which is the actual 8mm diameter. The original .318 diameter was designated “J” while the larger diameter was designated “S.” So the 8x68S uses a .323-inch bullet. Another suffix often appended to metric cartridges is “R” as in 7x65R or 9.3x74R. This denotes a rimmed cartridge, which we Americans can easily understand, but it’s pure coincidence that both “rim” and the German word for “edged cartridge,” *randpatrone*, both start with an “R!”

It takes a lifetime of fascination with firearms to become fully conversant with the seemingly whimsical way so many cartridges are named—and there are still some out there that will stump almost anyone. This volume is much expanded from the original *Safari Rifles*, and we made an early determination that there were better and more current sources for precise case dimensions and exact bullet diameters, as well as ballistics tables, for the many cartridges mentioned herein. In most cases cartridge headstamps and firearm barrel markings will be clear, and it’s a simple matter to consult standard references, either in print or on the Internet, to find out exactly what you’re dealing with. However, there are some odd birds out there, so, if there is any doubt, the smart approach is to slug the barrel and/or make a chamber cast.



Part I

Big-Game Cartridges



The Ultralights: .17 – .22



Chapter 1

“Safari” is a magical word that must stir the imagination of even the most Spathetic among us. For the hunter, the soft Swahili word conveys the adventure, excitement, and even danger that are the essence of African hunting. The meaning of the word has continued to expand ever since Theodore Roosevelt’s historic 1909 African expedition, but in truth the word “safari” simply means “journey.” And every journey must have a beginning. This includes the safari we are now undertaking through the myriad sporting rifles and cartridges available and suitable for today’s African hunting.



The Cape fox (a.k.a. silver jackal) is one of several small predators ideally taken with a very light rifle that minimizes pelt damage. This Marlin in .17 HMR was absolutely perfect!

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Like many of you, I am fascinated by the heavy calibers intended for use on the largest game—and I'm certainly not alone. In the twenty years since I began the original of this work we have seen an amazing rebirth of double rifles, incredible popularity of the .416s, and a raft of other big bores—not to mention a confusing gaggle of Short, Super Short, and Ultra Magnums.

It would be tempting to start with some of the juiciest new developments. We aren't going to do that, though. We're going to start at the opposite end of the spectrum and work our way up, giving due consideration to cartridges as small as the .17 rimfires. Since Africa holds a greater variety of game than any other continent, the spectrum of useful arms and loads is very broad. There is indeed a wide array of large and dangerous game: two kinds of rhino, five varieties of buffalo, plus elephant, lion, hippo, and leopard. Nevertheless, what really gives Africa its flavor and provides the greatest part of its hunting thrills isn't the big stuff but rather the hundred-plus species and subspecies of plains game: zebras, wild pigs, and the antelopes great and small. These make Africa the world's greatest hunting ground. And we mustn't forget the smaller predators: jackals, foxes, and small cats.

On almost any safari today (except very specialized quests for big elephant), the majority of hunting hours and the vast majority of the cartridges expended will be devoted to members of the antelope clan. And a varied group it is. African antelope range from the jack-rabbit-size dik-dik, suni, and royal antelope up to moose-size eland. Between these extremes are many beautiful, interesting game animals that, in American terms, could be said to range from the size of javelina to the size of elk. These hundred-plus species, subspecies, and races of antelope occupy, in some combination, virtually all of Africa's diverse habitats. There are desert antelope, swamp-dwellers, true plains species, and brush-dwellers, species that have adapted to rugged mountains, and others that have found their niche in the dense forests.

These animals collectively are the heart and soul of African hunting, and the appropriate cartridges for them make a suitable starting point for our safari through rifles and cartridges. In the old days the British liked to characterize their cartridges as "small bores, medium bores, and big bores." As new cartridges developed, the definitions tended to change—and none are truly standardized. I believe it was John Taylor, for instance, who identified the cartridges between .40 and .45 caliber as "large medium bores." Big bores were over .45 in caliber, and the behemoth .577 and .600 (and now .700) were sometimes called "ultra-large bores." This is arbitrary, but a book like this requires organization, so I will arbitrarily create a new category from .17 to .22 that I will call "ultralight."

Keep in mind that this category reflects the African context, with those hundred-plus antelopes ranging from jack rabbit to moose in size. The North



Donna Boddington used the .17 HMR to take this exceptional steenbok. Though small, this antelope is at the absolute upper end of the little .17's capability. Her shot was perfect, but penetration was barely adequate.

American hunting most familiar to most of us tends to be specialized. We go pronghorn hunting or bear hunting, and a “combination hunt” might mean a deer tag included on an elk hunt. The most specialized of all African habitats holds more different native species than any like-size area in North America. You will always leave camp with a specific plan for that day, but you really don't know what you might actually encounter.

This is the fundamental challenge of choosing rifles and cartridges for African hunting. We could have great fun around the campfire selecting the perfect rifle and cartridge for each of the hundred-odd antelopes and more, but this would be a purely theoretical discussion with little practicality, because one cannot take a hundred rifles on safari. Or even ten. The practical limit is three, two is the most common choice, and in many cases the most sensible approach is just one.

This means that most rifles taken on safari should be chosen with an eye toward versatility. Given the size range of African game, my ultralight cartridges are not versatile. All would be very foolish choices for a one-rifle safari. On the other hand, the little guns are fun to shoot and can be extremely useful on the smallest game.

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They are obviously at the opposite end of the spectrum from an open-sighted big-bore rifle but have in common that both the smallest and the largest cartridges are very specialized—so if an ultralight is chosen, extra care must be given to ensure great versatility in the other rifles taken on safari.

The .17s

The .17 Remington made quite a splash some years ago. Its little 25-grain bullet is amazingly fast, and it found much favor with hunters of small predators because the little bullet would rarely exit, thus doing little pelt damage. For instance, it became extremely popular among fox hunters in Australia. In recent years this cartridge fell into disfavor because of a reputation for being finicky and fouling the barrel very quickly. In 2006 it was essentially replaced (in the Remington line) by the new .17 Fireball, the old .221 Fireball case necked down to .17. The .17 Fireball is a bit slower and a bit less finicky, but indications are it hasn't caught on well.

On the other hand, one of the great commercial successes in recent cartridge history has been the .17 Hornady Magnum Rimfire (HMR), developed by Hornady by necking the .22 magnum case down to .17. Two hundred million rounds later the supply finally caught up with the demand! Also successful, but not quite so, is the .17 Mach 2, the .22 Long Rifle case similarly necked down to .17.

The little .17s have almost no recoil and tend to be incredibly accurate. They have their uses but are extremely rare in Africa because they are so specialized. Most serious American varminters find even the fastest .17 centerfires to be questionable on coyotes (which are very tough), especially as range increases. So the sensible limit for the .17 centerfires is probably animals weighing no more than forty pounds.

The .17 HMR, with great accuracy and relatively cheap ammo, is actually more useful—but is probably even more specialized. We used a Marlin .17 HMR in Namibia



Left to right: .17 HMR, .22 Long Rifle, .22 WMR, .22 Hornet. All of these “ultralights” are useful in Africa, but because of their heavier bullets the .22s are probably more versatile than the .17s.

The Ultralights: .17–.22

in 2006, and the same rifle again in 2007. It was wonderful for spring hares and foxes and would probably be perfect for genet and African wild cat. It is also perfect for the very smallest antelope, such as dik-dik, taken at medium ranges. However, results were questionable on antelope even as small as steenbok—questionable enough that I would not again use it on even a thirty-pound antelope.

.20s and .22s

With inexpensive, compact ammunition that makes little noise, the .22 rimfire has become a classic poacher's arm in Africa as well as elsewhere. For this reason, the “two-two” is not legal for game in some African countries, and its importation may not be allowed. Hunters who consider taking a .22 on safari should check the regulations carefully beforehand. Be advised that the regulations may simply state “.22,” making the .22 centerfires just as illegal as a .22 Long Rifle.

Where legal, though, a .22 is not only useful on safari but also a lot of fun. In theory the .22 Long Rifle would be quite adequate for the smallest antelope—the dik-dik and smaller duikers—and in heavy cover would be an enjoyable stalking rifle for such game. In Ethiopia Joe Bishop and I used a well-worn Brno .22 owned by outfitter Col. Negussie Eshete to take dik-dik, and in the forest I've often used borrowed .22s for calling small duikers. Unfortunately, in practice, except in thick cover the smaller antelopes are often taken at ranges exceeding the sixty-yard limit placed on the .22 Long Rifle by its looping trajectory.

Its real use on safari is twofold—plinking and practice while in camp, and shooting for the pot. Neither should be scoffed at. Any shooting practice at all, even during the course of a safari, is to the good, and a .22 makes such practice enjoyable and relatively quiet. It isn't unusual, especially for relatively inexperienced hunters, to develop a bad shooting habit during the course of a safari. Flinching,



Left to right: .204 Ruger, .223 Remington, .22-250. The faster .22 centerfires are popular among local hunters in southern Africa, where they are used to take smaller antelopes as well as pests like jackals.



While slower cartridges like the rimfires may be more ideal for the smallest animals, you never know what shot you might get. I used Larry McGillewie's .222 Remington to take this bat-eared fox at 200 yards.

for example, can develop overnight if the hunter is unfamiliar with the heavier rifles. The best cure is to go back to the basics, relearning proper shooting through practice. The quiet, recoilless .22 is the best tool available. The late Finn Aagaard told me that in his Kenya days he always kept a .22 and plenty of ammo in camp, and if any shooting problems surfaced, the .22 provided the best cure.

Although Africa does have a small variety of rabbits much like our cottontail, most of the pot shooting consists of birds. If a change of diet is more desirable than a bit of sport, an accurate .22 is absolutely the best supplier of guinea fowl. With a shotgun, the flocks will often outrun you before taking flight; with a good .22, it's a simple matter to snipe two or three as they run straight away, just out of shotgun range. On several hunts in Central African Republic PH Rudy Lubin's Ruger 10/22 was always on hand. On these specialized safaris for bongo and Derby eland we often ate sniped guinea fowl for days on end. This wasn't altogether because other game wasn't available but because the quiet little .22 created such little disturbance.

The varmint shooting we enjoy in America is relatively unknown in Africa, perhaps because of the abundance of "legitimate" game animals. However, in southern Africa night shooting for spring hares (actually more like a kangaroo rat

The Ultralights: .17-.22

than a hare) is occasionally done. And in rocky kopjes the dassie, or rock hyrax (Africa's equivalent of a rockchuck), is occasionally shot. The .22 would be fine for the former but totally outclassed for the latter because of distance.

Because of practical limitations on the number of guns one can take on safari, I would probably not bring along a .22 rimfire, but I would be delighted if one happened to be in camp. If I were to take any rimfire on safari it would be not the .22 Long Rifle or any of the .17s but instead the .22 Winchester Magnum Rimfire (WMR). While the .22 WMR is a bit noisier and more expensive to shoot than the .22 LR, it has great advantages. Propelling its 40-grain bullet at 2,000 feet per second, the .22 WMR is effective on small game to about 125 yards, and shoots flat enough to let you hit at that distance, which is virtually impossible with a .22 Long Rifle.

The truth is that the .22 rimfires, whether Magnum or Long Rifle, are much more deadly than I'm allowing for. It has been rumored that an elephant was killed with a carefully placed between-the-ribs shot with a .22, and John Taylor himself said that he would walk from the Cape to Cairo with a .22 rifle and a heavy revolver and never go hungry. With precise shot placement, the .22 could certainly be used for impala, reedbuck, and a wide variety of similar game. Indeed, a resident hunter shooting for the pot might well use a .22 for such purposes.

But this book is primarily for the visiting sportsman, the hunter in search of the best trophy that can be found. Such a hunter can't always wait for the animal to stand just so and can't always get as close as he would like. For him, the .22, if used at all, is a fun gun only, for the pot and for a few practice shots in camp.

The high-velocity .22 centerfires are primarily an American institution, developed by and for the American varmint who needed to reach out considerable distances to dispatch small pests and small predators such as fox and coyote. Their British ancestor was the rook rifle, a class of cartridge typified by the .300 Rook and .310 Cadet cartridges. The former started life as a black-powder cartridge, firing an 80-grain bullet at 1,100 feet per second, while the .310 Cadet, a smokeless load, fired a 120-grain bullet at 1,200 FPS.

Rook rifles were used for target shooting and for shooting rabbits, hedgehogs, foxes, and such. "Rook," incidentally, is an English word for a type of crow. In the well-populated English countryside, long-range cartridges weren't desired, and the relatively large bullet diameter of the rook cartridges ensured quick kills without the need for velocity. In America, oldies but goodies such as the .25-20 and .32-20 serve the same purpose.

In America, however, the woodchuck hunter wanted to reach out across wide-open fields, and he needed the flat trajectory that only comes with high velocity. And, of course, there was also the early fascination with the incredible velocity made



In Ethiopia, outfitter Col. Negussie Esbete had a well-worn Brno .22 LR available. It was perfect for Cordeaux dik-dik, encountered in fairly thick brush where shots were close.

possible by smokeless powder. With actions and steels just making the adjustment to the much higher pressures of smokeless powder, initially the only way to achieve high velocity was to reduce caliber and bullet weight.

The .22 Savage High Power, designed by Charles Newton and introduced by Savage in 1912, is a classic example—and is certainly the first of the high-velocity commercial .22 centerfires. Firing a heavy-for-caliber 70-grain bullet at 2,800 FPS, it was a real sizzler and was actually intended for use not necessarily on varmints but on game up to deer. The large-caliber, heavy-bullet boys damned it, as they would today. But those who used it often swore by it. I recall a photo of a 1920s missionary in China posing with a very large tiger taken with his Savage 99 in .22 High Power. He thought the cartridge was perfectly adequate! Karamojo Bell himself, guru of smallbores, wrote of shooting buffalo with the .22 Savage High Power—but he mentioned that he was very, very careful!

Although a few single-shot rifles were chambered for it, the .22 High Power in typical lever-action form didn't have the accuracy needed for varmint hunting, and therefore wasn't a true forerunner of today's super-accurate, flat-shooting .22 centerfire. Those honors go to the 1920s-vintage .22 Hornet. With a 45-grain bullet leaving the muzzle at 2,690 FPS, the Hornet is relatively flat-shooting, and

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it was originally offered in accurate bolt-action and single-shot rifles. It achieved tremendous popularity early on; its muzzle blast wasn't too severe, and it could reach out to 150 yards and beyond with ease, even on the smallest of pests. As the decades passed, the Hornet was nearly abandoned in favor of much hotter .22 centerfires, but today it has enjoyed a rebirth, with several high-quality bolt actions and single shots again available for this fine old cartridge.

Before we go on to the modern .22s, for completeness we should mention two Winchester developments, the .218 Bee and .219 Zipper. They were designed for, respectively, the Model 92 and 94 Winchester lever actions. The former employed a 46-grain bullet at 2,860 FPS, the latter a 56-grain bullet at a very respectable 3,110 FPS. Both have been chambered in custom single shots, and the Bee has been offered in bolt actions. In those forms, they can be real tack-drivers, but in their original lever actions, just like the old Savage High Power, they don't normally offer the kind of accuracy desirable in a .22 centerfire.

The Hornet, in Winchester Model 54 and Savage 23-D bolt actions, really got interest going for .22 centerfires that would shoot flatter and reach out harder. In 1935 the .220 Swift answered that need with a commercial cartridge that's still at the top end of the velocity scale. The original loading boasted a 48-grain bullet at 4,110 feet per second, and our modern concept of the varmint rifle was born.

The Swift is still around, and with it are later developments such as the .222 and .223 Remington, and .22-250, and newer cartridges like the .204 Ruger (a true .20-caliber) and the .223 Winchester Super Short Magnum. Equally good .22 centerfires that have gone by the wayside are the .222 Remington Magnum, .224 Weatherby Magnum, and .225 Winchester.

Most writers tend to divide the .22 centerfires into three groups: the relatively low-velocity .22 Hornet; medium-velocity cartridges (3,000 to 3,250 FPS or so) typified by the .222 and .223 Remington; and the really fast numbers, which include .22-250, .220 Swift, .223 WSSM, and .204 Ruger.

For the sportsman visiting Africa, all three groups are limited in use. Of all the .22 centerfires, I would personally judge the .22 Hornet as the most useful on an average safari. Relatively quiet, with compact ammo, the Hornet can perform all the functions of the .22 rimfire. It can also perform like a champ on the smaller antelopes and furbearers such as jackal, especially in thornbush country where the shots rarely exceed 100 yards. And it would be a lot of fun to pack around in the hills to pot the occasional dassie or perhaps a klipspringer.

Although they're certainly more powerful, I see less practical use for either the .222–.223s or the red-hot centerfires. They make a bit too much noise, and the ammo is a bit too bulky, to allow for casual plinking and target practice. They're



An advantage to the .22 LR is that it is quiet. We were hunting bongo in the C.A.R. and we were meatless and hungry—but we didn't want to disturb the area with rifle shots. The good old .22 and some guinea fowl solved the problem.

also much too destructive to consider using on edible small game and birds. The Hornet with solid bullets is absolutely the upper limit for such use. The resident hunter who is willing to pick his shots could put these cartridges to good use on even very large antelope (and many do). Indeed, in southern Africa the .223 is extremely popular for springbok and other antelope up to blesbok and impala, but the visiting sportsman would be handicapping himself unnecessarily.

If I could manage a very light rifle in my kit, I'd take a .22 Magnum or a Hornet and forget the rest. In the days when it was much easier to take multiple rifles on safari, my mentors at the old Petersen Publishing Company, Robert E. "Pete" Petersen and Tom Siatos, always included a .22 Hornet in their battery. In Zambia in '96 Pete had his trusty .22 Hornet, and it accounted handily for impala and oribi for the pot. In 2003 I took a .22 Hornet barrel for my T/C Contender to Namibia. It was perfect for the little Damara dik-dik, which was one of the objects of that safari, and worked equally well on steenbok.

None of this is to say that the hotter .22s aren't effective on game. In Africa my only use has been limited to a couple of borrowed .223s, but I have taken numerous

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deer (where it was quite legal) with both .223s and .22-250s. These cartridges, and the rifles that chamber them, make precise shot placement a joy. With head and neck shots, the outcome is certain. And I've never seen one-shot kills more dramatic and instantaneous than behind-the-shoulder lung shots with a .22-250.

If one is a serious varmint shooter, and if the proposed African hunting menu will include such shooting along with a few species of smaller antelope, there's nothing wrong with packing along a favorite .223 or .22-250.

If you choose such a cartridge, pay attention to bullet selection. Until just a few years ago, virtually all the centerfire .22 cartridges were loaded with varmint bullets—thin-jacketed bullets designed to expand explosively on impact, virtually disintegrating in small varmints and reducing the potential for ricochet. Such bullets are not designed to penetrate at all; they will be too destructive on the very small antelopes and may fail to penetrate with body shots on game even the size of impala and warthog.

Readers of *Africana* will recall Ruark's trouble with the .220 Swift in *Horn of the Hunter*. He was undoubtedly using the original 48-grain bullets, very fast and very frangible, and he experienced classic failure to penetrate, caused by premature expansion. The same thing will happen today with typical varmint bullets.

Fortunately or foolishly, .22 centerfires are legal for deer in numerous American jurisdictions. Bulletmakers have recognized this problem and have responded with heavier bullets, up to 70 grains, designed for penetration. If I were to take one of the hotter .22 centerfires on safari, I'd use a mixture of these heavy-for-caliber bullets for the midsize antelopes and pests, and full-metal-jacket military-type or match bullets for the tinier antelopes. So loaded, the high-velocity .22 centerfires would indeed serve a purpose. As always, the number of rifles that can be taken on safari is sharply limited, so whether this is a good idea or not depends largely on the variety of game to be taken and the other rifle or rifles chosen.



Light Cartridges: 6mm-.270



Chapter 2

I have written previously about what I consider to be a myth regarding the toughness of African game, and it's appropriate that this subject be addressed right now. In many books and articles about African hunting we have all read that the game there is much tougher than North American game of similar size. Often this is carried to such an extreme that it would seem even a whitetail-size impala shouldn't be hunted with anything less than a .375. The toughness of African game is not pure bunk. Africa has a greater number of large and small predators than our domestic game must contend with, and I theorize that African animals are always on edge and alert, much closer to that surge of adrenaline that makes any animal appear super-tough.

A fatal shot will be just that: fatal. Pound for pound, African game has no tougher bones than American game, and the heart and lungs are in approximately the same places and just as vulnerable to perforation by a bullet. A bullet that reaches the vitals will be effective, period. However, a hit that is off by just a bit may well result in a longer tracking job than you would expect with similar-size North American game. And even a perfectly placed, fatal shot, such as a behind-the-shoulder lung shot that hits no heavy bone, may result in a longer death run than you might expect with, say, a white-tailed deer. The answer isn't heavier calibers; dead is dead. The answer is more precise shot placement!

There are wide differences in "toughness" among the hundred-odd varieties of plains game. To say that a ten-pound duiker or a twenty-five-pound klipspringer is tough is ridiculous. Pound for pound they may well be, but the point is moot with any centerfire rifle. Impala are particularly hardy animals. Once I had a fine ram run fully 200 yards after receiving a 162-grain softpoint from a 7mm Remington Magnum precisely behind the shoulder and through the lungs. He was dead, of course, but nobody bothered to tell him. The result would have been exactly the same, I suspect, if he'd been hit with anything from a .243 to a .375. If the shot had been four inches to the left, on the shoulder, the result probably would have been an animal that dropped in its tracks. My producer and partner in our DVD series, Tim Danklef, tells about

Light Cartridges: 6mm-.270



PH Larry McGillewie and me with a superb Cape grysbok, taken with a .243. I have never actually taken a .243 to Africa, but it's an extremely useful cartridge for small antelope, and I've borrowed a few. This is outfitter Rex Amm's .243, a rifle I've used more than once!

following a well-hit impala nearly to the top of Pfumbe, a very significant hill just west of the Chewore River in Zimbabwe's Zambezi Valley. Everyone knows, of course, that seriously wounded animals never go uphill, but nobody told this impala that, either. A favorite line of Tim's is that if impala were as big as buffalo we'd all be dead.

Among the larger African antelopes, there are indeed great differences in the relative toughness of one species versus another. Elk-size kudu, for instance, seem to me to be relatively soft. I wouldn't want to shoot at them with an inadequate cartridge, of course, and I wouldn't want to hit one in a nonvital place. (I did that once, and lost the best kudu I've ever had a chance at!) But even if the shot is off slightly, the chance of recovering the animal after a short tracking job is good. Although similar in bulk to the kudu, the oryx/sable/roan clan is a different story altogether. Like the American elk, these animals are sturdy—just plain tough. A powerful rifle won't make up for poor shot placement, and if the bullet isn't squarely in the vitals, plan on an all-day tracking job with slim chance of recovering the animal.

Wildebeest, too, are tough, and perhaps it's animals like these that have given African game the overall reputation for being well nigh bulletproof. They aren't, but they deserve to be shot properly with a cartridge powerful enough to do the job. We have just looked at what I call the "ultralights," which have their purpose. However,

Safari Rifles II

their great failure is a lack of versatility. You may be specifically looking for a steenbok, but you never know what any hunting day in Africa might offer up. This might be the day you encounter the greater kudu of your dreams. So now let's turn to lighter rifles for the more general run of African plains game.

The 6mms

When I wrote the original *Safari Rifles* I began with, "Three 6mms (.243 bullet diameter) are in common use today, and all three are American developments: the .243 Winchester, 6mm Remington, and .240 Weatherby Magnum." This remains true in origin, but both the 6mm Remington and .240 Weatherby, though fine cartridges, have nearly dropped by the wayside in the last few years. Among 6mms the .243 Winchester reigns nearly supreme, but the .243 Winchester Super Short Magnum must now be added to the mix. It would be easy to deduce that this bore diameter, so popular in the United States, was strictly an American concept. That's true, but not strictly. The 6mm Lee Navy was introduced as an experimental military cartridge in the Lee straight-pull bolt-action rifle clear back in 1895, and both sporting rifles and ammo were also available for some years. But the cartridge died out, and there was no commercial American 6mm until the advent of the .243 Winchester and the .244 Remington (the original designation of the 6mm Remington) in 1955.

Most of the credit for the 6mm's place as a sporting cartridge must be given to the British and Europeans, who developed at least eight 6mm sporting cartridges prior to 1925. Best known of these was the .240 Belted Rimless Nitro Express, a long-case cartridge that was loaded to push a 100-grain bullet at 3,000 FPS. It was a popular plains-game cartridge, and is still encountered occasionally.



Left to right: .243 Winchester, .257 Roberts, .25-06. The various .25s are not common in Africa, but the 6mms—especially the .243—are very popular with local hunters in southern Africa. All are very useful for smallish antelope in open country.

Light Cartridges: 6mm-.270



In Mozambique in 2006, Greg Rader's light rifle was his Ruger No. 1 in .25-06. It performed perfectly, as seen with this truly exceptional Chobe bushbuck.

In the 1950s American engineers went to work on a modern, domestic 6mm, certain that the older British round could be brought up to date. Winchester saw the .243 as a dual-purpose cartridge that could perform as an excellent varmint cartridge with light bullets and as a deer and antelope cartridge with heavier bullets. Remington, on the other hand, envisioned the .244 as a long-range varmint cartridge and gave the rifles so chambered a 1-in-12-inch rifling twist. This was great for light bullets but could not stabilize bullets over 90 grains. Winchester selected a compromise 1-in-10-inch twist to stabilize both 80-grain varmint bullets and 100-grain big-game bullets.

Apparently, the American public saw things the same way as Winchester; the .243 was instantly popular, while the .244, in spite of its longer case and slightly greater velocity, darn near faded away. Later, Remington realized its mistake and renamed the cartridge the 6mm Remington, at the same time changing the rifling twist to 1-in-9 and adding a 100-grain loading. The .240 Weatherby Magnum came along in 1968. Although offered only in Weatherby Mark V rifles, it's a true short magnum that will fit in any .30-06-length action. The .243 WSSM, using a shortened Winchester Short Magnum case, was introduced in 2003. It is significantly faster than the .243 Winchester, but at this writing (in 2007) it is still too early to assess its long-term popularity.

Although the 6mm was viewed as a dual-purpose varmint/deer round, I have a feeling that relatively few 6mm rifles (in any of the three calibers) are often used



I had a scope problem on my .30-06, so I borrowed Debra Bradbury's well-used pre-'64 Model 70 in .270 to take this bontebok. Bradbury has used this rifle almost exclusively on several safaris, cleanly taking game up to eland.

strictly as varmint rifles. That said, in the windy American West 6mm bullets carry in the wind much better than .22s, so many serious western varminters do have a heavy-barrel 6mm in some persuasion. However, I believe the 6mm's greatest popularity lies with America's deer and pronghorn hunters, and rightfully so. The .243 and 6mm Remington are very similar in performance; the .243 pushes a 100-grain bullet at 3,070 FPS, while the 6mm edges that by about 50 FPS in factory loads and as much as 100 FPS with good handloads. The .243 WSSM edges the .243 by a solid 100 FPS, while the .240 Weatherby is much hotter, pushing a 100-grain bullet at nearly 3,400 FPS. All are flat-shooting, mild-recoiling cartridges that are extremely efficient on game up to the size of large deer. Most popular by far is the .243 Winchester, the perennial favorite as a "first deer rifle" for American youngsters.

With the incredible size range of African antelope, the 6mms are limited. They aren't kudu cartridges, much less cartridges for the hardy oryx tribe. On the other hand, they're nearly ideal for a tremendous range of game: gazelle, springbok, impala, bushbuck, reedbuck, and the list goes on. A good, accurate .243 would be extremely useful on many African safaris that involve such species—but such safaris also generally include larger game such as kudu, oryx, zebra, wildebeest, hartebeest, sable, and such, so a 6mm could not be the only accurate, flat-shooting rifle chosen.

As to which of the 6mms is best, well, it doesn't make much difference. The 6mm Remington and .243 WSSM are both slightly better cartridges than the .243, and the .240 Weatherby Magnum is clearly the most powerful of all. But all are accurate and flat-shooting, and no amount of added velocity will turn any 6mm cartridge into an all-purpose plains-game rifle.

Light Cartridges: 6mm–.270

Unlike the others, the .243 Winchester has achieved universal acceptance. This says nothing about its comparative worth, but is a factor in ammo availability. The .243 is one of the most popular sporting cartridges in both South Africa and Namibia, used extensively for hunting the pronghornlike springbok and also used without reservation on game up to kudu. However, there is a wide gulf between the local meat hunter, who goes out of his way to position for a head or neck shot, and the safari hunter, who tends to avoid such shots because of potential damage to the trophy. I will admit I have never taken any 6mm to Africa, but I have borrowed a .243 on numerous occasions for impala, bushbuck, springbok, and such. In this country, my own .243s have worked wonders on antelope and deer. Over there, the fast, efficient 100-grain slug has worked just as well.

I have never used the .243 on American game such as black bear and elk, though some hunters do. Nor have I used it in Africa against the largest plains game. With precise shot placement, it would do just fine—but there are much better tools available for the bigger jobs.

The .25s

Bore designations become extremely confusing because there are no hard and fast rules to govern what the makers call their cartridges. Americans, for example, are very likely to use the bullet diameter to name a cartridge, as is the case with the .257 Roberts and the .308 Winchester. Failing that, the approximate groove diameter is often used. The British have used these systems, but out of what seems sheer perversity they quite frequently use the smaller land diameter. So they have often called a 6.5mm cartridge (.264-inch bullet diameter) a .256. That's really misleading, because neither the British nor the Europeans have any history of true “.25-caliber” sporting cartridges. This bore diameter is American, and it goes back to the very beginning of the smokeless era with lever-action cartridges such as the .25-20 and .25-35, and Remington's rimless .25 Remington for its turn-of-the-century semiautos.

In terms of general-purpose hunting cartridges, there are just five .25s, and three of them are real old-timers. The .250-3000, or .250 Savage, was a Charles Newton cartridge introduced by Savage in the Model 99 before World War I. Its original loading, with an 87-grain bullet, was the first commercial cartridge to break the 3,000-FPS barrier. The .257 Roberts, based on the necked-down 7x57 case and offering a good deal more powder capacity, came along as a wildcat cartridge in the 1920s and was legitimized as a factory cartridge in 1934. The .25-06 is, as its name indicates, a .30-06 case necked down to take .257-inch bullets. In wildcat form it's been around for decades, but it didn't become a factory cartridge until Remington adopted it in 1969. Hottest of all is the .257 Weatherby Magnum, developed by Roy Weatherby in



Over the years I've used an eclectic array of rifles in Africa. This is a pretty little .250 Savage built on a Mexican Mauser action. It worked well on light plains game in Zimbabwe's thornbush, where ranges are usually fairly close.

1944. Newest is the .25 Winchester Super Short Magnum, introduced in 2003 as the last (to date) of Winchester's Super Short family (.223, .243, and .25 WSSM).

All five are extremely fine hunting cartridges. The .250 Savage and .257 Roberts are relatively mild cartridges, pushing 100-grain bullets at, respectively, about 2,800 and 3,000 FPS. The .25-06 and .25 WSSM are nearly identical ballistically, both adding about 200 FPS; the .257 Weatherby adds another 200 to 250, making it very fast and very flat-shooting. The .250 Savage lacks the powder capacity to push 117- and 120-grain bullets at useful velocities, but in ascending order the three others can handle the heavier bullets nicely.

I have never been a heavy user of any of the .25s, but it certainly isn't for lack of respect. All are fine game-getters, and although the bore diameter lost much of its popularity when the modern 6mms came along, the added bullet weight and increased frontal area of the .25s make them extremely efficient game cartridges.

The little .250 Savage fills approximately the same niche as the 6mms, but the three others almost reach into the general-purpose plains-game category. I took a lovely .250 Savage on a Mexican Mauser action to Rhodesia in '79 and had a wonderful time with it. I used it to take a number of impala for the pot, plus warthog, duiker, and such. In that role it was pure joy, but I didn't attempt to take any of the larger antelope with it. The four other cartridges have enough going for them to be used for somewhat larger game.

Light Cartridges: 6mm–.270

The .257 Weatherby Magnum was Roy Weatherby's personal favorite, and he used it on game up to Cape buffalo on several African safaris. I don't think I would go that far, but I have used the .257 on enough game to agree that its extreme velocity gives it a lightning-bolt effect on fairly good-size plains game. Ken Elliott, the longtime publisher at *Petersen's Hunting* (and thus my boss during our day there) has taken a .257 to Africa twice now and reports incredible results on plains game up to the hefty lechwe.

I have used both the .25-06 and .25 WSSM on quite a bit of North American game, although mostly deer-size, and must admit that their capabilities are wonderful. Even with the heaviest bullets I wouldn't recommend any .25 for the largest plains game, but if you're a fan of the caliber, your favorite .25 will serve you well for a wide range of plains game up to maybe 350 to 400 pounds.

The bottom line? If you have a good, accurate .25 you're comfortable with, don't leave it at home. But, like the 6mms, it should not be the only scoped, flat-shooting rifle you have if your game list includes the larger or tougher plains species.

The 6.5s

The 6.5mm, shooting a bullet of .264-inch diameter, has never been popular in America, despite the fact that a number of very fine European 6.5s have attained tremendous popularity over there. I will cover some of these in the chapter on metrics, and here we'll address just the American 6.5s. There aren't many. The .256 Newton, really a 6.5, was a fine cartridge on the order of the .270 Winchester. Although loaded commercially, it never really made the grade . . . and there wasn't another 6.5 until Winchester introduced the .264 Winchester Magnum in 1958. A short magnum able to function through .30-06-length actions, the .264 was a very hot number. It arrived in—and to some extent heralded—the magnum mania that extended through the 1960s, and it achieved almost instantaneous popularity.

The original factory specifications suggested a 100-grain bullet at 3,700 feet per second and a 140-grain bullet at 3,200. Velocity was enhanced by the 26-inch-barrel Model 70 "Westerner," the rifle in which the cartridge was introduced, but those original figures were somewhat inflated. Even so, with the 140-grain bullet the .264 was and is extremely flat-shooting and tremendously effective. Shortly after its introduction, several writers took the new cartridge to Africa, wrung it out on a variety of species, and wrote glowingly of it. (And the reports of .264 performance in the western United States and Canada were equally impressive.)

I'm not surprised. I got my first .264 in 1965, and I believed it to be a death ray. Never mind that the 24-inch barrel on my rifle never approached the velocities I thought I was getting in those innocent pre-chronograph days! I really believed in that .264, and

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This is my new .264 Winchester Magnum, built by Serengeti Rifles on a P.O. Ackley Mauser action with a 26-inch barrel. On the Serengeti or the Kalahari—or any other open country—I can't imagine a better setup.

Light Cartridges: 6mm-.270

it performed magnificently on a wide variety of North American game. Even though today's factory ballistics have been adjusted to reflect more accurate figures, the .264, in ascending caliber progression, would be the first American cartridge I would consider as an all-round rifle for African plains game—or, to put it another way, the lightest rifle I would choose to handle all the nondangerous species.

I have had a couple more .264s since that 24-inch-barrel Remington, and these have been original Winchesters with 26-inch tubes. I worked up a load with a 129-grain Hornady spire point that yielded more than 3,300 feet per second (over a chronograph!), and ballistics like that do indeed make the .264 one of the very best cartridges for wide-open country. I hadn't had a .264 for years, but I just took delivery on a .264 built for me by Serengeti Rifle Works, based around an old Parker Ackley left-hand Santa Barbara action and a good Obermayer 26-inch tube. I honestly don't know if that rifle will ever see the Serengeti. It would be just fine there, and equally good in the Kalahari or Ethiopia's Danakil, but what I really have in mind for the rifle is mountain hunting for sheep and goats.

Optimally I'd like a bit more caliber and a bit more bullet weight for game such as zebra, sable, and gemsbok—and certainly for eland—but the .264 will do the job.

Unfortunately, whether I like it or not the .264 is just about a dead duck. It had a short blaze of glory, and then the introduction of Remington's 7mm magnum blew it out of the limelight and it has never come back. The 7mm is indeed a more effective all-round cartridge, but with careful selection of loads and that longer barrel that the .264 needs, it remains one of the finest long-range cartridges for open-country hunting.

Come to think of it, none of our domestic 6.5s is faring well. The 6.5mm Remington Magnum was, for its day, an ultra-short magnum able to work through .308-length actions. Together with the .350 Remington Magnum, it should be considered the forerunner to today's short magnums. Introduced in Remington's short, light Model 600 carbine, it was and is a decent cartridge, propelling a 120-grain bullet at 3,200 feet per second. It just plain didn't catch anyone's eye, and although Remington has made a halfhearted attempt to bring it back, it must be regarded as one of the great losers in recent gunmaking history.

Much more recent is the .260 Remington, a wonderfully mild and effective cartridge based on the .308 Winchester case necked down to 6.5mm. The brainchild of Jim Carmichel, it came out amid much fanfare about its marvelous inherent accuracy. This I can't speak to; the two .260s I have owned were quite accurate but not spectacular. Ballistically, it's about the same as the great old 6.5x55 Swedish, meaning a 140-grain bullet at 2,700 FPS. This makes it mild in the recoil department, and at its modest velocity bullet performance tends to be routinely

Safari Rifles II

spectacular. We used it in South Africa and Namibia in 1999, where it performed wonders on plains game all the way up to blue wildebeest.

Unfortunately, the .260 is still a 6.5mm, a bullet diameter that seems almost impossible to sell in the United States. I'm told that after considerable initial success, sales of the .260 are slipping badly. This is regrettable, but I can't say it's a big surprise. Still, as the Europeans have long known, the high sectional density of the 6.5mm bullet has tremendous advantages. In open country an aerodynamic 6.5mm bullet holds its velocity extremely well and bucks wind about as well as anything available. On game, that high sectional density offers exceptional penetration. For a light rifle that offers performance without pain, I wouldn't hesitate to use a .260, 6.5x55, or 6.5mm Remington Magnum. In big country, well, I might wind up going full circle and coming back to the .264.

The .270s

The .270, bullet diameter .277, is another uniquely American development. There are just four factory cartridges that use this bullet: 6.8mm Special Purpose, .270 Winchester, .270 Winchester Short Magnum, and .270 Weatherby Magnum.

The little 6.8mm was designed by Remington as a military cartridge that would offer more punch in the AR/M-16 receiver. As a military cartridge it hasn't yet gotten a lot of play (and may or may not in the future), but as a sporting cartridge it has proven very effective on deer-size game with very little recoil. Its problem is that it was designed around relatively light-for-caliber 120-grain bullets. Velocity falls off quickly with heavier .277 hunting bullets, so I have a bit of trouble fitting it into the African scenario.

I have no such problems with the .270 Winchester! It was, as everyone knows, one of Jack O'Connor's favorites. To some extent he created its popularity, and to some extent it created his. Jack was undoubtedly the finest gunwriter America ever produced in terms of literary skill, and he was also one of the most experienced hunters in the outdoor-writing field. He didn't need a gimmick, so I'm not being derogatory when I say the .270 was his gimmick. He liked it, to be sure, but he privately admitted that the .30-06 was more versatile. But lots of folks, including the great gunwriters of O'Connor's youth, were .30-06 fans. So Jack hitched himself to the .270's star, and it hitched itself to him. Proof of this could be seen in the fact that the .270's popularity dropped considerably in the dozen years after Jack passed away. But nearly twenty years have passed since I penned this last line, and in recent years the .270 seems to have made a considerable comeback. Certainly it has with me!

I have used it a great deal in recent years, in Africa and elsewhere, and I must admit that O'Connor had it right: The .270 Winchester is a magnificent cartridge. Introduced by Winchester in 1925, it offered a 130-grain bullet at 3,060 FPS and a 150-grain bullet at 2,850 FPS. Both are extremely flat-shooting and extremely effective. O'Connor

Light Cartridges: 6mm–.270

preferred the lighter bullet; although I'm not one to dispute the master, I personally prefer the 150-grain bullet, and have had very good results with it on a variety of African game up to kudu. One of the attributes of the .270, besides its flat trajectory, is its effectiveness with light recoil.

I must admit that in Africa I'm more of a 7mm or .30-caliber fan. However, there is nothing wrong with the .270 in Africa. My old friend Debra Bradbury, widow of Weatherby Award winner Basil Bradbury, uses almost nothing other than her old Model 70 in .270, including on several African safaris. Using the compromise 140-grain load with tough Winchester Fail Safe bullets, she has cleanly taken plains game up to eland. Her confidence in the cartridge and load are such that she would have taken a buffalo with her .270 had her professional hunter allowed it—but he wisely insisted she use a borrowed .375!

The .270 has been used extensively on African game from one end of the continent to another. O'Connor himself used it as his light rifle on numerous safaris, and it worked for him on game up to greater kudu and eland just as well as it worked in North America on game up to elk and moose. My first professional hunter, Kenyan Willem van Dyk, had an old Model 70 in .270 that he swore by, and in recent years I've seen more and more .270s in both South Africa and Namibia. It is not anywhere near as universal as its parent cartridge, the .30-06, but has truly become a worldwide standard.

The new kid on the .270 block is the .270 WSM. Capable of pushing a 140-grain bullet to 3,200 FPS, it is considerably faster than the .270 Winchester, yet its short case allows it to be housed in a .308-length action. I must admit that the .270 WSM has become my personal favorite among the several new short magnums. I have not used it in Africa and don't particularly intend to (for no good reason), but I have used it on game up to elk and have done quite a bit of sheep and goat hunting with it. The extra velocity flattens the trajectory a bit, but since so little genuine long-range shooting is done

Left to right: .264 Winchester Magnum, .270 Winchester Short Magnum, .270 Winchester, .270 Weatherby Magnum. Although only the .270 Winchester is truly popular in Africa, all four of these cartridges are ideal for midsize game in open country.





An exceptional Chobe bushbuck, taken with a Dakota in .270 Winchester. In Africa I generally load a .270 with a good 150-grain bullet.

in Africa, this is not extremely significant. More important is that I believe the increased energy yielded by the higher velocity offers noticeably increased impact on game.

Depending on exactly whose loads you're using, the .270 Weatherby Magnum is a bit faster than the .270 WSSM. Obviously it is at least the equal of the .270 WSSM, plus a bit more. I used one in Namibia in the early 1990s and it flattened game up to gemsbok and hartebeest. The .270 Weatherby Magnum is largely an unsung cartridge, but to my mind it's one of Roy Weatherby's best. Again, in Africa the ultra-flat trajectory is rarely of great value, but any of the three fast .270s will reach out as far as is needed, and with good bullets will be effective on the majority of antelope up to perhaps 500 or 600 pounds. I'd rate the .270s, together with the .264, as the lightest rifles that make sense for the full range of African plains game—but unlike O'Connor and my friend Ms. Bradbury, I would personally draw the line long before I got to eland! The visiting sportsman or woman generally wants the best representative of a given species that can be found. Time is not unlimited, and it's impossible to predict the shot you might get. One simply must not be undergunned, which means that at least some of the time one will almost certainly be overgunned. Later in this book we will look at how the light rifles from 6mm to .270 might be combined with other calibers to be an effective part of a battery, but now let's take a step up in both caliber and versatility to the 7mms.

