

100 Yards is a Long Way!

By [Bruce Rutherford](#)

This summer I have had the pleasure and the privilege of teaching my grandkids to shoot. Part of the fun is that they are learning with the same rifle with which I learned. A Winchester Model 68 single shot .22 rimfire.

My grandfather bought it mail order from Montgomery Wards, for \$4.50, back in the 30's. I put a scope on it when I was a teenager, but now the scope is gone and it has the same front bead and semi-buckhorn rear sight that it originally wore.

It's a simple gun, manual load and cock, not much to break or malfunction. The stock is pretty well beat, after 75 years and five generations of shooters, but it still shoots straight and the grandkids are getting pretty proficient at busting pop cans, full of water of course, at 50 feet.

After a recent shooting session with them, I set up a rifle target at 100 yards because I wanted to try out some new .30-06 ammo and also because I was a little bored from handing out dozens of .22 cartridges, one at a time, to the grandkids. They were impressed with the distance I was attempting to shoot and at the "smaller than a pop can" bulls eye. "Can you really hit that from this far away, Grampa?"

Well, I hope so. Their curiosity and questions got me to thinking about the distances we shoot and what we think of as a long shot.

My '06 has a 3x9 Leupold on it that not only allows me to shoot 1 inch groups at 100 yards, from a bench rest, but also lets me see where I hit without walking down to the target. Quite an improvement over the open sights and the 3x and 4x Weavers that were common when I first started big game hunting, back in the 60's. I remember very well walking back and forth to the target after every third shot, to see the results and mark the group. Probably a good thing in retrospect, as it allowed time for the barrel to cool.

Nowadays we think of 100 yards as almost the minimum distance for modern rifle shooting and hunting, and we insist on a gun/scope/cartridge combination that is capable of at least two or three times that distance, at the very least. Modern

innovations in cartridge and bullet design have made even the venerable .30-30 into a 250 yard cartridge, assuming that we can hit what we are aiming at.

It is paradoxical that, in this modern age, we have more technical capability than ever before and at the same time, less need for it. If we miss a shot, we will get another chance, tomorrow or next week or next year. A hundred years ago, missing a shot might mean no meat on the table. A thousand years ago it might mean starvation.

What would our ancestors think of all this technology that we consider so essential? They would probably conclude that we are a bunch of techno-weenies that have no right to call ourselves hunters.

Looking backwards in time, we see the first smokeless powder sporting cartridge, the .30-30, as a quantum leap ahead from the black powder cartridges it replaced. No need to even think about trajectory out to 200 yards. Just point and shoot.

Those black powder cartridges were a big step above the cap lock muzzleloaders that they replaced as well. A watertight package that went off every time you pulled the trigger and another shot only seconds away. The percussion cap ignition was a big improvement over the flintlock. It eliminated the delay inherent in the flintlock and also eliminated the powder burned cheek. Rifling in the barrel made the bullet go to the same place every time, assuming you did your part. Before that was the smoothbore flintlock musket, and then 100 yards really was a long way. From the smoothbore musket to the 3000+ fps magnums was only 150 years. Barely a blip in the history of hunters and hunting.

The bow and arrow innovation was the "short-magnum" of its day. A faster, flatter shooting projectile, in a compact package, able to be fired from a concealed position with a minimum of movement. But with a bow, 100 yards is really, really a long way. Too long in fact.

Where I hunt, in the mountains of Colorado, there is archeological evidence of hunters who were there a long time ago, at the end of the last Ice Age. They built stone walls that naturally funneled traveling animals towards pits that were dug at the end of the walls, where they waited, with spears, till their quarry was within spitting distance. Back then 100 feet was too far.

Whoever those people were, they were long gone when the modern tribes, the Ute and the Arapaho, arrived. All that is left of their hunting technology is their stone walls and spear points. Mute testimony to the days when hunting was serious business.

If I am honest with myself, I have to admit that there is very little difference in practical field accuracy between my .50 caliber Hawken muzzleloader and my '06 with the Leupold. I can hit a paper plate, offhand, at 100 yards with the Hawken and I can't do much better than that with the '06. The scope just magnifies my wobbles. Beyond 100 yards, I had better pass up the shot or find a good rest. I have killed elk and deer at longer ranges than that, of course. But I have also missed quite a few.

Given normal hunting conditions: wind blowing, cold, stiff fingers, out of breath, bulky clothes, low light, snow or rain, buck fever, 100 yards is a long way. Most of the deer and elk, especially Roosevelt Elk, that are killed every year, are shot at 100 yards or less. I know that most of mine have been. I suspect that most of the animals that are wounded and crippled are shot at from further away. Probably by someone who once hit a paper target at 300 yards, on a calm summer day, from a bench rest.

Automated laser range-finding scopes are available now to completely eliminate the guess work from long distance shooting. Too bad they don't come with a built in gyroscope to hold the gun steady. Now I know how my Grandfather felt when everyone insisted that he needed a scope on his rifle, after successfully hunting without one for fifty years. He finally got one, a Weaver K3, when he was 65 years old.

Personally, I will never have a laser range-finding scope on any of my rifles, but my grandkids probably will. First though, they are going to practice shooting that old Winchester single-shot till they can hit a paper plate at 100 yards.

Because, 100 yards is a long way.