

US Deputy Team Captain Report

2012 NRA National Black Powder Target Rifle Competition, Raton, New Mexico

Our trip to the NRA Black Powder Nationals in Raton, New Mexico was a wonderful experience. The goal was to experience shooting in arid, windy conditions to better prepare ourselves for the World Championships in South Africa in Sept. 2013, and to work with Lee Shaver, the Team Coach. A total of 57 competitors (5 muzzle loaders and 52 cartridge shooters) gathered at the NRA Whittington Center from August 19-26. The muzzle loaders were Ed Decker, Brice Harper, Dick Hoff, Lee Shaver, and Mon Yee. Dave Gullo was there but he was competing with a cartridge rifle.

Dick Hoff drove down to our place and rode with Arleen and I to Raton. We stopped in Lamar, Missouri to spend the night with Lee and Andrea. Lee gave us a tour of his shop and showed us a Ferriss rifle he is finishing up. I saw my name on a barrel waiting to be stocked. He also gave us a cyber tour on his computer of South Africa and their shooting range.

Another day of driving to Raton, and we arrived there with no problems. We all stayed in one of the 4-bedroom Founders Cabins on a hill overlooking the range. The cabin was quite nice with private bathrooms/showers, and a large common area for cooking, dining, and relaxing. Wildlife sightings of antelope, mule deer, and turkeys were quite common, with the occasional bear thrown in for good measure. Andrea and Arleen could sit on the large, covered porch and watch the match with binoculars, or drive down to the range to be up close and personal.

Day One - Dick and I registered, got our information packets, chronographed our rifles, and got in some practice at 1,000 yards.

Day Two - This was official practice day for all shooters to get sight settings at 200, 300, 600, 800, 900, and 1,000 yards. It was a long day! from 9:00 am to 6:30 pm

Day Three - Competition began with position shooting - standing at 200 yd, sitting at 300 yd, and prone at 600 yd. Lee always likes to shoot the position matches to show the cartridge shooters how well a muzzle loader can compete with them, but he unselfishly gave up those

two days to coach Dick, Mon, and myself to shoot at 200, 300, and 600 yd with a sling and shooting just like we would in South Africa, with a coach. It was a great experience. The NRA staff allowed us to shoot along side the position match that was going on, but do our own thing for two days. We learned how Lee coaches, and Lee learned a lot about us so there will be no surprises when we get to S.A.

I learned several valuable things. First, the spit patch is out! With a clean barrel at the beginning of the relay, my sighters were close to the center then on about the third shot they started working their way out to 2 o'clock in a straight line, 8, 7, then 6. Lee gave me some of his cleaning solution and it made a huge difference, but I had to learn not to be afraid of getting the patch too wet. When the humidity is 12 percent, you really have to clean extra good or the fouling changes the path of your bullet. My bullet strayed again several times and each time I was able to correct the problem with extra cleaning. This may not be as serious a problem in the East with our high humidity.

The second most important thing I learned was my shots were stringing in a straight line from 12 o'clock to 6 o'clock. On one relay I had a 10, then a 10x, then a miss high, or a 6 o'clock 6. I would not change my sights and have another 10. Position and stock length! One evening Lee had me get in the prone position with my jacket and sling at the cabin and mount his rifle. He felt my shoulder placement, looked at my eye relief, and measured all with a tape. Then I tried a different rifle with a shorter stock (13 1/2") and it fit me perfect. I've been shooting a stock that was too long for me from the beginning and that explains a lot of my scores over the years. Now I am not a good wind reader but now I have eliminated two known accuracy problems (hopefully most of the time), Now I can begin to concentrate on wind reading. It's good to know why your bullets go where they go so you can correct the problem. I would never have known this if I had not made this trip.

Day Four - Another day of position shooting at 200, 300, and 600 yards for cartridge shooters, and another day of muzzle loading practice with Lee.

Day Five - The mid-range match began, shooting 200, 300, and 600 yards for two days. At the first of the week, Lee posted the NRA records for muzzle loaders and said "Our goal is to see how many of these

records we can break." Well, Dick Hoff did it the first day! He shot a 100-6x at 200 yards, breaking the old record of 100-5x set by Lee Shaver and Frank Monikowski.

Day Six - Another mid-range competition at 200, 300, and 600 yards prone.

Day Seven - Beginning of Creedmoor competition, shooting 800, 900, and 1,000 each day. This is when things began to get really crazy with the wind, But Lee still managed to set a new 900 yard record with a 96.0. (beating all the breech loaders with their coaches by at least 6 points at that distance) So, Lee's challenge worked; two new national records were set by our muzzle loading team going to South Africa . Perhaps more would have been set if Mother Nature had not gone haywire that week.

Day Eight - I'm not sure I can describe the wind conditions. Dick and I had a combined score of 6 points at 1,000 yards and Dick had the 6 points. And he's the best shooter we have back East! Lee figured it out better than we did, (but rushed one shot and fired a blank, and had two other misses,) and had a score of 55. One flag looked like a 25 mph wind blowing left to right, and the next line of flags were blowing 25 mph right to left! Just out of curiosity, I put my sights on 0 windage and my shot hit in the center of the next target number board to the right. I left the windage on 0 and the next shot hit the target number board to the left. that's the kind of day it was. The wind changed directions every 4 or 5 seconds. The two orange spotter disks used to indicate a "miss" were spinning round and round in the target board like a spinning wheel. One wind gust broke the wooden upright on one of the targets. Dave Gullo, shooting a cartridge rifle on the same relay (with a coach) shot an 82! Dave and his friend John shoot a lot together, like Lee and Mon, and that's a good thing.

By the way, a good portion of the shooters going to South Africa attended the NRA Nationals (a total of six). Dave Gullo was there but shot cartridge, and Brice Harper from Dodge City shot the first two days of position match so they didn't participate in Lee's coaching sessions. Brice did shoot muzzle loader with Lee, Mon, Dick and myself for four days mid-range and Creedmoor. We had to be on the range by 6:30 am and shooting began at 7:00 am and we shot three yardages every day, moving back and doing pit duty as well! We were able to back

right up to our firing points and work out of our vehicles. The targets are in perfect shape, starting off with new targets each day. The pits are nice, water is furnished, and the pit crew was excellent. Relay time was 53 minutes which is faster than what most of us are used to, But it was good practice because I've been known to be slow. I was able to get set up and finish on time with the cartridge shooters. Muzzle loaders got an additional 5 minutes on request but most of the time we didn't need it.

Results - Dave Gullo won the whole thing with an aggregate of 533.10 shooting a cartridge rifle on cross sticks, along side a wind coach. Lee Shaver placed sixth with an aggregate of 484.04, shooting with a sling at midrange, wrist rest at long range, and no coach. Brice hauled off a basketful of medals as a new muzzle loader. Dick set a new NRA record at 200 yards, and learned he was getting stronger by surviving six straight days of shooting. Lee set a new NRA record at 900 yards.

We asked a lot of questions and Mon and Lee were glad to share their experiences shooting out West and how they have worked together for years and helped each other to get better. I think it would be a good idea for all of us to share as much as we can with each other (not with the competition) as it will pay off when we go to South Africa. We not only need to share information with each other, but with new shooters to bring them along. I have a long way to go, but I would not be where I am today without the help of a lot of people. Thanks to Arleen and Andrea for preparing delicious meals. We always had plenty to eat, good company, and lots of laughs. And thanks to Arleen and Andrea for being our cheerleaders on the firing line.

Mon and Lee have invited long range squad members going to South Africa to come and experience Kansas wind for practice, learning, and more coaching. Any of us can do well at our home ranges, but try something different and see how good you are. I think I'll take them up on the offer and fly out and UPS my rifle to Mon's shop.

I would recommend Raton to anyone who wants a challenge. Besides shooting, there is a lot to see and do in the area. New Mexico is beautiful and you will love the range.

Days Nine and Ten - Driving 1,400 miles back home to Tennessee. Dick and I had lots of time to analyze the competition and talk about ways

to learn from the experience to make us better shooters.

In summary, I learned a lot about myself, my abilities, my strengths, and my weaknesses. I believe I came away from the experience a better shooter. My plan is to cultivate a better relationship with the wind so the wind will be a better friend to me! This report is from my perspective and what I learned. I'm sure everyone who attended had their own view of what the match meant to them. Attached are a few pics we took.

Ed Decker, Deputy Team Captain