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I wrote this article back in 2000 and in the following decade there has been significant development in the availability of suitable ammunition for heavy caliber rifles. Hornady have introduced ammo for a number of the old favourites such as the 450/400 and 404 along with the 458 Lott. Norma have introduced their PH range of ammo for most of the old timers and more modern versions all loaded with the heavier bullets from Woodleigh. If you don't want to reload these offerings are just about perfect. My only gripe is they have not included the 9.2 x 62mm with 320gr Woodleighs!

Cartridges for Dangerous Game

When I was asked to list the ten most popular cartridges and loads our clients used to take dangerous game the task seemed relatively straightforward. On reflection it would be both misleading and potentially dangerous to do without some informed comment of the results attained from using those cartridges. The 10 most popular cartridges and loads used by our clients to hunt Buffalo and Scrub bulls are dictated somewhat by the advice we provide to hunters. There is no legal minimum caliber and load designated for hunting Buffalo, Banteng and the like.

However these are large animals that can and have killed hunters. There are also numerous records of unprovoked attacks by buffalo and bulls that have resulted in deaths in Australia. Scrub Bulls, particularly those of the far north, are far more likely to mount unprovoked attacks on people than buffalo. Whilst they have thinner skins than buffalo, they are larger, more agile and far more aggressive.

Any animal, even an Elephant, can be killed with one shot from almost any centrefire rifle using the right bullet. There is even an instance on record of an Elephant being dispatched with a .22 Rimfire.

To kill large game with a small calibre requires steady nerves, good marksmanship and an animal prepared to pose in a manner that will enable careful placement in just the right spot on its head.

Ethical hunting, on foot, in thick cover means close ranges and animals that are rarely posing at the perfect angle, in this situation body shots not headshots are often all that is available.

Your first sight may well be a close range view of a very large, angry animal on a collision course with your mother's favourite son, such situations leave little margin for error and require a bullet that is going to penetrate and do instant damage!

A heavy caliber, with solid or strongly constructed bullets, there are none better than Australia's own Woodleigh range, is certainly required for quick humane kills.

In African hunting the choice of cartridge is slightly different, most countries stipulate minimum calibers and energy levels required to hunt various animals. With large dangerous animals such as Elephant and Buffalo .375 or 9.3mm (366) is usually the minimum caliber and around 4,000ftlbs the minimum energy level.

As a guide I would not feel safe, nor in a position to ensure the safety of my clients, with anything less than .400 calibre and close to 5,000ftlbs of energy and then only if it was loaded with the strongest and heaviest softnosed or solid bullets.

Why? Because I've seen the effects of just about every available caliber over 9.3mm and many smaller cartridges with all sorts of projectiles! Some of those results were not pretty and a number were downright dangerous!

I won't discuss the use of sub 9.3mm Cartridges, except to say they should not be used if the hunter is capable of using something bigger. However I have guided hunters who were successful using the following cartridges, with appropriately tough bullets, 30.06, 240gr Woodliegh, 300 Weatherby, 338 Win Mag, 300 Dakota, 340 Weatherby. .338 Lapua

In descending order of popularity the following calibers have been the most frequently chosen by clients hunting in with us in Australia and those clients I have accompanied to Africa.

375 H & H
458 Win
416 Rem Mag
470 Nitro Express
416 Rigby
404 Jeffery
500 Nitro Express
450/400 Nitro Express

Other cartridges over 9.3mm that have been used are 577 BP Express, 10.75 x 68mm, 500 Jeffery, 9.3 x 74mm, 9.3 x 62mm, 9.3 x 64mm, 378 Weatherby, 416 Dakota, 416 Weatherby and , 458 Lott.

The 375H & H, 458Win and 416Rem are obviously the most frequently used because both cartridges and rifles are readily available at affordable prices. We see one of these in the hands of 4 out of 5 hunters.

Unfortunately the 375 and 458 are rendered marginal by the factory ammunition available.

The 375 is generally loaded with projectiles that are not up to the job despite some of the fancy names. I have had to finish numerous animals that were hit with the 375 by what looked well placed shots, and we have lost a few to boot. If you intend to use one you should have handloads with 300gr or 350gr Woodleighs softs and solids.

In the past 458 factory ammunition was simply not loaded to anywhere near the claimed ballistics. This problem is compounded by the average barrel length of around 22 inches, which further retards the development of velocity and energy. The result is insufficient penetration and energy for caliber. Again we have had to follow up and finish a number of animals that could not be put down with the 458 and factory ammunition. Modern ammo is a little better but with 458 Lott now commercially available the sensible thing to do is have your 458 re chambered for the Lott.

If you must use the 458 Win, handload but settle for around 2000 to 2050 ft/sec (chronographed from your rifle) for around 4,500 ftlbs of energy with the 500gr Woodleighs or Hornandys. Forget the flashy hitech offerings and lighter bullet weights; what you want is solid performance.

Any attempt to extract more velocity from this short cartridge can result in sever pressures on 45 degree days with consequent erratic performance.

The 416 Remington is a far better choice that delivers close to the true 5,000 ftlbs claimed. It provides far better penetration and energy on the target. You will still need good solid bullets!

The other popular cartridges are all excellent performers developed by the British in the good old days when performance not advertising hype was the goal. They are usually found in the hands of gun enthusiasts with a bit more money than average. The 404 is an excellent performer with factory RWS ammunition using 400gr Woodleighs. It is one of my personal favourites and one that has got me out of trouble on several occasions. It's 423 calibre, 400gr bullets have a bit more frontal area than the 416 and the bigger case means you can push them faster with lower pressures, I don't bother, 2350 ft/sec for 4900ftlbs is ample and can be achieved with around 79gr of ADI 2208. (Marketed in the USA as Hogden Varget) Any factory rifle with an action that will accommodate a 375 H & H can be rebarrelled for the 404 quite cheaply.

The 470NE needs no introduction as the most popular round for double rifles when hunting dangerous game and the Federal ammunition with 500gr Woodleighs is perfect for the job.

All you need is around \$15,000 up to buy a decent double rifle.

The 450/400 is a little less powerful at around 4000ftlbs but its 400gr bullets have excellent penetration.

If you own a double rifle in this caliber you will be handloading unless you have access to Kynoch ammunition from overseas, again the Kynoch is loaded using Australian Woodleighs and Australian Bertram brass.

Of the other cartridges I have listed all perform well within their limitations. I have a particular fondness for the 9.3mm that has excellent penetration with 293 and 320gr bullets, far superior to the 375H & H. with 300gr bullets. It's dynamite on sambar and adequate for buffalo on any continent. Since 9/11 and the resultant tightening of firearms movements we provide our

The Weatherby range of cartridges have far too much velocity and energy for caliber to be totally reliable at very close ranges unless you are using the strongest solids. That aside, they kick too much for me to enjoy using any of them!

Hunting dangerous game such as Elephant and Buffalo doesn't require the level of skill and devotion necessary to become a successful sambar stalker but it does provide the ultimate test of nerve when things go wrong. When things go wrong there is not a cartridge made that is too big or a bullet too tough!

Barry Jones

(In camp, Central Arnhem land, July 2000)

Postscript

Since 9/11 and the resulting tightening of firearms movements we now find 80% of our hunters opt to use our firearms rather than endure the hassles of travelling with their own.

What do we provide?

A choice of bolt action and double rifles in 375 H&H

The bolt actions are loaded with 350gr Woodleigh soft s and solids.

The double is regulated for 300br Woodleighs

A 9.3 x 62mm loaded with 320gr Woodleigh softs and solids.