

The Sheep Mountain Doodle Dandy

By Glenn Smith

Big Game Hunting is not so much a "Guy Thing" any more. My long time friend, Shirley Olson is proof of that. Often times, our very first hunting trips will forever remain vividly etched in our memories. My first memories were good ones, filled with humor and challenges which bring a smile to my face whenever I recall them.

The hunting rifle

My urge to hunt started in the summer of 1956 and it was obvious that I needed a hunting rifle, and a lot more equipment. My limited funds created my first problem which was soon solved when I read this advertisement in a Popular Mechanics Magazine. Golden State Arms Co. of California was selling British Army Rifles, in fair condition for \$15.00 each. To sweeten this deal, they would provide 100 rounds of military ammunition. Now all I needed was employment to further enhance my funds, so I applied for a job at Hughes Brother's Market Gardens, located in the Hellgate canyon just east of Missoula. I was hired on at the staggering wage of \$1.00 per day for a nine hour shift. In a little over two weeks an old WW1 vintage Army Rifle would be mine!!

The Hunting Knife

Rudy Ruanna from West Riverside hand crafted the absolute finest hunting knives in Montana and I promised myself that one day I would own one, My limited funds however, would not permit this. It would take another year, so I made do with a Second Hand Store Special. When I was finally able to purchase my Ruanna Hunter--- it provided over 50 years of flawless service.

Hunting Season Arrives

The fall of 1957 shows subtle shades of red and yellow in the magnificent shade trees which grow so abundantly in Bonner. The first hints of frost makes its appearances, and the aroma of Hoppies #7 Gun Solvent inflames my imagination. An occasional rifle shot can be heard from the rifle range located just across the Milwaukee Railroad Bridge on the east end of Bonner, as mill workers sight in their rifles in preparation for the hunt. As a young young Bonner Hooligan, I was about to embark on an exciting journey, not to mention hunting in an area my Bonner friends and I developed a year earlier. Television was in its infancy and video games were unheard of, so many of us spent a lot of time exploring the Johnson Creek Drainage and the south faces of Sheep Mountain. Johnson Creek is a typical little mountain stream filled with babbling waters and deep quiet pools. In some places, the undergrowth is thick and tangled. Using a careful approach---a Royal Coachman Fly tied to a coil of mono filament line---and a willow stick would produce a nice catch of Brook Trout. Somewhere along this creek and just beyond my now aging memory, lays a small eight inch frying pan.

The Sheep Mountain Doodle Dandy

Pg. 2

During my teen age years, a lot of Johnson Creek Brook Trout fell victim to my ravenous appetite. A decision was made on one of our many hiking trips to clear an old logging road leading up to Wood Chopper's Cabin located at the southern faced foot of Sheep Mountain. This task was relatively simple but our next decision was more of a challenge. "Lets make a Hunting Camp out of the old cabin"!! This structure once housed a wood chopper who supplied fire wood needed to fire the Shay Locomotive working here. The cabin was rectangular in shape ---about 10'X12'---with a steep pitched dirt roof which had tumbled into the interior. Years of heavy and drifting snows caused it to collapse and now it was our job to rebuild it. Once the job was complete a huge celebration followed. Boys will be boys--- Beer was good--- and I could write an entire story about this celebration, so I'll stop here.

Best laid Plans, Chinese Fire Drill, or both ?

At gray dawn on the opening day of hunting season Dana Zimmerman and I would leave Wood Chopper's cabin and hunt the old fire scars on the southwest faces of Sheep Mountain, while Ed Olean and Gary Farnum would hunt the creek drainage up to the cabin. My confidence was slightly shaken as I looked up the huge face of Sheep Mountain. The time was here!! I must put up--or shut up!! Would Max Smith and his old WW1 vintage 303 British Combat Infantry Rifle be able to hike up the mountain and Bag a Mule Deer? In a short time I would learn that my Lee Enfield Rifle No. 1 Mark 3 was not built to be used as a hunting rifle. It was in need of some serious modifications and I would need a huge amount of additional hunting experience under my belt. Now was not the time to cry over spilled milk so lets plow on.

A good idea wasn't really that good!! (At least for My ego)

Dana and I struck pay dirt as we walked out onto a small cliff overlooking an old fire scar. A small band of Mule Deer saw us at the same time from below, and trotted off into a fir thicket There was no way to get an accurate shot so I decided to hold the high ground then spook them out of the thicket. I figured on a good shot when they emerged from the fir thicket and was totally shocked, when I heard a rifle shot that I didn't make. My good friend, Ed Olean dropped a nice Muley Buck, as I stood up on the cliff, and sang Yankee Doodle Dandy at the top of my voice. Both of us laugh to this day about my blundered attempt to shoot a Sheep Mountain Muley Buck. Dana and I hunted together less and less each year Do you suppose he lost faith in my abilities as a hunter?

My next Challenge--Convert that old Army Rifle into a hunting Rifle

Kenneth Towsley, a talented gun smith from West Riverside provided me with some excellent pointers. He advised me to remove the bayonet mount and front sight guards as these items were unnecessary weight.

The Sheep Mountain Doodle Dandy

Pg. 3

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Next he showed me the proper way to custom fit the shoulder stock to my arm length for a more controlled trigger pull. As a right handed shooter, he advised me to work down the fore stock to fit my left hand in order to give me a more controlled stance for off hand shooting. A good rifle scope and mounts was also on his list, as well as custom loading my ammunition for more accurate and effective shots. Armor piercing bullets were simply NOT GOING TO WORK!!

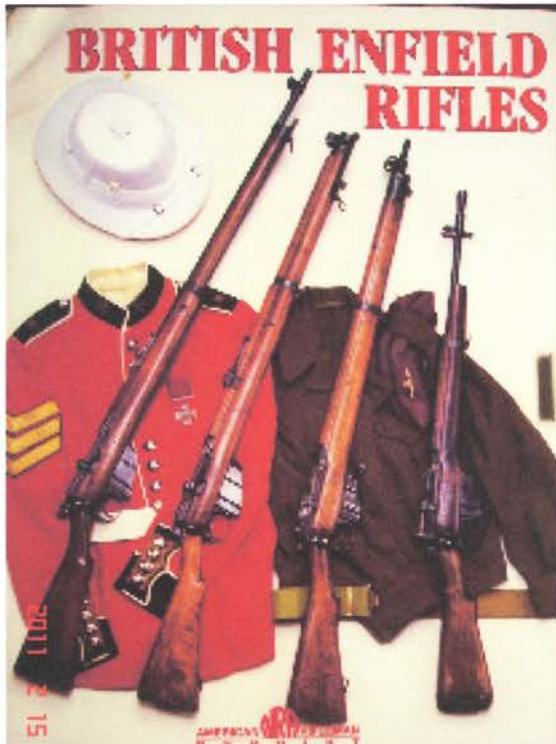
The final wrap up

During the 1950's, the good folks of Bonner, together with other surrounding area residents possessed a unique "CAN DO" attitude and were quick to help me improve my hunting skills. It would be impossible to thank everyone for the help I received. Even though I was a Hooligan---they helped me achieve and improve many other personal goals. I traveled down a slightly different pathway than most while living in Bonner, so I'll sum my experience up with this phrase borrowed from Mark Twain;

***"My schooling might have been a little poor---
but my education was SPECTACULAR!!!!"***

The Doodle Dandy
is my first hunting Trip
and my good friends who
gave me some very sound
advice

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The British Military Rifle I ordered from Golden State Arms looked like the second rifle from the left---over the red dress uniform jacket.

The rifle pictured below is the sporterized version of the rifle described above.

The first knife just under the rifle below is a Ruana "Hunter" (Purchased from Rudy Ruana late 1950's.



The Meat Hatchet and two remaining knives were made in my own shop, using experiences gained from Rudy Ruana

#1 Doodle Dandy Hunter

#2 Doodle Dandy Skinner