



THE AUTHOR AND A COYOTE BROUGHT IN ALIVE TO RANDALL'S RANCH. THE BRONC THAT CARRIED US DID THE BEST JOB OF BUCKING I HAVE BEEN ON IN MANY A DAY

Coyote Hunting Experiences

By ELMER KEITH

OF ALL our American large and small game, I know of no one animal that is so difficult to hunt successfully as the coyote. During the past fifteen years I have either myself killed, or assisted in securing, elk, deer (both mule and whitetail), sheep, goat, caribou, moose, and black and grizzly bear; and yet, I get more real satisfaction and sport from successfully outwitting Uncle Sam's yellow dog than in the taking of any of the species of big game. Successful coyote hunting calls for the very highest degree of skill, not only as a still hunter, but as a rifleman as well. I have found even mountain sheep easier to approach to within rifle range than coyotes that have been hunted much. Of course coyotes can be easily secured by driving through the country in a car, with one man to keep the car going and a rifleman to slip out on the off side and lie down while the car continues slowly on. The coyote will usually watch the car, and is easily collected in this way. But get out into rough country, alone and on your own hind legs, and you will find it another story. I have hunted coyotes more or less every winter for twenty years, and for ten years made it a business each winter. The more one hunts

and traps them the more respect he has for this cunning little wolf.

When a small boy in Montana, I used to pack a long-barreled .25-35 Winchester, and never lost an opportunity to empty the magazine at a running coyote. I would shoot at them as long as they were in sight, and occasionally hit one, but by far the majority of them went on over the ridge. I did actually kill one, before several witnesses, at between six and seven hundred yards, by holding up in the air over him, the full-patched bullet penetrating only half-way through his body. An accident, of course.

After joining the Helena Rifle Club, when I was sixteen, and mastering the use of the gun-sling in connection with a good star-gauged Springfield, then and not until then did I learn to do business with the coyotes at long range. By the time I had worn the best accuracy out of three of these rifles I felt reasonably sure of any coyote that I could approach to within 200 yards, with still another 200 yards of space for him to cover while I shot at him. I always used the sling, either prone or sitting. I hand-loaded my ammunition, weighing the powder charges to one-tenth of a grain and separating the bullets into groups based upon exact

similarity in weight. This combination secured for me a great many fine pelts up to ranges of 400 yards, and sometimes farther.

I soon found that for this extremely fine long-range work I needed better sighting equipment, and if possible a more accurate rifle. In time I learned that one good prone shot was worth a clip or two of running shots. So I had Larry Nuesslein assemble for me a heavy-barrel Springfield free rifle, equipped with double set triggers and a 5-A Winchester scope. This rifle had a 26-inch Winchester Sniper barrel, model 1922 pistol-grip stock, and Lyman 48 rear and hooded-head front sights, in addition to the telescope. Needless to say, after a short trial the iron sights were never used again for coyote shooting.

I soon found that this rifle, with good hand-loads employing the then new 6-degree Government National Match boat-tail bullet and No. 16 powder, would stay in a 4-inch circle at 400 yards with perfect holding. Later I hand-loaded the 9-degree National Match bullet with No. 16, and then with No. 17½ powder. I used these full-patched loads on coyotes, eagles, and bobcats for several winters, but finally lost so many shot through the

body that I began filing off the points of the bullets until the lead core showed. This did the trick up to 400 yards, beyond which expansion was very uncertain. Next I drilled a small cavity in the points after filing, but this did not make the bullets open up much better, as the National Match jacket is too heavy at the point; and these long boat-tails, while the most accurate missiles in the world, do not keyhole on striking a bone as do the 150-grain flat-base ones as a rule. At that time I was unable to obtain a single expanding type of bullet that would equal in accuracy the Government match bullet, so stuck to the latter.

One day while hunting a long ridge some twenty miles north of Payette, Idaho, I spotted three coyotes in a little basin, at around 200 yards. They had no knowledge of my presence, as the wind was in my face and I was looking through a small sage bush. I crawled to the top of the ridge, with my scope set for 200 yards, and using the 6-degree match bullet, unaltered. The coyotes were playing around much like a bunch of dogs. With the sling adjusted tight, I shoved the big Springfield around the edge of a sage bush, and assumed a perfect prone position. Holding just behind the shoulder of the coyote farthest away, I touched the set trigger. The recoil blotted out my vision for an instant; then I saw the coyote standing exactly the same as before but with his legs braced, while the two others ran up the opposite hill about fifty yards, and stood looking the other way, toward where the bullet had thrown up the dirt, apparently uncertain as to which way to run. Ignoring the first one I had plugged, I pushed the scope ahead, fed in another cartridge, pulled the scope back and set the trigger, all in a few seconds' time. I now held on the rump of the coyote farthest away, and as the cross-hairs quartered his rear end I touched the trigger. This fellow went down instantly to stay, while the one I had first shot started up the hill toward the other, with his tail wringing like a windmill. He and the one I had not shot at went on up the side of the sage-covered hill as fast as they could go, until I

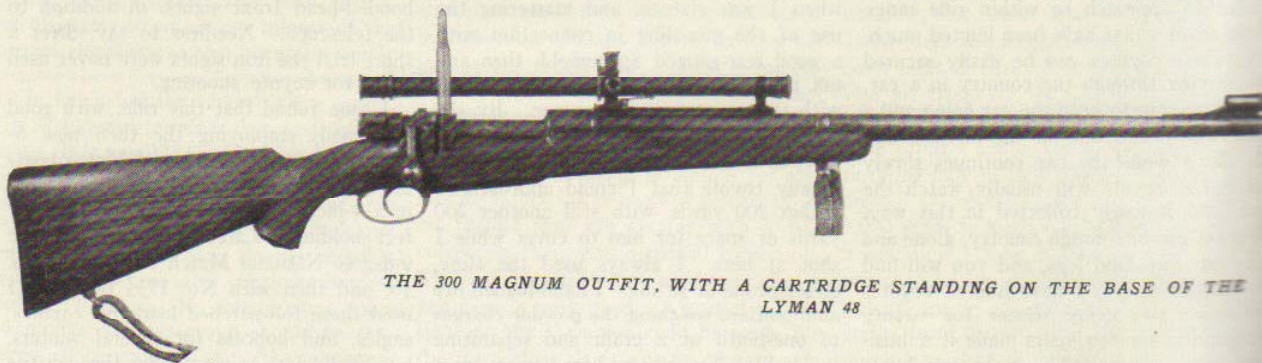
estimated that they were 400 yards away, when the sick one stopped. The other went on a few yards, and turned broadside. By this time I had raised my scope four minutes, and I settled the cross-hairs back of the unhurt pup's shoulder. As the rifle recoiled he turned back toward me, with his tail wringing and his head held low. He soon began to run in a large circle, going as if the devil were after him, finally rolling end-over-end. In the meantime the one I had first hit went on over the hill in high gear.

Getting up, but with the sling still on my arm and the rifle fully reloaded, I walked over and carefully examined the two others to see if they were really done for. With the scope set back for 200 yards I trailed the first coyote on over the hill, only to see him climbing another hill fully 500 yards away. As he was going slowly, with his head held low, I knew he was hard hit. I was out of breath from the climb and could not hold steady, so I lay down to adjust my scope and get some much-needed wind. Setting the scope for 500 yards, I waited for the coyote to stop, and then I held well up on his shoulders, the cross-hairs covering them. As the rifle recoiled I had a mental picture of the cross-hairs dead on. Evidently this cartridge case was a little soft or had been reloaded too many times, for the primer pocket enlarged and I got quite a bit of gas in my right eye. With my left eye I saw the coyote going down around the hill. Every few yards he would turn a somersault and stick his nose into the ground, only to try to jump again. By rolling and kicking he got down into the gulch out of my sight. I set the scope back for 200 yards, and worked my way down the gulch, to find the coyote dead. The first shot had gone through both lungs, making only a needle-like hole, while the last had gone through both shoulders and chest, low down, and pierced the heart. One fore-leg was broken. This proved to be an old dog, while the two others were young coyotes, though fully grown. The second one shot was hit through the heart, the bullet shattering the rump and traversing the length of the body, coming out low in the

chest. The third one was hit just over the heart, cutting one of the large arteries. By the time I had them all peeled it was dusk, and I arrived at my camp long after dark, tired but happy.

On another occasion, in this same section, I had hunted carefully all day, and for the three previous days, without seeing a single coyote. I had given up for the day, and taken an old abandoned road for home, when within a mile of camp I saw a coyote go into a draw, high up on the mountain-side to my right, and headed my way. I set my scope for 300 yards, the distance at which I thought he would come out. I hurried to a small knoll from which I could get a good prone shot up the mountain, and waited. After I had about decided the coyote had seen me and gone on up the draw, his head and shoulders appeared over the ridge. Swinging the cross-hairs to quarter his chest, I touched the set trigger. As I was pushing the scope forward to reload, I saw the coyote run up the ridge, turn around broadside, and look back; and I could not figure how I had missed at that range with a perfect hold. The next time I held just back of the shoulders, and got results. The coyote jumped into high gear and headed down the hill past me, with his tail doing the usual stunt. I followed until nearly dark, and finally found her dead in the creek, shot through the lungs. I skinned her out and went on to camp. That night I tried to figure out how I could possibly have missed the first chance, and finally decided to go back the next day and see if the bullet had touched the snow and ricocheted over the coyote.

On the way back, the following day, I got a shot at an eagle on an old fence post, at what I thought was 300 yards, but I could not see the ground between myself and the bird. I set the scope, and shot, only to see the eagle fly peacefully away. After stepping the distance over the ridge, across a long flat, and up another ridge, I found it to be over 400 yards. Upon climbing the ridge to where the coyote had been at my first shot, imagine my surprise to find a very large old dog lying dead (Continued on p. 19)



THE 300 MAGNUM OUTFIT, WITH A CARTRIDGE STANDING ON THE BASE OF THE LYMAN 48

COYOTE HUNTING EXPERIENCES

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in his tracks. My bullet had struck him in the chest, coming out through the top of the back just behind the shoulders, and tearing a two-inch hole at exit. This bullet must have tumbled, as I was using handloaded 9-degree boat-tails, unaltered. These were two of my lucky days; but many more were not so lucky.

One morning, the same winter, while going for my mail, a coyote came over a ridge within 200 yards of me. I was down and had the sling on my arm before this one saw me, when it stopped to figure out what I was. I held just back of the shoulder, but the shot did not even knock the animal off its feet. As I steadied the cross-hairs for a second shot I could plainly see the blood trickling down the coyote's side, from the first wound; but before I could touch the trigger this particular pup decided he had had enough, and went over the ridge in two jumps. I spent two days trailing him, but the snow had melted on the south side of the ridge, and I lost the track in the brush along the creek.

The next winter Bill Mobley came over to my camp for a day's hunt. We worked out a good many gulches without seeing a thing, and as the mercury stood at 37° below it was pretty cold hunting. Bill froze both ears solid because he would not don a cap, claiming that his ears were frost-proof. After turning back toward camp we came to a long ridge overlooking quite a little valley, and almost instantly a coyote jumped up and headed diagonally away up the opposite hillside—a long shot. I tried to whistle to stop him, but my lips were too cold. I figured that half-way up that hillside would be five hundred yards, so set the scope accordingly. I told Bill to whistle, and he put two fingers into his mouth and let out a blast like a steamboat. The coyote hauled around broadside, and holding my breath to stop the thumping of my heart, I held on my favorite place just back of the shoulder, and touched the trigger. The coyote dropped as my rifle settled down again, and rolled sideways down the hill.

While I was pushing and pulling that Winchester scope, and throwing in another shell, the coyote stopped rolling, got up, and hiked back to where he had been when I hit him. By this time my freezing fingers had gotten my trigger set, and Bill let out another shrill whistle. The coyote stopped again broadside, and I held the same as before and touched the big rifle off. This time the coyote rolled to the bottom of the hill, and Bill went over to him while I lay in the sling strap, and watched. When I got over there Bill had the skin half off. He said, "If I had a gun like that and could use it as you

can, I'd never set another trap." Both bullets had gone through the lungs behind the shoulder, about three inches apart. Bill knew next to nothing about the finer points of long-range rifle shooting, but he certainly could whistle, and between us we had a lot of good sport. The next fall we got two bear and a mule deer together.

The lack of killing power in the National Match bullets finally forced me to alter them, and when carefully altered I could see no difference in the accuracy. Filed and drilled, they gave fine results up to 400 yards, beyond which they would not open; and I have never found any missile fired from the Springfield that will surely open at long range.

One day while out with Charlie Cavinness, of Durkee, Oregon, we spotted a coyote coming up a ridge in our direction, and by utilizing a shoulder of the ridge as cover, we got to within 500 yards of him. He had by this time lain down broadside. Setting the scope of the old bull gun at 500, I had no trouble in hitting the coyote behind the shoulders, but he made it into a deep coulic, and on out to the sage-covered flat, where we lost his trail. I had used a 9-degree boat-tail, filed and drilled, but the range was just too great, and the bullet had lost too much velocity to expand properly.

While I was at Perry in '25, Frank Kahrs asked me to try the new Remington Hi-Speed 110-grain load, and I brought a quantity of this ammunition back with me. Careful prone tests showed that it was good for about a 6-inch group at 300 yards, beyond which it was very uncertain. I had my first chance with this ammunition during a hard rain storm late in the fall. A coyote came around the shoulder of a hill about 200 yards away, and did not see me until I flopped into a poor prone position, with my head down hill. I managed, by nearly dislocating my neck, to bring the cross-hairs to bear on him behind the shoulder, and at the touch of the trigger he went down as if he had been struck by dynamite. The hole at exit was 3 inches across. Later I killed three coyotes out of a bunch of five with this same load, though I finally had to give it up because at long ranges I got nothing but misses.

One day while gathering up cattle north of Payette, I jumped two coyotes almost under the horse's feet as I was crossing a ridge. I had two friends with me, and a good Government Springfield Sporter under my leg, and I asked the boys to watch one coyote while I gave the other rapid fire from a good sitting position, with sling. I was using the Remington 110 grain Hi-Speed. By the time I had gotten out the rifle and had taken position, the coyotes were 250 yards away, and going in different directions. I chose

the one headed down the gulch. The first shot struck behind him, and only made him pop his tail and speed up. The second shot shaved the hair of his chest and turned him up the opposite mountain. The third shot hit low behind him, while the fourth went just over his head and turned him around the side of the hill, quartering from me. Then the fifth shot struck him in the seat of the pants at around 400 yards, and apparently killed him instantly. I jammed in another clip for the second coyote, but he was already out of sight around a shoulder of the mountain, and I asked the boys to watch the one that I had downed while I went to try for a shot at the other. When I returned they did not know where the first coyote was, and I spent nearly an hour hunting for him. I finally saw him down a badger hole, into which he had rolled when hit. That bullet did not come out.

Desiring a rifle with a killing range longer than that of the Springfield, and one that would deliver equal accuracy, I had the Hoffman Arms Co. build me a special heavy-barrel 300 Magnum equipped with a Belding & Mull scope. Eric Johnson made the heavy 26-inch barrel, and chambered it very tight and with practically no headspace clearance, the bolt just closing on the cartridge. I could hardly hope for a more accurate rifle. This 300 Magnum, and my old heavy Winchester-barreled Springfield, are the most accurate long-range rifles I have ever owned.

Though the 3-power hunting scope was fine for running shots, I soon found that it did not have sufficient magnifying power, and that I could never completely eliminate parallax. Nor could I feel confident of my sight changes for long range. So I tried a 6-power Fecker, but this, though a very fine and accurate scope, did not have as large a field as the 5-A Winchester, was much longer and more bulky, while the Fecker aluminum mounts held the scope higher above the bore of the rifle and made good hard holding more difficult. I finally fitted a rib on the Magnum barrel to take the Winchester scope, which scope I have found to be the best and most reliable of all for long-range coyote killing. My only kick on this heavy-barrel 300 Magnum is the single trigger, which takes longer to squeeze off than it does to touch a set trigger. There is no animal that has its sixth sense more highly developed than the coyote, and many times when squeezing on this trigger I have had a coyote get nervous and begin to run again, the rifle often recoiling just as the animal jumped, and the bullet landing where the creature had been a fraction of a second before.

This Magnum rifle has paid for itself several times with coyote and bobcat pelts, and eagle tails. I have made a great

many kills at ranges up to and including 600 yards with this outfit, and the rifle will expand its bullets up to a range of 500 yards, beyond which expansion is very uncertain. After losing several pups with the drilled National Match bullets, I tried out the Western Tool and Copper Works bullets. These proved to be practically as accurate as the N. M. bullets, and they were much more reliable as regards expansion. Not so long ago, at the suggestion of Colonel Whelen, myself, and many others, this same company brought out this bullet equipped with a jacket much thinner at the point than the other. This is the best .30-caliber coyote missile that I know of. I have never been able to get the same extreme accuracy from the shorter 150-grain bullet, which is necessary for this very fine work.

With a charge of 64 grains of du Pont 15½ and the 172-grain W. T. and C. bullet, this 26-inch-barreled Magnum rifle develops over 3,000 foot-seconds velocity. I carry the scope set for 300 yards, and on coyotes I hold at the belly line at 200 yards and just barely over the back at 400 yards. For longer ranges I estimate the distance as closely as possible, and set the scope for the range. This increased velocity, with consequent flatter trajectory, makes the 300 Magnum quite an improvement over the heavy-barrel Springfield for long-range work. I have shot quite a number of coyotes lengthways of the body with this combination, and the bullet usually expands to such an extent that it does not come out, and therefore does not leave a 3-inch hole in the pelts.

For a first-class coyote rifle I would recommend nothing but the heavy-barrel type of bolt-action rifle, equipped with a first-class target scope of not less than 5-power and with as large a field as possible; the scope to be mounted as low as possible and in a mount having ready adjustments for long range. The rifle should have a first-class prone stock with high comb, and should be equipped with double set triggers. The barrel length should not be less than 26 inches, these long barrels increasing the velocity very materially, and aiding in perfect holding. Our best cartridges for the purpose are the 300 Magnum, .276 Askins-Dubiel Magnum, .30-'06, .270 Winchester, and possibly the .25 Whelen and .25 Roberts; although I strongly favor a caliber of not less than .270. The cheapest outfit of this kind that one can obtain is the Type T heavy-barrel Springfield sold through the D. C. M.

To acquire the ability to successfully judge distance over uneven ground, the best practice I know of is to estimate the distance to some object in the direction in which one is traveling, and then carefully pace the distance to check up. Such

practice if continued over a long period of time helps one a great deal. To be able to hit at long range one must know his rifle's zero, in both warm weather and cold; also at different elevations. My rifles when perfectly sighted at 4,000 feet elevation invariably shoot a few inches high at 7,000 or 8,000 feet. I have proven this to my own satisfaction with both the 300 Magnum and the .30-'06. A rifle must make one-inch groups per one hundred yards to interest me as a coyote rifle.

A CITY OF RIFLEMEN

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Youngsters,—boys and girls fourteen years of age and older,—are eligible as students of these schools of learning. With the consent of the superintendent and the principals of the junior and high schools, Mr. Forbes has addressed student assemblies numbering close to fifteen hundred, presenting the program to them. In this manner he is able personally to explain the program and the benefits to be derived from a knowledge of the use of the rifle as a constructive sport. Furthermore, the program and activities are brought to the attention of some twenty Boy Scout Troops by means of a bulletin sent out from Boy Scout Headquarters. The local newspapers cooperate by giving space to the results obtained, and by carrying announcements of new schools of instruction as these are about to be formed. Local dealers also lend a helping hand through the medium of window displays. These displays usually include the various models of target arms, ammunition, standard targets, photographs, a complete set of N. R. A. Junior medal decorations and diplomas, the regulation form of application, certificates of proficiency, and manuals of instruction.

The schools of instruction usually cover an eleven-week period. The first few lessons consist of lectures and chalk talks, which both boys and girls attend. When the mechanics of rifle marksmanship is taken up the group is divided into two classes, one for boys and the other for girls, and these classes are again divided into small instructional groups, each under an assistant instructor who continues the system of explanation and demonstration.

The courses of instruction offered at these schools have for the most part been provided by the Junior Division of the National Rifle Association. In some instances the scope of the course has been revised, the following subjects being covered in detail: History of Firearms; History of Projectiles; History of Powders and Primers; Objects of the Instruction; Classification of Firearms and Their General Characteristics; General Processes of

Manufacture; Nomenclature; Care and Cleaning; Safety; Positions; Sighting and Aiming; Holding the Breath; Trigger Control and Calling the Shot; Sight Adjustments; Effect of General Conditions Encountered in Firing; Range Construction and Nomenclature, and Range Discipline. Ballistics, both exterior and interior, are gone into quite thoroughly, though not to the point of confusing the student with theory.

In the three years of this training, five schools have been completed. As many as 126 students have been in attendance at one school. Of this number, 83 completed the course satisfactorily and obtained their certificates of proficiency. The remaining students, however, acquired a general knowledge of firearms and their handling. There are 84 students enrolled in the present school.

Of course no one is permitted to fire for record until he or she has completed the school of instruction. Those who accept Junior membership in the N. R. A. are permitted to fire for Junior qualification decoration. Seventy-six qualifications have been officially reported to National Headquarters, and fifty more will soon be forwarded. As an added incentive to individual effort, a bulletin board is maintained on the range, on which the five high scores for the week in both the boys' and the girls' sections are recorded. This has created quite a bit of enthusiasm on the part of the students and their families and friends, as the local press publishes the standings of the five high for each section each week.

The school now has ample outdoor and indoor range facilities. The outdoor range was completed last fall, providing for eight firing points at 50 yards and eight at 100 yards. To be sure, Juniors in their early training fire at 50 feet only. A new gallery range with seven firing points is now under construction. This is located on the top floor of the Y. M. C. A. building, which was never finished off. Practically all of the lumber and steel, except the dimension lumber used to carry the steel, was salvaged, and this was made available without expense. The targets are all numbered at the backstop, and they are placed in front of the backstop on 34-inch centers. The front of the backstop is faced vertically with beaver board nailed to framework, and stripes are painted on the floor from each firing point to its target, making a line for each firer. This makes it practically impossible for one to fire on the wrong target. On the floor, just in front of each firing point, a number is also painted to correspond with that on the target. Four relays are fired an hour, fifteen minutes per relay, allowing five minutes for change of relays and ten minutes for the firing of ten record shots.