



Hitting the grapefruit!

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Introduction

The title of this article might seem confusing at first. If you are a Trail or Nature Guide, or even planning to become one, then perhaps you will see the significance in the title. The folk who walk with a rifle in areas where they commonly encounter dangerous animals while guiding guests, are the ones most likely to have to “hit the grapefruit”. They are the ones who would have to protect both themselves or their guests in the event of a charge by one of those dangerous animals by using a rifle.

The title indicates that in the event of an incident involving a charge from a dangerous animal, and you have no other alternative than to shoot the animal, you will need to find the “grapefruit” – or the brain, to effectively stop the charge and prevent serious injury to either yourself or your guests.

You have probably watched YouTube videos of charging animals and seen how quickly they can move, so this article has been put together simply to prepare or enable (to get) you to understand the serious responsibility of carrying a rifle and the very great possibility that when you are carrying one, you may have to use it. When, or if that happens, you need to spring into action, without thought, chamber a round, get the rifle to your shoulder, find the sights, and fire the ONE ACCURATE SHOT to stop the problem and prevent injury to yourself and your guests. You also need to know, without any doubt, that you are carrying a properly maintained and serviceable rifle with reliable and effective ammunition.

As a guide, when you chose this as your career choice and you walk regularly, then it would (be)best (be) to think of “when” rather than “if” an incident will happen.

Now the way this article has been structured has been done purposefully so that elements you read under one section could appear again under another. Repetition is important, ask anyone who is studying! Also, there are those who like to read the sections they choose.

Preparation

The obvious preparation is training. It is logical that training prepares you. Don’t ever think that the training you do on the shooting range is a waste of time.

You need to be able to get your rifle into action quickly and safely and, in need, to fire an accurate shot to stop the animal from hurting either you or the guests who are walking with you.



So, time on the shooting range is imperative as well as ensuring that the time you spend is productive and that you are improving your skill each time to go to the range. This time on the shooting range is where you try out different ammunition, confirm that it chambers with no problem, that the load is comfortable to shoot, that the sights are set correctly and that the rifle functions perfectly in all respects.

Not only the shooting portion at the range, but also problems that may occur with the equipment. This could be discovering that the extractor is not working or that the rounds don't cycle, or the stock is too long, too wide, or the shots are going too high because the sights are not correct. All these issues are to be sorted at the range – NOT when confronted by an angry, charging animal!

The Advanced Rifle Handling (ARH) is one that you would have already had to pass to achieve your Backup or Lead Trails Guide qualification. Do not accept that once you have ARH that you are now ready for any eventuality! Practice – good practice and regular practice, is what will help to develop the muscle memory and familiarity with the rifle as well as your equipment that you will need if you are ever faced with a serious situation requiring you to use a rifle to defend yourself.

Don't fall into the trap of only doing ARH every three years. Our recommendation is 20 rounds every month. That is not simply "throwing lead at the target" but good practice to achieve good results. Keep a track of your shooting record! Make sure that you identify issues and work towards resolving or rectifying them.

It is a good idea to go to the range with someone and get them to observe and "crit" you and you do the same for them. Constructive criticism is good. We are often not aware of things we are doing incorrectly unless someone points them out to us.

Keep a track of your shooting by recording scores and times for ARH exercises or even targets shot at different distance. Remember to note the rifle you used as well as the ammunition and the bullets.

Mental preparedness

As a Field or Nature Guide, you need to ask a vitally important question: "Am I willing (and/or able) to kill an animal if a situation arose and I had no other way to avoid being hurt?"

If you believe that you are not able to answer this question in the affirmative, then perhaps you have made the incorrect career choice!

It would be both dangerous and irresponsible to answer the question negatively and believe that you will never be faced with that type of situation. You could be placing the lives of your guests and yourself at risk if you do. Remember that if you continue to walk regularly, it becomes not a matter of "if it will happen", but rather "when it will happen".

None of the training you have received during your courses has been directed at killing animals. You have been given the tools to avoid dangerous situations by believing your gut,



ignoring the pleading guest who wants to get closer for a better photo-shot and ensuring you and your guests' safety always.

Charges

These are the very events we wish to avoid!

The training you have had up to this point has been preparing you, to ensure that you can use all those skills to avoid a potentially dangerous situation.

However, speak to the qualified and seasoned Trails Guides and they will tell you that situations develop in any one of the following ways:

- From the dense bush
- Without warning
- Without perceived provocation
- Very fast
- When you were least expecting it
- Very close

The only way that you can successfully resolve that type of situation, may be to kill the animal!

Once again, you need to ask the question: "can I do that?"

We have also had four students who have been involved with animal incidents, and fortunately survived the incidents but in all cases the animal had to be killed. In each of those cases the incident occurred suddenly and surprised the Lead Guide so much so, that in one incident a round had not even been chambered.

I am not a Trail guide and therefore am not expert to deal with trail issues. These are the tips and issues that are taught on a formal course, namely observation, high ground, drainage lines, escape routes and long grass or reeds. These are possible even logical to some. I would like to raise the issue of Backup Guides!

In the aftermath of an incident where an animal charge has resulted in shots being fired at the animal, I would guess that most of us would consider that a traumatic experience.

- How able would you be to remember to make your rifle safe after the event?
- Would you be able to walk back to camp (assuming you were not severely injured)?
- Would you be able to calm the guests?

My assumption is that in these incidents, you would have to rely heavily on your Backup. The Backup would need to get you to calm down and take over your responsibilities such as radioing camp, settling the guests, making your rifle safe, giving you water.

- Do you trust your backup on a walk?
- Would you feel confident that your Backup could handle a situation as discussed above?
- Do you walk without a Backup? If so, who will help you?



Confidence

The more often you spend time on a shooting range, and in fact, the more often you successfully complete an ARH, the more confidence you develop. I guess this applies mainly to regular shooters rather than the first-time student who is usually very nervous about these new exercises and this “big gun”. Confidence is far more important than we give it credit, as it goes hand in hand with muscle memory. The more regularly you do an activity correctly and successfully, the easier it becomes because your confidence builds up. Enjoying yourself on the shooting range is also a great help, as it also builds confidence. Being relaxed, you are better able to concentrate on the issues you need to correct or refine as well as being able to shoot well.

Muscle memory

We can only develop muscle memory with regular practice, whether that is through dry firing or live firing. Muscle memory apparently develops to the point of actual “ingrained memory” once you have done the same activity correctly, 21 times! Any time that you do the activity incorrectly, you go back a few steps and need to build up again. This is so important for field guides who walk with rifles because you could be walking for years without incident, and then one day, it happens! When that occurs, muscle memory is what could save your life.

Ethics

Once you have confirmed that you would be prepared to use a rifle to stop a charge, and kill the animal if required, there are some other issues to consider as well.

Your rifle does not make you immortal nor untouchable nor is it a “magic wand” to ward off problems!

- Be true to Guiding and respect every animal and their environment!
- Show the animal to your guests at a respectable distance!
- Don't push boundaries – neither yours nor the animals!
- Don't be pressured by guests wanting to get closer for a better picture!
- Regard your rifle as a tool to be used in the right way at the right time!
- Always have an escape route!
- Always have a Plan B even if it is Plan A!
- Avoid thick bush – especially when tracking black rhino (for example!)

Oh, so you are laughing at the obvious. Well, it seems that some guides don't seem to understand these issues as there are many very sad tales relating to exactly these issues.

Don't become complacent – your life could be on the line, and that of your guests.

Be a true Guide, not the guide from “The Guides Guide to Guiding”!

So now it's time to address further issues that may relate to your career but are certainly relevant if you are going to be guiding with a rifle.



Legal requirements

The requirements in South Africa for a person to use a bolt action rifle (manually operated), either owned (or licensed) by a Lodge, is very plain, and consists of the following three Unit Standard qualifications

- 117705 – Knowledge of the Firearms Control Act
- 119651 – Handle and Use a Manually Operated Rifle or Carbine
- 123519 – Handle and Use a Manually Operated Rifle or Carbine for Business Purposes.

All Unit Standards are qualifications that are registered by an Accredited Training Provider, both with the Professional Firearm Trainers Council (PFTC) as well as the Quality Council for Training Organisation (QCTO). It is imperative to note that none of these qualifications ever expire!

Some training providers place an expiry date on their certificates – this is illegal! This seems to be a scheme that certain training providers use to generate more money! If you are faced with this request, then they should be reported to PFTC immediately. Your degree or matric certificate does not have an expiry date on it!

The above three Unit Standards allow someone as follows:

- To apply for their own manual rifle
- To be issued a manual rifle that belongs to a Lodge
- To be assessed for FGASA Advanced Rifle Handling

Using your own rifle at a lodge

The Lodge should respect that you will look after your own rifle far better than a rifle used by numerous people at a Lodge. Your rifle also will need to be kept under your control and should therefore be locked in a safe in your room when not being used. The above legal requirements will apply, however it is up to the Lodge themselves, to be comfortable that you use your own rifle. They may refuse if you have a different calibre to the ones they use as they may wish you to use the factory ammunition they supply.

They are also entitled to refuse if you make use of reloaded ammunition.

Best that this is checked with the Lodge management, or Responsible Person, before being disappointed.

The Firearms Control Act is very specific regarding use of a licensed firearm, in this case manual rifles. Note the specific wording in each of Sections 13,14,15, 16 and 17:

A firearm in respect of which a license has been issued in terms of this section may be used where it is safe to use the firearm and for a lawful purpose.



Now it is very important to note that Section 20 License to possess firearm for Business Purposes DOES NOT include this paragraph! This is to ensure that Business Firearms are ONLY to be used in that Business and may NOT be used for any other activity i.e., hunting or sport shooting.

Responsible person

This is the person who is mentioned in both the Firearms Control Act and the Regulations and is the person responsible for a Company or Lodge's firearms.

Simply by definition, it is assumed that they have the qualifications to ensure they are responsible.

So, what are their responsibilities?

- They may not issue a rifle to anyone that is in an unsafe or unserviceable condition
- They may not issue ammunition to anyone that is unsafe or unserviceable
- They are required to manage (read, complete, and keep up to date) the SIX Registers that are legally required
- They need to ensure that rifles and ammunition are inspected regularly to ensure they do not require any servicing

So, let's break down those responsibilities a little further. To ensure that a rifle or ammunition is serviceable, you would require some technical knowledge.

- Would you know how to check the stock for cracks, or even where to check?
- Could you confirm that the headspace of the rifle is correct?
- Do you know how to check that the bolt is correct for THAT rifle?
- Do you know the implications of switching bolts between rifles of the same type and calibre?
- Can you change an extractor if one is broken?

We are not expecting you to become a qualified gunsmith, but the authors of the Firearms Control Act did not give a whole lot of thought to this section when putting it together.

It is obvious that there should be someone who "looks after the rifles at a lodge", however those responsibilities are more than simply locking the rifles away.

A further problem exists, in that the Act did not cater for the Responsible person going on leave. Who takes over during that time?

The change of the Responsible person is simply a notification to Central Firearms Register that another person is now the new Responsible Person. The problem seems to be that the Register doesn't have the capability of reflecting that detail on their system.



Rifle handling

This section covers some basic shooting techniques that can be practised by either live or dry firing. Either are imperative to enable you to “hit the grapefruit” should that eventuality arise.

GRIP

The grip on a rifle is quite simple. You use your weak hand only!

Now don't get me wrong, I am not dismissing cheek-weld, butt position on the shoulder – here I refer to the hand that will hold the rifle **STRONGLY** into your shoulder!

You cannot do that with the hand that manages the trigger – the strong hand. We cannot have a controlled (gentle) squeeze on the trigger and have the other fingers “white knuckling” the pistol grip! We are not designed that way.

The weak hand should be wrapped around the fore-end, not too far forward so that the arm is relaxed (about a 45° angle), but with a slightly bent elbow and all fingers gripping the fore-end!

Some have taught that the index finger should “point towards the target”. Well, this may work for some, but simply from experience, this means that the rifle cannot be held strongly enough. This would affect folk with smaller hands more so than those of us with large “paws”.

So, let's look at this another way. Once the rifle is on your shoulder and you have fired a shot you obviously need to re-chamber the rifle by opening the bolt. Ok, so try that when you open your weak-hand instead of gripping the fore-end strongly! Obviously impossible!

This simply shows the type of grip you need to develop with that weak hand, and this can be done with continuous and regular dry-firing and some simple exercises!

Once you start with rifle shooting, you quickly learn how weak your weak arm and hand is! These can be strengthened by dry firing, which means you have access to a rifle, or with some simple exercises. These are appended onto the bottom of this article.

TRIGGER

The trigger is a lever and should activate (break) at about 1.5 to 2 kilograms

If you use a heavy calibre rifle that has a trigger lighter than this, then perhaps it would be a good idea to get it into a gunsmith for some attention!

A light trigger on a heavy calibre rifle is simply dangerous! Some of the older BRNO 602 rifles came out with set-triggers. These are easily identified because the trigger is not curved but is straight and has a small moveable insert. When



the rifle action is cocked and this trigger is pushed forwards, it becomes a hair-trigger and is VERY sensitive. This type of trigger can be replaced by a competent gunsmith - and in my humble opinion, should be done so immediately!

So how should one manage the trigger?

Well, there are two things to be mastered:

1. The trigger finger should be as low on the trigger as possible to allow for the easiest way of setting off the trigger. Remember, it's a lever and if you squeeze at the hinge point, it is harder than squeezing further away from the hinge.
2. The trigger finger should be curled around the trigger so that the trigger is on the first joint of the trigger finger rather than on the pad of the finger. This is logical in that if you squeeze on the pad, you will squeeze pad before trigger, but if you squeeze on the joint, the bone means you start squeezing the trigger immediately.

RIFLE POSITION

The rifle should "touch" four points of the body, namely

- Weak hand
- Strong hand
- Shoulder
- Cheek

We have already addressed the weak-hand and strong-hand.

Where should the rifle be positioned on the shoulder? Well, the answer to this involves both the shoulder and the cheek.

If the rifle is too low on the shoulder, the cheek must be pushed down onto the stock, meaning that the position of your head is angled. We walk naturally in an upright position with our head's vertical on our shoulders! This head position should be the same when shooting.

To achieve this the rifle stock should be moved up to the cheek and that will mean that the butt is against the shoulder and the comb is level, or slightly higher than the level of the shoulder.

Ladies seem to have shorter necks than men and therefore tend to pull their head back along the comb. This can be improved by moving your head forward on the comb, toward the target or sights. This aligns your head correctly to get the sights into the correct position too.



SHOOTING SPEED

PLAXCO'S SHOOTING PRINCIPLES

J. Michael Plaxco

1. Accuracy takes precedence over speed.
2. Speed is economy of motion.
3. Speed will come with practice (if you practice to be fast).
4. Let the sights dictate the cadence of fire.
5. You must learn what is an acceptable sight picture and trigger control of the shot required.
6. Shoot one shot at a time.
7. When all else fails, align the sights...squeeze the trigger.

We are all aware of the statement: "Slow is smooth and smooth is fast". To put this another way, "if you can't do it slow, you can't do it fast".

Jeff Cooper once said, "No one was hurt by a loud fast bang".

SAFETY CATCHES

Most rifles come out with a safety catch fitted as standard. For Guiding, these small latches could mean the difference between life and death!

We have seen students during an ARH exercise, put on the safety catch and then wonder what went wrong with the rifle. Those precious seconds wasted, trying to figure out the problem, could be the difference between firing that lifesaving shot and a disaster!

Our suggestion is to remove the safety catch!

It can be a simple procedure depending on the type of rifle, and for Guides, should become a standard "modification". The very fact that we walk in Stage 2 (safe guiding carry position) and must physically chamber a cartridge before a shot can be fired, is enough safety! To have a separate "catch" to apply, especially when you don't use it, is courting with disaster when it does go on, especially at an unexpected and critical moment!

When we see students looking at us with a confused look on their faces, we know that they have never had the safety catch go "on" before and now that it has happened, they look for some assistance to figure what went wrong with the rifle.

If that occurred when out on a walk with foreign guests, and they looked blankly at the guest behind them for some assistance, well, one can see that the situation would not end well!



To remove the safety mechanism from a BRNO or CZ is a very simple process and can take about 10 minutes. If you have a WINCHESTER, SAKO, RUGER or MAUSER-type, you will have to get a gunsmith to remove the safety.

When the safety catch is removed from a CZ 550 or BRNO 602, there is a small gap left in the stock – this is not a problem, but if it is a cosmetic issue, then a small piece of wood can be glued in place.

MAINTENANCE

Well (Now) the fact that you have completed the required Unit Standards, you have had the basics of rifle maintenance “hammered” into you!

(Well) You have been told when to clean your rifle as well as the items you need to do so, but no mention of how tight the actions screws should be, nor in which order they should be tightened!

So, let’s look under the stock. You may have two or three action screws on your rifle. If you have two, then they will probably be on either side of the trigger guard assembly.

If there are three screws, then one of them will be about where your weak hand would support the fore-end of the stock.

Now we are not looking at the sling swivels! Please make sure that you can identify the difference!

The rule for action screws is as follows – they must be tight! There should be NO free play at all! Do not use the 1/8th of a turn back off!

So, for a rifle with two action screws, the front one is the critical one as it is the one that holds the action onto, or against, the recoil lug! To tighten, start at the one at the back first then truly tighten the front one and tighten the back one again.

For rifles with three action screws, start at the front, then behind the trigger guard then the middle one which must be truly tight, then tighten up the others again.

Please ensure that you use a decent screwdriver when tightening these screws. It should fit the screw correctly and should also have a square tip. You may also find that your rifle has Allen screws – perhaps even swap your action screws for Allen type ones! They can be tightened well and have far less tendency for slipping, as can occur with a screwdriver.

Rifle modifications

It is obvious that if you own a rifle, that you are then able to customise it as you see fit. A rifle that belongs to a Lodge is a different matter, but the following suggestions for modifications apply to all rifles that could be used for Guiding.



1. BOLT HANDLE

It is imperative that the bolt can be manipulated quickly and easily, so it is recommended that the handle of the bolt is bent upwards to allow for the bottom portion of the hand to fit slightly under the bolt knob. This allows for positive upward pressure to be applied by the mid-section of the palm, therefore allowing the bolt to be positively opened.

A cheaper option is to place a rubber bolt-knob onto the bolt itself allowing for the bolt to have some resistant and not allow your hand to slip off the bolt knob at a critical moment.

2. SAFETY CATCH

This has been discussed previously but once again it is recommended that they are removed or cut down so that there is absolutely no possibility of them being engaged at the wrong time!

Please note too, that there is no requirement in the South African Firearms Control Act or its Regulations for a safety catch to be active on a firearm!

3. STOCK

Most (many) rifles come out with wooden stocks and mostly they are either a varnished or oiled finish. Both these finishes will very quickly wear off when the rifle is carried regularly. It is not a huge problem to re-varnish or re-oil the stock on a regular basis, but it can become a problem where the finish on the wood is worn off and weather starts reacting with the stock.

A suggestion is to either change the stock for a composite or synthetic stock. Both weigh the same as a wooden one but are far more durable and are totally weatherproof.

4. BARREL

Metal surfaces on new rifles are generally blued. This is a finish which is applied by an acid or rust method and is simply a "coating" that looks blue or even dark black but is not durable at all.

A solution to this problem is to use one of the new processes available such as CERAKOTE or GUNKOTE. Both processes provide a very hard wearing and weather resistant finish on the metal surfaces.

We recommend GUNKOTE as the process involves phosphating the metal initially after cleaning and sandblasting, and that process itself, is enough to stop metal from rusting. The GUNKOTE paint is applied after the phosphating and can be done in many different colours which is then baked to make the surface resistant to weather.

5. SIGHTS

Open sights or optical sights are the options available. Open sights with a shallow V rear sight have been around for well over 100 years and proven themselves to be sufficient in the hands of a proficient shooter. Other types of open sight include the Blenheim sight which has an aperture in place of the rear sight, which allows



your eye to automatically centre inside that circle and therefore you only need to “see” the front sight – which anyway, is the focal point for any open sight! Optical sights are very quick to get onto target but are quite bulky and therefore can catch on branches with the possibility of them misaligning them. Beware if you use one with batteries, as they tend to run out of power at the most critical moment!

ALL MODIFICATIONS MUST BE TESTED AT A SHOOTING RANGE BEFORE GOING ON A GUIDED WALK! You need to practice quick and slow reloading, fast and deliberate shooting and ensure that under any type of situation, the sights align correctly, the bolt can be manipulated properly and positively and that chambering of all types of ammunition is smooth and hiccup free!!

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Arm strengthening exercises

It is a fallacy that you need to be big and strong to manage a heavy calibre rifle. What you do need is enough strength in both arms and this can be easily achieved with some very simple but regular exercise.

Most new shooters find that their weak arm (usually the left one for a right-handed shooter) tends to get tired and sore very quickly. This is simply because it is not used as the primary lifting arm and therefore needs to be strengthened. However, if you concentrate on this arm, you will quickly reverse the problem and find your other arm then becomes tired.

The answer is to strengthen both arms simultaneously. So, we have developed a simple exercise, and students who have used this technique have confirmed that it works.

Get yourself two normal bricks (not ones with holes in them!). Place them lengthwise on edge on the ground. Now sit in a chair with your thighs parallel to the ground so that you can easily bend to pick up the bricks. While holding a brick in each hand slowly lift them upwards with elbows bent at 90 °, until your elbows, forearms and hands are level with your shoulders. Count to 5000 (1000, 2000, 3000...), to start then slowly lower both arms again until the bricks touch the floor and relax.

This should be done morning and evening every day with about ten repetitions. As your arms become stronger, you will be able to increase the repetitions as well as the time you can count to! If you do this for two weeks prior to ARH, you will give yourself a massive bonus!

You will strengthen your fingers, wrists, forearms, and shoulders.

NOTE: We use bricks rather than dumbbells, so that you must grasp the flat side of the brick to strengthen your fingers. You do not use your fingers when holding dumbbells!

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The following was written by an experienced Trail Guide after an event in Kruger National Park

A few years ago, while conducting a trail in the Kruger National Park, we encountered three White Rhinos feeding in a large open area. With a gentle breeze in our face and a low sun on our back conditions were seemingly perfect. Yet, just before extracting from the sighting, something worried the animals and they took off in our direction with a determined canter. We immediately realized that the trails group was in trouble. There was no time to take cover and the Rhinos could not hear our shouting with which we tried to alert them of our presence. They were making too much noise while running in a tight crash. Both Lead and Back-Up rifles chambered a round in preparation to fire. What happened next most certainly saved lives.

With the group of trailists positioned directly behind the two rifles and the Rhino heading precisely in our direction the Back-Up Trails Guide fired a 'warning shot' with less than twenty meters to spare. Upon the audio disturbance of the large caliber rifle being fired and the visual disturbance created by the puff of dust as the bullet hit the ground to the right and slightly short of the animals, they veered off to the left. Fortunately, they sidestepped the trails group by less than five meters and continued running.

It is important to note that warning shots are rarely effective (across species), but the execution of a coordinated plan between the Trail Guides will most likely determine the outcome of sudden dangerous encounters such as this.

George B. Shaw summed up the current status of the Trail Guides' brief when he said; "The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place". This greatly neglected, yet critical discussion between the Lead and Back-Up Trail Guides before a walking safari should include standard procedures or 'golden commands' for a sudden situation or dangerous encounter.

It is highly recommended that two Trail Guides, each with a large calibre rifle and monometallic bullets, conduct the trail despite the number of participants (maximum eight persons). The Lead and Back-Up Trail Guides walk in front of the group as they move across the terrain in single file. The purpose of the Lead Trails Guide is to facilitate the walking experience, which may include viewing potentially dangerous animals, while the Back-Up Trails Guide provides an extra set of eyes and ears, group control and support (firepower) during a sudden and dangerous encounter. It is important that the Back-Up Trails Guide 'follows the lead of the lead'. In other words, the Back-Up Trails Guide will prepare the rifle to fire and wait for further commands immediately after the Lead Trails Guide has chambered a round and he/she is in a safe position (not behind the Lead Trails Guide).

We encourage that the following 'three-command' system is incorporated by Trail Guides if no structured operational procedure is currently in place. The commands are to be delivered by the Lead Trails Guide only and are as follows;

Hold

Confirmation that the Lead Trails Guide has decided not to take any further actions at this point in time. This is valuable as it eliminates doubt as to what action the Back-Up Trails Guide should be taking and confirms leadership by implementation of a predetermined plan. This command may be used while an animal is approaching the group out of curiosity, approaching the group with the intent to confront or is performing a warning charge.

Warning



The Lead Trails Guide does not deliver a warning shot. Should a warning shot by the Lead Trails Guide be ineffective valuable time (space) would have been wasted and the likelihood of a rifle malfunction while reloading a second cartridge is amplified. Therefore, the warning shot should only be fired by the Back-Up Trails Guide upon the command provided by the Lead Trails Guide. The warning shot should be placed off to one side of the animal (not directly in line with the animal) and into the ground approximately three quarters the distance to the animal. The warning shot would therefore not only provide the loud audio disturbance, but an additional visual disturbance (puff of dust) as the bullet hits the ground. The warning shot placement is ultimately dependent on terrain. Warning shots have been effective in some cases but is most often not enough to discourage an animal of a determined confrontation or charge. Should the warning shot be ineffective, the Lead Trails Guide will be ready to provide the next command.

Kill

This command may be delivered in two ways. First, a shot fired by the Lead Trails Guide. This will always be a kill shot (aiming for the animal's brain). The Back-Up Trails Guide should follow up by shooting at the animal's brain as soon as the Lead Trail Guides shot is heard. The second and alternative command to the shot fired by the Lead Trails Guide is a verbal command - "kill". This verbal command may be necessary if the Lead Trails Guide is experiencing a rifle malfunction or is not in a position to land a brain shot. Once the verbal command has been delivered, the Back-Up Trails Guide takes over the responsibility of the situation until the animal is declared dead by means of checking the corneal reflex.

It is the responsibility of the Trail Guides to kill the animal once a 'kill' shot has been delivered. Should the shots not be fatal and the animal turns to run away, an anchor shot will be necessary to halt the animal after which it should be neutralized. It is unethical to allow a wounded animal to run away.

Thankfully, Trail Guides conduct their duties in a very forgiving environment. The last thing a Trails Guide would like to do is kill an animal on trail. However, the more time Trail Guides spend out in the field, the more likely it is that they will require the implementation of the 'three-command' system to best manage a sudden or dangerous encounter.

Article by Brenden Pienaar

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