

chinook country

WINDSWEPT ALBERTA PROVIDES THE PERFECT BACKDROP FOR A LATE-SEASON CANINE CAPER.

COY



OTES

Text and photos by *NAH* Editor Gordy Krahn

NANTON, ALBERTA, WAS A MESS. Fierce Chinook winds had sneaked into town during the dead of night and pilaged the sleeping community. We'd arisen early for the third and final day of our coyote hunt expecting the worst. The quaint bed and breakfast where we were staying had been rocked on its foundation.

"Beauty day, eh?" I greeted my guide and outfitter, Andre van Hilten, at the door and got a wry smile. I could tell by his demeanor that we were in for another tough day in the field. A coyote hunter's worst nemesis is the wind, and even though the storm had moved on, it was blustery outside.

Streetlamps were out and it was uncommonly dark as we passed through town, but the extent of the wind damage was palpable—broken branches, downed trees and scattered debris covered the streets. We rode in silence, paying homage to the citizens who had a long day of cleanup ahead of them.

I subscribe to the mantra: Hunt when you can, weather be damned. But I couldn't help but think that every Nantonite coyote had been blown clear into neighboring Saskatchewan and it would take them days, if not weeks, to walk back home. As we pulled out of town, heading south along a winding reservoir, Andre explained that high winds were common in the Nanton area and affect hunting strategy.

"Chinook winds blow in from the

Rocky Mountains through Alberta from a southwesterly direction," he said. "They can be as little as a slight breeze or blow up to 100 mph. When these winds become extreme, animals—predators and prey alike—seek cover in sheltered areas, east-facing slopes or tight covered drainages. Wind is our No. 1 enemy when it comes to calling coyotes." *Great*, I thought. I could feel the 30-mph-plus wind buffet the truck as we pulled onto a gravel side road and headed to our first stand of the day.

destination coyote

Weather conditions during the first day of our hunt, while windy, had been manageable, and the first stand verified why Alberta is a coyote hunter's dream destination.

Hunting partner Bryce Towsley and I followed Andre down a sharp ridgeline a quarter-mile from where we parked his truck and set up overlooking several shallow draws that fingered down to a frozen stock pond. It was that magical time of the morning that all coyote hunters cherish—the breeze was cool and wispy, as the sun crept up over the horizon. Andre laid into the rabbit distress call with the guttural growl of a chain-smoking blues singer, causing the hairs on the back of my neck to stand and applaud. I literally watched the hills come to life as coyotes began crawling out of the woodwork—nine in all! Most were milling around several hundred yards out, finishing up

the night shift and paying us very little attention. Whoa! Two were coming hard, one down the fenceline, the other circling the stock pond.

I'd like to say that we cleaned house, but circumstances conspired to produce a big fat zero! Don't ask. No worries, though. Apparently there was no shortage of coyotes and we'd get a chance at redemption.

And redemption came quickly. Our next setup was tucked into a rock outcropping in an overgrown pasture. A couple of minutes into the stand, a lone coyote showed up about 200 yards out along a fenceline but inline with several farm buildings. I slid around into position but held my fire as Andre finessed the coyote closer. It circled to my right and closed ground. At 100 yards it cleared the buildings and my Model 700—chambered in the new .17 Rem. Fireball—barked, sending a puny but deadly 20-grain payload coyote-bound. A millisecond later I saw bullet meet fur.

Back in the truck, Andre explained why Alberta has such a thriving coyote population and why that's good news for outfitters. "Ground squirrel, field mice and gopher populations are out of control and make an easy meal for coyotes," he said. "And flourishing populations of big game increase the chances of finding weak animals that a pack of coyotes can easily take down. Hunting pressure on coyotes is very low, mostly due to the low fur prices." Andre says that coyotes

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are becoming a cash crop for opportunistic Alberta outfitters, allowing them to extend their seasons, by offering exciting hunts during the winter months when most big game seasons are closed.

spot-and-stalk coyotes

High winds plagued the remainder of the hunt, culminating with the 60-mph squall that ransacked Nanton and the surrounding area. Blind calling became futile, and we had to change our approach if we expected to put up any more fur. While it's possible to call coyotes during windy conditions, it's crucial to get as close as possible to receptive ears. For that reason, we spent considerable time in the truck, driving around looking and glassing for ma-

rauding coyotes. Once we spotted coyotes we'd devise a plan to get close enough for the shot, or at least close enough to attempt to call them in.

Fortunately, coyotes are plentiful in Alberta and seem to have no aversion to working the dayshift. The rolling landscape provides adequate cover for sneaking and peeking. During February and March, find cattle and you'll likely find coyotes nearby. Cows are calving, and opportunistic coyotes camp out on the herds to drag off still-born calves or feed on (yuck!) manure and afterbirth. You might also find them mousing in CRP fields and along fencelines, or hunting brush piles and shelterbelts for rabbits. Swamps and heavy stands of timber also offer shelter from the elements and are productive to hunt.

Andre eased the truck to the side of the road and we scrambled for our binos. A pair of coyotes were cruising a distant fenceline a half-section away. When they disappeared from sight, we bailed out of the pickup and, using a rise in the landscape for cover, sneaked out into the field. Andre and I crawled to the crest of the hill and set up prone, while Bryce tucked into the fenceline, made like a post and watched the backdoor.

Andre had been calling for a few minutes when he tapped me on the shoulder. A lone coyote was charging our flank across a stubble field headed straight for Bryce. The coyote didn't know it yet, but it was in trouble. Bryce's patience ran out when the coyote was 100 yards out and he dropped it with a well-placed frontal shot to the chest. We hunted the rest of the day, and although we saw several more coyotes—even flung some long-distance lead at some of them—we came up short. It wasn't a great day by Alberta standards, but we'd each shot a coyote and had 2 more days to hunt.

By day No. 2, hunting coyotes had become a spot-and-stalk affair. I was hunting with Andre again, but paired up for the day with Remington's Linda Powell. Once again we were seeing a lot of coyotes, but calling had become ineffective so all we could do was drive around and try to sneak close when we spotted a coyote. Luck seemed to be conspiring against us—the coyotes we were encountering were either on land that we didn't have

THREE-IN-ONE RIFLESCOPE

BUSHNELL'S NEW YARDAGE PRO RIFLESCOPE TAKES THE guesswork out of making long-range shots by providing premium optics, a laser rangefinder and a bullet drop compensator in one package. This riflescope comes with five Bullet Drop Compensator (BDC) turrets calibrated to match most popular calibers and bullet weights. The shooter simply uses the supplied wireless remote to activate the laser rangefinder and then, once the distance to the target is displayed in the scope, adjusts the BDC turret to match the range, eliminating the need for hold-over.

For more information on Bushnell's full line of hunting optics, visit HuntingClub.com and click "Web Links."—GORDY KRAHN



For quick range acquisition and bullet drop compensation, Bushnell's Yardage Pro riflescope is a coyote hunter's dream come true.

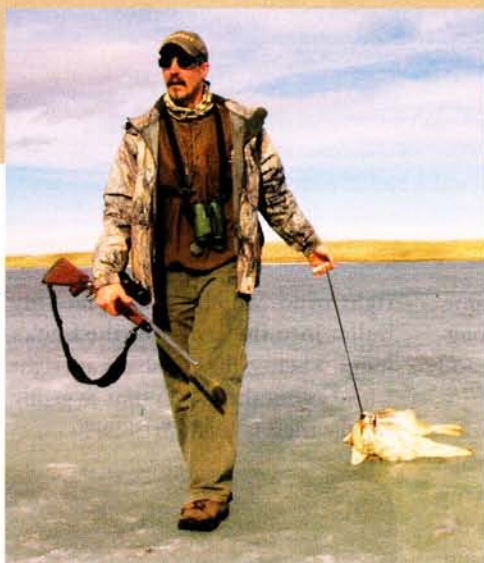


EMPIRICAL PERFORMANCE

Remington's new Mighty Mouse caliber delivers the downrange goods on coyotes from Wyoming to Alberta.

BY GORDY KRAHN

They say the proof is in the pudding, and preliminary field tests bode well for Remington's new .17 Fireball. For more on the good, bad and ugly on this speedy new caliber, along with data from two trips afield, visit HuntingClub.com and click "Web Extras."



Heavy Chinook winds made coyote hunting a spot-and-stalk affair.

permission to hunt, or they spooked before we could put a stalk on them.

Finally, we spotted a pair of coyotes out on the ice, cruising the edge of the reservoir. We parked the truck and circled wide on foot, trying to get ahead and above them. Linda stayed back a few steps, while Andre and I eased up to the skyline to take a look down on the reservoir. Busted! I'd no sooner poked my head up over the rise, when I caught a flash of fur making a quick exit into the cattails along the shoreline.

Lucky for me, a second coyote, the male, wasn't quite as quick. I dropped to the prone position and quickly acquired him in the scope, angling away at a dog-trot. I wasn't exactly sure of the yardage, but figured it to be in the neighborhood of 200 yards, so I tucked the crosshairs in behind the near shoulder, held down a tad to compensate for the sharp downward angle, pulled left to allow for trot-speed and windage and turned the bullet loose. The shot turned out to be 170 yards, and I was impressed by how the little 20-grain poly tipped bullet dumped the coyote on the ice.

Andre stood up and motioned for Linda to join us for the retrieve. It had been a good stalk and we felt good about the well-earned coyote. It was also one of only two coyotes killed that day. We added one more coyote on our final day in Alberta despite the deteriorating conditions and finally conceded that our hunt was over.

There's no doubt I'll go back to Alberta for coyotes, and Chinook winds or not, I feel rest assured that I'll be able to pick up where I left off: hunting one of the most coyote-rich environments I've ever had the pleasure to experience. 🐾

.17 REM. FIREBALL: BIG PERFORMANCE IN A SMALL PACKAGE

IF IT'S TRUE THAT GOOD THINGS COME IN SMALL PACKAGES, THEN REMINGTON'S HIT THE MARK with their new Mighty Mouse caliber, the .17 Rem. Fireball. New for 2007, and based on the classic .221 Fireball case, the .17 Fireball provides varmint hunters flat trajectory, outstanding accuracy, minimal recoil and good terminal performance in a compact package.

FLAT TRAJECTORY—The 20-grain AccuTip-V bullet leaves the barrel at a blistering 4,000 fps, giving it a trajectory similar to the consummate varminteer, the .22-250 Rem. With a 200-yard zero, the .17 Fireball drops 6 inches at 300 yards and 16.6 inches at 400 yards. Comparatively, the .22-250 Rem. drops 5.1 and 19.2 inches at 300 and 400 yards respectively.

ACCURACY—Those familiar with polymer-tipped bullets know they're inherently accurate. In varmint calibers, Remington's AccuTip-V combines superb flight characteristics and match-grade accuracy with a design optimized for explosive on-game results. In the field, we had to adjust for heavy winds and pin-point accuracy was difficult to achieve. However, minute-of-coyote accuracy was all that was needed to anchor several of the canines.

LOW RECOIL—Maybe the .17's best feature is its mild recoil, which means you'll never lose sight of your target, even when using high-powered optics. I could actually see the bullet hit fur on the coyotes I killed in Alberta. The .17 Fireball cartridge uses 50 percent less powder than the .22-250 Rem. and generates 86 percent less recoil.

TERMINAL PERFORMANCE—Ballistic-tip bullets are death to thin-skinned critters like fox and coyotes. On the coyotes we killed in Alberta, the bullets performed as expected: a small entrance hole, explosive expansion and very few exits. Most of the coyotes were dead before they hit the ground.

OK, now the bad news. The .17 Fireball has a couple of predictable drawbacks: Its 20-grain bullet sheds energy quickly beyond 200 yards, and wind has a significant impact on trajectory. By way of comparison, the .22-250 Rem. delivers 602 and 409 foot-pounds of energy at 300 and 400 yards respectively. The .17 Fireball drops to 247 foot-pounds of energy at 300 yards and 165 foot-pounds at 400 yards. And, without a doubt, the light bullet will have a more difficult time bucking the wind than heavier, high-velocity bullets.

Back to the good news. Initially, Remington will chamber the .17 Fireball in three versions of the Model 700 (CDL Classic Deluxe, Varmint Synthetic Fluted and Special Purpose Synthetic) and the Model Seven CDL Classic Deluxe.

OK, I'm not ready to retire my .22-250 Rem. from active coyote duty, and I still have some reservations about the .17's downrange energy and wind-bucking ability on coyote-sized critters out past 200 yards. But for light duty on fox-sized critters and coyotes out to 200 yards, the .17 Fireball is sure to earn a welcome position in my battery of varmint rifles.

To learn more about the Remington .17 Fireball, visit HuntingClub.com and click "Web Links."—GORDY KRAHN