

The Los Angeles Silhouette Club

The Old Man of the Mountain

By: Glen E. Fryxell

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Clover Creek Ranch is located in central Oregon, 6 miles south of the isolated little hill-country hamlet of Ashwood. It is a 2000+ acre ranch specializing in exotic game, including various sheep, goats, fallow deer, bison, yak, Russian and feral boar. The bunkhouse is at about 2700 feet elevation and the hills of the ranch stretch up to over 4200 feet elevation. The scenery is classic mountain West; the rugged countryside is littered with junipers, rock outcrops, grass, and lots of animals. Clark and Nancy Couch own Clover Creek ranch ([541-489-3344](tel:541-489-3344)) and offer year-round hunting. The bunkhouse comfortably sleeps 4 or 5, and has a hotplate, microwave and coffee maker. Indoor bathroom facilities are available in the adjacent outbuilding (including a hot shower!), which even has a washing machine if you need to do some laundry. There is a covered picnic table and a fire pit nestled in next to the bathhouse under some shade trees. Right next to the picnic table is a very well-outfitted skinning shed, with chain hoists, block and tackle, gambrels, meat hooks, knives, butcher steels, and a walk-in meat chiller. All in all, a very comfortable and well thought-out permanent hunting camp.

This was to be a special hunt for me on several levels. I was hunting with a Ruger Super Blackhawk that I had converted to .45 Colt with the guidance of my good friend Dave Ewer. This revolver has .480" chambers, .452" throats, a cylinder gap of .003" and a 7 1/2" barrel with a .4515" groove diameter). It shoots very nicely (good teachers are a blessing indeed). While I have worked with this gun a fair amount, and am very pleased with how my handiwork turned out, I had never killed anything with it. It was time. Over the course of a number of conversations with Rob Applegate, another good friend and one of the most knowledgeable experts in the field of cast bullets, I have pieced together a vision of what the perfect cast hunting bullet should look like. To be honest, there's really nothing new in this design, it's just a collection of features that Rob and I liked from other designs, proven through years of testing, all captured in one bullet. I had a .45 caliber version of this vision made up by Mountain Molds, specifically for the .45 Colt (I would have liked to have Rob make this mould for me as he makes the finest moulds I have ever seen, but medical issues in his family have severely limited his shop-time, so I turned to Mountain Molds and have been very pleased with the results). So, I had an excellent revolver, loaded with an excellent bullet, both of my own hand, but both also representing the contributions of dear friends. I also had the pleasure of making this hunting trip with another good friend, Bill Gilson, who I met through our interactions online at Sixgunner.com. Bill (aka "El Cazador", Spanish for "the hunter") is a pastor in Oregon and has been one of the organizers of, and regular contributors to, our annual Pacific Northwest Sixgunner rendezvous. Caz is a good man, a serious elk hunter, a member of the Pistol-Packin' Preachers, and lever-gun aficionado. I was hunting with Caz, but Dave and Rob were along in spirit through what they had taught me; I was hunting with a favorite revolver that I had built myself,

loaded with bullets that I had designed and cast with my own two hands. Yup, this was going to be a special trip.



Converted .45 Colt Ruger Super Blackhawk.

Caz and I met at the Bunkhouse Friday afternoon and went on up the hill to walk around the ranch a bit and stretch our legs after driving for several hours. We ran into Clark on the way back to the bunkhouse and chatted with him for a while, learning some of the history of the area in general, and of the ranch in particular. We asked him

questions about what the general lay of the land was, and where we might find various animals. Clark was downright chatty, and shared this information freely. After this, it was back to the bunkhouse for dinner.

The alarm clock rang at 5:30 the next morning, and soon the sausage was sizzling in the cast iron skillet, with the gurgling of the coffee pot providing an aromatic harmony. We wolfed down breakfast then loaded into Caz's truck and headed up the hill. Our first stop was just over the first ridgeline, overlooking the bowl northwest of the bunkhouse. We worked our way into the bowl on foot, and worked our way through the woods around the pond at the bottom. We found lots of sign there, and there were clearly lots of animals using this pond as their water supply, they just weren't there at the moment. We slowly worked our way back up the hillside back to the truck, and then turned the rig up the ridgeline to the west and headed for the Caterpillar D8 we had been told was about a half mile up the road (it turned out to be farther). It seems that there was a pond in the vicinity of this particular D8, that had a big ol' boar wallowing in it. We stopped along the way a couple of times to get out and walk down a couple of side roads, just to see what was out there, and to bask in the beauty of Creation. It was clear and sunny, with morning temperatures in the 50s, and the scenery in those hills and canyons was spectacular. With the familiar heft of a revolver on my hip, it was the glorious kind of morning that made one thankful to be a hunter. We didn't see anything on these hillside jaunts, but the weather, the countryside, the company and the hiking made them memorable. I believe Thomas Jefferson said something along the lines of "Of all the forms of exercise, those involving the gun are best.". Mr. Jefferson would have enjoyed this morning.



The Mountain Molds 325 grain .45 caliber flat point, loaded in the .45 Colt.

We continued to work our way up the road. At one point, we kicked up a small sow with 4-5 little piglets, that scampered off in that hilarious way that only piglets can. So far this morning, this was the only game that we had seen (other than a couple of small hogs down in the meadows around the entrance gate). As the truck crept up the heavily rutted jeep trail, suddenly a small patch of yellow paint became visible through the trees. "There's the Cat! Pull off." We quietly got out of the truck and swung wide of the clearing so that we could approach from downwind. We worked our way through the trees and sagebrush into the clearing. Sure enough, there was the Cat D8, and there was a drainage ditch, and there was sign of animal activity everywhere, but once again, there were no animals. Right place, wrong time. We scouted the general area to

see what we could learn, and then worked our way down the ridgeline and drainage to see if the pond was below the Cat. We saw lots of buffalo sign, but that was all.

Back to the truck. What next? Let's go farther up the hill and see if maybe the pond is up there (but I thought water flowed *downhill*...). A few hundred yards beyond the Cat, the jeep-trail crested out, and as we broke over the top, I immediately knew that this was the place we were looking for. There was a wide open, expansive meadow, that had a couple of modest undulations, one of which had been dammed to form a muddy catch basin. Sign was everywhere; the meadow was heavily grazed, a variety of forms of scat were apparent, there were well-established game trails woven through the grass, and off in the distance we could see half a dozen fallow deer (white, spotted and chocolate). I had a good feeling about this area. We dismounted, and once again swung around to approach from downwind. As we wormed our way through the sage brush and scrawny, wind-twisted junipers of the ridgeline, I spotted a large brown mass, reclining on the far side of the pond, a couple hundred yards away. A massive ear flapped to shoo away a fly. Even from this distance it was obvious that this was a hog, and a very large hog at that. This had to be the old boar that Taffin had told me about. I motioned Caz over to my position, and pointed the boar out to him. "Whoa! That's a big pig!". We side-hilled our way around to get a better look at him. He was stretched out napping in the midday sun, so we had no trouble moving without spooking him. Occasionally he would lift his head and look around, or adjust his position, swish his stump of a tail, or flop an ear, but mostly he just laid there and soaked up the sun. We stumbled onto a young yak carcass (cougar kill?) that did a fine job of masking any scent trail that we might have had (besides, we were downwind of the only animals that we could see; we would soon find out, however, there were in fact animals downwind of us). We sat back and marveled at the size of this old boar, but at this point neither of us was really interested in taking him as we both had planned (and budgeted) for meat hogs. Caz wanted to donate much of his hog to members of his congregation, and my intended trophy for this trip was a black Hawaiian ram, so we just sat and watched the old boar and the fallow deer, off in the distance. Eventually, we swung wide of the old boy and worked our way closer to see what was happening over by the fallow deer, and to get a better look at the woods beyond and the drainage below. The view from that vantage point was spectacular. As I sat there soaking it in, it occurred to me that if I passed on the ram that I could afford the old boar, and that a huge old boar skull, with his heavy tusks, would make a fine trophy to remember this trip by. Besides, I may never get a chance to shoot a boar like this again. The decision was made. "Caz, I'm going to take him."

The wind had shifted somewhat, and so we swung down into the drainage so I could approach from downwind. At about 100 yards, Caz stopped and broke out his camera so he could take pictures of me on the final approach and firing the shot. As I quietly worked my way into the wind, I was feeling an interesting jumble of emotions -- the excitement of making a stalk (I hope I never outgrow that!), a hint of anxiety (I was sneaking up to get up-close and personal with a 500-600 lb critter with large, self-sharpening tusks), and the silliness of the situation (the focus of all this excitement/anxiety was *asleep!*).

He was bedded down on the far side of a weather-beaten juniper log, which shielded

his vitals from me as I approached. At about 30 yards, I eased the hammer back as gently and quietly as I could. 20 yards. 10 yards. At 15 feet, I finally had a clear shot. The Super Blackhawk came up and the front sight nestled into his left "armpit", to angle the shot down through his heart (he was laid out on his right side, and I was approaching from his belly-side). I remember thinking "Squeeze...", and only vaguely remember the muzzle-blast, but I have no recollection whatsoever of any recoil (Caz captured the shot on film, and I must confess that when I first saw the image, it took me by surprise as it didn't recount the moment the way my mind's eye did, the Ruger was in full recoil with the muzzle pointed skyward above my head). Once the hammer fell, the old boar grunted loudly, and started to flail about mightily, kicking up a sizable dust cloud. My attention was focused on the neat, round .45 caliber red spot, painted exactly where I had intended. He continued to kick mightily. I thumbed the hammer back and kept him covered with the sixgun. If he started to gain his feet, I would shoot again before he stood up. If not, I knew from the shot placement that he was hit hard in the heart and lungs, and would die quickly. It was soon apparent that he would never regain his feet, and his kicks slowly became more and more feeble. A short while later, all was still, and his dust cloud drifted off with the breeze.

I approached him with the Ruger still covering him, and began to marvel at his size. From nose to tail he was longer than I am tall (I'm 5' 10"). His ribcage was the same size as that of a full-grown cow elk. His feet were softball sized. On his back left leg he had a softball sized festering wound, apparently from an earlier encounter with a ricochet. He was clearly well past his prime, and was leaner than most hogs (in fact, sausage made from this guy is so lean that it will stick to the fry pan if the pan is not greased). He was an old man, quietly waiting out the end of his days. His final moments played out in his favorite dust wallow, soaking up the sun on a beautiful fall day.

We took some pictures, but I was still fixated on the size of this guy and his thick, coarse, bristling golden-brown hair along his back; his thick, sharp tusks; his thick, wrinkled and very tough hide (it reminded me of a rhino's). It took awhile, but eventually I stopped admiring him and broke out the knives and started field-dressing him. It took both Caz and me to roll him over and prop him up with rocks so I could gut him. The Mountain Molds bullet had gone right where I had intended (at 1230 fps, with 21.3 grains of H110 and a CCI 350 primer), up through the middle of the left lung,



The Old Man of the Mountain
and the revolver that killed
him.

routed out a .45 caliber groove across the backside of the heart, through the right lung, passed a couple of inches under the spine and exited out the top of the right shoulder, after having penetrated approximately 30-32" of tough old boar. It basically punched a .45 caliber hole all the way through. In the lungs, this hole was surrounded by about 3" of severely bloodshot tissue. In other words, it did pretty much exactly what you would expect a 325 grain .45 caliber FP bullet at 1200+ fps to do.

I was about halfway through the gutting chores, and up to my elbows in innards, when I looked up and saw two hogs coming over the ridge,

on a bee-line for the smell of fresh blood (remember me saying that there were animals downwind?). Caz had his back to them and was watching me work, eating an apple. They were about 100 yards off and I could clearly see that at least one of them had a red-tag hanging from its ear (red ear tags are how meat hogs are differentiated from trophy boar at Clover Creek, and it turned out that both of these hogs were red-tagged). "Caz! Get your gun! Red-tags in-coming!". His apple got flung out of the way in a hurry as he grabbed his Winchester 71 and levered a .348 Winchester round home. The hogs turned in all this excitement, and were milling around on the other side of the drainage from us. Finally the larger spotted sow, stepped clear of the second, smaller brown hog and Caz planted a 200 grain Silvertip low in her chest, just behind her right leg. She jumped and squealed, turned around and slowly started to walk back to our left, with her head hanging low. Caz busted her a second time, a little higher up, this time on her left shoulder. She went down hard, with a red geyser erupting from her right shoulder. She died quickly. Congratulations were once again shared and pictures taken. Caz recovered both of these bullets, both perfect mushrooms; one weighed 140 grains, the other 156 grains.



Caz, his .348 Winchester and his spotted sow.

As Caz field dressed his sow, I cut the old boar in half. We loaded the front quarters onto a blue plastic tarp (the kind that every hunter has in the back of their truck), and tried our hardest to lift them into the back of Caz's truck. No go. It was still too heavy for the two of us to lift up to tailgate height. Fortunately, Caz had a couple of 6 foot 2x6's in the back of his rig and we used these to fashion a ramp onto the tailgate. We slid the front quarters about halfway up the 2x6's, then Caz lifted the 2x6's, levering the front quarters up to tailgate height,

and then I shoved them onto the bed of the truck. We repeated the exercise with the boar's hindquarters, and then re-positioned the truck and did it one more time with Caz's sow. We had to juggle the pig parts around some to get it to where we could close the tailgate, but we finally found a combination that worked, and then headed down the mountain to the skinning shed.

Matt met us down at the skinning shed and had the hogs hanging in no time at all (ah, to be young and strong...). I told Matt that I had my guess of what the old boar weighed (about 600 lbs), but I wanted his estimate (since he did this for a living, I figured that he would have a better sense of an animal's weight). He opined that my boar weighed closer to 500, but he knew the animal and said in his prime the ol' boy had gone between 800 and 850. Matt estimated the sow's weight at 475. Caz and I sat around and re-hydrated ourselves while Matt peeled the hides off of the two hogs, got 'em washed up, split and hung in the cooler, which he did in a most expedient fashion.



The recovered .348 Winchester 200 grain Silvertips from Caz's sow (photo by Bill Gilson).

We fixed a quick sandwich and since we still had a couple of hours left in the day

decided to go back up and sit overlooking the gut-piles in case any coyotes came in. A large flock of crows had almost completely consumed the sow's gut-pile, but much of the old boar's gut-pile was still there, with a couple of magpies working it over. A couple of sparring fallow bucks (chocolate) came within a couple hundred yards of our position, along with lots of crows and magpies flying over, but no coyotes. As the sun dipped below the horizon the temperature started to drop quickly, and I stood up to stretch my stiffening legs. As I did, I spooked a mixed herd of 15-20 hogs and Russian boar, 75 yards to my left, coming in from above the pond. If I had waited another 2 minutes to stretch, they would have walked right into our laps!

As we packed up to head on down the mountain a second time, we gathered a little firewood. When we got to the bunkhouse, we built a small cooking fire in the fire-pit and grilled steaks and sausage for dinner. Man, that was good! Sleep came easily that night (in spite of Caz's snoring!).

The next morning was a lazy morning, spent drinking coffee, soaking up sunshine, discussing religion, philosophy and solving the world's problems. Clark and Matt joined us and the conversation turned to politics and the presidential elections coming this fall. Then folks drifted off and I went over to the skinning shed and boned out the old boar while Caz got showered up and ready to go preach later that afternoon. We got Caz loaded up and on his way, then I settled in and fleshed out the old boar's skull. When I got home I cut and wrapped the back-straps, tenderloins and hams, and ground up the front quarters into a whole bunch of sausage. The old man of the mountain had a good life up in his mountain-top lair. Now he will contribute to the good life of my family and friends. The cycle of life rolls on. Barbeque anyone?

- Glen E. Fryxell

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