

## GUNS &amp; HUNTING »

# Bitterwater

## 'Pistachio hog run' a must hunt

### WON On-The-Spot

BY JIM NIEMIEC

WON Staff Writer

**CHOLAME** — Barley was being harvested off the golden hills of Bitterwater Valley as WON made a turn up the valley to the remodeled hunt lodge at Bitterwater Outfitters. The sun glistened off stocks of grain and you could see many fresh trails made by hungry hogs as they headed through Grant Ranch properties for their nightly feasts on freshly dropped pistachio nuts and ripe red grapes from the vineyards in the lower valley.

This WON hunting editor received a call from master guide Clayton Grant just prior to opening of the dove season.

"Jim, is there any way of getting you up here soon? The hogs have started their movement down into the pistachio groves and we are seeing up to 100 hogs a day. The wheat is all being harvested and there are some big boars running with sows and meat pigs. This is going to be one very good Russian boar hunting season in the valley and these hogs will fatten up quickly," were the confident words of Grant.

In addition to offering up a boar hunt, Clayton also suggested that this shooter bring along some dove ammo, as the mourning dove were piling into watering holes on the property in good numbers during their evening flight.

"The days are still pretty hot up here, but the nights are cooling down a little. Plan on getting to the ranch house about 5 p.m. We'll head out for dove and then get up early in the morning and set up for the hogs as they head back to the shade and protection of the sage, chaparral and mud wallers in the back country," was the information passed on by a phone call just prior to departure time.

Clayton, a recently retired professional rodeo roping champion, was relaxing in the main house with the AC blasting away upon arrival. He directed me to the new bunk room where I dumped hunting gear and then he showed off a room that was outfitted with TV, DVD, phone and a huge comfortable sofa where clients can just hang out when not hunting.

It was time to go hunting and there already were good numbers of dove sitting on fence lines and on the tops of grain sheds as we headed out to a stock tank just a few hundred yards behind the century-old farm house with its traditional wooden barn.

The shoot got off to a moderate start and then the dove began piling into adjoining grain fields in groups of 3 to 8 birds. It turned out to be a good (no, a very good) post-opening dove hunt with limits bagged. The sun still had not completely set over the coastal mountains when the last flight of mourning dove came to the small watering holes in groups of up



**HAPPY COWBOY** — The results of a successful wild boar hunt relies on the knowledge of the terrain. Mike Renteria rides the mountains of Bitterwater Valley daily and is a key team member of Bitterwater Outfitters. This 200-pound boar was harvested on the Grant Ranch with a single shot from a Weatherby Mark V, 7 MM Magnum that pushed out a Barnes copper 140-grain bullet.

WON PHOTO BY JIM NIEMIEC

*The rifle barked loud and the Barnes Triple Shock, 140 grain copper bullet was true to its mark and the hog folded up for a very clean kill.*

to 20 birds in a flock. It was a great ending to the first evening of hunting with Bitterwater Outfitters.

A wake-up call at 4:30 a.m. would have us drinking OJ and eating a couple of granola bars as the hunt party gathered in the kitchen. Joining us for the morning hunt were ranch owner Bob Grant and local cowboy Mike Renteria, who both shared in the success of this WON hunt.

Grant's plan was to get ahead of the hogs as they moved out of the pistachio grove, which would entail a little longer drive through the back end of the huge ranch. We hadn't gone more than a mile when a group of 6 hogs crossed in front of the 4WD.

"That's not a good sign! With no

moon out and a cooler night, the hogs should be staying in the fields longer. Seeing these hogs on the move prior to daylight means we'll have to be alert and glass hard over a couple of different drainages when we get up on top," stated Grant.

The sun came up with no sign of hogs on the move and Grant opted to drive down into the canyon and check for tracks, while Renteria would stay up high and continue to glass. Sure enough, fresh tracks through the barley stubble indicated the pigs had moved through under cover of darkness.

Clayton opted to head over to a traditional path used by hogs coming out of another huge pistachio grove where he felt the hogs would hang

out a little longer due to the excellent cover on an adjoining vineyard.

That decision worked to perfection, as a nice boar was spotted coming through the barley and he was on the move through ranch property headed to the badlands of the north facing slopes of a mountain.

"Jim, we'll have to get out around that hill, but we will have to let the hog cross first to catch him out in the open. There is a deep ditch he has to cross and you should be able to get on him for a clean shot of less than 125 yards, if he continues to run on that well established pig trail," suggested Grant.

The black boar came around the hill and was moving pretty fast, knowing he was caught out in the open. Kneeling, this shooter brought his Weatherby Mark V, 7 MM Magnum to the shoulder, picked up the boar in the Leupold scope and swung with the hog until the scope was filled in black. The rifle barked

BITTERWATER/14





## GUN TALK

By Steve Comus

## S&amp;W in Africa

A recent e-mail from Smith & Wesson's Bill Booth, announcing his return from a successful safari to Africa with that company's behemoth X-Frame revolvers, triggered vivid memories about the evolving saga of this storied five-shot revolver.

Bill and a number of friends did a plains game trip to Africa as they expand the horizons for wheel handguns. In recent years, Bill and his buddies have done virtually all of the North American species with the Model 500 in both .500 S&W Magnum and .460 S&W Magnum.

For those who are unaware, the .500 out of the handgun delivers ballistics basically identical to the old .500 Black Powder Express rifles, and the .460 tops the potent .454 Casull by about the same margin as the .454 Casull tops the .45 Colt. We're talking the real deal here, and not some kind of gimmick.

All of this reminded me of the winter of 2002/2003 when S&W hosted a bunch of us scribes at their Massachusetts factory to give a preview of their big X-Frame handgun that initially was chambered in the equally new .500 S&W cartridge.

Although it was met with enthusiasm, it turned out that the market reaction was even more excited — it even resulted in coverage in the major newspapers of the country.

Officially, the Model 500 was to be introduced at the 2003 Shooting, Hunting and Outdoor Trades (SHOT) Show. But because the Safari Club International Convention happened a week or two earlier that year, it actually went through a "sneak" preview there in Reno, Nevada.

The reaction among the world's foremost hunters was amazing. They loved it, right from the get-go.

Mark Hampton from Missouri is among the world's most accomplished handgun hunters, and he came to me during the SCI convention and wanted to know if we would be interested in doing a feature about it in *SAFARI* magazine. "Why not?" I replied, asking what he had in mind.

He was thinking Cape buffalo, and I envisioned elephants. I won. By the time the convention ended, he was booked on an elephant hunt that coming summer.

He went, and when it came time to take the pachyderm, he did it with a single headshot from the S&W 500. However, as happens at times, when his elephant fell, another elephant nearby charged.

Mark's professional hunter was carrying a big backup rifle, and normally would be the one to stop the charge. But his rifle misfired. Mark coolly cocked the hammer another time on the big

revolver and dropped the second beast as it approached at spitting range.

Since then, the big Model 500 continues to prove itself around the globe. The S&W legend grows.

Steve Comus is a nationally recognized hunting editor with *Safari Club International* and a former *WON Guns and Hunting* Editor. His column appears every other week in *WON* and he can be reached at [scomus@cox.net](mailto:scomus@cox.net).



**SMITH & WESSON'S BILL BOOTH** shows a nice bushbuck he took with the S&W Model 500 during a recent safari in Africa. The Model 500 now has taken the large and small game species in Africa, ranging from small plains game to elephant. The bushbuck was taken at 120 yards with the .460 and CorBon's 200-grain DPX.

# Conditions good for Saturday's Eastern Sierra deer opener

BY MARTIN STRELNECK  
WON Staff Writer

**BRIDGEPORT** — Buck hunters taking to the field for Saturday's X12, X9a and X9b opening day buck season will encounter conditions much better than last year.

"Compared to last year we're in a lot better shape," said Bridgeport DFG wildlife biologist Tim Taylor. "The forage, especially the bitter brush, is in much better condition

from around the 7,500-foot level and higher. Hunters should be in the field early in the morning since we're coming off a full moon, otherwise it will be a matter of beating the brush until evening. If you're looking for the bigger bucks, work the higher elevations."

Farther south, conditions in the higher elevations of the Owens Valley, with the exception of burn areas, are good. However, DFG points out because of this summer's fires, indications are deer populations have shown signs of "redistributing."

Last season saw a hunter success ratio for the X12-zone coming in at 30 percent, 34

percent for X9a and 27 percent for X9b.

For the hunters that bag their buck, there are three processing locations available. In the Bridgeport area — Albert's Meat Market, (760) 932-7177; and Buster's Market, (760) 932-7771 provide the service. Farther south, the Meat House in Bishop, (760) 873-4990 offers a full line of processing.

Because of extremely dry conditions, campfires or charcoal grills are prohibited outside designated campgrounds. And be aware of the no shooting zones, mainly Mono County — Mammoth Lakes, Swall Meadows, June Lake Loop, Twin Lakes Bridgeport and Crowley Lake area.

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# Bitterwater...

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loud and the Barnes Triple Shock, 140 grain copper bullet was true to its mark and the hog folded up for a very clean kill.

The hog weighed in excess of 200 pounds and had respectable tusks that measured just under 2 inches on the lowers and 1 inch on the uppers (showing). The pig was field dressed and when the stomach was opened up half of his nighttime meal consisted of red grapes and the other half pistachios, which would make this fat hog a great eater in addition to being a fine trophy.

Back at the ranch house, the skinning was completed

and the hog was quartered prior to taking it over to Paso Meat and Sausage Co. for processing in nearby Paso Robles.

"You won't believe just how sweet this meat will taste. Once hogs get on pistachios they get fat real quick and for some reason the meat retains excellent taste and even some of the larger boars are quite mild," noted Grant.

After a nap, this writer toured the ranch, which showed a huge population of ground squirrels (*on a future visit to the ranch, this hunting editor will pack along my Ruger plinker and plenty of copper [green] ammo*). There were still plenty of dove winging

around the ranch and many hillsides on the property had hog trails, a good indication of just how many wild pigs there are out there this year.

"We are looking at excellent hunting all winter long. The *Pistachio Hog Run* will last well into the early spring. These Russian strain pigs are pretty predictable and *now would be a wonderful opportunity* for a father to bring out a son, daughter or wife to shoot a hog. The hunt itself is pretty basic, as we move around from spot to spot to maintain trails that don't get a lot of hunting pressure. Most all of the shots will be less than 150 yards," stated Grant.

There are huge boars on the Grant Ranch and hunters heading up to Bitterwater Outfitters can opt to hold out

for a real trophy. During the last week of August a hunting client shot a boar that scaled over 300 pounds. In addition to excellent boar hunting, big game hunters might want to consider a combo hunt for boar and bison. The ranch currently has a population of 35 head of bison and in the herd there are a couple of trophy

bulls, plus a mix of cows and younger bulls.

For more information on hunting this coming season with Bitterwater Outfitters call (805) 610-4521. Clayton Grant is a licensed, bonded and insured outfitter whose guiding and hunting skills are based on many years of hunting experience.



**POST OPENING DOVE SHOOT** — Dove and ground squirrel hunting are options when not out hunting wild hogs with Bitterwater Outfitters. Master guide Clayton Grant took time to hunt with *WON* and bagged his limit of dove while gunning over a watering hole behind the century-old hunting lodge.

# WESTERN OUTDOOR NEWS

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# WON HUNTING CALENDAR '08

(Rifle and shotgun only)  
SoCal hunting calendar

Open now – Zone A deer

Sept. 13 – Open early mountain quail

Sept. 13 – Open sage grouse season

Sept. 14 – Close sage grouse season

Sept.13 – Open blue and ruffed grouse seasons

Sept. 15 – Close dove season

Sept. 20 – Open some B, C, D and X deer zones

Sept. 21 – Close zone A deer season

Sept. 27 – Open deer zones D3-5, 8 and 9

Sept. 27 –28 – Northeastern Calif. Youth Hunting Days

Sept. 28 – Close deer zone B4

Oct. 4 – Open Southern San Joaquin Valley duck zone

Oct. 4 – Open some special deer tag zones

Oct. 5 – Close zone C4

Oct. 11 – Open northeastern duck and goose seasons

Oct. 11 – Open additional special deer tag zones

Oct. 11 – Open additional zone D deer tags

Oct. 17 – Close early mountain quail season

Oct. 18 – Open duck and goose seasons (So. Cal. zone)

Oct. 18 – Open Balance of state duck and goose zone

Oct. 18 – Open Southern San Joaquin Valley goose season

Oct. 18 – Open general quail season

Oct. 18 – Open chukar season

Oct. 18 – Open snipe season

Oct. 18 – Open X9B deer zone

Oct. 19 – Close some special deer tag zones

Oct. 25 – Open zone D16

Oct. 26 – Close D8, D9 and D10 zones

Oct. 26 – Close first half of Southern San Joaquin Valley Duck Zone

Nov. 1 – Open white goose season (Imperial County)

Nov. 1 – Open zone D12

Nov. 2 – Close additional D zone hunts

Nov. 8 – Open fall turkey season

Nov. 8 – Open dove season

Nov. 8 – Open pheasant season

Nov. 8 – Open black brant season

Nov. 9 – Close zone D11, 13, 14, 15 and X9C

Nov. 23 – Close zones D12 and16

Edited by Jim Niemiec

Buffalo taken January 2008

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