

GUNS TO LIVE WITH

In the wilderness you can count sooner or later on finding yourself in a tight spot. Having the right gun handy can determine whether or not you come out alive.

GUNS / BY JOHN A. WOOTTERS
PHOTOGRAPHED BY JEFF FOX

AN ALASKAN TRAPPER was running his lines a few seasons ago, armed only with a .22 autofloading pistol, when he was attacked without warning by a large grizzly. The man barely managed to scramble up the slanting trunk of a dead tree. Grizzlies ordinarily cannot climb like black bears, but to the trapper's horror this one found the tree's slope sufficient for a claw-hold and, snarling, began dragging himself up toward the man. When the trapper saw that the grizzly would be able to reach him—and meant to—he unlimbered the .22 rim-fire handgun in desperation and emptied the ten-shot clip at point-blank range. One of the tiny bullets penetrated the roof of the bear's open mouth and reached the brain. End of one bear.

No one would seriously suggest a .22 as a survival weapon in grizzly

John Wootters knows whereof he speaks; he admits to having been in several emergency hunting situations.

country, but the presence of that pip-squeak pistol on the trapper's belt saved his life and illustrated the point that when the chips are down in the wilderness, any gun is better than no gun. Explorers, adventurers, and professional outdoorsmen aren't the only ones who may find themselves in survival situations. Such emergencies often arise—without warning and in many forms—dozens of times each year with hunters, pilots, fishermen, boatmen, snowmobilers, campers, hikers, trailbikers, rockhounds, amateur prospectors and archaeologists, bird-watchers, canoeists, and even picnickers—anyone whose work or recreation may take him into remote or rugged terrain. A freak blizzard, a lost compass, a failed engine, an injury or illness—all of these can turn a pleasant outing into a nightmare.

A firearm can make the difference in the outcome. Although not necessarily at the top of the list of essential emergency equipment (a good knife, compass, fire-making materials, and basic first-aid items are usually



COMPACT 12 GAUGE

Ithaca Model 37 Deerslayer has rifle sights, 20-inch barrel, \$139.95. Gun is easily kept in boat, vehicle, plane.



FLOATING .22

Armalite AR-7 weighs only 2 3/4 pounds. Barrel, action store in hollow stock, \$59.95. Gun was designed for survival use.



TAKEDOWN .22

Browning autoloader disassembles without tools to 19 inches overall, \$99.75 in Grade 1. Handy in camp or on pack trip.

more important), a gun performs four major functions: food gathering, protection against animals, signaling—and morale.

That last point shouldn't be underestimated; even when the firearm is never used, its presence often contributes to a lost or stranded man's confidence and ability to think his way out of his plight. Two years ago, a pair of experienced canoeists undertook a trip down a wild stretch of the Conchos River in northern Mexico. They were upset in a rapids and lost the canoe and most of their gear. One of the men shattered a leg. His partner had no choice but to make the man as comfortable as possible with what could be salvaged from the wreckage, and then strike out on foot to try to bring back help. The injured man had a little food, a pile of firewood, and a rifle. It was four days before a helicopter could return to rescue him, and he told a story of four days and nights of pain and fear, drifting into and out of delirium. He said he clutched the rifle like a drowning man

hugs a life preserver, that it was the only thing that helped him lie there and wait for the help he couldn't be sure was coming.

Often the presence of a gun prevents a situation from deteriorating into a real survival test. A lost hunter can survive for days on game he can kill, or help rescuers locate him by means of signal shots. He hardly stops to think "What if I hadn't had the gun?" Sometimes a man is never found, or found too late, and nobody speculates, "If only he'd had a gun!"

The backpacker who weighs every item of gear to the last ounce might decide that a featherweight, short-barreled .22 rimfire pistol fills his overall needs best. He might choose the Charter Arms Pathfinder, at 18½ ounces, the Smith & Wesson Model 43 at only 14½ ounces, or Ruger's alloy-framed Bearcat single-action revolver at 17 ounces. High Standard's tiny two-barreled derringers—the Model D-100 in standard .22 chambering and the DM-101 in .22 rimfire magnum—weigh only 11 ounces and measure

five inches overall. Fifty rounds of .22 Long Rifle cartridges add only six ounces to his burden.

For greater power in equally compact guns (but at the expense of heavier and bulkier ammunition), one of the lightweight, snub-nosed .38 Special revolvers might fill the bill. Examples are the Smith & Wesson Model 38 M&P (18 ounces, five shots), the Colt Cobra (only 15 ounces), or Charter Arms Undercover (16 ounces), plus several others.

Admittedly, these little snubbies are not easy to shoot accurately, but a little practice and a two-handed hold (or a rest) will work wonders. Even so, compactness in itself is not the only thing to be considered in a survival gun. It should be simple, rugged, reliable, and as versatile as possible. Since an injured man may have to use the gun, it should be one that can be loaded, cocked, aimed, and fired with one hand. Other things being equal, this places the autoloaders somewhat below double-action revolvers in desirability.

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COMBINATION RIFLE-SHOTGUN
Savage Model 245 comes in .22 L.R. or Magnum, .410 or 20 gauge, at \$63.95. Widely useful for hunting or emergency.



FOLDING SHOTGUN
Beretta FS-1 is hinged at center pin, comes in all but 16 gauge, for \$88. Handy outdoorsman's "knockabout" gun.



LIGHT, TOUGH SHOTGUN
Beretta Bronco .410 weighs only 3½ pounds, \$26.95. Similar .22 L.R. or Magnum rifle is virtually indestructible.

SURVIVAL GUNS [Continued]

Except for bears, few animals in North America must be feared by humans—in normal circumstances. That word "normal" is important, however. Any large animal may become dangerous if diseased, injured, with young, or in extreme hunger. Cougars, jaguars, and wolves may be unpredictable in the presence of an injured or helpless man. One Arizona outdoorsman, unarmed and his ankle broken, found himself facing a rabid mountain lion. He survived only because the animal apparently did not notice him.

The only wild animal that has ever charged me was an eight-pound gray fox, also maddened by rabies. He made a determined attack from about 50 yards and I had to stop him with a .22 handgun.

In some areas, poisonous reptiles represent a threat. But they can also be a source of food. Yet the most dangerous creatures on this continent are probably domestic cattle and swine—especially males—gone wild. I've

had several hair-raising encounters with Brahman cattle living wild in the brush country along the Texas-Mexico border, and one eyeball-to-eyeball confrontation with a feral sow with a litter of piglets. To my great relief she decided not to take me on. The little wild hog of the Southwest—called collared peccary, or javelina—is vastly overrated as a menace to humans, but now and again one will behave out of character. Twice I've seen unwounded javelina hoars offer to fight, and although both proved to be bluffing, I was greatly comforted by the feel of a good rifle in my hands.

Where an outdoorsman faces the chance of meeting a large, dangerous beast—especially the bears of Alaska and Canada—a survival gun with real stopping power is indicated. Many experienced guides will tell you this means a rifle—a big rifle. But fly fishing, for example, makes toting a rifle awkward, so one of the block-buster handguns might be a good compromise. The brand-new, all-stainless-steel .44 Auto Mag should be con-

sidered. Massive and expensive, it's still the most powerful production semiautomatic pistol ever made. What's more, it's surprisingly easy to shoot well. One of the big .44 Magnum revolvers—such as the double-action Smith & Wesson Model 29, or the single-action Ruger Super Blackhawk—would pack a similar punch.

Another handgun deserves special mention here because of its unique adaptability. It's called the Thompson-Center Contender—a single-shot, top-break gun for which interchangeable barrels are available in almost 30 calibers. Two of these—the .44 Magnum and .30-30 WCF—would be adequate bear-stoppers if any handgun can be. One of the barrels for the Contender is chambered for the .44 Magnum cartridge, but sports an additional choke tube screwed onto the muzzle. With this tube in place, the pistol fires special Thompson-Center shot cartridges that are about as effective (up to 20 yards or so) in power and patterning as a .410 shotgun. With the tube removed, the barrel fires all reg-



PISTOL-SHOTGUN
Thompson-Center Contender shoots .410 shells or .44 Magnum cartridges, \$144. Could down birds or a bear.



TOUGH LITTLE .22
Ruger Super Bearcat is six-shot single-action revolver, compact enough for tackle box or pocket, \$54.



SMALLEST .22
High Standard two-shot .22 Magnum derringer, \$46.95, stowable almost anywhere, is potent at short range.



WORKHORSE .22
Smith & Wesson .22 L.R. Kit Gun, \$105.50, is designed for rugged use by campers, fishermen, hunters.

ular .44 Mag. ammo. A Contender with this barrel-and-choke combination, plus an extra barrel for the .22 Long Rifle cartridge and an assortment of ammunition, offers really all-around performance for a survival-type firearm. Telescopic sights are available for the Contender, and another firm is reportedly about to market detachable, carbine-type stocks and long barrels (for legality) to fit this weapon. Thus, depending upon accessories, a Contender can be considered a rifle, pistol, or shotgun.

If bear-bashing power isn't needed and you're not on foot, there are several interesting rimfire rifles for emergency purposes on the market. Of these, the Armalite AR-7 Explorer is the only one specifically designed as a survival-type gun. It's an eight-shot semiauto which can be dismantled and stored in its own hollow plastic stock, making a 2¾-pound package, 16½ inches long. Further, it will float. Another rugged, compact .22 is the Garcia Bronco, an all-metal single-shot with skeletonized stock. It weighs a mere three pounds. It's not a take-down model, but even so measures only 32 inches long. An almost identical Bronco, weighing an extra half-pound, comes chambered for the .410 shot shell. The Browning .22 autoloading rifle, a high-quality sporter, nevertheless suggests itself as a survival weapon because of its take-down feature that reduces the overall length to less than 20 inches. Weight is 4¾ pounds, and no tools are needed for assembly or disassembly (also true of the Armalite and Contender).

If a light rifle is good, a light rifle/shotgun combination might be even better. Savage makes an over-under rifle/shotgun called the Model 24, available in various combinations of .22 rimfire, .222 Remington (center-fire), .410 and 20 gauge. It's a serviceable, sturdy little gun, fine for squirrel and turkey hunting as well as for emergencies. It weighs 6¾ pounds and its ammunition is both lightweight and compact.

The ultimate all-around survival gun, however, probably would be a large-gauge shotgun, provided it can be transported conveniently. About ten years ago a pilot friend of mine was earning part of his living flying sportsmen into remote areas of eastern Mexico. Retraining alone one afternoon from the Tampico area, his engine failed and he had to make a forced landing on the beach, wrecking a landing gear and wing tip in the process. He was stranded in a totally isolated, uninhabited area, and—bush-pilots' schedules being [Continued]

SURVIVAL GUNS [Continued]

what they were in those days—knew that a search for him probably wouldn't get underway for a day or two. In the plane was a 16-gauge shotgun, and with it he provided himself with food—pigeons, chachalacas, and tinamous from the forest inland, and curlews and ducks from the tide pools behind the dunes. When help arrived three days later, he was happy, healthy, sun-tanned, and gaining weight, hardly the picture of a haggard survivor.

My own favorite emergency weapon for prowling the back-of-beyond deserts and jungles in my four-wheel-drive vehicle is a *legal* sawed-off double-barreled 12-gauge shotgun with 19-inch barrels. Rifle-type sights are mounted and zeroed to group rifled slugs from the left barrel on target at 50 yards, providing enough sheer knockdown power to handle just about anything. With an assortment of buckshot and birdshot loads, plus the slugs, it's hard to imagine a situation I couldn't handle. Even greater versatility is available by inserting a Savage "Four-Tenner" sub-barrel into one chamber, adapting it to fire all standard .410 loads, or a Krieghoff adapter to permit the effective use of .22 rimfire cartridges.

Although I can't honestly claim the gun actually has saved my life, its presence has certainly been a comfort in more than one tight spot. It and

its ammo are both heavy and bulky, but this is a survival gun for vehicles—Jeeps, boats, airplanes, and such—where compactness can be sacrificed for effectiveness. Naturally, almost any 12-gauge gun could offer most of the versatility of mine, especially the so-called "buck special" pumps and auto-loaders offered by most manufacturers with rifle sights installed.

The hunter, of course, is always armed when away from camp, but the big-game hunter is carrying too much rifle and—usually—too few cartridges for ordinary survival purposes. If he is a handloader, a little forethought can provide special reduced-load cartridges for use on small game. If not, and his hunting rifle is chambered for one of the popular .30 caliber rounds—.308, .30-06, .300 Winchester Magnum—one of the Walther adapters sold by Harry Owens can convert it to fire the plentiful and less-powerful M-1 Carbine .30 caliber cartridge.

Nobody ever *expects* to get into a serious survival situation when planning an outing, which is exactly why many tragedies occur. Emergencies often confront outdoorsmen with no warning, indicating preparedness must be arranged even when the whole idea seems a bit far-fetched and silly. Ideally, a survival gun will never be needed, but if it is, it can be the one piece of equipment that brings you back alive. ■