

BEST TARGETS

BEST Targets Shooting Team After Action Report (AAR)

Event: 2014 Mammoth Sniper Challenge, Open Division

Date: January 3-5, 2014

Location: Rockcastle Shooting Center, Park City, KY

Websites: www.mammothsniperchallenge.com
<https://sites.google.com/site/rockcastlelive>

Shooter: Chris Andrews with Scott Whitehead

Gear: Remington 700 5R .308, SWFA 10x42 scope, Harris Bipod, Southwest Ammunition 175 gr SMK

Facility Notes

The Rockcastle Shooting Center is a multi-use facility that includes a golf course, atv trails and shooting ranges. The Mammoth Sniper Challenge takes over the entire property to set up 8-10 shooting stages used by all three divisions of the event. Rockcastle has an on-site hotel and restaurant that caters to the event as well as anyone could ask. On the weekend of the event the Kentucky weather was cold and snowy with highs in the mid 30's adding to the challenge.

Event Format

This event is divided into three divisions – Open, Tough Man and Extreme Tough Man. Each division shot 3-4 stages per day. The Open Division is strictly a shooting event in which everyone drives from stage to stage, enjoys the heat of their vehicle and sleeps in the hotel every night. The Tough Man Division ups the ante one step and requires competitors to hike from stage to stage starting every morning and ending every night at the hotel. The hikes between stages averaged 2.5 miles and one must carry their gear all day. The Extreme Tough Man Division is exactly as named. Extreme competitors leave the hotel Friday morning and don't return until Sunday afternoon after hiking, shooting and camping out for three days and two nights. Open division shooters are scored individually and the Tough Man divisions are scored as a team. Being our first EVER precision rifle event we chose to shoot in the Open Division.

The Open Division shooters were divided into squads of 10 and we rotated through the stages over three days. Some said that different squads had an advantage at times due to weather conditions throughout the weekend and what stage they shot when. I have no idea how to guard against this so I have no way to complain about it.

Interestingly at my first precision rifle match ever I was drawn to be the first shooter on the first stage of Friday morning ☺.

We shot 10 stages over three days. Each shooter got 4 minutes per stage to score as many points as possible. In general the targets were on the smaller side and distances ranged from 650 to 1180 yards with most targets in the 700 to 900 range. Targets were assigned point values based on distance and size. Most of the shooting positions were prone but many were not on the ground. We shot off of the roof of a car, from the back of an SUV, off an unstable platform suspended by ropes and out of the loft of a barn. Some stages required some movement to engage targets from two positions. Some of the targets were of known distance and other stages afforded 5 minutes to mildot range the targets with a spotting scope. One stage featured a sponsor provided laser rangefinder and one stage featured a stage gun that each shooter shot for bonus points after their 4 minutes were up. There was a short range, fast paced "cowboy" stage and another stage offered the option to make 90 degree canted shots for high point value. Very few shooters "cleaned" any stage and on the score sheets we saw quite a few score zero points on some stages. Being able to mildot range was essential and having a good shooting partner to act as a spotter helps as well.

Things Done Well

Just making it to this event felt like a success. Most people that we met over the weekend said something like "Wow, you really picked Mammoth for your first event?" I had one year and about 700 rounds worth of experience practicing with this setup to prepare for the event. I had good DOPE on the rifle/ammo combination and actually scored bonus points for a "first round hit" at 850ish yards on the first stage Saturday morning. We had prepared for and practiced the 90 degree canted position and I was one of the top scorers on that stage where many others scored zero points. Knowing that the weather was going to be cold we had packed extreme cold weather gear and didn't have any issues being uncomfortable. After watching my team mate's experience leading up to the match I'm glad I chose a rifle/ammo combo and shot it for a

year without making changes – this gave me a lot of experience and DOPE to work with. I was very happy with my Southwest Ammunition 175 gr SMK Match ammo.

Things Done Poorly

Although I knew I was going into the event at a disadvantage I didn't realize how far behind I was going to be with a top feed bolt gun. I spent more time per stage jamming rounds into the magazine well of the gun than I did shooting. I had to drop the bottom metal and start over several times. At times it was comical. To be in the game at these events you must have some kind of magazine fed gun and the standard is a bolt action. We saw more gas gun shooters here than we expected to and the gas guns are getting more and more accurate all the time. I can see where in some events the cyclic rate of a gas gun would make up for any perceived lack of accuracy. I made my first venture into precision rifle shooting on a budget. I chose a .308 because it is so popular and "off the shelf". There were many shooters with 6 mm and 6.5 mm variants that do much better in the wind. The best finishing .308 shooter finished 8th in the Open Division and although .308 will never go away it's not the hot hand in precision rifle competition. The scope I used was an SWFA 10x42. With this fixed power scope I sometimes found it difficult to find the targets. I saw many competitors adjusting the magnification of their scopes to find targets and then zooming in on them to take shots – this looked easy compared to what I was doing. A spotting scope with a finely graduated reticle would make mildot ranging easier than it was with our more coarsely graduated reticle. And finally, when making elevation adjustments that take multiple rounds of the turret be sure to count and double check them. I shot an entire stage with the elevation wound up one entire turn more than necessary. My spotter and I couldn't even see my misses and it wasn't until after the stage ended that I realized my mistake and understood why I was shooting branches out of the tree over the target I was trying to hit.

Results

I finished 23rd out of 50 Open Division competitors. My original goal was to not be last and I quickly raised my mark and hoped to finish in the top half of the group. The amount that I learned at my first event ever was amazing.

Lessons Learned

Equipment is important and although I was happy to get to the event with the gear I had this year I'll be making some upgrades for next year. You can spend as much as you'd ever like on hardware but know there will always be someone with something better and there will always be something new to have. Practice and preparation are just as important. I've now seen guys with "lesser" equipment out shoot much more expensive gear. I did it myself on at least one stage. Never miss a chance to practice every scenario you can imagine for these events. If you're going to an event for the first time find someone that has been before and ask as many questions as they'll answer for you. It would be ridiculous how much better I could do in this event if I could do it again next weekend just based on having some experience to build on.

Notable Names

We met many great people at the event and would like to thank all of them for their help. Trapper from RedNeck Tactical was our squad's RO and he was great. Jared Utter from KY volunteered to drive us around in his truck all weekend after we realized that our rental car wouldn't even make it to most of the stages. Although we didn't know it on Friday, by Sunday we figured out that our squad had some of the top shooters in it. John Paul Gangl of JP Precision and his partner Clark Kennedy from VA shot JP Precision gas guns well and Clark won best .308 shooter. Open Division winner Dave Preston and his third place finishing partner Dave Ostoske were in our squad. John Cuckler from AL was able to bring some people to our room Monday night to help Scott with some magazine issues he was having. Trip McIngvale had recently returned from Army service and was an excellent shooter with some great experience to share. Mary Kate and the staff at the hotel restaurant were open extra early every morning and late every night to support the event.

Summary

The Mammoth Sniper Challenge is an awesome event and I'm looking forward to going back next year. Scott and I made pages of notes on the 8 hour drive back from KY to NC and we'll be better prepared next year. I have huge respect for the Tough Man competitors and hope to be in one of those divisions someday ... maybe next year.

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