

Grizzly Mountain Long Rifles Take a Shot at Fundraising

by Scott_Staats

Family-oriented club has fun, learns history and donates to good causes

Three things happened almost simultaneously. First, the initial KABOOM, followed quickly by a small cloud of bluish smoke, then the loud ding or gong sound of the lead ball hitting the target. This could mean only one thing – The Grizzly Mountain Long Rifles have gathered for their monthly shoot.

Long Rifle Shooters, Photo: Staats "Shortstroke" firing a longrifle, Photo: Staats – Our group is not the good ole boy, come up on Sunday, drink a six pack and go home type of group, said Jim Malloy (aka Bull Frog to fellow shooters), the club's treasurer, historian, past president, secretary and other titles too long to list. – It's a family thing and we try to involve anybody who has a craft such as building rifles, making leather goods or anything else that represents the time period.

For anyone up on their history, they would find many of the members dressed in garb and toting rifles, knives, tomahawks and other paraphernalia representative of the time period between 1750 and 1840. Malloy said that 1840 was the last year of the big fur trade and the final Rendezvous.

Besides the apparent living history scene of the gathering, the shooting range itself was very interesting and challenging for the shooters. Prineville member Tom Cooper walked me through the course just before the first volley of shots.

Most of the 20 stations had steel targets up to 120 yards away so the shooter knows when a hit has been scored. One station had charcoal briquettes hanging on lines where you had to call your target. Another had playing cards lined up sideways with the difficult goal of cutting one in half with your shot. When asked if heâ€™s ever accomplished the feat, Cooper noted that he did on his last shoot â€“ his first and only time thus far.

Shooters are awarded points for hitting each target and receive an extra point for being dressed in time period garb. On monthly shoots, it costs \$2 to participate and shooters obviously arenâ€™t in it for the money. In each of the several divisions (men, women, trade gun, juniors and peewees), winners get \$3, second place is \$2 and third receives \$1. On other shoots, there are prizes for the top three finishers. They also have a tomahawk and knife throwing station. At the end of the year they pick the top shooter for each category.

Besides having fun, the Long Rifles are serious about donating for good causes. They recently held their annual Monte Carlo Night where all of the proceeds from the yearly fundraiser go to Relay for Life, which raises money for the American Cancer Society. Members donate from \$10 to \$40 and receive "funny money." Forty dollars will get you \$1,100 in the fake gambling bills to use in games such as poker, blackjack and dice.

Winnings are then put toward donated items in the silent auction. Some prizes include two nights at a few different resorts, ten yards of crushed gravel and yes even a kitchen sink and installation. One member once bid over \$20,000 for a set of six steak knives. Fortunately for him it was only Monopoly money.

"We are not a bunch of crazy people up here behind a locked gate with guns," Cooper said with a laugh.

“We do a lot to push our club into the public eye.”

And it must be working; PBS had a segment about the club on its Oregon Field Guide. According to Hope Bridges, the club’s current president, the Long Rifles are one of the largest muzzleloader groups in Central Oregon and they work with and support other groups.

Cooper said he enjoys the club because it’s oriented towards family. He said that other shooting sports he participated in weren’t as family oriented as the Long Rifles. “Members learn not only about guns, but also some pre-1840 history and the associated primitive skills of that time,” said Cooper.

Most, but not all, members wear clothing of that era. Cooper pointed to his moccasins that he made from moose hide and stitched with artificial sinew (he noted that he didn’t want to chew the sinew as was done in the old days). His mother made his canvas pants. He added the antler buttons, the leather hat and a shirt that resembles that of the old style. Cooper also made the rifle he shot that day.

The Grizzly Mountain Long Rifles formed in the early 1970s and the group has grown to 119 families. The Long Rifles are different from other Mountain Man or Rendezvous organizations in that they meet once a month for club shoots and involve all family members. However, they do have two Rendezvous a year. One is their Spring Shoot in May and the other big gathering occurs each February just east of Bend.

The Horse Ridge Rendezvous (also called Winter Bend) is one of the largest Rendezvous in the Northwest. There were about 2,500 people at the last Horse Ridge Rendezvous, including about 450 shooters. There are usually between 25 to 30 traders selling goods. Many people come just to shop on Trader's Row, where they can buy everything from homemade soap to guns.

Ages of club members range from kids to a few folks in their 80s. Safety is the number one concern, Malloy noted. Kids are never on the range without an adult and they don't load their own muzzleloaders.

Shooters usually get into groups of about four to six. There is no loading between stations and no walking behind the shooting line. If a target needs to be replaced, it's announced down the line that the range is closed and no one shoots until everyone hears that the range is open again.

Water jugs are positioned at each station to pour over the hot patches that fly out of the rifles when shot. The Long Rifles lease 40 acres of county land for the club, which is fenced and posted for safety reasons.

Family membership is \$15 a year and you donâ€™t have to own or shoot a muzzleloader to join. Some members are just interested in the way of life during that time period.

Membership gets you a key to the gate and use of the range, property and historic cabin. The cabin dates back to 1903 and was originally located up McKay Creek. It now serves as a home base for monthly meetings and living history education. The club has brought school kids, Boy Scouts and church groups up to the cabin.

Cliff Adams has been shooting muzzleloaders for 25 years, including 15 years with the Long Rifles. “I like the family oriented aspect of the club,” he said, “plus it gets me out of the house.”

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