



Black Powder Report

"Powder, Patch, Ball. Powder, Patch, Ball". You keep repeating the muzzle loaders mantra as you start to dribble some FFFg powder from your horn into the powder measure hanging from it's strap over your left shoulder. After pouring the correct amount of powder from the measure into the barrel of your rifle, you thrust your left hand into the shooting bag hanging over your right shoulder. You retrieve a one inch square piece of lubricated cloth stored in there, and centre it over the muzzle of the barrel. Plucking a .490 lead round ball from the same bag, you centre it on the patch material waiting on the muzzle.

Retrieving the "short starter" from its loop at the back of the shooting bag, you carefully start the ball and patch into the top few inches of the barrel. Storing the short starter back in it's resting place, you pull the 3/8 inch hickory ramrod from under the barrel, and start the patch and ball on their journey down the rest of the barrel.

While giving the ramrod short, even strokes until the patch and ball are resting firmly on top of the powder charge, you remember the time that you somehow forgot the proper sequence, and ended up with a patch and ball at the breech end of the barrel without any powder beneath it. This, in effect, rendered your rifle unshootable until you pulled the ball out again. Shortly after this revelation came to you, the cry of "DRY BALL" was heard echoing up and down the firing line, and the

good-natured ribbing from your shooting buddies soon commenced. You knew that you would be the subject of many jokes and comments until someone else made the same mistake. You didn't mind this, as, after all, you had been on the giving end of these jokes many times before, because EVERYONE will eventually dry ball.

With your rifle properly loaded, you place the ramrod back into the thimbles beneath the barrel, step up to the firing line, and prepare to perform the last step before firing the rifle.

With the muzzle pointing safely downrange, you take the "capper" holding the small copper percussion caps that will provide the initial ignition for your main powder charge in the barrel, and carefully place one onto the nipple of the rifle. You pull the hammer back to "full cock" thereby making the firearm ready to shoot. As you start the small "ritual" that you perform each time you fire a shot downrange, you can't help and think that all of the steps that you had just done only took about 30 seconds to perform.

The blue cloud of smoke starts to clear following your shot at the target, and you again begin to recite "Powder, Patch, Ball", restarting the whole loading procedure over in preparation for the next shot.

If you would like to experience this firsthand instead of reading about it, come on up to Range # 7 on the first Sunday of each month. We start shooting at 9:30AM, and will shoot all types of muzzle loading rifles and pistols, and black powder cartridge rifles and pistols. We then try to get onto our hawk and knife trail to throw some "kitchen utensils". If you don't own black powder stuff, come up anyways, as we would be more than happy to let you try ours. Come on up, join the fun, and help make some smoke.

Tim Wall

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