

## HISTORY OF TRAPSHOOTING

Trap shooting is the world oldest shooting sport dating back to the early 1800's. Wild pigeons were used for targets. The pigeons were placed under old hats with strings attached. When the shooter called for the bird, the puller would yank on a string that would remove the hat and allow the pigeon to fly away. Eventually, a wooden box with a trap door was used to hold the bird. A string was attached to the trap door to release the bird. Pigeons were used in England until Parliament outlawed the use of live birds in 1821.

The United States used pigeons up to the period just after the Civil War. Charles Portlock introduced stained glass balls as targets. Staining the glass balls made them more visible. The balls were much easier to hit as no two pigeons flew the same way.

Around 1870, trap shooters began using disks called clay pigeons or clay birds. The use of clay birds presented problems as the disks were too soft causing them to break easily or too hard resulting in the disks not breaking. Later, a dome saucer made of petroleum pitch and gypsum was used. These targets were aerodynamic and would get lift and fly smoothly like the wings on an airplane give a plane lift. The official target used today is no larger than 4 5/16" diameter and 1 1/8" height.

The machines used to throw the targets have changed over the years. At the beginning of the sport, they were operated manually. A thrower would sit in a trap house and load the targets manually. Today, many trap ranges have electrically operated machines. A machine automatically loads the targets. The machines must throw the target between 48 to 52 yards from the trap house into the air with the rock flying at approximately 65 mph.

A trap house conceals the machine or thrower from shooters on the line. Five shooters, called a squad, stand at posts arranged in an arc three yards apart starting at 16 yards from the trap house. Each shooter will shoot five rounds at this post and then rotate one post to the right. The shooter who was originally at the number #1 post will start each round. Each shooter will shoot five rounds at each post for a total of 25 shots.

## GUNS AND CHOKES

The gun and the choke have changed over the years. (A choke is found at the end of a gun barrel and funnels the shot in a pattern when it leaves the gun.) The gun started with the flintlock. There was no choke to create a pattern when the BB's left the barrel. The shooter was lucky to hit anything, even up close.

In 1874, after the Civil War, the first ejector double barrel gun using smokeless powder became available. This was the beginning of the shotguns. Gunsmiths and manufacturers began making better guns that have lead to today's shotguns.

A shooter has a choice of five different shotguns: single-barrel break action, double-barrel side-by-side break action, double-barrel over and under, pump action repeater, and autoloader. The double-barrel over and under is recommended as a first choice of shotgun for shooting sports and hunting. The single-sighting plane of the over-and-under allows the shooter to see more of the target for faster pick-up. With the double-barrel, one has to look at the added weight, but the increased weight of the over-and-under helps with a smoother and more controllable swing. The second choice of a shotgun would be the autoloader. If care is given to the autoloader, it can be as reliable as the break-action. The action of break-open will recoil back in a straight line to reduce the muzzle jump. The autoloader ejects the empty hull and load a new cartridge softening the recoil. The pump gun recoils more than other shotguns. Talking with a reputable gun dealer and getting information will be important in choosing the type of shotgun that is best for you.

Once you decide on the shotgun you want to use, you must decide on the choke. Chokes vary from improved cylinder to extra full and many in between. A well-known shotgun authority states at the 16 yard line, the choice of choke could be a light modified. At the 20-yard range, one may want to use a modified choke. At a further distance, a full choke would likely be the one to use. This is why it is very important to pattern your choke with the gun of choice. You can tell on a target how the choke will carry. You must depend on your gun and choke to do what you want it to do and that is BREAK

## TARGETS.

Once you have the right gun and the right choice of chokes, there are three very important elements that will make you a winner. First, you must find your dominant eye; second, proper mounting of your shotgun, and lastly; having a proper stance. You can discover your dominant eye by holding your arms straight out in front forming a small triangle with your hands. Move your hands to an object with the vertex of the triangle aimed at the target, and looking at the object, close one eye and then the other to see which eye sees the object. The one you see the object is your dominant eye. Second, mounting the shotgun means placing the stock of the gun to your shoulder. Then place your cheek on the stock not allowing your head to tilt to the side. You may have to move your cheek forward on the stock to prevent tilting of your head. This will allow you to see the target clearly. Many hours of practice will allow you to become proficient in doing this.

The stance is how you are going to face the trap house when standing at the line. Everyone has his/her own way of standing at the line. To help you get started, it is much like the stance of a boxer. Feet should be shoulder width apart with the forward knee slightly bent. Keeping your elbows down but not to your side, raise your hands as in putting up your “dukes.” Now, move your forward arm forward. Your backhand will be on the stock around the trigger area and the forward hand will be on the forward wood part of the gun below the barrel. Remember: The forward knee must be bent as to the saying: “Nose over the toes.”

Now you are ready to enjoy a nationwide sport enjoyed by thousands. Friends come and go, classmates come and go, but meet a trap shooter and you have a friend for life who enjoys the sport as much as you do. Many years of happy shooting!

McIntyre, Thomas. (1999). “Shooting Sports.” Field and Stream The Complete Hunter Book Five. (pp. 385 - 412).

