

Going the distance

Raf Jah and friends make the long journey to a desolate valley in Wales that is home to Orion Firearms Training. They set themselves a challenge: to 'stretch the legs' of their rifles and shoot out to 1,200 yards

It's nine in the morning on a cool summer's day in West Wales. The wind blows over the tops of the hills and down the winding valleys. We pull into a pub car park and a man steps out of his crew cab pickup.

"Gentlemen, good morning," he says and shakes our hand. Bob is our instructor today. "Well, no one else made the RV, so let's go." We pile into our shared car while he leads us off down the road. We seem to keep climbing and climbing until we come to a piece of flat ground atop a valley. We are taken out to a weird-looking container – which turns out to be a comfortable, warm firing point.

After much rummaging around for kit, I grab my first rifle. As far as I am concerned it's a straight-pull M16, but the world insists on calling it an AR15. It might not be the pinnacle of finesse, but it's cheap to fire and very accurate at short ranges.

We are given the go-ahead to fire out to 200 yards, to check our sights. Paul and Sammy use their .308s while I put the AR15 to good use. I'm well into my

second magazine when Bob chuckles over his telescope: "You really can get through some ammunition, can't you?"

"Just getting the feel of my new rifle," I snort back over the butt and keep firing. But as the third magazine goes in, I remember that I have foolishly only brought 200 rounds of 5.56 ammo. So I bring out my staple: a Canadian .303 No. 4 rifle with a Walther barrel and Nikon hunting scope. Everyone I know laughs at this set-up; the purists think it's disgusting and the wannabe sniper mob think it's ancient. It's zeroed at 300 yards, so I have to undershoot – but that's easy. The steel plates ping at the near distances and it's all good fun.

Bob starts to give us more challenging targets with steels further and further away, until we are shooting at 800 yards. By now, we are shooting slowly and selectively. Sammy hits a clay pigeon – that's a disk 2.5" wide.

Far out on the other side of the valley is a small, grey indentation – just a scrape on the side of the hill. To its left, right and inside it are what seem to be incredibly

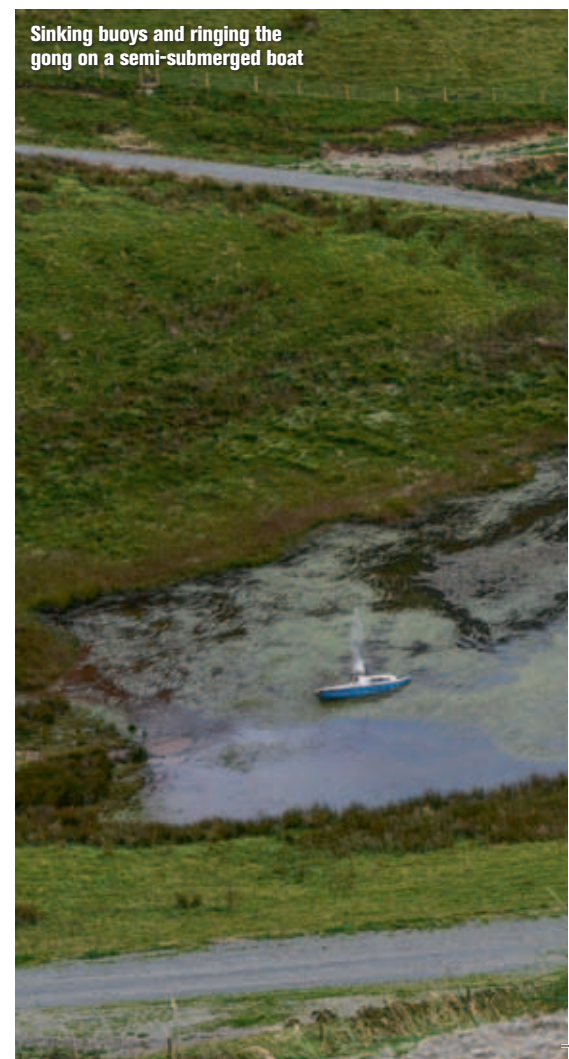
small steel plate targets. This is the 1,000-yard range. Paul and I move slowly out to this and ring the gong.

The next challenge has to be the 1,200 yard mark. At this stage we are pushing the 7.62 ammunition out to its farthest usable distance. Paul has loaded his own, with a charge that mimics the British Army sniper round, and his scope is 24x. His Remington barks and with a couple of ranging shots, he is on the target.

My old .303 is a different proposition. I have long held that the .303 will go further than the 7.62 but it is probably less controllable. I don't have a bipod, so I rest on an ammo box and beanbag. I squeeze the trigger through its long double pull



DISTANCE LEARNING: Shooting out to 1,200 yards at Orion



Sinking buoys and ringing the gong on a semi-submerged boat

and watch the Slovakian bullet fly down the range – I see the mud splatter as it hits marginally low.

Bob directs me to add a couple of clicks – which I do. As soon as my breathing steadies, I dig my elbows in deeper and squeeze off another round. The bullet flies slowly off across the valley. I see no splash.

“Hit,” exclaims Bob.

“What?”

“Listen,” he commands, and we all fall silent. After a few seconds the faint ringing of the metal plate wafts back to us. The

metal target is swinging. I am incredulous. So I try again.

“Hit,” shouts Bob.

I reload the old No. 4 and fire again. “Hit,” Bob chuckles from his seat and stares at me. “You’ve got a two-inch group at 1,200 yards.”

I simply don’t believe him. I clear my .303, have it checked by Paul, place it on the ground and scramble over the RCO’s chair. I ask if I can look through the cheap but effective 48x scope. There are three clear markings on the gong.

After lunch we head to the overwater firing point. Here our shooting is all over the place. Bob smiles as we shoot down at a radical angle on unknown distances into a lake. After watching us shoot high and wide, Bob intervenes with a couple of tips. As soon as we know what we are doing wrong and how to mentally calculate the drop and distance, we start sinking the buoys and ringing the gong on a semi-submerged boat. This is fast shooting with no time to adjust sights. It is all about mental adjustment and snap shooting. Paul is the clear leader at this game with his long-barrelled, heavy M16, but I try to give him a run for his money with the .303.

At the end of the day, we drive out a different way, “We need to come back,” mutters Sammy. No one disagrees. ■

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Have a go

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