

Varmint Bench Rest Silhouette

VBR

In 2009 four members of the Ridgway Rifle Club , John Billick, Steve Brennen, Mel Hoffman and Fred Kielbowick were returning home from participating in a 1000 yd bench rest match. The time to travel to the match site was the better part of 3 hours from Ridgway as was the return trip obviously. The match consisted of firing ten shots for score and you were done. It was on that return trip to Ridgway that a conversation began among the four about how great it would be if a similar range could be located on their home range of the Ridgway Rifle Club. The magic distance in long range competition shooting has long been 1000 yds and it was generally accepted that the Ridgway high power rifle range border with the Allegheny National Forest maxed out at around 945 yds from the firing line. Because of that believed limitation the conversation turned to the fact that Ridgway has always been and is best known as a silhouette range, hosting multiple NRA National Championships in that discipline since 1986. The four men began discussing the possibility for placing banks of steel silhouettes out on the far hillside and shooting them from a bench with bench rest style guns. But it was pointed out that some of the high power rifle silhouettes might be too easy to hit from the bench and near impossible to knock over with normal calibers at that great of a distance because of their mass. The idea of other animal silhouettes spawned from there. What specific animal silhouettes that could be used and yet be appropriate was tossed about. A deer target was mentioned among others but the vision soon turned to varmints as many long range shooters do participate in ground hog hunting in the summer and coyote hunting during the winter. By the time the men arrived back in Ridgway the four animal types, crow, ground hog, bob cat and coyote had been established as a good choice for this new shooting concept and named VBR silhouette for varmint bench rest. The brainstorming and consequent research continued, a trip to the Elk County Courthouse produced an aerial photograph of the club owned land with the borders superimposed. From that document it could be seen that the border that was thought to limit the distance was actually a diagonal line. Moving the proposed target bank site to the right and clearing the timber would give the Club the magic 1000 yard capability and the excitement of establishing a new and unique shooting venue increased. Meetings of the four originators continued with other interested members being invited for input to further tweak the concept. The two gun classes were established to draw potential competitors from already established shooting sports, the 12 lb gun to bring in the silhouette shooters and the 17 lb gun to bring the bench shooters. Time constraints for use during the proposed match were established. The actual animal silhouettes were drawn to scale and then modified until they became what

everyone thought would be a challenging shape to hit. The original standing coyote was modified to a howling seated form. The broadside bob cat likewise took a seat as it was suggested by the experienced bench shooters of the group that the difficulty of the target increased by limiting the horizontal distance across the silhouette. After finalizing of all the needed details, the proposal to establish a new shooting sport and a new range on club property was presented to the Club membership at a monthly meeting. The Ridgway Rifle Club has had a long standing mindset on re-investing in itself and supported any idea brought to it by members who were willing to see a project through. Thus the VBR concept was accepted and funded. The range was roughed out during the winter of 2009 -2010 with cutting of the trees and bulldozing the banks. While the 1000 yd distance was highly desired and ultimately achieved, the other distances were decided by the lay of the land. There was concern about how much energy it would take to knock down steel silhouettes at 1000 yds thus limiting the minimum caliber of a rifle needed to compete. There was no existing information that could be drawn from as there are no other ranges with knock over steel silhouettes at the extreme distances being considered. Ballistic charts weren't enough proof to ease the concern so in the dead of winter the first cutout of a coyote was placed in the snow at 1000 yds and the first shot was fired. To every ones relief the coyote went down with a hit from a 6.5X284. As it later turned out knocking them over was not an issue, hitting them was, and continues to be. After a flurry of activity by club members in the spring of 2010 the silhouettes were cut and welded, target stands to hold them created from railroad rail and after all related material was transported into place on the new range, the first match was held in May of 2010. Twenty nine shooters participated in that first match. Mel Hoffman won the first match with a score of 23 out of 40. At the time of this writing the most recent match, held July 8th 2012, drew 91 competitors with a new attendance record established each match of the 2012 season thus far. The current range record for score is 34/40 held by Walt Robertson established in October of 2011. In the three years of VBR existence only 5 scores have been achieved that totaled 30 or more hits out of a possible 40. Challenging it is.