

History buffs may like

By Jim Merriott

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If you are a person who enjoys reading about early American History, then muzzle loading or black powder firearms are right up your alley.

Ever since I saw the movie "Jeremiah Johnson" starring Robert Redford in 1972, the idea has kindled a flame. Evidently, I must be a dreamer, along with being a historian. Not only did that movie fire me up about the Old West, it rekindled an interest in American History that caused me to go back to college and major in American History and study museum curation.

So if you are a person who is interested in antique firearms, muzzle loading is for you.

My first thought was what kind of sidelock black powder rifle was I interested in. A shooter must make up their mind on what time period they are most interested in.

Are you interested in flintlock rifles from the Revolutionary War era, percussion-cap black powder rifles from the 1820-'40s or percussion ball-and-cap rifles like the Springfield used during the Civil War? Here are a few ideas that might help you.

Selecting your first muzzleloader is similar to selecting the handle, or nickname, you will go by when you become a black-powder enthusiast. A muzzle-loading mountain man without a handle is like a shooter without a rifle at a black-powder rendezvous.

So wisely pick your handle as I did some 30 years ago — I'm the Jayhawker — and pick your firearm the same way.

In today's market, shooters have an abundance of excellent muzzleloader firearms to look at. Fifty years ago, there were only a few replica models to choose from.

After "Jeremiah Johnson," the black powder rifle industry exploded. Today, there are lots of cataloged models. When selecting your first model, here are five important factors:

1. What will be the primary use of this firearm?

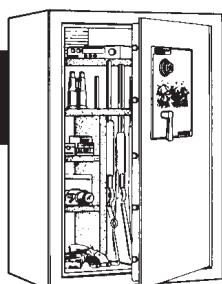
Although muzzle loading firearms may be used for more than one purpose, take some serious time to think about what you intend to hunt, small or large game.

A traditional iron-sighted long rifle at competitive local, regional, state or national events needs to fit in the guidelines of the National Muzzleloading Rifle Association or National Rifle Association as well as state laws in the field while hunting.

Match the caliber type with the game you hunt. If you plan on hunting big game in the Rocky Mountain region, it is wise to carry a .50-caliber fast-twist side-lock long rifle because of the laws in certain areas, but the majority of the time, a .45-caliber long rifle round-ball barrel with fixed sights meets or exceeds regulations in the lower 48 states.

2. The Law

Regulations regarding the use of muzzleloaders for different classes of game are set by each state. These regulations often set minimum calibers for deer and larger game, sometime require certain energy levels, and may restrict the choice of ignition systems, require exposed ig-



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