

# SO, WHAT'S IN THE BAG?

by David Langerman

When our early forefathers left the warmth and comfort of their hearth and the security of the settlement to hunt or journey for any reason they had to rely upon fire and their firelock (AKA flintlock) to provide for what they had left behind. A blanket would have offered more comfort, but in its absence a fire would suffice. Some provisions of food for the journey would have been welcome, but without it the firelock and the woods would provide. His security was in his own hands, and what was in his hand was either a flintlock rifle or fowler.

What we must realize is that when discussing the flintlock rifle or fowler we are really talking about the gun along with the bag and horn that made it work as a firearm. Without the shooting bag (or ball bag) and the powder horn the flintlock was little more than a heavy walking staff. So, just what was in that bag?

As a twenty-first century frontiersman, I have had the benefit of 250 years-worth of trial and error, so what I carry in my flintlock's shooting bag may differ in just a couple of minor ways from that of my forefathers. However, our bags are more alike than different. For instance, by the end of the 1700's smoothbore shooters had learned that loading patched balls like loading a rifle made for much more accurate shots. Had they figured that out sooner the Revolutionary War might have been won sooner, but rifles were still the exception rather than the rule back then. Similarly, at some point manufactured cards replaced the plant and animal fibers used as wadding to fire shot. So, let me show you what's in the bag from my perspective.

A knife is that primal tool that separates humans from lesser primates. Then and now it would be unheard of to go abroad without one. The common folder lays in the bottom of the bag until needed



and the trade knife resides in a sheath riveted to the back of the bag. A knife is used for processing tinder and kindling for fire, cutting patches for shooting, and processing the game shot.

A variety of shot bags serve the smoothbore. Any or all could be carried as the expected needs dictated. One holds a pound of round balls totaling twenty balls. Another holds a pound of birdshot, enough for 15 to 16 rounds. The other holds what was known as "swan shot" that was heavier than birdshot and lighter than buckshot, in this case #4 buck (.24 cal.). About 20 pieces make a load. The ball is loaded with lubricated patches while the