

The ARA Outdoor National Tournament is traditionally held over Labor Day weekend at the Benchrest Rifle Club of St. Louis.

The Benchrest Rifle Club of St. Louis is a world class shooting facility hidden in the hills of east central Missouri about 40 miles northwest of St. Louis. Among its many facilities, it has a 60-point benchrest range. Here's a link to the BRRC website. Take a look at the site and you'll readily see what I mean by "world class".

<http://www.shootingstl.com/>

For the last few years, many of our local shooters have participated. This year we were represented by: Scott Albury, Kevin Coss, Logan Deters, Ron Elbe, Jan Messer, and Brian Voelker.

As I have for the last decade, I made the easy four-hour trip down Avenue Of The Saints to shoot.

Usually slightly more than 100 shooters from across the country participate. This year, we had 123 shooters. The increase may be attributable to the door prizes being given away. This is the 20th anniversary of ARA so Dan and Dawn Killough decided to make this year special for all of us. In the past, the primary door prize has been a custom benchrest rifle built by a premier rimfire gunsmith. This year, in honor of ARA's 20th anniversary, THREE new rifles were given away. One was reserved for junior shooters at the tournament. The other two were given to adult shooters. (No, I didn't win any of them.)

Now, on to an explanation of the tournament itself.

Just stop and think about the statistics for a minute:

- 123 shooters
- 500+ windflags
- 984 targets
- 50,000+ rounds fired

As you would expect for a national event, the match is run very efficiently, effectively and safely by Dan, Dawn, and their support crew from the BRRC.

The match is an eight-target event held over two days. Five targets are shot on Saturday, and three on Sunday. Only three are shot on Sunday to leave time for the extensive award ceremony that closes the event.

It is shot in three relays of approximately 40 shooters each. In past years, shooters have moved right six or seven benches after each target. As you can imagine, 100+ shooters moving all of their equipment takes a lot of time. So this year, we only moved twice. My benchmates, Bill and Margie Barron, and I shot targets 1,2, and 3 on Bench 11 on Saturday morning. Saturday afternoon we shot targets 4 and 5 on Bench 27. Sunday we shot targets 6, 7, and 8 on Bench 43. All of the other shooters moved similarly.

It's a three relay match, but all 123 shooters set their windflags out before the first relay and leave them out all day. It's quite a sight to see the kaleidoscope of 500+ colors and styles of windflags turning and twisting devilishly in the wind.

And speaking of devilish winds.....

Many shooters were of the opinion that the wind conditions were the worst they had ever experienced at the Nationals.

I overheard one very good shooter say that he held at the bottom on the 25 ring and shot a 25 out the top. I believed him!

Scores reflected the conditions. No 2500s were shot. Winning scores for each target were 2400, 2300, 2450, 2300, 2350, 2450, 2450, and 2300.

Those were the best scores from 123 of the country's best rimfire shooters.

You can see all of the scores at this link:

<https://www.americanrimfire.com/index.php/results>

As of this writing, the equipment list isn't posted on the ARA website yet. But you should be able to see it next week if you're interested.

The range faces north. This year the 10 – 15 mph wind was primarily from the south. That means the wind blew over a timbered hill, past two large buildings, around 50+ vehicles and then through the covered shooting area. By the time that wind got to the range, it was turning, twisting, and swirling violently in both horizontal and vertical directions. And, it was a 6 o'clock wind which meant that small changes in direction could cause major vertical changes in bullet impact. During three of my relays, I never found a good "shootable" condition. I just shot. For the other five relays, I was able to find a condition that was marginally shootable. But, it only lasted for a few seconds. I was forced to shoot as rapidly as possible during those short time frames. (ARA would be a much easier game if we had 30 minutes to shoot a target. But with only 20 minutes to shoot, it often becomes a game of time management.)

I don't think anyone expected to shoot great scores. It wasn't a gentleman's match. It was a fight for survival.

It was like a knife fight. You know you're going to get cut up. You're just trying to survive. The goal is simply to try to avoid shooting any really terrible scores.

You must just keep your composure. Don't let your emotions beat you. Just take what the range will give you.

At least that's what I tried to do.

No, I didn't win anything.

But I had a great time.

I got to shoot with, and talk to, many of the best rimfire benchrest shooters in this country.

I got to eat the excellent food provided by BRRC.

I got to participate in one of the premier shooting events held anywhere.

I can highly recommend that you plan to participate next year.

Ron Elbe

Rimfire Benchrest Match Director

Oak Hill Gun Club

