

Andrew Spiechowicz Memorial Charity Shoot 2019 (Published in Archery Action Jan/ Feb 2020)

Origins of the Charity Shoot.

On the Friday of the 2007 June long weekend a massive East Coast Low was barreling towards the Hunter Valley & Newcastle. For all of us at Hunter Valley Traditional Archers it was business as usual as we all prepared for The Gathering long weekend. The threat of rain didn't dampen our spirits, as it usually doesn't, and by this point all of us at the club had come to expect a drop or two of rain on The Gathering long weekend.

However, what none of us were expecting were the 124 kilometre winds & the heavy rain that would lash across our region. On the Friday morning, the Pasha Bulker ran aground on the shores of Nobby's Beach and over the next 36 hours the strong wind & heavy rain would wreak havoc across Newcastle and the Hunter. 100,000 homes were without power, streets in Newcastle were flooded and ten people had lost their lives.

It was a devastating storm, and the HVTA club grounds weren't spared, trees had fallen, a torrent of water had swept down through the camp site towards the swamp and our tents had been completely flattened by the wind. So, for the first time in The Gathering's history, the shoot was cancelled.

After the weather had calmed down, it was decided we would move the 2007 Gathering to the October long weekend. So, The Gathering that year was held on the October long weekend with much more calmer weather.

Shortly after, it was suggested that we keep the October long weekend on our calendar and make it a charity shoot. The charity shoot would follow the same structure as The Gathering, 3D target ranges & novelties shoots, with all the money we raised over the weekend would go to the charity of the club's choice.

The first charity shoot was held in October 2009 with participants coming from all over Australia. Each year the number of people attending the sanctioned club shoot (The "Gathering") and the Charity Shoot has grown exponentially.

With many participants of these archery events making the journey a regular annual pilgrimage travelling thousands of kilometres to attend and spending thousands of dollars here in Newcastle and the Hunter district.

In 2013, the charity shoot was renamed to the "Andrew Spiechowicz Memorial Charity Shoot" in honour of one of the club's founding members "Specs" who passed away earlier that year. The club dug extra deep that year for "Specs" raising over eleven thousand dollars for the Cancer Council in honour of our fallen comrade.

What went down at the 2019 Charity Shoot

Every year, over the long weekend in October, the Hunter Valley Traditional Archers (HVTA) hold their charity shoot. 2019 saw archers from near and far travel onto the HVTA range in support of this year's charity *Hunter Love Bites*. Over \$6 000 was raised from the relatively small number of 120 archers.

HVTA chooses a different charity each year to support. The charities chosen rely on donations and/or small grants and are not government funded directly. Hunter Love Bites was chosen for 2019, with all the weekend profits go to the charity. As part of The National Association for Child Abuse and Neglect (NAPCAN), the Hunter Love Bites Committee formed in 2009. This was in response to statistics that showed the area has an above average Domestic Violence Rate. Love Bites targets young people aged between 14 to 16 years of age. It is an educational program that is built around two interactive workshops, one dealing with Relationship Violence and the second one dealing with Sex and Relationships. These workshops are followed up by a highly successful creative arts program (Art, Music or Drama) that allow and encourage the young people to have a voice. The creative sessions consolidate and incorporate the information from the educational workshops. The aim of Love Bites is to prevent domestic violence, family violence and sexual abuse by teaching young people the value of healthy respectful relationships.

The large HVTA camp grounds began to fill on the Thursday. The archers, in true archery fashion, began chatting and laughing and generally preparing themselves for a great weekend. A complementary dinner was on offer Friday evening, this was much appreciated by those that had travelled long distances to join HVTA.

Archers were called to muster at nine on the Saturday morning, at this time the skies decided drizzle was going to accompany us out onto the range. This did not dampen the enthusiasm of the 120 strong crowd that had turned up for the weekend. The targets were set out in the usual HVTA cheeky fashion causing much heckling to be heard as people worked out the best way to tackle shooting the 3D rubber targets. The score sheets may have become a little damp but then nature in her usual fashion cleared the clouds away leaving the rest of the weekend with perfect archery weather.

Archers made their way around three ranges each set up with ten targets. The targets were at a variety of distances and set through the trees to give realistic hunting shots. The scoring novelties at HVTA are familiar to most archers: the running pig, bow bird, speed round, hunt round and rolling discs. Archers are given the opportunity to shoot the ranges again to see if they can better their initial score. Extra prizes are on offer for the most improved.

Over the years HVTA have noticed that some archers struggle with the challenge of their main ranges. Much to their delight they have also noticed an increase in the number of cubs enrolling as members or just visiting the big shoots. In response to this the club has decided to add a short, easy walk range for beginners, small cubs, the mobility challenged and those just not feeling up to the long walk. The targets on this range for the Charity Shoot were set at between 10 and 25 meters and in easy to shoot positioning. The range proved extremely popular as even the more experienced archers were observed taking a stroll and a

shot on "The Gammy Knee Track". The camaraderie and good humour shown by HVTA members and visitors is truly what this wonderful sport is all about.

Saturday afternoon heralded the axe and knife throwing, always a popular event at this club. The cubs spied Towball in his 'lovely' red kilt and knew it was time to grab their parents and line up for the Balloon Pop. Excited cubs shooting arrows at balloons where each colour earns a different score. Reach fifty and a party bag can be chosen. Every cub earns at least one bag, some even earn more. Cubs are encouraged to enter using a gold coin to teach them the value of charity. For a larger donation adults then entered a knock out game of dart archery followed by a turn at the seven foot high swinging target. This swinging target was built by visiting archer Kevin Prescott and generously loaned to HVTA for the shoot.

Saturday afternoon also allows archers to reflect on times past and remember friends that are no longer with us. Everyone moves to a spot dearly loved by Andrew Spiechowicz (Specks) that overlooks the water. It is here that Nick Lintern speaks of archers, Specks, Andy Firth and Erik Nielson and others that have been loved within our sport. They are not forgotten as we drink a toast in remembrance. The swapping of friendship arrows and everyone finds their new friend, more shared stories.

Saturday evening spit roast dinner is always a treat at HVTA. Another chance for archers to enjoy a great meal as they mingle and chat and generally reminisce. To top the evening Nick Lintern, HVTA member and master bowyer of Norseman Bows, gave a bow and arrow tuning educational. This was very much appreciated by everyone present.

Sunday saw archers eagerly up, breakfasted and ready to get back to what they love to do, shoot arrows at targets. Scores in by two o'clock and it was time to settle back and enjoy the Sunday afternoon antics.

The Traditional Archery Community that arrive at our charity shoots are generous and always prepared to give whatever they can to make this shoot a success. The enormous 'pick of the table' raffle with donated prizes appearing from all over the place, the craftsmanship of the bow donated by Allan McKerrow and the beautiful obsidian flint knapped knife crafted by visitors Drew and Kelly all raised money as raffle prizes.

The hilarious hair shaves, not professionally performed, gave everyone a good laugh while also raising many dollars. Thanks must go to Flynn McCarthy, Towball and Chris Kendall (from Manning Archers) for volunteering to part company with their lovely locks and shaggy beard. Added to this Uncle Ronnie White generously made a stunning set of arrows for auction, he rarely shoots now so these are something special.

Dai Pritchard from the iconic Australian Band Rose Tattoo is part of the Hunter Love Bites music educational. Dai organised a fully signed t-shirt from the Rose Tattoo European Tour and two signed drum skins, one from Rose Tattoo and one from the Screaming Jets. These went at auction raising good money. Two of the items were purchased by two generous Queensland fans Dane and Otto.

Presentations over, a grateful Natasha from Love Bites received the generous cheque and it was time for everyone to relax and toast a jolly good and very successful charity weekend. Well Done HVTA members and visitors!!

The continued success of the “Andrew Spiechowicz Memorial Charity Shoot” wouldn’t be possible without all the visitors and members of the club who dig deep each year. And it also wouldn’t be possible without the HVTA club members who help make our shoots run so smoothly, from preparing, cooking and serving the meals, to setting up the ranges and all those who keep the club going.

2020 will be another year of archery for all of us at HVTA, with the Andy Firth memorial shoot on the 28th and 29th of March, The Gathering on (dates) June, the Andrew Spiechowicz Memorial Charity Shoot on (dates) October, as well as our regular club shoots every second Sunday, we hope to see you there!