

**The Eighth MLAIC  
Long Range World  
Championships**  
Bisley England by David Minshall

## **The Eighth MLAIC Long Range World Championships Bisley England**



## **Long Range Shooting**

Unlike Continental Europe, where grand shooting festivals had been held since at least the 14th century, target shooting as a sport never had a strong following in Great Britain until the mid 19th century. With the establishment of the Volunteer Force in 1859 and the subsequent founding of the National Rifle Association (NRA), the mass appeal of the sporting aspects of rifle shooting was to grow throughout the mid-late Victorian era.

From their inaugural meeting on Wimbledon Common in 1860, the NRA held competitions at ranges up to 1000 yards. During the latter part of the 19th Century, there was great public interest generated in long-range shooting with the famous international matches held at Creedmoor (USA), Dollymount (Ireland) and Wimbledon.

During the initial years, rifles used at long-range were generally of military configuration. This class of muzzle-loading match rifle evolved through the 1860s into a highly specialised form, typically incorporating a heavy barrel of .45 bore, finely adjustable sights and a pistol grip stock. Such rifles dominated in long-range target shooting competition until the end of the 1870s when breech-loading rifles began to replace the muzzle-loader in the hands of long-range marksmen.

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### **Modern Revival**

The modern revival of long-range shooting with muzzle-loading rifles began in the 1960s amongst members of the Muzzle Loaders Association of Great Britain (MLAGB). Long-range shooting has become an established discipline within the MLAGB and National Championship matches are held at distances of up to 1000 yards. A group of enthusiasts within the Association also formed their own Branch to further expand their long-range shooting opportunities and, on occasion, shoot out to 1200 yards.

The world governing body for muzzle-loading shooting is the Muzzle Loaders Associations International Committee (MLAIC). Founded in 1971, the MLAIC held their first World Championship in 1972 in Spain. In 1984 Zone Championships were introduced with the European Championships held in the Netherlands and the Pacific Zone Championships held in the USA. Subsequent to that World and Zone Championships have been held on alternate years.

Until 1999, muzzle-loading competitions were held at short range - 25m for pistol and revolver, 50m for musket and rifle, 100m for rifle, plus clay pigeon events for shotgun.

Worldwide interest in long-range muzzle-loading grew to such an extent that in 1999 the MLAIC held their first Long Range World Championships at Bisley, Surrey. Following on from the success of this, the Championship was again held at Bisley in 2000, then South Africa 2001, USA 2003, Great Britain 2005, South Africa 2007, and USA 2009.

This year, the 8th MLAIC Long Range World Championship was held at Bisley from 11 – 17th September. It was managed by the MLAGB as the national governing body for muzzle-loading and this year was the largest Championship held to date, with 68 competitors from 12 nations;

**Australia - Austria - France - Germany - Great Britain - Netherlands - New Zealand - Norway - South Africa - Sweden - Switzerland & United States.**



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Dave Gullo and Lee Shaver  
[USA] conferring during the  
300 yard training.





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### Programme

The World Championships comprise a series of individual matches fired at 300, 500, 600, 900 and 1000 yards. Additionally, there are international competitions for teams of four, fired at mid-range (300, 500 and 600 yards) and long range (900 and 1000 yards). Matches at 300, 500 and 600 yards comprise three convertible sighters and ten match shots. The 900 and 1000 yard matches are five convertible sighters and 15 match shots.

Shooting commenced with a training day which is essentially shooter's opportunity to check that all equipment is functioning correctly and to verify sight settings. The week's programme was;

**Sunday** - 11 September - Equipment Control.  
**Monday** - 12 September - Training 300, 500 & 600yds. **Tuesday** - 13 September - Individual Matches 300 & 500 yards. **Wednesday** - 14 September (am) Individual Matches 600 yards (pm) Mid-Range Team (commences) 300 yards. **Thursday** 15 September (am) Mid-Range Team (concludes) 500 & 600 yards (pm) Training 900 & 1000 yards. **Friday** 16 September (am) Individual Matches 900 yards (am) Individual Matches 1000 yards. **Saturday** 17 September (am) Long Range Team 900 & 1000 yards (pm) Prize Giving followed by evening closing banquet.

### Equipment Control

The preliminaries of the event commenced with equipment control. As with ISSF target shooting disciplines, the MLAIC have rules governing clothing and firearms. In general, clothing permitted in ISSF disciplines is permitted under MLAIC rules.

Given the range of firearms that can be used for MLAIC events and variations between period gun makers, it is not possible to define exacting specifications for them. Equipment control is therefore carried out by a panel of experts with detailed knowledge of muzzle-loading firearms. Events are held in two classes: Original and Reproduction.

The integrity of arms entered for the original rifle class is checked to ensure that, for instance, barrels have not been relined or bedded using modern materials. Modern-made reproductions of original firearms, with sights, lock assembly, stock and barrel in the original style are permitted.

Original parts may be used to build reproductions, such that a new barrel can be exchanged with an original that is no longer suitable for shooting.

A typical specification for a muzzle loading rifle used for long range shooting is;

*.45 cal percussion rifle.*

*34-36" barrel with 1:18 twist rifling.*

*Weight 12lbs (in the 19th century weight was restricted to 10lb).*

*Aperture sights with vernier scale adjustment and spirit level foresight.*

*530 – 560 grain paper patched or grease grooved bullet.*

*Charge of 85 - 95 grains Swiss No. 3 or 90-100 grains of Swiss No. 4 black powder.*

### World Championships

The Championship was formally opened on Sunday evening with brief speeches by Match Director George Arnold, MLAGB Chairman Ken Hocking and MLAIC Secretary General David Brigden.

There were initial concerns about the weather conditions and potential disruption to the first few days of the Championship. A severe weather-warning forecasting gales combined with heavy rain had been issued as the tail of Hurricane Katia approached the UK. In the event, Monday's practice session began in somewhat gloomy damp weather but only one competition was disrupted with a brief but heavy rain squall. Winds reduced through the week, although the improving conditions and clearing skies brought a tricky mirage for some of the long range shooting.

Targets used are the standard NRA full-bore rifle targets and the tiny 5.5 inch diameter bulls-eye at 300 yards is a challenge for muzzle loaders. Nonetheless, in the opening match John Whittaker (Great Britain) and Corena de Beer (South Africa) each won their classes, Original and Reproduction respectively, with a score of 45 in strong and blustery wind conditions.

Fired the same day was the 500 yard match. Laurent Smaniotto (France) won the Original class and Josef Ruoss (Switzerland) the Reproduction class. The top three in Original scored 42 and had to be separated by v-bull and count-back. This was a similar story in Reproduction where the top three each scored 45. Wednesday morning concluded the mid-range individual matches with the 600 yard event. This brought another gold medal for Great Britain in Original class, which was won by Jersey's Mike Alexandre scoring 40. Norway's Arne Riis won Reproduction with 43.

Germany got off to a strong start in the 300 yard element of the Mid-Range Team match on Wednesday afternoon. Their team score of 150 was however closely followed by Sweden (148) and South Africa (147).

Conditions on Thursday morning for the 500 and 600 yard shooting in the team match were perhaps the best of the week - clear and calm. Competition was keen and everyone was striving to make the most of the conditions. Germany made an outstanding team score of 178 at 500 yards. This included Harold Ruediger's 50.5. This is the first maximum score fired in an MLAIC Long Range World Championship and the first known to the author at all at this range and is a remarkable achievement.

USA made a strong finish at 600 yards with top team score at that distance but could not close the gap on the leading nations. Germany retained their early lead for first place, followed by Sweden and South Africa.

Thursday's shooting was concluded in the afternoon with 900 and 1000 yard practice in hot weather and an entertaining mirage. The long-range individual matches were held on Friday, 900 yards in the morning and 1000 yards in the afternoon. Competitors by now had several days shooting to be sure that both they and their equipment were performing at their best; long-range is however where all the rifleman's skills in reading the wind and understanding the atmospheric conditions comes to the fore.

South African shooters have obviously been putting much work into their long range training, shooting consistently well throughout the Championships. At long-range they took gold medals at all distances and

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in both Original and Reproduction classes. Kobus de Villiers shooting an Original Gibbs-Metford match rifle won at both 900 and 1000 yards, scoring 63.2 and 64.2 respectively, whilst in the Reproduction class Tertius Smit won 900 (score 65.3) and 1000 yards (score 64.3).

Saturday morning concluded the Championships with what for many is regarded as the premier event, the four man long-range team match. Eight nations competed for this. Given South Africa's strong performance in the individual long range events, with strength in depth, it is unsurprising to find that they won the team match.

The outcome was not quite so certain though after the 900 yard stage where USA had established a strong lead on 243, followed by South Africa 224 and France 218. Moving back to 1000 yards saw some significant changes in fortune with South Africa drawing on their consistent team to score 217 at the distance, followed by USA 191 and Great Britain 185. The 1000 yard results mirrored the final order for medallists with South Africa gaining gold (441), USA silver (434) and Great Britain bronze (396). The weather had remained kind to the shooters during this concluding event; the afternoon however saw a torrential downpour of rain and hail. By then though, shooting had finished and competitors were left to bask in their glory or ponder their strategy for medal success in forthcoming events.

An awards ceremony was held late afternoon at the MLAGB's Club House, the Exhibition Hut, which was full to capacity. With national flags flying outside, the magnificent medals and trophies on display and competitors in their uniforms, this was a splendid occasion which ran smoothly. Following the closing speeches, competitors, family and friends mingled at the Club House before re-grouping for the closing banquet in the evening. Held in the Army Rifle Association Officers' Mess all enjoyed a carvery and each others' company before parting.



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**The 600 yard stage of the Mid-Range Team match**





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**The Exhibition Hut, Bisley. Club  
House of the Muzzle Loaders  
Association of Great Britain.**

The Championships were an outstanding success for Match Director George Arnold and his volunteer helpers on the range and in the MLAGB's Bisley Club House.

Competition was friendly and keen with some outstanding scores being achieved. Notable are new World Records at 1000 yards in both Original and Reproduction rifle classes:

**Original - J de Villiers (South Africa) : 64.1**  
**Reproduction - T Smit (South Africa) : 64.3**

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Original match rifles are becoming scarcer on the range; they do however remain competitive as the above 1000 yard world records demonstrate. It is also notable that the Grand Aggregate winner in Original class had a higher score than Reproduction class.

These are, above all, a friendly championship. Shooters are competing in a challenging discipline and there is great camaraderie both on and off the range. Plans are already in place for the 9th MLAIC World Championships which will be hosted by South Africa in 2013.





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**Petra Leonhardt (Germany) shooting an original  
military match rifle by Thomas Turner at 900 yards.**



## Results

Full results and links to a photograph gallery and historical records of the MLAIC Long Range World Championships can be found at;  
[www.mlagb.com/bisley2011](http://www.mlagb.com/bisley2011)

### Associations and Other Contacts

The Muzzle Loaders Associations International Committee; [www.mlaic.org](http://www.mlaic.org)

Muzzle Loaders Association of Great Britain;  
[www.mlagb.com](http://www.mlagb.com)

Long Range Rifles Branch of the MLAGB;  
[www.longrangerifles.co.uk](http://www.longrangerifles.co.uk)

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### Further Information

Those with an interest in long range shooting with muzzle loading and black powder breech loading rifles can find more information on the sport and its history on the Research Press web site at: [www.researchpress.co.uk](http://www.researchpress.co.uk). There is an internet discussion list, Long Range Muzzle Loader at;  
<http://sports.groups.yahoo.com/group/lrml/>

*Acknowledgements to Roger Fenton for all photographs.*



*The Bronze medal winning Great Britain Long Range Rifle Team. Andrew Russell, Mike Alexandre (Coach), John Whittaker, David Brigden, Mike Hall.*