



North American Hunting Expedition 2009

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Budapest - Frankfurt
On board flight LH 3441
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Finally, we have set off.

After more than a year of planning, organising, arranging, phoning, emailing, making approvals, then changing them, as well as studying several versions of programme packages and then finalising them, we have come to the point where my plane to Frankfurt has just taken off, and I am sitting on board, firmly fastened into my seat. Soon the flight attendants will start bringing that familiar airline food - low quality, and child-size portions - but before that I might have time to write up my diary. Frankfurt is not my destination: it's only one of the many airports that lie ahead of me in the coming months, and is just a brief chapter in the long course of the journey I have just begun.

In fact, my final destination is the USA - first Alaska, then on to uninhabited country, total wastelands, and the untrodden wildernesses of Canada. That is the practical side of my journey; from an emotional point of view, the goal is to make a trip that I have been dreaming of for the last 25 years.

25 years is a long time, and I honestly hope that all the organisation and preparation of the previous year will have been enough to make my dream come true.

Hopefully, way beneath my seat, locked in its case, lies a gun: the indestructable Peli 1750. I will really need that gun.

Because I'm going hunting in the New World.

I'm not simply going hunting; I'm going on the longest and most extensive hunting expedition ever organised in America and Canada by a Hungarian.

Even the whole of last year was not enough for me to get used to the huge figures involved in the planning of this vast expedition, I still feel dizzy thinking about it. These figures, however, in themselves, are very informative. I plan, during two and a half months, in at least 6 hunting grounds within 4 US states, and 2 within Canada, to shoot 16 examples of big game, whilst on an unbroken continuous journey.

Ambitious plans!

But though they seem unbelievable, I have a good chance of fulfilling them.

Only now, after take-off, do I feel that I am setting out on an almost certainly unforgettable adventure. During all the long months of organising very rarely, if ever, did I realise that it was me that was actually travelling.



Such moments of realization were rare because the whole journey seemed so unlikely, such a fairy tale, that even now I can't believe it's happening to me.

Why am I going hunting at all?

I could just go to the same places, while spending less than 1/10 of the cost, and sacrificing less than a month of my life.

And why America?

I'm going hunting – and what's more, I have become a hunter - because of an excellent Hungarian writer, who besides his important books, made a huge contribution to the creation of the true Hungarian hunting culture. He represented those values that are dearest to me, and the following of which has never caused me any difficulty. A man whose work will define all Hungarian hunting and hunting literature for a long time to come and whose way of looking at things will be an example for the “duller” future generations.

This gentleman was called Zsigmond Széchenyi.

I can't even guess how many times I've read his books, which with their vivid, almost film-like descriptions of the everyday details of his hunts make it as if I was there with him, and all without a trace of boastfulness. He has, however, written one book which is dearer to me than anything else. I read it every year. This, for me, is the Big Book, the pinnacle of hunting literature; anybody is welcome to try to write a better one, but the chances of success are very low. This book is none other than ‘Hunting in Alaska’, the rich experiences of which provided the reasons for my choice of country for my first foreign hunting trip.

Decades have passed since the publication of his books about his expeditions.

Since then the world, and the world of hunting have changed enormously, and contrary to general opinion, I think, for the better. As I see it, the possibilities for hunting have never been so diverse as today. We can now hunt in places, and for such a variety of game, that would have been unimaginable at the beginning of the 20th century. Within 24 hours we are able to reach any part of the globe and if game exists there that can be hunted, we will almost certainly find someone there ready to professionally organize our hunt – due to often maligned business mentality. These advantages are the result of hunting becoming a business, something which is often condemned by many people. I think it important to say this, because when we complain about the increase in the prices and additional costs of hunting, we tend to forget that these prices are what keep in existence the almost unlimited possibilities for hunting throughout the world. Many people make their living through hunting and as long as this continues, we can be sure that our opportunities for hunting will remain.



In Hungarian hunting literature, however, from time to time people look back, searching hopelessly for the moment that can be called the Golden Age of hunting.

One of the aims of this journey of mine is to prove – mainly to myself – that the Golden Age has not yet ended. It has merely changed. There are still to be found even today, I hope, similar hunting adventures that were the privilege, according to many, only of the hunting classes between the two world wars, and before.

But, for me, hunting is first of all a philosophical guiding principle, on which I am basing my journey. What I am looking for – and what I have always been looking for – is Adventure, with a capital A. And what could provide a greater adventure, at the beginning of the 21st century than hunting? For me absolutely nothing!

I cannot say that I was born with a gun in my hand. There were periods of my life when I was able to hunt, but there were also many years when I was unable to get to the forest at all. It would not be true to say that I spend all my free time hunting and that I have no other interests. I have many other hobbies, but it's a fact that nothing gives me as much pleasure as hunting and there is nothing I would spend more money on. (Knowing hunting prices, it would not be easy to find a more expensive pastime, apart perhaps from private space flights.) I have been to many parts of the world, I have seen many mountains with a rucksack on my back, looking for adventure, even without a gun fastened to my pack. In many places I found what I was looking for, but I had to go on because I had the chance to combine my constant search for adventure with hunting.

Why Alaska and the American North?

Because I wanted to find a place on the planet where there is still the chance to organise a lengthy expedition. There are only two such territories still existing on earth: the northern part of the American continent (which includes two countries) and Africa. Africa has never really attracted me, at least not for hunting. Many of my readers might fall on their swords on hearing this, but it is, for me, the truth. This continent is somewhat enervated. Stub said: " Africa is the country for men. " I would change this sentence to: Africa was the country for men. The high-fence shoots of Namibia and South Africa have greatly diminished the hunting reputation of Africa. According to hunters /adventurers, like myself, high-fence shoots have finished Africa. I can already hear the protests and counter-arguments of veteran African hunters.

Yes, I know, jungle hunting can be a real test, as there you cannot shoot from a jeep, but how many good jungle hunting grounds are there, and how many species of game live in a tropical rain- forest that can be hunted? How many days can you extend a jungle hunt so that you can still get the full experience and intensity? Because, contrary to fashion, I prefer long expeditions. High-fence package shoots, when the hunter shoots his quarry almost next to the international airport, and goes home the



next day, is not my cup of tea. The ‘ I came, I saw, I shot ‘ accounts of such trips in hunting magazines I quietly ignore.

To let the adventure evolve, time is required.

I’m not saying that I will never hunt in Africa, but in America it is much easier to find that untouched environment which is what Széchenyi’s books are about. Today it is much more difficult to enter into the spirit of his novel, “ Csui “, than his Alaskan hunting diary. The American wilderness has not yet been tamed. There are no fences and civilization has not arrived. They haven’t let it. These vast forests, taigas and wastelands have barely changed in the last decades, and whoever wants a unique experience will have a good chance of finding it here.

It was an important aspect in my choice of target-area that Americans can provide really high-quality services. Not only for hunting, but as I found, in many other fields as well. America is a true consumer society, where there is huge competition in every field; those providing the services learnt long ago that unless standards are the highest, they will not survive in the market. I don’t think there exists a service in the world which cannot be bought in America, and this is good news for those keen on complicated programs.

When planning my journey, the alternative of an Asian expedition was also a possibility.

My advisors and I saw that there was the chance to make a trip of several months in some of the former Soviet republics, but the problem was that this would have been only mountain hunting. This would have become monotonous by the end, and having previously spent a lot of time in high mountains, I felt that for a while, I wouldn’t miss them. For safety’s sake, however, we included two high-mountain hunts into my American program – so that I wouldn’t forget my mountain skills – and the plans for the Asian trip were postponed.

In the case of such a complex journey, choosing the right organizers is critical. I picked a company called Cabela’s Outdoor Adventures, which, touch wood, seems to have been a wise decision. Cabela’s is a large chain selling hunting equipment and accessories, whose huge stores I have visited several times, and where I have bought various clothes and accessories on my previous visits to America. It is only natural that while shopping there were some complaints and misunderstandings, but they were always handled with flexibility and generosity by Cabela’s staff. The advertised “ 100% satisfaction guaranteed “ slogan was not, as I experienced, an empty promise, but was the actual business policy of a company that knows that it depends on the goodwill of its customers, and serves them accordingly. All this gave me a fundamental trust in Cabela’s and its services, so when I found out that they also organized hunts, I didn’t hesitate over who I would choose to plan my trip.



Actually, Cabela's do not directly organize hunts and they do not employ their own guides. Instead they use the best hunting companies in the world to organize their trips as well as introducing hunters to local companies, on a business basis. If a small hunting company wishes to enter the circle of those employed by Cabela's, they must expect to be very thoroughly vetted. This is because Cabela's will never recommend a company to its clients without having examined it in depth.

These rigorous standards are what make Cabela's so reliable. This comprehensive supervision gives complete reassurance to the hunter, who is trying to participate in an expedition that will take place almost 6000 miles from his home, and will involve huge amounts of money. Thus, I expect the organizers to have complete control of the system responsible for the success of my journey and the quality of my experiences.

I was fortunate enough to have my journey organized by two of Cabela's ace planners, Jennifer 'Jenn' Estrada and Frank Cole, with the assistance of Rebecca 'Becky' Lloyd. In choosing my wardrobe I was advised by Paula Gudahl from the Special Orders Department of Cabela's, who also ensured that the huge parcel was delivered on time to my hotel. The final month of preparation brought so many complex problems that Jenn had to enlist the assistance of Shauna Reker. Jenn is a general organizer for any type of trip, and doesn't know the meaning of the word "impossible": there is no situation in which she could not find a connecting flight, and no city in the world where she would not know the best hotels. Frank is an experienced hunter and organizer of hunting trips, who must have been around the world several times hunting, and who personally knows some of the guides working as sub-contractors for Cabela's.

The common characteristic of Jenn, Rebecca, Shauna, Paula and Frank is that – unlike many other organizers – they were able to solve the numerous problems of the last month independently, without involving me; for this they have my eternal gratitude. They really did a fantastic job. Without them this trip would never have happened.

My only job was to tell them what I wanted. And sometimes they even helped me with that. I didn't have to trouble myself picking the actual times and hunting grounds, and didn't have to make decisions over issues beyond my competence. What I respect most in them is their absolutely professional attitude.

Perhaps the most important thing was that I didn't have to spend the entire last year worrying whether everything would run smoothly. The success of a hunt cannot ever be guaranteed – whoever says that is lying – but it is reassuring to know that during my forthcoming trip I will be hunting with the best guides in Canada and America. If, after all this, it is a failure, I can honestly say that it will be despite the very best abilities of all the excellent participants involved.

Because hunting is such an uncertain sport: there is no guarantee of success.



Frankfurt – Chicago
On board Flight UA 941

Slowly we are leaving Europe behind.

The captain must know that I'm going to Alaska because, as if by magic, he has made the on-board temperature ice cold. Despite the almost record- high temperatures before we took off, some of my fellow passengers, those familiar with the route, are taking out their sheepskin coats from their hand-baggage, while the ill-informed, like me, are shivering under their thin blankets.

You can see from what I have written so far that it is not going to be a hasty journey.

No stress.

This is going to be my motto for the weeks ahead. I have enough stress at home; here and now the only task is for me to enjoy myself.

I haven't planned my first big foreign hunting trip so that I drive immediately from the airport to the forest, and unpack my gun on the first night. I want to spend some days just relaxing and doing nothing. I need a few days for the constant ringing of cell phones to grow fainter in my ears, and to escape from the emails that are chasing me. I must get used to the fact that from now on my main challenge will not be signing contracts, but getting back on time to the campsite every evening. To do this I'll need a few days to clear my mind, so that I can start the hunt with a fresh mind.

A more practical reason is my jet-lag; the time difference between Alaska and Hungary is at least ten hours. It's the sort of difference that's large enough to turn your biological rhythms upside down. Top sportsmen, who are travelling constantly, usually arrive at the competition venue as many days in advance as there are hours in the time difference. This is the only way they can ensure their best performance. Although hunting is not a top sport, if we are well-rested before setting out, it will enhance the accuracy of long-range shots. A well-refreshed man will enjoy the experience far more than his companion who is staggering about due to lack of sleep and exhaustion.

I have all the time in the world, so why should I be in a rush?

My journey-plan was made according to this principle, so the first few days do not include any hunting at all. The first step has taken me as far as Chicago, the capital of Illinois. This brief two-day stop-off was inserted into the journey- plan at the last minute, and it was only due to Jenn's routine that it did not disrupt the tight programme. In Chicago I am going to meet Rick Sweitzer, the head of Polar Explorers. I found Rick's company when I was surfing Google during an idle moment. I was searching for a company organizing trips to the South Pole. After exchanging letters and telephone calls Rick, invited me to visit them at their Chicago offices. Obviously behind the polite invitation was the



intention to get to know the person with whom – if all goes well – they will, in 2011, travel to the Antarctic, and before reaching the South Pole, will climb at least half of the Vinson Massive. There is nothing strange about this curiosity, especially as according to Rick, we can expect a temperature of below -94F on Vinson. I'm also happy that I'm meeting the people who will be guarding my life, for the first time, at the Chilean starting point.

Our plane drones on monotonously to the north of Toronto, over the south-eastern corner of Hudson Bay. Soon we will enter U.S. airspace.

Chicago will be the place where I, together with my gun, will first enter the U.S.

Since last year travelling to the U.S. for Hungarian citizens has been simplified. Because of the Visa Waiver Program (VWP) there is no longer a need to acquire a visa, provided that on any previous trips to the U.S. you have not broken any laws, and have a computer-readable e-passport, holding your biometric data, in accordance with the new regulations.

My well-travelled friends had many horror stories of the procedures they had to undergo in front of U.S. immigration officers even with a valid visa. It is worth stating, as it is not well-known, that even with a valid visa and the VWP, entry to the U.S. is not automatically guaranteed. These documents only entitle you to appear in front of the immigration officer, who has his own authority to decide your fate. He does not have to justify his decision. In spite of all this, I must say that I've never had a disagreeable experience with immigration officers or any other officials. Many people make the mistake of treating officials in the U.S. as they would in Hungary. U.S. officials will not tolerate disrespect, being lectured to or patronized, but if they are treated with respect, they will treat you the same way. If you bear this in mind, you won't have any problems.

Despite all this, I am prepared for any eventualities, and have brought with me letters of invitation, both detailed and brief descriptions of itineraries, a long list of hotel and plane reservations, many contact telephone numbers and their accessibility, wads of accounts and receipts of bank transfers and the secret, magic papers from my benefactors, to be used only in dire extremities. In contrast, which is strange, to bring in my gun only one form, called ATF Form 6NIA, has been required: this has been filled in and scanned in Hungary, again in America, printed out in Hungary, and now because of so much copying has become almost unreadable.



Room2034,Hilton Garden Inn
10 East Grand Avenue
Chicago, Illinois
U.S.A.

I have arrived in the US!

I have good news: the ATF Form 6NIA works. I passed through immigration with ease, like a knife through butter. The immigration officer, a surprisingly pretty lady, even wished me good hunting, and the customs officers were also very friendly. My ammunition has not even been checked ...

Now I'm on the dizzy heights of the city center Hilton's 20th floor, shivering with cold. My room is equipped with every hi-tech gadget imaginable, but is so freezing cold that I now think rather kindly of the captain of the Boeing 777. A typical characteristic of American culture is that they are incapable of regulating their air-conditioning; I don't understand why the machines have several settings, if no-one ever uses them. After installation, they set them to maximum, and as long as the machine works, that's how it stays. Another problem is that the machines are too powerful for the rooms. In Hungary, we could run whole refrigeration plants with the unit that is cooling my room.

In the hotel, by the way, is a general chaos: nothing works. Now it's the elevator that's out of order. All the staff, and every guest, is forced to use just one elevator. Everybody thinks twice about going downstairs. One such journey can take up to 30mins. You call the elevator, which takes 15mins to arrive; then the packed car goes either up, or down, stopping at every floor - and there are quite a few - before eventually reaching the ground floor. Regular customers take it in their stride. I decide to walk down to the shore of Lake Michigan, a place where people can relax, and young couples can meet, but being the first day of my arrival, I don't have the energy to do anything else. The weather is hot, and such a humid heat soon makes me start to sweat.

I'm tired.

At home it's about midnight, but I'm not supposed to go to bed yet. It's easier to get acclimatised if you force your body-clock to adjust.



Hilton Garden
Inn Chicago
26th July

It's only 3.30 am. local time, and I am wandering around the corridors like a ghost; I have still not adjusted.

The mystery of yesterday's broken lift has been solved: according to the management's letter of explanation, on the night before I arrived there was an "electric storm" - whatever that means. The point is that it managed to screw up, not only the electrics in the hotel, but in the whole of Chicago; that might be why there are sirens constantly going off. Talking of sirens reminds me to include a few lines about Chicago's shady past.

Its "official nickname" is the Windy City, a name coined in the 1880s, by a newspaper describing the weather conditions of the 1883 World Fair. This originally pejorative adjective was welcomed by the city, although over the last 100 years it has been the basis for many risqué jokes. Most Chicagoans would be pleased if it was only windy weather that people thought of when hearing the city's name, but this, unfortunately, is not the case. The word Chicago has been, up until now, synonymous with the Italian mafia, and organized crime, and I can't see this changing very soon: there are probably hardly any cities in the world which do not have a crime-ridden district called "Chicago" by the local criminals.

The city can attribute the dubious aspects of its name to just one person: Alphonse Gabby May Capone, or, to use his shorter and more familiar names, Al Capone, or Scarface. According to criminologists, Al was, and always will be, the most famous criminal in the history of crime; and as such, he deserves my account of his riveting and varied career.

He was born in the Brooklyn slums in 1899, and with all the constant gang warfare, was immediately plunged into the deep end of criminal life. For him, there was no alternative to becoming a criminal, as being born into a world of crime. As a young man he was a talented streetfighter, gaining his famous scar in a barfight. But even so, despite his well-known career, no murders were ever pinned on him, though, in 1919, he was forced to move to Chicago, because of his involvement in a double-murder trial.

He couldn't have found a better place.

In the Chicago of the 20's, every Italian wanted to be a gangster.

He started by joining John Torrio's gang, and established his fame by having the rival gang-leader, "Big" Colosimo, killed. With his talent for organization, and his merciless brutality, he very soon made it clear to his boss that he would become a talented mafioso. These are two traits that are

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