

The N.R.A. Whittington Center: A Progress Report

by Frank O. Foote

(The name of the N.R.A. National Range and Outdoor Center near Raton, N.M., was officially changed to the "N.R.A. Whittington Center" by N.R.A. Board action just prior to the ASAC meeting at El Paso. The change honors ASAC member George Whittington for his efforts on its behalf, and his other work for the N.R.A. Mr. Foote is Managing Director of the Center.)

This report is designed to inform members of the American Society of Arms Collectors on the background, origin, status and progress of the NRA Whittington Center located near Raton, New Mexico.

The NRA Whittington Center grew from a consensus concept which originated with the officers and directors of the National Rifle Association in the late 60's and early 70's. This concept basically was that the National Rifle Association has need for a development where the programs and purposes of the National Rifle Association, especially as related to training, education and competitions, could be adequately performed. In other words, the NRA conceived of an area of land and facilities whereby all of the purposes as relates to competition, education and training that are set forth in Article 1 of the bylaws of said association could be accomplished. This original concept, which has never been formally changed, also includes the eventual establishment of regional training and competitive centers located strategically in the several areas of the United States.

These concepts contained in Article 1 of the NRA bylaws include, but are not limited to, the promotion of public safety; the conservation of natural resources; the promotion of law and order and the national defense; the education and training of citizens of good repute in the safe and efficient handling of smallarms; promotion of good sportsmanship; the increase in the knowledge of smallarms; the efficiency of smallarms usage on the part of members of law enforcement agencies, the armed forces and citizens subject to service in the event of war; the encouragement of the lawful ownership and use of smallarms by citizens of good repute; the fostering of the conservation; better management and wise use of our renewable wildlife resources; the establishment and main-



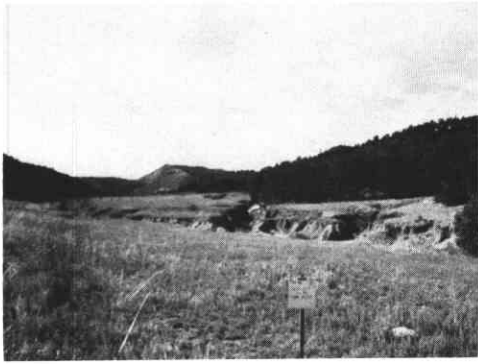
tenance of reference libraries and museums for its members and the public; the development and enhancement of the knowledge of wildlife conservation; the establishment of training classes and the development and conduct of qualification tests and competitions; provision for construction and maintenance of laboratories, target ranges and other testing and shooting facilities.

Gentlemen, the above are but some of the far ranging goals and objectives of the National Rifle Association. These are the goals and objectives of the NRA Whittington Center.

To implement this far reaching and ambitious program, the Board of Directors of the National Rifle Association sought and received from the federal government 501 (c) (3) or tax exempt status for the operation and construction of the NRA Whittington Center. To do this, a special trust known as the NRA Special Contribution Fund was established. This entity, whose trustees are appointed by the Board of Directors of NRA, is the entity charged with the ownership, operation and development of the Center. The NRA Special Contribution Fund received the coveted 501 (c) (3) tax status in May, 1974. Fund itself holds title to the real and personal property at Raton and provides policy direction to the operation and growth of the Center.

The NRA Whittington Center is approximately 35,000 acres of foothill and plains land located immediately southwest of Raton, New Mexico. This land was acquired





in 1973 and 1974 with title passing in 1974. The land was acquired from four different owners by trade. Mr. George R. Whittington of Amarillo, Texas, a member of this society, was delegated the responsibility for the negotiations, surveys and legal transactions which led to this acquisition. The majority of the land was acquired for what is now, under present market conditions, an extremely attractive price. Acquisition costs were approximately 2½ million dollars.

Selection of the Raton site for establishment of the NRA Whittington Center was the culmination of a search that occupied over two years' time by select committees of the National Rifle Association. Potential sites in several different states in the Rocky Mountain West, the Plains and the Southeast were carefully examined prior to selection of Raton. Evaluation of the available sites was a long and thoughtful process led by experienced and dedicated senior members of the Board of Directors and Executive Council of the National Rifle Association. Criteria used in site selection included accessibility, distance to the present and future centers of NRA membership, climate, topography of the land itself and the availability of adequate and suitable safety zones and noise control zones around the extensive range area found on the site. In other words, the NRA Whittington Center is and will be self-contained as to noise levels and safety zones. The range is conceived as a long term project of the National Rifle Association with safeguards built into the project as regards to encroachment, adverse zoning decisions and future developments that might impede or impair range usage at the Center.

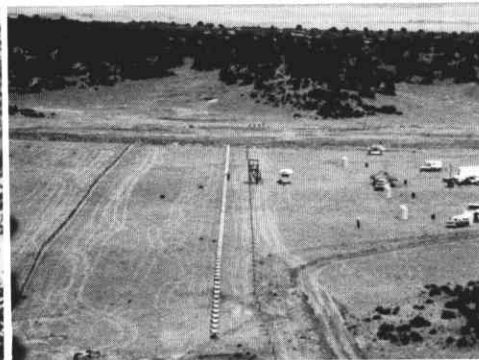
One of the main geographic features is an area of some 4,000 plus acres of rolling to level land immediately south of a range of hills rising more than 800 ft. above the range

level. This range of hills has as its main axis an east-west line providing a near perfect, natural backstop for range usage. The Special Contribution Fund owns the safety zones to and past this range of hills.

Much interest has recently been evidenced in the press regarding suitability of the Raton site. Suffice it to say, that these suitabilities were carefully examined by experienced persons, by senior officers and former officers of the National Rifle Association who had considerable experience in land transactions, industrial site development, range development, etc. The NRA Special Contribution Fund owns, or effectively controls, the mineral rights on the land which include the main areas of development. Kaiser Steel Corporation, whose land comprised the major portion of the acquisition, owns mineral rights on the land sold to the National Rifle Association and later transferred to the NRA Special Contribution Fund. This mineral right held by Kaiser provides that any activities of Kaiser Steel will not inhibit the use of the land by the National Rifle Association. Following acquisition, extensive mineral exploration by the Kaiser Steel Corporation has indicated no coal or shallow hydrocarbon deposits on the property deeded to the NRA except for approximately about 10 percent of the area in the far northwest corner of the property, which, as Kaiser has stated it, might be subject to some economic development of coal in the future. This portion is far beyond any safety zones and is contiguous with other Kaiser property.

Development of the NRA Whittington Center commenced in 1974 with the acquisition of a small operational staff, the marking of the boundaries with permanent markers and in commencement of fencing the perimeter which extends over 36 miles. These developments proceeded in 1975 and 1976.





In 1974, a temporary two bay metallic silhouette range was built and put to use. This range was later modified to provide 12 PPC and pistol points, 12 points of smallbore and 100 and 200 yard sighting-in capability.

Plans and development of the first permanent range, metallic silhouette commenced in 1975. In late 1976, a limited fund drive was started to build this range. This fund drive has resulted in over \$32,000 in contributions and pledges. The range today is operational with six bays of targets, but is not complete. The second range contemplated at the NRA Whittington Center is PPC or Practical Police Combat. Funding for this drive commenced in 1977 with over \$8,000 having been collected at the time of writing this report. Regularly scheduled shooting events commenced at the Center in 1976 with NRA approved PPC matches and monthly NRA approved metallic silhouette matches held during the summer months. In addition, training classes to teach firearms proficiency and/or train firearms instructors have been held in 1976 and 1977. The range is used for training and qualification sessions by law enforcement officers and the National Guard. A permanent skeet range was added in 1977.

The NRA Instructor Training School, operated by the Training Division of the National Rifle Association extended over nine days in June and July of 1977. Sixty participants, trainees, and over a hundred dependents took part in this school with all over age 5 involved in shooting programs. The nine-day school led to certification in rifle, pistol and shotgun instruction for the trainees.

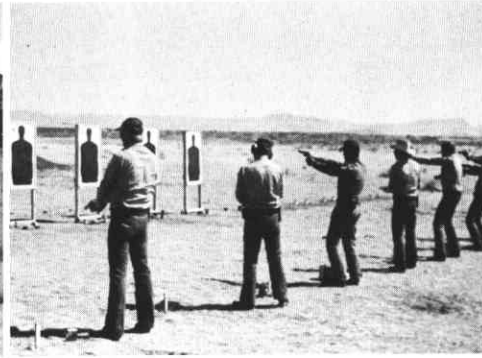
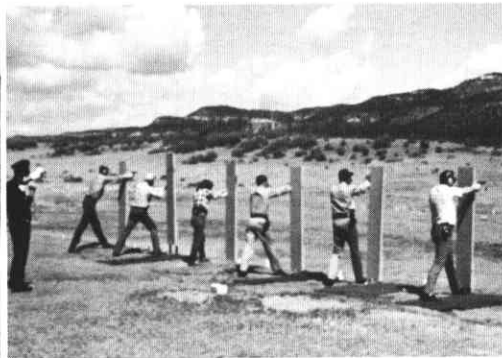
Hunting on the area commenced in 1976 with elk and turkey seasons. Hunting this year includes the above species together with deer and bear. Hunting privileges on the Center are available to NRA members by application and drawing. No NRA staff, officers, directors or members of

the Executive Council may hunt the area. Success ratios have been excellent on elk and turkey.

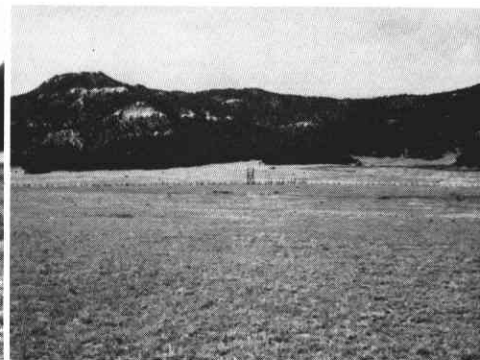
Funds to acquire and develop the NRA Whittington Center have largely been from borrowed funds from NRA. Several substantial gifts from private foundations and individuals have been received, along with notice of future testamentary devices that will eventually come to the Center. Fund raising for the silhouette and PPC ranges has been successful with excellent responses coming from NRA members, friends, clubs and state associations. Several individuals have given portions of their firearms collection to be sold with the funds to be used for development of the NRA Whittington Center.

The NRA Whittington Center is a new concept and endeavor of this parent association. This is a long term project that is based on the primary concept that the future of the shooting and firearms sports depends first, of course, on winning the tough legislative battles that constantly face firearms owners and secondly, on strengthening training education in competitive and recreational firearms usage to insure the future of our great mutual interest.

Of particular interest to this society may be the long term concept of the firearms museum at the NRA Whittington Center. This museum has been a part of the master planning and continues as an integral element and goal to become an important portion of the Center's program. I would add here that we conceive of this museum being used as a center for seminars and colloquiums in furthering the interests and level of knowledge of the many important firearms collectors groups.



More Views of the N.R.A. Whittington Center:



See the deer?

