

BOOM!ershoot

HOW A GUY AND HIS KIDS SHOOTING EXPLOSIVES FOR FUN BECAME A HUGE ANNUAL EVENT

BY JOE HUFFMAN



THIS SPRING, NEARLY A TON OF EXPLOSIVES will be made into 1,600 “reactive targets” and placed in a field near Orofino, Idaho, where 120 people from all over the United States and from abroad will use high-powered rifles to detonate them.





The explosions will be heard up to 12 miles away. Home windows will rattle up to 2 miles away. The earth will shake and the thump to the chest from each explosion will be felt by the attendees for hours. One hundred yards back from the shooting line you sometimes think a ceasefire was called when really there just haven't been any explosions for a few seconds.

One Seattle-area gun blogger, Phil of Random Nuclear Strikes, has attended for years and calls the event "the premier Long Distance Precision Rifle Event in the Pacific Northwest." I call it Boomershoot.

Boomershoot didn't start out with a ton of explosives and over a hundred people. The first event didn't even have a name. As much as anything, it was my two oldest kids, James and Kimberly, ages 12 and 9, and I attempting to recreate the fun we had at a similar event called The Blanchard Blast.

In May 1996 we drove to Blanchard,

Idaho, for our first dynamite shoot. The targets were pop cans filled with dynamite and ANFO. We had a great time and on the way home we were thinking about how we could put on our own event. In June of 1997 we went again and had another great time. That made us even more determined to hold our own event. It took me over two years (off and on) to come up with a suitable high-explosive mixture that I could make economically myself.

Explosives come naturally to me. I grew up on a farm and started helping Dad blast stumps when I was about 10 years old. I was quite comfortable handling explosives and had access to open land to do my testing. As part of my engineering education in college, I took chemistry classes. I knew how to balance chemical equations and calculate the heat generated in the reactions. What could be difficult? I'll spare you the two years of experiments, but I will say that when friends listen to the video

from the first detonation they don't recognize me doing all the whooping and hollering. I'm normally exceptionally quiet, and sedate, not one to vocalize success in a big way.

By September 1998 I finally had homemade explosives. It was time to hold our first event, right? What more did we really need except to send out a few invitations?

I INVITED ABOUT TEN PEOPLE AND seven showed up for an event on October 4, 1998. Five of them were from the gun club at Microsoft, nearly 350 miles away. My brother Doug and I made the explosives on the hood of my pickup. We painstakingly shook and prodded the explosives into the small hole of the pop cans I had collected. The holes were smaller back then and it took much longer than I had planned. My target production process needed a lot of improvement. After several hours we had about 65 targets containing about 30 pounds of explosives – as well as aching



Fireball in the sky (PHOTO COURTESY OF PETER BIDDLE, TWITTER.COM/OBS35D)