

THE CAPBOX

Hawken

By Bob Woodfill



Courtesy of Gordon, 2007

A LATE-PERIOD, S. HAWKEN RIFLE WITH A RARE CAPBOX AND CHEEKPIECE.

The Capbox Hawken was once in the Dr. Leonard collection, but now is in the Buffalo Bill Center of the West in Cody, WY. It is most interesting because this late-period, S. Hawken rifle features a rare iron capbox and a non-typical cheekpiece. The rifle was first described by John Baird in his first book, *Hawken Rifles, The Mountain Man's Choice*, on pages 48-51, and is accompanied by some good B&W photos of the rifle. The reader is referred to this article for John's thoughts concerning the rifle. Jim Gordon has also supplied us with some excellent color photographs of this rifle in his book, *Great Gunmakers for the Early West, Vol. III—Western U.S.*, page 388.

Capboxes on S. Hawken rifles are rare (Woodfill, 2018), and this is the only one known to this author. The barrel is stamped S. Hawken St. Louis. Although John Baird dated it as having been made in the 1850 period, I think that it probably was made in the 1860s, by J.P. Gemmer, based on the make up of its components. The vibrant, wide tiger-striped maple stock, a variant of the more common plain, dark maple stocks of Hawken rifles, and the short LOP of the buttstock were most certainly specifications of a custom order. Details of the original rifle are:



Capbox. Courtesy of Gordon, 2007

late 1850s. Slant breeches were used on the majority of S. Hawken rifles while vertical breeches were common on J&S

Slant Breech

Milling cuts on the face of the breech are indications that machine tools were coming into use at the Hawken shop during the

Hawken rifles. This particular breech positions the nipple at a high angle, thereby, requiring a long hammer throw. The small

Lock and breech. Courtesy of Gordon, 2007



commercial lock is marked T. Gibbons on the inside of the plate.

Barrel The barrel is of .50 caliber,

31 3/4" long, and measures 1" diameter at both the breech and muzzle. Most S. Hawken barrels had some taper and were larger in diameter. Obviously, these barrel dimensions were used to make the rifle lightweight. Non-tapered barrels were often used in late-period, S. Hawken rifles in an effort to reduce costs, by buying straight-tapered barrels from Eastern suppliers such as Remington. The barrel holds a silver in iron front sight—another characteristic of late-period rifles. The rear sight has a short base and is a copy of the Kit Carson Hawken rear sight.

Stock The non-typical late-period, S. Hawken stock has an English-style paneled cheekpiece probably introduced by



Paneled cheekpiece. Courtesy of Gordon, 2007

Tristram Campbell when he worked in the Hawken shop. This type of cheekpiece was

commonly seen on English stalking rifles of the period. The length-of-pull of the buttstock is 12.5" and is much shorter than common.

I am often asked by shooters, if they were to make just one Hawken rifle copy that was authentic, yet light enough for hunting, which rifle would they copy? My answer is this one, because it has all of the iconic, late-period, S. Hawken features, and a barrel weight that can be easily carried on foot or horseback for hunting.

You can do no better than order one of the Track of the Wolf (www.trackofthewolf.com) Kit Carson kits. The kit comes in either right or left-handed versions. The 1" octagonal barrel comes 36" long in either .50, .54, or .58 caliber. The barrel can be cut to 31 1/16" long as is the Kit Carson Hawken or 31 3/4" long as is the Capbox Hawken. If you are really concerned about weight and handiness, the barrel can be cut to 24" long, as were some of the short-barreled, Hawken rifles with only one thimble (Woodfill, 2018).



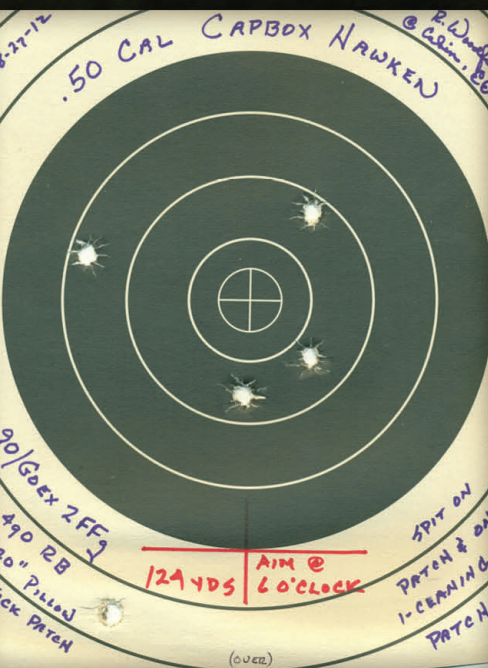
Beveled cheekpiece on copy.

original.

The cheekpiece on the pre-inletted stock can be modified to match the English-style beveled cheekpiece or left as is. I used a Hawken Shop hammer to match the large hammer on the original lock. My finished rifle in .50 caliber weighs 9.5 pounds. A .54 or .58 caliber rifle would weigh less, but of

course, recoil more. But who cares? Once you sight the rifle in, the recoil from one or two shots at an 8-point bucks would not be felt!

I use my Capbox Hawken rifle for shooting the Hawken Match at Friendship. A .50 caliber rifle provides the flattest trajectory with the least



Target shot at 124 yards.

recoil. Off cross-sticks my rifle, with a Green Mountain barrel, will keep all of the shots in the black of the Hawken target at 124 yards, if I do my part.

Selected References

Baird, John, *Hawken Rifles, The Mountain Man's Choice*. John D. Baird, Pence, IN, 1968.

Gordon, Jim. *Great Gunmakers for the Early West: Volume III—Western U.S.* James Gordon, Santa Fe, NM, 2007.

Woodfill, Bob. *Hawken Cheekpieces, Patchboxes & Capboxes, Muzzle Blasts*, February 2018.

_____, *Short-Barreled Hawken Rifles, Muzzle Blasts*, April 2018. MB

Lock on copy.



The balance of the kit parts from Track are authentic late-period, S. Hawken copies. The hooked breech, lock and semi-inletted stock come in either left or right-handed versions. The trigger guard, double-set triggers, buttplate, nose cap, barrel keys, key inlays, thimbles and stock style are good copies. You can add a capbox or leave it off. The

grade of maple from plain to fancy is your choice. Walnut was not used for stocks during this period. A stock of fancy maple with lots of tiger stripes would be suitable for the Capbox



Capbox on copy.

Hawken rifle, and a plain maple stock with the barrel cut to 24", and some brass tacks set into the buttstock, would re-create one of the short-barreled, Hawken rifles that were favored by the Native Americans.

I built a Capbox Hawken copy using Track's Kit Carson kit and their capbox PB-Plains-I, modified slightly to match the