

Bush Branch prize shoot and a plea for more shooting competitions

By Nicole McKee, NZ Mountain Safety Council

For years the Bush Branch prize shoot at Pahiatua has provided my family with lots of opportunity to learn safe firearms handling in a fun, friendly and respectful environment. Most or all of us McKees go every year. My four children have all shot their first rounds on an NZDA range and entered their first competitions at NZDA prize shoots. Two of them have even won rifles at the Bush Branch prize shoot over the years.

But most important by far, they've been taught safe firearms handling in an ideal environment where they also learn shooting skills, laugh, compete and mix with adults. They are outdoors learning their limits and the need for self-control and self-discipline. It can at times be challenging trying to teach a teenager who already knows everything but it is worth it to see their grins when they achieve a good shot, enjoy a day in our great outdoors and perhaps even win a prize.

This year's shoot at Bush Branch was a memorable one. The day was perfect with little wind but those who chose to shoot .22s had just enough gusts every now and again to blow their shots outside the red eight ring. Simon Gillice took out the open class and top-scored with his .22 LR. Brothers Alistair and Bruce Mackay battled it out for first and second place in the graded classes, with Bruce winning by one point in the final standing match. My daughter Kiriahi (14) won the Junior 100 m matches and 15-year-old Reon Sowry won the Junior 50 m match, a great effort as he was competing in his very first shooting contest.

Some kids are starting really young and the day certainly was memorable for little McGregor Eden, who at the age of 6 won Masterton retailer King & Henry's sponsored prize of a Norinco JW15A .22 rifle. However

the rifle will spend the next decade in his granddad's care awaiting Mac's coming of age at 16 when he can get his firearms licence and take it home. Meanwhile, he's eager to spend more time outdoors learning safe firearm handling practice with his new rifle, in the company of his granddad. I call this the "sponge age" – the time when we can fill their minds up with good safety lessons and then watch how they use those skills as they mature into young adults and young hunters.



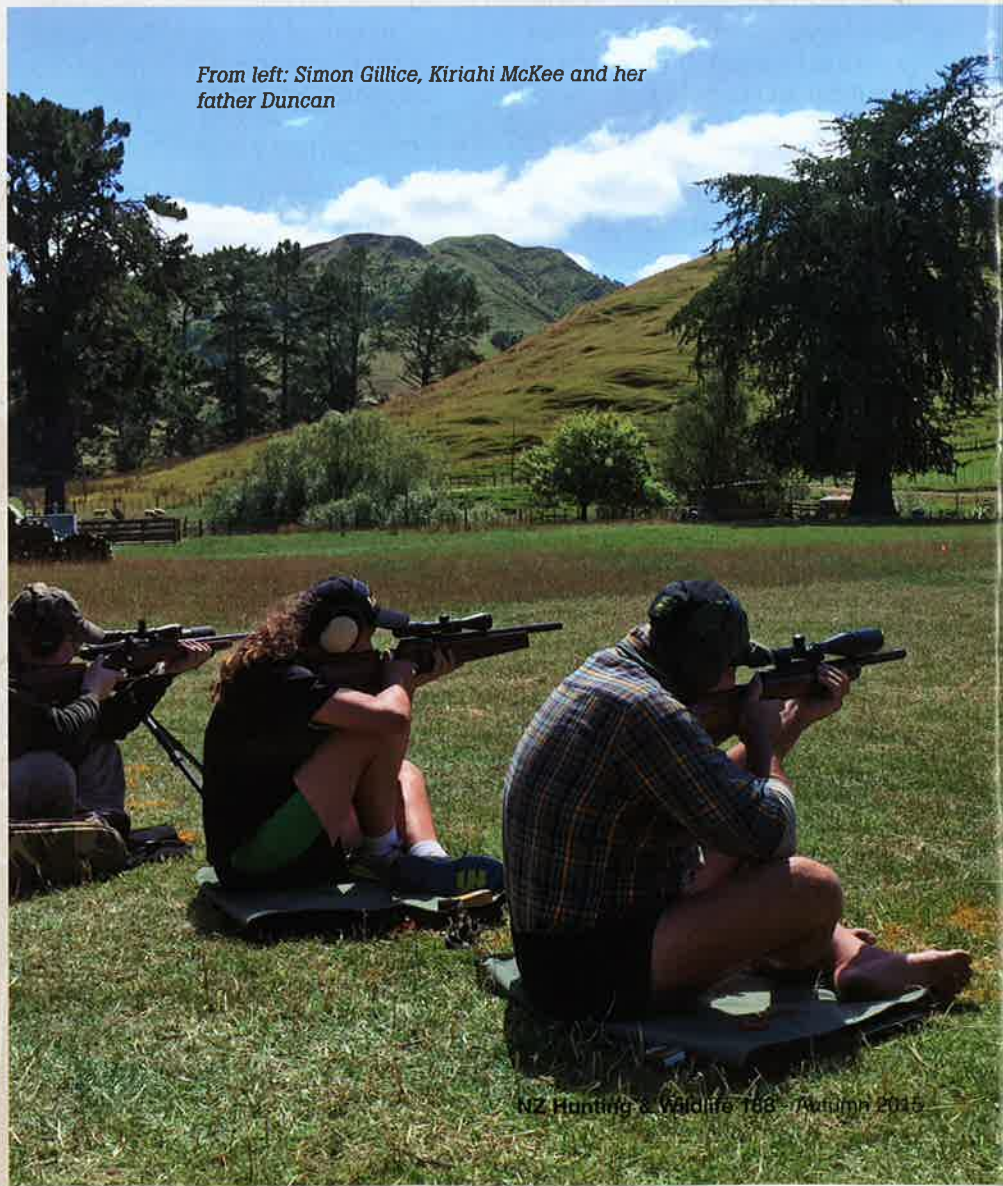
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When coaching I have been reminded that the time spent training others encourages forgotten skills from the back of my own mind to resurface again. Demographics are showing that while the firearms incident rates are very low, shootings usually involve experienced, middle-aged male hunters. Not too long ago the shooters were mostly aged much younger, 19–25 years. One can only speculate that if more

From left: Simon Gillice, Kiriahi McKee and her father Duncan





Junior shooters learning positional shooting and techniques at 50 m (from left): McGregor Eden, Brereton McKee, Rex McKee, Reon Sowry

hunters, including NZDA members, spent time teaching and reinforcing good firearms habits, fewer people would be inclined to pull the trigger on a misidentified target. Perhaps older, experienced shooters would benefit here indirectly – by reinforcing safe practices in their own minds as well as teaching good habits to our youth.

And where this all starts – well, for me and my whanau – is at the NZDA Bush Branch Prize Shoot. But the NZDA prize shoots are falling by the wayside nowadays. The stalwarts of our clubs are the same people that run these great shoots and as they retire we find often there is no one else ready or willing to take up the reins. Gone are the weekends when it was easy to travel short distances from branch to branch to compete. We would shoot, catch up

with familiar and new faces, talk around the barbecue and admire the year-on-year growth of our children.

A special note of thanks to Steve Silcock who also does a lot of organising for this event year after year. Tony at King & Henry in Masterton not only donates the junior rifle prize each year but also sets up the scope free of charge. To Ian Checkley for the use of his farm as the perfect venue and the two processed lambs he provided as prizes. To Whariti Meats in Woodville for processing those lambs. To the NZDA Bush Branch members who run the event and the businesses in Pahiatua, Woodville, Eketahuna and Palmerston North – Farmlands, Mitre 10, PGG Wrightsons, Hunting & Fishing Manawatu and Keinzley Agvet – and to the magazines *Rod & Rifle* and *Guns & Hunting*.

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