

An Original Hawken Rifle

I ran across an Original Hawken half stock rifle the other day and took a few pictures. This rifle I believe was marked S Hawken which means it was made after 1842 and before 1862. It has a patent breach but not a hooked breach. It has a primitive cheek piece not a beaver tail.



Note the repaired wrist and the rounded lock plate inlet. The tail ends on some rifles were pointed at the rear. This is a replacement lock and hammer. The originals were lost. The breach plug has a long tang but is not a hook breach.



The cheek piece is interesting because early primitive cheek pieces usually have a flat trapezoidal area at the bottom. The top of that trapezoidal area has been rounded over. There is a small line as decoration in the middle of the area. In the second picture you can see the tang has a screw in its tail in addition to the two tang bolts which end in the trigger plate. The silver looking piece has been cast into the cheek piece and I assume it is pewter or tin. The edges of the inlay are not even. I think it has been engraved with some one's name but I could not read it. The holes purpose is unknown it might even be a casting artifact.



The front sight might be a target sight. Many original Hawken rifles were sold with a small copper-based brass top sight which was very low to the barrel. It would not get caught on things as easily as this sight would. The rear sight is adjustable indicating this might just be a set of targets sights.



The butt plate is a two-piece brazed piece. I didn't see nor did I look for a rivet. I read the way these were made was to fabricate each piece, rivet them together, then add some brass and put the whole thing in the forge. The brass would fix both parts together and then the butt-piece was cleaned up. This process makes spending \$25. from TOTW seem like a deal. The escutcheon is what is thought of as a quintessential Hawken escutcheon. The Lock bolt protrudes from the escutcheon, but as the lock has been replaced I assume the lock bolt was also replaced.

The patch-box is heavy Iron not thin sheet metal it snaps closed with authority, there is no catch.



The entry pipe is cast. The ramrod pipes are either pipe or sheet metal formed into a cylinder and soldered to the rib. If you look back to the front sight picture you can see the front of the under-rib. Note the rib is sheet metal. Usually the end is filled in but this rifle has been fixed a little. One of the repairs was to cut the muzzle of the barrel off just a bit and then to re-crown it. I suspect in the process the solder fill in the end of the rib was lost. The owner said the muzzle looked like it was used as a hammer. By the way the rib was attached with 3-4 rivets. I noticed the two rivets near the entry pipe but couldn't see the front one or two rivets. The toe piece is standard and might be engraved, the out of focus picture and my memory cause a little confusion.

In conclusion I think this was a custom rifle built as specified by the buyer. The buyer was an old guy who wanted to shoot targets but wanted an old-time cheek piece. It was probably cared shot and cared for by the original owner, but his heirs used it as a barn gun and it was broken and discarded. Luckily for us they were rather lazy or just a keeper of things and didn't throw it away. Along came someone who knew what it was and recovered it.

Addendum

I asked the owner of this rifle to comment on the above article, his comments follow.

OMG,,,,,,My old Hawken is going to get some publicity! I am pleased with your narrative and gladly give approval for you to post on the IBPF website. Great job with the words and the layout. And yes, for security reasons, I do not wish to be identified, but have no qualms about acknowledging ownership or showing it to my shooting friends. A couple of comments:

- >The lock bolt escutcheon does not have a recess for a screw/bolt head, just a nice clean hole for the bolt, so it was designed to have a flat head protrude from it, but I'll bet the original had a much thinner, maybe even rounded head for appearance as well as being more friendly for handling. I had planned to change the profile, but never got around to it.
- > I am sure there is no engraving on the toe piece/strap. There are several scratches and dings on it that have no decorative direction.
- > I have always thought that there was some inscription on the cheekpiece inlay. I have tried magnifying lens with different lighting, including black light and infra-red. I even did a lampblack rubbing on tracing paper, but nothing showed up. I'm sure there was one, but got worn off.

> A pertinent feature might be that it is .45 caliber - smaller than the usual .54 - .58. I shoot a .440 ball with .018 patching. The 1 1/8" octagon non-tapered barrel has a right hand gain twist and the 6 lands and flat bottom grooves are equal in width and has discernable choke for about the last 6" (muzzle end).

> There definitely is a rivet in the buttplate - visible at the top of the buttplate but not on the top part. Thank you for your interest! I am sure the old gun is happy to get some attention and will be proud of your Hawken fullstock replication project.