

Cleaning and Care of Black Powder Small Arms

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MATERIALS AND SUPPLIES:

1. Shotgun cleaning rod (two may be necessary to make one rod long enough for longer barrels) and the following screw-on accessories for the end of the rod:
 - a. 12 gauge (for .69 and .75 caliber weapons) and/or 20 gauge (for .54 to .65 caliber weapons) copper bore brushes
 - b. 12 and 20 gauge (see above for related calibers) cotton bore mops/swabs
 - c. One or two plastic slotted bore cleaning tips
2. Corks to fit the muzzle(s) of your weapon(s)
3. Short wooden cooking skewers to plug vents or percussion nipples during cleaning
4. Small plastic funnel
5. Cleaning solution comprised of equal parts of isopropyl/rubbing alcohol (91% is preferable to 70%), hydrogen peroxide, and Murphy's Oil Soap
6. Moisture displacing, rust preventive, lubricating gun oils, such as Birchwood Casey Barricade for bores and lock mechanisms and WD-40 for external coatings
7. Gun grease
8. Small plastic spray bottles to hold cleaning solution, oil, and/or rust inhibitors
9. Screwdriver with tips to snugly fit all screws on your weapon
10. Worm for your ramrod
11. Roll of soft, absorbent paper towels (I use Viva select-a-size)
12. Cotton shotgun bore cleaning patches
13. 0000 steel wool and medium and fine grade 3M scouring pads
14. Longarm storage case or sleeve (for long arms, canvas gun cases can be purchased from Dixie Gun Works or Track of the Wolf).
15. Belt or shoulder pouch in which to keep cleaning supplies in the field

INITIAL CLEANING AND STORAGE:

When you first get your weapon, you should take it completely apart and apply oil to all interior and exterior metallic surfaces. Apply gun grease to all wooden surfaces that come into direct contact with metal parts (mortises, channels, etc.). Spray gun oil liberally on your bore swab and swab the bore. If you have a flintlock, applying oil to the leather flint cap will help to prevent rust on the inner surfaces of the jaws of the cock. This initial care will save you hours of cleaning later. Store your firearm in a canvas or other gun case. It is recommended that you spray your canvas case(s) with a marine canvas waterproofing product prior to use.

BEFORE YOU FIRE:

Prior to firing your weapon, be sure to remove excess oil from your bore using a cleaning rod with a slotted tip and a piece of paper towel or a few shotgun cleaning patches. Remove excess oil from your pan, vent, nipple, and all other surfaces that will be in direct contact with gunpowder.

DURING THE EVENT:

As time and opportunity permit, spray the areas impacted by gunpowder ignition (pan, cock, serpentine, frizzen, pan lid, etc.) with cleaning solution and wipe them off with a paper towel to keep them at least marginally clean and free from excessive fouling.

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AFTER THE EVENT:

After you are done firing for the day, follow these steps to clean your firearm:

1. Carefully clean your pan, battery/frizzen, cock, serpentine, and other areas of the breech that have been impacted by priming and firing.
2. Place your firearm in its full-cock position with the pan open. Remove the flint if one has been in use.
3. Place the sharpened tip of a short, wooden cooking skewer tightly in the vent or nipple.
4. Put 6 fluid ounces of cleaning solution into a container.
5. Place a small plastic funnel into the muzzle of the barrel.
6. Pour 2 fluid ounces of cleaning solution down the barrel.
7. Remove the funnel and place a cork stopper tightly in the muzzle. Rotate the barrel several times to agitate the cleaning solution inside the bore.
8. Remove the cork and pour the solution out into a sink or on the ground. Don't do this in your garden or flower bed! The solution is not kind to plants!
9. Repeat steps (5) through (8) two more times. After three rinses, the solution should be nearly clear. If the solution is still dirty, repeat the bore rinsing steps again. If you have been using paper cartridges, you may find that burned paper residue has made your bore dirtier than just powder alone.
10. Using the slotted tip on the end of your cleaning rod, repeatedly run pieces of paper towels roughly equal to 1/4 the size of a full sheet or 1/2 the size of "select-a-size" sheet down the barrel. DO NOT USE THE SAME SHEET MORE THAN ONCE. It may fall apart and get stuck in the bore, necessitating the use of a worm to remove it! Repeat until bore is clean and dry. You may remove the skewer from the vent or nipple after one or two bore swabbings.
11. Replace the slotted cleaning rod tip with the cotton cleaning mop/swab.
12. Spray oil (I recommend Birchwood Casey Barricade or its equivalent) on the swab and liberally oil the bore.
13. Now is a good time to replace your used flint with a new one for the next event.
14. Oil all external metallic surfaces, spray some oil on a clean paper towel, and using this paper towel wipe down all surfaces of the firearm. Leave a bit of excess oil in the pan and adjacent priming areas.
15. If you find that rust has formed anywhere on the weapon, clean it off with fine steel wool or a 3M abrasive pad and oil. If you find that rust has formed in your bore, plug the vent/nipple, pour some cleaning solution down the bore, and use a copper wire bore brush on your cleaning rod to scour your barrel. Rinse with cleaning solution. Clean and dry the bore with cleaning patches or pieces of paper towel and finish by running an oil-impregnated bore swab down the bore.
16. After cleaning and oiling your firearm, place it in its case to transport and store it.
17. Remove the lock mechanism for cleaning and oiling at least once every six months or after three successive events in which the weapon has been fired repeatedly.

NOTES ABOUT THE CLEANING SOLUTION:

The cleaning solution is comprised of three ingredients, each of which has a specific purpose:

Hydrogen Peroxide dissolves gunpowder. It is also used to remove blood stains on fabrics and treat lacerations; **Murphy's Oil Soap** is a non-corrosive surfactant that helps to remove residual powder, dirt and grime from a variety of surfaces; and **Rubbing Alcohol** acts to dissolve burned oil and causes the solution to dry more efficiently. At home, hot, soapy water does a fine job. In the field or in camp, this solution will meet your cleaning needs exceptionally well.