

## **Firearms Glossary**

### **Cody Firearms Museum, Buffalo Bill Center of the West**

**Action:** A firearm's receiver, bolt (or breech block), loading and firing mechanisms.

**Automatic:** A repeating firearm that automatically chambers and fires continuously with a single and sustained pull of the trigger; a machine gun.

**Airgun:** A gun that discharges a pellet or BB by compressed air or gas (typically CO<sub>2</sub>).

**Assault Rifle:** A military/law enforcement type firearm designed to provide either semi-automatic or fully-automatic fire.

**Backstrap:** The rear part of a pistol's grip frame.

**Ballistics:** The study of the physics of the performance of projectiles and the prediction and analysis of such performance.

**Barrel:** A tube through which a projectile passes as it is discharged from a firearm.

**Black Powder:** An explosive compound (a mixture of charcoal, sulfur, and saltpeter) used for ignition and propulsion in firearms. Black powder is still in use. (See *Smokeless Powder*.)

**Bluing:** A finish created by the controlled application of chemical solutions that oxidize the metal surfaces of firearms.

**Bolt:** A sliding metal bar that seats and removes a cartridge and closes the breech.

**Bore:** The internal opening of a barrel through which the projectile travels prior to departing the muzzle.

**Breech:** The rear section of the barrel of a firearm.

**Breech Loader:** A firearm that is loaded through the rear portion of the barrel.

**Buckhorn Sight:** A rear, open-topped sight displaying curved sides.

**Bull Barrel:** A very heavy barrel for use in precision-shooting firearms.

**Butt:** The thick end of a stock. (See *Stock*.)

**Buttplate:** A metal or synthetic plate covering the rear of the stock.

**Caliber:** The interior diameter of the bore of a gun barrel between the lands of the rifling; measured in inches or millimeters.

**Carbine:** A rifle with a short barrel originally designed for use from horseback.

**Cartridge:** A cylinder of metal or other material containing a powder charge, a projectile, and a primer for use in a firearm.

**Centerfire Cartridge:** A cartridge that has its primer set in the center of the base of its case.

**Chamber:** The enlarged rear portion at the breech end of the barrel that accepts a cartridge.

**Checkering:** Crosshatched lines that are cut into some pistol grips and stocks providing a gripping surface and an ornamental design.

**Choke:** The constricted end of a shotgun barrel that condenses the shot spread.

**Clip:** A metal device that holds a series of cartridges so they can be inserted into a magazine. This term is often misused to mean a detachable magazine. (See *Magazine*.)

**Color Case Hardening:** A heat-treating process that hardens steel and iron and leaves a colorful surface finish.

**Crowning:** The relieved (rounded or sunken) muzzle end of a barrel that protects the mouth of the bore.

**Cylinder:** A round container that holds a revolver's cartridges in separate chambers and rotates on a pin.

**Damascus Barrel:** A barrel produced by forging and joining different types of metal strips together. (Also called a "laminated" or "twist" barrel.)

**Derringer:** Usually a small single- or double-barreled pistol meant for concealment. (Also spelled deringer.)

**Double-Action:** A revolver or semi-automatic pistol function that enables the hammer to be cocked and released by pulling the trigger.

**Double-Set Trigger:** A mechanism that provides two triggers—one to set the firing mechanism for release and the other to lightly trip the firing mechanism.

**Dry Firing:** Operating the firing mechanism of a firearm without using ammunition.

**Extractor:** A device that withdraws empty cases from the chamber of a firearm so they can be thrown clear of the firearm by the ejector.

**Firing Pin:** A plunger-like part that strikes the primer of a cartridge.

**Flint Lock:** A firearm ignition system using a small flint that, when struck against a steel frizzen, produces sparks that first ignite the priming powder and then the main powder charge.

**Forcing Cone:** The rear part of a pistol or rifle chamber that channels the projectile into the barrel.

**Frame:** The structure of a firearm to which the barrel, action, and stock (or grip panels) are attached.

**Frizzen:** The part of a flintlock's firing mechanism that is struck by a flint, producing sparks that first ignite the priming powder and then the main powder charge.

**Gauge:** The bore diameter of a shotgun based on a formula involving the number of lead balls cast from a pound of lead that would fit in a given bore size.

**Grip:** A one- or two-piece handle for a revolver or pistol.

**Grooves:** Narrow channels cut in the barrel of a firearm that cause a bullet to spin.

**Half-Cock:** Partially cocking a firearm so that the hammer doesn't fall; a safety measure.

**Hammer:** A moving part of the firearm that causes the firing pin to strike the cartridge primer.

**Handgun:** A firearm designed to be fired with one hand, such as revolvers, autoloading pistols, and single-shot firearms.

**Hangfire:** A delay in the discharge of a loaded cartridge after the primer has been struck by the firing pin.

**Hollowpoint:** A bullet with a cavity in the nose that helps it to expand within the target mass.

**Lands:** The elevated spaces between the grooves in the bore of a barrel.

**Magazine:** A container for holding cartridges that are forced by spring pressure into position to be fed into the chamber of a firearm. A magazine can be a detachable or non-detachable box-type or tubular. (See *Clip*.)

**Magnum:** A larger-than-normal cartridge containing more powder than a standard cartridge of the same bullet diameter. The additional powder charge increases bullet velocity.

**Match Lock:** A very early type of firing mechanism that moves a lighted, wrapped slow match against a priming powder that, in turn, ignites the powder charge.

**Misfire:** When a cartridge fails to ignite and discharge a projectile. (See *Hangfire*.)

**Musket:** A long-barreled, smoothbore firearm often of military design.

**Musketoon:** A muzzle-loading, smoothbore carbine.

**Muzzle:** The forward end of a barrel where a fired bullet exits.

**Muzzle Brake:** A device attached to the muzzle of a barrel to reduce recoil.

**Muzzle Energy:** The energy of a bullet as it exits the muzzle; measured in foot pounds.

**Muzzle Loader:** A firearm with a solid breech that is loaded through the muzzle end of the barrel.

**Open Sight:** A notched, open-topped rear sight or an exposed front sight of some configuration.

**Over and Under:** One barrel placed on top of the other. Generally a shotgun design but can be a rifle or rifle/shotgun combination.

**Parkerizing:** A dull gray or green gun finish that resists rust. Frequently used on military firearms.

**Peep Sight:** A rear sight containing a hole through which to line up the front sight and target. (Also called an *aperture sight*.)

**Percussion Lock:** A firing device employing a hammer that strikes a percussion cap containing a detonating compound that ignites the main powder charge.

**Primers:** Small metallic caps containing an explosive compound that, when struck by a firing pin, ignite the powder charge in a cartridge.

**Receiver:** The section of a rifle or shotgun that houses the action. (See *Action*.)

**Revolver:** A firearm with a multi-chambered, revolving cylinder and, generally, one barrel. The same principle was used in some early rifles and shotguns.

**Rib:** An elongated, flat, raised stiffening device attached to a barrel. It can also be a sighting plane or sight base or merely a decorative device.

**Rifle:** A long-barreled firearm with a rifled bore.

**Rifling:** Spiral grooves cut inside a gun barrel that force a projectile to spin around its longitudinal axis to increase its stability in flight.

**Rimfire:** A cartridge that contains its primer inside the rim of the base of the case.

**Safety:** A mechanism that helps to prevent the discharge of a firearm.

**Sear:** The pivoting part of the firing mechanism of a gun that connects the trigger to the hammer or striker and holds it in the cocked position until the trigger is pressed and the gun is fired.

**Semiautomatic:** A repeating firearm that has an automatic chambering mechanism but requires a separate trigger pull for each round fired.

**Semiwadcutter:** A truncated bullet with a flat tip.

**Shot:** Round lead (or other metal alloys) balls loaded into shotgun shells. The two main divisions of shot: Birdshot-small shot (less than .24 inches); and Buckshot-heavy shot (.24 inches or larger).

**Shotgun:** A firearm with a smooth bore designed for firing a shotshell containing a charge of small shot at relatively short ranges.

**Side-By-Side:** A twin-barreled shotgun that has its barrels mounted horizontally. Can also be a double rifle or rifle/shotgun combination design.

**Single Action:** A firearm that has to have its hammer manually cocked each time before the trigger can be pulled.

**Smokeless Powder:** A fast-burning, more stable (than black powder), and more easily ignited powder that burns efficiently without the presence of external oxygen. (See *Black Powder*.)

**Stock:** A wooden, metal, or synthetic part of a long gun that is held by the shooter and is connected to the frame or receiver.

**Take Down:** A firearm designed to be disassembled readily into two or more sections for ease of carrying, storage, or shipping.

**Tang:** The upper and lower metal prongs of a long gun that connect the frame or receiver to the stock.

**Telescopic Sight:** An optical sight attached to a firearm that magnifies the shooter's view of a target.

**Top Strap:** The upper part (above the cylinder) of a revolver frame.

**Trajectory:** The flight path of a bullet after it leaves the barrel.

**Trigger:** A mechanism that initiates the firing of a gun.

**Wadcutter:** A target-shooting bullet that has a completely flat point that cuts a clean hole in a paper target.

**Wheel Lock:** A spring-activated steel mechanism that spins a serrated wheel against a piece of pyrite or other mineral creating sparks that ignite the priming charge which then flashes through to ignite the propellant powder charge.

**Wildcat Cartridge:** A non-standard cartridge made by a noncommercial producer.

## Sources

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