

WINTER SPECIAL

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THE #1 BOWHUNTING MAGAZINE

FEBRUARY 2022

THE
LURE OF
LATE SEASON

**KEYS TO COLD-WEATHER
WHITETAIL SUCCESS** P.26

WALKING THE WALK

**THE EXCLUSIVE STORY
OF A HOYT INNOVATOR** P.40

DOWNTIME OPTIONS

- ▶ PIGS AND PECCARIES
- ▶ ISLAND AXIS BUCKS

MAN-UP FOR MUSKOX

DO YOU HAVE WHAT IT TAKES?

TOP TIPS

- ▶ 4 STEPS TO BETTER ACCURACY
- ▶ HOW TO ELIMINATE "CREEP" P.62
- ▶ COOL GEAR TO KEEP YOU WARM





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CONTENTS
VOLUME 51, NUMBER 4
FEBRUARY 2022

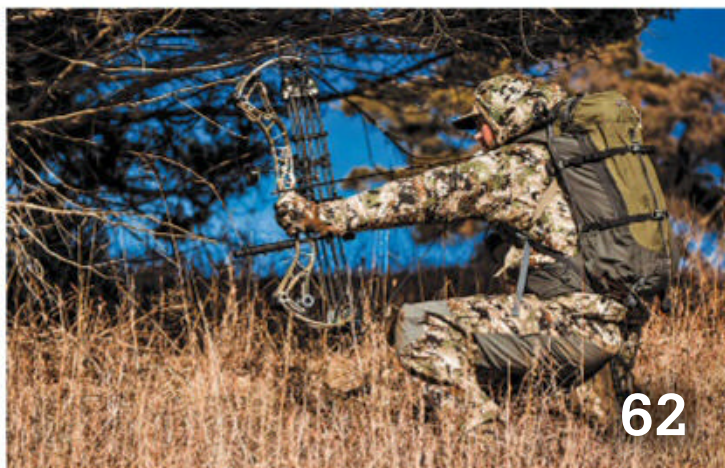


FEATURES

- 26 It's Never Too Late!** By Greg Miller
Serious bowhunters never throw in the towel so long as the whitetail season remains open.
- 32 Mission Muskox** By Frank Noska, Contributor
He's one of the toughest, most accomplished bowhunters we know, but for this hunt he depends on people who are a lot tougher than he is!
- 36 Mr. Big** By Rollie Johnson, As Told By Brett Schmit
The property was prime, and he knew the buck was there. All that was needed was for Lady Luck to show up.
- 40 Walking The Walk** By Danny Farris, Contributor
What do you get when you combine a hunter's soul and an engineer's mind? A passionate Archery innovator!
- 46 Plenty Of Pork** By Brandon Ray
If you like the "other white meat," then start doing your part to keep this prolific nuisance critter in check.
- 50 Axis Deer In Paradise** By Larry D. Jones, Contributor
You'd be hard-pressed to find a better place to hunt one of the most beautiful and best-tasting deer on the planet.
- 54 Peccary Party** By Joe Blake, Contributor
Never hunted javelina before? Here's why you should, and what you need to know before you do.

DEPARTMENTS

- 4 EDITORIAL** | By Curt Wells, Editor
- 58 WHAT'S NEW** | By Brian Fortenbaugh, Assistant Editor
- 60 WHERE TO GO/MARKETPLACE** | Special Advertising Sections
- 62 ASK BOWHUNTER** | Joe Bell On Bow Creep



COLUMNS

- 12 ON THE TRACK** | By Chuck Adams
- 14 NEXT-LEVEL BOWHUNTING** | By Joe Bell, Technical Editor
- 18 THE TRADITIONAL WAY** | By Fred Eichler, Traditional Editor
- 20 TRIED AND TRUE** | By Brian K. Strickland, Equipment Editor
- 24 KNOW HUNTING** | By Dr. Dave Samuel, Conservation Editor
- 64 THE QUEST** | By Randy Ulmer





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EDITORIAL

CURT WELLS | EDITOR

NO REST FOR THE WICKED...

IT MIGHT BE FEBRUARY, BUT IF YOU LOOK HARD ENOUGH,
THERE IS NO OFFSEASON FOR BOWHUNTERS.

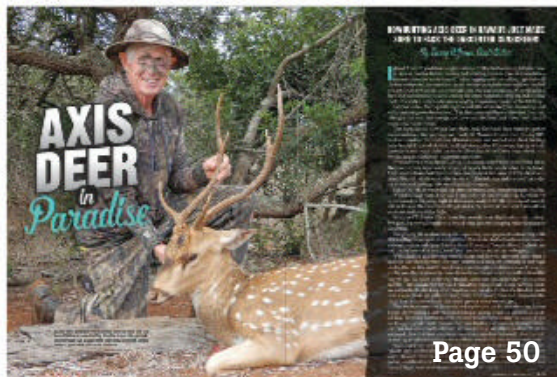
FEBRUARY HAS TO BE the most worthless month on the calendar for a bowhunter. Yes, there is still much to do when it comes to upgrading gear, trying new technologies, or working on shooting form.

And, of course, there is research to do on future hunts, deciding which hunts to apply for, and a multitude of other tasks that will help you make the most of your bowhunting life. But what about actually bowhunting in these off months?

As you receive this issue in December/January, there will still be some late-season whitetail or Coues' deer hunting going on, but it's slim pickings in February. Bowhunting wild hogs in the South is very popular, and our reader surveys have shown that a lot of bowhunters are interested in taking advantage of that opportunity in the dead of winter. On page 46 of this issue, Brandon Ray gives a rundown of hog-hunting opportunities, and on page 54, Contributor Joe Blake covers bowhunting for javelina, which are not related to pigs but are piglike and a blast to bowhunt. Other than that, there isn't much going on this month.

Once we get into March, things start looking up. If your budget allows and you're adventurous, there is always red stag hunting in New Zealand and Argentina. The rut is on in March, and it can be a great adventure. You might even be able to convince your spouse it's a good idea, so long as you offer to take him/her along.

Come April, turkeys take the spotlight, with seasons opening early in the month and extending all the way into May. Bear-hunting opportunities, for both black bears and grizzly/brown bears, start popping up in May and run into June. Another chance to get the family involved with your bowhunting in the "off season," would be a trip to Hawaii to hunt



the gorgeous axis deer. On page 50, long-time Contributor Larry D. Jones takes us on a trip to the Islands in pursuit of this challenging and very tasty (some say the finest venison there is) big game animal.

For the budget-minded bowhunter, June and July are great months for bowfishing, and opportunities abound across the country. Carp are spawning in the shallows, and there are all sorts of rough fish to get after. Whether you're a minimalist wading in a creek or shooting from a fully-rigged bowfishing boat at night, it's always a blast and is easy on the wallet (unless you're the boat owner). If your wallet is fat, summer is a good time to venture to Africa and check that dream hunt off your list. Less demand has created some truly great deals in Africa.



Once we get to August, things start heating up for bowhunters for blacktail deer on the West Coast or on Kodiak Island. And, let's not forget about caribou, sheep, and other species.

Undoubtedly, September is the "golden harvest" month for many bowhunters. At least that's what I tell my wife, Patti, as she looks over my hunt schedule and starts to raise her eyebrows. "Honey, September, October, and November are my harvest seasons," I sheepishly explain. "I'm like a farmer: I have to get to 'work.' This is no time to be a slacker."

That's about the time when she comes back with, "You're full of it. What about all the hunts you go on in the winter, spring, and summer? You bowhunt almost year-round."

I'm so proud of her. After all these years, she finally gets it...

Editor's Notes:

As **Bowhunter** enters its second half-century, you may notice that we have undergone a bit of a facelift. Art Director Mark Olszewski and Assistant Art Director Jason Henning are responsible for the "look" of **Bowhunter**, and they've been working on the redesign for some time. It's not a total makeover — we are who we are. But these changes give our pages a fresh look, and we hope you like them. As always, if you have any comments or criticisms about this publication, feel free to e-mail me at curt.wells@outdoorsg.com. Our entire staff thanks you so much for your support as a **Bowhunter** reader. **BH**



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EDITORIAL ASSISTANT Sally Burkey

ASSISTANT ART DIRECTOR Jason Henning

SR. DIGITAL EDITOR Drew Pellman

FIELD EDITORS

FOUNDER M. R. James

CONSERVATION Dr. Dave Samuel

TECHNICAL Joe Bell

TRADITIONAL Fred Eichler

EQUIPMENT Brian K. Strickland

CONTRIBUTORS

Chuck Adams • Joe Blake • Chuck Denault •

Danny Farris • Jeff Frey • Cameron R. Hanes •

Donald M. Jones • Larry D. Jones • Judy Kovar •

Lon Lauber • Pat Lefemine • Ron Niziolek •

Frank Noska • Matt Palmquist • Tony J. Peterson •

John Solomon • Dan Staton • Randy Ulmer •

John "Lefty" Wilson • C.J. Winand

ADVERTISING SALES

ADVERTISING SALES MANAGER Jeff Millar

(717) 695-8081; jeff.millar@outdoorsg.com

ADVERTISING SALES REP Mark Thiffault

(720) 630-9863; mark.thiffault@outdoorsg.com

PRODUCTION

MANAGER Brittany Kennedy

(717) 695-8089; brittany.kennedy@outdoorsg.com

ENDEMIC AD SALES

VP, ENDEMIC SALES

Mike Savino mike.savino@outdoorsg.com

NATIONAL ENDEMIC SALES

Jim McConville (440) 791-7017

WESTERN REGION

Hutch Looney hutch@hlooney.com

NATIONAL AD SALES

ACCOUNT DIRECTOR — DETROIT OFFICE

Kevin Donley (248) 798-4458

NATIONAL ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE — CHICAGO OFFICE

Carl Benson (312) 955-0496

DIRECT RESPONSE ADVERTISING/NON-ENDEMIC

Anthony Smyth (914) 409-4202

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CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER,
PUBLISHING & BRANDED MEDIA Mike Carney

EVP, GROUP PUBLISHER & OPERATIONS Derek Sevcik

VP, CONSUMER MARKETING Peter Watt

VP, MANUFACTURING Deb Daniels

SENIOR DIRECTOR, PRODUCTION Connie Mendoza

DIRECTOR, PUBLISHING TECHNOLOGY Kyle Morgan

SENIOR CREATIVE DIRECTOR Tim Neher

DIRECTOR, DIGITAL EDITOR Jeff Phillips

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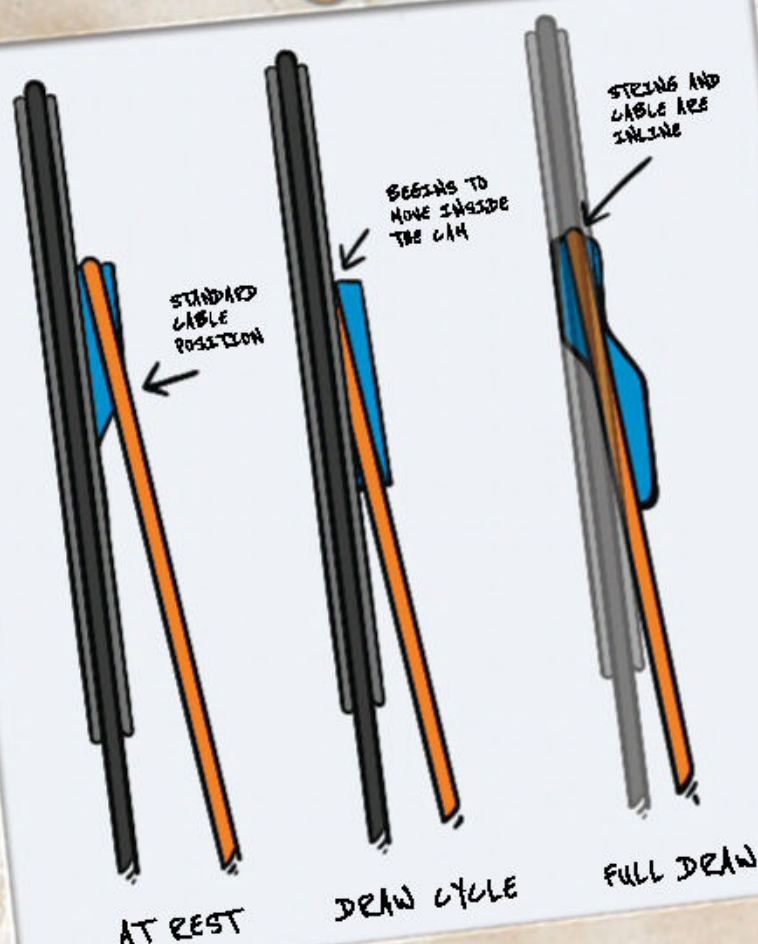


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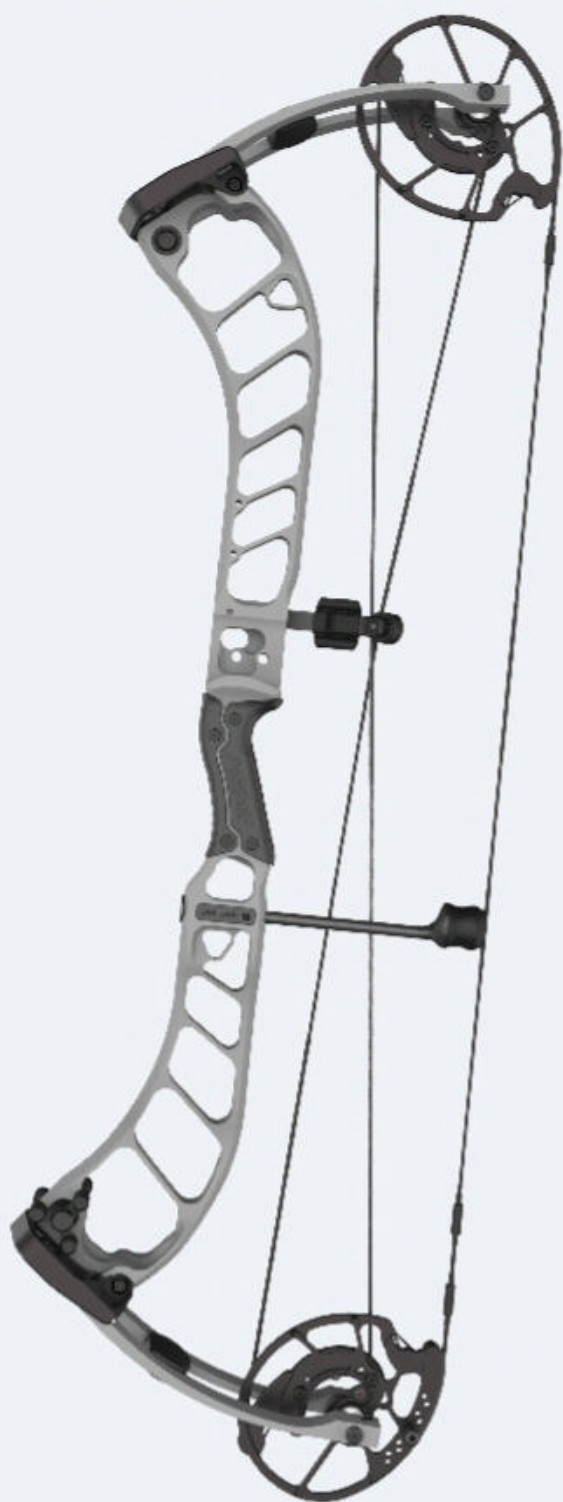
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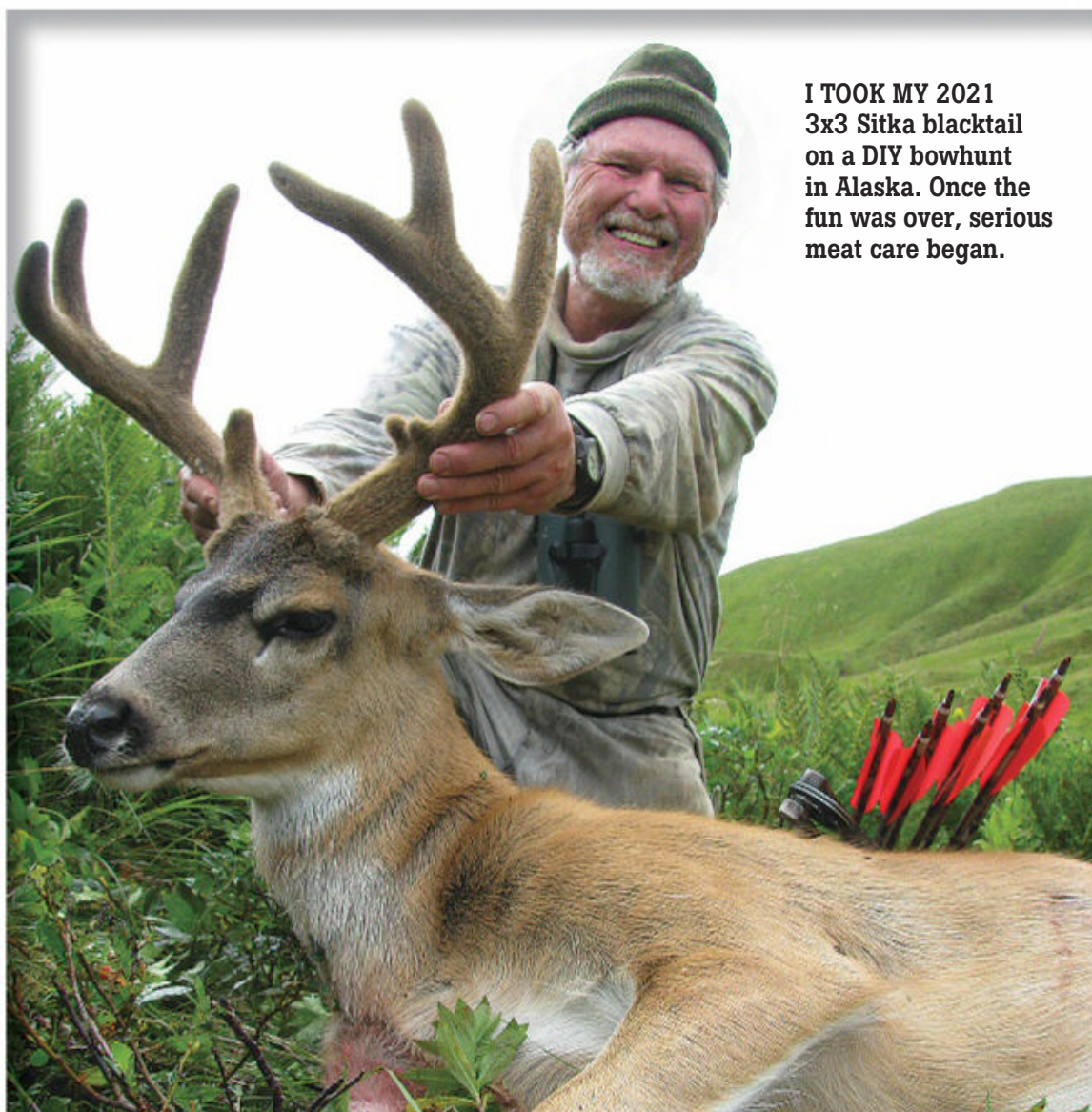
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ON THE TRACK

CHUCK ADAMS



I TOOK MY 2021 3x3 Sitka blacktail on a DIY bowhunt in Alaska. Once the fun was over, serious meat care began.

DO IT YOURSELF!

THERE'S NOTHING BETTER THAN BOWHUNTING WITH CLOSE FRIENDS, BUT AT TIMES YOU NEED TO GO IT ALONE.

THE AFTERNOON was half gone when I spotted the deer. He was all alone — an uncommon thing for summertime Sitka blacktail bucks. Most often, they hang in bachelor bunches of two to six.

Perfect, I thought, as I sized up the big, velvet-racked 3x3 through my back-packer's scope. Aside from a split brow tine on the left, his antlers seemed symmetrical and unusually large.

I had already glassed and passed up 17 other bucks that morning, including a handful of 3x3s with brow tines. This

customer was quite a bit bigger, and he was upwind with no other deer nearby. A perfect stalking opportunity.

I hustled off the mountainside, waded a small creek, and tiptoed up the opposite slope. At 200 yards, I dropped my frame pack and eased ahead over damp grass and soil. As usual, it had rained on Kodiak

Island earlier that day. Wet walking created almost no noise to spook the buck.

The deer was bedded in a hollow rimmed by low brush. I eased to the lip, spotted fat antler tips dead ahead, and lifted my rangefinding binoculars for a quick calculation — 32 yards. I shuffled about two yards closer and planted my feet to wait. The deer had to stand up sooner or later.

Fortunately for me, the buck started swiveling his head within five minutes — a sign he was restless to get up and feed. As his rear end rose, I drew my bow. His front end appeared above the brush, and I dumped the bowstring. The Easton shaft and G5 broadhead zipped through the buck's chest with a liquid plop. The big deer was mine!

Critters like my 106-inch 2021 Sitka buck can often be bowhunted without a guide, but only after you've researched the local rules and regulations. For example, several species like deer, elk, caribou, black bears, and moose can be pursued in Alaska by nonresident do-it-yourselfers. The upside is limited cost and complete freedom to hunt the way you want to on your own timetable. The downside is planning food, camping logistics, transportation, and meat salvage on your own.

Some of my best friends are hunting outfitters and guides. When required by law, I never hesitate to book with such professionals. But when legal and feasible, I find a special magic in DIY bowhunting. The freedom, solitude, open timeframe, and reduced costs can all be appealing — if you are an experienced and confident archer. Even if you don't feel adept, there is no better way to learn than tackling a hunt on your own.

As I deboned my big Sitka for a five-mile pack back to camp, I experienced the reality check every DIY bowhunter comes to grips with. There was no one but me to process and carry 65 pounds of meat and antlers. Once back at my tent, there was no one but me to bag and submerge my buck in the lake, so brown bears would not show up to ruin my day. There was no one but me to cook a late

supper before crawling in the sack. Such effort and logistics are handled by someone else on a guided bowhunt, so if you prefer being catered to, DIY bowhunting is not for you.

It was after 11 p.m. when I finally dropped the heavy pack beside my tent. The summertime Alaskan twilight was fading fast, but I felt good. Another hour of meat and camp chores, and I could get horizontal to play the day's pleasant tapes in my head. There would have been nobody to blame but me if I had blown the stalk. And there was nobody to congratulate me but me for making it happen. Just the way I like it.

Bowhunting on your own is possible in many parts of our continent. In general, hunting guides are required for nonresidents in Canada. Likewise, some places, like my home state of Wyoming, have quirky guide rules like the stipulation that nonresidents cannot hunt on certain areas their own on U.S. Forest Service land. And unless you can obtain free or access-fee permission to bowhunt, plenty of private property is off limits due to landowner preference or leasing arrangements with outfitters. But despite such restrictions, there are plenty of places where you CAN hunt on your own.

Some bowhunters I know openly sneer at the idea of paying money for DIY access to private land, but everyone must make their own decision. Unless the cost is too steep, I am fine with accessing privately owned places with elk, deer, or antelope for a fee. There are often fewer hunters to compete with, and more mature critters than found on nearby, heavily hunted public land. More elbow room can be well worth an access fee.

CAMPING VARIES depending on your DIY hunt. A roadside setup with travel trailer and/or roomy tent (below) is ideal, but remote adventures require small backpack tents and other Spartan gear.



Carcass and trophy salvage require special planning on DIY bowhunts. You must know how to properly debone meat in remote places, and you must make provisions in advance for transport to a meat locker.

Camping needs can vary wildly, depending on your DIY destination. I commonly drive to public and accessible private hunting land in the West, camping in my vintage 17-foot Airstream trailer when roads permit, or setting up a tent where a trailer cannot be pulled.

For fly-in hunts in Alaska, standard backpacking gear works best. All-weather dome tents, simple cooking equipment, poly tarps, quality sleeping bag and backpack pad, and similar gear are all required. To save on excess baggage fees with the airlines, I normally purchase food, a camp stove, propane bottles, and other heavy gear after I reach a town like Kodiak. With U.S. inflation and airfares on the rise, it pays to closely figure out all expenses, and then go the most feasible route.

Meat salvage can be a major obstacle on DIY adventures. For a bowhunt like my 2021 Kodiak trip, you must be in good

physical condition in order to quickly butcher and carry out the meat. Wanton waste is a serious hunting violation everywhere, and would be a shame anyway. Although you can hunt moose on your own in Alaska, to do so is largely foolish. A mature bull moose produces about 600 pounds of edible meat — a monumental chore to debone, and a backbreaking nightmare to transport even a short distance. If you don't act fast with several buddies to help, a dangerous bear will surely show up to ruin your day.

Once meat is carried out, arrangements must be made to transport it back to cold storage. On Kodiak, I immediately call my air-taxi service to schedule a pickup and storage in a freezer back in town. Be sure to plan meat care in advance, so you avoid legal and ethical troubles later on.

I bowhunted Alaskan deer alone in 2021 because none of my archery pals could break free to go. But I normally take such trips with one or two good friends. The comradeship is special, it's safer in remote country, there is someone to help pack out the meat, and large expenses like air-taxi service can be shared.

Do-it-yourself bowhunting is not for everyone, but it definitely has its advantages! **BH**

You can follow Chuck on Instagram and Facebook at Chuck Adams Archery. Visit Chuck's website at chuckadamsarchery.com.

CHUCK ADAMS BIG GAME HUNTING TIP

FINDING LAND FOR A DIY HUNT

RESearch IS KEY to locating areas where you can bowhunt on your own. It has never been as easy as it is in our digital age. Online maps, Garmin's state-specific HuntView SD cards, onX and HuntStand smartphone apps, and other modern tools will show you exactly where property lines are and who controls the land. Such aids are available online, or through outlets like Cabela's.

You can also contact hunt-booking agents, taxidermists, and game-department officials for info about private "block management" tracts open to the public, private properties with hunt-access fees, and other DIY opportunities.

If you want to bowhunt on your own, opportunities are plentiful — once you dig for information.

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NEXT-LEVEL BOWHUNTING

JOE BELL | TECHNICAL EDITOR



WHEN YOU SHOOT with natural upright posture, without leaning forward or back, your shooting form will remain highly repeatable and consistent.

STRIVING FOR REPEATABILITY

THE RIGHT WAY TO SHOOT A BOW IS TO DO IT THE SAME WAY EACH TIME. HERE ARE FOUR WAYS TO MAKE THAT HAPPEN.

THE BASICS of good archery do not change. Simply do it the same way each time, and you'll achieve perfection. Of course, this is easier said than done. But it really is that simple.

For the past 20-plus years, I've focused heavily on refining my shooting form, so it's as repeatable as humanly possible. This incorporated making a bunch of small changes in how I handled the bow during execution, and how I mentally approached the shot. Some of these changes focused on correcting fundamental form flaws (such as using the wrong draw length), while others emphasized an improved shooting feel through the end of the shot.

More than anything, I experimented with different bow-hand and

release-hand positions, searching for the smoothest, most consistent system. In the end, all these little details added up to some pretty powerful medicine for increasing my precision and control. As I did this, archery suddenly became more enjoyable and gratifying, too.

Of course, space here limits every little detail I'd love to share with you about my archery journey, but what I can do is share four things that truly stand out above the rest when shot-to-shot performance is key. Here are the four important fundamentals.

ALIGN The Body

Exceptional shooting performance starts with how the body is positioned. If you analyze several different archers, you'll notice each one shoots a little bit differently. One will shoot using a high draw-arm elbow, while the other will have a low-draw elbow. Some will hold the bow with a bent bow arm, while others will use a dead-straight, stiff arm. None of these attributes represent the right or wrong way of doing it, so long as the preferred form is done in a repeatable fashion.

Here's the problem: Usually, if it doesn't feel smooth or natural, it will be harder to duplicate each and every time. You don't want that. You want a shooting posture that uses very little muscle activity, so it's less variable and more repeatable.

If you stand with your feet shoulder-width apart and simply raise your bow arm at a 90-degree angle with your chest, this will feel totally natural and somewhat effortless. Your torso will be in line with the position of your feet, and your forehead will be directly above your neck — not facing down or up. Your bow-arm shoulder also will be low and not twisted upward, causing the deltoid muscle to expand unnaturally. You could actually close your eyes in this body position, and if you were sleep deprived, you might even fall asleep for a few seconds.

Well, what I just described is exactly how you want to position your body at full draw. This technique is known as proper "T-form." By experimenting and adjusting your draw length in 1/8-inch increments, you can mimic this type of body position and shoot with a greater, more relaxed feel. Do this, and you'll surely improve your shot-to-shot consistency.

Bone-To-Bone BOW CONTACT

How you grip your bow sets the stage for true consistency and relaxation. After all, it's our only true contact point with our bow, other than the release on the bowstring, which we'll cover in the next section. You want the bone in your



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arm (the radius) to be in line with your bow's grip and riser. This translates into your thumb rotated slightly at about a 45-degree angle. This places the base of your thumb with the grip and rotates your forearm in such a way to improve bowstring clearance. Since the thumb bone is braced against the radius bone and the thumb bone is resting against the "bone" of the riser, this is known as "bone-to-bone contact." This method eliminates muscle use in the hand and arm as much as possible, and also positions your bow hand in the most torque-free way possible.

How you place your hand on your bow's grip often comes down to the best feel. Focus heavily on this fundamental when practicing, and eventually it will become automatic.

BRACING The Release

I'm sure you've heard the phrase "a floating anchor" before. This means the hand that's holding the release is not wedged against your face or jawbone in a fixed manner. If it floats, then it will be in a different spot every time — bad medicine for consistent shooting.

A better way is to brace the release hand so it's "notched" into your jawbone or maybe near the base of your ear, so the hand (and the release's jaw or hook) doesn't float around or twist from side to side. With an index-finger release, I like to place the web of my thumb and index finger along the underside of my jawbone. This creates a nice "cup," which allows for repeatable performance. With a handheld release, try placing the knuck-

les of your index and middle fingers between your jawbone — again, creating a nice consistent cup along your face.

When anchoring your hand, make sure you don't press too hard into your jaw. What you should strive for is a light touch against your face, because if you press too hard, you'll only experience more inconsistency in your shooting accuracy.

The consistency of your anchor is extremely crucial because if it varies, so will the pressure, arm alignment, and overall string-torque dynamics. Even the slightest pitch of the release can cause an errant arrow, so keep your anchor solid but light. Don't ever "scrunch" or move your face to the release hand. Acquire a solid stance, keep your torso naturally upright, and bring your draw hand to the side of your face. This will ensure proper shooting form.

Finding CENTER

I don't know if any of these elements are more important than the other. They all go hand in hand for attaining repeatable accuracy. However, if I had to choose only one as most important, this one would be it. "Finding center" means aiming with real focus and maintaining this focus until the shot breaks, all by surprise. Doing it this way will allow you to shoot well — even when the intensity is high.

Finding center often involves working through any shooting anxiety you might have, such as freezing below the spot, or punching the release. To rid yourself of these ailments, you must do three things:

1. Embrace your sight's movement. In other words, there's no way you can

hold a bow and sight pin completely still, so accept this and let the pin float around the bull's-eye. Pick the smallest dot you can, so when you float a lot — or when shaking from intense pressure — you still won't miss by much. When aiming at a buck or bull, do your best to pick a patch of hair, or a discolored spot in the center of the lungs.

2. Use a release that's hard to punch.

An index-finger release may be the fastest tool in the woods, and the easiest to master for any type of archer, but it amplifies trigger-punching. A better option is one that disengages by pure motion — which is the hinge or back-tension release. This style of release will help you regain mental control for greater repeatability. It takes considerable time learning how to shoot hinge/back-tension releases properly, but once mastered, you will have a new mental outlook on proper shot execution. Instead of "driving by" and punching the release once your pin swings past the bull's-eye, you will soon find yourself letting your pins do their thing while focusing on aiming until the release breaks over. You can hunt with a hinge, too, especially a model with a safety on it — for easier drawing in the field — or you can switch back to your index-finger release weeks before the season, given you activate the release slowly by applying a solid motion with your back muscles.

3. Learn to let down when the shot doesn't feel right. The subconscious mind controls every detail in the shot process — except for the aiming part. For this reason, it's important to teach it right. In other words, if you feel like something is wrong, then it probably is. This is when you need to let down, take a couple deep breaths, relax, and try again. You don't want to train your mind to adopt bad shooting habits. This often occurs when you continue shooting long after you feel your muscles tire and your sight picture degrade to a point that you no longer feel strong. Adopt discipline in your shooting routine; refuse to shoot when it doesn't feel right, and you'll achieve better results.

Archery is a mental game, and the only way to stay on top is to keep things more repeatable. Try these four steps for improving your shooting skills. They've made a huge difference in my target shooting and bowhunting results, and I'm certain they'll do the same for you. **BH**



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TRADITIONAL WAY

FRED EICHLER | TRADITIONAL EDITOR

THIS YOUNG SPIKE Coues deer was my saving grace last fall, as he ended the unlucky streak I'd been having to that point.



MAGIC 8 BALL

GOOD LUCK. BAD LUCK. WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE, SO LONG AS YOU'RE BOWHUNTING?

I HAVE BEEN PRONE to having good luck while hunting. It's a thing, and my buddies often tease me about it. My favorite was when a friend said in an exasperated voice, "I swear, you could shoot an arrow in the air and it would land on a critter!"

Even the late, great Editor of this magazine, my dear friend Dwight Schuh, would often say, "Geez, Fred, you're just so lucky." He would preface it by saying something like, "I know you hunt hard, but you know what I mean."

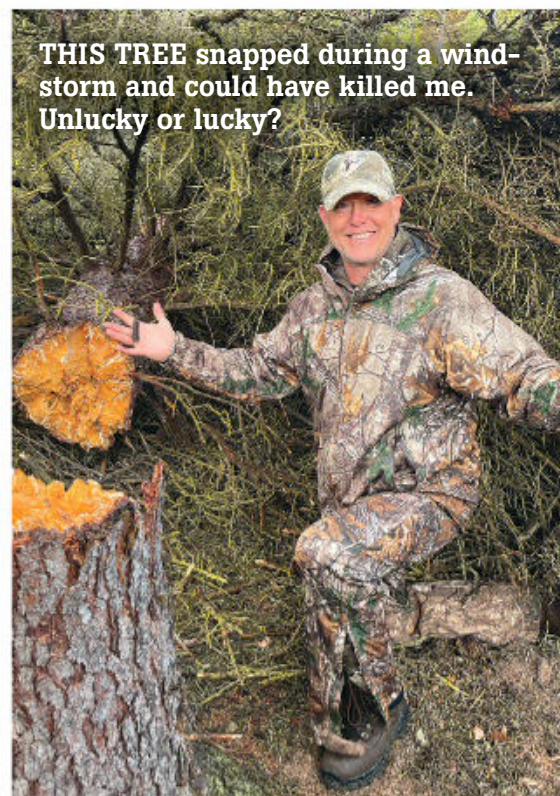
Don't misunderstand me, I have had plenty of misadventures and missed shots, and I've gone home empty-handed plenty of times. But, in general, when it comes to hunting, I get lucky a lot — truth be told, I've gotten kind of used to it. I would oftentimes even choose where to go hunting, or even my stand locations, based on my "Magic 8 Ball." That is, until this past fall.

My season started with a brown bear

hunt up in Alaska, where I not only didn't get a bear... I didn't even see one! But while on that hunt, I did get to experience a 6.1 earthquake that sent huge boulders tumbling down the mountains and scared me to death. I also had a bush plane that had a rough landing and ripped a cable out of the tail!

As if that weren't enough misadventure for one hunt, during that same week a really bad wind and rainstorm blew up out of nowhere, and my guide, Don, and I hustled for shelter as fast as we could. I tried to get under one big spruce, but the branches at the base of the tree were too thick, so I ducked under the one right next to it as the rain hit hard and

THIS TREE snapped during a windstorm and could have killed me. Unlucky or lucky?



the wind threw microbursts at the ridge. Minutes later, I heard a loud crack, and the tree I had originally tried to get under, which was only a few feet away from my current position, suddenly fell over with a loud boom.

I was fine, and I was fortunate the tree didn't fall in my direction, but it still really spooked Don and me. I know I should look at all three of those incidents as lucky, because all could have been worse, but I was still a little rattled. What happened to the bluebird days and the lucky hunts I was used to?

My next hunt was for Columbia black-tails in California. My buddy had been seeing a lot of deer, and the weather was hot, so I decided to sweat it out in a Muddy blind by a waterhole. Four days and 40-plus hours later, I'd still not seen a buck.

My son, Seth, who was with me on the hunt and taking a bathroom break at the time, spotted a buck on a ridge a short distance away. We made an amazing stalk and got within 20 yards. I couldn't tell if the buck was for sure the same 2x2 (legal minimum) my son had seen, and from the angle of the deer's head, I could see his antlers but couldn't see the forks. Slowly raising my binoculars, I eventually caught a glimpse of the fork it need-



EVEN MY Magic 8 Ball was letting me down last fall!

ed to have. I traded my binoculars for my recurve, and just as I started to draw, the wind changed, and my buck was gone. So, no Columbia blacktail meat for me.

Next up was antelope season in my home state of Colorado. Hard rains that made for a super-wet spring and summer had left lush grass and standing water everywhere, which had the antelope spread out and left me scratching my head. Since I usually take an antelope every year, and since my family loves antelope meat, I decided to head afield in an attempt to fill our freezer. Not only was it the worst first week of antelope season

for my clients that I can remember in 29 years of guiding, I didn't have one in rifle range — much less bow range. My Magic 8 Ball even started letting me down by giving me nothing but negative answers.

I then left Colorado for a public-land Coues deer hunt in Arizona. A friend of mine had been getting lots of deer on camera, and I was ready to wait out a desert whitetail in the Millennium stand I'd brought. On Day Four, the last day of my hunt, after having spent over 13 hours per day each of the previous three, a young spike showed up. I wasted no time in grabbing my recurve and promptly ended my unlucky streak.

I'm not complaining. I loved every unsuccessful hunt, and I had amazing experiences on each one. I enjoyed the hunting, the sunrises and the scenery, and most importantly the stories and laughs shared in camp with friends and loved ones. But I'd be lying to you if I said I didn't miss the luck I'd become so accustomed to, and I'll welcome it back with open arms sooner rather than later.

P.S. — If you happen to see my mojo, please send it back. I'll pay C.O.D. **BH**

For more information, visit fredeichler.com, and don't miss Fred's new show, "Everything Eichler," every Sunday at 12:30 p.m. on Sportsman Channel.

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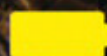
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BRIAN K. STRICKLAND | EQUIPMENT EDITOR



MY LATE-SEASON buck may not have happened had I not been properly prepared to deal with the cold and snow.

LAST STAND

COLD-WEATHER GEAR FOR THE BITTER END.

TIME AND THE ELEMENTS always seem to be factors in a late-season hunt, and when I climbed into that western Oklahoma blind several seasons ago, both were burdens weighing heavily on my mind.

It had been a long season, and I couldn't shake the late-November miss I'd experienced a few weeks earlier from this very blind. The buck first appeared at just under 40 yards, and when the string slipped from my release just 10 steps later, I watched helplessly as my arrow clipped the top of the buck's back. It was the last day of that scheduled hunt, and with a late-season storm now barreling in with just one day left in the season, I needed redemption.

Winter wheat is always a good draw with late-season snow, and like clockwork, does were the first to appear. As the evening ticked by, the number of does

appearing in the field increased, and the more I watched them feeding in my direction, the more I wanted one of them carrying my either-sex tag. With the sun setting and a doe in range, I drew, anchored, and was about to touch the release when she turned her head and stared at something that was still unseen to me.

Hoping for a buck, I paused, and as if the deer gods were looking my way, a handsome eight-point buck with a mahogany-colored rack trotted into view. Needless to say, my focus quickly changed. In an instant, a well-placed arrow was released, and moments later my redemption buck slid to the ground.

Late-season hunts are generally always tough. If the elements don't get you, the spooky game will. Virtually everything has to tilt in your favor if you expect to release an arrow at fur and bone, and having the right equipment so you can grind it out to the bitter end, can certainly help.

Obviously, having the right duds as you fight the elements is your first line of defense, and the new [1] **Fortress Parka and Bib** (\$320 each) from **ScentLok** should certainly make the short list. As you'd expect, they feature ScentLok's legendary scent-controlling Carbon Alloy technology to keep your quarry's nose in check, and with a body mapping system that strategically places 100, 133, and 200-gram PrimaLoft Silver insulation in specific locations, cold won't be a factor in your decision to head home early. Add in the garments' wind and waterproof abilities, and you'll have no excuses for not hunting longer. The Fortress series is available in Realtree, Mossy Oak, and True Timber camo patterns.

Browning's new [2] **Closing Day Late Season Parka** (\$167) and **Bib** (\$149) system is worth a close look, especially for discriminating bowhunters on a budget. Its four-layer design offers a Realtree finish in a quiet, windproof/water-resistant knit outer shell that's backed with 100-gram PrimaLoft Black insulation with a dense, high-pile lining. The Parka has an articulated hood and four deep pockets, while the Bibs offer a full-crotch gusset, stretch side panels, and two cargo pockets.

Keeping the cold air out and warm air in is **Huntworth's** new [3] **Fairbanks Jacket and Bibs** (\$180 each). Built for extreme elements, both feature a quiet, brushed-tricot fabric outer shell that is bonded to a waterproof membrane with sealed seams. The poly-fill insulation is backed with a thick Sherpa-fleece lining that's equipped with Microban antimicrobial protection to minimize your presence when game slips downwind.

When weight matters, as well as warmth and packability, you can always count on **KUIU**. Truly arctic-blast worthy, their new [4] **Super Down Burner**



Parka (\$800) is built with a durable 30D Ripstop Nylon Stunner Stretch shell that's backed with a Dermizax membrane and fully taped seams to make it completely wind and waterproof. It has enough 850+FP Quixdon Insulation to make a sleeping bag, and with its box-baffle de-

sign, cold spots are eliminated. Lastly, it easily stores in the provided stuff sack and features a deep hood, warming pockets, and underarm venting.

Vests are great additions when you need a little extra to keep the chill out, and ASIO Gear's [5] *Core-Warmth Vest*

(\$149) is built just for that. Constructed from an ultra-quiet laminated poly fleece material, it also has a water-repellent DWR finish and a 100% windproof design, making it an ideal layering piece when the temperatures start to dip.

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are the first things to go when it's cold. For the late-season Western hunter, it's hard to beat **Kenetrek's [6] Mountain Extreme 1,000** (\$505). The 1,000-gram Thinsulate Insulation in these boots is just enough to keep the cold at bay without being too bulky. They also feature a 7mm polyurethane midsole to ensure torsional rigidity, and their proprietary K-Talon outsole keeps your feet from slipping out from under you. The 2.8mm-thick leather uppers have a reinforced rubber sole guard for abrasion resistance. Lastly, with the no-seam tongue and breathable Windtex waterproof membrane, wet weather is not an issue.

Beefing the Thinsulate up to 1,400-gram is **Rocky's [7] Arctic Bearclaw** (\$236). Wind and waterproof, as well as breathable, they have an aggressive outsole with Rocky's exclusive 3D welt construction for added longevity. The Air-Port cushion footbed is easy on the feet, while also designed to circulate air to reduce sweat and odor. The full-grain leather and nylon uppers are made to withstand the rigors of a late-season hunt.

A good pair of rubber boots for the late season can be hard to find, but once you slip your feet into **LaCrosse's [8]**



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Aerohead Sport (\$190), you'll appreciate their effectiveness. Combining 7mm Neoprene insulation with a polyurethane AeroForm Shell — the same material used to insulate your freezer — these waterproof boots wrap your feet in heavenly warmth that you'll instantly feel. Designed for optimal fit and flexibility, they also sport abrasion-resistant shinguards for exceptional durability.

Arctic Shield is no stranger to cold-weather comfort, so when you need a little extra to stay in the game, their [9] **Slippaz Boot Covers** (\$55) and **Hand Warmer Muffs** (\$35) are a smart option. Retain technology — an aluminized polypropylene core layering system — captures and returns up to 90% of your body heat, while also reflecting cold air away from your skin. Both have a fleecelined interior and a polyester outer shell.

Another great muff is **Hunter Safety System's [10] Heated Muff Pak** (\$60). Designed with a USB battery-powered heat coil system, you'll feel the warmth with a flip of the switch that will last up to five hours on a single charge. It offers a soft, polar fleece-lined interior with multiple pockets for storing necessary gear within easy reach.

Today's hard-sided blinds have been

a game-changer, regardless of the time of year, but this is especially true during the late season. Virtually foolproof when it comes to eliminating your scent, **Redneck's [11] 5X6 Predator Platinum** (\$2,850) combines four 46"-tall vertical windows with large horizontal windows to provide 360-degree shooting. Foam throughout this fiberglass blind provides both insulation and noise reduction, and with the added EZ-Pull silent windows, whitetails will never know what hit them.

Muddy's [12] Bull Box Blind (\$2,999) also provides both horizontal and vertical windows on all sides and is constructed from four-layer Therma-Tek panel walls with carpeted solid-wood flooring under a heavy-duty molded plastic roof. The EZ window design offers quiet, one-handed operation, and with the included tower it stands over 16' tall, so it's like having the ideal scent-controlling treestand anywhere on your property.

For a more portable blind option as well as the benefits of Realtree EDGE concealment, the **Rhino Blinds [13] Rhino-600** (\$290) is an affordable choice. With its thicker 600D material, it provides protection from cold winds,



as well as rain and snow. It features a 71" center height, 60"x60" base, and three large horizontal silent-slide windows with shoot-through mesh to provide 270 degrees of shooting opportunities.

BOG jumps into the blind arena with the new [14] *Haymaker* (\$460). Ideal for those hunts over a high-energy food source, the Haymaker is constructed from a UV-protected, heavy 600D Field-Khaki fabric that is wrapped around a steel frame, so it's built to withstand the blustery late season. You'll appreciate the silent Stealthtrac window system on all four sides and the user-friendly trapdoor on top allows you to use it as a waterfowl blind when whitetail season ends.

And whether coffee, tea, or hot cocoa, a warm drink always hits the spot. YETI's [15] *18 oz. Rambler with Hot-shot Cap* (\$30) features their proven stainless-steel, no-sweat design that's 100% leakproof, and its sleek design, easily slides into your pack's side pocket.

Wrapped in Mossy Oak's Bottomland pattern, Stanley's [16] *Classic Trigger Action Mug* (\$25) has a double-walled, vacuum-insulation, stainless-steel design that keeps drinks warm for up to seven hours and features a no-spills lid. **BH**



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DR. DAVE SAMUEL | CONSERVATION EDITOR



INTERESTING ISSUES

THERE'S A LOT GOING ON — SOME GOOD, SOME BAD.

WHO WOULD have thought that climate change would be part of the reason Arizona put a ban on trail cameras effective January 1, 2022?

Hunters love trail cameras, and I do, too. However, there are certain situations, not found everywhere, where trail cameras reduce “fair chase,” cause hunter conflicts, and may impact wildlife movements. With an extended, record-breaking drought, ponds in Arizona have become vitally important hubs for wildlife coming for water. With that much big game coming to limited water, it's only natural that those water sources

would also be hubs for trail cameras placed by hunters. Are there that many hunters putting cameras on water? In the Fall 2021 issue of “Fair Chase” magazine, there is a photo of one side of a water catchment in Arizona with at least 11 trail cameras posted. My guess is, there were more than 50 cameras on that water catchment.

During a public comment meeting of the Arizona Game and Fish Com-

mission, an overflow crowd of residents attended. Forty-nine addressed the commission, with 31 against abolishing cameras and 18 in favor. The commissioners later voted 5-0 for the ban, noting increased traffic by those checking cameras before and after hunting season, but also while others hunted at the same waterhole. Conflicts arose. Livestock operators complained that the visits to check cameras affected their cattle using the water. Fish and Game noted that increased human traffic checking cameras affected wildlife attempting to water at human-constructed tanks, catchment systems, or waterholes. This has been especially true during very dry periods, which have skyrocketed in recent years. Yes, climate change affects trail camera use in some parts of the country.

Some hunting outfitters feel the ban impacts their hunters who hunt near the water. Other outfitters believe there are just too many cameras being used. As much as hunters love to use trail cameras, apparently in certain places camera use can be too much of a good thing. This isn't happening only in Arizona, but also in other Western states such as Nevada and Utah.

Utah is in the middle of the debate to ban cameras during the hunting season. Nevada has already made changes. In Nevada, you can't use trail cameras on private land from August 1 to December 31 without the landowner's permission. Nor can you place trail cameras on public land during that same time period. If the camera transmits images or video, then they are banned from July 1 to December 31. In addition, all cameras are banned if they're placed in such a manner as to alter wildlife behavior.

CLIMATE CHANGE Affecting Woodland Caribou

Labrador is not seeing habitat loss from development like what's happening in other parts of Canada, but climate change is causing caribou numbers to decline. A new 20-year study shows

that climate change has impacted adult female survival for woodland caribou. Researchers looked at snowfall, insect harassment, and growing season length while following 257 radio-collared caribou. Warmer weather leads to a cold rain rather than snow in late fall. The icy layer from the rain is quickly buried by snow, creating a hard layer that prevents caribou from breaking through to access vegetation they normally feed on.

Wolves are also part of the problem. The George River Herd has migrated farther north, and in one population, the winter ranges of the Labrador caribou overlaps with the George River Herd. It's believed that this draws wolves to that area where they are taking the Labrador animals. If winter temperatures continue to warm, further caribou decline is expected.

CWD Driving Evolution In Mule Deer

Finally, a bit of good news about CWD. University of Wyoming researchers found that a single genetic mutation linked to slower CWD progression has become more common over time. Deer with the "slow" mutation were less likely to test positive for CWD. Additionally,

the "slow" allele (a form of the gene that arises via mutation) is more common in herds that have been exposed to CWD longer.

Over the past 20 years, the frequency of the "slow" allele has increased more in herds with a higher CWD prevalence (the number of cases present at a certain time). What this means is that when a deer with the "slow" allele gets CWD, the progression of the disease takes longer in that deer. That's because deer with that allele take longer to accumulate detectable levels of CWD.

Apparently, does with detectable levels of CWD can pass the disease on to their fawns. Thus, if they have the "slow" gene, they may have a few more years of reproduction or non-CWD fawns than does without the gene. That means that they can produce more young without CWD. The researchers noted that, "If these deer have more opportunities to reproduce before dying of CWD, and if the 'slow' allele is becoming more common, then this could alter our expectations about future population declines caused by CWD." A lot more data is needed, but it's an interesting occurrence that may lead to less CWD mortality in a herd.

NJ BLACK BEAR Hunt Stopped In 2021

Black bear management continues to be a political football game in New Jersey. Governor Murphy and the New Jersey Fish and Game Council are to blame. In New Jersey, by law you cannot have a bear season unless the Commissioner of the New Jersey Environmental Protection Department has approved the state's Comprehensive Black Bear Management Policy. That policy has expired, and a new one has yet to be approved.

Unfortunately, at press time Governor Murphy remains solidly opposed to bear hunting, and the Commissioner of the NJ Environmental Protection Department is appointed by the Governor, so he won't sign a new management plan. This means the game agency likely won't be able to manage bears until there's a change in administration.

Will hunters pursue NJ bears next hunting season? We don't know, but we do know that bear problems are shooting up — as are citizen complaints. It's a common story in New Jersey. **BH**

If you have questions about topics covered in this column or on any wildlife-management issues or wildlife species, contact Dr. Dave at drdave4@comcast.net.

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IT'S NEVER TOO LATE!

IF YOU CAN STAND THE COLD, AND IF YOU HAVE THE RIGHT FOOD SOURCES NEARBY, YOU CAN FIND LATE-SEASON SUCCESS.

LET ME LEAD OFF THIS ARTICLE by saying it's my honest opinion that trying to arrow a mature buck during late archery season is one of the toughest tasks facing us whitetail bowhunters. And while I know that arrowing a mature buck during the mid-fall transition period can be difficult, it pales in comparison to accomplishing the same feat during late season.

To begin with, we all know that transition-period buck behavior doesn't last long and will soon be followed by pre-rut and rut behavior. But late-season buck behavior drags on for many weeks, oftentimes right up until the end of archery season. And during this time, mature bucks can become super-reclusive and display hypersensitive behavior toward any type of human pressure.

Here's another reason why I feel the post-rut period can be one of the toughest times in which to try to kill a mature buck. First of all, mature bucks — and whitetail deer in general — have been subjected to a tremendous amount of hunting pressure for the previous several months. Second, mature bucks are in very definite post-rut patterns at this time of year. What this means is that they aren't being distracted in the least by any sense of the breeding urge.

POST-RUT, Now What?

While having to deal with definite post-rut conditions can be a tough deal in itself for late-season bowhunters, harsh weather conditions also can prove to be a major stumbling block. Take it from someone who grew up and still lives in northern Wisconsin: There's nothing that quite compares to bowhunting in subzero temperatures and knee-deep snow. And those are the exact types of conditions bowhunters in the Upper Midwest can often expect during the late archery season.

BY GREG MILLER

VIC SCHENDEL IMAGE

IT'S NEVER TOO LATE!

A past late-season bowhunt in North Dakota perfectly illustrates how severe the weather can be at this time of year. During the four days I was there, daytime temps just barely rose above zero. Now, I'm talking here about daytime temps right around zero, and nighttime temps well below zero. (Honestly, it even hit -35 degrees a couple nights while we were there!)

About the only good thing I can say about extremely cold weather like this is that it often stimulates the feeding urge in whitetails. And that was the case with my North Dakota experience. Thanks to some valuable intel provided by our mutual friend, Brody Moreland, my longtime wingman and videographer Matt Tande and I decided to check out a picked cornfield that was playing host to a tremendous amount of feeding activity. After surveying the situation during a midday scouting trip, we decided to pop up a portable ground blind along a brushy fenceline that bordered the field's eastern edge.

We climbed into the blind a good two hours before dark and began seeing deer almost immediately. In fact, I remember saying something to Matt along the lines of, "Well, maybe we'll have a quick hunt." But that's not quite how things worked out.

Truth is, we sat and suffered in that extreme cold until there was only 15 minutes of legal shooting time remaining. That's when the buck we were looking for finally made an appearance. Earlier that day, Brody had showed us trail-camera photos of a buck that he really wanted us to take. "He's an eight-pointer that I've pretty much decided is a management deer," Brody said. "So, I'd really appreciate it if you'd shoot him, if you get the chance."

As it turned out, it didn't take the buck long to feed within bow range of our blind. However, a bunch of other deer were also feeding directly in front of us. So, it became a game of trying to figure out when I'd be able to draw my bow without spooking any of them. Thankfully, I was able to accomplish that task, and I promptly sent a broadhead-tipped missile through the eight-pointer's vitals.

My North Dakota bowhunt perfectly illustrates the key ingredient to putting together an effective game plan for taking late-season whitetails. And that ingredient is food. Put simply, find the food and you'll find the deer. The great thing about this is that, especially in Northern areas, preferred deer foods often can be few and far between come late season.

A CASE In Point

Some years back, my son Jake and I co-leased a tract of land in southern Kansas. Jake ended up taking a great buck on that property during a November rut hunt. But because of a very hectic fall schedule, I was forced to delay my trip to our Kansas property until the month of December. Although I knew I'd definitely be dealing with post-rut conditions, I was confident I'd eventually be able to figure things out. But that's not quite how the hunt went.

I'd pretty much spun my wheels for four days and had already checked out of my hotel room to head home, when I remembered that I'd put up a scouting camera in a grove of mature oaks upon my arrival at our property. After retrieving the camera, I pulled the memory card to check what was on it. Imagine my surprise to find that in recent days a heavy horned eight-point buck had walked in front of the camera several times in broad daylight.

I immediately returned to the spot where I'd captured the photos and quietly hung a treestand. I then drove to town,



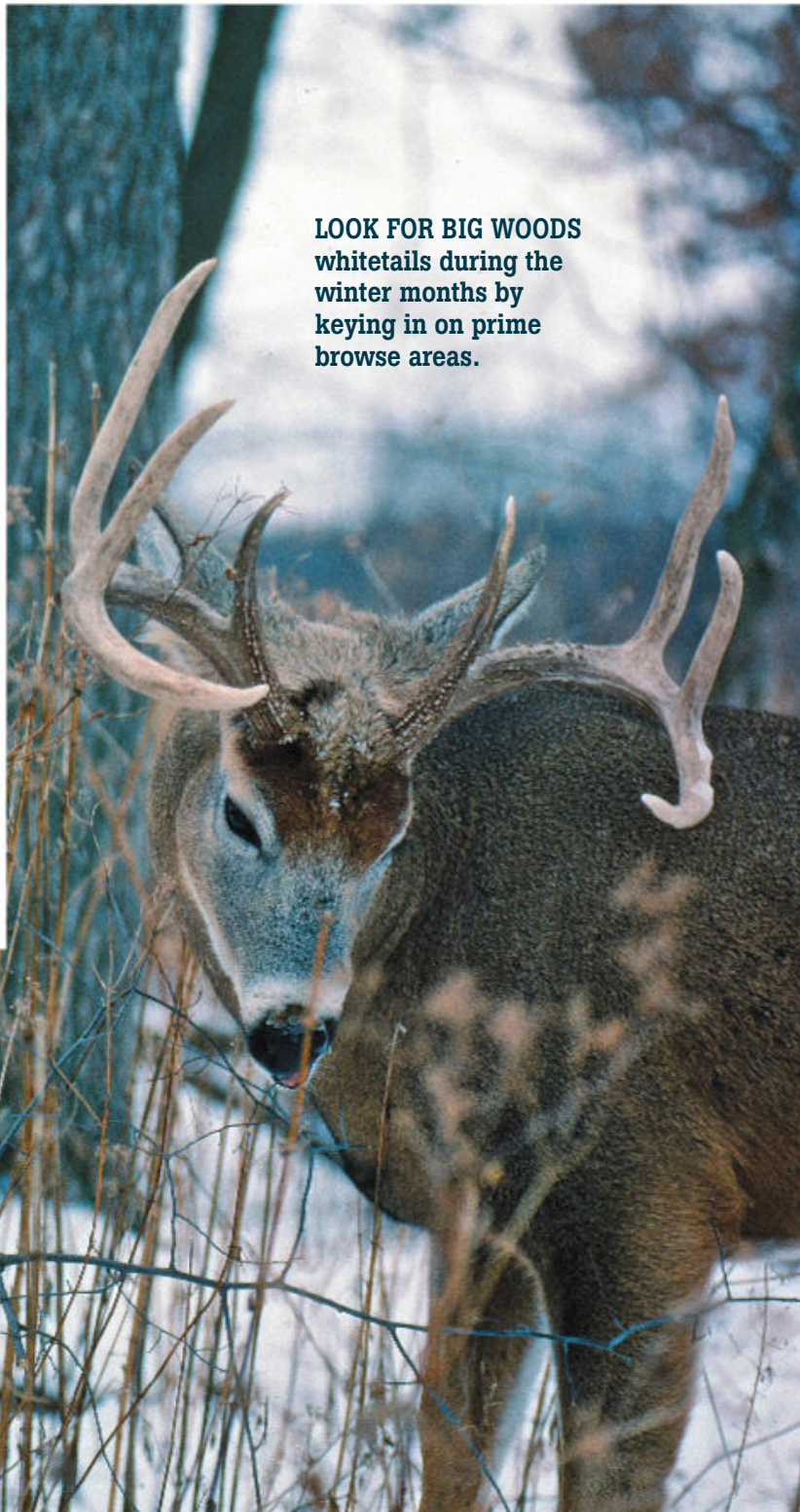
I KILLED this North Dakota whitetail a few years back during a December bowhunt. The temperature at the time was a "brisk" -20 degrees.



THIS IS HOW mature whitetail bucks spend a lot of their time during the post-rut — resting and relaxing.



LOOK FOR BIG WOODS
whitetails during the
winter months by
keying in on prime
browse areas.



I ARROWED this Kansas eight-point during a December hunt. The buck was frequenting a stand of mature oaks in search of acorns.

checked back into the hotel where I'd been staying, took a quick shower, and headed out to my stand site. A couple hours later, the eight-point showed up and eventually walked to within 15 yards. One well-placed arrow ended that Kansas bowhunt.

Interestingly, while I had noticed on the camera photos that the buck seemed to be quite skinny, I had no idea just how emaciated he was. His neck was not swollen in the least, and you could clearly see his ribs protruding through his hide. It was obvious that the eight-pointer had been a very active participant in the recently completed rut and was attempting to recover some of the energy he had expended in previous weeks.

FOOD Is Key

Like me, my buddy Matt Tande loves chasing late-season whitetails in our home state. Matt is fortunate in that he was born and raised in famed Buffalo County, Wisconsin, which has a reputation for producing numerous trophy whitetails every season.

Anyway, Matt had been chasing several big bucks that were focusing their feeding attentions on one of the few standing cornfields in the area. With daytime temperatures hovering in the single digits, the bucks were making their way to the corn well before last light. After surveying the situation, Matt decided to place his portable treestand along a runway that showed the most promise.

Although he saw plenty of deer throughout his first hunt, Matt didn't manage to put his eyes on any of the bigger bucks he knew were frequenting the cornfield. "But I decided to just keep hunting the spot as long as the wind was right," he told me. "I figured that it was just a matter of time before one of the bigger bucks would make an appearance."

Matt's thought process that it was just a matter of time eventually proved to be spot-on. "If memory serves me right, I was on my fifth or sixth hunt near the cornfield before a good buck finally showed up," he recalled. "It was interesting, too, because the 10-point definitely had only one thing on his mind. And that was to enter the cornfield as quickly as possible to feed. Considering the stretch of brutally cold weather we'd been experiencing, I can totally understand why he was in such a hurry." In any event, Matt let the big whitetail close the distance to 20 yards before taking his shot. The buck made it less than 150 yards before crashing to the ground.

A Late-Season GIANT

Without a doubt, my greatest late-season archery achievement involves a giant buck I arrowed in my home state of Wisconsin way back in December of 1990. My hunt for that buck perfectly illustrates the importance of first pinpointing primary deer feeding areas and then narrowing down your options for the perfect stand location.

Now, you must remember that my hunt for the nontypical took place well before scouting cameras came onto the scene, which means I was trying to ambush the buck purely through looking at and attempting to interpret sign. And after hunting him for a couple seasons, I finally decided that a stand I'd placed in a large, triple-trunked oak located along a brushy fenceline would provide me with my best opportunity for taking the trophy deer.

The field that lay straight out in front of my treestand had been planted in alfalfa just a couple years earlier. What's more, the landowner had not taken a third cut from the field that year, which meant it was still quite tall and lush.

IT'S NEVER TOO LATE!

Also, even though it was the second week of December, there was very little snow on the ground. So, the resident whitetails had easy access to the alfalfa. A brief scouting trip to my stand site a couple days earlier had shown that the deer were definitely taking advantage of the situation. Now, I just had to wait for favorable weather conditions to put my plan into action.

As it turned out, I was listening to a weather report early on the afternoon of December 13 and happened to hear that the wind would be blowing lightly from the northwest until sundown. Since a northwest wind was perfect for hunting from my brushline treestand, I immediately made plans to be in that stand for an evening hunt.

The sun was just about to slip below the western skyline when I heard something walking along a small, wooded bluff off to my left. Seconds later, a half-dozen antlerless deer walked out into the alfalfa field and immediately started feeding. Five minutes later, the six whitetails had fed their way to within 20 yards of my stand. That's when I heard another deer approaching from the wooded bluff. I slowly turned my head to look and was amazed to see a giant buck walking toward the group of antlerless deer.

The big whitetail walked to a mere 15 yards before stopping to paw at some lush alfalfa beneath the snow. Unfortunately, he was almost directly head-on to my position at that point, so

initially it was a no-shoot situation. But that situation quickly changed when the buck suddenly took a few steps to his right, which then put him almost perfectly broadside.

Thankfully, I was already at full draw. Seconds later, I watched my arrow disappear tight behind the old deer's near-side shoulder. I then had the pleasure of watching him plow into the snow after running just a short distance across the field. The 17-pointer's antlers have a gross nontypical score of 202⁵/₈, and he still ranks as my best-ever archery whitetail.

SUMMING It Up

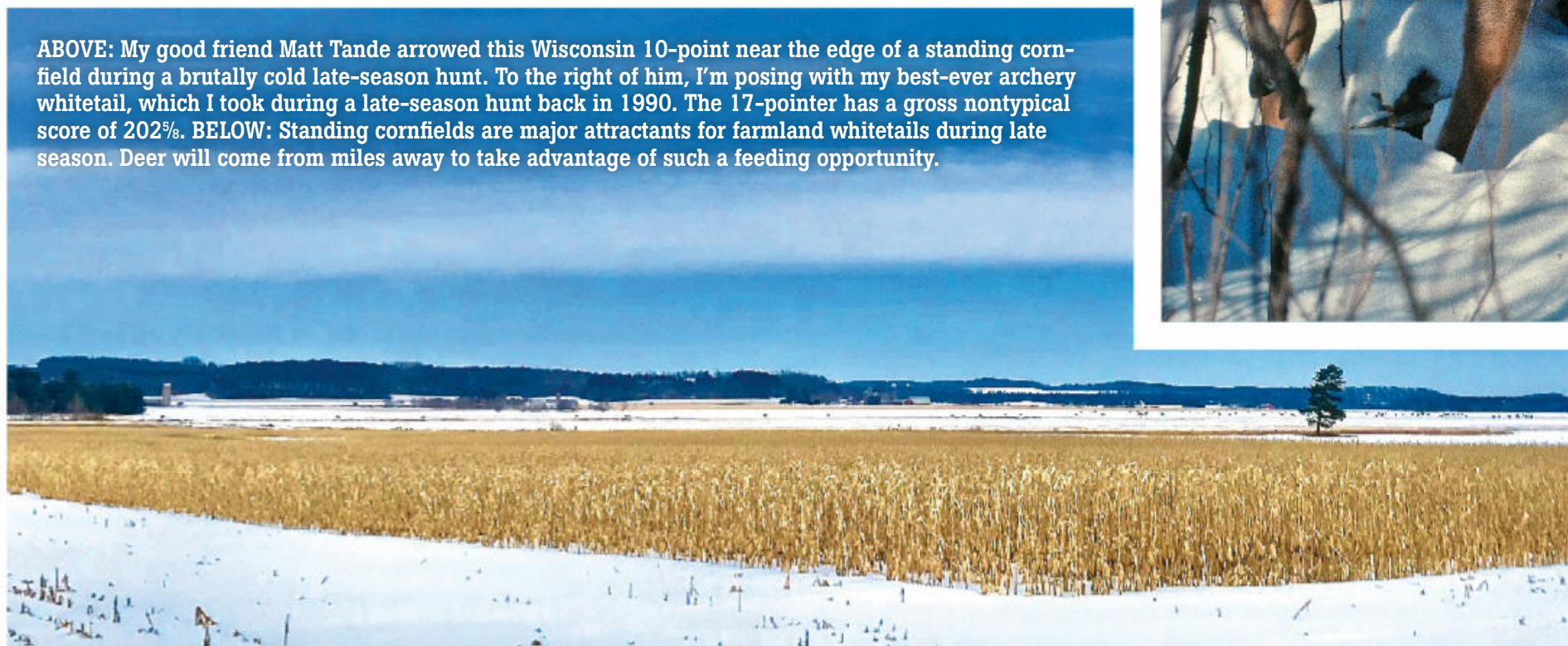
As I've pointed out in this article, there are a number of food sources that Upper Midwestern whitetails will key in on during late season. Depending upon the area and severity of the weather (especially snow depth); things like corn, soybeans, alfalfa, winter wheat, and acorns all can be major whitetail attractants once severe winter weather rolls in.

In far Northern zones (north of what I call the "agricultural zone"), whitetails will head for major browse areas when winter weather turns nasty. Recently logged areas are always a major winter-whitetail attractant, as are regrowth areas in the three to five-year-old stage. Truth is, the vast majority of the shed antlers I've found in my home state of Wisconsin were picked up in such areas.

Also, as I've mentioned, there are other weather condi-



ABOVE: My good friend Matt Tande arrowed this Wisconsin 10-point near the edge of a standing cornfield during a brutally cold late-season hunt. To the right of him, I'm posing with my best-ever archery whitetail, which I took during a late-season hunt back in 1990. The 17-pointer has a gross nontypical score of 202⁵/₈. **BELOW:** Standing cornfields are major attractants for farmland whitetails during late season. Deer will come from miles away to take advantage of such a feeding opportunity.



tions that can play a huge role in dictating how much daylight feeding activity late-season bowhunters can expect to see. Approaching winter storm fronts, a sudden dip in temperatures, or maybe even a rise in temps after a stretch of brutally cold weather, can induce whitetails to get more active.

But when it comes right down to it, the true key to realizing success during late archery season boils down to getting out there and getting after 'em! As my brother Jeff so perfectly put it many years ago, "I know darn well that we don't stand much chance of arrowing a late-season buck, even if we hunt every day, but we stand zero chance of arrowing one if we aren't out there trying!"

So, when it comes to scoring on a big whitetail during late archery season, it really is just a matter of being out there. However, it's also wise to be on the lookout for the approach of bad weather, or a current stretch of bad weather that's about to end.

It's been my experience that here in the Upper Midwest, there is definitely such a thing as too cold and/or too much snow. And when it comes to figuring out how much snow is too much, or how cold is too cold...well, I guess that's where common sense comes into play. **BH**

The author is a veteran outdoor writer who has written several books and countless articles on whitetail hunting. He lives in Bloomer, Wisconsin.



ONE OF THE GREAT things about having a snow cover is that it's very easy to figure out exactly where preferred deer travel routes are located.



M I S S I O N

MUSKOX



PHOTO BY DONALDMJONES.COM

THERE'S ONE THING CERTAIN ABOUT A BOWHUNT FOR MUSKOX – IT WILL NOT LACK FOR ADVENTURE.

BY FRANK NOSKA, CONTRIBUTOR

After a mostly sleepless night, due to the excitement and reality of bowhunting muskox again, morning finally came. As I rose and prepped for the day in a warm but unfamiliar house in a remote Alaskan village, I could hardly wait to get out on the snow-covered tundra and start searching for a big bull muskox.

I peeked out the bedroom window as the sky grew lighter. It appeared to be clear, indicating a beautiful, sunny day. Making sure my bow, hunting gear, and warm clothes were organized, I listened as others in the house slowly arose and readied for the day. After living in Alaska for 20 years, I have learned that nothing happens too quickly in these remote places. My local hunting friend, Jim, and I were enjoying some coffee and breakfast, when he said something that totally surprised me: “I think it is going to be too cold for hunting muskox today.”

Hearing that, my experience from past bowhunting excursions came into play. I’ve learned there are some important components, besides your hunting gear, that must be part of your game on hunts such as this. These include being understanding, flexible, and adaptable.

“You live here full-time. How could it be too cold for you?” I said to Jim. “You

are better acclimated to this extreme weather than anyone I know.”

We both had a good laugh about this, but knowing Jim for as long as I have, I could also tell he was serious about wanting to wait until the next day, when the forecast was for a “warm up” to about zero degrees; a considerable difference from the current -30 degrees Fahrenheit. So, I deferred to my friend’s experience and knowledge and accepted his decision to not go hunting that day.

Two of the many things that I love about hunting various species of big-game animals across North America are experiencing the different types of environments, and the different cultures. Muskox hunting is the epitome of this concept. Muskox inhabit some of the harshest environments North America has to offer. The subzero temperatures, wind, and snow are extreme. And a



A TYPICAL ALASKA ARCTIC village.

muskox hunt will take you to some of the most remote, wild places on the planet.

It is in these faraway places that you get to experience different and unique native cultures and traditions. I have eaten many native foods, fished with the locals through the ice, and even went to ball games at their small schools. This aspect of muskox hunting adds to the adventure and has been rewarding to me.

I’ve also found it interesting to learn how these indigenous people have survived and flourished in such a harsh and unforgiving environment. It doesn’t take long to realize much can be learned from the elders, locals, and guides in these villages. In several of these villages, snow machines are the only method of travel this time of year — no cars or trucks. Their knowledge and ingenuity are readily apparent. For example, the simple task of connecting a sled to a snow machine has to be done a specific way or it will fail and break down on the long, rough rides. It never ceases to amaze me how the locals are able to start, operate, and repair these vital modes of transport under the coldest and most brutal conditions.

Over the years, I have taken eight of these woolly, prehistoric-looking creatures with my bow, which has led to some wild experiences. On my very first muskox hunt, one of our snow machines quit

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running, a long way from the village. This is a fairly common occurrence, and one reason I try to have at least two other snow machines, besides the one I am driving, go out with us on the hunt. And it's also why I strive to find good snow machines that are in decent shape mechanically.

On my very first muskox hunt, our snow machine quit running. The locals immediately went to task, while I watched in amazement as they dismantled the machine in a raging snowstorm and subzero temps. Nuts, bolts, and various pieces of snow machine were all over the snow and getting covered up by drifting snow. The "head mechanic" wasn't even wearing gloves, for crying out loud!

If I were a betting man, I would have bet the farm there was no way they were going to get that snow machine running. I was wrong. Three of the local helpers with us walked to their own snow machines and brought back an assortment of parts collected from other snow machines, of various brands.

Listening to them talk and discuss the problem, it quickly became obvious they knew what they were doing. "We can file this Polaris part down a little here, and it will fit the Ski-Doo. Then we can use these extra-long bolts, off of that part, to make this Arctic Cat part work on the Ski-Doo, just to get us back home," they said.

Watching them work and dismantle that broken snow machine, then reassemble it again, made me feel slightly unworthy of being in their company. When all was said and done, they pulled the starter rope, the machine fired up, and we continued on with our hunt. I could only smile and shake my head in complete bewilderment.

The physical act of traveling to a muskox destination is an adventure in and of itself. Even living in Alaska, as I do, the logistics, packing, planning, and traveling to hunt muskox is a major undertaking. As with most successful bowhunts, the success of the hunt is often directly proportional to the amount of preparation and planning. And with this type of extreme-weather hunt, the preparation is even more important. It could mean the difference between life and death in these unforgiving conditions, should something go wrong. Obviously, only the best warm clothing, boots, gloves, facemasks, goggles, etc., should be taken. The following are three must-have pieces of checked luggage I take on all my muskox hunts.

SKB hard bow case

Along with my bow and arrows, I pack extra clothes, gloves, facemasks, etc. in this case. It's usually a very rough ride on the sled for hours or even days, before you find the muskox. On several hunts, I know my bow would not have survived the beating had it not been in a padded, hard case. Also, I keep my arrows in a protective tube inside the case, and I never have the broadheads installed on the arrows. When a muskox is located, there is plenty of time to put the broadheads on your arrows, and then put the arrows in your quiver. Having broadheads on your arrows, in your bow case, bouncing around for hours or days, is a recipe for disaster.

Rubbermaid 44-gallon trashcan

This large container is perfect for housing bulky clothes, boots, and other gear for airline travel to your hunting destination. If you're successful, a life-sized

A FEW OTHER MUSKOX MUST-HAVES:

- Several heavy duty garbage bags and dry/duffle bags (for displaced gear, clothes, and meat)
- Duct tape/packing tape
- Two plastic tarps
- Ropes
- Warm sleeping bag, pad, and a small tent — in case you don't make it back to camp
- Satellite phone
- InReach device with the same local contact information

muskox skin will fit perfectly inside the can for your return flight home.

A 30-gallon Sterilite tote

The 30-gallon Sterilite tote, with a smaller Sterilite tote nestled inside of it, is used to contain all of the other gear you'll need on your hunt. A muskox skull and horns will fit nicely inside the tote for your return flight home.

On one of my hunts, I had been stalking a bull for the better part of the day. Each time I thought I was just about to get within bow range, the bull would run and put several hundred yards between us again. This cat-and-mouse game continued for some time, until the bull finally got in a good position for a stalk, and I was able to close the distance. In the strong wind, I crept closer and closer, all the while thinking, *This might happen*.

The bull had known I was there for some time, but by going slow, and taking my time, I eventually maneuvered into bow range. I must have crossed some kind of invisible line with the bull, because all at once, he whirled around to face me. Then he charged me, and there was nothing for me to hide behind! All I could do was quickly step aside at the last moment and let the bull run right past me. Instead of being on a muskox hunt, I now felt more like I was in a Mexican bullfight, or I should say, a muskox bullfight!

Once the bull blew past me, he continued to run away, and I did not have to do the bullfight shuffle again. My friend, Nick Muche, who was watching me from a distance, was able to film the ordeal. Nick ended up shooting that particular bull later in the day.

Muskox are made for bowhunting. Once a target bull is located, the real fun begins. Sometimes, it is easier to get within bow range than other times. But with a little bit of maneuvering, a bowhunter can usually work into a com-



BRIT FREEL, MYSELF, and Nick Muche all were successful on this 2016 muskox hunt. The bull that Nick is holding is the one that charged me and made me do the "Muskox Bullfight" dodging maneuver.



AFTER I HARVESTED my muskox, I got to go ice fishing with the local people on a cold, but beautiful sunny day.

fortable bow range. I used to wear white clothing overtop my warm clothing, thinking it would camouflage me in the snowy environment. After not seeing any noticeable advantage to doing this, I now just wear the appropriate clothing to keep me warm — no matter what color it is.

It is virtually impossible to stalk within bow range of a muskox bull without his knowing you are there, due to

the wide-open country they call home. Sometimes they are calm and easy to approach; other times they are nervous and alarm easy.

Stalking slow is one of the keys. Also, I try to stay as low to the ground as possible; oftentimes crawling considerable distances during the stalk. Having been in close proximity to many muskox, I have learned they're less skittish when I stay low. It is a submissive way to approach them, and it has worked better for me than standing up straight and walking. If a muskox starts to portray nervousness, I will stop and lie still, sometimes for as long as 30 minutes. Once the bull settles down, I will then resume my low-and-slow stalk.

A survival characteristic of a herd of muskox is to form a circle when they feel threatened. This creates a small problem for bowhunters, because a good shot opportunity is not often there. It can also be hard to keep your eye on the bull you're after, especially if there are several bulls in the group. Once again, time and patience are paramount. Remain still, **low, and unthreatening, and the muskox**

will eventually relax and start to slowly move around. This creates the window of opportunity a bowhunter needs to get a good, high-percentage shot.

Just planning, gearing up, and traveling to the wild places muskox inhabit is no small undertaking. The things that can happen in a remote, unfamiliar village are limitless. Maintaining a good attitude, being able to adapt to changing circumstances, and being flexible, is just as important on this hunt as taking warm clothing...or having a team of mechanics who deserve their "Man Cards" more than I do. Oh, one more thing. If a local resident says it's too cold to hunt? It's too cold to hunt! **BH**



THIS MUSKOX FROM 2017 allowed me to approach to within bow range because I took my time and stayed low to the ground. Once I got within range, I then waited for the bull I was after to give me a good broadside shot.



IF YOU ARE GOING TO GIVE

MR. BIG

“IT WAS DAY SIX OF MY ‘DEERCATION,’ and this morning I got to the farm and realized I’d forgotten my pack. I hurriedly headed back home to get it, and got back to the farm a bit later than normal. When hunting the bottoms, I only go to my stand at first light (grey light). When hunting anywhere else, I get to my stand 30 minutes before first light. I use my Rambo E-Bike to enter and exit the hunting area, because the deer don’t seem to spook as much from a bike. I then quietly walk to my stand on ‘sneak trails’ that I’d brushed out in the late summer.

My 17-foot ladder stand sits in a wooded funnel between a cornfield and CRP field on the valley floor. It has always been a good intersection of great activity throughout the years. It was the morning of October 31, and the winds were too strong for my liking — around 20 mph. At least I’d have some cover noise. I’d already gotten in about 40 sits prior to this hunt. So far, the buck I had been after, Mr. Big, had shown his face on two other occasions this week. I had only seen him in the flesh one other time in the three prior years.

BY ROLLIE JOHNSON,
AS TOLD BY BRETT SCHMIT



A BUCK A NICKNAME, HE BETTER LIVE UP TO HIS MONIKER.

Around 8 a.m., I could see a doe coming right down my sneak trail. A *good sign*, I thought to myself, as I settled in for the morning hunt. Anticipation, possibility, and optimism filled the air. It was Halloween, which, for me, has always proven to be a good day to be in the woods.

A short while later, Mr. Big suddenly appeared in the CRP field to my left, about 150 yards out. My heartbeat accelerated to maximum overdrive as adrenaline coursed through my veins. He was staring in my direction, and he could tell there was a hot doe nearby. I grunted at him, but he never heard me due to the wind, so I picked up my rattle bag and rattled for several seconds. I normally bring a set of actual antlers for rattling but had forgotten them at home. Thank God I had the rattling bag in my pack, or this story would have never been written. The rattling finally got his attention and he bristled up as he began marching purposefully in my direction.

My breathing grew stronger and faster as Mr. Big kept walking toward me, but he hung up at 75 yards. Then a 140-class nine-point suddenly appeared. This nine-point was closer and gave me a decent 20-yard shot opportunity, but all my attention quickly returned to Mr. Big. I felt in my gut that this was it. My opportunity at Mr. Big after all these years had finally arrived, and I was going to make the most of it."

Brett Schmit is 38 years old and has been bowhunting since 2000. He is a relative of mine, being the brother of my brother-in-law. Brett caught the bowhunting bug from his dad, Tom, and his older brother Tom. Brett's dad died when Brett was just 12 years old. His brother Tom stepped in to help fill that very large father-figure hole and has been a good mentor and encourager to Brett over all these years.

Brett takes the two weeks prior to firearms season off for his "Deercation." He hunts a gorgeous 200-acre farm of primo deer habitat that sits in one of the many beautiful farm valleys that surround the Winona, Minnesota, area. Winona sits directly across the Mississippi River from the famous trophy producing Buffalo County, Wisconsin. It's a mix of ag fields, CRP, and steep, hardwood hillsides. This is big-buck paradise.

Brett is a hardcore whitetail hunter, who takes his hunting seriously and puts in the time and effort needed to be successful. He's recently branched out and scored on turkeys, and a year ago he killed a beautiful 6x6 bull elk in Montana with his bow. He's also arrowed five Pope and Young-caliber bucks.

When Mr. Big first showed up on Brett's trail cameras four years prior to this hunt, he was a 140-class eight-pointer. The following year, he had grown into a bigger 10-point frame, with longer tines and main beams. He increased antler mass in years three and four, and Brett estimated him to be 7½ years old going into the 2020 season.

"The nine-point worked to my downwind side, which worried me because I feared if he spooked, he'd head back the same direction he came from and take Mr. Big with him.

While uneasy over what he sensed wasn't quite right, I was fortunate in that he didn't blow the whole deal, but rather slowly walked away from me in the direction of the creek.

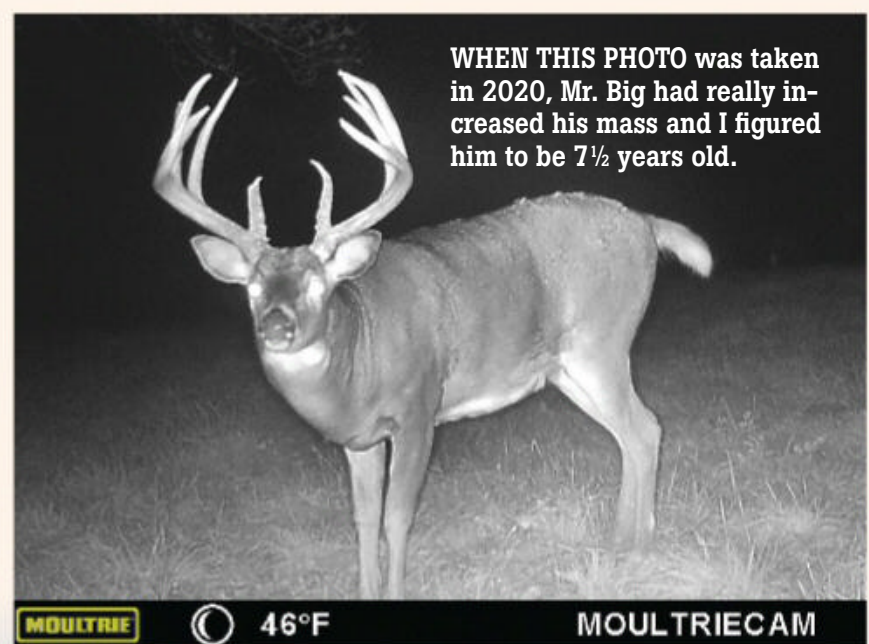
Again, I rattled softly, and Mr. Big bought the subterfuge and trotted in angry and ready to rumble with the unseen intruders. He was coming in fast, and I drew when he was at 50 yards. There were few shooting lanes to be had, and I feared I may not get a clean shot. I mouth-bleated when he was at 25 yards, and he stopped on command in the one small opening I had. I held for a few brief seconds, focused, and then released.

He was quartering-toward me when I shot, but my arrow appeared to land right in the pocket. I had a good visual on the buck for about 100 yards before he disappeared from sight. I felt confident about my shot but was shaking uncontrollably. It all felt so surreal. Did this really just happen? I think I just killed Mr. Big!

I climbed down from my stand, still shaking and trying to regain my composure. My eyes were moist with tears and my voice choked with emotion as I tried to film myself for my video journal. My feelings were all over the place from pure joy and celebration to disbelief and relief for accomplishing a dif-



IN 2019, MR. BIG had grown into a bigger 10-point frame with longer tines and main beams.



WHEN THIS PHOTO was taken in 2020, Mr. Big had really increased his mass and I figured him to be 7½ years old.

THE 200-ACRE FARM where Brett hunts is primo whitetail habitat.



WHEN WE FINALLY RECOVERED Mr. Big, I was in absolute awe over the size of his body and his antlers, which green-scored 193 P&Y-style inches.



difficult four-year journey. I just couldn't wrap my head around the fact that I had just shot this giant!

I quickly checked for first blood and found a couple drops at about the 30-yard mark. I tried calling my friends, but I had no cell service where I was, so I headed back to my truck in hopes of a signal. Once back at my vehicle, I was able to get enough cell service to contact friends and family to let them know what had happened and that I would be needing their help in recovering the buck.

Six hours later, my brother Tom, my nephew and frequent hunting partner Brandon, close friend Ryan Meyers, my niece Anna's fiancé, Mitch, and my niece Emily's boyfriend, Joel, all showed up to help me track Mr. Big. There was a palpable sense of anticipation and excitement in our tracking team, yet I was still a nervous mess!

We were in a marshy CRP area, which is not great for tracking. I didn't get a complete pass-through, so I knew the blood trail wouldn't be great. We cautiously blood-trailed the buck for approximately 400 yards, and having gone that distance, I'd be lying if I said my gut wasn't churning with doubt. Suddenly, I heard Ryan cry out, 'Oh my God!' He then pointed to the ground ahead.

Relief and jubilation poured over me as I knelt over Mr. Big and patted his massive chest. I then grabbed his unbelievably

enormous and heavy rack and proudly lifted it for all to see. I felt a bit of an out-of-body experience, like this was all a big dream, and I had to keep telling myself it was not a dream — it was real! He was even bigger than I had imagined, both in body and antler mass. High-fives, smiles, hugs, and congratulations flew around our tracking team. It was such a privilege to share this moment with my friends and family.

I was filled with a deep sense of gratitude and an enormous feeling of accomplishment. I had done it! I also felt a strong sense of melancholy, knowing my relationship with this buck was now officially over. I can't thank this magnificent whitetail enough for the challenge he presented me over several years." **BH**

Brett grew up in the tiny town of Rollingstone, Minnesota, just a few minutes outside of Winona. He still resides there with his wife, Mandy, and daughters Camryn and Hayden.

Author's Notes: Brett's arrow had taken out both lungs, yet Mr. Big still traveled farther than most deer do, given the shot placement. Brett's buck green-scored 193 inches. His equipment on this hunt included a Bowtech BTX set at 64 pounds, Victory Archery arrows, Rage broadheads, Carter release aid, and Predator Camo.



By Danny Farris, Contributor

Randy Walk

“WHEN A COMPANY IS ABLE TO MARRY COMPETENCE WITH TRUE PASSION,

TAYLER J. LARSEN PHOTO

WALK

I’LL NEVER FORGET my first impression of Randy Walk. I’d seen photos and read plenty about him in archery trade publications, but the first few times I actually ran into him were at the annual Archery Trade Association Shows in the early 2000s. To put it plainly: Randy was intimidating.

I was working as a sales rep for a small trade magazine and was basically an archery industry rookie. My boss was former **Bowhunter** Equipment Editor Bill Krenz, who had a rich career in archery and had previously spent several years as the marketing manager for Hoyt. He told me stories about how in 1985, Hoyt had hired Randy Walk as a part-time bow builder while he was going to school and earning a degree in engineering, and how he went on to climb the company ladder from fledgling engineer to director of engineering, and eventually to president of the company. It was an impressive story.

At those early ATA Trade Shows, I would always see Randy in the background, arms folded and with a seemingly stern look on his face as he watched over all the goings-on in the Hoyt booth or at other show happenings. I was eventually introduced to him, and while he was cordial, he didn’t seem to have a lot to say. What I didn’t know at the time, however, is how easy it actually is to get Randy Walk talking. All you have to do is ask him something about bowhunting!

As a consumer, that’s exactly how I’d hope the president of a major bow manufacturer would be — first and foremost a hardcore bowhunter. In my eyes, there’s simply no substitute for the fundamental perspective of a true enthusiast. Bowhunting isn’t just a sport — it’s a culture. So how is a company supposed to manufacture products for bowhunters, when their leaders don’t truly understand what motivates us? It would seem to be an obvious requirement, but



Zak Kurtzhals

THAT'S WHEN SPECTACULAR THINGS HAPPEN." — **RANDY WALK**

KING **THE WALK**

you'd be surprised how often that's exactly what you find — leaders who aren't even bowhunters. Not at Hoyt. Their leaders walk the walk.

Randy Walk is a self-described archery brat. He was raised by two passionate archers who dragged him along to archery shoots and family bowhunts throughout the state of Utah. His father owned an archery shop, and just about everything the family did involved archery. "I can't actually remember when I started shooting a bow," says Randy, "but one of my favorite hunting photos shows my brother and me standing next to my dad with a nice buck Dad had taken with his bow. I was two years old in that photo, standing there proud as a peacock with a bow in my hand. Needless to say, my interest in archery and bowhunting started at a very young age."

By the time Randy was in his teens, he was competing in multiple shooting classes at local archery tournaments and

was well on his way to becoming an accomplished bowhunter, but he never expected to one day make a career in the industry. "I went to college to become an electrical engineer," says Randy. "The electronics industry was booming in the early 1980s, and I fully intended to carve out a career in that field. I never planned to go to work for an archery company, but that's when fate intervened."

In 1985, Randy and his father were shooting in an archery tournament with a man named Jim Pickering, who also happened to be the national sales manager for Hoyt. "Jim asked what I was doing for work while I was going to school. When I told him I was working at a golf course café, he told me he thought I'd be a natural fit for some part-time positions they were trying to fill down at Hoyt. I applied the next day."

Starting out as a part-time bow builder, Randy quickly assumed additional responsibilities and was given the opportu-

WALKING THE WALK

nity to work closely with then Hoyt President Joe Johnston, National Sales Manager and now also Director of Engineering Jim Pickering, and Earl Hoyt himself.

Upon graduating from the University of Utah in 1987, job offers started rolling in from companies looking for electrical engineers. "My plan was to take one of those offers and use the degree I'd worked so hard to earn," claims Randy. However, Hoyt was in the process of making some major changes: They were moving their manufacturing operation from St. Louis, Missouri, to Salt Lake City, Utah, and they offered Randy an opportunity to build a brand-new engineering program from the ground up in their new location.

That year, Randy accepted a position as assistant director of engineering and was tasked with leading the move from St. Louis to Salt Lake City, and with developing a new formal engineering format, updated testing procedures, and state-of-the-art product development processes. "The risk of being left behind in the fast-moving field of electrical engineering made staying on with Hoyt a difficult decision," says Randy. "But my love for archery and bowhunting tipped the scales."

Randy's original commitment to Hoyt was for only three years. "I had an opportunity to spend a lot of time with two great engineering minds in Earl Hoyt and Jim Easton, and to transfer engineering from Earl to our newly formed engineering team," says Randy. "I was having fun. I'm not sure what happened at the end of that initial three-year commitment, but three years somehow turned into 36."

In 1991, Randy was promoted to director of engineering, then to general manager in 1995, and finally in 1996, to president of the company. During his tenure at Hoyt, the company grew from 25 employees to over 230 and has become one of the most successful archery manufacturers in the world. Thir-

ty of Hoyt's 47 U.S. patents related to archery products were developed under Randy Walk's leadership — nine of which are attributed directly to him.

When asked which patents he's most proud of, there are two that stand out. The first has to do with the split-limb technology that you see incorporated into the vast majority of compound bows today. "In 1996, we introduced split-limb technology to solve some inherent problems with one-piece solid limbs," explains Randy. "We initially took some criticism for the concept, but now, over a quarter-century later, split limbs are the norm and have helped to dramatically improve bow performance for the entire industry."

The second patent is for the TEC Riser, which remains the



Randy doesn't know exactly when he started shooting a bow because he was too young to remember when that was. Here two-year-old Randy stands right of his dad and brother with a bow in his hand enjoying his dad's success.

This wall at Hoyt headquarters is reserved for employee bowhunting photos. Randy takes great pride in the passion that is shared by the team he's assembled over the years.





As a dedicated bowhunter, Randy's goal has always been to design products that he himself would want to use. Most of the innovations that he and his team have produced over the years were born from personal experiences in the field.

Randy was inducted into the National Bowhunters Hall of Fame in 2003. Here he shares the moment with his friend, mentor, and the man who originally encouraged him to come to work at Hoyt, Jim Pickering.

hallmark engineering and design element used in all current Hoyt compound bows. This advancement was the direct result of one of the scariest moments in Randy's career. "In 1992, I was shooting a prototype bow and experienced a riser failure while at full draw. The bow riser basically broke right at the grip, which is the worst place a riser can fail, because the entire bow basically comes right back at you. I stood there in pain — cables wrapped around my head and bow parts dangling from me like Christmas tree ornaments — and I told myself, 'never again.' I will not allow this to ever happen to one of our customers."

Randy and his team immediately went to work, and they came up with a revolutionary new bridged-riser design. "Our TEC Riser dramatically increased strength, while actually cutting weight and bulk from previous designs, and every Hoyt compound features our TEC Riser to this day. It remains the stiffest, most stable compound shooting platform around, but what I'm most proud of, is that no one shooting a TEC Riser has, or ever will, experience that type of catastrophic failure."

Randy's long list of innovations are both time-tested and

competition proven. While he attests that the core of Hoyt's market is comprised of bowhunters, target archery is where the company's engineering and design prowess is actually confirmed. "When archery was reintroduced to the Olympics in 1972, Earl Hoyt's goal was to make the Olympics his proving ground. Both the men's and women's gold medals were won with Hoyt bows that year, and we have dominated the medal count ever since."

Hoyt was an engineering-driven company back then, and continues to be today. "Bow performance and efficiencies have improved dramatically as technology has advanced over the years," says Randy, "and truth be told, today's best competitive archers can probably win with just about any bow, but only on their best days. What we try to do at Hoyt, is design and engineer bows that they can still win with on their bad days."

With all the responsibilities that come with running one of the industry's premier bow-manufacturing companies, you might not think a guy like Randy Walk would have time for doing much else. But Randy's passion for all things archery and bowhunting has driven him to accomplish far more than just building great-shooting bows. He has won 12 Utah State Archery Championships in Bowhunter Freestyle, Bow

WALKING THE WALK

hunter Unlimited and Freestyle. In 1991, he set a new world record in broadhead flight, shooting a 450 grain broadhead-tipped arrow over 600 yards with a 70 pound bow! The previous record was just 475 yards. He has served on the Archery Trade Association's Board of Directors for four terms, was on the Executive Committee for one, and chaired the Technical Committee twice. He also has served on the Utah Archery Association's Board of Directors since 1981, and like both parents before him, was inducted into the Utah Archery Hall of Fame in 2020. He was awarded the Mule Deer Foundation's Leadership Award in 2010, and was inducted into the National Bowhunter's Hall of Fame in 2003. While that is one heck of a resume, what really impresses is that throughout all this, Randy found time to take over 40 species of game with a bow!

In *Bowhunter's* 2013 *Whitetail Special* issue, I shared the story of the 226-inch Kansas whitetail that Randy had taken the year before. Randy had stood motionless for hours upon a rickety, three-foot-tall platform built from old shipping crates that were set up in the middle of the only patch of cover for miles. Randy knew the buck was there, and that the unique strategy to take the buck was a longshot, but he also knew it might be his only chance. Long story short: The buck ended up checking that little patch of cover for does, and Randy took the giant at a distance of about two yards! As Randy told me the story, I remember thinking, *How many executive types would have the drive to do that — to stand motionless on a shipping crate for hours, praying for that one chance?*

When you break it all down to engineering, manufacturing, research and development, finance, human resources, marketing, sales, and customer service...how rare is it to find someone who possesses the skill set to run all of that, yet also possesses the passion for our sport that we bowhunters expect to find in the leader of a major bow company? A person who at his core, is truly one of us? I can tell you, it's pretty darn rare. So when Randy suddenly announced that he would soon be retiring last summer, I panicked.

A brand's identity means a lot to bowhunters, and Hoyt's identity has always had a heavy engineering focus, and has always been led by truly hardcore bowhunting enthusiasts. It's a big part of why I, and others like me, relate so well to the brand. What might Hoyt have become without someone like Randy at the helm; someone who actually walks the walk? I didn't want to find out.

Enter Zak Kurtzhals.

I met Zak not long after he was hired by Hoyt as a product engineer in 2003. He was a Nebraska boy, whose father-in-law owned a successful bow shop, and a bowhunting nut who had taken a liking to the shop-owner's daughter while he was earning his degree in engineering.

"As I was going to school and trying to figure out what I eventually wanted to do with my degree, I had the opportunity to go to the ATA Show with my father-in-law," says Zak. "The ATA Show is the industry's largest display of archery and bowhunting gear, and when I walked into that showroom, my head was spinning. It had an impact on me, and I ended up developing a brand-new goal — I wanted to become an archery

The Hoyt management team, from left to right: Gideon Jolley, Director of Intellectual Property (25 years); Tom Driffil, VP of Sales (20 years); Randy Walk, former President (36 years, 26 as President); Zak Kurtzhals, President (18 years); Jeremy Eldredge, Marketing Director (17 years).





Randy is all smiles over his big Stone sheep ram.



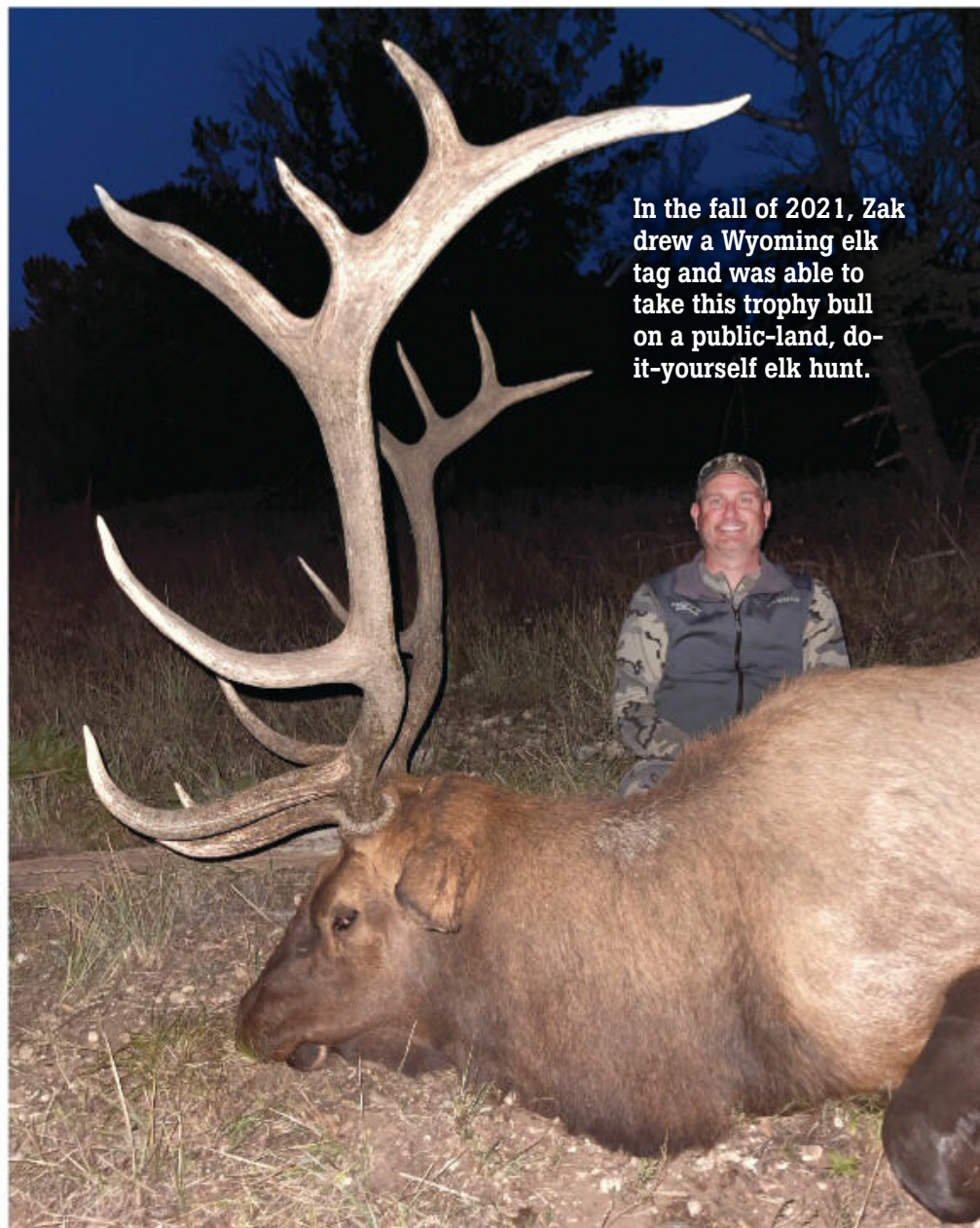
Randy's giant Kansas buck that was featured in the 2013 Whitetail Special of Bowhunter sports 18 scoreable points, 29½-inch main beams, is 22 inches wide, and green-scores 226 inches! He took the buck at just two yards!

engineer. I quickly realized it was my dream job, and it didn't take me long to learn that Hoyt set the engineering standard in the archery industry."

As luck would have it, Zak's father-in-law was a Hoyt dealer, and he was able to introduce Zak to the director of engineering at the time, Jason Fogg. "When I met Jason, I had two years of schooling left," explains Zak. "But I stayed in his ear, and upon graduating I was given an interview and was hired as a product engineer."

In 2016, I was able to join Zak on an antelope hunt. He killed a nice buck on that outing, and we became fast friends. I quickly realized that just like the rest of the engineering team Randy had assembled, Zak was hardcore. His ideas were spawned by actual experience in the field, and he could hunt and shoot with the best of them. Zak was nothing less than what I had come to expect from Hoyt.

Little did I know that Zak had been making his own quiet climb up the company ladder. In 2010, he was promoted to product engineering manager. Then, shortly after I hunted with him, he took on the title of director of engineering. A



In the fall of 2021, Zak drew a Wyoming elk tag and was able to take this trophy bull on a public-land, do-it-yourself elk hunt.

short time later, in 2017, he was named vice president of engineering. By 2019, he was overseeing all of manufacturing as well, and by April 2020, he was named vice president of operations. From the outside looking in, it might have seemed as though someone was grooming a new engineering-minded executive, who also happened to be another passionate bowhunter, for a much bigger position.

When the formal announcement came out that Randy's replacement as president of Hoyt would be Zak Kurtzhals, it was a huge relief. Not only would the president's chair continue to be filled by a hardcore bowhunter who understood our bowhunting culture but also by someone who came through Randy Walk's school of engineering-focused archery products manufacturing and had 18 years' worth of education on where this iconic company came from, where it has been, and how it has evolved. Hoyt has a culture all its own, and because Zak is a product of that culture, brand loyalists like me, and many thousands of others, can have faith in Zak's vision and direction.

Not long after taking the reins last summer, Zak and I had a chance to talk about how elk season treated us in September. I was excited to show him a photo of the big bull I'd taken with my Carbon RX-5. After congratulating me, he whipped out a photo of the beautiful bull he'd taken, and I quickly shoved my phone back in my pocket. His bull dwarfed mine! You might be thinking, *Of course it did, he's the president of Hoyt! Who knows what kind of private ranch or reserve he had the privilege to hunt?* If that was your thought, you'd be dead wrong. Zak saved his preference points like we all do, and then drew a Wyoming tag — where he took the magnificent bull on a DIY public-land bowhunt. Fortunately for us, Hoyt President Zak Kurtzhals is truly one of us...and he walks the walk! **BH**

A close-up, high-contrast photograph of a wild boar's head. The boar has dark, coarse fur with some lighter patches around its eyes. Its large, pointed ears are visible at the top. The boar's snout is prominent in the lower left, showing its texture and a small tuft of hair. The background is a soft, out-of-focus mix of warm tones, suggesting a natural, outdoor setting. Overlaid on the center of the image is the text "PLENTY OF PORK" in a white, bold, sans-serif font.

PLENTY OF PORK



AN AVERAGE-SIZED,
mud-covered Texas
feral hog sow.

MILLIONS OF FERAL HOGS ROAM AMERICA. THEY JUST MIGHT BE THE PERFECT GAME FOR BOWHUNTERS.

By Brandon Ray

The December afternoon was ice-cold. So far, I had not seen a single deer. The wind direction was perfect, and I hoped a sneaky eight-point I had only seen on my trail camera would show himself. With an arrow nocked, I waited.

Instead of a buck, a mob of 14 hogs — a herd previously only seen on trail camera well after dark — mobbed the free corn. The last hog in line was a chunky boar. Even in the low light, his big, white tusks were visible against his dark hair.

With 10 minutes of shooting light left, I pulled my bow to full power. I waited for the big pig to give me a broadside angle. Finally, he turned. With a sound like a karate chop through a board, my small-diameter arrow tipped with a four-blade Wasp Dart broadhead punched through the near-side shoulder shield and stopped against the offside ribs. Hit through both lungs, the 280-pound Texas boar went down in a cloud of dust just 50 yards from my blind. His bottom tusks were three inches above his gumline. Trophy boars like that are tough to find where I hunt. Wild pigs are hunted year-round, day and night, because they raid farmers' crops. No deer, but I was proud of my surprise boar.

MILLIONS Of Pigs

Thirty years ago in that same Texas Panhandle county, there were no wild hogs. Today, they are common. Creeks and rivers served as a wild pig highway to expand their range. Like some biblical plague of locusts, nocturnal feral hogs destroy farm crops under the cover of darkness. They root and destroy manicured golf courses on the edge of town. Hogs spook deer, eat supplemental feed intended for deer or livestock, raid turkey nests, muddy ponds, destroy cattle pastures, etc.

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, there are about nine million feral hogs in the country...and that number is ballooning. Texas has more than any other state. According to the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department (TPWD), Texas has an estimated 2.6 million feral hogs. Wild hogs have been documented in 99 percent of Texas counties. In Texas, you can hunt feral hogs year-round with no bag limit. With landowner permission, it is legal to hunt day or night — with bait, traps, dogs, and even from aircraft. Despite the friendliest hunting rules ever to try to curb numbers, their range is still expanding and their numbers are still growing. It's literally war on feral hogs.

Texas is not the only state with pig problems. Most states in the Southeast have expanding wild hog numbers. Besides Texas, Florida and California are top destinations for a quality hunt. Hawaii has hogs. Wild hogs show up in random places like southern New Mexico and western Oklahoma.

The good news? Hogs might be the perfect animal for bowhunters. Unlike big deer that bring top dollar, many landowners will grant trespass rights to hunt hogs for little or no money. Some folks refer to them as the "poor man's grizzly," as there is a sense of danger that a wounded boar might charge. Hogs are smart and challenging to hunt. Wild pork is tasty. A giant boar's skull or shoulder mount always garners attention in a Man Cave. Their eyesight is average, but their hearing is good and their nose is incredible — I've tried every imaginable form of scent elimination currently available, and I've yet to find one that works 100-percent of the time with hogs once they are within bow range. A steady wind in your face is your best bet to get close.

Hunting HOGS

Step one is to look for their sign. A herd of hogs leaves lots of

PLENTY OF PORK

evidence. Look for blunt-toed tracks around waterholes. Wallows on the edge of a pond might be as small as a car tire or as big as a bathtub, depending on the size of the hog. Hogs require water daily for consumption and to regulate their body temperature. A water source is an ideal ambush spot anywhere that water is limited, or in times of drought. Pig scat is round and tubular; not pelleted like a deer. Trees and fenceposts near windmills or creekbottoms will be smeared with mud from hogs scratching an itch or marking their territory. At fence crossings, look for wiry hairs snagged in barbed wire. I've tried lots of different attractants and bait recipes, but nothing works any better than corn.

In the summer, I have good luck hunting hogs at windmill ponds. Mostly, their visits are past sunset or in the dark. A trail camera over scattered corn at the water's edge tells me when to be patient and vigilant. Waiting for a steady wind is essential, as hogs have no patience for human stink.

Glassing early and late in the day, near both cropfield edges or along creekbottoms, is an effective spot-and-stalk strategy. Sows and piglets will travel in herds. Mature boars are loners most of the year. Big boars will typically only mingle with the herd when a sow is in heat. What is a trophy boar? Most veteran hog hunters would say a boar 200 pounds or heavier, live weight. What about teeth? A bottom tusk that measures three inches or more above the gumline is excellent, but some old boars will sport broken tusks from fighting other boars.

My nighttime equipment setup includes a bow rigged with a single, green fiber-optic pin, and a sight light. I limit shots to 20 yards or less in the dark. A flashlight mounted to my stabilizer bushing with a red lens works best. I've tried white, green, and red lights, and red seems to spook pigs the least. I wait until my target hog settles down to either feed or drink at close range, and then I draw my bow with the light on its lowest setting and point my bow at the sky, slowly bringing the bow down to illuminate the pig. A button on my bow's grip lets me increase the brightness of the light if necessary. The red light combined with a sight light and green pin with a large-diameter peep works best for me. Lighted arrow nocks help

pinpoint hit location. Look at Elusive Wildlife Technologies (elusivewildlife.com) for all kinds of lights, as well as a bow-mounted light called the Piglet for night hunting.

Boar Of A DIFFERENT COLOR

Wild hogs come in every size, shape, and color. Some look more like domestic pigs — with floppy ears, a short nose, and a fat body — while others look more like true Russian boars, with a long face and big tusks. Some regions favor one characteristic over another...sort of a gene-pool roulette wheel.

I've seen lots of black-and-brown ones; football-sized to calf-sized. I've seen and shot a few spotted ones, too, and I've even seen a solid-white one. But a big boar I encountered in spring 2020 was unique.

From the canyon rim and with my unaided eyes, I thought it was a stray cow. The distant animal was a reddish color; feeding on the valley floor in broad daylight. My watch said it was 4:30 p.m. Through 10X binoculars, it looked more like a sand-colored aoudad sheep, which wouldn't have surprised me because wild aoudads often roamed that canyon as well. It wasn't until I cut the distance to a quarter-mile that I could tell it was neither a cow or aoudad; it was an odd-colored, red pig — and a big pig at that!

A careful stalk through a patch of prickly pear cactus set up a 25-yard shot. The big boar was totally unaware of my presence; his nose plowing up dirt for a snack and the wind steady in my favor. My 450-grain arrow found the boar's heart and he only made it 40 yards. I never got him on a scale, but I think 300 pounds was a fair estimate of his size. I've seen cinnamon-phase black bears, but this was my first cinnamon hog! It was an unexpected encounter on an April afternoon when I was scouting for turkeys.

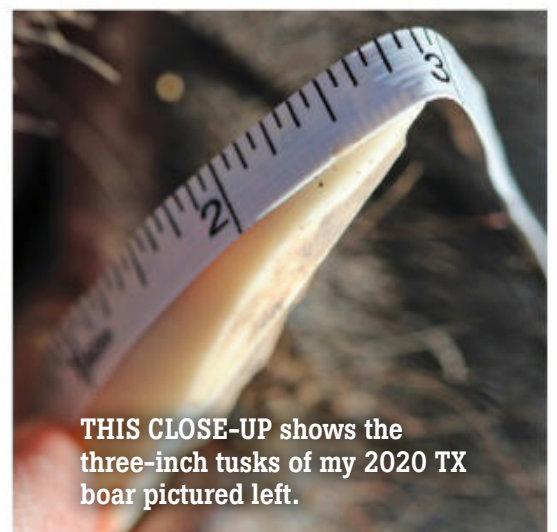
Hogs EAT COWS?

Hogs are omnivorous. That means they eat both plant and animal matter. Most of us think of hogs eating corn from timed feeders or raiding crops like wheat, milo, or peanuts. But they eat eggs from ground-nesting birds, small animals, and they also feed on carcasses.

Years ago, I remember trailing a 10-point whitetail buck I had shot at sunset the night before, but given my errant shot placement, I'd decided to wait until the following morning to



THIS BIG BOAR was shot on a cold December afternoon in 2020. The Texas boar had three-inch lower tusks.



THIS CLOSE-UP shows the three-inch tusks of my 2020 TX boar pictured left.



BIG HOGS have big feet!

THIS IS THE cinnamon Texas boar I shot in spring 2020.



trail him. When I found that buck stone-dead in the creekbottom, a herd of hogs was eating his carcass! Recently, and it's happened more than once now, I've stalked hogs in a very unusual circumstance.

I glassed the herd of 15 hogs wandering down a wooded Panhandle creek. It was late afternoon and the sun was sinking. I could just see the tops of several black hogs' backs near the creek. About six hogs were huddled together, and they were obviously tugging at something given the noises they were making. When I peeked over the creek bank at 30 yards, I realized the hogs were mostly inside the body cavity of a large, deceased cow! As I prepared for the shot, the gentle breeze shifted for just a moment. The lead sow snapped her head up, grunted loudly, and charged across the creek, taking the entire mob with her. I've since glassed hogs at that same rotting cow carcass multiple times.

I shot my first feral hog with a bow in 1988 in the rolling hills west of Albany, Texas. In the 30-plus years since that first one, I've shot a lot more. These adaptive beasts are as much a part of hunting culture today as deer and turkeys. When there's no money to travel or time to chase more glamorous species, feral hogs are always close to home. They are a nuisance to farmers and ranchers, but darn near perfect for bowhunters. **BH**

The author is an accomplished bowhunter and outdoor writer/photographer from Claude, Texas.

AUTHOR'S NOTES: An average-sized, 100-pound feral hog is not difficult to penetrate with most broadhead/arrow

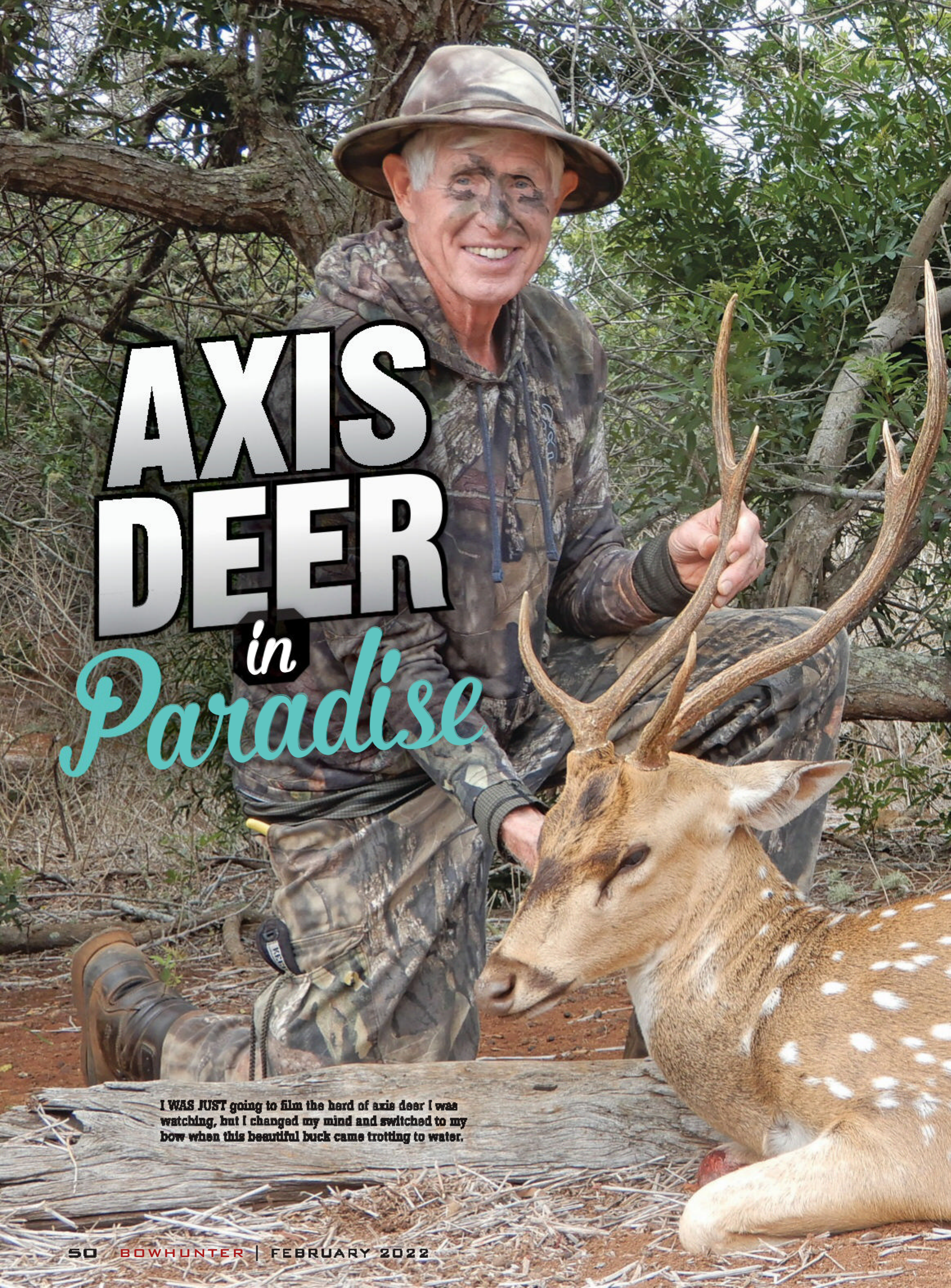
combinations. However, big boars are different. Some mature boars can weigh over 300 pounds. Their hide is tough and often caked with mud. And on the biggest males, it is a true test to punch an arrow through to the vitals.

I've peeled back the thick hide over the shoulder and chest area — sometimes called the shield — of several jumbo boars. That layer of hide and fat measured over two inches thick! That's two inches of wiry hair, mud, and fat before the broadhead ever reaches the ribs and vitals.

For this reason, consider medium to heavy weight arrows with sturdy, fixed-blade broadheads. I prefer arrows with a finished weight of at least 450-500 grains. Small-diameter arrows with a high FOC (front-of-center) aid with deep penetration. My current arrows — Victory VAP TKO shafts — have a 95-grain, stainless-steel insert combined with a 100-grain broadhead, so almost 200 grains up front.

I get excellent penetration pulling a modest 60 pounds from my compound. A few quality fixed-blade broadheads I've used on big hogs in recent years have come from companies like Wasp, Iron Will, Solid, Slick Trick, NAP, Muzzy, Silver Flame, and G5.

Out of my stickbows, I prefer even heavier, 500 to 600-grain arrows tipped with file-sharpened Zwickey or Bear Razorhead broadheads. Study hog anatomy photos. Their heart sits very low in the chest. Wait for a broadside or slight quartering-away angle, and then aim at the heart and lungs to avoid their stout front shoulders.



AXIS DEER *in Paradise*

I WAS JUST going to film the herd of axis deer I was watching, but I changed my mind and switched to my bow when this beautiful buck came trotting to water.

BOWHUNTING AXIS DEER IN HAWAII? JUST MAKE SURE TO PACK THE UNSCENTED SUNSCREEN!

By Larry D. Jones, Contributor

I placed Andy 20 yards to my right and said, “If that bull comes in, let him come as close as possible before drawing and shooting, because you can arrow him a lot easier from five yards than 50.” After bugling and cow-calling, I got the bull riled up and spotted his massive six-point antlers through the trees as he was headed straight for Andy. Seconds later, the bull came charging toward me. As he ran past, I drew and instinctively released, sending my arrow behind his front leg and into his chest. That’s when I saw Andy’s arrow angling forward and buried to the fletching.

Moments later, Andy quietly approached. His whole body was trembling and with a quivering voice he stuttered, “I let him come in until he was three feet from me. I thought that was close enough, so I drew and shot him. And if you don’t think I was scared, you’re wrong!”

That happened in 1979, and since then Andy Day and I have hunted together numerous times. Two years ago, we traveled to Molokai, Hawaii, for a five-day DIY hunt for axis deer. We hunted on Molokai Ranch and learned a lot about hunting these beautifully spotted, skittish, high-strung deer. It was there that I discovered trying to stalk through thorny, waist-high Lantana brush and groves of Kiawe trees, which have low-hanging limbs, is nearly impossible.

We borrowed a blind from Garrick Kanemitsu and set it up near a water tank. There weren’t any trees nearby, so we cut some brush and tried to hide the blind as best we could. Andy hunted from that blind and was able to shoot two does, but the shots were nearly 50 yards, which was too far for me, so I climbed a tree and saw deer, but without a proper treestand, getting a shot wasn’t going to happen.

Due to COVID-19, we ditched our plans to return in 2020 and set our sights for 2021.

But travel last year was rough, too. Andy and I planned to fly into Seattle on May 17, where we were booked on the same flight to Honolulu. Andy’s COVID tests weren’t acceptable for Hawaii, therefore he had to get a test at the Seattle airport, which forced him to rebook and take a later flight.

Feradyne VP of Sales Chris James’ eight-hour flight arrived on time. By 6 p.m., we were all together, so we did some grocery shopping before heading to our condo.

Our priority the next morning was organizing our equipment and meeting with Molokai Ranch Manager Coco Augustiro. Once we checked out our hunt areas, maps, and road systems, and signed liability forms, Coco told us, “You’re allowed to shoot one buck and as many does as you want.” Then he handed us keys to the gates.

We loaded our gear into our rental pickup and drove to the water tank where I had seen deer from the tree two years earlier. There I hung my treestand 10-feet high in a big Banyan tree, just 20 yards from a leaky water trough. It was perfect for the typical northeast winds in that area, which would blow from the water to me. We drove to the water trough, which was on a ridge where it was open and flat. This was where Andy and I had placed the pop-up blind on our previous hunt. We walked trails, checking wind direction, and decided to place the blind 60 yards from a water tank. We gathered bushy limbs from nearby trees and brushed-in the blind. Any branches or limbs that might prevent a shot opportunity were clipped.

Then we drove rutty, red-dirt roads looking for deer, tracks, and other sign. About 2 p.m., after walking a dirt road and finding a vantage point, we glassed and spotted deer. They were scattered across the lower area between us and the ocean. It was hard to get a good headcount, because the axis deer were feeding and weaving through brush, but there had to be close to 200 deer. We decided to go after them and tried to circle and sneak close, but there was always one unseen axis deer that would blow the stalk by making a high-pitched alarm bark, which caused other deer to bark and scatter.

We were up by 3:30 a.m. the next morning, and on the road by 4:20 a.m. Andy decided to glass for deer and still-hunt, while Chris hunted from the upper blind near water. I hunted from the Banyan treestand. My choice was excellent: The wind was perfect, and the deer never looked up. I had roughly 30 deer come in and drink, but the only bucks were short-horned, velvet bucks, so I passed.

AXIS DEER IN PARADISE

Chris took a 60-yard shot and hit a doe. He texted Andy, who soon joined Chris to help with a tough recovery. Chris had made a good shot, but the doe had enough time to move before the arrow connected, so the impact was a little back. They began tracking, and quickly discovered swarming black flies on blood and gut matter that were a key to finding the deer. After a lot of diligent searching, Chris spotted the axis doe in some thorny brush and finished her with a well-placed arrow.

At midday, we returned to the condo for lunch and meat care. We saw deer during our evening hunt, but we didn't have any shot opportunities.



CHRIS JAMES sat patiently in a pop-up blind until this nice doe walked into range.

The next morning, I climbed back into my Banyan treestand just before first light. I had several deer come to the water, and one was a young buck. Around 9 a.m., a herd of about 40 axis deer approached from the south, crossed over to the hillside to my east, and then circled right toward me and the water. They were slowly walking side by side, six to eight abreast. Their spotted hides created a sea of movement as they weaved through the thorny brush. I saw two good bucks in the herd, and I was trying to get my camera recording when one mature buck ran to the water, dropped his head, and began drinking. He came in fast and was quartering away at 20 yards, so I gave up on the camera and grabbed my bow instead. I came to full draw, placed my



THESE THREE FAWNS were approaching fast when I quickly put my camera away. A doe spotted my movement and barked, spooking the herd.

20-yard pin behind his front leg, and squeezed my release. My arrow struck right where I had been aiming, and the buck leapt skyward and then bounded into the brush and out of sight.

Once my shaking subsided, I texted Andy and told him I'd made a good shot on a buck. Forty-five minutes later, I climbed down, walked to where I'd last seen my buck, and found blood splattered on a rock. It was easy tracking, and I found my buck just as Andy arrived. After taking photos, we loaded my buck and my gear into the rental truck, and then drove to a spot near where Chris was hunting, where we hung my buck and started butchering it. Chris joined us after his hunt was over to help with the meat care, and I was happy for the extra hands and skilled knives, which made quick work of some of the tastiest wild game meat on the planet.

I felt my treestand was the best place to kill a deer, but my safety harness was too small for Chris. So that afternoon, Chris and I put up a blind behind the big Banyan I'd been hunting out of and brushed it in. His shots from that blind would be 30 to 40 yards.

The next morning, Chris and I walked to the Banyan-tree blind under the cover of darkness. Chris crawled into the blind, while I climbed the tree to my stand, from which I would film his hunt.

Shortly after daylight, a doe walked in and Chris took a shot, but he missed the doe clean. An hour later, more than two-dozen axis deer approached our position from below. They were drinking and scattered along the water, and eventually moved to within 20 yards of me. Chris took a 50-yard shot, but missed low. After nervously jumping around for a few moments, the deer eventually settled down. They hung around, but soon a flock of turkeys showed up and started harassing



ON A CLEAR DAY, you can see Lanai from this high vantage point on Molokai.

the deer, eventually causing the entire herd to leave. We went back to the condo and had lunch, and then Chris went bow-fishing and I tagged along to launch a few shots at fish. Chris and I returned to the Banyan-tree setup later that day, but we didn't have any luck. Unfortunately, that was also Chris's last opportunity to hunt before he had to head home.

The next morning, it was Andy's turn to sit in the Banyan treestand while I filmed him from the blind.

About 9 a.m., a small herd of deer came in — and there was a decent buck in the group. I had a great view as they walked in and drank. I kept the camera rolling, expecting Andy to shoot. But what I didn't realize was tree limbs were obscuring his view. The buck turned and was quartering away, and Andy eventually found a big enough opening to shoot through. Andy released his arrow, which hit the quartering-away axis buck in front of its ham, angling forward into the chest cavity. The buck sprinted back into the brush.

Not wanting to make any noise, Andy texted me that he wasn't too sure about his shot placement. I texted him back, letting him know that from my position, I thought his shot looked pretty good.

After quietly waiting 10 minutes, I slipped out of my blind and walked to the tree to film some cutaways for TV purposes. Then we cautiously went to the impact site, where we found enough sign to indicate the buck probably wouldn't travel far.

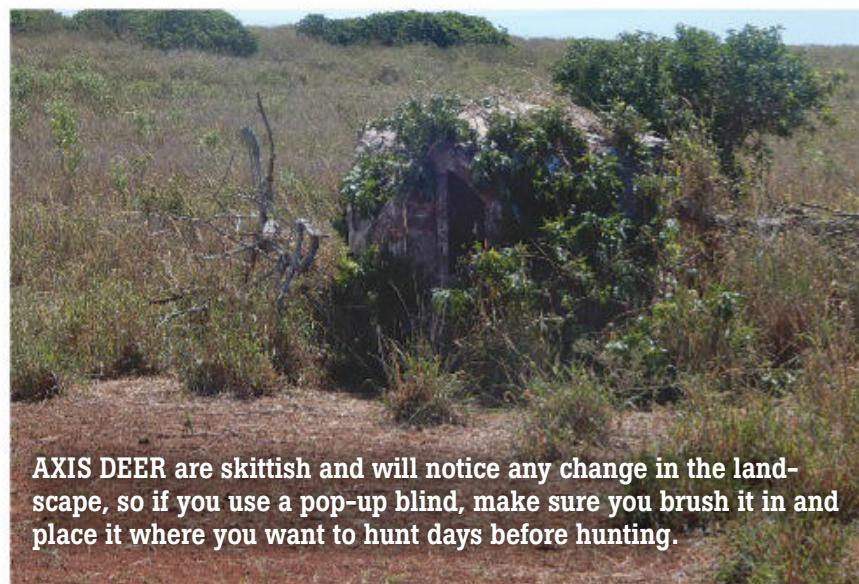
After waiting 30 minutes, we slowly moved in the direction of where we thought we'd heard the buck crash to the ground, using our binoculars to scan the brush ahead of us. Finally, Andy spotted what appeared to be his dead axis buck. He then slowly moved toward the deer, just in case his intuitions were wrong... They weren't! The buck was dead.

Chris had to be at the airport at 11 a.m., so we made quick work of photographing, skinning, and de-boning Andy's buck before driving Chris to the airport. After dropping Chris off at the airport, we returned to the condo to finish taking care of Andy's meat.

Southeast winds over the next three days forced Andy and I to abandon the Banyan tree, so we went and checked out an area closer to the ocean. There we found well-used trails; the dirt was literally reduced to a fine powder by the hooves of who knows how many axis deer that were using them.

After hiking around a bit, I eventually found a spot where several good trails crossed. A suitable tree was within 16 yards, so I climbed into the tree and trimmed a few limbs. Before I left, I gathered a few leafy limbs and used them to further help hide my ambush.

Later, eight deer began walking the trail I was sitting near, so I decided to take a few pictures. I had taken a couple photos



AXIS DEER are skittish and will notice any change in the landscape, so if you use a pop-up blind, make sure you brush it in and place it where you want to hunt days before hunting.

MY FRIEND ANDY DAY is left-handed, so he had a challenge hunting from my Banyan treestand because it was set up for me — a righty. As you can see here, Andy found a way to make the setup work.



when I noticed the deer were closer and walking faster than I'd thought, so I quickly turned and put my camera in my pack. That was a rookie mistake.

A doe, 80 yards away, spotted my movement as the three fawns leading the way were walking by me. The doe then proceeded to bark at me while stomping her front hoof. Then she bounded off, taking the rest of the axis deer in the group with her.

While all this was going on, Andy had been sitting in a natural blind he'd made in an area based on his scouting. An hour into his sit, a doe and her little fawn grazed within five yards of his position. Andy told me later that the approaching doe and fawn got him thinking about my advice on our elk hunt way back in 1979, when I told him to let an animal come as close as possible. And he did. But he couldn't bear the thought of the tiny fawn being without its mom, so he let them walk and just enjoyed the moment in the Hawaiian sunshine. Can't say that I blame him, because I'm pretty sure I would have done the exact same thing! **BH**

AUTHOR'S NOTES: My equipment on this hunt included a Hoyt Helix bow, Easton FMJ arrows, 125-grain Wac'Em broadheads, and a Spot-Hogg sight. My Mossy Oak Break-Up Country camo helped me disappear amongst the foliage of the Banyan tree. I carried my skinning and butchering equipment, water and food, and survival gear in my Kifaru pack.

We used Alaska Airlines to get to Honolulu, and then used Mokulele Airlines to fly to Molokai. Since these airlines are not connected, you will have to pick up your luggage and take it to Mokulele Airlines, plus pay a luggage fee. There is a city bus you can take for free, but when scheduling flights, allow at least two hours between connections. Pay close attention to your arrival and departure times, or you may end up having to rent a hotel room.

If you would like to hunt axis deer on Molokai Ranch, contact Coco Augustiro at (808) 336-1181.

PECCARY

SOUTH TEXAS IS SOME INHOSPITABLE COUNTRY. It's hot, dry, and loaded with poisonous snakes, deadly spiders, and every conceivable type of vegetation designed solely for the purpose of poking, sticking, slashing, and otherwise subjecting a bowhunter to significant blood loss! Every winter, I venture south from my frigid home in Minnesota, leaving the cold and snow in the rearview mirror, for a week of hunting in this stark landscape for one reason — collared peccary.

Day Two of my 2021 hunt at the Lincoln Ranch in Webb County found me sitting on a folding stool in a hollow of thick brush and cactus. I was guarding the intersection of two senderos; perfect travelways for the whitetails, hogs, and peccary that call this ranch home. As in much of South Texas, the brush is so thick it's literally impossible for man or beast to move through it, so all manner of game use these two-tracks to get from Point A to B. Lincoln Ranch owner/outfitter Karl Dickinson spreads corn along the senderos each morning to lure javelinas and other game into the open for his waiting bowhunters, and on this particular morning his baiting strategy worked to perfection!

The sun was getting higher, and the day was already becoming uncomfortably warm. Karl's truck had passed my ambush quite some time before, and I was just beginning to think that the peccary would be a no-show this morning when the telltale sound of sharp teeth crunching loudly on kernels of corn reached my ears from just around the bend. Peccary can be maddeningly slow feeders, and it seemed to take forever for the group to reach the intersection and feed into view. In all, there were four collared peccary in the group, all adults, and as they fed closer, I gripped my 52-pound longbow tighter while simultaneously trying to melt into the brush.

As the first animal passed me broadside at eight yards, I slowly started to draw my bow, only to have the peccary scoot through my opening and not offer a shot. The second critter did the same thing. Of the last two targets, the animal bringing up the rear was clearly larger, so I decided to allow Number Three

to pass unscathed. But when the last peccary stepped into the clear, I wasted no time in drawing my longbow to the corner of my mouth and released the heavy, footed cedar shaft...

Collared peccary, more commonly called javelina or "javies" for short, are a completely unique animal and quite possibly the perfect bowhunting trophy. They live in the deserts of the Southwest, from the arid mountains of Arizona and New Mexico to the South Texas brush country and throughout Old Mexico. Not a large animal by any standards, most adult javelina in Texas will tip the scales at 35 to 45 pounds, while their mountainous brethren farther west can reach 60 pounds or more. With their blunt snouts they resemble pigs, but in fact they are not a pig at all. Their coarse, salt-and-pepper coats blend in well with the dry terrain they call home, and their formidable set of canine teeth is wicked to say the least! Many a bowhunter, yours truly included, has become more than a little unnerved when surrounded by a group of agitated javies; pacing stiff-legged, hair erect, and popping those menacing teeth at pointblank range. Believe me, it's an experience not soon forgotten!

Javelina are very gregarious and often travel in groups of a half-dozen animals or more. I've seen them feeding in numbers of up to 20-plus animals, but that many eyes, ears, and noses can be problematic. On a previous trip to Texas, I had a large group of close to 30 javelina working down the sendero in my direction, and one huge boar definitely caught my attention. As the group neared my hiding spot, the trophy animal seemed like a sure thing, until a smaller male cut off the road and nearly into my lap! His sharp alarm bark and the ensuing mayhem had me looking for a tree to climb — not a good proposition in South Texas! Several of the tiny youngsters were squealing and darting in and out of the cover all around me, a couple so close that they ran between my outstretched legs!

Early on in my bowhunting career, I remember reading magazine articles clearly stating that javelina were a pushover and easy to bowhunt. These "experts" made it sound like a collared peccary was virtually blind and deaf, and mention of their sense of smell was never made. Well, I can tell you after chasing peccaries with a bent stick for 20 years now, nothing could be further from the truth. In my experience, their sense of smell is on par with other game animals, so if you don't keep the wind in your favor, you won't be tagging too many javies!

A javelina's eyesight has always gotten a bum rap. True, they don't see stationary objects well, but they spot movement instantly, and being at the bottom of the food chain in a land of



JAVELINA are gregarious animals and are most often found in herds of four to 20, sometimes more. This small group is feeding along a typical South Texas sendero

PARTY

THE COLLARED PECCARY
IS A UNIQUE ANIMAL
THAT MAY VERY WELL
BE THE PERFECT BOW-
HUNTING QUARRY.

BY **JOE BLAKE**
CONTRIBUTOR

PECCARY: DONALDMJONES.COM



PECCARY PARTY

coyotes, bobcats, and mountain lions has not made them a curious animal. Get busted by a close-range javelina, and there will be chaos like you can't imagine — grunting, barking, popping of jaws, and a cloud of dust that will leave you shaking your head!

Hearing is a peccary's least important line of defense, but I don't believe it's because they can't hear: The country they live in is dry and noisy, and the wind is almost always blowing and rattling the thick brush. Combine this with the fact that javelina generally travel in good-sized groups and make a lot of noise themselves, and it's understandable that their hearing is often compromised.

There are three main methods for arrowing a javelina: spot and stalk, stand hunting, and calling. For a pure adrenaline rush, nothing beats calling, and I never head out in search of javelina without a couple predator calls in my pocket. I've not had a great amount of success calling blindly, but if you want some wild action, wail on a predator call after you've spooked a group of javies!

Years ago, while hunting the King Ranch in Texas, one of my partners busted a herd of peccary and I immediately ran to the spot where they had been and started blowing frantically on a rabbit-in-distress call. The results were unbelievable! For as long as I screamed on the call, the entire herd charged in and out — woofing, growling, and popping those vicious teeth. Some came to within an arm's length, but they were in constant motion and never offered an acceptable shot. In the end, I ran out of breath and quit screaming on the predator call, and the herd slowly melted away, but the excitement was unforgettable.

Javelina live in big, inhospitable country, so setting up a blind and hoping for natural movement to bring animals past

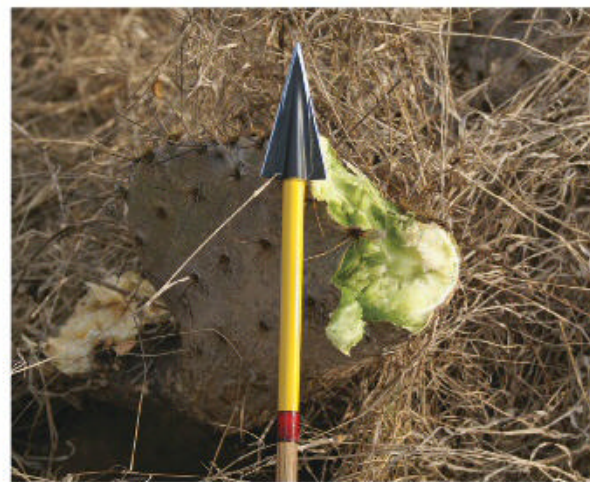
your ambush is akin to the proverbial needle in a haystack. Enter the “yellow brick road” — corn. Spreading corn along roads and senderos will bring the animals out of the impenetrable brush and to your hiding spot. I like to set up inside 10 yards from the travelway, with heavy cover behind where I sit on a small stool. Peccary are not large animals and their vitals are only about the size of your hand and tucked forward, so close-range shots are always best. Unlike hogs, javelina are not nocturnal; their sparse hair does not provide much warmth, so cold, desert mornings are usually slow until the sun starts to heat up the countryside. In my experience, midmorning through midafternoon offers the best hunting for javelina. Just like other forms of baiting, the animals will become accustomed to a bait schedule, so corning the senderos at the same time each day will improve your odds.

My favorite method for arrowing javelina is to spot and stalk these elusive critters. In mountainous country, get up high with good optics and pick the country apart slowly. As I mentioned earlier, peccary blend into their surroundings extremely well, so take your time and use good glass. In Texas, the spotting part can be exceedingly difficult, because the land is pretty much flat and the country incredibly thick. Again, here's where the use of corn comes into play. Spreading corn on the open senderos pulls the animals out of the heavy cover, allowing a patient bowhunter to then slip within range. Most of the javelina I've arrowed have been taken in this manner: Watching a corned road, and then stalking slowly and quietly along the edge of the road, keeping the wind in my face. In good peccary country, a bowhunter will likely be presented with several good stalking opportunities per day — another reason these critters are perfect for bowhunting.

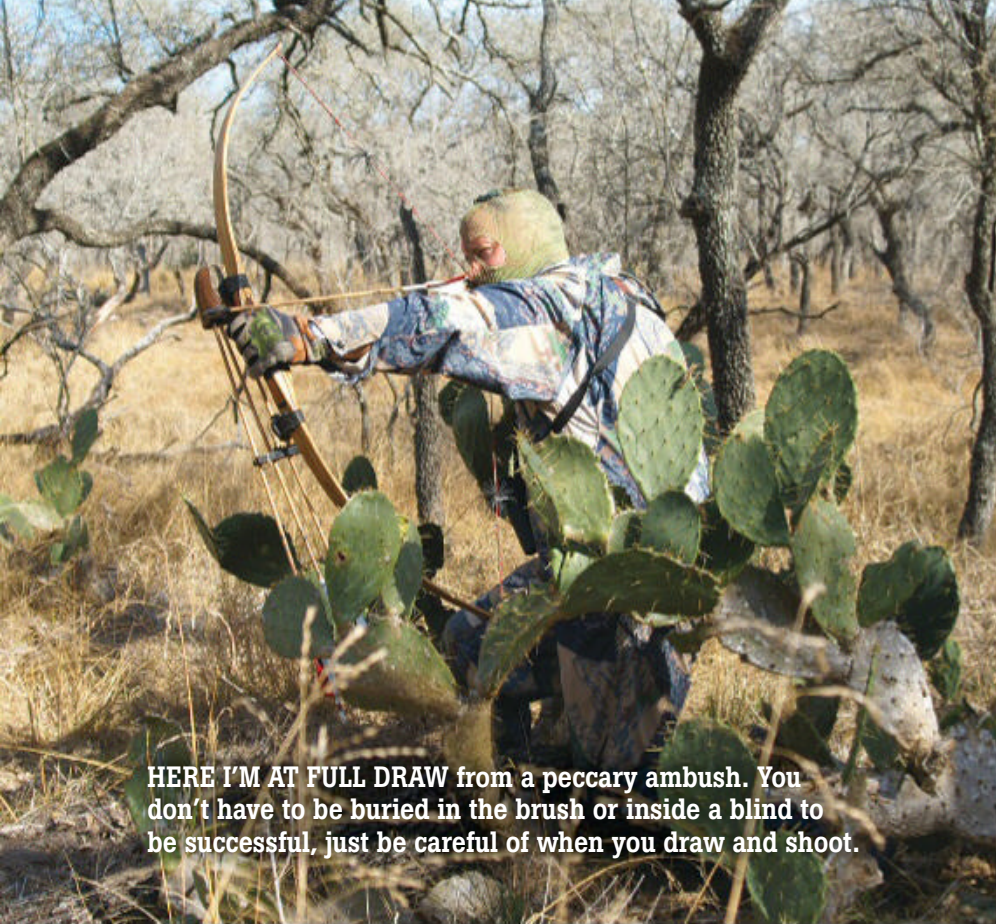
... The heavy, footed shaft hit with a loud crack and in-



JAVELINA are small targets, and their vitals are tucked well forward in the chest cavity. Practicing on a life-sized peccary 3-D target will help prepare you for your hunt.



THE VIEW from my ambush, where I arrowed the javelina in the opening story. Peccary country is very often stark and desolate. Prickly pear cactus are a favorite diet of peccary...look for prickly pear flats in your hunting area and you'll likely find Javies. Inset: Freshly chewed prickly pear pads are a sure sign that javelinas are actively feeding in the area. Stalking through these areas can lead to close encounters.



HERE I'M AT FULL DRAW from a peccary ambush. You don't have to be buried in the brush or inside a blind to be successful, just be careful of when you draw and shoot.

stantly fell to the ground, and the big boar rocketed off the sendero and was immediately swallowed up by heavy cover. Confused about what had happened, I sat quietly listening to the animal's retreat. But the silence returned almost instantly, which left me even more confused. I waited about 20 minutes before easing to the far side of the trail to pick up my arrow. My arrow was intact and the broadhead still sharp, with very little blood on either. Easing slowly in the direction of the wounded peccary, I found almost no sign — save for some scuff marks in the bone-dry ground — but looking ahead, I saw my trophy piled up less than 25 yards from the impact site.



In the end the shot had been perfect, but the arrow had centered and then bounced back off the opposite shoulder — a quick, clean kill, nonetheless. This particular boar proved to be my biggest ever, tipping the scale at 52 pounds...a fitting end to another trip south to enjoy one of my favorite bowhunts — a Peccary Party! **BH**

The author is a custom bowyer and a longtime Contributor to this magazine.

Author's Notes:

Javelina may be small in stature, but they're tough as nails. In fact, I like to refer to them as Texas Cape buffalo. Their vitals are small and tucked forward, so aim accordingly. That said, I use pretty much the same setup for javelina as I do for moose, or anything in-between: Low to mid 50-pound Prairie Panther longbows of my own design and manufacture (prairielongbows.com); Thunderhorn bow quivers from Duane Jessop out of Montana (thunderhornmfg.com); footed cedar arrows from arrowsmith Steven Burns from Oregon (719) 213-8801; and I tip my hunting arrows with 190-grain, three-blade VPA broadheads (vparchery.com).

If you'd like to find an excellent place to bowhunt collared peccary, reach out to Karl Dickinson, owner and operator of Lincoln Ranch Bowhunting (lincolnranch.com). Karl offers great bowhunting-only adventures for white-tails, hogs, and javelina.



MY 2021 collared peccary, arrowed with a 52-pound Prairie Panther longbow and a 640-grain footed, cedar arrow tipped with a three-blade VPA broadhead.



WHAT'S NEW

BRIAN FORTENBAUGH | ASSISTANT EDITOR



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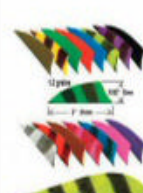
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SCI CELEBRATES 50 YEARS

WITHOUT A DOUBT, no one has worked harder on behalf of hunters over the last 50 years than the folks at Safari Club International (SCI). And as they prepare to celebrate the organization's 50th Anniversary, they're planning something truly special for members who attend the upcoming SCI Convention at Mandalay Bay Resort & Casino in Las Vegas, NV, Jan. 19-22, 2022. Get ready for busy days and stellar convention nights that will have you laughing, feeling patriotic, and thankful that this uniquely American hunter-conservationist story continues.

The grand opening dinner and auction on Wednesday night, Jan. 19, will start with a true, Blue Collar Comedy bang with the legendary Larry the Cable Guy. The multi-platinum-selling and award-winning comedian is still one of the most sought-after acts in the business, and he's sure to keep the Mandalay Bay Ballroom crowd in stitches as they enjoy all of the evening's entertainment (6:15-9:30 p.m.).

On Thursday evening, Jan. 20, a special "Night of the Hunter" awards program will be hosted by none other than professional hunter and Outdoor TV celebrity host Jim Shockey, along with well-known and well-traveled outdoorsman in his own right, J. Alain Smith. This special night of recognizing individual and organized conservation efforts is a must-see, and it's scheduled to take place from 6:15-9:00 p.m. in the Mandalay Bay Ballroom.

Get ready to celebrate American Freedom on Friday night, Jan. 21, with special guest and true American hero, retired Navy SEAL and Medal of Honor recipient Master Chief Petty Officer Edward Byers, along with political leader, businessman, and avid outdoorsman Donald Trump, Jr. Festivities are planned for 6:15-10:00 p.m. in the Mandalay Bay Ballroom.

On Saturday evening, Jan. 22, country music star Craig Morgan will take the stage, singing hits like "Redneck Yacht Club" and "That's What I Love About Sunday," before handing the evening off to

well-known TV host and conservative political commentator Tucker Carlson of "Tucker Carlson Tonight." Tucker will close out the Club's 50th Anniversary celebration at the Mandalay Bay Ballroom, from 6:15-9:30 p.m.

If you've never thought about supporting SCI before, now's the time. This storied records-keeping and hunter advocacy group is on

the move, and you won't want to miss being part of these amazing four nights. Get your Freedom Package tickets while they last — members can save \$75 and get the package at \$450. And the best part is that all purchases during the event go to protecting hunting and wildlife conservation efforts around the world. For more info, visit safari-club.org. —**Jeff Waring**

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Join SCI in celebrating 50 years of defending your freedom to hunt by registering today for the 2022 SCI Convention at Mandalay Bay in Las Vegas! Whether your dream adventure is to hunt Midwest whitetails, go on an African safari or to chase upland birds and waterfowl, the SCI Convention has it and so much more!



ASK BOWHUNTER®

WITH JOE BELL | TECHNICAL EDITOR



increase letoff by widening the valley, but it will be worth it.

If you've tried adjusting your bow's cams with little change in how it feels, the next step is to upgrade to an entirely new bow — one that is smoother and more forgiving. Despite a highly competitive bow market that hinges on all-out speed and efficiency, there are still models out there that are plenty fast but equipped with more forgiving draw valleys.

When exploring new bows, be sure to visit a well-stocked pro shop; one that carries a wide range of brands. This is important, because every bow draws and shoots differently, sometimes even bows of the same model. For example, you can take the same bow but then adjust it to two different draw lengths and weights, and it will feel differently at each setting. You simply have to test various models at different cam settings in order to determine what feels right to you.

That being said, there are still a few bows to take a hard look at, based on their reputation for being ultra-smooth and easy to hold back. These include the Hoyt RX-5, Mathews V3, Elite Enkore or Remedy, Bowtech Solution SS, and PSE EVO EVL, to name just a few.

No matter what bow you select, be sure it features a solid back wall at your precise draw length. This will ensure consistency as you hold the bow back with firm back tension until the shot takes you by surprise. To shoot this way, it's imperative that your draw length be set correctly. When you hit full draw, you should still have room to pivot your shoulder blades inward toward your spine. If not, your draw length is too long.

The best way to verify correct draw length is to have someone look at your draw elbow while you're at full draw, both from the side and rear. It should be in line with the arrow, not to the right or left of it. Adjust the draw length until your elbow is lined up with the arrow or just slightly above it when looking from the rear, and you'll begin holding your bow with greater confidence. This will also help you shoot more accurately, especially with today's highly efficient cam designs. I hope this helps. **BH**

Q ARE THERE ANY compound bows made with a little bit of creep in them? With many models, your back is always against the wall, and I would like to relax a little more.

Thanks in advance for your help. *Bob Theim, via e-mail*

A TODAY'S BOWS are fast and efficient. The big tradeoff for their performance is oftentimes an aggressive draw cycle and an ultra-narrow draw valley — the exact thing you're experiencing.

Fortunately, there are a few things you can do to remedy the issue. To begin with, try relaxing the bow's limbs using a bow press, and then adjusting the position or "timing" of the cams to a different setting by twisting or untwisting the buss and power cables. This will alter the cams' draw dynamics slightly, sometimes changing how the valley feels at full draw. You can twist/untwist the strings at different junctures to see if this makes a difference. This adjustment usually re-

sults in a very minor change — nothing drastic — but it could lessen the valley's sharpness just enough to give you the comfort you're seeking. Be sure to stay within your bow's recommended cam-timing range. This will allow for appropriate nock travel and easy arrow tuning.

Another step is to experiment with the cams' draw-stop pegs, if it's equipped with them. A sliding draw-stop post allows for the greatest adjustability for altering how the valley feels. Please review your owner's manual to perform this procedure, or visit an authorized pro shop to seek out help. Sometimes making a small adjustment to the draw-stop position can give you a much better-feeling bow. You might lose speed and

Email your ASK BOWHUNTER questions to bowhunter_magazine@outdoorsg.com

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HEART OF ENDURANCE: PART FOUR

LIKE DROPLETS OF RAIN IN THE WIND, ONE'S LIFE CAN BE BLOWN IN ANY DIRECTION.

HE LAYS STILL, gazing up. The stars appear and disappear through the swirling fog. His illness temporarily forgotten, he attempts to rise. His pain and weakness snap him back to reality — to his new normal — reminding him of his cancer and the frailties of age. He slowly crawls out of his sleeping bag, unsteadily rises, and prepares himself for the coming hunt.

He tucks himself and his pack under the lee side of a thick patch of gnarled evergreens clinging to the crest of the ridge. His tiny headlamp illuminates the cloistered space before him as he spreads his gear and then sits amongst it.

As he sorts through his well-worn equipment, he goes over his mental checklist. He reminisces over this same chore performed hundreds of times on different mountains on myriad hunts. He ponders, with a measure of awe, his good fortune to have experienced all of these adventures in a single lifetime. He treasures each and every hunt; the successful as well as the miserable. He has lived a very blessed life indeed.

Completing the task, he pulls the tent from its nylon case and spreads it before him. He stuffs the sleeping bag into its sack and lays it, along with all remaining gear, onto the tent. He rolls the whole pile into a tightly compressed package and ties it with a cord. He squeezes the parcel into a black garbage bag and ties the top. As he works, the sky turns from indigo to azure — the first hint at the boldness of the coming dawn — and with it all the possibilities of a new day.

He stows the bundle under a twisted alpine evergreen that's preposterous position on a small cliff face defies both logic and physics. Lifting the lowermost branches to place his parcel, he exposes a mangled gnarl of roots clutching desperately yet firmly to the upthrust granite. The tree's mere act of being belies its seemingly untenable existence.

He takes up his bow, nocks an arrow, draws the string, and looks through the peep. Finding everything in order, he replaces the arrow in its quiver, dons his pack, and trudges upward. He climbs out of the saddle and onto a large pinnacle of rock. As he rises above the crest and to the edge, the entire world opens beneath him in a vertigo-inducing panorama.

He surveys the vast horizon, deeply punctuated in all directions by jagged peaks. Beyond these spires are yet more mountains — range after range, fading purple into the distance — a visage of infinity's earthly mirage.

The knob he stands upon seems like the top of the world, but it is just a nubbin on this mammoth, hog-backed ridge that constitutes this reach of the Continental Divide.

A fine mist is gently falling. Tiny droplets of rain drifting to his right will drain into Bird Creek, then Bear Creek, then on to the Broken River. From there it will flow to the Platte, the Missouri, the Mississippi, and ultimately the Atlantic Ocean.

Some of those droplets, tickled by the smallest of breezes, will fall to the left and trickle into Rock Creek, then Elk Creek, and on to the Palisade River. From there they will flow into the Colorado River and eventually on to the Pacific Ocean.

His life has been replete with similar minute and capricious gusts of wind, he muses. And much like these droplets of rain, he has been whimsically nudged

ever so slightly in this direction or that, to ultimately disparate destinations.

Most of these breezes have been favorable and fortuitous winds, granting him safe passage to good things, and to good people. He has been very blessed in his life, as very few of these prods have been from hostile winds.

However, the most recent wind has morphed into a malevolent gale and blown him away. This deadly vortex has forced him drastically off his bearings and on toward a nightmarish precipice.

One impetuous puff of wind, one malicious mutation, one diabolical strand of DNA, one sinister, malignant cell, and his life's course has been altered dramatically — becoming more ominous and horrific with each passing day.

All of this wondering, pondering, and just plain not understanding, has brought him to yet another sad realization: At this very late juncture in his life, the only thing he knows with any certainty is that he does not know anything for certain.

He decides to just let the mystery be.

He smiles resignedly and mumbles to himself, "There is one thing you do know for certain, you precious little snowflake: You're not being blown into Bird Creek, nor into Rock Creek. This fickle wind has blown you into, and then up, Shit Creek...and you, my delicate friend, have no paddle."

To be continued... **BH**

Author's Note: Place names have been changed to protect "secret spots!"

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