

FIND THE RIGHT BOW | **15** TOOLS FOR TURKEYS

P.28

Bowhunter

THE #1 BOWHUNTING MAGAZINE

APRIL/MAY 2022

**WIND
BURN!**

P.42

DON'T LET THAT BUCK
GET A WHIFF OF YOU

WHITETAILS

REFLECTING ON 30 SEASONS

TURKEYS

SET 'EM UP, KNOCK 'EM DOWN!

BEARS

FRONT ROW & IN YOUR FACE

AOUDAD

THE AFFORDABLE SHEEP HUNT

ABOVE AND BEYOND

SWEET TEA AND TALL TINES P.24

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SCIENCE OF BEAR BAITING





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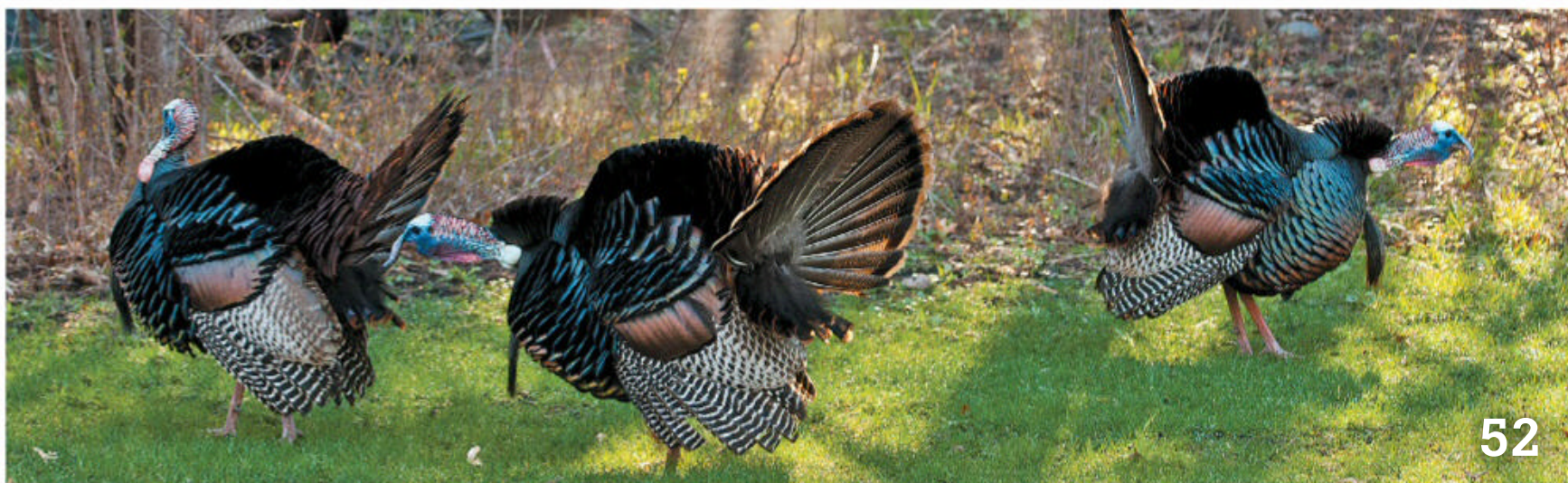
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EDITORIAL

CURT WELLS | EDITOR

CAN YOU HUNT TOO CLOSE?

IN AN AGE WHERE MANY SEEK TO ACHIEVE THE LONG BOW-SHOT, ARE WE LOSING THE THRILL OF GETTING CLOSE?

IT WAS 1996. The place was Qikitaluk Island, Repulse Bay, Nunavut, smack dab on the Arctic Circle. Hunting buddy, Kendall Bauer, and I were standing slack-jawed, staring at a world-class central barren ground caribou standing on the horizon.

I'd already arrowed a bull that still ranks Number 22 in the Pope and Young Record Book, so it was Kendall's turn to stalk this bull, which was so big it didn't even look real standing next to the young bull by his side.

The tundra was featureless. All we could do was hunker down and hope to make a move when they dropped over the horizon. I laid face down on the lichen-covered ground 20 yards behind Kendall and waited. The young bull must have caught our movement and started down the hill to investigate. The King stayed put. As caribou often do, the youngster lost his train of thought and started to feed toward us. As he got closer, I could hear the bull chewing the lichen, his molars gnashing rhythmically. I remember wondering, *If a caribou steps on my leg, will it break?*

I dared not move for fear of spooking the young bull, which would surely spook the beast on the skyline. The sound of grinding teeth switched to deep, nostril-flaring inhales. With a snout full of Wells scent, the young bull whirled to run and one of his hooves hit my boot. Both bulls disappeared forever, but it was a bow-hunting moment never to be forgotten.

Was that encounter too close? Nah. I once had a Montana raghorn bull elk



A CLOSE ENCOUNTER is the bowhunter's goal. Getting too close is rare, unless you're talking dangerous game.

at two yards. When I drew my recurve he bolted, and I bounced an arrow off his scapula. Too close? Possibly. Then there was the time a black bear poked his head into my pop-up ground blind and I thumped him on the nose with an arrow, sending him on his way. Close? Yep, but not too close...

In this issue, you'll read about a couple of close encounters with big game animals that may spawn familiar memories for many bowhunters. Getting up close and personal to big game animals and turkeys is what we strive to do. As we work toward that goal, animals often do the unexpected and we find ourselves within an arm's length. We don't necessarily plan for such close encounters, but it happens. And, if you're dealing with bears, cats, or even a cow moose, it can get a little sketchy. In the late 80s in Montana, a mountain lion was slowly stalking me, and when he got to 18 yards, I ran an arrow through him in self-defense. Too close? Most definitely!

I know bowhunters who stay back when they can stalk closer to an animal because they know they can make the long shot. That seems contrary to the principal element in bowhunting — getting close. It's what fuels the thrill for this bowhunter. Too close? Not likely. **BH**

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Cover Photo: JOHN FORD





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They come from America's heartland, where hunting is a way of life. Pursuing everything from giant whitetail to Canada geese, the *Heartland Bowhunter* team takes you into bow range, showcasing the challenges, thrills and drama of the hunt.

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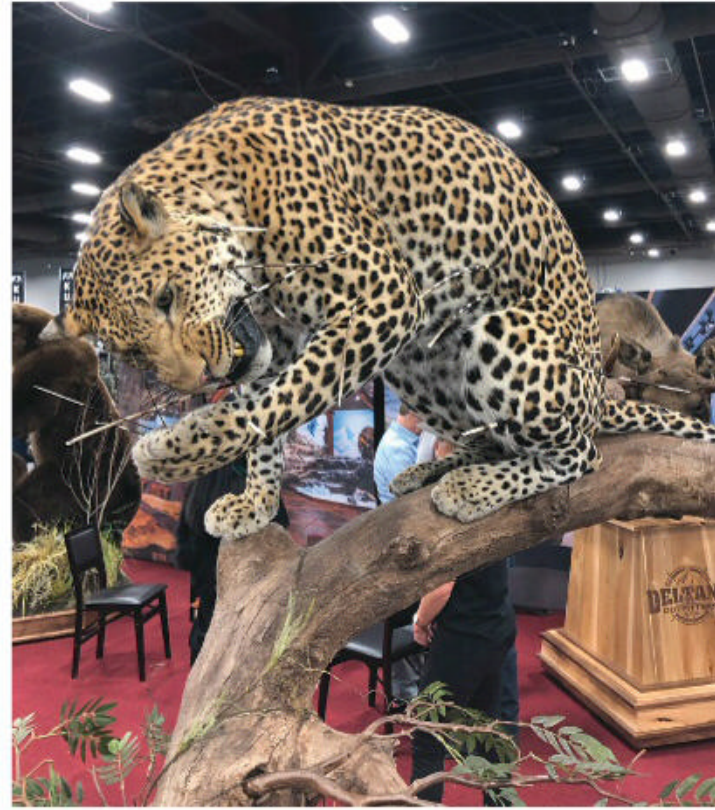
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50TH SCI CONVENTION A SUCCESS

SAFARI CLUB INTERNATIONAL recently held its 50th Convention in Las Vegas, and it is being considered a huge success. The annual fund-raising event broke a record for donations and auction sales, funds

that will fuel SCI's mission of protecting hunting and hunters worldwide. Hunters, outfitters, and taxidermists gathered to support this mission, which is becoming even more important in today's political, and pandemic, climate.



This leopard is an example of the outstanding taxidermy that can be found at SCI.

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SCI is the only major hunting group that takes the fight to Washington, D.C., state legislatures, courthouses and the public arena to expose the lies of those who want to cancel our freedoms. Our freedoms to hunt and fish are constantly under attack. Whether we hunt big game, deer, upland birds or waterfowl, the anti-hunting crowd wants to destroy our freedoms. They're opposed to ALL hunting – and they're better organized and better funded than ever before. We need your help.

Please join SCI Today to Continue the fight to protect our hunting rights.

With all these challenges, hunters in North America and across the globe would be justified in feeling a bit like the leopard in the photo above (on display in Las Vegas) as it works to remove porcupine quills. Assaults on hunting are coming from every direction and SCI is there to represent hunters and meet those threats. Don't let the word "Safari" lead you into thinking SCI is only for international hunters and faraway places. SCI's tagline is "First for Hunters," and they represent hunters in all of North America as vigorously as anywhere else. Find out how you can help at safariclub.org. The 2023 SCI Convention will be held in Nashville, TN, Feb. 22-26.

— Curt Wells



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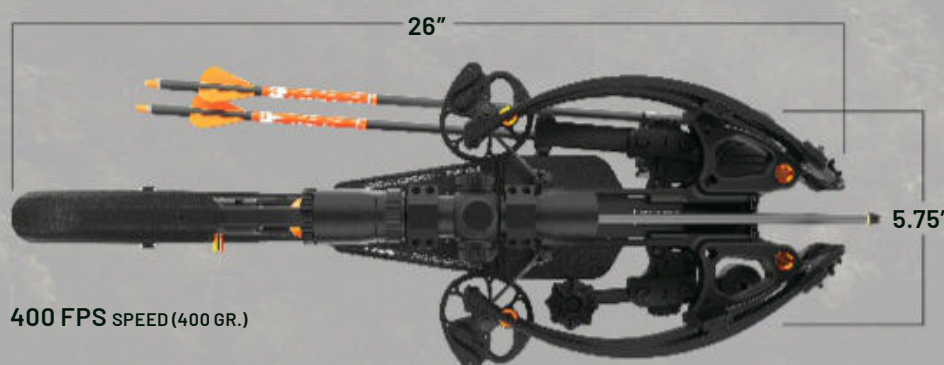
This allows the cams to rotate an incredible 340 degrees, while both cams remain perfectly level when drawing and shooting the crossbow.



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BOWHUNTER BUSINESS

JEFF WARING | PUBLISHER

SPOT HOGG'S Founding Family — That's Gloria and Steve Johnson, surrounded by Cabe, Quin, Logan, and Josh.



SPOT HOGG

"I THINK THAT I SPEAK FOR THE ENTIRE TEAM WHEN I SAY THAT AT **SPOT HOGG**, WE'RE PROUD TO BE BUILDING 'THE WORLD'S TOUGHEST ARCHERY PRODUCTS.'"

—JOSH JOHNSON, PRESIDENT, SPOT HOGG

AS THE **Bowhunter** Magazine & TV team heads into its 18th season of video field production, it's the perfect time to look back and count our many blessings when it comes to our sponsors, partners, and friends — the folks who have made it possible for us to enjoy success in the field.

Without a doubt, our bowsight sponsor, Spot Hogg, from Harrisburg, Oregon, has been a rock-solid contributor to countless great days afield, whether during preparation and practice, or on hunts across this great country, or even far-flung international adventures.

As any hunting archer can attest, there's no better feeling than arriving at a hunt destination, pulling the bow out of the case, giving everything the

once-over, and then sending an arrow downrange, spot on. A bowhunter with confidence that his sight picture is true, is a happy bowhunter, and one who is far better equipped to succeed. Add to that the security of knowing a bomb-proof accessory is attached to the bow makes things even more comforting, especially with the knowledge that at some point even the most conscientious hunter likely will be removing

grass and sticks and even caked-on mud from tackle.

While Spot Hogg didn't get its official start until the late-'90s, the popular brand's story began much earlier when machinist Steve Johnson developed a thumb-activated, relaxed release aid called the Cascade. He had teamed up with fellow freestyle shooter and bowhunter Ron Miller on the concept, and Steve began to build the release in the machine shop where he worked while Ron helped market and promote the release on the range.

The enterprise quickly became a full-fledged family effort with Steve and wife, Gloria, running the operation from the kitchen table and back of the garage, while sons Cabe and Josh helped keep an eye on their younger siblings, Logan and Quin. While initially the family was able to keep up with Ron's word-of-mouth sales effort, eventually orders began to outpace production, and when Steve came up with the Premiere arrow rest design to replace the old flipper rest of the time, it became clear that bigger things were in store. Steve bought out Ron's share and soon the family was staffing a booth at the Vegas Shoot.

That's where Bowhunters Hall of Famer Freddie Troncoso from Golden Key-Futura first caught sight of the Premiere rest, stuffed it in his pocket, and pulled Steve aside. In short order, they came to an agreement where Steve's





SOUND ENGINEERING is central to everything that the Spot Hogg team builds. Here, Bryce Pick works on sight parts.

Center Spot machining would build archery accessories for Golden Key, and that outstanding arrow rest was re-named the Golden Premiere.

Before long the Johnson family took out a loan, bought a used CNC machine, and moved to the outskirts of Harrisburg into a little farmhouse to start up shop and build products. Their first order was for 5,000 units. "Dad and Mom were blasting away in the shop while Cabe and I helped with assembly and kept an eye on our brothers," Josh told me. "And the next thing we knew we had a 10,000-unit order come in! Steve needed to get help, and he turned to local lumber mill legend Arlin Brewer. From that point on, things really started hopping, and Steve had to hire another machine shop operator, and then additional folks to help with assembly. Before long, there were a half-dozen folks working for them, and they had to add an evening shift, and then a midnight shift, just to keep up with orders.

The Premiere rest series had expanded to the Rover, Platinum Premiere, Super Star, Ultra Trac, Spring Master and more, and led to a host of other archery accessories, all marketed under the Golden Key brand. And by the mid-'90s, the Johnson Family had to move their operation into a bigger facility in Harrisburg proper.

Everything was moving along smoothly, and according to their agreement, until around 1998, when Steve Johnson took his idea for the first consumer-targeted shooting machine to the folks at Golden Key. A diehard archer, Steve built his original shooting machine so that he could measure bow performance. What he discovered was a game-changer for bow-tuning, but the folks at Golden Key were not interested, so the Hooter Shooter was the first product released under the Spot Hogg brand, and it remained the sole product for five years or so.

"Up until that point, we were kind of invisible," Josh Johnson confided, "because although we were designing and building products, we were marketing solely through Golden Key." But Steve Johnson wasn't done creating innovative, problem-solving archery tackle, nor products that would challenge the Golden Key team's vision.

"Cabe was working in the shop, and I was still in school, but we were hunting a lot," Josh continued. "And we were breaking stuff." Seeing firsthand what his sons were doing to archery gear, Steve set out to build a better bowsight that would stand up to the punishment. He soon introduced the Hogg-It, a ruggedly constructed bowsight that the Golden Key folks also passed on because they thought it was too expensive.

Now with two solid products, Steve hired Doug Shanklin to attend trade and



THE ASSEMBLY ROOM is where it all comes together. Featured in one of Spot Hogg's first ads (right), Cameron Hanes continues to prove the toughness of Spot Hogg tackle.

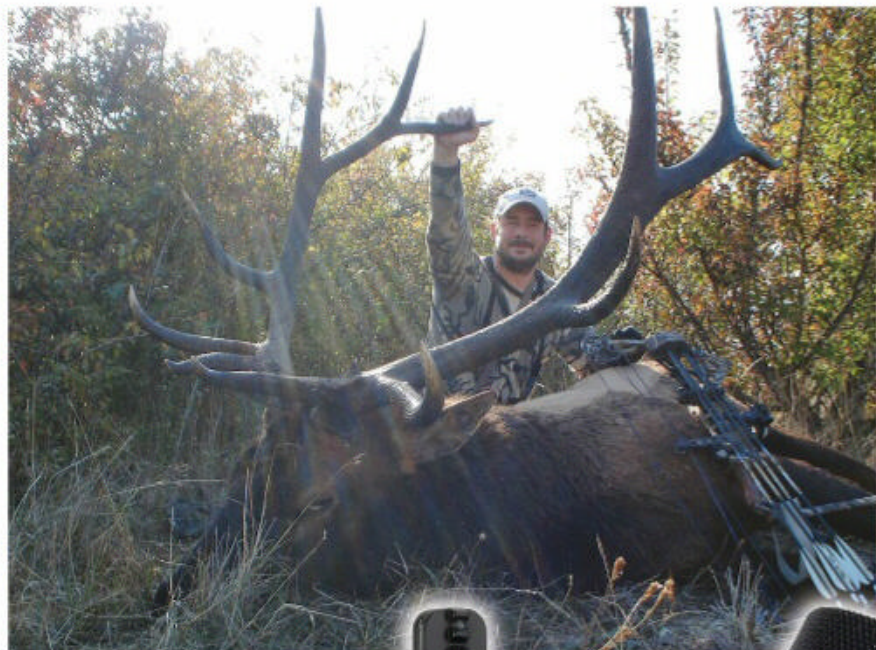
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JOSH AND CABE Johnson show they know a little bit about big bull elk, too!



AVAILABLE on Spot Hogg movers, the Triple Stack system offers the clean, simplicity of a single vertical pin but with multiple adjustable aiming points.

consumer shows and events to promote the Spot Hogg brand. With Cabe continuing to help in the shop and Josh beginning to take on some marketing assignments, the team soon was overwhelmed with calls to fulfill product orders.

By the early 2000s, the Golden Key operation was in transition, and the Spot Hogg brand entered a new chapter, handling not only manufacture but sales of the Premiere line of rests. “We had to change some of the product names,” Josh explained, “but we produced everything but the prongs anyway. Fortunately, we were able to locate and purchase the remaining parts and moved forward with Premiere series rests, the Hooter Shooter, and the Hogg-It sight.

Like their father, the Johnson boys enjoyed shooting competitively, and given the tuning insights gained from their Hooter Shooter, Cabe and Josh soon proved quite successful. “We’d mastered various tuning techniques and, frankly, we were employing some mechanical advantages that other folks didn’t know about,” Josh confided. “That’s about the time I headed over to Wayne Endicott’s famous Bow Rack to shoot leagues, and incidentally that’s also where I first met

Cameron Hanes.” Soon Wayne was shooting a Hogg-It sight and stocking Spot Hogg products, and that relationship proved to be tremendously positive.

“Our time on the shooting line taught us that folks want options; they don’t always want the top model, or the most expensive — but they always want the most durable,” Josh said.

It was that inspiration that led Josh to an idea for a new sight, and his dad was more than happy to take on the design challenge. Steve soon had a prototype in hand. “This is the strongest sight you’ll ever see,” he told Josh. Then his son put it on the ground and stomped on it and broke it. Undaunted, Steve picked up

the pieces and headed back to the shop. Weeks later he showed up with an improved design, and try as he may, Josh just couldn’t break it. “That was The Real Deal,” Josh told me, “And it had micro-adjust, too!” Now that was a sight built for a new breed of Western bowhunter. Cam Hanes wanted to shoot that sight!

From The Real Deal came a number of similar models — a complete line — starting with the Hunter, the Hoggernaut, Hogg Father, Tommy Hogg, Boss Hogg, and eventually leading to products like the The Grinder and Fast Eddie sights.

The **Bowhunter** Magazine & TV team began working closely with the folks at Spot Hogg around 2009, when Founder Steve Johnson was stepping back and Cabe and Josh were beginning to assume leadership of the operation. Without a doubt, it has been our pleasure to watch this dynamic team add to the Spot Hogg legacy, with more and more innovative products in the sights, rests, and release aid categories, not to mention revolutionary advances like their new Triple Stack aperture. As the brand heads toward its 25th Year, we offer a heartfelt tip of the **Bowhunter** cap! **BH**



WE SHOULD all be happy that the Spot Hogg Family continues to grow!

BOWHUNTER TV

STAIRWAY TO HEAVEN

► **Bowhunter TV** Host Curt Wells had a great hunt in Southeast South Dakota in November 2020. He was the guest of Jae Koletzky, who owns some spectacular whitetail ground, and his hunting buddy Matt "Turk" Tereshinski. Curt took this fine buck one morning just before heading home for Thanksgiving. Don't miss it, airing the TV week of March 6!

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ON THE TRACK

CHUCK ADAMS



THE RACK of the bull called Needle is a lasting memento of a difficult hunt followed by a difficult recovery. This elk is the largest I've shot in my home state of Wyoming.

DOUBLE HUNT

NO BOWHUNTER WORTH HIS SALT WANTS IT TO HAPPEN.
BUT WHEN IT DOES, YOU BEST DO THE RIGHT THING!

Hunt #1

I WAS HALFWAY DOWN the long ridge when a bugle erupted to my right. Far below, a 300-inch 6x6 was chasing cows in a timber-dotted draw. I craned my neck to locate the new bull in the dim predawn light. What I saw sent a shiver down my spine.

A wide, massive rack floated above a ridge 400 yards to the south — a rack I thought I would never see again. Days earlier, I had dogged that very bull from dawn till dusk as he pushed three-dozen cows and calves across deep canyons and near-vertical slopes. When the sun finally sank, the large Wyoming six-

point was still beyond bow range, surrounded by his harem and posing on a rugged point of rock. He bugled, grunted, and plunged out of sight.

Hard hiking across miles of terrain had failed to show me that elk again. There would be no mistaking his wide-flung antlers with the broken left brow

tine. After searching till my eyeballs ached, I figured he was gone for good.

Then, miles away from where I'd chased him, here he was again. A parade of cows and calves trotted across a knob and dipped out of sight. Ears and antlers followed, also sinking below the horizon.

I forgot the smaller bull below me, trotted into a deadfall-littered ravine, and hustled up the other side. I had barely reached the top when cow elk began filing across the main canyon 600 yards below. They joined the bunch with the other bull, creating a massive herd. I stopped counting at 60 elk.

Last in line was the heavy-antlered bull. As I watched through my 10X binoculars, he charged through the milling cows — screaming like a banshee and pacing back and forth. The smaller bull turned and fled. That 300-incher looked like a baby compared to the big guy.

A coulee angled steeply downhill toward the herd, and I ducked into it. Twenty minutes later, I crossed the main canyon and crept uphill through stunted evergreens. Elk were chirping and crunching in a meadow above the trees.

I slipped between two pines and peeked uphill. Cows and calves were feeding in an old burn, and several drifted within 15 yards. I eased an arrow from my hip quiver, knocked the shaft, and waited. The herd bull was nearby, hidden beyond the grassy folds. A stiff morning downdraft blew in my face.

Minutes passed before the bull bugled again just out of sight. I gripped my bow as cows trotted downhill toward me. Instantly, tall antlers rose above the slope.

The bull swaggered out and stopped barely 30 yards away. One cow nearly stepped on me as she scooted away from the rut-crazy male. I drew as the bull nosed another cow, planted my 30-yard pin behind his shoulder, and released.

The cow squirted ahead, the bull lunged forward...and the G5 Striker V2 broadhead smacked him dead-center with a "plop" no bowhunter wants to hear. Elk scattered in giant clouds of dust.

The bull walked 100 yards, bedded, stood again, and trudged over a ridge. I backed away immediately. Gut-shot animals always die, but you should never push them.

The cool, sinking breeze had started swirling as the morning air heated up. I hoped the bull would not smell me and go on high alert. That hope was wrong.

Hunt #2

I've never lost a gut-shot animal. This happens to every bowhunter sooner or later, but unless spooked, a paunch-hit critter normally travels less than a half-mile. If you wait several hours before following, the result is usually good.

Midafternoon found me snooping along the likely path my bull had taken. Two spots of dark blood on a log and fresh tracks in the dust confirmed his path down a timber-choked draw. Another spot of body fluid 300 yards farther along proved the bull had continued downhill to the bottom of the ravine. I could not find another speck of blood, and the ground in the bottom was hard as a rock.

By dark, I'd scoured every slope and ravine within a half-mile. An old burn dominated the area, and it was mostly open enough to see a downed animal.

Next morning, my friend Tommy Moore and I strapped on our hiking boots and continued the search. By mid-day, we were certain my bull had traveled farther than a half-mile. I suspected the wounded elk had smelled me on shifting air currents before I was able to leave. Juiced up on adrenaline, it was hard to say which direction he'd gone, or how far.

Deep canyons fanned out to the north, east, and south. Tommy and I canvassed the country within a mile,

slowly hiking ravine bottoms and slopes in a grid pattern. It was too early for birds to find the carcass or death odor to set in. A tough situation. The sun set on that first full day of searching.

Tommy had to work the next day, but my wife, Greta, drove from home to help me. We searched from daylight till dark over the next four days, fanning outward across vast expanses of terrain within one to two miles. An animal can always crawl in a crack or stop in thick cover, where you might walk past and miss it only feet or yards away. But daytime temperatures were climbing into the 80s. Ravens, eagles, and magpies lived in the area, and such scavengers always descend on a carcass within a few days. After five days, the stench of decay should be detectable for several hundred yards.

The key was getting close to where the elk had dropped, and we certainly had not done that. Greta and I began calling my bull "Needle." The haystack we were searching was incredibly big and rugged.

Day Six dawned warm and clear. Miraculously, Greta spied a dry, matchhead-sized drop of blood on a tree branch nearly one mile from where I had hit the elk. My wife's eyes are incredible.

The bull had left the ravine and headed south. Two long, narrow, and fairly open canyons sliced the country even farther in that direction than we had looked — two to three miles away and a greater distance than I had ever seen a paunch-hit animal go.

Greta drove our pickup to the top of the first draw and dropped me off. Two hours later, I met her at the bottom. No birds, no coyotes, no smell. The place I'd hit the elk was 1¾ miles to the north.

Greta left me again at the head of the second canyon — 2¾ miles from impact.

"This is crazy," I muttered, as I dropped into the narrow cut. I was beginning to believe we might never find Needle.

Halfway down the ravine, something white flashed to my right. A lone magpie sailed across a draw 100 yards above me and vanished beyond a ridge. The bird was alone, but it was the only one I'd seen that day. I decided to investigate.

As I crested the ridge, the bird flew from a tree and floated into another draw.

What the heck, I thought. *Might as well follow.*

I reached the top just as the bird dove into a clump of densely packed evergreens. As I eased ahead, four magpies erupted from the same spot. The Wyoming breeze fanned my face, carrying the faint smell of decaying carcass. I trotted down the hill as more birds scattered from the thicket. Seconds later, a fat antler tine appeared through the screen of limbs.

Not much later, Greta and I did a happy dance on the upwind side of the elk. Coyotes and birds have to eat, too, so nothing goes to waste in the woods. Selfishly, I was sad about all that ruined meat. But hairy and feathered scavengers had already polished off most of the bull's rear end, and I knew not one scrap would be left when they were done.

I removed the head with knife and rubber gloves. A generous sprinkling of borax, salt, and baking soda on the defleshed skull cut the odor to nearly zero. I had gorgeous antlers to remind me of both hunts — the challenging sneak, and the taxing recovery. My 2021 Wyoming bull later scored a touch over 360 record-book points, in spite of two battle-broken tines on the left side. Intact, he would have scored over 370...one of my best-ever elk.

According to my GPS, Needle traveled just over 2¼ miles before he dropped. Our smartphones confirmed that Greta had walked over 30 miles looking for that bull, and I had walked over 50 miles. If you search hard and long enough for a mortally hit animal, you will almost certainly find it eventually. The double-hunt process might not always be fun, but the conclusion will be thrilling for a number of reasons! **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

FOLLOWING UP A CENTER HIT

AN ANIMAL HIT SOLIDLY in the paunch with a sharp broadhead requires patience. It will always expire, but you must wait at least six to eight hours before beginning the search...preferably more if daylight allows. If it is pushed or smells you, it might travel much farther than the normal 400 to 800 yards.

After waiting, you should look for blood, body fluid, and tracks. Try to predict the most likely travel routes, and remember that gut-shot animals sometimes move uphill. Proceed slowly with eyes peeled, in case you need to take a finishing shot.

Beyond 24 hours, you should grid-search terrain, preferably with the help of friends. It is your responsibility to recover the animal, even if you lose the meat. Keep looking — it's the ethical thing to do — and the critter will almost certainly be yours.



THE EMPTY QUIVER

DANNY FARRIS



WHEN YOUR TRUCK breaks down on the way to your hunt, you'd never expect to come out of it with a pile of turkeys like this! My old friend Jeremy Eldredge and I piled up a dozen toms with our sons on a hunt that started out badly back in 2012.

PILE 'EM UP!

THE BEST TURKEY HUNTS ALWAYS SEEM TO START OUT WITH A LITTLE ADVERSITY.

IHAVEN'T ALWAYS been superstitious, but the deeper into my bowhunting career I get, the more I can't help but notice how strange coincidences seem to repeat themselves. For instance, many of my most successful hunts seem to begin with something bad happening.

Take the best turkey hunt I've ever been on, for example. It occurred about 10 years ago. Hoyt's Marketing Director, Jeremy Eldredge, and I have sons that are roughly the same age, and for several years he and I had been taking them to Nebraska each spring to hunt turkeys. That particular year, the two of us were packed in with four of our young boys, driving through the middle of nowhere in Eastern Colorado, when my shiny new SUV broke down on us. We barely made it to the closest town around for miles, only to find out that the local mechanic was in the process of closing up shop for the weekend. It appeared as though our bad luck was going to cost us half our turkey hunt!

After a little begging and pleading, we were finally able to talk the good-natured mechanic into staying open for

a few more hours to help us get back on the road. Thank God, because on that trip, the six of us went on to take a dozen toms with our Hoyt bows! That is a pile of turkeys, and a feat made even more impressive when you consider the oldest boy in our group was only 14!

Bad luck and turkey hunts, like the one I just described, have happened to me more often over the years than I'd care to admit to. So frequently, in fact, that I have become a bit superstitious in my old age to the point I've actually come to anticipate — and look forward to — a lucky stroke of bad luck at the beginning of any hunt, which is exactly what happened when **Bowhunter** Editor Curt Wells and I went back to Nebraska last spring to film an episode of **Bowhunter TV**.

Having been invited to come hunt

by a buddy of ours from the Pope and Young Club named Joel Klammer, Curt and I drove into Central Nebraska on a beautiful day. The next morning, however, bad luck showed up. A storm front was rolling through and dumped six inches of snow on us — and temperatures were expected to stay low for the next several days.

Day One of our short trip was a bust. With blowing snow and little visibility, the turkeys were laying low...but I had a feeling a bit of bad luck in the beginning was just what we needed!

The next day, I decided to drive an hour or so to some ranches I used to hunt back in the day with Jeremy, and I was surprised to find the snow hadn't impacted that area to nearly the same extent. I visited old friends and was able

to gain permission for us to hunt on some dryer ground. But it was still cold, the turkeys were flocked-up, and Curt and I both knew we were going to have our work cut out for us.

On Day Three, I set a ground blind near a thick stand of cedars where the rancher had been seeing a flock of turkeys on a regular basis. Not long after daylight, cameraman Ken Sciacca and I heard some distant gobbles. With a little calling, we were eventually able to entice a couple of toms away from the rest of the flock to come check us out.

The “snowbirds” stood backlit atop a hill in the cold morning air. Steam billowed from their beaks as they strutted and gobbled in an attempt to convince our small flock of decoys to come join the rest of their group.

In late March and early April, when turkeys are often still in their big winter groups, it can be difficult to pull toms away from the flock. I often combat this by creating a small flock of my own with my decoys. I typically use a minimum of three, but sometimes when it still feels like winter and all the birds are really packed together, I figure the more the merrier. So, on that particular day I opted to set up four decoys: A strutting tom over a bedded hen, flanked on both sides by feeding hens, and it worked!

The toms on top of the hill were eventually joined by a third gobbler, and the trio decided they needed to steal those hens from the lone tom and bring them back to the group. It didn't work out well for one of them, and the bad-luck barrier was broken!

Curt and I had three tags each, and with the first one filled, it was time to get to work.

After watching the flock of 50 or so birds retreat into the cover of the thick cedars, I figured it was time to leave the blind and take the fight to the turkeys. I gave them some time to settle into their mid-day lull, and then donned a bow-mounted Stalker Decoy and headed their way.

Occasional gobbles allowed us to zero-in on their position as we worked through the thick cover on hands and knees behind the decoy until we saw movement. After a long stare-down with several strutters that were within range but offered no shots through the clutter, we finally watched one perch himself upon a stump.

Inching my way along behind the decoy, I was able to sneak within 15 yards of the slumbering tom, at which point I knocked him off his perch with a well-placed Rage broadhead! Now we had two down.

The next morning, Curt and his cameraman, Cody Worley, set up a stone's-throw from where I'd set up the day before, and I went just down the road to another location. Ken and I popped up a ground blind, started calling, and soon heard gobbles coming our way.

I'd set a Browning trail camera out in front of our blind, pointed back in our direction, and had four gobblers strut into our decoys, right in front of it — capturing an awesome reverse-angle HD video of the action as I filled my third and final tag. It was amazing!

Now, if you ever want to see the Edi-

tor of this magazine get grumpy? Just put him three turkeys behind in a turkey killing contest! It wasn't really a contest, of course, but Curt is a competitor who doesn't like to be down by three under any circumstances — especially when it comes to bowhunting! Let's just say that when Curt got my text informing him that I'd just filled my third and final tag, Mr. Wells suddenly became more determined than ever to get on the board... and it didn't take him long to do so!

Cameraman Cody also happens to be a turkey guide in Florida, and Curt had assigned him primary calling duties. Shortly after receiving the news that I'd killed another bird, he had Cody get aggressive with the flocked-up turkeys, and although he was probably speaking Osceola to those Merriam's, two toms broke from the flock and came over to investigate. When the encounter was done, one lay dead in the middle of Curt's decoys. Not long after the tom's quivering had subsided, another red-head was lured in, and by lunchtime Curt had two of his three tags filled.

The next morning, Curt had his third and final bird pitch right into his decoys from the roost, and he soon had him flopping. At the same time, after purchasing a tag for my cameraman Ken, he and I were able to sneak in on another group with our Stalker Decoy, and Ken made his opportunity count.

We'd filled all seven of our tags, all with archery tackle, on a hunt that had been cut substantially short by Mother Nature. Thank goodness it started out so badly! **BH**

When Mother Nature slapped us with a blizzard on the first day of our 2021 Nebraska hunt, I had a feeling it was on! Here cameraman Ken Sciacca sports his bird, while Curt, me, and Cody Worley stand over our turkey carnage.





NEXT-LEVEL BOWHUNTING

JOE BELL | TECHNICAL EDITOR

A BOW'S HANDLING features are noteworthy. If it doesn't balance and point quickly, especially when fully accessorized, it won't be as enjoyable and effective to use in the field. Hoyt's RX-7 Ultra is a proven model with great handling features.



NEW BOW INSIGHT

CHOOSING A NEW BOW IS NEVER AS SIMPLE AS IT SEEMS.
TO FIND THE RIGHT ONE, YOU MUST WEIGH ALL OPTIONS.

I'M AMAZED with all the hype behind new bows each year. Much of the buzz revolves around things like reduced hand shock, increased speed and efficiency, and easier tuning capability. These are certainly all desirable traits to have in a new rig, but they are not necessarily the most important.

Other elements, such as how the bow feels at full draw, how it handles and points in the woods, and whether or not it makes you more stable while aiming, are all attributes that make a huge difference in improving hunting accuracy. Yet these elements don't seem to get as much attention.

I consider the following four factors crucial when shopping for a new bow. Only by shooting a wide range of bows can you truly decipher the right model for you.

DYNAMIC String Angle

When you come to full draw, the bowstring makes a sideways "V." This V crosses near your face at a certain angle. The angle is unique, since it's based on the bow's draw length, axle-to-axle length, limb angle and bend, and the diameter of the cams. These elements all impact how sharp or gradual this bowstring angle becomes.

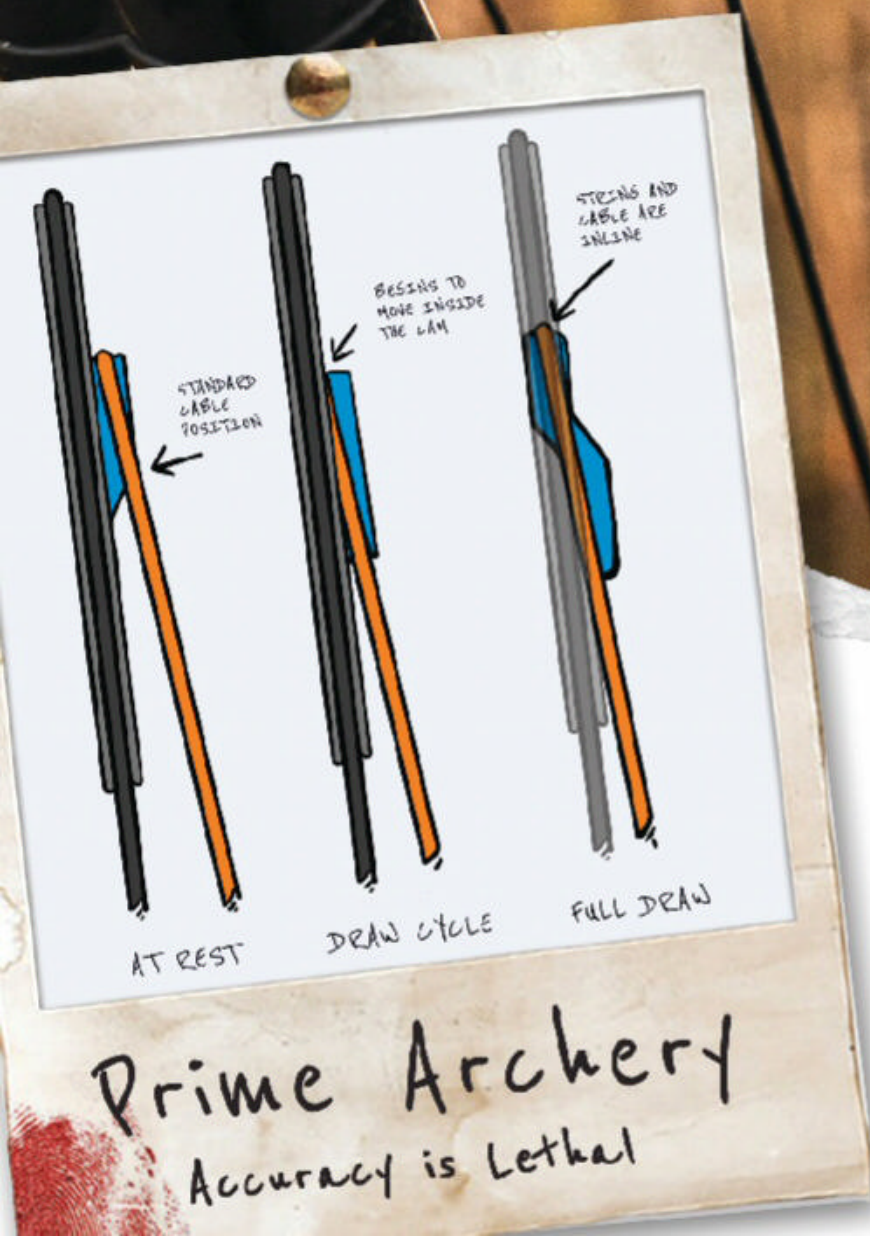
Ideally, you want the angle of the bowstring to fit your face and anchor position perfectly, allowing for three

points of contact. This means that at full draw, the bowstring should touch the tip of your nose slightly, your release hand should be anchored solidly against your jawbone, and your peep should be aligned dead center with your eye and your sight aperture. To maintain proper shooting form, your head must stay in a natural position — not pointing up or down in an unusual way.

If the angle is too sharp, based on the bowstring's dynamic position, then you must tilt your head downward, some-



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times shifting the shoulder's position as well. Ultimately, this disrupts good shooting posture. This is a common negative for archers using super-compact bows with fairly long-to-moderate draw lengths.

To accommodate the steep string angle, you could increase your draw length to bring the bowstring closer to your face — allowing for three points of contact. But again, this would alter proper mechanics. A shorter-nose release could help remedy the longer draw-length issue. But keep in mind, this will probably cause you to change your anchor slightly, and there will now be additional bowstring contact against your face. This could be perceived as creating another inconsistency, so be cautious with this detail.

Bottom line: The bowstring's effective string angle should be comfortable for your style of shooting, posture, and anchor position. If it's not, then shooting consistency will probably suffer.

SPEED vs. Smoothness

Many bowhunters still want a fast bow. Arrow speed is important to minimize low and high misses, plus it offers additional penetrating power on game. However, should speed take priority over other attributes, such as smoothness?

In my opinion, never. Yet when bowhunters shop for a new bow, they're always comparing bows based on IBO speed ratings with average-weight hunting arrows. My advice is to make speed a secondary trait; not a primary or make-or-break factor.

In the deer woods, smoothness counts for a whole lot more than raw performance. When hunting, you must draw slowly and deliberately, often in awkward positions or in cold weather. A fast bow with a lousy draw cycle will detract from your stealth and deadliness.

Fortunately, today's bow engineers recognize the importance of this feature and are on a continual mission to improve drawing smoothness without sacrificing speed. Bowtech, Hoyt, Mathews, Prime, PSE, and Elite, all produce flagship bows with exceptional draw cycles.

A smooth draw is not just found in the cam design, either. The bow's brace height also helps improve drawing ease. All things equal, a taller brace height will feel smoother simply due to a shorter powerstroke. This allows you to cycle the bow faster during rushed shots. To



A VIBRATION-FREE BOW that shoots smooth is certainly important. However, it's also imperative that the bow fits you well at full draw. This means the bow's effective string angle should allow for a consistent anchor, while complimenting proper shooting technique. A string angle that is too steep can cause discomfort and form issues.

choose the ultimate hunting weapon, you must note every detail, and draw-smoothness is an important one.

ACCURACY vs. Shock-Free

It's trendy to gauge bows based on hand shock. A bow that emits less post-shot vibration is considered better and smoother. There's no doubt a bow that produces little to no hand shock is highly desirable, since it will shoot quieter and probably more efficiently. However, it doesn't necessarily mean it will make you more accurate.

Accuracy comes from repeatability. This is where a narrow, comfortable bow grip is paramount. This is where you physically engage the bow, so it must be solid and consistent, and accentuate a relaxed hand-feel at full draw.

Additionally, a stiff, long riser will improve a bow's overall stability. This stability will not only make the bow more forgiving, but also improve its steadiness while aiming. The cam system's draw letoff also plays a role in how well a bow aims and stays forgiving through the shot, so be sure to experiment with different letoff options.

Although it's very difficult to test this at a pro shop, certain bows are more tolerant of "pulling into the wall." If you prefer a strong, active shot when shooting, this might be a huge concern for you. Paper-tuning your bow can quickly tell you if it will be more tolerant of strong back-tension. No matter how you pull into the shot, some bows produce clean tears. Whereas with others, you

may notice a clean tear on one shot, but then a gaping rip on another. When this is the case, search for a different model.

FEEL & Handling Capabilities

In the woods, a bow setup is a complete system. In other words, you don't hunt with a bare-riser setup. Instead, you deck it out with all sorts of accessories (sight, rest, quiver, and stabilizer). It must feel and handle well while fully equipped.

Personally, I like my hunting rig to be super-streamlined and balanced. I don't like a bow that tilts forward, back, or to the side, which can cause unwanted torque and accuracy issues, especially in tough bowhunting scenarios. A balanced bow is also easier to pack into the woods. Ninety-nine percent of the time I'm carrying my bow — not shooting it — so I want it to pack with ease.

After shopping for bows and narrowing down the options, ask your bow tech if you can mount a few accessories to certain models, so you can make a final evaluation as to how the entire package feels and shoots. This step may seem a bit nitpicky, but today's bows are pretty darn expensive. You simply want to turn every stone to be certain of your investment.

No doubt, shopping for a new bow can be confusing and even pressure-filled at times. After some time, you may feel rushed to decide, often still doubting your decision. By equipping yourself with the right insight and weighing each option thoroughly, you'll be in a better position to make the right choice and remain confident about the outcome. **BH**



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TRADITIONAL WAY

FRED EICHLER | TRADITIONAL EDITOR



SOUTHERN STYLE

IN SPITE OF TOUGH HUNTING, BUGS, AND HOT WEATHER, THE SOUTH IS STILL LOADED WITH WHITETAIL CHARM.

ALTHOUGH not necessarily a whitetail destination, the South has a lot to offer when it comes to whitetail deer hunting. You just may have to adjust your strategy, gear, and expectations a bit.

Don't get me wrong, occasionally there are some whoppers that come out of the South, but as a rule, you shouldn't count on it.

As a boy, I grew up hunting hard-pressed whitetails on public land in north Florida. After 35 years of living in the West, I have now become spoiled by hunting whitetails in Colorado and nearby Midwestern states, where it is not uncommon to see multiple whitetail bucks every sit. Another plus is the bucks in this part of the country are traditionally much larger in both body and antler size. The more open country in the Midwest also usually means more stable wind conditions, which is just an-

other advantage to all hunters, but especially us traditional bowhunters.

Despite all these advantages, I still enjoy heading to sweet tea and boiled peanut country when I can. Partially because I still love the South, but also because I enjoy the beautiful little hard-to-hunt whitetails found there.

This past season, I headed to South Carolina to hunt with my buddy and President of Montana Decoys, CJ Davis. I went in the middle of October, and the weather was hot. So hot that mosquitoes almost forced me out of the stand the first evening — reminder number-one that I was back in the South. So was the fact that I didn't see a deer.

The next day I did not forget my Thermacell, so I wasn't swatting mosquitoes, but my deer sightings still remained at zero. CJ, however, was averaging seeing two deer a sit. I'm still not sure if that is because he was putting himself in a better spot, or if I had become rusty at picking out the small, elusive deer in the thick brush.

I did, however, hear a few deer blow at me my third sit, which is another tough thing about hunting down south. The hot and humid weather makes you sweat, and no amount of specialized clothing or cover spray can get rid of sweaty human smell. When the wind isn't blowing in the thick brush, your scent tends to just pool up around you in a wide, 360-degree radius, eliminating the chance of a deer coming into bow range. The other difficulty is that since you can often only see 20 to 30 yards in the thick cover, it's very important to make sure your clothing, gear, and bow are super quiet, because once you do see a deer, odds are it's already in range.

Besides the heat, humidity, and lack of much wind, we also had a full moon to deal with, which made most of the deer action we were seeing on the trail cameras occur in the middle of the night.

On the last two days, the deer started moving a little better and I almost had a shot at a spike that just wouldn't give me the angle I wanted. I also had a small 3x3 or 2x2 that things just didn't come together on, and I had a doe that managed to keep brush between us, even though she walked by me at under 20 yards.

On the last morning of my hunt, I spotted a nice buck that looked huge as it fed past me, eating white oak acorns. His antlers were a beautiful light-brown color, and his body looked dark in the shade of the trees.

As I watched him feed, I slowly lifted my recurve from its hanger. He bracketed himself in the thick trees and gave me a perfect broadside shot. My Muzzy tipped Easton arrow arched through the trees, and I heard a thud but didn't see my arrow connect, so I started to



CJ AND I BOTH went with Bear Takedowns on this hunt. He used the wooden riser and I went with the new Mag riser.

doubt my shot. *Was the thud my arrow hitting a dead log, a stick in the mud, or the deer?* I wondered.

I called CJ because I was my usual nervous wreck after a shot and couldn't tell him much, other than I had shot and had no idea what had happened. After he got done laughing at me, we waited a while and eased in to see what we could find. We easily found where the buck had been standing, as he kicked up leaves when leaving fast. Unfortunately, I couldn't find my arrow or any blood.

We eased into the brush about 40 yards, continuing to search for blood and my arrow, when CJ loudly called out that he had found blood. I asked how much and if it looked good while walking toward him, and he responded that there was quite a bit on the buck lying dead in front of him.

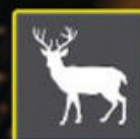
For those looking to travel and try something different, check out one of the Southern states for a hunt. There are some great public-land options in the South. Or for a reasonable price, you can usually get a guided hunt for about half the price of a guided Midwest whitetail hunt. While I ended up killing a beautiful buck on my hunt with CJ, I would have been just as happy with a small buck,

THERMACELL can save your hide. I forgot mine one time, and it did not happen again.



a doe, or no deer at all. If that works for you, try a hunt down south. If nothing else, it can help bring you back to reality if you are used to hunting big bucks in one of the more popular whitetail states. Just make sure you bring something for mosquitoes, as well as rubber boots and some lightweight camouflage. I would also make sure everything from your clothing to your bow is whisper-quiet, or you may struggle to fill your tag. **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.

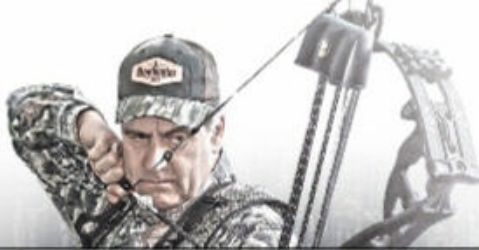


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COMPOUNDS, CROSSBOWS, AND TRADITIONAL BOWS

THESE THREE WEAPONS ARE MORE SIMILAR THAN YOU MIGHT THINK.

BACK IN THE late 1970s, my hunting buddy bought a Bear Whitetail Hunter compound bow. This was one of the first compound bows on the market, and his purchase made me jealous.

Within a few weeks, I purchased my first bow — a used Bear Kodiak Magnum recurve. Since we were now bowhunters, we needed a place to shoot. As luck would have it, our local gun club had set up a couple haybales for bowhunters. A problem developed when we noticed a sign that read, “NO compounds allowed!” Even though we hunted together, the Club would not let us practice together. Go figure?

Nowadays, it’s not uncommon in many states for “vertical bowhunters” to regularly share the woods with crossbow hunters, and even our firearms

friends. Obviously, things have changed within the archery world in the past five decades. But, comparing the different archery tools we use to hunt deer is difficult, and very few studies even exist.

In 2015, the Ohio’s Division of Wildlife conducted an Archery Survey, which was a follow-up to their annual Deer Hunter Effort and Harvest Survey. The bowhunter sample size consisted of 1,391 completed responses made up of 57% compound, 41% crossbow, and 2% traditional bowhunters.

For one question, the study determined the average distance each deer

hunter shot their first arrow using their weapon of choice. Compound hunters took the longest shots at 25.5 yards, followed by crossbows (24.7 yards) and stickbows (18.4 yards). The mean-yardage distance for all three was 25 yards.

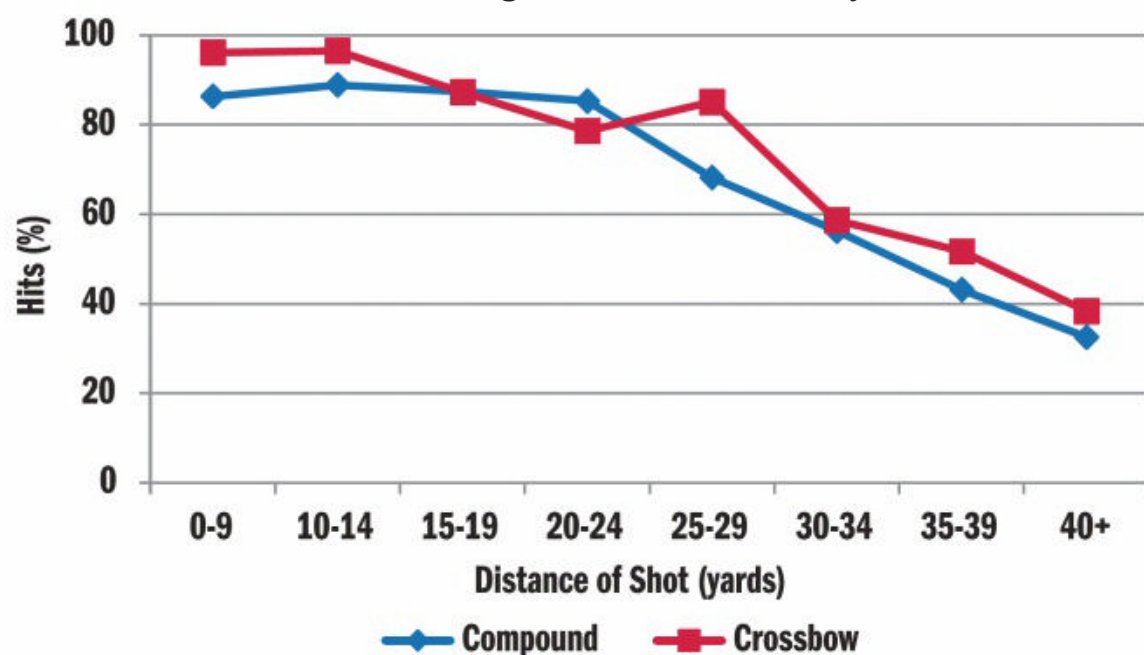
What was interesting about this first-shot study was there didn’t seem to be any significant differences in yardage between compound and crossbow hunters. Yet, many crossbow manufacturers try to market their crossbows on how far you can shoot an animal or target with one. Since all three weapons were attempting to harvest a deer within 26 yards, this is probably occurring because all hunters are hunting in the same habitat, which allows, on average, shots less than 30 yards. Obviously, yardage distances between marketing and hunting scenarios are vastly different.

The report also looked at the differences between the three bow types in relationship to the yardage where a hit was recorded. Unlike the previous paragraph, there was a difference in yardage between a first-shot attempt and whether an actual hit was made. Their data showed compound (22.6 yards) and crossbow (22.4 yards) hunters were basically the same in yardage where a shot connected in a hit. Traditional hunters had the closest yardage at 15.8 yards.

As stated in the report, “The average distance for all archers’ initial shot was 25 yards, but shots resulting in a hit were almost 30% closer than those who missed. The majority of compound and crossbow shots were in the 20 to 24-yard range, whereas most shots using traditional gear were in the 15 to 19-yard range.” As you’d imagine, accuracy decreased with distance for all weapon types. Considering many bowhunters have pins or electronic sights that go out to 80-plus yards, the vast majority of hits for Ohio deer were within 25 yards. This may be one reason why many hunters only have three pins or less on their bowsight?

Another interesting question had to do with the distance a deer traveled after

Relationship Between Shot Distance And Hits For Compounds And Crossbows During The 2014-2015 Archery Season



The Ohio data shows shooting accuracy above 80% for compounds and crossbows out to 25 yards, but dips below 40% for shots over 40 yards. And even though many of us shoot long distances, 78% of shots on deer with compound bows are within 35 yards.

being shot. On average, deer harvested with a compound bow traveled 82.1 yards, while crossbow-harvested deer went 64.7 yards. And although the survey sample was small, deer taken by traditional bowhunters traveled an average distance of 57.6 yards. Why did this occur? Most likely because shorter shooting distances combined with heavier arrows made pass-through shots much more likely. As with all archery weapon types, two holes are always better than just one. When you compare all three weapons, the average distance a deer traveled after being hit was 74.2 yards. Interestingly, 55% of all recoveries were within 50 yards, and only 11% exceeded 100 yards. Obviously, a lot of factors go into how far a deer travels after a hit.

The report also asked hunters how long they waited to recover the deer once they shot. "In nearly half (49%) of the 972 recoveries, hunters reported that the deer expired within sight of their stand. Given that many hunters saw the deer expire, and nearly 90% of recoveries occurred within 100 yards, it is not surprising that 84% of deer were recovered in less than 30 minutes. In only 6% of recoveries, hunters took longer than one hour to find their deer."

About 15 years ago, I posed the same question to three groups of urban, compound bowhunters in Maryland and Pennsylvania on, "How far did your deer travel after being shot?" After two years, they collectively took over 300 deer. Unfortunately, a computer crash deleted all my data. But, from what I remember, the average distance a deer ran after being hit was 75 to 80 yards. Interestingly, this

is very similar to the Ohio data. I also grouped the harvest data into whether the bowhunter used a fixed or expandable broadhead. In short, deer killed with expandable broadheads traveled 25 yards less than fixed broadheads. As you can imagine, 25 yards can be significant when you consider the small-sized properties located in an urban environment.

Now before everyone starts barking at these numbers, please note that there is a lot of "noise" in my data set. For example: Was a rangefinder used to determine this distance? Was the killing shot a lung or heart shot? Did the arrow puncture one or both lungs, etc? As you can imagine, the aforementioned questions plus many more make this data very interesting, but tough to stand up to scientific standards. Obviously, we all shoot different setups that cover a range of draw lengths, arrow weights, and poundage. But, given the choice between the two types of broadheads for a "normal" setup, expandable heads seem to produce the shortest blood trails for deer-sized animals. And no matter what type of broadhead you use, the bottom line is shot placement. **BH**

C.J.'S SUMMARY: A tip of the **Bowhunter** Magazine hat is given to esteemed deer biologist, Clint McCoy, and the Ohio Division of Wildlife for collecting this data. I know of no other state that has anything close to the archery data contained within this report. Hopefully the "unrest" over bow weapon of choice will someday subside, because at the end of the day, we hunters are all in this together.

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TRIED AND TRUE

BRIAN K. STRICKLAND | EQUIPMENT EDITOR



TURKEYS are never easy. But pics like this will become more commonplace with the right gear.

KING OF SPRING

DON'T LEAVE YOUR EQUIPMENT TO CHANCE WHEN YOU HEAD TO THE TURKEY WOODS THIS SPRING.

IT HAD BEEN a slow morning; and as I walked along the hedge-row toward my truck, contemplating my next move, a thunderous gobble sounded off. He was obviously close — less than 200 yards or so — but from the direction his gobble came from, I knew he was off limits.

I had asked the landowner more than once for an opportunity to chase toms on his little quarter section of turkey paradise, but it was clear from his response both times that it wouldn't happen in this lifetime.

The other issue was the wide creek sandwiched by thick cover that separated the public and private land. Although I had deflated a few toms on this piece of public dirt in the past, it's no secret that even hot gobblers are hesitant to breach

such obstacles at times. But with nothing to lose but time, I quickly made plans and popped up a ground blind, and then went to work.

For nearly an hour we went back and forth, and I bet that I must have sent him at least a hundred call sequences, and as if on cue, he responded nearly every time. Although I had yet to get a visual on the gobbler, it was obvious he was interested. As the minutes ticked by, he inched closer, but it seemed like the creek was a brick wall between us.

Contemplating this stalemate, I decided to make a move and edge my setup to where the creek's hairpin turn jutted deeper onto public ground. I couldn't get through my first calling sequence before his rattling gobble echoed in my direction, and before I knew it, he winged across the creek and landed less than 20 feet from my decoys. As he strutted facing away, I came to full draw and quickly made the final move in this spring chess match!

Wild turkeys don't traditionally qualify as big game, but when everything comes together in tough conditions, they certainly have a way of delivering big hunts, and this one proved it. Not only did it verify it can happen even when the chips are down, but it also proved that having the right gear can make all the difference.

When it comes to bowhunting turkeys, functional blinds are obviously a critical part, and at just 16 lbs. and a footprint measuring 75" square, the [1] **Rhino 180** (\$250) from **Rhino Blinds** (rhinoblinds.com) is one to consider. Covered in Realtree's EDGE camo, it features a unique two-way mesh material on two sides that allows you to see completely through the blind while preventing toms and other game from seeing you inside. It also has adjustable silent-slide windows on three sides for 270-degrees of shooting, and is equipped with an oversized zipper-less door for quiet entry and exit.

Browning (browningcamping.com) has also become a player in the hunting-blind arena, and their [2] **Evade** (\$380)

is a good example. It's equipped with silent-track windows on all sides, and is constructed from a rugged 600D polyester fabric with a black interior. My favorite concept is its large double-door design with magnetic door closures, so big guys like me don't have to contort themselves when climbing in.

With its pentagon-shaped footprint, the [3] **Pro Series Extreme View** (\$220) from **Ameristep** (ameristep.com) offers 37% more floor space than similar hub-style blinds and is also equipped with a one-way mesh material in the window section to provide a 360-degree view without actually opening any of the 12 windows. The silent window covers can be easily adjusted for shooting opportunities, and with its 77" shooting width and full-size door, it can easily host multiple hunters.

For the run-and-gun turkey hunt-

er looking to save weight and also be concealed, **ALPS** (alpsoutdoorz.com) gives you the three-sided [4] **Dash Panel Blind** (\$120). This single-hub gem can be adjusted from 40" to 80" and is equipped with their Silent-Trac window system. When you couple this with their **Vanish Folding Chair** (\$100), you'll be low enough to stay hidden behind the 54"-tall blind but up off the ground enough to easily draw your bow.

Another portable folding chair is **Muddy's** (gomuddy.com) [5] **Tripod Seat** (\$50). It has a padded seat with a contoured backrest constructed from a rugged water-resistant fabric and steel folding frame.

When comfort outweighs a run-and-gun approach, it's hard to beat **Millennium's** (millenniumstands.com) [6] **G100 Shooting Chair** (\$225).

At just over 7 lbs., it's not a huge burden to carry like other high-end blind chairs, and with 5" of adjustability (13" to 18" seat height), it will fit virtually any bowhunter.

Decoys are the next box that needs to be checked off, and luckily for us, there is no shortage to choose from. For those of us who prefer a lightweight, packable option while still requiring highly realistic faux birds, the new [7] **Photoform Strutter** (\$130) and **Hen** (\$84) series from **Primos** (primos.com) is one for the short-list. Using a proprietary process, they take an actual image of a strutting tom and hen and print it on lightweight 3-D molded foam, which enables you to collapse and fold them for storage in your pack.

Adding to their flock of lightweight and extremely portable decoys, **Montana Decoy** (montanadecoy.com) intro-





duces the new [8] **Wiley Tom 3D** (\$130). Developed using their realistic HD photo of an actual wild turkey, it's designed for use either as a full-bodied 3-D strutter or 2-D deke, depending on what the situation calls for. You can replace the printed fan with a real one by using individual tail feathers, making it easy to replace damaged feathers as the season progresses. Best of all, its trifold design is easy to pack, and when you add their **Miss Purrfect XD Hen** (\$80) to the mix, you'll have the complete package.

Sometimes, having a decoy that's a little different from everything else hard-hunted toms have seen can be the ticket to a punched tag. Take the new blow-molded **Avian-X** (avian-x.com) [9] **HDR Feeding Hen** (\$150), for example. Like their entire HDR series, it has a hand-carved look and feel, with lifelike paint schemes that scream realism. Add to this the relaxed posture of the Feeding Hen, and a pressured gobbler will likely feel the coast is clear when he sees it.

Although I love the taste of wild turkey, the real reason I hunt them is the in-

teraction between hunter and game, and there's nothing that gets you neck-deep into the process like **Ultimate Predator Gear's** (ultimatepredatorgear.com) [10] **Turkey Stalker** (\$85). These lightweight (less than 11 oz.) tom-foolers, with their shoot-through design, mount to your bow, so you can become one with the turkeys and stalk in close when all else fails. They are available in Eastern and Merriam's/Rio models.

Turkey calls are a dime a dozen, but if there's one style that will cause me to head back to my truck if I forget it, it would be a handheld slate. The ease of use and realism makes even an average caller sound like a champion, and the [11] **Drury Outdoors Signature Pot Call** (\$50) from **Hunters Specialties** (hunter-spec.com) is a good example. Built with a native sycamore pot and a select grade of anodized aluminum, it can deliver high-frequency locating calls, as well as soft and seductive yelps, clucks, and purrs.

Putting good use to diaphragm calls is a must for bowhunters, and the [12] **Signature Series 3-Pack** (\$30) from **Zink**

(zinkcalls.com) will give you options. With three different reed designs, they deliver vastly different sounds that range from clear, extra raspy, or something in-between.

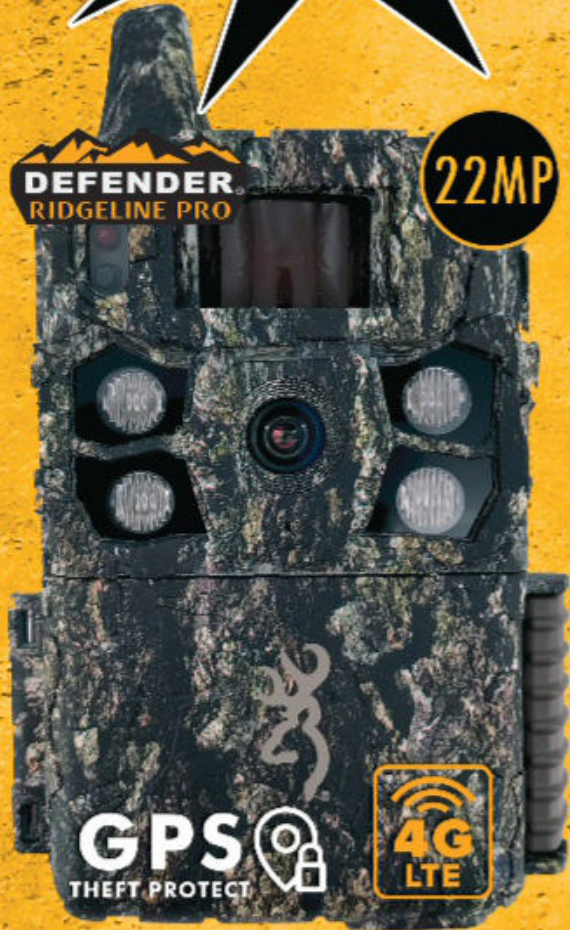
Including a gobble call to the mix a few years back really added a dose of realism and aggressiveness to my setups, especially early in the season. It's something you should try if you haven't, and the [13] **Thunder Shaker Gobble** (\$16) from **Flex-tone** (flextonegamecalls.com) makes it easy. Simply give it a shake, as its name suggests, to produce true-sounding gobbles that will grab the attention of nearby toms.

Sometimes, it's not until the back half of the turkey season before it all comes together, and that can make for buggy situations, especially when you're hunkered in a blind. **Thermacell's** (thermacell.com) [14] **MR300 Hunt Pack** (\$30) creates a 15' mosquito-repellent bubble to make those hunts more bearable. It offers a better on/off switch than its predecessor, and also features a re-engineered grill, quiet ignition, improved ergonomics, and an accessory mounting system. **BH**



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DR. DAVE SAMUEL | CONSERVATION EDITOR



THE PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF HUNTERS

THERE ARE WAYS HUNTERS AND ANGLERS CAN IMPROVE OUR "BRAND."

LAST SUMMER, my friend Russ Mason from Michigan wrote a great article for Michigan Out-of-Doors. It was about "branding." For hunters, branding means giving the nonhunting public a positive perception of hunting.

How does the nonhunting public see us? How do antihunters see us? How do we see ourselves? How are we "branded" by the public and by ourselves?

Hunters see themselves as conservationists when it comes to wildlife and their environment. While that is true, what is also true is that a lot of the general public doesn't see hunters that way. If an industry is threatening a local wet-

land by some type of construction, and citizens come together to discuss how that negatively impacts that wetland, how many hunters are in that group? In most cases, not very many. To the general public, hunters are not branded as environmentalists.

The shame of that is that hunters sit in blinds hunting waterfowl and know the value of wetlands to ducks. Hunters

can identify the species of waterfowl, and also know a lot about other wildlife using and benefiting from that wetland. They could influence their "brand" by attending such meetings in large numbers.

A lot of antihunter dialogue is focused on the idea that total preservation of wildlife is much better than conservation of wildlife. Total preservation means no killing involved, but hunters know that conservation includes harvest to achieve better wildlife management.

As Russ pointed out in his article on branding, "Hunting has an image problem and hunters haven't done enough to correct it." Russ also notes that even with this image problem, the nonhunting public still leans toward supporting hunting as a tool for wildlife management. They also view hunting in a positive light if the harvest is used for food. One great marketing tool that was started by my friend Bob Easterbrook was the idea that hunters could donate venison to the needy. The general public loves the idea that hunters donate venison, and it really improved the image of hunters and hunting.

So, what other things can be done to improve the hunter's image with the public? There are already huge sections of the public who use the outdoors, and some are friends of hunting. Perhaps the biggest group is birdwatchers. They spend lots of money just to be able to see and identify birds. In fact, hunting and birdwatching have many of the same attributes, except for the harvest. Wildlife photographers do, too. Their "kill" is a quality photo. Obviously, the hunter image with the nonhunting public could be enhanced if there was more association with birdwatchers, photographers, and other outdoor enthusiasts.

Hunters have lagged behind when it comes to getting their "brand" out via social media. More hunters now use social media, but they seem to do it to talk to each other rather than interact with nonhunters. Improving our brand must involve the media.

The Nimrod Society (NimrodSociety.org) was created by a bowhunter named Alan Taylor from Michigan to facilitate programs to educate the general public on the positive role anglers and hunters play in society through accurate and factual education and media programs. In the 1990s, several anti-hunting referendum ballot issues were passed in Colorado in part because the general public did not understand the issues or the positive role hunters play in wildlife management. In a nutshell, a group of concerned sportsmen and women worked with Nimrod to develop a media-based program to educate the urban, nonhunting public about the scientific, economic, and conservation benefits of hunting and fishing.

Through perseverance and cooperation with many outdoor users, they succeeded in getting legislation passed whereby a Wildlife Council was formed that directed the funds from a small surcharge placed on licenses sold to hunters and fishermen to be used for a mass-media, public-education program. They called this the "Hug a Hunter" program.

Imagine what this could do in your state every time an antihunting issue arises. For example, if the antis attacked

an existing black bear season, using misinformation to persuade nonhunters to vote their support. If your state had this Wildlife Council and the license surcharge, they could develop a huge mass-media campaign to present what would happen if bear hunting became illegal. I can think of several states that could use this Nimrod idea right now.

State wildlife agencies just don't have the funds to run such education programs, but the license surcharge makes it work. All states may not follow the "Hug a Hunter" model that Colorado developed, but the concept can work everywhere. In recent years, Michigan got legislation passed for a license surcharge with the funds used to educate nonhunters about the values of hunting and fishing. Doing so improves the hunting brand with nonhunters.

The Nimrod Society's goal is to promote similar education programs in all states. Note: Nimrod is not a member organization. You can't join the Nimrod Society. But if you go to their website, you can learn how it worked in Colorado and how you and other sportsmen and outdoor users can work together to get such a program started in your state.

There are literally millions of outdoor

users such as birdwatchers, hikers, and wildlife photographers, who would support these efforts if hunters would work with them in a cooperative manner to create this Nimrod model in your state. Doing so would improve the hunter's image with them, but via the resulting multimedia campaign, it would also improve our image and brand with nonhunters. It's time that we reached out to all segments of the public. As Russ Mason pointed out in his article, we need to build the trust of all nonhunters if hunting is to remain alive.

There is one more way you can learn about the Nimrod Society and how you can work with them to show the true relationship between sportsmen and conservation. Mr. Taylor has created an endowment to Hillsdale College in Michigan to create the Nimrod Education Center. This Center is dedicated to helping educate the public about the importance of sportsmen-funded wildlife management. To learn more about the Nimrod Education Center, visit Hillsdale.edu/educational-outreach/nimrod-education-center. **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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SEASONS OF GOLD

MY QUEST FOR A HEARTLAND GIANT CAUSED ME TO REFLECT ON MY 30 YEARS IN THE WHITETAIL WOODS.

LEAVES FELL LIKE GOLDEN SNOW

through the October sky, the final leg of a journey that began long ago, when spring rains and warmer weather promised a season of bounty and growth. Now, the sand had run out on that promise, leaving its casualties on the forest floor while the hardwoods prepared for its deep slumber. Although inevitable, the wind had catalyzed these events, blowing from the southeast with blustery gusts that rocked the oak tree I was nestled in like a buoy on the ocean.

It was October 27, 2021, and I was on my own journey of sorts. It had been 30 years since I first climbed an oak tree, nocked an arrow, and settled in for my first season as a bowhunter. Much had changed since then — and some not at all — I thought as I sat back for my evening vigil. Less than an hour before, I'd clambered up the steep ridge I now sat upon, doing all I could to suppress my scent and sound as I approached. The shingle oak I was stationed in abutted an isolated pond; a woodland waterhole barely 30 feet across, its banks littered with rubs, tracks, and trails. Some years, especially the dry ones, this oasis held little but mud and muck, but sporadic squalls over the past month had ensured ample water to quench the thirst of any passersby.

Borne of boot leather and brush-busting attire, I had discovered this stand site while scouting the previous winter. It sat in the heart of this Midwest acreage, along the edge of a forgotten farmstead put out to pasture decades before — now a sanctuary for the local whitetails and other wildlife. As I tore through this thorn-infested thicket, I eventually came upon a small clearing laced with giant rubs and numerous scrapes that painted a portrait of a giant's lair. While their tortured trunks and twisted branches lay dormant and drab that frigid day, I hoped things would change come fall, and a quick stroll in early October confirmed as much. Autumn had rekindled their colors and reopened their wounds, as numerous

cedar trees — their bark now hanging like shredded tapestry — surrounded the stand site, while a large scrape, its dark earth streaked by cloven hooves, lay between two major trails. A narrow ditch — as obscure as a secret passage — led from the thicket to a creekbottom below, where a giant cottonwood served as a marker for my entry point up the ridge.

When I started bowhunting in 1992, it was considered taboo to intrude on a buck's core area for fear of educating him and cutting your season short. However, as the years passed and my tags went unfilled, it became obvious that going down swinging was better than taking a third strike. To creep into a mature buck's bedroom, to enter his domain under the right conditions, was not only an underused tactic but one that had produced results for me in years past. I felt the southeast breeze and approaching storm provided me with a golden opportunity to roll the dice, so here I sat on this late-October day.

Now just past 3:30 p.m., the brisk wind felt cool against my cheek as I got settled; its steady current carrying my scent over the bluff behind me. Trails coursed below and behind my ambush, weaving in and out of the thick growth, while a poison ivy vine dangled like a serpent above me; its tendrils long since severed, one of the many challenges this tree posed when I hung the stand a month prior. The pond behind me sat calm and collected; reflecting the trees along its bank like a glass mirror while leaves drifted aimlessly upon its surface. A trio of Osage orange trees, their limbs branching like ghoulish arms, stood before me, now unburdened by the hedgeapples that lay upon the forest floor like lime-green softballs. Ominous thorns jutted from black locust trees scattered along the ridgeline, while swamp and shingle oaks, still young and unassuming, grew sheepishly near the pond. A centuries-old hickory, the elder statesman of this group, took center stage — its plate-sized bark resembling sheetrock laid against

BH
FEATURES



ALTHOUGH I had no trail-cam images or previous sightings of this heartland ghost, the giant rubs and large tracks in the area told me to stay the course.

BY EYAD H. YEHWAWI

PHOTOS BY THE AUTHOR

its trunk. Even after all this time, I never grew weary of this scene or its participants, and I couldn't help but smile.

I laid my head back on the shingle oak's trunk and stared skyward, watching the trees sway and the leaves fall in the blustery conditions. It was hard to fathom that three decades had already passed since my first season with bow in hand. And despite all the changes in my life since then, the sights and sounds of those early years remained steadfast and strong. I zipped my vest higher as the temperature started to cool, my mind confident that I'd made the right decision in pushing the envelope. Entering a mature buck's bedroom can be a risky proposition at any point in the season, but the wind was ideal, and the approaching front would erase any scent left behind. Neither were small favors, as when it came to bowhunting mature bucks, foreign odors and lingering scents are not easily forgiven. I had no clue what was living within this overgrown farmstead, having not placed any trail cameras near this sanctuary for fear of alarming its occupants. Changes to one's dwelling are rarely missed, and I didn't need a camera to tip the scales in the whitetails' favor, or tell me what the rubs and tracks already had: Something of giant proportions was living on this ridge. Years ago, big tracks and massive rubs were enough to stir my imagination and fuel my dreams, and it was surreal to know that mindset had not changed.

At 4 p.m., I looked to my right and saw two young does working toward my location. The wind was still in my favor and blowing with enough intensity that I knew its allegiance would not falter on this night. I left my bow on its hanger and relaxed, watching the does' shy but steady approach. The lead

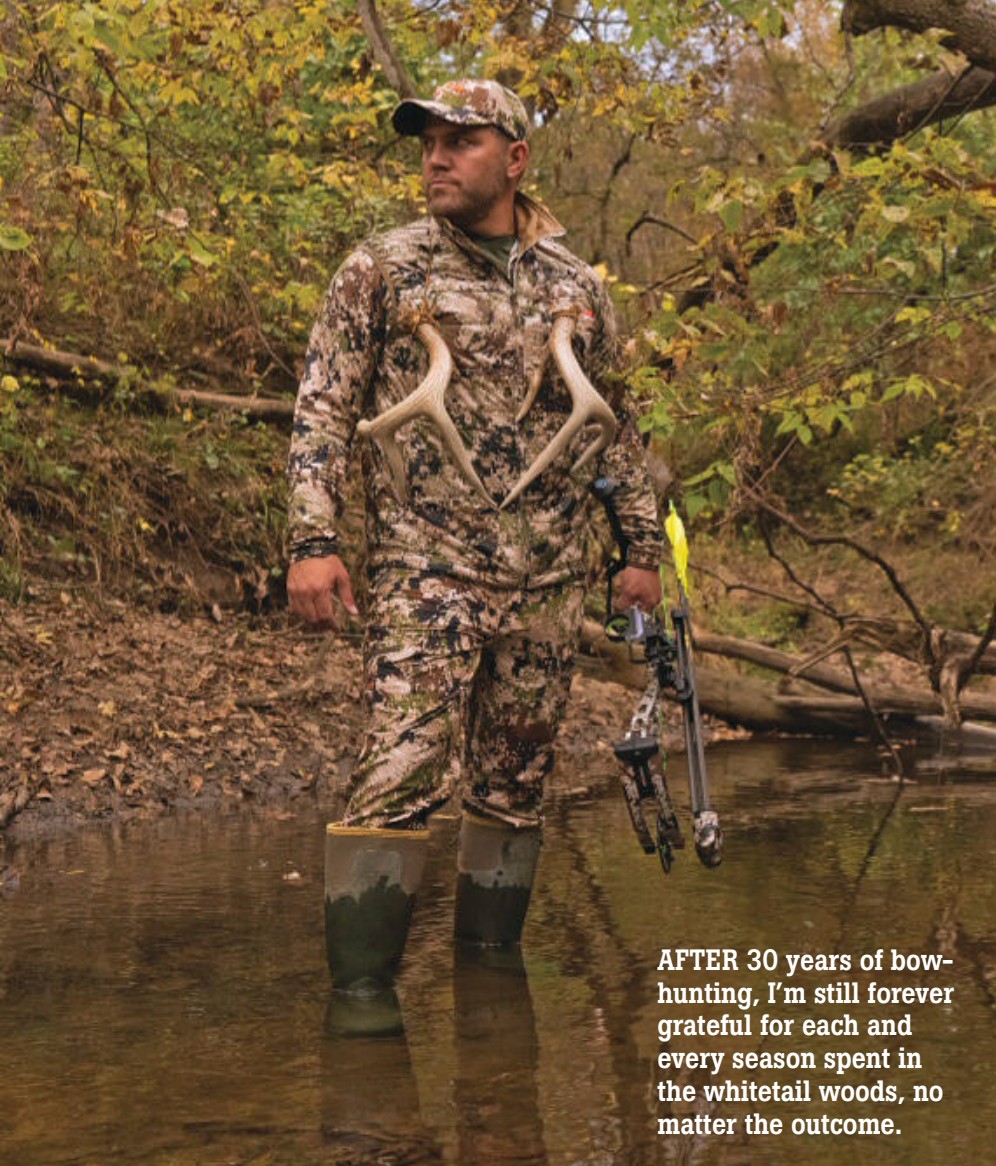
doe continued to feed, chewing on a honey locust pod that bobbed with each bite before hanging from her mouth like a cigar. Materializing from the thicket minutes later, a mature doe ambled along, cautiously moving toward the yearlings that preceded her entry. I watched the elder doe slowly quarter toward my position before she turned broadside at 20 yards. I carefully reached for my bow, my hand inching closer each time her head dropped to the forest floor, eventually lifting it off the hanger and preparing for the shot. Despite having an antlerless tag in my pocket, I had no intention of taking this doe and was more interested in what may be following her backtrail.

As I was watching the yearlings meander about, the mature doe, which was walking the same path as the youngsters, suddenly became nervous. She stood on full alert, plunging her head to the ground, then back up again, doing all she could to decipher the foreign odor that had found her nostrils. Like any strategy, this setup had an Achilles' heel, as there was no way to enter this stand without crossing at least one trail, which unfortunately happened to be the one she was on. I knew once this doe reached her threshold of certainty that a human presence was in her midst, there would be no stopping the barrage of stomping and snorting that was sure to follow, and make me further question whether I should fill my antlerless tag. Taking my chances, I left my bow at brace and grimaced, hoping she would lose interest and make her way down the ridge and out of sight. In time, she did just that, veering to the north and over the ridge as I breathed a sigh of relief. The younger does soon followed; oblivious to any danger and perhaps frustrated at having to leave the honey locust pods they were enjoying behind.



SPLASHES OF GOLD, rutting whitetails, and big dreams draw bowhunters to the heartland each autumn. Inset: The cedar trees surrounding my stand were shredded and scarred — painting a portrait of a giant's lair.





AFTER 30 years of bowhunting, I'm still forever grateful for each and every season spent in the whitetail woods, no matter the outcome.

Shortly before 5 p.m., I glanced to my right and saw a tawny hide and subtle movement through a tangle of multiflora rose. In a matter of seconds, the ebony nose and ivory-rimmed eyes of a fourth doe materialized just past the old hickory. Despite my Midwest roots and decades in the Iowa hardwoods, never had I seen a doe of her size and stature. Moving from right to left, she paused perfectly broadside in my shooting lane at 25 yards. I gripped my bow tighter, feeling the tension in my fingers and forearms, contemplating the situation — the antlerless tag whispering in my ear once more. Nevertheless, I ignored this temptation, remembering the shredded saplings and raked cedars that had drawn me here. Although I'd never laid eyes on the buck that made the giant rubs and tracks that encircled this sanctuary, if there was ever a night he would show his hand, this was it, and I had to be patient.

The wind continued to howl through the hardwoods, ripping leaves from their branches with each gust, while darkening clouds promised torrents of rain and rapidly fading daylight. While the wind was still in my favor, the mature doe seemed uneasy, although the trail I had crossed and compromised was still well ahead of this matriarch. Despite having no knowledge of what was following her backtrail — no pictures, proof of life, or previous sightings — I simply knew *he* was coming. Years of bowhunting had taught me many lessons, some without remorse, and one of which was to trust your instincts and be prepared because second chances can be few and far between. The doe glanced back, crouched down like a scolded puppy, and then crept forward — just as a giant beam and long tines appeared through the thicket.

When I saw his antlers and bullish mass, I clipped my release to my bowstring and squared my shoulders — pivoting on my seat as I tightened the tension on my D-loop. The giant buck stepped between two shingle oaks, their trunks bordering his path like timbered pylons, before he turned left and passed behind a honey locust tree — its thorns resembling daggers in the fading light. I hit my anchor in one fluid mo-

tion, watching the buck reappear as my peep centered the sight housing. My fluorescent-green pin followed suit, settling behind the beast's shoulder when he stopped at 25 yards, his attention on the doe that had seduced him like a siren's song. I held my aim and exhaled, taking my time — remembering to take my time — knowing that more mistakes are made in this moment than any other. Then my arrow was gone, striking the buck with a solid hit, just before crimson splashed upon the fallen leaves. The giant dashed to the east, dipped under an Osage orange tree — the arrow falling near its gnarly trunk — and then disappeared over the ridge. I sat there in silence with the wind offering no hints or help as to whether the monster had fallen, before tipping my hat skyward in a gesture of gratitude — the first and most important virtue that bowhunting instilled in me all those years ago.

With flashlights in tow, my friend Mitch and I worked our way down the ridgeline three hours later — the trees now cloaked in a starless sky. The blood trail was sparse but steady, and beginning to sow a bit of doubt, when Mitch shined his beam through the hardwoods. Nestled in the leaves along the oak-laden flat, a tall and heavy rack met our gaze. As I knelt beside the buck's sleek coat and polished tines, I thought back through the years and realized how fortunate I was to still participate in this endeavor — from climbing trees and drawing my bow to sitting for hours on end for just a chance, one chance, to even see an animal of this caliber — much less harvest one. There was much to be grateful for on this night, knowing how rare these moments are and how blessed we are to experience them.

Bowhunting whitetails is a centuries-old tradition, played out in autumn's arena each fall. It is a season of golden grain, ivory antlers, and the Hunter's Moon, and of dreams fulfilled and hearts broken. It is the time of year when a bowhunter's preparation and mental fortitude are put to the test — against both weather and whitetails — with some bowhunters journeying through the gauntlet rewarded and unscathed while others succumb to their mistakes and misfortunes. I have experienced both sides of this coin, but I continue to play the game because that is the nature of bowhunting. No matter how many years we spend in the field, accurate arrows, short blood trails, and long tines lying still are never guaranteed. If they were, bowhunting would cease to be a challenge, and greener pastures would beckon. I have yet to hear their calls and know I never will, because bowhunting won't allow it. I only hope that when the cold winds blow in October, turning my head and heart toward the timber each fall, that I'm up for the challenge. No matter the outcome, though, come season's end I'll be sure to tip my hat skyward and be thankful for the opportunity, for tomorrow is promised to no one. And as any bowhunter will attest — neither is another season of gold. **BH**

The author is an optometrist, freelance writer, and avid bowhunter from Southeast Iowa. He is the author of the award-winning book "Crimson Arrows: A Bowhunting Odyssey," available at Amazon and crimsonarrowsmedia.com. He currently lives in Iowa with his wife and children.

Author's Note: On this hunt I used a Bowtech Revolt set at 70 pounds, Victory arrows, 100-grain Rage Trypan broadheads, Black Gold sight, Vapor Trail rest, TightSpot quiver, and a Spot Hogg release. My clothing consisted of Sitka outerwear, First Lite Merino wool base layers, and LaCrosse boots.

The POOR

IF YOU WANT TO BOWHUNT SHEEP BUT YOUR WALLET CAN'T HANDLE IT, YOU MIGHT GIVE Aoudad A TRY.

A **AS A HUNTER**, outdoorsman, and adventure-seeker, I've always been excited to step outside of my comfort zone and hunt new species in terrain I've never seen before. For most of my life, these hunts were on a shoestring budget and included a lot of blood, sweat, and tears — and great memories of sleeping in the back of my truck to be able to afford them!

So, in 2018, when I was asked by Bryan Broderick of Day Six arrows to come along on a free-range aoudad hunt with Scott Campbell, owner of Top O Texas Outfitters, in the Texas Panhandle, I was all in! At this point, I didn't really know what an aoudad was, where they lived, or what they looked like. I didn't care because it was something new, it only cost \$500 for a trespass fee, it was a short drive from Colorado...and the word on the street was that killing an aoudad with my recurve would be next to impossible. Challenge accepted!

I could tell that Scott and his son, Wes, were awesome

dudes from the get-go. It also didn't take me long to realize that this was definitely going to be an adventure hunt, because the terrain was difficult, the aoudad were cagey, and there wasn't a ton of them to be found.

We walked several miles each day, glassed until our eyes practically popped out of our skulls, and in the end, I was lucky enough to take a 12-year-old ewe with my recurve on Day Four...and that's where my addiction for the poor man's sheep began!

Most sheep hunts are priced far beyond what a blue-collar construction worker can afford — costing \$18,000 to \$65,000, on average. The aoudad, or Barbary sheep, will cost you the price of the tag on up to \$6,500, depending on whether you go with an outfitter. These prices are a bit more realistic for the average hunter, but the adventure will be far more than the dollar amount may indicate.

As I write this article, I find myself in the Davis Mountains of Texas, guiding aoudad hunters for Scott. I've been



MAN'S *Sheep*

BY ARON SNYDER

doing this for three to four months a year since 2019, and I'm just as excited today as I was on my first hunt there for these amazing creatures! The areas I am lucky enough to guide and hunt in are the aforementioned Davis Mountains in far West Texas, and the Palo Duro Canyon in North Texas.

If you don't think of Texas as a mountain-filled area with giant cliffs and 6,500 to 8,000-foot peaks, you'd be wrong, as I was. By no means am I comparing these Texas locales to the likes of the Northwest Territories, Alaska, Colorado, or British Columbia, but they do have their own special beauty, challenges, and adventure.

So, what's so special about aoudad? To start with, they are one of the toughest animals I've ever seen or hunted. Not just because of the extreme weather changes they deal with, the rough country they live in, or the fact that they can eat up arrows like it's their job. Beyond that, they are extremely crafty, very rarely bed for more than an hour, and typically hang out in large groups, so you have many eyes to deal with.

Being a longtime mule deer hunter, I originally planned on mimicking the tactics I use when hunting muleys in the high country of Eastern Colorado and the plains of Alberta to get close to these intelligent sheep. It only took a few days of hunting aoudad for me to figure out I needed to modify my approach. It wasn't that my muley mindset wouldn't work, because it did at times, but I quickly learned that my initial plan of bedding something down at 10:30 a.m. and then making a stalk wasn't going to be my primary technique — that is, if I or my hunters hoped to experience any kind of consistent success.

So, what did I start doing differently? First off, I became more accustomed to running to get to a ram or ewe before it got out of its bed. Not on the final approach, obviously, but if the total stalk was a mile long, roughly three-quarters of it would be spent moving at a pretty good clip. I use the same technique for getting ahead of a group of aoudad so I can get set up for an ambush.



LIKE ALL SHEEP hunts, much of your time is spent behind quality glass as you try to locate a band of aoudad.

Something else that I really didn't think about in the beginning was calling them in, but when aoudad are rutting, calling definitely works! The sound is hard to describe in text, but I use it frequently when coming in on an aoudad from above and I can't get any closer. When using this call, the dominant rams will often charge in, which helps cut the distance down for a closer shot. Another call that has worked at times is the sound of a lost lamb bawling. This will sometimes bring the ewes closer, but it can also occasionally bring in the lead ram. Overall, I've learned to move fast at times, be more patient at others, and to spend a lot of time behind good glass.

To give a few examples, I will go over what techniques I used to kill my last three rams. All three were over 30 inches in length, between 11 and 15 years old, and were killed between four and 16 yards.

I was riding the struggle bus on my first ram hunt and pretty much got my butt kicked from beginning to end. To give you an idea of how bad it was, I had 49,000 steps on my watch the day I finally made it happen. Determination was really what helped me pull it off.

I had blown multiple stalks, missed a few shots, and was starting to doubt if I'd be able to make it happen. With a final desperation move, I had my buddy walk parallel to a field the aoudad were feeding in to push them into the canyons below. It worked like a charm as far as the pushing part of our plan but guessing where 50 to 60 aoudad are going to run is like throwing darts with your eyes closed in the dark.

I made my best educated guess, and then took off running in hopes that I could get far enough ahead of the aoudad so as to get a better idea of where they wanted to go and where to set up an ambush to intercept them. After a mad dash of 500 yards, I got a decent glimpse of a ewe that I hoped was leading the pack, and it looked like she was heading to a small pond about 100 yards from me. I quickly moved into position and got set up for a shot.

About five minutes later, I had multiple rams and ewes all around me, but nothing had winded me yet. I could see a ram coming in fast, and guessed he'd be within range in a few seconds. To my surprise, he veered even closer to me, and before I knew it, I had a four-yard shot! I didn't totally panic, given the ultra-close distance, and managed to get a clean shot off. My arrow passed through the ram's heart, and he expired 75 yards away. My amazing wife and Scott were watching all of this through a spotting scope. Having these two with me was just as important as the actual hunt. The ram ended up measuring just over 30 inches and was 11 years of age.

My second hunt was one of those experiences that only happens once in a lifetime. It was the first day of my hunt, and



THIS IS MY FIRST aoudad ram, which I arrowed at just four yards with my recurve.

after about 20 minutes of glassing, we spotted a large band of rams with multiple ewes coming over the top of a ridge.

There was a lot of sparring going on between the rams, and I quickly made my way up the mountain to position myself above them. It only took me about 45 minutes to get above them, but the closest I could get was 85 yards — too far for a shot with my recurve.

So, I took a guess at where they might exit, in hopes they would cross in front of me. After a few minutes, 13 different ewes and lambs crossed in front of me at 25 yards, and all I could do was hope the rest of the group followed suit.

Out of the blue, a lamb and a ewe started coming straight at me. Seconds later, the lamb was a foot away and started pushing her head against my recurve's limb tip. I was trying not to shake at this point, but it didn't really work, and both lamb and ewe blew out of there and headed back toward the rest of their group.

The lead ram took notice of this and started coming straight at me to investigate. He followed the exact same path as the lamb and ewe, and before I knew it, he was 10 yards away. I made a quick shot, my arrow passing through his heart, and he dropped 45 yards from my position. I was on my knees when I took the shot, and that was probably a good thing as my legs were shaking uncontrollably. This ram was 33 inches and 13 years old. He was a true giant with any weapon, and one of my most-cherished animals to date.



THIS 33-INCH, 13-year-old aoudad ram was only 10 yards away when I took the shot.

I've been lucky enough to hunt multiple species all over North America, but my third aoudad ram definitely holds a place as one of my all-time favorite hunts. Although the ram was by far my biggest, it had little to do with the ram's size and score and more to do with the crazy stalk and how it all came together.

We had spotted a large group of rams and ewes in what you would basically call a "rut fest" — bashing heads together, hooking and chasing ewes. Having these rams butt heads at 80 yards was amazing, but it also allowed me to scoot a few feet closer every time they cracked heads.

It took me a long time to get within bow range, but after a

couple hours of calculated stalking, I was 56 yards away and figured I better not push my luck. I got into a good shooting position directly above them, and then waited for something to push them closer to me.

Suddenly, one of the ewes started making an odd sound, which I could only figure was her signal to the rams that she was getting in the mood to breed. My hunch was apparently right, because moments later I spotted two giant rams coming out of the cliffs over my right shoulder!

The two rams came straight at me, and both were larger than any of the rams I had been watching in the group below me. I quickly made a 180 on my knees and repositioned to take an uphill shot. I barely had my fingers on my bowstring, when the rams had closed to 20 yards. I was comfortable with a frontal shot at this distance, but the behavior of the animals would dictate everything.

As I went to full draw, I told myself if the rams didn't see me, I'd take the shot. When I hit my anchor, they had closed to 15 yards and had no idea I was around. I released the arrow and it quickly passed through the larger of the two rams. He dropped dead roughly 25 yards from the point of impact. I couldn't believe what had just happened, not only the shot, but the rut activity I had experienced over the past three hours. It was truly something that I think about every day, and a story I tell anyone who asks.

So, while the aoudad might be the poor man's sheep hunt, it is definitely rich in experience, adventure, and excitement. For anyone looking to try their hand at hunting these amazing animals, I strongly suggest making it happen... You won't be disappointed! **BH**

The author is an avid backcountry hunter, survival expert, photographer, and owner of Kifaru International.



MY LARGEST aoudad ram to date looks a little rough after the frontal shot at 15 yards. The rut was on, which made for an exciting hunt.

WHAT IS AVAXHOME?

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ERASE THE LINE

WHEN IT COMES TO KEEPING AN ANIMAL FROM SMELLING YOU, THERE'S STILL A LINE THAT CAN NEVER BE CROSSED.

BY COLE TANNER

Scent control is a journey I have been on since I first started hunting as a kid. Now, more than 25 years later, it's time to look back on where I've come from, where I am now, and what lies ahead. The intent of my story is not to convince you on how or why or if you should or should not do what you do. This is my experience down the roller-coaster ride of scent control. The good, the bad, the ugly, the real. I think you'll be able to relate. So, let's go!

A LOOK BACK

My scent-control story started long before I knew it had begun. My grandpa was the first person to introduce me to

hunting. I was an enthusiastic learner, to say the least. When it was time to go hunting, I had learned that we each had specific jobs to do. My grandpa was the wits, the weapon, and the know-how. I had the young set of eyes and the windicator.

The day I remember was a brisk fall afternoon hunt for rabbits. Grandpa parked his small car in the field near a woodlot. I fell behind his every step as we left the car behind and the adventure began. I copied his mannerisms the best I could. He was deliberate about what he was doing and where he was going. Every once in a while, he would stop, give me a glance over his shoulder, and motion me to the front. This was my favorite part —

I was up.

I could hardly reach into my pocket fast enough. I pulled out a small bottle of windicator that the sweat and dirt had made my own. My grandpa had been refilling that bottle with baby powder for who knows how long before our epic trips. I flipped up the top and squeezed it with everything I had. Out came the puff and off it went. My grandpa knew rabbits weren't going to wind us, but he was trying to teach me a lesson he knew I would someday understand.



OZONICS DEFINITELY made me rethink my scent-control tactics.

I looked back at him just as fast as the cloud dissipated. He would ask, “What does it mean?” I would point in the direction of the cloud and say, “There’s the line.” My grandpa would ask me every time what the line meant and what we had to do. He had taught me that we had to shoot the rabbit before it got to the line. If we didn’t shoot the rabbit, it would wind us when it hit the line and run away. He was adamant about making this point every time.

And you know what? I have hunted with that line in mind my entire life. I set treestands based on the line. I decide where I’m going to hunt, when I’m going to hunt, and if I’m going to hunt based on that line. That line has become the clearest thing I’ve never been able to see. My experience had taught me that line had zero margin for error, because when an animal got to that line, the gig was up — period! I couldn’t change it, no matter what I did. We’ll come back to this after a bit.

WHAT SCENT CONTROL Did To My Life

Let me tell you a story. There was a

father who was going to take his son on his first-ever hunt. Before the morning hunt, the boy jumped in the shower and washed off with the special shampoo and soap his dad had instructed him to use. When the boy was done showering, his dad had special towels that appeared from a special tote, ready for him. Said towels had been washed and dried with his dad’s special laundry detergent in a separate washer and dryer from the one that Mom used.

The father ran through the same shower routine but had an extra step with the special deodorant he had to put on. The father also pulled from the special tote their travel clothes for the day.

ERASE THE LINE

These weren't the clothes the boy was going to wear hunting; these were just the clothes to wear for the ride to and from the hunt in the truck.

After a fun drive and a lesson on what good country music was, they found themselves parked by the field entrance. The boy was chewing on some special gum his dad had given him, because apparently it was important for his breath. The boy didn't understand, but shrugged it off and chewed away.

His dad then unloaded their special totes with their special hunting clothes and other gear. With doors open on the side of this gravel road, they both changed into their special hunting clothes.

"Okay, let's get sprayed down," the dad exclaimed with a finger pointed in the air. The boy didn't entirely understand this part either. But his dad was adamant, and it seemed important, so he sprayed down his clothes, boots, and pack.

As they walked into the woods, the father led the way down a winding trail that brought them to a big oak tree where a double ladder stand was strategically placed. The boy knew from past tagalong trips with his dad that there would be one more spraying routine before they climbed into the stand. He stood at attention as Dad administered the final round of scent control.

Once on stand, the boy's nervous excitement manifested itself in an unintended steady tap of his knee. He didn't notice it at first, until his dad reached over and gently squeezed his leg. The tap stopped and the boy looked at his dad with a smile. His dad winked and said, "It's going to be a good day."

The light in the sky started to change from a dark blue to a fire of reds and oranges. The boy's stomach started to

EVEN DURING the rut, when a buck smells you, it's game over!



rumble, as breakfast from a few hours ago was not sitting well. Unable to deal with the belly pain, the boy let out a fart. His dad looked over in half surprise and amazement. "Sorry, Dad," said the boy with an embarrassed grin.

In that moment of unexpected gas, all the "special" scent-control tactics the father had employed were seemingly wasted, as his scent-elimination regimen could only work on existing odors.

I was the dad in this story for more years than I care to admit. I think a lot of us have been. Heck the scent control I mentioned was about half of what I did on a huntly basis. You can't tell me I was the only person who bought the latest and greatest special "scent-free" hunting clothes, got out in the stand, let out a fart, and wondered why I could still smell it. I was under the impression from the ads that I saw that the clothes would stop my odor. Doubt would creep in, as I felt I must be doing something wrong. This vicious cycle kept repeating itself...

Let's ASK OURSELVES WHY?

This all came to a head one day when I decided to just stop everything I had been doing. I woke up, took a normal shower, slapped on my normal deodorant, put on my normal hunting clothes, grabbed my bow and went hunting. And you know what? The exact same

thing happened as when I did all those special scent-control tactics. When I got a deer downwind, they smelled me — same as before. I realized that whether I gave an inch or a mile, I was still giving. Close only counts in horseshoes and hand grenades.

Not until I stopped did it become clearer why I started down this road of scent control in the first place. I had convinced myself that these scent-control tactics were like building blocks that I could stack up to get over the hurdle of success.

Why do you do what you do when it comes to scent control? When you honestly ask yourself that question, you might not even know the answer. That's okay, if you think about it. Do you do it because that's what you've always done? Is it working?

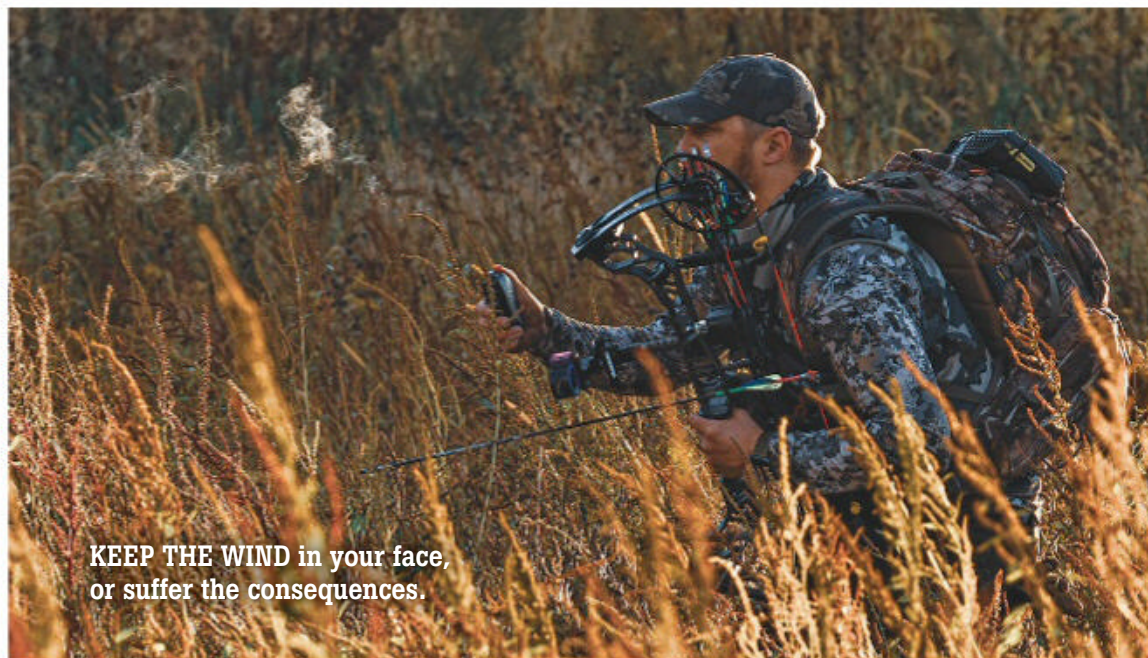
Do you do it based on fear? Are you afraid if you don't do what you've always done, it will cost you an opportunity? When you get a deer downwind, what have your experiences taught you? Oftentimes, experience is what you get when you don't get what you want.

WHERE I Am Now

My hunting experience had taught me that the "line" left zero margin for error — until I started hunting with ozone.

My introduction into ozone was filled with skepticism and disbelief. The category of scent control had left a bad taste in my mouth over the years, and I figured this was just the next product in the long line of smoke-and-mirror antics. At the time, I was a hunting guide in Colorado and had the chance to guide Scott Elrod, the CEO of Ozonics, on an archery elk hunt. When I guided, I only had two rules for clients: 1) Don't guide the guide, and 2) Don't walk like an elephant.

Before we even started hunting, Scott was adamant: He wanted to throw caution to the wind and go right at elk with the aid of his Ozonics. I was quick to remind him of my first aforementioned rule but tried to be understanding. I explained that his Ozonics might work on whitetails

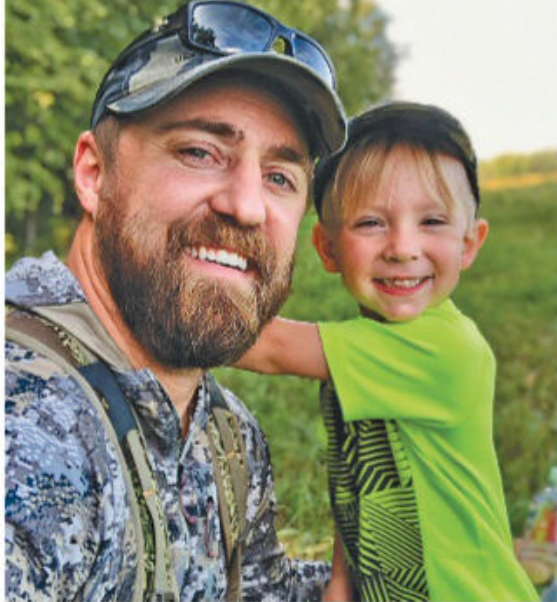


KEEP THE WIND in your face, or suffer the consequences.

— heck, I had buddies who used one — but elk have bigger eyes, ears, and noses than whitetails. They are an entirely different animal that won't put up with any guff. Elk hunting becomes a cat-and-mouse game of playing the wind while manipulating your position and circumstances by being aggressive, but not too aggressive. You want to get close enough to a good bull to shoot him, but you don't want to bump him or his cows prematurely. It's like playing catch with an egg: It's all fun, until it's all over your face.

Scott insisted, and I begrudgingly agreed. I did what he asked, and over the next five days my world was flipped upside down. We moved in on elk in ways I had never done before. I'm usually not one to be short on words, but I was left speechless. Scott was gracious in his grandeur. He looked at me with a twinkle in his eye, and I knew this was going to change things for me entirely.

When I guided, my job was to get you a shot opportunity. It wasn't about killing; I was trying to put you in a po-



sition that you could capitalize on. The fact is, when hunting with Ozonics I see more animals, I have more opportunities, and I am more successful. Now, almost 10 years later, Ozonics has changed the game for me. The line was a permanent marker, but now it's a colored pencil. I'm erasing the line.

What LIES AHEAD

I have a four-year-old boy at home named Jet Kodiak. He is obsessed with hunting. Every kind of meat we put on the dinner table is moose meat. Pepperoni on a pizza? Moose meat. McDonald's double cheeseburger? Moose

meat. If we see a picture of an animal in one of his books, he asks me where the vitals are? He loves it...and he's never even gone hunting.

Not too far down the road, I am going to be at a crossroads of Jet's first deer hunt. I've decided I'm drawing some hard lines in the sand on what gear we are going to take hunting. I'm going to bring the weapon, the wits, and the know-how. And Jet is going to bring the windicator. No scent control, no ozone, nothing. And you know what, I might carry on like this with him for a while.

I want Jet to experience a deer walking in, getting downwind, turning inside out, and blowing at us every five seconds as it runs for the hills. I can see his face now, looking at me with a confused and exciting feeling of misunderstanding about what just happened. I want to teach him about the line like my grandpa taught me. I want him to learn how to respect and hunt the wind. And then someday, I'll teach him all my secrets, and show him what my experiences have taught me. Then he can decide for himself what scent-control tactics are going to work for him. **BH**



I'LL ADMIT the "line" has recently become blurred, but trust me when I say it will always be there.

BOWHUNTER

AS THE CEO OF SCIENCE OF CARDIO, I have been training clients for over 15 years. Working with many talents and abilities, my expertise ranges from professional athletes to retirees, young adults, and rehab clients. I am also an avid bowhunter. Like the mountains called to John Muir, I say “The woods are calling me and I must go.”

Hunting is my soul and my passion. I am always asking myself, “How can I get in shape for the steep terrain? Can I hit my target at 70, 80, or 90 yards? Do I have the stamina to go from sunrise to sunset? Can I do anything to prepare for, or prevent injuries? Do I have the grit and toughness to arrow my once-in-a-lifetime animal?”



TING

*HERE'S A BLUEPRINT
FOR BOWHUNTING
FITNESS. IT'S UP TO
YOU TO FOLLOW IT,
OR CHANGE IT TO
MEET YOUR NEEDS.*

BY RYAN FRITZ



TNESS

BASIC STRENGTH-TRAINING TIPS

Be cautious and start slowly when training for a vigorous hunting trip. Too many people try to build “Rome in a day.” Make it a slow and steady micro-progression. Your first workout should be on the light side of weight or resistance. Exercise is about stress and the recovery process. You stress your tissues (nerves, muscles, bones, tendons, ligaments) when you lift weights or engage in other exercise. When you rest, the repair process begins and the magic happens. During the resting or recovery process is when your muscles grow as they repair damaged tissues/cells. When you stress and rest your body every other day and repeat the process over eight to 10 weeks, you will adapt to the stress and get stronger, more efficient, and in better shape.

Going too hard or fast out of the gate will most likely result in an injury, typically joint bursitis or tendonitis — both inflammation injuries. Sometimes, stress fractures occur when too much stress is put on the bones too fast, and they don’t have time to repair themselves. When in doubt: Be the tortoise, not the hare.

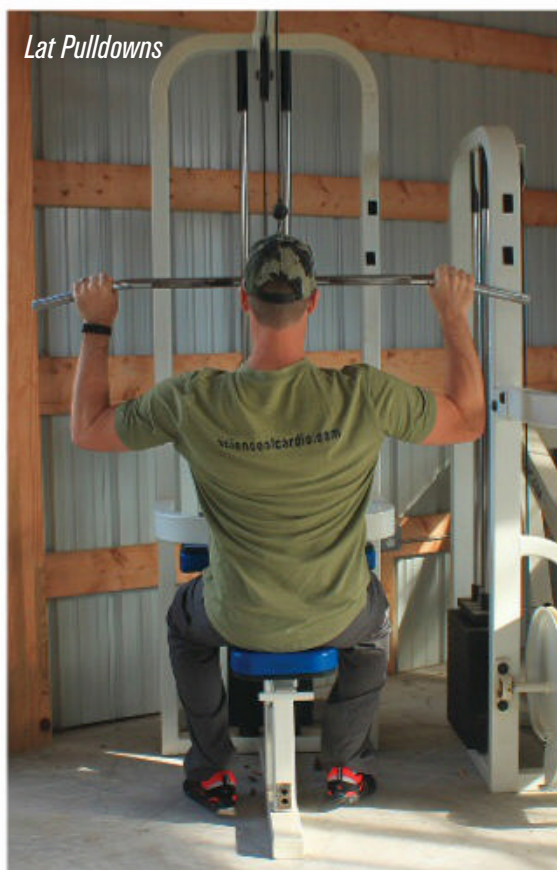
My advice is to exercise every other day to prevent overuse injuries and allow your body to heal/repair before challenging it again. You can even take this healing/repairing advice one step further by taking an entire week off every two to four months. This is a trade secret of strength and conditioning coaches, college and professional sports teams, and Olympians. It’s called “supercompensation.” There is science behind what professionals do: If it’s good for them, it will work for you.

EXERCISES FOR BECOMING A BETTER BOWHUNTER

The following are some helpful exercises, tips, and tricks for bowhunting fitness that I personally implement for optimal success. (Note: These are suggestions/recommendations that can be modified depending on your personal fitness level, ability, and equipment. Please consult your physician before starting any exercise program.)

Back Rows — Back and shoulder muscles used to draw your bow.

Three sets of 10-12 reps (2-3x per week @ 70-90% effort). This can be done with a dumbbell, barbell, or an elastic band. Standing or seated. An alternative is a bent-over row.

*Back Rows**Bent-Over Rows**Lat Pulldowns**Chest Press**Hiking**Sled Drag/Pull*

Lat Pulldowns — Pulling muscles in the upper back for climbing up in a tree-stand.

Three sets of 15-20 reps (2-3x per week @ 70-90% effort). This can be done with a cable machine or an elastic band. Typically seated. Alternatives are pull-ups or chin-ups

Chest Press — Shoulder muscles for pushing/stabilizing/holding your bow.

Three sets of 8-12 reps (2-3x per week @ 70-90% effort). This can be done with a dumbbell, barbell, or an elastic band. Standing or seated. An alternative is a push-up.

Hike — Build up leg strength and endurance.

Beginners (1-3 miles), Intermediate

(3-6 miles), Advanced (6+ miles).

Hiking uphill requires more energy and a higher cardio challenge, but going downhill is more of a muscle challenge to stop the body from falling. I recommend both. Include loads/packs for meat-hauling and camping gear (2-3x per week).

Sled Drag/Pull — Getting your game from field to vehicle/camp.

Use a snow sled, and maybe add a sandbag or buy a metal-weighted sled that



There's no substitute for consistent shooting practice in various scenarios.

you can add weights to, to simulate dragging an animal. Another option is to load a snow sled with wood or rocks and pull/drag it for a given distance.

Above all else, I recommend you shoot your bow multiple times per week. Practice shooting both uphill and downhill; take long-range shots and ultra-close shots; quick shots and those where you must hold at full draw for an extended period of time; and be sure to shoot from various positions (standing, seated, kneeling).

INTENSITY

Intensity for resistance training is very important to progress. If you don't use enough weight, you won't get results. If you go too heavy, you risk injury. I like to call it the "Goldilocks Zone" — not too small, not too big... just right. I like to use a 1-10 scale for intensity, with one being super easy and 10 being you can't do another rep. If you are training at the 7-9 range, that will help you gain strength and promote muscle growth. I will start newbies out with two sets of 10 reps. You will have to play around with this until you figure out your own body. Another tool that you can use for intensity is the maximum-rep calculator (look online for said calculator and you'll understand what I mean). Try to complete a weight as many times as you can. I personally do 70-90% of my one-rep max. For example: If you bench 100 lbs. for 10 repetitions, your estimated maximum is 133 lbs. Typically, these charts will have a percent of one rep maximum (1RM) that you can use to find out your appropriate load for the proper challenge (see chart above).

YOUR ONE REP MAX IS 133.3 LBS.		
PERCENTAGE OF 1RM	LIFT WEIGHT	REPETITIONS OF 1RM
100%	133.3 lbs.	1
95%	126.7 lbs.	2
90%	120 lbs.	4
85%	113.3 lbs.	6
80%	106.7 lbs.	8
75%	100 lbs.	10
70%	93.3 lbs.	12
65%	86.7 lbs.	16
60%	80 lbs.	20
55%	73.3 lbs.	24
50%	66.7 lbs.	30

With my clients, the biggest issue I deal with is them pushing through pain and using too much weight when things are injured or healing. Don't do it. It is better to make it to the top of the mountain by the end of the day than to not make it all.

FREQUENCY

This is a personal thing, and each individual's gameplan should be designed based on availability, age, ability,

and exercise experience. For someone who has never lifted weights or hiked much, I would start out slowly, with a break in between workouts. For example: Strength-train and go for a one-mile hike on Monday and Thursday. For someone who works out regularly, I would recommend 2-4 workouts per week. I personally strength-train twice a week; same for cardio. If you are preparing for a sheep or goat hunt in steep country, I recommend you do more aggressive hiking almost daily as you get closer to your hunt. The most important thing you can do is to listen to your body, because it will tell you all you need to know. If you start getting knee pain, you should take a break or lessen your sessions per week. Human muscles can take a break continuously for up to two weeks before they lose strength or begin to decondition. Taking a day or two off will not ruin your strength gains.

Here is an example of a Monday, Thursday, Saturday routine. *Please adjust accordingly to your needs and schedule. Monday/Wednesday/Friday or Tuesday/Thursday/Saturday, etc. Be flexible, and know that something is better than nothing.*

Workout 1 (Monday)		
Exercise	Volume (Sets/Reps)	Load/Intensity
Band Row	3 sets of 12 reps	70-90% 1RM
Lat Pulldown	3 sets of 15 reps	70-90% 1RM
Chest Press	3 sets of 10 reps	70-90% 1RM
Band Pull Aparts	2 sets of 20 reps	Light mini-band
Sled Pull/Drag	3 sets of 50 yards	70-90% 1RM
Hike (Long)	3-6 miles	70-90%
Shooting	30-50 shots	10 reps each @ 30, 40, 50, 60 yards
Workout 2 (Thursday)		
Exercise	Volume (Sets/Reps)	Load/Intensity
DB Bent-Over Row	3 sets of 10 reps	70-90% 1RM
Push-Up	3 sets of 15 reps	Body Weight
Shoulder Stability Ball	2 sets of 15 reps each side	70-90% 1RM
Sled Pull/Drag	3 sets of 50 yards	70-90% 1RM
Hike	1-3 miles	70-90%
Shooting (Short/Long)	30-50 shots	20 reps @ 10 yards 20 reps @ 80 yards
Workout 3 (Saturday)		
Exercise	Volume (Sets/Reps)	Load/Intensity
Seated Row Machine	3 set of 12 reps	70-90% 1RM
Single Arm Band Lat Pulldown	3 sets of 15 reps each side	70-90% 1RM
Internal Shoulder Rotation Iso (yoga block)	3 sets of 5-10 seconds each arm	10-20%
DB Shoulder Lateral Raise (Holds)	2 sets of 20-30 seconds each arm	70-90% 1RM
Sled Pull/Drag	4 sets of 75 yards (Alternate grip/side)	70-90%
Bike or Sauna (Save the knees)	20-30 minutes	Bike 50-75 rpms
Shooting (Angles & Holding Shots)	20 reps (10 reps up/10 reps down)	Hold before each shot 30 seconds

INJURY PREVENTION

I must stress again the need to prevent overuse injuries. If you've dealt with bursitis, tendonitis, inflammation, arthritis, or a nagging injury, it can be challenging to get out to hunt. The solution is to address the root cause, before you get to an injury. I use prehabilitation, or "pre-hab exercises," to prevent injuries. It's like flossing for your joints. When you floss your teeth, it helps to protect them from decay. The same is true for your joints — use them or lose them. Bottom line: If you do not maintain your muscles, tendons, tissues, and ligaments, they will atrophy.

If you have pain in a joint, or if you notice differences between the right versus left side, then I recommend switching to hold (isometric) exercises versus traditional-movement reps, which will allow your body to use the proper muscles and nerve signals. When you put too much weight on a joint and it can't handle the stress, your body will then compensate or figure out a way to get the job done. You may be able to finish the exercise, but that doesn't mean it's safe for your joints. Never work through pain. Adjust angle, position, load/weight, stop, or consult a professional.

The following are some of my favorites:

Single-Arm Stability Ball — Shoulder stability for push-and-pull arms.

Hold a stability ball on a wall at shoulder height, then do a figure-eight motion with your shoulder. You can also do circles with a ball on the wall. Do three sets of 15 reps



Single-Arm Stability Ball



DB Shoulder Front Raise ISO



DB Side Raise ISO

Dumbbell Holds — Holding bow in a stable position (waiting for a shot).

Hold a dumbbell or weight at shoulder level in front of you and/or hold weight to the sides at shoulder height. Do three 30-second sets.

Band Row — Drawing and holding for extended periods.

Pull a band back to your shooting position and hold. Do three sets of 15-20 reps.

Band Pull-Aparts — Rotator-cuff muscles.

Hold an elastic band at shoulder level and pull both arms apart. This will engage your rotator-cuff muscles, tendons, and ligaments. Do three sets of 15-20 reps.

Internal Shoulder Rotation — Rotator-cuff muscles.

Lie on your back with your elbow at shoulder level and your elbow bent at 90



Band Row



Band Pull-Aparts (start)



Band Pull-Aparts (finish)



Internal Shoulder Rotation ISO (start)



Internal Shoulder Rotation ISO (finish)

degrees. Then place a book or yoga block in front of your hand/wrist. Lower your hand/wrist down/forward to book/yoga block, and push into it. Hold with pressure for a given length of time. Three sets of 10-15 seconds.

PRACTICE RUN

Lastly, do a practice run with all your gear/equipment and food. See if you can drop some weight off your pack. Go on a hike and camping trip before the season; maybe while scouting for a game. Practice, practice, practice. I like to reverse-engineer my alpine-hunting trips by researching the area online, with books, topo maps, and guides to get elevation gains, topo, distances, etc. Then, try to work toward those goals in your pre-season training. If I know I'll be hiking six miles of backcountry with elevation gains of 2,800 feet or more, I will try to simulate that intensity at least once before I head out.

Hunting big game involves a major dedication of time, effort, and money. Being thoroughly prepared is the only way to protect that investment! **BH**

For more information about the subjects the author covered here, go to scienceofcardio.com/hunting-fitness.

The author lives, trains, and hunts with his wife, Amy, in Hancock, Maryland.

Proper fitness can lead to stress-free times afield, like hiking deep into the woods or dragging out your deer.



This is my Kansas buck from 2020.

MUCH ADO —ABOUT— *Turkeys* By Rollie Johnson



The hen slowly made her way toward the banks of the Red River. In tow were six toms that were spinning in strut like mindless robots. The toms' courtship dances reminded me of the old 70s vibrating football game where the players just moved around in random circles. The birds were only 80 yards from my setup at the time.

I had called from atop the rising embankment in the woods above the riverbottom and got immediate responses from multiple gobblers. I smiled as a result, and adrenaline pumped back into my veins as I headed down the embankment.

I've often heard people say that hunting turkeys is like hunting elk: You

call to locate them, and then move in as close as you can and get set up. And like elk hunting, just because you locate turkeys, doesn't mean that they will cooperate and follow the script. This had been the case in my previous dozen-plus setups. The problem wasn't finding toms; it was getting them to act the way they were supposed to. Regardless, I was just grateful to be playing the turkey game here in Minnesota, just a mile south of my house. Elk would have to wait until September.

I hurriedly set up my pop-up blind and stuck my plastic protagonist jake decoy about four yards from the front of my blind. My faux jake's wannabe

"girlfriend" was placed a few yards to my right, where she played it cool, acting all coy and coquettish. A light breeze made my synthetic thespians dance and rotate, further adding a sense of life and vitality to the scene.

This was my third set of the morning, and the gorgeous morning sun pouring into the riverbottom made for a beautiful mid-May hunt. The small flock of turkeys was still out of range, and all I could see at that moment were the fanned-out tails of the toms rotating and shimmering in the sunlight. I couldn't see the hen anymore, as a couple of small, rolling knolls blocked my view of the birds — and most likely that of the toms' view of my decoys.

WHEN IT COMES TO BOWHUNTING TURKEYS, SOMETIMES ALL YOU NEED TO DO IS SET THE STAGE.



WHEN THE GOBBLERS get to strutting and dancing, things can get crazy.

PHOTO BY JOHN PENNOYER

I called for all I was worth with great gusto and enthusiasm. I can use a diaphragm call, but truth be told, I'm not that great at it, so I stick with my easier-to-use slate and box calls. I have no clue if I over-call, under-call, or do anything correctly. But sometimes what I do works, and sometimes it doesn't!

After an hour or so of bantering back and forth with the birds, I figured this was going to be just one more frustrating and uneventful turkey hunt. I could see them and hear them, but so far, they wouldn't budge. And then, by some unseen force, the hen began slowly sauntering in my direction — pecking at the ground as she came — and the six amigos

followed her like automated drones on a leash. The hen's slow and steady path ultimately brought the toms to roughly 30 yards, where they could now clearly see my ruse. That changed everything, and I grabbed my homemade longbow and got ready for action.

The Magnificent Six, previously unable to think on their own, now quickly came toward my position full of bravado and machismo. When the lead tom sauntered in front of my blind at four yards, I drew my longbow, focused on his head and neck, and then released my arrow tipped with a three-bladed Tom Bomb. Unfortunately, the tip of my bow's top limb hit the roof of the blind, and my ar-

row skidded harmlessly away. I quickly nocked a second arrow, and in the bird's confusion got off a second shot with the same exact results... Dadburnit!

The six toms scattered in all directions, confused by the scenario and strange noises. One tom scooted to my left at 12 yards and paused broadside. I had a screened window on that side, so I grabbed another arrow with a "normal" Bear Razorhead, focused on his vitals, contorted my body and bow to keep from hitting the blind's roof, and released. The magical "thunk" of broadhead meeting feathers and flesh was music to my ears. The arrow-struck bird quickly ran two 20-foot circles and dropped dead.



WHEN MY SON, Shane, was five he worked the box call to bring this bird into bow range.

A fluttering of tail feathers in the wind signaled “game over.” Jubilation and celebration soon followed, made all the sweeter by a previous two-year drought on turkey success. I was back!

As a committed traditional bowhunter for 35-plus years, I’ve only been pursuing turkeys for the past 12 years, during which time I’ve experienced my share of celebrated successes and dismal failures. Urged on by my good friend Paul Sperial, I jumped in with both feet and have loved the journey and look forward to it each spring.

The vitals of a turkey are small, as so much of the bird is just fluff and feathers. It’s too easy to wound or not bring down a turkey with a misplaced body shot. A gobbler’s head/neck is roughly the same size as his vitals, and a shot to this part of his body usually results in a dead turkey, or a whistle-clean miss. This is why, through the urging of my friend Paul, I’ve recently switched from aiming at a tom’s body to focusing my aim on his

head and neck. As an aside, I’ve never considered myself a consistently great shot, which is why I’ve also employed the use of seriously big fixed-blade heads specifically designed to lop the head off a turkey at close range.

The equipment I use includes a Primos pop-up blind, tripod folding chair, an old backpack, my jake and two hen decoys, binos, and calls. I wear all black clothing and use a black facemask and lightweight black gloves — the perfect camo for blending into the dark confines of a blind.

On this hunt, I used one of my shorter 62-inch longbows. I’ve also taken a couple of nice toms with my recurves. When bowhunting turkeys from a blind with traditional tackle, you’ll want to make sure to use the biggest/tallest blind you can. I normally set up my blind for a couple weeks of practice, but as you can see from this hunt, in the heat of the moment, it’s very easy to forget where your bow’s limbs are in relation to the blind. It’s a lesson you’d think I would have learned over the years, but apparently I’m a slow learner...

Speaking of blinds, turkeys — unlike deer — could care less about them. When I set my blind up, I leave the front windows open, without screens. The two nearest side windows I like open but with full screens. This gives me additional visibility for birds coming in, plus more hidden protection and an occasional shoot-through opportunity. In my quiver, I carry two arrows tipped with head-loppers, and four loaded with regular broad-

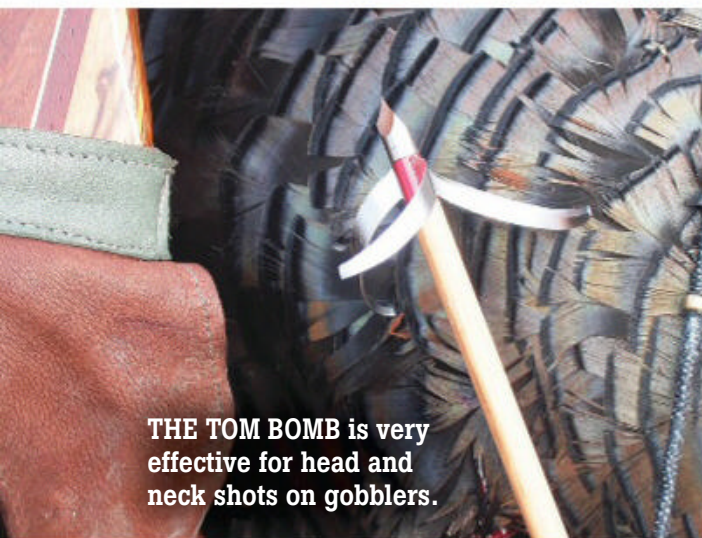
heads, so that if I must shoot through a screen on the side, I’m good.

I’ve had good success locating a flock right before sunset, and when this happens, I’ll set up early the next day in the predawn darkness, out of sight but within calling distance of their roost trees. This is by no means foolproof, mind you, because turkeys are turkeys and oftentimes have a mind of their own and just go where and when they want to — they are a very fickle and finicky critter, for sure. This is where scouting comes into play: If I’m able to figure out their daily patterns, I’ll set up an ambush before sunrise between where I saw them go to bed the night before, and where my scouting has told me they will usually go shortly after they fly down from their roost to feed.

All that said, I still consider myself more of a run-and-gun turkey hunter. I’ll drive to several locations that I know have held birds in the past and call to them. If I get a response, I’ll pack in and set up — no matter the time of day. On more than one occasion, I’ve driven my seven-mile turkey loop several times a day just to look for turkeys. If I’m fortunate enough to spot some, I’ll then use the terrain to sneak in as close as I can before setting up. “Adapt and overcome” is a good motto for spring gobblers.

A couple years back, I had an early morning hunt near a roosting tree. As light slowly poured out over the landscape, detail and color returned to forest and field alike. The terrain came alive with the sounds of spring. The gobblers and hens ramped up their morning wakeup chatter with increased intensity, and soon the flapping of large wings could be heard as the entire flock descended to Mother Earth. I bantered back with my best imitations, and most often got an immediate response. Always an encouraging sign, but I’ve been at this long enough to know that just because these birds were “returning fire,” didn’t necessarily guarantee I’d get close encounters of the turkey kind.

The morning continued to wear on, and after a dull hour or so of no visuals or audios, my hopes began to fade like so many other previous high-hoped beginnings. Just when I’d pretty much given up all hope, fate intervened in the form of a bright-red head poking over the rise of a small hill. My heart rate instantly accelerated into overdrive, and I hit the call with intensity. Soon, two more red heads emerged like periscopes scanning left and right. Let the Gobbler Games begin!



THE TOM BOMB is very effective for head and neck shots on gobblers.

The gentle breeze was timed perfectly as it made my three decoys dance and spin on cue, creating the illusion of life and movement. The three testosterone-amped toms began to fluff and strut in their ingrained attempt to both show off for my hen decoys and intimidate my jake.

But then a strange and bizarre thing happened: The three toms began running in circles, up and down and all around the small hilltop. One would run a hundred yards one way, disappear behind the hill, only to show up again where he began 10 minutes later. A few times, one would feign a direct assault in my direction, only to veer off in another random direction when he was 40 to 50 yards away. These gobbler antics were both hysterical and extremely frustrating, and I smiled and laughed under my breath at the unpredictable and unexpected circus before me. With each rush, dodge, dive, and duck of the toms, I'd hold my bow in the ready position and then sit back down in disappointment... These ADHD turkeys were driving me nuts!

After 45 minutes of dancing, dodging, and disappearing on and off, suddenly the three crimson heads appeared again 50 yards to my left, and they soon gained the crest where they then stood like generals evaluating the battlefield below them. Only one dared close the distance, as he slowly came on a beeline



I KILLED this tom with my newly created one-piece recurve.



I ARROWED this fine tom with my homemade longbow.

with deliberate purpose toward my jake decoy. A hostile skirmish was about to take place.

As he closed the distance, the emerald iridescent-green plumage of his puffed-up chest shone in the bright sunshine. *What a magnificent creation*, I thought to myself as I tightened my grip on my homemade recurve and readied myself for the moment of truth.

The tom strutted low and wide, zig-zagging slightly left and right as he entered the gladiator's arena. He was calling loudly as he crossed by my open shooting window at four yards. I focused, silently drew back, canted my bow to the right to avoid my limb tip hitting the blind, and released an arrow that quickly dispatched him by way of decapitation.

My plastic and foam actors continued their performance like true professionals; still dancing and spinning despite the drama that had just transpired before their very eyes. I was the only one to applaud their performance. I struck the stage, collapsed my blind, folded the actors back into my daypack, shouldered all said baggage, and then exited Stage Left with my bow in one hand and turkey legs in the other.

I smiled deeply, admired the gorgeous morning, and gave thanks for that little extra bit of satisfaction that's always felt when getting it done with traditional gear. **BH**

The author is a traditional bowhunter from Moorhead, Minnesota.

Too Close

By Joel Klammer



PHOTO BY DONALDMJONES.COM

BOWHUNTERS WANT TO HUNT THEIR WAY IN AS CLOSE AS POSSIBLE, BUT THIS IS A LITTLE RIDICULOUS!

As I watched the small bear on the bait, my watch read 11:55. My pickup time was approaching, so I quietly grabbed my quiver and slipped my arrow into it. Then I noticed the bear look up. It quickly moved off into the bush. Looking in the opposite direction, I saw another bear headed to the bait, so I quickly put my arrow back on my bowstring and prepared for a possible shot opportunity.

As the bear slowly approached the bait, I immediately recognized it as the one I'd named "2½ Ring," because his back was between the second and top rings of the bait barrel. The 12-yard shot was good, and the bear ran 20 yards to my right, stood and looked around, then slowly walked away from me. As the bear disappeared, I heard my guide's truck on the nearby road. That was close — too close!

This story began in the summer of 2012, when my good friend Kirk Peters mentioned a bear hunt planned with a group of friends in the spring of 2014. They were booked with Ryan Derlago at his Stickflingers bear camp. It sounded like a great hunt, so I told Kirk that if anybody in the group cancelled, I would be interested in filling in. Kirk called a few weeks later to let me know that he had two hunters cancel, and so the long wait for the spring of 2014 began.

Time flies, and the next thing I knew I was in Ryan's bear camp for a six-day hunt. Ryan uses barrels at all his bait sites, and he gave us a pre-hunt speech on how to use the barrels to judge a bear's size. Ryan told us that if a bear's back (when he's standing on all fours) was as tall as the barrel, you should shoot him. If his back was even with the second ring on the barrel, he was an average

bear. Ryan also noted that oftentimes the bears will knock over the barrel. Should that be the case, Ryan told us to imagine trying to stuff the bear inside the barrel. If you think the bear would easily fit, he's not a big bear. But if you don't think you could get the whole bear in the barrel... shoot him!

My first evening was spent close to camp at a bait called the "Sand Pit." I enjoyed watching a couple nice bears that evening, but my first sit ended without seeing a bear worth shooting. The next three nights ended the same as the first, with me returning to camp with a full quiver of clean arrows.

Come Day Five, the only hunters in camp with unfilled tags were me and Kirk's friend Jimmy. Time was growing short, but Jimmy and I now had a lot more flexibility in choosing stand locations.

Ryan suggested that I sit a stand they called "Too Close," because it had not been hunted for a few days and was a consistent producer. The name came from the fact that it was too close to the road, but that didn't seem to matter to the bears.

Too Close was near an old overgrown road cut. The bait was in the bottom of the cut on the north side, with the "stand" along the top of the south bank. All the other baits we'd hunted that week were from treestands, but this one was a chair on the ground. In the past, some branches had been piled in front to provide concealment, but they had weathered to the point they no longer afforded much cover. The chair was placed in front of a small tree, which broke up my outline. I was anxious to see what it would be like to be at eye level with the bears.

It was a cool, cloudy afternoon, with occasional light rain. It wasn't long be-

fore a small bear showed up at the bait. I assumed he was a year-old bear at best and weighed less than 100 pounds. But he was a bear, and fun to watch for a kid from Nebraska. After a while, he was joined by another small bear that looked like his twin. They chased each other around and took turns eating.

Then the newcomer chased the first bear up the old roadbed to the west. Moments later, they came back — and right at me! When the first bear got within about five yards of me, he saw something wasn't right and cut around the brush in front of me while the chaser disappeared behind me. I was surrounded! The bear in front was clearly curious about the blob on the trail and stood about 10 feet away, staring at me. He was pretty close... Too close! Eventually, the little guy wandered back over to the bait, ate a bit, and then disappeared back into the bush.



THIS IS the pointblank view of the bait barrel from my "chair blind."

A half-hour later, another bear showed up. This bear did me the favor of standing directly against the barrel, and I could plainly see it was 2½-rings tall. I looked it over and figured I could probably stuff it in the barrel without much effort. It was late in the hunt, but I decided to let the evening play out.

Suddenly, the 2½-ring bear looked up and then took off. I froze, scanning the bush, and soon spotted movement. It was a bigger bear, and he paced back and forth on the top of the cut across from me, popping his jaws. I did not move a muscle, as this was a bear I would definitely shoot if given a chance.

It's hard to say how long he went back and forth, but I felt like I had not so much as twitched for 15 minutes. The big bear finally made it to the bait, 15 yards away, and it looked like my opportunity was going to happen. And then, still motionless as I imagined him settling in and hopefully giving me an opportunity to draw my bow, something seemed to bump my shoulder. A second push on my back pulled me out of my trance. I slowly turned my head to look, and there, not three feet away, stood a bear — slowly backing away as I made eye contact. That was all the commotion the big bear needed to decide it was time to split. He was gone in an instant.

Too close? Yeah, I suppose I should have been scared. Or maybe mad at him for messing up my chance at the big bear. But the truth is, I started laughing to myself. I couldn't help but see the humor in what had just happened. The little bear got the drop on me when he finally decided to come figure out just what I was. And the goofy look on his face when our eyes met? The whole episode was hilarious!

That was pretty much the end of the hunt, as darkness was fast approaching. I gathered up my gear and headed out to the road to wait for my ride. Ryan and Mike were both amused as I told my story on the ride back to camp. They told me I was the first hunter they'd ever heard of who tried to play tag with bears! A new experience in their camp.

For the final day of my hunt, it was decided that I'd sit both morning and evening. I liked the setup at Too Close and thought there was a chance the bigger bear would come back. As we headed out that final morning, I told everybody if the 2½-ring bear showed up again, I would not hesitate to shoot.

It was a glorious spring morning that found me settling into my chair about 9 a.m. I had been sitting for almost two hours with no action, when I just happened to turn my head to look behind me, and there was my little buddy sneaking up behind me again. Not this time, my friend!

As our eyes met, he looked away and then quickly disappeared into the woods behind me. But never fear, because about 15 minutes later, he calmly wandered down the old roadbed to the bait and started to eat. At least now I knew where he was and had some entertainment that didn't involve my direct participation!

And that brings us back to 11:55 a.m., and the scene at the beginning of this story.

The bear I shot had walked out of sight and away from the direction of my pickup vehicle, allowing me to quietly slip toward the road. Experienced guides are hard to fool, and Ryan and Mike immediately asked me about my missing arrow.

"I just shot a bear," I told them.

"When?" they asked.

"11:57," I replied.

They looked at the clock in the truck and gave me a confused look. This was because the truck clock was more than a few minutes behind my watch and hadn't even reached 11:57.

When we returned to the site, I showed Ryan where the bear had briefly stood before walking off and immediately spotted blood. I was pleased that Ryan told me to go ahead and track the bear. He let me take the lead, and a short distance later we found the bear after it turned off the trail just enough to get to the edge of a swampy area. The double-lung shot was the perfect ending to a fun hunt. The bear had a good hide, and the meat was delicious.

Sometimes I wonder if that small bear is now an eight or nine-year-old bear, hanging out around the stand called Too Close, waiting for a rainy day to sneak up on some poor, unsuspecting hunter. He would be quite a bit larger at this point, so it probably would not be so amusing to his new victim, and there's no doubt that hunter would think the bear was "too close!" **BH**

The author is a dyed-in-the-wool traditional archer who has been on the board of the National Bowhunter Education Foundation for over 22 years. He lives in Ainsworth, Nebraska.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: On this hunt I used my trusty Bear Takedown recurve, ash arrows I built myself, and Grizzly broadheads.



THIS IS THE 2½-Ring bear I arrowed the day after my close encounter.

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WHAT'S NEW

BRIAN FORTENBAUGH | ASSISTANT EDITOR



COVERT® OPTICS THERMX™ HS1

The ThermX HS1 (\$999.99) is a thermal scanner for game recovery and predator detection. The interface has various palette and brightness options for different lighting/ambient temperatures. High-contrast images are shown on the 1.5" OLED color display in 160x128 resolution and four color modes. Weapons' mountable with adjustable windage/elevation. **Covert Optics**, feradyne.com/covert-optics/.



BROWNING® STRIKE FORCE™ FHD

The Strike Force FHD (\$149.99) is a 22MP camera with four high-power IR LEDs for enhanced nighttime images and 1080p HD videos w/sound. Economy Mode conserves energy consumption, High Power Mode extends illumination distance, and Fast Motion generates trigger speeds that adjust from 0.135–0.7 seconds. It has a 110' flash range. **Browning Trail Cameras**, browningtrailcameras.com.



EASTON® 5MM FMJ™ AUTUMN ORANGE

Celebrate Easton's 100th Anniversary in style with their 5MM FMJ Autumn Orange arrows (\$119.99/half-dozen fletched). These limited-edition shafts have a small-diameter carbon core wrapped in a 7075-alloy metal jacket for superior strength and ease of pull from targets. Straightness is +/- .002", and it's offered in spines of 250, 300, 340, and 400. You can buy bare shafts or fletched with 2" Bohning® Bully™ Vanes. **Easton**, eastonarchery.com.



TENPOINT® NITRO 505™

The Nitro 505 (\$2,999.99–\$3,099.99) is a reverse-draw crossbow that delivers speeds of 505 fps. Measuring 6.5"W x 30.7"L and weighing 7.9 lbs., it features the ACUslide™ safe cocking/de-cocking system. The RX8-Cam™ system rotates 404 degrees. Its riser is balanced and the trigger is crisp. Available in a Ready-To-Hunt package. **TenPoint**, tenpoint-crossbows.com.



KIFARU® GNARGALI™

The Gnargali (\$315), at 2.78 lbs. and 5,090 cu. in., puts the technical fabrics in key places. The front straps, upper handle, and bottom sleeve keep your weapon/tripod secure. The bottom of this top-loader is double-lined, and there is a load shelf on the back. Side pockets, removable/repositionable top straps, and an internal bladder pocket round things out. Does not include frame. **Kifaru**, kifaru.net.



OUTDOOR EDGE® RAZORCAPE™

The RazorCape (\$53.95) has two replaceable 3" caping blades; two replaceable, 3" drop-points; and one 3" gutting blade. Blades are changed via the pushbutton RazorSafe™ system. The handle is constructed from a nonslip polymer. The stainless-steel blades hold their edge well. The knife weighs 2 oz. and has an overall length of 7.1". **Outdoor Edge**, outdooredge.com.



MUZZY® BOWFISHING CARBON COMPOSITE ARROW

The Carbon Composite Arrow Combo (\$34.99) has a green Nocturnal™ lighted nock and the proven Iron™ point. The Iron's three barbs guarantee fewer lost fish and quick removal. The arrow is 80% fiberglass/20% carbon. At 1,400 grains, it truly hammers fish. The Combo is sold with or without a bottle slide. **Muzzy Bowfishing, feradyne.com/muzzy-bowfishing/.**



DELTA MCKENZIE® BIG 8™

The Big 8 (\$169.99–\$219.99) gives you eight shooting faces with green and white spots for fast target acquisition. New “self-healing” foam stops fieldpoints and broadheads from all bows. Available in a portable 16" size and a long-distance 20" model. Both include a sight-in grid, integrated carry handles, and the 20" model has a replaceable core. **Delta McKenzie Targets, dmtargets.com.**



ALPS OUTDOORZ® SHIELD™ JACKET

The Shield Jacket (\$99.99) is a technical top made of a polyester shell with a Sherpa fleece interior. It's offered as a quarter-zip pullover with a high neck collar, or as a full-zip jacket with a fleece-lined hood. Both have zippered chest pockets, plus a ribbed waistband and cuffs. Available in sizes S–3XL. **ALPS OutdoorZ, alpsoutdoorz.com.**

CARBON EXPRESS® MAXIMA SABLE RZ™

The Maxima Sable RZ (\$89.99, half-dozen fletched/\$164.99, dozen shafts) is a lightweight, carbon-weave shaft with 360-degree spine consistency for faster in-flight stabilization and 4X the accuracy of standard-spine arrows — especially when tipped with broadheads. Laser-checked for straightness and weight-sorted for consistency (+/- 1 grain), Sable RZ's are available in spines of 350 (8.4 gpi), 400 (7.5 gpi), and 500 (6.5 gpi). Includes precision-machined inserts, premium Launchpad™ nocks, and Bulldog™ nock collars. **Carbon Express, feradyne.com/carbon-express/.**



ULTIMATE PREDATOR® WIND DRIFTER™

With the Wind Drifter turkey decoys (\$84.95), you get a jake and two hens that move realistically with the slightest breeze. And by realistic movement, I mean 360-degree orbital, axial, and tilting rotation on a 60" travel path. These foam dekes are super lightweight and fold up for transport. Easy to set up — simply set the stake, hook the wire, and hunt. **Ultimate Predator, ultimatopredatorgear.com.**



MYSTERY RANCH® BINO HARNESS

The Bino Harness is offered in a 10X (\$125) and 12X (\$135) size, with each available in two torso sizes (Regular or XL). It works in harmony with your pack, or on its own. Quick, one-handed access with a quiet magnetic closure. Store small items in the strategically placed pockets. Neoprene backing on the harness provides a much cooler/breathable material on warm days. **Mystery Ranch, mysteryranch.com.**

ASK BOWHUNTER®

WITH DR. DAVE SAMUEL | CONSERVATION EDITOR



DECADES OF bear hunting experience have taught me a few things...and here is the result of my lessons learned.

BH

Q A FRIEND AND I are looking for a guided black bear hunt. One bit of information we requested in our search was the distance between baits. We've narrowed our search down to two camps, and both are very remote, with baits spaced off of a dirt road. Is there a rule of thumb about how far apart baits should be to help increase our chances of taking a good boar? *Wyatt F., via e-mail*

A THERE ARE NO hard and fast rules on this, but there are several things to consider. A study done in Pennsylvania showed that black bear boars had home ranges of 67 square miles, while that of females was 16 square miles. Note that food availability in Pennsylvania is very good compared to other regions, such as those found in Canada. Thus, at least for that type of habitat and food availability, an area that is eight square miles is prob-

ably where you'll find a boar. This means that at a minimum, baits should be at least 10 miles apart, in order to prevent overlap on different baits. In Canada, my guess is that home ranges are much larger than that, so bait sites there might be placed even further apart. When baits are placed far apart and you get a good boar on a trail camera there, he probably won't go to another bait because of distance. At some point in the future he should return. The big question is, when?

How often he returns is affected by several factors. Your best chances are to keep your odor down at the bait. Bears become used to the guide's odor, so that isn't an issue, but your "stink" is. Approach the bait in the best manner possible to prevent your scent from contaminating the site and keeping that big boar away.

Movement is also a factor: Be still in the stand at all times. Big boars prowl around baits looking for danger before coming in to feed, and they can also hear very well. So, it is paramount that you keep your movements and noise to a minimum if you want to tag a big, mature boar.

Having other bears at the bait will also help attract boars. When a big boar sees other bears feeding at a bait site, he is more likely to come in relaxed. And when he is looking for a female, the more bears you have around, the better. Note though, that if a boar finds a hot sow, he may not visit any baits for several days, or even several weeks.

If the baits are more than 10 miles apart, and if a big boar got his picture taken on a trail camera at one bait, stay on that bait. Now, if your guide has several big boars on other baits that are placed far apart, you may want to hunt those baits as well. The best-case scenario is a big boar coming to one bait every night, or every other night. If that's the case, sit that bait for several days in a row to give yourself the best chance of shooting that rascal.

The urge to move to another bait because you aren't seeing bears is something that happens to all of us. The bait is being hit every night and you have photos of good boars on camera, yet they don't come in. So, you move to another bait. Sure enough, the next day he comes in just before dark. It's called bear hunting for a reason — and it's a blast! **BH**

BEARS like these on camera warrant multiple sits.



JOSH BELYEA PHOTO

E-mail your ASK BOWHUNTER questions to bowhunter_magazine@outdoorsg.com

BH WHERE TO GO

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THE QUEST

RANDY ULMER

HEART OF ENDURANCE: PART FIVE

SUCCESS OFTEN REQUIRES TEMPERING EXHUBERANCE.

HE CLIMBS HIGHER along the top of the behemoth ridge to its apex. His pace is slow, resolute, and unfaltering. Swiftiness and alacrity are luxuries of the past; more capabilities stolen by his disease. What once was easy for him gets harder with each passing day.

Reaching the summit, he stops to rest. In the predawn light, he can just make out the full breadth of the stunning country before him. Apparently, this sweep of terrain, not satisfied with merely being steep like its surroundings, insisted on being vertical. He fastens his bow to his pack, and then crawls methodically down through fissures in the cliff and onto a flat-bottomed, sheltered alcove.

He gently lays his pack down amongst the crags and sits beside it. He has been here many times. He knows it will provide cover and good vantage over the places he has seen the old monarch. A low stone parapet protects his legs and feet from the biting wind. At 13,000 feet, exposed to the predawn jetstream, he must convince himself it's summertime.

From this rampart hideaway, he looks across a deep and rugged chasm. He can just make out the towering cliffs on the opposite side of the canyon, and although he cannot see him, he knows his nephew, Zach, is on top of the escarpment looking back toward him. It is perhaps a mile across — close enough to make out hand signals through powerful binoculars in full light. However, it would take many hours of travel by both foot and vehicle to get to where Zach sits from his current position. One must approach Zach's position from the Pacific side of the great divide; his must be approached from the Atlantic side.

He rests his back against the cold stone of the cliff wall and places the tripod astraddle his legs. Looking through binoculars in the gathering light, he tries to conjure deer and elk in the open spaces below and nearest him.

Ethereal and ghostlike, the elk materialize first — phantom yellow against green. As the light strengthens, he makes out the forms of mule deer as well, grey-orange in their late-summer coats. Opening morning has always been a special time. His entire being is currently thrumming with anticipation.

With each muley buck he spots, he feels his heart beat a little faster, until he makes out the size of its antlers and dismisses each as not "the one."

The light has grown stronger and he can see Zach nestled on the edge of a vertigo-inducing precipice across the gorge.

They have hunted together for a very long time; the kid accompanying him on jaunts into the wild since he was just old enough to scramble along behind. They have become alike in both thought and action. They need not stop or speak to communicate. When he needs something from his nephew, most often it has already been done. He knows this bond is rare and unique. He cherishes it genuinely and profoundly.

The sun is fully up now. He should be able to see "Old Unkillable," if he is in the open. However, the steep mountain country is rough and grooved by erosion and avalanche. It is corrugated and scalloped, with large folds and myriad small cuts. His elusive prey could be in any one of the many stringers of stunted alpine evergreens, or in a gully just out of sight.

Another hour passes. He glasses Zach periodically for a signal. Zach has not found the buck either. Zach's view is perpendicular to the mountainside the buck lives on, while his is tangential. It

would be easy for him to have missed the buck — not so for Zach.

The buck would have to be bedded or stationary for Zach to have missed him. He feels a growing sense of unease. Has another hunter disturbed the buck? It is opening morning of archery season for both elk and deer, and a large number of hunters frequent this remote and hostile country.

Or, worse yet, another deer hunter could have beat him to the buck this morning. An overenthusiastic hunter may have tried to camp too close and spooked him during the night. Mature deer like this wise, old mossback must be hunted with the utmost care and precision.

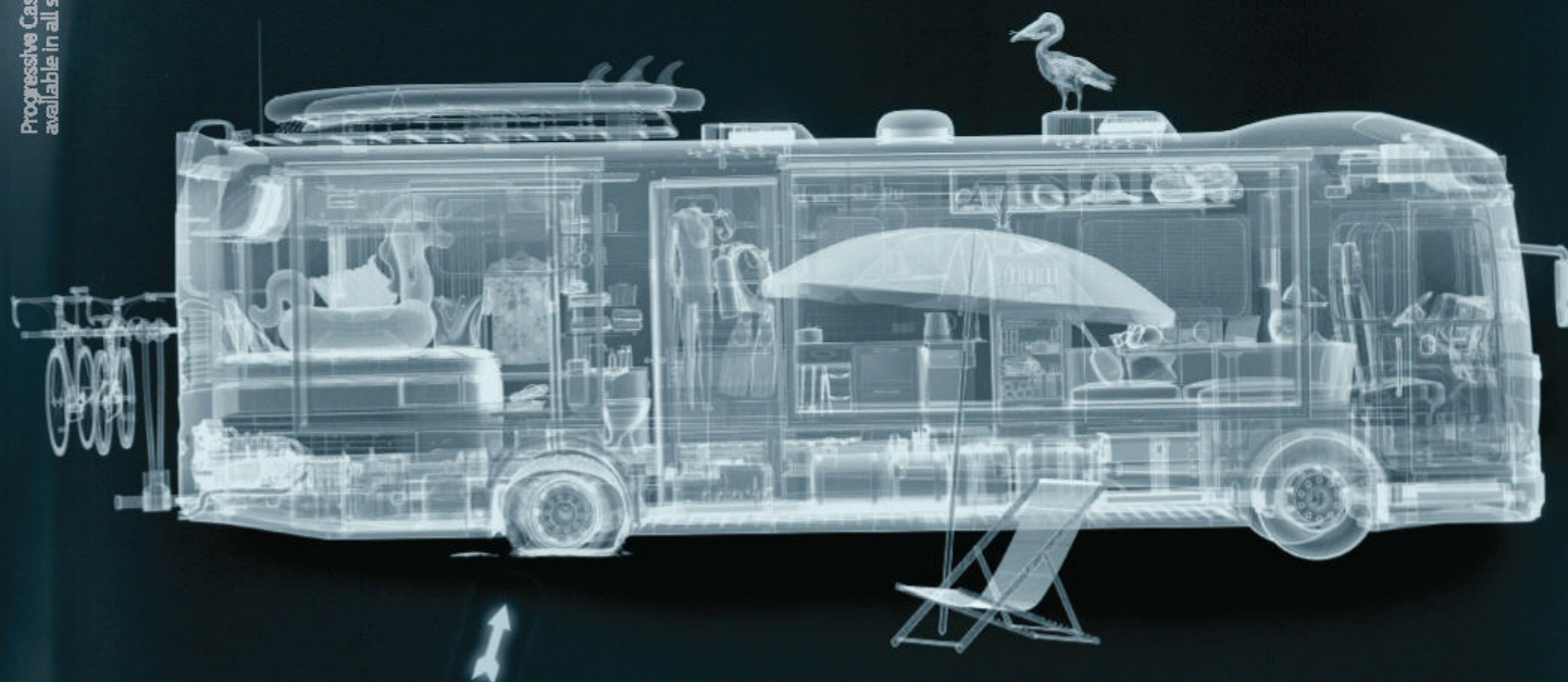
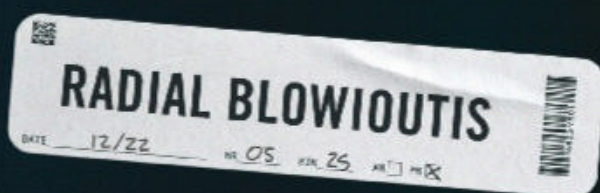
Far too many times he has seen impatient and careless hunters blow an elusive old buck out of the country. To be successful at taking a buck like this, you must remain far back and observe, exercising restraint and channeling the patience of Job, until the moment is right. That is when you strike. And then, only if the odds of success are great.

The first inkling a buck such as this should have that something is amiss is when the arrow strikes him and it's too late to do anything but accept the hand that fate has dealt him.

He, too, was overzealous and impatient for the first two decades of his career chasing big bucks. His perennial lack of success proved his incompetence. Patience, self-control, and wisdom — very slow to come to him — finally arrived; hesitantly and with fits and starts, during middle age.

To be continued... **BH**

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