

DO-IT-YOURSELF SPECIAL

Bowhunter®

THE #1 BOWHUNTING MAGAZINE

JULY 2022

HOW TO HUNT THE WEST!

ON YOUR OWN FOR
BUCKS, BULLS, & GOATS

CARIBOU WISDOM

OVERCOME YOUR BIAS AND SCORE P.44

BROADHEADS

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DIY PURSUITS

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EDITORIAL

CURT WELLS | EDITOR

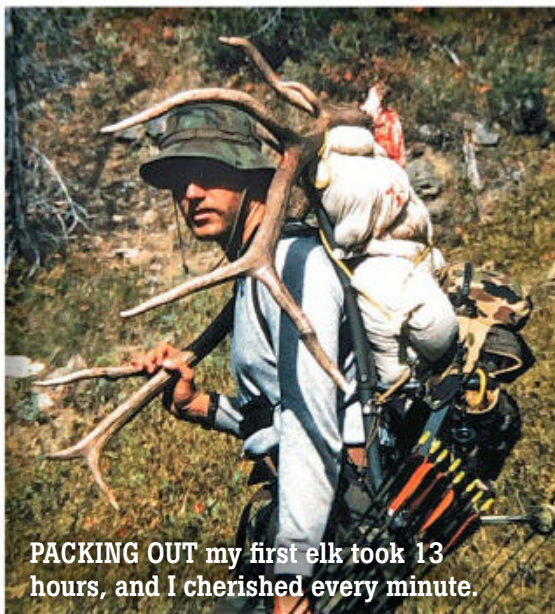
DIY ROOTS RUN DEEP

NO ONE EVER SAID HUNTING ON YOUR OWN WAS GOING TO BE EASY, BUT IT SURE FEELS GOOD.

IN SOME WAYS, it's fitting that this Editorial, my 100th as the Editor of **Bowhunter** Magazine, lands on our annual DIY Special. As a rookie bowhunter back in 1981, I would never have dreamed of being in this position today, but I believe much of the credit goes to my long history of DIY hunts.

My bowhunting roots are deeply embedded in those early years, when all my adventures were cultivated by two things: The knowledge I gleaned from reading **Bowhunter** and other resources; and my alliance with like-minded bowhunting buddies. We banded together, did the research, shared the preparation, the costs, the effort, the excitement — and most importantly, the rewards. We learned about decoying pronghorns, ambushing white-tails, calling elk, and baiting bears. We took breathless breaks on mountaintops, we broke sweat in antelope blinds, and we blood-trailed late into the night. In most cases, rather than DIY, it should be DIT as in “do-it-together.” Without those hunting buddies, without those adventures to write about, it's doubtful I would be writing these words in this hallowed space.

My elk-hunting history is a perfect example of the long and winding road of hunting on your own. My first elk hunt took place near Fort Peck, Montana, when I was only in my second year of bowhunting. I hunted with a bunch of buddies from the North Dakota Bowhunters Association. There was no bugling action, which was what I was after, so the next fall I switched to the Little Belt Mountains. We got into some bugling there but still didn't tag an elk. The following year, we focused on Montana's Crazy Mountains and committed to hunting there until we got it right.



PACKING OUT my first elk took 13 hours, and I cherished every minute.

I killed a bull on the first day of that trip, and my hunting partners and I spent the next 11 years hunting the Crazies — all on our own. We learned, gained valuable experience, and yes, we killed bulls.

My “elk education” continued as I graduated to other states like New Mexico and Idaho. I've now hunted elk in seven states and two Canadian provinces. Some years I hunted elk in two states, and in 2021 I did my third full DIY elk hunt in Arizona; this time with my two sons, which made my 34th bowhunt for elk my all-time favorite. We got a heavy dose of the one thing that elevates elk hunting above all other bowhunting — bugling. Read all about it in the upcoming August/*Big Game Special* and watch the action on **Bowhunter TV** sometime in July.

Yes, some of those 34 elk hunts were outfitted affairs; either because a guide was required (Canada), or because time constraints wouldn't allow me to spend two weeks hunting like I did back in the 80s. Each hunt was exhilarating in its own way, but there's always something special, something enduring, about a well-executed DIY hunt. As I drove home from Arizona last fall, my co-pilot was a deep sense of satisfaction, accompanied by emotional flashbacks to the first bull I took in the Crazies nearly 40 years prior.

Whether your DIY hunt is a complex adventure, or a hunt just out your back door, there's no better feeling than when your do-it-yourself hunt becomes a “did-it-myself” hunt. **BH**

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An Outdoor Sportsman Group® Publication

PUBLISHER Jeff Waring

EDITORIAL STAFF

EDITOR Curt Wells

ART DIRECTOR Mark Olszewski

ASSISTANT EDITOR Brian Fortenbaugh

EDITORIAL ASSISTANT Sally Burkey

ASSISTANT ART DIRECTOR Jason Henning

SR. DIGITAL EDITOR Drew Pellman

FIELD EDITORS

FOUNDER M. R. James

CONSERVATION Dr. Dave Samuel

TECHNICAL Joe Bell

TRADITIONAL Fred Eichler

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CONTRIBUTORS

Chuck Adams • Joe Blake • Chuck Denault •

Danny Farris • Jeff Frey • Cameron R. Hanes •

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

Lon Lauber • Pat Lefemine • Ron Niziolek •

Frank Noska • Matt Palmquist • Tony J. Peterson •

John Solomon • Dan Staton • Randy Ulmer •

John “Lefty” Wilson • C.J. Winand

ADVERTISING SALES

ADVERTISING SALES MANAGER Jeff Millar
(717) 695-8081; jeff.millar@outdoorsg.com

PRODUCTION

MANAGER Brittany Kennedy

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

ENDEMIC AD SALES

VP, ENDEMIC SALES

Mike Savino mike.savino@outdoorsg.com

NATIONAL ENDEMIC SALES

Jim McConville (440) 791-7017

WESTERN REGION

Hutch Looney hutch@hlooney.com

NATIONAL AD SALES

ACCOUNT DIRECTOR — DETROIT OFFICE

Kevin Donley (248) 798-4458

NATIONAL ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE — CHICAGO OFFICE

Carl Benson (312) 955-0496

DIRECT RESPONSE ADVERTISING/NON-ENDEMIC

Anthony Smyth (914) 409-4202

www.bowhunter.com

Bowhunter, (ISSN # 0273-7434) is published 8 times a year, including two double issues; February (Winter Special), April/May, June (Gear Special), July, August (Big Game Special), September, October, Nov/Dec (Whitetail Special), by OUTDOOR SPORTSMAN GROUP®, 1040 6th Ave., 17th Floor, New York, NY 10018. Periodical postage paid at New York, NY and at additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address change (form 3579) to **Bowhunter**, P.O. Box 37539, Boone, IA 50037-0539. Return undeliverable Canadian addresses to: 500 Rt. 46 East, Clifton, NJ 07011. Canada Post Publications Mail Agreement No. 41405030.

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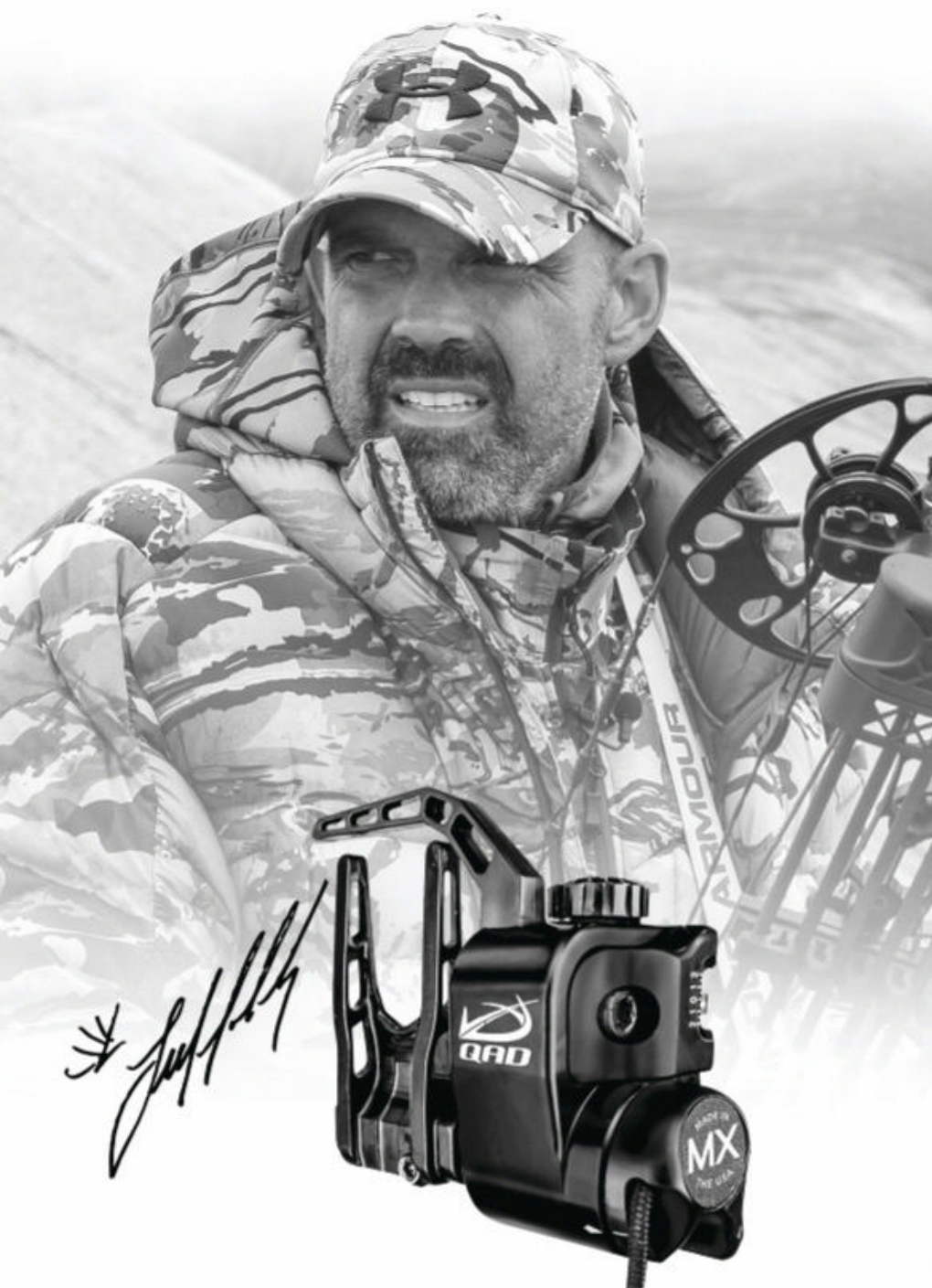
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PUBLISHING & BRANDED MEDIA Mike Carney

EVP, GROUP PUBLISHER & OPERATIONS Derek Sevcik

VP, CONSUMER MARKETING Peter Watt

VP, MANUFACTURING Deb Daniels

SENIOR DIRECTOR, PRODUCTION Connie Mendoza

DIRECTOR, PUBLISHING TECHNOLOGY Kyle Morgan

SENIOR CREATIVE DIRECTOR Tim Neher

DIRECTOR, DIGITAL EDITOR Jeff Phillips

For questions regarding digital editions, please contact
digitalsupport@outdoorsg.com

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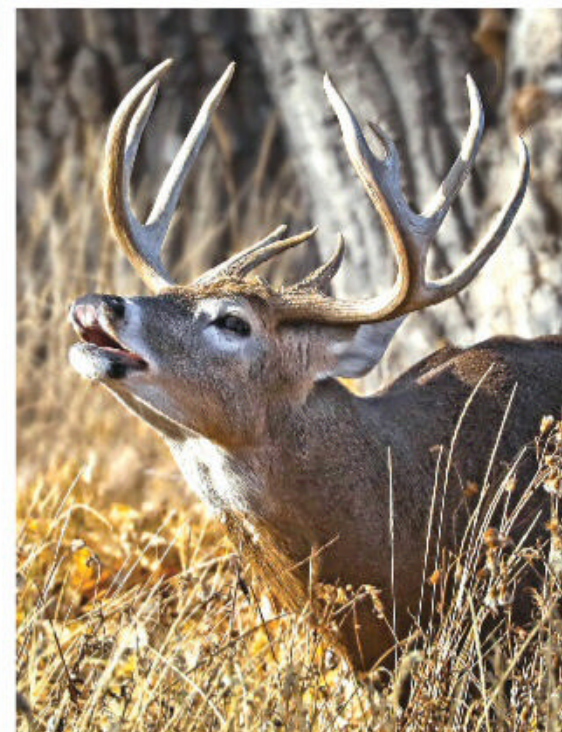
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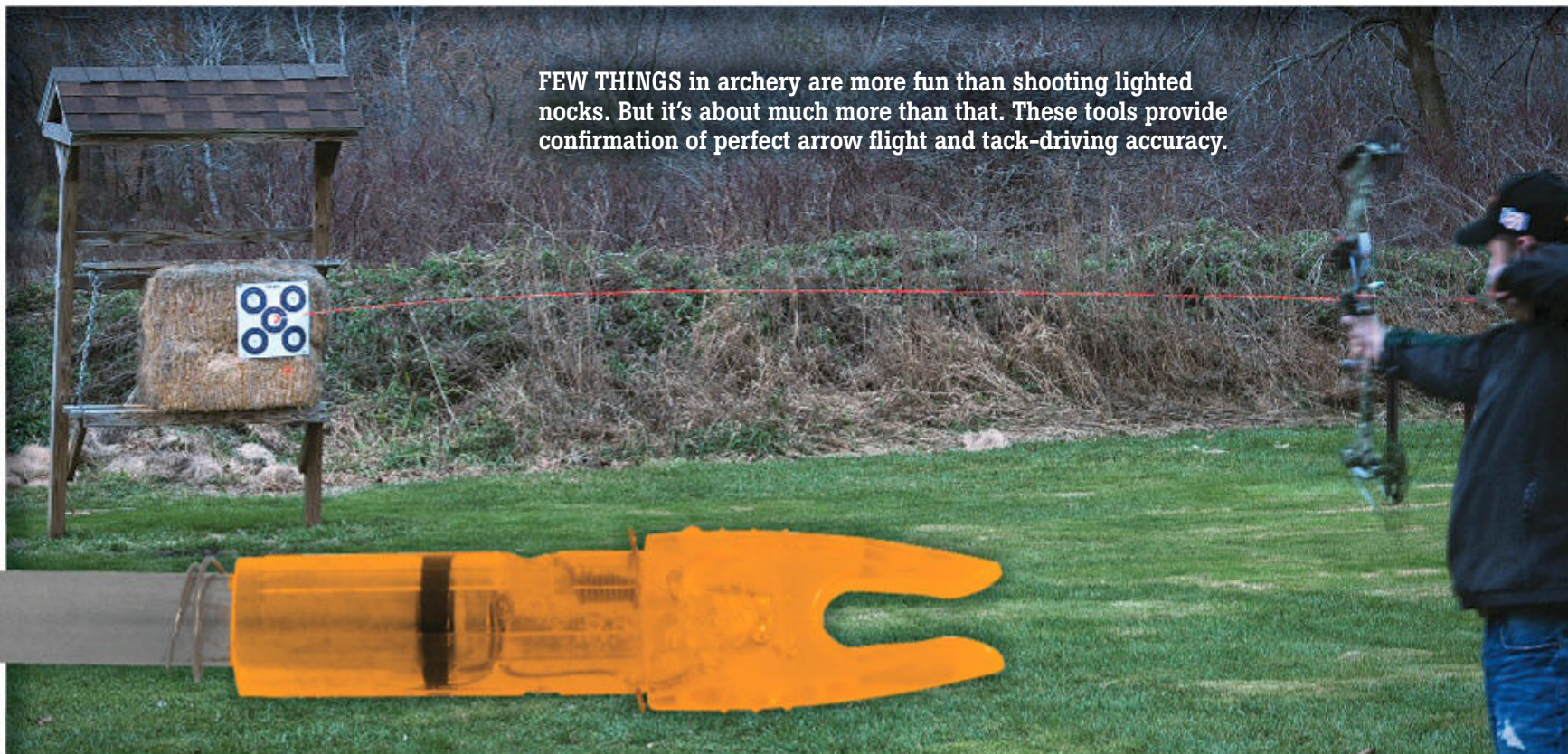
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BOWHUNTER BUSINESS

JEFF WARING | PUBLISHER



FEW THINGS in archery are more fun than shooting lighted nocks. But it's about much more than that. These tools provide confirmation of perfect arrow flight and tack-driving accuracy.

THE BURT COYOTE COMPANY

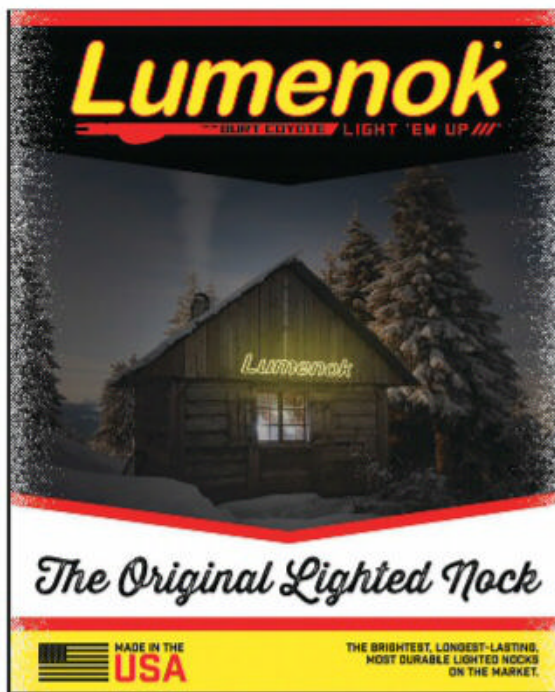
"WE'RE PROUD TO BE WORKING TOWARDS OUR 10 MILLIONTH LIGHTED KNOCK!"

—CURT PRICE, PRESIDENT

TRUST ME WHEN I SAY it's tough for the **Bowhunter** Magazine & TV team to imagine a time when we couldn't thrill at the sight of a Lumenok-equipped arrow glowing down range, but it really wasn't that long ago...

"Actually, my inspiration came early one morning in the fall of '98, when I'd rattled in a nice 10-point," Curt Price began. "That buck bought it hook, line, and sinker, but then he busted me trying to draw. I was still able to get an arrow off, and I thought that maybe I'd shot high, but I wasn't sure. Dad always said, 'You've got to find the arrow!' So, I climbed down and searched, and searched, and searched. Hours later, I found my arrow in the brush and confirmed a clean miss. But as I headed home, I just couldn't stop thinking about how hard it had been to see my arrow in the morning light and how difficult it had been to find it in the brushy CRP."

Too bad my arrow didn't have a light on the end of it, Curt thought.

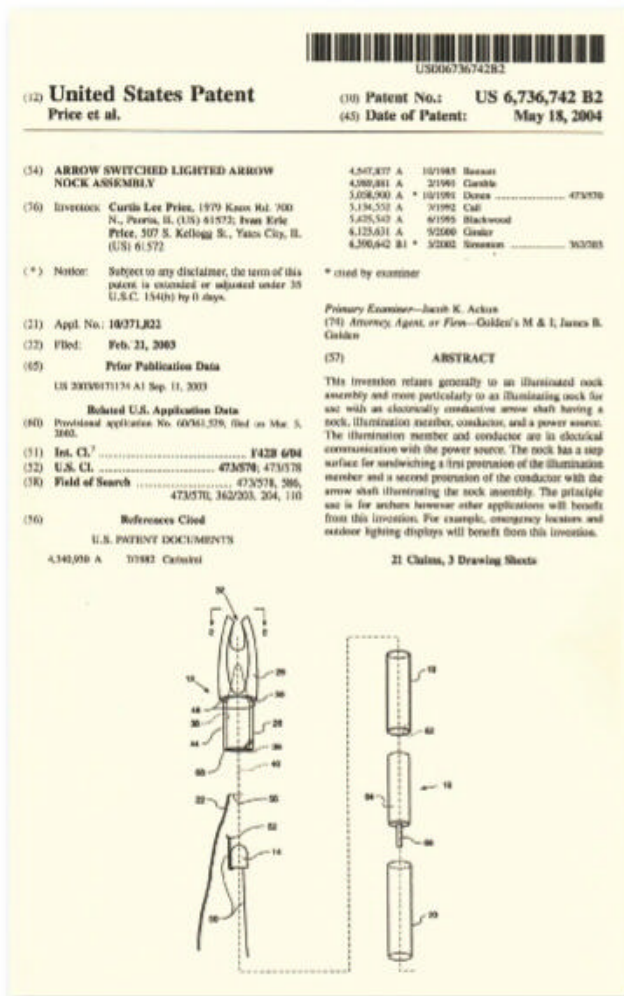


The Burt Coyote Company's 2022 catalog has everything you need to, "Light 'Em Up!"

On his way home, he stopped to visit at his brother Eric's place and share his idea for a lightednock. "Initially, I thought maybe we could use some sort of chemical light," Curt continued, "but it was Eric who suggested that a small LED and watch battery might be the solution. It was. Within a few days we had a battery powered design, and in about a week we had a working prototype. By the end of hunting season, my quiver was full of arrows with lighted nocks."

It was about a year later, Halloween of '99, when Curt took his first deer, a white-tail doe, with what by that time the Price brothers were calling the Lumenok.

Truth be told, there were four earlier patents issued on lighted nocks, and two made it to market; however, the sim-



(Left) The Price brothers' original lighted nock design was a thing of beauty, but the Lumenok continues to evolve and improve. (At right) Here's one of the first Lumenok ads to grace our pages.

as foolproof as could be, and it was very well received by bowhunters, it took a few years for the Price brothers to refine their design and get the business up and running. Eric was a machine tool technician for a heavy equipment manufacturer, and Curt was a full-time electrician. "It was tough," Curt confided. "I literally was working 20-hour days, installing electrical systems and then coming home to build Lumenoks at night. And Eric was working all day at the shop and coming home to do much the same." At that time, the Price brothers built, packaged, sold and shipped every Lumenok by themselves.

But by 2002, things started to change. The Burt Coyote Company headed off to the Archery Trade Show with a provisional patent on their Lumenok, and the brothers came home with valuable industry insights, increased knowledge of componentry, vital arrow manufacturer contacts, their first salesman, and a pile of product orders. Soon they were hiring employees to help assemble and package nocks, and they were shipping out of their Yates City, IL, homes to points all over the country. Lumenoks were available in retailers ranging in size from small archery pro shops to Cabela's. They also were visible on a few TV shows, early adopters of Lumenoks for obvious reasons, and that important exposure made the phone ring.

plicity of Curt and Eric Price's original design was marvelous — and proved far superior to what had come before. Lightweight, durable, bright, and long-lasting, the Lumenok system's nock, LED, conductor, and battery combo formed an incomplete circuit that when nudged into the back of an aluminum or carbon arrow would complete the electrical circuit and shine brilliantly! The nock turned on automatically upon release of the bowstring and turned off easily with a gentle wiggle to disengage the contacts.

While the Lumenok design was about



Family has been key to The Burt Coyote Company's success. (Clockwise) Here's Eric's son David; father, Don; Curt and Eric; Curt's daughter, Melissa Swindler; Eric's wife, Debra; Curt's wife, Michele; and Lumenok Girl Jessica Eggen.

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(Above) It's in the blood – Don Price, here with a great black bear, taught his boys well. They love their deer hunting but like to get out west, too. Here's Curt with a nice muley and Eric with a stickbow moose!



All-new Crescent Crossbow Nocks feature an improved shank and deeper V for functionality and performance.

“By late spring of '04 they were awarded a patent on the Lumenok and needed to devote more time to the growing business. “That’s when I was able to quit my job and work from home with a few employees,” Curt continued. “And Eric had a few folks working with him, too. We shuttled things back and forth. We called it the five-mile assembly line.” By 2005, however, the brothers were able to purchase a small building in town and began to work on plans for a new headquarters across the street. They moved into those new digs in 2006, with a couple of CNC machines and ample room for R&D, manufacturing, assembly, packaging, warehousing, and more...

Once able to ramp up manufacturing, they went from a handful of employees to a dozen or so working during the day and then an evening shift with mostly high schoolers packing things up. “Today we’ve got 32 employees,” Curt explained. “We always have someone running the machines, prepping nocks, putting them together, packaging and shipping, plus our office crew. It’s a busy place!”

From the very beginning, The Burt Coyote Company set out to steadily improve the product, and today’s Lumenok features best-ever strength, durability, brightness and battery life (their truly unique, replaceable battery lasts up to

40 hours). And the nocks come in a wide variety of models and colors to fit any arrow shaft. The company also offers completed Lumen-Arrow Bolts, Arrow-Glow bowfishing arrows, the Extinguisher Arrow Puller, and the must-have F.A.S.T. Arrow Squaring Tool.

“We did this because we love it,” Curt explained. “Working in the Archery industry has been a privilege because shooting bows and arrows is what our family did every weekend. We lost Mom in '05, and Dad in February a year ago – I think Eric would agree with me when I say that Dad was our best employee – but our family really got us started in this and has always had our backs.”

The **Bowhunter** Magazine & TV team would like to thank The Burt Coyote Company for always having our backs, and for lighting our way with Lumenoks for over 20 years! For answers to all your lighted-nock questions, go to Lumenok.com or call (309) 358-1602. **BH**



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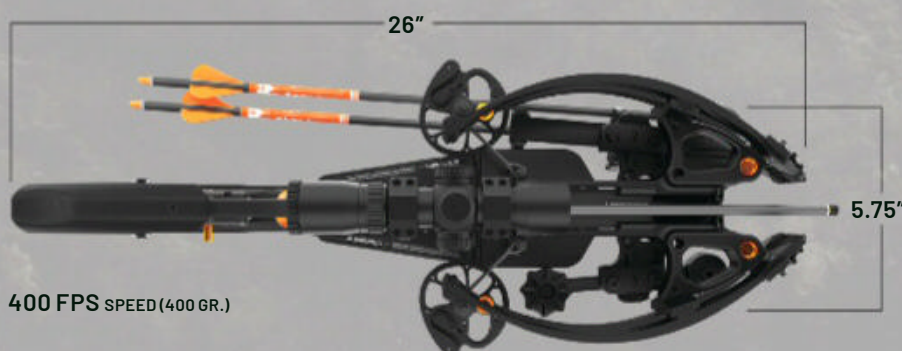
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NEXT-LEVEL BOWHUNTING

JOE BELL | TECHNICAL EDITOR



TO SHOOT quickly and effectively in tough bowhunting scenarios, your bow's draw weight must feel ultra-comfortable. If you have to muscle the bow to full draw, you're overbowed. Inset: Shooting at 3-D targets is an ideal way to practice. Use your rangefinder on every shot to improve muscle memory for quickly ranging an animal when the action is fast.

SWIFT-SHOOTING SUCCESS

SOMETIMES YOU'LL HAVE LONG MOMENTS TO PREPARE FOR THE SHOT, BUT MOST OF THE TIME YOU WON'T.

WHEN I LOOK BACK at my last two decades of bowhunting, the majority of the shots I encountered were pretty rapid. In other words, I didn't have a lot of time to analyze and prepare for the shot. In those instances where I responded quickly but smoothly, I achieved success; when I didn't, I blundered the opportunity.

Nowadays, when preparing my equipment and mind for hunting season, I plan for worst-case shooting scenarios. This means striking fast — and accurately — when the situation calls for it. Here are some details I think about to improve my success at the moment of truth.

Practice For The **REAL DEAL**

During the off-season, I enjoy shooting my bow in the backyard. My routine is to shoot two to three arrows at each

distance, pull, and then repeat. I do this at a variety of distances, shooting bag targets, foam blocks, and 3-Ds. This sort of practice helps refine my shooting form and my sight's settings.

However, I would be remiss to call this particular regimen, "preparation for the real thing." Not by a long shot. In the weeks leading up to hunting season, I drastically change my routine. Instead of shooting from normal stand-up positions, I begin shooting from my knees

or from my bottom, and I exercise discipline by shooting just one arrow — then pulling and shooting again. This helps me prepare for real hunting scenarios.

Next, I train myself to use my rangefinder on every shooting attempt — even if I already know the distance. I want to establish muscle memory of grabbing the rangefinder and punching the distance, all in one fluid motion. Rather than carrying my rangefinder in a hip pouch, where I must unzip and fumble for it, I like to loop my rangefinder around my neck and then tuck it between two shirts. This keeps it secure and quiet, where I can access it in the blink of an eye. I know of no better way to do it. I sometimes store my rangefinder in an outer pouch on my daypack, but once I'm in good hunting country, it goes on my neck for fast use.

Finally, I routinely use visualization techniques when practicing. I imagine a hunting scenario where one minute I'm hiking or glassing and then the next I have a big buck or bull standing inside my effective range. I picture the moment,

and then I nock my arrow in one smooth and rapid fashion. After this, I deploy my rangefinder, then hook-up and shoot — concentrating on a solid execution. If there is one facet I want to slow down on, it's the aiming process. I want to acquire the target quickly, but I also want to aim and trigger the shot with absolute focus and concentration.

IMPROVE Your Bow For Faster Shooting

Today, it's easy to deck out your rig with all sorts of sophisticated accessories and "accuracy enhancers." This is all good, so long as these add-ons don't malfunction due to rough travel in the mountains or hinder your ability to shoot rapidly in the heat of the moment. Keeping gear simple and streamlined is best for serious bowhunting.

I prefer sights and rests to be no-nonsense, meaning they're ruggedly built using large adjustment screws. Anything that can vibrate loose can quickly ruin your arrow's tune and cause an errant shot.

To determine a rugged sight from a flimsy one, grab hold of the pin guard and attempt to move the dovetail arm from side to side. If it flexes pretty easily, it's not the best product for hardcore bowhunting. The same goes for rests with lots of side-to-side play in the launcher mechanism. There's nothing worse than shoddy engineering on a "precision-based accessory."

The effectiveness of your aiming system is crucial, too. What's the best design? Fixed pins or movable? Of course, only you can decide what sight is best for you. Generally speaking, a sight with five to seven fixed pins is ideal for the West, because there's nothing you have to move prior to taking the shot, yet you still have plenty of pins for long-range shooting. Of course, you'll give up some degree of precision since you must hold over or under when the shooting distance is incrementally different from the aiming bead (e.g., 38, 43, 47, 52 yards, and so on).

If you use a sight with seven pins, it's a good idea to separate the fifth pin from the others, so you can quickly find the long-range pin you want. This can be done easily by painting the stem or wrapping a strip of white, weatherproof tape around it. Doing this reduces seeing a "wad" of glowing fibers, lessening anxiety at the moment of truth.

With a moveable pin, accuracy is greatly improved. You adjust the sight for a very specific distance, then aim dead-on. But movable or "slider" sights can cause



WHEN USING a "wad of sight pins," it helps to divide the pins into sections. Wrapping a piece of weatherproof tape around the base of the fourth or fifth pin can lessen anxiety and help you to pick the right pin.

delays in real-life bowhunting scenarios. If the animal suddenly moves during the encounter, you must readjust the sight, taking valuable seconds away from drawing your bow and executing a good shot.

To help remedy this problem, many archers prefer a movable sight but with a fixed, five-pin aperture. You basically use the sight like a conventional fixed-pin sight, but now the bottom pin becomes your "floater," giving you added precision on long-distance shots. When used appropriately, this style sight gives you the best of both worlds.

INSIST On A Forgiving Setup

This is where the rubber meets the road. You can exercise all the preceding steps, but if your bow setup doesn't fit you like a glove, then your effectiveness in fast-shooting situations could suffer.

To ensure a consistently accurate and forgiving bow, insist on these three aspects:

Dial In The Fit: Adjust your draw length in quarter-inch increments by using the proper cam setting and/or module, then by twisting or untwisting the bowstring. You can also use different D-loop

sizes to micro-tune your draw length. A precise draw length ensures comfort, repeatability, and deadly accuracy.

The bowstring's draw angle is also important. For best results, match the angle to your facial features and preferred anchor point, so you don't have to tilt your head forward or back — ruining good shooting form. You can do this by lengthening or shortening the draw length, then adjusting the length of the D-loop to find the most comfortable position. Small details like this can greatly improve your bow's shootability.

Choose An Easy Draw Weight: You can't shoot smoothly and swiftly if your muscles are fighting the bow. Try this test: Sit in a chair, aim at a 20-yard paper-plate target, and then draw your bow. If you can't keep the sight pin near the plate while drawing to anchor, then you're overbowed. Reduce your draw weight until you can draw smoothly and with a controlled aim.

Insist On A Well-Balanced Feel: Well-balanced bows tend to handle easier, point quicker, and stabilize on target faster. If your bow doesn't demonstrate these qualities, experiment with different stabilizer and counterweight options until it holds more plumb. A bow quiver can disrupt a balanced feel. To solve this, choose a low-profile quiver that hugs the bow's riser, such as the TightSpot quiver.

Being able to shoot quickly is vital. Rarely is there time to analyze the shot. Instead, you must act smoothly and deliberately to take advantage of a solid opportunity. By incorporating these steps, you'll become more capable of handling fast, challenging shots in the field. **BH**



THIS DESERT MULEY wouldn't stand still for more than a few seconds at a time, requiring me to take a fast yet smooth 45-yard shot.



ON THE TRACK

CHUCK ADAMS

CLASSIC BOWHUNTING publications like the five written by Saxton Pope provide valuable insights to our sport's history.



ON THE TRACK OF BOWHUNTING HISTORY

IT WOULD BEHOOVE ALL OF US TO TAKE TIME TO LEARN HOW OUR WONDERFUL SPORT CAME TO BE.

ABOUT 20 YEARS AGO, I was conducting archery seminars at a sports show in Northern California. Just before I went on stage, a gentleman walked up with a book in his hand. It was a leatherbound first edition of Saxton Pope's 1923 classic, "Hunting With The Bow And Arrow." The man opened the cover, and there was Pope's original signature, plus a sheaf of yellowing papers that appeared to be arrow-testing notes handwritten by Pope himself.

I was shocked when this fellow told me he had found the book in a local pawn shop and purchased it for \$10. He wanted to know what it was worth.

I had a seminar to give, but I asked him to meet me after the presentation. My excitement faded when the fellow failed to show up. His find was surely a

one-of-a-kind piece of bowhunting history discovered only a few miles from where Pope spent much of his adult life. I will always wonder where that book went, and for what price. I would have loved to own it myself.

In the years that followed, I managed to obtain first editions of all five books

and pamphlets Saxton Pope wrote before his untimely death in 1926 at age 51. My copy of "Hunting With The Bow And Arrow" was also signed by Pope, but has no personal notes with it.

Bowhunting history is important. **We all should know how this wonderful sport evolved. The late, great Fred Bear was one of my heroes, and arguably did more to promote archery hunting than any other single person. I had the good fortune to interview Fred at his original factory in Grayling, Michigan, about 15 years before his death.** My personally autographed copy of "Fred Bear's Field Notes" is dear to me because I spent time with the great man on several occasions.

A widely publicized estate auction in Squaw Valley, California, proved to be a bonanza for an archery history buff like me. Doug Walker was the late Publisher of "Western Bowhunter" and "National Bowhunter" magazines, plus a number of books. He collected many archery mementos during his long and storied career. In his early days as a sales rep for Bear Archery, Doug hunted and rubbed shoulders with famous early archers like Howard Hill and Fred Bear.

I traveled from Wyoming to California to attend that auction. My rental car was almost doing wheelies when I left.

Tucked in the backseat was Howard Hill's famously inscribed "Little Sweetheart" hunting bow, and a hunting arrow signed by Hill. Howard gave both to Walker, along with photos to prove it. Fred Bear's personally carried hunting knife set and compass were nestled beside the Hill items, and so was Art Young's wooden-arrow transport box, made by his friend Saxton Pope before the duo hunted Africa in the 1920s. In that box were several Art Young arrows, including one with the broadhead Young commercially marketed after his Africa trip. In the bottom, scattered willy-nilly, were more than 100 Art Young broadhead blanks.

Perhaps the most near and dear to me from that auction is an obsidian arrowhead and obsidian knife given to Walker by Lee Pope — Saxton Pope's son. Both

were knapped for Pope by his friend Ishi during Ishi's all-too-short stay at the University of California, where Pope worked as a physician.

I was born and grew up less than 20 miles from Ishi's home territory in Northern California, which makes these artifacts precious to me. The "last wild Indian in America" was one of the forefathers of modern bowhunting.

Not many years ago, an antiquities expert in my home state of Wyoming obtained and advertised another Ishi arrowhead. A collector needs to be careful about fakes, but as was the case with Doug Walker's items, this one checked out in spades. Charles Miles, a famous archaeologist, actually sat with Ishi in 1914 on the UC campus and watched Ishi knap this remarkably serrated head from milky white bottle glass. Miles was 20 years old and a university student at the time. He treasured this Ishi arrowhead for most of his life. It is featured in a photo on page 29 of his 1962 classic book, "Artifacts Of North America." The authenticity of this arrowhead is reinforced by the fact that Miles never learned to knap arrowheads himself. There was no way he could have "manufactured" the piece.

An Ishi-knapped arrowhead from more than 100 years ago is special. But how about a stone knife aged at 1,000 years old?

Native American stone tools are



I WAS thrilled to obtain an Art Young arrow complete with Young's patented head at a recent estate sale.

GENUINE items knapped by Ishi are among the rarest artifacts from bowhunting yesteryear.

SOME OF THE best pieces of bowhunting history are free for the finding. I spotted this awesome and ancient hafted stone knife blade on my own Wyoming property after a hard rain.

abundant in North America, and legal to find and keep on private land in most states. I have discovered hundreds of flint, chert, and obsidian arrowheads in places where I've hunted and hiked, including in the heart of California's Ishi Country. Before you look, please note that keeping artifacts found on public land is a violation of federal law.

Some of the best finds can be accidents, like the stone knife just mentioned. An unusually shaped point of stone appeared after a hard rain along a trench I had dug

on my Wyoming property. Minutes later, after carefully removing more soil with my hands, I found myself holding a large knife blade fashioned centuries before. The notched tail indicated that a wood or bone haft (handle) once had been lashed to the knife. Based on the shape and size, one local expert aged my find at 1,000 to 2,000 years old. It gives me chills to hold it in my hand as an ancient hunter once did!

Other such happy accidents occur to lucky people. One guy I know found an old longbow at an antique mall in Cody, Wyoming. He knew just enough to be suspicious about what it really was. A careful analysis by an authenticating expert proved it to be one of Saxton Pope's personal hunting bows; probably carried on Pope and Young's grizzly bear hunt in Yellowstone Park in 1920.

Their guide was famous outfitter and outdoorsman Ned Frost, who lived in the Cody area. Nobody knows if this Pope bow was a memento kept for a while by Frost's family, or if Pope left it behind for another reason. But Pope's bow-making style was unique — from the way he shaped the limbs to the tight cord wrapping on the handle. This item is genuine.

You or I could only be so lucky!

In my mind, nothing beats bowhunting. But in the off-season, a stroll down memory lane with historical artifacts is pretty darn thrilling, too! **BH**

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

CHUCK ADAMS BIG GAME HUNTING TIP

FINDING HISTORICAL ARTIFACTS

ARCHERY ARTIFACTS are like gold — they are wherever you happen to find them. But if you wish to own a piece of bowhunting history, there are excellent ways to get on track.

Nice collectibles, including Fred Bear items, are regularly advertised online. As I write this, for example, a fairly low-number Fred Bear Signature Takedown Bow is being offered on eBay. Fewer than 300 of these consecutively numbered bows were produced in the 1980s before Mr. Bear passed away. Each was signed by Fred and features a flawless finish, 22-carat gold-plated hardware, and a handsome hardwood presentation case.

If you Google "archery collectibles" or similar phrases, you might be pleasantly surprised at what's available.

Estate auctions and other auctions also can be good bets. One of the niftiest collectible auctions occurs at the biennial Pope and Young Awards Convention. I obtained my own Fred Bear Signature Bow in 2015 at the P&Y Convention Auction in Phoenix, Arizona.

Perhaps most special of all are accidental finds through pawn shops, antique stores, and the classified sections of newspapers. That's not to mention abundant Native American artifacts that still show up on private land after rainstorms, floods, or freezing winter weather. Finding archery treasures is half the fun...enjoying them is equally satisfying.



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ULTRALIGHT HUNTING



TRADITIONAL WAY

FRED EICHLER | TRADITIONAL EDITOR

If you're caught between spring and fall hunts, never fear. You can still find plenty of bowhunting action in the summer!



THE SEASON IS NEVER OVER

YOU DON'T HAVE TO LOOK TOO HARD, OR SPEND A LOT OF MONEY, TO HAVE FUN AFIELD WITH FRIENDS AND FAMILY.

I KNOW LIFE isn't all rainbows, sunshine, and lollipops, but there is no reason your bowhunting opportunities can't be. I'm always looking for fun, reasonably priced adventures to have with my bow when most of the big-game seasons are over.

Bowfishing is often my go-to for helping fill the void between spring turkey and fall deer season. However, while bowfishing is a blast, it can get repetitious. So, what are some more fun options for traditional bowhunters during the slower times of year that will also provide some great meat for the table, if successful?

Alligator hunting is one of my favorites, because it's so different. I've heard some folks refer to it as "bowfishing on steroids," but I personally feel it's more like bowhunting than bowfishing for

the simple fact you're pursuing a huge animal capable of doing you harm if you don't do your job right — kind of like bowhunting grizzlies or brown bears, if that makes sense?

Gators are also delicious to eat, and I've always enjoyed introducing 'gator meat to my dinner guests, as well as serving it to people at wild-game dinner banquets. Another plus is that you can usually use the bowfishing gear you already have. I use a Muzzy bowfishing reel, because I can set the drag tight enough that I can wear

down even a large gator, so long as I don't let them pull the bow out of my hands. I recommend using the 150-pound line the Muzzy reel comes with, but you can re-spool with heavier line if need be. I also use Muzzy's gar or gator arrows.

The Retriever reel is another good setup, if you want to go to a floating buoy. It's kind of like in the movie "Jaws," when they're following the barrels. Besides your preferred bowfishing gear, a competent 'gator guide is a good call as well, unless you draw a tag in one of the Southern

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SCHEDULE SUBJECT TO CHANGE

TRADITIONAL WAY

states and really know what you're doing. Two alligator guides I have been with are Hoppy Kempfer, who owns Osceola Outfitters in Florida, and Matt Herndon, who owns Southeast Adventures Florida. Both of these guys have reasonably priced hunts; most alligator hunts run from \$1,750 to \$3,500, depending on the size 'gator you want to kill.

Another great off-season hunt is for hogs. You can get on a lot of places in Florida, Georgia, Texas, Louisiana, or other Southern states with hogs for \$150 to \$300 a day nonguided, and some places have great deals on even guided hog hunts with lodging for \$350 to \$500 a day. Hoppy at Osceola Outfitters in Florida, for example, gets \$250 a day for a guided hog hunt, and if you book multiple days, you can get lodging as well.

First Point Bowhunting in Texas is another option for a fun hunt. They offer self-guided day hunts for hogs and javelinas for \$125 (includes lodging).

Although I mentioned a couple of reasonable pay-to-play places where I've hunted hogs on private land, you also can hunt public land with success for those willing to do a little scouting for



One of the great things about summertime bowhunts is the whole family can take part.

an affordable DIY hunt. I have harvested quite a few hogs in Florida on public land, and there's definitely some pride involved with doing it all by yourself.

Javelinas are another great summertime/off-season animal that you can have some fun chasing around. Despite rumors of their not being edible, when prepared and cooked properly, javelinas can be great table fare; not quite as tasty as a chunky wild hog, but definitely a good-eating little critter that's always fun to share with friends, especially those folks who have to look up what a javelina or collared peccary even is.

You don't need a lot of poundage to

kill any of the aforementioned critters, which makes them ideal for men, women, and youths. I used a 40-pound set of limbs on my Bear Mag riser recurve for the alligator and hog shown here.

Remember, family hunts are always the most enjoyable hunts you'll ever experience, and what is a vacation if you can't work in a little time afield? So, skip Disney World or the beach and take a hunting vacation. If your significant other has an issue with it, please don't mention my name. **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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HUNTING WHITETAILS

C.J. WINAND

TWO YEARS AGO, I was hunting in Kansas with Josh Tatum, who shot a really nice buck. By examining the lower jawbone, another biologist and I aged Josh's deer as a 4½-year-old buck. But, because his trail camera indicated the buck was older, Josh was doubtful, so we sent the buck's front teeth to deerage.com. A cementum annuli analysis indicated his buck was actually 7½ years old. The discrepancy was humbling.



AGING DEER: OLD VS. NEW METHODOLOGY

JUST BECAUSE A BUCK HAS A HUGE RACK
DOESN'T NECESSARILY MEAN HE'S AN OLDER DEER.

BACK IN COLLEGE, my wildlife professor had us take a quiz on aging 10 deer jawbones. We were using a technique developed in 1949 by deer researcher Bill Severinghaus from New York, based on tooth wear and eruption. To this day, this method has been the standard in aging deer for all wildlife biologists, and I was very proud to see an "A+" on my quiz.

Aging deer has become somewhat of an obsession for many hunters. How cool is it when you know the exact age of your buck! One of my all-time favorite bucks only scored in the low 150s, but he was 9½ years old. Obviously, having a deer live this long, let alone being fortunate

enough to tip him over, is something I'll most likely never get to experience again.

Although all wildlife students and professional deer biologists are familiar with the tooth replacement and wear technique developed by Severinghaus, through the years, various research pa-

pers started to question the accuracy of this aging technique. The initial study only used a small sample size of 26 known-aged deer between 2½ and 10½-plus years old. This is not a slam on the classic research, but as you can imagine, getting a sample size of known-aged deer in 1949 had to be very difficult. In fact, even today, an adequate sample size of known-aged deer is still challenging.

Although still not proven, more questions concerning the accuracy of Severinghaus's method started to emerge concerning tooth-wear difference as it pertained to various soil types. For example, the teeth of a deer that lives in a silty loam soil may not wear as fast as the teeth of a deer living in a sandy environment. Additionally, there may be differences in wear due to variations in nutrition (good versus bad), or what was found in mule deer — does tended to be incorrectly aged more often than bucks.

Through the years, various research papers have concluded that deer older than 3½ were extremely variable and showed no consistent pattern of wear using the Severinghaus method. They further determined that many biologists would under-age older deer and over-age, younger deer.

Then, in the 1970s, researchers started to compare the jawbones of known-aged deer with the cementum annuli method. The latter is the process where you count the dark rings of cementum (like the growth rings in a tree), which is in the root of a deer's lower front teeth. Cementum rings tend to coincide with seasons; appearing dark and thin during winter, when resources are scarce, and light and thick during spring and summer, when resources are more abundant. This annual layer of cementum on the tooth makes aging possible.

Although not 100% accurate, this is still the most precise way of aging deer (or other critters). The advantage of using the Severinghaus method is that it can be used in the field, whereas the cementum annuli method requires laboratory analysis and costs roughly \$33 per deer.

Another potential bias in many of the previous aging studies is they were conducted with known-aged, deer raised in pens. As you can imagine, acquiring a data set of known-aged, free-ranging deer can be a daunting challenge.

In 2002, biologist Ken Gee presented data on 432 deer collected from the Noble Foundation Wildlife Unit in Oklahoma from 1983–1997. These deer were captured as fawns using a drop-net and marked with either an ear tag or a tattoo. Although Gee was trying to compare or modify the Severinghaus model, he also found inconsistencies throughout. He concluded that aging deer 3½ years or older was simply too variable to classify into a specific age class.

Last year, I drew an Iowa deer tag and had the opportunity to hunt on land managed by wildlife biologist Dr. Mickey Hellickson, owner of Orion Wildlife Management Services. While hunting, I came across some of Hellickson's raw data on deer they'd harvested on the ranch. Hellickson compared a total of 228 jawbones from bucks and does taken off his properties in Iowa, and compared the tooth replacement and wear results with the cementum annuli process.

Hellickson's rough data indicated the tooth replacement wear method developed by Severinghaus was only accurate 18% of the time. The cementum annuli method indicated the majority of jawbones were one year older than the tooth replacement and wear methodology had shown. Additionally, 51% of Hellickson's jawbones were classified as one year older using the cementum annuli process, while 23% were two years older, and 8% were three years or older.

I shared this data with the National Deer Association's Chief Conservation Officer, wildlife biologist Kip Adams, and he said, "I've heard of these discrepancies before, and it may occur more in the Midwest and South."

My question back to Adams was, "If this is true, just how far geographically does this disconnect between Severinghaus's tooth replacement and wear method exist?" As of this date, no biologist knows. **BH**

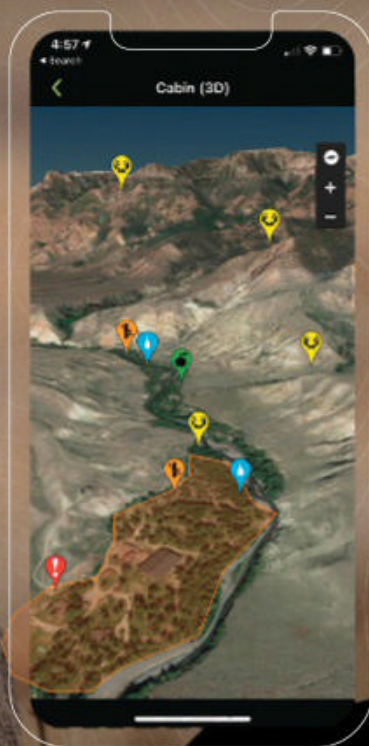
C.J.'S SUMMARY: Having an idea of the age of the bucks in your area can be a valuable tool in determining which bucks to tip over, and which ones to pass. Although this column may seem to rock the boat on ag-

ing deer, the good news is state deer biologists only need to know three age classes — fawn, yearling, and adult — of deer when they create population-reconstruction models.

As for hunters, I'd suggest aging your deer with the Severinghaus method up to 2½ years of age. For anything 3½ years old or older, I recommend sending in your deer's bottom front teeth to Wildlife Analytical Laboratories (deerage.com). For a nominal fee, they can perform the cementum annuli technique and accurately age your deer. Just like people, through the years I've seen deer with missing or extra molars on the side of the jaw; one jawbone had its first molar growing perpendicular to the jawbone.

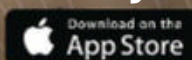
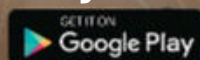
Although rare, some whitetails (generally in the South) even possess upper canines. Variability can also include deer wearing down the teeth on one side more so than the other. The result is two different age classes within the same jawbone. Additionally, biologists have also suggested that sex biases and nutrition (or lack thereof) can have significant impacts on tooth wear, as will soil make up, particularly in areas with especially sandy soil.

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If you want to "get away from it all," you'll need the right gear.

GOING OFF-GRID

DON'T LET EQUIPMENT FAILURES SPOIL
YOUR NEXT REMOTE ADVENTURE.

MY PACK SEEMED to get heavier as I eased up the switchbacks toward the basin. Not that it was light when I started nearly a half-dozen miles back, but now my 6,000 cu. in. pack was feeling more like 7,000; and the combination of altitude, age, and the heavy load had slowed my pace considerably.

As I've gotten older, seeking solitude has become more important than actually notching a tag; however, truth be told, I was hoping my extra efforts to go off-grid would be rewarded with both.

After reaching a cluster of pines and setting up camp, I brewed a cup of coffee in the chilled mountain air and watched the sun fade behind the horizon. The

silence was truly deafening. It always is in this part of the world, and I began to recall the many lonely nights I'd spent before in places just like this.

There truly is something special about off-grid pursuits with a bow in hand. Needless to say, these types of hunts are not easy. Everything needs to fall into place if you want your pack

heavier going out than coming in. While there are many things out of our control, our equipment choices and preparation are not one of them.

Obviously, a quality pack is the first must-have, and you'd be hard-pressed to find a better company than **Kifaru International** (kifaru.net). They offer exceptional tents, stoves, and sleeping systems, but their bread and butter is their multiple pack systems. Their new [1] **Hellbender** (\$362-\$391, bag only), is the perfect size at 2,250-plus cu. in. for a day hunt but could also be used by minimalists looking to stretch their legs for a day or two. A defining feature is the fold-open meat shelf which can be used to pack out the first load of meat or take in an extra dry bag full of gear, a tent, or even a treestand and climbing sticks, while your other gear stays in the pack. Combined with Kifaru's **Duplex Tactical Frame** (\$454-\$488), this versatile pack can do it all for both the Western hunter and the whitetail hunter.

Adding yet another gem to their performance pack series, the guys at **ALPS OutdoorZ** (alpsoutdoorz.com) have introduced the [2] **Elite Wilderness Pack System** (\$299-\$499). Built around the all-new Elite frame, it's 30% lighter and stronger than its predecessor and features an adjustable frame design, so you can find that perfect ergonomic fit and elite comfort. To keep meat loads from shifting in the load sling, it also sports side panels and compression straps. The Elite frame is also designed to accept either their 1,800 cu. in. daypack or the larger 3,800 for multi-day trips in the backcountry. It's constructed from 500D nylon Cordura fabric that is tear and water-resistant, and features a fully accessible main compartment with multiple interior mesh pockets and exterior pockets.

When ounces count, the ultralight hunting geniuses at **KUIU** (kuiu.com) seem to always deliver, and their [3] **Pro LT Pack System** (\$539-\$579) is just one example. Well over a pound lighter than its predecessor, this modular pack

system allows you to attach any of their four packs ranging in size from 3,600 to 7,000 cu. in. onto the same Pro Suspension and Carbon Fiber Frame. Each pack features multiple internal and external pockets, a hydration system, external compression straps, and are fully constructed from a tough abrasion and water-resistant Cordura ripstop fabric. They are also equipped with an additional 2,500 cu. in. load sling for hauling extra gear or meat.

A proven leader in quality and pack design, **Mystery Ranch** (mysteryranch.com) adds more depth to their line with their new [4] **10X & 12X Bino Harness** (\$125–\$134). It features a magnetic lid that stays in place to protect your optics while also providing one-handed operation when it's time to quickly grab the glass. This fully adjustable harness sports a zippered front pocket and a pair of side stretch pockets to keep small items close, and it can easily be paired with their new **Bear Spray Holster** (\$32) and **Rangefinder Pocket** (\$29) to complete the package.

The right sleeping bag can mean the difference between a good rest or a night of misery. To prevent the latter, **Klymit**

(klymit.com) designed the [5] **KSB 0** (\$229) sleeping bag. Stuffed with 650 fill power down at the top with a synthetic blend at the bottom, it provides a balanced warmth-to-weight ratio, and to keep the fill next to your body it has an innovative Flexible Baffle design that runs the length of the bag. It also sports a mummy hood with draft collar and drawcord to keep the chill out.

Another ultralight bag worth a look is the new [6] **Lost Ranger UL 3N1** (\$549–\$649) series from **Big Agnes** (bigagnes.com). These sleep systems feature an outer bag that functions like a quilt, an inner mummy bag that can be used as a standalone piece for those warmer hunts, and a pad sleeve that will secure any size pad to your bag for the ultimate in comfort. Plus, the innovative Down-Tek fill repels water while maintaining insulating value.

When you want to cut the weight and have a quick and easy shelter to set up, tipi-style tents are a great option, and at just over 3 lbs., the **Seek Outside** (seekoutside.com) [7] **Cimarron Light** (\$465) is hard to beat. Designed to take a beating, it's constructed with 30D Cordura nylon and features guy points

and stake loops strategically placed to ensure it can take whatever Mother Nature dishes out. You can even add one of their ultralight tent stoves to ensure four-season comfort.

Designed for the solo hunter looking to cut weight but still keep the elements at bay, **Stone Glacier** (stoneglacier.com) offers the [8] **SkyAir ULT** (\$165). Made for the minimalist, it has a trail weight of 8 oz., but with a waterproof footprint of 27 to 32 sq. ft. and a center height up to 47", it offers plenty of room to stretch out. It can also be paired with additional comforts such as a mesh insert to keep the bugs at bay, and a vestibule to store gear.

Never disappointing, **Browning Camping** (browningcamping.com) adds the [9] **Talon 1-Person** (\$279) tent to their long list of successes. With a footprint measuring nearly 7' x 4' and a center height of 43", it's the perfect size for adventurers. Although it's not the lightest shelter on the list at just over 5 lbs., its durable and weatherproof material won't fail if the weather conspires to spoil your plans. It features aluminum poles and hubs for rock-solid performance and has a full-length, no-see-um mesh door and interior vents for optimal airflow.



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Nothing spoils a bowhunt faster than uncomfortable feet, so don't be cheap when it comes to boots. If you're planning to bowhunt more rugged terrain, it's hard to beat what **Kenetrek** (kenetrek.com) has to offer. Their notable [10] **Mountain Extreme** (\$465) is a favorite among mountain hunters, and it features a 7mm polyurethane midsole for torsional rigidity and their proprietary K-Talon outsole for keeping you vertical and not horizontal. The 2.8mm-thick leather uppers with one-piece vamp construction are complemented by a reinforced rubber sole guard for abrasion resistance, and with the no-seam tongue and breathable Windtex waterproof membrane, the only moisture your feet will see is what they produce.

Another boot designed for rugged terrain is the [11] **Reserve High GTX** (\$389) from Canadian bootmaker **AKU** (aku-outdoor.us). Handmade in Italy and tested in extreme conditions, I honestly love the pair I've put through the wringer. They provided me just enough stiffness for extended hunts out west that kept my feet in the game, which used to be one of my biggest obstacles, and they also handled the morning dew and stream crossings.

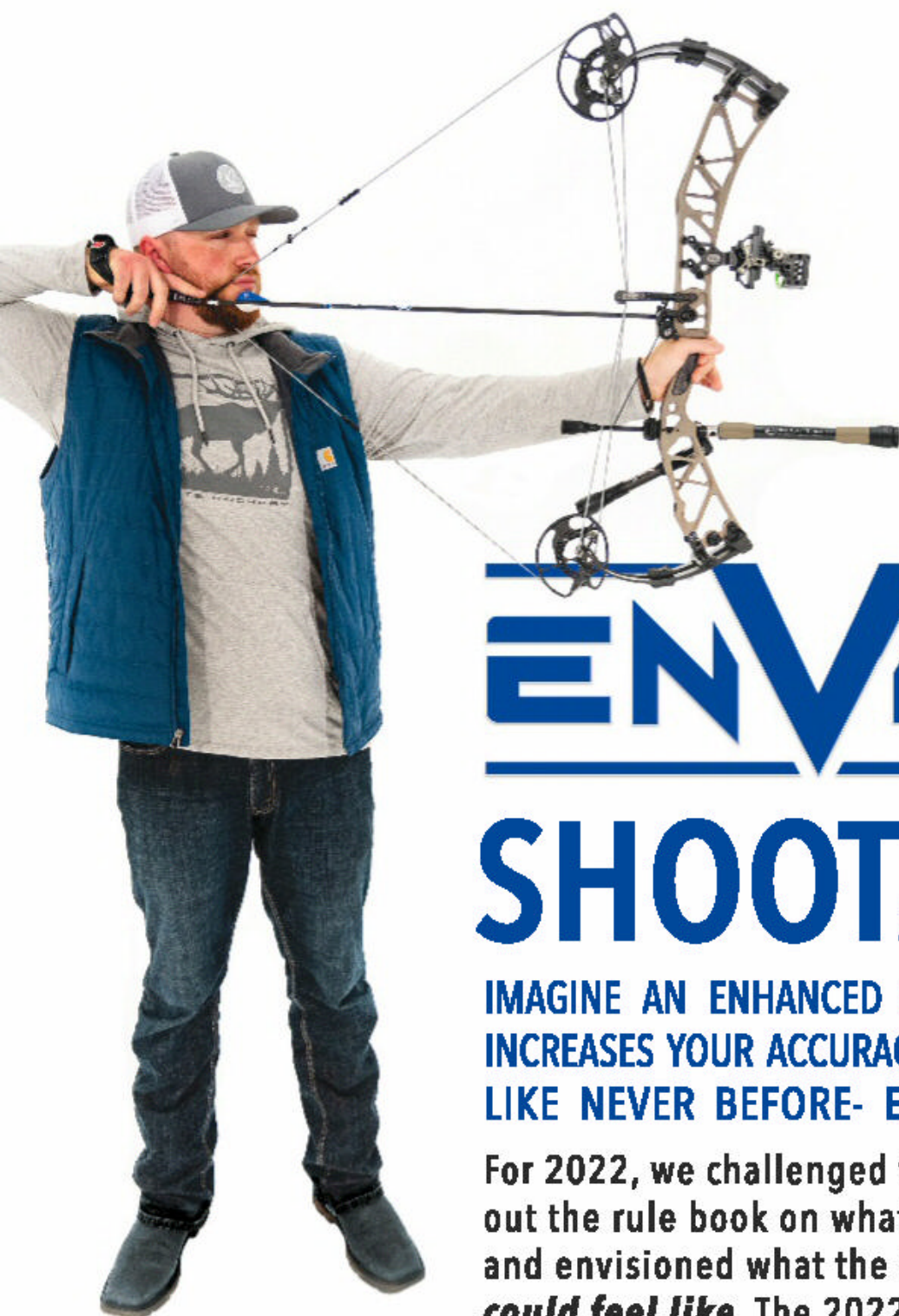
If you want a more flexible and lightweight option that's still tough enough to get the job done, check out **Danner's** (danner.com) [12] **Recurve Moc Toe** (\$200). Weighing just 45 oz. per pair, the Moc Toe has a Vibram Recurve outsole with adaptive lugs and flex lines and a cushioning open-cell OrthoLite footbed with SPE Midsole and TPU heel clip for enhanced support and comfort. Making these boots an even sweeter early season option is their 7" height for ankle support, waterproof, leather/nylon uppers, and options available with Thinsulate Ultra Insulation.

Not enough can be said about how the **onX** (onxmaps.com) [13] **Hunt App** (\$30-\$99) has changed the way we hunt, and now they've enhanced said app with even more features. Besides the must-have topo maps and aerial images that let us save, share, and navigate in and around public and private dirt, it also allows us to add photos and create scouting reports. The latest updates give users a tree-species feature, plus a new optimal wind feature that allows you to view the current wind direction and set your preferred wind direction for a particular waypoint.

Having a good blade is essential to any and all hunters, and the [14] **Randy Newberg DTS** (\$65) from **Gerber** (gerbergear.com) is an all-in-one taskmaster when it's time for the "dirty" work. It couples an edge-holding 440C recurved oversized primary blade that does the bulk of the processing, plus a unique tool that's sole purpose is to cut tough-to-reach tendons at bone joints to make the breakdown process even easier.

At just 1.67 oz., the **Benchmade** (benchmade.com) [15] **Altitude** (\$245) is perfect for backcountry bowhunters looking to shave some ounces but still get the job done. Designed with a blaze-orange finish, it's constructed from edge-holding S90V steel — one of the hardest around — and features a slim design and unique carbon-fiber scales for better dexterity and control.

We all need a third hand sometimes, and the **Bow Spider** (bowspider.com) [16] **Packing System** (\$89) delivers just that. Designed to carry your bow in virtually any hunting situation, its universal design fits any bow and connects to any pack, hip, or tree to keep your bow close. Simply drop it into the receiver and it locks in place, but easily slips out with a pull. **BH**



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DANNY FARRIS

BETTER BLOOD TRAILING

NOTHING'S MORE FRUSTRATING THAN FOLLOWING BLOOD TRAILS YOU STRUGGLE TO SEE.

Though color-blind, bowhunter Bill Pellegrino was impressed by his new-found ability to see red with Bloodvision glasses, especially at night with artificial light. Below, Bloodvision glasses from Sköpt Optics intensify the color red while muting all the other colors. They retail for \$89.99 and are available through dealers or online at skopt.com.



THE ARROW'S IMPACT resulted in a resounding thump, and the buck instantly disappeared into a thick backdrop of evergreens. I didn't see exactly where it hit, but I felt confident.

This was back in the days prior to modern laser rangefinders, so I paced the yardage off as I approached where the buck had been standing. My 35-yard distance estimate had been fairly close. Now I really started to get excited.

Excitement soon turned to anxiety when I couldn't find blood. I searched for quite a while before Jeff showed up to give me a hand. Jeff and I bowhunted a

lot together as teenagers, and this was to be one of our biggest successes to date.

We started following tracks I'd found exiting the scene. As we walked a portion of the trail I had already covered, Jeff suddenly pointed at the ground and said, "There!" Before I could even react, he pointed again, repeating, "There, there, there," as he followed a blood trail that seemed invisible to me.

"Stop!" I commanded in frustration. "Where? Show me what you're looking at."

Jeff knelt and pointed at a small drop of blood in the dirt and pine needle mixture. When I focused on the spot, I could finally see a hint of red, but to actually confirm it was blood I had to touch it and look at it on the tip of my finger. I couldn't understand how Jeff could see those little spots so well. It didn't dawn on me that I might have a color-vision issue. I identified all my colors in Kindergarten! I knew the sky was blue, stop signs were red, trees were green, and bananas were yellow, and if asked what color shirt someone had on, I could tell you. Soon, Jeff had us standing over my buck, and I wrote off my blood-trailing difficulty to not paying close attention.

A few years later, I entered the military and was given a color-vision test. Upon completion, I was shocked when the doctor told me I was color blind.

"What do you mean I'm color blind?" I asked as I frantically started pointing out colors in his office.

"The term 'color blindness' is a bit of a misnomer," he responded. "Most color-blind people aren't actually blind to color; they just don't see color as well as people with normal color vision. Color deficient is probably a more accurate description of your condition."

Now I understood why I had such a difficult time seeing blood. Over the years, I've learned a lot from being a color blind — or should I say — color-deficient bowhunter. First, my deficiency has forced me to refine my "dry tracking" skills. These are the tracking methods famously used by African trackers we've all heard stories about. While I'm not as effective as they are, I've been forced over the years to step back and carefully consider which path an animal might take, then to scour the ground and foliage for anything that might be the slightest bit out of place. I've recovered many animals using these techniques, and all bowhunters should develop these skills.

I've also learned that I am not alone. While color-deficient vision is rare



REGARDLESS of how well you see color, refining your dry tracking skills can pay big dividends. My son, Casey, can see blood better than most, but this buck wouldn't have been recovered without sound dry tracking skills.

among women, it is relatively common among men. As many as one in five men have some form of color-deficient vision, and my personal experience seems to confirm that. Two of the guys I hunt with most have color-deficient vision. Bill Pellegrino is one of the best bowhunters I know, yet he can't follow a blood trail to save his life. Likewise, my son, Lane, inherited my curse.

Even among those with so-called normal color vision, the ability to see color comes in differing degrees. So, even if you can pass a standard color-vision test, your ability to see color might fall at the lower end of the normal color-vision spectrum. I've enlisted the help of so many others to help me blood trail over the years, it has become obvious that not all people with normal color vision see blood the same way, and some see it far better than others.

Lucky for me, one of the best blood-trailers I know is my son, Casey. If there's a pin drop of blood on a trail, he will spot it. It simply stands out to him.

Two years ago, Casey made a single-lung shot on a buck that didn't bleed much. The two of us took up the trail, and between my dry tracking skills and his ability to see blood, we were able to recover one of the most difficult-to-find bucks of my career. Portions of the long trail were completely devoid of blood, but we kept following tracks and parted grass. If we went too far without Casey spotting a drop of blood, we'd double back and follow another path until we confirmed we were on the right trail. Our success motivated me to research new technological advancements in eyewear that might help me see blood better.

I soon discovered Bloodvision color optimization eyewear from Sköpt Optics (skopt.com). Bloodvision glasses use a patented technology called Optichro-

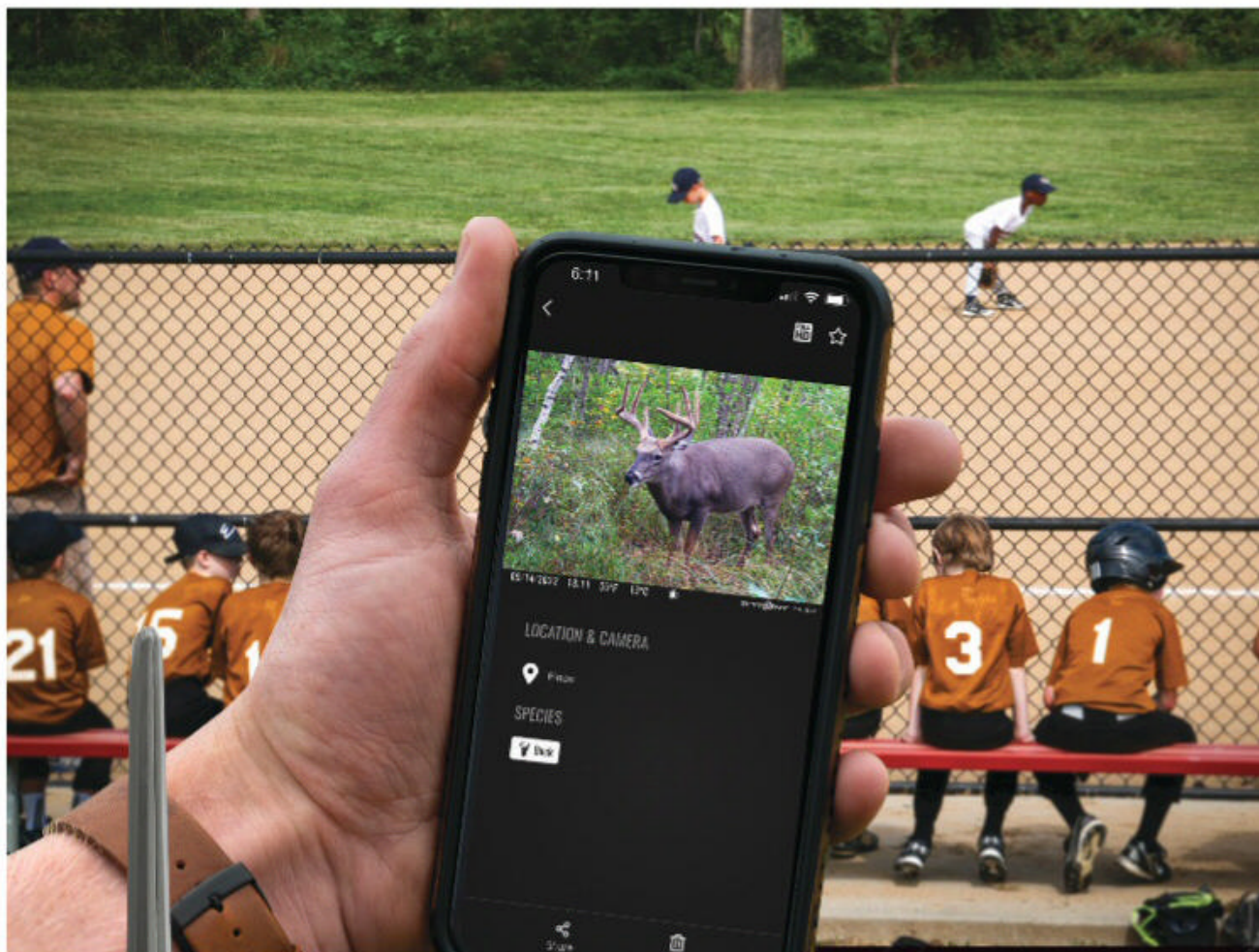
matic Filtration to help you see blood by intensifying red colors while filtering and muting all other colors of the spectrum. This makes blood-red pop and jump out against other colors.

I had an opportunity to test Bloodvision glasses this fall after arrowing a buck here in Colorado. My fellow color-challenged compadres, Bill and Lane, were also able to test them next to two other pairs of color-vision glasses. While the competitors' much higher-priced optics seemed to make all colors appear brighter, they didn't really help us to see red when it was mixed in with all the

other colors along a blood trail, especially in low light.

The Bloodvision glasses helped all three of us color-cursed bowhunters, as well as two of our buddies who have normal color vision, to see the blood more vividly. As advertised, other colors were muted, while blood-red stood out.

Regardless of where you fall on the color-vision spectrum, I highly recommend you give these amazing optics a try. Any bowhunter will benefit from the ability to see red more vividly, but for those who suffer from color-deficient vision, these glasses could be a game-changer. **BH**



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DR. DAVE SAMUEL | CONSERVATION EDITOR



REGULATIONS are changing regarding the use of trail cameras so be sure you are aware of the law.

KEEPING ABREAST OF TECHNOLOGY & DISEASE

EXPLORING SEVERAL UPDATES ON WILDLIFE ISSUES

Trail CAMERAS

IN OUR FEBRUARY ISSUE, I presented problems Western states are having with the use of trail cameras. At that time, I noted that Utah was considering some changes. That has now happened and here is the new law.

The Utah Legislature passed HB 295 during the 2021 legislative session that instructed the Utah Wildlife Board to make rules governing the use of trail cameras in hunting. The game agency surveyed 14,000 big game hunters asking for feedback on potential changes. The survey showed that the majority of hunters opposed using trail cameras that transmit images in real time. So, from

July 31 to December 31 each year, cameras that have internal storage memory as well as wireless cameras that transmit images to a hunter's smartphone, cannot be used. Private landowners can still use cameras to monitor their property and agricultural operations, but most hunting on both private and public land is affected. The law also states that no one can sell or purchase trail-camera footage

that aids in the attempted taking of big game animals. The Wildlife Board also banned night-vision devices to locate big game beginning 48 hours before any big game hunt opening date and ending 48 hours after a hunting season.

Other states already had made rules concerning trail cameras. As of 2015, hunters in New Hampshire can use cellular-linked cameras but cannot hunt an animal on the same date the photos are taken. Nevada banned the use of trail cameras on public land in 2018. The 2022 Hunting Regulations in Montana state that you can't use video to track animals while hunting, nor can you use real time video, including that taken from drones, while hunting.

Effective January 1, 2022, hunters in Arizona cannot use trail cameras for the purpose of taking, locating, or aiding in the taking of wildlife. States everywhere are concerned for a variety of reasons, but "fair-chase" principles are the underlying issues. Advancement of technologies that aid the hunter have led to where we are today. We've seen similar advancements in drones and "smart" rifle technology. The technology advancement challenge is not only faced by state wildlife agencies, but hunters as well. We haven't heard the last on this issue.

CWD Always In The News

Years ago, I noted in this column that prion diseases, such as Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD), are very complicated, very hard to solve, and probably impossible to eliminate. One only need study the research done for decades on Creutzfeldt-Jakob's Disease in humans to see just how complicated prion diseases are. For the average person, just reading prion research and trying to understand what it says, is daunting. However, we need prion/CWD research if we are ever going to find ways to save deer and make sure humans stay safe when eating deer that have that disease.

A recent, but not completed, study titled, "Tissue-Specific Biochemical Differences Between Chronic Wasting Dis-

CURT WELLS

ease Prions Isolated From Free-Ranging White-Tailed Deer,” shows just how complicated and scary the prion situation is in CWD. They noted that “most infected cervids likely shed peripheral prions replicated in lymphoid organs.” I thought that the prions were neurogenic and came from the nervous system to the brain, but this work leads one to believe that deer have strains of prions that replicate in the lymphatic system, as well as those that replicate in the nervous system.

But what does the fact that prions can also come from the lymphatic system mean to deer and to deer hunters? Some background. CWD is the only prion disease known to infect and be transmitted between captive animals and also free-ranging individuals. Infectious prions have been found in saliva, urine, feces, antler velvet, blood, and reproductive tissues. Deer can get the prions in two situations. One is described as “horizontally,” which means that a CWD-free deer is exposed to infected saliva, feces, or urine during close contact or by coming into contact with infected prions in the environment. Deer can also get the prions “vertically,” which means an infected doe passes the prions to a fetus.

OK, so now we have non-nervous system prions that come from the lymphatic system. Where do they figure into the disease? This study wants to determine if these lymphatic prions have unique characteristics that affect CWD transmission. The authors note that there are different strains of CWD-neural prions. Do lymphatic prions also have different strains? The answer is probably “yes.” We already know that we can experimentally inoculate the brains of cattle, sheep, pigs, and cats with CWD prions and infect them. And we know that cattle and cats resisted CWD infection after oral exposure. We also know that different prion strains affect deer differently. One strain (H95+) emerges from deer that have a more CWD-resistant genotype. This is a possible red flag regarding the disease’s infectious potential.

The yet unfinished study will continue to look at the biochemical makeup of lymph-node prions and brain-derived prions in deer. And any differences may have important implications for the disease’s potential transmission to humans.

GUN SALES Helps Conservation Funding

A huge part of all conservation funding comes to state wildlife and fish agencies via the Federal Aid in Wildlife Res-

toration Act, more commonly known as the Pittman-Robertson Act (i.e. PR money). This act created an 11-percent excise tax on firearms, ammunition, and archery equipment, paid by manufacturers and passed on to the buyers (hunters and others). There is a similar excise tax on fishing tackle, boat equipment, and boat fuel, and this tax brought in \$400 million in 2021.

PR monies for 2021 reached a record \$1.1 billion. Americans who purchased guns contributed a huge amount of money for conservation. Gun sales peaked in 2020 and dropped slightly in

2021, when 18.5 million guns were purchased. Since the pandemic, more and more Americans look for ways to enjoy the outdoors, and the excise-tax money supports the continued management of our outdoor resources. **BH**

EDITOR’S NOTE: It’s also worth noting that, according to the Archery Trade Association, federal excise taxes collected during the last two pandemic years totaled over \$100 million.

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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TAKE A PHOTO TO LEARN MORE

Bowhunters are often conventional thinkers, but when you head west, that may need to change.

WESTERN

BH 
FEATURES

BY GAVIN STEELE



THE WESTERN HUNTING ADVENTURE has become increasingly popular in recent years — and for good reason. Hunting elk and mule deer can take you to the most remote and breathtaking places in America, and yield plenty of delicious table fare, too. Many hunters from across the country have done all the research on tag options, points and outfitters, and plan their hunts far in advance. But have they planned to be “Western lethal?” These hunts will bring new and challenging circumstances to those who are new to the West. So, what does it take to be Western lethal? Attention to detail!

LETHAL



The Bow

The first step in being a lethal bowhunter is optimizing your bow. Just as your favorite squirrel rifle isn't suited to taking deer, not all bow setups are created equal. In the West, you likely will be hunting larger-boned and thicker-skinned game, and in harsher elements. In the mountains, your cardio will be pushed. And in the moment of truth, a less-than-steady hold will be the norm. For these reasons, the ultimate Western hunting bow should be a stable and forgiving one. Ever wonder why pro 3-D shooters always opt for slower, longer ATA bows instead of the shorter, faster “hunting” bows that seem to be all the rage? The reason is stability. A longer axle-to-axle bow with a generous brace height will transfer less torque and shaking into the shot, allowing greater accuracy. Bows in the 33 to 36-inch range are stable and proven to cross over well from 3-D to the field. Also, adding a rear stabilizer for balance in the wind and for those steep uphill/downhill angles common out west will benefit a longer bow.

Draw weight is also critical, even for the traditional bowhunter using a recurve or longbow. There is little to gain from choosing heavy draw weights. For the compound archer, a heavy draw weight not only isn't unnecessary due to the efficiency of today's bows, but it's also detrimental to executing those sudden shots at odd angles that are common to Western hunts. Being able to hold at full draw longer when a bull elk hangs up behind trees, and being able to confidently lean out and shoot around obstacles, will increase success. It doesn't matter how well you think you can handle 80 pounds; you will always shoot lighter better!

The Arrow Build

There has been a lot of emphasis put on extremely high FOC (front of center) and very heavy (600-plus grains) arrows lately. I would caution against this for the Western hunt. I'm not saying that heavy arrows don't have their place — like from a traditional bow, where speed is never an option, or from a treestand where shots are usually close and a heavy arrow's momentum will surely punch a downward-pointing wound channel and exit, creating massive hemorrhaging. But this is not the Western hunting scenario, where more than likely the shot will be farther

(should you choose to take it), on level ground or even uphill, through a crosswind, and at an animal that takes steps of two to four yards in a fraction of a second. Here is where faster flight times and flatter trajectories are beneficial. I can say from my own experience, and that of many of my friends, that more opportunities are lost from yardage errors versus a lack of penetration — trajectory is a big deal!

From the time you range a bull elk until the time you are drawn, anchored, and ready to shoot, that bull could easily have taken a few steps and be five or 10 yards farther than your last range — a very real variable in the heat of the moment. Another factor is your arrow's trajectory path. Obstacles like limbs and branches well above your line of sight become a problem, and with super-heavy hunting arrows this consequence becomes more exaggerated and unpredictable. And, of course, a heavy arrow's longer flight time becomes even more crucial when your quarry is keyed-up or moving at the time of the shot. Inches matter.

Since there is no added benefit to an arrow that blasts through an animal with 40 pounds of extra force versus an arrow that passes through with only five pounds of force to spare, logic suggests choosing an arrow weight that penetrates but is also flatter and faster. Building the “humerus” arrow is just that... humorous!

Arrows in the 425 to 500-grain range — especially those of smaller diameter that experience less drag with 16 to 18-percent FOC — yield ample penetration, flatter trajectories, and carry through wind better. I cringe when I hear someone declare the perfect arrow weight without considering draw length. It will vary from one archer to the next, so it's a relative value.

Speaking of wind and trajectory, super-fast, ultralight arrows and crosswinds don't mix well. As in other shooting sports, there's a point of diminishing returns between speed and stability. In bowhunting, this seems to occur around 285 FPS. Long-draw archers have the option to add extra weight to their arrows (and often need to), and still keep that forgiving and stable speed.

A Word On Lethality

Now I want to address the question of lethality. What is the most lethal arrow performance? I challenge the popu-



THE BENEFITS of a longer, more stable bow are easily noticed when shooting at extreme uphill and downhill angles. Avoiding heavy draw weights also will allow you to lean out and around trees and other obstacles and to shoot more comfortably and accurately.

lar view of the pass-through being optimal on the Western hunt. If sufficient penetration through the vitals is obtained, meaning a pass-through of the vitals, there is little benefit to the arrow blasting through the animal and into the ground. The customary argument of a second hole for better blood is negated, I believe, by steep shot angles and the fact that the lower-body cavity will now capture blood before it pours out the entry or exit holes. This is especially true on large, Western animals with thick layers of hole-plugging fat over their ribs and voluminous chest cavities. That said, there are benefits to the arrow staying in the animal.

First, the blood trail. A shaft remaining in the entry wound will keep it open and force hydraulic bleeding as the walls of the wound press against the shaft and then retract. This squirts blood, and while it may not pour blood on the ground in dramatic fashion, it will yield a more consistent trail for a longer distance than many pass-throughs on level ground.

Second, an arrow lodged deep in an animal's body cavity will continue to cut vital organs, especially as the rear of the arrow comes into contact with outside forces like brush or even the animal's scapula, forcing the broadhead to make wide, slashing lacerations. Choosing a durable arrow that won't break easily when leveraged upon and a sharp cut-on-contact head that moves freely, like a knife, will enhance this effect.

Third, an arrow's fletching, protruding and clearly visible, will give better clarification as to the lethality of the hit and better prepare the hunter for the appropriate recovery steps.

Here's an example. A friend of mine shot at a buck that ducked the shot. The arrow impacted at the top of the pelvis, skipped off the bone, drove forward and down toward the bottom of the liver, and then stopped with six inches of the arrow protruding above the hip. A very bad hit owed to the lightning reflexes of the buck, but one that I thought still showed promise for recovery. The next morning, we started on a 1,000-plus-yard blood trail that was scant, but still clear enough to recover the deer within a few hours of taking up the trail.

Now, you could say this is a poor example, as the recovery would have been quicker had the arrow passed through the heart or lungs. True enough. But the point is, on a marginal hit, an arrow staying in an animal is often beneficial to lethality and recovery.

The Broadhead

Another contributor to arrow performance is broadhead type, and no topic starts more brawls around the campfire than this one, but the facts are the facts. Although they may cut big holes, large mechanicals use more energy (robbed from the arrow's momentum) to deploy and to penetrate than cut-on-contact heads do. This loss of energy is not ideal for penetrating the thick-skinned, big-boned animals found in the West, especially when considering the variety of impact angles. By no means am I suggesting all mechanicals are destined to fail. Some are better than others, but regardless of which of the most popular mechanicals you use, there will be some loss of penetration simply due to physics.

Mechanicals aren't the only heads to be mindful of. Other fixed-blade broadheads featuring chisel tips atop long ferrules with blades set farther back, are not ideal for penetrating bone. These heads try to wedge bone apart in three directions. It may shatter the bone, allowing the arrow (now drained of its energy) to slip through. Or it may not, ending the arrow's penetration altogether. And, as with mechanicals, a ferrule extending well past the blades will not move as freely inside an animal. However, like mechanicals, some fixed-blade designs are better than others. Those that have a sharply tapered ferrule with blades positioned close to the tip will do better, but not quite as good as one other tried-and-true design.

Cut-on-contact (COC) broadheads, typically two-bladed or three, deliver the full-penetration potential (momentum) to the animal. And they are flat out destructive when they remain in a body cavity. The only argument against this design is their perceived tuning difficulties. However, this is not ac-

curate. Most tuning problems with COC or fixed heads (assuming the bow is in proper tune in the first place) can be corrected by very subtle changes to the arrow, such as using longer fletching and adding helical to enhance stability by inducing more spin on the arrow. Most pre-fletched arrows use a short, tall, stiff fletching that does not offer sufficient stability when combined with some of these broadhead designs. I have heard it said that longer fletching and/or helical are simply “Band-Aids” and don’t truly correct this problem. But the same could be said of other commonly accepted quick fixes. Bottom line: Longer, helical fletching works. And while we’re looking at fletching, note that a stiffer vane will cause more deflection than a softer one, should your arrow clip an unnoticed branch or twig in flight.

Even if you don’t want to change fletching, there are still a multitude of short-profile COC heads to choose from that make tuning a breeze. And to those hunters who prefer not to tune broadheads before each season... I have a question. What shooter, of any discipline, doesn’t vigorously verify his tune before a tournament? And how much more of an obligation does the hunter have to ensure his equipment is lethal when a quick, humane recovery is at stake? I am not opposed to mechanicals, but to choose them for every hunt purely to avoid a few minutes of tuning, is lazy and unethical.

It may appear that I am carelessly bashing 95-percent of the broadheads out there, but that’s not the case. A rifle hunter chooses different bullet weights and construction for specific hunts, and the bowhunter is best served doing the same with his arrows. Wide-cutting mechanicals pair well with heavy arrows for some hunts but may not always be the best choice out west. Although long-ferruled, fixed heads might seem like a good compromise, they too suffer on penetrating the bones of

large Western game. For the Western hunt, where animals are bigger and the shots longer, the ultimate broadhead combines the best penetration capabilities with flatter-shooting arrows, and more lethality when lodged in a rib cage. In my opinion, that broadhead is in the cut-on-contact category.

The Pack

Just a quick note on what happens if your equipment does prove lethal. Will you be ready to respond? I see so many elk hunters, especially first-timers, carrying a small pack on their back. The problem is that the Western hunt demands the prompt care of meat. Say it’s 10 a.m. on September 12, and you just shot a bull elk at 9,000 feet in broken terrain 2½ miles from your truck. If it’s a good shot, you will find the bull in an hour, break him down, hang him, and head out with the first load — unless you wore one of those tiny daypacks that only has room for a midsized jackrabbit! What if the temperature is forecasted to be 85 degrees that afternoon? Now you’re in danger of losing some of the meat you worked so hard for — all because you can’t take a load on your first trip out. You’ll wish you had carried that extra two pounds of a full-sized backpack that has the versatility to carry heavy loads.

A lot of thought must go into being well-prepared for a Western hunting adventure. That doesn’t always mean buying the newest gear or following the popular trends. I may have raised a few eyebrows here, but my thoughts are based on my experiences. I have to run with what works for me, and you should do the same. Just remember that when it comes to being “Western lethal,” it’s all about the details. **BH**

The author, a Wyoming bowhunter, takes part in all his state has to offer, including fly fishing and dodging grizzlies.



A PASS-THROUGH doesn't always equal more blood. (Left) This is one of many bulls I've shot at close range with a 420-grain arrow for a complete pass-through but leaving no blood trail to follow. (Below) This bull is an example of a somewhat high pass-through hit that was lethal but produced no blood trail because the body cavity captured most of the blood loss.



WESTERN WHITETAILS -Adventure Awaits-

**YOU STILL CAN FIND A LOT OF GREAT, AFFORDABLE
DEER-HUNTING OPPORTUNITIES IN THE WEST.**

By CMSgt (Ret) Dana R. Rogers

PHOTO BY VIC SCHENDEL

I'd been glassing the post-rut whitetail for days — catching him on the open sidehills of the Ponderosa pine-covered National Forest landscape as he scent-checked for unbred does. He fed and browsed on forbs, but his dark-chocolate 5x5 antlers gave him away just above the Sideoats grama around the Forest Service slash piles. After a few days, the buck finally made a mistake and I caught him in an opening close to where I had a blind located. The shot wasn't far, and I soon was wrapping my hands around the antlers of a "mountain whitetail." This was the third and final whitetail I'd managed to put a tag on during the late fall/early winter of 2021.

I've been blessed to travel and bowhunt quite a bit the past few decades, and I've spent several falls chasing whitetails in

Iowa, Illinois, Missouri, and even in the Southeast. But my favorite adventures of late have been in Western states like Montana, Wyoming, Idaho, Colorado, and even a bit farther east like the Dakotas, Nebraska, and Kansas. All have piqued my taste for adventure and wide-open spaces. Other than Kansas, these states certainly don't have the reputation for top-end trophy whitetails, but don't sleep on any of these states. They all produce good, representative P&Y-quality bucks. What's more, you can hunt whitetails in most of them with archery tackle without having to deal with long draw odds. Each of the states I'm talking about is also blessed with quite a bit of publicly accessible lands. These states have leased private lands, state lands, BLM, and even U.S. Forest Service holdings. Here



are a few things I've learned while spending time bowhunting in Idaho, Colorado, Wyoming, Montana, Kansas, Nebraska, and the Dakotas.

When looking at Western whitetail bowhunting, there are a variety of options. Many of the Western states open on or around September 1, and several of them run well into December and even later. You can also hunt whitetails in combination with antelope or elk in some states, so keep your options open. The mid and lower-elevation ranges of Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming offer some fantastic whitetail bowhunting opportunities. These states are undersubscribed, and pressure on whitetails is often low. Most bowhunters in these states are looking for mule deer and elk in September.

Colorado's whitetail hunting is typically relegated to the Eastern Plains river systems.

An often-overlooked point in many of these Western destinations is that ranchers find whitetails to be a huge nuisance. I've been granted permission on private land more than once on an irrigated alfalfa field, specifically because I was after whitetails. Usually, other big game species, which the ranchers hold in higher esteem, are off limits.

Western whitetails are often a bit different in their movements than most Eastern whitetail hunters may be used to, so using Western tactics is something you'll need to brush up on and keep in mind. I like to stay mobile and glass from high points at a distance. Drilling down on feeding patterns or rut-



This Great Plains buck is on the move from his bedding area to his preferred food source.

ting movements will help put the savvy bowhunter ahead of the curve. In these locales, there are often few trees and white-tails are used to traveling a mile or more from bed to feed. A well-placed ground blind or a decoy set have helped me place a tag on several whitetails out west.

I like to spend a few days scouting on each trip, after I do most of my pre-hunt scouting via onX Maps and Google Earth. Once camped in a general location, I start focusing on my previous efforts, making sure access points, roads, and trails that I've previously identified are legitimate and legal. I'm also getting the lay of the land with the elevations and looking over the varying terrain features. I try to visit with area residents, whether it's at a local archery shop, coffee shop, or visiting with farmers and ranchers I meet at a local diner. I've also gotten a lot of great tips from rural mail carriers over the years.

When it's time to put the pack on and hike into huntable areas, I usually do that during the middle of the day when game is bedded down. Make sure to pay attention to the wind. Walking around bumping deer or allowing your scent to flow through an entire area won't do you any good.

Talking to a state biologist or local conservation warden is another method of pre-hunt scouting, but one of the things we bowhunters must also keep in mind with these Western herds is the awful effects of CWD and EHD. These insidious killers of wildlife have left a swath of death in their wake in much

of this part of the whitetail's range. I've had to change plans and adjust locations more than once over the past decade because of reports of huge die-offs. In fact, two of the ranches I'd previously planned to hunt on a permission basis last fall shut down all deer hunting because of EHD. Keeping abreast of information like this is very important for any bowhunter planning to travel a thousand miles in hopes of having a successful bowhunt.

When I travel west, the weather and time of year always dictates how I'll camp. In the West, I'm usually bowhunting in September to mid-October. I may spend a few weeks tent-camping and cooking over a fire on National Forest lands or hunting out of the back of my pickup. A bit later in the year, I'll be hauling my small travel trailer and cooking meals in a warmer propane-fueled camper with a nice comfortable bed. On the late-November and December hunts, the camper or hotel-type accommodations come into play. There are many small towns in these areas where camper hookups are easy to find, and cheap motels and restaurants become the norm for me. You can always save money by combining forces with a friend. Things like pre-cooking and packaging your meals will help make your hunting days stretch further while saving you money.

I like to glass from distant roads or high points while on the Western plains. Spot-and-stalk hunting is often the rule here, and that's good because it's an extremely exciting and challenging endeavor. I often employ that strategy in September



I killed my first buck of 2021 on private land in the Great Plains. The Dakotas, Nebraska, and Kansas yield great options.



Here I'm glassing deer on their feeding patterns.



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WESTERN WHITETAILS — ADVENTURE AWAITS

and into early October. In the early rut period of November, I usually combine spotting and stalking with a mobile decoy like those made by Heads Up, Montana Decoy, and Ultimate Predator. If you can locate a buck that's locked down with a doe in a swale, creekbottom, or brushy slough in early November, you can often get the wind in your favor and execute a stalk to pointblank range. These are exciting bowhunting tactics you should keep in your bag of tricks for use prior to the firearms seasons — for obvious safety reasons.

My second whitetail of 2021 was an adventure that kept me scouting to locate an ambush location. This particular buck lived in a mid-elevation range, not far from an urban setting. There were patches of public land and National Forest interspersed in between two small mountain towns. It also had several small private ranch properties mixed in.

The state's firearms season was winding down, but I really wanted to use my Hoyt Axium instead of a gun. With all the human population and buildings, a firearm couldn't legally be discharged, so most rifle hunters steer clear of this urban setting. Using the onX app, I found several of these small public-access points with 20 to 80 acres of public land in between housing areas.

Just after Thanksgiving, the beautiful dark-antlered buck I'd been glassing left a private sanctuary. He made his way within bow range of a ladder stand I had prepositioned on a freshly logged sidehill. My arrow slammed home, and the buck's short death run ended next to a waterway. The late season had once again been kind to me after most bowhunters had given up for the year.



My second 2021 buck is a nice representative of bucks I've found at lower elevations on public land in states like Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming.

From Kansas up into the Dakotas, the public lands may not be quite as voluminous, but there is still plenty of it if you do your homework. Most of these states also allow a traveling bowhunter to purchase a license without points and a draw. I do a ton of research with onX maps, but Google Earth and each state's game agencies often have mapping software to help you research their public lands.

I've found that watching crop rotation and looking for large agricultural fields like winter wheat and alfalfa is critical in these states. Waterways, with small ribbons of timber and shrubs, is where I've often found good whitetail hunting. Per-

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mission to hunt private property isn't an easy thing to come by in this day and age, but that shouldn't stop a bowhunter from inquiring. I spend about half of my time hunting private versus public here in the Great Plains states, but the public options are great. North Dakota's PLOTS program is phenomenal, and the other three states have quite a bit of Walk-In lands that usually see more pressure from pheasant hunters than archery or firearms deer hunters.

The strategy I was using last fall on a mid-November bowhunt is one I've used successfully many times. The local grain harvest was really rolling, and the rut was in full swing. This kept pockets of deer moving from formerly loaded grainfields that were now stark deserts. By keeping tabs on which fields in the area were still standing or being harvested, I was able to target a location with standing cover and crops. I knew these areas would start to really pop in the next week. Packing in a few stands and hanging them in downwind locations between feeding and bedding areas, gave me hope I could intercept a nice buck.

After some unsuccessful rattling, I started trolling with grunts and eventually saw movement in the distant cover. Three bucks looking for a sweet-smelling doe eased into the brushy draw to investigate. One was a nice fat 4x4, about three years old, and I decided immediately he'd do just fine. Grunting lightly, he cut the distance from 150 down to 30 yards and then tried to cut downwind. I held steady and made a great shot. He quickly crashed 50 yards through the standing ko-chia weeds and tipped over before making it into thick cover. That was my first Western whitetail of 2021 — a pleasing ending to that weeklong trip to the plains. The best part was, I could drive my pickup to this buck, so there was no long drag off of a large public parcel that doesn't allow vehicle traffic.



I recovered this mature 5½ year old the next morning after a short tracking job. He's another mid-elevation mountain whitetail taken on public land.

Western whitetail bowhunting offers some fantastic opportunities for those with a craving for adventure. Do as much scouting as you can online, stay mobile and flexible, keep your options open, have a great time, and find success! **BH**

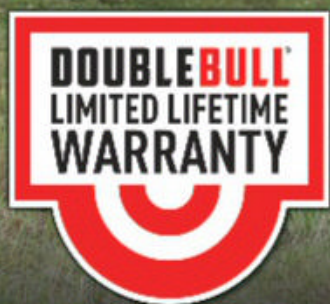
The author is a retired USAF CMSgt, wildlife habitat management specialist, and freelance writer/photographer.

Author's Note:

My list of equipment used on the hunts described in this article included a Hoyt Axiom bow, Carbon Express arrows, Rage broadheads, QAD rest, IQ Bowsight, TruFire release aid, Leupold optics, Danner boots, Badlands backpacks, and a T&K Hunting Bino Harness.

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IT WAS 1:11 A.M. ALASKA TIME WHEN THE FIRST MESSAGE CAME THROUGH. "HOLY CRAP!" IT READ.

Boone, my five-year-old yellow Lab and hunting partner, groaned and stretched as if I was inconveniently waking him up from his beauty sleep. Then came another message that read, "That's a dandy bull."

The messages were from my brother back in Michigan, where it was just past 5 a.m., and he was responding to the three pictures I'd sent him a few hours earlier. I was wide awake and waiting for daylight to break, so I could pack out the remainder of my first caribou. I'd seen a grizzly in the area a few days earlier and wasn't too keen on packing out meat alone in the dark — even with my 10mm and trusty watchdog close at hand. It was 31 degrees, so I knew the other half of my meat was fine until morning. I finished texting with my brother and then tried to get some sleep. A similar pattern would

play out a month later when I sent him a photo of my second bull of the season.

Looking at the two bulls, it would be easy to say I'd had a great fall. I can't argue with that. Everything about bowhunting caribou resonates deep within me. How their lives are interdependent and inextricably tied to all the critters in the Arctic; their quirkiness and free-spirited nature, and the humility they teach you while trying to get close to them. Few things are more humbling than working to get close to a bull caribou, only to have him bust you and prance away. But this article isn't about my admiration — let's call it my obsession — with caribou. It's about last season and the barriers I created for myself.

When I'm outside, my thoughts usually surround one of three themes: life and death, finding things (animals, antlers,

'BOV



berries, etc.), or work. This past fall, I was approaching caribou hunting as a reprieve from the grind — a mental clearing from the year. The season was going to be movie worthy. I could feel it. I could see a montage scene in my head where multiple images scrolled. The last scene would be with the sun setting in the background, caribou antlers glistening on my back, Boone in a caribou-hide cape, the tundra grasses parting, angels singing, and Bob Ross painting us with fluffy little clouds in the sky. My mentality was that caribou hunting was going to be a reckoning; a settlement of the score for the long, COVID-filled year of uncertainty that would end in a Zen-like state. Except that isn't what happened. Far from it, in fact. It was a year of learning about my decision-making skills and the cognitive biases I bring to the table.

When I am not enjoying Alaska, I am an associate professor of business administration and director of a sports and recreation business. My expertise and experience lies primar-

ily in sports marketing and data (analytics), but I love the psychological aspects of business. Biases impacting our decision-making is a topic I think about often in business, and while bowhunting. The following are a few biases that crept up on me this season, with an anecdote sprinkled in here and there.

OVERCONFIDENCE BIAS

A year ago, a friend I was hunting with left his bow on the tailgate of his truck, drove away, and proceeded to watch his bow tumble down the road, cracking the limbs. After that incident, I decided I needed a backup bow. I'd been shooting my trusty Bowtech Destroyer 350 for almost 10 years, but I committed to a new Bowtech Realm as my main bow.

I shoot my bow almost daily year-round, so at the end of July, as I was getting ready to head out for my first caribou hunt, I was good to go. Then, being the genius that I am, I decided to shoot some of my target broadheads to make sure

BIASES

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MY FIRST caribou of the season.

everything was good. I watched in horror as my first three arrows missed the target at 40 yards. *What the fudgecicle?* I thought to myself. I shot what felt like a thousand arrows over the next four days — adjusting my sight, adjusting my rest, sight again, rest again — before eventually switching broadheads. I even changed my arrow weight, as my draw weight is 55 pounds, and my draw length is 28.5 inches, so I'm right on the cusp of 340 or 400-spine arrows. Switching to mechanical broadheads worked, but I knew my bow was not in tune.

After 10 years of shooting my Destroyer, Easton FMJ arrows, and G5 Montec broadheads with no problems, I was overconfident in my setup and magical thinking (i.e. bias). I accomplished complete pass-through shots on three moose and two caribou at over 60 yards. The issue here was not my gear; it was me. My

“overconfidence bias” was that my broadheads would fly similar to my fieldpoints, so long as my cams were aligned properly. They weren't. Thinking I'd need minimal practice with broadheads was poor decision-making at its finest.

ANCHORING BIAS

My next series of unfortunate events were the result of “anchoring bias.” In decision-making, anchoring bias shows up in how we fixate on a set of initial datapoints or information and fail to adjust for new information as it's collected. We all tend to have a little anchoring bias with certain hunting spots. For example, I hunt caribou in places where I've had various forms of success in the past. But at the end of the day, hunting caribou is a lot like ice-fishing for perch: The caribou (perch) are either there or they aren't, and they may or may not ever be found where they once were again.

Anchoring bias crept into my decision-making in two distinct ways in the fall of 2021. On one particular stalk, I took off my pack (which held all of my survival gear) to lower my profile as I belly-crawled toward a group of bulls. I ended up in a borderline hypothermic state and unable to find my pack in the fog. Fortunately, two other hunters picked me up and I used my Garmin inReach's tracking feature to retrieve my pack the next day. Never leave your pack is the lesson here.

Onward to the second story of how anchoring bias impacted a bowhunting opportunity.



EDUARDO AND I sat and watched this group of caribou, but they eventually busted us.

TWO BULLS stopped to spar as they migrated through our hunting area.



SLEEPING 'BOUTY

It was a windy morning, and I was climbing up a steep hill to one of my favorite caribou spots. As I climbed, something brown caught my eye. It looked out of place against the grey rocks. I stepped cautiously, thinking, *It's velvet antler tips. It's a caribou. It's a bull.* I took one more step. *Shoot, that is a big bull. He's bedded. Be quiet.* Step. More antler. As I reached for my quiver, I thought, *Something isn't right. The antlers are oddly angled.* At that point, I could only see antlers awkwardly twisted and leaning against the hillside. I took another step. I could now see the monster bull's head, tilted against the hill in the most bizarre angle. I took my hand off the arrow in my quiver and thought to myself, *He's dead. No way could I walk up on a caribou like this.* Two more steps put me at about 30 yards, and I could now see the entire animal. He was a dandy, and I thought for sure he was dead. I frowned in disappointment, figuring another hunter must have wounded him and he came up here to die. I solemnly looked at the dead ani-

mal and decided I would check the Alaska hunting regs to see if I needed to tag him if I took the meat, because I couldn't leave him to rot if his meat was salvageable.

As I set my bow down, the limbs lightly clanked against the rocks. The presumably dead caribou suddenly jumped up and looked at me in terror. My somber nature quickly dissolved as my heart jumped. In shock, I fumbled to pick up my bow, but the bull was off and running. I'm not sure who was more scared, me or the beautiful bull, which I now affectionately refer to as "Sleeping 'bouty." Lesson learned. I was so fixated (anchored) on the angle of his head and antlers that I assumed he was dead. Good thing it wasn't a grizzly!

CONFIRMATION BIAS

The last bias that impacted my decision-making while hunting this past year is "confirmation bias." This is when a person seeks out information that reaffirms thoughts and past experiences. Confirmation bias appeared at the end of the season after I had already tagged one bull. Two of my close hunting friends, and fellow professors, and I decided we should hunt caribou as a group. Drs. Mark Lindberg and Eduardo Wilner and I have worked together for three years on a number of hunting-related projects. We also created and teach an interdisciplinary class together called "Huntology: The Business, Science, and Philosophy of Hunting." I know them well and respect them deeply as colleagues and friends. However, as soon as I committed, I over-analyzed every aspect of why it would be a disaster to hunt with others.

The past four years, I have hunted moose and caribou alone; not necessarily by choice, but because of conflicting schedules, distance, differing philosophies, responsibilities, etc. As someone who has always considered herself a risk-avoiding wimp, hunting alone in Alaska was intimidating at first, but I've grown to love doing it. So, when the suggestion of hunting together came up, I automatical-

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HERE'S the second caribou from my October hunt.

ly looked for reasons to confirm my bias of hunting alone. My personality, which is rooted in independence and rational thinking, kicked in. My mind told me: *Three people stalking caribou is too many.* Despite my pessimistic, overanalyzing nature, we all committed to going.

ARCTIC OVENS BASE CAMP

The date we agreed upon rolled around and I left the night before Mark and Eduardo did to find a good camping spot. Early fall in the Lower 48 coincides with late fall in Alaska, and snow had already covered the ground. Temperatures were between 10 and 30 degrees, so we decided to bring our Arctic Oven tents — a staple shelter in Alaska for hunters, trappers, and other outdoor folks. Mark brought his larger dome version that included a wood stove for him and Eduardo, and I brought my smaller Arctic Oven for me and Boone.

On our first morning, I walked over to their tent for coffee as we waited for the sun to come up. That's when we heard some rattling outside. Mark thought Boone was getting into his cooler. I insisted that Boone never gets into anything. As it turned out, Boone did help himself to Mark's entire roast chicken (overconfidence in my cooler-opening, camp mutt). We laughed over my confirmation that Mark knew much more about sneaky Labs than I did, as he'd hunted waterfowl for decades with the food-driven retrievers. We collectively agreed that Boone

could not be trusted, and then we came up with a game plan before leaving camp.

Later that day, Eduardo and I were sitting together in our whites, waiting as we thought a group of caribou would be crossing our paths at any second. As the caribou crested the edge we had anticipated, I ranged the distance. Most were at 70 to 75 yards — out of our comfort zone. As they funneled closer, I whispered, "68, 65...60 yards." Eduardo drew and shot a beautiful bull. That evening, as the three of us hauled out the dandy bull, I thought to myself, *I don't think I could have asked for two better friends to share this hunt with.*

That same thought would cross my mind multiple times over the next two days as we packed out two more great bulls and enjoyed fresh tenderloins cooked over the wood stove. We each end-

ed up harvesting a beautiful bull with our bows, and we took another trip together a few weeks later. My seeking confirmation that hunting alone was better went out the window. I sent my brother a message via inReach the last evening that read, "Epic trip." Nothing else needed to be said.

HINDSIGHT BIAS

I suppose I could say I knew it would be a good hunting season all along, but that would be "hindsight bias," where I overestimate my ability to foresee an outcome. As I reflect on my season's mental battle with decision-making, the bigger picture becomes clear. I learned a lot about my resilience and about my ability to make decisions. Instead of another bias, I will leave you, dear readers, with a deeply rooted quote about the effectiveness of checking your mental biases before and during caribou hunting. The quote comes from the philosopher Brian Fantana who is played by Paul Rudd in the movie "Anchorman," where Rudd laments the effectiveness of the cologne Sex Panther to Ron Burgundy (Will Ferrell): "They've done studies, you know. Sixty percent of the time, it works every time."

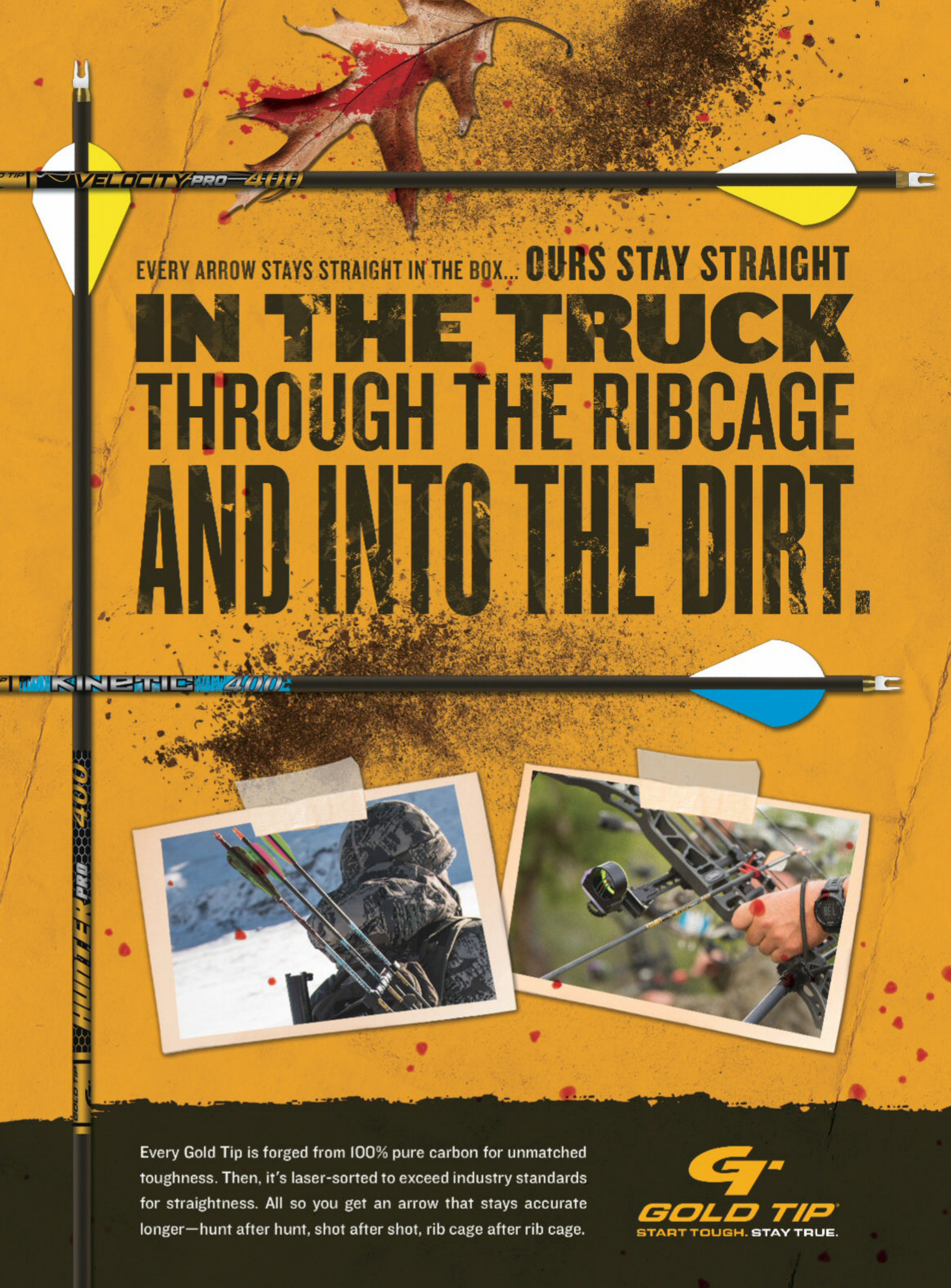
I suppose that is caribou hunting. Just ignore that 40 percent, and you'll be successful all the time. **BH**

The author is an avid bowhunter, washed-up athlete, and is an Associate Professor of Business at the University of Maine.



MARK, EDUARDO, AND I take a moment to admire out beautiful bulls outside of Mark's Arctic Oven 12. Below, a long string of caribou follow a cow through the snow-covered mountains.





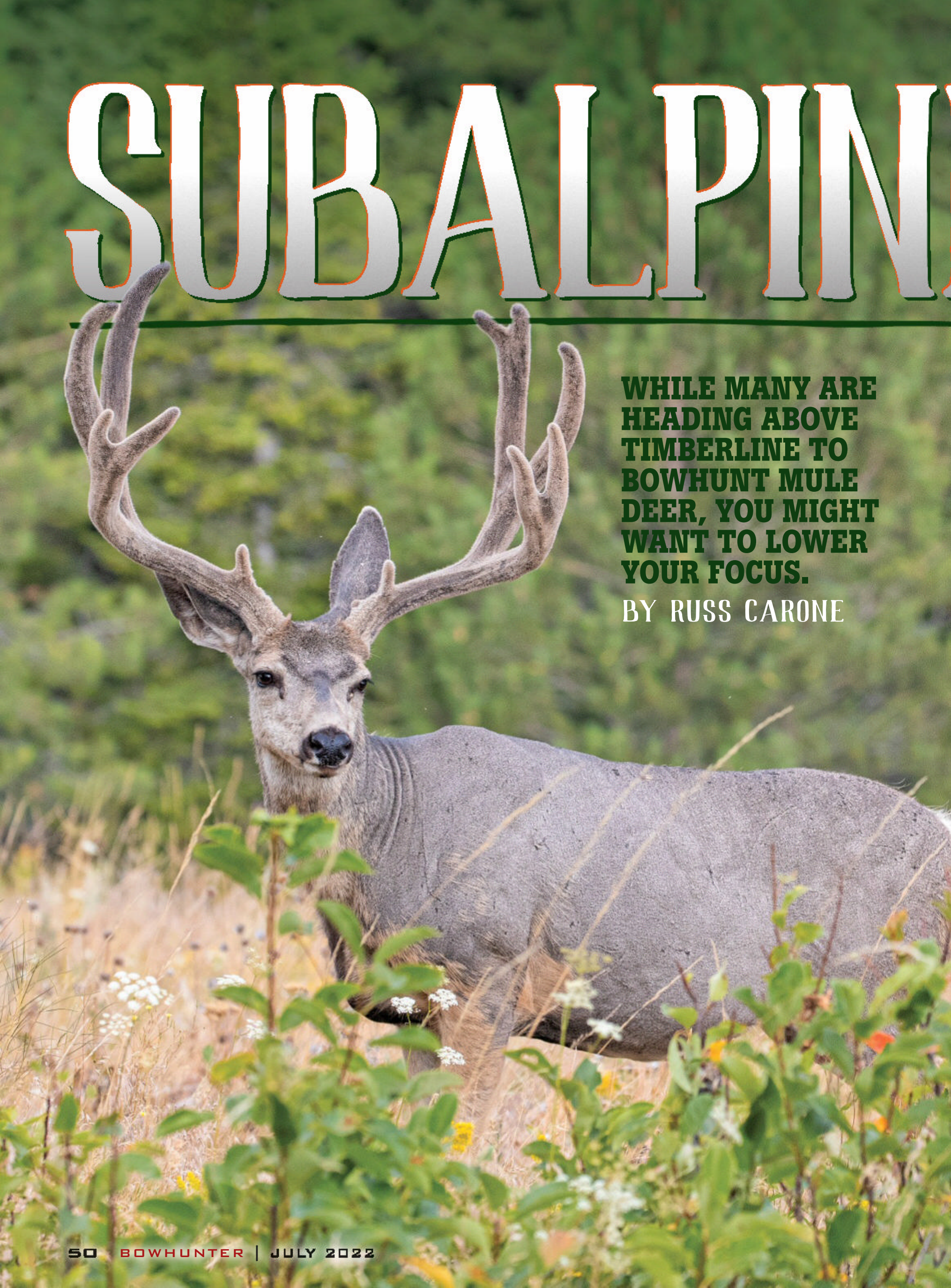
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SUBALPINE

A photograph of a mule deer with large, velvet-covered antlers. The deer is standing in a field of tall grass and small white flowers, with a dense forest of green trees in the background. The title 'SUBALPINE' is overlaid at the top in large, white, serif capital letters with a thin orange outline.

**WHILE MANY ARE
HEADING ABOVE
TIMBERLINE TO
BOWHUNT MULE
DEER, YOU MIGHT
WANT TO LOWER
YOUR FOCUS.**

BY RUSS CARONE

EMULEYS

High-country alpine mule deer hunting has become extremely popular in the last decade. Truth is, there are some phenomenal bucks to be found in subalpine areas, especially in Colorado. If you're like me and want to avoid high-pressure alpine hunting, this is your guide to success in the subalpine.

Beginning in 2020, Colorado Parks and Wildlife threw a wrench in the archery mule deer season by pushing back the opener for the next five years. The archery season in Colorado historically began on the last Saturday of August, which meant the opener could be as early as August 25 or as late as August 31. For the 2020-2024 seasons, the archery hunt begins on September 2. The season change works wonderfully for pursuing bugling bulls in the rut, but velvet muleys become dramatically harder to kill after the first few days in September.

Without a doubt, your best chance to kill a mature target buck with a bow is on the first day or two of the season — regardless of the date. Summer scouting can help a bowhunter find a crusty old buck and learn his habits and movement patterns. Such a deer will likely remain in those daily patterns until hunting pressure ensues. Therefore, the season-date changes won't affect your opportunity in the first few days of the season.

Scout Like A Madman

If you can take advantage of those first few days of the season, your best chance to kill a great buck is to put in



I'm a big fan of 15X binoculars mounted to a tripod when mule deer scouting and hunting.

the legwork over the summer. Late June and early July are fantastic for locating bucks, as they are feeding heavily during daylight hours. However, antler growth at that time of year is still in its early stages. Personally, I like to scout during this time of year because I'm not looking to kill a buck with a specific score, but rather a large-framed, older buck that gets me excited. Later in the summer, bucks spend less time away from cover, but sport fully developed headgear.

Considering these logistics, I think the best approach to summer scouting is to spend some time in early July trying to locate as many large-bodied bucks as possible, mark and record their locations, then check in on their antler growth in August to see which of those bucks grew the biggest rack.

The Camera Conundrum

In years past, after I located a large-bodied buck, I'd wait for him to leave the

feeding feature for his midmorning bed, and then set a trail camera or two. I've found that this minor disturbance may alter the buck's daily routine for a day or two, but they like that area for a reason and will quickly return to their normal patterns. After about a month of letting the cameras soak, I'll swap the cards, make some placement adjustments, and fix any problems created by curious bears. Because I'm not constantly checking-in on the bucks throughout the summer, my cameras allow me to spend more time finding big bucks in new areas. Unless I've found a true giant, I'd rather find 10 big bucks across several areas than watch the same area every weekend and only have a buck or two located.

The Weekend Before Opener

I probably shouldn't write this, but here's a secret to creating some security for big-buck honey holes. I like to set up two or three tents on the Sunday before the opener once I've decided on my top-two areas to hunt: One tent is my actual camp, and the other is a decoy to make hunters think the area is crowded. This secures my preferred campsite before the masses infiltrate the mountain.

I started doing this after getting burned a few years ago. I located a great buck the night before opening day, only to find other hunters' camps: One where I wanted to camp, and one way too close to the buck's core area. I was forced to pick a spot that lacked shade and was farther from water. I never killed that

SUBALPINE MULEYS

buck, but the frustrating part was those hunters were hunting elk not deer.

The next season, I staked my claim the week before the opener and took things a step further by setting up another “decoy” tent closer to where the bucks were living to prevent people from camping there. The bucks didn’t seem to mind the unoccupied decoy tent, and I dealt with far less hunting pressure.

Let The Games Begin!

In terms of killing tactics, I focus on spot-and-stalk hunting during those crucial first days of the season. I live for this style of hunting, but it will not likely be feasible in the coming days when bucks spend less time in open areas. I prefer to set up on a vantage point overlooking the core area of one of my target bucks. Doing so allows me to glass from above, and from a spot that is far enough away that downhill morning thermals will not give me away and I’m close enough that I can hustle to make a stalk before a buck vanishes in the timber.

These first few days can seem incredibly passive, but the prepared hunter must be ready for aggressive action at a moment’s notice. Yes, action will take place in the gray light of morning or evening, but during cloudy days with inclement weather, I’ve found that bucks will enter an opening to feed at any time of the day. If it’s hot, keep your eyes on

the edge of the timber, and don’t feel too guilty if you take a glorious midday nap!

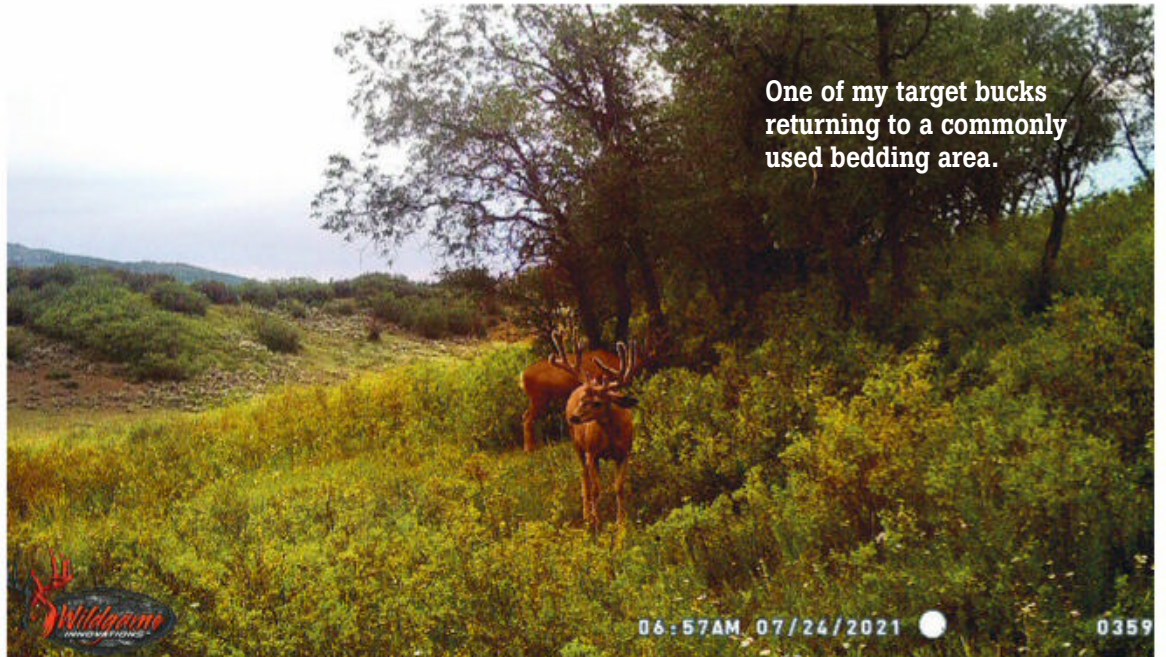
A note on areas that have ATV access — stealth makes wealth. Do not be tempted to drive a four-wheeler or dirt bike from camp to your glassing position. Instead, wake up earlier and quietly hike to your first-light position, and I guarantee you will see far more animals. This sounds like a no-brainer, but I’ve witnessed other hunters making this mistake far too often and I know this is solid advice.

Conversely, afternoon hunts in ATV country do not have to follow such rules. In years past, I have sped up the mountain after work, parked my ATV within a quarter-mile of a glassing point, and have not disrupted deer movement in the evening. This is because mornings

are generally calm and quiet, while afternoon thermals lift the air and sound upward, and the bucks are not yet in any feeding features. Bottom line: Please don’t ruin your hunt, and mine, by being lazy in the morning.

The Second Week

Even the best-laid plans can lead to an unsuccessful first weekend of the season, and every muley hunter should be prepared for the hardships of hunting the rest of the season. Patterns will change as hunting pressure ensues. Bucks become vampires in mid-September, regardless of hunting pressure; they’ll spend far less time in typical feeding areas during daylight hours and more of their active time in stands of aspen where food availability is remarkable. Between the extra



One of my target bucks returning to a commonly used bedding area.

I located my '21 buck and his buddies in late June.



cover security and availability of quality nutrition, almost all mature bucks will eventually transition into these areas.

At this point, I generally sit on a master vantage point before first light, where I'll glass for 30 minutes to an hour, before making my way down into the timber to still-hunt. I love days with a bit of wind because it covers my sound and movement. Mule deer bucks may only spend the first few minutes of daylight in open areas but will then feed in stands of aspens for an hour or more before they settle down into their first bed to chew their cud. In terms of weather, I've found that cool mornings yield longer timber-feeding sessions, and warm temperatures lead to an early morning bed. An hour or so after they bed, the rising sun will force bucks to move into a secondary bed that has better shade.

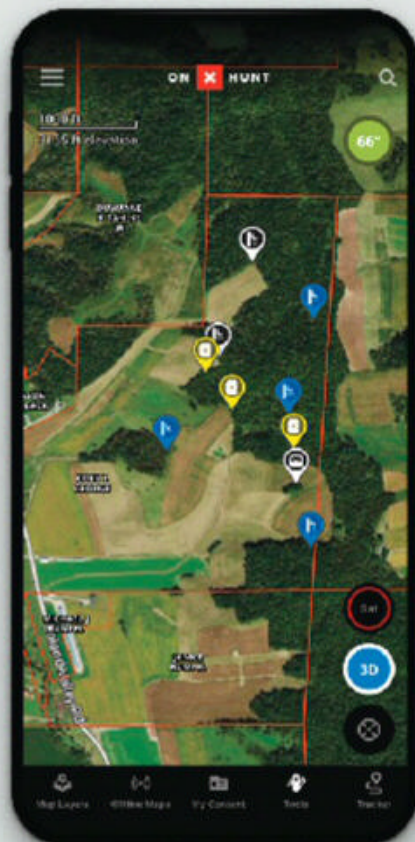
Obviously, still-hunting in the aspens is considerably more difficult when the bucks are bedded down than it is when they're on their feet feeding or moving to a secondary bed. Therefore, I focus on still-hunting in the early morning, and then around 10 a.m., when they transition to their next bed. Furthermore, the bucks you targeted over the summer will most likely not



stray far from where you saw them in August, so you could encounter them in the timber while still-hunting. The bucks may not be as visible, but they like that area for a reason, and they probably haven't left it as a result.

One last tactic to employ during this phase of the archery season is to use tree-stands and ground blinds. This whitetail strategy can pay dividends at any point in the season but is a great option when the muleys seek refuge in the timber. A

local hunter I exchange notes with has killed many 180-plus bucks out of a tree-stand. He learns their movement patterns by setting many trail cameras; then he sits on stand in the mornings and evenings. If you spend your morning on the glassing vantage with small openings in the timber, you may get lucky, but still-hunting and sitting in treestands and blinds can multiply your odds of finding a great buck during this second week of the season.



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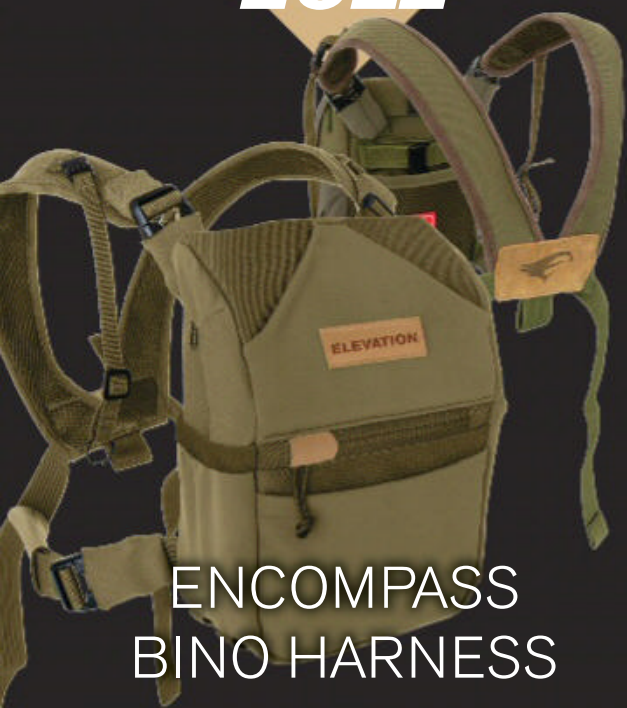
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SUBALPINE MULEYS



Last year, I arrowed this 30-inch buck while still-hunting through the aspens.

Weeks Three And Four

At this point in the season, bucks will most likely transition to new areas on the mountain. If you were seeing them at around 10,000 feet in early September, you can bet on them relocating anywhere from 500 to 1,500 feet farther down the mountain. I hypothesize that they're moving due to the following factors: The high-country feed is becoming less nutritious, there is increased hunting pressure, they are rubbing off their velvet in the timber, and they are staging for the upcoming rut.

These bucks need to prioritize putting on as much weight as possible to set themselves up for success in the breeding season by moving less, reducing human-imposed stressors, and eating more. In low-country areas with flatter terrain, the same concepts can be applied. But instead of dropping elevation, they will move to thicker cover.

Because you can hunt anywhere from 5,000 to 11,000 feet with many archery mule deer tags in Colorado, don't overlook the brush zone below the subalpine. Many hunters think that mule deer only migrate to that country later in the fall, but many resident deer call it home.

The major drawback in this country is a lack of visibility. Gambel oak, pinyon pine, and juniper trees provide deer with great cover, which limits hunters to ambush-hunting tactics. I've killed two mule deer bucks in this area, but I definitely prefer hunting the subalpine.

A few years ago, I set up on a heavily used trail in the pinyon/juniper country,

where I had a buck come in to 30 yards and only got a glimpse of his rack before he stopped broadside with his head behind some branches. Thinking it was a different buck, I took the shot and walked up on my target's younger brother. While I was thankful for the meat, putting my tag on that younger buck was a tough pill to swallow. That experience in the brush made me decide that I'd only hunt there if I found and patterned an exceptional buck.

Basically, if you still have a tag in your pocket by mid-September, you need to start thinking like a whitetail hunter. Muley bucks will be less visible, so once again, trail cameras should come back into play. While the trail camera/trees-tand combo is my least-favorite method of hunting, it's still a useful tactic for killing a great buck.

This article began as my personal hunt plan and outline for filling my 2021 archery tag, but I realized that it might be useful for other hunters as well. My scouting season turned up a few excellent bucks. I followed my game plan and killed a crusty old muley while still-hunting in the timber on the breezy evening of September 10. I'm hopeful that the 2022 season finds you with a subalpine muley tag in your pocket and that my approach helps you punch it! **BH**

*The author is a physical education teacher and coach in Palisade, Colorado. This is his second feature for **Bowhunter Magazine**.*

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THERE'S MAGIC IN THE FIELD

For hunting icon Jeff Danker, exploring the outdoors with family and friends is as good as it gets. Follow Jeff and co-hosts Daniel McVay and Jaylee Danker as they enjoy the camaraderie of the hunt — while chasing big bucks and other critters on *BuckVentures*.

WEDNESDAYS
9 PET

SPORTSMAN

SCHEDULE SUBJECT TO CHANGE

BURNING POINTS

FOR PRONGHORNS

THE GLOW OF THE MORNING SUN made the green vegetation around the water-hole shine. I had just taken off my long-sleeve black shirt as the temperature was steadily rising for the third day in a row, and I was seated comfortably in the shadows of my blind with a good book when I heard a slight splash of water. Leaning forward, I saw the unmistakably massive horns of one of the best antelope bucks I'd seen in the area.

My new longbow sat waiting with an arrow nocked. Slipping out of my chair and onto my knees, I quickly got my hand on my longbow's grip and raised it for the shot. The buck was broadside, the bright sun illuminating his beautiful white-and-tan hide. For some reason, I was not rattled by the size of his dark-black horns. As I started to put tension on my string, something didn't feel right, so I let up. With only 17 yards between me and my dream buck, I drew my bowstring back again with purpose and watched my white-fletched arrow fly.

For anyone traveling from parts unknown to the West, nothing says you've made it to this wonderful part of our country like the sight of a pronghorn antelope dashing through the sagebrush.

Mountain lions and bighorn sheep are rarely observed by the public, but everyone has seen an antelope. Yet there's no state or national organization that honors or supports them. The elk and sheep get all the glory. Even ducks and pheasants garner national support by millions of hunters.

The pronghorn is one of a kind, only found in North America, and with no known relatives. I probably haven't hunted them enough due to my desire to hunt other game in late-August and early September. So over the years, I'd squirreled away 12 points for antelope in Wyoming. I really wanted to hunt a spot with a chance at one of those coveted Wyoming monsters. The genetics of Wyoming are hard to beat, and I stumbled into a ranch with a history of having Boone and Crockett-caliber antelope, but the area had suffered an 80-percent decline two years prior due to a tough winter.

However, the ranch manager encouraged me to put in, as there were still a few big ones running around, so I kissed my 12 years of points goodbye. It was time to hunt Wyoming pronghorns again.

Larry Hanify, of A&H Archery, had crafted a lightweight longbow for me that I'd wanted for winter practice and archery shoots where I'd be shooting over 100 arrows a day. I never used it until the Colorado Traditional Archers Society High Country Shoot in 2021. The new bow was smooth, and several friends commented that I was shooting well. It was pleasant not to be fighting the poundage of my heavier bows, so I decided to carry it on my antelope hunt.

Antelope have long been considered the stepchildren of other Western big-game species. You almost never hear about someone saving for years to go on their dream hunt out west for antelope. As a result, over-the-counter licenses for antelope have been available in most Western states for most of my life.

In the past, public lands had good pronghorn numbers, and securing permission on private ranches usually involved little more than a \$50 trespass fee, or a bottle of the rancher's favorite adult beverage. But things have changed, and draw tags in Wyoming and Colorado are now considered common.

In trophy areas, bowhunters now need as many points to hunt antelope as they would to draw an elk tag. Going antelope hunting every 10 or 15 years doesn't sound so great. Nebraska, South Dakota, and Eastern Colorado still have OTC tags, but the numbers and trophy quality are not on par with the better units in Wyoming, Arizona, or New Mexico.

PRONGHORN ANTELOPE DON'T GET
MUCH RESPECT, BUT THEY'RE A HAND-
SOME AND WORTHY GAME ANIMAL.



By Nathan L. Andersohn

BURNING POINTS FOR PRONGHORNS

Unlike most species, you never read articles about the varying body sizes of antelope in various parts of North America, and I've never read about differing colorations or subspecies. They are a good-looking animal, and any well-traveled bowhunter should have an antelope shoulder mount on the wall. Just like mountain goats, their horns alone are not overly impressive — unless a hunter has spent considerable time hunting them. A couple of inches makes a big difference in the record books.

If a hunter is really into scoring and entering animals in the Pope & Young Club records, field-judging a pronghorn viewed through binoculars is a challenging feat. A quick examination involves estimating the length of the horns, guessing the mass in four locations, and figuring the length of the prongs. It may sound easy, but huge mass makes the horns look short, straight horns look longer than they really are, and heavily curved horns look short. Prongs higher on the horn may result in better mass measurements.

Antelope have one thing in common

with black bears: If you can't decide if it's a big one, it's not. However, if a goat or black bear makes you think or say, "Holy crap!" then you'd best nock an arrow and get ready.

The Wyoming draw for antelope currently starts on June 15. I had failed to draw several tags, so I went all in with my 12 points in an attempt to draw a tag on the private ranch I intended on hunting. Did I mention that points are purchased annually for only \$31? I'd been buying points for years in hopes of drawing a tag in a trophy unit. I put in with my friend Tavis, and our combined points got us both tags. It doesn't hurt to have a wingman when hunting the remote high deserts of Wyoming.

On opening morning I was carrying my virgin longbow to a hideaway overlooking a remote spring. The low light of predawn was just bright enough to complete a visual check of my blind for rattlesnakes. And in short order I was seated in my fancy new swivel chair. Comfort is king for an all-day sit.

A mule deer doe was the first visitor, with several more after her. It wasn't until 9:25 a.m. that the first antelope buck came to water. He looked good, but with



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a full week off work and 12 points gone, I was determined to be patient and assess the situation for a few days.

The first-day jitters kept me busy — estimating yardages to various spots around the pond, trimming reeds in the water, adjusting windows, and deciding screen or no screen on my blind's two major shooting holes. Once the antelope started coming in, they were fairly steady all day long. The temperature climbed by the hour to the low 90s. I read a book but was frequently disturbed by the sights and sounds of drinking antelope — a good problem to have. I saw a buck late in the afternoon that looked good, but I was convinced I hadn't seen either of the two big ones I'd observed while scouting.

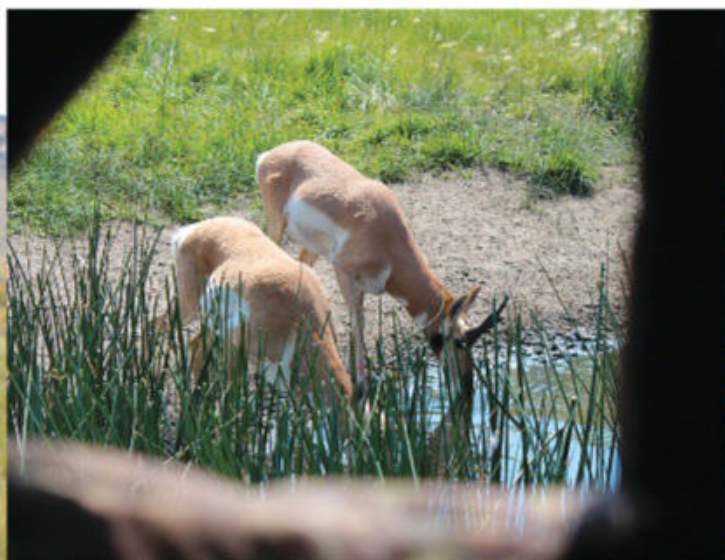
The alarm went off at 5 a.m. again the next day, and I was soon driving in the dark to the same blind. I had two other blinds, but opening day was so fun, I was hoping for a repeat. The deer watered first again, but the antelope activity started around 8:20 that morning.

Along about 10 a.m., two mature antelope bucks faced off 25 yards to the west of my position. They locked horns and went flat-out bonkers on each other. The only thing I can compare it to is two

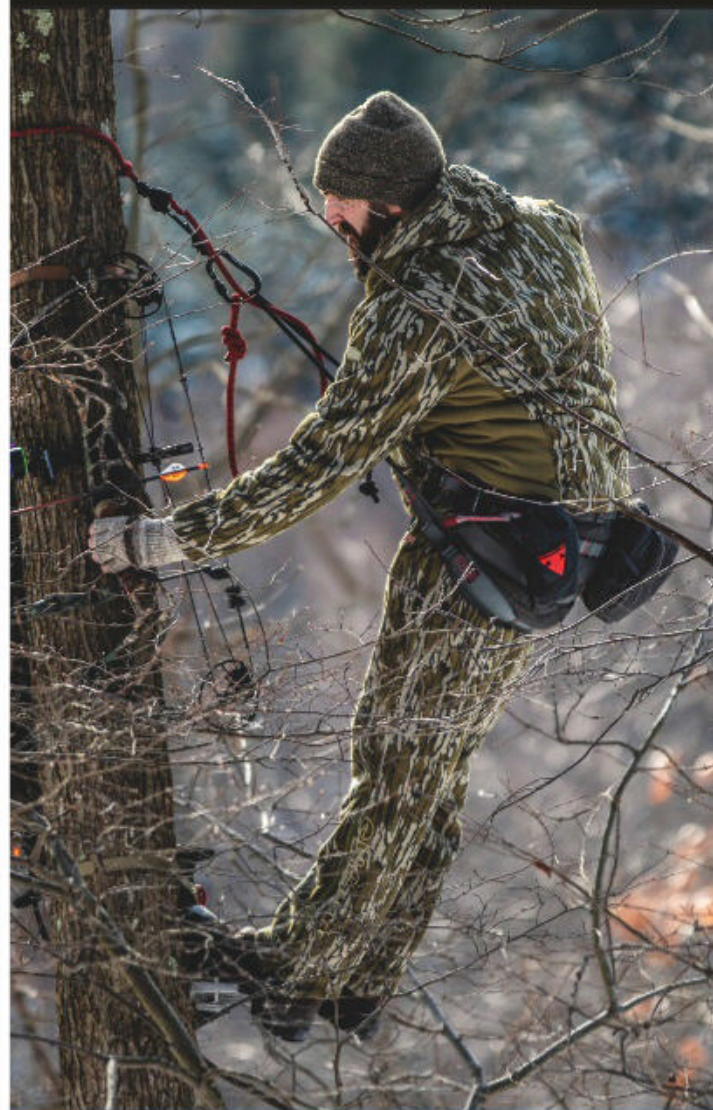
whitetail bucks in the middle of November. They pushed back and forth, dirt flying, snapping their locked horns left and right. When they separated, the buck on the right was missing a prong. I would have thought mid-August was too early for the rut, but these two bucks apparently already had a score to settle.

Every mature buck that piqued my interest got examined with my 10x50 Zeiss binoculars. The ranch manager said the horns were consistently short compared to New Mexico or Arizona bucks but had great prongs and mass. That was proving to be true, but not being an expert, and having been in the blind only two days, it was hard to evaluate just how much mass I was looking at. But as the sun moved to the west and lower in the sky, a fine buck came in with five does and fawns.

He looked to have excellent prongs that angled outward. With little thought, I got situated to draw on the buck. As is often the case, he was quartering to me at about 45 degrees. When he finally stepped away and hesitated on the bank of dirt above the pond, I drew; however, an angling window seam covered a portion of his upper body and I had to lean



MY PRIMOS BLIND, surrounded by a wood snow fence, worked well. About a month before the season opener I'd set up the snow fence around each of my blind locations. Inset: Here's a view from inside my blind. Antelope waded right into the spring-fed pond.



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I PASSED on this beautiful but smallish buck.

back in my chair to see his chest. It didn't feel right, so I let up and watched the buck walk off. There is always another day, and he was too nice a buck for me to risk an awkward shot.

The Tuesday morning forecast was for rainstorms on Wednesday and Thursday. Tuesday was to be clear and in the 90s for the third day in a row. I eased my truck to my hidden parking spot,

pulled out my Block target, and then shot eight practice arrows in the early light of the day. It never hurts to loosen up and go through the mechanics of the shot. By now, I had a favorite trail down the ridge to my waiting blind. The reeds were just right. I took down the screens on both the left and right shooting holes.

The mental game gets better a few days into a hunt. The routine and focus on the ultimate goal develop, and a hunt plan with ample days means there's no rush, so it's possible to live in the moment. I am not a big-time trophy hunter, but knowing that I may never have the opportunity to hunt such a coveted unit in Wyoming again had me focused on killing a truly great pronghorn buck.

As in prior days, the mule deer trickled into the spring early. Surprisingly, the antelope, including several decent bucks, started to show up at 7:30 a.m. I stuck to my routine of glassing every set of horns that showed merit.

At 8:30 a.m., I was just getting settled in and starting to read a book when I heard the water splash. As described ear-

lier, I soon was on my knees picking the spot on the sunbathed hide of an excellent buck with several companions.

The white fletching looked as if it had flown straight to the exact spot I'd focused on, and water sprayed everywhere as the buck exited the spring. He barely made it 35 yards before going down. I sat quietly, shaking with adrenaline-filled veins. The now non-virgin longbow had proven itself on my biggest pronghorn buck ever. Apparently, a 47-pound draw weight is plenty... **BH**

The author is an attorney in Colorado, and he's the first and only bowhunter to complete the Super Slam of North American big game with a longbow.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: On this hunt, I shot a 47-pound, 64-inch ACS takedown longbow (aharchery.com), Carbon Express Heritage 150 arrows, and Razorcap broadheads. Other important gear included a Primos The Club XXL blind, Browning Huntsman chair, KUIU Tiburon clothes, and sandals for long, hot days.



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THE QUEST FOR PERFECT BROADHEAD

I WAS LOCKED AND LOADED by the time the screaming bull had come into view. The only thing left was for him to follow the script and walk the same path that the lone cow had taken only minutes before. If the 6x5 bull did that, it would be a chip shot of single-digit yards to send my arrow into his vitals.

But like most game animals, this elk couldn't read, and he totally ignored my script. Rather than walking within spitting distance of my crouched position, the lovesick fool chose a route that took him 35 yards from the business end of my arrow. But when he paused for the briefest of moments, I was already at full draw and wasted no time dumping the string. As I watched my arrow take off through the crisp, Idaho air, I didn't have to ponder its flight path as I had seen this broadhead perform flawlessly dozens of times before. Only this time, there wasn't foam waiting downrange.

START WITH THE RIGHT ARROW

If your goal is perfect broadhead flight, and it should be, then you've got to put some thought into what you're doing. More specifically, you need to start with the right arrow for your setup. Otherwise, you're going to have a hard time getting any reasonably constructed broadhead to fly decent.

Perhaps the most important thing to consider when it comes to arrow choices is spine. Carbon, aluminum, or a mixture of both doesn't really mean that much when it comes to broadhead flight, but correct arrow spine means everything. Arrow spine is simply a measurement of the arrow's stiffness. The lower the number, the stiffer the arrow.

Now, if you choose an arrow that isn't spined correctly, it will flex mid-flight and cause all sorts of inconsistencies as it travels downrange. Add a fixed-blade broadhead — which basically amounts to adding wings — to the front of this arrow, and you can see how quickly good flight can deteriorate if arrow spine isn't where it needs to be. Luckily, arrow manufacturers provide spine charts so that bowhunters have a great place to start when choosing the correct arrow. Major factors that determine which spine is right for you are draw weight and arrow length.

CONSTRUCTING THE ARROW

Once the correct arrow has been selected for your setup, the next step is to ensure that the ends of the arrow are perfectly square. Doing so will ensure that your inserts and nocks sit flush against the arrow shaft. Once your insert is installed, you can take things a step further and square the end of the insert as well. The goal is to have the nock, arrow, insert, and broadhead all seated together and running along the same, perfectly straight line.

If the nock, arrow shaft, and insert are not flush and straight, it will cause your broadhead to sit at an angle. And although this is difficult to see with the naked eye, an arrow spinner will quickly reveal a "wobble" if the insert isn't squared to the shaft and the front of the insert isn't squared to the broadhead. Achieving such precision in your arrow-building process easily can be achieved with the help of G5's A.S.D. Flip or Lumenok's F.A.S.T. tool.

Without going into great detail, both of these small but effective tools square-up carbon and aluminum components in a matter of minutes with a simple twist of the wrist. As a result, arrow shafts and inserts will be square and sit flush against one another. This is the perfect scenario, no matter which broadhead you choose to take afield.

ADDITIONAL ARROW COMPONENTS

The final addition to consider for your arrow is the fletching. With a wide variety to choose from, it can become overwhelming to narrow things down to just one. I will be the first to tell you to experiment with different types and brands of fletching as well as the number of fletching (3 or 4) and orientation (helical or offset). All these factors can



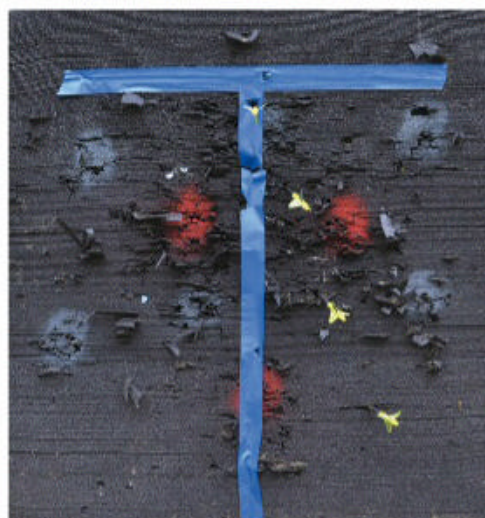
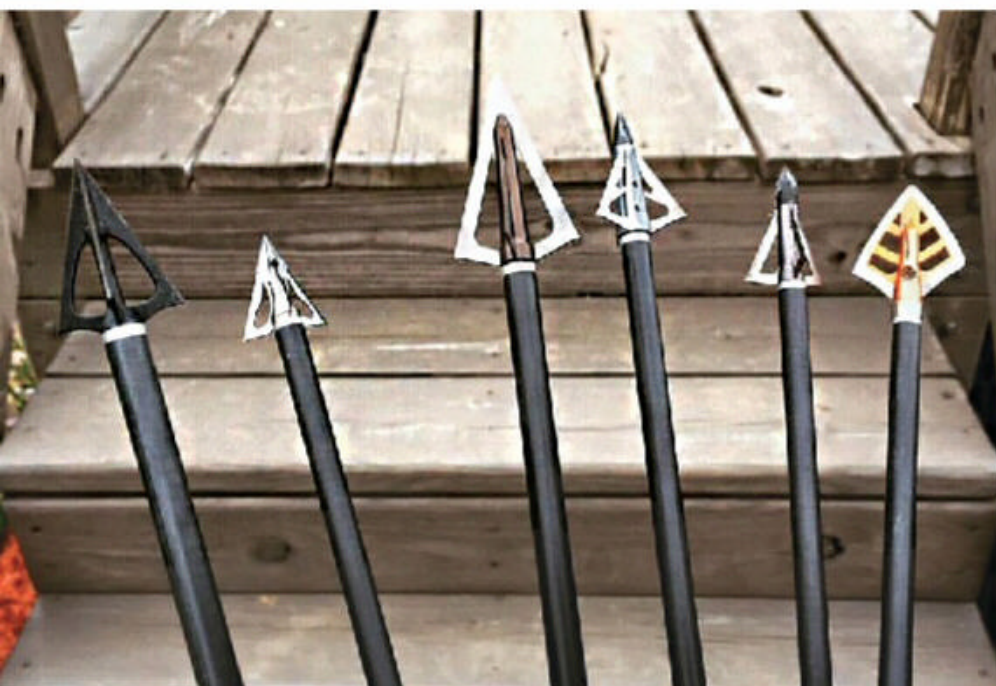
BOUDDHEAD FLIGHT

I TAGGED this 6x5 Idaho bull while hunting with a Wasp Drone broadhead and a perfectly squared Victory Archery arrow shaft.

*ACHIEVING PERFECTION
WHEN IT COMES TO BOW-
HUNTING SHOULD BE
EVERYONE'S END-GOAL.*

BY STEVE FLORES

THE QUEST FOR PERFECT BROADHEAD FLIGHT



(Top left) The G5 A.S.D. (arrow squaring device) makes quick work of squaring up arrows and inserts. (Top center) New Archery Products took the short-profile style fletch to the next level by adding a “kick-er” to the rear edge of the vane, increasing arrow rotation by 300%. (Top right) This is the the ultimate goal — broadheads and fieldpoints that impact the same spot. Pictured here is the Wac’em 3-blade fixed head. (Left) No matter what broadhead you choose, you have to start with the perfect arrow. Otherwise, you’re chasing your tail trying to achieve good arrow flight. (Above) Walk-back tuning is a simple, yet highly effective method for tuning your bow to your broadheads. The left photo shows arrows drifting to the right. The rest is moved to the left in micro increments until your arrows look like the photo to the right. This is an essential step toward accuracy.

affect broadhead flight. The most surefire way to determine which is best for you is to play around with various setups. Testing different fletching sizes (length, height), number of fletching, and their orientation will quickly reveal what works best for your preferred broadhead/arrow setup. Personally, I’ve never had issues with any arrows I’ve fletched with three Bohning Blazer Vanes. But again, what works for me might not be the best choice for you.

WALK-BACK TUNING

If you want to ensure that your newly constructed arrows have the best environment to promote laser-like flight perfection, there is one proven way to do it — walk-back tuning.

Walk-back tuning is simply a method for ensuring that your bow’s centershot is set correctly. It is done using arrows shot at a constant aiming point, using one pin, from varying distances. It may sound complicated, but it’s actually a very simple procedure. Here’s how it’s done.

Step 1: The first step to walk-back tuning is preparing your target. Start by making a “T” with some blue painter’s tape — splitting your target down the middle.

Step 2: The second step is to sight-in your bow at 20 yards. Use the intersecting point of the “T” as your aiming point. Make sure your arrow is hitting dead center of the intersecting tape lines before moving on to the next step.

Step 3: The third step is to use the same aiming point and the same 20-yard sight pin, and to shoot the remaining arrows at incrementally longer yardages. For example, your first ar-

row (used as your aiming point) is shot from 20 yards. The remaining arrows can be shot from 30, 40, and maybe 50 yards, but you still aim with your 20-yard pin. Obviously, your impact point will fall lower with each shot.

Step 4: The fourth step is to analyze your arrow pattern. If your arrows fall to the right of the vertical centerline (like mine did), then you must move your rest to the left to bring your arrows closer to the centerline. Conversely, if your arrows are falling left of the centerline, you would move your arrow rest to the right.

Step 5: The final step is to adjust your arrow rest (left or right) and return to your 20-yard starting point. Repeat the walk-back tuning process until all of your arrows land in the vertical tape line.

The first time I tried walk-back tuning, I made the mistake of moving my arrow rest too much at one time. Believe me when I say it takes very little arrow-rest movement to influence your arrow’s flight path. Minute, incremental adjustments are the best path to quick success.

The beauty of this method is that it can be used for field-points, fixed-blade heads, and even mechanicals. With a little time and effort, you will have your arrows flying like cruise missiles no matter what is on the business end of them — making your confidence soar. And we all know confidence is key!

BROADHEAD CHOICES

Whether you’re new to bowhunting or a seasoned veteran, you’ll quickly realize that there are more than enough broad-head options from which to choose. And, while any broad-

head that strikes the sweet spot of a game animal will do the job, there are certain characteristics that will influence arrow flight in a good way or bad way.

The two things I consider when choosing a broadhead are manufacturer reputation and cutting diameter. I like to start with a company that has been in the game a while and understands the importance of tight tolerances in the construction of their broadhead.

As for cutting diameter, I could write an entirely different article on this subject and what it means when your broadhead impacts flesh. But that's not the reason I brought this up. Think about mechanical broadheads for a minute. There is a reason they fly like bullets: Mechanical heads don't have large blade surfaces exposed to the air during flight.

Such is not the case with fixed-blade heads. Those blades act as wings and can easily guide your arrow in directions you hadn't intended. That's why it is so important to build your own arrows to ensure everything is flush and in a straight line from nock end to broadhead point.

Therefore, when choosing a fixed-blade broadhead, I like conservative cutting diameters. For me, this usually falls into the range of around 1 $\frac{1}{8}$ to 1 $\frac{3}{16}$ inches. Broadheads with those cutting diameters have flown excellent out of my setups out to 100 yards. And, while I don't advocate shooting game animals at that distance, I routinely practice that far out to improve my shooting and test the limits of my broadhead-tipped arrows.

CONSIDER DISTANCE

Speaking of shooting range, it's important to understand that shooting a whitetail at 20 yards and a bull elk or antelope at 60 yards and beyond, is an entirely different thing. Broadhead specs won't affect you nearly as much at close range. In other words: The farther the distance to your target, the greater the chance for poor arrow flight to show its ugly face, whether it be in the form of a strong crosswind or a poorly constructed arrow.

Conversely, most up-close whitetail shots don't allow enough time for things to go wrong. If you've built your arrow using the aforementioned steps, you will be in good shape, even if you decide to go with a broadhead with a wider cut.

CONCLUSION

While you can go over and over broadhead specs, number of blades, cutting diameters, and overall design, none of that really matters if you're shooting the wrong arrow with less than square ends, and/or your rest and bow are out of tune. Those are the components that will give you perfect flight results with a wide variety of broadheads. Neglecting them will come back to haunt you — usually in the form of a botched shot. And that's the last thing any ethical bowhunter wants to happen. **BH**

Steve Flores is a dedicated bowhunter who enjoys pursuing whitetails near his home in the mountains of southern WV. He also enjoys chasing elk in Idaho.



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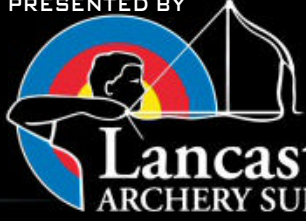
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does are trying to stay ahead of them. My favorite time, when I see the most frantic rutting and chasing, is a couple of days either side of November 5.

Of course, there are outside influences, such as weather. Hot temperatures, strong winds, or heavy precipitation will change your perception of the rut activity. The moon phase does have an unpredictable impact, but don't ask me why or how. The full moon in 2022 occurs on November 8, but the idea that deer move more at night because they can see better is ridiculous. They can see just fine — moon or not.

I've had bad hunts during a full moon, and good hunts — just like any other time of the season — so the best advice is to put in the hours whenever you can, because the calendar says the rut will still be happening. Now is the time to use your vacation days, put yourself in funnels between patches of cover, set up decoys, call, rattle...whatever it takes to get a rutting buck close.

By about November 12, the "breeding phase" kicks in. Bucks lockdown with estrous does until they submit. In prairie country, like Kansas, this lockdown often happens in the wide open, where you may be able to stalk into bow range with a decoy. Otherwise, you'll find yourself sitting in the woods watching young bucks while the big dogs are with a hot doe. Your only hope is for a doe to submit, and for the buck to come looking for another.

The breeding phase is followed by what I call the "desperation phase." Bucks want more and are on the move again as we approach Thanksgiving. Many outfitters will tell you they see the biggest bucks of the year cruising during this time. The one negative influence now is the firearms season, and all you can do about that variable is to plan around it as best you can.

That's the rough pattern I see year after year. Weather always impacts your perception of the rut, and it's equally as unpredictable as the mysterious behavior of the whitetails themselves. Therefore, I can't give you the perfect week. All I can tell you is to commit to as many days afield as you can, pick a "phase" you like, and give it your best shot. Good luck. **BH**

AUTHOR'S PHOTO

Q I AM PLANNING to hunt the Midwest for whitetails this fall for the first time. What dates do you recommend for my hunt? *Gilbert G., via e-mail*

A YOURS is a common question with an elusive answer. There are many variables, but one constant is the gestation period of the whitetail, which is 200 days, plus or minus five days. Not all does come into heat at the same time, but most Midwest fawns are born around June 1 — putting conception at around November 12 — which gives you the rough timing of the breeding phase.

Based on 40 years of bowhunting in the Midwest, here's how I see the season play out. The early part of September is good if you like mosquitoes, heat, and deer with predictable movement patterns at the edge of daylight. The so-called "October lull," is an enigma. In my experience, this inexplicable drop-off in

daytime activity actually starts around the third week in September and runs through mid-October. I've killed bucks during this timeframe, but it's tough. I don't pretend to understand why, but the lull seems to be pervasive in much of whitetail country.

By mid-October, things start winding up. Bucks become less tolerant of each other and does become more interesting — hence the "seeking phase." Movement patterns are still predictable as daylight activity picks up. If you monitor social media, you'll see a sharp increase in the number of mature bucks falling to the arrows of bowhunters who have done their scouting and established a pattern.

Once November hits, most travel patterns vanish. Bucks are on the move and

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THE QUEST

RANDY ULMER

HEART OF ENDURANCE: PART SIX

IN THIS GAME WE CALL BOWHUNTING, YOU MUST REALIZE THAT OUR ATTEMPTS TO BE SUCCESSFUL ARE NEVER IN VAIN.

IT IS DAWN of opening morning. The hunter waits patiently, nestled amongst chiseled craigs, well above timberline. His nephew, Zach, sits across a spectacular gorge in full sunlight atop a dizzying cliff face, looking through powerful optics. Two hours after sunrise Zach finally signals that he has found the buck. Hallelujah!

Zach indicates the buck, “Old Unkillable,” has moved a great deal farther up the massive drainage and much lower in elevation than where he’s ever been spotted before — most likely spooked there yesterday or earlier this morning. It will be a long and difficult stalk indeed!

This mule-eared colossus had previously always been seen close to the top of the ridge, above timberline and within a mile of where the hunter had made his spike camp the night before. When leaving camp this morning, he brought just enough food and water for the day, assuming he could easily make the short return trip back to camp in the evening. He carries neither sleeping bag nor tent.

Now he has a difficult decision to make: Hike all the way back to camp, grab his sleeping bag, tent, food and water, and return. Or he can head farther into the wilderness to stalk the deer now, without survival essentials and risk a long and miserable night as a result. He knows he lacks the energy to return to camp for his gear and still have the fortitude to make a stalk that afternoon. It would simply be too draining.

The thought of the effort required to stalk the deer now, as well as the potential privation if he does so, sends a shiver of trepidation and foreboding down his spine. Privately, he has always considered himself a lazy man, although anyone who knows him would never describe him as such. He dreads the physical hardship of the hunt, yet he hunts the most difficult terrain — another of his life’s many paradoxes.

Despite his reservations and hesitancy, he always pushes forward, executes and follows through, knowing that discipline is the sole distinguishing characteristic between the accomplished man and the sluggard.

Throwing caution to the wind, as is his nature when consumed with the pursuit of a truly giant muley, he makes the decision to go now and deal with the consequences later.

He quickly stuffs his optics and tripod into his pack and lashes his bow on top. He slowly picks his way down through the treacherous cliffs to more favorable terrain. Once on negotiable footing, he moves as rapidly as possible. He is far away from his quarry and in no danger of being detected.

Dropping into the immense basin where the buck now beds, he makes a two-mile, three-hour loop through the rough country. The topography looks easily navigable from above and at a distance, but turns out to be a web of erosion and rock. It is like walking across giant, loose, nearly vertical corduroy.

He traverses the length of the mountain, aiming for a small saddle on a finger ridge he knows will put him close to the buck. As he approaches, he slows on the lee side of the saddle near a deep cut where the buck lies. He stays hidden behind a sizeable berm created by countless avalanches.

Quietly, he removes his pack and shoes then sinks to the ground. He rolls onto his back and gazes into the cloudless, intensely azure sky. This is the place to wait; the time for patience. He is downwind and several hundred yards from the bedded buck; far enough to be safe from detection yet close enough to strike quickly.

Moving along the top of the long, massive escarpment, Zach has traveled up the gorge a few miles in order to be straight across from the buck. Since he stopped and dropped his pack hours before, the anxious hunter periodically looks through his binoculars at his nephew, hoping for a signal. As the afternoon wanes, the hunter gazes lazily through his binoculars at the top of the cliff for the hundredth time. Zach is there, but now frantically signaling that Old Unkillable is up and feeding. The hunter’s heart quickens.

What odd thoughts and emotions descend upon one when a dream is within reach. Deep within, as always, he feels his success or failure is predetermined by fate. But fate has tricked him many times before. He tries to keep his hope at bay, fearing disappointment. He struggles to defeat this fatalistic thinking, but fibers of doubt and anxiety persist.

He methodically moves down the hidden edge of the cut in bare feet. The small canyon is some 70 yards across and very steep. It is lined by rockslides intermixed with crushed, tangled trees and new-growth brush.

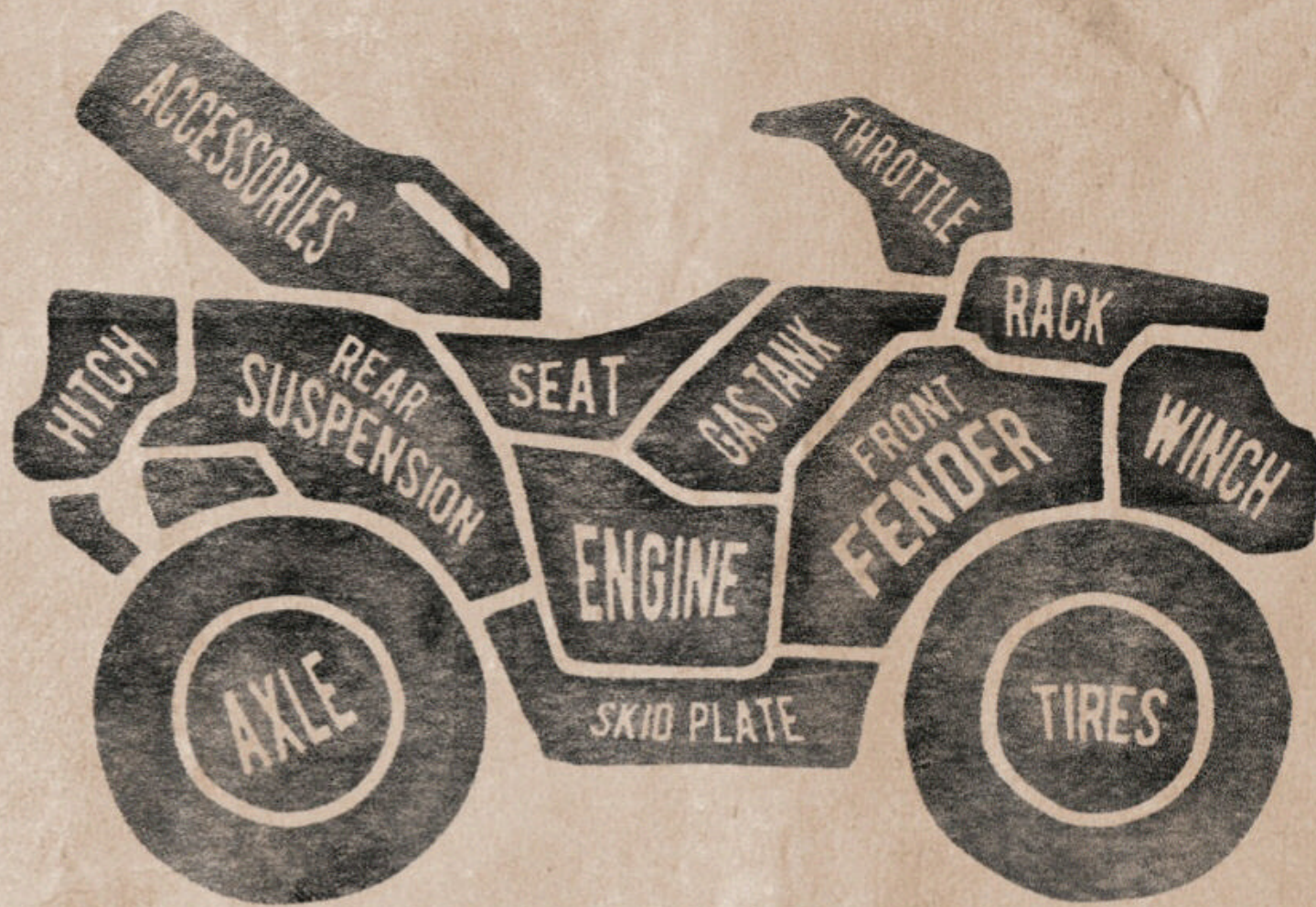
Every 50 yards, he scans the cut. Each time he crests the tiny rise, he tells himself: “You cannot make a single mistake with this buck.” Ever so slowly he raises his head, canted, so as to expose only one eye, and peaks over. No deer. Inching farther forward, he lifts binoculars and glasses his surroundings. No deer. He moves up a little farther, exposing his shoulders. Still no deer.

He moves down another 50 yards and repeats the process, creeping forward with all the stealth and predatory intent of a cougar. His head, his heart, and his very soul are fully immersed and engaged in this instinctual, primal pursuit. Every fiber of his being knows that these are the critical moments of the hunt. It is simple: If he sees the buck first, he has a chance; if the buck were to see him first, the hunt is over and his efforts wasted. Any error now lays waste to months of effort and preparation.

To be continued... **BH**

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