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SEPTEMBER 2022

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EDITORIAL

CURT WELLS | EDITOR



Those who attended Dwight's induction were (left to right) Dwight's daughter, Margie, his grandson, Dieter, Dwight's daughter Emily, and Dwight's wife, Laura, who is holding her late-husband's plaque. That's me in the back, then Founder M.R. James and Publisher Jeff Waring.

SOMETHING YOU MAY HAVE MISSED...

WELL-DESERVED RECOGNITION FOR A MAN YOU ALL KNEW.

BACK IN MAY, something happened that likely flew under the radar of most bowhunters. Dwight Schuh, my predecessor as Editor of **Bowhunter** Magazine, was inducted posthumously into the Archery Hall of Fame.

Some of you might say it was about time. However, Dwight was inducted into the Bowhunter Hall of Fame way back in 1997. At that time, the two Halls of Fame were separate entities, with the Archery Hall of Fame largely focused on the industry and competitive archery. Since then, the two have become one — and The Archery Hall of Fame (AHOF) is now a destination, with a showcase museum at Bass Pro Shops' Springfield, Missouri, headquarters.

Publisher Jeff Waring and I flew to Springfield to attend Dwight's induction, which was supposed to happen in 2019. Like most things, two years' worth of AHOF inductions were postponed

due to the pandemic. As a result, the list of inductees from 2018 and 2019 combined this round to include PSE Founder Pete Shepley; Eastman Outdoors Founder Bob Eastman; trick-shot and showman Bob Markworth; Black Widow Archery Founders, "The Wilson Boys;" SpinWing Vane inventor Richard Carella; and our friend Dwight Schuh.

Fame is no longer what it once was. Today, you need only make a few clicks on your computer showing you doing something memorable and BOOM! — you're instantly famous. A couple decades ago, you earned your notoriety by interacting with your peers on a more personal level. They came to know

you through years of personal appearances, correspondence, and reading your stories and articles written about you. It took time and effort to become "famous," if that makes sense. Back then, being well-known took hard work!

Dwight Schuh accomplished that, and in my mind, his notoriety was genuine among his fellow bowhunters. It's always unfortunate when someone receives their well-deserved recognition posthumously, but from the **Bowhunter** Team's point of view, nobody deserved this honor more than Dwight.

Our trip to Springfield also allowed us to see the Schuh Family again. Dwight's wife, Laura, and daughters

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Emily and Margie, along with grandson Dieter Berriochoa and Dwight's close friends, Ron and Tanja Smith, also made the trip from Nampa, Idaho. Naturally, we were also excited to visit with other members of the Bowhunter Family, like Dr. Dave Samuel (AHOF class of '07) and renowned whitetail artist Chuck Denault and, of course, it was a thrill to watch **Bowhunter** Magazine Founder M.R. James unveil Dwight's plaque.

Dwight's contributions to bowhunting are engraved for eternity on that beautiful museum plaque. Highlights include: 40-plus years as a successful freelance outdoor writer/photographer, editor, columnist, and public speaker; "Bows and Arrows" Editor for *Sports Afield*; *Outdoor Life* Western Editor; and Editor of **Bowhunter** Magazine from 1996 to 2011. Dwight authored nine books on archery, bowhunting, and do-it-yourself backcountry hunting, and he was a Senior member of the Pope and Young Club. Dwight also successfully took 22 of the 29 North American big game species with bow and arrow.

While those qualifications are impeccable, those who knew Dwight personally knew him as a man who defined integrity and ethics. He was intense, committed, and driven — all qualities every bowhunter should strive to possess. To me, Dwight was a mentor, colleague, friend, and someone I looked up to from the day I decided to order my first bow in 1980. Never did I imagine I would follow in his immense footsteps, which I know can



This etching of Dwight Schuh now hangs in the Archery Hall of Fame Museum at Bass Pro Shops in Springfield, MO. Dwight was inducted for his "influence on the sport" and as a "contributor to the sport." Enough said.

never be filled. I still miss Dwight but, in some ways, he's still right here with me.

M.R. James' presentation at the Saturday night induction ceremony was one of honor and respect. He considers his hiring of Dwight Schuh as his successor to be the best move he ever made. And I'd have to wholeheartedly agree with that assessment. **BH**

Five of the six AHOF inductees were represented at the ceremony, including Dwight's wife, Laura Schuh, Dustin Fridkin for the Wilson Boys, Bob Markworth, PSE Founder Pete Shepley, and Bob Eastman, founder of Eastman Outdoors.



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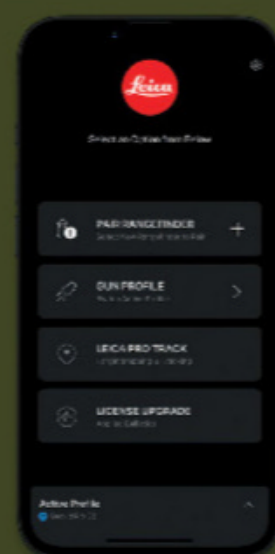
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BOWHUNTER BUSINESS

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Bill Wadsworth, shown here teaching an early bowhunter education class, was the driving force behind the NBEF's founding in 1979.

NATIONAL BOWHUNTER EDUCATION FOUNDATION



"OVER THE YEARS, BOWHUNTER EDUCATION HAS PROVEN TO BE GOOD BUSINESS. OUR GRADS ARE SAFER, MORE SUCCESSFUL BOWHUNTERS, SMARTER SHOPPERS, AND LOYAL LIFETIME CUSTOMERS." —MARILYN BENTZ, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, NBEF

FOR REGULAR READERS of this column, my choice to spotlight the National Bowhunter Education Foundation (NBEF) in this normally business-oriented space might come as a surprise. But rest assured, this is no mistake!

As **Bowhunter** Magazine continues to celebrate its 50th Anniversary and pay tribute to industry partners — those companies that have not only provided invaluable support to the **Bowhunter** Magazine brand but also to the growth and improvement of the Bowhunting community as a whole — the ongoing role of the nonprofit NBEF cannot be overlooked or underestimated. And **Bowhunter** Magazine and key staff members have given wholehearted support to Bowhunter Education since the very beginning of the program, and we've always held the point of view that

not only is bowhunter education vital to our future, but it's also good business!

Bowhunter education got its start in 1969 when New Jersey bowhunter and retired Boy Scouts of America executive Bill Wadsworth developed a program at the request of the New York State Field Archers and Bowhunters Association. Incidentally, this was about the same time that **Bowhunter** Magazine Founder M.R. James was beginning to form his idea for the first bowhunting-only magazine, which would come together a couple of years later.

Bill Wadsworth worked tirelessly to

refine his bowhunter education program for nearly a decade, convinced that it was the best way to not only make for safer and more successful bowhunters but also to protect his favorite pastime from a growing anti-hunting contingent. By the mid '70s, Bill's program had gone nationwide under the auspices of the National Field Archery Association's Bowhunting and Conservation Committee, bringing on the likes of long-time **Bowhunter** Conservation Editor Dr. Dave Samuel to develop a program that would stand the test of time and ultimately become "one of the principal deterrents to the antihunters' efforts to eliminate bowhunting."

By the late '70s, the growth of bowhunting and the expanded need for educational services had outpaced the capabilities and scope of the NFAA-committee-level program, not to men-

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tion the need for a curriculum developed not only by hardcore bowhunters but by professional educators had more than justified establishing a separate and independent 501 (c)3 corporation. The first official board meeting of the newly formed National Bowhunter Education Foundation took place in mid-October of '79 at TVA's Land Between the Lakes.

Bill Wadsworth's original bowhunter education program, which had continued to evolve during the NFAA committee days, included the development of teaching practices and protocols and creation of student and teacher manuals, a host of supportive graphics, along with other educational materials. While to be clear, in the early days Bowhunter Education was not universally accepted by members of the archery industry because some viewed it as an obstacle to participation and growth of the sport, especially when proficiency testing or mandatory bowhunter education was suggested. And even board members had heated arguments over a variety of different subjects. Guess what? Seems bowhunters are passionate, opinionated folks!

But through it all, the dedicated members of that original NBEF Board (and ensuing Boards) solidified Bowhunter Education through strategic industry relationships as well as coop-



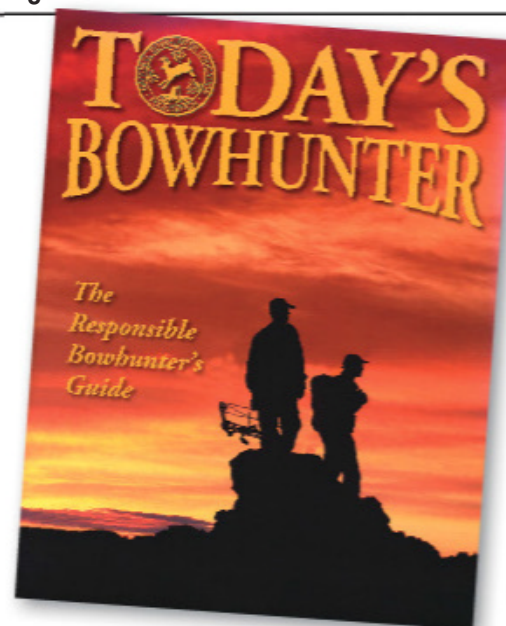
NBEF Board and Regional Coordinators, including President Steven George, VP Joel Klammer, Secretary Gary Brunberg, Treasurer Dennis Fredrickson, Dr. Jack Frost, Jeff Rawlinson, Barb Terry, C.J. Winand, Anders Gejer, Paul Topham, Dave Bauer, Curtis Hermann, and yours truly bring their unique talents and passion for improving Bowhunter Education to the table.

eration with the National Association of Hunter Safety Coordinators (now the IHEA), which was key to the addition of bowhunting curriculum to state hunter education programs and proving the need for more bowhunter education.

As Dr. Dave Samuel remembered from those early years, the NBEF team accomplished a ton: "...64 instructor workshops took place, the basic student manual went into its 10th printing, 20 states and provinces placed their names and logos on the cover of the student manual, and the NBEF published a 'Bowhunter Instructor Training Manual,' as well as an important set of eight educational deer

targets..." Now being called the International Bowhunter Education Program (IBEP), the NBEF's program was well on its way to being hailed as the preeminent accredited program of its type and being accepted not only across North America but also in many other parts of the world.

Before long, Bowhunter Education had become the largest such organization with many thousands of volunteer instructors reaching tens of thousands of students each year. During the '90s, Bowhunter Education moved online and by the early 2000s had introduced Internet Distance Learning and a newly modeled "Today's Bowhunter" student manual (an updated version of that manual is still in use). Since 1979, over 3 million bowhunters have taken the IBEP and been certified. And in just



Bowhunting dreams start with this manual.

the last couple of years (during the pandemic), over 90,000 students took the course online!

Today, the NBEF also offers a wide variety of complementary resources, including the "Today's Crossbow" manual; "Today's 3-in-1 Responsibility Guide" covering treestand use, shot placement, and game recovery; an "Urban Bowhunting Guide;" and a long list of educational tools from posters, flipcharts, and diagrams to Advanced Anatomy Shot Placement Guides with overlays and even Mini 3-D Deer and Bear Models to perfectly illustrate proper shot placement.

Simply put, after nearly 50 years, the NBEF remains in the business of being the leading advocate for doing things right while bowhunting, and for that they earn a tip of the Bowhunter cap! **BH**

For more information, go to NBEF.org, email info@nbeff.org, or contact NBEF Executive Director Marilyn Bentz, P.O. Box 2934, Rapid City, SD 57709; (605) 716-0596.

1st NBEF Directors Meeting Held to Plan Growth

by Dr. David E. Samuel

The first directors meeting of the National Bowhunter Education Foundation (NBEF) was held October 12-14 at the Tennessee Valley Authority's Land Between the Lakes. Surrounded by beautiful scenery and terrific whitetail hunting, 15 bowhunters hung their bows on the racks on Thursday October 11 and retired indoors for three days of meetings. The site was the Brandon Springs training facility, the new official training center for the National Bowhunter Education Program (NBEF). Local organizers were Bob McBayner and Merrill Jones who spent the early part of the week with the NFAA Bowhunter Rendezvous, and the latter part of the week with us. Our hosts were Frank Holland, the Manager of The Land Between the Lakes and his staff, and they sure made our stay a comfortable one.

The National Bowhunter Education Program is growing by the day. Since its inception in 1969 over 100,000 bowhunters have taken the program whose objective is "to instill in bowhunters a responsible attitude and to assist them to adopt and follow an acceptable behavior towards people, wildlife, and the environment in which they hunt." The NBEF is in various stages of use in 40 states and four Canadian provinces. Originally under the wing of the National Field Archery Association, the program grew at such a rate that the separate foundation was formed. Our meeting was held to insure a continued growth.

The first order of business was to elect a chairman. Bill Wadsworth has given his heart and soul to the program and we unanimously elected Bill our Chairman. Action Committees were selected in the following areas: Course Content, Up-dating and Service, Equipment Standards, Public Relations, Liaison, Legal, NBEF Education Center and Financial Planning. Some of the top priorities were to develop a policy on Voluntary Membership, Bowhunter Education, to initiate sources of funding, to develop methods of involving all bowhunting organizations and manufacturers in the NBEF, to discuss some of the new teaching aids that were developed, to consider the value of an executive secretary for the foundation, and to adopt the Land Between the Lakes as the official education center for the Foundation.

Following the three-day meeting the consensus was that the NBEF had come a long way in its short 10-year history. There is much to do, but many obstacles have been overcome. One priority is to generate more interest in the program from industry. Again much has been accomplished along these lines, but there still is work ahead. Dave Staples submitted, by mail, a statement concerning his own company, Spectre Archery Enterprises, and how his involvement with the NBEF program in Pennsylvania and New Jersey had increased his total gross sales. Others in attendance

agreed that this does occur and that in the long run this course can have a positive effect on the archery business.

Over the next 12 months watch for the latest developments on the NBEF in Bowhunter. Meanwhile, for further information on where you can take the course in your state, contact the National Bowhunter Education Foundation, Rt. 2, Box 514, Redlands CA 92373.

DIRECTORS - NATIONAL BOWHUNTER EDUCATION FOUNDATION

Len Cardinale	Active bowhunter and lance operator from New Jersey.
James Dougherty	Retired bowhunter, owner of Jim Dougherty Archery in Tulsa, Oklahoma.
Max Greiner	Self-employed wildlife artist, formerly with Jennings Company Bows, a Texas bowhunter.
Al Henderson	Retired archery coach, many years in archery, Arizona.
Harold Hill	University administrator, active archer, Arkansas.
Earl Hoyt, Jr.	President of Hoyt Archery Co., Missouri.
M.R. Jones	Editor, Bowhunter Magazine, Fort Wayne, Indiana.
James Jones	Hunter safety coordinator, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, bowhunter from Concord, New Hampshire.
G. Merrill Jones	Outdoor magazine editor, Alabama, bowhunter.
Eve Kraecher	Long friend of NFAA and archery from New Mexico.
Bob McBayner	Top match team man, long time bowhunter from Alabama.
Frank Nathan	Another 1000 man, diverse background in archery, Bowhunter Staff, Washington, D.C.
David Samuel	Wildlife biologist at West Virginia University, active bowhunter.
Marilee Savorn	President, Arrows Corporation, innovator in archery products from Kirkland, Washington.
Keith Schayler	Novel writer and active bowhunter, Pennsylvania.
James Shubert	President N.F.A.A., dentist, Minnesota.
Dave Staples	Lance operator, Associate Editor Bowhunter, Pennsylvania.
Lee Sims	Active in Professional Bowhunters Society, archeryman, bowhunter from Oregon.
Wayne Thims	Wildlife biologist and archer from New York.
Bill Wadsworth	Long time friend of bowhunting, both New York and New Jersey, Chairman, NBEF.

BOWHUNTER

Dr. Dave Samuel shared the news of the NBEF's founding in this article from 1980.



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NEXT-LEVEL BOWHUNTING

JOE BELL | TECHNICAL EDITOR



Because your thumb is less sensitive than your index finger, this style of release improves aiming focus, quickly making you a better shot.

THUMB-TRIGGER ADVANTAGE

WHEN EVALUATING THE DIFFERENT WAYS TO TRIGGER THE SHOT, THE HANDHELD THUMB RELEASE COULD BE THE CLEAR WINNER.

THERE'S BEEN A WAVE of bowhunters jumping on the thumb-release bandwagon. What's this all about? Well, it seems this group of bowhunters is discovering they shoot much more consistently with a handheld thumb release than with a wrist-strap, index-finger release. The reason is simple: The thumb is inherently less sensitive to trigger feel, and this is what's needed to free the archer's mind for precision shooting.

On the other hand, the index finger is super-sensitive to trigger feel, making it easier to anticipate the shot. Aiming becomes harder, too. From there, it's easy for the shot to start breaking down to the point where shooting becomes a complete disaster. But the thumb release can help break this improper shooting cycle.

In the following sections, I'll outline three convincing points for using a thumb release. Then I'll provide some helpful tips on how to shoot this style of release correctly.

Reprogram The Shot

A thumb-trigger release will immediately change how the shot feels. Drawing your bow will feel a little different. The draw anchor will feel different and a little clumsy, too. All your fingers will

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be curled around the release's handle, which means full contact with the release using your entire hand — not just a single point of contact with your “twitchy” pointer finger.

All these differences add up to using different muscle groups and memory through the act of repetition. This is normal and a complete blessing, because you now have the chance to rebuild the entire shot execution until it's perfect.

To ensure the right type of programming, you must stay disciplined and use good shooting form. Take it slow, and be methodical in how you rebuild your shot sequence. Let the sight pin “float around” on the target's spot. Do not try to keep it motionless, because that's impossible for anyone to do. Let it slowly move around the bull's-eye until the shot just happens. It's critical that you stay relaxed while aiming intently. If you do this over and over, you'll eliminate bad habits and acquire a brand-new way of shooting.

Improves Muscle Mechanics

Since your draw hand is in full contact with the release, the mechanics of the anchor will be different. Your hand and wrist will be straighter because the tension of the bowstring is forcing the release's handle in proper alignment. Your hand will also pivot vertically to some degree as you anchor on your jaw-



Many experienced bowhunters scoff at using a “target-style” release for bowhunting, claiming they are too clumsy or noisy for the deer woods. This way of thinking just isn't true.

bone using the “web” of your thumb and index-finger knuckles. With this position, your thumb is pointed down and your pinky finger is pointed up. Hand position depends solely on what feels comfortable. Regardless, the overall position of your hand now makes it easier to use your rhomboid muscles to hold and even activate the shot.

A Crisp, Clean Shot

Not all thumb releases are created equal. However, a good one will have a polished double-sear system that pro-

vides a tremendously crisp trigger. This type of release exhibits no perceptible trigger movement — meaning no creep. If the release has trigger creep, it will create a huge distraction: Your mind will be drawn away from aiming to thinking about what the trigger is doing. Once this happens, the quality of the shot will decay. Then, in due time, anticipating the shot and punching the trigger again becomes a problem.

It's important to let the arrow fire on its own. Our job is simple: Aim, aim, and aim until the shot breaks. Through repetition and muscle memory, “triggering” the shot is simply a job for the subconscious — not the conscious.

Carter, Scott, Spot Hogg, Stanislawski, T.R.U. Ball, TruFire, and others all make quality thumb releases with creep-free triggers. There are many styles available to accommodate different hand sizes and anchor preferences.

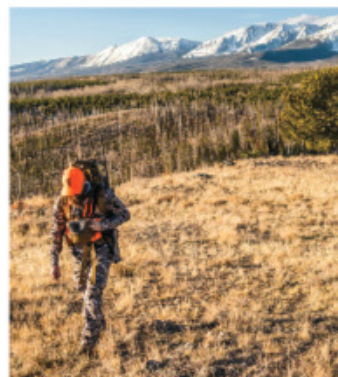
One of the best places to sample releases is at a well-stocked pro shop, or at a major archery tournament where manufacturer vendors are available. Using a simple string bow (an old bowstring or cord tied in a knot that allows you to brace one end against your palm while pulling on the other end with your release), you can sample different releases, triggering each once to find the right feel.

Thumb-Trigger Shooting Tips

Grip The Trigger Indirectly: When shooting a thumb release, try placing the tip of your thumb on the release's body, while the knurled trigger rests near the “meaty” knuckle area of your thumb.



One key to shooting a thumb release well is to maintain a relaxed draw hand. This allows the release to naturally rotate, forcing the trigger into your thumb and causing the shot to break all by surprise.



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NEXT-LEVEL BOWHUNTING

This position, given the trigger knob is adjusted correctly, allows you to depress the trigger not by moving the thumb itself but by relaxing the back of your hand and allowing the handle to naturally rotate downward to activate the trigger. Shooting this way mimics the same mechanics you'd use with a hinge or triggerless back-tension release. This promotes maximum control, repeatability, and eliminates the chance of anticipating the shot.

Relax The Hand: It's critical to relax your hand when using a thumb release. If not, you'll grip the handle differently each time and even disrupt the alignment of your wrist with the bowstring, creating varying degrees of torque on the D-loop.

To establish a relaxed hand, grip the release's handle between the second and third knuckles of your hand. This creates a solid "hook" and will minimize muscle tension compared to holding the handle with the tips of your fingers. Once you hit anchor and acquire the target, send a mental cue to relax your fingertips, and the remainder of the shot will take care of itself. Don't worry about the release



Thumb releases definitely have their place in bowhunting — no matter what the naysayers will tell you.

flying out of your hand, because it won't! The way the release's body is shaped allows it to stay solidly cupped inside your fingers and palm region.

Establish A Consistent Anchor: Some archers prefer to pivot their hand 45 degrees; others pivot it up to

90 degrees to get the right feel at anchor. Establish whatever position feels best to you.

To make small adjustments in draw length without affecting how the bowstring crosses your nose and face, vary the length of your D-loop. Keep in mind, when using a handheld release, it's better to shoot a slightly longer D-loop that allows some degree of twisting, because you'll have to pivot your hand somewhat to find a solid anchor. If the loop is too short, it could torque the bowstring and cause tuning and accuracy issues. For best results, try to keep the loop's inner length from the bowstring's surface a full $\frac{5}{8}$ inches or longer.

When done right, switching to a thumb release can be a complete game-changer. You'll shoot much more consistently and with greater confidence. Your performance on the shooting line or in the field will simply be a byproduct of your new shooting style. This might be just what you need to enjoy archery all over again and to hang more trophies on the wall. Give it a shot! **BH**

The author works on perfecting his technical archery know-how from his home near Prescott, Arizona.

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ON THE TRACK

CHUCK ADAMS



MY 2021 Alberta deer was a nice, deep-forked critter with wide antlers and extra "kicker points" on one side. Not a bad consolation prize after my weird-antlered target buck disappeared!

COVID MULE DEER!

WHEN LEAST EXPECTED, COVID RED TAPE REARED ITS UGLY HEAD.

I KNEW I WAS IN TROUBLE last November about five seconds after I stopped at the U.S./Canada border.

"Put on your masks," the Canadian official sternly warned my wife, Greta, and me as he peered through solid glass from eight feet away. He was not wearing one himself.

"Put on your masks?" I thought as we peered back from the cab of my pickup. Did he think the virus could leap from my vehicle, cross open space in a stiff prairie breeze, and penetrate the enclosed building where he stood?

My wife and I had submitted all nec-

essary documents to the Canadian COVID database and had a backup file with us if necessary. Included were negative COVID tests for both of us taken within the past 72 hours.

Put on your masks?

The border guard glared at our

passports, checked the database, and grabbed a small box from a table.

"Sir, you have been selected at random for another COVID test. Be sure to consult with the nurse and submit all materials within 24 hours to avoid penalties."

Another COVID test? I thought. What nurse? What penalties?

The guard placed the box on a shelf outside the building, fled like a grizzly bear was on his tail and, from the safety of his cubicle, he instructed me on how to take the test. With my mask in place, of course.

Late that night, in my friend Duane Nelson's remote southern Alberta mule deer camp, I managed to connect with the Internet and videoconference with a COVID nurse in Toronto.

Toronto was 2,000 miles away.

After making sure I had swabbed each nostril 15 times — yep, she watched and counted — the nice lady in eastern Canada asked where I planned to deliver my test materials. She told me that Calgary had the closest COVID drop facility.

Calgary? That was more than 200 miles north of me, and I planned to hunt deer at daybreak!

Duane Nelson came to the rescue. My pal knew a guy who sent out next-day packages every afternoon from his business. We decided to drive 1½ hours at lunchtime the next day, dump the stupid test, and go back to hunting. Fingers crossed that this was the last bureaucratic snafu.

As dawn broke across the Alberta prairie, I guzzled coffee to keep my sleep-deprived eyeballs open and glassed endless slopes and coulees for deer. Greta and Duane were glassing, too. *At least I was searching for bucks in Alberta again*, I reminded myself. The year before, the border was closed like a vault door to frivolous activities like nonresident hunting.

It wasn't long before Duane spoke up.

"There's a really wide buck on that hill," he said as he pointed toward a distant knob. I've hunted with my outfitter friend for more than 30 years,

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ON THE TRACK

and he's normally calm, no matter what. But there was definite excitement in his voice.

The deer was facing us, bedded beneath a bluff that provided some shade. I lined up the spotting scope, turned the focus dial...and sucked in my breath.

The buck's antlers were incredibly wide, but they were also weird. This was mule deer country, and the deer's face was all muley. But his antlers were pure whitetail, with four main tines plus brow points on each side, rising up from a single main beam. Alberta law uses a deer's tail and body to determine species — not the rack. We watched until the buck stood to stretch, turn, and bed again. His butt was white, his tail white and ropey with a black tip — definite mule deer traits. My mule-deer-only tag was good for this guy!

"I don't know what that strange rack would score for a mule deer, but ask me if I care!" I told Greta and Duane. "Those antlers are pushing three feet wide, and they're symmetrical and gorgeous. There's nothing else to say!"

Greta always names big bucks and bulls we find together, and her handle for this one was perfect.

"He may or may not be a hybrid, but I'm calling him Prius," my wife declared. "His antlers sure make him look like a whitetail/muley cross!"

I was bowhunting during Alberta's

I snapped this shot of the buck we called "Prius" through my spotting scope. The muley's whitetail-like antlers were huge!



November gun season. Unlike earlier archery season, gun/bowhunting was only legal from Wednesday through Saturday each week.

We managed to take a few photos of Prius through my spotting scope before he stood to feed late that day. We saw the strange buck four days in a row, but the wide-open habitat was a foot-hunting challenge. The rut was heating up, and Prius was an aggressive doe-chaser. Between all those eyes and ears, and the quick way animals moved around, the sun set Saturday evening without my getting closer than 125 yards.

Greta and I stayed in camp to relax and watch deer. Duane headed back to his farm to work until the following Wednesday's hunt. Meanwhile, old Prius vanished like smoke.

Try as we might, Greta and I could not find Prius over the next three days. We did see several other nice bucks. One was especially large, with two "kicker"

points on the right, deep forks, and a spread pushing 30 inches. That buck had appeared like magic, suddenly chasing females near camp. I figured Prius was doing the same, but possibly far away. Rutting muley bucks sometimes wander many miles in search of estrous does. All bets are off for finding a specific animal in early November.

Duane arrived back at camp before daylight on Wednesday. We drove to a high point where I'd spotted the "back-up buck" the day before.

Shortly after sunrise, six doe mule deer filed from a ravine 300 yards away. Close behind was the wide buck with two extra points on the right.

"I think I'll go after him," I told Duane. "Haven't seen Prius in awhile, and this guy is a dandy!"

Duane and I eased across a slope and hunkered down to watch the seven deer. Amazingly, the buck left his females and swaggered uphill on a beeline for us. Cover was sparse, but a slight roll in the ridge hid all but our heads.

The big deer disappeared below the horizon. Seconds later, polished antler tips were bobbing directly below. Duane had my rangefinder, and he started whispering the distance. Fifty yards, 45 yards, 40.

I came to full draw just before the buck's eyeball cleared solid ground. He turned broadside, paused, and looked downhill toward the does. At 35 yards, his body looked as big as a barn. His antlers glittered in the early morning sunlight.

My Easton arrow and G5 broadhead smashed home with a satisfying thump. The buck wheeled in a circle and pitched on his nose. Duane and I were soon admiring his heavy, 180-inch rack.

The next day, Greta and I crossed the border again into northern Montana en route to our home in Wyoming.

"Do we need masks?" I asked the U.S. Customs official.

"Hell no," he said with a giant grin. "This is the United States of America!"

It was good to be on native soil again, but I was already thinking about my next Alberta mule deer hunt. Maybe Prius the weird-racked buck would be back where I could stalk him again, and he might be even bigger in 2022.

I can hardly wait. **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

STUDY THE REGS BEFORE YOU GO

IT IS WISE to review game regulations for every area you plan to hunt — particularly places you've never been before. Different states and provinces have different rules, and some might be overlooked if you don't get facts ahead of time.

For example, I once bowhunted deer in the Midwest at the invitation of a large property owner. I had never visited that state before. My host was also a license vendor, so he issued me a whitetail tag and told me to go hunt.

"What about the \$5 archery stamp?" I asked.

He had a puzzled look as he pawed through his game department paperwork.

"Oh yeah, I guess you need that, too," he admitted.

Later that day, a game warden checked my license. Thank goodness the archery stamp was attached.

Rules vary considerably from place to place regarding trail-camera use, padlocks or cases for bows during transport or, as was the case on my recent Alberta muley hunt, how the game department defines a particular kind of deer where species sometimes interbreed.

It is impossible to second-guess the myriad hunting rules across North America. Do your research, and don't accidentally break the law!

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TRADITIONAL WAY

FRED EICHLER | TRADITIONAL EDITOR

My anticipation is often heightened by early season photography trips.



ANTICIPATION

A SUCCESSFUL SEASON DOESN'T ALWAYS MEAN FILLED TAGS.

I HAD BEEN LOOKING forward to it for months. First, I couldn't believe she had actually agreed to go. I had even bragged to a few of my buddies about it. When the big evening came, I felt ridiculous and uncomfortable. My practiced moves were forgotten, and I felt awkward and out of place on the waxed gym floor.

Despite all the anticipation, my first high school prom had not turned out like I wanted. I vowed I would never go to another one, and that I would never wear a cummerbund again — a promise I have kept.

Well, hunting season is almost upon us, and like that prom night, it seems I have been waiting a long time for it to get here. My anticipation is running high, and like you, I have hopes of being successful.

I've learned over the years, that the anticipation of hunting season is the best part. For example, when I am daydreaming about the upcoming year, the animals always come into range, turn

broadside, and look away. In my dreams I never miss, and the weather is perfect.

Truth is, it won't be long before I'll be sweating it out in an antelope blind. I will probably get chewed up by mosquitos and will undoubtedly spot a black widow spider in my blind. I will worry it will bite me if I nod off to sleep and accidentally lean my head into its web, so I will spend the entire day wide awake, which is probably good since I have also had rattlesnakes slide into my blind looking for shade.

I also know it will also probably rain right before season and all the bucks I have seen hitting my small waterhole will disperse and drink out of one of

the many other puddles created by the downpour on the high-desert plains.

I hope that last paragraph doesn't lead you to believe I'm not an optimist, because I am. In fact, I believe all bowhunters have to be optimists, or we would give up on our sport for something easier — like rock climbing.

Then we could just get our meat from the store like most people, having let someone else kill the animal, clean it, wrap it, and freeze it for us. I'm not making fun of people who do this, because there have been many years where my bad luck or poor hunting skills have forced me to go the store-bought route if I wanted to eat meat of any kind.

What is funny to me is that despite knowing the difference between anticipation and reality, I'm still super-excited every year. Things work out just often enough when hunting to keep me coming back. I am successful just enough to never lose interest, and to never get bored. My success just may come in different forms.

Even though my stated goal is to kill an animal to eat, I often find success without being successful. Sometimes, success is a day of perfect weather, or a blind without a black widow in it. Other times, it's calling in a bull elk or just having one scream back at me in defiance.

Take last year for example, when I



The difference between anticipation and reality is sometimes harsh.

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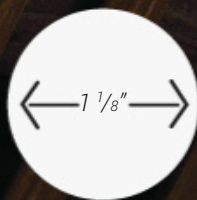
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TRADITIONAL WAY



Like all of you, I'm looking forward to hunting season this year.

rattled-in a bull using two old elk sheds. I had called-in said bull once before, and he was wiser as a result.

He would respond to me after that first close encounter but wouldn't come out of his bed in the thick cover. When

I started working the sheds to sound like two bulls fighting in his territory, he couldn't stand it anymore.

I didn't get that bull, but I considered the day a huge success since my addition of the shed-rattling had

fooled him into coming in again. At least it did before I missed him, and he took off to new country and I never saw him again.

This year, I'm hopeful for another successful season, so I'm doing everything I can to help increase my odds. I am already running trail cameras and getting some awesome photos that are giving me high hopes for some of my hunting areas. I'm already spending some time afield glassing, as well as taking some wildlife photos when I get the opportunity. I'm hanging treestands and making some small adjustments like trimming shooting lanes, putting up lifelines, and screwing in bow hangers. I am setting up some pop-up blinds and making sure I have room to draw with my recurve or my longbow. I'm scouting some new areas too, so I have even more options on places to hunt if the old spots don't pan out. I hope you have a successful season as well, no matter where you hope to find it.

Well, I have to finish this up and get to the store. Since I missed that bull last year, I don't have any meat in the freezer... **BH**

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



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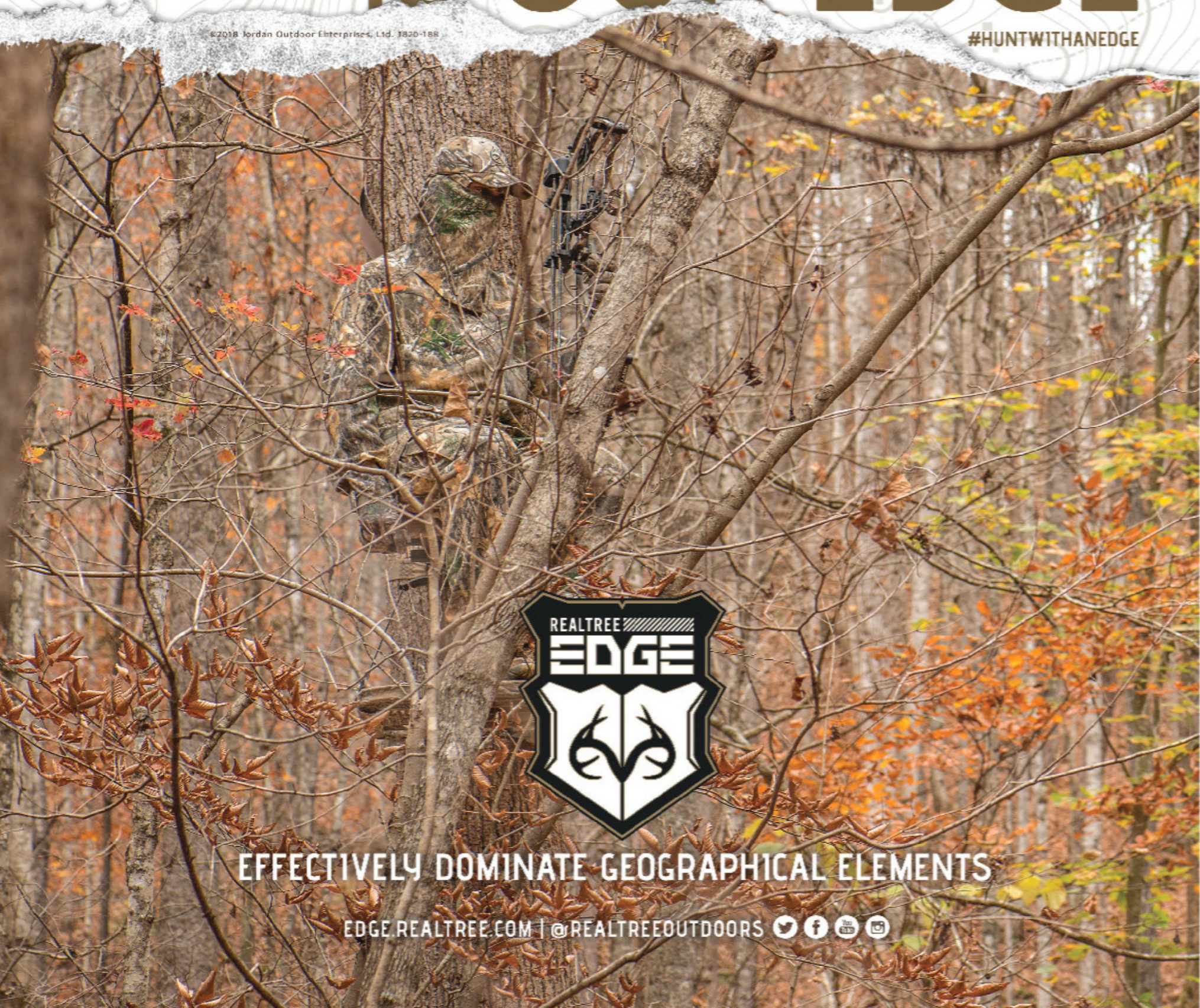
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TRIED AND TRUE

BRIAN K. STRICKLAND | EQUIPMENT EDITOR



A GOOD FALL food plot can pay dividends year after year.

FALL PLOT PREP

TOOLS TO HELP YOU DEVELOP AND ENHANCE YOUR KILL PLOTS THIS FALL.

FOR WELL OVER a decade now, food plots have been an element of the farms I have hunted. Although I fought the urge to jump on the food-plot bandwagon when it seemed to be the latest flavor of the month, I've since changed my tune. Fact is: A good food plot in the right location and hunted at the right time of year simply works!

One of the best whitetail bowhunts I ever experienced was on the inside edge of a secluded food plot. At the time, it was simply a place where the does wanted to be as they headed to a larger ag field, and with the calendar just flipping to November, the bucks did, too.

I bet every deer on the property visited the small plot that evening, and when the sun finally dipped below the horizon, one of the bucks I was after showed up.

He strolled onto the plot as if he owned it — hitting each scrape with vigor as he did. When he finally nosed the scrape in

front of me, my arrow zipped through his chest and he darted into the timber. I couldn't help but smile, knowing that this food plot had paid off once again.

As much as I remember every detail of that hunt, I also remember the sweat equity it took to make it happen. Whether you're wanting to clear a small kill plot or create a destination plot designed to benefit the health of your deer herd, there's simply more to it than just breaking some ground and spreading some seed.

Lucky for us, there's no shortage of tools to create and enhance our food-plots, and if you're short on equipment or just want to make a secret spot a little better, **BioLogic's** (plantbiologic.com) [1] *Hot Spot No-Till* (\$19.99) blend is a great option. Like many bowhunters, I tend to gravitate toward these hidden gems, and more than once some type of no-till blend has made them a little better. As its name suggests, BioLogic's blend requires no soil tilling: simply clear the ground, apply seed, and watch it grow. This fast-germinating mix of wheat, deer radish, rye, and rape plants easy and is awesome when it comes to attracting deer.

Clover is another can't-miss forage in most regions in the fall, but it's also a protein-rich food that holds its own the rest of the year as well. Developed as a backbone for any long-term food plot, **Big Tine's** (bigtine.com) [2] *Foundation Clover* (\$29.99) is a five-clover blend with three drought-tolerant perennials for persistent success up to five years, plus two faster-growing sweet annuals that kickstart the plot until the perennials have time to develop.

Another way to keep deer interested throughout the whole season is the new [3] *Southern Greens* (\$24.99) blend from **Antler King** (antlerking.com). Powered by collard greens and radishes, it's resistant to both drought and cold, making it extremely palatable regardless of the time of year. Although its name may throw you off a little, this blend of brassicas, winter wheat, and oats are just as effective up north.



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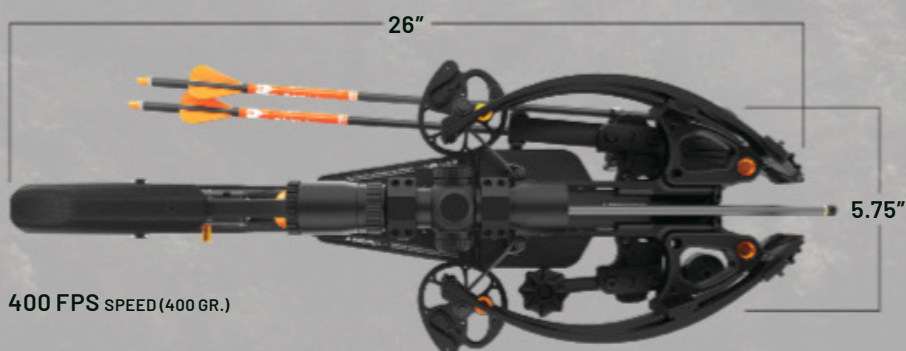
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AccuForage's (accuforage.com) [4] **Fall Frenzy** (\$38.50) is a protein-rich brassica-based blend that's both beneficial and irresistible to deer. Its three main ingredients contain 20% or higher protein, which is a must for establishing good deer health. Fall Frenzy contains hybrid forage brassicas, rape, turnip, radish, and other versatile forage that will withstand cold, warm, and dry conditions.

Diversity can be important if you only have one spot to scatter seed, and [5] **The Perfect 10** (\$26.99) from **Ani-Logics Outdoors** (anilogics.com) would certainly qualify. A popular annual, it combines 10 whitetail-preferred forages that provide essential nutrients and attraction from early fall deep into the late season. This smorgasbord includes Ani-Crush winter wheat, rye, oats, winter peas, clover, radish, collards, turnips, sugar beets, and rape.

It's no secret how sweet-tasting brassicas act like a magnet when bucks are in a post-rut recovery mode. To keep your herd's interest when the temperatures dip, try one of the latest from **Boss Buck** (boss-buck.com) — [6] **Final Destination Sugar Beet & Turnip Seed Blend** (\$34.95). The 4-lb. bag covers a half-acre, making it per-

fect for new micro-plots, or as a supplement to an existing one. This blend provides the late-season nutrients and energy deer need for the tough winter months.

Another sweet-tasting option for the late-season is the [7] **Rack'M Radish Pro** (\$19.99) from **Evolved** (evolved.com). It's blended with Evolved's ProGro Biostimulant, which is a proprietary seed coating that has been proven to grow healthier plants with more forage per acre. This annual combines daikon radishes with a special T-Raptor rape and turnip hybrid that regrows throughout the season.

If you're needing a blend to supplement an existing plot or maybe add to a harvested bean or milo field, **Domain's** (domainoutdoor.com) [8] **Green Machine** (\$24.99) would be a good choice. Designed to stay green all winter, it consists of a variety of wheat, rye, oats, winter peas, forage rape, and radish. This quick-germinating mix was specifically chosen for its pH and cold-weather tolerance.

Sometimes, dirt needs a little boost to make it come alive, and **Whitetail Institute's** (whitetailinstitute.com) [9] **Impact Soil Amendment** (\$59.98) is the cure. Designed to treat soil with low pH

levels either before sowing seed or to an emerging or existing plot, simply mix with water and apply to create high-yielding, nutritious plots. Its size makes it ideal for hard-to-reach locations, and it certainly beats lugging bags of pellet lime to said hotspots.

Another water-based supplement to try if you're worried that your plot will be a little skinny this season due to drought, insects, or soil that's not up to snuff, is [10] **PlotBoost** (\$24.99) from **DeerGro** (deergro.com). With its complex blend of carbohydrates, amino acids, and micronutrients not found in traditional fertilizers, all that's needed from you is to mix it with water before application, and then let the magic begin. The 32-oz. bottle covers up to an acre and can be applied with hand-pump, backpack, ATV/UTV, or tractor sprayers.

If you're a one-man operation and don't have access to a tractor, the **GroundHog Max** (groundhogmax.com) [11] **Plow** (\$349) is an affordable and effective alternative. Its unique design centers the discs directly under the ATV/UTV's own weight to ensure it digs deep enough for an effective seedbed. It weighs 43 lbs. and is fully adjustable for depth.



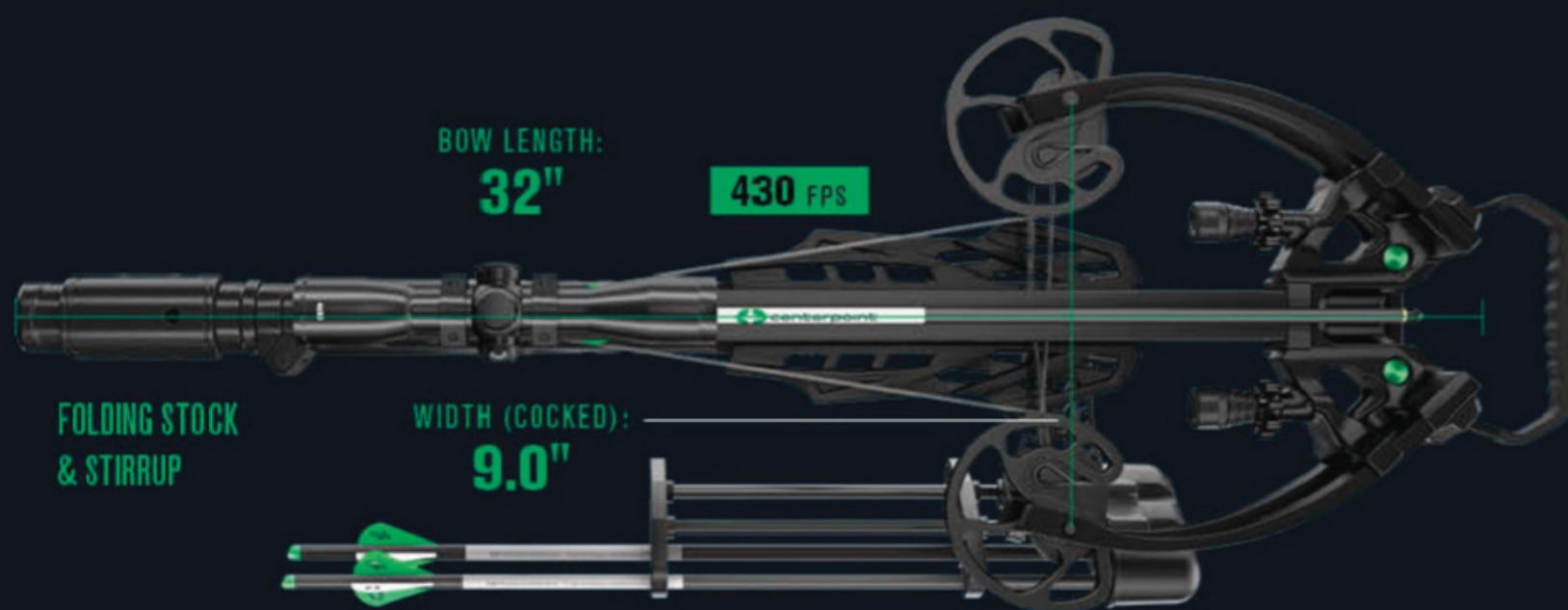
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When you need a simple solution to broadcast your seed, **EarthWay's** (earthway.com) [12] **2750 Bag Spreader** (\$64) might be the best solo option. It's fitted with a corrosion, tear, and weather-resistant nylon hopper that holds up to 25 lbs. of your favorite blend. With a simple crank of the handle, it spreads seed evenly. It's fitted with a flow-rate adjustment valve and on/off control switch to limit waste, and it folds up for easy storage.

Edging the food plot with an attractant can certainly add a little extra draw to your setup, and the **Hunters Specialties** (hunterspec.com) [13] **NFUZE**

(\$14.99) would be a top contender to do just that. Teaming up with Rackology, HS developed a scientific blend of protein, minerals, and vitamins that are designed to dramatically increase overall herd health, immune system, antler growth, and reproduction.

Another attractant designed to draw in the action is the [14] **BB2 Cube** (\$24.99) from the folks at **Big&J** (bigandj.com). Offering the highest protein-to-salt ratio available today, it is specifically designed for those hard-to-reach locations and would be a great addition to any existing plots. Essentially, it's a

compressed form of Big&J's popular BB2, which has built quite a reputation over the years as a healthy supplement and attractant.

One of the latest attractants from **Moultrie** (moultriefeeders.com) that seems to be holding its own on one of my farms is the [15] **Deer Magnet Drip Bag** (\$19.99). Available in a berry and apple blend, it's essentially a flavored, natural trace-mineral salt that you hang over an existing mineral site, or you can use it to develop a new one. When it rains, it creates a drip-mineral attractant that whitetails really seem to enjoy. **BH**

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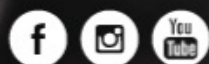
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THE EMPTY QUIVER

DANNY FARRIS



Just because bulls aren't talking doesn't mean calling won't be effective. Remain confident, and every time you use your call, assume that it's going to work.

COURTESY BUGLES

STRATEGIES FOR DEALING WITH SILENT BULLS.

WITH THE SEASON'S END fast approaching, my good friend JD Gossage and I had decided to take a quick weekend trip to some public land not far from home. Earlier in the year, we had packed in and hunted up near timberline, but with this short weekend trip, we intended to stay lower in heavy timber. It was late September, and our plan was simple — get a rutting bull to answer our calls and kill him.

We started out early, diligently setting up each time we stopped to call, nocking an arrow, and then silently waiting several minutes before moving on. We covered several miles that morning, and as the day wore on, the monotony started to wear on us.

By that afternoon, our discipline started to wane. Without consciously thinking about it, we'd gradually stopped being as selective about where we stopped to

call. The time we spent waiting after each sequence of calls became shorter and shorter, until eventually we were doing nothing more than throwing out a high-pitched squeal and a couple of cow calls — listening momentarily for a response, and then moving on.

By the time evening arrived, we were tired, a long way from camp, and frustrated by the lack of any response. I led the way with JD in tow; both of us were

simply covering ground and not paying much attention. I stopped, put my grunt tube to my lips, let out a squeal, and then followed it with a few cow calls. Nothing.

Without pausing for more than a few seconds, I looked at the ground just ahead of my boots and started to trudge forward, and then something exploded ahead of me. Startled by the sound, JD and I looked up to see a nice bull swapping ends at just over 20 yards, and with-

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THE EMPTY QUIVER

out so much as an arrow on a string, we watched as butts and elbows disappeared through the timber.

The cursing that followed was both poetic and pathetic. The least these bulls could have done was give us a little courtesy bugle to let us know they were coming. Is that too much to ask? Unfortunately, it often is.

I can't recall how many times this exact scenario has burned me, but it's more times than I'd like to admit. In recent years, I've become more disciplined. For some, calling elk isn't their preferred method of hunting. I've known some very successful elk hunters who prefer to spot and stalk the same way they hunt velvet muleys. For me, however, the calling aspect is what makes elk the most thrilling animal on the planet to hunt with a bow. Don't get me wrong, if I have an opportunity to put the sneak on a big bull, I'm going to do it. But, that's definitely not my favorite way to hunt them.

So how does an elk-calling nut handle it when the bulls aren't talking? Here are some of the methods I've found to be most helpful.

Rule Number One

My first rule is to always assume your calls are going to work. While this might seem easy and obvious, I assure you it's not — especially when you've been calling all week with no response. Have confidence and remain optimistic, so you'll be ready to capitalize when the opportunity finally presents itself.

Select Your Setups With Purpose

Don't get caught in the trap of simply stopping wherever you happen to be standing and hitting a call. It's an easy habit to get drawn into. Pick your calling spots purposefully.

The first question to ask yourself is, what kind of shooting lanes do I have? Choose positions that give you some visibility of an incoming bull. Next, ask yourself how far will a bull be able to hear me? Choose spots that aren't boxed-in by terrain. It's amazing how limiting a hill between you and a bull can be.

Wait After Each Calling Sequence

This is the one that has burned me most throughout my career. It's very easy to get lazy as a hunt draws on and



Bulls frequently come to calls silently. Be sure to give them time after each calling sequence and remain alert. Your patience will eventually pay off big!

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to stop giving bulls time to show up after you call. Both early season bulls that are just starting to think about gathering cows and late-season bulls that have been called to, can be very hesitant to respond.

Oftentimes, their reaction to hearing a call will be to sneak in quietly. Just because a bull didn't respond doesn't mean he's not going to come and investigate, so follow my first rule and assume he's on his way by giving him time to get

there. Break this rule too often, and it's only a matter of time before you'll experience exactly what JD and I did earlier in this article.

Use Multiple Calls

Some successful elk hunters have a favorite call. Typically, it's a go-to squeal that they swear will motivate a bull to answer.

While high-pitched squeals are generally good choices for generating responses, I've witnessed bulls that I swear have a favorite sound that fires them up,

and nothing else seems to work. Sometimes that sound ends up being cow calls from a diaphragm; sometimes from a bite-and-blow-style call; sometimes a chuckle, or even a whistle through a grunt tube.

One year, I was guiding a client who had an old bite-and-blow call hanging around his neck. After several series of beautiful-sounding calls with my diaphragm, we got no response.

The client then asked if I'd mind if he gave it a try. When he did, it sounded like a cat got its tail slammed in a door. But seconds later, a bull hammered back at him.

I tried my distinguished calling again with no success, but every time my client would "slam the cat's tail in the door," the bull fired off. For whatever reason, the bull would only respond to that sound. I don't know why, but I've found that it pays to have a variety of calls with which to experiment.

Learn Bedroom Talk

A few years back, a Colorado guide named Don Latham showed me the value of being able to call softly. While soft cow calls aren't usually a problem, learning to make soft bull vocalizations was much more difficult.

At first, I didn't understand the value of this skill, but Don was a master of it. Even call-shy bulls seldom stop calling all together. They still need to communicate with their cows, so they often just quiet their calling dramatically, making soft bugles that the cows in the immediate vicinity can hear but that you'd never hear from several hundred yards away.

What Don taught me was that call-shy bulls might not answer if you're hammering at them from a distance, but if you slip into their bedroom and use soft bull vocalizations they'll frequently come check you out. This is a great mid-day tactic. Just remember that you need to get within their comfort zone and that bugling softly takes practice. Mastering this skill, though, will produce results.

Remain Vigilant

Dealing with call-shy bulls can be a challenge. It would be nice if they would just be courteous and give us a bugle to let us know they're around, but sometimes bull elk are just plain rude. Keep these tactics in mind next time you're seeing fresh elk sign but are getting no responses. Give special consideration to Rule Number One. If every time you call you truly assume it's going to work, you'll avoid many of the most common mistakes. **BH**

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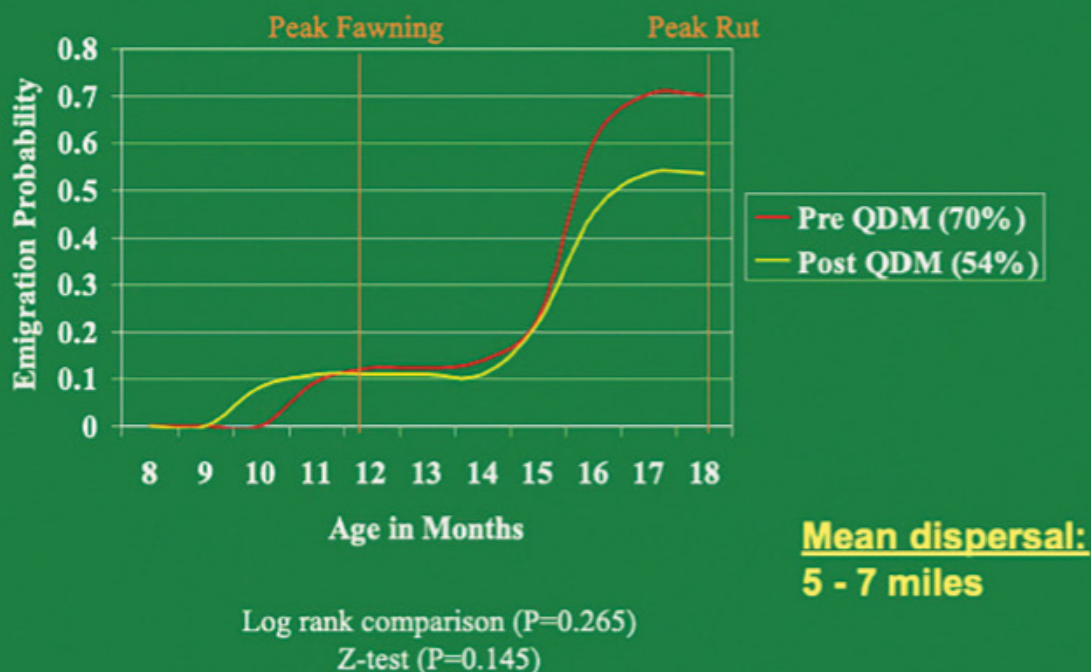
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HUNTING WHITETAILS

C.J. WINAND

Emigration probability curves



DISPERSAL IS JUST a fact of life for many yearling bucks. Biologists know that around 20%-25% of dispersing bucks will leave their maternal range in spring (June), while 75% will leave in the fall (November). Why do bucks disperse? Many believe it's Mother Nature's way of ensuring genetic diversity for the deer herd. You also may have noticed these are the dates when peak numbers of road-killed deer occur.

VANISHED?

DISPERSALS AND EXCURSIONS MAY EXPLAIN WHY A SPECIFIC BUCK LEFT YOUR AREA, OR WHY A NEW BUCK HAS JUST SHOWED UP.

BOWHUNTERS PAY THOUSANDS of dollars each year for just one opportunity to release an arrow at a buck. Although many people won't ever understand this logic, bowhunters know when they choose archery gear over a firearm the rewards are magnified.

This decision to make things harder challenges every bowhunter. Yet, all the hardships we encounter are fully accepted by those who hunt with bow and arrow.

We have all employed elaborate tactics when trying to kill a specific buck, only to have our best-laid plans go down in flames. While there may be no specific answers as to what happened,

there is biological data that may help us understand why our target buck disappeared. Besides increased hunting pressure, understanding some natural deer-movement behaviors may provide us with answers as to where the buck went.

Dispersal

As a young boy, I recall hearing my Pap say, "Those bucks are smart; they al-

ways let the doe lead the herd." Although this may sometimes be true, for the first 12-18 months of a buck's life, he's basically following his mother.

Dispersal is when a young buck leaves his maternal home range and sets up a new one. Different research has shown about 50% to 75% of all bucks between 12 and 18 months of age will disperse roughly 5 to 7 miles away from their maternal home range, depending on the existing habitat.

Bucks living in open environments will disperse farther than those living in the big woods. Data from prairie states have found many of these bucks will travel more than 30 miles. Although probably an outlier, the record is one young buck in South Dakota that moved 131 miles away from where he was born.

With bucks leaving their mothers, they are basically "orphans" for the first time in their life. And while a young buck is learning his new terrain, research has shown these dispersing orphans have a higher death rate than those that don't leave their natal home range.

Many biologists believe spring dispersals (May/June) by yearling bucks have something to do with maternal aggression. This is most likely due to fawning season, when the adult doe establishes a new area for her soon-to-be-born fawns.

The fall dispersal (November) also includes female aggression, but most likely also includes a buck's social position within his population. The conclusion on dispersal is simple: The yearling buck you had on trail camera that then abruptly disappeared, may have in fact left the building! And for whatever reason, a Pennsylvania study found spring buck dispersal averaged 5.6 miles, whereas the fall dispersers only went 3 miles.

The good news is, there's an easy management option to reduce the number of yearling bucks from dispersing from your Back 40. The answer is to tip over the adult doe.

For example, when an adult doe, yearling buck, and two fawns show up under



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your stand, taking the doe increases the chances of the yearling buck staying in your hunting area. This is because you've eliminated the maternal-aggression factor. Better yet, if you take out the doe earlier in the season, you can help increase the food supply in the area while also reducing the buck-to-doe ratio, which will only help to intensify the rut.

Additionally, a Maryland study showed you could reduce the buck-dispersal percentage in your area from 70% to 54% by implementing a quality deer management program where you implement a 15-inch inside spread and an aggressive doe harvest.

Up to this point, I've been talking about yearling buck dispersal, but yearling does also disperse from their maternal home range. Yearling doe dispersion has been recorded up to 25%, but the norm is between 10% and 20%.

We used to believe when there's not enough groceries to feed the deer in an area, dispersal of both sexes will increase. Current research has determined deer-density rates do not affect dispersal rates.

Excursions

Excursions are any occasion where a

buck or doe leaves its established home range for more than 12 hours and travels more than 1 mile outside of its boundaries before returning. Documented cases of excursions from South Texas, Maryland, Pennsylvania, and Tennessee have found both sexes and all age classes of deer. Although excursions are more related to the rutting times of the year (60%), we now know they can happen throughout the year (40%).

Of the bucks that make excursions, about 50% will make more than one excursion throughout the year. The average distance they travel outside their home range during an excursion is 1.5 miles away, but research has shown there is a lot of individuality in excursions. One buck went over 8 miles away from his established home range.

How long do deer stay outside their established home range? Time varies from 2 hours to a few days, but the majority of deer returned home within 16 hours.

Biologists don't know why excursions happen, but we do know that 78% of all deer will make an excursion at some point during the year. Compared to yearling deer dispersal, deer excursions exhibited: 1) The averaged distances

moved are not as far; 2) Movement over the landscape is much faster; and 3) The travel path is much more complex.

Some biologists believe deer that exhibit excursions are the ones that do not disperse; others believe it's simply a case of learning a new area. Either way, excursions occur year-round, and there's no way to predict when or how far a deer will take off. The good news is, all the deer that take excursions eventually come back home. **BH**

C.J.'S SUMMARY: When you consider all the time and energy you put into your hunting area, dispersal and excursion behavior of bucks and does can leave you heartbroken at times. This is primarily because the distances traveled for both dispersal and excursions are well outside a landowner's property boundary. Dispersal and excursions can also be the answer to why you no longer see specific bucks on your property.

On the flipside, they might also be the reasons why you see new bucks in your hunting area. Whatever the case, maintaining quality habitat throughout the year is the key to keeping more deer under your stand.



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BUGS AND BOMBS

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Winter Ticks Killing Moose Calves

IN THE NORTHEASTERN areas of America and Canada, research is finding that winter ticks are really bad for moose calves. Research done in Alberta in the late 1990s showed the same thing, but now things are worse. Here's why:

In recent years, the moose population in Maine has been growing. Same is true for New Hampshire and southern Canada. As moose numbers grew, tick numbers did, too. Ticks hatch from eggs in the fall and the tick larvae then climb onto a passing moose calf. They'll feed on blood from the calf all winter, and the larvae then reach adult size from February till early May. After feeding, the fe-

male ticks drop off in the leaf litter. Then in early summer, each tick lays up to 4,000 eggs. In early fall, these eggs hatch and the larvae climb onto vegetation waiting for a host (often a moose calf). When a moose calf walks by, it can pick up thousands of larval ticks. The larvae, nymphs, and adults feed on the calf's blood for months, and the health of the calf ultimately deteriorates.

Climate change has led to warmer and longer fall weather in recent years. This means that moose are exposed to more ticks before snow arrives. This leads to situations where a single moose gets infected by as many as 100,000 ticks in one season. The moose gets inflamed skin and rubs on trees, causing hair loss. Both adults and calves can rub so much that they rub off much of their hair, giving them a gray color. These moose were called "ghost" moose before people knew what was causing this. Of course, rubbing off fur in winter isn't good for the moose.

The death rate for calves in Maine has reached an all-time high due to ticks. Researchers there radio-collared 79 moose calves in one winter, and 60 were dead by May. The 86-percent mortality was the highest ever recorded in Maine. Those huge numbers of ticks cause calves to literally bleed to death over winter and early spring.

Winter ticks on moose are not transmitting disease, only feeding on the same moose, over and over. If a moose calf has 30,000 winter ticks, in March and April the daily proportion of total blood volume lost is almost 60 percent. Replacing that lost blood is more difficult when forage is reduced in late winter. Thus, survival at these levels is nearly impossible for the calf. Adult bull moose with 30,000 winter ticks have a daily proportion of total blood volume loss of 18 percent, and cow moose lose 15 percent. That's still not good, but it's survivable.

What can be done? To determine whether a reduction in the moose population can lessen the impacts of winter ticks, Maine has set aside a large area with moose harvests increased in half that area. The study will go on till 2025, and I'll update you as that progresses. One thing is certain: Climate change is impacting moose calf survival, and it is doing that via winter ticks.

Ukraine War Impacting Wildlife

Most of us knew little about Ukraine when it was attacked by Russia. Actu-

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ally, we still don't know a lot, except that bombs are destroying buildings and people are leaving their homes. A little research shows that Ukraine covers 233,000 square miles, which is about the size of Texas. Around 30 million people live in Texas, and 40 million live in Ukraine.

Ukraine is a beautiful country, with lots of wildlife and wildlife habitat. Troop movements, sewage from bombed septic systems polluting fresh water, and forest fires caused by bombs are all impacting wildlife, migrating waterfowl, and wildlife management.

Ukraine has many important wildlife preserves, and some have been devastated by the war. Money from ecotourism has been lost. Some have suggested that the impacts of the war on Ukrainian wildlife maybe never be repaired. Truly sad on many fronts.

Don't Fence Me In

As the world's human population continues to grow, so does our need for fences. In 2009, I drove across Nebraska on the way home from the Pope and Young Convention in Colorado. Interstate 80 runs 480 miles across Nebraska,

with fencing on both sides of the highway. Along the highway, a car was parked with its emergency lights blinking. I slowed and noticed a man standing by the four-foot, welded-wire fence that also had two strands of barbed wire across the top.

Apparently he was trying to rescue a deer caught in the fence, so I stopped. The doe was bawling and in trouble, and from all appearances it had been there a long time. I have no idea how the man spotted the deer, but now he had a big file and was trying to use it to cut the fence's welded wires. I helped the man with the file, and after 15 minutes we broke the wire and helped the deer escape.

Her leg appeared hurt, and she moved away slowly at first. But after 50 yards, she kicked it into high gear and disappeared. Wet from the morning dew, as we went back to our cars we felt like we'd accomplished something.

Fences are everywhere, and livestock fencing isn't used only in our country. In Africa, livestock fences inhibit the normal movement of many migratory species. Since 9/11, the trend in many parts of the world is to build security fences to keep people from moving from one country to another, especially in rural areas. That explains why there's a 2,200-mile fence sepa-

rating Mongolia from China. One radio-collared gazelle was tracked for 20 days along 30 miles of that fence that it wanted to cross.

As noted above, sometimes animals get tangled up in a fence and die from starvation. It happens all the time somewhere in the world. Of course, there's the fence we've heard a lot about that separates parts of the U.S. and Mexico, but similar fences between countries are being built all over the world. Maybe some are necessary, but none are good for wildlife.

We've got an estimated 620,000 miles of fences in the Western U.S. One paper I read noted that we have become "fence-blind." We drive by these fences, and they've been there forever, yet we just don't see them anymore. We see the cattle but not the fences. And we see the antelope but don't recognize the problems fences cause for them.

Fences prevent migration, concentrate wildlife, and thereby lead to disease and even genetic problems in certain species. They keep wildlife from water and alter natural predation. Obviously, the ecological repercussions of fencing are complex, but we need to pay more attention to the wildlife consequences of these fences. **BH**

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HE was calm and confident, as if no other bull had dared to challenge him in years. After admiring his harem in the early morning light, the bull I called “Mega” headed downhill and out of sight with a swagger I hadn’t seen before. His cows remained scattered and clearly had alternative plans. After watching the first few cows filter into the adjacent timber patch and hearing Mega scream with annoyance below them, I knew he’d likely turn back and follow them. To have a shot, I needed to get to that timberline — quick!

There were about a dozen cows, all within sight of where I needed to be. The herd was working through some scattered, young Douglas fir saplings that provided little cover for me,

so I stayed low and used a slight rise in the terrain between us to my advantage.

Despite my making good progress, Mega came up a small brushy drainage between us faster than expected. Initially, I was only able to see the white tips of his massive antlers above the brush, but I expected him to eventually turn and head uphill toward the timber and his cows. I was still too far away and needed to quickly close the gap by at least 20 yards.

Despite one cow in clear view, I made a quick dash through an opening to where I could set up for a shot. She caught the movement and sprinted for the timber. Mega followed. It was now or never, so I let out a cow call to stop them.

Quartering-away, they both froze at the edge of the timber

THE

AN OREGON GIANT

**NEW OREGON STATE
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TYPICAL ROOSEVELT ELK**

***WHEN A ONCE-IN-
A-LIFETIME ANIMAL
GIVES YOU A SHOT,
YOU MUST FIND A WAY
TO MAKE IT HAPPEN.***

BH
FEATURES

for a better look, just as I took one last reading with my range-finder — 86 yards — still too far. I couldn't take that chance.

After a frustrating moment of regal stillness, Mega and the cow turned and hit the timber, leaving me mesmerized and heartbroken following my two-hour stalk. I'd never seen such an impressive bull! Hearing loud crashing and one final bugle, I figured Mega was pushing his herd to safer country. With rifle season approaching, I thought to myself, *Well, that may be the last time I get to see Mega.* Little did I know, later that day I'd get a second chance.

It was September 26, 2021, the last day to fill my general season Oregon archery elk tag. Hunting had been tough. Despite numerous interactions and a couple close calls, my

girlfriend, Jessica, and I were both sitting on un-notched tags. It was her first season chasing Roosevelt elk through the thick timber of the Oregon Coast with a bow, and Jessica was humbled by the difficulty of the challenge. We'd spent multiple weekends tracking and pursuing elk that didn't want to play. Calling hadn't resulted in much opportunity, and as anyone who has attempted it before knows, stalking elk in Western Oregon and successfully finding a shooting window without being noticed is a tall order. It had been a physically and emotionally draining season.

The previous day, after hiking about six miles chasing bugles and ending up in a claustrophobic thicket, tensions were high. I broke the camel's back when I turned back to

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MEGA—AN OREGON GIANT

It was mind-blowing to think that a bull could survive long enough to reach this size, given where he lived.

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SPYPOINT LINK-BIRD-41

search for my quiver and arrows that had somehow been ripped from my bow and lost in the thick brush behind us. To better our odds (and for the sake of our relationship), we decided to give each other some space on the last day.

I headed to a different spot — an area close to home, where I'd had success in the past but had stayed clear of out of respect for family and friends. Now they were either done or hunting elsewhere, so they'd given me the green light. A friend had arrowed a herd bull there two days prior, giving me hope that elk would still be in the area.

I got an early start, and after hiking about a mile and 650 vertical feet, I could see the valley floor below me. It was still dark when I looked back and saw headlights parking at another access point.

Annoyed and not wanting to deal with competition, I decided to push deeper. The closest logged units, where I generally like to be at first light when spotting and stalking Roosevelts, were another two miles in. By the time I got to where the clearcuts could be seen through an opening in the timber, the sun had risen just enough to illuminate an elk. Despite low light, and the elk still almost a mile away, I knew instantly it was a good bull.

Mega was a nomadic bull. I knew of him mainly because of my brother Evan — a hunting and fishing guide and the owner of Coast Land Outfitters LLC. He'd had a few encounters with Mega over the years. I'd also heard rumors from others of a giant 7x7 bull being seen in some far-reaching places and, from descriptions, assumed it was him.

In September alone, Mega had been observed traveling seven miles between herds of cows in a single day. He came and went quickly, and was difficult to pattern. Challenging topography, almost impenetrable brush, and a check-

erboard of land ownership made him tough to hunt.

The fact that he lived long enough to become such a monster still surprises me. Bulls even close to his caliber are extremely rare in the country where he lived. His instinct to keep moving along, combined with his seemingly unusual intelligence (and probably a little luck), all contributed to my good fortune on that late-September day.

Crushed by defeat and still dumbfounded by it all, I called Evan to break the news of my failed stalk. That being my first encounter with Mega, I was eager to share my experience with someone who would appreciate it.

"What an incredible bull!" I repeated multiple times. After dotting for a few



After pushing deeper into the mountains to get away from other hunters, I was able to take a photo of Mega standing in a clearcut.



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MEGA—AN OREGON GIANT

moments, we agreed it was likely he and his herd had been bumped and were looking for new country. It felt unlikely I'd catch up with them, and even if I did, in the thick, brushy timber I'd likely spook them again. My new goal for the day was to get out ahead of them. Pursuing spooked elk from behind had never worked out well for me in the past.

After walking roughly a mile of gravel road, uphill and parallel to where the herd had entered the timber, it was pretty clear they had not crossed. After turning back in the direction I'd come from, I was overcome by curiosity and headed downhill off the gravel. Each time I thought I'd found a decent path to follow, I'd inevitably hit thickets of brush and downed trees that would push me in another direction. Honestly, I wasn't having fun! Beating my way through eye-high ferns and crawling under and over downed trees of all sizes, I'd occasionally let out soft cow and calf calls. If there was any chance of intercepting the herd, my best move was to convince them that I was an elk and not a clumsy, frustrated hunter.

If they ever responded, I didn't hear them. I came to an open bench in the timber, where I could finally see ahead. I was so relieved to be out of the brush that I took a short break and stretched out on my back for a moment to rest and reset.

After about a five-minute break, I continued in the direction where I'd

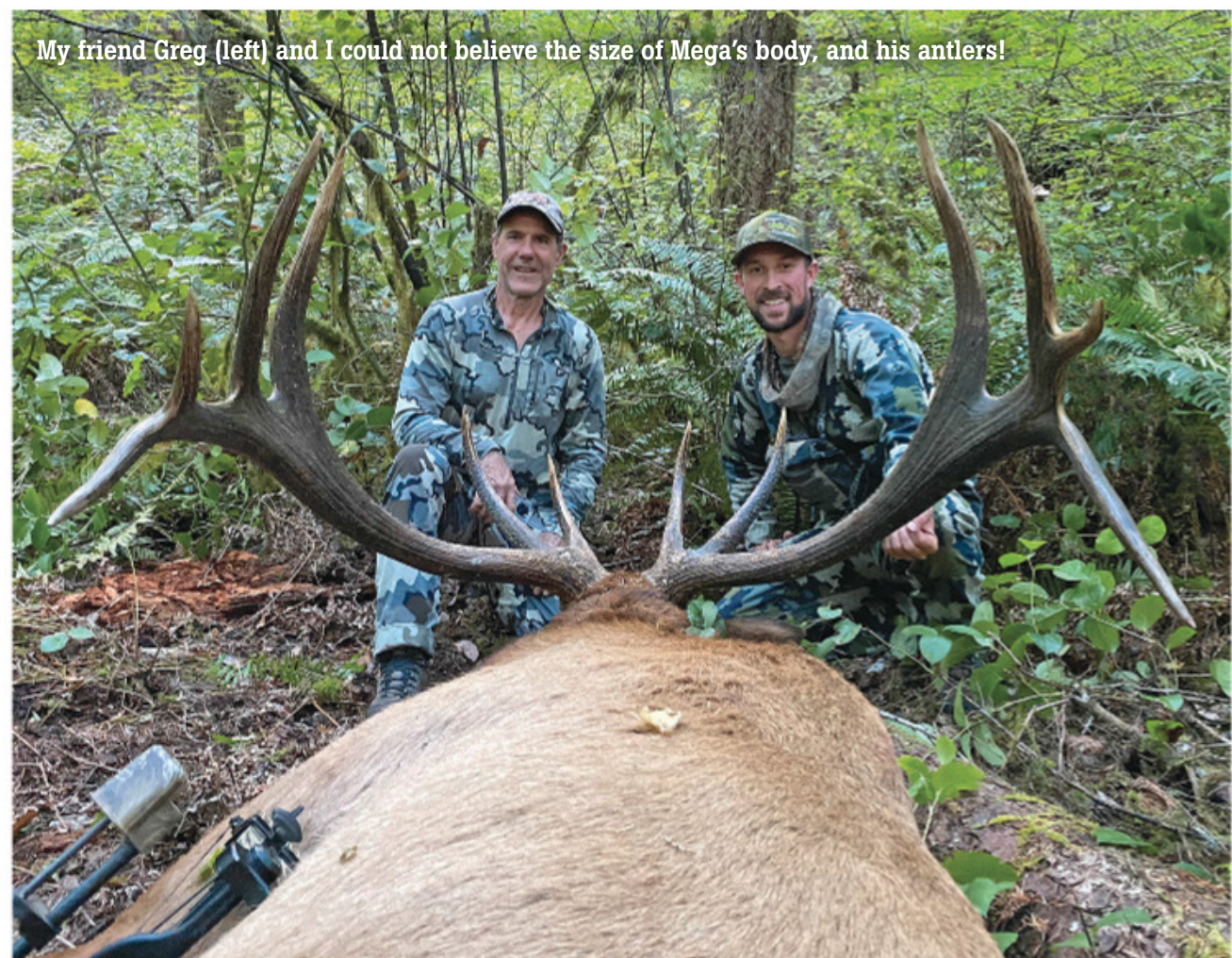
seen the herd leave the clearcut. At this point, using onX maps, I figured I was 300 yards from where they'd entered the timber, and I was really surprised that I hadn't cut any new elk tracks.

I was moving slowly, scanning the ground in all directions and zigzagging up and downhill as I went. The timber was fairly open at this point, and I began thinking it was likely the elk had spread out, which would make tracking them even more difficult.

I moved another 100 yards and still couldn't locate new tracks. I was now expecting to be able to see the clearcut through the timber and was scanning to find my best route out. As I squinted in search of an exit, I suddenly saw a slight movement 120 yards away in the dark timber. I eventually made out the silhouette of at least two elk and realized I'd picked up the twitch of an ear. It had been about four hours since my morning stalk, and the herd was still almost right where I'd left them!

But they were on high alert, and I was convinced they'd either heard or smelled me. Regardless, it didn't appear that they'd seen me yet. After making some frantic motions to my left, they settled down, turned uphill, and slowly began moving single-file to my right.

When a few of the elk started to feed, I felt confident I might still have a chance — but I needed to move. Mega's movement captured my full attention, as I began to strategize a plan of attack.



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My brother, Evan, is a strong man, but I'm pretty sure even he will admit packing out Mega's antlers was exhausting at times.

Instead of going straight at them, I followed a line where I thought we might intersect — correcting with each adjustment they made. Most of the cows moved slowly out of sight, providing fewer eyes to contend with. One cow was in clear view, standing beside an old-growth stump, and I watched her bed. Mega was behind her but hidden by trees and brush.

As I continued sneaking in her direction, Mega stepped into the picture and pushed her out of her bed. He was still about 90 yards out and facing slightly away from me, and he was preoccupied with raking some small vine maple.

The ground was loud, but fortunately I found a downed log running in his direction that provided me with a quiet path to walk. The next 30 yards took me 15 minutes to cover because I had to freeze each time his head turned my direction. I hit a dead-end when I came across a much larger downed tree crossing mine.

At this point, Mega was facing slightly in my direction, but there was a perfectly placed Douglas fir between us that blocked his view. I could see most of his body and one antler on each side of the tree.

I ranged Mega at 60 yards, and I vividly remember thinking to myself, *Oh, my God, I'm actually going to get a shot!* That's when my heart really started racing!

I took maybe 30 seconds to calm myself, and then draw my bow. My eyes were now focused on two small branches about halfway between us, leaving an opening of about a foot. By going into a partial-splits position, I was able set my

60-yard pin right at the bottom of the opening. Mega was quartering slightly toward me, so I carefully settled my pin right at the crease of his front shoulder and squeezed my release.

Despite hearing my arrow make an odd noise — probably touching a leaf in its path — the bull didn't jump the string and the arrow appeared to hit him right where I'd been aiming. Mega exploded out of sight, and I was left in silence.

There were a few quiet rustlings in the brush, but I never heard the familiar sounds of a spooked elk herd or a falling bull. I stood there in shock for a few moments before cow-calling and slowly moving forward to assess the scene. There was blood...and lots of it! I sat down, made a phone call, and began the long, restless wait.

Two hours later, Evan and my friend, Greg, helped me take up the blood trail, which turned out to be a short one. Mega had fallen only 60 yards from where I'd shot him!

The experience of walking up on him, especially with my brother and friend who had taught me so much over the years about hunting, was amazing. We hugged, high-fived, and did the usual celebration, but we all knew that this one was something special.

Everything about this bull had us shaking our heads in disbelief. His body was huge, but his antlers were like nothing I'd ever seen before. Being in the woods in that moment, with those two great guys and Mega, was a dream come true for me. **BH**

The author lives in Oregon and is a fisheries biologist and part-time hunting and fishing guide for Coast Land Outfitters LLC.

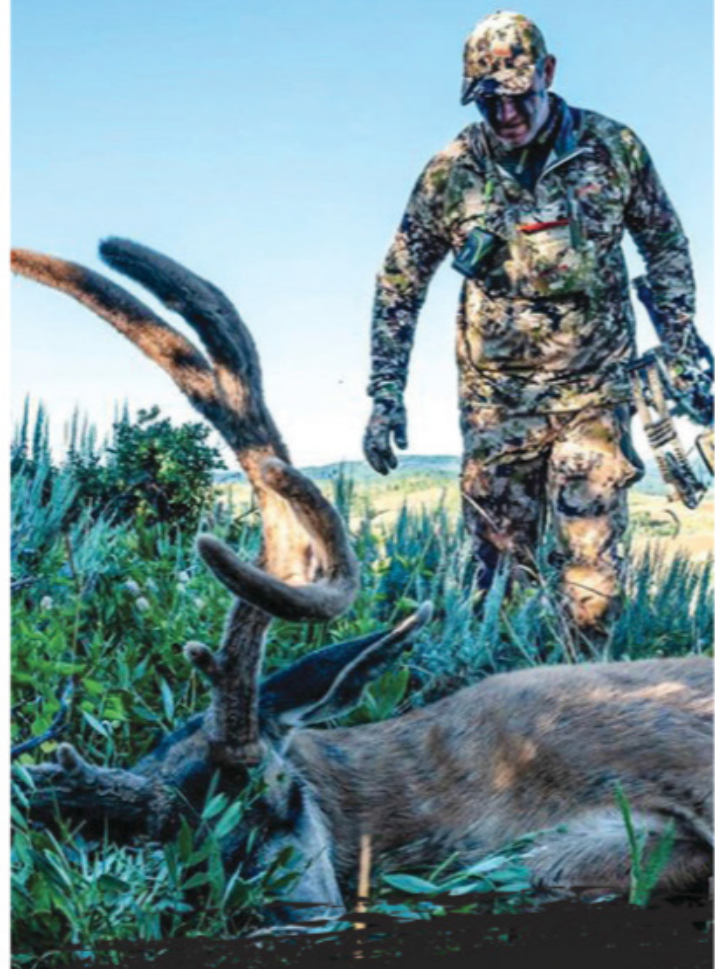
AUTHOR'S NOTES:

Mega has since been officially measured at 401% gross and 391% net, making him the new Oregon state archery record for typical Roosevelt elk, beating the previous record by more than 10 inches. Mega ranks second all-time in the Pope and Young records, and Boone and Crockett currently ranks him third in Oregon, and seventh all-time.

My equipment on this hunt included a Hoyt Maxxis 3 bow outfitted with a Spot Hogg sight. I was shooting Easton Axis arrows tipped with 100-grain Grim Reaper broadheads. I wore KUIU Verde camo and Crispi boots and used a Leica 900 rangefinder and Rocky Mountain Hunting diaphragm calls.



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MY ANNUAL slog to the mailbox had been replaced years ago by a quick online search for Montana's special permits. In fact, it was 42 years ago that I'd last drawn a mountain goat tag. So, I wasn't expecting much different from my previous 41 unsuccessful tries, but the screen read, "Goat — Successful."

As I basked in the elation of getting drawn again, other thoughts quickly entered my mind. First and foremost was that I was now 62 — not 22 — which meant training was going to take a whole lot more effort if I wanted to survive mountain goat country.

As high-country snow was replaced with blankets of multicolored wildflowers, I was anxious to start looking for goats. The first few scouting trips brought me back to several drainages where I'd hunted elk decades ago. It was great to be back in my old stomping grounds. But the difference between hunting elk and goats is several thousand vertical feet.

Most of these trips resulted in checking off drainages I didn't want to hunt, and learning that deep burn in my quads that lingered longer than it used to was a reminder I still had a ways to go before I was going to be in proper physical shape.

As the summer wore on, the trails became easier, my body recovered faster, and I started to find goats — even a few billies. I quit looking at my scouting trips with dread but instead started to relish being out in those rugged, wild places.

I was amazed at all the new country I was seeing for the first time that was so close to my lifelong home. The cool, dank forests where I had always hunted elk suddenly gave way to knife-edge ridges, cliffs, and grassy pockets that no elk would go to unless pressed to extreme measures. The air was clearer and cleaner up there, too. I suddenly found my senses heightened, but that was probably due mostly to the fact that one misstep could cost me dearly.

I was determined to take a goat with my bow. One thing that became clear very quickly was that while the nannies and kids were often seen on steep, grassy hillsides not far from the cliffs, the billies always seemed to be in the nastiest terrain a drainage had to offer.

Some of the billies I'd found during scouting were approachable; others were off limits for myriad reasons. The more I watched these animals casually traverse seemingly impossible terrain, the more

my respect and admiration continued to grow for these amazing and beautiful critters.

By the beginning of September, I had developed my list of top goat drainages to hunt. I also had been shooting my bow more than I had in years — practicing regularly out to 100 yards.

Goats undergo a rapid transformation in preparation for winter. Their almost shaved-looking summer coats grow quickly in September to protect them from the brutal conditions they must endure from November through May. I really wanted a billy with a good hide, so I decided to wait until late September to start hunting. I was rolling the dice, since an early fall storm could potentially put an end to accessing the high country.

Waiting until later had another benefit: I would be able to take advantage of the Montana elk rut — something I've enjoyed for nearly 50 years. My annual two-week elk hunt is one of my most anticipated and cherished times of the year, and after experiencing elk success with hunting buddy Mark Reyher and his son, Austin, I excitedly shifted into goat mode.

Mark had been to Kodiak, Alaska, on two successful archery goat hunts. We spent hours in the dim light of elk camp discussing bowhunting strategies for goats, and the pros and cons of all the spots where I'd located billies. Mark agreed to accompany me on my first hunt just a few days after returning home from our elk hunt. Mark was the only guy I knew in my age bracket who had taken a goat with his bow. I knew his advice for bowhunting the "white devils" would be invaluable.

Mark and I spent several days hunting what I felt was my best goat area. We found several billies and I made a couple stalks, but as the days wore on the billies seemed to move into more inaccessible country. I decided it was time to try my number-two spot.

Good friend and fellow Montana bowhunter Dave Deming volunteered to go in with me on my next hunt. Dave had never been on a goat hunt and

NO COUNTRY FOR GOAT Old MEN

By Mike Ellig

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NO COUNTRY FOR OLD GOAT MEN



My initial scouting trips were brutal, but with improved conditioning I looked forward to my hikes into goat country, which is always beautiful but dangerous.

was willing to head in with me to see what it was all about. Dave is one of the best shots I have ever been around, and he helped me fine-tune my shooting form, so if I needed to take a shot at longer range I'd be ready to get it done. Dave and I found multiple billies, but our trip ended with nothing more than sore legs and some good stories.

Dave was a college football player, and his reminders of those "glory days" are two artificial hips and four knee surgeries. Long story short: Dave figured there were enough deer, elk, and antelope in our home state that he really didn't need to go looking for trouble chasing mountain goats!

Old friend and hunting companion Steve Morrical came along on my next trip to help me pack in and set up camp in the middle of where I knew there were plenty of goats. Steve had recently retired and was always in good shape. He had drawn a goat tag a couple of years prior, so I welcomed his insights on how I could be successful.

While hard to explain, experienced bowhunters know when something just isn't working like it should, and I was starting to get this sense as I continued to pursue goats. Starting from the bottom of the mountain had several disadvantages. First, it required tremendous energy just to get where the goats were. Second, the wind almost always created an updraft once the day started to warm up, which pushed my scent right to the goats. Lastly, the goats expected danger to come from below, which is why they bedded in places with a good view of things downslope. I had to try a new

strategy, because what I had been doing was proving futile.

On my first scouting trip, I had taken a route in the mountains that separated two major river drainages. There I saw groups of nannies and kids, but no billies. Nonetheless, that trail was easier to negotiate, and there were multiple places from which to glass the drainages.

Steve and I became concerned with reports of the season's first major snowstorm bearing down on us. Instead of a multi-day pack in, we decided to carry daypacks, figuring we could travel six or seven miles and get back before the storm set in.

At 5 a.m. the next morning, we parked my truck and were on the trail into goat country. We made it to the crest just before daybreak, where we then started glassing the cliffs, chutes, and scattered timber as the sun rose. When a goat is in the open, there's nothing easier to see. But the rugged terrain features these animals call home can swallow an entire herd in the blink of an eye and spit them out miles away an hour later.

As we sat down to glass our fifth drainage of the day, Steve suddenly said, "There's a goat, and he's in a good spot!" Minutes ticked by as we patiently waited for the goat to reappear, but it seemed like the mountain had swallowed him.

"I know it was a goat," Steve said in frustration. We'd been good friends and hunting partners for over 40 years, so I knew better than to question his word.

After 19 days, this was the opportunity I'd been waiting for, and we quickly devised a plan for my approach: Steve would stay on the ridgetop and direct me to the goat using a fluorescent hunting vest.



After going about a quarter-mile, I was relieved to see the goat step out from his hiding spot for a few seconds. I mentally marked the spot and moved as quickly as I could, given the terrain. My first check-in with Steve indicated I was 300 yards away and the goat was at 5 o'clock. I slowed my pace and became more mindful of the wind and my noise.

The next time I checked in with Steve, he indicated I was 100 yards from the goat and directly above it. At this point, I knew this was probably going to be THE opportunity of the season for me.

I crept toward the top of the cliff where I thought the goat was bedded. Finally, after another 50 yards, I could just make out a small patch of white hair through the trees. From what I could make out, he was bedded with a commanding view for miles below him — this billy had picked his fortress well. My ace in the hole was the wind preceding the storm, which was starting to gust now and would hopefully conceal the sound of my final approach.

I could see a small grassy area, and my gut told me it would be a good spot for the billy to feed once he got up from his bed.

I carefully studied my path, and an hour later I had closed the distance to 23 yards from the bedded billy. The only apparent area with any grass for him to feed on was just to his left — and it was right in my shooting lane.

An hour passed, and the goat still hadn't budged. Normally, in a mountain setting there are too many swirling air currents to get away with being this close to a wild animal for long, but the

impending storm pushed a consistent west wind right in my face. It was now starting to sprinkle rain and snow, and the wind was getting stronger. I knew the billy was going to get up soon.

After two hours of waiting with an arrow nocked and my release clipped to my loop, I was starting to get those uncontrollable shakes — the ones that come and go. I knew the ones that wouldn't stop weren't far behind as the wind grew stronger and the rain intensified. I prayed for an opportunity before hypothermia.

Finally, the billy got his feet under him and started shaking the wet from his thickening winter coat. Seconds later, he moved into my shooting lane.

I drew and tried to settle my pin on the goat's vitals, but my stiff, shaking muscles would have none of it. Still, I knew it was as good as it was going to get given the circumstances, and touched my trigger.

Quite honestly, it was a poor shot, and my arrow struck the goat low and forward. But the force of the impact knocked the goat backward off a ledge.

I quickly moved closer and saw the goat bedded again 20 yards from me. I was ready with a second arrow should he stand up, but I was hoping he'd expire right where he was.

But the goat suddenly lurched to his feet, and I quickly came to full draw and sent my second arrow where I'd hoped my first one had struck. And the goat collapsed on the spot — but, at the head of an avalanche chute above a cliff.

Just when I thought I was going to go down and run my hands over his ebony horns, the goat made a small kick and



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The photo to the left shows the end of my goat's fall off the cliff. It's not uncommon for goats to take a tumble, and while my goat ended up looking pretty rough, his hide and horns were undamaged.



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started to roll down the chute. I watched in horror as he gained momentum, heading for the cliff. The last thing I saw was my goat doing midair cartwheels as he disappeared, followed by a thunderous crash seconds later. At that point I knew I'd achieved my goal, but I had no clue how much of my goat would still be intact after the fall.

As I was strapping my bow onto my pack, Steve showed up all smiles. "I saw the whole thing; that was awesome!" Steve said. With that, we headed to the bottom of the cliff to find my goat.

The initial fall looked to be about 250 feet. From there, he bounced through some boulders before eventually getting hung up in trees. Fortunately, the billy's hide only had a few minor blemishes, and his horns were still intact.

Steve and I quickly skinned and deboned the goat, and then we loaded our packs. We were both beat, and the route to the trail was daunting.

After briefly considering camping there for the night, Steve suddenly lit a fire under my butt by saying, "If we can make it to the crest before dark, we will be on the easy trail back to the truck from there."

As tired as we both were, we also

Hunting mountain goats is always an adventure, and so is the recovery and pack out.



knew that with the storm coming it was in our best interest to push ourselves even harder than we already had. So, we did just that.

Our progress was slower, and our steps shorter, but just after dark I felt the welcome flatness of the trail under my feet. By the time we made it to the truck — 5½ hours later — it was spitting a cold rain and the wind was gusting. The seat of my Ford pickup never felt so good!

Hunting goats at this age isn't for sissies, but it sure makes for great friends and memories shared at the campfire. **BH**

The author, a third-generation Montanan, founded Black Gold Bowsights in 1987, and is also responsible for founding Ripcord Arrow Rests and TightSpot Quivers. He sold the companies after 30 years and now works on habitat restoration projects and grows hops for local Montana breweries.

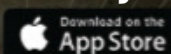
AUTHOR'S NOTE: My equipment on this hunt included a Mathews V3, Victory arrows, Grim Reaper broadheads, a Black Gold Ascent sight, Ripcord arrow rest, TightSpot quiver, First Lite base layers and a variety of outerlayers, including KUIU and Sitka.

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This isn't the first bull I've taken in the closing moments on the last day of a hunt. Working hard and pulling out all the stops at the end always makes taking a bottom-of-the-ninth bull like this extra thrilling.

Once we thought we were high enough to avoid the upslope wind, we side-hilled into one of two drainages that led down to the open meadow. Only problem was, we couldn't hear the bull bugling anymore, so we set up in a couple of elk-thrashed passages through the trees, but we didn't see or hear a thing.

Steve's best guess was they had changed their route for some unknown reason. He suggested we start heading back down to avoid bumping elk out of the meadow in the dark. Farther down the mountain, we hit the edge of the

meadow just as the light was beginning to really fade, and then we strolled along its edge to where we'd parked the truck.

With the end in sight and not a care in the world, we began to cross a small creek when suddenly an elk screamed from the trees just to our left and about blew the hats off our heads! I can't speak for the other guys, but I panicked. Why? Because the wind was totally wrong, blowing right at the bull, so none of us could understand what he was even doing there. But there he was. By the time we got our wits about us, the bull was

gone, but he sure did provide us with a memorable start to our hunt.

These mountains are curious creations. With dips and ridges and all sorts of jagged terrain, sometimes you can hear a bull bugling from miles away; other times you might have a bull that's just over the hill from you and you can't hear him at all. That's exactly what happened to us: The herd used a drainage right over the hill from us to come down the mountain, and the terrain had muffled his calls...until we strolled out right in front of him.



The BOTTOM OF THE NINTH Bull

THERE'S A SPECIAL APPRECIATION FOR ANIMALS THAT ARE TAKEN AS THE LIGHT FADES ON YOUR FINAL DAY.

By Danny Farris, Contributor

Scrambling from the truck on our first afternoon in Ute Trail country, we knew we were late. Bowhunter Contributor Matt Palmquist and I had just arrived to meet my good friend Steve Gentile in Central Colorado. Steve had been spurring us on, trying to get us to hurry because he had a good bull located. For several evenings in a row the bull had followed his cows down the mountain and out of the timber into a meadow to water and feed. As soon as we stepped out of the truck, the bull bugled from not far up the mountain. Yep, we were late.

Hustling to get the wind right, we didn't head straight at the bull. We couldn't. We had to circle, get some elevation, and then approach from his level as the wind was blowing straight up the mountain. Matt's a Kansas flatlander, but he certainly wasn't the only one sucking wind as we climbed.



The next morning, Matt and I split up. Matt would be spending the week with Ute Trail Manager Joey Taverna. My guide, Steve Gentile, on the other hand, didn't really seem like a guide. Steve and I had been good friends for a long time. We'd guided hunters for deer, antelope, and turkeys together for another outfitter friend of ours for years, so this particular adventure felt more like going hunting with my buddy than being guided by him. And the stories Steve had told me about Ute Trail over the years was why Matt and I were there.

Ute Trail's operation began in the late 1960s, when Glenn Everett, a fourth-generation cattle rancher, decided to start outfitting on the family's spread. Glenn's son, Casey, now runs the cattle business, while Joey Taverna, who started as a guide in his teens, now runs the outfitting business. The group of guides at Ute Trail have been hunting and working together since most were old enough to hold a weapon, and together they have well over a century of experience hunting the area.

Ute Trail is located atop a plateau that overlooks tall ponderosa pines, sprawl-



Steve Gentile (right) and I have hunted and guided together for years, so to me it felt more like hunting with a buddy than an actual guide. He and I work well together.

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ing aspen thickets and lush, grassy meadows that seem straight out of a Louis L'Amour novel. Operations are run out of the Everett Family's historic cow camp. Hunters and guides alike stay in the same buildings where the Everett cowboys have for years. If the nostalgia of an authentic Western adventure is what you're looking for, then this is the right place for you!

Day Two of our hunt was a good one for Matt, as he and Joey got into what I like to call a "rut-fest," which is when one or more herd bulls are trying to maintain their harems while being bombarded by satellite bulls. When you get into one, sometimes you don't know which way to go or which bull to chase, because elk sounds seem to be coming from everywhere.

Matt had some chances that day, but he was trying to put his tag on a herd bull, and that's hard to do with so many sets of eyes around them. Although he didn't score, Matt will tell you that day was one of the best he's ever spent afield.

Then my luck seemed to sink in. I say that because in recent years, I've made a habit of starting hunts with a lot of ac-



Ute Trail is operated out of the Everett Family's historic cow camp, where six generations of Everetts have worked cattle dating back to the 1890s. The camp seems like it's straight out of a scene in a Western movie.

tion, only to have it come to a screeching halt due to unforeseen circumstances. In this case, it was a full moon rising just after our arrival, combined with a stretch of Indian Summer weather. The days got hot — very hot — and the elk shut down. When this happens, elk tend to do most of their normal activities under the cover of darkness, when it's cooler. I've encountered similar conditions on many occasions, and all you can do is try to keep a positive attitude, remain vigilant, and do your level best to capitalize on fleeting opportunities.

The next few days were frustrating for everyone. The bulls had been going crazy the week before, but now it was as if they'd vanished. Encounters were limited, but there were a few good ones.

One evening, Steve and I decided to sit water after a scorching-hot afternoon, and sure enough, a young bull with three cows showed up. The only problem was, they hit the wrong waterhole across a wide open flat. Now this bull wasn't a shooter by Ute Trail standards, but you never know what bull might be following this small group in, so we decided to work closer to where they were watering.

Using my bow-mounted decoy and an occasional cow call, I was able to work to within 40 yards of the small harem, with almost no cover. It was amazing, but no other elk were seen before nightfall.

Before we knew it, we were waking to the last day of our hunt, with neither of us having filled a tag. The good news was conditions had improved a bit and we were all optimistic. Steve and I got a bull to bugle that morning and threw the book at him, but ultimately we couldn't pull him away from his cows.

Matt and Joey, on the other hand, hit paydirt when they located a herd with several active bulls.

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The winds were fickle that day, so they had to play it slow and smart. Finally, Joey was able to call a nice five-point bull away from the main herd. As the bull closed, Matt picked an opening where he intended to take his shot, but the bull took an unexpected turn that kept just enough cover between them to prevent it.

In hindsight, Matt wished he'd been more aggressive and moved to create an opening, but when bowhunting elk you're always dealing with second-guessing.

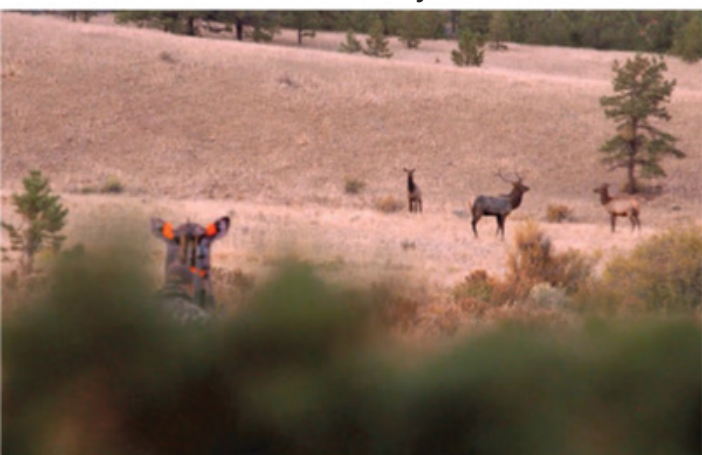
That afternoon we regrouped at camp, and Joey suggested that we all tag-team the area where he and Matt had been that morning. We deemed that evening the "bottom of the ninth," and it was time to rally.

As we approached the cavernous bowl where the elk had disappeared earlier in the day, Matt and Joey went left and Steve and I went right. Steve knew of a wallow not far up the incline that he wanted to check out. As we approached, bulls began sounding off in the distant timber above.

We reached the wallow to find it had been recently thrashed, and there was absolutely nothing consistent about the wind there. It was a mountain hunter's worst nightmare because there was no way for us to form a solid plan of attack.



Although our hunt was challenged by conditions beyond our control, we had some awesome encounters. The first image was taken by Matt's cameraman the morning he and Joey got into the rut-fest, while the second image shows me working to within 40 yards of this young bull and his cows using a bow-mounted Stalker Decoy.



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THE BOTTOM OF THE NINTH BULL



These are the moments I live for. My bull stopped at 30 yards and looked right at me before advancing to just 13 yards. The adrenaline felt in a situation like this can almost be measured on the Richter scale! It's just one of the things that makes bowhunting elk the ultimate thrill for me.

You see, as air tops ridges and flows through trees, it swirls and creates currents that constantly fight each other. Elk seem to know exactly which pockets create this havoc.

Now we were faced with a dilemma: Do we sit this water that elk might likely hit that evening, or should we head up the mountain toward the bugles? Heading up the mountain with such an inconsistent wind would risk blowing the entire herd out. Sitting water, however, might result in a long wait just to find out nothing shows up — and we'd still risk getting winded.

We decided to err on the side of aggression. After all, it was the bottom of the ninth.

Before heading up, Steve and I spent a good 15 minutes — and almost two bottles of wind-checker powder — in an attempt to truly evaluate our wind dilemma. Our efforts ultimately led us to the conclusion that the direction it was blowing from least often was from our left. It was swirling everywhere, but only occasionally from that direction, so we decided to circle left and climb until we were at the herd's elevation.

After climbing to the necessary elevation, we then started to side-hill, breaking out of the timber across a narrow opening. Coming down the opening was a five-point bull, and he seemed to be taking a path that was going to offer me a shot. We didn't call. We just waited.

Just before the bull came clear, we felt the wind on the back of our necks and the bull disappeared, but he seemed to be a lone satellite as there were still bulls sounding off in front of us. We continued on, knowing we would need a little luck.

Suddenly, we caught movement ahead. A cow broke from the timber with a nice six-point bull right on her tail. She circled out in front of us, leading the bull back in the direction she'd come from.

Steve and I discussed the plan. I'd stay put and begin our calling sequence, and Steve would drop back and take over once we knew the bull was interested. I stood with a tree behind me for a backdrop and watched as Steve took up a position about 50 yards over my right shoulder.

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MYSTERY
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My first calls were those of a pleading cow. When the bull answered, I hammered him with a bugle, then I switched back to pleading. His irritation was obvious.

Seconds later, he appeared about 100 yards out with a sapling pine tree dangling in his antlers. Watching him stop and bugle with that tree on his head was a sight to see! I slowly turned my head toward Steve and signaled for him to take over and pull him past me. When he did, the bull covered ground fast — too fast.

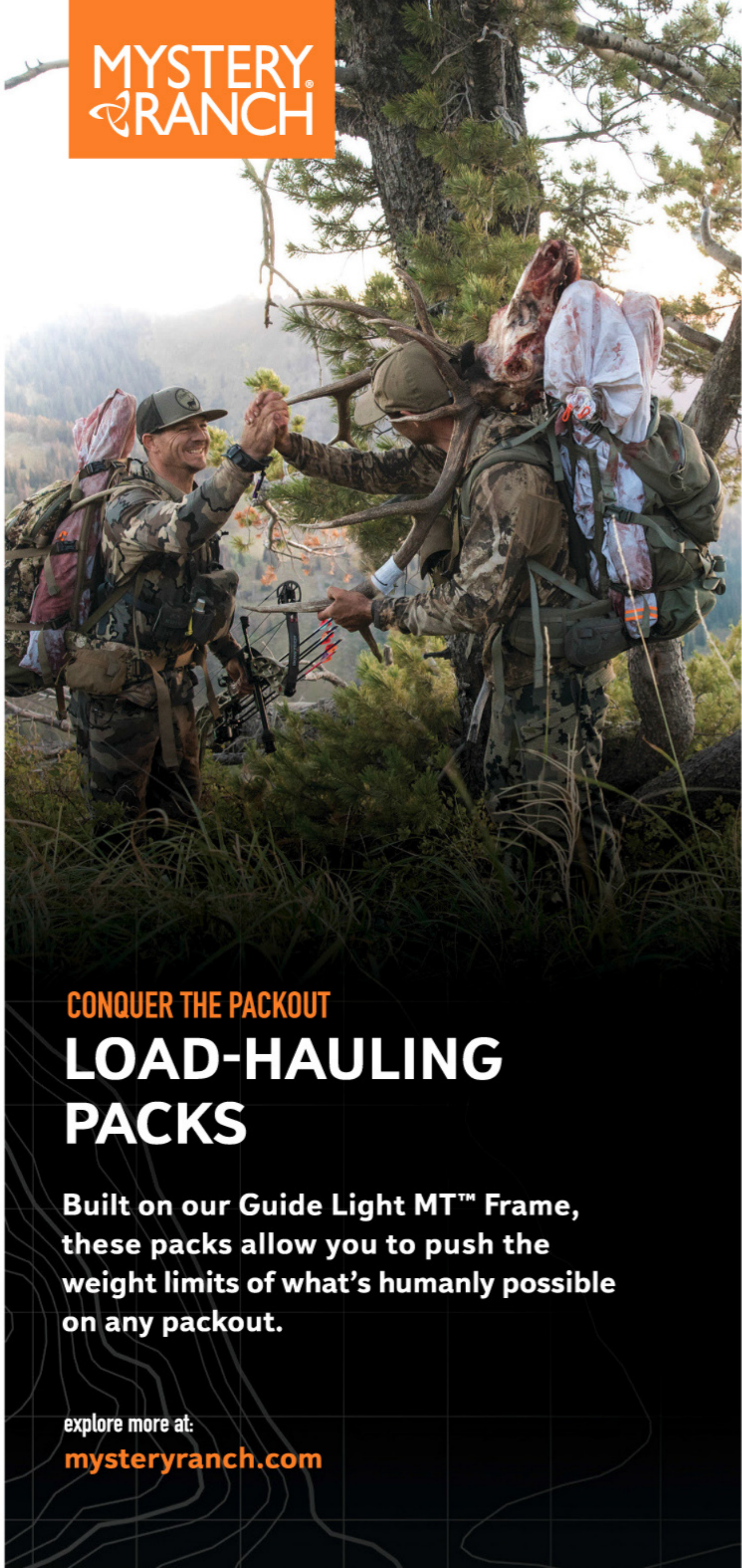
Before I knew it, I needed to draw, but there wasn't much cover. He must have caught a glimpse of movement because his focus diverted in my direction, but all he saw was a bow-mounted cow elk decoy. He continued toward me, stopping again to glance at me at about 30 yards, but I had no shot.

Just then, Steve hit him with another begging cow call from beyond my position, and that did him in. He stopped almost completely broadside in front of me at 13 yards and my arrow disappeared behind his shoulder. The sun had set, and our bottom-of-the-ninth bull was down. **BH**

Author's Notes: My equipment included a 70-pound Hoyt Carbon RX-5 bow, Easton Hexx FOC arrows, Bohning Heat Vanes, Muzzy Trocar broadheads, Spot Hogg sight, Lumenok lighted arrow nocks, SIG SAUER optics, Browning apparel, Kenetrek Mountain Extreme boots, Rocky Mountain Hunting Calls, and a bow-mounted Stalker Decoy from Ultimate Predator Gear.

I want to give a special thanks to Joey Taverna, Steve Gentile, and the entire crew at Ute Trail Guide Service. They run one incredible elk camp that was truly a blast to be part of. The moon and weather took a toll on our hunt, but these guys were undeterred and worked hard to make the trip a success. To book a hunt with Ute Trail, contact Joey at (719) 221-9906, or visit him online utetrailguideservice.com.

Finally, I want to thank my son, Lane, who was playing in a college football game about 90 minutes away on the last day of our hunt. I planned on going to that game instead of hunting that day, but when he found out I hadn't filled my tag, he told me, "Dad, just watch the film after the game and go kill a dang bull!" He insisted on it, and had he not done so, I wouldn't have been there that last day.



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MY AWAKENING to big-country whitetails came 30 years ago. Ten of us surrounded the old rundown homestead. Everyone was wearing blaze-orange, shotguns loaded. Tumbleweeds choked the old corral fence, and the roof was caved in on the window-less house.

As we neared the old fence, a rooster cackled as he shot out of the tall grass. Guns blazed and the pheasant dropped. A noise startled me to my right. A giant whitetail buck, a wide typical with tines like a picket fence, bounced out of the tumbleweeds. As he galloped across the prairie, I remember thinking, *Why are we hunting birds? We should be hunting deer!*

BIG-COUNTRY WHITETAILS

Carved through the middle of North America is a swath

of land called the High Plains. I'm referring to regions like the Texas Panhandle, Oklahoma Panhandle, eastern Colorado, western Kansas, western Nebraska, eastern Wyoming, and parts of South Dakota. The Great Plains extends even further north to encompass parts of North Dakota, eastern Montana, and even southern portions of Canadian provinces Alberta and Saskatchewan.

The landscape consists of big ag fields and rolling hills covered in short grass and brush, and lots of wind. Summers are too hot, and winters are too cold. The only thing to block a view to the horizon is a barbed-wire fence. Pheasants, pronghorns, prairie dogs, and big whitetails call this lonely landscape their home.

Whitetails you say, but where? Yes, look closer. Hiding

A man with a beard, wearing a camouflage jacket and a baseball cap, is kneeling in a field of tall grass. He is holding a large deer antler with both hands. The background is a warm, golden sunset sky. The word "TUMBLEWEED" is partially visible in large, white, stylized letters at the top left.

TUMBLEWEED

LIKE A TUMBLEWEED ROLLING ACROSS THE
PLAINS, YOU NEVER KNOW WHAT SIZE BUCK WILL
STROLL DOWN A WESTERN RIVERBOTTOM.

By BRANDON RAY

PHOTOS BY THE AUTHOR

in plain sight are whitetails living a secret life. Some are in big CRP fields or small pockets of brush near ag fields or old farmhouses. Cutting through this expansive, lonely country are creeks and rivers that provide ideal habitat for sneaky deer, and that's where I focus most of my efforts.

Some of these creeks have ancient cottonwood trees as tall as skyscrapers. Others have shorter elms or willows. But the whitetails do just fine in either place.

Deer densities are modest in these locations, and the casual hunter will lose interest as a result. Hunting pressure is lower in these remote riverbottoms than most places because they are far from big metropolitan areas. For hunters interested in quality more than quantity, this is a good place to hunt.

Need more proof? I shot my biggest buck ever — a 180-class nontypical — on a cold December morning in 2009 in a creek-bottom in the Texas Panhandle. On a frigid November afternoon in 2000, I arrowed a 160-class typical buck from a ladder stand in eastern Colorado. That buck responded to a grunt call at sunset. I've held the matched sheds of an honest 200-inch typical from a random, no-name creek on the High Plains. I've taken other quality bucks in the Oklahoma Panhandle and in several counties at the top of Texas.

In November 2020, my friend Shawn Hoover arrowed a big buck in the Oklahoma Panhandle. If not for several broken tines, that buck would have scored over 190 inches. The giant buck came from a barren landscape more suitable for gophers and jackrabbits than whitetails.

DEER YOU CAN SEE

In many places I've hunted whitetails, thick woods mean the deer are hard to see. Scouting in said areas mostly involves reading sign like rubs, tracks and trails, followed by setting a stand and waiting.

Hunting the High Plains is different. With a commanding view — either a mesa overlooking the river corridor, a haystack, or a scope clamped to the truck window — you can use big optics to watch deer moving up and down the river-bottoms. Most of the deer I watch are within 200 yards of the actual river. Some are just out of the brushline, in the open, but most will travel parallel to the river; moving up and down its course to make rubs and scrapes and look for does. Seeing a big buck through a spotting scope, and then making a game plan for an ambush, is my favorite part of this pursuit.

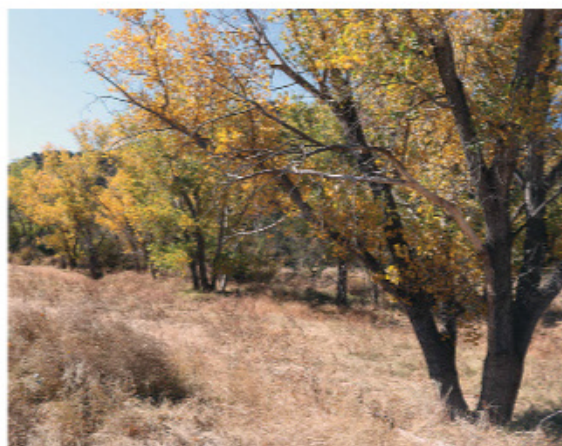
YOU JUST NEED ONE TREE!

I remember a scouting day in the Oklahoma Panhandle way back in 2011. With a spotting scope clamped to my truck window, I watched three bucks and three does from a mile away. The six deer stood up at sunset from a tangle of tall sunflowers on the neighbor's property. They jumped a fence on to land I could hunt, walked down a narrow ravine across open cattle pasture, and then ended up a mile away in a wheatfield on a different neighbor's ground at dark.

There was a lone cottonwood tree with a trunk as big as a tractor tire in the ravine the deer walked down. My friend, Shawn Hoover, had already set a ladder stand in that ancient tree, because he knew how those deer traveled.

Below: Colorful cottonwood trees line a creek on the High Plains. Whitetails will use these strips of cover to travel up and down the riverbottom.

Right: Here, I'm glassing the winding riverbottom below from a high mesa. Vantage points like this one in the Texas Panhandle make it possible to watch deer without their knowing they are being watched.



The next morning, I was perched like an owl in the darkness in that cottonwood stand. With daylight came the deer leaving the wheatfield to the north. Two does and a handsome eight-point were headed down the ravine toward my tree. The buck was in the back, trailing the two females by 50 yards. The two does walked past my tree at 20 steps, and they were

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just about to get my scent stream on the south side of the tree. But then the wind rattled the yellow leaves of the cottonwood, and that movement allowed me to draw my bow undetected. When the buck hesitated, I let my arrow fly. Hit through the ribs, the buck trotted 50 yards and tipped over.

Shawn had been watching the hunt unfold through his

spotting scope from a nearby road. When he got to me with the pickup to help me load my buck, instead of saying congratulations, he said, "Why didn't you shoot the big one?"

"What do you mean?" I responded. "I shot the only buck I saw."

Shawn reported that a 150-class 10-point was skirting around the other side of the hill behind me, just on the other side of a plum thicket where I couldn't see him. Even though I never saw the bigger buck, I said, "He looked too young. I'll save him for next year." Shawn laughed, because he knew I was lying.

RECENT HUNTS

My favorite place to hunt wandering whitetails is a stretch of river corridor in the Texas Panhandle. That small creek winds through red canyon walls and under old cottonwoods. The creek is narrow enough that you can jump across it in most places.

Like most riverbottoms I hunt on the High Plains, I don't see a lot of deer there, but I usually see the right deer. Most years, I estimate there's about 20 deer living in that one-mile stretch of riverbottom habitat. Usually, about two to three are bucks I would be more than happy to put my tag on.

In the fall of 2020, fresh rubs littered the trees growing near the creek. Spying from a canyon rim 1,000 yards away through a spotting scope, I watched several good bucks travel the river on an old two-track.

The next evening, I watched the deer do the exact same thing. Where they traveled close to the road, there were no large trees.

The following day, I made a natural ground blind at the

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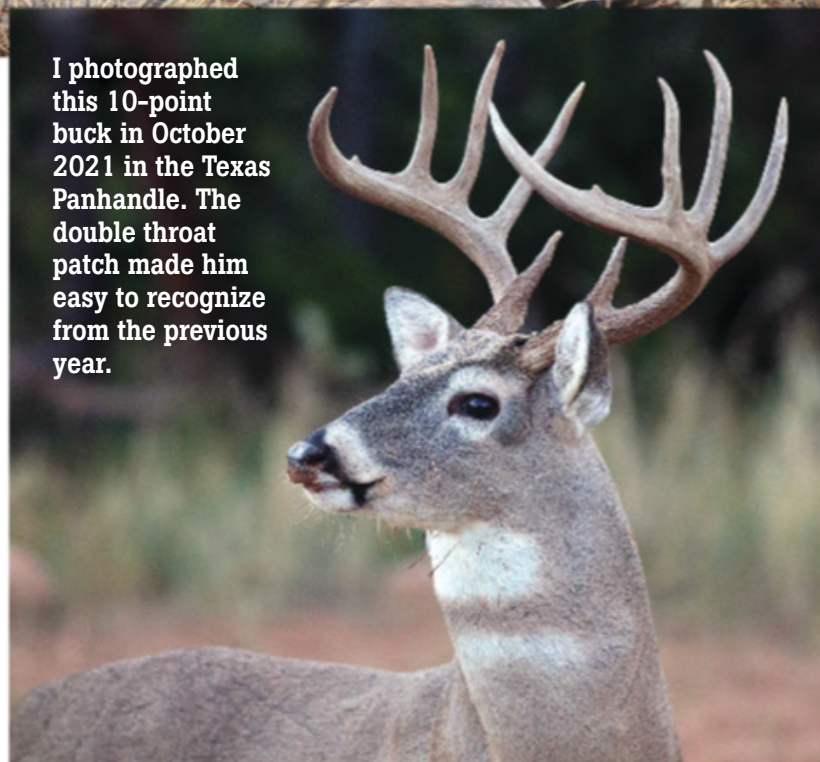


This is the mature eight-point I described shooting from a natural ground blind in the Texas Panhandle in 2020.

base of large cedar tree. Two days later, when the wind was right, I waited in the dark, brushy blind.

It was after sunset when the trio of bucks came from the north. Two were young eight-points; the third buck was a bigger, mature eight.

The bucks barely acknowledged my blind as I drew my bow. At



I photographed this 10-point buck in October 2021 in the Texas Panhandle. The double throat patch made him easy to recognize from the previous year.

15 yards, my arrow blasted through the mature eight-pointer, and he crashed near the creek soon after. I didn't see a lot of deer that afternoon, but I did see the right deer!

The pattern I've noticed from decades of hunting these riverbottom bucks is that there is usually a group of local deer that are there all fall. Then, come November (I've also seen it happen late season in January), a mature buck or two I've never seen before will show up — a true "drifter" that has likely traveled many miles up the river corridor in search of a hot doe.

LAST YEAR'S HUNT

My first sit of the 2021 season was on October 13. Two fine bucks that I recognized from the previous year showed up in the afternoon. One buck was a 3½-year-old 5x5, and he was easy to identify because of his double throat patch. He had the potential to be a stud with more time, so I shot him with my Canon camera at 20 yards instead of with my bow (not an easy decision, as he was already a fine buck).

The second buck was an older nine-point — possibly 5½ years old. His rack was wide, with long beams. He was

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also recognizable because of a black scar under his right eye. That 145-class buck passed by me at 25 yards. It was very tempting, but the season was still young.

What else is out there? I wondered. *Will a bigger, “drifter” buck show up later in the season?* I let both bucks walk.

Six weeks later, I was seriously questioning my sanity for passing on those two river nomads back in October. The tight buck-to-doe ratio in that creekbottom meant lots of fighting for breeding rights. Most of the bucks there wear battle scars and broken racks by December. Finding an intact, mature buck there after Thanksgiving Day is difficult.

It was December 5 when I got a second chance. Weary from a long season of waiting for Mr. Right, I was shocked when the wide nine-point I’d passed in mid-October came wandering down the creek. I could see the G-4 on his left side was now broken. The buck also appeared thin — run down from a month of dogging does.

Recognizing that this was my chance, I sent an arrow through the broadside deer at 15 yards. The old buck trotted 60 yards and tipped over. A season-long pursuit had ended in less than 30 seconds.

CONCLUSION

Two months later, while retrieving a trail camera I’d almost forgotten about, I discovered the picture of a new “drifter” buck. He was only on the camera one day — January 11 — but in broad daylight. He was old, guessing 7½, with a big belly and a wide, long-tined rack that sported eight points with matching kickers on both G-2s. He was likely a buck I’d seen two years earlier with the exact same rack; an eight-point frame with kickers on both back tines. I sure hope the unexpected “drifter” wanders past my blind next year! **BH**

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

Author’s Note: Gear on my 2021 Texas hunt included a Mathews V3 31 bow with a QAD Integrate rest, Flatline stabilizer, and HHA Optimizer Lite sight. My arrows were Victory VAP TKOs tipped with 100-grain Iron Will Wide heads. A Scott Echo release triggered the shot, and an Ozonics Orion X unit helped with scent control. My optics included a SIG SAUER KILO3000 BDX 10x42 binocular/rangefinder and a vintage Cabela’s Big Sky 20-60x66mm ED spotting scope.



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THE LONG

WHEN A HUNT GOES WRONG, YOU BUCKLE DOWN UNTIL IT GOES RIGHT.



By Jim Willems

EST GOAT

THE STEALTH FIGHTER flew by just above my head, making a swoosh that startled me in the early morning light. It hit its target with a thud right in front of me, and the unfortunate blackbird fell from the sky and landed on the dam of the water tank where I was hunting. Without touching the ground, the zone-tailed hawk grabbed its prey and lifted off. I watched the unusual-looking bird gain altitude and fly off until I couldn't see it anymore through my 10x42 binoculars. I'd never seen this species of hawk and was interested to learn what it was.

This is just another example of the amazing things that bowhunters get to witness on a scale like no other. You have to be a part of nature to truly witness nature at its base level. Sitting still and silent for 13 hours a day in a blind or treestand is the best way to meld into the surroundings and be a part of what happens every day in the wild.

There are several hunts that I plan on doing every year if at all possible, starting in order of when the season opens: Sitka blacktails, pronghorns, elk, black bears, and whitetails. Licenses to hunt all of these are either over the counter, or fairly easy to draw if you do some planning. I may not get a pronghorn or elk tag every year, but I do get them often enough to keep them on my annual list of "things to do." If I can draw a muley tag or find a Coues deer hunt for later on... then I've got myself a pretty busy season.

I had gone two years without a pronghorn tag, so I was really looking forward to this hunt. This year, I would be hunting a draw unit in Colorado, and my scouting trips had me thinking I might be able to get a truly great buck, which might also require a good deal of time — something I wasn't sure I'd have in order to achieve my goal.

I finally located three really good bucks — all in the 78 to 80-inch range. And while I was willing to spend additional time trying to locate a buck that might have two more inches of horn, I knew full well that I would be a fool to pass up any of the aforementioned bucks should I get a good shot opportunity.

The first few days of my hunt were rainy and cold. Hunting water is by far the best way to score on a nice pronghorn buck, but that doesn't work so well when it's wet.

The "poor" hunting conditions really made my hunt more enjoyable, and I spent those days driving, glassing, and stalking. I ended up getting a couple of shots during my stalking attempts. One went just low, and the other

was well behind the buck when he decided to take off just as I released my arrow. I had a couple of fun days and really got to know the area a lot better. I also got to spend more time glassing and sizing up my three target bucks.

BUCK #1

This buck was near an almost dry tank. The tank was so dry that when I first got there it only had water in a couple of hoofprints, which was not great but was the only water around for quite a ways.

Those first rainy days ended up making the puddle about five yards across, which helped, but after sitting for two full days and only having a few small bucks come in, I got discouraged and left for another spot.

Looking back, that was probably my best option for tagging-out early. Hindsight tells me if I'd stuck it out for a few more days, that buck probably would have presented me with a shot.

BUCK #2

This pronghorn was in some lower country with quite a bit of water around, but he was hanging out near one tank in particular. This was the same buck I'd missed on one of my earlier stalks, and I felt he might be the biggest of the three. So, I set up a ground blind and figured I'd have him down within the next few days.

As time goes by, you eventually recognize your mistakes and have to improvise. I soon realized that while I was seeing lots of antelope at this tank, the big one just wasn't coming in. He was bothered by the blind, and he only had to go about a mile to hit another tank.

I would see him off and on each day, but he never came close and seemed to be staying farther away each day. No problem, I thought to myself. *I have plenty of time to hunt; I'll just have to try something different.*

I've had good success in the past hunting from a tripod stand, so long as I was on flat ground where the animals couldn't look down on the tripod as they came in. So, I set up a tripod after dark and was sitting 10 feet off the ground as the sun came up the next morning.

Things were looking good, and at one point I could see 35 bucks around me. Buck #2 was really the only one I wanted out of those 35, so when he crossed a fence and headed toward a creek about a mile away, I really lost faith. Between the stalks and the activity at the blind and tripod, I figured Buck #2 simply had enough of my trickery.

VIC SCHENDEL IMAGE

THE LONGEST GOAT

BUCK #3

This guy was hanging out near a higher tank, just below the trees on the mountain range. My two ground blinds were already set up, and I dug out a little pit for my feet so I could sit on the ground and cut some brush and put together a nice little brush blind. I was ready by noon, and it wasn't long before antelope started showing up.

I couldn't see them coming in from below until they peeked over the dam, so I had to stay alert and ready at all times. By

early afternoon, the buck I wanted popped over the dam. But instead of watering right in front of me, he circled to the far east side — a place I never expected to see goats water — and he stood at 26 yards.

Since I hadn't anticipated a shot in that corner of the pond, I didn't have a proper shooting hole trimmed out in my blind. I thought I could squeeze the shot through, but it didn't work... I hit a small branch and my arrow sailed about four-feet high. My easy pronghorn hunt was getting more frustrating by the day!

I left that tank and headed back to camp on a different road. I ended up



Most years I'd be really happy to take a buck of this caliber.

driving by a tank I was unaware of that not only looked really inviting but also had a great buck standing nearby. I walked down to the tank and decided this was the spot and that was my buck. The few small trees there were just big enough for a treestand, which I happened to have with me.

Early the next morning, I was hanging the stand and clearing out shooting lanes. The tank was only 23 yards across at the farthest point, which is perfect re-curve distance. Climbing into the stand, my confidence was at maximum level. If it didn't happen that day, I would be done by tomorrow, which was great because I had a mule deer hunt starting in just a few days.

Way off in the distance, I could see some cowboys rounding up cattle and pushing them to the south. After about an hour, the cowboys and cattle hit a fence, made a hard left, and started heading my way. And even though they were still over a mile away, I started to get concerned because I could see a buck above me but couldn't tell if he was the one I was after.

It wasn't long before the whole herd of cattle came bawling up the hill right by my tank. The cowboys had pushed them through a gate a few hundred yards above me and then left, without shutting the gate.

For the next few hours, I sat listening to all the bawling and running back and forth as cows and calves tried getting back together. I soon realized this stand was now useless for the rest of the day, so I got out and headed to a natural blind that a buddy of mine had built at a spring about a mile away. I had a lot of antelope come to the spring, but nothing big.

Figuring the cows would probably be making lots of noise around my treestand tank the next day, I opted to go back to the brush blind where I'd missed the buck two days before.

Sitting in the blind, I was feeling pretty good about my decision after several groups of does and small bucks came in to water. That's when I heard cattle bawling off to the west.

Rising up a bit for a better view, I quickly spotted several cows running down a hill with a cowboy right behind



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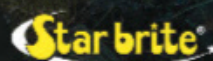
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THE LONGEST GOAT

them. Knowing full well what was going to happen next, I got out and headed back to the spring to my east. Once again, I'd seen goats, just nothing big.

BUCK #4

Day 11 found me back in my treestand, praying that nothing else would go wrong. Bright and early, I spotted a good buck coming up a draw and heading my way — all alone.

It took him about an hour to actually drop into the tank and give me a 23-yard broadside shot. I concentrated, anchored, released, and shot just under him. That was a slam-dunk shot, and I blew it! Mentally messed up and needing to regroup, I walked back to my truck and drove to camp to take some practice shots.

I knew my buck wouldn't come back to the treestand tank again that day, so I went back to the spring.

Late in the day, a decent buck came in and gave me a 38-yard shot. I shot over him...

Now I was really in bad shape. What should have been a six or seven-day hunt just kept dragging on as a result of my uncharacteristically poor shooting.



I was able to pass up some really nice bucks while waiting for one of the big ones.

Having time to size-up numerous bucks before deciding which one to take, makes for a fun hunt.

I was also running low on food and ice, but I kept putting off the 70-mile trip to town, thinking I'd tag out any minute. *If I don't make it happen tomorrow, I'll have to go to town,* I thought.

By Day 12, I was out of ice and down to a can of beans and some ramen noodles. Yet I was still confident that I'd get it done that day, just like I'd been the past 11 days.

My day started off with that zone-

tailed hawk divebombing a blackbird, which was way cool, and a feeling of confidence that Buck #4 would be back.

It was a long day, but late in the afternoon Buck #4 finally showed up with some does, and he walked to the same spot where I'd missed him before. I took my time, concentrating on the color change right behind his right leg. My old Bear Razorhead broadhead hit high and the buck lunged forward into the muddy,

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stinky water. Before long he expired and my longest antelope hunt was over. But now he lay dead in the middle of the tank.

I didn't want to even consider stripping down and wading in after him — it was that gross — so I found a length of rope in my gear box and used it to lasso one horn and drag him to shore.

I've been hunting with a recurve bow for almost 40 years. Honestly, it had been decades since I struggled so much to seal the deal on an animal. But, bowhunting is a mental game, and you have to be in it all the time. Slack off just a little bit, and it all falls apart. Thankfully, I had time to work through my mistakes and make it happen! **BH**

The author is an avid traditional archer and former President of the Pope and Young Club.

Author's Note: On this hunt I shot my trusty 56-inch, 52-pound Bighorn takedown recurve with a Thunderhorn strap-on quiver holding Carbon Express Heritage shafts tipped with Bear Razorheads. Optics included Leica Geovid 10x42 binos while hunting and Geovid 15x56 binos on a tripod for glassing. I wore KUIU clothing and Danner boots.



After 12 long days of hunting, I was finally able to make good on this great Colorado buck.

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HOW NOT TO GET A BIG BUCK



THERE'S NO ALTERNATIVE FOR HUNTING HARD IF YOU WANT TO TAG A GREAT BUCK.

By Nathan Andersohn

Bowhunters are obsessed with hunting whitetail deer, and justifiably so. Tasty, low-fat protein is pretty high on the list of reasons. However, there isn't a bowhunter alive who cannot help but admire Grandpa's "big one" hanging above the fireplace, or stop to stare at any impressive whitetail mount.

Typically, we read about tips that will help you take a big buck, but the following are a few traits and habits that will prevent you from tagging a buck like Grandpa's.



Scouting for rubs and scrapes helps "lucky" bowhunters.

The Other Guys Are "Lucky"

Ask any taxidermist if he has any regular customers who shoot big bucks year after year, and the answer will most likely be "yes." If you have yet to harvest a trophy buck and you know someone who has shot multiple big bucks, check your ego at the door and have a serious talk with said hunter about scouting, stand locations, hunting techniques, and general tricks of the trade.

The successful hunter is doing several things you aren't, and it's up to you to discover the missing link by talking to him/her. Consistently killing good whitetail bucks requires overtime and discipline. The hardest-working, most dedicated bowhunters are ultimately the "luckiest."

Convince Yourself Of Their Unimportance

You have never been a trophy hunter. No one ever stopped by your house to

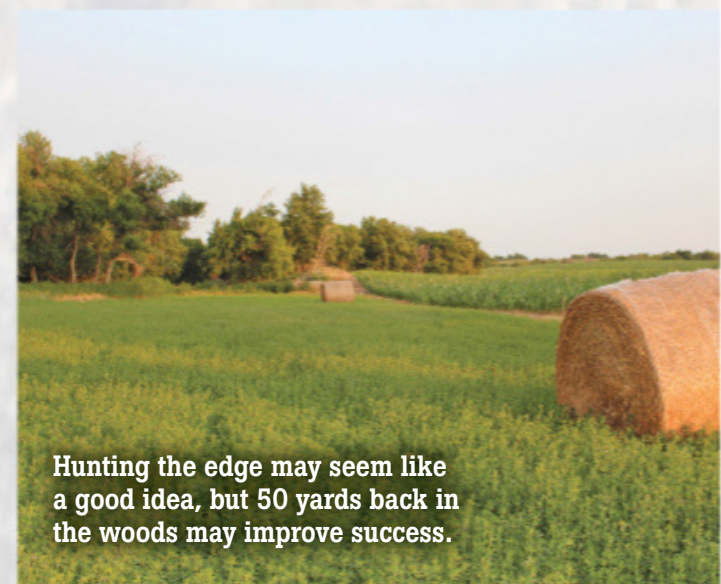
put their hands on your buck, and no one has ever wanted their picture taken with one of your bucks. You have been spared all that hassle of taking your cape to the taxidermist, getting it scored, answering unsolicited phone calls from friends, and dragging antlers to the state convention for an awards ceremony.

Who needs the memory of a massive 5x5 rack moving through the timber, then turning broadside as you suck it up, take a deep breath, pick a spot, and shoot the perfect arrow? You will remember it for eternity, and you've got to tell the story over and over to your taxidermist, friends, and family. Who needs it? Those little bucks taste fine.

Treestands & Field Edges

Scrape lines on the edge of an alfalfa field, every willow rubbed along the border of a cornfield, and a pounded trail entering the wheat stubble...all get us excited and there's no doubt you will see deer. If you sat all night, you would really have action, because that's when most of the activity is happening in these spots.

Newbies always sit the edge. I only have one stand overlooking a large crop-field, and I've never had a shot at a good buck from that stand.



Hunting the edge may seem like a good idea, but 50 yards back in the woods may improve success.

HOW NOT TO GET A BIG BUCK

The basic problem is, if the wind is blowing from the field to the cover, the deer will smell you and never enter the field. If the wind is blowing from the cover to the field, every doe that enters the field will blow and scare off the bucks lingering on the edges. Besides, big bucks do not like walking into open fields. With a crosswind, I have killed lots of bucks 20 to 50 yards from the edges of cropfields in the “thick stuff.” Try it, and you might start seeing more of the big ones.

Don't Hang Your Stands In October

If you are hanging all your stands in October, you are new to the game — or a procrastinator. Early October is not a great time to scout. Stand locations should be determined January to April, when all the previous year's rut sign is apparent.

Busting through the woods, cutting limbs, making trails, and hanging stands will definitely alter deer movement. Plus, the woods will look a lot different in late November when the leaves fall to the ground. I have found early April during turkey season to be a pleasant time to hang and move stands. Days are longer,



sign is good, and there's no rush. It is a great time to get kids, family, and friends involved in the process.

Ignore Observations

On-the-ground observations are worth thousands of trail-cam pictures and hundreds of maps. If bucks consistently run

the edge of a picked cornfield, cross a creek 50 yards from your treestand, or make daytime visits to a pond just out of range, move your stand! I have moved a stand and killed a buck the next day. Scouting never ends, but it is useless if you don't react to your observations. Make notes at the end of every season of all the potential stand locations for the next season.

Don't Have An Exit Strategy

Everyone knows that a hunter should not bust deer getting into a ground blind or treestand. Deer will react and remember such intrusions.

The same is true with exits. A deer's day is not over when it gets dark. Deer will continue to feed and travel after sunset, so cutting across a field to your truck or house and busting bucks along the way with scent or sound will severely impact future hunts. The best evening stands are between bedding and feeding zones, but only use those stands with a covert exit that leads directly to a road, field, or trail not used by deer.

Hunt Your Best Stands In October

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► Bowhunter TV Host Curt Wells takes on one of bowhunting's most difficult challenges by heading into the spectacular mountains of British Columbia in search of a big billy. The physicality of a mountain goat hunt is undeniable, as are the long odds of success with bow and arrow. Curt was guided by Daniel Norton of Robson Valley Outfitters (mountainhunt.com). Don't miss this replay of our first episode, the TV week of August 15!



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HOW NOT TO GET A BIG BUCK

Planting a food plot in
late summer may pay big
dividends in November.



ing is slow, and we are all just anticipating the November rut. Until the very end of October, buck activity is very early and late — plenty of reason for selectively hunting waterholes and food sources.

Studies have shown that all hunting has some impact on deer movement. Daily hunting may move deer off your lease or private land before the rut starts. Be cautious and picky about where you hunt, and minimize contact with bedding areas. Save a couple of promising stands for November, then hunt nonstop when the wind is good. Odds are, most well-seasoned bowhunters have killed at least one monster buck in the last week of October, so get to it when you think conditions are good.

Put Off Buying Warmer Clothing

Every hunter has abandoned a stand because of extreme cold. It doesn't matter if the hunt is in Southern Alberta or Northern Florida — cold is relative.

With today's selection of lightweight, comfortable hunting clothing, no one can honestly claim they don't have access to warm duds. As a bowhunter, I stick to down and wool. Buy the best garments

you can afford, but I personally recommend any and all clothes from KUIU.

In addition, cold feet will end a hunt quicker than any other factor — true story! Every hunter needs a go-to set of boots on frigid days, so like the rest of your body, it's imperative that you buy the best boots your budget will allow and then take care of them to ensure they last as long as humanly possible. I will add to this by saying whoever invented chemical hand and footwarmers deserves some kind of award!

Skip Morning Hunts

I love to deer hunt, but I must drive one to five hours to hunt my spots. As a result, most of my whitetail adventures require an overnight stay because I refuse to miss a morning hunt.

Morning sightings are often just as good as evening hunts. I killed my biggest buck in Nebraska after watching him exit an alfalfa field through a strip of trees at 9 a.m.

I moved my stand and killed him coming the other way that evening. I've certainly killed more bucks in the last 30 minutes of the day, but at least 20-percent of my deer have fallen soon after sunrise.

As an aside, the best time to kill a doe for the freezer is in the morning. It is a pleasure to follow a blood trail, recover, and skin a deer in daylight hours.

Don't Hunt The Rut

Everyone has commitments and obligations that restrict their days afield. One primary requirement to harvesting a big buck in the northern half of the U.S. is to hunt in November.

The magazines are filled with articles about hunting cropfields in September,



Top-of-the-line clothing, including well-insulated boots, will keep a bowhunter in a treestand longer.

I shot this buck in the morning, but I was probably just "lucky."



the pre-rut in October, and the second rut in December. But November is the best time to kill a buck. If you doubt it, review the Pope and Young Record Book for the kill dates of the biggest bucks.

If you live in the South, review your state's top entries in the "Pope and Young Bowhunting Records of North America Whitetail Deer, Volume 4" (available at pope-young.org). It will give you a good indication of the best time to hunt the rut.

Don't Set Any Goals

Most years, you just sit in the same oak tree in the corner of a cornfield. It is close to your house, requires minimal effort to get to, and you have shot a couple of decent bucks from that ambush.

It's important for most people to learn, achieve, and better themselves throughout their lives. Every year, there should be a new goal or milestone in a bowhunter's life. It may be improving arrow flight, acquiring a deer decoy, firing up a chainsaw to funnel deer movement, or building a couple of ground blinds. But you could just put off such things until next year.

Don't decide to improve your land with an orchard or cloverfield. Goals to improve your shooting, habitat, gear, and knowledge will only make you

more obsessed. Just leave everything the same.

Shoot A Small Buck

The largest 4x4 buck I ever shot was following 80 yards behind a 3½-year-old buck. A lot of hunters shoot the first buck. I know several bowhunters who talk big about holding out for large-racked bucks, then shoot average bucks every year. This is usually followed by ramblings about "ground shrinkage," which, of course, is not true. These hunters are so afraid they won't get a deer, that they'll continue shooting at the first "good" buck they see in bow range.

My takeaway message from all these ramblings is this: If you want to kill a truly great buck, and you know that one exists on the properties you have access to hunt, then be patient and be prepared to eat tag soup as a result of your commitment to your goal. If you don't believe the commitment part of this last sentence, just ask my buddy Jim Willems, who spent 24 days hunting a 192-inch buck that he'd only seen once in daylight. Jim killed that giant on the evening of Day 24. **BH**

When he's not daydreaming about big whitetail bucks, the author practices business and real estate law in Broomfield, Colorado.



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By JOSH HONEYCUTT

PLOTTING AFTER DARK

THE LAST SECONDS of shooting light tick away. Then the floodgates open, and deer pour into the food plot. Now, you're stuck, especially given the massive target buck you've been after all season is at 50 yards and closing. What do you do?

It can be difficult to exit a stand or blind when deer are still in the food plot. It's something virtually every bowhunter deals with at some point, and the last thing you want to do is walk out and clear the field — educating the deer in the process.

Fortunately, there are ways to slip out of a food-plot ambush location without pressuring deer too much. These are your options.

BANK ON IT

The best solution is preemptive expectation and preparation. This will happen at some point. If you have the ability and resources, planning for this is the best way forward.

Consider planting screening cover to shield your entry and exit routes. Tall vegetation types around treestand and blind locations help, too. Basically, the goal is to prevent deer from seeing you as you travel from the base of the tree or blind, all the way back to your vehicle — or at least until you get well away from sensitive hunting areas. Using this concept allows you to climb down and walk out undetected, even if deer are nearby.

Those who choose to use this method have numerous options available to them. A good annual option is Egyptian wheat. It's an invasive plant, but you don't have to worry about it spreading or becoming an issue on your property. That said, you will have to plant it each year. And oftentimes, it isn't as hardy as other options.

In contrast, giant Miscanthus is even taller and sturdier. It stands up to rain, snow, and wind much better and lasts lon-

ger. It's also a perennial, meaning you won't have to replant once it's established.

In conjunction with planting strategic screening cover, using natural terrain features is great, too. Wadable creeks, ditches, drainages, ravines, and streams are perfect entry and exit routes that help shield you visually, as well as diminish your scent. Other visual barriers, such as the backsides of ridgelines and thick walls of cover, do the same. Use what's available to you.

LEAVE EARLY

Another solution might seem counterintuitive. But if you're playing cat-and-mouse with a big buck and the odds of him appearing in the fading moments of legal light are slim, it makes sense. In some instances, you'll still be able to see well at the end of legal shooting light. This is especially true on cloudless days with a brighter moon phase or position. If you look around and no deer are in the open, or at least close enough to spook, go ahead and climb down.

Similarly, if it's nearing the end of legal light, or you've already lost sight of your pins, it might pay off to pack up a smidge early. This is true even when deer are in sight but at a great distance, and you know they won't reach bow range before quitting time. Climbing down a few minutes early when nothing is close to your stand can prevent a botched departure once deer get closer.

HAIL A TAXI

Another good solution is to call someone who can drive to your stand and pick you up. This "soft push" won't have as negative of an effect as your human form would. Asking someone with an ATV, tractor, or vehicle to drive in can greatly reduce

IMAGE: MARK RAYCROFT

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PLOTTING AFTER DARK

1) Deer in the food plot after dark can be a pesky situation. Meet it with strategic thinking. 2) Consider planting food plots closer to bedding areas to see more daylight usage and decreased likelihood of their arriving after dark. 3) Plant food plots in staging areas. Choose food plot species that hit peak attraction simultaneously with the destination food sources beyond them. Deer will get there sooner and won't linger as they move on toward the larger food source. 4) Planting food plots in a linear path between bedding areas and larger destination food sources requires understanding lines of movement, or how deer travel from Points A to B to C.



1

pressure on deer. This will clear the field, with minimal long-term effects.

The best vehicle to use for this is whatever the local deer are used to seeing. Conditioning is key, and if they see a vehicle they recognize and don't consider a threat, they are less likely to react negatively. It's all about consistency.

Furthermore, it's important to be as

quiet as possible. Don't talk to whom-ever picks you up until the doors are closed, windows are up, and deer can no longer hear you. Don't allow them to associate human voices with vehicles.

For those who are hesitant about this method, I've used it for years, and my trail-camera photos confirm that deer re-enter food plots within minutes of my

Boosting Daylight Food Plot Use

Most deer typically visit food plots at night, especially mature bucks. To increase deer activity in your plots during daylight, I recommend planting them closer to known bedding areas, so deer feel more comfortable reaching them before nightfall.

Another important factor is that the targeted bedding areas have daytime browse for deer to feed on before they head to your food plots. Deer eat throughout the day, but usually within or on the fringes of their bedding areas. Keep this in mind when selecting plot locations.

Planning and creating good entry and exit routes is another major factor. If you can't get to or depart from your food plot without alerting deer to your presence, these aren't worth hunting more than a time or two at most.

Positioning treestands and blinds in the right locations is important. If deer can detect you during the hunt, daytime plot use won't last very long. You must stay completely off their radar for maintained success.

What you plant matters, too. To see frequent use, a plot needs to provide forage for the entire period you hope to hunt there. This requires consistent forage value. It also needs to be synced with destination food sources. This, too, takes planning.



departure. Oftentimes, they merely run into the edge of cover and wait for us to leave. That said, don't overuse this tactic. While it can be effective when needed, mature bucks might begin to catch on over time, especially if you mess up.

USE A 2-D DECOY

Some hunters deal with after-dark deer in the food plot, or elsewhere, so often that they keep lightweight 2-D decoys on them. Montana Decoy's options are perfect for this use, as are those from Ultimate Predator Gear. Select one that works for you and where you hunt. For example, in cattle country, a 2-D cow decoy might work better. And of course, a whitetail decoy works anywhere.

When using a decoy, it's important to match your gait to the decoy being used. Deer still see quite well after dark, so they might be able to view the profile of your decoy. It's important to match the sound of your footsteps to that of the decoy being used. So if it's a deer, walk like a deer; if it's a cow or other selection, do the same.

A Careful Matter

When it comes to bumping deer out of food plots, it might be tempting to do so if it's a doe or young buck. However, I urge restraint and suggest treating every deer as if it's a mature target buck.

The reasoning is simple: Every deer you spook can impact target bucks, even if they weren't present for the negative encounters. You see, deer will behave nervously where they encountered you, and when mature deer eventually arrive, they'll notice that odd body language exhibited by the deer spooked by the boogiemer.

Therefore, always treat each deer as a mature deer. Do your best not to spook any whitetail deer. This way, you'll retain maximum preservation of hunting-spot quality.

BARK LIKE A DOG

If all else fails, and you don't have someone to pick you up and can't wait until deer leave, select a noise that's natural to a deer's environment. However, choose a spooking method with the least impact.

Start by mimicking something less frightening, such as a hawk, owl, or other nonthreatening animal. If that doesn't spook deer off, perhaps try a bobcat, coyote, dog, or fox sound. Regardless of the chosen vocalization, start soft, and then get louder as needed. You don't want deer to associate the sound directly with the tree or blind you're sitting in.

Those who don't want to draw attention to their location might place a remote unit somewhere nearby, but in a spot that still pushes deer away from you. Check your state and local hunting laws before doing so, as this tactic is prohibited in some areas.

WAIT IT OUT

In contrast, if none of the above is an option, you're left with one other solution. If you can't leave before deer get close, or they appear suddenly as you're packing up, it might require waiting. This could take two minutes or two hours — perhaps more. But if you're dedicated to staying off their radar and you can't deploy any of the above solutions, this might be your only choice. It doesn't come without its drawbacks, though.

Waiting it out prevents deer from seeing or hearing you, but unlike the other tactics I've mentioned, this one still leaves a deer's sense of smell in play, especially if they can get downwind of


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PLOTTING AFTER DARK



Here's a buck I shot on one of my plots. I planted Egyptian wheat around it to provide a visual shield.

your setup and you aren't hunting from an airtight, hard-sided box blind. Having hard stops, such as a river, brush-piles, or other obstacles, can provide peace of mind, though.

Overall, regardless of the selection made, the general rule is to refrain from spooking deer. Doing so is a mistake that will reduce the quality of your hunting

spot, especially if it happens frequently over time. So, if deer are still in the food plot after dark, don't sweat it. You have the tools to fix the problem. **BH**

The author is a diehard hunter and accomplished outdoor communicator who has chased game, big and small, all over North America.

Go Low-Profile

Whether you're dealing with deer in a food plot, or not, there are certain things you can do to be stealthier when walking in and out of the woods. The first is using the elements to your favor, such as higher winds and soft rain. These muffle the sounds of your approach and can even provide visual cover if vegetation is moving with the wind.

Another tip is losing light. Flashlights can be seen very easily by deer, and they know it isn't a natural aspect of their environment. If in a situation where you must use a light — such as on public land, in dangerous terrain, in unfamiliar places, etc. — consider using a red light instead. These are more difficult for deer to see, while still providing illumination for your walk in and out.

Lastly, hunting from the ground can be better for preventing deer from seeing you before daylight and after dark. Many times, I've approached a treestand before daylight and didn't spook deer until I started climbing the tree. This is true even when I've climbed silently. Likewise, there have been times I've spooked deer when climbing down after dark. Hunting from a ground blind can give you the edge needed to slip in or out, without deer seeing or hearing you.

All things considered, some hunters don't have the ability, permission, or resources to make changes to the landscape, or to implement the tactics I've covered in this article. Some hunters do, and no matter what they try, they still spook deer after the hunt. In either instance, it might be best to back off the food plots and start hunting travel routes instead. Generally, these clear out at or soon after dark, providing a window of opportunity to exit and leave with minimal risk of pressuring deer.

BH WHERE TO GO

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT ADVERTISING IN THIS SECTION, PLEASE CONTACT
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ASK BOWHUNTER®

WITH MATT PALMQUIST



This is a see-through blind that is brushed in well with just one window open to shoot through.

This is the view from inside a Rhino 180 See-Through Blind — a real game-changer!

block light. This will also help with scent control, especially when using an Ozonics unit. Be sure to identify locations that allow access without impacting a buck's core area.

Brushing-in the blind is critical to success when hunting whitetail deer. The better you brush it in, the more relaxed deer will be. It is less of a problem if you can erect the blind a month or more before hunting, allowing deer to accept it, but even then, I advise extra concealment.

This is best done using available resources. If cedar trees are present, tuck the blind into the bushy tree and use the trimmed branches as cover for the exposed sides of the blind. For open terrain, find an area of tall grass or weeds to use for a backdrop and cover as much exposed blind material as possible to blend in naturally with the surroundings. Pay special attention to the corners of the blind. Animals will notice abrupt edges, so make sure the corners are covered to avoid detection.

Wind can be a problem, as some parts of a blind may flap. If I can't tuck the fabric in to prevent wind-flap, I will use safety pins to fasten any loose areas that could spook approaching deer. It is imperative that you stake down the blind to avoid issues on windy days. I stake all four corners and use the supplied cord to tie each wall to adjacent tree branches or a ground stake. Failure to do so will almost guarantee Murphy's Law will bring a gust of wind when your target buck is approaching the blind.

The final component to success is executing the shot. It will be difficult to see your pins in the dark blind, so if legal, you can use a sight light to illuminate your pins. Be certain your arrow will clear the blind fabric around the window. It's imperative that you practice shooting from your blind, preferably toward dusk, to experience both factors.

Having made all these mistakes myself, I speak from experience. I hope my blunders can help you shorten your learning curve and lead to success! **BH**

AUTHOR'S PHOTO

Q I HAVE BEEN hunting deer out of pop-up ground blinds with little success. Can you provide some tips for effectively using a blind? *B. Amber via e-mail*

A TRADITIONAL POP-UP blinds can be a great option for hunting whitetails, but there are some challenges. I've committed my fair share of mistakes over the years that cost me dearly. But those hard lessons have helped improve my system.

One of the hardest things to acclimate to is the smaller field of view. Treestands allow you to see your entire surroundings with little movement. Ground blinds have windows that give you a limited view, but because deer don't tolerate movement and noise at eye level, you must avoid the urge to peek out closed windows, especially behind you, because this allows light to enter the blind, which can expose you to any deer watching the blind.

A relatively new ground blind technology allows you to see through the blind walls, but game animals cannot see in. This see-through mesh is a game-changer because it gives you a much better view of your surroundings, even through any brush you've used to conceal the blind, and helps you spot approaching deer well in advance. I would suggest looking for this feature when purchasing a ground blind.

When choosing a location for your blind, avoid setting it up near a simple trail as deer can easily change course to avoid it. Instead, use some type of attraction such as a waterhole, bait (if legal in your state), or even a decoy or two to distract a buck. This puts the deer on the "X," so you can set up with one shooting window open and the rest closed to



THE QUEST

RANDY ULMER

HEART OF ENDURANCE: PART SEVEN

HUNTING IS INBORN, AND IF YOU
DON'T UNDERSTAND IT, YOU'RE
PROBABLY NOT A HUNTER.

THE HUNTER CREEPS forward on bare feet with all the stealth, fervency, and predatory instincts 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 the hunter sees the buck first, he has a chance; if the buck sees him first, the hunt is over. Any error now will lay waste to months of effort and preparation.

When asked why he hunts, the hunter struggles to fully explain this deep, innate desire and need. It would be like attempting to explain sexual desire to an asexual being — impossible within the boundaries of our language. The hunter's primal yearning is something that must be experienced to be fully understood.

He detects movement in the near distance. His muscles tense spasmodically. With trembling hands, he slowly raises his binoculars. Heavy velvet antler tips move methodically above the brush as the buck feeds. The hunter feels a surge of adrenaline as well as an overwhelming sense of unreality.

Although absolutely still, his body is charged with a familiar intensity. His primordial instincts have awakened within him and seem a living, breathing force.

Being this close to a velvet-antlered monarch has never been comfortable for him. The feelings are so intense that he desperately desires the ordeal over with

as quickly as possible. Yet, paradoxically, these powerful emotions are what compulsively draw him to return each fall to hunt with bow and arrow.

One can't fully appreciate a heavy-antlered mule deer buck at a distance; you must experience him intimately, close enough to feel his essence. It is the difference between seeing a photograph of the Grand Canyon and standing on its rim.

It is a strange feeling to have this buck so close. The hunter and "Old Unkillable" have a long history. He feels like a boy who yearns for his birthday then wakes, happy his day has arrived, yet dreads its ending. Perhaps he has matured as a hunter, as he now enjoys the pursuit more than the kill. The kill means an end to the hunt.

When this close to his quarry, he has always experienced an intense, nagging apprehension and anxiety. He worries that the animal will suddenly turn and run before he can loose an arrow. "Patience seldom goes unrewarded," has always been his bowhunting mantra. He quietly recites it now: "Patience, patience, patience."

"Closing the deal" is the hardest aspect of any hunt to master. A younger version of himself, wanting relief from the acute suspense and angst, would rush — hurrying either the stalk or the shot.

The buck turns and slowly feeds away. The hunter sneaks along behind, slowly gaining ground, cat-like, arrow nocked. He watches the bobbing velvet rack intensely. When it stops moving, he freezes; when the rhythmic motion continues, he eases forward.

He is now within range. The buck stops to feed. Hands moving as slowly as those of a clock, the hunter engages his release and patiently waits for the buck's eyes to be hidden in the brush. When the buck's vitals are exposed, and his eyes shielded, the hunter lifts the well-worn Hoyt and eases the string to his face.

The hunter holds the pin steadily — shockingly so. He does not think of missing, or about the buck's outsized rack. He focuses only on the pin and the exact spot he wants the arrow to strike. Taking a full breath, he lets half out and squeezes. He does everything right, just like he teaches.

The arrow is away and flying true. As it strikes, the buck jumps and crashes away down the chute. The now trembling hunter watches without moving, carefully marking the precise place where the buck disappeared from view.

The hunter collapses to the ground and looks up through the branches at the cloudless blue sky and exclaims in a whisper, "Thank You!"

Twenty minutes later, he moves forward to the place, just out of the avalanche chute, where the buck stood at the shot. While searching for his arrow, he discovers a Clovis spear point. An unbelievable coincidence, he thinks. Then upon further reflection, he realizes this cannot be coincidence; other hunters have been here before him, doing what he does now. Deer frequented this niche then, as they do now. This ancient stone artifact is merely a timeless reminder of the continuity of man's existence in this mountainous hideaway.

That ancient hunter didn't find his spent projectile; nor does the modern hunter find his. What else is the same for him as it was for his ancient ancestors living here 10,000 years ago? And what about 10,000 years from now? Will some future hunter find his arrow? Will man still hunt? Will any of man's existence remain the same?

Other than hunting, what would summon a modern man into the wilderness to experience this intimate physical contact with the Earth and its inhabitants — the self-same intimacy ancient man's everyday life required and provided?

To be continued... **BH**

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