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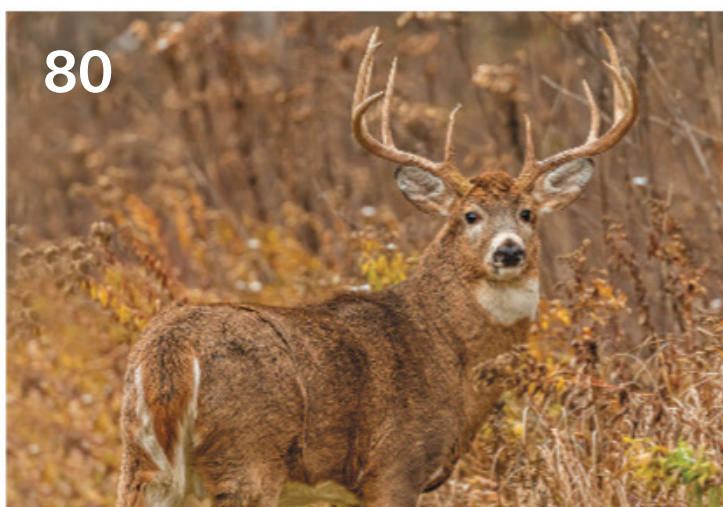
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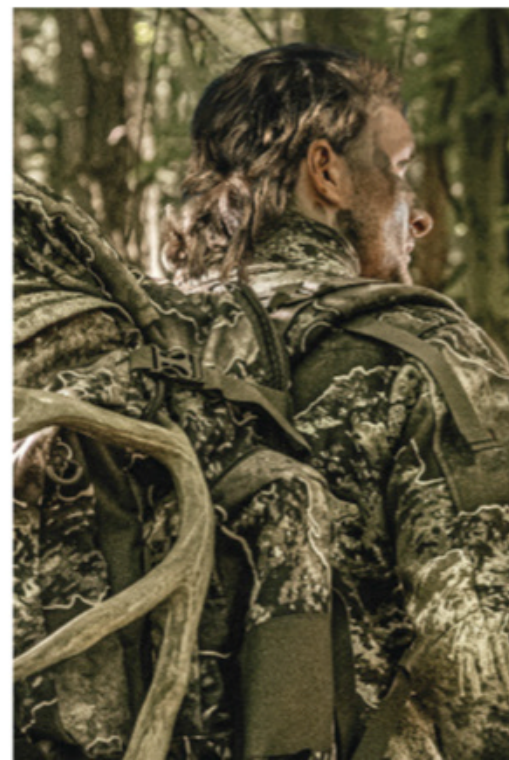
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EDITORIAL

CURT WELLS | EDITOR

ADVENTURE STREAMING

WHEN YOU CAN'T GO, LET THE ACTION COME TO YOU.

WHEN IT COMES to giving readers of *Bowhunter* Magazine, or viewers of *Bowhunter TV*, what they want, there are two types of consumers of outdoor media: Those who are only interested in reading about, or watching adventures that they do themselves, or are capable of doing, both physically and financially; and those who would rather be entertained by the wild and crazy, more complex adventures they'll likely never have an opportunity to take part in.

Our job is to balance those interests by covering both the blue-collar bowhunting adventures and the wild and crazy stuff. In the grand scheme of things, our focus is narrow, but intentionally so. The fact is, most outdoors types have more than one interest. They may be bowhunters and bass anglers, or

goose hunters and long-range rifle shooters. Today's outdoorsmen and women tend to specialize, unlike years ago when we did everything from grouse hunting to fishing for bluegills.

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Of course I'm biased, because there are over 200 episodes of *Bowhunter TV* available, as well as a number of other bowhunting shows. If I'm in the mood to watch some bugling elk (I'm always in that mood), I can simply do a search and watch a bunch of bulls screaming while my fellow bowhunters try to make it happen.

The same goes for any kind of hunting, fishing, or shooting sports you can imagine. You will find whatever you're



Bowhunting adventure comes in many forms and only you can decide what excites you. Whether you're in the Mackenzie Mountains of the Northwest Territories searching for mountain caribou, or slipping through the woods in South Dakota tracking a buck you just shot with your bow, it is all adventure in its own way. If you're interested in a particular bowhunting adventure, or any type of outdoor pursuit for that matter, you can find something to watch on MOTV!

interested in on MOTV. But this service is about more than just what interests you. If you watch these shows with an analytical eye, you can learn how to get better at whatever it is you do. Pay attention to what was done that led to success, or what mistake resulted in failure. What decisions were made, and why, that changed the outcome? You may even be inspired to try a new pursuit or discover a new destination. If you think you have nothing to learn, then you most certainly do.

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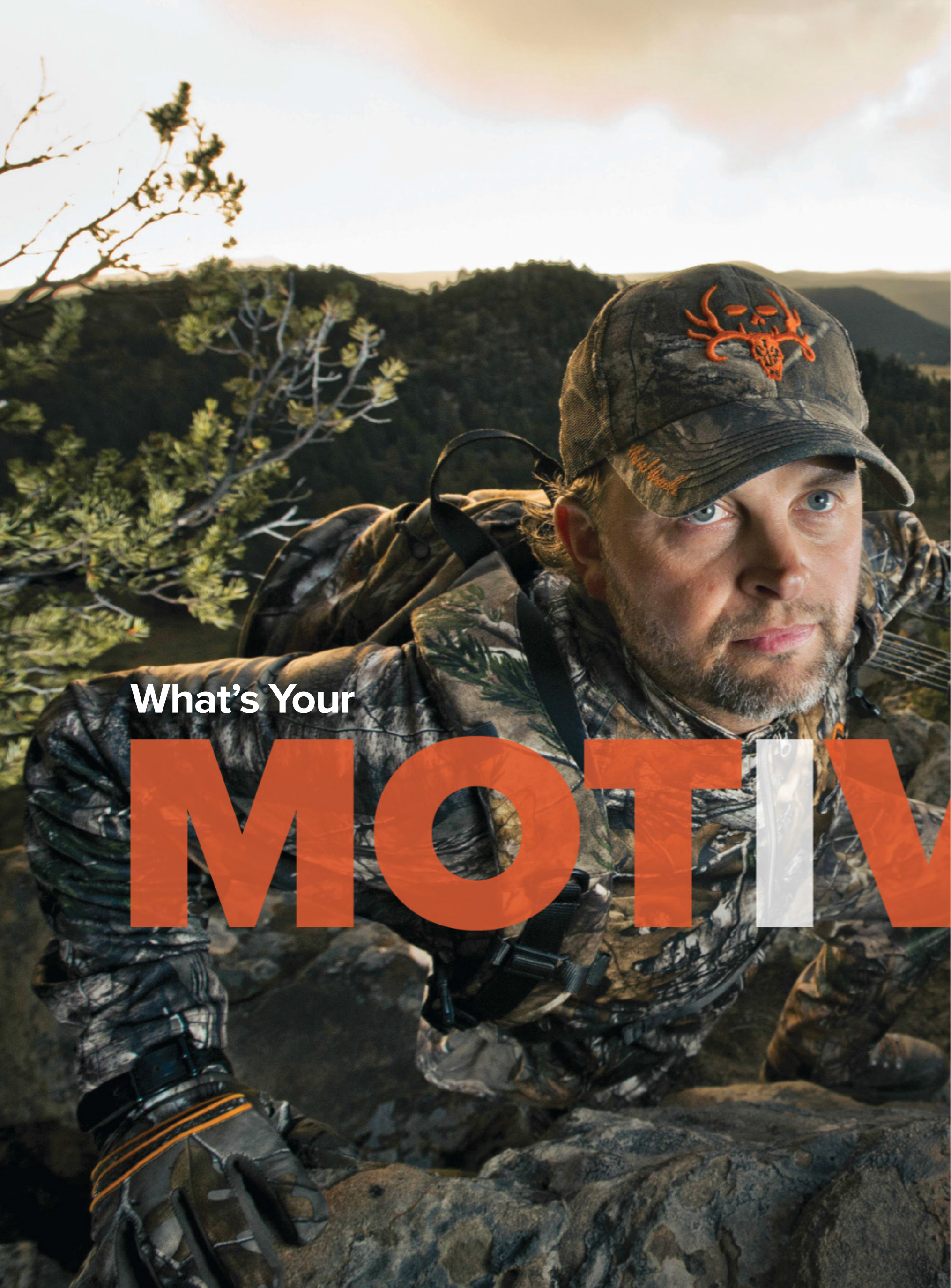
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ON THE TRACK

CHUCK ADAMS



I believe that broadhead design is the single most important factor in arrow penetration. A sharp-nosed, streamlined head like the G5 Striker V2 will maximize your arrow's kinetic energy on impact.

isn't necessarily true. However, lady bowhunters like Kristy Titus usually think about it more because their draw weights tend to be lower, their arrows lighter, and as a result their kinetic energy is oftentimes on the marginal side. But no matter what bow and arrow you shoot, there are factors that can enhance or absolutely ruin deep penetration with critters like caribou, elk, moose, mature black bears, wild boars, and a host of massive African species.

First, let me say there's no such thing as too much arrow penetration. The more you can get, the better. Deep penetration improves the chances of an exit hole for greater blood loss to the ground. Even if your arrow doesn't pass completely through, every inch of broadhead travel means more tissue damage and a quicker kill. The old notion that an arrow needs to stay inside a critter is bunk. Complete pass-throughs are best.

For an elk-sized animal (500 to 800 pounds), I believe pointblank arrow energy should be 50 foot-pounds or more. Kristy's setup shoots a 330-grain arrow at 263 fps, producing 50.7 ft.-lbs. of energy. With her arrow slowing down about two fps per 10 yards of forward travel, at 60 yards the shaft would still have about 46 ft.-lbs. — enough to deeply drill an elk, if other factors are optimal. Let's discuss those factors.

One thing I believe is overemphasized in penetration is shaft diameter. Arrow manufacturers often tout their skinny shafts as superior penetrators, but in my experience, this is seldom true in an animal — unless the arrow impacts heavy bone. Most arrow-penetration tests at the factory are made in artificial, clinging substances like ballistic gelatin. These have nothing in common with animal flesh and yield false results.

With most arrow hits on game, the projectile passes through ribs or soft tissue. The broadhead cuts a hole much larger than the shaft, and once that cut is made, the shaft slides along behind with very little friction. Shaft diameter — large or small — is not a factor. Blood,

PENETRATION INS AND OUTS

ACHIEVE TWO HOLES IN ANY SIZE GAME WITH THE FOLLOWING TIPS.

JUST A FEW DAYS before I wrote this, I had the pleasure of chatting with TV celebrity Kristy Titus at the Total Archery Challenge event in Park City, Utah. Kristy has an upcoming elk hunt and wanted to make sure her new 58-pound Bear Refine compound was set up for great penetration.

We looked at her setup, did a few calculations, and decided any elk inside 60 yards would be in deep trouble... Kristy is a great shot.

Serious archers like Kristy do not leave anything to chance when it comes

to their equipment. They analyze every aspect, make adjustments as needed, and go hunting with confidence.

Bowhunters shooting heavy draw-weight setups tend not to worry about arrow penetration for bigger game. This



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fat, and other slippery body materials lubricate the broadhead channel and lower shaft friction to almost nil.

Be it a fat 2413 aluminum shaft or a skinny 5mm carbon shaft with only two-thirds the outside diameter, both will penetrate about equal with the same broadhead. Penetration tests through leather and animal carcasses have proven this to me beyond the shadow of a doubt.

Small-diameter arrows certainly penetrate better through bone, like the edge of a shoulder blade, because bone clamps down on a shaft. Small-diameter shafts also track better in a crosswind. But in most cases, the difference in animal penetration is overblown.

One of the most important variables in arrow penetration is how well your arrows fly. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to understand this. A clean-flying arrow puts all its power directly behind the broadhead in flight. On impact, that power pushes straight ahead to drive the broadhead deep. By comparison, a wobbling arrow sheds energy as it wags back and forth in flight. On impact, even more energy is flipped to one side.

Be sure your arrows cut bullet-holes through stretched paper from 10 or 12 feet away. If they tear paper up, down, left, or right, you need to tune your bow until those poor paper tears disappear. Then — and only then — will your hunting arrows achieve maximum penetration in game.



Your standard deer rig doesn't always suffice for bigger critters like this bull elk.

More than anything else, broadhead design will make or break penetration.

Think about it. If you attached a rubber blunt to your arrow, it would bounce off an elk. If you attached a streamlined, razor-sharp head with two narrow blades and a knifelike point, it would slice completely through a broadside elk. Same arrow, same kinetic energy, but very different results.

That said, it should come as no sur-

prise that Native Americans bagged deer, elk, and other critters with arrows tipped by small, sharp, streamlined two-edge stone points. Their bows were crude and positively puny, with estimated arrow speeds below 150 fps and kinetic energy below 25 ft.-lbs. Yet slender arrowheads made the critical difference and fed primitive peoples for thousands of years.

Most bowhunters use broadheads with designs somewhere between a rubber blunt and a slender two-edge knife. For deer-sized game, heads with three or four blades and fairly fat nose sections will penetrate fine. So will mechanical, open-on-impact broadheads that expand rapidly and cut a huge hole. But for animals like elk, broadheads must be carefully selected.

Sure, mechanical heads like those offered by G5, Rage, and others will slice a giant wound channel through a whitetail deer. From a powerful 70 or 80-pound compound bow, these same heads might get the job done on a broadside elk, but all else being equal, a two or three-blade fixed head with a slender nose will penetrate much better on bigger game out of any and all bow setups.

Bowhunters often wonder what broadhead weight is best. Weight is not really a factor in animal penetration, but front-of-center (F.O.C.) arrow balance certainly affects flat trajectory and pinpoint accuracy. For the best of both, it is wise to shoot hunting arrows with a balance between 10 and 15 percent weight forward. Tests by Easton and others have proven this to be a great compromise between flat trajectory and consistent accuracy.

For a gal like Kristy, with very lightweight arrows, a 100-grain broadhead yields correct F.O.C. balance. With heavier arrows in the 450 to 550-grain range, 125-grain heads are necessary for proper F.O.C.

Deep arrow penetration in really big game is a must. Use a bow/arrow setup that produces at least 50 ft.-lbs. of point-blank arrow energy. Tune for perfect arrow flight, and then select a streamlined and low-friction broadhead. With these three factors, you might be pulling your arrow out of a tree after it blows through an elk! **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

CALCULATING ARROW ENERGY

TO CALCULATE the kinetic energy of your arrow, you need to know its velocity (speed) and how much it weighs.

Most archery stores have a chronograph you can shoot through to determine the speed. Any grain scale will give you an exact arrow weight — be sure your chosen arrowhead is attached.

From there, a simple formula reveals the precise energy: Velocity (fps) x Velocity (fps) x Weight (grs.) divided by 450,240 equals Energy (ft.-lbs.). For example, let's say you shoot 500-grain arrows at 250 fps. Using this formula, 250 x 250 x 500 divided by 450,240 equals 62.47 ft.-lbs. With perfect arrow flight and a proper broadhead, you'll probably shoot completely through a broadside elk or moose.

To increase arrow energy, crank up bow poundage and/or increase arrow weight. Arrow speed and flat trajectory will diminish with a heavier arrow, but kinetic ft.-lbs. will always increase.

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NEXT-LEVEL BOWHUNTING

JOE BELL | TECHNICAL EDITOR



In the heat of the moment, we often rush the shot, causing a good opportunity to go awry. The key to success is to slow down and go through a pre-shot checklist.

AVOIDING THE MISS

IT TAKES MONTHS TO PREPARE FOR BOWHUNTING SEASON, BUT ONLY A FEW SECONDS TO BLOW IT ALL!

NOBODY WANTS to reminisce about big misses or poorly placed shots from seasons past. But, in many ways, maybe it's good these memories haunt us from time to time, because they'll give us the motivation we need to improve our skills, so we never experience those dreaded moments again.

Fortunately, when we do blow a shot, it's usually due to a simple form flaw — something that can be remedied with some basic instruction. Here are three common areas where shooting problems originate and what you can do to cure them.

Using A Faulty Anchor Position

To shoot well under pressure, you must be consistent with how you anchor your draw-hand along your face. If you anchor too far back or too hard into the face, you'll shoot differently each time, causing major accuracy problems.

The best way to analyze and modify your anchor, so it's more repeatable, is to practice different anchor positions. The string bow is perfect for this. You can make this training aid out of an old bowstring or a few feet of paracord. An old bowstring with a D-loop already in place is my preference, given it's long enough to accommodate your draw length. Otherwise, tie-in a D-loop on the paracord, then form a knot in the string to create a large loop exactly the same length as your draw length.

With the string bow, there's no resistance involved, so it's easy to draw and anchor while evaluating your shooting form. You can also practice triggering the release and using back-tension. When doing this, use a large mirror, so you can see how your elbow is positioned in relation to the D-loop. For best results, the draw elbow should be in line with the D-loop, which is a telltale sign of the correct draw length.

A good draw-hand anchor, when using an index release, puts the web of the hand solidly against the jawbone. With a T-handle release, the first and second knuckles on the back of the hand should straddle the underside of the jawbone perfectly.

Once you find a comfortable spot to anchor your hand, pay close attention to the amount of pressure you put on your jawbone. You want just enough pressure to create a solid hold, without forcing the bowstring hard into your cheek. The same goes with your nose. Be sure it barely touches the bowstring when you're in the full-draw position. This will reduce the chance of torquing the string differently from one shot to the next.

In what may take you months of shooting practice to accomplish, you can probably accomplish in a couple weeks, if not days, using the string bow. It's truly an invaluable training aid.

Rushing The Shot

When a big buck suddenly appears, we can't believe it. The moment of truth is happening, and we want to capital-



Good shooting form is critical to achieving shot-to-shot consistency and establishing greater shooting confidence. However, we must maintain proper shooting posture whether we're shooting level with the target or uphill/downhill.

ize on it right away. But when we rush, we tend to get more excited, increasing our likelihood of blundering the shot. To avoid this, slow down, take a deep breath, and methodically work your way up to the shot-execution phase.

The best way to do this is to use a pre-shot checklist. My list goes something like this: (1) Is the shot clear? Take inventory of possible obstacles that could cause the arrow to ricochet. (2) Establish the shot distance — make sure your rangefinder is picking up on the right

object. (3) Analyze the proper aiming spot based on animal's position. (4) Draw when the animal is looking away. (5) Use the correct sight pin, level the sight, and then aim until the bow recoils by surprise.

Steps four and five on this checklist are critical. This is where I tell myself to slow way down and come to full draw nicely, then settle into my anchor. My focus is centered on aiming well, letting the sight pin float, and executing the release by surprise. I don't want to punch or jerk the release. If punching is a problem for you, then use the string bow to practice proper execution. You'll know if you're executing the release by surprise, based on the positioning of your bow hand and elbow after the shot. The bow hand will end up slightly left of your aiming position, while the draw elbow will pull slightly inward from steady back-tension.

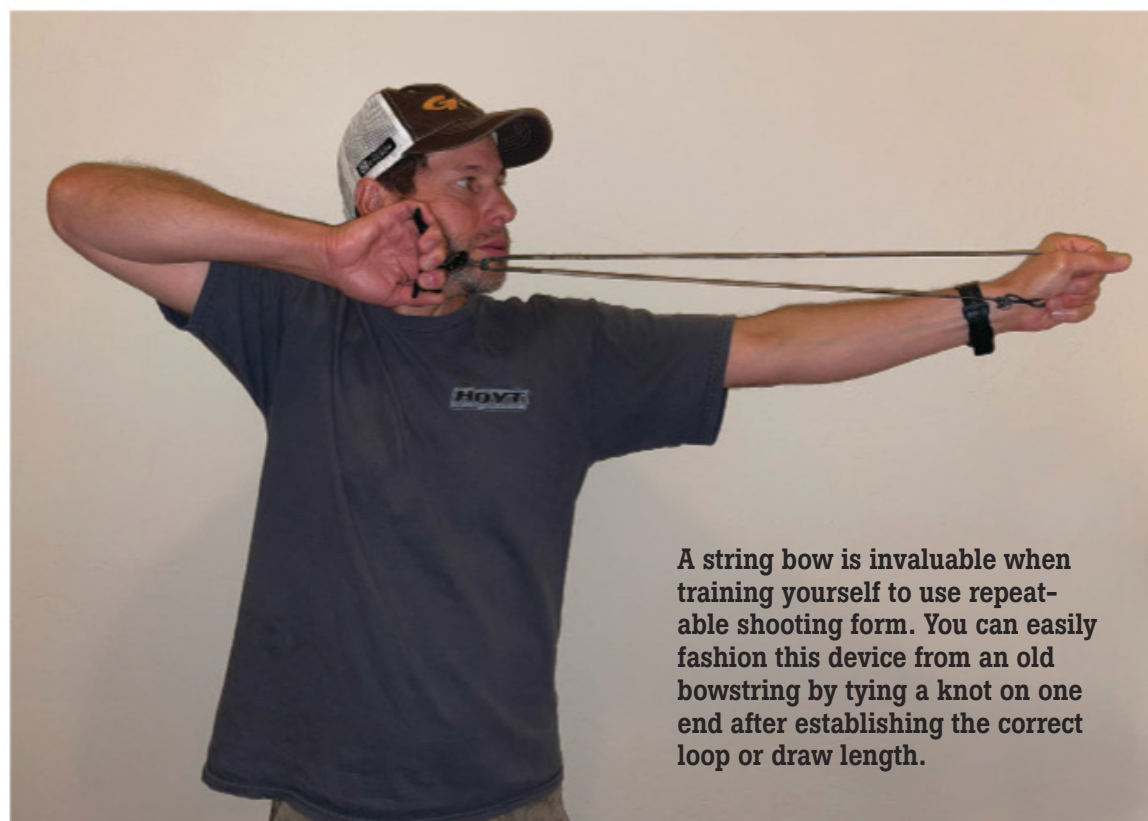
For many bowhunters, choosing the wrong sight pin can be easy to do. To avoid this, use fewer sight pins, change to a movable sight with a single pin, or color-code sight pins so they're easy to sort. On my current setup, I use a fixed-aperture, nine-pin bowsight. This gives me extra sight pins for practicing at long distances, or for making a long follow-up shot if necessary.

To break up the wad of sight pins, I add small strips of colored tape to some of them, in order to separate the close and midrange pins from the longer-range pins. It works like magic, allowing for fast visual assortment, even when I'm anxious and drawing down on a buck.

Lacking Confidence

I've been on many hunting trips where I thought I was confident, but when that critical shot was in motion, I blew it. Each time, I had to go back to the drawing board. This involved shooting with good form, practicing real-life hunting scenarios, and visualizing successful shooting outcomes.

Maintaining Good Form: As already mentioned, using a string bow can help dissect form flaws. However, you must maintain this form in awkward shooting scenarios as well. For example, when bowhunting, we're often tired and cold after sitting for long periods in a tree-stand, or we're faced with an ultra-steep shot we've never taken before. To keep your bow shooting straight, you must maintain proper form — no matter what.



A string bow is invaluable when training yourself to use repeatable shooting form. You can easily fashion this device from an old bowstring by tying a knot on one end after establishing the correct loop or draw length.



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NEXT-LEVEL BOWHUNTING

To simplify proper form, your body should maintain a “T-like posture” when you’re at full draw. This means your torso is straight up and down, and your arms are in line with the grip and arrow, which resembles a “T” when observed from the archer’s side.

It’s easy to maintain this T-form on a flat surface, but it becomes a little more challenging when shooting downward from a treestand, or sharply up or downhill in steep mountain country. But with good technique, you can still maintain solid form from the waist up. In a treestand or when shooting slightly uphill/downhill, train yourself to draw on a level plane, then swivel at the hips slightly to keep your arms perpendicular to your chest.

For extreme uphill/downhill shots, experiment with different uphill leg positions, often bending your uphill leg to open up your stance more, so you can improve your torso’s posture in relation to your arms. This will help you mimic T-form, so your bow shoots the same as it does on level ground. If you simply bend downward, point the bow at the target, and then draw straight back, your torso won’t be in line with your arms, and you’ll exert a different kind of torque on the bow.

The best place to build confidence and to determine if you’re using solid shooting form is to practice under real-life bowhunting conditions.

Practicing The Real Deal: The best way to build confidence and to determine if you’re using solid shooting form is to practice under real-life bowhunting conditions. Shooting 3-Ds is ideal, but be sure the targets are at different shooting angles and you’re wearing the same clothes and gear you’d use when hunting. Practicing from an elevated position is imperative if you’ll be hunting from a treestand. And don’t forget to use your rangefinder and go through your mental checklist prior to each shot.

If you notice your bow is shooting off on angled shots, check your sight’s 2nd and 3rd-axis leveling adjustments. Without a properly leveled sight, you can miss big time — even when using correct form.

When practicing, don’t forget to in-



When shooting at extreme angles, experiment with opening up your stance. This will help keep your torso perpendicular to your arms.

clude holding your bow for long periods of time, then doing your best to execute a good shot. The more you practice worst-case scenarios, the more confident and prepared you’ll feel about opening day. Remember, you can still make a good shot, despite shaking and being nervous. Focus on letting the pin float while pulling solidly through the shot until the bow fires.

Visualization Techniques: I often practice the art of visualization prior to a big hunting trip, and I’m convinced it helps. I picture a monster muley nibbling on browse as I come to full draw and settle my sight pin steadily on his quartering-away vitals. Then I imagine myself aiming with tremendous focus until the arrow flashes ahead — exactly as I wanted it to.

When you visualize yourself killing a buck over and over in your mind, you’re feeding your subconscious mind positive thoughts. Unlike your conscious mind, it can’t tell the difference between what’s real and what’s imaginary. It’s a great way to program your mind so it knows what to do when faced with the same scenario but in real-time.

Missing shots is not fun. It can lead to sleepless nights and awful bowhunting memories. By following my advice, I guarantee you’ll improve your proficiency and confidence as a bowhunter, and you will deliver accurate shots when they count most. **BH**

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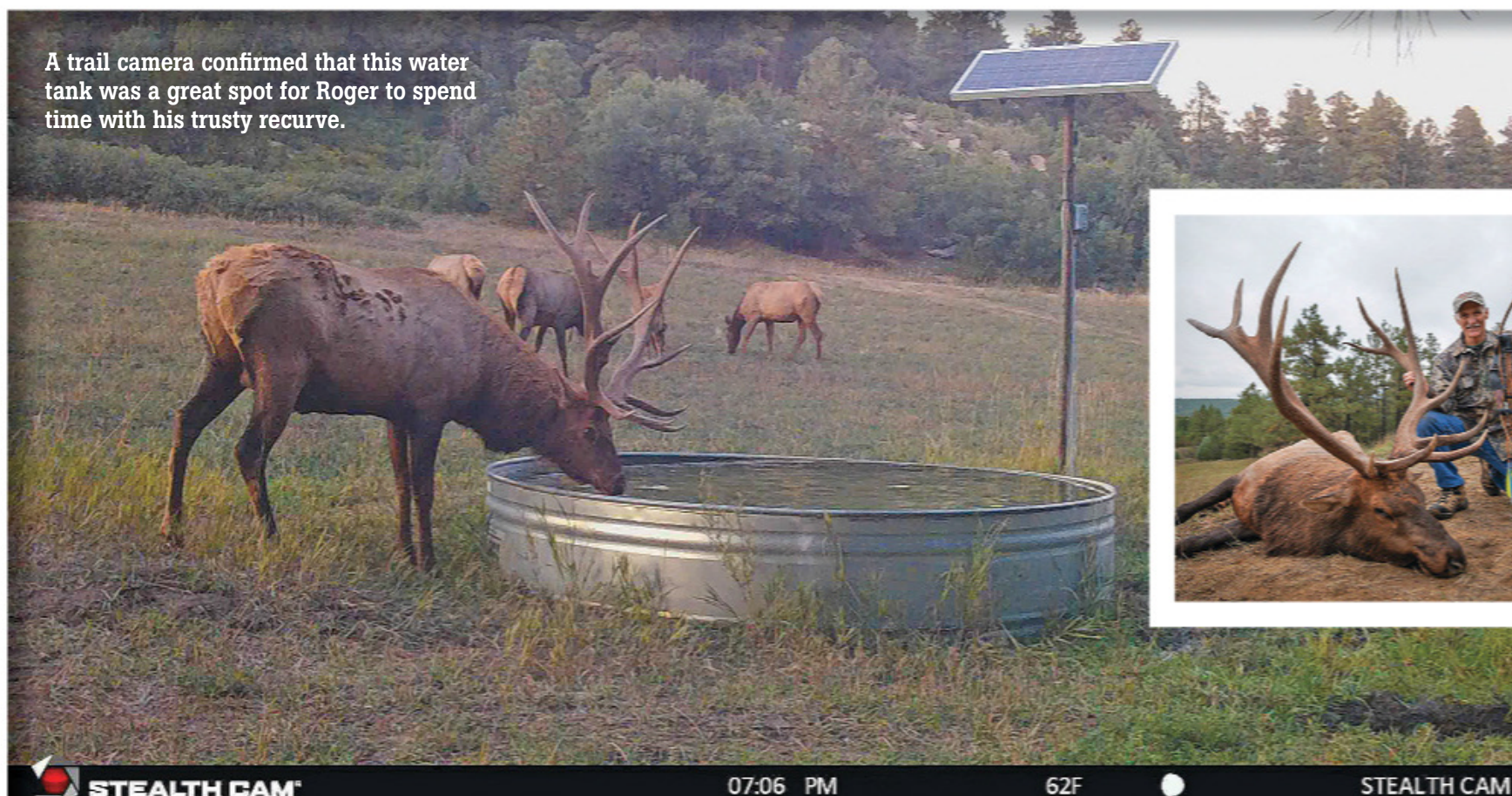


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FRED EICHLER | TRADITIONAL EDITOR



SCOUTING FUN

TRAIL CAMERAS ARE SO MUCH MORE
THAN THEIR MONIKER SUGGESTS.

CHECKING YOUR TRAIL CAMERAS is a lot like walking downstairs on Christmas morning: None of us knows what “presents” lie in store for us inside that wrapped box or stored on a tiny piece of plastic, yet the excitement level is pretty much the same. And for those readers who use trail cameras? You’re lying if you don’t echo my sentiments.

For me, it’s the sheer curiosity of what surprises might await my eyes via the pics and videos my cameras have taken. They are never the same, and sometimes you get that amazing animal or bird that you hadn’t anticipated, or that you may have never seen before in person, or in that particular way.

Personally, I feel they are great for scouting or just seeing what animals are around. Others might not feel the same way, and I’m not here to delve too deeply

into the debates on them or recent state legislation regarding their use. I’m just here to tell you that I love trail cameras — and why.

I don’t feel they give hunters an unfair advantage. Most seasoned woodsmen and women usually have a pretty good idea of what critters are roaming around on their hunting areas based on tracks or other sign, which then leads them to place cameras in certain areas for further confirmation.

That said, I will add that in certain cases on public land, where there is only one waterhole around for miles, I have seen trail-camera use get a little ridiculous at times. And in those cases, I do feel it may be detrimental to wildlife that need to drink without being spooked by the noise or flash of multiple cameras turning on — even if it’s the infrared lights.

I have also seen as many as five blinds around one waterhole in Arizona. While I consider that example to be more of an issue of hunters not respecting their brethren (another topic altogether); isn’t surrounding the only viable water source around for miles with multiple blinds pretty much on par with a waterhole trail camera when it comes to possibly deterring thirsty critters from drinking?

But I digress...

Since I put some of the pictures I get on my wall, I often set up my cameras for scenic backgrounds, because who doesn’t like a pretty picture? Others are placed in the off-season, so I can enjoy looking at images of things like calves and fawns being born, or bear cubs doing what they do. Or for keeping track of

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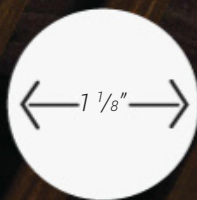
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TRADITIONAL WAY

elk and deer that are close to shedding their antlers (important intel if you're a shed-hunting fanatic like me).

Despite sometimes having different goals when I set up my cameras, some rules always apply.

To decrease false triggers and to get better images, I do a lot of small things to mitigate the odds of being disappointed with a lot of pictures of nothing. For example, I rarely set my cameras facing directly east or west, because the sun and/or direct shadows

falling on the camera's motion sensor can cause false triggers.

To prevent this from happening when setting up my cameras, I always pay attention to where the sun will be at different times of the day. I also trim any small branches or grass in the intended path of my camera's "eye" that might cause repeated false triggers due to their being moved by even the slightest of breezes.

If I'm setting a camera on a game trail, I don't face it perpendicular to the trail, but rather on a quartering angle to the trail. Doing so helps ensure I get a pic/video of the whole animal instead of

just body parts — even if it's walking fast or running.

Since many animals are curious and spot the cameras, I will sometimes place mine eight to 10 feet above ground and looking down, to avoid their getting messed with. Another advantage to placing your cameras at this height — especially on public ground — is to thwart people from stealing them. Speaking of theft, I also recommend protecting your cameras from animals like bears by enclosing your cameras in a manufactured "bear box." They are invaluable!

I also want my cameras running for long periods of time without filling up SD cards or having batteries die. That's why I always go with 32 GB cards, because they can hold thousands of hi-res photos or lots of video clips — depending on length of video and resolution. As for batteries, I recommend lithium. Are they more expensive? Yes. But they last a lot longer than the alternatives I've used — I have left cameras running for seven months without their lithium-powered batteries dying.

My last bit of trail-camera advice might be the most important, and it brings us back to my opening paragraph: If you're using and checking cameras regularly, please do so with caution. I will take great pains to slip in and check my cameras in the middle of the day or late at night (always being scent-conscious) to minimize my human presence as much as possible. After all, isn't that why we set up cameras in the first place?

I'm sure after reading that last paragraph, many of you are thinking, *But what about cellular cameras?* Valid point.

Cellular cams are awesome, and I own a few of them myself (currently Stealth Cam's DS4K because it suits my personal needs and criteria for any and all cams I buy). But they, like anything else in life, are not without a few shortcomings — cost and service signal being the two biggest — so be sure to do your research before dropping cash on a cell camera and data plan.

But once again, I digress...

Good trail cameras — no matter the make or model, cellular or conventional — can and will provide you and others with years of enjoyment, like they have for me and my family. Just be sure to check the regulations before setting up a trail camera in the area where you're planning to hunt. **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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Treestand setups require more foresight than most people would think.

GET ELEVATED

HANG 'EM HIGH TO FIND WHITETAIL SUCCESS THIS SEASON.

IT'S NO SECRET, to consistently find success in the whitetail woods you need to be elevated. That's not to say that today's ground blinds don't have their place, but for the average bowhunter with limited time in the woods, the benefits of treestands far outweigh everything else.

I'm a 20' guy, but if I can get away with 15' or less, I will. Sure, the higher you go, the less likely a deer may smell or see you. But elevated bowhunters must also consider shot angles. Stands hung much higher than 20' tend to cause problems like single-lung hits — especially if the deer is close.

Stand positioning is the next consideration. I like my stand positioned facing away from where I think a shot will occur. If I'm hunting a food source, the tree will be between me and the deer, and the same is true if I'm hunting a funnel. The concealment the tree's trunk provides is better than any camo pattern you're

wearing, but keep in mind that the size of the tree also matters with this setup. Too big and it's much harder to shoot around, which limits opportunity, so ideally I like trees slightly smaller than the size of my torso.

Lastly, consider your entrance/exit strategies. Nothing kills a potential stellar setup faster than when deer know they're being hunted. If they can detect your presence, you and your well-placed ambush are hosed... not just that day, but possibly for weeks to come.

Obviously, having a quality treestand, steps, and safety harness matters. That doesn't mean you need to fork over a car payment to buy a setup, but it does mean you will often get what you pay for.

Finding a middle-ground stand system is always best, and topping that list is **Rhino Treestand's** (rhinotreestands.com) [1] **RTH-200 Deluxe Hang-on** (\$149.99). Besides having an ultra-comfortable mesh flip-up seat with a backrest and padded armrests, it also sports a 24" x 32.5" platform with both having the ability to be leveled. The seat is 21" high, which is a plus for tall bowhunters. At nearly 30 lbs., it fits rock-solid against the tree. Pair this with Rhino's 31" Climbing Steps (\$112/4-pack), and you'll have a solid whitetail combo.

Another comfortable hang-on is **Millennium's** (millenniumstands.com) [2] **M150 Monster** (\$318.99). Not only does it feature Millennium's legendary comfortMAX sling seat that can be adjusted from 16"–20" in height, but it sits above a huge 24" x 37" platform. At 19 lbs., it's still light enough to provide a level of mobility, and it can be configured to sit level on trees that lean as much as 15 degrees — bonus!

Built to be a solid performer for years is **Muddy's** (gomuddy.com) steel-constructed [3] **Boss XL** (\$149.99). It has a spacious 25" x 34" expanded-metal platform and comfortable flip-up Flex-tek seat. At 19 lbs., it offers a level of portability. Equipped with a 2" silent strap and with no metal-on-metal contact, you'll be ghostlike.

When you need to save a few greenbacks but still want a quality hang-on, the [4] **Falcon** (\$109.99) from **X-Stand** (x-stand.com) is a player. Coming in at 20 lbs., the steel-constructed Falcon is equipped with self-lubricating nylon washers that eliminate metal-to-metal contact. The quick-hitch receiver enables you to level the seat and platform together, or independently, depending on your preferred stand tree. Additional noise reduction is achieved with X-Stand's powder-coated, no-slip finish. Its comfortable mesh seat flips up quietly, so you can stand to shoot if need be.

Another hang-on coming in at just over 10 lbs. is the [5] **Element** (\$459.99) from **Elevate Stand Co.** (elevatestand.co). Constructed from lightweight 6061-T6 aluminum, it's streamlined for easy and quiet packing when you need to slip in unnoticed. It features a generous 29" x 18.75" leveling platform, and with both ratchet and cam straps coupled with aggressive tree cleats, it securely attaches to trees with little worry of shifting.

Mobility can certainly be a plus for bowhunters, and while tree saddles have wowed the bowhunting crowd the past few years, a lightweight hang-and-hunt

setup is hard to beat. At just under 19 lbs., the [6] **Helo Hunt Ready System** (\$568.99) from **Novix** (novixoutdoors.com) is a strong contender. This all-in-one aluminum package comes with four 32" climbing sticks that are neatly attached to the 9.2-lb. hang-on. The stand is equipped with a leveling platform and Novix's Offset Bracket, so you can level it left to right.

If you're wanting something even lighter, the 5.7-lb. [7] **D'Acquisto Series .5 Public Land Hang-On** (\$524.99) from **Lone Wolf Custom Gear** (lonewolfcustomgear.com) is easily the lightest trees-stand out today. A scaled-down version of their popular 1.0, which comes in at 8.1 lbs., the .5 version is constructed from 6061 American Made Metal and carries their all-new Hammered Titanium hard coat for added concealment. It, too, has leveling capabilities, and when paired with their Double Step Sticks (\$99.99), the whole system neatly stacks together at a combined weight of roughly 10 lbs.

Another hang-on built for the bowhunter on the move is **Hawk's** (hawkshunting.com) [8] **Rival Micro** (\$279.99), and at just over 10 lbs., "micro" is definitely a fitting description. Its all-alu-

minum construction features a 300-lb. weight rating, a level-adjusting 20.5" x 17.5" platform, and a flip-up mesh seat. When coupled with Hawk's Helium 3 Pack Climbing Sticks (\$159.99), the entire system is well south of 20 lbs.

Still looking to cut some weight without sacrificing platform size, then check out the redesigned [9] **Air Raid Evolution** (\$249.99) from **XOP** (xopoutdoors.com). At 11 lbs., this cast-aluminum gem features a generous 30" x 19.5" platform that's equipped with XOP's slim I-Beam, making it 2 lbs. lighter than its predecessor. Like all top-end stands, it features a fully adjustable seat/platform and an ultra-thick seat. When equipped with a 4-pack of their Ultra Series Steps (\$149.99), the system tops out around 19 lbs.

Maker of the original tree saddle, **Trophyline** (trophyline.com) has raised the bar once again with the new [10] **Venatic Saddle** (\$299.99). It combines the quality and comfort you've come to expect from Trophyline in their lightest saddle yet. Made from an ultralight ripstop fabric, Trophyline removed the bulky straps from previous saddles and replaced them with strategically placed narrower ones for an overall weight of





just 20 oz. Besides being just as strong as previous models, the new design also offers a level of comfort that surpasses the competition.

Tethrd (tethrdnation.com) is another fan favorite of saddle-hunters, and their new [11] **Phantom Elite Kit** (\$399.99) will certainly wow the Tethrd faithful. The Elite comes with special edition SYS Haulers and an MVP back support. At just 24 oz., it's a fast-mover's dream. Other notables include Comfort Channels that incorporate high, medium, and low support settings on the bridge loop, as well as

a strong UtiliBridge system that offers 30" of one-hand adjustment.

For those who prefer climbers, **Summit** (summitstands.com) arguably makes some of the best. Their new [12] **Viper Level PRO SD** (\$529.99) makes using a climber safer and easier with the Easy Level dials — simply turn them to get the best possible angle while attached to the tree. Not only does it add a level of stability while ascending/descending, but it also allows users to dial-it in once elevated. The Viper Level PRO SD comes equipped for comfort and security via the Quick Draw PRO

cable system, foam-suspension seat w/ wraparound armpad, and a generous 25" x 36" platform.

In the ladder treestand category is **Big Game's** (biggametreestands.com) [13] **Hunter HD 1.5** (\$259.99). Designed with their wide Flex-Tex Flip-up seat and backrest, it's an ultra-comfortable perch at nearly 19' high, and with its generous 23.5" x 29" platform, it provides plenty of room when you need to stretch out. With a 350-lb. weight rating and all-steel construction, it's a rock-solid option.

At nearly 20', the [14] **Lockdown Wide** (\$399.99) from **Rivers Edge** (

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riversedge.com) is another top-quality option. Equipped with a patent-pending Ground-Level Ratcheting system, it can be secured while your feet are on the ground, and with its extra-wide TearTuff comfort seat, you might find yourself dozing off if the action is slow. The unique Ultimate Shooting Rail can be completely tucked away for bowhunters, or adjusted both vertically and horizontally if you decide to break out the smokepole to fill your freezer.

Taking treestand safety to the next level, **Primal Treestands** (primaltreestands.com) launches the new [15] **Descender Device** (\$75.99). Use it with your current full-body harness, or get it as a package from Primal (\$129.85). The Descender is a friction-based system that automatically kicks into gear to provide a controlled rate of descent if you happen to fall.

A fan favorite, **Hunter Safety System's** (huntersafetyssystem.com) [16] **Pro Series** (\$159) harness combines the latest technology in treestand safety with the classic features we expect from HSS. With new fabrics, it's 40% lighter than its predecessor, and with Elimishield Hunt Scent Control Technology, it kills human odor before it forms. It incorporates a built-in USB port to ensure you can stay charged and connected, and also features bino straps and eight pockets to keep essentials close at hand. **BH**

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I captured this image of Mike Short's giant whitetail as we were hanging treestands a few months prior to bowhunting season.

BEGINNER'S LUCK OR POETIC JUSTICE?

A NOVICE ARROWS A MONSTER WHITETAIL AND LEAVES TWO VETERANS HOLDING THE SHORT END OF THE STICK.

JUST ABOUT EVERY bowhunting community has a guy who drives everyone crazy by consistently bagging trophy animals while seemingly never making mistakes. In my community, that guy is Bill Pellegrino.

Bill is an outstanding bowhunter for several reasons. First of all, he has seven world archery titles to his name, so the guy can really shoot. Second, he knows his equipment. He owns and operates Bill Pellegrino's Archery Hut in Colorado Springs, Colorado, and his store is arguably the finest pro shop in the entire region. And finally, Bill is a killer. It's an instinct that some have, and some don't. Being a phenomenal shot does not mean you have it. Bill does, and he's deadly on all big game — especially whitetails.

About the only thing I can think of that is more dangerous to a mature whitetail buck than Bill Pellegrino is blue tongue. The walls of his archery shop are covered in proof of that statement. He has downed a pile of mature whitetail bucks, but what impresses me most about his success is the fact that he hasn't taken them on guided hunts. He does every bit of it on his own, and I respect that.

When it comes to whitetails, I'm no Bill Pellegrino, but I'm no slouch either.

I fancy myself an experienced whitetail hunter, and if you were to turn me loose in a big buck's backyard, with ample time and resources to pursue him, I'd be lying if I didn't say I feel pretty good about my chances. But team me up in such a situation with Bill, and whatever buck we're chasing is going down!

That's exactly how I felt going into the season several years ago in Eastern Colorado. The year prior, Bill and I had discovered a gigantic whitetail buck living along a cottonwood creekbed, and



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fortunately for us, Bill knew the landowner!

We got permission to hunt that property the following fall, and then a few weeks later, we scored big when the landowner found the buck's right-side shed antler. Bill and I rushed down to see it, and when we put a tape to the shed antler, our excitement level went into overdrive.

We knew this buck was big, but we hadn't quite realized just how big. His main beam measured 28 inches! His G-2 was 13 inches, and he had three awesome kickers to help rack (no pun intended) the score up even more. His G-4 was broken at the base, but after

applying a conservative estimation of its length, the shed antler measured a whopping 91 inches!

As spring gave way to summer, Bill and I started burning a little boot leather on the property as we investigated deer trails and began hanging treestands. We kept track of the big buck, and as his new antlers grew, we realized that he was going to be even more impressive than he was the previous year. His new rack had a similar shape, but it included two huge kicker points that stuck straight out to the sides. He was awesome, and we were confident that one of us was going to kill the buck of a lifetime.

Then, less than two weeks prior to the bow opener, Bill called me with some

concerning news: The landowner told Bill that we would not be the only ones bowhunting his property that fall because he had given another guy permission to hunt!

I couldn't believe it, but I quickly calmed down when Bill explained that the guy who would be in there with us was actually a friend of his. His name was Mike Short, and he was new to bowhunting. He was a rookie and had never even shot a deer with his bow. After hearing that, I immediately jumped to the conclusion that Mike would shoot the first legal deer that walked by, and that was only if the rookie didn't manage to screw that up.

Bill gave Mike a call and discussed how we would all go about bowhunting the property at the same time. Unlike us, Mike wasn't sure when he would be able to start hunting.

When the season finally arrived, Bill and I hit the woods hard, and I was relieved by the fact that Mike didn't. We had the place to ourselves, and I was absolutely convinced that one of us would get a shot at that monster buck.

Well, as big whitetail bucks often do, this one seemed to simply disappear. And just as Bill and I were reaching the point when we needed to get back to work for a few days, Mike finally showed up. Even after realizing that he would be there while we were not, his rookie status kept me from getting overly concerned. Then, the unthinkable happened...

The next day, Bill called and said that Mike needed help tracking a buck. My hands immediately began to sweat as I asked, "How big of a buck?"

"He said it looked like a big one," Bill replied, but when you're talking about a rookie, I figured that could mean anything!

We arrived and began helping Mike with his very first bowhunting blood trail. As we rounded a corner, I was the first to look up and see the downed deer about a hundred yards away. I couldn't believe it. It was our giant — the buck I just knew Bill or I were destined to kill.

Mike stood tall over his trophy and handed two veteran bowhunters the short end of the stick that day. I was thrilled for him, but it was a bitter pill to swallow, and I couldn't help but wonder if this was just beginner's luck or poetic justice? Realizing that I'd completely underestimated Mike's skills leads me to believe it may have been the latter. **BH**



Not only was this 190-class Colorado buck Mike Short's first whitetail, it was also the first big-game animal he had ever taken with a bow!

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HUNTING WHITETAILS

C.J. WINAND

Doe Ages (Minimum)

6 SUCCESSFUL = DOE WITH TWO FAWNS
7 UNSUCCESSFUL = DOE WITH ONE FAWN
6 MIXED = DOE WITH NO FAWNS

Individual ID	Year						
	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
D-06-05	3	4					
D-07-12		2	3			6	
D-08-02			2			5	
D-08-11			3		5		
D-08-13			3		5		7
D-08-33			3	4			
D-09-11				3			6
D-09-31				3	4		
D-10-01						2	3
D-10-03					2	3	
F-08-08					2	3	4
D-10-09					3	4	
D-10-10					2	3	4
D-10-24					3	4	5
D-10-27					3	4	5
D-10-28					3	4	
D-10-30					3		5
D-10-33					3	4	
D-11-14						3	4

DR. KILGO'S DATA from a seven-year radio-telemetry study of 19 does and their fawns in South Carolina was very revealing. After 44 recorded birthing events, about a third of adult does were successful in raising twin fawns; one-third had mixed results, with one fawn surviving while the other died; and the remaining one-third of does continuously lost both fawns. This finding suggests some does have innately successful maternal behaviors, while others may not learn them at all.

PHOTO CREDIT: DR. JOHN KILGO

WHICH DOE IS BEST TO SHOOT?

CORRECTLY DETERMINING WHICH ANTLERLESS DEER TO TIP OVER WILL IMPROVE HERD HEALTH.

IN 1971, **Bowhunter** Conservation Editor Dr. Dave Samuel penned his first column for the magazine, entitled "Woods and Water." Over 50 years later, he's still writing his popular column (long since renamed "Know Hunting").

The topic of his first article was the need to harvest antlerless deer. This was not a popular topic back then, and it still meets some resistance from hunters to this very day. Back in the 1970s, many deer herds across the country were managed by buck-only laws. I was 10 years old at that

time, yet I still vividly remember the guys in our hunting camp saying, "The state wildlife department is insane if they want us to shoot does. But, if they're going to issue doe tags, we'll do our best to fill them because we need the venison!" Make no mistake about it, in many parts of the country, killing antlerless

deer was beneath the sportsmanship of many hunters well into the 1990s. Ironically, 25 years later, one of my first columns for **Bowhunter** was entitled, "The Basics Of Doe Management." The ABCs of deer education Dr. Dave was writing about in the 1970s was slowly becoming accepted into the average bowhunter's mindset. As deer numbers started to increase across the country during the 90s, so did the number of hunters becoming more selective about exactly what they wanted to shoot. The emergence of quality deer management and the QDMA (now called the National Deer Association) also entered the picture at about this same time, which caused many hunters to advocate for better habitat, healthier herds, and older age classes of bucks. As a result, the biggest unknown from the viewpoint of hunters was: Just how many adult does should be taken in relationship to the existing habitat? I clearly remember telling landowners and hunters, "Once you shoot enough does that you have scared yourself silly, do me and the habitat a favor and shoot some more!" Although this was sound advice for the vast majority of hunters and hunting properties back then, things started to change in many parts of the country as we entered into the 2000s. These days, the expansion of coyotes east of the Mississippi has caused many hunters to consider backing off their antlerless harvests — especially in the Southeast. A perfect example is South Carolina, where according to state wildlife officials their deer population is down roughly 27%. Statistics from South Carolina's Department of Natural Resources show that between 2002 and 2015 the deer population in the state was declining. According to SCDNR, the overall reduction in deer harvest is likely attributable to a number of factors, including habitat change, long-term drought, two decades of aggressive antlerless deer harvest, and the complete colonization of the state by coyotes and their impact on fawn survival.



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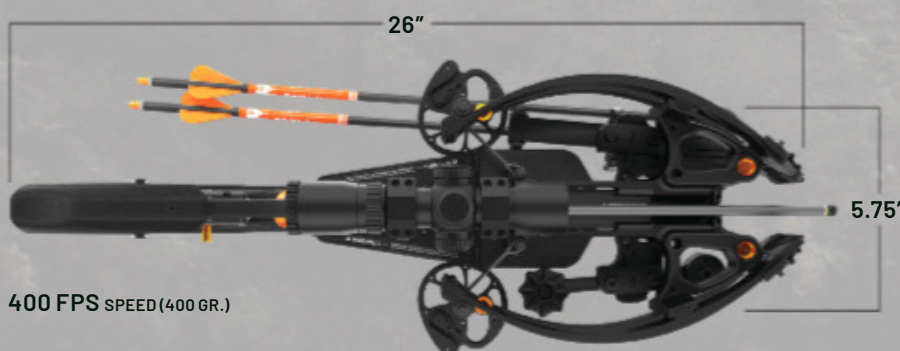
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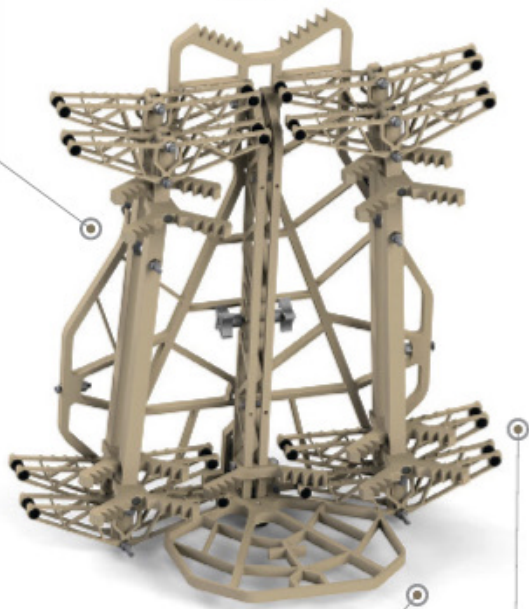


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HUNTING WHITETAILS

Prior to the 1970s, various range maps listed coyotes as a species that lived primarily west of the Mississippi River. Today, most every state in the continental U.S. has coyotes — the Eastern Shore of Maryland, Delaware, and South Jersey might be the last bastions of “coyote free” habitat, but it’s simply a matter of time before that changes.

For reasons still unknown, the expansion of coyote numbers in the Midwest and Northeast has not (repeat, not) significantly impacted deer-recruitment rates. Will this change in the future? Maybe, but this is only speculation.

With fewer adult does available across the landscape, many hunters ask, “Assuming you have an adult doe with two fawns or a single adult doe, which antlerless deer is best to shoot?”

Many biologists would answer, “If you’re trying to increase your deer herd, take the lone adult doe. The reasoning is because if the doe doesn’t have any fawns, she’s most likely a bad mother. Another assumption many of us believed is that a doe becomes a better mother as she increases in age, thus improving her offspring’s chance of survival. Biologists and hunters all “assumed” these two theories were true? But, where’s the data?

As of last year, hardly any data existed. Then, Dr. John Kilgo, from the U.S. Forest Service Southern Research Station, presented a seminar at the Southeast Deer Study Group entitled, “Some Mothers Are Just Better Than Others: Maternal Variation In Fawn-Rearing Success.” Although his sample size of 19 does was relatively small, his findings were very interesting.

Kilgo and his colleagues were trying to determine whether individual does can learn from past fawning experiences in becoming more successful mothers. In other words: Can past success or failure in rearing at least one fawn affect future success/failure in fawn survival?

Kilgo’s data showed that if a doe successfully raised one or two of her fawns, her odds of success in raising future fawns were good. Whereas unsuccessful mothers were almost always not as productive in future years in their efforts to raise fawns to six months of age.

As for older does being better mothers, Kilgo’s results showed, “Although maternal age had a slightly positive effect on future success regardless of past success or failure, odds of future

success or failure depended more on initial success or failure. Does that failed during the first year of monitoring were 40% more likely to fail in the future, whereas those that were successful in the first year of monitoring were 22% more likely to be successful in the future.”

In a separate study, Graduate Research Assistant Tristan Swartout from the Auburn University Deer Laboratory monitored the breeding history of 36 does that were present within their facility.

Like Kilgo, Swartout also found variations between does; some does only recruit a fawn every few years, while other does may be recruiting fawns consecutively for up to seven years.

The Auburn data showed that if a doe recruited fawns the year prior, she recruited over 1.4 times as many fawns the next season. Swartout showed 40 mothers that recruited fawns consecutively in their lifetime, which was 47% of all known mothers. However, these 40 females recruited 75% of our fawns from 2008 to 2019.

Some noteworthy mothers within the Auburn facility included one female that recruited nine fawns in eight seasons; one female that recruited at least one fawn for seven consecutive seasons; and one female that recruited five fawns in a two-year span (triplets the first year, twins the second year).

Swartout’s results showed that peak recruiting appears to be at six to seven years of age. This follows other research, which suggested reproductive ability in does peaks at three to seven years of age. Interestingly, the Auburn facility has much older does still recruiting fawns, and 16 known cases of does recruiting a fawn after 10 years of age. **BH**

C.J.’S SUMMARY: As Dr. Kilgo and Tristan Swartout suggest: If you’re concerned about reduced recruitment or declining deer numbers, advising hunters to consider the taking of antlerless deer only when other deer (and smaller deer) are present may help in determining which does to shoot. The goal is to help hunters tell the difference between successful and unsuccessful mothers. As the data from both studies show, unsuccessful mothers (no fawns present) have a much better chance of remaining unproductive mothers in the future than successful ones (fawns present). If given the choice, adult does with no fawns are the ones you want to target.

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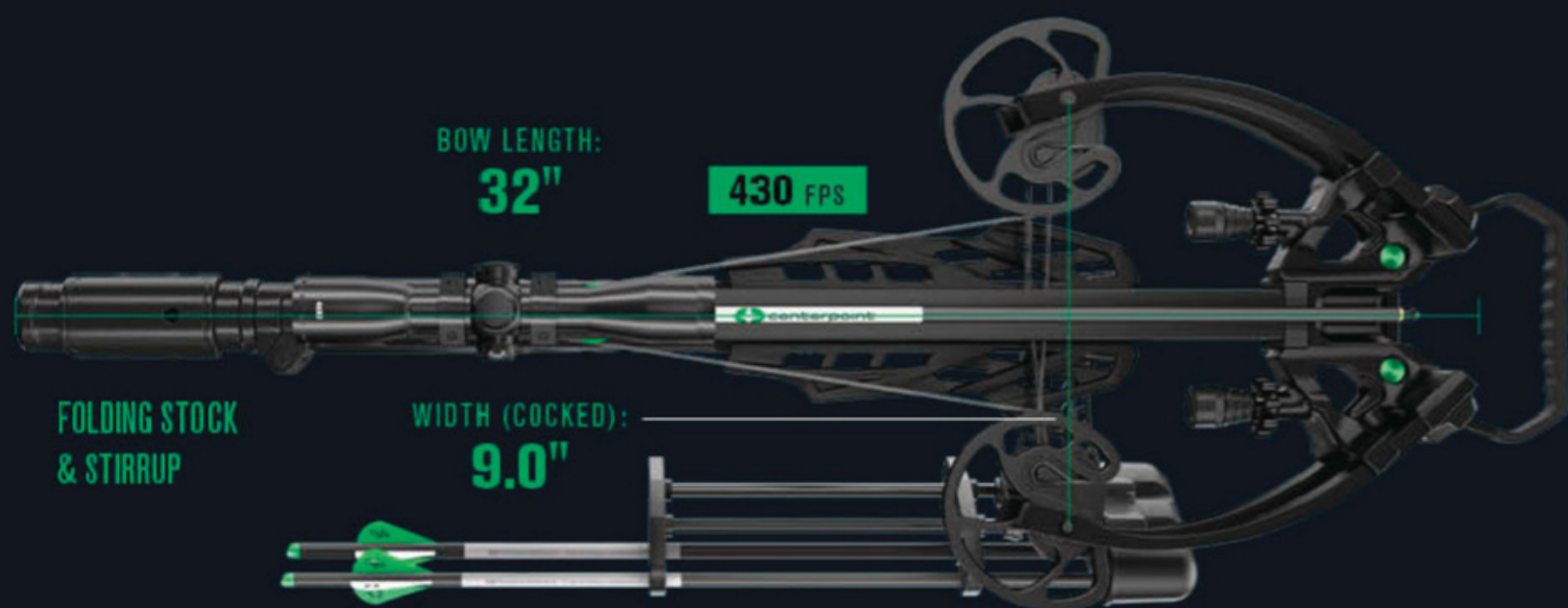
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KNOW HUNTING

DR. DAVE SAMUEL | CONSERVATION EDITOR



Despite current participation and gear sales, hunters represent a “shrinking share” when it comes to influencing conservation policy on a national scale.

PITTMAN-ROBERTSON

UNCERTAIN CHANGES TO AN IMPORTANT ACT LOOM ON THE HORIZON.

SINCE the Pittman-Robertson Act (PR) was passed in 1937, excise taxes on guns, ammunition, and archery equipment have raised billions of dollars for wildlife conservation, hunter education, and wildlife management at the state level.

Specifically, these “PR” excise taxes pay for hunter education and safety programs, acquisition and improvement of wildlife habitat, research into wildlife problems, surveys and inventories of wildlife problems, acquisition and development of access facilities for public use, and other game-agency activities. It’s safe to say that if state wildlife agencies lost those funds, much of what they do for all wildlife would be

substantially reduced, and many jobs would be lost.

Relative to guns, the original tax in 1937 was 10 percent on firearms, but it excluded pistols, revolvers, and ammunition. Later, the tax was increased to 11 percent. And in 1970, it was amended to add a 10-percent tax on pistols and revolvers.

This excise-tax link between federal legislation and conservation has come under increased political scrutiny in re-

cent years, as gun sales have soared. The 22.6-million guns sold in 2020 is more than triple the number sold in 2000, and as you know, the vast majority of these new gun sales are not used for hunting.

However, the increased excise-tax revenues continue to flow to our state wildlife agencies. In 2020, that tax totaled \$750 million, and in 2021 the total raised was \$679 million. That growing pot of money has not gone unnoticed by politicians, who have also realized that the original “user-pay” model for taxing guns is no longer valid because most guns being purchased these days are not being used for hunting.

Nevertheless, as the yearly amount given to states increased, the state wildlife agencies have increased their conservation activities and hired new employees. A second factor is important to consider: The number of hunters is not increasing, and this means that equipment sales are also relatively flat. Because gun sales to nonhunters have increased, the impacts of stable or reduced hunter numbers is not impacting funds going to state wildlife agencies like they should.

Since work done by state wildlife agencies also benefits non-game species, there have been ongoing efforts to come up with ways to get nonhunters to contribute to non-game management. Using a “user-pay” model, various proposals were made to impose excise taxes on equipment used by nonhunters as they enjoy wildlife. Efforts to get manufacturers of binoculars (used by birders) and other such equipment have not been popular with manufacturers and have failed. State wildlife agencies have had to pick up the slack as a result, and are now forced to manage both game and non-game species.

As an aside, let me note that the same “user-pay” model generated by the PR Act is also used in fisheries management, via the Dingell-Johnson Act (DJ), which imposes excise taxes on fishing tackle and boating equipment. Indeed, all these factors are now entangled as PR funds have dramatically increased.

CURT WELLS PHOTO

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KNOW HUNTING

What brought my attention to this situation was a paper written by professors at Texas A&M and Ohio State University. This paper (“Violent Entanglements: The Pittman-Robertson Act, Firearms, And The Financing Of Conservation”) was just published in *Conservation and Society* 20(1): 24-35, 2022), and it outlines the history of this situation. It notes that the original PR model was “user-pay,” but that has now changed. Nonhunting citizens are now buying the vast majority of guns and ammunition. Additionally, they note that there are now, “ethical concerns produced by this emerging relationship and the ways Pittman-Robertson entangles conservation with guns and violence.”

Do you see the problem here? Conservation funding is being increasingly decoupled from the practice of hunting. Additionally, wildlife is becoming more important to nonhunters (and hunters are a “shrinking share” in this respect). They also note that hunters are a smaller share of firearms users.

Because of this situation, the authors of said paper raised three ethical questions: Should conservation depend upon and benefit from the sale of something

associated with violence and the loss of human life? Should conservation continue to facilitate gun-use for nonhunting purposes? Should a small minority of those who benefit from wildlife (hunters) continue to have disproportionate influence on conservation policy?

As PR funds grow because of nonhunters buying guns, there will be modifications to PR funding. For example, in the 2019 appropriations bill, the text of PR was modified to include “recreational shooter and recreational shooting” in several places, thus “broadening the set of gun users eligible to benefit from PR funds.”

With all this change, it should not be a surprise that there have been several recent bills to amend the PR Act. One would make supplemental funds available for management of endangered species — supposedly accelerating efforts toward endangered species. This bill is complicated and far from passage, but it shows the trend in political views concerning the PR Act.

A more recent bill (H.R. 8167), was introduced by Rep. Andrew Clyde from Georgia. It would repeal excise taxes on firearms and ammunition, as well as repealing certain DJ taxes on fishing rods and boat motors. Clyde’s bill would re-

place these lost excise taxes by redirecting unallocated lease revenue generated by offshore/onshore energy development on federal lands. Those dollars presently go into general revenue, and are used to fund a number of needs.

To say that this alternative is tenuous and unpredictable is an understatement. Use of lease revenues could change in a heartbeat, leaving politicians to decide whether to allocate funds for wildlife and fisheries to the states. And such decisions would have to be granted every year. No guarantees here. In fact, because of the Biden Administration’s push on climate change, the number of acres offered for lease to energy development in April has been reduced by 80 percent. What will politicians do with these reduced lease revenues that go into the general revenues? State wildlife agencies could get nothing.

Even though there are 53 cosponsors of the Clyde bill, and with all the changes in gun purchasing in recent years and with the negatives now associated with shootings and gun violence, the Clyde bill probably won’t pass. However, the signs of change are on the horizon, and PR and DJ revenues will continue to come under further scrutiny. **BH**



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Slingshot AND ME

BY CURT WELLS, EDITOR

*"MILES!" I EXCLAIMED,
"WHAT IS GOING ON WITH THE OLD GUY'S FOREHEAD?"*

"I don't know. Looks like we have a unicorn to hunt this fall," replied my longtime friend and Kansas outfitter Miles Willhite.

We were looking at a trail-camera image of a buck that was at least 7½ years old. His consistently scraggly seven-point rack was unmistakable. After seeing him on and off over the years, I decided in 2019 that I wanted to take him because of his maturity rather than his antlers. But the buck avoided me in both 2019 and 2020.

The 2021 photo we were now looking at showed that besides his tall, heavy beamed, seven-point rack, he was now sporting a forked main beam jutting straight out of the middle of his forehead! The previously unnamed buck's status instantly rocketed skyward in my mind, and he was given the name "Slingshot." My desire to tag that buck increased tenfold.

Even back when Slingshot was a mere five or six years old, he was a sporadic visitor. Some years I saw only camera photos or an occasional sighting, but it didn't matter because his antlers just didn't do much for me. As he aged, his beams gained mass, and in 2020 a nighttime photo showed he had massive beams. Truth is, the weirdness of his antlers probably saved his life over the years, especially during the rifle season, but now this old warrior was capturing my imagination.

My 2021 Kansas hunt with Miles started off in an elevated, hard-sided blind. It was a gorgeous afternoon as the sun shone through the trees and lit up every deer that came our way — and there was plenty of action! I saw at least a half-dozen bucks that had me whispering to myself, "That one needs one more year." One heavy eight-point was the kind of buck I would take on the last day, but I was still focused on Slingshot.

That doesn't mean there wasn't temptation. It is evil and ever-present on most bowhunts. You weigh your desire to shoot an animal against your limited time. All hunts run out of time, so you must consider all factors as you try to maximize the use of that time. What is the weather like? You might think you have five days left,



2020

*When two old guys square off, there isn't always a clear winner.
At least not yet*



I laugh when I hear people snivel about giving bucks a name. What would you call this old buck, "That 7½-year-old deer with the thing sticking out of his forehead?" I think Slingshot is much simpler and more descriptive, no?

SLINGSHOT AND ME

but Mother Nature could steal three of them with adverse weather. Are you seeing good numbers of animals? Will the action, whether it's based on rutting activity or favorable weather, get better or worse as the hunt grows old? Then, of course, your willingness to go home with an unfilled tag is a huge factor in whether you will pass on good bucks while waiting for great ones. It's an age-old dilemma.

Let's not kid ourselves. Few among us hunt strictly for the meat. If you do, you're losing money. Feeding my family is not my primary goal. The meat is a welcome byproduct of my treasured time spent in the field as an active, card-carrying participant in the ecosystem.

The juxtaposition of all these factors changes with every hunting adventure. The one element that can override all these factors is the commitment to a singular animal, or to a specific class of animal. Even then, that commitment can certainly change toward the end of a hunt and no explanation or excuse is necessary. It's your hunt, and it's your call.

My call for the next seven days was to let every buck except Slingshot walk — unless I encountered a beast. When the wind was wrong for hunting Slingshot, I'd venture off to other farms to search for a buck that would make me forget Slingshot. And I found one.

I was cruising some prairie country early one morning and pulled into an approach to glass the rolling hills that were divided by slivers of timbered draws. Suddenly, a huge typical buck popped out of a cedar patch on a neighboring property that I didn't have access to. This deer was a legit Boone and Crockett-class buck. I know because my heart was telegraphing it to my brain in some kind of Morse code.

It was evident by the buck's attitude that he had a doe locked down in the cedars. When the buck ducked back into the woods, I immediately called Miles and asked him if it

might be possible to get permission to hunt that property. "No chance," replied my friend.

So, I strapped my Stalker decoy to my bow and ran down the property line, which was only 30 yards from the cedars. I set up and tried to call the buck out, but it was futile for two reasons: The buck had a doe and didn't care; plus, the wind was blowing so hard I'm not sure he could hear my grunts. I firmly believe if I could have snuck into those cedars with the decoy and challenged the buck, I would have had a chance. Instead, I was challenged with trying to bury my visions of that magnificent deer and return my focus to Slingshot...

I'm always asking the "why" of things and was puzzled as to how a seven or eight-year-old buck could suddenly grow an antler in the middle of his forehead. So, I went to our resident expert, Conservation Editor Dr. Dave Samuel, for an explanation.

"I wrote about this in my book on antlers, 'Whitetail Racks,'" Dave recalled. "The pedicle has a special cell layer on top where the new antler grows. If you take some of those special cells and move them, they often grow an antler tine on that spot. Many years ago, a researcher in Canada took some of those cells and grafted them to the lower leg bone, and an antler tine grew out of the leg. Sometimes those cells are displaced from some type of injury just as the antler starts to develop. So, if the buck bumped the pedicle early on, some of those cells might have ended up in the middle of his head and grew this new antler. That would explain why he never had it before."

I don't know what happened, but this was a very unique buck that had me fantasizing about his shoulder mount hanging on my wall — oops! I was getting ahead of myself. That's almost always bad...

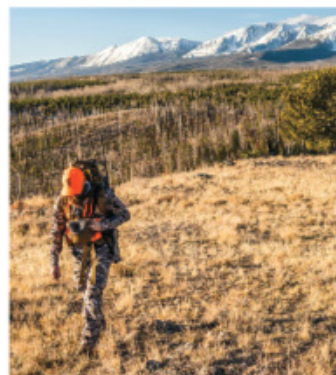
I passed on buck after buck for seven days without laying eyes on Slingshot. He was a ghost, which amplified my desire.

My afternoon hunt on November 12 was the stuff of dreams. My cameraman, Jake Hanson, and I were sitting in an elevated blind watching over my two decoys on a food plot. Does and yearlings began to ooze out of the trees, some get-



These photos show different angles of Slingshot. The lower left is the Browning Trail Camera image that first revealed the buck's new antler. In the photo below, you can see there's a difference in Slingshot's eyes. One may be impaired.





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Two bucks approach my decoys on an evening when the action was wild. Slingshot later emerged from the trees at top center. I use my Ozonics unit at all times, so it blows ozone out of the blind along with my scent. It works very well for me.

ting a bit nervous about the decoys, but not overly so.

Then the bucks started to show up. One buck, which I called “Hybrid” because his left antler was shaped like a mule deer rack and his other was normal, checked out my decoys and I passed on him for the fifth time. He needed another year or two. Other immature bucks strolled into the plot, and at one point there were two bucks coming to my decoys at the same time. Then to my right I spotted a good 10-pointer, hanging around on the other side of the fence as if he was reluctant to come into the field for some reason.

Then, like Clint Eastwood walking into a Hollywood party, Slingshot strolled out of the trees about a hundred yards out — head high and confident. I could almost hear the theme song from “The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly,” as the other bucks in the field nervously stepped aside. The big 10-pointer to my right froze in his tracks, then slinked off to the northwest.

In the blind, it was chaos. Jake was changing lenses and I was reaching for my bow, getting my feet right and my range-finder ready. Slingshot was generating panic in more than just the deer herd.

Another question I’d been asking myself for a couple years was whether Slingshot was still a “breeder.” Was he still rutting at his age? Or had he dropped out and that’s why he was seldom seen in the daylight? Not so. Slingshot was chasing does with the same instinct-driven vigor he’d been born with.

I was confident that once Slingshot worked his way toward my end of the plot, the decoys would take over. The plan was coming together, but then something went awry: Slingshot stopped at 40 yards and stared at the decoys for a long time. Then he started to swing around to my left, edging his way closer but constantly staring at the decoys. He was tense, ready to explode at the slightest provocation. I’m sure he was wondering why this young buck (my decoy) wasn’t giving way to his dominance.



When the wise, old buck was at 32 yards, he froze up again, slightly quartering to me. I hate that yardage. It’s close enough that the sound of the bow will ignite the buck, yet far enough away that he will certainly alter the shot by jumping the string. I held off. Had he started feeding or making a scrape, I may have taken the shot. But he was wired to detonate, so I had to wait for him to continue his investigation of the breeding pair before him.

Right about then, another buck came to the edge of the trees to my left and Slingshot bolted and chased him off. He never came back. I second-guessed my decision to hold off, but it was too risky. Later, after studying the photos and video, it appeared

there was something wrong with one of Slingshot’s eyes. They didn’t look the same. If he was impaired in one eye, that would explain his reluctance to challenge my decoy more aggressively. I’ve seen that before with a one-eyed buck. Or maybe this old codger was simply too smart for me and my tricks.

My hunt ended the next day, so I made plans to go back to Kansas in December and take another crack at Slingshot. I was hoping he wouldn’t get too carried away in the rut and break off his namesake antler, but my worst fears were realized when Miles sent me a trail-camera photo and the buck was back to being a seven-pointer. His third antler was gone. Dr. Dave had told me he may not grow it again the following year, so I may have missed my opportunity. Still, I wanted this buck, in large part because of his maturity, so I stuck with my plan to go back in December.

On December 17, I was sitting in a different blind on a bottleneck, and just before sundown Slingshot (sans slingshot) walked out of the prairie grass and headed straight for me. I got prepared for the shot while studying his forehead, trying to see if the slingshot was broken clean off or if he had somehow “shed” it early. It wasn’t clear what had happened.

When the old seven-pointer got to 30 yards, he saw some-

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SLINGSHOT AND ME



When I failed to put my tag on Sling-shot, after two intense encounters, I settled on this beautiful buck just days before Christmas. Unsure of my shot, we enlisted the help of Jason Vanley and his Drahthaar, Erro. Turns out we didn't need a tracking dog, but he did a fine job anyway.

thing he didn't like in the blind. Once again, he was alert and wired to detonate. In my haste to end this story, I thought to myself, *This guy is too old to jump the string from this distance.* Turns out he was quicker than I imagined. The video showed the buck dropped a foot before the arrow got there, and it grazed his backstraps. I'm always amazed by the quickness of an alert deer.

Later that same evening, I saw Sling-shot cruising the edge of the food plot as if nothing had happened. I only scuffed him up a little. So, I kept hunting. With only five days to go until Christmas, a nice 5x5 buck came into the food plot and I decided it was time to fill my Kansas tag.

The buck moseyed over by the blind and was quartering-away at just over 30 yards. I took careful aim but cheated a bit low due to my previous experience. The difference this time was that this buck was feeding and not alert. He didn't move a muscle before my arrow got there. As a result, I shot low. It was a poor shot on my part, plain and simple. The buck bolted for the trees and dropped into the creekbottom. I didn't



like the looks of the video, or my arrow, so we backed out and Miles called for a tracking dog, just to be on the safe side.

The next morning, after fretting about coyotes finding my buck, we took up the trail with Erro, the Drahthaar tracking dog. His handler, Jason Vanley, tried to keep the dog on the surprisingly ample blood trail, but his nose was too good. He could smell the dead deer ahead of us and wanted to go right to it. My buck lay dead



next to the creek about 75 yards from the impact point. There was so much blood, that I figured I must have severed his pyloric artery (which runs below the lungs and stomach). The buck likely had been dead within minutes.

It was a fine buck that I was happy to tag, but as you can imagine, I am spending the summer wondering about Sling-shot. *Did he live through yet another firearms season, another winter, and all the other inherent dangers such as coyotes, EHD, and vehicle traffic? Will he grow another extra antler?* Maybe not, or maybe he'll grow a larger, crazier one that will require a legal name change. If he comes by me again, I hope he won't be so alert. We're like two aging gunfighters. If we square off again, maybe Slingshot will be a step slower next time. **BH**

Author's Note: On this hunt, I was shooting a Hoyt RX-5, Easton Hexx arrows, and Rage Trypan broadheads. My bowsight is from Spot Hogg, as is my Tuff Guy release. I also used Browning clothing, Browning Trail Cameras, and an Ozonics unit at all times.

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CAVEMAN

HONESTLY, SINCE I WAS A YOUNG BOY, I cannot remember a time when I wasn't obsessed with the bow and arrow and with hunting whitetail deer. When I was seven years old, my dad bought me my first bow — an Xi Silverhawk XP — and I was hooked from that moment. Fortunately, my home state of Virginia has plenty of deer, so over the years Dad and I were able to enjoy many great bowhunting adventures.

But as a teenager reading countless hunting magazines and watching more than my share of outdoor TV, I began to dream about making a trip to the Midwest's Cornbelt. When I went off to college, my time and funds were limited, but I still figured that somehow I'd make it happen. In 2008, while in my senior year, one of my professors asked me to be a lab assistant for one of his Wildlife Biology classes that fall. I'd be super-busy that semester, but I said, "Sure thing, sign me up!"

Turns out, I ended up meeting one of my best friends in that class, and the door to the Midwest opened up for me. Grant Wallace was two years behind me in school, but we soon found that we had a shared passion for bowhunting. Before long we were swapping hunting stories and sharing photos, and I realized that he was as crazy about hunting whitetails as I was. And his family owned a farm in Ohio!

Grant invited me to come up and hunt with him in the fall of 2009, so I headed off the first week of November — no windshield GPS, no iPhone mapping app, just MapQuest directions telling me how to get there and back. Let me tell you, for this small-town kid with limited traveling experience, that was a big deal for me. And, boy, did we have the time of our lives!

Here we are, 12 years later. Grant and his family have been gracious enough to let me come back year after year, and now my dad even gets to join in the fun.

Dad and I make our annual trek to Ohio during the first or second week of November. It's a trip that we look forward to every year. We spend 52 weeks out of the year talking and texting over the year's hunting strategies and the potential for upcoming bucks. Over the past dozen years, we thought we'd experienced it all, having taken quite a few topnotch bucks. But last summer, Grant placed trail cameras over some mineral stations, and almost immediately we were looking at photos of a buck we couldn't believe.

There he was — this large, split-droptined, double-main-beamed buck with bladed tines and stickers and kickers everywhere. To say the least, we were giddy! We wondered whether capturing him on camera was a fluke. Where in the world did he come from? Was he a regular, or would we never see him again? Regardless, we all agreed that with his club-like droptine, "Caveman" was a fitting name.

YOU JUST NEVER KNOW WHEN A DOOR WILL OPEN.



CAVEMAN

BY LANDON JENKINS

We all agreed that with his club-like droptine, Caveman was a fitting name for this Buckeye State giant!

CAVEMAN

After we had time to process the Caveman situation, we realized this was the same buck I'd encountered back in 2018. Let us jump back in time to the morning of November 5, 2018.

On that calm, crisp morning, I experienced what we like to call one of those "rut-crazed hunts." You know the kind of hunt I'm talking about: One of those days that's forever burned in your mind and fuels future fires during the November grind.

That morning while in the stand, I watched this buck lock-down a hot doe. He was a big-bodied buck with a huge head, and I watched him fend off several other bucks as they honed-in on the scent of the doe. Bucks were bristling-up and posturing, grunting, chasing, and snort-wheezing. Although I real-

ized he was a mature buck, I elected to pass on him due to his gnarly but narrow rack.

I ended up tagging-out that morning on a nice eight-pointer (but that's an entirely different story). After I shot the eight-point, I packed up my gear and quietly climbed down the tree. As I began to ease toward my truck along the edge of an overgrown CRP field, I spotted Caveman and his doe. She was bedded down, and he was standing almost directly over her. I knew he was rut-crazed, and I wanted to see just how close I could get to him and his doe. While recording on my phone, I ended up walking within 15 yards of them before they took off. He was completely oblivious to my existence because he was so focused on his doe.

After that close encounter in 2018, Caveman fell off our radar. Over the next two years, we would occasionally talk about that gnarly buck I'd walked up on, but we never really knew where he went. So, we sort of shrugged off his disappearance...until we snapped his photo at a mineral site in August 2021.

Over the next couple of months, Grant and I strategized over the phone. I knew this buck was at least 4½ years old when I'd encountered him in 2018. He now had to be at least 6½. We regularly exchanged phone calls and texts on locations where we thought Caveman might be bedding, feeding, or traveling. During a couple of late-evening glassing sessions in August and September, Grant was able to put eyes on the buck. Grant called me and said, "Well, I'm looking at him again." And our giddiness didn't subside. We'd never had a buck of this caliber that was this consistent.

As the September 25 season opener arrived, Grant began the quest for Caveman. We knew it was only a matter of time before the buck would show up. We'd communicate almost daily via phone calls or texts and discuss stand locations, wind directions, and hunting pressure (was he being pushed too much or not enough?). Our minds were flooded with thoughts on how to capitalize on this buck.

Finally, on October 21, Grant had set up in a pinchpoint where compounding terrain features opened up to some cropfields. Not long after climbing into his stand, Grant spotted a doe, and then out popped Caveman right behind her. The buck wasn't chasing; just hanging out downwind as mature bucks do, slowly following and watching her every move. As the two deer made their way toward Grant, all the stars appeared to be lining up. That is until the neighbor started riding his dirtbike up and down a nearby road and spooked the deer.

Grant called me soon after, practically in



You'd never think a buck of Caveman's caliber would be so prone to daylight movement, but our trail-camera pics proved otherwise.



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CAVEMAN

tears and sick to his stomach. I often say that hunting can take you from the lowest of lows to the highest of highs. A true rollercoaster ride of emotions typically accompanies most hunting seasons. It has actually taught me that while life can be a grind, good things are always just around the corner.

Two days later, on October 23, Grant climbed back into the same stand. It was a super-rutty sit. Grant ended up seeing several bucks and tagged-out on a great 10-point that he just couldn't pass up.

With Ohio being a one-buck state, and with Grant now done hunting, Dad and I knew that Caveman would still be there, and we couldn't wait to get to the farm! Of course, the buck wasn't living solely on Grant's place. Although the old buck was frequenting their farm, we knew at times he was on neighboring properties as well. Grant decided he'd deploy several cameras and wait for our arrival to check them.

Friday, November 5, Dad and I pull out of Virginia and headed to Ohio for what we call our week of "rutcation." The hunt began with camera checking, treestand prep, and some quick scouting. As luck would have it, one of those cameras had daylight photos of Caveman.

As our rutcation week began, we started bouncing around on a few different farms, sitting many of the same stand locations we'd hunted in the past. We saw plenty of small bucks, and lone yearling fawns were in abundance. But the mature bucks and does were not showing themselves. I passed on a nice 3½-year-old 10-point and a mature eight-pointer. Every buck that I saw made me think of Caveman.

Monday morning, November 8, was my sixth sit of the



Separating two crop fields and intersecting a fencerow, this swale is similar to the one where I used my tree saddle to set up a quick ambush.

hunt. That morning, I told Grant and Dad that I was going to devote the rest of the week to the area Caveman frequented.

But that morning resulted in more of the same — several small bucks and two yearling fawns. I texted Dad and Grant and said we needed to change things up. I figured most of the mature bucks were locked-down with does, so I suggested to Dad that we meet up at 11 a.m. and do a quick, midday scouting mission.

It had warmed up to 60 degrees and was quiet, so I hung a new stand not even 150 yards from where my truck was parked. The spot was in a swale between two cropfields that intersected a fencerow.



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We knew the drainage held deer, but we'd only hunted it once or twice before. I asked Grant if he thought I should walk farther down the draw to see if there was any fresh sign. "You know what will happen," he said. "You'll spook deer."

I said, "Yeah, you're right. I'd better not. I'll just follow you back to the house."

We loaded into the trucks, and Grant pulled away. I followed in my truck, but upon glancing back, something told me to take another peek at that draw. I threw the truck in park and sent Grant a text that said, "I'm going to ease into the draw. I'll be at your house in a few." Dad stayed next to the truck, and I asked him to watch the bottom side of the draw in the event I jumped deer.

I had just peeked my head in the draw where the swale intersected the fencerow and, just as we'd anticipated, a large-antlered buck blasted out of there with a doe and they ran across the picked beanfield. I didn't get a good look at the deer, but all Dad could say was that the buck was a dandy and he didn't need binoculars to see his rack. I knew it wasn't Caveman because Dad said the buck was wide, but I knew the draw was one of those places where a buck and doe in heat would hide away from other deer.

It was 1 p.m., and I told Dad that I was going back to Grant's house to shower because I wanted to come right back in there to sit for the remainder of the day. I explained to Dad that while I knew it was warm and the buck movement had been slow, we were, after all, hunting the Buckeye State, and it was November 8.

Arriving back at the property at 2 p.m., wearing a fresh set of hunting clothes, we saw a five-point with his nose to the ground in the draw where we'd jumped the buck and doe ear-

lier. I'd hunted in there one time before, so I knew the tree I wanted to sit. With the wind in my favor, I made my way into a forked walnut using my climbing sticks and tree saddle, in hopes that the hot doe from earlier would wander back into the draw with that big buck.

It wasn't long before I spotted a small eight-point walking across the beanfield. He cruised through the draw, heading into a big block of cover on Grant's property. This draw connected two larger blocks of cover. We'd mostly overlooked this spot, even though I knew there was just enough cover there for cruising bucks.

At about 4:45 p.m., I looked into the cut beanfield and spotted a huge-bodied deer making its way into the draw. At 150 yards away, my first impression was that it wasn't a shooter because it wasn't super-wide. But after easing the binoculars to my eyes, a large club droptine materialized...and I was in disbelief... Caveman was heading into my draw!

He entered higher up than I'd anticipated but was probably 45 yards from me in the thickest part of the draw, with absolutely no available shot. Since I didn't plan for this setup, I hadn't cut any shooting lanes.

As I was assessing the situation, I could see Caveman drinking from a small puddle. Carefully, I eased my grunt call from my vest pocket and made a couple of soft grunts. He didn't react, so I grunted at him again — this time with a little more volume. When Caveman raised his head and looked my way, I hit him with two more grunts. The draw was so thick, I knew he couldn't see me. He began to aggressively paw the ground, and then headed in my direction. I was a nervous wreck.

As he closed the distance to 25 yards, walking straight to-

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CAVEMAN

ward me, I was able to draw my bow and knew it was gametime. When the buck came into the open at about six yards, I gave him a soft “maahh.” He froze in his tracks, and I tucked my pin tight against his shoulder and released. I watched as my lighted nock flashed into his vitals, and then he bounced off into the beanfield and stopped, looking around like nothing had happened.

I began to panic, but as I nocked another arrow and ranged the buck at 47 yards, I noticed he was beginning to wobble. He tipped over seconds later, and I was left in utter disbelief!

I quickly grabbed my phone and tried to call Grant. He didn’t answer, so I texted him and my dad, telling them I’d shot Caveman and he was dead in the middle of the beanfield!

I was still shaking when Grant and



Not long after I took this optimistic “selfie,” the buck of my dreams came into bow range.

Dad arrived on the scene. And I’ll never forget what it was like for the three of us to walk up to my Buckeye State monarch. Honestly, the entire hunt was a team effort, and I felt like Caveman was as much their buck as mine. We were all riding on a cloud!

Never be afraid to change things up. Try to live — and to hunt — with an open mind. You never know when a door will open to your dreams! **BH**

The author hails from southwest Virginia and is also passionate about wildlife/land management and conservation.

Author’s Note: For this hunt, I shot a 60-pound PSE Source bow, Easton Axis 340 arrows, and 100-grain Slick Trick Magnum broadheads. My final sit was in a CRÜZR XC saddle, and I used a Tethrd Predator Platform and Lone Wolf Climbing Sticks.



This rearview look at Caveman shows just how impressive his club droptine is. Inset: Grant and I have shared some great hunts together, but this one was epic!

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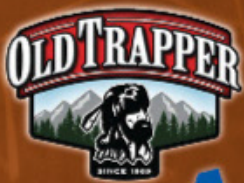
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*SOMETIMES, EVEN THE MOST PATIENT
AND EXPERIENCED BOWHUNTERS
JUST CAN'T HELP THEMSELVES.*

BY ROB NYE

PHOTO BY DONALDMJONES.COM

During a guiding career spanning more than three decades, I have met hundreds of highly dedicated hunters. Many of them have literally traveled the world in pursuit of their passion. These people spend a lot of time — and plenty of loot — on their hobby, but when I think of sheer bowhunting enthusiasm and a pure love of the pursuit of game, one name instantly comes to my mind.

Dave Butler is a retired detective from New Jersey who has been hunting strictly with a bow and arrow for nearly 50 years. He gave up hunting with guns after being shot accidentally a couple of times. The second mishap convinced him that gun hunting was no longer his thing; the story is actually pretty darn funny, and if you ever have the pleasure of sharing a camp with him, I implore you to ask Dave to tell it!

At 84-years young, Dave is still a very accurate archer and keeps himself in excellent physical condition. He is always the first guy up in the morning and the first hunter ready to hit the woods, and his guide better not show up a minute before legal shooting hours end to pick him up. He's without a doubt a pure hunting fanatic, and I am always amazed by how much he still enjoys every minute of his time afield.

I first met Dave nearly 20 years ago at a fly-in tent camp I was running on the Fond du Lac River in extreme northern Saskatchewan. Dave and hunting buddy Joel Riotto had heard about these remote hunts for fearless, un-hunted black bears via articles by M.R. James in **Bowhunter Magazine**. It was quickly apparent that Dave was a guy who likes to laugh and who sees the funny side of everything. I would also come to know that, like anyone from New Jersey, he is not hesitant to let you know his opinions about anything and everything. I'm a big fan of folks with little to no filter; it beats the heck out of wondering what they're thinking!

My hunting methods are noticeably different than what Dave and Joel were used to when they hunted at other bear camps, so I answered a lot of their questions about my methods. I'm used to initial skepticism, because fly-in hunts use a lot less bait than experienced hunters are used to seeing at most bear camps.

Their initial doubts proved to be unfounded; they both shot trophy bears and they also enjoyed catching a lot of walleye and big pike.

Since that first trip, I have guided Dave for spring bears, fall deer, or both

FABIO HOUDINI

nearly every year. But when COVID hit, he was forced to miss two consecutive spring bear seasons. Dave called me one day to tell me he was going to dig a tunnel under the border. “At my age, I can’t afford to miss any more bear seasons — I only have about 27 more left!” Needless to say, Dave was happy when the Canadian border was opened in time for him to make his annual deer hunt with me in the fall of 2021.

Several of my deer clients had let me know they were interested in early season hunts for whitetails still in velvet. I had tried a couple times in the past to



This is the kind of buck every bowhunter dreams of showing up on their trail camera.



Fabio poses, as he seemingly loved to do, with another good buck while still in velvet.

pattern farmland deer, but if a farmer rolled in with harvesting equipment, usually the bucks would change their habits and all my time spent scouting and finding good stand locations would be for naught. When clients pay good money for their hunts, I prefer to stack the odds in their favor and not have their hunts messed up by things beyond my control.

Baiting for deer is legal and effective in Saskatchewan. Our archery hunts begin in mid-October, mainly because baiting earlier in the year often encourages bears to take over the baits, and this can be a problem for deer hunters.

A friend told me that he had been having very good luck baiting deer and hunting in September. He claimed the deer show up when the bears don’t, so I decided to experiment and started a couple deer baits in August. Within two days, a dandy buck showed up at one of them and immediately made regular visits. This guy had just about everything you’d want in a Canadian whitetail; his 6x6 rack was high and wide with plenty of tine length, and even sported matching droppers near the end of the main beams. All in all, I figured it was a buck no bowhunter would ever think of passing up.

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FABIO HOUDINI

Just in case you missed it, Fabio poses with his left side toward the trail camera.



Over the next two weeks, the buck made several daylight appearances. I was getting trail-cam photos of his rack from every conceivable angle, and at all hours of the day. By now I had begun referring to the buck as “Fabio,” because he was kind of like a male model posing for the camera.

Archery season started on September 1, and with no deer clients booked until mid-October, I must admit it was mighty tempting to string up my longbow and go shoot Fabio myself. I had faced this dilemma many times over the years, but I’ve always resisted my own primal urge in favor of my clients’ success — but it hasn’t been easy to do at times!

I only got a couple of poor-quality nighttime photos of the buck after he shed his velvet in early September, and then he disappeared completely. Some resident hunters were pursuing elk in the general vicinity of the deer bait, and I wondered if one of them had encountered the buck and put him on the ground, or if maybe some wolves had made a meal of him. The other bucks in the region were still visiting my alfalfa buffet regularly, but there was absolutely no sign of Fabio until I checked the camera on the morning of October 25 — he had reappeared the day before in late afternoon, and he hung around for quite a while, too!

The pictures revealed that he’d broken off one of his brow tines, but he was still a fantastic trophy. I was amazed that I hadn’t seen hide nor hair of him for several weeks before he suddenly returned. It was quite the disappearing act he pulled off, so he earned the surname “Houdini.”

Dave was scheduled to arrive later in the day on October 25 and hunt throughout the week. Also in camp were some new clients who also had been patiently waiting through the COVID nonsense to get to Canada.

One of my guides asked me who I wanted to put in that stand the following

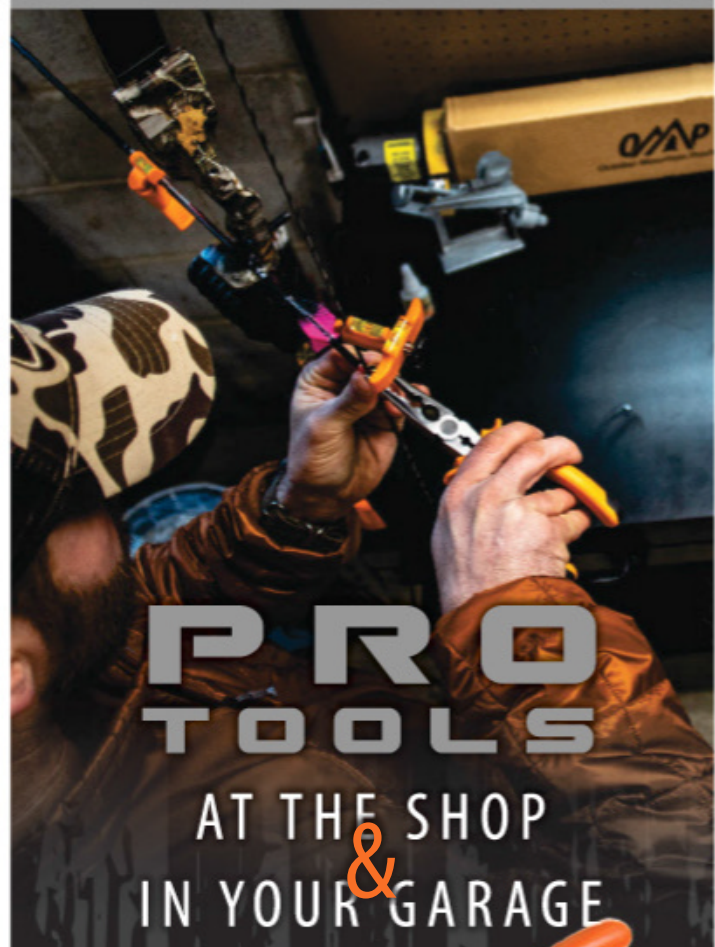
day. Without hesitation, I told him that Dave Butler would be going there — not because Dave is a long-time friend and client, but rather my firsthand knowledge of Dave’s skills as a bowhunter and the fact he’d never failed to get the job done. Dave has killed a serious number of deer during his 60-plus years of casting arrows, and he has taken many species of big game across North America.

There was a caveat to Dave’s hunting that buck. He’d told me on his first-ever hunt with me that he likely wouldn’t shoot anything — no matter how big it was — until the last day or so, because he liked to get his money’s worth. He has always been true to his word. In fact, I started referring to him as “Sergeant Friday” after he passed up a 160-class buck several times during the week before finally shooting him the last morning of his hunt. He just hates to miss a minute on stand with bow in hand.

I explained to Dave that Fabio had vanished from that area once before, so there would be no passing him up unless he broke off one entire side of his rack. He agreed with me that bucks of that caliber are rare, and then he promised to shoot him if he showed up again.

Dave was in the stand well before daylight and had action for most of the day. The bucks were getting frisky, and lots of fresh rubs and scrapes were evident around his stand.

At one point, a skittish doe showed up watching her backtrail. Dave raised his Prime bow when he saw a huge-bodied buck with a very wide and heavy rack trailing her through some very thick willows. He told me later that when he saw the buck’s gigantic mass, he instantly said to himself, “Screw Houdini, I’m gonna shoot this beast!” Unfortunately, the doe spooked and ran off, and the buck turned and followed her without going near the bait or offering Dave a shot.



There are two things an outfitter hopes for — great bucks and great clients. This photo shows both as Dave Butler helps Fabio Houdini pose for one last time.

Believe it or not, Dave was actually disappointed a little while later when he saw the big droptine buck emerge from a stand of spruce trees about 50 yards away. The bruiser nonchalantly strolled to the bait, seemingly without a care in the world.

Dave studied him for about 10 minutes as the buck fed and walked around while offering multiple shot opportunities at 20 yards or less. Dave was convinced the buck he saw earlier was more impressive, and a mental struggle began as to whether he should shoot the buck or let the deer go.

Then Dave suddenly remembered the trail camera and thought, *Uh oh, if Rob checks the camera and finds out I passed this dude up, I'm going to be in some serious doodoo!* (Not an exact quote.) He lat-

er reported that he'd been watching the buck for so long that he felt zero nerves when he settled his pin and launched a deadly arrow tipped with an old-school Thunderhead. The buck bolted down the same trail he'd walked in on before piling up within 70 yards.

I got the last laugh, though, when I discovered the camera contained a faulty memory card and had taken no pictures of the event. Dave could have passed him up, clammed up, and would have possibly had another chance at the big-beamed buck... More importantly, he would have had at least one more day of hunting! **BH**

The author is a long-time friend of this magazine, a great outfitter and guide, a fair shot with a longbow, and one of the funniest humans you'll ever meet.

NOT TODAY!

By M.R. James, Founder



A DEEP-ROOTED COLORADO BOWHUNTING ICON AND HIS FAMILY BATTLE MOTHER NATURE'S FURY.

ON THURSDAY, DECEMBER 30, 2021, a small fire somehow ignited inside a storage shed on the outskirts of the tiny Boulder County town of Marshall, Colorado. Its first tiny flames quickly grew and spread into a nearby mini-ocean of tinder-dry prairie grass. There, lashed by roaring winter winds later clocked at 90 to 100 miles per hour, the blossoming range fire soon exploded into an out-of-control inferno that wreaked total devastation on the houses, subdivisions, and businesses standing in its path.

Some investigators, with good reason, later called it one of the worst and most expensive fire disasters in Colorado history. By the time the Marshall Fire was finally contained long hours later, some 30,000 area residents had been evacuated, with more than 1,100 of their homes and contents destroyed.

Among the evacuees were Colorado bowhunting legends Marv Clyncke (pronounced Clinky) and his wife, Judy Clyncke. As the flames and windblown fiery ash drew closer, they'd initially evacuated their home on the original Clyncke homestead/ranch along South Boulder Road. That's where Marv was raised, met Judy while in high school, and continued to live after marriage while raising four outdoor-loving sons and a daughter.

But the fast-approaching firestorm abruptly sent Marv and Judy to safety in their married daughter Dawn's home some three miles away. Once there, the couple kept close tabs on updated reports about walls of windblown flames still moving directly toward their house.

Naturally, the thought of losing their home and personal items — along with decades of family memories, big-

A photograph of a large, leafless tree in a yard with a house in the background and a fire burning in the foreground. The tree is the central focus, with its bare branches reaching out. To the left, a portion of a wooden house is visible. In the foreground on the right, a fire is burning brightly, casting a warm glow. The ground is covered in grass and some fallen leaves.

Wildfires are terrifying — especially when they come this close to destroying everything you've worked for your entire life.

game mounts, irreplaceable photographs, artwork, and treasured personal heirlooms — was terrifying.

I'd first shook hands with Marv and Judy in 1972 at the Pope and Young Club's biennial convention in Denver, Colorado. A year later, Judy met me at the Denver Airport when I flew from Indiana to appear as guest speaker at the annual Colorado Bowhunters Association convention in nearby Boulder. We've been friends ever since, sharing bowhunts, P&Y and CBA gatherings, and a mutual passion for bowhunting that has strengthened our bond through the years.

When national TV news coverage of the Marshall Fire first reached our Indiana home in early January of this year, my initial comment to Janet was, "I sure hope Marv and Judy's home isn't in that fire's path." Little did we know then how close Marv and Judy came to seeing their house

and its contents disappear in wind-whipped fire and roiling clouds of smoke.

It was only when I finally reached Marv by phone that Janet and I heard the sobering and graphic details of the Clyncke's frightening story. Media coverage, including news reports and TV clips that Marv shared, provided terrifying first-person accounts of the unfolding disaster. And, as bad as it was, it could have been much, much worse for the Clyncke Family and other Boulder-area residents.

For better background perspective, readers should know that Marv's first Bowhunter feature story and photos date back to the August/September 1972 issue. Titled, "Elk and a Plastic Pipe." That debut article presented the once-unique concept of calling rutting bulls within bow range by imitating bugles and cow calls.

NOT TODAY!

Seems an old rancher friend of Marv's had made an "elk whistle" that he swore lured elk close enough to shoot. Marv liked the idea and soon crafted a similar whistle, but he used a durable plastic tube since bamboo tended to dry and split. Marv's feature was the new magazine's first article to suggest calling elk within good arrow range.

As for Marv and Judy, their combined list of bowhunting promotions, fundraisers, donations, and myriad personal accomplishments is longer than any longbow Marv owns and still loves to shoot. Both Clynckes are emeritus members of the P&Y Club, having long ago taken sufficient record-book animals to qualify as Senior P&Y members. Marv also had been elected to the Club's Board of Directors, where he once served as First Vice President and as an Official Measurer during the past 47 years.

In addition, Marv was a founder of the Colorado Bowhunters Association and subsequently became the first bowhunter — or rifle hunter — to take all eight of his home state's original big-game species: whitetail and mule deer, elk, pronghorn antelope, cougar, bighorn sheep, mountain goat, and black bear. He's also a charter member, life member, official measurer, and the first President of the Compton Traditional Archers.

Note: Colorado later introduced and added Shiras moose and desert bighorn sheep to its list of native big-game species. Marv arrowed a record-book Shiras moose after drawing a tag in 2017, and today, at age 81, still has hopes of drawing a desert bighorn license and completing his decades-long quest to tag all Centennial State big-game animals to complete the Grand Slam of North America's wild sheep — all taken with his trusty longbow.

Speaking of sheep hunting, Marv has been on a total of 61 sheep hunts over the years, mostly helping other hunters get their ram but also personally arrowing Stone, Dall, and Rocky Mountain bighorn rams. And it was back on August 3, 2006, that Marv was at my side in the Colorado high country south of Leadville, when I arrowed a record-book ram we'd glassed and stalked. That made me one more indebted person on a lengthy list of successful bighorn hunters that Marv has assisted in making sheep-hunting dreams come true.

Helping others and raising money to benefit wildlife are two lifelong Clyncke traditions. Both Marv and Judy — mem-



Marv Clyncke and I have been friends since meeting at the 1972 Pope and Young Convention in Denver. When I drew a Colorado bighorn sheep tag in 1996, Marv was at my side during the long stalk that put me within 25 yards of this P&Y ram.

bers of the Colorado Bowhunters' Hall of Fame — have donated considerable time and monetary support to numerous hunting and conservation organizations, clubs, and groups, while spearheading countless fundraising efforts. Notably, Marv's talents as a custom knifemaker and gifted scrimshaw artist have generated tens of thousands of dollars in donations later presented to deserving civic and sportsmen's groups.

More recently, although safely evacuated out of the Marshall Fire's path near the dawning of 2022, Marv and Judy



Besides being a successful bowhunter for decades, Marv also is a talented scrimshaw artist and knifemaker. This bolo tie is one of my personal favorites that I've owned since the 1980s.

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soon became increasingly concerned by the latest broadcast news updates. It was obvious that fast-spreading flames continued burning directly toward the Clyncke home. It seemed likely that only a miracle would spare their property.

That's when Marv, unwilling to sit idly and safely on the sidelines, elected to drive back home and do whatever possible to save his house and its contents. Two grandsons, Matthew (age 33) and Owen (24), would join Marv's battle to protect the Clyncke home, an additional family house on the property, a detached garage, storage sheds, and all their contents.

"We collectively said, 'Not today!'" Owen remembers. "That was our plan — not losing our property."

"I don't remember thinking anything," Matthew said afterward, "just that this fire must be stopped. We had to save the houses and outbuildings."

By the time the Clyncke trio arrived back at the homestead, the howling wind was already dropping burning ash into the yard and surrounding fields. Grabbing water buckets and fire extinguishers, Marv and his grandsons were instantly busy dousing burning ash and sparks wherever they fell, keeping the buckets repeatedly filled and emptied.

When the onrushing fire finally reached electric lines and knocked out all power on the Clyncke property, including the water pump, Matthew used an axe to chop a hole in the thick ice covering a nearby pond to open another critical water source. In addition, shovels were used to dig dirt from a grassy ditch and smother new flame hotspots before they could spread.



This small pond provided water to douse flames after the fire knocked out power on the Clyncke property. The raging fire also burned trees around the pond and threatened Matthew's nearby home as well.

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NOT TODAY!

Luckily, Mother Nature lent a helping hand when the raging winds subsided to "...only about 30 miles an hour." In all, the Clyncke's battle was waged for nearly six long and exhausting hours, bolstered later when a cousin, Scott, daughter, Katherine, and son, Edward, drove up to lend a much-appreciated hand.

"We were obviously not trained fire-fighters," Marv explained later. "We were trying to save our homes and our lives is what we were trying to do."

Even after turning back the advancing flames near his house, Marv worked on to save a nearby neighbor's home and prevent flames from jumping across the paved road into an occupied subdivision.

Grandson Owen recalled that at one point he was facing a wall of flames taller than he was, standing not 20 yards from the Clyncke house. "It was the most scared I've ever been in my entire life," Owen said.

No doubt the hectic hours spent saving the Clyncke homes and outbuildings were an emotional rollercoaster ride; making progress in one spot, only to see new fires crop up somewhere else. Unaccountably, twice firetrucks with trained crews rolled by the Clyncke property without stopping or offering any assistance.

One firetruck pulled into a nearby



Judy Clyncke poses with grandsons Matthew (left) and Owen, who bravely battled the out-of-control fire and helped save the Clyncke home and outbuildings.

churchyard, where for a time the crew watched Marv and his grandsons battling spreading flames using only individual grit, a single garden hose, buckets of pond water, a shovel and axe, a pickup truck, and Bobcat skid-steer tractor.

"That was something I still don't understand," Marv said later. "I was praying the whole time we were fighting the fire. I kept thinking what a heck of a way to lose everything we'd worked our whole lives for to make sure the family

had a good life, and it's going to go up in flames.

"What made me more determined than ever to stop the fire was seeing so-called professional firefighters sitting and watching us, but obviously unwilling to help. I even thought about running over and pulling them out of their truck, but we didn't have time to spare with the fire burning all around us. Honestly, we didn't have time to be afraid we might die. That thought never occurred to us." **BH**





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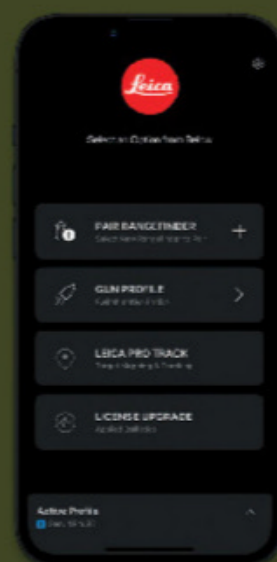
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THE GHOST

OF

FRIDAY

THE 13TH

BY KEITH ANDREWS

**STRANGE HOW A HUNT CAN
LAST FOR YEARS, THEN END
IN A MATTER OF SECONDS.**

At a young age, I was given the gift of my love of hunting by my dad and other family members. Through the years, I have passed this gift on to my son. Countless hunting stories have been told around the family dinner table, a late-night campfire, or even in the downtime on a hunting trip. I have been bowhunting whitetails since I was 20, and I've had the opportunity to guide whitetail hunters in Illinois where, in 2002, I met another guide, Mike, from Pennsylvania.

Since then, Mike and I have become close friends, and we have leased various Illinois properties where we spend two weeks hunting together each fall. When our sons were young, we hoped they both would join us one day for the yearly trip. Eventually they did: Lil' Mike in 2013; my son Dylan and Lil' Mike's childhood friend, Ralph, followed a couple years later.

Mike and I have shared the many aspects of hunting, both in and out of the stand: The comradery, the highs and lows, the excitement and frustration, the laughter and disbelief, and so much more that is hunting. There were years of seeing many deer or very few; and years with both of us heading home with only memories of time well spent. We let nice bucks pass, with hopes of letting them grow...and then there was the year we saw a very elusive buck, which is where this story got its start.

THE GHOST OF FRIDAY THE 13TH

In late 2012, we met Jack, a farmer in south-central Illinois. We leased his land for our 2013 season, and we've done so every season since. In 2017, Jack's son, Donnie, gave us the opportunity to hunt an additional 55 acres. In the off-season, we would set trail cameras up around the two properties and Jack and Donnie would periodically pull the SD cards and send them to us.

For the 2017 hunt, Mike and I started at Donnie's but saw very few deer from the stand or on camera in the first four days. So, we joined Lil' Mike and Ralph



Our whitetail hunting party includes, left to right, Lil' Mike, Dylan, Mike, Ralph, and me. The smiles say it all!



at Jack's. Dylan arrived on Saturday to hunt the last week. That evening, Lil' Mike, Ralph, and Dylan were checking the SD card from a camera at Donnie's when someone exclaimed, "Oh my God, wait till you see this one!"

It was an impressive 10-point buck with very long brow tines, but his left G-3 and G-4 were broken. After looking at this deer, we decided not to hunt him in hopes he'd make it another year. We never saw him in person that season — only twice on camera — and he never

showed up on any of our cameras in the off-season.

The 2018 season began with Mike and I hunting Donnie's property. On Day One, I saw one of the biggest deer I've ever seen.

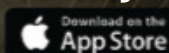
Through my binoculars, it was easy to see it was a big 10-point, and he was headed toward my stand. Along the way, he stopped, made a scrape, and then worked a licking branch at a cedar tree. The buck then turned and walked away from me and out of sight,

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THE GHOST OF FRIDAY THE 13TH

The locals called this buck, "Grandpa," and in 2018, I only saw him once in daylight, so I moved to another property. The buck later appeared on my trail camera, in daylight, near my stand, when I wasn't there!



On Day Two, Mike and I were in our stands before sunrise when I heard a deer running by the base of my tree. Still too early to shoot, I looked through my binoculars and could see the silhouette of the big 10-point from the day before. He trotted into the opening, and then stopped by the cedar tree where he had worked a scrape the day before. I grunted at him several times, and he turned and walked a few steps toward me. Then he turned away and disappeared again.

This buck now had my full attention, so I hunted at Donnie's the entire two weeks. I didn't see the buck again in daylight, but my trail camera revealed that he had shown up near my stand several times; 30–40 minutes before I'd arrived and about an hour or so after I'd gone. This 10-point was elusive, as well as all-consuming, and he was occupying most of my thoughts.

At camp in the evenings, we all studied the pictures and started noting similarities with the buck from the 2017 season that had two broken tines. Both had very long brows, so we were thinking they might be the same buck.

He appeared on our cameras many times in the off-season until early March 2019. In late March, Mike and I met in Illinois to hunt for the buck's shed antlers, with no luck. We did learn that the locals were familiar with this older buck — they called him "Grandpa."

In mid-October 2019, Grandpa appeared on camera one time. I hunted Donnie's to start that season, and in the first five days I saw very few deer from the stand or on camera, with no sign of Grandpa. So, I joined the others at Jack's, but I couldn't get Grandpa off my mind.

After two days, a camera check at Donnie's revealed Grandpa at my stand at 9 a.m. the first morning I'd hunted at Jack's. I was back at Donnie's the following morning!

For the next five days, there were no sightings of Grandpa from the stand or on the camera, day or night.

One morning, the weather was terrible — 19 degrees, high winds, and snowing. Mike and I went our separate ways to hunt that morning, and just before 8 a.m., Grandpa came running.

I grabbed my bow and drew back. When the buck came into my shooting lane, I grunted but he didn't stop. I hollered, which stopped him behind a bush at nine yards — no shot! He scratched his back with his antlers, looked around, and then took off running again and I watched as he disappeared once more.

The next morning, I saw several does and a few really nice bucks. That afternoon, I watched three does and two small bucks come running into sight. The bucks were nervously watching be-



It was brutal to see the big 10-point show up within easy bow range of my treestand when I wasn't there. But that's the game we play.

hind them because Grandpa was there, 45 yards away and facing my direction.

As Grandpa moved toward me at a steady pace, I drew back and grunted, but he didn't stop. Again I hollered to get his attention, but he never broke stride. Frustrated, I sat down to text the others, "He did it to me again!" I wouldn't see him the rest of that season.

Late the following October, I arrived a day before the others. I checked the camera at the front of Donnie's property and found photos of Grandpa. This amazing buck with impressively tall brow tines had now developed a drop-tine on his right antler!

Excited, I called Mike, and we quickly decided to hunt only Donnie's place. We hung our stands in the best spots, hoping that Grandpa would pass by one of us. Grandpa appeared on camera twice, without either of us seeing him. That's when Mike renamed him, "The Ghost."

We decided that Friday, November 13, would be the last day of our Illinois hunt. We'd hunt until 9 a.m. and then take down our stands and get ready to head home on Saturday.

That morning, we were up at 3 a.m. for coffee and breakfast. The weather was wicked, with high winds and freezing conditions. We tried to talk ourselves out of hunting that final morning, but then we headed out for our last hunt despite the poor weather conditions.

Once in our stands, we sent a few group texts for safety check-ins and to wish one another good luck. We were cold and tired. I was frustrated, as this was my third season of being outsmarted by the buck we now called The Ghost.

As daylight brought everything into clear view, I wondered if I could handle another year of being consumed by this buck. Two hours later, I leaned my forehead against the tree and thanked God

for allowing me to follow such an amazing animal. I just wanted to see him.

At 7:55 a.m., a doe came running into my shooting lane, stopping in front of my tree and panting heavily. Knowing this doe was likely being chased by a buck, I reached for my bow just as The Ghost appeared at 48 yards, facing the doe.

He began to trot in on the same path he'd used the previous two years. At full draw, I mentally reminded myself to take my time and pick a spot, while also wondering if I'd miss yet another opportunity to take this buck that had consumed me for so long.

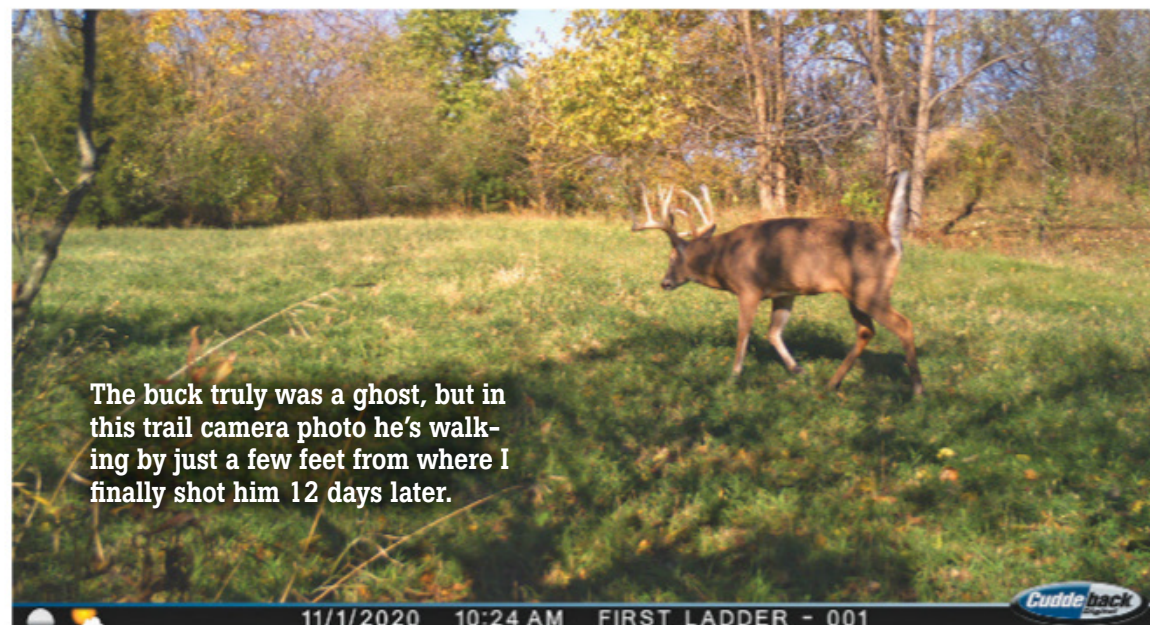
The buck stopped broadside, at 22 yards, in the middle of my shooting lane. And when I released, I knew the shot was good. The big buck spun, and then he headed back to where he'd come from and then out of sight. But soon I heard a crash, followed by utter silence.

In a matter of seconds, my frustration melted into an indescribable high. Shaking uncontrollably, I got down from my stand, and while pacing in circles was able to get a text out to Mike and Lil' Mike that read, "OMG drop-tine down!"

Knowing Mike was on his way, and not wanting to jump the buck, I walked in the opposite direction from where I knew he'd died. Ralph called to congratulate me before pausing to say, "Isn't it ironic that The Ghost went down on Friday the 13th?"

Still trying to catch my breath while not quite believing what just happened and waiting for Mike to arrive, I walked to my arrow. It confirmed a good shot.

A short while later, I heard Mike calling my name as he was trying to find me. Suddenly, I heard Mike screaming, "He's dead!" Apparently, Mike's excited run to find me had resulted in his literally stumbling upon my buck, which lay dead under a cedar tree.



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THE GHOST OF FRIDAY THE 13TH

There was a blur of excitement with the two of us talking, congratulating, and pacing. It all escalated when Lil' Mike arrived.

I continue to thank God for these amazing animals and this experience, which reaches far beyond the hunt itself. The massive amount of support from family and friends during my journey was beyond humbling.

I don't think my friends Mark, Travis, and Ted will ever realize just how much their constant phone calls and texts of encouragement helped me push on till I got it done. To each one of them, I extend a heartfelt thank you. I also thank my wife for being so understanding and supportive of this passion of mine. **BH**

The author lives in Sandersville, Georgia, where he works at Barksdale Contracting.

Author's Note: My equipment included a Bowtech Reckoning, Easton T64 FMJ arrows, 100-grain Tooth of the Arrow broadheads, KUIU clothing, and a Millennium L110 ladder stand. My buck grossed 209 $\frac{4}{8}$ nontypical, and he was aged at 8 $\frac{1}{2}$ years old.

The Ghost was a buck worthy of a group photo. In the back is Lil' Mike and Jack, and in front is Mike and me holding those spectacular antlers.



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BIG BUCKS

BEFORE THE RUT

BY GREG MILLER

OVER THE YEARS, I often have been asked what time period during the deer season I most prefer to hunt mature bucks. While I once would have answered that my favorite time to hunt big deer is during the rut, that's no longer the case.

Now, it's not that I don't absolutely love chasing mature bucks during the rut. It's just that years of experience doing so have shown me that I stand a much better chance of patterning and killing a big buck during the late pre-rut.

A PERFECT CASE IN POINT

One such hunt that immediately comes to mind involved a mature nine-point I took in my home state of Wisconsin some years back. The hunt was made extra special by the fact that I arrowed the big deer in an area that had been subjected to extremely heavy gun-hunting pressure for a number of years.

Anyway, as the story goes, I'd spent the better part of a morning scouting my hunting area while accompanied by my then nine-year-old daughter, Jessie. Suffice to say, Jessie and I found just enough fresh big-buck sign to figure out exactly where I needed to hang a treestand for a morning hunt.

The spot was located at the very top of a steep, wooded bluff. If I'd correctly read the buck sign we'd found, the local whitetails were spending the nighttime hours feeding in some croplands located at the very bottom of the bluff. Then, sometime around first light, those deer were making their way to their daytime bedding spots located on the top of the bluff.

While I felt fairly confident that I'd hung my stand in a great spot, I really had no idea just how perfect my decision would end up being. I'd barely had time to get settled on my very first sit in that stand when I heard deer walking in my direction. Seconds later, I spotted a half-dozen antlerless deer walking through the timber approximately 40 yards away.

I must admit that it was encouraging to have that group of deer show up so early. But it was even more encouraging when I heard a loud and deep grunt emanate from a patch of thick brush located just a short distance behind the does and yearlings. Judging by the reaction of the antlerless deer that were now



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BIG BUCKS BEFORE THE RUT

standing right in front of me, something very good was about to happen.

Thankfully, I'd already grabbed my bow and had prepared for a shot, because the situation became quite hectic over the next few seconds. First, the herd of antlerless deer suddenly got very nervous and trotted to within just a few yards of my position. But rather than watching them, I focused my attention on the area where I'd heard the grunt... and I'm glad I did, as seconds later, a big buck strolled into view.



I arrowed this big Wisconsin nine-point during the final stages of the pre-rut. I was set up along a fresh rubline that ran between a primary feeding area and a preferred bedding area.

Confident that the buck was going to follow pretty much the same route the antlerless deer had taken, I got into position to take my shot. True to form, the old whitetail did exactly what I figured he'd do, and the big nine-pointer made it less than 100 yards after the hit.

If memory serves me correct, the buck's antlers had a gross typical score that ended up being somewhere in the mid-140s. However, it was his body size that, in my opinion, was most impressive. That big ol' farmland deer had a whopping field-dressed weight of 214 pounds. One of the heftiest whitetails I've ever taken, and the feat was accomplished during the pre-rut period.

PATTERNING PRE-RUT BUCKS

There are several reasons why I so love hunting pre-rut whitetails. First, it's pretty much a given that those deer will still be residing within their home ranges for most of this time period. Second, because they've been marking their home ranges with numerous rubs and scrapes during the past couple weeks, their travel routes are fairly easy to figure out.

But the main reason I prefer to hunt bucks during the pre-rut is because that, along with being much more "patternable," mature bucks also become a bit more active in daylight. And provided we display a healthy degree of stealth while hunting those deer, their level of daylight activity does nothing but increase as the rut draws closer.

While I cut my eye teeth on hunting pre-rut whitetails prior to the introduction of scouting cameras, using them has only reinforced what I long suspected about pre-rut mature buck behavior: The amount of time they spend wandering about their home ranges during daylight hours only increases as the pre-rut progresses.

Although I've hunted whitetails in more than 20 states, at various times during the season, I wouldn't even begin to guess exactly when mature bucks in some of those states begin displaying strong pre-rut behavior. But in my home state of Wisconsin, and in most other parts of the Upper Midwest, it almost always occurs during the last week to 10 days of October.

Which, in my opinion, is one of the greatest assets of using scouting cameras at this time of year. Personally, from the



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As many hunters know, fresh buck sign continues to appear on a daily basis during the pre-rut. The trick is accurately reading that sign to help figure out our hunting strategies.

very first moment that I begin capturing daylight photos of the mature bucks that reside in my hunting areas, I'm going to be spending a lot more time hunting those deer!

PRE-RUT DECOYING

It's a given that calling can be very effective for luring in mature bucks during the pre-rut. And the same thing absolutely applies to decoying. What we need to remember is that, while big whitetails aren't feeling the full effects of the rut, they're certainly in the mood to check out and potentially challenge other bucks...especially a buck they don't recognize (i.e., your decoy).

I well remember a bowhunt in northeast Kentucky from some years back. The hunt took place during the last week



This big Kentucky whitetail fell victim to a buck decoy I had placed in a freshly picked cornfield the last week of October.

of October, which meant I'd be dealing with a definite late pre-rut situation. And since I'd dealt with that similar situation numerous times before, I was confident that decoying could be a very effective strategy.

There were several other hunters in camp when I arrived. After seeing that I'd brought along a decoy, they started ribbing me in a good-natured way. According to them, decoys only worked during the rut. My reply was that maybe we should wait until the end of the hunt to see if decoying would also be effective during the pre-rut.

Long story short, on the third evening of my hunt, a big nine-pointer strolled out into the picked cornfield my stand site overlooked. After surveying his surroundings, the buck finally spotted my decoy, and it was game on! I ended up arrowing that deer at a range of 20 yards when he stopped to glare at my decoy.

THOSE TIMES...

Now, while the pre-rut can be a great time to pattern and ambush mature whitetails, there are those occasions when big bucks can pull a disappearing act during this time of year. Personally, I

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This big eight-point was living on my hunting property for most of the fall, but then suddenly took a walk in late October. Ironically, my nephew ended up arrowing the deer some two miles away.

can't begin to count the number of times a big buck I'd been hunting earlier in the fall suddenly dropped out of sight during the final days of the pre-rut. A perfect example of this occurred in Wisconsin just this past hunting season.

Throughout most of the month of October, I'd been capturing photos of a big eight-point buck on a property I was leasing. I was sharing photos of the buck with a few close friends, a couple relatives, and on social media.

All the photos I'd initially captured of the buck were taken after dark. Judging by what I could see on the photos, it was obvious I was dealing with a very mature whitetail. So, I knew that all conditions had to be absolutely perfect before I could plan an ambush.

But then, during the final days of the pre-rut, the big eight-pointer suddenly disappeared...and I mean he was gone! Of course, my first thoughts were that the buck had been killed by a neighboring landowner, or that perhaps he had been hit by a vehicle on a very busy highway that bordered the south end of my property.

However, my speculations as to what had happened to the old whitetail were solved just a few days later when I received a text message from my nephew, Zane Miller, who was hunting a block of timber located approximately two miles from my property, when a big buck strolled into view. The deer ended up walking to within 15 yards, which

proved to be a fatal mistake. It took only one brief look at my nephew's photos of the deer to ascertain that it was the same big eight-point I'd been capturing photos of for nearly two months.

But what also really needs to be emphasized here is that, when mature bucks suddenly go on the prowl, they never, ever walk in a straight line. So, one can only speculate about just how many miles the big deer actually put on before walking within bow range of my nephew's treestand. But I guarantee that it was a more than just a couple.



A subtle rattling sequence brought this giant Nebraska buck to within 10 yards of my stand on a chilly late-October morning. The deer remains my largest bowkilled typical whitetail ever.

WHAT'S THE BEST GAME PLAN?

I've already mentioned that hunting around fresh buck sign can be an effective strategy during the pre-rut. But there's also something to be said for setting up along preferred travel routes that link bedding areas to feeding areas. Truth is, I employed just such a strategy to take one of my best-ever bucks during the pre-rut.

It was the last week of October, and I was hunting a dense riverbottom in western Nebraska. My cameraman and I had climbed into our portable trees-tands well before daylight on that crisp October morning. Not long after first light, several small bucks and a few antlerless deer passed by our position.

I waited perhaps 15 minutes after all those deer had disappeared before picking up my rattling antlers and letting go with a somewhat subdued, 30-second rattling sequence. Moments later, I spotted movement in the direction from which the antlerless deer had appeared. And then I saw antlers... GIANT antlers!

Right from the get-go, I could tell that the approaching buck was one of the largest whitetails I'd ever seen while hunting. The giant deer ended up walking to within 15 yards of my position. The hit was perfect, and we recovered the trophy animal after a relatively short trailing job. His 13-point rack has a gross typical score of 177³/₈.

SUMMING UP

I guess the best advice I could give is that, once you're convinced the pre-rut is underway, start spending more time in the woods. Whether this time is spent doing a bit of careful midday scouting, putting up more trail cameras, or planting your behind on a portable treestand, you just really need to be out there doing something.

That said, it's also very important to remember that you're dealing with a pre-rut situation, which means big bucks aren't quite yet in that mode of behavior where they sometimes seem to throw caution to the wind. So, while we need to be spending more time gettin' after 'em, we also need to keep in mind that it would be very wise to continue to employ all of our hard-earned Ninja skills. **BH**

The author is a well-known Wisconsin outdoor writer and photographer who has shared his considerable whitetail knowledge over the years via magazine articles, books, and television shows.

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A large moose with massive antlers stands in a forest with autumn foliage. The moose is the central focus, facing slightly left but looking towards the camera. Its antlers are large and light-colored, with a prominent palmated structure on the left side. The background is filled with green and yellowing trees and bushes, suggesting a late autumn setting. The overall tone is natural and majestic.

A STACKED DECK

**AFTER WAITING 20 YEARS FOR THIS MOMENT
TO HAPPEN, I *"ALMOST"* HATED IT WHEN IT DID!**

BY LEW WEBB

PHOTO BY MARK RAYCROFT

This very special bowhunting adventure started much like most do...with an excited, "Oh my gosh, honey, I finally drew that tag!" In this case, after 20 years of applying in my adopted home state of Colorado, I had finally drawn an archery bull moose tag, and I was over-the-moon stoked, as was my nonhunting wife of 36 years — read into her excitement what you will.

I live in the southwest corner of Colorado, about 15 miles northeast of Durango. In that part of my home state, I'm fortunate to be able to hunt elk, mule deer, black bears, and turkeys literally in my front yard.

This moose tag, however, was for Unit 6, which is in north-central Colorado, on the Wyoming border. I had applied there for years but had never actually been in that specific unit. No worries, though, as I planned on making several scouting trips and was confident in my abilities to locate a couple of good bulls prior to opening day.

Overconfidence can kill you at times, as can Mr. Murphy, and as it turned out I showed up the day before the season opened towing a little camp trailer I'd borrowed from my neighbor, having had no opportunity to scout and only a vague idea of where I was going to start hunting the next morning.

Even more pressing at that moment of my arrival was quickly finding a place to camp so I could at least look around for a couple of hours. The "quickly" part wasn't to be, but I did eventually find a secluded little place just off the road. It was dark by the time I got my camp set up. *Oh well, I guess the hunt I'd waited 20 years for would start with a recon mission instead of what I'd hoped for*, I thought before turning in for the night.

As I walked away from camp in the dark the next morning, I'm sure the grin on my face was huge. I was moose hunting, and I love moose hunting — especially with my longbow!

When I walked into the woods, I immediately realized a distressing fact — I was working much harder than I'd anticipated. I live at an elevation of approximately 8,000 feet and was in great shape, so I was a bit surprised. Thinking I must've accidentally picked a bad piece of woods with a lot of deadfall, I trudged on.

When it got lighter, I was absolutely astounded at what I could see. In every direction there were live, perfectly healthy green trees up to 18 inches in diameter, snapped off like toothpicks. Other huge and healthy trees were



Hunting in this blowdown maze was a nightmare! Thoughts of possibly packing a moose out of this mess only increased my anxiety.



blown over; their giant rootballs literally ripped out of the ground! I found out later that just a day or two earlier a wind that was clocked at 114 mph had roared over the ridge from the east and had simply devastated the woods!

Two hours later, I found myself 100 yards above a creek that ran through an equally wide marsh. When I stopped to call, I got an instant reply from the other side of the marsh. I grunted again and raked a nearby bush with a bovine scapula a rancher friend of mine had given me, and here he came...

Now, I'm certainly not a professional moose hunter, but I've called-in enough bulls over the years to know that what I was doing at that moment might prove effective.

He was coming in nicely and we were continuously exchanging dialogue, but I couldn't see him, even when he splashed across the marsh to my side. Suddenly, there he was — about 35 yards away — but something wasn't quite right.

It didn't take me long to figure out my trepidation — the bull only had one ant-

ler. I immediately stopped communicating with him, as I really didn't need a lap dance by this 1,000-pound critter, and he eventually wandered off.

I'd hunted hard and had some close encounters but just couldn't close the deal on a bull I wanted. I had also taken a three-day hiatus to hurry home to see my wife, wash some clothes, grab some more groceries, and generally regroup. In addition, the crazy blowdown situation had me a bit frustrated and discouraged. There were places I could get to if I worked hard enough, but I was hunting alone, and I feared loss of precious meat should I arrow a bull in said places.

Another factor in the hunt had been the huge wildfires burning on three sides of the unit I'd drawn. Unit 6 is an OTC archery elk tag, so many of the lucky elk hunters who had drawn tags in other places that were currently on fire opted to turn in their elk tags, thus saving their points... So there were elk hunters everywhere I was hunting moose!

Oh well, I thought. Nothing to do at this point but tighten my boot laces and keep at it. So, with a new resolve, back to the moose woods I went.

Late in the afternoon of Day 17, I was almost five miles north of my second campsite, where two days prior I had called-in a very nice bull a half-mile from where I was now. That bull had come to within 20 yards of me but never gave me a good shot in the thick timber.

Hoping I might relocate him and convince him to play the game again, I was quietly sneaking through the woods 200 yards above a marshy area located in the bottom of a steep canyon. Apparently, this particular canyon's depth and orientation had somehow protected it from the ridiculous winds that had caused the gnarly blowdown, so there weren't quite as many trees on the ground.

Stopping to look and listen, I heard a loud limb snap down in the canyon. Focusing my attention downhill, I then heard several more loud snaps — enough to convince me that the sounds I was hearing were being made by a large animal in motion.

I was carrying my grunt funnel and a moose scapula that I'd recently acquired off a found skeleton, which replaced the aforementioned bovine scapula, which had broken after multiple days of overzealous raking. The thermals were still blowing uphill, so the wind was good.

All things considered, I was in a pretty good spot, so I decided to start the game from right where I was. Nocking

A STACKED DECK



This moose scapula appeared at a most opportune moment, just a day or two after I'd broken the bovine scapula I'd been using up until then as part of my calling arsenal.

an arrow and leaning my bow against a tree, I sent a moderately loud grunt in the direction of the popping noises. That produced an instant grunt response from what sounded like maybe 100 yards below, followed seconds later by the sounds of a moose thrashing a bush. The acoustics in that canyon were awesome, and I was in business!

Things ramped up pretty quickly from there. I matched the bull's thrashing with that of my own, and his next grunt was closer. I grunted again, he thrashed again, and this time he was even closer.

I became hyper-focused, and without realizing I'd picked it up, my longbow

was now in my left hand. The scapula thrashed one more time and was then put down; my grunt funnel was still in my right hand.

The bull was now grunting consistently as he approached from downhill and I realized if he stayed on his current path he'd ultimately enter a wide shooting lane in front of me at very close range. Perfect!

The bull was close and coming hard, so I decided I was done making noise and set the funnel on the ground to ready myself for the shot. I've always shot two fingers under, because a college football injury to my right ring finger doesn't allow that finger to completely straighten for a clean, three-finger release, but I digress. I was locked and loaded!

The bull stayed on course, and then suddenly, he was there...less than 20 yards away and perfectly positioned for a shot. But a branch the diameter of my wrist, sticking up from a downed tree, perfectly covered the spot behind the bull's right shoulder that I had been focused on. At that point, all I could realistically do was wait for the still-grunting bull to move just enough to give me a clear shot.

After what seemed like forever, the bull then strangely moved through my

next shooting lane and uphill — and seemingly out of my life. Desperately, I grabbed the funnel from the ground and grunted hard at him, stopping him dead in his tracks. I then sent another soft grunt in his direction, and that caused the bull to turn and start heading back toward me.

At 20 yards, I was starting to get a bit concerned that this situation was gonna get ugly. Yeah, I'd picked the fight, but I wouldn't be able to "throw a punch" if he kept coming in straight on.

Luckily, he made a turn to his right to go around a big root ball, which gave me just the right shot angle that I needed. As I drew, he caught the movement and stopped, looking directly at me at just a bit over 15 yards. When my middle finger snugged into the corner of my mouth, the arrow was gone.

The hit was ideal, and the bull winced when the arrow sunk, but then something odd happened: He just stood there looking at me, and for a split-second I scanned for cover thinking he was going to make a death-defying charge at the unseen bull that had just "stung" him.

My concern was quickly put to rest as I soon watched the bull turn and then slowly walk away. I knew the arrow was

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A STACKED DECK

in the right spot with plenty of penetration, so I just watched as he slowly sauntered away, knowing he'd be down soon.

I could still see the bull when he stopped about 70 yards away and began to wobble. He was also on a bench that dropped off steeply behind him, and while I wanted him to fall dead, I most definitely did not want him to do so backwards, given his precarious position.

Of course, he did just that, and I spoke a few words of French, to which there was no one around at the time for me to beg their pardon! Then, when I made my way over to his final landing spot under the low-hanging limbs of a tree, and in the edge of a wild rose thicket (or whatever you call those demonic plants that are little vines with a million thorns on them), there was more French. It was apparent that I had quite a bit of chopping and trimming to do just to be able to maneuver around to work on him and take a few pictures. I hate when that happens!

As I finally laid my hands on that magnificent beast, all the aches and pains in my 62-year-old body suddenly disappeared. Although the deck had been



Like the proverbial blind squirrel finding an acorn, even a guy like me eventually gets lucky.

stacked against me, from having no time to scout, to the blowdown nightmare, to having to negotiate a woods overcrowded with elk hunters... I had persevered and it had all come together.

My bull was beautiful and well worth the 20-year wait. It was then that I realized I was by myself, several miles from camp

with darkness closing in fast, and I had a 1,000-pound bull moose to take apart.

Yep, more French.

I really hate when that happens! **BH**

The author has been bowhunting for 40 years and was just re-elected to a third term as Vice President at SCI.

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HAVE GREAT SUCCESS ON WHITETAIL BUCKS.

By Matt Palmquist, Contributor

ES

SOMEWHERE BURIED in the sea of kochia weed lay a very impressive 6x6 whitetail buck along with a hot doe. I contemplated my options and decided to loop around and set up on the edge of an adjacent cropfield, hoping to ambush the deer when they came out to feed in the evening. Many hours passed, during which I had several exciting encounters with mule deer that came to investigate the buck decoy I'd deployed out in front of me, but there was no sign of the magnum whitetail. The sun was setting and still no buck, so I waded into the thick kochia. I never did see the buck I'd spent all day waiting on, which left me pondering what I could have done differently.

Welcome to the world of bowhunting open-country whitetails, where scenarios like the one I just described happen often. Plains bucks live in large cropfields, CRP, and the weed pockets mentioned above. Large expanses of monotonous structure in open terrain can lead to exciting hunting, but pinpointing a buck's location can be

challenging. After years of hunting deer in open terrain, I have learned a few techniques that can increase your odds of success.

It really goes without saying, but good optics are integral when hunting whitetails in open country — or anywhere, for that matter. Equally important is utilizing any elevation you can find to provide a better vantage point when glassing. In parts of the plains, terrain — or lack thereof — can make this challenging and will force you to get creative. I have used oil tank batteries, machinery parked next to a cropfield, and even the roof of my pickup to gain an advantage when the topography is devoid of high points.

After you locate a buck to pursue, it's important to mark his location before moving closer. Large fields, where everything looks the same, can make it difficult to keep tabs on your target. Oftentimes, landmarks that stand out to guide you to a buck's location are lacking, and

WIDE-OPEN SPACES

even if they are present, once you move, the landmark can be so subtle it's hard to identify again.

That's why I suggest using telephone poles or fenceposts adjacent to the field, counting them from the corner of the field and gauging their distance from the field edge to where the deer is bedded. When hunting in cropfields, terraces can help you keep tabs on a buck. Use aerial images from onX Hunt, HuntStand or similar mapping apps to make certain you know how many terraces are in the field, because you may not be able to see every terrace from your vantage point, which can ultimately lead to confusion. The bottom line is this: If you study the situation long enough, you'll eventually identify multiple landmarks that will help you zero-in on your target as you close the distance.

As I alluded to already, it is easy for your landmarks to seemingly disappear as you stalk your target. Patience is the name of the game for success in these situations. If you aren't sure exactly where the deer is located, it's always best to hang back with the wind in your face until you relocate the buck. Deer will typically stand and stretch multiple times throughout the day, allowing you to dial-in and close the distance.

On the flipside, if you can see the buck and have adequate cover, it's time to get aggressive. Deer can reposition, so it's important to take advantage of the situation if things are favorable for you to get close enough for the shot. Identifying the time to be aggressive comes with experience and learning when to push the limits and when to pull back on the reins.

Early in my bowhunting career, I found myself 35 yards from an awesome whitetail with bladed tines and chocolate-colored antlers. I will never forget the image of that buck bedded in a plum thicket. My inexperience cost me an opportunity at that deer. Looking back, I was very indecisive

about what to do next. I waffled back and forth between getting closer and staying put, preparing for a shot. As the sun dipped lower in the western sky, I felt I had to improve my position and forced the issue by crawling toward the buck — ultimately spooking him.

My takeaway from that experience was there are times to be aggressive and times to wait it out. If it's the middle of the day, trying to get in the perfect position is warranted because you have lots of time to make strategic moves. However, if you're within an hour of sunset, I would stay patient and let the situation unfold. I panicked on that buck because I didn't think he would stand during shooting hours, so I pushed forward. In every situation where I've pushed the limits in the waning hours of daylight, the buck has either spooked when I moved, or he stood up on his own as I closed the gap — catching me out of position and unable to draw my bow. There may be times where you don't get a shot due to darkness, but it's more likely the deer is going to get up from his bed before legal shooting light expires.

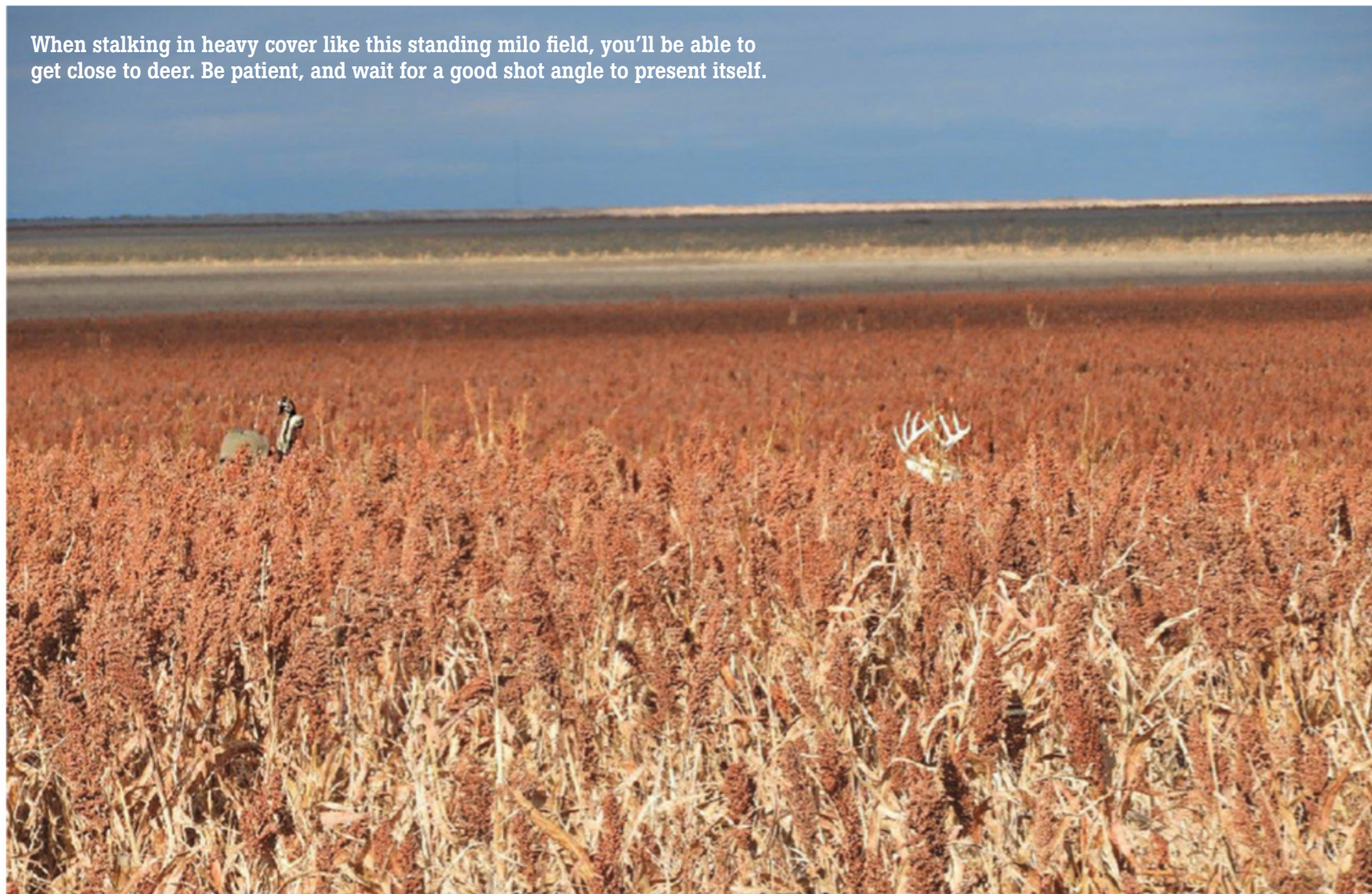
Hunting open-country whitetails can provide opportunities that you won't experience in other states, where escape cover is everywhere. Take my buddy, Kaleb Baird, for example.

A few years ago, Kaleb had located a dream, double-drop-tine buck in a large milo field. As luck would have it, the combines rolled in to harvest the grain, spooking the buck into a weed-choked drainage adjacent to the large field.

Kaleb watched for the buck to exit the weed patch, but the cautious buck never emerged — presenting Kaleb with a great opportunity to move closer. Kaleb relocated the deer in the ditch as he picked his way along the top of the drainage and was able to crawl into range.

While Kaleb continued his patient vigil, a coyote suddenly exploded out of the weeds between Kaleb and the buck — presumably due to a slight shift in the wind. The buck sprang to

When stalking in heavy cover like this standing milo field, you'll be able to get close to deer. Be patient, and wait for a good shot angle to present itself.



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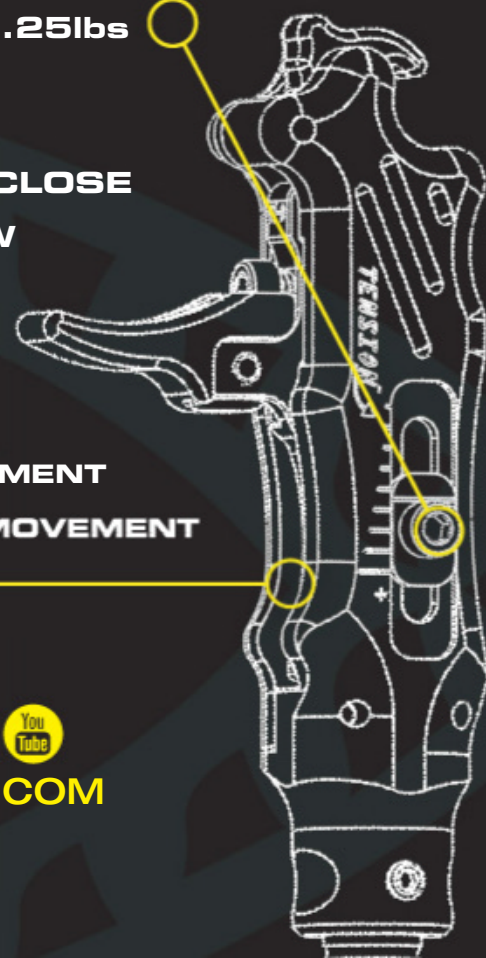
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his feet and stood broadside, which gave Kaleb the opportunity he needed to make a great shot. Being persistent and not panicking when the buck spooked out of the large field was the key to my friend's success on that hunt.

In a perfect world, deer will always stand up and share their location, allowing you to precisely plan your final approach. However, in the real world that doesn't always happen, and sometimes, even if they do stand, the cover is just too thick to see them.

In situations where I can't physically see the buck I'm after, I like to add decoys to my arsenal of tactics — especially during the rut. For best results, stalk into the vicinity where you last saw your target buck. Once in position, let out a grunt to hopefully entice a territorial response from the bedded buck. If nothing happens, then I recommend increasing the volume and aggressiveness of your calling.

Be diligent and allow plenty of time before rushing through the cover that you think the buck is hiding in. Every situation is different, and some bucks need the threat of an intruder to be close before it triggers the desired response. When I'm in the "zone," I will then slowly move forward while continuing to search for a piece of antler, ear, etc.

Garrett Roe, owner of Heads Up Decoy, has been decoying open-country whitetails for a long time. His pursuits have resulted in a lot of close calls and plenty of success, but few compare to his hunt for a long-tined 10-pointer he named "Tall Boy."

Garrett hunted Tall Boy for several years, with multiple close encounters and heartbreak. The buck became less visible



Kaleb Baird was able to kill this awesome double-droptine buck even after it spooked from a large cropfield. Keeping tabs on him was key.

as he matured but slipped up during the rut in Garrett's third year of pursuit — showing himself while tending a doe as the sun set in the western sky.

Garrett glassed from that exact spot the following morning, spotting the buck shortly after sunrise, still being led around by his girlfriend. The pair was in a dense grass field, allowing Garrett to stalk toward a landmark close to where he'd last seen Tall Boy.

However, Garrett wasn't 100-percent sure if the buck was still there, so he raised his buck decoy above the tall grass to

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make certain it would be seen and let out a loud grunt. Tall Boy was close, emerging from the grass with his ears pinned back while stomping his way toward the imposter! When the buck stopped at 22 yards, Garrett closed his three-year saga with the buck by sending a perfectly placed arrow through his vitals.

Garrett summed it up well in our discussion about hunting whitetails in the wide-open spaces when he said, "Each year is a constant internal battle between patience and aggression."



Garrett Roe finally caught a break, ending his three-year chess game with "Tall Boy."



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This statement really struck a chord with me as I thought about my experiences over the years, as well as those of my friends.

Take Kaleb, for example. He was patient in his approach; moving into position, and then content to wait until the shot presented itself. With a little help from his coyote friend, the wait was short-lived and Kaleb capitalized on his opportunity.

Garrett, on the other hand, aggressively moved into the buck's comfort zone. Once there, rather than wait for the buck to make a mistake, he opted instead to present a challenge to Tall Boy with a loud grunt from an intruding buck. Both hunts resulted in happy hunters and two beautiful whitetails.

Reflecting on my own experience with the 6x6 in the weed patch, I should have gambled and gone into the jungle of ko-chia. Instead, I spent the entire day on the outskirts hoping that I'd get "lucky" and they would come out on their own. My panicked and passive approach in that situation ultimately cost me dearly.

Every situation is different, and decisions must be made. I truly feel erring on the side of aggression will lead to more success than staying passive will. It is a simple fact: The more you're on the ground with mature whitetails, the more you'll refine your spot-and-stalk toolbox — leading to more success!

Don't be afraid to make mistakes. Every mistake you make will only lead to adjustments in your strategy that will ultimately result in more punched tags, more antlers on the wall, and more meat in the freezer! **BH**

The author is a regular Contributor to this magazine who resides in Kansas with his wife and children.

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OVERCOMING NEWFOUND BOWHUNTING ADVERSITY MEANS YOU MUST ACCEPT THE GAUNTLET THAT'S BEEN THROWN BEFORE YOU.

By Will Jimeno

PHOTO BY JOHN PENNOYER

AS THE NEW JERSEY 2021 archery season began, I was excited to begin another season of chasing a good whitetail buck with my bow. But it seemed the ugly cloud of 2020 that brought us some really difficult times was still lingering when it came to my hunting area and the NJ deer herd.

Unfortunately, Epizootic Hemorrhagic Disease (EHD) had struck in southern New Jersey and was making its way toward northern New Jersey, where I live and hunt. As August approached, the sad and ugly news began to spread of deer being found dead everywhere — from woodlots to golf courses and beyond. This was something of concern, as many of my fellow bowhunters were describing how they were finding dead deer, especially bucks — many in velvet, and some out of velvet.

Opening day arrived on September 11, 2021, and not only was EHD rampant and taking a toll on the herd, but it was warm, which only helped EHD continue its rampage of death. This was certainly going to be a challenging season, and my Tactacam cellular cameras confirmed my fear that EHD had arrived in my area. I was only seeing a few deer compared to previous years when deer were plentiful. As for shooter bucks? Well, they were nonexistent.

September and October came and went, and the heat persisted, which had me and other Jersey bowhunters praying for a frost to arrive in hopes of ending the EHD outbreak and possibly saving the herd and some of the mature bucks that we'd been keeping tabs on.

As I waited and watched, I took the opportunity to hunt out of state, which gave me time to catch up and spend time



I killed this Missouri buck with my compound in early October, while hoping for a chance to do the same back home in New Jersey with my recurve.



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THE REWARD OF CHALLENGE



After a long season plagued by EHD taking its toll on the local deer herd, I was ecstatic to get this picture of a nice buck on a property I could hunt.

with good friends in both Maryland and Missouri. I even arrowed a nice Missouri buck in the “Show Me State” with my Mathews compound, while also keeping an eye on my hunting areas back in NJ via my Tactacam cell app. Still, there were no mature bucks to be seen.

My prayers were answered after Halloween, when the first frost came. The change from warm to cold weather was such a welcome relief, and with it came the potential for seeing a good buck that hopefully survived the terrible EHD outbreak.

In November, I was visiting my youngest daughter, Olivia, at Auburn University during Military Appreciation Week. She works for the Veterans Resource Center on campus, where she helps returning veterans achieve their education. She does this all while being a full-time student, which I’m so proud of... War Eagle!

While there, my phone received a notification at 10:45 p.m. on Friday, November 12. As I opened my camera’s app, I was excited to see a great mainframe eight-pointer that had a branch going through his antlers. Finally, there was a buck in my area worth going after with my bow! Yet something inside told me I needed to challenge myself with this buck.

That challenge was to hunt that buck with my Black Widow recurve, with which I’d only taken one deer in the past. I love shooting my recurve, but my confidence with it is something I have always struggled with. I know those of you who have tried it will understand what I mean.

However, this buck was one I felt strongly about taking with my recurve... if I could pull it off. First and foremost, I would need to see more daylight pics of him in my area. Unfortunately, I only re-

ceived photos of him on November 12 at 10:45 p.m. and November 13 at 6:50 p.m. — and nothing after that.

I took this time to practice with my Black Widow and felt comfortable, but I chose to limit myself to about 10 yards. My short effective range only further compounded my challenge of killing this buck. Still, I stayed focused on the goal.

I anxiously awaited another photo of this buck, which came four days later, on November 17, at 2:47 a.m. When I saw this pic, my gut told me it was time to get serious. Worst-case scenario, I’d spend some quality time in the woods with my recurve.

I arrived at my spot early afternoon on November 17. It was a slightly warm day for that time of year, and besides that, the moon was full, which made me feel my chances of seeing the buck were not be as good as I’d hoped.

As I walked to my blind, I was startled by a young eight-pointer that suddenly jumped from his bed and stood broadside 15 yards away, looking at me with curiosity. Then, as I looked toward my blind about 70 yards away, I saw a mature eight-pointer in front of my blind. *This has to be a good sign*, I thought to myself, as I stood statue-still until both bucks eventually walked off.

I decided to put some Signal 11 Tramp Stamp doe-in-estrous lure on some bushes to the left of my blind in hopes of luring-in the buck. I then settled into my blind and nocked my arrow with great anticipation.

The afternoon was quiet. The first deer finally showing up at 4:45 p.m. There were two medium-sized does only eight paces from my blind. I took this opportunity to draw back on one of

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THE REWARD OF CHALLENGE

them, which gave me more confidence that I could draw without being noticed at such close range. As I let down, I felt an overwhelming sense of confidence.

Soon after, a button buck came in with a large, mature doe. The first two does moved off to my left, and things were beginning to fall into place. I figured if the buck was anywhere in the vicinity, he would smell the scent I'd put out and see the big doe...and maybe, just maybe, that would be enough to entice him to show up and hopefully give me the close shot I'd been praying for.

As I watched the large doe, something caught my attention to my left where I had placed the Signal 11 lure. I could see one side of a large set of antlers, but as the buck continued to my left and eventually out of sight, I still wasn't sure whether it was the buck I was after.

All I could do was stay positive and keep my fingers crossed that the buck was off scent-checking the two does that were previously in front of my blind. Hopefully, the buck would circle back to check out the mature doe that was still standing in front me. So I sat there with all my senses at high alert and praying for an opportunity.

Ten minutes later, I heard footsteps in the leaves and headed my way, followed by two deep and authoritative buck grunts. Glancing out the window on the left side of my blind, I immediately identified the maker of the footsteps — it was *the buck!*

I gripped my recurve and mentally prepared myself for the task at hand. Once the buck was in front of me, all I could do to stay in my zone was to keep telling myself to pick a definitive spot and follow-through like I'd been doing during my backyard practice sessions.

The buck was quartering toward me, and I was only pulling 43 pounds, so I knew I needed him to turn broadside, but the button buck and doe were in the way and the buck wasn't turning!

After what seemed like an eternity, the button buck and doe eventually turned to my right and walked away. Meanwhile, the buck had moved slightly farther away but was now broadside and starting to follow the doe. As he slowly walked through my intended shooting window, I quickly readjusted my position to shoot him out of the window on the right side of my blind. Light was beginning to fade, and I knew this was going to be my only opportunity at this buck!



Finally seeing a good buck made it easier to sit and wait patiently with my recurve.

As the buck appeared in the window of my blind, I picked my spot right behind his shoulder, drew back, and let my arrow fly. Everything happened so fast, I wasn't sure where my arrow had impacted — or if it did at all! I sprang to my knees and watched the buck and the other deer run off at breakneck speed, and then I listened for any telltale sounds of the buck crashing to its death. Hearing nothing, my heart was suddenly filled with doubt and I became deeply concerned about the shot.

I only made it 10 minutes before gathering up my bow and pack to get out of the blind and head over to the spot where the buck had been standing 12 steps away. There was no sign of blood, so I started looking for my arrow — to no avail. Something within me said, "You did everything right; you just need to believe." So, I slowed down and gathered my thoughts before doing anything foolish.

I knew the area very well, so once I'd calmed down, I decided my best option was to start searching for sign in the direction in which the buck had headed after my shot. About 30 yards out, I finally came across blood. It was only a tiny drop of blood, but that drop soon turned into more and bigger drops!

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THE REWARD OF CHALLENGE

As I followed the blood in the dark, my angst started to creep back in, but then I looked up and saw my buck lying dead 40 yards in front of me. As I approached the beautiful eight-point, I was in awe of my shot, which was perfectly placed right behind the shoulder!

The buck had only gone approximately 70 yards, and I was overwhelmed with joy and pride after achieving my goal — not to mention a rekindled love affair with bowhunting!

The first person I called was my wife, Allison, who was the person who first introduced me to bowhunting along with my father-in-law, Paul, who we lost in 2016. Allison was so happy for me, and I knew Paul was looking down on my accomplishment with a smile.

I knelt next to this buck and gave thanks to the Lord and all those who have helped me on my journey as a bowhunter. I also gave thanks to all our military men and women for their sacrifices, which allow me — and you — to be free to pursue our passions.

In the end, challenges — no matter how difficult — bring with them great rewards, and I'm grateful for the fact



I was able to check off another bucket-list item by taking this buck with my Black Widow.

that I accepted my own personal bowhunting challenge and was ultimately rewarded with a great stickbow white-tail buck! **BH**

Readers may recognize the author as one of just two survivors rescued from the rubble of the Twin Towers after the terrorist attack on 9/11/2001.

Author's Notes: My equipment on this hunt included a 60-inch, 43-pound Black Widow PSA X Bacote recurve, Carbon Express Heritage Traditional 150 carbon arrows, 150-grain Grim Reaper Hades Pro broadheads, Signal 11 scents, a Primos Double Bull blind, Ozonics unit, LaCrosse boots, and Mossy Oak camo.

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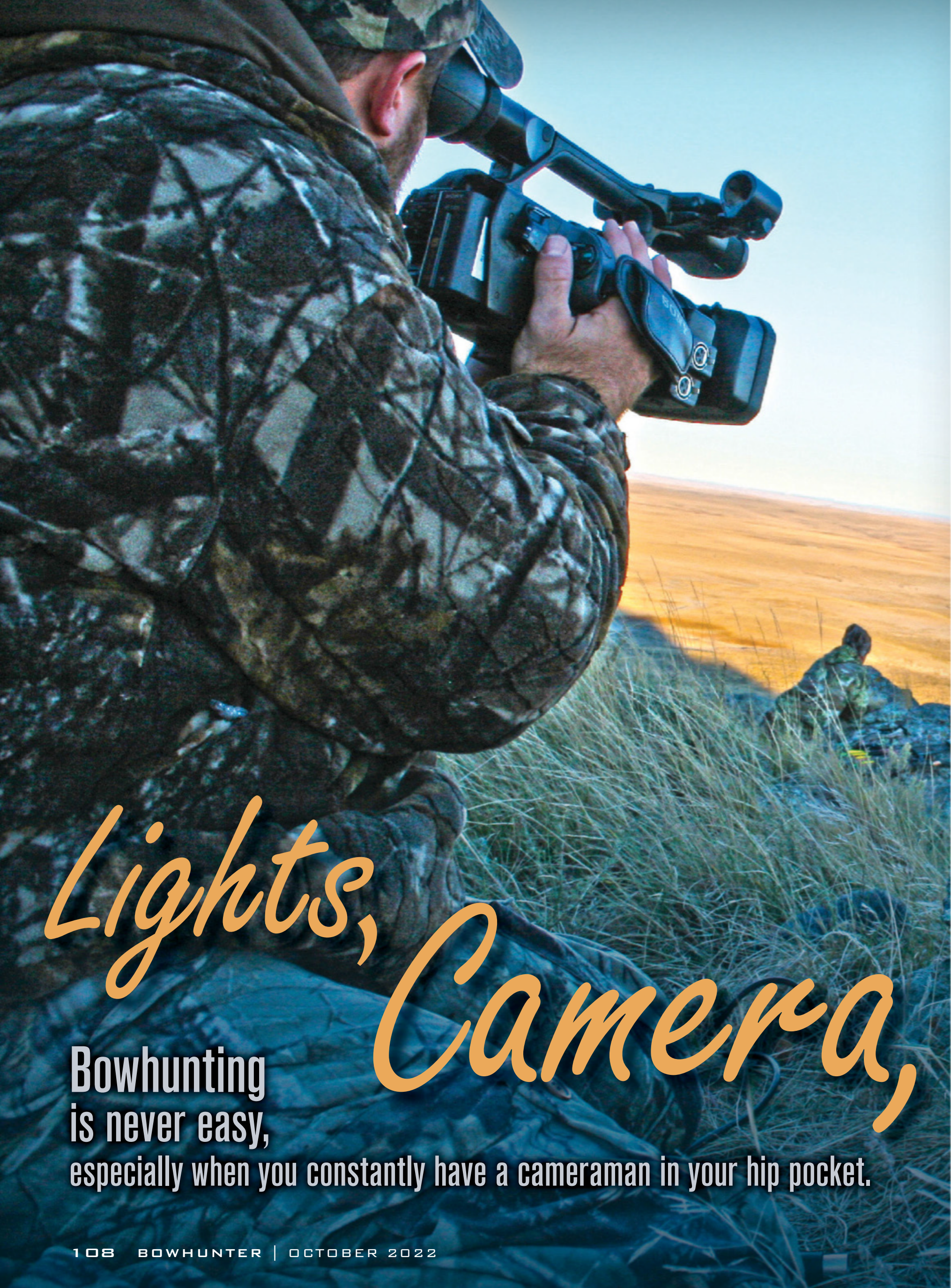
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Gear that hunts



Lights, Camera,

Bowhunting
is never easy,
especially when you constantly have a cameraman in your hip pocket.

WHEN I WROTE THIS ARTICLE, it was the second season of the Canadian border being closed due to COVID. Thankfully, the border is now open, with conditions, but that's good, because there is too much great hunting in Canada, and some truly great Canadian outfitters were in danger of having to close up shop as a result of nonresident hunters being denied entry.

Normally, I would've found myself flying to Edmonton, Alberta, to meet my friend and **Bowhunter** Assistant Editor Brian Fortenbaugh for our annual spring bear hunt at Buck Country Outfitters in Goodsoil, Saskatchewan. As this outfitter's name implies, they're known for big whitetails, but the bear hunting there is topnotch as well. Prior to the mandatory border closing, Brian and I had been enjoying our bear adventures for five years straight. While the border was locked down, I found myself reminiscing about past hunts and my time spent over many seasons chasing animals as a cameraman. I learned a few things along the way.

How I Got Started

I have always had a love of hunting and dreamed of making a living in the outdoors. When I was just out of college, I sent

an article to **Bowhunter** Magazine about a deer I'd killed. I never intended to be a writer, and if you asked my high-school English teacher, she would have said that was a good thing. Thankfully, Dwight Schuh, Editor of **Bowhunter** at that time, had a different opinion.

In 2004, my first article was published in **Bowhunter**, and sometime after that I got a mass e-mail from Dwight asking if anyone on the list had an interest in working as a cameraman for **Bowhunter** on its new TV program. *Why not?* I thought. *That sounds like fun!*

Next thing I knew, I was flying to Oregon to meet and learn from Larry D. Jones. As a teenager, I'd admired Larry's articles because his stories often took me to faraway places. Now, I was honored to be spending a long weekend at his home while he was teaching me the basics of running a camera.

I got my first video assignment that fall. I didn't have to travel too far, as I was meeting Dwight in my home state of Wisconsin. We hunted south of Prairie du Chien, on an impressive farm that just screamed "big bucks!" We stayed in a cabin on top of a beautiful bluff overlooking the Mississippi River. I was so excited — I was on assignment with the legendary Dwight Schuh, and we were chasing giant whitetails!

BY BRIAN RUSK

Action?

LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION?

Things Don't Always Go As Planned

This is where I learned something very important about being a cameraman: What you see on TV is a tiny fraction of what is actually recorded on a filmed hunt. It takes hours of footage to come up with enough good material to produce a half-hour TV show. A half-hour episode is really only 15–18 minutes of actual show sans commercials, which means hours of footage are never seen. It's all edited down to the best, most-usable clips. Unfortunately, on that hunt with Dwight, we had bad weather and very little action.

The week went by fast and I had racked up hours of footage, but the bucks just wouldn't cooperate. That hunt ended with Dwight shooting a doe toward the end of the week. I was bummed out, but Dwight was upbeat. He wanted this show to be different. He wanted to show the viewers that not every hunt ends with a big buck being tagged.

That doe was the first of many animals I'd film. Some hunts would be awesome; others, not so much. Yet each one brought new adventures and new lessons. Honestly, the more I think about each hunt I've



A doe is never "just a doe," especially when you are on your first TV gig with one of your heroes — Dwight Schuh.

been privileged to film, the more I realize there were more that ended without a kill than with a tag punched. And regardless of the quality of what I was able to capture with my camera, the bottom line for me was this: A successful hunt is the best way to guarantee the fruits of my labor will see the light of day.

It's Not All Action-Packed

A few years ago, I was setting up a Colorado elk camp with my wife, Nicole. We were hunting the southwestern part of the state in an over-the-counter unit — an area I was very familiar with, having been there several times before.

As we got settled in, a man and his son pulled up. They were excited and looking for a place to camp where they would also have access points for their ATV. I pointed them to another camp down the road that had good access.

They had been watching videos and were super-excited to hear the bulls screaming like they'd seen on TV. As they pulled away, I told my wife that I was pretty sure their hunt was going to be an eye-opener.

My reasoning was based purely on my experiences running a camera for TV. I once filmed **Bowhunter** Publisher Jeff Waring on a Montana elk hunt, and after a week of chasing elk, I didn't even have a single bull on camera! Jeff hunted hard, and I did my best to capture as much good footage as I could, yet we both knew none of it would ever be seen on TV. There just wasn't enough action to build a story. We tried and came close, but it just wasn't meant to be.

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LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION?



Publisher Jeff Waring with a buck I filmed him taking at Nelson Outfitters in Wyoming.

Much like my hunt with Jeff, the father and son had also struck out. They had not heard a bugle in several days and were very disappointed. The last time my wife and I saw them, they told us they had tried bathing in the ice-cold river, which didn't go well. That was enough for them, and a day later their camp was gone. I could not help but feel that TV had given them unrealistic expectations.

These journeys are not easy. If we showed all the miles of walking, the rain and mud, the sweat, and the tears, on television, **Bowhunter TV** would not hold as much entertainment value.

Armchair Critics

Some people love to rip on hunting shows. I get the criticism — to a degree.

From "It's all guided" to "It looks like

a game farm" to "These TV guys always get to hunt the best stands," I've heard it all. My buddies once made fun of me during a trip to Colorado because of an article I'd written for **Bowhunter**. It made me an easy target, and television makes the target even bigger. The internet and social media also add fuel to the fire. As much as we would love to tune it all out, it becomes part of the job.

I've been lucky to have filmed in some great places; some that even seem like a game farm. Nelson Outfitters in Sheridan, Wyoming, is an example. It is one of the coolest places to film, because the action doesn't stop. Soon after daybreak, the deer leave Dave Nelson's lush alfalfa fields to head for their beds in higher elevation. It is a parade of whitetails and muleys, and I've seen more deer there in one day than I've seen in 10 years at home.

I can understand why some viewers would think Dave's operation is high fence. It's not; Dave's properties just happen to have the best food source (well-irrigated alfalfa fields) around for miles, and that's why his clients are treated to seeing literally hundreds of deer — not to mention antelope and elk — during their hunts there. But the armchair critics know only what they see on TV.

Primetime Isn't Always Primetime

I have been on plenty of awesome hunts where the "talent" and I went home empty-handed. Shots are missed, or the animals simply didn't cooperate.

I once watched Dwight Schuh pass on a beautiful mainframe eight-point whitetail. The buck was wide and had



Even Nature's Call couldn't stop Assistant Editor Brian Fortenbaugh from making this Saskatchewan moment happen.



I can't thank the folks at Bowhunter enough for blessing me with moments like this.

two droptines — one coming off each main beam. That buck would have been a dream for me to take, and I'm sure for Dwight as well, yet he passed on that buck not once, but twice! Why? Because there wasn't enough light for the camera. The cameras back then did not perform well in low light. We would sometimes lose up to 20 minutes of legal shooting light. Also, we were hunting with Jim Hole, Jr. at Classic Outfitters in the Edmonton Bow Zone, and Dwight wanted to get good footage for the TV show.

Dwight, being a writer, could have shot the buck and wrote a story about it, but he was there to film the hunt and was therefore stuck with the task at hand. Personally, I'm not sure I could have shown the same restraint that Dwight did. That was one dandy Alberta white-tail! By the end of the hunt, we had endured bitter temperatures, snow and ice, but we still went home empty-handed. You don't get to see that on TV.

No Love For Cameramen

Over the years of working with the **Bowhunter** staff, some have confided in me that it wasn't exactly a dream of theirs to be in front of the camera. Before TV, they were lucky and got to go on hunts without having someone there to make an already challenging hunt even more so. It was a game of one on one — not two on one.

If a deer got downwind of a staffer's treestand, it was one person trying to fool the deer's nose instead of two. If it was a spot-and-stalk muley hunt and Curt Wells was right where he needed to be, it took only patience and shooting skill to be successful. Curt now has to deal with making sure his cameraman is in position and able to capture the footage before he can even think about

drawing — adding more challenge to an already difficult situation.

It became work for some, in part because not everyone wants a cameraman as a shadow. Imagine having to answer Nature's Call while someone is hissing, "Big buck, or big bear coming!" This actually happened to me and Brian several years ago on a spring bear hunt in northern Saskatchewan. Brian was trying to take care of business out the window of our ground blind when a very large boar came charging in. Brian knew I wasn't joking, and he quickly regained his composure enough to make a great shot on the P&Y-class bruin. The giant bear expired within sight. It was a moment that we joked about later, and had it not been for his cameraman, who occasionally likes to write, you wouldn't know the rest of the story.

What A Ride

Every time I pause to reflect on where I've been with the **Bowhunter** staff over the past 17-plus years, and what I've seen, I realize just how lucky I am to have been blessed with the opportunity to be a part of this wonderful group of people. I have made friends over the years who have become like a distant family, and for that, I am thankful.

There was a time when I thought I would like to be on the other end of my camera. I don't feel that way anymore, because years of working behind the lens as a part-time videographer have worked out just fine — and I'm still "killing" critters on every assignment I'm blessed to receive...without ever drawing my bow. **BH**

*The author is a true friend of the **Bowhunter** staff, and he makes his home in Superior, WI, with his wife and children.*



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Tying release loops of any size is simple with the Cinch D Loop Plier (**\$27.99**). Designed with two notches; one for smaller pin nocks and one for standard nocks. The spring-loaded handle makes it versatile and easy to use. Other highlights include an indent on the side of the tool for burning consistent loop ends, and a rope-holder for finishing ends. **OMP**, octobermountainproducts.com.

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AXIS® SPT

The AXIS SPT (**\$62.99/half-dozen fletched**) was designed for bowhunters with shorter draws and lighter poundage. Realizing the popularity of this arrow, Easton recently added spine sizes to this offering so the AXIS SPT now covers spines from 260 to 700, so it will meet the needs of virtually all hunting bow setups. In addition, the AXIS SPT will be offered with FOC-enhancing half-out inserts and X-nocks included. **Easton**, eastonarchery.com.



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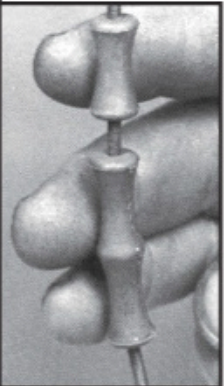
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WITH CURT WELLS, EDITOR

Want to tell your story to our readers? That process begins during your hunt by taking high-quality photos with a “real camera.”



Q I WOULD LIKE to submit a story to **Bowhunter** for possible publication. What is the process?
Russell H., via e-mail

A I GET THIS question quite often, so it's time to address this again. Every publication has a specific focus. At **Bowhunter**, we publish articles about bowhunting adventures, tactics, gear, and great destinations. The best articles include all or several of these elements.

I will address photos first, because the lack of, or poor quality photos is the number-one reason an article gets rejected. If you send us a story with fuzzy photos of a buck in the back of a truck, you're wasting everyone's time. Don't send prints or slides — those days are over. Digital photos are best taken with a “real camera” rather than a smartphone. Even a decent point-and-shoot camera takes better photos than a cell phone. Some newer phones, like an iPhone 13, will take de-

cent images if the light is good and the focus is sharp, but a real camera with a flash powerful enough to fill in shadows and overcome backlit situations is a far better choice. You don't have to lug around a DSLR. Get a small point-and-shoot camera with a belt pouch, so it's easy to pop it out and take photos of a scrape or a wallow without having to stop and unload your DSLR from your pack. I carry a DSLR, but I also have a Canon G7X Mark II on my hip. It takes excellent images and HD video.

Photos must be well-lit, sharp, and tasteful. No lolling tongues, excessive blood, or arrows sticking out of the animal. Some things we can fix, but resolution is not one of them. Shoot at the highest resolution, and do not downsize photos. We want them straight out of the

camera, and that includes trail cameras, which often provide good support images. Screenshots won't work.

We need more than just “hero” photos. Snap some support images of things like live animals, camp, game sign, glassing, calling, climbing a mountain, using a decoy — anything that will help illustrate your story. Scenery photos are worthless, unless there is an animal or a bowhunter in the image.

Your manuscript should be submitted in Microsoft Word. Do not send your article as a PDF, or with photos embedded. Keep it to 2,000 words or less and write with “flow.” It's like driving down a road with potholes. When you get to a word, sentence, or paragraph that you have to read twice — that's a pothole. Restructure until the road is smooth. Lead off with something interesting, like some action. Grab the readers by the eyeballs and draw them in. Tell your story, and then end it with something that ties back to the beginning, or leaves the readers thinking about what they've read. You don't have to be a professional writer; you just need a good story and photos to match. We can fix your words. We can't fix your photos!

Also, consider timing. If you shot a monster bull elk in September, don't wait until March to send us your story. By then I've likely purchased all the elk stories I can use. Think eight months in advance.

Your article package should include your digital manuscript, photos, and a list of photo descriptions/captions. If your photos are large, high-res images, you can go online and send them via an app like WeTransfer to my e-mail address, which is curt.wells@outdoorsg.com.

Lastly, don't be intimidated. We often publish articles by amateur writers, and unlike websites and some publications, we'll send you a contract and pay upon acceptance of your article. Tag a special animal, and you'll likely get calls from folks looking for info and a photo. The next thing you know, your story is on the web, and you got nothing. Don't give it away. Give us the opportunity to create something you'll treasure. **BH**

AUTHOR'S PHOTO

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

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THE QUEST

RANDY ULMER

HEART OF ENDURANCE: PART EIGHT

ONLY IN THE FACE OF MORTALITY CAN A HUNTER
TRULY BELIEVE HIS ACTIONS WERE JUST.

CAREFULLY AND METHODICALLY, the hunter follows the spoor; deep tracks of a bounding mule deer, widely spaced down the steep scree.

He reaches the old monarch in time to see life's fire leaving the buck's eyes. He has witnessed death many times before. Something is different this time, as the life fades in these eyes — something profound, deeply personal, and disturbing — something knowable only to one witnessing his own diminishing mortality. He has met death and got to know it, as it has been his constant companion of late.

It is finished.

The revelation of a heretofore unrecognized truth penetrates him to his soul. The eyes he is looking into are exposing all the false and distorted euphemisms of "harvest" and "take." This buck was not harvested — threshed like wheat, nor was he taken — as if somehow kidnapped. He was killed.

The tree-filtered sunlight haloes the buck's magnificent antlers in silver light. Long, curving points grace each antler — their width, length, and mass disproportionate to the body. He inhales the musky, wild, primal, and pungent essence of the fallen monarch lying before him.

Is this a dream?

He kneels, places his hand on the velvet-covered antlers, and tries to believe. He recites his Hunter's Prayer, the same one he has uttered after every successful hunt. This prayer is part animistic and part Christian — another of his life's paradoxes.

To Old Unkillable: "Thank you for your sacrifice. Forgive me for what I have done."

To God: "Thank you for allowing me to be in this country, partaking of your bounty."

His deed is done — the collapse of his motivation and energy sudden. Exhaustion floods over him, and it's palpable and overwhelming. He falls next to the buck as a result.

He feels the same bittersweet tsunami of emotions each time he is successful on a hunt — a mix of elation and regret. He thinks of the Olympic medalists who become depressed after winning, because the victory didn't bring them the happiness and peace of mind they'd hoped for.

He tells himself the work and the effort is the journey, and the journey is the reward. The triumph — the victory — is a gratuity.

He slowly and methodically dresses the buck, resting frequently. With a mighty effort he drags the carcass, a few inches at a time, under the shade of a small spruce tree.

As his excitement diminishes, thirst and hunger burst to the forefront of his consciousness. He can see the bottom of the canyon below and upstream, where he knows there will be water.

He moves laterally along the steep ridge face for a better view of the canyon's bottom. Looking up-canyon, he

sees beaver dams and ponds through the trees. *Not good*, he thinks. He can't risk drinking that water with his immune system ravaged by chemotherapy. If he were to contract Giardia or Leptospirosis — both organisms carried by beavers — it would surely do him in.

He remembers hunts during his youth, where this would be of minor concern. He thought himself immortal — as so many young men do. But since the failed bone-marrow transplant, the hunter's immune system is infantile and impotent in the face of a difficult challenge. Whatever lingering immunity he built from drinking such water in the past is gone. His choice is dehydration now, or life-threatening disease later.

Through binoculars, he watches the beavers far below, tirelessly taking care of their daily business. He envies their energy, wishing it were his to spend.

"What are you going to do now, you old fool? It's a lot harder going up than coming down," he mumbles. For he has come a very long distance today, both vertically and horizontally. In the past two days, he has worked harder than at any time since his diagnosis and treatment.

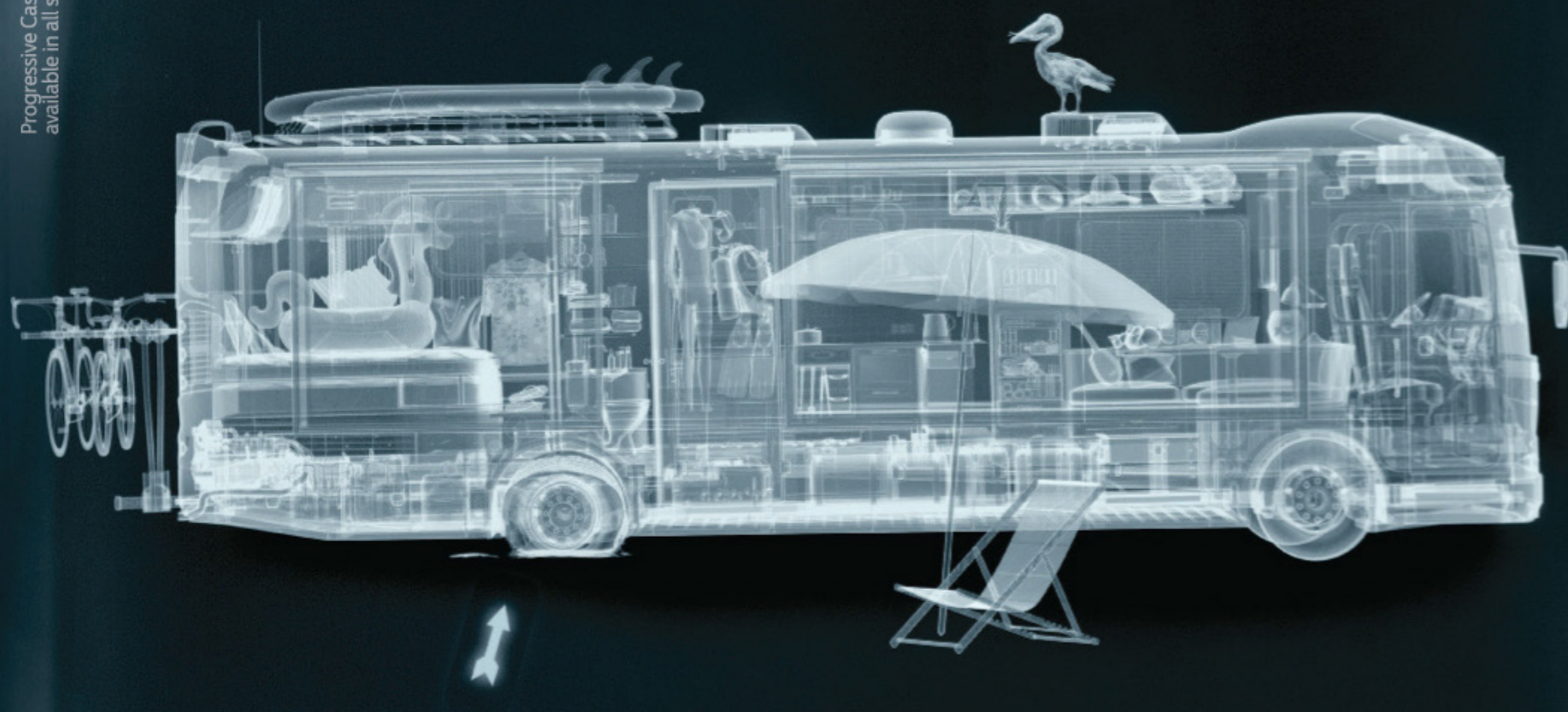
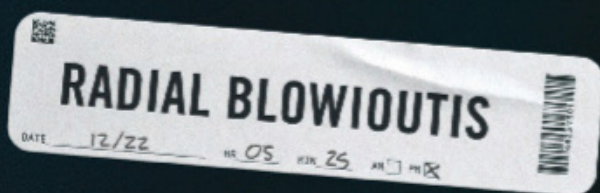
He turns and looks back in the direction of his camp. The light is softening. The golden alpenglow of evening on the peaks above timberline is like sunlight on gold leaf — beautiful and awe-inspiring.

The reality of what he now faces is daunting. It is late. His camp is far away now, as he has traveled all day, and it is 2,000 vertical feet above him. This day has already tested him to his limits. Fully rested, fully hydrated, and fully fed, he might make it back to his cache...but he is none of those things at that moment.

You are in a good bit of trouble, my friend, he thinks. *You have a decision to make, and you'd best make the right one, or you will pay the consequences. And they will be severe.*

To be continued... **BH**

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