

WINTER SPECIAL Bowhunter®

THE #1 BOWHUNTING MAGAZINE

FEBRUARY 2023

**SCOUT
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**15 WAYS TO FIND
YOUR NEXT BUCK** P.30

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TIPS TO STAY IN THE GAME

GOOD TIMES P.54
THE TRUE MEASURE OF SUCCESS

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KEYS TO PROPER SHOT PLACEMENT

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DARK CONTINENT ADVICE
BETTER SAFE THAN SORRY
TUNE YOUR BOW LIKE A PRO P.22





ALL BITE. NO BARK.

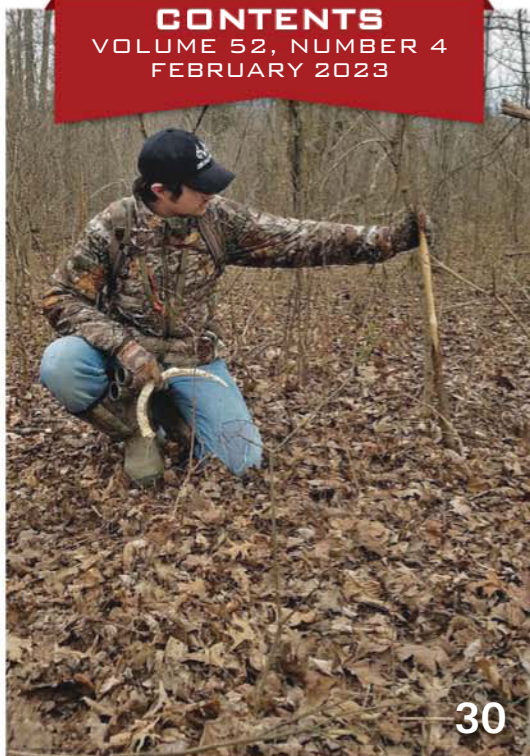
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EDITORIAL

CURT WELLS | EDITOR

THE PHYSIOLOGY OF BOWHUNTING

EVERY BOWHUNTER SHOULD STRIVE TO UNDERSTAND THEIR OWN BIOLOGY AND THAT OF THE GAME ANIMALS THEY HUNT.

THIS PAST SEPTEMBER, I met two “new” bowhunters in elk camp in New Mexico. John and Andy were from Florida and had started shooting a bow just three months earlier. This was their first bowhunt.

So, in the interest of helping them be successful, I started giving them some advice on shot placement. I talked about the position of the scapula and the humerus, the plural sacs around the lungs, and the suprasternal notch location should they be faced with a frontal shot at close range.

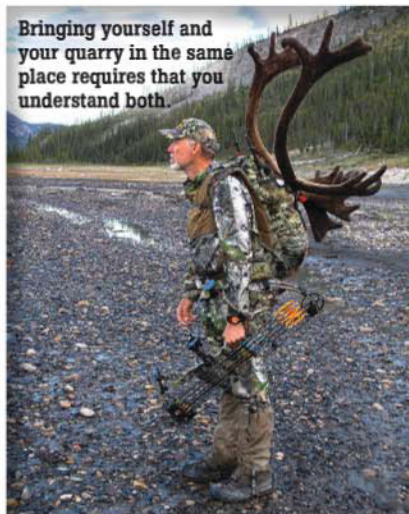
They were taking it all in, when Andy looked at his buddy and said, “It’s crazy how he’s using all these biological terms.”

I laughed with them, but it struck me that my language seemed odd to them. Over the years, I’ve tried to learn as much as I can about the anatomy of the animals I hunt. I’m intrigued by how their bodies work, and by what it takes to make them stop working — as quickly as possible. It’s valuable knowledge, and I’m still learning with every animal I encounter. I suppose it’s analogous to a fly fisherman who must study entomology (the science of insects and hatches) if he hopes to be proficient. So should a bowhunter study the physiology of the game they pursue.

To that end, you will find an article on page 44 written by Dwight Gwynn, Ph.D., which delves into the skeletal system of deer. To the bowhunter, a deer’s bone structure of a deer can be just as important as its cardiovascular system.

However, your study of physiology should not be confined to the animals you hunt. Your own physiology is even more critical. If you are not healthy and out in the woods and fields pursuing game with vigor, you cannot be successful. We all take different approaches to our personal health goals. Some are more serious about

Bringing yourself and your quarry in the same place requires that you understand both.



it than others, but there is no debating the value of good, long-term health. The longer you’re healthy, the more years of bowhunting that will be in your future.

To that end, you will find an article on page 38 written by Aron Snyder, who has some words of wisdom for those of you who wish to prolong your life in the field. There is so much to learn about staying healthy and fit, and you should take advantage of every resource available to you, which is why we share Aron’s personal experience and advice.

We can’t talk about health without addressing the mental part of the game. Every bowhunter understands how important mental strength is when it comes to shooting, but what about your hunting attitude? How do you approach bowhunting? Stressed out? Pressured by the money and time you spend? Are you having fun? On page 54, Zach Bowhay has some thoughts on having a positive mental approach to bowhunting.

One thing I’ve learned over four decades of bowhunting, is that the most valuable asset we can possess is good health. If you don’t have your health, it doesn’t really matter how much money you make, or how extensive your hunting opportunities are. Every bowhunter can benefit by advancing their understanding of all phases of the physiology of bowhunting. That focus can only enrich your bowhunting experience. **BH**

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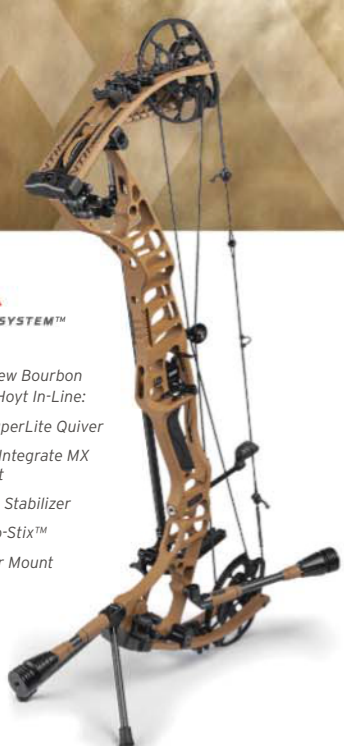
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The handle is made from genuine natural bone, and features decorative wood spacers and a hand-carved motif of two overlapping feathers—a reminder for you to respect and connect with the natural world.

This fusion of substance and style can garner a high price tag out in the marketplace. In fact, we found full tang, stainless steel blades with bone handles in excess of \$2,000. Well, that won't cut it around here. We have mastered the hunt for the best deal, and in turn pass the spoils on to our customers.

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★★★★★

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knife is unbelievable...
this is an incredibly
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A man in camouflage clothing and a large backpack is standing on a mountain ridge, looking through binoculars. The background shows a vast, hazy mountain landscape under a clear sky. The man is wearing a camouflage cap and a watch. His backpack is olive green with orange straps and has several items attached, including what looks like a camera and some tools. The text 'ATION' is overlaid in large, white, sans-serif capital letters, with the 'A' having a small orange triangle to its left.

ATION

[binge watching]



BOWHUNTER BUSINESS

JEFF WARING | PUBLISHER



JOHN HAFNER PHOTO

MATHEWS ARCHERY

CELEBRATING 30 YEARS OF ARCHERY INNOVATION!

OCCASIONALLY, there's a technological leap that changes everything. That's the way it was back in 1992, when Matt McPherson introduced his first single-cam bow.

Years earlier, a young Matt McPherson had shared his concept for a compound bow built on recurve limbs in a "Between Bowhunters" letter to **Bowhunter** Founder/Publisher M.R. James. The genius young bowmaker already was looking at archery equipment with a mind for innovation. Much later, his idea for a "Dual Feed Single Cam Compound Bow" would prove to be a true gamechanger.

But it wasn't until selling his interest in McPherson Archery back in the mid-'80s that Matt was able to go his own way. Determined to start a new and different kind of bow company at home in the Upper Midwest, Matt first set up shop in Austin, Minnesota, then found the perfect spot in Sparta, Wisconsin.

He also found the perfect partner in fellow archer and bowhunting friend Joel Maxfield, who came on as GM and

helped get things started. Matt's brother, Steve McPherson, would run their Zebra Bowstrings operation.

It had long been known that maintaining a compound's bow tune was a matter of keeping its two cams in synch. What was dubbed the Mathews Solo-Cam eliminated that problem by using an "idler wheel," while also enabling true centershot and creating a lighter, smoother, and more forgiving setup.

From the very beginning, Mathews bows were easy to hold on target, aim, and shoot accurately, and they soon proved wildly popular. By the spring of '97, Mathews had six models in the lineup, including the Signature, Feather Light, Ultra Light, and Z-Light models — remember the ad with the bow hoisted by a single, red balloon?

And the innovations just kept coming. In '97, Mathews introduced the Z-Max, with its perimeter-weighted cam. A year later, the MQ1 (with their StraightLine Cam) was unveiled. At the close of the '90s, Mathews was not only dominating the 3-D circuit but was recognized outside the archery industry by *Inc. 500* as the 78th fastest growing company in the U.S. As a matter of fact, between '93-'97, it was reported that Mathews experienced a whopping sales increase of 2,666%.

And the hits just kept coming: with the super-smooth Conquest Light ('00); the Q2's Harmonic Dampers ('00); Parallel Limb technology, String Suppres-



Here's a staff photo from the early days, taken outside Mathews' original garage shop.



Levi Morgan releases the last shot to win the ASA Classic this past July in Cullman, Alabama.

PHOTO COURTESY OF COMPETITION ARCHERY MEDIA



Editor Curt Wells first interviewed Matt McPherson for our October '09 issue.

sors and the Roller Guard on the Legacy ('02); the High Performance Single Cam on the LX ('03); the ergonomic InLine Grip and V-Lock Zero Tolerance Limb Cup Systems on the Outback ('04), Switchback ('05), and Switchback XT ('06); E Composite Slim Limbs on the Drenalin ('07), DXT ('08), and Reezen ('09), not to mention the AVS Technology showcased on the dual-cam McPherson Monster; the Grid Lock riser and Reverse Assist Roller Guard on the Z7, which would mark Mathews' one-millionth bow sold ('10), followed by the Z7 Xtreme ('11), super-light Heli-m ('12); and then the Matched Radius Idler Wheel on the Creed ('13) and Creed XS ('14); crosscentrics on the NO CAM HTR ('15), Halon ('16), Halon 32 ('17), and Triax ('18); Switchweight modules on the Vertex ('19); and the highly engineered bridge risers on the VXR ('20), V3 ('21), and the V3X ('22). And with the

Mathews' first full-page ad ran in *Bowhunter Magazine's* 1992 August-Big Game Special.

most recent riser, Mathews refined its integrated line of accessories, including the Mathews QAD Integrated MX Rest, Bridge-Lock Sight Technology, LowPro Quivers, and even a Stay Afield System (SAS) to service strings and cables without a bow press.

From the beginning, Mathews has woven a very compelling story worth hearing and reading. *Bowhunter* was graced with the company's first full-page ad in the summer of '92, and this brand remains forever grateful for the partnership that followed.

Mathews has blessed all of us with so much more than just great bows and groundbreaking innovations, which we've proudly supported. This company has proven time and again that behind their products lies a greater purpose: A heart for archery, pro shops, rabid enthusiasts, and for people in general. Whether it's via family friendly Genesis products or countless dollars and dona-



Joel Maxfield enjoys the moment with the brown bear that finished his Super Slam.

tions in support of National Archery in the Schools (NASP), or through the founding purposes of the affordable Mission Archery line and other brands that have been a source of Mathews Family charitable donations... This company was built by good people with a "hidden" agenda — improving lives everywhere. For that, we offer a tip of the *Bowhunter* cap and anxiously wait for what Mathews does next! **BH**

Are the cams on your bow out of synch? If the cams on your bow don't "fire" at precisely the same moment, you get uneven thrust which can significantly affect arrow flight

Are you having problems getting tight arrow groups? Were you shooting well last season, but can't seem to get tight groups this season? Did you buy a new bow only to find you shot better with your old bow?

Maybe the problem isn't you. Maybe it's your bow. Maybe the cams on your bow are out of synch. It's a common problem that can be caused by a dropped or dry-fired bow, poor quality control at the factory, or simple cable stretching due to shooting.



The new Mathews SoloCam can't go out of synch

Because the Mathews SoloCam has just one cam (with an idler wheel on the opposite end) it can't go out of synch

The single cam on the new Mathews SoloCam provides the necessary thrust while the idler wheel connects this thrust to the opposite limb. Since there is just one cam to "fire" you'll never experience uneven thrust. Which means you'll always get consistent arrow flight. And you'll never have to wonder if your cams are out of synch.

Because it only has one cam, the Mathews SoloCam generates significantly less recoil than any two cam bow - even if the two cams are in perfect synch. Less recoil means smoother shooting. It also means less noise which reduces the chance of spooking that big buck.

Just as fast as a two cam bow and far easier to maintain

The new Mathews SoloCam is one of the fastest bows built. And, because it has only one cam, it's easier to maintain (for example, the cables can be changed more easily).



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THE EMPTY QUIVER

DANNY FARRIS

A fatal fall took Roy Roth from us in 2015 while he was hunting sheep in the mountains of Alaska. His grit and determination were legendary.



CHALLENGE

IT'S WHY WE DO WHAT WE DO.

FROM THE ROAD, the canyon's entrance is hidden by thick timber. Tourists drive by it daily, seldom realizing the canyon is even there. Penetrate the tangle, and you'll find a broken trail that is all but gone in some spots — long since covered by deadfall and undergrowth. The broken trail is unmarked and relatively unknown, but it's manageable once discovered, and it provides access up a narrow drainage that's flanked on both sides by towering rims of rocky spires.

My son had drawn a limited-entry elk tag, which I helped him fill earlier in the season. Then, my much-anticipated Greenland muskox hunt consumed the second-half of the elk season.

I'm not complaining, mind you, because September had proven kind to both my boy and me. But elk are my favorite species, and I now found myself with only one day left in the season to hunt them, so I intended to pull out all the stops.

The area I planned to focus on really shouldn't be day hunted. When hunting there in the past, I typically spiked out for several days at a time, but that wasn't an option with only one day left.

BOB AMEEN PHOTO

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I had other spots I could have chosen that weren't so hard to get to, but this was the spot where I thought my chances for success were best. I'd just have to head in early and pack out late — sleep would have to wait.

I made my way up the trail under the cover of darkness, eventually arriving at a spring-fed pond just as the sun's glow began to illuminate the canyon walls. It takes about three hours of steady hiking to get there from where I'd parked my truck, and my timing was perfect.

Above the pond, the canyon topped out on a plateau of lush grass where elk often feed. I expected to hear a few bugles as I hiked in the darkness, but I hadn't. It was a silent climb.

I spent the morning calling sporadically as I worked my way up and around the edge of the plateau, but there were no responses. Midday was spent searching for scant sign. By late afternoon, I felt my chances dwindling. Then suddenly, I thought I heard a distant bugle.

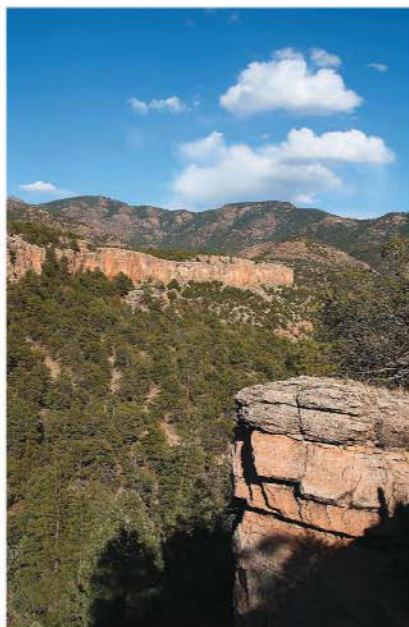
I hustled in the direction of the sound, covering a considerable distance in the process before setting up to call. No response. I moved again — still nothing. I kept moving — begging and pleading with cow calls and bugles. But as hard as I tried, the results were the same.

Frustrated and tired, it was time to accept the situation and start heading back toward my truck.

Pulling up my onX app on my smartphone, I began plotting my egress. I had two choices: I could either backtrack a few miles to the top of the canyon and then head down the trail I had used to enter, or I could take a shortcut and pick my way down through the spires and rimrock and save myself several miles in the process.

I'd never attempted the latter, but my maps showed timber growing in what appeared to be avalanche chutes between the cliffs. I figured if timber was growing there, then there had to be a way down, so I chose a route and began my descent.

The terrain was relatively tame for the first 1,500 feet of my descent. Then things started to get steeper and more aggressive. Loose rocks and deadfall quickly became a problem, but the thought of turning around and climbing 2,000 vertical feet, only to hike several miles in the wrong direction to get back



Often, one of the biggest challenges we bowhunters face is the daunting terrain our quarry calls home.

to the trail, seemed just as daunting. Fatigue had set in, and I was exhausted, so I decided to press on.

I soon found myself in one of the most frightening predicaments of my life. I've faced some danger over the years, but this time was different... I was scared!

Working my way down, I reached to brace myself against a deadfall tree trunk that's circumference was about the size of a basketball. It snapped like a matchstick as soon as I put weight on it. The base of the trunk swung violently from above, hitting me in the back and



Consistently successful bowhunters thrive on overcoming challenges, so they often push themselves to the limit.

sending me head-first over the rocks in front of me.

I tumbled at first, then began to slide. Frantically trying to regain control, I slid backwards into a rock that abruptly stopped my fall. My Kifaru pack cushioned the blow, and luckily, I came out of the situation relatively unscathed.

After gathering myself, I realized I was now in a position in which going up seemed just as dangerous as going down, and I'm not ashamed to say, that's when the praying began. I promised to be a better father, a better husband, a better man. I pulled my phone back out, confirmed that I still had no coverage, then recorded a short video for my wife and kids, just in case I didn't make it out of this jam.

All I could think about — other than my family — was Roy Roth.

Roy was a bowhunter who became legendary for his relentless, never-give-up attitude. He was an absolute beast, but he was taken from us too soon. Roy suffered a fatal fall in the mountains of Alaska in 2015, and now I found myself wondering if he was watching over me. The thought had a calming effect.

I could see a gap in the rocky spires to my right. If I could get there, hopefully I would be able to see into the next chute and find a more manageable path out of the mess I was currently in.

At a snail's pace, I picked my way toward the gap and discovered a route with less loose rock and deadfall, eventually making it safely back down to the trail in the bottom of the canyon.

Consistently successful bowhunters all have one thing in common: They don't shy away from challenges but rather thrive on them. They choose to hunt with a primitive weapon. They climb trees, rocks, and ridges in the dark, exposing themselves to untamed elements that humans have been attempting to mitigate for countless years. They go farther, stay longer, and try harder. And their success as a result is no accident because it's what naturally occurs when preparation meets undaunted determination — no matter how scary the scenario.

A flood of relief overtook me as I made my way down the trail leading me back to my truck. Once on the road home, my mind again began to drift, and I found myself pondering a familiar, all-consuming question: How many days till next elk season? **BH**

TOP: AUTHORS PHOTO/BOTTOM: BOB AMEEN PHOTO

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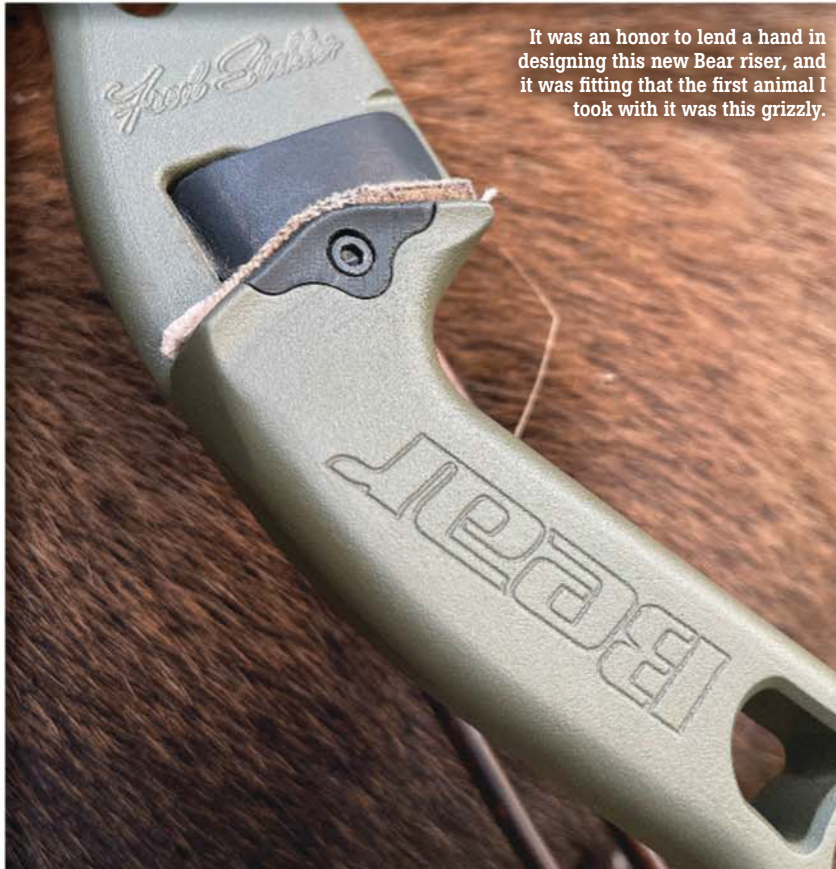
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TRADITIONAL WAY

FRED EICHLER | TRADITIONAL EDITOR



It was an honor to lend a hand in designing this new Bear riser, and it was fitting that the first animal I took with it was this grizzly.



This past year, I got to work on two projects with two iconic archery companies, at the same time. I got to work with Bear Archery on a new riser, which is based on Fred Bear's original takedown riser with the unique latch system Fred invented. That ingenious latch system allows you to quickly assemble and disassemble a recurve without any tools. It also enables bowhunters and archers to quickly change limbs in case heavier or lighter limbs are wanted, or longer or shorter limbs are required.

As a traveling bowhunter, I take my bow everywhere with me, and a takedown is just easier to carry in my truck or put in a suitcase for airline travel. The fact that I was privy enough to provide

FOUR-LEAF CLOVER

LUCK PLAYS A PART IN ANY SUCCESSFUL BOWHUNT...AND I WELCOME IT EVERY TIME.

WHEN I WAS A KID, I remember my dad telling me how rare it is to find a four-leaf clover. If I remember Dad's words correctly, I think he said the odds of finding one is somewhere in the ballpark of one in 10,000. That's why finding one is good luck. I'm not sure how that equates to bows and arrows, but I swear I have some that are luckier than others.

I will also admit to being a little superstitious, but I think that stems from having a mom who was raised in the foothills of North Carolina. If a black cat starts to cross my path, I'll try to get in

front of that kitty to keep it from walking in front of me. I also avoid cutting down trees where the main trunk forks... I am not insane, but I'm most definitely weird about certain things.



Here are the new Easton arrows I helped design.



input on a refinement of Fred Bear's original riser design was a super-exciting project for me. I got to tweak prototypes and take them hunting to figure out what I liked, or what I wanted changed.

At the same time, I was testing out a new Easton shaft that we designed specifically for traditional shooters, and again I felt blessed at the opportunity to test Easton's prototypes in the field. The thing is, I had amazing luck with all the prototypes, as well as with the finished versions!

I took Bear's second-to-last riser prototype with me to Alaska, and with my first shot at an animal I killed a beautiful brown bear. My next shot opportunity resulted in a miss on a black bear, when my bottom limb smacked the steep bank I was on and threw my arrow wide. But the amazing thing is, the bear came back, and I didn't make the same mistake twice — my next arrow double-lunged him.

The next thing that happened, which cemented my gut feeling that this new Bear/Easton combo was lucky, occurred when I received the finished version of the riser, and the arrows, two days before I headed out on an elk hunt in Oregon. I bare-shaft tested the setup, and after about three shots, two brace-height adjustments, and one change to point weight, I was getting perfect arrow flight. I was shooting bullet holes through paper and hitting the bull's-eye at 20 yards with a bare shaft!

I was excited (shocking, right?), but I've always considered myself more of a hunter than a shooter, and I wanted to get in the field with my new combination.

My hunt was rough. It was a semi-guided deal, the weather was super-hot, and the elk just weren't talking. When night fell on Day Three of my hunt, I had yet to see an elk — and I was worried my luck was waning.

The next morning, I went out to try it again. I was in a treestand, and my friend was running a video camera above me. I let out a few plaintive cow calls and then waited — much like I'd done the three previous days.

After my first calling sequence, I spotted a young bull coming toward me in search of the cow he'd heard. I slowly lifted my new 45-pound Bear recurve and readied the Easton arrow for the shot. I remember thinking I'd have to bear down (no pardon for the pun), as the bull wasn't on the trail closest to me but approached further out in the meadow.

I drew back and shot, and then watched as my arrow hit the bull about five ribs up from the last one, angling forward. When the bull turned, I could see my Muzzy

broadhead poking out the opposite side, right at the crease of his shoulder.

I watched the bull stagger as he hit the trees, and I couldn't believe my luck. I had just taken the only elk I'd seen in four days of hunting! I was impressed with the performance of my equipment, but I was even more impressed when I ranged the shot — it was 39 yards!

Before you judge, I shoot instinctive, and had I known the distance with the light setup I was using, I may have hesitated on taking the shot. Regardless, I do remember looking at the bull with incredible confidence and knowing that

all would be well...and it was. I've passed on shots at half that distance when they didn't feel right. But this one felt right.

My next hunt was for antelope back home in Colorado, and when a young buck showed up at 22 yards (ranged after the shot), I smoked him as well.

As I mentioned earlier, I am a tad superstitious. That said, I have no doubt that my good luck came courtesy of the "four-leaf clovers" who go by the names of Fred Bear and Doug Easton. **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.



Fred Eichler

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For 2023, we are proud to partner with world-famous traditional bowhunter, Fred Eichler on an all-new, first of its kind aluminum Take Down riser. The Fred Eichler Signature Take Down features a 17" machined riser with Bear's patented Fred Bear latch system. The 2023 Eichler Signature riser can be paired with Bear's #1, #2, and #3 limbs to create a Take Down with a 58", 60", or 62" AMO.

FEATURES

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- EICHLER RISER #2 LIMBS = 60" AMO
- EICHLER RISER #3 LIMBS = 62" AMO
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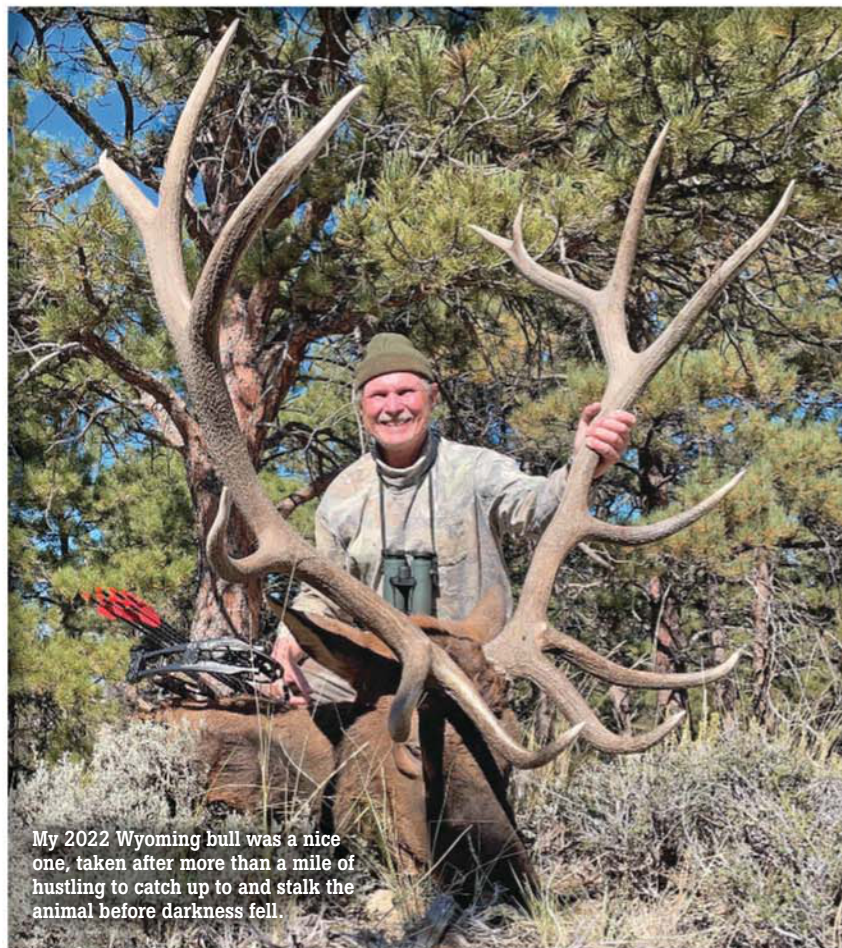


1933-2023



ON THE TRACK

CHUCK ADAMS



My 2022 Wyoming bull was a nice one, taken after more than a mile of hustling to catch up to and stalk the animal before darkness fell.

TRACK STAR ELK

THE ONLY WAY TO CLOSE THE DISTANCE TO FAST-MOVING BULLS IS TO BE A FASTER-MOVING BOWHUNTER.

IHAD BEEN CLIMBING for about a half-hour when the bull strolled over a ridge. His antlers looked huge against the evening sky, even from a half-mile away. But silhouettes can be deceiving. I dropped my pack, grabbed my spotting scope, and adjusted the tripod.

A dozen cow elk were milling around the bull like leaves in a whirlwind, but his extra-large body and tan sides stood out in the crowd. I turned the focus ring, and the animal snapped into crystal clarity.

This was the 11th day of my 2022 Wyoming elk hunt. I had seen quite a few bulls, but nothing like this one. His rack was massive, the tines long and even, the back Y's genuine "whale tails" guaran-

teed to excite any serious elk hunter. The bull tipped back his head to bugle, and his main beams dropped to the front of his butt. A rump-scratcher for sure!

The first 10 days had been both exciting and disappointing. There were more elk in my favorite honey hole than normal, with bugles and grunts floating across canyons every morning and evening. As is usually the case in the second half of September, large summer elk herds had splintered into small rutting pods with an average of six to 12 cows, one dominant bull, and smaller males around the edges. But try as I might, I could not locate a truly outsized elk.

Please don't get me wrong. I have always believed that any elk is a trophy — be it cow, spike, raghorn, or giant. However, with more than two weeks to search, I wanted to hold out for a genuine big one until near the end. That meant more fun before I dropped an elk and hard work began.

The 2022 elk season showed me numerous mature 6x6 bulls as I hiked, called to locate, and glassed distant slopes. I sneaked within 30 yards of several bulls, but they all had one or more antler deficiencies. Most carried short third points (a common elk trait), short main beams, under-developed back forks, or smallish beam diameters. All in all, I decided it was a below-average antler year for elk in my area. By Day 11, I had also decided any decent 320-inch bull would be in deep trouble if I could get close.

Wyoming is an excellent elk state, and the country I was combing was typically good. The entire area was a patchwork of public and privately owned tracts — something commonly found in the Rocky Mountain West. The onX app on my smartphone showed me exactly which sections, half-sections, and oddball tracts were BLM, state, or private ground. I had permission to hunt from a few landowners, but much of the private ground was off-limits. More than one bull I spotted crossed several chunks of public and non-public property in a single morning or evening. This made hunting tricky.





Meat care in bad situations can be tricky. I gutted my bull, butterflied the shoulders, skinned the tops of both hams, and sliced deep into the neck to accelerate cooling before hiking out in the dark. I was back on-site to butcher and pack meat at daybreak. The 50-degree night helped cool the meat.

The mountains I was hiking always abound with water — springs, stock ponds, and natural catchments for rain. Last year was unusually wet, with frequent precipitation throughout the summer. There are no agricultural fields like alfalfa to draw elk, so waiting on stand would have been a dead-end strategy. With only native grass to eat and lots of places to drink, bulls in my neck of the woods tend to be far-ranging nomads with no fondness for a single canyon or ridge. I often refer to them as “track stars,” because they sometimes move far and fast. I commonly see a particular bull only once before he vanishes forever into parts unknown.

I hustled across a saddle, trotted along a hill, and looked past a patch of stunted pines. The bull was crossing a draw 400 yards below me, and he was all alone. His cows were clustered above him with a medium-sized 6x6 grunting and bugling to keep them in a tight group. Whale Tail had been driven off by a more aggressive male.

The big elk trotted across a ravine, disappeared in a deep canyon, and reappeared on the far slope. This was an old burn with almost no trees, and the bull was easy to see. Other elk were milling on a ridge a half-mile in front of him, including a bull with decent antlers. Another rutting cluster.

I planted my fanny and watched through 10X binoculars. The big, lone elk bee-lined toward the herd, swaggered into the mob, and chased the other bull downslope. Confident he had another harem, Whale Tail circled a few times

before bedding with eight cows feeding around him.

Even from half a mile, I knew a stalking setup when I saw one. The wind was ripping down-canyon in my face, and the elk were bunched on a small bench with a tight, steep draw on the downwind edge. I ran off the slope, trotted across the canyon, and climbed the other side. It was 5:45 p.m., and the sun was dipping low.

In less than 20 minutes, I had eased across the last ravine and dropped to my knees for a final crawl. A minute later, I peeked through foot-high grass at the bench in front of me. Several cows were

feeding less than 20 yards away, moving in and out of second-growth pines. The bull grunted just out of sight.

The next 10 minutes were eventful. One cow was larger than the rest — a sway-backed and paunchy old bat with a long, narrow face. Suddenly she turned, walked directly toward me, and planted her front feet on the edge of the bench less than six feet from my nose!

I was flat on the ground, looking directly up at the old gal, as she swung her head back and forth to scan the country beyond me. I’ve never been that close to an elk for that long without being bust-

YOU ASKED WE EXECUTED

Ninety years of excellence packed into one legendary bow. Introducing the 2023 Bear Archery Execute 32. The Execute 32 encompasses everything the industry has come to expect in a flagship hunting bow. The compact 32" ATA and 6.5" brace height makes this bow maneuverable, comfortable and most importantly lethal in the field. The Execute offers speeds up to 340 FPS with our most capable and highly adjustable EKO cam system. To enhance the performance of the Execute even more, every Execute ships with a limb stop for a rock solid back wall. The bow fits draw lengths from 28.5-30.5" and features a new parallel limb design with wider and more stable limbs and more efficient machined limb pockets. The Execute 30 offers all of these great features in a shorter 30" ATA and a draw length of 26"-30".

ed. Her eyes glittered in the sinking sunlight, and her nostrils flared to test the wind. Then she looked right down at me.

I was frozen. She stared hard and long at me. She was close enough to kick my head off. Then she dropped her head to grab a mouthful of grass and turned away. Thank goodness for a strong, steady breeze!

Minutes later, tips of polished antlers flashed 30 yards in front of me. The bull trotted into the clear, stepped closer, turned away, and tipped back his head to bugle. My rangefinding binoculars said 25 yards.

Cows were lifting their heads in alarm as I rolled to my knees, drew my Bear Alaskan bow, and sent an Easton FMJ arrow on its way. But the quartering bull never saw a thing. The G5 Striker broadhead smashed through the last rib on the left side and blew out in front of the right shoulder. The bull staggered downhill and collapsed.

As quick as I could, I gutted the elk, butterflyed the shoulders, skinned the tops of the hams, sliced into the back of the neck, and jammed wrist-thick branches underneath to ensure rapid cooling. It

was supposed to drop to 50 degrees that night, and it was already cool. There are no bears in my elk area to worry about, and I knew the meat would be good.

Never mind the three-mile hike back to my pickup in the dark. Never mind the half-dozen massive backpack loads of meat and antlers up a steep, severe slope the next morning. My rancher pal Tommy Moore, his son, Shaw, and hired

hand, Joel, met me at the top with Tommy's 4-wheeler to transport the meat up a mile-long ridge to my pickup. Thank God for good friends!

My track-star bull gross-scored over 360 inches. Catching fast-moving elk is never easy, but sometimes pays off! **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

ELK CARE IN TOUGH SITUATIONS

IF YOU DROP an elk in a bad spot, especially close to nightfall, there are necessary steps to save the meat.

In warm weather, the animal must be gutted, quartered, and hung or draped over logs or rocks to cool...even if you have to do this by flashlight or headlamp. Lightweight game bags are advisable to ward off egg-laying blowflies during daylight hours.

Cool weather makes things easier. You can gut your elk and slice through the armpits to butterfly the shoulders away from the neck and ribs. Skin as much of the hindquarters as you can. Cut deep into the back of the neck to prevent lingering, spoiling heat in this vulnerable area. If possible, prop the carcass on logs or limbs to ensure cooling air circulation. The tenderloins and backstraps should cool quickly because they lie against the exposed ribcage.

As I did with my 2022 elk, it is crucial to return to a late-evening kill at daybreak and start transporting meat. The foregoing procedures can be risky in grizzly country, but it is ill-advised to carry meat at night with dangerous bruins around. Do the best you can, and keep your fingers crossed!

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TRIED AND TRUE

BRIAN K. STRICKLAND | EQUIPMENT EDITOR



While I wholeheartedly support any and all archery pro shops, there's just something about tuning my bow myself that is so gratifying.

TUNE IT UP

TOOLS FOR CREATING THE PERFECT TACK-DRIVING RIG.

The off-season is a great time to tune your rig — no matter its age. I'll be the first to admit that my time is valuable, and it's often easier for me to just spend some coin at my local pro shop for them to do the "dirty work" for me as a result. However, the satisfaction I feel when making the tweaks myself is hard to beat.

A good example of my efforts at the bow press was on a memorable antelope hunt in my home state of Colorado. I'd spent hours that season tuning and tweaking my rig and dropped countless arrows in the target developing my accuracy.

With only hours left in the hunt, I saw a lonely goat bedded in a large cholla cactus patch across the pasture. Stay-

ing out of sight while crawling into bow range, I finally hit the 70-yard mark. Watching my arrow blow through that pronghorn's heart when he stood to feed, knowing I had put my own "personal touch" to this intimate pursuit we call bowhunting, only made my smile even wider as I posed for photos.

Setting up and tuning your bow requires some additional equipment.

Although there is a little upfront expense to get started, you'll earn it back over time.

So, let's get this tuning process started with a good "gripper" like the [1] **Micro Bow Vise** (\$235.99) from **Ram Products** (ram-products.com). It features three dimensions of movement, plus a built-in leveling system to lend you that steady "third hand" often needed when working on your rig. It also allows your bow to be adjusted 360 degrees for easy tweaking, no matter the angle.

Another solid option is the [2] **Versa Cradle Wide-Limb Vise** (\$309.99) from **October Mountain Products** (octobermountainproducts.com). Accommodating and protecting both split and solid limbs, its locking ball-head design offers simple, 360-degree adjustments. It bolts to your workbench, and will even hold your bow horizontally.

A bow press would be the next must-have for any home shop, and a solid performer is the bench-style [3] **EZ Green Bow Press** (\$425) from **Last Chance Archery** (lastchancearchery.com). It works with most of today's compound bows, and its patented finger system with a hand crank presses the limbs as if you were drawing the bow. It accepts the company's **Archery Draw Board** (\$230) for more precise tuning of timing, draw length, and cam lean.

Can't fit a bench press into your budget, then consider the portable [4] **Bowmaster Bow Press G2** (\$44) from **Prototech Industries** (prototechind.com). This cable-style press comes in at less than a pound and coils up to fit in your pack, making it a great in-field tool for making adjustments on the fly. It offers a wide adjustment range and works with both solid and split-limb bows (adapters sold separately for the latter).

Hamskea (hamskeearchery.com) raises the bar once again with their [5] **GEN2PRO Third Axis Level** (\$79.99). Constructed from lightweight aluminum, it's both durable and accurate and features a built-in string groove and circular turret for leveling your bow in

a vise. Users can mount it to virtually any sight for 1st and 2nd-axis leveling. The alignment rod allows for 3rd-axis leveling while at full draw, so users can adjust based on their natural torque.

Increase arrow speed while also dampening string noise with **Pine Ridge Archery's** (pineridgearchery.com) popular [6] **Nitro Buttons** (\$5–\$10). Available in several models, Nitro Buttons are designed to slip over your string to align with your top and bottom cams. They come in an array of color options, so you can trick out your bow.

Although a peep sight is the cheapest accessory on your rig, it's perhaps the most impactful, and **Radical Archery** (radicalarchery.com) offers a complete line to pick from. Perhaps their most innovative is their anodized [7] **Glowpeep** (\$15.99), which is coated with a photoluminescent material that provides a slight glow for up to 12 hours when fully charged. The faint glow is ideal when your eyes haven't fully adjusted in low-light situations.

Another lowlight peep is the **TruGlo** (truglo.com) [8] **GloBrite Peep** (\$14.99). Its adjustable green inserts have three different brightness settings. A tube guarantees it's always in line with your sight, and the aperture diameter is $\frac{3}{16}$ ".

Providing six tools in one is **Easton's** (eastonarchery.com) [9] **Elite Nock and D-Loop Pliers** (\$38.99). Its dual jaws lock D-loops in tight without damaging the serving, while also assisting in installing nock points. Pair this with their **L Bow Square** (\$13.99), which features a precision laser-etched ruler, and you have a great set of necessary tuning tools.

Paper-tuning is an essential step in the tuning process, and although you can easily make your own paper-tuning setup, **.30-06 Outdoors** (30-06outdoors.com) makes it foolproof with their [10] **Paper Tune-In System** (\$15). The colored targets are helpful in seeing tears, and each target comes with the recommended arrow rest and nock-point adjustments needed based on the tear results to achieve perfect arrow flight.

Fine-tuned arrows are just as important as a finely tuned bow. **G5's** (g5outdoors.com) [11] **A.S.D. Flip** (\$39.95) is an essential if you want your arrow/broadhead setup to be as accurate as possible. The Flip "de-burrs" shafts for perfect insert and broadhead alignment

SACRED STONE OF THE SOUTHWEST IS ON THE BRINK OF EXTINCTION



Centuries ago, Persians, Tibetans and Mayans considered turquoise a gemstone of the heavens, believing the striking blue stones were sacred pieces of sky. Today, the rarest and most valuable turquoise is found in the American Southwest— but the future of the blue beauty is unclear.

On a recent trip to Tucson, we spoke with fourth generation turquoise traders who explained that less than five percent of turquoise mined worldwide can be set into jewelry and only about twenty mines in the Southwest supply gem-quality turquoise.

Once a thriving industry, many Southwest mines have run dry and are now closed.

We found a limited supply of turquoise from Arizona and purchased it for our **Sedona Turquoise Collection**. Inspired by the work of those ancient craftsmen and designed to showcase the exceptional blue stone, each stabilized vibrant cabochon features a unique, one-of-a-kind matrix surrounded in Bali metalwork.

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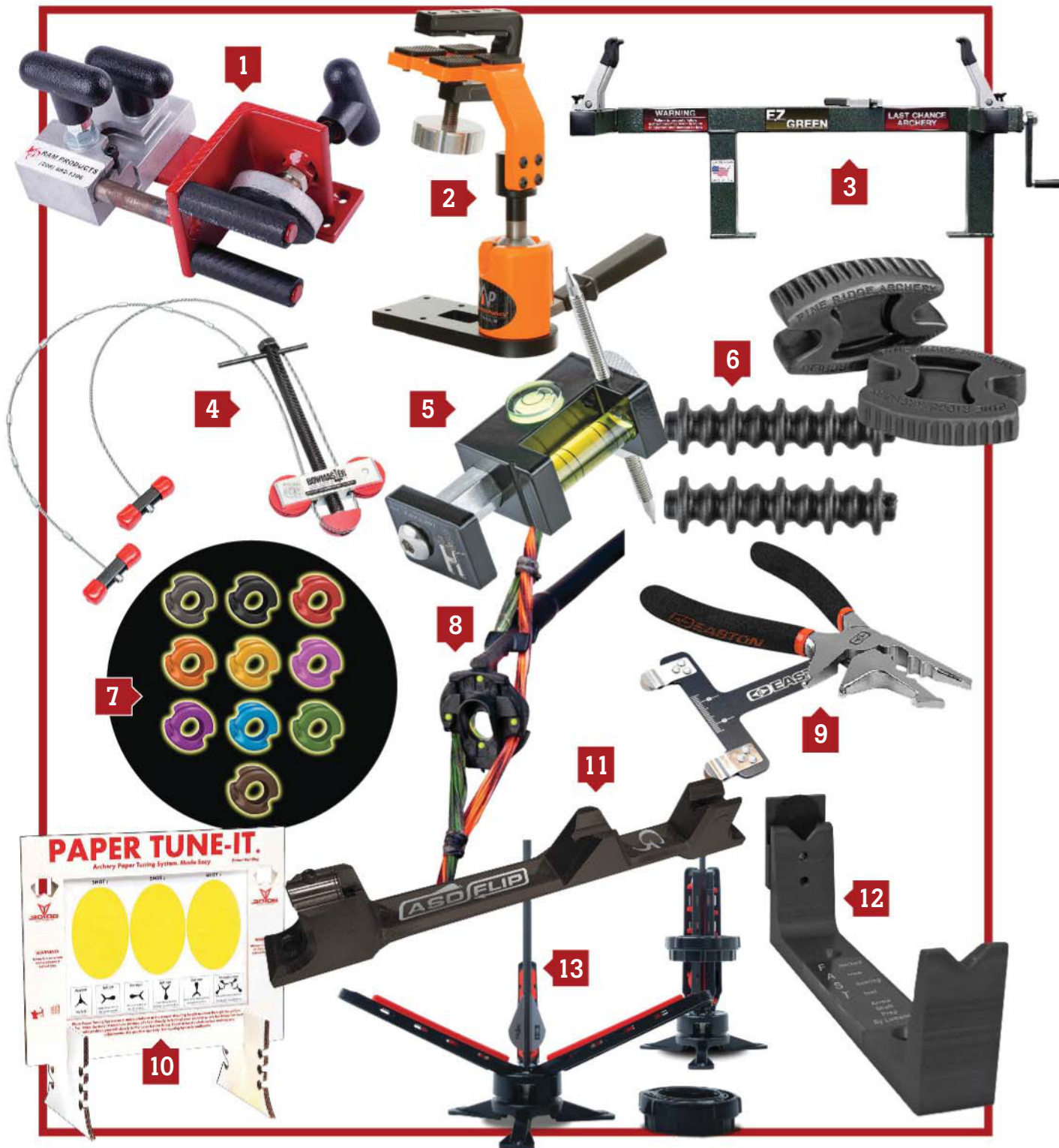
to help eliminate broadhead wobble. It's designed to work with all carbon and aluminum arrow sizes.

Another arrow-squaring option is the **Lumenok** (lumenok.com) [12] **F.A.S.T.** (\$40.90). Crafted from aircraft-grade aluminum, it comes with several self-adhesive sanding discs made to

hone dozens of arrows. Use it freestyle, or mount it to your bench.

Simplified setup and repeatability should be the mantra of the **Bohning** (bohning.com) [13] **Cauldron Jig** (\$109). This 3-vane advanced fletching system is compatible with any size shaft. The complete kit includes snap-in inserts that

enable you to fletch arrows in configurations of straight or 2 and 3-degree right or left helical, while also providing the right amount of pressure for excellent adhesion to all three vanes at once. A vane stop gives users the ability to place vanes where they want them, while also leaving the nock in place for perfect indexing. **BH**





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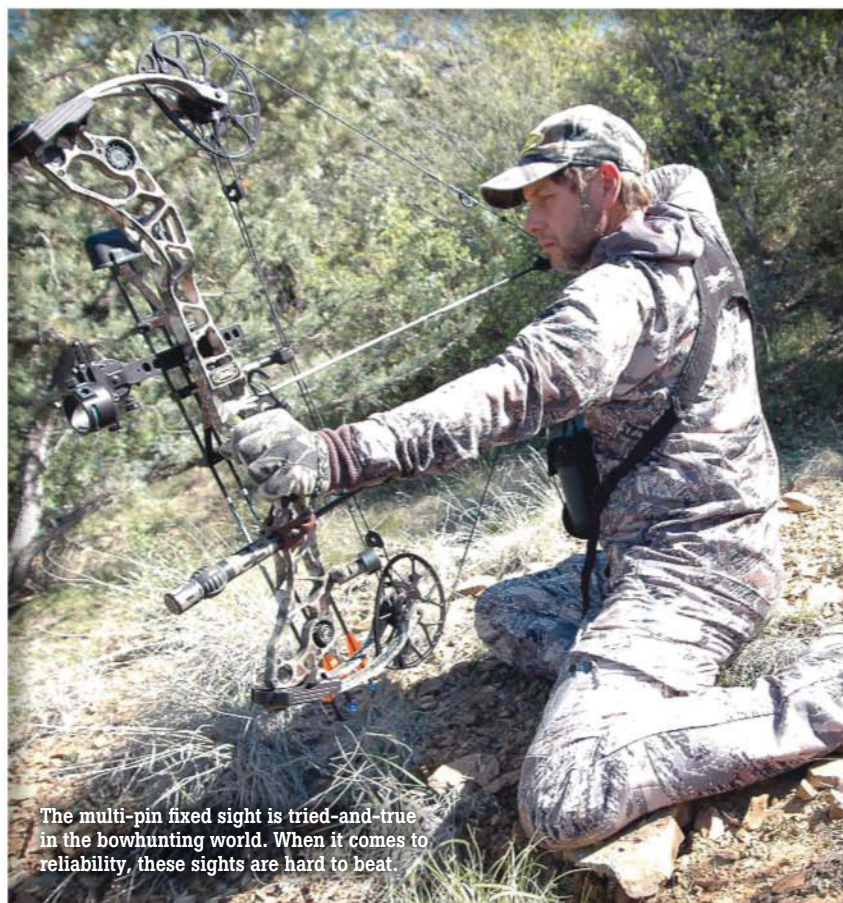
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NEXT-LEVEL BOWHUNTING

JOE BELL | TECHNICAL EDITOR



The multi-pin fixed sight is tried-and-true in the bowhunting world. When it comes to reliability, these sights are hard to beat.

AIMING WITH PRECISION

THE RIGHT BOWHUNTING SIGHT WILL IMPROVE YOUR SHOOTING FORM — LEADING TO LETHAL SHOTS IN THE FIELD.

PRECISION MEANS A LOT IN BOWHUNTING. A shot that goes awry by only a few inches can end your hunt in misery, so every bit of exactness is vital. Aside from using a super-tuned bow, an accurate shot comes down to aiming well and following-through correctly. These are the cornerstones to shooting consistency.

The best way to aim a bow and follow-through, is to bear down on the aiming spot while allowing the sight pin to float smoothly in a revolving motion — until

the shot breaks by surprise. Your focus should then remain with the target until the arrow strikes it. If this is done the same way each time, precision will follow.

Staying relaxed and focused on the sight pin in relation to the target is essential to this process. Any visual distraction will cause a loss in concentration and the shot will come apart quickly. This is why a bright, distinct aiming reference is so important.

This leads us to today's bowsights. With so many options available, what offers the most precision? Unfortunately, the answer is not as simple as we'd like, because every bowhunter has different tastes based on sight-picture preferences and hunting applications.

However, by examining the pros and cons of each style of bowsight, you can begin to distinguish what may work best for you. Pin diameter and leveling capabilities (a column in itself) can play a role in precision, too, as can the sight's overall ruggedness and reliability. Let's review some of the fundamental differences and traits in today's bowhunting sights, and then see how they stack up based on overall performance.

Multi-Pin Fixed Sights

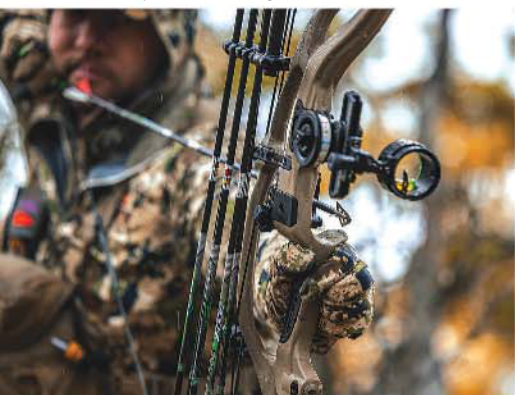
Fixed-aperture sights with multiple pins are the cornerstone of the bowhunting industry. They are simple, rugged, and provide multiple aiming references, so as game moves rapidly from one place to the next, you can act quickly by ranging the distance and choosing the right pin to cover the shot. In this regard, they are highly versatile.

However, this versatility can also be a curse. With multiple aiming beads in the sight window, there can be "clutter" and a jumbled sight picture. For some archers, this means too much confusion and a loss of aiming focus, as now one must visually scramble for the right pin before engaging with the target. After months and even years of shooting a multi-pin sight, the process of "counting pins" and selecting the right one should become second nature. Nevertheless, some archers never do it well each time, particularly when a big buck or bull is in view, which causes missed shots.

Single-Pin Sliding Sights

This configuration mirrors a tournament archery sight for maximum precision. With a movable up-and-down aperture, the sight pin can be adjusted for incremental shooting distances, allowing for dead-on aiming without the need to hold slightly high or low when distances are irregular.

The single-pin sight also shines when the shooter is under pressure. There's only one aiming bead, so it's impossible



Single-pin sliders produce shot-to-shot consistency. But, this style of sight can be a problem if an animal moves unexpectedly.

to use the wrong pin. Also, with less clutter in the sight window, it's easier to get on target and begin aiming. These are all huge bowhunting pluses.

The potential downsides are that these sights are notoriously heavy, bulky, and equipped with all sorts of moving mechanisms that can sometimes come loose, rattle, and otherwise make the sight less reliable. This, of course, depends on the sight's brand and engineering.

When examining any bowsight, be sure to grab hold of the aperture housing and attempt to wiggle it from side to side. If it flexes by applying mild pressure, avoid it for hunting purposes. Such models are usually more of a liability than a help in the deer woods.

Hybrid Sights

Moveable or sliding-type sights with multi-pin apertures are considered "hybrids." With this style, you can use the top or bottom pin as your "floater," then aim dead-on after dialing in the yardage mechanism. However, in those fast-moving bowhunting scenarios, you bypass this micro-adjustability and use the sight just like an ordinary fixed-pin sight. Simply range or estimate the shooting distance, select the right pin,

and then aim accordingly. In this regard, it gives you the best of both worlds.

What's Best?

No one can tell you this. However, after 30 years of bowhunting and using all sorts of sights, and collecting feedback from good bowhunting friends, here are my thoughts regarding the positives and negatives of each bowsight design.

Multi-Pin Fixed: This sight is unbeatable in terms of reliability, which is huge for me. I do a lot of crawling through chaparral and sage, and I've found sights that incorporate a lot of moving parts tend to cause dependability issues. Precision is important, but so is knowing that a sight can hold its zero under tough conditions. The worst thing ever is to have an ultra-precise sight that ruins a 30-yard shot because of a flimsy design.

Five and seven-pin sights are popular for Western hunting, but they drastically increase the "clutter effect." To manage this type of sight picture, you'll need to be methodical in counting each pin as it glides across the target, then select the right pin. If not, you'll inevitably go with the wrong pin when the pressure is on.

Single-Pin Slider: When you acquire the target with just one aiming reference, it's clean, fast, and refreshing, and the ability to dial-in the aiming bead to an exact distance is another major plus. All these traits make this style of sight very precise. Additionally, using a single pin is ideal for archers with poor vision — simply because it's natural for the eye to gravitate to a single aiming reference.

The chief downside to this sight style is found in its lack of speed, such as when a buck or bull dashes away unexpect-

edly and you must reset the sight for the correct yardage. This can cause added motion, time, and strain on a shooter's nerves. Some well-practiced archers are good at improvising in these scenarios and can aim low or high as needed to make the shot. But sometimes this aiming compensation goes beyond what is comfortable, especially if the shot distance has changed significantly.

Hybrid Multi-Pin: These sights can do it all! A standard three or five-pin aperture can handle ordinary shooting distances, while the bottom pin can be dialed-in to a precise distance. Archers who can't tolerate pin clutter should consider a two or three-pin aperture, to lessen the confusion at the moment of truth.

As a great remedy to all this, Spot Hogg (spot-hogg.com) offers its Triple-Stack sight system. This unique product provides a single-post design with three individually micro-adjustable aiming dots. This cleans up the sight picture considerably, compared to three horizontally mounted posts. You can set the aiming dots for 20, 30, and 40, or 25, 35, and 45, or whatever, depending on your preference and bow speed. It also comes with yardage "pointers" for each pin, and when using the appropriate yardage tape, it gives constant yardage updates for each aiming bead as the dial is turned.

I have not hunted with the Triple-Stack yet, but the system appears to be a sensible solution to the pin-clutter problem. You can choose any of the three aiming beads as your designated "floater." However, after shooting the sight for a while, the top pin is my preference, particularly at long-range targets since it offers the least-obstructed aiming bead. **BH**

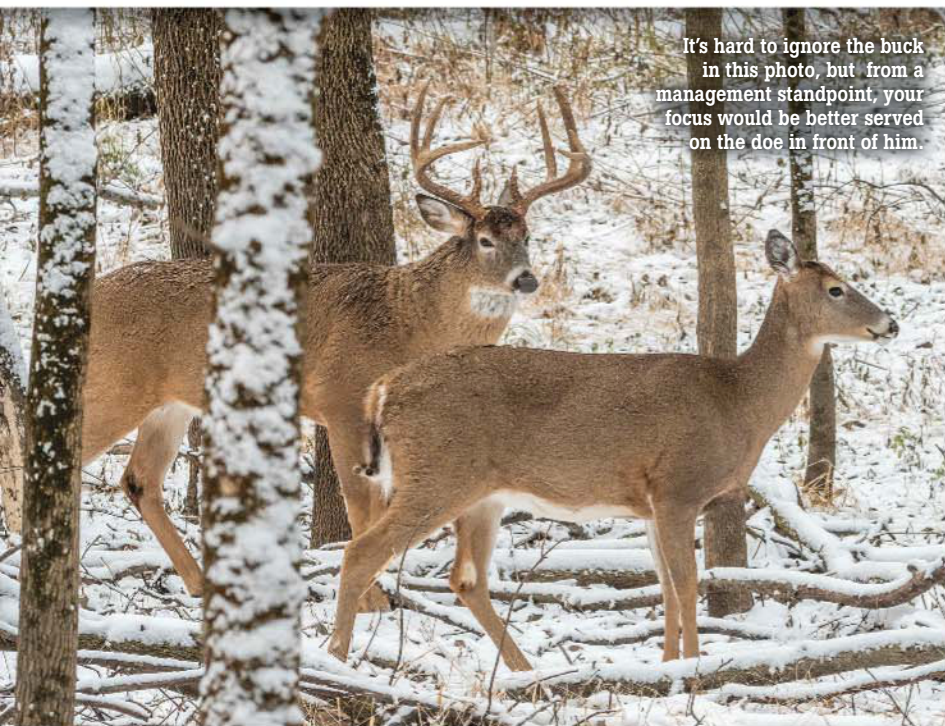


Spot Hogg's new Triple-Stack aperture uses a single sight post with three adjustable aiming beads. The concept eliminates clutter when using more than one aiming bead but gives archers additional pins to handle rapidly changing shooting distances.



KNOW HUNTING

DR. DAVE SAMUEL | CONSERVATION EDITOR



It's hard to ignore the buck in this photo, but from a management standpoint, your focus would be better served on the doe in front of him.

MANAGING DEER GETTING MORE DIFFICULT

KEEPING DEER HERDS IN BALANCE IS
BECOMING MORE OF A CHALLENGE.

EVEN THOUGH hunters have longer seasons and bigger bag limits, there is a deer management problem looming down the road. In fact, in some states, the problem is already there.

The National Deer Association's (deerassociation.com) annual report showed that in 2020, bowhunters in seven Northeast and Midwest states were responsible for 40% of the deer harvested in those states. Guns still dominate the way we manage deer, but the fact is that arrows are gaining ground on bullets.

Consider my home state of West Virginia. In 2018, archers there took 24% of the total deer harvest, and in 2020 crossbows and bows took 30%.

In 2020, New Jersey's bow and crossbow harvests comprised 64% of the total harvest. In Connecticut, bows and crossbows took more deer than guns (58%), followed by Massachusetts (50%) and Ohio (48%).

This rise is often attributed to the increase in crossbows, but there are other factors at play here — like urbanization — through which bowhunters will continue to shine as management tools. But while urban hunts continue to grow, so

does another management problem — the reluctance to shoot does.

In West Virginia, and in a growing number of states, there is more interest in harvesting bucks than does. Numerous states are now reporting more bowkilled bucks than does — a disappointing fact, relative to herd management.

So, we have a situation where there are more deer (particularly in urban areas), are fewer hunters overall, and now fewer hunters willing to shoot does.

Ohio reduced the cost of doe tags to combat this issue, and initially their approach worked. But when reintroduced in 2020, it failed — Buckeye State hunters just didn't want to shoot a doe for their second deer.

Is there an answer to this problem? Maybe, but the options won't appeal to hunters, deer managers, and others.

Forever Chemicals

A recent newspaper headline read, "Forever chemicals in deer, fish challenge hunters, tourism." That caught my eye, so I read on. It noted that authorities have detected high levels of PFAS (polyfluoroalkyl substances) in deer in several states, including Michigan and Maine. The article further stated that "legions of hunters seek to bag a buck every fall." Let me add that there are a number of these PFAS chemicals and one of those, PFOS (perfluorooctane sulfonate), is often mentioned. Both PFAS and PFOS are potential problems. Apparently, once in the environment, these chemicals are very difficult to remove, hence the name "forever chemicals."

The newspaper headline gave readers the impression that deer hunters are headed for a big problem in Maine and Michigan. But are they?

I quickly dug up the studies done in Maine and Michigan. But first some background on these "forever chemicals." PFAS are manmade chemicals that can be deadly to their creators. They've been around for many years, mostly used in various industrial applications and consumer products like fire foam, carpeting,

JOHN PENNYER

waterproof clothing, food wrappings, metal plating, personal-care products, etc.

Once in the environment, they may end up in sewage solids. If these solids were used to fertilize farm fields, then said fields would be contaminated. Deer consuming plants growing in those fields would subsequently absorb PFAS, especially in their livers. But does that mean those deer are unsafe for human consumption?

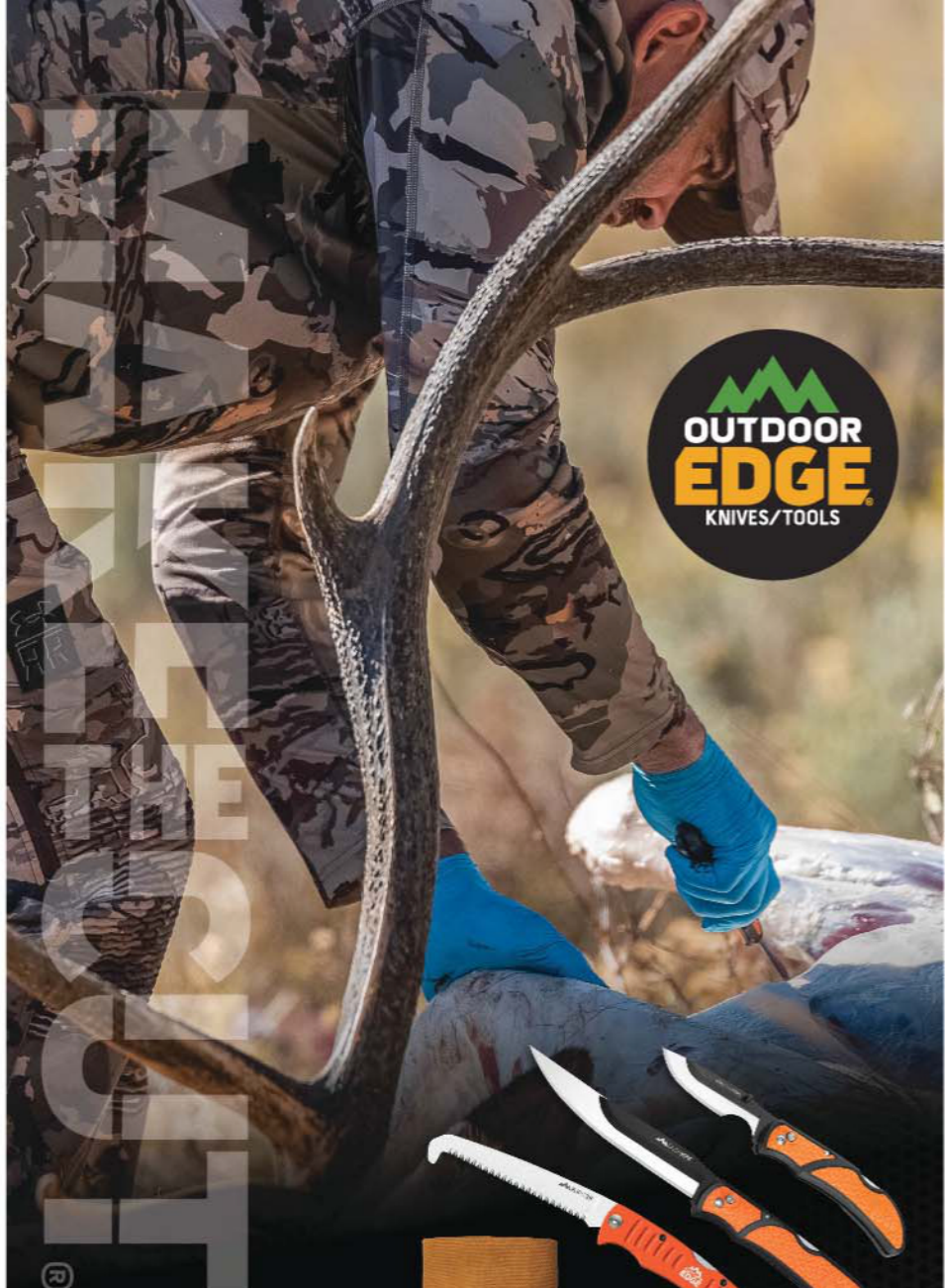
Michigan was the first state to look at PFAS in deer. In fact, the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services now recommends that people do not eat the organs from any deer, fish, or other wild game statewide because PFAS accumulate in these organs. But the concern for deer meat is far less.

Clark's Marsh in Michigan has PFAS, so deer in that area were sampled. One deer out of 20 tested in that area had high levels of PFAS. Muscle samples from the other 19 deer showed no PFAS, or very low levels. Even so, the state issued a statement that recommended not consuming venison from deer taken within three miles of the Marsh. A subsequent sample of 22 deer in 2019 found nothing. The liver and muscle of another 44 deer killed near the Marsh in 2020 showed that some had detectable levels of PFAS in their livers. The closer to the Marsh, the higher the levels. So, PFAS are only a concern in one three-mile area of Michigan, and only if you eat the liver.

PFOS were found in fish collected from Kent Lake in Maine. Because of that, in 2019, 20 deer were sampled in that area for PFAS (muscle, liver, kidney, heart), and no PFAS were found in muscle or heart samples. Thus, no deer-consumption guidelines were issued. However, five of eight deer taken close to an area where sewage was placed on agriculture fields had PFOS in meat, which caused the state to issue a warning to eat "less than two to three meals per year of deer from that area." As in Michigan, PFAS are not an issue in Maine deer, except for one small area where sewage was placed on agricultural fields.

In 2020, Wisconsin issued a "Do Not Eat Liver" warning from deer harvested within five miles of a Fire Technology Center contaminated with PFAS. Thirty-two liver samples from 32 different counties were then tested, and one had detectable but safe levels of PFAS.

So, the bottom line is that PFAS are bad actors for humans, and in very localized areas they may get into deer. If hunters are concerned, then don't eat deer liver. What about that newspaper article headline? Totally overblown. **BH**



NEW

RAZORGUIDE PAK™

From the Alaskan bush to the rugged mountains of Old Mexico, the RazorGuide Pak™ is built from years of experience in the field. Featuring two RazorSafe® knives and an aluminum handled folding saw, the RazorGuide Pak™ meets the demands of all veteran hunters. When the job is done the entire kit stores in a compact waxed canvas roll pack.



LEARN MORE



POSTSEASON

FEBRUARY IS THE PERFECT TIME TO CONDUCT YOUR POSTSEASON SCOUTING

DEER SEASON IS OVER, and it's time to look toward next fall and winter. Deer hunters who consistently experience success don't merely get lucky. They put in the time and effort it takes to fill tags each year. More specifically, they spend time postseason scouting for deer.

February is an excellent time to complete such efforts, mostly because you no longer need to worry about pressuring deer. Some bucks made it through the season, and now is a great window to learn as much about them and their core areas as possible. It's time to put the pieces of the puzzle together, so you have a clearer picture of your hunting areas and target bucks next season.

Here are 15 important tips you should know.



BH 
FEATURES

N SCOUTING

FOR DEER

MISSIONS. HERE'S WHY AND HOW.

BY JOSH HONEYCUTT

1. SCOUT DIGITALLY

Begin the process by scouting digitally. Search for high-odds locations, and then rank each area by importance — eliminating the “dud areas” in the process. This will help you hit the best areas, especially if trying to cover a lot of ground and green-up arrives before you finish. Apps like onX and HuntStand will further help you avoid areas that aren't worth pursuing, saving you time in the process.

2. USE TRAIL CAMERAS

Leave your cameras running beyond the end of deer season. Doing so will allow you to continue capturing images/videos well into the postseason, so you can gain more intel as to which bucks might still be alive, and where you might find a good buck during the colder months next season.

3. HISTORY REPEATS ITSELF

As you begin postseason scouting, remember past intel that can help with this process. Camera photos, sightings during the season, discoveries from past years, and more, are all excellent things to make note of year after year.

4. CHECK HUNTER HOTSPOTS

Those who hunt public lands and with shared permission on private ground should remember where they saw concentrations of hunters during the season. Those hunters were there for a reason, and you need to know why. Even if you don't hunt those same spots, it's good to know what's going on throughout the general area.

5. CHECK RECENT SIGN

As you walk the land, look for beds, droppings, rubs, scrapes, tracks, and more. Finding these things will show how the local deer are using the property. Of course, doing this with snow on the ground makes all the aforementioned sign much more visible.

6. FOOD

Food drives most all deer activity, but especially so during the late and postseason. Good areas to cover will have quality wintertime food sources, such as harvested crops (waste grain), standing crops (soybeans and corn), brassica plots, wheatfields, remaining mast, woody browse (buds, stems, and leaves), and more.

7. CUT SOME TRACKS

Finding deer tracks is great. But cutting a set of mature buck tracks is a true blessing. If that happens, follow those hoofprints everywhere they go. Doing so will often lead you to hidden beds, as well as desired food and water sources.

8. FOLLOW TRAILS BACK TO BEDS

Follow all tracks and trails back into bedding areas. This will help you chart exactly where deer are spending their daylight hours. Sit down in the beds and look around. Understanding these locations and knowing what deer see from them is the foundation of a hunt plan during the season. It will tell you how close you can get without spooking deer.

9. ISOLATED WATER SOURCES

Most deer don't like to drink at loud, running water sources. Large bodies of water are also undesirable. Instead, find isolated water sources that are small, potentially stagnant, and within or on the fringe of bedding cover.

10. PINPOINT FUNNELS

The rut is an excellent time to see a mature buck. Oftentimes, at that time of year, deer can be intercepted along funnels and pinchpoints. Some of these include saddles, narrow strips of trees, fencerows, fence gaps, creek and ditch crossings, benches, ridgelines, and other areas that force or encourage deer movement into a narrower area.

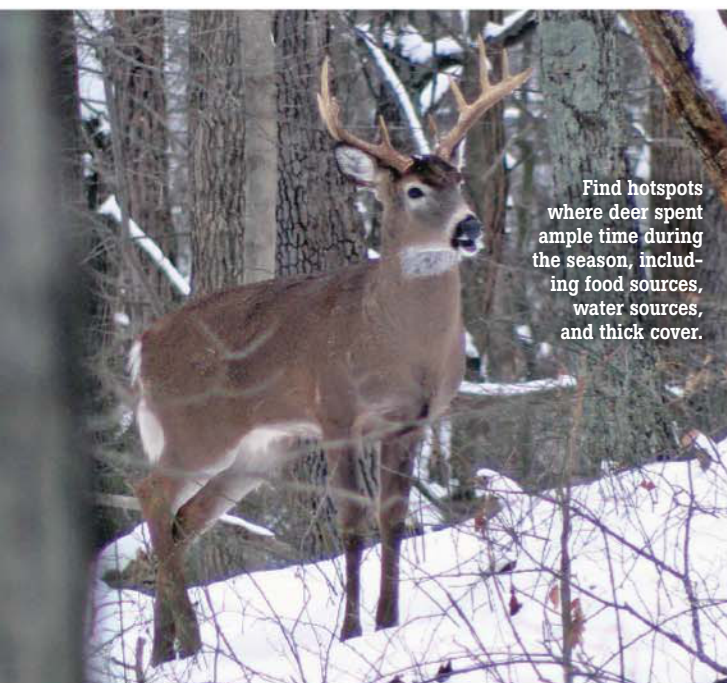
POSTSEASON SCOUTING FOR DEER

11. SHED HUNTING

Postseason scouting is mostly about finding sign and understanding how deer are using the area. That said, it's also about shed hunting. These dropped antlers will tell you whether or not the buck's you were after made it through the season. Of course, sheds won't tell you where to hunt during the early season, pre-rut, or rut, but they will reveal potential late-season hunting opportunities.

12. HABITAT IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS

For those who own or manage private land, now is the time to work on improving the habitat on your ground. Some suggested habitat-improvement projects to consider include hinge-cutting, creating bedding areas, clearing new food plots, installing waterholes, creating access routes, and more. Do these "chores" immediately following your post-season scouting efforts.



Find hotspots where deer spent ample time during the season, including food sources, water sources, and thick cover.

THE TIMELINE ANTITHESIS

Some hunters prefer not to wait until the postseason to begin their wintertime scouting. They begin as soon as they finish hunting and filling their tags for the year. Their hope is to find the freshest sign possible. Public-land hunters, in particular, tend to do this. I don't like this concept for several reasons. Other hunters are likely still in the field. It's incredibly selfish and rude to tromp through an area just to meet your needs. Treat other hunters with respect. You push deer around when scouting, possibly putting them in the laps of your hunting brethren (it's ok to be selfish when following this rule). There is still some sign left to be laid down by deer. Wait a little longer for the remainder of it to be placed on the landscape. Most deer don't begin dropping antlers until February/March. Scouting too soon will cause you to find fewer sheds. The later it gets in winter, the more open the landscape becomes — making it easier to spot what you are looking for.



Follow tracks and trails back into cover to see where deer bed, especially mature bucks.

POSTSEASON MISTAKES

There are many mistakes to avoid during the late season. Some are minor, while others could potentially hurt you in the long run.

- **Starting too late.** Waiting too long can give other hunters and critters time to recover sheds first. Waiting until the landscape begins to green-up also starts to hide important sign like rubs, scrapes, sheds, tracks, etc.
- **Covering too little ground.** The more ground you cover, the greater the odds of finding what you're looking for.
- **Avoiding bedding areas.** Now is the time to find exactly where deer are laying down. Find the bedrooms postseason, and then set up accordingly before the next season opens.
- **Expecting deer to be in the same location all season.** Deer move about their home ranges based on their needs throughout the year.
- **Not scouting sanctuaries.** Some hunters don't invade sanctuaries during the season, which is a concept many subscribe to. But even these hunters should scout sanctuaries during the postseason.
- **Putting too much stock in old sign.** Make note of rubs you find from two or three years prior, but don't rank them as highly as those you found most recently.



Search for rubs, scrapes, and other sign while post-season scouting.



Trail cameras are excellent for monitoring the antler drop.

Most bucks shed their antlers during the month of February, making the latter part of the month a good time to find them.



My success on this January buck was a result of my postseason scouting from the prior year.

POSTSEASON SCOUTING GEAR

- Trail cameras for inventory.
- Good boots and socks to prevent blisters.
- Layered clothing to avoid thorns.
- Chaps to prevent leg injuries.
- Turkey vest or pack to hold sheds, trail cameras, etc.
- Quality optics.
- A good hunting app to record findings.

WHY YOU CAN'T FIND SHEDS

- **Hunting areas where late/postseason deer don't spend time.** Hunters won't find sheds where deer don't frequent around drop time.
- **Searching too early.** Shed hunting isn't productive until deer lose their antlers for the winter.
- **Searching too late.** This gives other shed-hounds and critters time to find the antlers before you.
- **Scouring the wrong places.** Look near high-odds locations first, such as bedding areas, travel routes, water/food sources, fence crossings, etc.
- **Not using your eyes correctly.** Unless glassing an open area, spend most of your time scanning the ground within 30 yards of your position.
- **Thinking too big.** Don't look for an entire antler. Instead, look for the tip of a tine. Think small, and you're more likely to spot antlers.
- **Not glassing enough.** Binoculars are excellent tools for finding sheds, especially when you see something that looks like a shed but aren't certain.
- **Covering too little ground.** It takes a lot of walking (or riding) to find many sheds.
- **Getting distracted too easily.** Stay focused on your goal.
- **Not recruiting help.** Bringing others along can up the odds of stacking sheds. Just remember to return the favor.
- **Failing to use a dog.** A canine's nose is much better than yours, so let your four-legged "bestie" do what we can't.
- **Going with no plan.** Always have a strategy in place. If it's not working, then adapt accordingly.

13. MARK POTENTIAL STAND LOCATIONS

As you're scouting, it's important to note potential stand locations on your app or map. Doing this will help you remember them during the season to come. Placing a marker on the exact tree, and not the general area, will make it easier for you to find — even in the dark.

14. IDENTIFY POSSIBLE ACCESS ROUTES

Treestands are worthless if you can't travel to and from them without alerting deer. While in the field, it's paramount to future success if you can first find ambush entry/exit routes, and then decide whether or not they'll work.

15. PAINT A PICTURE

The best thing hunters can do is use technology to highlight scouting intel. Using a good hunting app, record all findings while postseason scouting. With the "Trace Path" feature turned on in the app, walk every trail on the property. If you need to get off a trail, pause the feature to prevent false trail lines. While doing this, drop relevant pins for all sign discoveries (beds, droppings, rubs, scrapes, tracks, etc.). Do the same for deer sightings, big-buck camera photos, and any other intel of interest. Then, with all postseason scouting information highlighted, you will eventually paint a picture of how deer are using the property — further simplifying things come hunting season.

Now is the time to get the job done. Put in the work, and I promise you'll be glad you did this fall. **BH**

The author is an accomplished outdoor writer, photographer, and videographer with work appearing in more than 80 hunting magazines and websites.

MY LEGENDARY PROJECTS

WHAT'S A GUY LIKE ME
TO DO WHEN ASKED OF
TASKS LIKE THESE?
BE HUMBLD IS THE
ONLY CORRECT ANSWER.

By Fred Eichler,
Traditional Editor

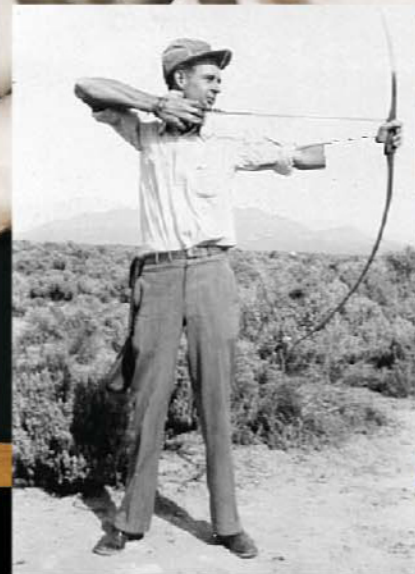
Fred Eichler
Carbon Legacy
arrows

Here I am with Jim
and Greg Easton at the
Easton factory back in
the early 2000s.

I have written about Fred Bear and his influence on me in the past for a lot of reasons. Besides Fred being a major factor in why I wanted to bowhunt, in many ways I feel he was the "Father of Bowhunting." I'm not saying Fred was the first or only influencer in our sport, because there have been many great men and women who have also done their part to promote archery and bowhunting. A few early day influencers that come to mind are Will and Maurice Thompson,

Art Young and Saxton Pope, Ann and Earl Hoyt, Doug Easton, Howard Hill, and Ben Pearson, to name a few of many.

While many others helped introduce archery to the masses, you'd be hard-pressed to argue that Fred was anything other than the most influential advocate of our sport. Fred brought archery and bowhunting to millions of Americans through his company, Bear Archery, and his videos brought bowhunting to television on ABC's "The American Sports-



Easton Founder, Doug Easton, made longbows before later making his legendary arrows to go with them.

man,” where some of Fred’s exploits were shown by host Curt Gowdy. Fred’s VHS tapes, books, radio interviews, and articles inspired countless numbers to enjoy “flinging” arrows at targets and animals... God bless him for doing so!

Whether you agree that Fred was the most influential bowhunter ever or not, I know for a fact he impacted my life, especially in my younger years. His “Field Notes” took me to places I could only imagine in my mind but never thought I

would see. He signed a copy of that book for me at a mall in Gainesville, Florida, that my mom took me to when I was just nine years old. I met Fred in person two other times after that first encounter, and he made me feel special both times by taking just a few minutes to talk to me.

Fred was always humble, despite his amazing accomplishments, and he always asked questions that made me feel like he was truly engaged in our conversation. When I was in my early 20’s, I

took a job working at Bear Archery’s pro shop and museum. Fred had unfortunately passed by that time, but his spirit was still there, and I could feel it.

I also worked with Frank Scott, who had been employed by Fred at age 17

FRED EICHLER BEAR ARCHERY RISERS



OFFERED IN
3 COLORS

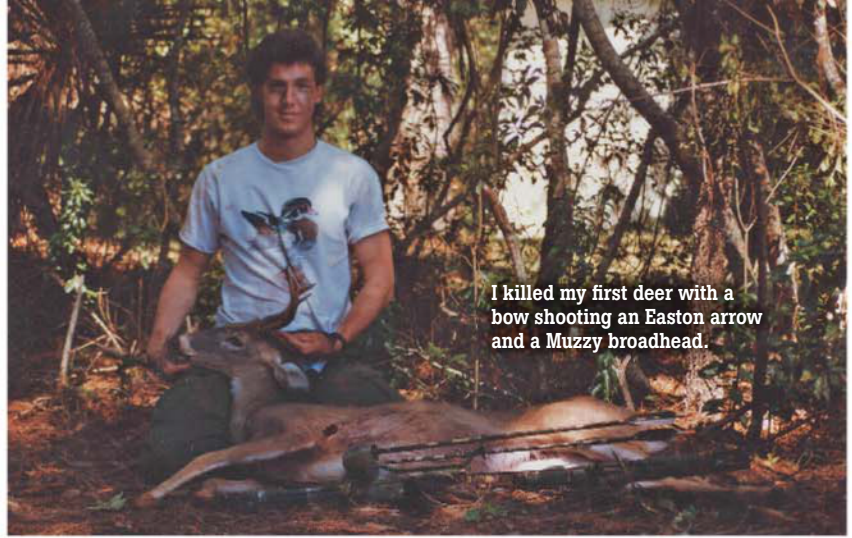
FRED EICHLER/BEAR RISER

- 17" riser with Fred Bear's original latch system
- Lengths with different limbs of 58", 60", 62"
- Poundage options of 30-70 lbs.
- Accommodates older Bear limbs
- Three finishes — Bear camo, hunter green, buckskin
- Interchangeable shelf heights — low, medium, high
- Adjustable strike plate

EASTON SMM CARBON LEGACY FRED EICHLER EDITION

- Full-length 34" shafts for those who want a longer arrow
- Available bare shaft or fletched with 4" LW helical barred feathers
- Spines are 340, 400, 500, 600, and 700
- One gpi lighter in most spines than Axis traditional arrows for more speed/higher FOC balance
- Dark teak wood appearance
- Hi-vis factory dip for better feather-fletching adherence
- Accepts standard 16-grain HIT insert or brass, as well as steel or aluminum Half-out inserts

and stayed there until he was in his 70s. I got to meet guys like Bob Munger and many others who were there and are still looked at as icons in the archery industry. I still have my original Bear Archery name badge from back in the day, and I still remember how many of the employees, including myself, would proudly explain to people that Bear Archery was the largest archery manufacturer in the world.



I killed my first deer with a bow shooting an Easton arrow and a Muzzy broadhead.

I have always felt a closeness to the company that still bears its Founder's name. Fred's presence is alive and well at the factory, and Bear continues to use Fred in their promotions, which to me is a sign of respect for this legendary man. When I left Bear, it was for a job managing an archery shop in Fort Collins, Colorado, and Frank Scott gifted me a Fred Bear takedown recurve.

Since that time, I have been fortunate to hunt some of the places Fred did, and some of the animals Fred spoke of and wrote so eloquently about. My passion for bowhunting and promoting the sport I care so much about has been a major part of my life. As I get older, protecting our hunting heritage, as well as learning more about our archery and bowhunting history, means even more to me now than it did when I was a young man.

Over the years, I have also been fortunate enough to help some iconic companies like Hoyt Archery make design changes that I think improved their line of traditional bows. I also designed a finger tab that 3Rivers Archery picked up after Jonathan Karch and his dad, Dale, saw it while they were on a mule deer hunt with me. Jonathan and Dale both took beautiful mule deer with traditional equipment on that hunt, further solidifying my belief that both of them were the real deal when it came to traditional equipment.

Just last year, I got an amazing opportunity to work with the General Manager of Bear Archery, Jonathan Lene, and Timmy Langley, one of the company's engineers, on a new recurve riser. Their vast experience with bows and bow design eclipsed mine, but I was able to make some of the changes I really wanted.

I really wanted a bow that was super-light and designed to shoot better off the shelf, with more feather-clearance than other models. I kept the small-handle design, because most recurves I've shot

make it hard for me to consistently put the riser in my hand where I want it.

My reasoning behind my suggested change to Fred's original shelf was due to a lot of arrow contact on the older designs, which hindered me from achieving the perfect arrow flight I so desired. I also wanted to change up the side plate. The original design had one set screw for adjusting the plate, and I wanted two set screws. Just the opportunity to make some improvements on Fred's original takedown with the unique latch system Fred designed was inspiring, to say the least. Bear Archery is where my archery career started, and Fred Bear was my bowhunting mentor, even though he didn't really know me or the impact he had on me as a youngster.

One of the most exciting parts of this project was the testing of prototypes that we kept tweaking. I understood that things like curved designs and taking out material in the riser and adding another set screw all added more costs in



Fred was hands down the biggest influence for me when I was a budding bowhunter.



(Left) Here I'm working on small changes to one of the riser prototypes — sparks literally were flying. (Right) This photo shows me testing the final prototype riser and arrow combo through paper. Trust me when I say I was satisfied with my paper-tuning results.

machining, but I had an image of what I wanted — and we did it.

At the same time I was working on the project with Bear, I also had the unique opportunity to work with another company that still bears its Founder's name, and one that has given more back to the sport of archery than any other company — Easton Archery.

Easton was started back in 1922 by Doug Easton. Doug started making longbows to sell after a chance meeting with Saxton Pope (who the famous record-keeping organization Pope and Young was partially named after).

During the conversation, Mr. Pope complimented young Doug on his craftsmanship on the longbow he had made. Doug figured if he impressed his mentor, he may as well start making them to sell.

Not long after that, Doug stopped making longbows and started selling just arrows when he realized he could make arrows faster and easier than a handmade longbow. Anyone who enjoyed archery or bowhunting may only need one bow, but I guarantee he/she will go through hundreds of arrows. It was a good decision, and Doug built an amazing company from the ground up as a result, and one that has been passed down from father to son for two generations so far. I never met Doug Easton in person, but I can say with great pride that I do own two of his original longbows, plus a few of his original footed wood shafts. So, in a way, I do almost feel like I know Doug Easton.

I did get to meet Doug's son, Jim Easton, multiple times, and I also got to walk through the Easton factory and interview Jim about his family's history. To hear Jim talk about throwing quarters in the air in his father's shop, and watching Howard Hill shoot them out of the air, was pretty amazing.

It was also impressive to learn about how Jim's dad perfected the manufacturing process for aluminum, which helped make arrows stronger and more uniform. More people shoot Easton arrows than any other brand, but what is even more impressive to me is the millions of dollars Easton has given back to the sport through their support of organizations like NEAA, NASP, and USA Archery, to name a few, as well as building Easton Foundation archery centers in Salt Lake City, Utah, Newberry, Florida, Chula Vista, California, and Yankton, South Dakota. Currently, Doug's grandson, Greg Easton, is at the helm and carrying on the family tradition of making amazing arrows and supporting the sport.

As a teen, I killed my first deer with an Easton arrow and a Muzzy broadhead — a combination I still use to this day. As a young man leaning over his first-ever archery deer, I had no idea that one day I would get to work with Easton on testing arrows — much less eventually helping Easton design one.

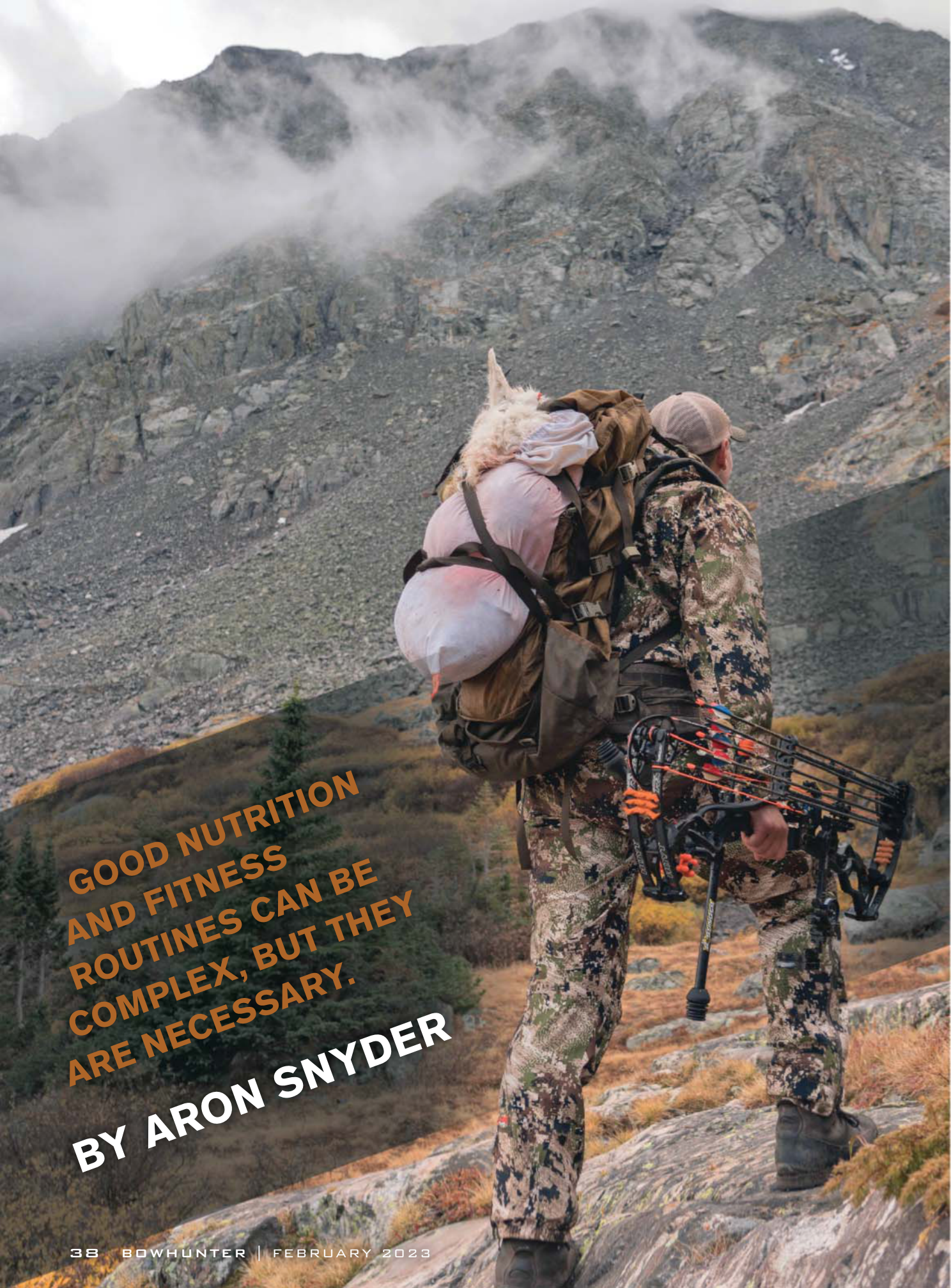
Back when Easton came out with their Axis and Full Metal Jacket shafts, I was privy to test and ultimately give

my opinions on said arrows to the company on things like strength, accuracy, flight characteristics, and performance on game animals. Being able to test Easton prototypes that weren't named yet, and didn't even have labels on them, was incredible.

This past year, while testing and working on the new Bear riser, I was able to help Easton work on an arrow that is designed specifically for traditional shooters but will also work great for those of you using "training wheels." Calm down, because I'm just kidding. I shoot both — I just prefer bows that have fewer moving parts.

To have a hand in helping design a bow that has my name next to that of the "Greater Fred's" and to offer input on an arrow that is designed for traditional shooters and bowhunters at the same time, is by far my proudest archery moment.

My humble suggestions weren't that groundbreaking and certainly aren't going to change the sport like so many other people have done. However, I'd like to think Mr. Bear and Mr. Easton are somewhere shooting their bows and watching their arrows fly, while also appreciating that there are many of us who are thankful for the work, sacrifice, testing, and promoting they did. I don't know if they're on hunts with me or not, but I'd be lying if I said I haven't had moments where I felt like both of these great men are standing right beside me...probably laughing at me... and for good reason! **BH**



**GOOD NUTRITION
AND FITNESS
ROUTINES CAN BE
COMPLEX, BUT THEY
ARE NECESSARY.**

BY ARON SNYDER

BACK

WHEN I WAS YOUR AGE...

I DON'T FEEL OLD ON MOST DAYS, but I'm definitely starting to feel things that I didn't feel a few years ago. Things like a grouchy knee, IT band issues, sore muscles, tendonitis, and a few other ailments that let me know I've got a few years under my belt. I'm certainly not ready to throw in the towel, but I've started coming to terms with the fact that I probably have more years behind me (I'm 45) than I have ahead of me...at least when it comes to the rough-and-tumble world of backpack hunting in the wilderness and the grind of extreme mountain hunts. I bring this up because I'm currently at a hunting camp, guiding mule deer hunters, and there was a discussion last night at the dinner table about fitness, health, and the longevity one might have when referring to strenuous hunts and how you might extend those years.

I'm sure some of you reading this are saying, "I'm 65 and still getting after it...you're still a pup," and I wouldn't disagree. What I would say is that, at times anyway, I should have listened to the older crowd when I was about to do something physically stupid in my younger days. And even though I know better, I'm still abusing my body and making poor choices today. So why is that? Some of it might be bravado or ego, the internal struggle to prove to myself I can still run with my younger self — and maybe, just maybe, because I can still do it. The why doesn't really matter, but what does matter is that I don't injure myself while doing said stupid tasks. I want to stay in the mountains/wilderness as long as I can, and at this point I'm still running strong.

So, with the thought-provoking conversation last night, I thought I would cover the good, the bad, and the ugly of what I've done to my body and what I've done to stay relatively healthy and injury free, and how I've altered my diet and workout program over time.

DIET

As boring a subject as it may be, dieting is probably the most important and most overlooked ingredient to a long

lifespan in the field, as well as your day-to-day life. More than once I've told people that they should probably lose 40 pounds off their butt instead of worrying about dropping four ounces in pack weight. I speak from experience on this one! When it comes to gear, if you have money, it is easily attained without hard work or discipline. Dieting and nutrition demand a lot of discipline, hard work, and determination. Diet is 65 to 70 percent of the battle. In other words, **YOU CAN'T WORK OUT**

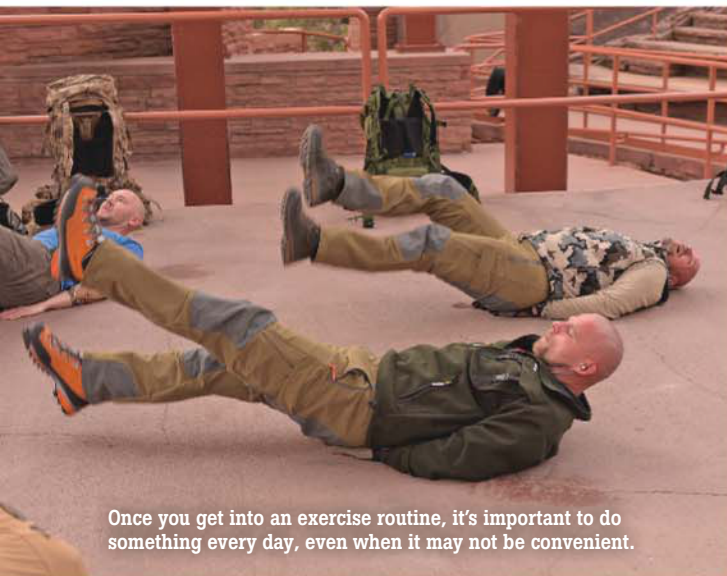
ENOUGH TO OUTWEIGH A BAD DIET!

Every body type is going to be a little different, and that means everyone's diet will be different. However, cutting out processed carbs/sugars, gluten, and drinking 100 ounces (or more) of water a day is probably a safe path to a better and healthier life. This means giving up soda, cookies, crackers, chips, and all the other good stuff we love to eat. This will help you lose weight but will also help with inflammation, gut health, and multiple other physical ailments. You can find a lot of good information and some unbelievable health and fitness coaches in the outdoor industry on the Internet. Get to know their programs and philosophies and see if they match your needs and personality. My diet plan, much like my workout plan, is pretty boring: High protein, high fat, some carbs (the good ones), and keeping away from processed carbs. I pretty much live off wild game, and my wife cooks all organic, so that's a big help, too.

Another potential downfall I've found for myself is overeating and binge eating. I'm a recovering fat kid, and having something sweet in the house is the same as having alcohol in an alcoholic's home. For whatever reason, I have the discipline to keep junk food out of the house, but lack the discipline to not eat it when it's in the house. **SO, KEEP IT OUT OF THE HOUSE!**

Finding healthy substitute food has been another lifesaver for me. Find something to snack on to keep cravings

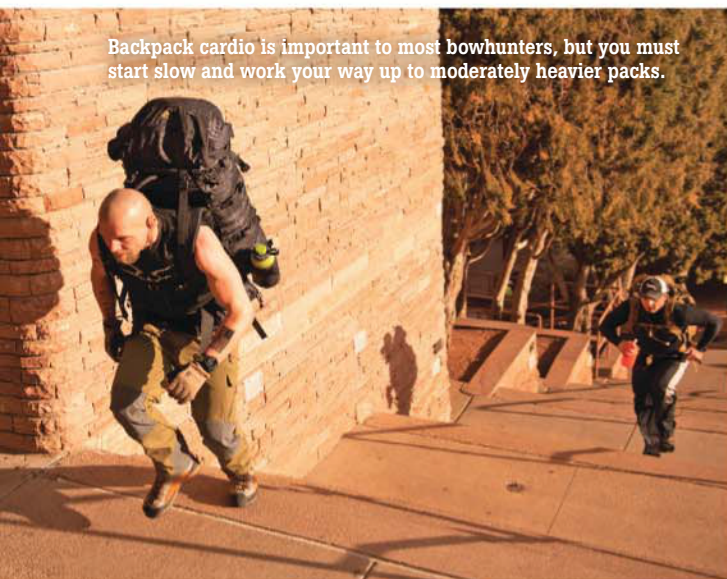
BACK WHEN I WAS YOUR AGE...



Once you get into an exercise routine, it's important to do something every day, even when it may not be convenient.



Low-impact exercises can get you in shape without punishing your joints or wearing down your body as a whole.



Backpack cardio is important to most bowhunters, but you must start slow and work your way up to moderately heavier packs.

down that isn't too bad for you like jerky, raw almonds, cheese sticks, fruit (some fruit anyway), and the occasional somewhat healthy protein bar.

One thing about a good diet plan is that eating healthy food will eventually become second nature and not a chore, as it will be in the beginning. You will also feel about 100 times better, and that will hopefully carry you through the rough times.

EXERCISE

Much like dieting, exercising every day will eventually become second nature, and in a lot of cases, an addiction. The problem is that there are so many exercise programs, fitness coaches, and marketing hype, that it gets confusing. Every person is going to have different goals, body types and builds, so a workout program specific to YOU is your best bet. This isn't a must but is definitely something that you will eventually want to do.

In my case, I've gone from the far ends of each spectrum on workout and fitness programs from a 275-pound powerlifter to a 190-pound backpack hunter/hiker. In the end, I have landed somewhere in the middle, with my focus more on mountain hunting and endurance than overall strength and an average body weight of 210–215 pounds. That weight keeps me around 11 to 12 percent body fat and allows for decent speed and endurance on the mountain, but also keeps a decent amount of muscle mass on me and a little extra fat when needed.

The workout program I've stuck with to maintain this "condition" is pretty boring, but it works for me. I do have a home gym, but I can do a modified version in any hunting camp or hotel. I focus on push-ups, air squats, abs, and lunges, and I use resistance bands for my arms/shoulders and back. I don't lift overly heavy weights and focus on supersets (going from one exercise to another with moderate rest) and keeping my heart rate at the higher end of fat burning. I also do a lot of backpack cardio and mountain biking, and when the weather stinks, I live on the rower and Hitmill X to keep the cardio going.

As far as the reps/weight go, here's a few examples of a normal superset routine:

- › *Air Squats: 30 squats x 4*
- › *Push-Ups: 30 push-ups x 30*
- › *Curls: 35/40 lbs. x 4 reps x 12*
- › *Crunches: 50 crunches x 4*
- › *Overhead triceps extensions: 45/50 lbs. x 15 reps x 4*

This obviously isn't the only workout I do, or the only muscle groups I focus on, but something like this will kick my butt in short order — and I can do these exercises anywhere I want to.

This is what works for me, but if you're confused in the beginning, then get a good trainer (in person or virtual) to help get you on the right path. A qualified trainer will also help you work around your current physical ailments/injuries to keep you going while also preventing future problems.

For example, Matt Chan (a CrossFit trainer) sat down with me in my office several months ago and basically told me backpack cardio wasn't something I needed anymore. He went on to explain that I had been doing it for so long that my body had adapted to it and I needed to change things up a bit as a result.

Mountain-biking was one of Matt's suggestions, because it's low-impact and would help save whatever I had left in my knees. So, I purchased a bike from my friends over at Yeti, got the necessary gear to get going, and just rode the bike for three months. I was worried I'd get my butt kicked on our first big



Finding yourself in a situation like this is the reward for taking excellent care of your body through diet, nutrition, and exercise.

BACK WHEN I WAS YOUR AGE...

scouting trip. I was very wrong, and I did better hiking with a heavy load than I had in years!

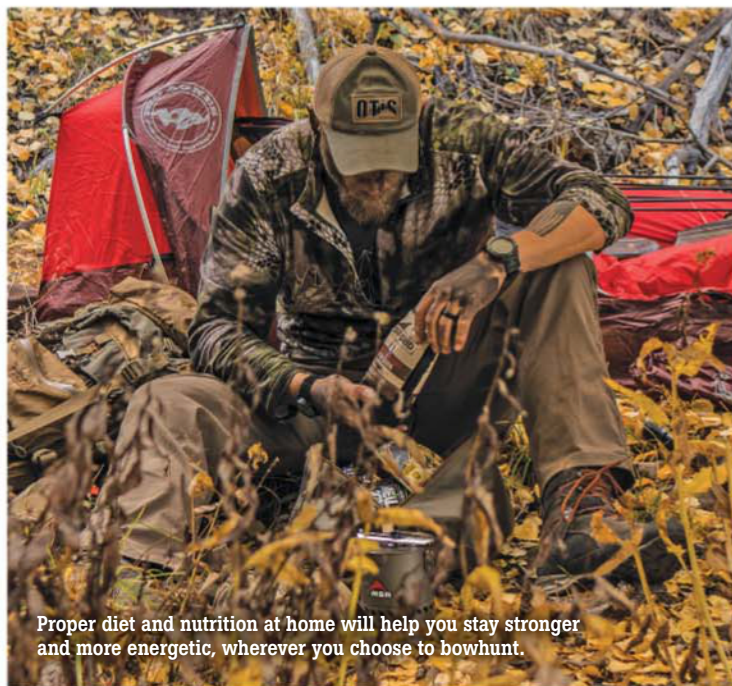
Don't be afraid of working out or let it overwhelm you. Baby steps at first, and then go from there. Like dieting, you will ultimately live a happier and healthier life all the way around.

SUPPLEMENTS

The general idea behind supplements is taking something other than food — amino acids, caffeine, Creatine, protein powders, vitamins/minerals, probiotics, herbals, etc. — to help your performance and physical wellness. At one time, I took about every supplement I could to help my performance and muscle growth. But in the end, I realized a good diet was all



The difficulty of the terrain you plan to hunt should be matched by the intensity of your own physical health and conditioning. Don't let the mountain win!



Proper diet and nutrition at home will help you stay stronger and more energetic, wherever you choose to bowhunt.

I truly needed. I'm not saying some supplements don't work; I'm just saying that as a mountain hunter who doesn't want to stack on unwanted mass, they weren't for me. I just want to get to my destination easier and feel as good on Day 10 as I did on Day One.

While I don't want to go into too much depth on this subject, I do feel the need to address this fact: Since hitting 40, my focus has been on improving my gut health, joints, core strength, and endurance, so my daily supplementation looks much different from what it was when I was 28. Here's an example of what I mean:

2008

- › Test Booster
- › Pre-Workout
- › Creatine
- › Protein Powder — 200 grams/day
- › HGH Booster
- › BCAA
- › Multivitamin

2022

- › Fish Oil
- › Vitamin C
- › Vitamin D
- › Probiotics
- › Turmeric
- › Collagen
- › Glucosamine

Any of these supplements can be beneficial, depending on what you're trying to accomplish. At this point, I'm trying to stay healthy and pain-free, and the supplements I'm taking now have been a huge help.

Water isn't a supplement; it's far more important. The human body is made of 60-percent water, and it is alarming how little water most people drink each day. On average, you should be consuming 80–120 ounces of water each day.

OVERTRAINING & EGO

As far as longevity on the mountain goes, overtraining and ego (internal or external) can do some serious damage to the longevity of your outdoor career. This is a heavily debated topic on social media. I see both sides, and I'm as guilty as anyone for overtraining, lifting heavy, packing out entire animals, and telling people to "suck it up" when they start complaining about pack weight or intense workouts. The other side is, I'm starting to feel pain in overused body parts more often than I'd like.

Would this be happening if I'd trained with less weight and frequency in the gym? Would my knees feel better if I hadn't let my internal ego take over and pack out way more weight than I should have? Or would I be worse off by not hitting the gym and strengthening and conditioning my body? To these questions, I would say that like most things in life, a happy medium is probably the best approach. If you're "that guy," crank it up if it helps push you. I'm not saying train with medium weight or medium intensity, but you should definitely let your body heal and only go full-bore when necessary.

I hope I'm making some sense, as I don't want to be taken out of context, so if the time comes that packing out the entire animal is easier than dragging it, then get to packing. On the same subject, frequently training with 100-pound pack weights is a bad idea. I'm not saying you shouldn't test the waters and see how you do with that much weight, but you are potentially taking years of life off your knees and back, so it should be done in moderation. At this point, I wouldn't change anything I've done when it comes to training because it has been one hell of a ride, both in the gym, field, or wilderness. The question is, will I have the same outlook in 10 years? I'm guessing if my knees and body are so shot that I can no longer hunt, I will be saying something totally different.

So, get your butt in the gym and train like a madman! You want to be strong, fit, and ready, but stay reserved until the time comes when you really have to get after it.

PREVENTIVE MAINTENANCE/ STRETCHING

Like most people I've talked to in my age bracket, I'm horrible about stretching and preventative maintenance — at

least I was for the first 40 years of my life. I now own multiple foam rollers, Vudu floss and massage guns, and I see a massage therapist and dry needle specialist frequently. I'm not sure how much any of this would have helped when I was younger, but the aforementioned have mostly been a lifesaver for me in recent years. Stretching and maintenance isn't always what I'd call "fun," but speaking from personal experience, I will say it's worth adding to your daily routine...and stick with it if it works for you like it has for me.

You can search out a lot of info about the items I've listed, specific stretches for specific issues, and which exercises to do for combating current problems. I don't want to go into too much detail with this as I'm not remotely qualified, but I would suggest, especially as you get older, finding someone who is, and they will most certainly help you out in many ways.

SUMMARY

As I type this article, I'm sitting at a table in West Texas with aoudad and mule deer hunters I've been guiding. My knees hurt — especially my right one — my back is a little stiff, and both my shoulders are popping a little. I still do my morning workout each day and go as hard as I can on the mountain, but it wouldn't hurt my feelings to have a little less pain at times.

All the physical issues are daily reminders that I've been very blessed to experience some incredible adventures with amazing people. I try to keep that in mind when my body aches a little. **BH**

The author is a survival and backcountry hunting expert who just moved his company, Kifaru International, to Wyoming.

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SKELETAL DEFLECTION & PENETRATION



EVERY BOWHUNTER SHOULD MAKE AN EFFORT TO UNDERSTAND THE BIOLOGY OF THE ANIMALS THEY HUNT.

By Dwight Guynn, Ph.D.



As a retired wildlife biologist who is over a decade past his “use by date,” I’ve dissected hundreds of wild animals — mostly deer or elk size. I’ve studied skeletons and locations of various bones to the point that my friends sometimes benevolently refer to me as a “bonehead.” And, as a lifelong bowhunter, I’ve considered what arrows striking different bones could mean for the hunter involved.

When you read this article, you may think that arrows striking bones is quite common, but except for ribs, that has not been my experience. The infrequent events I describe here occurred over decades of bowhunting.

Of course, an arrow’s angle of flight, kinetic energy, and broadhead type all factor into the equation. The purpose of this article is to help you understand the various potential results when bones are impacted by an arrow.

Ribs

We typically ignore the rib bones because an arrow with even moderate kinetic energy can usually penetrate a rib or slide between them with minimal effort and deflection. In addition, on a broadside shot, the ribs cover the vitals, and avoiding them just isn’t practical.

The only time ribs deflect an arrow is when the shot angle is extreme. For example, while hunting elk in Colorado, I shot at a bull that was strongly quartering away. My arrow glanced off the bull’s rib cage, passed under the shoulder blade (scapula), and then exited through the front of the bull. The nonlethal hit served as a reminder to aim farther back on a strongly quartering-away animal.

Spine

A series of vertebrae make up the spine. When an arrow strikes the thoracic vertebrae, comprising the spine over the chest, it can either penetrate or glance off.

On a broadside shot, deflection off the spine typically causes the arrow to travel either below or above the spine. When deflection occurs above the spine, it’s typically a superficial wound.

But what happens if the arrow strikes the blade-like projections (spinous process) at the top of the vertebrae? Such a hit can create shock to the spinal nerves, causing the animal to collapse. While not fatal, the hit has only a short-term effect from which the animal usually recovers quickly. Therefore, my rule of thumb is to always follow up a spine shot with an immediate arrow to the chest.

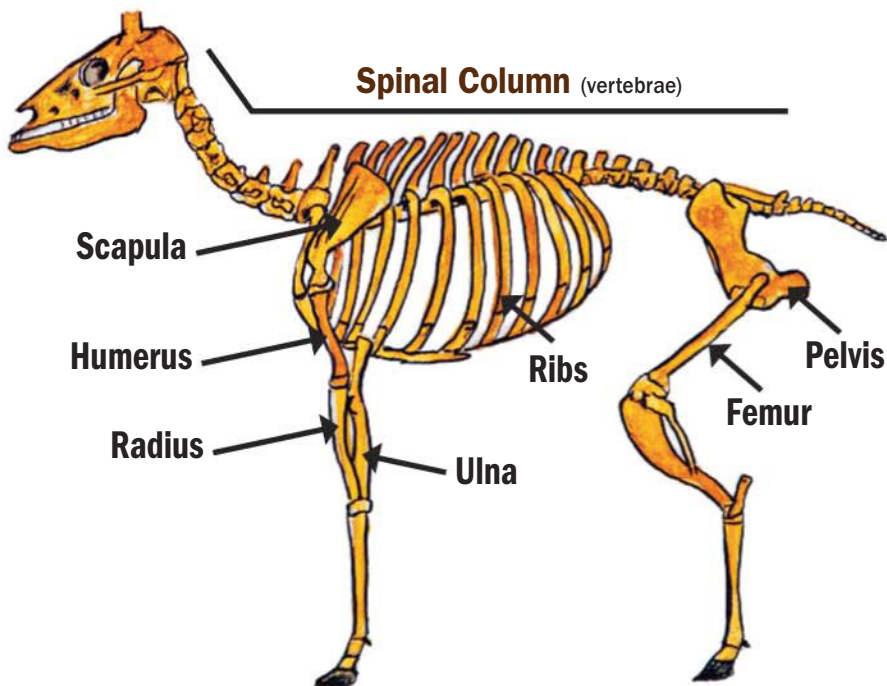
An arrow deflecting downward under the spine can cut the dorsal aorta artery just beneath it — always leading to a quick death. However, if the arrow is low enough to pierce the chest cavity, then even if it misses the lungs and other organs, it may cause breathing problems because the hole in the chest makes it difficult for the diaphragm to function properly. Death may or may not result, depending on whether fat, skin, and/or other tissue helps plug the hole.

If an archer is in a treestand, the shot angle could be straight down. If the arrow deflects off the vertebrae, it could continue through the body of the animal. This often results in a one-lung hit, and a difficult tracking job.

When a broadhead actually penetrates the vertebrae, the effects can range from “stunned” to complete paralysis. It all depends on whether the arrow severs the spinal cord.

The spinal cord is the long bundle of nerves extending from the brain down the entire length of the spine. Severing this bundle of nerves requires the arrow to cut or smash through the sidewall of the vertebral cavity (vertebral foramen), which protects the cord. Severing the spinal cord causes paralysis and a follow-up shot is required.

SKELETAL DEFLECTION & PENETRATION



I once killed a deer that had a scar on its neck. When I dissected the neck, I found a lump of gristle the size of a ping-pong ball surrounding one of the neck vertebrae. Cutting into the gristle, I discovered a broadhead that had entered the vertebrae from the right side; its tip extending through to the left side. The broadhead had pierced the thick vertebrae just under the spinal cord but did not injure the cord.

The body of the vertebrae is filled with a jelly-like compound (nucleus pulposus) consisting of mainly water, as well as a loose network of collagen fibers. Interestingly, it does not contain nerves like the spinal cord. The deer had lost the arrow shaft at some point and healed up, appearing completely healthy.

I've also severed a deer's spinal cord with my own broadhead. It happened near sunset one evening on a hunt in the Appalachian Mountains of Virginia.

I spotted a deer entering a cut cornfield a couple hundred yards away. I stalked toward the deer through thick broomsedge along the cornfield's edge. The deer continued toward me and entered the broomsedge within 25 yards of where I crouched. I drew my recurve and launched an arrow. The deer vanished. Poof! I'd expected to see the deer bound off, whether hit or not.

Confused, I walked toward the spot where the deer had disappeared, where I spotted my arrow sticking straight up out of the tall grass with its nock and fletching looking like a flag on a pole.

Mystified, I crept closer and discovered the deer with my arrow through its neck. I quickly finished the job with an arrow through the buck's chest.

After butchering the animal, I found my arrow had cut through the disc between two vertebrae. A spinal disc is made of cartilage tissue; softer than bone, acting as a cushion between each of the vertebrae. When the arrow passed through the disc, it had severed the spinal cord. I was lucky.

Scapula

An animal's shoulder blade (scapula) lies at the top of its front leg and extends up and back at an angle along the side of the animal. The bone is wide and flat — almost like a slice of pizza. It's thicker than a rib, which makes it more difficult to penetrate. Its position, just above and

at the front of the heart/lung area, makes it a likely bone for the arrow to strike if the shot is only slightly high. I've had three different results from hitting scapulars with my arrows.

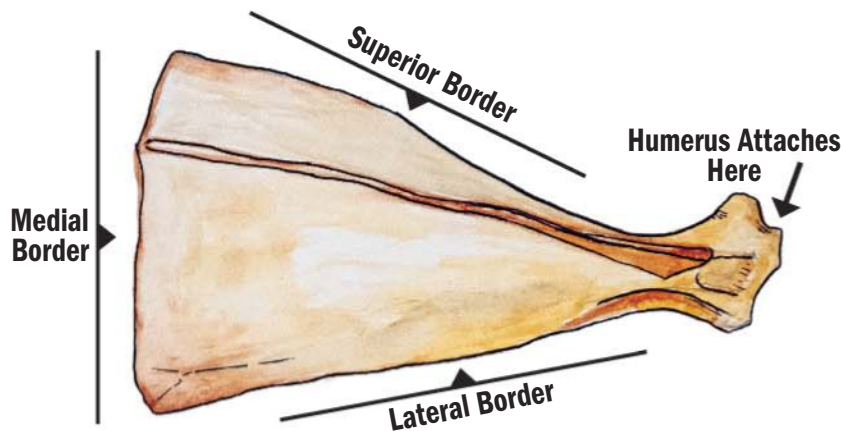
Once, while hunting elk at treeline in Colorado, I called in a 5x5 bull that presented a slightly quartering-to shot at 20 yards. I felt I could make the shot and loosed an arrow. The bull moved at the sound of the shot, and my arrow went wide of the mark and struck the bull squarely on the shoulder blade. I could see my arrow was not fatal and stalked to where I had seen the bull disappear.

By good fortune, I spotted the bull hiding in some spruce trees. I eased forward to where I could see his broadside chest. My next arrow entered the center of his chest, and the bull made his last run only 50 yards before expiring.

While butchering that bull, I examined the results of my first arrow that had struck his scapula. The two-bladed head from my 70-pound compound had penetrated the scapula just enough for the point of the broadhead to stick through about a quarter inch. If I hadn't been lucky enough to get in a second arrow, the bull would most likely have developed a gristle coating around the broadhead and healed completely.

Another experience when I shot a bull elk on the scapula, had much different results. I was hunting in the mountains of western Montana with a 70-pound compound and broadheads with three replaceable blades.

Time and again, the bull approached me through the dense timber to where I could almost shoot between the trees, only to retreat. Finally, I was able to position myself for a shot through an opening in the trees as the bull approached once again. When he walked into this narrow opening, his chest was broadside



Right Scapula (shoulder blade)

and I came to full draw. I cow-called and the bull stopped. I estimated the range at 30 yards and released my arrow. The elk proved to be at 25 yards, and my arrow impacted high, striking the scapula. My arrow appeared to have penetrated about a third of its length into the bull's chest, but I remained unsure of the shot.

The wounded bull ran about 20 yards and stopped. Through the thick timber, I watched him reach around with his mouth and pull the arrow out of his chest. Then he slowly walked away.

Fifteen minutes later, I heard a heavy exhale from the direction in which the bull had retreated. An hour later, I walked in the direction of the sound I'd heard and found the bull dead just 60 yards from where he'd been hit.

When breaking down this bull, I found that my arrow had indeed penetrated his chest and pierced the near lung. The bull had broken off the broadhead when he extracted my shaft, and the broadhead had remained in the chest cavity.

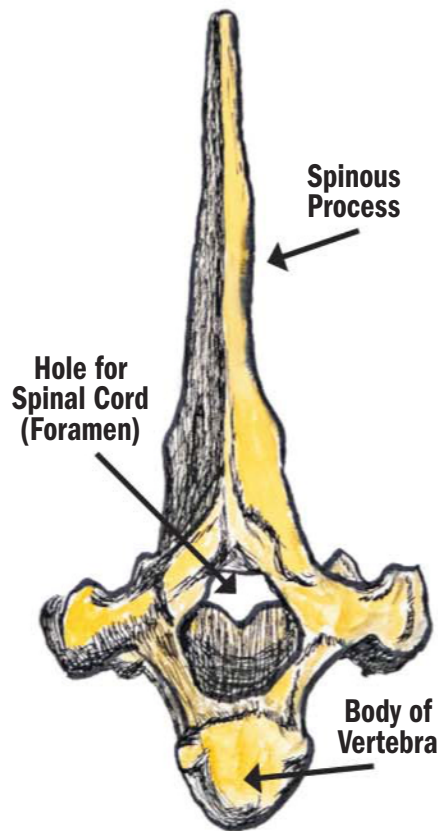
Why was the result of this shot so different from the elk previously described? I can only conclude that the arrow shaft was a factor, as well as the greater efficiency of my compound bow. The first

elk was taken in a year when compounds were new and in their early stages of refinement. The second bull was taken after more than 20 years of improvements in compound-bow efficiency.

The first elk was shot with a 2219 aluminum shaft (read fat arrow). The second elk was taken with a slim A/C/C (aluminum-carbon composite) shaft; a tiny bit smaller in diameter than the broadhead's ferrule. Once the broadhead on the slim arrow had penetrated the scapula, the shaft had a sufficiently large enough hole through which to slide.

My most puzzling experience with an arrow striking the scapula occurred this past hunting season with a whitetail deer. I sat perched in a cottonwood tree with a doe tag in my pocket and watched a single doe approach like she had read the script. At 15 yards, I drew and mouth-bleated to stop her. She stood ever so slightly quartering-to me. Since I sat high above the doe, I put my sight pin a little high on the deer's chest, near the scapula.

At the shot, the deer spun and bolted back the way she had come. Feeling good about my shot, I waited only a few minutes before climbing down. I found my arrow sticking in the ground where it



Vertebra (frontal view)

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I killed this nice whitetail buck with a double-lung shot through his ribs.

had passed completely through the doe, and I noticed it had what looked like rumen contents on it instead of bright-red, foamy blood. Puzzled, I sniffed the shaft and confirmed it was indeed covered with rumen content.

Following the trail on which the deer fled, I found a few drops of blood at first,

then nothing for about 200 yards. Fortunately, the deer had expired within the next 50 yards. I remained puzzled. How could such a seemingly perfect shot, at such close range, produce these results?

Further inspection of the deer revealed that my arrow had entered exactly where I had aimed but had struck

the back edge (medial border) of the scapula and deflected back and down, where it passed through one lung, the liver, and the rumen, before exiting low on the stomach. The moral of these three stories is this: You just never know what will happen if you accidentally hit the scapula!

Front Leg

Late one morning in one of Montana's high-mountain basins, I had several close encounters with bull elk but had been unable to get a shot. I continued to stalk around the basin, periodically bugling. To my surprise, a bull answered from about 200 yards at midday. I set up quickly and nocked an arrow.

After only moments, the bull came in on a steady walk. Due to the open cover, I couldn't draw my bow without him seeing me. He finally stopped, facing me at 10 yards. The staring contest lasted only moments before the bull bolted back the way from which he'd come. I jerked the string back on my bow and gave a cow-call that stopped him — only problem was he stopped behind a fir tree.

The bull bugled and then walked into the open, where he stood broadside at what I judged to be 20 yards. I put my 20-yard pin on the crease behind his shoulder and sent my arrow on its way. The impact looked good, but maybe a little low. The bull spun and ran downhill.

I waited 45 minutes before taking up the blood trail. The arrow had not exited the bull on the offside, and I couldn't see it sticking out the near side of the animal as it ran off. I was mystified but realized that sometimes it's hard to tell what you saw at the peak moment of excitement. I followed a small but steady trail of blood drops for 60 yards, where I found the bull dead.

Examining the bull, I discovered that my shot had indeed been low, and had struck the leg joint at the top of the radius and ulna. This joint extends up over the bottom of the chest front. My arrow had deflected upward and penetrated the chest, piercing both lungs before finally lodging completely inside the bull's chest cavity.

Hits on the front leg of deer and elk that are below the chest usually result in a superficial wound. Sometimes the leg is broken, and the wounded animal may recover. Severing an artery in the front leg can result in death, but it usually means a spotty blood trail and extremely difficult recoveries.

Rear Leg

On another occasion, a friend of mine shot at a sharply quartering-away deer and hit it in the rear leg. While the femoral artery traverses the rear leg, my friend had missed this major artery. If he had cut this, the deer would have tipped over in very short order.

The arrow made a loud crack upon impact, indicating a bone strike, and the deer ran into nearby brush. After waiting an hour, we were able to follow the sparse blood sign and finish the animal with a second arrow. My friend's initial shot had struck the deer's upper rear leg bone (femur), breaking it. The deer traveled only a short distance before bedded. We were lucky in recovering it.

While severing the femoral artery is quickly fatal and almost always results in massive blood trails, sometimes hits occur in the large muscles of the hindquarter. These can create significant blood loss and impair an animal's ability to travel.

I once dumped the string on a pronghorn that lunged forward at my shot. My arrow struck him at the back of the hindquarter, making a large cut. The antelope ran about a hundred yards and then bedded. I watched him for some time, but his head remained erect.

Finally, I approached the animal and it limped away. I pursued it at a walk for several hundred yards before it bedded again, at which point I was able to slip close enough to administer the coup de grâce. While arrows striking the rear leg can lead to death with just large cuts to major muscles, immediate pursuit is recommended to prevent blood-clotting and the animal's escaping.

Summary

Occasionally, striking either a front or back leg with your arrow works. Obviously, it should be avoided if possible. The same can be said for all other bones, except the ribs. While we can't always make the perfect shot, it helps to know the location of the scapula and spine to avoid them. When you do strike bones, understanding the potential outcomes can help you in knowing what to do next. At times like these, knowledge of the skeleton and the different effects of striking various bones can be critical. Sometimes it really does pay to be a "bonehead!" **BH**

The author has a Ph.D. in wildlife management and has spent 30 years working in the wildlife profession. He has been an archer



My arrow entered this doe perfectly but exited low on the offside due to my arrow deflecting off the scapula.

since the age of five, when his grandfather made hickory bows for him.

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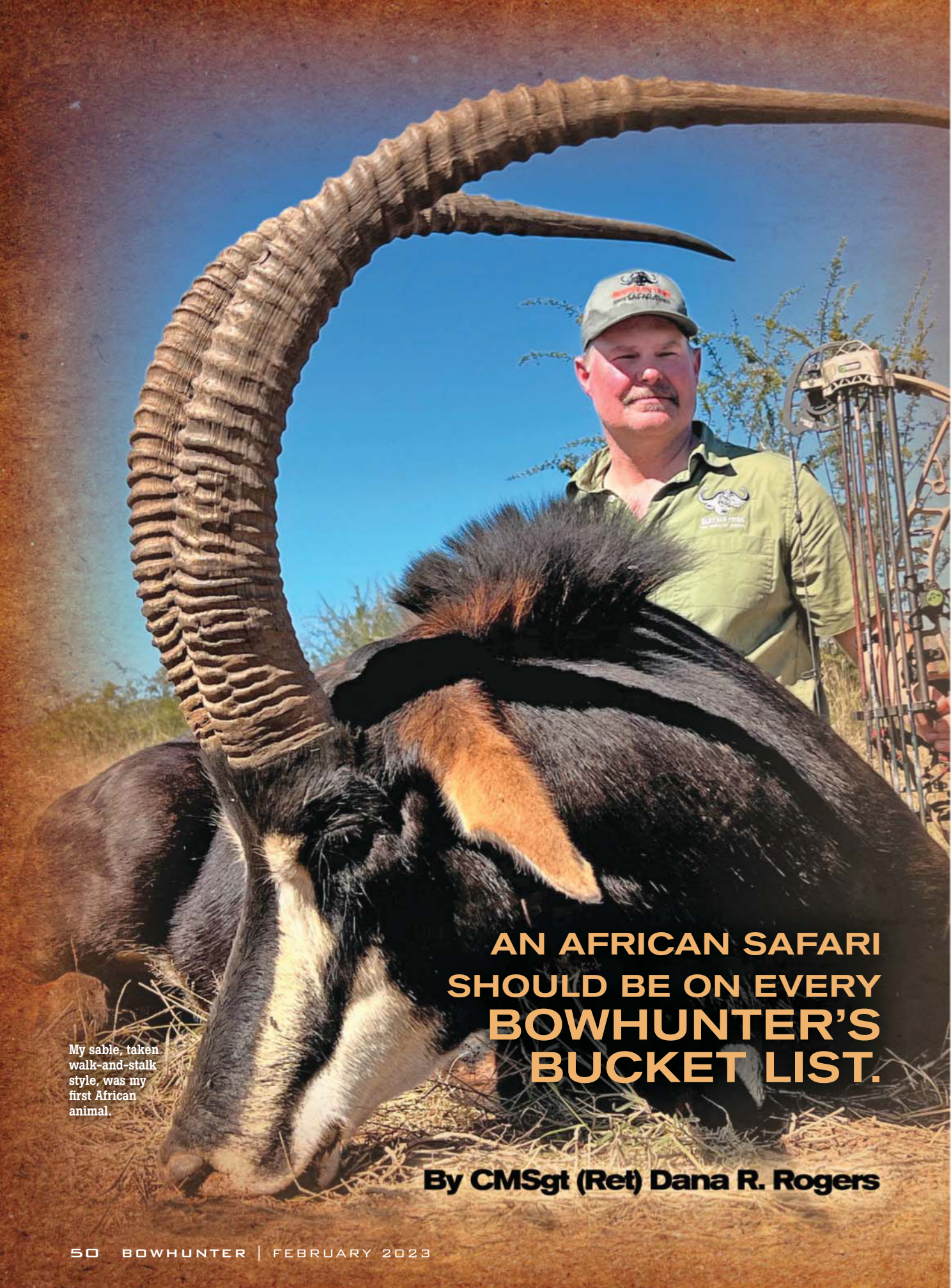


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My sable, taken walk-and-stalk style, was my first African animal.

AN AFRICAN SAFARI SHOULD BE ON EVERY BOWHUNTER'S BUCKET LIST.

By CMSgt (Ret) Dana R. Rogers



ADVENTURE AWAITS IN AFRICA

THE CAPE BUFFALO wasn't looking at me; he was looking through me. After a long day of travel and more than a half-dozen stalks, it was getting dark as I moved out into the opening. He caught my movement and raised his head from the water. He was huge — perhaps close to 48 inches. I ranged him at 52 yards, but I was not about to risk taking that shot as darkness fell on the bushveld. The scene was epic, however, and it permanently burned a memory into the recesses of my brain. I never saw that old dugaboy again, but as my first African safari ended, I knew I'd return.

I've been blessed to hunt all over the Western U.S., much of Canada, and Alaska in my 52 years. My interest in Africa was always there; I just never found the right situation to travel to the Dark Continent. After retiring from the U.S. Air Force after more than 27 years of service, I set several bucket-list goals for myself. When COVID crushed the African safari market, it left many operators struggling, which made a trip to Africa much more affordable.

After much research and planning, I made arrangements to travel to South Africa in late May/early June 2022. I had the opportunity to hunt on several different concessions and with a handful of different Professional Hunters (PHs), doing research for future trips and adventures.

My good friend and fellow South Dakota Bowhunters board member, Ryan Biel, also made the journey to experience Africa. On our first afternoon's hunt, Ryan was able to harvest a beautiful impala ram. A few days later, I managed to take a gorgeous sable bull. It was quite the adventure, and we traveled to many different concessions and split our 10 days between three different safari camps. Heavy rains in early May kept the bush green and laden with far more cover than normal. As a result, we spent most of our time spotting and stalking animals.

Ryan and I managed to take a few more species by the midway point of our safari. Ryan made excellent shots on a great blue wildebeest and a nice gemsbok. I had to learn a few hard-won lessons: African animals are tough, and the habitat in which they live is full of surprises. While I had no reservations about slipping an arrow through a few stems of grass back home in South Dakota, don't try that in Africa!

While stalking my sable bull, I tried two shots that deflected sharply off the stouter African grasses and caused a long tracking job and a far less satisfying end-

ing to retrieve the bull. I also had to learn that aiming straight up the leg and low means just that. I wound up hitting my blue wildebeest bull straight up the leg, but midbody. We eventually got him, but my arrow placement was a good four inches higher than it should have been.

Ryan and I certainly experienced several exciting moments. In our last camp, he and PH Adriaan Brits noticed a black mamba on the windowsill of their chalet. When they went outside to inspect him, the mamba dropped to the ground and decided to race right through the open door they'd just exited. Needless to say, they decided to move chalets and bunked at the far end of camp the remainder of that stay.

If you are thinking of taking the leap and making a trip to Africa, there are a few things you need to keep in mind. If you've traveled outside the U.S., flying to South Africa isn't a big deal. But a bowhunter does need to understand things are different overseas. You'll need a passport, and the flights from the U.S. will likely take between 24 and 48 hours, depending on layovers and how much you are willing to spend. I traveled through Denver and then Frankfurt, Germany, before finally landing in Johannesburg. Ryan went through Minneapolis and then Paris, France, before arriving a few hours after I did.

Traveling with a bow isn't as difficult as with firearms, but be advised that inspections and "shakedowns" from Customs agents and local law enforcement can and do happen occasionally — especially to those travelers who are uninformed or appear vulnerable. Ryan had his bow case taken to an outside Customs inspector who thought his case contained a firearm, which cost us an extra hour. While I was just about to leave the international area, a local Joburg police officer pulled me aside and then attempted to get a little "tip" out of me. Once I informed him the cases were bows and not firearms, and that I had a local South African waiting for me just outside, the officer backed off and I continued on my way without being fleeced.

A few other lessons I learned the hard way in-country dealt with the food, water, E. coli, and lost hunting days. The chefs at the concessions were great and the food was delicious. But it's not America, and the intestinal tolerances of people vary greatly.

I love rare meat and runny eggs — bad move on my part! We also drank many beverages with ice. Bottled water should be the only water you consume, even when brushing your teeth. It was likely through one of these



Here, PH Adriaan Brits and I are discussing my options for a follow-up stalk on my sable.



Ryan took this nice impala ram just hours after arriving in camp the first afternoon.



Ryan took this solid blue wildebeest.

self-inflicted mistakes that I came down with a very nasty bug halfway through our safari. I tried to tough it out, but after two days of massive fluid loss and not being able to keep much down, I was taken to the local Thabazimbi clinic. The doctor there left me speechless when he told me about the strong *E. coli* strains prevalent in the area. He also suggested that even when drinking bottled water, that a small amount of whisky should be added.

I lost a few days of valuable hunting time and learned some hard lessons. Even while quite sick, Adriaan managed to put me on a beautiful gemsbok. We slipped through the thornbush, I made a perfect shot, and the bull made a quick death sprint of only about 70 yards.

Once I started to recover from the bug, Adriaan, Ryan, and I traveled to a distant concession. Once again, we engaged with a few different PHs who operated those properties. There we learned another valuable lesson that all traveling hunters need to understand: There really are no rules or game laws on private ranches in Africa. The game is considered the property of the ranchers, and what we American bowhunters hold as ethical values are not always firmly adhered to there. Some PHs will absolutely pressure you to do things most of us would consider unethical, just to sell another animal.

On more than one occasion, Ryan and I had to let the new PHs know that under no circumstances would we be shooting from a vehicle or after dark, or just putting an arrow into an animal so it could later be finished off with a rifle. Once our ground rules were firmly established, everything was fine. It's just something American sportsmen and women need to be aware of.

We had some great opportunities and saw dozens of species on most of the concessions. Ryan took another nice im-

pala and a great blesbok, while I remained focused on trying to kill a Cape buffalo.

We spent several days glassing from high hills trying to locate groups of bulls. Although most of the hunting in South Africa is done on high-fenced properties, I assure you the animals living on these large concessions are not tame.

With the bush being so thick and green, we often had difficulty locating animals — even after glassing for long periods of time from a distance. Over the last three days, I went on at least 18 stalks. Crawling to within 50–100 yards of a herd of Cape buffalo is exhilarating. On each occasion, something went wrong in the closing moments. The wind would switch or the buffalo would catch us moving, at which point the herd would thunder off in a huge cloud of dust, leaving me disappointed but smiling. I promised myself everything had to be just right for me to even consider releasing an arrow at one of the most dangerous critters on the planet.

African hunting is often about targets of opportunity. Both Ryan and I had personal lists of species we wanted to target. We knew the trophy fees for each animal, and we kept those dollar amounts in mind as we looked over opportunities.

Our PH, Adriaan, often said, “Be ready to take what the bush gives you.” That’s definitely good advice. We would often set out looking for one species, only to find ourselves with a great opportunity at something else. For example, both Ryan and I had kudu very high on our priority lists. But with the extremely thick bush and ample moisture, the kudu weren’t coming to our blind setups. Finding a mature bull to stalk proved nearly impossible during our 10-day safari.

Taking what the bush gives you was at the forefront of my mind as we looked over new country and species. The kudu weren’t cooperating, but we saw several beautiful nyala bulls.



Here's a group of zebra in the bushveld.



Quite sick with E.coli, I still managed to get a perfect arrow into this representative gemsbok.



Ryan's gemsbok was taken walk-and-stalk.



This beautiful nyala provided me with a good stalking opportunity.

A few times, I tried to get our PHs to let me go after them, but they just weren't quite mature enough for the ranch's standards. What the hunters take on a property reflects on that PH and ranch, so even though Ryan and I aren't "trophy hunters" in the highest sense of the word, we still had to abide by the minimum-size standards set forth by our PHs.

One day, while we were driving the bakkie (pickup) from one buffalo glassing point to another, we rounded a bend and saw a gorgeous nyala browsing next to a water tank. As we continued to drive by the tank, we made a quick plan for me to stalk the nyala.

A small amount of brush and the above-ground water tank would hopefully provide me with enough cover to slowly slip within bow range of the nyala. As I closed to 32 yards, the bull lifted his head and the stare-down commenced.

After a solid three minutes, the nyala finally turned to walk around some brush. Luckily for me, that was the only path of exit that would present me with a clear shot.

As the bull came clear of the thornbush, I drew and settled my pin on his vitals in one fluid motion. In an instant, my arrow zipped through the bull like a hot knife through butter. The long-maned, spiral-horned antelope then proceeded to dash a short 50 yards. It was over in seconds, and I'd just taken what I consider to be one of the most beautiful game animals in the world.

The morning before Ryan and I were to drive back to Johannesburg and our departure for home, Adriaan suggested we hunt for just a few more hours. They really wanted to get us another animal, and they especially wanted to see me get another crack at the elusive Cape buffalo.

After a few failed stalks, we were traveling to the main

ranch house when one of the trackers spotted a group of buffalo. We made one last-ditch effort, and I finally got to within a range I was willing to shoot.

The bull was a shade over 30 yards and in some very thick brush. I slid to the side and was just about to draw my Hoyt, when I noticed a limb across his vitals. I tried maneuvering to a spot where I would have a clear path to the bull's vitals, but just as I was about to draw, the herd erupted from the thicket and bounded off in a huge cloud of dust. It just wasn't meant to be.

We spent 12 days on six different concessions and with several different PHs. Africa is an amazing place, and the opportunities and adventure are worth the price of admission! In the end, Ryan and I learned a lot, and both of us had a great time. I am planning a 2023 return trip as we speak, and I'm sure that safari won't be my last. If you'd like to join me, along with Adriaan Brits at Bowhunter Safaris South Africa, I'd be happy to help you with the details. **BH**

The author is a freelance writer and retired CMSgt from Hill City, SD. He and Ryan Biel have served on the board of directors of the South Dakota Bowhunters Inc. for nearly a decade. If you are interested in a South African bowhunting adventure, contact him at dana.rogers.1@hotmail.com.

Author's Notes: My equipment on this hunt included a 70-pound Hoyt Ventum Pro, IQ Bowsight, QAD Ultrarest, TruFire release aid; Sirius Apollo 250 arrows and single-bevel Tuffhead broadheads, and Leupold optics with T&K Hunting's bino harness and bow sling.

African game will require a beeper setup in the opinion of most I queried. My Cape buffalo setup was 902 grains, while my plains-game shafts were 690 grains.

UNDER PRESSURE

**HUNTING IS MORE ENJOYABLE WHEN YOU STOP STRESSING
ABOUT KILLING AND FOCUS ON THE ADVENTURE.**

BY ZACH BOWHAY

Around 15 years ago, I saw the writing on the wall that future hunts in far-off places were going to get increasingly tougher to come by due to supply versus demand for tags. Because of this, I started building points and applying for more states across the West and beyond than I'm willing to admit to. Since that time, a lot has changed in the tag game, and although I could go on and on about my ever-growing dislike for point systems and the like, I will save that for another time. Instead, I want to share with you how I am starting to reap the rewards of all my research, time, and money spent when it comes to drawing tags here and there.

As happy as I am that I have reached this point and am getting to hunt more often instead of just banking points, drawing these tags comes with a lot of pressure. The pressure being to not only fill the tag that I have waited so long for,

but to fill that tag with an animal worthy of all the resources I've spent to acquire said tag.

Before you crucify me for that last statement, let me say that any animal taken deserves reverence for ending its life, but if all I wanted to do was just shoot any animal, I would simply hunt within a few miles of my home here in Idaho where I don't need preference points or expensive out-of-state license fees. This pressure I feel on these hunts comes from many places: friends, family, acquaintances, the dreaded social media, and largely from myself, to be honest.

Over the past few years, I have tried hard to manage this pressure, and as I age and mature, to put things into perspective. What follows are some of the thoughts and feelings I have gone through in this process.

My Biggest Test

In the spring of 2021, I decided I was going to burn my Wyoming points that I had been building for more than a decade. Wyoming is a state I love to hunt, and drawing an elk tag there has been a dream of mine for a very long time. So, when I finally drew a tag, I knew the hunt should be a very good one, with a better-than-average opportunity to kill a great bull. I also knew that drawing this tag could very possibly be my only hunt in a top Wyoming unit in my lifetime.

The hunt started off amazing, with lots of action. As a matter of fact, the elk were so vocal, there were days I couldn't even enjoy camp because bulls would start bugling midday and draw me away from my camp chair — and my midday nap.

I realize now that success isn't only measured by an animal on the ground.



I accompanied my brother, Jeremy, on his Utah bison hunt, where we both truly just took it all in on this once-in-a-lifetime adventure.

After passing up a few small and mid-sized bulls early in the hunt, my buddy Matt called a nice six-point bull right into my lap. As I watched the bull walk by me at 13 yards, I started to have second thoughts about my decision. Deep down though, I knew that wasn't the bull I came to Wyoming for. Still, for the next several days as the rut continued to heat up and herd bulls became increasingly more difficult to lure away from their harems, my internal strife over passing up that six-point only intensified.



It's pretty cool to be exploring and chasing elk where those before us carved out a living. Wyoming gave me a lot of memories, just not a bull elk for my wall.

A few days later, my brother and Matt had to head home for work obligations, and I was left alone in Wyoming to chase elk. The next day was bitter cold, and with a fresh blanket of snow on the ground and bulls screaming, it was one of the most magical days of elk hunting I have ever experienced.

As I climbed the mountain through a fresh blanket of snow toward the bugling bulls above me, I noticed the stress was starting to leave me. I called in and passed on a nice, young six-point bull. An hour later, I called-in that same bull and passed him again.

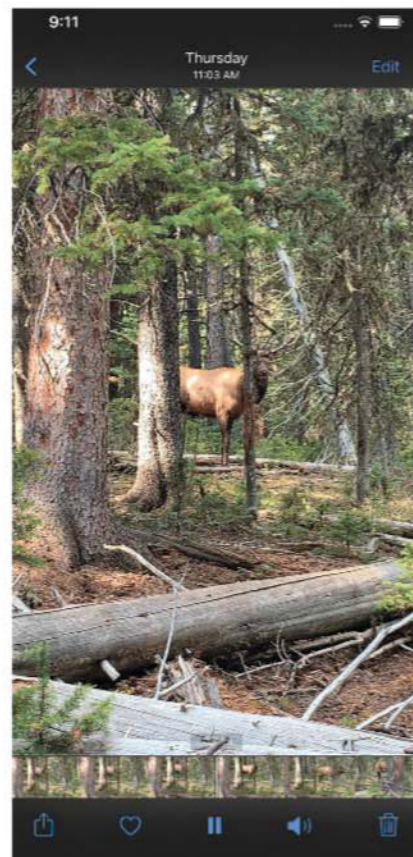
A quarter-mile later, I had several more subpar bulls pass by within bow range, but below me I could hear cows and what I believed to be a big herd bull. I worked in silently toward his bugles and finally found myself looking at him through the underbrush at 60 yards.

I recognized him as the awesome double-sword bull I had been after, and when he went behind a tree, I slithered closer. I knew I was getting close because I could hear him walking around. Suddenly, I jumped a cow and the herd bolted. I stopped the now quartering-away bull at 45 yards, and although I wished this tale ended differently, it didn't, because I flat blew the shot and the bull and his cows ran off and soon continued with their rutting festivities.

As I sat there in disbelief of what had just happened, I started to take it all in. It had been a beautiful morning with incredible elk hunting, and I had got within bow range of the caliber bull I'd

come to Wyoming for. It was right then that I realized that as much as I wanted to kill an elk, I didn't "have" to kill an elk to consider the hunt a success. Full disclosure here: I have no desire to fall into a group of guys who never shoots anything besides pictures of sunsets. I am lucky to fall into a group who has been on dozens of hunts for elk and other species over the years, and more of them have been successful than unsuccessful. I am not saying this to come across as a braggart, but to inform you that this is coming from a place where I am gaining perspective rather than from the jaded view of a guy who never kills anything. It was just refreshing to realize that was the kind of bull I was after on this hunt, and I wanted to kill one like that or go home empty-handed, knowing I tried my best to fulfill that goal.

From that point on, I enjoyed that hunt immensely. The following day, I got in on another great bull and had my bow drawn and needed him to take one more step, but he winded me and bolted. A couple days later, I snuck in and nearly got a shot at two big bulls as they were in the middle of a huge fight. These encounters kept happening, and I experienced elk hunting like never before. As



Being willing to pass up opportunities makes the hunt much more enjoyable as you get to witness more up-close action.



One of the biggest benefits of hunting is time spent with friends and family, and this time should be cherished.

good as the hunting was, I figured there was no chance I would leave without killing a bull. Still, after 18 days of elk hunting, I left Wyoming without a bull but with a very satisfied feeling for the hunt I had and how I had done. I guess this maturity thing might be getting to me after all.

Social Media Monster

I will be the first to admit that I spend too much time on social media, and hunting season can be a crazy time online. Most of my friends and followers are hunters, and it seems that every time you hit service and check your phone, someone has killed another monster buck or bull.

It's easy to get caught up in this and start doubting yourself and your skills. Honestly, though, everyone is in a different situation, hunting different areas with different conditions. I have several friends who really struggle with everyone they "know" posting kill pics. I learned a long time ago that going down that rabbit hole isn't productive. Instead, I just tell them congrats and get back to work on the task at hand.

Money Is Irrelevant

No, I am not a man with deep pockets, but I often hear things like, "That's an expensive tag, you have to kill one." To this I say, if you're worried about the money, you shouldn't be going on these hunts anyway. Once the tag is bought and I am on the trip, I don't worry about the money. I refuse to let the money I spent be my motivation for why I "have" to kill an animal. In my opinion, that degrades the entire experience and really misses the point of the adventure. Instead, I focus on enjoying the mountains

and the time I get to spend there — both alone and with friends and family.

Let It Go

Take my Wyoming hunt, for example. Once I forgot about the pressure and just started hunting for the bull I wanted instead of being so focused on having to kill an elk, it was just more enjoyable. Being in the middle of animals and co-existing with them is a blast. This happens much more often when you aren't trying to kill every single bull or buck in bow range. It's amazing when you are in a herd, and you get to watch how they interact with one another for an extended period of time because you don't mess it up by firing an arrow.

Another great thing is getting to enjoy the hunting that often comes with hard draws or once-in-a-lifetime tags. In 2019, my brother drew a coveted Utah Henry Mountains bison tag. This is a once-in-a-lifetime draw, meaning even if you don't kill a bull, this is your only tag. Fortunately, he killed a great bull with two hours to spare on a 10-day hunt, but the whole time we were in awe of just getting to be there, and I felt blessed to be a part of it. If we had been so singularly focused on having to kill a bison, it would have greatly taken away from this amazing experience.

You also often experience much better hunting than you do in OTC or general areas. This allows you to hunt differently and more effectively than you would in areas with high hunting pressure. Use this to your advantage, hunt smart and hard, but enjoy the experience

and don't let the pressure to kill erode your experience.

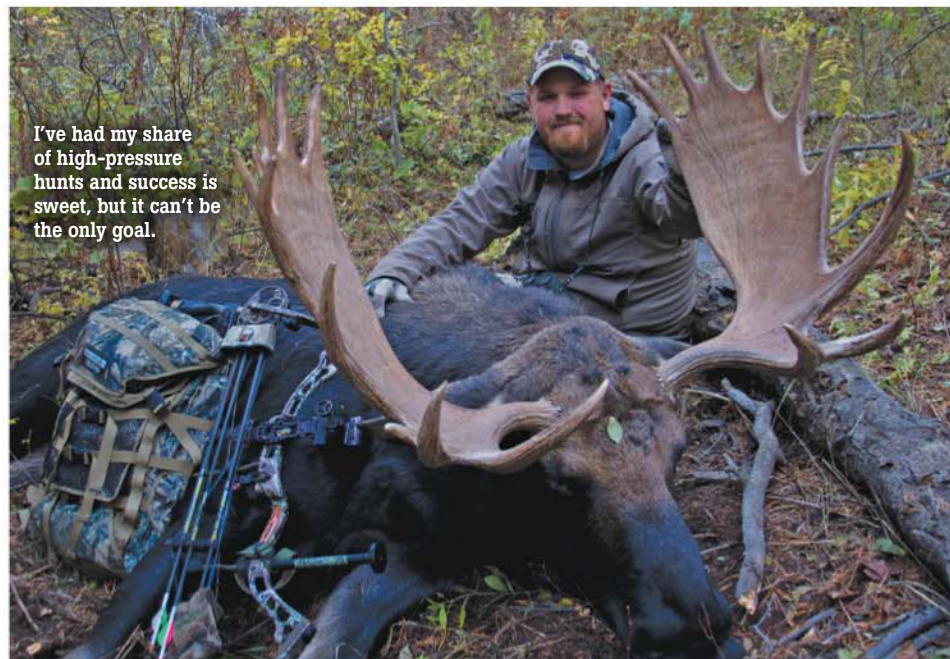
Perspective

Now in my early 40s, I am hopefully a long way from riding off into the sunset. I plan to enjoy many more hunts in the future. I tend to hunt alone these days, and I have plenty of time to think about what really drives me and why I do the hunts I do. I swear when I was younger, I learned more about elk on every hunt. Nowadays, it seems I just learn more about myself. I've realized that every generation will talk about the "good old days." I have seen my share of great hunting, and I am thankful for all those experiences.

I also realize that things change and that to continue hunting I have to change my perspective on some things and that the days of unlimited tags, low hunting pressure, and screaming bulls on every ridge likely isn't coming back. The only time I will probably ever experience this going forward is when I draw these special tags in special places. So, when I do get these opportunities, I can't let the pressure from outside — and within — spoil my experience. Instead, I am going to live it up, give it my best, and drink up every minute. **BH**

The author is an avid hunter who lives in Idaho with his wife and kids.

Author's Note: My equipment includes a PSE EVO XF bow, Option sight and Quivalizer, Hamskea Epsilon rest, and KUIU clothing and packs.



I've had my share of high-pressure hunts and success is sweet, but it can't be the only goal.



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BRIAN FORTENBAUGH | ASSISTANT EDITOR



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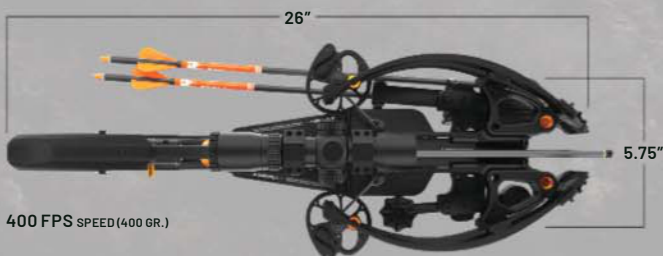
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Using a bow that doesn't fit you well — either in draw length and/or draw weight — can cause a lot of discomfort at full draw.

In the end, your confidence will reignite, and you can enter next season with a whole new outlook. Here are five things I do during the off-season to get my shooting — and mindset — back on track.

Examine Your Weakness. No training plan is complete without first analyzing what usually goes wrong when you miss a shot. Be honest about it. Is it due to basic excitement and buck fever, or do you punch the trigger every time you shoot under pressure, such as when friends are watching you shoot? If it's the latter, you'll need to overhaul your release technique. The best way to do this is with a different tool. I highly recommend trying a hinge release with a safety. I've used the T.R.U. Ball Sweet Spot and Carter Honey with excellent results, even when hunting. Give it a try.

Dial-In The Bow. Sometimes, missing comes down to being uncomfortable at full draw. For this reason, be sure you're not over-bowed. Pulling too much draw weight can severely tax your muscles and make it harder to relax as you go from the harsh draw cycle to full letoff. If you can't sit in a chair and smoothly come to full draw while keeping your pin on a 20-inch circle, you're pulling too much weight. Back it down. The same goes for your draw length. Be sure your draw elbow is more or less in line with the arrow (not above or below it, and not to the left or right). Ask a friend to take pictures of you at full draw, then review the results.



I believe the best way to restructure shooting form is to switch to a hinge release with a safety mechanism.

Blind-Bale Shooting. Once you're feeling good about your new release and bow adjustments, then it's time to ingrain proper shooting form — all through slow, repetitive action. Get close to the target butt and begin shooting with your eyes closed — feel the sensation of a perfect shot. This type of training builds the correct muscle memory, so when you're under pressure, your subconscious will execute a clean shot for you — just the way it has done time and again. Trust the process, and do it for at least 21 days. As you shoot, be sure to follow a pre-shot sequence. This means establishing a solid shooting stance, nocking the arrow the same way each time, drawing methodically in a smooth fashion, and settling into your anchor.

Reinforce Good Habits. After acquiring the right muscle memory, be sure to protect it by shooting only when you feel strong and focused. Resist the urge to go back to old habits and stay true to your training. Shoot only two or three arrows at a time, focusing heavily on executing each shot to the best of your ability. Never go out of step with your shooting sequence. As you shoot, imagine you're drawing down on a massive buck, and while aiming solidly, let the shot take you by surprise. Keep shooting this way and you'll reach new heights as a shooter.

Practice With Pressure. Once you're feeling good about your shooting — punching the heart out of all your backyard targets — now's the time to test your mettle under real shooting pressure. The best way I've found to do this is to participate in 3-D shoots or indoor target leagues. Both sports can be intense as you shoot in front of people, giving you a sense of how you'll perform when a big buck is in your sights. Remember, embrace the pressure, and trust the shot programming you've worked so hard on over the past several weeks or even months. Once you begin shooting under these conditions, you'll feel yourself "getting over" the confidence slump. You'll also start grinning for opening day, ready to strike with a new level of lethality. Good luck! **BH**

AUTHOR'S PHOTOS

Q AFTER A LONG bowhunting season, my confidence in my shooting has been shaken. What can I do now in the off-season to get it back?

Wyatt F., via e-mail

A I'VE HAD MANY BOWHUNTING seasons with massive blunders and missed shots! The memories of these gross mishaps can quickly get you down and shatter your confidence. However, if you're anything like me, your spirit may be tried but it will never give up. This is the attitude you'll need to restructure your shooting using a systematic process.

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HEART OF ENDURANCE PART NINE

**"THOUGH I AM HURT, I AM NOT SLAIN, I LAY ME DOWN TO
BLEED AWHILE, THEN I'LL RISE AND FIGHT AGAIN."**

—THOMAS BARTON

THE HUNTER is utterly spent; weaker and wearier than ever before. He has no food or water, and no energy remaining to climb back to his camp. His fatigue is absolute. The difficulty of doing even the smallest thing seems insurmountable. He yearns to lay down and sleep forever, but his subconscious determination will not allow it.

He gazes down-canyon and sees a river far below him. *That river reminds me of me*, he thinks. Deceptively calm at a distance, offering no hint of the tumultuous current lying just under the surface.

He can see where the gorge in which he is standing meets a larger drainage, and where that drainage leads to the river. The river, he knows, will eventually lead him to the road back to civilization.

With no load on his back, a lot of luck and a great deal of grit, he might make it to the river and out of the wilderness by midnight. But what then? There is no traffic on the mountain road in the middle of the night, and he still has a deer carcass to attend to.

He also knows there is no cell service for five miles down the road he will reach. His truck is a long uphill hike from where he would reach the road. He weighs a risky, forced march with no provisions against staying out on this frigid night with no tent or sleeping bag.

Although his body is deeply exhausted, his mind has not fully succumbed. It is still racing from the thrill of the encounter with the mule deer buck he has so recently slain — and with the worry of his current situation.

The sun has dipped well below the towering ridgeline to the west, and dark-

ness is overtaking him. In the depths of this deep canyon, it is getting cold — fast! The mountaintops are aglow from the soft light of the recently risen moon. He needs to find shelter quickly.

He has been this cold, hungry, and thirsty before...but never all at once. And never with his bones riddled with pathology and the ever-persistent nausea.

He searches the dark woods with his headlamp and discovers a small hanging bench, upon which stands an ancient spruce tree; its low, expansive branches brushing the ground. Crawling through the spruce boughs, he finds a dry, cave-like space near the trunk that will afford him some protection.

Using a flat stone, he digs a trench in the forest duff several feet from the spruce's trunk. He then pulls the decaying debris to one side and piles it up for later use. *This hole looks eerily like a grave*, he thinks. *Well*, he muses, *if I die here tonight, it will save my family a great deal of time and money on a funeral*.

He dresses in all the clothing he has carried with him, including his raingear. Leaving the shoes on his feet, he empties his pack and puts his legs into it as deeply as possible. He pulls the drawstring tightly around his thighs, cinches the raincoat's hood over his head, and beds

down in the rectangular excavation. Then he rakes the piled needles over his feet and legs first, before doing the same over his torso.

Nestled into this safe space, he contemplates the waning day, and his waning life. He has always felt in control of his destiny, believing the outcome of his life would be at least partially determined by his actions; for you are not truly alive if you do not possess the power to alter the future.

He does not feel the same now. He does not feel fully alive. His future has been savagely wrested from his grasp and set on an unalterable course. He was once active and dynamic. Now he has given himself over to merely living hour by hour.

His disease is like a forest fire that has provided him with no avenue for escape. Terrified and confused, he desperately looks for some type of opening through which to flee. Despite the madness of his panic, he slowly comes to the realization — and then the acceptance — of his fate. There is no escape.

With the misery of chemotherapy and the agony of a bone-marrow transplant, he once raged against his disease and all it brought with it to his body. Most of all, his anger was directed at the abomination of death.

No longer does he rage. For he has come to the consolatory realization that with all of the good fortune he has experienced in life, perhaps he owes the universe a bit of tragedy.

Even with his ailment, he knows he is one of the lucky ones. And that when he draws his final breath, he can take solace in the fact that he truly experienced the best of what life has to offer.

Despite his angst, he is profoundly grateful. This gratitude has converted what he has left into enough.

These deep thoughts, like his heartbeat, are only heard in absolute silence. *The sun has gone down on this day as well as my life*, he thinks.

They say nothing good lasts forever, and he knows that he must soon say goodbye to all he has held sacred.

To be continued... **BH**

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