

REMEMBERING A LEGENDARY BOWHUNTER

P.38



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THE #1 BOWHUNTING MAGAZINE

APRIL/MAY 2023

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TWO WHITETAIL TRIUMPHS

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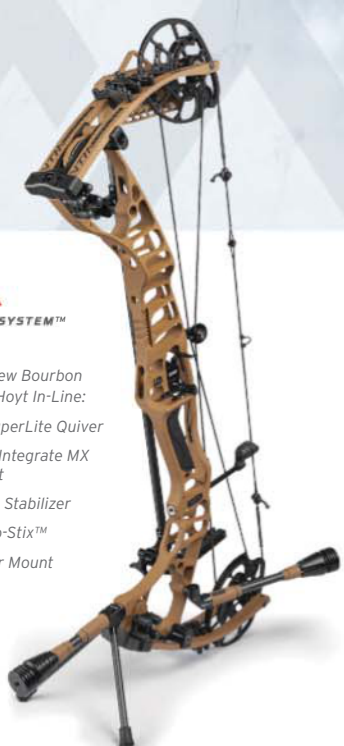
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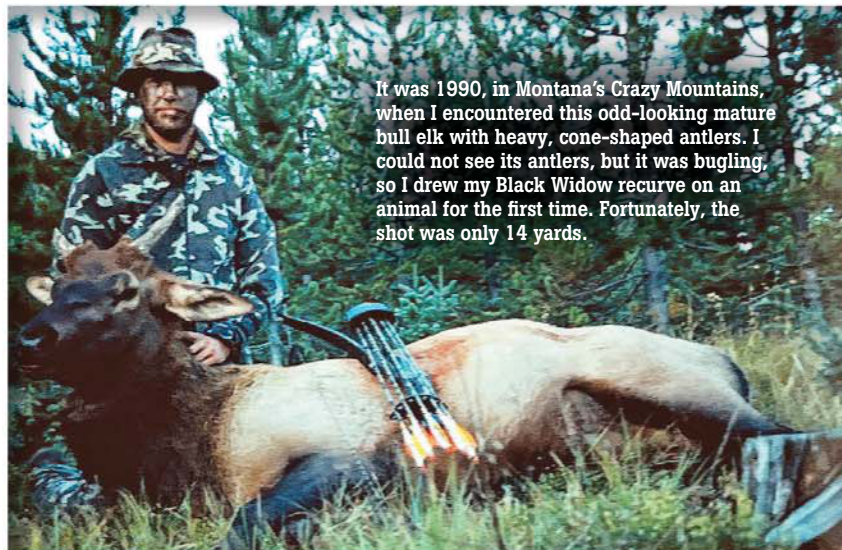
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EDITORIAL

CURT WELLS | EDITOR



It was 1990, in Montana's Crazy Mountains, when I encountered this odd-looking mature bull elk with heavy, cone-shaped antlers. I could not see its antlers, but it was bugling, so I drew my Black Widow recurve on an animal for the first time. Fortunately, the shot was only 14 yards.

BOWHUNTING THE HARD WAY

IF YOU HUNT WITH A TRADITIONAL BOW, YOU'RE PLAYING UNDER DIFFERENT RULES THAN THE REST OF US.

THE GREATER CHALLENGE presented by traditional archery is undeniable. The first factor that comes to mind is modest arrow speeds. Today's modern compounds launch hunting arrows at 280 to 300-plus fps, and even with such speeds, we still have problems with quick-reacting game "jumping the string" and altering our shot.

An arrow fired from a traditional bow is at least 100 fps slower — a fact that should put an animal's ability to react to the sound of a bow front and center in the minds of any and all bowhunters who choose to draw down on an animal with a stickbow.

Then there is the stickbow's modest effective range, compared to those who use a compound with sight pins and a release, and feel comfortable shooting at an animal at 50 yards and beyond. Traditional bowhunters think in terms of 30 yards and less — usually much less. This shortcoming, if you will, is a game-changer for many species of game and when the terrain dictates the distance of a shot.

Yet another burden a stickbow hunter must bear, if he/she hopes to become proficient, is the constant, year-round obligation to practice. They must dedicate far more time and effort to practice

than those who shoot compounds with a release, sight pins, and rangefinder.

Physical strength must be maintained as well, as do the callouses on the fingers used to draw the bow. Most importantly though, is fine-tuning the collaboration between the brain, eyes, and the arms that is necessary to complete an accurate, instinctive shot.

From a hunting standpoint, the most significant handicap presented by a stickbow has to do with the most important decision a bowhunter makes when in the presence of game — when to draw the bow. It's what separates stickbows from compounds, and compounds from crossbows.

The timing of the draw is especially critical when your bow doesn't have a letoff and you're holding 55 pounds at full draw instead of 15 pounds. There's almost no room for error when choosing the exact moment to draw a stickbow.

My archery history began with a compound, but for three years — from 1990 to 1992 — I hunted exclusively with a Black Widow recurve. The first animal I ever drew my recurve on was a bull elk, and somehow I made a perfect shot.

During that period, I managed to kill seven animals, one of which was a white-tail that I would not have tagged if not for the quickness of shooting instinctively. However, I also left a number of tags unfilled due to my lack of skill and effective range.

On one occasion, I held off on a 30-yard shot at a big caribou in Quebec, because I thought he would come closer. Instead, he ran off, leaving behind a very dejected budding outdoor writer who went home without a salable story to tell... That one hurt.

I just wasn't very good with my recurve and lost confidence, but I did experience all the challenges of hunting with a traditional bow. That's why I admire those who have consistent success hunting the hard way. Bowhunters like Nathan Andersohn of Colorado, who has completed the archery Super Slam with a longbow, get extra-credit in my eyes. It doesn't get tougher than that!

Every bowhunter must decide to what level of difficulty they want to take their bowhunting efforts. If you're pondering the idea of injecting even more challenge into your bowhunting, we have a couple of great articles for you in this issue.

First, on page 38, you'll discover some inspiration in M.R. James' celebration of the life of G. Fred Asbell, a renowned traditional bowhunter and former Hunting Editor of this publication. Asbell's bowhunting life and his contributions to the sport were exceptional, and motivational to thousands of bowhunters.

Then, on page 42, **Bowhunter** Contributor Joe Blake has some advice for those who think they would like to venture into the world of hunting with a stickbow. Read carefully and heed Joe's advice — especially the section on draw weight. I did not listen back in 1990 when I ordered my Black Widow recurve bow at 64 pounds at my draw length. It was a mistake, and a good example of what happens when you don't listen to your elders. One of those elders that advised me against such a heavy draw weight was, you guessed it, G. Fred Asbell.

Rest in Peace G. Fred. Thanks for showing us how to hunt the hard way. **BH**



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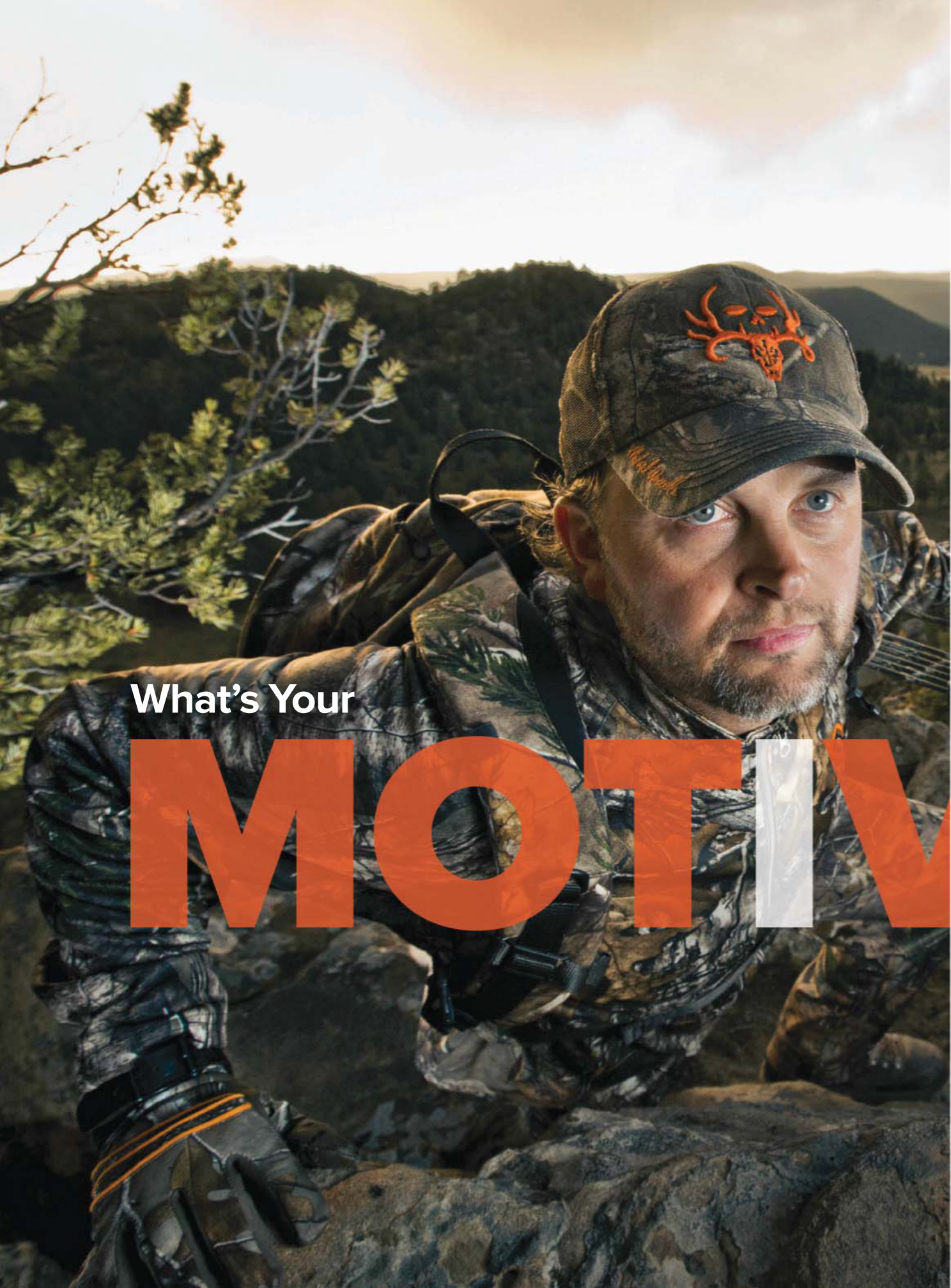
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ON THE TRACK

CHUCK ADAMS



My 2022 Alberta mule deer was a dandy but required 2,000 miles of travel during two roundtrips by vehicle to make it happen.

NEVER GIVE UP

WHEN THINGS SEEM BLEAK, ALL A BOWHUNTER CAN DO IS MAINTAIN A POSITIVE ATTITUDE AND KEEP AT IT.

"ANOTHER 60 MILES," I groaned, as I crossed the U.S. border into Canada. I had been white-knuckle driving across ice and snow for nearly 10 hours, and I was tired.

But the thought of big Alberta mule deer kept me going. My pal and outfitter Duane Nelson was waiting in camp, and we planned to be glassing vast stretches of prairie the next morning.

I enjoyed excellent bowhunts in 2022, yet despite my success, shooting critters last year was unusually difficult.

The 500-mile drive from my home in

Wyoming to southern Alberta seemed like déjà vu — because it was. I had already made the 1,000-mile roundtrip journey just days earlier. Duane's area in southern Alberta only allows November deer hunting four days per week, and I had opted to bowhunt rutting muleys during the November firearms season.

Wednesday through Saturday in ear-

ly November went by without even one Pope and Young buck to be found. The mating season seemed slow to start, and bucks were smaller than normal. With plenty of office work to do, I drove home the following Sunday and hit the road for Canada again two days later. Biden's gas hike did not help.

Just before dark on Day Five, Duane and I found a solid 165-inch 5x5 chasing does. Next morning, I stalked the deer and made a nifty 35-yard shot. I did not relish the 500-mile return trip over snow-covered roads, but I had my 2,000-mile mule deer.

Earlier in the year, I bowhunted pronghorns in my home state. My normally productive antelope spots had been hammered by hemorrhagic fever the previous fall, and at least half the pronghorn population had died — and almost every mature trophy buck was history.

After several long days of glassing, I began to lose hope. A few juvenile bucks with tiny horns were chasing does — females that would normally have been dominated by impressive bucks. For me, the fun of pronghorn hunting is stalking males with tall and massive headgear — 2022 was not the year for that.

I was hiking one afternoon, when a lone buck stepped out of a draw. Given what I had been seeing, this animal looked freakishly large. I tiptoed down a ravine, peeked over the edge, and nailed the "monster" from a bit over 30 yards. His horns later scored a hair over 73 P&Y points — smaller than most I have taken in Wyoming. But this buck had somehow survived the plague and given me a rare chance to score.

I love bowhunting truly wild, fair-chase bison, and I secured a coveted Wyoming buffalo permit last year. For some unknown reason, normally productive bison habitat was devoid of buffs in 2022. During long hours of hiking and searching for fresh tracks, I came up completely blank.

Meanwhile, a rifle-hunting friend of mine was having identical bad luck. We compared notes almost daily, with the same depressing results.





Butchering a bison in the Wyoming wilderness after dark is hard enough, but finding one to shoot in 2022 was more difficult than I'd ever experienced before.

Finally, after days of glassing empty terrain, I spotted two bull bison one afternoon as they ambled between thick patches of timber. I quickly sneaked over soft snow to within a scant three yards of the closest one. Even at point-blank range, I could not find a clear lane through the dense brush.

Several nervous minutes later, one of the bulls stepped into the open at 25 yards. One G5 Striker broadhead from my Bear Alaskan bow put him down inside 50 yards. Then the all-night butchering began.

On most bison bowhunts, I've seen several dozen buffs. But I saw only two in 2022. My gun-toting buddy had it even worse. He shot his own bull after exactly 30 days of hiking till his legs would barely hold him up. His was the only bison he found during all that time. Without extreme persistence, both of us would have gone home empty-handed.

Kodiak, Alaska, is known for nasty weather. But the summer of 2022 was the worst even longtime residents could remember. Bush pilots were cancelling charter trips left and right, and many hunters and fishermen found themselves stranded for days on end.

In early August, I took a solo backpack trip on Kodiak for Sitka blacktails. I was lucky to fly in and out of camp on schedule, but I spent more than 60-percent of my time seeking shelter inside my tiny dome tent. Winds were so severe, the rain fly on my 100 mph-rated tent ripped in multiple places. Thank God for duct tape!

In spite of wretched conditions, I enjoyed several long Alaskan summer days of serious spot-and-stalk hunting. It was up before dawn, hike 10–15 miles over

rough terrain, hope the clouds did not drop around my ears, and reach the tent again after dark. I got caught in sudden storms twice while miles from camp, but I slogged back using a GPS and my knowledge of the country.

Even with the foul conditions, I managed to take three awesome nontypical velvet Sitka bucks. I was hunting the only area where I had ever seen more than one nontypical Sitka deer in the past, and I was specifically looking for weird, oversized specimens.

Official scores for all of my 2022 Sitka deer beat the existing P&Y velvet

nontypical World Record. My best is the largest ever recorded for an archery Sitka buck in any record-book category, with a net score of 117%. I consider it the single-best animal I have ever taken with a bow. All measurements will be double-checked by a P&Y panel prior to the April 2023 Awards Convention in Reno.

One key to bowhunting success is never giving up, and my difficult 2022 archery adventures proved this to me in spades! **BH**

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

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TRADITIONAL WAY

FRED EICHLER | TRADITIONAL EDITOR

I love experimenting with new gear like this prototype decoy — especially when it gets results like this buck!



INVENTORS AND PIONEERS

THERE ARE LOTS OF GREAT THINKERS AND INNOVATORS IN THE ARCHERY WORLD WHO DESERVE RECOGNITION.

THE MULE DEER SPIKE came right up to the decoy and stared at it. I was so tempted to take him with my recurve, mostly because he was right in my wheelhouse — 10 to 15 yards away and fixated on my decoy. The only reason I hesitated was because I was in a large blind with two cameras running so I could document the muley's reaction to the decoy.

In full disclosure, I was also holding off because the larger mule deer buck in the group was looking hard at the decoy as well, and I was hoping for a shot at him. It was peak of the rut, and I was experimenting with a new prototype decoy — and possibly risking ruining my hunt that morning to see if this decoy would work. I was nervous, because I had tried another prototype decoy from the same company that didn't work at all a few years earlier. In fact, it spooked some deer, and so it didn't go to market as a result.

Testing new products is one of my favorite things to do. I enjoy trying to figure out if the product is something I would truly use, or if it's something I wouldn't buy if my life depended on it.

For example, in recent months I've had the opportunity to test a new prototype mule deer decoy from Montana Decoy, a new outfitter tent from Cabela's, as well as the final production model of the Bear recurve riser I worked on.

I am honest in my assessments of new products or test versions, but over the years I've made some people angry and had them argue with my feedback. When frustration or an argument is the response, I usually remind them in a polite way that they asked for my opinion, and I did not ask for theirs!

I'm certainly not right all the time, and my opinion is just that — an opinion. Truth be told, I'm probably wrong



I was tempted to shoot this muley spike, due mostly to his being so close to my blind, but I elected to hold off.



Here the buck I ultimately killed is approaching a group of does as they stay fixated on my decoy.



more often than I'm right, and a prime example of that was the first time I saw bottled water in a store.

At the time, I thought that bottled water was the dumbest idea I'd ever heard of. In fact, I would have bet the farm that trying to sell bottled water was a faulty business plan, because why would people pay for what they could get for free? I was way off on that one!

Fortunately for us, there are a lot of amazing products out there that help us hunt more efficiently, shoot more accurately, get better performance, stay warmer, hide more effectively, etc. There has been a slew of amazing people in the archery industry who have come up with innovative ideas that have added to our experiences in the field...and I'm rarely one of them.

I never cease to be amazed and impressed by those who have invented new products or improved upon existing ones, and I often find myself scratching my head and saying to myself, "Why didn't I think of that?" I enjoy flipping through old issues of **Bowhunter** and looking at the ads to see the products that were released years ago. Some are still relevant; others have gone by the wayside.

If you don't know much about the history of archery or the men and women who have helped shape it, then have some fun and look up some of these people. Trust me when I say they have all left their mark on the archery and bow-hunting world via the amazing things they created.

Admittedly, I'm providing you with an embarrassingly small number of names. There are many others who should be listed here but aren't, but those

who are were the first ones to pop into my feeble-at-times mind.

For example, when people say bows, I think of men like Doug Easton, Earl Hoyt, Fred Bear, Tom Jennings, Ben Pearson, Mike Palmer, Fred Asbell, Ken Beck, Howard Hill, and John Schultz, to name just a few. Just think of how great it is to have a broadhead you don't have to make yourself, thanks to people like John Musacchia, Bruce Barrie, Andy Simo, John Zwickey, Ben Pearson, Fred Bear (yup, those last two are both listed above as well), and Richard Malesky, to name just a few.

Think of the camouflage most of us wear, thanks to people like Jim Crumley, Bill Jordan, and Toxey Haas. I even think of the calls we use, courtesy of people like Larry D. Jones, Ben Lee, Preston Pitman, and countless others.

Don't get me started on treestands. We all use them, but I'd bet money that few hunters know the names Ben Southard, James Baker, or Bob and John Louk. That's a shame, in this man's opinion...

When I am hunting, I think of some of these people, as well as those who aren't listed here but should be, because they were smart enough, inventive enough, or had a dream to make things better for all of us. Yes, they also did it for profit, but who doesn't want to make a living working on something they are passionate about?

Now, to finish the story I started at the beginning of this article... The larger buck I'd been watching started moving in closer to my decoy. My heart rate did what it usually does, and my breathing ceased its rhythmic routine to be replaced by what most of you all have experienced, which I can only describe as the opposite of rhythmic and calm.

I drew back, and fortunately muscle memory took over and I watched as my arrow flashed out of my bow and took the buck through both lungs. He dropped a few seconds later.

It's times like this that make me pause and take a moment to thank all of those who have come before us. Those true pioneers who invented, and in some cases continue to invent, all kinds of amazing things for the sport I love that's really more than a sport. It's a lifestyle.

For those of you interested enough to actually watch this hunt, you can find it on MOTV's digital series, "Just Shot," or you can check it out later this year on Sportsman Channel. **BH**

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

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NEXT-LEVEL BOWHUNTING

JOE BELL | TECHNICAL EDITOR



Arrow-spinning devices allow you to slowly spin the shaft while analyzing broadhead alignment for the slightest imperfections.

BROADHEAD TUNE-UP

ENSURE EACH HUNTING HEAD ALIGNS PERFECTLY WITH THE SHAFT FOR THE ULTIMATE IN SHOOTING PRECISION.

WHEN AN ARROW flies at high speed, it is subject to air resistance. This is what allows the arrow's fletching to produce drag. Fletching that is larger and has a strong degree of helical will consequently produce increased resistance — an element that optimizes flight recovery and stabilization. This aids in steering the arrow better.

The same can be said with the surface area of a broadhead, whether it be a fixed-blade or mechanical. It has the ability to "catch air" and steer the projectile one way or the other. However, as long as the fletching does its job of catching more air than the broadhead, it will remain in control and guide the arrow with as little

oscillation as possible. Of course, this only applies if the broadhead turns on a centralized axis. If there are any irregularities in how the broadhead rotates, air-drag suddenly changes, and so does the arrow's flight and steering dynamics. This introduces a phenomenon known as "planing." This is why sufficient fletch-

ing size and precise broadhead-to-arrow alignment are crucial for shooting consistency. If one or both are lacking, poor accuracy will result.

To ensure top forgiveness and accuracy out of your hunting setup, you must align each broadhead to the shaft perfectly, so it rotates smoothly to eliminate steering problems. Here are a few different ways to true-up broadheads with the arrow shaft. Not every method works for every arrow and broadhead combination, so I suggest using as many of these techniques as needed to achieve perfect alignment.

Preliminary Steps

Keep in mind, if your bow is not tuned for straight arrow flight, properly aligned broadheads will make little difference in improving shooting performance. For this reason, you must tune your bow prior to using broadheads. If you know little about bow tuning, I suggest reading "Bow Tuning for Beginners" (bowhunter.com/editorial/bow-tuning-for-beginners/393561.) This article will pave the way for easy and effective bow-tuning.

Secondly, you can't true a broadhead without spinning the shaft. There are two simple ways to do this. You can spin the arrow on its nose like a child's top and then look for any signs of misalignment or wobble. Or, better yet, you can use an arrow-rolling device, which allows you to rotate the shaft slowly or quickly. Arrow rollers are clearly more precise, since you also can position the broadhead's nose next to a reference point, such as a mark on a wall or box, to detect the smallest misalignment. Pine Ridge makes a quality spinner that breaks down easily, so you can take it on hunting trips.

Lastly, arrows are cut to size with a cut-off saw. Each cut is rarely the same, leaving the surface slightly off-camber and not square. To polish the end so it's flush, you'll need some sort of squaring tool. G5 Outdoors makes a great Arrow Squaring Device (ASD) with a built-in cradle. Simply lay the shaft into the de-



Prior to screwing on broadheads, be sure to sand arrow ends and/or insert faces with a squaring device. This will help the broadhead seat flush to the shaft, so it spins more smoothly.

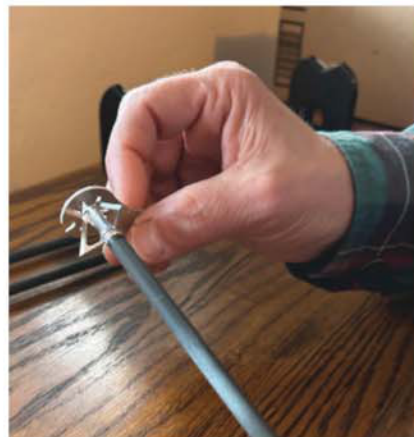
vice, and then spin the end against the friction-bit several times to clean up the surface. You can shave the face of the insert or each end of the shaft using this tool. Lumenok's F.A.S.T. Tool is another quality product for squaring off both ends of your arrow.

You also can square off inserts or ends of the shaft with fine-grit sandpaper taped to a block of wood. By placing this block of wood against a level surface, you can then line up the arrow spinner so it's 90 degrees to the wood, then place the shaft in the spinner. While keeping the shaft against the sandpaper surface, rotate it and smooth-out the end. Be sure to position the spinner exactly perpendicular to the wood to obtain a perfectly even surface.

Screw On And Rotate

Once the preliminary steps are in place, you can begin screwing on broadheads to shafts and start spinning and checking alignment. Usually out of six arrows and broadheads, you'll get lucky and have one or two that spin perfectly without further modification.

However, for the other arrows and



Sometimes, rotating a washer or changing out a replacement blade is all that's needed to get the broadhead to spin properly.

broadheads, you'll have to troubleshoot to see if you can improve the seating between the broadhead and arrow. I've found the simplest and most effective way to do this is to rotate the broadhead's washer by 90 degrees, then tighten the head back up. Then try spinning again. I usually do this over and over again, using different heads with different shafts until I find the right combination. Most of the time it works like magic. If the washer is off by one-thousandth of an inch, it probably won't square-up well, causing alignment problems.

If rotating washers is ineffective, or if your broadheads don't use washers, you can try re-squaring the insert or shaft to see if it makes a difference.

Swap Out Replacement Blades

Like washers, I've found that replacement blades are sometimes out of tolerance, causing the butt of the blade to dig into the washer and insert face. This causes poor alignment, despite rotating the washer in different positions. When this is the case, I often swap out blades, trying them in different broadhead ferules, hoping for a better result. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't. If the broadhead you're using doesn't have removable blades, try one of the following steps.

Change The Surface

There are aftermarket washers available that can improve broadhead-to-shaft alignment. Nylon washers, such as those made by Cir-Cut, or rubber O-ring washers sold by 3Rivers Archery, give just enough to improve broadhead seating. Firenock also makes precisely machined titanium spacers to improve seating tolerances between shafts and broadheads.

Any type of insert that gives a little can also help. I was a big fan of Easton's Polycarbonate arrow inserts when they were offered years ago. I found them to be tough yet malleable enough to make proper broadhead alignment a breeze.

Rotate Inserts

Gluing in inserts with slow-cure epoxy is another trick to improve alignment. By attaching inserts to broadheads, then gluing them in, you can rotate the insert and broadhead combination in small 90-degree positions until the broadhead spins better.

Some bowhunters prefer hot-melt glue for this same reason. Once an insert

is installed using hot-melt glue, it easily can be heated up again and then rotated with the broadhead already seated. By twisting the broadhead, the insert usually will seat more flush, improving alignment. Bohning and Easton both make quality hot-melt glue that is safe to use with carbon shafts.

Flex The Nose

Gold Tip offers an additional method for improving broadhead alignment. Using the arrow-roller and reference point, you can rotate the shaft slowly while placing the nose of the broadhead next to a reference point. There will be a high and low spot in how the broadhead rotates. Take a pencil and mark the high spot on the arrow shaft or broadhead. You can then remove the shaft and press the high spot of the broadhead against a firm, non-marking surface in an attempt to improve alignment. You are only applying a light amount of resistance with this technique. Be cautious, making sure you're holding the shaft safely behind the broadhead area to avoid injury.

Using this method allows the threads to mash slightly, eliminating the unsquared surface between the insert and broadhead shank.

Switch Broadhead Brands

Sometimes, switching to a higher-grade product is what's needed to improve broadhead alignment. I used one particular brand of fixed-blade broadheads for close to a decade, when suddenly the quality seemed "off."

Out of six broadheads, only three or four would align perfectly with my arrow shafts, no matter what I did, so I switched to a different brand that was more precisely made. Besides improved spinning and concentricity, quality broadheads are more consistent in weight. I prefer broadhead brands that weigh within plus or minus 1 to 1.5 grains of each other.

No arrow performs well unless it's perfectly balanced. Broadheads that don't sit flush with the shaft will cause the arrow shaft to flex and vibrate unevenly as it launches from the bow. These mild disruptions will produce drastic point-of-impact differences. Such impact problems are not only bad for a bowhunter's confidence but absolutely deplorable for hunting. We simply owe it to ourselves and the animals we hunt to be as accurate as possible. By insisting on true-spinning broadheads, you'll become more effective and ethical as a bowhunter. **BH**



HUNTING WHITETAILS

C.J. WINAND



With the classroom portion of the Deer Steward 2 course complete, Kip Adams goes over what will be needed for calibrating sprayers, seeding rates, and the environmental conditions you must consider for safe and effective prescribed burns.

THE NDA DEER STEWARD CLASSES

THE BEST WEAPON FOR ADVANCING YOUR DEER-HUNTING KNOWLEDGE IS EDUCATION.

OVER THE PAST TWO DECADES, this column has been based on the latest deer research conducted by some of the top deer biologists in the country. These scientific findings are not simply someone's opinion; they're peer-reviewed results.

My job is to excise the big science words from this research and present the findings so the average bowhunter can understand and apply the results in their neck of the woods. More than ever, many hunters now are interested in acquiring deer data from true professionals who aren't just trying to sell a product. And except for a few magazines and websites, this data seems to be harder and harder to find.

The number-one e-mail question I receive from **Bowhunter** readers is, "How do I become a wildlife biologist?"

My answer to that question usually goes something like, "Because of the intense competition within the profession, plan on going for a master's degree in wildlife management/biology. If you love whitetails as much as I do, then colleges such as Texas A&M Kingsville, Mississippi State University, University of Georgia, and Auburn University are good choices. Granted, you can get a job with a four-year degree, but most employers are looking to hire those who hold advanced degrees. Once you get a job, your next

challenge is convincing your spouse that your work is not your hobby, but rather your hobby is your work!

Although you may think this question only comes from students, many adults rephrase the question as, "I'm now a professional (fill in the blank), but I almost majored in wildlife biology. Is there any class available to help me advance my deer-hunting career?"

If you're one of these folks, the National Deer Association (NDA) now has a solution for you. NDA's online video Deer Steward Level 1 class is a goldmine of information on deer research and management advice from some of the country's top deer biologists and college professors.

Over the past 10 years, these classes have gained more and more followers from average deer hunters to the folks at state deer agencies. This course has become so popular that the NDA recently partnered with the Arkansas Game & Fish Commission (AGFC) to provide a customized three-day Deer Steward course for their staff and leadership.

And Arkansas is not alone, as the NDA has held customized Deer Steward courses for five other state wildlife agencies. The beauty is, the average deer hunter and landowner can take the exact same advanced online training course that teaches key principles of deer and habitat biology, ecology, management, and hunting.

AGFC Deer Program Coordinator Ralph Meeker said, "NDA's Deer Steward course is a great opportunity for hunters and managers alike to learn more about the most recent deer and habitat research, and how it directly applies to our management efforts. NDA did a great job communicating many of the individual components related to deer and habitat management and how they tie together. This made it much easier for our staff to not only understand but also, undoubtedly, to communicate those same ideas to our constituents."

Once I found out that various state wildlife agencies were donating time and money for their employees to take



Vortex Optics in Barneveld, Wisconsin, held last year's Deer Steward 2 class for the NDA. The NDA's dream team selfie: (l-r) Dr. Craig Harper, Matt Ross, me, Ben Westfall, and Kip Adams. The NDA team will teach you more about deer than you'll ever need to know.

the course, I signed up for the same on-line Deer Steward 1 course. And man, was I impressed!

There's simply no other course that informs and educates hunters on deer-hunting research more than this one. What immediately stood out to me was how the instructors put their information together in a very simple and easy to follow format.

The class is divided into five sections, but my personal favorite is instructed by NDA Director of Conservation Matt Ross. Matt put together numerous papers from around the country on deer

movements and home-range use. The end result was something I call, "the science of deer hunting," and Ross deserves much credit for his incredible Power-Point presentation. Without a doubt, few college courses, websites, or articles can ever provide more practical knowledge and in-depth training on deer biology and habitat/herd/hunter management, than the NDA's Deer Steward 1 class.

After each of the five sections, you're given a quiz where you must earn a 70 percent or more to pass. And although the course is graded (which you can take multiple times), the tests were thought-provoking and fun. Like many hunters and deer biologists who have taken the class, I learned a lot and highly encourage all my deer-a-holic friends to take the course.

For those hunters interested in getting their hands dirty, the Deer Steward 2 class is for you. It covers establishing food plots, aging jawbones, determining the rut using fetuses, reading a soil test, herbicide use, calibrating chemical sprayers and no-till drills, prescribed burns, forest and field management, and so much more. If you own or manage any land for deer hunting, this class is for you!

C.J.'s Summary:

You can argue that deer biologists have failed miserably in educating their most valuable resource — deer hunters. But that doesn't have to mean you. Hunters can learn more about deer hunting with the NDA's Deer Steward classes than a lifetime of personal hunting experiences will ever teach them.

Deer Steward 1 provides students with a comprehensive understanding of the key principles of deer and habitat biology, ecology, and management. Deer Steward 2 will teach students how to apply the principles and applications learned in Deer Steward 1 through hands-on field experience. At the end of Deer Steward 2 training, attendees can plan and implement advanced strategies wherever they hunt. As it stands now, nearly 6,000 people have taken either the Deer Steward 1 or 2 class since the program began. Maybe you should be the next? If you're interested in signing up for the Deer Steward 1 class, go to deerassociation.com/steward/deer-steward-online/, or contact Ben Westfall at ben@deerasociation.com. **BH**

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BRIAN K. STRICKLAND | EQUIPMENT EDITOR



A good target is worth its weight in gold to serious bowhunters.

PRACTICE TRULY DOES MAKE PERFECT

NOTHING AIDS IMPROVED ACCURACY LIKE CONSISTENTLY SLINGING ARROWS.

Although it sounds cliché, practice truly does make perfect. That said, there are elements to a good archery shot that go far beyond just slinging a few arrows, and now is the perfect time to tune up your rig and yourself.

Having a properly tuned bow is important, but accuracy when it really counts starts with developing a shooting process that is consistent in any situation. For me, that process consists of:

- Having a consistent grip.
- Visualizing the shot.
- Drawing to a consistent and solid anchor point.

- Calibrating or floating the sight pin on the kill zone.
- Focusing on the spot you want to hit, rather than on the pin.
- Developing a surprise release.
- Following through until the arrow hits the target.

Regardless of the routine you develop, spending time dropping arrows

ultimately breeds success. Although I have nothing against block or bag targets, it's hard to beat what 3-D targets bring to the table. They add realism, and whether you're shooting from a treestand, up a ridge, or through brush, a good 3-D target will only enhance your shooting ability.

If you have elk on the brain, topping your must-have 3-D list would be **GlenDel's** (feradyne.com/glendel) new [1] **Half Scaled Elk** (\$349.99). Its body is constructed from a self-healing foam that incorporates GlenDel's exclusive Poly-Fusion 12"x12"x12" replaceable core. Because of its open-layered design, arrows pull easy while also ensuring extended target life. The insert could also be used as a standalone target at elk camp. The Half Scaled Elk stands 38" tall and carries a removable set of antlers.

Using the same weather-resistant, self-healing High Roller Foam found in their popular series, **Morrell** (morrelltargets.com) launches the new [2] **Transformer 3D Buck** (\$299.99). Its red eyes give it a cool look, and with its ability to stop arrows up to 500 fps, as well as pull them out as easy as they went in, it's hard to beat this target. A 360-degree head, 8-point rack, and a unique design that allows the body to be used as a standalone target, while also offering both 3-D scoring on one side with raised vitals on the other, round out this target's features.

Topping the realistic list would certainly have to be **Rinehart's** (rinehart3d.com) Signature series. With over 100 target styles and species to choose from, the options are virtually limitless. The whitetail deer is their most popular in the series, and the [3] **Big Ten Buck** (\$749) is just one example. With a sculptured look and life-size appeal of a 250-lb. buck, it's molded with Rinehart's self-healing foam to ensure easy arrow removal. It also offers replaceable inserts with IBO, ASA, or Universal scoring.

Delta McKenzie (dmtargets.com) also offers a plethora of 3-D targets, and with turkey and bear seasons in



full swing, their [4] **Backyard Strutter** (\$132.99) or **Aim-Rite Black Bear** (\$238.99) would be ideal additions to your backyard range. Both stand 26" tall and are constructed from Delta's solid FlexFoam, which can take a beating while also offering easy arrow removal. Universal scoring and vitals rings will help you get dialed in.

Another option for the budget-minded bowhunter is the [5] **Big Shooter Buck** (\$139.99) from **Shooter 3D Archery Targets** (feradyne.com/shooter-targets). It stands 48" tall, is equipped with 125" headgear, and is 25% larger than its smaller **Shooter Buck** (\$114.99) cousin. It features a slim, lightweight design — I've often taken mine to deer camp as a result — and a replaceable insert that stops both broadheads and fieldpoints.

The [6] **Double Duty 3D Buck** (\$249.99) from **BIGshot** (bigshottargets.com) is a full-sized buck that comes with a replaceable vitals area with ASA universal scoring rings. It also offers a broadhead-tuning grid on the opposite side, so you can further improve accuracy with your "real" arrows. BIGshot's UV-resistant coating and pre-painted mold prevent weather-wear and cracking, and with its solid back-wall design and no plastic legs, it can take a beating.

As much as I like 3-D, it's hard to beat the benefits of block-style targets. Not only can they take countless hits from today's fast compound bows, but they are also extremely portable and affordable. One that is truly a no-brainer for any backyard range is the popular [7] **Infinity Series** (\$199.99) from **BLOCK**

(feradyne.com/block). There are two versions — 20"x20" or 22"x22" — and both have six individual shooting faces with five designs and offset aiming spots for extended target life. Both will stop broadhead and fieldpoint-tipped arrows traveling up to 500 fps.

Another topnotch block-style target is **Morrell's** [8] **Kinetic 1.0** (\$149.99). Living up to its name, it's designed to stop anything you sling at it and has a 20"x20" shooting surface with a pair of high-contrast graphics for easy aiming. Made for fieldpoints only, the Kinetic 1.0 is a heavyweight at 60 lbs., so you know it's solid when taking hits from ammo traveling upwards of 500 fps.

Taking cubes to a new level is the [9] **Big 8 Series** (\$189.99–\$245.99) from **Delta McKenzie**. With an asymmet-

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ric hexagon design, they offer a larger shooting surface than most others in this category, and with Delta's new premium competition-grade self-healing foam, they are made to last up to 8X longer as well. Available in 16" and 20" configurations and designed to handle today's ultra-fast bows, they offer 8-sided shooting with a blend of highly visible green-and-white aiming points with a sight-in grid. Both sport an integrated handle, and the 20" version has a replaceable core.

Developed from a high-density, layered foam, the [10] **Range 19** (\$109.95) from **Power-Stop Archery** (powerstop-targets.com) measures 19"x16"x14" and features screen-printed target faces on two sides. One target face has 5 spot targets, while the other offers 4 targeted

battleships. Developed for use with any broadhead or fieldpoint, the Range 19 is lightweight and is also available in a slimmed-down **Range 16** version (\$99.95).

The latest in the growing line of block-style targets from **BIGshot** is their [11] **Titan 10x** (\$259.99). Living up to its name, it provides 10-sided shooting and BIGshot's new HS Foam Formula to ensure maximum value and durability. Arrows and bolts pull out easily, and with over 150 aiming points, a large 17"x17" surface, and a treestand mode for those elevated shots, the Titan 10x covers all the bases.

The [12] **High Performance Trio Target System** (\$149.99–\$369.99) from **365 Archery** (365archery.com) uses a proprietary self-healing foam with a re-

placeable core to guarantee easy arrow removal and extended durability. Available in 18", 24", and 36" configurations, the cubed core gives you six-sided shooting with multiple bull's-eye patterns plus a fixed support base to keep the target upright and rock-solid for today's hard-hitting bows.

Last but certainly not least is the **Hurricane** (feradyne.com/hurricane) [13] **High Energy Cat 5** (\$69.99) bag target. The Cat 5's Tri-Core technology is the reason why this target can take countless hits up to 650 fps. Its 25"x25" self-standing profile features bright tri-color graphics that are offset for extended target life, plus the integrated sight-in grid helps users achieve pinpoint accuracy. **BH**



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DR. DAVE SAMUEL | CONSERVATION EDITOR



Elk herds in the Northwest are still showing signs of TAHD, or “elk hoof disease.”

WILDLIFE PROBLEMS ARE TWO-FOLD

BACTERIA AND POLITICS CONTINUE TO AFFECT WILDLIFE AND HUNTERS.

Elk Hoof Disease Deadly And Spreading

IT SEEMS THAT A LOT of wildlife news involves diseases. Some are new, but some have been around for a while and are just now appearing in alarming numbers.

That is the case with what we now call “elk hoof disease.” The more scientific name is *Treponema* associated hoof disease (TAHD). The culprit is *Treponema* bacteria, and it affects both Roosevelt and Rocky Mountain elk in the Northwest. It’s deadly and ugly.

Elk hoof disease was first noticed in southwestern Washington elk herds in

the late 1990s. Not much happened until a number of limping elk were seen in 2007-2008, and then a scientific study was started. Elk with this disease have deformed or sloughed hooves. The wounds are apparently painful and cause elk to limp. One reference noted that sometimes things get so bad, that the diseased elk are walking on exposed bone.

Apparently TAHD has spread and has been found in 17 counties in Washington, as well as various locations in Oregon, Idaho, and California. How long TAHD has been in some of these areas is not known. If it is only occurring in low numbers, it can go undetected for months, if not years.

How do the elk get the *Treponema* bacteria that invades their hooves? Research shows elk can get TAHD by walking in contaminated soil. The research study was rather interesting. Hooves from infected elk were obtained and minced with soil that was placed in stalls indoors. Four healthy elk were placed in those stalls, and two other healthy elk were placed in control stalls with no minced hoof material. Early lesions were seen on the four elk within two months, and by four months moderate lesions were seen.

A survey of hunter harvests showed that bulls with TAHD were more likely to have asymmetrical antlers. In fact,

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a survey of hunters in southwestern Washington noted that 35 percent of elk were reported to have deformed hooves. When hooves were deformed, 65 percent of bulls that had six points on one side had a deformed antler on the other side. Researchers stated that the TAHD probably impacted a higher percentage of deformed antlers, because the hunters didn't notice minor hoof deformities on some elk that had antler asymmetry.

Researchers also noted that antlers are important for elk during the rut. They suggested that if the antlers are abnormal, it could impact reproductive success. Obviously watching for lame and limping elk is a high priority in the Northwest, and as further research is done, I'll report on it here.

No deer were ever seen in the Northwest with elk hoof disease. But deer do get hoof diseases that are somewhat similar to that found in elk. In 2017, I wrote about a hoof disease in Kansas. It was also contagious and spread from one deer to another. It was called "foot rot," and in one rather small area, 20 percent of the bucks had it. Shane Hesting, the wildlife disease coordinator with the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks, noted that he saw a few cases of this foot rot every year, but for some reason he heard of many more in 2017. He said that cases were reported to him from 11 counties in Kansas. Just as with the elk hoof disease, he noted that there may have been more in previous years, but they just were not reported.

He noted several potential causes. First, deer that survive hemorrhagic disease viruses sometimes have damaged hooves that might lead to infection in the fall. Second, he suggested that a foot rot bacteria (*Fusobacterium*) could be contracted through open wounds at deer feeders. Any other source of injury to the hoof area could allow these bacteria to invade the hoof. Hesting sent what appeared to be infected hooves to the Southeastern Cooperative Wildlife Disease Study at the University of Georgia, but I could find no subsequent reports on the results of those tests.

Based on the fact that the elk hoof problem and the Kansas deer hoof problem are apparently impacted by different bacteria, plus the fact that no deer with hoof disease were found in the Northwest where the elk problem exists, leads

me to believe that we are dealing with separate hoof diseases. Hopefully, the numbers of both diseases will remain relatively low.

Black Bear Hunt In New Jersey

Bear seasons have been a political football game in New Jersey for years. The state wildlife agency has monitored their bear herd and has always supported some hunting because of increasing bear/human conflict. In 2018, Governor Phil Murphy bowed to those opposed to hunting bears and cancelled a scheduled hunt. Of course, bear numbers then increased, as did conflicts with humans in that heavily populated state.

Last year, Murphy supported the hunt, but again there were legal delays. Once the hunt took place, the goal of a 20-percent harvest was not met. Because the kill in the first season was much lower than desired, an additional four days were added to the season. Even with the extra days, only 114 bears were killed, and that was only a seven-percent harvest.

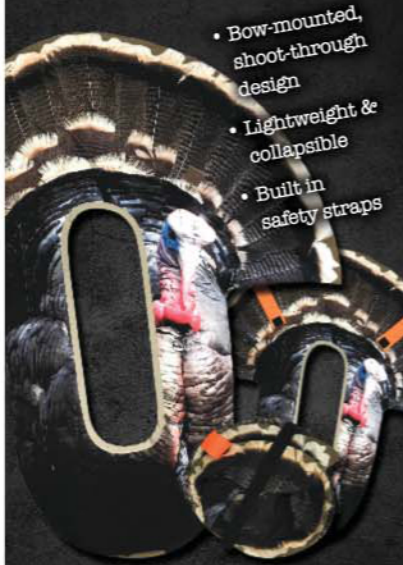
Hunter participation was lower for several reasons. Hunters did not expect to have a hunt because of antihunter legal interference, so they weren't ready when the season finally happened. It is also more than likely that after a four-year layoff, hunter interest may also have decreased. My guess is that the antihunters will cite this lower harvest by stating that the 3,000 bears in New Jersey is an overestimate, and bear seasons should be halted again. Such arguments will ignore any increase in human/bear conflicts. They always do.

We can expect growing problems implementing hunting in more and more states. The reasons are many but include the fact that some states now require nonhunters to be included on state Game Commissions. Of course, continued increases of the percent of our population living in urban areas, the loss of access to hunting areas, the difficulties in recruiting and retaining hunters, and the growing difficulties in getting our young people into hunting, will lead to problems. Diseases such as CWD also impact the quality of hunting and reduce participation. **BH**

If you have questions about topics covered in this column or on any wildlife-management issues or wildlife species, contact Dr. Dave at drdave4@comcast.net.

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OF TIMES & TRAITORS

SCREAMS ECHOED through the October sky, their maker circling high overhead, as a red-tailed hawk soared above America's Heartland. The raptor banked and turned south, its dark silhouette casting a shadow on the field below, while its speckled chest and rust-colored tail stood proud against a backdrop of blue.

Continuing along the treeline, I headed south as well, soon entering the timber and climbing the shingle oak I had chosen for my evening vigil. It was October 19, 2022, and I was on my first bowhunt of the whitetail season in my home state of Iowa. Like a conversation with an old friend, my ascent was easy and effortless, and soon I was staring through golden leaves and rays of sunlight from 20 feet above the forest floor.

Scanning the timber before me, its autumn colors on full display, I hoisted my bow skyward and nocked an arrow. Time passed quickly, filled with woodpeckers and brown creepers intent on searching for insects atop a dead elm tree, while wood ducks whistled through the timber before settling on a secluded pond. A chipmunk scampered past along a fallen hickory, navigating the slippery trunk like an acrobat before disappearing beneath a brushpile. A fox squirrel, his pace and personality on par with a drunken sloth, crawled wearily toward his nest, calling it a day after gorging on fallen acorns.

Just past 5:30 p.m., I looked east and noticed two does filtering into the field, working their way through the food plot before dining on the lush clover. I was watching their backtrail to see if any tall-tined suitors would be joining them, when I caught motion to my left and saw long main beams appear from the thicket. Carrying a rack with character and heavy mass, the buck looked regal as he worked his way through the timber. Ahead of the giant were three trails — all within bow range and leading to the food plot. With ample shooting light remaining and the buck upwind of my position, I took a deep breath and prepared for the shot.

Despite my wishful thinking, the buck would come no closer. Something was amiss, and as the northwest wind gently brushed my face, I knew what it was...

BY EYAD H. YEHWAWI

WHEN IT COMES TO BOWHUNTING GIANT WHITETAILS — THE RULES OF ENGAGEMENT CHANGE COME NOVEMBER.



Hypnotized by the spells of the rut, this giant ignored the wind and his surroundings, offering a five-yard shot and a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

OF TINES AND TRAITORS

The best bowhunters I know have always said, “The ideal wind to hunt a mature buck is one that is almost wrong for you, and almost right for him.” While this giant could see other deer foraging in the food plot, his nose could not guarantee him safe passage. Trust but verify, as they say, and in this case the wind prohibited the buck from doing just that. The beast turned, scratched his ivory belly with a giant hoof, and then vanished into the thicket from which he came.

I hunted sporadically through late October, focusing my attention on the west side of the farm. On the morning of November 2, I headed to a north-facing slope with a thicket atop its east/west running crest. The forest floor, normally an ocean of dead and dry leaves, was moist with morning dew, softening my footfalls as I approached.

Not long after climbing up to my perch, I heard antler tines ticking together in the early morning light. As if warming up before a wrestling match, two young bucks were locked-up on the ridgeline — their dreams of dominance and breeding rights stoking their fire.

Then I heard grunts and a snort-wheeze emerge from the thicket, just before a wide-racked buck materialized down the ridge. With his lips curled and antlers tilted back, the giant paraded toward the combatants, no doubt ready to teach them a lesson in the rules of engagement.

The buck moved along the edge of the thicket, on a trail rife with honeysuckle and shingle oaks, making a clear shot impossible. I watched as he vanished down the ridge, leaving me with memories and nothing more.

I returned to my truck at midday, where I formulated a plan for the evening hunt. The temperatures were scorching, with near-record highs and steady winds gusting from the south. I changed into a long-sleeved Merino wool shirt and

bibs, knowing I needed clothes that would dry quickly and stay warm when wet. I knew by the time I was done sawing shrubs and fine-tuning my stand placement that I would be drenched, and I hoped my attire would perform as advertised.

Now just past 2:30 p.m., sweat and sawdust flew from my brow and blade as I made quick work of the honeysuckle and saplings with my handsaw. Crimson streaks ran down my fingers and forearms as I cleared more brush — the thorns of multiflora rose and prickly ash reminding me to take my time.

Adding insult to injury, a flock of blue jays arrived on the scene, their vocal jeers and jabs berating my efforts like die-hard fans at a football game. A pair of gray squirrels, more agile and opinionated than their chestnut-colored cousins, barked from a giant white oak in an attempt to also voice their displeasure at my presence. They knew no bounds, heckling and harassing my every move, and I wondered if the constant commotion and noise would make bowhunting

I was drenched with sweat by the time I got done sawing any and all branches that might hinder my arrow from cleanly reaching its mark.



Practicing with purpose and visualizing real-world scenarios can help calm your nerves and steady your aim when the moment of truth arrives. Inset: With marginal wounds and minimal sign, patience and perseverance are keys to success when blood-trailing whitetails.

this evening a waste of time. I finally secured my stand in a shingle oak just past 3 p.m., and then sat back to let the warm breeze wash over me.

Although my clothes were soaked and the woodland watchdogs had sounded their alarms, I was more concerned with something else. I knew that if I didn't clear the brush that veiled my shooting lanes, I wouldn't have a clear shot and could miss another opportunity. But in doing so, I had left enough ground scent to raise the caution flag of every white-tail in the county. A double-edged sword no doubt, but if there was ever a time to be aggressive, it was November in the white-tail woods.



Staying mobile, scouting, and adjusting to observed deer movements are keys to bow-hunting during the rut.



With no daylight photos, my buck was a ghost, and the last whitetail I expected to encounter that night.

The hours passed and the temperature cooled as the sun made its descent. Just past 6 p.m., the wind now barely a breeze and the woodlands ablaze with golden hues, I heard antlers raking trees in the thicket.

As the sound of bone shredding bark continued, I picked up my grunt tube and bellowed a series of grunts and growls through the autumn air. Greeted with nothing but silence, I was just starting to put my call away when I heard footsteps in the fallen leaves.

I turned and saw a young buck moving through the timber — his long legs and sleek body befitting his age. Soon the buck was within bow range, moving along the trail I had cleared without a hint of suspicion. Just when I thought that I had dodged a bullet, the buck stopped on a dime, his head bobbing and legs backing up, realizing something was wrong.

I was prepared for snorts and bounding footsteps to follow, but instead my ears picked up the sounds of walking once more. I slowly reached for my bow, watching the buck below me that was now more interested in the approaching sound than the scent I had left behind.

As I attached my release to my D-loop, a sweeping rack and stout shoulders materialized along the trail, moving at a steady gait. I was drawing my bow, when I realized that this buck was also young and south of his prime — a handsome whitetail, but one that I would pass.

I lowered my bow and was watching the two bucks in the fading light, when suddenly they looked toward the thicket. Their ears were on full alert, their bodies tensed and coiled, both staring fearfully into the dark timber. Looking up, I quickly spotted tall tines and a massive body cresting the ridge.

The monarch strode toward me like a gladiator; his bull-ish frame side-stepping with his head cocked to one side, the wrinkles in his neck unlike anything I had ever seen. A large kicker-point protruded off his left beam like a coat hanger as he continued toward me, now within 10 yards and closing. I was in shock over how fast things were suddenly happening.

Then I recalled the noise I had heard at sunset — that of antlers shredding bark and raking trees — as the big buck marked his territory in the thicket. The grunts and growls I had responded with were too much for him to bear, and he had come forth at last light to face his challenger.

Now at seven yards, the buck stared in my direction as I hugged the shingle oak, praying he wouldn't see me. He tilted his head skyward, twisted his tines through the branches of an Osage orange tree, and then raked the ground — flinging dark earth and leaves through the fading light.

I came to full draw and settled my pin on a swirl of dark hair nestled behind his shoulder, calming my nerves as I took aim. I was squeezing my release, when suddenly the buck turned and dipped beneath the Osage tree.

I was still at full draw and following the giant step-for-step, when out of nowhere a loud pop echoed through the hardwoods. In my haste to stay on the whitetail, my bow limb had hit a dead branch above me — and in that moment I thought it was over. Filled with anger and rage, the buck seemed not to notice, instead closing the distance to five yards before stopping and turning broadside.

Maybe if the squirrels and blue jays had been more vocal that afternoon, or the young buck had snorted upon discovering my scent along the trail I had cleared, the giant would have known something was wrong. Maybe if the wind had shifted or swirled as he approached, or his eyes and ears had detected something was amiss when I banged my bow against the tree

OF TIMES AND TRAITORS

limb, the old warrior would have never come closer. Instead, his senses and surroundings had betrayed him, leaving him to his own devices and the spells of the rut.

My pin hovered in small circles behind the buck's shoulder once more — and then my arrow was gone.

Striking the buck high near his last rib, I watched him plow toward the thicket as my arrow's fluorescent wrap and fletching traced his course. In a matter of seconds, the barreling crescendo stopped, a hearty cough erupted from the thicket, and then all went silent.

I listened intently, the woods still graveyard-quiet, before collecting my thoughts and deciding what to do. Thirty minutes later, I crawled down beneath a hazy half-moon that shone through the treetops, slowly making my way down the ridge with plans to return the next morning.

My good friend Mitch and I arrived at the farm just after sunrise the following day. We knew there would be little sign due to the high entry wound and no exit, so we crept along, focused on any clue that would give us direction.

Having no luck, we slowly spread out and took separate trails, confident the buck was before us in the sanctuary he called home. Just when doubt was starting to creep in, I heard Mitch holler, which I knew could only mean one thing.

Rushing toward Mitch's voice, I then heard him say, "Come and look at your buck, buddy!"

I pushed through the thicket and entered a small clearing, where my Iowa giant lay still. I tipped my hat skyward and knelt beside the fallen buck, admiring his hulking body and cedar-stained rack, so grateful to harvest a whitetail of his caliber. Mitch and I celebrated as the sun crested the eastern horizon, sharing handshakes and hugs, with smiles any bowhunter would appreciate.

Giant whitetails are masters of survival, using their senses

and surroundings to thrive against unthinkable odds. Still, there comes a time during every season when their guard is down and they throw caution to the wind. And if a bowhunter is fortunate, he or she will be there to capitalize on this brief advantage.

After all these years, despite new tactics and technology, the principles of bowhunting success remain the same: Play the wind, be precise and prudent with your shot placement, and never forget the power of patience and perseverance. At the end of the day, however, perhaps the best strategy any bowhunter can employ is simply showing up to the dance as often as possible. For no matter the weather or time of year, prior setbacks or success, each hunt offers the possibility of a once-in-a-lifetime moment. And on that warm and windy day in November 2022, I experienced one of mine. **BH**

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

Author's Note: My equipment on this hunt included a Bowtech Revolt set at 70 pounds, Gold Tip Pro Hunter shafts, and 100-grain Rage Trypan broadheads. My clothing consisted of a First Lite Merino wool hoodie and Kanab bibs, Muck boots, and a Gray Wolf Woolens vest. Other equipment included a TightSpot quiver, Spot-Hogg Wiseguy release, Black Gold sight, and Vapor Trail arrow rest.



Hunting the downwind edge of bedding areas, with strategic entry and exit routes, is a goldmine for bowhunters during the rut. Insets: With a gray muzzle and a hulking body, my 2022 whitetail is one of the largest bucks I've taken over the past 30 years.



AS PURE AS IT GETS

Proud to represent America's hunting community, the *Bone Collector* team has a pure passion for the game, the land and the lifestyle. Hosts Michael Waddell, Nick Mundt and Travis "T-Bone" Turner keep it real as they celebrate the true brotherhood and sisterhood of hunting.

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THE BAIT STATION was located above a rocky bend in the river, just a stone's throw from the border of Northwest Territories. Getting there from our Northern Saskatchewan camp was a chore. First, there was a one-mile ATV ride to access an aluminum boat stashed along the river's edge. Then a five-plus-mile boat ride upriver through some of the North Country's most pristine wilderness. In total, the process took over an hour.

Two things struck me as I followed our host, Kent Wolowski, up to the bear bait. First, the smell of popcorn covered in caramel sauce filled the air, which made me hungry. I could see why bears were attracted to it. The second thing I noticed was how low the tree-stand was hung — maybe 6½ feet off the ground. I could literally pull myself up onto the platform if needed. It reminded me of a lesson learned years ago.

My mentor in the bowhunting industry was former **Bowhunter** Equipment Editor, Bill Krenz. Bill wrote for **Bowhunter** for years but relinquished his position in the early 2000s to start a new publication, at which point Bill then hired me as an eager young ad salesman.

Eventually, I developed an interest in writing and Bill gave me a chance. Shortly after submitting what I now realize was a dreadful first manuscript, Bill called me into his office and handed me a story he had recently written called "The Lesson Bear." This was the article he used to teach me the basics of writing.

"The Lesson Bear" was the story of a Saskatchewan bear hunt Bill shared with **Bowhunter** Founder M.R. James. On that trip, he hunted from a relatively high treestand that was placed too close to the bait. When his opportunity came, the steep-angled shot led to a single-lung hit and a lengthy tracking job. Bill was lucky to find that bear.

Bears have a unique anatomy that can be difficult to visualize under all that hide and hair. Their chests are wide from side to side, and narrower from top to bottom, which can make hitting both lungs a challenge from elevated positions. Standing under this treestand, I remembered "The Lesson Bear" and realized Kent knew exactly what he was doing: Shot angles would not be a problem on this hunt.

Reflecting on that article also made me realize how special this hunt really was to me. The story of my mentor's Saskatchewan bear hunt with the **Bowhunter** crew had been a lesson in far more than just bears. Now, 20 years later, here I was in Saskatchewan, hunting bears with **Bowhunter** Publisher Jeff Waring and Editor Curt Wells. To me, this hunt represented a journey that was coming full circle.

The trip was an adventure before the hunt even started. Kent's bear camp is located on Fontaine Lake, approximately 40 miles north of the end of civilization in Saskatchewan. To say it's remote is an understatement, and as each plane we boarded got smaller and smaller, I couldn't help but wonder how primitive a facility we would eventually arrive to find. I was in for a surprise.

As our floatplane taxied into a cove on the lake, we looked out the window to see a roomy bunkhouse on a beautiful beach. We were



RTT

A JOURNEY COMES FULL CIRCLE.

By Danny Farris, Contributor



We loaded my bear in the front of Kent's aluminum boat for the ride downriver to camp. The wind usually had a bite on that hourlong boat ride, but on this one, I didn't seem to feel it. Inset: Camera-man Matt Young and I enjoying one of our many boat rides through the pristine Northern Saskatchewan wilderness with outfitter Kent Wolowski at the helm.



GOOD GRIT

greeted by Kent, along with camp cook Tim Fehr, guide Greg Sikorski, and renowned Saskatchewan bear guide, Rob Nye.

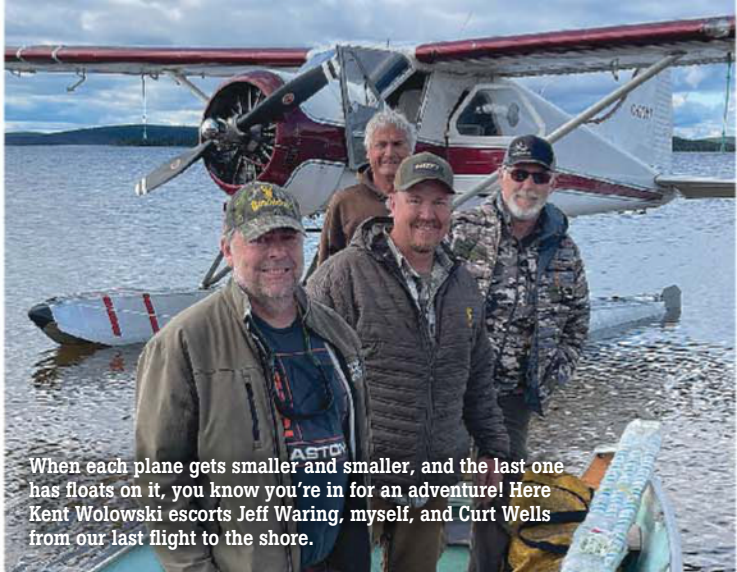
After stepping ashore and having a look around, we couldn't help but wonder how all the equipment, boats, and building materials for the bunkhouse arrived in such a secluded location. Kent explained that everything was brought in during the winter on sleds behind snow machines. Considering the nearest road is nearly 40 miles away, it must have been quite a task, but the work paid off with an incredible backcountry camp.

Curt, Jeff, and I were accompanied by cameramen Matt Young and Jake Hansen. They would be documenting the hunt for an upcoming episode of *Bowhunter TV*. I was excited to have Matt accompanying me in the stand for the week. Matt and I work well together. He is just as good of a hunter as he is a videographer, he's typically up for whatever it takes to get the job done, and he has been by my side on some of my most memorable hunts.

Our first sit in the stand resulted in a young bear visiting the bait, but Kent had a big boar on camera that I was determined to hold out for. Baited bear hunts are fun, specifically because you can often observe bears at close range for extended amounts of time. This bear hung around the bait for more than an hour, and it was a great way to get our hunt started.

Good news was waiting for us back at camp. Curt had punched his tag on a Pope and Young-caliber bear and was now looking forward to a week of world-class northern pike and lake trout fishing! I must admit I was a bit jealous, as I was looking forward to the fishing almost as much as I was the bear hunting. So, I decided right then and there to put some serious time in on the bait in hopes that I might tag the big boar sooner rather than later.

June days are long in Northern Saskatchewan. The sun rises at 3:50 a.m. and sets at 10:20 p.m. Most of the action on the bait seemed to be happening in the afternoon, and many hunters do a bit of fishing before heading to the stand. Not me. Kent took Matt and I on the hourlong trip to the stand fairly early, in hopes that I'd fill my tag quickly and be able to spend the rest of the week fishing.



When each plane gets smaller and smaller, and the last one has floats on it, you know you're in for an adventure! Here Kent Wolowski escorts Jeff Waring, myself, and Curt Wells from our last flight to the shore.



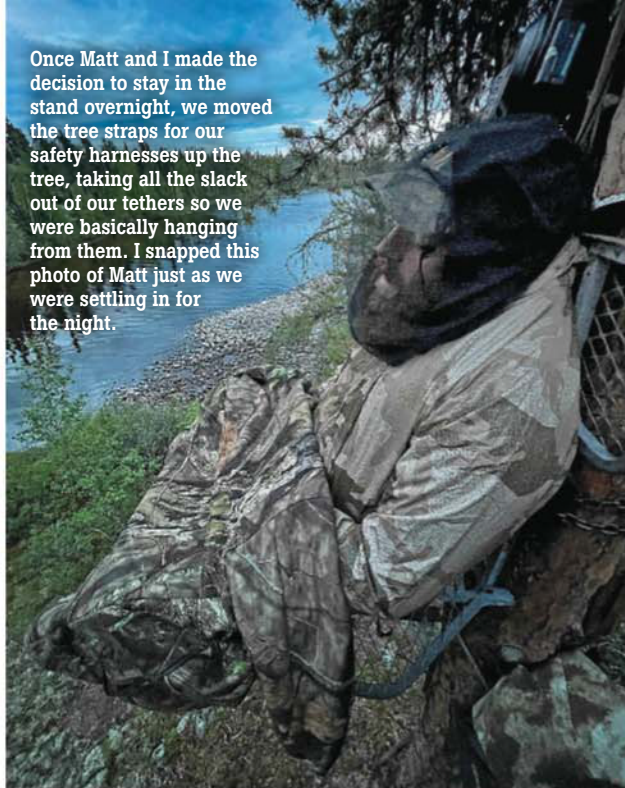
The fishing that Kent offers at his camp is every bit as good as the bear hunting. Curt was fortunate to take a good bear on the first day of our hunt, which enabled him to spend the rest of the week fishing. Jeff and I were both a little jealous.



This is a cool shot of our bear camp, taken from the cockpit of the plane that got us there. The stand I hunted out of hung just 6½ feet off the ground (right) and provided a perfect shot angle. Had I known I would ultimately spend a night over a bear bait in that stand, I would have preferred it had been hung a little higher.



Once Matt and I made the decision to stay in the stand overnight, we moved the tree straps for our safety harnesses up the tree, taking all the slack out of our tethers so we were basically hanging from them. I snapped this photo of Matt just as we were settling in for the night.



longer even concerned with fishing. This bear made it personal, and I was determined to even the score!

We arrived early again the next day and were relieved to see that the bear hadn't been back while we were gone. We climbed into the stand that morning with renewed determination. When the bear still hadn't shown by late that afternoon, Matt and I had a decision to make.

Based on our experience with this bear, he seemed to prefer the early mornings, and because he had not been there, I was confident that he would make an appearance early the following morning. The problem was, if Kent came to pick us up around 9 p.m. like we had planned, we wouldn't be back to camp until 10 p.m., and most likely wouldn't be in bed until at least 11. To be in the stand a half-hour before sunrise, we would need to leave camp again by 2 a.m. That didn't leave much time to sleep, and if the bear happened to be on the bait when we arrived, we would have gone to a lot of trouble just to spook him off.

Now, I haven't ever done this before, but desperate times call for desperate measures. The best way to insure we would be ready and waiting if this bear showed up at first light again the next morning, was to sleep in the tree.

Over the years, I have hunted with lots of cameramen, and I only know of one who might be willing to sleep in a low-hanging treestand over a bear bait with me, and that's Matt. He didn't hesitate. He did, however, suggest that I text Kent on the inReach and ask him to bring us some bear spray, which I was more than happy to do.

When Kent arrived with some extra food and our bear spray, he snuck to the base of the tree and said, "I've seen some crazy bowhunters in my day, but you two take the cake!" With that, he handed me the bear spray and said, "Text me when he's dead!"

We soon found out that sleeping in a treestand takes some ingenuity. Matt folded his seat up and sat with his legs crossed on his platform, leaning back against the tree. My stand was a bit lower than his though, and our bear had just crawled into it the day before! I wasn't about to sit all the way down on the platform where the bear

could stand flat-footed on the ground and still reach me! I'd have to stay in the seat, keeping me a little bit higher off the ground.

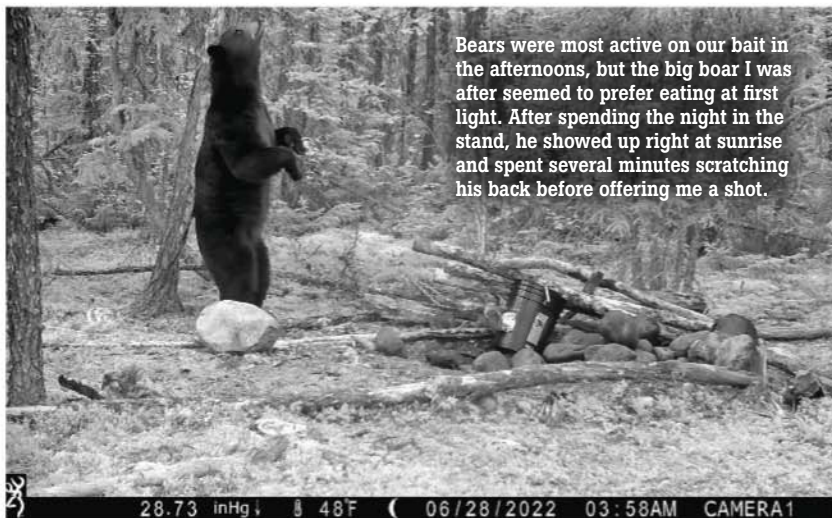
Matt and I were both using Hunter Safety System harnesses, and we raised the tree straps high enough to remove all the slack from our tethers. Now we were basically hanging in our harnesses and couldn't fall out. We just had to hope this bear didn't try to climb back into the tree.

To my surprise, we both slept fairly well. But make no mistake, I had my hand wrapped firmly around that can of bear spray the entire night.

I nudged Matt as the darkness began to fade and told him we needed to get up and get ready. We quickly ate a protein bar for breakfast, and then readied our gear. If this bear was going to show up, now would be the time.

It didn't take long. In the calm just after sunrise, we caught movement coming toward the bait from the right. It was our boy. He stopped on the way in to stand up against a tree, then bobbed up and down scratching his back for a few minutes. His hesitation before approaching the bait made me little nervous. After spending close to 24 hours straight in that treestand, I had

Bears were most active on our bait in the afternoons, but the big boar I was after seemed to prefer eating at first light. After spending the night in the stand, he showed up right at sunrise and spent several minutes scratching his back before offering me a shot.



After an 11-hour sit, my target bear hadn't shown. Upon climbing down from the stand, I checked our Browning trail camera and discovered why: The boar and a sow had hit the bait at first light and departed before I arrived.

The next day, we set out earlier in hopes the boar would repeat his pattern. He didn't, and Matt and I put in another long day in the stand — 12 hours this time. We had some action, but the boar I was after never showed, and I figured he was probably preoccupied with that sow he had been with the day before.

The following morning, we experienced some bad luck. An equipment issue caused us to be a bit late getting to the stand, and when we arrived, we found something that added insult to injury: I had accidentally left my seat cushion in the stand overnight, and it now lay shredded at the base of the tree.

I checked the camera and was disgusted to see that our big boar was the culprit. Once again, he had come in at first light, and this time, he had crawled up into the tree, shredded my seat, and urinated all over my treestand — it was still wet!

Enough was enough. This bear was dancing circles around us, and with time starting to dwindle on our hunt, I was no

GOOD GRIT

absolutely no intention of sitting there and watching him put on a show. I was going to take the first good shot he gave me.

When he was finally done scratching his itch, he approached the bait and turned fully broadside. I wasted no time in drawing my bow, and as soon as Matt confirmed that he had him in frame, I let my arrow go. It was a solid double-lung hit, and the bear only made it 10 yards before pausing and then going down.

When Kent arrived, he simply said, "Unbelievable job, guys. Good Grit!"

We loaded my bear into the front of the aluminum boat and made our way back to camp. Once there, I got a kick out of Curt's reaction. I have shared quite a few camps with Mr. Wells, and he is typically composed when you roll in with an animal. But this time he got excited.

Everyone was still asleep when Kent left to pick us up, so no one else knew we had been successful. When Curt saw us coming on the ATVs with that bear, he pumped his fist in the air and started hollering. I knew then that Matt and I had really done something.

That afternoon, Jeff Waring was able to arrow a nice bear — making our trip a complete success. I didn't get to do as much fishing as I would have liked, but reaping the rewards after putting in extra effort to get the job done, and then getting to celebrate the success with some of my best friends, made this hunt one that I'll never forget. The hunts that require a little grit always seem to be the ones I remember most fondly. **BH**

Bowhunter Publisher Jeff Waring completed our trip on the last afternoon when he arrowed this Northern Saskatchewan bruin. It was the perfect ending to an awesome hunt.



AUTHOR'S NOTE:

On this hunt I was shooting a Hoyt RX-7 Ultra with Easton Sonic 6.0 arrows tipped with Rage Trypan NC broadheads. Other pertinent equipment included Leupold optics, Browning Oviz apparel, Browning Trail Cameras, and Hunter Safety System tree harnesses. Kent Wolowski's Rock Ridge Outfitting offers topnotch fishing and wilderness bear hunting in Northern Saskatchewan. To book a hunt with Kent, contact him at (306) 768-2617, or visit him online at RockRidgeOutfitting.com.

Matt Young and I put in the longest sit of our lives to harvest this Saskatchewan boar. Staying in a treestand for almost 24 hours straight is something I hope I never have to do again, but it sure made for one memorable bear hunt.





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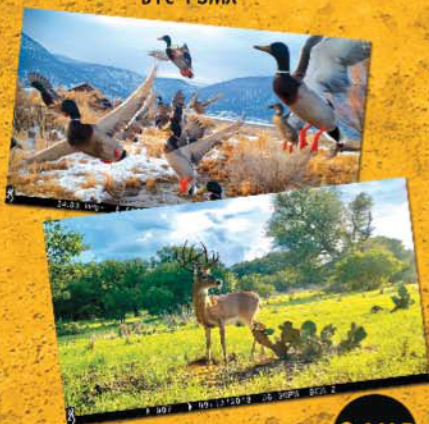


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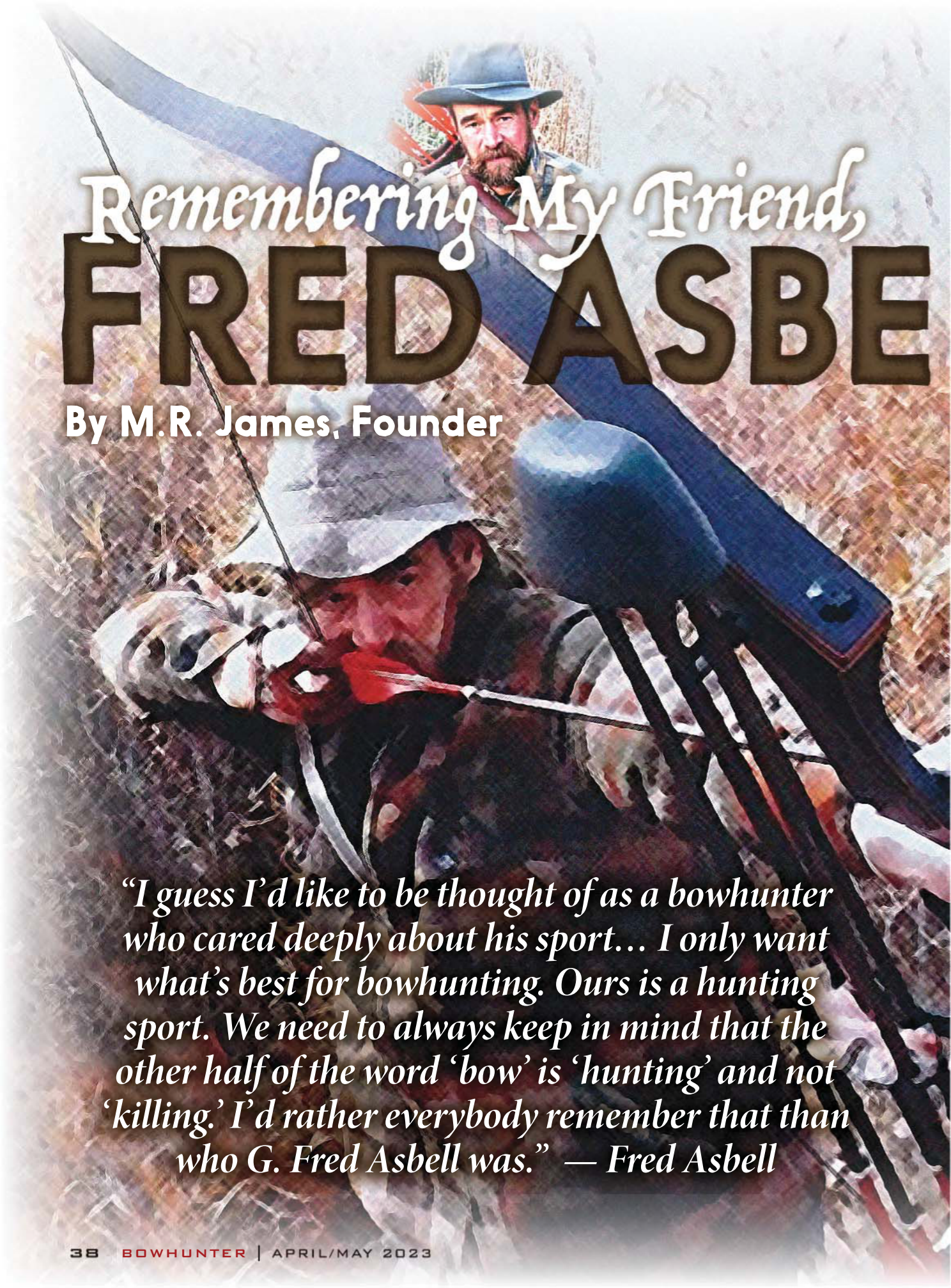
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Remembering My Friend, **FRED ASBE**

By M.R. James, Founder

“I guess I’d like to be thought of as a bowhunter who cared deeply about his sport... I only want what’s best for bowhunting. Ours is a hunting sport. We need to always keep in mind that the other half of the word ‘bow’ is ‘hunting’ and not ‘killing.’ I’d rather everybody remember that than who G. Fred Asbell was.” — Fred Asbell

Crouching in the shoreside willows overlooking a well-tracked game crossing, I'd watched hopefully as the two caribou bulls — including the giant Fred eventually killed — emerged from the trees directly across the surging northern Quebec river. They'd paused briefly before splashing down into the swirling waters, swimming straight toward me. Their sweptback, velvet-furred antlers reminded me of bobbing tree branches caught in some powerful undertow.

For a few fleeting seconds, I believed I'd get a shot. But then I could only watch helplessly as the rushing current pushed the bulls downriver and well out of bow range. The caribou finally clambered ashore, shook themselves, and walked into the mouth of a small creek. They disappeared exactly where my hunting partner had gone soon after our native guide dropped us off maybe an hour earlier.

So, I wasn't really surprised when Fred appeared a short time later, walked toward me along the edge of the riverside willows, and asked, "Wanna come over and take some pictures?"

"Did you shoot that big son-of-a-gun?" I asked.

"I am proud to announce that I did," Fred said with a big grin spread across his bearded face. "Never in the annals of bowhunting has so much luck been accorded to any bowhunter."

Luck? Sure. Partly. But I've since come to understand that the harder a hunter works, the "luckier" he becomes. And take it from someone who knows, G. Fred Asbell was one very determined and hard-working bowhunter who deserved all the smiles that Lady Luck cast his way. Few men I've known have done more to promote serious bowhunting over the past half-century. As a first-class bowyer who once made sweet-shooting Bighorn longbows and recurves. As a talented author of helpful how-to books and adrenaline-laced hunting stories that were both inspirational and beneficial. And, finally, as a natural leader whose clear vision and firm hand helped steer two national bowhunting organizations to play increasingly influential roles in 20th and 21st Century archery.

Although born in southern Illinois in the latter months of 1940, Fred and I grew up not 35 miles apart — he in Petersburg, Indiana, and me in Mt. Carmel, Illinois — our paths never crossed until, most appropriately, the 1972 Pope and Young Club convention in Denver.

I had killed my first whitetail in Indiana in '63 while in college; Fred arrowed his first in '64. We both were active in tri-state National Field Archery Association tournaments. Fred later helped form the Indiana Bowhunters Association, becoming a Director and President; meanwhile, I joined the IBA and helped form the Princeton, Indiana, NFAA archery club while



Fred had many reasons to grin as he poses with his P&Y bull he arrowed in Quebec during our so-called "Old Man's Hunt" in 1990.

working as Sports Editor of the "Princeton Daily Clarion."

In 1968, after a stint in the Navy, Fred had taken a three-month leave of absence from his job at IBM near Indianapolis. He and his Hoosier hunting buddy, Bob Pitt, hired an Alaskan outfitter to pack them into the bush, where they stalked moose, caribou, and black bears.

"It was quite an experience," Fred told me. "Before Alaska, I was barely more than an anxious beginner wandering through the woods and hoping the gods of the hunt would bring me and some dumb animal together. After three months of living in a tent and hunting across the Alaskan tundra, with almost no contact from the outside world, bowhunting and its methodology, me and the animals, all began to mesh. My whole approach to bowhunting changed. I finally understood the game."

Fred was still an IBM employee when the company opted to set up a Colorado purchasing department in 1969. Fred volunteered and moved to the Rocky Mountain West, where his bowhunting options vastly expanded: elk, pronghorns, moose, bighorn sheep, mule deer. He also enjoyed more Canadian caribou adventures and stalked British Columbia grizzlies.

Fred was very much at home in the Rockies. He'd later leave the security of a full-time job with IBM and — with Colorado bowhunter Denny Behn — founded Bighorn Bowhunting Company to build custom hunting bows. A 55-pound Ram longbow and 61-pound Custom Bighorn recurve are among my personal collection of special Asbell Bighorn hunting bows.

It was at the 1972 Pope and Young gathering in Denver that Fred and I first shook hands, and having so many common roots and interests, we seemed destined to become good friends. **Bowhunter** Magazine, which had been unveiled in August of '71, published its first G. Fred Asbell feature in 1978.

REMEMBERING MY FRIEND, FRED ASBELL

Fred went on to write numerous magazine articles, and in 1980 I announced he'd joined the **Bowhunter** team as Hunting Editor. That association would continue for two-plus decades, during which time we shared more hunting camps and special memories.

Noteworthy is the fact that Fred would go on to become the longest-serving President in Pope and Young Club history (1984–2002). I had the privilege of working with him on the P&Y Board of Directors as both a Director and First Vice President. In the early 2000s, I was elected President, serving two terms in that office and several more as P&Y Past President-Director. And it was during this same time that **Bowhunter's** readership grew from some 100,000 to a paid circulation topping 220,000, and a total readership approaching 500,000. Without question, Fred contributed to the magazine's growth and popularity. Later, his articles and "Traditional Bowhunting" columns attracted, influenced, and entertained many more readers.

Fred Asbell's books, seminars, and clinics are considered excellent and informative how-to bowhunting and instinctive-shooting treasure troves for legions of readers and attendees. Tens of thousands of copies have been read and reread by generations of bowhunters looking to master "hunting the hard way," as the legendary Howard Hill called it. Fred explained it this way in his bestselling 1988 book, "Instinctive Shooting."

"Instinctive shooting is shooting a bow using only the abilities of the hand, the eye, body coordination, and instinctive memory. It is looking — concentrating — on what you want to hit and allowing the bow hand to point the arrow at the correct place — and the bow hand being directed by the brain, which says 'right there.' There is no physical reference whatsoever. That means no sights, no looking down the arrow, nothing except looking at the target and shooting."

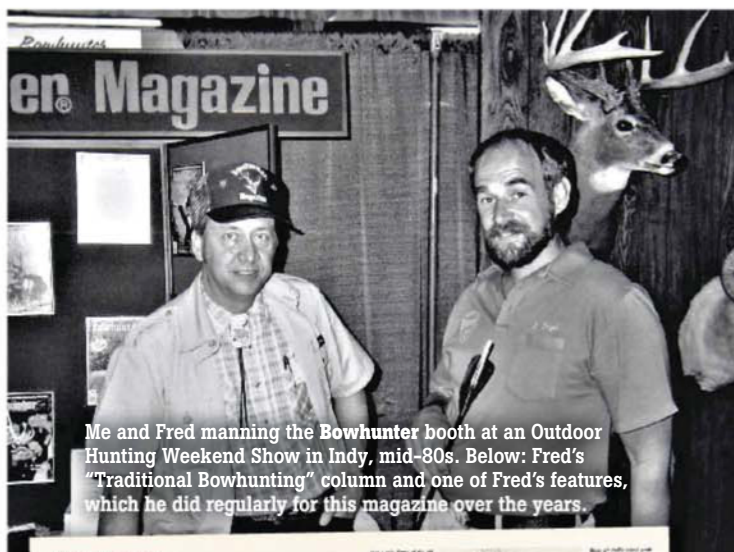
Remember the big bull caribou that Fred shot on a 1990 Quebec "Old Man's Hunt" the year we both turned 50? Here's how he described that hunt's moment of truth:

"I fell two times as I tried to run through the brushy tangle back in the direction I had come... And then I was out of the brush and on the creek bank behind the boulder pile. And there was the smaller of the two bulls trotting just below me as if everything had been perfectly timed. Even as I grabbed for an arrow, I could see the bigger bull coming. There was no time to think about how lucky I was — or how hard I was snorting and blowing — or about the sweat running into my eyes.

"I swung with him as he trotted past. I watched the big red-fletched arrow hang in the air — as they always seem to do — and saw it disappear through him. He flinched, jumped sideways, and went into the creek. With a lunge he came out the other side and stood there looking around, wondering, I suppose, what had just happened. And then he lay down and it was over."

Fred followed his wildly popular 1988 book with "Instinctive Shooting II" in 1993, followed by "Stalking & Still-Hunting: The Ground Hunter's Bible" in 1997.

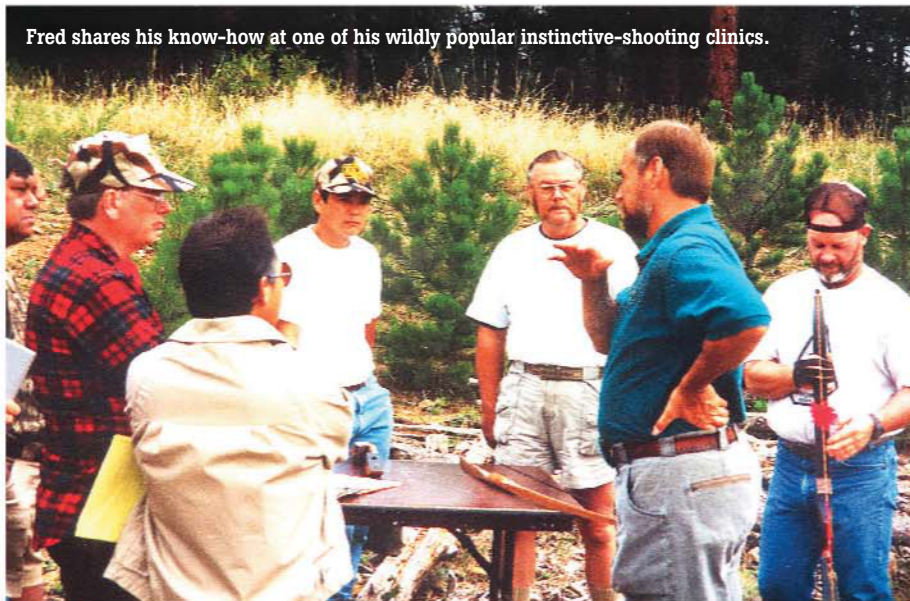
He explained the genesis of his shooting style and method as follows: "I've always shot instinctively. I sent for a Howard Hill archery catalog. In it was a sequence of pictures showing him shooting the bow, and I tried to do it that way. My backyard was small. I'd go out and shoot hundreds of arrows — but only from 10 to 15 feet. I'd shoot an old tennis ball or pencil — things like that — and I really developed my instinctive eye. Of



Me and Fred manning the **Bowhunter** booth at an Outdoor Hunting Weekend Show in Indy, mid-80s. Below: Fred's "Traditional Bowhunting" column and one of Fred's features, which he did regularly for this magazine over the years.



Fred shares his know-how at one of his wildly popular instinctive-shooting clinics.



Fred with a tall-tined whitetail he killed with his stickbow.

Fred wrote several best-selling books on the subject of instinctive shooting.



course, in those days I had no idea there was such a thing as a sight."

Over the years, Fred's shooting clinics — most notably at Ken Beck's Missouri-based Black Widow Bow Company, where over the decades a total of 721 shooters attended 42 instinctive-shooting clinics at the Nixa, MO, bow-making facility — complemented by his books, magazine features, and principled bowhunting philosophy. Overall, Fred reached legions of supporters and standing-room-only crowds wherever his hands-on instructional clinics were scheduled.

The last time I saw my longtime friend and his wife, Teresa, was late May at the 2022 Archery

Hall of Fame induction ceremony, held at Bass Pro Shops in Springfield, MO. There, displayed in the AHOF Museum, are engraved plaques of all members recognized by their peers for exceptional accomplishments in archery and bowhunting. Fred's 2010 plaque reads, "Visionary Leader and Legendary Bowhunter," noting that he had "hunted 32 states, nine Canadian provinces, and Africa, taking numerous record book animals," including 19 of the 29 recognized North American big game species.

Other legends of bowhunting, whose plaques are on permanent display, include Fred Bear, Ben Pearson, Jim Dougherty, Howard Hill, Bob Swinehart, Chuck Adams, Saxton Pope, Art Young, Will "Chief" Compton, and Glenn St. Charles, to name only a few. And I'd be remiss if I failed to mention the **Bowhunter** staff members and regular Contributors to the magazine who have also gained AHOF recognition. These include Dr. Dave Samuel, who has continuously served the magazine for 50-plus years, Len Cardinale, Dwight Schuh, Randy Ulmer, and some guy named M. R. James.

Induction banquets are a happy but exceptionally busy time. While happy to see Fred and Teresa, I knew our time together would be all too brief. And when the banquet ceremonies ran past midnight, I missed seeing the Asbells afterwards and wishing them safe travels back to Michigan.

I'd thought Fred looked his usual self, albeit a bit tired. An earlier bout with kidney cancer had taken its toll, yet I'd heard his subsequent surgery went well.

Then, a half-year later, on January 6, I got word my friend had been hospitalized in serious condition with kidney failure. I confirmed the news by phone with Teresa, who requested prayers from all friends and followers. The online response was overwhelming and positive. Then, on January 8, came the sad news that Fred had gone to sleep in the night and passed away peacefully with Teresa at his hospital bedside.

The bowhunting community has lost a friend and eloquent spokesman who touched tens of thousands of men, women, and budding young archers and bowhunters. I — and all who knew, loved, and respected G. Fred Asbell — will never again know a man like the uniquely gifted, bearded archer who preferred wooden bows and wool clothing to the standard mechanical tackle and camouflage uniform carried and worn by millions of 21st Century archery hunters. **BH**

BACK TO THE FUTURE

STICKBOWS HAVE BEEN AROUND AS LONG AS BOWHUNTING ITSELF. THUS, THEIR RESURGENCE IN POPULARITY SHOULD COME AS NO SURPRISE.

BY JOE BLAKE, CONTRIBUTOR



▲ Here I'm shaping one of my Prairie Longbows in my MN bow shop. Whether you opt for a factory bow, a vintage bow, or a custom-built model, stickbows are the ultimate hunting weapon.

◀ Shorter bows work well inside most pop-up blinds. My 2022 MN spring turkey was taken with a 60-inch, 52-pound Prairie Panther longbow from inside such a blind.

Immediately, I knew I was in trouble as the giant, velvet muley buck was bearing down on me at a steady walk. But he was coming in head-on, and didn't seem inclined to turn and offer me a shot. I was sitting halfway up the steep side of a wooded draw somewhere in the vast reaches of the North Dakota Badlands, leaning against a gnarly, old tree that the record-class buck seemed intent on visiting. Yards became feet, and eventually the huge muley was a mere eight feet away,

working the overhanging branch with his mouth, pre-orbital glands, and even the bases of his fuzzy antlers. His face and rack completely covered his body...not that it would have mattered anyway, because I was shaking uncontrollably. It was doubtful I could have even drawn back my recurve bow!

Suddenly, the deer did an about-face and marched straight away from me to join up with a trio of nice velvet bucks that I hadn't even seen. The quartet then climbed up out of the draw and disappeared.

Waiting a half-hour to see if any other deer would make their way up the draw, and to calm the rapid-fire beating of my heart, I eased out of the draw to glass my surroundings. As

► Women and children can easily get involved in traditional archery, and lighter bows are readily available. Here my wife, Kim, takes aim at a passing carp on a spring day.



▲ Stickbows are the perfect weapon for the fast action of bowfishing. Here my son, Ryan, shows off a nice carp, and my daughter, Megan, shows off her very first gar.



▼ The 3 basic stickbow types: L-R, recurve, longbow, and self-bow...each type of bow is an efficient and deadly weapon in practiced hands.



◀ Fast, accurate shooting is possible with a stickbow, so it's not an issue when that buck of a lifetime pauses for just a moment.

◀ Stickbows lend themselves perfectly to shooting in awkward positions: Kneeling, sitting, twisted around, and even shooting while reclined is possible with traditional bows.

luck would have it, I watched a nice buck slip into the head of a dry wash a couple hundred yards away, and when I didn't see him come out, I quickly began my stalk.

The open prairie offered quiet walking, and the stiff wind this country is famous for covered any sound I might have been making while also carrying my scent directly away from

where the buck had disappeared. Approaching where the mule deer had dropped into the deep cut, I tossed a couple rocks to the other side of the hideout...nothing. After I ran out of rocks, I bleated softly on my deer call with similar results, so I assumed the buck had slipped out the bottom of the ravine while I was out of sight. Walking to the edge and looking down, I didn't immediately see anything, but then a velvet antler tip moved directly below me, and my pulse hit overdrive!

The deer was bedded in the shade of the overhanging bank, so all I could see was an occasional antler tip. Not wanting the deer to bolt, I stood there like a statue, arrow nocked and tension on the string of the bent stick cradled in my left hand.

BACK TO THE FUTURE

For over two hours I stood — baking in the sun and getting pounded by the incessant wind — until the buck finally got on his feet and exposed his body. At a distance of maybe three feet from the tip of my broadhead to the top of his back, my heavy cedar arrow scarcely cleared the bow before hitting the buck with a resounding *thunk!* The buck rocketed up and out of his hiding place and across the prairie, heading for the heavy cover of the wooded valley to the east, but the broadhead did its job well and the hard-hit deer folded up in midstride less than 100 yards away.

Although this hunt took place decades ago, I remember it like it was yesterday. As it happened, a lot of firsts took place on this hunt: My first mule deer, my first traditional kill, and my first tag filled with a wooden arrow that I had crafted myself.

As I write this piece, 50 years of shooting and hunting with stickbows have passed since I first picked up a fiberglass recurve as a kid in Minnesota. I still handcraft a lot of cedar arrows, I still twist up all of my own Flemish strings, and for nearly two decades now I've handcrafted my own longbows under the Prairie Longbows moniker. I've seen a lot in five decades; most notably the compound taking over the bowhunting market to the point that seeing a fellow stickbow enthusiast is a rarity.

Stickbow popularity has ebbed and flowed over the years, but there's been a recent surge in their popularity the likes of which I've not experienced in a half century. I've thought a lot about this and I believe that in this crazy, messed up world we find ourselves in, people are seeing the absolute need and desire for simplicity, self-sufficiency, and for the use of these age-old tools to provide for themselves and their families. Whatever the reason for a person's interest in stickbows, there are a few constants to consider...

Bow Types. As far as traditional bows are concerned, there are three basic options to consider: self-bows, longbows, and recurves. All three types have their diehard enthusiasts, and all three can and will cleanly and effectively harvest game.

Self-bows are quite simply a bent stick, and they are commonly fashioned from a single piece of wood, with popular options being Osage, Yew, Hickory, and a few others. Self-bows have no glass in their construction and little if anything in the way of laminations — generally, a self-bow enthusiast will pick a relatively straight piece of wood called a stave, and then whittle and shape the bow to his or her liking.

Self-bows are the simplest and oldest form of stickbows, and they've been around since man first fashioned them as an improvement on hunting with a spear. Typically, they're not as durable as modern, laminated bows, but they are still deadly in practiced hands, and self-bow hunters still take more than their share of game, even in these modern times.

In shape and function, longbows closely resemble self-bows, with the biggest difference being longbows are glued together in multiple layers and have glass in this stack. These laminations make the modern longbow much more durable and nearly impervious to weather, while significantly improving performance.

A traditional longbow, often called an ASL (American Semi-Longbow) or Hill Style Bow after the legendary longbow hunter Howard Hill, is typically as long as the name



While stickbows are most often considered a close-range weapon, my partners Fred Rasmussen, Dan Johnson, Denny Mahoney, and I are proof that even open-country trophies like caribou are fair game.

suggests: 66 to 74 inches for the most part, and they are very quick on target acquisition, smooth-drawing, and shoot heavy arrows extremely well. They can and often do have noticeable hand-shock and can be finicky with arrow spine because their sight window is seldom cut all the way to the center of the riser, but they have been around for decades and have accounted for countless game animals hitting the meat-pole from rabbits to elephants!

More recently, longbow designs have improved, and RD (reflex-deflex) and hybrids have taken over the longbow market. These modern longbows can be found in much shorter lengths (from 54 to 64 inches), lack the hand-shock of an ASL-style bow, and can perform on par with even the fastest recurves. While many purists don't consider these modern longbows to be a true representative of this niche, there's no denying their popularity!

I picked up my first RD longbow 30 years ago — a 60-inch Monarch longbow crafted by the late Monty Moravec — and that started a love affair with these bows that continues today and eventually led me to start handcrafting my own line of reflex-deflex bows nearly two decades ago. I honestly believe that these bows are the ultimate hunting weapon, and I will continue to carry this style of bow in the woods, across the prairie, and up and down mountains until my bowhunting journey has ended.

As the name implies, recurve bows have a pronounced curvature at both ends of the bow. A recurve is the Ferrari of the stickbow world when compared to the simple lines of a longbow or self-bow, and this style has continued to gain popularity since taking over the traditional scene in the 50s and 60s.



Compared to a self-bow or longbow, the recurve can be very short; 44 to 48-inch bows are not uncommon, which makes them handy in the tight confines of a treestand or ground blind. Generally speaking, recurves shoot a faster arrow than their straight-limbed counterparts, although this is less true now with modern longbow designs. Recurves also shoot a much wider range of arrow spines than most longbows.

When I shot recurves, I typically hunted with shafts in the 90 to 100-pound range, because these tight-grained arrows could be found in very heavy mass weights, even though I shot bows 30 to 40-pounds lighter than my arrows...you can't do that with a longbow! Another advantage to recurves is that they more closely resemble a compound bow, especially the deeper grip, which makes a person's transition from modern to traditional archery easier.

Bow Weight. The first and most important consideration when choosing a stickbow is draw weight. **DO NOT OVERBOW!**

With no letoff advantage, shooting a traditional bow is very different than shooting a compound, and the worst thing an archer can do is to pick out a bow that's too heavy. Shooting a heavy bow will lead to poor form and bad shooting habits, and very often leads to the end of your Back to the Future journey in short order!

A 25 to 35-pound self-bow, longbow, or recurve is a manageable and comfortable weight for most adults. And depending on your state or province's regulations, can even be hunted with in some locales.

The first recurve I ever owned was 45 pounds. It was so heavy for me at 11 years old that I couldn't even draw it back! I struggled for a time, but having access to a lake full of carp provided lots of shooting opportunities and I quickly gained strength.

Eventually, I worked up to 60 to 70-pound recurves, but those weights have dropped significantly now that I'm in my 60s...my primary hunting bow is a 52-pound Prairie Panther longbow, but with a bow shoulder that's seen lots of wear and tear, I also built myself a 42-pound Prairie Wildcat that I can shoot all day without discomfort.

My best advice is to start light and work on form, and only after you're completely comfortable should you consider increasing draw weight. Heavy bows are not necessary to be a successful traditional bowhunter, and a stickbow in the 50 to 55-pound range will cleanly kill any animal in North America, while bows in the 30 to 45-pound range are plenty for deer and bear-sized game.

Shot placement is the key, so hunt with a bow that allows you to consistently put your arrows where they need to go. Of course, always check your local game laws to be sure what's legal, and then work up to the heaviest bow you can shoot comfortably and accurately.

One thing to note is that while traditional bows are not adjustable like a compound, you need to know your draw length relative to the bow's marked poundage. Factory stickbows are scaled at 28 inches...if you draw more or less than 28 inches, you will lose or gain draw weight — typically two to three pounds per inch on a well-designed bow. Of course, custom bowyers can build you a bow to your exact specifications.

Bow Length. A bow's physical length can and will play a role in your success in the field. Too short, and the bow can be difficult to shoot, especially if you have a longer draw length, while a bow that's too long may result in clearance issues in heavy cover, a treestand, or if you hunt from ground blinds.

Ultra-short recurves were wildly popular back in the 70s, but as with most choices, a compromise is often the best option. Personally, I think that 60 inches is the perfect length, because it's long enough to be smooth and forgiving but short enough where limb clearance is seldom an issue. As a generalization, shorter bows are quicker handling, faster shooting, and offer better clearance, while longer bows are smoother, more forgiving, and more comfortable to shoot. In the end, as with most decisions, personal preference is what counts.

Today, more and more hunters are giving stickbows a try, and rightly so. Traditional bows have been around for thousands of years, and will no doubt continue to successfully put meat on the table for as long as humans roam this planet. Happily, the wealth of information available now makes it easier than ever for outdoorsmen and women to go Back to the Future and give self-bows, longbows, and recurves a try! **BH**

The author has been shooting, hunting with, and writing about stickbows for decades, picking up his first recurve with lawn-mowing money back in 1972 at the age of 11. In 2005, he came full circle and began handcrafting his own longbows under the Prairie Longbows name, and he continues offering a limited number of these bows from his shop in Minnesota. For information, visit prairielongbows.com, or search Prairie Longbows on Facebook or Instagram.

WORTH THE WAIT

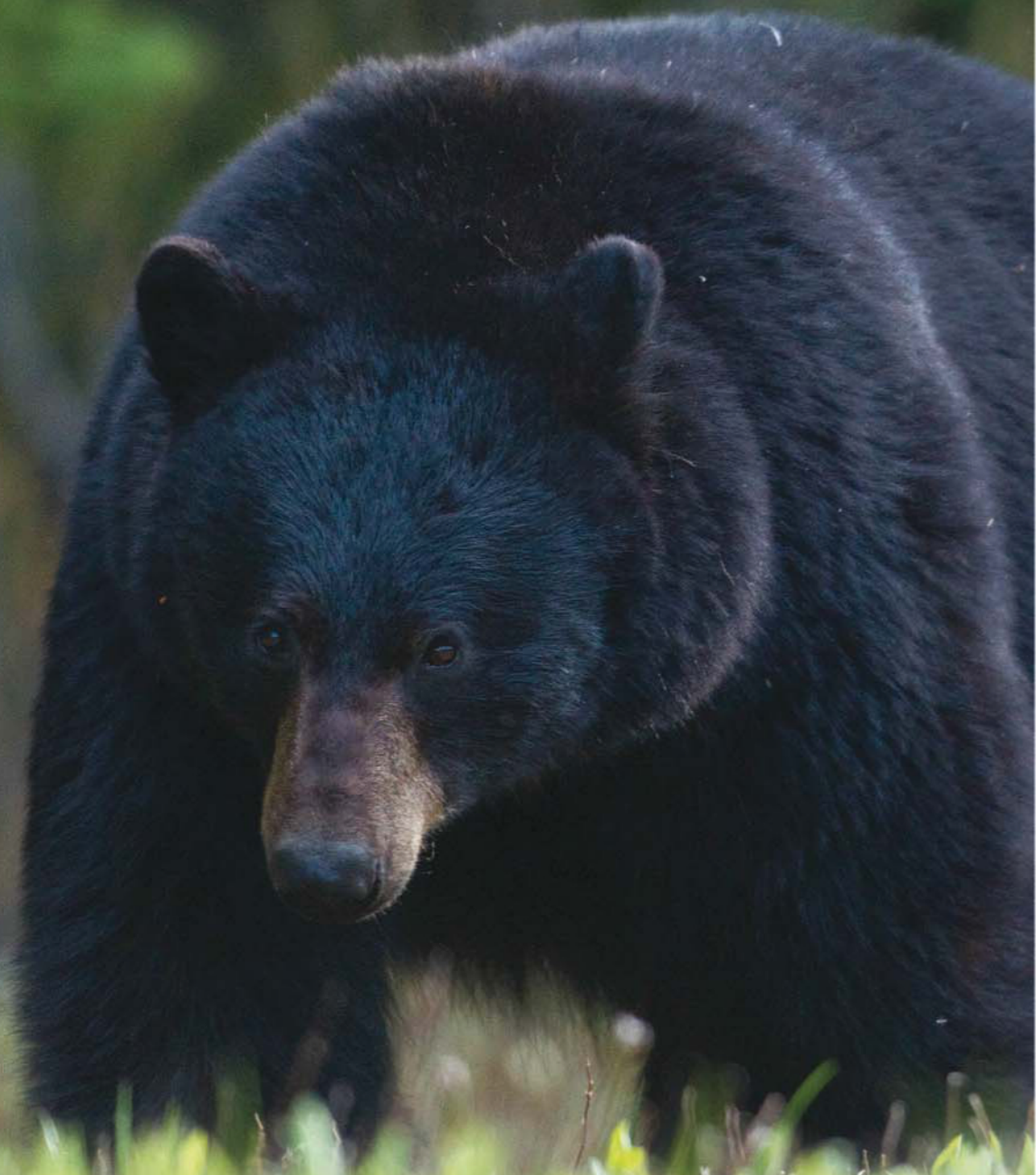


PHOTO BY DONALD M. JONES.COM

THINGS CAN CHANGE IN A HEARTBEAT FOR MYRIAD REASONS, AND THIS BEAR HUNT WAS NO EXCEPTION.

BY MATT PALMQUIST, CONTRIBUTOR

The splashing in the inlet to the ocean brought me back to life from my treestand stupor. I struggled to see through the trees, but finally spotted two bears. One was aggressively running the other bear off, but both looked like shooters to me.

As the bears continued to mill around on the open shoreline and the sun descended in the western sky, I decided to gamble and crawled down from my treestand to position myself on the edge of the grassy tidal flat. A bear emerged from the forest on the far shoreline. I watched him for a while before finally deciding he was worth trying to stalk, but the terrain was wide-open and I was running out of daylight.

When the bear would sink his head into the lush tidal grass to eat, I would move forward aggressively. I couldn't believe my cameraman, Eric, and I were able to rapidly close the distance as the bear fed. This might actually work!

Prince of Wales Island (POW) in Southeast Alaska is known for its mon-

ster black bears. When I first started hunting bears, I didn't expect that it would become a recurring hunt on my schedule. But my good friends Jason Stafford and Jesse Knock live for hunting these coastal bruins, and their passion for bear hunting has rubbed off on me. In all honesty, the hunting is a bonus; the adventure of exploring remote areas of Southeast Alaska with Jason, Jesse, and our buddy Daniel Peters is worth the trip north. We always have tons of fun with lots of laughs, and we leave POW with stories to tell for the rest of our lives.

This hunt started several years ago, shortly after our first hunt on POW in 2018, when Jason and I were both able to take Pope and Young bears. Alaska Game and Fish has a unique application process as far as the time it takes from submittal of application to the time of the hunt. We applied late in 2018, and found out in February 2019 that we would be hunting POW again in the spring of 2020.

Fast-forward to early 2020. Jason and I were getting amped up and regularly



We were blessed with clear skies and beautiful views on our flight from Ketchikan to POW, an island famous for monster black bears.

WORTH THE WAIT

talking to Jesse and Daniel about the logistics for our upcoming adventure, when talks started in the media about something called COVID that was spreading across the world. At first, we didn't think much of it, but that quickly changed when the world basically shut down.

We sat in limbo, not knowing what was going to happen to our tags after travel ceased and the spring 2020 bear season was cancelled for nonresidents. POW is increasingly difficult to draw. To some, hunting could seem secondary compared to what was occurring across the world, but to a couple of obsessed bowhunters anxious to hunt trophy brunns again, it was a big deal.

Kudos to the crew at the Alaska Department of Fish and Game for making things right. The draw had already taken place for the 2021 spring hunt, and if they pushed our hunt to 2021, there would be double the hunters afield. So



This guy became known as the "floppy-eared bear" after we captured pics of him on our Browning trail cameras.

the next option was to bump the 2020 tagholders to the 2022 spring season, to allow adjustments to be made in tag allotments before the 2022 draw. We didn't expect an application in late 2018 would result in a spring 2022 hunt, but better late than never!

Three years after learning of our success in the draw, we finally headed north to Alaska. Jesse is dialed in when it comes to baiting bears, and this year was no different. He spent months studying maps and areas we could hunt exclusively from a skiff, accessing the baits from the ocean. He had multiple baits set up before we arrived near large tidal flats adjacent to gnarly, dark timber.

After our obligatory hugs and greetings with our friends, Jason and I turned our focus to getting stocked up with baiting and grocery supplies for the week before heading to our friend's cabin, which would serve as our base camp for the week.

Once settled, it was time to refresh the baits and see what intel we could gather from our Browning trail cameras. The first bait we checked was destroyed: There was zero bait left, and the barrel was torn off the tree and carried into the woods. We scrolled through the card and saw enough to get Jason's attention.

We quickly hung a stand, which Jason then climbed into for the evening hunt. He saw a few bears, but not the one he came to Alaska for. The bears he saw were leery as they approached the bait, and Jason was convinced the swirling wind was the culprit.



When Daniel and I went to rebait the second site, we found it to be in the same state of “bear disrepair” as the first bait site — a good problem to have, I must admit. The bait barrel was empty, but the camera was lying on the ground, so our intel was nil. Even so, the sign was great, so I set up on the ground between two large pines with Eric over my shoulder for the evening hunt. My anticipation level was high, but nothing showed that evening. I also felt like the wind may have been swirling, but we checked the spot the following morning and nothing had touched the bait overnight.

My experience hunting bears in Southeast Alaska is limited, but Jesse has been doing it for years. He couldn't believe that no bears had hit that bait after

we refreshed it, especially since the activity up to this point had been dynamite.

We left that bait and went to check another site. On our way there, we saw a nice bear on the shoreline. Daniel glassed him, and then said it was a good bear but a borderline shooter at this point. We closed the distance for a better look, and that's when we noticed that the bear had an injured front leg and a noticeable limp. We were contemplating a stalk, when the bear decided that he had seen enough of the intrusion and ducked back into the timber.

When we got to the bait, we found a similar scene: The bait was gone, and the area was torn up. We rebaited and tucked into the brush less than 20 yards from the bait.

The weather was sunny and gorgeous, which isn't the norm in Alaska, so I felt like sitting was our best option. Unfortunately, the results were the same as the previous day, and our only visitor that evening was a pine marten, which was still pretty cool.

I had been spoiled on previous spring bear hunts in Alaska, having killed nice bears on the first day both times. I was in uncharted waters going into Day Three, with very little action to speak of. To add to it, I hadn't been sleeping well and felt like I was coming down with a bug. But with limited time to hunt, sitting out was not an option.

The boys and I strategized for a bit before making the decision to go back to the same location as the night before. When we got to the site, my eyes told me the bait had not been hit. But Daniel's more-experienced peepers picked up on subtle things like sticks being moved and a track near the bait, which spiked my excitement level and caused us to hang two treestands close to where I had sat on the ground the night before.

Hours later, I finally heard a splash in the inlet and soon spotted a bear. He charged through the water toward another bear on the opposite shoreline. Finally, the action we had been looking for — even though it wasn't on the bait.

Eric was above me, and from his vantage he could see more than I could. Eric



My cameraman pulled this screenshot of my bear from the video he shot during my stalk. Look closely and you can see the bear favoring his left front leg.



The day before I arrowed my bear, I nearly had a chance to stalk him on this shoreline.

WORTH THE WAIT

My bear measured 20 $\frac{1}{16}$ P&Y-style inches. I had no clue he was this big, and it was icing on the cake that was my time spent with good friends doing what we all love to do.



told me that he watched the bear start heading toward the bait at one point, only to turn around and walk back toward the grass flat.

That was enough for me to decide it was time to make something happen. We crawled down and snuck to the edge of the trees. We could see a bear on the opposite shoreline, and after watching him I realized he was limping noticeably. *It had to be the bear from the day before*, I thought to myself. I debated on his size, but I ultimately came back to the fact that Daniel thought he was a nice bear and decided his experience with bears trumped mine. Couple that with an injured front leg, and I figured it was worth trying a stalk.

I have talked at length about stalking bears with Jesse and put those conversations to use. The wind was light, but it was in my favor. When the bear put his head down to eat, we would move.

I couldn't believe it as we quickly closed the distance and soon found ourselves 50 yards from the bear! At this point, the bear noticed us and turned in our direction. The bear then took a couple steps, before sitting down and facing us. I contemplated a shot, but the angle was too risky at that range, so I waited.

When he turned to walk back toward the trees, I double-checked the distance. The bruin stopped perfectly quartering away, and when he did, I settled my pin and sent my arrow on its way. The hit looked and sounded good — the former reinforced by the sight of my Lumenok lighted nock vanishing into the bear's hide!

Daylight waned as Daniel idled up in the skiff. We replayed what just happened and Daniel grinned, because he watched the entire thing unfold through his binoculars. I didn't hear a "death moan," but I did hear branches breaking up the mountain as the bear charged off after the shot. We discussed leaving him, but after weighing all the options and evaluating the footage, we decided the shot looked good enough to warrant us cautiously taking up the trail right then and there.

Daniel took off up the mountain ahead of us. We weren't even headed up the hill yet, when we heard Daniel hollering that he had found my bear. What a relief! It had been a long day, but the last 30 minutes made that miserable sit worth the wait!

The author is a regular Contributor to this magazine, and he lives in Kansas with his wife and children.

Author's Notes: My equipment on this hunt included a Hoyt RX-7 Ultra bow, Spot Hogg sight, Vapor Trail Gen7 rest, TruFire release, Rage Trypan NC broadheads, TightSpot quiver, and clothing from Browning in Mossy Oak camo.

My buddy Jason Stafford has hunted black bears for years, dreaming of killing a true giant that ranks high in the P&Y record book. His dreams finally became reality in May 2022. On the fourth day of our hunt, Jason was back at the same bait he sat on the first evening. This time he opted to sit away from the bait near the shoreline, where



Jason's dreams became reality when he killed this bear, which scored 20 $\frac{1}{16}$.

the winds were more consistent. When the giant bruin he had been after came into the bait, he waited for him to get comfortable before stalking in for a shot. Jason's arrow flew true, and he killed an awesome bear with a huge body and a skull to match!

Our baits were in remote locations, making it difficult to check and rebait them regularly. Action was slow at the beginning of the hunt, and after much discussion, we concluded that the bears had drained the bait barrels days before we showed up to refresh them. They moved off to "greener pastures" to eat, and it took time for them to get back on the baits again.

We blamed swirling winds for the apprehensive approach of the animals, but I think we were starting all over again and the bears needed time to become comfortable on the baits. In hindsight, we probably should have been more patient, given the circumstances, and allowed more time for the bears to once again get accustomed to the established bait sites.



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I WAS BEWILDERED AS I NOCKED AN ARROW and dawn spilled daylight onto the gorgeous Wisconsin landscape. Why? Well, I hadn't heard a single gobble. For the previous two mornings, just after sunup, a gobbler had strutted right here, and I fully expected that he'd be roosted within 200 yards of my setup. He wasn't.

My 2022 turkey season began out west. Birds that would answer the calls but go the opposite direction gave me a touch-go. With time running out, I anchored one with the shotgun on a spot-and-stalk mission.

After that hunt, I returned to Wisconsin and got things situated for the state's youth hunt. I annually mentor young kids — usually nieces or nephews — with turkey hunting, to plant seeds in the next generation. My nephew and my friend's son both nailed big, paintbrush-bearded gobblers before noon on opening morning of the youth hunt.

With all of that behind me, it was time to focus on what I love most about spring: Bowhunting big Eastern gobblers in my home state.

My Approach

After the drawing, Wisconsin allows turkey hunters to purchase one leftover tag per day beginning in late March. Each tag is for a specific zone and time period. The state has been allocating tags this way for many seasons, and it's been proven to maximize opportunity without overharvesting. However, it's important on an individual level not to harvest too many birds from one area or property. I've found that "conservative harvest" means I can return to properties every spring and have birds to hunt.

Since I can't get enough of spring turkey hunting, I buy multiple tags. My strategy is bouncing around and getting permission on several different parcels that are far apart. I also hunt on public land. All told, I hunt in two to three different counties every spring. Again, the idea is to spread my harvest across a greater area, so that I have little to no impact on any one area.

My strategy with gaining access to private ground has allowed me to meet a handful of salt-of-the-earth folks whom I otherwise wouldn't have — folks like Farmer Kevin. I hunted Kevin's property for the first time in 2021, and I bowkilled a bird there on my first attempt during Time Period F, which is the last week of the season.

In spring 2022, I planned to reach

out to Kevin to see if I could hunt on his farm again, but my Time Period F leftover tag for the zone Kevin's property is in didn't validate until May 25, so I became distracted by my earlier tags and sort of forgot about Kevin's place for the time being.

A Strong Start To The Spring

My first archery hunt was a quick one on my neighbor's property. After having a bird skirt me on the first morning, I noticed a flock on the other side of the road. A look through my bins confirmed that the flock was guarded by two toms. With no approach, I headed for home to get some writing done.

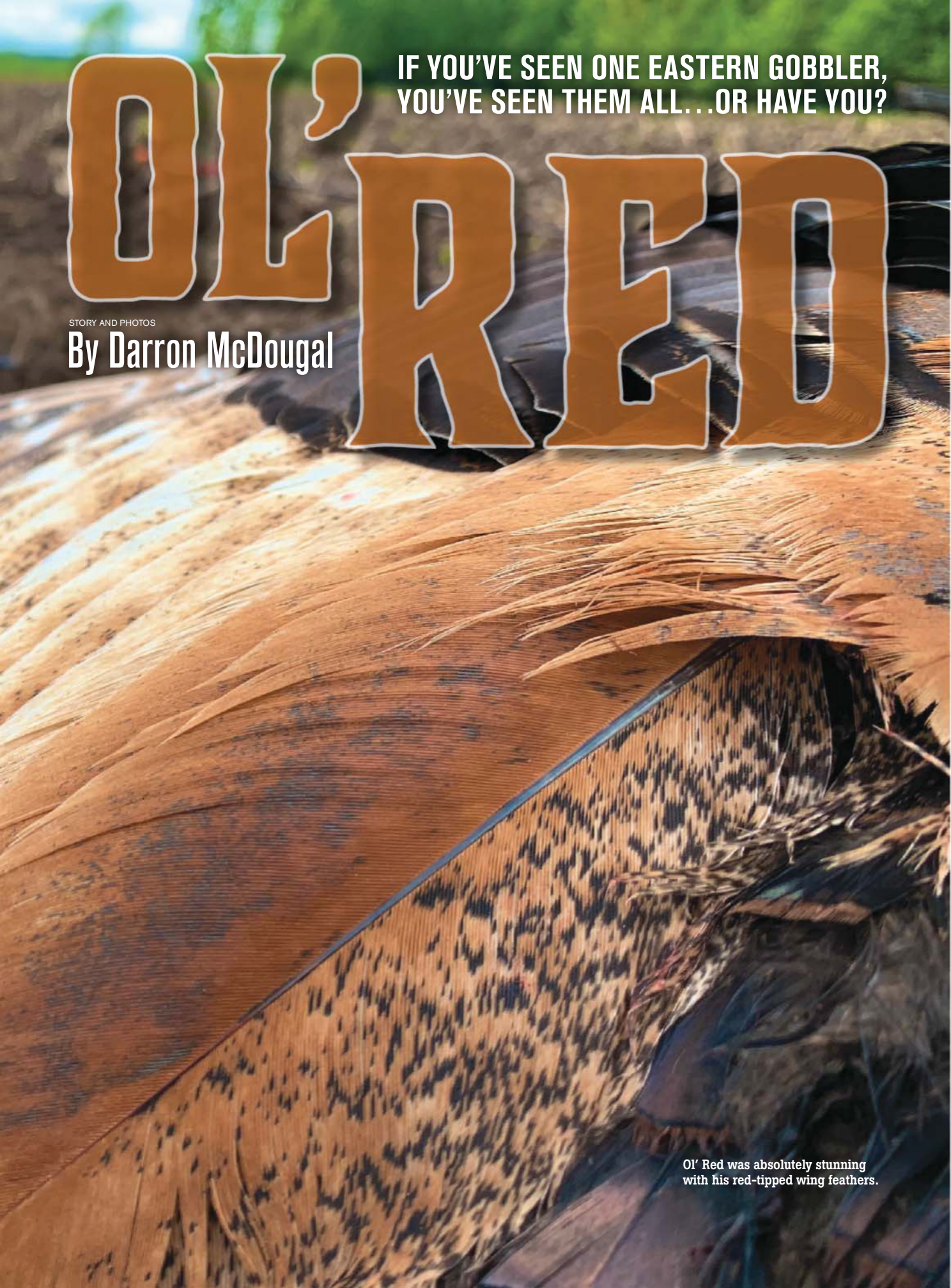
I hunted that spot the following morning. Immediately after flydown, two mouthy gobblers hammered away as they marched right to my DSD Decoys. Two came in. One left.

Three weeks later and more than 20 miles away on another property, I had another hot-off-the-roost hunt when two roaring gobblers dropped down into the field and beelined right to my decoys. I picked out the strutter and thumped him with my Mathews V3X. I was now two for two with the bow.

After two successful shotgun hunts on different properties far away from the other properties I'd already hunted, it was time to see what was shaking at Kevin's place.

When I drove past Kevin's property early the morning before my F tag started, I didn't see any turkeys in the field where I'd scored in 2021. However, way back behind his barn on the other side of the road was a dark dot where a freshly worked dirt field adjoined a lush alfalfa field. I pulled off along the shoulder of the road and scanned with my binoculars. It was a lone tom in full strut. I couldn't put my finger on it, but something about him seemed different. I chose a landmark, so that I'd know where to set my blind and decoys the following morning — if Kevin was cool with me hunting again.

I called Kevin to make sure that I could hunt on his farm. He told me to go ahead, but he said that he'd given some



OL' RED

IF YOU'VE SEEN ONE EASTERN GOBBLER,
YOU'VE SEEN THEM ALL...OR HAVE YOU?

STORY AND PHOTOS

By Darron McDougal

Ol' Red was absolutely stunning
with his red-tipped wing feathers.

other hunters permission to hunt, too. He also mentioned that they'd asked a few weeks earlier but hadn't showed up yet. In other words, he didn't know which Time Period tags they had. I assured him that I'd back off if I saw the other hunters.

Showing Up At Kevin's

As my headlights flooded the road that cuts between the barn and other buildings and enters the field where the gobbler was strutting, they illuminated the taillights of someone else's vehicle. I looked through my binoculars and distinguished that a pickup truck was parked just off the field road in the grass. Naturally, I assumed that another hunter had beaten me there. Slightly bummed out, I backed off and went with Plan B, which was to hunt on the other side of the road where I'd killed my 2021 gobbler.

Things were quiet over there as I hiked across the dirt field. I walked and called and walked and called. No gobbling. I decided to set up anyway and call periodically for a little bit, but to no avail. I retreated and drove by the field I'd originally planned to hunt, fully expecting to see a happy hunter marching off the field with a gobbler slung over his/her shoulder.

Instead, the bird was strutting right where he'd been the previous morning, and I noticed that the truck was still parked there. Confused, I pulled in to get a closer look at the truck, and that's when I planted my forehead in my palm. The truck was dented and battered. It was unmistakably a farm truck that Kevin had parked and left there, not a truck belonging to another hunter. "I could've killed that bird this morning," I muttered, as I headed for home. All I could do was laugh at my simple oversight.

A Showdown With Ol' Red

The following morning, I arrived at Kevin's nice and early.



I unloaded my QuietKat e-bike, slung my blind, decoys, and bow onto my back, and then rode the farm road into the field until I was 100 yards from where I wanted to set my blind and decoys. I tip-toed the rest of the way, plugging the decoys into the dirt and erecting my blind just eight yards from the plastic birds. That brings us to where we left off in my introduction.

Even though there was no gobbling, I knew I needed to stay put. The bird had strutted right here for the previous two mornings. Would he do it again?

A gobbler interrupted my thoughts 30 minutes later, and it came from just below a hill in the alfalfa field. How things can instantly change! I made a few yelps with my mouth call to let him know that I was out in the dirt, and he gobbled back. I didn't make another peep.

He appeared less than 100 yards away from my blind, and the moment he spotted my DSD Jake and Feeding Hen decoys, he dropped his breasts down and swaggered toward me with his beard swinging back and forth as only fully committed gobblers do. I downplayed the encounter by whispering, "It's just a bird," trying to get some ice in my veins. Even after killing dozens of gobblers with my bow, I still get wound tight whenever a gobbler is coming in hot.

In less than one minute, I was watching him at 20 yards and closing through my peep sight. When he reached the plastic jake and began circling it, my pin settled perfectly on his right wingbutt as he quartered toward me. Normally, I let toms beat up the decoy and then calm down before shooting, but everything was lined up so perfectly, and I didn't want to mess it up.



A QuietKat e-bike made for a quick, silent entry, and buzzing back and forth with the bird, blind, decoys, and bow was far easier than on foot. Work smarter, not harder, they say.

This is the setup that yielded me an eight-yard shot at the gobbler discussed in the article. Inset: This battered truck was the one I saw in my headlights when I arrived to hunt the first morning, causing me to think that other hunters who had permission to hunt on the property had beaten me there. Turns out it was just a farm truck.



Have you ever seen an Eastern gobbler with red wing feathers like this (left)? I've killed dozens of turkeys with my bow over the years, but this one was the most unique of them all.



Slowly, I squeezed my Spot-Hogg Wiseguy's trigger until the bow fired.

My arrow blasted almost through the bird. He ruffled up but didn't know that he'd been harpooned as he walked on wobbly legs for five steps before slumping to the ground. Again, I've killed a lot of toms, but I never tire of watching the show unfold at less than 10 yards!

The Unicorn Turkey

While taking a few moments to soak in the late-May sights and sounds, including another gobbler sounding off in the nearby timber, I noticed that my bird exhibited unusual plumage. So, I unzipped the blind and walked out to collect my prize.

Sure enough, the bird's wings were extremely brownish/red rather than the typical sandy/gray on all the other gobblers I've taken in Wisconsin. Even the wing quills exhibited red pigmentation. I've taken the wild turkey Grand Slam with my bow, and I certainly found it fascinating to take the Osceola, Merriam's, and Rio Grande and see their differences in coloration. Suffice it to say that I found it even more fascinating to take this unicorn Eastern.

I shot lots of photos before taking the bird back home to show my wife, Becca. She sees me bring home a pile of turkeys every spring, but even she couldn't believe the unusual coloration. I'm not into naming animals I hunt, but I think I'll call him Ol' Red. **BH**



Even the bird's fan (right) was very red compared to most of the gobblers I've anchored in central Wisconsin, such as the one pictured at left.

The author, a full-time freelance outdoor writer, published his very first article ever in the May/June 2009 issue of Bowhunter Magazine. He and his wife, Becca, live in central Wisconsin.

Author's Notes:

I bow-killed my first two toms of spring 2022 with my Mathews V3X 29. The day before I went in after Ol' Red, though, I was shooting some practice arrows and noticed some inconsistencies. I believe the bowstring crept, as my tune was off. So, I grabbed my Mathews V3 27 and took a few shots with it. It was dead on. I guess it pays to have a back-up bow.

I took out Ol' Red with an Easton 6.5 340 Acu-Carbon arrow tipped with a Trophy Taker broadhead. I used a Spot-Hogg Fast Eddie XL sight, Stokerized stabilizer, and a Mathews UltraRest Integrate MX. I hunted from a Realtree EDGE blind by Tidewe, and Dave Smith Decoys helped me get a slam-dunk shot at eight yards.

IT ALL FALLS INTO PLACE

**THE ONLY WAY TO ERASE THE MEMORIES OF
PAST MISTAKES IS TO FOCUS ON THE PRESENT.**

BY MELISSA STARK

PHOTO BY MARK RAYCROFT

I was shaking so much, there were bubbles in my bowsight's level. I couldn't believe what I was seeing. My hands were already freezing as I gripped my bow and clipped on my release. *You have got to be kidding me!* I thought to myself.

I'd sat more than I had in the past 2½ seasons, and after having the worst luck the entire time, I doubted whether an opportunity like this would ever come again. I knew it was incredibly rare and I'd better not mess it up this time. The biggest buck we had on camera all year, one we drooled over and never thought we'd get a shot at, was walking right toward me!

Two days before, I got him on camera lip-curling at a spot where a hot doe had just left her mark. I had many heartbreaking opportunities with different deer the last couple years, but this time was different. This season, while on stand, I'd been thinking a lot about "Old Man Glodrey," my 74-year-old friend who had recently passed. We used to spend a lot of time together down at the VFW, talking smack and telling hunting stories. If you knew Glodrey, then you knew his stories could be quite embellished at times. But now he wasn't there to listen to my stories anymore.

For the past seven years, my oldest brother, Jeramy, and I have been going



This photo shows my buck lip-curling in response to a doe two days before I shot him.



to West River South Dakota to hunt (we live east of the Missouri River). We have never been home for the rut, which is what I've been waiting for ever since I started hunting seven years ago.

Instead of West River, this year we went with my boyfriend, Chad Sandbo, to his buddy's hunting shack in eastern

Minnesota to rifle hunt. We had a great time and tagged out four days early, so we got to come home in the middle of the rut to bowhunt — finally!

We arrived home from Minnesota, only to experience a substantial ice storm that kept us out of the field the first day. The next day, Chad and I went out to

sit in our stands, but trees were falling all around us from the weight of the ice and it wasn't safe to be there.

While we were there, we also noticed many of the deer trails that went right by our stands were blocked by fallen trees. We knew we had to do something, so instead of hunting the next day, we took

IT ALL FALLS INTO PLACE



The day before I shot my buck, not far from here, everything was coated in a layer of ice.



After the storm, the ice-encapsulated grass sounded like breaking glass under our tires and feet.

a chainsaw out to the woods to clear the fallen timber.

We drove our truck across the field, right up to the treeline. Every blade of grass was encapsulated in a thick coating of ice, which made a lot of noise as it crunched under our tires. We got the trees cut up and moved, and we even had time to set up a blind that I didn't really think we would hunt out of. While brushing in the blind, Chad noticed that there was potential for a nice shooting lane over to the far left, if we just cleared it out a little.

The next morning, it was in the teens and windy, so I sat in the new blind to protect me from the wind, while Chad sat in his stand about 400 yards away. We sat morning and evening — nothing. Same thing the next day.

The following morning, we had a hard time getting out of bed. We failed to charge our heated-vest batteries, my electric-sock batteries were low, Chad lost his lucky shirt, I didn't have clean pants to wear... a number of other things just weren't right.

We hem-hawed around until we had only 20 minutes left before we had to leave. Then I checked all three of my weather apps, and all three indicated a switch in the wind direction — in a positive way for us! So, Chad and I hustled to get our clothes and gear together, and away we went! I sat in the blind to stay warmer and try my luck with a different wind.

I own a sign and vehicle wrap shop in Britton, South Dakota, called Off The Wall Signs, where I design, print, and install signs and vehicle wraps, including on my own car in orange, gray, and black camo to match my bowstring! While trying not to think of all the work I had waiting for me, I did my usual scan and spotted a good-sized doe off to my left, about 20 yards away. *Sneaky girl*, I thought to myself. *How come I didn't hear you?*

The doe was fixated on something behind her. Sure enough, it was a buck! At first, I didn't realize how big he was. It took me a minute to assess his rack — especially his brow tines — at which point my eyes went blurry and I began to shake, because I just knew I was going to shoot him if he let me.

The pair kept grazing closer and closer, and I felt confident they would eventually come to where I wanted them to. But wait...

After the buck took two steps into the woods, he suddenly appeared uneasy and backed out of the timber as a result. He then continued to move along the edge of the field. For a split-second, I was afraid I had missed my chance, but then I remembered the shooting lane Chad had pointed out when we set up my blind.

A couple steps later, and the buck was almost perfectly broadside at about 15 yards. "You have got to be kidding me," I whispered under my breath. Just one more step is all I needed him to take!

It seemed like forever yet super-fast at the same time, but the buck finally moved his leg forward to expose his vitals. "Breathe, Melissa," I whispered to myself, as I tried to level my bow while shaking uncontrollably.

I almost didn't take the shot, because of the self-doubt from the previous 2½ years of messing up multiple opportunities at big bucks. I even contemplated giving up bowhunting because of my previous mistakes, but I loved the sport too much to just throw in the towel. I knew I was a great shot, and I knew in my heart it was just a streak of bad luck that I was determined to break. Still, the thoughts of prior screw-ups clouded my mind. But this was my chance to change all of that, and I focused harder on the task at hand than ever before.

The buck began moving forward again, and at the very last millisecond, I exhaled all the doubt and released my arrow. I saw my arrow hit, then watched the buck run off and disappear into the brush.

I listened but couldn't tell whether the sound I heard was the buck crashing to the ground or another deer running around and making a racket in the ice-covered woods. I knew it was a good shot, but after all the horrible heartbreaks I'd endured the previous two years, I wasn't celebrating quite yet.

Little did I know at the time, that the reason I didn't hear the deer approaching while I was in the blind before the shot was because they were walking in our truck's tracks from the day before, eating the corn that we'd exposed for them by smashing the ice off. If we hadn't gone out there and made a ruckus

Using a Mathews Reezen and arrows I fletched myself, I shot this big-bodied boy on the morning of November 13, 2022.



the day before, who knows if they would have come toward me that day?

I texted Chad that I'd shot a big buck, and he asked if I'd seen enough of his rack to identify which buck it was from our camera pics.

"All I saw were brow tines," I responded, and Chad knew immediately which deer it was.

We had to wait an hour to start tracking my buck, because I had deer on top of me the whole time. It killed me to have to wait so long, but I knew that was the right thing to do.

After all the deer went away, I got out of the blind and discovered the best blood trail I'd seen in my past three years of bowhunting! I was jumping up and down and crying happy tears when Chad got to me, as I was now confident we would find the buck.

Ample blood sign made for easy tracking at first. But then the blood trail got thin a couple of times, but that wasn't anything new to me after a couple years of bad luck.

I kept leading us down the edge of the field, and soon we saw the blood trail turn into the brush, where we found the buck lying dead a few steps later. We'd tracked him about 75 yards.

I had to check out the entrance/exit wounds while I was dressing him. My field autopsy showed my arrow was just a tad back but still got both lungs.

I rested my hand on the buck's body and thanked him many times for giving up his life to further enrich mine. I cried out all of the stress and all of the feelings of defeat and failure that had built up inside of me over the past 2½ seasons. I also cried tears of joy, because this was the first deer I'd killed with the love of my life beside me (Chad was in his stand 400 yards away when I shot the deer, but he was there to track and retrieve with me). I cried because Glodrey was there too, and he watched it happen right along with me.

It was all so meaningful and empowering. The gratitude I felt and the pride I earned for never giving up, even when

packs of coyotes sang to me as I hiked in every morning for the past 2½ seasons. Tears would freeze to my face and the overwhelming feeling of defeat reminding me of all of my failures. No matter what happened though, I never gave up.

This is yet another lesson for me that all the pain, suffering, and work that led up to this day had to happen so that this chain of events could fall into place the way it did. I'm grateful for the struggle. I'm glad it's not easy, because anything in life that's worthwhile never is. **BH**

The author lives in Britton, South Dakota, with her boyfriend of 13 years, Chad Sandbo, and her dog, Harvey 2 Face.

Author's Note: My equipment included a Mathews Reezen bow, Winner's Choice Competition strings, Easton Full Metal Jacket arrows fletched with Bohning Blazer Vanes and sporting Nockturnal lighted nocks, and Rage Hypodermic broadheads. My buck's estimated live weight was well over 300 lbs.



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BRIAN FORTENBAUGH | ASSISTANT EDITOR

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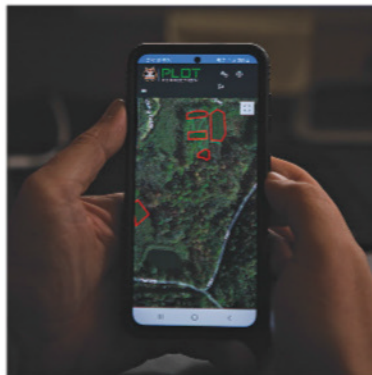
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ASK BOWHUNTER®

WITH CURT WELLS, EDITOR



Here are the three styles of broadheads to choose from: cut-on-contact, fixed-blade, and mechanicals. I threw in one of my trusted Zwickey Deltas from the '80s just for old time's sake.

Q I'm 14, just getting into bowhunting, and I'm struggling with broadhead choice. I understand the need for ultra-sharp blades and good arrow flight, but I can't decide on the type of broadhead. I should mention I have a 26-inch draw length.

Randy E., Alaska, via e-mail

A I'VE SPENT 42 YEARS shooting broadheads and have developed some opinions that may ruffle a few feathers. Here are some thoughts.

First, broadhead testing is a fairy tale. There, I said it. Shooting broadheads into plywood, steel barrels, tires, foam/3-D targets, slabs of beef ribs, or ballistic gel, in no way replicates reality. You might draw some comparative analysis, but these tests are no predictor of performance on an animal. I could dive deeper into this, but as you make your choice, view such tests with skepticism.

Much of the debate falls on which "style" of broadhead — cut-on-contact broadheads (two or three-blade), fixed-blade broadheads (with or without re-

placeable blades), or mechanical broadheads with moving parts.

I'm glad you mentioned your draw length, because I will start with the style of broadhead that undeniably penetrates the best — the cut-on-contact two-blade. It's common sense and physics.

Here's a story. In my early years, my buddy and I shot a common fixed-blade broadhead. My buddy arrowed a pronghorn, and when we got to it, the buck hadn't yet expired. So, to hasten its demise (and not ruin an arrow), he knelt behind it and tried to thrust an arrow into the pronghorn's chest. The arrow snapped in half and didn't even begin to penetrate the skin.

A couple years later we'd switched to Zwickey two-blade Delta broadheads and had a similar situation when things "got Western" with a cow elk. We de-

livered the coup de grace by slipping a Zwickey-tipped arrow into her heart. It only took two fingers to push it in.

This got me to wondering if I could measure the force needed for a broadhead to penetrate tanned elk hide. I rigged up a scale and measured three pounds of force to push a Zwickey through the hide. When I tried various ferrule-type broadheads, no matter how hard I tried, I simply could not push it through the skin. The point was made. This undeniable "ease" of penetration is significant to traditional archers and a great benefit to those who shoot low draw weight and light arrows. Or in your case, a shorter draw length.

During my years of shooting cut-on-contact, two-blade heads, I noticed something else. I saw more animals expire within sight back then. Whitetails, elk, and caribou scarcely reacted to being struck by my arrow. I shot a bugling elk at eight yards, and his only reaction was to turn his head and watch me shoot him again. I believe that was because he felt little to no "impact" when my ultra-sharp Zwickey zipped through his chest. Conversely, a broadhead with a ferrule must "punch" through the skin, going in and coming out, and I believe the animal reacts to that sudden impact. Yes, it happens fast, and some might scoff at the concept, but that's my experience.

While the cut-on-contact broadheads have their advantages, most bowhunters fall into the other two broadhead-style choices. Fixed-blade broadheads with replaceable blades are a favorite with bowhunters who want ultra-sharp blades and fail-safe construction. However, based on sales figures, the vast majority of bowhunters use mechanical broadheads, which offer excellent arrow flight as well as devastating wound channels — but a word of caution on that. Contrary to what some believe, opening a mechanical broadhead takes very little energy, but driving those wide-cut blades through fur, skin, and muscle does require a lot of energy.

You don't say what your draw weight is, or the weight of your arrow, but a cut-on-contact broadhead might be the way to go, at least for now. **BH**

AUTHOR'S PHOTO

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

BH WHERE TO GO

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THE QUEST

RANDY ULMER

HEART OF ENDURANCE: PART TEN

"THE PROBLEM OF SELF-IDENTITY IS NOT JUST A PROBLEM OF THE YOUNG. IT IS A PROBLEM ALL THE TIME — PERHAPS THE PROBLEM. IT SHOULD HAUNT OLD AGE, AND WHEN IT NO LONGER DOES, IT SHOULD TELL YOU YOU ARE DEAD." — NORMAN MACLEAN

IN THE CLOISTERED, cave-like space under the boughs of this massive spruce tree, he falls asleep and dreams. It is a dream so vivid and real it seems a vision — a remembrance of his first deer hunt as a six-year-old boy with his father and his grandfather.

In the dream, he awakens to the acrid smell of sulfur and the bright glare of a lit match reflecting off the cabin wall. His grandfather lights the lantern first, then the old wood stove. The fall air is crisp and has penetrated the cabin. He buries himself deeper amongst the pile of quilts and peers out. Wisps of smoke fill the plank-floored cabin before the stovepipe drafts. He smells coffee and hears the sound of sizzling bacon.

They breakfast on a rough-hewn ponderosa table. Pulling out his old open-sighted, lever-action .300 Savage and a box of cartridges, the old man begins a story.

The deeply weathered wrinkles around his eyes crinkle in merriment, and his keen, blue eyes sparkle as he tells his tale. In the background is the static-broken voice of Loretta Lynn singing through a battery powered radio.

When the old man is certain he has their full attention, he makes a show of methodically opening the box of bullets. Without interrupting his story, he pulls out a single cartridge and ceremoniously places it in the breast pocket of his wool flannel shirt. He buttons the pocket, pats it, and then reverently returns the box of shells to the pineboard shelf.

The entire episode is meant to illustrate that a truly intrepid and experienced hunter, such as himself, needs only one shot to kill a deer. The scene leaves a profound mark on the young boy.

In the sheltered alcove, under a blanket of fir needles, the hunter wakes, shiv-

ering. His chattering teeth signal that hypothermia is setting in.

As he girds his body to rise, some distant remnant of Puritan doctrine whispers to him that it is good for man to do without — to be uncomfortable. And for the hunter, paradoxically, discomfort does bring a sense of being fully alive and engaged with nature, along with a sense of connectedness to the Earth. When he rests alone, away from the drone of the world, he often finds a sense of peace and contentment in his suffering.

He slowly lifts himself into the sitting position, careful not to scatter the spruce needles, and then shakes the last of the debris off his back before doing some pushups. He then stands as high as the overhead boughs will allow. Bent over, he does knee-bends. He repeats the two exercises until he is warm and feels the first tingling of his skin, indicating the onset of perspiration.

His impulsiveness has led him to experience this particular species of suffering often. He has spent far too many freezing nights on the mountain sans sleeping bag and tent. The key, the hunter knows, is to maximize the length of time he sleeps between bouts of shivering. He must raise his body temperature as high as possible without perspiring, so as not to accelerate the cooling process.

Once warmed, he reassembles the heap of debris on the edge of his grave, lays down as before, and buries himself.

He sleeps and dreams again. In this dream, he rides a horse above and across

these mountains he thinks of as home. He is healed and forgiven — healthy once again — at the peak of his youth.

His pleasurable slumber eventually takes a melancholy turn, as he dreams of his wife of 25 years as a young woman, wearing a yellow flowered cotton dress. He reaches to hold her, but as in real life, she is unreachable.

Upon his diagnosis, she began her metamorphosis from spouse to smoke — a vapor impossible to embrace and beyond all recovery or repair. She left quickly, her previous vows and proclamations of love fading and then forgotten, dragging in her wake a great deal of his optimism and his faith in humanity. Her betrayal put the divide between darkness and day into much sharper relief.

He then dreams of himself as an adolescent, lying in bed. He hears his father's voice beckoning for him to rise and do his chores — there is a cow to milk, chickens and pigs to feed. He looks toward the voice and sees his father standing in the doorway.

His father taught him a great deal about this world when he was very young, but then he walked out that door. The hunter has felt his father's absence keenly and yearned for his guidance ever since. *Although he can no longer see me, does he still love me or care that I am his son?* he wonders.

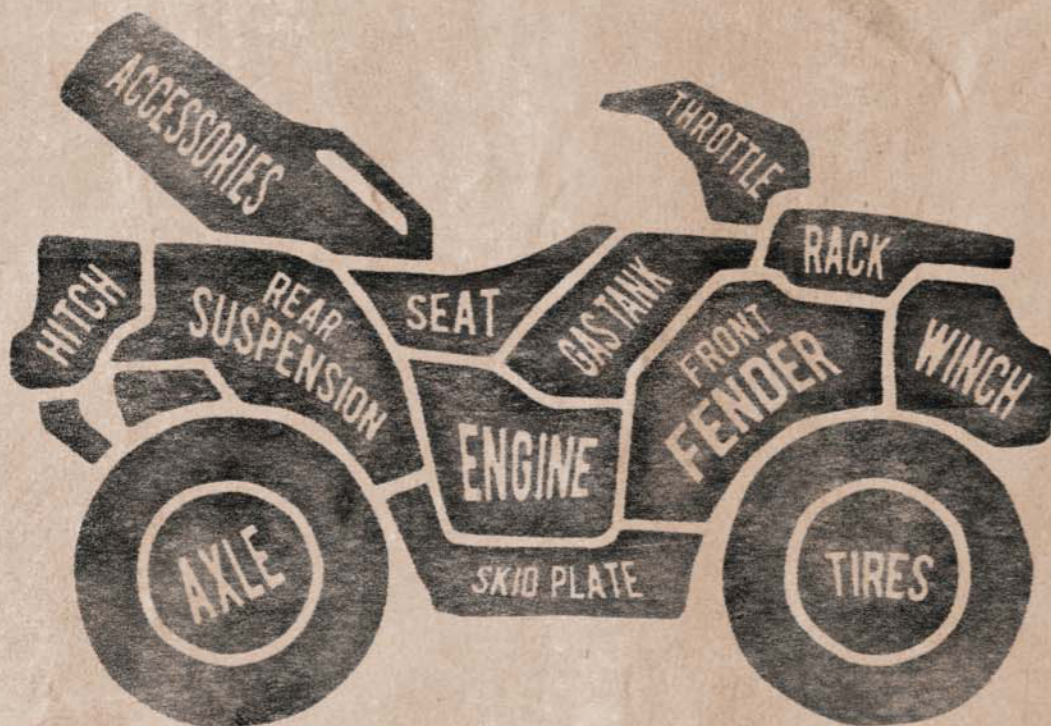
In a state of semi-consciousness, he thinks: *Don't go down that road or you will certainly weep.* For when these forlorn feelings of abandonment flow over him, it is difficult to let them go. He has no time to cry this morning; no time to search for the pieces of his heart that have been torn away from him.

Why does he dream so often of the past? Perhaps when you have no future, the past comes to live with you, weighty and cumbersome, gaining great import. Memories saved to reminisce someday are spent freely — not secreted away in an attic shoebox. They are brought down and savored now, against one's diminishing ability to make more.

To be continued... **BH**

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