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Bowhunter

THE #1 BOWHUNTING MAGAZINE

SEPTEMBER 2023

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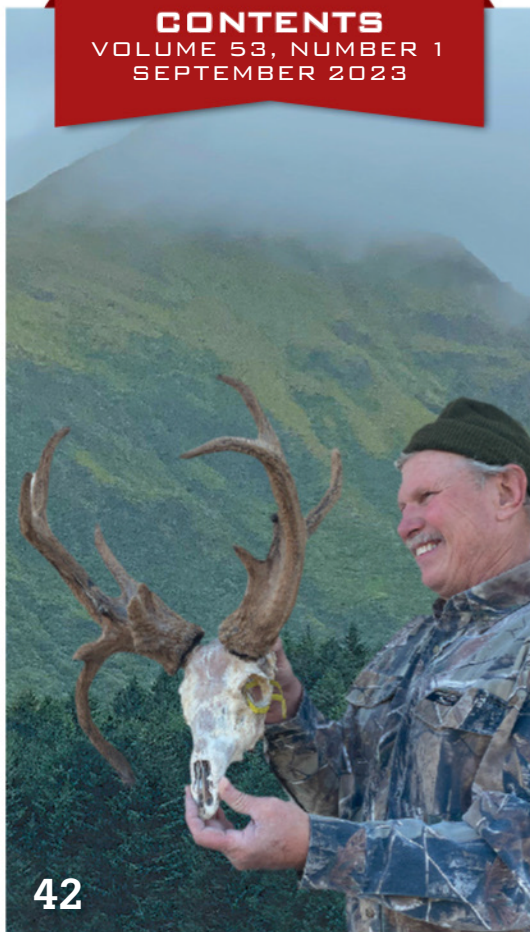


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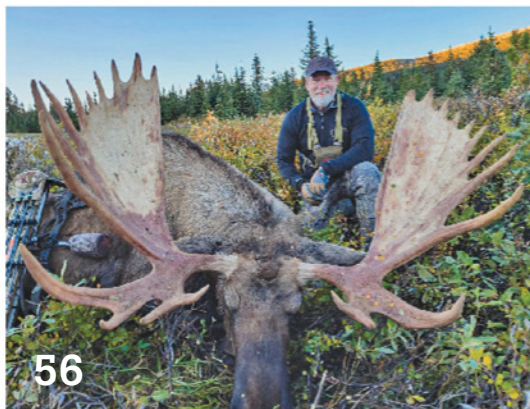




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EDITORIAL

CURT WELLS | EDITOR

THE ART OF RESTRAINT

SOME GET LUCKY, BUT THOSE BOWHUNTERS WHO CONSISTENTLY TAG MATURE ANIMALS KNOW THE SECRET.

AS I WORK THROUGH the year assigning and buying articles for each issue of *Bowhunter*, I don't necessarily look for a "theme," unless I'm working on one of our special issues (DIY, Big Game, Whitetail).

Mostly, I'm looking for a variety of articles that cover adventure bowhunting, how-to, exceptional animals, and the exploits of both highly accomplished and everyday bowhunters who have a story to tell. Occasionally, an underlying theme, woven into the collection of stories, will materialize.

The theme that emerged in parts of this issue (read Adams, Bowhay, Gaul, and Brush) has to do with restraint. That is, restraint when it comes to deciding whether an approaching animal is worthy of wearing your tag. We all practice some degree of restraint based on sex, maturity, the size of the antlers, horns, or skulls, or restrictions dictated by regulations. Mostly, we practice restraint until an animal meets our personal, self-assigned parameters. These parameters are highly variable from bowhunter to bowhunter, hunt to hunt. The beauty of it is we can set our own goals and make no excuses (or shouldn't).

If your goal is to tag a mature animal with exceptional headgear, one truth remains — you can't shoot the big ones if you're always shooting the little ones.

Fifty years ago, when I started bass fishing, the thought of releasing a fish was heresy for a young angler. Then I started slipping them back into the water. It felt great. I won, and the fish lived on. I haven't put a knife to a bass since. I had to learn to let them walk (swim).

Though not a perfect analogy, a bowhunter must also *learn* to let immature animals walk. It doesn't come naturally, especially to the novice. It helps if you consider the animals that you let walk to be "released." You worked your plan



to get within your effective range of that animal, and the only thing left undone was to make the shot. The animal was yours. You won.

Your path to gaining the discipline required to achieve your goal is paved with the willingness to go home without an animal. You must acquire a taste for tag soup. The reality is restraint doesn't always pay off. You could pass on dozens of animals, and your target animal may never show up. You won't always reach your goal. But fear not. Your goals are not etched in stone. You can modify them as your hunt progresses. Lowering your standards is perfectly acceptable, as long as you're good with failing to reach your goal. You answer to no one.

Otherwise, it's all about commitment. You must grit your teeth, relax the tension on your bowstring, and let the lesser animals walk. You may end up going home and confidently telling your friends you still have your tag because you didn't get an opportunity at a mature animal. And when they call you crazy for passing on animals they would have gladly hung their tag on, just tell them, "You can't shoot the big ones if you're always shooting the little ones." **BH**

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NEXT-LEVEL BOWHUNTING

JOE BELL | TECHNICAL EDITOR



Archers who trigger their release as soon as their pin touches the bull's-eye, will eventually be stricken with consistency problems. Whereas shooting by surprise tends to keep shot anticipation at bay, giving archers much more shooting control.

sided as I watched the 40-yard pin glide smoothly to the deer's chest and then roll around like it has done so many times before in practice. I was in deep focus, aiming solidly, when the shot broke by surprise. The distinct sound of the arrow striking the deer's chest was unmistakable, and I knew he was mine.

Benefits Of A Surprise Shot

After years of experimenting with different arrow-releasing methods, I've come to the conclusion that there is no better way to release the arrow than for it to happen by surprise. Why? Because it eliminates or drastically reduces the mental distress caused by shot anticipation — a phenomenon that contributes to flinching, freezing, trigger-punching, or some other anxiety based ailment that disrupts smooth shooting and consistent accuracy.

A surprise shot is effective because it trains the mind to wait for the shot to just happen, while the muscles in the back cause the draw-hand/arm-elbow unit to pivot rearward, eventually taking up the trigger tension or movement of the release's handle until the sear activates. This method is governed by the subconscious mind and your body's muscle memory to keep it strong and consistent, so it won't fail when the pressure is on.

THE SURPRISE SHOT

TO ACHIEVE MAXIMUM SHOOTING ACCURACY, LEARN TO RELEASE THE ARROW BY SURPRISE WITH THIS STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS FOR DOING IT RIGHT.

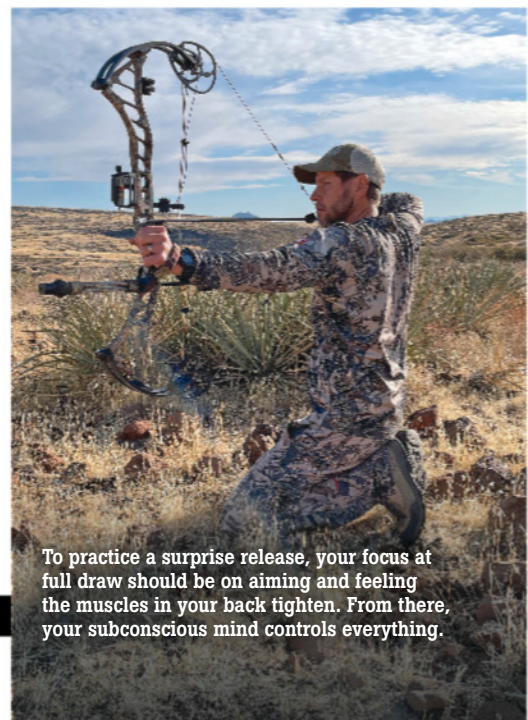
I SPIED THE MULEY BUCK feeding out in the open with a group of does. With very little cover to hide behind, I had to move methodically, advancing only when deer eyes were solidly obscured by a patch of desert scrub or rock outcropping.

After a two-hour cat-and-mouse chase with the buck and his harem, I finally closed the distance to legitimate archery range. Yet the buck wouldn't stand still long enough for a solid shot, so I had to wait and hope for a better opportunity.

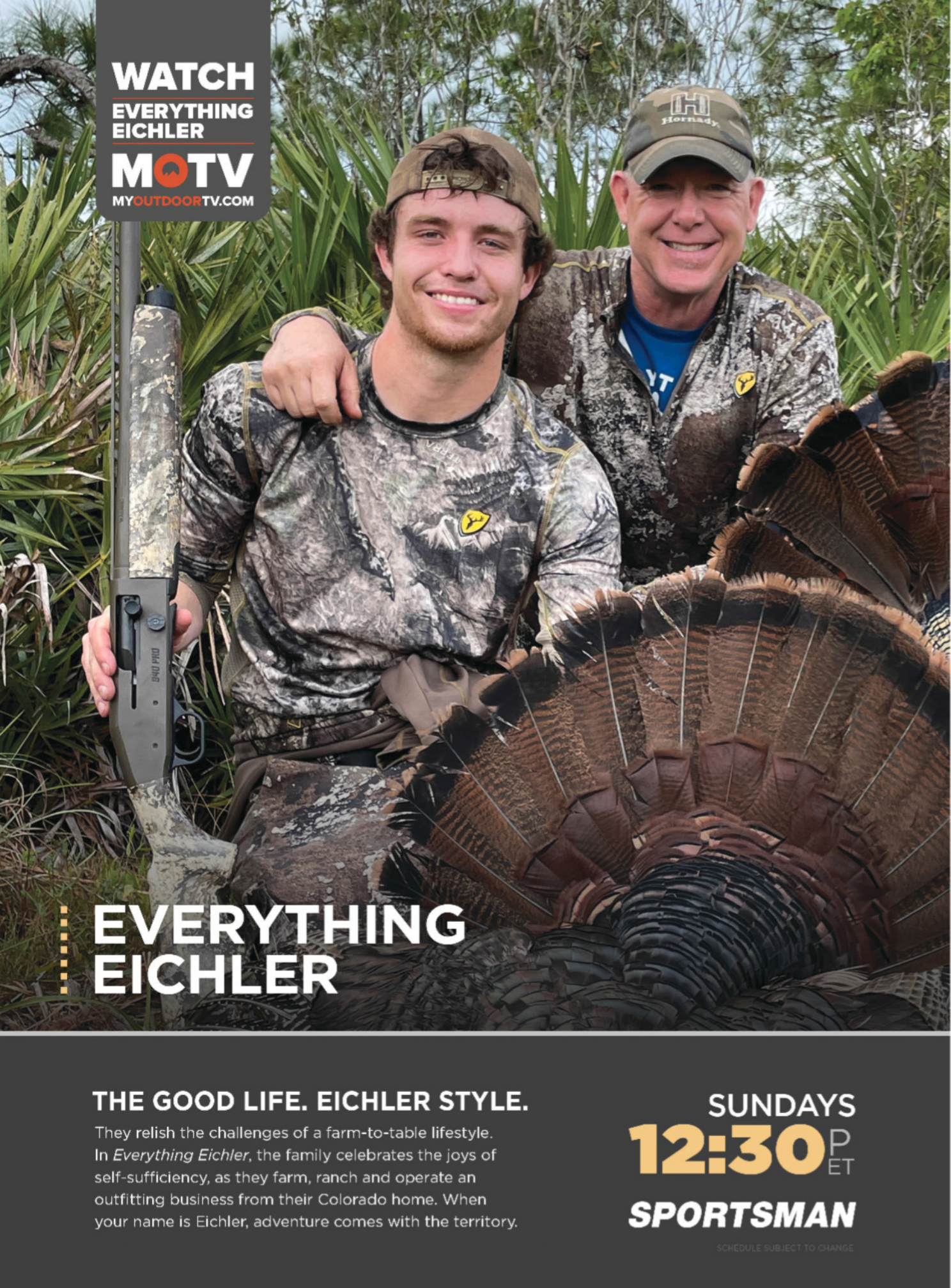
Finally, as the sun began to dip near the horizon, the group of deer went over a small rise in the terrain, and I knew now was the time to strike. I hurried to

the top of the hill and quickly spotted antler tips. With my heart pounding through my chest now, I snapped the distance to the buck with my rangefinder — 45 yards exactly — and then slowly came to full draw. At anchor, I could feel the adrenaline flooding my body, causing me to feel anxiety. I wondered, *Would I aim solidly and make the shot?*

Fortunately, that worried feeling sub-



To practice a surprise release, your focus at full draw should be on aiming and feeling the muscles in your back tighten. From there, your subconscious mind controls everything.



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On the other hand, a command-style way of releasing the arrow is much different. It relies more on the direct timing of the shot, rather than muscle movement. You settle the pin and then consciously pull the release's trigger when the sight picture looks right. After doing this over and over again, the mind can fall into an unhealthy rhythm of snapping the pin on the bull's-eye and forcing the trigger. If not kept in check, this method can quickly lead to a major snap-shooting or trigger-punching problem, ruining you as an effective archer.

To prevent shot anxiety and disastrous shooting, learn to release the arrow by surprise. Here are four steps for doing it right.

Adjust The Bow

To practice a surprise-style way of shooting, you must be comfortable at full draw, with the draw length set short enough to pivot the elbow an inch or so. This will give you the room you need to activate the rhomboid muscles in your back, so you can pivot the arm-elbow unit enough to smoothly trigger the shot.



To execute a surprise shot with an index-finger release, adjust the trigger so it sits somewhere between your first and second knuckle — creating a motionless “hook” with your finger. Then use your back muscles to pivot your draw-arm elbow rearward, until the sear activates.

There are two telltale signs of proper bow fit. From the side view, an archer's full-draw position should look like a “T.” This means, the torso is straight up and down (not swayed forward or back) with the bow arm and draw elbow in line with the arrow. The head and neck position are also straight (not canted downward or upward), with the chin more or less parallel with the arrow.

From the rear, the draw-arm elbow is also in line with the position of the ar-

row. If the elbow is above, below, or to the left or right of the arrow, then the draw length is either too short or too long. Either way, this could lead to difficulty executing a surprise release.

Another important consideration is draw weight. If you can't pull the bow straight back, in a smooth, fluid motion, you're shooting too much weight. Reduce the weight until you can cycle the bow smoothly, with your draw-arm elbow rotating straight back.

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A wide-angle photograph showing three archers on horseback, viewed from behind, as they stand on a rocky ridge. The archer in the foreground is on a white horse, the middle one on a light-colored horse, and the third on a dark horse. They are all wearing camouflage gear and have bows mounted on their backs. The background features rolling hills and a forest of evergreen trees under a clear sky.



For best results with a T-handle release, adjust the trigger mechanism so it sits near your thumb's first joint. When back tension is applied, the handle will naturally rotate and force the trigger to activate.

Fine-Tune The Release

When releasing the arrow by surprise, you use your back muscles to trigger the release rather than letting your conscious mind say when to fire the bow. To do this, you hook the release's trigger deeply and pull with your back muscles until this movement causes your draw-arm unit to pivot rearward, eventually

forcing the trigger on the release to fire the arrow.

To do this correctly, you'll need to shorten the stem or strap on your index-finger release, so the trigger bisects somewhere between the first and second knuckle on the finger. This setting will allow the finger to grasp the trigger in a natural hook. From there, your job is to keep

the finger curled but completely motionless, until the tightening of the back muscles pulls the arm, hand, and finger unit rearward, activating the trigger's sear.

With a thumb release, it's best to place the thumb tip on the body of the handle, while the trigger is tucked just under the thumb's first joint. By keeping the wrist and hand relaxed while at full draw, the handle will naturally rotate downward, forcing the trigger deeper into the meaty part of the thumb, eventually causing the shot to break by surprise.

The hinge, or trigger-less release, is shot the same as a thumb release, only there's no trigger to control. This makes it easy to use when mastering a surprise-style shot execution. With this type of release, you simply come to full draw, plant the pin on the bull's-eye, aim intently, and then keep the wrist relaxed until the handle turns and the sear activates by surprise.

Train The Mind

To shoot the arrow by surprise, you must shift your focus completely compared to your old method of shooting. Instead of putting all your emphasis on hitting the bull's-eye, shift your attention to the actual process of shooting the



Either way, you're about to make the right choice.

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NEXT-LEVEL BOWHUNTING

arrow. When you focus on the process of shooting, accuracy and hitting the bull's-eye will happen naturally, so don't worry about it.

Tim Strickland, my good friend and archery coach, recommends using your entire body to trigger and direct the arrow into the bull's-eye. He suggests, just because the archer's sight pin is where it's supposed to be, actually means very little. You must direct the arrow into the spot using good follow-through, back tension, and a relaxed shooting posture in addition to aiming intently.

There are two things you can do to keep the mind focused and busy while the shot just happens. First is to aim...aim...aim...until the shot takes you by surprise. Second, is to feel the tightening or movement in your rhomboid muscles. By shifting your focus onto one or both of these areas, you'll keep shot anticipation at bay and maintain solid shooting control.

Build Muscle Memory

Muscle memory begins by working through a new shooting technique step-by-step until it becomes completely engrained. This, unfortunately, takes weeks,

if not months, of orderly shooting practice.

The best way to build muscle memory is to get close to the target butt and shoot with your eyes closed, otherwise known as "blind-bale shooting." With your eyes closed, you eliminate the sight pin and bull's-eye, keeping the mind completely relaxed as you reprogram your shooting technique. Don't rush the blind-bale shooting process.

When blind-bale shooting, you'll notice quickly if the trigger on the release is set too light or too firm. A trigger that's set too light is not good, since the shot won't come as a surprise, eventually causing shot anticipation. A trigger set too firm, on the other hand, can be a mind distractor and disrupt an otherwise smooth shot execution. To execute the shot correctly, set the trigger just right. Ideally, you want the shot to break in about four to six seconds — long enough to eliminate anticipation but short enough to prevent a physical breakdown of the shot.

One other point, if you feel any awkward trigger creep or "movement" upon tightening your back muscles, I recommend upgrading to a better release. Trigger creep can cause poor shot control and even anticipation, ruining a surprise style of shooting. Visit a well-stocked ar-



Hinge or triggerless releases make shooting by surprise the easiest of all. You simply aim while keeping the wrist muscles totally relaxed. As back tension is applied, the handle will turn and activate the sear.

chery shop and sample several different releases until you find a quality model with a crisp, clean trigger. Releases with polished trigger mechanisms cost more, but they are worth it.

There are many reasons to switch to a surprise-style way of shooting. For one, it will increase your accuracy and consistency. Secondly, it will enhance your shooting pleasure two-fold. Shooting with greater control is a whole lot more fun than wrestling with poor technique and lousy shots. Overall, it's the most effective way to practice archery and to become a better bowhunter. **BH**

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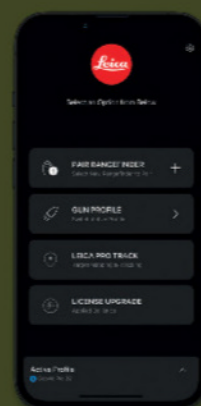
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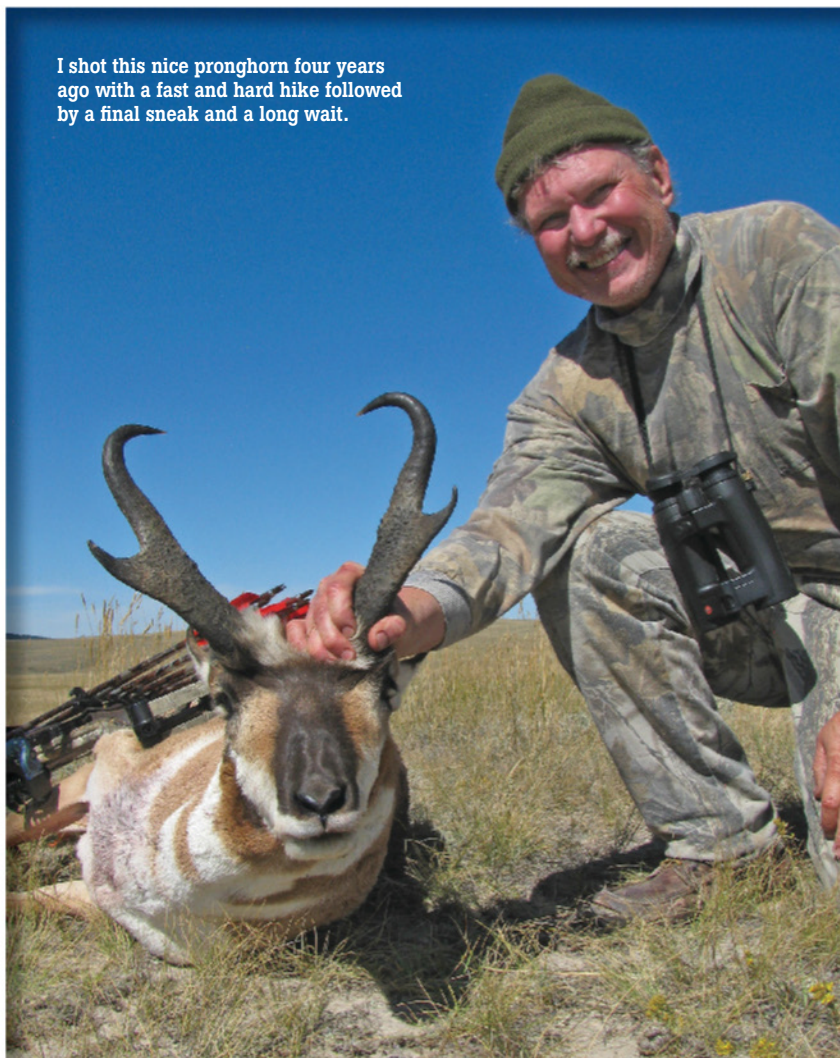
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Only whitetail deer, pronghorn antelope, and baited black bears can consistently be taken from a stand. Foot-hunting is more complex than waiting for animals but can yield higher chances of success in many situations — if a bowhunter knows how to hike.

Sitting in one spot for mule deer, wild sheep, moose, elk, and other unpredictable critters might merely be waiting for an accident to happen. By comparison, smart hiking can deliberately place you inside close bow-shooting range.

It seems to be a modern trend — almost an obsession — for some bowhunters to emphasize physical fitness and raw hiking speed above all else.

For example, I was bowhunting elk on public land a few years ago, when I heard tramping feet nearby. I ducked behind a bush, and watched two young, camo-clad archers hustle past along a horse trail. Neither guy was looking left or right — just beelining cross-country with tails on fire. It was the prime evening elk hour, when animals are up, moving, and vulnerable to a sneaky predator.

Shortly after the pair of hikers passed, I slipped along the same horse trail in the same direction. Footing was silent on the well-worn path, with excellent views of slopes on both sides. Before dark, I had spotted a dozen elk in three separate groups. None was a big bull, so I hustled back to camp by flashlight.

Next day, I encountered the same two athletic and hard-charging guys on the same trail. We stopped to chat.

"I don't get it," one complained. "We have covered a lot of ground the past week, but only saw two cow elk. Must not be very good habitat."

I did not burst his bubble by revealing what I had seen in just one evening or offer advice on how to find more elk. Smack-dab in the middle of September was not the time to deliver a seminar on right and wrong ways to hike.

Being fit and fast is one thing. Using your physical ability to good advantage





If you plan your day hikes in advance, you can cover prime terrain without wasting your time or effort.

is another. In my experience, there are only two times when fast hiking makes sense in bowhunting.

First, you might need to bust your butt to get in position after you locate a target animal. Second, you might want to reach a honey hole lickety-split, so you have more time to slow down and hunt. All other fast hiking is a mistake when you have a bow in your hand.

I grew up foot-hunting for deer in my native state of California. Those Columbian blacktails were notoriously unpredictable, with no discernable habit patterns a hunter could count on. I learned to ease through the countryside, glassing a lot and only moving fast after I spotted a distant buck. Moving in slowly for the kill from long distance seldom worked, because the critter usually wandered off before I arrived.

Take for example a nice Sitka black-tail buck I saw on a distant hill six years ago. The 3x3 was feeding with a smaller buck about two hours before sundown. Terrain in between was gnarly, with sheer bluffs and dense alder brush. I clawed my way across a canyon as fast as I could, and only slowed down when I reached more open ground 100 yards from the deer. The brutal hike took more than an hour, leaving me another hour to tiptoe into range.

I peeked beyond a boulder and spot-

ted antlers 45 yards above me. Both deer were in a dip, and all I could do was double-check the distance with my range-finder and wait. Finally, just before dark, the bigger buck topped a rise between us with his head behind a bush. Bingo! My arrow laced the buck's chest for a very quick kill.

Hike fast, sneak slow — that's the standard formula for success on an animal you locate in the distance.

In the year 2000, I had the awesome good fortune to harvest the new P&Y World's Record typical American elk. That bull was living in a canyon several

miles from the nearest road, and he was being chased by other bowhunters.

To get a jump on things, I hiked over four miles in the dark to be in position at daylight. Most of the trek was uphill. Hustling was the name of the game, because other archers were likely to appear before sunrise and scare the bull and his cows.

Fast hiking put me in position on the fateful day, and the giant bull let me sneak the last 100 yards for a 39-yard shot.

Reach your hotspot fast, and then slow down to locate and stalk animals. This has worked for me many times

Congratulations to Chuck on his 7th World Record and the largest Sitka buck ever recorded in any category!



Chuck Adams
ARCHERY

"I finally found the perfect bow brand. I've shot many models in the past, but never was completely satisfied...until now. No matter which you choose, compound, recurve or longbow, Bear bows are carefully designed for great speed, pinpoint accuracy, and game-getting silence at a price any hunter can afford. They are true bowhunters' bows that work!"

Chuck Adams

ON THE TRACK

when a productive place was quite some distance away.

The surest method to bow-bag a pronghorn is sitting near water in hot weather. But I dislike being bored in a sweltering pit or pop-up blind, when I could be stalking across broken prairieland.

Four years ago, I spotted a dandy antelope in my home state of Wyoming. The "goat" was more than a mile away, just below the top of a ridge. I circled at a trot and hiked up the last slope with the wind in my face. I slowed down just below the crest, knocked an arrow, and eased the final 50 yards.

The buck's distinctive, flared-prong horns appeared first, and I took a knee with hopes he might stand up soon.

Nearly one hour later, my legs were cramping but the breeze was still perfect. Finally, the buck rose from his bed.

At 25 yards, the quartering shot was a slam-dunk. The tough part had been hard hiking followed by an uncomfortable wait. That buck was a record-book beauty and well worth the effort! **BH**

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

CHUCK ADAMS BIG GAME HUNTING TIP

LEARN TO TIME YOUR HIKE

A REASONABLY FIT BOWHUNTER can hike 3–3½ miles per hour over fairly level ground. In up-or-down terrain, half that speed is about all most folks can manage.

If you hunt all day, you can theoretically cover 15 or 20 miles between dawn and dusk. But proper foot-hunting is always stop-and-go. You might briefly hustle to reach the top of a ridge, but then sneak along slowly or pause to glass surrounding terrain. Even over semi-open ground with good views, a 10-mile daytrip is probably the practical maximum for smart hiking.

I always cut any hike in two — either in miles I want to cover, or time I want to spend. For instance, let's say I have planned a morning trek for mule deer. I spend half the allotted time hiking away, and the other half hiking back. On all-day hunts, dividing your expected movement time in two can prevent a tedious hike back in the dark.

With the nifty onX app and a smartphone, you can track your route and precisely determine when you are likely to reach your vehicle or hunting camp again.

Smart bowhunters don't hike willy-nilly — they manage time and distance according to a calculated plan.

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TRADITIONAL WAY

FRED EICHLER | TRADITIONAL EDITOR



Killing turkeys like this Rio from last spring is fun, but for me, it just doesn't compare to big game.

crazy when that cow elk or that small buck or doe steps out.

Honestly, to me, that is part of the allure of hunting with a traditional bow. A longbow or a recurve just seems to make everything a trophy. I gauge animals and my hunts more on excitement level than I do on antler or horn size — and I still get pretty excited over all of them.

As I write this, I am prepping my gear for fall hunts and doing my normal practice regimen, which includes shooting just one arrow a day. I practice this way because in most real hunting situations the first arrow we release is the one that always counts the most.

I also put a new Flemish string from FirstString on my bow, so it will be broken in before the fall seasons open. I will then use the old string, which is obviously broken in, as a backup string in case something catastrophic should happen to the new one during a hunt.

I also always have an extra finger tab — also broken in — with me, so in case I lose one, the backup feels the same. For those curious readers, I use a tab I designed that 3Rivers Archery carries.

FINALLY

THE FALL SEASONS ARE JUST ABOUT HERE, SO MAKE SURE YOUR GEAR IS AS READY TO GO AS YOU ARE.

I AM ALWAYS anxiously awaiting the fall season to start. Like a lot of you, I chased some other stuff around this past spring and summer. Turkeys are fun to hunt, and bowfishing is a blast, but if I'm being honest, nothing quite compares to the fall.

I find that when I daydream about bowhunting, it's never about rabbits, hogs, or even turkeys. It's always about some giant bull elk, a huge whitetail buck, or a mule deer buck with a rack so big he has to walk backwards and drag it.

It's fun to daydream and run fake sce-

narios like these through my head, even though I know that realistically, I will probably get a cow elk, a small muley buck, or a whitetail doe that most would let walk. I also know that while the giants may walk through my daydreams, I will get just as excited and shake like



Summer bowfishing is a great way to keep a bow in your hand all year long.





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LEGENDXR



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TRADITIONAL WAY

I started with a glove because I wanted to be like Fred Bear, but I could never shoot as accurately with one. If you are a glove shooter, please don't get offended by my choice of tab over glove. And if you are rubbed the wrong way, you may want to ask yourself why most Olympic archers use tabs instead of gloves... I'm just saying!

For other gear prep, I will often replace the foam in my Selway quiver hood, so it holds my broadheads more firmly in place. I will also go over any setscrews on my Bear recurve, which has three — two on the side plate for making arrow-flight adjustments, and one for adjusting shelf height. My longbow doesn't have any...

For a comparison, the last time I counted screws on my compound setup — including sight, rest, and bow but not factoring in my release — there are 32. I consider these numbers just one more reason why I prefer the simplicity and advantages of stickbows over all others. Again, just my opinion, and I'm in no way putting down the equipment choices of any of my bowhunting brethren. I'm just saying...

Continuing on with my archery gear checklist. I will also spin my broadhead-tipped arrows to make sure everything is as it should be. Things like too much epoxy or heat glue unevenly distributed, can cause a wobble — as can an unevenly cut arrow, bad insert, or the wrong-sized insert. A slight wobble probably won't cause a huge difference in accuracy, even at longer ranges, but it may cause a little one. And when it comes to my confidence, I prefer to know that all is perfect. Then, if I miss, I know it's my fault — or at least it reduces my number of excuses!

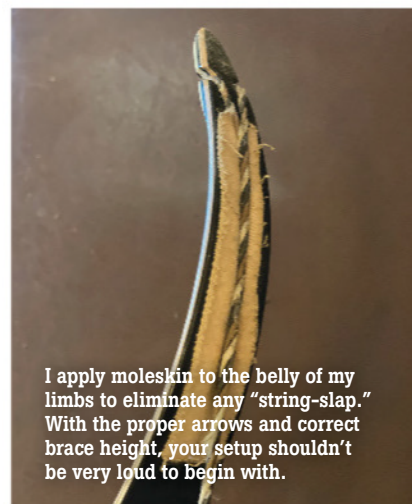


Spinning your arrows is a great way to check your broadhead's alignment.



My signature tab.

I also check that my nocks aren't cracked and are in good shape. I will also often replace the moleskin I use on the tip and inside belly of my limbs, which helps to reduce string noise when I shoot. I go back and forth on string silencers of yarn or even the rubber ones, as I have had the yarn silencers get soaking wet and even frozen with ice in cold weather. Any weight added to the string can have a negative impact on arrow flight.



I apply moleskin to the belly of my limbs to eliminate any "string-slap." With the proper arrows and correct brace height, your setup shouldn't be very loud to begin with.

I have also had situations where I have lost one rubber or yarn silencer, and that will prevent the string from coming down the way it's supposed to. I have tried all kinds of string silencers, and there are advantages and disadvantages to all of them.

My current setup includes a heavy enough arrow that my bow is as quiet as possible with the right brace height, and just some moleskin on the belly of the bow near the tip, so it reduces the "string-slap" noise on the limb.

Good luck to you all this fall. I hope you will make sure that when that big doe or cow elk steps out, your equipment is as ready as you are to make that first shot count the most! **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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TRIED AND TRUE

BRIAN K. STRICKLAND | EQUIPMENT EDITOR



Every bowhunter understands the promise of a quality food plot.

FALL HARVEST

KEEP 'EM GREEN ALL SEASON LONG WITH THE BEST BLENDS AND TOOLS AVAILABLE TODAY.

IF I HAD to pick one element that gave me the most fits early in my whitetail-hunting career, it would easily be my ability, or inability, to consistently grow lush, attractive food plots.

Back then, food plots were the latest craze, and it seemed every article or video had something to share. Looking back, it wasn't always my fault — Mother Nature was the culprit many times, with unseasonably warm and dry conditions or a deluge of rain. But if I were completely honest, bad planning and execution were also in the mix.

However, as the science of food-plot management has developed over the years, and as seed blends, fertilizers,

herbicides, and my knowledge has improved, producing a great food source has become relatively easy. Sure, the entire process still takes considerable time, energy, and money to make food plots look like those on TV, but with the right mix, delivered at the right time, you can be the envy of your hunting buddies.

Mossy Oak's BioLogic (plantbiologic.com) needs no introduction, and their [1] *Green Patch Plus* (\$32.99) is just one of the many reasons why. One

of their most economical blends, this scientifically driven fall-plot blend combines the drawing power of cereal grains with proven and highly palatable New Zealand brassicas and clovers. It's attractive within days of planting and will last throughout the season.

Formulated to be a high-impact food source during the season and beyond, [2] *Southern Greens* (\$24.99) is just one of the latest from **Antler King** (antlerking.com). Blended to be both drought and cold-resistant, it's suitable for virtually any region of the country. It's powered by protein-rich collard greens, as well as radishes that turn into a sweet, high-energy food source when temps start to dip. Rounding out this powerhouse is a blend of winter wheat, oats, and clover.

Pennington (pennington.com) is another seed company that has been developing top-quality blends for decades, and their [3] *Rackmaster Deluxe Supreme Fall* (\$81) is one of their most popular. It is a combination of highly succulent winter annual grains, brassicas, winter peas, and annual clover. Designed not only to germinate and grow quickly to attract wildlife in fall/winter, but with annual crimson and arrowleaf clovers, it also provides a quality food source in the spring to ensure optimal deer nutrition for growing bucks and gestating and nursing does.

Evolved Harvest (evolved.com) is a fan favorite of many whitetail bowhunters, and their [4] *5 Card Draw* (\$19.99) is proof-positive why. Designed to draw whitetails and other wildlife throughout the year, this protein-rich blend is an annual and perennial mix of oats, wheat, white clover, barkant turnips, and chicory that can be planted in spring, summer, or fall. High in protein and minerals, it's formulated to adjust to a variety of soil conditions to ensure full-season attraction.

Food plots, by nature, are often difficult to access. Deer either catch you when leaving at twilight, or during those predawn hours when you're trying to slip

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WHAT'S YOUR **BEEF?**



in. To help conceal your movements, **AccuForage** (accuforage.com) has developed their new [5] **Out of Sight** (\$35.50) seed blend. Designed to grow 12' tall in a variety of soil conditions, it acts as a screen that is perfect for field edges, funnels, or natural travel corridors you use to access stand locations. It also provides needed bedding cover if your property lacks it, or if you want to establish one in a particular area. Couple this with their **Fall Frenzy** (\$38.50), a mix of hybrid forage brassicas, rape, turnip, radish, and other forages that will grow in just about any climate conditions.

If you're limited by time or space, having a diverse plot that grows the right groceries at the right time is important. Ensuring that your deer have what they need throughout the hunting season, **Ani-Logics** (anilogics.com) developed the [6] **Perfect 10** (\$26.99). A popular

blend, it combines 10 "perfect" forages whitetails prefer and need from early fall through the late season. This smorgasbord includes winter wheat, rye, oats, winter peas, clovers, radish, collards, turnips, sugar beets, and rape.

If you're needing to boost an existing food plot or maybe enhance the attractiveness of a harvested bean or milo field, **Domain's** (domainoutdoor.com) [7] **Green Machine** (\$24.99) would be a good option. Designed to stay green all winter to keep deer interested, it blends a variety of wheat, rye, oats, winter peas, forage rape, and radish. This fast-germinating mix grows quickly and was engineered for its pH balance and cold-weather tolerance.

If you have a remote location that's difficult to access or just don't have the necessary tools to establish a large plot, **Big Tine's** (bigtine.com) [8] **No-Till**

Buck Brunch (\$19.99) is a solid solution. With no soil prep required, this shade-tolerant blend features annual clover, forage rape, turnip, forage wheat, and rye that establishes quickly and boasts proteins, vitamins, and minerals for better antler growth and overall herd health. It's ideal for fall planting but can be planted in spring to help mend soil.

If you're looking to provide your food plot with a headstart and keep it delivering quality nutrition throughout the season, **DeerGro's** (deergro.com) [9] **PlotStart and PlotBoost** (\$69.98) combo delivers that one-two punch. I've used them more than once on my Texas plots and was very happy with the results. PlotStart is a calcium-based fertilizer that provides a unique mix of complex carbohydrates, amino acids, and micro-nutrients to enhance the soil productivity and is applied at or before planting.



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Apply PlotBoost when your plot is actively growing to enhance growth for greater overall yields.

For over three decades, **Whitetail Institute** (whitetailinstitute.com) has earned a solid reputation with popular blends like Clover, Destination, Pure Attraction, and No-Plow — to name a few. However, even the best blends need some help once grasses and weeds start overtaking what you've planted. Designed to control most grasses and weeds, [10] **Arrest Max** (\$56.99) is a selective herbicide specifically developed for food plots. It controls a broad range of annual/perennial grasses that is safe to use with Whitetail Institute's perennial forages like clover and alfalfa.

Unlike many fertilizers on the market that offer just the basic N-P-K formulations, **Rackology** (rackology.org) takes them to the next level with their premium [11] **Food Plot Fertilizer & Supplement** (\$16.99) blend. This proprietary formulation adds many of the nutrients deer need directly to the soil, while also creating the healthiest soil possible to produce maximum plant nutrition. Having deer supplements delivered directly to the forage deer eat provides better overall absorption and long-term benefits to your deer herd.

Whether you're broadcasting your favorite blend on a micro-plot or have bigger plans in mind, the 80-lb. [12] **Capacity Spreader** (\$399.99) from **Boss Buck** (bossbuck.com) is a handy tool to have. Simply attach it to an ATV/UTV, or even your truck, and watch its remote-controlled magic go to work. Ideal for seed, feed, and fertilizer, it comes complete with a wireless-activation system and features an adjustable flow rate, so users can evenly spread the right amount.

Another option for evenly broadcasting seed is **Moultrie's** (moultriefeeders.com) [13] **ATV Spreader** (\$369.99). Its tapered, plastic hopper holds up to 100 lbs. of seed or fertilizer and comes with a handheld, electronic controller that regulates dispersal rates with six different settings. Its quick-release mounting system is compatible with most ATV/UTV models.

Although as bowhunters we tend to focus on hunting food sources in the fall, establishing mineral sites next to them can certainly enhance your food plot's attractiveness. [14] **Xcellerator** (\$9.99) from **Rack One** (huntrackone.com) provides deer with the necessary vitamins and minerals that not only promote overall health but also maximize antler growth.

Although there are many seed blends that don't require a ton of soil prep, long-term results are often measured by the preparation you're willing to put into it. Making that process a little easier is the all-in-one [15] **Master Series Cultipacker** (\$4,599) from **Micro Food Plots** (microfoodplots.com). It's equipped with 12 notched-bladed disks, a Clod Buster cultipacker, drag, and Accu-Seed Spreader to ensure seed is spread evenly. The 16" Run Flat Tires transport it to virtually any spot on your property, and with the multipurpose Electric Lift, users can get the ideal depth when disking. Plus, with its 40" disking swath, it won't take any time to ready your seedbed for the best possible results.

Another implement that can take your plots to the next level is the [16] **Firminator RT** (\$10,250–\$18,000) from **Ranew's Outdoor Equipment** (thefirminator.com). Available in 4', 6', and 8' models, this tractor PTO-driven rig couples the benefits of a rototiller instead of disks with their proven Accu-Seed spread and cast-iron cultipacker to deliver the best seedbed with a single pass. Its unique ground-driven design evenly spreads seed based on your speed, and when not moving, it stops dispensing to minimize waste. **BH**



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THE EMPTY QUIVER

DANNY FARRIS



The biggest key to elk-calling success is simply having confidence that your calls are going to work.

CONFIDENT CALLING

THE WORST ELK CALLERS I'VE EVER HEARD, HAVE ALL BEEN ELK!

SEPTEMBER 10 is typically a lucky day for me. My son, Lane, and I had been hunting hard without much action, but the 10th always seems to be when things start to turn on.

We woke to silence again that morning, but as we donned our packs to head out for the day, the silence was broken with one of the oddest sounds I'd ever heard in the elk woods: A pathetic attempt at an elk call that sounded more like a howl than the bugle of a bull.

Assuming the ridiculous sound coming from not too far above our camp was a rookie elk hunter with a

shiny new grunt tube, I immediately turned to Lane and said, "Great, we have company."

Come on man, just shut up, I thought to myself as the stranger kept ripping bizarre-sounding elk howls. Then, just as we were getting serious about putting some distance between us and the annoying intruder, he added a guttural tone to the end of one of the strange

calls that carried so much bass that it literally seemed to shake the trees. Lane and I both froze in our tracks, and then Lane looked back at me and said, "I don't think a human can do that."

"No way," I replied, and then quickly added, "that's a real bull!"

Lane ended up arrowing that crazy sounding bull later that morning. The full story was published in last month's issue of **Bowhunter**. My point, however, is the bull's calling sounded so ridiculous that we nearly wrote him off as a hunter and walked away from him — and that isn't the first time I've been fooled in such fashion.

A few years ago, I was trailing a bugling bull in New Mexico as he was making his way into a bedding area. He was very vocal — eagerly answering my calls — but I couldn't get him to turn around and come my way.

Then, someone suddenly opened up

AUTHOR'S PHOTO

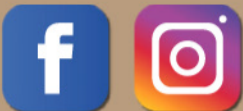
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with a series of mews about 100 yards down the hill to my left that sounded like a child playing their dad's bite-and-blow cow call. It was ridiculous! I'd never heard such a racket of rapidly repetitive and high-pitched cow calls. I immediately assumed a novice elk hunter had heard me and the bull calling back and forth and was now trying to encroach on my hunt.

To my surprise, the bull's calling got even more aggressive, and he seemed to have turned and was now heading straight toward the terrible-sounding hunter! I chose a course to try to intercept the bull, but he moved too quickly and before I knew it, his bugles were coming from right where the fake-sounding cow calls had come from.

I can't believe this idiot's going to kill my bull, I thought, as I continued to close the distance! I was certain I was going to hear a shot followed by thundering hooves at any second, but I never did.

Then, as I hurried around a cedar tree, I came face to face with a group of bedded cows, with my bull standing about 20 yards on the other side of them. I froze, but it was too late. I was busted, and the entire herd rumbled down the ridge as I slowly realized there was no other hunter. That was a real cow

making those terrible-sounding calls, and not only did she call the bull right in, but she also fooled me into rushing the situation and stumbling right into the entire herd!

The vocal interaction that comes with bowhunting elk during the rut is precisely what makes them my favorite species to pursue. I'm fully aware that many of the most successful big-bull killers out there prefer not to call at all, opting instead to ambush bulls over water or food sources, or to use traditional spot-and-stalk techniques.

While those might be proven methods for taking older age-class bulls, they will never be the way I prefer to hunt them. Don't get me wrong, if I'm able to pattern a big bull, or I spot one that is in a good position for a stalk, I'll do whatever I think gives me the best chance at success...but calling them in is what makes chasing elk the pinnacle of all bowhunting thrills to me.

I wish I had a nickel for every time I've been asked, "How does my calling sound?" It's easy to get caught up in trying to call perfectly, but in my opinion, the timing and intensity of your calls is far more important than making perfect sounds. That doesn't mean you shouldn't practice at becoming as good as you possibly can. But believe me, you don't have

to be an expert caller to be successful. You do, however, need to become an expert listener.

Elk are very social animals that constantly communicate with each other — even in the most heavily hunted areas. Just because you can't hear any calls, doesn't mean the elk aren't talking to each other or that you shouldn't call. You just need to be cognizant of the atmosphere around you, and then call with the appropriate volume and intensity. To do that, just listen to the elk. If they aren't sounding off, call softly and sparingly. If you get a response, mimic the bull's volume and intensity. As he gets louder and more intense, so should you.

The biggest key to calling success is simply having confidence that your calls are going to work. Take the time to set up and nock an arrow every time you start to call, and then make sure to give bulls time to come in and investigate. As soon as you get lazy — walking around calling willy-nilly — that's when a bull is going to come in silent and bust you. It has happened to me more times than I care to admit.

Experiment with as many different call types as possible until you find one that works for you. Then, be confident, and always remember that some of the worst elk calls I've ever heard were all made by actual elk! **BH**

ON  HUNT

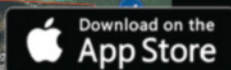
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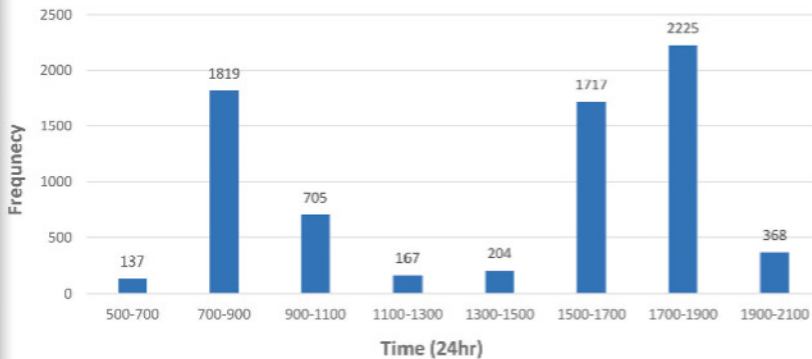




HUNTING WHITETAILS

C.J. WINAND

Figure 1a. Harvest Frequency of Typical Pope and Young Deer (Velvet and Nonvelvet) based off time of day



What time of day is best to harvest a Pope and Young buck? If you're too lazy to get up in the morning, or if your work schedule only allows you to hunt in the afternoons, the best time to be in a treestand or blind is whenever you're able to.

DECISIONS, DECISIONS, DECISIONS...

HOW LONG TO WAIT BEFORE TRACKING AND THE BEST TIMES TO BE IN THE WOODS WILL FOREVER BE OPEN TO DEBATE.

LAST YEAR, I was in a ground blind hunting with a buddy of mine of more than 40 years. Right after sunrise, a mature doe stood 25 yards in front of us.

Before I knew it, his arrow was on its way. The deer did the classic mule kick and sped away into the forest. Although we didn't hear the deer fall, I felt his arrow hit perfectly and I started to congratulate him. The look on my friend's face told me a different story... He was clearly upset when I started to unzip and get out of our ground blind.

"What are you doing?" he hissed. "We're going to wait 30 minutes before we start trailing, right?"

I was a bit surprised at this response, because unless I'm not sure where I hit, or know I have a liver or gut-shot animal, I almost always start trailing immediately. And if I don't find the deer within 100 yards, I will back out.

Surprisingly to me, many of my very experienced hunting buddies always wait 30 minutes. Are you one of these hunters?

Data from the Ohio Department of Natural Resources showed the average distance an arrow-hit deer will run after the hit was 74.2 yards. Interestingly, 55% of all recoveries were within 50 yards, and only 11% exceeded 100 yards. Obviously, a lot of factors go into how far a deer travels after a hit: Location of arrow entry/exit, habitat structure, topography, and of course, stress of animal. Some deer will stop bleeding regardless of where they are shot. For example, fatty tissue, organ material, muscle, and skin movement can stop a blood trail quickly.

There are occasions where I thought I made a "perfect" hit, only to find out

I was wrong. Anyone who has enough TV-filming experience will tell you that sometimes what you think you saw through your mind's-eye, isn't always the case when you go back and look at the footage.

For example, my daughter once shot a buck right through both hindquarters on film. She's a decent shot, but her arrow accidentally hit the edge of her blind's window — causing the errant shot. Video replay showed she most likely missed the femoral artery, and most watching it felt it was just a muscle hit.

After a difficult, 400-yard tracking job the following morning, we found the buck dead. When we field-dressed her deer, we were all surprised by the in-field autopsy: Her arrow deflected off the buck's femur, and then went through the abdominal cavity, diaphragm, and one lung.

Remember, we all viewed the tape multiple times and were convinced her shot was a muscle hit. Yet, we were all wrong. We didn't push that deer, but when we found it the next morning it was obvious that it had died quickly.

Data from John Jeanneney's classic books, "Tracking Dogs For Finding Deer" and "Dead On," suggests all bowhunters rethink the conventional wisdom of waiting 30 minutes after the shot. I totally agree, but I'm finding out I may be in the minority when it comes to how long to wait.

You should remember a deer's heart pumps at least three times faster while running than it does at rest. By pushing the deer, you keep its heart pumping — accelerating blood loss. Additionally, moving deer have a better chance of flushing out any potential clots.

That said, by pushing a deer too soon, there's always the possibility it will run farther away...but at least you'll have blood to follow. Each circumstance is different, and your experience should lead you to the right decision.

Some of my hunting areas are in suburban backyards. Thus, a deer could go through several properties before expiring. Still, I'd rather find the deer in



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HUNTING WHITETAILS

someone's backyard during daylight hours than wait until dark and use my flashlight and disturb the landowner and have them potentially mistake me for someone else.

There's no way this column will end this argument on waiting versus pushing a deer, but there is some old data from Africa that's very interesting. The classic paper authored by J.V. Ludbrook and A.J. Tomkinson entitled, "Evaluation of Bow Hunting as a Form of Recreation Hunting in Natal," compared rifles (.222, .30/06, .375 H&H mag) to compound bows (50, 60, and 80 pounds) and crossbows (100 and 150 pounds).

A total of 96 animals were harvested with rifles, compounds, and crossbows. The researchers shot these critters in the thorax, spine, abdomen, hindquarters, neck muscle, lower leg, and withers/back muscle, with the aforementioned weapons.

To compare the weapon types against one another, the researchers first shot the various critters with archery equipment. Then they used rifles to place their bullets at the same location where the arrow entered and exited the animal. Granted,

there are some discrepancies in shot locations for the various animals, but this type of research is literally one of a kind.

On average, the bowkilled animals traveled 92.8 yards, while those shot with firearms went 59.3 yards. Although the South African game went a little farther than whitetails after being shot with a bow, you must remember they live every day with some of the world's top apex predators, so this really isn't surprising. But what about the time it took to become immobilized? The researchers found the times between bow and rifle kills were not significantly different on any of the shot locations.

Grouping all the shot locations together among the different critters, arrow-hit animals usually took 20 seconds longer to die than those shot with rifles. If you only look at the thorax (heart and lungs), archery immobilization was 29.7 seconds; 22.3 seconds for firearms. This is one reason why you'll find most mortally hit deer within 100 yards.

While we recovered my buddies deer quickly, how soon to take up the trail will continue to be debated.

"What's the best time of day to kill a deer?" is another common question. Al-

though many states/provinces have this data, very few publish the results.

With the help of Roy Grace and P&Y Director of Records Tim Rozewski, data was given to Tristan Swartout, a graduate research assistant at the College of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences, Auburn University Deer Laboratory. As you may assume, most P&Y deer were killed during the morning and late-afternoon time periods.

Although the late-afternoon timeframe may seem a little better, there's no way to determine what percentage of hunters are hunting specific times. For example, 75% of all hunters may only be hunting in the afternoon. Obviously, this would skew the results.

Unlike the P&Y's numbers, data from my years of hunting notes indicate mornings are better — especially for larger bucks. Either way, it would be interesting to look at the P&Y data set for harvest trends during different periods of the season. **BH**

CJ's Summary: The 30-minute waiting game after the shot will always be a topic of conversation around hunting camps. Bottom line is this: Your shot placement is critical to recovering your deer within 100 yards.



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DR. DAVE SAMUEL | CONSERVATION EDITOR



No matter their color, hogs do well in the wild and are very destructive to crops and certain habitats.

WHY WE HAVE MORE WILD PIGS

MANAGING PROLIFIC WILD HOG POPULATIONS IS A COMPLICATED AND DIFFICULT TASK.

INVASIVE WILD PIGS, which includes wild boars from Europe and Asia, and feral pigs (wild pigs solely of domestic stock) are a huge problem in many states.

In localized parts of wild-hog range, you have some hogs that are black in color. These hogs have predominantly wild-boar genetic DNA and come from shooting preserves where they are bred and released into the wild for hunting. Feral pigs are domestic swine that have escaped into the wild — some hundreds of years ago, and others in more recent times. Those hogs are usually mixed color. If the wild boars are not harvested, they will most likely hybridize with domestic hogs, yielding more hogs of various colors. Regardless of color, wild hogs do well in the wild.

The reason there is a lot of interest

in wild hogs is due to the massive crop damage they create. There are lots of studies on this damage, and suffice it to say, in many states it runs into the millions of dollars annually. That's one reason why states that don't have wild hogs, don't want them. States that do, want to reduce and control them.

Not only do they damage agricultural commodities, but they transmit disease, compete with native wildlife, and are detrimental to the environment. Hunters, on the other hand, like wild hogs because they provide recreational as well as food value, which in some cases has led to the translocation and subsequent

establishment of hogs in many parts of the country.

One recent study showed that state regulations to control hogs vary widely, which should come as no surprise given the fact that a few states have no wild hogs, some have had them for years, and some are just now getting them. The study showed that regulations have a big impact on hog populations, and states with permissive regulations tend to have the biggest hog problems.

Hunters have been known to import hogs from other states and release them to get populations started in the wild. Even where regulations make that illegal, it still happens. It's not the problem it once was, but once feral swine are released into the wild, hunters must control them or there could be a population increase. Even then, hogs may be impossible to control.

The study concluded that states that have established hog populations will probably continue to have them. However, if states with lower populations enforce strict regulations, they may be able to keep the wild-hog problem from growing.

Dr. Sarah Chinn, from the University of Georgia, conducted a three-year study

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on hog reproduction, and it showed why we have hogs — even with strict regulations. She and her cohorts trapped hundreds of hogs on the 310-square-mile Savannah River installation in South Carolina. Of those captured, 514 were sows, and 492 of those were culled and necropsied to get data on reproduction. The remaining 22 were radio-collared and released. Thirty-one percent (160) of the 514 sows were pregnant. Of those, 50 were adults, 29 were subadults, 53 were yearlings, and 27 were juveniles.

Here are some numbers that show just how hog reproduction makes control measures difficult. Chinn found pregnant females every month of the year, but 47 percent were observed between February and April, and 31 percent between September and October. Interestingly, she found four sows that were pregnant and lactating at the same time. Female piglets reach sexual maturity in five to six months. These juvenile hogs don't all breed, but they can. Wild sows averaged six piglets per litter but can have as many as 12. Sows can breed again five to six months after giving birth to a litter. Again, they don't all do that — but they can.

There are lots of variables that impact hog numbers in different states. For example, in my home state of West Virginia, 20 or so wild boars were taken from a West Virginia game farm in 1971 and released in a few southern West Virginia counties, where there was no rifle deer season. There still is no rifle deer season there, but there is a bow season. The reason wild hogs were released there is a bit complicated, but suffice it to say, a controlled gun hunt occurs there every year.

The West Virginia DNR has a good estimate of the number of wild hogs there and their dispersal, which has been extremely limited. Today, there is a seven-day season in late October and a three-day February season in southern West Virginia, and only 180 permits were issued in 2022. Archers can hunt hogs the entire season, beginning in September, and they can also hunt the three-day February season. No other state has a situation like what West Virginia has in four counties in the southern part of the state. Their control efforts have been working for years. Yes, there are occasional pockets of feral hogs that pop up in other parts of the state, but hunters have pretty much controlled that growth. This exemplifies why state

regulations for controlling wild hogs are so variable.

Finally, if you think predation by the high numbers of coyotes found on Dr. Chinn's study site in South Carolina might control pig numbers, think again. Coyote diet studies in that area showed that coyotes eat lots of things, but not hogs.

One coyote scat study done at the Savannah River installation found that in 146 coyote scats, none had any hog DNA. Coyotes can prey on very young piglets, but it doesn't happen very often. Chinn goes on to suggest that the best approach to controlling hogs is to capture adult females and all her piglets at one time with baited traps, concentrating capture efforts during the peak breeding months of February through April.

Apparently, our earliest settlers brought feral swine as a food source for their settlements, and later settlers brought wild boars to America for hunting. They are now part of the landscape, and something our state and federal wildlife agencies must deal with. As you can tell, it is complicated — biologically and politically — and difficult. **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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Triple ON SITKA

THE 5X5 DEER was bedded eyeball-deep in summer grass. I peeked past an alder bush, careful not to spook the smaller buck bedded only 15 yards away. The five-point was 86 yards away; a distance verified by my 10X rangefinding binoculars.

This was my second stalk on the big buck in less than an hour. Wind was steady, but terrain was tricky. I crawled within 100 yards the first time, but the land dropped off sharply and left me with no place to sneak. The second time, the stud's smaller 3x3 companion stood, fed uphill, and plopped down directly in my way. Nuts!

I scanned the layout, backed off again, and circled higher on the ridge. A shallow crease angled downward toward the target buck, and I hoped I could wiggle within bow range on my belly. It was the only option left.

A few years ago, the Pope and Young Club added nontypical Sitka blacktail categories for velvet and hard-antlered bucks. Nontypical Sitka's are rare, but I've encountered a handful of them over my 39 years of chasing them in Alaska. I never went after those "oddballs" in the past — I just took a few photos and moved on.

But there was one isolated canyon where I had seen several nontypical bucks over the years. In 2022, I decided to backpack into that area in search of one or two of them. I knew it wouldn't be easy, so I carved out the entire month of August for my DIY trip and went solo, because none of my pals were able to clear their schedules.

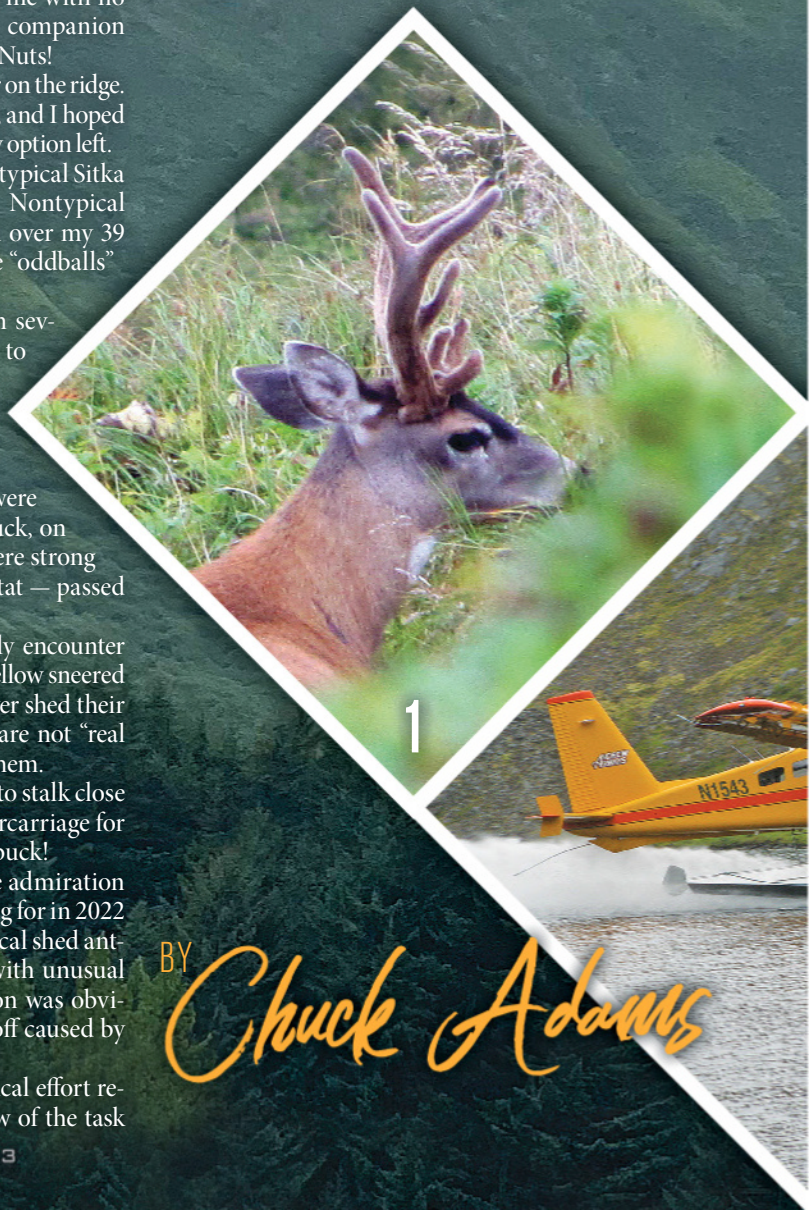
After 18 trips to Kodiak Island, I knew these deer were strongly territorial. I once saw the same unusual 2x5 buck, on the same hillside, three years in a row. I figured there were strong nontypical genetics in this hard-to-reach pocket of habitat — passed down from one generation to the next.

If you spend enough time online, you will eventually encounter hunters with some truly bizarre ideas. For example, one fellow sneered at taking nontypical bucks that grew weird antlers or never shed their velvet or antlers. This guy claimed such "eunuch" deer are not "real men" and had no respect for those hunters who pursued them.

I don't know of a hunter on the planet skilled enough to stalk close enough to a summertime buck in velvet, check his undercarriage for abnormalities first, and then draw his bow and kill said buck!

Any mature buck with large antlers has my complete admiration — velvet stag or not — but I was sure the deer I was looking for in 2022 were virile animals. What else could explain the nontypical shed antlers I had found in the canyon, and the fact that deer with unusual racks kept popping up year after year? The phenomenon was obviously genetically passed along...not some strange one-off caused by damaged or nonexistent reproductive organs.

If you wish to hunt summertime Sitka deer, the physical effort required can be daunting. You will receive a sobering view of the task



BY *Chuck Adams*

Play ODDBALLS!

THE GOOD OLD DAYS OF KODIAK
DEER HUNTING ARE GONE.

from the Kodiak airport. Barometer Mountain rises 2,073 feet above the runway...and that is often how high you must climb in August or early September to find velvet-antlered deer in their alpine habitat. Terrain is commonly as steep as Barometer, temperatures hover in the 60s and 70s, and mosquitoes and blackflies swarm in thick clouds. Meat salvage must be immediate — with long pack-outs par for the course.

The 5x5 deer I was trying to stalk made any difficulties well worthwhile. He was basically a massive-racked 2x2 with extra points sprouting from his lower main beams. To qualify as nontypical, P&Y requires a Sitka to have at least five inches of odd antler tines. This buck carried at least twice that, and I figured he would easily beat the existing World's Record nontypical velvet Sitka. That honor belonged to my friend Jack Frost's 1990 buck from Kodiak — a 3x4 with a net score of 89%.

I slipped down the hill, pushing my Bear Alaskan compound bow in front of me. The slight dip in the slope was just deep enough to hide me, and the breeze was blowing away from both bedded bucks.

When the mini ravine finally petered out, I raised my head to look. The little buck was 30 yards to my right; the big nontypical about 50 yards directly below.

Nearly one hour later, the smaller deer stood, stretched, and dropped his head to feed. Within a minute, the 5x5 stood and turned broadside.

My rangefinder said 49 yards, a realistic shooting distance in the wide-open terrain. I settled my 50-yard pin low on the buck's chest. An instant later, my Easton FMJ arrow and G5 Striker broadhead did their intended job — dropping the heart-shot buck within 75 yards.

A rough measurement gave my first-ever nontypical Sitka buck a score of 97 inches. Months later, the antlers officially netted 96% — well above the existing World's Record.

Kodiak's weather was brutal in 2022...the worst I have ever encountered. I spent nearly a week in my tiny dome tent before I shot my first deer.

As I pulled out my knife to de-bone the buck before a rugged six-mile trek back to camp, the heavens opened and drenched me to the bone. Despite the misery, I grinned as I noted two well-formed testicles between that buck's legs. Eunuch my butt!

Long after dark, I staggered back to camp, submerged the 60 pounds of meat under water to fool bears, stripped off my sopping wet clothes, and crawled into the sack. The date was August 11.

Four days and several paperbacks later, I finally poked my head out of the tent. I'd had far too much rest, but constant near-zero visibility had made hiking and glassing impossible. All I could do in the meantime was de-flesh the skull, preserve antlers and bone with salt, and tuck the trophy in the corner of my tent. I doubted a brown bear



1. I photographed this nice nontypical Sitka from close range several years ago, before the category existed with P&Y. I passed up the deer, even though it would have easily scored over 95 nontypical points. 2. Many early season Sitka starting points are reached via floatplane.

3. In 2022, I spent over 50 percent of my time on Kodiak in a tiny tent. Rain, fog, and high winds were the worst I'd ever seen during 18 trips to the island.

Triple Play ON SITKA ODDBALLS!

could smell it, but my .454 Casull handgun and large canister of pepper spray were handy just in case. I have never had a bear problem on Kodiak. The danger is there, for sure, but overrated in my opinion.

Sitka bucks carry the smallest antlers of any North American deer. Some folks believe Coues deer have the smallest headgear, but a study of the record books belies this notion. Top archery Coues bucks score between 130 and 140 points. The largest Sitkas score below 120. A mature Sitka deer can weigh 200 pounds or more on the hoof — far more than a Coues deer — but Sitka antlers are dwarfed by body size. If you want giant racks, Alaskan deer are not for you.

I was thinking that very thing on the morning of August 17, as I peeked over a bluff and spotted a buck browsing 200 yards below me. He was another 2x2 with extra tines sprouting from the bases — clearly a 90-plus-inch nontypical.

There was no way to stalk... too many other deer in the way. As I watched, something rustled behind me. I glanced back just in time to see a small 3x3 skid to a halt 20 yards away. He snorted, spooked, and leaped off the ledge I was sitting on. In an instant, the draw below exploded with running deer.

The nontypical raced across a valley and up the far slope. He slowed, stood on high alert, and finally bedded near another buck. He was easily a mile away but now in a stalkable position. I grabbed my bow and trotted off the mountain.

Alaskan days in August are long. About 18 hours of daylight lets you cover lots of ground with plenty of time to stalk. Two

hours later, I peeked past a clump of grass and spotted the nontypical's antlers beyond a bush. My rangefinder said 40 yards.

I never shoot at bedded animals, because it makes their vital zone tough to judge. Fortunately, the deer stood up less than 20 minutes later, gazed into space, and dropped his head to feed.

My arrow vanished behind the buck's shoulder, at which point he then staggered out of sight but did not go far. Within minutes, I was admiring his 94-inch, 4x5 rack. The antlers later officially scored 93%.

It immediately started to rain, and fog dropped around my ears — typical for Kodiak. I didn't mind the cold, wet task I was now faced with, or the four-mile pack job back to my tent after the fact... I had my second nontypical velvet Sitka buck, and another World's Record beater!

Rain hammered my tiny tent all night, and it never let up for more than a week. Staying in touch with my wife, Greta, and a few friends like my sometimes Kodiak-hunting partner, Ron Niziolek, by satellite phone and In-Reach device kept me sane. I also used those same wonderful forms of communication to stay in touch with my air-taxi pilot, who flew in to retrieve deer meat whenever the weather cleared.

August 26 dawned without a cloud in the sky. I hustled out of camp before sunrise, determined to fill my third and final deer tag before bushplane pickup on August 31. I was hoping for another oddball lurking somewhere in the canyon.

Ten hours of hard hiking followed. One tall-racked typical 3x4 with brows fed past me that afternoon, but I was focused on nontypical antlers. I hiked over one more hill... and gasped in amazement. The largest Sitka buck I had ever seen was feeding 200 yards away!

Through my binos, his antler bases looked as thick as my wrists, with two typical tines per side rising high above his head. Points sprouted in every direction below that, including two in the rear that were at least six inches long. An incredible droptine extended below the deer's right jaw. I counted five points on the left and seven on the right.

I dropped down and crawled out of sight around the hill.



My first 2022 nontypical velvet Sitka buck required three stalks before a shot was possible.



I stalked my second 2022 Sitka buck from more than a mile away.



A summertime Sitka hunter should de-bone a deer for quick meat cooling, avoidance of dangerous bears, and easier backpacking in difficult areas. Complete salvage of all edible parts is required by Alaska law. A mature buck yields 50 to 60 pounds of delicious meat.

There were at least a dozen deer around that awesome buck, and I only had a few hours till dead dark. The breeze was steady and whipping the side of my face. I had a chance.

An hour later, I crawled between tundra humps above the place I'd last seen the buck. Suddenly, ears appeared 20 yards in front of me. I buried my face in the grass as a doe and fawn fed toward me. Soon, I was staring up at the duo from less than 10 yards. Eventually, they wandered upwind and out of sight.

And then it happened. The magnificent velvet rack I had seen before rose above a bush barely 30 yards away, disappeared, and rose again as the deer lifted his head between bites. My heart leaped into my throat!

Antlers continued to bob, but I could not see the body at all. The deer fed to the left and bedded 33 yards below me.

Finally, a forked-horn buck I had not seen stood up 40 yards in front of me. The big oddball swiveled his head and stood up, too, exactly broadside and completely in the open.

The deer stared at me for long seconds, and then looked directly away. I rolled to my knees, drew, and held for 30 yards to compensate for the downward trajectory. My arrow hit with a dull crack, and the deer dove out of sight.

I raced to the crest just in time to see him flip over 125 yards away. I'm not a good dancer, but I sure made a stab at it on that remote Alaskan hillside!

My last nontypical velvet Sitka buck was a genuine bomber! Official net score after the mandatory 60-day drying period was 117%, with more than 33 inches of nontypical tines. The awesome rack was scored even higher by a P&Y panel in February of 2023, with a final net measurement of 117% and a final gross score of 121%. This is the new P&Y nontypical velvet

World's Record, beating the old record by more than 30 percent and scoring the highest of any archery Sitka deer in any category. It is my seventh World's Record, and I consider it the best animal I have ever taken with a bow. **BH**

Author's Notes: For serious nonresidents, the big draw of Sitka bucks has always been multiple tags in your pocket and amazing numbers of deer. All that changed in 2023.

Against advice from the Alaska Game Department and deer biologists, the politically appointed, seven-person Alaska Board Of Game caved to pressure from a few residents who resent nonresident hunters.

Going forward, nonresidents in the Kodiak area can only harvest one buck per year. Given the many thousands of dollars required for airfare, air taxi or boat services, motel, rental vehicle, remote-country gear, hunting license and tag, and other expenses — not to mention the time required to plan a remote DIY hunt — one deer might not be worth traveling north for our continent's smallest-racked animal. A larger whitetail, blacktail, or mule deer in the Lower 48 makes more sense.

I feel fortunate to have hunted Sitka bucks for nearly four decades when the annual bag limit was five, then four, and finally three for many years. Sitka populations are still as huge as ever and are only affected by winter weather. Even the Board Of Game admitted this before their controversial decision.

On my 2022 Kodiak bowhunt, I saw an average of three-dozen branch-antlered bucks per day, and never saw another hunter. Going forward, many bucks that might have been harvested and enjoyed will now freeze to death or die of old age. So sad.



My new P&Y nontypical velvet World's Record Sitka deer was a genuine giant. After official measuring, the 5x7 beat the former World's Record by more than 28 inches.





Bodi and I were in awe as we walked up on my bull. And I was sure glad to have Bodi's help on the hunt and pack out!

The Bull Of *FIVE* Lifetimes

WHEN YOU SET YOUR BULL-ELK STANDARDS HIGH AND
STICK TO THE PLAN, GOOD THINGS WILL HAPPEN.

By Zach Bowhay



Finally, after days of tracking and calling, I was about to catch a glimpse of the bull we had been chasing. Its deep, guttural bugle had convinced us that this bull was exceptional. As I saw the large, polished brow tines coming through the jack pines, I thought I was about to encounter a shooter bull. However, as the bull turned sideways, it became clear that he didn't match the caliber we were after. Don't get me wrong, he was a handsome 5x5 with thick beams and decent tine length, but I was after a bull that was next-level.

The bull approached to within 13 yards, peed all over himself, and bugled so loudly it almost blew our hats off. It was quite a show. As the bull turned to leave, my hunting companion Josh, who was right over my shoulder with a video camera running, whispered, "I don't know how you are doing this?"

Curious about his statement, I asked Josh what he meant. He explained that he couldn't understand how I was having all these cool, up-close encounters with great bulls without actually killing them.

I told him that most hunters only get one limited-entry elk tag in Utah, and I was incredibly fortunate to have my third tag in the Beehive State. Despite having killed two great bulls on previous hunts, I always left with a feeling of what could have been if I had held out until the end of the hunt, when the rut was really kicking in. This time, I was determined to find out what would happen if I exercised patience and waited until peak rut to see what would unfold.

A few days earlier, we arrived in my unit and set up camp in a hot, open location. We explored the area on ATVs, looking for promising places to hunt and spotted a large aspen patch on a higher ridge surrounded by timber — a spot where elk tend to bed and feed during prime hours.

That evening, Josh, another hunting buddy, Bodi, and I headed toward the aspen patch, guided by the bugling bull we had heard from the upper end. We called periodically to keep him engaged as we moved closer. When we were about 150 yards away, we decided to call a little more to gauge his response. However, we reached a standstill with the bull pacing back and forth about 70 yards above us.

Finally, I caught a glimpse of him, and I was astounded. He was a huge, perfect 6x6 bull — everything you could ask for. I hadn't planned to kill a bull on the first day, but this bull was likely over 360 inches, and I would surely take the shot if presented.

The Bull Of Five Lifetimes

After positioning ourselves for a shot, the bull grew impatient and left without giving us an opportunity. We returned the next morning, and the bull was bugling, but he wasn't interested in engaging.

That evening, we hunted a timbered flat surrounding a large, open park. There wasn't much action until right before dark, but the bull we encountered there was a nice 300-inch 6x6 — a beautiful bull, just not what we were after.

The next morning, while we hunted, my dad and brother drove to the south and west to look for better camping areas with shade, and hunting areas that would cut some time off of our morning ATV commute to where we had been hunting. Dad and Jeremy said the new area was amazing, so after an uneventful morning, we drove around to see for ourselves.

That evening, we hiked to a large aspen strip in the timber. When I bugled, a great-sounding bull responded immediately. It was my first real test on this hunt, and a beautiful 330-class 6x6 with matching devil tines appeared. As hard as it was to do, I let him walk, hoping I wouldn't regret my decision.

Just then, another nice bull I figured to be around 290 inches, showed up in



My brother snapped this pic of a great bull from our camp one evening.

the same spot. After he left, we went and drove the area with our remaining daylight and decided to move camp to our newly discovered mecca.

After moving camp, we went on an evening hunt behind a big, dry lake on a vast aspen ridge. The young aspens didn't show much sign initially, but as we reached the next canyon, we were greeted by a symphony of bugling and rutting action.

We tried to cut the distance to the herd before darkness fell, but unfortunately, we ran out of light without laying eyes on any bulls. Driving back to camp that night, we ran into a fellow hunter named Jason, who we had met a few years ago in the Henry Mountains. Jason informed us that the bulls were screaming below the waterhole he was sitting near and urged us to check it out in the morning.

The following day, as we made our way down to that area, our tip was confirmed when we encountered several bulls tending a couple of herds of cows. We called sparingly and approached what seemed to be the larger-sounding bull.

We closed the gap, and with gentle coaxing finally caught sight of the big bull. It was evident that he was a massive-bodied bull with an impressive rack; however, upon closer inspection, I realized he was a mature 5x5 pushing the 300-inch mark. As much as I love big 5x5s, I decided to let him pass and pursued the other herd in search of its suitor.

After an hour of exchanging bugles and cow calls, we finally had the herd bull approaching our setup. This bull had long tines that swept forward and then downward — a characteristic that seems more prevalent with bulls from the Southwest.

Despite being a big bull, I made the choice not to pursue him. The sighting was brief, and he didn't offer a shot. In hindsight, I realized he was likely a very large bull, possibly in the 350 to 360-inch class. It was a momentary lapse in

judgment that could have haunted me if the hunt hadn't worked out in the end.

Over the next few days, we hunted various areas and encountered numerous bulls, including another run-in with the big bull from the first day. We passed on several bulls, listened to hundreds of bugles, and had an incredible time in the elk woods as the rut was intensifying.

On September 9, we had the encounter with the bull at the beginning of this story. Unfortunately, Josh had to return home the following morning for work commitments. Josh and I had shared many hunting days together over the past five years, and our friendship was invaluable to me. I had a feeling this hunt was building up to an epic conclusion, and I desperately wanted him to be there when I killed my bull. However, sometimes life demands our presence elsewhere. My dad also decided it was time to head home, so Josh would drop him off in Idaho before continuing to Montana.

The next morning, Bodi and I set out well before dawn, bidding farewell to Dad and Josh and jokingly leaving them with this: "You won't make it to Salt Lake City before I kill a bull."

Bodi and I headed up the ridge where we had lost light while pursuing bugling bulls a few days earlier. Soon, we found ourselves trailing a herd with several bugling bulls.

The area consisted of large, open meadows surrounded by timber, forcing us to stick to the trees and attempt to maneuver around the meadows without being detected. As we approached the edge of one meadow, we knew the bugling bull was close.

We set up to call, and then I heard Bodi say, "He's running across the meadow right at us!"

With Bodi positioned to my right with his camera, the bull walked right past me at 15 yards. He was a nice young six-point, but again, he wasn't the bull we were after.

Once the young bull disappeared, we decided to cut across the meadow to



Above: Having numerous close elk encounters is the perfect recipe for an epic elk hunt. Below: It's tough to beat a good hunting partner, and you'd be hard-pressed to find one better than my buddy Josh.



try to catch up with the other bugling bulls moving up the ridge. As we approached the top, we stumbled upon the entire herd, and they thundered off. With the wind swirling, we decided to take a break for lunch and wait for the afternoon thermals to stabilize. Not long after sitting down, we started hearing bugling over the rim of the ridge to the east of us. After a short wait, we made our way toward them.

Not far downslope, we called a small five-point bull in to 15 yards, but again we decided to pass. Down below, there were two bulls having an absolute rut fest, and their bugles were loud and nonstop.

We moved cautiously, calling sparingly, and soon I spotted a bull chasing a hot cow. Eventually, he came within 55 yards — offering a good look. Although he was a nice bull, probably around 315–320 inches, he still wasn't what I wanted.

At this point, there was only one bugling bull left that we hadn't seen. His bugles were incredible and nonstop, so we kept moving forward.

When he seemed to be within 75 yards, we got set up. Bodi, about 20 yards behind me, operated the camera while we both cow-called and bugled.

The bull responded eagerly but wouldn't show himself. I motioned to Bodi to start raking a tree, and as he did, the bull's curiosity got the better of him and he was on his way.

Breaking out of the timber at 50 yards, I instantly knew he was a shooter. As he moved toward the opening in front of us, I readied myself for the shot. However, before he cleared the brush, he paused, raked the ground, bugled, and then proceeded forward.

I went into autopilot mode — drawing my bow like I had done countless times before in preparation for this once-in-a-

lifetime opportunity. At 32 yards, I cow-called, and the bull stopped in his tracks. Without hesitation, my arrow was on its way. The shot struck slightly lower than intended but was tight to the shoulder, passing through both lungs. The bull made a big loop in front of us, jumped a large log, and went down within sight.

Bodi and I quietly celebrated, allowing the bull some time to expire. Surprisingly, we had cell service, and although I usually wouldn't do so, I made a quick call to share the news with Josh and Dad. I guess I was wrong, as they had made it to Salt Lake City, but they were only a couple hours past there when I called.

Approaching the bull, the realization of his true magnitude started to sink in. His massive body, long tines, and heavy beams were awe-inspiring. After pursuing elk for over 30 years, I was finally sitting beside a truly giant bull — and he was all mine.

Bulls of this caliber have managed to evade hunters — both human and animal — for many years and being able to take such an animal with a bow on his own turf is an experience I don't take lightly. I felt a deep reverence for this bull and gratitude for the mountains, the overall experience, and the friends and family who supported me throughout the hunt. I must admit that I was overcome with emotion and shed a few tears on that mountainside. Bodi and I savored the moment, took lots of pictures, and then got to work.

By 2 p.m., we had the bull quartered, and we optimistically believed we would make it back to the truck by 5 p.m. However, our estimation turned out to be way off.

We decided to take a supposed "shortcut" that led us through the most treacherous blowdown timber and a rocky canyon from hell that I had ever



There were so many bulls in the hole where we found my bull; they were literally uprooting the trees in their rut frenzy.

encountered. It was a tough day, but at 9:30 p.m. we finally stumbled onto the road where my brother was waiting with cold drinks and some snacks.

The following morning, Bodi and I chose a much better route and managed to pack out the rest of the bull by midday. After one final night spent in our cots inside the wall tent, listening to the bugling bulls, we reluctantly broke camp and began our journey back home.

Although I was ready and excited to see my family, once on the road headed home, a part of me couldn't help but feel a tinge of sadness over knowing that I was leaving behind this extraordinary elk paradise and an experience that I will likely never encounter again. Nevertheless, even with that realization and likely killing the bull of five lifetimes, I plan on spending as many future years as I'm physically able in pursuit of the exhilarating high that comes with bowhunting elk in the mountains of the West! **BH**

The author is an outdoor writer and all-around good guy who makes his home in Idaho with his wife and children.

Author's Note:

My equipment on this hunt included a PSE EVO XF bow, Black Eagle X Impact arrows, Ulmer Edge Titanium 125 broadheads, Option Archery bowsight and Quivalizer, Hamskea Epsilon rest, KUTU pack and clothing, Vortex Razor UHD binoculars, Phelps Game Calls, Benchmade knives, Worksharp Field Sharpener, and Crispi Altitude boots.



These big, open meadows held lots of elk, but we often had to loop around the meadows to stay with the elk without being seen.

THIS IS A STORY ABOUT FAMILY; not just my family, but also those who are the future stewards of our world. And as big as the world is, the decision to make it better oftentimes consists of small choices to make it so.

I am an avid but aging outdoorsman, who loves nothing more than hunting and fishing. I'm also the father of four beautiful children — two girls, Erin and Jodie, and two boys, Chris and Tyler — and along with consistency, I would have to say that teaching them how to care for something or someone has been paramount to my job as their dad.

One of the key ingredients to becoming a good person is stewardship, which is putting the needs or the love for someone or something ahead of what you want or think you may need, at any given moment in time. When we master this, we become good stewards.

When my two boys were young, they quickly fell in love with the outdoors, and their progression over the years has been wonderful to witness. In fact, **Bowhunter** Magazine was kind enough to publish photos of my boys' first bowkills some 17 years ago in what was called "Your Best Shots" — a proud moment for all of us.

Since then, Chris and Tyler have honed their skills and matured as hunters, learning along the way that it is no small feat to hunt and kill an older, wiser deer. They've also learned

patience and respect, and their love for the sport has only increased with every shot NOT taken.

I began hunting at the age of 21 in a non-hunting family. They weren't opposed to hunting; they'd just never done it themselves. The lessons whitetails taught me were many and oftentimes humbling, but each reward for perseverance was sweeter for me, and like all hunters, those lessons never end.

Everything you've read up to this point is the truth, and while we are not "bowhunting snobs" by any stretch of the imagination, my sons and I always dream of killing whitetails worthy of recognition by the Pope and Young Club — something I've been blessed to do twice (once in Montana, and then again in my home state of Pennsylvania).

In case you haven't picked up on it yet, I'm extremely proud of both my boys and their siblings. So, without further ramblings on Dad's part, please enjoy the following tale of a special whitetail that came to be known as the "Coughing Buck."

I'd been looking for a farm in Ohio for some time, and in

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F BY TOM GAUL FOOT

fact had paid to hunt with several outfitters but had just not found the right fit for us. Then a friend of mine put me in contact with a guy named Travis, who managed hunting properties in Ohio and Illinois.

I reached out to Travis, and he had openings the week of October 14–22, 2022, on a property in Ohio. That week would not have been my first choice for various reasons, but at least my boys and I were in the game for an out-of-state hunt together.

There was so much to love about this 1,500-acre farm, the breathtaking scenery for one, and the fact that Muskingum and Coshocton Counties — both known for producing big white-tails — came together somewhere on this piece of paradise.

Travis allowed us to come out in August to scout the farm. I marked 36 different sets that would be available for us to use. We even helped Travis out by setting up additional stands and securing safety lines as we scouted. Travis also gave us the nod to bring our climbers with us in October, should we need to make “halftime adjustments.”

The only real stipulation was that we target 130-class deer or better, unless they were younger than four — again, age being the real deciding factor. There was no penalty for making a bad call, and Travis wasn’t even going to be in Ohio during our hunt. Now that’s some real trust! He made us feel like we were a part of something bigger than just killing a deer, and we were happy to oblige.

To say we were a little excited would have been like saying the Chicago Fire got a little out of hand. While the days slowly passed, every once in a while Travis would pour a little gas on the fire by sending me trail-camera pics of great bucks, which I would share with my boys and my good friend, Phil.

One of the pictures we received had a little text attached that read, “You will know this deer by the cough he has. He’s not sick, and in fact will probably go 160, but he does make a strange sound like he is coughing.”

The buck was just plain stunning, with stickers, a flyer, mass, and two little devil bumps just in front of his huge brow tines. He was the exact reason we decided to hunt Ohio and was instantly dubbed the “Coughing Buck.”

Finally, the day came to leave Pennsylvania for a week doing the thing we love most — hunting whitetails. The six-hour drive flew by as we told stories and discussed plans for the upcoming week. I also remember hearing my sons



All you can do as a parent is try your best to raise your kids right and I think I did a good job.

(Left to right): Chris, Tyler, my friend Phil, and I were overjoyed for Chris and his hunting success, which left us all with a very special memory.

STEPS

FOOTSTEPS

making jokes about what they would do if they heard a cough way off in the woods...well, we were about to find out!

Before we knew it, we were in our Ohio camp. After unpacking our gear, we set up a few targets to double-check our accuracy and then talked hunt strategies one more time before going to bed.

We set out the next evening with high hopes and bows in hand. Tyler and Chris, with almost the flip of a coin, spread out in two sets on a line with a perfect wind.

Chris typically has the hot hand in our family, and he was headed to a set called "Foundation," while Tyler would be hunting an area named "Kennel Island." Phil was farther down the line in a blind, and I was trying a different part of the farm.

Cell service is pretty good on the farm, but I somehow missed the group text that Chris had sent, letting us know he'd taken a shot at the Coughing Buck. It wasn't till after dark when I pulled up on my ATV and saw the boys' faces that I knew something great had happened.

Any hunter worth his salt knows that whitetails are remarkable animals, capable of seemingly impossible feats at times — especially when hit by an arrow. Unless you have a cameraman with you to record the events, there are no instant replays outside of your mind's eye. This fact explained why my boys, while giddy with excitement, had not yet taken up the Coughing Buck's trail.

We stood there against the backdrop of a million stars, listening to Chris tell his tale. It was one of those father/son moments I will never forget. Why? Because in that moment in time, under those beautiful stars, I knew I had raised my boys right. My mind also flashed back to the first time the three of us set foot in the whitetail's world together when they were young boys, and the countless times I had



After double-checking that nearby does weren't watching him, Chris slowly drew, anchored, and waited for the buck to present him with an ethical shot.

brought two of everything just in case, and while this particular moment was Chris's, it was also Tyler's and mine.

Before Chris took us to his stand, he once again gave us the play-by-play, explaining in further detail what happened in those magical minutes.

He reached his stand tree early, clipped his safety harness to the safety line, and quietly climbed to his perch. As the afternoon counted down to the primetime hour, does began to file in on both sides. And then it happened.

Like a whisper you think you hear, wondering if it really happened, a faint cough rang out from somewhere out there. Chris said he didn't believe it could be real, until it happened again, this time close enough that it raised the hairs on his neck. As he tried to pinpoint the sound, the unseen buck coughed again and then materialized on a logging trail 80 yards to his left.

When Chris saw the deer — the biggest he'd ever seen from a stand — his body started trembling like it would on a cold December day. As the buck slowly sauntered in, Chris tried to regain his composure. But try as he might, he still shook with adrenaline-filled emotions. The game was on, and he was about to find out if all the clinics these animals put on through the years had sunk in.

Finally, the buck was within Chris's ethical shot range — 32 yards. But there

was a big fallen tree on the buck's path that delayed his progress, at which point the "cougher" stopped and began feeding.

Through the downed tree, Chris recalled seeing an opening the size of a trashcan lid to the buck's vitals, but he remained patient. Chris said that he'd waited too long and worked too hard to rush a shot on an animal of this caliber.

The deer finished foraging and then slipped through the deadfall with ease. I can only imagine the adrenaline rush coursing through my son's veins.

With the buck's vitals 28 yards away and now clear of any obstructions, Chris was ready. My sons are no amateurs, and this wasn't Chris's first rodeo. The only difference in this instance, was that Chris was about to draw down on the biggest buck he had ever seen in person!

The does that had worked in and around Chris while he was watching the buck were still there, acting as sentries. Chris knew this, so before he slowly drew his bow, he cautiously looked over both his shoulders to make sure the does' eyes wouldn't betray his movements. Confirming it was clear, Chris then drew back in one fluid motion, anchored properly, and then waited.

The buck had just finished destroying the limb of a small tree and began to take a step. With a simple mouth bleat, Chris gave the buck moment to pause, and then loosed his arrow.

Travis sent me this camera photo of the "Coughing Buck" prior to our hunt, which got all of us amped-up!



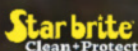
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FOOTSTEPS



We were blessed with a magnificent sunrise the morning after Chris recovered his buck.

His arrow hit the crease behind the buck's shoulder. In a split-second, the buck turned and exited through the limbs of the big, dead tree — only this time not quite as gracefully as the way he had entered the stage!

After Chris finished telling this first part of his story, Tyler's chapter began.

Tyler was so pumped for his brother, and his light was about to shine. I believe we are all born with certain gifts, and one of Tyler's is his natural ability to see things others cannot. Tyler has always been one to take his time — no matter the task at hand — and that is why in all my years hunting, I have never met a better tracker.

We slowly walked to the point of impact, looking for sign of a good hit, but at that moment there was none — no blood, no arrow. Chris jogged his memory a bit and remembered where the buck had passed back through the debris.

After what seemed like an eternity, we found Chris's arrow — or at least a portion of it — at which point Chris's face went pale.

With no pass-through and only part of the arrow in our possession, there was very little sign. But like I said, Tyler is an amazing tracker, and it wasn't long before he started spotting small spots of blood in the duff and began to see in his mind which way the buck had run.

Thanks to Tyler's keen eyes and intuition, it was only a matter of minutes before we found the Coughing Buck piled-up dead against some brush. That's all it took to restart our excitement like an electric current in the air.

Before Chris put his hands on his dream buck, father and sons stood in awed silence out of respect for this magnificent animal for the joy and bounty he had bestowed upon us. Soon after came

the pictures, which will only further solidify the memories for years to come.

Being a bowhunter is something my sons and I have always been proud to call ourselves. None of us will ever apologize for that fact— no matter what the naysayers have to say in this ever-changing world.

I have two grandsons coming up — Bear and Jaxon — and I plan to expose them to these incredible moments for as long as the good Lord allows me to. If they do decide to hunt, it will be my honor to help them on their way. If they don't? I'm ok with that, too. Being a good steward to these young men means being there 100 percent — no matter the path they choose to take. **BH**

The author and his family live in central Pennsylvania. He is a friend of this magazine who always goes above and beyond to lend a helping hand in the deer woods.

Author's Note: My son Chris's list of equipment on this hunt included a Mathews Legacy bow, Easton FMJ arrows, 100-grain Muzzy broadheads, Nockturnal lighted nocks, API tree-stands, and a Vortex rangefinder.



My grandson, Bear, is already showing promise for the future.

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A WILLMORE

My bull moose was everything I could have hoped for and then some.

RETURN

**WHEN YOUR
FAVORITE SPOT
ON EARTH KEEPS
WHISPERING
YOUR NAME, YOU
ANSWER THE CALL.**

BY JEFF SWAN

The small bull moose that Rhett had just called in crossed the meadow about 100 yards south of us and slipped into the timber behind us without offering an opportunity. Rhett and I got back together, and since he was unable to see the bull from his calling location, I was describing the encounter when Rhett said he could hear another bull grunting. I heard nothing! Rhett insisted, stating that it was plain as day and coming from the same direction the young bull had just come from. Finally, I heard the bull grunting, and he was coming our way!

But I'm getting ahead of myself. We need to back up a little to paint the whole picture. This adventure started way back in the spring of 2019 at the Pope and Young Convention, where I picked up a hunt with Big Knife Outfitters and Cody Cassidy during the auction. The hunt was to have taken place in September of 2020 but was postponed until 2021 due to COVID. That hunt was quite the adventure, but that's another story. Fast-forward to spring of 2022, and I was fortunate enough to purchase the same



This was our comfy moose camp in the Willmore. You can almost scratch and sniff the smoke, right?



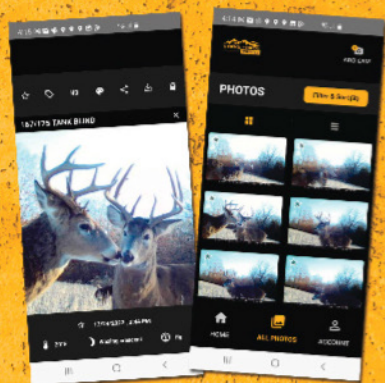
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A WILLMORE RETURN

hunt at the Pope and Young Convention for the fall of 2022.

Both the hunts took place in the Willmore Wilderness located in west-central Alberta. The Willmore is an 1,800-square-mile wilderness area just north of Jasper National Park. There are no roads, bridges, or buildings in the park, just miles of remote wilderness seemingly untouched by man. The only way in or out of the Willmore is on foot or horseback. The beauty of the wilderness is worth the price of admission, and I feel privileged just to have had the opportunity to explore the park. It's greatness rivals any that you can experience in its neighboring, more famous parks to the south — Jasper and Banff.

The summer months seemed to drag on and I could not wait for September to roll around. I spent the summer working on my shooting, conditioning, and acquiring additional gear that I was missing the previous fall. I was also fortunate enough to get a friend, Danny Fane, to join me for what would be his first big game hunt outside of the whitetails we chase here at home.

September 14 finally arrived, and we loaded my truck with all our gear, including a chest freezer and generator to bring the meat home. After 24 hours of driving, we arrived in Hinton, Alberta, and we got a hotel for the night. The following morning we met up with Rhett Shingoose and Evan Spady, two young guides with whom I'd hunted the previous year. Danny and I would be hunting with them at the same camp as last year. The 16-mile ride to camp on horseback into the Willmore Wilderness went without a hitch, and before we knew it, we were settling into a comfortable camp and getting our gear ready for the first day of hunting.

The first morning, we awoke to six inches of fresh snow. Our hunt turned up some moose in the distance, but nothing worth chasing. That evening Rhett, Danny, and I decided to go to an old sheep camp, about an hour from our camp, where we could overlook a long, willow-choked meadow that we'd hunted last year. We spotted a giant bull moose at the far end of the meadow, about three miles away, and the chase was on. We got to the area where we felt the bull was and immediately heard grunts, so we backed out of the 10-foot-high willows and set up in a bit of a clearing where we hoped to call in the bull.

Once set up, Rhett began to call, and the bull followed the script perfectly! He came right in, to the spot we had just been standing when we first heard him grunting. All I could see was his giant rack and head above the willows at about 30 yards. The bull was only about 15 yards from Danny, who also did not have a shot through the willows. Despite Rhett's best attempts to sound like a lonely cow, the bull never took those final steps to clear the willows before turning back and moving away from us. He most likely got some of our scent as he was standing in the exact same spot we had just been minutes before.

The next couple days were full of adventure and moose encounters. The bulls were in the mood and responded to our calls. Danny was having lots of action with Evan calling in several bulls, just nothing that Danny wanted to take home with him. Meanwhile, Rhett and I were seeing moose, but nothing we could get close to. Many of the moose we were running into were close to camp, in places we didn't hunt last year.

On Tuesday, September 20, after having several encounters with bulls within a half-mile of camp, Rhett and I set up on a point of timber that extended into

Here we're glassing for moose above
timberline on the first morning.





This drainage, which leads to the gap in the distant mountains, was very close to where we set up to call my bull.

a willow drainage, all within earshot of camp. Rhett set up behind me about 30 yards and began calling. We hadn't been there long before I caught movement across the meadow and out came a young bull moose who proceeded to walk across the meadow into the timber to our backs. This bull never made a sound as he crossed the opening. This brings us to the beginning of the story.

After hearing the grunts, we once again got set up with Rhett behind me. The bull was obviously worked up as he grunted frequently, and we could hear him thrashing willows every few steps. He seemed to be following the same path as the young bull, and when I finally saw him, I was shocked. He was a giant! He would stop every 30 yards or so to thrash a willow, grunting as he walked. To add to the adrenaline rush, a second bull of nearly equal caliber was following him. Rhett obviously had the bulls fired up with his calling.

Just like the young bull before him, the monster bull stayed out about 100 yards and walked into the timber behind us. I never did see where the second bull that was following him went. Once inside the timber, the bull went silent. We could occasionally hear his paddle's hitting a tree branch, but no grunts or thrashing of the brush. Rhett never gave up, and after several minutes, Rhett's calling finally got the bull fired up again, and he was coming. I repositioned myself to the other side of the timber finger

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A WILLMORE RETURN

we were hiding in, and Rhett continued to call at the bull.

I could hear the bull grunting and raking but could not see him until he turned the corner around a willow bush at less than 20 yards. At this point, I was surprisingly calm. The bull turned toward me and began raking a short willow, so I took the opportunity to draw my bow. When he stopped raking the willow, he just stood there quartering toward me and offering no shot opportunity. After what seemed like forever, but was less than a minute I'm sure, Rhett, who was stretched out on the ground 30 yards from the bull, made one cow call. That broke the bull's trance, and he turned and started walking toward Rhett.

There was a large pine tree that the bull walked behind, and when he reappeared at 13 yards, I waited until his near leg went forward and then released my arrow. The shot was perfect, and I knew I had just killed a giant. The bull ran directly away from me, fortunately for Rhett, who was on the trail where the bull had stood and less than 15 yards away. When the bull got to 50 yards, he started to stumble and Rhett yelled at me to shoot him again, but there was no need, as we then watched the bull fall. The effectiveness of a well-placed shot with a razor-sharp broadhead was on full display, right in front of us.

The whole experience was surreal. Rhett was beyond excited, far more than I was at that moment. Harvesting an animal with my bow, any animal, always brings about mixed emotions. There's always the elation of accomplishing a goal, along with a tremendous amount of respect for the animal, and even some remorse. The taking of a life is something I take very seriously, and I do my best to always show respect for the animal and live up to my responsibility to make a quick, clean, and humane kill.

After soaking in the moment and sharing our excitement with each other, the daunting task of breaking down a giant bull moose began. From where we were, we could hear the bells on the horses as they were let out of camp to forage for the night. However, that did little to ease my concerns about grizzlies as we cut up the bull in the darkness. We finished without any issues and made it back to camp several hours later to celebrate. The following morning, we all gathered to finish the job and



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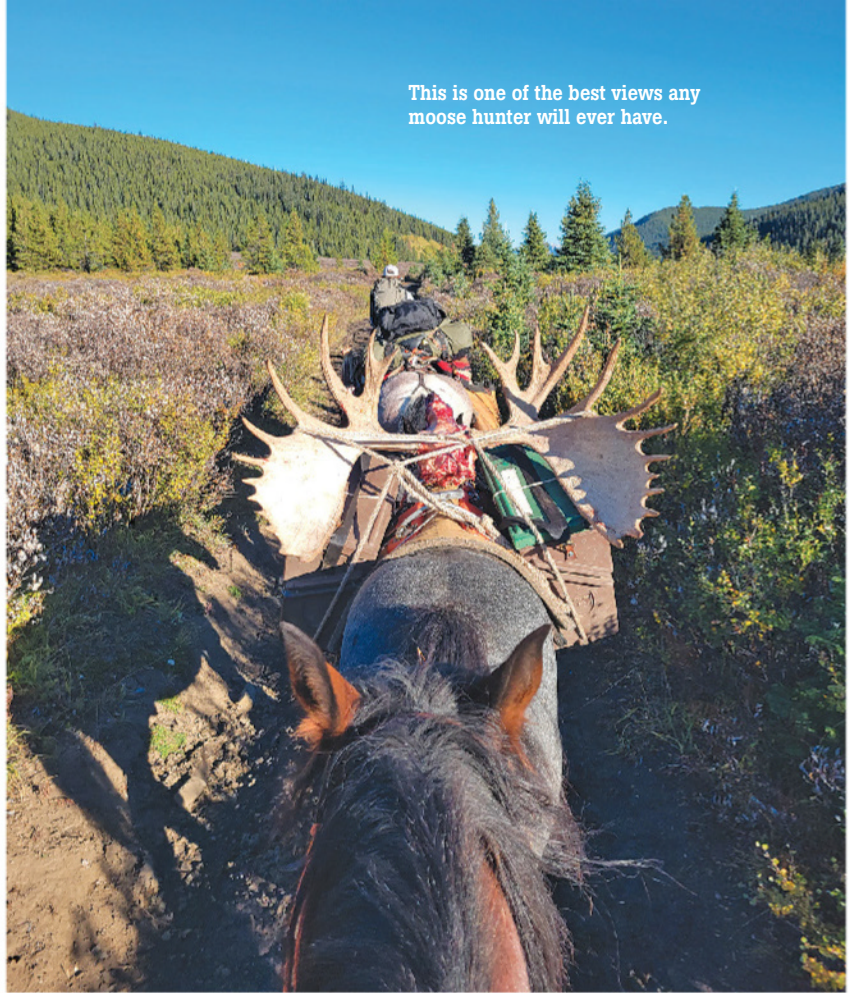
A WILLMORE RETURN

pack up my bull for the trip out. I had to go out early with my moose due to an infection in my finger, while Danny remained in camp to finish his hunt. He didn't end up taking a bull, but his time in camp got him addicted to Western hunting and he has already booked his own return trip to the Willmore to once again match wits with the largest ungulate in North America. I hope that one day soon I'll get back with Cody, Rhett, Evan, and all the other fine guides who work for Big Knife Outfitters and call the Willmore their home away from home. **BH**

The author is an emergency room physician's assistant from Albia, Iowa, who has been bowhunting for over 40 years.

Author's Note: I used a Hoyt Carbon Defiant bow, Easton arrows tipped with G5 Montec broadheads, Vapor Trail rest, CBE sight, Tru-Fire release, Sitka and KUIU clothing, Kenetrek boots, Swarovski optics, Leupold rangefinder, and Eberlestock pack. For information about Big Knife Outfitters, contact Cody Cassidy at (403) 740-6699.

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SEPTEMBER

Surprises

AS A BOWHUNTER, September is the pinnacle month, where all the planning, practice, preparation, hopes, and dreams come together. The time leading up to this month builds with anticipation, as we think about the possibilities and opportunities the season may bring.

Part of the thrill that comes from the anticipation of each new bow season is the fact that the hunt could go in innumerable directions. Contemplating how the hunt could go, and then living out the surprises that come during the hunt, is a large reason why there is such a love for heading into the woods each fall with a bow in hand.

Take 2022, for example, as I had a New Mexico archery mule deer tag in a unit I had never hunted before.

Close But Not Quite

September arrived, and my brother, Nathan, and I spent the first week hunting together. Although we hadn't located many deer, we were fortunate enough to find one nice, main-frame 4x4 buck that was likely in the 170-class range.

I had three opportunities with this buck, one of which resulted in my sneaking within 56 yards of him while he

was bedded. However, while creeping in, I startled a blue jay, which then alerted the buck to my presence and sent him fleeing from his bed.

Another stalk ended when I ran out of daylight. The final sighting of this buck came after Nathan had successfully notched his own tag, but we lost sight of the buck after he moved over a ridge.

By Kyle S. Lipke



Killing this buck was a dream come true for me. I will always be thankful for the experiences and the memories I was given while hunting this deer — it was truly the pinnacle of my season!

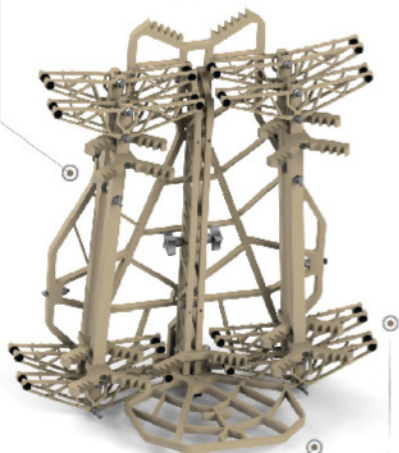


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SEPTEMBER SURPRISES

Although we hadn't seen the buck often, each time we'd relocated him, he was only a few hundred yards from the last sighting. Nathan and I both felt if we spent enough time hunting the area, we would eventually find the buck again and hopefully capitalize on the opportunity.

The Search Continues

I plopped my pack against a small cedar tree and sat with my back to it, situating myself for an afternoon of glassing. The vantage point was on a plateau positioned above two drainages that gave me a solid 180-degree view. Nathan was about 1,000 yards to the west of me at another glassing point. Between the two of us, we hoped we could glass-up the buck and coordinate a stalk.

The mid-September days had been toasty — 90 degrees or better. This had kept deer activity to a minimum and mostly during the first and last hours of daylight.

Despite this, we got to our glassing points by 5 p.m. I wanted to be settled in with plenty of time to spot any bucks that came out to feed.

Sitting cross-legged, I methodically worked over the drainage, and following hillsides with my binoculars, I searched for any hint of summer hides or velvet antlers. Over an hour passed, with neither of us spotting a deer. With the same results 30 minutes later, I decided to stretch my legs and walk 50 yards behind my perch to glass a smaller drainage.

Coming to a fenceline, I quickly spotted a deer 300 yards away in a group of cedar trees. My optics confirmed it was a small 3x3 buck. With the wind steadily blowing in my face, there was no need for a puff of powder from my wind checker.

Sliding under the fence, I headed



Using my onX app on my smartphone helped me navigate my hunt unit.

straight at the buck for a closer look. Arriving at a dense cedar, I peered around its branches. While the 3x3 was feeding, I spotted what I thought were two other mature bucks moving through the trees. I figured one was the big buck I'd had several close encounters with; the other appeared to be a similar-sized buck with a kicker on his right antler, which created a "trident" with his G-2 and G-3 points.

It appeared like the bucks were moving toward me, then I lost sight of them in the trees. With the bucks out of sight and another good-sized cedar about a hundred yards ahead of me, I hastily rushed to the tree.

Stopping at the cedar, I caught my breath and analyzed the situation. I still couldn't see the bucks, but I knew they weren't far, and the wind was still in my favor.

I considered making another dash for the next group of trees, but because I didn't know exactly where the bucks were and there was plenty of light left, I stayed put — I didn't want to be overly aggressive and blow my opportunity.

Suddenly, I caught the movement of a buck moving through the trees right in front of me. He was close. Nocking an arrow, I vainly attempted to slow my

Hours of glassing each day was the name of the game on this hunt.



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pounding heart rate while instinctively ranging openings in preparation for a shot.

The small buck walked into the open first. Ranging the buck at 99 yards, I then spotted the trident buck feeding at 120 yards. I remained motionless, in case they fed my way.

It quickly became apparent that wasn't going to happen. Both bucks jumped the fence and then slowly fed away from me.

Game On!

Still thinking that there were three bucks, I waited to make a move. Then I got a text from Nathan saying there were just two bucks. That was all I needed to know.

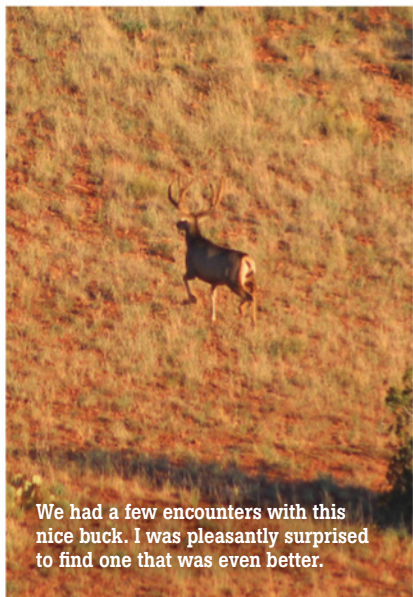
With the bucks feeding away, I set my bow under the bottom wire and slid back under the fence. I unlaced my trail shoes and left them behind.

With just a thin layer of cotton between the soles of my feet and the ground, each step I made was much quieter. I nocked an arrow and eased ahead.

When both bucks were behind trees, I would increase the pace of my stalk, promptly gaining extra yards. When I couldn't see one of the bucks, I would halt and then gaze through the brush until the position of each buck was accounted for and I knew they weren't looking in my direction.

At this point, the sun was beneath the skyline, and I wondered if I was going to run out of light before an opportunity even presented itself. Just then, the trident buck cut to his left and headed toward an opening.

I didn't know how far he was, but I



We had a few encounters with this nice buck. I was pleasantly surprised to find one that was even better.

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SEPTEMBER SURPRISES

I was blessed to share this hunt with my brother, Nathan.



knew he was on the border of shooting distance. The buck wasn't in the open long enough for me to range him, so I crouched in front of a tall cedar and froze.

When the small buck walked into the opening, my rangefinder read 60 yards. I rolled the dial on my sight and waited. The trident buck then moved to the edge of the opening, at which point I ranged him at 57 yards.

I hooked my release to my D-loop and held my breath. As the trident buck followed the path of the smaller buck, I couldn't help but notice the mass of his body and his big, round nose. I anticipated the trident buck would stop like his smaller buddy had done, but he just kept walking. I knew if I didn't act fast my shot opportunity would likely be gone.

As the trident buck approached the opening, I grunted at him and drew my bow as he stopped. Coming to anchor, I remember briefly thinking this was a once-in-a-lifetime chance. My heart pounding, I took an extra second to focus my aim, and then I sent my arrow on its way.

The report was an unmistakable thump. The buck immediately bounded away, pounding the ground with each jump he took.

After watching the buck run roughly 150 yards, I lost sight of him in the trees. The collision of possible success and the unknown left me with deep sighs and a heavy case of the shakes.

Trying to calm down and give the buck some time, I waited. After 10 minutes, I couldn't take it anymore, so I went to look for my arrow.

Making it to where the buck was standing at the shot, I could already see dark-red blood strewn along the ground. My arrow was found in the dirt, 10 yards

beyond and coated from end to end with blood.

There was good initial blood, and it was fairly easy to follow. I followed the trail for about 60 yards, then started having trouble locating blood in the fading light.

I didn't have a flashlight and was still unsure of the hit. I considered moving to where I'd last seen the buck but reasoned it was best to err on the side of time and more help, so I backed out.

Going In

I met Nathan back at the truck. Describing to him the buck's reaction, the blood found, and how I felt about the shot, we agreed that it was best to go back and trail the buck rather than leave him overnight.

We grabbed a quick snack, some water, and several flashlights. We also notified my other brother, Ben, who was driving down to hunt with us, so he'd be aware of the situation and our plan.

Headlamps on, Nathan and I made the trek back to the spot where I had released my arrow. We again analyzed my arrow, then started on the blood trail.

The blood was easy to follow for about the first 80 yards. Occasionally, the blood would minimize to a tiny drop here and



With temps in the 90s and minimal deer activity, there was plenty of downtime.

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there, and then nothing for several yards. Nathan would stay at the last spot of blood, as I scrutinized the ground ahead until I picked up new blood.

It was in these dissipated spurts that doubt started to creep in. This was exacerbated when we came to the fence and found that the buck had jumped over it. Although neither of us said anything, Nathan and I later commented that we both were questioning the outcome of my shot at that point.

Making it under the fence, we followed the trail for a short distance before it cut left off the plateau — a good sign. Then, the size of the blood drops began increasing, and with them so did my confidence.

We came to a clump of trees, and rather than going right or left, the buck cleared through a small opening in the center. Ducking down to make it under the branches, I came through on my knees. When I looked up, my flashlight beam found the buck lying dead right in front of me!

After fist-bumps and hugs over my success, Nathan and I then sat in admiration and appreciation of my buck. He was mature and heavy, and his trident kicker was an outstanding surprise that exceeded my expectations. My arrow had sliced the edge of one lung and center-punched the liver. The buck was dead a few short moments after I last saw him.

Ben met up with us shortly thereafter, and we convened for celebration, pictures, and the breaking down of my buck. By the time we hauled my buck to the truck, it was 2 a.m. I drove home to get the meat on ice, which made the entire event an all-nighter, but I didn't care at that moment, because I was left with a September surprise that I will cherish for the rest of my life. **BH**

The author lives in New Mexico, where he loves bowhunting and writing about his hunts.

Author's Note:

On this hunt, I used a Mathews V3 31 set at 75 lbs., Easton 6.5mm arrows fletched with Bohning Blazer Vanes and tipped with a Sw Hacker #207 broadhead. My sight was a Spot Hogg Fast Eddie XL single-pin, and my release was Spot Hogg's Wiseguy. I used a Trophy Taker drop-away rest, a Rock Solid stabilizer, and my binoculars and rangefinder were from Vortex..

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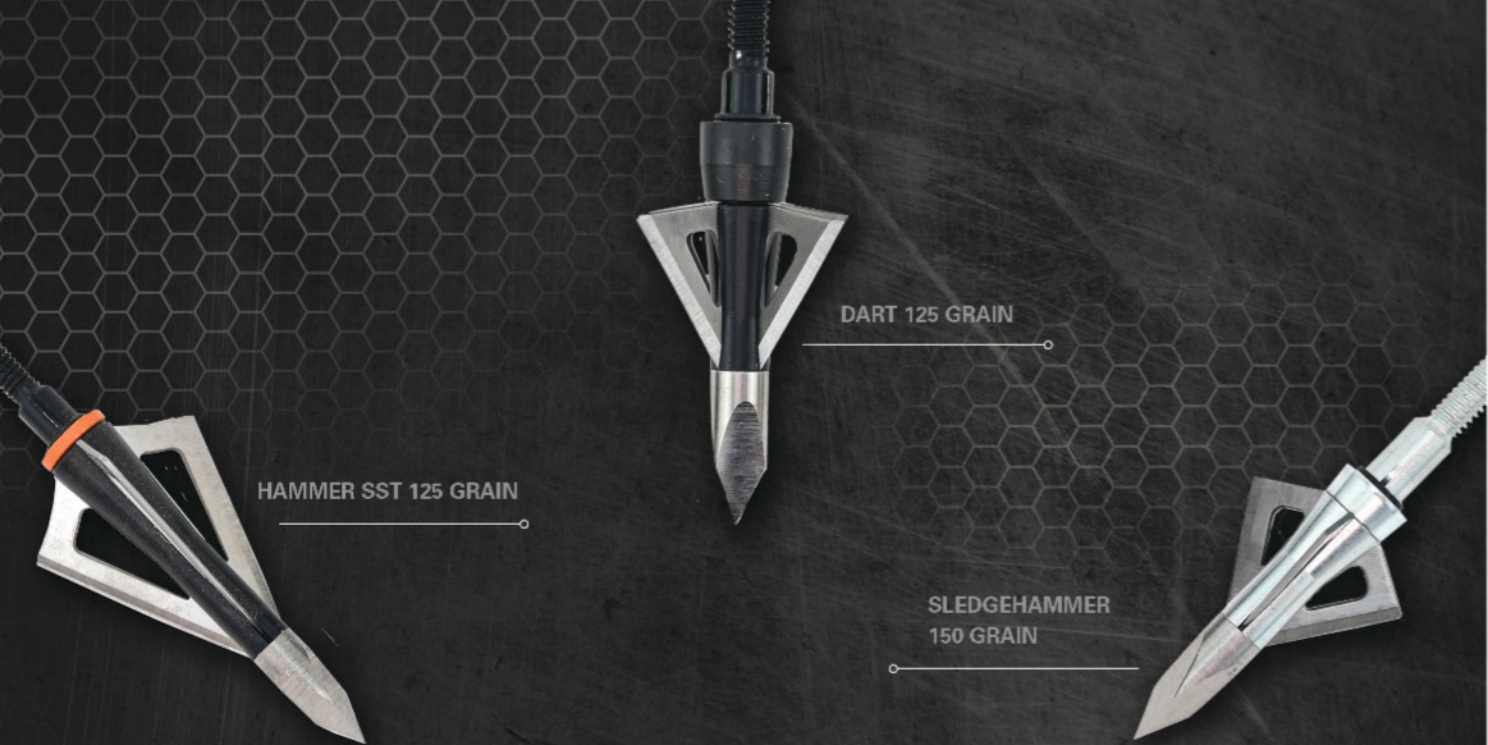


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THE CLOTH OVEN

"IN THE MIDST OF CHAOS, THERE IS ALSO OPPORTUNITY" —SUN TZU

BY TOM EDGINGTON

Beads of sweat were collecting around the rim of my camouflage ballcap. One by one, each sweat droplet would run down my nose, pass around the nosepiece of my fogged glasses, and drop into a small depression located under my chair. Although I could not see it through the closed window, a big bull elk was drinking water 10 yards from my blind. I could not move a muscle for fear that he might hear me and make a quick exit.

Six days earlier, I had traveled to Pioche, Nevada, to hunt the opening day of Nevada's archery elk season with Shawn Lytel of Whiterock Outfitters. When I booked this hunt, I was concerned that, given the August 25 start date, the elk rut would not have started yet, making it difficult to locate a good bull. Shawn told me that the bulls would have shed their velvet by then and that we should expect to hear some bugling and observe some rutting activity. Shawn also indicated that I should be prepared to sit over water and do some spotting and stalking, as he didn't know how receptive the elk would be to calling.

During the months before the hunt, I practiced shooting my elk target from a seated position to get ready for hunting out of a blind. I would place my chair at different distances and angles relative to the target. I practiced placing my feet properly as well as drawing my bow smoothly. I planned to take my chair with me, so I would not have to get used to a different chair, which could affect the positioning of my feet and my string clearance when at full draw.

Upon my arrival at camp, Shawn showed me trail-camera pictures of some giant velvet bulls using a waterhole. The pictures were taken in late July. In Nevada, it is illegal to place, maintain, or use a trail camera on public land from August 1 — December 31 of each year. So, we did not know whether the bulls were still using the waterhole. Although the temperatures were hovering in the 80s, it had just rained prior to my arrival, making us question whether sitting the waterhole would be fruitful.

I sat that waterhole blind a couple of times during the first two days of the hunt, but no elk showed up to drink.

The morning of Day Three found us glassing from a high vantage point that overlooked an open bottomland. We soon discovered a good bull that was chasing several cows and sparring with a couple of smaller bulls. The elk were in a bottom that was a mixture of open grassy areas interspersed with dead trees, small bushes, and rocks. A small seep wended its way through a swampy area that included a couple of wallows and eventually intersected a shallow ravine. We expected the elk to walk through the swampy area and cross through the ravine to spend the day in the heavier timber located a few hundred yards on the far side of the ravine. Shawn suggested that I head down the mountain to find a good ambush point along the ravine, while he watched the elk from above. He would signal me when the elk were headed my way.

I got into position about 9 a.m. The sun was rising in the sky and the temperature was beginning to climb. *It won't be long*, I thought. I was wrong. The bull and his harem decided to bed in the open! I found a small evergreen bush that offered a diminishing amount of shade and then plopped down to wait.

As I sat at the base of the bush, I noticed that the wind was swirling through the ravine. I hoped that the increasing temperature would create thermals that would take my scent

THE CLOTH OVEN

up the mountain and away from the elk when they approached. It was noon before the elk started to head my way. A couple of cows and a calf were leading the herd. Soon, the big bull jumped into one of the wallows, about 80 yards away. The cows continued to head my way to cross the ravine. If the bull followed, it would put him within easy bow range. Then I felt the wind on the back of my neck, which caused the herd to quickly reverse course.

Late in the afternoon of Day Four, we spotted another good bull not far from where I spooked the elk the day before. He had several cows and calves with him and bugled frequently. We only had a few minutes of shooting light remaining, so we had to get into position quickly and hope that he would come to the call.

After sprinting across the desert landscape to get in front of the herd, I found a large bush that would afford me some cover and nocked an arrow. Shawn dropped back about 20 yards and started to call. The bull immediately answered. Shawn had his attention. I could periodically see the bull through the trees and brush as he paced back and forth a



This is one of the bulls that visited Shawn's waterholes.

couple hundred yards away. As Shawn continued to call, the bull's cows started to drift our way. The cows made it to just inside 100 yards when I checked my pins. It was getting dark fast. I could still see my pins, but I would need the bull to come into bow range fast before it got too dark to execute the shot. The cows kept coming. The bull did not. The cows got to within 20 yards before they caught our scent. The bull was still about 100 yards away when the cows started barking and running away.

The forecast for the next day was hot and dry. In the morning, we went back to the area where we hunted the night before to see if we could relocate the bull that we were calling to, but we were unsuccessful. Given the dry weather and hot temperatures that we were experiencing, Shawn thought that I should sit another waterhole for the evening hunt.

The waterhole that I would be watching was manmade. It consisted of a large catch apron that fed four plastic drinker troughs located inside a

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THE CLOTH OVEN

fenced-in area. The fence was designed to prevent cattle and wild horses from damaging the troughs but was low enough to permit elk and deer to easily jump over it. Shawn had tucked a Primos Double Bull blind inside one corner of the fence. Two of the blind windows were open and afforded shots to two of the four troughs.

Shawn walked me to the blind and then took up a spot a few hundred yards downwind, where he could watch the entire area through his spotting scope. I crawled through the fence and entered the blind. I unfolded my chair and carefully placed it in front of the two open windows. I made sure that I had my feet oriented correctly and could draw my bow without contacting the side of the blind with my arrow.

Once in the blind, I noted the range to each of the drinking troughs that I could see through the open windows. The farthest shot would be 37 yards; the closest would be 17 yards. One of the troughs that I could not see from the blind was about 10 to 15 yards away. Any elk drinking from that trough would be facing directly at the blind, which would



I had high hopes that my time sweating in the cloth oven would pay off when a big bull arrived at the water trough.

make it difficult to get drawn without being detected. I was certain that is why Shawn had closed the window facing the trough.

The blind was weathered. Several pieces of duct tape were used to cover small holes and rips located in various portions of the blind. The duct tape served two purposes: 1) It helped to minimize light from entering the blind, which might make it easier for an elk to spot movement inside of the blind; and 2) It helped to hold my scent inside of the

blind. Unfortunately, it also helped to trap heat inside the blind. The weather forecast had predicted temperatures around 90 degrees Fahrenheit for the afternoon. It felt much hotter inside the blind.

I had been in that cloth oven for about an hour, when I caught movement outside of the fence. A great bull elk was headed my way. The bull got to about 50 yards from the fence and bugled. As he cautiously approached, I could tell that his eyes were fixated on my blind. Now,

A photograph of a hunter in camouflage gear and a cap, standing in a tree stand. The hunter is holding a bow and looking down. The background shows a body of water and trees, with a warm, golden light suggesting late afternoon or early morning.

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THE CLOTH OVEN



My window of opportunity, through which I eventually arrowed this magnificent bull.



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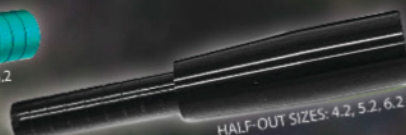


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all I needed was for him to jump over the fence and start drinking at one of the troughs.

He kept coming closer, but he did not jump the fence. He continued to walk closer to the blind, and I eventually lost sight of him. I could hear him walking behind me, and he eventually appeared at the far side of the fence. He had circled the entire fenced-in area and continued walking around it, stopping occasionally to bugle. He circled the entire fence a second time. When he came into view again at the far side of the fence, I ranged him at 64 yards, but still outside of the fence. I would have to be careful not to hit the fence, but he never stopped walking long enough to give me a shot. He circled around the back of the blind again and jumped the fence in front of the closed window. Then he started to drink from the closest trough.

This brings us back to the beginning of the story. The window facing the elk was shut and the elastic string used to retain the window in a closed position was secured in place with a large piece of duct tape. A few smaller pieces of duct tape were also applied around the bottom edge of the window. Any attempt to peel back that tape would surely alert

the bull. I carefully and quietly folded a portion of the top corner of the window back to better assess my predicament. Just as I thought, the bull was facing the blind and taking in copious amounts of water.

Viewing the bull through the window did nothing to lower my excitement level. To make matters worse, the temperature inside the blind felt like it was rising with each passing minute. I slowly let the top of the window go back in place and silently leaned back into my chair to ponder my situation. As I sat there, dripping with sweat, the bull screamed out a bugle in the direction of the blind. I swear that it rustled the side of the blind. The adrenaline level inside the blind was about to reach redline proportions. All that I could hope for was that the bull would walk over to one of the other troughs and offer me a shot. I then heard the bull jump back over the fence.

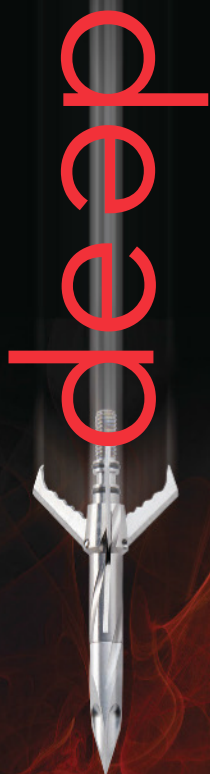
As I contemplated just tearing open the closed window, which would afford me a shot, the bull began to rip into a small bush located on the far side of the fence. It was sheer chaos for a moment, as he horned and pawed at the bush. This was my chance. I quickly pulled

my knife out of my backpack, quietly slit through the duct tape holding the window cord, and slowly opened the window. Although the bull didn't notice the open window, he had stopped attacking the bush and was getting ready to walk away from the watering area. Shawn was watching the whole sordid affair through his spotting scope from a location several hundred yards away, and he recognized that my chance was quickly evaporating, so he bugled at the bull. The bull stopped and looked his way, which gave me enough time to take a range reading, and soon my arrow was on its way! **BH**

The author resides in Cowansville, Pennsylvania, with his wife, Susan.

Author's Notes:

I used a PSE EVO EVL 34 bow, Easton FMJ arrows, and 100-grain G5 Striker broadheads. My bow was equipped with a Hamskea drop-away rest, a Spot Hogg sight, Control Freak stabilizers, and a TightSpot quiver. I used a Nock 2 It release, a Leupold Full Draw 4 rangefinder, and Swarovski binoculars. I wore Sitka and KUIU clothing and Crispi boots.



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Gifting A BOONER

By Greg Brush

This big early season whitetail taught me much about the true value of bowhunting with friends.



THE CONCEPT OF SWAPPING HUNTS CAN LEAD TO GREAT ADVENTURE AND LONG-TERM FRIENDSHIPS.

Suddenly my dream buck was there, standing perfectly broadside, leg forward and head down, oblivious to the danger lurking within the Redneck blind a mere 20 paces away.

I methodically drew my bow and began confirming the steps to an accurate arrow. Bow hand fully relaxed? Anchor points as they should be? Check. Sight ring centered within my peep? Check. This was a chip-shot for a veteran bowhunter with decades of experience. Or was it?

The big whitetail's rack had it all: above-average width, tall eyeguards, and the type of mass that only comes from avoiding two-legged predators for five years or more. But it was the length of those 10 perfect tines that I found myself staring at...those G-4's had to be 10-inches tall!

Look away, Greg, look away! I screamed within, knowing full well that fixing my gaze on this tremendous deer's antlers would only result in di-

sastrous consequences akin to staring into the eyes of Medusa!

Slowly, I eased myself away from the precipitous ledge of failure by continuing my internal pep-talk. *Deep breath. You've got this. Just pick a hair and continue increasing pressure on your trusty old release until the bow goes off.*

Suddenly, the bow broke. The stud buck instinctively dropped, whirled, and then sprinted across the green plot at breakneck speed before disappear-



1.



2.



3.



4.



5.

1. I've learned much about kindness and generosity from Texan Mark Sanderson, shown here with one of our archery hogs. **2.** Ryan Capp took this big bull moose on a DIY hunt with me in Alaska. **3.** Brian Capp and I settle into our Redneck blind. **4.** Andy Capp arrowed this giant Kudu during our South African bowhunt. **5.** Andy Capp is understandably pleased with his enormous Alaska-Yukon moose.

ing into the safety of the thick, Ohio underbrush. The look on the face of my hunting partner, Brian, who was quietly filming me from the far-left corner of the blind, said it all...it was obvious he was as confused as I was over why the buck didn't tip over within eyesight or ear-shot, like so many other center-punched deer that came before him had?

Very Special Friendships

This tale would be pointless without mentioning the extraordinary people and deep relationships involved. In September 2013, I traveled to Alberta, Canada, with my good pal, Mark Sanderson — a gracious Texan.

It was on that Canadian mule deer quest that Mark and I met two young bowhunting brothers from Indiana — Brian and Andy Capp. The four of us hit it off immediately; swapping tales of big muleys, majestic moose, jumbo Alaska

salmon...and the many giant whitetail bucks that the Capps had taken from their family farms in Indiana and Ohio. At the end of the hunt, we shared contact info and vowed to stay in touch.

Fortunately, the "brotherhood of bowhunting" made the 3,000 miles between us inconsequential, and when I had a fortuitous cancellation in my annual DIY Alaska moose hunt, Andy immediately seized the opportunity. That fall, he took an impressive 62-inch bull moose with me.

The broad, unspoken approach to a hunt goes like this: Come visit, and I will host you on an epic adventure — giving 110-percent effort to make it a success. The concept is simple. When your hunting pals recognize your commitment to their success, they want to reciprocate on their home turf down the road. We never really discussed this approach. It just happened.

The next fall, I visited Andy and bow-hunted whitetails on his home farm, where I managed to arrow a beautiful 150-class nine-point. The following year, Andy's older brother, Brian, ventured north and took a gnarly old 65-inch bull moose with me. Later that fall, I returned to Indiana to chase big whitetails, and the pattern continued over the years.

Once, we all traveled to Texas and hunted with Mr. Mark — our mutual friend from that initial Canadian adventure. One spring, Andy visited Alaska and arrowed a nice black bear with me. Another year, we met in Oklahoma for a short-but-sweet hunting reunion. One August, Brian ventured north and chased caribou.

Our adventures eventually took us abroad, making memories together on a South African safari, a Sonora hunt, and even a Costa Rican vacation, where Papa Capp maintains a condo and small

GIFTING A BOONER

sportfishing boat, not so ironically named, “Family and Friends.” Indeed, this is one generous family!

The Pressure Within

While Brian and Andy repeatedly exhibited unbridled kindness, a poison was slowly growing within me. Years of hunting the Capp's family farms created a rather unhealthy obsession in me to

hang a tag on a Booner. Little by little, my fall hunts became less about fun and more about achieving that goal.

Meanwhile, the realization that my friends would go to the ends of the Earth to help me, compounded the pressure. It's funny how pressure works like that. The fear of failure lives inside us all, and mine was self-inflicted.

Year after year, my two pals improved their dirt by building mini-waterholes, planting food plots and screening cover,

placing new stands, and cutting shooting lanes with the sole purpose of creating a whitetail-hunting utopia. They also monitored their deer all summer; a time-consuming chore the Capp brothers gladly performed while I outfitted anglers in Alaska.

As the caliber of bucks on the Capp's family farm improved, the pressure grew. I had bowhunted the Midwest from Iowa to Wisconsin for decades prior to meeting the Capp family; taking numerous Pope and Young-caliber bucks and even experiencing a few close encounters with a few that looked to surpass the magical score of 170 B&C inches.

Setting goals is fine, but becoming fixated solely on a numerical value of a living creature isn't. That's the problem with trophy hunting: If you let the prize become more important than the experience, the pursuit can become polluted.

Plan B

We all know the rut is the best time to arrow a monster buck. Or is it? Over the years, my annual whitetail bowhunt with the Capp's took place late-October to mid-November — prime rut in the Midwest.

No doubt, the willy-nilly nature of a rutty buck can provide a very excit-



This is one of the many trail camera images that revealed the big 10-point's evening patterns — a clear chink in the buck's armor that we later capitalized on.

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Scouting with the Capps from atop a water tower verified exactly where the big 10-pointer entered the field each evening. And the ambush was set.

ing hunt, where anything can happen. However, luck plays a monumental part, since a mature buck cruising frantically for a hot doe can be so unpredictable. The dreaded “lockdown” periods can only further add to a bowhunter’s frustration.

While considering my 2022 hunt timing, these negative aspects of the rut

were discussed with Brian and Andy. That’s when they modestly pointed out that both of their 180-class bucks, as well as numerous other mature 160-plus deer, had been arrowed during the early season. The key, they said, was to monitor relaxed deer via trail cameras until one special buck revealed a pattern that

showed a chink in his armor. Once that weakness was identified, the clever bowhunters simply waited until conditions were right for a high-success ambush. It made perfect sense, and so my first early season hunt was planned!

A few months later, though, Mother Nature threw me a huge curveball. The month of June came and went. July passed quickly and August rolled in, with very few deer images and zero big-buck photos. The home farms in Indiana had been hit hard by EHD, and the mature bucks had been impacted the most.

I was disappointed, but mostly I was heartsick for Brian and Andy because they had worked so hard before Mother Nature intervened. We quickly agreed that their Indiana farms would get a pass from all hunting that year and a plan was hatched to salvage the season.

In a group text, Brian reminded Andy of a small but lush parcel of family land in nearby Ohio, where baiting was legal and EHD may have missed. The very next day, testifying to the Capp brothers incredible work ethic, a small pile of corn and a trail camera was strategically placed to inventory the deer.

About a week later, a breathtaking typical 10-point revealed himself. And true

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GIFTING A BOONER

to their selfless nature, the brothers declared, “You will hunt this Booner, Greg!”

The Hunt

It would make for a better story if my big deer was a result of weeks of grueling all-day sits and clever run-and-gun chess moves. It would sound even cooler if the buck was walking away when I skillfully turned him 180 degrees with two grunts and a snort-wheeze.

But the truth of the matter is that the actual hunt was rather anticlimactic

because Brian and I had barely been sitting an hour when my dream buck presented the previously mentioned shot opportunity.

This is not to imply we got lucky. My two pals had meticulously scouted this little Ohio parcel, located one big, old 10-pointer, and patterned him well. Several evenings they even sat on a distant water tower with spotting scopes, determining the exact spot the buck liked to enter the field from. They then created the perfect setup to position the deer for a high-percentage shot. Indeed, Brian and Andy had done all the heavy lifting.



This was my “Slow Down-Aim Longer” note-to-self, which helped me focus on executing a clean, accurate shot.



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Quite frankly, I only needed to show up, do as instructed, and NOT screw it up.

I wanted to hunt the very first morning after arrival, but the boys thankfully called me off, explaining that the big 10-pointer was on a clear evening pattern, with zero camera photos of him during morning hours.

“Every night, that buck emerges from the same spot, enters the same field, and does exactly the same thing — surveying the other deer before commandeering the small corn pile in a deep, dark corner of the plot,” Andy said. It was the stuff of dreams...a totally unpressured deer in a classic early season pattern.

The real chess match was having the discipline to NOT hunt until the time was right. As Brian put it, we would, “Wait, wait, STRIKE!”

My friends did a masterful job of tempering my childlike enthusiasm. Each morning over 4:30 a.m. coffee, Brian and I would review the weather forecast and he would reply, “Nope, wind isn’t right,” to my repeated question, “Can I hunt tonight?”

Five days of brutal stalling commenced. Brian and Andy spent the week at work, surely discussing strategies of how to control an overeager Alaskan. Meanwhile, I passed the time hanging out with their families and shooting at Brian’s 3-D target.

On Day Six, the wind direction was forecasted to shift later that afternoon, creating conditions that were good to hunt our buck. I trembled with excitement, thinking the long wait was finally over...until Brian burst my bubble by posing the question, “Do you want to



While far from official, Trophy Tape gives hunters a quick and reasonably accurate estimate of a buck's score. In this case, the magical 170-inch mark was easily surpassed!

hunt tonight's good wind, or wait until tomorrow's PERFECT wind?"

Brian went on to explain that the wind direction was forecasted to be the same — in our faces — for the next few days, so why rush things that night and potentially spoil the good evening hunts to come.

I had chased whitetails long enough to know a big, mature buck like the one we were chasing is uber-smart and we likely would get but one chance at him. Booger it up by being careless, and it was over. My answer was swift: We would wait one more day!

The True Gift

Circling back to the opening of this story, I'd like to boast that the recovery of my dream buck was one of those short-and-sweet tracking jobs that didn't take us deep into the tangled brush. But what fun would that be?

Our blood-trailing efforts produced immense pressure as the fear of not recovering the beast rose with every sparse droplet of blood and extra yard of trailing. We had done everything right following the shot; sitting still a full hour before quietly slipping out of the Red-neck blind and retreating to a nearby fast-food restaurant to buy more time. We took no chances.

Over a burger, Brian's smartphone video revealed the shot. My arrow punched a large hole low and tight near the top of the buck's heart. Still, the scalded-cat-death-run was considerably lengthier than we expected.

Thankfully, at the end of the long, difficult trail we found the buck of my dreams. He was all we had hoped for and

more; nearly 175 inches of antler and the large, rippling body of a champion thoroughbred of a whitetail buck.

There was no whooping and hollering. Rather, I succumbed to the quiet reverence that the buck deserved, as Brian silently looked on, an ever-so-slight smile on his face. He knew the wild ride I had endured. I think he also realized that the quest was over, forever. Never again would I pursue a trophy buck with the focus and effort that could taint the experience.

Instead, I would simply hunt good deer with good friends...no, check

that... I mean GREAT friends! After all, how many pals gift a Booner to their hunting buddy? **BH**

The author is a passionate bowhunter with over 40 years of experience, and he lives and works in Alaska, saving his pennies to pursue big game with family and friends.

Author's Note:

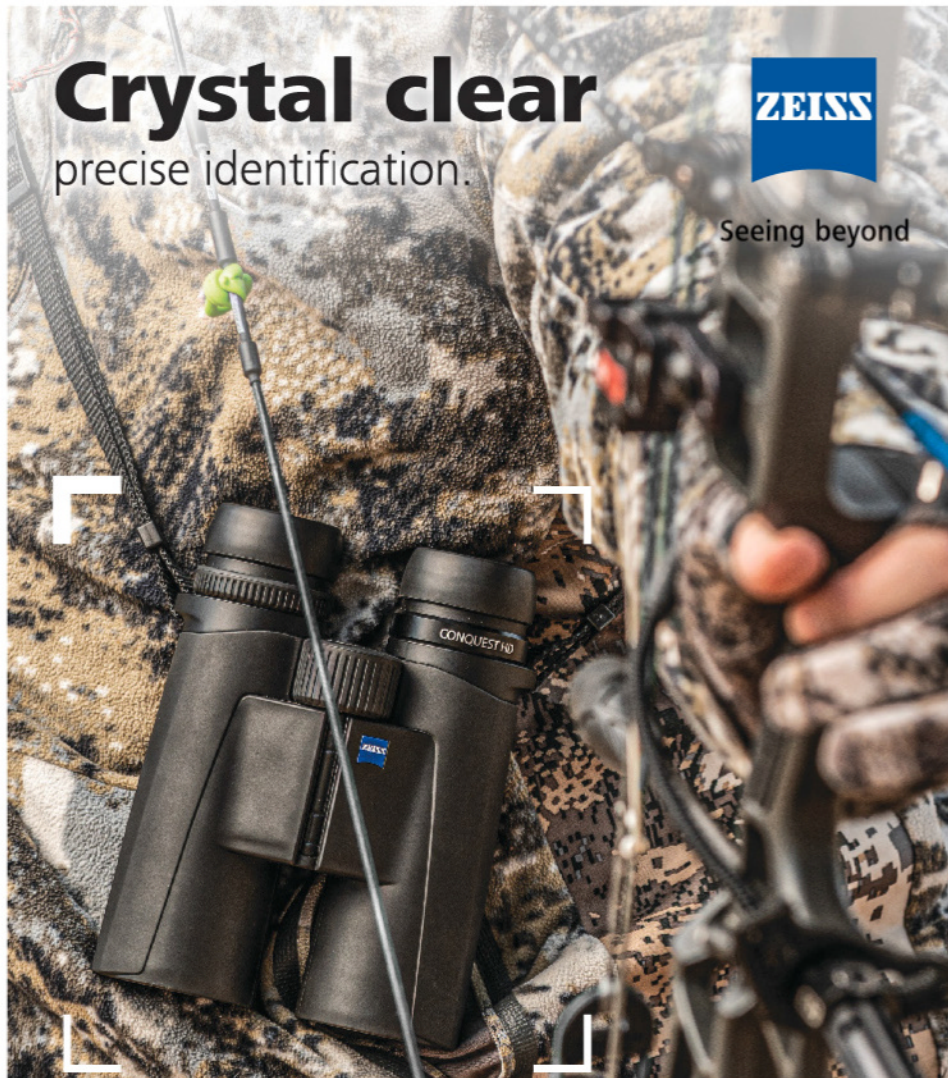
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WHEN I BEGAN bow-hunting whitetails in the 1980s, trail cameras were not in a hunter's repertoire — at least none of the hunters I knew. George Shiras, however, was monitoring game trails 100 years prior. In the 1880s, George devised a camera trap that consisted of bait, tripwires, an automatic flashbulb, and a very large camera. Rudimentary? Yes...but in the 1880s, this device would have been cutting-edge.

Trail cameras have evolved massively since Shiras first captured photos of whitetails and other critters near Whitefish River, Michigan. Advancements in technology now allow hunters to monitor areas in real time from anywhere in the world via wireless networks. While there is no denying that the furtherance of trail-camera technology has aided hunters in their pursuit of mature whitetail bucks, pitfalls of camera usage abound. In fact, every year, trail cameras save the lives of big bucks — and it probably happens more often than we think.

There are a handful of ways in which trail cameras can actually be a detriment to hunters, but there are also workarounds to help you avoid these perils.

The first and most obvious reason cameras save the lives of deer is the electronic component. Electronics fail, and even the most robust, well-designed devices will succumb to the elements at some point in time.

These failures are not always catastrophic. Sometimes, hunters may not even realize their camera isn't working properly. In reality, I would rather have a camera fail, than only capture a portion of the animals passing in front of it, because having only part of the "big picture" can leave

TRAIL CAMERAS CAN BE FRIEND OR FOE, DEPENDING ON HOW YOU USE THEM.



Bryan Simpson and son, Tate, are doubling-up on cameras. Oftentimes, one will capture what the other doesn't. It's insurance that can reveal more useful info than a single camera.

HOW TRAIL CAMERAS SAVE

By JOHN KIRBY

hunters chasing their own tails. This is like my parents explaining to me as a youngster that not telling the whole story is a form of lying.

Trail cameras can and do lie by omission. In fact, in 2021, I watched a 10-pointer that would have scored north of 165 walk directly in front of my cellular camera and my hunting buddy's cellular camera, which was located directly above mine. Both cameras failed to capture good images of the giant buck and the doe he was courting.

That experience left a bad taste in our mouths, due mostly to the fact that the gigantic buck and his doe stood for several minutes, less than 10 feet from both cameras. As a result of this event, and other similar situations, it has come to my attention how often one camera captures what the other does not.

When I double-up on cameras, most of the time I will use a traditional SD-card model to back up a cellular camera; however, that is not always possible. This backup strategy keeps intel flowing when batteries die or SD cards fail.

Sometimes I deploy multiple cameras on a single tree, or on different trees to capture various angles. For instance, I might place the second (or even a third camera) on the same tree about 180 degrees from the first camera. This positioning helps me intercept deer movement that otherwise might go unnoticed. This strategy is especially advantageous around staging, feeding, and bedding areas, when deer meander off trails for longer periods of time.

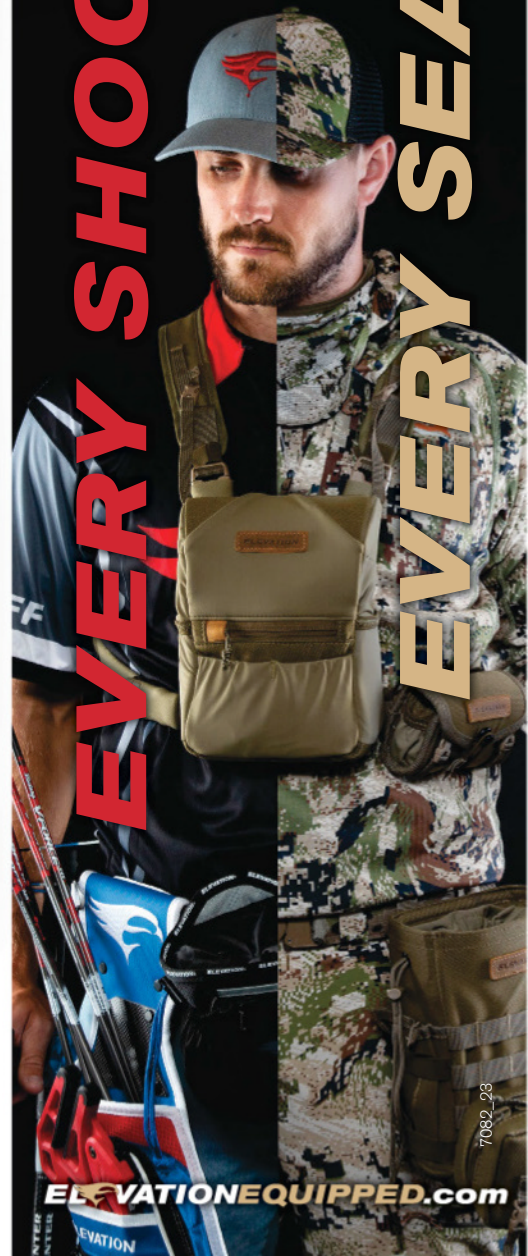
George Shiras likely placed his invention on primary deer routes. For good reason, too, as main trails get the bulk of hoof

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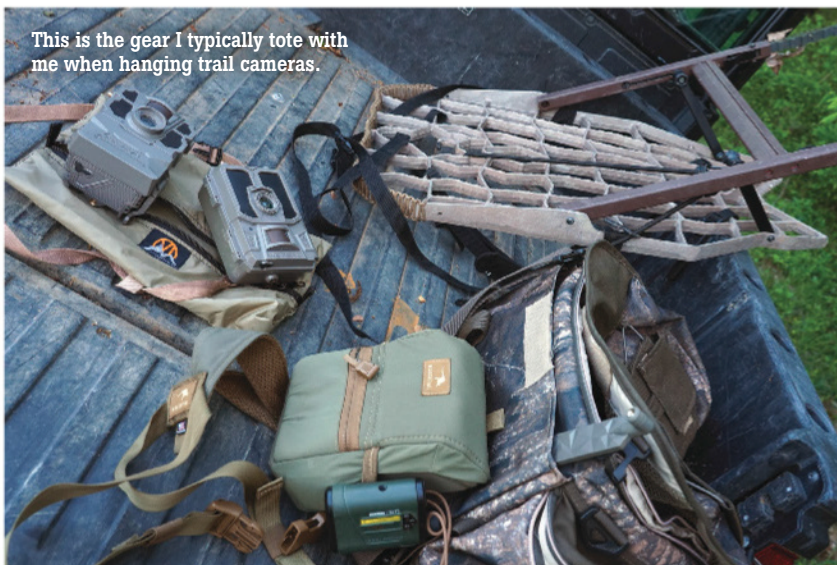
traffic. However, this placement strategy is the second way that trail cameras can save the lives of deer.

While placing trail cameras on big, primary deer paths is a good way to monitor whitetail activity, that strategy also may provide inaccurate or incomplete information. Big, mature bucks tread more carefully than the majority of the deer herd. If hunters only use cameras on these main trails, they may miss a large chunk of the story.

Secondary and tertiary trails, usually downwind of the main trail, see the majority of daylight big-buck movement. At night, those same wily bucks are more apt to slink along a main trail, but that intel is much less important to me. This scenario of monitoring only main trails has duped me and many others into believing a certain buck must be bedding a good distance away — or is strictly nocturnal.

Monitoring main trails will always be important, but if mature bucks are your goal, secondary and tertiary trails are where the magic happens. Using cameras in the wrong location may be saving deer's lives.

This is the gear I typically tote with me when hanging trail cameras.



Mature whitetails aren't easy to kill, even with the aid of modern technology. Wild animals are extremely observant and tuned to their surroundings, so it makes sense that critters can detect the presence of trail cameras.

What is it about trail cameras that animals notice? Visual appearance is an obvious factor, but I believe there's more to it than that.

It is possible that wildlife sense a

change in electromagnetic fields or hear the camera shutter taking an exposure. Regardless, I've seen deer, coyotes, and other animals spook from the presence of a trail camera. If you're targeting a mature buck that has the propensity to dodge trail cameras and your hunting strategy is based mainly on data from the "eye in the sky," this can lead to trail cameras being a lifesaver for deer.

My workaround here is to hang cam-

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These photos are examples of 180-degree camera placement for monitoring two trails and how to blend them in to avoid detection.

eras seven to 10 feet up in a tree that is wider than the footprint of the camera's body, and preferably has foliage to further conceal its presence. I also back my cameras as far away from trails as possible, without fear of missing any action. This helps with both audible and visual concerns and opens the field of view, so that quick-moving animals don't escape the camera's view.

When monitoring trails, I will rou-

tinely turn my cameras so they are quartering-to the path, as opposed to pointing perpendicular to it. This gives the camera more room for error, as it keeps the subject in frame longer, resulting in fewer photos of half an animal — or no critter at all.

This next life-preserver that hunters face involves confidence, or lack thereof. Even with the very best camera strategies, photos do dry up at times. No mat-

ter the cause, this downturn in camera activity can provoke doubt and allow it to infiltrate a hunter's mind. This can cause hunters to react out of emotion or make assumptions based on partial or inaccurate intel.

The lack of activity captured on trail cameras may cause some hunters to abandon hunting an area altogether. To avoid this morale-killer, check your cameras to rule out malfunctions being the culprit of declining deer activity.

Once you've confirmed your cameras are working properly, it's time to make adjustments — moving cameras, adding cameras, spending a day scouting, conducting observation sits, scouting from afar with binoculars, or doing anything that allows you to locate your target ani-



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HOW TRAIL CAMERAS SAVE DEER'S LIVES

mal. Harvesting mature whitetail bucks is difficult enough, but losing confidence in your hunting approach makes things exponentially harder.

Confidence may not kill deer for you, but it keeps you sharp and in the game. You must be present in both body and mind when shot opportunities present themselves. The moral of the spiraling-confidence paradigm is to remember that if things aren't going as planned, change something — even if that means pulling all your cameras and hunting deer like we did before this technology was available. Just do something different, until you regain a pattern on your quarry.

Another personal example of trail cameras keeping deer alive involves the same large-framed 10-pointer I mentioned earlier. This scenario began in 2021 but bled over into the next season.

In 2022, my hunting buddy and fellow outdoor writer Josh Honeycutt and I were both passing up mature bucks while waiting on the return of the giant Bluegrass State buck that I first laid eyes on standing in front of the two cellular



This Kentucky velvet buck was very aware of the trail camera's presence.

cameras that never took photos of him. The big buck survived the 2021 hunting season, along with another unique buck. We estimated that both bucks were 170-plus in 2022.

Unfortunately, we had both filled our Kentucky buck tags by the time the two big bucks showed up in 2021, and neither buck gave us an opportunity to even attempt to hunt them as they both no-showed us in 2022. We knew both bucks were alive because of scouting and

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The elevated part of this dual-camera setup was made possible with the help of a climbing-stand platform.



Mapping data points in the postseason based off camera intel has proven very useful.

them into my overall hunting strategy. My intention here is to remind myself and others to rely on woodsmanship, gut instincts, and critical thinking in combination with savvy camera tactics. Collectively, each component amalgamates into something greater than relying on one tactic in isolation. The sum is bigger and more effective than its parts. **BH**

The author is co-host of "Southern Kentucky's Great Outdoors" on ESPN Radio and has been bowhunting whitetails and other animals for over 30 years.

camera photos in January and February of 2022. Knowing that caused both of us to pass up good opportunities that normally would have caused an arrow to fly.

These two whitetails saved the lives of several other deer — for a while anyway. By early November of 2022, I chose to harvest a heavy-racked Kentucky eight-pointer, and in mid-November, Josh notched his Kentucky buck tag on a mature 10-pointer.

Had Josh and I not traveled out of state in pursuit of whitetails and other big game, one or both of us probably would have waited all season for one of the giants to return. This isn't the first or last time that trail-camera data confirming the presence of a big buck will impact my decision-making in terms of a target list. Holding out for a buck that's home range is on the outskirts of your property boundaries, at best, can be a lifesaver to other deer. That's both the beauty and the curse of cameras. They let us know little nuggets of information that may or may not be advantageous to us in our pursuit of specific target animals. Danged if you do, dangd if you don't.

My use of trail cameras has saved the lives of several whitetails from the sharp, broadhead-tipped arrows in my quiver, and I am sure other hunters have succumbed to the same pitfalls. As with anything in life, when we stall-out on an objective, we must regroup and find a workaround or alternative. Doing so requires hunters to keep moving forward and putting one foot in front of the other until we accomplish our goal, or at the very least, milk the journey for all the knowledge and experience we can. Skilled hunters become excellent because they learn from both their successes, and their mistakes.

To be clear, I am a proponent of camera use and will continue to implement

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THE WELLS MEN IN KANSAS #2

► Bowhunter Editor and TV Host, Curt Wells, poses with his grandson, Carson, and the heavy-beamed Kansas buck Carson arrowed while hunting with Miles Willhite. Contact Miles at willhitemiles@gmail.com or 316-648-3601. And check out the effectiveness of Browning's Ovis camo against the skyline! Don't miss it the TV week of August 28.

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ASK BOWHUNTER®

WITH CURT WELLS | EDITOR

Our Ask **Bowhunter** question for this issue was posted on our Instagram page, @bowhunter, and below are several of the responses, followed by our comments. Check out our page for future questions and other content.

Fixed-pin sights (left) and multi-pin sliders (right) both have their pros and cons.



DO YOU PREFER a fixed, multi-pin bowsight or a slider sight?

A This is awesome that **Bowhunter** Magazine is on Instagram! I prefer a 5-pin slider, hands down. It brings the versatility of sliding during practice or 3-D shoots, while allowing me to lock it down while hunting and shoot 20 to 60 yards with ease. AND if my prey is unaware outside of 60, I can confidently slide to the precise range and engage with confidence. (*addicted2elkhunting*)

A A 3-pin slider is the way to go. You are able to dial-in your yardages better and have options ready for any situation. Plus, you don't have all the clutter of a 5-pin fixed sight. (*jr_gettler*)

A I shoot a 3-pin slider. Quick target acquisition and gap-shooting for regular hunting distances, and the ability for precision and long-distance shooting if, and when, necessary. Also, it is great to shoot the same sight year-round, hunting and 3-D, for repeatability, familiarity, and consistency. (*n8lenz*)

A I like a 5-pin slider. I set it up for 20–60 yards for hunting, and slide it for everything else. (*pateman97*)

A I use a 3-pin fixed sight. (*broadbents18*)

This sampling of responses to our question had a predictable result. The majority chose a compromise between the two sight options, a multi-pin slider sight, and for good reasons.

The original slider sights were single pin, which allowed the archer to adjust the slider so that the one pin was set for the correct yardage. The downside of this style of sight is you must be constantly aware and reaffirming what yardage your sight is

adjusted to. Should you lose track of that, you would most certainly miss your target. It requires a deeply ingrained familiarity with your sighting system.

With the advent of multi-pin sliders, this problem is mostly mitigated, and here's why. If you use a five-pin slider sight, you set your pins for the typical 20, 30, 40, 50, and 60-yard ranges, same as if you were using a fixed-pin sight. Next, you determine which sight tape to use based on your arrow speed

and trajectory. Your sight will come with instructions on how to proceed. Most (not all) archers will then use their bottom pin as their moving pin. If you need to shoot at 73 yards you simply adjust the sight to the 73-yard mark on the tape and then aim with your bottom pin.

The advantages are your sight is set and ready to go for typical hunting yardages, requiring no adjustment during intense encounters. If an animal is beyond the range of your 3, 4, or 5-pin sight, you adjust to the necessary yardage and aim with the bottom pin. As mentioned in one comment, this also allows the archer to use the same sight at 3-D shoots and events such as Total Archery Challenge courses.

*There are still those among us, myself included, who prefer to keep things as simple as possible and stick with fixed-pin sights. I've used both types of sights, but in the end, I don't need to adjust anything, and I don't shoot beyond 60 yards while hunting. The bottom line is, if you're a multi-dimensional archer who bowhunts all types of game and also enjoys the target game, a multi-pin slider sight will serve you well. **BH***

AUTHOR'S PHOTO

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



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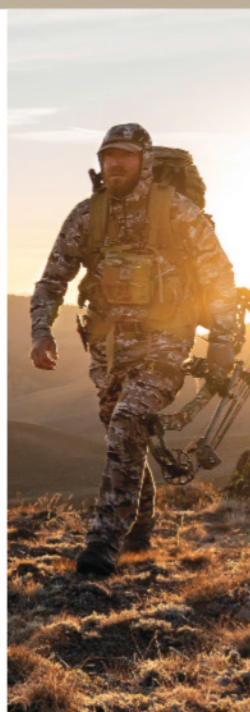
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