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APRIL/MAY 2025

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STARTS  
NOW!**

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## EDITORIAL

CHRISTIAN BERG | EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

### CHANGING SEASONS

**S**PRING ISN'T the beginning of the calendar year, but it marks the beginning of a new year for bowhunters. The arrival of warmer weather means we can finally head outside to shoot our bows in comfort, and spring turkey seasons allow us to once again head afield with lethal intent after a long winter.

Spring is also a time of transition here at **Bowhunter**, as the staff shifts from attending trade shows and checking out the latest new bowhunting gear to putting those items to good use on the range and in the field. We're also busy filling out big-game permit applications, planning logistics for fall hunts and creating a year's worth of dynamite magazine content that'll help you effectively prepare for a successful season.

Speaking of preparation, don't miss Contributor Bill Winke's insightful feature, *Plan B is the Key*, on p. 30. As Bill notes, we often learn far more from failure than we do from success, and we can all benefit from the hard lessons he gleaned from a tough 2024 whitetail season. Follow Bill's advice by getting to work now, and I guarantee you'll be in a much stronger position to punch your buck tag come fall.

As we look ahead to 2025, I also wanted to let you know about a trio of notable comings and goings taking place this month.

**Longtime readers know Randy Ulmer** not just as one of our longest-serving contributors but as one of the most successful tournament archers and big-game bowhunters of all time. Randy is a well-deserved inductee to both the Archery Hall of Fame and Bowhunter Hall of Fame, and I am pleased to announce his popular back-page column, *The Quest*, makes its return in this issue. Prior to assuming my role as **Bowhunter** editor-in-chief, I had the privilege of working with Randy throughout my 15 years as editor at *Petersen's Bowhunting*. I'm thrilled to continue that relationship here with one of the most knowledgeable archers and bowhunters of our time.

In addition to his column, I look forward

to regular feature contributions from Randy, including an upcoming article that highlights his incredible success bowhunting giant mule deer over the past quarter century.

**This issue also marks the debut** of a new crossbow column, *At the Crossroads*, written by Brad Fenson. A resident of Alberta, Canada, Brad spends more days afield than 99 percent of fellow hunters. Although Brad's column caters to the crossbow contingent of our archery hunting community, he is an all-around sportsman whose long list of accomplishments includes countless trophies taken with vertical bows and firearms. Brad is also a dedicated conservationist and wild-game connoisseur who feeds his family almost exclusively with organic protein harvested from fields, forests and waters across North America. I'm confident Brad's contributions will be of value to all readers, regardless of your preferred archery tackle.

**Finally, this issue marks the end** of an era for Conservation Editor Dr. Dave Samuel, who recently told us his April/May *Know Hunting* column would be his last. Known affectionately as "Doctor Dave," he has been a **Bowhunter** Contributor since this magazine's founding 54 years ago, and it's no exaggeration to say he is beloved by staff and readers alike.

A professor of wildlife management at West Virginia University for three decades, Dr. Dave Samuel is also a past Pope and Young Club board member, with numerous record-book entries to his credit. Samuel is also a prolific author, nationally acclaimed whitetail authority and lifelong advocate for the use of bowhunting as an effective wildlife-management tool. In 2007, Samuel was inducted into the Archery Hall of Fame by **Bowhunter** Founder M.R. James.

It's impossible to pay proper tribute to what Dr. Dave Samuel has meant to **Bowhunter** and the Bowhunting community, but we will attempt to do so in an upcoming issue. In the meantime, enjoy your retirement, Dr. Dave! **BH**

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#### GROUP PUBLISHER

Michael F.X. Cassidy

#### ADVERTISING SALES

ADVERTISING SALES MANAGER Jeff Millar  
(717) 695-8081; [jeff.millar@outdoorsg.com](mailto:jeff.millar@outdoorsg.com)

#### PRODUCTION

PRODUCTION MANAGER Leah Jaroh  
(717) 695-8087; [leah.jaroh@outdoorsg.com](mailto:leah.jaroh@outdoorsg.com)

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NATIONAL ENDEMIC SALES  
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Anthony Smyth (914) 409-4202

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## ON THE TRACK

CHUCK ADAMS



My Wyoming bison was a dandy, with massive horns large enough to be measured for a Pope and Young award.

### BIG BISON BOOGIE!

PERSISTENCE PAYS OFF WITH A BEHEMOTH WYOMING BULL

**I**T IS NEVER WISE to take a knife to a gunfight. But that was exactly what I found myself doing on Oct. 7, 2024. I had just left my pickup and entered legal Wyoming bison habitat when something orange flashed in the trees.

Dawn was barely breaking, but someone was already ahead of me. Seconds later, a gun-toting nimrod in a blaze vest stepped into the clear. The only open big-game season was for buffalo, so this guy's intent was clear. He was snooping through the area I had planned to hunt.

The man never saw me as he trudged out of sight, despite my own fluorescent stocking cap. There is no separate archery season for buffalo in Wyoming, so I had to abide by gun-hunting rules.

I groaned and angled away, with hopes of finding an undisturbed bull. This was my second day of bowhunting for bison in that particular area, and my 33<sup>rd</sup> day of combing various places in hopes of seeing a buffalo. So far, I had seen neither hide nor hair.

My home state of Wyoming is one of very few places that allow hunting for free-ranging American bison. There are less than a dozen habitats in North America recognized by the Pope and Young Club as harboring truly fair-chase buffalo. Most such beasts on our continent are found on fenced farms or places where they are rounded up periodically and inoculated like cattle. The difference between domesticated and wild buffalo is stark.

As I sneaked through the woods, memories of other bison hunts crossed my mind. I had enjoyed the good fortune to harvest nine record-book bison in Utah, Arizona and Wyoming, including a former Pope and Young world record from Arizona and the current Wyoming state archery record. I had obtained those tags by lottery draw or auction bid.

The bison is one of my all-time favorite animals, for several reasons. Unlike buffs on private ranches or farms, the hard-hunted kind are skittish and difficult to find. They are notoriously nomadic, routinely walking many miles between feed, water and bed. In Wyoming, the success rate for bison hunters is less than 50 percent, and that includes the harvest of cows. The kill rate for mature bulls is less than 25 percent.

AUTHOR'S PHOTOS





Bull bison are huge and awesome to see — nearly one ton of heavy horn, rippling muscle, massive bone and glistening hide. The meat, even from an old bull, is incredibly tasty and extremely healthy. There is lots of it, too, enough to fill a large freezer with low-fat steaks, chops, roasts, stew meat and burger.

In addition, I feel a deep kinship with ancient archers who pursued these noble beasts before they were nearly wiped out two centuries ago. Bowhunting bison offers a historic thrill rarely experienced with other types of North American big game.

I hiked across two ridges covered with knee-deep grass and virgin timber. My boots were damp from trickling creeks in between. Unlike open prairie lands people often associate with buffalo, this was a checkerboard of dense evergreens and small meadows sprouting haphazardly from steep mountain slopes. Hard-hunted Wyoming bison favor the same country as elk. Like elk, they no longer roam the wide-open and dangerous places their ancestors once preferred.

Two hundred yards ahead, I spied another flash of orange. A different guy, shorter and stockier, stepped out and tipped his blaze bill cap my way. Wyoming requires only one fluorescent garment during gun season — hat, vest or coat. I ambled over to compare hunting notes.

This fellow was from Colorado — the

lucky recipient of a rare non-resident lottery tag. Like me, he had seen no bison, no bison tracks, and no fresh cow-like piles of dung. Buffalo leave plenty of sign, particularly big and boxy hoof prints. They sink deep into all but the hardest soil or thickest patches of grass. In soft terrain or fresh snow, it is sometimes possible to track down a buff and get a shot.

Hours later, I climbed in my pickup and headed back to camp. Midday temperatures were balmy with no snow — even at 7,000 feet — and the area seemed devoid of bison. Buffalo season had already been open for months, and I feared that gunners might have spooked animals out of the country.

Almost all fair-chase Wyoming bison spend their time in National Parks or vast and roadless wilderness areas. Legal hunting occurs on remote public land, most of it accessible only by foot or horseback. The area I was hiking had traditionally produced bull buffalo, and other hunters clearly knew it. I thought about shifting to another place but decided to give my original plan another day or two. A bull might wander in.

Oct. 8 dawned clear and cold. My truck thermometer read 17 degrees as I steered toward bison country and parked. I chose a different route than before, angling crosswind to avoid sensitive animal noses.

One hollow with scattered grass was crisscrossed by bison tracks, but they were old. The prints were pressed deep in dried mud from a rain two weeks before. I measured and identified three separate sets of tracks. The largest taped 5.5 inches across — an especially big male. Except during the mid-summer rut, bison bulls tend to stay by themselves or with a few bachelor buddies.

At noon, I had planted my butt to eat a sandwich when two gunners strolled past 50 yards away. They were talking and laughing and never saw me. So much for slipping silently for buffalo.

I hiked all afternoon. No buff, but no more hunters either. Just before sundown, I was easing through thick trees less than 300 yards from the edge of the legal hunting zone.

Suddenly, something brown flickered to my right. As I turned, a bull bison galloped past 30 yards behind me. He vanished over a hill, hooves pounding like a jackhammer. I whirled and ran after him, my heart in my throat.

I peeked beyond the rise, and the buff was feeding 25 yards away. I don't know why, but bison bulls sometimes cavort like playful fawn deer. One second, they are dozing, the next they are bouncing in a wild and heavy-hoofed boogie. This guy could not have smelled me, so I figured he had decided to dance a little jig.

I nocked an arrow, ripped back the Bear Alaskan's bowstring and squeezed the release trigger. The FMJ shaft flickered and smashed the broadside bull. The 2-blade Zwickey broadhead sliced through both lungs, and blood bloomed on both sides as the buff charged away.

It was nearly dark when I found the beast, piled up against a log 125 yards from the hit site.

This was my tenth fair-chase archery bison and one of my largest. After climbing to a hilltop with cell service, I called three good friends. They drove like mad and helped me with the nighttime meat salvage chores. Thanks to my pals Ron Niziolek, Sam Niziolek and Jason Stafford, we managed to butcher the giant animal and drag out the head and meat with plastic sleds. The sun was just peeking over distant hills as I drove toward the meat locker.

My 2024 bison has been officially scored and will be panel measured for a possible award at the Pope and Young Biennial Convention in April 2025. It was a difficult hunt, but a late-evening bison boogie turned frustration into success! **BH**



Sam Niziolek (L) and Jason Stafford helped butcher and haul out my giant Wyoming beast.





## TRADITIONAL WAY

FRED EICHLER | TRADITIONAL EDITOR



Chuck Adams and I are great friends, and I love spending time with him, even if he did kick my butt in both poker and shooting aerial targets last fall!



Whenever I see Chuck, we like to tease each other and always have a great time. Chuck is next level when it comes to hardcore bowhunting, sometimes operating a month or more from a tent camp to try and tag the trophy animal he is after. If he isn't successful, Chuck is fine feasting on tag soup. It's that willingness to challenge himself — not to mention the self-discipline to hold out for the one animal he is after — that has propelled Chuck to more bowhunting world records than anyone else in history. But what's great about Chuck is that despite his drive to take older, mature, trophy animals, I know he still believes any animal is a trophy. An example of this is that while Chuck was after another world record this past fall, passing many animals most would love to take, he was among the first to congratulate me on taking a spike bull elk (pictured on the next page) with my recurve. That, to me, is what bowhunting should be about. It's "dealer's choice," and each of us as bowhunters are the dealers who make our own decisions in the field. What may be a trophy to one may not be regarded as a trophy to another, and that's OK.

Chuck and I talked a lot when he was here, and one of the discussions we had was about Fred Bear. We were both fortunate to have met him, and we both had the same impression of what a great guy he was. We also agreed Fred wanted to grow the sport he loved and never ridiculed anyone for harvesting anything with a bow. That segued into a discussion of what I refer to as "anti-hunting

## DEALER'S CHOICE

AN ANIMAL'S "TROPHY" STATUS  
IS IN THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER

**C**HUCK ADAMS BEAT ME in a game of poker last fall. It pains me to admit that, because I beat him a few years ago in a grueling game where we played 13.5 hours straight. So, we are now tied, and I am of course hoping to come out ahead on the next one.







Although Chuck Adams is a world-renowned trophy hunter, he doesn't look down on bowhunters who gladly take smaller animals. In fact, Chuck was among the first to congratulate me for this spike bull I took with my recurve last fall.

hunters." I explained to Chuck that I managed an archery shop years ago, and I used to get so disappointed when I would hear a bowhunter disrespect another bowhunter's animal by saying things such as, "You only got a spike?" or "Why did you shoot a doe?" Chuck said he also has experienced bowhunters making negative comments to fellow hunters. Sadly, this hurts our sport more than most realize.

I grew up bowhunting pressured



This Missouri doe I took last fall might not be a trophy to every bowhunter, but it certainly was to me.

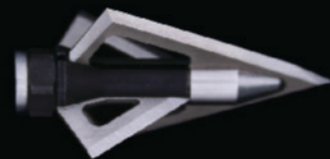
public land, and I still really enjoy hunting public land. Last fall, I was hunting public land in Kansas, where I had two other treestands within sight of mine. It was a great hunt, and although I saw some deer in the few days I had to hunt, I didn't come home with a deer. Had I taken a doe or buck, no matter the size, I would have been proud as a peacock.

I don't have a problem with hunters who want to hold out for the biggest buck or bull on the mountain. I do have a problem with any hunter looking down their nose at other hunters who harvest any animal, no matter how big or how small, if they took it legally and ethically. In fact, I once offended a hunter who was ridiculing a mature doe I harvested, because we were in the same camp and he had harvested a mature, rutted-up buck. I congratulated him and was excited for him until he started telling me I should have held out for a big buck. The best part of his story, to me, was that the doe his buck was following had spotted him when he drew his compound, but the sex-crazed buck just stood there after the doe spooked, allowing him to shoot. I explained the doe I shot with my recurve never spotted me, and that a doe is often harder to take than a rut-crazed buck. I know you may be thinking I broke my own rule of never belittling another hunter, but in my defense, I feel I didn't. If you recall, I mentioned I had been complimentary until he had to insult my deer. I was always taught not to throw the first punch, but if someone does, make yours harder and throw two! I am not going to delve into whether a doe or buck is more difficult to take, because that all depends on a lot of variables. However, I will say shame on us if we as bowhunters don't all stand together and support each other, as opposed to tearing someone else or their accomplishments down. Social media often causes the worst in hunters to come out. I prefer to just compliment people or hold my tongue. Many others would benefit from the same attitude.

I will end by admitting I am a work in progress when it comes to not insulting fellow hunters, as I feel I am a better poker player and recurve shot than Chuck. I feel he was just lucky when he outshot me at aerial targets using a borrowed Bear recurve. So, I plan on kicking his butt at both poker and archery next time our paths cross. **BH**

For more information, visit [fredeichler.com](http://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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## KNOW HUNTING

DR. DAVE SAMUEL | CONSERVATION EDITOR



Although public acceptance of hunting remains high, a recent survey indicates a slow but steady erosion in societal support.

times since 1995), wildlife officials are concerned by the recent, downward trend to a level not seen since 2011, when overall support for hunting registered 74 percent.

In fact, CAHSS officials were concerned enough about the 2023 results they decided to repeat the survey, typically conducted every three to five years, in 2024 to gauge whether the decline in support for hunting was an anomaly. While the 1 percent decline from the 2023 survey to the 2024 survey result was not considered “statistically significant,” taken together the surveys indicate public support for hunting is indeed declining. Each percent of change in the survey results represents roughly 2.53 million adult Americans, meaning there are approximately 12.65 million fewer Americans who support hunting today than five years ago.

Interestingly, when survey participants were asked whether it was OK for others to hunt, legally and within regulations, regardless of their personal opinion about hunting, the level of support for hunting rose to 87 percent. However, that’s down from 95 percent in 2011 and 92 percent in 2019.

“Although public support for legal, regulated hunting is still strong, I believe these findings are a clear call to all who participate in and advocate for hunting...that we must be much more conscious about how we communicate about hunting to ensure public support does not precipitously erode and, in turn, adversely affect our abilities to participate and employ it for wildlife conservation and other societal benefits,” said Brian Clark, deputy commissioner for the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources.

Results are based on the 2024 survey of 2,015 Americans ages 18 and older, weighted for age, gender, ethnicity and geographic region to produce a national sample with a 95 percent confidence interval and a sampling error of  $\pm 2.18$  percent. This means that if the full survey (available for download at [cahss.org](http://cahss.org)) were

PHOTO: COURTESY OF MATHEWS

## SUPPORT FOR HUNTING ON THE DECLINE

NATIONAL SURVEYS SUGGEST ERODING PUBLIC APPROVAL

**H**UNTERS COMPRISE just 6 percent of the U.S. population, yet hunting has long enjoyed strong support from the non-hunting public. A pair of recent surveys, however, indicates that support is on the decline — a concerning trend that could signal new challenges on the horizon.

In 2024, 76 percent of adult Americans approved of legal hunting, a slight decline from 77 percent in 2023 and down 5 percent from 81 percent in 2021, according to surveys conducted by Re-

sponsive Management for the Council to Advance Hunting and the Shooting Sports (CAHSS). Although the 2024 level of support is in line with the historical range for survey (conducted 11



conducted 100 times, the results from 95 out of the 100 surveys would fall within 2.18 percentage points of each other.

Of particular note for **Bowhunter** readers, bowhunting is the most widely supported hunting method at 76 percent, 4 points higher than firearms hunting at 72 percent. In terms of hunting by species, deer (76 percent), turkeys (75 percent), ducks and rabbits (67 percent) and elk (64 percent) received the highest approval, while only a 38 percent minority approved of hunting wolves, mountain lions and grizzly bears.

The survey also examined attitudes about people's motivations for hunting. Those who hunt for meat (84 percent), locally sourced food (83 percent), wildlife conservation (82 percent) and wildlife management (80 percent) garnered the most support, while support for trophy hunting (29 percent), for the challenge (47 percent) and for the sport (48 percent) received the least support.

Authors of the study suggested recent inflation and the higher cost of meat may have influenced the high approval rates for hunting for meat and/or food. Meanwhile, I believe the non-hunting public has a misconception about trophy hunting. It's true many hunters want to shoot animals with large antlers, but by definition "trophy hunting" doesn't account for everything involved in growing and harvesting mature animals. For example, hunters interested in trophy-sized animals often invest considerable time and money improving wildlife habitat in their hunting areas. They also typically pass up shots at smaller, less mature animals while trying to secure an opportunity at older, larger animals. That's all part of trophy hunting. Trophy hunting also typically requires hunters to spend more days afield to be successful. That means they spend more money in the local community. And studies show hunting more days also improves the quality of the hunt for trophy hunters. Carrying this thought even further, having a quality hunt improves the relationship between trophy hunters and state wildlife agencies. You can't stress enough the importance of a strong relationship between hunters and the agency that manages wildlife.

Clark, the Kentucky wildlife administrator who has dedicated much of his career to promoting hunting participation, said education is critical to helping

non-hunters fully appreciate the many nuances of hunting and how it benefits both game and non-game species. That's why the way hunters portray their pursuit and harvest of animals — whether through mainstream media, outdoor media, social media or simply personal interactions with non-hunters — is so critical. "I hope we can initiate more honest, intentional dialogue within the hunting community on this important topic," Clark said.

In addition to hunting, the survey asked respondents about their feelings on recreational shooting. Interestingly, recreational shooting earned the same overall approval (76 percent) as hunting, with the same 5 percent decline in approval over the past five years. CAHSS officials noted that negative publicity regarding firearms, such as rising incidence of gun crime and mass shootings, may be taking a toll on attitudes about hunting, stating in the report's executive summary that "there is a growing tendency among some Americans to conflate hunting with shooting, shooting with guns, and their negative attitudes on guns to negative attitudes toward hunting."

It is also worth noting that approval for hunting is highest among rural residents (87 percent), men (84 percent), those in the Midwest (81 percent) and whites (80 percent). Meanwhile, support for hunting was lowest among blacks (61 percent), Hispanics (63 percent), those who live along the Pacific coast (65 percent), women (68 percent), suburbanites (69 percent) and urban dwellers (70 percent).

So, where does this leave hunters as we look to the future? Well, as our society becomes more urban and suburban, that's certainly a strike against hunting. And any increase in anti-gun sentiment among the general public is also problematic, even though firearms hunting has nothing to do with crime and bowhunting has nothing to do with guns at all.

No one can say for certain what these numbers will be in another five or 10 years, but my guess is that fewer citizens will approve of legal hunting, unless something is done to market the value of hunting to non-hunters. Somehow, state wildlife agencies and conservation groups must recruit more hunters and convince non-hunting citizens to support hunting. Given the ongoing cultural shifts taking place across America, doing so will not be easy. **BH**



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# THE EMPTY QUIVER

DANNY FARRIS



The action never seemed to stop on this incredible spring bowhunt, but what made it really special was having your hunting buddy right there with you the entire time. The moment after Editor-At-Large Curt Wells made a particularly good shot was one I'll never forget.

## SPRING BOWHUNTING PERFECTION

QUALITY TIME WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS IS WHAT IT'S ALL ABOUT

**R**YAN SOLOMAN AND I met while guiding together in Southern Colorado, and his thick Southern accent made it obvious he was far from his Georgia home. Listening to him talk, I assumed he would be out of his element pursuing western species such as elk, mule deer and antelope. I was wrong.

I quickly realized Ryan was one of those rare individuals who seems to transcend the mere title of hunter. It would be more accurate to call him an assassin. He was basically raised as a hunting guide on

Southern Georgia's Gopher Plantation, an operation his grandfather has been cultivating since the early 1960s and today offers some of Georgia's finest hog, deer, turkey, quail and duck hunting. Evi-

dently, starting young on ultra-cautious whitetails, notoriously call-shy Southern toms and literally racking up thousands of successful hog kills can hone a hunter just like a stone hones steel.

While guides are often a bit competitive with their peers, I didn't want any part of competing with Ryan. He was stealthy, keen-eyed, great at reading body language and field judging, a master with any call and, regardless of the species, had a knack for knowing when to be patient and when to be aggressive. What might have impressed me most about him though was a byproduct of processing all those hogs over the years. The speed and efficiency with which he could handle a knife after an animal was down was nothing short of amazing. When something was on the skinning pole, your best bet was simply to get out of Ryan's way!

AUTHOR'S PHOTOS



Although 10 years my junior, I looked up to Ryan, and he became a lifelong friend. So, when he invited **Bowhunter** Editor-at-Large Curt Wells and I to come out for a spring hog, turkey and bass-fishing trip to his beloved Gopher Plantation, I was excited to see where this prodigy had been created.

We arrived to typically warm spring weather and immediately set out after hogs. The Gopher — named for the protected gopher tortoise that inhabits the area — is a 10,000-plus acre pine plantation that sits right in the middle of Southern Georgia's vast rural farmlands. Just as Ryan was explaining how much his neighbors appreciate him drawing hogs off their farms with his year-round feeding program, we spotted our first pig. With both Ryan and Curt in tow, I put a stalk on a perfect, eater-sized swine. When my arrow found the vitals on a 40-yard shot, we had our first hog down less than 15 minutes into the hunt!

After a rough fall filled with nothing but bad luck, Curt was looking to rebuild some confidence, and man, were we in the right place. His first hog was taken with a nice, 50-yard, spot-and-stalk shot as I ranged from behind him. Wells doesn't often get animated after a shot, but with the bad luck bug off his back and me right there to egg him on a bit, he turned and excitedly proclaimed, "I'm back, baby!" It was an awesome moment with Curt that I'll always remember.

Bowhunters don't always get the chance to turn around and high-five their buddy after making a nice shot. Bowhunting is often a game played on

your own. In fact, it can be difficult to plan a bowhunt where you really get to spend quality time in the field with family and friends. Take fall whitetail hunts, for example. Plan a whitetail hunt with a friend or family member and you might be able to plan on eating lunch together every day, but most of your time will be spent separated in different stands.

When planning spring bowhunts, I like to focus on species that allow me to spend time with family and friends. Hogs and turkeys are two great examples, especially if you can find a good place to spot-and-stalk your hogs. This Gopher Plantation hunt was one of the best I've ever experienced for actually spending quality time in the field with your hunting buddy. Curt and I stalked hogs together every morning, fished for bass in the middle of the day (I caught a personal best 8-pounder on this trip, by the way) and then either continued to spot-and-stalk in the evenings, or sit a ground blind just to change things up a bit. There was no shortage of action, or time spent together in the field, and that's exactly what I value most in a spring bowhunt.

The chance I had to hunt an Eastern turkey with Ryan was icing on my bowhunting cake. He and I had hunted Merriam's together in Colorado plenty of times, but the Easterns he cut his teeth on in Southern Georgia are considered by many to be a bit more challenging than our western birds. As Ryan puts it, "They're just more cautious and cagy down here, where everyone and their uncle is trying to kill 'em!"

After spotting a couple toms in a field of deep grass, I donned a bow-mounted decoy and slipped to the edge of the cover. Ryan positioned himself behind me and began a calling sequence. The lead tom's head went from blood red to pale white when he poked his head out of the grass and spotted my Stalker Decoy. Seconds later, he and four other longbeards charged into my lap like miniature velociraptors. Luckily, they slowed at about five yards, giving me time to calm down and bury my pins on the biggest longbeard just before watching him flop over and take an upside-down bicycle ride to nowhere!

Like I said, the spring bowhunts I value most are those that allow me to spend the most quality time afield with family and friends. Little did I know, this special place that produced one of the best hunters I've ever met also turned out to be one of the best places I've ever seen to spend time bowhunting during the spring. **BH**



Ryan Soloman is one of the deadliest hunters I've ever met. Harvesting my first Georgia longbeard with him right behind me was like putting icing on a big, old spring bowhunting cake!

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## PROTECTING YOUR TRAVEL TRAILER ADVENTURES

Embarking on the open road with your travel trailer is an exciting experience, filled with adventure and the promise of new discoveries. However, ensuring that your journey remains carefree involves more than just planning the perfect route and destination. It involves protecting your travel trailer with insurance customized for you. Here are a few reasons why having insurance for your travel trailer is not just a wise decision, but an essential one.

### Peace of mind on the road

Traveling comes with its share of uncertainties, and having insurance for your travel trailer provides you with the peace of mind that you deserve. Whether you're cruising down the highway or parked at a scenic campsite, knowing that your investment is protected can make your travels even more enjoyable.

### Protection against the unexpected

Damage to your travel trailer can happen when you least expect it. Comprehensive and collision travel trailer insurance can cover you in case of events that are out of your control, like a tree limb falling on your trailer. Optional Pest Damage Protection<sup>SM</sup> provides coverage for damage from pests such as rats, mice, insects, birds, or other nondomesticated animals.

### Coverage for personal belongings

Your travel trailer is not just a mode of transportation; it's your home on wheels. Optional personal effects coverage can help cover the cost of personal belongings inside the trailer, providing financial assistance in case of theft or damage.

### When auto insurance isn't enough

Auto insurance generally provides coverage for your travel trailer only when it is connected to your vehicle and may assist in cases where your trailer causes damage to another vehicle. However, it typically does not provide standalone coverage for repairing or replacing your trailer if it sustains damage or is totaled.

You can choose travel trailer insurance options that help cover those expenses and may even offer the benefit of total loss replacement coverage.

### When homeowners insurance isn't enough

Homeowners insurance may provide some coverage for your belongings, but often has limitations when the trailer is off your property. A customized travel trailer insurance policy can ensure that your trailer and belongings are adequately covered.

### Liability protection

Accidents involving your travel trailer can also lead to liability issues. Insurance can provide protection against third-party claims, covering medical expenses or property damage that may arise from an incident involving your trailer.

Insuring your travel trailer is not just a precaution; it's a commitment to a worry-free travel experience. Safeguard your investment, enjoy the journey, and make every moment on the road a memory worth cherishing. Start your adventure with the confidence that comes from knowing your travel trailer is protected against life's unexpected twists and turns.



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**Browning Early**  
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**TenPoint**  
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### **Browning Early Season Hooded Shirt & Pant**

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**\$69.99 (shirt) and \$89.99 (pant) | [browning.com](http://browning.com)**

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**\$199.99 | [tenpointcrossbows.com](http://tenpointcrossbows.com)**



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Versatile and feature-rich, this do-all rangefinder hits a pleasing price point and promises rapid yardage readouts via a bright red display. Leupold's high-performance, DNA laser engine ensures accuracy, and the selectable Bow Mode calculates angle-compensated ranges for archers.

**\$199.99 | leupold.com**



**Leupold**  
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**Kenetrek** ***Sliderock Hiker***

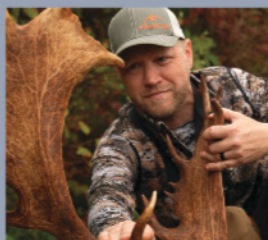


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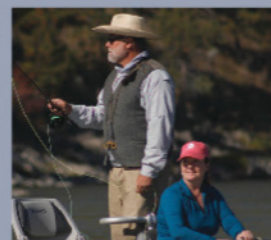
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HUNTERS**

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## AT THE CROSSROADS

BRAD FENSON



I'm a lifelong bowhunter who has taken countless animals with compound bows, including this bighorn ram. However, I am also a passionate hunter who takes advantage of just about every opportunity available, including firearms and crossbows.

## PURSUE YOUR PASSION

HUNTING IS AN INTENSELY PERSONAL ENDEAVOR

**M**Y NAME IS BRAD FENSON, and I am a hunter. Hunting has been a passion for most of my life. As a child, I took on odd jobs to make money to purchase my first pellet gun. Shooting sparrows and ground squirrels kept me occupied from sunup to sundown.

My first big-game animal was a mature bull moose with close to a 40-inch antler spread. I could not imagine going a year without hunting ducks and geese, and spur-of-the-moment walks with my shotgun provided opportunities for upland game birds.

Introduced to bowhunting as a teenager, I hunted whitetails in the boreal forest. There was never enough time in the field, so archery became my ticket to more time outside. The vertical bow was a passion for years, and I found myself flinging arrows daily. Over the years, I've been fortunate to harvest many species with my vertical bows, including bighorn sheep, elk, moose, mule deer, whitetail deer, black bear, pronghorn antelope and several caribou subspecies. A number of those animals score high enough to qualify for the Pope and Young Club record book. Although vertical bows have generated a lifetime of memories, I continue to hunt with every tool available, including rifles, muzzle-loaders, shotguns and crossbows.

I've also been an outdoor writer and photographer for nearly 40 years. These days, I prefer to say "outdoor communicator," as digital outlets such as social media, podcasts, websites and blogs are all platforms I support.

I like to say my areas of expertise are hunting, fishing, camping, cooking and conservation. They are the pillars that help define my life. Working in the conservation field for close to four decades gave me an intimate look at wildlife and the habitat it needs to thrive.

### No Off-Season

Spending 10 days in the Arctic hunting muskox taught me to look out a year ahead as it relates to hunting. The Inuit didn't use a calendar to know what portion of the year or season they were experiencing. The available food and hunting were the calendar and dictated the season.

Have you hunted every month of the year? It was easy for me to take the challenge and plan my year around deer,

AUTHOR'S PHOTO



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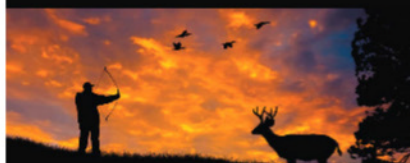
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## AT THE CROSSROADS

ducks, moose, predators, black bears and anything else that runs or flies. July and August seem the most challenging, but an early deer season in California or a trip to Africa, New Zealand or Argentina filled the holes and my seasons. If there is a hunting season somewhere, I try to take advantage of it and can honestly say I hunt every month of the year. A resident of Alberta, Canada, I travel extensively and have hunted in most Canadian provinces and 25 U.S. states.

It isn't unusual for me to head out on a hunting trip and have a rifle, shotgun and bow in my truck. Purchasing all available licenses has paid off over the years. I like to refer to myself as a planned opportunist. One never knows what you'll run into when hunting, but having a fist full of tags and options for harvest has made me successful and able to keep my freezers full. The planning part involves having various tools, and when an opportunity presents itself as a legal animal to pursue, the ability to switch gears has always proven beneficial. Hunting sharp-tailed grouse on the prairie has often become a spot-and-stalk bowhunt for mule deer. Calling elk has produced several bulls but also generated close encounters to arrow black bears and wolves that came to investigate.

### My Crossbow Journey

One of my first experiences with a crossbow produced a "Robin Hood" while shooting at a target. My second arrow was sunk deep into the first one already in the target, showing how accurate crossbows can be. I've shot two Robin Hoods with my vertical bows over the years, but neither on the initial introduction to the bow! This piqued my interest and led me to investigate the horizontal bow, its history and continued advancements. Crossbow hunters represent one of the fastest-growing segments of the hunting community. Although they are often met with opposition, they continue to expand in use and acceptance.

Hunting with a horizontal bow has provided me with plenty of opportunities. The experience has been a wonderful journey, and I can honestly say that my years as an archer, stalking deer and elk with my favorite compound bow, is what has made me successful with any hunting tool.



**This is one of the many mature whitetail bucks I've taken with crossbow near my home in Alberta, Canada.**

Yes, crossbows and vertical bows are different, but the hunt remains the same for me. Getting within 30 yards of an animal and making a lethal and humane shot keeps me flinging arrows instead of closing the bolt on a rifle for most of my season.

My passion for adventure has taken me around the world and allowed me to harvest some incredible animals. A central barren ground caribou taken with a muzzleloader is the current World Record in the Longhunter Society's Big Game Record Book. And a mountain lion I harvested with my crossbow is the current World Record in the Safari Club International Record Book. That said, I have never set goals to break records and consider all antlers and horns taken as personal trophies. Anyone who knows me understands the meat is as valuable as the headgear, and the fact we can have antlers and backstraps means double the reward. Most of my animals have not been entered into record books, despite the fact that many of them qualify. They are a reward for hunting hard, smart and staying diligent.

I previously wrote a crossbow column for *Petersen's Bowhunting* for several years and am glad for the opportunity to reprise that role now in **Bowhunter**. While personal opinions regarding crossbows certainly vary, there is no arguing that over the past 20 years, crossbows have become entrenched as part of an ever-changing archery hunting landscape. **BH**

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# If It's *Meant* To Be...

IN THE WHITETAIL  
WOODS, FATE IS  
SOMETIMES BETTER  
THAN A PLAN

*By Landon Jenkins*



**SWEET NOVEMBER** is the most wonderful time of year for the whitetail hunter. Crisp, cool mornings make the world feel rutty, and as Halloween passes and the calendar turns, it is time for my father Larry and I to make our annual bowhunting pilgrimage from our home state of Virginia to Ohio.

Every fall since 2009, Dad and I have traveled to the Buckeye State to hunt my buddy Grant Wallace's family farm in central Ohio. Looking back, it's amazing to think about all the big bucks, great times and unforgettable memories we've made. I met Grant in 2008 while studying at Lees-McCrae College in Banner Elk, N.C. Soon after we met, Grant and I realized we were dedicated archers and whitetail hunters, and we quickly became the best of friends. Grant and his family graciously invite us back, year after year, to partake in "rut-cation" that includes early mornings, lots of coffee and, by the end of the week, a worn-out, pie-eyed glaze from long sits in the tree.

Like me, Grant has a young family. We have found that over the last few years, our priorities have changed. We are not able to spend as much time

preparing for the season. We have not been able to run nearly as many trail cameras or put together an inventory of "hit-list bucks." In short, the time we have to hunt and participate in hunting-related activities seems to be more limited each year. So, during the fall of 2023, Grant and I reverted to a more traditional hunting style, using good, old woodsmanship skills rather than modern technology to guide our efforts. Well, our best laid plans didn't come to fruition, but sometimes when the unexpected happens, there is no denying it was meant to be. That is exactly the way it happened for me on the evening of Nov. 5...



I took this fantastic Ohio buck on Nov. 5, 2023, from a stand I hung while scouting the previous day. I had no idea this buck was in the area.



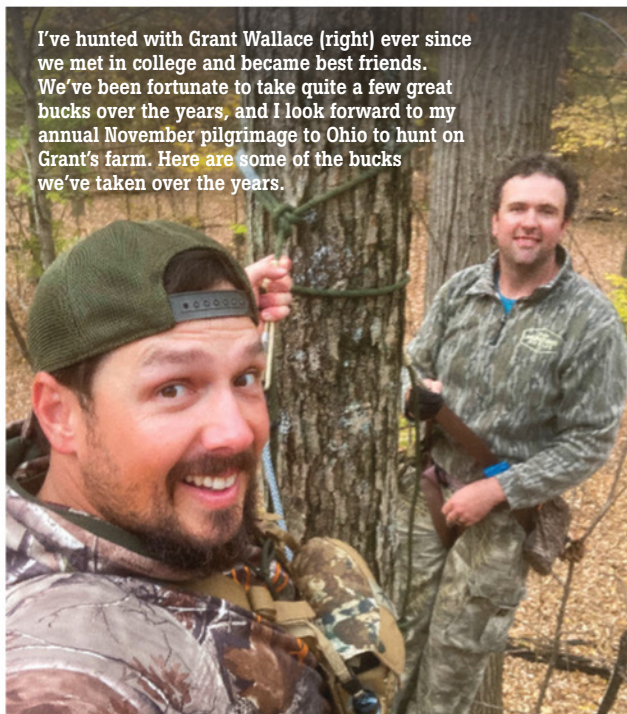
## If It's Meant To Be...

### DO IT FOR DAD

Upon arrival, Dad, Grant and I fell into our normal routine of strategizing for the week ahead. Grant and I began to discuss which of our “old faithful” stands needed to be refurbished and where we should investigate hanging some new sets. By the time we began our scouting, it was midday. We made our way into a few different spots, checking on old stands and hanging new ones. One spot in particular looked promising. The previous season, Grant had taken a nice 8-pointer in the vicinity during late November, just before the Ohio gun opener. Located in the northeast corner of a

square ag field, there are two field corners that come together and a nice hardwood ridge that connects to these field corners. That year, the field consisted of cut beans and standing corn. There was also some CRP grass on the western end of the field, with woodlots to the north and south and vast agricultural fields to the east. With a northwest wind (common for the area), this stand sets up perfectly, allowing your wind to drop down onto a wooded hillside most deer don't travel. We decided to erect a hang-on stand above a set of sticks. I hung the stand and sat in it while Grant and Dad trimmed some shooting lanes. I got “that funny feeling” something might happen there, and Grant and I agreed this spot would be money.

I've hunted with Grant Wallace (right) ever since we met in college and became best friends. We've been fortunate to take quite a few great bucks over the years, and I look forward to my annual November pilgrimage to Ohio to hunt on Grant's farm. Here are some of the bucks we've taken over the years.





That evening, the first hunt of our trip, Dad decided to give the new stand a sit. He had an encounter with a nice 9-pointer and saw a few more smaller bucks cruising, along with a few does, but nothing in range. Grant and I have been fortunate to harvest some nice bucks over the years, and we always try to set up my Dad in what we think are the better spots. Like I said, we had a good feeling about this spot. The next morning, Dad went back in there. It was the same story, a few small bucks and some does. That afternoon, I asked Dad whether he wanted to go back in there, but he decided to try a ladder stand about 800 yards away. I checked the wind, and it was northwest. I told Dad I would give that stand a try and see what happens.

## MIDWEST MAGIC

As I climbed in for the evening sit, it was 50 degrees that afternoon with a 5-10 mph wind; the forecast predicted the winds would calm close to dark. I sat and reminisced about when I was a kid watching *Realtree Monster Bucks* videos and dreamt of hunting the Midwest. Of all the stands I have hunted in Ohio, this stand gave me that true Midwestern feel — hardwood ridges, bean and corn fields and creek bottoms. I found myself feeling grateful for being able to hunt in a place like this.

Not long into the sit, I began to see some feeding does. Then, a small 6-pointer made its way into the field and began to harass them. This went on for about 15 minutes as they made their way into the CRP. Shortly after that, two button buck fawns came out of the woods and followed suit. As the evening unfolded and I got down to 45 minutes of legal shooting light left, I told myself there must be a big deer moving somewhere nearby; I could feel it in the air. Not five seconds later, I looked across the cut bean field, and 200 yards away there was a deer standing in the opposite block of woods. Before even glassing him with my binoculars, I could tell it was a good buck. He was standing there like a statue, with nothing but his head and neck sticking out of the woodline. Closer examination with my binos confirmed the buck's shooter status, but I doubted I would get an opportunity. It just so happened there were no other deer in the field, and in hindsight I believe that was a blessing. Had there been other deer in the field, the buck likely would have gone to them.

I sent five or six grunts in the buck's direction. He did not snap his head my way, but I could tell he'd heard me. As mature bucks do, he slowly and cautiously made his way into the field,



This is the view from the stand where I shot my 2023 Ohio buck. I had hung the stand the previous day, and although my father Larry had hunted out of it a couple times, I was able to take a great buck during my first sit in the tree.





## If It's Meant To Be...

stopping every 30 yards or so to look and listen. Still, there were no other deer in the field. Once he closed to 100 yards, he was standing in the center of the field and could easily go in any direction. That's when I gave him three more soft grunts. I felt like it was spring turkey season, and I was working a gobbler that was hung up, strutting in the middle of the field.

Unbeknownst to me, while I had been fixated on this big buck, a small doe crept in behind me in the woods. When I made those last three grunts, it spooked her, and she took off running in the opposite direction. So, back to the buck: He heard my three grunts, then heard the doe run off through the woods behind me. I assume that sounded like a chase to him, because he broke and started coming in my direction. I slowly grabbed my bow and began to shuffle my feet around on the stand's platform, because I anticipated the shot being on my weak side.

Unfortunately, when I hung the stand, I did not get it seated as tightly as I should have, and the stand squeaked as I moved. The buck stopped 75 yds away and stared right through me before he started walking again. Once more I slowly began to shuffle my feet, and again the stand squeaked. Again the buck stopped and stared right through me. The whole time I was thinking the game was over. But as the buck began walking again toward my corner of the field, I finally was able to shuffle all the way around to my weak side.

I had previously ranged the only shooting lane we had cut into that field corner; it was 30 yards. Had the deer been at 28 yards or 32 yards, I wouldn't have had a shot. But as his head disappeared behind a tree along the field edge, I drew the bow. When he hit the opening, I gave him a soft *mahhh*, settled my pin and eased into my shot. When the shot broke, I watched my Nocturnal lighted nock head straight toward the boiler room. The arrow zipped right through him, and I remember

My buck fell in the cut bean field, about 90 yards from my tree. If you look in the lower right of the photo, you can see the Nocturnal lighted nock glowing on the end of my arrow that had passed through the buck moments before. After watching the buck fall, I made a couple phone calls and then sat in the tree waiting for Grant and Dad to arrive.



I knew the buck was good, but I didn't realize how good until we walked up on him. The giant deer had a live weight of 264 pounds, an inside spread of 21.5 inches, 25-inch main beams and a 10-inch brow tine. We measured him at 168 $\frac{1}{8}$  inches.



telling myself, *He isn't going far*. The buck trotted off about 60 yards, stopped and then started getting wobbly. I watched him fall about 90 yards away.

I was in disbelief! I found myself asking why this had happened to me rather than Dad or Grant. I could not believe the way the hunt had unfolded. There were so many factors that could have gone wrong, yet all the stars aligned and guided that buck into my only shooting lane in the field. I called Dad and Grant to let them know I shot a good buck. Then I waited for them to join me on the short recovery. I sat back down, called my wife and kids and sat there watching the sun fade over the horizon as I basked in the glory of my success.

Once Dad and Grant showed up, we grabbed my arrow and walked up on the buck. I knew it was a good deer, but I did not know how good. Once again, we found ourselves in disbelief. The mature buck was an absolute brute of a specimen, with a body size that rivaled his impressive antlers. The rack had an inside spread of 21.5 inches, the main beams measured 25 inches, and one brow tine measured 10 inches. We later measured the buck at 168 $\frac{1}{8}$  inches, and considering a couple of the tines were broken, my guess is he would have scored about 172 inches fully intact. Before field dressing, we also weighed the buck at an impressive 264 pounds — linebacker status for sure — and I estimated his age at 6.5 years old.

Hunts usually don't unfold the way we imagine them. Sometimes it's only going to happen if it's meant to be. **BH**

*Landon Jenkins is a passionate outdoorsman who is even more passionate about being a husband and a father. He lives in Southwest Virginia with his wife, Becca, and sons, Bryant and Carter, who join him in the deer woods whenever possible.*

**Author's Notes:** I used a Carter Chocolate Lite four-finger release and PSE Source bow set at 60 pounds and outfitted with John's Custom Archery string and cables, Trophy Taker Smackdown arrow rest and HHA bowsight. I shot 405-grain Easton Axis 340 arrows built with 2-inch, shield cut Tru-Flite feathers, Nocturnal lighted nocks and 100-grain Slick Trick Magnum broadheads.



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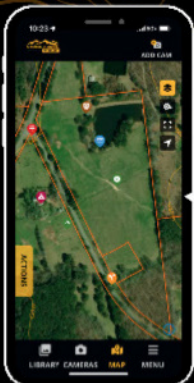


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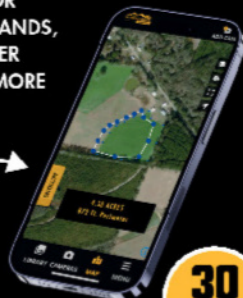
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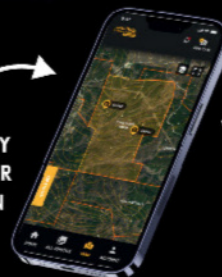


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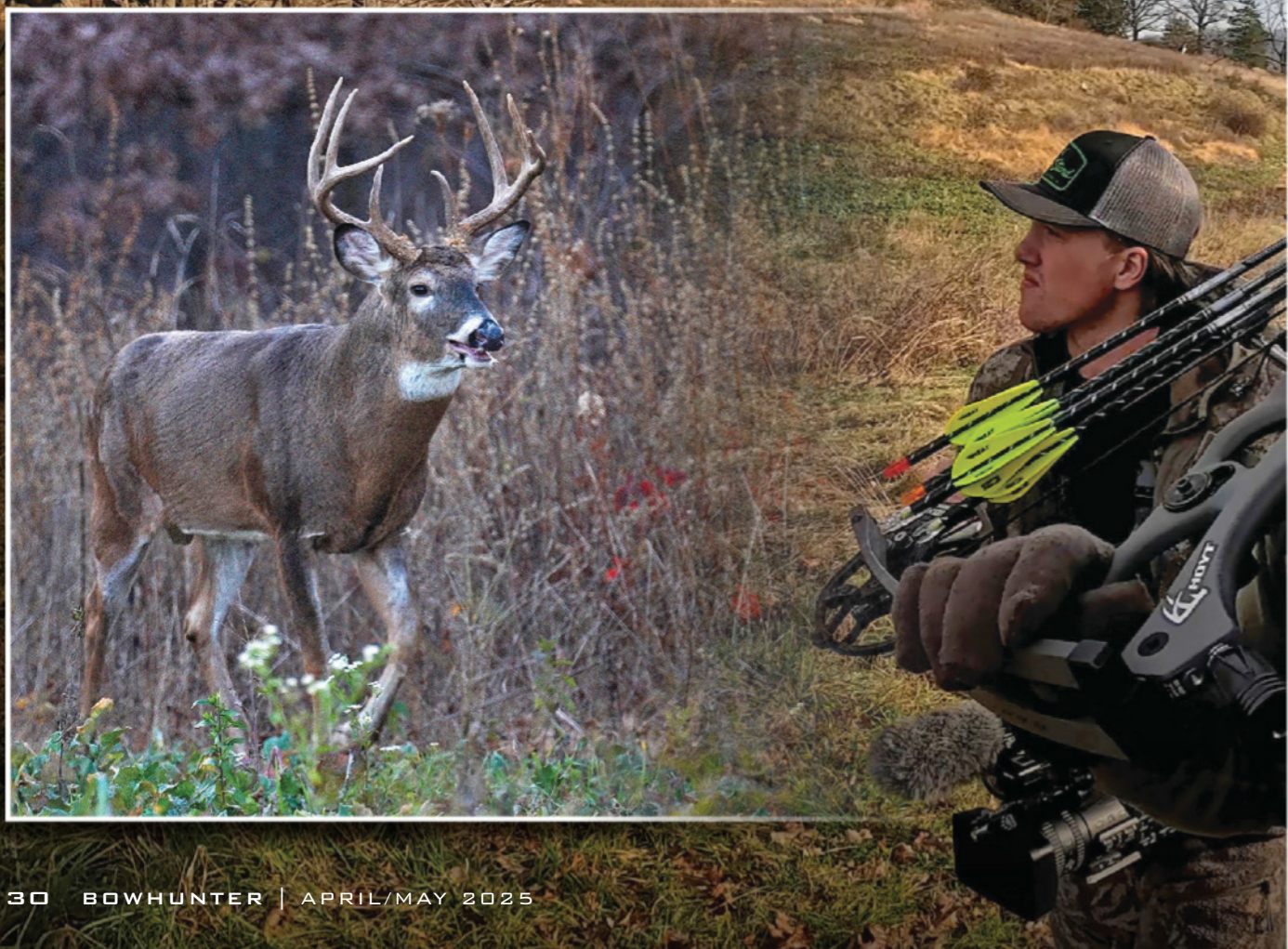
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# PLAN B IS THE KEY

A GOOD BACKUP PLAN IS  
CRITICAL FOR CONSISTENT  
WHITETAIL SUCCESS





**THE 2024 WHITETAIL SEASON** is in the books. Good riddance! Maybe it went better for you than it did for me. I sure hope so. I spent the entire season hunting two bucks. That would have been fine if they had shown up a few times. I hunted at least 50 days for those deer. Assuming morning sits along with afternoon sits during the last week of October and throughout most of November — not to mention a few, early-season afternoon hunts and some frigid December and January sessions — I probably had close to 90 sits.

Yeah, you read that right — 90! Just think what good things I could have done had I spent that time being socially responsible. I could have helped build a house for a needy family or even gotten a second job and given the income to the Salvation Army. Instead, my total net reward was one sighting of each of those two bucks during the entire season. Yep, two total sightings.

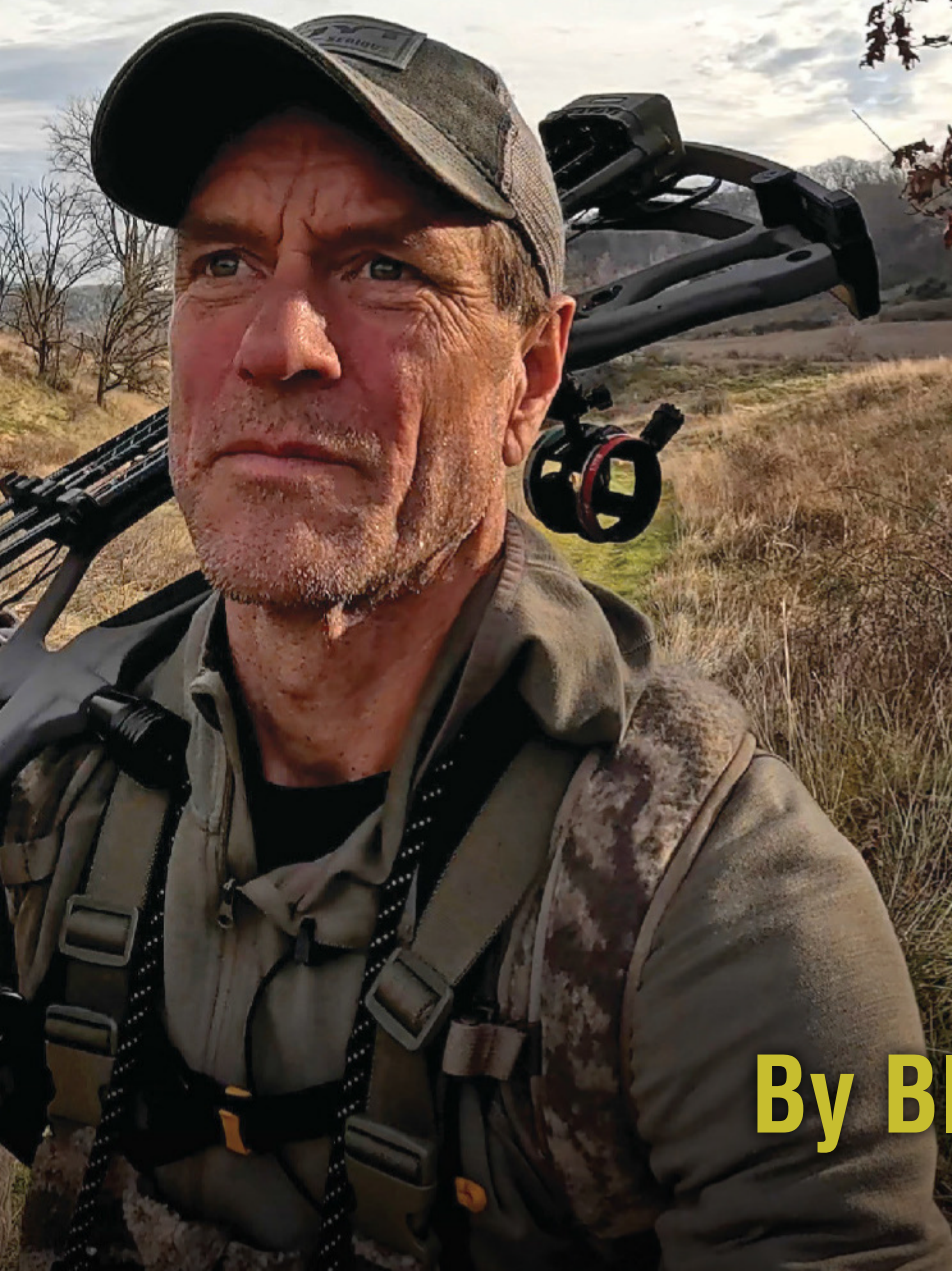
Boy, when I form those words in my head, it sure sounds bad. I went on stand 90 times and saw each of my target bucks just once! The bigger of the two was in late Novem-

ber at about 150 yards; he didn't come to the call on that windy morning. The other buck came by just past shooting light one evening in early November.

That, my friends, is what you call utter defeat. I am sitting here now, still trying to make something positive of this, if for no other reason than to salvage some pride. Maybe if I tell you the trap I fell into, I can spare you the same fate, but the real purpose of this article is to help us both look back with a constructive eye toward turning a bad season into a winner the next time around.

## HOW I FAILED

My problem was assuming too much. I had the buck I was most excited about hunting on trail camera often the year before in the area where I planned to hunt him. A lot of the photos were in daylight, so I assumed he would follow the same script during the 2024 season. I set my entire strategy (and my stands) around that expected behavior. Well, to come right to the point: he moved and he changed. He became a lot less daylight active.



By **BILL WINKE**



## PLAN B IS THE KEY

Every buck is different, and this one proved that point in spades. He didn't do what I had seen so many others do. From being daylight-active in his normal range during the 2023 season (the same area where he had lived the year before), he transformed into a mole and dug a hole and crawled into it during the 2024 season.

More accurately, I think he moved his core area about a quarter mile and then stayed close to his bed until after dark. I had seen bucks become more nocturnal as they reached middle age, but rarely had I seen them move when they had spent the prior two adult years living in one spot.

He showed up on camera in daylight on Oct. 30 for the first time all fall. That gave me some hope he was back and that I would get him soon enough in his old haunt — or at the very least see him a few times. Though I hunted around his old core area as carefully as I could for weeks, he was a very infrequent guest.

In fact, I had photos of him only two more times during the next three weeks, and those were at night. I finally did see him in late November on the fringe of his old core area on a morning hunt, but he wouldn't come to my grunt call.

Ironically, he did show up in daylight on one of my cameras about 500 yards from where I was hunting him the last day of the early bow season — the day before the firearms season opened — just to rub it in!

The other buck was a nice 8-pointer that had some age on him and had been living in the same area as the one I was most excited about. He was just along for the ride, but a definite shooter had he just showed up. He too had been a regular on my cameras over the years and had even shown some daylight activity in the area where I was hunting back in September. I saw him once, right after shooting light in early November. I figured he was a sure thing. Nope, that was it; one and done. Since then, I have gotten plenty of photos of him around the farm, but only one during the entire fall in daylight.

Here's a reality check for people waiting years for an



I got the first in-season daylight photo of my target buck on Oct. 30, (left) in the same area where the buck had lived the year before. Little did I know the buck was highly nocturnal and would lead me on a long journey ending in hard lessons. He showed up just often enough to keep me locked into the area, but almost never in daylight and not often enough to create a quality hunting experience.

Iowa bow tag. If you had drawn that “dream tag” and come to hunt my farm on a week's vacation during prime time (a pretty good sounding option, right?), you would have had roughly 14 sits (two sits per day times seven days). Well, I had 90 sits. You would have had to draw the tag at least six times to get as many sessions on stand as I had. It would take you roughly 24 years to draw the tag that often — and still you would have no buck! Welcome to the promised land! Obviously, I did something wrong. Let's figure out what it was.

## WHAT I DID WRONG

I assumed the buck I was hunting was going to act like most of the other bucks I had hunted over the years. I assumed he



I spent the better part of 50 days hunting this bedding area last fall, because it was where the buck I was hunting had spent a lot of his time in 2023. I was getting just enough trail-cam photos of the buck in this area to make me think it was just a matter of time before we crossed paths.





It takes boots-on-the-ground scouting and time studying maps to figure out the chess match of entry and exit. If you get that wrong, you can really damage your hunting area (and your chances). Trail cameras (below, left) can teach you a lot about what the deer are doing in your hunting area, but when the buck you are hoping to hunt doesn't show up by a reasonable point in the fall, it is time to move on to Plan B.



The off-season is the time to learn everything you can about your hunting areas. Put boots on the ground now so you'll be prepared to pivot if things aren't going your way this fall.



It's a lot of work to carry stands deep into your hunting area and set them all up. However, not having enough stands to hunt, regardless of the wind direction, without educating deer will make for a very long season.

would keep the same basic core area and range he used the year before and that he would continue to be daylight-active. He didn't do any of those things, but my assumption was natural and not the biggest mistake I have ever made. The real mistake was not having a plan for what I would do if he didn't follow the script. Not having a good Plan B is what really cost me my season, and that is the meat of this article. Plan B is just as important as Plan A.

I also stuck with Plan A too long. By the time I realized that it wasn't going to work, I was already into November, and it was more or less too late to find a new hunting area or even scout new, more aggressive stand locations. I needed to shift in the direction where I thought the buck had likely moved. And I needed to hunt closer to the bedding areas, since he wasn't moving much in daylight. But in the back of my mind, I still

believed it was just a matter of time, until the rut ended and he disappeared completely.

I needed more places to hunt that buck, and I even needed more bucks to hunt. I could have found some additional places to hunt had I started early enough, and I sure could have scouted up more stand locations closer to bedding areas had I done it during the off-season. As sensitive as this buck seemed to be to pressure (he was already mostly nocturnal), I wasn't feeling too good about pushing into the places I thought he might be living with a stand on my back in mid-November.

Yes, he could have walked past my stand on that morning in late November instead of passing 150 yards away. And he could have come charging to my grunt call. Then I would be writing about how crafty I was to be patient and wait on the fringe for my opportunity or how effective a grunt call can



## PLAN B IS THE KEY



Not everyone struggled last season. During a short break from filming the author, cameraman Carsen Christenson shot this great buck.

be when used at the right time. Funny how small things can change the course of a season — and in some ways, limit our learning curve.

In some ways, it is better that I didn't get him that morning. If I had, I would not have learned this important lesson, one I am sure will be useful to me for the rest of my life. If you are serious about bowhunting whitetails, you need more than one plan. Plan B is just as important as Plan A.

## WHAT WILL I DO ABOUT IT

Hopefully, my target buck will still be around this fall. If so, I will have a much better plan for how to find him and hunt him. I will have trail cameras in a few more places to figure out

his range sooner so I can react to it before the season starts. It really stinks to play catch-up in early November. It is way too late by then. It is tough enough to be successful when you are dialed-in — nearly impossible when you aren't.

In addition to having my cameras in a few more places, I will do a much better job of scouting this winter. I haven't hunted that property for long and I need to know it better. I need to know where I can get in and out without alerting the nearby deer in a lot more areas.

Scouting is critical, not just to find sign, but even more so to find the entry and exit routes that can keep you undetected. It is possible to mess up an otherwise good spot by missing the best ways to sneak in and out. It can take time to figure out how to win that chess match, and the sooner I get started on that project, the better my Plan B.

Second, and just as importantly, I need a few other properties to hunt. Again, it is a bad policy to start looking for new hunting areas in early November. I need to find those options now, during the off-season, and scout them during the winter. Then I can pivot more easily should this buck not even be on the farm this coming season.

It was a humbling season, but sometimes that is what you need. It is the poke in the ribs required to learn all you can now, so the same thing doesn't happen again. For every unsuccessful season, there are lessons to be learned and solutions to be applied. We just need to look harder. Poor seasons aren't fun, but they have much to teach. We learn a lot from them; maybe more than we do from successful ones. Looking at the past season with a critical eye is the key to making next fall even better. **BH**

## FOUR MORE THINGS THAT CAN RUIN A SEASON

In this article, I profiled one way a season can go south. But there are other things that can also derail success, and each of them comes with a lesson and a solution. Here are four more that come to mind.

**1. Your Hunting Area Goes Bad:** This is a very common and discouraging problem — and probably the biggest reason why people stop bowhunting. We hunt an area for a few years and assume it will always be a good option. So, we get lax and stop looking for new spots. But things change. The neighbors give permission to a group that shoots everything that walks, or they let their new dog roam free. Maybe the nearby sanctuary now has a house right in the middle of it. Or, heaven forbid, the current owner sells it. You can never stop looking for better spots, even if the one you have seems good. Unless you control all the variables, you can't count on your spot being good forever.

### 2. The Weather Throws a Curve:

I set up most of my best spots for a northwest wind, the best wind for rut hunting. But what happens if it blows from the south the entire first two weeks of November? I quickly burn out my few good south wind stands and there I sit, cursing the weather and my "bad luck." Yes, maybe the weather wasn't ideal, but the bigger issue was my lack of preparation. I should have scouted more spots for non-ideal winds. You can sometimes react to the weather by hanging new sets, but it is hard to nail the best entry and exit routes without lots of scouting and plenty of time in thought. Plus, the older I get, the less I feel like

doing that and the more inclined I am to over-hunt my existing stands. Flying by the seat of your pants too often is the recipe for a crash landing in a bunch of educated deer. Prepare now for any prolonged wind direction you might get this fall, even if it is not the one you want.

**3. You are Hunting a Ghost:** I have also made this mistake. I spent weeks one year hunting a buck that was dead. Man, talk about a hard lesson! Trust your gut instinct. If you feel that you should be seeing him, but you aren't, or you aren't getting photos of him as you head into the best part of the season, it is time to move on to Plan B. I have a friend who will only hunt his target buck until a certain point in the season. If he isn't seeing him, or getting regular photos of him by that date, he moves on.

### 4. Overhunting Your Best Stands:

This is an obvious season-wrecker, but it is still very common. In fact, I still do it. It comes down to the common problem of not having

enough pre-set options. You are stuck on one buck, or one small property, and you hunt that deer or that area way too hard.

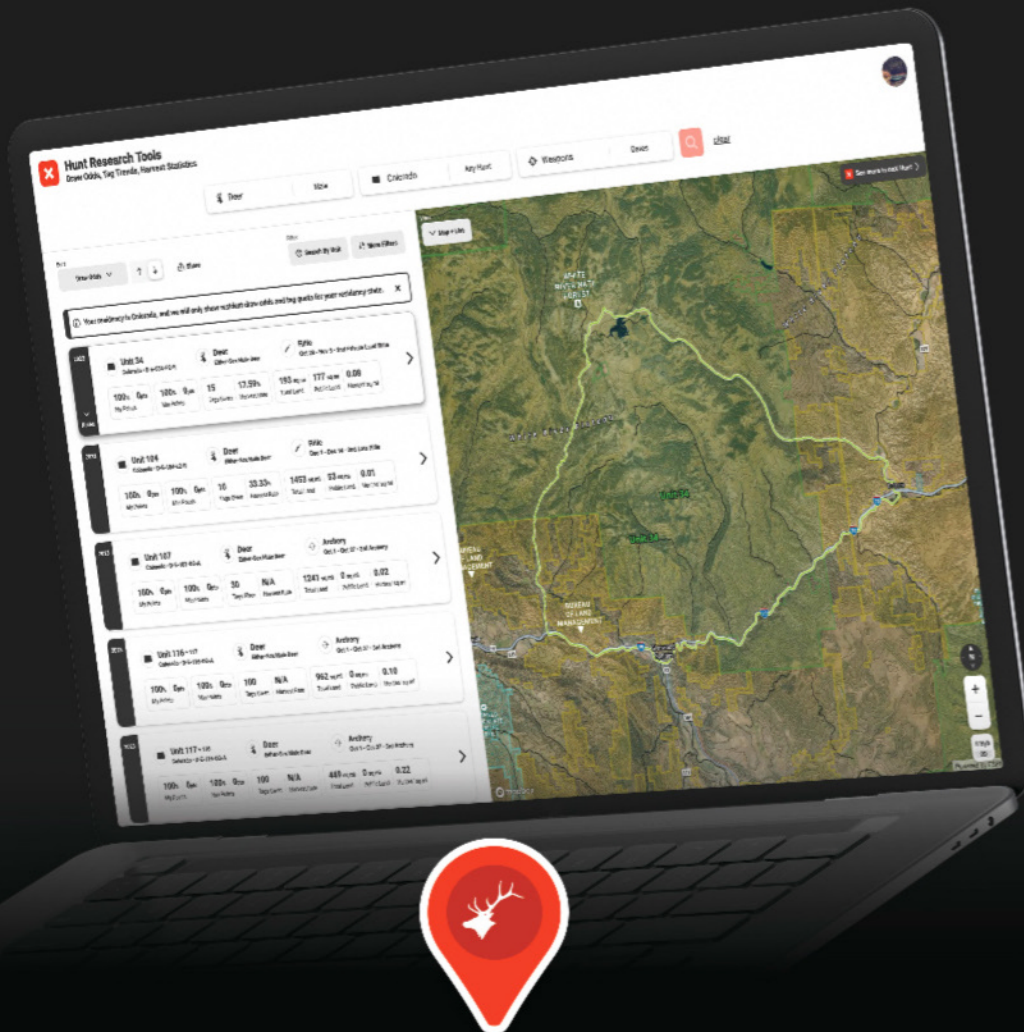
A lot of people ask me what public areas are good in my home state. I have a few I know are productive (I never tell people exactly where they are, however), but what I do tell them is to have four or five options pre-scouted so they can react to changing deer movement and hunting pressure quickly. You can't waste critical stand time scouting during the best part of the season. It is a very good rule to have twice as many spots and stand options as you think you will need.



Hunting a "ghost" — a buck that is already dead — is a sure-fire way to sink your season.



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By **FRANK NOSKA**

BROWN BEAR PHOTO: VIC SCHENDEL



# Unimak Island: LAND OF BIG BEARS

## A DANGEROUS DIY ADVENTURE IN THE LAST FRONTIER

**L**AST YEAR, I got lucky in the Alaska big-game drawing and won a fall brown bear tag for Unimak Island. The odds of drawing this tag are extremely low, but it finally happened for me after many years of applying. Having hunted brown bears far down on the Alaska Peninsula on three other occasions, I had a good idea of what to expect. Like an old guide told me down there several years ago, Unimak Island has some of the world's worst weather, and the hunt must be approached with that in mind. Combined with the long distance that required several hours to fly down there, and the shortage of daylight during the Alaskan fall, it made planning the logistics of this hunt extremely challenging.

I've lived in Alaska since 2001, having moved to the "Last Frontier" specifically for its embarrassingly rich bowhunting opportunities. As if that wasn't proof enough of a serious archery-hunting addiction, I am also a pilot who recently finished building an experimental, high-performance Super Cub bush plane to help me tackle adventures such as this bear hunt. I guess you could say I'm pretty serious about this bowhunting stuff!

While flying down the coast to Unimak Island, I was fortunate to spot not one but three dead walruses that had washed up on the beach. In Alaska, if a person finds a dead walrus, they can pick up the head and/tusks. Then, after getting it sealed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, they can keep it. Planning for this possibility, I made sure to have an axe, the proper knives and a knife sharpener handy. It took some precious time to get these walrus skulls detached from the bodies, but I couldn't pass up the opportunity to get them. These things are not light, nor do they smell particularly good. I had to deal with the smell and weight of those "trophies" for the rest of the hunt, but that's another part of the story.

Blessed with some good weather, I arrived on Unimak Island with a couple hours of daylight left. So, I flew around and scouted for the best bear-hunting area I could find. I hoped to see something dead on the beach, such as a whale or walrus, so I could hunt nearby in wait of scavenging bears. Unfortunately, I found nothing like this. However, I did identify

what looked like a good place to land, camp and hunt. Successfully landing there right at dark, I was happy to be safely on the ground. Little did I know, this spot would subsequently provide me a great hunt. Relying on past experience in this extreme environment, the first thing I did was get my Super Cub secured to the ground with augers and ropes. Then I put wind spoiler covers on the wings to help protect it if the wind blew hard. This is an unforgiving area known for extreme winds and weather. I wasn't taking any chances.

Once I had the plane taken care of, the next step was getting my tent up. My small KUIU tent went up quickly, and next my bow and gear were readied for hunting the following day. I had the stinky walrus heads in a Rubbermaid tote. I placed them on the ground behind the airplane, then pulled a black garbage bag tight over the top to help keep the scent from getting out. It had been a long day, and sleep came easily that night.

### Opening Excitement

At daylight the next morning, I hiked to one of the tallest nearby hills. I wanted to get to the highest spot where I could see the most area. It didn't take long before I had what looked like a good bear spotted several hundred yards away. Using the rolling hills and a small creek, I stalked towards the bear. The bear was feeding on grass along a small creek. Wearing waders, I got into the creek and moved closer. The sides of the creek were steep, providing me with the concealment I needed. In virtually no time, I was within 200 yards of the bear. Using the meandering creek, I stalked to a spot where I thought I would intercept the bear's path. Sure enough, as I peeked up over the bank, the bear was getting closer and closer. Just as the bear came over a small rise in the terrain only 30 yards away, I came to full draw. Unfortunately, the bear saw me draw and stared directly at me. Then, in a flash, he turned and started running the opposite direction. Wow, that was close! I was almost done with my hunt in the first hour of the first day.

Now focusing my binoculars and looking around for another bear, it didn't take long before I had bears spotted in just about every direction. I think I had four or five in sight





While flying my custom-built Super Cub to hunt brown bears, I found not one, but two, dead walrus lying on the beaches of the Alaskan coast. Never one to pass up a chance to add to my wildlife collection, I couldn't resist landing to retrieve the tusks from both animals.

at one time. One was a sow with two cubs that were moving in my general direction. When the sow was within 200 yards, I stood up and waved my arms, trying to get the bear's attention and scare her away. Well, I got the bear's attention alright, but she didn't run away. Instead, she quickly charged towards me. When she was less than 30 yards and still fast approaching, I aimed the pistol I was carrying at her and put some finger pressure on the trigger. Walking backwards and yelling as I kept the pistol pointed at the bear, it was a tense situation. Luckily, she finally stopped her aggressive approach and retreated with her two cubs. This first morning of hunting sure wasn't without action and excitement!

After collecting my senses and settling my nerves, I started looking for another bear to pursue. I could see two more bears in different directions, but they didn't look very big. So, I kept searching and glassing for a larger bear.

### Scintillating Stalk

Within an hour or so, a different bear appeared down the coast and was walking in my direction. It didn't take long to conclude this bear was a shooter worth going after. I maneuvered to intercept the bear. Running as fast as I could, the bear still got past me before I could get into position along the beach. Now all I could do was follow the bear and hope he would stop or slow his pace, allowing me to stalk within bow range. Paralleling the coast, I followed behind the bear. When he would go over a hill and out of sight, I would hustle to that exact spot and cautiously peek over. Not knowing whether he was just over the hill or hundreds of yards ahead, it made for an exciting and fun pursuit. I could also easily see and follow his fresh tracks in the soft sand. Up and down hills the bear and I went. When the bear started slightly angling towards the ocean, I thought to myself, this could be my best opportunity.



To say that my 2024 brown bear hunting area on Alaska's Unimak Island was remote would be an understatement. My bush plane and tent were the only signs of human civilization for as far as the eye could see!

Sure enough, he went down the steep bank and was at the waterline in no time. I hustled towards the bear.

There was a wide, grassy flat, with very tall grass that led to the edge of a steep, 10-foot cut bank and then sloped down to the sandy beach. Raising my head just high enough to peer over the top of the grass, I saw the bear right at the water's edge. I knew he was out of bow range, and my rangefinder indicated 120 yards. When he started walking down the beach, I backed up in the grass, totally out of sight of the bear. Then I moved as fast as I could, in the same direction as the bear, paralleling him. Thinking I was well ahead of the bear, I peeked up over the grass only to see him way past me down the beach, still walking. I backed up out of sight and ran in his direction again. After covering several hundred yards, and slowly but steadily closing the distance, I looked over the top of the grass one last time. There, directly in front of me, was the bear climbing up the steep bank.

I immediately got as low as I could in the tall grass and nocked an arrow. The bear saw the suspicious blob in the grass and slowly started approaching. The bear didn't know what I was and was slowly getting closer and closer. In my crouched position, I believe the bruin thought I was another bear.

I took the first shot opportunity I had, and it was about 30 yards. I didn't have time to use my rangefinder; I just judged



the distance and shot. It was a lethal shot, but not the best shot I've ever made. The bear was quartering to me, and the arrow passed through one lung and the intestines. I saw the arrow exit out the opposite side of the bear, flipping end over end in the high grass.

After watching the wounded bear bed down, I slowly stalked in for another shot. On the second shot, I stalked to 18 yards with assistance from a steady wind that covered the sound of my approach. I thought I had a good angle for a finishing shot, but the arrow hit high, prompting the bear to jump up and run another 400 yards. Had I known how "alive" the bear still was, I never would have gotten as close for that second shot! I'm sure glad he didn't see me then. A little while later, I was finally able to get a good, broadside shot and end the hunt — but not before the hard-hit bear got up again and attempted to charge me. This happened at 50 yards, and I was fortunate to evade the mortally wounded bear. Had someone been watching this play out from a nearby hill, they surely would have questioned my sanity!

After successfully harvesting my bear, I experienced two additional close encounters worth mentioning. While skinning my bear, I noticed another bear working its way in my direction. This bear ultimately got to 30 yards and showed so much aggression that I had the pistol pointed at him before he finally backed off and left me alone. Then, while I was sleeping in my tent that night, I was awakened when I heard the Rubbermaid tote with the walrus heads inside get knocked over. I yelled, put my boots on and grabbed the pistol and

flashlight. Quickly exiting the tent, I ran that bear off. I never actually saw the bear because it was dark, but it left some impressive tooth marks in my tote!

I've been around a lot of brown bears over the course of many Alaska hunts, but I've never had to point a pistol at multiple bears on the same hunt. Bowhunts such as this — the ones that present challenging logistics and serious danger in the field — are the kind I like. I know such adventures drive my wife and mother crazy with worry, but I cannot help myself. The satisfaction of finding success on a DIY expedition of this caliber, while also making enough good decisions to stay alive, is what I live for (no pun intended). This was my seventh successful DIY Alaska brown bear bowhunt. Based on all I learned on this hunt; I sure would love to get my hands on another Unimak Island bear tag! **BH**

*Frank Noska has 206 Pope and Young Club record-book animals to his credit and is the only bowhunter ever to complete two Super Slams of all 29 North American big-game species. In fact, Noska is just four animals shy of his third archery Super Slam. He lives in Wasilla, Alaska, with his beautiful and supportive wife, Millie.*

**AUTHOR'S NOTES:** On this hunt, I shot a Mathews Lift bow outfitted with Side Hill custom bowstring and cables, Tight Spot quiver, Schaffer Performance Archery Opposition Air bowsight, Victory arrows and Rage broadheads. I used a B3 Archery release aid and wore hunting apparel from KUIU.



A hair-raising stalk resulted in a trophy brown bear on the first day of my 2024 Unimak Island brown bear hunt. But my bear was far from the only bear encounter I had during my hunt. I pulled my pistol on — and nearly shot — two aggressive bears I encountered while hunting, and I was awakened in the middle of the night by a third bear that slipped into camp and attempted to steal the walrus tusks I collected en route to the island.



# Customized Confid

## BUILD YOUR OWN ARROWS FOR MAXIMUM PERFORMANCE IN THE FIELD

**I am an arrow connoisseur.** I consider many hours in my archery room cutting, fletching, weighing, spinning and building different arrow combinations to be time well spent. I've done everything from increasing FOC by adding weight to my arrow's front end via heavy inserts or broadheads to manipulating back end arrow weight. I've toyed with different fletching styles, counts and on-shaft angles. I've played and pounded foam with factory nocks and four brands of lighted nocks.

Building your own arrows with customized component combinations that inspire shooting confidence is fun. During my long bowhunting career, I've crafted everything from 350-grain lightweights that fly at warp speed to 514.4-grain clubbers that hit like a ton of bricks.

Before we dive into the science and pure joy of arrow building, here are some rules. First, keep it safe. A general rule of thumb is to have 5 grains of arrow weight per pound of your bow's draw weight. If you pull 70 pounds, your minimum arrow weight should be 350 grains. Second, arrow spine is king. Spine is a measurement of the arrow's stiffness. You'll find the arrow's spine labeled on the side of the shaft. Arrow manufacturers produce spine charts to help you select the right shafts for your bow, and I recommend following them.

Last, make the process fun. Stressing over the arrow's finished weight, FOC percentage, three-fletch or four-fletch and lighted or non-lighted nock isn't fun. Enjoy the process from start to finish. And remember, the most critical piece of the arrow-building puzzle is accuracy. If you shoot a shaft that flies accurately, is quiet and hits with enough energy to ensure proper penetration, you're golden.

### GO LIGHT!

The lighter an arrow, the faster it flies. Awesome, right? It can be. However, if you opt to go the light and fast route, there are a few things to consider.

The first two are wind drift and shot noise. Crosswinds, common in the field, will more easily move a lighter arrow off course than a heavier arrow. Also, because lighter arrows have less mass, they absorb less energy from the bow, resulting in increased noise and vibration at that shot.

Yes, I started with a pair of negatives. However, there are some positives to going the lightweight arrow route. An arrow traveling at higher speeds gives the bowhunter more room for error when estimating shot distance, as a

light arrow will have a flatter flight trajectory than a heavy one. As much as we rely on rangefinders, it's not uncommon to get a range on an animal and have it walk closer or move further away before the hunter drops the string. A lighter, faster arrow provides some added leeway when guesstimating the final range. Another lightweight arrow win, especially for bowhunters who love to send carbon at longer ranges, is an increased maximum range when using adjustable-pin bowsights. For example, I can run my 360-grain arrow sight tape all the way out to 144 yards on my Spot-Hogg Boonie before reaching the maximum limit of the sight's pin-adjustment range. With a heavyweight arrow, my maximum range would diminish considerably.

Other lightweight arrow factors to consider are penetration and accuracy. If you push the 5 grains of arrow weight for every pound of draw weight too far, you'll end up with erratic arrow flight as you move back in distance from the target. Also, I've seen bowhunters push the lightweight arrow idea too far and watched carbon explode on the side of multiple 3-D targets.

I am a fan of lightweight arrows for certain bowhunting situations. Over the years, I've built several shafts between 365 and 380 grains and have harvested everything from pronghorn to elk to bear to mule deer.

My top lightweight option for 2025 is Easton's 5.0. An ultra-versatile Accu-Carbon arrow, the 5.0 allows bowhunters the ability to customize. Match Grade 5.0s come with 5mm, 16-grain HIT inserts with 13-21-grain HIT collars. Standard Grade 5.0s come with HIT Inserts and 50-grain steel one-piece Half-Outs. These micro-diameter arrows feature Easton's new 5MM Microlite nocks that sport an ultra-compact build and improved throat design that leads to enhanced string engagement. Easton 5.0s are available in bare and fletched shafts.

For testing purposes, I took a dozen 5.0s and built them three different ways. I used the 16-grain HIT insert with four Flex-Fletch 2.5 Pro vanes set at a two-degree right helical for the first group of three arrows. Two arrows weighed 361.1 grains, while the third one weighed 361.4 grains.

The next group of three sported identical vanes in the same orientation, but I added the HIT collar, which boosted my FOC and brought my arrow weight to a three-arrow average of 381.1 grains. These arrows produced an average speed of 305 fps fired from Hoyt's RX-9 Ultra set at 68.98 pounds and a draw length of 28.75 inches.



# ence



Building your own arrows is both fun and rewarding. I took this Colorado highhorn sheep using a custom-crafted Easton 4MM Axis Long Range arrow.

**By JACE BAUSERMAN**





I used my chronograph to measure the speed of my various Easton 5.0 arrow builds. My Hoyt RX-9 Ultra with a 68.98-pound draw weight and 28.75-inch draw length powered 381.1-grain arrows at 288 feet per second.

My final set of four arrows wore the same number of vanes in the same orientation, but I used the HIT collar as a nock collar and went with the 50-grain Steel Half-Outs. The total arrow weight was 415 grains.

One of the great things about arrow building is this process. Testing and tinkering lets you determine what arrow weight, vane orientation, vane number, nock type, insert type, etc., works best.

I discovered my best three-arrow group from 123.5 yards (the furthest I could shoot each arrow build without sight interference) was with the 361.1 grain 5.0s. I will note the conditions were dead calm. Lighter arrows drift more in a crosswind, especially when shots are longer.

The magical thing about the 5.0 arrows is that bowhunters can use various Easton components to build them exactly how they want them. I found the arrows ultra-durable and ultra-accurate.

## HOW ABOUT MIDDLEWEIGHTS?

My favorite boxers to watch are Middleweights. They are lightning-quick and hit with a ton of energy. Middleweight arrows are the same way, which is why my typical bowhunting arrow, when pulling between 65 and 70 pounds, is between 407 and 420 grains.

My go-to middleweight arrows, which I've used to take down everything from elk to bear to bighorn sheep, are Easton's 4MM Axis and X10 Parallel Pros. These micro-diameter shafts reduce wind drift via their slim build and second-to-none tolerances, ensuring precision downrange accuracy. The micro-diameter build allows the arrows to track seamlessly behind any broadhead to reduce friction, which leads to more pass-through shots on big-game animals.

The 4MM Axis Long Range Match Grade sports a 100 percent carbon-fiber build for maximum velocity. However, shooter customization is easy thanks to Easton's many Match Grade Half-Out insert grain weights. Those wanting an FOC



There is a virtually endless combination of fletching options for your arrows. From vane length, shape and weight to the number of vanes you use and vane configuration (straight, offset or helical), experimenting with various fletching styles will yield a preferred option that produces the accuracy and confidence you need in the field.



Easton offers its X10 Parallel Pro arrows in a wide range of spine sizes, suitable for everything from target archery to bowhunting. This is one of two whitetail bucks I took down last season using a "middleweight" X10 arrow weighing roughly 420 grains.

boost can add heavier inserts such as the 75-grain aluminum/steel, 100-grain titanium/steel, or 150-grain all steel.

My 4MM Axis Long Range insert choice could be more exciting, but it's what works for me. The 55-grain aluminum insert is plenty durable and, paired with the 4MM Microlite Nock and four Flex-Fletch 2.5 Pro right-helical vanes, produces a speed of 294 fps when fired from my Hoyt RX-9 Ultra set at a draw weight of 68.98 pounds. The speed increases momentum, and when these 418.8-grain shafts hit the target, they hit with brute force, penetrate deeply and provide me with immeasurable shooting confidence.

I spent a year with Easton's X10 Parallel Pros this past season. Rooted in arrow lore, these built-for-bowhunting



of insert and outsert components to customize final arrow weight.

**EASTON** 50

arrows stem from the same X10 family that debuted at the 1996 Atlanta Olympics and are responsible for more World and Olympic titles than any other arrow in history.

Constructed using tried-and-true X10 precision and quality, this shaft is a multi-purpose (recurve, compound, target, field, barebow) weight-coded wonder with a straightness rating of  $\pm .001$ -inch. Available in 15 spine sizes from 250 down to 1150, Easton makes an X10 Parallel Pro for any poundage setup. Components such as the 4MM Pin, Pin Nock, 4MM Microlite Nock, 4MM Nock Collar and all Match Grade Half-out options are sold separately from the shafts. Easton did this to allow shooters total build control and maximum arrow customization.

Last season, I took down multiple longbeards, a pronghorn at 76.5 yards and two Pope and Young caliber whitetail bucks with SEVR-tipped X10 Parallel Pros. I tested the arrows with different fletch counts — three and four — and different vane types and orientations. I continuously gravitated back to my Flex-Fletch 2.5 Pros set at a 2-degree right helical in four-fletch.

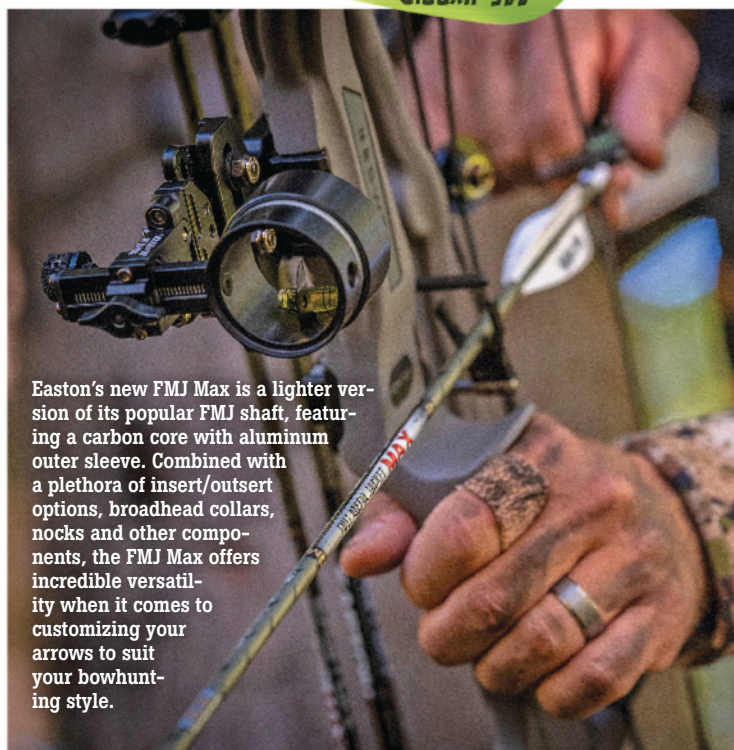
There is only a 5.5-grain difference between my X10 Parallel Pros and 4MM Axis Long Range Shafts. I prefer the lightweight yet durable AC (aluminum/carbon) construction of the X10 Parallel Pros over the 4MM Axis Long Range. However, the specs and performance of the arrows mirror one another so closely that I wouldn't switch from one to try the other.

For me, 25-plus years of arrow building has taught me that my quiver will always have middleweight arrows. The combination of velocity and weight I get produces extreme momentum, which leads to insane accuracy and undeniable penetration.

## GO HEAVY!

When pulling between 65 and 70 pounds, I consider my heavy-for-draw-weight arrow anything over 480 grains. However, if you're pulling 40 pounds and shooting a 500-spine shaft that weighs 6.2 grains per inch (gpi), heavy for you might be anything over 415 grains.

Heavy arrows do have some advantages. The most significant reasons to shoot a heavy arrow are less wind resistance and church mouse-quiet flight. Many bowhunters rave about



Easton's new FMJ Max is a lighter version of its popular FMJ shaft, featuring a carbon core with aluminum outer sleeve. Combined with a plethora of insert/outsert options, broadhead collars, nocks and other components, the FMJ Max offers incredible versatility when it comes to customizing your arrows to suit your bowhunting style.

a heavy shaft's ability to penetrate more when the broadhead hits bone. This is true, to a degree. However, being a western bowhunter, it's hard to justify a heavier shaft that reduces my yardage margin of error when I can shoot a middleweight arrow that blows through elk at 60-plus yards.

If I were strictly a whitetail hunter who limited my shots to 50 yards, chances are good I'd go with my 482-grain 4MM Easton FMJs. Over the years, I've killed many deer and a few elk with FMJ shafts, which feature a carbon core bonded to an aluminum outer sleeve. My 340 spine FMJs weigh 11 gpi, 2.7 gpi more than my 4MM Axis Long Range and 2.2 gpi more than my X10 Parallel Pros. A heavier arrow absorbs more of the bow's energy, helping to reduce shot noise and vibration, and when it's dead still out and a trophy buck is 12 yards from your tree, you want a quiet shot. As with the 4MM Axis Long Range and Parallel Pros, collars and multiple insert grain-weight options are available.

The FMJ Max is new to Easton's FMJ Family for 2025. The significant difference between the Max and the standard FMJs is the weight. Engineered to be versatile, the FMJ Max line has a lower gpi rating for a comparable spine size. The 5MM FMJ Max 340 spine arrows weigh 9.8 gpi. The shafts also utilize Easton's all-new 5mm Microlite Nock System. The new nocks have shorter ears and an improved throat design that boosts shot-to-shot forgiveness and allows for improved tuning.

My FMJ Max Match Grade arrows arrived with 3-inch AAE Hybrid Stealth Vanes. I cut the arrows to size, added the included Match Grade HIT collar and glued in the 5MM HIT inserts. Typically, I would've stripped the factory vanes and reflected, but I received the shafts a tad close to my deadline and needed to begin testing. I've been an AAE Hybrid Stealth fan for years and have no issues with a three-fletch arrow.

My finished shaft weight was 455.1 grains. After testing these arrows to 100 yards, they proved ultra-accurate and



This is one of many animals I have taken using Easton's original FMJ shafts. The carbon/aluminum hybrid construction makes these arrows extremely durable and boosts penetration.



## Customized Confidence

pushed, on average, a full 2.25 inches deeper into fresh foam targets at 40 yards compared to all-carbon shafts. This is a testament to the reduced friction offered by the FMJ's aluminum exterior, along with easier arrow removal from the target.

### FINAL THOUGHTS

Remember, how you build your arrows is up to you and nobody else. Why change if you're getting excellent results with your 370-grain lightweight three-fletch offset arrows? Why change if you have all the confidence in the world in your 420-grain arrows with four, low-profile, 2-degree helical vanes? And if you're blowing through deer, elk and every other animal you draw back on with those heavyweights, you guessed it, why change?

Well, there is nothing wrong with experimenting. There is nothing wrong with trying this arrow, that arrow, or various insert options as you keep the process fun. When it starts to become stressful, stop! Don't overthink arrow-building; you can enjoy it and find that perfect-for-you build that fills the freezer and walls. **BH**

My initial testing with FMJ Max Match Grade shafts showed they sank about 2.25 inches deeper into my foam target than comparable all-carbon shafts.



## Additional Arrow Options

Although all my recent arrow-building experiments have involved Easton shafts, they are far from the only high-quality options available to today's bowhunters. Regardless of whether you are looking for lightweight, middleweight or heavyweight options, you'll find something to consider in the following collection of proven, high-quality shafts from other manufacturers.

### 1. ALTRA CENTRUM PREMIER

Available in fletched 6-packs and 12-packs of bare shafts, these ultra-straight ( $\pm .001$ -inch) arrows come in spine sizes of 250, 300, 350 and 400. Built for accuracy, Altra uses state-of-the-art measuring equipment to ensure every shaft and the included premium components are straight. A spine size popular with bowhunters, the 350, weighs 9.4 gpi, which puts these arrows featuring premium aluminum and stainless steel components in the middleweight and heavyweight categories. A proprietary blend of high-modulus carbon gives shooters what Altra calls "No Spine" technology. The technology means improved tunability and increased shooting consistency.

**\$109.99 per 6, fletched | [altraarrows.com](http://altraarrows.com)**

### 2. BLACK EAGLE TALON CRESTED

Sorted to perfection to ensure maximum arrow-to-arrow performance, you don't need to worry about consistent spine, straightness and weight. These shafts are available in spine sizes of 300, 350, 400, and 500. They come in  $\pm .001$ -inch and  $\pm .003$ -inch straightness, and the bright yellow cresting boosts in-flight and post-shot visibility. Black Eagle offers several upgraded components to customize your arrows better and achieve the ideal FOC for your setup. With the customizable components available on the BE website, you can build Talons for different hunting scenarios.

**\$69.99-89.99 per 6 | [blackeaglearrows.com](http://blackeaglearrows.com)**

### 3. CARBON EXPRESS PREDATOR AIR

A top-end arrow at a pleasing price point, Carbon Express' Predator Air arrows are light, durable and scary accurate. These arrows make an excellent quiver filler if you want speed blended with on-impact energy. Each .244-inch inner diameter arrow boasts quality, woven-carbon construction and has a straightness tolerance of  $\pm .0025$ -inch and a weight tolerance of  $\pm 2$  grains.

**\$59.99 per 6 | [feradyne.com/brands/carbon-express](http://feradyne.com/brands/carbon-express)**

### 4. GOLD TIP PIERCE LRT

A micro-diameter tactical hunting arrow, the Pierce LRT ensures increased penetration and less wind drift due to the smaller diameter of the arrow, which gives the wind less surface area to press against. A patent-pending component system means the 44-grain Ballistic Insert System goes in straight every time, and the Dyna-SlickShield arrow coating boosts penetration and eases arrow removal from foam targets. The Pierce LRT is available in spine sizes from 250-500 and weights ranging from 6.6-9.8 gpi. The shafts boast a straightness tolerance of  $\pm .001$ -inch and a weight tolerance of  $\pm .5$ -grain.

**\$251.99 per 12 (bare shafts) | [goldtip.com](http://goldtip.com)**

### 5. ULTRAVIEW UV 1K

Available in cut-and-assembled 6-packs and full-length 6-packs, UltraView's UV 1Ks arrive with all-white vanes and 4mm black nocks. The real story, though, is the hybrid 4.5mm diameter, which falls between what has become the accepted, small-diameter 4mm norm and the standard arrow norm of 5mm. The ice coating allows easy arrow removal from foam targets, and this coating, along with the arrow's micro-build, will boost penetration on big-game animals. The UV 1K comes in 250, 300 and 350 spine sizes, with 100-grain UV Field Points and 75-grain dual-material, steel-core aluminum outserts.

**\$219.99 per 6 | [ultraviewarchery.com](http://ultraviewarchery.com)**

### 6. VICTORY VAP SS

Not a newbie but a goodie, Victory's VAP SS comes in Elite ( $\pm .001$ -inch straightness), Gamer ( $\pm .003$ -inch straightness) and Sport ( $\pm .006$ -inch straightness) options. I recommend the Elite, which promises an ultra-small diameter build, maximum speed, reduced wind drift and uncanny downrange penetration. Multiple insert options allow bowhunters to tailor every VAP SS build to their liking, so you can easily take this middleweight and get it ready for a heavyweight prize fight.

**\$269.99 per 12, bare shafts (Elite) | [victoryarchery.com](http://victoryarchery.com)**







# PR DATOR™ AIR

THE MOST ACCURATE SINGLE SPINE ARROW ON THE MARKET



## SHOOT BETTER.

- 360 DEGREE SPINE CONSISTENCY
- 37 GRAIN SS INSERT
- .003" MAX STRAIGHTNESS VARIANCE
- WEIGHT SORTED TO +/- 1.0 GRAINS

| SIZE | GPI | LENGTH | SPINE | ID/NOCK | OD    | INSERT |
|------|-----|--------|-------|---------|-------|--------|
| .500 | 6.2 | 32"    | .502" | .244"   | .283" | SS #0  |
| .400 | 7.2 | 32"    | .399" | .244"   | .288" | SS #1  |
| .350 | 8.1 | 32"    | .343" | .244"   | .293" | SS #1  |
| .300 | 8.6 | 32"    | .305" | .244"   | .296" | SS #1  |

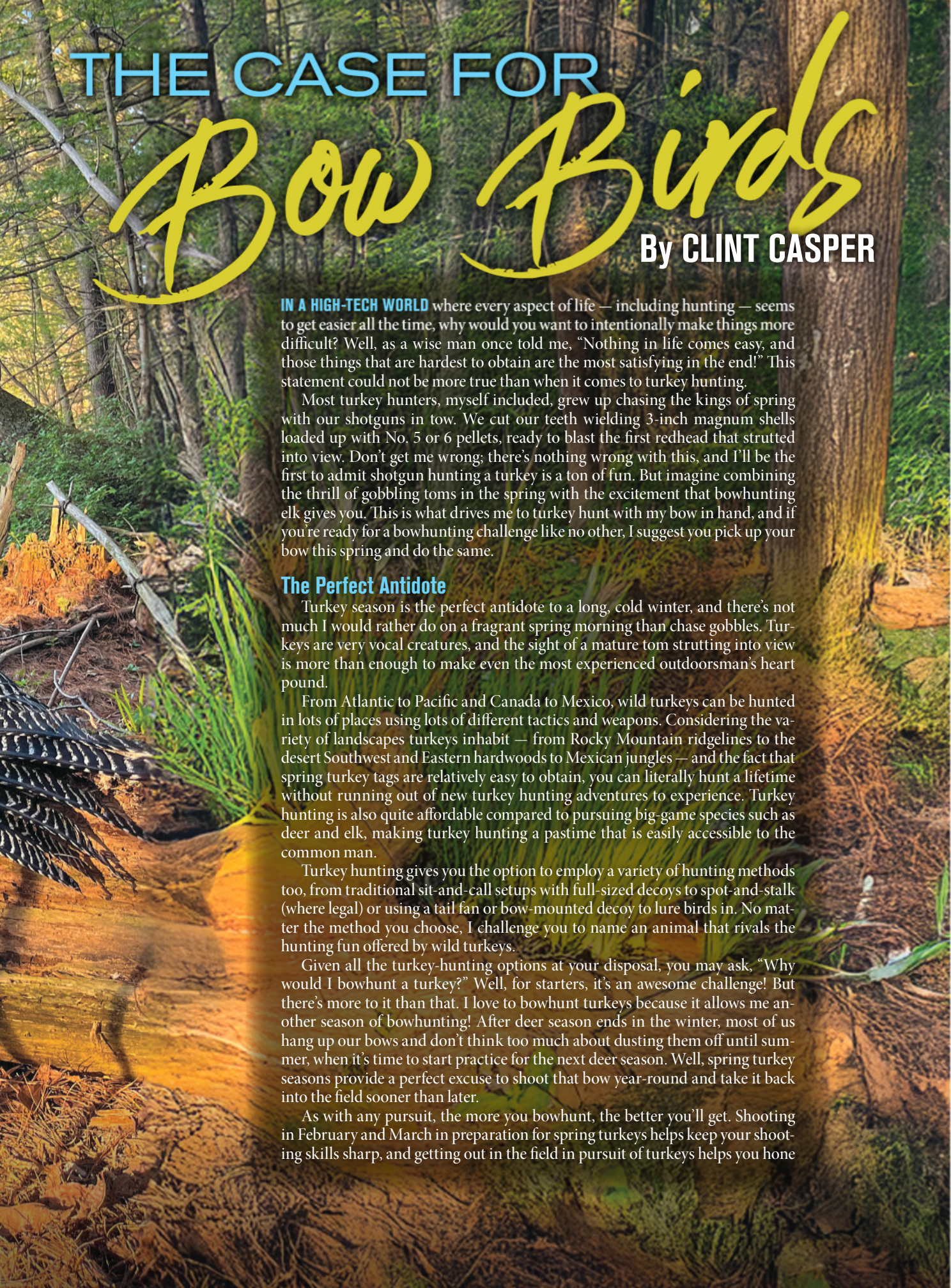




Although the use of a ground blind and decoys isn't my preferred strategy for bowhunting turkeys, it proved effective on my 2024 Ohio longbeard. Bowhunting turkeys allows for the use of multiple strategies over the course of the season, which keeps the chase interesting and fun.

**CHASING SPRING TURKEYS WITH STICK AND STRING IS A CHALLENGE WORTH TACKLING**





# THE CASE FOR

# Bow Birds

By CLINT CASPER

**IN A HIGH-TECH WORLD** where every aspect of life — including hunting — seems to get easier all the time, why would you want to intentionally make things more difficult? Well, as a wise man once told me, “Nothing in life comes easy, and those things that are hardest to obtain are the most satisfying in the end!” This statement could not be more true than when it comes to turkey hunting.

Most turkey hunters, myself included, grew up chasing the kings of spring with our shotguns in tow. We cut our teeth wielding 3-inch magnum shells loaded up with No. 5 or 6 pellets, ready to blast the first redhead that strutted into view. Don't get me wrong; there's nothing wrong with this, and I'll be the first to admit shotgun hunting a turkey is a ton of fun. But imagine combining the thrill of gobbling toms in the spring with the excitement that bowhunting elk gives you. This is what drives me to turkey hunt with my bow in hand, and if you're ready for a bowhunting challenge like no other, I suggest you pick up your bow this spring and do the same.

## The Perfect Antidote

Turkey season is the perfect antidote to a long, cold winter, and there's not much I would rather do on a fragrant spring morning than chase gobbles. Turkeys are very vocal creatures, and the sight of a mature tom strutting into view is more than enough to make even the most experienced outdoorsman's heart pound.

From Atlantic to Pacific and Canada to Mexico, wild turkeys can be hunted in lots of places using lots of different tactics and weapons. Considering the variety of landscapes turkeys inhabit — from Rocky Mountain ridgelines to the desert Southwest and Eastern hardwoods to Mexican jungles — and the fact that spring turkey tags are relatively easy to obtain, you can literally hunt a lifetime without running out of new turkey hunting adventures to experience. Turkey hunting is also quite affordable compared to pursuing big-game species such as deer and elk, making turkey hunting a pastime that is easily accessible to the common man.

Turkey hunting gives you the option to employ a variety of hunting methods too, from traditional sit-and-call setups with full-sized decoys to spot-and-stalk (where legal) or using a tail fan or bow-mounted decoy to lure birds in. No matter the method you choose, I challenge you to name an animal that rivals the hunting fun offered by wild turkeys.

Given all the turkey-hunting options at your disposal, you may ask, “Why would I bowhunt a turkey?” Well, for starters, it's an awesome challenge! But there's more to it than that. I love to bowhunt turkeys because it allows me another season of bowhunting! After deer season ends in the winter, most of us hang up our bows and don't think too much about dusting them off until summer, when it's time to start practice for the next deer season. Well, spring turkey seasons provide a perfect excuse to shoot that bow year-round and take it back into the field sooner than later.

As with any pursuit, the more you bowhunt, the better you'll get. Shooting in February and March in preparation for spring turkeys helps keep your shooting skills sharp, and getting out in the field in pursuit of turkeys helps you hone



## THE CASE FOR BOW BIRDS

hunting skills that will also come in handy during the fall. For example, turkeys have notoriously good eyesight and can easily spot even the slightest movement. Move even slightly as a bird approaches and, BOOM, it's gone! Cross a ridge on the skyline while turkeys are feeding in a nearby field and, POOF, they'll catch you up there and run in the opposite direction! Bowhunting turkeys will teach you that every move you make is critical and may carry serious consequences. As I said earlier, practice makes perfect, and there's no shortcut to learning when to make your move or draw your bow when hunting turkeys. You just have to get out there and learn via good, old-fashioned trial and error.

Turkeys also have an extremely keen sense of hearing that allows them to detect danger and use a variety of vocalizations to communicate with other members of the flock. A turkey can pinpoint the location of a sound, making bowhunting them rather challenging. In order to get into bow range, a bowhunter must make all the right moves, sounds and maneuvers.

Learning what calls to make and when to make them forces us to be fully immersed in the moments we are bowhunting these amazing animals.

I'll be the first to tell you bowhunting turkeys will result in a lot more failure than success, but every one of those failures is a learning experience that will make you a better bowhunter! I owe a lot of my western bowhunting success on elk, mule deer and antelope to skills I learned while bowhunting Eastern turkeys "run-and-gun" style back home in Ohio. I have turkeys in my backyard and can hunt them and practice my skills all spring. So, when my 10-day elk hunt arrives, I've already made many stalks and honed my skills during the spring in preparation for fall.

## Fill Your Bag of Tricks

When it comes to tactics for bowhunting turkeys, a mixed bag of tricks is your friend. The use of a strategically placed ground blind, often in the corner of an agricultural field or food plot with some decoys placed within easy shooting range, is probably the most popular and proven technique for consis-

Spring turkey season gives you a reason to shoot your bow and tinker with your setup. This is a great head start for fall big-game hunts.



Knowing when to call, and which sounds to make, is a critical component to spring turkey hunting. Listening carefully to the sounds real turkeys make and then doing your best to imitate it often produces the best results.



Trail cameras are a great tool for spring turkey hunting, helping to pattern birds and determine your most effective blind locations.



tent success. However, I personally find the long hours of waiting often required with this tactic to be taxing on my patience. That's why I typically prefer ditching the blind and chasing the flocks with a mobile approach. A run-and-gun style works especially well when a tom is henned up and won't come close enough to your setup. By taking the action to him, you can often slip in close enough for an ambush, or call him in from a short distance in order to get your shot.

Unlike deer season, when an opportunity at a great buck may only come once if at all, with turkeys, the opportunity to arrow a bird can happen once every few days or five times in the same morning! Most turkey flocks will include multiple male birds, and this gives you the opportunity to hunt many different birds over the course of a season. This makes for a far more relaxed endeavor than chasing a single, mature buck in the fall. After all, if you mess up an opportunity on a gobbler that catches you approaching or drawing your bow, you can often regroup and get back on that same bird or another on the same morning. So, have fun, try new things and understand that failures and messing up are part of the equation here, and

that the potential to rewrite the story in your favor could happen 5 minutes later.

Without a doubt, bowhunting turkeys will make you a better bowhunter and provide you with more opportunities to enjoy the outdoors. Good luck this spring! **BH**

*Veteran bowhunter Clint Casper has taken dozens of longbeards in multiple states across the Midwest. A regular **Bowhunter** contributor, he lives in Ohio with his two sons, Easton and Keaton.*

**AUTHOR'S NOTES:** My preferred equipment for the 2024 turkey season included a Mathews Lift 29 bow outfitted with a QAD Integrate MX2 arrow rest and Easton 4MM Axis Long Range arrows tipped with SEVR Titanium 2.0 broadheads. I used a Primos Double Bull 360 ground blind, Avian X Jake and Hen decoys and slate and mouth calls from Woodhaven. I also relied on Maven optics to glass birds during my hunts and Moultrie Edge Pro cellular cameras to monitor my hunting areas remotely.



Decoying is an effective tactic for bowhunting spring turkeys, helping attract and occupy birds while you draw and shoot.



Left: Knowing when and how to move while bowhunting turkeys is critical. Despite their keen eyesight, I love to stay mobile when chasing spring gobblers and have taken many longbeards over the years (above) by carefully slipping in close and then patiently waiting for the right moment to take my shot.



# BEARS & BOWS

## *A Great Combination*

**LOVERBOY STRUTTED** into the wilderness bait site in all his grandeur, patiently following a sow. Late June at the Arctic Circle is prime rut for black bears. After several days of observation from the shooting platform, I knew Loverboy was a boar — and the best bear I'd seen on my hunt. He wasn't a monster, but he was a very mature bear.

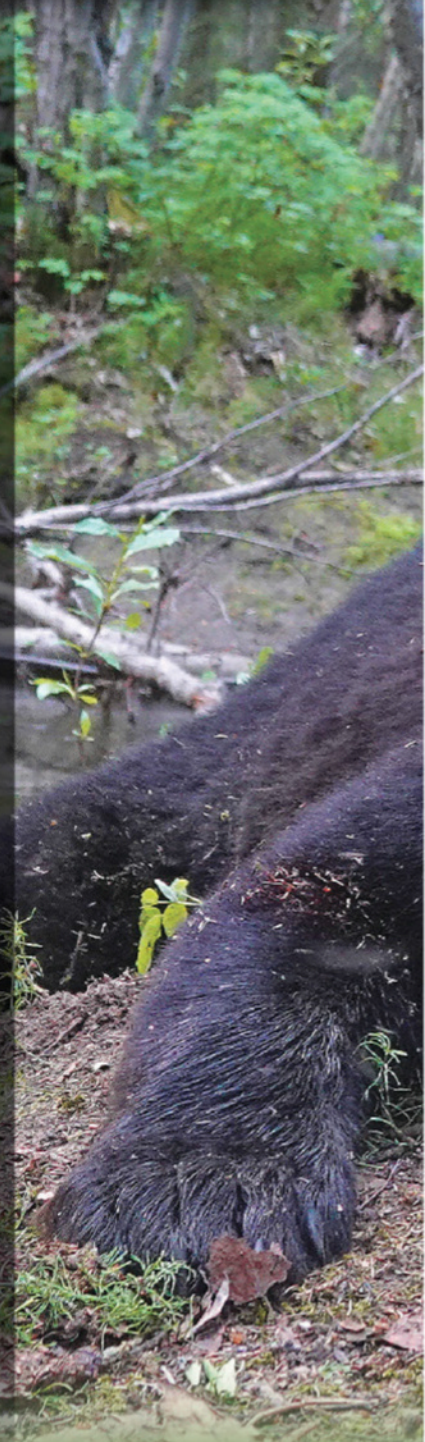
My longbow, an arrow nocked and ready, rested in my bow hand as my eyes tracked the boar's movement. He'd slipped past me before, but this time — 4:20 a.m. on the fourth day of a five-day hunt — I did not intend for him to be so lucky again. He crossed behind two trees, nudging the sow, and turned broadside. I nodded to Carl, my guide, and he hit the record button on my video camera. My intention as a true instinctive shooter is to set in a solid anchor, hesitate and pull through a perfect release. My brain said "now" when I locked my eyes on a rough tuft of hair just behind the bear's front leg. I vaguely remember scraping the corner of my mouth, and the white-fletched arrow was sailing on its way.

### **PURSuing PREDATORS**

Bears and bows are a great combination. Bears are a serious predator, and bow-hunting them comes with an element of danger; those claws and teeth aren't for show. I've hunted and taken polar bear, brown bear and grizzly bear on spot-and-stalk hunts. They are in a class of their own, each with their own special challenges for a bowhunter. The black bear doesn't get quite as much respect as the other bears, but it is no slouch. The black bear actually attacks and kills more people than the other three North American bear species combined. The reason should be somewhat obvious, as black bears are abundant and roam freely from Maine westerly to Washington state, south into Arizona, and North past the Arctic Circle.

Black bears are the most serious predator on our continent; one study in Montana indicated they killed 90 percent of the elk calves in a few regions. They don't just stop at killing babies. Several years ago in Eagle County, Colorado, I interrupted an elk herd moving through some "dark" timber. We call it dark timber because it's exactly that, dark brown soil with a canopy of spruce trees so thick it is dimly lit in daytime hours. The elk steadily moved through the forest on a single trail as I slowly moved up the steep slope to fill my elk tag. Just when I spotted a set of antlers that held promise, a huge commotion erupted as an oversized black bear charged in from above me and took a dive at a cow elk, 25 yards to my right. The spruce forest erupted with pounding hooves and broken limbs as 20-plus elk exploded in all directions. Based on that encounter, I believe black bears do hunt and harvest mature big-game animals. As with any predator that has conflict with man and domestic stock, they must be managed. My hunting buddies of Greek descent have many stories of bears slaughtering sheep. Hunting is effective, although with states having restrictions on using dogs, baiting and spring hunts, bears are becoming more of a problem across the West.

Black bears haven't missed the attention of bowhunters. Only whitetail deer and elk account for more entries in the Pope and Young Club's Record Book of North American Big Game than black bear entries. A huge reason for the popularity is access, and the second might be that twist of danger. I've never carried a pistol in the November rut to protect myself from whitetail deer, but I sometimes do in the Colorado Rockies, when I possess a bear tag.





# BOWS:

A FAR-NORTH ADVENTURE FOR  
RUTTING ALASKA BRUINS



This mature boar, an individual I nicknamed "Loveboy" for his amorous ways, was the largest specimen I saw during my hunt.

By **NATHAN L. ANDERSON**



## BEARS & BOWS: A GREAT COMBINATION

Spring bears are eating machines. After a long winter hibernation, they are on a rampage to fatten up. That is probably why bear baiting is so effective. My first bear hunt was over bait in Saskatchewan, Canada. I eventually went on spot-and-stalk hunts in Colorado, Alaska and British Columbia. I liked the spot-and-stalk hunts best. I've also killed bears at water holes in September, while in a treestand. I guess that could be considered a distant cousin of baiting, and it's a lot of fun. Whether a traditional bait site, water or sitting over an animal carcass, the benefit for the elevated bowhunter is the potential for a bear unaware of the hunter's presence to present that perfect quartering-away shot. The chest cavity narrows towards its brisket, with that evil shoulder blade looming above and forward of the lungs. When excited at close range, and shooting out of a treestand, the shoulder shot is all too common. The quartering-away shot allows a much bigger window for success.

I've heard very strong statements from youthful bowhunters who have harvested numerous deer that hunting bears would be no big deal. Many of them returned from their first hunt with a lot more respect for what they considered the lowly black bear. Many have had stories of blown chip shots and encounters with bears that raised their heart rate.

Let's not forget the beauty of a bear rug in front of the hearth or on the wall above the couch in the den. My young nieces would first ooh and ah at the size, touch the fur and then feel the teeth. I've been asked many times, "So, you shot that with a longbow?" Bear hunters do get some added respect.



This old trapper's cabin just a few miles south of the Arctic Circle served as bear camp for my 2023 Alaska hunt. The cabin sits up on wooden stilts to prevent marauding bears from gaining entry!

## NORTH TO ADVENTURE!

At the 2023 Pope and Young banquet in Reno, Nev., I was nosing around for a spring adventure. The pandemic had really put a dent in my pipeline of hunts, planned well in advance. It was a little late, but a guy has to try. A very tempting Alberta black bear hunt with two tags caught my interest. As stated earlier, I've rarely hunted baited black bears, but it sounded like an adventure, and I was in need of an escape. Not two hours later, an Alaskan outfitter I've hunted with several times — Stan Parkerson of Denali Hunts in Fairbanks — told me he had one opening for a baited black bear and grizzly hunt a couple miles south of the Arctic Circle. To make it more of an adventure, it involved a long flight in a Super Cub with no known competing hunting operations. I was hearing buzzwords that lit my hunting fire — wilderness, Super Cub, Arctic Circle and grizzly. It was probably entrapment, and I got snared!

On the flight to camp, Stan told me no grizzlies had showed up yet, but the black bears were coming in. We landed on a remote strip a mile from a trapper's cabin. My guide Carl got me situated in the cabin. The original owner, now deceased, used to winter here. It's a tad odd looking, as it's built on top of 4-foot-high vertical logs around 30 inches in circumference. I asked, "What's up with the stilts?"

"Bears," Carl replied. Bears tend to break down doors and windows and destroy cabins. The elevated cabin had worked over years, outside the occasional attempt to claw through the floor. The 12x18-foot cabin had two single beds, a small dining table and a propane cook stove, everything needed for our adventure.



Shooting in camp every day helps a bowhunter stay loose and maintain confidence throughout the hunt.



The Super Cub is the workhorse of the Alaska bush, making remote bowhunting adventures possible throughout the Last Frontier.





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## BEARS & BOWS: A GREAT COMBINATION



This mature sow climbed a tree adjacent to our stand, seeking refuge from a boar that was harassing her on the ground.



The bridge to the camp outhouse proved an excellent place to hang my bear hide and meat after the harvest.

No lighting system was needed in mid-June, as it never gets dark so far north. The outfitter said the best time to hunt was 10 p.m.-5 a.m. I pictured myself falling sound asleep after midnight my first time on stand, but surprisingly, I made it to 5 a.m. without dozing off, as the parade of bears kept the adrenaline flowing.

Lots of bears is great; the hard part is sorting out the boars. It's illegal to shoot sows accompanied by cubs, and most outfitters want hunters to shoot boars. Every black bear article mentions how to tell the boys from the girls. Just like our current society, it's hard to tell sometimes. Small-bodied bears with big ears and pointy noses are obviously sows or immature males. If a bowhunter sees a bear that looks like a black sofa and has a head like a giant melon, it's a shooter. The dilemma is that most bears are in between these two extremes. The rut helps, as an aggressive, mature boar will harass every sow in sight. However, when only one bear is in front of you, it's not so obvious, since you have nothing to compare it with. It's never easy, and even after more than 30 years of hunting black bears, I'm no expert.

One bear was easy to identify, as he apparently was courting every girl in town. He'd calmly walk up to a sow, sniff around and give her a nudge. The sow would respond with a playful bite or soft tap of her paw. Some would roll on their side and wrestle with him a bit. I immediately called him Loverboy. He had little discretion; if it had hair, Loverboy was interested! He was one of only two bears I saw over the course of several days that was for sure a boy. Even though his belly was fairly flat, he was long (at least 1.5 feet longer than most bears I'd observed) and lean, as his desire for love was trumping his desire for food. His skull looked OK, but not overwhelming. We saw Loverboy for three days; he was fun to watch, but always on the move, and rarely presented a good shooting angle.

I had a similar problem with a gorgeous cinnamon bear. Carl was pretty sure it was a girl. I was leaning toward it being a male, but it definitely did not have a huge skull. The hide was a real trophy, but it never presented the classic, quartering-away shot.

On day four, I decided Loverboy was on the hit list, as nothing bigger had made an appearance. We got settled on the tree platform as usual around 10:30 p.m. It was a pleasant evening, with temperatures in the 40s. I thought my bear had wandered off, but at 4:18 a.m., I looked to my right and Loverboy was on his way in with a date.

Six hours of waiting and the early hour had me a bit fatigued, but I snapped back to action mode quickly. The arrow fletched with white feathers was easy to see on the black hide as it struck tight behind the front leg of the boar. Loverboy made it less than 18 yards and luckily collapsed short of the stream. I was suddenly wide awake and ready for all the work involved in transporting and skinning the bear.

On the fifth and last day of the hunt, I left the trapper's cabin with a grizzly tag in my pocket, which could also be used for a second black bear. On the trail to the treestand, I remembered I had forgotten to strap on my pistol. I thought to myself, *My guide has one; it's no big deal*. Two hours after arrival late in the evening, a twin to Loverboy showed up; an obvious boar and very aggressive. He strutted in and stared and smelled but didn't eat. Obviously, he was experiencing this scenario for the first time. Likely he'd never seen a human. I decided to pass, as he wasn't substantially bigger than my bear, and I had some more time to see what else showed up.

An hour into the bear laying claim to the spot and chasing off all newcomers, he noticed us on the tree platform. We were maybe 8 feet up, and when he leaned on the ladder, his head was about 12 inches below our feet. My lack of personal protection became dreadfully obvious. Some strong words and pepper spray only made the boar back up 8 yards. "I think we might have trouble leaving here tonight," Carl said. Well, that was an understatement.

After much commotion and shouting, the aggressive bear backed off about 30 yards. I had the pepper spray and Carl had a .44 Mag. We moved quickly as the bear circled around and followed us to the ATVs. I looked over my shoulder several times as we whisked away. What an adventure! **BH**

*Nathan Andersohn, a businessman and real estate attorney from Broomfield, Colo., is a dedicated traditional archer who has taken all 29 species of North American big game with a longbow.*

**AUTHOR'S NOTES:** On this hunt, I shot a 51-pound ACS longbow, Carbon Express 250 Heritage arrows and Razorcap broadheads. I wore KUIU apparel and LaCrosse boots. For information on booking your own black bear hunt in the far north, visit [denalihunts.com](http://denalihunts.com) or call Outfitter Stan Parkerson at 907-455-6056.



# BOWHUNTER TV



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## THE FUTURE LOOKS ROSY!

► Bowhunter TV's 2025 season could not have had a better start as Spot Hogg President Josh Johnson hosted Bowhunter Editor-at-Large Curt Wells on an amazing elk hunt in Oregon and bagged in this massive Roosevelt bull.

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Premieres

**WEDNESDAYS**

**9:30 PM** US/EASTERN

**MONDAYS**

**4:30 PM ET**

**TUESDAYS**

**1:00 PM ET**

**WEDNESDAYS**

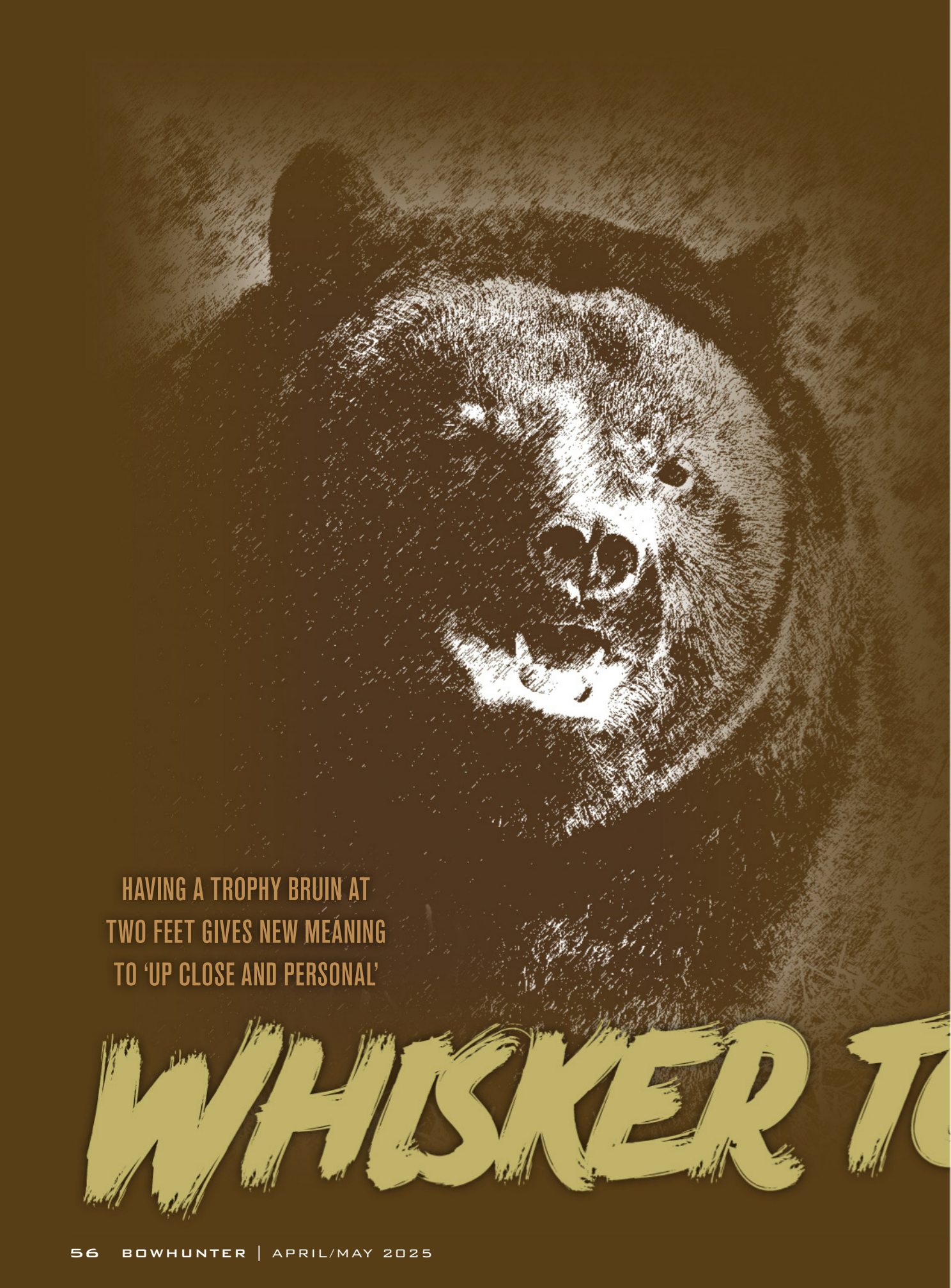
**12:30 AM ET**  
**5:30 AM ET**

**SUNDAYS**

**3:00 PM ET**







HAVING A TROPHY BRUIN AT  
TWO FEET GIVES NEW MEANING  
TO 'UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL'

# WHISKER TO



**T**HE GENTLE LAPPING of waves on the rocky shoreline 30 yards away was relaxing, as were the haunting cries of nesting loons, reaching my ears on the subtle breeze from all corners of the big lake. Throw in the warm, Manitoba sunshine filtering through the pines, coupled with several sleepless nights from anticipation and two days of travel to reach this remote corner of the province, and it was difficult to stay focused!

I was sitting on a stool 25 feet from this remote bait site along the north shore of Mahekun Lake, a large body of water 180 miles northwest of Thompson, Manitoba. Reached only by float plane, this lake embodies true wilderness and is a highly sought after destination for walleyes, northern pike, moose, and the giant black bears that drew me to this outpost.

Early on, entertainment was provided by a multitude of pine squirrels, whiskey jacks, ravens, and a curious pine marten that visited my ambush. But at exactly 7:30 p.m., I turned slowly to look over my left shoulder and was surprised to see a big bear inside 40 yards and closing! Even after 34 spring seasons bowhunting bears all across Canada, it always amazes me how such a big, powerful animal can move in complete silence, like a wisp of black smoke oozing through the timber.

As the axiom goes, “The big ones always look big,” and this bruin left no doubt he was a shooter: ears stretched out nearly to the sides of his blocky head and he had a heavily creased forehead and multiple scars across his nose and face — the marks of a true warrior. His path would bring him past me at a distance of maybe 10 feet, but I intended to let him walk by and reach the bait barrel before I made any move. A black bear does not have the best eyesight in the world, especially if a hunter is fully camouflaged and remains totally still, but they are always alert and aware of their surroundings. I wasn’t sure I would go unnoticed at point-blank range. I didn’t!

At 10 feet, just after clearing the small pines I was using for background cover, the brute stopped cold and his beady, little eyes bored a hole in my camo form. Daring not to even breathe, I was frozen like a statue as the big bear slowly backed up and began circling my ambush. I didn’t want to turn my head for fear he’d catch the movement and spook. So, I followed his trail by the soft footfalls reaching my ears, but when the pines behind me began to move. I eased around just enough to see his scarred, wet nose poke through and start sniffing my elbow. Too close! My heart began a jack-hammer pounding that seemed to echo off the surrounding timber; definitely more cardio than a 61-year-old heart should be subjected to! I’ve had my share of close encounters over the course of my bear-hunting career, but nothing like this, and just when I thought my nervous system was about to implode, the record-class bear decided to ratchet things up a notch.

## WORTH THE WAIT

I was bowhunting with Russell Bettschen, owner of Lynn Lake Fly-In Outpost Camps. Russ and his wife Lori have welcomed hunters and fishermen to northern Manitoba for decades, and their remote camps are a bucket-list destination for sportsmen and women looking for stringers full of walleyes and giant pike or trophy moose and black bears. This trip had actually been scheduled for three years earlier, but when Covid hit and the border closed, everything was put on hold. Waiting patiently for things to return to normal is not an easy thing to do, especially when a trip of this magnitude gets delayed, but everything finally fell into place, and I was headed north from my home in Minnesota in mid-June of 2023.

A 14-hour drive and an overnight in Thompson did little to ease my excitement, and finally I was sitting at the float plane base, Wings Over Kississing, on the northeast edge of town. The flight in the de Havilland Otter was a brief one with a stiff tailwind, and in little more than an hour I was shaking hands with Russ and guide Joe Fleury on the dock at the lodge. To say this remote location offered all the comforts of home would be an understatement, as the island-based lodge had generator power, hot showers and even WiFi so hunters and fishermen could reach out to loved ones; remote wilderness, yes, Spartan camp, no! Beds were comfortable, food was delicious and plentiful, the fishing was incredible and the views from the lodge spectacular. But I was here to arrow a giant bear with my longbow, and arrow I did!

## EPIC ACTION

Stepping back a couple feet, the brute began circling to the east. I assumed he had satisfied his curiosity and would now proceed to the bait and offer a shot; not so fast! As he passed my hide, he stopped and looked at me again from point-blank range, but this time, instead of backing up, he decided an even closer look was in order. I had a small, dead pine tree laying diagonally beside me, and as he reached the base of the tree, he stepped over with one front foot, then his second front foot, then one back foot, and finally his second back foot, and was now literally IN the blind with me! I’m not sure I was even breathing at this point, but my heart was definitely working overtime! I could have reached forward

# DO WHISKER

By **JOE BLAKE**

BEAR IMAGE: VIC SCHENDEL



## WHISKER TO WHISKER

and put my hand atop his pumpkin of a head, but in truth I had no clue what to do. I didn't want to spook him so badly that he left and never returned, nor did I want to provoke an attack at such close range. After a brief stare down, I moved my right foot ever so slightly, making an almost imperceptible rustling sound in the caribou moss below me. At such close range, it must have been deafening, because the bear spun around and ran head-long into a nearby pine! Eventually, he retreated to the lake shore, where he alternately lay down, sat up, drank and tested the air, but he finally made his way to the bait site 8 yards away.

After such a heart-pounding encounter, the shot was fairly anticlimactic: my heart rate and breathing had returned to

a manageable level, so I needed only to wait for the boar to present a perfect shot: for quite some time, he wouldn't stop moving, pushing and pulling logs from in and around the bait barrel, and then he would alternately lay down or sit on his haunches like a dog, neither of which offers a great shooting angle. So, I sat patiently with tension on the string of my 52-pound Prairie Panther longbow. At last, the big bear rose, turned slightly and looked up the hill to the north, and I quickly drew the heavy, footed arrow to my cheek and sent the shaft on its way. As the arrow struck the spot I was looking at, the bear let out a loud woof and ran up the hill, stopped briefly, and then slowly walked off to where he had come two hours earlier. The woods grew silent, and I was immediately struck with an intense feeling of exhaustion.

Eventually, the sound of Joe's boat motor reached my ears,



Although bear camp (above) is located off the grid in a remote wilderness area, Lynn Lake Fly-In Outpost Camps provides all the comforts of home, including electricity, hot showers and WiFi. Bait sites are scattered around the shoreline of lake and accessed via boat. The lake also provides excellent fishing opportunities, as evidenced by this big pike (above right)!



### BOOK YOUR EPIC BEAR HUNT

If you're looking for an epic adventure of your own, I certainly recommend Lynn Lake Fly-In Outposts. Owners Russ and Lori Bettchen have catered to hunters and fishermen in northern Manitoba for decades and offer unmatched wilderness hunting and fishing adventures from their lodge on Mahekun Lake or from a number of even more remote outpost camps. Check out all they have to offer at [bearhunt.net](http://bearhunt.net).

Another great resource for any outdoor adventure in this awesome province is Travel Manitoba. I have worked closely with these dedicated individuals for many years, and they have been instrumental in making sure every trip goes smoothly. Reach out via [travelmanitoba.com](http://travelmanitoba.com) and let them help you plan your next excursion.





I took this fine Manitoba black bear from the ground with my longbow at the conclusion of a hair-raising hunt that had the bear within 10 feet of me five times! Inset: A trail camera at my bait site captured the action and showed just how close my natural blind was from the barrel.



and he and fellow bear hunter Dave Blanchard from Minnesota listened, wide-eyed, as I retold my story and showed where the bear had been standing. With darkness approaching, the decision was made to take up the bear's trail in the morning, and the next day I was finally able to lay my hands on this exceptional trophy.

I detest the word epic, because it is overused to describe outdoor adventures. That said, I can think of no other adjective to describe the excitement of this adventure. Having a trophy boar inside 10 feet on five separate occasions, and inside 5 feet twice, certainly qualifies! We estimated my bear at weighing more than 300 pounds, with a skull that measured more than 19 inches. Although I don't care to enter animals in any sort of record book, this bruin will forever be my best bear.

So, the question is, how close is too close? I'd say whisker to whisker is definitely too close! Epic indeed. **BH**

*Joe Blake is a regular **Bowhunter** contributor and dedicated traditional archer and bowyer from Minnesota.*

**AUTHOR'S NOTES:** Regardless of what game I'm after, I carry one of my own Prairie Longbows that I craft in my shop in Minnesota. I also rely on a Thunderhorn Lynx quiver made by Duane Jessop of Montana; heavy, footed, Douglas fir arrows handcrafted by Steven Burns of Oregon; and 190-grain, 3-blade VPA broadheads. Specific to bear hunting, since the bugs in remote Canada are legendary, I always carry a Thermacell to repel mosquitoes.





## TECHNICAL BOW TEST

JON E. SILKS | GEAR TESTING EDITOR

### BOWTECH PROVEN 34

A VERSATILE, FEATURE-RICH PERFORMER

**W**ITH THE ALL-NEW Proven 34, Bowtech combines a variety of signature features and technologies to create a bow that can truly do it all; competition-level shooting stability meets bowhunting performance meets the DIY lovers dream rig!

With a 34-inch axle-to-axle length and adjustable GripLock grip, the target side of this bow shows its face, while the FlipDisc cam module delivers notably different shooting experiences and performance markers between the available Comfort and Performance settings. DIY enthusiasts will be thrilled by the ability to tune and time via Bowtech's DeadLock and TimeLock features that require no bow press to adjust. And past-parallel limbs and a series of shock-, vibration- and noise-reducing accessories tame the shot. Let's dive in and take a closer look.

#### Pushing the Envelope

Bowtech took last year's CenterMass Technology a step further with the all-new CenterMass Sight System that shifts the sight-mounting location to the sight window's inside surface. As the sight window protrudes to one side, allowing for arrow clearance and sight-picture centering, it makes sense that placing the sight mount to the inside of that structure brings the mass weight of the sight closer to center of the bow. This enhances balance and stability, which, of course, is the focus and goal of CenterMass Technology. The shallow mounting channel requires a specific sight bar for attachment. Standard mounting holes are also included. Bowtech offers CenterMass sights, quivers and stabilizers to compliment the design. Additionally, the Proven features Bowtech's Center Pivot design

#### THE SPECS

**Manufacturer:** Bowtech Archery, 888-689-1289; bowtecharchery.com

**Model:** Proven 34

**Riser:** CenterMass, Center Pivot, machined aluminum

**Grip:** GripLock, adjustable angle

**Limbs:** Wide-stance, carbon glass, split

**Draw Weights:** 50, 60 and 70 pounds peak

**Draw Lengths:** 25–30 inches and 27.5–33 inches, in half-inch increments, across two base cams; rotating module

**Cam System:** DeadLock Cam System

**Letoff:** Performance, 80 percent (advertised), 75.8 percent (as tested); Comfort, 85 percent (advertised), 82.2 percent (as tested)

**String:** X99, 61.6 inches (standard cam); 66.83 inches (long-draw cam)

**Cables (x2):** X99, 39.2 inches

**Brace Height:** 6.625 inches (standard cam); 7 inches (long-draw cam)

**Weight:** 4.7 pounds (advertised); 4.66 pounds (as tested)

**Finish:** Sandstone (pictured) and nine other camouflage and solid-color options

**Advertised IBO Speed:** 336 fps (standard cam); 331 fps (long-draw cam)

**MSRP:** \$1,449

**Comments:** Easily tuned, optimized and customized without a bow press — the ultimate DIY rig!



The Bowtech Proven 34 is packed with features that make it easy for shooters to customize their shooting experience without a bow press, from draw length to grip angle to a choice of Comfort or Performance draw cycles.



that places the limb's pivot point at the halfway point along its length, boosting stability and resulting in less hand shock and vibration by counteracting the forward movement of the bowstring and arrow.

Bowtech's molded GripLock grip system allows the shooter to easily adjust the angle of the grip heel with an Allen wrench to produce a customized wrist position anywhere between low and high. The polymer material provides a measure of warmth in cold conditions, while the rubber insert offers control. Bowtech's commitment to a tame and silent shot is found in their rubber-tipped string stop, cable-guard dampeners and riser-mounted Orbit Dampeners that employ a soft rubber core surrounded by a weighted outer ring. The FLX-Guard cable-containment system uses a carbon glass mini-limb and rollers that flex toward the centerline of the bow during the draw cycle to reduce torque and then springs away at the shot to allow complete vane clearance.

## Easy-Tuning Platform

The Proven 34's DeadLock Cam System is a DIY dream. Novice archers and pros alike can adjust, tune and time the bow with a simple set of Allen wrenches — no bow press needed. The DeadLock Cam System features an adjustment block on the end of the axle assembly of each cam. While tuning the bow, a lock screw is loosened and a drive/adjustment screw is turned to move the cam position left or right until perfect tune is achieved. Retightening the lock screw secures your adjustment.

Next, a rotating module moves the standard cam through its 25-30-inch draw-length range in half-inch increments, or the long-draw cam from 27.5-33-inches, also in half-inch increments.

The aptly named FlipDisc cam module produces two distinct experiences with its Comfort and Performance settings, with Comfort resulting in 85 percent letoff and a smooth draw and Performance coming in with 80 percent letoff and more aggressive draw cycle.

Finally, TimeLock is a technology that allows bow press-free adjustments to the cam's rotation when not correct for any number of reasons, such as string

# SPEED & ENERGY

| COMFORT MODE               |                       | PERFORMANCE MODE      |                            |                       |                      |
|----------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|
|                            | 375-GRAIN ARROW       | 425-GRAIN ARROW       |                            |                       |                      |
| <b>ARROW SPEED</b>         | <b>295.6 fps</b>      | <b>278.6 fps</b>      | <b>ARROW SPEED</b>         | <b>305 fps</b>        | <b>287.6 fps</b>     |
| <b>KINETIC ENERGY</b>      | <b>72.77 ft./lbs.</b> | <b>73.27 ft./lbs.</b> | <b>KINETIC ENERGY</b>      | <b>77.48 ft./lbs.</b> | <b>78.1 ft./lbs.</b> |
| <b>DYNAMIC EFFICIENCY</b>  | <b>83.99%</b>         | <b>84.55%</b>         | <b>DYNAMIC EFFICIENCY</b>  | <b>84.66%</b>         | <b>85.31%</b>        |
| <b>AVERAGE NOISE LEVEL</b> | <b>88.4 dBA</b>       | <b>87.5 dBA</b>       | <b>AVERAGE NOISE LEVEL</b> | <b>89.4 dBA</b>       | <b>88.5 dBA</b>      |

### DRAW-FORCE CURVE

### DRAW-FORCE CURVE

EDITOR'S NOTE: All of our Bow Tests are conducted using the same standardized procedures and professionally calibrated testing equipment. Bows are tested with a draw length of 29 inches and a draw weight of 65 pounds, unless otherwise noted.

stretch, string seating, etc. TimeLock is used to re-position cables between the tuning dots on the cams, with the proper position then locked down similar to DeadLock.

## Locked, Loaded & Aligned

Bowtech pre-loads the Proven 34's carbon glass limbs to reach a past parallel position at rest, which is a key to the success of Center Pivot Technology, resulting in less shock, vibration and noise at the shot. Ten-inch limbs are machined into their final form and matched into pairs based on deflection values. Their wide stance increases torsional stability and reduces cam lean.

The Dual Lock Pocket System is responsible to align the limbs to the riser at this critical interface. It is designed to lock all the bow's components together to produce a rigid platform for maximum consistency and accuracy. Pockets extend to reach the center of each limb, another vital component of Bowtech's Center Pivot Technology.

## At The Range

The Proven 34's relatively long span between the axles did not disappoint, providing one of the most stable shooting platforms we have tested in recent memory. The FlipDisc created two very different shooting experiences, with the Comfort side delivering on a super-smooth draw and the Performance side presenting a more aggressive draw and faster arrow speeds.

We walked a paper tear left and right with DeadLock and rotated the cam position with TimeLock to prove their effectiveness while also adjusting the grip's heel position to find just the right wrist position. Additionally, the grip's flat back provided a stable hold.

Both FlipDisc settings demonstrated a solid back wall at full draw, as well as a small jump and low-frequency vibration at the shot. The valley was more generous for the Comfort setting, allowing us to relax at full draw. **BH**



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## Your Elk Country Journey STARTS HERE!

Created specifically to capture the imagination of the aspirational elk hunter, this magazine is the source for those chasing dreams of hunting North America's ultimate big-game animal. Trusted experts like Will Primos, Fred Eichler and Craig Boddington deliver the blueprints as you begin your elk hunting journey.

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# New Blood Flow Breakthrough Helps Men Enjoy Strong, Long-Lasting Intimacy – At Any Age

*A new discovery that supports nitric oxide production and healthy blood flow gives men across the country new hope for a satisfying bedroom performance*

After age 40, it's common knowledge that performance begins to decline in many men. However, a new potency formula is showing that any healthy man can now enjoy strong, long-lasting, and frequent performance at any age.

This doctor-designed protocol, created by leading anti-aging expert Dr. Al Sears, is celebrating its highly effective 5th generation formula, which is already helping men support a healthy performance and libido.

When Dr. Sears released the first pill — Primal Max Black — it quickly became a trusted men's performance helper, promoting bedroom fun across America.

It worked by supporting healthy testosterone levels. However, Dr. Sears knows from almost 30 years in private practice that testosterone isn't the only performance challenge men face. That's why his dual strategy includes attention to blood flow because no amount of testosterone will replace the need for healthy blood flow for successful intimacy.

And this second formula became Primal Max Red.

## **SUPPORTING THE MECHANICS IS AS IMPORTANT AS SUPPORTING THE HORMONES**

While Primal Max Black helped maintain optimal testosterone, Primal Max Red tackles a lesser-known challenge.

Truth is, we ignore the importance of blood flow and circulation for supporting a man's sex life. Because without blood flow, nothing hap-

pens.

Luckily, a Nobel prize-winning scientist discovered a means to help support performance, strength, and confidence by supporting vital blood flow, which is essential for a satisfying performance.

Using this landmark Nobel Prize as its basis, Primal Max Red supports healthy blood flow by using a key ingredient to support nitric oxide production. Nitric oxide is the molecule that allows blood vessels to relax and expand, thereby increasing blood flow.

Al Sears MD, who has authored over 500 scientific papers and has appeared on more than 50 media outlets including ABC News, CNN, ESPN, and many more says, "Supporting optimal blood flow is an essential component of maintaining sexual health as men age. Then, once we optimized it and had a great deal of success, we set out to see if we could do even better."

Conventional nitric oxide supplements are limited to smaller doses of key ingredients because everything must fit into small capsules. But Dr. Sears followed the science and introduced a revolutionary new powder version of his Primal Max Red formula.

This new powder formulation enabled him to include bigger doses of the key nutrients, which matched the doses used in published clinical studies. Not only is the formula more effective because it uses proven doses, it also means you get a delicious drink instead of more and more pills.

## **HEALTHY BLOOD FLOW DELIVERS SATISFYING RESULTS**

Primal Max Red is the best



**IMMEDIATE GAME CHANGER FOR AMERICAN MEN:** Doctors are now recommending Primal Max Red for its ability to support the vital but overlooked need for healthy blood flow during intimacy.

way to maintain an active life. It works by supporting blood flow and the production of nitric oxide.

This critical support is the reason men across the country are enjoying a full and satisfying performance at any age. Because testosterone is not the only factor men need to consider.

Primal Max Red effectively promotes healthy blood flow that men can use to support intimacy in the bedroom. The unique and powerful blend of ingredients in Primal Max Red supports the kind of sexual health and performance men are looking for.

"There was a time when supporting healthy blood flow for men was impossible," Dr. Sears said. "But science and technology have come a long way in recent years. And now, with the creation of nitric oxide-supporting Primal Max Red, men can feel more confident and more in control while they enjoy intimacy at any age."

Now for men across America, it's much easier to support

peak performance as they get older.

## **HOW TO GET PRIMAL MAX RED ALONG WITH COMPLEMENTARY BOTTLES OF PRIMAL MAX BLACK**

To secure the new Primal Max Red formula, readers should contact the Primal Max Red Health Hotline at **1-800-278-1556** and use promo code **PMAXBH325** within 48 hours. And to cut down on the cost for customers, it can only be purchased directly from the company.

## **READERS ALSO GET AN EXTRA BONUS SUPPLY OF PRIMAL MAX BLACK**

Every order of Primal Max Red gets a matching supply of Dr. Sears' testosterone formula Primal Max Black for no additional charge.

All orders are backed by a 100% money-back guarantee. If any user is not satisfied, just send back the bottle(s) or any unused product within 90 days from the purchase date, and you'll get all your money back.





## THE QUEST

RANDY ULMER



This photo shows me (center) and two of my old, good hunting buddies — the late former Bowhunter Editor Dwight Schuh (left) and my nephew, Zach Nicholson.

### OLD, GOOD HUNTING BUDDIES: PART 1

“THERE WERE NO EMBRACES, BECAUSE WHERE THERE IS GREAT LOVE THERE IS OFTEN LITTLE DISPLAY OF IT.”

— Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, *Don Quixote*

**I**F I WERE ASKED to give one piece of advice to novice bowhunters and told my recommendations could not be about hunting techniques, equipment or shooting, I would counsel them to *choose their hunting buddies wisely*. The friends you hunt with can make or break any expedition, especially a long and difficult hunt.

Twenty-five years ago, on the night before the season opener of an Arizona elk hunt, I was sitting in the cab of my truck in the heart of the Kaibab National Forest. It was midnight, and I was waiting for a friend who had promised to meet me there at 8 p.m. This was long before the backcountry had cell service, so I couldn't call to determine what was going on. I was seething mad. My “friend” had let me down in striking fashion.

Sitting beside me in the darkness was one of my oldest and dearest friends, Jim Bowen. The friend Jim and I were waiting on had let me down many times before. This friend was a good elk hunter and guide and had committed to guide two out-of-state buddies of mine on their very first elk hunt.

All four of us had drawn a great unit on a very good moisture year. Our anticipation was running high. My buddies were paying my friend to guide them; he was not just doing them a favor. Being the selfish fellow I am when it comes to big elk, I desired to hunt for myself and wanted to help my out-of-state buddies only *after* I killed a bull.

Past experiences with this friend had given me pause, so I made him promise on several occasions to show up. I was concerned he would blow us off. My reputation was on the line, as I had recommended him to my out-of-state buddies. I made him *swear and pledge on his honor* to show up. He assured me, on multiple occasions, he would. He did not.

When it became thoroughly evident

my friend wasn't coming, I started the engine and nosed the old truck off the gravel road and onto a two-track that ran deeper into the woods.

Jim had witnessed my growing frustration throughout the evening. On the long and bumpy ride back to camp, he gave me some incredibly simple, yet profound advice. I took his words to heart then and have adhered to them ever since.

Jim said, “Randy, you do not need a lot of friends, you need a few *good* friends. You tend to have a very difficult time saying no to friends and allow them to use you. You need to be true to yourself and tighten up your circle. You need to fire some of your so-called friends.”

After some serious soul-searching, I concluded Jim was right. The character traits he mentioned had indeed caused me endless consternation, much to the detriment of my emotional well-being.

Theoretically, every friendship should have an equitable give-and-take. Many of my “friends” had no concept of reciprocity — they were always the takers. I decided to pare down my friend group; not in a mean and sudden way, but in a slowly-drifting-apart kind of way. I resolved to spend time with those friends who lifted me up and motivated me to become a better person. I was determined to shed the takers.

Ultimately, I guided both out-of-state buddies on that elk hunt. One killed a very large bull, the other missed a behemoth bull twice at 20 yards — on different days! On the other hand, I shot the wrong bull (much smaller than theirs, a sad story for another column).

Old friends are not necessarily good friends, and good friends are not necessarily old friends. However, the truest and most reliable friends and hunting partners are old friends who are also good friends. These folks have a track record — they have proven themselves again and again. In other words, they have performance history. You know with certainty you can trust and rely on them in difficult situations. More on this topic next time... **BH**



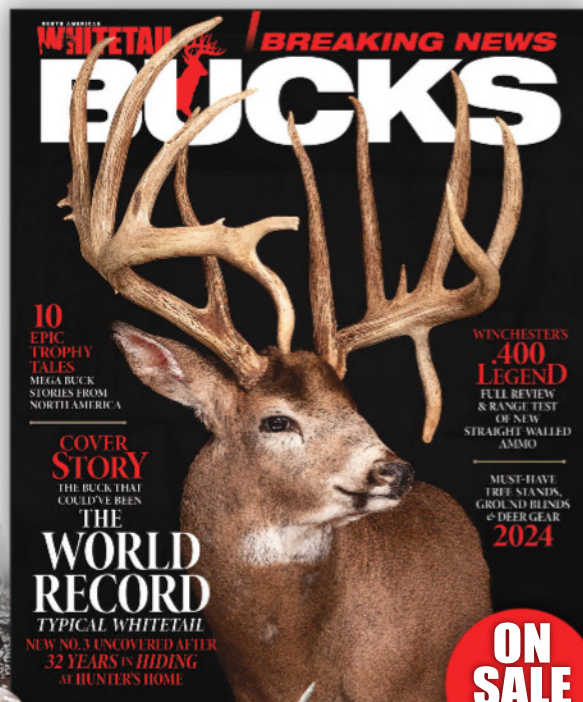
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