

THE **ELK-HUNTING** ISSUE

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September 2023

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By **CHRISTIAN BERG**

FIRST SHOT

ELK HUNTING'S GREATEST GIFT

THERE'S SOMETHING magical about bowhunting elk.



Editor Christian Berg and Outfitter Rich Schneider celebrate a successful hunt.

Maybe it's the spectacular places elk call home. Maybe it's the strenuous physical effort an elk hunt requires. Maybe it's the majesty of bugling bulls. Or maybe it's the incredible challenge of calling those bulls into bow range.

Regardless, I believe most archery elk hunters will agree there is nothing quite like chasing wapiti, and when you are fortunate enough to finally taste success, it is an accomplishment that forever bonds you to those with whom you share the moment.

I had such an experience in September 2019, when Gear Editor Jon Silks and I traveled to Montana to chase elk with Outfitter Rich Schneider of J&J Guide Service. The hunting was nothing short of electrifying, and by the end of the week, Jon and I had downed a pair of dream bulls. My 6x6 scored in the 330s, while Jon's behemoth scored an incredible 366 inches thanks to great tine length and off-the-charts mass.

Of course, we were expertly guided to both bulls by Rich, a true "elk whisperer," who has an uncanny ability for knowing a bull's next move before the bull does. Over the course of that week, I developed an immense respect for Rich the elk guide and an equally immense fondness for his larger-than-life presence, a term that can apply to both his physical stature and personality. Rich is a storyteller *par excellence*, and whether he is regaling you with tales from his glory days as a high school baseball player, his national Tiddlywinks championship (no kidding) or his grandchildren's latest accomplishments, hanging with Rich is a true experience. This is a man who can call in a 350-inch bull one minute and in the next engage in a heated debate over the greatest rock and roll song of all time.

Yep, Rich is a true Renaissance man!

Then there is Rich's wife, Sue, arguably the finest camp cook and most gracious host you'll ever meet. The nightly dinners at J&J compete neck and neck with the hunting as a highlight of every visit, with the company around the dinner table as delicious as the fare upon it. Simply put, J&J became a second home for Jon and me as Rich and Sue became part of the *Petersen's BOWHUNTING* family. We have returned many times to chase elk, pronghorns, mule deer and whitetails, but it's the time spent with Rich and Sue that means the most.

Recently, Rich was hit with a shocking stage 4 cancer diagnosis and the kind of prognosis that doesn't encourage long-term planning. Rich tells Sue he doesn't have a "bucket list," because he's lived his whole life doing what he loves. Still, I know the thought of not spending every day of the upcoming elk season in the field hurts him as much emotionally as the cancer does physically.

Thankfully, Rich has a great support system in Sue, his children and grandchildren, as well as a great medical team helping him do all he can to fight. Right now, Rich is feeling pretty good, and he and Sue hope they can spend at least part of this fall in hunting camp. Although it's unlikely Rich will ever return to full-time guiding, he may yet make a few bowhunters' elk dreams come true.

Of course, the future is very uncertain; an unsettling truth we would all do well to remember. And while I hold out hope Rich and I will once again stand on a ridge as the seductive sounds of a bugling bull reach our ears, I will always count his friendship as the greatest gift elk hunting has given me. **B**

PETERSEN'S BOWHUNTING

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By **CODY ROBBINS**

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Big velvet bucks are great for getting you excited for the season. Just don't assume the bucks you see in August or September will hang around for long.



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WHITE BEAR

FINDING A GROUP of bachelor bucks in the summer is one of my favorite things. The velvet-covered antlers look a little bigger than they really are, and the bucks seem to have no problem traveling in daylight. This makes summer scouting trips, or even checking trail cams, a lot of fun. The entertainment value big velvet bucks provide is exactly what a bowhunter needs to get fired up for fall.

I find myself bursting with confidence in late summer. I brag to my pals that I have the big one “cased!” And then, *BAM!*, two days before the season opens, he vanishes. Nine times out of 10, this happens right about the time he rubs his velvet off. I refer to it as “rubbing the stupid off.”

It seems this chapter of a buck's annual cycle is pivotal. In the summer, deer from a wide area will congregate around the very best feed. And during those summer months, bucks seem happy to hang with others of the same dominance. But once they rub their antlers clean, all bets are off. Things reset in their brains, sending them back to their home turf, where they have be-

come the boss in previous years. This is when a buck goes home to start establishing dominance for the upcoming breeding season.

If I have a buck on my Stealth Cam that really excites me in the summer months, I obviously set up for him and make sure I'm prepared ahead of time. But I don't stop there. I go back through old trail-cam pics from prior years and look for that same buck in the breeding season. If you can prove he has a past record of spending time in other areas, you need to set up in those spots as well. This puts you ahead of the game, instead of putting all your eggs in one basket and being left high and dry when he changes things up!

This is my advice for this fall. Don't get mesmerized by a “reliable” big, old buck in the early season and get complacent. Be proactive and try to get ahead of him in case he pulls the pin for new country when he and his bachelor buddies grow apart.

The part of whitetail hunting I enjoy most is the process. Learning each individual buck and his habits is a huge part of that. If you pay close attention to a certain buck, you will learn that when he disappears at one spot, he will most likely show up at another, just like he has done years previous.

This reminds me of a situation last fall. I set up my wife's best friend Liane in a blind for a certain buck we call Sky Scraper. I pumped this deer up to her and got her so excited to see him! Liane had no luck seeing Sky Scraper on her hunt that week, but my wife Kelsy, who was sitting a stand a mile from Liane, saw him twice! And we'd never gotten a picture of him there.

The cool part about big whitetail bucks is that so often we honestly don't know their next move. It's fun to think we can come up with foolproof plans, but at the end of the day, only that big buck knows what's coming. **B**

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By **JASON SNAVELY**

WHITETAILS

ACORN ATTRACTION PART 1: INCONSISTENT BUT LETHAL!

Find This Tree Fruit and You'll Usually Find Deer



Knowing when and where white oaks are dropping acorns in your hunting area is a big key to bowhunting success!

AS A GREEN, high-school aged bowhunter growing up in the hilly farm country of Pennsylvania, I quickly learned that oak trees, and the succulent whitetail candy that rained from them each fall, were a key component to successfully filling my tag. Acorns contain critical nutritive and attractive components that lead to more daytime deer observations. It eventually dawned on me that if I scouted out the better acorn-producing trees, I would find something else scattered all over the ground: deer droppings!

Fruit of the Forest

The tree *fruit* (not a nut) is known as an *acorn*, pronounced “akern” if you grew up in the South. Acorns, also known as “hard mast,” are relished by many woodland wildlife species. Depending on the conditions Mother Nature throws at us, acorn production can be inconsistent, unreliable and cyclical. While astute bowhunters are aware of this, they also recognize that it’s a mistake to ignore acorns altogether.

If acorns had nutrition labels, they would disclose that the main reason for the attraction relates to the fact that they boast a high fat content that equates to maximum digestible energy. White oak acorns, widely considered the most attractive to whitetails, offer 8 calories per acorn, which is very high! Highly palatable and digestible, acorns are also very high in total digestible nutrients, a measure of food quality. In fact, acorns have more digestible nutrients than native

browse and even corn and soybeans! Considering that, it’s no wonder even the ag fields can suddenly become devoid of deer when the oak trees are raining acorns onto the forest floor. That is exactly the kind of high-calorie diet deer need to prepare for the grueling breeding season and harsh winter weather that will follow.

Interestingly, some research has reported that red oak acorns have a higher fat content than white oak acorns. So, don’t write them off as a great location to hang a stand! It has been widely accepted that the acorns from the red oak species contain higher tannin contents, a phenolic compound that is bitter to the taste. However, it is important to keep in mind that there are many variables at play in nature.

While this all sounds great, just like anything in nature, relying on acorn production has its downfalls. It can take an oak tree roughly 30 years to produce acorns, depending on the species and stand quality. While all good deer managers and hunters understand the importance of offering diverse food sources, it’s hard not to think about the fact that your food plots can be productive in 30 days, not 30 years!

As a bowhunter, it’s important to capitalize on a good mast production year from oak trees. Research has shown that with white oaks, on average, you can expect to see two good mast crops out of a five-year period, whereas with the red oaks you can expect a good mast crop one year out of three or four years. Again, the key to maximizing habitat conditions for whitetails is to maintain diversity so your bowhunting success is never a function of a cyclical event that nature throws our way.

Red vs. White

As a bowhunter, you must learn to distinguish the two main groups of oak trees, red and white, and gain a little understanding about how they operate. You certainly don’t need to be a dendrologist (tree biologist), but there are a few basic principles that are easy to remember, and understanding them will help you become a better bowhunter.

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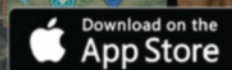
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WHITETAILS

There are many species of red and white oaks in the U.S., and the common species on the property you hunt will vary greatly with your geographic location. Start with basic tree identification by looking at the leaves. The leaves from white oak species have smooth, rounded lobes, while red oak leaves have pointed bristle tips.

Another distinguishing characteristic between red and white oak species is the time it takes each *individual* acorn to develop. This is a key distinction I find a lot of confusion around, even among fellow biologists. It takes two years for an *individual* (key distinction here) *red oak acorn* to develop but only one year for white oak acorns to develop.

While both red and white oaks flower in the spring, a red oak acorn forms and grows but *doesn't mature* until the following summer. Red oak acorns drop during their *second fall of development*. On the other hand, all the acorns produced on a white oak flower mature and fall in the same year. Interestingly, red oak species can have two acorn crops, at different maturity levels, *on the same tree at any one time*. There is a fallacy that red oaks only produce every other year. This is *NOT* accurate, and it implies that a red oak tree that drops its acorns in the fall of 2023 won't be productive again until the fall of 2025. This is simply not true. The important point is that individual acorns from red oak species take two years to develop but an individual tree may have mature acorns dropping

in the fall of 2023, with other acorns on the same tree developing and set to drop in the fall of 2024. If you're a tree, living in a cyclical and unpredictable environment, this is a great way to spread out your exposure to less than desirable environmental conditions such as summer drought or late-spring frost.

Another interesting fact, and one I will discuss more in my October column, is that white oak acorns drop in the fall (October) *and germinate that same fall*, whereas the acorns of red oak species do not germinate until the spring or summer. Since white oak acorns germinate the same fall they drop, they are less available in the late winter and spring. A red oak acorn that drops in the fall and lays on the forest floor all winter, awaiting spring to germinate, is available as food for a much longer time.

Whether you know them as a-corns or a-kerns, we can all agree that when conditions are right for a boom year, a keen bowhunter can capitalize if he or she understands some basic oak ecology. Whitetails are imprinted on acorns during their first fall as fawns and, as a result, they are very aware of their high fat content and unbeatable digestible energy. The nutritional content of acorns can send whitetails into winter in peak condition, ready to take on the perils of a stressful breeding season and winter.

Next month, I'll discuss the latest research on acorn production, how to scout your best-producing oaks and tie all the information in with how you, a bowhunter/deer manager, can enhance acorn production in your hunting area. **B**



The easiest way to differentiate red and white oaks is by examining the leaves. Red oak leaves (left) have pointed bristle tips while white oak leaves (right) have smooth, rounded edges.

AUTHOR'S PHOTOS

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BOWHUNTING WISDOM

By **BILL WINKE**



If you can't afford your own hunting property, one of the best ways to gain access is by proving yourself as a trustworthy helper who can assist with chores such as erecting fences and shooting does to keep the deer population under control.



YOUR FUTURE IN BOWHUNTING

Plan Now So You Don't Get Shut Out of the Action!

WE HAVE SEEN a huge change in land ownership and land use during the past 20 years, especially as it relates to “recreational land,” aka hunting ground. So, where is this all headed? You may as well accept the future and do something about it, or you will someday end up on the outside looking in.

I wrote an article about the future of deer hunting for the *Iowa Game & Fish* magazine 25 years ago. In that article, I laid out what I thought was going to happen in my home state, based on then-current trends and common-sense projections. What I told the Iowa readers didn't sit well with them; they were used to open hunting and easy access. I got some strongly negative feedback telling me to stuff it. It was a classic example of killing the messenger if you don't like the message.

At the risk of repeating the bad news and getting *Petersen's BOWHUNTING* readers on my back, I am

going to cover this sensitive subject again. I will tell you where I think this is all headed and how you, with some planning, can stay ahead of it.

Supply & Demand

A lot of people are buying rural land to secure their own, private hunting area for the future. Twenty-five years ago, this was mostly unheard of in most parts of the country. That is when I started. In 1995, I took my own advice from that *Game & Fish* article and bought part ownership in some land. It was the best thing I ever did, both financially and as a bowhunter.

Fast-forward to today, and the trend toward buying land specifically for hunting is gobbling up hundreds of thousands of acres each year; and I don't really see it slowing anytime soon. In addition to buying hunting ground outright, many people are leasing hunting land at rapidly increasing rates. When I was a boy, not a single Iowa farmer I knew took money to let people hunt. Now, it is rare in the area where I grew up to find a single farmer who isn't leasing his farm for hunting, or strongly considering it.

To guarantee a place to hunt, for yourself and your children in the future, you need to understand why this is happening. It is simple; anything that has value will eventually command that value in a free-market system. In other words, if you have something that is valuable, eventually the market will assign a price tag to it.

Having a good place to hunt is valuable. And in the areas where the supply is lowest (highly populated regions) or

AUTHOR'S PHOTOS

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the demand is highest (top trophy hunting counties anywhere), the price goes up. That is Economics 101; supply and demand work in opposite directions to set the price of pretty much everything in a capitalist economy.

Ideally, you will be able to make a small land investment, but I understand that is not in the cards for most readers. If you can't afford land right now, start moving in another direction.

The Management Solution

Here is one potential path few people are talking about. Many people who buy hunting land live a good distance from the property and quickly realize they need lots of help, from maintenance and habitat projects to shooting enough does and ugly, bully bucks to keep the herd at a healthy level. These absentee landowners will often grant privileges to people who prove they can be trusted.

You may have a buddy or family member who owns land. That is a great starting point. Rather than ask to shoot a buck, ask to help them with land projects and eventually to shoot a few does. That starting point may soon lead to a situation where you are trusted with shooting cull bucks (which can be awesome to hunt). It is tougher if you approach strangers, but it can be done. It just takes more time to get your foot in the door. Remember, you aren't asking to hunt at first.

To be trustworthy in this regard, you will need to become more sophisticated and learn not only how to rough score a deer on the hoof, but more importantly, to age a deer on the hoof. You will probably end up with a target list of bucks that you and the landowner agree on.

With these skills, you become valuable, because the landowner can trust you to make good management decisions. Gaining this level of trust does take time, because you have to start slow. The landowner will eventually realize how much help he really needs and how big of a part you play in helping him reach his goals.

Being the designated cull-buck shooter may not be as exciting as going after the biggest deer on the property, but it also doesn't come with a big mortgage. Hunting even cull bucks can be very challenging and thrilling, and much better than sitting at home watching football on TV. So, for this

plan to work, you need to become very knowledgeable regarding what needs to be done to produce a well-managed herd and then play a role in making that happen.

Pay to Hunt

Of course, you can also lease hunting land. I did that for two years (2020 and 2021) while I was between the sale of one farm and the purchase of another one.

At first, it rankled me that I had to pay several thousand dollars to hunt a farm I once hunted for free as boy. But then I got to thinking about the fact that I had 500 acres all to myself in a good neighborhood. Further, if I was going to buy that farm, the cost I was paying for the lease would barely even cover the property taxes, let alone the mortgage. That kind of put things into perspective. And I did shoot two really nice bucks there!

WHILE OWNING IS DEFINITELY BETTER FROM AN INVESTMENT STANDPOINT (AND IT IS MORE PERMANENT), LEASING GIVES YOU MORE FREEDOM.

Granted, owning land is better than leasing in most cases, because owning creates equity and the investment should grow in value over time. But it still puts a strap on your finances in the process.

After buying the current farm, I have had to cut back on some of the other stuff I used to do for fun (trout-fishing trips being one of first casualties), because I didn't have time with all the projects I now had to do, and I didn't have as much discretionary income with the big mortgage. In fact, I had to work more hours at my freelance jobs to help pay the cost, further cutting into my outdoor time. So, while owning is definitely better from an investment standpoint (and it is more permanent), leasing gives you more freedom.

Sweat Equity

Even when I was boy, I knew the importance of "paying" for my hunting privilege. I knew that someday I would be competing with lease hunting (I saw it happening in other states). So, rather than taking my hunting

permission for granted, I always offered to work for the farmer in return. I grew up on a farm, so building fences and putting up hay was second nature. The farmers all started taking me up on my offer. Dang it!

Before I finally realized I would be better off working longer hours in my office (rather than bailing hay four days per week) so I could buy my own land, farmers were actually calling me, asking me if I wanted to hunt deer on their land. Of course, what they really wanted was for me to come help them put up their hay. It was comical to see how quickly the word got around.

Anyway, my point is this: If you are good at something landowners see as valuable (roofing, construction, farm work, mechanical work) you should be able to find places to hunt by simply offering your services. Like anything, it will take time, but once the word gets out, entire neighborhoods will open up to you. It is getting harder than it was when I was a boy, but if you are willing to sweat next to a farmer, you will find him very generous, and soon he will be asking his friends and neighbors if you can hunt their land too.

Go Public

Public-land hunting seems to have gained a kind of romantic prominence, as if it is somehow purer or nobler than hunting private land. I hunted enough public land in my life to know that it is not nobler. It can be fun, and it sure can be challenging, but it is often frustrating and unproductive. Given options, I would not pursue public-land hunting as my first choice. But that's just me. Even the good public land in Iowa is less productive than average private land. I am guessing it is the same way in most places, except the Western states where there is so much public land hunters get spread out.

It just comes down to numbers. The more hunters on a piece of land, all else being equal, the harder the hunting will be. If all else fails in your attempts to find private access, it is great to have a few secluded ridges on public ground to fall back on.

Gaining long-term hunting access to good hunting land takes time, persistence or lots of cash — sometimes all three! To keep from being on the outside looking in 10 years from now, you have to start now. Then, stay engaged until you see it through. Your hunting future depends upon it. **B**

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By **RANDY ULMER**

BETTER BOWHUNTING

The urge to hurry the shot on big game can be overwhelming. You must be mentally prepared to handle all shooting scenarios.

AVOID HURRYING YOUR SHOT

Here's How to Tame That Fight-or-Flight Response

WHEN I BEGAN BOWHUNTING, I had many bad habits plaguing me. Over time I whipped most of them; however, one habit I have not been able to overcome completely is hurrying the shot during the moment of truth.

When shooting at a big buck or bull, my patience goes out the window and I often loose the arrow before I have really settled-in for a good shot. I am much better now than I used to be, but no matter how much I fight the urge, as soon as the sight makes it to the deer I have an overwhelming urge to send the arrow downrange immediately.

I am certainly not the only bowhunter to experience this phenomenon.

I think to some degree or another we all feel it. I have seen many of my hunting buddies miss great opportunities at nice bucks by shooting too quickly. I have many friends who are great target archers and seem to have ice water in their veins when they are shooting tournaments. However, put a big buck in front of them at 40 yards and they fall apart, hurry the shot and miss. Just recognizing that this affliction is real will help us deal with it.

Why We Rush

I believe hurrying the shot is tied to the same fight, flight or freeze instincts we experience when faced with dangerous or high-pressure situations. When adrenaline and cortisol are coursing through your bloodstream, it is extremely difficult to be patient. I am convinced that this primordial impulse is the biggest reason animals can slip through our fingers when we should have them dead to rights.

I hurry the shot because I have an overwhelming urge to get the action over with as quickly as possible to ease the incredible tension in my mind and body. I am afraid the animal will detect me and run away, or turn and walk away, giving me no more shot opportunities. So, I hurry the shot.

The strength of this impulse seems

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BETTER BOWHUNTING

to be directly proportional to the size of the animal. I do not experience it when shooting at does or small bucks — only the big ones.

One of my friends recently told me about a terrible shot he made a few years ago. As we discussed it, he confided that it was a big buck, and for the first time in many years he could not remember settling the pin in the kill zone and going through his shooting routine. He simply put the pin on the buck in the general area he wanted the arrow to go and punched the trigger. He hit the buck in the shoulder, and after spending days looking, he finally gave up. Because this buck was the biggest my friend had ever drawn on, it brought forth a flood of excitement and he simply rushed the shot.

The urge to rush also tends to be stronger when we're not in full control of the situation. This is especially true for me when I am in a treestand, at full draw, waiting for a deer to move into the open for a good shot. Most of my hunting is done out West, on the ground, with me calling the shots. When I'm in a treestand, I can only

react to what the animal gives me — I can't affect the situation myself. This can be very unnerving.

Because I am not in control, it feels like the whole encounter can unravel at any moment. The result is the urge to shoot at the first moment of opportunity.

I can always tell when I have rushed the shot because I cannot remember all the details of the shot process, and I can't remember where the pin was when the shot went off. When I make a good, patient, surprise release shot, I remember all the details.

The Remedy

We must be fully aware of this problem before we can fix it. Usually, we don't realize we are rushing the shot until the arrow is gone; the entire shot process is a blur. We don't remember what happened during the moment of truth. To fix the problem, we need to look back on it and ask ourselves some tough questions: What did we do wrong and why?

The secret to preventing this mental "blacking out" is to make all the actions involved in making the shot instinctive — to pre-program our nervous system to handle the psychological intensity — without rushing.

I have developed a system that works well for me. It may sound funny, but I have a mantra that I force myself to run through over and over as I get closer to the shot. Because most of my hunting is spot and stalk, I know when the shot is imminent. I tell myself, "Know the exact distance, use the right pin, pick a spot, squeeze the trigger and follow through." I alternate that mantra with this one: "Patience seldom goes unrewarded." Running these thoughts through my head over and over before the shot calms me down and helps me to have the patience to wait for the right opportunity, and the patience to take the extra few seconds it takes to make a good shot as opposed to a quick shot.

It also helps me to visualize the whole process repeatedly in my free time. Visualization has been proven to reinforce the same habits as actual practice. So, I mentally practice waiting for the animal to present a good shot, range him, choose the right pin, place it exactly where it should be and squeeze the trigger. I try to elicit the same emotions I would experience in an actual encounter, and I learn to deal with them as I visualize handling the entire process smoothly and successfully. **B**



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By **BRAD FENSON**

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TARGETING BIGGER GAME

Follow These Tips to Up the Odds of Success

IT WAS DARK when we left the truck and started our trek around a large hayfield. We could hear bull elk screaming and cows mewing. The sounds generated immediate excitement, and we scurried through game trails and skirted the field to ensure the wind would be in our favor.

There is nothing easy about elk hunting, and hiking for miles through rough terrain and a tangle of trees and limbs should be expected.

The elk started to file off the field as the eastern horizon brightened. We were ahead of the animals in the bush and used our cow calls to entice a bull to check us out or round us up. Five cows and calves meandered past us while a big bull bugled farther upwind. The elk were headed for a steep river valley where they were safe from most hunters and had the solitude they sought. Not catching a bull up top would mean navigating steep elevation, a labyrinth of challenging terrain and thick brush.

Be Ready for Action

For safety reasons, I never slide a bolt down the rail until a shot opportunity arises. Thus, my crossbow was cocked, but all the bolts were firmly secured in my quiver.

When moving, potential problems might include getting the bowstring caught in the tangle of limbs or grass pulled under the cams. As a result, the best place for the crossbow is across your back, with a good sling employed to center the bow, keep your hands free and allow you to focus on balance and hiking. I also carry a shooting stick, which can double as a hiking pole.

When we reached the valley floor, a

spike bull ran to within 20 yards of us, hoping to find the lonely cow that had been vocalizing. That animal eventually turned and headed back into dense cover as we sat perfectly still. The herd bull was bugling in the background, and we cut the distance to within 100 yards before starting to cow call, followed by a bugle. Cows answered, and when one of them wandered our way, the bull was forced to defend his turf.

With a bolt now on the rail, I steadied the crossbow on shooting sticks to wait for a shot. The trees came alive with the thrashing of antlers, and a big, mature bull worked to within 45 yards while screaming at us. A small window opened for a potential shot, but the bull was quartering toward me. A couple of more steps and he would be in the clear; however, a cow had worked beside us and caught our wind. The entire herd blew out, and we were forced to re-start our hunt from scratch.

Consider Broadhead Options

I can still see the antlers of that bull thrashing alders and working toward me. The body was immense, and waiting for the right shot opportunity was imperative. When hunting larger game, big bones, thick hides and dense muscle make for a formidable challenge for a bolt and broadhead. Hence, I have two options for hunting big critters such as moose and elk, with different strategies for penetration.

First, consider using a heavier broadhead for big critters. In thick cover, most shots are up close and personal, so a heavier broadhead is preferred for increased penetration. In my experience, a SEVR Robusto 150-grain broadhead with a 2-inch cutting diameter has proven to penetrate shoulder blades and big rib bones while maintaining flight direction. The extra weight quiets the bow with advantages that outweigh the flatter trajectory. If I do catch bone with the broadhead, the chances are better for maximized penetration and a clean pass-through. The speed of modern crossbows

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SPEED

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WIDTH

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LENGTH

26.5 INCHES



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CROSSBOWS

makes a heavyweight broadhead a good option at any time, but they are even more advantageous when pursuing big animals.

A smaller cutting diameter is preferred in more open country, where shots can be longer. Less cutting surface means better penetration and maintained energy. The 100-grain SEVR Titanium 1.5 broadhead is ideal in these situations and has proven its effectiveness on big critters over the years. The broadhead is lighter but offers cutting advantages for penetration on big-bodied animals.

Prepare for the Weight

The most important consideration when taking aim at any animal is proper shot placement. An advantage of using a crossbow is that you don't need to draw the bow when your target is close. The downside to not drawing is you may need to hold the crossbow in the shooting position for a period of time. Well, most crossbows are front-heavy, and that weight will create muscle fatigue fast.

I suggest shouldering your crossbow and holding it steady for 30 seconds before engaging the target. It will not take long to see that a steady hold is hard to achieve, but it is possible with practice. Hence, anyone planning to hunt big animals from the ground should practice different hunting scenarios at the range.

It's a good idea to practice tucking your elbows close to your body while holding the bow. When it is time to shoot, slowly lift your elbows to bring the scope to your eye. Not having your arms fully extended while holding the weight will make it easier to maintain shot accuracy when any length of time is involved.

I recommend trying different shooting sticks to find the lightest and easiest to use. There are some great options on the market right now, including those by Swagger and the Primos Trigger Sticks. However, in reality, a hiking pole may be all you need to rest the front end of the crossbow on to keep it stable.

One other note — maneuvering through thick cover with extra gear can cause problems, and the extra noise created can alarm or spook animals. It's

best to go with a minimalist attitude to maintain stealth and accuracy.

Know Your Anatomy

When you're going after new animals, look up their anatomy to understand the optimal bolt placement for a quick, clean kill. Not all creatures are created equal, and big animals often require a focused approach to ensure the bolt finds the heart and lungs. Bigger targets don't mean bigger kill zones, so focus on the vitals and aim small to hit small. It's also important to note that there's often a bigger "void" on the top half of an elk or moose, so you don't want to place a bolt in that area.

Practice More

Elk, moose, black bears, wild hogs and bison are big animals that should involve strategy for best results. Practicing with different broadhead weights and knowing and understanding the trajectories means you can change them up to always have an edge. Shooting 3-D targets can help to focus on the vitals instead of a big target. There's no doubt that the time spent becoming intimate with your equipment makes you more successful in the field. **B**

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FINDING FORGIVENESS

Adjust Your Bow for Your Own Personal Fit and Style

WHEN WE FIRST got into archery, bow tuning was a little foreign to us.

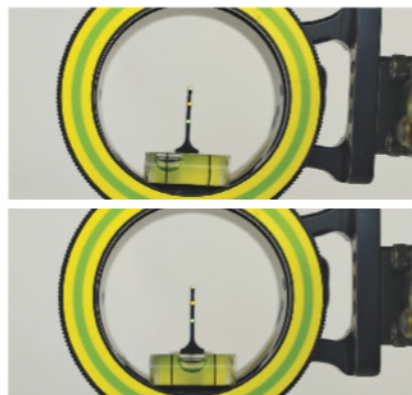
After all, the only other shooting we were familiar with was shooting a gun. So, the idea that we needed to adjust or tweak our bows seemed unnecessary and a lot of extra work. We didn't know tuning our bows would improve our ability to hit where we were aiming.

We soon found out that the more we adjusted our bows to fit us personally, the better we could shoot. We usually would just blame ourselves when we missed. Our friends told us good shooting form was only half the battle. They explained our shooting setup is a very personal thing and that it's not one size fits all.

That is when we learned about "forgiveness." Forgiveness meant that even when we executed shots poorly, we would miss the mark by much less. Expecting to hit the spot on a poor shot may be unrealistic. But did we need to miss by a foot? A forgiving setup might make catching the spot on a poor shot possible. That sounded great to us.

Really good archers are very consistent from shot to shot. Similarly, a shooting machine can shoot an arrow out of a poorly tuned bow into the same spot over and over. But average archers like us need forgiveness to make up for our shooting form variances.

Through our conversations, we found that arrow rest placement, cam timing, custom-built arrows, third-axis sight leveling, well-placed stabilizers, fine-tuning draw length and using high-quality bowstrings and ca-



Paying attention to small details, such as proper calibration of your sight's bubble level, can yield big gains to your accuracy.

bles could all improve the forgiveness of our bows. A local bow shop offered tuning services. So, just like taking a car to a mechanic, we took our bows to the bow mechanic.

When we got our bows back and started to shoot, we saw instant improvement. We literally had just purchased accuracy. Our shooting form wasn't any better, but our arrow groups were much tighter. Our misses were not as big. We had found forgiveness.

Now that we were shooting so well, we started shooting a lot more. Hitting where you aim is a lot more fun than missing, and the more we shot, the more consistent our shooting form became.

As we got more consistent, that's when we noticed our arrow flight wasn't so great. Our friend mentioned there might be even more forgiveness available. He said most top shooters will make the final tweaks themselves. The shops do a great job, but they're not you. They may not have your draw length or hold the bow the same way you do. So, they may be able to get you 90 percent there, but there is likely more forgiveness to be had.

We got a few tips, and we tweaked our arrow rest location just a little and our arrow flight improved substantially. So did our arrow groups.

Finding forgiveness with our archery equipment was a game-changer for us. We shouldn't recommend it though, because it is very addictive and will lure you into shooting more and having more fun, which can drastically affect your personal life. **B**

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6 The stand comes with 2 ACCESSORY HOOKS.

TREE BRACE included to support the stand.



By **JON E. SILKS**

BOW TEST

PRIME REVEX 4

Smooth on the Draw, Stable on the Target and Deadly Accurate in the Field

WHEN PRIME ARCHERY'S engineering team set out to design the company's flagship bow for 2023, they wanted a rig that was super stable, smooth drawing, mechanically efficient, rock solid on target and deadly accurate.

That's a tall order, but after much effort the Revex series was born. Available in three models (Revex 2, 4 and 6) featuring axle-to-axle lengths of 32, 34 and 36 inches respectively, Revex bows feature Center-Grip and Swerve riser technologies, wide-stance and offset split limbs and limb pockets, the new modular Core Cam, Nano Grip, a new String Stop and much more. The Revex 4 is the subject of this review.

Built-In Stability

The machined, 82X aluminum Revex riser is built specifically to bring greater stability through Prime's Center Grip Riser design and integrated Swerve feature. By placing the grip in the physical center of the bow, more of the bow's total weight is shifted lower and acts as a built-in stabilizer that enhances stability at full draw and improves aiming. The top cam is slightly larger than the lower cam to compensate for the offset nock travel.

In addition, Swerve Riser Technology harmonizes movement and flex between the upper and lower halves of the riser by creating a structure on

The 2023 Revex 4 features Prime's stability-enhancing Center Grip Riser design and unique Swerve Technology that brings harmony in movement and flex to the entire riser platform.

THE SPECS

Manufacturer: Prime Archery, 810-392-8431; g5prime.com

Model: Revex 4

Riser: Reflex, machined aluminum

Grip: Nano Grip, neutral wrist

Limbs: Split, machined fiberglass

Draw Weights: 40, 50, 60, 65, 70 and 80 pounds peak

Draw Lengths: 26.5-30.5 inches, in half-inch increments; modular

Cam System: Core Cam; dual, machined aluminum

Letoff: 83 percent (advertised); 80.65 percent (as tested)

String: BCY 452X, 60.41 inches

Cables (x2): BCY 452X, 39.22 inches

Brace Height: 6.25 inches

Axle-to-Axle Length: 34 inches

Weight: 4.6 pounds (advertised and as tested)

Finish: Realtree Edge, plus 14 other camouflage and solid-color options.

Advertised IBO Speed: 340 fps

MSRP: \$1,299

Comments: Balanced, stable and comfortable.

the bottom half that mimics the sight window. Prime measured the resulting lateral cam movement and found a 50 percent reduction compared to non-Swerve risers. For 2023, Prime also added a rear stabilizer bushing for mounting back bars and also used smaller riser cutouts to add strength and stiffness.

Prime's Nano Grip uses NASA developed Aerogel that provides a great thermal buffer between the aluminum riser and plastic overmold grip on cold days afield. The shape, angle and contour of the Nano Grip is designed to produce a neutral wrist position.



Core Accuracy

The new Core Cam features Prime's Cam Balancing Technology. This system brings the bowstring and cables in line during the draw cycle, keeping the cam loads balanced and actively reducing cam lean. The Core Cam is modular to produce the best performance at every draw length. Modules have cable stops built in.

Prime says the Core Cam is the company's smoothest system yet, using a



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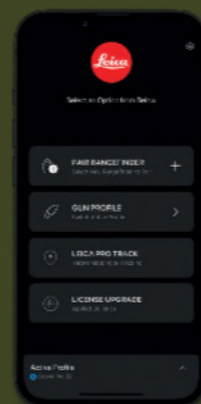
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BOW TEST

bowstring, power cable and take-up cable all anchored exclusively to the cams, similar to a three-track binary system. Prime, however, designed the cable grooves to shift the take-up cable over the top of the axle's center and in line with the string to focus the lion's share of the force on the centerline. The resulting balanced load improves efficiency and aids in shooting consistency.

Shhhhh!

There are many features on the Revex that help quell shot noise and vibration. First is the past-parallel position of the split limbs at full draw. This configuration forces energy from the shot in equal and opposite directions, effectively canceling vibration, shock and noise. The short, stout limbs are set far apart to enhance stability through torsional rigidity.

The Revex also has a new, carbon-weave string stop that improves shock and vibration dampening over past models. The soft rubber stop quickly reduces string oscillation after the shot. Prime also places two riser dampeners at the lowest point of the riser, on either side of the lower

limb bolt. The dampeners have three weighted extremities that absorb vibration as they move during the shot. A weighted rubber wrap on the Flexis AR cable-containment arm serves the same function. Last but not least, each set of machined split limbs are outfitted with Split Limb Dampeners.

Accessory Integration

The Revex is compatible with a pair of new custom bow accessories. Prime partnered with TightSpot to design a quiver built specifically to fit the Revex like a glove. Another partnership was formed with Hamskea Archery to design a new, limb-driven arrow rest — the Prime Epsilon Rest.

At the Range

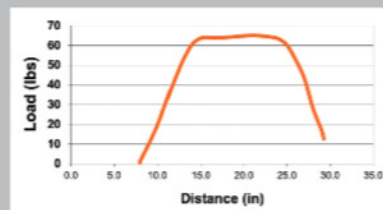
Prime's focus on smoothness and stability was a success, as the Revex 4 is easily drawn and sits motionless at full draw, locking onto the target with ease.

At the shot there was a medium jump in the handle with some very slight, almost undetectable, vibration. A post-shot pause, followed by a slow falling away, demonstrates a controlled follow-through, while the grip proved both comfortable and functional. **B**

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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.

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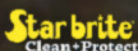


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By MARK DEMKO

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HERE ARE THE EPIC STORIES
BEHIND THREE OF 2022'S
BIGGEST BOW-KILLED BULLS

B
FEATURES

Mahlon Barkman of Ohio poses with the gigantic 6x6 he harvested while hunting New Mexico's Gila Wilderness with New Mexico Professional Big Game Hunting in 2022. The bull grossed 404⁵/₈ inches, with a net score of 395³/₈. PHOTO COURTESY OF BEN CHAPEL

GILA WILDERNESS GIANT — Mahlon Barkman

WHEN MAHLON BARKMAN opened an email from the New Mexico Department of Game & Fish in spring 2022, he was shocked to learn he'd drawn a tag for one of the coveted elk-hunting units in the Gila National Forest in his first year of applying. Securing the permit, however, was just the first step on an incredible journey that would take him to great highs and lows by hunt's end.

Barkman, who would be bowhunting with New Mexico Professional Big Game Hunting, immediately reached out to guides Ben and John Chapel, since he still wasn't fully convinced he'd pulled a tag.

"I couldn't believe my eyes. I wasn't expecting to get drawn, because it was a pretty hard unit to draw," Barkman said. "I texted John to ask if this was for real. I sent him the screen shot, and he said, 'Yes, what's the hunt code?' I told him and he was just like, 'That's a bad-ass hunt.'"

A few months later, Barkman, along with the others in his hunting party — Andy Nisley, Abe Miller and Leroy Miller — headed west from their home state of Ohio to the Land of Enchantment, stoked for their opportunity to pursue bugling bulls. After arriving at the Chapel family's ranch, the group made its way into the mountains to a base camp that would be their home for the next several days.

"The first morning we went out there and we climbed this

big hill and heard some bugles up there..." Barkman said.

"We went after this one bull we called, and [we] set up and called him in...I thought he was 40 yards, and he was only 30 yards."

As a result of misjudging the distance, Barkman hit the elk high. Although he and Ben, who was guiding him, found some good blood at first, eventually it petered out and they lost the trail.

"He wallowed up and after that we didn't find a drop of blood," Barkman said. "I think he's still with us. I couldn't get that out of my head."

Despite the missed opportunity, Barkman trudged on. And while days two and three were rather uneventful, the fourth day of the hunt found them getting into some good elk action. After hiking over a couple of mountains that morning, Chapel and Barkman came to an open area that had been scorched by fire a few years earlier.

"It was pretty nasty. There were deadfalls, and it was a hard walk," Barkman said, "We were going through these aspen patches and open areas and spooked a cow and a spike. We waited a little bit, cow-called and didn't hear anything, so we kept on going."

Suddenly, Chapel told him to nock an arrow.

"I just looked up and here comes this huge rack over the mountainside," Barkman recalled. "He was probably already 30 or 40 yards (from us) at

that time and I just got my bow and got an arrow, nocked it and drew back. I remember asking him how far it was and he said, 'Thirty-five yards.'"

Blocking the other bull out of his mind, Barkman let one of his Victory arrows fly from his Xpedition X30. The Helix broadhead hit its target, with the bull taking off at the shot.

"He ran maybe 20 yards and started tumbling back down the mountain," Barkman said. "He rolled over probably 60 yards in front of me."

With the big 6x6 going down within eyesight, Barkman couldn't believe his eyes. The huge bull ended up grossing 404½ inches, with an official net score of 395½. In addition to an impressive spread, the rack sported solid mass all the way around. Barkman said packing out the bull was an arduous task that required several hours over two days.

"We couldn't get horses in because of all the deadfalls that were around. There was no way to get a horse close," he said. "Ben and I caped it and quartered it up and put the meat into shade. I believe it was 3½ miles we had to pack out."

In addition to Barkman, Nisley and Abe Miller also scored on good bulls during the hunt, with Nisley taking a 6x6 that scored 338 and Miller downing a 6x6 that measured 320. Barkman said he highly recommends New Mexico Professional Big Game for anyone looking to pursue elk in the state.

"They work hard for you to try and get you what you're looking for," he said.

Although he ended up taking a world-class bull, Barkman says he still has mixed emotions about not the first elk he shot. He estimates that bull's rack would have been in the 350-inch range, a fine specimen for anyone's first archery elk.

"Some people have asked me, 'I bet you're glad that you didn't get that [first] one?' But I was like, 'Well, I can't really say that. I hate wounding animals,'" he said.

"But it was a true blessing that I got this bull. It didn't sink in until a couple months after the hunt."

EARLY GRADUATION GIFT Anna Hartman

Anna Hartman knew the fall of 2022 was the last real opportunity she'd have to get away and hunt with her dad Price before heading off to Rutgers University to continue her education and play volleyball for the Scarlet Knights in fall of 2023. So, even though the high school senior had taken a nice bull while hunting with Y3 Outfitters of Wyoming the previous year, she was super excited to head back to the Cowboy State for one last chance at a wall-hanging elk.

On the first morning of her September hunt with Y3 Outfitters' owner and guide Morgan Forbes, Hartman quickly got into elk, encountering a nice bull with a group of cows. But the trio — she was also accompanied by her dad — lost sight of the animals

AWESOME ELK HUNTS

as they moved away from them. Still early in the hunt, the group moved on, climbing several hills and mountains hoping to catch up with that group of elk or others. Eventually, they heard another elk bugling and decided to try and move in on that bull.

Following a short break, Forbes and Anna left Price behind, striking out on their own. A short time later the pair were working their way around a mountain when Forbes looked back toward the valley from where they'd just come.

"Mo's scanning the trees and stuff, and all of a sudden, he holds up his hand and he's like, 'Shhh.' He gets out his binoculars and he sees the bull. It's bedded down," Anna said. "We hadn't heard it in the past 30 to 45 minutes. The bull was staring right at us for like 5 minutes. Eventually, it kind of looks away and very slowly we moved away."

The pair decided to circle all the way around the valley, perhaps a mile in all, to reposition themselves downwind of the animal. About 10-15 minutes after they slipped into position for a shot, the elk stood up, giving the 17-year-old her opportunity. Anna said the experience was both awesome and nerve-racking at the same time since the bull was less than 30 yards away.

"It was still the first day, but I was like, 'If I have this chance now, I may not get a chance again.' As soon as that bull stood up, I had the crossbow against my shoulder; I was looking through the scope...I was like, 'If I can't make this shot, this might be it. I was nervous, I was excited, I was shaking.'"

Following the shot from her Ravin R10 crossbow, the bull bolted downhill, expiring after only a short run. But before going to retrieve the elk, the duo went to get Price, so he could be part of the experience as well.

"We walked down to the bull and it's just massive," Anna recalled.

According to Forbes, the big 6x6 likely scored more than 350 inches.

"I'm thinking that was the best bull we killed last year, but if not, for sure in the top two or three," he said. "I've always had a great time having Anna and Price out. They are part of the team and will put in the work to get into mature herd bulls. It just seems like when I'm hunting with Anna things just work — we're going to get close encounters and lots of action."

As far as retrieving the bull from the woods, Anna said it took seven people to hoist the bull into a truck to transport it back to camp. Even so, the entire crew was back at the lodge for a late lunch, wrapping things up well before the sun set on the first day of hunting. And, amazingly, Anna was on her way home to Murfreesboro, Tenn., the next day to return to school and the volleyball team since the season was in full swing.

"It was one of the best feelings — (an) awesome, great trip," said Anna, now 18. "I made my dad proud. It's not just for him, but it's one of those things we can do together, and I loved how he supported me through it."

As for Price, he said the opportunity to hunt one last time with his daughter in Wyoming is an experience he'll remember the rest of his life.

"It was the last big trip before her college and volleyball career, which will limit my hunting time with her, but I'm excited about her starting her next adventure," he

Seventeen-year-old Anna Hartman (right), accompanied by dad Price, took this 350-class bull with Y3 Outfitters in Wyoming.

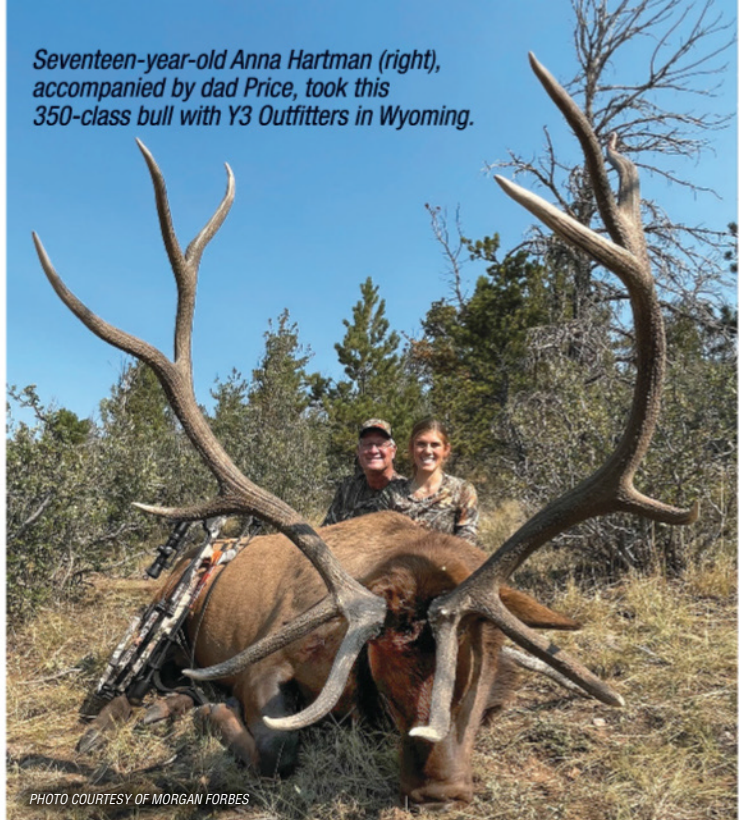


PHOTO COURTESY OF MORGAN FORBES

said. "We've got many great memories in the field and have been blessed with her opportunities. As with all dads, her success is more important than my success."

SECOND-CHANCE BULL Kaden Titus

From deep dejection to total elation, Kaden Titus experienced a range of emotions as he pursued a once-in-a-lifetime bull last fall. In the end, the Summerville, Ore., resident stood at the precipice, literally and figuratively, as he pondered if he'd blown everything, not realizing his state-record bull was lying less than 40 feet below him covered by the approaching darkness of night.

Hunting on private land in Eastern Oregon, Titus had set his sights on a large bull that he and friend Jordan Lanman had located while scouting in August. However, when the season opened in early September, the bull was nowhere to be found.

"We hadn't seen this caliber of bull in this area for a long time," Titus said. "So, we were obviously pretty excited and we basically decided all right, now we were going to [try to] kill that bull, went out opening weekend and hunted him hard for the first week and half. He ghosted me — I couldn't find him. There were other elk in the area, but I never found him. Honestly, I kind of got discouraged."

After hunting a new area for a few days, Titus decided to return to the area where he'd originally seen the bull, giving it one last try and hoping for a miracle.

"I said, 'Oh, man, I need to give it a shot,' so I went back up in this area," Titus said. "My buddy was actually pretty sick so he couldn't go with me. I went solo."

That morning of Sept. 16 started off with Titus having a 300-inch 6x6 in his sights, but the elk got downwind of him, so he backed out. Two other bulls were bugling in the basin, and Titus thought one of them was bedded down, so he decided to go after that elk. But, as he was hiking around



Kaden Titus of Oregon harvested his state-record archery bull elk in September 2022, with the 7x7 having a net score of 392.

PHOTO COURTESY OF MIKE LANMAN

the basin, he ran into another bull that bugled much closer to him.

"I'd walked within probably 75 yards of him, but it was so thick I couldn't see anything," Titus said. "So, I sat there and waited. Hopefully, that other bull would lure him out and get him moving or something. I sat there for probably 20 or 30 minutes and he never did anything, so I figured he was still bedded."

A lengthy game of cat and mouse ensued.

"I sat there and just let out a cow call. I was going through my sequence...and his bugle instantly changed. He just screamed at me. I could never see him, but I had to be 70-75 yards from him. I thought that would be enough; he'd come check it out that close."

After cow calling for 45 minutes, Titus switched to bugling.

"He would scream over every single bugle I did...he would absolutely just unleash on me, but he would not budge," Titus recalled. "Then I went to a challenge bugle, everything. He just wouldn't budge. I guess in my mind that told me he had cows behind him, and he wasn't going to leave them."

After five hours of waiting patiently, Titus decided to try and sneak close enough to the bull to attempt a 50- or 60-yard shot if the animal got up. Picking a large pine tree as his destination, it took him 90 minutes to go 15 yards. That's when he spotted the elk, which had gotten up to rake its bed.

"When he snapped up, I finally got a glimpse and saw it was him," Titus recalled. "Obviously, my heart started pumping pretty hard. I watched him...probably four to five times he got up, raked his bed out and laid back down. I was able to maneuver when he had his head down to where I could have a shooting lane there."

Titus ranged the animal at 53 yards and when his chance finally came, he raised his bow, drew back and let an arrow fly, shooting two inches over the elk's back.

"I hit a pine tree behind him. I heard the big smack and

he blew out of there and down the hill..." Titus said. "I literally threw down my bow and was sitting there second-guessing myself, thinking how could I miss that when he doesn't even know I was there."

Shockingly, as Titus was lamenting his blown opportunity, the bull moved back into the area he had been bedded in.

"I will never understand why he went back up there," Titus said. "The only saving grace is he didn't have a clue what had happened. And I came to find out he did have those cows behind him, so he wasn't going to leave them."

Amazed at his second chance, Titus tried to sneak closer to the bull, but the animal caught his movement and began circling to pick up his scent. However, when the elk was almost directly downwind of him, the bull turned, offering a quartering-away shot. Titus drew back his Prime Rize, unleashing an Easton Axis arrow.

"I heard it hit but didn't see it hit. He whirled around and took off. I cow called to him and barked at him and that was enough to get him to stop and look me," Titus said. "It took about 10 seconds and you could see his ears flip back like he was hurt. He just turned around and walked away from me and I could see my arrow sticking out."

Titus then texted Lanman, who although ill, insisted on coming out to help look for the elk. A few hours later, the pair were on the trail, trying to locate the bull.

As they were following the blood trail, Titus caught a glimpse of the bull and its wound, which looked to be a little high, leading him to believe he got the top of one or both lungs. Eventually, he was able to sneak within 20 yards of the animal, but the bull caught his movement and bolted. It was now almost completely dark, making any further pursuit a risky endeavor.

"I took off after him just to see where he went, so I'd have a spot to go in the morning, [at least] a direction anyway, and he went out of sight," Titus said. "I just kind of took my time walking over there and I realized it's just a sheer cliff. I walked out to the cliff thinking he just fell off [the edge] or something."

Not sure if the animal went over the side or found another way around the cliff, Titus slowly walked the cliff's edge to see if he could get a better look at the ground below. That's when he caught movement at the base of the cliff.

"He was just sitting there under a tree and his head was bobbing side to side like he was kind of going in and out of it..." he said. "Three or four minutes went by and I could see his back legs kick out and he was lying over on his side."

A short time later, Lanman's uncle Mike and cousin Tanner joined the pair to help retrieve the animal, and when the quartet approached the downed elk, they were blown away.

"We knew he was big, obviously, but we didn't know he was that big," Titus recalled.

According to Titus, the 7x7 grossed 403 $\frac{3}{8}$ inches, with a final net score of 392, making it the largest typical Rocky Mountain elk ever taken with archery gear in the Beaver State.

"I never actually thought we'd get it done," Titus said. "Those elk move so much, and when we didn't see him for that first week, I was pretty convinced he had left the area."

"Walking up on him, it was just pure emotion and tears. There were a lot of thank yous and a lot of high-fives." **B**



Author Tate Morgan took his best bull ever on Sept. 3, 2022, the opening day of Montana's archery elk season. Less than a week later, his accomplishment was eclipsed by his father Rob (below right), who took a giant bull known as 'Bumper' on Sept. 9.

Living for September

For This Montana Father-Son Duo, Chasing Elk Isn't a Hobby. *It's a Way of Life.*

BY TATE MORGAN

From the time I was a little kid, I watched my father Rob start prepping for elk season months before opening day. Back then, I didn't understand why he spent countless hours shooting every evening after work. All that time spent preparing for just one arrow; it seemed excessive to me.

That is until, one day, Dad brought home a massive bull he had killed. I

remember standing there looking at the antlers, and that's when it clicked. From that moment, I couldn't wait until the day I turned 12 so I could finally experience my own elk hunt. With my birthday being late in the year, I wasn't able to archery hunt elk my first season. Having to wait a whole extra year was like torture, but finally the day arrived. It was elk season again, but this time I had a tag in my

pocket! That morning — sitting in the dark, waiting for daylight to come and listening for the sound of a screaming bull — is still imprinted in my mind.

Shortly after daylight, Dad nudged me and said, "Don't move! There's a bull coming up the ridge we are sitting on." I can still remember the rush of nerves that hit when I saw a 6x6 bull walking toward us. It felt like it took an hour for the bull to close the

distance before he would be in range. The bull stepped behind a tree and I knew that was my chance. I came to full draw, settled my pin and my arrow flew true. The bull ran a short distance, and we were able to watch him fall. After the rush settled, I fully understood why elk hunting meant so much to my Dad all those years.

Opening-Day Surprise

Fast forward 16 years, and my passion for hunting elk has now grown into a full-blown obsession. My summers are spent shooting thousands of arrows in preparation for one shot, and the summer of 2022 was no different. The quest for the bull I'd been hunting the last three years was on again! The weather opening weekend wasn't ideal due to high temperatures, but the heat didn't stop Dad and me from hunting.

Opening morning was slow, but that would soon change. After the morning hunt, Dad and I went back to camp

to cook breakfast and make a plan for the evening. Knowing the elk weren't moving in our usual area, I opened the onX Hunt app on my phone and started scanning the map for some new country. After an hour, I decided on a spot that looked pretty rugged, in hopes there wouldn't be other hunters. After a tiring hike, I climbed up on a high ridge and set up to glass for the evening. It was 3 p.m., so I knew with the hot temperatures I had a while until anything would start moving. As the sweat rolled down my back, I pulled out my spotting scope and started checking pockets of dense cedars, trying to glass up an ear or a antler tip. Eventually, I caught movement, but it was a mule deer doe and her fawns running across a ridge. When I looked at the dense cedar patch they ran out of, I noticed a dark brown spot. ELK! After watching a cow for about 20 minutes, 11 more elk started to feed out of the thick cedars and into the warm sunshine. Around 5:30, I

heard a faint bugle. I thought to myself, *Now, it's game time!*

I started down the ridge towards the elk, remaining hidden in the little cover I had. As I got closer, I dropped my pack so I could crawl a couple hundred yards across an open hillside. I kept tabs on the cows, moving ever so slowly so they didn't bust me before I got into position. After an hour of closing the distance, the cows split into two groups. Half came down the draw I was overlooking, and the other half fed over the ridge. If the bull followed the group of cows that went over the hill, I couldn't put a stalk on him with the wind. I was hoping he would follow the group of cows below me, as I knew I could make a play if he did. Based on his bugles, I thought he was coming down the draw toward the cows below me. There was a rock rim lined with cedars in front of me, so I crawled to the edge, being careful to remain hidden in the shade.





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Now, it was a waiting game. I still hadn't seen the bull, but I could tell he was getting closer, as each bugle echoed louder through the trees. I had two shooting lanes offering 60-yard shots to the bottom of the draw. The cows fed below me for about an hour, and I started wondering whether the bull was going to show himself before dark. Just as that thought entered my mind, I heard a branch snap. I looked to my left and was shocked to see the bull, his antlers weaving in and out of the cedars. I had no shot! He started moving through the nastiest bushes, twisting and turning his head to fit his rack through the brush. I still hadn't gotten a great look at him, and when he finally stepped into an opening, I wasn't sure he was big enough. After all, it was opening day, and I had my heart set on a different bull we named Bumper that I had spent the last three seasons chasing.

My heart was racing as I tried to decide whether to shoot, but I ultimately let this bull walk as he presented a great shooting opportunity at less than 30 yards. When he turned back into the brush, I realized I had just made a huge mistake, as the bull was way bigger than I thought! Panic swept over me, and I felt sick to my stomach as I watched the bull walk away. Quickly scanning the cedars in his path, I realized I might have one more chance. I ranged the opening in the brush at 52

yards, drew back and hoped I would be able to stop the bull at just the right moment. As he stepped into my lane, I let out a soft cow call with my diaphragm, and the bull stopped dead in his tracks! He swung his head around and looked back, slightly quartered away. My pin settled halfway up his body, in line with his off-side leg, and the shot broke. It felt like slow motion watching my green Nocturnal lighted nock sail through the air and bury deep into the bull's side, just behind the shoulder.

I knew I had just killed my biggest bull ever, and that's when the rush of emotions hit! I pulled out my Garmin inReach and texted Dad to tell him I had just killed a bull. I was shaking so badly from the adrenaline rush I could hardly type. After grabbing my pack, I went to where the bull was standing when I shot and marked the location on my GPS. After following blood for a little while, I was hoping to find the bull before he made it off the bench and down to the bottom of the canyon, but I didn't get that lucky. Then I heard a rush of air and knew it was likely my bull taking its final breath. The trail was steep and rocky, but a short distance later I found the bull piled up in some brush on the steep hillside. I couldn't believe my eyes; he was indeed *a lot* bigger than I thought!

With darkness setting in and the temperature still warm, I was going to be working against the clock to get my bull out before losing any meat. It

The lure of elk hunting isn't just about the animals. The places elk call home are also among the most stunning landscapes on earth.



really is true that the hard work begins after the shot. Thankfully, Dad and a couple good friends were able to come help. We quickly got the bull quartered, loaded into game bags and divided among our packs. About halfway back to the truck, we noticed a green aura in the sky. Our packs were heavy, but as we stopped to take a second look we realized it was the northern lights! It is extremely rare to see them this far south, and it sent a chill down my spine as I stood there watching the ghostlike patterns dance across the sky. As I stood there, with my biggest bull to date on my back, I was so thankful to have Dad and close friends with me! There is no feeling quite like all the hard work paying off on an elk hunt!

Dad's Turn

Our season didn't end there, as Dad still had an elk tag burning a hole in his pocket. A few days went by with some rainy, windy weather, and the elk hunkered down and quit talking. On the morning of Sept. 9 the weather started to clear and we had the right wind to head into the drainage where we had previously hunted Bumper. The sunrise was just cresting the horizon as we heard a faint bugle off to the west. We started down the ridge toward the bugle and spotted some elk right away. I pulled out my binos and couldn't believe my eyes; there was Bumper, standing in the middle of his harem like a statue!



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Living for September



This is the sight that greeted the author and his father when they crested the rise and saw Bumper on the ground.

As we sneaked down the rimrock, we could hear Bumper bugling and chuckling as he pushed his cows back towards the timber. We knew the only chance we had was to clear the saddle in front of us and catch him going through a gap before he made it to his bedding area. Because he had more than 20 cows with him, every step had to be perfect. We tried to make it to the gap, but with that many eyes we had to take it slow, and the elk made it past us before we could get within range. As we continued sneaking forward, a couple cows came back out of the timber with a bull right on their heels, screaming his head off.

As he stepped out, I saw he had a huge frame and Dad asked, "Is that him?" We looked for a moment and realized it was a different bull, but still a mature shooter. We had no idea the second bull was in that area, but it was clear he had swooped in and was trying to steal some cows from Bumper. The new bull chased his newfound cows toward us, and they stopped only 30 yards away! Dad was getting ready to shoot right as Bumper let out a deep, growling bugle.

"Wait, wait, wait!" I whispered to Dad. "I think Bumper is coming back

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Tate (left) and Rob Morgan may hunt the rest of their lives without topping the pair of bulls they managed to tag during Montana's 2022 archery elk season.

out!" As more cows continued piling out of the trees, Bumper emerged from the shadows to repel the invader trying to steal his herd. Bumper ran down the hill toward the other bull, giving Dad an opportunity to draw his bow amidst all the commotion. As Bumper came closer and closer, I was whispering the ranges as we waited. I called out, "61, 61, 61" as Bumper finally stopped broadside and quickly pulled my binos to my face as Dad released the arrow.

The arrow's path looked good, but we didn't hear the impact or see any visible reaction to the shot from Bumper. Then, I saw Dad's arrow bounce off some rocks behind Bumper. We stood there in disbelief, both thinking, *There is no way that arrow just missed the bull completely!*

Bumper took a few steps forward, stopped and looked back at the rocks where the arrow had landed. His eyes widened and he took off over a little roll in front of us, toward the timber.

The second bull and all the cows soon joined him as they ran out of sight. As the whole herd ran further up the hillside almost to the timber, they reappeared and stopped to look back. The smaller bull was still with the herd, but we didn't see Bumper. We knew he wouldn't just leave his cows, and in that moment we realized he was probably dead in the bottom. Then, we heard it; a rush of air echoed through the draw! That startled the herd, and they disappeared into the timber. We walked over to Dad's arrow and found it completely covered in blood. Ecstatic, we practically floated to the top of the roll and looked down to see Bumper lying there. Walking up on any elk is an unbelievable feeling, but when it's a fully mature bull that has bested you for three years — surviving both bow and rifle seasons on public land for even longer than that — nothing can compare.

The 2022 archery elk season will forever be one of my favorite bow-hunting memories. Taking my largest bull to date and Dad's writing the final chapter on a bull as cunning as Bumper are two experiences neither of us will ever forget! **B**

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Over a lifetime spent DIY bowhunting for elk, virtually all my harvests have come from rugged, remote country. I've always loved pristine wilderness habitats, and since most people can't, or won't, put out the effort involved in accessing such places, I made backcountry elk hunting my forte. And having enjoyed a nearly 100 percent success rate for 40 years, it is safe to say my approach to success was productive. Now, let's take a look at the flip-side.

Somewhere around age 60, I began to lose my physical prowess and mental passion for the undertaking; finding myself in such a predicament was stressful, frustrating and depressing. Having to accept the fact that my number one interest in the bowhunting world was leaving my means weighed heavy on my mind. So, in 2021 I started looking for *easier* ways and places to bowhunt elk. Actually, I already knew the only way that I'd be able to access easy elk was by dropping a lot

of jingle. Outfitted, private-land hunts or high-dollar landowner tags are about the only avenues to consistent success on trophy bulls for a lazy, old man like me. And I knew I'd never pay \$10,000 for an elk tag, nor would I ever spend that much for a babysitter. So, now what?

The only "easy" elk I'd ever accessed in my 40 years of hardcore, DIY elk bowhunting had been in Arizona. Over my lifetime, I'd drawn two Arizona elk tags, and both hunts had

Elk?

NO MATTER YOUR APPROACH, BAGGING A BULL IS A CHALLENGE

By Eddie Claypool

Arizona's elk terrain is much easier to handle than a true high-country, wilderness hunt. But that proved just perfect for Field Editor Eddie Claypool and his clan at this point in their bowhunting lives.

culminated in the two largest-antlered bulls I'd ever taken. So, as I reviewed my preference point totals in January of 2022, I saw that I had 11 in Arizona. What would that get me? A quick bit of research indicated that I could draw one of the "entry-level" units, but certainly not one of their premier units; a top-ender would take at least another six to 10 years. And since I wasn't getting any younger, I knew I'd better simply get back into the game and make the best of any kind of an elk hunt I



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Easy Elk?

could handle. I threw my name in the pot for a unit along the north side of the Mogollon Rim. And a few weeks later, I found out that I would indeed be hunting Arizona elk that fall.

Manning Up!

As the reality of my situation soaked in, I found it almost amusing I could now understand how bowhunting elk could be intimidating. In my “past life,” killing elk with a bow — anywhere and everywhere — had been like taking candy from a baby. I used to hold out for only mature bulls, and on most hunts I’d give myself plenty of chances



Since water is at a premium in the arid climate of Arizona, many “wallows” are just dust-bowls, while rubs are often nothing more than hapless juniper bushes ripped to shreds by rut-raged bulls.



at them. But that was then, and this was now. Time changes everything.

Similarly, the elk hunting in Arizona was no longer what it was in my younger years. Increased hunting pressure and increasing private control of our public wildlife resources had ensured that. And since I would not be in a top-tier unit, things were likely going to be a bit tougher this time around. Throw in the fact that I’d not actually bowhunted elk at all over the past few years and I found myself in a very strange place; nervous about an Arizona elk hunt. Baloney!

Gathering my senses, I began to whip my rapidly softening man flesh into some semblance of decent physical shape. Putting gear together and shooting my bow, the summer slid by. In July, a quick trip to Nevada had resulted in the loss of our beloved dog, Lulu. My wife Peg and I were reeling from this heartbreak, and with a trip to the local dog pound in early August (with the intention of donating Lulu’s leftover food), we instead found ourselves walking out with a new canine companion, Lucy. A bundle of energy and love, this whelp gave us a much-needed infusion of joy, and we were now excited to take her on her first elk hunt.

Crowd Control

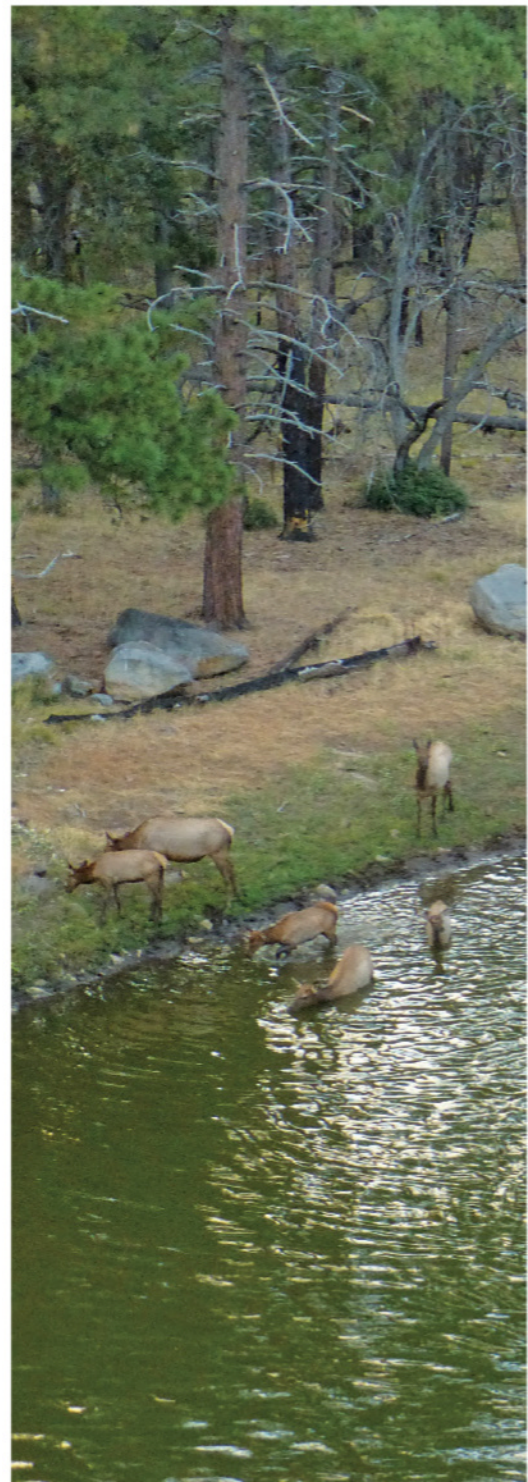
Leaving Oklahoma in oppressive September heat, we journeyed west for 18 hours, finding ourselves pulling into our hunting area near midnight. Finding a quiet spot to park, we all fell into the bed of our camper and rested under the fresh, pine-scented air of the Mogollon Rim. Tomorrow, we’d hunt for a permanent campsite.

By noon of the following day, we’d tucked our trailer into a hidden niche far from the maddening crowds, or so we thought. Previously, when I’d hunted Unit 3A/C shortly to our east, Peg and I had become familiar with the amenities. So, heading to the local grocery store, we soon had our camper stocked with food and drink. For the next couple weeks, we’d lay low and I’d covertly make my short hunting excursions from our base camp. Warm middays, cool nights and afternoon thunderstorms were the order of the day; elk in the pot, or not, I figured it should be a fun ride.

With the onset of elk season, a mass influx of people hit the woods. Roads

became dust clouds, and the incessant hum of human activity detracted greatly from a quality outdoor experience. Then again, this was Arizona, home of urban elk! Actually, I knew I’d better not gripe about the accessibility of the terrain or the animals, because this was *exactly* what I’d signed up for. It was time to simply make do with the party I’d chosen to attend.

As the first couple of days of the season passed, my sum total of elk sightings hovered at *zero*. I’d heard a few bugles, but I wasn’t sure whether they’d come from real elk or other



hunters. And if they were live elk, their makers were on a death march for parts unknown, as well before daylight the masses hit the scene. By sun-up each morning, all was quiet. Wondering where the elk could be hiding during daylight hours, I grabbed my maps, searching for blocks of trackless country. There were none. Out of my element, I realized this new age of "easy" elk hunting wasn't going to be what I'd hoped.

After four days of hunting morning and evening, I still hadn't seen a live elk. Wow! This wasn't anything close

to my previous Arizona elk hunts. Were those units that much better? Or had Arizona elk hunting gone that far downhill? Figuring that entry-level units were exactly that, I decided I'd better get myself in gear or I might actually eat a tag.

Heading for a fringe area of my unit, I hoped that people saturation would be considerably less far out in the juniper flats. Parking my truck in what I hoped was a remote location, I jumped on my ATV and headed out. Peg and Lucy would explore and lounge around the truck while I was

gone. Hoping that this shot-in-the-dark attempt to find action would be successful, I prayed for good fortune.

When I arrived back at the truck a few hours later, the sun was slipping behind the western hills. I'd covered many miles by wheel and foot, and I'd not seen or heard an elk. As a matter of fact, elk sign had been marginal everywhere I'd explored. I was getting slightly depressed. Upon realizing Peg and Lucy weren't at the truck, I became concerned. Shortly, both of them came hurrying back, excited about their recent endeavors. It seemed they

A wide-angle photograph of a forest scene. In the foreground, a pond is filled with water, and several elk are wading in it. Some are partially submerged, while others are standing in the shallow water. On the grassy bank surrounding the pond, more elk are gathered, some looking towards the water. The background is a dense forest of tall, thin trees, likely pines or junipers, with some fallen branches on the ground. The lighting suggests it might be late afternoon or early morning, with soft shadows.

Anywhere you find water in Arizona elk country is likely to be a hub of animal activity. Unfortunately, that also means you are likely to find multiple treestands and/or ground blinds belonging to other hunters in the immediate vicinity.

Easy Elk?

had located a bugling bull only a quarter mile from where we were parked. Amazing! I'd run all over in search of elk and they'd hit the jackpot almost within earshot of the Ford.

A New Plan

Back at camp, I planned a new strategy over supper. Clearly, I didn't know how or where to find these highly pressured elk. So, I figured I'd better go with the flow. It was time to accept some help from my girls, shift gears and pursue parking lot bulls. Man, was this ever foreign to me.

The following morning, I parked near our previous location and began hiking in the dark. Soon hearing the distant whistling of a bull — or two, or three — I went into hunt mode. Slipping through the scattered junipers, I was soon close to the action. Just as daylight arrived, I spotted a nice 6x6 chasing cows. Quickly stalking toward the animals, I soon found myself between a harem and a bull that was laser focused on a lone cow eluding his advances. With the thermals in my favor, this looked like a perfect setup.



Lucy, the newest addition to the Claypool Clan, didn't quite know what to make of her first dead elk. But she came around quickly as soon as she learned that it was harmless — and edible.

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Shortly, as I rounded a juniper while attempting to stalk closer to the herd, I found myself face-to-face with the herd bull as he headed back to his harem. Drawing my bow, I tried to quickly assess his antlers as he flashed through the cedars. Coming up with “good enough,” my brain locked on “kill mode.” Spotting a small opening directly ahead of the bull’s travels, I swung my bow toward the shooting lane and waited. A couple seconds later, antlers came into view at 10 yards and a sight pin locked onto ribs. Punching the release, the arrow slammed home. The elk blasted out of the area, taking his cows with him, and in a matter of seconds the area was eerily quiet. Settling to the ground, an adrenaline rush hit. It had been too long since I felt that old, familiar feeling.

A few minutes later, I took up the trail. I’d seen where the arrow had gone, and I knew my trophy wouldn’t be far. Following the trail a short distance, horizontal antlers confirmed my hunt was over. As I walked up on the bull, I knew immediately it was not the massive-antlered specimen Arizona is celebrated for producing. But, at that very moment, I also realized I was no longer the bowhunter I’d been for



Eddie, Peggie and Lucy Claypool are all smiles after their “easy” Arizona elk hunt ended on a high note with Eddie punching his first elk tag in several years.

the past 40 years either. I was no longer laser-focused on huge antlers, nor was I out to stroke my ego. My elk-hunting life had come full circle, and I was right back where it started; a guy just happy to be in the game and thrilled to get any bull at all.

As the reality of all this sank in, bittersweet emotions flooded my soul. Kneeling, I thanked God for the animal He’d provided, the life that had just been lost and the opportunity to experience the pursuit once more. Then, I got to work. **B**

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Author Jace Bauserman fought through severe back pain caused by disc and nerve issues to take this Colorado bull last fall. He specifically chose a hunting area where he would have to pack out his bull only a few hundred yards before using a wheeled cart to get to his vehicle.

Finally, it had arrived — the time in my life when years of accumulating preference points in multiple Western states were paying off in spades. In the fall of 2021, I'd successfully hunted Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep, and my good fortune rolled into 2022 when I pulled a premium Colorado elk tag.

All systems were a go. Though I'd never bowhunted the unit, I'd accompanied many friends and family and knew the country well. My buddy Jason and I made a scouting trip in mid-July, and the number of elk we saw was remarkable.

My gear was in order, and I was in top physical shape. In late July, after

the scouting trip, I completed my third 100-mile mountain marathon near Fairplay, Colo. The stars were aligning, and my goal for the upcoming season was to take a bull that scored in excess of 300 inches. I'd killed a few 300-class bulls with my trusty Browning rifle, and while I've taken a number of archery bulls as well, none of them had broken the 300-inch mark. This year, I told myself it was 300 inches or nothing at all.

But then, something happened.

One Bad Box Jump

It was one week post-100-miler, and I'd run two miles to the local gym for a little recovery workout. Things were

going well until I completed a set of lightweight deadlifts and followed those lifts with a bunch of box jumps. Something in my back popped — the pain was immediate — and it dropped me to my knees.

I stretched and stretched and tried to jog the two miles back home, but my wife had to come to pick me up in her car. Never in my life had I been plagued by back pain, and while I was hopeful it was a strain, I knew something wasn't right.

The X-ray was abnormal, which meant an MRI. The pain was somewhat tolerable most days, but it was now late August, and I was concerned about how much it would affect me in

THE BAD BACK BULL

**HERNIATED DISCS, COMPRESSED NERVE
PUSH A DIY ELK HUNTER TO HIS LIMITS**

BY JACE BAUSERMAN

the mountains. I couldn't run. Crawling was extremely painful, and when I put weight on my back and went for a walk on flat ground, my lower back screamed at me.

The MRI report read: *There is a disc bulge at L4-L5. There is disc herniation, protrusion-type, present. There is mild to moderate canal stenosis identified. There is a right lateral annular tear. There is disc herniation at L5-S1. There is an encroachment upon the S1 nerve root on the right side.*

The surgeon wanted to perform an injection, and he let me know I was a candidate for surgery but wanted to try the injection first to see if it could get me by for a while. The problem was the injection couldn't be sched-

uled until Oct. 2. You have to love the medical system!

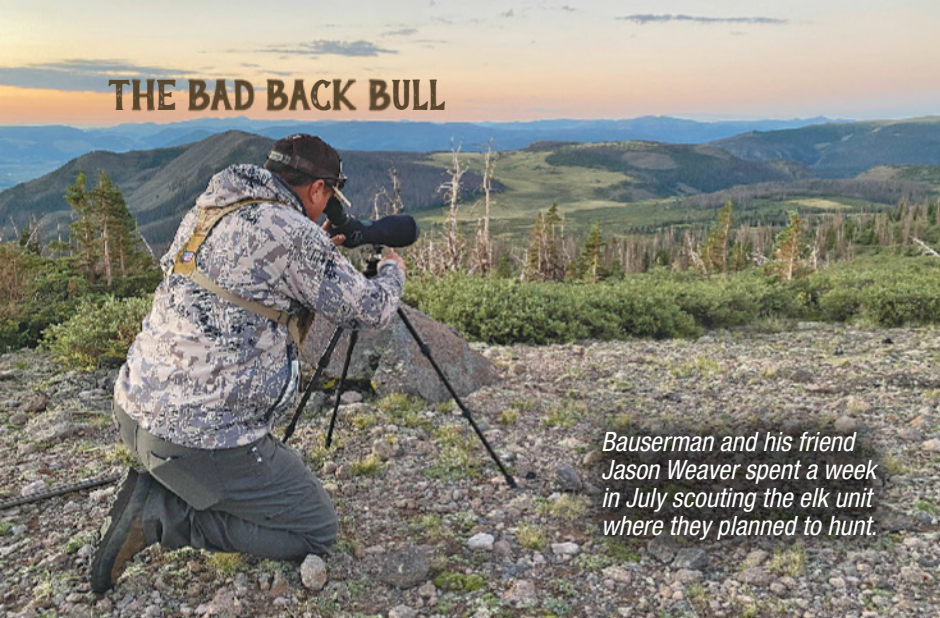
Trip #1

Having completed three 100-mile mountain ultramarathons and hunting the West for 20-plus years, I consider myself tough. I can compartmentalize pain and push it to the back of my mind, and that's what I did on this first trip.

It was early September, and Jason and I packed in on horses and mules to the locale we'd scouted in mid-July. A steady regimen of muscle relaxers mixed with Ibuprofen was doing the job, but crawling out of the tent each morning was excruciating.



THE BAD BACK BULL



Bauserman and his friend Jason Weaver spent a week in July scouting the elk unit where they planned to hunt.

The bulls were making a little noise, and Jason and I had glassed up a 360-plus-inch magnum that moved his cows into some dense timber on the edge of a meadow. After the thermals stabilized and started moving up the mountain, we dropped in elevation quickly. It was mid-morning, and the bull would bugle from his bed every 15 or 20 minutes, which allowed us to stay silent and keep creeping closer.

There were several satellite bulls in the area and a pile of cows, and we planned to stay quiet and use the cover to keep moving forward. Twice the wind shifted, and we had to retreat and come in from another direction. By now, evening was pressing in. The herd bull was getting more active, and we could hear the bull ripping apart a pine and splashing in a wallow.

Typically, I would have used this opportunity to close the distance, but we had satellite bulls all around us, and I could have easily arrowed a pair of good five-point bulls.

Despite our best efforts and lots and lots of crawling, the closest I could get to the shooter bull was 73 yards. The window was tight, and I let him follow his cows toward another drainage rather than take a low-percentage shot. He wasn't spooked, and I would be back after him in the morning.

The walk back to camp was excruciating, and I knew I had to kill the bull in the next couple days, or I would likely have to spend a few days flat on my back recovering from the abuse of the hunt.

Jason got terribly sick that night — worse than I'd ever seen him — and there was no other option the follow-

ing morning. We had to get off the mountain and get Jason home, and as bad as it hurt leaving the bull, I firmly believe everything happens for a reason. Not once did I complain or try to talk him into staying. His health was in jeopardy, and I care much more about him than I do a big bull.

Trip #2

Jason couldn't return in mid-September, which meant no pack animals. My back condition had worsened, and there were nights the pain was so severe I couldn't sleep. Returning to the hellish country I'd hunted earlier in the season wasn't an option. I knew I could hack it for a few days, but if I killed a bull, I was in no shape to get the bull out of the backcountry on my back.

Luckily, my good friend Lane Farris phoned and told me he had killed his bull — a solid 6x6 — and was willing to stay in the area and help me. Lane had drawn the same unit I did, and he told me the place he and his dad, Danny, were hunting was much less extreme. Lane explained there were many logging roads, and we discovered that if I did harvest a bull, we could use my ATV to retrieve it as long as we did it during a specific timeframe.

Logging roads and less vertical ascent and descent sounded heavenly, so I returned, met Lane and packed two miles into our spike camp. We gave it our all for five days. The bulls kept us awake at night with their constant bugling, but with each passing day, the daytime bugling activity grew less and less. I can't explain it. The bulls weren't getting pressured — we never saw another bowhunter. My only

thought was that there were too many cows, which proved true.

A stalk on day five showed precisely why the giant bulls weren't coming to our cow talk. On this stalk, I found three 5x5s, two 4x4s, one of which I had at 32 yards, and one 320-ish 6x6. I couldn't close the distance on the 6x6 due to the number of cows. The herd bull wasn't even trying to run the satellite bulls off because there were more than enough girls to go around.

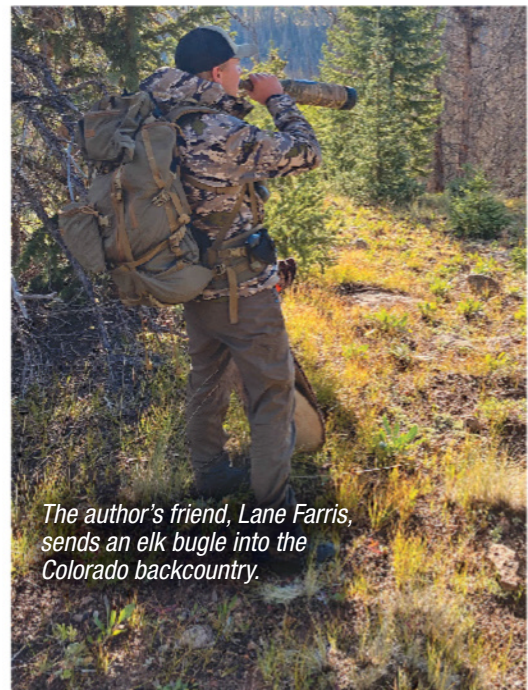
That night, after five days on the mountain, I could no longer take the pain. My back was terrible. I'm not much of a whiskey man, but if there were a drop to be found in our camp, I would have guzzled it in a second.

The following morning, with tears in my eyes, I thanked Lane for being such a wonderful friend, but I had to wave the white towel. He understood. Lane knew how hard it was for me to pack my gear and leave those bulls — walk away from a tag that took me 10 years to draw — but he could see that I couldn't go anymore.

Trip #3

Frankly, I didn't think there would be another trip when I returned home from my adventure with Lane. However, I planned to give it one last go after a few days of icing and stretching, along with a few too many muscle relaxers.

My buddy and elk-calling guru Steve Fernandez offered to go with me for a fourth-quarter, three-day, give-her-hell mission. There were only five days of the season left, but Steve's schedule and my back condition limited us to three days. Usually, I would



The author's friend, Lane Farris, sends an elk bugle into the Colorado backcountry.



Help from friends Steve and Jess Fernandez was crucial in helping Bauserman succeed.

have stayed the last two and hunted alone, but I was in no place to do that.

I also made a new goal: Shoot any legal bull. Some will call it settling, and that's fine. I know in my heart I'd given my all, and I had very little left in the tank. I don't mind going into the pain cave; I crave it weirdly, but my back condition was creating an unbearable wave of pain that was difficult to handle.

God, as He typically does, had a plan. After setting up camp, Steve and I hit an area lined with logging roads for a few hours before dark. Every step was a struggle for me, and the thought of explaining to Steve that I wouldn't be able to hack it — that we would have to call it quits — was at the forefront of my mind. Then Steve let out a bugle, and a bull answered.

I settled next to large pine, and Steve moved 75 yards behind me. Seconds into his calling sequence, a cow walked by me at less than five yards, but no bull appeared.

We stormed up the mountain, got the wind right, and tried again. This time, Steve saw the bull move into a small meadow. He was coming toward Steve's calling, but it all happened so fast Steve couldn't drop back. So, we stayed quiet and forced the bull to come looking for us. Calling too much in open terrain is only good if the caller can drop back. The bull will get to a point where he knows he should see an elk, and when he doesn't, the game is up.

We slipped back into the timber a bit, and when the bull stepped out from behind a lone pine in the neck of the small meadow, I sent a SEVR-tipped Easton through his lungs. He only went 50 yards before tipping over.

The pack was all downhill, and Steve grabbed a game cart before we left his home. All we had to do was pack the bull 300 yards to a logging road, and then I could use the game cart to haul him to the truck.

I was pretty broken when the mission was over, but the sense of accomplishment I felt was overwhelming, and as I sat in camp with Steve and his wonderful wife Jess next to a crackling fire, I took a deep breath of mountain air, thanked God and sat smiling ear to ear.

It had been an elk season on the brink, and thanks to wonderful

friends and a no-quit attitude, my Colorado elk tag didn't go unfilled. Yes, I had to adjust my tactics and goals, but it was an excellent learning experience, and the memories of this hunt will be one my bowhunting mind calls on often.

Life is far from perfect, and bad things happen despite your best efforts to prevent them. When they do, don't take the "poor me" approach. Be an example to others and push beyond the limits of what seems possible. Remember, CAN'T NEVER COULD, AND WANT NEVER DID. **B**

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I WILL NEVER FORGET walking down the left-field line with tears in my eyes after my last college baseball game. At that moment, I realized my time as a ballplayer was over, and the idea of going on to the next level was not an option.

Over the next few days, I was forced to put things into perspective and realize that even though I wouldn't go to the big leagues, I had pulled off something very few individuals ever accomplished. I was able to have a successful college baseball career. This was my goal from the start, and I had achieved that goal.

This same conundrum reared its ugly head as the 2022 deer season came to a close. Every year I try to prepare myself for the ups and downs of the hunting season. Being a very driven person, it is easy to get frustrated while looking at all the trophy pictures that flood my phone throughout the season. This, along with watching all the hunting content available online and on TV, can easily discourage many "everyday hunters" by comparing their seasons to unrealistic expectations.

Stop Comparing

Comparison is the thief of joy. This famous quote rings true in every aspect of life, especially nowadays. The majority of people now carry smartphones with amazing cameras. This, in conjunction with the constant connection to social media, makes it extremely easy to get caught up in

the pretty "exterior crust" of everyday life. I am constantly reminded there will always be bigger bucks shot, and it will always seem as if it is easier for everyone else to kill deer while I struggle.

While pursuing my psychology major in college, I was always told that perception is reality. If you believe everyone is easily killing big bucks every time that they climb into their treestand, then that will be your reality, especially if that is all you focus on.

It's virtually impossible to not get sucked into this distorted reality. Any hunter who has been at the game for a while usually has a network of friends who are always sharing information throughout the season. There are trail-camera pictures, hero photos, friends' hero pictures and friends of friends' hero pictures. At times, it can seem as if the whole world is killing bucks except you.

When I first started bowhunting, I was only aware of a really tight group of people and how they were doing in their season. It was only when I received a phone call or helped recover deer that it came to my attention that somebody killed a buck. Of course, I always had hunting magazines and hunting shows to watch; however, they were extremely limited. I didn't have access to semi-live hunting shows and Instagram Live notifications to contend with

By JIM BOUCHARD



Make it a **HOMESIDE**

back in those days. I just hunted and dealt with the challenges in front of me. With the constant influx of information today, it is very easy to develop a negative viewpoint of your own hunting abilities.

Having success is one thing; another thing is this confusion over what is considered "success." Well, I, for one, am over that same, old story I see on television.

We have a lot of history with this buck...

We have years of trail-camera pics of this buck...

We are really trying to pass on these deer until they are age 5½ or better...

Anyone who has indulged in outdoor media can undoubtedly add many other common phrases from popular outdoor television. But let's be honest — for the rest of us, that isn't really reality.

Going back to the start of this article, I never had a shot at the big leagues; those guys are so damn good. That doesn't mean I wasn't a good baseball player. Similarly, many hunters will never shoot a Pope and Young whitetail, let alone a Boone and Crockett deer. That doesn't mean you aren't a good hunter. As a matter of fact, I know many hunters who would out-hunt a majority of public hunting figures. Being the best you can be, given your unique circumstances, should be your bar for success.

Before I go on, I want to make it clear I don't think what is on television is wrong — I just believe it is on the fringes of hunting. It has to be understood that this content abso-

lutely can be enjoyed, and, in a lot of cases, it can be very informative. I don't know how many hours of hunting shows I have watched in my life, or the number of pages of outdoor magazines I have read. However, just like watching professional sports on television, one must realize these individuals are at a unique level in their craft. Early on in my hunting career, I was naive about this and failed miserably using the techniques I read about. I had to learn the hard way that my quarry and land were much different than those written about in a magazine or seen on TV.

Be Your Best

I also don't believe hunters should simply lower the bar; pushing yourself to accomplish dreams is an absolute must. Successful hunters have to be driven and extremely resilient. There is only one way to be successful at anything, and that is through dedication and hard work. Bows will not shoot themselves and deer will not simply surrender to you — hunting is hard!

Of course, you will always hear the stories about those who went out and sat in an old treestand for half an hour, got lucky and shot a grizzly, old buck on their first sit. This has happened since the beginning of time, and it will continue forever. However, it is also far from the norm.

Don't bank on being lucky; do your best with the time and scenario laid out before you. I am simply trying to put things into perspective. If all you do is compare yourself

SUCCESS IN THE WOODS IS ALL ABOUT PERSPECTIVE



RUN SEASON

LANCE KRUEGER PHOTO

MAKE IT A HOME-RUN SEASON

to what you see from social media, television and your buddies, you will never be happy.

One must also remember that what is shown publicly is typically the hand-picked best morsels of hunting content. The misses, lost animals, poor shots and other mistakes are often left out. The majority of hunting could, by many, be considered dealing with failure. Most of us have dealt with horrible weather, failing equipment, getting winded, poor shots and long blood trails. However, all this doesn't make good television and can't be summed up in a well-executed trophy photo. The content we ultimately see is edited to fit timeslots and word restrictions.

We Define Success

So, what is success? Well, that's up to you! Maybe it's finally killing a buck on grandpa's farm. Maybe it is being successful on public land rather than the back forty you are so familiar with. Or, perhaps a great adventure could be had by heading out of state and starting from scratch on some new ground.

I recently had a buddy who has been an archer his whole life decide it was time to kill a buck with a longbow. After some ups and downs and hard lessons, he connected with a great buck on a frosty November evening. The deer wasn't going to win any local buck pool honors, but that didn't matter. His heart was set on abandoning the compound for a year, practicing religiously and trying to accomplish something he had never done before. I am sure that buck will have a special place in his heart for the remainder of his life.

Over the years, I have had the good fortune to shoot some very respectable bucks. However, last fall was a struggle, and with very few sightings through much of October, I could feel that anxiety in my gut building exponentially with every passing day. This was compounded with every new text from another friend who had killed a buck.

It wasn't until a good cold front came through on Oct. 30 that I finally got my opportunity. That particularly quiet morning was broken when I heard the telltale sound of a buck marching through the frosty, fallen leaves. As I listened to the deer approaching, I prepared myself for the potential moment of truth, but I quickly realized the buck was working its way out of range.

As the buck changed course and started to walk out of my life, I grunted. He froze after the first sequence but never committed and simply vanished into the cedars. It was at this point I heard another twig snap behind me, followed by the chilling sound of hooves approaching from the river to my south. I could only see the figure of a deer working through the tall grass, and I had to get the buck to change course. I once again tried a quick grunt sequence while projecting the sound behind me.

The deer froze, contemplated my offering and came in on a string. At first sight of the buck, my bow came back and I sent my arrow through both lungs and watched the deer go down 40 yards away. I was as shaken up as I have been on any other buck I have ever shot, big or small. My rule has always been that if the deer makes my bow come back, it's the one I want.

It was an amazing morning. I tricked a buck against his best survival instincts and made a great shot. I also



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Author Jim Bouchard made a high-pressure shot when it counted, taking this buck in a heavily hunted area of northern Michigan. Although the deer wasn't close to the record books, it didn't matter to Bouchard, who saw the hunt and season as a huge success.

got a chance to share the morning with my most reliable deer dragger, my daughter. All in all, it was a true success, regardless of inches. All those hours of practice and time spent scouting came down to that moment, and I was able to close the deal. That is what mattered most to me.

Aim High

This season, be sure to set goals. Achieve things you never thought you could achieve, but do it for yourself — that is all that matters. Bowhunting is one of the best ways to test yourself as a human, because nobody else is watching. What you do is on your own and under your control; your destiny is in your own hands!

If you truly accomplish what you set out to do, do not be ashamed. If you are ashamed, you need to recalibrate your expectations and ethics, because you obviously compromised. Celebrate those victories. Enjoy them while you can, and then get ready for the next challenge, whatever it might be. **E**



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Is it possible to come home empty-handed from a hunt where almost everything that could go wrong did go wrong and still have had an incredible experience? Well, when your bow shows up two days later than you do and the end of your hunt is wiped out by a hurricane, yet you somehow still see more moose than days you actually hunted, the answer is unequivocally, "Yes!"

When I departed for Newfoundland in September 2022, I was beyond ecstatic to once again be returning to "The Rock" to pursue moose. The province has long been known for providing one of the best moose-hunting experiences in North America, with guides that offer drive-in, fly-in and even helicopter-in hunts, catering to every interest imaginable.

For this trip, I was staying with Ryan and Jackie Quirk, owners of Victoria Outfitters, a moose- and bear-hunting service that plies 16-plus square miles of rolling forests in the central part of the island. I thought I was heading to a drive-in camp, and I was, at least for 99 percent of the way. But, after traveling the dirt roads south of Millertown for the better part of 45 minutes, the gravel ended abruptly, with a quick boat ride needed to reach the lodge on the opposite bank of the Victoria River. Hence, even though Victoria Outfitters is easily accessible, it still offers a remote experience, with the river serving as a barrier that helps to keep hunting pressure in the area light.

A Passion for Moose

A miner who works in the Canadian territory of Nunavut most of the year, Ryan Quirk has an intimate knowledge of moose hunting and the moose populations in his part of Newfoundland, having grown up in nearby Buchans Junction and spending more than 25 years pursuing the animal with gun and bow. Six years ago, he decided to take his passion for moose hunting to the next level, purchasing a hunting lodge to lead others to moose-hunting success.

"I've always been passionate about the outdoors and moose hunting," Quirk said. "And my family has always been in the outfitting industry. When this camp came up for sale, I jumped at the opportunity."

Since purchasing the lodge, Quirk has made a number of changes designed to improve the experience and success rates for moose hunters, including expanding the territory he hunts, putting in an outpost cabin in the backcountry and even trying some innovative tactics to lure in wary bulls. His backcountry camp is 1.5 miles from the closest dirt road, accessible only by Argo or a long, hard walk on foot.

A Moose Mecca

There are a number of states and Canadian provinces where you can pursue moose with the proper planning,

Bowhunting the **ROCK**

By **MARK DEMKO**



MOOSE BY MARK RAYCROFT

cash and/or the patience to wait — sometimes for years — until you draw a tag. But when you consider all the obstacles that stand in a potential moose hunter's way, it's easy to see why Newfoundland offers some of the best opportunities for a person to embark on what is usually a once-in-a-lifetime trip. First off, the island is home to 110,000 of the animals, offering one of the highest moose densities in the world. And although non-residents must hunt with a registered guide, the tradeoff is those hunts come with a guaranteed tag. Finally, and often most importantly, while moose hunts in other parts of Canada and Alaska can run \$13,000-\$20,000, if you do your homework, you can find a high-quality hunt in Newfoundland for somewhere in the range of \$5,000-\$9,000, putting this bucket-list animal within reach of any hunter who budgets and plans properly.

As for the quality of the bulls, you can't go to Newfoundland with expectations of arrowing a 60-incher; however, a bull with a 40- or 45-inch spread is a real possibility.

"The moose population is very strong in this area — it's a healthy population — and there are some quality bulls," Quirk said. "A 35- to 40-incher would be a good bull, and every year we get bulls in the high 40s."

As far as the best time for bowhunters to visit, there's

no doubt it's the period leading into the rut in early fall. It's then that you're most likely to lure a moose to the call, providing an opportunity for a shot at close range.

"The best time for bowhunters would be the pre-rut, from the last week of September following into the first week of October," Quirk said. "When the rut is on strong, it's a little difficult because the mature bulls will have their cows, so it's a little tough to draw them away from the cows they already have."

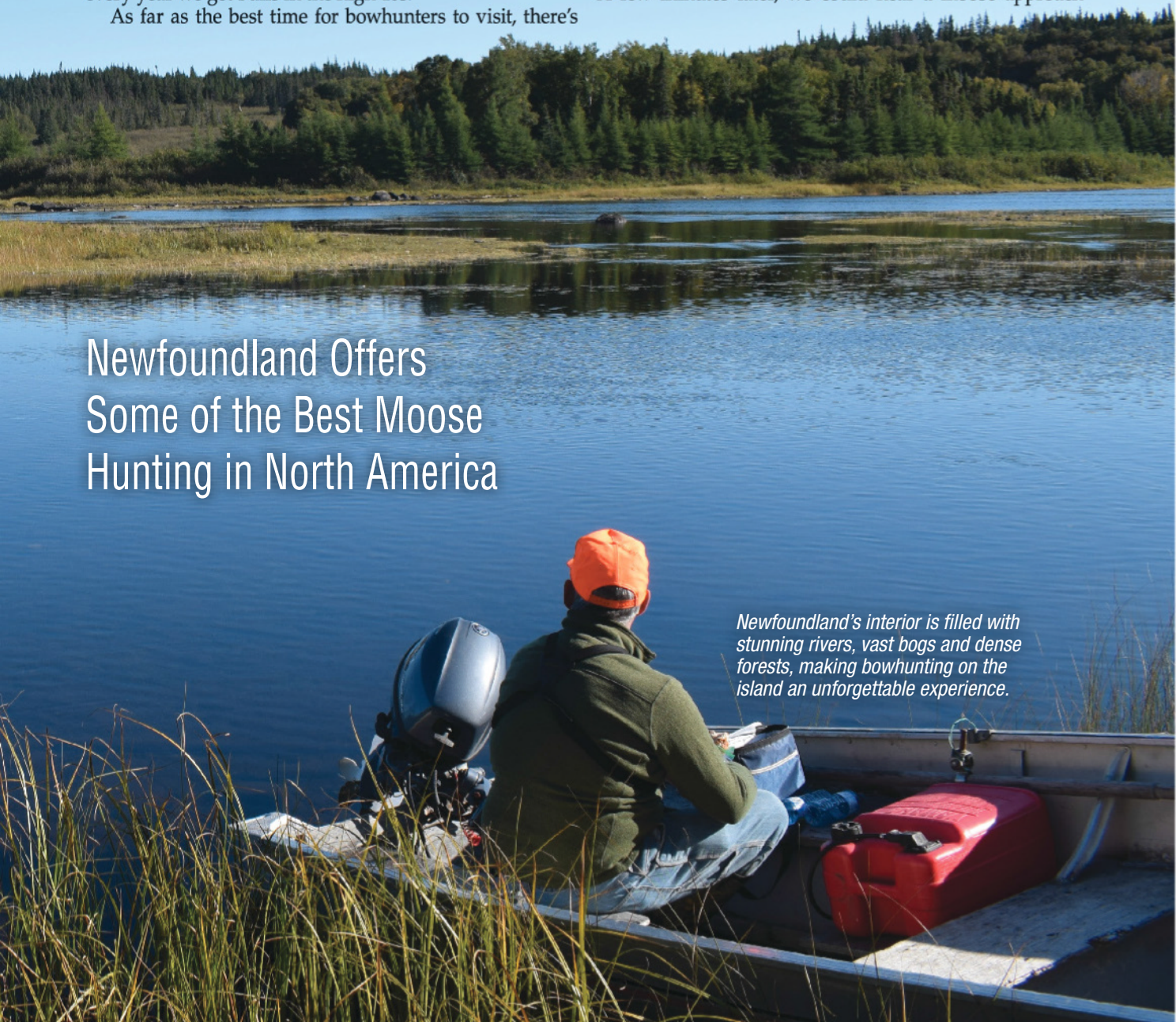
Close Encounters

During my hunt, I was guided alternately by Quirk and Dermot "Derm" Alexander, a guide with decades of moose-hunting experience and a cow call louder and more remarkable than any I'd heard previously. Although the week started off warm, which is not conducive to good moose movement, the temperatures dropped substantially after our first day of hunting and we were greeted by heavy frost the following morning.

About 45 minutes into our hike, Alexander let out a cow-calling sequence and heard a response in the distance. A few minutes later, we could hear a moose approach-

Newfoundland Offers Some of the Best Moose Hunting in North America

Newfoundland's interior is filled with stunning rivers, vast bogs and dense forests, making bowhunting on the island an unforgettable experience.




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ing through the forest, crashing and thrashing as it drew near.

"Get ready; get ready. He's coming," Alexander whispered.

Within minutes, bits and pieces of a yet unidentified bull emerged from the timber. The animal was slightly below us on the landscape, and as it approached to within 20 yards of us, trying desperately to find the female that made those sounds, it was at eye level with me. You could see the steam coming from its nostrils as its breath hit the cold air, and even more incredibly, its large right eye rolling around in its head, looking our way intently to try and determine who and what we were.

By this time, I'd determined the animal was a small 6-pointer, so I opted to pass on it in hopes of finding something larger later in the week. The bull, either winding us or simply identifying us as something out of the ordinary, stepped back, ran 15-20 yards and looked back before disappearing into the thick forest. Although I'd hunted moose three times previously, never in my life had I had a close encounter like that, and it was one of the most thrilling experiences I've ever had afield!



Moose Bowhunting Tactics

It's safe to say most moose-hunting guides simply cow call as the rut approaches, or mimic bull sounds and rake bushes and trees to try and entice a bull in. So, imagine my surprise when on day two of our hunt Quirk grabbed a set of moose antlers and began rattling, just like you might do for whitetails!

"I've always watched that for whitetails," he said. "It's been a good technique for mature bucks. It's something new that I've tried and it seems like it's working."

A bowhunter himself, Quirk tailors his archery hunts to the setups needed for bowhunting success. For example, instead of hunting the edges of large bogs and marshes like he might do with rifle hunters, he'll set up in much

NEWFOUNDLAND ESSENTIALS

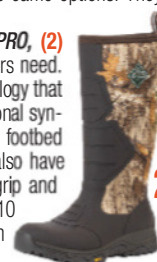
When hunting Newfoundland, you need to prepare for the terrain and the weather, both of which can be downright gnarly at times. It's common to walk several miles each day, and when your feet aren't firmly planted on rocks, they're usually stepping on spongy, saturated ground that grabs and pulls you into the earth with every step. Hence, a good pair of knee-high neoprene/rubber boots are essential. In addition, the weather can change on a dime, which means it rains frequently, making quality rain gear a must.

For my rain gear, I was wearing **NOMAD's Hailstorm NXT Jacket and Pants (1)**. Made of quiet stretch fabric, they're 100 percent windproof and waterproof, yet allow heat and condensation to escape, keeping you comfortable afield, something that's imperative since you'll cover a lot of ground yet stand still for 30-45 minutes at a time while calling.

The jacket features zippered hand and chest pockets, adjustable hood and underarm zips for venting, while the pants have an adjustable waist, multiple pockets for storage and zippered leg openings for easy removal of pants and boots. Both come in sizes S-XXXL in Mossy Oak and Realtree camo options. They retail for \$170 each and can be purchased at nomadoutdoor.com



As for footwear, it's hard to beat **Muck boots** like the **APEX PRO, (2)** an insulated boot that provides the flexibility and comfort hunters need. The boots' Thermal Regulating Fleece has an open-fiber technology that reportedly wicks away moisture 33 percent better than traditional synthetic fleece to help maintain warmth and comfort, while the footbed features memory foam for long-lasting comfort. The boots also have a Vibram Arctic Grip AT Traction Lug outsole for excellent grip and traction, even when hunting in snowy conditions. They cost \$210 \$255 and are available in Brown and Bark/Realtree Edge in sizes 7-15; you can get them at muckbootcompany.com





1) Although it's a drive-in camp, the last 150 yards to Victoria Outfitters' lodge requires a boat ride, with the river serving as a natural barrier that helps keep hunting pressure in the area light. 2) Dermot "Derm" Alexander lets out a cow moose call on the edge of a Newfoundland bog last fall. 3) Victoria Outfitters' owner Ryan Quirk has adopted the somewhat unorthodox tactic of rattling for moose, just as one might do for mature whitetails. 4) The Rock is home to some of the highest moose densities in the world, with an estimated 110,000 of the animals roaming the island.

tighter confines where bulls might feel more comfortable approaching the call.

"There are a lot of things you need to do a little differently," he said, "one being you can't really set up in a big, vast space. You have to try to get the moose in at close quarters, with some cover to get them in close. And (playing) the wind is key for archery."

As for his success rates, Quirk estimates he averages about 80 percent annually, with the vast majority of those harvests coming from firearms hunters. Hence, it's no surprise that he draws clients from not just North America but around the globe.

"Moose is a species that's on everyone's bucket list and the previous owner had focused a lot on the European market," Quirk explained. "We carried on that tradition and do a sports show in Dortmund, Germany, every year, and we get a lot of interest from the Europeans."

About That Rattling

The day after the close encounter with the small bull, we headed into one of the more remote spots of Quirk's hunting territory, an area that he has found consistently produces quality bulls. For the second time on the hunt, Quirk grabbed his set of moose antlers and started rattling as we carefully scanned a field surrounded by pines, spruce and thick undergrowth. Only 15 or so minutes later, we froze when we saw a palm appear on one side of a small spruce tree, with the points of the other antler sticking out from the other side of the tree. A shooter bull had come in for a look!

"Did that rattling work? I wondered. Well, it certainly didn't hurt anything.

It turned out the bull was with a cow,

so it wasn't keen to leave her for a "cow" it couldn't see. Hence, it never came closer than 70 yards, all the while remaining in thick cover before disappearing back into the timber. Even though we chased after it, we were unable to catch up with the animal again that evening as darkness quickly descended upon us.

Heading to the Finish Line

After a couple of days of excellent hunting, the trip ended as challengingly as it began, as the remnants of Hurricane Fiona approached and battered the island. Friday featured swirling winds coming from all four directions, which meant no self-respecting moose would come within 100 yards of us, and our last day was a total loss, with gale-force winds and sheets of driving rain all day.

During the three-and-a-half days I was actually able to hunt, I saw two bulls and two cows, not too bad all things considered. If you're used to hunting whitetails, or even elk, a handful of moose may not seem like a lot. However, chat with anyone who's moose hunted more than once and seeing four moose in three or so days is usually considered pretty good. Throw in the lynx, caribou, coyotes, snowshoe hares, bald eagles and other wildlife I saw during my hunt, and it was an epic week I will not soon forget.

If moose hunting is on your bucket list, there's no doubt Newfoundland is a destination you need to visit at least once! **B**

Moose Hunting with Victoria Outfitters

For more information, or to book a hunt with Victoria Outfitters, contact Ryan and Jackie Quirk at 709-572-9046 or visit victoriaoutfitters.com



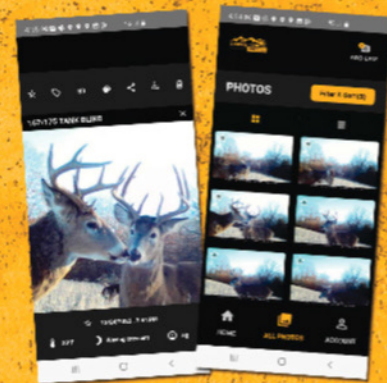
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CROSSBOW TEST

By **JON E. SILKS**

Mission's Sub-1 Lite launches bolts up to 335 fps and features the company's Benchmark Fire Control Technology that includes a two-stage, match-grade trigger, Easy-Load Bolt Retention Arm and de-cocking mechanism.



MISSION SUB-1 LITE

A First-Rate Crossbow With Exceptional Accuracy and Deadly Impact!

WHEN BUYING A Mission Crossbow, you aren't just getting that particular crossbow — you are getting the whole Mission experience.

Mission is a family of hunters who designs gear through that lens to offer meaningful innovation and utility. Your new “family” also has state-of-the-art manufacturing and some of the best engineers/designers in the world, as well as a host of patents and performance awards to prove it. Finally, you're brought into Mission's “Legendary Support” circle and can expect the very best in customer service.

Mission's Sub-1 Lite features the Benchmark Fire Control that includes a match-grade trigger, Easy-Load Bolt Retention Arm and unique de-cocking mechanism. High-let-off synced cams,

along with a set of short fiberglass limbs, generate game-dropping bolt speeds, while an adjustable butt stock and cheek piece bring a custom fit.

Benchmark Performance

Two of the many features and technologies that work together to achieve sub-one-inch groups at 100 yards are found in the company's Benchmark Fire Control System. First is a match-grade, dual-stage trigger with fully contained rolling sear that produces a crisp 3.3-pound trigger pull. Second is the Easy-Load Bolt Retention Arm that promotes downrange accuracy by applying a precise and repeatable amount of pressure to secure the bolt to the rail. Additionally, this system employs a unique De-Cocking Button that allows for safe de-cocking without pulling the trigger or shooting a bolt. When cocked, the trigger safety is automatically engaged, and the safety is also ambidextrous to accommodate both left- and right-handed shooters.

The ‘Bow’ in Crossbow

Mission builds the Sub-1 Lite's bow assembly on a stout aluminum riser that is home to the company's integrated Riser Step (RS) Tread that offers a ribbed surface on the back

THE SPECS

Manufacturer: Mission Archery, 608-269-2728; missioncrossbows.com

Model: Sub-1 Lite

Safety Features: Anti-dry fire, auto trigger safety, safety wings

Cam System: Sync X Cams

Riser: Aluminum, black anodized, stout

Overall Length: 30.25 inches

Axle-to-Axle Width: 13.8 inches (at rest); 10.5 inches (cocked)

Advertised Weight: 6.9 pounds (advertised and as tested; bow only)

String: Zebra Hybrid, 41.75 inches

Cables: Zebra Hybrid, 20.5 inches

Limbs: Short, wide, split

Draw Weight: 150 pounds; adjustable

Power Stroke: 13.75 inches

Stock/Forearm: Precision Stock, rifle inspired, molded composite

Finish: Black or Realtree Edge

Advertised Speed: 335 fps with 350-grain bolt

MSRP: \$1,899 (for Sub-1 Lite Pro Kit)

Comments: A high-end nail driver!

side of the riser where the user steps to anchor the bow for cocking. This eliminates the need for a foot stirrup and reduces overall bow length. A set of machined aluminum limb pockets precisely aligns the short fiberglass split limbs to the riser. The limb configuration brings torsional rigidity and stress distribution to the rig, resulting in consistency and efficiency.

Another major player in the Sub-1 Lite's impressive downrange accuracy is the company's Controlled Acceleration Technology that features the Sync X Cams and patented Flight Deck. The dual cams are tied together to eliminate timing issues and horizontal nock travel, which in turn brings consistency and accuracy.

Mission's CNC machined rail adds to the accuracy as it eliminates vertical nock travel. Peak draw weight is 150 pounds, and when coupled with the 13.75-inch power stroke and 80 percent letoff, the bow is easy to cock and de-cock with the provided rope cocker and generates bolt speeds of 335 fps with a 350-grain bolt. Mission also sells a Removable Silent Draw System that drastically reduces cocking effort. The draw weight of the Sub-1 Lite can actually be reduced significantly and the long bolts will allow all tension to be removed so the string and cables can be replaced without a press.

Stock Options

Focusing on fit and feel, Mission equipped its rig with a rifle-inspired stock that offers six different length-of-pull adjustments through the ad-

SPEED & ENERGY

	BOLT SPEED	KINETIC ENERGY
420-GRAIN BOLT	304.67 fps	86.59 ft./lbs.
500-GRAIN BOLT	282 fps	88.31 ft./lbs.
347.2-GRAIN MFR. BOLT	332 fps	85 ft./lbs.

BOWHUNTING Test Measurements:

Maximum Width: 18.13 inches (at rest); 14.75 (cocked)

Overall Length: 30.1875-32.375 (7 positions)

Mass Weight: 6.9 pounds (crossbow only); 8.5 pounds (with accessories)

Average Trigger Pull: 1.61 pounds

Length of Pull: 14.50-16.69 inches (7 positions)

Average Shot Noise: 91 dBA with 420-grain bolt

Maximum Shot Deviation at 35 Yards: .5-inch

justable butt stock and 1.25 inches of adjustment in the comb/cheek piece. An overmold, AR-15-style pistol grip adds control and comfort and can be interchanged with any AR-style aftermarket grip. The foregrip is flared, providing a positive grip, and when coupled with the large safety wings works to keep the shooter's fingers below the flight deck and out of harm's way.

What's in the Box?

The Sub-1 Lite comes with a Hawke XB1 Scope, MX-3 Quiver, three Mis-

sion bolts, Mission soft case, rope cocking aid and rail lube.

At the Range

The test rig proved to be maneuverable with a relatively compact footprint and light mass weight. It shot very consistent, tight groups at 35 yards and is one of the quietest crossbows we have ever tested. This bow is super easy to cock with the rope cocker, RS Tread and high letoff. It also displayed the typical, top-notch Mission quality in fit, form and function. It's easy to operate, fun to shoot and deadly accurate! **B**



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RIG'EM RIGHT OUTDOORS HYDEOUT:

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AN INNOVATIVE big-game hide from waterfowl-hunting masters!

A portable, hub-style ground blind is a terrific tool for any bowhunter's arsenal, particularly in scenarios where terrain and/or fickle wind makes it impossible or impractical to use a treestand or saddle. From open fields and prairies without a tree in sight to tricky creek bottoms where scent swirls as if it were in a blender, a blind makes an ideal concealment option.

Ground blinds are also a godsend in foul or extremely cold weather, allowing you to hunt comfortably on days when you might otherwise never leave the house. Regardless of whether you're hunting a local woodlot or you're on an adventure 1,000 miles from home, keeping a blind handy in your vehicle is a savvy move that's likely to pay off more than a few times over the course of your bowhunting lifetime.

That said, not all blinds are created equal, particularly when it comes to bow-friendly features such as the ability to set up and adjust the blind quickly and quietly, adequate space to draw and aim inside the blind and properly sized and placed shooting windows to send an arrow on its way without interference from the blind fabric. Thankfully, the new Hydeout blinds from Rig'Em Right Outdoors check all those boxes and more.

Available in standard and XL models, in your choice of Optifade Subalpine (pictured) or Timber camouflage, perhaps the biggest feature that separates the Hydeout from the competition is that the camouflage is on both the outside *and* inside of the blind, rather than the black interior found on most pop-up blinds. Rig'Em Right says this helps hunters remain hidden inside the blind without having to wear solid

black clothing and eliminates an unnatural "black hole" effect when looking into the blind from the outside. Having tested the Hydeout XL this summer, I can't say based on actual hunting experience whether this is a superior concealment system. However, I am certain it will appeal to many bowhunters, especially those who prefer Sitka Gear apparel featuring Optifade camo.

Hydeout blinds are constructed with durable, double-layer, 330D polyester fabric, while the five hubs (roof hub marked with orange for easy ID) operate very smoothly and quietly. I give the blinds high marks for eliminating all Velcro inside the blind, as all window coverings (solid fabric and camouflage mesh layers on each window) are adjusted using silent hook and loop closures. Similarly, the zippered door can also be operated via hook and loop closures that allow you to enter and exit in silence. In fact, the only Velcro on the entire blind can

be found on the removable reflective strips (one on each outer wall) that aid in locating the blind in the dark.

I also love the Hydeout's generously sized windows that let me aim my bow without worrying whether the arrow will clear the opening. The lower side windows make it easy to shoot from a seated position, while the larger, center windows are perfect for standing shots.

The standard Hydeout accommodates up to two hunters, measures 55 inches square at the base, stands 65 inches tall and weighs 19 pounds. The Hydeout XL accommodates up to three hunters, measures 65 inches square at the base, stands 72 inches tall and weighs 26 pounds. Both models have fabric loops for brushing in the blind and come with a camouflage, backpack-style carry bag, ground stakes and tie-down ropes. **B**

— Editor Christian Berg



\$429.99 (Hydeout) and \$529.99 (Hydeout XL) / Rig'Em Right Outdoors
252-726-9508; rigemright.com



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MADE IN
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IRISH SETTER ELK TRACKER XD:

LIGHT, RUGGED, RELIABLE BOOTS FOR ANY HUNT

WHEN IT COMES to most products, the saying, “You get what you pay for,” is usually true.

And while you can often make do with hunting gear and apparel you got on the cheap, there's one item, in my opinion, on which you can never scrimp — footwear. If you do, you do so at your own peril and should expect achy feet, possibly a sore back and other issues.

Over the years, I've worn affordably priced hunting boots that didn't come as advertised, weren't comfortable as you broke them in or simply couldn't hold up to the pounding from the woods and trails, showing signs of wear and tear much sooner than I'd expected. As a result, sooner or later I came to regret my purchase. That said, one company that has long been known for manufacturing high-quality, comfortable, dependable boots and footwear is Irish Setter.

When you purchase Irish Setter boots, you know you'll have seven-plus decades of quality and innovation behind every pair. Introducing its first boots in 1950, the company is known for its lightweight, shock-absorbing, ultra-comfortable footwear for work, casual wear and, of course, hunting. Hence, I was thrilled when I got a pair of the new Elk Tracker XDs recently. I'll be wearing them all fall, starting with an elk hunt in September, followed by several whitetail outings in October and November.

The first thing you notice with the Elk Tracker XDs when you put them on is the extremely comfortable footbed and feel

of your foot in the boot, coupled with the incredible ankle support they provide, a combination that's essential when you're trudging across steep hills, rocky mountainsides and other rough terrain. The rubber rand around the base of the boot is designed to fend off rocks, sticks and other sharp objects, while the full-leather upper, with the leather gusset overlay, prevents dirt and debris from entering the boot and creating an “irritating” situation.

Released in July, the Elk Tracker XDs come in standard (D) and wide (EE) widths in sizes from 8-14 in three styles: 8-inch insulated and non-insulated models, and a 10-inch non-insulated boot. For my hunting, which usually takes place when temperatures range from the 30s to high 60s, I opted for the 8-inch insulated boot with 200-gram Primaloft insulation.

Speaking of temperatures, Irish Setter notes the Elk Tracker XDs feature TempSens technology, essentially a moisture-wicking technology that helps regulate the temperature in the boots to boost foot comfort. Perspiration and moisture are wicked away in warmer temperatures, helping to keep feet cooler and drier, while in colder temperatures the same process helps to keep feet warmer by creating a thermal barrier that works to control the interior temperature.

This may be a small detail, but one of the challenges I've found with some boots over the years is a boot tongue that never seems to lay right or remain in place, leading to rubbing and irritation on your shins and/or ankles. Well, with

(SHOWN IS 8-INCH NON-INSULATED
ELK TRACKER XD)



\$249.99-\$259.99 / Irish Setter Boots
888-738-8370; irishsetterboots.com

the Elk Tracker XDs, the padded, comfortable Cushin tongue and the full-boot lacing system work together seamlessly for a snug yet comfortable fit, something that's especially important when you're climbing or descending inclines. The boot features locking lace hooks on its upper portion, allowing for easy lacing and tying, and it's designed so you can easily slide your foot in or out of the boot in seconds.

As far as foot comfort, the EnerG high-rebound material in the midsole helps to absorb the shock of pounding on the ground for hours on end, while foot cushioning and support come from the removable Comfort Cork EVA memory foam footbed. Last, but certainly not least, these waterproof boots have a rugged outsole that's made to handle the many obstacles that the North American landscape can throw at them, with a well-designed tread pattern that's made to release mud and dirt, leading to solid traction under almost any conditions.

Even with all of the features described above, the Elk Tracker XDs are lightweight, checking in at less than 4 pounds per pair. Hence, even after wearing for them for hours they never felt heavy or like they were “tugging” on the foot and ankle.

Whether you're planning a western hunt for mule deer or elk, or you simply want a dependable, foot-cradling pair of boots for plying the back forty for white-tails, you can't go wrong with these new classics from Irish Setter! **B**

— Associate Editor Mark Demko

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By **MARK DEMKO**

NEW GEAR

EXCEPTIONAL DESIGN

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*Carbon Express;
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The new Maxima Photon SD arrow is highlighted by an optimized construction that promises enhanced strength, accuracy, speed and penetration. These .203-inch inner diameter arrows are crafted from a 30-ton carbon custom weave and feature Tri-Spine Technology, resulting in an arrow that reportedly recovers 25 percent faster out of the bow than comparable models and generates up to four times the accuracy of traditionally constructed, single-spine arrows. The Maxima Photon SD comes with Launchpad Precision Nocks and aircraft-grade aluminum half-out, standard-threaded 21-grain inserts, offering the ability to customize F.O.C. Arrows are sorted and matched by spine ($\pm .002$ -inch straightness tolerance) and weight (± 1 -grain weight tolerance) for exceptional consistency. They come in 300 (8.9 gpi), 350 (8.1 gpi) and 400 (7.2 gpi) spine sizes and are available as a half-dozen fletched with 2-inch Quadel Raptor X Vanes, or as one dozen bare shafts.



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An oldie but goodie marks a milestone this year as Wildlife Research Center's popular Trail's End #307 celebrates its 40th year. A complex blend of doe urine and estrous secretions, this powerful attractant, which is now enhanced with Scent Reflex Technology, is dynamite for luring in whitetail bucks, especially during the rut. It's available in both 1- and 4-ounce bottles and comes with Wildlife Research Center's Money-Back Guarantee.



MADE FOR BOWHUNTERS

\$189.99

*Millennium Treestands;
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Designed to be compact and easy to move, the Bowlite L-116 is a single ladder stand that stands 16 feet tall and weighs 53 pounds. Made of powder-coated steel, the stand features Millennium's renowned ComfortMAX contoured, tight-sling seat; integrated accessory hooks; and a 20x18-inch platform. Seat dimensions are 19.75x17 inches; total weight capacity is 300 pounds.



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pro-tracker.com*

Keep your practice tips and broadheads firmly in place on your arrow with the Friction Grip Inserts. Designed to fit all major arrow brands, these weighted arrow inserts utilize cutting-edge technology to prevent heads and fieldpoints from coming loose. They're extremely durable — crafted from 7075 aluminum — promise enhanced accuracy and can be installed without any special tools (glue-based installation).



PERFECT FOR ANY ACTIVITY

\$46

Realtree; realtree.com

Available in Realtree Advantage Classic, the Bamboo Men's Long Sleeve Hooded Shirt is made of super soft, lightweight fabric that wicks away moisture and is breathable, making it perfect for casual wear, hunting and many other outdoors activities. The shirt, which is made of a 70 percent bamboo/30 percent polyester blend, features a loose cut and V neck for comfort and comes with a chest pocket and thumb holes. It's available in sizes XS-5XL.



AN ICONIC BROADHEAD

\$43.95 PER 3

Sw Hacker; sw Hacker.com

Sw Hacker's #282 Hank Parker Signature Series Broadhead is a 125-grain expandable head featuring the company's famous wing-blade design that cuts through the first layer of hide, bone and fat before the primary blades deploy internally. The razor-sharp blades are made of .032-inch-thick stainless steel, with blade-lock technology keeping them locked in place during practice. When completely deployed, the #282 has a 2.25-inch cutting diameter, providing lethal results on deer, elk and other game.



SUPERIOR SCENT SUPPRESSION

\$12.99-\$29.99

Dead Down Wind;
deaddownwind.com

Dead Down Wind steps up its scent-suppression game with Premium Black, featuring the company's odor-destroying enzymes plus the new NIDORX additive, designed to quickly and efficiently attack human and pet odors, food, gas and other smells that spook deer and other game. Premium Black products include 24- and 32-ounce Field Sprays, a 16-ounce 3-in-1 Wash and a 20-ounce Laundry Detergent; a combo pack is also available.



ULTIMATE HIP PACK

\$229.99

Mystery Ranch;
mysteryranch.com

The Treehouse 9 hip pack is designed for hunters who want to go light. The 9.5x15.75x9.25-inch pack, which weighs 3.5 pounds, offers 545 cubic inches of space for bowhunting accessories, snacks and more. Highlights include quiet exterior and interior fabrics; large main compartment with rip-zip top flap for easy access; zippered front pocket with interior pockets; side pockets with elastic pull cords for holding water bottles or other items; and a strap for securing the pack to your stand.



ARCHERY-FRIENDLY RANGEFINDER

\$199.99

Leupold Optics; Leupold.com

Leupold ups its game with the second generation of its RX-1400i TBR/W laser rangefinder. Powered by the company's DNA laser engine, this rangefinder provides fast, accurate readings, with a bright display that's visible in any lighting conditions. The rangefinder can determine distances to 900 yards on game. It also features Flight-path Technology highlighting potential arrow obstructions; 5x magnification and a Last Target Mode that allows you to range accurately in snow, rain and fog.

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By **EDDIE CLAYPOOL**

THE DIY GUY

GILA REDUX

On the Hunt for an Even Bigger New Mexico Bull

AS I ROLLED into the Gila country of southwestern New Mexico in early September of 1989, I was excited.

The previous year, I'd made my first trip to the area and discovered the incredible elk-hunting opportunities it afforded. Although I'd taken a record-class bull on that previous trip, it was *nothing* in comparison to some other bulls I'd seen. Now, I was back and anxious to take full advantage of my second chance.

Slowly making my way far back into the remote reaches of the Plains of San Agustin, my old truck inched over rough arroyos and inclined rockslides. Finally pulling under a large pine in a small meadow at the foot of Pelona Peak, I took a deep breath and smiled. I'd found this remote canyon the previous year and encountered some massive bulls. The memories of chasing those giants up and down the winding ridges and drainages of this hidden gem had burned inside my head for the past 11 months. I'd not been able to anchor one of the monarchs, but I'd been close enough to taste it. Having blown numerous excellent opportunities on Boone and Crockett-caliber bulls, I finally took a 300-class bull on the last day of the season. Even though that nice 6x6 pacified my bloodlust, I headed home still focused on the big boys that had eluded me. Now, it was time for redemption.

Grabbing my bow and fanny pack, I headed out for an exploratory hunt. On my previous visit, I'd discovered a remote waterhole most of the elk



in the area had been using. Heading for this location, I was determined to see if the spot was still littered with elk sign. Putting a couple miles behind me, the pond was soon reached; tracks, droppings and rubs were everywhere. Making my way to a nearby ridge, I slowed to a crawl. Pulling my bugle from my fanny pack, I sent forth a piercing whistle. Immediately, a distant response reached my ears; then another, and another. Wow, there were numerous bulls close by, and a couple sounded mature!

Still-hunting toward a bugle that sounded hoarse and raspy, I soon caught movement. Reaching for my binoculars, I tried to get a good look at the bull. An occasional flash of big antlers greeted my gaze, and I was stoked! Certain I was closing in on a massive-antlered old-timer, I went into hunt mode. Inching ahead, sliding from tree to tree, I soon found myself entering a thicket of dense juniper and oak brush. Clearly, this was the bedding area of my quarry, and I questioned whether to sneak into his core area. Never one of great patience, I determined to make my move. Dropping to my hands and knees, I began to crawl

forward, moving my bow along a few yards at a time. Thankfully, the big bull bugled every few minutes, giving me a clear idea of his location.

I'd advanced about 50 yards when I caught movement ahead. Elk legs came into focus at about 25 yards. With no possibility for a shot, I inched ahead. Realizing the bull was raking its antlers on a tree, I quickly slithered another 10 yards. I was now only about 10 yards from my quarry, yet a clear view still wasn't possible. I could easily make out the form of the old bull through the brush, and I could see large antlers jerking around as he brutalized the tree. Now what?

Nocking an arrow and rising to my knees, I drew my bow and looked for a clear path to the bull. Leaning far to my right, a small opening appeared and I threw my top pin onto vitals and stabbed the release. With a thunderous crash, the bull launched itself through the thicket like a rocket ship, limbs exploding with his exit. Moving as quickly as possible, I extricated myself from the jungle and peered downslope. Forty yards distant lay my trophy. It was almost too good to be true. **E**

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