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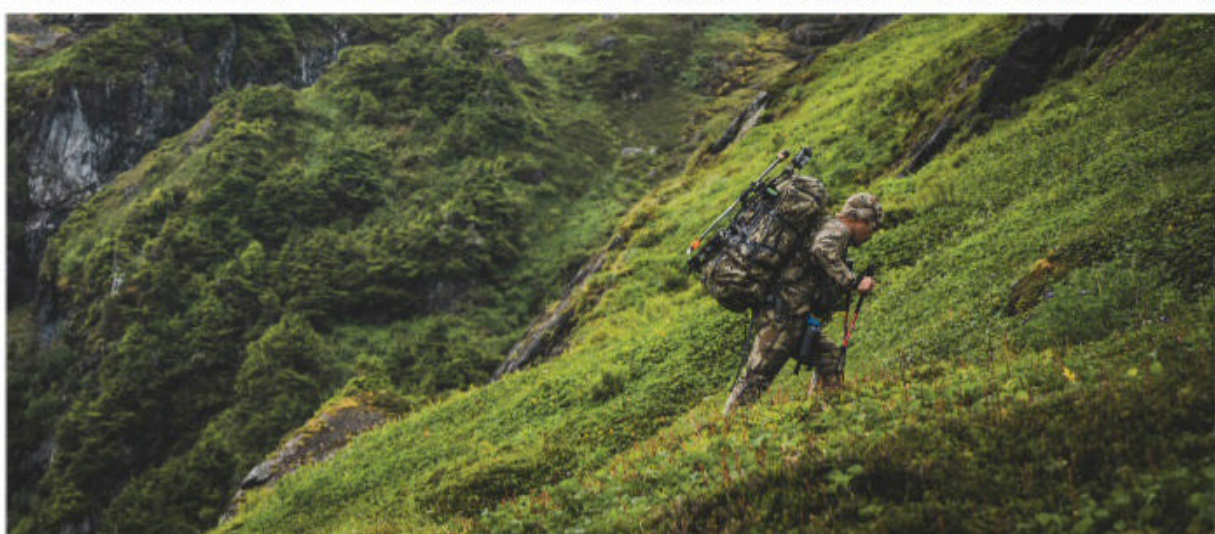
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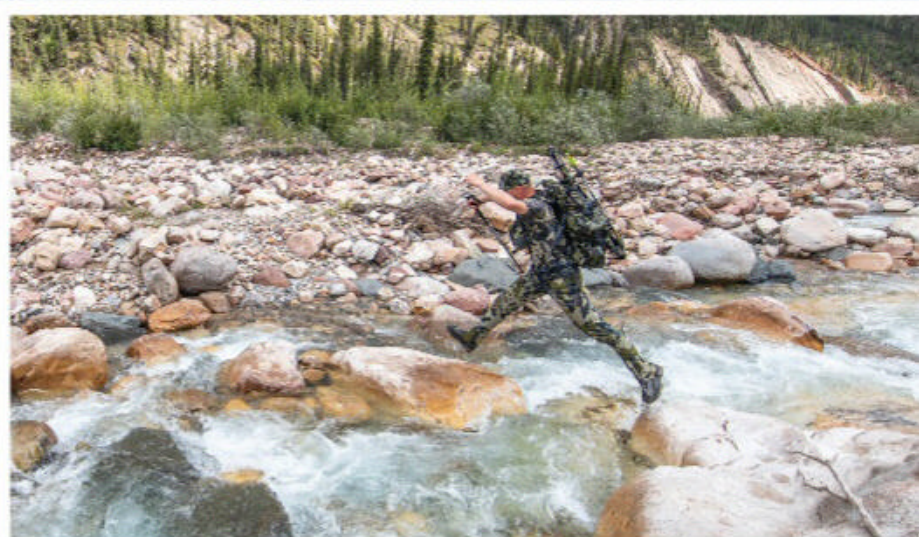


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THE BEST FOR
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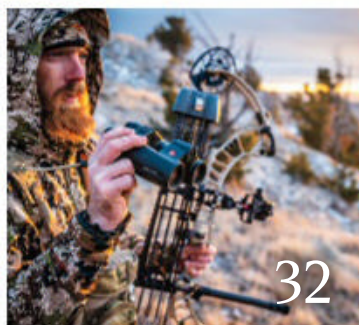


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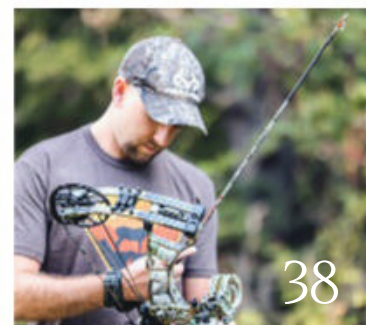
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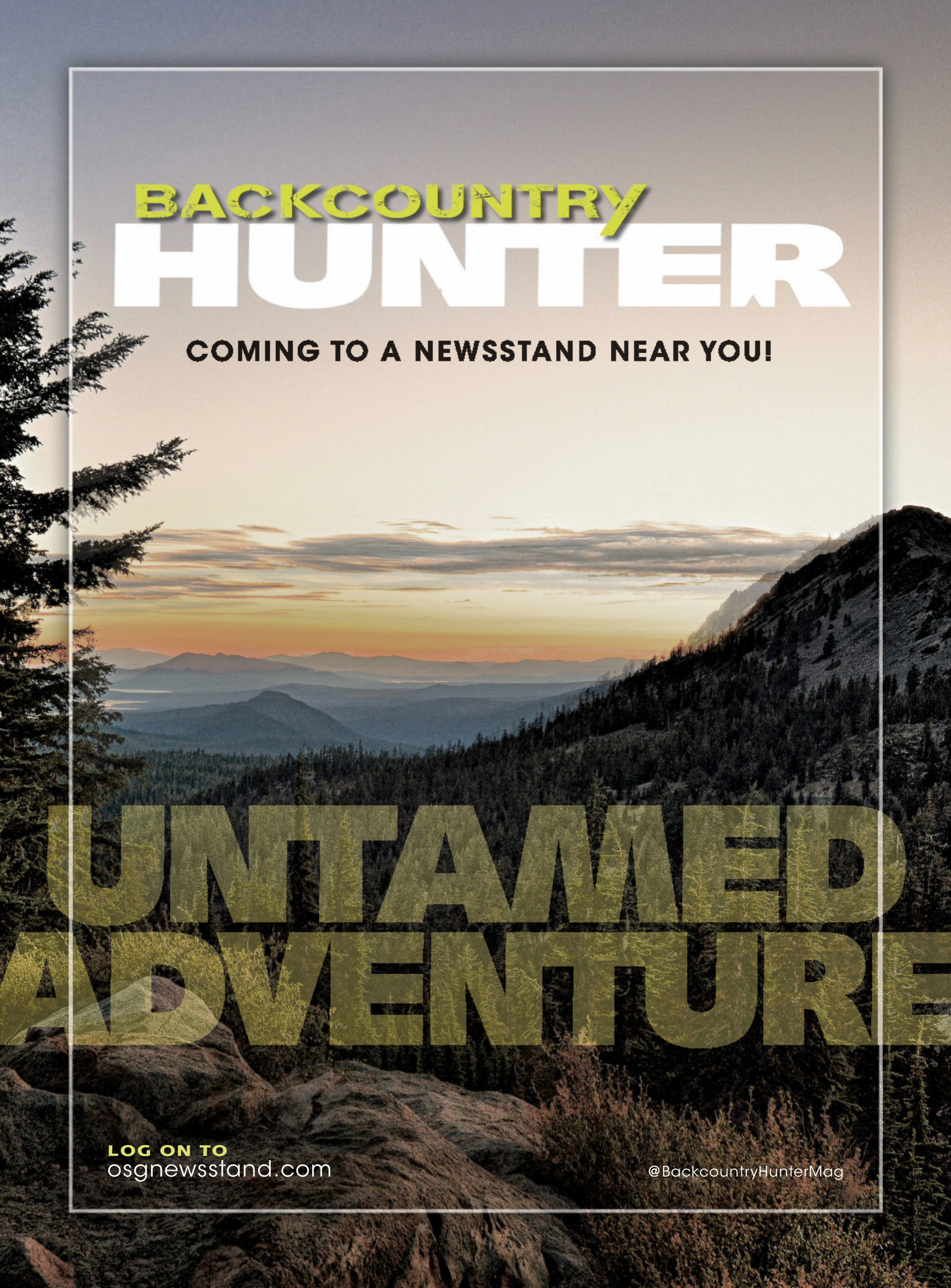


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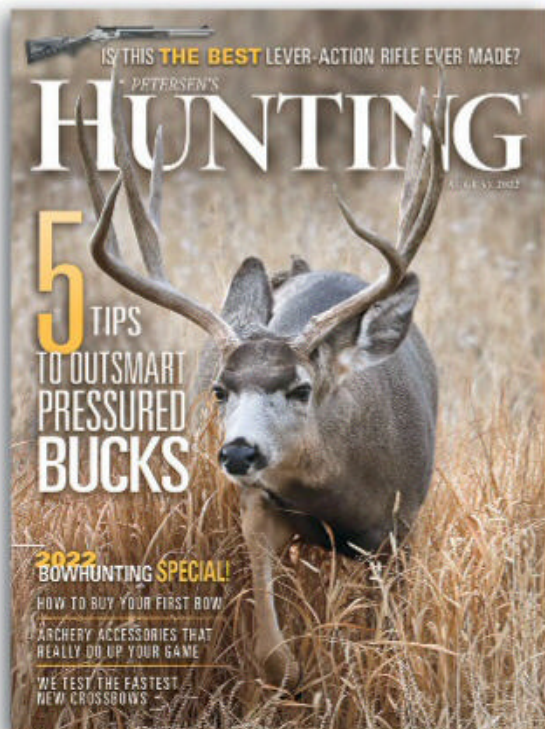
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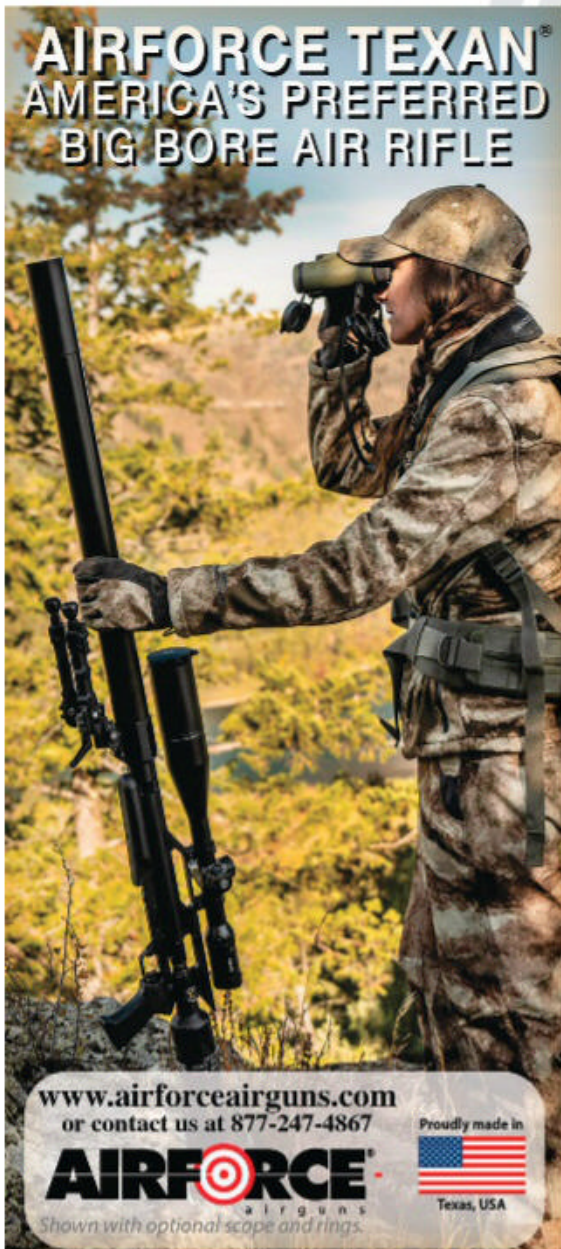
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FROM THE EDITOR

August Is Never Too Early



FOR YEARS I thought August was too early to go hunting. It was still summertime, after all. And hunting is an autumn adventure. Sure, I was thinking about hunting, and planning out fall hunts. I was shooting my bow religiously, sharpening my knives, and fine-tuning my gear. Early August was also when I realized how out of shape I'd gotten with the easy-livin' of summer, and I'd implement a not-so-strict workout regimen of morning hikes with a heavy pack on my back. But actual hunting would have to wait for September 1—the opening day of dove season when I'd gather with a bunch of friends sitting around a waterhole, shooting, laughing and, after the guns were put away, drinking beer and grilling fresh dove breasts.

Then, one August, I found myself sitting in a box blind in South Carolina. Or it could have been a sweat lodge. Either way, I had a gun in my hand, a valid deer tag in my pocket and I was in the woods, in August. Between the heat, the mosquitos and the lack of deer, I won't say it ranks very high on my list of favorite hunts. But it was slightly better than sitting in my air-conditioned home dreaming about September.

A few Augusts later, I was in a bush plane on approach to a gravel bar in the middle of an Arctic river. A few friends and I spent a week on the banks of that river, hunting caribou and avoiding grizzlies. Hunts in

Alaska, especially these DIY adventures in wild, untamed country, encourage a type of atavism, a regression into a more pure form of the hunter. I can't think of a better way to kickstart the hunting season, and that particular hunt for caribou does rank high on my list of best experiences in the field.

Along with hunters in South Carolina and Alaska, Californians have long known that hunting season can be a summertime affair. Heck, some of their deer seasons open as early as July. After years of dreaming about it, I finally got to experience an early deer hunt near the Central Coast. And while it was hot, and smoky, there were plenty of deer. Along with some fine wine shared among friends, old and new. You can read about that August hunt at Steinbeck Vineyards on page 44 of this issue.

As it turns out, August is not too early to go hunting. And even if you don't have any early season plans this month, I hope this issue gets you thinking about where to go next year. Because as it turns out, it's always hunting season somewhere.

See you around the campfire,




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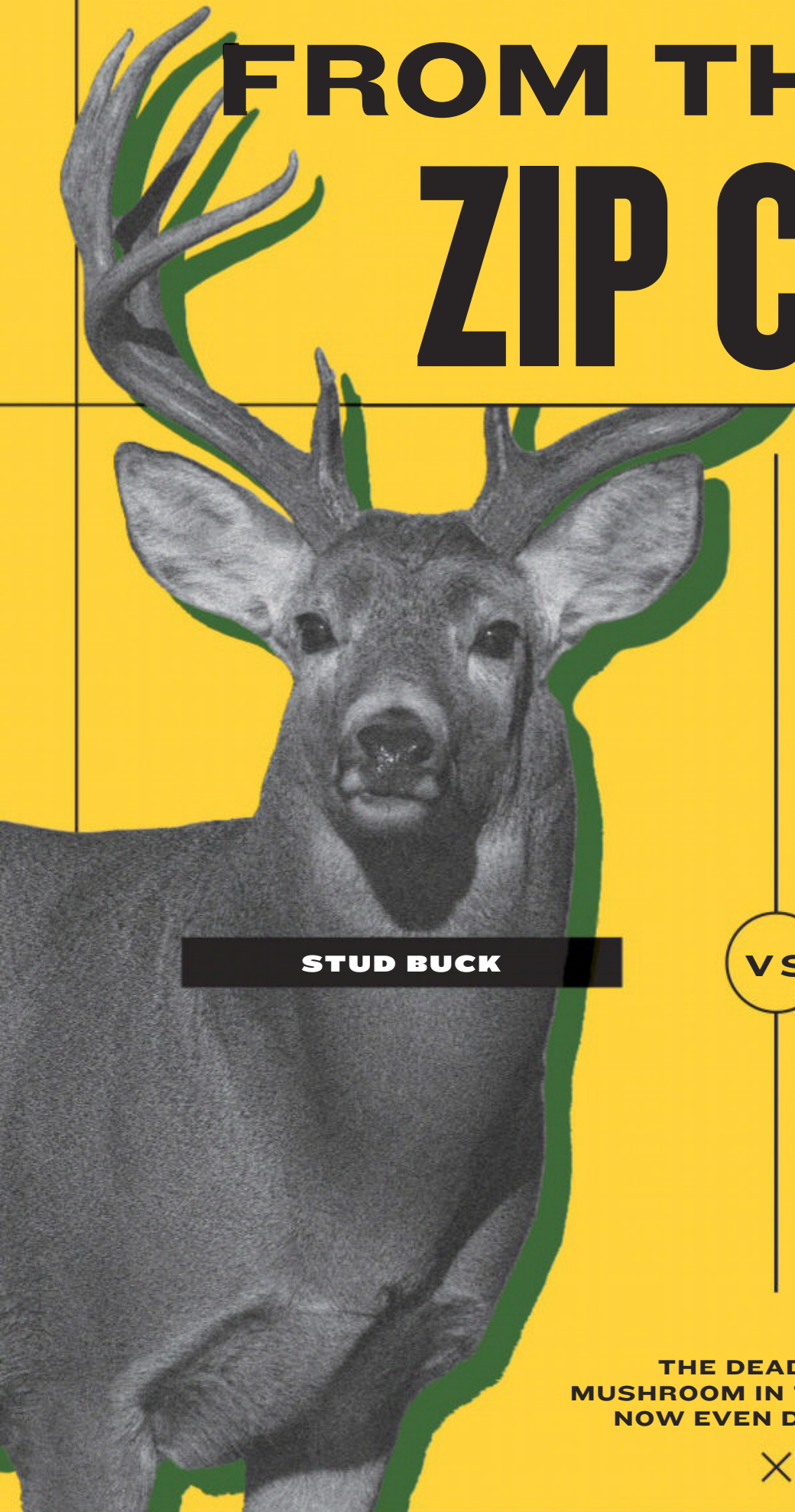
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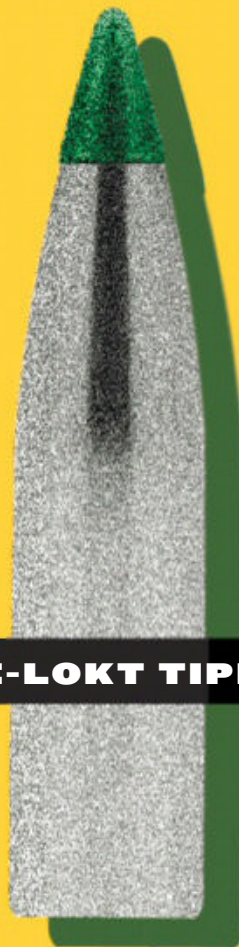


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OUTTHERE

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The early season: A time graced by warmer weather and less hunting pressure, when many hunters are still caught up by summer BBQs and family trips. Some gunpowder enthusiasts turn their noses up at the early season. Mostly due to the fact that many states require early hunts to take place with a stick and string. That, though, is what many of us hunters find so great about these first hunts of the season: The challenge and struggle to outsmart game, and get close enough to weave an arrow through the vitals.

Hours upon hours of practice have consumed those who dedicate themselves to the art of the traditional bow. Cold days spent staying sharp through the winter and summer nights sending shots down range. Now, finally, seasons around the country are starting to open. When field tips are replaced by broadheads. Hunting boots and camo are pulled from the closet. It's time to take to the field, hoping to outsmart those wary bucks and bulls that have lived in our dreams during the long off-season. —Joe Ferronato



GARMIN INREACH EXPLORER+

There are few items in my pack, if any, that trump the significance or importance of my Garmin inReach Explorer+. Not only is it an intuitive and very capable GPS, but it gives me the ability to communicate with loved ones back home no matter where my adventures take me. The most important feature, however, is the lifeline my inReach provides with the civilized world if things go south and lives are at risk.

Garmin, through a monthly subscription, gives inReach users the ability to send and receive text messages via GPS satellites from anywhere in the world. I used to relish the ability to leave civilization behind and disconnect for days on end. While I still

crave that solitude, now with a wife and kids of my own, the ability to check in and know things are okay on the home front is a mental gamechanger.

The number one reason every hunter needs an inReach is Garmin's SOS feature. When activated, the SOS button pings your location to Garmin's emergency response coordination service who then contacts and coordinates an extraction with the nearest emergency services. This feature alone has saved countless lives and makes an inReach worth its weight in gold.

Although it is not talked about nearly as much as the previously mentioned features, Garmin's inReach line of devices also

CONSERVATION CORNER



WOLF WARS RAGE ON

IN MAY, the Biden administration appealed a poorly reasoned federal district court decision. That ruling overturned a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) rule that removed Endangered Species Act (ESA) status for gray wolves throughout much of the United States. Safari Club International (SCI) commends the administration's decision, as an appeal will take a necessary stand against incorrect legal precedent and will protect important wolf conservation policies.

Since 2003 and spanning three Presidential administrations, the Service has repeat-

edly tried to remove gray wolves from under the ESA—a move that is not only justified by wolf population recovery, but will also free up regulatory resources to protect other species that are truly at risk. During the previous administration, however, the Service succeeded in delisting the gray wolf in the lower 48 U.S. states. The Service's decision was based on the best available science showing, among other things, that the largest population of wolves in the Great Lakes states of Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan, have exceeded recovery goals for 20 years. Wolves have also expanded their range to new habitat, including a recently confirmed pack established in Colorado. Unfortunately, a federal court in California vacated the Service's decision and reimposed ESA protections on gray wolves in a February 2022 decision.

This appeal is the first step to correcting the district court's errors. As expected, anti-hunting groups are outraged at the Biden administration's decision. Although

these groups generally acknowledge that gray wolves have recovered in parts of the country, including the Great Lakes, they seek to force the Service to reestablish wolf populations everywhere—from Maine to Washington State. But their ideological focus ignores real-world constraints on wolf recovery, including suitable habitat and human-wolf conflicts.

Not only are these groups unconcerned with true conservation efforts and the direct benefits inherent in protecting state and local species management, but they are willing to accept the dangerous precedent set by the recent federal district court decision so that they can actively fundraise based on emotion, not science.

SCI, however, supports the decision to take the first steps to protect a science-based approach to wildlife management wherein species are removed from the ESA when recovery criteria are met. SCI urges the Service to continue to challenge anti-conservation policies in the future. —*SCI Staff*

provide users with a plethora of other valuable information. These include a digital compass, the ability to track and share your routes and waypoints with others, and check weather forecasts for your location. All these features are also available to be used from your cell phone with Garmin's Earthmate app when paired via Bluetooth with your inReach device.

If there is one item I never leave home without when venturing afield, my Garmin inReach is it.—*Colton Heward*



BULLET BOARD

BULLET BASICS

From Africa to Alaska, no bullet is more trusted by dangerous-game hunters than Swift's A-Frame. It is the ultimate refinement of a partition-type bullet, with a rear core separated from a front core by a wall of copper. The front core is bonded into place, and never pancakes or fragments off the bullet, even when heavy bone is impacted. Thick jacket walls control expansion and create the ideal mushroom shape.

Being flat-based and rather blunt-tipped, the A-Frame is not an aerodynamic bullet. It's not meant to be. Its specialty is killing with authority, and when gnarly game with big teeth and heavy claws are the quarry, that trumps all else.

TESTING GROUND

My friend Mark Belcher fired the bullet shown, directly into the chest of a Mozambiquan Cape buffalo. The buff was facing straight on about 100 yards away. Muzzle velocity from Mark's .416 Ruger was an estimated 2,400 fps. The bullet took the bull at the neck/chest juncture, producing a sound "like a car

Swift 400-grain .416 A-Frame



crash." Impact speed was about 2,150 fps, with 4,100 ft/lbs of energy. After wheeling 180 degrees, the old bull dashed 20 yards and dropped.

FIELD PERFORMANCE

Driving through the buffalo's heavy chest hide, the bullet plowed deep through lungs, compromising the heart, and stopped in the first stomach chamber. Death occurred very quickly.

STATS

Penetration was about 36 inches. Weight of the recovered bullet is 398.8 grains; an incredible 99.7 percent of original. Expanded diameter averages 0.76 inch, or 1.83 times original diameter. It's no wonder that many African and Alaskan professional guides consider the A-Frame the best of the best.

NOTES/OBSERVATIONS

For a three-part, bonded-core bullet, A-Frames shoot very accurately. More importantly, they hit like the proverbial sledgehammer. They excel at killing big aggressive critters that want to kill you.—*Joseph von Benedikt*



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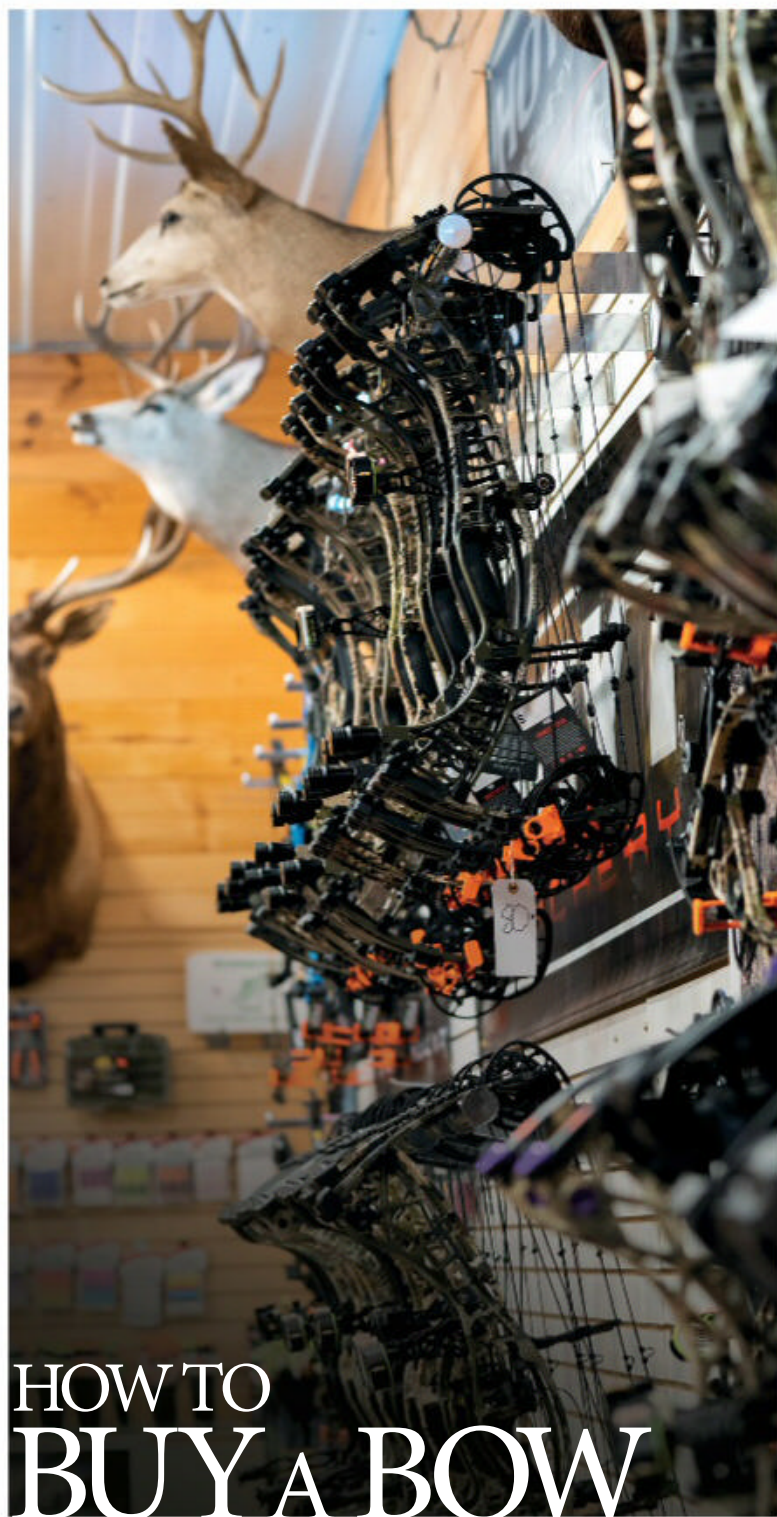
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RIFLE: Zastava .308



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HOW TO BUY A BOW

Entering the world of archery can be an intimidating undertaking. Where do you start? What bow do you buy? How do you learn to shoot? All these questions run through the minds of new archers and the answers seem so intimidating it keeps them from entering the sport. Don't be disheartened. There are easy ways to get started in bowhunting. The following guidelines will help you feel more confident with your setup and skills. Archery is a journey. Pick your gear, practice a lot, and extend your season. Happy Hunting. —Joe Ferronato

1 GO WITH THE PROS

Finding a pro shop that you feel comfortable with and trust is of paramount importance when starting bowhunting. Archery shops are there to help you select the right bow and guide you through products that will work for you when you're afield. Expect to spend a lot of time in your chosen shop. Here you will have your bow tuned, arrows cut, and new accessories added over the course of your career.

It's important you find a shop with employees you get along with. You need to feel comfortable asking them a lot of questions. Many areas have multiple stores to choose from, so feel free to jump between shops. Every shop acts as dealers to certain bow brands as well, which may dictate which shop you end up make your go-to.

2 SHOOT MULTIPLE MODELS

Once you're at a pro shop, the walls will—hopefully—be lined with many bows to choose from, including models from Bowtech, Hoyt, Mathews, Prime, and others. It is paramount you shoot as many bows fit within your price range. Don't get too caught up with the manufacturer's specifications; most of the bows out there in today's world shoot similar speeds, are of similar noise levels, and share similar weights.

Shooting models from different makers allows you to get a feel of a bow. Think of it like hunting boots, not every boot maker will fit every person as well as another. Focus on the draw cycle, grip, and balance of the bow while in hand. It's hard to put into words, but you'll notice a difference—even being a novice shooter. Pick a bow that works with you, not against you. When you have shot multiple models, you can then make your decision based off the fit and feel you are most comfortable with.

3 ADDING ACCESSORIES

Once you've picked a bow, you'll notice that accessories are anything but slim pickings. There are dozens of rest and sight choices, along with stabilizer mounting options, and quivers. This is where a shop employee will help immensely. It is important to understand that the accessories can either complement and improve the feel of a bow or turn it into an uncomfortable blunder.

Balance is of paramount importance. Make sure that you pick accessories that don't compromise the balance of your bow. Pick a quiver that fits tight against riser (the main center section of the bow) and stabilizers that complement and steady the bow while at full draw. Most shops will let you try different accessories before purchase.

The most important accessory will be your sight. Pick one that is comfortable to your eye and shooting style. There are many options, so don't just choose the first one you see. I prefer models that offer three to five pins in the housing body and are adjustable for farther shots. In a hunting scenario, the fixed pins allow easy and quick shot solutions when your game is at closer ranges. When an extended shot is necessary, a quick dial allows you to precisely place an arrow in the sweet spot.

(See page 38 for more info on what to look for when buying a new bow.)



AS PURE AS IT GETS

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A full-page photograph of a hunter in camouflage gear aiming a Bowtech SR350 compound bow. The hunter is positioned on the right side of the frame, with the bow held vertically. The background is a dense forest with trees and foliage in warm, autumnal tones. The text 'OUT THERE' is in the top left, and 'At Full Draw' is in the center left. A paragraph of text is at the bottom left, and a page number with website and date is at the very bottom left.

OUT
THERE

At Full Draw

THE EDITORS

As the name implies, Bowtech's new **SR350** compound bow was designed with quickness in mind, boasting up to 350 fps of arrow speed. At 33 inches, this bow follows the longer axle-to-axle trend and features a 6-inch brace height and an overall weight of 4.4 lbs. Bowtech's Deadlock Technologies are also integrated into this flagship bow, making it smooth, quiet, and most importantly, accurate. The SR350 offers "speed-bow" performance in a forgiving and comfortable platform. **\$1,299; bowtecharchery.com**



A beefier sibling to the original Annihilator, the new, bigger version is made of a single solid piece of 4140 tool steel. The **Annihilator XL** advertises a modest cutting diameter of 1-1/16-inch, but where this head shines is in its interesting concave shape between each of the three blades. This unique design is engineered to disperse more tissue and create larger wound channels. The Annihilator XL is available in 100-grain, 125-grain, and 150-grain configurations. **\$65-\$67/Per 3; annihilatorbroadheads.com**



Spot Hogg's **Triple Stack** system builds upon the double pin design with a third vertical pin integrated into the housing. The extra pin, in conjunction with its yardage indicator, provides archers with a third aiming point when time is tight. The Triple Stack system is compatible with many of your existing Spot Hogg sights including the Hogg Father, Tommy Hogg, Fast Eddie, and Fast Eddie XL. **\$370; sandsarchery.com**



Listening to its customers, Burris updated the **Oracle 2** Rangefinding Bow Sight to fit the needs of archery hunters everywhere. This new sight has improved Auto-Brightness Technology, and lower levels of manual-brightness adjustment. Draw your bow, and simply press a button. The range is calculated, and your aiming solution is illuminated along the center post. With a laser able to range deer out to 200 yards, you won't have any issues with this rangefinder performing in the field. **\$959; burrisoptics.com**



It's no secret that quality binos at a reasonable price are hard to come by. Feradyne's new **Covert Optics** 8x42 binocular offers high-quality ED glass paired with BAK-4 phase-corrected, dielectric-coated roof prisms. Lenses are Diamond Bright coated for optimum light transmission, which also helps reduce glare and helps to protect against damage in the field. Whether you're headed to the whitetail woods or thick timber for elk, these 23.5-ounce optics will perform for you. **\$500; feradyne.com**

One Dish. Many Stories

A country's cuisine offers a world of flavors.



“South Africa has 11 official languages,” said our guide. My girlfriends and I gaped at this tidbit while sipping gin and tonics inside the fully furnished canvas tent. But there was no time to ponder, because dinner had arrived. Riding in the saddle upwards of six hours per day and covering ground in the Lowveld plains of South Africa’s Limpopo region can work up quite an appetite.

Our African chefs turned out an impressive array of food, considering what little equipment they had to work with in the bush. Marmite at breakfast, afternoon tea service, saddlebag lunches, and sit-down, candle-lit dinners—an unexpected conglomeration of flavors and textures that seem to take influence from all over the world. I had a hard time putting my finger on South African cuisine. Much of it was reminiscent of food I’ve eaten before—and yet, it was different. While en route from Johannesburg to base camp on the second day, I saw Africans selling unrecognizable fruit on the side of the road.

South African cuisine has been influenced by a world of cultures. Many different flavors find a place on a safari’s table.

Later, my friend came out of the village petrol station munching a steak and kidney pie—a really good one. If I had to define my experience of South Africa in the simplest way possible, it would be this dichotomy between the exotic and familiar.

Chef Bryn Mayo sent me his recipe for lamb stew and the obvious hit me. I was reminded that for as many official languages as South Africa keeps, the region has been influenced by even more groups of people throughout its history—each one imprinting its stamp on what South African cuisine is today. The Cape Malay tomato bredie is one example.

In South Africa, a bredie is a slow-cooked meal of meat and vegetables. The Cape Malay tomato bredie is one of the region’s most traditional dishes, originating from the Dutch Cape Colony that occupied the area from the mid-1600s until 1795. Even if you knew nothing of South Africa’s complicated history, one



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Accommodations on many safaris are primitive yet modern, such as this elevated canvas tent.

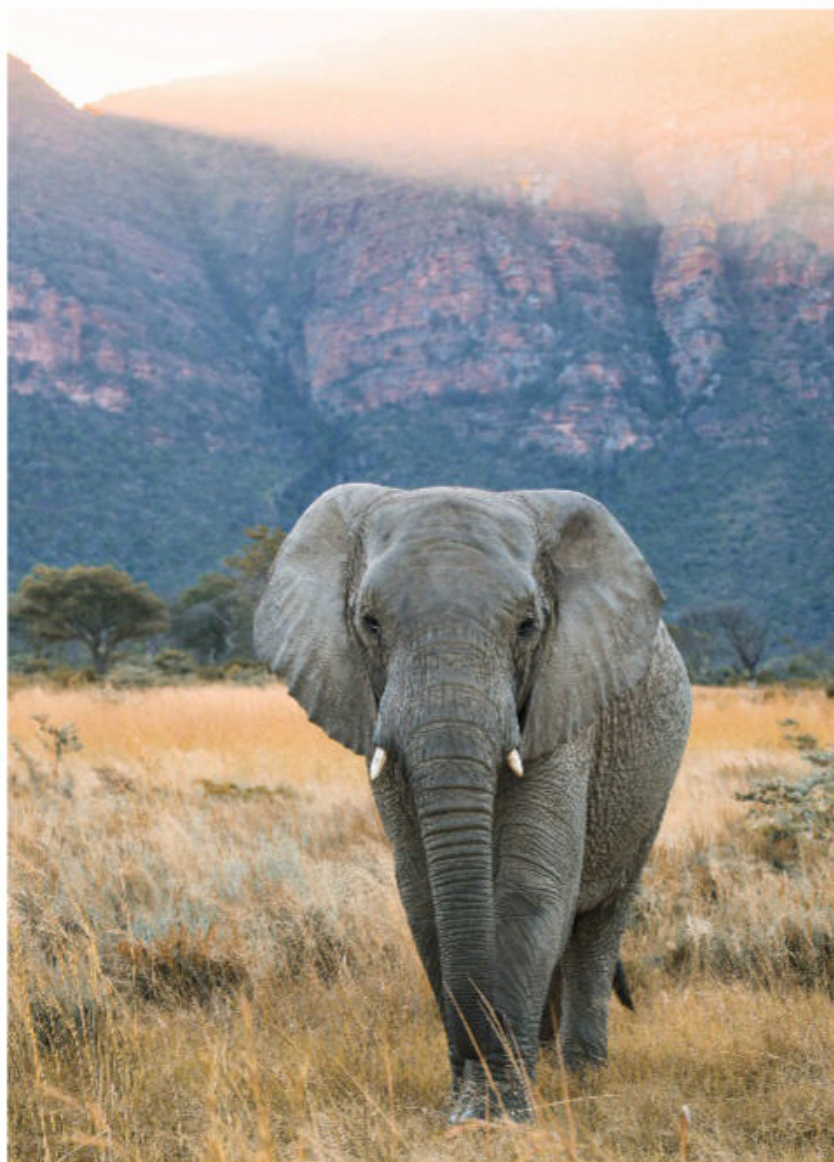
taste of this spicy “Dutch” stew and your brain will immediately tell you there’s a bigger story there.

Cass Abrahams, celebrated authority on Cape cuisine and author of two cookbooks, said in an interview with *South Africa’s Sunday Times*:

“I truly believe the history of our people is told through the tastes and aromas of our cuisine. It is reflected in our food. Wars, joys, laughter—even geography, weather conditions, and therefore available ingredients—are all tied up in a plate of food.”

Traditional tomato bredie recipes called for mutton or beef, which have long been important meat sources for the region, going as far back as the indigenous Khoi peoples who herded livestock. When the Dutch East India Company arrived in 1652 to establish a trading post and rest stop for its trade routes to Asia, merchants bartered with locals to obtain meat. However, relations eventually soured, as the indigenous herders held fast to their pastoral way of life and resisted forced labor. Consequently, the Khoi were killed or displaced out of the Cape of Good Hope—now Cape Town—and the Dutch began importing most of its slave labor from present-day Indonesia. As there were few Dutch women around to fulfill domestic tasks, these Muslim slaves quickly made their way into the kitchens, where they couldn’t resist adding more flavor to their masters’ bland European diets.

Then, beginning in 1795 when the Napoleonic Wars weakened the Netherlands’ overseas holdings, England swiftly seized most of the Dutch colonies. Indentured servants from India began arriving from the British Indian Empire, and they, too, made their contributions to shaping local cuisine. Today, spices such as ginger, cinnamon, cardamom, coriander, cumin, turmeric, fenugreek, and chili are mainstays in not only Cape Town, but also collective South African cooking.



African wildlife is stunning. While on safari, the author got to experience many different species of game.

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PROGRESSIVE

VENISON BREDIE WITH YELLOW RICE INGREDIENTS

2 ½ pounds boneless venison shoulder or neck, cut into 1 ½-inch cubes

1 tbs. vegetable oil, plus extra

2 tsp. kosher salt, plus extra

3 tbs. all-purpose flour

1 large onion, diced small

2 carrots, peeled and diced small

1 tbs. tomato paste

2 bay leaves

4 cloves of garlic, smashed

3-inch knob of ginger, sliced

14.5-oz. can diced tomato

2 quarts unsalted chicken stock or light game stock

1 sprig rosemary

1½ pounds yellow potatoes

Freshly chopped cilantro

Worcestershire sauce, to taste

YELLOW RICE INGREDIENTS

2 cups long-grain white rice

2 tsp. ground turmeric

2 tbs. butter

1 cinnamon stick

1 tsp. kosher salt

1½ tbs. Demerara or turbinado sugar (or regular)

2 cups of water/unsalted chicken stock

DIRECTIONS

1. Preheat oven to 325° Fahrenheit. In a large enameled Dutch oven, heat vegetable oil over medium-high heat. Sprinkle 2 tsp. of kosher salt and 3 tbs. of flour over venison cubes to coat. When oil is hot, add meat in batches and sear well on one side. Remove meat and set aside.
2. Lower heat to medium and add more oil if needed. Sauté chopped onion and carrot for 5-7 minutes. Add tomato paste, garlic, sliced ginger, bay leaves and a pinch of salt. Sauté for 1 minute, stirring frequently.
3. Return meat to the pot. Add diced tomato, chicken/game stock and 1 sprig of rosemary. Scrape the bottom of pan to release browned bits. Bring to a simmer, and then cover tightly and cook in a 325°F oven for 2-3 hours, or until meat becomes tender. During the last 45 minutes of cooking, add peeled and halved/quartered potatoes.
4. To prepare the yellow rice, rinse and drain two cups of long-grain rice two or three times. Place the rice in a medium pot, then add 2 cups of water or stock, turmeric, butter, a cinnamon stick, 1 tsp. kosher salt, and sugar. Simmer covered for about 20 minutes, or until water is absorbed. Fluff rice with a fork or spoon.
5. When the stew is done, discard bay leaves, ginger, and rosemary. Season to taste with salt and Worcestershire sauce. Stir in chopped cilantro. Serve bredie with yellow rice.



Venison bredie with yellow rice. This African stew is a delectable treat that can be made with a variety of wild game.

Like other dishes around the world that have seen long-standing popularity, people have made tomato bredie their own. I've come across recipes that included ingredients such as coconut milk, yogurt, and, oddly, crème fraîche. Incidentally, a small French religious community, called the Huguenots, was invited to immigrate to South Africa between 1688 to 1691. The Dutch East India Company chose this select group for two reasons: to spread Protestantism and to develop agriculture, particularly grapes for wine, which kept better than water on board a ship. Today, South Africa boasts an impressive wine culture, producing approachable, food-friendly wines that I had the pleasure of partaking.

This recipe is not a true Cape Malay tomato bredie recipe, but it is close, said Chef Bryn. Two unusual ingredients depart from the traditional Dutch/Malay recipe: Worcestershire sauce—that signifies British influence—and “wild rosemary,” a shrub indigenous to South Africa to bring his bredie a little closer to home. Although South Africa’s “wild rosemary,” *Eriocephalus africanus*, isn't related to our *Salvia rosmarinus*, the effect is similar. Of course, I swapped the lamb for venison, which historically wouldn't have been out of the ordinary when game meat was available.

My safari in South Africa was an unforgettable adventure, but I wouldn't have guessed that recreating this dish would turn out to be yet another journey that would take my curiosity across continents and oceans—one that didn't require me to leave the house. I'm convinced that the words of Cass Abrahams ring true universally: that the stories of people can be told in one plate of food. 🍲



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Levering Up

With Ruger's help, a once-great Marlin rifle gets a second chance.



I am at the stage in my life where I no longer chase the most high-tech precision rifle with the greatest optics and state-of-the-art bullets. The technology that has been integrated into guns, optics, and ammunition in recent years is impressive, but it's also taken some of the "hunt" out of "hunting" for me. For much of my hunting these days, I'm looking for a way to make things more challenging. I'm talking about traditional muzzleloaders, hand-guns, and iron-sighted rifles—especially lever actions. Marlin's new 1895 SBL is just such a tool.

Lever actions were the workhorse of the American outdoorsman for more than a century. These guns are compact, portable, durable, reliable, and have plenty of capacity for most purposes. They're also legal to own in every state in the Union.

After Marlin's near-death experience, Ruger has helped restore one of the company's iconic lever actions to its former glory.

To me, there's something special about a lever-action rifle and I'm not the only one who feels this way. Lever guns are making a serious comeback.

Despite being one of the brand leaders in that market, Marlin Firearms almost missed the party—on its 150th anniversary the storied firm was on its way to becoming a victim of Remington Outdoor Company's bankruptcy. That was until Ruger swooped in and bought the brand. Less than a year later, new Marlin rifles hit the market. Numerous models including 336s and 1894s will be produced, but the first carbine released was the Model 1895 SBL (Stainless Big Loop) chambered in .45-70 Government.

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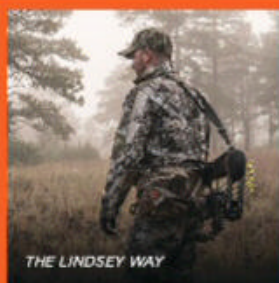
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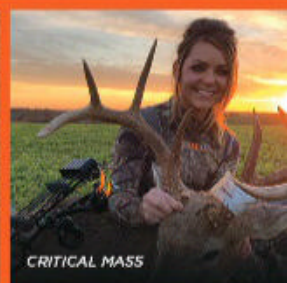
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CRITICAL MASS



The new 1895 SBL features a barrel and action finished in raw stainless steel. The muzzle is even threaded for suppressors.

MARLIN 1895 SBL	
Type:	Lever-action repeating rifle
Caliber:	.45-70 Government
Barrel:	19-inch stainless steel
Weight:	7.3 pounds
Capacity:	6+1
Stock:	Green laminate
Finish:	Polished stainless steel
Sights:	Fiber optic/tritium front, ghost-ring rear, Picatinny rail
Trigger:	5.5-pound, single-stage Triggertech, field-adjustable
Price:	\$1,399
Website:	marlin.com

HITTING SPEC

Unlike Remington’s disastrous roll-out of their own Ilion, NY-made Marlin lever guns, Ruger has done it right. The new 1895s aren’t carbon copies of the previous versions; Ruger put their own spin on them. For starters, the major components are machined from stainless-steel forgings, making them weather-resistant. The barrels are cold hammer forged in Ruger’s own factory and their traditional rifling is compatible with jacketed and cast bullets. The actions are slick and smooth, and ours fed and ejected reliably. Part of the magic is a fluted and nickel-plated bolt that encounters minimal friction from the receiver. The tubular magazine holds six rounds and can be topped-off as needed, a huge benefit of a lever-action. The large lever loop, one of the distinguishing characteristics of this model, allows for its use with heavy winter gloves. The trigger on our sample broke cleanly and consistently at 5.5 pounds.

The stock on the 1895 SBL is a green laminate, with checkered panels on both the pistol grip and forend. The forend has been slimmed noticeably when compared to my 20-year-old

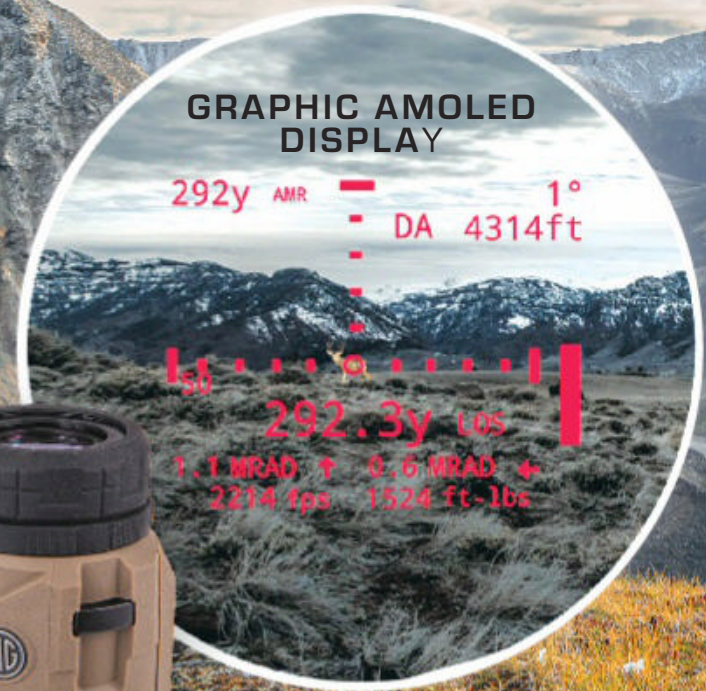
Marlin 1895G Guide Gun and I like the way the new gun handles. The black recoil pad is soft and does a nice job of keeping the powerful .45-70 from being overly punishing to shoot. The traditional Marlin “bullseye” at the toe of the stock now features a red center, signifying the Ruger affiliation.

Barrel length on the 1895 SBL is 19 inches, which means that the muzzle sits an inch forward of the magazine tube. Part of this section is threaded 11/16-24 to allow for the use of suppressors. A thread protector cap covers things up when no device is mounted. I didn’t have a suppressor in my inventory that matched this thread pattern so we did not mount a can for testing.

If a rifle even comes with iron sights these days, they are likely junk. This is not the case with the 1895 SBL. A green fiber optic front and ghost-ring rear sight provide a lightning fast and surprisingly precise aiming solution that will never fog up and is unlikely to break. The front sight also has a tritium insert, making it useful in low-light situations where iron sights can be more of a liability than an asset. In addition to the sights,

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the 1895 SBL comes with a long Picatinny rail for optics mounting. There is a great deal of real estate on this rail, giving you the ability to mount optics in the traditional location above the receiver or in the forward "Scout" position. The rail can also be removed, allowing an optic to be mounted directly to the receiver via traditional drilled-and-tapped mounting holes. Similar ghost-ring sights and optics rails were a common aftermarket option on previous Marlin models, usually costing the owner an additional \$200.



ON THE RANGE

For our accuracy testing, we mounted an EOTECH Vudu 1-10x28mm scope in a set of 34mm Modern Sporting Rings from Talley Manufacturing. I had the opportunity to hunt both elk and mule deer with this scope last fall and came away impressed by its performance and versatility. At 1x, this scope is as fast as any red-dot optic and, at 10x it is capable of allowing precision shots at extended ranges. This scope's mounting position required the removal of the rear sight which was held in place by a Torx screw.

We tested the 1895 SBL with two loads: Hornady's LEVERevolution 250-grain MonoFlex and Federal Premium's Hammer-Down 300-grain bonded soft point. Accuracy was excellent with both ammunition types, repeatedly producing one-hole three-shot groups in the .5- to .75-inch range. In terms of range, the limiting factor will be bullet drop rather than accuracy. To me, though, the whole point of hunting with such a firearm is to get closer.

The 1895 SBL is a very utilitarian carbine. It could serve a variety of hunting roles from the northern timber to the southern piney woods and would be an ideal truck gun. I've hunted black bears in the thick Maine brush and feral hogs in Florida's swamps with an older 1895G and was a huge fan of wielding so much power in so handy a package—add in the stainless-steel construction, the upgraded sights, and the optic mounting options and you have a carbine that is more capable than ever. I'm happy that Ruger took the risk of carrying on Marlin's proud tradition and, based on this first offering, the company has done a great job. 



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The Complete Package

Leica's newest rangefinding binos offer everything hunters need, and more.



The rangefinding binocular war has been raging for several years and there's some impressive products in this market. However, even in this crowded field, the Leica Geovid Pro 32 binoculars stand out because of their optical performance, compact dimensions, and suite of ballistic features. The Geovid Pro 32 binos combine a hand-held weather station, a ballistics solver, a rangefinder, and binoculars into one highly portable package that sells at a competitive price.

THE SECRET SAUCE

In the world of expensive and high-performance binoculars, there are two main types: the roof prism (the best type is the Abbe-Koenig) and the Porro prism. The biggest advantages of

Leica's new Geovid Pro 32 binoculars are compact, easy to use, and offer great optical clarity for any hunt.

roof prisms are their compact size and their ability to be easily weatherproofed. The advantage of the roof prism's biggest competitor, the Porro prism, is the higher light transmission and simpler design. Two of the reasons Porro prism binoculars aren't more popular are their size and the difficulty associated with making them weatherproof.

In 2013, Leica unveiled the Perger-Porro prism, a design they hold the patent for, which allows the company to do things no one else can. This prism design has all the advantages of the regular Porro prism (best light transmission and simplicity), but brings a highly ergonomic banana shape that is easily weatherproofed. Additionally, the Perger prism has great depth of field and an in-

A man with a beard and blonde hair, wearing camouflage gear and a backpack, stands on a rocky mountain peak. He is holding a rifle. Large antlers are visible on the left side of the image. The background is a blurred mountain landscape.

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WAYPOINT



SPRINGFIELD ARMORY



The Geovid's laser rangefinder is capable of ranging targets out to 2,500 yards, making it perfect for long-range hunts.



ternal surface that is ideal for projecting information onto one of the prism's surfaces. The Perger prism minimizes the light transmission lost from the filter needed to create a heads-up display inside the binos because it can be cemented to one of the prism's surfaces and reflect only the color required for the display. Other prism designs require more complicated methods to create a heads-up display. The Perger design is the ideal prism for superior optical performance from a rangefinding binocular.

THE COMPLETE PACKAGE

Leica has always been a frontrunner in the rangefinder department and the one built into the Geovid Pro is no different. It has a beam divergence of .5 Mil x 1.2 Mil, so at 1,000 yards the beam will measure about 1.5 feet tall by 3.5 feet wide. It fires at 1.6 mW and the results I saw in testing show that Leica's estimate of registering targets out to 2,500 yards is very close to correct. On a bright sunny day hitting a treeline at 2,148 yards wasn't difficult.

Where these binoculars show an incredible degree of simple sophistication is the built-in ballistic solver with a full suite of environmental sensors. There is also an app available to make building and loading rifle profiles into the binos a painless process. The Geovid Pro 32s come with the Applied Ballistics (AB) Ultralight solver built in. This gives the consumer the ability to range a target and have the heads-up display in the binos show the elevation and wind hold to hit out to 875 yards.

Using ballistic solvers can be a little intimidating if it's not something used frequently, but the Leica app is the easiest

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Power:	8X (10X available)
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Beam Divergence:	.5 Mil X 1.2 Mil
Eye Relief:	16mm
Field of View:	405 feet at 1,000 yards
Length:	6 in.
Width:	5.1 in.
Weight:	1 lb., 14 oz.
MSRP:	\$2,900
Website:	leicacamerausa.com

one to learn that I've experienced. All that's required to build a rifle profile is the bullet data (which is as simple as choosing an option from the Applied Ballistics library), the muzzle velocity, sight height, and zero range. The values for the bullet's ballistic coefficient (BC) from the library are displayed and it's a simple matter of touching the value and altering it during the truing process when absolute precision is necessary. However, using the BC from the Applied Ballistics library will get 99% of rifles to within a few inches out to the 875 yards allowed with the AB Ultralight software.

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Paired with the Leica app, the binos offer ballistic solutions, including wind calls, through the Applied Ballistics library.

Once the profile exists in the app, it's a simple matter of loading it into the binoculars via a Bluetooth synch. Inside the binoculars, there are several sensors that measure temperature, pressure, and humidity each time the shooter ranges a target and then incorporate that data into the onboard ballistic solver calculator to generate a firing solution that displays elevation and windage corrections. There is no need to have the phone or a handheld weather station to compute accurate environmental conditions or to generate a firing solution. Wind direction and speed have to be manually entered into the binoculars to get an accurate wind hold. I just use a 10 mile per hour full-value wind as a baseline and then adjust off of that. Using a baseline wind for the distance I'm shooting is the fastest and most accurate method I've found to get good wind calls without standing around holding a weather station in the air.

All of that happens inside the binoculars at the touch of a button and the information pops up in the field of view. It's almost instantaneous, making it hard to believe that so much technology is packed into such a small package.

GOING FARTHER

For shooters desiring the ability to ring steel past 875 yards, the Leica app has the option of upgrading from AB Ultra-light to AB Sportsman or AB Elite. With these options comes the ability to generate ballistic firing solutions at the maximum ranging distance of the binoculars. With the extended range also comes the ability to correct for earth-based effects like Coriolis and spin drift. Additionally, the Elite software allows for the use of custom drag curves from the library or from one the customer receives at any shooting event where AB has their trailer set up to generate drag models. That trailer was a big hit at an Extreme Long Range shooting competition I attended in Wyoming last year where many competitors had AB create a drag model for their bullet out of their rifle. That curve could now be used in these Leica Geovid Pro 32 binoculars.

With all that tech packed into a svelte package it would be easy to worry about the binocular's durability. Don't. Leica

FINDING YOUR WAY

ProTrack is an app-enabled capability offered with the Geovid Pro 32 binoculars that allows the user to range a target and drop a digital pin on a map to make navigating to that point easier. Pro Track works with Google Maps, a GPS, or Base Map. While other range-finding binoculars work with one or more of these options, the Geovid Pro binoculars do so with a higher degree of accuracy thanks to the binocular's internal compass that has a margin of error less than two to five degrees. Some binoculars only guarantee a margin of error of 10 degrees.

The user must select their preferred map type and open that application on their cell phone. I used Base Map because it doesn't require cell service to work in the field and it's a simple application to learn. Once paired, ranging a target drops a pin on the map. The user is then free to navigate by whatever route they choose to the pinned location without fear of becoming disoriented or misremembering the spot where he last saw the target or animal. This is a great way to stalk an animal seen a couple ridgelines away or finding the exact spot an animal was standing at the shot.

uses a magnesium housing that is waterproof to 15 feet and shockproof to 100g of force. While these are certainly high-tech, they are not fragile.

The Leica Geovid Pro 32 binoculars will prove popular for anyone looking to trim weight and size from a hump up the mountainside or for those looking to eliminate some of the bulk worn in the field. These binoculars offer capabilities and convenience that were only a dream a few years ago and it all comes from a tiny package at the touch of a button. 

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The *Magnificat II* has the kind of thoughtful design that harkens back to those rare, 150-year-old moon phases that once could only be found under glass in a collector's trophy room.

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What You Really Need In A Whitetail Bow

Before dropping big dollars, consider these features.

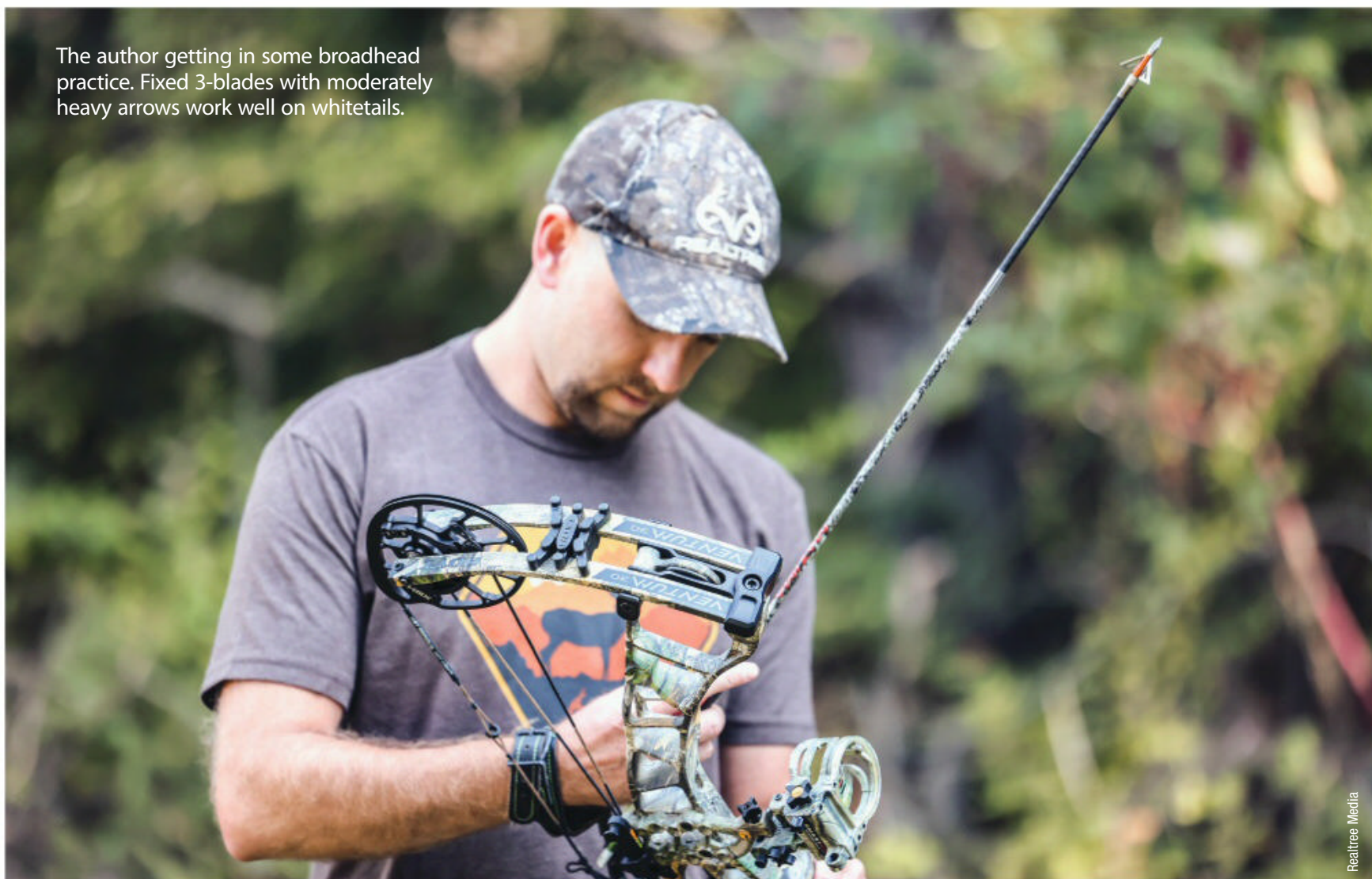
If you have an opinion about bowhunting equipment, there is someone out there just waiting to tell you you're wrong. Opinions about archery gear follow trends, but that doesn't mean the requirements for bowhunting whitetails change much. Most of them are arrowed from treestands or ground blinds at 15 to 25 yards, often in low light. They're nervous critters, prone to jumping the string and masters at stopping behind cover when you're stuck at full draw. They're also surprisingly tenacious, able to live and run a long time despite mortal wounds. And even fatally hit deer have a habit of scrambling across property lines and into thickets, where recovery becomes difficult.

All of that calls for simple, but specialized, equipment. Your bow needs to be quiet, pinpoint accurate, and easy to draw under any circumstance. It should be capable of punching two holes through the deer with an aggressive broadhead, too, even from sharp angles. Do you need a specific brand? No. Shoot as many bows as possible and then buy the one you like, because all the new ones are pretty good. But you can't go wrong sticking to these criteria.

LENGTH

Early parallel limb designs made sub-31-inch bows possible, and they were all the rage around the turn of the millennium.

The author getting in some broadhead practice. Fixed 3-blades with moderately heavy arrows work well on whitetails.



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Today's short axle-to-axle bows shoot well and are handy in the woods.

By the twenty-teens, though, sentiments—or maybe marketing efforts—were swaying hunters back to longer axle-to-axle bows. Target shooters, after all, routinely wield 40-inch+ compounds, so 34- to 36-inch bows should help hunters shoot better, too. Right?

Maybe a little, but a big bow has drawbacks. I hunted with a couple different 35-inch honkers for a few seasons, and up in treestands or in ground blinds, they were simply in the way. I switched to a 28-inch bow in 2016, and marveled again at how handy it was—and it shot just fine. We now know that it's not necessarily the total axle-to-axle length that matters most, but the riser length. Bow design has recently trended toward longer, sturdier risers paired with short, beefy limbs that combine the shooting advantages of a longer bow with the maneuverability of a short one. If you're shopping for a new bow, don't be afraid to choose one that's 28 to 32 inches. It'll shoot just fine.

THE DRAW CYCLE

"A slow hit is better than a fast miss." That catch phrase implies fast bows are more difficult to shoot than slow ones, but it's not true. "Speed bows" may have more demanding draw cycles, but that has little to do with how well they shoot. (Many people actually shoot a more-demanding draw cycle better.)

For bowhunting, speed is a good thing. It gives you a flatter arrow trajectory and also allows you to shoot a heavier arrow with more oomph. In today's bows, I'm most interested in IBO

ratings of around 340 feet per second (keeping in mind they won't shoot that fast when set to real-world specs).

Contrary to the popular claim, I've not found that long brace heights (7 inches+) are inherently more forgiving to shoot, either. Extremely short brace heights tend to slap forearms, though, and that can be a problem when you're bundled up in your favorite late-season coat. They add effort to the front of the draw cycle, too. For me, the brace height sweet spot on a white-tail bow is about 6 inches.

The rest of the draw cycle is especially dependent on personal preference. A solid back wall is always good, since it prevents you from overdrawing the bow, and these days, most bows have a good back wall, thanks to better cam designs along with limb and/or cable stops. Let-off and valley vary a little more, and those are especially important considerations for whitetail hunters.

When a shot doesn't work out, I prefer to lower my bow and draw again, if possible. But bows with extremely high let-off (like 90%) and generous valleys can actually seem difficult to lower slowly without abrupt motions. As such, I prefer a shallower valley and 75 to 80% let-off. But other hunters prefer not to risk the extra motion, and instead wait at full draw until a better shot presents itself. Furthermore, they don't like a shallow valley, which can make it feel as if the string is about to jump out of your hands. There are real differences bow to bow, and you won't know them without shooting different models.

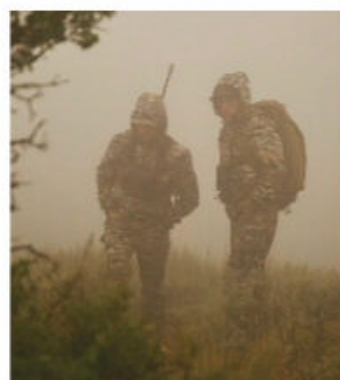
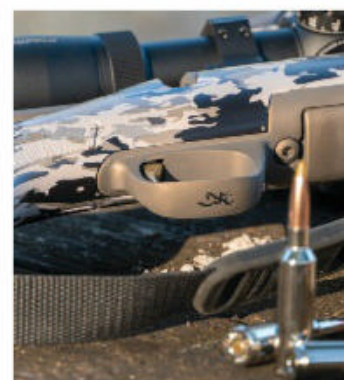
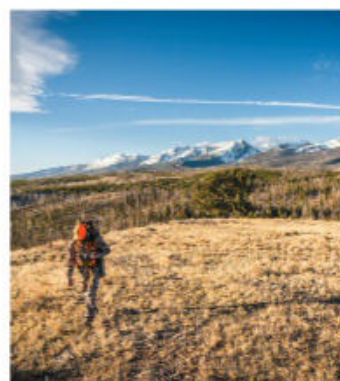
Today's bows are so efficient that draw weight isn't as important as it once was, especially for whitetails. I have a 28-inch draw length and I order my bows with 60-pound limbs. I keep them maxed out, whether I'm hunting or shooting targets. That's plenty of weight, and it is still easy to pull after a three-month break. Life seems somehow simpler that way.



A streamlined setup works well in treestands and ground blinds alike.

THE ARROW AND BROADHEAD

Before pocket-sized rangefinders, overdraw rests, and ultralight arrows were the in thing for flatter shooting. Today's trend is the opposite: Heavy, high front-of-center (F.O.C.) arrows paired with compact, cut-on-contact broadheads for maximum penetration are the name of the game. That's also extreme,



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WHITETAILS

since whitetails aren't Cape buffalo. Choose your proper spine and go for shafts weighing in at 8 to 9 grains per inch. Paired with a 45-grain insert and 125-grain broadhead, my finished hunting arrows weigh around 450 grains, which is plenty heavy with a fairly high F.O.C., but fast enough to shoot one pin to around 25 yards.

Speaking of broadheads, fixed, replaceable 3-blades, boring as they may be, just work.

I've tried a little of everything—from giant mechanicals to compact single-bevels—but for whitetails, I still settle on classics like the Wasp Havalon HV, Thunderhead, and Muzzy MX-3. They're sharp out of the package, economical, fly well out of tuned bows, and leave great blood trails.

ACCESSORIES

For precise aiming at distant targets, a fine single pin on an adjustable sight, paired with an accurate yardage tape, is the way to go. Many Western bowhunters prefer just such a setup. I've used those a good bit, too, but in the whitetail woods, I prefer a standard 3- to 5-pin sight with large fiber-optic pins. More fiber means more visibility. When sight shopping, go with the largest



Modern bow design, including this Mathews, has trended toward long, stiff risers paired with short, beefy limbs.

diameter available (for many sights, that's .019). Simple, rugged sights that can be adjusted without tools are a good thing. I pair them with a 1/8-inch aperture peep on the string, which isn't the biggest one made, but it's close. The idea is to maximize every second of legal light.

For a rest, I prefer a full-containment, cable-driven drop-away, and I particularly like the modern ver-

sions incorporating a dovetail

mounting system directly to the riser. When hunting, I simply nock an arrow and flip the rest into the upward position. Such rests are quick to set up and tune, and I've never had a failure. That said, don't let anyone shame you out of a capture rest—like a Whisker Biscuit—if that's what you prefer. They're handy and they work; I keep one in my kit as a just-in-case backup.

I keep my bow spartan. I hunted for years with a hip quiver before conceding that a bow-mounted quiver is more convenient but still, I take it off as soon as I'm in the tree. I don't add stabilizers or back bars to my bow either. I can't tell they make much difference inside 30 yards. My setup won't win many tournaments, but it makes shooting close-range whitetails seem like second nature. 



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RARE



VINTAGE

DAVID DRAPER

PASSING THE BOTTLE—AND THE BUCK.

A PRIOR COMMITMENT put me behind the clock and provided a quasi-legitimate excuse for rolling into Steinbeck Vineyards a day late, joining a group of good friends on a hunt for blacktails among the rolling hills of grape vines just outside Paso Robles, California.

My delayed arrival gave the hunters—Jeff, Gordy, and Linda—most of the first day to get the lay of the land, but, I hoped, not tag out. God and Southwest Airlines willing, I'd arrive at the vineyards in late afternoon, giving me just enough time to get through most of a bottle of Steinbeck's famed wine before my friends met me for dinner.

Ryan Newkirk, operations manager for Steinbeck Vineyards, and our guide for the week, had other plans. Jeff had tagged out that morning and Gordy had just missed a good buck. Apparently, that put me next in line on the trigger. Within minutes of arriving at the lodge, I was at the ranch's range confirming the zero on my Mossberg Patriot. With a few hours of late-summer sunlight left, Newkirk thought there was a chance to get me on a deer that evening. I realized this deer hunt was really going to cut into my drinking.



A SLOW TOUR

This trip would combine three of my favorite things—hunting, eating and drinking. I'd heard rumors the meat of these California coastal blacktails came virtually pre-marinated, as they spend their days munching on the many varieties of grapes grown on the vineyards. I was anxious to sample such a unique pairing of fresh venison and vintage wine.

Steinbeck is a bit unique in that they don't deer-proof their 600-acre vineyard. Instead of fencing the deer out, like most of the neighboring grape farms, the Steinbeck family takes a holistic, sustainable approach. Though they do lose a substantial portion of their grapes to deer depredation, the trade-off is the opportunity to hunt deer on their property. The income produced from guiding a small group of hunters every year helps offset some of the loss of income. But really, Newkirk, and his grandfather/vineyard owner Howie Steinbeck, just really like to hunt.

Lucky for me, the Steinbeck family also enjoys sharing that opportunity with others, so we all piled into Newkirk's Ford and started making laps around the various rows of vines that cover the rolling hills of the property. If you're not from the West, you might look down your nose at hunting from a truck, but it's really the only way to cover that ground. With thousands of rows of vines, there are a lot of places for deer to hide, and

they disappear instantly in the shadows of leaves of thousands of grape vines. The rows are narrow, too, and the deer can step into the next row before you even have a chance to spot them.

You also might think you can cover a section-sized property quickly in a truck, but the deer's sneaky nature and ability to hide anywhere means we had to creep along at a slow pace. Steinbeck sits among rolling folds of hills, so any elevation helps, and we often stopped upon the few high spots to pick apart the rows. And because the vineyard rolls out the welcome mat for deer, there are hundreds of them on the property, but they disappear as quickly as they appear. Before the sun finally set, we had spotted a lot of deer, but no bucks worth making a stalk on.

Anticipating the arrival of a group of hungry hunters, my good friend Brooks Hansen, who also happens to work for Camp Chef, laid out a luscious spread of appetizers that we made quick work of. There were also several varieties and vintages of Steinbeck wine uncorked, and vineyard manager Cindy Steinbeck gave us detailed descriptions of each. We swirled and sniffed our glasses as if we were true wine connoisseurs.

DEEP IN THE VINES

The next morning it took a while for the fog to lift—literal moisture in the air, not the slow-headedness caused by the many now-empty bottles of wine that littered the patio table. That brain fog would take a few more hours to clear, and by then we'd cruised the property a couple times. We found a few decent bucks early in our rounds, but Ryan was sure there were better on the property. One particular buck had gnarled old antlers, but he looked to be just a 3x3, and we were hoping to find one of the few classic-framed, and exceedingly rare, 4x4 blacktails that Ryan had seen during his pre-hunt scouting trips.





A small copse of oak trees rose in the middle of one of the blocks of vines, and in its shade, we could see the tines rising above the cover. Three or four bucks had bedded in there, but any shot was impossible. Though the distance was manageable for the 6.5 PRC I was toting, the thick cover was not. There was also no feasible approach as the bucks were on alert, and the rows of vines impossible to penetrate effectively.

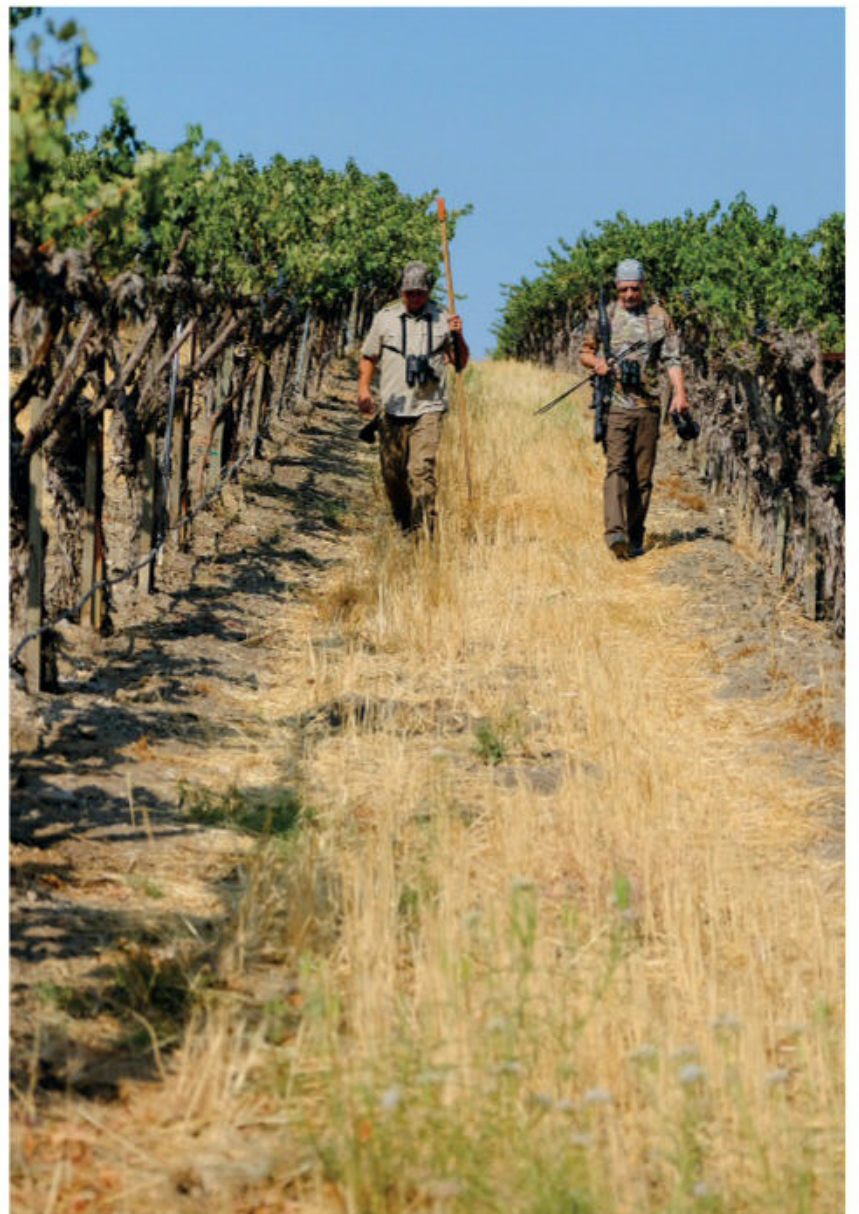
Newkirk had a plan. He'd leave me high on the hill where I could see the bedded deer and take Gordy and the rest of the group to the other side. The deer drive presented low odds that either of us would get a shot, but it was a break from the mental grind of the slow cruise around the vineyard. And still, there was a chance the bucks could cross the trail near me.

It was a small chance that turned into no chance. The bucks quickly figured out they were being hunted and slipped unseen through the rows of grapes. Newkirk's drive did push some smaller bucks and many does past me, and it was an educational experience to see how they used the combination of cover, shade and elevation to parse their way from the pressure of the hunters.

The bucks seemed to like a particular block of vines, whether because of its ample shade or they were just tuned to that particular varietal of grapes. Ryan insisted that certain deer liked certain types of grapes, and as the fruit ripened they'd move through different rows to find their preferred variety. We spent much of that second afternoon circling that same block, and soon spotted a very good buck, running with a smaller friend.

MISSED OPPORTUNITIES

Newkirk recognized the buck as the one that had slipped through their fingers the day before, and I insisted Gordy get another opportunity at it. Ever the gentleman, Gordy was adamant it was still my turn, so Newkirk and I slipped from the



Ryan Newkirk (left) and Gordy Krahn walk the rows after a busted stalk. The rolling terrain provides some cover, but the deer disappear quickly in the dense vines.

A RARE VINTAGE

truck and crept down an open row just a few lines over from where the deer were feeding. When he dropped to one knee, I followed him down and soon picked a light brown spot from the surrounding tangle of vines, leaves, and grapes.

The two bucks were less than 50 yards away. Newkirk assured me the bigger buck was on the left, but as I swung the crosshairs over, I noticed the smaller buck had spotted us. There was enough cover to mask our movement, but it knew something was off. A second before I could sort the front shoulder of the buck from the surrounding tangle of vines, both deer stepped into the next row and disappeared. It was a game of inches that lasted a matter of seconds.

Under the earlier pressure, the bucks hadn't left this block, but after we circled in the truck, we weren't able to find them again. That doesn't mean they had left—the vines and shadows provide so much cover they could be 50 yards from us and we wouldn't know—but Newkirk decided we had better move on, hoping to catch them, or another buck, on the move as the sun switched the shadows to the other side of the vines.

An hour or so later, we spotted two bucks on a distant hillside, one of which looked just like our target buck from earlier. The deer were in a good position to spot us too, so we carefully stalked as close as possible, which ended up being not very close. Newkirk set the sticks at 175 yards out, not an easy shot standing, made even more difficult as I had to wait for the bigger of the two bucks to separate from the surrounding vines. By the time it finally did, my confidence shook along with the crosshairs, and I sent an errant round just over the deer's back.



My miss gave Gordy a second chance at the buck, which we found again just before sundown. Gordy crept within range of the bedded buck, and once he stood, put a single Hornady CX copper bullet through its chest. As we shot photos in the fading light, I got to admire the size of the mature blacktail up close. And though I was chuffed at missing my chance at such a fine buck, having my friend get redemption with a perfect shot at the same deer, made the wine go down easier later that night.

The mature grape vines provide ample protection from the hot, summer sun. The deer move often to take advantage of the shade.



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STRIPPING VELVET

Both types of fog were thick again on the third day, and it took a little longer for them to clear. It was mid-morning before we started our rounds, but soon we spotted the deer we were looking for. I'm always a sucker for the strange, and, after my drunken request made the night before, Newkirk agreed to put me on the gnarly buck we had passed the day before. But finding the buck and getting a shot on it was a different matter. The deer were already on the move, heading to their bed among the vines. After two busted stalks, the buck finally disappeared, putting us back behind the windshield as we searched the entire vineyard for it or another mature coastal blacktail.

After a few laps around the vines, we made our way back to the eastern end of the ranch, across a deep ravine from where we'd lost the buck earlier that day. As we turned a corner surrounding an older block of cabernet vines, we spotted the deer bedded a few hundred yards up a hill. Laying in the shade, the deer now seemed unconcerned with the white truck that had been circling it all morning. That gave me the opportunity to slip from the passenger's seat and sneak into a sitting position with the rifle solidly locked into the shooting sticks for an accurate shot.

Walking up on the buck, we realized, his dark horns weren't just gnarled. They were also still hung with strips of frayed velvet. We were also surprised to find a main frame that held four points on each side, instead of the 3x3 as we had first thought. The front right fork formed into a crab claw and the back left had been damaged in velvet. He was the kind of battle-worn old buck I was proud to hang my tag on, and one worthy of pairing with a 2016 bottle of The Voice, Steinbeck's signature sirah-sauvignon blend which Cindy Steinbeck presented to me back at the skinning shed. 🍷



After several busted stalks, and one miss on a bigger buck, the author finally connected on the third day of the hunt. And soon celebrated with yet another bottle of Steinbeck Vineyards wine.



MOSSBERG PATRIOT LONG RANGE

Considering the current economy, it's hard to still find a good deal. But Mossberg delivers on that value promise with their Patriot series of rifles. I've used the original Patriot on everything from Coues deer to aoudad, but for this hunt I opted for the new(er) Long Range model in 6.5 PRC. While the shots at Steinbeck weren't especially long, I still appreciated the accuracy delivered by the button-rifled, fluted barrel and tuned action that's been pillar-bedded into the distinctive Monte Carlo stock. The user-adjustable trigger was factory tuned to 2½ pounds, and broke crisp thanks to the blade-style design.

I stuffed the Patriot with Hornady's Outfitter ammunition, which features their new CX bullet. California limits hunters to using non-toxic ammo, but that's not a sacrifice when you consider the CX's lineage. It's the newest version of the proven GMX, featuring a monolithic copper-alloy construction topped with a polymer, heat-shielding tip that initiates reliable expansion, while retaining nearly 100% of its original weight for deep penetration.

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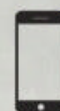
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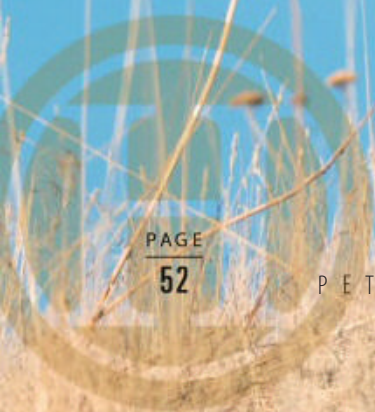


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OVER



ADAPT AND RECOME

COLTON HEWARD

BEATING THE ODDS ON PRESSURED, PUBLIC-LAND MULEYS.

THE UNMISTAKABLE, oversized track of an old buck amidst the edge of a bubbling desert spring was a welcome sight. Truth be told, we were two days into a five-day hunt without even a glimmer of a mature mule deer to pursue. Fed up with the amount of human traffic and complete lack of deer, we packed up camp and kicked up some dust. Our plan? Relocate to the most remote and least likely area to see deer in the entire unit and hope like hell the desolation of the country was a deterrent to the hordes of other hunters.

When I first laid eyes on the buck later that day, I knew it had to be the deer that left the big track at the spring. Its grizzled gray muzzle, combined with a body that dwarfed those of the deer's two compadres, confirmed his maturity. The massive set of antlers that adorned its head was just a bonus.

Fast forward three grueling days of patiently waiting for the perfect stalk opportunity. I finally had the buck bedded, unaware of my presence, a mere 37 yards away. As the sun crept higher into the September sky, the buck's shady retreat at the base of the serviceberry bush was rapidly diminishing. Like clockwork, as the sun stole the last shred of the buck's shade, he stood, stretched, and walked to my left. With his head now buried in a bush chowing down a mid-afternoon snack, I re-ranged the buck. 51 yards. I deliberately crouched over to roll my slider sight to the new yardage when my rangefinder, which I had just set back into my bino pouch, fell to the ground, clanking on my bow limbs on the way down. That was all it took. The buck's head jolted up. The deer gave one look my way and bounded out of my life forever.



T

This experience still stings, but remembering it does bring a smile to my face. Sometimes it is the failures that teach us the most, and this hunt for a mature, public-land muley on a highly pressured unit did exactly that. In fact, this past fall I implemented some of what I learned on a similar hunt, but this time, it ended with me hanging my tag on a hard earned, mature, public-land buck.

The harsh reality is, unless you have a substantial slush fund or access to private property, you are going to have to deal with the woes of pressured public lands. You can either complain about this conundrum or adapt your strategies. Below are a few tips to increase your likelihood of success next time you find yourself pursuing an elusive muley on the vast expanses of public land across the West.

PATIENCE KILLS BIG BUCKS

If you only get one thing out of this article, let this be it: Patience kills big bucks. Read that again and let it sink in. Patience kills big bucks. The ability to exude patience in every aspect of the hunt is what I believe to be the X-factor in mule deer hunting, the thing that separates the 1% who consistently kill trophy bucks from the rest of the competition.

When hunting mule deer, patience can be peeled back like the layers of an onion. The first layer is your ability to spend countless hours behind your glass. A mature buck, especially on heavily pressured public land, is going to move very little during daylight hours. If you are not behind your glass throughout all hours of the day, chances are you will miss the small window where the buck slips up and exposes himself.

The next layer of patience applies to what you do after you locate a shooter. Consider all the outlying variables and resist the urge to rush a stalk, especially when bowhunting. Every scenario is different, but often I like to let the buck bed before beginning my approach. It is much easier to sneak on a stationary buck, than one up and moving.



The biggest test of patience for a bowhunter comes once you are within striking distance of a bedded mule deer. Every situation is different, but usually, waiting for the buck to stand on his own accord will result in better shot opportunities. This often requires several hours of agonizing torture, but the pain is worth the reward. I have had success both waiting the deer out and forcing them to stand with a grunt or rock, but the latter usually ends with a less than desirable outcome.



Patience is a trait acquired through years of trial and error. It sounds simple, but if you can apply disciplined patience to every aspect of your hunt, it is only a matter of time before you hang your tag on a mature buck.

EXPAND YOUR SEARCH

By nature, as we get older, the more difficult it is for us to break free of our old habits. That same logic applies to where and how we hunt. As pressure increases on public land, the habits and home ranges of mule deer evolve for survival. One of the tactics that I regularly preach is to look in unexpected areas.

It is easy for hunters to get sucked into good-looking deer areas, and yes, chances are there are deer there. But that is also where most of the hunting pressure will be concentrated. When pressured, mature bucks will vacate these areas and seek seclusion in nontraditional habitat. Don't be afraid to look in these areas. Chances are you won't see as many, but it only takes one.

After several discouraging days of hunting, my good friend and I ventured into a new area in hopes of escaping some pressure. We still ran into two other trucks of hunters, but that was a breath of fresh air compared to the dozens of fluorescent-orange-filled pick-ups on top of the mountain. The morning



Patience is key when hunting big, mature mule deer. Wait for them to move, ensure you know your ranges, and shoot true.



Glassing is a necessity when hunting pressured deer. Good optics help discern movement patterns and find big bucks.



was slow, with little to show for our hours spent behind the glass. As we were getting ready to move, through the mirage and heat waves of the late morning, I caught a glimpse of a mature buck over a mile away. The deer was in the last place I expected, but was one of only a handful we saw that morning and warranted a closer look.

Three hours later, the buck stood from its bed for a midday snack. The only difference between when the deer bedded and this moment? I was now tucked in a sagebrush 225 yards away, rifle at the ready. Settling my crosshairs on the point of the shoulder, I squeezed the trigger, he crumpled in his tracks. My excitement grew as we approached the downed buck and experienced the opposite of ground shrinkage. What I thought was a very respectable, public-land buck turned out to be one of the better muleys I have been fortunate enough to hang my tag on.

READ THE FINE PRINT

True woodsmanship skills are becoming somewhat of a lost art, replaced by trail

cams, high-end optics, and a menagerie of other high-tech gadgets designed to aid in our ability to find more game. Good, bad, or indifferent, the tools we have available to us today have made us the most

effective hunters to ever hit the woods. But these fancy new tools cannot replace the necessity for “old-school” skills such as tracking, reading sign, and other hunting tactics that our granddads employed.



Being able to identify and read tracks is important. When deer are scarce, following sign will put you in the right area to find a big buck.

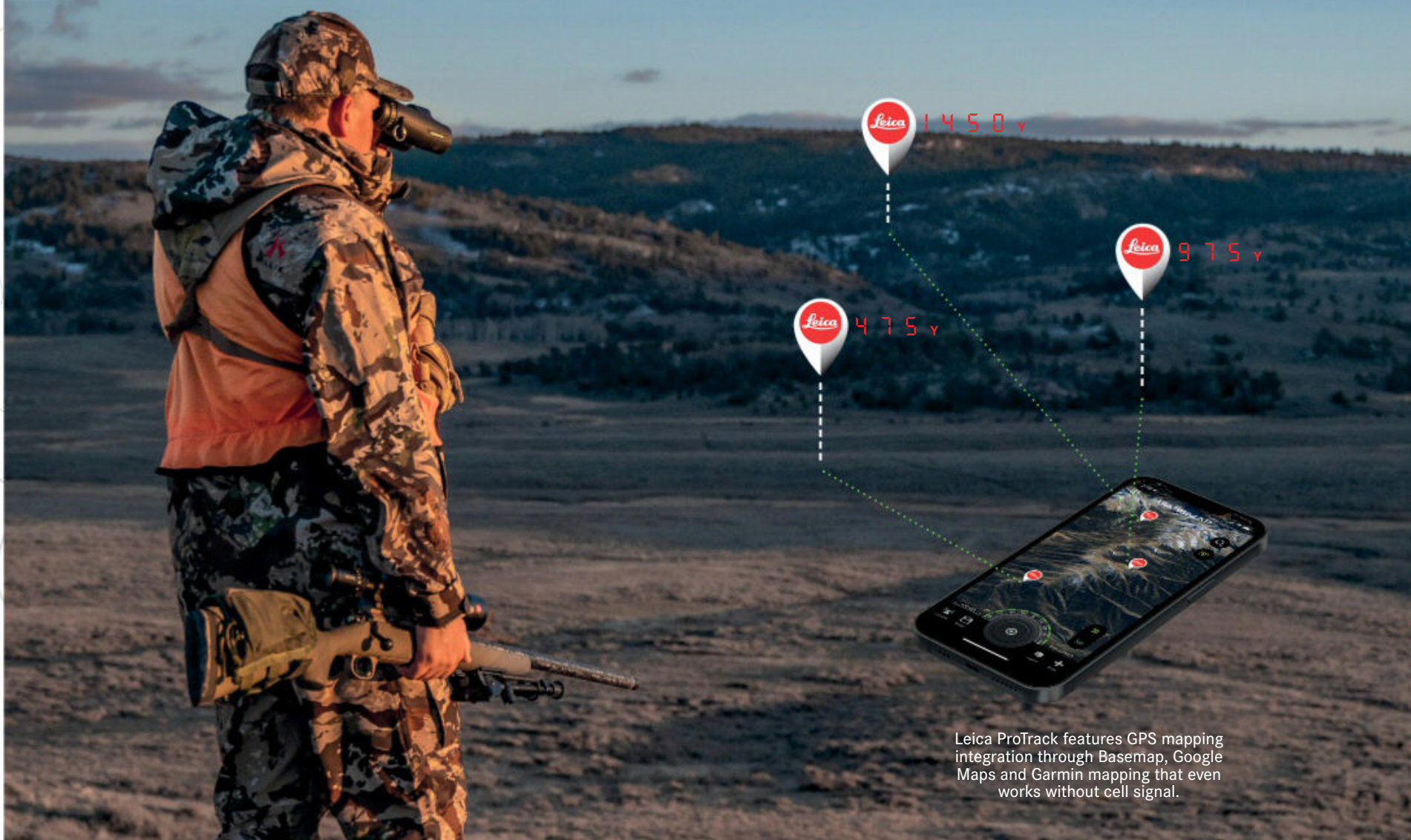


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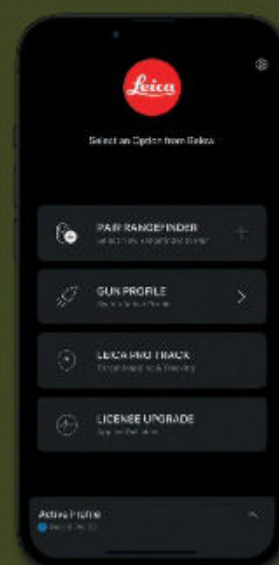
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ADAPT AND OVERCOME

Had we not stopped to check that random spring in the middle of the Idaho desert and discovered that buck track, we wouldn't have spent the time there to find that deer. Although the ending didn't go as planned, finding that one track concentrated our efforts to that random area, which resulted in a great encounter. It's okay to use the modern tools we have at our disposal, but it's also important to take the time to read Mother Nature's fine print. You never know what she might tell you.

GO WHERE OTHERS WON'T

Every year people are willing to go further and hunt harder to taste success. But, if you are willing to lace up your boots and wear out some leather, you can get away from most pressure and have a better hunting experience.

When going into a new area, the very first thing I look for when e-scouting is designated wilderness or roadless areas and focus my efforts there. I also keep my eyes peeled for basins or pockets that



If you're patient and consistent, the odds of finding a big, mature mule deer increase, even if you're hunting in a pressured unit.

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are not visible from any roads. Sometimes these areas require only a few hundred yards to see into, but you can bet mature bucks know these areas and frequent them often.

My one and only buck that broke the mythical 30-inch-wide mark was killed in a secluded cedar- and sage-littered basin that was impossible to see from any roads. I didn't have to go far, maybe three-hundred yards to see into it, but that old buck knew the area well. If I had to guess, he had used that basin to elude hunters for years.

SET REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

Setting unrealistic expectations is one of the most common mistakes I see hunters make. If you have a general-season tag in your pocket and are hunting public land—despite what social media might tell you—a mature four-year-old buck, regardless of antler size, is a trophy.

If you were to check the harvest statistics of most general-season deer hunts, I bet the average success rate hovers around 30%, and less than that on archery hunts. Of the 30% that are successful, I would guess around 25% of the bucks killed are at least four years of age or older. That means that less than 10% of mule deer hunters are hanging their tags on mature bucks. That mature buck might be a giant two point, or he might be a 200-incher, but when hunting heavily pressured public land, both are trophies to be proud of.



The author with a great public-land, mature mule deer. Being patient and setting realistic expectations for the area you're hunting can pay dividends.

I also want to throw out the caveat that the trophy is truly in the eye of the beholder. So much pressure today is put on killing the biggest and best and that drowns out the hunting experience. If a buck gets you excited, tip him over and be tickled pink with the outcome.

The pursuit of big mule deer across the vast expanses of public land is an unquenchable obsession that requires a specific skill set learned through years

of trial and error. Employing a few of these tactics this fall can streamline your learning curve, but even then, a mature buck is far from a guarantee and involves a certain degree of luck. I suppose that is what fuels the fire for us die-hard mule deer junkies. When the stars align and you bag a mature muley of your own, it will surely be one of your most cherished trophies and leave you yearning for their sacred haunts each fall. 🍷

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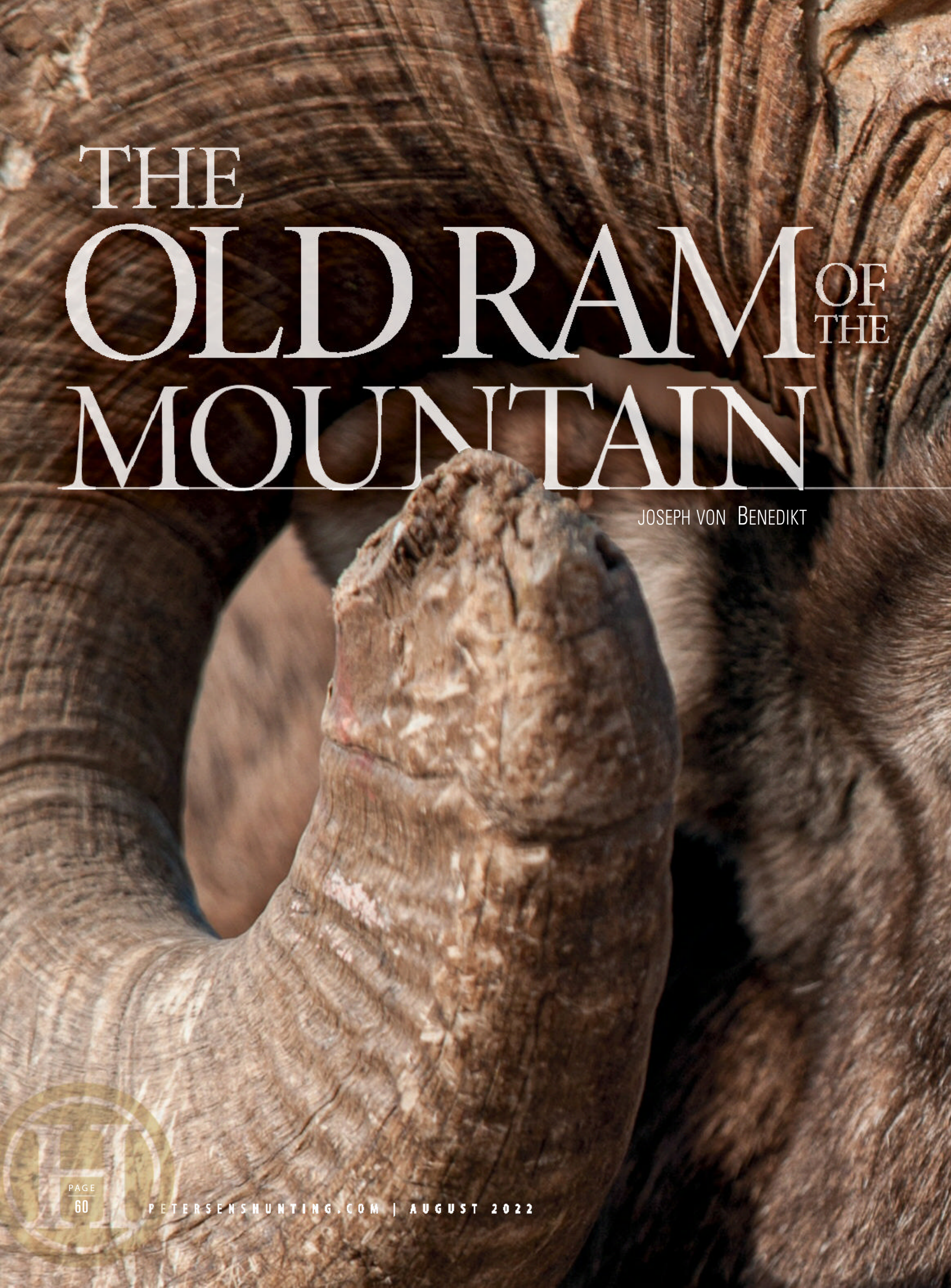
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THE OLD RAM MOUNTAIN OF THE

JOSEPH VON BENEDIKT



PAGE
60

PETERSENHUNTING.COM | AUGUST 2022

HUNTING ANCIENT BIGHORN SHEEP AMONG THE CLOUDS.

PRONE IN THE DUSTY granite rubble, rifle trained downward at a shocking angle and pressure on the trigger, I mentally hit “save.” This was one of the most significant moments in my hunting life; yet one—I instinctively knew—that I’d struggle to hang on to with clarity.

Three weeks earlier, I hadn’t the faintest idea that I’d soon be high among the cloud-shrouded peaks of the southwest, with a Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep permit in my pocket.

Like many mountain hunters, I’d yearned to hunt wild sheep for most of my life. Utah, Colorado, Idaho, and Wyoming collected my yearly application fees. I researched Alberta and Old Mexico and watched cancellation lists, hoping for a wildly discounted last-minute opportunity. Home listings in Alaska got more of my time than they deserved, particularly those within striking distance of good Dall sheep habitat.

Decades passed. Hope wore thin. **Stubbornly I continued submitting applications. In return, I received “unsuccessful” notices.**

In May of 2021, an email slid into my inbox with an unassuming *whoosh*. I stared at the words my friend Jason Nash, vice president of marketing at Federal Ammunition, had written in capital letters: BIGHORN SHEEP HUNT. *Need to be in camp early June, read the next line.*

Federal had obtained two conservation bighorn sheep permits for tribal land in New Mexico. Company president Jason Vanderbrink had one. The other, if I could be ready in 2 1/2 weeks, was available to me. Unbelieving, I shrugged it off as a hoax. With shaking hands, I responded: “To hunt bighorns, I can leave in an hour and be there by dawn.”

A tribal representative named Mike Martinez called. He needed my full name for the permit. This wasn’t a hoax.



A miracle opportunity to hunt bighorn sheep brought the author to a stark realization about the gear, optics, and ammunition he really counts on.

NO TIME TO TRAIN

Two and a half weeks isn't much time to get ready for a Rocky Mountain bighorn hunt. I stay in reasonably good shape, ready for a backcountry adventure at any time, but I sure wasn't in sheep shape. Mind churning over what gear to select, I resolved to do a minimum of four miles a day in the steepest terrain I could find for the next two weeks—carefully. A turned ankle or something similarly unfortunate would be a catastrophe.

"Rockies," as many sheep enthusiasts call them, are amazingly adaptable animals. They occupy habitat ranging from craggy, arid badlands of 4,000 feet or less all the way up to alpine peaks so high they create their own weather systems. I would be hunting at 11,000 to 13,000 feet. The goal was to take a very old ram of 10 years or more, with horns measuring somewhere around 170 to 175 inches per Boone & Crockett's protocol.

Now, that's a big sheep. In most areas, a "management" animal wouldn't be anywhere near that big. However, this particular demographic of sheep regularly produces giant rams, arguably second only to Montana and Alberta's legendary populations. Martinez warned me I may see a Boone & Crockett ram of 180 inches or more—and I'd have to pass on it.

IN THE MOMENT

A couple weeks, and a 12,200-foot ascent later, I found myself laying across a dusty high-country sheep trail, crosshairs

trained on an old, old ram. I had no qualms about taking the shot. It was far, reaching 532 yards down into the basin at an extreme angle, but I had the right equipment, and I'd proofed it out thoroughly before coming.

We'd worked slowly into the basin, glassing every foot of it as it came into view. Rams blended into the grayish-brown cliffs and mountainside, and although I have decent game eyes, it took a while before I began picking out the sheep. Voices low, movement guarded, Martinez, head guide G.T. Nunn, and the other guides pointed out singles and small bands. In all, we counted 16 different rams in that alpine basin.

At least three were old enough.

One would likely make Boone & Crockett. Being so large and likely "just" nine years old, he was ruled out.

Mentally reeling from sensory overload, I soaked it all in. The weather was perfect; the scenery superb. Poignant, too, was a sense of impending loss. A fear that it was all happening much too fast.

Ideally, I'd hoped to hunt for several days, learning about the animals, their taxonomy, habits, and habitat. Just spending time in sheep country—any sheep country—with a valid tag in one's pocket is an incredible gift, and I wanted to unwrap that gift slowly, savoring every mile and every moment. Now I was worried whether I'd be able to adequately retain the memory of the events unfolding so quickly.

DEATH OF A MONARCH

Catching some small sound or a whisp of scent on a vagrant breeze, four rams bolted from below us, where they'd been hidden beneath a cliff bottoming the steep mountainside we sat atop. Two of the sheep looked old, even to my untrained eye. Guides muttered, subdued excitement in their whispers.

"That one's 12 if he's a day," Nunn finally stated. "The one with the really good coat."

Although the old warrior had tight curls, which would minimize how his horns stretched the tape, his mass carried so well it looked as if his third circumference would measure nearly as large as his first. Deep "pie crust" ridges corrugated his bases. His horns were broomed blunt and heavy. And Nunn was right: His cape was the best we'd seen in the entire basin.

At first, I couldn't reconcile that. It was early June in the high Rockies. Snow was just receding from the peaks. These rams spend the entire year between 11,000 and 13,000 feet, feeding across slopes blown free of snow by savage winter winds. The ram should be drawn and ragged like the others.

A muttered expletive came from one of the other guides.

"He could be 13."

Glued to his spotter, Nunn agreed.

It dawned on me that the ram was so old he'd likely not rutted, which would explain the excellent condition of his body and coat. Unlike the other rams, he'd gone into the winter fat and healthy, not exhausted and thin.

It was just the first day, but I became aware that we could not find a better ram. We might search a week and not find another nearly as right.

"Like him?" Nunn asked simply.

Adrenaline beginning to trickle, I confessed I liked him very much.

Still unsettled and edgy, the rams fed and moved restlessly on the basin floor. Studying the terrain around, I could not see a way

to get closer without blowing them out and around the far ridge.

"I think our best bet is to take him from here," Nunn said, mirroring my conclusion.

Moving carefully, I laid prone in the rocks, bipod wedged below, toes scrabbling for a grip above. To my surprise, the rangefinder in my binocular showed a 32-degree angle. That's steep.

The Distance was 532 yards. Far, but not too far.



High altitude and steep shooting angles are common in sheep country. The ram fell at 11,571 feet; the author's shooting position was high above, at 12,200 feet.





This wonderfully old broomed-off ram proved to be 14 years old. He was the oldest sheep the outfitter had ever taken.

The night before, I'd run updated ballistics on my phone app, plugging in the altitude and predicted temperatures, then adjusting the turret on the scope to match. Now, calculating a compensation for angle, I dialed the turret.

My crosshairs were rock steady. Not a breath of wind stirred. "Up this high, everyone shoots over," whispered someone. "Especially when shooting up or down steep." Others muttered agreement.

Lowering my crosshairs to the rams' brisket, I breathed deep, wondering at the calm I felt. Mentally I hit "save," and slowly squeezed the trigger.

In the scope I watched the ram leap and wheel away, and over the subdued crack of the suppressor I heard the bullet impact. The shot had felt great, but all around, the guides were shouting in whispers. "Missed! Guts. Under! Over! Shoot again."

Limping, the old ram dashed across the tiny hanging basin bottom, leading the band onto an eyebrow of a trail up the far ridge. I'd hit exactly where I'd aimed.

"You hit a bit low," stated Nunn, his voice steady and confident. "Hit him again."

"How far now?" I asked, tersely.

"Five-ninety-one."

Correcting for angle, I dialed the turret, this time trusting the calculations. The ram paused and the 6.5 PRC barked. Shot squarely through the shoulders, the old ram dropped in his tracks, rolling, kicking, and lodging in the rocks. Because I didn't want him to kick and fall farther, I shot him again, then jammed the magazine full of fresh cartridges and trained the crosshairs back on the ram.

There was no need. He lay still. Clattering rocks echoed around the basin as wild sheep moved nervously, unsure where



First cut on a high-country bighorn ram. After the stalk, the shot, the celebration, and the photos, this was the moment when it hit home that it all was really happening.

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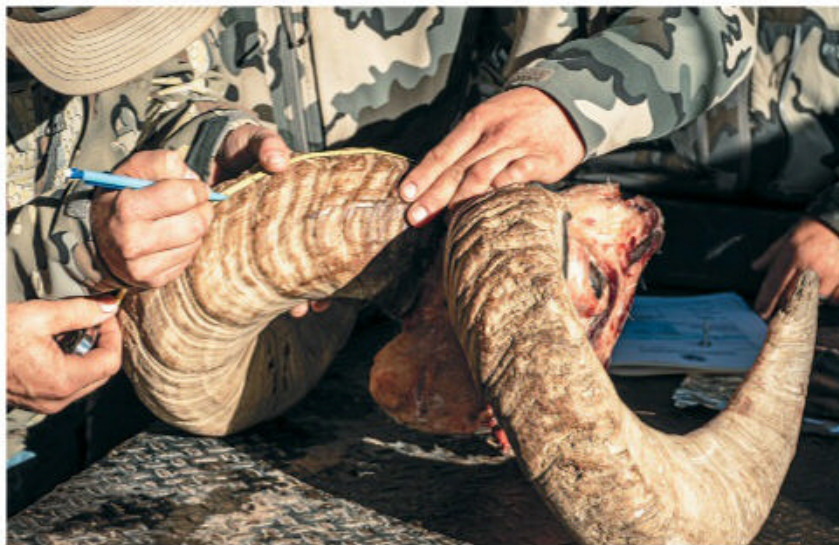
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Although many hunters don't really care how a massive old ram stretches the tape, measuring one is an enjoyable and necessary step. Size and age are recorded for conservation and management purposes.

the shots were coming from and whether there was danger. As we gathered ourselves and our gear, the bighorns settled, bedding again or going back to feeding.

HANDS ON HORNS

Uncertain without their leader, the band of remaining rams climbed the ridge slowly as we approached. Requesting a moment alone with the ram, I climbed ahead, sensory overload giving way to an odd calm. I knelt, and for the first time laid my hand on fresh sheep horns.

Any place above the timberline is special. This, being tribal land, being home to wild sheep, being the place I became a sheep hunter, was extraordinary. In that moment I felt vastly alone and absolutely at home.

Sitting, grateful, I motioned the others up.

Short of elephants and perhaps lions, which I've never hunted, I suspect there is no animal on earth that draws such respect as an old, high-country wild sheep. Guides put gnarled hands on the ram, smoothing the hair scuffed by falling, caressing the growth rings on the scarred, massive horns.

Nunn counted, then counted again. His forehead furrowed, he grunted, "Mike, what do you get?"

"Not sure I wanna say," Martinez responded with a slow grin. "Maybe fourteen?"

"Same here," Nunn responded. He glanced at me. "This is an old, old ram. You have no idea what you have here."

Being a new sheep hunter, I didn't—but at least I was aware that I didn't. Age, I knew, is valued tremendously by serious sheep hunters and conservationists.

The next day an official drilled and plugged the ram's horn, agreed with our assessment, and recorded the age. When Nunn told me this was the oldest ram they've ever taken, I finally realized the significance.

Meat divided amongst the guides, head atop my pack, we descended off the mountain. Martinez, it turned out, has real talent with a camera—and a way with respectfully capturing the essence of the experience. Graciously, he carried my Leica and shot photos along the way. Letting the others forge ahead, we took our time, moving reluctantly out of the quiet peaks that hang so close to heaven. 



FEDERAL TERMINAL ASCENT

Just before my hunt, Federal had announced its new 6.5 PRC load featuring the 130-grain Terminal Ascent bullet—a natural choice for bighorns. If there's a modern cartridge that equates to Jack O'Connor's legendary .270 Winchester, it's the 6.5 PRC. As for the Terminal Ascent projectile, it's arguably the most versatile hunting bullet available.

It's streamlined and aerodynamic. It's got a wonderfully effective tip made of a space-age, heat-resistant composite, which maximizes ballistic coefficient and initiates immediate expansion on impact, even at very low impact velocity. Its rear half is solid copper, so it can't pancake, fragment, or pulverize into nothing even when impacting massive bone. And it's got a frontal lead core bonded in place, so it invariably mushrooms perfectly and retains nearly all its weight.

It's the only bullet on the market that promises—and delivers—perfect mushrooming and deep penetration whether impacting at 15 yards or 1,000 yards. It's that holy grail of bullets that manufacturers have been chasing for decades.

How about accuracy? Federal's accuracy spec requires the Terminal Ascent produce 10-shot groups of no more than 0.60 inch at 100 yards. Out of a Gunwerks ClymR topped with a Swarovski Z5, the Terminal Ascent bullets averaged 1.25 inches at 100 yards. Fitting the rifle with a suppressor drops that number down to half an inch.

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RACING AHEAD

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CENTERPOINT » AMPED 425

18
SCORE

MSRP • \$499



WEIGHT	9.4 LBS.
LENGTH	36 IN.
WIDTH COCKED	15.5 IN.
ACCURACY	3.1 IN. (30 YDS.)
TRIGGER PULL	5.5 LBS.
VELOCITY	423 FPS (400 GR. ARROW)

CENTERPOINTARCHERY.COM

THE CENTERPOINT AMPED 425 is the lowest-priced crossbow in the test at just \$499. The 2022 model features a silent crank to help cock the crossbow but I had no trouble cocking the Amped 425 with a rope cocker. The crossbow also includes a foldable stirrup, adjustable cheekpiece, and five-position buttstock. When fully extended, the buttstock adds an extra 2 ¾ inches, a great feature for long-armed shooters.

The Amped 425 shot an impressive 423 fps with the included 400-grain arrows. However, it's difficult to compare

this crossbow with the others in the test. The trigger doesn't stack up with any of the other crossbows and the scope ranks last. The CenterPoint was also the least accurate, but with upgraded aftermarket arrows, accuracy improved. If you're planning to shoot deer-sized game at 30 yards, you'll have no problem hitting the mark. The Amped is an incredible value for the budget-minded crossbow hunter.

AD

CHRIS LARSEN



THE CROSSBOW industry continues to innovate. During my 15 years in the industry as a dealer and member of the media, I've never seen as much of a technological leap as I've witnessed in the past few years. 350 feet per second was once considered blistering fast in the not-too-distant past. This year, two crossbows topped the 500-fps mark.

Performance captures headlines, but crossbows are also becoming easier to handle and most importantly, safer. Several models now offer user-friendly cranks, the ability to be safely de-cocked without shooting the crossbow, and better, more-ergonomic triggers and safety switches.

This year's crossbow test features one budget-friendly crossbow, two mid-priced crossbows, and two crossbows that test the limits of just about everyone's wallet. To help hunters choose the best crossbow for their needs, these five were evaluated to compare their strengths and weaknesses. Crossbows were scored in five categories: portability, trigger pull, accuracy, ergonomics, and velocity.

All crossbows used in the test were pulled right off the shelf at my local archery shop except for the Wicked Ridge Fury 410. The final version wasn't available to test at press time, but I was provided a prototype that was close to the expected production model.

EXCALIBUR » MICRO 380

21
SCORE

MSRP • \$1,199

THE EXCALIBUR MICRO 380 is offered in two different versions. A box-store model in Mossy Oak Breakup Country and a dealer exclusive in Realtree Excape. The dealer-exclusive crossbow is \$100 more, but includes an upgraded Overwatch speed-compensating, illuminated-reticle scope and a sound-dampening system including Excalibur's Air Brakes Suppressors.

I tested the dealer-exclusive model. The Overwatch scope is Excalibur's best scope and it alone is worth the upgrade price. The CeaseFire system virtually eliminates

any chance of a dry fire or partial dry fire situation, the leading cause of crossbow failure. Excalibur crossbows are known for incredible accuracy and the Micro 380 is no exception. The sound dampening accessories are nice but do cut about 15 fps off the speed.

While the Micro 380 is the widest crossbow in the test, the benefits of recurve crossbows are a bulletproof design and the ability to easily service the crossbow in the field if necessary. An experienced hunter can change out the string in the field in a few minutes using a simple stringing aid.

WEIGHT	8.8 LBS.
LENGTH	34.5 IN.
WIDTH COCKED	21 IN.
ACCURACY	1.2 IN. (30 YDS.)
TRIGGER PULL	3.2 LBS.
VELOCITY	365 FPS (350 GR. ARROW)

EXCALIBURCROSSBOW.COM



RAVIN » R500

24
SCORE

MSRP • \$3,024

THE RAVIN R500 was scheduled for release in 2021. But, 2021 was a difficult year for many manufacturers and Ravin was forced to push out the release of their most advanced crossbow ever to this year. Good things come to those who wait. The Ravin R500 is everything it is advertised to be. It's smoking fast, incredibly narrow, and as close to idiot-proof as you can make a crossbow.

The R500 test model blew through the chronograph at 502 fps. While that is impressive, the narrow frame is the

most mind-blowing attribute of this crossbow. It's four inches axle-to-axle when cocked and just over eight inches wide at the widest point. The VersaDrive Cocking System is a worm-drive crank that cocks and de-cocks the R500 easily and with no worries of a failure due to your hand slipping off the handle. The crank stops in place if there's a problem. Ravin plans to release an optional electric crank at some point in 2022. The R500 also had the best trigger in the test.

WEIGHT	10.5 LBS.
LENGTH	28.5 IN.
WIDTH COCKED	8.25 IN.
ACCURACY	1.5 IN. (30 YDS.)
TRIGGER PULL	2.5 LBS.
VELOCITY	502 FPS (400 GR. ARROW)

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WEIGHT	11.2 LBS.
LENGTH	32.75 IN.
WIDTH COCKED	10.25 IN.
ACCURACY	1.3 IN. (30 YDS.)
TRIGGER PULL	2.9 LBS.
VELOCITY	487 FPS (445 GR. ARROW)

TENPOINTCROSSBOWS.COM



24
SCORE

MSRP • \$3,049

THE SPEED WARS continue to rage in the crossbow industry and TenPoint is the leader in 2022 but there is an asterisk. The TenPoint Nitro 505 is the fastest production crossbow on the market, shooting a blazing 505 fps with a 400-grain arrow. At the ATA show, I saw speeds well over the 505 mark. But the crossbow ships with TenPoint's 445-grain EVO-X Centerpunch Arrow. This arrow delivers more kinetic energy and is more accurate than the 400-grain TenPoint ProElite Arrow but you will lose about 20 fps with the EVO-X.

The Nitro 505 is super narrow at 6.5-inches axle-to-axle and 10.25 inches at the widest point when cocked. TenPoint's ACUslide makes cocking and de-cocking the Nitro 505 easy and safe. Like the R500, if your hand slips off the handle when cranking, the crank stops in place. The Nitro 505 Crossbow includes the EVO-X Marksman Elite speed-compensating, illuminated-reticle scope. It's the perfect scope for most shooters but TenPoint also offers an upgrade to either the Garmin Xero or Burris Oracle scopes.

WEIGHT	10.6 LBS.
LENGTH	31 IN.
WIDTH COCKED	14 IN.
ACCURACY	2.1 IN. (30 YDS.)
TRIGGER PULL	3.5 LBS.
VELOCITY	393 FPS (400 GR. ARROW)

WICKEDRIDGECROSSBOWS.COM



20
SCORE

MSRP • \$1,049

WICKED RIDGE Crossbows are manufactured by TenPoint. They're known as more affordable, yet less technologically advanced than TenPoint. That's generally a fair assessment. However, the Wicked Ridge Fury 410 De-Cock is the best Wicked Ridge crossbow I've ever shot. The ability to de-cock without shooting an arrow is a new feature no Wicked Ridge crossbow has had before. The Fury 410 includes an integrated ACUdraw De-Cock crank. If your hand slips off the

handle while de-cocking, the crank stops in place. The Fury 410 De-Cock also comes with TenPoint's RangeMaster Scope. It's the same scope that was mounted on TenPoint's top-of-the-line crossbows for many years. The team at TenPoint touts this crossbow as having \$2,000 worth of features & performance at half the price. After testing the Fury 410 De-Cock, it's hard to argue with that message.

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TAKING THE TEST

OUR 2022 Crossbow Test rated five attributes of each model: portability, trigger-pull weight, accuracy, ergonomics, and velocity. In each category, a score from 1-to-5 is possible with 5 being the highest possible score. The human

factor is present in the test, especially in the accuracy and ergonomics categories. The goal of the test is to determine how each crossbow would perform in the real world with actual users, not just on the test range.

RESULTS BY SCORE (5 POINTS PER CATEGORY=25 TOTAL POINTS)	PORTABILITY	TRIGGER PULL	ACCURACY	ERGONOMICS	VELOCITY	TOTAL
CENTERPOINT AMPED 425	4	3	3	4	4	18
EXCALIBUR MICRO 380	4	4.5	5	4.5	3	21
RAVIN R500	5	5	4	5	5	24
TENPOINT NITRO 505	4.5	5	4.5	5	5	24
WICKED RIDGE FURY 410 DE-COCK	4	4	3.5	4	4	20

PORTABILITY

Vertical bow shooters making the switch to crossbows will be most surprised by the weight and bulkiness of crossbows. Crossbows are, in some cases, twice the weight of compound bows. When it comes to the total weight, manufacturer specs are either measured with no accessories on the crossbow or just completely made up. For the test, crossbows are weighed with all accessories including the scope, quiver, arrows, and cocking device. This is the true weight of the crossbow. When

shopping, don't compare the true weight with advertised weight as they are not fair comparisons. When measuring the width of crossbows, I don't use the axle-to-axle measurements. To fairly compare the width of crossbows for tests like this, I use the widest points on the crossbow. In some cases, it's the outside edge of the limbs. In other situations, it's the outside edge of the cam. Length is also factored into the equation.



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DRIVEN HUNTS 2

SEASON PREMIERE

JULY 2 | 5:30P ET


Outdoor

presented by

Aimpoint

The Excalibur Micro 380 is the lightest crossbow in the test but also the widest. The Ravin R500 won this category. It's the narrowest and shortest crossbow in the test. It's also the lightest of the crossbows with a built-in crank.

TRIGGER PULL

A Weaver Trigger Pull Gauge was used to measure trigger pull. Crossbow triggers have come a long way since the flurry of trigger recalls the industry went through years ago. The Ravin R500 had the best trigger in the test, but the TenPoint Nitro 505 also earns excellent marks for trigger pull. The triggers in the Excalibur Micro 380 and Wicked Ridge Fury 410 were also above average. I've helped thousands of hunters get started with crossbows and only a small percentage of them notice the trigger on the range. Unless a trigger is truly bad, it's even less noticeable in the field.

ACCURACY

The BOG DeathGrip Tripod has revolutionized crossbow hunting. If you're hunting out of a ground blind, I cannot recommend it enough. I used the DeathGrip to shoot three groups of three arrows at 30 yards from each crossbow. I eliminated the worst group from each crossbow and averaged the two best groups to find the score. The 30-yard distance was chosen because I believe it's an ethical distance for the vast majority of hunters. While some manufacturers are promoting their accuracy out to 100 yards, I don't believe that distance is ethical for hunting.

The Excalibur Micro 380 and TenPoint Nitro 505 both stacked arrows into the SpyderWeb Target used for the test but the Ravin wasn't far off the mark.

ERGONOMICS

This category measures the user experience. Fit and finish, ease of use, and balance are all factored in. Ravin's VersaDrive and TenPoint's ACUslide are both market leaders when it comes to safe and easy-to-use cranking systems. Wicked Ridge introduced a de-cocking feature on two crossbows this year including the Fury 410 De-Cock. Excalibur earns points in this category thanks to its ability to be easily serviced in the field and without a bow press. Quivers are often overlooked but the Micro 380 and Nitro 505 both have the best quivers in the test.

VELOCITY

Velocity was tested using a Competition Electronics ProChrono Pal Chronograph. I fired three shots through the chronograph and averaged the speeds to determine the final score. All of the crossbows in the test shot reasonably close to the advertised speed.

So who won? The scores show the TenPoint Nitro 505 and Ravin R500 both rank among the best of the best. But the reality is many people wouldn't consider spending \$3,000 or more for a crossbow. The real winners are the hunters. Even if can't afford a four-figure investment, technological advancements are trickling down to more budget-friendly crossbows. 




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MORE DETAILS

A man with a beard, wearing a camouflage baseball cap and a matching long-sleeved shirt, is shown in profile. He is holding binoculars with both hands and looking off to the side. A rifle is visible behind him on the left. The background is a blurred forest.

BORN TO WEAR CAMO

A hunter is more than just a predator. Hunters are caretakers, providers and leaders, too. Head into the backwoods with Michael Waddell, Travis "T-Bone" Turner and Nick Mundt as they honor America's authentic hunting culture.

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R7 MAKO HANDGUN FIRING PIN SAFETY BLOCK RECALL

Kimber Mfg. Inc. ("Kimber") has discovered a quality issue involving the firing pin safety block of certain Kimber R7 model handguns shipped from January 10, 2022 through February 14, 2022. Firearms assembled with the subject firing pin safety block may release multiple rounds from a single trigger pull.

This Recall Notice applies only to the Serial Numbers of those products listed in the **List of Serial Numbers of Recalled Products** located at kimberamerica.com/serial-r7-mako. If your handgun is among those in this **List of Serial Numbers of Recalled Products**, please contact us immediately by calling 888-243-4522, and do not load, use, sell, or otherwise make available your handgun, as the condition may lead to serious personal injury or death. Kimber is voluntarily recalling the affected products to help ensure the personal safety of the parties that purchased and/or used them.



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What Are The Odds?

IF WE hunt enough, we're likely to have a bizarre experience that qualifies for the old saying: "You can't make this up."

I knew a man high up in the corporate world who wanted to hunt big game. Pete had never hunted before, and I figured a Wyoming antelope hunt would be a good place to start. There would be plenty of animals and shooting opportunities with a typically high hunter success rate. My hunting buddy George would accompany us.

We had barely driven into the unit when we spotted a small herd. Pete and I got out while George stayed with the truck. We were able to close the distance by slipping along a small draw. When we thought we were close enough, we peeked over the top. The antelope were still there, feeding in the sage. Pete rested his .270 on the rim of the draw and fired. The buck went down instantly. The plan worked perfectly. I hand-signaled to George to drive the truck over and shook George's hand.

The buck hadn't yet died, though Pete hit it squarely in the neck. I instructed Pete to punch his tag. We'd take pictures as soon as George drove over. Suddenly the buck started scrabbling around. I watched, half curious and half amazed. Surely the neck shot was fatal. He seemed to be gaining more strength and somehow got to his feet as we stood there a couple yards away. It began to wobble and weave as if it was a newborn fawn. I expected it to drop any second. When it took a few quick steps and started moving away I told Pete to shoot again. Though he tried, his gun jammed. In the meantime, the antelope had disappeared over a small rise.

George drove over and quickly appraised the situation.

"Where's the buck," he asked.

"He took off," I stammered. "He's over that hill."

"What the hell happened?" George said. "I saw you guys standing right next to it."

I had no good answer. I didn't know what the hell happened. George and I quickly decided he should run up on the hill and put the buck down if he saw it. Both he and I had antelope tags. Pete was not only holding a jammed gun, but he was totally unnerved and badly shaking.

When George got to the top of the hill, he raised his rifle and put down Pete's buck, then gave us a thumbs-up sign. Everyone was happy. As we took photos, I decided to move the buck near some rocks with pretty lichens where Pete could pose again. I grabbed a horn and started pulling and was aghast to see there was no hole in the antelope's neck. George shot a perfectly healthy animal.



I was shaking my head in disbelief when I saw an antelope stumbling and struggling up a hill along a fence line a long way away. It disappeared over the top and I took off running while George field-dressed his antelope. As I ran, I saw a fresh drop of blood. When I got to the top I looked down and saw a buck antelope lying in the sage. It wasn't bedded but lying on its side. There, finally, was Pete's antelope. I signaled thumbs-up to Pete and George. I walked up to the animal and saw that something was very wrong. This antelope was wearing a tag and was already field-dressed. I didn't know whether to laugh or cry. Obviously, another hunter had shot it and left to drive his vehicle closer. When I told Pete and George, they didn't know whether to laugh or cry either.

Hours later, after searching for Pete's buck, we sat down and had lunch. As we ate our sandwiches, we saw a small herd of antelope walking our way. As we glassed them, George said: "Take a close look at the buck. His neck seems to be darker than usual." Could it be Pete's buck walking about with that wound? I looked through my binocs and saw what George saw. It had to be dried blood. No question about it. Pete took a steady rest and put the buck down. It was indeed his buck, which had survived a wound to its neck.

What were the odds of all those events happening that morning? I still marvel every time I think about it. 



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