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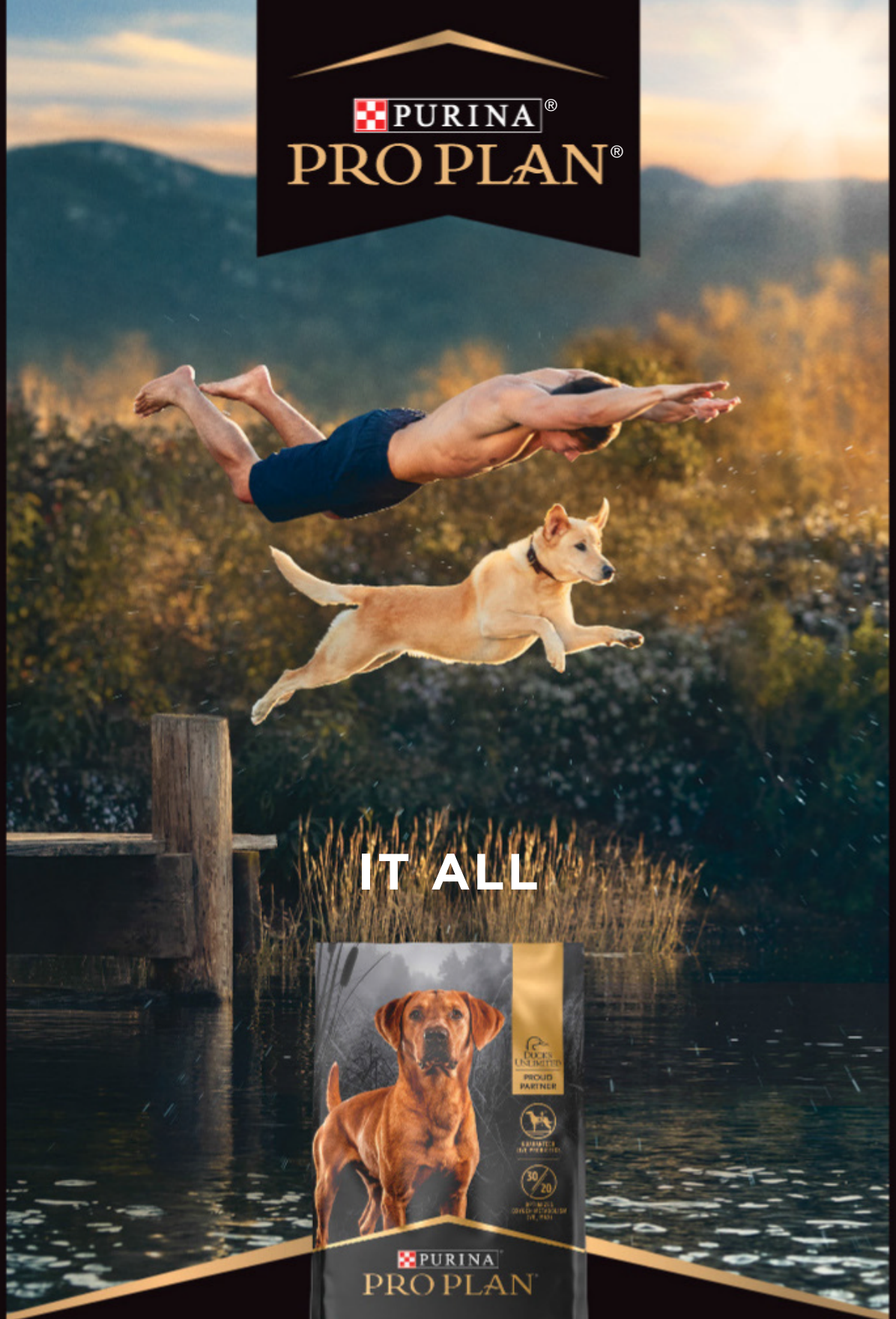
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Most Everyone's Mad Here

I HOPE, dear reader, you've known me long enough to know I believe any hunt is so much bigger than the kill. In fact, if you pressed me, I'd likely tell you that little moment after the bullet leaves the barrel is my least favorite part of the hunt. Instead, I enjoy everything else—the build-up, the planning, the travel and, most of all, the camaraderie of hunting camp. Sure, the stalk is challenging and the hard work after an animal is down is rewarding, but it's who you share camp with that makes the trip.

On a recent hunt for Roosevelt elk in Oregon, a Hollywood casting agent couldn't have assembled a better group. Most of us were industry veterans with friendships forged around campfires and, honestly, bellied up to bars after trade shows over the many years of working together. When I looked around the room that first night, I couldn't help but marvel at how far we'd all come.

I first met Rafe Nielsen when we were both fresh out of college and toiling away at Cabela's in the company's glory years well before they went public. Those were fun days, filled with hard work. Nielsen was an intern, so his stint there was short. He moved back to Utah, to an entry-level job at Browning, before I could really get to know him. Now, more years later than we both care to admit, he's running the marketing department in Morgan, Utah—proof that good things happen to good people, especially when they work hard.

Working hard may not best describe Skip Knowles, but somehow the guy scratched out a living long enough as a freelance writer that he was finally rewarded with a top position at a hunting magazine. Experienced *Hunting* readers may recognize his name from his time as Associate Editor here. Now he leads *Wildfowl*—the top waterfowling media brand in the country—and *Predator Nation*. Skip is also the mad genius behind the beautiful *North American Elk* magazine. Okay, so maybe he is a hard worker. Knowles also serves as the best whipping boy

you've ever met, mostly brought on by his unironic boasting, often using such self-given sobriquets as "International Gun Slinger." If anything, Skip takes the heat off me when I screw something up.

I first met Shawn Skipper when he was a baby-faced editor at the NRA. Now that baby face wears a few more lines, and currently a scraggly beard, but he's one of the best facilitators in an industry filled with specialized press flacks. What he can facilitate depends on what time of day or night you call, but rest assured, Skipper can and will make it happen. Leupold wouldn't get half the press coverage it does without him at his desk—not that he's ever actually at his desk.

If you made it this far in my monthly missive, you're likely wondering why I'm telling you about these people. Think back to your favorite moments at hunting camp. What made them memorable was the people you shared them with. I suspect you have your own group of friends that gather together on opening day, and each year you create more stories to tell and retell. You laugh so hard it hurts, commiserate over missed deer and lost opportunities and form strong bonds that last long after the hunt ends. In short, the hunt isn't just about the hunt; it's actually the mechanism that takes you to amazing places where you often meet wonderful people.

When you turn to page 54 of this issue of *Petersen's Hunting*, you'll read the story of how my hunt for elk happened. But what's missing are all the moments after my opening-day kill: Skipper's surprise birthday party, so unplanned we had to use liquor-store receipts rolled tightly and shoved in a piece of frozen cake to serve as flaming candles; Outfitter Jody



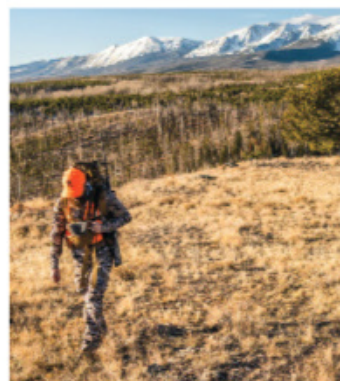
Smith constantly calling me Darby, though he knows my name is David; Skip just being Skip; and Nielsen, always the straight man of the group, shocking his audience with an unbelievable tale about an epic missed opportunity.

Ask each of them and I'm sure they'll have something equally as damning to say about me. From my admittedly amateur mushroom picking expedition that left Nielsen's face numb to the sheer volume of hard seltzers I celebrated my success with—a celebration that lasted from morning to night for the remaining four days of the hunt. Those stories, and more, bring to mind a quote from Lewis Carroll's Cheshire Cat:

"You may have noticed that I'm not all there myself."

See you around the campfire,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David Smith".



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Readers Weigh In

LESS GOVERNMENT, NOT MORE

Dear Editor,

I was recently reading a 2020 article in one my older editions that talked about hunter education and ethical hunting. It is without a doubt that unethical hunting, trespassing and disrespect for the outdoors we love will have a negative effect on the future of hunting, our 2nd Amendment rights and shooting traditions.

Another imminent danger we have is that in our zeal to protect these liberties, we have allowed conservation managers in states like Alabama and elsewhere to overregulate, micromanage and use the hunting public for a revenue tool. All these rules make it more cumbersome and costly to go hunting, which in turn is having a negative impact on the number of hunters, especially the next generation who have so many more things to compete for their time and attention, such as youth sports and after-school activities.

I encourage conservation and wildlife departments to simplify licensing. We also need to simplify reporting requirements because we are subjecting hunters to legal jeopardy over rules to micromanage deer herds that are not in danger. We rebuilt Southern deer herds without these new rules that make it harder on seniors to hunt and to get youth involved. Our hunting future is in trouble when seniors decide it is not worth it to go and children never get to learn. In-

deed, it jeopardizes our 2nd Amendment not just hunting when a new generation is only taught to fear firearms.

DON WALLACE

Via e-mail

LIES IN THE LONG GRASS?

Dear Sirs,

As a subscriber to Petersen's Hunting for a number of years and also appreciating the opportunity to give gift subscriptions to family and friends, I thought I'd mention something I've noticed now concerning Mr. Peter Capstick. In some articles he's been mentioned in a roundabout way and there has been some insinuating remarks that he is a fraud. I first encountered his writing in the book "Death In The Long Grass."

At the time I read this book, there was much controversy over hunting in Africa and much upheaval in central and Southern Africa. Nations would be created and boundaries declared. At that time, Mr. Capstick wrote what I felt was an honest appraisal and his accounts, I, for one, appreciated. I later read "Death in Silent Places" and "Death In The Dark Continent." I thought his writing to be fair, accurate and, at times, a little over-emphasizing, but not boring or hum drum.

I appreciate Mr. Craig Boddington and have supported his advances in the hunting and writing world. I've read Ruark, Hemingway, O'Connor and

Roosevelt, as well as W. D. M. Bell and Pretorias. Mr. Capstick researched and used references and footnotes where necessary. I think he put African hunting and some issues of the day in a contemporary spotlight. He certainly sold a lot of books. I don't consider him a fraud and would like to state that here. He's not the final opinion, but I for one respect his writing and his views on hunting. Thank you.

WAYNE DYKGREVE

Helena, Montana

ORYX INFORMATION

After reading the article about free-range hunting for scimitar-horned oryx in Texas, I was hoping to get some contact info on how to explore that potential adventure. I saw nothing in the article as who to contact with questions or further interest. Can you possibly put me in touch with the author or a party to contact, etc. Thank you.

DANIEL A. YESNES

Via e-mail

Daniel – Kevin Steele, publisher of Petersen's Hunting and author of the article you mention (The Other Oryx/June-July 2022) hunted with Steve Jones of Backcountry Hunts. Jones is one of the top outfitters operating in the Trans-Pecos region of west Texas and New Mexico. We've hunted everything from aoudad to bear to antelope and mule deer with Backcountry Hunts and can't recommend

them enough. If you book a hunt with Jones, please tell him the team at Petersen's Hunting sent you. —David Draper.

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Among all the big-game species hunters chase, pronghorn, colloquially known as antelope, get the least respect. They don't carry impressive headgear, like that of an elk, but a true trophy pronghorn, with horns measuring 16 inches or more, is rarer than a six-point bull. Perhaps the biggest fallacy in all of hunting is that antelope meat is inedible. Nonsense. Treated right—cooled quickly in the field and cooked to medium-rare—an antelope backstrap is best eating game meat on the planet. What's best about the pronghorn is their role as the gateway drug to Western hunting. Miss a pronghorn, or blow a stalk, and there's often another just over the hill. But don't get the idea antelope are easy. With oversized eyes capable of seeing nearly 360 degrees around its head and vision that can spot movement from miles away, getting within rifle range of this prairie speedster will test the skills of the savviest of hunters.—*David Draper*



PRIMOS TRIGGER STICK

From Alaska to Africa and more than its fair share of states in between, the Primos Trigger Stick tripod has proved its worth tenfold over the last decade. I wish that I had etched a small mark on the tripod's legs for each animal that succumbed to the Trigger Stick's solid rest over the years, but between myself, family, friends and clients, that number is easily north of several hundred.

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also gives shooters the ability to adjust the leg's angle to compensate for shooting on a steep hillside or any other awkward shooting position you might encounter.

As a big-game guide, there are a small handful of items that I never ever leave the truck without. One of which is my Trigger Stick. When my clients are not using it for a shooting rest, it doubles great as a walking stick or binocular rest. It is slightly on the heavy side, weighing 3.5 pounds, but that is a small sacrifice to pay for the rest it provides when the outcome of the hunt is at stake.

There have been several generations of Trigger Sticks since I originally pur-

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WHETHER YOU'RE an uplander, big-game hunter, waterfowl enthusiast or enjoy the sight of a full-strut American wild turkey, grassland ecosystems play a critical role for the sustainability of our most iconic wild-game species.

Unfortunately, grasslands, including sagebrush shrub-steppe, are now considered one of the most imperiled ecosystems on the planet. More than 70 percent of America's tallgrass, mixed grass and shortgrass prairies have vanished, followed by the precipitous decline of grassland bird populations—more than 40 percent since 1966.

In 2020, in response to this catastrophic decline, Pheasants Forever, Quail Forever and a coalition of more than two dozen conservation and sportsman's groups unveiled the largest grasslands legislative effort in organizational

history: The North American Grasslands Conservation Act. In July of 2022, we're proud to announce this historic grasslands bill was officially introduced in the United States Senate by Senator Ron Wyden of Oregon.

Several years in the making, the Grasslands Conservation Act is a significant step for grassland conservation efforts in the 21st century. This act will help kickstart the voluntary protection and restoration of grasslands and sagebrush shrub-steppe in North America by creating a landowner-driven, voluntary, incentive-based program. The legislation is modeled after the North American Wetland Conservation Act, which has helped conserve nearly 30 million acres of wetland habitat across the continent since being adopted in 1989.



HOW CAN HUNTERS SUPPORT THE CAUSE?

Simple: Grassroots advocacy. More than 50,000 voices helped our coalition achieve Act language and bill introduction—but our collective voice for the uplands is now required to carry this monumental legislation to the finish line.

Visit ActforGrasslands.org right now and take action by submitting a form that will deliver a message of support for America's cherished grasslands and sagebrush to your United States senator.

From pheasants, quail and pristine trout streams to whitetail deer, Rocky Mountain elk and pronghorns, hunters have a unique opportunity before them to help restore America's grasslands—and the iconic species they represent.—*Jared Wiklund, Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever PR Manager*



chased mine as well as other monopod and bipod Trigger Stick options, but the science behind them remains the same. The Trigger Stick's versatile ease of use combined with its consistent reliability reigns supreme amongst shooting aids and has more than earned itself my "tested tough" stamp of approval.—*Colton Heward*



BULLET BOARD

BULLET BASICS

Arguably the ultimate refinement of the monometal bullet, Barnes's LRX (for Long Range X) features a sleek profile and generous boat tail. Its polymer tip is designed to maximize aerodynamics, protect the bullet during heavy recoil inside the magazine, and initiate immediate, reliable expansion on impact, even at lower velocities. Grooves around the shank of the all-copper bullet reduce bearing surface and chamber pressures, so the LRX can be driven fast. Plus they maximize consistency; this bullet is obscenely accurate.

TESTING GROUND

Friend and serious hunter Becca Golightly used the 265-grain LRX bullet shown to shoot a bull elk from 701 yards, using her .338 Lapua—an impressive shot in the rough Idaho terrain. Muzzle velocity with her load is 2,900 fps. Calculating for the altitude and temperature in Idaho's elk country, impact velocity was estimated at 2,090 fps.

Barnes 265-grain, .338-caliber LRX



FIELD PERFORMANCE

Impacting at a downward angle, the bullet took the bull on the upper shoulder and ranged down through the vitals, coming to rest against the off-side hide in the lower shoulder region. The bull dropped on impact, then stood back up, facing straight on. Becca shot again, driving a second LRX stem-to-stern through the bull and dropping it for good. That bullet was not recovered.

STATS

After penetrating an estimated 24 inches of bone, muscle, vitals and more muscle and bone, the recovered bullet still weighs 260.5 grains, or 98 percent of its original weight. Mushroomed diameter averages 0.57 inch, or 1.68 times original diameter.

NOTES/OBSERVATIONS

This particular version of the LRX is superb for use in fast .338-caliber magnums, and as Becca demonstrated, is very capable at extended distances. It is also ideal for use on moose, bison and grizzly bears up close; it has a very high sectional density of 0.331, and penetrates extraordinarily well. As noted above, accuracy tends to be excellent.—*Joseph von Benedikt*



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RACK ROOM

HUNTER: Haisar Dao

SPECIES: Whitetail Deer

WHERE: Texas

RIFLE: Winchester Model 70; .270 Win.



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APP MASTERS

HUNTING APPS CAN MAKE YOU A BETTER DEER HUNTER. HERE'S HOW

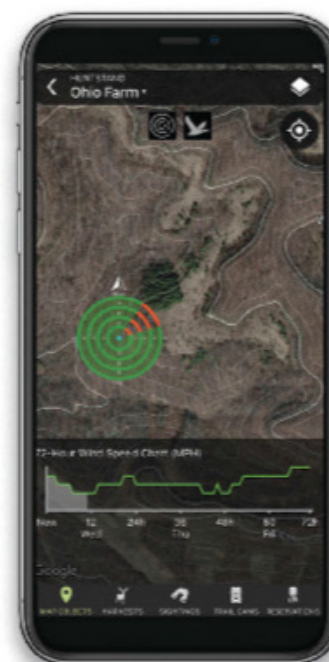
Snorts, blows, and stomps, oh my. I forced my way to the perfect stand location yet again. But it wasn't working. I couldn't get there without alerting deer. So, after days of brainstorming, I started studying app layers. And there it was—the perfect entry route to my desired stand location. A crease in a big bluff just safe enough to climb that spit me out 5 yards from my tree-stand. After finding it, a season of futility morphed into a filled tag.

I've used hunting apps since their inception, tested almost every option on the market, and currently serve as a HuntStand Pro ambassador. That's afforded me the opportunity to learn just how impactful these tiny tools can be. They increase efficiency. Here's how. —*Josh Honeycutt*

1 ZOOM OUT

The primary way apps make us better is by increasing efficiency. We zoom out and study an area from a big-picture perspective. Time is limited. Good hunting apps help cross off undesirable areas while prioritizing those of interest.

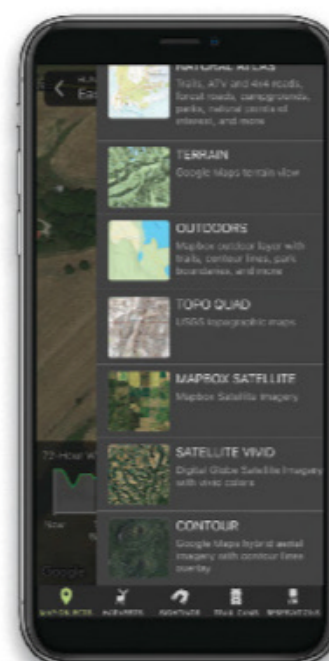
Of course, good spots hinge entirely upon five key factors, including bedding cover, food sources, water sources, rutting activity (or lack thereof) and the amount of hunting pressure. While a hunting spot might be good during the early or late season, it might be void of activity during the rut, or vice versa.



2 ZOOM IN

A myriad of app layers facilitate various objectives, especially homing in on potential hotspots. Aerial-based layers can zoom in on vegetation types, which can convey bedding cover, food sources and other habitat features. While these layers update every one to three years, revolutionary monthly update layers reveal changes in virtually real time, which is excellent for scouting distant lands. It provides the most recent information on fires, flooding, crop rotations, grazing patterns, timber harvests and other impactful habitat changes without being in the field.

Topography-based layers are excellent for studying the terrain, especially elevation changes. Oftentimes, this affects where deer bed, and where food and water sources are located. Topography and terrain certainly impact seasonal pattern changes. A good app facilitates the understanding of the relationship between these things, and how deer respond. Of course, other layers, such as hybrid and 3D, are perfect for studying habitat, topography and terrain, too.

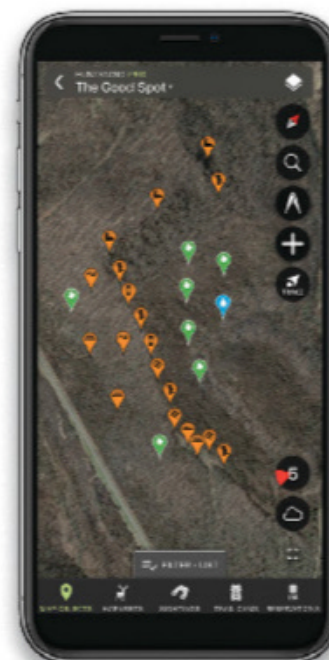


3 CHART HOTSPOTS, ACCESS ROUTES & MANAGE STANDS

Lastly, keep track of scouting finds, and use the most efficient methods to do so. Good hunting apps help paint a picture of how deer use the land. While in the field, mark the exact location of each bed, rub and scrape. Do the same for each food and water source.

Then, with the app's tracking feature on, walk every deer trail on the property. If you must get off a trail, pause the feature to prevent false lines. Then, once every trail is walked, this feature will light up the property with its complete trail network. This, paired with other marked discoveries, paints a picture of how deer use the area.

With the scouting discoveries highlighted, it's much easier to select treestand and blind locations. Of course, establishing good entry and exit routes is crucial. Fortunately, apps are great for drilling down on quality access, too.



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OUT
THERE



Field To Table

THE EDITORS



More hunters are taking it upon themselves to butcher their own game meat, and the right tools will help you complete the task. With Benchmade's new **15500-3 Meatcrafter** you can delicately carve your meals with the trailing-point CPM-S45VN blade that is designed to flex along the bone, but stays rigid enough to handle any cutting job. The handle is an OD green G10 laminate and fits comfortably in the hand, and the blade features SelectEdge technology to keep the edge sharp. **\$350; [benchmade.com](https://www.benchmade.com)**



You can choose to wrap your meat in plastic wrap and butcher paper, or you can take the civilized approach and use the **Chamber Vacuum Sealer** from MEAT!. The chamber creates a vacuum that completely removes all air for unparalleled protection of your precious game meat. The sealer is equipped with an adjustable seal timer and vacuum, a pressure gauge and has a digital readout. Simply set your desired time, place the bagged meat in the chamber, close the lid and wait. **\$800; meatyourmaker.com**



Equipped with a 500-watt motor, the Chard **#12 Heavy Duty Electric Grinder** will tackle any job you have at your butcher station without breaking the bank. The machine has Stuff, Grind and Reverse functions and comes with a large hopper, a food pusher and fine, medium and coarse grinding plates to get your ideal burger size. The blade is stainless steel, and the motor can grind up to 6 pounds per minute. **\$195; chardproducts.com**



Combining new technology with traditional smoking practices, the **XXL Vertical Smoker** is pellet-driven smoker that will maintain the proper temperature throughout the cooking process. Temperature is adjustable from 150-350 degrees and the Smoke Control technology allows the user to adjust the amount of smoke output for their desired flavor. The system includes six racks and hooks and can be paired with the Camp Chef Connect app for handsfree control and monitoring. **\$800; campchef.com**



Having a sharp knife will help ensure you make accurate cuts safely and efficiently. With Work Sharp's **Mk.2 Knife and Tool Sharpener**, the user can hone any edge in minutes. The sharpener comes with 20- and 25-degree guides and a 65-degree scissor guide, along with coarse, medium and fine abrasive belts to tackle any job required. Simply plug it in, grab your knife and run it over the belt while following the angled guide. **\$100; worksharptools.com**

The Liberty To Go Long Range

Mossberg's latest entry in their Patriot line is a true long-distance performer.



After forty-five years of editing and writing firearms and hunting articles, you could say that I have become somewhat jaded in my likes and dislikes regarding those subjects. I know what I like and what I dislike. Mossberg's newest Patriot incarnation left me with a positive impression as soon as I picked it up.

You don't read much these days about how a firearm "feels." But I have found most enthusiasts either like or dislike a gun's feel as soon as they lay hands upon it. I have always favored Colt revolvers over S&Ws for this reason. A Colt just feels better in my hand; likewise, a 1911 feels better than a P-35 Hi-Power. A trim Rigby bolt-action rifle feels better to me than a Remington 700. At first grasp, Mossberg's Patriot LR Hunter just felt right in my hands.

We were hunting a big spread south of Fort Davis. I joined Mossberg's Linda Powell, Bushnell's Matt Rice and Federal's Mike Holm, along with a few of my competitive scribblers. Our intent was to cull some of the ranch's over-productive aoudad and to hopefully shoot a nice whitetail buck.

I was handed one of the new Patriot LR rifles for the first time at the range. It was obvious to me that the rifle was designed from the ground up with long-range shooting in mind, which features that include:

PURPOSE-BUILT STOCK

Contoured to aid in long-range shooting, the Patriot LR's stock features a raised Monte Carlo comb combined with a high one-piece Picatinny rail that precisely positions the rifleman's eye behind the scope's ocular lens and permits mounting large-objective-bell scopes (50mm and up). Also, aluminum bedding pillars mate the barreled action to the wood stock which in turn is coated with a special polymer in a gray spiderweb pattern. The stock also features a semi-vertical pistol grip that aids in shooting from bags, backpacks or tripods, along with a complementary flat-bottomed forend fitted with dual swivel studs. These permit the simultaneous use of both a sling and a fixed bipod. Length of pull measures 14 inches.

BARRELED ACTION

Patriot LR's are available with 22-inch barreled actions in 6.5 Creedmoor and .308 Winchester. Twenty-four-inch barrels are standard on magnum models for the 6.5 PRC and the .300 Win. Mag. All barrels are half-round and half-fluted. Muzzles are threaded 5/8x24 for use with suppressors. The rifle's fluted bolt is fitted with a large teardrop-shaped bolt handle that aids in engagement and cycling with or without gloves. Mossberg's proprietary LBA trigger is user adjustable from two to seven pounds. Detachable box magazines are standard. Capacities vary depending upon caliber. My rifle was chambered for Hornady's excellent 6.5 PRC cartridge and held 4+1 rounds.

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MOMENTUM ELITE



MOSSBERG PATRIOT LR HUNTER	
Action:	Bolt Action
Caliber:	6.5 PRC (tested)
Capacity:	4+1
Optics:	None (full-length Picatinny rail)
Stock:	Composite, Monte Carlo; LOP: 14 inches
Weight:	7 pounds, 8 ounces
Barrel Length:	22 or 24 inches
Overall Length:	44.75 inches
Price:	\$822
Website:	mossberg.com



SCOPE

Our rifles were fitted with Bushnell’s top-of-the-line 4500 4x Elite scope. With a 4x magnification power range of 4-16, a 30mm tube and a 50mm objective lens, the optic was ideal for maximizing light-gathering ability along with engaging targets out past 500 yards. Side-focus parallax adjustment from 50 yards out to infinity was an added bonus. Eye relief measured a generous 4.4 inches and exterior lenses are treated with Bushnell’s EXO water repellant coating.

AMMO

My old buddy Mike Holm, Federal’s centerfire rifle and pistol ammo product director brought along a generous supply of Terminal Ascent loads. One of the best currently available hunting projectiles, Terminal Ascent excels in optimizing both long-range accuracy and terminal effect on game in close and far away. The Terminal Ascent load for the 6.5 PRC uses a 130-grain bullet with a muzzle velocity of 3,000 fps. The high-tech projectile has a G1 BC of .532 and when zeroed at 200 yards drops 9.6 inches at 300 and 25.5 inches at 500. Exterior conditions were 80 degrees at 1,200 feet elevation.

Our range session proved the rifle/scope/ammo combo to be very capable. After zeroing at 100 yards, I also chose to set my elevation turret for 300 and 500 yards so that I could “dial-in” as necessary. Five-hundred yards has long been my personal limit when shooting at big game. Not because I can’t hit farther away under proper conditions when using the right equipment, but simply that past 500 yards too much can and eventually will go wrong. Wounding and potentially losing an animal to satisfy one’s ego isn’t ethical in my view. I choose to limit my “way-out-there” shots to steel plates.

Mike Holm from Federal took both a whitetail buck and a great boar while on the hunt in Texas. The Patriot LR was accurate and lethal.

IN THE FIELD

With our gear checked out, it was time to board the hunting trucks and head out into the desert. The hunt honcho was Steve Jones, whose Backcountry Hunts has an established forty-year reputation as the “go-to” outfit for big-game hunts in west Texas and New Mexico. I was paired with one of Steve’s ramrods, Robert Curry, a great hunter who I have had the pleasure of hunting with several times over the years.

Within moments of leaving camp, I was astounded to see a heavy, wide mule deer buck standing skylined atop a rimrock butte that rose a hundred feet or more above the two-track. Unfortunately, mule deer were not on our dance card and after admiring the buck for a bit we moved on.

Aoudad ewes were our primary prey. This property had a population that far exceeded its carrying capacity and the aoudad were now posing a threat to the survival of both the mule and



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GUNS & LOADS

whitetail deer populations. Our job was to thin out the herd a bit.

My first opportunity came as we passed below a high butte. Rising at least three hundred feet above the creek bottom that we were following, the herd of fifteen to twenty aoudad were perched on multiple boulders, spires and outcroppings amid the rust-colored rimrock.

I picked out a likely target and ranged her to be 300+ yards distant. Dialing my scope to its preset 300-yard hashmark, I held mid-shoulder on the ewe and gently pressed the Patriot's trigger.

I lost the ewe in recoil, but from the hollers that Robert and my partner Mike let out, I knew the Terminal Ascent bullet had hit its mark.

"She went straight down!" said Robert.

"Perfect hit." Mike replied.

Well, this was going to be fun!

Subsequent shots proved the Patriot LR capable of engaging successfully out to 500 yards. At one point, accompanied by Linda Powell, we came upon a herd of the sheep (although more accurately aoudad are a goat-like caprid) at just over 500 yards, up atop the rimrock and across a deep canyon. I handed Linda



The author with a West Texas whitetail buck taken with the Mossberg Patriot LR Hunter.

my rifle (she had opted to shoot a .300 Blackout for closer range work) and told her to have at it.

Dialing the scope to my 500-yard mark, she settled in for the shot and gently pressed the trigger. Once again, the hoots and hollers told the tale. Linda's shot had been spot-on as the ewe toppled from her perch.

Unfortunately, whitetail deer proved difficult to find. Heavy rains had created tall grass and high brush on the ranch and visibility in the cover favored by the deer was extremely limited. I just happened to be in the right place

at the right time just before sun-up on the last day of the hunt. We were riding

along a cottonwood lined creek and spotted a young eight point right at first light. While he didn't pose a long-range shot at 160 yards, I wasn't about to pass him up. He took the bullet low in the chest, ran about twenty feet and dropped.

As you have likely guessed, I was impressed with the new Mossberg Patriot LR Hunter—it now even has a permanent place in my gun safe. If you are looking for a capable rifle for longer-range hunts, at a reasonable price, check it out for yourself. I'm pretty sure you'll be as impressed at first glance as I was. 📞



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OPEN COUNTRY

JOSEPH VON BENEDIKT

Blowin' In The Wind

The answer to hitting center by holding off.



We'd stalked as close as possible to the big pronghorn buck. He was getting nervous, and we were out of cover. The distance was 440 yards—exactly a quarter mile. Doable in calm conditions, but a crosswind was gusting.

Uncomfortable with the shot, I lay in the sparse, sun-dried grass and watched the conditions. I had the right rifle, cartridge, and bullet; a super-accurate custom 6.5-284 loaded with a streamlined Nosler AccuBond. Finally, prone and steady, I held the crosshairs about nine inches into the wind and squeezed the trigger.

Impact was too far back. I'd underestimated the wind drift by half. Running the bolt fast, I compensated accordingly and finished the buck.

Thankful I'd managed to rectify my mistake quickly; I began running through what went wrong. Clearly, my read on the strength of the wind was off. Plus, the wind was gusting, which made it much harder to predict. And exacerbating the issue, there were very few good environmental indicators (tall grass, tree leaves, floating bugs) of the wind's strength. In retrospect, I shouldn't have taken the shot.

That was a long time ago. In the years since, I've learned more patience, and my willingness to risk a challenging shot in unpredictable wind conditions has decreased.

Wind can greatly effect your bullet's flightpath. Learn to read the wind to ensure you hit your mark.

I've also learned a few things about reading wind more effectively.

WIND VALUES

Long-range shooters use the term "value" to describe how much affect the wind has on a shot. A full-value wind is a 90-degree wind. It blows perpendicular to the path of the bullet and has maximum effect. A no-value wind is either straight behind or straight into the nose of the bullet. As the term suggests, this has no lateral affect on bullet flight.

Shooters call wind by the clock. Imagine the marksman is the center of a clock face. Straight ahead is 12 o'clock, straight behind is 6 o'clock. You get the drift, no pun intended.

Full-value winds are from 3 and 9 o'clock. For practical purposes, I consider anything from about 8:30 to 9:30 and from about 2:30 to 3:30 full value, and anything from 11:30 to 12:30 and from 5:30 to 6:30 to be no-value wind.

It's the 'tween values that are perplexing. A rule of thumb is to accord 75 percent of full value to oblique winds. At this point in the game, correctly calling wind is more art than science.

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Using electronics to read wind and calculate drift helps immensely, but you still need to learn how to read the wind between you and your target.

WIND SPEED

Obviously, the faster the wind, the more your bullet will drift. If you use a device such as a Kestrel (see sidebar) to get a precise read on wind speed and value, it's relatively easy to compensate quite accurately. That is, if the wind is consistent all the way downrange to the target.

In hunting country, it rarely is. Desert draws and mountain canyons suck the breeze this way and that. Undulations in the earth cause thermal drafts. Even cloud shadows scudding across the ground influence the direction and strength of the wind.

As a result, there are often multiple wind vectors between you and your quarry. No device can read wind speed direction and strength several hundred yards away. It's up to you to look over the lay of the land, to watch environmental indicators between you and the target, and to make the best wind-compensation call you can.

ENVIRONMENTAL INDICATORS

Watch for movement in grass, particularly tall grass. Watch for tree leaves to shiver. Look for dust stirring. Look for cottonwood fluff or insect swarms hanging on the breeze. If wind is strong enough to sway small trees, take note. Look for these indicators at your shooting position, around your quarry, and in-between.

Most important is right at your shooting position. Wind right at the target has little time to work on your bullet. At your shooting position, it will push your bullet just slightly off course as well—but that new vector magnifies with distance.

Some rules of thumb for estimating wind by environmental indicators: A gentle breeze on your cheek is 3-5 mph. Leaves shiver at 5-8 mph. Dust stirs and raises at 8-12 mph. Trees sway at 12-15 mph.



Gorges and draws have a big impact on wind patterns. Watch the environmental indicators around you to make sure you get the proper wind call.



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READING MIRAGE TO ESTIMATE WIND

Spotting scopes and high-magnification riflescopes with parallax adjustment are very useful for reading wind strength by looking at heat waves—or mirage—coming off the earth.

Focus on your target, then bring the focus back toward you. Mirage between shooter and target becomes visible.

If mirage rises straight up, or “boils,” there’s no need to hold for wind. If it tips 60 degrees, wind is 1-3 mph. When mirage tips 45 degrees or thereabouts, wind is 4-7 mph. If mirage blows so low and fast it appears parallel to the earth, wind is 8-12 mph. Faster than that, you’ll usually just see dust in the scope—no mirage—and you shouldn’t attempt extended-range shots at game.

The cool thing is, when your scope is pointed in a given direction, mirage provides the effective wind speed you need at that vector, not the actual wind speed.

For example, if you’re shooting in a 10-mph wind but it’s straight behind you, the mirage will appear to boil in the scope, indicating a no-value shot.

CROSS-CANYON SHOOTING

For those of us that hunt the wide-open West, cross-canyon shots are common. And problematic. It’s usually impossible to estimate wind between you and the target because there are no environmental indicators, and so far above the earth, there is no mirage.



KESTREL WIND METER AND BAL- LISTICS TOOLS

Kestrel Ballistics makes super-accurate wind meters. These also read on-the-spot environmental conditions such as altitude, barometric pressure, temperature, and other factors that must be compensated for when shooting long. Ask professional shooters in PRS and NRL Hunter and at the National Matches at Camp Perry use. They’ll all say: “Kestrel.”

Although the top-shelf models are sophisticated and expensive, the Kestrel 2700 Ballistics Weather does all a hunter needs. It measures wind, altitude, temperature and more. Plus, it has a capable on-board ballistics computer. Once programmed with your rifle and bullet info, it will provide accurate long-range solutions.

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OPEN COUNTRY



The only shot this aoudad ram presented was far across multiple rocky draws. Wind was present and complicated.

Here's what I do: After estimating the wind strength at my position and in the bottom of the canyon, I average the two, then double it. Experience has shown me that air flow well above the ground, being free of friction with trees and shrubs and such, is much faster than near the ground.

PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

Nobody is perfect at reading and compensating for wind. But practice does make you much more proficient.

With today's modern ballistic calculators, we can compensate precisely for bullet drop. No matter the altitude, temperature, barometric pressure, or angle, space-age tools crunch the input and regurgitate accurate solutions. Even the effect of the rotation of the earth on bullet flight can be precisely calculated.

Not so with the wind. Pure rifleman-ship is the only thing that successfully compensates for wind. Commit methods to memory. Polish skills afield. You'll be a better hunter for it and won't be likely to make the mistakes I did on that big pronghorn buck. 🍷

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embroidered 10-point buck. This versatile hoodie has two front pockets, rib knit cuffs and hem, and metal toggles on the cords so it's perfect for year-round comfort. Imported.

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This jacket is a superb value at \$99.95*, payable in 3 convenient installments of \$33.32 each, and backed by our 30-day guarantee. (Size XXL, add \$10.) To reserve yours, send no money now; just return the Priority Reservation. You won't find this custom design in stores. So don't miss out; order yours today!

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E45203



America's Most Elusive Deer?

The diminutive red brocket might be the most difficult trophy in the world.



When it finally happened it was almost too easy. We'd been on stand all morning with no action, then taken a break to change locations for the afternoon. Truth is, I'd have taken a longer break, but veteran guide Hector Arias knows his jungle and he had a feeling. We hiked up (another) ridge, climbed into (another) machan, and settled into hammocks for (yet another) long afternoon.

I doubt we'd been there 15 minutes on a steamy Yucatan afternoon when Hector looked to his left and his eyes widened. I saw the animal, but couldn't see the head through foliage. Hector raised his binoculars—the first time in several trips I'd ever seen him use them.

"Shoot."

Well, actually, "Choot," but I got the message: I didn't need to see the head. The little, red deer pranced along a steep hillside, maybe 25 yards, almost even with our tall platform.

Leaning up in the hammock, I got the Mossberg on him, fired, and saw him roll down toward us. I still hadn't seen the head, but I would soon—a beautiful red brocket, thick bases, straight spikes, and long ones for a red brocket: more than three inches on both sides. It was my eighth hunt in the jungles of Mexico's Yucatan, my fourth specifically targeting a red brocket. This was the first and only one I've ever seen.

A DIMINUTIVE DEER

The conversation usually goes like this: "What's a brocket?" The brockets are small, straight-antlered American deer, ranging from southern Mexico to northern Argentina. Don't feel bad if you don't know of them; they are the least-known American deer and rank high among our least-studied wild animals. Brockets are genus *Mazama*, together with *Odocoileus* (white-tailed and mule deer), one of just two genera of native North American deer. Even today, scientists are uncertain how many varieties exist; some authorities now identify 11 species.

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Because of short range and thick foliage, shotguns with buckshot are most commonly used for brockets. Boddington used a camp Mossberg semiauto with Aguila size 0 Buck, delivering a wonderfully tight pattern.

The majority are found in South America, but at least two are found in huntable numbers in Mexico: *Mazama americana*, the red brocket; and *Mazama pandora*, the Yucatan brown brocket. Therefore, whether widely recognized or not, they are North American big game.

Both are small jungle deer, shy and largely solitary. Although unregulated subsistence hunting is a problem across much of their range, neither species is scarce or threatened. They're just hard to hunt, primarily because of their lush, dense habitat. The red brocket is actually more widespread, found as far north as the jungled hills above Veracruz. The Yucatan brown brocket, also commonly called "gray-brown," is confined to the Yucatan Peninsula, which includes parts of Belize and Guatemala.

When I first hunted down there nobody understood the differences between the red and brown; many questioned the very existence of red brockets in Yucatan. Some references say the red is the largest of the brockets, but in North America this is not true. Our variety of red brocket is distinctly smaller, maybe 40 pounds, while a big Yucatan brown brocket may exceed 60 pounds. Although pelage varies a lot, the red is very reddish, often almost orange, while the brown is, well, "gray-brown." There are also distinct differences in face and skull shape. The red is narrower, with pedicels closer together and smaller antlers generally straight up. The brown's antlers flare slightly outward, and the tails are different.

Habitat and habits vary more. The red brocket is a creature of deeper jungle, feeding primarily on fruit and mast. The brown is primarily a browser, usually found in slightly more open jungle. And, occasionally, in edge habitat near agriculture. Both make tiny rubs and scrapes, but even local hunters can't distinguish these signs between the two species. Reds are primarily identified by preferred foods: In season, they love the feathery white amapola flower. My last two hunts were in March, when these flowers are dropping, and this finally worked.



The typical stand for brocket is a hammock suspended far up between two trees. The height reduces scent and offers a good view of the jungle floor.

Brown brockets are hard enough, because all jungle hunting is hard. Over the years I've shot several browns, including one near the edge of cleared pasture. A red would never be caught near such open ground. Throughout much of the Yucatan jungle the two species somewhat overlap, with reds more likely to be found in hilly country. The brown brocket is not easy, one of North America's rarest prizes. But, in areas that have both, I figure there must be ten browns for every red. Not that, in any week-long hunt, one will ever see ten brocket deer.

A TOUGH (?) HUNT

Words like "challenging," "difficult," and "tough" have various connotations. These words apply to any day on a sheep mountain, and most days pursuing elk. They do not apply to hunting brockets. Like so much whitetail hunting, it's almost entirely stand hunting. So, it's a game of patience and persistence. There are differences. You won't get cold, but you may sweat. Ground blinds are occasionally used, but the preferred and most common stand is a hammock suspended far up (20 feet or more) between two trees or sturdy limbs. For safety and stability, a few poles are lashed together under the hammock for a rudimentary floor.

If you have major fear of heights this may not be for you, but the result is quiet and surprisingly comfortable; you can kick back in the hammock with feet secure on the platform, and gun across your lap. Sleeping is probably not a good idea.

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Hector Arias packs a big brown brocket out of the jungle. A big brown brocket may exceed 60 pounds; the reds are normally about 25 percent smaller.

I haven't figured a way to effectively read, just too much movement—and delay—if you need to put the book down and raise the gun. As for playing with your smartphone, same deal, and there won't be any cell coverage in the jungle.

So, you have to sit it out and pay attention. As I've often admitted, patience is not my strong suit. I'm normally not an all-day sitter for whitetails. If you are, you've got a leg up for brockets. For brocket deer, I've sat all day many times, sometimes for a week straight. A couple of those weeks went by without seeing a single deer, red or brown. For me, sitting all day is murderous and, most of the time, you are looking at a few dozen yards of empty jungle. Fortunately, there is other wildlife. You'll see tropical birds, probably spider monkeys and the big howler monkeys, and there will be occasional sightings of coatimundi, aguti and peccaries. A buddy of mine, sitting at a waterhole, had a big jaguar come to drink. But most hours you will see nothing, and there will be many long hours.

As with whitetails, early mornings and late afternoons are most likely, but these deer are less predictable. It may happen any time—or not at all. Generally, best to gut it out. Had Hector not insisted we get back out—now—it may not have happened on my fourth try.

Outfitter Mario Canales, attorney by trade, hunter by passion, spends much time combing his hunting areas for sign. He

has tried various foods, baits and attractants, so far to no avail. Perhaps worse, from a hunting perspective: Trail cam evidence suggests that some bucks are “regularly irregular,” dropping by every third or fourth day when a favorite food is ripe, before disappearing when that snack is exhausted.

Preferred foods, in season, are the most likely spot for both brockets, but browns are frequently caught at waterholes. Hector Arias was guiding me when I took my best brown brocket,



Boddington and guide Hector Arias with a good red brocket. Arias also guided Boddington to his best brown brocket—a decade earlier.

a giant, at a waterhole while blistering hot at midday. Feeding areas, with a buck found by scouting and verified by trail cameras, is the best answer. For sure, brockets are challenging, but they are not “difficult” or “tough.”

Young, enthusiastic outfitters like Mario Canales are working hard to figure out the red brocket, and success is improving, but it also takes luck. In 2021, on my third attempt for a red, hunting with Mario for the first time, I sat for a week and never saw a deer. However, my hunting partner, Sergio Morales, got a big red brocket. Between us, we were 50 percent, exceptional. I kept the faith and tried again.

Along with patience, persistence and faith, a bit of luck helps. The red brocket is so elusive that my Mexican friends doubt that two dozen have been taken by sport hunters, but as knowledge grows, success is improving. This season, famous sheep hunter and fellow Weatherby award winner Rex Baker got his red brocket, also on his fourth attempt. But no guarantees on this one; Dan Cabela and Jay Link, both on their third tries, did not. Luck matters; my friend Mike Arnold also got a red brocket this year, his first brocket hunt. More astonishing, within a day he got a brown brocket. Obviously, I haven't been so lucky. But, instead of being envious, I feel sorry for him. No way can he appreciate how elusive these little deer are. 🍷

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How To Screw Up And Kill A Little Buck

He might've been a good one next year,
but now you'll never know.

I enjoy living like a hermit for about the first 10 days of November. Rifle season opens the second Saturday of the month, and I plan to be in a bow stand every possible minute during the week and a half ahead of it. Last fall was no different, and the action in early November was good. Bucks were cruising and acting foolish, and I passed up a couple nice ones in the days immediately following Halloween. But since I had some bigger deer on my trail cameras and plenty of time, I wasn't in a hurry to fill my tag.

But then the slump began, putting the wheels in motion for the tale I'm about to share. I barely saw a deer at all during the final three days before rifle season, and so early bow season sputtered to a halt with a certain itch left unscratched.

The gun opener dawned cold and clear and perfect, but the deer didn't seem to care at all. My 7-year-old son Anse and I sat in a box blind that morning in a favorite spot without seeing a thing, and the evening hunt was even slower. We would've pooled good money to see a possum waddle across the field, just to have had something to watch.

Then, in the waning legal light, as Anse was whittling a stick, he looked out the blind window and said, "There's a deer!" A nose-down buck had appeared 200 yards away, gliding across the field at a loose gait. I threw my binoculars up, saw the frame of a rack, and a thought drifted through my mind like the final curl of smoke from a snuffed match. "He's too small."

Meanwhile, Anse was chanting, "Shoot him, Deeds! It's a giant!" At any moment, I thought, the kid might break into





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Hunting, especially during the rut, can be slow. When a buck steps out, it's easy to get the urge to pull the trigger.

singing Eye of the Tiger. The entire encounter, from seeing the buck to resting my rifle on the Trigger Sticks, to yelling a bleat to watching the 90-inch 7-pointer crumple and fall dead from a perfect heart shot, might've lasted 25 seconds.

Walking up to the deer, I knew beyond a doubt that I'd passed three much bigger ones within chip-shot bow range the week before, when I was hunting alone with a bow and arrow, and when things were quiet and calm and full of promise. Still, I wanted to set a good example to my son, and so I smiled and gave Anse a high-five for spotting the buck.

He looked me square in the eye and asked: "Deeds, did you know he was that little when you shot him?"

GROUND SHRINKAGE

Yes, every ethical harvest is a trophy, the freezer is filled, and you can't eat the antlers. He got me excited, so I shot him. All of those catchphrases were coined to assuage the "buyer's remorse" that comes from shooting a buck that seems to have shrunk a bit upon hitting the ground. Truth is if you hunt enough, you'll someday kill a buck that's smaller than you thought he was when you pulled the trigger. It's happened to every serious deer hunter I know. All of them. In fact, some of the day-in-and-out deadliest deer killers I've met have a pretty notorious "big eye" in the moment of truth.

When your day comes, and you find yourself standing over a trophy of tomorrow that's dead as hell today, there's nothing to do but own it, notch your tag and move on. Killing one young buck doesn't amount to much of anything in the grand scheme of deer management. And if you're worried about being judged by other hunters on social media, there's an easy solution: Don't share it. The world will go on just fine without you updating your status: "Well he's not the biggest one out there, but he'll eat good."

Still, if you want to keep it from becoming an annual habit, remember the warning signs—coming from a guy who's as likely as anyone to make the same mistake again this fall.



No matter the size of buck you shoot, be happy that you punched a tag and enjoy the memory of the hunt.

THE RUT MAKES IT WORSE

It's much easier to carefully look over a buck while he's picking in a bean field in September than when he's barreling through a blackberry thicket after a doe in November. Erratic behavior is what makes hunting the rut so much fun, but it also often makes the opportunities more fleeting. Rutty bucks might do about anything at any time, and when you're caught off guard, sometimes it can feel as though you have time to look a deer over or shoot him, but not both. Besides that, rut hunting is notoriously feast or famine, and the anxious urge to shoot only gets worse when a buck suddenly appears after a few days of slow hunting.



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TUNNEL VISION

Those deadly deer hunters I mentioned above are all a touch impulsive. Once the decision is made to shoot, they don't dally with binoculars or inner turmoil. In fact, be it a doe or a Boone & Crockett buck, when the decision to shoot is made, they're only focused on how to make good on the first lethal opportunity they get. It's actually a good way to be, if it is indeed a Booner slipping through the thicket. But sometimes it gets little bucks killed, too.

Many of those hunters have lots of big deer on the wall, but they got them by attrition and shooting lots of smaller ones, too. For a deer hunter, that tunnel vision can be a blessing and a curse, but I guess I'd rather struggle to control it than not have it at all.

TRUST YOUR GUT

When I've messed up and shot a little buck, I've almost always known exactly what I was doing, even if only in the deep recesses of the mind. If shooting a big deer is important to you—



The author with a smaller buck he killed. Despite seeing bigger deer, he made a conscious decision to pull the trigger and fill his freezer.

and you wouldn't be reading this if it wasn't—then you must remember that there are very few top-end whitetails in any given area, and so when you do see one on the hoof, it'll look so big as to be out of place; almost startling. If that's what you're resolved to shoot, you might go all season without seeing such a deer but when you do, you won't have to talk yourself into anything.

When I convince myself to let a borderline buck walk, it stings, but only for a few minutes. Long-term, I've almost never regretted passing a deer.

ACCEPTANCE

Over and again, I've seen dedicated trophy hunters turn deer season into an exercise of second-guessing, misery and buying beef. I left that behind years ago, and am a happier hunter for it, though I do admire their restraint. Me? I'll go into this fall same as any other, hoping to kill a big, mature buck, but knowing, too, we all have our struggles: And one of mine is an itchy trigger finger.

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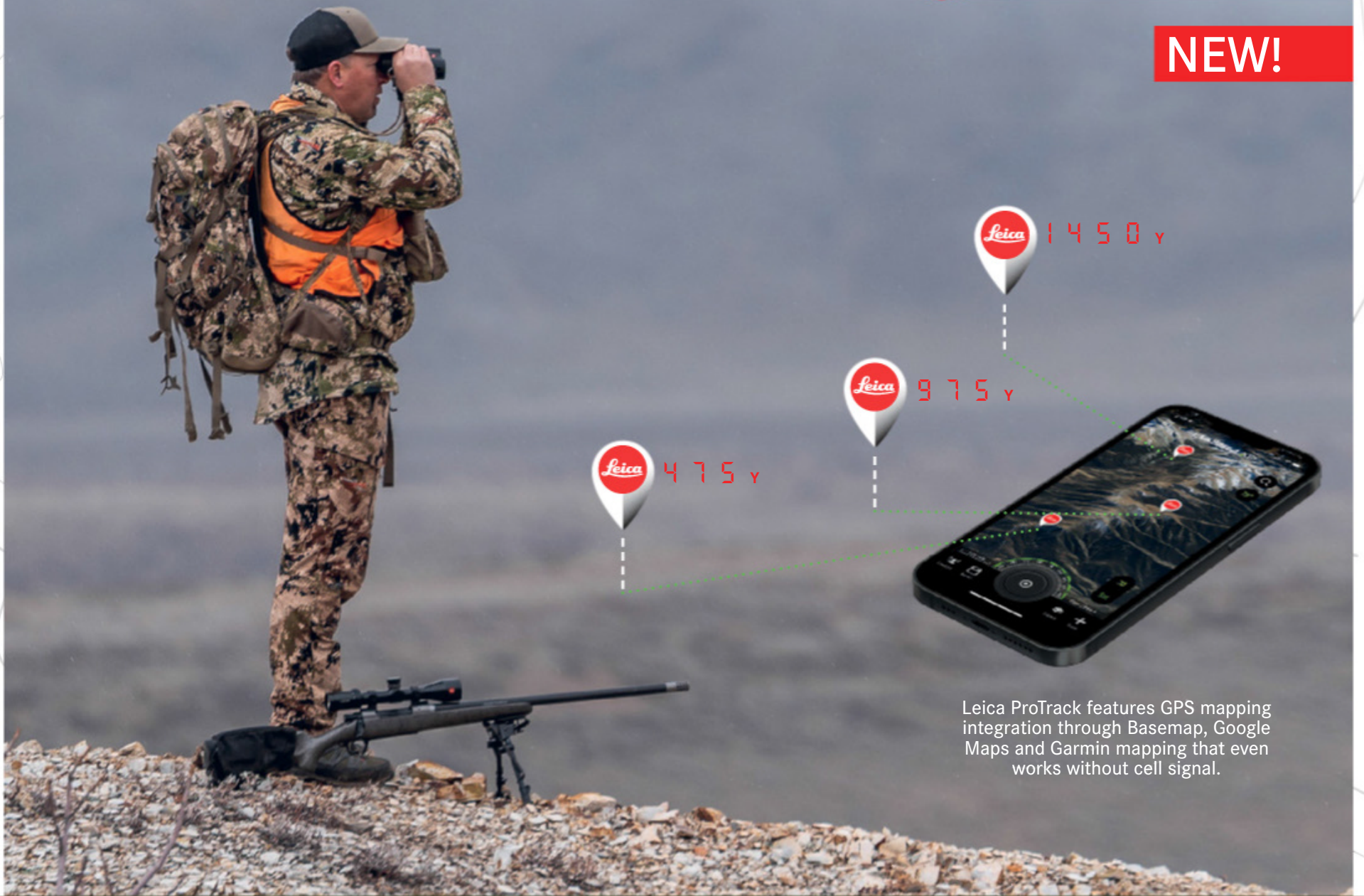


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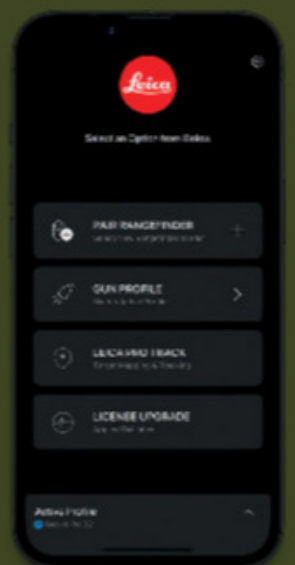
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ALL-SEASON ADVENTURES WITH MOTV

THE EDITORS

MYOUTDOORTV BRINGS THE HUNT HOME.

ON HUNTS around the world, we've yet to meet a person who's not a better version of themselves when they're in hunting camp. There's a sense of adventure that permeates camp, spiking the excitement level of everyone there. The anticipation keeps hunters awake all night, and gets them out of bed early in the morning, well before the sun rises. We're all trying to get the best buck, bull or boar, but we're equally as thrilled when another hunter drags in something bigger. It's that camaraderie of camp that fosters new friendships and strengthens bonds between old acquaintances.

A well-built camp is just one part of the hunting experience, and an important one. But there's so much more to the hunt—the preseason planning, the prep before opening day, the miles hiked and the hours spent on stand, waiting for just one opportunity to punch your tag. Hunters dream all year of that moment, and whether they fill their license on opening day, or hunt all season long, the off-season is always worth the reward. Even if on the last day of the season, that tag goes unpunched. Everything surrounding the experience is about the hunt.

The only downside to our preferred pastime is that it only lasts so long. Lucky hunters may get to experience the chase year-round, but for most hunters, they get a few weekends in the fall, or maybe a full week in deer camp if they can get away for that long. Others scratch out a day here and there in the autumn months, calling in sick when they can or burning precious vacation days when the weatherman promises a favorable forecast. Still, no matter how hard we try to hang on, hunting season has come and gone before you know it.

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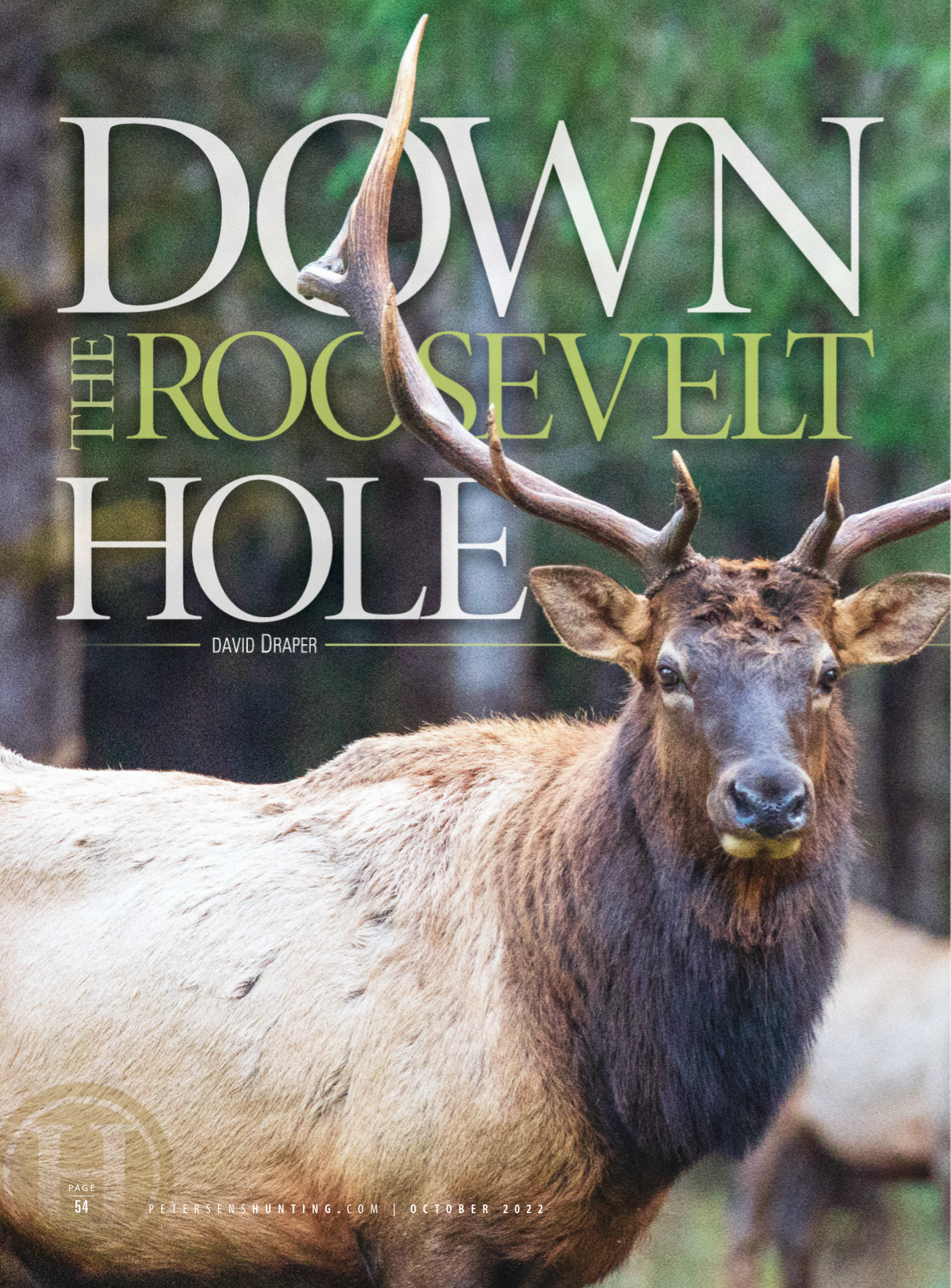
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One of our favorite features on MOTV is the Huntstream channel, their newest live channel that continually streams the freshest and best hunting content on MOTV. If you're not sure what you want to see, or just want to lean back in your chair and stream continuous outdoor TV while you work or play, MOTV Huntstream is for you.



DOWN THE ROOSEVELT HOLE

DAVID DRAPER

HUNTING ELK IN OREGON'S WET WONDERLAND

MY FIRST HUNT for Roosevelt elk began as I imagine most hunts in southeast Oregon do—with a delayed start due to heavy fog. In the dark before dawn, Shawn Skipper and I had hopped in outfitter Jody Smith's truck and climbed out of the deep valley with the idea of finding some high ground to glass the surrounding clear cuts. But that idea was quickly abandoned as the first rays of sunlight failed to penetrate the dense, wet air. Smith managed a five-point turn on the tight, winding switchback, and headed back down, hoping the rising sun and warming temperatures would help lift the fog.

Skipper and I, along with a few other friends, were hunting Rosies—as the giant-bodied elk are affectionately called—just a few miles inland from the rugged Oregon coast where Smith had secured some prime, private elk country. Here, the mountains rise out of the sea, with old-growth pine forests lining the driftwood beaches mere yards from the Pacific. This is timber country, though the industry here has taken a downturn due

to heavy-handed environmental oversight. Limited logging had created some fresh clearcuts, but most of these hillsides were covered in older trees and the thick, lush undergrowth you'd expect to find in such a rainforest.

With the plan to glass those few clearcuts dashed by the area's persistent weather pattern, Smith instead parked the truck next to an abandoned barn and led us down a hard gravel road, our crunching steps the only sound cutting through the otherwise quiet dawn. Visibility was increasing slightly with each moment, but it was a relative amount, going from 15 to 20 yards, to 30 and then maybe 50. On the side of the trail, I stepped over a giant *Amanita* mushroom. The large red dome covered in white spots—like something straight out of "Alice in Wonderland"—added to the ethereal ambiance. I wouldn't have been shocked to see a top-hatted rabbit bouncing into the fern-covered ditch.

I

I WONDER WHICH WAY I OUGHT TO GO?

Like Alice, I was a little bit lost. All I had read about Roosevelt elk led me to believe we'd be hunting them in the thick timber, hoping to just catch a glimpse of them ghosting through the fog-shrouded trees. Getting a clear shot was a pipe dream, so rare that experienced elk hunters in the Pacific Northwest counted encounters—much in the way grouse hunters in the Northeast count flushes. Years may go by before they finally punch a tag on a mature Rosie bull.

Smith himself had added to this legend of the all-but-invisible Roosevelt. Though we had only met the day before, I had interviewed him for an article about elk hunting a decade ago. He told me that most of his clients show up expecting to take long shots at elk in open woods, but that was not the case here on the coastal side of the Cascades. “The cover here is so thick, I give them an up-close and personal experience,” said Smith.

Though it was 10 years old, that quote was at the top of my mind as we walked along the gravel road. On our left was an overgrown meadow with a shallow creek snaking through it, which I only knew because I could hear its faint murmur as it coursed through the grass. To our right, rose a near-vertical hillside studded with Alaska cedar, redwood and Douglas fir trees. The undergrowth—pine duff weaved with ferns, vines and other shrubs—looked nearly impenetrable. I was pulling in deep breaths, exhaling only slightly to oxygenate my blood and prepare my flatlander's lungs for the climb into that steep, dense brush. My mind was already imagining an up-close encounter with a bull, and I remembered to reach down and turn my Leupold VX-6 HD scope to the 3X magnification setting. No need for 18x in Roosevelt country.

So, when Smith stopped and put his binoculars to his face, I was more than a bit confused. And when he lifted his left hand and pointed deep into the fog that was slowly lifting from the meadow to our left, that confusion turned to surprise. Smith was gesturing far down the long valley and silently mouthing the words: “Two bulls. Good ones.”

At any moment, the author expected to take a right turn into the heavy brush. Instead, they spotted elk feeding in the open meadow.



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Loggers left giant stumps like this one scattered across the landscape, which happen to make great rifle rests.

IT WOULD BE SO NICE IF SOMETHING MADE SENSE FOR A CHANGE

Hunting coastal country, and its ever-present, ocean-inspired weather patterns, is a true test for good optics. Few pieces of glass, no matter how good, can see clearly through what amounts to wet curtain, but my Leupold BX-4 Pro Guide binos were able to pull two large blobs through the gloomy light. Sure, they might be elk, but just as easy could be brush or boulders. Heck, they might have been two old Volkswagen's left to rust for all I could tell. Until they started moving.

The more I strained to see, the more confusing the situation got. The fog would lift, then drop again. The moving brown blobs turned gray, then almost black. They stood clear as day, then faded into the mist. Two elk became one, then none as they disappeared altogether. Was Smith hallucinating? Was I? Somehow he was able to get a range—just under 300 yards, though I had a hard time believing we could even see that far in this fog.

Smith motioned me to get closer as he and Skipper stayed behind. A lone stump—cut chest high and as big around as a dinner table—sat between me and the elk. If I could just make it there, it would serve as a perfect rest for my Browning X-Bolt. The one benefit of the wet weather is the soft ground that muffles footsteps, but I still managed to get tangled in a hidden fence. The metal twang reverberated up the valley. I could only hope the wet air would deaden the sound, but when I looked through my binos, the elk seemed to quicken their step toward the dense cover of the surrounding mountains.

Finally, I made the stump undetected. The elk had slowed their trot. I snapped the bipod legs into place, settled my chest against the tree trunk and verified the range at little more than 200 yards. I turned the CDS dial—married to the ballistics of the 6.8 Western cartridges stuffed in the magazine—somewhere between 2 and 2.5. At 3X, the scope's view was wide and bright,



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but I needed more magnification. As my heart thumped an increasing beat, I cranked the zoom and peered through the glass. At 18X, the reticle jumped in time with my heartbeat. I took a deep breath and split the difference, setting the scope to 9X. Still, the reticle wavered, but now in manageable time.

Sometime after dawn, it was finally getting brighter as the sun burned off the fog. Both the bulls were now clear in scope, and I shifted from one to the other. They were about the same size—two nice 5x5 bulls, though the size of the body made the racks seem shockingly small atop their wide skulls. I deemed the first bull as the bigger of the two, but before I could break the trigger, the second passed behind him. Oh bother. I took a deep breath and willed them to separate.

My bull—or the bull I hoped to shoot—dropped into the creek bed, then emerged. Light now, with nearly full sun, he loomed large in the scope. The reticle danced across the brown chest and as it crossed the midpoint, I squeezed the X-Bolt's trigger. Water exploded from the elk's shoulder as the bullet impacted the wet hide. The bull took a single, staggering step backwards and I heard Smith behind me: "Hit him again." Before I could settle in for a second shot, the bull tipped over, everything disappearing in the tall cover, except for one side of its rack that rose above the grass.

I GIVE MYSELF VERY GOOD ADVICE, BUT I VERY SELDOM FOLLOW IT

Every time I walk up on a dead elk—and I've walked up on a lot of them—I'm always amazed by their size. It doesn't matter if it's a bull or cow, my first thought is always: "What



Browning's new Ovis camo, shown here on the author's pants, blends well in a variety of terrain.



GOING LONG IN CLOSE QUARTERS

Later in the hunt, after Skipper killed his bull at a range of 535 yards from a sniper's hide far above the valley, I reminded Smith about that interview so many years ago where he insisted he gets his clients up close and personal with elk in the deep timber. He ruminated for moment, scratched his chin and replied: "Oh sure, I've killed a lot of elk at close range. But shooting them out in the open is so much easier." When I asked if those up-close experiences were exclusively bowhunting during the rut, he assured me it was not. "I love stalking bulls in the timber. It's the perfect place to carry a lever-action rifle."

Our group left the Browning BLR lever guns at home and carried variations of the Browning X-Bolt. My version was the X-Bolt Mountain Pro Long Range Tungsten—a mouthful to say, but pleasant to shoot thanks to the Recoil Hawg muzzle brake fitted to the end of a 26-inch spiral-fluted barrel. Not that the 6.8 Western the rifle was chambered for needs much taming. Browning calls their Pro series rifles "semi-custom," and they come fitted in a carbon-fiber stock that trims the rifle's overall weight down to an easy-to-carry 6 pounds, 12 ounces, minus the scope.

When in Oregon, of course you should be carrying Leupold optics, which are made right up the road in Beaverton. The X-Bolt was topped with a Leupold VX-6HD riflescope with 3-18 magnification. Of all the zoom ranges, I find the 6X version the handiest for all-around hunting. Had I stepped foot into the timber, the bottom end of the range would have been perfect for fast shots in deep cover, yet I was quickly able to zoom in when I encountered my bull in the open. The VX-6 also comes with a FireDot illuminated reticle, which would have been perfect in my low-light, heavy-fog encounter, had I remembered to turn it on.

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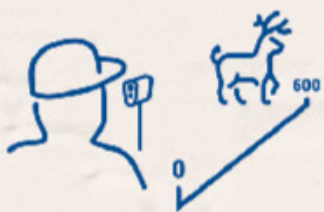
am I supposed to do with this?” But when I walked up on my very first Roosevelt elk, the body was so big—nearly 1/4 larger than a Rocky Mountain elk—I was struck dumb. Was this another hallucination? Could an elk really be so large? And mind you, this was not a true giant Roosevelt—just a nice, mature bull. I can’t wrap my head around just how huge a record-book Rosie would be.

The lifting fog revealed a beautiful landscape, and the perfect backdrop for the author’s first Roosevelt elk.

I also couldn’t wrap my head around how fast my hunt was over. I’m well-known for shooting the first legal animal I see without worrying about antler inches or record books. It happens so often, that before every hunt I must tell myself: “Wait.

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Be patient. Take your time.” But I hate failure and I love fresh venison and I usually, at least, make it to midmorning of the first day before pulling the trigger. All my hunts are guided by the adage “Never look a gift horse in the mouth.”

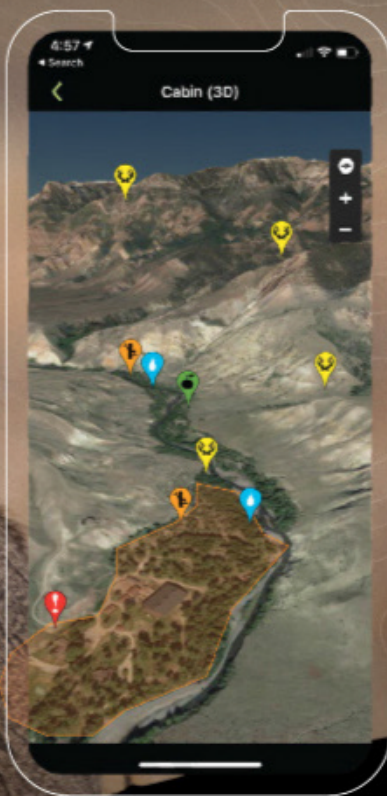
But here, now, I was no more than an hour, and likely a bit less, into my very first Roosevelt elk hunt and my tag was punched. And, though it was incredibly short, the hunt was



Roosevelt elk are big bodied animals, growing even larger than their Rocky Mountain relatives.

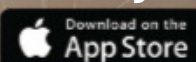
nothing like I imagined it to be. But that’s the great thing about hunting, isn’t it? No matter what you think you know about how things are going to play out, no matter how much you read and research, out there, in the mountains, once you go down that rabbit hole, anything can happen. 🤖

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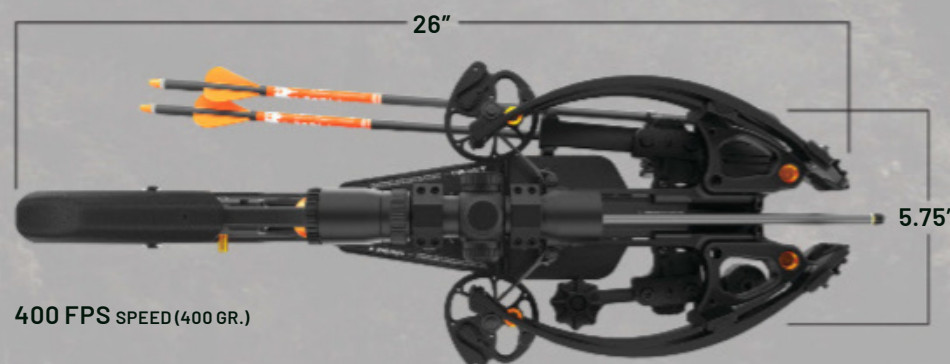
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MOUNTING UP FOR MULE DEER

JOE FERRONATO

HUNTING THE REMOTE IDAHO BACKCOUNTRY IN SEARCH OF BIG BUCKS.



THE SLOW-PACED mule stepped along the trail with a comfortable gate. Moving with the animal, I was completely relaxed. Snow was falling gently, and the wind had a bitter nip. There was nothing around but wild country full of elk, wolves, bear and, our quarry, big mule deer bucks. This land always tracked my subconscious with the enticement of adventure. I had dreamt of it on multiple occasions, and finally I was here.

Living in Montana, I can hunt remote and desolate country in my backyard. While my home state has a wonderful access to the backcountry, Idaho has an appeal for those who strive for the extreme. The mountains in the Idaho are different from those found elsewhere. They are stacked tightly, and if they were ironed flat, the state would be the largest in the lower 48. No slope is gentle, they are steep and every step means business. Taking on a trip to these areas is not for the faint of heart.

As I rolled down the dirt highway leaving dust and the Montana border in the background, my stomach tightened with excited nerves, contrasted by a peaceful feeling of coming home. Idaho, and its mountains, stole my heart when I took up residency during my studies at Boise State University. That dirt road met pavement just mere miles from the access point where my first archery elk was killed. I was home.

A

An hour or so more of driving landed me at a quaint cabin not far from the highway; mules and horses roamed in the pasture while chickens, rabbits and hound dogs were penned not far down the gravel driveway. The mountain air and peace captured my senses; my companions for the trip greeted me. For the next eight days, I would be joined by Caleb Davis of Continental Divide Outfitters and David Herman.

Davis is a backcountry expert, and his ability to pack stock is impressive. We wasted no time preparing for our early departure the following day. Our gear was separated, wrapped in canvas manties and weighed for easy packing come morning. Davis' weight estimations were near perfect, and our canvas-clad gear was ready for the long pack to camp.

TO A REMOTE PARADISE

With our four-legged companions in tow, we headed to a trailhead high in

the mountains. I have an affinity for horse and mules; I grew up around them and now have my own. Once rigged with riding saddles and pack saddles both, the stock carried us towards the backcountry camp. Atop the animals, it was hard not to notice the lack of noise. This was an escape from the fast daily lives of modern culture.

After riding most of the way, the last few miles called for hiking. A brisk breeze picked up and temperatures began to plummet. Dismounting and walking kept our core temperatures up and helped warm cold bones from the long ride. Soon after, we reached a camp that was nestled comfortably on a flat meadow surrounded by burned forest.

THE BURN

Forests in the northwest are overgrown and unhealthy. When logging on National Forest land came to a halt and fire suppression began, forests exploded with growth. Thick timber and downfall hide animals well and disperse them widely as they strive to find areas with significant browse in the undergrowth.

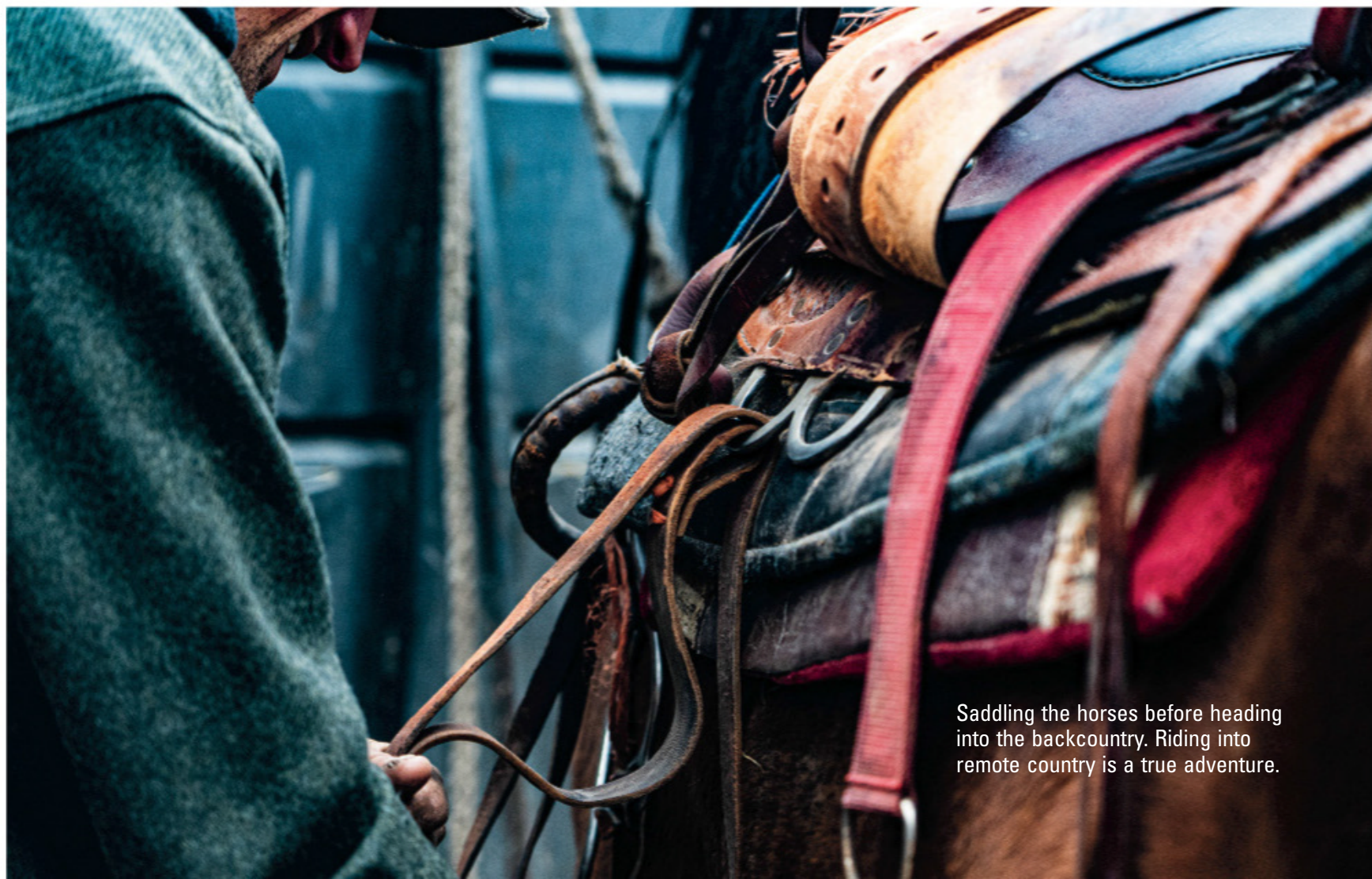
With forests being overgrown, trees become unhealthy. Strong winds blow down week-rooted trees leaving dead, dying and dry wood scattering the land-

scapes—the perfect equation to equal a mega fire that burns hot, damages soils and causes the regrowth of forests to be slow over the following years.

This equation was solved in our hunting area nearly 10 years ago, leading to a fire that burned nearly 350,000 acres. It left the landscape desolate of forest and void of wildlife for years while the environment waited on its resurrection.

Our camp laid deep within that old burn that ravaged the forest and left the old-growth trees burned and dead but still standing. It was an eerie place—as if the forest had burned recently, not a decade in the past. Herman shared a story from the previous season when a windstorm blew the dead trees down atop the wall tents and nearly killed Davis in the process. Downed trees blocked the exit from the backcountry and hundreds needed to be cut to safely get hunters and stock back to town.

So, why'd we go back? While hunting around these dead trees can be hazardous, burns are one of the best places to find mature bucks: That is, after the soil regained its nutrients and traditional forage for the mule deer began to emerge bringing animals back to the area. The new, thriving growth and open terrain offers great habitat for the deer. What's more, hunters can glass long distances through burned timber.



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David Herman steadying the Benelli Lupo preparing for a possible shot opportunity.

WEATHERING A STORM

Weather forecasts called for a significant storm to push through over the next couple of days. Hunting wouldn't be the best, but with limited time, we were going to hunt hard. Our first evening on the glassing knob yielded nothing more than a couple of does and heightened adrenaline levels as the high winds carrying the storm made the dead trees of the burn pop and crack. Every noise left us snapping our necks looking for our presumed coniferous attackers.

The first night in the wall tents offered little sleep, too. Though the wind kept my mind racing until the latest hours, the warmth emitting from the woodburning stove finally lulled my mind to sleep.

As I walked to the cook tent, the light snow glistened in the faint moonlight that penetrated the thin layer of clouds still lingering in the night sky. We headed back to our glassing point to start the day. A couple of hours in, we spotted a few smalls bucks at the head of the canyon browsing for food in the light snow. Deer movement was slow, and the wind was beginning to pick up once again.

Temperatures continued to plummet, and the brunt of the storm reared its ugly face. We retreated to the leeward side of the knob and built a fire. My midday nap found me huddled by the blaze, clinging to its warmth. The fire, and my abundant amount of layering gear from Kuui, kept me warm as I slept. When I woke, the snow had completely covered the ground and was building up on the outside of my waterproof gear.

Just as we huddled around a fire for warmth, the deer stayed bedded throughout the storm.

BREAKING THE SILENCE

For those who have never experienced the lonely silence of the backcountry, I do not envy you. It's not a complete silence, it is a silence void of the sounds of urban life. When a hunt is slow, as ours was for the first couple of days, your mind races, thinking of your daily life and what brought you to this moment. But by the end of it, you become accustomed to listening to the sounds of your surroundings—learning the ins and outs of the area you're hunting.

I exhaled deeply as I hit the ground atop the downed tree hidden by the snow. Sometimes hunting hard means falling hard and the new snow made the landscape slick, but it offered us an ace



The author with his buck taken while standing against a tree with the Benelli Lupo chambered in .300 Win. Mag.



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in our pursuit. While the hiking was slow, the tracking was easy. Fresh tracks began to catch our attention as mile and mile fell victim to our boot tread.

One great four-by-four buck—a mature representation of the species—nearly met his fate, but the slick scree we were crossing gave way under the snow alerting the buck to the imminent danger. The hunt continued, but after that moment the silence became increasingly louder.

A rush of life began to stream across the landscape on the third day. The howling of wolves echoed through the canyons and the bugle of bull elk answered—coming as a shock to me.

Wolves in this country are common and the sound of the elite predator drove our group to hunt harder.

Heading south from camp, instead of to our glassing point, we planned to go down canyon to hunt draw by draw, cutting tracks and glassing thoroughly before advancing our position.

Dropping down the steep slope an eruption of crashing trees surprised us as a bull elk launched from its bed and barreled down the slope. The wind was right. We were quiet. Were we not alone? Soon after, the massive track stood out in the snow as only that of a predator does. A substantial lone wolf track—left only minutes before—weaved through the down-

fall. Moments later the pitch-black beast appeared under 50 yards from us. Without a tag in my pocket, I could do nothing but watch as both the wolf and I continued with our hunts. The echoing howls served as a reminder that we weren't the only hunters in the area, and, maybe, that we were on the right track.

We soon cut the track of three deer, traveling together. The deep cuts in snow gave us hope that they were close. Over the next ridge we spotted the three bucks moving up the finger of a draw towards the ridge above. They were unaware of



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Lupo, the Italian word for wolf, is a perfect way to describe Benelli's newest bolt-action rifle. Of sleek design and built with the trusted craftsmanship the legacy company is known for, the Lupo is a fine choice for any hunter wanting to up their accuracy and confidence while on the hunt.

Chambering offerings include most of the popular hunting cartridges: 6.5 PRC, 6.5 Creedmoor .270 Win., .300 Win. Mag., and more. Each action is paired with a barrel equipped with a twist rate designed to stabilize the bullets for superb accuracy. Barrels are treated with the company's Crio treatment and equipped with a hardened-steel barrel extension that is mated to an alloy receiver.

The 60-degree bolt throw is intuitive and fast. The bolt cycles easily and feeds reliably from the removable

box-style magazine. Triggers are adjustable from 2.2 to 4.4 pounds for a customized shot that is fit to the user.

Beyond an adjustable trigger, Benelli designed the ergonomics of the sleek rifle to be adjusted to each hunter. With both length-of-pull and comb adjustments, this rifle can be fit comfortably to the hands of any shooter.

The Lupo controls felt recoil with the Progressive Comfort system, making shooting the .300 Win. Mag. easy without use of a muzzle break. If you require more recoil mitigation, the barrel is threaded in the standard 5/8x24 for the use of a break or a suppressor—if you prefer a more civilized hunt.

Just like the wolves that ran through our hunting territory, the Lupo is built to be an apex predator on the landscape.

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MOUNTING UP FOR MULE DEER

our presence and offered a perfect opportunity for a shot. We moved forward and laid down prone, we studied the bucks and only one was mature. Herman was first shooter. After a perfectly placed shot across the 500-yard draw, the buck fell. Only hours into the day, the silence of our trip turned into cheers and congratulations. Now it was our howls of excitement echoing through the canyons.

With one tag filled and rejuvenated spirits, it was my turn.

A CONTINUOUS GRIND

The following day, after a joyous night at camp, we embarked to a different area in hopes of finding a wayward buck. We headed into higher country with more snow, steeper slopes and, unfortunately, a lack of deer. The silence returned and my mind was consumed by thoughts of going home empty handed. There was still plenty of time in the hunt, but wild places tend to play tricks on the brain.

It was a long evening in camp, as we returned early to rest up for the next day. Camp chores did little to quiet my



thoughts and I pondered the best plan late into the night.

Morning came quickly after I drifted off to sleep. I slid my feet into warm boots that spent the night drying by the wood stove. The feeling was comforting, and I noticed I had a renewed sense of enthusiasm for the coming day.

The day started slow. Areas that should have yielded bucks showed no

It takes time and dedication to learn the art of packing. Loads must be balanced and secure, especially in rough country.

sign of deer. The faint bugle of elk rang in my ears encouraging me that there was still life in these hills, and we just had to keep moving. More miles fell to our boot tracks as we found enough stamina to carry us through the rough

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WHAT'S YOUR **BEEF?**



With gear and trophies secured to the pack string, the team rode out of the backcountry.

country. Though we made a grand effort that day, no bucks were found.

On the fifth day of hunting, we returned to our original glassing knob. The morning yielded views of does and small bucks. With hunting days nearing end, we made a call to yet again hike hard.

The weather had warmed significantly and burned soil turned into a slick, muddy mess. Though the snow was receding, slick steps led to many falls on our way through each drainage.

As we crested a finger ridge, we spotted two good bucks working across the draw. They were moving fast, not spooked but walking with a purpose. The trailing deer was a shooter. He was 225

yards, moving slowly away. I found a position on the closest tree and made the Benelli Lupo steady, the Leupold VX-6 HD offering a clear view of the buck.

"Wait, breathe, aim, and execute," I thought to myself.

As I finished my thought, the buck paused for a moment. The trigger broke clean and the Barnes .300 Win. Mag. 180-grain TTSX BT bullet hit its mark, dropping the buck in its tracks. It was a solemn moment. One that wrote a perfect ending to a grand adventure, at least once we quartered the buck and got it to where we could bring the horses to pack it out. The steep climb on the muddy slope made our legs scream, but the joy of the adventure drove us forward.

The next morning, we packed deer meat, antlers and gear on our stock, mounted up and rode down the trail. Once again, the slow-paced mule carried me through the backcountry. This time, though, our pack string carried not only gear, but great trophies that took the form of an experience, memories, knowledge, meat and antlers that will stay with me forever. 🍖

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NOTHING COMES EASY IN ELK COUNTRY

MARK KAYSER

TAGGING A BULL ON PUBLIC GROUND
IS A MARATHON, NOT A SPRINT.

JUDGING FROM the shocking number of rifle shots emanating from the adjacent canyon, the elk were not only sensing hunting pressure, but feeling the heat. I hoped the half-a-box attempt at the elk would nudge them to dash across into the canyon I was watching directly next door. Unfortunately, at dusk, the elk were still not playing by the rules and had gone MIA in big country. I needed to play by different rules as well if I hoped to win the race on elk in the public domain.

Today, nobody argues that public-land elk have learned to dodge hunters and not simply by climbing a higher mountain. Elk rarely play by the rules when they sense hunting pressure. Herds hurrying to private lands are as common as elk leaving a dust trail into remote sections of the forest. Some have taken up year-round leases on large estates basically avoiding inten-

sive hunting pressure. Other herds make the trek once they experience the orange invasion.

A Brigham Young study published in the *Journal of Wildlife Management* clearly shows this phenomenon in central Utah. The study, ending in 2017, collared 454 elk with GPS tracking units. The biologists discovered elk's use of public land dropped by more than 30 percent in midseason of rifle hunting. Surprisingly, the elk returned to public lands soon after the hunting pressure diminished. According to the same article, elk used other evasive moves into remote or dense habitat to avoid hunting pressure. Thirty percent, to me, sounds low, according to my undocumented observations. In many of the units I hunt, I would argue that at least 75 percent of the herd disappears in a dust cloud to private lands or outlying ruggedness.

T

The movement of elk to private lands is an occurrence that has increased in recent decades. I've seen it materializing on my summer trail cameras for years. One high-country meadow gathered dozens of images well into the fall. Over the span of three years, the camera quit capturing elk images by the end of August. The reason was visible by driving past a private ranch at a lower elevation. The private holding always held elk, but the herd size swelled earlier and earlier each fall as the elk discovered refuge from increasing hunting pressure.

My hunting experiences in Montana, Wyoming and Colorado have all led me to similar conclusions. The few elk that were not hightailing it to the rough stuff took up residence on private lands with limited or nonexistent hunting pressure. Regardless if the elk escape to an out-of-the-way sanctuary or lollygag on some absentee billionaire's ranch, you need to be aware of elk lifestyle choices in your hunting unit to win the public-land game.

UNDERSTAND THE ELK

Although states like Colorado and Montana harbor herds of elk in the hundreds of thousands, that does not equate to an elk behind every tree. Elk are long-legged cruisers built to cover ground. They have



no mortgage on a property like whitetails and abandon any section of forest if neighbors get rowdy. Understand that fact. Your summer scouting may have revealed a plethora of elk, but by the October opener of rifle season the area could have more hunters than elk.

I cannot stress this enough. If you do not live in an elk hunting area or have contacts that do, reach out to game and fish personnel assigned to the region. Elk are a big money-making priority for wildlife agencies, and these professionals track elk movements for animal management, and landowner complaints. Many elk herds migrate from lower elevations for winter range to the high country for summer nutrition. Tracking down migration corridors provides a roadmap to where elk may start the race, where they may pass and their final destination. The same migration experts may even be able to put dates on the migration course. Unfortunately, many elk now refuse to wait for the first snow to begin their



Finding elk in large parcels of public land can be difficult. Fresh sign gives you confidence you are in the right neighborhood.

safety dash. The trail-camera elk I mentioned earlier routinely drop 3,000 feet in elevation in a matter of days, well before snow and firearm season, to cross the fence onto private.

Uncovering all refuges should also be a priority. Elk managers know where the elk end up. Some landowners complain to government entities about hayfield depredation and fence damage. Although they may not get attention if they don't let the public aid in managing the menace, officials know exactly where elk congregate. These taxpayer-funded officials could also provide insight on whether the elk stay in a particular area all season, jump fences daily or even retreat to public if a landowner's family has a traditional hunt planned during the season.

By identifying private-land refuges, public areas closed to hunting and large blocks of inaccessible backcountry, you



When elk feel pressure, they may leave an area quickly and put lots of distance between them and suspected danger.

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Mark Kayser glasses a high mesa for elk using his Sig Sauer Kilo3000BDX binoculars.

narrow the field where elk will gather during hunting season, plus ascertain herd travel patterns. This aids in discovering avenues to hunt adjacent public land and accessing backcountry. A hired horse could be the answer to elk stockpiled 12 miles into a designated wilderness area. Or a section of state ground aligned against a large private tract could be your golden ticket to a straying herd.

On-the-ground intel also plays a significant role in analyzing the elk activity of an area. Squishy droppings, the crisp outline of tracks and the fresh aroma of elk cologne in the air all tell you that animals have recently passed. Elk are big and a herd or band of bulls leaves a lot of sign.

One head-scratching season I was finding ample sign and fresh bull tracks in the snow, but my efforts did not result in sightings. My detective work resulted in a hypothesis that the bulls were nocturnal. A near-vertical slope abutting high-altitude meadows gave the bulls a safe house to base out of when not feeding. Even good intel cannot help you in cases like this. Nevertheless, I knew where the elk camped and dined.

UNDERSTAND YOUR COMPETITORS

Understanding the elk may be more than enough of a homework load, but you also need to study the behavior of your competition: other hunters. Humans are creatures of habit, and in recent years, their habits have become increasingly less ambitious. The data is clear, nearly three-quarters of the American popula-

tion is out of shape. With the explosion of rugged, all-terrain vehicles, those soft hunters *braaap* their way down all legal—and even some illegal—trails.

Start your study of your peers by identifying every road, two-track and designated hiking trail in the unit. I am not suggesting that you avoid those pathways. You may need to use the very roads your competitors use. I am suggesting you understand that everyone else will be utilizing the path of least resistance and even if you do utilize the same routes, you need to go farther on foot or be more innovative in your approach.

I often use a closed road to hike into elk territory. The two-track road forks off the only major road in the area. It leads to a sheer slope and with 1,500 feet of clamoring, you can leave the road crew behind and find elk. On a recent hunt, I did find fresh ATV tracks leading to an abandoned campsite indicating a few in the less-than-ambitious crowd were willing to break the law to find elk. Even so, that closed road has led me to elk on nearly every hike.

As you mark the most used trails in a unit, look for all designated campgrounds and identify popular undesignated, public-land campsites. Your discussion with game and fish officials can shed light on the latter item. Elk country, by nature, is steep and rugged so any openings, flat sites and meadows that could accommodate campers, tend to turn into elk camps on the opener. Along

one section of Bureau of Land Management property I occasionally hunt, the clay-based soil restricts travel when wet so every level strip of land off the county gravel road has a camper sitting on it a week before season. It is a nail-biter whether I will find a camp spot when I hold a tag for that unit.

Lastly, do some sleuthing on the outfitter and family hunting traditions of the private land. You may not have access, but neighboring public land could give you opportunity if hunting pressure is too intense on a property. Outfitters need to get aggressive with elk to fill tags in short windows. Visiting family members, like a college kid home for the weekend, also spur intense hunts for success on private lands. An early morning shoot-out on the private property could push a herd of elk over the fence onto public. The window may be minutes, hours or days, but there is potential for success.

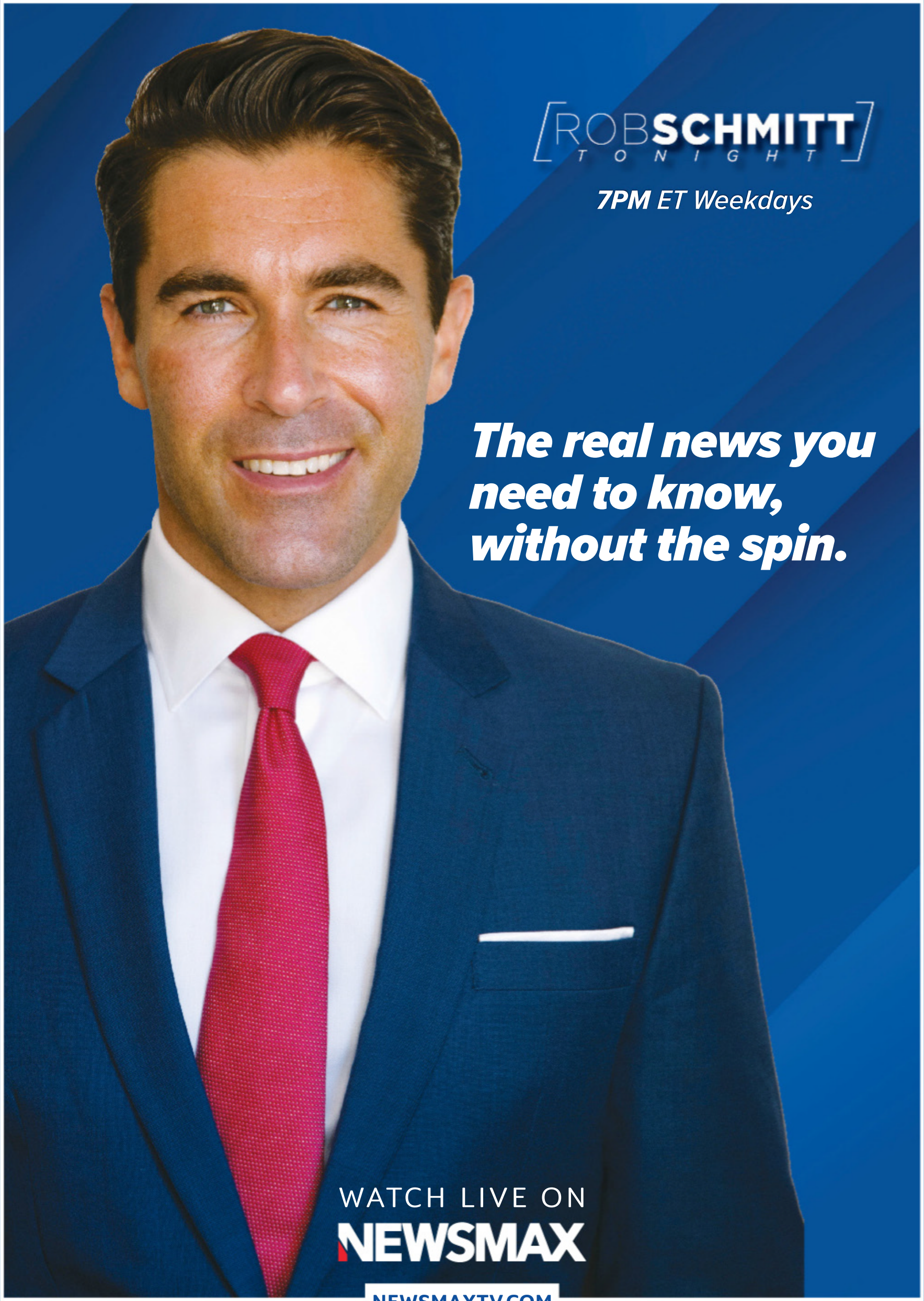
THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED

My buddy hunts with me on occasion, but demands we never hunt the vertical country I introduced him to on a Wyoming elk hunt one season. The straight-up trail includes a scramble through a narrow, rocky cliff face before topping out to where elk hide out. After his first ascent up the trail, he required several doctor visits provoked by the elevation and strenuous ascent.

How rugged of country you tackle is a personal decision, but if the elk do not have a private estate for a holiday, they certainly will negotiate even the most difficult terrain to escape. My bible for elk is “North American Elk Ecology and Management.” Buried in one chapter is this notation, “When elk are distributed by hunters, they may travel 2 to 3 miles before stopping, and are neither as evasive nor quick to seek hiding cover as deer.”

Three miles may not seem like an impossible hike on flat ground, but elk country is rarely flat or networked with improved trails. Keep this in mind, elk can descend 1,000 feet and ascend 1,000 feet in a matter of minutes. That move equals one big canyon which may take you an hour or more to traverse.

Finding remote areas breaks down into two categories. Either you hike or climb away from the crowd. Elevation ascents from a trailhead more than 1,000 feet typically cancel out the average hunter.



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The same goes with hiking a mile beyond a trailhead, particularly in uneven, mountainous terrain. Blocks of country locked from motorized vehicles encompassing two square miles or larger, demand your attention. Even if most of the herd scrambles to private ground, a splinter herd may still find desolate high country more agreeable. Utilizing my HuntStand hunting app prior to the hunt and with downloaded maps in the field, I am always on the hunt for the next peek into a potential elk neighborhood far from any trail.

ROADSIDE ATTRACTIONS

There are options for hunts near a road. Consider the overlooked. An obvious

area overlooked by many elk hunters is literal road frontage. A study found in my bible suggests that all traffic is not created equal and elk tolerate some depending on its nature.

Past research from a University of Idaho study in Arizona's Coconino National Forest suggests that slower traffic, typical of 4WD trucks and all-terrain vehicles on national forest service roads, was more disruptive to elk than the faster traffic found on an "improved" highway. Another study along Wyoming's link to the East and West Coast, Interstate 80, supports the highway theory. Herds were tracked within close proximity and tolerated the constant drone of coast-to-coast traffic.



RIFLE TO WIN THE PUBLIC-LAND RACE

I was not always a fan of the lightweight rifle for the backcountry. Now with more than half my life behind me, lighter is better. This past fall I was able to field test the new Bergara Premier MgLite. Immediately the rifle stunned me with its appearance of a PRS-style competition rifle built for speed and accuracy. Unlike many PRS rifles, the MgLite is incredibly light thanks to the skeletonized XLR Element 4.0 Magnesium chassis. A carbon-fiber pistol grip and folding stock also shave weight while adding to efficiency, especially while backpacking.

Also helping in the weight department is the new CURE Carbon Barrel. Bergara designed the innovative barrel by weaving together continuous strands of stainless steel into the carbon fiber using Bergara's proprietary ColdBore Technology to maintain straightness and stiffness.

What this adds up to is a bare-bones rifle that weighs between 6.7 to 6.8 pounds depending on the caliber. I topped my MgLite with a Sig Sauer SIERRA6 BDX 3-18x44mm riflescope. The low power would be ideal for timber stalks and the 18 power was plenty for a 500-yard shot on a bull if needed. With an attached Quake Claw sling and a full magazine of .300 Win. Mag. cartridges, my rifle weighed 9.7 pounds.

Bergara offers the Premier MgLite in a variety of calibers including the 6.5 Creedmoor, 6.5 PRC, .308 and .300 Win. Mag. Accuracy is guaranteed at 1 MOA, but I was able to shave that down to .75 or better on most sand-bag range days using the Hornady Precision Hunter 200-grain ELD-X load. More information is available on Bergara's website: bergara.online

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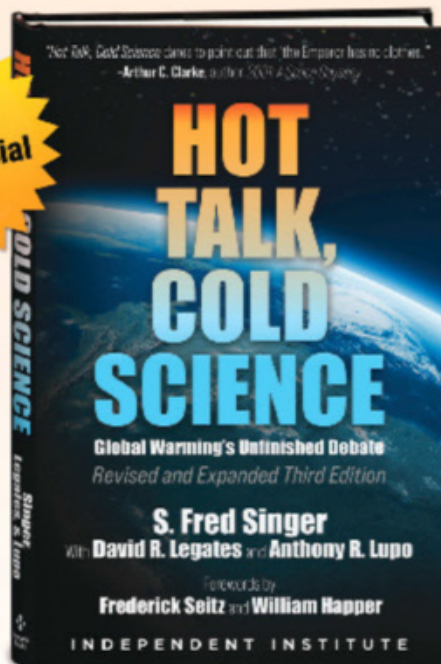
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... nor on the horizon over the upcoming years (p. 103)

- **How the ice mass in Antarctica has actually been *increasing*** since 1979 and NOT decreasing like we’ve been led to believe (p. 64)
- **The carbon dioxide disconnect** and why there is ZERO evidence linking carbon dioxide to climate change (p. 66)
- **How the BIGGER problem** of “global cooling” has been **overlooked** and why it could cause far greater hazards to humans than global warming (p. 174)
- **How a FAKE consensus of scientists and CORRUPTION of the peer-review process** have been purposely misused by politicians to further their agendas since 1990 (p. 56)
- The “Hockey Stick” scandal in which a small group of scientists conspired to rewrite climate history so they could claim that temperature increases in the 20th century were “unprecedented” —

and how it was debunked! (p. 73)

- The “Climategate” scandal among top IPCC scientists that misrepresented and withheld important climate information ... and then attempted to prevent discovery! (p. 77)
- **And much, much more ...**
Those are just a handful of the little-known facts (which are never reported by the mainstream media!).

Discover What the “Establishment” Doesn’t Want You to Know

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Mark Kayser spent several days in this hunting unit looking for public-land elk. He found them in the steepest and most rugged area of the mountain.

On one hunt I discovered elk sticking close to a highway in Montana. After several days of tricky navigation, I fi-

nally caught up with them and tagged a mature bull. Unfortunately, private land locked extraction via the nearby highway and I had to pack the bull out through a winding connection of public land for three miles. I did not say it would be easy to hunt right-of-way country.

The bulls described earlier that gave me fits with nocturnal feeding habits had one Kryptonite: harsh weather. A forecast of overnight snow nudged me to again check the higher meadows that were littered with tracks of night feeders. Hiking two hours in the dark, I arrived at shooting light as the snow ceased and discovered several bulls still busy feeding, bolstered by the gloomy dawn.

Using a low rise and crawling on my knees, I stalked to a broken tree and eased my backpack onto the stump for a cushy rest. Two bulls sensed my presence and started trotting toward timber, but a third fed unalerted to the goings on of the others. I took a moment to settle my nerves and then sent a 200-grain Hornady ELD-X bullet into the bull. He dropped, but with a jungle of timber and vertical slopes within an easy jog for him, I followed with an insurance shot to secure my public-land meat supply for the winter. 📍

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Mule Deer Madness

WHEN LEWIS and Clark made their epic journey up the Missouri River to find a water route to the Pacific in 1804 they encountered a deer that looked nothing like the whitetails they knew at home. The large ears on the unfamiliar deer looked similar to those of a mule and it's said they gave the mule deer its name. The explorers also must have noted the difference in the antlers as well. Unlike whitetails, the mule deer's antlers forked and were much taller and wider.

I was thinking about this when I guided a group of Pennsylvania hunters on a deer hunt in Utah in the mid 1960s. None had ever seen a mule deer before, and I knew from past hunts that they'd want to shoot the first buck they saw. That would have been a mistake, unless it truly was a big buck, because those were the banner years for muleys. Impressive bucks were plentiful. Savvy hunters passed up many deer in their quest for a trophy. When my hunters first laid eyes on bucks, they were, predictably, astounded. It was challenging for me to encourage them to pass on mediocre deer in the fairly open aspen forest. They were excited and anxious to shoot. One of the hunters succumbed to the pressure and dropped a thin-horned four by four with a 21-inch outside spread. He was thrilled, but that ecstasy disappeared when he saw his pals tagging bucks that had high forks and massive spreads that ranged from 25 to 28 inches.

That same quandary exists today, despite the plethora of TV shows and YouTube videos that depict mule deer hunts. Most hunters who see a mule deer in the flesh for the first time will undoubtedly marvel at those tall, forked racks.

I recall a Colorado hunt with a friend from the South who had never seen a muley before. On a snowy, bitterly cold day he rode horseback with his guide when they spotted a buck on a ridgetop less than 100 yards away. The guide, who was an old timer and a veteran hunter, was a man of few words.

"Get off your horse and shoot that buck," the guide emphatically whispered.

The hunter hesitated.

"How big is it?"

"Just get off your horse and shoot!"

"Is it 30 inches wide?"

"Just shoot it! Now!"

The hunter finally dismounted and started pulling the gun from the scabbard but it was too late. The buck whirled and bounded off into the thick forest.

Later, after dinner at camp I talked to the guide privately.

"How big was that buck?"

He stuffed a new chew in his cheek and spat.

"The biggest #@&*#@ buck I've ever seen in my life!"

He never mentioned that to the hunter because my friend would have been mighty embarrassed and upset. I never men-

**"THE BIGGEST
#@&*#@
BUCK I'VE
EVER SEEN
IN MY LIFE!"**

tioned it to him either. Some things are best left unsaid.

On another hunt I was riding horseback in the Wyoming Range with an outfitter and his hunter. I had already tagged a buck and went along for the ride. This country was noted for massive bucks. At one point the outfitter dismounted to make a quick nature call and told us to ride up the trail and he'd catch up. I was in the lead with the hunter riding behind me.

Suddenly I spotted a monster buck standing in a small basin 150 yards away. The buck took my breath away. I turned and looked at the hunter, expecting him to quickly dismount and shoot. Instead, he was sitting in his saddle staring at the buck. I was perplexed.

"Get off your horse and shoot that buck!" I said.

The hunter stayed rooted in the saddle and watched the huge deer. Again, I implored him to get off the horse. Still no reaction.

I leaped out of my stirrups, grabbed the head gear on the hunter's horse and practically begged him to shoot. He wasn't budging. Finally, the great deer ran off. About then the outfitter came charging around a bend in the trail behind us, galloping his horse madly, and glared at the hunter. He wasn't happy.

"Why in God's name didn't you shoot that monster buck. They don't get any bigger than that!"

The hunter, who had never been on a big-game hunt in the West lowered his head and was obviously upset. "I thought it was an elk," he said.

Mule deer can do that to you. It's easy to be fooled. But in my way of thinking, just being out there in the Western mountains is plenty reason to enjoy a muley hunt regardless of the antler inches. 

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