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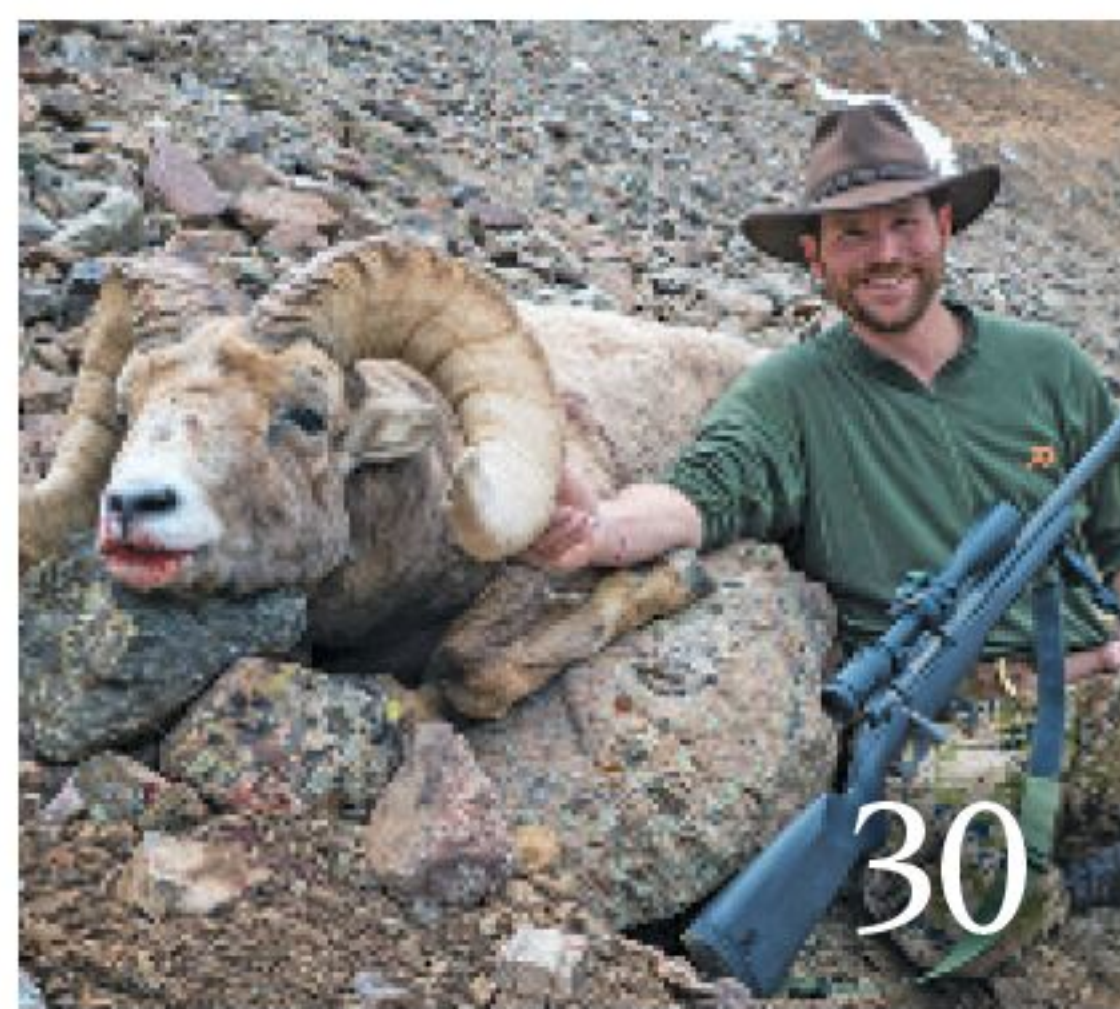
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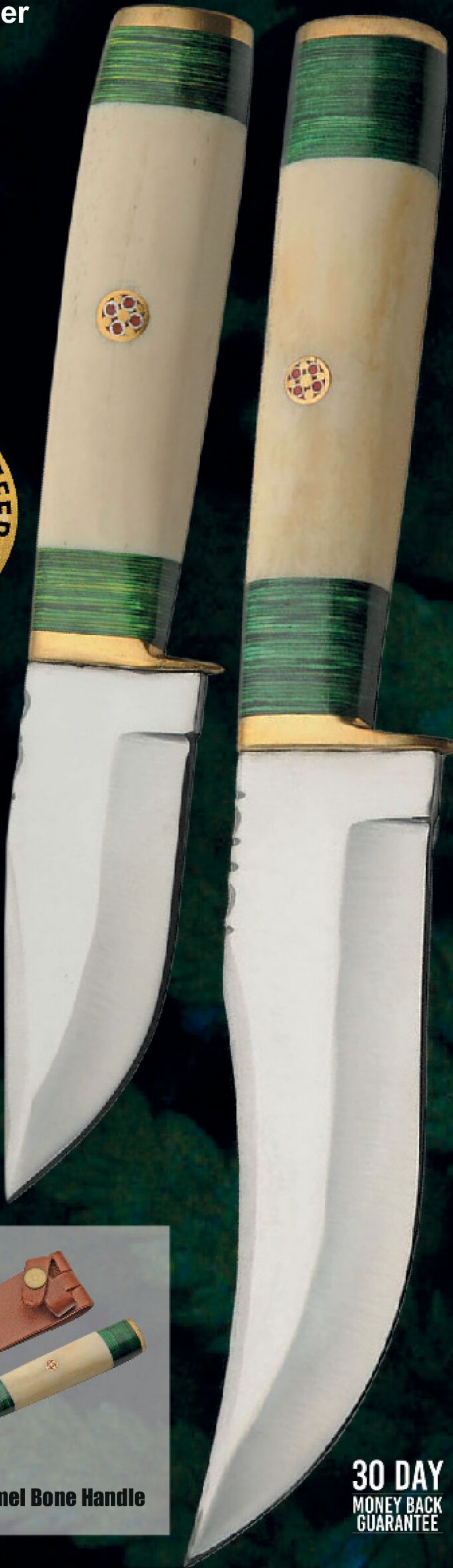
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In The Deed The Glory



THOSE WORDS, written by philosopher Hartley Burr Alexander, are etched into the walls above the southeast entrance to the University of Nebraska's Memorial Stadium in Lincoln. I paused to read them on more than a few autumn Saturdays as I passed under the archway on my way to watch the Cornhusker's play football when I was a student there in the mid-1990s. The complete creed reads:

*Not the goal but the game;
Not the victory but the action;
In the deed the glory.*

During most of that last decade of the millennia, the glory also came from an impressive streak of victories. (The Huskers won three national championships during my tenure at the University, which is probably just a coincidence, but I'll take credit for it.) Alexander's words were always a reminder that, win or lose, the real reward was working hard and giving it your best. Enjoy the experience, no matter the end result.

Although I'm still a Husker fan, I don't watch football much anymore. And it's been probably two decades since I've been to Memorial Stadium. If you pay any attention at all to Husker football,

you'll know things have not been going well on the gridiron there for the past decade or more. Plus, I have better things to do on Saturdays now, like go hunting. But Hartley Alexander's words still come to me now and then, often when I'm in the field on a particularly difficult hunt.

Is a hunt really unsuccessful if you don't pull the trigger? Modern media (this magazine included at times) reinforces the idea that a punched tag, preferably on a trophy animal, is the most important, and sometimes the only measure of a successful hunt. The glory is not in the deed itself, but in the goal of killing the biggest animal—that is what victory looks like to some hunters. It's gotten rather disgusting, particularly if you spend any time at all on social media. (I wish I didn't.)

I can be as guilty of this line of thinking as any other hunter out there. It's easy to focus too hard on the actual act of killing, ignoring everything else in that attempt. Kind of like not being able to see the forest for the trees, and definitely overlooking an awesome sunrise as you spend too much time waiting for buck or bull to walk onto the landscape. I've done it, and I bet all of us are guilty of it at one time or another.

Is going home empty handed really that bad? I doubt many of us will really go hungry if we don't put a deer in the freezer this season. So, what is the true measure of success? The camaraderie of hunting camp? The miracle of nature and its bounty? Call me a Calvinist, but I also believe hard work is its own reward. I'm guessing Alexander was likely a Protestant—in the deed the glory is straight out of the guidebook for getting into heaven.

So, I challenge each of you to keep that in mind this hunting season. (I won't ask you to suffer through the football season as a Husker fan). If things aren't going your way, or if you're left with tag soup for supper, remember to take a moment to look around. Enjoy the experience itself. Take victory in the action, and remember the goal is the game itself.

See you around the campfire,

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink.

David Draper | Editor in Chief
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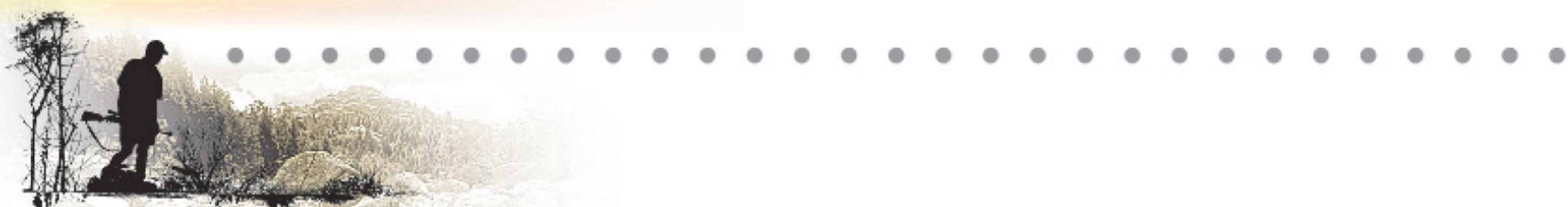


I

It's amazing to think how such a small creature can mean so much to hunters. The dove's outsized influence surely makes it the most popular game bird in the country, particularly on September 1—the traditional opening day of dove season in most states. The dove opener marks the start of hunting season and offers a chance for friends and family to gather together before hunters get serious about bigger game in the months to come.

Part hunt, part picnic, a good dove shoot combines some of the most challenging wingshooting in the world with, once the sun goes down, a raucous party, complete with cold drinks and hot coals. Most of the time, the doves bagged on opening day don't even make it to the freezer. They go straight from the game bag to the tailgate, where hunters gather around to separate the breasts from the bird before tossing the fresh meat on a scalding-hot grill. The afterparty often goes on for hours as stories are swapped, plans are made and friendships—new and old—are strengthened, all thanks to a little, gray bird. —David Draper





LEUPOLD SX-4 PRO GUIDE HD SPOTTING SCOPE

Leupold's SX-4 Pro Guide HD spotting scope first earned my "tested tough" stamp of approval two years ago after it braved -20-degree temps and extreme winter conditions on Kodiak Island without a glitch. Its compact size is also an added bonus as weight and pack space are a premium on backcountry hunts. Since then, the SX-4 Pro Guide HD rarely leaves my pack and has seen the world. The HD glass and edge-to-edge clarity have allowed me to scrutinize everything from elusive bushbuck in the Umkomaas Valley of South Africa to massive grizzly bears above the Arctic Circle and many, many other critters in between—never once letting me down.

For a compact scope, the SX-4 Pro Guide HD is packed with features to make you a more effective hunter. First and foremost, Leupold's Elite Optical System provides maximum light transmission to put you in the game first thing in the morning and keep you in the game 'til well after the sun dips below the horizon. It also provides hunters resolution and clarity to easily assess trophy quality from extreme distances. I can also attest to the scope's 100% fog- and waterproof qualities that keep you in the field no matter the elements you encounter. The body of the scope is made up of magnesium that is encased in a rubberized armor coating, protecting your investment.

CONSERVATION CORNER



RMEF HELPS OPEN THE GATE TO THE WALLOWAS

WHEN 2023 draws to a close, the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation (RMEF) and its partners are expected to complete a northeast Oregon project that conserves and opens public access to 15,573 acres of prime habitat for bighorn sheep, mountain goats, mule and whitetail deer, Shiras moose and, of course, Rocky Mountain elk.

RMEF, Manulife Investment Management's timberland business and the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW), with support from other groups and individuals including the U.S. Forest Service, closed on phase-one of the Minam River Acquisition in late 2021. Combined with

phase two, the project protects elk winter range plus 114 miles of perennial and intermittent streams, including the Minam River, that supply spawning, rearing and migration habitat for Chinook salmon, Snake River Basin steelhead, Grande Ronde bull trout, Pacific lamprey and other fish species.

"One of the long-time hallmarks of our organization is the proven ability to successfully work alongside a wide variety of partners, whether private landowners and entities, state and federal agencies, individuals and outdoor industry groups or sportsmen and NGOs, to get things done," said Blake Henning, RMEF chief conservation officer. "We see that again with the Minam. And it's a win for wildlife, hunters, anglers and everyone who enjoys the outdoors."

The project serves as a gateway to the beautiful Wallowa Mountains. It links the Minam River Wildlife Area, now the fifth largest in Oregon, and Minam State Recreational Area while establishing a permanent entry point to the remote, rugged landscape of the 361,000-acre Eagle Cap Wilderness through an existing trail network on the

Wallowa-Whitman National Forest that includes the Minam River Trail. It also improves public access for hunting, fishing and other recreational activity to an additional 6,000 acres of U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management lands.

This landscape-scale conservation offers easily accessible recreation and wildlife visibility due to its location along Highway 82 and the Hells Canyon Scenic Byway. It also allows biologists to better track and manage both elk populations and wildlife habitat through active management.

"The significance of this acquisition cannot be overstated. An opportunity to protect such a large swath of diverse habitat does not come along very often," said Curt Melcher, ODFW director. "ODFW has pursued opportunities to permanently protect this property since the 1960s. This acquisition would not have been possible without the leadership and funding from RMEF, as well as strong partnership with Manulife Investment Management." —**Mark Holyoak, RMEF**
Go to rmeff.org for more information.

This spotting scope comes in both angled and straight models, as well as 15-45x65mm and 20-60x85mm configurations. Considering I use it primarily for back-country hunting, I prefer the 15-45x65mm scope to save both weight and space in my pack. With that said, there have been a few times when I was looking at a mule deer buck at well over a mile away and have wished I had a little more magnification range. Regardless of your choice, you can't go wrong with this capable and packable spotting scope. For me, I can't afford not to have it in my pack. —*Colton Heward*



BULLET BOARD

BULLET BASICS

This fine bullet performs outside the box. Fundamentally, it's Barnes's Tipped Triple-Shock, which features a moderate boat tail, a polymer tip—that boosts aerodynamics and initiates immediate, reliable expansion—and grooves around the shank that reduce bearing surface and keep pressures low. However, it's a light-for-caliber version. Unlike light lead-core bullets, which tend to fragment to pieces or pancake on impact and penetrate poorly, this monometal bullet maintains all its weight on impact and penetrates well. Plus, since it's so light, it can be driven fast—which provides a terminal-performance benefit for any monometal design.

TESTING GROUND

I recovered the bullet pictured from a big kudu bull I shot in Namibia, using a .338 Weatherby RPM with a 20-inch barrel. Muzzle velocity was 3,005 fps, and muzzle energy about 3,700 ft/lbs. Shot distance was 205 yards. Estimated impact speed was 2,560 fps, and energy was about 2,690 ft/lbs.

Barnes 185-grain .338 TTSX



FIELD PERFORMANCE

The bull stood in a narrow window through the camelthorns, quartering slightly to me. I put the bullet on the point of the near shoulder, driving it toward the crease behind the off-side shoulder. The bull leaped spasmodically on impact and vanished into the brush. In all, he went about 40 yards before piling up.

STATS

The Tipped TSX bullet mushroomed perfectly and penetrated an estimated 22 inches of muscle, bone and vital organs before coming to rest against the offside hide. Retained weight is 184.2 grains—100% after discounting the polymer tip. Average expansion is 0.70 inch; more than double original diameter.

NOTES/OBSERVATIONS

This bullet is a tremendous choice for big game up to and including elk. It won't penetrate quite like a heavy-for-caliber version, but it drives plenty deep enough and expands better than most. Accuracy is nearly always stellar. It's worth mentioning that the 185-grain .338 TSX predecessor of the Tipped TSX version was the favorite of Barnes matriarch Coni Brooks in her .338 Win. Mag.—*Joseph von Benedikt*



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SET A TRAIL CAM FOR SUCCESS

I've been using trail cameras since they were the size of Trapper Keepers and powered by D-cell batteries. Though I have 15 to 20 of them running at any given time during the fall, I still make setup mistakes on occasion. I've forgotten SD cards, angled cameras too high or low, pointed them right into the sun and sifted through 3,000 images of swaying grass. It all amounts to wasted effort and batteries, but good education, too. Here's what I've learned.—*Will Brantley*

1

WORK THE SETTINGS

I monitor trails, creek crossings and field edges with high-megapixel cameras that offer the longest detection range and fastest trigger speeds, and I set them to take multiple shots with little or no delay. Photo opportunities in places like that are fleeting, and I want to see what I'm getting. I might use video settings to pattern an early season buck near a bedding area, but otherwise, videos take too long to watch and sort.

A camera with the same settings will fill up an SD card and burn through batteries if placed over a bait or mineral site, or even a waterhole or hot scrape. In those instances, set the photo delay to 30 seconds (for scrapes) or a minute (for bait). You don't need high photo resolution or fast trigger speeds to clearly see a buck eating apple-flavored corn.

2

KNOW YOUR CAMERAS

I love to hide cellular cameras over pinch-point trails or on the edges of bedding areas ahead of the rut, and then leave them alone until they tell me I have a buck to go hunt. But at least two thirds of the places where I hang trail cameras have limited cell service. So, I still lean on old-school cameras to inventory bucks over scrapes or bait, and I actually prefer the simplicity of them anywhere I can set them without much intrusion.

I'd rather have four, \$100 cameras than a pair of \$200 cameras, too, because most (not all) of them crap out after a few years anyway. Some of the newer models that are ultracompact and require as few as 4 AA batteries are among my favorites. Infrared flash is a must.

3

HANG IT PROPERLY

It's easy to aim a camera on flat ground. It needs to be about 3 feet high, and within 10 or 12 feet of where you expect the deer to be. Hills and hollers present challenges, so learn to set your cameras high on trees and then angle the lens. (I usually do this when monitoring scrapes, too.) Plenty of cameras today have brackets that make this easy, but sticks wedged in behind the camera body do a noble job as well. Preview screens and aiming tools on some cameras definitely help line things up.

On field edges, avoid pointing cameras due west or east, since lens flare from the setting or rising sun is likely to obscure many of your images at precisely the time of day you're hoping to see deer. Get some camera stakes and you can set field cameras exactly where they need to be.



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30-06 SPRG | 300 WSM | 300 WIN MAG | 300 WBY MAG | 300 REM ULTRA MAG | 338 WIN MAG | 375 RUGER | 375 H&H MAG

OUT
THERE

The Chase Is On

— THE EDITORS —

Designed to get you closer when hunting varied, demanding terrain, Lacrosse's **Ursa MS** boots feature TecTuff polyurethane-infused leather uppers and quick-drying, breathable SuperFabric quarter panels and gussets. Hexguard rubber rande shrug off abrasion, and Gore-Tex liners provide breathable waterproofing. Vibram MONT outsoles deliver traction, support and reliability, especially when packing loads or navigating unforgiving terrain. LaCrosse will put them against the most stable, elite, lace-up leather boots out there. Gunmetal/orange or brown/gold. \$300; lacrossefootwear.com



LaCrosse Boots | Tess Housley



Swarovski's new **ATC/STC** compact spotting scope is a backpack hunter's best friend with an overall weight of only 35 ounces and a total length of less than 12 inches. Available in both angled and straight configurations, both of which feature 17-40X magnification and a 56mm objective. Swarovski's renowned Swarovision technology lies at its core, producing crystal clear images and vibrant colors from dusk till dawn. Offered in either green or orange. **\$2,721; swarovskioptik.com**



The **Connect** pack from Badlands features all the storage you need for a day on the stand. The easy-access lid flips into a gear shelf when hunting from an elevated position. For added storage beyond the 1,700 cubic inches, the pack features Badlands SWAP System which allows you to easily attach external accessory pockets. The three-layer KXO-50 fabric is quiet and has a waterproof barrier. An ultraquiet liner can be found throughout the pack to keep noise down while afield. **\$270; badlands.com**



The **Protac 2.0** boasts an astonishing 2,000 lumens when running on high—with maximum beam distance of 241 meters. It runs off one Streamlight SL-B50 Li Ion battery that is USB rechargeable. The Ten-Tap power switch allows the user to choose between different settings, which includes a low-beam option that will greatly increase the run time. When operated on high, the battery will last for 2.25 hours of constant use; on low, it can operate for 25 uninterrupted hours. **\$120; streamlight.com**



The **1745BOW Air** case from Pelican leaves little to be desired when protection of your archery equipment is of the utmost importance. The case itself is crushproof, dustproof, watertight and features six heavy-duty locks. Internally, the case is fitted with arrow grippers for a dozen arrows, arrow-tube straps, two accessory pouches, a MOLLE strap system and a padded divider to keep your bow separated from the rest of your equipment. **\$480; pelican.com**

Ultralight Accuracy

Kimber's Caza-edition Mountain Ascent drops the pounds.



I can't put a finger on exactly when the lightweight hunting rifle craze began, but I know it was during the 1980s and 90s when folks really began putting a priority on cutting weight. With the lightest versions of factory bolt-actions still tipping the scales at close to seven pounds, a number of custom gunmakers took over. Synthetic stocks, skeletonized actions and pencil-thin barrels helped a few niche makers meet the weight goals their customers required. It didn't take long for factory rifles to join the fray and Kimber was one of the first to really do it well with

the Montana series of synthetic-stocked ultralight rifles. These rifles were as light as any custom gun and available at a fraction of the price. With the new sub-five-pound Mountain Ascent Caza, Kimber carries that tradition one step further.

SLIMMING DOWN

The Mountain Ascent Caza is an ultralight sporter designed for big-game hunting in the roughest terrain. It is currently available in 6.5 Creedmoor, .308 Winchester, .270 Winchester, .30-06 Springfield and .300 Winchester Magnum. Our test rifle

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Huron



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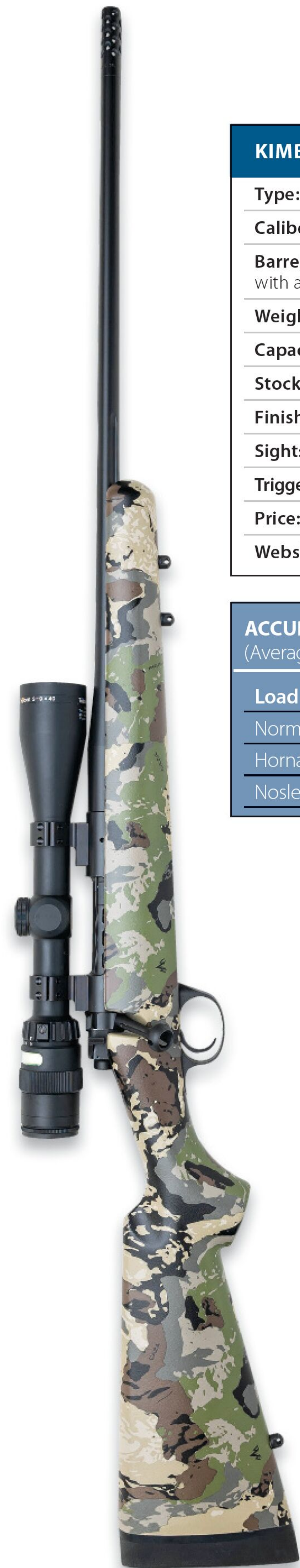
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ACOG



KIMBER MOUNTAIN ASCENT CAZA

Type:	Bolt-action repeater
Caliber:	6.5 Creedmoor (tested)
Barrel:	22-inches, threaded 7/16-28 with a removable brake
Weight:	4.8 pounds
Capacity:	4+1
Stock:	Pillar-bedded composite
Finish:	Black nitride/Cerakote
Sights:	None, drilled and tapped for scope mounts
Trigger:	4.1-pound single-stage
Price:	\$2,370
Website:	kimberamerica.com

ACCURACY TEST

(Average of three 3-shot groups at 100 yards)

Load	Velocity (fps)	Accuracy (in.)
Norma Whitetail 140gr. SP	2,631	0.8
Hornady Match 140gr. ELD-M	2,675	1.4
Nosler Trophy Grade 142gr. ABLR	2,592	0.9

came chambered in the 6.5 Creedmoor cartridge. In that chambering, the rifle weighs in at 4 pounds, 14 ounces, which makes it extremely comfortable to carry over long distances when compared to heavier guns.

Though the core Mountain Ascent rifle is nothing new, there are some features on the new Caza and Skyfall versions that make them very attractive. The Mountain Ascent starts with the company's 84M action, which is machined from stainless steel and includes a two-lug bolt. The slender but sturdy receiver uses a full-length Mauser-style extractor. This feature is a real aid to reliability, an often-overlooked virtue on a hunting rifle. By my definition, it is not a true controlled-round-feed action since the extractor does not snap over the cartridge rim until the round is chambered. Nonetheless, it provides plenty of extraction power.

The bolt itself is a great example of the lengths that Kimber went to in order to





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— B. of Maryland



Rating of A+

GUNS & LOADS

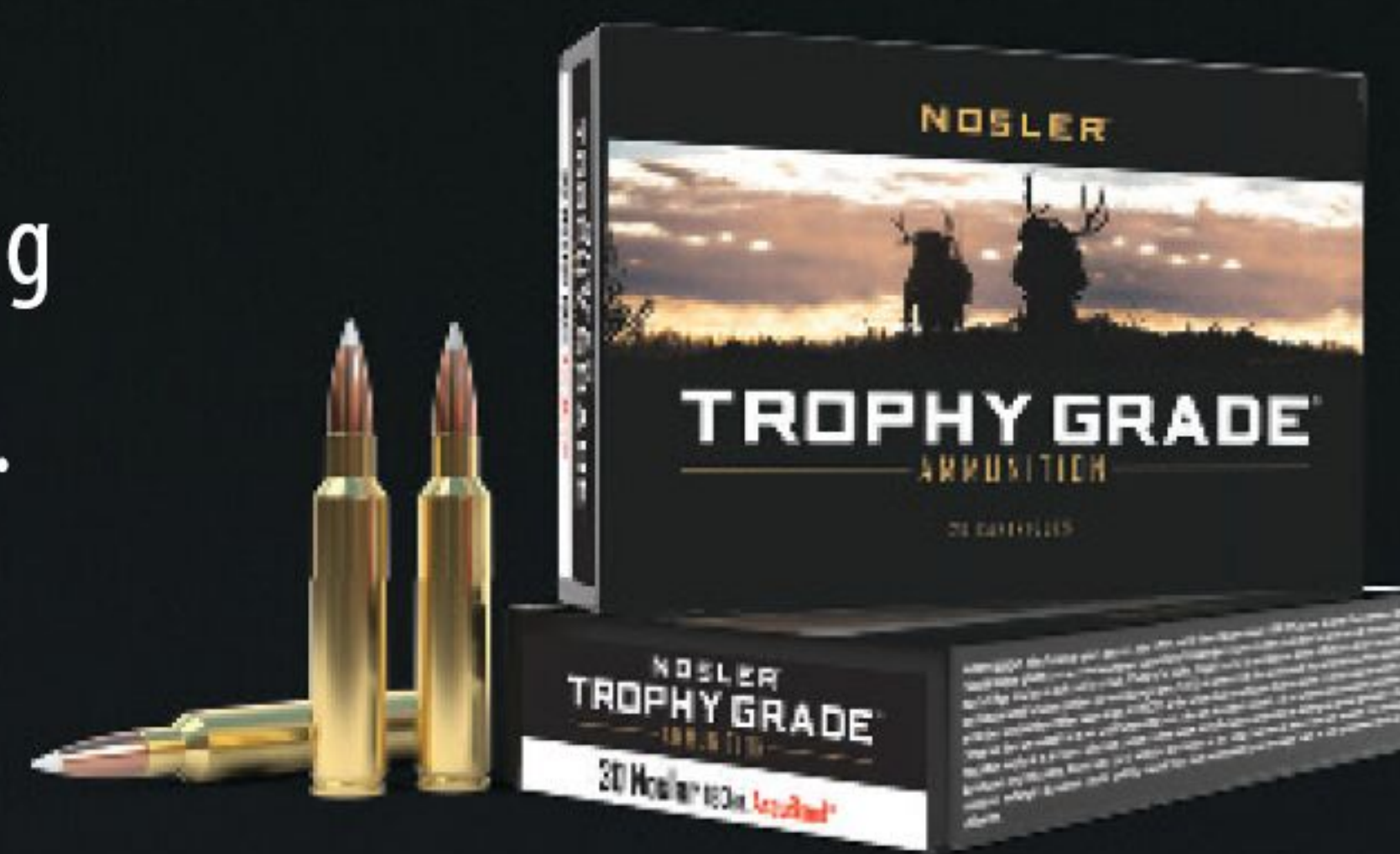
minimize the Mountain Ascent Caza's weight. The bolt body is spiral-fluted and three longitudinal grooves are cut away from the extractor. The bolt handle is fluted and the bolt knob is hollow. Though seemingly trivial, over the entirety of the rifle these grams turn into ounces shaved off the weight.

The controls on the Mountain Ascent Caza and the broader 84M family are borrowed from some of the most legendary hunting rifles in history. The Model 70-style three-position safety is easy to manipulate and, at the middle position, allows the action to be cycled with the safety engaged. Since the Mountain Ascent Caza uses a four-round blind magazine, the ability to run loaded cartridges safely in and out of the chamber is a necessary step of unloading the rifle. The single-stage trigger broke at just over four pounds with no discernible creep. Though a lighter trigger would have made bench testing easier, this one is just right for most hunting applications. The trigger can be adjusted via a pair of screws, but I left this one alone.

The stainless-steel barrel on the Mountain Ascent Caza is a very thin contour and is also fluted. At 22 inches in length, it strikes a good balance between maintaining portability and maximizing muzzle velocity. This button-rifled barrel is rifled with four grooves at a twist rate of 1:8—ideal for the Creedmoor chambering. The barrel is threaded 7/16-28 at the muzzle and equipped with a multi-port muzzle brake. This device cuts recoil, of course, and is a must-have in the rifle's most powerful chamberings including the .300 Winchester Magnum. Though some users might opt to mount a suppressor to this rifle, note that 7/16-28 is not a common thread pattern among suppressor manufacturers. Though an adapter could be used, I personally wouldn't mount a suppressor to a barrel of this contour and length.

The stock on the Mountain Ascent Caza is a high-quality synthetic. Kimber describes it as a "reinforced composite" and it is lightweight but very rigid. The shape of the stock is traditional American sporter with a drop at comb of 0.43 inch and a drop at heel of 0.54 inch, making it ideal for scope use. The entire stock, with the sling swivel studs, recoil

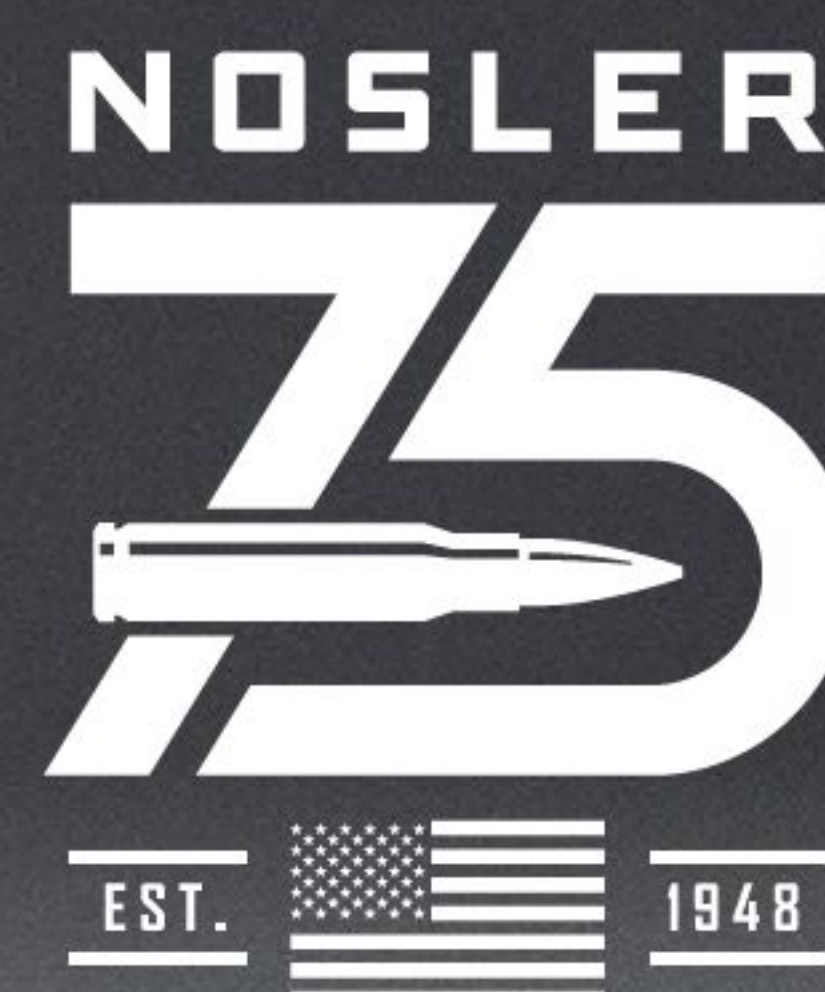
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pad and aluminum trigger guard installed weighs just 1 pound, 9.6 ounces. Aluminum pillars provide a steady mounting surface for the action—ours came with guard screws torqued so tightly it would have no doubt crushed a stock without them. Three sling swivels, two at the forend and one at the toe, are securely mounted to the stock. The double studs at the forend allow for the simple mounting of a bipod without disrupting the sling. Since a bipod can put a great deal of force on a sling stud, it was nice to see the secure way in which Kimber installed these to the stock.

The Caza element of the rifle's name comes from the Pnuma Outdoors camo pattern used on the stock. This swirling tan, brown, black and green pattern is effective and attractive camouflage. A Mountain Ascent Skyfall version, the stock of which is wrapped in Kryptek's pattern of the same name, is also available.

All of the exposed metal components are finished in a satin black KimPro II finish. This finish provides lubricity as well as corrosion protection and helps camouflage the otherwise bright stainless-steel parts underneath. The combination of the black metal finish with the Caza camo stock is an attractive and subdued package unlikely to spook game.

ON THE RANGE

The Mountain Ascent Caza is drilled and tapped for scope mounting, allowing for the use of heavyweight 8-40 fasteners. Wishing to set up the rifle for practical use afield, I used a set of



Weighing less than six pounds with an optic mounted, Kimber's Mountain Ascent is among the lightest factory rifles available, and at a good price to boot.

Talley Ultralight aluminum mounts to secure a Trijicon 3-9x40mm Accupoint scope as low as possible above the bore. With low mounts, the objective lens just cleared the barrel shank and still allowed enough room for the bolt handle to operate. The entire package was light, handy and balanced well—weighing just 5.87 pounds with the scope and mounts installed.

Kimber guarantees sub-MOA accuracy that it met that standard with two of the three loads we tested. Featherweight rifles can be tricky to shoot from the bench since they are extremely sensitive to any inconsistency in how they are positioned and held. Nonetheless, we were able to shoot several respectable groups with the Mountain Ascent Caza. Recoil was mild thanks to the 6.5 Creedmoor chambering and the muzzle brake. The brake, of course, added plenty of muzzle blast to the mix.

I took the time to survey both the factory and custom ultralightweight rifle offerings and could not find one readily available that is lighter than the Mountain Ascent Caza. Even the much-sought-after and long-discontinued Remington 700 Titanium rifles weighed more than five pounds. A few custom rifles come close in terms of weight but at \$4,200 for a New Ultra Light Arms Model 20, \$5,625 for a Rifles, Inc. Strata and \$3,199 for a Proof Research Elevation, none can match the price point of the Kimber. When compared to those rifles, the \$2,370 sticker price on the Mountain Ascent Caza seems a bit more palatable.

Ultralight rifles are not ideal for every hunting scenario—like anything, there are trade-offs. They can be a challenge to shoot in field positions and the barrel contours heat up quickly. If you are seeking the absolute minimum in terms of mass, though, they are an attractive option.

The factory hunting rifle is as diverse as ever with countless models available for consumer to choose from. For those seeking the ultimate lightweight big-game rifle, the Kimber Mountain Ascent Caza needs to be in the conversation. This rifle is unbelievably light and, despite that, performed well in all of our testing. 



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The Best High-Country Cartridges

Looking for a cutting-edge mountain cartridge?
Consider these.



The author used a Gunwerks ClymR in 6.5 PRC, loaded with Federal 130-grain Terminal Ascent bullets, to take his Rocky Mountain bighorn from 591 yards.

When you've planned, traveled and endured gut-wrenching effort to get into mountain country and earn a shot opportunity, the last thing you want is for your cartridge (and the bullet it launches) to let you down at the moment of truth.

The ideal cartridge for mountain hunting must fit in lightweight rifles, so your shootin' iron doesn't weigh you down. It must also be authoritative, so you can cleanly kill your quarry.

Those two features are often at odds with one another—powerful cartridges recoil a lot, particularly in ultralight rifles. Every hunter must find a balance—a cartridge that imparts as much terminal performance as possible without recoiling too much for accurate shooting.

Additionally, a cartridge for hunting mountain country must have reach. Whether hunting alpine-country mule deer in Colorado, or chamois and tahr in New Zealand, or the altitudes that get real gnarly—up to 17,000 feet or so for Asian wild sheep—the shots will often be far. Your favorite .308 simply won't cut the mustard. You need a cartridge that shoots streamlined, aerodynamic projectiles fast.

How aerodynamic, and how fast? Look for a G1 ballistic coefficient (BC) close to 0.600 (and higher is better), and a muzzle velocity approaching 3,000 fps or more.

Accuracy is another essential characteristic of high-country cartridges. Historically, most cartridges could produce good accuracy, assuming a custom rifle with a premium barrel and tuned handloads. However, with today's recent crop of designed-for-accuracy cartridges and modern, match-grade

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factory ammunition, you can buy off-the-shelf rifles and cartridges ideal for high-country hunting.

There's one more characteristic that's helpful in the West where encounters with grizzly bears are probable. For hunters that handle recoil well, it behooves you to pack a rifle chambered in a cartridge capable of civilizing a bear with impolite intentions.

There are dozens of capable, appropriate cartridges for mountain hunting, but the best are mostly recent inventions. They're optimized for the low-drag modern bullets that make such a difference downrange.

Here, in no particular order, are seven top picks.

6.5 PRC

Introduced in 2018, this cartridge is the most popular low-recoil, high-performance hunting cartridge on the market. Typical hunting bullets range from 127 to 143 grains in weight, and exit the muzzle from about 2,850 to 3,050 fps. It's ideal for deer-size game and can stretch up to elk if a tough, deep-penetrating bullet is used. It's easy to find good projectiles with that magic BC of 0.600 or more, so it excels at hitting targets at long range—but doesn't hit them nearly as hard as the bigger-bore cartridges that push heavier bullets.



Deep in Montana's big mountain country, von Benedikt used a prototype 4-pound, 15-ounce Weatherby Mark V Backcountry Ti chambered in 6.5 Wby. RPM to shoot this color-phase black bear.

6.5 RPM

Introduced by Weatherby in 2020, this is the pinnacle of 6.5mm mountain cartridges. It's a .30-06-length round that fits into Weatherby's super-slim six-lug Mark V action, and provides the proper magnum performance necessary to go the distance in big, mountainous terrain. Bullets range from 127 to 140 grains, and exit the muzzle at blistering speeds from 2,975 to 3,225 fps. It's terrific for high-country mule deer and wild sheep, and can stretch to elk with good bullet choice. Like all 6.5s, projectiles don't have the frontal diameter and weight to snowplow elk-size animals, so it's best used inside 400 yards on such game.

6.8 WESTERN

Introduced in 2021, this short magnum cartridge brought new life to the grand old .277 bore by using fast rifling. Thanks to that, the "Six-Eight" capably shoots 160- to 175-grain, heavy-for-caliber bullets that have high ballistic coefficients. Muzzle velocity ranges from about 2,835 to 2,970 fps. It's a better choice for elk-size game than any 6.5mm cartridge thanks to larger frontal diameter and greater bullet weight. It's being well supported by Winchester and Browning, and we anticipate other ammo companies will soon produce factory 6.8 Western loads.



This big velvet mule deer fell to a very long shot from the author's .280 Ackley Improved—a cartridge that's also accounted for his longest shot on elk.

.280 ACKLEY IMPROVED

This is the oldest round on my high-country cartridge roster. Designed by the legendary P.O. Ackley more than a half-century ago, it was so far ahead of its time that it's very competitive with modern cartridges. It shoots 7mm projectiles nearly as fast as the 7mm Rem. Mag., but uses less powder and recoils less. Plus, rifles hold 4 or 5 rounds in the magazine. Pick one with a fast, 1:8 to 1:8.5 rifling twist rate so it will stabilize cutting-edge long-range hunting bullets, and it'll provide spectacular performance out as far as you want to shoot at game.

7MM PRC

Introduced late in 2022, this is our newest high-country cartridge. It made a profound impression on savvy riflemen. Demand for rifles and ammo blew up like wildfire. It's efficient, inherently accurate and optimized for long-range 7mm

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Jenna von Benedikt and two daughters (ages 10 and 14) shot Idaho black bears with the 7mm PRC last spring. Many savvy shooters believe it is the most capable long-range hunting cartridge available.

bullets. Modern 175- to 180-grain super-bullets exit the muzzle at 2,950 to 3,000 fps. There's nothing wrong with your classic 7mm Rem. Mag., but you'll have to have a custom rifle with a fast-twist barrel, a lengthened magazine and tuned, hot-rodded handloads to even just match factory 7mm PRC ammo. Barrel life of the 7mm PRC is excellent—debatably 3 or 4 times that of the 28 Nosler.



This nice reedbuck fell to a Hornady 212-grain ELD-X bullet, fired from the author's GA Precision rifle while hunting in the Stormberg mountains of South Africa.

.300 PRC

Introduced in 2018, this is the holy grail cartridge for us .30-caliber guys. It features a balanced set of characteristics unmatched by any other big .30: efficiency, authority, inherent accuracy and long-range capability. Optimized for the best long-range .30-caliber projectiles, it provides unparalleled wallop at extended distances. Modern 200- to 225-grain bullets exit the muzzle at 2,810 to 3,000 fps. Barrel life is good and behavior is civilized; it's not a fire-breathing dragon of a cartridge that's hard to tune for accuracy. If moose and other game bigger than elk are regularly on your menu, this is the cartridge for you.



GREAT BACKCOUNTRY BULLETS

Picking just the right bullet for a high-country hunt can be confusing. Small-bodied Coues deer call for soft, rapid-expansion types. Big bull elk, moose and mountain grizzlies require heavy-for-caliber, controlled-expansion bullets. Most deer, wild sheep, caribou and the like fall somewhere in between.

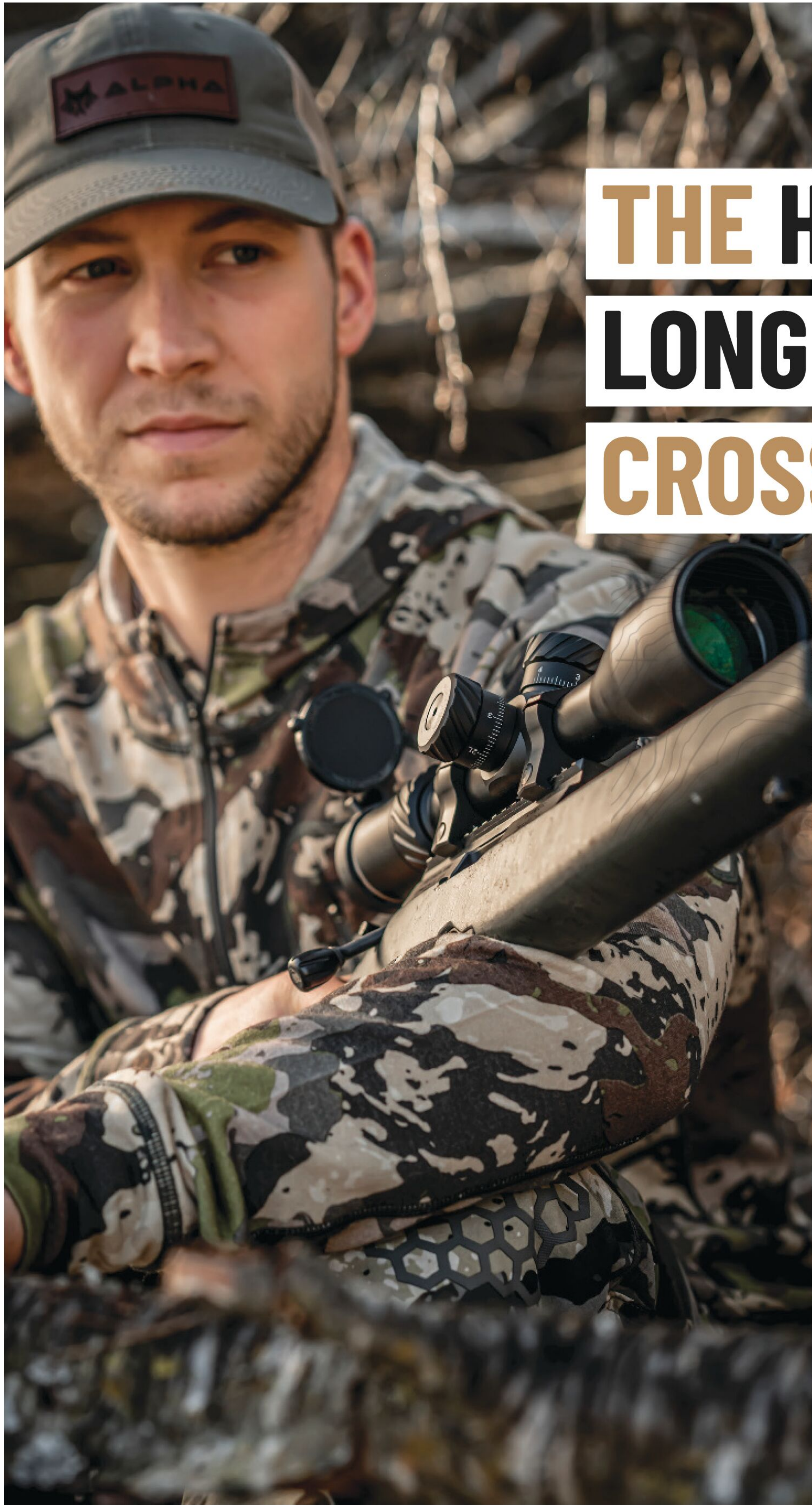
For best terminal performance on small deer and pronghorns, I like a composite-tipped, boat-tailed bullet designed for accuracy. Hornady's ELD-X, Nosler's Ballistic Tip and Sierra's Tipped GameKing are prime. Berger's target-type hunting bullets are also excellent.

For medium game, I generally opt for a bonded-core bullet such as a Nosler AccuBond, Swift Scirocco II or Hornady InterBond. For work on the big-bodied stuff, I like monometal bullets and heavy bonded-core bullets such as Barnes's LRX, Hornady's CX and Federal's Terminal Ascent.

Pick several that fit your terminal performance needs and test them all through your rifle. Let it tell you what it wants to shoot.

.338 RPM

Introduced in 2022, this is the second-newest cartridge on the list. It has a place on this list of favorites because it fits into svelte mountain rifles, has 600-yard reach, has authority enough to argue with grizzlies and doesn't kick the stuffing out of me. Thanks to a rebated-rim design, the .338 RPM fits into Weatherby's small-diameter six-lug Mark V action. Appropriate bullets range from 185 to 250 grains and exit the muzzle from 2,700 to 3,100 fps. My Backcountry 2.0 Carbon rifle weighs 5 pounds, 14 ounces, has a handy 20-inch barrel and shoots everything I put into it into sub-MOA groups. ⓘ



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Expert tips for booking your next trip.



New Zealand guide/outfitter Chris Bilkey with Caroline and Craig Boddington and Caroline's fine red stag.

I get it, a lot of good hunters are anti-guide and take pride in doing it themselves. It's admirable, honorable and there's nothing more satisfying than making a plan and executing it all by yourself. Problem is, there are lots of places you just can't go on your own, and great game animals you can't hunt without a properly licensed local guide—western Canada and much Alaskan game included. There are very few areas left in Africa where DIY is legal, let alone practical.

Not interested in those places? Fine, but let's also accept that, sooner or later, many of us are fortunate to reach an age where stubbornly doing things the hard way (that we consider the right way) isn't quite as practical anymore. Some of us hire guides not because they possess hunting skills we lack, and not because it's a legal requirement, but because a guided hunt simplifies logistics. There is also the consideration of availability of equipment and facilities we may not possess, or simply cannot beam into a distant hunting location.

This last is what an outfitter brings to the table, along with access to a hunting area that, provided we do our homework, holds the game we seek. In small companies, outfitter and guide may be the same person, but in most situations (and all larger operations) are not. The outfitter is running the show, managing logistics, directing operations. The outfitters hire the guides. The guides accompany the hunters (you and me), so in large measure it's the guide who assumes primary responsibility for your satisfaction and who spends most of the season with boots on the ground in the hunting area. The guide thus brings local knowledge and experience with the game you are seeking.

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Ours is not a perfect world. There are dishonest and ineffective outfitters, and there are inexperienced, lazy and incompetent

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Great B.C. guide/outfitter Ron Fleming is flanked by Brittany Boddington and Conrad Evarts on top of a tough goat mountain.



Dave Leonard, Alaskan Master Guide and owner of Mountain Monarchs of Alaska, in sheep camp in Alaska's Brooks Range.

guides. Looking into the store window, it's our job to weed them out. We do this not by listening to sales pitches or by believing everything we hear and read, but by doing careful and objective research, obtaining current references and doing the painstaking work of contacting them (preferably by phone).

You can assume that most of the names on an outfitter's reference list were successful, right? Hunting is hunting, no guarantees. When you find a reference who didn't get his/her game, but was still happy with the hunt you've probably found an honest outfitter. Ask harder questions: What year, what month? How many other hunters were in camp? How did they do? Camp conditions and food? Weather issues, at what time of year? Anything you didn't like?

The late Jack Atcheson Sr., a Butte, Montana booking agent, arranged some of my earliest hunts and remained a great friend and mentor. Jack believed the three most important things in planning a hunt were area, area and area. The most disorganized outfitters and unfamiliar guides can look pretty good in great areas, while even the best of the best struggle when the game sought is scarce. Followed also by Jack's fourth caveat: The guide who accompanies you. Because your guide is the person who orchestrates your hunt.

Today, with so many Internet resources, good areas aren't difficult to ferret out. Start with the record books, always the best references for where the big stuff is coming from. Things change, so look for recent entries and trends. This data will also suggest good outfitters for various species in certain areas. Top guides are harder to identify. They may switch outfitters. Also, outfitters do much of the marketing and selling, so are best served by taking credit, rather than passing it along to the guide who made it happen. So, when talking to references, always ask: Who was your guide? Did you meet any of the other guides? Recommendations on guides I should ask for?

Word of mouth is some of the best advertising in almost any business. However, in hunting, it's essential to evaluate both the words and the mouths they came from. In Africa, it's unavoidable for first-time hunters to develop hero worship for their PH, extolling him as the Second Coming of Frederick Selous. Everybody does it. I did it. My first, the late Willem van



Conrad Evarts and the author with a fine Arizona desert bighorn on just one of many mountains they've climbed together.

Dyk, withstood the test of time, but it was many years and several safaris before I could properly appreciate how good he really was. This applies worldwide: When getting a recommendation, try to factor in the experience level of the person you're getting it from. A first-time elk hunter who got a nice bull and was wildly ecstatic might have found the West's best outfitter, but has little basis for comparison. Apply healthy doses of salt and ask hard questions.

When talking to an outfitter, make sure you know what you want. Sure, we all want our game, but under what conditions? Spike camp, wall tent, cabin, five-star lodge? What is the typical hunting day like? What techniques will be employed? You okay with horses? Don't like stand hunting? (Please don't book

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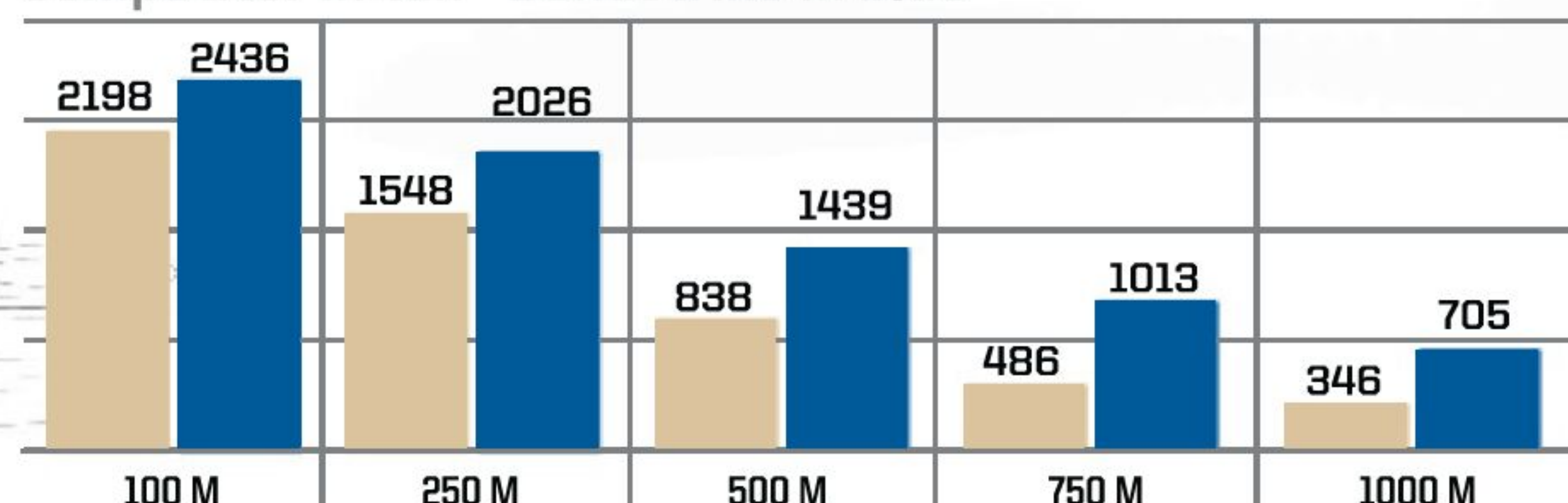


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Conrad Evarts and Boddington, in their CBEO booth at a Safari Club convention.

a whitetail hunt with me.) Be honest with yourself and prospective outfitters. Be honest about your preferences and physical abilities. Some friends just asked me to join them on an ibex hunt in Kazakhstan. Good price, place I've never been, tempting, except the hunt is in 2025. I could do it today, but I can't predict what the hips and knees will be like in two more years. With regrets, I passed.

EXPECTING THE UNEXPECTED

So, you did the best research you could, made your decision, plunked down your cash. Gulp. Condition is relative and mostly mental, but have you checked with your doctor? Have you put in honest effort, got in the best shape you could for your age and overall health, all based on expected conditions? Got an equipment list, followed it? Spent a lot of time on the range, practicing not just at expected ranges, but also from anticipated field positions? Good.

Now you're in it, just arriving in camp. Too late for more preparation. The single best advice I can offer: Listen to your guide. He or she knows the area and its wildlife better than you do, and you are paying for that experience. Use it. Some hunting decisions will pay off, some won't. No guide likes to be told how to hunt their game in their area. It's okay to voice opinion, just couch it gently. As in, "Have you thought about...?" Or, "I wonder if we might try...?"

The most important dynamic is that you and your guide (and others present—wranglers, packers, trackers, cook) need to form a team as quickly as possible, with a common goal: Your success and satisfaction (not the same thing). Be respectful, pay attention and keep your counsel. Pride goeth before a fall, so no matter your experience level, do not say something stupid like: "You show him to me, and I can hit him."

It's often not required for you to lift a finger. Remember basic team building and pitch in as you can. Don't take chances, and don't do anything beyond your expertise or abilities. Not handy with an axe? Don't chop firewood. Take a turn doing



ENDORSED OUTFITTERS

ENDORSED OUTFITTERS

Professional booking agents are great sources. Some of the good ones are lifelong friends and remain valuable resources: Jack Atcheson Jr. and his brother Keith, Bob Kern, Tommy Morrison, Bev Wunderlich. I have even more old friends on the outfitting and guiding side. At conventions and in correspondence, I spend a lot of time recommending potential clients to my friends. It's often been suggested that I should be in the booking business.

Truth is, I once was, a long time ago. I learned two things: First, I'm a rotten salesman. Second, I took it too personal. I agonized over that level of responsibility for other hunters' dreams. Still, I know a lot of great outfitters who I trust, and I was spending inordinate time steering business their way.

My old friend Conrad Evarts and I came up with Craig Boddington Endorsed Outfitters (CBEO) at the dinner table in a Kansas deer camp. We are not a booking agency: no commissions. Rather, we're a membership, dues paid by our members with shared links on our websites. The business side is ably managed by Conrad, who I trust with my life. We don't pretend to know everyone. There are many great outfitters all over the world we don't know and haven't hunted with. Our outfitters are folks we have hunted with, that we trust, and who I'm comfortable sending my friends to.

We limit geographic saturation, so we've had to say no to great folks. We never intend to be huge, because by agreement we will cap at 100 members, if we ever get there. That takes time, because growth requires vetting and visiting. An unintended result: All our outfitters started as friends, but have become an extended family, working together with each other, sharing knowledge, resources, even customers. We don't have all the options, but we've got good ones, on the Outfitter pages at craigboddington.com.

dishes instead. In small camps, the guide must do most everything. Anything you can do to help will be appreciated. And just may give your guide extra moments to ponder the next hunting move and make a better decision.

Almost no hunts are perfect. Most have ups and downs, highs and lows. Equipment fails, weather turns fickle, stalks fail, shots are missed. (Oh, yes, that can happen.) Never judge a hunt on a given day, only in total. Roll with the punches and keep trying, it ain't over until it's over. Oh, and one more thing: Above all, and even on the worst day, remember to have fun. That's what you're really there for. 🍷



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Doe Or Don't?

Should you fill that antlerless tag, or wait for a buck?

We hear a lot about conservative bow-hunting tactics for big deer. Today's expert advice is to stay completely undetected until the time, dictated by trail cameras, is right to strike on a buck. While you wait, you wouldn't dream of shooting a doe and stomping through a bedding area to find her. Would you?

It's true that getting a shot at a big deer is easier when he doesn't know he's being hunted. But when paranoia over spooking a "target buck" means going years without killing a deer at

all, the strategy can be counter-productive. I've known hunters who are good at getting close to big deer, but not at killing them. Some calamity always seems to arise at the moment of truth. The shot angle isn't right, or they get busted while drawing, or the buck jumps the string.

You know that guy, right? But you probably know the other guy, too. The bowhunter who isn't afraid to blow up a food plot full of deer by shooting a doe on the edge of it an hour before dark, or to "spoil" a frosty November morning by double-lunging the first doe that trots into range. Perhaps the next world-record whitetail was five minutes behind her. He'll never know.



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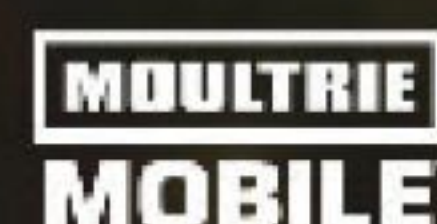


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It may be politically incorrect to call that latter hunter a killer, but it's sure easier. Maybe the doe killer spooks some big bucks with all that doe shooting—but I'd lay odds he puts as many inches of antler on the ground over the long haul as the conservative hunter does. And he has a hell of a lot more fun and gets to eat way more fried backstrap along the way.

START THE SEASON RIGHT

When you're hunting a big buck, there are obviously times when you should pass on does. Personally, I like to limit my doe shooting to pinch points and staging areas, where I'm hunting traffic going to or from a food source or bedding area. I don't (usually) shoot does during the pre-rut, since they're the best bait you can have around come November.

But antlerless deer get no quarter from me in the early season, and here's why. Being an effective deer hunter takes conditioning. I'm always a little rusty during my first sits of a new season. I might put my bow hanger too low in the tree, or forget to tether the sections of my climbing stand together. But the bigger problem is the summer's worth of jitters that've been saved up for the first legal whitetail of the year. That dump of adrenaline when I decide to shoot a deer is severe enough to cause me to make mistakes—I'm not too proud to admit that. But it's not as severe on a doe as it is on a big buck, and by the time I've arrowed a couple does, I'm back into peak form.

In addition to that mental game, actually shooting deer, instead of just watching them, allows a bowhunter to hone mechanics that can't be perfected on the target range, including ...

KNOWING WHEN TO DRAW, HOLD AND LOWER

The crux of bowhunting is drawing when the animal is at close range. Whitetails are sharp-eyed and wary, and shooting does will teach you when you can get away with moving and when you'd better sit still. Yet, the best time to draw might not be the same for you as it is for me, and that's why you can't just rely on the advice from others to learn the skill. Some hunters prefer to draw when the animal is obscured and then hold until the shot presents itself.

I hate getting stuck at full draw, though. For me, fatigue sets in with my bow arm before my release arm. If a shot I'm expecting doesn't pan out, I almost always lower the string and start fresh. When hunting over food sources, where deer are calm but moving, I frequently draw and lower my bow multiple times while waiting for the perfect angle.

Of course, lowering the bow requires just as much movement as drawing it. You won't get good at timing those motions around live animals without practice. Those "killers" I referenced earlier have learned to be decisive in their movements during the moment of truth.

AIMING AT ANGLES

We all hope for a 20-yard broadside shot, but live critters have a way of disappointing us. Several years ago, while hunting as a guest for an outdoor television show, I waited for just the right angle on a nice Texas 10-pointer. My videographer and I were seated in a ground blind 20 yards away, and I drew when the buck gave me a gently quartering-away angle. But he took another step away just as I rested my finger on my release-aid trigger, and the quartering angle went from gentle to severe. I

For learning the mechanics of when to draw and picking shot angles, there's no substitute for shooting numbers of deer.



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The author shows off a ham from an early season doe, fattened on clover and acorns.



The spoils of an early season hunt.

made a quick adjustment to put my pin at the front of the buck's hip and let fly. On camera, the shot looked too far back, but I knew the angle was good. The arrow zipped through the base of the buck's neck and stuck in a mesquite tree. He was dead in 50 yards. Had I held just behind the shoulder crease, I'd have superficially wounded that buck.

I'd guess that misjudgment of shot angles is to blame for most wounded-and-lost deer hit by bowhunters because we're taught over and over again to aim "behind the shoulder." That's a good spot on a broadside deer, but a four-legged animal has to be standing a pretty particular way to actually be perfectly broadside. Most shots are more angled than you think, and experience shooting numbers of deer will teach you to consider the angle before the aiming point.

Ask yourself, where do you want the broadhead to exit? Then pick a spot accordingly. Seeing various hits from various shot angles verified by blood trails will teach you which shots are safe for you to take, and which ones you should pass.

WHEN TO SAY "MEH"

A soft bleat works wonders for stopping a moving whitetail, but many hunters are loath to do it out of fear they'll spook the deer or give themselves away. I bleat to stop at least half of the deer that I shoot with a bow, and it usually provides a great shot opportunity. I make a high-pitched, nasally fawn sound,

when I'm drawn, anchored, looking through my peep sight and need the deer to stop.

I don't like to bleat at deer that are beyond 30 yards, though. I want the rare shots I take at those distances to be at oblivious animals. There's no reason to give yourself away to a deer that's feeding casually along, either. Let it happen naturally. And bleating at a deer that's already alert will usually finish the job of spooking it thoroughly.

All of these assessments—drawing, lowering, angles, bleating—must be made in seconds, when adrenaline is raging, and you're trying to focus on shot mechanics, too. When you haven't practiced them on a live deer in three years, and the buck of a lifetime is standing at 18 yards, odds are good some calamity will arise. ⓘ



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PLANNING YOUR WESTERN BIG-GAME ADVENTURE

JACE BAUSERMAN

OUR TOP TIPS FOR HUNTERS WHO DREAM OF HUNTING THE WEST.

THE WEST is rich in hunting lore, and if you desire adventure in awe-inspiring terrain teeming with game animals you've only dreamed of, it's time to plan your Western rendezvous. I'm here to help.

For more than 20 years, the Rocky Mountains, the sage-dappled plains and the cedar-studded canyons of the West have been my playground. I've planned and executed more do-it-yourself missions than I can count, have pulled a few dream tags and have had incredible success hunting under-the-radar units that require only a point or two to draw.

Here's how you can do the same.

L

LADIES FIRST

Many of my first Western hunts were for female critters, and this is a tip I feel few are willing to put out there. Rifle tags for cow elk, doe deer and doe pronghorn are easier to come by, and if you want to experience the West and get a handle on planning and executing a hunt, this is an excellent go-to route.

There is no better way to learn a hunting area inside and out than actually hunting it, and when I know a limited, draw-only bull or buck tag will come my way in a few years, I pull an easier-to-get tag and learn the locale, and how game animals use it.

Even if you can't get a tag for a female elk, deer or pronghorn in the exact unit you want to hunt bucks or bulls in, going West with any doe or cow tag in your pocket is an excellent way to build experience and gain hunting confidence.

KNOWLEDGE FOR NEWBIES

The West is vast and intimidating, and I recommend a pronghorn mission for the first-time hunter looking to punch a buck tag. I know elk and mule deer are likely higher on the list of dream animals, but planning an off-the-beaten-path hunt for elk and mule deer is more complex than planning a pronghorn hunt, and nothing will build your confidence like finding speed goats in open terrain and having a successful hunt.

In most locales of the West, success rates for pronghorn hover around 75% in rifle units. And while almost every state with pronghorn requires the hunter to enter into a draw process, plenty of units out there don't require years of waiting.

I also encourage would-be pronghorn hunters to look at muzzleloader and archery seasons. Over 50% of Colorado's big-game units are available over the counter (OTC) for archery hunters. I have killed 22 speed goats while bowhunting in OTC archery units during my hunting tenure. I also talk with several hunters each year that draw a muzzleloader tag on their first or second year of applying.

Pronghorn inhabit open spaces where they can use their eyes and legs to escape danger, and most states harboring pronghorn are loaded with open-to-anyone dirt. Colorado,





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Wyoming and Montana are three of my favorites, but I also enter the drawing for tags in Arizona and Nevada each year.

Being flexible and hunting with archery tackle has allowed me to hunt pronghorn out West yearly while I build points in multiple states for rifle tags.

POWER IN THE PREP

Planning is critical regardless of whether your first Western hunt is for pronghorn, elk or mule deer. As one of my hunting mentors told me at a young age, “You don’t want to go off half-cocked. Do that, and you’ll be miserable and find trouble.”

For me, the hunt starts the second I have secured a tag. In most places, you’ll know your draw fortune by mid-June or before, and if you’re going the OTC route, the mission should have already started.

Study those maps—drop pins for camping areas, access points and glassing locales—and get the best gear you can afford. However, the devil is in the details, and you need to familiarize yourself with each piece of your hunt gear to have a safe, successful and enjoyable hunt.

You need to learn your backpack inside and out. You need to load the pack down with your hunting gear and develop a what-goes-where system that stays the same. You must walk with your pack and train your body to accept what that pack feels like, loaded with weight.



Gear preparation is critical, and it’s a great idea to take regular walks with your backpack loaded down with your complete Western system.

T

TOP 6 OTC TAGS FOR WESTERN HUNTERS

COLORADO SECOND & THIRD SEASON RIFLE ELK

Colorado, with around 280,000 animals, has the world’s largest elk herd. The state also allows rifle hunters to chase bulls in several OTC units the state’s second and third rifle seasons. Most OTC units get hit hard, and success rates are low, but those willing to get off the beaten path and leave it all on the mountain can find success.

COLORADO ARCHERY PRONGHORN

The Centennial State is a DIY OTC gem, and if you want to learn the ins and outs of a Western big-game sojourn, head to Colorado in August and slither across the eastern plains after a speed goat.

UTAH GENERAL DEER & ELK

I have been applying for deer and elk in Utah’s limited units for 14 years and have yet to hunt the Beehive State, but I have good buddies that hunt general deer and elk units each year. Be on the ball if you go this route. Utah puts its remaining permits on sale on a specific date (visit the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources for more intel), and in 2022, those tags sold out in just a tick over two hours.

IDAHO BLACK BEAR

Had this been a spring issue of *HUNTING* magazine, I would have recommended Idaho black bear ahead of Colorado pronghorn for the first-time endeavor. It’s that much fun. Don’t dally on getting your tags and baiting permits (many units allow for a second bear tag); you’ll have copious acres of public land and a robust bear population to look forward to.

OREGON BLACKTAIL

Like many states, most Oregon big-game tags come through a draw process, but if you want to hunt the western side of the Cascades, you can chase these forest ghosts in the old-growth ecosystems of the Pacific Northwest without waiting to draw a tag.

ARIZONA OTC MULEYS & COUES DEER

When most other hunts are over in the late season, grab your bow and head to Arizona for muleys and Coues deer. Over-the-counter archery tags are available, and with both species being in prime rut in late December through the first week or two of January, this is a great time to put your optics to work, find a solid OTC buck and run an arrow through him.



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Once you decide on your sleeping system, which should include a tent, sleeping bag, cot/air mattress and pillow, you must know that you can get that system deployed in minutes when Mother Nature gets nasty. Even though I have used the same Alps Tasmanian 2-person tent, Zenith 0° mummy bag and Swift Air Mat for several years, I set it up three or four times a summer in my backyard.

The same goes for my cookware, food, first-aid and kill kit. Do you know your stove will work in freezing snow and howling wind? Have you consumed the foods you plan to take on your hunt to ensure they agree with your gut? Do you have three methods for starting a fire, a way to contact emergency services and a first-aid kit with more than some duct tape and Band-Aids? These questions must be answered, and you need to know your gear and how to use it inside and out.

ACCLIMATE

Each year, hundreds of Western hunts are over before they begin. Last year, I helped two bowhunters from sea-level geographic regions get off the mountain. Both arrived on day one full of piss and vinegar, covered six miles in elevations between 9,000 and 11,000 feet and got altitude sickness. Both had done their preseason due diligence and were in top physical shape. Still, there is no way to prepare for altitude unless you make a preseason scouting trip or arrive a couple of days early and spend time puttin' around camp and taking things slowly to allow your body time to acclimate. I live at 4,400 feet above sea level, and even though I head to the mountains multiple times each summer to scout and fish, I never go ultra-hard on the first day of hunting.



Be ready to handle Mother Nature's worst moods. Lack of preparation can end a hunt quickly.



DREAM HUNT TAGS

There are animals like sheep, moose and mountain goats out West, and it's possible to draw them even as a nonresident. There are also units—many of them—managed for trophy potential for deer, elk and pronghorn. You need to put your name in as many hats as possible each year if you have aspirations of a dream-tag hunt.

Learn each state's drawing system—none are overly complicated—and start building preference points each year while you hunt general units. Of course, states like Arizona have a pure lottery system, and you could draw a mule deer tag in the Kaibab or Unit 7 elk stamp your first year, if you're extremely lucky.

I also recommend putting in for unique lottery tags like Nevada's Dream Tags, which allow you to buy tickets for drawings for premium big-game permits. It's also a great idea to buy a ticket, even if it's just one when visiting one of the many outdoor shows like Utah's famed Western Hunting & Conservation Expo. Two years ago, my buddy entered a drawing for Stone's sheep, and for the cost of a \$125 raffle ticket, won a \$60,000 dream hunt.

Stay calm with the draw process. I'm 43 years old and have been applying in multiple states for dream-hunt tags for more than two decades, and only now am I starting to realize how good of an idea this was. Over the past two years, I've drawn a Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep tag and a premium, limited-draw elk tag. Both hunts were successful and wouldn't have been possible if I hadn't stayed the course.

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Most years, the author hunts OTC units for elk, and when he does, he is after any legal bull.

BE HONEST WITH YOURSELF

I keep in top physical shape for Western hunting, but at age 43, I can't do what I could at age 27. Time catches up with everyone, and you need to have a solid plan for getting the meat of an animal out of the backcountry and into a Yeti.

Too many hunters look past this, and the excitement of downing a bull six miles from the truck starts to dwindle

when you realize that animal must be broken down and hundreds of pounds of meat must be packed off the mountain.

And this isn't only for elk. Spoilage can happen fast when you kill a pronghorn in 95-degree heat and don't have game bags to keep the meat clean or any plan to get the goat cooled quickly.



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Learn how to bone out big-game animals and save the hassle of hauling bone-in meat for miles.

Prepare ahead of time. If you don't know how to bone out game, YouTube is a great place to start. Nothing trumps practice, and I recommend, even if it's on a whitetail you can drive to, bone it out instead, put it in game bags and pack it out on your back. As any coach will tell you, practice leads to success.

It's also an excellent idea if you don't want to haul meat on your back to make plans with a packer ahead of your hunt. A top-end packer is a lifesaver and will bring a string of horses and mules to your location, pack up your meat and get it off the mountain for you.

BE REAL

The question I get asked the most at seminars, and which dings my social media inbox more than any other: "I'm just looking to shoot a 300-inch bull, nothing too big, and would like some tips for a good OTC unit."

If you want to hold out for a 300-inch bull, that's up to you, but please understand how much horn it takes to make up 300 inches and that in 20+ years of hunting the West, I have yet to kill a 300-inch bull in an OTC unit.

When hunting OTC units or those that take only a year or two to draw, regardless of the state I'm hunting, I kill the first legal bull, or buck for that matter, that I see.

Be realistic. When you draw that trophy unit, hold out for whatever you have deemed a trophy, but when hunting general units, arrive with the attitude that you're going to have an excellent hunt, and, hopefully, kill a legal animal in the process. 

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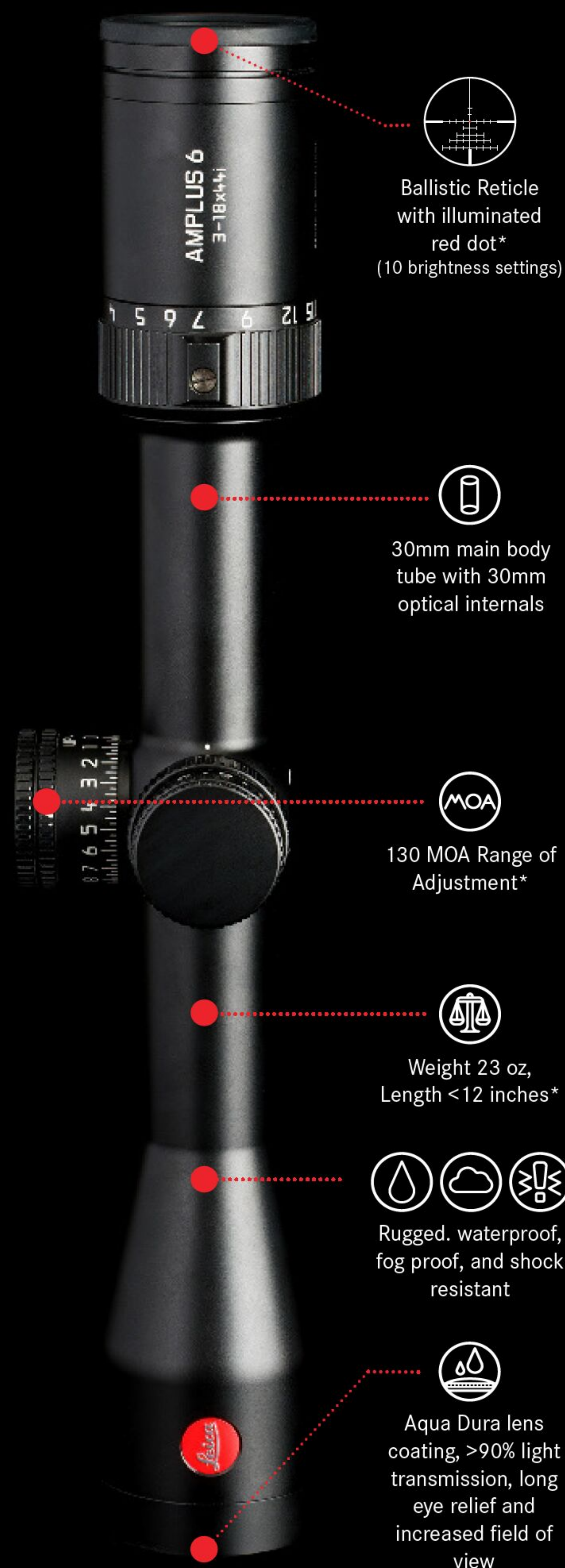
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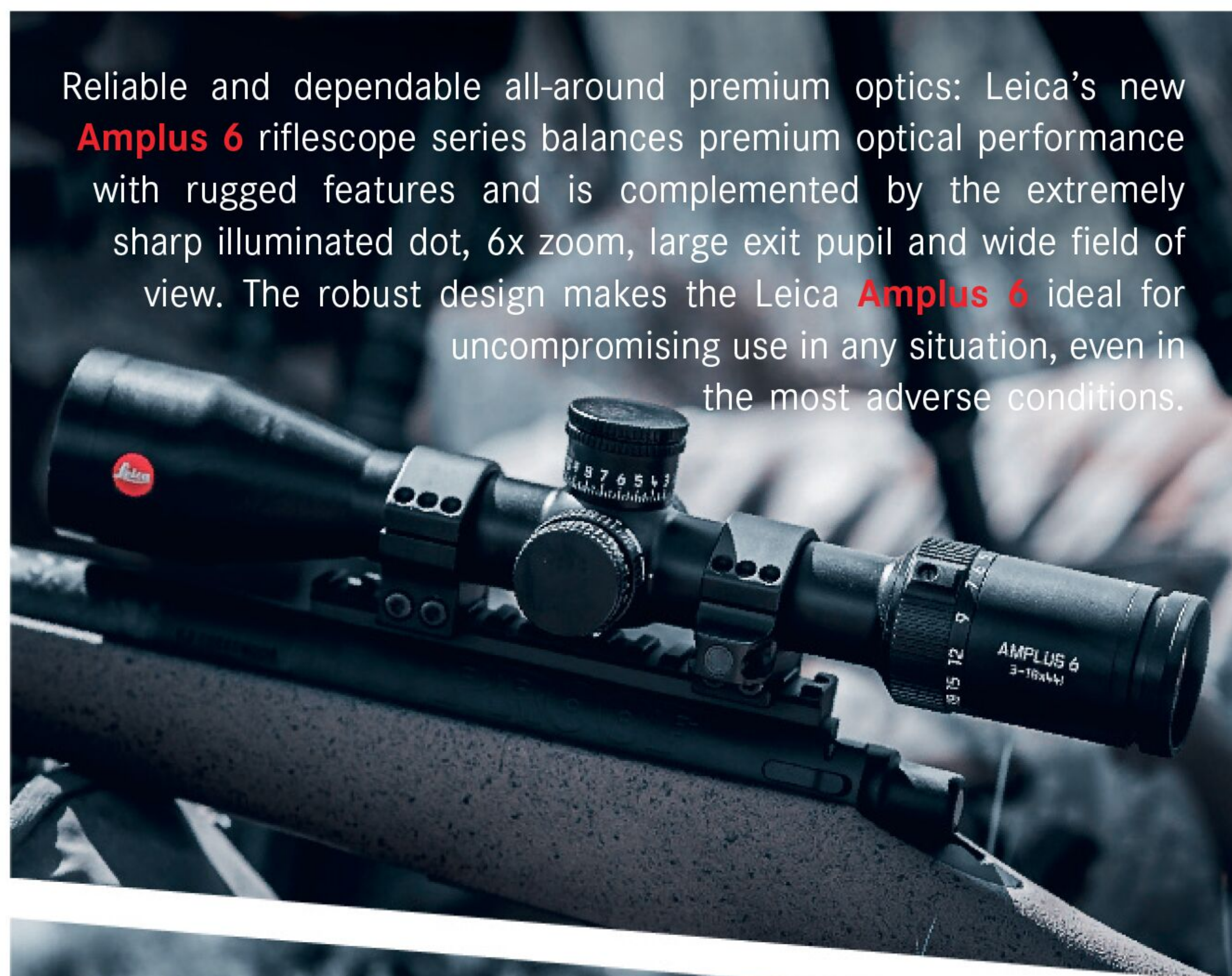
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THE MULE DEER is the classic Western deer. Locals take it for granted, but millions of Eastern deer hunters dream of hunting muleys. The wapiti is the West's great game. Also taken for granted by many resident hunters, while the rest of us fantasize about finding just one mighty bull.

Heading afield with a tag for each is thus the best the West can offer, the ultimate Rocky Mountain combo hunt. Many folks who live in elk and mule deer country accept this as a normal autumn opportunity. They have the whole season to play with. Not so simple for most of us. The best times for each species don't coincide, nor do the best habitats often overlap. Not to mention luck of the draw in getting tags, doubled if you want both elk and mule deer licenses.

A combo hunt is difficult to plan and tougher to execute, but can be done. I've headed afield with both tags in my pocket on numerous occasions, a glorious feeling full of opportunity. To be honest, I haven't punched both tags very often. Doesn't matter, I always expect to.

This story is not about the ideal mule deer rifle, of which there are many; or the ideal elk rifle, also many. Instead, about consciously choosing one rifle for both. Residents who commonly hold both tags probably don't overthink this the way we dreamers do. They grab Ol' Betsy and fill the freezer. I submit that the ideal elk/mule deer rifle deserves more serious thought, especially for we dreamers and rifle nuts.

Boddington's biggest mule deer, in both body and antler, taken with a 130-grain Barnes TTSX.



MULE DEER CARTRIDGES

Let's start here. On average, muleys are heavier than whitetails. However, the largest northern whitetail is as heavy as any mule deer. So, practically, any cartridge considered adequate for a big whitetail is plenty of gun for mule deer. There is a difference. It's not just that mule deer are often hunted in bigger, more open country. Mule deer are rarely hunted from stands. They are glassed and stalked, so the situation controls the shot. Average shots are longer and usually taken from field positions rather than the solid rests offered by most whitetail stands and blinds.

Even so, there are lots of options. I took my first few muleys with a .243. Since then, I've taken them with cartridges from .22 centerfires to the .375 H&H and many with 7mm and .300 magnums. All worked, but not all were ideal. I've written that magnum cartridges are not essential for deer hunting. I'll stand by that, including mule deer. You need reach, but cannons are not necessary.

The faster .25s (.257 Roberts, .25-06) with 115-120-grain bullets are awesome mule deer medicine. Likewise, 6.5mms with 140-grain bullets. The old .270 Winchester is still hard to beat. A strong case can be made for the less popular .280 Remington. A .30-caliber bullet's weight, power and recoil aren't necessary, but the .30s do work. Because I use it a lot, some of my best mule deer—with the longest shots—have been taken with the great old .30-06—never a bad choice if you don't mind the kick. You can—and I often have—used various magnums (old, new, short, long, belted, unbelted) in bullet diameters from .257 to .308. I've also used larger calibers, but neither they nor any magnums are mandatory for mule deer.

BULL ELK ARE GAME CHANGERS

For many hunters, elk is the largest game they will pursue. However, elk are not created equal. With today's burgeoning elk herds,

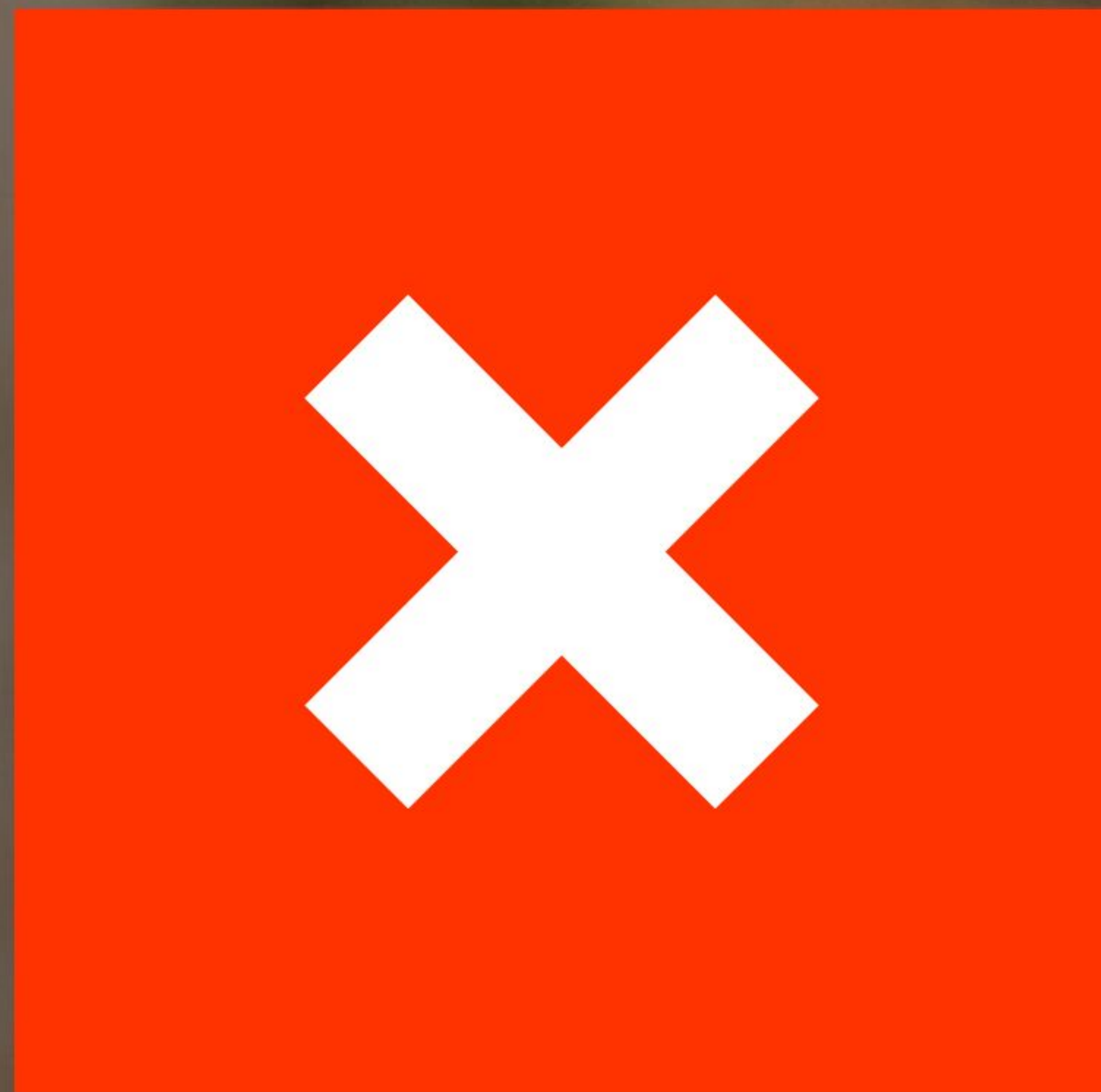
cows make up a large percentage of the harvest. Especially for resident hunters seeking winter meat. This is why many local hunters take a more casual approach to elk rifles than we out-of-state dreamers in search of just one bucket-list bull.

A cow elk offers some of the best venison, but she is not large. Often, just 25% heavier than a big muley. Any sensible mule deer cartridge is fine for cow elk. Spike bulls are bigger, and three-year-old raghorns bigger still. At this point I leave the 6mms and .25s behind, but most mule deer cartridges are still suitable for most elk.



A big New Mexico bull, taken at 400 yards with a single 150-grain Partition from a .270 Winchester.

ON  HUNT

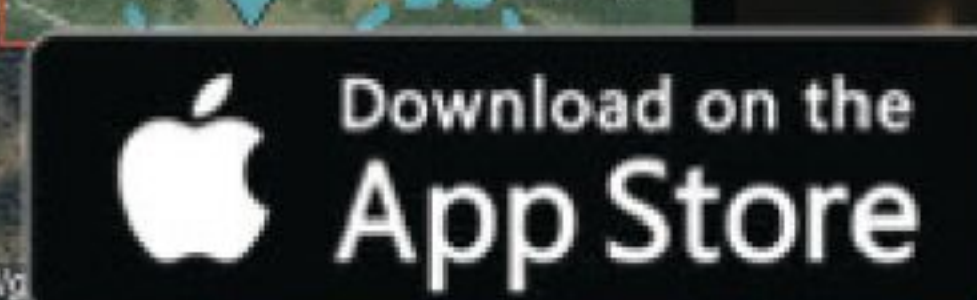
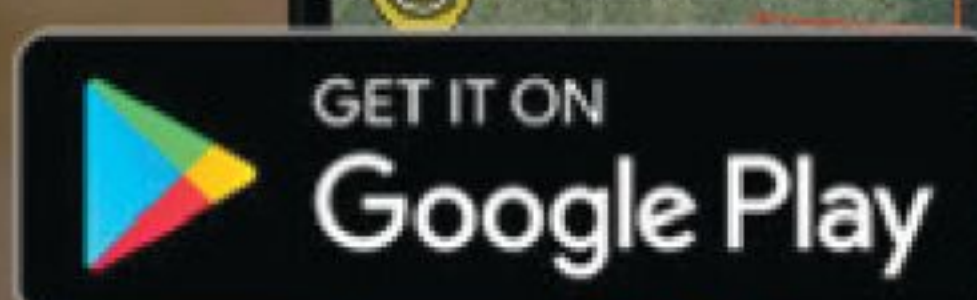


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A nice Colorado bull taken at timberline with a .30-06. The venerable cartridge has accounted for several of the author's elk/mule deer combos over the years.

Mature bulls change the game. The wapiti typically reaches maximum antler growth at between 8 and 12 years. Elk increase in body size and strength, until they decline of old age. Weights vary depending on feed, but a mature bull in good condition should weigh around 800 pounds and can exceed a half-ton. This is a horse—er, deer—of a different color that can be three or even four times larger than a big muley. A bull elk is powerful and tenacious. They're in top condition from exercising up and down the hills. To cleanly take a big bull elk, you must hit him well, but also hard, with a good bullet of sufficient weight and construction to ensure penetration on such a large animal.

Old, mature bulls are a small component of any herd. Chances of finding such a bull are not good, especially on public land. In my life, I've taken just a partial handful. However, some are killed every year throughout elk range. If this is the kind of elk you dream of, then it seems to me you should be armed for the encounter.

In North America, combination hunts aren't common. In Africa, you almost always have multiple species on license. There's no predicting what you might run into. So, if you have a chance to hunt elk and mule deer together, let's borrow a page from the African rulebook: The rifle you carry must be adequate for the largest game you might take with it. For our discussion, that is a massive bull elk.

ELK CARTRIDGES

I've never pushed the envelope on elk and have no desire to. The smallest cartridge I have taken elk with is the .270 Winchester. The largest, again, the .375 H&H. The former is adequate, but not overpowering. The latter is a real thumper on elk, but not necessary. Actually, because trajectory isn't especially flat, it's probably a poor choice for mule deer, and thus for an elk/mule deer combo. I feel the same about the .35 Whelen, a great elk cartridge, but overpowered for deer and not as flat-shooting as I like in open country.

For elk, let's throw out my line about magnums not being needed. There are several standard cartridges that are adequate,



PERFECT FOR PRONGHORN

Being over-gunned on game isn't as big a sin as being under-gunned, but there probably isn't a cartridge that's truly ideal for pronghorn, mule deer and elk. Although tenacious, the pronghorn is a small animal, max 100 pounds for a big buck. Most elk cartridges need not apply.

It is not true that pronghorns must be taken at long range, but their country is wide open, so reach and accuracy are essential. When I was a kid, I thought the .243 was ideal for pronghorn. Later, I thought the .25-06 was unbeatable. Both are pretty good, but one thing is missing: Pronghorn country is usually windy, and calibers from .25 down don't hold up as well in wind as larger calibers with heavier bullets.

Because of long, aerodynamic bullets that resist wind deflection, the 6.5s are excellent. Flat trajectory is still needed, so I think the 6.5 PRC ranks as one of the all-time best pronghorn cartridges. The old .264 Win. Mag. is also a fine pronghorn cartridge, but I hesitate to suggest any cartridge called "magnum" is needed for 100-pound game. Also perfect for pronghorn is the old .270 Winchester. Both it and the 6.5 PRC are needlessly powerful, but both have the flat trajectory and wind-bucking ability you must have for our "speed goats." It is probably not altogether coincidence that both also serve as minimums for elk, and for our elk/mule deer combination.

SUPER LITE

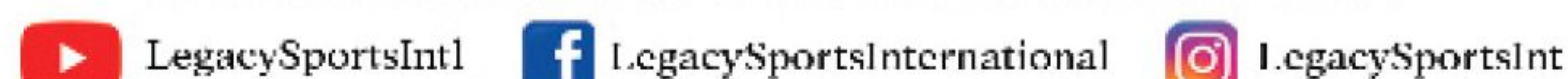
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A fine mule deer from eastern Wyoming, dropped cleanly with a .270 Win., one of the best choices for muleys, and adequate for elk, with a good, and well-placed, bullet.

but we must include a whole bunch of magnums. I have no qualms about the .270 Win., and I've taken as many bull elk with the .30-06 as with any other cartridge, and as many elk/muley combos. However, strictly for elk, and hunting for big bulls, the medium magnums are hard to beat. I've used the 8mm Rem. Mag. a lot, and also several magnum .33s.

Which .33 depends somewhat on how much recoil you're willing accept, but the .338 Win. Mag. is a quintessential elk cartridge, hard-hitting and powerful. Any of the fast mediums could be used for our elk/deer combo. I will not include them because they are needlessly powerful for deer, and, absent brutal recoil, don't shoot as flat as ideal. Most important, although wonderfully effective, they are not essential for elk.

COMBO CARTRIDGES

We're not going to leave mule deer out of this discussion. Our mule deer might (or might not) be taken at longer range than our bull elk, but this is certain: A mule deer offers a much smaller target. This places greater emphasis on accuracy, and also on flatter trajectory, because on smaller animals there is less margin for ranging errors.

So, our combo cartridge needs to shoot flat, and must be accurate. Both are relative. A bull elk's chest area offers a massive target. I am not an extreme-range shooter on game, but for both elk and mule deer I want to be confident to at least 400 yards. Mostly, I want to be certain I have enough power to cleanly take a bull.

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For me, that's a subtle and indefinable mix of velocity, energy, bullet weight and frontal area. Not everyone agrees, but I rule out most 6.5mms (and all smaller calibers) on the last two. Today, because of bullet aerodynamics and action lengths, most modern 6.5s are limited to 140-grain bullets. I can't rule out the 6.5 PRC and faster 6.5mms, but I submit that any 140-grain bullet is on the light side for big bulls.

My personal minimum is .270, .277-inch, preferably with 150-grain bullets.

Because of 1:10 rifling twists, this is the bullet weight limit for traditional .270s: .270 Win., Wby. Mag. and the WSM. Because of higher speed, the latter two deliver more energy but, because of bullet weight, these are also sound minimums. The "new" .270s: 6.8 Western and 27 Nosler, have faster twists and push heavier bullets—up to 175 grains. We can't shoot them in traditional .270s, but, for elk-sized game, added bullet weight moves the .270 from minimal to plenty.

Bullet weight is the 7mm's advantage. The .284 hunting bullets have always ranged from 140 to 175 grains. For deer, I like faster, lighter bullets. For elk, and thus for our combo, I'm happy with anything from 160 grains up. Numerous 7mm cartridges have the velocity to play our combo game. My thinking starts with the .280 Rem. and goes up from there. Candidates include the short (unpopular) 7mm WSM and SAUM, .280 Ackley Improved and, of course, the 7mm Rem. Mag. and Wby. Mag. Don't overlook the "new" 7mms, the PRC and 28 Nosler. Also specified for faster twist, these bring bullets of 180 grains and beyond. On the elk side of our equation, bullet weight matters.

So does frontal area, which brings us to the good old .30-caliber. A .308-inch bullet hits harder than a 6.5, .270 or 7mm, and the .30s also bring greater bullet weight. For deer, lighter and faster bullets are fine. For elk, I've generally loaded up good 180-grain bullets. With today's heavier "low-drag" bullets, I've switched to 200-grain slugs; even better. Traditionally, .30-caliber bullets topped out at 220 grains. Hard-hitting and deep-penetrating, the heaviest .30 bullets were round-nose, reducing range and terminal performance. The popularity of long-range shooting has brought us longer, heavier .30-caliber bullets with incredible aerodynamics, again needing faster twists than the long-standard 1:10.

There are lots of great .30-caliber cartridges to pick from. Again, I'm not an extreme-range shooter on game, but for our elk/mule deer combo, I want enough velocity that I don't have to do higher math for 400-yard shots. My cartridge list starts with .30-06, still a fine cartridge for elk and for mule deer. All the numerous .30-caliber magnums are in the running. Far the most popular is the .300 Win. Mag. I'm more of a .300 Wby. Mag. guy, but both are fast, powerful and effective. However, if I had to start over, and wanted to use the extra-heavy, super-aerodynamic bullets, I'd shift to a faster twist, probably in Hornady's .300 PRC chambering. With all the fast .30s, we are probably over-gunned for our mule deer. That doesn't matter, because we'll be ready for our big bull elk at any sensible range. ⓘ

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Trans-Pecos

DELIGHT

THE CARMEN WHITETAIL IS ONE OF THE LEAST-KNOWN WHITETAIL SUBSPECIES, BUT THIS TEXAS NATIVE OFFERS HUNTERS A BIG CHALLENGE IN BEAUTIFUL COUNTRY.

WORDS & IMAGES by
J. GUTHRIE

SOME HUNTS are framed by the trophy—a tangle of antlers or sweep of horn taken home—and some are simply a place. Some hunts are both. The small, but rugged mountain ranges across the Trans-Pecos and the Carmen whitetail, a little deer whose secrets still escape hunters and biologists alike, are inseparable, and hunting one across the other is a humbling experience not soon forgotten. It might be the deer or the mountains or both, but it sticks with you long after the shot ceases to echo back at you from across the way.

Last November with a bunch of good friends, I trekked deep into the heart of a 36,000-acre ranch south of Marfa, Texas. From the hill above the old cowboy camp where we stayed you could see into Mexico. You didn't have to walk that far—just sit on the porch of the barn where we slept—to see

mule deer, aoudad and javelinas working their way across distant hillsides through the brushy draws. Occasionally, the stunted oaks gave up their most precious secret, a deer that has all but escaped the attention of hunters, a deer science has barely touched.

Taxonomists are a funny bunch, and the most bookish of them will come to fisticuffs with one another over the subtle differences that separate subspecies from subspecies. Whitetails are no different. There are three dozen subspecies, or half that depending on who you talk to, spread across the continent. However, they all agree *Odocoileus virginianus carminis* lives in the oak-choked draws of Mexico's Sierra del Carmen Mountains, hence its name. Strips of mule-deer-inhabited desert are what separate, or did separate, the Carmen from its brush-country-born brethren, *texanus*.

In very few places isolated populations exist north of the Rio Grande. Billy Tarrant, a Texas Parks & Wildlife Department biologist and district leader in the Trans-Pecos region, said the largest Carmen population is inside Big Bend National Park. Several biological surveys sprinkled over the last five decades have further defined the Carmen's range, and isolated pockets can be found in the Sierra Vieja and Chinati Mountains in Persimmon County and the Del Norte, Rosillos, Chisos and Dead Horse Mountains in Brewster County. Severe droughts in the '90s and encroachment by *texanus* have taken their toll on these isolated groups. Tarrant said the TPWD has collected sporadic blood samples in hopes of one day completing a definitive DNA study, but the Carmen as a subspecies is not currently managed as such.

It doesn't take a genetic code to pick out a Carmen whitetail, since bucks stand only 32 to 35 inches at the shoulder and both sexes have a broad, elongated tail that hangs nearly to their hocks. Bucks will weigh a shade over 100 pounds and does around 60. Comparisons to the Coues are inevitable, and we must turn to the taxonomists to find that Carmen deer have a broader

rostrum and typically larger antlers and longer points—otherwise they are almost exactly alike. This lack of knowledge about the Carmen—it is all summed up in a couple of booklets—is a touch strange, considering whitetails are the most studied and managed wildlife species in the world. The more you look, the less there is to find, and perhaps that is what is so enchanting about these deer.



Carmen whitetail hunters live in their binoculars. Most mornings started out at an overlook where feeding bucks would first be spotted with binoculars and then given closer scrutiny with a spotting scope.



A pile of new and old skulls and sheds in the front yard is added to by each group of hunters.

WHEELS *of field*

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It was up to our outfitter, Steve Jones, to fill us in on the details omitted by the studies, namely where to find and how to hunt this critter. The ranch sat in the Chinati Mountains and was the perfect place to walk yourself to death or break out the good glass and let it do the scouting for you. Jones, one of just a few outfitters who runs Carmen hunts on this side of the river, had us on the overlooks at daylight with our backs to the sun, and the critters, from Carmen deer to aoudad to coyotes, would shine. Spot and stalk sounded deceptively simple, especially after a look into the first deep canyon.

My hunting partner, Rob Lancellotti, and guide Steve Brugman, a man with an uncanny talent for spotting game, had a nice buck spotted inside of 10 minutes the first morning. Through a few curved and coated panes of glass, it looked like an easy stalk. I drew the short straw, and two hours and two canyons later the mature 5x5 had given us the slip. The deer were crawling all over the hilltops, something I thought was a little odd. Tarrant said later that Carmen deer have small home ranges and hang out up high, usually above 3,000 feet, and the mule deer stay down in the draws. The aoudad bands were down in the draws, too, feeding on the oaks, so the deer had the tops to themselves.

It was a little before noon when we peeked over a ridge looking for deer in the shade and saw a whole herd of mature aoudad rams. Both Rob and I both took rams 10 minutes apart that were just short of 30 inches. It was a sweet bonus to our hunt, and the rest of the day was spent skinning the animals, packing them out and preparing the capes.

That night was surprisingly cold and full of stories of nice bucks. Jones only shoots mature deer, preferably over eight points and 3½ years. There were plenty of big bucks to go around on this rich, well-managed ranch. Never one to spread the outfitter bravado like rancid peanut butter, Jones was awfully confident one of us would soon hang a buck from the skinning pole under the front yard's big oak tree. He was right, and then some.

We slipped out of camp a little late the next morning in an old square-body Chevy, heading up to the previous morning's lookout. The Suburban squeaked and groaned its way up the



This fine Carmen buck was at least 4 1/2 years old. It sported an exceptional typical frame and added an unusual split beam off the right brow tine and several sticker points.

ridge, and warmed by the rising sun, I slipped into a daze. Brugman's size-11 boot stomping on the brake and the sputtering exclamations about deer and bucks and antlers snapped me awake. Most hunting guides have different levels of excitement depending on trophy quality. Brugman's frantic pointing and inability to clearly say, "Get your ass out of the truck and start shooting!" were pretty good indications the buck was a good one. Problem was, I simply could not spot the buck, despite Brugman's efforts.

As so often happens, I was looking past and over the buck standing in some tall grass just 300 yards off the road. Our usual spots were measured in quarter-mile increments. After finally seeing the buck for myself, my own sputtering and spitting started, as did my efforts to get out of the Suburban. It was hardly a stalk, hardly the picture of grace, but it was one helluva buck. I have managed to shoot bigger deer, but along with a 6 1/2-year-old King Ranch six-pointer I killed almost a decade ago, this buck ranks as one of the coolest. With long

dagger points and a second split beam of sorts splitting off his right brow tine, it was one of the neatest bucks Jones or Brugman had ever seen in all their years.

Do you know how this story gets even better? About three seconds after my shot, a beautiful buck stood up and watched the old nontypical run down the hill to die. Lancellotti is no fool, and he was soon standing over a deer that was as perfectly symmetrical as mine was nontypical. Two Carmen bucks, beautiful mature bucks, in about two minutes—the hunting gods were in our hip pocket.

Lancellotti, always reverent and appreciative when a game animal gives its all for him, stood quietly as I set up for photographs. Out of the corner of my eye, I watched him look south across the purple mountains, then back at his elegant little buck, then at the horizon again. He was thinking what I am trying to articulate here. The Carmen's combination of the familiar—they are whitetails, after all—and the different makes for one of the best, but least-known whitetail hunts around. 📸



HUNTS



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ELK ON THE FLY

SCOTT HAUGEN

MOVE FAST AND HUNT SMART TO FILL YOUR TAG THIS YEAR.





ARRIVING A DAY before the season opener, I was eager to set up camp and start searching for elk. In fact, I was so excited I skipped the camp part and went right to scouting. Nine hours later, I'd not found a fresh track, rub, wallow or any droppings.

Discouraged, I pitched my tiny tent in the dark. I was bowhunting the area for the first time and wasn't able to physically scout the spot so far from my home. My online research and phone calls to biologists and fellow hunters pointed me to this location in the Rocky Mountains. It took seven years to draw the tag.

Shortly before 11:00 p.m., I was awakened by a pack of howling wolves. They were close. I sprung out of my sleeping bag, broke down my tiny camp and drove four hours to my backup spot in a different drainage.

I hunted all day and saw lots of sign. It was fresh. Two wallows were still murky with suspended sediment and reeked of bull urine. Sap oozed from fresh

rub on pine trees and elk droppings were moist. I didn't see a single elk.

I camped in the backup spot that night. Not long after dark I heard a distant bugle. Another bull followed. I laid in my sleeping bag, listening. Over the next hour the elk got closer. The air was filled with elk chatter. Not just bulls, but cows and calves, too. I'd heard those sounds before, when calves separate from the herd as they feed and cows keep track of them by way of loud, verbal communication.

About 2:00 a.m., the elk sounds dissipated. I hunted all day and didn't see or hear an elk.

The next night the elk returned. Again, they were vocal. This time, when their sounds waned, I followed. Led by a full moon, I rarely needed to turn on my headlamp. My goal was to keep them in earshot so I could figure out where they were going.

What I learned that night, nearly 20 years ago, changed how I hunt elk.

D

DARK OPS

The herd was traveling more than three miles from their bedding area high in the mountains to food and water near where I camped. By 3:00 a.m., they'd already reached thick timber to bed, where later in the morning rising thermals combined with shade would keep them cool for the day. Two days later, high in the timber, I killed a bull.

Scouting for elk in the dark is a game of patience. It's a highly effective way to learn about elk in an area you're hunting for the first time. The goal of nighttime scouting is to listen for elk and monitor

their movements, but not get close to them. If you're hard of hearing, like me, electronic hearing devices are invaluable, saving time and long hikes. A dim headlamp and navigation device are must-haves, because often you're scouting in total darkness. Scouting in the dark reveals when and where elk are moving and provides insight as to how you can hunt them.

In this case, wolves pushed the elk out of the first place I planned to hunt. I've had this happen multiple times since, and the presence of wolves is just one reason it's wise to have a backup plan. Wildfires, drought, hunting pressure and a simple lack of elk, are other factors that can change even the best laid plans.

While we have good intentions of scouting for elk during the summer, not many of us have the time or money to make a trip or two to distant places searching for elk. So, what do you do when the season arrives and you've never seen the land you're hunting? Scouting at night is one move. That's just the beginning.

HUNT, SCOUT, HUNT

When hunting a place for the first time I rarely return to camp during the day. I hunt hard early in the morning, scout all day, then hunt the last few hours. I return to camp well after dark.

In the middle of the day I'm searching for elk sign, not typically calling or glassing for animals. My goal is to learn the land and how to hunt it. By midmorning, elk are usually bedded down. This is the time to search for fresh droppings, rubs and tracks. Tracks can be hard to read on hot, dry ground, so locate water which attracts elk. Sometimes a tiny creek or spring to drink from will draw elk from miles away. If you're lucky, you'll find a wallow.

Look for three kinds of wallows. First is the traditional water wallow, where bulls frolic and urinate in mud and water. Once located, study the water closely to see if there's a current flow. If there is, the wallow will run clear. If there's not, sediment will be suspended, which can give a false read on when it was last used.

If there's no current flow in a wallow, sediment can stay suspended for a long



If you're seeing fresh elk sign, but no elk, nighttime scouting can reveal where elk are bedding, feeding and how far they're traveling.



BOLT ACTION RIFLE SYSTEM

S O L U S



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Study wallows to see if there's a current flow or if sediments suspend. Such information is invaluable when hunting a new area.



Moist, shiny and fresh—just what bowhunters want to see.

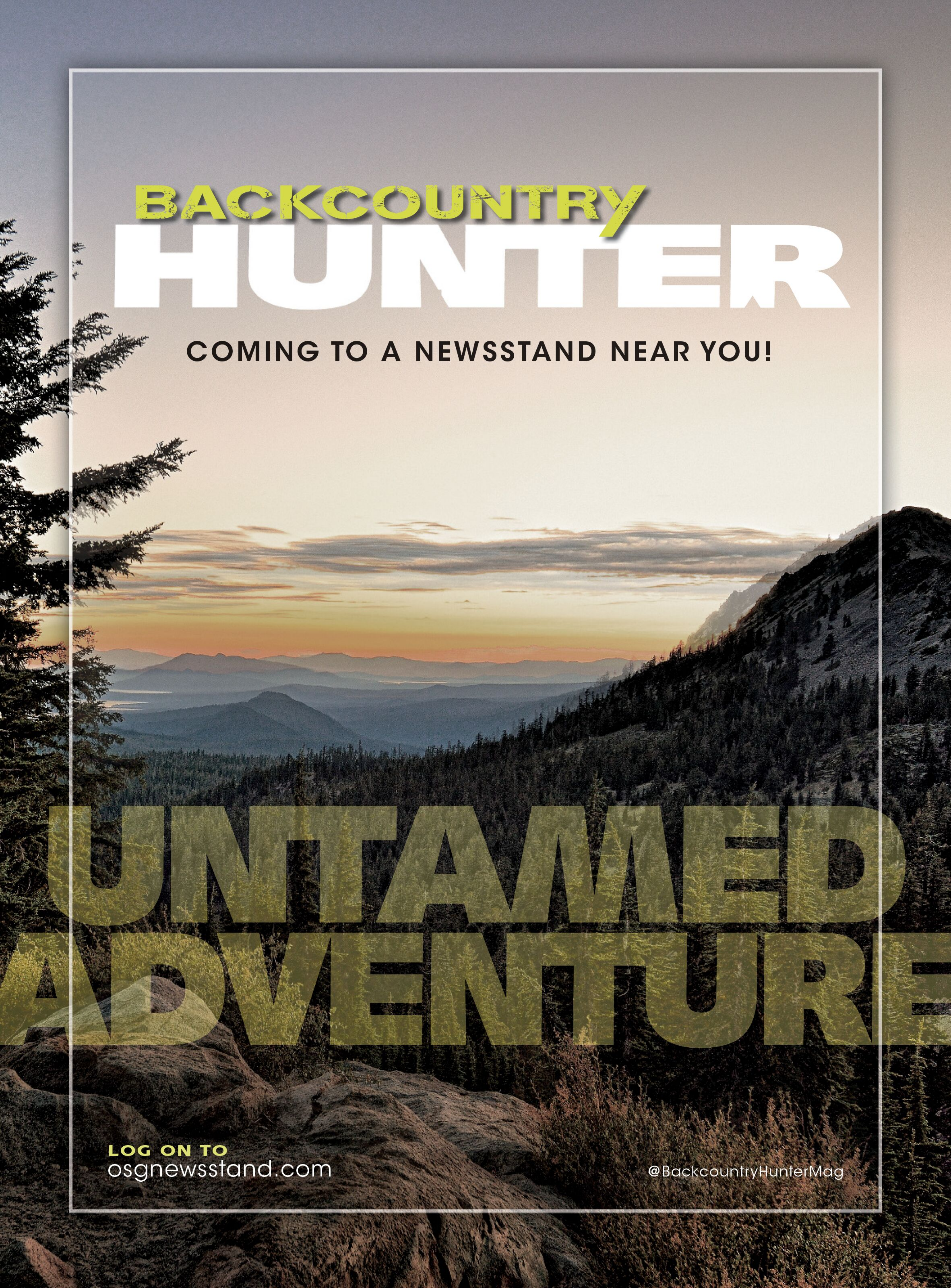
Look closely at rubs to see if the fringes of the peeled bark are dry and curling or dripping with sap. If it's the latter, you're in the right spot.



time. This gives the illusion that a bull just used it, when, in reality, it could have been days prior. If you're not sure what you're looking at, take a stick and swirl the mud. Watch closely to see if the sediment gets carried away, or just sits there. If it gets washed away, you're likely to be looking at—and smelling—fresh sign. If the wallow is stagnant, keep scouting because the bull that last used it could be miles away.

Also, look for moist-ground wallows. These wallows are made by bulls in dark forests amid thick ferns as well as where the grass is green and collects moisture at forested edges. Bulls still roll around, rake, rub and urinate in these wallows even though there is no water. Early in the morning, condensation retains the bull's scent and it's easy to read tracks. By midday, many moist-ground wallows dry up, and though you might not smell them, they're easy to identify by sight due to the worked up ground and tattered grass. Search for old rubs in such areas, indicating bulls have been using the area year after year.

Last is the dry-ground wallow. I've seen bulls roll on the hardest, driest, most open ground, totally enveloped in dust. Bulls will scrape, gouge, urinate and roll on dry ground and it seems to happen when water is scarce. If you can smell urine in a dry-ground wallow or scrape, you have the advantage because moisture and odors quickly dissipate on hot days.



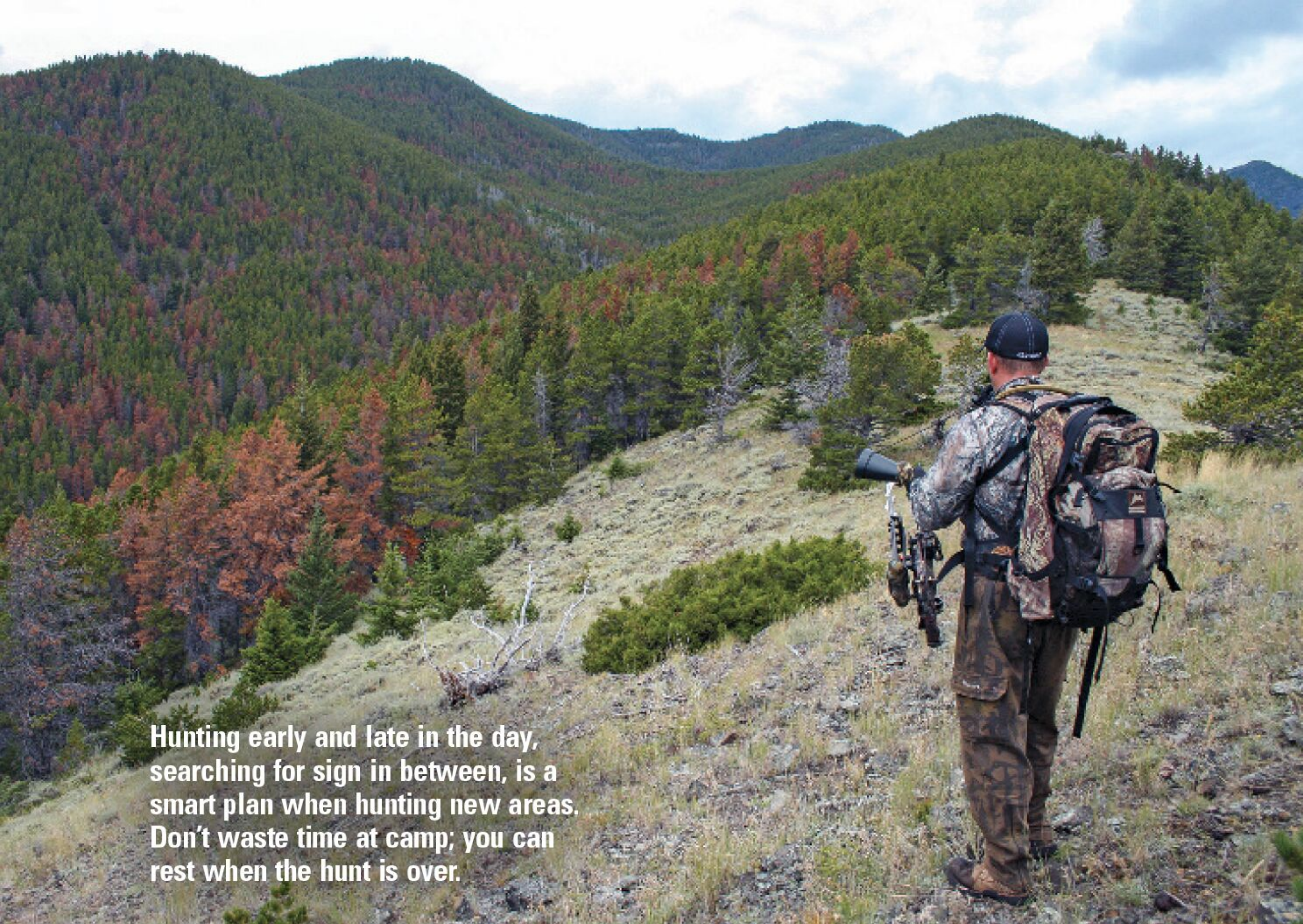
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Hunting early and late in the day, searching for sign in between, is a smart plan when hunting new areas. Don't waste time at camp; you can rest when the hunt is over.



At the peak of the rut, bulls are tired from chasing cows through the night, but that doesn't mean they'll quit bugling.

MIDDAY CALLING

We wait all year to hunt elk, not spend time in camp. If you locate fresh sign when scouting in the middle of the day and you think elk are close, it might be wise to make a move. Because they're likely bedded in timber—either in a ravine or high on a ridge—check the thermals to make sure they're steadily moving uphill. If they are, approach from above.

Never give up the wind when bowhunting elk. I don't care if an elk sees or hears me as long as I'm in the shadows, but I've never killed a bull that's smelled me. We can't begin to comprehend how incredibly powerful an elk's sense of smell is.

Many times, I've located elk herds bedded in the middle of the day. I've tried all

sorts of moves to kill a bull, from stalking in on the herd to subtly calling to moving with a decoy. Stalking can find you close, but often there are lots of eyeballs to contend with, and it's just a matter of luck as to where a bull might be laying.

Subtle calling to a herd of tired elk can be futile, unless you happen to catch a bull with ramped-up testosterone levels. Creating a sense of urgency is the key.

I've had my best success bowhunting bedded elk at midday by moving to within a couple hundred yards and aggressively calling. Start with loud cow and calf chatter, simulating a calf that's wandered too far from its concerned mother and they're relying on loud voices to reconnect.

If you've ever heard this in the wild, it's very loud, fast-paced calling; mimic that.

Follow the cow and calf chatter with bugling sounds of an insubordinate bull. Make the bugles crisp and short. No lip bawls or chuckles. Often, the entire herd starts talking. If the bull gets nervous, it'll move to keep the herd in order and often head to the lost cow and calf sounds you're making. If the bull bugles at any point, immediately cut it off with bugles that sound exactly like what it's delivering. This sends the message that you're a big bull willing to fight for cows. Even in the middle of the day, this aggressive move can work. If it doesn't, back out and hunt the herd when they start moving, right before dark.

TRAIL CAMERA BENEFITS

When hunting an area for the first time, try to set out trail cameras. Check them in the middle of the day. This takes time and effort but it's an efficient way to learn about elk and predator movement. Set them on video mode, for the sounds and movements you'll capture will be extremely useful.

One season I set cameras in an area I hunted for the first time. I was seeing fresh sign but no elk. It took four days of moving cameras and covering ground, but what I learned was the herd I was targeting moved nearly seven miles every night to feed and water.

If you're not seeing elk, trail cameras can reveal why. One season I couldn't find an elk. I caught a poacher on trail



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8:30 P
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SPORTSMAN

SCHEDULE SUBJECT TO CHANGE



Trail cameras can reveal a lot of valuable information in a short period of time.



Wildfires have forced a lot of elk from their traditional habitats.

camera who was using an ATV in a non-motorized hunting area. I followed a trail the man had cut and found a gut pile. And his cell phone. The cell phone and footage were turned over to the police.

I've caught many predators on trail camera during elk season. The presence of coyotes and cougars don't seem to bother elk to the point the whole herd will leave an area, but bears can, and wolves almost always do. By September, calf elk are big enough to make it hard work for bears to kill them—not like during the calving season when bears kill a lot of elk. If I'm catching cougar, black bears or grizzlies on trail camera, I'll keep hunting the area. If I catch wolves on camera, or hear wolves howling, I'll leave. The only thing I've seen run elk out of a drainage faster than wolves, is a wildfire.

MOVE OUT

Before leaving home, monitor wildfires in your hunt area. This is something you can do all summer, but many fires spark during elk season, when the for-

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AMERICA'S SECRET WAR ON CASH

How Banks and a Power-Hungry Government Want to Confiscate Your Cash, Steal Your Liberty, and Track Every Dollar You Spend

If you like paying for things with cash, enjoy the feeling of having some money in your pocket, or even have some cash tucked away in your house for a rainy day, then consider yourself warned.

You've got a big target on your back.

Big Brother and your neighborhood bank are all aiming to stop you from using cash.

Consider this:

- **The IRS has seized bank accounts of people that have done nothing wrong except make regular cash deposits of less than \$10k in their accounts**
- **Banks in cooperation with the feds are spying on you and can file a Suspicious Activity Report (SAR) on anyone who may regularly deposit cash.**
- **Legitimate businesses and their employees are being cut off from the banking system because their customers usually pay in cash.**
- **JP Morgan Chase adopted policies preventing you from keeping cash in your safe deposit box . . . or even paying your credit card bill with cash.**
- **Law enforcement officers are seizing cash from anyone they think is carrying too much . . . even just a few hundred bucks.**

That's right, if you have just a few hundred bucks on you, you can immediately be suspected of being a drug dealer or a terrorist. No drugs

or bombs need be in your possession. The cash is all the evidence they need . . . and good luck getting it back.

That's why *The War on Cash*, is a must read for all Americans.

This amazing book blows the cover off the intimidating tactics being used by governments and their allies to restrict the public's use of cash, and to abuse the laws for their own purposes.

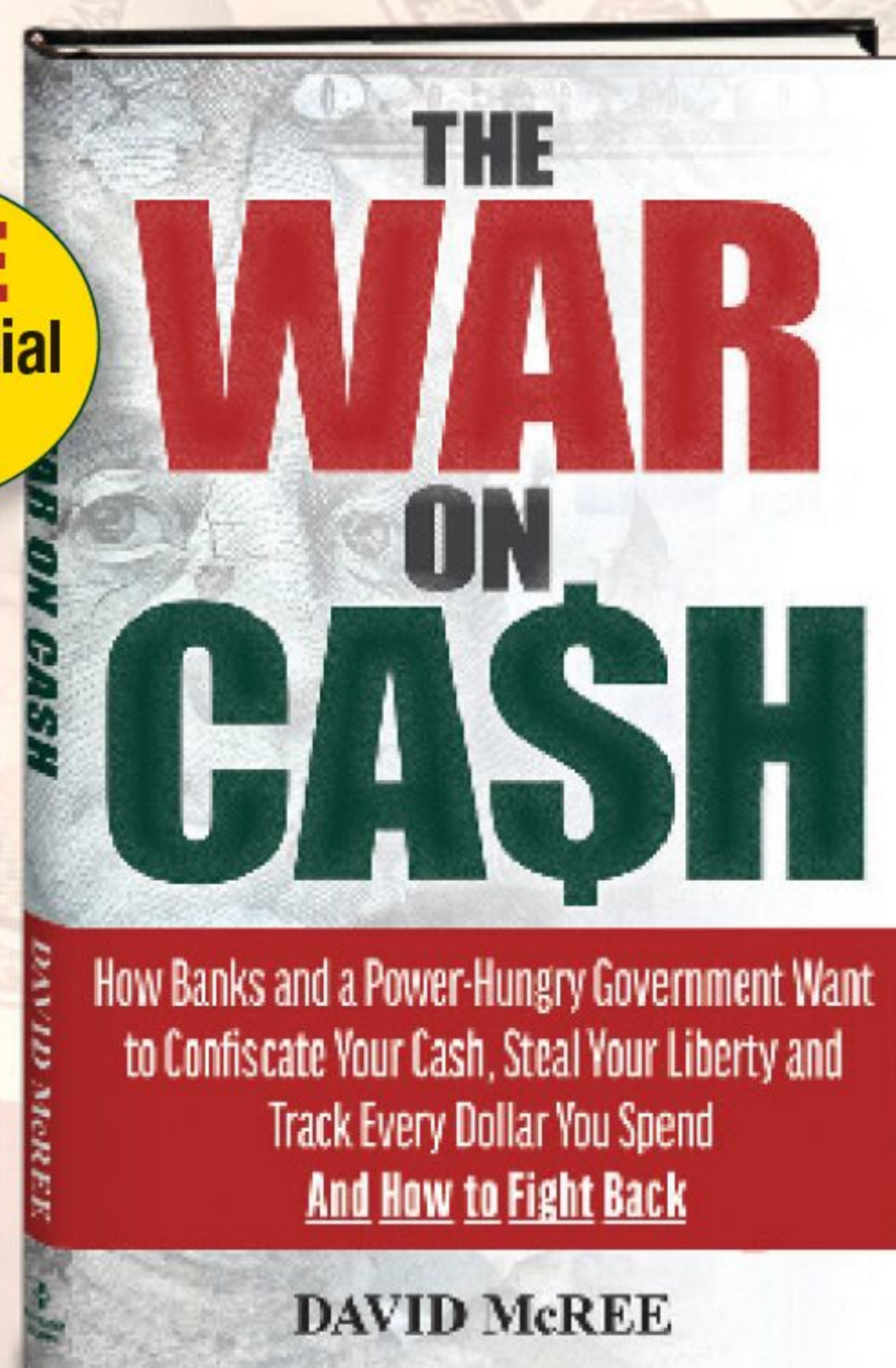
Inside this bombshell book you'll discover how:

- **Payment processing companies, sensing that trillions of dollars are at stake, are pulling strings behind the scenes to get a piece of every transaction you make**
- **Foreign governments have already taken outrageous steps to force their citizens to abandon the use of cash — and how these steps serve as a ready-made blueprint for the United States**
- **The perfectly legal type of bank deposit that can lead to your bank account being seized instantly**
- **How a hard-working, honest businesswoman found herself reported to the federal government by her bank for "structuring"**

If the government can eliminate cash from the system, it can control everything you do.

That's why you need to get *The War on Cash* to protect yourself and your freedoms before it's too late.

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ELK ON THE FLY

est is dry and lighting storms are on the rise. Every September hunters are afield when a fire flares up and they have to vacate.

I've changed locations due to the intrusion of fellow hunters, too. If they're hunting an area, educating animals, elk will quickly go into hiding. It's hard enough killing a bull, but trying to kill a bull on constant alert can be impossible.

I like having a plan B and C. Make sure your backup spots are within your legal hunting area.

Last season I ran into a hunter where I'd not seen elk in over a decade. I asked if he had any luck. He said no. "But we used to kill bulls in here all the time." While that could have been, the man overlooked the fact that a string of wildfires and increased logging in the area forced the elk to move somewhere else.



If you don't have time to scout for elk before the season begins, don't panic. Look, learn and move, and the chances of killing a bull greatly increases. 

The first year author Scott Haugen drew this out-of-state tag, he went home empty, but what he learned allowed him to call in this bull on opening morning the following year.

WHERE TO GO

Petersen's HUNTING is read by over 3.5 million avid outdoor enthusiasts every month, many of whom are looking to book a hunt during the upcoming season. An ad in "WHERE TO GO" is the best possible way to let our readers know where you are and what you have to offer. To place your order call Mark Thiffault at 800-200-7885. Email: Mark.Thiffault@Outdoorsg.com or Write: **Where to Go** section, *Petersen's HUNTING*, 33172 Via La Pluma, San Juan Capistrano, CA 92675. Visa, Mastercard and Amex accepted.

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Once Called “More Valuable Than Gold” — Fast-Acting Joint-Calming Formula Now Available to the Public

After 35 years of research, a new solution for occasional achy knees, hips, shoulders, and more — Already helping thousands of Americans move with ease again.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that over 58 million Americans – 24 percent of the population – suffer from regular joint discomfort.

But according to Dr. Al Sears, who owns and operates his world-renowned anti-aging clinic in Palm Beach, Florida, Americans can rediscover the flexibility and strength of their youth with an all-natural solution.

At the center of the new formula is a rare ingredient historically used to support maximum joint health in places like China and India. Ancient cultures were so fascinated by its power and effectiveness, it's been revered in many religious traditions.

Due to high demand and its unwavering popularity, the ingredient has been fought over and survived numerous price wars over the course of thousands of years.

“I'm thankful I secured a sustainable supply,” Dr. Sears said. “And with advances in modern technology, we've made this ancient solution even more powerful. It really is more valuable than gold.”

Professional Athletes Amazed By Mobilify

Dr. Sears' new formula, called **Mobilify**, is built around a powerful natural ingredient with a long history of promoting joint health.

Made from the resin of the Boswellia trees found in India, Africa, and the Middle East, Ayurvedic medicine men reportedly prized it more than gold for its joint health-supporting properties.

More recently, researchers put this ingredient to the test on a group of rugby players with aching knees. The 52 professional athletes were divided into two groups: one received a placebo, while the other received a dose of Indian frankincense.

After just four weeks, the players that received Indian frankincense couldn't believe what they were experiencing. They could stand, walk, and even run more easily. Researchers noticed improved recovery in their joints, tendons, and muscles.

In another study, researchers examined 48 patients living with occasional knee discomfort. With a 120-day trial period, it was the longest clinical trial involving Indian frankincense to date. Researchers used radiographic assessments to measure the extract's impact on joint health and comfort.

When the trial ended, scientists found that Indian frankincense helped patients naturally restore normal joint function in their knees, substantially improving responses to occasional pain and stiffness.

By modernizing a time-tested solution, Dr. Sears devised a new way for Americans of all backgrounds to maintain the durable joint



JOINT COMFORT REVOLUTION: Doctors are now recommending **Mobilify** because its active ingredient soothes aching joints in as little as 5 days!

health they need to meet everyday demands.

“Whether it's chasing your grandchildren around the playground or hitting new personal records at the gym, this formula is a godsend for healthy joints,” Dr. Sears added.

Maximum Relief

Studies continue to show that Indian frankincense is a powerful joint health supporter on its own. However, Dr. Sears' **Mobilify** formula adds additional natural ingredients to help patients achieve maximum joint health.

“I knew I could take this solution to the next level,” he said. “That's why my research team and I decided to include strong helpers to help my patients achieve peak joint comfort for life. That's what truly sets this formula apart.”

One of these is bromelain, an enzyme mixture derived from the pineapple plant.

Like Indian frankincense, bromelain has a long history of use as a folk remedy for joint discomfort and a host of other ways to promote optimal health.

In a scholarly review of clinical trials, researchers determined that bromelain promotes healthy responses to occasional stiff joints and discomfort.

Another helping ingredient, papain, is extracted from the papaya plant.

Noting papain's ability to break proteins down into smaller fragments, researchers tested its impact on muscle soreness.

In a study published in the Journal of Sports Sciences, ten pairs of male athletes received either a helping of papain or a placebo before and after running downhill for 30 minutes at a time.

The group that received papain reported quicker recovery time, with researchers noting that the papaya extract supported healthy responses to soreness and muscle discomfort.

Research has also shown that stronger muscles help protect joints from excessive wear and tear.

Mobilify Rescues Vietnam Vet

Thousands of Americans have already followed the “gold rush” to restore the joint health they once had.

Dan returned from military service with exhausting back discomfort. Without being able to exercise like he used to, a slew of other health challenges haunted him for decades. He could barely make it up a flight of stairs without pausing for rest.

Then he discovered **Mobilify**.

“Now I walk 2.2 km once or twice per day,” he said. “Never thought I could feel this good again.”

Shirley had undergone a series of surgeries for her back discomfort and says **Mobilify** dramatically helped her recovery.

“I am stronger, more alert, and exercising every day and hope to improve more so I can get back to swimming every day,” Shirley said.

How to Get Mobilify

To secure the hot, new **Mobilify** formula, buyers should contact the Sears Health Hotline at **1-800-256-0638** TODAY. “It's not available in retail stores yet,” says Dr. Sears. “The Hotline allows us to ship directly to the customer.” Dr. Sears feels so strongly about Mobilify, all orders are backed by a 100% money-back guarantee. “Just send me back the bottle and any unused product within 90 days from purchase date, and I'll send you all your money back.”

Use Promo Code **PHMB823** when you call to secure your supply of **Mobilify**. Lines are frequently busy and due to heightened demand, supplies are limited. To secure your supply today, call **1-800-256-0638**.

Do The Right Thing

THE DUCK hunt was exceptional with perfect weather, numerous foolish ducks and hard-working dogs. Our host counted the birds as they were retrieved and piled up next to the blind. My buddy and I were still two short of our limit when our host announced the hunt was over. When he saw the quizzical look on my face, he explained that since the dogs were unable to find two in the marsh we technically reached our limit. In his mind, those wounded ducks would never recover and were considered part of the bag.

I understood and respected the host. So did my pal. It was refreshing to know those ethics still prevail. That same attitude can also be assigned to big-game hunting. Nowadays if you're hunting with an outfitter and you wound an animal, you're done hunting. Typically the outfitter will allow you and your guide to spend the rest of the hunt searching for that specific animal. An exception is if you cause a flesh wound where the animal will undoubtedly fully recover. In that case you may hunt for another. The same should hold true if you're on a DIY hunt. It's up to you to decide if you want to call the hunt if you severely wound an animal. Of course, every effort should be made to recover the wounded quarry. As every experienced hunter knows, there are instances where a blood trail simply disappears, no matter how long and thoroughly you search.

The idea of cancelling a hunt when a wounded animal can't be located can be a bitter pill to swallow. Many hunters save up for years to go on a dream hunt. While it's true that no fair chase hunts can be 100% successful and the hunt means far more than the kill, tell that to the person who had a place on the wall for his trophy and an empty freezer waiting for the much-desired meat. To many, it's more painful and frustrating knowing that his poor shot, regardless of the circumstances, negated the joy he'd otherwise have experienced. It would have been different if he never saw an animal or never had a decent shot.

Suppose we consider one of the more prestigious species such as sheep, mountain goats, moose or others that may require drawing a lottery tag after two decades of applying, or taking an expensive hunt with an outfitter. If you shoot a mountain goat and it falls into an abyss and cannot be retrieved, do you shoot another? I know of a hunter in Wyoming who wounded a goat and was unable to follow it because of the treacherous terrain. He opted to quit hunting and looked hard for the injured animal. He found it after searching for a week. The goat was still alive, barely, and the hunter was able to approach close enough for a killing shot.

What about legalities? Are there any wildlife laws that address the issue? I checked with our local game warden supervisor who indicated there were no specific laws, at least in Wyoming, that prevent a hunter from shooting a

**HUNTING ETHICS
AREN'T GOVERNED
BY LAWS, BUT BY
PERSONAL CHOICES
TO DO THE RIGHT
THING."**

second animal after wounding and not recovering the first. Here's how Wyoming rules cover the issue. I suspect most state wildlife agencies have similar laws.

"No person shall wound or kill any game animal without making a reasonable effort to retrieve it and reduce it to possession. For the purpose of this subsection, making a reasonable effort shall include a person physically going to the nearest location where the game animal was when a person attempted to take the game animal, in order to search for any sign the game animal was wounded or killed, and take the game animal into possession."

Bottom line, if you can't find the animal, personal ethics come into play. It's up to the hunter to determine if it's acceptable to potentially kill two animals. Hunting ethics aren't governed by laws, but by personal choices to do the right thing. It's entirely up to you, and by knowing the consequences of wounding an animal, you'll be highly motivated to make that first shot count. 



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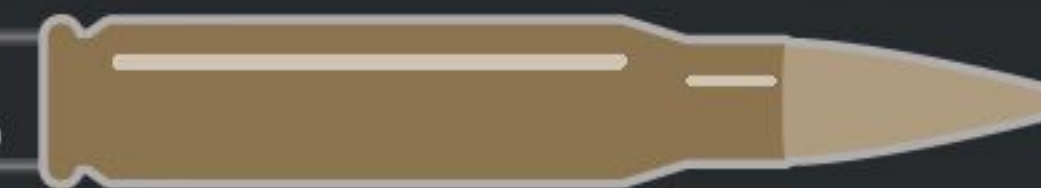
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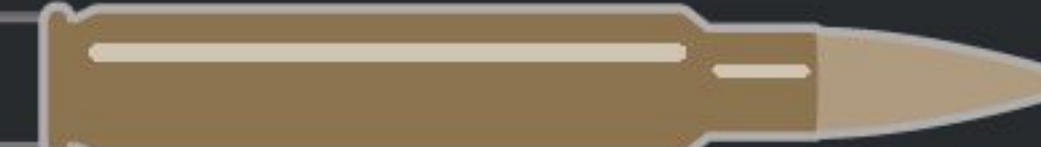
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