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STEVEN RINELLA

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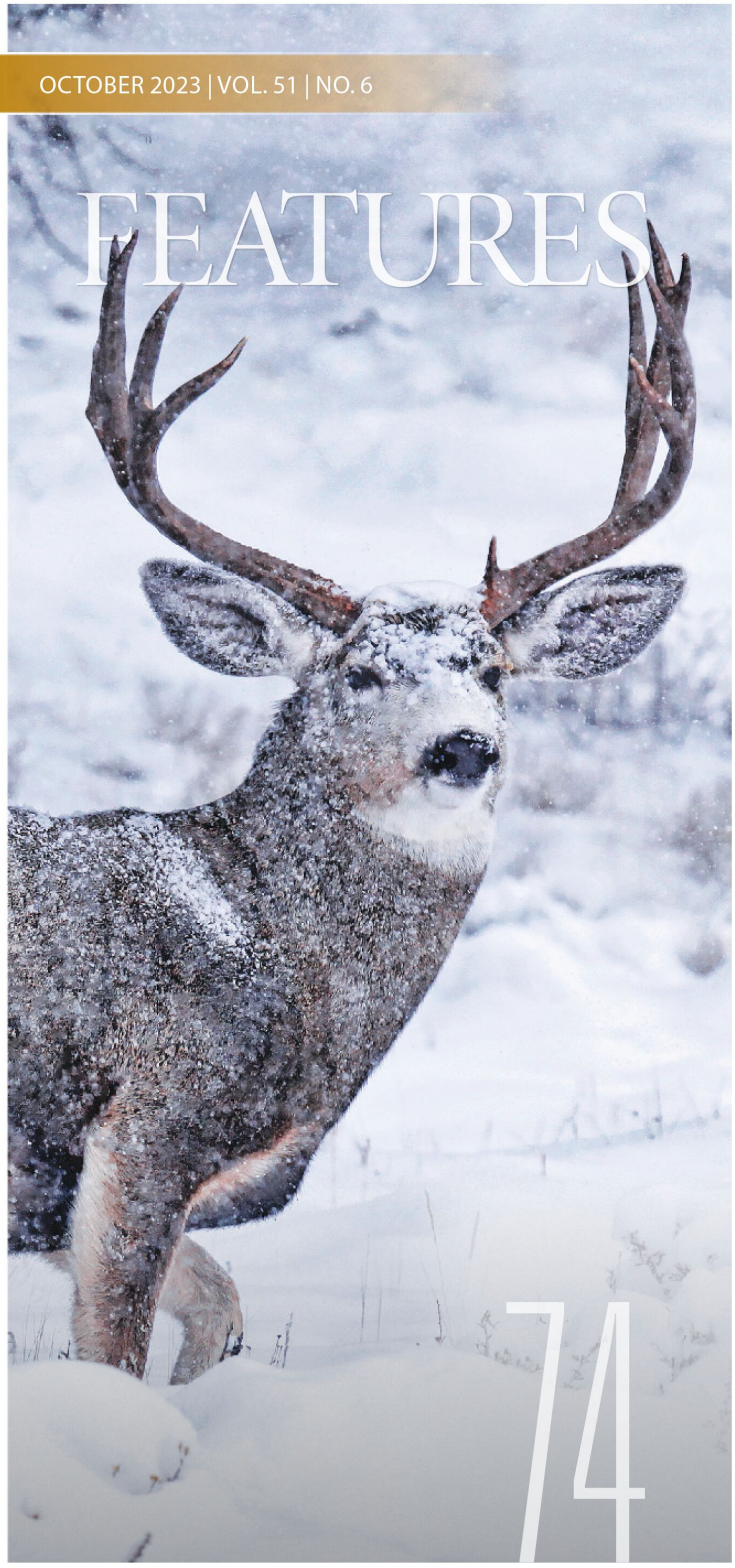

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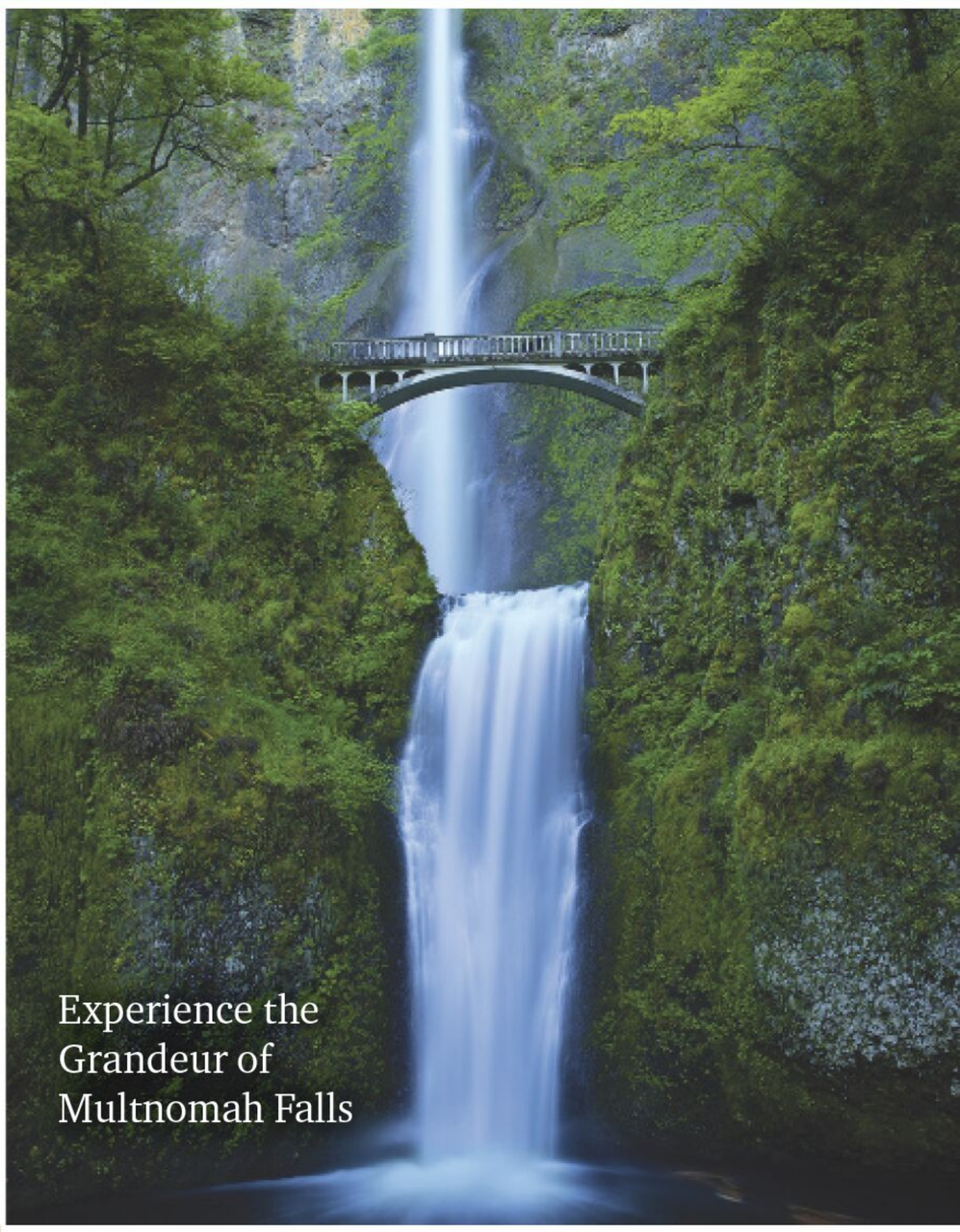
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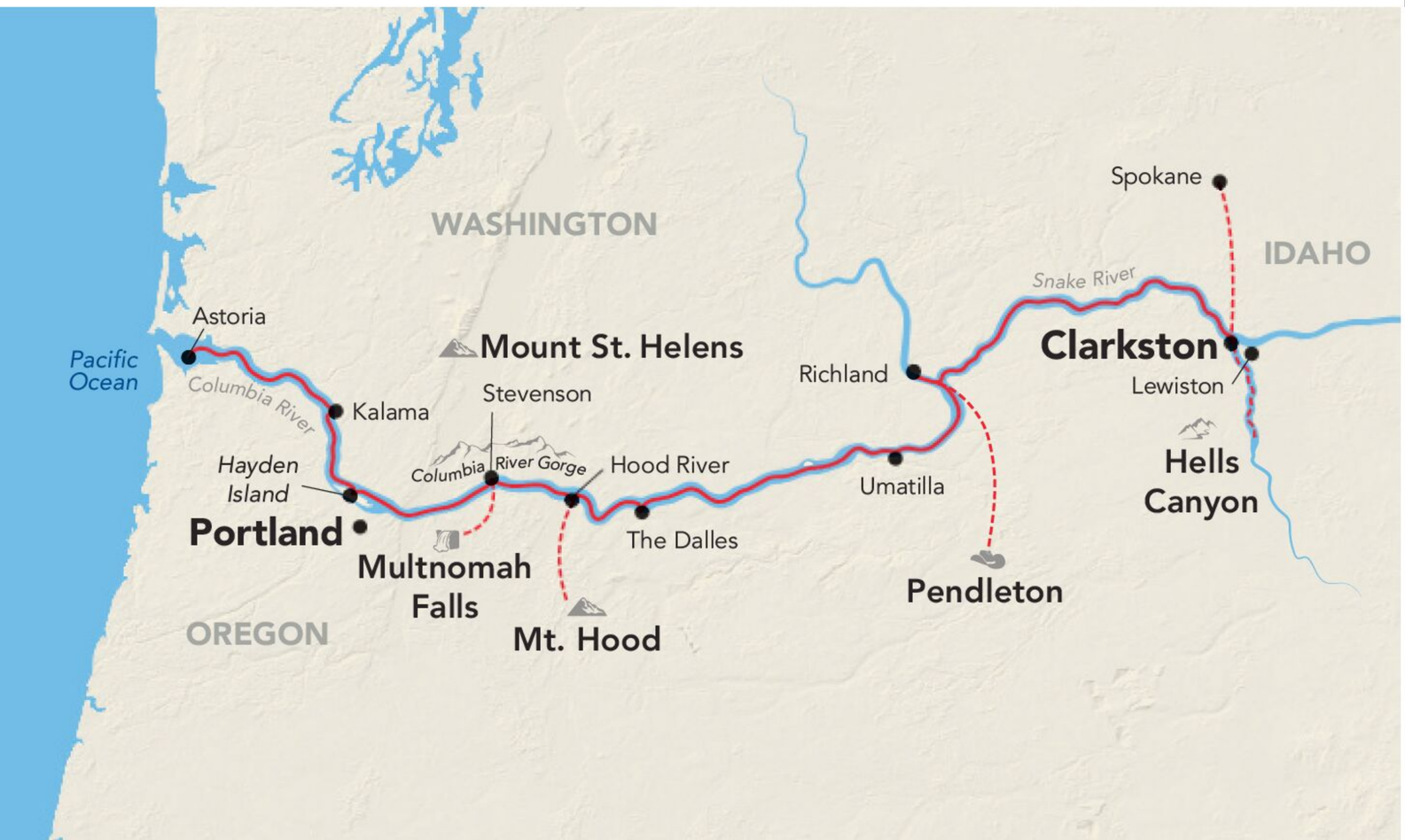

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This knife boasts a full tang blade, meaning the blade doesn't stop at the handle, it runs the full length of the knife. According to Gear Patrol, a full tang blade is key, saying *"A full tang lends structural strength to the knife, allowing for better leverage ...think one long steel beam versus two."*

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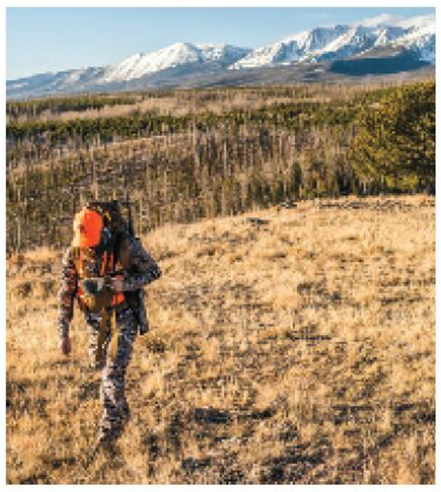

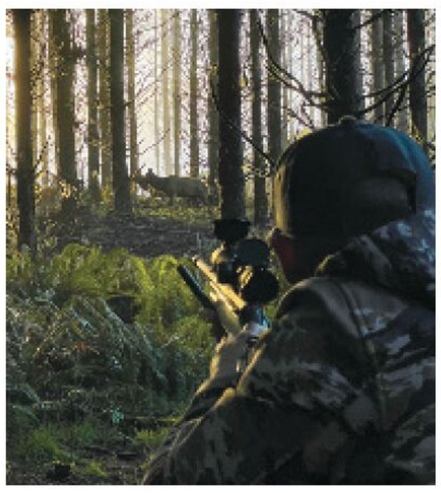

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The Truth About Trophies

WE TALK a lot about trophies here at HUNTING magazine. From our cover images to our tactics columns to our in-depth features, the hunt for the biggest animals is the thread that runs through every issue. I don't, and won't, apologize for that. Trophy hunting has become taboo in today's world, but even those woke hunting companies that won't even mention the word *trophy* often feature photos of their staff with bucks and bulls all of us would be enviable of. They preach about smiling over a dead animal, but in images they post on social media they don't look so sour.

Trophy hunting is, and long has been, at the heart of why we go afield with a gun in our hand. How we define that trophy is where it becomes personal. Honestly, of all the animals I've killed, only a few have been scored, and those got the measuring tape because the landowner or outfitter was keeping detailed records for management purposes. I can promise you I've never in my life asked a guide "What's it score?" before pulling the trigger. I have asked outfitters "What's a mature animal here?" or "What kind of buck (or bull) should I expect to see?" When hunting alone, my standards are generally even lower, and I shoot the first legal animal that comes into my crosshairs. It's all meat in the freezer to me.

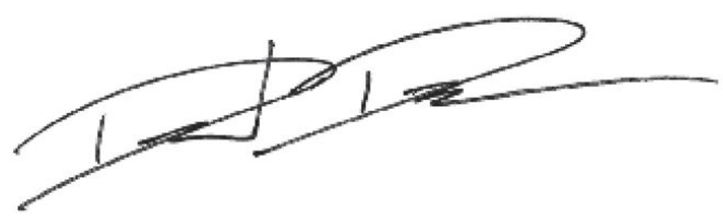
Tess Rousey

Please don't take this as bragging or acting holier-than-thou. It's just my personal hunting philosophy. In many ways I envy hunters who hold out for a trophy as they often get to squeeze every last second out of the season, where I'm usually done on opening day. Hunters that hang the bar high and then do everything possible to achieve it are worth admiring. Antler inches have never been my motivation, but I understand the drive to put in the hard work in hopes of achieving a set goal, even if it means eating a tag at the end of year. I just think backstrap tastes better.

To my knowledge we've never polled our readers on how they define themselves. I bet if we did, nearly 100% of you would simply call yourself a hunter. Not a trophy hunter. Not a meat hunter. Just hunter. Sure, our goals and motivations for going afield may be different. Heck, I bet there are even a few in the group, probably among our more mature readers, that carry a firearm afield, tag in pocket, with little to no intention of ever pulling the trigger. It's the experience they crave. Having killed enough in their younger years to satiate the need to draw blood, they still have the desire, the drive, the very need to hunt. That experience—the quickening of the heartbeat when an animal steps onto the landscape—is their trophy.

I have a couple prime opportunities in my pocket this season, including an elk tag I've waited 12 years to draw. Going in to that particular hunt, I like to think I'm going to hold out for some particularly magical milestone—perhaps a certain measurement we hunters have arbitrarily decided makes a trophy. But then I'll see a bull that, for whatever reason, trips my trigger, quite literally. Maybe it will have a particular bit of character to its rack—I have a love of the weird or abnormal. If the bull is busted up and scarred with the marks of a warrior, I'll have a hard time holding off. Hopefully, it will be old and on the downward slide, kind of like me. In the moment, I'll decide what's right, and—should my shot be true—the trophy will be the overall experience, not just the antlers I'll hold in my hands while I smile for a photograph.

See you around the campfire,



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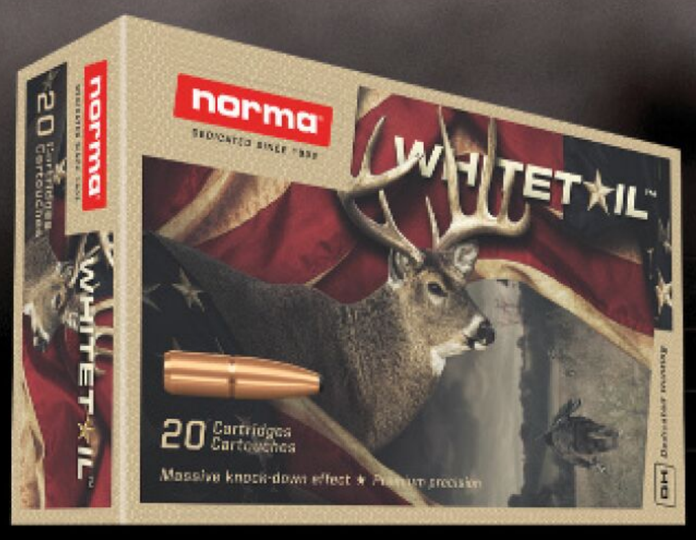

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Tess Rousey

TRACK

Few marks in the wilderness will quicken a hunter's heart more than a fresh track. The print, pushed deep into a muddy trail or scuffed lightly atop fresh-fallen snow, instantly alerts us to the wildlife inhabiting the surrounding wilds. A woodsman experienced in the ways of reading sign will likely pause at the sight. Even during the off-season, he'll kneel, examining the track closely, parsing the clues to better understand the wilderness around him. Are the edges crisp or dulled by time? Is it still filling with water, as if the animal is only seconds ahead? Are the tracks deep and far apart—a sure sign of running game? Or do they meander as the beast grazed undisturbed by predators such as man? All these subtleties tell a story written in a language hunters spend a lifetime learning on the trail of game. —*David Draper*

TESTED TOUGH

Spartan Precision Javelin Pro Hunt Bipod

Most of our hunting gear comes and goes as we constantly chase the latest and greatest innovations that give us an edge in the field. However, every once in a while, a piece of gear comes along that once experienced, solidifies a permanent place in your gear repertoire. Over the past several years of using and abusing Spartan Precision's Javelin Pro Hunt Tac Bipod from the tundra of Alaska to the plains of Africa, it has more than earned its indefinite slot in my pack and a well-deserved tested-tough stamp of approval.

The Javelin Pro Hunt Tac Bipod overcomes the biggest complaint that hunters have had for decades with bipods—size and weight. Weighing a mere 7.6 ounces, the Javelin Pro Hunt Tac is one of, if not the lightest bipod on the market and gives shooters seven to nine inches of ground clearance, ideal for shooting from the prone position. When not deployed, the bipod legs fold together, making it possible to stash the bipod in your pants pocket or just about any pocket on your pack. The bipod also features easily adjusted, spring-assisted legs for rapid adjustments when time is of the essence.

Spartan Precision's patented Magnetic Attachment System lies at the core of the Javelin Pro Hunt Tac, allowing shooters to attach and detach the bipod in a matter of a few seconds. The days of awkward, clunky tripods weighing down the front of your

CONSERVATION CORNER

BOONE AND CROCKETT CLUB PRIORITIZES FOREST MANAGEMENT

WILDFIRES are nothing new in the West, however, dense forest stands, the rapid spread of highly flammable invasive vegetation and warmer, drier weather are making these fires even more catastrophic. These high-intensity wildfires cause total forest stand replacement, altering the soil chemistry and structure, changing hydrological systems, releasing tons of carbon and toxic pollutants, all while destroying wildlife habitat and threatening communities.

Active forest management can help reduce fire risk while also benefiting wildlife and hunting opportunity. Managing for a mix of young- and old-forest habitat types supports more wildlife species because active management replicates the natural disturbances that typically occurred. The diverse landscape supports an array of ecological functions while also increasing ecosystem resilience to disturbance and stress and ensuring connectivity to a variety of habitat types that wildlife depend upon for food and shelter.

The Boone and Crockett Club has a long history advocating for policies to support wildland forest management. In the early 1900s, the Club worked to develop and pass legislation that created the National Forest System and the U.S. Forest Service to manage these forests. More recently, we worked with Congress to give the federal government new direction on forest management and supported creation of Good Neighbor Authority that allows the Forest Service to partner with state forestry agencies to administer forest health projects. In 2021, the Club worked with members of Congress to include more than $8 billion in funding for forest resiliency projects in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act that is now starting to get allocated on the ground.

These policy efforts are helping, but there are more opportunities in the future. This year, the Club is working to improve how Good Neighbor Authority is implemented to ensure that local governments and tribal entities can partner on forest health projects. In addition, we are working to fix a legal precedent that has delayed hazardous fuels reduction and fuel break projects on national forests in the West. Finally, the Club is working to develop a new Forest Conservation Easement Program through the federal Farm Bill to support the purchase of development rights from willing private landowners to prevent conversion to nonforest uses.

To stay informed on these issues, as well as other conservation and big-game records and news, join the Boone and Crockett Club at *boone-crockett.org*.
—Jodi Stemler

rifle are gone. The Javelin Pro Hunt Tac Bipod also allows 15-degrees each way of cant adjustment to ensure a level shooting platform on uneven terrain. Premium products always come at a premium price, but I promise you the original sticker shock will be long forgotten years down the road when your bipod has never failed you and provided a rock-steady rest when you needed it most.—***Colton Heward***

BULLET BOARD

Hammer 129-grain 6.5mm Absolute Hammer

BULLET BASICS

Hammer Bullets are a leading company in a new genre of monometal bullets. Individually lathe-turned on CNC machines and weight-sorted, these projectiles are incredibly consistent and renown for accuracy. Profiles are long, with fine-entry noses and boat tails. Shanks are grooved to minimize bearing surface, enabling maximum velocity. Absolute Hammer bullets feature a large hollow nose and are designed to expand on impact and to sheer off the petals created when the mushroom opens. This creates small auxiliary projectiles that spiral off from the primary wound cavity, while leaving a blunt-nosed shank that drives deep.

TESTING GROUND

The bullet shown was recovered from a springbuck in Namibia after being shot lengthwise through the buck from about 120 yards. The hunter was Adam Weatherby; his cartridge of choice was a 6.5-300 Wby. Mag. Muzzle velocity was about 3,450 fps, and muzzle energy calculates out to 3,410 ft/lbs.

FIELD PERFORMANCE

On impact, the springbuck simply dropped in his tracks, dead. It didn't even twitch. Although this example is on a relatively small antelope species, we saw the bullet perform well on other African species including blue wildebeest.

STATS

Impact velocity was estimated at 3,200 fps. Shot placement was centered on the chest; the bullet was recovered below the tail after driving through brisket bone, vitals, abdomen and the heavy bone and muscle of the pelvic region. We estimated depth of penetration at 36 inches. Retained weight is 69.4 grains, or about 54% of original. Average expansion is 0.36 inch, or about 1.3 times original diameter.

NOTES/OBSERVATIONS

Hammer bullets tend to be more readily available than most, and are rapidly becoming a favorite of ammo companies focused on achieving top-notch accuracy. They are legal in lead-regulated regions. Kills tend to be fast, but blood trails minimal due to small, caliber-size exit holes.—***Joseph von Benedikt***

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RACK·ROOM

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SPECIES: Desert Bighorn

WHERE: New Mexico

RIFLE: 270 Win. Kimber Mountain Ascent

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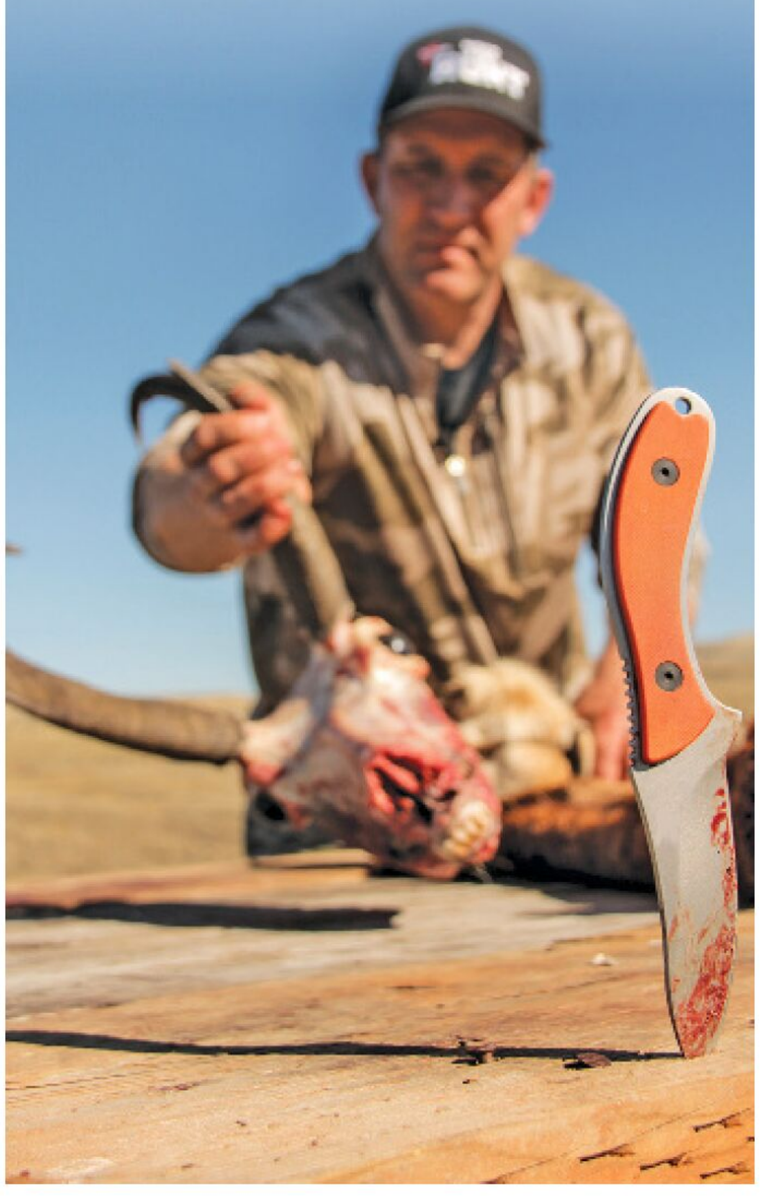
HOW TO CAPE BIG GAME

THERE'S MORE THAN ONE WAY TO SECURE A TROPHY. THIS APPROACH DETAILS HOW TO DO IT FROM THE OUTSIDE, IN.

I was 12 years old when I shot my first big-game animal, a Columbia blacktail deer. Once home, Dad showed me how to cape the buck for mounting. That was in 1976 and I've been caping big game ever since.

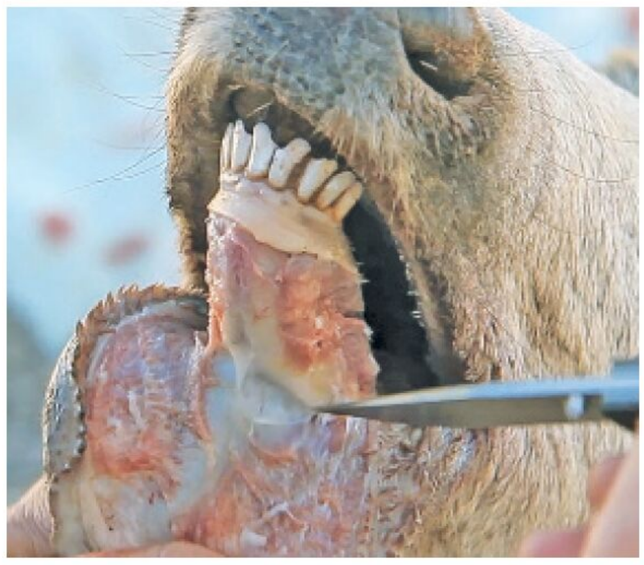
Here's a simple caping approach that minimizes the risk of cutting holes and is simple to do.—***Scott Haugen***



1 FIRST CUTS

It's easiest to cape an animal with the head and hide removed. The caping cuts start from outside the animal's mouth. With a slender, sharp knife, begin with the mouth facing you. Keep the blade tight to the jaw bones when cutting.

Start with the lower jaw and cut the front of the lip away from the bone. Work around the jaw until the lips are freed. Move to the upper jaw and cut the lip free. At the nose, cut through the cartilage until you meet bone atop the bridge of the muzzle. Once the nose is free it will allow you to skin up the skull, toward the face. Keep cutting around the skull until you meet resistance.



2 FLIP IT OVER

Halfway between the nose and eyes you'll meet too much resistance to continue. Stop and fold the hide back over the skull, then proceed by caping the animal in a standard fashion.

Start at the base of the skull where your first cut ran down the spine to remove the head. Make a Y-incision towards each pedicle, then start peeling the skin away. Remove the hide from around the base of the antlers, initiating cuts from beneath the skin and under the burrs of the antler. Do not cut through any hair.

As you work the hide around the antlers or horns, you'll meet resistance from the ears. Pinch the ear cartilage and skin down to where it meets the ear canal. Sever the ears with a cut tight to the skull. Cut as small of a hole as possible when removing the ears, as too big of a hole could result in hair slippage and ruin the cape.

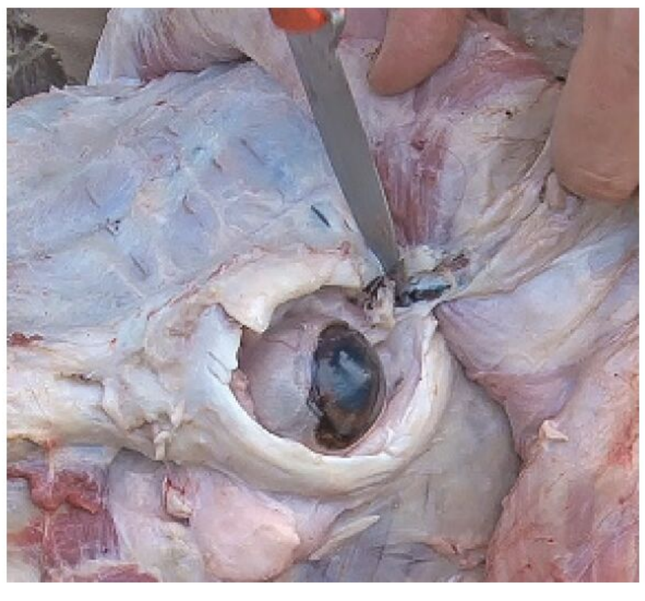
Continue cutting and peeling the hide off the skull, turning it inside out as you go. At the eye, reach under the hide and into the eye socket, lifting the eyelids away from the skull. Lift and pull the skin tight as you make small cuts, keeping the blade against the eye socket.

Do not cut across the tear ducts as it may result in a large, irreparable hole. Use the point of the knife and make small cuts deep into the tear duct, at a 90-degree angle to the skull. This is a deep cut, and the ducts are bigger than you may think, so keep the blade against bone.

3 FINISH IT

With the tear ducts removed, continue working the hide down the face. Cut into the corner of the mouth and keep skinning until you join your initial caping cuts.

Once the cape is removed, fold it skin-to-skin, roll it up and place in the freezer. Never salt a skin then freeze it, as salt will not allow the cape to freeze, resulting in spoilage.



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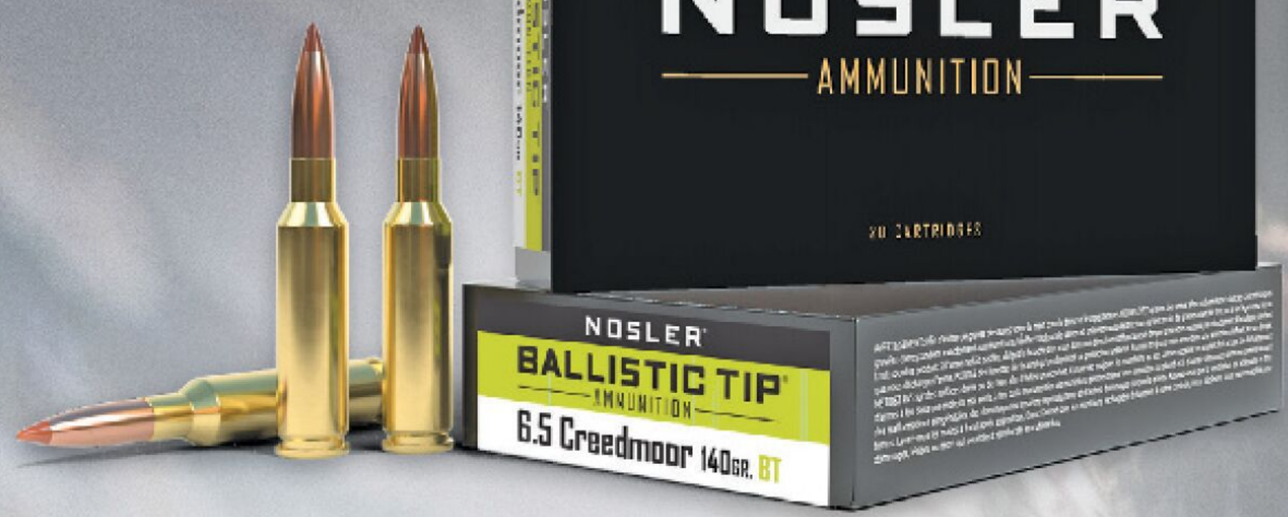
THE EDITORS



Nosler's **BallisticTip** Ammunition in 6.5 Creedmoor features a 140-grain spitzer-style bullet with a heavily jacketed base that allows for larger mushrooms. The polymer tip promotes proper expansion on impact for reliable energy transfer over a broad range of velocities. For improved accuracy, the bullet features a boattail design that helps heighten BCs. The 140-grain bullet lends itself perfect for mid-sized game like mule deer, whitetail, antelope and hogs. For larger game, the BallisticTip line is also loaded in a variety of popular hunting calibers. ***$50-$71; nosler.com***

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For backcountry pursuits, a hatchet can be a useful tool. The new **Hellgate** from MKC weighs in at just 14.9 ounces, and is made of 52100 high-carbon ball-bearing steel. This makes the hatchet tough, yet lightweight, with a perfect balance. The honed edge is made for more than just chopping wood or clearing brush. It's so sharp, the company promises you can field dress an animal if you find yourself without a knife. MKC offers free sharpening and repair for life. ***$375; montanaknifecompany.com***

The **3 Primal** from Riton is made to be a crossover scope perfect for both the range and long-distance hunting. For quick adjustments in the moment of truth, the Primal has exposed zero-stop turrets and two throw levers that are also removable. Made of aircraft-grade aluminum, this scope will withstand backcountry elements. It is 100% water-, fog- and shockproof. Windage and elevation adjustments are calculated with 1/10 MRAD, giving you precise holds on game. ***$660; ritonoptics.com***

Many people opt to leave the spotting scope behind when trekking deep into the backcountry. Vortex revamped their 11-33X spotter, commonly known as the Mini Razor by its admirers, to the new **13-39x56 Razor HD**. The added magnification paired with premium glass, makes the new Mini Razor an excellent option for anyone trying to cut weight but still glass effectively. The new model comes in both straight and angled models that weigh 29.5 and 28.6 ounces respectively. ***$1,299; vortex.com***

The **Helix** is multi-day pack optimized for hunters with 3,500 cubic inches of capacity and smart pocket design. Each Bog bag includes carry pouch and cinch straps to lash a tripod, gun or bow to the back as well. The Helix can be used on its own or attached to the Bog's Inception carbon-fiber frame, complete with meat shelf, for hauling heavier loads. Durable ripstop nylon construction with Hypalon-reinforced, MOLLE-compatible straps. ***$190 (pack only); boghunt.com***

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KEITH WOOD

A Killer B

The new B-14 Ridge Carbon continues Bergara's reputation for accuracy.

Big-game rifle trends fluctuate over time. Over the past few decades, we've seen hunting rifles at the extremes of weight and bulk—either uber light or ridiculously huge. Both have their challenges. Things have seemed to settle again near the middle ground and, at this point in history, the "lightweight precision" hunting rifle is immensely popular. These rifles are portable hunting rigs designed to be capable of taking shots at extended distances if the situation dictates. They are nearly as portable as some of the true featherweights, but built with features that make them far more shootable. Like most firearm trends, this one began in the custom world, but major manufacturers have migrated in this direction. Among those makers is Bergara, whose new Ridge Carbon combines the virtues of a precision big-game rifle with an achievable price tag.

Bergara is a European company, based in the storied Basque gunmaking country of northern Spain. Long known for producing some of the best barrels in the business, Bergara began manufacturing complete rifles several years ago. They pulled in experienced gunsmiths from the Marine Corps Precision Weapons Section to help, which was a wise move. Turns out the folks in Quantico who built sniper rifles knew what they were doing. These guns quickly achieved a reputation for quality and accuracy. I've tested and hunted with several examples over the years and have been impressed to the point that I often recommend Bergara rifles to friends and fellow hunters. They are, to put it simply, a pile of rifle for the money. When my friend Chad Schearer handed me the Ridge Carbon in Bergara's SCI booth this year, I was immediately impressed and asked them to send me one for testing and evaluation.

The Ridge Carbon is part of the B-14 Wilderness series of rifles. It is available in 6.5 Creedmoor, .308 Winchester, 6.5 PRC and .300 Win. Mag. It combines Bergara's push-feed B-14 action with a carbon-fiber-wrapped barrel and a synthetic stock. These rifles are relatively compact and light-

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HUNT

The open grip and straight comb of the traditional-style sporter stock provide a comfortable platform for hunters.

The B-14 Ridge Carbon features an oversized bolt knob for easy handling and quick reloading in the field.

weight with the lightest examples coming in at 6.4 pounds. Perhaps best of all, this rifle represents great value for consumers. One of my go-to hunting guns is a rifle I built myself (and featured in this column). That rifle is more or less identical to the Ridge Carbon, but cost me at least twice as much as the Bergara's $1,599 retail price, even with the free labor. Sure, my hand-built gun shoots slightly better groups, but not enough to matter in the real world.

A CLONE OF ITS OWN

The Ridge Carbon is built upon Bergara's B-14 action. This receiver combines the attributes of several established actions, notably the Remington 700, but with some tweaks of its own. The B-14 uses a two-lug bolt with a cone breech. It uses a sliding plate extractor and a plunger-type ejector. Like the 700, the recoil lug is sandwiched between the barrel shank and the face of the receiver but, in the case of the B-14, the lug fits inside a pocket to ensure it maintains its position. The top of the receiver is drilled and tapped for scope mounts and is cross-compatible with the 700 in that regard. The action is coated with Sniper Gray Cerakote.

The bolt body is spiral fluted, and the bolt handle includes an oversized knob. The bolt release is mounted onto the receiver rather than inside the trigger guard. There is a visible cocking indicator located at the rear of the bolt. Like a 700, the safety is a two-position lever that is located on the right side of the tang; forward is the "fire" position. The trigger is a single-stage with no discernible take-up or creep. Ours broke at 2.75 pounds straight out of the box.

I'm not a huge fan of detachable magazines on hunting rifles, opting instead for an internal magazine such as the one used on the Ridge Carbon. The magazine on our test rifle, which was chambered in 6.5 Creedmoor, held four rounds while examples in the two magnum chamberings hold three. There is a hinged floorplate that allows the user to unload the magazine without cycling each cartridge through the action. The floorplate release is on the front side of the trigger guard.

SOFT TOUCH, SOFTER RECOIL

The Ridge Carbon is equipped with a rigid injection-molded synthetic stock. Steel pillars are molded into the stock's action-screw inlets to provide a rigid torquing point for the action screws though the stock is not bedded. The stock is of a traditional sporter style rather than the tactically inspired stocks now found everywhere on the market. That means a straight comb, an open grip and a comfortable forend. The stock, which uses Bergara's SoftTouch finish, is painted in a tan and green camouflauge pattern with black speckles and includes a rubber recoil pad.

The Ridge Carbon is equipped with a carbon-fiber-wrapped barrel. These button-rifled and stress-relieved carbon-wrapped barrels combine a traditional stainless-steel core with a 45-degree anti-torsion carbon fabric. The carbon fiber provides rigidity with minimal weight and can facilitate heat dissipation. Let's be honest with ourselves, though, it mainly looks cool. The profile is a No. 6 contour but, thanks to the materials used, is very light. Rifling twist is 1:8 in this chambering, so any available 6.5mm bullet will stabilize. Barrels range from 20-24 inches depending on the cartridge and come threaded 5/8-24 at the muzzle. Thanks to the common thread pattern used, a host of muzzle devices can be mounted. A removable multi-port Omni muzzle brake comes installed on the rifle.

OUT-OF-THE-BOX ACCURATE

Thanks to the chambering, the stock fit and the muzzle brake, the Ridge Carbon was extremely soft-shooting in terms of recoil. Accuracy was consistently good, with all but one of the four loads tested producing sub-MOA groups. One load, Federal Premium's 130-grain Barnes TSX, averaged 0.5 MOA at 100 yards. The fact that one can buy a legitimate out-of-the-box half-minute gun for $1,599 and get it done with factory ammo is a great example of how far rifle and ammunition performance has come in recent years. The Ridge Carbon balances well and offers a good mix of portability and shootability. I would have no issue carrying this rifle on a backpack hunt in tough terrain and would feel

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confident making a tough shot with it if I had to. It would do great in a treestand or ground blind as well, thanks to its relatively compact dimensions. This is, essentially, everything that we can ask a big-game rifle to do.

Bergara continues to impress me with accurate, well-built rifles designed for the field. The Ridge Carbon certainly fits that definition. This is a versatile setup, ideal for many of North America's big-game hunting scenarios in its various available cartridges. The Ridge Carbon brings you custom rifle elements such as the carbon-fiber-wrapped barrel, but in a factory package and price point. I drew an either-species Montana deer tag for this fall. When I make the trip west, this rifle is coming with me. Ⓗ

The spiral-fluted bolt body helps reduce overall weight in the platform.

A multi-port Omni muzzle brake mitigates recoil.

BERGARA B-14 RIDGE CARBON

Type: Bolt-action rifle

Caliber: 6.5 Creedmoor (tested)

Barrel: 22 inches, 1:8 twist, carbon-fiber-wrapped, threaded 5/8-24, muzzle brake

Weight: 6 pounds, 8 ounces

Capacity: 4+1

Stock: Synthetic

Finish: Sniper Gray Cerakote

Sights: None. Drilled and tapped for scope mounts

Safety: Receiver-mounted, two-position

Trigger: Single-stage, 2.75 pounds

Price: $1,599

Website: bergara.online/us/

ACCURACY TEST

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

Load	Velocity (fps)	Accuracy (in.)
Norma Whitetail 140gr. SP	2,596	0.7
Hornady American Whitetail 129gr. InterLock	2,739	0.8
Nosler Trophy Grade 142gr. ABLR	2,582	1.6
Federal Premium 130gr. Barnes TSX	2,525	0.5

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CRAIG BODDINGTON

The Copper Option

As non-lead bullets become mandate, better options abound.

In 1882, Lt. Col. Eduard Rubin of the Swiss Army invented the jacketed bullet, sheathing a lead core in a thin layer of copper. The jacketed bullet became critically important two years later with the first nitrocellulose-based propellant. Even hardened lead was too soft for new smokeless velocities. For the next century, almost all centerfire rifle projectiles used a lead core jacketed in copper or copper alloy.

Hunting bullets soon developed with some lead core exposed at the tip, allowing the jacket to peel back while the soft lead expanded or "mushroomed." Military, some match and bullets intended for the largest game kept the lead core completely encased to prevent expansion, called full metal jackets or "solids." Randy Brooks of Barnes Bullets introduced his homogenous copper alloy Super Solid in 1985. In July 1985, I used a 400-grain .416 Super Solid for my first elephant, which delivered through-and-through penetration with a side-on brain shot.

That same year, Randy and Coni Brooks began experimenting with an expanding copper bullet. Later, they brought some samples down to the old Petersen building in Los Angeles.

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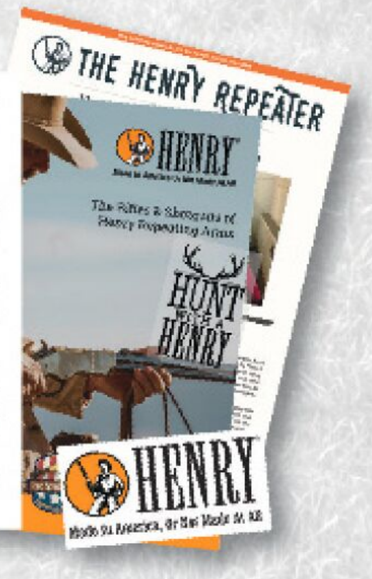

Randy considered calling it the "Super Soft." Expanded in water, his bullets all looked much the same, petals peeled back from a hollow nose cavity. Hold them by the base, and the petals make a cross. Rotate the base slightly, and the petals form an X. The Barnes X Bullet was introduced in 1989, the first homogenous-metal expanding bullet.

Today there are many copper (copper alloy) bullets. Some hunters swear by them; others prefer traditional lead-core bullets. Some rifles produce great groups with copper bullets; others do not. No different than any other bullet. You never know what a given rifle will shoot well until you try it. In some areas (including the entire state of California, for all hunting), unleaded projectiles are required.

Is this contentious? You bet. We don't like to be told what we have to shoot. So let me say this: The copper expanding bullet performs.

HOW IT'S BUILT

Copper bullets all work much the same, featuring a hollow nose cavity with skived nose so that, upon impact, petals peel back. The degree of expansion is limited or controlled by depth and diameter of cavity. Generally, the copper bullet cannot expand as much as a lead-core bullet. Expansion is the enemy of penetration, so copper bullets are penetrating bullets. If you like exit wounds, you should love them. On the other hand, if you like perfectly mushroomed bullets "against the hide on the far side," good luck. In my experience, most copper bullets will exit; it takes large animals to stop them. As with all else, expansion diminishes as range increases and velocity drops. Weight retention can push 100%, except petals can break off.

The copper bullet is more rigid than a lead-core bullet, so it doesn't compress as easily into the rifling. There is thus a pressure spike on firing, and the original Barnes X caused heavy copper fouling in some barrels. Later, Barnes learned that grooves around the bearing surface alleviated both issues. Today, most copper bullets have grooves or driving bands. Many copper bullets now also sport polymer tips. The sharp tip improves ballistic coefficients. As in tipped lead-core bullets, upon impact the tip is driven into the nose of the bullet, initiating expansion.

Copper is 26.6% lighter than lead. This means that a copper bullet will be longer than a lead bullet of the same weight. Eventually, this leads to action length and specified Cartridge Overall Length (COL) limitations. As an example, Hornady's new CX bullet goes up to 190 grains in .30 caliber, while their lead-core ELD-X can be much heavier.

Because weight retention is higher, for hunting, copper bullets can be lighter than lead-core bullets. When Randy Brooks took his polar bear, I was surprised that he used a 185-grain X-bullet in his .338. With a lead-core .338 bullet, I would have used at least 225 grains. Absent weight loss, not as heavy a slug is needed to ensure penetration, and the lighter bullet can be faster, with less recoil. Years later, I took my own polar bear with a 250-grain GMX in a .375 Ruger. It delivered complete penetration. In .375, 250 grains sounds light-for-caliber. Because of the copper bullet's greater length, it really isn't.

Copper bullets of several brands. Generally, they all perform the same, although petals can break off, and expansion diminishes as velocity decreases.

Boddington used some of the first Hornady CX bullets, 180-grain in a .300 Win. Mag., on an ibex hunt in early 2022. So far, this was the only CX he has recovered from game.

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FIELD PROVEN

I've used copper bullets off and on since 1989. My experience has been: The bigger the animal, the better they work. In California, they're wonderful on big hogs. California deer hunters, suddenly required to use them, often complained they didn't work so well on our small-bodied blacktails. American hunters love the behind-the-shoulder lung shot: large target, little meat damage. Because copper bullets are penetrators with limited expansion, on smaller deer this shot tends to leave small entrance and exit wounds and may require some tracking. African hunters prefer a central shoulder/top of the heart shot, believing it yields quicker and more certain results. With copper bullets, especially on smaller-bodied animals, borrow that page and change your mindset: Go for the center-shoulder shot.

Tony Lombardo with a California hog. Copper options are not factory-available for many older cartridges. Boddington used a handloaded Hammer copper bullet in his Winchester M71 in .348.

As to which copper bullet is best, let your rifle tell you. Performance on game is similar, but like any bullet, groups will usually vary. The Barnes X long ago morphed to the TSX with driving bands, then to TTSX with polymer tip. Latest is their LRX, with a higher BC. Federal has their excellent Trophy Copper, and have long loaded Barnes bullets. Winchester has Copper Impact with their Copper Extreme Point: a larger diameter tip and cavity. I used it in Africa last summer in a 6.8 Western where it showcased excellent performance with no bullets recovered.

I used Hornady's GMX quite a bit and usually got good accuracy and always got reliable performance on game. Their CX bullet is an upgrade, adding a Heat Shield Tip and reducing the required velocity for reliable expansion. As Hornady's Neil Davies remarked to me, "We've tweaked the CX as much as we can, but there isn't much tweaking to be done on a copper bullet." So far, I've used 180- and 190-grain .30-caliber CX.

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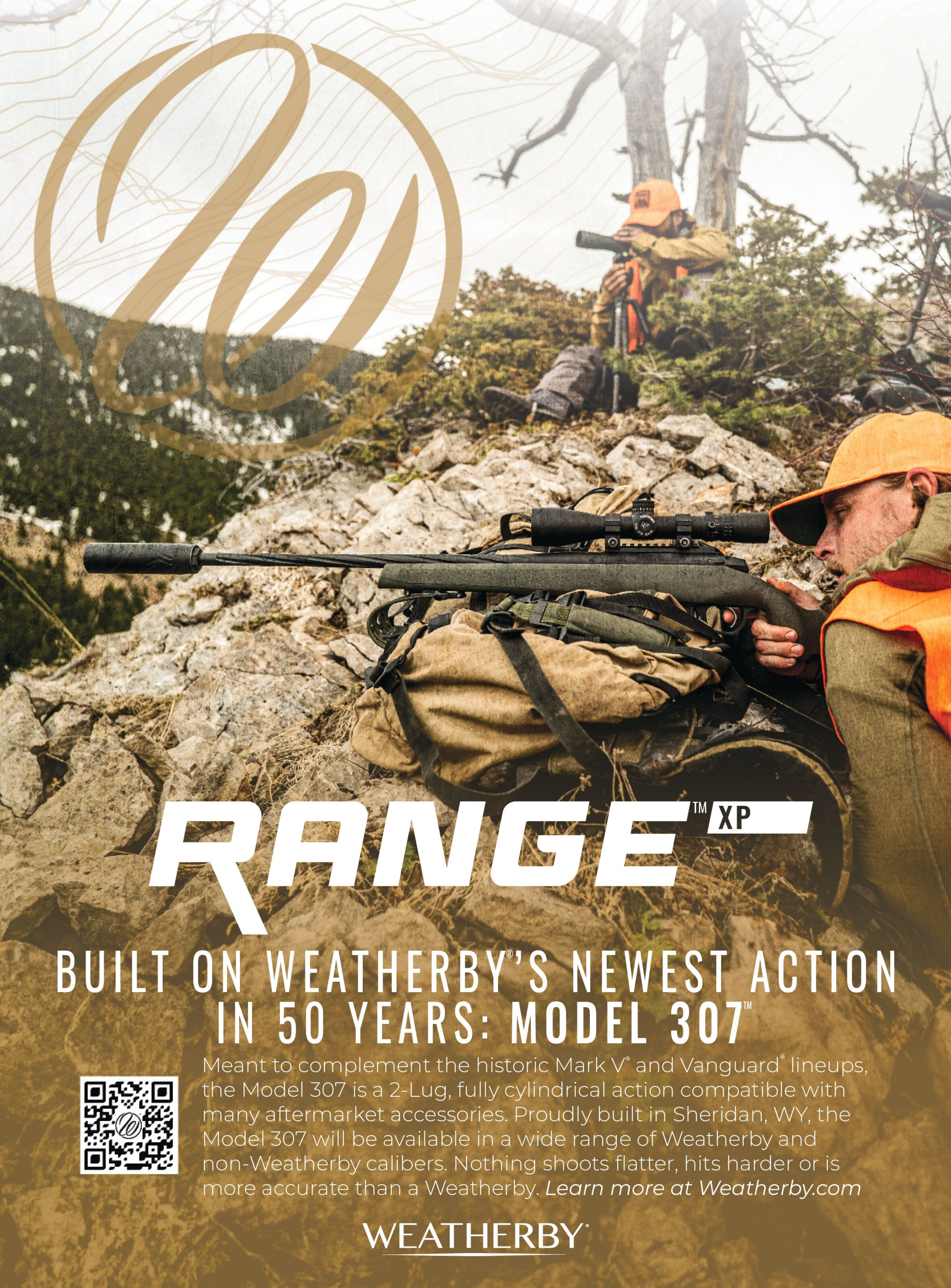
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WHAT'S YOUR BEEF?

Exceptional performance, but I can't say "better than GMX." Norma's EcoStrike is another highly advanced copper bullet, nickel-plated to prevent copper fouling. I haven't hunted with it, but I've seen excellent accuracy. The newest copper bullet from the majors is Remington's Core-Lokt Copper. This one I haven't had a chance to use. I figure if they dared to put the Core-Lokt name on it, it would have to be good.

These days, nothing is available everywhere, but factory options for copper bullets are increasing rapidly, with all major manufacturers now offering one or another copper bullet.

Supplies being as they are, it's probably a long-term project to try a bunch of bullets to see what your rifle shoots best. Copper bullets are getting more popular, but sometimes, the majors don't offer a solution. There are smaller shops across the country that might. No major manufacturer loads an unleaded .348 bullet, essential if I wanted to hunt California hogs with my .348. Cutting Edge in Idaho makes lathe-turned bullets. Although specializing in long-range bullets, they offer *four* .348-inch bullets. Montana's Hammer Bullets also offers copper .348 bullets, and they solved another problem for me. My old .250 Savage has the original 1:14 barrel. Because of length, even 75-grain copper bullets tumbled. Hammer offers a 67-grain .257 bullet that my rifle shoots well. Along our California Central Coast, gun-savvy local friends are raving about Sam McGuire's locally made Copper Rose expanding bullet, also turned on CNC lathes. I'm sure there are other good copper bullets I haven't even heard of. These days, nothing is available everywhere, but copper options are on the rise.

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WILL BRANTLEY

Larry's Legacy

One hunter's lessons are passed on to the next generation.

The red Chevy S-10 was tiny, the way '80s-era four-banger pickups were, and perhaps that made the buck in the bed of it seem larger than life. But the deer would've been big on a flatbed trailer, too. It was a massive, main-frame 8 pointer with beams that curled like flames from a hardwood campfire and forked G-2s so long they could've been used to stake bean plants.

The buck even looked large next to Larry, who didn't step out of the S-10 so much as unfold from it. He was 6-foot-4, give or take, and wrapped in lean muscle built from a lifetime of working cattle, hauling hay and wrestling implements. He worked the farm in the evenings, his second job, after he'd put in his eight hours at the plant.

Larry banked his vacation, using some of it for turkey hunting in April, but saved most of it until November, for rifle season. He hunted the same farm that he'd worked since he was 14, where he'd learned to be a deer hunter. The first time I walked into his house, I saw shoulder mounts of two whitetails that were bigger than any I'd ever seen on the hoof. Record-book deer, or close to it.

"What did those things score?" I asked, but he shrugged and smiled and said, "I've never been too worried about that." He'd tell me the stories of getting them without missing a detail, though. He shot the biggest one on a foggy morning, on the bank of the pond dam, through a blackberry thicket with a .30-06 that he called Old Stomper.

We liked telling hunting stories, Larry and me. It was an unlikely friendship, since I was the skinny, 17-year-old boy who was dating Michelle, his youngest daughter. She and I had been to the movies the afternoon he killed the giant 8 pointer, and we'd rushed back to meet him at dark, to see how his hunt had gone. This was before cellphones.

The three of us stood around the tailgate of that little S-10, looking at the buck, clouds of breath blowing in the nighttime November chill, as Larry told of how the deer had stepped out

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Larry loved hunting big bucks and took several during his lifetime. This 10 pointer was the last buck he hung on the wall.

of the creek bottom, near the canebrake, 10 minutes before dark. He smiled, laughed and shouldered an imaginary rifle. It's been almost 25 years, but sometimes I think, if I'm quiet enough, I can still hear him telling that story.

A TRADITION OF SUCCESS

Larry was good at hunting trophy deer. The last one he had shoulder-mounted was in 2017, a typical 10 pointer that I guess would score about 150. He didn't measure it, of course, but he did pose for a picture with it, alongside Michelle and our son, Anse, who was three at the time.

So much of how Larry hunted was at odds with today's mainstream advice. His time in the woods was restricted to the weekends and vacation days he could get from work. He couldn't afford to stay at home to keep from overpressuring his spots. He didn't worry much about the wind, and he never looked at a hunting app in his life. He simply got in his stand before daylight and got out after dark, with a short break for lunch.

That's not to say he was always passive. The evening before he killed it, Larry saw the giant 8 pointer across the river bottoms, 500 yards away or farther. So, the next day he snuck closer and set up on the edge of the creek, next to a canebrake in a folding dove chair. That night, when the buck came back out, it was a mere 90 yards away.

Larry's gear was minimalistic, but purposeful. His go-to rifle was a Model 700 in .270, with a 3-9x40 scope, but one year he surprised us all when he sprung for a brand-new Ruger .300 Win. Mag., Leupold scope and laser rangefinder. He had designs on being able to kill a buck from across the bottoms, at 500 yards if he needed to, but he switched back to his .270 the following year. He embraced trail cameras and ran them all summer and fall. He'd check his cards once a week, download photos on the home computer, and then tell his wife Mary, Michelle's mom, to e-mail them to us. After that, he'd call to be sure Michelle had received them.

As only a grandfather can, Larry passed his affinity for hunting to his grandson Anse—pictured here with his first buck.

He must have had a thousand pictures of that last big 10 pointer he shot from his box blind, with his .270.

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Michelle and Anse posing with Papaw's big 10 pointer he shot back in 2017 when Anse was only three years old.

ONE FINAL SEASON

Anse shot his first deer, a 140-class 10 pointer, when he was six years old. Michelle and I had hoped that a doe or spike would be the kid's first deer, but that's not what stepped out. I was worried my son would be spoiled on deer hunting, but Larry wasn't. "I told you that boy would get a good one," he said. "He'll be hooked for life."

It was August of last year, and Larry and Anse had been working on stands and checking trail cameras. Anse was eight years old, and it would be his third deer season. Though he'd killed several whitetails, he hadn't yet shot a buck from Papaw's stand. Larry wanted to change that.

But Anse came home and said Papaw's back had been hurting him. Larry thought for a while that he'd pulled a muscle. But the pain persisted and got worse, and just after Halloween, he was diagnosed with cancer. It was serious, the doctors said. They'd need to run more tests to know how serious, and what the treatment options were.

Larry had no plans of being given a timeline or treatment. He went home, to live as long as he could, maybe for another deer season. And he planned to sit with Anse and me on the afternoon of opening day, November 12. We'd stocked the box blind with an extra heater and propane, and we thought perhaps we could drive the truck to the back door of the blind, where Larry could step in and not have to walk much.

Two days earlier, when we'd made the plan, it could've worked. The forecast for opening afternoon was perfect, with a rare dusting of snow on the ground. But Larry could scarcely stand from his favorite chair. He called Anse to his side, wrapped a frail arm around him and said, "You go hunt my stand, and keep watch. There are some nice 8 pointers over there, and an old big one, too."

The sit was magic. We'd no more closed the box blind door when a spike came crashing through the timber wild-eyed after a pair of does. The noise settled, and an hour later I saw more does coming, with a nice 8 pointer in tow. Larry's blind overlooked a lane bulldozed through the trees, and the does crossed it, 60 yards in front of us.

"Get ready, buddy, he's going to be right behind them," I whispered. The rifle was already out the window. I heard the safety click and knew the kid was steady. The buck materialized, quartering sharply to us, and I didn't have to explain to Anse to hold on the front of the shoulder, at the crease of the neck. The buck scrambled across the dozer lane at the shot, and we found heavy blood in the snow. The deer lay dead next to the creek, the one that flows through the bottoms and eventually trickles out near the canebrake.

Larry stood from his chair that night, one of the last times he was able, and walked out onto the porch. And there the four of us stood, him and Anse, Michelle and me, as Anse laughed and smiled and told the story of his buck, even using his hands to shoulder an imaginary rifle, our clouds of breath blowing in the nighttime November chill.

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You can't hunt what you can't see. Sounds simple, but locating game in the vast, rugged expanses of the West is a challenging obstacle many hunters struggle to overcome. There is an art to using your optics effectively, but first things first: the glass. When hunting the West, there are four optics that are essential for locating, assessing and sealing the deal when the moment of truth arrives. They are a clear binocular, powerful spotting scope, reliable rangefinder and a precise riflescope.

Western hunters are inundated with a smorgasbord of optics ranging drastically in function, size and cost. Filtering through the endless options can be a daunting task, but there are a few crucial variables to consider when assembling your Western optics list. Below is a breakdown of these optical essentials and how to select the best options for your next hunting adventure.

Keep in mind the old adage "you get what you pay for" when selecting optics. That is not to say there aren't several great budget-friendly options. But if there is one genre of hunting equipment to splurge on, optics is it. Remember, you can't hunt what you can't see.

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When hunting the West, a good set of 10x42 binoculars will be your go-to optic for most glassing situations.

Rangefinders give hunters the ability to make accurate shots and measure distances while on a stalk.

BINOCULARS

More than likely, you will spend several hours a day peering through your binos. Inferior glass will lead to fatigued eyes; fatigued eyes lead to less time behind your glass; less time behind the glass means fewer animals located. Edge-to-edge clarity and a large field of view are both important factors to consider. The most common binocular configuration for hunting the West is 10x42. That platform offers a great combination of magnification, field of view and light transmission. You may be able to get away with 8X binoculars, but in many instances you will feel "undergunned" and long for more magnification.

Another important factor to consider is the binocular's light-gathering capabilities. Good binoculars will have the ability to light up the topography in front of you during those crucial twilight hours in the morning and evening.

If you are looking to take your glassing game to the next level, do not underestimate the value of glassing from a tripod. Doing so eliminates the natural tremor in your hands and puts you in a comfortable glassing position for extended periods. You will be amazed at what you see glassing from a tripod.

RANGEFINDER

Rangefinders have changed the game for Western big-game hunters. The ability to range your intended target and get an instantaneous reading of the distance is one of the greatest modern advancements in optics. The two most important factors to consider when selecting a rangefinder are the intended distances you plan to shoot and the reliability of the rangefinder. There are few things worse than pulling your rangefinder out as you prepare for the shot only to have the battery die or the lens fogged from the elements. Do your homework and make sure the rangefinder you choose is ultra-reliable and always carry an extra battery.

Long-range shooting has become synonymous with Western hunting, and rangefinders lie at the core of that discipline. Top-of-the-line rangefinders not only tell shooters the range, but they have onboard computers that instantaneously calculate ballistics and spit out a precise "shoot-to" formula. Many rangefinders also give hunters the ability to range targets at absurd distances beyond 3,000 yards. Though that is unnecessary for any shooting application, knowing the distance you must cover to get within range is a useful benefit that powerful rangefinders can provide.

A sturdy and accurate riflescope is imperative to success. Turrets enable hunters to adjust for various shot distances while afield.

I won't dive into the weeds of rangefinding binoculars, but needless to say, they are the wave of the optical future. The technological advances that some of the rangefinding binoculars have incorporated into them are next-level impressive.

RIFLESCOPE

Topping your rifle with a capable and reliable scope is equally as important as the quality-made rifle it is attached to. Hunting the West is often a rough endeavor and the ability for your scope to hold its zero, despite the constant jarring and battering, is imperative for a successful hunt. Like your other optics, you also want to select a riflescope that has the appropriate lens coatings on the glass to maximize your effectiveness in lowlight conditions.

Selecting the correct riflescope for your hunting pursuit depends on the terrain, your preferred methods of hunting and you and your rifle's capabilities. If you plan to still hunt through

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dense timber where shots are close and fleeting, you can't go wrong with a simple 3-9x40 scope. On the flip side, if you intend to shoot 300+ yards on a regular basis, a scope with more magnification is beneficial. Paired with a solid rest, greater magnification lays the groundwork for pinpoint precision. However, too much of a good thing is not always a good thing. Increased magnification amplifies any little self-inflicted movement and decreases light gathering capabilities and field of view. Inside 500 yards, my ideal riflescope configuration is 3-18x44. Everyone will prefer a different scope configuration based on their needs and experience. Figure out what works best for you and run with it.

Turreted riflescopes have grown in popularity in recent years and with good reason. They eliminate the guesswork on holdover and allow shooters to dial their crosshairs to the exact distance of their intended target. Most turrets utilize either Mil or MOA, but some companies, such as Leupold, have developed their own turret system. Leupold's CDS Dial allows hunters to tailor their turret to their specific ballistics and dial simply to the designated yardage marked on the turret as opposed to a Mil or MOA conversion. Regardless of your preference, turreted riflescopes are a game-changing technology that makes all of us more precise shooters.

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The importance of spotting scopes is often overlooked. They yield information about the trophy quality of animals at great distances before embarking on a stalk.

SPOTTING SCOPE

Of the four necessary optics, a spotting scope is of the least importance to the overall success of your hunt. With that said, my spotting scope never gets left behind. Having a spotting scope allows hunters to scrutinize and determine the trophy quality of an animal from extreme distances. This can dramatically save time and energy when deciding if an animal is worth going after.

Depending on your pursuit, there are two primary factors to consider when purchasing a spotting scope: weight and magnification. When packing deep into the backcountry, a spotting scope can be cumbersome. To combat their size downfall, many optic manufactures offer compact spotting scope options with lower magnification ranges and smaller objective lenses. When weight is not an issue, the sky's the limit with some mega spotting scopes sporting 100mm objective lenses and magnification up to 70X. My ideal, do-all spotting scope is a 20-60x65mm spotter.

Your ability to locate game in the rugged canyons and desolate expanses of the West begins with a tailored optics collection. Before your next excursion, take an inventory of your current optics and note what has and has not worked. Over time, and as monetary assets allow, build the best optic package you can afford. Your ability to use your optics and locate game will have a direct correlation with the success of your Western hunting adventures.

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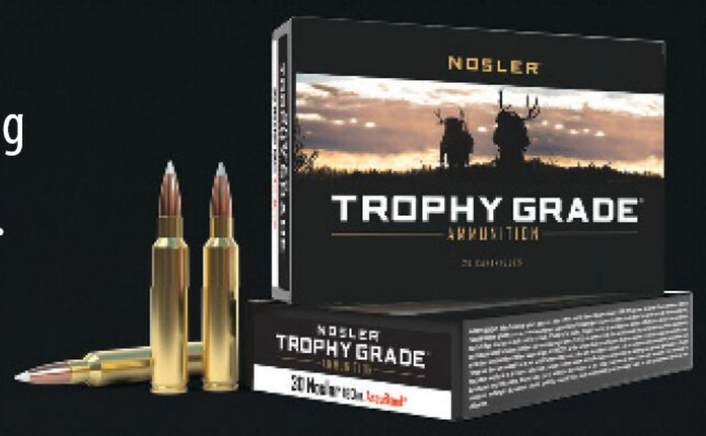

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SILENCE IS GOLDEN

BRAD FITZPATRICK

OWNING A SUPPRESSOR IS LEGAL, AND EASIER THAN YOU THINK.

OVER THE COURSE of my career as a hunter and a writer I've seen many new product fads, many of which faded away after a few years. But one trend that's going to have a lasting impact on the way we hunt and shoot is suppressor ownership, and with companies like Silencer Shop streamlining the purchasing process it's clear that suppressors are here to stay.

I believe that's a good thing, and I speak as a hunter who has fully converted to hunting with suppressed firearms. A few years ago, I didn't own any suppressors and didn't plan to, but after buying my first can, as suppressors are colloquially called, I quickly decided that hunting with a silencer was far better than without. Now I own four suppressors and don't plan on buying any hunting rifles that don't come with threaded muzzles that will accept a can.

My story is not unique. A major reason why so many hunters are protecting their hearing by using a suppressor is companies like Silencer Shop. They help gun owners understand that owning a suppressor is not only legal, but that the purchasing process is quite simple and painless.

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Whether you're hunting hogs, chasing a trophy whitetail, or you finally drew that bull elk tag; protecting your hearing is important. Let us help you ditch the bulky hearing protection and improve your hunt with a silencer.

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SUPPRESSORS MADE SIMPLE

Based in Austin, Texas, Silencer Shop carries a full range of suppressors for everything from rimfires and centerfires to big-bore firearms and hunting handguns. Not only does Silencer Shop sell cans, they also help their customers complete the required paperwork to own a suppressor and make the process very simple, even for first-time buyers. And here's a bit more great news: When you want to buy additional suppressors in the future (and you will), Silencer Shop maintains your records, so the process is even easier going forward.

"Our main challenge is educating people about suppressor buying," said Chase Semonik, writing and community manager at Silencer Shop. Semonik says that many people still believe it is illegal to own or hunt with a suppressor, but owning a can is legal in 42 states. Those who do want to buy a silencer are often intimidated by the buying process, but Semonik says that shouldn't be the case.

"Yes, you can own a suppressor," said Semonik. "And no, it's not hard to buy one." Provided you live in a state where suppressors are legal, the process for purchasing is quite simple when working with Silencer Shop.

"When you decide on a suppressor, we take down your registration information, which is similar to the information you provide on a Form 4473 when purchasing a gun," said Semonik. You'll need to have fingerprints on file, but Silencer Shop works with 6,000 dealers and offers over 3,000 kiosks where you can have your fingerprints taken (at no charge to you). You'll snap a photo of yourself on your cell phone, fill out the required forms digitally using DocuSign, and your application for a tax stamp is sent to the ATF. Going forward, your information will be stored so it's on file and the process doesn't need to be repeated.

"We've taken out as many steps as possible," said Semonik. "You simply purchase the suppressor on our site and when your tax stamp is issued by the ATF, your suppressor ships and can be picked up at the nearest dealer."

As someone who has undergone the suppressor purchasing process in the past, I can assure you buying one is indeed simpler than most hunters and shooters think. And, as Semonik says, the only regret most suppressor owners have is that they didn't buy one sooner.

"I've probably spoken to over 10,000 suppressor owners at shows, events and through customer service," said Semonik. "I've never met anyone that was sorry they bought one."

WHY SUPPRESSORS MATTER FOR HUNTERS

A single gunshot generates about 140 decibels (dB) of noise. That's enough to damage your hearing. Semonik, who grew up hunting and shooting in Michigan, says that he realized, like so many other hunters, that the cumulative effects of years of gunshots without sufficient hearing protection substantially damages hearing. I know older hunters and shooters who have lost hearing due to gunshots. Odds are you do, too.

Suppressors protect our hearing without bulky earmuffs and ear plugs that can be lost or forgotten when we head afield. And while some make the argument that ear plugs are cheaper than a suppressor, I would counter that it's also easier to buy earplugs than to replace the muffler that has fallen off your car. Would the cheaper solution work? Yes, but why not just fix the issue?

What hunters are surprised to learn is that suppressors improve accuracy. They boost velocities slightly while reducing noise, and the added forward weight of a suppressor dampens recoil. The flinch we associate with "kick" is sometimes less about recoil force than the fear of enduring a painful muzzle blast. And while suppressors do add weight, they don't have to be bulky. Semonik points out that modern suppressors often add just 6 or 7 ounces of mass to a rifle.

Your neighbors will also appreciate your suppressor. I can shoot unsuppressed at my home, and my neighbors have always been very gracious. Not everyone will be so lucky, and the opposite is likely more common. So, I always shoot suppressed on my backyard range. I know doing so will keep those living around me happy, and I also know that when I'm in the field, the loud report of an unsuppressed rifle won't alert everyone else as to where I'm hunting.

Suppressed rifles also don't alert game to your presence like the report of an unsuppressed rifle. Semonik says that he shot an elk in a herd with a suppressed rifle and that they weren't alarmed by the muffled report of the rifle. I've seen antelope and whitetail deer act the same way. Most often, the game doesn't seem affected by the report of a suppressed rifle at all—certainly not to the degree they are spooked by a 140 dB rifle shot.

WHY SILENCER SHOP?

Silencer Shop is a one-stop location for purchasing the top suppressors from a variety of brands, so no matter what type of suppressor you're looking for, you'll be able to find it there. Not sure what you want or need? Their customer service team in Texas is very knowledgeable and courteous and will be happy to help you choose the right can and answer any questions that you have. They will also walk you through the process of purchasing a suppressor so it's as simple and straightforward as possible.

What are you waiting for? Now is the time to buy a suppressor, and Silencer Shop has made the process very simple. The only mistake you'll make is waiting any longer to own your own can. Ⓗ

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June 1982

BIG BULLS On The MESCALERO!

By Craig Boddington

THE DESCENDANTS OF GERONIMO MAY HAVE THE BEST ELK HERD IN THE UNITED STATES.

THE RUTTED track was thick with mud from yesterday's showers; we'd left the truck far behind and were making slow going on foot. The dawn sky was still heavily overcast, but the clouds were moving quickly and would soon disappear behind snowcapped Sierra Blanca.

We checked a stock tank for tracks—the big, heart-shaped marks were there, but they were full of rain. Probably yesterday evening. Then from far up the canyon came nature's eeriest sound—the bugle of a rutting bull elk. The hair on my neck stood up as the banshee wail sounded again, then faded away slowly. My partner and I looked at each other and grinned. Then we chugged up the ridge after our guide to take a closer look.

From the top we heard the bugle again, going away from us. We were in an old burn, and the elk seemed to be headed for the untouched timber a thousand yards away. Paul and I both used our Zeiss binoculars. First there was nothing, and then the buff-and-chocolate forms appeared one by one. Our guide smiled slightly—he'd already seen them.

I looked at my watch and shook my head in amazement. Thirty minutes into the first hunting day and already a couple of dozen elk in sight—this wasn't like any elk hunt I remembered!

In fact, the last time I'd chased these big deer, I'd spent ten of my toughest hunting days ever following tracks without even seeing an elk. And that's not too unusual these days. Some people may disagree, but most folks who have done a lot of North American hunting will rate a big bull elk as one of our toughest trophies. For one thing, in many of the more popular northern ranges, elk travel vast distances as weather and food supplies dictate. An area full of elk one week may be empty the next. For another, most elk herds today are subject to heavy hunting pressure, with the result that modern elk are "educated," much like whitetail deer. In many areas where bugling seasons are held, hunting pressure has caused the bulls to change their habits, so they often bugle only at night or not at all. Worse yet, while overall elk populations are very healthy or even increasing, the bull-to-cow ratio is down in much of the prime range, and the percentage of mature, trophy-class bulls is very low.

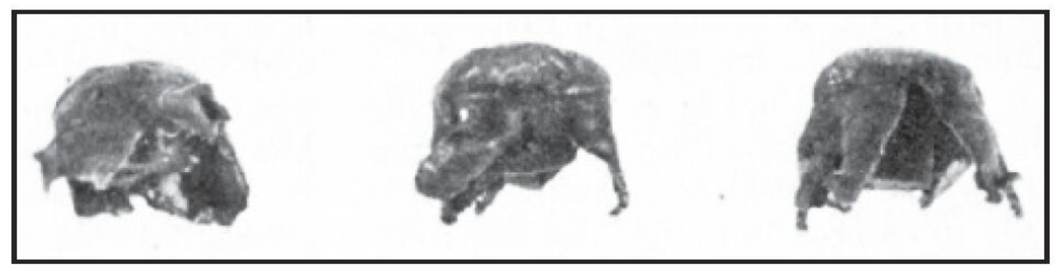
The end result is that in many areas any bull elk is a tough customer, and immature spikes and three- or four-pointers make up the vast majority of the bull harvest.

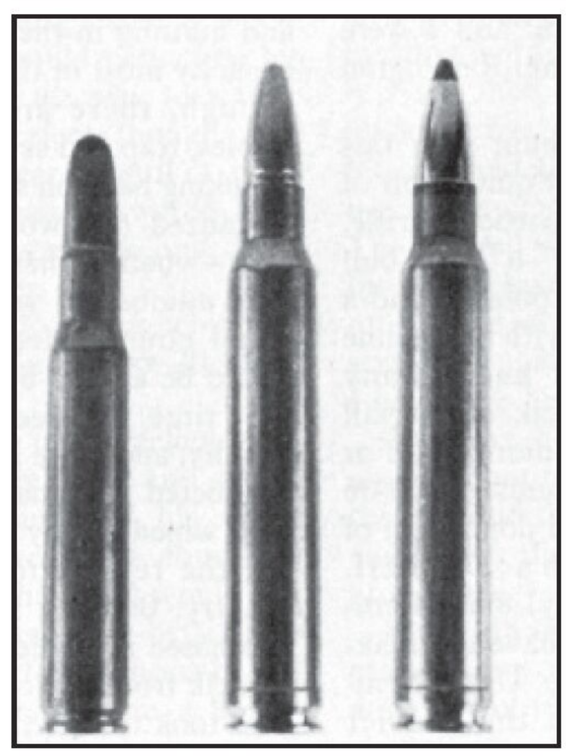
A member of the *Cervus*, or round-antlered, deer family, the elk has antlers that have a main beam that goes up and back, with additional points coming off that beam. Six points per side is the norm for a mature bull, with the points becoming longer and the mass increasing until the decline of old age. A heavy six-by-six is the goal of most hunters, but seven points per side is not too unusual.

Although called elk by most of us, this is a misnomer—that word originally described the moose of Scandinavia, and the early settlers applied it to our *Cervus elaphus*. Wapiti is a more proper name, but you'll forgive me if I stick with elk—it's shorter and easier to say. Whatever you call it, it's a tough customer. In past years, I had collected a couple of five-pointers from Montana's jack-pine jungles, but I had never laid my sights on a six-by-six.

Elk hunting means hard work, usually. Days and days of riding, climbing, and following tracks, and the knowledge that you'll probably be beaten. And yet these big deer are among our greatest trophies—majestic, imposing, elusive. And they live in beautiful high country. When Remington Arms' Paul Spenard called and asked me to join him for a bugling elk hunt on the Mescalero

The half-million-acre Mescalero Apache Reservation started their elk herd in 1966 with a few animals from Yellowstone; today the herd numbers around 4,000. The carefully managed hunts offer a unique opportunity to hunt at the peak of the rut.





The author and his partner, Remington's Paul Spenard, chose the 8mm Rem. Mag. in Remington Model 700s. Basically a .375 H&H case necked down to 8mm, or .323 caliber, the "Big Eight" offers power and flat trajectory, making it a good choice for the big-bodied Mescalero bulls. Remington Core-Lokt 220-grain ammo was used; the bullets above were recovered from elk. All show excellent weight retention, and all were lodged just under the hide on the far side.

BIG BULLS

Above, the author and his guide, Arlys Kanseah, check for sign around a waterhole. At right, Paul Spenard answers a bull elk's challenge. Bugling is done in the early morning and late evening; midday is best spent glassing and checking for sign.

Apache Reservation in New Mexico, needless to say I jumped at the chance, but I didn't hold out much hope for a big bull—I'd hunted elk before!

At the appointed time in late September, I flew to Paul's home in Amarillo, Texas, to be met by Paul and Joe Roberts of *American Rifleman*. The fourth member of our party, George Rockwell of Remington, would meet us at the Mescalero.

It was blazing hot in Amarillo, not the kind of weather for a crisp fall hunt. From the airport we went straight to the rifle range to recheck our rifles one last time. George and Joe would be using 7mm Remington Magnums, while Paul and I were both using Model 700s in 8mm Remington Magnum.

This would be my first hunt with this cartridge, although I'd spent quite a bit of time on the range with that particular rifle. Elk are big, tough animals—a large bull may weigh in excess of 800 pounds, and a rutting bull can be charged with adrenaline and hard to put down. I know many hunters swear by a .270 for elk, and it will do the job. But I prefer a bit more gun. For my money, the 7mm magnums or .30-06 should be minimum, and I'd done most of my previous elk hunting with a .375 H&H. But the new (to me, anyway) 8mm Remington Magnum seemed to have the makings of an ideal elk cartridge. Using Remington factory loads with the heavier 220-grain Core-Lokt bullet at about 2,830 feet per second, the "Big Eight" churns up almost 4,000 foot-pounds of muzzle energy, yet shoots plenty flat enough for the occasional long shots common in elk hunting.

Like most Model 700s, this rifle was quite accurate. Topped with a 3-9X Lyman scope, it would consistently group under 1 1/2 inches, and after the plane ride it was still just where I wanted it—2 inches high at 100 yards. I figured I was ready.

It took half a day to drive from Amarillo to the Mescalero Reservation at Ruidoso, New Mexico. And no, not one inch of that drive looked like elk country. First farmland, then flat ranch country, and finally broken sagebrush hills.

We passed through Ruidoso and were into the pines and mountains of the Mescalero. Now, this was more like it! I had been told we would stay at the lodge, but I wasn't exactly prepared. The Inn of the Mountain Gods is a huge facility, actually more of a five-star resort, looking out over a beautiful trout lake. Between horse racing in the summer, skiing in the winter, and hunting in the fall, it remains filled to capacity most of the year. And if that isn't enough, there are golf courses, riding stables, trap and skeet ranges—you name it.

Thinking back on spike camps in the snow, I realized this would be a most unusual hunt—whether there were any elk or not!

A number of years ago the Mescalero tribal council determined that tourism would be a good business for the tribe. At that time the deer herd was extremely healthy, and some guided hunts were being conducted. The native Merriam's

Much of the Mescalero is thick timber, but even in heavy cover binoculars are a must for spotting elk in the shadows.

elk had been wiped out by the turn of the century, but the reservation was still prime elk country. Between 1966 and 1967, the tribe purchased and released 157 Rocky Mountain elk from Yellowstone Park. The small herd took to the country, no doubt preferring the mild winters to those of their native Wyoming, and soon began to spread over the 460,000-acre reservation.

Today there are an estimated 4,000-plus elk on the Mescalero, and the very limited hunting over the years has resulted in a superb bull-to-cow ratio. The first elk hunts were conducted in 1973. For 1981 there were 40 bull permits authorized for all-inclusive package hunts and 20 more for general hunts. Additionally, the tribal members were allocated

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The author's big bull, typical of Mescalero elk, was taken after stalking into the midst of some half-dozen bugling bulls. Relatively few rut rifle seasons are held today, but the lightly hunted Mescalero elk bugle heavily, adding a special excitement.

a very few permits by drawing, and 200 cow permits were authorized. From a herd of 4,000 elk, that isn't very many!

The Mescalero Reservation is a separate entity from the state of New Mexico, and as such sets its own hunting season; no New Mexico hunting license is required. The package elk hunts are scheduled during the September bugling time, and success has run near 100 percent, with a strict five-point minimum imposed.

Bob Thompson, the hunt director, and the tribal council hosted a barbecue and orientation the evening we arrived. We were on the second package hunt, during which a total of 26 hunters would be in the field. Bob gave us the rundown on the Mescalero elk and the conduct of the hunt. George Rockwell and Joe Roberts would hunt together, while Paul and I were paired up. We were introduced to our guide, Arlys Kanseah, a veteran conservation officer for the reservation. Paul won the toss for first shot on the first day, and after that we would trade off for the five-day hunt.

Many of the hunters we spoke with that night had been on more than one unsuccessful elk hunt in the northern Rockies. Like me, they were hopeful but skeptical. It couldn't really be that good, could it?

The next morning, as we watched elk fade into the distant timber, I reckoned maybe it could be that good!

There were several bulls bugling back and forth, and at least one deserved a closer look. The timber appeared fairly open, so after long deliberation we decided to try a stalk. Arlys is a big man and had 20 years on Paul and me, but we scrambled to keep up as went across the wide valley and circled up through the timber.

Mid-morning had come and gone by now, and the bulls had ceased bugling. Paul eased into the lead as we moved through the patchy timber, and then we all froze as a spot of chestnut went into motion in the trees. A wild horse, common on the reservation, and he didn't want anything to do with us! He galloped ahead through the timber, and we saw flashes of buff moving as he passed. I put my binoculars on the spot and saw the great antlers as a bull rose from his bed. He trotted in the clear for an instant, then followed his cows over the rise and into the thicker timber. Off to my left Paul had been screened by brush; all he caught was a flash of antlers.

We moved slowly, circling the ridgetop, but there had been too much commotion; all we found was plenty of fresh tracks.

Toward mid-afternoon Arlys took us to a hidden spring he knew of, a place where he had heard bulls bugling a few days before. We settled into some brush overlooking a pothole, muddy from wallowing bulls, and waited. An hour of silence passed, then another. I was just easing a cramp in my leg when a bull's wild, lilting call drifted through the trees.

Paul winked at me, and all cramps were forgotten. Hands moving slowly, Paul reached for his bugle, but halted when the sound came again. The bull was closer and moving our way. We had guessed wrong—he was behind us and would pass close by in the heavy timber on his way to water. The light breeze was perfect, though, and his trumpeting grew nearer until it rang against our ears. He was answered now from far down the canyon, one bull, then another, and yet another.

Now I could hear his footsteps behind us and then a pause as he bugled not 20 yards from us.

More footsteps, and a twig cracked. And then the bull stood there, head and shoulders exposed, as he surveyed his water hole. I counted one, two, three, four, five long points and knew that Paul would not shoot. Like me, he wanted a six-by-six. We watched the young bull for a time as he bugled, but darkness came before a bigger bull answered his challenge.

The next morning found us back at Arlys's secret waterhole. This time it would be my shot, but there was no action. About 8:30 we headed back to the truck and, on a hunch, Arlys drove a few miles away to a long valley overlooked by two timbered ridges. In the bottom was a fenceline with a faint vehicle track and a dry watercourse with a few potholes.

We stopped at a muddy waterhole to check for tracks, and I glanced at my watch. 9:00 a.m. A moment later a bugle sounded on the northern ridge, quickly answered by another, and yet another. We bugled and were replied to in chorus, but the bulls were moving away, probably into the dense timber to bed down.

The bulls were at least a mile away and still moving, their bugles coming only faintly on the breeze. From the tone and sequence there were at least five bulls, not together but drifting in the same direction. The only option was to follow and hope they kept bugling until we located them, but with the sun warming up quickly it was a long shot.

We moved quickly until the sound told us we were gaining and then moved ahead carefully, stopping to glass and listen. The top of the ridge was a long table covered with dense pines and undergrowth; visibility shrank to 40 or 50 yards.

Then Arlys froze. I peered into the brush and saw a bull looking at us, a strange young fellow with an odd-shaped five-point antler on one side and three or four points on the other. We stared each other down and then he moved off to the right, bugling as he went.

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A few yards farther and another bull crossed in front, a spike with a mid-sized six-pointer in pursuit. We waited them out, then moved on ahead. Now, from the sound, we had three bulls to our right, one to our left, and one straight ahead. The bull to our front had a deep, guttural voice—if he wasn't the biggest, he sure sounded like it!

We moved ahead another 50 yards. Things were getting mighty touchy now; the whole crew had to be within 100 yards of us. Arlys peered ahead with his binoculars, then eased into a crouch, his mouth forming words. "Cow watching us." Slowly I searched the brush, then spotted her under a tree, a bare 40 yards from us. A bugle sounded from just behind her, echoing in the close timber. We looked closer. The big bull was behind the tree, the tip of his antlers visible on one side and his rump on the other. He bugled again, then scratched against the lower branches, and I could see his antlers.

This was the bull I wanted. No question about it, but no chance for a shot. He had the cow and the other bulls wanted her; we could hear them churning the underbrush around us.

Paul stayed put while Arlys and I crawled one tree closer, hoping for a better angle. I got to one knee and put the crosshairs on the bull, but there was no shot.

He bugled again and one of the unseen bulls charged in closer, bellowing. Surely he would step out to do battle. But he wasn't concerned. He bedded down while his rivals bugled all around him. The cow apparently liked Big Daddy—she bedded as well, and now all I could see was the very tip of one antler.

We waited while my bull did an unheard-of thing—he bugled from his bed every few minutes. I shifted position, hoping for a clear shot, and now lost sight of him altogether.

A lot of time passed. Five minutes, ten minutes, fifteen—who knows? All I know is that it passed slowly. Then a bugle sounded from our right, very close. I focused on the spot where my bull must lie, on one knee with the rifle ready to bring up. Out of the corner of my eye I saw movement as the smaller six-point charged up to within ten yards of us. That was too much for the old boy. He rose to his feet and trotted into the clear.

I swung with him quickly and shot just behind the shoulder. He shuddered, then trotted on and stood, looking. I shot again, for the shoulder this time, and he took a great leap and piled up. He was a fine, even, heavy-horned six-by-six, but I had to wait for my breathing to settle down before I could go forward and admire him.

There were plenty of bulls working that particular canyon, so the next dawn found us working our way along it on foot. We heard the first bugles long before shooting light, and this time it seemed we might catch elk in the open bottom.

We did. Bugles echoed along the canyon as we pussyfooted past a five-point bull and then a spike. Both were moving up into the timber to our right, but the deeper bugles ahead of us sounded like the elk were still in the bottom. I was behind a few paces, hoping for some pictures, and I saw the big bull first. He was 200 yards ahead of us, drifting through the trees.

The wind was perfect, so Aryls and Paul moved ahead quickly. The hillside was open for a short distance, but the thick timber loomed all too close. As we stepped around a clump of scrub pine, the bull spotted us. He was ten yards from the timber, and Paul got off a quick shot just as he swapped ends. I could hear the bullet hit, but the bull faltered for only a step and then took a great lunge. Just at that second Paul's 220-grain Core-Lokt bullet caught him at the base of the neck, and the backslapping began!

Paul's bull was another heavy-beamed six-point bull, a near duplicate of mine. His first shot had hit well back, angling forward through the lungs, and his bull wouldn't have gone far—but on big animals like these it pays to make sure.

Although both of our bulls required more than one shot, I came away mighty impressed by the Big Eight. Bullet penetration was perfect, as was expansion. Recovered bullets retained from 60 to 70 percent of their original weight, and all mushroomed perfectly.

It had been an exceptional hunt for Paul and me, but all the hunters had similar stories. Joe Roberts took a fine bull, and George Rockwell took a monster seven-by-seven, the biggest of the hunt. In fact, the 26 hunters took 26 good bulls.

Moreover, the Mescaleros put on an exceptional experience. These are proud people, descendants of Geronimo's little band who fought the cavalry to a standstill for years. They're proud of their reservation and proud of their heritage, and they make their hunters welcome. The lodging is almost too plush, but those who have earned their spurs in wind-swept fly camps will appreciate it! The food was superb, and Dallas taxidermist Bill Flagg is on hand to assist with trophy preparation and meat processing. These hunts aren't cheap by any means, but it's a class operation throughout.

It's also a rare chance, in this day and age, to hunt bugling elk in full rut. If you've never hunted elk before, well, maybe you should hunt the more traditional areas a few times before you head for the Mescalero. You might get spoiled! Ⓗ

Hunt Director Bob Thompson and taxidermist Bill Flagg examine some of the antlers taken on the hunt. A 5x5 bull is minimum, with success near 100 percent.

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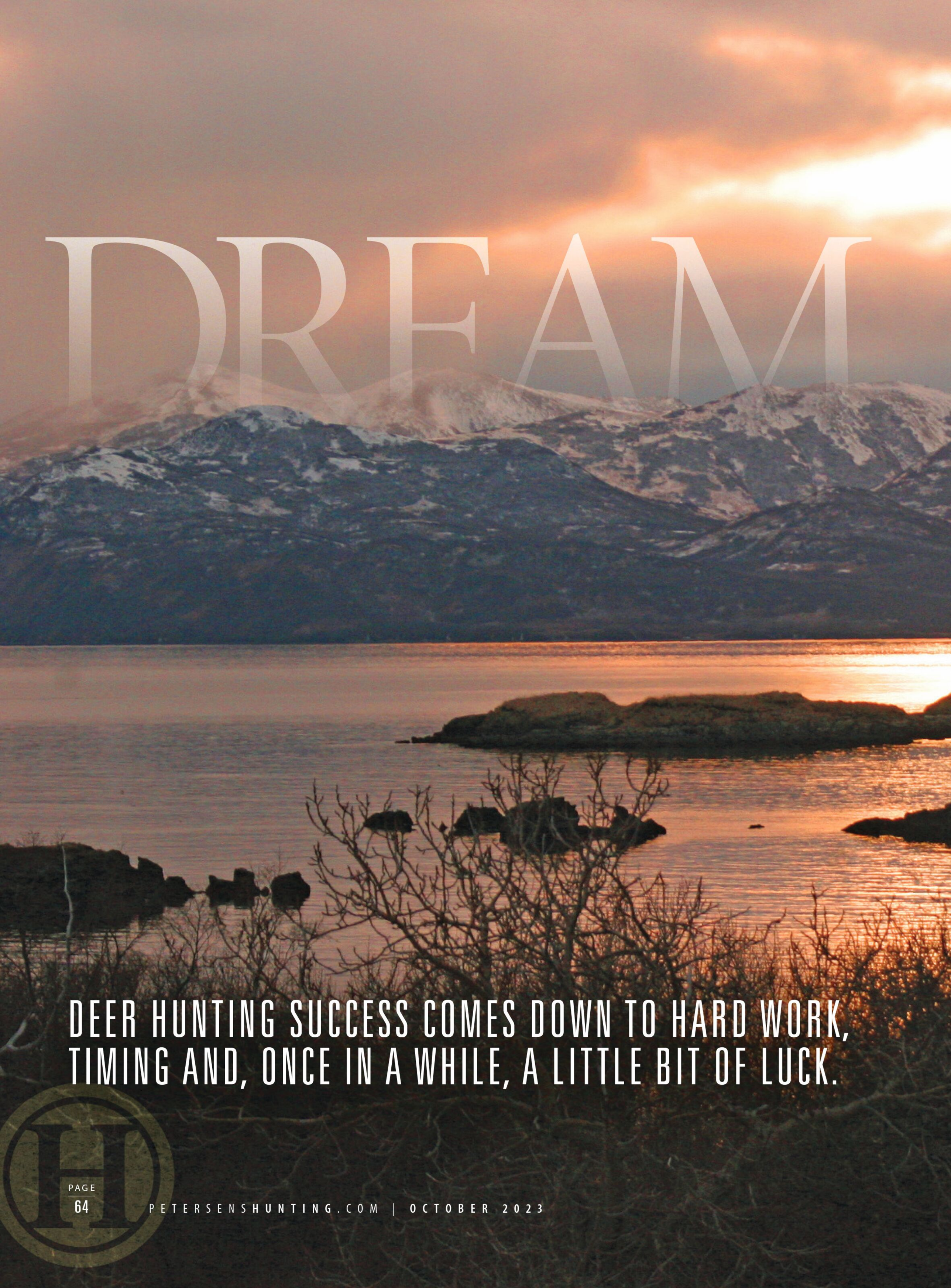

DEER HUNTING SUCCESS COMES DOWN TO HARD WORK, TIMING AND, ONCE IN A WHILE, A LITTLE BIT OF LUCK.

SEASON

SCOTT HAUGEN

THIRTY MINUTES into opening day, a Columbia whitetail deer materialized in an oak draw I had been glassing. With its head down, feeding on acorns, the deer would have been an easy shot. The 3x5 buck was young, and knowing I'd likely never hold one of these prized tags again, I held off.

Three days later I was second guessing myself. Looming in my mind was the season prior, in 2005, when my wife drew the coveted tag. That marked the first year the season was re-opened for these deer after a more than 25-year closure. We hunted hard every day, daylight to dark. It was unseasonably hot, and we didn't see a mature buck. She didn't fire a shot.

I grew up hunting and fishing in the game-rich Umpqua River Valley, near Roseburg, Oregon—the only region in the world where Columbia whitetails could be hunted. I'd seen them my entire life, but when the chance came to hunt the little gems, my view of them shifted.

Sound management paved the way for hunters to once again pursue the western-most whitetails in North America. The odds of drawing a tag were low. Landowner tags were fetching $10,000.

E

Early October is hot in the Umpqua Valley and mature bucks are highly nocturnal. The brushy habitat they thrive in is not easy to hunt, especially when so dry. Glassing for bucks on the move early and late in the day offers the best chance, followed by searching for bedded bucks in thick cover by day.

On the final morning of the brief season, I spotted a buck working its way toward the hills from the river. When it disappeared behind a yellow, grassy knoll, I made a move.

A speedy stalk found me in position, prone and secure. As the buck moved through tall, dry grass in a shallow draw, I waited. The closer it moved, the more heavily my heart pounded.

I knew exactly what I was looking at through the scope, and when the 3x3 with eye guards buckled at the shot, a lifetime dream became reality. I never thought I'd get to hunt these deer, as my father and grandfathers did.

The deer season was off to a good start. I still held more deer tags. Six more, in fact.

DOUBLE-DROP-TINE MULEY

Rolling into pronghorn camp in the dark, I saw a double-drop-tine mule deer in the headlights. The next morning, I spotted the buck again, its unique rack and double throat patch glowing in the rising sun. It wasn't old, but no one would pass it up come rifle season—including me.

I had a Wyoming deer tag and returned a few weeks later. Glassing for most of the morning, I failed to find the drop-tine buck. The season had opened a few days prior, and I feared someone had shot it.

I watched a big whitetail buck chase a doe into some pine trees and that's when the hind end of a mule deer caught my eye. The buck finally moved and on the right side of the rack, through brush, I saw a familiar drop tine. It skirted the inside of the timber. I slowly followed. Temperatures were in the single-digits and the frozen ground was noisy.

A half-mile later, I caught up. That's when I saw the left side of its rack tangled in orange baling twine. Moving behind big pine trees, I got to 160 yards, set up the shooting sticks and waited for the buck to emerge from behind some brush. Weeks of anticipation had come down to this moment. The shot was simple.

Cutting the twine from the rack, I was relieved to see a perfect drop tine matching the one on the other side. It was a fitting end to a hunt I'll never forget.

MY FAVORITE DEER

A few days later I was back in my home state of Oregon, hunting what I consider to be the toughest trophy deer to consistently attain in all North America, the Columbia blacktail. I'd drawn a bonus tag for the Willamette Valley. For generations, my family has pursued these brush-country deer along the western slopes of the Cascade Range.

In the evening of the first day, I slipped into a wooded draw and rattled. I was in

When Haugen cut the baling twine from the Wyoming muley's rack, he was elated to see all tines intact.

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the same place I sat a year prior, rattling for my wife when she held a tag. On that hunt, the biggest deer that had ever come to my rattling briefly appeared, but no shot presented itself in the driving rain.

After 30 minutes of rattling on my hunt, the wind changed. Seconds later a series of snorts resonated. A buck had been coming in. It was on the same trail as last year, and though I can't say for sure, I'm betting it was the same big buck.

Day two found my four-year-old son Kazden by my side. More than anything, he wanted to skin a deer with his new knife. I wanted him along to experience the entire hunt, not just show up at the house with a deer for him to skin. He'd hunted with me before, but this was his first deer hunt.

With Kazden, a trophy buck was no longer the priority. I told myself I'd shoot the first buck we saw. Minutes into the hunt we saw a spike–legal with this tag–but I couldn't bring myself to pull the trigger.

A few hours of searching turned up nothing. Kazden kept asking about the spike. His level of interest put a lump in my throat. My greed may have deprived my son of what he wanted. We hiked back to where we saw the spike and found it not far away. A 150-yard shot put the little buck down.

Kazden was elated and after helping me field-dress the deer, we dragged it to the truck and headed home. With my guidance, Kazden skinned the entire deer by himself. He still talks of that hunt, and we've been on many together. Ironically—for reasons obvious to a father—this buck stands out as the most memorable of my dream season.

WESTERN WHITETAIL

Days before Thanksgiving, with an over-the-counter tag, I was in Idaho searching for a western whitetail. Hunting the rugged mountains in the Clearwater drainage, I found a good buck bedded atop a shale slide. Setting up the shooting sticks I felt good about the nearly 300-yard shot, until I looked through the scope.

The sun had just poked above the mountain behind the buck and was directly in line. No matter how hard I tried, I couldn't find the buck through the intense glare. Then it bolted. As the buck scampered up a steep hillside, I moved behind a big pine tree, looking for shade to cut the glare.

The buck was moving straight uphill, directly away. This offered a big kill zone. I put the crosshairs on the buck's nose and pulled the trigger of the .300 Winchester Magnum. At 340 yards, the bullet hit the base of the neck. It was over quickly, but the pack out was far from easy or fast.

RATTLING SITKA BLACKTAILS

I used to live in Alaska, and love chasing Sitka blacktails on Kodiak Island. I arrived in early December, hoping bad weather had pushed bigger bucks to lower elevations, and that they'd not yet dropped their antlers.

On the first morning, I stumbled into a flat where several draws met. Snow had fallen all night and was still coming down. Fresh tracks and rubs were everywhere.

As I set up against the alders, my rattle bag and grunt tube sounded good. After fifteen minutes of rattling, I saw movement across the clearing, in the alders. It was a buck, but I wasn't sure how big.

I was on the gun, hoping the buck would come into the open. Through the falling snow, a perfect 4x4 rack materialized. When it turned broadside, I stopped the buck with a mouth grunt, then dropped it with the .300. Carrying nearly 105 inches of antler, it truly was the Sitka blacktail of a lifetime.

The author's Idaho whitetail wasn't the biggest buck he saw on the trip, but he was more than pleased with the results.

The author killed this big Sitka blacktail near cover, but because brown bears were still active, he dragged it into the middle of an opening with a good visual to break it down for the pack out.

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SOUTH OF THE BORDER DOUBLE

After Christmas, I headed to Sonora, Mexico. I was hunting with good friend and outfitter Jeremy Toman, whom I hunted with before. He takes one or two Coues a season in this camp, purely by chance. I knew that going in.

We were hunting mule deer and if a Coues appeared, great. A record two-week cold spell put deer in the brush and slowed the rut. In the first two days we saw only one Coues showing any rutting signs. Fortunately, it was a shooter.

The buck was with a doe that was feeding on the edge of thick brush. The doe showed no interest in him. Eventually the buck bedded down. When the doe fed out of sight, we got low and tried closing the gap.

Weaving our way through the brush, the doe busted us. Both deer took off into dense cover. We kept going, but it felt as if it was blown. Minutes later we found the buck standing in shadows, the doe feeding on the backside of a thicket. Just as I got in the shooting sticks, he took off.

"I've been guiding here nine years, and this is one of the biggest Coues bucks I've seen," whispered Toman. "There just aren't many Coues here, and very few mature bucks."

Quickly, we were in pursuit.

Haugen ranks the Sonoran Coues deer as the toughest tag he had to fill. He's the first to admit that luck played a big part in this hunt.

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Haugen's desert mule deer in Sonora, Mexico marked the final buck of his dream season.

There are some monster muleys roaming the desert, but they're not easy to find.

Again, we found the buck next to the doe, but a small tree blocked the shot. By luck, the buck turned into a tiny opening. It was the only one I would be able to shoot through—and the bullet hit the mark. Had it not broken off two tines, the Coues buck would have measured 114 inches—a true trophy Coues. Not that inches matter, but it's a good means to judge mature bucks.

Two days later, the cold weather broke and mulies began moving. We passed some nice bucks, hoping for better. On the second-to-last day a pair of fighting bucks clashed on a hillside. One was pushing 30-inches wide, but it had multiple broken tines. The other buck had a tall, heavy rack. As soon as the bucks separated, I shot.

Kneeling beside the desert muley, it hit me. It was the seventh deer subspecies of the season, and though I didn't set out to achieve the undertaking, it just came together. The family enjoyed a lot of venison that year, save for the two bucks taken in Mexico that went to ranchers.

I learned a lot that season. Notably, that hard work is rewarded. Also, that sometimes it just pays to be lucky.

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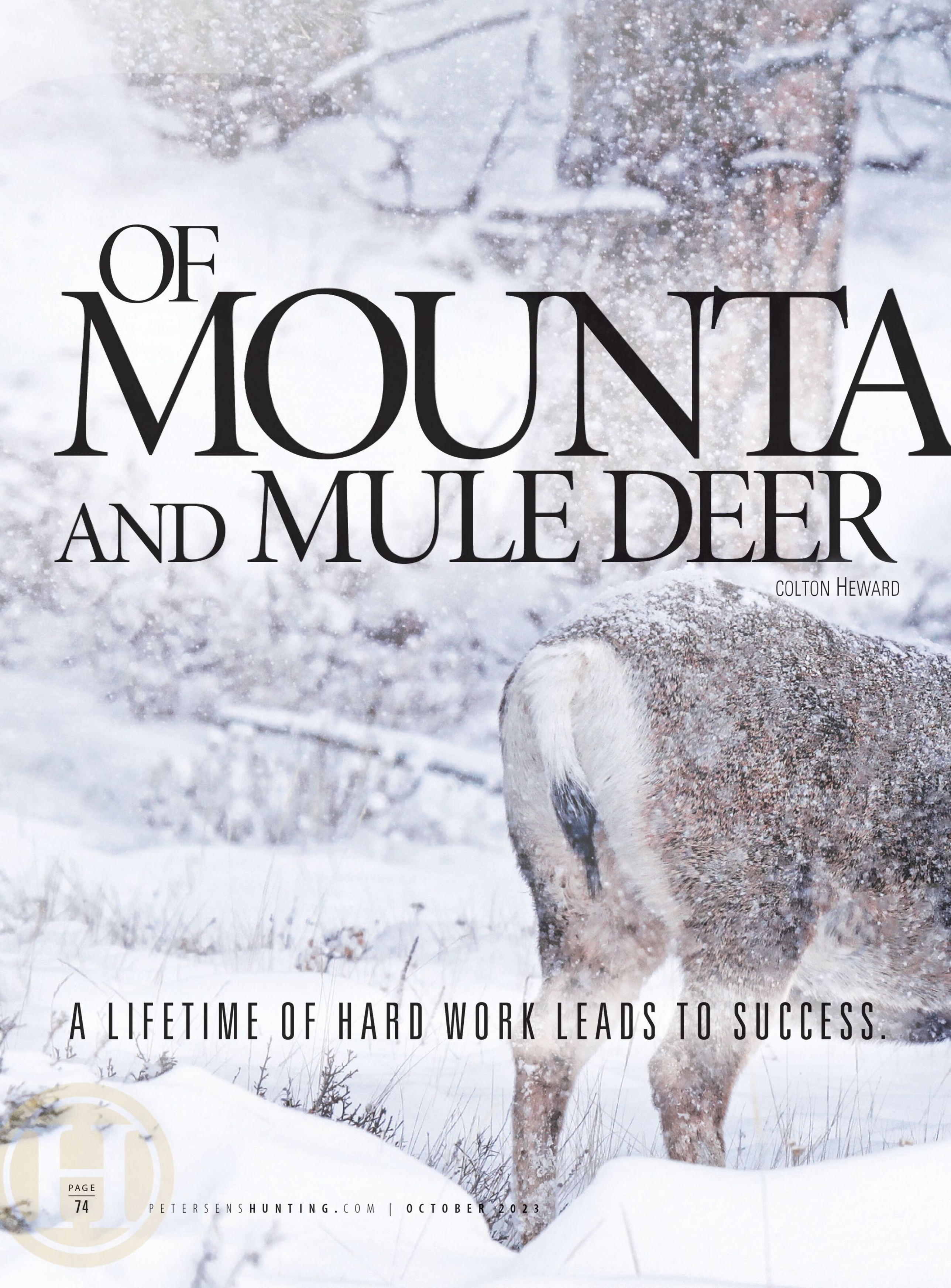

OF MOUNTAIN AND MULE DEER

COLTON HEWARD

A LIFETIME OF HARD WORK LEADS TO SUCCESS.

INS

WITH EVERY STEP, the buck continued to grow, and the realization I had just killed a deer I had only dreamed of began seeping in. Truth be told, I had no idea how much antler adorned his head when I squeezed the trigger. I knew he was mature with a decent frame, but I never imagined I was settling the crosshairs on the biggest buck of my life. Overcome with feelings of appreciation and deep respect, I sat on a protruding rock for more than an hour, admiring the fallen monarch and replaying the events that led up to this humbling experience. Hanging my tag on this buck was far more than the successful end to a memorable hunt. It was the culmination of my lifelong obsession with hunting the iconic mule deer.

My passion for mule deer began long before I could carry a rifle of my own. Growing up, I eagerly awaited every issue of hunting magazines my father subscribed to. For years, I read and often re-read every story I could find of the biggest mule deer killed across the West. Somewhere buried in those endless pages of massive mule deer, and tailing my father and grandfather on their adventures, a flame was lit, and an addiction was born.

A

At the age of 12, I drew my first mule deer tag in Idaho. I can still vividly recall tracking the young four-point through my scope as he tailed a group of does through the scattered sage 300 yards above us. With light fading, my father whistled, and the buck paused. The distance was further than my father wanted me to shoot, but after several days of hunting with few buck sightings, he whispered, "If you're comfortable, kill him." A single shot from my .25-06 echoed along the canyon walls and the buck collapsed. To this day, that is the smallest buck I have ever killed, but you could not wipe the smile off my chubby 12-year-old face. On Cloud Nine, I am pretty sure I floated up the steep hill to the fallen buck. In my mind, I was officially a mule deer hunter.

GUIDING GIANTS

Fast forward 20 years and my obsession with hunting mature mule deer has only deepened with each passing season. I primarily hunt heavily pressured public lands and the astronomical odds of hanging a tag on truly big mule deer became readily apparent. Over that time, I have been incredibly fortunate to kill many great bucks, one that even carried a 31-inch spread, but a buck in that "next-level" trophy category had always eluded me. Eleven years ago, I also began guiding mule deer, elk and pronghorn hunts on a premier chunk of private real estate in northern Utah. Since mule deer are my forté, most of my clients are deer hunters and I have had the opportunity to pursue giants for six to eight weeks every fall for the past decade. My time as a guide has been a continual education on hunting big bucks and has allowed me to witness many giant mule deer hitting the dirt, several breaking the magical 200-inch mark. I revel in my client's success, but without fail, after walking up on every big deer I have ever guided, I always wondered in the back of my head if I would ever get to experience that exhilarating feeling for myself.

THE ODDS ARE AGAINST ME

It was difficult to not get discouraged as we drove around the unit the day before the opener only to find hordes of other hunters in nearly every drainage. I had also put some unnecessary pressure on myself by bookending an elk hunt in New Mexico that only left me three days to hunt deer here in Colorado. Fortunately, my best friend Colby, his father Ryan and I had successfully hunted this same unit last year and had some boots-on-the-ground knowledge of where we could go to escape some of the pressure.

Our scouting day proved rather fruitless with only one sighting of a semi-mature buck. Opening day found us reverting to the area we found success in

With a horde of hunters in the unit, the author searched new country for big bucks.

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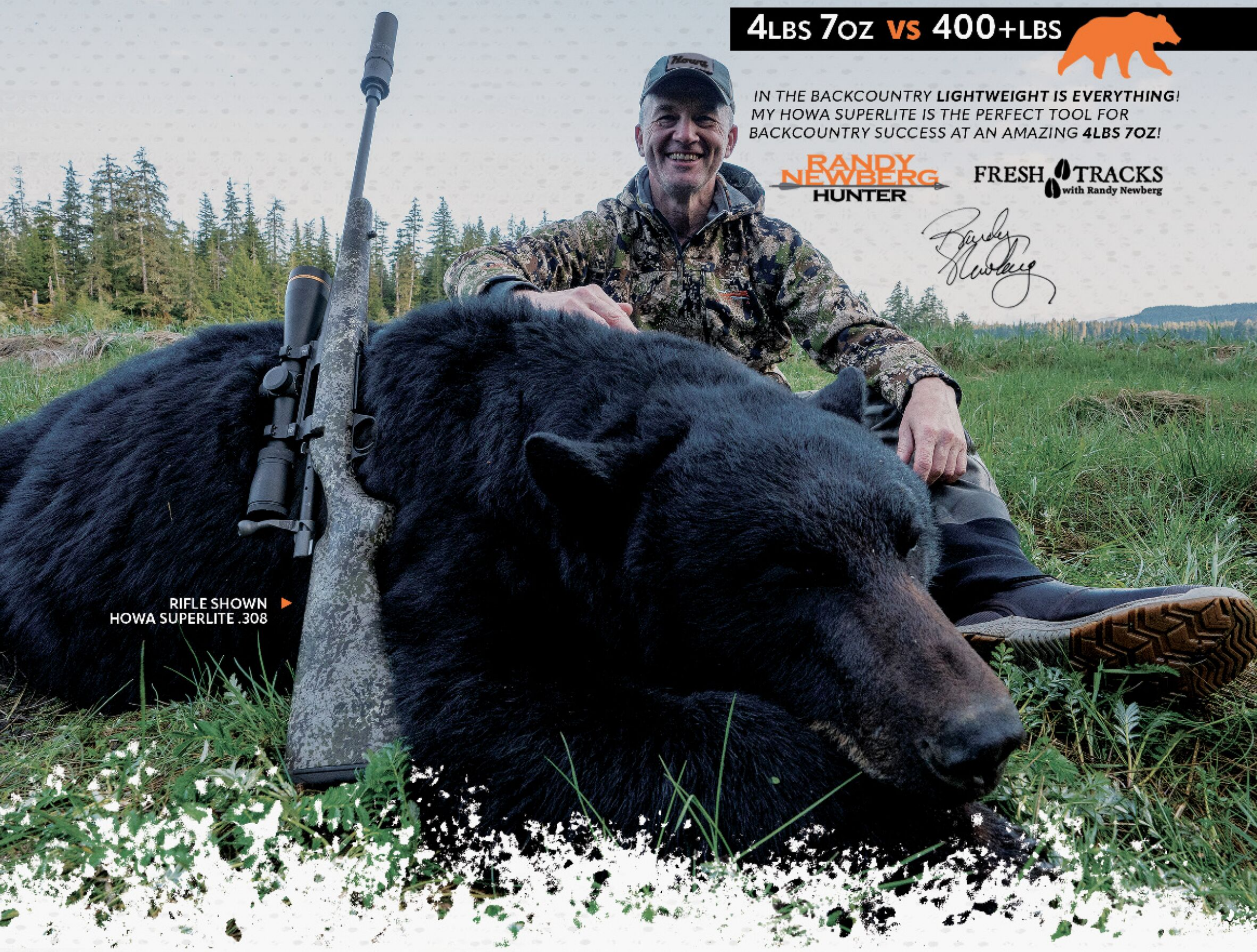

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the previous season, burning through the vast landscape below with our optics. From sunup to sundown, we spent hours behind the glass with little to show for our efforts but self-induced ocular migraines. It was apparent we were hunting migratory deer and this year the deer flat out were not in the same areas we had seen them in last season. Back to square one, we made plans to hunt a completely different area in the morning at a much higher elevation.

The bitter bite of a brisk wind in early November cut through every piece of clothing I had on as we glassed the steep mountainside above us the following morning. Things began to look up as the sun illuminated several groups of deer feeding in the drainage. Nothing was worth getting excited about, but we were happy to see deer and hoped a mature buck would materialize. After nearly two hours of glassing, we were frozen solid and ready to move when Colby said, "I've got a buck." More than two miles away a buck had crested the basin rim and was feeding in one of the few openings on the oak-choked hillside.

The frigid temperatures, the mirage in the spotting scope, combined with the extreme distance and steady breeze, made examining the buck's size difficult. We could tell he had a mature body and a decent frame with a respectable back end, but his fronts looked like small crab claws. Through the distortion of our spotting scopes, we estimated this buck's rack would hover around the mid-160 mark. Being the second day of a week-long hunt, Colby elected to pass. However, knowing I only had one more day of hunting, I was not about to let an opportunity at a very respectable, mature deer slip by.

Surveying the topography and vegetation, it was evident there was no "easy" approach. We could get a vehicle within a mile or so below the buck, but from there it would be a straight climb up an incredibly steep, snow-covered spine ridge. Below the feeding buck, a rocky knob protruded above the dense oak where I hoped I would get into a position to shoot from. But there was one major flaw with this approach. If the buck moved out of the clearing he was feeding in, the odds of getting a shot off drastically diminished. I didn't love the plan, and in reality, I knew it was a low-percentage stalk, but with time ticking, I had to try.

Time spent behind glass is the best way to locate big bucks in wide-open country. Be patient and grid hard as to not miss any opportunities.

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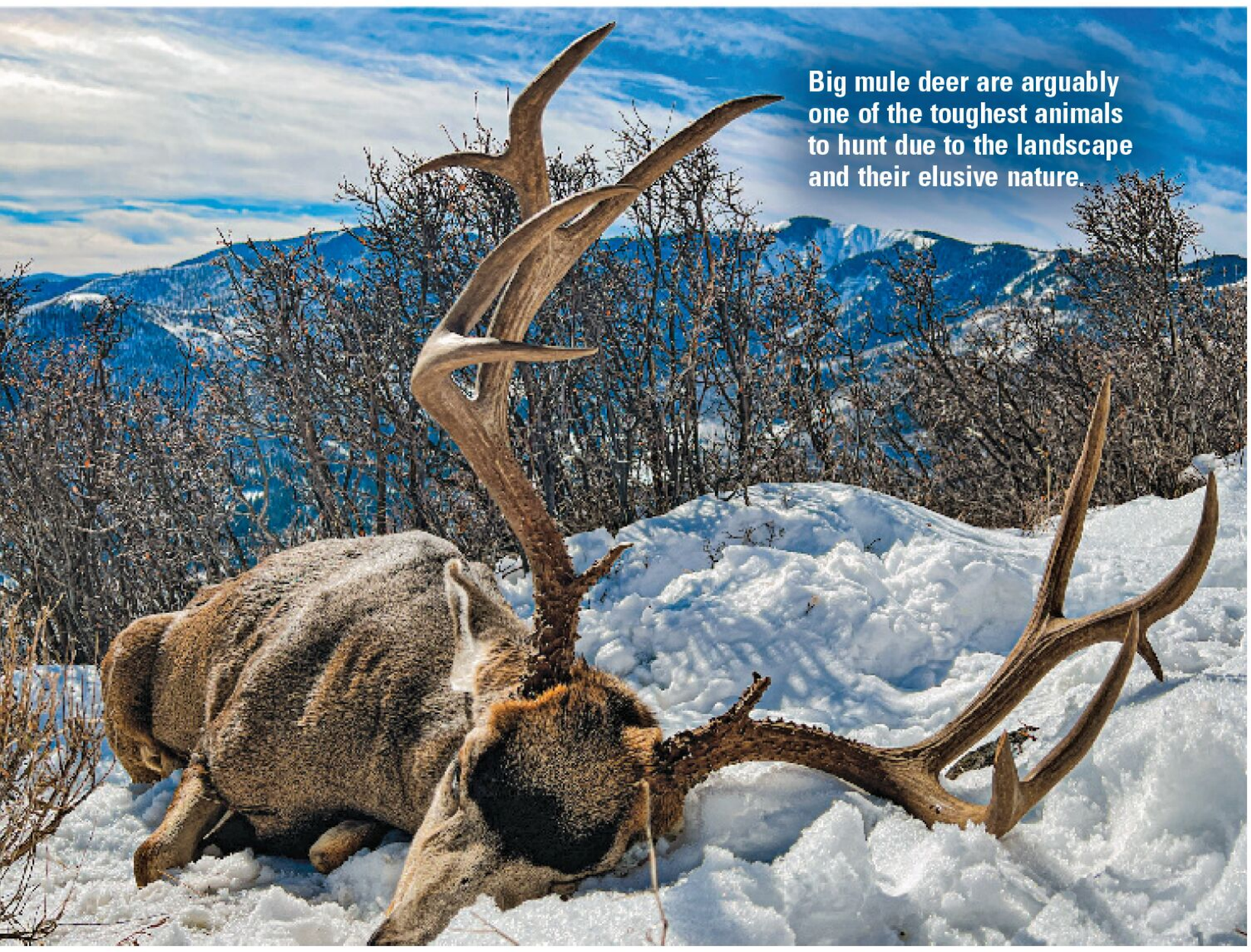
Deer tracks are a good way to figure out what animals are in the area and can give you a good starting point for glassing.

SLOW GOING

My legs burned and doubt began to creep in as I trudged up the steep incline, battling slippery snow and mud. "What am I doing?" I thought. "There is no way that buck is still in that small opening." The going was slow, but time was of the essence. Nearing the top, my lungs gasped for air as I desperately tried to get my heart rate under control. I had climbed 1,515 vertical feet in .92 of a mile. Cresting the ridge, I frantically glassed for the buck to no avail. My heart sank, though I had been preparing myself for that letdown.

Defeated, I glanced uphill one last time and could see a deer standing in the clearing with my naked eye. How I missed seeing him through my binoculars I will never know, but the sun reflecting off his slick gray coat lit him up like a high beam in the night sky. Unfortunately, what I thought was going to be a 300 to 400-yard shot was well over 700. Further than I felt comfortable shooting. With a new surge of enthusiasm, I dipped below the ridgeline, out of sight of the buck, and picked my way upward through the dense oak on a well-travelled game trail.

Knowing I now had to be in range, I inched up to the ridgeline, using a Volkswagen-sized boulder to shield my presence. Peaking over the rock, I immediately saw the unsuspecting buck. He hadn't



Big mule deer are arguably one of the toughest animals to hunt due to the landscape and their elusive nature.

The Browning X-Bolt McMillan Long Range rifle chambered in 6.8 Western is an optimal choice for hunting the West.

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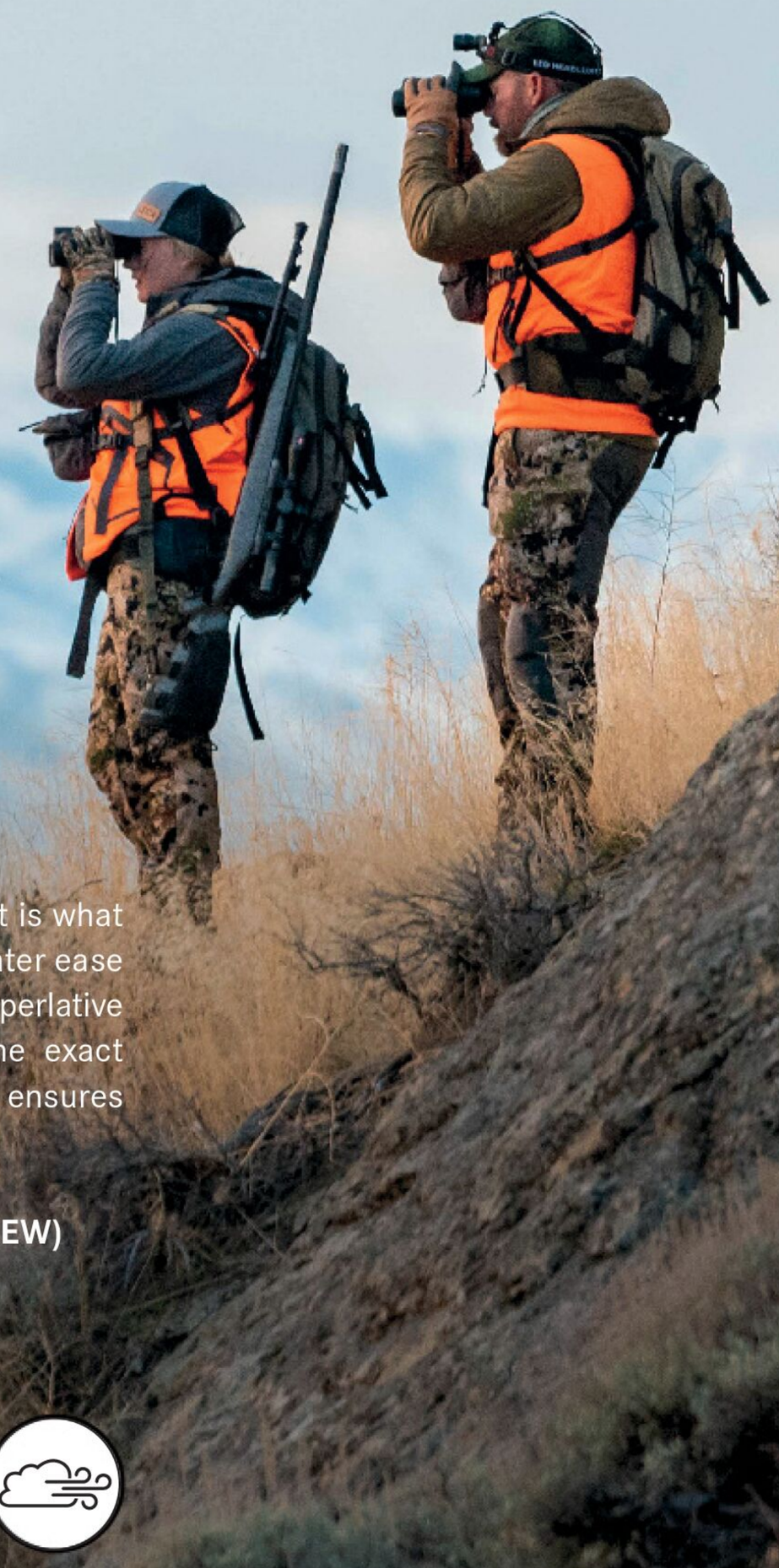

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The author with his buck and good friend, Colby. He has spent every season in pursuit of big mule deer bucks; this is the largest he's ever killed.

moved more than 15 yards since we first laid eyes on him more than two hours ago. The shot was still going to be a poke, but the boulder provided a solid rest, and I was extremely confident in my Browning X-Bolt McMillan Long Range rifle chambered in 6.8 Western. I dialed the Leupold CDS turret to the exact yardage, took an exaggerated deep breath, and settled the crosshairs on the crease of the shoulder. Squeezing through the trigger, the shot felt good and the audible "whack" of the 175-grain Sierra Tipped Gameking impacting flesh was music to my ears.

Deafening silence crept in as panic and doubt began to percolate, not knowing where the bullet hit or where he had disappeared to. The silence was broken when I heard the faint whoops of excitement nearly two miles away from Colby and Ryan. I knew that could only mean one thing: He was down. Elated, I slowly gathered my gear and shouldered my pack.

Still unsure of exactly how big the buck was, my heart skipped several beats when I first saw the four-inch cheater protruding from his right G-3 that I had no clue he had. With every

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Loaded down with meat and antlers, the rough terrain was challenging but the joy of the hunt made the pack out easy.

step, the buck grew: big eye guards, sweeping main beams, above-average mass, towering backend and a wrapping frontend. I was in disbelief. Hidden in the snow was a matching cheater on his left G-3—the cherry on top to one of the prettiest and biggest bucks I had ever personally seen on public land, let alone had the opportunity to hunt.

This buck will always hold a special place in my memory bank, and on my wall. But when I think of this buck, my mind drifts back to the solace of the mountain top he called home, the overwhelming feeling of gratitude and humility I felt walking up on him and the mountain memories made with my closest friends. I may never kill a bigger mule deer, and that's OK. But you can bet your last dollar that I will spend every fall till the day I die in mule deer country, pursuing the elusive mature bucks that call the West home.

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MAKING MEAT

BRAD FITZPATRICK

TIRED OF WAITING TO DRAW THAT TROPHY TAG? DON'T OVERLOOK OTHER OPPORTUNITIES TO FILL THE FREEZER.

Elk meat is a sought-after delicacy. Hunting for cows when a bull tag is unobtainable is a great way to fill your freezer with the mouth-watering meat.

WHEN I WAS A KID, I was an avid *Petersen's HUNTING* reader, and I always hoped I'd have the opportunity to someday pursue the types of trophies that I saw in the pages of this magazine. Fortunately, I have not only had the opportunity to hunt most of the big-game animals on my bucket list, but I've also been able to chronicle those adventures in the pages of the magazine I loved best as a youngster. But that doesn't mean that my hunting career is over or has even slowed. I've simply changed my focus, and now, more often than not, my personal trips are meat hunts.

One of the things I've learned as I've spent more time hunting for the freezer: Though meat hunts are more accessible and cost less than trophy hunts, the experience is still very much the same. In many ways meat hunts are more enjoyable than trophy hunts because I don't have the pressure of finding just the right buck, ram or bull. I also haven't had to wait for years or even decades to draw a tag. If I decide I want to add a meat hunt or two to my fall to-do list, I can usually manage that—and at a price that's lower than I would pay for a trophy hunt.

Meat hunts are also beneficial for game management. Simply removing all the breeding-age males from a population is rarely the best strategy, and in areas where game is overpopulated, removing females may help improve the herd's overall health. In some instances, the animal that you are hunting is an invasive species that may be harming native wildlife populations.

FROM FIELD TO FREEZER

Obviously, the intention of most meat hunts is, at least in part, to fill the freezer. During the pandemic many Americans learned how disconnected they are from their sources of food. A worker shortage in one part of the country or world can have a ripple effect on food supplies. A global disruption like the pandemic can have substantial impacts. I'll never forget seeing a 20-something mother staring blankly at an empty meat counter and understanding—perhaps for the first time—she had no idea where her food really came from or how quickly it could disappear.

But not all aspects of obtaining meat from the field are so glum. I have two kids with outsized appetites and keeping them fed is not an inexpensive process. Game meat provides a low-cost alternative to buying roasts, steaks and burger at the store. And, obviously, natural game is far more healthful, free of artificial hormones and antibiotics. And, best of all, I know where my meat came from and followed it every step of the way from the field to the freezer.

CULL VS. NON-TROPHY VS. MEAT HUNTS

Let's examine several of the common terms that are used to describe any hunt that is not a traditional trophy hunt. At

The author with a management buck taken in Texas. Many Texas ranches offer hunts for both management bucks and does.

In Africa, it is common for herds of various species of antelope to grow to unsustainable sizes requiring a cull hunt—just as with this red hartebeest.

outdoor shows and in print and online advertisements, you'll find outfitters and professional hunters advertising cull hunts, non-trophy hunts, management hunts and meat hunts. But what's the difference?

It's the objective of the hunt that determines the appropriate name (although many of these terms are used interchangeably and the target animal varies depending upon the outfitter or guide). Generally, a meat hunt is limited to animals suitable for the table but not trophies. Many meat hunts offer hunters an opportunity to take young animals and females so long as doing so helps achieve management goals. In many cases females and young animals will be particularly sought-after because they represent the best table fare.

Non-trophy or management hunts typically target males of the species that are not trophies or that don't possess the genetics of a trophy animal. In some cases, these are males of a species that have abnormal horn or antler growth, or they have reached an age of sexual maturity, but do not (and likely will not) have horns or antlers that would be considered trophies. The definition of "non-trophy" and "management" animals will vary from place to place. One of the largest mule deer I ever killed (larger even than some of my "trophy" mule deer) was taken on a management hunt.

Cull hunts are a way to reduce the overall number of animals in a herd or population. Some ranches in Texas use cull hunts to help achieve management goals for deer, and in some instances invasive mammals like aoudad are available on cull hunts. But most of these hunts are available in Africa where a certain species (usually some form of antelope) has increased in number to a point where their herd sizes need to be reduced.

WHY YOU SHOULD BOOK A NON-TROPHY HUNT

Of course, the primary reason to book a non-trophy hunt is to obtain fresh protein. Game meat is natural, lean and, if you can process and transport the game yourself, it's more economical than buying beef, chicken or pork from the grocery store.

These hunts are also generally cheaper than trophy hunts. Hog hunts in Texas and Florida can be booked for as little as $300 a day, and in many cases, you can take as many hogs as are available. Trophy elk hunts with guaranteed tags range from $6,000 and up, with some costing $16,000 or more. A cow elk hunt, by contrast, might cost between $1,700 and $2,500. Whitetail trophy hunts start at about $3,500 and increase well into the five-figure range if you're hunting trophy-managed bucks in high-fence areas, but you can book doe hunts for $400 per deer and management buck/doe combo hunts for around $1,500.

These reasonable rates with wide availability make meat hunts attainable, and that means you can fill your freezer every year and enjoy these experiences without waiting until you draw a trophy tag.

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Though trophy bulls are desirable, management and cow tags give you the opportunity to fill your freezer with the meat every year.

Much as we all hate to admit it there are only so many years when we are physically able to climb steep mountains, and if you start applying for trophy elk tags late in life, you may find that by the time you draw you aren't as physically capable as you had been a few years before. So why wait? You can travel across the country hunting cull hogs, deer, exotics, bison and elk and enjoy a new adventure every fall without waiting until you finally get the tag you want.

There's also a great deal less pressure placed on the hunter during a meat hunt, and that makes the experience more enjoyable for many hunters. The respect shown to the animal should be the same whether it's a cull whitetail or a trophy elk, and hunting for meat doesn't mean it's excusable to make bad shots and wound game, but with most non-trophy hunts there are more target animals and you can be more selective with your shots. Waiting ten years to draw a trophy mule deer or sheep tag places immense pressure on the hunter to make the most of every opportunity, and there's a chance you'll be presented with a questionable shot. I've known hunters that faced just such a decision on once-in-a-lifetime trophy hunts where time and money invested can cause a hunter to consider shots they would normally pass. That type of pressure can drain some of the enjoyment from the hunt. Non-trophy hunts don't normally involve that type of stress.

I also believe that non-trophy hunts are a great way to introduce new hunters to the sport. Now that I have a son in elementary school, I have a greater appreciation for just how brief the attention span of a six-year-old really is. As he matures, I hope he'll have the patience to wait and pass deer until an old, mature trophy buck presents a shot. But soon he'll be old enough to head afield and kill a doe, and I would love to take him on a management hunt where his odds of success are high, if for no other reason than I want his first experience with an animal to be focused on acquiring meat for the freezer so that he has an appreciation of the process. Trophies can come later. For now, he needs to understand that hunting provides a source of food. I want him first to take pride in the fact that he has provided for his family.

Perhaps most importantly, non-trophy hunts give us an opportunity and excuse to do what we love most: spend time outdoors. I've hunted non-trophy animals across the United States and in Africa, and I count some of those experiences among my favorites, despite not having a trophy on the wall. Last fall in New Mexico, I was hunting cow elk in October and the rut was in full effect. The canyons echoed with bugles as the sun faded each day, and I saw a half-dozen big bulls harrying herds of cows and chasing off younger rivals—an experience

FIELD-TO-TABLE HUNTS

In 2020, I had an opportunity to attend an Outdoor Solutions Field-to-Table hunt in Texas, and it was an outstanding experience. After I killed a deer and hog, Chef Albert taught our group how to properly butcher, wrap and cook the game we had killed. I have spent my entire life hunting, but the experience made me feel more confident and taught me lessons I might never have otherwise learned.

Field-to-Table hunts occur around the country and each of these offer an opportunity to take different game animals and prepare them under the tutelage of a trained chef. These classes are suitable for rank beginners, but they're also beneficial for even the most experienced hunter. You'll walk away with a new appreciation of the art of cooking wild game, a better understanding of how to properly handle meat and a freezer full of the best protein available.

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- **How the ice mass in Antarctica has actually been *increasing*** since 1979 and NOT decreasing like we've been led to believe (p. 64)
- **The carbon dioxide disconnect** and why there is ZERO evidence linking carbon dioxide to climate change (p. 66)
- **How the BIGGER problem of "global cooling" has been overlooked** and why it could cause far greater hazards to humans than global warming (p. 174)
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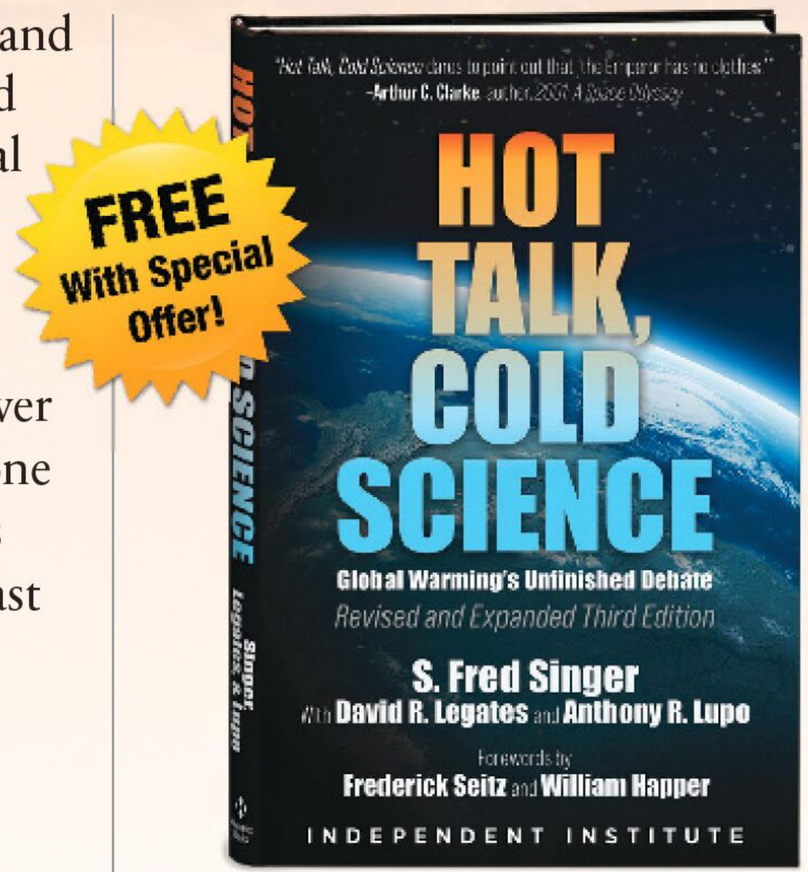
Those are just a handful of the little-known facts (which are never reported by the mainstream media!).



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Hogs are abundant and offer an affordable and fun hunt. The meat from these animals is quite delicious as well.

I would have missed if I'd spent the years waiting for my bull tag to show up in the mail. On a hunt in South Africa's Karoo Desert, I was invited to cull springbok on a property where the population of these antelope had exploded. Dry conditions had persisted there for more than a year and food was becoming scarce; the decision was made to remove a number of springbok so the remaining animals (and the rest of the game) would survive the drought without massive die-offs. We hunted for a full day, and when the sun set, we built a fire in a dry riverbed and ate fresh springbok steaks fresh off a mopane-wood fire while drinking beer and staring into the star-filled African sky, all while jackals called back and forth in the surrounding hills.

THE BEST NON-TROPHY HUNTS NOW

If you're looking for a non-trophy, meat or cull hunt there are plenty of great options in the United States and abroad. Here are a few of the best options.

Hogs: Hernando de Soto brought a handful of hogs to Florida in 1539 and turned them loose, setting into motion a feral pig explosion that would plague the United States for centuries. Today there are an estimated six million wild hogs across the United States, though considering how crafty these animals are and their ability to reproduce rapidly that estimate is probably low.

Most landowners and state wildlife agencies share the same sentiment when it comes to hogs—get rid of them. That makes feral hogs hunts affordable and available, particularly in the south. Texas is the epicenter of hog hunting,

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Always looking for the nearest rest stop?

New Prostate Discovery Helps Men Avoid "Extreme Bathroom Planning"

Men across the U.S. are praising a revolutionary prostate pill that's 1000% more absorbable. Now the visionary MD who designed it is pulling out all the stops to keep up with surging demand…

Among the all-too-familiar, occasional problems like sleepless nights, frequent urination, late-night wake ups, a bladder that's never quite empty, and constant, extreme planning for rest stops and bathroom breaks.

These are the common signs of inconvenient urinary issues. But men nationwide are now reporting they've found help these occasional problems thanks to a major breakthrough in nutrient technology.

Prosta-Vive LS is the new prostate pill sweeping the nation. Men say they feel they're now having strong, complete, effortless urine flow they enjoyed in their 20s and 30s.

The key to its success is a new nutrient technology that makes the key ingredient 1000% more absorbable, according to a study by endocrinologists at Washington University in St. Louis.

Nick Summers is the spokesman for Primal Force Inc., the firm in Royal Palm Beach, Fla. that makes **Prosta-Vive LS**. He reports demand is surging due to word-of-mouth and social-media.

"We knew **Prosta-Vive** really worked to 'support healthy, stronger urine flow," Summers stated. "But no one could have predicted the tens of thousands of men looking for a truly supportive prostate pill."

NEW PROSTATE FORMULA DRAWS 5-STAR REVIEWS

It's not the first time Dr. Al Sears, the Florida-based MD who designed the breakthrough formula, has shaken up the status quo in men's health.

A nationally recognized men's health pioneer and the founder of the Sears Institute for Anti-Aging Medicine in Royal Palm Beach, Fla., Dr. Sears has been featured on ABC, CNN, and ESPN.

He's authored more than 500 books, reports, and scientific articles, many focusing on prostate issues that may affect virtually all men sooner or later.

"By age 60, I find about half of my male patients feel the need for prostate support," Dr. Sears explains. "By the time they reach age 80, it's over 90 percent."

Prosta-Vive LS has reportedly made a life-changing difference for these men. One appreciative thank-you letter came from Jim R, a patient.

"I had immediate results," Jim R. wrote in his thank-you note. "I slept through the night without going to the bathroom.

"Last night was the most amazing of all," he added. "I slept for 10 hours without going to the toilet."

Results like these explain the flood of phone calls the company's customer service department is handling from men who want to know how the new formula works...

PROSTATE PILL BACKED BY CLINICAL RESULTS

Prosta-Vive LS's extraordinary success is being attributed to advanced innovations in nutrient technology.

Most prostate pills rely on either outdated saw palmetto … or the prostate-soothing compound Beta-Sitosterol.

But Dr. Sears cites growing evidence that saw palmetto and Beta-Sitosterol work much better together than either does on its own.

In fact, a recent clinical trial involving 66 men taking a combination of saw palmetto and Beta-Sitosterol reported "significant" improvement across the board.

Among the results: Fewer of those occasional late-night wake ups, a stronger stream, less starting and stopping, and complete emptying of the bladder.

That's why **Prosta-Vive LS** includes both saw palmetto and Beta-Sitosterol, to ensure men get the extra prostate support they need. Frustrated men say it's giving them tremendous support.

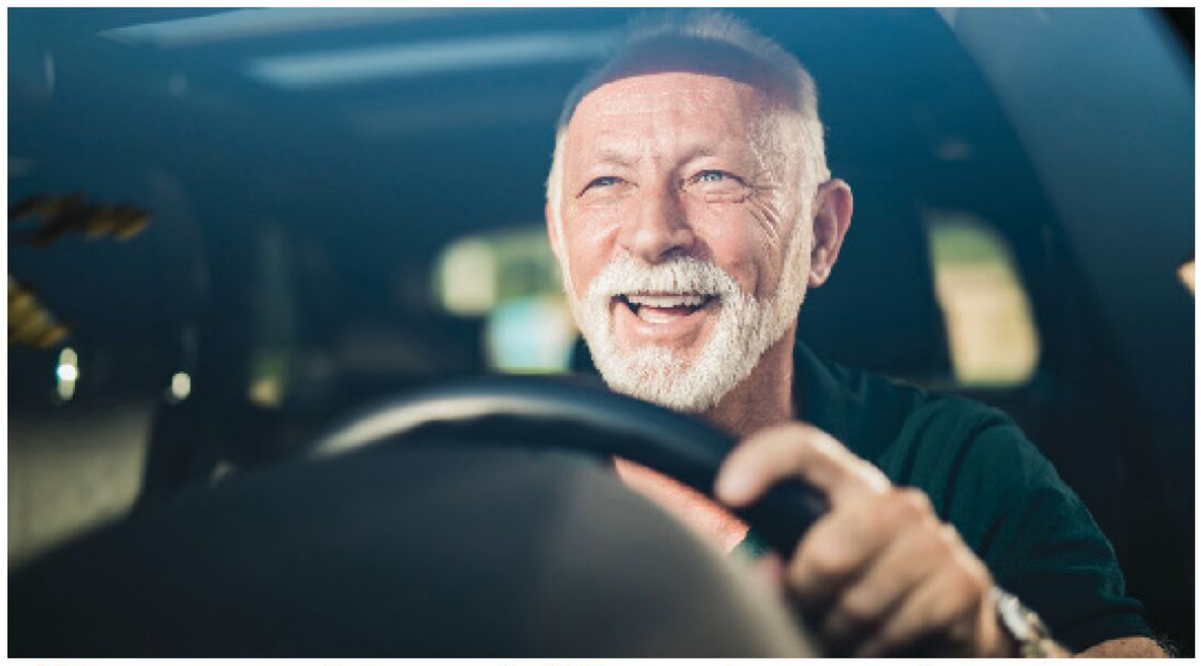
But there's another key reason **Prosta-Vive LS** is helping men get back control in the bathroom.

YOUR PROSTATE IS HUNGRY FOR HEALTHY FAT

The other key innovation in **Prosta-Vive LS** is its addition of healthy omega-3 fatty acids.

"It turns out what's good for your heart is also good for your prostate," says Dr. Sears. "That's why I put heart-healthy omega-3s in a prostate pill."

Researchers have long known Beta-Sitosterol has a great potential to support healthy prostate function.



NO more extra "pit stops", NO more interrupted meetings - Men are free of bathroom woes and feel RELIEF.

But Beta-Sitosterols are "hydro-phobic" -- they don't mix well with water. And that can make them much harder for the body to absorb.

That's where long-chain omega-3s come in. The latest research shows they boost Beta-Sitosterol absorption by 1000%.

Dr. Sears explains, "Most people only get trace amounts of Beta-Sitosterol because it can be hard to absorb. In this respect, the long-chain fatty acids in **Prosta-Vive LS** are a real game-changer. They supercharge the absorption."

This improved absorption is proving to be a revolutionary advance. **Prosta-Vive LS** is changing men's lives, quickly becoming the No. 1 support supplement for supporting men's prostate health nationwide.

Now, grateful men are calling almost every day to thank **Prosta-Vive LS** for supporting a renewed sense of empowerment over their own lives.

One patient, Ari L., wrote, "I used to get up on occasion at night to go to the bathroom. Now I only get up once… and I feel it has supported my prostate, keeping my PSA levels in the normal range."

Patients report they have more energy, sleep better, and no longer feel embarrassed by that occasional sudden need to use the restroom.

Thanks to **Prosta-Vive LS**, thousands of men feel more confident about their urinary health and are no longer being held hostage to pee problems and feel more confident about their urinary health.

They say they're getting great sleep and finally feel back in charge of their own lives.

HOW TO GET PROSTA-VIVE LS

Right now, the only way to get this powerful, unique nutrient technology that effectively relieves the urge to go is with Dr. Sears' breakthrough **Prosta-Vive** formula.

To secure a supply of **Prosta-Vive**, men need to contact the Sears Health Hotline directly at **1-800-420-4580**.

"It's not available in retail stores yet," says Dr. Sears. "The Hotline allows us to ship directly to the customer and we're racing to keep up with demand."

Dr. Sears feels so strongly about **Prosta-Vive's** effectiveness that 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 your money back," he says.

Given the intense recent demand, the Hotline will only be taking orders for the next 48 hours. After that, the phone number may be shut down to allow for restocking. If you are not able to get through due to extremely high call volume, please try again!

Call **1-800-420-4580** NOW to secure your limited supply of **Prosta-Vive** at a significant discount. To take advantage of this exclusive offer use Promo Code: **PHPV923** when you call.

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and most ranches I've hunted there were only too happy to have hunting clients knock down a few pigs. The good news for meat hunters is that feral hogs can be quite delicious, particularly sows and young animals, though I've had the meat from mature boars that was quite good.

Just about any deer rifle will do for pigs, but my favorite hog weapon is Bill Wilson's AR rifles chambered in .300 Ham'r. It's the only round I know of that was designed for hog hunting and tested on hogs (in addition to his affinity for making beautiful custom pistols Wilson is an inveterate pig hunter), and I've found it to be highly effective even on large boars.

Deer: In many areas, whitetail doe and management buck tags are relatively easy to obtain. I've hunted management deer in Texas and Arkansas, and on both occasions, I managed to acquire hundreds of pounds of meat in a few days. In many places you can kill multiple deer in a single day, and there are some great values available.

You might also be surprised to learn that on some ranches a 130-inch whitetail is a cull once it reaches a certain age, and on well-managed ranches you're likely to see several deer in that class in a single day. But non-trophy deer hunts aren't limited to whitetails: many hunters consider mule deer to be the ultimate North American trophy, and on many ranches a "non-trophy" mule deer is a pretty impressive animal. Utah's Ensign Ranch has a very well managed herd, and when my guide told me to shoot a 30-inch 3x4 classified as a management buck, I did not argue with him.

Cow/Management Elk: I love elk meat and consider it to be the best of our native wild game. I also enjoy being in elk country, and I'm certainly not going to wait around to draw my desired bull tags to hunt the Rockies for wapiti. I've been fortunate enough to take my trophy bull elk, and I may or may not have that opportunity again, but I certainly will not wait around and hope to draw a tag.

Colorado has many ranches that offer opportunities for cow elk, and this is probably your best bet, although other Rocky Mountain states like New Mexico, Idaho and Montana also offer great opportunities. You can book a cow elk or non-trophy bull hunt on many ranches, but you can also apply for cow tags (with much higher draw odds) and do a DIY camp or hire an outfitter. Be prepared to bring out a lot of meat if you're successful, but whether you punch your tag or not, being in the field with these incredible animals is a reward in itself.

Don't wait for that once-in-a-lifetime tag to turn up before you allow yourself to enjoy all the hunting adventures that are offered. You may not bring home a trophy, but you will bring home memories of time spent in the field and lots of meat. I'd say that's a fair trade.

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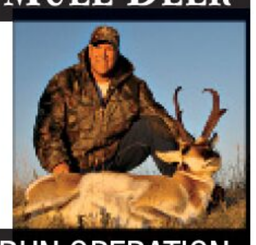
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JIM ZUMBO

What's Fair?

"THE FIRST TIME a caveman beaned a monkey on the head with a rock from a slingshot they deemed it unfair chase." So said the late Jack Ward Thomas, noted conservationist and former Chief of the U.S. Forest Service. Fast forward to today, where unfair chase is still being bandied about by hunters, nonhunters and antihunters.

Unfair chase is in the mind of the beholder. What is deeply concerning to one person might be perfectly acceptable to another. Bottom line, when hunters assail each other publicly, the issue becomes conspicuous to all observers, many of them nonhunters who may form judgements that negatively affect hunting.

Take bear baiting for example. It may or may not be legal, depending on the state or area where you're hunting. Consider three Rocky Mountain states that have large numbers of black bears. Idaho, Colorado and Wyoming had allowed baiting for as long as I'd been hunting the West, which now spans more than five decades. In 1992, bear baiting was terminated in Colorado via a ballot box referendum. The public spoke in Colorado, at least enough of them to garner the most votes. I recall an article written years ago (when baiting was still legal) by a respected Colorado outdoor writer who despised baiting and said so publicly. It's fair to say that his opinion and that of other hunters who didn't approve of baiting bears swayed plenty of votes from nonhunters who make up the vast majority of Americans.

It really comes down to ethics, which is a state of mind engendering strong feelings that have nothing to do with the law. We just "feel" that a questionable issue is acceptable or not. Those feelings are typically formed by the actions of our mentors, what we personally observe when we hunt, and what we see and hear on TV, YouTube, social media and other sources. Interestingly, the Boone and Crockett Club considers bear baiting to be fair chase. That's a slippery slope to some, and some hunters condemn the B&C Club for that position and others like it, which is a shame because the Club has been a staunch supporter of hunting since 1887 when Teddy Roosevelt founded it.

Some of the differences between hunters are taken seriously by those in favor and those who oppose the issues. How often do we hear criticism about crossbows being used during archery seasons, or about muzzleloaders shooting like your favorite .30/06, or real-time trail cams that let you see deer walking around in the woods while you're sitting in your recliner, or long-range hunting where you can shoot an elk at 1,000 yards or about many of the other technical advances that appear every year.

In the grand scheme of things, does it really matter that hunters are at odds with each other on many fronts? As I see it, since about 4% of the U.S. population hunts, it indeed matters. This divisiveness doesn't go unnoticed by antihunters who use these disputes in their propaganda. As our numbers drop, so does our voice, despite the good work done by many conservation organizations that fight for us.

I'm not suggesting a gag order for hunters. Far from it, but it might be prudent to keep our feelings out of the public eye. Argue around a campfire, in deer camp, the barber shop or after church services. To be sure, all of us have opinions, and there are those who will use them against us. They want hunting stopped, period! We have too much to lose.

"IN THE GRAND SCHEME OF THINGS, DOES IT REALLY MATTER THAT HUNTERS ARE AT ODDS WITH EACH OTHER ON MANY FRONTS?"

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