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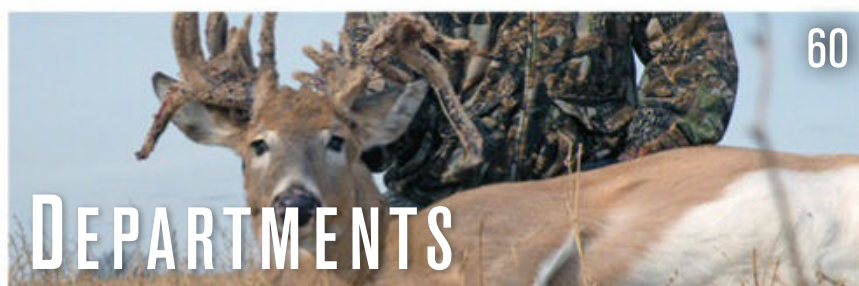
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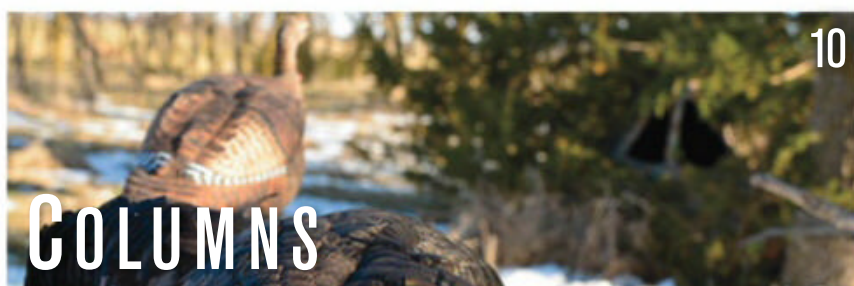
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Curt Wells
➤ Editor

Change Can Be Good, Too

WE VALUE EVERY SUBSCRIBER/READER, WHICH IS WHY WE'RE ALWAYS LOOKING FOR WAYS TO IMPROVE.

WITHOUT QUESTION, we live in a digital world. Ones and zeros (binary code) control most aspects of our lives these days. Even so, most of our readers still prefer to hold a magazine in their hands. They like tradition. But we're also a multimedia brand, and increasing numbers of our readers are more comfortable with scrolling a lit screen. To each his own. And we mean that last sentence.

But to better accommodate our valued subscribers, we now offer both options. You can sit by the fire with a print copy of **Bowhunter**, or you can read all the stories of bowhunting adventure, not to mention the advice of our unparalleled stable of highly experienced columnists, from the convenience of your electronic device whether at home, at camp,

or even in an airplane — and for just the cost of your subscription (read that, no additional charge). Considering that if you bought every issue on newsstand you'd be spending nearly \$50, a paid subscription is still the best deal going...but that best deal just got a lot better. Here's how: All new and current paid print subscribers will have access to the digital version of **Bowhunter** Magazine that can be read on their smartphones and tablets (Apple or Android), and on some PC's running Windows 10. Current subscribers should go to mymagnow.com and select "create a digital account" next to the image of **Bowhunter** Magazine. New subscribers who order from the magazine's webpage will be prompted to create a digital account once they complete their magazine purchase. It's that simple.



This is the webpage where you can sign up for our digital version.

YOU WILL ALSO NOTICE two additional changes in this issue. Longtime Equipment Editor Tony J. Peterson will now be writing a new column called, "Common Ground," found on page 10. Tony has always been a DIY/public land kind of bowhunter. It has been his focus and his love, so we're playing to his strengths. This column will concentrate on helping readers make the best use of the bowhunting opportunities this country's public lands have to offer.

Obviously, we are going to continue our gear coverage, because bowhunters are gear junkies. We like to research it, buy it, break it in, pack it, unpack it, and use it on our quest for success. Tony did a great job, but that task will now be handled by Brian K. Strickland.

Brian is a longtime freelancer who is intimately familiar with the bowhunting industry. He's covered this business for years, and he knows quality bowhunting "stuff" when he sees it. Brian, an avid bowhunter, lives in Colorado, and will be a valued Contributor.

We are not sitting still, waiting to dissolve into history. Having access to our content, in both print and digital form, is our way of accommodating the wishes of our readership. However, the staff at **Bowhunter** Magazine is constantly looking for other ways to bring even more value to our subscribers. If you have ideas on how we can further improve your magazine, feel free to send us a note.

Thank you so much for being part of the **Bowhunter** Magazine family. We are truly humbled. **BH**

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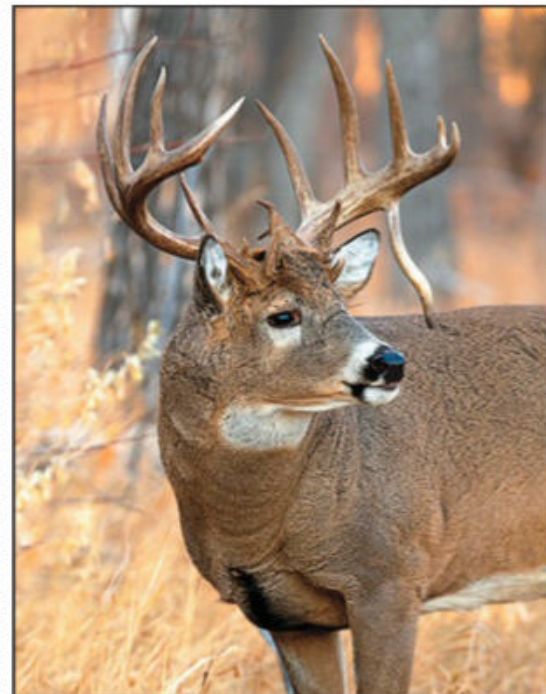
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Cover Photo: MARK RAYCROFT



"LONG BOMBS" HITS THE MARK!

Dear Bowhunter,

Curt, thank you for writing your article, "Long Bombs," in your February 2020 issue. It's a more serious issue than most are willing to acknowledge. The younger generation is seeing way too much of this from television hunters. Somewhere along the line, the need for success now outweighs respect for the animals we hunt. Anyway, thanks again for writing that article. It has been a point of contention for me for a while.

Merritt Compton, via e-mail

Dear Bowhunter,

I just got finished reading the article, "Long Bombs," by Mr. Wells. I live in the heart of elk and Coues deer country, and every year I hear the stories of wounding animals simply by taking unethical shots. Just this year alone, I heard of one hunter who had already shot and not recovered three bull elk on the same hunt. I got in a pretty heated argument with a "hunter" who let it be known that he just arrowed a Coues deer, of all animals, at 132 yards. Thank you, Curt, for standing up for what bowhunting really is: The sport of showing respect to an animal by taking a clean, ethical shot.

Justin Riesop, Lakeside, Arizona

Dear Bowhunter,

Curt's February 2020 article, "Long Bombs," was excellent! Promoting these shots in our modern tech world allows this "acceptable" behavior to spread like wildfire. Social media, along with the ego stroking and narcissism it fuels, is a huge contributing problem we face. Your article is a testament to why I've been a Bowhunter subscriber for over two decades. Ethics, respect, and empathy for the animals we pursue are some of the main disciplines we need to teach as responsible hunters. I hope you don't take too much heat for addressing this issue, but it needed to be said.

Aaron Louks, via e-mail

Dear Bowhunter,

Curt, well done with your "Long Bombs" article! This is a subject I've been venting about for a while now. It especially unnerves me seeing "big names" in the industry touting how they just received their new bows. We then watch as they take them out of the box, and several shots later they pronounce, "I'm all set up to take shots with this XYZ bow out to 100 yards." That may be true, but it doesn't mean they should be taking shots at animals at that distance! This article was long overdue. Great job!

Bob Theim, Friendship, Wisconsin

Dear Bowhunter,

A fast human can run 30 feet in a second. How much quicker is an animal? Even if it only takes one step, the most perfectly shot arrow by a great long-range shooter will not land in the right place. For some, however, they just keep shooting long range until they get lucky enough to hit something vital. Shoot enough arrows and wound enough animals, and eventually you will kill one and then brag about the distance. As you described, long range is different with different situations, but a first arrow in excess of 60 yards is pushing the limits regardless of circumstances. You have taken a good step toward letting the long-range shooters (because they should not be considered hunters) know that it is not the right thing to do. Thanks, Curt.

Kent Reiersen, via e-mail

Curt responds: Kent, Thanks so much for the comments. I'm sure some were offended but I believe they know a long bomb is a gamble. We've received an unbelievable number of responses and all but two have been supportive. I wish we had the room to run them all. And to those who took the time out of their day to send us emails, I thank you all very much. When people say we should simply "live and let live," I cringe. As a bowhunting community we must "regulate" ourselves – or someone else will. BH

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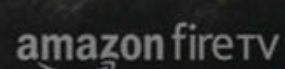
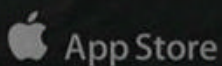
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Tony J. Peterson

Spring Recon

HOW TO GO FROM LONGBEARDS TO BIG BUCKS ON PUBLIC LAND IN THE SAME SEASON.

NEARLY 10 YEARS AGO, my buddy drank too much coffee one morning while we were trying to find some turkeys on public land in Nebraska. We pulled off on a gravel road and ended up in a parking area, where he relieved himself and I yelped on my mouth call for lack of anything else to do.

As soon as I did, the whole woods seemed to erupt in gobbles. We scrambled to find a place to camp, and got our gear ready to go. During that hunt,

we called in quite a few birds, found some sheds, watched plenty of deer from our blinds, and made a plan to return in the fall.

Acting off of that first-year intel alone, we returned in November. And then the following April for turkeys, and then in November again... You get the point. Not only have we arrowed quite a few longbeards (and jakes) on those trips, but they resulted in quite a few bucks — including my personal best — all off of public land.

Here's the thing about this strategy — most of us want to travel to hunt, but not to scout. We figure that we can do enough digital recon to put ourselves in prime spots when we show up on a deer trip, but there really is no way to replace



I shot this buck last fall in Nebraska on public land after a successful spring turkey trip to the same spot. If you're looking at traveling for deer, a great way to learn new ground and identify quality dirt is to go on a spring turkey trip first.

boots on the ground. And if you won't put those boots on the ground unless you've got a compelling reason to do so, consider a turkey hunting trip.

THE LOW-PRESSURE LOOK

So far, I've gone turkey hunting in South Dakota, Nebraska, Missouri, Iowa, and Wisconsin with dual motivations. Having a good time turkey hunting is one, of course. But a second and equally important reason is to take a good look around at unfamiliar public land. Some places, like the public areas I hunted in Missouri, didn't do enough to motivate me to splurge on a nonresident deer tag in the fall.

Others, like some of the Walk-In ranches I bowhunted turkeys on in South Dakota, were good enough to get me to go back. In fact, the best public dirt I found in that area yielded 100-percent success on bucks for me, four years in a row, with the biggest taping out in the mid-140s.

The goal with a turkey hunting trip that might provide the necessary intel for a return trip for whitetails, is to both cover ground and to watch. The first part can be tough, because bowhunting gobblers generally involves a pile of gear and a blind, which isn't overly mo-



If you head out on a dual-purpose turkey and deer-scouting mission this spring, pay close attention to all deer sign, and mark waypoints where you find the highest concentrations. This legwork can lead to quality deer hunting come fall.

bile. This is where the watching comes into play, because if you aren't going to run-and-gun, you at least want to pull the binos up and pay attention to what the deer are doing.

There's no guarantee that what an April buck does at first and last light is what he'll do in late-October. Or it might be exactly what he'll do. Deer use specific travel routes year-round in many places, which means you might witness spring deer activity that closely mirrors their fall traveling.

Or, you might find yourself in a situation where you can't (or don't) see a

whole lot in the way of deer movement. That's okay, because you've still got recon options.

WINTER SCOUTING IN SPRING

I'm of the opinion that the best time spent in the deer woods outside of actually hunting involves winter scouting. Finding last fall's rubs and scrapes is like getting a sneak peek into where the area's bucks prefer to be when you can hunt them. While it's easy to get distracted by gobbling toms, don't forget to keep your eyes open and take note of spots where you find lots of deer sign.



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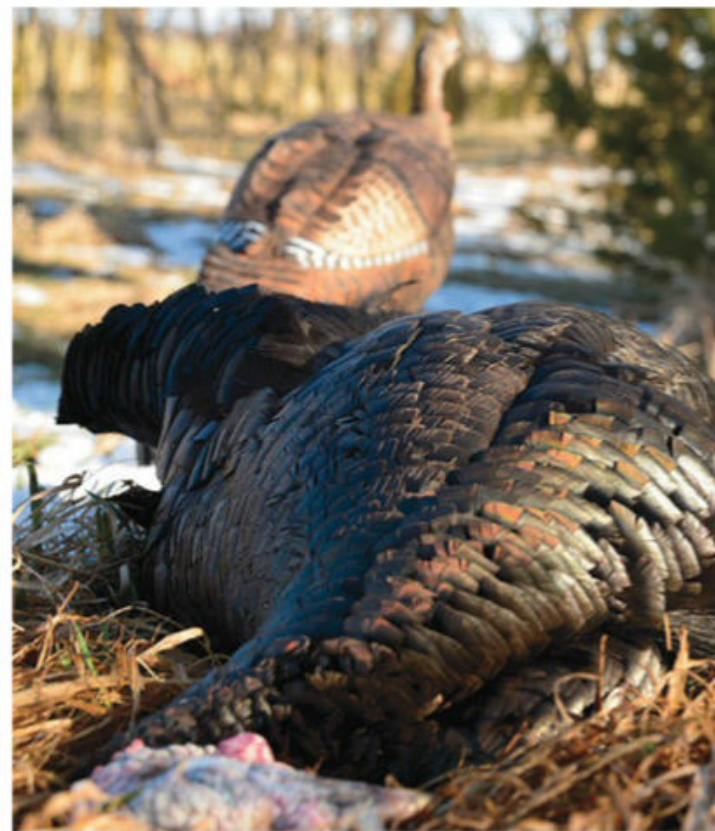
This happened to me last year in Nebraska while turkey hunting a new (to me) piece of public land. I managed to call in a trio of jakes on my first setup, and as I was taking my grip-and-grin photos, I started to notice rubs all over the patches of brush around my setup.

Fast-forward to last September, and not 200 yards from that spot, I watched a couple of bucks cruising through the same tract of ground. On opening night, I shot a velvet 10-pointer that died within 20 yards of where I had arrowed the jake. The following night, my hunting partner killed a monster 11-pointer out of that same stand, and it was all made possible by a spring turkey trip.

LOGISTICS

Naturally, you've got to make sure you can get a turkey tag and a deer tag in your chosen state. If you can, you'll realize a turkey trip allows you the opportunity to trial-run your camping sites (or motel choice), and learn the best ways to navigate through the unfamiliar territory.

It also allows you to quickly way-point staging areas, travel routes, and a host of other potential stand sites for your return trip — all while you're hunting longbeards. But remember, this is a scouting mission that might yield unimpressive results. Don't get married to a spot simply because you



I arrowed this jake in the spring of 2019 no more than 20 yards from where my buck died last September in Nebraska. A part deer scouting, part turkey hunting trip can prove invaluable for finding whitetail hotspots on public land.

went on a dual-purpose turkey and deer-scouting mission.

Occasionally, you'll find a suitable turkey woods that just doesn't lend itself to the investment of a deer tag come fall. That means the worse-case scenario for this type of trip is that you got to go turkey hunting for a few days, which is a good enough reason to go without the potential bonus of finding a deer hotspot. **BH**

PUBLIC-LAND ESSENTIALS

When I think about using paper maps and the generally limited information of only 15 years ago, I cringe. Traveling bowhunters have it so good today. This is due in no small part to apps like onX (\$30+, onxmaps.com), which offer up so much relevant info that it can seem overwhelming. If you're not using something like onX to find and digitally scout new spots, mark sign, and develop a plan, you're missing out.

Another must-have for this style of hunting is a quality pack. ALPS OutdoorZ (alpsoutdoorz.com) makes some of the best, and their Hybrid X (\$300) is perfectly sized at 2,750 cu. in. Not only is this pack loaded with pockets and gear lashes, but it's also built for hauling loads of all sizes. As someone who had to haul out all of his bowhunting gear and two gobblers one amazing spring morning, I can attest to the fact that this matters even to the turkey hunter — let alone a hang-and-hunt whitetail addict.





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Chuck Adams

Thoughts About Bush Planes

I'VE FACED A LOT OF SCARY CRITTERS IN MY DAY, BUT NONE SCARIER THAN A CARELESS PILOT.

I OFTEN GO ON do-it-yourself bowhunts in remote and rugged areas. Some of those places, like Alaskan deer country, are teeming with dangerous bears. Sometimes I go by myself, but more often with a good friend or two. The obvious question is often asked by magazine readers, seminar attendees, and social-media followers. What is the most dangerous part of hunting on your own?

Most folks assume it is remote conditions, with risks of a broken leg or catastrophic fall, or the nightmarish chance of being mauled by a monstrous bear. I laugh at these misconceptions. A careful woodsman has little chance of hurting himself while hiking, and anyone worth his salt carries a satellite phone or Garmin inReach device to make instant contact in an emergency. Brown and grizzly bears can certainly ruin your day, but chances are slim to none if you keep your eyes peeled, maintain a clean camp,

use extreme caution around downed game, and carry bear spray plus a really big handgun. In my opinion, it is probably more dangerous for you to drive your car to the corner grocery store.

When I ponder the risks of remote-country hunting, I do not worry about falling over a cliff or providing a bear with a free lunch. What I do worry about are bush-plane rides.

Climbing into a bush plane is a calculated risk, whether on a guided or DIY adventure. Bush planes can be just

as risky on outfitted hunts as when you arrange your own transportation. It can be difficult to research your pilot before a guided trip. The outfitter has you picked up and flown in and out, and you are relying on that guy's good judgment, unless you ask some questions beforehand.

My first bush-plane ride occurred many moons ago on a guided trip for Dall sheep. This was arranged for me, and I knew nothing about the air-taxi operator. Our assigned pilot was also our guide, and he tried to take off from a rough dirt strip in a severe crosswind. I was too inexperienced to know better, but my hunting partners were both seasoned pilots. The Cessna 185 barreled down the runway, lurched into the air...and was instantly slammed back to earth in waist-deep brush. The plane nearly flipped. The four of us were white as sheets as we manhandled the still-upright but severely scratched and dented plane back to the runway.

It seemed like forever as we waited for the wind to lull and finally managed to lift off. My two pilot pals told me later they thought we were dead.

Nearly 30 years after that, I was once again bowhunting with two companions — this time on a self-guided trip for Alaskan caribou. I had researched the pilot we planned to use — a veteran with thousands of hours in the air and a perfect safety record. But when we arrived at the air-taxi service, we were told there had been a scheduling switch.

My mistake was crawling into the Beaver floatplane with a 20-something pilot who flippantly bragged that he loved to fly in high winds. It was moderately breezy that day, but our guy managed to land us on a lake near a caribou herd. He promised to return on our chosen pickup day.

Bush planes are the main mode of transportation on many North-Country bowhunts. They can be a godsend, but there are things you should know before booking any air-taxi trip.





Animals like my Sitka blacktail buck are often hunted after a bush-plane ride to a remote area.

We never saw him again. We were finally rescued from the wilderness by two private pilots who saw us frantically waving a red tarp. Next day, we learned that our cocky young pilot had nosedived into another lake in gale-force winds the very next day after he flew us. He had two passengers on board, and all three ended up in the hospital with serious injuries. Fortunately, several empty gasoline drums in the fuselage kept the plane afloat until help arrived. Otherwise, all three might have drowned. It could have been us.

As the old North-Country saying goes, “There are old bush pilots, and

bold bush pilots, but no old, bold bush pilots.” A seasoned pilot is cautious, and he never flies in challenging conditions. He gets old by being careful.

Even the best air-taxi operators can have trouble. A Super Cub, Cessna 185, Beaver, or similar bush plane has one, and only one, engine. If that engine conks out, the machine instantly becomes a rather poor glider. It is also said up north that a bush pilot is never good to fly with unless he’s also good to crash with. Real professionals have the skills to land their planes without catastrophe in most cases, even if the engine fails. They

remain cool, assess the terrain, find a reasonably safe spot, and glide to the ground.

A number of years ago, another sheep guide/pilot and I were banking for final approach to a small lake when the engine stalled. There are few things more terrifying than seeing the single propeller in front of you come to a complete stop.

This guy had been flying a Super Cub less than one year — something I only found out later — but he frantically fiddled with gadgets as the plane wallowed toward the ground. The engine coughed, sputtered, and came back to life. We landed and set up camp. The culprit turned out to be bad aviation gas that had somehow become mixed with water.

I shot a great sheep the next day, and my guide flew back to base camp alone to get good gasoline. He told me he would not risk flying me again until everything was right. I appreciated that, and figured the 30-mile hike back through rugged grizzly bear country would be a suitable alternative if my guide never returned. Fortunately, he found some water-free fuel and flew me out the following day.

I have no qualms about flying to remote guided or unguided places to bow-hunt, but I have gotten wiser over the years. I research pilots I plan to use on my own, and I ask outfitters to provide specific info about air-taxi operators they rely on. I have seriously irritated a few guides and bush-plane companies the past couple of decades when I refused to climb into a plane with someone who was sprung on me at the last minute. Enough can go wrong in a well-handled plane without asking for extra grief.

If a pilot does not have a great reputation and a long and spotless safety record, I keep my feet firmly on the ground! **BH**

Chuck Adams

BIG GAME HUNTING TIP

Three Bush-Plane Strategies

If you plan to fly to a remote bow-hunting area by wheel or floatplane, here are three tips to ensure a safe and productive experience.

First, you should research specific pilot records that are easily available online. Also ask for a list of previous passengers, and phone a few to get a feel for your pilot.

I never fly unless my pilot has 5,000 hours or more in the air in remote country. Most pilots I rely on have a lot more

than that. For example, I first flew with my friend Dean Andrew on Kodiak Island, Alaska, 34 years ago. He was younger then, but already experienced. I’ve flown with Dean on Kodiak nearly half the years since, and his 25,000-plus flying hours on that island give me extreme comfort. It’s never happened, but I’m betting my life that Dean would also be a good pilot to crash with.

Second, ask your pilot exactly how much the air-taxi service will cost. This should include meat-pickup trips to transport your game back to civilization for processing or freezing. Air-taxi services are never cheap, and you don’t

want an unpleasant surprise because you failed to budget ahead of time.

Finally, find out how much weight you and your companions can safely load in the plane. A good pilot will never overload, and you need to arrive with pre-weighed, carefully chosen hunting gear, camping equipment, food, and incidentals. A top pilot will weigh everything before your flight, including you. Calculate everything ahead of time on a bathroom scale to prevent planeside problems.

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HUNTING WHITETAILS

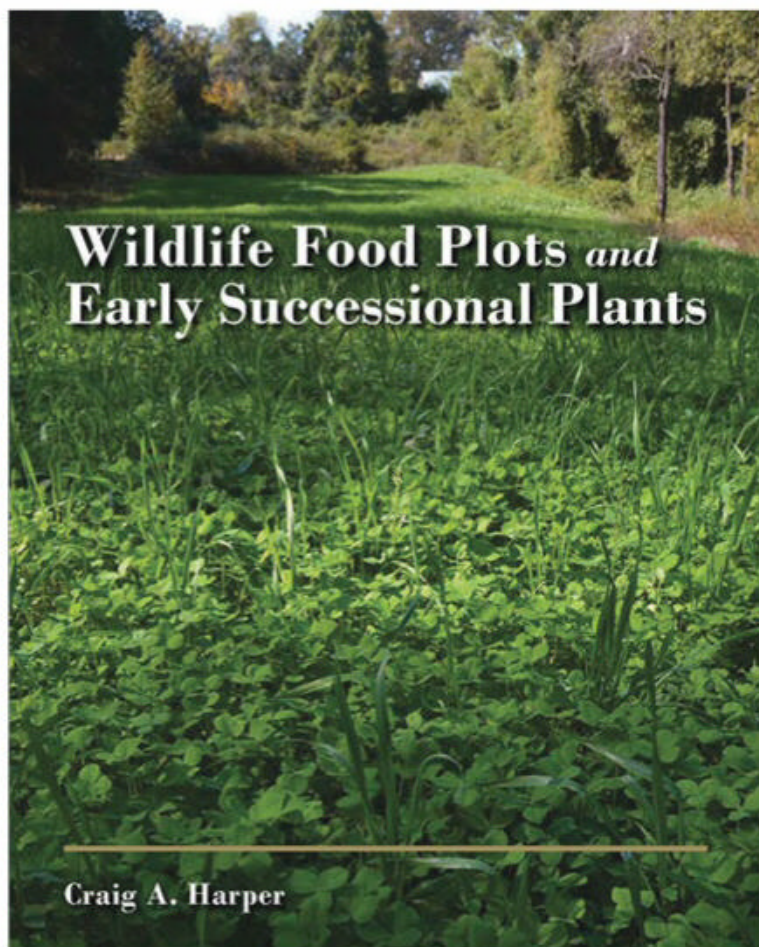


C.V. Winand

Habitat. Habitat. Habitat.

USE THIS GUIDE TO BETTER THE FOOD AND HABITAT ON YOUR HUNTING PROPERTIES.

I BECAME a wildlife biologist so I could become a better deer hunter. Once I understood the relationship between deer and their habitat, I started to tip over more deer on a regular basis. But, the road to understanding proper deer habitat and management can be tough when you actually put boots on the ground.



Dr. Craig Harper authored a book entitled, "Wildlife Food Plots and Early Successional Plants." Using food plots to supplement naturally occurring foods is the theme of the book. To order, go to nocsopublishing.com. To slightly modify a quote from the Director of Conservation for the Quality Deer Management Association, Kip Adams says, "The information within this book is backed by science and tested with spent (broadheads) gunpowder."

Location, location, location is the universal mantra from any real-estate agent. The market value of any property is where it's located. The same scenario can be said of understanding deer hunting and management. Using the real-estate analogy, deer management equates to habitat, habitat, habitat. This parameter can't be underestimated.

Deer management can be described as the three legs of a stool. Biologists

and land managers must constantly balance: (1) existing deer populations, (2) hunter-management objectives, and (3) existing habitat. Although all three of these components are very important, understanding deer habitat is the key. For bowhunters, the existing habitat is the most important element when considering the value of a treestand location.

The quality and quantity of habitat is always a primary factor when assessing

the value of a hunting property or treestand location. Additionally, the composition and location of various vegetation types on the property is where we put the pedal to the metal. This is where the art and science of wildlife management comes into play.

Recently, University of Tennessee Professor and Extension Wildlife Specialist Dr. Craig Harper authored a book entitled, "Wildlife Food Plots and Early Successional Plants." The beauty of this book is that it is actually two books in one. The first half meticulously details food-plot management and how food plots fit into a deer-management plan. The second half is a Plant Identification Guide that teaches hunters the importance of naturally occurring plants (from north to south), their value to wildlife, and how to get rid of them if they are undesirable. Without a doubt, the information you can glean from this book is unparalleled in educating hunters on food plots and understanding deer habitat.

The commercial food-plot industry was born back in the 1980s. Almost every deer hunter thought the world evolved around this "new" management technique called food plots. Well, we've come a long way since then. Obviously, there is a lot more to managing deer than just food plots, and Harper nails this point by saying, "Food plots do not replace other habitat-management practices, but complement them."

Harper uses decades of research from himself, his graduate students, and other professionals to disprove some old-time beliefs. He uses biological research as opposed to commercial bias or hearsay, or even "this is what we've always done," (which is true with some government agencies) to give new insight to habitat management for deer and other species in a very objective and understandable manner. Harper provides information on soils, establishment of food plots, plant mixtures, and management advice that can be used anywhere. Without question, the information on herbicide use for managing food plots and early successional communities is unmatched by any other resource.

Harper explains plant phenology (timing of growth), nutritional requirements of deer, and how and why deer select the various plants they do. This information is provided in a way that helps deer hunters understand what types of food plots are needed for different times of the year. In addition to information

on deer, the book also contains chapters for other species, such as wild turkeys, mourning doves, and waterfowl.

Oftentimes, hunters plant food plots and within a month or so there's nothing left. Was there something wrong with your planting? Maybe. But chances are you have too many deer on your property. Instead of spending all your time and money on another planting failure, you probably should start managing your woods and fields and consider lowering deer density on your property. And yes, on many properties this is easier said than done. One big advantage of food plots is that they can significantly help reduce the deer-browsing pressure on a recovering forest understory.

Harper also adds another valuable point when he says, "Wherever you grow food plots, plants arising from the seed-bank will also grow. It only makes sense to recognize the importance of both, and to use plants occurring naturally to your advantage when possible." In other words, since the seeds are already supplied naturally (and are free), why not use them to your benefit? Many hunters rely solely on food plots, and yet neglect the native vegetation.

Food plots should have a minimum

of four hours of overhead sunlight, with screening cover no more than 100 yards from the middle. Compared to a square-shaped food plot, a long, linear food plot has a better chance of crossing the home range of multiple deer. Additionally, pinch-points made up of woody debris, shrubs, or evergreens are very beneficial along linear food plots. Trees-stand locations taking advantage of these "squeezed-in" funnel areas can be very beneficial.

Harper emphasizes that considerable thought should be given to prevailing winds when deciding on your food-plot location. And probably more important, entering and exiting your stand during the nighttime hours. Educating deer while hunting wrong winds, or going straight to a stand location, can kill all your plans. Having your trail curve prior to your stand location can help immensely in hiding your approach and exit. Sometimes, planting a tall visual break such as switchgrass is all that's needed.

Harper recommends food plots should maintain a 50-foot buffer next to an adjacent tree's rain-drip line. Additionally, thinning undesirable trees up to 100 yards from your food plot can

create a natural progression from forbs to shrubs to saplings to mature trees.

Food-plot management practices influence a deer's daily movements and home-range size. Yes, food will attract deer, but high-quality cover is what holds deer on your property. This is where the composition and design of your food plot and adjacent cover helps immensely. Remember, food plots should not replace habitat-management practices, but complement them.

C.J.'s Summary: A deer biologist's job is to maintain deer numbers at or below the carrying capacity of the property, so they do not destroy the habitat in which they live. Harper's book gives hunters a college-level degree on managing deer. Because the name of the game in advancing your hunting education is understanding habitat quality, this publication will help you become a better deer hunter. Noteworthy within the book is the Plant Identification Guide. The Guide contains more than 300 commonly found weeds and other plants found in food plots, fallow fields, and other early successional communities. Each plant species contains multiple color pictures, a description of the plant, wildlife value, and recommended control technique if undesirable. "Wildlife Food Plots and Early Successional Plants" is a book you want to read and digest fully. **BH**



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Joe Bell

➤ Technical Editor

Bow-Tuning Tools & Techniques

IF YOU DESIRE PEAK PERFORMANCE FROM YOUR HUNTING BOW, LEARN THESE SKILLS.

EVERY YEAR AT THIS TIME, it seems we're pummeled with new technology designed to improve bow performance, broadhead accuracy, and arrow speed. All of these things are blessings come hunting season. And archery engineers know this, which is why they're on a continual reinvent-and-tweak process to enhance the shooting process. The problem is, this new gear is often dialed-in to perfection in a controlled lab setting, where experts can place small touches to make it perform at peak levels.



For precise bow setup and arrow tuning, the I consider a draw board a critical tuning device. I prefer the Last Chance Archery Draw Board, since it slides easily into my Last Chance Power Press Deluxe. The bow can then be rotated in a sharp, downward angle, which aids in setting the sight's leveling features.

A new bow is a prime example. Chances are, this year's bow was made slightly better than last year's in terms of speed, consistency, and low vibration. However, can this performance be detected and felt straight out of the box, or do you need to

create the perfect shooting package by fine-tuning draw length, accessory setup, and cam position to achieve the highest level of precision? Based on my 30 years of shooting compound bows, I believe the latter to be absolutely true.

With that in mind, let's look at the primary areas of concern when super-tuning a bow. By learning these skills, and by acquiring a few useful tools, you'll surely up the ante in your shooting game, just like the pros do. And instead of rushing back and forth to your local archery dealer to request these critical alterations, you can do them conveniently at home, to your perfection, even days before a hunt.

CAM ALIGNMENT

As a technical-archery aficionado, I put a lot of tuning focus on the main platform — the bow. The cams must be in proper vertical alignment and synchronization to ensure level nock travel and a smooth arrow take-off. If not, arrow flight and broadhead accuracy will suffer. The system will also emit more noise and vibration, since bowstring travel will veer outside of a straight, consistent line, directly behind the arrow's nock.

In a perfect world, cam adjustments would be simple. You would draw your bow back, have a friend eye-up which cam's draw-stop hits before the other, and then place the bow in a press to twist up cables so the cams become synchronized — then you're done. However, this rarely works as planned. Instead, once the buss cable is twisted, especially in a half twist, the harness tends to elongate and resettle after several shots, causing the dreaded desynchronization to occur again. This back-and-forth process of drawing the bow and placing it in the press for string adjustments continues over and over again, producing less-than-stellar results.

A better way is to use a draw board to synchronize the cams' stops. This allows for an up-close and meticulous evaluation (while the bow is at full draw) of the orientation of the buss cable against the draw-stops, so you can make your adjustments ultra-precise...no more guessing and drawing back repeatedly. A draw board is also helpful for adjusting the pull-down cord on arrow rests, by ensuring the correct alignment and tension of the cord as recommended by the manufacturer.

Perhaps the greatest virtue in using a draw board is that it simplifies the process of yoke-tuning. Ideally, cam lean is measured dynamically — at the full-draw position. To correct cam lean, use two small levels; one on the bow riser, and another on the cam. Place the bow in the draw board, plum the bow riser using a level, then attach a level to the top cam.

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NEXT-LEVEL BOWHUNTING

If the cam's bottom lobe is pitched to the left, causing the bowstring to be left of the centershot position, make one full twist to the left side of the split-yoke harness. Make one twist at a time until the cam position is straight up and down, or plumb with the bow riser's level. I use a Hamskea Third-Axis Leveling device on the riser, and another hands-free level for the bow's cam.

LEVELING THE SIGHT

Setting the 2nd and 3rd-axis leveling feature on your bowsight will improve shooting form and precision in the deer woods, especially when bowhunting mountain game like mule deer and elk.

To adjust 2nd axis, I place the bow in a vise, position it in a normal up-and-down position, and plumb the riser using a leveling device. The Hamskea device works well for this, too. Then I adjust the sight's bubble level to center (the 2nd-axis feature).

For 3rd axis, I follow a three-step process. I place a plumb line on a nearby wall, or use a vertically level door jam. Then I place the bow in a draw-board device, but position the device at a sharp, downward angle. I attach the Hamskea Leveling Tool to the bow's sight bar, or the riser, and align the tool's dual-bead, four-inch-long sighting pin along the plumb line.

If the sight's bubble reads out of center while in this downward position, use the sight's 3rd-axis adjustment (which moves the sight or leveling aperture in and out like a swinging door from the

shooter's face) to re-center it. As a last step, I remove the bow from the draw board and then perform the procedure again by drawing the bow by hand and aligning the Hamskea's aiming guide to the wall's plum line. Sometimes, a shooter's form will alter the level reading, and minor adjustments may be necessary to recalibrate the bubble.

ARROW FLIGHT & TUNING TIPS

There are a number of tuning techniques one can use to establish improved arrow flight and broadhead consistency. However, paper-tuning is the foremost choice, since it provides an immediate visual of the arrow's flight pattern.

I prefer to paper-tune first without fletching attached to the arrow, as it produces the smallest footprint and thus improves tuning precision. I wrap a strip of electrical tape around the portion where fletching would exist. This keeps the arrow properly balanced and weighted. I then shoot this arrow through taut painter's paper from four to six feet away. Once I have a bullet-like hole, I follow-up with a fletched shaft to confirm the tear. If I don't see a clean "rip," then I know fletching contact with the rest is occurring, and I'll spray aerosol foot powder on the vanes, checking for contact points with the arrow rest. I'll twist the arrow nock to mitigate this contact, or switch to lower-profile vanes to altogether solve the issue.

If, for some reason, I cannot achieve a precise arrow tear, despite adjusting the arrow rest's height and centershot position, then I'll attempt to yoke-tune the bow's cam positioning.

Yoke-tuning entails placing the bow in a press, then twisting one side of the string harness that attaches to the top limb, or top and bottom limbs (depending on your bow model), allowing you to control the cam(s) vertical positioning and, ultimately, how the bow cycles the arrow. In order to maintain the synchronization of the cams' draw-stops and the bow's draw length, you must twist one side of the harness and then untwist the other side in equal rotation.

To perform yoke-tuning, be sure to make one twist at a time until achieving the perfect paper tear. With consistent left tears, twist the left side of the yoke and untwist the right. Continue in this fashion until the tear is corrected. With right tears, twist the right side of the yoke and untwist the left side.

Despite persistent yoke and paper-tuning, sometimes broadheads will still

TESTING ARROW QUALITY

No tuning column would be complete without mentioning the importance of consistent arrow spine. Most of today's arrows are uniform in weight and straightness, but arrow spine can vary somewhat, depending on the manufacturer and the grade of arrows.

Spine relates to the "flex," or stiffness, of an arrow. The stiffness must match the bow's stored-energy capabilities, and it must be consistent from one arrow to the next. If not, each arrow will flex differently in flight, causing inconsistent groups, especially with broadheads.

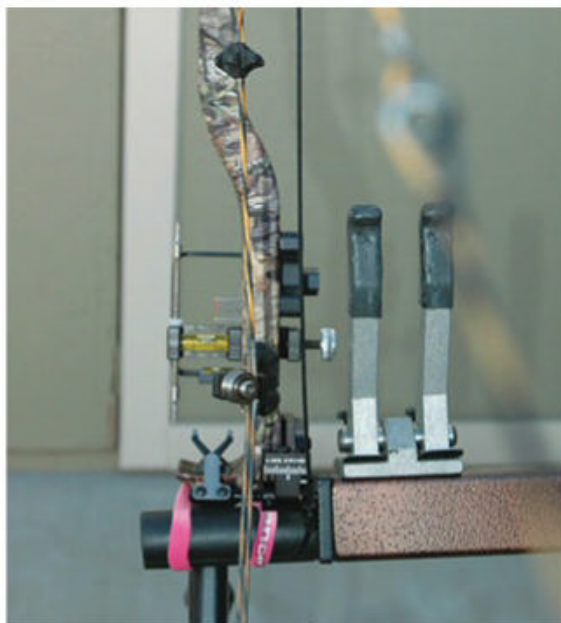
To ensure arrows are matched from one arrow to the next, I use a RAM Products Spine Tester. This device allows you to measure spine consistency 360-degrees around the shaft. To maintain solid consistency, I prefer spine to be .005-inch, plus or minus, from one shaft to the next.

As an added bonus, while using the tool and checking spine, I note the stiffest portion of the shaft (high-spine setting) and mark it accordingly, so I can align each arrow nock in the same spot for one extra measure of precision and tighter groups.

impact a few inches away from fieldpoints at 30 or 40 yards. If this is the case, then you can continue yoke-tuning until the groups align. For example, if the broadheads group left of fieldpoints, then you'd twist the left side of the yoke and untwist the right. If your bow is equipped with a top and bottom yoke, you would make one twist on the left side of each opposing harness, then untwist the right-side portions. By doing this, and then shooting another group, you can actually induce a slight amount of cam lean into the system in an attempt to bring the two groups together. A small amount of cam lean is not always a bad thing!

If you reach a shooting juncture where impact points of broadheads and fieldpoints are only an inch or two apart, you can try adjusting the arrow rest's position in 1/32-inch gaps until the arrow groups intersect.

Bow tuning, for most, may seem like a monumental hassle. However, it's no different than anything else in life. By doing a little bit of work at the front end of things, you'll reap improved benefits when it's all said and done. Besides, sweetening up the accuracy output of your bow can be a big confidence booster come hunting season, making you deadly as a bowhunter. BH



Third-axis sight adjustment is best done at a 45-degree angle. The Hamskea Third-Axis Leveling Tool makes this process easy. By attaching the tool to the bow's riser or sight bar, you can level the sight's bubble in both the horizontal and vertical planes, properly calibrating your sight's 3rd-axis setting.

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Fred Eichler

➤ Traditional Editor

My Biggest Fish: Part 1 Of 2

I'VE BOWFISHED FOR DOZENS OF DIFFERENT FISH SPECIES OVER THE YEARS, BUT MARLIN WERE COMPLETELY FOREIGN TO ME.

THIS COLUMN IS IN TWO PARTS, because I had to give a little history on how it came to be that I would travel such a long distance to pursue my biggest fish with a bow.



I have been a bowfishing fan for about as long as I have been shooting a bow. I started out chasing frogs and carp. I had a blast, but I was always looking for new adventures and new species of fish to go after with my bow.

During the summer months, besides hogs and some small game, for me, bowfishing was where the action was. I was after anything and everything that swam and was legal. I was especially excited about the tastier fish. I know all fish are edible, and smoked carp is delicious, and I have even had stingray that tasted like scallops. But, if we are being honest, carp is not the main go-to in the fish department for amazing table fare. And at the risk of sounding like Forrest Gump, it is darn hard to beat a fried frog leg, fried catfish, fried gar strap, fried redfish, sheephead, black drum, or the myriad other fish that are way better than carp.

My bowfishing excursions took me to different places in search of different



species. I wanted to experience it all, and because bowfishing is a relatively inexpensive sport, if I could afford gas money, a license, and sometimes even a bowfishing guide, I was constantly going somewhere.

When it came to bowfishing, I was living the adage, "jack of all trades, master of none." I wanted to learn a little bit about every species of fish. Once I learned where to hunt it, how to hunt it, and what time of day or night to hunt it, I was ready to go. Once I shot and ate it. I was ready to move on to something else. I would often repeat the super-fun ones, the super-tasty ones, or the ones that the family and I could do together. But for the most part, after harvesting the species I was after, I was ready to move on to something else.

I became enthralled with big fish, and even alligators. I liked the challenges involved, as well as trying to figure out the right gear for the right species and situa-

tion. I often tested new Muzzy bowfishing equipment before it hit the market, and I gave my input on a lot of different gear. Over the years, I had developed a formula for what worked in my opinion based on what I was going after, and where I was going after it.

While talking with my friend, Ty Miller, who lives in Mexico, we discussed how cool it would be to bowfish for marlin. To me, a marlin would be the ultimate bowfishing challenge. Not just the challenge of luring one into bow range, but the challenge of how to handle a fish that powerful once it was hit with an arrow.

So, I began a multiyear quest. First, I started researching. I learned the main difficulty was figuring out where to legally do it. While I was discovering that there were limited places to even go, my friend Ty was in the process of getting the first permit ever given in Mexico to allow bowfishing for a marlin. I also realized in my research that there wasn't any information out there on bowfishing marlin. The only thing I could find was an old Howard Hill video of him shooting a marlin with a bow, but the line then went to a rod and reel and he eventually brought the fish in with the rod. I wanted to do it without a rod and reel. Because I couldn't find any other information on bowfishing marlin, I had to rely on my own past experiences, and those of friends who were spearfishermen, to help me figure out how to get it done.

Basically, I was on my own on this one...

Stay tuned for Part 2 of my quest for a marlin with stick and string in the July 2020 issue. **BH**

For more information, visit fredeichler.com, and don't miss Fred's new show, "Everything Eichler," every Sunday at 12:30 P.M. on Sportsman Channel.



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Brian K. Strickland

Deer Herd Health

FAT AND HAPPY DEER DON'T WANDER FAR. KEEP 'EM CLOSE WITH MINERALS, SUPPLEMENTS, AND QUALITY FORAGE.

AS I WAS PREPARING a fall food plot a few years back, a good buddy of mine who has been involved in various whitetail circles over the years insisted that managing habitat for whitetails is like a good marriage. Although it can be hard at times and there are setbacks, if you're willing to put in the work, paydirt will ultimately come. After 25 years of marriage and nearly as long chasing whitetails, I've learned that there is a lot of truth to that.

Practices in both habitat and deer management have improved dramatically since the turn of the century.

Much has changed in the whitetail world since I arrowed my first buck nearly two decades ago. Not only have we evolved into better bowhunters, but the practices in both habitat and whitetail management have also seen dramatic improvements since the turn of the century. It wasn't that long ago that the term "food plot" became a part of our whitetail vocabulary. But now, if you own or control hunting land, you end up spending far more time and money managing it than you do in a treestand.

That being said, there's more to enhancing deer habitat than just flinging some seeds and hoping for the best. I should know; I've tried that a few times with iffy success. Instead, it's about developing goals and long-term plans on how to achieve them.

For example, on a 160-acre chunk of dirt we own in southeast Kansas, we planted our first food plot over a decade ago. I argued at the time that it really wasn't needed, since the creekbottom habitat that snaked through the property was surrounded by winter wheat, beans, milo, and native grasses. But with food plots being the latest craze at the time, we jumped on the bandwagon.

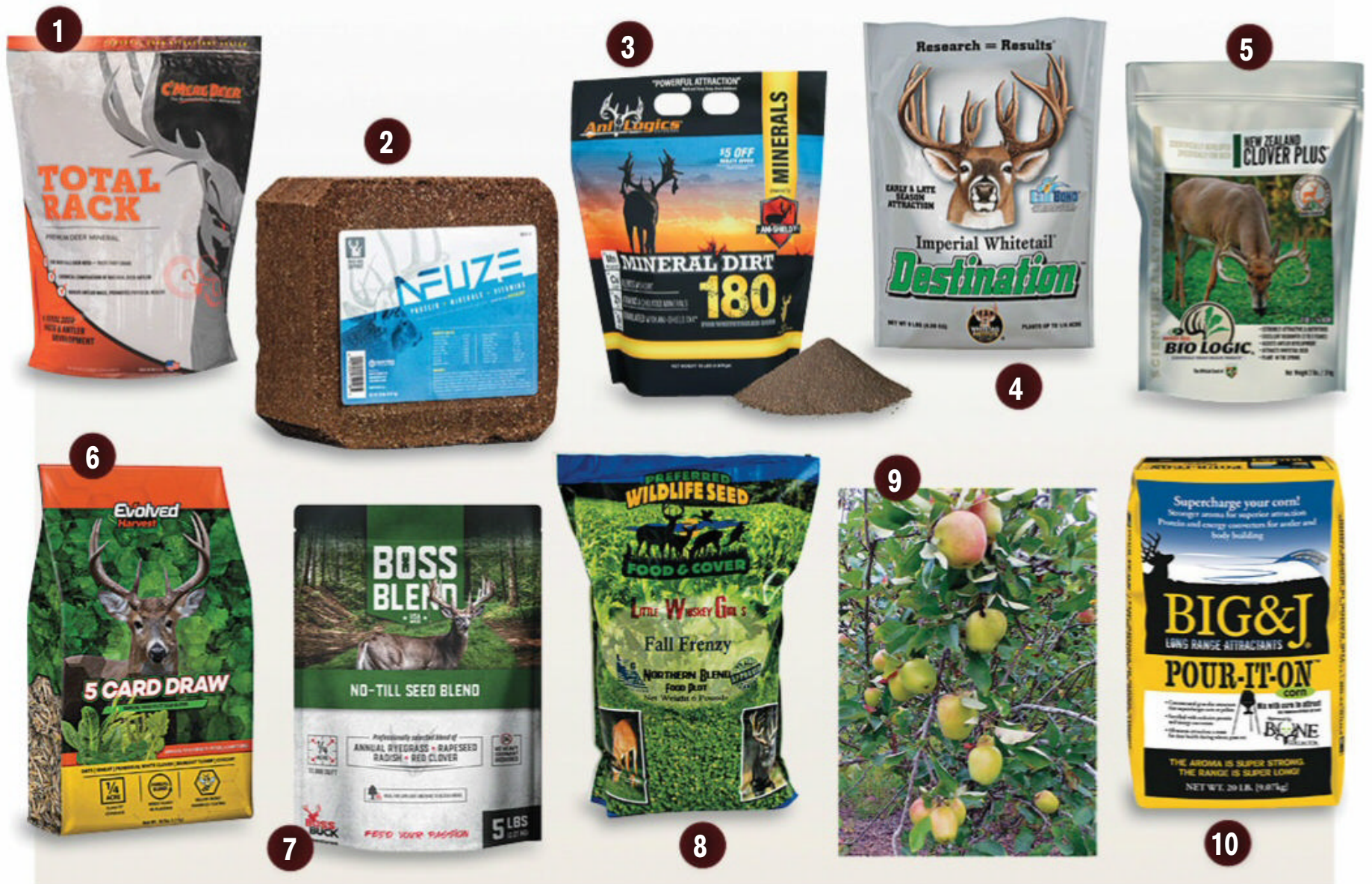
Success was marginal at first. Mast trees died, plots failed, and does and young bucks seemed to be the only ones interested. But with each mistake came some success. Today, the three-acre plot is a whitetail hub in the middle of the property.

Mineral supplements are a good place to start when it comes to deer health. They're super easy to apply, and if your property lacks in this area, mineral supplements are a great springboard toward deer health. The new [1] **Total Rack** (\$29.95) from **C'Mere Deer** (cmeredeer.com) contains proprietary attractants and minerals such as calcium, phosphorus, magnesium, potassium, iron, manganese, and zinc, which maximize intake while also providing important nutrients for recovery, nursing, and antler growth.

Hunters Specialties (hunterspec.com) teamed up with the folks at Rackology to develop the new [2] **Nfuze Protein-Mineral-Vitamin Block** (\$14.99). Scientifically blended for maximum efficiency, this 20-lb. block of whitetail magic provides premium ingredients with optimum ratios of vitamins, minerals, and protein to dramatically increase overall herd health, immune system, antler growth, and reproduction.

Another mineral option worth looking at is [3] **Mineral Dirt** (\$10.99) from **Ani-Logics** (anilogics.com). Available





in liquid, granular, or block forms, Ani-Logics incorporates their Ani-Shield TX4 technology to ensure your deer herd is lapping up all the necessary vitamins, essential oils, probiotics, and chelated minerals, which have an absorption rate up to 70%. Also, if you really want to scientifically know your deer herd's health, Ani-Logics also offers a Deer Liver Analysis (\$129.99) test kit.

While minerals provide a great foundation for deer health, food plots are also a must. For over 30 years, **Whitetail Institute** (whitetailinstitute.com) has been developing products geared toward deer nutrition, making them the W\who's Who of the food-plot industry. Their new [4] **Destination** (\$29.95) mix is an annual seed blend that is highly palatable, rich in protein, and designed to hold deer all season long. Living up to its name, **Destination** contains their proprietary blend of peas, Whitetail Oats, radishes, Alex Berseem, and kale that establishes quickly and is so easy to plant, your hunting buddies will be green with envy.

One of my first successful food plots several years back was a **Mossy Oak BioLogic** (plantbiologic.com) blend, and it was a deer magnet once fall rolled around. Although BioLogic has several seed blends to choose from, their [5] **New Zealand Clover Plus** (\$17.99) is hard to

beat. Planted spring or fall, it is a blend of both red and white clovers, with two types of mineral-rich chicories for an extra nutritional boost when needed most. Hardy and drought resistant, it produces larger leaves and thinner stems for higher nutritional value and improved digestibility, and also provides up to 35% protein.

Another option is the new [6] **5 Card Draw** (\$19.99) from **Evolved Harvest** (evolved.com). Evolved has been around the block more than once, and they have had their complete line of seed blends, minerals, and attractants dialed-in for a long time. To ensure your plot will draw whitetails throughout the year, 5 Card Draw is an annual/perennial mix of oats, wheat, perennial white clover, barkant turnip, and chicory. Planted spring, summer, or fall, it's highly palatable, adjusts to a variety of soil conditions, and is high in protein and minerals to ensure whitetails are getting what they need, when they need it.

Looking to provide a food plot in a remote location or short on equipment to plant one? Then consider **Boss Buck's** (bossbuck.com) [7] **No-Till Seed Blend** (\$14.99). With no soil prep required, this blend features select annual ryegrass, rape, radish, and red clover that will grow in high, moderate, and even low-shade areas. Just simply sling it on top of exposed ground and pray for rain.

Although their name may throw you off guard at first glance and even make you chuckle, **Little Whiskey Girl** (littlewhiskeygirl.com) is serious about their food-plot blends. Their popular Lucky Leaf (\$35) is a protein-rich smorgasbord of clovers to include galliant, red, jumbo ladino, mammoth, white, alsike, and forage. Prepare the soil after the last frost, and watch it grow this spring. Their [8] **Fall Frenzy** (\$35) is also popular. It contains a blend of brassicas, rape, radishes, turnips, and beets, making it an attractive draw during those early season hunts, but also just as effective once the snow flies and the sugar-rich bulbs become prime.

Although seed blends and minerals seem to get most of the attention when it comes to whitetail nutrition, natural attractants like soft and hard mast trees also deserve a seat at the table. **Chestnut Hill Outdoors** (chestnuthilloutdoors.com) is a leader in such attractants, and they offer a variety of mast-producing options. Although food plots yield quicker returns, once established, soft mast requires less effort to maintain and adds diversity to your property. Depending on the variety, Chestnut Hill's [9] **Crabapple**, **Pear**, and **Persimmon** trees (prices vary) often begin producing fruit within a couple of years.

Big&J's (bigandj.com) [10] **Pour-It-On** (\$29.99) is both an attractant and

TRIED AND TRUE

supplement that provides complete nutrition on a cellular level. The concentrated granular is made with a proprietary refining process that not only creates a strong aroma to draw deer in, but the organic trace minerals and protein are better absorbed to provide overall deer health and antler growth. Its energy converting amino acids also provide the ingredients deer need post-rut, and during the winter recovery period.

Although some may cringe at the thought of using a feeder, I'm not one of them. I guess that's because of my Texas roots, where feeders outnumber residents in some counties. **Moultrie's** (moultriefeeders.com) [11] **30-Gal. Gravity Tripod Feeder** (\$159.99) is great for dispensing protein supplements by using an adjustable-flow gravity dispenser, with three feeder funnels that eliminate the need for a power source. Simply fill the hopper with up to 200 lbs. of your favorite supplement or feed, and the deer will figure out the rest.

Fertilizers are an often-overlooked element to a healthy plot, but not all are created equal. Unlike most fertilizers on the market that offer you just the



basic N-P-K formulations, **Rackology** (rackology.org) takes food-plot fertilizer to the next level with their premium [12] **Food Plot Fertilizer & Supplement** blend (\$19.99). Their proprietary formulation adds many of the nutrients deer need directly to the soil, while at the same time creating the healthiest soil possible to produce maximum plant nutrition and health. Having deer supplements delivered directly to the forage deer eat provides better overall absorption and long-term benefits to your

deer herd. Lastly, whether you want a whitetail attractant just during bow season, or a nutritional treat all year long, **Rack One** (huntrackone.com) adds the new [13] **PB&J** (\$9.99) to their expanding line of attractants. Mix it with other food sources, or use it as a stand-alone supplement. PB&J is made using shelled Georgia peanuts to deliver a rich aroma, and an even better taste. Also, with 22% protein and 40% fat content, it's an excellent supplement during the rut and winter recovery period. **BH**



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The Wild Harvest Initiative Grows

THE VAST MAJORITY OF THE PUBLIC DOESN'T UNDERSTAND THE VALUE OF HARVESTED AND CONSUMED WILD GAME AND FISH, BUT THEY SHOULD.

DID YOU EVER CONSIDER the economic benefit from the consumption of wild game and fish? Consider this example. In the elk hunting seasons in Canada for 2014-15 and 2015-16, there were 30,375 elk harvested. That two-year harvest generated 6.7 million pounds of edible meat. The United States' elk harvest for those two years was much larger with 383,361 elk harvested, generating 85.4 million pounds of meat.

of wild fish and game consumed in the United States and Canada. The initiative will only deal with personal, noncommercial harvest, and will be relevant to people who are concerned with safe, healthy food.

Such a survey is a huge undertaking, with many variables to consider. Although hunting and fishing participation is declining, we still have 13.7 million Americans and 2.1 million Canadians over the age of 18 who hunt. There are 25 million recreational fishers in the United States, and 2.7 million Canadians who fish every year. These statistics do not count the millions who legally hunt but do not buy a license.

For example, in 2009 there were 84,000 licensed hunters in Alaska. However, many Alaskan hunters do not need to purchase a license. That's true everywhere. Most states have regulations where resident or nonresident landowners, their spouses, and in some states their children and grandchildren, and the spouses of such children and grandchildren, and in some states the landowner's parents, do not need a license to hunt or fish on their own land. Thus, the total number of hunters and fishers in the United States is millions more than reported as license buyers. How will the initiative reach all of these people to obtain estimates of their wild game and fish harvests? It's a challenge for sure.

One real value of this initiative is to obtain the pounds of fish and game meat that is harvested and eaten. Once done (and it won't be easy to do), one can determine the estimated economic and agricultural replacement values of wild game and fish. If we are to influence non-hunters, politicians, and others about the values of hunting and fishing, such data is imperative.



It's hard to be against hunting when it provides you with healthy wild game meat like this.

We hear about food problems all the time. Food is pulled from grocery stores because it is unsafe. Children in some parts of our country don't get enough to eat. We hear about the loss of habitat due to agriculture all the time. Yet we have this sustainable food resource sitting right under our nose that could feed hundreds of thousands with minimal ecological impacts. The problem is that the public, both hunters and non-hunters, don't fully recognize the importance of harvested and consumed wild fish and game.

Shayne Mahoney, a wildlife biologist from Newfoundland, launched the Wild Harvest Initiative in 2015, and the ramifications are huge. He recognized the fact that the general public doesn't understand the full value of hunting. Consuming wild game is one of those values, and more and more non-hunters are sharing in this feast. It's hard to be against hunting when you are eating wild, healthy game.

Up until its formation, no one had ever attempted to quantify the amount

However, how do you get such data? Fishers and hunters can tell you what they harvested and consumed, but the weights would have to be estimated. One report from butcher-packer.com stated that 60 percent of the dressed weight of venison was not used during processing, while huntfishsport.com reported wastage of field-dressed venison was 44 percent.

Another variable that influences results is subsistent legal fishers in Alaska, where participation is measured by households rather than individuals. Surveys also show that in some regions, most fishers keep the bulk of their catch for food, while in other areas fishers release most of what they catch. Obviously, counting fish caught has limitations in determining fish consumed.

Sharing wild fish and game is a growing phenomenon in America. For example, the bowhunters in hundreds of urban deer hunts donate hundreds of thousands of pounds of meat to soup kitchens. In just a few years, the bowhunters in my hometown (Morgantown, West Virginia) have donated 3,000 pounds of venison to the needy. One estimate showed that 35,000 pounds a year are donated annually, reaching 44 million individuals.

A 2012 study in Sweden showed that even though wild game can be bought commercially, most non-hunters get it from friends who hunt. My guess is that is true everywhere. And sharing can take various forms. Wild game dinners are common in America. In the Far North, sharing fish and game is extensive. There are many community hunting trips where 30 percent of the meat is shared. One study showed that in two communities in Alaska, 30 percent of the Inuit households accounted for 70 percent of wild food consumed there. Another study showed that in rural Alaska, 60 percent of households harvested game, but 86 percent of households consumed game.

Some northern villages provide a community freezer to make sure the elderly and others get wild fish and game. The ways that people share wild fish and game are actually too numerous to cover here. Suffice it to say, wild fish and game feed millions.

The proportion of wild game and fish in one's diet varies. For North Americans who eat wild meat or fish, consumption rates varied from as little as 22 pounds per person per year to 770 pounds per person per year. (I know that sounds high, but remember that natives in the Far North live

on wild meat and fish). The Wild Harvest Initiative listed one study that showed in the Hudson Bay region, the farther north a community, the higher the rate of consumption of wild protein.

I might add here that all of the above statistics came from a literature review, conducted and published by the Wild Harvest Initiative.

As the Wild Harvest Initiative continues, the results, some of which are listed above, will draw attention to the importance of maintaining habitat for wild game and fish, especially for those species we consume.

It will also give lawmakers data to consider when expanding agricultural systems that will reduce wild protein harvests.

If we as hunters and fishers fully understand the values of wild game and fish as food resources, we can convey that message to non-hunters and politicians. The ramifications of the data collected and compiled by the Wild Harvest Initiative, once shared with the public, surely help gain support for hunting and fishing. To learn more, go to conservationvisions.com. **BH**

If you have questions about topics covered in this column or on any wildlife-management issues or wildlife species, contact Dr. Dave at drdave4@comcast.net.

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BEAR RODEO

WILDERNESS BEARS ARE A DIFFERENT BREED THAT
ADD EXCITEMENT TO YOUR ADVENTURE.

BY CURT WELLS, EDITOR



Boats are a great way to negotiate bear country in Canada, and the fishing is great, too!

"CARSON, PROTECT DANNY — SHOOT THAT BEAR. NOW!"

As cameraman Danny Dodge climbed down to retrieve his dropped cell phone, the black bear stood just 15 yards away, pondering whether this strange being was trying to claim his bait.

My 17-year-old grandson drew back and fired. The .45 caliber lead ball made a clacking sound when it smacked the bruin in the mouth, obviously hitting a tooth. The bear ran off like it had been given a turpentine enema. And we laughed out loud. It was a hilarious moment shared with my grandson in the wilderness.

Danny climbed back into his trees-stand and Carson tucked the slingshot back into his pack.

Carson wasn't even supposed to be there. Bowhunter Magazine Founder, M.R. James, had to cancel at the last minute, so Carson was happy to fill the slot. Five gobblers and four deer had fallen to his arrows, but this would be his first bear hunt. He was a little nervous about bears, especially wilderness bears, which are typically fearless and bold. On this hunt, bold would prove to be an understatement.

We were hunting with outfitter Kerry Ukrainetz of Kamkota Lodge in Sas-

katchewan, but my long-time buddy, Rob Nye, was running the outpost camp. I killed a chocolate boar there in 2018, but the goal of this hunt had morphed into ensuring that Carson would kill his first black bear. Joining us on this hunt was Dave Butler, a retired narcotics detective from New Jersey who had many black bear bowhunts in his rearview mirror.

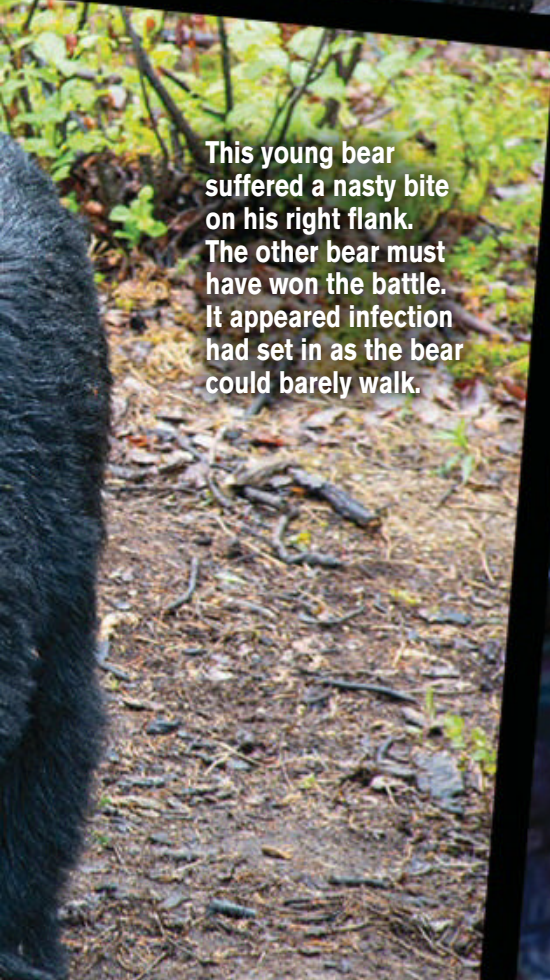
After a long drive from Saskatoon to the lodge, and a one-hour boat ride to our island camp, Rob met us at the beach. We stowed our gear and prepared our bows. In the flickering light of the evening campfire, Rob and Dave inundated Carson with wild stories of



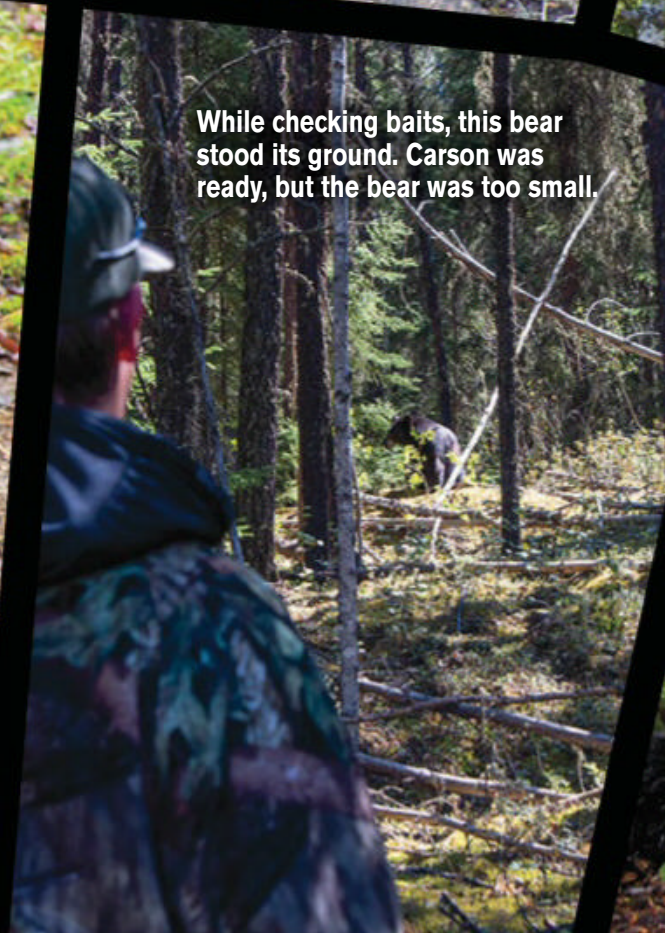
This boar challenged our judging skills with his forehead crease, but he was short in body length.



My grandson, Carson, and I shared a tree while cameraman Danny Dodge sat in an adjacent tree.



This young bear suffered a nasty bite on his right flank. The other bear must have won the battle. It appeared infection had set in as the bear could barely walk.



While checking baits, this bear stood its ground. Carson was ready, but the bear was too small.



New Jersey bowhunter Dave Butler arrowed this fine bear on the second-to-last day of the hunt.

bear hunts past, and some equally chilling stories about the perils of dealing with a narcotics detective. A little fear can be a good thing, on both subjects.

The teenager appreciated the concept of sleeping in late on bear hunts, but I was up with the sun and drinking coffee on the beach. The lake, part of the Churchill River System, was flat as glass. In the distance, ravens squawked their complex and mystifying language. A skinny northern pike ventured too close to the surface and wound up flying the unfriendly skies of Bald Eagle Air. Such ambience in the wilderness is the true gift to those who love life in the out-

doors. Such moments are to be treasured as integral pieces to the puzzle of the total hunting experience.

Breakfast was followed by a boat ride with Greg, our guide, to replenish bait sites. The first spot was called the Eagle's Nest, and we immediately encountered bears having brunch. It took a bit of coercion to run them off so we could quickly hang a stand for Danny.

With chores done, we grabbed our fishing rods and headed for the nearest rocky shoreline to wrestle with some golden walleyes to populate the deep fryer back in camp. There's nothing quite like a belly full of ultra-fresh wall-

eye and a nap before heading out for an evening of bear hunting.

Late afternoon found us geared up and cruising the lake toward the Eagle's Nest. As expected, the bears were back, but we ran them off and climbed into our stands.

Greg was barely back in the boat when the bears started filtering back. That's when Carson's education on the difficult art of judging black bears began. We were sitting in the same tree, so I whispered lessons as each bear appeared, pointing out traits — small stature, narrow nose and head with no crease in the forehead, dainty wrists and pointed toes,

rub spots, subordinate posture — that disqualified each bear. When a chocolate bear ghosted through the trees, Carson's heart rate climbed. He was partial to a color phase, but we could see it was skinny and its fur was scruffy. It wasn't a small bear, but it was not *the* bear.

Ten different bears, none mature boars, worked the bait, intimidated, chased, and fought with each other, and came and went repeatedly. At dark, Greg showed up and scattered the bears so we could climb down. Carson's first night of bear hunting left him wide-eyed, but it was just the beginning.

Day Two was a repeat. Coffee in the morning sun, bacon and eggs, chasing bears off baits, fishing, shore lunch, a nap, then off to the Eagle's Nest. It was a cooler day, and the bears were active and aggressive. The slingshot was deployed just to clear the bears away so we could get in our stands. That was a precursor to an evening that could only be described as a "bear rodeo." There were bears everywhere, all night long. At one point I could see nine bears at once, all within bow range! They were fighting, chasing, growling, and even breeding. I can't remember ever witnessing such a wild and crazy night of bear activity.

When a good-looking black bear came in, the other bears scattered. That's usually a sign of dominance, but this wasn't a huge bear. He had a crease in his forehead and was stocky, but he was short in body length. Carson wasn't being fussy on his first bear, but Grandpa was. Like the saying goes, "If you have to ask, it's not a big bear." The rodeo continued, but no mature bears showed up. When Greg came to pick us up, things got wild. The bears refused to leave the bait and Greg, with rifle in hand, was throwing rocks and sticks until there was sufficient space for us to slip past the bait and get to the boat. It was quite the memorable evening.

Day Three was much the same — until we got in the stand. Cloudy and spitting occasional light rain, it was the kind of weather that suppresses bear movement. A pair of bears were working the bait when a third bear showed up. That's when Danny dropped his cell phone. If you leave anything on the ground for long, a bear will smell it and bury some canines into it. That's when Carson dug out the slingshot and eliminated the threat. We saw just four bears that evening — not enough for a rodeo.

Midmorning of Day Four, we boated up a tributary to check two baits that had some good bears on trail camera. We

bumped bears off both baits, rebaited, and left. One of the feeding bears stood its ground on a trail and I told Carson to get ready to draw, but we ultimately judged the boar as too small.

A decision was made to hunt the Eagle's Nest one more afternoon. We had to run five bears off the bait before we could settle in. Just as Greg finished replenishing the bait, a boar strolled in that looked better than what we'd seen so far. Greg indicated the bear was a Pope and Young bear with at least an 18-inch skull. That was all Carson needed to hear. He'd patiently watched bear after bear for four days. This one was good enough for him.

We could still hear the drone of Greg's outboard when Carson came to full draw. I'd coached him to pick the "middle of the middle" of the bear and then move his point of aim a couple inches toward the shoulder. Carson's Lumenok disappeared in that exact spot, zipping through the bear's chest. The boar took just two steps and stopped. "Your bear is going to drop right there," I whispered to Carson. Thirteen seconds later, the bear tipped over right next to the bait site. I was proud of my grandson and congratulated him on his first bear. I also cherished the privilege of being there to share the experience with him.



My 17-year-old grandson, Carson, who is serious about his hunting and fishing exploits, poses with his first black bear. Carson got a heavy dose of bear-hunting experience during our week in Saskatchewan.

Once Carson had his bear down, I turned to filling my own tag and arrowed this fine boar on the last day of the hunt. It couldn't have been a better hunting trip with my grandson.



Now we had three hours to wait for Greg to return. With so many bears around, it wasn't safe to get down, drag Carson's bear to safety, and take photos. Instead, we switched positions and I became the "shooter."

A slew of bears began filing into the bait, but none paid any attention to the dead bear. If they had, Carson was prepared to protect his bear with the slingshot.

When both Greg and Rob came to pick us up, all heck broke loose. Rocks and sticks were flying, and .45 caliber pellets were being shot in all directions as we tried to get to Carson's bear. Two bears circled around behind us and tried to get into the boat, which smelled like bait. Defense of the boat was critical, so recovery paused until those bears were repelled. Finally, we rolled Carson's bear onto a tarp, dragged it the 30 yards to the boat, and extracted ourselves like a SEAL team leaving a firefight. It was the definition of a bear rodeo.

The next morning found me struggling to get good photos of Carson and his bear, which was now stiff and wet. After a day of fishing for northern pike, I decided to hunt one of the stands upriver, but there would be no rodeo. I did not see a single bear all evening. The good news was that Dave Butler had arrowed a nicely-furred bear that same evening.

My last-day plan was to hunt the morning, but we woke up to rain pelting the roof of our tent. Bears are seldom ac-

tive in the rain, but when it quit just after noon I headed to a stand where Dave had passed on a good boar because it had a bald patch on its back. That didn't bother me. Not on the last day.

While Danny and I settled into our stands, Carson assumed the title of "apprentice guide" and spent the rest of the day with Greg freshening baits and checking trail cameras. My young grandson had represented himself well all week, handling his share of camp chores. That's a big thing with me. There can be no sitting around if there's work to be done.

This new spot was picturesque. The river had widened to a mirror-smooth lake that shimmered behind us. The bush before us was ultra-thick and utterly silent, save the drone of a few mosquitoes.

The silence lingered for some time when suddenly a bear oozed out of the timber, moving very, very slowly. It could barely negotiate the logs piled on the bait. When it gingerly lay down and rested its head on a log, without so much as licking the bait, it was clear something was wrong. The bear shakily stood up and turned. On his right flank was a nasty bite mark, the result of another bear tearing into him. Infection must have taken hold. I suspected death would come within a day or so.

Then, a bear with a bald spot on its back emerged from the trees. The sick bear wobbled off to avoid a fatal confrontation. I reached for my bow.

It was at least 15 minutes before the boar presented me with a shot angle I was content with. My arrow covered the 18 yards in a flash and zipped easily through the bear's chest. The silence returned. We hung a blaze-orange vest on the tree to signal success, and it wasn't long before the drone of two outboard motors invaded the tranquility.

What couldn't be invaded was the tranquility in my mind. Being able to share this adventure with my grandson was both unexpected and gratifying. It had been a flawless week of bowhunting in the wilderness with Carson. I'm sure his appreciation of the experience will strengthen with time. Someday, when I'm gone, he will fondly remember his week in Saskatchewan with Grandpa. Just thinking about that brings tears to my eyes.

Indeed, there can be no greater reason to share the outdoors with the ones you love. Even if it is a bear rodeo. **BH**

AUTHOR'S NOTES:

My equipment included a Hoyt RX-3 bow, Gold Tip Velocity Pro arrows, Rage Trypan broadheads, Spot Hogg sight, Scott release, SIG SAUER optics, Browning clothing in Mossy Oak camo, and a Hunter Safety System full-body harness. Carson used similar gear including a Hoyt RX-1 bow, Gold Tip arrows, and Rage Hypodermic broadheads. Carson's bear skull measured 18 $\frac{5}{16}$ inches green, so Greg's estimate was right on. My bear measured 19 $\frac{3}{16}$ inches. If you're interested in a spring bear hunt in the Canadian wilderness, contact Kerry Ukrainetz at kamkotalodge.com.

SCOUT UNTIL IT HURTS

SUCCESSFUL WHITETAIL HUNTING IN THE FALL STARTS WITH LOTS OF LEGWORK IN THE SPRING.

I know I'm reaching way back to my early days of being a trophy whitetail bowhunter here, but it's something that bears mentioning. Some of the strategies I first learned back in the late '80s and early '90s are still very applicable and effective today. And the vast majority of those strategies came about as a result of spring scouting.

I'm not implying that I find something new and different each and every time I take a walk in the spring woods. But it does seem that I find just enough new and interesting things to make it worthwhile to continue to lay down a lot of boot leather this time of year. That's because, in my opinion, there's absolutely no better time to thoroughly scour and scout your hunting areas.

Buck sign (rubs and scrapes) from the previous fall have been in a state of relative "suspended animation" through the winter months, which means they will appear nearly as fresh as the day they were made. And it's my humble opinion that these highly visible pieces of buck sign are priceless evidence regarding how the deer we're hunting prefer to travel about their home ranges.

Personally, I prefer to wait until the snow cover has pretty much

totally disappeared before hitting the woods in spring. Once that happens, it often becomes a war of attrition. I can't begin to tell you how many hours I've spent attempting to gain a better understanding of exactly how the mature bucks in my hunting areas are relating to their surroundings.

For example, one of the most important things I learned during my years of being a big-woods whitetail hunter is that wilderness deer truly are creatures of habit. Provided that a few important factors remain constant, they often will bed in the same areas, travel via the same routes, and also eat and drink at the same spots year after year.

My many conversations with other hunters over the years have made it very apparent that a fair number of people still struggle when it comes to pinpointing the exact location of buck bedding areas on their hunting properties. I believe this is simply because those individuals are not exploring every square inch of their hunting areas. It could also be because some people still believe that it's taboo to ever trespass into buck bedding areas.

But, as I've discovered, bumping mature bucks from their bedding areas during the spring period





THE

I killed this big Wisconsin buck after first pinpointing the exact location of the deer's primary bedding area while scouting the previous spring.

BY GREG MILLER

SCOUT UNTIL IT HURTS

doesn't have any long-term negative effects. At least I've never seen where it has during the 30-plus years I've been employing the strategy. But I have seen a bunch of instances where the procedure paid big dividends during a future archery season.

TWO BIRDS WITH ONE STONE

Over the past 10 years or so, I've incorporated scouting into my spring turkey hunts. There always seems to be at least a part of each day during turkey season when things slow down to the point where a person needs to do a bit more walking and calling rather than sitting in one place waiting for a gobbler to show up. This is also an excellent time to explore and search for buck sign from the previous fall.

Several years back, I had the opportunity to co-lease a 220-acre tract of whitetail-rich bluff country near my home in Wisconsin. Over the next couple years, I scouted and/or hunted the tract from one end to the other. In my mind, I was convinced that I'd left no stone unturned — especially when it came to scouting. Turns out I was wrong.

It was late-April 2016, and I was slowly walking the edge of a large CRP field in search of a receptive turkey gobbler. Every so often, I'd send a few seductive hen yelps into the steep, wooded hillsides that bordered the field.

As I walked, I also kept an eye out for buck sign along the edge of the field. I'd gone a couple hundred yards, when I spotted a shining antler rub on a six-inch poplar tree 50 yards ahead of me. As I drew close to the tree, I spotted another rub a short distance inside the woods. A well-worn deer trail led me to the second rub, and from there I could see a line of rubs farther ahead.



While it is possible to incorporate spring scouting into your shed-antler hunts, you'll be far more effective if you do one or the other.



I found this impressive rub during a spring scouting mission in my home state of Wisconsin. The discovery led to my taking one of my best ever Badger State bucks the next season.

Long story short, that rubline led to the discovery of an obvious preferred big-buck bedding area on a good-sized "shelf" located near the very top of the steep bluff. Although I'd walked fairly close to the bedding area on previous spring scouting missions, I hadn't noticed it.

Of course, the discovery of what was an obvious big-buck bedroom temporarily put my turkey hunting efforts on hold. I spent the next two hours re-exploring the rub-line, and also trying to figure out why the bucks were so attracted to the CRP field. And then it hit me. There were a number of large red oak and white oak trees growing along the edge of the field. The acorns from those trees would no doubt drop into the field, which made them easy pickings for the deer.

A quick study of the ground under the oak trees confirmed my suspicions regarding the acorns. After scrutinizing the area a bit more, I selected a certain mature red oak as the best tree from which to ambush a big buck during a future archery season. I returned a few days later to do all the necessary things to get the oak "treestand ready."

SPRING SCOUTING PAYS OFF

As luck would have it, the acorn crop the very next season was nothing short of fantastic. Even better, my scouting cameras showed that several good-sized bucks were doing just what I had suspected they'd be doing. I knew exactly where I'd be hunting come opening day of the archery season.

Due to an unfavorable wind direction, I was unable to hunt from my stand in the red oak on opening day. But the wind was absolutely perfect to hunt there on Day Two. I was in my treestand a full three hours before dark, and it's a good thing I was.

The first deer made an appearance well before sundown. It was a hog-bodied eight-pointer that I'd been getting trail-camera photos of for a couple of years. While he was a very impressive deer, I decided to let him walk. There was a bigger 10-point living on this same farm, and he often traveled with the eight-point. So, with this information in mind, I decided to give him a pass. It turned out to be one of the best hunting decisions I've ever made.

After munching on acorns for a while, literally right under



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SCOUT UNTIL IT HURTS

the oak in which I was perched, the eight-pointer walked off. I was seriously second-guessing my decision to pass on the buck when I noticed movement in the woods on the far side of the CRP field, some 75 yards away. And then the 10-point strolled into view.

The big deer fed on acorns for a while before abruptly raising his head and walking in my direction. There was no doubt he was headed for the big oak where the eight-point had been feeding earlier, so I slowly grabbed my bow and got into position for the impending shot.

When he was approximately 40 yards out, the 10-point suddenly slammed on the brakes and stared hard at something off to his left. Upon looking in that direction, I spotted the big eight-point tearing up a small poplar sapling with his antlers. By the time I looked back at the 10-point, he had already resumed his march in my direction. Seconds later, he was standing 15 yards in front of me, munching on acorns. It proved to be a fatal mistake for the big Wisconsin whitetail!

The point of relating this story is to reinforce what I was preaching about earlier, that whitetail deer are creatures of habit. However, immediately on the heels of that statement, I have to say that farmland deer aren't necessarily as easy to pattern as wilderness deer. The reason for this is that there are almost always more places where farmland deer can find the foods they most prefer to eat. And it has been my experience that just about the time I think I've got a farmland buck's feeding pattern figured out, the deer abruptly starts hitting a different food source.

Mature bucks access their home ranges via a number of travel routes. Scouting during the spring is a great way to pinpoint the exact location of those routes.



Which brings me right back to why it's so important to do as much off-season scouting as possible. I learned long ago that if I truly wanted to increase my success rate on mature bucks, I needed to figure out not only why big bucks had suddenly "taken a walk," but more importantly, where they'd gone.

There's another important point that needs to be addressed here, and it concerns what I consider to be the most productive approach to spring scouting. Not only does it entail spending a lot of time in the woods, it also means paying very close attention to the job at hand, which is attempting to figure out exactly how the bucks in your hunting areas are using their surroundings at all times during the season.

Quite simply put, if you're seriously searching for shed antlers, then you're going to miss a lot of important buck sign from the previous year. Likewise, if you're seriously scouting for buck sign from the previous season, then you're going to miss out on finding some shed antlers.

Those of us who have spent any time at all searching for sheds in heavily forested areas know that it's a slow-go operation. It's take a few steps, stop, scrutinize the ground around you, take a few more steps, look around, etc. etc. etc. But while you no doubt will also find some buck sign from the previous fall when using this approach, you won't be covering much ground in a day's time. And in my opinion, that's the whole point of spring scouting — covering as much ground each day as possible.

In the event I haven't already made it apparent, effective spring scouting entails doing a lot of legwork. It also means paying attention to your surroundings. Rubs, scrapes, and heavily used trails all need to be sought out and investigated. Remember, for most of the fall hunting season, rub and scrape lines almost always are established along routes bucks use when traveling between bedding areas and feeding areas. Just make sure to keep in mind that mature bucks typically use a number of different routes when accessing their home ranges. However, in most cases, big deer will have certain travel routes they prefer to use more than all others. These routes almost always host the greatest amount of rub and scrape sign.

I know some of you might be thinking that your trail cameras can provide all the information you need to hunt a particular piece of ground. Well, I've been using cameras since the very first day they came onto the scene. And like a lot of modern-day hunters, I'd hate to be without them. That being said, however, I've always refused to trust exclusively what my trail cameras show me.

For one thing, trail cameras are able to cover only a very tiny piece of ground. And if you're thinking this situation is easily rectified by putting out more cameras, remember one very important fact. The more cameras you put out in your hunting area(s), the more disturbance you'll cause when checking those cameras. I've personally never seen a case where more noise, more human odor, and more disruption in more places on a particular piece of property equated to a higher success rate on mature bucks.

I honestly believe that technology has made us more efficient hunters, but I also believe that any information gathered via technological means always should be tempered with some common sense and practical knowledge. A little bit of extra leg work in your hunting areas wouldn't hurt either. Especially during the spring. **BH**

The author is a hardcore Wisconsin bowhunter with over 50 years of bowhunting experience. He has authored close to 1,000 magazine articles and written five books on taking trophy deer.

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CONQUERING

If you are planning to hunt the mountains this fall, you need to start preparing now. Mountain hunts are different from most other types of bowhunts. The mountains will test your gear, your physical preparation, your shooting ability, and your mental fortitude. Fail any one of these tests, and odds are you will be coming home with an unpunched tag.

Although I have been fortunate to hunt the high country on several occasions for sheep, mountain goats, mountain caribou, and elk, I have found the mountains to quickly expose any weaknesses in my prehunt preparations. Regardless of whether you are

planning a DIY hunt, or are going on a guided hunt, the prehunt planning and preparations for a successful hunt are basically the same.

If your hunt is an outfitted hunt, ask the outfitter for a recommended gear list. All outfitters have them.

Probably the two most important pieces of gear that need to be properly fitted to you are your boots and your backpack. There are several manufacturers of mountain boots and backpacks and I can't imagine purchasing either of these pieces of gear sight unseen through mail order. If you don't have access to a store that carries this gear, you may want to consider attending one

of the annual hunting conventions that host vendors of mountain-hunting gear.

When hunting the mountains, you need clothing that can dry quickly. You will find that your clothes are going to get wet, either from sweat or from the weather. None of my mountain clothing is manufactured from cotton, because once cotton gets wet, it is almost impossible to get it dry in a tent. Consider shirts with pit zippers, and pants with vent zippers. These are great for reducing body heat and sweating while hiking.

For mountain hunting, I also recommend one or two trekking poles. They provide you with additional support when coming down slopes with a



“IT IS NOT THE MOUNTAINS
WE CONQUER BUT OURSELVES.”
— *SIR EDMUND HILLARY*

Hiking scree slopes can
be challenging.

MOUNTAINS

BY TOM EDGINGTON

heavy pack. I use one with an ice-axe head that has come in handy when climbing up icy slides.

You will also need a good pair of binoculars. Don't skimp here. Get as good a pair as you can afford. If you are planning a DIY hunt, a good spotting scope is also a necessity. If I am going on an outfitted hunt, my guide usually carries one, so I leave mine at home to reduce my pack weight.

Quality raingear is a must. I like the lightweight and breathable types made by KUIU and Sitka. I have used other brands of heavier, rubberized raingear, which are more impervious to rain but do not breathe. However, when I hiked

in it, I got just as wet from sweating and found it to be of no advantage.

Staying hydrated while in the mountains is important. Some hunters use a bladder and hose arrangement in their packs that allows them to drink while hiking. I use a wide-mouth plastic bottle with a screw-off lid that is fitted with a filter straw. I store the bottle in a side pocket, so I can take a drink while I am hiking. You may also want to consider a lightweight, squeeze-type water filter that doesn't take up much room in your pack and weighs almost nothing.

When it comes to gear preparation, the U.S. Navy SEALs have a saying: “One is none and two is one.” I always

take two bows with me and leave one in base camp. If my bow breaks while in the mountains, I take some comfort in knowing that a backup is available, even if it requires me to hike back to camp, or have the outfitter fly it out to me.

I always carry two releases with me. I carry my spare release in my pants pocket and not in my pack. You may drop your pack during a stalk, and if you need your spare release during the stalk, you won't have it.

I always take two identical angle-compensating rangefinders with me that have been calibrated to my bowsight. I keep one rangefinder, and I let my guide use the other one. If your guide has his

CONQUERING MOUNTAINS

own personal rangefinder, make sure that it is angle-compensating and that it reads identical to your rangefinder.



This packable target butt allows me to practice shooting every day while on the mountain to stay sharp.

Your pack must be capable of supporting your bow for hands-free hiking. I carry my extra arrows in a plastic tube that is strapped to the side of my pack. The tube prevents the arrows from becoming bent or damaged in the event of a fall. I also carry a small repair kit with D-loop material, screws, spare sight pin, Allen wrenches, and string wax. I also take a 10 to 12-inch-diameter chunk of high-density foam that fits in the bottom of my pack for taking practice shots every day while on the mountain.

On mountain hunts, weight is a big consideration. When it comes to food



Hiking with a fully loaded pack is a must when preparing for a mountain hunt.

for the hunt, freeze-dried is the way to go. In preparation for the last mountain hunt that I was on, I purchased a long-handled spork made from titanium that is specifically made for the commercial bags of freeze-dried food. It weighs next to nothing, and it makes eating out of those bags much easier.

Hiking in the mountains will cause you to expend many calories. If you just rely on eating freeze-dried food for three meals, you probably won't be consuming enough calories to see you through to the end of the hunt. During a couple of mountain hunts, I had not been consuming enough calories and staying hydrated, and my body basically shut down. Marathon runners refer to this as "bonking." In addition to the freeze-dried meals, I take my own high-calorie snacks, protein bars, and chews on every hunt. I separate them into one plastic bag of snacks for each day. I put the snacks for the day into easy to reach pouches on my pack belt. I force myself to eat a snack at least every couple of hours.

You will need a lightweight sleeping bag and pad as well as a knife, headlamp, and possibly a tent if your outfitter does not provide one. Your outfitter's list will identify other gear items that I didn't specifically mention.

Your physical preparation should start several months before you're scheduled to hunt. You should confirm with your doctor that you are able to handle the physical challenges that the mountains will present before even considering booking an outfitted mountain hunt, or planning a DIY hunt.

I generally try to stay in shape year-round. However, at least three months before a scheduled hunt I start hiking with my backpack on. I start with 20 pounds in my pack and try to work up to 70-plus pounds for at least four miles before I leave for the hunt. I monitor my time and distance, trying to either reduce the time, and/or add distance. You can use bags of sand for weight. You should always hike in the boots that you're going to wear on the hunt. I also wear the socks, shirts, and pants that I plan to use on the hunt. Now is the time to discover any issues with clothing items. I don't want any surprises.

At some point, you need to pack all of the gear that you plan to take with you on the mountain into your pack. Strap your bow to the pack. Your bow should not move on the pack as you hike. A moving bow can sap your energy and throw you off balance. Now is the time

to identify any issues with the pack and/or your method of packing.

If you live where there are hills available to hike, you should take advantage of them. When preparing for a mountain hunt, I make sure that I am hiking up and down hills. Hiking downhill with a heavy pack on helps to condition your knees. I always use my walking sticks while hiking. I also do some side-hilling to condition my ankles. If you don't have hills available to hike, you can hike stadium steps. I generally try to do at least three hikes per week in the three months prior to leaving for a mountain hunt. I visit the gym on the off days.



At some point during my preparation phase, I always practice shooting with a pack on.

I use a PSE Carbon Air 34 bow set at 66 pounds. My bow is equipped with a Spot Hogg Hogg Father seven-pin slider sight. Your sight should have a bubble level and be capable of 3rd-axis adjustment. A lot has been written about the need for adjusting the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd axes of your bowsight, so I will not repeat those details here. I also use a TightSpot seven-arrow quiver that can be quickly detached from my bow.

I shoot my bow year-round, and I generally use the months of January-March to try out any new gear items, arrows, releases, etc. I also use this time to work on my form by shooting a blank bale in my basement. As the weather gets better, I move out to my yard to get my pins set and calibrated to my rangefinder.

Based on the several mountain hunts I've taken over the years, it is more likely than not that you will be shooting uphill, downhill, or along a sidehill rather than on the level. So, you need to practice all three shooting scenarios. Learn to use the bubble level on your sight while practicing. I use 3-D targets, and I also practice shooting from my knees and from different positions and angles.



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CONQUERING MOUNTAINS

It's hard to prepare mentally for the challenges that you will likely face on a mountain hunt. I try to build my mental



When hunting mountain game, spotting scopes are a must.

fortitude while hiking during the summer months, which often present temperatures in the mid to high 80s with high humidity. Hiking in those conditions is not fun. The Navy SEALs call it "embracing the suck." I try to remind myself that every step is going to bring me closer to my goal of a successful hunt. Enduring those conditions while preparing for a hunt will make them easier to withstand during your hunt.

When hiking up a steep hill, I break it into small chunks. I pick a rock or ledge partway up the hill. My only goal is to

get there. Once I get there, I pick another rock or ledge. I do this over and over until I get to the top. It's like the old adage, "How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time."

I can't think of a mountain hunt where my mental fortitude didn't start to wane at some point. Your body starts to wear down from the hiking, you encounter bad weather, treacherous terrain, lack of animals, or maybe you even miss a shot or blow a stalk. It happens to everybody. It's easy to become discouraged. Take one day at a time. After a tough day, I listen to music on my cell phone or iPod and look at pictures from past hunts. I also carry a Garmin InReach, which allows me to text my family and friends. This helps to lift my spirits and gets me ready to give my all the next day.

Proper preparation for a mountain hunt will not make your hunt easy. Every day you'll need to meet the challenges thrown at you by the mountains. But I've had no greater sense of accomplishment than when I put my hands on a pair of antlers or horns knowing that I beat the mountains. Then again, as Sir Edmund Hillary said, "It is not the mountains we conquer but ourselves." **BH**

The author is a serious mountain hunter from Cowansville, PA.

Here I am with my hard-earned mountain caribou.



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- Merino wool underwear (2)
- Boxers/briefs (1 pair for each 2-4 days)
- Hunting pants (2)
- Hunting shirts (2)
- Handkerchief (2)
- Down jacket
- Warm hat
- Ball cap
- Trekking poles
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- Gloves (1 pair light, 1 pair warmer)
- Glassing pad
- Small first-aid kit
- Bow repair kit
- Backpack
- Sleeping bag and sleeping pad
- Inflatable pillow
- Book
- Freeze-dried food/coffee packs*
- Protein bars, energy chews/gels, almond butter, hydration-powder
- Knife
- Headlamp
- Camp shoes
- Personal kit (medication, toothbrush, toothpaste, ChapStick, deodorant, soap, towel, spare glasses)
- Insect repellent and/or headnet
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2020 BEAR FORECAST

BASED ON THE DATA, 2020 COULD BE
THE BEST YEAR OF BEAR HUNTING EVER.

PHOTO BY DONALDMJONES.COM

By John Solomon, Contributor

TECHNIQUES USED by wildlife agencies to estimate bear populations vary widely. In the end, a reasonable number is established and backed by a scientific method. Over the last several years of researching and reporting on bear populations, I've learned that population estimates are most often a conservative idea of the herd strength. That said, the annual **Bowhunter** survey addresses a total black bear population of over 850,000. This is definitely a conservative estimate, since a few states and provinces do not have an established baseline population prediction. No matter how it is measured, there are a lot of bears in North America, and they are showing strong.

As the data from our survey shows, there is no shortage of bears nor opportunities to hunt them. Given the diverse environments and geographic zones the overall population covers, it is simply amazing that not one respondent had a forecast rating below "Good." In fact, about 77% were rated as "Very Good" or "Excellent." All but two reported their bear population as "Stable" or "Growing." Other notable contributions this year include a fantastic 34% success rate in Minnesota (totaling over 2,300 bears harvested), as well as an all-time record harvest in Vermont.

The issue of hunting grizzly bears continues to reside in legal and political processes. In July 2019, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service relisted grizzlies to the Endangered Species List in compliance with a federal court order. Although some limited hunting seasons were planned, none were enacted prior to the relisting.

While raw data can be impressive, the table of numbers and dates provided each year for the forecast is meant to get your interest focused and provide good leads for research. Each state or province will have individual requirements and seasons, and it is each hunter's responsibility to know and understand the rules for hunting. Be sure to check out the "Remarks" section, as each respondent has the opportunity to provide nuggets of important hunting information not found in the numbers. In other words, that section gives you insights on where to hunt, important when-to-hunt opportunities (such as overlapping deer and bear seasons), and other wisdom.

As bear-hunting opportunities develop, we'll continue to report them here with details on how to maximize your time in the woods bowhunting bears. Before you pull on your boots and grab your gear, sharpen a pencil, sit down, and put in the research that can get you on your best bear hunt yet. Be safe, and good hunting. **BH**

A man and a woman in full camouflage gear stand in a dark, wooded area. The woman in the foreground holds a compound bow, while the man behind her holds a set of antlers. The scene is dimly lit, with a bright light source creating a silhouette effect on the trees in the background.

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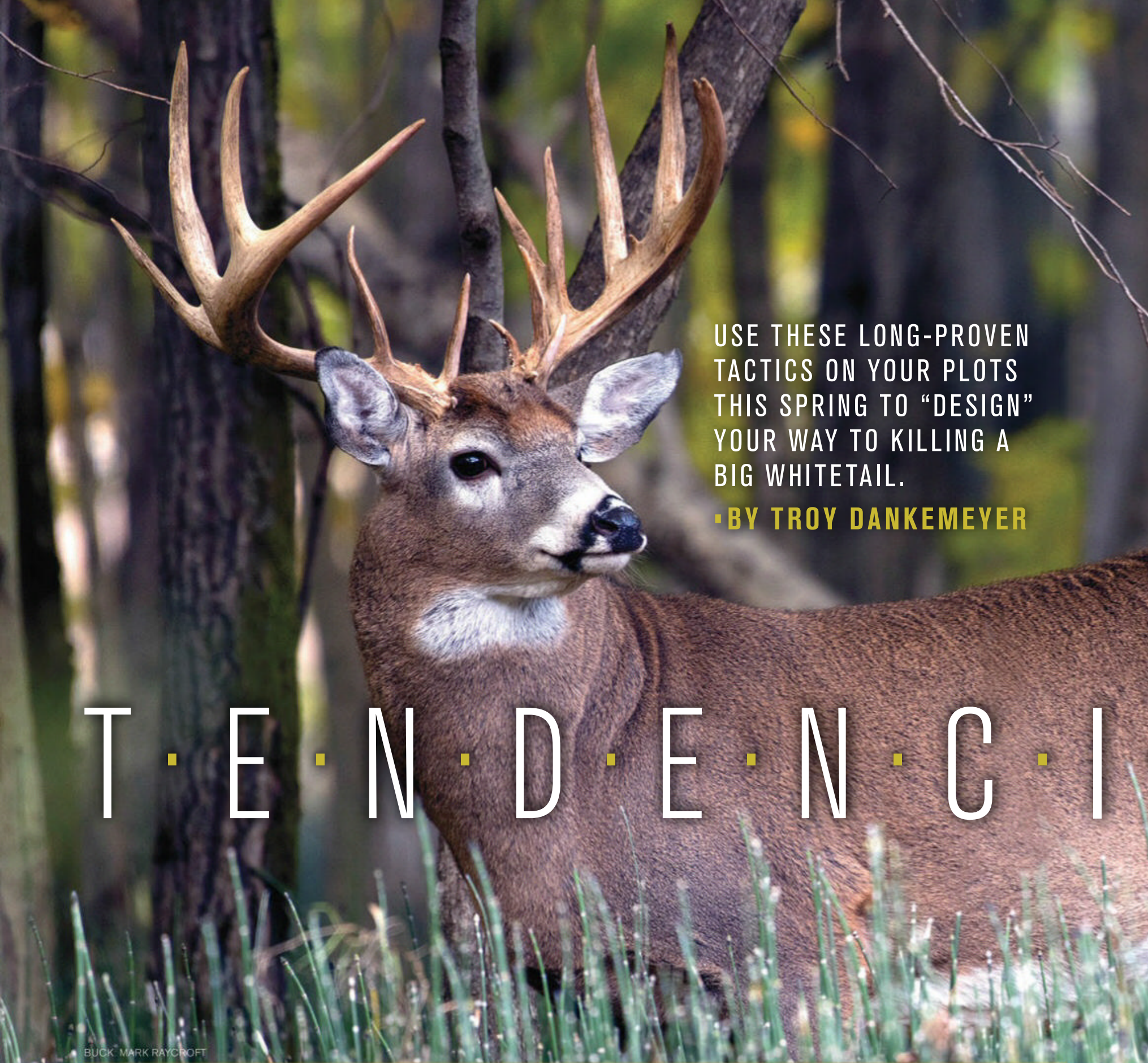
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State/Province	Forecast	Estimated Bear Population	Previous Harvest	Percent Success	Spring Season	Fall Season
Alaska (grizzly)	Good	30,000	Approx. 1,900	Unknown	Varies Widely By Mgt. Unit	Varies Widely By Mgt. Unit
Alaska (black)	Very Good	Not Available	Approx. 1,600	23%	Varies Widely By Mgt. Unit	Varies Widely By Mgt. Unit
Arizona	Very Good	1,500-2,500	318	5%	5/1-7/31 (Bow Only)	8/7-12/31
Arkansas	Very Good	6,000	433	Unknown	None	9/26-11/30
California	Good	30,000	Unknown	4%	None	8/18-9/9 (Bow Only)
Colorado	Very Good	17,000	Unknown	7%	None	September
Georgia*	Excellent	800*	125	Unknown	None	See Remarks**
Idaho	Good	20-25,000	Approx. 2,500	Unknown	Varies Widely By Mgt. Unit	Varies Widely By Mgt. Unit
Kentucky	Very Good	800-1,000	60	6%	None	10/24-10/30 (Bow Only)
Maine	Excellent	36,000+	3,306	33%	Tribal Lands; Varies	8/26-11/1*
Maryland	Very Good	2,200+	145	8%	None	Late October; Check Regs
Massachusetts	Excellent	5,000	201	1%	None	See Remarks
Michigan	Excellent	14,000	1,432	30%	None	Varies; 9/10 Earliest Start
Minnesota	Excellent	12-15,000	2,322	34%	None	9/1-10/17
Montana	Very Good	13,000	Approx. 1,450	Unknown	April-June	9/5-9/12 (Bow Only); 9/13-11/29 (General)
New Hampshire	Excellent	5,800	1,050	10%	None	9/1-11/30; Varies By Region
New Jersey	Excellent	2,200	315	Unknown	None	10/12-12/12
New Mexico	Good	8,000	472	11%	Limited Draw; Residents Only	9/1-9/24 (Bow Only)
New York	Very Good	6-8,000	1,295	Unknown	None	Check dec.ny.gov/outdoor
Nevada	Very Good	600-700	17	33%	None	9/15-12/1
North Carolina	Excellent	17-20,000	3,530	Unknown	None	Generally Nov./Dec.; Varies
Oklahoma	Good	Unknown	57 (53 archery)	15%	None	10/1-10/15
Oregon	Good	25-30,000	Approx. 1,600	6%	4/1-5/31	8/1-12/31
Pennsylvania	Excellent	20,000	4,618	2%	None	September-November
South Carolina	Good	800-1,000	Approx. 50	5%	None	October
Tennessee	Very Good	7,000	545	Unknown	None	See Remarks
Utah	Excellent	Unknown	Unknown	40%	Depends On Unit*	Unknown
Vermont	Excellent	4,500-6,000	734 (record)	Unknown	None	9/1-11/22
Virginia	Excellent	17,000	2,861	10%	None	Early Oct.-Mid Nov. (Bow Only)
Washington	Very Good	25-30,000	Approx. 1,500	See Remarks	April-May	August-November
West Virginia	Excellent	12-14,000	2,606	10%	None	9/26-12/31 (Bow Only)
Wisconsin	Excellent	24,000	3,524	30%	None	September-October
Wyoming	Very Good	Unknown	451	10%	4/15-4/30 (Bow Only)	8/15-8/31 (Bow Only)
Canada						
Alberta (black)	Very Good	40,000	2,122	Very Good	April-June; Varies By Unit	Sept-Nov; Varies By Unit
British Col. (grizzly)	Very Good	13-15,000	Not Reported	Very Good	April-June; Varies By Region	Aug-Nov; Varies By Region
British Col. (black)	Excellent	120-140,000	3,400	Unknown	4/1-6/30	9/1-11/30
Manitoba	Excellent	25-35,000	3,500	55%	April-June	August-October
New Brunswick	Excellent	17,500	Not Reported	70% NR/15% R	April-June	September (Bow Only)
Newfoundland/Labrador	Very Good	6-10,000	Not Reported	Not Reported	May-July	September-November
NW Territories (grizzly)	Good	4-5,000	Not Reported	Unknown	April-May	August-October
NW Territories (black)	Good	10,000	Not Reported	Unknown	Not Reported	August-October
Novia Scotia	Excellent	8-10,000	Not Reported	15%	None	September-December
Ontario	Very Good	85-105,000	6,497*	56% NR 15% Res	5/1-6/15	8/15-10/31 (North); 9/1-11/30 (Central)
Quebec	Very Good	70,000	Not Reported	30%	May-June	Not Reported
Saskatchewan	Very Good	30-40,000	2,100	74% NR	4/15-6/30	8/25-10/14
Yukon (grizzly)	Good	6,000	82	3.40%	4/21-6/15	8/1-11/15
Yukon (black)	Good	10,000	115	3.70%	4/21-6/15	8/1-11/15

Bear Population Trend	Baiting Legal?	Hounds Legal?	Online License Purchase?	Online License Application?	Remarks
Stable	Yes*	No	Yes	Yes	Go to www.wildlife.alaska.gov to review hunting regulations. *Only in an Active Predator Control Area by permit.
Stable	Yes*	Yes**	Yes***	Yes	GMUs 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 14B, 15 are most promising. *Only in an Active Predator Control Area by permit. **Only by special permit. ***Go to www.admin.adfg.state.ak.us/license .
Stable	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Spring: Units 3C, 23N, 27 are most promising. Fall: Units 29/30A, 23N, 24A, 23S, 27 are most promising.
Growing	Yes*	No	Yes	No	*Baiting legal on private land only; not legal on public land. Bear Zones 1 and 2 are most promising. Available licenses expected to increase substantially.
Growing	No	No	Yes	Yes	Most promising areas are woodlands above 3,000 feet in northern part of state; also Sierra Nevada Range.
Decreasing	No	No	Yes	Yes	Archery season overlaps with rifle season. Most promising areas are Grand Mesa, White River NF, & Douglas Pass.
Stable	No	Yes*	Yes	NA	*Southern Zone only, not WMA. **Late Sept., mid-Oct. & mid-Nov. Check regs for particular units.
Stable	Yes*	Yes	Yes	Yes	*With permit
Growing	No	Yes	Yes	No	Great opportunity for public-land hunters in the Daniel Boone National Forest as well as on state owned land in Harlan, Letcher, Bell Counties in far southeastern Kentucky.
Growing	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	*8/26-9/21 bait legal; 9/19-11/1 hounds legal; 9/1-10/31 trapping is legal; N, W, and E Units are most promising.
Growing	No	No	Yes	Yes	Maryland's bear hunting area has recently been expanded to include Washington and Frederick Counties; little hunting pressure in these areas.
Growing	No	No	Yes	No	9/8-9/26, 11/2-11/21, 11/30-12/12
Growing	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Amasa BMU (Upper Peninsula) and Baldwin BMU (Lower Peninsula) most promising. Nonresident license cap raised from 2% to 5%.
Growing	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Regions 1, 2, and 3 are most successful in corresponding order.
Stable	No	No	Yes	Yes	Must pass bear ID test at fwp.mt.gov/education/hunter/bearID . NW regions make up nearly 80% of statewide harvest.
Stable	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Archery bear season overlaps with archery deer season. White Mountains and Central region have highest density.
Growing	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Bear Management Zones 1-5 are most promising.
Stable	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Check wildlife.state.nm.us for details.
Stable	No	No	Yes	Yes	The southern Catskills provide ample public land, a good bear population, and an early season opportunity in September.
Growing	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Nevada has always had some very large bears – 1 out of 4 males is 400+ pounds.
Stable	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	The Coastal Bear Management Unit, in particular Zone 1 and Zone 2, are the most promising for hunters.
Stable	Yes*	No	Yes	Yes	*Baiting on private land only. Only 4 counties in SE Oklahoma allow bear hunting.
Stable	No	No	Yes	Yes	Spring harvest was 594 (13% success rate). SW and NE regions have highest densities.
Stable	No	No	Yes	Yes	Crossbows are permitted in archery season.
Stable	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No Report
Growing	No	Yes	Yes	No	Archery only for 28 consecutive days beginning the 4 th Saturday in September.
Growing	Yes**	Yes	Yes	Yes	*Opening & closing dates vary by area. See wildlife.utah.gov.com , or go to Guide Book. **Only bowhunters
Decreasing	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Early season bears often taken by cornfields. Contact local game wardens for areas farmers want more hunters.
Growing	No	Yes	Yes	Lifetime/ Disabled Vets	17% harvest increase over previous season. 73% of harvest was firearms. 72% of firearms hunters used hounds.
Stable	No	No	Yes	No	Success rates for spring season are typically 4X that of general season. NE units most promising.
Varies	No	Yes	Yes	No	Logan, McDowell, and Mingo Counties are archery only for deer and also have high bear densities. These counties also have a 2-bear limit.
Stable	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	The northern units (A, B, D) are the core of bear range in the state and have shown the highest success rates.
Stable/Growing	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Bear populations highest in NW region of the state. For more information, go to wgfd.wyo.gov .
Stable	Yes	No	Yes	No	No Report
Stable	No	Yes	No	No	No Report
Stable	No	Yes	No	No	Nonresident hunters must hire a licensed guide or be accompanied by a resident hunter with a permit to accompany.
Stable	Yes	No	No	No	Nonresident success rate is approximately 75%.
Growing	Yes	No	No	Yes	No Report
Stable	Yes	No	Yes*	Yes*	*Licenses and applications online for residents. Nonresidents must contact a guide.
Stable	No	No	No	No	Starting January 1, 2020, all hunters will be required to take the Northwest Territories Hunter Education training course prior to being issued a hunting license. Nonresident hunters are exempt when using a licensed guide/outfitter.
Stable	No	No	No	No	No Report
Stable	Yes	No	No	No	No Report
Stable	Yes	Yes	Yes	In Person	*3,002 harvested by nonresidents. NW Ontario is the most promising area. Go to ontario.ca/hunting for more information.
Stable	Yes	No	No	No	No Report
Stable	Yes	No	Yes	NA	Nonresidents require the services of a licensed outfitter.
Stable	No	No	No	No	Nonresidents must hunt with licensed Big Game Outfitter.
Stable	No	No	No	No	Nonresidents must hunt with licensed Big Game Outfitter.



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BIG WHITETAIL.

• **BY TROY DANKEMEYER**

T · E · N · D · E · N · C · I

BUCK: MARK RAYCROFT

[1] This is an example of leaving some weeds to grow in a food plot to create screening cover. [2] This is an example of planting various native grasses as screening cover, so bucks feel comfortable in daylight. This screening cover also helps you get to and from your stand undetected. [3] This is a turnip/brassica mix from my local co-op. [4] This is a two-year-old Monster Buck plot

1



2



TALK ABOUT DÉJÀ VU.

The buck was cautiously working in my direction, just as another buck had done a week earlier when my 70-year-old mother was in this same stand. Her buck worked his way around the plot edge, making use of my hinge-cuttings just inside the timber to stay concealed while he checked on the does out in the food plot. When the 167-inch buck walked by at 22 yards, my mother administered a well-placed arrow and the buck truly was hers.

I was hoping this buck was going to take the exact same route. At 50 yards and closing, I could see this was another mature buck that, according to trail-camera photos, had showed up on my farm only a few days prior. I am convinced that after my mother killed her bruiser a week before, this buck came in and claimed the niche that needed filling once the dominant buck was gone. The buck hit my hinge-cutting edge at 35 yards and stopped, as so many mature bucks have done in years past at this same spot. He did not want to break cover to go check on the does. Besides, he was on the crest of a hill, so he could see part of his domain without being exposed. Unfortunately for him, he had no idea that I had set up this site three years ago for this very moment, and even though he may have felt he was in adequate cover, he didn't realize there was an open shooting lane between him and my stand, just 20 yards away.

I drew, took careful aim, and let fly. I watched my arrow zip through his lungs, and in a split moment, he wheeled and crashed down the hill back the way he had come. It didn't take me long to find him about 70 yards later, piled up just below the hill he had been watching minutes before. As I sat there admiring the 174-incher that had walked into my "trap," I had to smile and wonder how many times this would play out in this spot in the years to come.

You might wonder why I am confident in the future of my hunting that particular spot on my property. I make my living managing whitetail properties in Iowa. I "design" the cover and food-plot arrangements to give a bowhunter the best opportunity to kill a mature buck. Let's take a look at my strategy for getting this done. We'll start with a couple of definitions.

Pattern: Something that repeats itself in a predictable way.

Tendency: An inclination toward a particular characteristic, or type of behavior.

I never liked the word "patterning" when it came to verbiage on killing big deer. After spending 20 years in the field of managing properties for big whitetails, with dozens of clients, and on my own farms, I would much rather use the word "tendencies" when talking about mature buck movement.

My 70-year-old mother arrowed this great buck a week before I killed mine.



E S

3



4



TENDENCIES

When it comes to big-buck movement, any property owner or lessee who has owned or leased land for an extended period of time, let's say four-plus years, will be the first to tell you that there are certain areas on every property that big, mature bucks have a much stronger tendency to use as travel corridors. They will consistently see more movement in these spots than on any other areas of the property.

Oftentimes, these areas are not conducive to other deer-herd movement. My point here is this: Mature bucks move through the landscape differently than doe family groups, younger bucks, and subordinate bucks. (Of course, this doesn't necessarily apply to late-season deer movement to and from bedding and food sources.)

For posterity's sake, I am going to assume that most knowledgeable land-owners have already pinpointed where these special spots are on their property. We have already been inundated with tons of advice and information about creating bowhunting setups in "corridors, pinch-points, bottlenecks, etc." To be sure, finding those areas on a property is crucial, and tried-and-true stand setup tactics have put a lot of big white-tails in the back of pickups for decades.

In this article, however, I don't want to focus on locating those big-buck areas on your property. Instead, I want to concentrate on designing and manufacturing new big-buck areas with some simple practices involving your food-plot setup. Your goal as a hunter should be to create additional quality hunting locations on your property.

When setting up a food-plot design on my clients' farms, my personal farms, or my leases, I always start by asking myself the number-one question: What will



I killed this big Iowa buck from the same stand my mother had arrowed her buck from just a week earlier.

make the mature, usually lazy (efficiency of movement), more reclusive buck that is living on my property or a neighboring property feel safe and comfortable enough to use or check out my food plots during daylight?

Throughout the years, I have found the answer to this question to be one overriding thing: I need to have enough of the right kind of cover in very close proximity to the food plots in order to make that mature buck feel "tucked away" and safe.

Your buck needs to know he is one good "sneak" away from getting back into the heavy cover where he feels safe.

If I don't have that type of cover directly adjacent to the existing plots, then that is where my design begins. Here are some practices I have used over the years, and that I'm still using, to achieve my stated goal.

Screenings: Don't use screening plantings only for your ingress and egress from stand sites. Use the various types of screening vegetation, such as Egyptian wheat, corn, and native grasses, to screen back edges of plots, or plant them close to bedding area access points in a way that a mature buck can "keep an eye" on the other deer activity on plots without breaking cover.

Hinge-Cutting: If your plots are adjacent to, or in timber, use hinge-cutting on some of the trees near the perimeter of food plots to achieve the same goal as screening, but in a timbered setting.

Separate and Conquer: Take your bigger food plots and divide them into



I like to break up my bigger food plots into smaller plots, and I always make sure I plant them adjacent to good cover where mature bucks will feel safe staging before going to feed.

smaller plots by using the above screening vegetation. This creates a situation where a buck cannot look over your entire food plot from one access point to determine if there are other deer, possibly a receptive doe, on the plot. By strategically separating your bigger plots into smaller ones, a buck will have to move more to investigate each section. That movement makes him more killable.

Weedy Beans: In the past few years, I have, by accident, found that here in Southeast Iowa some of the best big-buck movement is a result of my letting large parts of my plots get really weedy by not doing a second spraying. This three-foot-tall weed cover, mixed in with the food, is a magnet for mature bucks. They love feeding actively — in daylight — in that type of cover.

I don't think it is critical which of these practices you use. Every property is different, and you will determine your own food-plot design accordingly. What is important is that you provide the type of cover a mature buck is comfortable being in, as close to your plots as possible. That aspect alone makes him more apt to use these areas during daylight, which again, is your ultimate goal.

After you have determined the practices you want to use to create this situation, and you've answered the "number-one question," it's time to start hunting the small areas, inside approaches, sub-plots, or whatever you want to call them. I firmly believe that as hunters, we tend to spend way too much time hunting directly on our food sources during traditional archery seasons (again, late-season hunting is a different game). Instead, we should be hunting these "edge areas" more carefully. So many times I observe the larger, mature bucks hanging back in these areas observing rather than participating in the activities of other deer on the plots.

Remember, real-time observation is the best tool you have to gain intel on your farm. Try this on your plots next season, and take an observatory approach, maybe from afar the first year, and watch the tendencies of how these big deer use the area. Once you have figured that out and set up your stands according to the knowledge you've gained, that little corner or staging area next to the food source will be a hotspot of big-buck activity for years to come. Killing a big, mature whitetail is all about capitalizing on their tendencies. **BH**

The author is a whitetail fanatic, property manager, and Alaska brown bear guide in his spare time. He lives near Bloomfield, Iowa.

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WARRIOR BOWS

MY HEART POUNDED. Nocking an arrow to my string, I tried taking deep breaths to calm myself. Whether my pulse was elevated from the quick climb to intercept the feeding turkeys or from anticipation, knowing that at any second they would feed around the corner, was hard to say. Most likely, a combination of both. Now, I was hopeful of a getting a shot with my new little West Asian recurve.

There was nothing to camouflage myself in or behind, so once the turkeys came around the corner into view I'd certainly be spotted standing square in the open. Fortunately, the point-and-shoot nature of my little recurve gave me confidence that I could take a quick shot at the first good opportunity. Luckily, in New Zealand, where Merriam's are invasive and compete with the native bird populations, the sex of the bird does not matter. All turkeys are legal.

Leaning slightly forward on my toes to peer around the corner, I spied the turkeys heading right up the gut in front of me. The pounding of my heart made the seconds I stood waiting feel like hours. The grey head of the first hen fed out from behind the hill. Noticing my odd shape, she stopped feeding, looked at me, and pulled back, never exposing her dark body. As she fled, I stepped forward and up, bringing her retreating body into view, and I released my arrow. A quick shot while moving is natural with this light traditional bow. Silently and speedily, my arrow left the string and drove through the hen's back and into her chest, dropping her.

This West Asian recurve is also known as a "mounted archery bow," because it was designed to be shot off horseback. First developed in the Iron Age, this style of bow achieved fame in the Middle Ages as it provided the military force of the Mongolian and Turkic armies. With the coming of firearms, bows became obsolete for war, but because this bow's unique design allows for shooting from a moving animal, the horseback bow has seen a resurgence among equestrian archery clubs and also still holds many benefits for hunt-

ing. Specifically, it's short and easily maneuverable within a blind or in tight brush, and it can be shot from the same side of the bow as the arm drawing the arrow, allowing for multiple shots to be taken quickly. And it's light, fast, strong, accurate, and extremely silent.

My bow is a reflex recurve in the design of a traditional Turkish bow. Modern-day fiberglass and wood substitute for actual animal horn, animal sinew, animal glue, and wood that would have made up the composite of the ancient Turkish bows. Still, it retains all the advantages of the ancient bows.

It's shot instinctively. There's no aiming or sights. Instead, the mind envisions the path of the arrow's flight. Through much practice and repetition, accuracy is achieved. Think of throwing a football. There's no aiming, but yet those who dedicate themselves to the sport can accomplish great accuracy at various distances, and their minds can account for movement, as well. For archers who already shoot instinctively, the arrow on the other side of the bow is a little perplexing at first, but they soon adapt.

This bow, by design and style of shooting, allows for many advantages that made the turkey kill narrated above possible. Specifically, for that hunt, drawing with the arrow on the same side of the bow as the arm that pulls the string, with a thumb draw holding the arrow in place, frees me to move without risk of displacing the arrow from the shelf. This style makes it easy to shoot while moving or while tracking moving game, allowing total concentration to be on the target, and not on the position and stillness of the shelved arrow. In thick terrain, it gives you greater flexibility, because the bow can be held at any angle needed without disrupting the arrow. In fact, the bow can even be held and shot horizontally with the arrow down. Pressure from the index finger holds the arrow up against the bow, eliminating the need for a shelf and adding to the simplicity of the bow.

A thumb draw is performed by first nocking an arrow to the same side of the bow as the arm the shooter uses to draw the string. I nock the arrow to the right side of the bow, because I draw with my right arm. Next, bend the thumb under the arrow nock and across the string. Rest the thumb against the middle finger, and place the index finger over the thumb. The index finger helps to strengthen the thumb, allowing it to pull back stronger bows without the string slipping free. Keeping the hand fairly level with knuckles up, pull the string back. Release the arrow by opening the hand.

It's a common mistake to allow your hand to slip forward during the release. Not only does this reduce the force driving the arrow, imparting less energy, but it also takes pressure off of the string as you're releasing, making the release much less crisp and more prone to error. Both the lack of strength and uncertain delivery can add up to poor results. To counter this, positive pull-through is often employed with these bows. At clinics for mounted archery, Lukas Novotany, world-champion mounted archer and renowned bowyer, teaches a "male arrow." By this he means leaning into the shot and actually pushing the bow forward, as well

My first turkey taken with my Turkish recurve. This bow's design allows for quick, accurate shots, especially at moving game.



WE ARE ALL TAUGHT TO SHOOT
ARCHERY A CERTAIN WAY, BUT
GOING IN A COMPLETELY
DIFFERENT DIRECTION
CAN BE FUN, TOO.

BY
Breanna Lewis



Originally developed for mounted horseback shooters, my West Asian recurve is also perfect for bowhunting big and small game in the fields and forests.

SHOOTER ON HORSEBACK BY DANIELLE RUSSELL; ALL OTHER PHOTOS BY THE AUTHOR

STEPS OF THE THUMB DRAW



1. Nock an arrow to the string on the same side of the bow as the hand that draws the string.



2. Bend thumb across string under arrow.



3. Place thumb against middle finger.



4. Close index finger over thumb.



5. Draw bow, keeping knuckles fairly level.



6. Release string with positive pull-through with drawing hand and push through with bow hand.

as employing positive pull-through with the string hand. I find this technique improves my accuracy and precision.

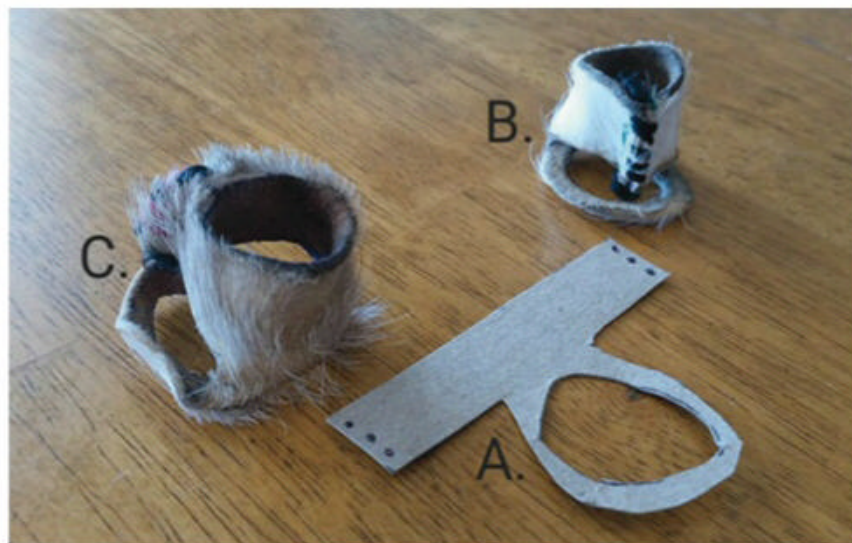
Using the thumb draw has many advantages beside mobility. Having a single point of contact to the string for a release helps to make the release cleaner and more consistent, similar to mechanical releases used with compound bows. A sole point of contact and a keen release is very important in a short, light bow, because they lack the length and mass to stabilize any movement. Slight differences between shots have a dramatic impact.

Many people use a hard thumb ring to protect their thumb and make an even crisper release. However, I find this difficult when hunting, so I have my own soft thumb rings of deer hide that sharpen my release and keep my shots much more consistent. I've included the pattern used for these deer hide thumb rings below. When making these thumb rings, keep in mind that the deer hide will stretch. Over time, I've had to shorten the circumference of the top portion of my thumb ring to keep it snug over my thumb. A tight fit is important to keep the deer hide from sliding off your thumb when opening to release, dampening and potentially interfering with the arrow's departure.

Another prerequisite of shooting off this side is that arrows can be quickly and safely nocked to the string by holding them in the bow hand when shooting. A light grip still needs to be kept on the bow, but a couple extra arrows can be fanned out and rapidly pulled to the string without worrying about cutting yourself or the string with the broadheads. A little trick that I use for my arrows is expanding the nock so there's a pronounced position that allows me to orient my arrow by feel and nock it without ever taking my eyes off the game. Practice is imperative for developing a feel for nocking arrows mindlessly. At first, I established this feel by repeatedly nocking arrows with my eyes closed. This required 100 percent of my concentration and I was very slow and clumsy to start, but

after much repetition it became fluid. Once this skill was ingrained, I made it more effortless and automatic by repeating the action while doing another activity, such as while watching a movie. Fanning out the arrows in the bow hand prevents the arrows from interfering with one another when they are drawn to the string. With this method, the arrow made most available will slide above the other arrows.

I use light and slender arrows designed for a compound bow for my little recurve, because like a compound bow, it shoots a very fast arrow. However, the weight and spine of the arrow is predicated on the strength of the bow. I don't shoot deer or other big-game animals farther than 20 yards, for fear of decreased accuracy and penetration. This short-range restriction does not bother me, because the emphasis when using a traditional bow is on the quality of the stalk or ambush



Pattern for making a deer hide thumb ring. (A) Shows the pattern to cut out of the deer hide. Make holes on each side to stitch together. The loop in the deer hide should fit the bottom segment of the thumb. The stitched section should fit the top segment and be snug. (B) Shows the view of a stitched thumb ring. (C) Shows the front view of another thumb ring. It's important to note that the direction of the hair goes up to the tip of the thumb. This helps for a smoother release.

versus the distance of the shot. Impressive shots can be saved for target competitions.

Along with the benefits this style of shooting, the bow design itself, although intended to aid the mounted warrior, really suits the hunter. The short nature of the bow makes it an excellent fit for spring turkey hunting, because it can be easily shot from a pop-up blind. For this same reason, it's also great for deer hunting or stalking in thicker brush. Its shortness lessens the chance of it hitting and noticeably disrupting brush, alerting game when preparing for a shot. This feature also makes it easier to get through tight brush or vines, going to a stand, or trying to silently cover ground while still-hunting. Needless to say, less clearance is needed for drawing and releasing an arrow.

So, how do you start using this style bow? I started with a PVC horseback recurve a friend of mine made. I shot this very light bow for almost a year, getting accurate enough to where I could hit a swaying bottle cap hanging from a piece of floss in a bush, before I upgraded to a wood bow. While I really enjoyed shooting this wood bow, it was still not strong enough for me to feel comfortable hunting game. Because mounted archery is a target sport, most of the bows readily available will not be strong enough for hunting. I ended up having a Saluki Bow made by Lukas Novotany that was strong enough to hunt with, and I couldn't be happier with it.

For those wanting to start using this style of bow, I suggest that you begin by ordering or making a relatively inexpensive bow. Practice and hunt with that bow to get a feel for the ease and fluidity of taking quick and multiple shots. Then, when you're as hooked on these recurves as I am, order a stronger-poundage bow, or have one made. Saluki Bow Company (salukibow.com) has my total confidence for creating beautiful, light, and accurate recurves.

Like with all traditional bows, enjoyment is derived from the art of shooting, not just hunting. These speedy bows are a blast to target shoot. The quick style of shooting makes it fun to mix things up by shooting flying targets, or shooting from moving objects. My dad and I are big fans of "archery golf" through pastures and woodlands. For horse lovers, these bows and techniques open up another door of opportunity with the rapidly growing sport of mounted archery. The sport combines one's love of horses with archery, but also introduces an element of competition. While living in Florida, I was part of the Mounted Archery Association of the Americas (mountedarchery.org). The social aspect and the camaraderie of our Florida chapter encouraged me to practice more, and also helped my shooting through the analysis and advice of expert horseback archers. While hunting, especially deer hunting, is a solitary activity for the most part, these competitions are a great way to master your shooting skills in a fun and challenging setting, and they can be a great way to get youth into archery. **BH**

The author is a bowhunting enthusiast who follows the seasons between hemispheres, guiding hunters in Canada, Wyoming, and New Zealand.

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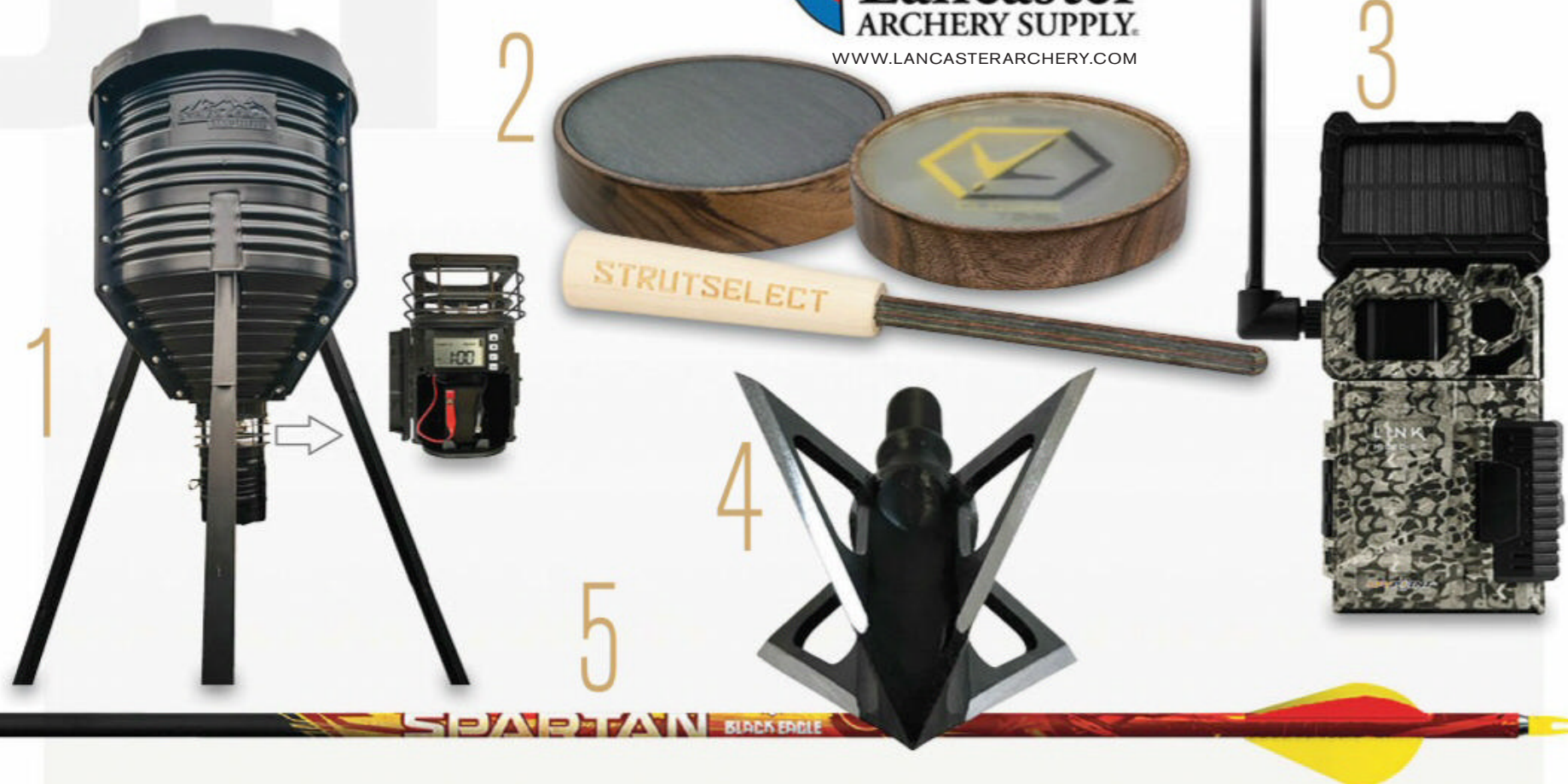
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With a feed capacity of 240 lbs., the Strike Force Outdoors Tripod Feeder (**\$169.99, Photocell/\$179.99, Programmable Timer**) has the largest capacity of any poly feeder on the market. It's equipped with heavy duty steel legs, a built-in varmint guard, and a sturdy metal spin plate. The Programmable Timer model can be set to distribute feed up to six times per day, and feed amounts per cycle are adjustable. The Photocell version comes preset to feed at dawn and dusk (adjustable). *Contact: Strike Force Outdoors, 1-888-272-4430, strikeforceoutdoors.com.*

2 HUNTERS SPECIALTIES® CLOSING TIME™

- Produces all turkey sounds
- Slate or glass calling surface
- Kiln-dried walnut pot

Hunters Specialties recently introduced its Strut Select® collection of premium turkey calls. Included in this new line is the Closing Time pot call (**\$44.99, Slate/\$39.99, Glass**). The Slate version has a Pennsylvania slate calling surface tuned using a glass soundboard. The Glass model has a ready-to-play frosted glass surface. Both feature an American walnut pot and Dymalux®/maple two-piece striker. *Contact: Hunters Specialties, (319) 395-0321, hunterspec.com.*

3 SPYPOINT® LINK-MICRO-S-LTE™

- Integrated solar-panel technology
- 80' flash and detection range
- Uses LTE in place of 4G

The SPYPOINT LINK-MICRO-S-LTE trail camera (**\$249.99**) has an integrated solar panel that charges the

included 10,200 mAh lithium battery pack directly. Images are sent to you via cellular network, and it uses the LTE network in place of the 4G network. Trigger speed is 0.4 seconds, and the detection and flash range are both 80'. Available in April 2020. *Contact: SPYPOINT, 1-888-779-7646, spypoint.com.*

4 TOOTH OF THE ARROW BROADHEADS®

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- Two cutting diameters

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5 BLACK EAGLE ARROWS® SPARTAN™

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The Spartan (**\$83.49, half-dozen fletched/\$148.99, dozen shafts**) from Black Eagle Arrows is an 1⁸/₆₄" hunting arrow that combines the best characteristics of larger 1⁹/₆₄" and smaller 1⁷/₆₄" shafts. This 100% carbon arrow has a stainless-steel insert that reinforces its front while also making arrow removal easier. Weight tolerance is +/- 1 grain, and straightness is .001" and .003" (or straighter). The Spartan is available in spines of 200 (11.6 gpi), 250 (10.0 gpi), 300 (9.0 gpi), 350 (8.0 gpi), 400 (7.2 gpi), and 500 (6.4 gpi). *Contact: Black Eagle Arrows, (678) 208-3429, blackeaglearrows.com.*

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1.2 GAL.	TANK SIZE	.95 GAL.	
3	OUTLETS	3	
YES	OVERLOAD PROTECTION	YES	
79.7 cc	ENGINE SIZE	98.5 cc	
YES	LOW OIL ALERT	YES	
YES	PARALLEL CAPABLE	YES	
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MODEL 1800

Customer Rating

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Case contents and locks not included.

COMPARE TO PELICAN MODEL: 1150 **\$39.95**

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ITEM 64550/63518 shown

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Customer Rating

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ITEM 63750 56810/63181 shown

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ITEM 60395 62325/62493/61523 shown

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COMPARE TO REESE TOWPOWER MODEL: 74554700 **\$141.08**

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ITEM 69595/60334/90018 shown

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Outdoor

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ITEM 62384/62897 62898/62899 shown

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ITEM 61765 46411 shown

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LIMIT 4 - Coupon valid through 5/3/20*

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Customer Rating

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SAVE 50%

COMPARE TO COLEMAN MODEL: 635394 **\$39.99**

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ITEM 56719 ITEM 63066/62314 shown

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ITEM 61674 62761/47835 shown

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ITEM 64799 63934 shown

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ITEM 63921

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LIMIT 5 - Coupon valid through 5/3/20*

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Customer Rating

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SAVE 66%

COMPARE TO GO GREEN POWER **\$14.99**

ITEM 64110

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LIMIT 5 - Coupon valid through 5/3/20*

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Customer Rating

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COMPARE TO PEAK MODEL: PKCOTV-R **\$39.99**

ITEM 61960 61777 shown

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LIMIT 5 - Coupon valid through 5/3/20*

ROADSHOCK 3" LED LIGHTS

Customer Rating

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COMPARE TO TRAVELLER MODEL: 122349099 **\$32.99**

FLOOD ITEM 64322

SPOT ITEM 64323

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ASK **Bowhunter**

With Dr. Dave Samuel Conservation Editor

QUESTION *I'm from Pennsylvania, and I'm still seeing a buck that is in velvet and hasn't shed its antlers. I've heard that on rare occasions, a doe will have antlers, and if so, they are usually in velvet. I haven't been close enough to determine whether the deer I'm seeing is a buck or doe. A buck in velvet this late in the spring has got to be rare. If he doesn't shed his antlers, that also has to be a rare phenomenon. My curiosity is killing me. Am I seeing a buck or a doe? What causes bucks to not shed their velvet, or their antlers?* **Patrick K., via e-mail**

ANSWER The male hormone, testosterone, plays a major role in the shedding of velvet and antlers. When you see a deer in velvet in late spring, when most bucks have already dropped their antlers, then you know there is a testosterone problem. The first thing most people assume when they see a deer with velvet antlers is that it is a buck. While that is true most of the time, there are exceptions.

On very rare occasions, a doe may have antlers. There are two types of antlered does. A male "pseudo-hermaphrodite" has the external genitalia of a doe, and small internal testes. These "does" usually have hard horns and shed their antlers. The second type of antlered doe is one that has normal female organs but still produces a small amount of male hormones. These antlered does do not have enough testosterone to complete antler growth, so they usually remain in velvet. They also usually have rather small antlers with an unsymmetrical appearance.

Having said all that, most likely the deer you saw was a buck. Why would a buck still be in velvet and carry his antlers in late spring? There are several possibilities. If a buck gets castrated while growing antlers, it not only will have velvet-covered antlers, but those antlers will not shed. Shedding involves a decrease in testosterone, and castrated bucks have no testosterone, hence they will not shed their antlers. In a normal buck, when testosterone rises the blood vessels going to

the development of antler bone close and the velvet begins to dry and then is shed. Likewise, when the testosterone level drops in the winter, the antlers will drop off.

With small or no testes, there is no change in testosterone levels, so the velvet stays and the antlers do not drop off. This can cause an interesting phenomenon called "cactus bucks." In the spring, as new antler growth occurs, it grows on top and around the old antler, especially at the base, giving the antlers a weird "cactus-like" appearance. These antler points tend to stay in place in warmer climates, but farther north, some of these many extra tines tend to freeze and break off in cold weather.

All velvet-antlered bucks, whether a normal buck or one with a hormone problem, can also suffer an injury to the developing velvet antler. This can lead to abnormal points or growth patterns. In fact, one of the most common ways a buck can develop nontypical antlers is because of an injury when the buck is in velvet, and these injuries can be anything from a bump on the velvet to a twig cutting it to an insect burrowing into the velvet. Any injury to the sensitive antler at this time can lead to nontypical antlers.

Seeing an antlered doe or a buck that never sheds its velvet or antlers is rare, but obviously occurs. That is just another reason our year-round observations on the critters we love is so interesting and enjoyable. **BH**

E-mail your ASK **BOWHUNTER** questions to bowhunter_magazine@outdoorsg.com

On very rare occasions, a doe, like this one from Kansas, will grow a set of smaller, velvet-covered antlers. PHOTO: C.J. WINAND



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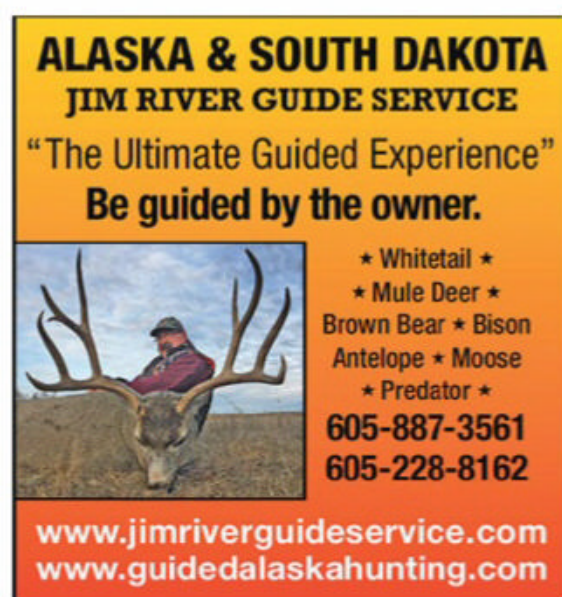


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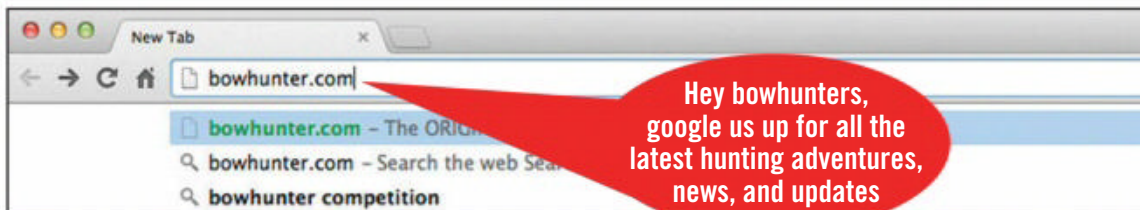


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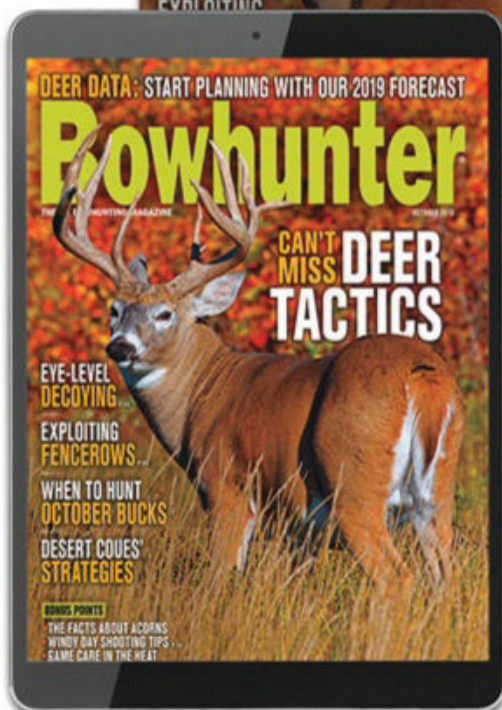
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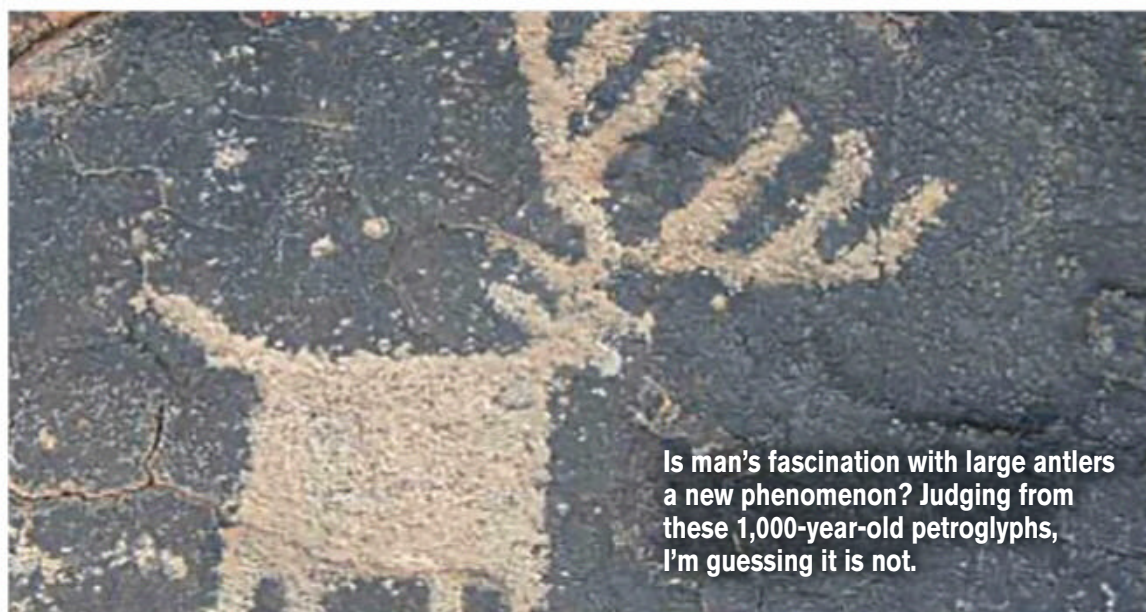
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Antlers

I'LL NEVER BE ABLE TO FULLY EXPLAIN MY FASCINATION WITH BIG-ANTLERED BUCKS, BUT I DO KNOW IT'S REAL.

IN A DARK CANYON NOT FAR from my childhood home, stands a large, vertical, black-rock slab. On it are carvings made a thousand years ago by a member of an ancient pueblo culture. The etchings show a deer and a man holding a bow. Nothing more; no landscape, no trees... just the man, the bow, and the deer. The remarkable thing about the etchings (enough to catch my attention even back then) was the unusually large set of antlers.



Is man's fascination with large antlers a new phenomenon? Judging from these 1,000-year-old petroglyphs, I'm guessing it is not.

This image has remained with me, branded into my memory, through all these years. I've often wondered: Was this ancestral man as fascinated by large antlers as I am? Or was this just an accident of proportion made by a primitive artist?

I suppose we'll never know the truth. However, I have suspicions that I (as well as you, my like-minded friends) do know. He liked big bucks, too!

The antlers from the deer I have killed and eaten, as well as shed antlers and dead-heads I've found throughout the West, are displayed on just about every wall I own, inside as well as outside. These are the large antlers. The smaller ones, deemed unworthy of display, lie

scattered from hither to yon, hanging in trees, or stacked in various piles as "landscape features."

Is it strange that I still keep the antlers from the bucks I killed during my childhood? I haven't kept much of anything else for that long. Why? What's the fascination?

It would be interesting to know what a psychiatrist would make of this phenomenon. Normal? Abnormal? Pathological? I think perhaps pathological. When asked what I would pull out of my burning house first? I'm more than just a little bit embarrassed to say (if there were no people or pets inside), it would certainly be my antlers.

I am certainly not alone in my obsession. Many of you are afflicted as well. Of this, I am certain. So, should I be committed to an institution? I don't think so. However, there is some consolation in knowing that if I were sent away, at least there would be some like-minded folks there to swap hunting stories with!

There is something absolutely regal about a mule deer buck sky-lined on a mountaintop above timberline. Much like the petroglyph of my youth, there are no trees in the picture — just deer, antlers, and sky. A Monarch looking down on his empire; his entire kingdom beneath him. The antlers make the picture complete. Small bucks and does just don't produce the same visual phenomenon.

My first experience with above-timberline deer came while I was attending college at the foot of the Rocky Mountains. My brother and I backpacked a few miles and several thousand vertical feet through black-timber foothills to reach the base of towering ridges above. You could either take the Forest Service trail seven miles, traversing endless switchbacks and seemingly random turns and curves. Or, if you were the adventurous type, you could hike straight up through the trees and deadfalls, then weave between the cliffs to gain the top. We, of course, being young and bold, chose to go straight up. As we made our way, the country became more vertical and the Douglas firs gave way to smaller evergreens, then subalpine scrub, then nothing but grass, alpine tundra, and wildflowers.

Approaching the summit, we jumped a very fine buck. His antlers were wide, heavy, and high. He trotted up the bare hillside. As he reached the summit, he stopped and looked back, a mere 100 yards away. My breath was stolen. Something about the sight of that buck, nothing but blue sky behind him, touched me deeply: something real, something palpable, something primordial.

I can't explain why this fascination exists, but I do know it is real. I've experienced the same absolute rush from near accidents, as well as from bungee jumping off a bridge. It was an immediate, deep-seated thrill. Fortunately, I still get this same feeling whenever I see a large muley buck sky-lined on a rimrock. I hope I never stop.

Sometimes, even now, when I fall asleep and dream, the vision of the black-rock wall and the petroglyphs I found there finds its way back to me. Timeless reminders of the continuity of man's existence — ancient, crude figures of deer and man and bow. **BH**

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