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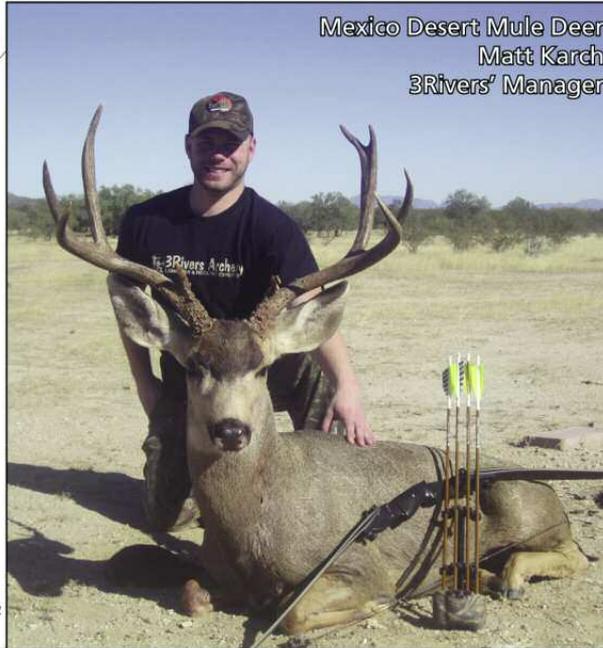
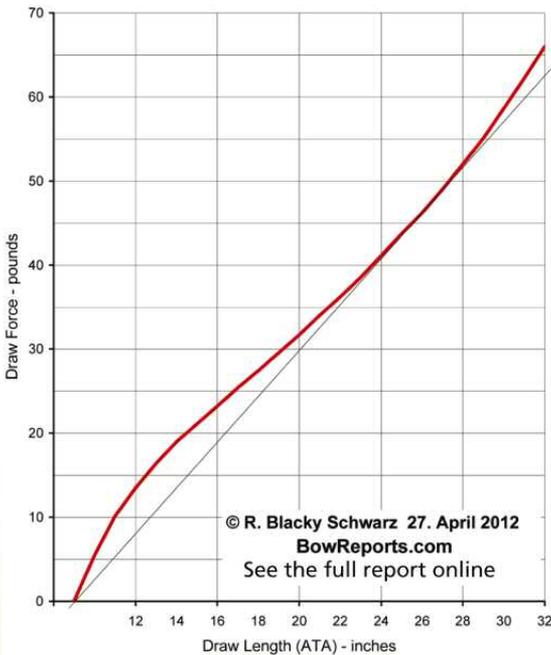
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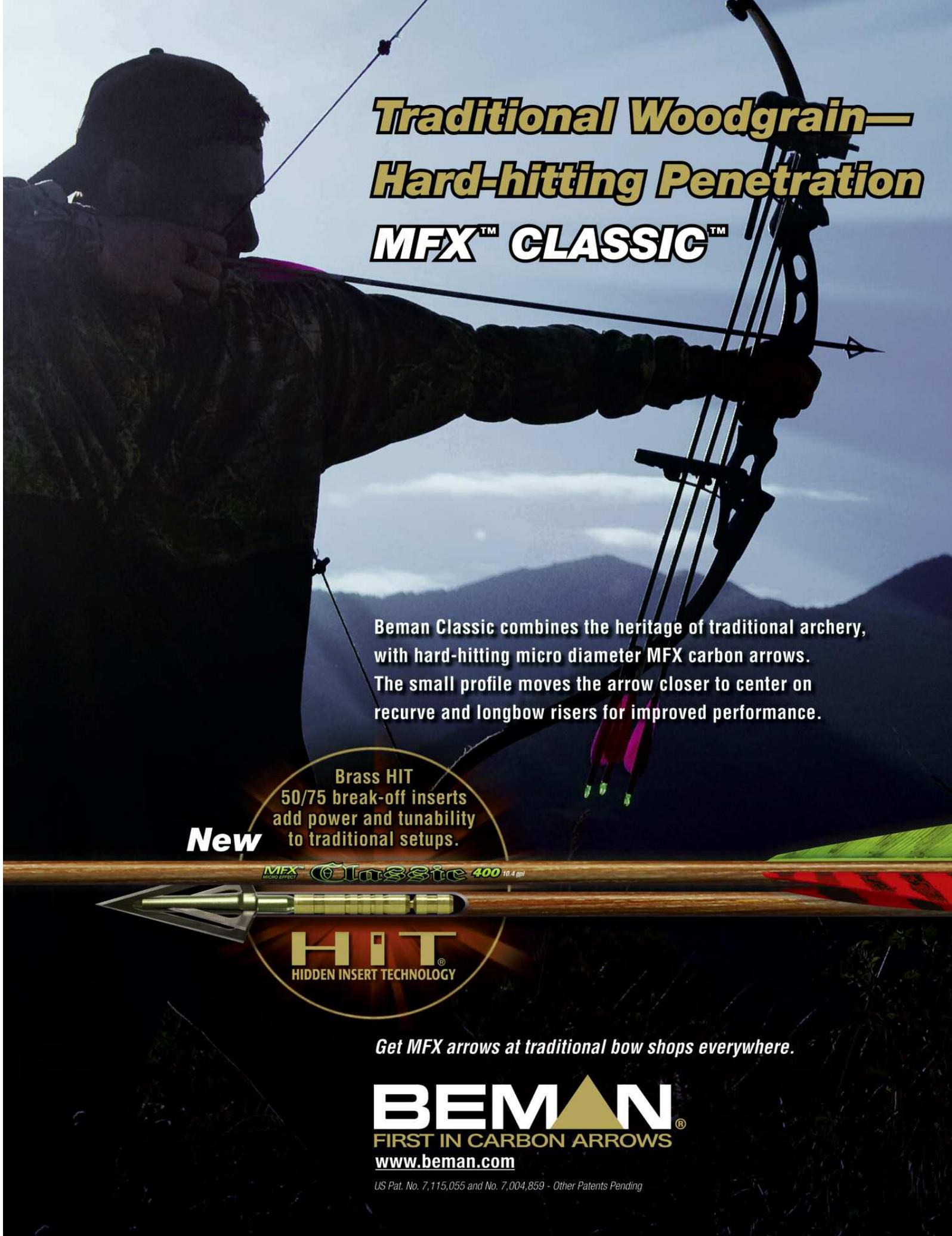
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A Look Inside

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On The Cover — A bowhunter, admiring a caribou rack in a northern Canada camp, silhouetted against an outpost cabin.

Photo by Jerry Gowins, Jr.



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Editor/Publisher/Founder

T.J. Conrads • tj@tradbow.com • 208-383-0982

Advertisement Manager/Co-Publisher

Larry O. Fischer • larry@tradbow.com

Co-Editor

E. Donnell Thomas, Jr. • donthomas@lewistown.net

Shooting Editor

G. Fred Asbell

Field Editor

David Petersen

Campfire Philosophers

David Petersen • David Sigurslid

Contributors

Nathan L. Andersohn • Darryl Quidort

Duncan Pledger • Fred Eichler

Jerry Gowins, Jr. • Denny Sturgis, Jr.

Jason Wesbrock • Connie Renfro

Kirby Kohler • Brian Sorrells • Dennis Kamstra

Editorial Information

1898 Timberline Dr., Lewistown, MT 59457

donthomas@lewistown.net

Advertising and Classified Information

Belinda Fischer • belinda@tradbow.com

P.O. Box 519, Eagle, ID 83616

Phone: 208-853-0555 • Fax: 208-383-9010

Advertising Sales

Mark Viehweg • mark@tradbow.com

Phone: 309-343-0203 • FAX: 309-341-4642

Subscription Information

Allie Stinson • subscriptions@tradbow.com

P.O. Box 519, Eagle, ID 83616

Toll Free: 888-828-4882 • Phone: 208-383-9019

Fax: 208-383-9010

Webmaster/Online Advertising

Robin Conrads • webmaster@tradbow.com

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Co-Editor's Note

A Wolf in Wolf's Clothing?

Sportsmen for Wildlife ... now that sounds like a great organization. But as is so often the case, real hunters had better peek behind the smoke and mirrors.

Let's begin by looking at the curious case of Corey Rossi, one of the original founders of SFW's Alaska chapter. Aided by the group's growing political clout, Rossi was soon named Director of the state's Wildlife Division even though he had no formal training or education in the field. (Alas, such cronyism is hardly unusual in Alaska's frequently bizarre Third World political climate.) Then Rossi lost his job in January, 2012 after being charged — Oops! — with 12 misdemeanor wildlife violations stemming from a 2008 bear hunt he'd guided.

But before his unceremonious departure, Rossi had already set in motion a proposal to privatize Alaska wildlife resources for profit. The plan would create special permits for private landowners, to be sold to the highest bidder. (In Alaska, this would almost exclusively involve Native Corporations, which own large parcels of the state's most productive game habitat.) The draft plan even suggested that permit holders would not be bound by seasons and regulations in force elsewhere in the state. And it was no mere pipe dream. As reported by the Anchorage Daily News in response to a leaked department memo, the state's legal department was already drafting the law with encouragement from the Governor's office.

Now to the Lower 48, where SFW sprouted in Utah (with strong support from the Mule Deer Foundation, an alleged habitat group that deserves a close look of its own someday.) Utah has been playing footsie with SFW for several years now by providing special landowner permits for the group to auction. As reported in the Anchorage Daily News, the SFW non-profit tax returns show that the group raised \$2.4 million from permit sales in 2010, of which it spent \$1.1 million on "conventions and conferences." Anyone ever see a mule deer attend a convention?

We're finally hunting wolves in the Rockies again, thanks to the 2011 Simpson-Tester rider to the budget bill, which SFW actually opposed for some reason. (Appealing to anti-predator sentiment throughout the West and Alaska has been a huge moneymaker for SFW. Perhaps a plan to trim wolf numbers rationally threatened their cash cow.) Unfortunately, SFW falsely claimed that several other groups supported their position including the NRA, who offered this in response: "Due to the blatant misinformation contained in the press release circulated by these two groups (SFW and the related Big Game Forever) any claims they make in the future should be thoroughly investigated and independently confirmed." Folks, this isn't Don Thomas or Dave Petersen calling foul. It's the NRA.

Meanwhile, SFW founder Don Peay has been busy trying to export his hunting-for-profit schemes elsewhere about the West, including Arizona and Montana. So far at least, hunters and game departments in those states have seen through the hoey. Quoth Peay: "It's time to revisit the widely accepted principle... that game is a public resource." He further describes the principles of the North American Model as "socialism." Interesting. A year or so ago that term began to appear as if on cue in the predictable hate mail writers who stand up for wildlife and ordinary hunters receive routinely. Now we know where it came from.

Wolves and socialism are two unpopular concepts whose very mention can end all rational debate, and SFW has learned to exploit both adroitly to further its own goals. (For the record, I am not now, nor have I ever been, a socialist.) Make no mistake about it. This is *your* wildlife SFW wants to convert into profit, and when wildlife is sold to the highest bidder, most of us will be on the outside looking in.

So watch these guys. They're coming soon to a state near you, and they threaten our way of life more than PETA could hope to in its wildest dreams.

Don Thomas
Co-Editor

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Letters to the Editor

Dear **TBM**,

I have been reading your magazine for a few years now, and believe it to be one of the finest hunting magazines on the market. But after reading the Editor's Note this last month, I have had second thoughts.

As a citizen of Wallowa county, I have to live with the effects of the TMP. Our "attack" of the Forrest service's plan was not a fabrication, in fact we private citizen along with county and elected officials had submitted viable and acceptable alternatives. We have to realize that the woods are for everybody, not just those of us who would rather hike further and hunt harder than the average sportsman.

I know this was just your opinion, but this is mine. We have one of Oregon's larger wilderness areas (which was partially excluded from the TMP calculation) where you are able to wander for days without seeing another soul. We also need our national forests for other uses, whether it is recreational, woodcutting, grazing or other. If taken away, what will they take next?

Chris Martin
Enterprise, OR

Chris,

My editorial was not based on personal opinion; rather, it was built on solid information from several individuals who actually were involved in the entire process, as well as the proposed TMP itself.

Of the three counties involved, one chose to take the

hard line and argue for no changes to roads, while the other two sent a group of ATV riders out to inventory roads. The alternatives submitted by all the counties were not viable or acceptable from a natural resource standpoint. Their alternatives called for very little change to what is in place now, which are very high road densities in many places, and would do little or nothing to address the problems that poor elk distribution is causing on neighboring private lands.

The Forest Service recognizes the need for reasonable access for all citizens, so an extensive network of roads and motorized trails was identified to remain open; however, everyone's idea of reasonable is different.

The claim that wilderness areas were excluded from the TMP calculation is absolutely false. The entire forest, including Hells Canyon National Recreation Area and Eagle Cap Wilderness, was analyzed in the wildlife, fisheries, and socio-economic reports. It is required by law — and common sense — that they analyze cumulative effects at an appropriate scale. This was done, and the wilderness areas were addressed to the extent necessary for the decision makers to make an informed decision.

Your assumption that recreation, wood cutting, and grazing would be taken away is also completely false. In the Final Environmental Impact Statement, that you apparently failed to read, livestock grazing, logging, noxious weed control, prescribed burning, etc. will continue unaffected by the Travel Plan. Recreational activities, including firewood cutting, would be affected to the extent that the network of



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open roads and trails would allow motorized access. For example, watersheds that currently have five miles of roads per square mile may only have 2.5 miles of roads per square mile under the Travel Plan. This reduces the road densities to a more reasonable level while retaining ample access for the public and for management of the forest. To some, this reduction is too severe. In fact, taking it down to 2.5 miles per square mile only provides poor to marginal conditions for elk, so elk habitat was compromised in these cases to provide for public access. Other watersheds weighed heavier in favor of elk habitat

"They" are people just like you and me. We hunt, fish, hike, cut firewood, coach local kids' sports, support rural local communities, etc. There is no "they" in regard to the Travel Plan issue. Secondly, nothing is being "taken." The professionals in the Forset Service are using their experience, input from the public, and peer-reviewed science to meet the legal and ethical demands of public land management. A reasonable level of motorized access can provide for a range of motorized and non-motorized recreational pursuits. No one is being "shut out" of their public lands, although physical limitations of each citizen are factors that determine where they can go on public land. — T.J.

Dear TBM,

The Gauntlet by Jeff Stonehouse (Aug/Sep 2012) is a great story. I think Larry the rancher is my kind of guy. It is amazing, sometimes, how much better a guy can shoot when a challenge is laid down. There is one question that remains about Jeff's goat hunting episode; did Larry the rancher pay up with the steak dinner? We have to know!

Great magazine, great articles. If I can't be hunting or shooting, then give me **Traditional Bowhunter**.

John Barkley
Via email

Dear TBM,

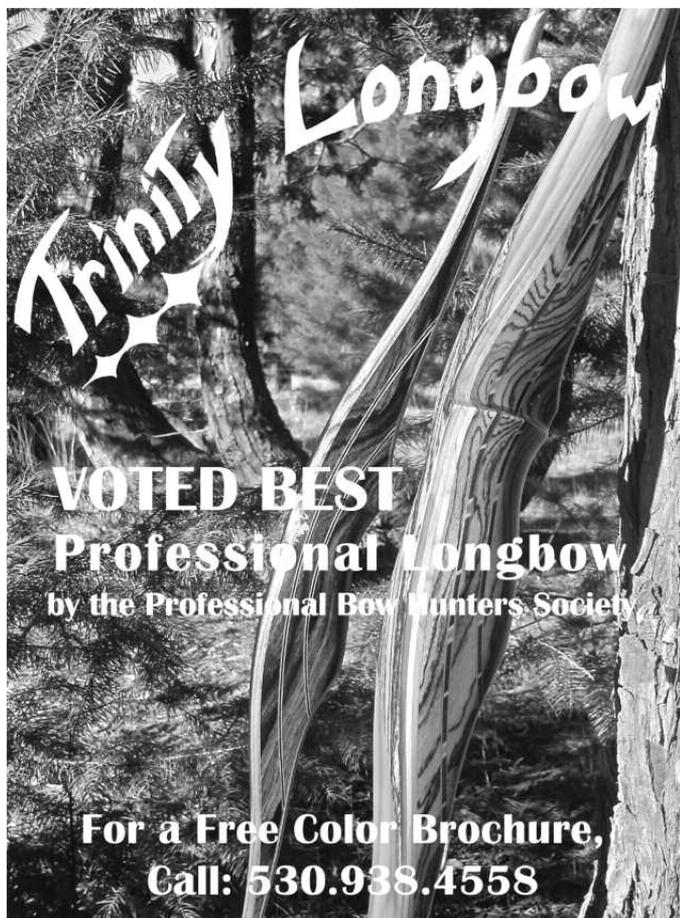
First I would like to say that you folks do an incredible job in continuing to provide what is, in my opinion, the definitive resource on the sport of traditional archery in general and traditional bowhunting in particular. I have been faithfully reading (and re-reading) these magazines for years. I am always gleaning something new and interesting from both the current ones and the past ones. I hope that your success continues for many years to come.

Now, to a point of interest I wanted to question you on. I just got the new Oct/Nov 2012 issue a couple of days ago and as I was admiring the fine print on the cover I noticed something I was curious about. Was Mr. Bear actually a southpaw? If so, I had never before realized it. It is nice to know since I am a southpaw myself. Some folks refer to us as "wrong-handed."

Chris Hancock
Via email

Chris — Indeed, he was a Southpaw. As a close friend said once about being left-handed, "We're the chosen few!"

— Eds



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Dear **TBM**,

Just finishing up the Oct/Nov 2012 issue and, as always, a delightful read! However, I do feel compelled to comment upon the article by Rollie Johnson, *Sinew on Sinew ...* overall a wonderful story; however, it would appear that Mr. Johnson is a little confused about his bow nomenclature. Notably, he states that the "... tricky part is scraping down the belly of the bow to one single growth ring" In fact, one makes sure the back of the bow is prepared thus, not the belly. Further on in the article, Mr. Johnson says to "... begin layering it (the sinew) on the belly of the bow ..." Here again, he means the back of the bow. Putting sinew on the belly of the bow would be quite useless, as sinew has no compression strength and would only add dead weight to the bow limbs.

Please don't view this as a complaint; rather, I was mostly concerned that this might prove bewildering to any beginner bowyers out there! Please also accept my thanks for an outstanding magazine, and good luck to all this coming hunting season!

*Rick Atkey
Via the Internet*

Rick,

All we can say is mea culpa! This should have been caught by all of us, as well as our proofers; however, it slipped through the proverbial crack. — Eds

Dear **TBM**,

I loved Don Thomas response to Ted Nugent being our self-proclaimed representative, in spite of all of his violations. I have been a long time reader of your magazine and Don Thomas is one of my favorites. He hit the nail right on the head with his opinion of Ted Nugent and he made my day.

I will be subscribing to your magazine instead of buying it off the rack from now on. You folks have the best hunting magazine going these days.

*Daniel Kettel
Via email*

Dear **TBM**,

Thanks for opining on the series of violations committed by Ted Nugent. I am glad someone spoke up and said Ted's escapades go far beyond a simple one-time mistake. From my vantage point they appear to be a pattern and practice of illegal activity. I stand with you in telling Nugent and Bogner that the traditional bowhunting community will chose our representatives all by ourselves.

*Mark Putra
Watertown, WI*

Dear **TBM**,

I recently picked up my Oct/Nov 2012 issue and was shocked to read E. Donnell Thomas' comments about our self-appointed spokesman for our sport! I seriously thought I was the last person on planet Earth who feels the same way. I have a very low tolerance for people who are arrogant, rude, loud, or obnoxious, and it seems Mr. Nugget is hitting on all cylinders and has for quite a long time.

Mr. Thomas will surely be inundated with letters from

people who believe he has done so much good for our sport, but I happen to believe he has produced more negative publicity than positive. Thank you Don for such an eloquent open letter.

*Joe Meyeres
Via email*

We received a fair amount of letters, calls, and emails on Don's editorial. To be sure, the positives were almost ten to every negative comment. A few of latter were laced with profanity and threats, and most came unsigned. — Eds

Dear **TBM**,

I have been a subscriber to your magazine since the first publication. This is just a short note about one of your advertisers, Trinity Longbow owned by Edward Boyd. I recently purchased a longbow from Mr. Boyd and could not be more pleased with the workmanship, quality, beauty, and shooting ability of the bow. I have purchased four other custom bows from other companies, and his is by far the best.

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*Edward H Sittner, Jr.
Lake St. Louis, MO*



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The Gift

Sometimes, *silence is golden.*

By David Petersen

Every September for years now, when the elking action is hot, I've dashed off informal and often excited evening "hunt reports" via e-mail to a few friends who have visited my hunting area and know the landmarks. Then I forget about the reports, and the "sent" folder eventually gets deleted. Consequently, should I later decide to write about a particular hunt or hunting experience, I'm forced to try to sort out the details from a smear of overlapping memories spanning as long as a month. And these days the old memory ain't so pretty as she once was. Belatedly, this past elk season I had a "Duh!" moment and decided for once to

keep copies of my daily hunt reports, informal and unpolished as they tend to be, for future reference. And from there I decided that I would simply share a few of the letters themselves. So here we go ...

To Doc Dave Sigurslid (early September): Last night while sitting in my brush blind at Hillside Spring, where the spring pool hadn't been touched in ten days or so, a bull started bugling from down at the bottom of the Meadows. I cow-called to him and next time he bugled he was closer. I called again and this time he whistled from right up the hill behind me, with some cows chirping in the background. I gave

another cow call and the bull left his girls and came down to the bench toward the spring. But rather than taking the game trail that runs by my stand, he came crashing down through dense aspen saplings and stopped some 50 yards away, by the old wallow near the bottom of the spring seep, though I couldn't see him for the thick vegetation.

The bull spent close to an hour there, sometimes crunching around, sometimes silent, and bugled four more

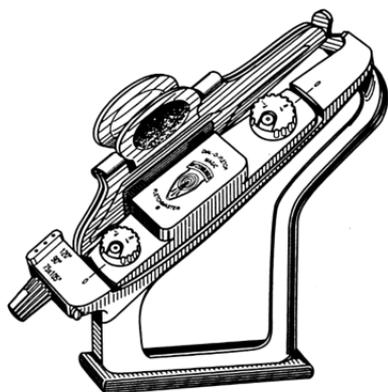
September aspens in Colorado's San Juan National Forest are as attractive to elk as they are to elk hunters.

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times. A full-throat bugle from a mature bull at that range is enough to shake the trees! At some point he snuck out. When he bugled again he was well below me, to the southeast, on the big game trail I take coming and going from my truck. So I got my gear together pronto and was able to hunt him almost all the way out, when he broke off east and crossed Big Gulch and was moving fast and it was getting too dark to stay on him.

After that experience — lots of hearing but no seeing — I really want a look at this guy, to see if he’s the 350-category beauty I saw back on September 1st, or a smaller 6x6 I got pictures of last summer, or someone new to the local mix.

Weather of late has been perfect for hunting, with mostly overcast skies, highs in the low 70s and nights in the low 40s. There’s a chance of rain every day, but so far the few little showers have been so ephemeral that I haven’t even had to put my rain suit on. This is prime-time, and I should be hunting mornings as well as evenings but rarely do, having so damn much “home work” to keep after, like getting in several cords of firewood for the winter. That will change on Wednesday, when Alex Bugnon arrives from New York for his annual week chasing elk here. Having someone else to hunt with is really



Elkheart in his habitat.

motivating and energizing, though as Alex learns the local landscape better every year and increasingly gets the hang of the game, like you and me, we hunt mostly apart. He likes to walk as much as I like to sit. And having been raised in Switzerland he views every mountain as a challenge to take on. Walking is interesting and you see more elk, but mostly from a distance and/or running away. And after enough strolling around you’ve alerted every elk on the mountain to your stinking presence. Sitting is boring unless you have a Zen mind that appreciates every little thing around you at every moment, which I do and so do you. And one of these evenings a bull will come in to drink and give me a Christmas shot opportunity, just like so many times before. Hunting is an exercise in faith ... no, not faith, but positive patience.

Anyway, all of that with the invisible bugler played out last night. Tonight was even better. Much better, even though I’ve rarely spent so much time so close to so many elk talking constantly, while not seeing any of them because the vegetation, primarily aspen saplings, is so thick. When I parked my truck about 4 p.m., a bull was already bugling from up the mountain, somewhere around Elk Spring, you remember, on the east side of the Bowl from Hillside. He ran around in the Bowl between the two springs, bugling all evening and really had the cows going on several exciting occasions,

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The Hillside wallow minutes after the “invisible” bull departed.

leaving me pinned down for fear of getting busted if I tried a stalk with all those moving noses out there and shifting breezes, hoping the herd would drift my way. When I finally left at dark, the bull was right back where he'd started, at Elk Spring. Darn it, I'm going out in the morning. Enough fooling around and warm-up. Time to get serious. — Selah ...

To Alex Bugnon (a week later): Forty-one degrees this morning, light sprinkles, another perfect hunting morning. But I'm giving the elk a day off.

Last evening was yet another fun time chasing a bugler at close quarters, but frustrating also. I've been going out anywhere from 2:30 to 4 p.m. and straight to Hillside Spring. Yesterday I was a bit late because I had to help Caroline process our annual bushel of roasted green chilies (which, along with elk meat, always comprise most of our freezer contents going into winter). As soon as I got up the hill from where I park the truck, I heard a bugle that sounded as if it came right from Hillside. Then the wind came up, whipping hard this way and that, and it started raining lightly. The closest conifer trees for shelter were over by Elk Spring, so I went there, where I hadn't been for a couple of days. Once again the spring pool had been hit by elk, including a wallowing bull. Sitting out the sprinkles under a dripping fir, waiting for the rain to slack or quit,

took half an hour, during which I heard no more bugling.

Anyhow, when I finally snuck on over to Hillside — approaching on the game trail that comes out just below the wallow, maybe 60 yards below the spring — the bull was nowhere to be seen or heard. It started sprinkling again, so I hunkered down under a tree, where several years ago I built a half-assed brush blind overlooking the wallow. The wind continued to shift around and I was nervous about being in there at all, knowing a bull had just been in the area and almost certainly was still nearby. I was on high alert the whole time I was there, close to an hour, but nothing came of it until finally, about the time the wind shifted downhill for the evening, the bull bugled again, from just above the spring—not from the ridge toward the Meadows, but in the aspen sapling jungle just north of the spring, and close. I waited until he bugled again before I started moving, at which point he was headed over toward Elk Spring, where I'd so recently been. These guys are really giving me the run-around this year!

But before I took off after the traveling bugler I went over to check the wallow, which had not been used so far this year, and sure enough, it was freshly torn up and stinking. This bull is the most tenaciously local and vocal of several singers I hear most days, so I'd love it if he turns out to be the huge 6x6 I saw

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New York jazz pianist Alex Bugnon, aka “the human ATV,” makes packing elk look easy, in this case dancing down the mountain with a ham and front quarter of the author’s bull, bones still in.

the rain had stopped again and the bugling picked up as the unseen bull headed toward Elk Spring. Thanks to the wet ground I was able to move quietly and fast enough to keep up with him in parallel, maybe a hundred yards below me to the south. Then suddenly, just as I was narrowing the gap, a second singer chimed in from the east, from beyond Big Gulch. The two of them closed on one another and really got into a screaming contest with a “parallel bugling march” uphill, headed north. I had been doing a good job of moving in on the first bull through the thick stuff and had gotten close enough to nock an arrow, but now the pair headed uphill too fast to follow, and the daylight was going fast. So I said shucks, backed off, and started for the truck—when a third bull let out a particularly deep-throated scream from down in the dense little valley below Hillside to the north and the Meadows to the west. He seemed to be cheerleading the other two without participating. My cow calling had no effect on him, as it hadn’t on the two vocal combatants.

on the first of the month, already with 15 cows that early in the rut. But I’m betting it’s the smaller 6x6 that hung around here all summer. What this means is if I hadn’t been late in getting

up the mountain this afternoon, thanks to the chilies, and had I been in my Hillside hide an hour earlier as usual, I might well be packing meat now.

Oh well ... except for dripping trees,

And so it was that I felt a little agi-

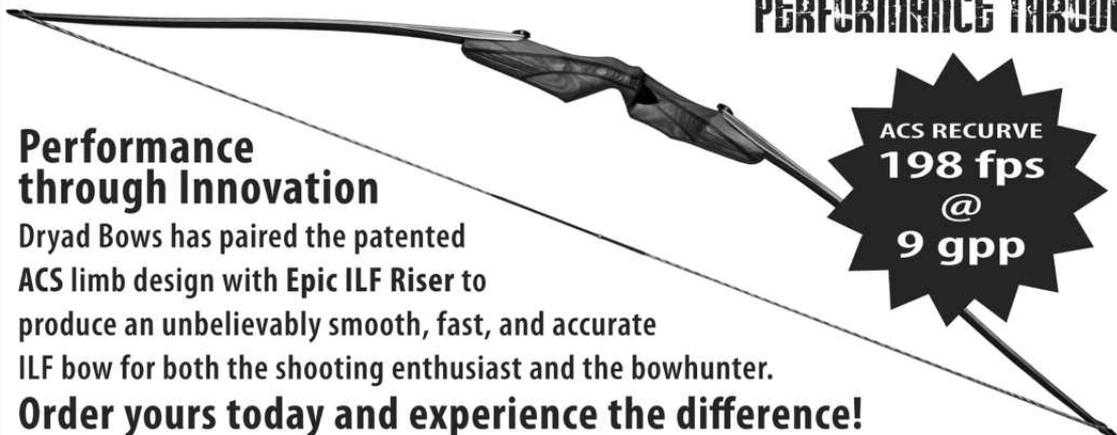
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tated when I got home and heard myself grumping to Caroline, "I've had enough fun already. Time for some action." Having sat in ambush, not always comfy, for some two weeks, to have an elk finally show up right there in the bulls-eye zone and for me to miss a rendezvous with him by just minutes ... Arrgggg. So even though I'm up to my ears in vocal elk, not only can't I get a shot, but so far I can't even get a peek! I'll have to be super careful not to spook these guys out of the springs area or my work will get a whole lot harder. And yours too, when you come next week.

As a side note, I haven't had the crippling leg and foot cramps again, been several days now, but my hands still lock up when writing, tying boot laces, etc. I wonder if I can get through field dressing an entire elk without my knife hand becoming useless. I hope to find out soon!

Adios ...

To Thomas Downing (third week of September): Sitting over Hillside Spring again last night, 6:45. The

mountain had been unusually quiet all evening — not a bugle anywhere. In fact the singing's been tapering off for a few days now. The morning before, there was a bit from the Thumb, up in the NW corner of the Bowl, just as we were getting there, prompting Alex to make a stalk. But the bugling stopped and what he found when he got close wasn't any elk but a big brown sow black bear with two yearling cubs (likely the same trio I saw back on opening morning). As a city boy this was a first close bear encounter for Alex, and later he acknowledged in his musical French accent that the experience had been "On-believable!" But no more bugling all day and the same yesterday morning and evening. My odds didn't seem exactly high. Sometimes, for their own reasons, an entire mountainside's worth of elk will clear out and not return for a week or more. Riches to rags. That was my concern, as it seemed to have happened.

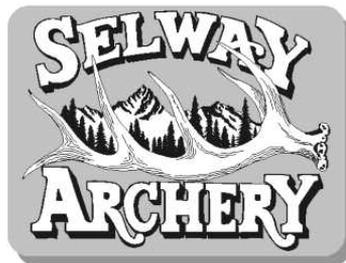
So I'm sitting there drinking a cup of hot tea from my thermos, thinking all these gloomy thoughts, when suddenly

I heard what I knew was an elk tripping down the ridge to my left from the Meadows above, plowing right down through the brush 50 yards away, as seems to be the pattern this year, rather than using the game trail that runs right beside my blind. And maybe a good thing too, as the wind had been shifty and could have switched at any moment. As soon as I saw that it was a nice 6x6 I got ready for a shot. That's when the bull stopped for a look around, just about on my level along the hillside but 30 yards or so through scattered trees and brush. At one point, he looked right at me but failed to see, dressed as I was in a dark brown plaid shirt, camo outback hat and net face-mask.

That was a tense few moments for me. But, apparently reassured that he was alone, the bull came on down to the bench and walked right to the spring pool to drink. When his head went down I waited to see if it would pop right back up again, as so often happens when prey species are at water and feeling vulnerable to lurking predators like

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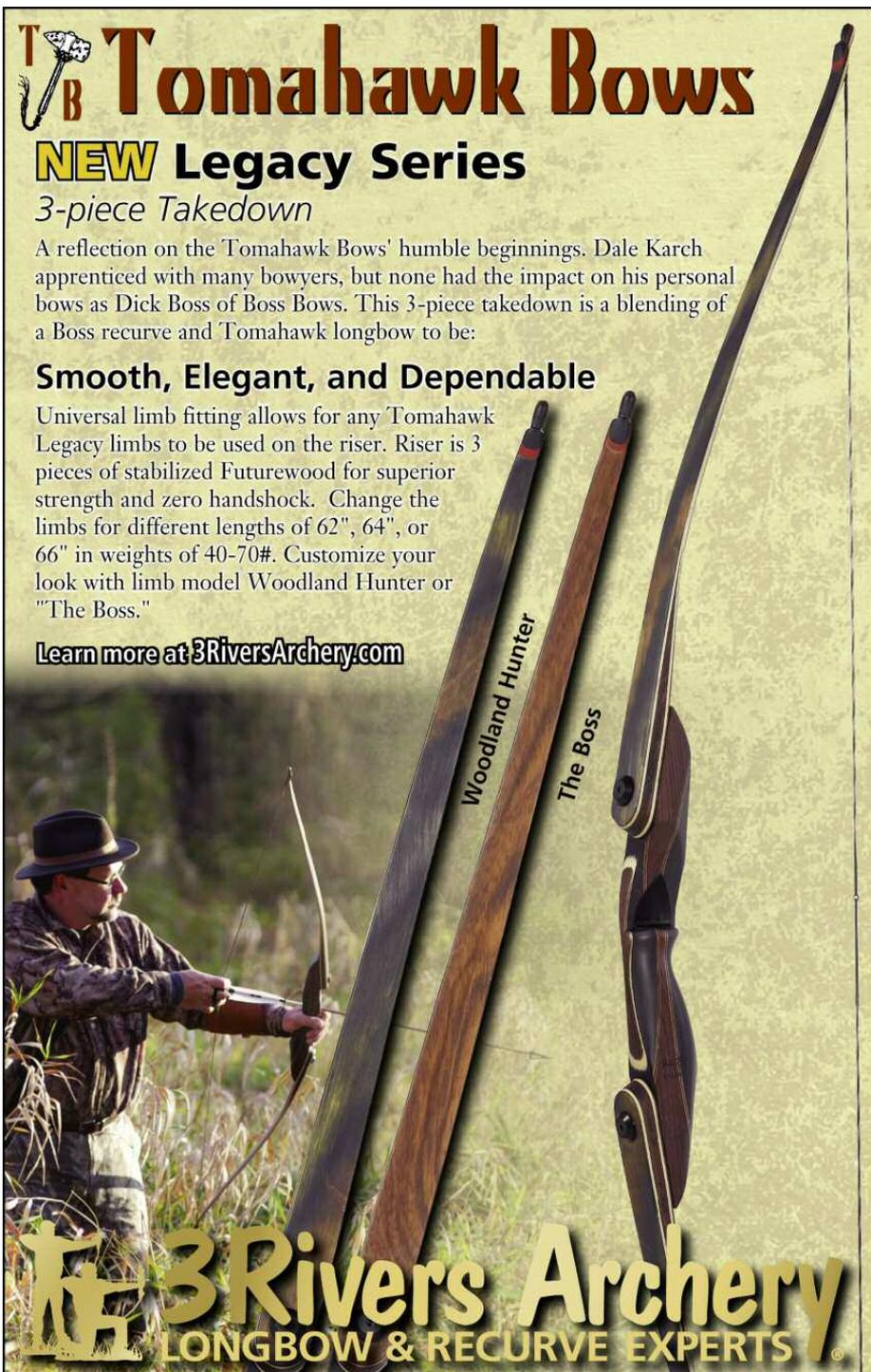
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lions and me. But he kept drinking and I began a slow draw, reciting my silent mantra-in-motion: full draw, solid anchor, shoulders locked back, pick a spot ... I let one fly and saw it hit mid-chest and instantly disappear into fur and flesh. Given the steep downward angle of the shot, maybe 35 degrees, almost like a treestand, I knew it was good if not quite perfect and the arrow would exit low from the off-side chest, with luck slicing the heart as well as both lungs.

So many things could have gone wrong, and have so often before, but this time didn't. Sometimes the magic works! At the shot, the bull raised his head and looked around, then started walking away, not running! But he was already, instantly, behaving uncharacteristically "relaxed" and made it only 15 yards before collapsing. Two deep rattling breaths, then quiet. Dead in seconds and never out of my sight. (In fact I was able to grab my camera and get a quick fuzzy pic of him walking away, an instant before he went down.)

The arrow in fact had entered mid-chest and exited low-chest on the off side, barely missing the heart while missing all ribs coming and going. He's a strange, lovely bull with six points on the left side and only four on the right. Yet both main beams are of equal size so that at a glance the antlers look balanced. I try hard not to look at antlers once I decide to take a shot, and as I approached him a few minutes later and got my first good look I thought, what the heck, he's a 4x4! When I saw that the other beam had six long tines I was almost disappointed, having lost bragging rights to "the world's biggest 4x4."

I was alone — Alex had gone on up the mountain as usual, and we planned to meet at the truck around dark. Working alone I had the animal quartered and bagged in under two hours, mostly working by headlamp as darkness soon came on. It would have been much faster had it not been for an annoying equipment malfunction — a cute little folding bone saw I had recently bought proved to be utterly worthless. I mean, it won't even cut a small aspen sapling or make a scratch on an elk bone! Not wanting to take the extra time in the dark to remove the



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The author with the final load; another European mount in the making.

est spirits.

So once again, after weeks of daily hunting and tons of vocal excitement but no shot ops whatsoever, even on a cow, suddenly I'm sitting there one quiet evening and up walks a dandy bull. Killing from ambush like that, with everything nice and relaxed and almost too easy, can be anticlimactic to all that went before. Yet it's all part of the big picture.

What a gift was this unexpected bull. There's already snow in the high country.

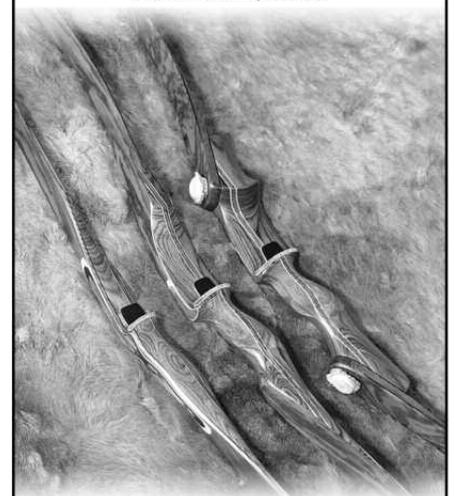
Field Editor David Petersen lives and hunts in rural southwest Colorado where his knowledge of and success with wapiti has earned him such "appreciated, yet a little embarrassing" nicknames as Elkheart and "the man made of elk." Ironically, having entered his "bucket list years," Dave's attention of late is coming full circle, back to chasing whitetails as he did as a teen growing up in Oklahoma.



Equipment Note

On this hunt Dave carried a 53# Shrew Classic Hunter longbow strung with an SBD string. Arrows were CE 250s wearing heavy internals and Tuffhead 225s.

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lower legs at the "knees" with a knife, I opted to leave the legs on until Alex and I came back in the morning for the pack-out. Like a lot of hunters, I guess I'm yet to learn the difference at a glance between gadgets designed to appeal to the eye, and those that actually work. We need John Deeres out here, not Corvettes!

Otherwise, perfect is the word for this kill. I carried out the tenderloins and back straps last night, as I always do — sure was dark out there — and Alex and I got the rest, including the head (another skull mount) in two loads this morning. Doc Dave, bless his curmudgeonly old heart, volunteered to cut and wrap the meat so that I can keep

hunting with Alex. That's a long day's work and really appreciated! Now it's Alex's turn to make meat. And when he leaves in a few more days I still have a cow tag to try and fill with the snaky Osage selfbow Clay Hayes gave me. Oh happy days!

In the end, this experience makes me rethink the value of silent times out there, sometimes spanning days with no bugling or cow talk. Maybe the bulls decide to take a day off from singing once in a while to keep things "cooled down" a bit so that they can rest and eat and drink. Beats me, but it's something to think about. Even when we don't see or hear them for days at a time, they're usually still out there, making like for-

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Searching for Velvet in a Valley of Death

By Doug Humphries

Alaska can make you feel insignificant and powerless. The weather looms, always. It threatens not only to kill you from exposure, but also to knock your tiny little plane from the sky. Bush planes are a requirement if you intend to penetrate our last great wilderness. Though hunters see them as a tool to get into the field and then as a lifeline to get back out, the Alaska weather sees them as toys to be played with and broken at will.

Then there are the wolves — ghostly glimpses by day, ominous howls by night. If you hunt caribou in Alaska you must compete with the wolves. Though

shy by nature and seemingly uninterested in man, one cannot help but imagine what could be if the wolves so chose. Finally there are the bears — the awesome, occasionally horrifying bears. Knowing that grizzlies are present will make a hunter look over his shoulder every few steps. Seeing a print will send a chill up a hunter's spine and put his head on a swivel until he's certain the bear is not nearby. Seeing a grizzly will simply make you freeze.

On my last trip to Alaska, the bears were everywhere. I was hunting the Fortymile region of Alaska's interior. Technically described, the interior is the area south of the Arctic Circle,

north of the Alaska Range, west of Canada and east of 154 degrees west longitude. It's huge. Denali National Park is a small part of the interior, and alone it is the size of Massachusetts.

The Alaska Range sprawls south of Fairbanks, an impressive geological feature that includes North America's tallest peak, Mt. McKinley. The interior is home to the famous Wrangell Mountains, and the Yukon River flows westward across the region from

The bush plane is to Alaska what the mule is to Montana. The only thing more amazing than the versatility of the plane is the capability of the pilot.



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Photo by Doug Humphreys

Camp was situated next to a pre-WWI gold mine. Though everyone in camp looked diligently, both caribou and gold were scarce.

Canada to the Bering Sea.

Almost hidden amidst the iconic landmarks of the interior is the Fortymile region. Tucked between Fairbanks and Canada, this area is home to the Fortymile caribou herd,

which numbered in excess of 500,000 animals in the early 1900s. Since then the caribou have ranged in population from fewer than 10,000 to the current estimate of 38,000 animals. In 1995 the Fortymile Planning Team was initiated, and since then the herd has been intensively managed to accomplish a population target of 50,000 to 100,000 caribou.

The hunt was a drop camp arrangement. Our outfitter provided access to his guide area, arranged a bush flight to the field, and provided the required camp supplies. All the work in the field was up to my four hunting companions and me.

I had to wait two full days for my bush plane transport to caribou camp thanks to low clouds, buckets of rain, and the fact that I was the last of my group to be flown into the field. By Alaska standards, two days really isn't that bad. The problem was that after months of anticipation, minutes seemed like hours and the time passed slowly. Daylight that started and ended in the middle of the night made days feel like weeks.

After hiking the seven miles from the landing strip to the campsite, I recognized that waiting to fly in last was much less a sacrifice than I had originally thought. I was still able to get to camp before opening day, and while I enjoyed my pilot's hospitality my com-

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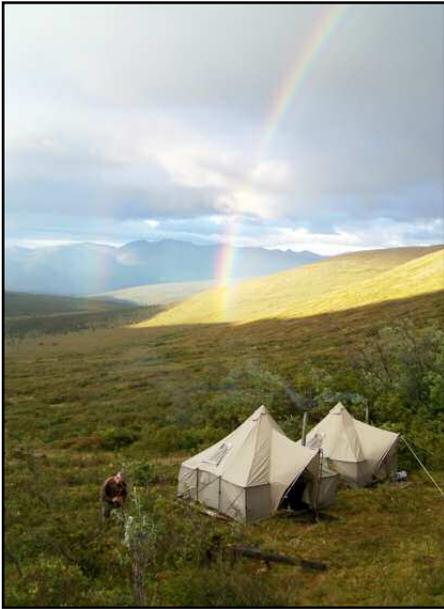
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The valley beneath camp was rarely without a rainbow. Though the country was barren, it carried a mystique all its own.

panions had been hard at work constructing camp throughout two days of miserable weather.

The smartly constructed wall tents puffed white clouds of smoke from wood stove pipes, and the smell of beef stew hung in the air coming from the tarped cooking area. I've set up enough camps to know they had been hard at work, and even if I hadn't, my friends' tired expressions and glossy eyes would have given it away.

The outfitter was in camp when I arrived making sure we were settled. Everything up to that point had gone



Miles of hiking and hours spent behind binoculars staring at nothing presented physical and mental challenges. The author spotted the only shooter bull he saw at over a mile, thanks to persistence behind the glass.

exactly as he said it would, and camp was exactly how he had described: tucked neatly into the head of a valley to stay out of the winds with equipment that was either new or very well maintained. I was curious, though. Normally chatty and lighthearted, he was not talking much and seemed to be concerned about something.

In an attempt to get him talking I suggested that the country was certainly unique for Barren Ground caribou. He seized the opportunity and replied,

"We hunt tough country that happens to be on the migration route. Not many people get to hunt caribou in country like this." I could tell there was a "but."

"Normally, this area would be covered in caribou right now, but ... " I knew it ... "this year we've had more rain than we've seen in over 50 years. It has the migration completely fouled. I flew over this valley last week and there were caribou everywhere, but it seems they may have moved on." This certainly explained the worried look

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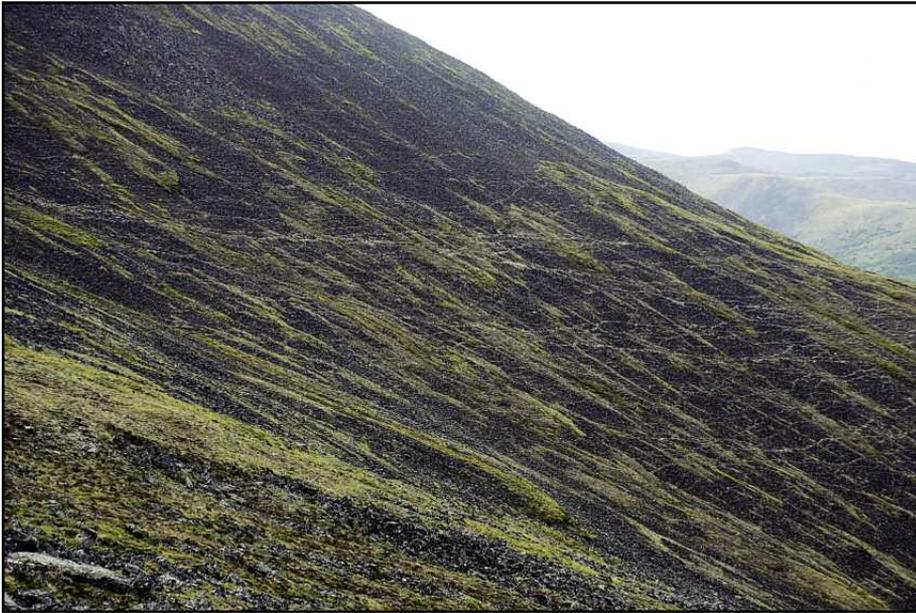
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and quiet disposition.

“On top of everything it looks like there are a few grizzlies around, so you guys will want to be careful. Good luck. I’ll be back to check on you in a few days.” With that he was off to the landing strip and we were left to our hunt.

The first day of hunting produced one caribou sighting. The second day passed with no better result, as did the third and then the fourth. Worse than not seeing caribou was seeing the bears.

It seemed that every valley we glassed had a grizzly in it.

In a valley not far from camp we discovered a moose kill that was being aggressively protected by an old boar. We hunted elsewhere upon making that discovery. That particular valley was nicknamed the “valley of death” for the rest of the trip. After four long days the group had accumulated over 300 hours of hunting and only put eyes on a few dozen caribou — and on way too many

bears.

On the morning of the fifth day I was behind the glass at 4 a.m. I looked out across the barren ground and could feel its emptiness. There was simply nothing there. My feet were blistered from endless miles of roaming, and it seemed on the rare occasion I did see a caribou it was in the area I had just left. On this day I sat, watched, and hoped a caribou might come to me.

I turned my focus to the ominous dawn. Angry clouds engulfed the high peaks, and the thunder that rumbled through the valleys left me with an uneasy sense of vulnerability. Fall had come early, and though it was only August the tops of the mountains were already white. My fingers, used to east coast heat and humidity, stung from exposure. I raised my binoculars and resumed my futile search.

When I couldn’t take it anymore I placed the binoculars in my lap, rubbed my eyes, and tried to focus through the fading light on the same rugged expanse I’d been looking at for 16 hours. I felt as if I were looking at a painting. Except for light and shadows nothing changed; there was no movement, no noise, no hope. It was 8 p.m. and though I had several hours left until dark, I held little hope that I would see a caribou.

As I sat lamenting a hunt that seemed to have gone terribly wrong, a single bull emerged from the timber across the valley from my vantage point. His long antlers inspired me, and his lazy demeanor gave me hope. Though close to a mile away, I picked up my longbow and began the long hike that would hopefully put me in front of the bull.

The valley was shaped like a giant horseshoe. I was on one side, the bull on the other. At the head of the valley was a saddle that led to the valley where we had found the moose kill: the valley of death. It was clear he was working his way to that saddle, and if I couldn’t get there first, my likely one and only chance at a decent bull would evaporate.

The mountain was steep. What wasn’t rocky was thick with blueberry and dwarf birch. My ankles ached from stumbling through fields of granite and

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my quads burned from wading through waist high bushes that grabbed my legs and stubbornly refused passage.

Despite his lethargic gate, it was clear the caribou was covering ground more quickly than me. My saving grace was that he took every opportunity to rub his antlers in a thick crop of alder or on the trunk of a black spruce. His efforts to expose antler from underneath velvet allowed me to gain ground I was losing, and distracted his attention from my less than stealthy approach.

As I neared the head of the valley, I realized that the funnel that looked tight from a distance actually provided plenty of room for a caribou to pass out of range. I could stretch a shot with my longbow to 30 yards, but closer is always better. I did my best to predict his path, and when he dipped from view I sprinted to a small black spruce for cover. When the bull emerged, he was only 50 yards away and walking right at me.

I turned my focus to the bull and watched as he effortlessly navigated terrain that had bruised both my ego and my body. What appeared lazy from a distance now looked proud, even cocky, up close. He swaggered more than walked, and he held his head at a perfect angle to display his large framed antlers.

As I lie in wait, the sun dipped below the clouds yet stayed just above the horizon. The world was lit with the golden hue of evening light, and the subtle reds and yellows of the barren ground exploded in to a neon swirl of fall color. Heavy dew added an animated sparkle to the landscape, and a rainbow stretched over the bull and ended where he had first appeared.

Now past the distraction of bushes and trees, he walked with purpose toward the saddle. The good fortune of the evening held, and he passed within range of my arrow. I pulled with three fingers against the string, focused on a patch of discolored hair, and allowed my subconscious to take over, trusting it would know best when to release. The bull paused for just a moment, and the arrow flew. It struck with a thud, a few too many inches behind the tuft of hair. The bull bolted up the face and crossed through the saddle,



Photo by Matt Ganitt

Five sixteen-hour days and a mile long sprint put the author in front of a fine interior Barren Ground caribou.

into the valley of death.

Though the shot was a bit farther back than I'd have liked, the blood trail was good. With the semi-dark of an Alaska night looming, I decided not to pursue the bull until morning. The nights were cold, and if the carcass went untouched the meat would be fine.

The next morning did not start like most on a traditional archery hunt. The bows were left unstrung and on the cots, the back quivers left swinging from the frame of the wall tent as we loaded shotguns and rifles. This was not how any traditional archer wants to pursue an animal, but in this case there simply was no reasonable alternative.

We walked from ridge to ridge out of camp until we reached the saddle. To the east was the valley where I'd shot the bull the night before, to the west was the valley of death. We could see the covered moose in the bottom of the valley, its guard conspicuously absent. We each swallowed hard at the thought of the grizzly having a new kill to protect.

We found the blood trail shining crimson on matte gray granite. The trail veered north toward a gully thick with willow. We walked slowly to the edge of the gully and peered over the edge, weapons shouldered. Only yards from where we stood lay the unguarded cari-

bou bull.

With sighs of relief, we posted a guard with a shotgun loaded alternately with slugs and buckshot while the rest of us worked frantically to quarter the bull and load the meat packs.

When we returned to the saddle we looked back one last time into the valley. The bear had returned to his moose kill and he was standing upright on his two back legs watching us as we left his valley.

"Yea, though I walk through the valley of death, I shall fear no evil." But make no mistake; if that valley happens to be in Alaska and I'm hunting caribou, I'll fear the hell out of grizzly bear.

Doug Humphreys is a freelance writer from Shepherdstown, West Virginia, where he lives with his wife Aundrea and children Oren and Amelia.



Equipment Note
The author hunted with a 64" 60# custom 1992 vintage Noble longbow, 3Rivers cedar shafts, and 135-gr. Zwickey heads.

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Floating for Brown Bear

By Nathan L. Andersohn

Rain pelted my face as I hid on the edge of the remote Alaskan river with the water rushing past the tree-lined banks. The constant noise of the water's turbulence pouring over the slippery rocks eliminated any risk of the approaching brown bear hearing my pounding heart as he walked along the far bank 30 yards distant. Unfortunately, he wasn't seeing any splashing king salmon in the shallows. Five bears had already worked down the same trail earlier in the evening, but the swirling winds had given us away every time.

My mind was spinning as I looked for an aiming spot on the bear's ribs; lack of sleep and stormy weather were taking their toll. When the bear stood broadside I started to draw my longbow, but as I reached half draw he turned toward me to scan the river for fish. I let up partially, but redrew as he turned broadside again. In a flash my arrow was gone, and I watched as it passed harmlessly in front of the bear's chest.

He turned, smelled the arrow, and roared as he disappeared into the brush.

I felt devastated after blundering my first ever shot at one of the greatest big game animals in North America. It was a rookie mistake, not letting down completely before picking a spot and redrawing. I had rushed the shot in the panic of experiencing my first chance to take a brown bear.

Before this hunt started, I already had three brown bear hunts under my belt. The big browns had eluded me, and my selection of outfitters hadn't been the best choices I'd ever made. I'd never drawn my bow on any of the previous hunts. Sure, there had been some exciting moments, like a bluff charge by a large sow and three 250-pound cubs. Once, a small bear strolled by at 15 yards and I passed on the shot. The one thing all the hunts had in common was rain, dan-

Tony Mudd, Fred Eichler, and Braun Kopsack in the wilds of Alaska.

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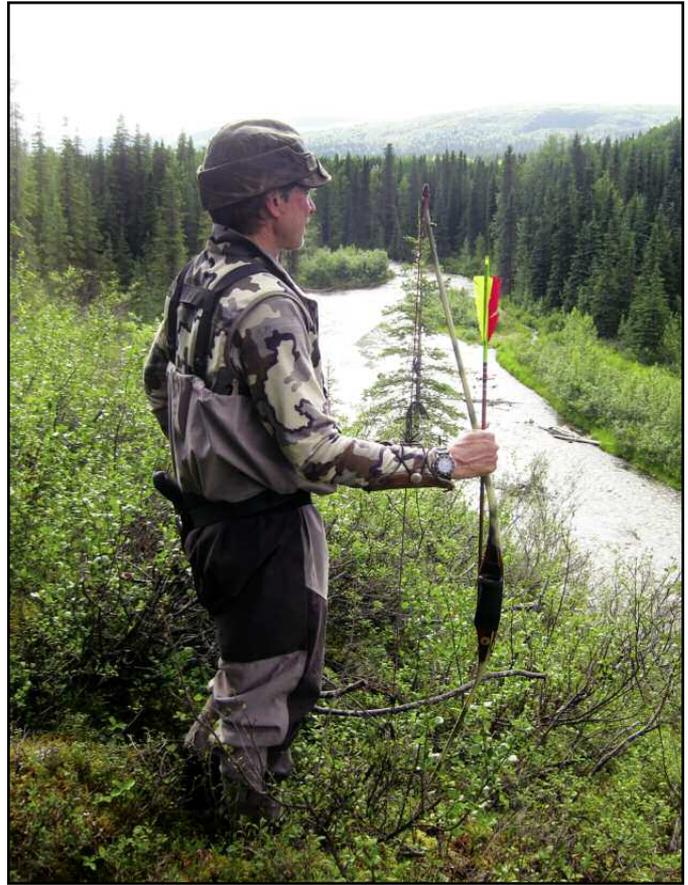


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The author on a bluff overlooking a bear hotspot.

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gerous rivers, wet gear, and days of waiting for a bear to appear.

Even after all the previous disappointments, I wasn't ready to give up. I don't know if it's my German heritage, hunting tenacity, or pure country stubbornness, but I wanted to take a brown bear with my longbow. I also found that I like to hunt dangerous game. The adrenaline shoots through my veins like hot water in a boiler when I get close to critters that can kill me. Whether it's grizzlies, polar bear, water buffalo, or brown bear, I like the rush. The added pressure with dangerous game is that you don't want to put your friends in harm's way by having to follow a blood trail as a result of a marginal hit.

Brown bear hunting isn't for the weekend hunter or the guy that has killed a few deer. The equipment needs, gear preparation, and mental preparedness all come easier after a few decades of hard hunting. A bowhunter needs to be comfortable with the concept of living in a pair of hip boots or chest waders, cool temperatures, downpours of rain, slippery rocks, and fatigue. Camp life is not very glamorous. The goal is to be low-key, with no fires and simple meals. Most of the time you are either hunting or sleeping.

I met outfitter Braun Kopsack through a mutual friend, Tony Mudd. Braun guided Tony to his brown bear. Tony had 29 days of brown bear hunting under his belt before he closed the deal. Braun's father homesteaded in Alaska, so he grew up in the bush hunting, trapping, and fishing. One of the leading mountain runners in Alaska, he runs marathons



High tech in hunting camp, with Tony, Jake and Braun reviewing film in camp.

up mountain passes and is the founder of the Matanuska Peak Challenge, a 14-mile event with a 9,100 ft. elevation gain. Braun has taken 29 Dall sheep with rifle, pistol, and bow. On top of that, his trophy room contains two Marco Polo sheep, brown bear, mountain goats, ibex, and wolves.

We flew in on two floatplanes to a mountain lake. As we inflated the rafts and organized the gear I felt a good spirit in our hunting party, which included guide Tony Mudd, Braun, Fred Eichler, and cameraman Jake Kraus. Tony is a great companion in hunting camp, always positive and happy. Jake, Fred, and I had hunted together several times and see each other occasionally, as we're all Colorado residents. Fred and Jake are a blast to travel and hunt with, as they are both fun-loving, knowledgeable outdoorsmen. You know you're going to have a great time with Fred in camp! Having a gang of serious hunters on a hunt is a real luxury. Fred had taken a bear with Braun before and couldn't wait to do it again.

We floated down the river for several miles to the first campsite. Braun was concerned by the lack of fish and seagulls at the lake, but the farther we floated the more we saw. We'd planned the hunt to coincide with the king salmon run, and four-foot long bright red salmon shot by us like submarines as we paddled through the rapids.

We set up camp in a secluded location away from the river so as not to disturb the bears in the area. The beaten bear trails on both banks indicated we had hit the salmon run perfectly.

Camp was a simple affair: one small Bomb Shelter tent and a large tarp hung overhead to cover our gear and provide a protected area to cook and lounge.

The sleeping arrangements were a bit tight with Tony, Fred, Braun, and me sleeping shoulder to shoulder and Jake crossways at our feet. I had at least one dream about a nice king-sized bed all to myself.

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Fred Eichler with his brown bear.

We hunted the first morning without any sightings and returned for a much needed nap. The nights were short with the sun going down near midnight and rising just a few hours later. The evening hunt proved exciting as the bears started to move. A sow with two cubs cruised by us, but got our wind 100 yards upriver and trotted into the forest. A small bear gave us a show chasing fish unsuccessfully, and then vanished as he apparently winded us too. Then I missed the beautiful boar. I had my head hanging low as we walked back to camp after midnight in the fading light.

The mood quickly changed when we got back to camp and found out that Fred had shot a bear. It was too late to blood trail, so we planned for an early morning. Tony and I walked to the riverbank behind an old beaver dam to hunt while Braun set out with Fred and Jake to search for the bear.

When we returned, Fred was carrying a hide from a good boar. Life was good, with us one for two on bears with the hunt just starting.

Tony and I hunted the next two days with only one sighting of a bear by Tony late the second day. On the fourth day we moved to a second camp after a brief float. All five of us walked a half-mile downriver from camp, staying in the water so as not to leave behind any scent. We needed chest waders because of some large holes next to a steep bluff. We climbed up 15 feet and found a good place for me to set up for an unobstructed shot across the river.

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Tony Mudd, the author, and Braun Kopsack with the author's hard-earned brown bear.

It was around 30 yards to the far bank. Braun told me when I signed up that more than likely I would have a 30-yard shot across the river. I have taken plenty of game beyond that range, but most of those shots did not involve dangerous game.

I practiced all spring and summer at 30 yards and it felt good, but targets and brown bears are two different things. After three days of practice in the field, I felt mentally ready for the shot. The memory of my missed shot was fading, but I knew I had to stay focused.

The sun glared on the water's surface below me as salmon continually passed by. Getting comfortable, I practiced drawing my bow on an imaginary bear on the far shore as I settled in for a long evening. Brown bear hunting is a lot like a rodeo — hours of boredom and seconds of terror — except you don't know which day you get to ride the bull!

But soon Braun whispered "bear" and pointed downriver. I didn't see the bear until it stepped out of the brush. Its blonde fur and blocky head looked handsome in the evening sun as it splashed through the water 80 yards away, chasing salmon in all directions. With the bear distracted, I stalked down the steep bluff closer to the water's edge. Ten feet above the river, I stopped and got ready for a shot.

The bear came across the river then headed up the far bank. I waited until it was perfectly broadside, with my eyes

focused on a scruffy tuft of hair on its chest as I drew my longbow. Then red and chartreuse fletches arced across the river and passed through the bear, sticking in the bank's soft dirt as the bear exploded, spinning and roaring. I saw blood spray out of the exit wound as the bear charged into the brush, and then all was silent. But only for a second, as the team above me jumped up screaming for joy. I raced uphill to join the celebration.

Looking across the river, I could see my shaft covered in blood, and a quick inspection through my binoculars revealed blood sprayed across the white river rocks. Cooler heads than mine agreed we should return in the morning to recover the bear.

We were up early the next morning, eating eggs and pancakes. Hardly well-rested, I needed to see hair before celebrating further. Braun led the way, and a short hundred yards into the woods he called out. After racing forward to the dead bear, I literally gave a bear hug to Braun and Tony. Now I could celebrate after the 34 days I'd spent hunting one of the greatest animals in North America. I'd waited a long time to be in a picture with a brown bear and I wanted to savor the moment.

How could a day start any better than standing next to a brown bear with good friends in the wilderness of Alaska on a beautiful sunny morning? This was a moment to remember.

When regular contributor Nathan Andersohn is not travelling the North Country in search of adventure, he practices law in Broomfield, Colorado.



Equipment Note

The author shot a 60# Black Widow PLX longbow, Carbon Express Heritage 250 arrows, and 3-blade Razor Cap broadheads on this hunt.



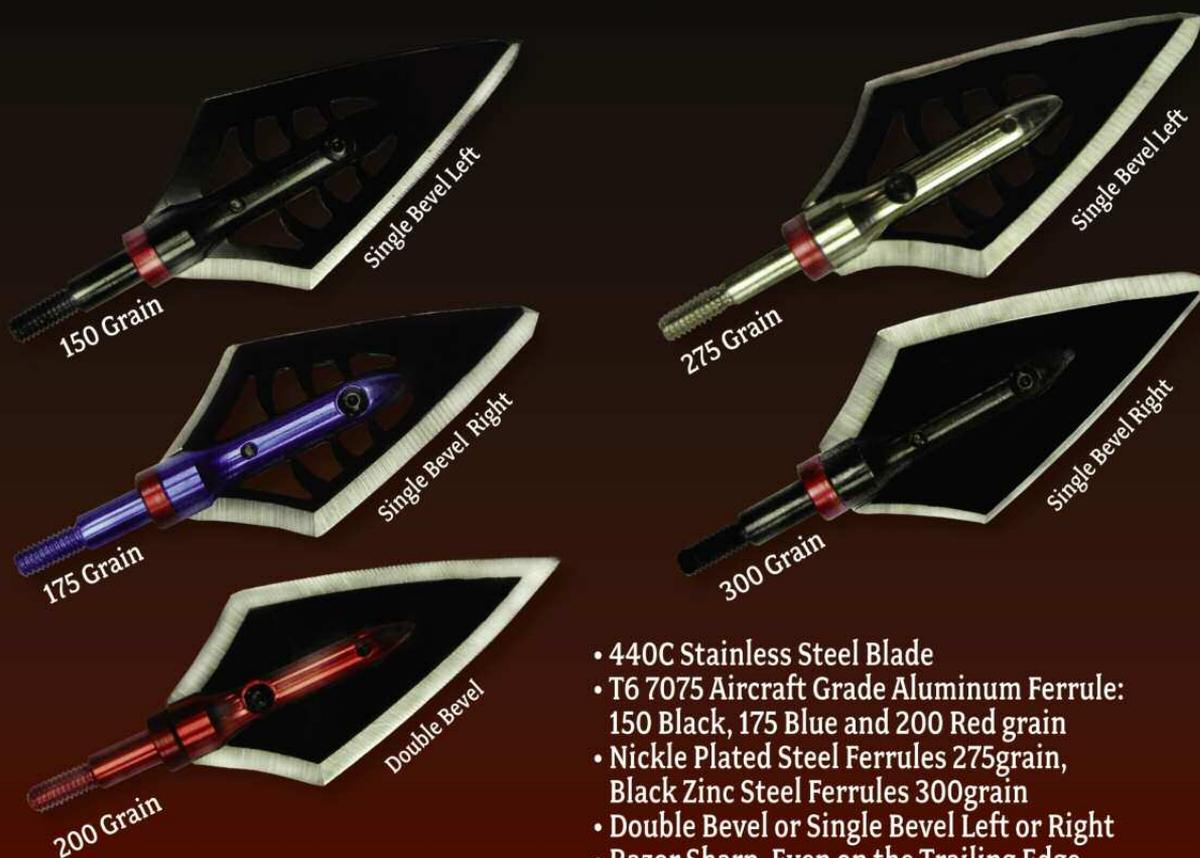
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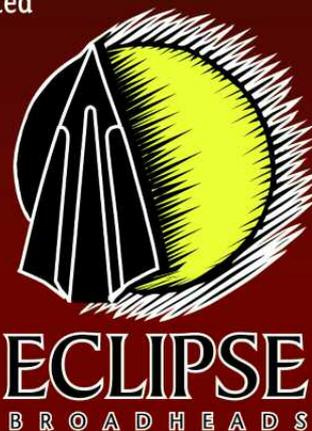
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Pick a Spot!

Axis deer offer plenty of spots to choose from.

By E. Donnell Thomas Jr.

The setting could not have provided a starker contrast to my last deer hunting experience, which took place four months earlier, during the Montana whitetail rut. The weather had been relatively mild by local standards, but I still had to bundle up head to toe in wool and slog through snow the minute I set foot outside the house. Now I was sweating even though I was dressed in shirtsleeves, and the air was alive with the sound of exotic birdsong. Rather than a background of solid snow, my eyes treated me to a view of the broad Pacific when I stopped to rest on my way up the hill.

Credit goes to my old friend Doug Borland for the scouting essential to this hunt. We'd both been hunting

Hawaiian axis deer for years, enjoying some hard won success along the way. The year before, he'd located an area with abundant sign that didn't require quite as much climbing to reach as our usual cover, and we'd enjoyed a number of close encounters there without managing to put a deer on the ground. Since Hawaii was right on the way from our Montana home to the PBS banquet in Portland (well, if you use your imagination) I was back again for another try.

We'd modified our usual axis deer hunting tactics the previous year. We both love pure spot and stalk hunting, and almost all of our experience with the species had come that way. But axis deer are so sharp — more on this subject later — that stalking one in Hawaii's alpine

represents an exceptionally difficult challenge even by traditional bowhunting standards. We'd both done it successfully (at the cost of lots of sweat, blisters, and vertical feet of elevation), but we'd blown a whole lot more stalks than we'd brought to fruition. Given the game density in the new area Doug had located, we'd decided to set up ambushes along trails instead. We'd both experienced close range encounters with deer the year before, but with this species, reaching bow range simply means that the hunt has begun in earnest.

That afternoon, when Doug and

***Don and longbow champ
Larry Yien glassing for deer
in the Hawaiian alpine.***



My first axis deer, taken on a tough hunt in the Hawaiian alpine.

Ernie Holland peeled off toward simple ground blinds Doug had constructed prior to our arrival, I continued on up the hill into new territory. The deer were bedding on top of a ridge during the heat of the day and moving to lower elevations to feed in the evening, much

like elk. After studying the sign, I chose to set up downwind from the confluence of two trails where a patch of brush offered some natural cover.

Then I snipped out a few shooting lanes that would allow me to cover both trails, dug up a spot in the dirt so I

could sit and maneuver quietly, and sat down to wait.

The British Empire, upon which the sun once never set, was responsible for the dispersal of many traditions about the globe, ranging from bad cooking to the language that dominates world commerce today. Wildlife and outdoor sport were part of this diaspora, and species as diverse as brown trout, mallards, and red deer owe their current worldwide distribution to the British. So does the axis deer.

The axis deer (*Axis axis*, or chital) is native to the Indian sub-continent. As a child reading James Corbett's memoirs of man-eating cats (see Dave Tetzlaff's recent review of *Man-Eaters of Kumaon*) I noted with great interest how Corbett would track the course of a tiger through the jungle at night by listening to chital and sambar bark as the cat moved through their territory. Sadly, free ranging wildlife is nearly gone in India now, so it is unlikely that any of us will ever have a chance to hunt these deer in their native range.

Fortunately, the British who colo-

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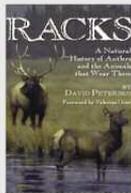


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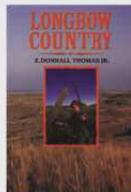
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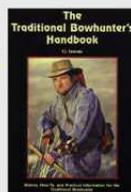


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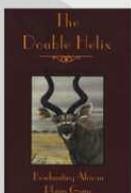


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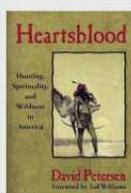


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Glassing for deer in Argentina.

nized India were generous enough to share their bounty with countrymen far and wide. As a result I have been able to hunt free ranging chital successfully in Hawaii, Australia, and Argentina. They do occur closer to home, in Texas. While most of us associate Texas axis deer with exotic game farms, in which I have no interest, free range chital were introduced to Texas in 1932 and have reproduced successfully in 32 counties, although I have no experience with them there.

The British brought their sporting traditions to Australia's "fatal shore" when they settled there in the early 19th century, but they soon realized that their new home contained no mammals other than marsupials, the platypus, and the dingo (the latter likely derived from descendants of the Asian red wolf introduced by early Malaysian traders.) Through their Acclimatization Societies, the colonists addressed that natural deficiency for better or worse by introducing feral populations of animals ranging from Asiatic water buffalo to camels to feral pigs, goats, and six species of deer, including the chital.

Axis deer were introduced to Argentina in 1906. Although I am unable to document direct British influence on this introduction, British residents of Argentina and Chile did have Acclimatization Societies and they were responsible for the introduction of the brown trout to these countries, so I infer

their involvement in the introduction of Old World deer as well. Axis deer reached Hawaii in 1857 as a gift from the British government in Hong Kong to King Kamehameha V.

Australia, Argentina, and Hawaii all share certain characteristics that enabled these introduced deer to thrive: a mild climate similar to India's, abundant forage, and, most significantly, an all but complete absence of the natural predators they faced regularly in their home environment, especially the big cats. (There are cougars in Argentina, but no felids inhabit Australia or Hawaii except feral house cats.) The deer have fared so well in all three places that biologists now worry about their impact on native plant species and habitat.

I have developed a tremendous respect for chital no matter where I've hunted them, and not just because I share the widely held opinion that they are the most beautiful of all the world's deer. Whitetails set the standard for wariness among American bowhunters (although those experienced with African plains game may already be questioning that opinion.) A comparison between chital and whitetails proves interesting. I think the chital's senses are every bit as acute, and their vision may be better. Axis deer seem to lack some of the whitetail's spooky "sixth sense" intelligence, but their reaction times are even quicker. Chital lack pre-



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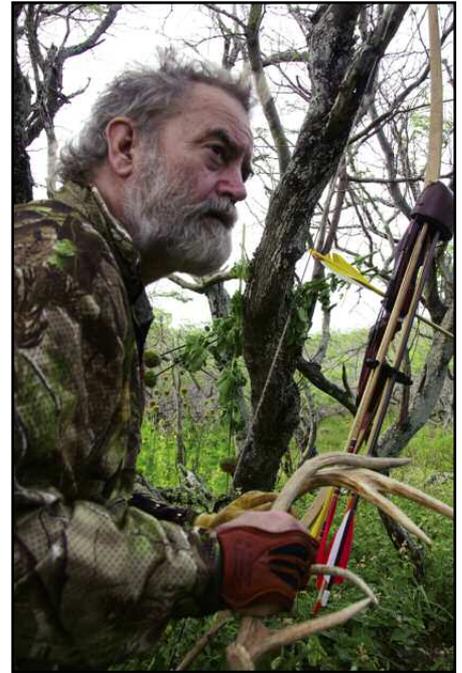
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dictable rut behavior, don't respond to calls or rattling (I've tried), and rarely inhabit terrain suitable for treestands. And the winner is ... ?

When Dave Petersen asked which individual animal I'd taken meant the most to me during an interview for this magazine (**TBM**, De/Jan. 2010) I didn't have to think long about the answer.

That animal was my first axis deer, and although I've told the story before I think it bears repeating because of the insights it offers about hunting them.

That hunt also took place in Hawaii. Our day began with a steep uphill hike through rain drenched jungle brush. Just shy of the alpine, I set off in one direction while Doug and our Hawaiian friend Walter Naki continued in the other. An hour later, I'd met a strong blast of wind burbling over the top of the mountains and, soaking wet and chilled in cotton hunting clothes, lay hunkered down behind a bush contemplating the irony of surviving all those seasons in Alaska only to die of

hypothermia in Hawaii.

An hour later, the sun broke through the clouds and I set off around the side hill into the valley beyond. I was traversing a wet, slippery slope when a commotion erupted in the brush below me. The wind had carried my scent down into the bottom of the draw, sending an axis hind bounding up the other side.

She offered no possibility of a shot, but the noise she made roused two stags from their beds farther up the draw. When the pair reached the top of the opposite side, the larger of the two paused quartering away, staring intently in the direction the hind had taken. The stag stood at least 40 yards from me and probably farther, but I somehow felt confident that I could kill him even though the shot was beyond my usual range. And I did. I still had to get the deer down off the mountain, but that exercise turned into a labor of love before it was over.

Now to those insights I promised. First, hunting axis deer in Hawaii is a whole lot tougher physically than most people imagine. Second, because of its inherent difficulty, the bowhunter may need to test the limits of his range. I'm certainly not advocating irresponsible shots. I'm simply suggesting that if you are faced with a difficult but reasonable

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shot, you better take it because, in contrast to many other bowhunting situations, it's unlikely to get any better. Third, success on an axis deer hunt requires the simultaneous occurrence of two unusual events: perfect execution by the hunter and a mistake on the part of the deer.

Australian axis deer inhabit a geographically restricted range along the Queensland coast, and I consider myself fortunate to have experienced several opportunities to hunt them. During those hunts I enjoyed numerous stalking opportunities, but I only released one arrow. Fortunately, it proved to be a good one.

That hunt marked the start of my transition from spot and stalk tactics to ambush hunting for chital. It began one morning when my great friend the late Bill Baker and I watched a line of axis deer with a tremendous stag at the rear work its way through an isthmus between a lake and a steep wall of boulders as they returned to their bedding area in the Great Basalt Wall. Rather than risk spooking them by an ill-advised approach, we carefully noted



Don and the late Bill Baker with an Australian stag.

some landmarks and returned in the dark the following day.

Since Bill was eager to obtain some video footage of a successful axis deer hunt with traditional tackle, he lagged behind with his camera while I carefully worked into position behind a downed tree the deer had passed the

day before. After a long, motionless wait, I saw deer filtering toward me down the lakeshore, but something told me that they were going to pass wide of my log. After I oozed 15 yards laterally, the lead hind veered again onto a vector that would take her right into my lap. I had apparently out-thought myself, but

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Even without game, the view from the Hawaiian alpine can be spectacular on a clear day.

at that point there was nothing to be done but await developments.

When the hind stopped mere feet away, I had to endure one of the longest stare-downs of my bowhunting career. Fully expecting an explosion of alarm barks at any moment, I closed my eyes and slowed my breathing down until it resembled a hibernating bear's. When I finally heard the hind walking off on my upwind side, I knew that the hardest part of the hunt was over.

But I still had to kill the stag. By the

time I felt comfortable enough to open my eyes and look around, I felt disappointed to see that the stag at the end of the line wasn't the exceptional specimen we'd seen the day before. But not too disappointed ... when he paused in front of me I sent an arrow through his ribs and watched him pile up 30 yards away.

I learned some lessons from that encounter as well, prime among them being that if you can survive initial scrutiny by an axis deer or a member of its herd, you have a reasonable chance

of getting away with some delicate close range maneuvering. That realization proved valuable during my last Hawaiian hunt.

Sitting in a ground blind cobbled together from natural materials bears little resemblance to similar vigils conducted from pop-up blinds or other more elaborate structures. My "blind" did little more than break up my outline, so I had to hold still ... really still. Absent a chair to sit on, I had to be ready to move quickly into shooting position without being detected. Rocks and thorns beneath me eliminated any possibility of comfort.

Since perfect discipline is practically impossible in such conditions, the trick is to pick up approaching deer as far away as possible. All that requires is vigilance, and mine was rewarded when I saw a flicker of movement in the brush shortly after I'd settled in. By the time the flickers became deer, I was up on one knee in position to shoot in the direction they seemed most likely to take.

The first deer in line were hinds, as usual. But by the time I could identify a dozen spotted forms moving toward me I hadn't seen a single antler, and no more deer were visible behind them. Did I want to sacrifice the possibility of a stag that probably wasn't even there for a shot at a deer with no horns?

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Don's most recent chital, taken for venison and not for antlers.

Damn right I did. We rarely eat store bought meat when we're in Hawaii, preferring the finer, cheaper, and more gratifying fare we can obtain from the hills and the sea. And I'd eaten enough chital to recognize it as some of the finest venison in the world. (I use the term venison in the European sense, to refer to all wild game meat and not just deer.) The cupboard was bare back at base camp, and a plump axis hind was just what we needed to get us through the rest of our stay.

But I learned years ago not to count on venison before it's on the ground, and even as the lead hind reached bow range I knew I still had a long way to go. And sure enough—the old rip veered off at the last moment on a course that would take her on my downwind side. She had enough of a quartering tailwind for me to hope she wouldn't spook immediately, but I knew it was only a matter of time.

More deer had walked into bow range by then, but they were all quartering toward me. Since there is a difference between testing the limits of your bow range and taking a shot at an irresponsible angle, all I could do was wait. Then the inevitable alarm bark erupted behind me and the brush was full of deer bouncing around like popcorn in a hot pan.

But that first chital on the moun-

tainside years earlier had taught me that it was too early to stop hunting. I remained positioned for a shot, and when a dry, mature hind appeared broadside at 30 yards and hesitated, I took it. The *splat* that followed reminded me that while spine hits may not be pretty, they sure are effective, especially when they eliminate the necessity of a difficult nighttime tracking job miles from the nearest road in weather warm enough to make meat spoil quickly.

Even with the deer lying at my feet, the day's challenges weren't over. Because of airline weight considerations, I'd taken my trusty Randall knife out of my duffle before we left home. With the tropical night fast descending, I learned that the folding knife I'd substituted at the last minute wouldn't cut butter much less field dress a deer.

Fortunately, Doug and Ernie were a bit better equipped, and after we regrouped we soon had the venison dressed, bagged, and on our backs for the walk out by headlamp.

And when the steaks came off the grill the next night, I remembered why axis deer don't need to carry horns to make them worth whatever effort it takes to shoot one.

The full-time move back to Alaska mentioned last year didn't happen when Don realized that he'd worked for himself for too long to work for anyone else. He and his wife Lori remain Montana residents. Have Bow, Will Travel, Don's latest bowhunting book, is available through donthomasbooks.com.



Equipment Note

On his last axis deer hunt, Don carried a 64# takedown longbow by Neil Jacobsen, cedar arrows, and 2-blade Magnus heads.



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Thanks For the Snowshoes

By Tim McKinley

“You cook good rabbit pilgrim. Cold up here.”

— Bear Claw Chris Lapp to Jeremiah Johnson

There’s one! I watched a snowshoe hare shuffle farther along beneath a dead spruce that was hanging parallel to and a couple of feet above the ground. It had spotted me and moved a bit deeper into the cover. That may have been a mistake, as I might not have spotted it had it remained still. It was a relatively long shot, and all I could see was a bit of its shoulder and most of its head, but I was afraid if I headed closer or more to the side for a better angle it would spook and be gone. I carefully rotated around on my snowshoes, drew, focused, and heard a welcome smack as my arrow made it just over the branch in front of the hare and into its shoulder, anchoring it. Good times.

For the majority of Alaska’s diehard hunters, hunting snowshoe hares in winter involves not enough meat and too much fuss. But in my book, snowshoes are just too good to pass up with a stickbow. It’s been said that small game means big fun, and hares fit the bill for me, especially dur-

ing their peak population years. I enjoy playing cat-’n-mouse with them with my bow, for they can be challenging to spot and then challenging to hit.

There’s no closed season on hares in Alaska, but I prefer to go early (late October/early November) in the winter when the snow isn’t deep yet, and late (February/March) when the days are longer and the coldest weather is behind us. Where I live, the sun comes up at 10:12 a.m. on December 21 and sets at 3:53 p.m. That still leaves plenty of daylight to chase rabbits, but I prefer longer days. The hares are generally all white during those time periods, except for their dark eyes, a few darker hairs around their ears, and some yellow on the undersides of their feet. You should look for the dark eye, but I also find them by spotting part of their rounded shape or their coats’ slightly different shade of white against the snow. Although their coat color seldom matches the white of the snow exactly, it does keep them from being spotted from a distance, and I hate to think of how many I’ve likely

Just as cold as it looks. Last light breaking on the edge of some bunny habitat.



***Not the first hunter through this patch today;
a medium-sized lynx beat the author to it.***

walked past without seeing them.

Outdoor folks who live in good snowshoe country mark time by the cycles of hare numbers through the years, the way people everywhere mark time with graduations, births, deaths, and anniversaries. We remember where we were and what we were doing during the peak years when there can be absolutely incredible numbers of hares. Snowshoe numbers generally build to a peak every seven to ten years, drop off precipitously, and then slowly build again. The first peak I can remember occurred when I was working as an intern at a moose research facility near Sterling, Alaska in the mid-1980s. As we would make our way down the tight, primitive roads to sample vegetation along transects in the spring that year, we heard a constant thunder of little foot-beats in the brush as the hares scattered back into the thicker stuff away from us. Then I found a real sweet spot for bunnies near Clear, Alaska during the last winter I lived in Fairbanks in the early 1990s, although that peak was smaller. Now I'm marking time to the end of another peak, with enough hares that my wife and I have them all around the first house we ever bought.

Now I only go after them when there's snow on the ground, but conditions can vary a lot between early and late winter. Early in the season when the snow is relatively shallow, the hares make few trails but hop everywhere and the snow often looks like a white carpet of tracks. A novice snowshoe hunter out for a walk then might think there were a lot more hares than there really were. Then as the snow gets deeper many fresh tracks appear on top of older ones as the

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After spotting a snowshoe, the next trick is to try and find a way to thread an arrow to it.



A 3-blade Snuffer with the tip cut off, backed by a Zwickey Scorpio, is the author's preferred head.

hares create trails. I use different tactics with different snow depths, considering what might happen after the shot. If I hit the bunny, will the shot anchor it? If I miss or get a pass-through, will I be able to find my arrow?

All kinds of heads (rubber blunts, hex heads, SGH-type heads) will kill hares, but I sleep better, eat more rabbit, and buy fewer arrows using a blunted Snuffer with a Scorpio behind it, especially in deep snow. With this set-up, as long as I can find the hole in the snow where the arrow entered I can usually find it. The Snuffer tends to stick to any brush it might hit under the snow, rather than bouncing off at a different angle. The Scorpio grabs the snow and slows the arrow down through friction, stopping it a lot quicker. To blunt the Snuffer, I just put a cutting wheel on my Dremel tool and cut the last section of the tip off to create a slot in the blades. With the Scorpio added, the limiting effect on penetration is incredible.

For shafts, I've sometimes used the carbons that I use on big game, but less expensive aluminum arrows or cast-off arrows from friends make a better option. I try to remember to carry bright flagging tape to mark the general area where I've lost an arrow. Often I'll come back weeks later after the snow has melted and find the arrow sitting high and dry in the open.

Late in the winter when there is typically three or four feet of snow on the ground, wearing snowshoes is absolutely essential. However, getting squared around for a shot with snowshoes and heavy clothes on can be a lot like a WWII tank slowly turning on its tracks and rotating its turret. I'm partial to the old Sherpa snowshoes, which unfortunately are no longer made. Funny how attached you get to some gear. The lacing and boot harnesses on my go-to pair (10" x 38") are worn out after countless miles on them, and one of the metal extension tubes is actually broken, but I'm still looking for parts instead of buying a different pair. While the smaller Sherpa's are fine, I prefer the extra flotation the larger ones provide. You can still find them used, but they're hard to find.

Snowshoe hares make a bit bigger target than cottontails, but they are extremely lean. I've never found much fat on them. I try to hit them right on the shoulder or tight behind it. Hit there with a blunted Snuffer, they don't go far at all.

For me, hunting hares is a still-hunting game. At least partly because of the thick cover, I'm almost always shooting at stationary targets. While dogs aren't necessary, they could really help in some situations. But when there are decent numbers of bunnies I like snowshoeing through good cover slowly, trying to look everywhere, including behind me. I prefer to go out in the afternoon following a light snow so that any tracks I see will be fresh. We get a lot of snow, but days or weeks can pass between snowfalls. Old snow with layers of tracks made over time makes it harder to recognize recent sign.

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When it all comes together.

I've learned to rest my eyes constantly when moving through areas that have little or no fresh sign. Snowshoes don't use holes in the ground as cottontails do, but they do make and use holes under the snow. One of my best new spots contains a lot of downed white spruce. The bunnies there have dug holes in the snow that get them into the hollow area created by snow covering the branches of the fallen trees. Once underneath the snow, they are able to move along the entire length of the tree where they are insulated in their own snow cave and can move around without predators spotting them. I often find them right on the edge of one of these holes, where the trick is to hit and stop them before they duck into it. While the tracks indicate that some of the hares I see near these holes have been sitting there before I showed up, I also think that some of them heard my approach and came out of their lairs to investigate. Nearness to the entrance holes must give them a sense of security. More often I find hares tucked into the hollow bowl of shallower snow under a standing spruce or backed under some snow-covered, overhanging alder or willow.

One of the things that saves hares from me is my camera. I carry a small but high-quality point-and-shoot digital model in a zippered coat pocket. Often as not, when I spot a sitting rabbit I reach for the camera before the bow. By the time I put the camera away and get my bow up, my target has frequently had enough and is gone! But I like to go home with some nice pictures, and they'll last a lot longer than any stew ingredients that are still hopping around because I

reached for my camera first. Although hares make good eating, I probably like taking their pictures even more.

On the table snowshoes offer a bit of familiar rabbit flavor, but it's not very strong. There's a surprising amount of meat on them, mostly on their hindquarters, but even the backstraps provide at least a few bites. I've eaten snowshoe hares brined and smoked, brined and grilled, pan fried, and, of course, in stews. But I can't remember ever cooking one on a spit over an open campfire as in the movie I quoted at the start. I'll have to try that some time.

First-time contributor Tim McKinley works as a fisheries biologist in Alaska.



Equipment Note

The author hunts snowshoes with his 58" 60# Black Widow PSAX and the shafts and heads described above.

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A Tough Way To Do It

By G. Fred Asbell

I was disappointed that Pitt wasn't coming out to elk hunt with me, but I understood about the problems he was having with his knee. Colorado elk country is no place for a man with a bum knee. We'd never chosen the luxury of a drive-in camp near a road, knowing that roads meant people and people meant a limit on the number of animals we'd encounter, particularly elk. We always backpacked with a small tent, freeze-dried food, and a Svea stove. We'd talked about trying to locate a decent place that would allow us to drive, but Bob decided it would be best for him to

just give the knee a year's rest.

So with hunting alone in mind I decided to do some things differently. At the time — this was nearly 30 years ago — I was doing a lot of backpacking, and I'd read about some intense, survival-type hunts, which sounded appealing to me. This would be an opportunity to do a few things I'd thought seriously about, like getting up high with my whole camp on my back and staying with the animals day and night. I'd camp where I was when I ran out of daylight and be up there right with them before it even got light in the

morning. I'd do the whole cold camp routine: eat jerky and pemmican, build no fires, erect no camp, and stay on their tails night and day. Every now and then someone did an article in one of the magazines about doing that very thing, and they always made it sound like a great adventure. I felt confident I was tough enough to do it too.

Mule deer and elk season opened in early September. I spent the first ten days chasing mulies and waiting for the bugling to begin. I love hunting white-tails and I've hunted them often, but their celebrated rutting activities seem

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reserved compared to rutting bull elk. I lay awake the last night of my mule deer hunt remembering how crazy the bulls had been some years and getting excited about the coming "bare essentials" elk hunt I had planned.

I'd found a one-pound down sleeping bag, which is unbelievably light compared to the usual three or four. I also had a bivy sack, which is an ultra-light nylon waterproof envelope that replaces a tent and is barely large enough for a single reclining person. I'd carry minimum weight and be warm and dry under almost any conditions. I'd done a couple of weekend pack trips eating only pemmican and jerky, and though hardly superior dining, I was sure that would sustain me.

Pemmican, as the Indians made it, was ground up jerky and fat melted together, with berries and nuts added. The French voyageurs were said to prefer it over any other food as a source of stamina and energy. A mountaineering company was offering their version in small tins, and I found it reasonably palatable. The pleasure would be in the elk hunting and not the accommodations, I told myself. I had a few moments of doubt about what I was doing, but I felt as prepared as anyone could be.

Near the middle of September following an evening of mixed snow and

rain, I parked at the end of the road, unloaded, hoisted my Kelty pack onto my shoulders, and headed up the trail toward elk country and adventure.

Just after daylight, I broke out of the timber and turned northwest following the tree line. As soon as I reached the open I began hearing and seeing elk moving in and out of the edge of the trees. There was elk sign everywhere, and it seemed like a good time to begin hunting. I followed a heavy trail that lead me down into dark timber and a ravine with water in the bottom. The wind was still moving upward so I sat and broke out the pemmican, hoping to see elk even though it was mid-morning and everything had moved out of the openings above me. The bugling had suddenly stopped as though someone had said, "Everyone shut up on three! One, two ..."

I stayed barely in the trees for a while, moving west down the valley, and then went on up to the ridge through a line of huge rocks that gave me some cover, just in case. I could stay out of the wind behind one of the rocks and keep an eye on the timberline, waiting for the elk to move out and feed just before dark. Heavy clouds rolled in before long, dropping the temperature and producing strong, gusty winds that kept everything down in the timber. Before dark I headed down to the timber too, hoping to find a little wind protection and a warmer spot to spend the night.

I don't know that I've ever been so happy to see morning and sunlight arrive as I did the following day. Without question that was the longest, coldest, most uncomfortable night I've ever spent outdoors. My one-pound sleeping bag in Gote-Tex bivy just didn't get the job done at all! I'd sure outsmarted myself on this one. My teeth chattering really did keep me awake all night. My light bag didn't provide enough insulation, and the bivy sack didn't wick moisture away as advertised. There was enough condensation inside the sack to float a boat. These equipment shortcomings combined to make for one very cold, miserable night. What a fool I'd been!

I managed to get a fire built, which I hadn't planned to do, and drank some heated water to help me warm up,

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which helped considerably. I felt pretty stiff as I loaded my Kelty and started up through the trees for timberline, where I was sure I'd find elk. My pack seemed a lot heavier than it had the day before. The wind had settled overnight, and I figured the elk had probably moved into the meadows to feed.

By the time I'd made the climb, my uncomfortable evening was forgotten and I was trying to figure out the location of a loud bugle off to my left that sounded as if it had come from a dragon. I paused well inside the trees and glassed before proceeding cautiously ahead, being careful to stay far enough back that I'd be hidden. As soon as you're in the open every animal around has you spotted. A deer may just go over a ridge or into cover, but elk will typically run over several ridges, not to be seen again.

I was a step or two behind everything all morning. I heard but never saw one bull and only a couple of cows with calves. One cow locked onto me and kept me pinned down for an hour. By the time she moved away, things had quieted down. My pack was definitely a problem. It was uncomfortable and made me overbalanced when I was squatting or kneeling. It didn't take a genius to see that carrying my camp with me on my back was not the way to hunt elk, regardless what the magazine articles said. It was heavy and constantly pulled me to one side or the other as I tried to move smoothly. I'd already decided I was going to have to drop it someplace before the evening hunt.

Everything I'd thought would work on this hunt was making me look like a rookie. The solo backpack hunts written about in the magazines were usually about sheep hunts with guns, with the hunter sitting and glassing, moving from one vantage point to another, and eventually downing his trophy from a ridge 400 yards away. But moving up and down the mountain, alternately sneaking and hurrying, is what bowhunting elk is about, and that's definitely a different kettle of fish. For the close-in work of bowhunting, carrying my camp on my back was not a good way to go.

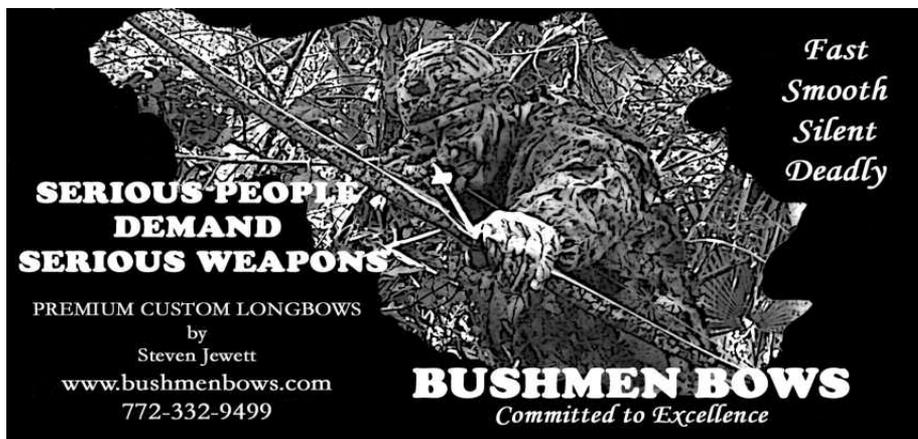
Mid-morning, I looked for a place to

get out of the wind but still be where I could keep an eye on the tree line and wait for the evening hunt. I got cold after my pemmican lunch and moved to a patch of ground balsam where I could lay down out of the wind and still keep an eye on things and maybe doze a little. I was still cold when a decent bull came out of the timber 500 yards away just before dark. The wind was wrong, but wanting to get some blood moving I considered how I could circle around on the upwind side during the remaining light. I had hardly started when the bull turned and went back into the timber in response to a bugle. Then cows and calves began appearing all along the edge of the trees, but it had become too dark to do anything but look for a place to hole up for the evening.

I'd decided to sleep down close to the

bottom of the valley below where I'd slept the previous night. An area there had been logged some years before, and I remembered a number of big logs I could use as a wind block. Hopefully, it would be a little warmer there.

I put on all the clothing that I'd brought with me, and I did a little better that night. I ate extra amounts of pemmican and jerky and did jumping-jacks before crawling into my bag and vented my bivy sack more. That helped some, but there was still lots of condensation inside. I was up before daylight, again trying to get a fire going to help stop the shivering. I was sure the fire wasn't a good thing as far as the elk were concerned, but survival came before meat at the moment. There was a lot of frost and I struggled getting a decent blaze going, but eventually my



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old Boy Scout training came to the rescue. I caught myself nodding once I'd warmed up and had to admit the thought of lying down beside the fire and going to sleep felt tempting.

The next couple of days passed like the earlier ones, with elk, cold wind, some snow, some rain, lots of walking and climbing, being in the wrong place continually, and no shots. There were plenty of elk in the area and I'd hit the rut just right, but too much seemed to be working against me. The bulls were chasing cows in every direction, so there was no rhyme or reason to where they were, nor to the frenzy caused by the chasing.

Typically there's no such thing as spooking *one* elk. Spook one and in a matter of moments a dozen or more animals are usually in flight and you are suddenly all alone where there were elk everywhere the day before. I was being forced to hunt very cautiously, and sometimes that works against you. Given the situation I had chosen for myself, with minimal food, shelter and equipment, this was a lot tougher than most of my bowhunting. But one bull and one arrow were all that I needed.

Easier said than done. By the fifth morning I could feel frustration growing. I raced up and down the mountain all morning again, hearing bulls

bugling all over but never getting to them before they went quiet or moved another ridge away. I was close enough on one bull to see a piece of antler through the trees, which prompted me to pull an arrow from my quiver, but he disappeared without me ever getting a complete look at him. I climbed way up after a bugle that sounded huge, but never located anything more than an empty basin.

Then the mountainside went quiet, as it had the day before. As I walked down the ridge back toward my stashed pack, I stopped here and there and bugled, but the elk were done for the morning, and as it turned out, for the day. By the time I got to my camping spot that evening, I was thinking about throwing in the towel. I wasn't enjoying this "bare essentials" style of bowhunting as much as I thought I might.

In my attempt to go ultra-light, I'd left out a couple of things that I now realize are key ingredients in my enjoyment of a hunt. One was a tent where I could have a light, if only a candle, so I could read after dark and see something when I woke up. Another was real food, a wonderful pleasure to prepare and eat after a long day of exertion. Pemmican and jerky began to taste

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awful in short order, and the fact that they involved no preparation made them even less enjoyable. An extra arrow or two for practice would have been great. (I'd only brought broadheads to conserve space and weight.) I'm a bow shooter, and I feel deprived when I can't turn an occasional arrow loose when I'm bowhunting. On this trip I climbed and hunted hard all day and then had only a cold slab of food and a cocoon to crawl into at night, with no "camp life" at all. Hunting with no light, no heat, and no palatable food was like eating grass and sleeping under a rock.

But I did learn some things about bowhunting and about myself, and that was worthwhile. I decided I'd hunt in the morning and then pack back out, maybe defeated, maybe not. I spent another uncomfortable night, but knew I'd be enjoying a hot cup of coffee soon.

The next morning, I decided it would be a lot simpler to stay low and go down to the meadow along the creek. I'd not done that before, because the elk seemed to be higher up above the timber. I could drop my pack with my camp down there and pick it up on the way back to the pack trail and maybe be down to my rig by mid-afternoon.

Near the edge of the brush along the creek, I immediately saw a couple of cows followed by a small bull coming across the open meadow toward me at a trot. I shucked my pack and went to my knees, drawing an arrow and getting it on the string. The elk saw the movement, swerved to their left, and angled up into the lower edge of the trees. As I came to my feet wondering whether I should follow them or cross the creek in the direction they'd come from, a 5 x 5 bull came into the meadow edge close behind me and cut across a small opening heading in the direction the other elk had just taken. I thought he might have seen me, but time was running out.

I got up and walked away from his path of travel, directly toward the timber he'd come from. Inside the trees I immediately circled back in the direction he'd taken, hoping to come in behind him. Going very carefully I slid my feet forward a little bit at a time, standing still and looking things over with my binoculars. Nothing was mov-

ing. The elk had apparently all moved on. As I kept moving slowly and cautiously forward, I heard something to my right. When I turned that way, a stick broke under my foot.

At the snap, the bull came grunting and growling off a rise just above me 50 yards away, shaking his head like an angry range bull. I instinctively stepped behind a pine. The tree must have hidden me from him, because he came around the edge of the rise breaking limbs. He must have taken me as a another bull. He gurgled a half-bugle, swung around, and came on with his red eyes glaring, evidently trying to frighten away the competition.

It would make a better story if I said I shot him right then from under ten yards, but he got past me, ran into my scent, whirled mid-stride and went back up the rise faster than any animal that size should ever be able to move. But when he stopped at the top and turned to see what smelled so bad, I drew and shot, hardly aware of picking a spot. But I must have, because the arrow zipped through him and he went down in three steps. Oddly enough, I remember that my next thought was that it was going to be a while before I got to enjoy that cup of hot coffee.

Sometimes at the oddest moment an opportunity springs up in front of us. I'll conclude by saying that even though

that 5 x 5 now adorns my wall, I have no desire to hunt elk like that again. Even though we may not be aware of them, we each have parameters established for how we hunt, and what an enjoyable hunt requires. I found out that this was not my kind of hunt. Hunting has to be fun, and that involves a lot more than just being successful.

G. Fred Asbell lives in Michigan with his wife, Teresa. Having bowhunted with traditional equipment for 50 years, G. Fred has written three books on instinctive shooting and one on stalking and still-hunting. His latest is Advanced Instinctive Shooting ... The Rest of the Story.



Equipment Note

Fred was carrying a 65# Bighorn bow (what else?) and Black Diamond heads when he made his "tough way" hunt.

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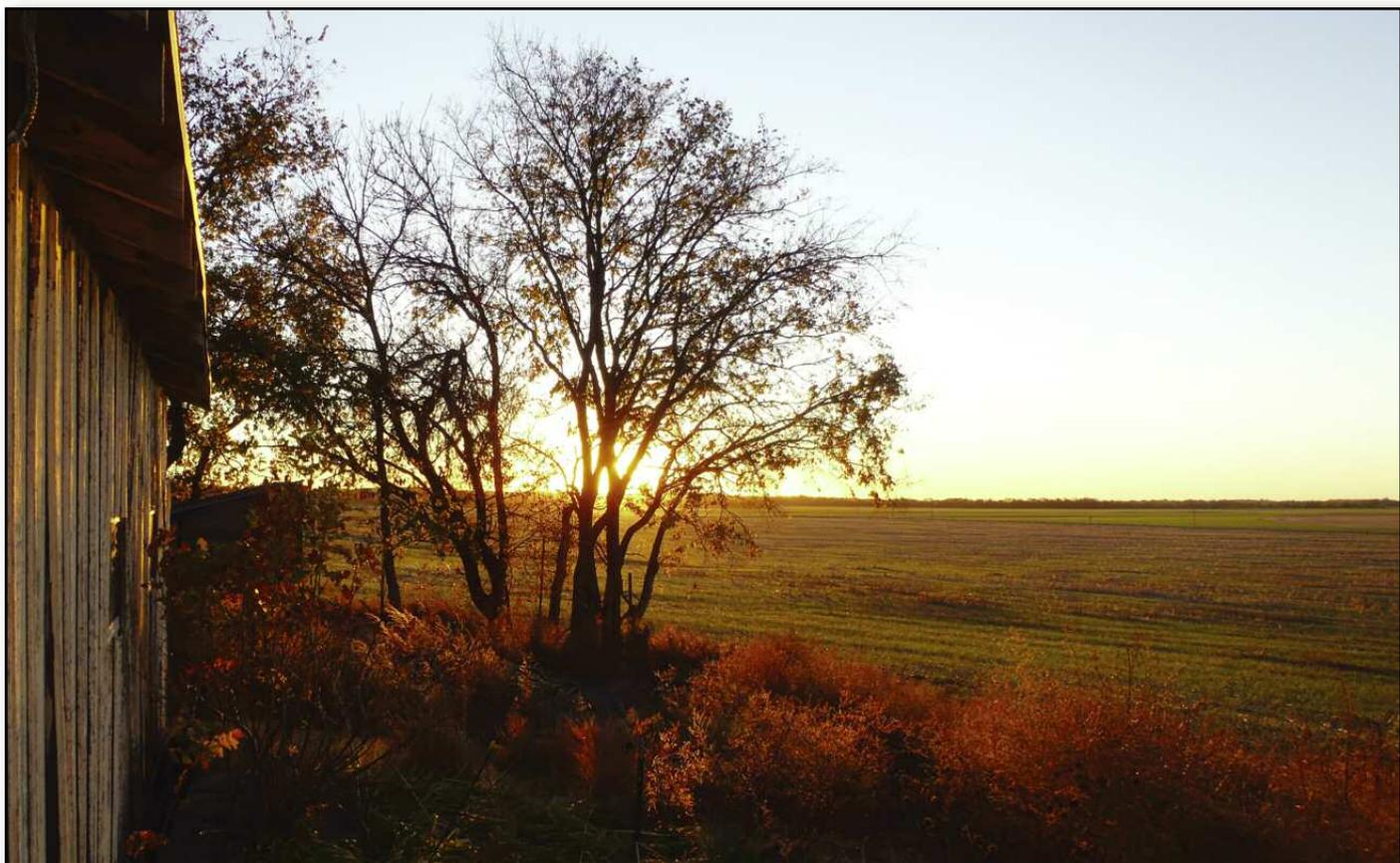
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White Knuckle Whitetail

A Bowhunter's Confessional

By Scott J. Leslie

This tale of admission began with a conversation that went something like this:

Randy: "You want to come south and hunt whitetails in Kansas this year?"

Me: "Sure, how do you plan to hunt them?"

Randy: "Climbing treestands."

Me: "(Gulp) Climbing treestands ... never used one before. Don't you need a really straight tree with no limbs to offer safe hand and foot holds?"

Randy: "No, they're easy to use, and you're completely mobile with them."

Me: "I'm sure they're wonderful, but I could order one of those secure, safe ladder and stand combos from the dis-

count catalog and have it sent to you. You could even keep it after I leave."

Randy: "No need to waste your money. I have the climbers here. Besides, they are much easier to pack into the woods than those clunky ladders."

Me: "Sure, but I don't want to make all that noise going up and down a tree each morning and evening. Once the safe and sound ladder and stand are set, you can slip up the tree without any noise."

Randy: "No worries, the climbers are very quiet."

Me: "Yeah, but having never used one before, I'm sure there's quite a learning curve. I would hate to lose precious hunting time figuring out how to maneuver one of those things up a tree."



The author and his climber.

Randy: "I have been using them for years, very easy to use. You'll be fine. See you this fall."

With that, the discussion was over. Randy's complete devotion to climbing treestands overpowered my desire to use *anything* but the stands he was offering. What Randy failed to grasp and what I was desperately trying to hide was a little known fact that only a few close bowhunting friends know — I absolutely hate heights!

It's not the actual height that I despise; it's the thought of falling from an elevated platform. I have hunted from treestands for years and continue to do so, but usually under some very specific circumstances.

I like limbs. Climbing a tree with big, thick branches leads me to believe that if I were to fall, I could catch myself on the way down and avoid certain doom. Of course, the branches just ensure a more evenly distributed amount of trauma instead of what the ground alone could inflict. Regardless of my false sense of security, sitting in a big old conifer feels safer to me than being strapped to a poplar dangling 18 feet in the air with no net.

I also like a big platform with a large seat. If I am going to be in a tree for hours, I want to be comfortable. The big platform also helps hide the ominous view of the ground below. Given these strict requirements, it usually takes me a while to find the perfect set up and hang a stand. Not want-

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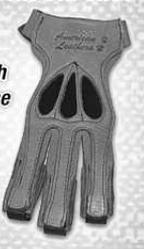
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ing to reveal my aversion to heights and the ridiculous length of time I take to hang a stand, I usually embark on my treestand adventures alone.

Now, with a chance to go to Kansas, the Mecca for giant whitetails, I had to figure out this climbing treestand business or find a way to back out of the invitation of a lifetime.

Turning down the hunt was out of the question. So, I did my best to suppress my fear and focused on shooting my bow from the "safe" treestand I have hanging behind my house.

I arrived at Randy Ott's home in Springfield, Missouri at the end of October, as the rut was beginning to pick up speed. Randy's longtime friend and hunting partner, Brian Grey, joined us on the trip. An avid traditional shooter, Brian brought along an Osage selfbow he had crafted and already proven deadly on deer.

The all-night flight from Alaska caught up with me and I experienced most of northern Missouri and eastern Kansas from behind closed eyes. By afternoon, we were setting up camp along the edge of a freshly planted winter wheat field in north-central Kansas.

We had permission to hunt two farms in the area. Another group of hunters was on the other property for the next two days, so we decided to hunt the draws and woodlots along the nearby creek. An existing ladder stand on the edge of the field served as my perch for the first evening and prolonged the anxiety of using a climbing treestand one more day.

I soon busied myself trying to identify the sounds in this unfamiliar landscape. I could detect the calls of great-horned and screech owls near by. Coyotes cried in the distance, and the constant yelp and occasional gobble of wild turkeys all sounded welcome. A half dozen songbirds strange to me fluttered past and added their music to the mix as the shadows lengthened. My evening closed without seeing a deer.

At dawn, we were back on stand. The morning hunt mimicked the previous afternoon's, with a few deer observed but no shooting. After lunch, Randy and I decided to try a draw with the climbing treestands, and I finally had to reveal my issue with heights.

I can only assume that my reputation as a competent and agile hunter influenced Randy's choice of the tree I was to scale first. He could have selected a nice, straight tree with a uniform trunk, but no. The curved and knurled hickory provided the perfect test for this budding new climber.

Randy was a great instructor. He demonstrated how to adjust the climber to the diameter of the tree and the seemingly effortless motion it took to scale it. He descended with just as much grace and met me back on the ground. Now, it was my turn.

I hooked my feet in, clinched the seat with both hands, and began performing bodily motions decorum prohibits me from accurately describing. For lack of a better term, I began to "inchworm" my way up the tree with a slow but steady progress. Randy insisted that it would be easier if I moved quicker and took longer extensions between my stomach crunches. I assured him I was doing fine and continued my sloth pace up the trunk.

When I had reached a whole ten feet of elevation after

what felt like an hour, I told Randy he was free to head off to his own location. Wanting to assure I got settled safely (or not wanting to miss the show) Randy insisted on watching the whole embarrassing ordeal until my safety harness was secure and the stand was level.

After my display of panicked climbing, I had no choice but to come clean and confess my fear of heights. He nodded acknowledgment, chuckled, and headed off for the evening. I spent the next half hour waiting for my pulse to return to double digits and blood to return to my fingertips. Eventually, I calmed down enough to enjoy the sights and sounds of the area.

Since the rut was on, I tried rattling. A narrow 8-point-er slinked in, searched for the source of the commotion, and stopped 12 yards from my tree. Another time and place this young buck would have earned more attention, but the potential for a great deer in Kansas kept him safe.

As shadows engulfed the little draw, I knew the inevitable was at hand: time to come down. I did my best to remember what Randy had taught me and hesitantly began my descent. All went fairly well, but by the time I reached the forest floor I felt as if I had run a marathon. Despite the ordeal, I was alive and had successfully learned to use a climbing treestand.

We regrouped in the dark, and after a short debriefing agreed that the buck sign here did not warrant another day of hunting. We broke camp and departed for the other property.

As we set up camp in a quiet corner of the next farm, Randy shared the story of an encounter he had with a huge



Randy with a buck taken from the tree where he had the author place his climbing stand.

buck in the area while turkey hunting. He was confident that it had not been taken off the property yet. That evening as I burrowed down in my sleeping bag, visions of giant, rut-crazed bucks filled my head.

In the predawn stillness, we made our way to where Randy had seen the buck, slipping across wheat fields and over barbed wire fences still held in place by dust bowl era limestone fence posts. Skirting along the edge of a field, we veered right, made our way down into a creek bottom, and arrived at

An advertisement for BobLeeBows.net. The top half features the text "Legendary" in a large, stylized font on the left and "Then AND Again" on the right. Below "Legendary" is a photograph of a hunter in a yellow jacket kneeling next to a large buck with impressive antlers. To the right of the hunter is a large, detailed image of a recurve bow. Below the bow, the text reads "winner of BEST BOW in Bowhunting World's field test of 12 recurves". At the bottom right, it says "Create Yours." followed by "BobLeeBows.net 903.586.1877" and a Facebook logo.

a treestand location he had scouted earlier that year.

I convinced Randy that I was capable of using the climber unsupervised, so he headed toward his stand on the other side of the creek. When he was out of earshot, I began the whole unmentionable process of climbing the tree. The process went faster this time, and soon I was seated 15 feet up the tree waiting for the dawn.

As light filled the bottom, I surveyed the new location. The prairie we had walked in from was 15 yards behind my tree at eye level. In front of me was an open area dotted with a mix of different trees spanning 25 yards before pitching sharply down to the creek. I could see rubs, scrapes, and a heavy game trail running parallel to the creek five yards in front of me. This looked good.

A doe and fawn appeared on the opposite side of the creek and slipped away. A small buck meandered along the same path as well later in the morning. As the temperature rose and the animal activity slowed, I worked my way down the tree to meet Randy. He had seen a buck, but nothing he would consider shooting the first day here. Brian had a similar morning.

We decided to return to the same trees for the evening hunt. I lobbied to leave a little earlier than usual to allow for a casual approach to the stands and give me extra time to get up my tree. A quick lunch, a little stump shooting, and we were ready for the afternoon.

Randy and I parted ways at the edge of the creek bottom and I made my way to the tree. The climber felt more familiar this time. I had just laid my bow across my knees when a thunderous grunt erupted behind me, so close the air vibrated. I froze.

Some does and fawns came from behind me. The buck's



Brian took this Kansas buck with his selfbow.

vocalization had evidently pushed them off the prairie and down into the bottom. As they moved by, I caught movement and a glimpse of bright antler to my left behind a cedar.

The buck stayed concealed and moved over to the creek well out of bow range. While he drank, the other deer milled about in front of me. If all went well, the buck would rejoin the group and offer a shot.

As I waited for the buck to work my way, the largest doe in the group moved closer. I held my breath as she passed. Unfortunately, this put her directly downwind. When she caught my scent, her head went up and her eyes locked on me. Then she bolted straight toward the buck, taking him and the rest of the deer across the creek and out of the bottom through the field across the creek.

The remainder of the afternoon passed quietly. When I met Randy later, we discussed the event. From his stand he had a better view of the deer as they ran across the field. He was convinced that the buck was probably the monster he had seen before.

Since the buck had not winded me, Randy insisted that I return to the stand the following morning. The reasoning made sense; since the buck only ran because the does spooked, he would probably return to the area and tend his scrapes.

Dawn broke frosty and still. I had already been on stand a half hour when hoof steps in the crisp prairie grass announced a deer's approach. A soft grunt behind me along the edge of the prairie confirmed it was a buck. Through a clump of cedars, I caught the glint of tall, white antlers and pivoted to face the field. As he stepped out from behind the

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cedars, I readied for the shot. The window to shoot through looked small but feasible. I stopped him with a soft bleat and drew to anchor. Then I released the string and watched hoar frost erupt in a shimmering cloud as my perfect arrow deflected off an invisible limb and arced harmlessly over his back.

He trotted ahead 15 yards and stopped behind another cedar. From there, he moved forward along the edge of the prairie and out of sight, close and at eye-level. To peek around the tree risked being seen.

By the sound of shuffling through the frosty leaves, I could tell he was working his way down into the creek bottom. Then I heard him begin raking his antlers. Hoping he was focused on a rub, I peeked around the trunk. The buck was quartering away, destroying a sapling six yards from the base of my tree.

The range was not a problem, but my position in the tree and the treestand seat were. Quickly and quietly I twirled around on the platform to put me in the right shooting position. Then I remembered Randy mentioning something about practicing tipping up the seat and rotating it around the tree out of the way when I needed to shoot. I had overlooked this tactical maneuver because the seat was positioned exactly where the lower limb of my longbow needed to be for the shot.

This was not the time to try moving the seat. Instead, I leaned out away from the tree, swung the lower limb of the bow out and around the seat, and drew. I reached anchor and glanced down to confirm the lower limb was clear before focusing on the deer's chest. I picked a crease on his chest and the arrow was away.

The buck kicked at the impact and bounded 30 yards before stopping, seemingly unscathed. The shot had looked perfect, but why was the deer standing out there looking back at me? As I began to consider another arrow, the deer staggered sideways and collapsed.

I watched until his chest heaved for the last time. The deer was dead, but I still had the most harrowing part of the hunt in front of me: keeping my wits about me and getting down the tree in one piece. I took a deep breath, mentally rehearsed the process of descending the tree, lowered my bow, and scooped down.

I could see the buck, but I still tracked him from the sapling, first by the dirt kicked up on the leaves and then by blood, picking up the feathered end of my arrow along the way.

I had not realized the true size of the deer until I knelt beside him and grasped the massive antlers. I waited as long as I could before heading toward Randy. At the base of his tree, I whispered up that I had killed a BIG buck, but I don't think he believed my animated depiction of the size. Randy slipped down and together we walked back to the deer.

After congratulations and dozens of pictures, we began to field dress the astonishing deer. Before we could finish, Brian's truck horn sounded. We smiled; he must have had his own good fortune as well. Randy went to check. Both returned a short while later. Brian had scored on a buck and was looking for help to retrieve his deer. We decided Randy would go help while I finished with my buck.



The author and his massive white knuckle buck.

They returned in time to begin the long drag out. Even with two of us hauling the deer, we still needed to stop frequently to catch our breath. Eventually, we arrived at the truck and made our way back to camp where I got to see Brian's deer, a beautiful buck that would have made any hunter proud. The fact that he harvested it with the bow he had crafted himself made the accomplishment all the more meaningful.

The day was beginning to heat up, and we were low on ice. Not wanting to take a chance of losing meat, we broke camp and headed to a friend's farmhouse and a freezer. By late afternoon we had settled in at the farm toasting the events of the day, retelling stories, and butchering deer.

As with most hunting trips, the end came too quickly and soon it was time to begin the long trip back to Alaska. As the jet taxied down the runway I looked down at my hand on the armrest and noticed the blood had finally returned to my fingertips. I guess climbing treestands aren't so bad after all.

Scott Leslie makes his home on Prince of Wales Island, Alaska, where he works for the U.S. Forest Service.



Equipment Note

Scott used a 56# Fox takedown longbow and cedar arrows of his own making tipped with 125-grain Woodsman broadheads on this hunt.



Made in America

An interview with Larry Hanify

By Brad Isham

It was summer 2011 when I first met Larry Hanify at the Eastern Traditional Archery Rendezvous at Denton Hill. I carried my own self-made longbow, with juniper limbs, with multiple carbon and bamboo lams in the core. The riser was made of an hourglass middle of curly maple sandwiched between semi-circles of burlled cocobolo. The most special part of the bow for me,

though, was just above and below the riser. Under the clear glass on each belly-side fade laid a small tuft of hair. The hair was from my dog Boo. Boo had passed away earlier that year. He was one of those dogs, a once in a lifetime dog, who had left a profound affect on me.

I was very proud of my bow and the work that went into it. It was sixty-four

pounds and sixty-four inches and I shot nothing but it the entire spring and summer.

When I met Larry he was gracious enough to give me a compliment on Boo. I stopped at his booth, seeing a small riser lying on the table. There was something about it, so I picked it up. The fit and finish of the little fourteen-inch riser was very impressive. A medium grip with a narrow locator, it felt good, fit my hand well, and left an impression on me.

We talked about A&H Archery's risers, their O.L. Adcock designed limbs, and A&H's precision manufacturing. Larry is not a salesman, but has a quiet confidence in his products and processes of manufacturing that sell the products for him.

Home from the shoot and meeting Larry, I continued to shoot Boo through the summer readying for my first fall elk hunt. Shooting good to 40 yards at my borrowed elk target, Boo and I developed a Zen-like relationship.

One evening I drew back to hear a quick, quiet, clicking noise. A visual inspection revealed nothing. A few more arrows and Boo exploded sending laminate shards sailing. I was heartbroken, sickened, and saddened at loosing Boo a second time.

I had an elk hunt coming soon and I needed to make a decision. The love, care, time, and effort I put into Boo was lying on the ground in useless pieces. I just didn't have the time needed to make another bow, but I remembered meeting Larry Hanify, his quiet confidence, and that beautiful riser.

I bought that riser from Larry. I searched the in-stock limbs on the A&H website and found a set at 56 pounds and 64 inches. I worked with Dan at A&H, concerned that the limbs were eight pounds less than Boo. Dan took the time to set up the bow and chronograph it for me before I committed to it. He assured me it would be at least as fast as Boo, maybe faster, and he was right. The little 56-pound bow spit a 650-grain arrow out at 175 feet per second; five feet per second faster than Boo at eight pounds less draw weight. I was sold. Then I started

Larry Hanify working on a riser in his shop.

buying Larry's Abowyer broadheads and as I talked to Cody, Dan, and Larry, a common theme began to emerge. Made in America and made by them. Interested in this small business with big principles I requested an interview with Larry and this is what I discovered.

Isham: Tell me about your education and career as it relates to your current businesses.

Hanify: I've taken college classes over thirty years, mostly relating to technology and engineering. I spent my career as a toolmaker, automation engineer, and principal engineer for a major U.S. manufacturing company. I retired in 2008 but still do contracting and consulting for a three billion dollar company.

Being a toolmaker, I learned to use the best tools money can buy, and a fair number of the tools I used I would build myself. So when I wanted a quality bow or broadhead, I just learned to build my own. I love archery and wanted something a little better so I learned to build better jigs, forms, and tools to build the archery equipment. After years of working as a process engineer and working on patent development, I found it is much more rewarding to build hunting equipment.

Did you know when you're shopping in a tool catalog often you will see two



A pair of A&H's bows.

columns. One says "USA" (the cost is higher) and one says "Import" (lower cost). I think it's good to have the second column. Sometimes imports are the right choice and necessary for the budget, but they're just not my first choice.

Isham: Tell me about your early bows and how you got started bow building.

Hanify: I purchased American made Allen, Darton, Hoyt, and High Country

compound bows. Then I bought a Black Widow and after years of hunting I shot my first buck with a traditional bow. It was like starting all over again. That was in the early 1990s and I sold that Black Widow for just \$100 less than what I paid for it. I built one just like it for myself and for a few friends. Yep, all American made, just like all the tools in my toolbox, my Dodge truck, my wife's Ford van, and the Haas CNC in my

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The crew at A&H. From left to right, Phil, Dan, and Cody, with Larry seated.

shop. It's hard to find anything around here that's not made in the USA.

Isham: Tell me about the relationship between Abowyer Broadheads and A&H Archery.

Hanify: I started Abowyer in 1997. We built broadheads and only made thirty bows or so. We also built parts for resonator guitar builders. In 2005 I was working with a friend and local bowyer,

Jim Paauwe. He was helping me part-time and was building a few bows for O.L. Adcock/A&H Archery, New Mexico. Jim passed away a few years back but left some beautiful pen and ink artwork of some of the risers we built. So over the next couple of years I built risers and limb molds for O.L. I started A&H Archery in Michigan six years ago as a partnership with O.L.'s old partner.

After five years he left the business. Now we're just a small team of four; Phil, Cody, Dan, and me. We all have different skills but it takes a team effort to build all the bows and broadheads.

Isham: How did you and O.L. Adcock get together to design, develop, and finally manufacture the ACS longbow?

Hanify: O.L. gets all the credit for the development of the ACS limb design. We have been fine-tuning the process with precision CNC equipment and are putting a lot of care into building. We now have advanced the product from its original start with better performance and durability. We are a company that works at continuous improvement on all of our products.

Isham: Tell me about meeting Dr. Ed Ashby.

Hanify: Dr. Ashby came to my home to purchase broadheads for his study on Dec 1, 2004. I had been building broadheads for five years with little advertising so I wasn't sure how he found my small business, Abowyer. I did recognize his name and was almost sure I had read some of his work. After an hour or two of discussion about the broadheads, his study, and hunting in general, he purchased two packs of my Bone Heads. I recall he paid for them with a friend's checkbook, he was living in Australia, and the car he was driving was from New Mexico, but he had a deep passion for archery so it was natural for me to trust him.

Isham: Are all of the Abowyer heads made in America and can you describe the process?

Hanify: All are American made. The manufacturing is very basic. We CNC the ferrule, laser cut and CNC the blades, and finally they are laser welded. All are ground, sharpened, and spin tested by hand in our shop.

Isham: Can you give me an overview of your risers?

Hanify: We sell a 12-, 14-, 16-, and, by special order, an 18-inch riser. The JK is a low wrist, the ST is a medium wrist, and the RC is high. We can also drop the heel very low upon request. The risers are built using laminated hardwood and fiberglass, solid aluminum, carbon fiber over foam core, and solid phenolic.

Isham: And the limbs?

Hanify: The limbs are four-layer pro-

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Larry taking a break while hunting elk.

proprietary carbon over action wood or carbon over bamboo. All of the risers and limbs are made in our shop, every single step.

Isham: Why is it important to you to keep your manufacturing under your roof?

Hanify: That question is so basic for us; it's jobs in Michigan. Next, it's very rewarding building bows. We have the talent to both engineer and build quality bows and broadheads as good or better than most anyone else. Combine that with a passion for archery and our shop is what you get.

Isham: Why is it important to keep all of your manufacturing in America?

Hanify: It's the easiest way to control the quality. You may not be able to raise the quality of your products if someone else is manufacturing it. You can raise your margins manufacturing offshore but you cannot give a job to someone in your neighborhood. You can build a durable company in the USA or help to build someone else's company off shore.

Isham: Tell me about your favorite hunting.

Hanify: I love Wyoming and Colorado. I love to hunt elk, but I am a meat hunter. My first rule is don't pass up an animal on Monday that you would shoot on Friday. I did shoot a 290-inch bull elk, though.

Isham: Anything else you want to mention?

Hanify: Our team builds the highest performance bow you can find. The broadheads we build have the lowest impact of any broadhead. The goal is to shoot through an animal without the animal knowing it was shot. No death run, just a peaceful end within eyesight.

I think it is very important that folks who sell and manufacture archery equipment can make the choice to run their business in a way that best fits them. We always try our best to practice "Made in USA." It's just our choice.

Because of time constraints on my current life, work obligations, and committing more time to my family, I've decided not to build my own bows for a while. I'll miss it, but it consumed me. Shooting is, for me, the fun part of archery and some of the time I'm not spending in the shop I can now spend on the range. My A&H longbow is still made in America and I love shooting it. I know the man that made it; he is a fine man, and a good American.

I had to cancel my elk hunt due to the death of my older brother, but I was able to take a deer on a friend's farm with my new A&H longbow. It was standing in front of a cedar tree when I shot it. The Abowyer broadhead not

only passed through the deer, but also penetrated the tree so deeply the deer had to pull itself off of the shaft before expiring within 50 yards. I think I killed the tree too! My Colorado elk hunt is rescheduled for this year and my A&H longbow and Abowyer broadheads will be with me.

Brad is an experienced traditional bowhunter and recovered bow maker. He loves to travel and hunt whenever he can and is the author of traditional bowhunting's novel, The Sound Of The String, available at www.thesound-ofthestring.com and traditional archery retailers on-line.



In Larry's Own Words

"I love archery and wanted something a little better so I learned to build better jigs, forms, and tools to build the archery equipment with.

"Yep, all American made, just like all the tools in my toolbox, my Dodge truck, my wife's Ford van, and the Haas CNC in my shop. It's hard to find anything around here that's not made in the USA.

"Now we're just a small team of four, Phil, Cody, Dan, and me. We all have different skills but it takes a team effort to build all the bows and broadheads.

"You may not be able to raise the quality of your products if someone else is manufacturing it.

"You can raise your margins manufacturing offshore but you cannot give a job to someone in your neighborhood.

"You can build a durable company in the USA or help to build someone else's company off shore.

"We always try our best to practice 'Made In USA.' It's just our choice."

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The Phantom Meets The Invisible Man

I know this title sounds like it belongs on a cheap “B” horror flick, but this story is non-fiction. Just like Tony Stark confessed to being Iron Man, I also confess. Yes, it’s true. I am the Invisible Man. My wife says the only time I’m invisible is when there’s work to be done, but she doesn’t follow me into the woods. I may not be a super hero, but I really am invisible, at least while ground hunting for whitetails.

The Phantom, as you probably have guessed, is a whitetail buck. He was a shadow in the timber, a flash of antler in the brush, a ghost in the pre-dawn darkness. I just was never able to get a good look at him. I was confident, however, that one day our paths would cross.

It was just after daylight on a crisp November morning. I was watching the first orange sunbeams filtering through the naked tree limbs when I heard the telltale sound of a deer approaching from behind me. I glanced over my shoulder and caught a glimpse of big antlers as the buck worked his way through the thick brush. I reached for

my bow.

He was following a deer trail that led up the side of a ravine to the edge of a soybean field, and within ten yards of my ground blind at the point where it reached the field. I had one narrow shooting lane to the trail, three feet back from the field’s edge. If the buck stopped before entering the field, he would be standing broadside at ten yards right in my shooting lane.

As the buck approached the field he was as invisible as I was because of the thick brush, but I could hear his footsteps. My fingers tightened on the bowstring, as a large rack of antlers glided through the lane. As the chest became visible, I came to full draw and focused on the sweet spot ...

It was seven years ago that I first became invisible. Tired of getting spotted all the time in my treestand, I started looking for better camouflage. I liked the leafy camo and Ghillie suits, but balked at the high price of both. My wife says I’m a tightwad, but I prefer frugal,

or thrifty. I’ve been wearing some of my hunting clothes for 30 years, and they look it. Maybe my wife’s description is more accurate. Anyway, I decided I could make something myself to do the job, so I bought some army surplus camo netting and came up with what I call my “Sasquatch” suit.

I noticed that many of the places I hunt had a lot of deadfalls, brush, and other foliage at ground level, but very little cover at treestand level. I thought, “Why should I sit in a naked tree, silhouetted against the sky, when I’ve got all this ground cover to hide in?” Also, I’m not getting any younger and climbing trees was beginning to take a toll on my aging body. It just made sense to hunt from the ground. I’m always ready for a new challenge and with my new Sasquatch suit I was confident that I could be successful.

It’s hard to believe, but this season marks 49 years of bowhunting for me. My hunting partner Mike Misch has been chasing critters with me for the last 37. We used to have difficulty persuading our wives to allow us enough time away from home to fulfill our bow hunting needs. During our negotiations they would unleash a barrage of verbal barbs aimed at our sense of responsibility. Family vacations, kids birthdays, wedding anniversaries, etc. were tough to deal with, but now that we’re both retired we spend so much time at home that our wives can’t wait for bow season to arrive so they can get rid of us for three weeks.

This year’s hunt began October 29th. We had twenty days in the Illinois farm country to quench our thirst for the hunt. The first morning of our hunt I headed for my favorite hangout, a narrow crop field dividing two deep, brushy ravines. Deer travel along the field and also cross it in several locations. It’s a quarter mile long but less than 50 yards across at the narrowest point. I dubbed the spot “Mongo Run” three years ago

The Invisible Man in his Sasquatch suit standing in front of the blind where The Phantom was taken.

after I had the good fortune to harvest the “buck of a lifetime.” A 12-yard shot from my makeshift ground blind felled the monster whitetail I named “Mongo” (*TBM April/May 2010*).

I have three ground blinds along each side of the field. I hunt the blind with the best current wind direction. If the wind changes, I can just walk across the field and hunt from the other side.

I arrived at my north #2 blind well before daylight. I hadn't even settled in when I glanced out across the field and saw movement. Blinking my eyes and straining to make it out, I watched as a ghostly form materialized out of the darkness. Silently, like a wisp of fog drifting on a morning thermal, it floated along, four feet off the ground. As it drew nearer, the object slowly began to take a familiar shape. A large rack of tall, white antlers stopped, hovered there for a moment, and then resumed its ghostly flight. The seemingly disembodied rack drifted past me like a phantom and melted into the inky blackness.

“Did I see what I think I saw?” I asked myself. If so, The Phantom was definitely a shooter. It was too dark to count points, but there was no mistaking the size of the rack.

That evening I was back at Mongo Run, but this time I was in my north #1 blind. An hour before dark I noticed some deer running around like crazy at the south end of the field. I figured there must be a buck down there stirring things up. Sure enough, a few minutes later a small 8-point showed up followed by a whopper. The bigger buck fell into the heart-pounding category. The 12 pointer's rack would easily score 160. I named him Clyde.

Clyde was following the field edge right toward me, but stopped 50 yards out to munch on soybeans. With my heart pounding in my chest, I stood waiting as several tense minutes ticked by. Finally, he resumed his course, but at 45-yards he suddenly turned off into the woods and vanished. I was all pumped up, and then suddenly deflated. It was another classic bowhunting moment.

On the evening of day three there was a change in wind direction, which gave me an opportunity to hunt my south #2 blind. I decided to move about

five yards farther west to a perfect natural blind between two deadfalls right in the middle of a tangled mass of briars and weeds. All I had to do was clear out a spot to sit and cut some shooting holes.

I always carry a pair of pruning snips for cutting twigs, weeds, and especially briars. I make minimal changes to the terrain. The less you change, the less likely the deer will notice. I make small shooting holes through the brush. You don't want to make a large tunnel that will lead a deer's eyes right to your face. I always try to be in the shade and have a good background. I also try to have a few vertical pieces of cover in front of me that extend high enough to hide my head and upper limb of my bow when I'm preparing for a shot.

I like to use natural cover whenever possible. Field edges quite often have thick cover due to increased sunlight. The trees there have more leaves, and weeds and briars grow tall. Sometimes dead trees fall into the fields and are pushed back with a tractor by the farmer. These make great natural blinds.

If I'm hunting in the open woods, I

look for a deadfall, an old stump, a bush, etc. Then if necessary, I add more material. I don't make any major changes, however, unless I have at least a few days before planning to hunt there. If you build a log fortress where nothing stood before the deer are going to notice.

You don't want to be sitting in that blind the first time a deer sees it.

I once watched a doe stare down a fence post that had just been placed earlier that day. She knew that post wasn't there before. She stomped the ground and bobbed her head up and down for ten minutes before moving on.

My goal is not to construct something to hide behind, but to blend into the existing terrain. When successful in this, there's nothing to draw the deer's attention. They'll walk by without even looking in my direction.

After I finished my pruning, I donned my Sasquatch suit and settled in to hunt. I always carry a swivel stool to sit on, but I didn't need it in this blind since there was a big log right there.

After I had been sitting there for a

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while, a gray squirrel came bouncing down my log with an acorn in his mouth. He stopped a few feet from me and looked me up and down for a few seconds then sat up on his haunches and nibbled on his acorn. I don't know if he ever saw a sasquatch before, but he didn't seem too concerned.

About an hour and a half before dark I spotted a nice 8-point coming across the field right toward me. When he got to my side of the field he stopped to work a scrape just nine yards from me. He rubbed his face against the overhead branches to leave his scent then continued along the edge. He stopped directly in front of me, just four yards away, and began scratching behind his ear with his hind foot. After relieving that troublesome itch, he took a few more steps then stopped to work another scrape.

Watching that buck work a scrape a mere five yards away was extremely cool. The coolest part was that he was completely oblivious to my presence. It would have been an easy shot, but it was only the third day of a 20-day hunt and Clyde was weighing heavy on my mind.

On the evening of day four I was hunting a spot I call the five fingers. Five small drainages converge there to create a small creek. A doe and two fawns wandered through an hour before dark. A few minutes later, I heard a grunt from across the creek. A 150 class 9-point buck was moving fast with his nose to the ground like a hound dog, hot on the trail of the doe. "Barney" was a definite shooter sporting a wide rack with long tines, but he never got closer than 50 yards. I wasn't too disappointed, though. I felt very lucky to have seen three shooters in only four days. My luck, however, was about to change.

Over the next nine days deer sightings were few and far between. Warm weather and a full moon had put a stop to daytime deer movement. There was plenty of nighttime activity though. We could hear them running around out-

side our tent all night.

I nearly forgot about The Phantom since I had the two outlaws, Barney & Clyde to hunt down. Sasquatch and I waited in ambush on numerous occasions, but nary a hair of either did appear.

On day 13, I was back at Mongo Run. A 9-point buck suddenly appeared directly across the field from me, 50 yards away. I reached for my video camera, but it slipped from my grasp and fell to the ground with a loud thud. The buck looked around nervously and then bounded away. I named him the "Dropped Camera" buck, or "DC" for short.

The day after the DC fiasco I decided to build a new blind to better cover the runway the buck had used to enter the field. I had noticed a lot of deer using that particular runway, and my nearest blind was not in a very good location.

I started clearing out a place in the weeds along the field, but then I noticed a large bush that looked like the perfect spot. I called it my "Am-bush." It was 12 feet tall and had branches that arced up and out and hung nearly to the ground. Underneath it was roomy enough to stand. I would be able to cover the field and the runway, but thick brush made it impossible to shoot or even see a deer coming from behind me until it was point blank.

I cleared three shooting holes facing the field and one narrow shooting lane to the runway just off the edge of the field. I knew from experience that deer usually stop at the edge of the field to check for danger before entering.

About an hour before dark I heard something in the ravine behind me. I grabbed my bow and stared intently in the direction of the sound. Suddenly, a

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loud snort emanated from the ravine and a flash of antler caught my eye as the buck made a hasty retreat. I was a bit mystified. "Why did he spook? Did I just have another Phantom encounter?" I asked myself. I pulled a pinch of milkweed fluff from the pod in my pocket and watched it slowly drift toward the ravine confirming my suspicion. The nose knows.

The next morning there was a favorable wind to try the new blind again, which brings me back to where this story began.

As the buck stepped into the shooting lane, I came to full draw and focused on the sweet spot. He stopped just as I predicted, but before I could aim and release he was on the move again. I had no choice but to let down and wait until he cleared the brush. With bow arm extended and fingers tight against the string, I waited for another chance. By the time he passed in front of my next shooting hole he was 18 yards into the field and quartering away. Finally in the clear, it was time for my old Bear Grizzly recurve to go to work. I felt the spruce shaft come back to my face as my fingers locked against my cheekbone. And then it was gone, only to magically reappear behind the left front leg of the buck. I could clearly see my arrow shaft protruding from his rib cage as the huge 8-point ran a zigzag pattern for 120 yards and entered the woods on the far side. I was a bit concerned at the apparent lack of penetration, but figured that the broadhead probably hit the off shoulder. "When in doubt, wait it out," is one of the self imposed rules I follow, so I returned to camp to get Mike.

An hour later we were on the blood trail where I saw the buck enter the woods. Thirty yards into the woods I found my arrow with the nock end jammed six inches into the ground at the edge of a steep ravine. After inspecting my arrow I looked down toward the bottom of the ravine and there lay my buck.

"The blind squirrel just found another nut!" I said to Mike. (When I shot Mongo three years ago, Mike had summed up my prowess as a trophy hunter by saying, "Even a blind squirrel finds a nut once in a while.")



A tired but happy author with The Phantom taken with a 45-year old Bear Grizzly recurve.

"Whaaat?" he said.

"Look down there."

"Holy cow! Look at the size of that rack! You never said he was that big."

"I guess I left out that part," I replied.

We carefully worked our way down the steep slope to the buck. After taking some photos, I prepared to field dress the buck. Mike offered me his knife, stating that it needed to get broken in. It was an antler-handled beauty that he made himself.

"It would be an honor," I said.

With the field dressing complete, we were faced with the daunting task of getting the buck up that steep hill to the truck. We half dragged, half lifted the buck four or five steps and then would have to rest. It took us about a half hour to make the 80 yards to the top.

Afterwards, Mike said, "Man! I hurt in places I didn't know I had places!"

"Yeah? Well, I'm just one big pain!" I replied.

"You got that right!" he agreed.

Did I shoot the Phantom? I think so, but I'm not sure since I never got a very good look at him. That's the way it is with phantoms.

I always have a great time trying to outsmart these elusive creatures.

Taking a trophy buck is just frosting on the cake. It was the first shot I've taken since Mongo, and I'm thankful that I got the chance. A little frosting once in a while tastes pretty good.

The Invisible Man triumphed on this occasion but, admittedly, the phantoms of the forest usually win. I'm never disappointed when I go home empty-handed, though. After all, I'm just a part-time predator hunting full-time deer right in their living room. And hunting them from the ground is great. It has a primal feel to it, like I'm part of nature, not just a visitor. I love being the Invisible Man, just me and Sasquatch hidin' in the weeds.

Gary Olsen is a retired electrical contractor. He and his wife Kathy are building a log home which he works on every day that he's not bowhunting.



Equipment Note

The author was hunting on the ground with a 47# Bear Grizzly recurve that is 45-years old, and Sitka spruce arrows tipped with 4-blade Zwickey Eskimo broadheads.

Anecdotes from the Past

Some of the best glimpses of bowhunting's past can be found in vintage archery magazines. Once the sport was becoming popular in the early 1940s, publications sprung up for the growing ranks of archers who were eager to read more about their new addiction. The pages were filled with articles recounting hunts (some successful and some definitely not) as these new toxophilites sorted out the new techniques and equipment needed to bring down big game with a bow and arrow.

A number of interesting items, however, appeared not in the feature articles but buried in other places, such as letters to the editor, short pieces, or early advice columns. Often places like this contain overlooked but fascinating bits and pieces of early archery trivia.

Who Shot the Bear?

In a copy of the *Traditional Archery Magazine*, there's a short piece by the editor asking, "Who shot the Bear?" It recounts the story of a Wisconsin resident who received special permission from the State DNR to shoot a large, aggressive "nuisance bear." It was such a fine specimen that he decided to have it mounted. During the skinning process, a hunting broadhead was discovered squarely embedded between the beast's eyes.

"Wouldn't it be interesting to know who had the nerve to stand up to a bear and shoot it between the eyes?" the editor asks, and then invites the shooter to write him and give him the details, to be printed in an upcoming issue. As far as I can tell, neither the mystery archer (nor the next of kin) stepped forward.

Bowhunting Isn't for Everyone

A letter to the editor by a disgrun-

tled doctor appears in the same issue.

"I am very disillusioned with bowhunting white tailed deer," he writes. "I have a 'clean' record of ten years of deer hunting (wounded fatally three deer — recovered none) and never have been able to bag one. It's time to quit.

"Gun-hunting is quite a different story. Have about 10 or 11 deer with no deer going more than 50 feet after being hit and only two required more than one cartridge. That's the way I like to hunt. This running away wounded to a lingering death just does not fit my moral of hunting and sportsmanship."

Negative letters like this were rare, but one wonders how many others, who didn't take the time to express their frustrations, quietly turned away from bowhunting once they discovered that it was a lot harder than bagging deer with a rifle.

Early Slob Bowhunter

In a 1949 "What's Up?" column in *Archery Magazine*, the writer talks about the recent privilege of a special bow season and decries the bad behavior of some of his fellow archers.

"To be perfectly honest," he writes, "I have seen the level of sportsmanship lowered considerably in the past few seasons. The number of arrests has increased, two archers have wounded their own companions, some have resorted to stealing another's deer, and some have shot tame deer. This is not good. In part it has come about through a vast increase in numbers of hunters. Numbers alone are bound to include a few 'bad eggs' or 'skunks'."

Later Slob Bowhunters

A letter that appeared in the "Editor's Mailbox" six years later shows

that poor sportsmanship had not yet disappeared. The writer describes coming upon a group of young bowhunters with a fine buck that one of them had taken with a shot through the neck. The arrow, however, was still sticking out of the slain animal.

"At that time," he relates, "I was president of the MAA (Massachusetts Archery Association) and we were doing everything possible to avoid adverse publicity, so, of course, I had to shoot off my mouth! The conversation went like this:

"*Yours truly* — 'Don't you boys think it might be smart to yank that arrow out of the deer? A lot of people in this neck of the woods are trying to make it tough on archers, you know, with remarks about deer running through the woods looking like pin-cushions, special privileges, etc.'

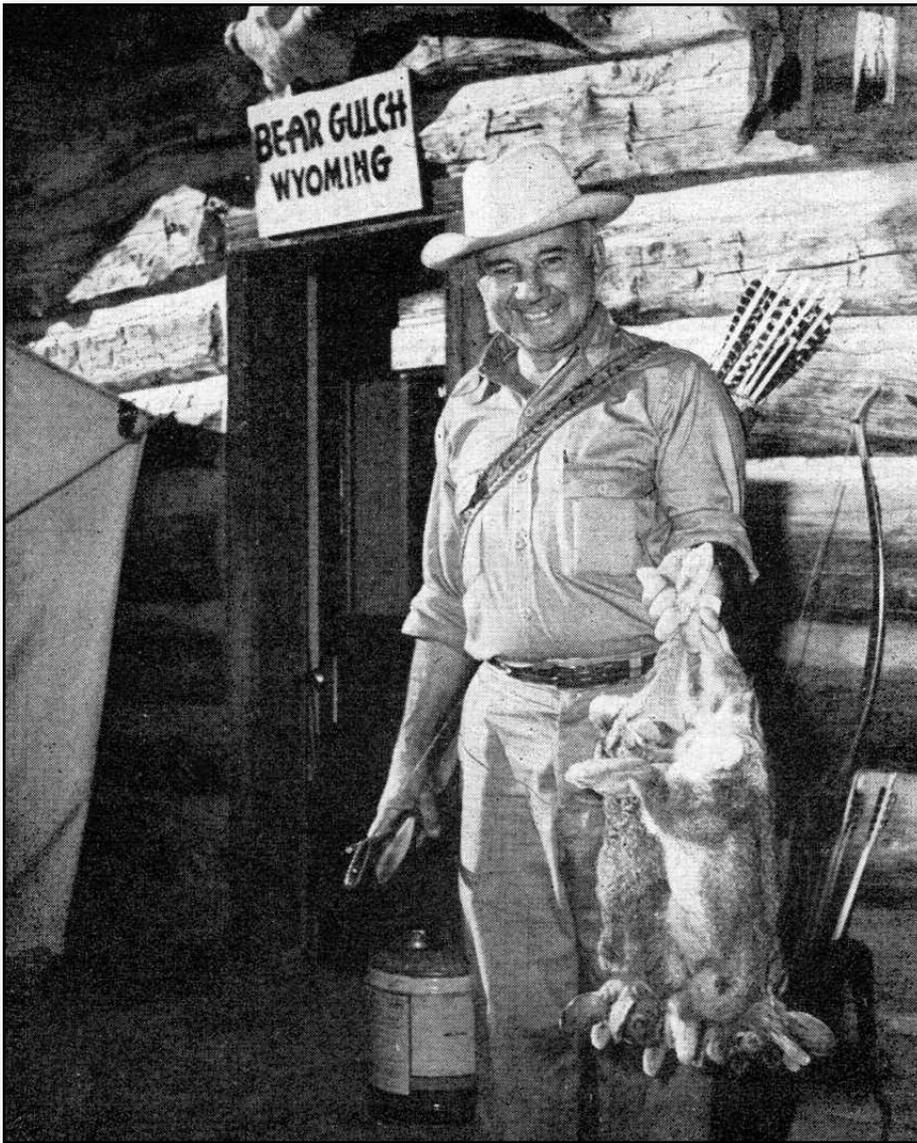
"*Proud Hunter*: 'Listen, Bud, I shot this deer with an arrow. Maybe down in Massachusetts they do what you say, but up here we don't hide what we do, we brag about it! The arrow stays in, and what's more, we're going to drive around town blowing the horn!'"

And then there was a short news feature that appeared around the same time titled "Bow and Arrow Hunter Bags Farmer's Pig." The punctured porker in question was the recipient of not one but three arrows, and it was noted that the New Jersey bow and arrow season had opened that Saturday.

Aging Archers

Another writer addressed the factor of age in one's ability to shoot a bow. He recounts: "I remember my friend Ed Driess of Texas, 70 years old, (sic) kind of frail, carried a one legged stool so that he could rest while we shot. Well, Ed used to take his little 30 pound bow and just clobber the rest of us ..."

Was a bowhunter of three score and ten considered ancient by archers of the time? Even though life expectancy today has increased by about a decade since the letter was written, there are a



Bob Morely, chief cook and bowhunter, at Bear Gulch in Wyoming.

lot of 70-year-olds today who are shooting bows in the 50# class and can keep up pretty well with younger hunters.

Aging Venison

Back in 1940 hunting deer with a bow was a new adventure, and those who succeeded at it were extremely proud — even to the point of jeopardizing the meat. A well-known archer of the time, George Brommers, writes of his friend, Kore Duryee, who had killed a deer the previous fall:

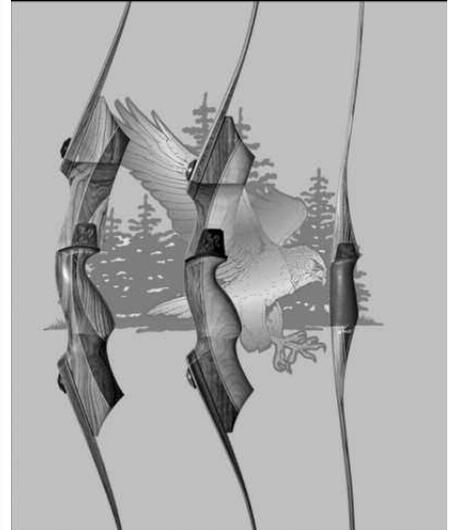
“... what you probably did not hear is that Kore — gloating over his trophy and unwilling to leave it out of sight — insisted on giving the buck’s carcass a loving seasoning on his back porch. Poor

Kore, it was no dice. Long before the health department could intervene, Louisa (his wife) forced the removal of the deceased to some kind of a deer morgue.”

And You Thought the Woods Were Crowded Now ...

A report appearing the *Wisconsin Bowhunter* magazine tells us: “Never in the history of deer hunting, including the regular deer seasons, have so many hunters concentrated in one area as they did on the town roads and drainage ditches of the Necedah refuge on the opening day, September 17, 1947. An estimated number of more than 3,000 bowmen moved into this well

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known deer area. During a check of approximately half the area, 478 cars were counted. Along the boundaries of the area covered, 83 camps were seen in operation — 51 in a small open site near Sprague.”

One would think that with that much commotion the deer would have headed for Illinois, but that was evidently not the case. The commentary goes on to say: “Hunters reported seeing many deer. In the morning the total number of deer seen by 43 hunting parties added up to 617.”

Fred Bear’s Chef

A fellow named Bob Morley was the chief cook at the hunting camp known as “Bear Gulch” on a 50,000 acre spread near Gillette, Wyoming. A short piece in a 1955 magazine tells us:

“Bob from Barstow” is well known in archery circles. He travels to the national meets across the country. His pleasant smile and cowboy boots are his identification marks wherever he goes. Bob is a carpenter by trade, but he is equally adept with skillet or bow.

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“This year Bob bagged his pronghorn buck near a waterhole at seventy-three yards with his 65 pound, 48 inch bow using a twenty-two inch broadhead arrow. He then fried and served antelope steaks for dinner that night.”

The menu also reportedly included mashed potatoes with gravy, green peas, gelatin salad, hot coffee, and a choice of chocolate or lemon pie. Pretty good for camp grub!

Early Bowfishing Problems

In a *Questions & Answers* page appearing in April 1950, a reader complains:

“We are trying to do some fish spearing, but we have all kinds of trouble with the reel. Everything we have tried is very hard and slow to rewind. I have a vague picture of Mr. (Howard) Hill once using a hoop sort of an arrangement on his bow that must have been 18” or more in diameter. I can’t imagine how he kept it attached to the bow and how he held the string on the hoop after he got it there. Can you help us?”

Editor Tracy Stalker replies: “I can’t help you on your fishing problem. The only thing I have seen used is a tin can or one of the rubber line holders fastened to the back of the bow. I wonder how one of the new spinning reels on which the line is stripped off the end of the spool would work?”

Singing Bowhunters?

An archer from New Zealand writes: “Please accept my thanks for taking up the matter of archery songs. I hope your interest leads to the publication of some of those ballads we read about but seem unable to locate. What could be more soul stirring than a revival of some of the old archery ballads to tie us more closely to the sport we love?”

One Tough Bird

While practicing up for deer season back in 1948, a couple of archers were looking for “targets of opportunity.” They’d already scored on rabbits, squirrels, armadillos, and two feral cats when a vulture came soaring overhead at a mere 40 feet. Here was an interest-

ing aerial target that would pose a new challenge for the pair.

“Dud and I drew and released in a single motion,” the writer states. “Both arrows landed solidly with a resounding ‘whump’ and both arrows bounced back in our very surprised faces. The bird continued on with hardly a break in his graceful movements.”

All the more surprising, considering that Dud was shooting a 70-pound bow and the writer, a 75-pound Osage recurve.

How Does it Feel to Get Shot?

Michigan bowhunter Tom Parks could give you the answer after a 1945 accident in which he received a broadhead in the stomach.

“In order to find some descriptive term for the sensation induced by the wound,” the chronicler writes, “... he was asked if it felt anything like a toothache or hitting one’s finger with a hammer. His answer was ‘Oh, my no’. He stated that the nearest he could come to describing it was that it was similar to the feeling one undergoes when one’s wind is knocked out and gasps for breath. ‘The pain’ he said, ‘was not severe.’

“He did not feel the arrow enter, but says that ‘all of a sudden there it was.’ From what I can learn, Mr. Park’s reaction after pulling out the arrow was almost identical to that of a deer when hit. Dropping the arrow, he ran at top speed for a distance of 50 yards at which point his companion overtook him and forcibly laid him down. He (Park) states that when lying down he felt very weak and didn’t seem to care what happened.”

While anecdotes like these culled from old archery magazines illustrate how much bowhunting has changed in the last 70 years, they also establish that our predecessors experienced many of the same challenges and rewards that we do today.

A regular contributor to the magazine, Duncan Pledger is a bowhunter and journalist from Milton, Wisconsin.



Hide tanning is an art that, along with fire, stone tools, and the like, helped make us into who we are today. We've developed methods of preserving animal skins ranging from the primitive but effective — brain tanning — to the most modern chemical emersions common to today's leather industry. What follows is an explanation of an exceedingly simple, easy, and cheap way to turn your next deer hide into a supple and attractive trophy.

The first ingredient is the hide itself. Every year tens of thousands of whitetail hides are discarded. The hide of a doe or young buck whitetail is one of the easiest hides to tan. It's not too big to be cumbersome. It's thick enough to resist tearing but thin enough to soften, and it fleshes easily. It seems intuitive that hides from smaller animals such as squirrels or coons would be easier to tan, but that's just not the case. Smaller hides are easy to preserve, but they're nearly impossible to get soft without using harsh chemicals to break down the fibers in the hide. As you'll see, we're going to avoid breaking down the fibers, which will result in a much longer lasting end product.

When you pick out a hide, make sure it's not scored. Scoring is what happens when a hide is cut with a knife from the flesh side but not all the way through. These areas are more likely to tear in the softening process later on. I've found that after you make the initial cuts on a deer — up the legs, the belly, and around the neck — you can put the knife away and literally pull the hide off. Use your skinning knife sparingly and you'll avoid scoring your hide.

Once you've got a nice hide, you'll need some sort of fleshing tool. With a deer hide you aren't actually cutting the flesh from the hide, but rather pushing it off. The right angle on the edge of an old lawnmower blade works well after you pad the ends to form handles. Next comes the fleshing beam. 2x6s nailed into an A-frame configuration work well. The idea is to be able to drape the hide over one of the legs of the "A" and lean against it with your belt line to hold the hide in place while you push down and away with the fleshing tool. It helps if you round the edges of the board a little to reduce the chance of cutting the hide between the fleshing tool and an abrupt edge on the beam.

Next you'll need a plastic drum or garbage can, two pounds of salt, and two pounds of alum. You can get alum in bulk at pool chemical supply stores. Also, they sell it along with food preserving items at some grocery stores.

Once you've gathered all the necessary materials you can get started. To flesh the hide, lay the A-frame fleshing beam on its side so that one of the legs is sticking up. Now you can stand on the lower leg with the upper reaching your belt line. Now drape the hide over the upper beam flesh side up and work the meat and fat off from the center outward. It should come off pretty easily until you get out to the legs. Here there's only membrane, and it's a real bummer to remove. I don't usually worry about a little membrane left on the hide, as this will work off during the softening process.



Home Tanning

Be careful not to score the hide during the fleshing process. You shouldn't need too much pressure to push the flesh off. After the hide is fleshed, wash it with some laundry detergent and a few changes of water. You'd be amazed by how dirty the water will be.

To mix the tanning solution, simply put five gallons of warm water in your drum and throw in the salt and alum. Warm water dissolves the salt and alum easier and quicker than cold. Once the solids are mostly dissolved and the solution is cool, put the hide in, stir it, cover, and let it sit for a few weeks. Once the hide is in the solution it can stay there indefinitely. You're basically pickling it. While it's soaking, stir it every few days initially so the solution can penetrate

The author using a draw knife to push the flesh off the deer hide.

all portions of the hide.

The amount of time needed to pickle the hide fully depends on the temperature. During warm weather, two weeks should be more than enough. If it's cold out, two months may not get it done. You can check whether or not the solution has penetrated fully by taking a slice off the edge of a thick part of the hide. Up around the neck is a good place. The color should be uniform all the way through. If the slice reveals a band of color, let it soak longer.

Now you have a preserved hide. All you have to do is pull it out, dry it, and viola, you've got a nice supple hide to drape over the couch, right? Well, not really. If we did that, the hide would dry into something like a sheet of plywood. In order to get it soft, you need to do a little more work. Actually, that's misleading. Now is when the work really begins.

Before proceeding, I like to rinse the hide again in a few changes of fresh water to get the salt and alum out of the hair. Once this is done, roll the hide up and ring as much water out as you can. It helps to roll and ring it in several different directions: top to bottom, left to right, etc. Now lay it out flesh side up and apply a light coat of oil. Vegetable oil works well, but Neatsfoot oil is made specifically for tanning and leather application.

Now you'll need a few hours you can devote to pulling and stretching the hide until it's completely dry and soft. Pulling and stretching the hide while it's drying allows the fibers in the hide to stick together. Moving into the sunshine



The finished hide — a trophy by itself.

sounds like a good way to speed the drying process, but it's also a good way to a stiff hide. Sorry, but there are no shortcuts in this process. The thinner portions of the hide will dry sooner, and as they do they'll turn darker. Stretching these areas will lighten them like magic. Sometimes it helps to break the hide over the corner of a table to stretch difficult areas. If you can't stretch the hide until it's absolutely bone dry, stick it in a plastic bag in the fridge or freezer until you can finish.

When the hide is almost completely dry, it often helps to cable it. Cabling is a final step involving rapidly pulling a hide back and forth over a tight cable or rope. This really helps to loosen those hide fibers and produce a super soft hide.

Frequent contributor Clay Hayes lives in Kendrick, Idaho. He recently started a website featuring how-to videos on all things traditional. You can find info and tutorials on everything from bow-building to hide-tanning at www.twistedstave.com.



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The wood shavings have been swept up, a new string completed, a final check of the tiller, and with pride you apply the final finish to your new wood bow. Well, maybe. Let's not rush that final finish idea until we have spent a little time shooting your new bow. As important as building a good bow is, getting good arrow flight out of it is equally important ... possibly more so.

A lot of bowyers have an aversion to marring the finish on a new creation, even when a little more wood needs to come off to get it shooting right. A good sealer, whether a natural oil, urethane/varnish, or rubbed wax, is a good idea to stabilize the moisture content, but with a wood bow you need to be open to tampering with that fine finish to correct the tiller after shooting a break-in period. You may need to decrease the draw weight to something more manageable, take more mass off the tips to reduce hand shock and speed the bow up, or make slight adjustments to keep the limbs in perfect tiller. Often you need to reshape the handle for improved arrow clearance or increased shooting comfort. But usually by the time a budding bowyer reaches the point of shaping handles, sight window, and riser, he's anxious to put the finish on.

For some reason many people believe that a primitive bow just doesn't have the potential for good arrow flight and proper tuning. That simply is not true, but I see way too many being shot with arrows wobbling toward the target. I expect my selfbows to produce arrow flight as perfect as one could expect from any longbow or recurve. As ethical hunters we must put in the time to find the right arrow and broadhead combination that recovers quickly from the bow and flies true and straight.

Tuning a primitive bow is similar to tuning any other bow, although perhaps a bit touchier. Wood bows are not clones but rather individuals, and the correct arrow spine doesn't necessarily follow a formula. Most selfbows are more critical of spine than those close to or center shot like a longbow or recurve. A good

Tuning the Primitive Bow



starting point is a spine that matches the draw weight.

When I start shooting the bow as it arrives at final tiller and shape, I try a couple of differently spined arrows in the general ballpark and see how they fly. Remember, for a right hand shooter a too-stiff arrow will come out of the bow nock right then generally straighten up, whereas a too-light spine will come out nock left and fishtail a lot. For lefties just the opposite is true. An arrow too stiff in spine will often slap or crack as it is shot. Sometimes with the

bow canted it is hard to tell if your arrow is spined wrong or the nock is too high or low. A high nock kicking up as it leaves the bow can mean that the nocking point is too high, but it also can indicate a nocking point way low, causing the arrow to kick up after shelf contact.

Once I have an idea what the bow wants, I shoot a few arrows into a dirt

Primitive arrows should group at your maximum yardage. Here, river cane shafts have been tuned to the author's shooting distance.



Two styles of selfbow handles. Notice the bulge on the left-hand bow.

bank from five feet and see what is happening with the arrow coming out of the bow. Remember, you can't select an arrow spine until you get the nocking point set. If the arrow spine seems right, I may try bare-shafting the arrows into the bank. Be advised that you have to go with averages doing this with a primitive bow because a bad release, high elbow, or inconsistent

draw will mimic spine and nock problems. The arrow has more handle to get around and may take longer coming out of paradox than your old center-shot recurve. Good form is a must for bare shaft tuning.

The nocking point may also be very different from that of your other bows. I have found that many selfbows need a much higher nocking point than expect-



Make sure the arrow rests on or as close to your knuckle as possible.

ed. I went from 3/8" high on a laminated longbow to 5/8" with most selfbows. There is no too high or low, just what the bow wants to produce good arrow flight. It's best to start out with a high nocking point, maybe 3/4", and work down in 1/8" increments.

For archers new to primitive bows, arrow rests can produce some hard decisions and lead to arrow clearance problems. I personally never cut an arrow rest into the wood. To me, that detracts from the fine lines of the bow. I shoot off my hand against a thin wrap of rawhide lace rolled under the top of the leather handle for a hand locator and rest. Others I know use a small wedge of thick leather glued to the bow riser under the top of the handle. Many of the large cutout rests I see on selfbows seem to hinder good arrow clearance rather than help. Tens of millions of arrows have been launched off an archer's knuckle. The arrow and hand-grip just have to be in the same spot for each and every shot.

A small wedge will accomplish this. Hand placement will affect how the bow shoots, and the type of grip, rest, or handle design can help with consistency. I like a straight handle, but the bulbous handle design, which has a swell in the center of the handle, offers another way to help grip the bow the same each shot. Some bows want a firm grip while oth-

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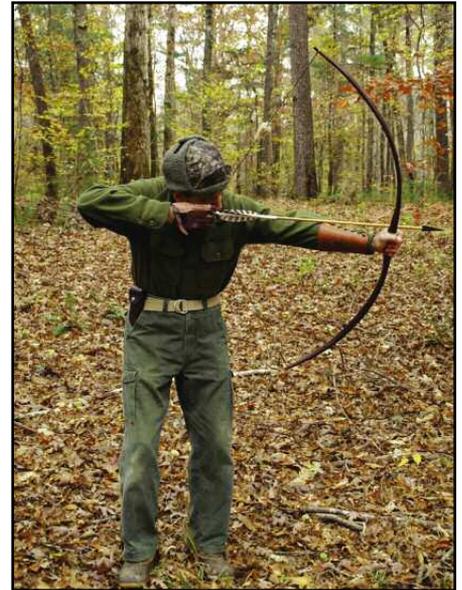
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Don't be afraid to make alterations to your bow when trying to get the best arrow flight from it. Here the author is reworking the handle radius.

Leaving arrows several inches longer helps with primitive bow arrow flight.

ers want a very light touch. Go ahead and experiment.

Another consideration for the handle and riser as you are working the wood down is to radius the riser around so that the arrow is touching only a small spot on the wood. You do not want to create a wide, flat place the arrow has to pass along. With a non-bending handle with fadeouts you have a lot of wood to work with, so make it streamlined to mesh smoothly into the handle and limbs, curving in a nice arc from back to belly. Make both sides' top and bottom similar for good looks. A much smaller handled bow, such as one that bends through the handle, already has a small area but still could be made more streamlined. All of these factors can affect arrow flight.

Once you have a field point flying true with no wobbles, switch to broadheads. Be advised that things may change. This year the afternoon before deer season opened my hunting buddy Steve came up to join me for the big day. He proudly showed me the beautiful new arrows he had crafted, but quickly put them away to practice at the broadhead bale with older field tips. When I asked how the new hunting arrows shot, he told me "fine" ... he thought. I advised him to get them out, as we could re-sharpen them but we needed to see them fly. It was pitiful to see the look on his face at this late hour, since they flew

like wood ducks through thick timber.

As Steve found out, just because your bow shot great with an arrow tipped with a field point, it may not shoot your favorite broadhead. I generally can shoot a five-pound lighter spine with the same weight field points as my broadheads. You don't know till you try it.

Big, wide, or multi-blade broadheads may not fly well from your selfbow either. I try to shoot my broadheads with someone looking over my shoulder to watch arrow flight. I'll take a perfectly

flying arrow over a wider blade from a wobbling arrow any day. Don't get locked into anything; shoot a lot of arrows and see what works. For good penetration an arrow must impact perfectly straight with no wobble to displace the mass of the shaft from behind the tip. Shoot each of your hunting arrows several times to be sure they are right.

We have all read over and over again to cut our arrows 3/4" to 1" back of point longer than our draw. Have you ever

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Having a friend watch your arrows for erratic arrow flight helps in identifying how your arrows are leaving the bow.

noticed real primitive arrows from our past history? Most seem long for the archer's draw. As usual, hunters who depended on the bow for their livelihood figured it out long ago. When I finally came around and started leaving my arrows up to three inches behind the head longer than my draw, arrow flight tuning got way easier. I also got a heav-

ier arrow.

I noticed back when I cut my shafts to leave 1" behind the point that trying to cut off or lengthen my arrows in 1/4" or 1/2" increments just didn't seem to affect the spine the way it had when tuning center shot recurves in the past. Adding several inches to my arrows has made them much more forgiving of

spine with selfbows. A longer, heavier arrow is much more forgiving of flaws in form as well.

While tuning and beginning to shoot your new bow, if you notice that the tiller needs tweaking, do it. You will only compress wood fibers in the belly of the bow and worsen the tiller by ignoring the problem. Whip out the scraper and make it right. Failure to correct minor tiller problems for fear of blemishing the new finish is the number one major failing I see with novice bowyers. If you decide that the nocks on the bow tips could be worked down, or you are getting arrow slap and want to try streamlining the riser more, do it. You can always apply more finish. That is one reason I favor animal oil finishes. I carry a small vial of rendered bear or pig oil in my quiver, and actually have taken a few scrapes here and there to remove dings while sitting in my stand. Rub the hard glass over the new scrape honing it slick, hand rub in a little oil, and you're good to go again. This is one benefit of wood over fiberglass. Wood can always be improved upon by a few more scrapes, and the draw weight can easily be lightened if needed.

If you love to shoot arrows and demand good arrow flight, a primitive bow is another step up in challenge. As you step up to the line and send that perfect arrow down range, you will feel a measure of pride you will never obtain from a more modern bow.

Frequent contributor Sterling Holbrook lives in Alabama with his bowhunting wife Krista.



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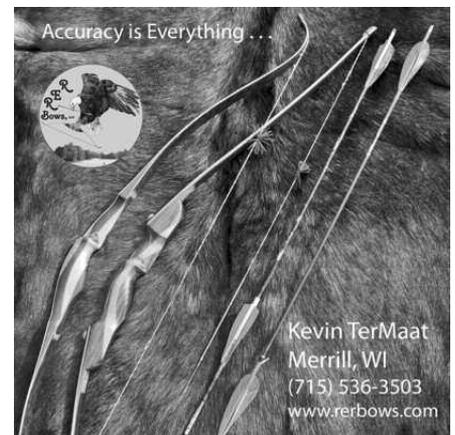
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The woods glowed with a soft white light from a fresh blanket of snow. It was late December 1998, and I was in a treestand with an antlerless tag in my pocket, watching a dozen does and fawns file past. When the last deer melted away, I realized I had lost the drive to hunt with my compound and vowed to switch to a recurve. I experienced a similar feeling in 1993 after shooting my last deer with a rifle. In both instances I realized I needed to add challenge to make the hunt more natural and rewarding. The need to make the hunt more difficult may sound oxymoronic, since one of the goals is to fill a tag, but many hunters continue to seek difficulty and challenge to their hunt and turn to the traditional bow to find it.

Not long after I made the switch, I overheard a couple of traditional bowhunters talking about how traditional bows are superior for hunting. A few years later I heard the same argument from a legend in traditional bowhunting, and then I heard the bowyer who made my first custom bow echo the same message. These views were based on the premise that traditional bows are the best bow choice because their simplicity of design and aiming makes them the easiest to shoot accurately in a hunting situation. Simplicity of design I can appreciate, but simplicity in aiming while maintaining the highest degree of accuracy in the woods? After 13 years of traditional bowhunting and nearly 50 big game harvests, I still struggle to believe traditional bows are easy to shoot accurately.

Although I view bowhunting more as a lifestyle than a sport, shooting a traditional bow has much in common with sports. Shooting a traditional bow requires strength, hand-eye coordination, concentration, and muscle memory. In hunting situations there are even more similarities, such as performing under pressure, endurance, reaction time, and mental challenge, all components basic to competitive sports. There is a small segment of the traditional bowhunting community consisting of great shooters who have mastered the requirements of making tough shots and have the abilities to do so. Similarly, in sports a small percentage



Baseball and Bows

By Kirby Kohler

of athletes is truly great and gifted. Unfortunately for most of us, we do not fall in the “great” category.

I have been an athlete longer than I’ve been a bowhunter. As a kid I was skinny and sinewy, topping the scale at 145 pounds when I graduated from high school, but I played every sport I could no matter who was the competition. I wanted to win every time whether I was good at the sport or not. To say I was overly competitive would be an understatement. I played hockey, golf, football, basketball, and tennis, but I loved baseball and was a gifted swimmer. In swimming, my goal every year was to be one of the best in Minnesota, which was possible given my talent and work ethic. I didn’t have similar talents in baseball, but I loved the game and practiced every free moment.

When I played baseball, I took pride in being a catcher because I was highly involved in every game and had the opportunity to impact it on every pitch. I

remember a game when I was 15-years old, when my swing and timing came together perfectly. In my first two at bats I hit a couple of line drives. In my third, I connected on a fastball and watched the ball fly over the fence. I still remember the effortless feeling of the swing. I finished the game five for five and played as if I were a hitting machine. However, in the next seven games I managed to go 0 for 20 with a couple walks and plenty of strikeouts. My coach said that I was trying to hit a home run every at bat. I practiced day after day as always, but just could not get out of my slump. With time and determination, I crawled out of that hole and finished the

Like an athlete, the traditional bowhunter needs to practice, and be able to perform under pressure. The author kept his wits about him as this bull stood just yards away. Making the shot under pressure takes continuing practice, in shooting and hunting.

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Being a successful traditional bowhunter means you must spend time improving your hunting and stalking skills to get close to game.

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A few years ago in New Mexico, I came face to face with a drooling, slobbering, red-eyed bull elk with nothing

but air between us save for the six-foot tall fir directly in front of me. Somehow I held it together during the dream-like encounter. With my bow arm up and tension on the string, I soaked up the sight of the bull as he scanned the aspen bench for the cow I'd imitated moments before. I remember the spray of rain from my matted fletching as I loosed the arrow, its slight wobble to the right as it cleared my riser, and its spin just before it sank into the bull's chest. I remember the spoor released into the air as the bull turned and bolted. I remember calmly putting my bugle tube to my lips as if I had done this dozens of times (like running around the bases after my first and only home run) and letting go a scream to stop the bull. He did, and I remember the rush of air that thundered through the forest as the bull collapsed on his side. At that moment I felt I had achieved the pinnacle of my bowhunting career.

In the three seasons since then I have been on a roller coaster ride of ups and downs with my bow. I never expected to experience a parallel between baseball and bowhunting, but this experience has reinforced how difficult it is to hunt with a traditional bow.

Many of my hunting friends are compound hunters and likely always will

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be. A few have dabbled in traditional bowhunting and go back and forth from a compound to a traditional bow. But when the rut kicks in and the big boys act lovesick, my friends toss their stick-bows into the corner because of the difficulty of making the shot with a traditional bow when it counts. When crunch time comes and the pressure climaxes as a bruiser buck cruises by at 15 yards or a bull appears with red hot eyes that pierce through the forest, they want a release aid, peep sight, kissers button, and a sight pin.

The compound and its typical accessories eliminate much of the human element from bowhunting. There is little need to be concerned about when to draw when shooting a compound with 80% let off. A walking deer while shooting a compound is essentially a standing deer because of arrow speed and sight pins. And a deer that suddenly changes angles when the hunter reaches full draw poses little concern for the compound shooter, while the entire shot sequence needs to start over for the traditional archer.

In seven years of shooting high-tech compounds, I never missed a 15-yard shot at a deer. But like most honest traditional bowhunters, I have missed 10-yard shots at deer with traditional tackle despite thousands of practice arrows each year.

On a hunt in Kansas this past season I was reminded of the difficulty in hunting with a traditional bow. A doe crashed through the thicket looking as if something had been pestering her, glancing over her back and looking as fidgety as a deer could look. Then a buck's gleaming white rack bounced through the brush behind her, solving the riddle of her behavior. With the buck eight yards away, I reached full draw and was a split second away from releasing the arrow into his chest. Then he closed the distance to three yards. Unfortunately, this move altered the shot angle since he was walking directly at the base of my tree. I had to come down from full draw as I waited for him to turn broadside. When he did, I started to draw again. By the time I hit anchor he had moved far enough to my left for the other trunk of the cedar I was in to hit the top of my upper limb.



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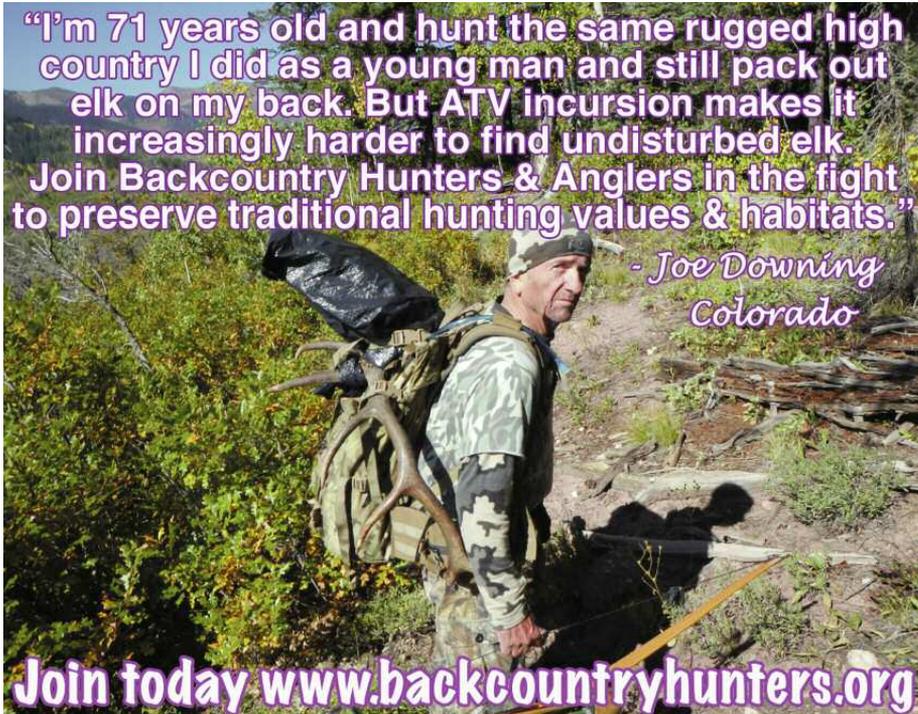


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This prevented me from moving my bow arm to pick a spot behind his shoulder.

So there he stood at three yards with a rack that would challenge any "book" out there. I could do nothing except hope that he would turn and give me another opportunity, but he didn't. There is little chance that buck would have survived such an encounter with any of my friends who shoot compounds. The short length and high let-off of modern compounds would have made that shot easy.

Just as I was gifted in the swimming pool, some traditional bowhunters are naturally gifted archers. Those of us who are not will have to work hard, struggle through difficulty, adjust goals, and identify our abilities to obtain success. We need to identify our shooting abilities and then maximize our skills through practice. Not every hunter will be able to pick a spot on a deer walking broadside at 30 yards. Some of us will need to limit ourselves to stationary targets at shorter distances.

Traditional bowhunters can make-up for deficiencies in shooting ability by improving hunting skills. Closer shots are easier shots. By studying the landscape and animal behavior, hunters can increase the number of close encounters they have each season. I find it interesting that hunters will spend hundreds of hours practicing shooting each

year, but devote little time to improving themselves as hunters by stalking animals or studying sign. Some of the most successful hunters I know are average shooters but great hunters. There is more to being a traditional bowhunter than just shooting.

When you decide to hunt with a traditional bow, you have to learn how to hunt with a traditional bow. Stand placement, stand height, when to draw, when to release, effective range, arrow trajectory, arrow flight clearance ... dozens of hunting variables need to be altered. Shot opportunities with a compound are not always shot opportunities with a traditional bow, and we all need to accept those limitations.

By saying traditional bows are the easiest bows to shoot accurately, we may be misleading hunters new to traditional bowhunting. Preaching to a newcomer or a youth hunter that hunting with a traditional bow is easy and only poor shots ever miss fails to tell it like it is. That approach will not sustain traditional bowhunting. We may be contradicting ourselves as we fight to maintain primitive weapon status and the long archery seasons we have come to enjoy. If hunting with traditional bow is so easy, why do we need long hunting seasons or possibly our own seasons?

I believe it is important that we as traditional bowhunters recognize that not every hunter has the physical ability to shoot high scores on the range or make every shot in the woods. Some bowhunters are gifted, a few have no business in the field, and most of us fall somewhere in between. Some believe that missing a shot indicates lack of skill rather than the inherent difficulty of shooting a traditional bow. Some believe every shot should be automatic, and if it isn't then there must be a problem with the hunter. Even after shooting thousands of arrows and thinking about hunting 365 days every year, I'm not going to rely on turning into a perfectly performing robot during every encounter with game.

Expecting any archer to perform like a machine on every shot seems shortsighted when one considers the plethora of variables that affect us and the shot. Have you ever made a "perfect shot" and still had something go awry?

An unseen limb, a jittery doe that ducked the arrow, a bunny that darted off as your shaft center punched its shadow. Maybe you shot four inches low because you expected the deer to drop and it didn't. Maybe you blew the shot because your mind was at work or at home rather than in the woods. Hunt long and hard enough, and I think even the world's greatest traditional bowhunters are going to run into undesirable results.

Some may make hunting with a traditional bow look easy, just as some baseball players make hitting a 90-mph fastball over the fence look easy. But the rest of us find it difficult and challenging. For me, traditional bowhunting will always be the most rewarding way to hunt, but under no circumstance is the traditional bow the easiest to shoot accurately. We need to accept its challenges for what they are.

The author, his wife Melissa, and their three children, Autumn, Landon, and Tanner, recently moved to Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin, where they enjoy hunting, fishing, and exploring the bluff country along the Mississippi River.



Ten Ways to Increase Success When Making the Switch

10. Start shooting with a bow no heavier than 45-pound draw weight.
9. Create shooting drills that replicate hunting scenarios and practice them regularly.
8. Place treestands low to the ground to increase the area of the kill zone.
7. Practice shooting over and under branches.
6. Reduce skyline silhouette in treestands.
5. Limit shots at game animals to 20 yards or less, but practice regularly out to 40 yards.
4. Reduce bow noise by shooting a heavy arrow (10 to 12 grains/pound of draw weight).
3. Do not shoot at walking deer.
2. Do not shoot at alert deer.
1. Re-learn how to hunt.

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In 2010 a number of things very important to my bowhunting came to an end, some more rapidly than others. The losses started with the unexpected passing of my father in June. Even though he had stopped hunting long before I was born, he was probably the greatest factor in making me the bowhunter I am today. With the gift of my grandfather's recurve many years ago, he gave me strong reason to return to traditional bowhunting. By taking it upon himself to secure permission for me to hunt a pair of small woodlots near his Wisconsin home, he made sure I had ample opportunities to pursue my passion. What those two woodlots lacked in size — they were less than ten acres each — they made up for in excellent deer hunting.

In August my wife, daughter, and I traveled to Wisconsin to scout and hang treestands in both woodlots. It didn't take long before we realized that, after being in decline for several years, the smaller of the two had finally become useless for deer hunting. Disease had slowly claimed much of the old timber, and buckthorn had choked out seedlings, immature trees, and deer trails. The previous season's last tiny oasis of deer activity near the property's northeast corner was now a waist-high tangle of impenetrable thorny brambles, and the deer had responded by moving elsewhere. As with any graveside visitation, I said a few words of gratitude, turned, and left.

In retrospect, perhaps I should have pushed the landowner harder for the preservation of that few acres of habitat. But to him, it was simply a useless backyard full of freeloading animals that ate his flower gardens. Aside from his friendship with my father, I was allowed to hunt there for one reason: he wanted the deer gone. Whether they disappeared due to my broadheads or habitat destruction meant little difference to him.

At least I still had the larger of the two properties, so that's where I spent the majority of my hunting time. One October afternoon the landowner and I were talking when our discussion took an unexpected turn. Her estranged husband, who walked out on her 16 years prior, was finally pursuing divorce. With her in questionable health and the cost of repairing the house exceeding its value, she no longer wished to retain ownership of her home. Accordingly, that would be my last season hunting the small woodlot behind her house.

A few weeks later I was at home considering my outlook for the following hunting season when my phone rang. One of my cousins was calling to say my uncle had put his hunting land on the market. Several years prior, health issues had forced an end to his hunting and required him to move back to Illinois. He still owned the cabin and half of the original acreage that had been in my family for decades. When I was a child that hunting camp was the source of many stories, and I hung on every word as if they were clues to the location of a hidden cache of Christmas presents. It was the first place I walked a trail beside my grandfather with a bow in my hand and a deer tag on my back. Needless to say, that small piece of land held tremendous sentimental value.

But I hadn't set foot on the property since my grandfather passed away in February of 1988, so with great antici-



Square One

By Jason R. Wesbrock

pation, my wife, daughter, and I headed to Wisconsin fully expecting to put in an offer on the property. Rachel was 13 years old and planned to take up bowhunting the following season, and I was excited about the possibility of my daughter beginning her journey at the same place I started mine many years ago.

By the time we left the property that afternoon, I felt as if I'd been gut shot. What was once an expanse of mature hardwoods and pines had long ago been clear-cut and replanted with corn rows of marketable spruce trees dense enough to impede the travels of all but small game. The neighboring agricultural field where I spent many childhood evenings waiting for whitetails was now surrounded by a deer-proof fence, compliments of the state's capitulation to a farmer determined that no wildlife should dine on his crops. Adjoining the opposite end of the property, what I remembered as another woodlot of excellent habitat had become a green desert of manicured lawns, steel barns, and wood houses. Progress.

After a few months of phone calls and emails to various realtors, much burned boot leather, offers, counter offers, and finally a closing that my wife and I thought would never take place, we became the proud owners of a different piece of habitat roughly 18 miles due north of Aldo Leopold's famous farm. As winter yielded to spring, I found myself as interested in learning the property's plant life as the habits of its animals. I was pleased to discover that with its close proximity to Leopold's property, much of what I discovered on ours resembles the positive aspects he recounted about his.

Even though our property isn't as large as Leopold's, it's

The author's daughter, Rachel, helping reforest with white oak acorns.

an incredibly diverse piece of habitat containing enormous white oaks, burr oaks, and white pines, the age of which I can only begin to speculate. There are black oaks dating back to the mid-1800s (an examination of one dead specimen showed 160 sets of annual rings), a few patches of delicious wild blackberries, and a spring-fed creek with a small wetland area that supports a bounty of waterfowl and sand hill cranes. In total, the property contains three species of pines, four types of oaks, black cherries, poplars, white birches, sugar maples, alders, red cedars, black spruces, and hundreds of other plant species ranging from wildflowers to scrub brush, the names of which I intend to learn one day.

By the time deer season opened on September 17th we had purchased a large camper for the property, installed an electrical hookup, driven a new well, and utilized the previous owner's septic system. Rachel and I had done extensive scouting and hung a few treestands along heavy travel corridors and funnels. On opening morning a few minutes before first legal light, she had two deer milling around well within her bow range, clear and broadside. To her credit, she knew taking a shot that early was illegal even though she could clearly see the deer. She never even took her bow off the hanger or nocked an arrow, as she remained content to watch the show and wonder if one of those deer was destined to wear her first punched tag later.

Since Rachel claimed the north stand, I selected one near the southwest corner of our property, which subse-



Dense cover and abundant browse proved excellent bedding habitat along the creek line.

quently yielded no deer sightings that morning. Rachel's two early bird does were the only ones to make an appearance for either of us. After much discussion about wind conditions and what we thought we knew about local deer activity, Rachel decided to return to her north stand for the afternoon hunt. I opted to return to my morning location as well. Three hours of legal shooting light remained when we both settled in for the second half of opening day.

The wind was light and variable, and I had already given Rachel a few pointers on bowhunting in such conditions. Releasing an occasional piece of milkweed (minus the seeds) helps keep tabs on one's scent stream. Even so, variable winds have probably saved more deer from my freezer than any other weather condition. More times than I can recall, a group of deer had closed the distance toward my stand as I selected the one I wanted to wear my tag. At some point between passing up shots at other deer and reaching full draw on my intended quarry, the wind shifted, noses flared, and white flags waved. My best suggestion to Rachel: If faced with a similar situation, consider taking the first deer to offer a good shot. It may be the only chance you get.

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An hour before sunset I found myself contemplating my own advice. My occasional pieces of milkweed had been drifting to all points of the compass when a soft, sudden rustling caused me to look over my right shoulder. At the far edge of a small clearing 30 yards south of me a pair of whitetail does appeared, one slightly larger than the other. A stand of immature black oaks obscured any possible shot to the clearing, but both deer were heading in my direction anyway.

As the deer approached, they passed directly underneath my stand and stopped ten yards from my broadhead to nibble some browse. They were positioned quartering hard away with their heads closer together than their tails — two sides of a triangle with me at the bottom. While I eased into shooting position, the smaller of the two deer spun her head back and looked straight into my eyes. How that deer picked me off I'll never know. Her nostrils didn't flare, so the swirling wind hadn't yet betrayed me. For whatever reason, the larger doe paid no attention.

Breaking eye contact, the alerted doe took two bounds and stopped broadside. But I know better than to drop the string on a tightly wound deer. When the large doe turned to her left and took a few steps, I drew, found anchor, set my aim, and felt the string slip from my fingers. In less time than it takes to tell, my arrow penetrated both her lungs, exited through her right shoulder, and came to rest in the sandy soil. Eighty yards later, my first deer taken from our property folded into a patch of white pines and black oak seedlings.

I sent Rachel a quick text message to say I'd shot a big doe and that she didn't need to get out of her stand. I'd see her back at the camper after last light. As much as I wanted her with me when I recovered the deer, it was more important to me that she continue to enjoy her hunt. According to her reply enjoying her hunt meant helping with the recovery, so I guess we both put each other first. After some flashlight assisted field dressing and traversing the rolling terrain with my homemade game cart, our opening day hunt came to a close.

Later that night, Rachel and I feasted on fresh tenderloins, sweet corn, and potatoes while discussing the chain of events resulting in the meal before us. As much as I missed having access to those two small woodlots I'd hunted for



Opening day on our new property. My only regret is the deer came by my treestand instead of Rachel's.

years, if not for that loss, my wife and I wouldn't have become landowners. And while I dearly wanted to pass on the tradition of bowhunting to my daughter on the same family property where mine began, sometimes it's best to look through the windshield instead of the rear view mirror. Starting at square one definitely comes with its own set of challenges, but it can also yield some rather special rewards.

When regular TBM contributor Jason Wesbrock isn't leaving boot prints in his new Wisconsin habitat, he makes his home in Illinois with his wife Christine and daughter Rachel.



Equipment Note

On this hunt the author shot a TradTech Titan recurve and carbon arrows tipped with 125-grain Ace Standard broadheads.

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Campfires

By *Duncan Pledger*

When you think back on your bowhunting memories, it's surprising how many of them include a campfire. Or maybe it really isn't.

Whether it's sitting around the fire at dinnertime while deer liver sizzles in an iron skillet or recounting hunting stories under the stars as you gaze into the glowing embers, a fire is an integral part of any hunting camp.

Sig Olson, the great naturalist from Minnesota, once wrote: "Something happens to a man when he sits before a fire. Strange stirrings take place within him, and a light comes into his eyes which was not there before."

Could such stirrings result from a reawakening of some primitive part of us that goes back to when we lived in caves? For our ancient ancestors, fires

were a serious business — a barrier against wild animals, a source of life-giving warmth, and a light in the blackness of night. Fire was a nurturing friend in an otherwise hostile world. In spite of the millennia that have passed since then, some of those feelings have never been totally extinguished.

They surfaced for me many years ago during a solo bowhunting trip in central Wisconsin's desolate sand hill country, as I sat by my campfire one frosty night in late October. The sky was blazing with stars and a pack of coyotes howled and yapped back in the scrub oaks and pine. The civilized part of me knew that coyotes are harmless enough and I was in no danger of freezing, but I still found myself adding more wood to the blaze and drawing a little closer to its warming embrace.

For the purist, setting a fire is the true test of woodsmanship — a challenge that proves making a fire entirely of natural materials and touching it off with a single match is not a lost art. The construction begins with a few curls of resinous birch bark and pinecones, around which are placed a small pyramid of seasoned kindling carefully split with an axe. Then larger splits of increasing thickness are arranged in a geometric pattern around the central cone. When a match is set to it, the fire takes hold without hesitation and burns down clean to make wonderful cooking coals.

I've also seen fires made by simply dragging some brush into a heap, dousing it with white gas, and flipping in a match. Bigger pieces of wood are immediately thrown on, regardless of how green they may be, and should the whole smoldering, sputtering business go out (as it often does), there is always some cussing as more "fire juice" is applied. Fires such as this do not work well for cooking, but serve their purpose as a focal point for after-dark socialization.

While the cavemen probably cursed the smoke, today it has become a part of the campfire's mystique. Its fragrance drifting through the air speaks of wilderness camps, adventure, and fellowship, and its pungent odor has a way of clinging to our clothes and gear. Jackets, canvas packs, and bow cases take on the sharp smell, and getting a whiff of it as we rearrange a closet during the long winter months can bring back fond memories.

You become most aware of a fire when you're camped in the backcountry with no other humans around. It becomes an all-engaging center of attention as it cooks dinner, incinerates the waste, and then becomes your silent companion as you listen to the owls calling in the twilight.

That's when you feel the link with the past the strongest and become part of the long chain of campfires as old as the human race.

Regular contributor Duncan Pledger is a journalist and bowhunter from Milton, Wisconsin.





KUIU Introduces Two New Packs to Their Icon Line

KUIU, the leader in Ultralight Mountain hunting technology and design, announced the introduction of two new packs to their Icon line; the Icon 5000 and Icon 7000 along with a redesign of their patent-pending Carbon Fiber Frame and Suspension. The Icon sets itself apart from the

crowd with a modular design based around access, organized storage, versatility, and function for a wide range of backcountry hunting situations.

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The Icon packs are available in KUIU's new Verde & Vias Camouflage as well solid colors. Go to kuiu.com to learn more.

New Kickback Quiver

Great Northern Quiver Company, LLC has added a new quiver to their line of Professional Bow Hunting Quivers.

The Kickback is built like the Professional Adjustable Strap On model. They have taken the bottom mounting pad and rotated it 180 degrees so it mounts on the belly of the bow instead of the back of the bow. This adjustment allows shorter model bows more clearance so the arrow nocks no longer stick in the ground.



Everything else about the quiver has stayed the same. Like all of the Great Northern Quivers, there are no tools involved with the installation or removal of their quivers.

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To order on-line, check out their web site at www.OnlyHuntingDecoys.com.

The Taxidermist's Bow

By Jeff Stonehouse

Ed Schlein, my taxidermist, was smiling broadly as he handed me the old recurve. It had been hanging idle on the wall of his garage for as long as I could remember. "I haven't been able to shoot it since I messed up my shoulder in '02," he explained. "It's a beautiful bow, and it deserves to be put to good use."

"Absolutely," I agreed, admiring its elegant lines and then drawing it cautiously, unsure of its true condition. The Louis Meyer recurve had seen plenty of action since its creation in 1976. During three and a half decades it had been put to the test and showed obvious signs of wear and tear, but it was also clear that it had been loved. Having acquired the bow in the late '80s, Ed seemed wistful as he surrendered the relic.

Undoubtedly his recurve meant a lot to him, and he assured me that it had lots of life left in it. "Take it hunting, as a favor to me," he urged, "since I'm no longer able." Over time, he had proven himself to be a terrific taxidermist and I had come to consider him a friend, so I agreed to bring some new vigor to the long cherished but now neglected bow.

Considering its age, the bow was in decent shape. Its lower limb was twisted slightly and there was minor damage to the finish, but I was able to remedy those problems. The old recurve was a real performer from the start, producing tight groups and excellent arrow flight. I did notice quite a bit of shot noise, but after I added silencers to the string and adhesive fleece to the undersides of the limbs the bow was whisper-quiet. Natural curiosity led me to conduct extensive research via telephone conversations and the Internet, but in the end I was unable to gather additional information about the bow or the bowyer. Was he a

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mere hobbyist? Where did he live? How many bows did he build? These are all unanswered questions, adding a sense of mystery to the bow and its creator.

Setting aside my usual takedown recurve, I committed myself to shooting only the taxidermist's bow until it fit my hand like a glove. The grip was a bit beefy for me, but after a while it felt right. A month of daily practice on 3-D targets prepared me to take the vintage bow hunting. With a bonus doe tag in my wallet, I simply needed to pick a day to head afield. There was no hurry, however, since my license was valid from September through the end of January.

Time, unfortunately, has a way of getting away from us. Between work and family I found it difficult to break away even for one day. Finally a friend of mine called to invite me to hunt with him. I welcomed the nudge. We agreed to rendezvous at a specified location early on November 22nd and try to fill our antlerless tags.

I arrived late and discovered my buddy's truck in the parking area, empty and locked. He had already begun his hunt, but on his windshield he had taped a note explaining that we would meet around lunchtime. I uncased the old recurve and strung it

up, grabbed my daypack, and headed into the frosty Colorado woods.

This was strictly a meat hunt. I was not looking for the challenge of big antlers, yet I did hope that this day would produce a memorable experience and produce an interesting story to tell Ed when it was over.

Trudging up a slope of pines and gambel oak, I was only minutes into my hunt when I spotted a small group of does moving through the brush. They were nibbling on dried up oak leaves and branch tips as I dropped to my knees in the snow. Raising my binoculars, I made a quick head count. There were five. Now I began planning a strategy to get within bow range. After assessing the situation, I figured that it would not be a difficult stalk.

And I was right. I circled around downwind of the group where the footing turned out to be quieter with fewer dehydrated brambles under the snow. Then I crept through the white powder, using the scrub oak for cover, and closed in to 20 yards. Not a single deer noticed any movement as I drew the custom recurve and released the arrow. Upon impact, the broadhead sent the doe running. She took off like a rocket, covering more than 100 yards before piling up. I

did not see her go down, but I was able to blood trail her easily in the snow. While gutting the deer I wondered if my hunt had the makings of a story worth telling to my taxidermist. Would he be disappointed?

After dragging the doe a short distance downhill to my truck I met up with my buddy Dave, who had also scored on a baldy. He was all smiles. We shook hands and congratulated each other.

"Hmm, I never saw that bow before," Dave stated, eyeing the vintage recurve. He ran a fingertip along one of its limbs. "Sweet," he concluded after his examination.

"It's my taxidermist's bow," I said simply. Then I slipped the relic into its case and looked at my deer, the result of a casually arranged morning hunt. The old recurve had done its job.

Later, I returned Ed's bow and gave him a full report, omitting no details but adding no embellishments. I watched his reaction closely, afraid that the ho-hum story had let him down. To my surprise he was moved. The emotion he felt was evident in his eyes. "Thank you," he uttered softly, cradling his old recurve like something fragile and precious. Then he handed it back to me without saying another word. He just smiled.

Frequent contributor Jeff Stonehouse is a freelance writer from Divide, Colorado. His book, Stickbow Trails, is available on Amazon.com or you can order a copy by contacting the author at archerystone@yahoo.com.



Author's Note

I thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity to put my taxidermist's vintage recurve to good use and repay him for all of the fantastic work he has done for me. I used Carbon Express Heritage arrows, 125-grain 4-blade Muzzy broadheads, and Pentax 8x32 DCF ED binoculars. If you're looking for a great taxidermist, contact Ed Schlein at Elk Ridge Taxidermy at 719-495-3258 or visit elkridgetaxidermy.com. He is located in Colorado Springs, CO. His work is outstanding.



Finding Flint

By Billy Berger

For over a half million years flint was a vitally important tool material for early humans, who sought it out for any task requiring a super sharp edge. But after metal was discovered, stone quickly became obsolete. Well, almost.

The phasing out of stone tools doesn't mean that metal was better for all

tasks. Early metal tools and ornaments were often reserved for the elite because they were so expensive and required advanced skill to make. And even when metal was available, it coexisted with stone tools for millennia. A perfect example is Otzi, the 5,300-year-old Neolithic mummy found in the Austrian Alps in 1991. He had a copper

axe, but his arrows were tipped with flint points. Today metal is used for most tools, but a fascination with stone tools persists, and the increased interest in traditional and primitive bowhunting skills has led to a resurrection of the desire to make stone tools, particularly arrow points.

For those most interested in learning the skill of flint-knapping, the first hurdle to overcome is finding the raw material. Flint-knapping requires the right type of stone, and not just any stone will do. For simplicity I will use the term flint, although flint is a broad descriptor that will also include chert, jasper, agate, chalcedony, petrified wood, opalite, and agatized coral. All of these different types of stone possess similar qualities, breaking in a predictable and controllable manner to produce razor-sharp edges.

Flint is often found in small, localized areas. Finding it requires a keen eye and some knowledge of how it is formed. Of course, if you want to start right away you can always buy flint from dealers (just Google "flint dealers" or "flint for sale").

Exactly how flint forms isn't entirely understood, but we have a basic idea of the processes involved. Flint and its close cousin chert are most often found in association with limestone, a sedimentary rock composed mainly of the fossilized remains of shell-bearing sea creatures that flourished in the shallow seas that covered much of North America millions of years ago. Over the eons these creatures lived and died, their silica-rich skeletons sank to the sea floor and built up into thick layers. These layers were then covered with sediment and eventually solidified into limestone. Under the right conditions the limestone formed pockets of very hard stone composed of microscopic crystals: flint.

Eventually these layers were uplifted

Top—Colorful flint can make projectile points that are as deadly as they are beautiful.

Left—These large limestone beds are common in the midwestern U.S. and display the characteristic light gray color of the ancient sea creatures they are composed of.





A large deposit of light grey flint still encased in its parent limestone.

and millions of years of erosion exposed the flint for our early ancestors, providing them with an ideal, tool-quality material. This stone was so valuable it was often traded hundreds of miles away from its source. Today that stone is still there waiting quietly for someone, possibly you, to find it and unlock its amazing potential. But how do you find flint and where do you look?

The best way to begin is to order a geologic map of your state and locate areas of limestone. Drive to those areas and look for road-cuts, washouts, or other places where the earth has been exposed. Watch for the characteristic light gray color of limestone. Keep in mind that not all limestone contains flint, and even if it does the flint can vary greatly in quality. Some limestone may not have any flint at the location where you are looking, but a few miles away that same limestone bed may contain large amounts of flint. You will have to put in some time and cover some miles.

One common problem with exposed surface flint is that it is often fractured after millions of years of weathering. Water will seep into tiny cracks and cold will freeze the water, splitting the flint in numerous directions. In that case you may have to dig down into the earth below the frost line to expose flint that has not been subjected to this freeze-cracking.

Flint can come in a variety of shapes and sizes. Thick deposits in large limestone beds are often large and flat and can weigh hundreds of pounds. Flint

also comes in round or oblong pieces called nodules. These nodules can be as small as a chicken egg or as large as a basketball.

The most widespread deposits of flint I have ever seen are along I-70 in central Missouri. For mile after mile the highway cuts through limestone with thick deposits of flint. This flint is actually called Burlington chert and was quarried and traded for hundreds of miles from its source by native cultures. I have also found large areas containing flint in northeastern Missouri along I-61 near the towns of Hannibal and Palmyra.

The chemical composition of the silica that forms flint can affect its color. Earthy tones like grey, tan, brown, and black are the most common, although sometimes flint can be found in red, orange, yellow, white, pink, and even aqua green. Some flint creates beautiful points with a combination of several swirled colors.

Even if you find tough, grainy flint that seems impossible to work, don't throw it away. There is a trick to making tough flint easier to work: heat-treating. Thousands of years ago early man discovered that if flint is buried under a fire and slowly heated to a few hundred degrees for a few hours before allowing it to cool slowly the properties of the stone will change, making it much glassier and easier to work. This heat-altered stone will also produce much sharper edges. Most stone will heat-treat at temperatures between 350 and 500 degrees Fahrenheit. How deeply the



These large nodules of flint (some whole and some broken) were found by the author on a roadside in Kentucky.

stone is buried determines the temperature it will reach. The heating must be done carefully, because stone that is heated or cooled too quickly will crack or in extreme cases explode.

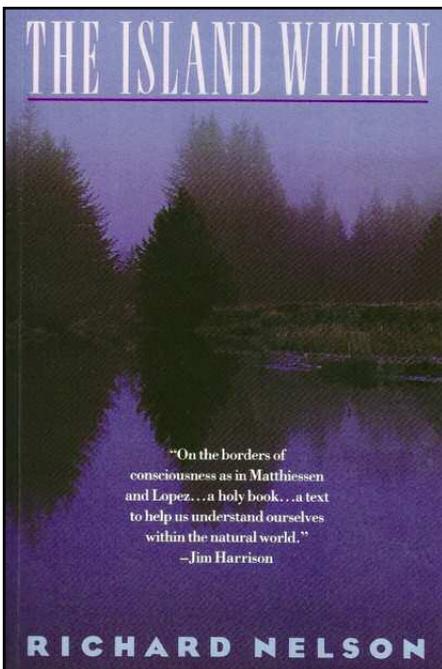
Heat-treated stone will often change color, and sometimes it will look so different from the raw stone that it appears completely unrelated. Browns and yellows in raw stone will often turn red or purple after heat-treating. White can sometimes turn pink, although sometimes there is no color change at all. It all depends on the stone and the minerals within it. Also, be advised that some stone color cannot be changed and attempting to do so by heat-treating will only ruin it.

Areas in northwestern Georgia, Lookout Mountain near Chattanooga, Tennessee, southern Kentucky, and parts of Ohio, Indiana, Texas and Kansas hold deposits of flint. There are many other sources of flint throughout the country. As you find your own, you will learn what to look for and will begin finding more sources of stone. And that's usually the way you have to go about it, because most experienced flint-knappers keep their prized sources of stone a secret. But don't worry; there is plenty of flint to go around.

Billy Berger is a primitive bowhunter from Marietta, GA who loves creating and hunting with stone arrow points.



Book Reviews



The Island Within

By Richard Nelson
ISBN: 0-679-73239-X

Cover price: \$17 paper

Published by Vintage Books, NYC

Reviewed by David Petersen

I watch the deer bound away into a thicket, soft and silent as a cloud's shadow. ... For several minutes I stand quietly, hoping to find the animal's shape somewhere in the tangle of twigs and boughs. But there is no movement, no shaking branch, no hint of sound. It's as if the moss and forest have soaked the deer up inside themselves, taken

even the heat of its breath, and nullified its entire existence. A withering sense of loneliness fills me. ...

—Richard Nelson, from the opening page of *The Island Within*

Back in my years of teaching magazine and “nature” writing at the local college and elsewhere, I always encouraged my students to learn to “read as a writer.” More specifically, among the best ways to learn how good writing works is to analyze how good writers do it. How do the writers we most enjoy so smoothly and invisibly manipulate our emotions to provoke laughter, anger, tears, and at the best of times an almost visceral sense of “being there” yourself, an active player in the story’s action?

And among the books I always assigned toward this end was Richard Nelson’s *The Island Within*. First released back in 1991, *Island* won that year’s John Burroughs Medal for outstanding natural history writing. Like all great books, it is timeless; as fresh and compelling today as it was a generation ago.

The story line is this: A young Ph.D. candidate in anthropology with anti-hunter leanings moves from the American Midwest to Alaska to live with Native subsistence hunters, study their cultural and spiritual worldviews, and write his doctoral dissertation about them (subsequently published as the book *Make Prayers to the Raven*). Not far into his extended time living

among and hunting with coastal Eskimos and inland Koyukon Indians, Nelson himself becomes an avid meat hunter, having been gently guided into approaching the activity with the same overarching sense of humility and respect embodied by his native mentors.

I feel inept and frail, seeing these animals, whose everyday world is beyond my reach or comprehension. They find security and ease where I could never survive, drawing on capacities vastly different from my own but no less perfected. I am reminded of [tribal elder] Grandpa William’s assertion that no animal should be considered inferior or insignificant, and that humans should never place themselves above any part of nature. In the wisdom of his tradition, if I am to judge one creature humbler than any other, it should be myself.

While the author describes in provocative detail his illuminating experiences with Native hunters, he reserves his most poignant and thoughtful reflections for those times he spends alone on an uninhabited, brown-bear-infested coastal island, sneak-hunting for deer. The fact that the author hunts with rifle rather than stickbow detracts not a whit from our reading pleasure or feelings of unity with him, as he definitely has a traditional bowhunter’s heart and sensibilities: quality over quantity, spirituality

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over sport. Nelson's quest in *The Island Within* is to explore, discover, and describe in highly poetical prose the very soul of heartfelt hunting. This book is a powerful antidote to today's puerile and redundant plague of horn-porn pap. Yet never does Nelson's writing come across as preachy or elitist; the man's boots remain firmly on the ground:

The long, quiet, methodical process of the hunt begins. I move deeper into the forest, ever mindful of treading the edge between protracted, eventless watching and the startling intensity of coming upon an animal, the always unexpected meeting of eyes. A deer could show itself at this moment, in an hour, in several hours, or not at all. Most of hunting is like this — an exercise in patient, isometric endurance and keen, hypnotic concentration.

The Island Within, simply put, is a thinking reader's read, a heartfelt adventure overflowing with the poetic honesty and open-ended wonder of an exceptionally soulful hunter and human animal.

Bows, Swamps, Whitetails

By Tim L. Lewis

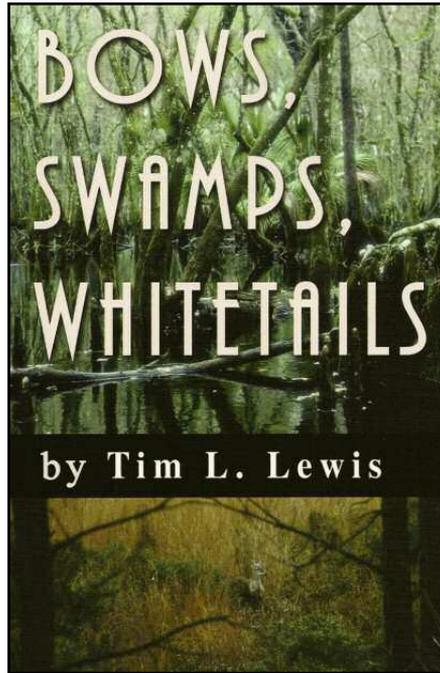
ISBN-13:978-0-595-41362-1 (pbk)

Suggested Retail Price: \$14.95

Reviewed by: David Tetzlaff

Tim Lewis's book will certainly not initiate a rush on Florida non-resident license sales when bigger deer with more admirable headgear are available elsewhere. And few out of state hunters, aside from those tempted by Osceola turkeys or feral hogs, will turn their compass to the far flung destinations of the Deep South. However, for reading pleasure (and sympathy for the punishing conditions that southern hunters endure) *Bows, Swamps, Whitetails* is an easy, relaxing read.

Tim Lewis is the epitome of the Nature Hunter. His notebook and camera are as vital to the hunt as is his bow. Through his eyes, photos, and meticulous field notes we observe the cornucopia of life that traffics the hammocks, pastures, and swamps of the Florida



whitetail woods: deer, feral hog, bear, turkey, waterfowl, cougar, coyote, alligator, snakes both venomous and harmless, and the typical roster of Eastern small game. Of note, in an anti-predator world, is his refreshing respect for the four-legged hunters that share his woods as Florida's carnivore population is on the rise.

Homage is paid, and rightly so, to bowhunting icons such as the Thompson brothers, Howard Hill, and Fred Bear, all of whom loosed arrows in the Sunshine State. Lewis briefly notes his own contemporaries, but probably could have offered more space in the book to his fellow swamp-runners. The Woodson Lease has seen more than its quota of disorderly and opinionated characters. Dishing on that crowd would have added vibrant color and local flavor to this particular chapter,

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perhaps more so than a retelling of the Thompson or Hill stories.

Southern archers seldom contend with snowfall or ice storms, but northern readers who hunt under those conditions may find special interest in the extremes of the wet and humid hurricane zone. One angry swipe from the ferocious winds and drenching rains of a hurricane can turn familiar woods into a tangled mess of devastation in a few hours, leaving the hunter to sort out landmarks and game movement patterns as if the area had never been scouted at all. With hurricanes comes change. A favorite acorn-producing oak hammock can be flattened, one's best stand tree will be uprooted, and areas typically bone dry become temporary ponds.

Bows, Swamps, Whitetails vividly describes the challenges of anchoring game under conditions that few others will encounter. Bowhunters who would give pause at stepping out of the truck into a 90-degree morning choked by suffocating humidity and clouds of mosquitoes may still enjoy reading about such hunts from the comfort of an easy chair.

Reviewer David Tetzlaff, a student of the swamp himself, is the current president of the Traditional Bowhunters of Florida.



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Traditional Harvests



Lou Tocco of Bedford Hills, NY, with an 11-point buck he took while hunting near Brookfield, CT. Lou used an Ed Mikuta longbow and self-made Sitka spruce arrow tipped with a Simmons Tree Shark.



After going years without ever killing a turkey with a bow, Darren Haverstick arrowed this bird behind his house. Darren used a two-piece takedown Thunderstick Mag, homemade ash arrows, and 200-grain Ace Super Express broadheads.



Ken Hall of Prescott, AZ, hunting with Colorado Elk Camp Outfitters of Cortez, Colorado, harvested this cow, his first archery elk, using a 54# Chastain takedown, STOS broadhead, and carbon express arrow.



Seven-year-old Clint Libby skipped school and helped his dad track this doe on opening day of the Maine Archery season. Equipment used was a 50# 1968 Bear Kodiak Hunter, Magnus 2-blade on a carbon shaft.





Ron Tandy of Florida with a magnificent gemsbok he took while hunting South Africa. Ron shoots a Black Widow recurve.



This Maine gobbler was taken by Chris Libby using an old model 50# PSE (Samick) Blackhawk and Bear broadhead on an aluminum shaft.



Joel Riotto of Demarest, NJ, flew into a wilderness camp on the Athabasca River in Alberta to take this bear using a Dale Dye bow and Zwickey broadhead.



Bowhunting Safari Consultants' client Jason Wheatley traveled from North Carolina to South Africa to take this great waterbuck.

The Traditional Harvests page is sponsored by Rod Bremer of Columbia River Knife and Tool (CRKT) in Portland, Oregon. Each issue one bowhunter, whose photo is bordered in red, is selected at random to receive a knife courtesy of Rod and CRKT.



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Tapering Your Own Arrow Shafts

Tapered arrow shafts solve arrow flight problems for many archers. Tapered shafts cost more to purchase than parallel shafts, but many bowhunters will gladly pay more for the improvement in arrow performance and the confidence gained in their equipment. For hunters, a rear taper is the most common. This is achieved by tapering the rear eight to ten inches of a $23/64$ inch or $11/32$ inch wooden arrow shaft down to fit a $5/16$ inch nock. This taper allows the arrow to clear the bow better, eliminating arrow slap on the shelf. A tapered arrow is also said to recover from paradox faster and have more FOC (weight forward of center), making it more forgiving of an archer's "less than perfect" form.

Bill Bonczar, owner of Allegheny Mountain Arrow Woods, shoots rear tapered shafts himself and reports that up to 25% of his sales are now tapered shafts. Although he spines his shafts after tapering to be sure of matched sets, he notices very little spine loss when rear tapering shafts because the center part of the shaft is left at full diameter. Bill says, "On average, I see maybe a couple of pounds of spine loss after tapering." Total weight loss depends on the wood. "Heavy hardwoods may lose 15 to 30 grains of weight, lighter softwood shafts lose less," Bill explains. "It's not easy to get good FOC balance with wooden arrows. With heavy hardwood shafts, people hesitate to add more tip weight to improve FOC because it makes the shaft even heavier. Taking weight off the rear of the shaft, by tapering, moves the FOC balance toward the front without adding more weight to the arrow. I think a lot of the performance gained from tapered shafts is not especially in how they clear the bow, but in the flight characteristics of the arrow itself. Tapered shafts recover from paradox quicker and fly better because of better balance caused by the change in FOC."

Bonczar's well manufactured shafts are perfectly tapered on a lathe, but you can do a nice job of tapering shafts yourself. By hand tapering your own shafts you not only save money but you can experiment with various taper lengths to find out what works best for you.

To taper your own shafts you'll first need to make a simple cradle to hold them securely while you work. I use a $3/4$ inch by 2-inch pine board about 26 inches long with a shallow groove cut lengthways down the center. Complete the cradle by driving a small finish nail down into the groove near one end. This acts as an arrow stop. Be sure this nail is below the level of the arrow shaft so the cutting tool will pass safely over it. For a 9-inch taper mark the cradle at three, six and nine inches from the stop. For a 10-inch taper mark three, seven and ten inches.

I use a small, sharp block plane to taper the shaft. A spoke shave or cabinet scraper could also be used. Set your



Be sure that the arrow stop nail is safely below the level of the cutting tool.



The first pass removes wood from the first three inches of shaft.



The second pass removes wood from the 6-inch mark clear to the nock end of the shaft.



Check the tapering progress with a 5/16 inch "hole gauge" drilled in the cradle board.



Running the tapered shaft through a handful of sandpaper will remove any ridges and imperfections while reducing it to finished size.

tool to remove a very small curl of wood.

Until you get a feel for the process, it helps to lightly stain the nock end of the shaft with a watered down stain. Lay the shaft in the cradle, push it up against the stop, and use your tool to make the taper. Start at the 3-inch mark and plane off a small streak of stained wood to the nock end of the shaft. Slowly rotate the shaft in the cradle while continuing to remove stained wood to the nock end. After one revolution, when three inches of stain is gone, start at the 6-inch mark and repeat the process, again planing all the way to the nock end, for another complete revolution of the shaft. Finally, do it again from the 9-inch mark, removing wood all the way to the nock end of the shaft, to complete the 9-inch taper. Check your progress with a 5/16 inch hole drilled through your cradle board. Leave the shaft slightly oversized and attain final finished size with sandpaper. A quick sanding will remove any ridges and imperfections left from the planing process. You'll end up with the rear nine inches of your arrow shaft tapered nicely down to fit a 5/16 inch nock.

You'll soon learn how to smoothly taper a shaft to your own specifications. By varying the taper length on individual shafts you can make slight adjustments in the spine and

weight of your finished arrows, thus making a perfectly matched set. You may want to experiment with other tapers as well. A full length taper, said to be Howard Hill's favorite, can be easily accomplished by dividing the shaft into three equal parts and planing them in three passes just as before. A barrel taper is essentially a front taper and a rear taper on the same arrow.

In theory, a thicker diameter arrow shaft will show more effect from tapering than a skinny shaft arrow. Likewise, the closer the bow's sight window is cut toward center, the less effect rear tapering will have on the arrow clearing the bow. Thus, a selfbow, shot off the knuckle, would show more benefit from using tapered arrows than a modern recurve bow with a sight window cut past center. But that's just theory. Traditional archery is too individualistic to adhere to theory. You'll have to try it yourself.



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Tips From the Old Timer

By Dennis Kamstra

Archery, like any hand/eye coordination sport, has a huge mental component. This is especially true for instinctive shooting of a bow and arrow. Like many archers, I develop release problems when I use my eye as a triggering device. Coming to full draw, and then beginning the aiming process can be very difficult. One has a tendency to freeze off target, which can result in pushing or dropping the bow arm at release. Once you move the bow arm at release, you have lost all accuracy. If you watched any of the archery competition during the Olympic Games you saw all archers using a draw check or clicker to trigger their release. This does two things; it assures that you are at full draw, and it uses the ear as a trigger release rather than the eye. A clicker is a great learning tool and I have successfully used one while hunting as well. However, I find it too cumbersome and time consuming when not shooting from a blind. I have developed a technique that works well for me and it may be something you want to experiment with.

It is really quite simple. I acquire the target, come to 1/3 draw, and then aim. Then, while concentrating on a specific aiming point, I come to full draw and when my index finger touches the corner of my mouth, I release. This allows the sense of touch to become my release trigger instead of my eye. It also does one other very important thing; it triggers the release when the back muscles are pulling the string and not while in a static position. This produces a clean break away release with a follow through that leaves the release hand behind the ear, instead of away from one's face.

Some people may call this snap shooting, which for some reason has a negative connotation. But if done consistently, this can be an extremely accurate shooting technique. If your follow through leaves the bow arm at the exact same position as while aiming and your release hand ends up behind your ear, you are doing something right! In order for this technique to work properly, you



will have to cant your bow about 30 degrees to allow an open sight picture. So to review: an animal comes into shooting range, you pick the aiming spot, you slowly bring your bow up and come to 1/3 draw (now your back muscles can feel the tension), hold this position while you bore into your aiming spot, then you smoothly pull the string back to full draw. The instant your index finger reaches the corner of your mouth, allow your draw fingers to relax into a crisp break away release. Do not stop at full draw, but continue to pull as you relax your bow fingers. Once I started this technique (25 years ago) I immediately became a more successful bowhunter.

One more thing. I had a professional golf instructor tell me that it takes at least 40 hours of repetition for any swing change to become transferred from the side of the brain that controls mechanical function to the side of the brain that controls unconscious function. Instinctive shooting is no different. You must allow the unconscious part of your brain to take over. So, you must put in the practice time. When you have developed this technique, you will notice that you no longer see the broadhead; you are already concentrating on the spot, you will not raise and lower your bow at full draw to acquire the

right distance, and you will no longer have that fly-away release where the release hand moves sideways instead of straight back. Some will argue that you will not consistently come to full draw with this method. I do not agree, but even if you come back to 28 inches instead of 28.5 inches, how far will you miss your aiming point at 25 yards distant? Incidentally, my scores on the 3-D range immediately improved with this technique.

We should all be aware of the importance of wind direction while hunting. There are all types of techniques to test the wind, but I find the ash bag to be the best. A feather tied to the tip of your bow might give you an idea of wind direction, but it will not tell you if the wind is swirling or how the wind is drifting 15 feet downwind. The commercial puff bottles just do not put enough indicator in the air to tell the whole story. To make an ash bag, simply find a porous piece of material (if you can find one, the old Bull Durham tobacco pouch works great) and cut a circle out of it that is about eight inches in diameter. With heavy thread, stitch around the outside of this circle. When you have stitched to where you began, leave extra thread (3-4 inches), cut the thread, and pull the ends together making a pouch.

Fill this pouch with hardwood ash. When hunting, simply tie this pouch to your belt loop and give it a few shakes. This will produce a huge cloud of ash that will be visible for several yards.

If you hunt in areas where ticks, fleas, and chiggers abound, you know the discomfort they can produce. I seem to be a bug magnet and have tried everything on the market to repel them. 100 % Deet works the best, but it stinks and it will melt plastic.

I have found a way to prevent bugs from crawling up my pant legs and finding their way under the elastic top of my socks — their favorite place on my body. I tie an insecticide impregnated ear tag used for cattle to my shoe laces. I'm quite sure this is not an approved use and the small print (somewhere) probably tells you to keep them away from human skin contact. All I know is that I've used them for years with no ill affect. I do try to stay away from the pink ones ... people do notice them!

Once you have purchased a set of rain gear or a new tent, you must see if it works before going into the field. Put on your new rain suit and jump in the shower for a full minute or two. Then get out and check for wet spots on your under garments. After buying a new tent, erect it and turn the garden hose on it for a full five minutes. Then check the inside for leaks using a flashlight. Many, even high quality tents, will require sealing of the stitches on all seams. Any good mountaineering shop will sell sealant specifically for this purpose. Trust me, you will not want to go on an Alaskan hunt without proven gear!

Every once in awhile I run across a piece of hunting gear that I find remarkable. I would like to share one with you, but first I must qualify that the manufacturer, Rancho Safari, is owned by my hunting partner Jerry Gentellalli, so I might be biased.

Jerry makes a product called Jerry Flage Panels. These panels are shaped like an arch when erected. They are approximately four feet across at the bottom and about six feet high. One side has the standard Gillie suit strips of

material and the other side is smooth. Each panel has two viewing or shooting ports that can be opened or closed using zippers and Velcro, and they come in a variety of camo colors. These panels come rolled up (into themselves, no separate bag to lose) into a small roll about five inches in diameter and 24 inches long. To erect one, you simply take a single aluminum tent pole, which has a bungee cord inside so you don't lose a section of tubing, and thread it through the outside of the panel. This takes no more than 60 seconds. The beauty of this product is you can use a single panel to walk behind, held like a shield, or you can connect four together to form a portable blind. The big advantage of a blind made with these panels (four for a small blind and five or six for a larger blind) is that the erected blind will be open on top ... no roof.

Pop-up blinds have always frustrated me because they are not high enough to use a longbow in a standing position. I have used a single panel to close in on

Cape buffalo, hippo, and crocs with great success. They act as shade as well. When I need to pause during a stalk when an animal gets spooky, I simply lie on my back and cover myself with the panel. I can keep an eye on the animal by looking through a viewing port. Even the birds will not notice me (birds are often the ones who signal the first alarm). In fact, the panels were originally designed to be used by goose hunters. I find them invaluable for putting up an impromptu ground blind. My tracker carries two of them wherever we go. The only downside I have noticed is that they do get hung up in thorn bush if you are walking with them.

Dennis now lives in South Africa, where he is a licensed professional hunter, arranging hunting and photo safaris. His e-mail address: safariden@aol.com.



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Make Mine Mystery

A primary reason traditional bowhunting is the best bowhunting will always remain steeped in mystery. Allow me to explain.

Most everything about mainstream bowhunting these days — as mapped out for us by the hi-tech, “modern” bowhunting industry and media — is aimed with a laser sight at minimizing that scary old “element of chance,” ostensibly to “improve our odds.” At the same time, due to its tight focus on trophies, too much of modern mainstream bowhunting — again, as projected through products, advertising, and those who write effusively about the alleged glories of hi-tech hunting — worships the kill as if it were *all* of hunting, rather than merely the culminating act within a much broader and richer natural drama.

The advertised goal of hi-tech bowhunting is reducing chance via technology, thereby increasing hunter “success” with stuff we can buy rather than the stuff we’re made of. To which assertion some readers predictably will retort, “So what? The gear we hunt with is a personal choice.” Yes, it is. But that’s

not the point I’m shooting for here. Rather, I wish to express my concern for all the well-intended folks who, by swallowing the hi-tech sucker-bait dangled by industry and media, are allowing themselves to miss out on the far richer joys and rewards that only true, traditional-values hunting can offer.

Just as its promoters inadvertently imply, by minimizing the element of chance, excessive hunting technology kills mystery. And that, I’m here to argue, is a huge loss. Why? Because mystery in the hunt — not knowing what might happen next, if, or when — holds the doors of possibility intriguingly open. A trophy in hand, while *satisfying*, can never be as *exciting* as the fair-chase lead-up to its taking, simply because it signifies a done deal. It’s the *anticipation arising from the unknown* that powers the spark that keeps thoughtful hunters hunting. To the extent that hi-tech gear works as advertised to reveal the unknown, it thereby reduces mystery and not only the challenge but the *fun* of hunting.

Think what it would be like if technology someday allowed us to predict accurately and consistently not only the specific animals we’re likely to encounter each time we go out, but where and when, with no mystery or chance involved. Would we still be so hot to hunt? I for one would not, because the experience wouldn’t be hot at all. After this fashion maximizing the hi-tech “advantage” works as a distinct *disadvantage* to overall hunter satisfaction by doing all it can to take the hunt out of hunting.

In the end, by electing to follow the modern bowhunting trail at its worst means paying more for less of what counts most.

Forget about playing chess with a cagey wind — buy a Maxi-Mojo Scent-Diaper Suit and “just go hunting!” Why be “disadvantaged” by not knowing how many and what “quality” deer are visiting your hunting grounds and at what times of day they tend to use which trails, waterholes, and foraging areas? Why waste precious hunting time with old-fashioned boots-on-the-ground scout-

ing for inconclusive sign? Why risk (there’s that word again) hanging your treestand in an unproductive spot? Just blanket the woods with game cams and have the images delivered real-time right to your personal computer!

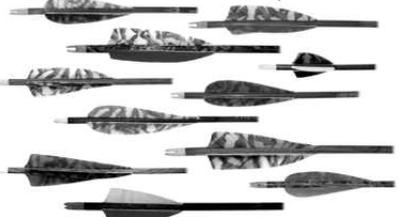
I trust you get the pale-gray picture I’m sketching here. When nature and the hunt are deprived of their mystery through the heavy-handed application of inappropriate technology, when the magical excitement of the unknown is minimized by mechanical intervention in our favor ... well shucks, then what’s the *point*? When the fair-chase pursuit of wild, free-roaming game is manipulated (and legal manipulation is still manipulation) to the extremes we see flogged by the “pros” in our most embarrassingly adolescent outdoor media, the players become mere pitiable caricatures of true sportsmen and women ... like so many Sacha Baron Cohen cardboard *Dictators* running a race that’s so laughably stacked in our favor it’s no race at all.

To recap in a final effort to make myself clear on this tricky “each to his own poison” point: For the multitudes of sportsmen and women who fall victim to the bright and shining promises of short-cut hunting technology, I feel no resentment, but only sadness that they’re innocently foregoing the very best experiences, feelings, memories, and (true) campfire stories that hunting and life have to offer, in exchange for the hollow prize of maximizing, via any legal means they can buy, the certainty of making kills and the likelihood those kills will “make the book.” In the end, the hi-tech path is not often a sin to be derided, but merely a counterproductive compromise to be pitied.

That’s why I say, so boldly and so often: “Make mine mystery. Make mine traditional.”

Campfire Philosopher David Petersen lives in rural southern Colorado. Find more of his shameless celebration of “wildlife, wild places, and wild people with wild ideas” at www.davidpetersenbooks.com.

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