

Plus: Kodiak Deer Bow Hunting with Lon Lauber

Hunt Alaska

FALL 2018

GOATS AT 50!

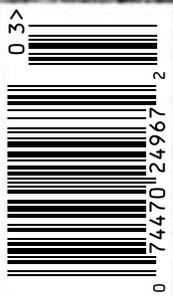
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Sitka Blacktail

Tracking Arrowed
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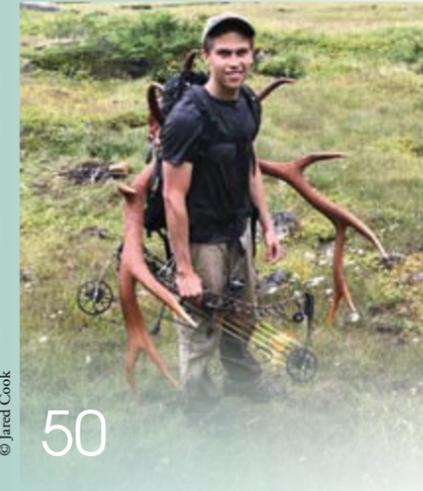
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COVER / Paul Atkins worked hard over many hunts to take a mountain goat in Alaska. © Paul Atkins

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THE MAGAZINE OF HUNTING THE GREATLAND

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Raft Review

by Larry Bartlett



PR-49: Standard or HD Package
 The PR-49 is designed to provide extreme access for serious Alaskan hunters and anglers. This boat is ideal for wilderness streams with character ratings of Class I to III. Customers can expect extremely shallow draft with moderate loads. This 9-ft packraft has an impressive 850-pound load capacity and is constructed of tough PVC material that uses 420-denier side tubes and has an 840-denier floor thickness with plenty of lashing points and strong handles for dragging and lining around hazards. The PR-49 comes with a revolutionary mesh seat and cargo sling, double-action air pump, a robust repair kit with extra material for extensive repairs, four-piece Aqua-Bound kayak paddle, and a PVC carry bag for easy transport to the field. The PR-49 is also available in a HD model that has 840-denier chafe guards on each side tube that extend up the sidewalls 4.5 inches. It adds approximately 1.5 pounds to the pack weight and \$75 to the cost. The full package comes with the same accessories as the standard.

Kork

The Kork pushes the limits of the small-boat category when it comes to flotation and performance hauling half-ton loads. It's weight is ideal for Alaska's logistical challenges. Flying commercially with this boat package is a snap as checked baggage. The Kork paddles and performs like the PR-49 but the bulbous ends on the Kork maximize its weight-hauling capacity by increasing the boat's waterline plus the extra thick skin makes it respond excellently to impact while heavily loaded.



Legend: Basic or with Rowing Kit

The Legend is a hybrid canoe/kayak that hauls loads like a canoe but handles like a kayak. It can be maneuvered easily with a 240-cm kayak paddle or rowed with oars. Its intended function is to perform for one hunter, his gear, and an entire bull moose in river depths greater than 7 inches, but also provide effective hauling capacity and shallow draft for two people and moderate loads of gear and smaller game animals. This boat is an ideal option for commercial air travel with the floor removed and packed separately to meet 50-lb maximum checked-baggage rules. It's an ideal inflatable for anglers and hunters traveling to villages and towns across the state.

Pioneer Xstream: Basic or with Rowing Kit

The Pioneer X-stream is an inflatable canoe design, a convertible self-bailer with no wood accessories. The floor is fully removable to provide weight distribution options during transport. The floor is a 4-inch, drop-stitch design that inflates to become more rigid than I-beam construction and is easier to repair. This canoe is super stable and the side tube alignment has a low profile on the waterline. There are lashing points along every square inch of the top surface of the Pioneer X-stream.



Levigator

The Levigator is a great family raft and provides the hauling capacity hunter groups demand with a total load capacity of 3000 pounds. The Levigator provides rafters what they need in a raft for serious expeditions and was designed to perform on shallow rivers with heavy loads!

Side-by-Side Raft Comparison

	Length	Width	Tube Diameter	Weight Capacity	Shipping Weight
PR-49	9'	43"	13-15"	850 lbs	15 lbs
Kork	11'	44"	14-16"	1000 lbs	40 lbs
Legend	13'	46"	15-19"	1250 lbs	56 lbs
Pioneer Xstream	16'6"	50"	16-24"	1800 lbs	88 lbs
Levigator	15'9"	66"	22"	3000 lbs	110 lbs

For more information on rafts for Alaska contact Larry Bartlett at 907-388-2477 or go to PristineVentures.com
 Check out Larry's Float Hunting Tips Series online at HuntAlaskaMagazine.com

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[THE OPENER]

Your Next Hunt

Story by Marcus Weiner

Alaska is a land of opportunity for both resident- and traveling hunters. Replete with game species big and small, avid hunters have many options to consider, both exotic and mundane, during each hunting season. Perhaps you are after your first bear and want to start with a black bear before advancing to brown. Maybe you've got a jones for a high-mountain hunt and Dall sheep or mountain goat are on the menu. More likely, you are one of the many that rely on caribou, moose and deer to fill the freezer, so your thoughts gravitate towards the locations where you've had success.

So how do you determine where to go and what to target on your next hunt? First, some questions need to be asked. When can you go? How many in your group? What's the budget? What's the level of experience? What are the expectations for the hunt? What level of service do you need? Will the hunt be DIY, or will you use a transporter or guide? Answering these and many other offshoot questions will get you into a better position to determine your next adventure. In case that's not enough to think about, we are going to provide some examples of hunts you might want to consider.

DIY Blacktail Deer

Blacktail deer are abundant in Prince William Sound, Kodiak, and much of southeast Alaska. Early-season hunts are typically in the alpine, and as the season progresses, deer move towards lower elevations as winter hits and forage is harder to find. For many, deer are the first big-game animal they target.

Of the popular deer hunting locations, we've spent the most time hunting the southern part of Kodiak from August through October. Hunts require a fair amount of hiking and brush-busting at lower levels and then the walking gets easier when you push through the brush line, typically about 1/3 of the way up the hillsides. Does typically outnumber bucks, so if you are strictly in the hunt for meat, then plan on going when the season opens for does, which is usually in October. Be bear-aware, as the island's brown bears are used to hunters taking deer and will sometimes respond to a rifle shot like it's a dinner bell. Because of this reality, we've hunted in August and September most of the time because the bears are most likely going to still have plenty of salmon to eat.

Hunts are drop-off or boat-based. We've not yet done a boat-based hunt but it's near the top of our list. The opportunity to move to new locations and to also potentially catch fish when not hunting are very appealing.

Prince of Wales Island is also worth considering. Many miles of logging roads will help you get into the alpine, and there's not a lot of competition from other hunters

on this sparsely-populated island. This holds especially true on the north end of the island. When you aren't hunting, there are countless opportunities to catch a fish.

We've also hunted in other towns in Southeast, and for the most part they are good choices. The hiking in Southeast is considerably steeper and more treacherous than in Kodiak, so plan accordingly for pre-hunt fitness and proper gear.

Transporter-Aided Moose and Caribou

When it comes to hunting moose and caribou, and particularly when we are talking in remote destinations off the Alaska road system, then it pays dividends to hire a transporter to aid in getting you into the field.

Last fall, we used Alaska Monster Moose Transporters to get us into moose country on the Innoko River. It made access and hauling-out moose a much easier task. As a transporter they can't tell you where to go or give you tools or advice as to how to hunt, but they can move you around the area and they have an intimate knowledge of the location. Since part of their program is to hunt by boat and to spot-and-stalk moose once located, having this service helped us take our second bull.

Many transporters and air taxis offer access to the Western Arctic Herd, which is the state's biggest caribou herd. This herd has more than 200,000 members, yet usually the biggest challenge is finding them. This is because they are a highly-migratory herd animal, travel large distances in a vast area, and are constantly on the move. Once you find them, then taking an animal is usually the norm. But finding them is the key, so our advice is to use a transporter or air taxi that has their finger on the pulse of the herd's whereabouts.

Fully-Guided Brown Bear Hunt

For many elite hunters, brown bear are on their bucket list. There are many places that a hunter can go to find brown bear, but in general the biggest bears are in places that have plenty of food. In our opinion, this means the Alaska Peninsula, southwest Alaska, southeast Alaska and Kodiak Island.

Guides have an intimate knowledge of the land they hunt and that's part of what makes them so valuable to hunters. Your chances of taking an animal, and especially a trophy, go up considerably when you use a guide. Plus, let's face it, it's sure nice to have a professional guide that can cut up and carry out your bear.

If you'd like further information or recommendations as to who to contact for these hunts, email me at info@fishalaskamagazine.com.



Marcus Weiner is Publisher of Fish Alaska magazine and Hunt Alaska magazine. His favorite hunt is typically the next one on the calendar.

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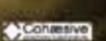
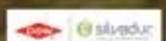
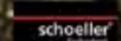
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EDITOR'S TRACKS

Priorities and Preparation
Story by George Krumm

Fall is a most special time of the year. I can recall so many wonderful hunting, fishing and other outdoor adventures that occurred in the fall, that I often think my favorite months are September or October. For all the hunters heading to the field soon, I know you feel the same. I used to jokingly say to some of my friends, "Wake me up when September comes." Yes, I know I'm borrowing the phrase from Green Day, but hey, the song struck a nerve as well as a chord. Fall comes early in Alaska, though, and many hunts begin in August.

This issue hits the newsstands on or about July 1. By then, certainly most hunters will have been to the range or will be very soon. I recommend going sooner rather than later—going to the field

with a marginally accurate, or worse yet, inaccurate rifle would be unacceptable. I recall one hunting season back when I was still in college where procrastination nearly cost me a deer and elk hunt.

Back when I was in college, though my priorities should have begun with school, the reality was they were more like 1&2) Hunting/Fishing; hard to say which was higher on the list; 3) Chasing women; 4) Beer and 5) School. When late fall arrived, it was time to hop in the '73 Duster and beat feet east to Anaconda, Montana, to hunt deer and elk. I arrived in the late afternoon and explained to our hunting partner and my Dad that I needed to go to the dump to make sure my rifle was ready. I figured five rounds would confirm it was good to go, though I hadn't shot it for a few months.

I arrived at the dump, paced off 25 yards and set up a target, making sure there was a small mountain of bulldozed dirt behind it. I went back to my makeshift bench—the hood of the Duster and some sand bag rests—and put a round in the chamber. I was a decent shot and had been shooting this particular 7mm Remington Magnum with the same 160-grain Sierra spitzer boat tail hand loads for years so I figured this would just be a formality. I expected

my two or three shots at 25 yards to be touching the X. I also assumed my three shots at 100 yards would be about three inches high, and in about a one-inch group or less which is what this rifle and load typically produced for me. Did I mention assumptions are dangerous?

Fire for effect! Round one, for whatever reason, was low and to the left, about three inches from the X. I figured I just goofed that one up. Round two was about an inch over the X. Round three went about three inches to the right. I felt my blood pressure rising, and heat on my face. What in the heck was going on?

I stopped then, inspected the bore visually, looked at the crown, and checked my scope rings and mounts to ensure they were tight. Everything checked out. I was baffled. I ran a few patches through the bore and I repeated three more shots. They, too, were all over the paper at 25 yards. I called my Dad, apprehensive about how he was going to give me grief for not sighting-in my rifle weeks ago. He did, and rightfully so. I was embarrassed.

Dad came down to the dump and insisted he shoot my rifle just to verify I wasn't full of BS. He shot three times, and his shots, too, were wandering



Make sure to spend adequate time at the range to make sure your gun is shooting accurately. © Marcus Weiner

around the paper. He then went to his truck and got out a Winchester .30-06—his backup rifle, and told me to set up a new target. I did so, and repeated the three-shot volley.

With the '06, after three shots there was one hole in the paper touching the X. I fired two more and the hole widened. We backed up the vehicles to 100 paces and I shot a tight group about two-and-a-half inches high. I humbly asked Dad if I could use the '06 for our hunt, and

then listened while he lectured me about priorities, planning and preparation. I deserved it. That was more than 30 years ago. The lesson stuck, at least as far as my preparation for hunts is concerned. I still have that rifle, and though it's been to a couple different gunsmiths, we still don't know for sure what's wrong with it.

By the time you read this, it's nearly the 11th hour. If you haven't already started getting your gear together, including sighting in your weapons of choice and

practicing with them, I recommend you get on it. As embarrassing as the story above is to tell, if it saves someone else a similar experience, or worse yet, the experience of wounding an animal instead of making a clean kill, then it's worth it.

Best of luck to all of you this hunting season!



George Krumm is the editor for both Hunt Alaska and Fish Alaska magazines.

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[HUNTING FOR A COMPLIMENT]



Lifelong Alaskan Maddy Hull, 16, with her first moose.



Larry Shugak harvested this Sitka blacktail deer in November 2017.



Bobby Ives and his father Robert, both of Ester, AK, with his first bull caribou taken in August 2017 up the Ivishak River.



Josh Hall with a berry-fed bear up high in October 2017.



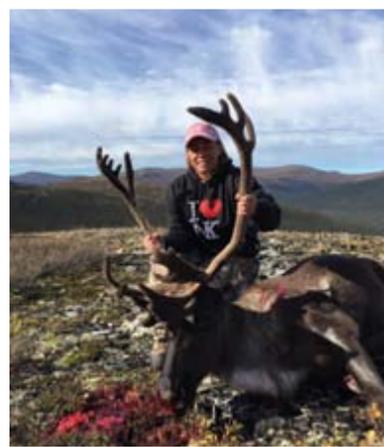
Bert Pearson of La Grange, KY, with a Dalton Highway caribou in September 2017.



Sterling Lyman of Soldotna took this caribou outside of Kotzebue in September 2017.

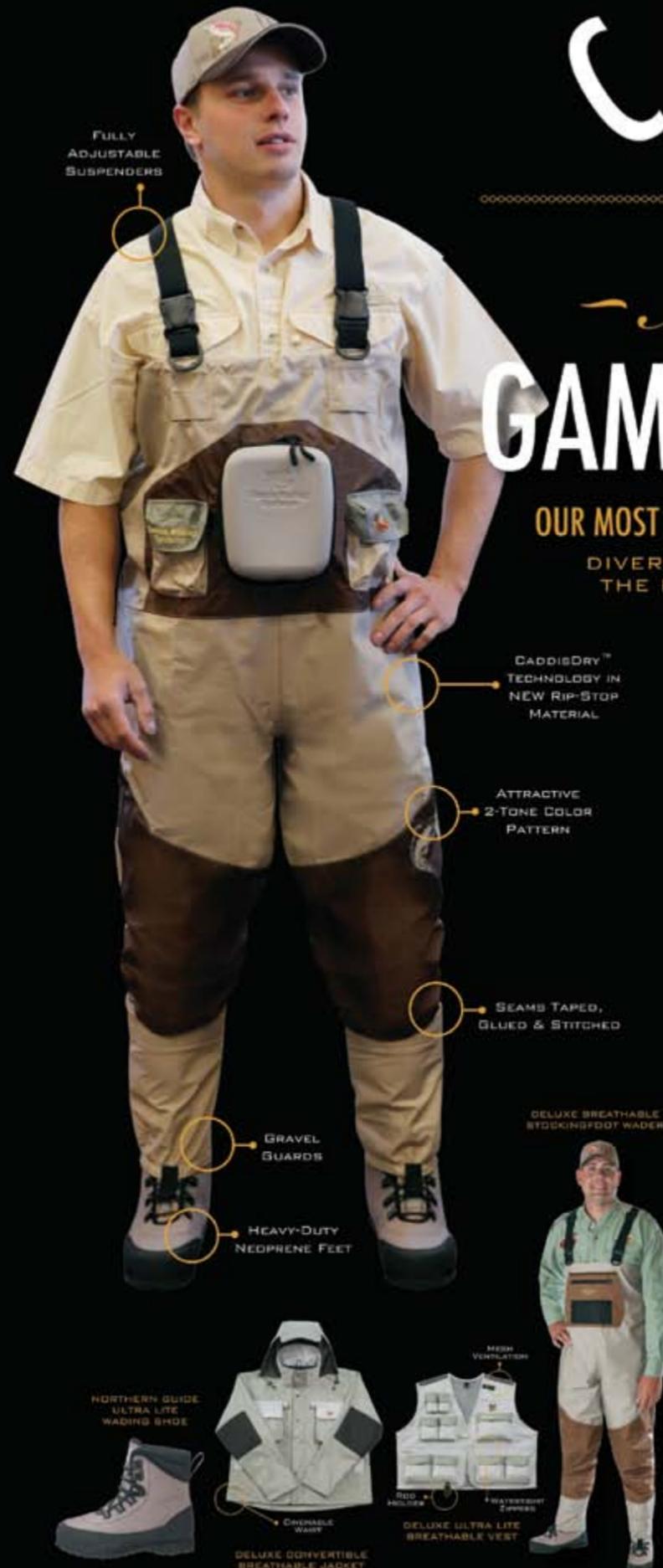


Larry Peet after a successful Denali Highway caribou hunt.



Debbie Coates of Fairbanks got her first caribou on a solo hunt off the Steese Highway in 2017.

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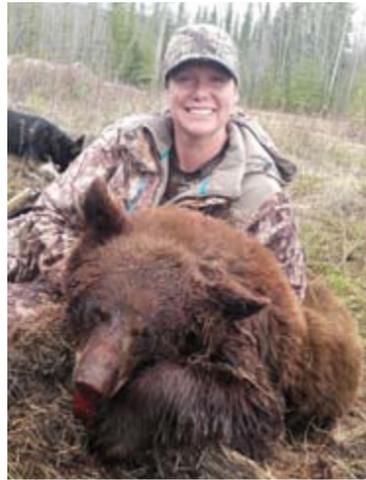


Gavin Millard, 13, with his first buck on opening day on Baranof Island.



Millie Ladybug Maschner, 14, of Nome, ptarmigan hunting the road system.

E. Rose Abdulkareem of Tok, AK, with her first solo bear hunt results in May 2017.



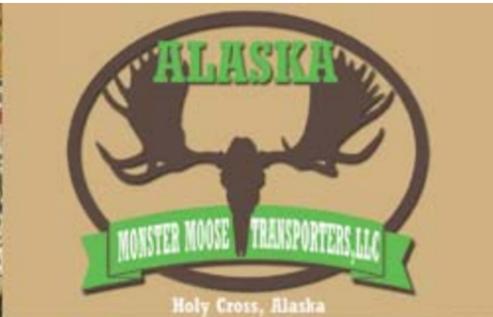
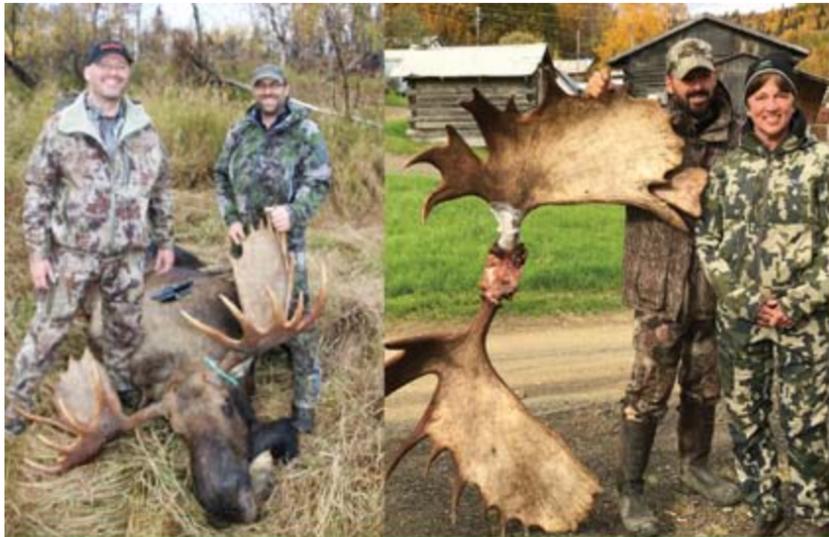
Victor Engel of Concord, NH, with a black bear he took while hunting out of Cordova.



Demetri James took this 61-inch moose on Copper Lake Trail while hunting with his dad Jim in September 2017.



Doug and Jacob Evert of Leslie, MI, during their self-described "hunt of a lifetime" in October 2017.



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[ONLINE]

Just as fall is prime hunting season here in Alaska, our all-new website has launched with tons of subscriber-only bonus content available! Optimized to better display the features and content you love, we've been hard at work creating this all-new site for you. And here is some of the new content being added this fall.

Fall 2018 Highlights

➤ This month we've posted the third installment of Larry Bartlett's float-hunting blog series: *Surviving Plan B When Plan A Dissolves*. As the owner of Pristine Ventures which makes popular packrafts for Alaska, long-time hunter and hunt planner, and author of several books and videos on float hunting Alaska, Larry Bartlett has seen it all. Find this blog on our website.

➤ Don't miss this month's Hunter's Special from Kenetrek Boots: Purchase any Mountain Boot, and receive a FREE pair of Hunting Gaiters! See our site for details.

➤ Some hunters love to mount their trophy to be able to look upon it at their home or office and remember those epic times. Check out a new blog titled *Taxidermy Tips: Care in the Field to get the how-to knowledge necessary to prepare your trophy for mounting*. We talk with several top taxidermists around the state for tips on field care for hunters to get the best quality trophy mount. While you are there check out a list of taxidermists we recommend who preserve both big- and small game into a trophy to be admired and view some of their featured work.

➤ This month we're bringing you a new blog by Hugh Clark titled *Cold Bay Emperor Goose Hunt*. Clark is the

President of the Alaska Waterfowl Association and a veteran waterfowler. If you hunt waterfowl, then you'll enjoy this story of an avid outdoorsman in the thick of the season in a true waterfowler's paradise.

➤ For many hunters, the apex of it all is producing delicious, quality food for the table. This August check out our blog on *How to Make Your Own Jerky*. Then in September you'll see a new blog added called *How to Make Your Own Sausage*. You'll find recipes, recommended products and a step-by-step guide to make jerky and sausage at home. Check back frequently.



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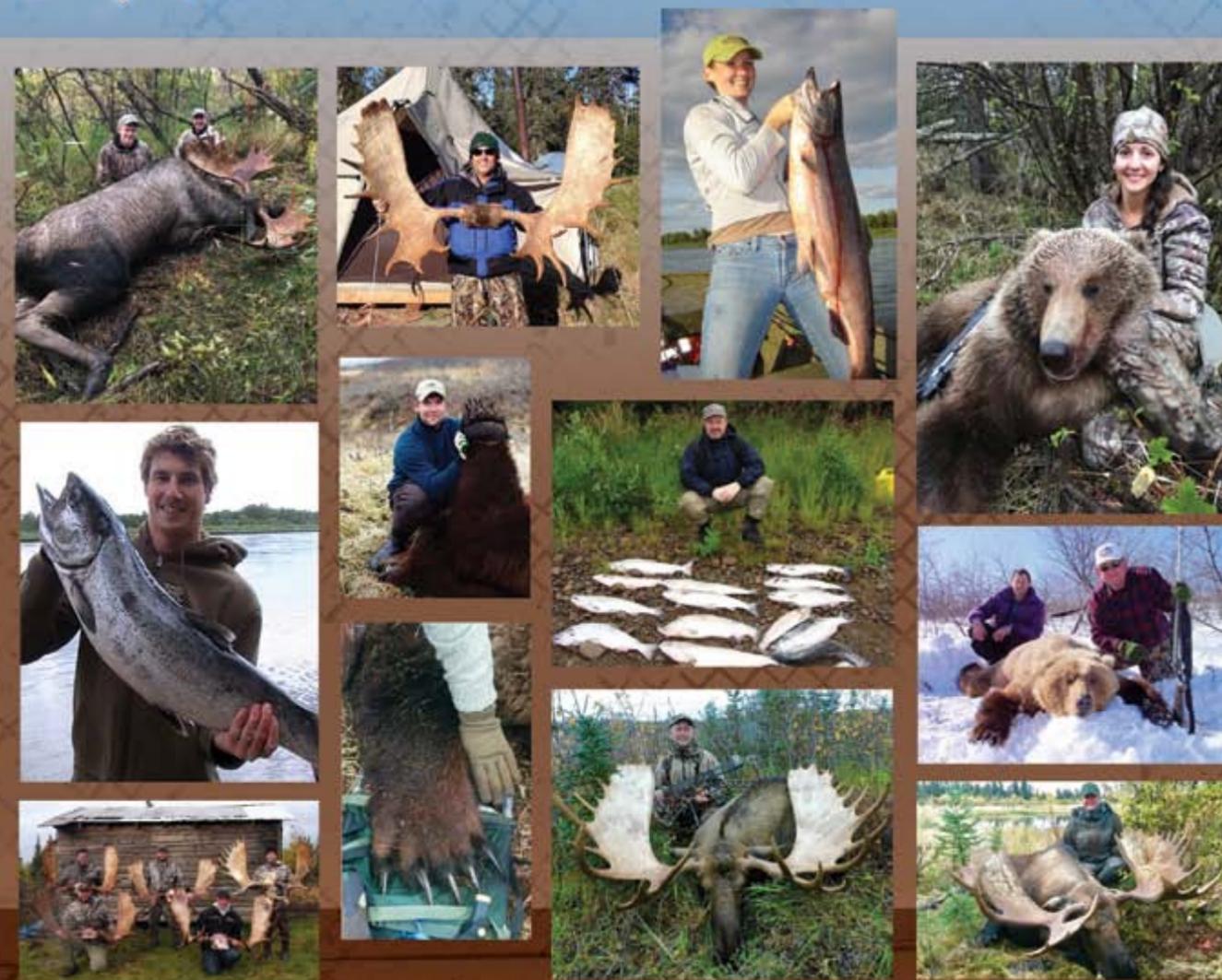
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www.black-hills.com

The 6.5 Creedmoor is a superb light-recoiling long-range cartridge. It was designed to employ the highest ballistic coefficient projectiles available in 6.5 caliber. Black Hills makes use of those new projectiles in the form of the 143- and 147-grain ELD (Extreme Low Drag) bullets from Hornady. Their ammunition tests with these bullets loaded in Black Hills Ammunition showed them to be capable of consistent one-half MOA from a factory-stock Ruger Precision Rifle. Not only are the external ballistics and accuracy superb, the performance on game is impressive.



Diamond Blade Knives Surge

www.diamondbladeknives.com

The Surge knife is focused on function but doesn't skimp on style. The stainless-steel bolster and generously-sized handle furnish control and safety; the blade design provides you with unerring service. It is a Drop Point-style knife made from Friction Forged D2 high carbon tool steel with a 4-inch blade, Suregrip handle and comes with a Kydex sheath. We used it to take apart two moose and several deer last year and our testers loved how this knife felt in the hand and how it allowed hunters to perform any task needed. Plus, it's super-sharp and has amazing edge retention.



Bradley Smoker Smart Smoker

www.bradleysmoker.com

We've been using this electric smoker and are impressed. The smart phone app to control the smoker is both cool and useful. The smoker allows you to really dial in temperature control, resulting in perfectly smoked salmon and perfectly cooked jerky. The unit has a touch screen, large capacity and two temperature probes. It also features an automatic feed system for the wood discs it burns. Bradley makes multiple flavors of wood discs; we recommend trying the variety pack which includes apple, alder, hickory, maple and mesquite.



Nikon Monarch 3000 Stabilized Laser Rangefinder

www.nikonportoptics.com

Nikon just changed the laser rangefinder game with the introduction of its new Monarch 3000 Stabilized Laser Rangefinder. This incredibly small, lightweight unit is feature packed with Nikon's award-winning optical image stabilization technology, crisp new red OLED display and 3,000 yard fast-ranging capability. It will most certainly redefine the expectations of hunters and shooters in 2018 and beyond. The optical stabilization system reduces viewfinder vibrations by approximately

80%, while simultaneously aligning the viewed image with the laser. This function begins immediately when the unit is powered-up and assures faster, more successful "first-shot" measurements. Monarch 3000 Stabilized has a maximum measurement distance of 3,000 yards on reflective targets and displays distances in .1-yard increments. An all-new, variable-intensity, crisp red OLED reticle display provides either automatic or five selectable brightness levels for maximum contrast against most targets and backgrounds. The rangefinder's 6x monocular features bright, fully-multicoated optics, user-friendly 18mm eye relief and a wide 7.5° field of view for fast target acquisition. Nikon's Hyper Read technology displays all measurements in approximately 0.3 seconds—regardless of the distance. By holding down the power button, the user can continuously measure across multiple targets for eight seconds. The Monarch 3000 Stabilized integrates Nikon's ID (incline/decline) Technology to take the angle out of your shooting equation—up to an incredible +/- 89 degrees. It also offers the ability to switch between First Target Priority Mode (reading of the closest target) or Distant Target Priority Mode (provides range to the furthest target through clutter, branches, etc.).



Alaska Game Bags Gun Sock

www.alaskagamebags.com

Alaska Game Bags makes various models of gun socks from synthetic material that fit a handgun, shotgun and rifle. They are light, yet tough, and offer protection for your valuable firearm. The handgun version is 14 inches long, while the rifle model is 50 inches and the shotgun model is 60 inches. We recommend using one on your firearm in your gun case when traveling and then you can use it in the field to keep dirt and moisture off of your firearm. It fits most guns with- and without scopes and features a drawstring closure.

Kenetrek Mountain Guide Boot

www.kenetrek.com

The Kenetrek Mountain Guide Boot is the one that professionals rely upon. Kenetrek continues to work on making it even better; adding a new, rock-solid, one-piece vulcanized-rubber K-73 outsole to the boot that already keeps sheep up at night. Tough hunts mean traversing glaciers and navigating scree fields with ridiculous weight on your back and just enough air to catch your breath . . . and that's when staying upright becomes everything. Boots are available in a 400-gram Thinsulate version or a non-insulated model. Boots also feature: 10-inch-tall, 2.8-mm-thick premium full-grain leather uppers with one-piece vamp construction and no seams down the tongue for better abrasion resistance; reinforced double- and triple stitching in high-wear areas, anti-corrosion boot hardware that swivels instead of breaks; protective rubber toe cap for extra abrasion resistance; and a Windtex waterproof, breathable, flexible membrane that keeps water out but allows perspiration vapor to escape.



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Stone Glacier Skyscraper 2P Tent

www.stoneglacier.com

This new four-season tent from Stone Glacier is light, spacious and rugged. It features SlingFin WebTruss technology, which makes the tent strong, easy-to-pitch and provides a low wind-profile. It only weighs 4 pounds, 4 ounces and provides 32 square feet of floor space, a 41.5-inch interior height and two vestibules for storing gear.



Kryptek Anorak

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Vortex Viper HD Binoculars

www.vortexoptics.com

These new binos are an optical masterpiece, giving hunters, shooters and outdoor enthusiasts a premium option without the premium price tag. The HD optical system delivers stunning resolution, color fidelity and edge-to-edge clarity. Lenses are fully-multicoated with XR anti-reflective coatings that provide critical low-light performance—turning waning light into game-spotting opportunity. A super-wide field of view promotes fast subject acquisition and more efficient glassing. Exterior lenses are protected by ArmorTek—an ultra-hard, scratch-resistant fluorine compound that repels oil, dirt and the corrosive salt of fingerprints. The smooth center-focus wheel dials in your image for sharp viewing. Soft and comfortable twist-up eyecups are perfect for extended glassing and provide customized eye-relief for the viewer. A short-hinge design and rubber armoring with perfectly-placed thumb detents makes the new Viper HDs easy to hold, protects against impacts and ensures solid purchase—no matter the weather conditions. 100% waterproof, fogproof (purged with Argon gas), dustproof and shockproof construction. From a physical size and weight perspective, they are one of the lightest, most compact, full-size binos on the market—a noteworthy attribute when gear consideration can be measured in grams. Includes the GlassPak chest harness—keeping your binos at the ready while providing comfortable, protected, strain-free, all-day carry. And like all Vortex products, the all-new Viper HD Binoculars are covered by Vortex's lifetime, unconditional, no-fault, transferable, VIP Warranty. Available in 8X42, 10X42, 10X50, and 12X50.



QLH Chest Holster

www.quicklockholsters.com

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Skinner Sights TRAPPER and BEAR BUSTER Sights

www.skinnerights.com

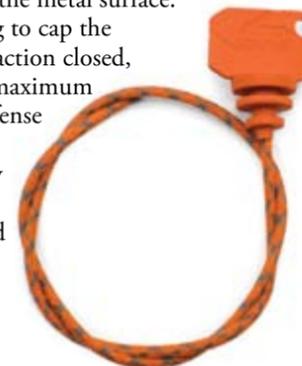
Skinner Sights introduces their new Skinner TRAPPER rear aperture sight for the Marlin .336/1895 (including Marlin guide guns) and Henry .45-70/.30-30 rifles. While fully elevation- and windage adjustable, the Skinner TRAPPER rear sight is sleek, rugged, and accurate affording an improved sighting system for your rifle. For use with the TRAPPER, Skinner Sights also introduces their new BEAR BUSTER front sight. The BEAR BUSTER is available in blue steel and blue with a white face. Both sights are machined from solid steel or stainless-steel barstock and are virtually unbreakable and covered by Skinner Sights' lifetime guarantee.



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LEM Big Bite Grinders

www.lemproducts.com

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Author Scott Haugen waited several minutes for this bull to move, thereby offering the exact angle for proper shot placement. When taking any shot at big game, it should be done with 100% confidence.



TECHNICAL TALK

Own Your Shot

Story and photos by Scott Haugen

With my rifle solidly set in the shooting sticks, I prepared for the shot. The bull moose I was looking at was facing my direction, slightly quartering to the left. If I pulled the trigger on the frontal shot, the bull would likely lunge forward, into thick alders. So, I waited.

Minutes later the bull turned to the right, and when he was broadside I let him have it tight behind the shoulder with a 150-grain Nosler Partition, fired from my .270 Weatherby Magnum. As expected, the bull moved slightly forward, but fortunately he was facing a 40-yard-wide patch of open grass. I quickly hit him with another shot, this one hitting the mark behind the ear, dropping him on the spot.

It wasn't lucky, for two reasons. First, knowing animals that are hit in the vitals typically run in the direction they're facing upon bullet impact, forced me to be patient and wait for the bull to turn. This put the bull in precise position where he faced an open meadow, which resulted in easier breakdown of the animal. Second, the rifle, bullets and Swarovski scope I was shooting was driving tacks all day long at 200 yards, about 50 yards shy of the range at which this bull stood. There was no guessing, no lack of confidence, and when it came time to pull the trigger, I was 100% certain my shots would find their mark.

I never take a shot at a big game animal thinking, "I hope I hit it." If I'm not 100% certain of where my bullet is going to hit, I don't pull the trigger. If I miss, I usually

know why immediately, as it's normally my fault. Achieving such confidence is a three-part process.

First, I want to know how the animal is behaving. Ideally, it's relaxed and has no idea I'm around. This means I can take my time, remain calm and get properly set up in the gun which allows me to pick a specific spot on the animal for proper bullet placement.

Second, I want to achieve the most solid rest possible in order to ensure an accurate shot. If an animal has no clue I'm around, I take my time getting set up. Shooting off a solid rest from a prone position is best, but that angle can make it tough getting a clear shot in much of Alaska, which is why a tripod is vital.

My next favorite shooting position is sitting with my knees up, both elbows on both knees, gun solid in the tripod. This optimizes the number of anchor points, keeps my arms solid, and allows the crosshairs to remain rock steady.

Shooting from a knee is also a solid option. When assuming this position, raise the knee that's on the same side as your shooting hand. It will feel uncomfortable at first, as you'll rest the elbow of your shooting arm on the knee of that same side, which feels like the gun is binding-up in the shoulder. But this form is proper, and allows that elbow to stay steady on the knee, not float around. The result will be a rifle that's solidly anchored in the tripod, optimizing accurate shot placement.

If standing and shooting from a tripod, remain calm, control your breathing and pick a spot before pulling the trigger. Concentrate fully on hitting a precise spot, not a general area.

My shooting stick of choice is a tripod. The more legs your shooting support system has, the more anchor points there will be, the

more solid your rest, and the more accurate your shot. I'm not a fan of a monopod due to its lack of stability. A bipod is better than nothing, but where you'll really notice a difference is when you go to a steady tripod.

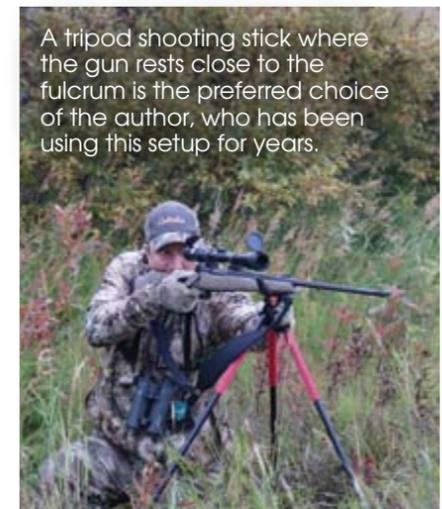
I prefer a tripod where the gun rests as close to the fulcrum as possible, like Bog Pod's Red Legged Devil RLD-3. An extended pistol-grip-style rest may be quick to handle, but with it comes wear and it can become unsteady over time, resulting in inaccurate shooting. Some place the rifle too far from the fulcrum, sacrificing stability.

The third component of pulling a good shot every time is a steady trigger pull. This comes with practice. When preparing for a shot, you should only be concentrating on what the animal is doing and what your next move will be. You should be able to operate and manage your gun without looking at it. Know how the focus and parallax dials work, as well as the turrets if shooting a long-range gun. Know how stiff the safety is and if you can quietly operate it with your thumb, or if you need a thumb and forefinger. Know your trigger pull and how to quickly operate the action without looking. If you need a follow-up shot, it should come smoothly and without hesitation.

When preparing for hunting season, don't just shoot your rifle on the range, off a solid bench, and call it good. Practice shooting in a safe area, from all the aforementioned positions, and off shooting sticks. Know what positions work best for you, and shoot with confidence. The more diverse your shooting positions, the more options you'll have, the more accurate your shooting will be, thus the more animals you'll connect on with one well-placed shot.



Note: For signed copies of Scott Haugen's best selling book, Hunting The Alaskan High Arctic, send a check for \$38.00 (FREE S&H), to Haugen Enterprises, P.O. Box 275, Walterville, OR 97489, or order online at www.scotthaugen.com. Scott is host of The Hunt, on Netflix. Follow him on Instagram, Facebook & Twitter.



A tripod shooting stick where the gun rests close to the fulcrum is the preferred choice of the author, who has been using this setup for years.

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[AFTER THE SHOT]

Laying It All Out There

Story and photos by Paul D. Atkins

There's not a day that goes by that my phone doesn't remind me that fall is just around the corner. Either with a text message or a phone call, or sometimes through Messenger; somebody needs information and/or the logistics about hunting in Alaska.

Questions are usually about the caribou herd. "What do the numbers look like? Are there still good places to hunt?" Or maybe it's about the moose population, or transporters, or hunting in other parts of the state, and eventually the last question, "Will you go with me?" "Ha ha, love to, but can't, got too many irons in the fire the way it is. But I tell you what, I can give you the basics and point you in the right direction," I reply.

The months of May through August are notorious for this and even though this is my regular "After the Shot" column, I'm going to refer to it as my "Before the Shot" column.

Those same conversations usually include talk about the latest gear, or where "I would go" if I were chasing caribou, or maybe "What does it really take to find a good bull?" They're all great questions that must be asked before any hunt. A short text usually turns into an hour-long conversation that eventually leads to fishing and other oddities that make Alaska such a great destination. A lot of thought is put into each question, and

in the end, most are answered, but before wrapping it up I mention the word "communication." "Make sure you communicate with everyone involved," I say. "It's as important as anything else and will cause problems and doubt if left unresolved."

As September approaches, hunters, non-resident and resident alike, start to develop a fervor or a "look forwardness" in anticipation of either coming to Alaska and hunting with a guide, or heading out on their own, to pursue big game. Whether it's your first time or hundredth, it doesn't really matter. The ability to fly-in, boat-in or walk-in gives Alaskan hunters a feeling of pride and adventure like no other. Maybe they're looking for that trophy of a lifetime, or maybe they're trying to fill the freezer or maybe it's just getting outdoors and enjoying time with family and friends, we all have our reasons. Whichever it may be, though, it all starts with a plan and communicating those plans with all involved.

Once you've decided the where, what and why, you'll then be left with the task of organizing the logistics and putting the hunt together. First and foremost, it will start with how many is in your party. Is this a group hunt? Or are you going solo? The number of hunters in any camp will have a big influence on what comes next. For example, if you're going with one other hunter you'll simply just multiply everything by two. Food is a classic



Discussing gear and the needs for a particular hunt is critical. A list needs to be made among the hunters and everyone needs to know what is on that list and how it works.

example, but you'll also need to consider seats on the bush plane (if it's a drop-off) number of tents, sleeping bags, frame packs, if you're going to use a raft or not, and numerous other items that will have to be considered. When it comes to these decisions everyone involved needs to have input. In doing so it creates a feeling of comradery and provides it even more so when you get to camp and are actually hunting.

Long ago, when I first arrived in Alaska I planned a caribou hunt with friends from the lower 48. I was a novice at the time and hadn't really been on a big-game DIY hunt such as this before. It was a five-day hunt on a river far from civilization and I organized the whole thing. Everything from the food,



Being in the right place at the right time is all part of hunting. When discussing a spot or where to go make sure everyone agrees on the final decisions.

to the transporter, to the kind of gear each would actually need in camp. It was a disaster due to the fact that I didn't communicate this to my friends. Wrong boots, wrong clothes and worst of all, the wrong tents. I picked it all and at best it was a long, wet, cold and miserable five days, plus we didn't even see a caribou. Thankfully, they didn't hold it against me, but I learned quickly and eventually we tried it again and were all very successful. Communication was the key—something I should have done more of for

the first trip.

Hunters that are planning a hunt in Alaska, whether it be for two-, five- or even more people, must get together and decide what's best for the group. Nowadays, with improved gear (and lots of practice) it is easily done, but it's something that should take place months and even years before. A good planning process and communicating those plans are what makes an adventure to remember.

Good communication also means that hunters in camp should "never assume," especially those unwritten rules that each of us have. Not all members may know what the rules are or what is expected from each person. For example, who shoots first or who shoots second or should I follow up his or her shot? My good friend Lew and I have this down to a science and many

times without even talking we know who's going to do what. This isn't always the case, especially with hunters that are new to each other. Communication is the key and needs to be done right up front.

Last, but not least, is the money issue. For many years flying was the only way I hunted the Arctic. It was cheap (cheaper) in those days and four people could fly-out for \$1200 or so. We divided the amount four ways, and when it was all said and done we were able to go on a bunch of great hunts that were

successful and didn't break us. We filled our freezers, shot a few trophies and had memories that lasted a lifetime, it was awesome! Nowadays, with the high price of fuel and other commodities, it has gotten significantly more expensive to fly and the price of a drop hunt has quadrupled. Expensive to some; worth it to others. The point I'm trying to make is that the cost of any hunt needs to be discussed long before anything is purchased or booked. Be transparent with those in your group, so each knows exactly what the cost will be and what each will need to contribute.

Hunting is what we do and what we love and for some of us it defines us, especially here in Alaska. We all love spending time with others in camp, sharing in their successes and sometimes in their failures. That love all starts with a plan and the "knowing" of what is expected on adventures such as these. It doesn't start at the end of a hunt, but in all three phases: the planning, the actual hunt itself and in reflection when it's over. Grab some buddies and make a plan!

Good luck this fall and be safe!



Paul Atkins is an outdoor writer and author from Kotzebue, Alaska. He has written hundreds of articles on big game hunting and fishing throughout North America and Africa, plus surviving in the Arctic. Paul is a longtime contributor to Hunt Alaska magazine.

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2) Hunt Alaska Magazine will also award its favorite photo with a Leupold VX-3i 3.5-10x40mm scope and a lifetime subscription to Hunt Alaska Magazine.

Winners will be selected 9/30/2018.

See HuntAlaskaMagazine.com for official contest rules.



BALLISTICS & AMMO

Ladder Testing for Long Range Shooting

Story and photos by Randy Flickinger

The idea of Ladder Testing was a development in the late 60s or 70s by a man named Creighton Audette. His thought and testing were to determine an accurate load with the fewest shots fired. Conversely most shooters, myself included, have always relied on the Optimal Charge Weight (OCW) method of building accurate loads for hunting or long range.

Ladder Testing or Incremental Load Development Method (ILDM) is a faster and more economical method than the OCW. OCW can be more accurate but requires a good deal more time, effort and number of rounds fired. OCW is an option if you do not have a chronograph and want to arrive at a similar answer, which is an accurate load for your rifle. You can read more about OCW in a later article or you can "Google" it. I do not have enough space here to explain the differences.

So . . . Ladder Testing (ILDM), in a nutshell, is loading up 10- to 20 rounds to fire at the same point of impact at 300 yards



This is the target at the bench where I mark each shot corresponding with the impact at 300 yards. It's the easiest method to keep track of the cluster or flat spot in the accuracy.



Target set at 300 yards to test the loads to see where and if the accuracy may flatten out. Notice the cluster that is marked on the duplicate target for shots 4-, 5-, 6- and 7.

using the same bullet, case and primer. The only change is the incremental powder charge. Hence, Ladder Charge. With the incremental powder charge and subsequent increase in velocity the bullet will impact the target, theoretically, higher with each shot. Shooting over a chronograph you will find the "node." A node is a velocity flat spot where .4- to .8 grains of powder will not change the height of the impact and a cluster will develop.

You will notice from the pictures accompanying the article, for my most recent ladder test, the "cluster" that formed above the orange dot (aiming point) is the flat spot in the velocity. Note shots 4-, 5-, 6- and 7 at 300 yards are virtually the same hole. The extreme spread on shots 6- and 7 are only 3 fps different. This is where I will make my stand. The flat spot is between 43.7 and 44.0 grains. I can split the difference and go with 43.9 or 43.8 and probably be fine. Obviously, more fine tuning, but very promising.

This cluster of shots, or sweet spot, is sometimes described as the "optimal velocity for the bullet weight that determines barrel harmonics." Harmonics, or barrel harmonics, is the behavior as the barrel waves or whips almost like a hose that you add water pressure to. It moves laterally (side to side) and rises after the trigger is pulled. All things being equal, the pressure, velocity and "shockwave" are repeated with each firing. Accuracy will also be repeated as the harmonics of the barrel is optimized. Granted, it will change with firing in succession without letting the barrel cool. But I think you get the idea.

I know from other tests that once you find the "sweet spot" or optimal velocity for your bullet weight, you can pretty much pick from several different powders and get the same results. So long as you stay in what I call the "velocity stream," powder is, well, for lack of a better word, less important. Gasp! I hear screaming from the cheap seats. Heretic! Liar!

Do not get me wrong—powder is important, but again, if your chosen bullet makes bug holes at 2755 with Reloader 23 you should get the same results with Reloader 16, IMR4350, H4350 or H414 provided you do not exceed pressure and are safely following all loading data, and load to similar velocities. Over the years I have tried to explain to reloaders that weighing each charge to the exact grain or "throwing" a charge with a volume measure like the RCBS Uniflow you will get the same results for most if not all hunting distances. Once you get past 400- to 500 yards, accuracy and a velocity variation of more than 35- or 40 fps at 100 yards, can change the point of impact (POI) by two inches or more.

I did not have a great deal of time for my next match and I needed to find a load that would work pretty much right out of the gate. With components on hand I decided to work up a quick ladder test. My go-to for Precision Rifle Shooting (PRS) is the

Savage 10 Stealth in 6.5 Creedmoor. Using Federal brass, Nosler Custom Competition 6.5 140 bullets and GM210M Federal Match primers I was all set except for powder. I had worked up a load for the 130 Berger VLD with Reloader 23 so my direction was to work out the kinks for the 140 Nosler. Let's face it, a couple bulk packs of 500 projectiles was a big factor in my decision plus two eight-pound containers of Reloader 23 in the reloading room made it easy.

Normally, 10 rounds at 300 yards is the norm for a good test. This time I only loaded eight rounds. Safely. No amount of hurried time is prudent in handloading. Using Reloader 23 and starting at 42.2 grains and using .3 grain increments my last load was at 44.3. Overall length was set with a Hornady Overall Length Gauge and .20 off the lands.

At the range, I set up the target down-range and make a "duplicate" target at the bench. This is so I can mark the shots on paper at the bench. Not exact science, but it works pretty well provided you have a good spotting scope and can see the impact for each individual shot. I note the impact at the bench on the duplicate target. I number the shots the same as the string on my chronograph; each shot is noted with the velocity.

My next step is to fine tune the velocity node to get a really low extreme spread plus maybe play with Cartridge Overall Length (COAL) but . . . with .234 inches at 300 yards who are we kidding. Fine tuning may be moot.



Randy Flickinger was licensed as an assistant hunting guide in Alaska for 18 years and is currently a manufacturer's representative for ATK Federal Ammunition. He teaches reloading for RCBS and resides in Oregon.



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[SHOOTING FOR THE FIELD]

The 28

Story and photo by Steve Meyer

We had flown in under a low overcast, the steep mud banks of the tidal slough our floatplane landed on were filled to capacity with the incoming fluid that passes for water in upper Cook Inlet. While our two chocolate labs romped in the marsh behind the cabin, we hauled our gear up for our annual three-day duck hunt in Redoubt Bay.

Our chores were done a few hours before the evening flight, and we settled into camp chairs in front of a narrow slough in front of the cabin. Teal had a habit of using the slough as a flyway and we always try to take a few of the best tasting of the ducks for the first night in camp, so I had my 28-gauge O/U across my lap, just in case. A Northern Harrier that glided above the marsh had my attention when Christine hollered, "Teal!" Looking to my left I saw the little buzz bombs screaming down the cut. Picking up the diminutive gun, I swung the muzzles past the lead bird and pressed the trigger, sending #7 steel shot on its way.

Before you determine the crazy person writing this is going to lobby for the 28-gauge as a great waterfowl gun, I'm

not. My 12-gauge O/U was present as my primary waterfowl gun. Rather, it is only to illustrate my love of the 28, to the degree I'll take it most anywhere there may be an opportunity to use it.

The early history of the 28, and where it came from, is a bit sketchy. It is clear that the gauge was being used across the pond in the mid- to late 1800s. It originated with a 2 1/2-inch hull, shooting a 5/8-ounce shot charge. A 2 7/8-inch hull, sporting a 3/4-ounce shot payload came later. By the mid-1900s, the load was standardized with a 2 3/4-inch hull and a 3/4-ounce shot charge. Current offerings include a 2 3/4-inch hull available with 3/4-, 7/8-, or 1-ounce shot charges. The 2 1/2-inch loads are still available from specialty ammunition manufacturers.

The introduction of the 28 in the beloved Parker double around 1903-05 was the first real exposure to the 28 in America. That it became legal for small-gauge skeet shooting cemented the gauge as a mainstay, even though it lacked popularity in the 12- and 20-gauge dominated hunting world. While sales were not brisk, most of the major shotgun manufacturers offered some form of the 28, including pumps, autoloaders, and both variations of doubles.

It's difficult to predict to what the hunting public will gravitate. We seem a weird lot at times. New gun and chambering combinations that don't do anything different or better than what came before them become popular. Perhaps it is reflected in marketing. I don't know, but it is fascinating and good for us gun folks always looking for something different. It is rare for a cartridge/shot shell offering to go along in relative obscurity and after many years, suddenly become popular.

It is so with the 28. It may be that gun writers, looking for something to write about, took a 28 to the field and started it; or maybe folks who wanted to challenge their ability with something different. I don't know, but about 20 years ago, the 28 started gaining in popularity and folks discovered its attributes that had been there all along.

Guns built with frames scaled for the 28 are light and easy to carry in the field. There is a marked difference in the frame of a 28 in your hand versus a 20 and more so compared to a 12. If recoil is a factor, and it is for some, the 28 is mild to shoot. The ammunition is lighter and less bulky.

All of that aside, the first question is, is it effective on birds in the field? Taking birds on the wing is a function of gun fit, pattern, shot size, and velocity. On paper, the modern 28-gauge loads issuing 7/8-ounce of shot at around 1250- to 1300 feet-per-second, duplicates a standard 20-gauge field load. The 1-ounce loads available add a bit more shot to the pattern. Keeping the 28 to its intended purpose of hunting upland birds, ptarmigan, grouse, quail, partridge, and pheasants, it kills just fine when chokes are used to maximize the shot charge. Some say it hits "harder" than a 20. On paper that doesn't make sense, but I can attest that in the field it does a remarkable job if the hunter does his/her part.

One aspect of wingshooting that isn't often discussed is the relationship the hunter has with the gun. Shotgunning is described as an art and as such, there is an indescribable "it" that you either have or you don't with the gun you shoot. Confidence may be the "it" we talk about—That feeling you have with a shotgun where you just know the gun is an extension from your eye to the game. There is no conscious thought to it, it just happens when you mount the gun and press the trigger. All of the aspects of best form and function in wingshooting can be taught, but it won't translate well to the field without that "it" factor. It seems the gauge and the load have less to do with the outcome than that relationship, and that is perhaps why the 28 shines in the field. Folks who try them tend to fall in love.

There are a few detractors for the 28.



Folks who try the 28 tend to fall in love with them.

Ammunition is more expensive, particularly with the premium field loads that shoot 7/8- or 1-ounce shot charges. But realistically, how many boxes of shells is one lucky enough to need in a season? Skeet loads for practice ammunition are at least reasonably priced.

The 28-gauge does not lend itself to shot sizes larger than #5, but small shot sizes, if matched to the purpose, work well. I've shot many North Dakota pheasants with Focchi 7/8-ounce nickel plated #5 shot, with no discernible difference from the 1-ounce, 20-gauge loads I shot for years.

If the 28 has a weakness, it is in the realm of non-toxic shot. Available steel shot loads are limited to small shot sizes. Small steel shot does not hold velocity well and there are no current hyper-velocity steel shot loads available, thus, effective range is limited, particularly if larger birds such as pheasants or the larger members of the grouse family are on the menu. Having made a personal commitment to using non-toxic ammunition for everything, I've used steel shot extensively on grouse and ptarmigan in Alaska. If one keeps the range inside 30 yards or so, it works fine. Kent now offers a 7/8-ounce load of Bismuth shot for the 28 that I've found essentially duplicates lead load performance. It is about twice the cost of other premium loads.

"Damn," I thought, when at the bark of the little gun, seven Green-winged teal dropped into the slough. The shot left me with one more bird to fill my limit on the evening flight. A case of "more than you ask for" that didn't create any illusions that the 28 is a great waterfowl choice, but it certainly cemented my love for the gauge. If you want a change of pace in your upland hunting, give the 28 a try. I think you'll love it too.



The author is an outdoor writer, lifetime hunter and shooter who has resided in Alaska since 1971.

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[LIFE ON THE LEDGE]

Caring for Game Meat

Story and photos by Lon E. Lauber

Family and friends eating at my house frequently rave about the delicious wild game portion of the meal. I'd like to claim four-star chef status or the uncanny ability to select tastier game on the hoof. However, neither is true. One needs to start with an animal well cared for in the field. The aim is to make life harder for bacteria and flies by creating a cool, high-acid environment to slow bacterial growth, making a protective glaze coating, and controlling flies.

Use the Right Game Bag

Never use game bags made from plastic. They tend to hold in heat and don't permit air circulation. Use high-quality game bags like those made from a breathable, bug-resistant material. They must be strong enough to carry the meat, yet allow maximum air circulation. They must have tight-enough mesh to keep the flies out. My personal game bag favorites are the mesh, stretchy kind from Alaska Game Bags. This flexible, interlocking-knit design provides a one-size-fits-all format.



Studies show that hanging game meat for five days at about 42 degrees produces the best combination of flavor and tenderness.

Cooling the Meat

The sooner your game meat is cooled down, the better tasting it will be. It's important to gut and skin the animal as soon as possible. This allows body heat to dissipate more rapidly, thus lowering the carcass temperature. If you're hunting near a stream or lake, it's safe and recommended to dunk the meat in cool water. But make sure you or the wind and air can dry the meat rapidly too.

Air Drying/Storing Meat in the Field

Once the carcass temperature has been lowered, it's important to also dry the meat. The key is to hang the meat out of direct sunlight (in the shade) where any breeze will gently blow across the carcass. I've learned excess moisture can be squeegeed off the meat with your hands, or wiped away with paper- or cloth towels.

Once the excess moisture has been removed, if circumstances allow, you can spray lemon juice and Tabasco sauce in a light coating over the entire carcass. This will create a high-acid, protective glaze over the meat while it is drying. Once the meat is dry, it can be placed in game bags and re-hung.

Exhaustive studies show hanging game meat for five days at about 42 degrees provides the best combination in flavor and tenderness. Hanging wild game longer will tenderize the meat but at a considerable loss of flavor. If practical, on remote hunts, quartering the animal in the field and then de-boning just prior to departure is a good method.

In warmer weather, flies are a problem with game carcasses. The solution is to build a small flytrap near the "hanging tree." The success of the flytrap can be explained with deer herd management jargon. The "habitat" near your meat-hanging tree will be home to a given number of flies/insects. Since your meat is now cooled, dried, and protected with



Remove the hide as soon as possible to allow the meat to cool down.

the citric acid, flies will be more attracted to the rancid meat in the trap, thus killing the majority of this area's flies. Yes, other flies will migrate into the area, but that takes time. Additionally, these transient pests will also be attracted to the trap. The obvious benefit is minimal or no insect larvae on your meat.

To build a flytrap use Golden Malrin—available at many feed and mill stores—and a black garbage bag placed about eight- to 10 feet away from the meat. Make a little tent with some branches and the plastic bag. First, place meat scraps under the branches. Pour the Golden Malrin on and around the scraps of meat. Cut fly-entrance slits in the garbage bag then place it loosely over the pile. The bag can be anchored with rocks or more

branches.

The sun will heat up the plastic, which in turn spoils the meat. The flies are attracted to the whole mess and crawl in through the slits in the plastic. The Golden Malrin kills the flies. When you're ready to leave the area, put the whole trap into a Ziploc-type bag, carry it from the field, and dispose of it properly.

The previous tips will help you in warm hunting temperatures. But what can you do to improve the quality of late-season game meat?

Old Man Winter

When an animal is killed in below-freezing temperatures, it's important to skin it as soon as possible and then cover the carcass with a tarp or sheet of plastic (a space blanket works too) for 20 minutes to one hour. If the meat's surface starts to freeze, cover the plastic-covered carcass with snow to insulate it so freezing does not occur until rigor mortis sets in. Rigor mortis is the process where the muscle tissue starts to stiffen up, and may take several hours, depending on the size of the animal and ambient temperature. If the carcass freezes before rigor mortis sets in, the pH level will not drop to around 5.3. Then your meat will not be nearly as tender or have

as good of a flavor.

Home Cutting Tips

With so many hunters now doing basic butchering at home, knowing how to cut the meat is important to ensure proper flavor and texture.

If you want tender steaks, cut the meat across the grain. The grain is what gives the meat its tough texture. When you cut with the grain, you get meat with jerky-like texture.

When I want to serve tasty steaks to guests, I cut the meat into small roasts and freeze these whole. Then I partially thaw the roasts out and cut the steaks to the thickness everyone prefers. Also, a roast has less surface area than steaks. This minimizes freezer burn.

Freezing meat at temperatures between -5 and -10 degrees F will increase its shelf life. Moreover, if you've thawed out too much meat and wish to refreeze it, you can. First, dry it out; then re-wrap it.

Game meat care and scrumptious, healthy table fare are my pride and joy. Being prepared with the right tools for the job, and learning how to care for your meat properly will reward you. Family and friends will be raving for more wild-game meals.



Lon E. Lauber is a full-time professional photographer, writer and bowhunter. He is a nine-time Alaska state archery champion and has taken 52 Pope- and Young-class animals.



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The Wisdom of a Dog
 Story and photo by Bjorn Dible

On a rainy spring day in southeast Alaska, when the hooting of male sooty grouse brought the green mountains alive, my dog nudged my hand off my laptop. I was in a bad mood, suffering from the illusion that I didn't have enough time to get all things done I needed to do that week. Besides my day job, I had rapidly approaching deadlines on several articles—most about hunting—that I hadn't begun writing. I'd budgeted that Saturday to write, but Fen, with her persistent nuzzling, had other plans. If she could talk, she would have said something like, "Sucka, you gonna write about hunting when we can go do it? Something must be wrong with your psychology, chump." Some people think it's weird I envision Fen talking like a 1970s pimp, being that it's 2018 and she's a tiny golden retriever and all. I say shame on you. Golden retriever bitches can be pimps, too.

I shut my computer, grabbed my .22 rifle and drove a few miles down the road to the mountain where I first learned how to hunt. The hooting of male sooty grouse—colloquially known as "hooters"—echoed down from its steep slope. Until recently called the blue grouse, the sooty is the largest grouse in Alaska. A rooster weighs around three and half pounds. Sooties are the only species of grouse commonly found in Southeast.

While the season is open August 1 to May 15, most sooty hunters only chase birds in the spring, when the males are hooting. A good hunting dog



MC Martin and Fen with the first sooty grouse of 2018.

makes a sooty hunt a lot more fun and easy, since sometimes birds will glide or run if a shot isn't instantly fatal. I lucked out with Fen. Still a pup at 2½ years old, she's a good retriever and loves grouse hunting. On the few occasions I've taken her along on big game hunts she's stayed glued to the back of my knees. She even mimicked belly crawling when my partner MC and I snuck up on a herd of caribou the previous September. That same summer, when a potentially predatory bear trailed MC back to camp, Fen stood motionless by my side—a low growl rumbling in her throat conveying something like "come any closer, punk, and I'll cut you."

I followed an old hunter's trail into the dark and ancient forest, clambering over windfall and through devil's club. Fen ran from scent to scent, sniffing stories of deer, wolves and men who'd been trying to trap them. The deeper we went into the woods the better I felt. To many people, the forest of southeast Alaska feels spooky or worse. To me, it feels like home. These woods in particular were filled with a flood of good and defining memories. As a kid I'd followed my dad around on numerous day hunts that, at the time, felt as epic and brutal as the John Franklin expedition. We didn't see a deer for a long time, mostly because I was about as sneaky and graceful as a drunk, congested elephant. At tree line, I first bloodied my hands with a young buck my dad shot. A few years later, I shot my first

deer as the last crimson traces of the setting sun disappeared on the Chilkat Mountains. I was with my brothers when they shot their first deer on the mountain's slopes. In the more than two decades since I first visited the mountain, I'd lost track of the number of animals it had provided.

I paused to listen and distinguished two different grouse hooting over the sound of a waterfall. Fen stared quizzically up into the trees, and then at me. My childhood dog, Buff, a big yellow lab lapdog, knew that the sound of hooting meant a grouse. Fen still hasn't put the two together. Buff was both a best buddy and great bird hunter. In the fall, he knew what brush pockets to work to flush grouse and ptarmigan. When it came to waterfowl, he was even more exceptional. I'll never forget the time he swam a quarter mile out in wind and rough seas, chasing a wounded surf scoter. I screamed for minutes, though I'm sure he couldn't have heard me. When he finally turned back to shore, I could barely make out his tan-colored speck bobbing in three-foot waves, surrounded by fifty or so harbor seals. When he got back to shore I praised him, but he seemed apologetic for not being able to get the duck that I'd made a lousy shot on. I didn't think I'd ever like another dog as much as Buff.

Fen nuzzled my hand, eager to continue up the mountain. I picked the grouse I thought would be easier to get to and we began climbing in its direction.

At around 1,000 feet we neared the source of the hooting. I walked in circles, scanning the maze of trees and boughs. It was breezy, so the grouse would stick close to the tree trunk and, likely, be in a clump of brush. Generally, a hooter prefers to be high in a big spruce tree. This bird seemed to be in a stand of medium-sized hemlocks. A sharp-shinned hawk shrieked from a nearby tree, no doubt looking for the hooter too. The grouse would be even more hidden because of the other predator. It took me 45 minutes before I spied faint movement in a clump of brush as the grouse hooted. When a sooty makes its mating call, sacs on the side of its neck inflate and the bird makes a bobbing motion.

At the crack of the shot the bird plummeted and Fen tore down a cliff. A minute later, she returned and placed the bird in my hands. I thanked the bird, then praised Fen as she made a sneering smile indicating that she was sheepishly pleased with herself.

I sat listening to branches sway and trees creak and moan as the bird's luster rapidly faded. Fen put her paw on my arm. If she could talk, I imagined she'd have said something like, "That'll do, pig." Other grouse hooted nearby, but one was enough for today. I gutted and skinned the bird and left what I wasn't going to use to be reabsorbed by the woods. A buddy I hunt with told me, years ago, how he never throws even scraps in the trash, as the dump is no place for the remains of wild animals. Ever since I make sure to return all the non-usable parts to the forest. I smelled the meat of the grouse—it's light and tasty and always reminds me of spring. The breast would be perfect for a curry I planned to make for lunch. With the rest of the bird I'd make soup in the slow cooker that would be good for a couple more meals. Fen would get the liver, heart and gizzard after I cleaned polished quartz pebbles out of it.

Fen flushed a clucking hen and it flew to a branch twenty feet from the ground and stared down at us. Together, Fen satiated and me with a clear mind, we walked out of the woods to the car, where she passed out a few minutes later. If Fen could talk, I'm pretty sure she wouldn't berate me for almost wasting the day staring at a computer. Instead, she'd just be thankful for getting to spend the day in the woods doing what she loved with someone she loves. Dogs' desires might seem simple, but their wisdom is nothing short of profound.



Bjorn Dible is a Juneau writer. He's the author of Haunted Inside Passage: Ghosts, Legends and Mysteries of Southeast Alaska and Never Cry Halibut: and Other Alaska Fishing and Hunting Tales. You can contact or follow him at facebook.com/BjornDibleauthor.

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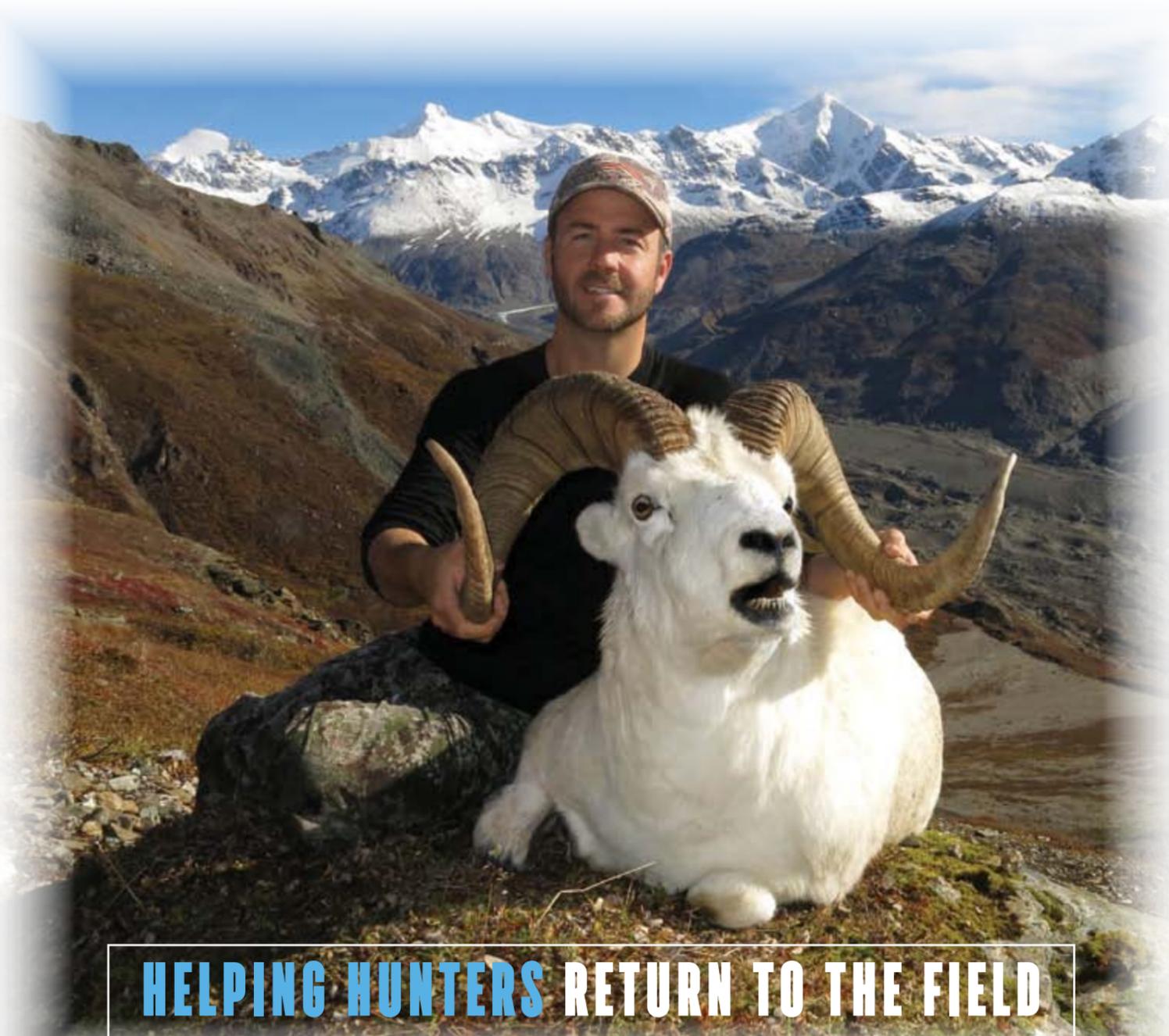
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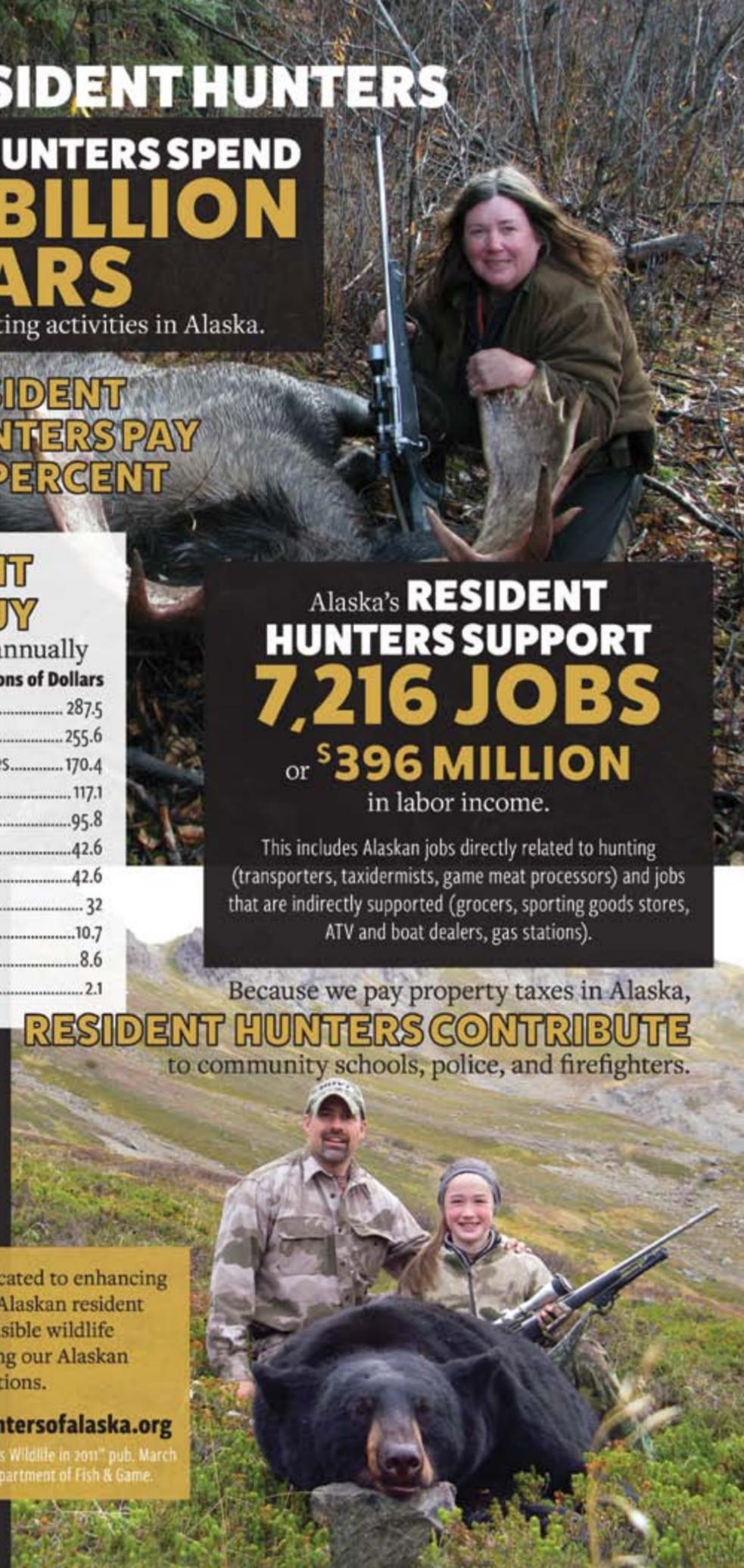
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Data source: "The Economic Importance of Alaska's Wildlife in 2011" pub. March 2014. Prepared by ECONorthwest for the Alaska Department of Fish & Game.





STORY AND PHOTOS BY PAUL D. ATKINS

GOATS AT 50!



The struggle was real—as real as it gets. The goat was up there, I knew, but my legs were screaming to stop. Each step was pure agony, especially after the long traverse through the rocks and boulders that lined the mountainside. My good friend and hunting partner, Carri Ann, was directly above me, coaxing me on as we started our vertical approach. I wanted to stop, but I knew deep in my soul that if I was ever going to get a goat, this would be it; there probably wouldn't be any more chances, ever.

Goat hunting and I haven't fared too well over many years of pursuing these incredible animals. They have been my Achilles' heel. I'm not ungrateful for those experiences. I've cherished every one of them and even though I came home with unused tags, I learned something new, plus I learned something about myself. The adventure with friends and the memories we created on each of those hunts can never be replaced, but as the years passed and each hunt started and finished I knew that time was about to catch up with me.

I'm over 50 now and the thought of climbing mountains—I mean real mountains, those that go up forever—make your body hurt just to look at them. It is relentless on your body, especially your knees, back and stamina. But if you want a mountain goat then that is what you have to do and those are the places you have to go. The pain will be worth it in the end.

Left: Some consider goat hunting the toughest hunt you will ever do in North America; I know I do. It's an adventure like no other, and it will test you to the limits. These magnificent creatures live where no man should go. Above: The ride out is always fun and the beginning of what all of us hope will be a great adventure. Figuring out who gets to ride in the front seat is always a battle.



Above: Choosing the right transporter is a big part of any hunter's success, especially on fly-out, do-it-yourself hunts. Great pilots who fly in Alaska and know the area are a big part of whether you will be successful or not. Left: Gear is so important on an adventure and undertaking such as this. Kodiak Island is unforgiving and if you aren't prepared with the right gear it can become dangerous pretty quickly.

Like I've said before, goat hunting is both physical and mental, heavy on the mental, particularly in my case. Getting your body in shape is really the easy part, but focusing on what it takes to traverse across slick slopes, monster boulders, all the while moving in a vertical direction is at a whole 'nother level.

I'll be honest, when I got the goat bug several years ago I thought it would be easy. Get the right gear, work out a little bit and I was ready to go. I didn't realize at the time I was way out of my league and that naive thought process basically and ultimately meant failure.

Those first goat hunts were like that. Fly to wherever, meet up with a guide or fellow hunting partner and start the process up the mountain. It worked for a while, then I either couldn't make it due to exhaustion or the terrain (like the second time) or a freak blizzard blows in just as you start your ascent (like the first time) and your hunt ends before it even starts.

All were learning curves and if I'm being honest I'm glad some of those things happened. Sometimes I think the thought of going on a goat hunt and actually booking or planning one was more important than actually going. I was wrong. But looking back, I wouldn't trade any of it for anything.

Anyway, that all intensified a couple of years ago when I realized, with the help of

a friend, that I was on the verge of doing something that few have accomplished and few have had the opportunity to do.

"You know, Paul, you only need one more animal to complete the Super Ten." "What's that?" I asked. "It's when you take one of each big game animal in North America," he said.

I never really thought about it, but as soon as those words left his mouth I knew immediately which animal was missing from my list: a mountain goat. After that it became a goal or a dream or both I guess, but I knew in the back of my mind that time wasn't on my side and if I was ever going to do this I had to do it now.

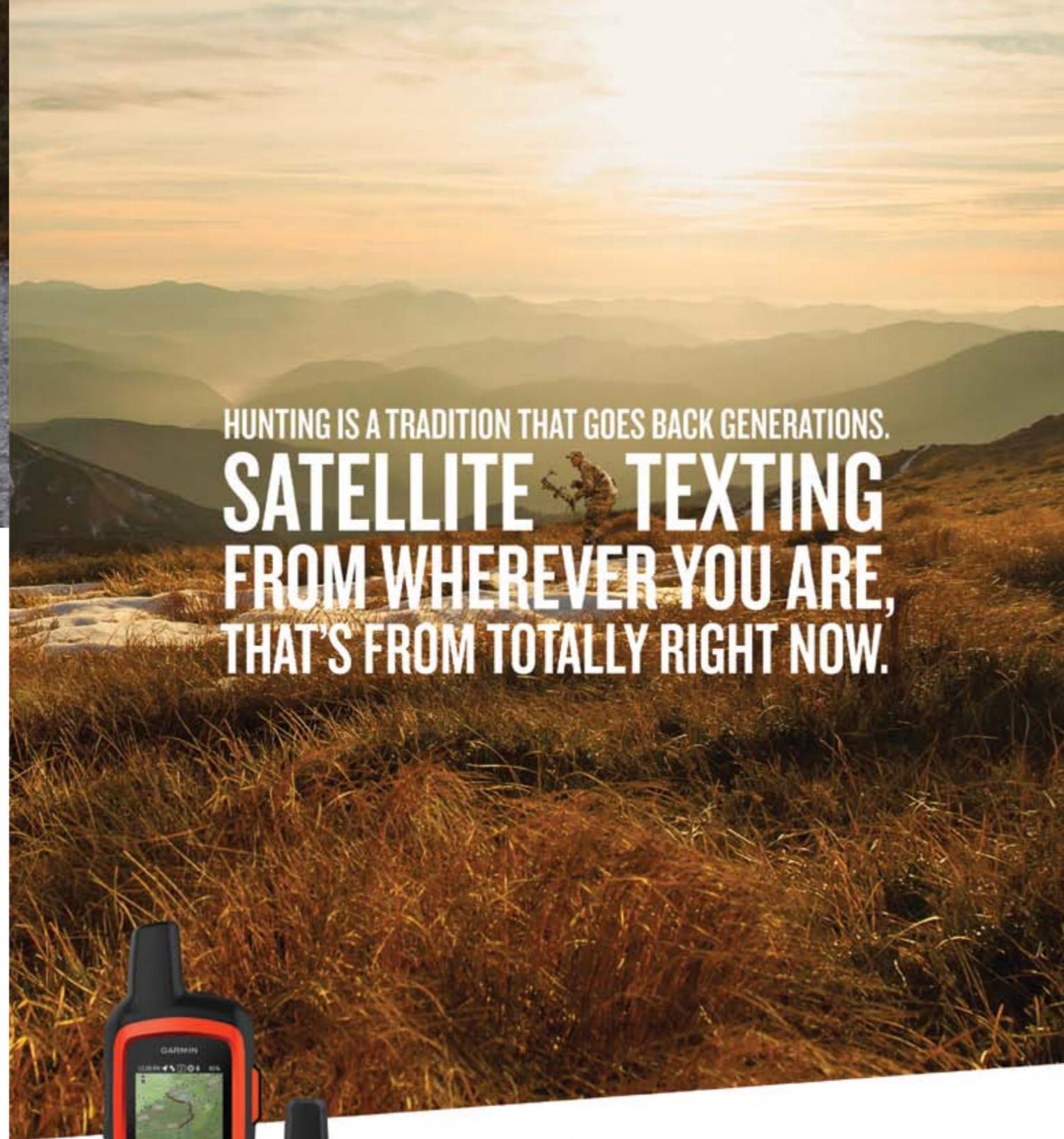
As a writer, I've been in the game for many years, but only seriously since I came to Alaska back in the 1990s. The hunting was incredible and the multitude of storylines never seemed to stop. Deadlines came fast, too, and staying caught up was almost impossible at times, but it has been fun and over time I was able to have many experiences, but just as importantly met a lot of great people.

Luckily, through those outdoor experiences I was allowed to meet a like-minded person a couple of years ago who would eventually help me in achieving my lofty and what I thought almost impossible goal. Carri Ann Mueller is that person and one of my close friends. She, too, is an avid hunter and for those that don't know,

she and her beautiful goat were featured on the cover of the Fall 2017 issue of *Hunt Alaska* magazine. I was on that hunt with her and her husband, Andy, and to say it was an incredible experience is an understatement. Kodiak in the springtime is tough and even though there were many ups and downs for me personally on that trip, it was encouraging. So encouraging, that as soon as we returned we immediately planned another hunt for the fall, shooting for early October.

As soon as I returned home that spring I fine-tuned my workout regime, trying to figure out the physical part the best I could. I ate right, I checked and re-checked gear and constantly thought about goats, mountains, and each painful step it would take to get within range. It became an obsession.

After a long summer of working out and getting prepared, September finally arrived. Like many who hunt Kodiak, we shipped all our gear down early giving us plenty of time to focus on other aspects of the hunt. One thing I've learned about hunting Kodiak: It's better to ship your gear before you arrive if you can. It makes things so much easier and it isn't too expensive, plus it puts your mind at ease knowing that all your stuff will be waiting for you as soon as you get to the dock. Picking the right transporter and pilot is also important and should be done long before the hunt takes



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Finding a rock on Kodiak isn't tough, but finding a flat one is. Here Andy Mueller and the author work on the two goats they were able to pull off the mountain. Great excitement and memories to go along with a couple of great trophies, plus the meat is incredible.

place. Upon arriving home from a spring hunt, I immediately called Seahawk Air and booked with Roland, one of the best outfits on Kodiak Island. Selecting the right air service to drop you off and pick you up is one of the most important aspects to any hunt, but especially on Kodiak. Seahawk fills the bill and then some.

Kodiak can vary weather-wise, but we arrived with sunshine and clear skies, something pretty rare, especially in October. We knew, however, that a storm was blowing in that evening and some pretty nasty days were in the forecast for part of our adventure. Either way our hunt was finally here, back to the place that looked quite different than it did six months ago! The four of us, Carri Ann, Andy, Carri Ann's cousin Jordan and myself were eager to get to camp, set-up and start glassing. I was even more anxious, especially once we got in the air and all those steep, jagged mountains started appearing below me. Yes, I had doubt and a bit of anxiety, but I knew this time it would be different. Mentally and physically I was ready, plus I knew that we would be flying into a mountain lake where hunting goats would be closer to eye level, making it a bit easier, or so I kept telling myself.

As rain hit the windshield of Roland's plane we cut through the mountains with ease. Like most things on Kodiak our plan changed with the incoming storm. The area we wanted to hunt would be a nightmare, especially with 70 mph winds, so we quickly decided to go elsewhere. We flew a few passes looking for a suitable site, something higher with a lake, but more importantly something with goats. As the rain came harder and options were getting fewer we rounded a corner and saw goats, lots of goats, plus a lake. Roland said he could do it and within minutes were standing on the lake shore.

The camp spot was occupied, but after visiting the guys there, who were flying out that day, we decided to stay. They had taken a couple of super-nice billys during the week and told us there were many more. From the air, we could see they were telling the truth. Getting camp set-up in the rain and mud took a while, but eventually we were in and lucky for us, just in time. The big storm showed up about the time we hammered the last tent peg in. Big wind and pouring rain pounded our tents, but we were safe and sound until the next day or so, we hoped.

The next day arrived, but it wasn't ideal. Rain and clouds made glassing difficult, so we decided to make a move up through the alders and see how far we could go. It was slow going, but we made a trail through the thickest stuff getting to the mountain

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valley. It was a beautiful sight. Rocks covered in green moss, void of alder and devil's club, plus several places to glass the jagged peaks above. We couldn't see much, but we knew the storm was scheduled to end the next day and it was supposed to be much better. The weather man was right and the next day was much clearer.

Back at the valley the wind was constant, but the rock I was leaning on provided a comfortable spot to glass from. All four of us were glassing when unexpectedly to our right three goats appeared in the rocks above us. They looked like nannies and after closer observation we could tell they were. Nannies without kids are legal, so we immediately decided to make a move. The climb up wasn't too tough, but crossing the cuts and washed out ravines was. Even though we couldn't see the goats anymore we finally got into a good position, or so we thought. Andy, who was above us, peered over the top and to his and our surprise the goats had moved down and were now below us!

Carri Ann and I made a mad dash down and within seconds a goat appeared in front of us at ten yards. She was a lone nanny and looked small, but I knew this might be my only chance. The goat turned left and was going away. I shot and missed cleanly, but Andy, who was above and had

a clear shot, didn't miss. One goat to carry back to camp.

Jordan had been glassing the far reaches of the valley earlier and thought he saw a goat bedded in the open. I thought it was a rock, but after our initial climb we could see that it was indeed a goat. A lone billy had perched itself in the steep rocks, perusing all that lay before him. He didn't move or even twitch, making it hard to tell exactly how big or small he was. It was then we decided to make another move. Traversing the rim of the valley, high above sea level, we made the long, exhausting trek towards him. It was excruciating on the ankles, but finally we were out of his line of sight and below him.

It was then that Carri Ann and I decided to leave our hunting group and make the vertical climb. We knew we were at least five miles from camp and the vertical rise would only add to the distance. We dropped our packs and climbed. I was on the verge of giving in, but knew that if I was ever going to get my goat then this was it, if it was still there. With the help of my friend I pushed on, finally reaching the place we needed to be.

With no goat in sight we carefully made our way across the rocks. Big rocks, more like boulders the size of small cars lay between us and the place where the goat

should be. Tension was high as I unslung the rifle from my shoulder. I had no less than got it to my side and turned down the scope when two horns appeared above the rocks. There he was! He saw me as soon as I saw him and the race was on. He began to run and ascend the cliff when I felt the recoil from the rifle. I missed again, but immediately chambered another round and this time I did not. One more to make sure and the goat was down. My goat. I was elated and a feeling of relief and accomplishment came over me. I had my Super Ten, but more importantly I had my goat, conquered my fear of the mountain and fulfilled a lifelong dream with good friends, without whom I couldn't have done it.

Goat hunting is hard, and if somebody tells you otherwise they're wrong. It's definitely a physical and mental challenge, especially if Father Time isn't on your side. Memories are priceless here in Alaska, especially on Kodiak and this one will live on forever.



Paul Atkins is an outdoor writer and author from Kotzebue, Alaska. He has written hundreds of articles on big game hunting, and fishing throughout North America and Africa, plus surviving in the Arctic. Paul is a contributing editor for Hunt Alaska.



The work begins after the shot. Getting your goat field dressed and off the mountain can be treacherous. The steep inclines and rough terrain make it hard, even more so when you're five miles from base camp.

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WOMAN, MOUNTAIN, WILD:

MC Martin with two Admiralty
Island Sitka blacktails.

A Sitka blacktail hunting story
Story and photos by Bjorn Dihle

The first time I saw the mountain was in the spring of 2013, during an attempt to kayak from Juneau to Sitka. It was late April and one northerly gale after another turned the ocean surrounding Admiralty Island into a chaotic mess of whitewater. I'd budgeted 17 days—a generous amount of time even when accounting for bad weather—but Njord, the Norse god of the winds and sea, had other plans. During one storm, I hiked from my camp along the western shore of Seymour Canal to Mole Harbor. I post-holed through snow and pushed through brush until I came to the fresh tracks of a large brown bear skirting the edge of a frozen lake. He knew the area better than I did, so I followed his trail. I was low on food, and the hooting of sooty grouse, barely audible over the wind, lured me up into the hills. In the dusky evening, I knocked a bird out of a tree with my short-barrel shotgun. As I held it, it warmed my chilled hands and I felt acute gratitude for the sustenance it would provide. I stared through swaying trees and whooshing branches as the wind tore open black clouds to reveal the snowy mountain. It was named after Jack Thayer, a forester and the only person to be killed by a brown bear on Admiralty Island in the last century. There was something magnetic about that mountain. I hoped one day to see what the world looked like from its top. I returned to the coast and battled it out with choppy seas for a few more days before tucking tail and paddling home to Juneau.

My next chance to climb the mountain came in 2016, during a hike my brother Luke and I made that covered the length of the island. The weather was terrible even by Southeast standards—by the time we got to its base, we felt as energetic as a couple of half-drowned rats. Sun beams tore through storm clouds, revealing its snow-covered slopes. The wind howled, the rain fell harder, and clouds closed back



around the mountain. We headed to the coast, too cold and wet to feel any regret.

A year later an air taxi company I work with guiding bear viewing trips, dropped me off at a lake near the mountain's base. It was August, the alpine was green, the sky was bluebird and buck season was open. I carried my old 7 Mag with the hopes of taking a deer or two in the high country. My girlfriend MC, the only reason I'm not living in a cave on Admiralty Island, shouldered her backpack.

Some people might have misgivings about clawing their way up a mountain in the heart of a brown bear wilderness. Not MC. She's game for any adventure—from Kyoto to the Arctic. She's kind of a princess by Alaska standards, though—she doesn't pee standing up, chew tobacco or drink a case of Rainier a day. It took some getting used to. Seven years prior, when we got together, she was a vegetarian. I quickly got her out in the wild with only moose steaks for sustenance. That night, after devouring several pounds of meat, she began panting, howling and snarling. She tore out of the tent and charged off onto the tundra. When she returned hours later she was covered in blood, which made me smile to myself. There's nothing hotter than a woman who runs with wolves and eviscerates a caribou without breaking stride.

MC has a different story about giving up being a vegetarian. It does not involve wolves or her running down a caribou beneath the full moon. A lot of the details don't add up, though, so I'd go with my version if I were you. We both agree that we ate moose roasted over a fire and it was delicious, but there our stories diverge. Basically, the gist of her account is that if she was going to eat meat, she wanted to kill and process it herself or shack up with a dude who did. As I have zero skills with women, this proclamation was a godsend.

Having success in taking big game isn't always easy. MC had accompanied me when I'd shot animals and even come close to pulling the trigger a few times, but she'd yet to harvest anything bigger than a sooty grouse in Alaska.

We pushed through thick jungle—the sort that makes you clench your teeth and half expect to bump into a dinosaur—to the base of a ridge and then followed a game trail through giant spruce and hemlock trees. I occasionally hollered, something I always do when hiking through brown bear country until I near the edge of where I plan to hunt. I've startled enough bears at close range to know that it's no good for me or for them.

At about 1,500 feet we entered a series of meadows and fresh deer sign began to



A nice Sitka blacktail buck.

appear in abundance. A doe paused and studied us from a thick patch of blueberry bushes. Another deer bounded off into the cover of the forest. An hour later, just above tree line, we crested a rise and glassed an expansive saddle below. Three deer lay at the edge of the forest on one side and a doe was bedded on a cliff on the other. One appeared to be a small buck, but it looked like a hard stalk. While we were contemplating the best course of action, two small deer appeared and sprinted circles after each other. We decided to slowly hunt our way up the mountain—we could always try the valley in the evening. It would be better than anyway.

We edged along a stand of stunted mountain hemlock trees when a bear—just out of sight—roared. I chambered a round, spoke to try to calm it and waited. Usually when you startle a bear they huff and run away. Sometimes they growl or clack their jaws if they're thinking about fighting. I'd heard bears roaring at each other in the past, but I'd only been roared at once before. I'd nearly blundered into an old male while he was eating salmonberries. He let out what sounded like a roar, growl and hiss all at the same time and, then, attacked the salmonberry bush with a fury to let me know what

he'd do to me if I didn't back off. That was by far the scariest berry picking I've ever seen.

Hosea Sarber, the famous guide and game warden who likely hunted down the bear that killed Jack Thayer, had a saying that about one out of 25 brown bears you meet are ready to fight for reasons only known to themselves. During the hike Luke and I made of Admiralty we encountered roughly 25 bears. Sure enough, only one picked a fight. That 25th bear is the last thing anyone wants to run into.

MC and I waited for a few tense minutes. There wasn't a sound, not even a branch cracking or the thumping of a bear running away. We spoke again, and then hiked a few yards higher to get a better vantage. There appeared nowhere for a bear to hide. It was weird, almost like the bear had just vanished. My best guess was that it was roaring as it ran away. After fifteen minutes of waiting, we slowly zigzagged our way up the mountain. A deer appeared above, and we quickly knelt behind a rock. A quick glance through the rifle scope revealed it to be a one-antlered buck.

"Is it a buck?" MC whispered.
"Yeah, a unicorn," I said, passing my rifle over. She took a rest, chambered a

Planning a Sitka blacktail deer hunt

Sitka blacktails are neither large nor possess trophy racks, but to me they may be the most beautiful and tastiest of all deer. The best time to hunt is August 1 to mid-September for the high country and November 1 through December for lower elevation.

Location

Virtually all of southeast Alaska is populated with deer. Prince William Sound and the Kodiak Island Archipelago have good deer numbers too, and the latter may be the most popular destination for out-of-state hunters. Bucks are biggest on Prince of Wales Island, and a network of logging roads offers access into the mountains. The ABC Islands of Southeast (Admiralty, Baranof and Chichagof) are my favorite places to hunt. The populations are generally good, other hunters usually absent, and the adventure and aesthetics are fantastic. Kodiak, though, is crawling with deer and a trip to explore the island is well worth the adventure just in itself.

Alaska Airlines flies daily to all communities in Alaska of any size. The Alaska Marine Highway ferries make regular trips to all of Southeast's major communities. Getting to a mountain usually involves a bush flight or boat ride from Juneau or Sitka, though from Hoonah, on Chichagof Island, you can utilize the many miles of logging roads to find a mountain to climb. In every sizeable community there are air taxis with pilots who are happy to fly you out to your adventure.

Training

Get in shape before you go. An alpine deer hunting trip is serious fun but involves more than a little sweat and pain. Expect at least a 2,500-foot climb through steep jungle before you'll be in optimal habitat. Your pack, along with

your gear, will weigh around 90 pounds after harvesting a typical buck. Climbing mountains is the best training. Put rocks in your pack if you're really serious. If you live somewhere without mountains, walk hills, flights of stairs or even a stair-stepper. Late-season hunts tend to be significantly less arduous, but unless you're beach combing, expect to work a bit.

Gear

Good gear is critical when facing the tempestuous weather of coastal Alaska. Prepare for a deluge of rain, even though it is just as likely the weather will be decent. I wear Xtratuf rubber boots (NOTE: If you have ankle or knee issues, consider tall hiking boots and make sure you bring plenty of dry socks), nylon rain pants, poly-propylene tops and bottoms, a wool hat, a pair of wool gloves and a good rain jacket. When I am hunting I generally wear all fleece as it's much quieter than nylon. A lightweight synthetic sleeping bag, pad and an ultra-light three-season tent like those made by Hilleberg, makes a trip much more enjoyable. The MSR WindBurner is a great lightweight and foolproof stove, or the classic Whisperlite is a solid option.

Other Considerations

August is often warm, even hot. Keeping your meat in premium condition isn't always easy. Also, most of the coastal region of Alaska has a dense population of brown bears. So, once I shoot a deer, I try to get it off the mountain as soon as possible. If I can't, I hang my meat in pillow sacks well off the ground or bury the sacks in a snowfield. Hunt with a partner, make a lot of noise on the way to the alpine, and, once you're done hunting, frequently check your surroundings after downing a buck. Late-season deer hunting alone can be even more risky.

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round and then gave me a weird look. "I don't want to shoot a unicorn," she whispered. "What?" "A unicorn. The most innocent animal in the forest," she whispered as the deer stepped out of view. "It's like any other buck minus an antler," I argued. "You shouldn't have called it a unicorn. I'm already wound tight enough," MC said.

I apologized and with a renewed fury we scuttled and crawled up the mountain until we spied the buck with three other deer a mere forty yards away. They were all bucks, though two of them looked like spikes. MC rested the rifle on a mound and, with a trembling hand, worked a round into the chamber. She aimed at the one-antlered buck, which was closest and offered the best broadside shot. At the crack of the shot it collapsed and the other deer ran a few yards, then paused and looked back. I urged MC to shoot another. At the second shot, a fork-horn cringed and then leapt out of view. I left MC kneeling over the first deer, her hand on its side as its life left its body. I found the other buck and dragged it back. With no small amount of mixed feelings, MC thanked each of them before we began butchering.

As we worked, I was treated to MC making the craziest grunting sounds I'd ever heard. It was like what I'd imagine the lead singer of a Neanderthal death metal band to sound like, if that sort of thing existed during the Pleistocene Epoch. I

kept alert, with my gun ready for bears. The mountain doesn't see many hunters, but some bears have learned to associate dead deer with a gunshot. An hour later, we had our game bags loaded with around 100 pounds of premium meat. We buried the game bags, wrapped in garbage bags, in a snow slope a half-mile from the gut piles. I left a sweaty shirt and peed nearby, hoping it would dissuade any bears from investigating too closely.

That evening, after making camp near the top of the mountain, we sliced and boiled the two deer hearts for dinner. Along with some instant soup, it was the perfect meal for the occasion. An expanse of rain forest, mountains and ocean stretched in every direction. Deer began to appear—many of which were significantly bigger bucks than the two MC shot, but we had no regrets. We watched until the sun set pink and the mountain dimmed to black. MC got into the tent, zipping it shut as fast as she could in a vain attempt to keep the bugs out, and climbed into her sleeping bag. For a short while, I remained outside studying shadows in the still night. Of the seven billion folks currently roaming the Earth, I was pretty sure I was the luckiest.



Bjorn Dible is a Juneau writer. He's the author of Haunted Inside Passage: Ghosts, Legends and Mysteries of Southeast Alaska and Never Cry Halibut: and Other Alaska Fishing and Hunting Tales. You can contact or follow him at facebook.com/BjornDibleauthor.



MC enjoying the view from camp.



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Taking this massive elk proved to be a difficult and rewarding undertaking. Below left: The last load signifies the arduous task is almost complete.



“IT’S THAT BIG BULL!” mybuddyTruTripple whispered from two feet away. There was an undisguisable tremor in his voice, but I can’t blame him. We could both hear the arrow I had in the rest rattle from my shaking hands. “There is no way we can get to him. There are at least eight cows in that thicket with him,” I said (with a still-shaking voice). It was the last day we could kill a bull and still have time to get him to the beach.

It all started a week before. Well . . . actually it all started about ten years before. Growing up on Prince of Wales Island, this moment had been the topic of many day-dreaming schemes of how we were going to draw that tag one day and be able to go over to Etolin Island for a couple of weeks and have a really good hunt. Chasing blacktail in the alpine was what we waited for all year, and having found ourselves on some pretty tough excursions in these pursuits, as well as trapping and fish-guiding the summers, we deemed ourselves plenty well-qualified to chase the bulls we heard stories about.

Through high school and college I charter fished during the summers out of Whale Pass. Every clear day those big snow-capped peaks just on our side of the mainland were sharp as could be from our floating vantage point, and almost without fail we would start talking elk. Tourists from all over heard the plan. By plan I of course mean the big-picture idea of getting to Etolin and shooting a big bull with a bow. One visiting fisherman in particular, I suppose having had similar

ETOLIN ISLAND ELK: *an epic adventure*

STORY AND PHOTOS BY
JARED COOK



Above: The three hunters are tired but satisfied after this epic hunt. Below: Brian DeNatly is thrilled to be part of the hunt.

“plans” himself, took a liking to the idea. This was Brian DeNatly.

Brian is about the same age as my dad and was the third amigo on the hunt. He swears he wanted to go, but I am partially suspicious he came per my dad’s request to keep Tru and me from getting into too much trouble. Having hunted with Brian on multiple occasions prior to this trip I had learned a few things about him. One is that he is always, and I mean always, in a pleasant mood. Two is that Brian is a real friend. Lastly, Brian missed his calling to be a butcher. Brian knows meat cuts that Tyson Foods has never seen.

Tru is one of those guys that Lewis and Clark would have wanted along when they travelled west across the continent. Tru lives and breathes anything fur, fish, or game. Tru can do almost anything, but even when he can’t, he answers fast and speaks with a confidence that can be compared politically to the current administration. Tru is that guy that really does spend as many days a week at the gym as he claims he does, and it’s all in preparation for anything outdoors. On top of all of this, he is one heck of a friend.

Having drawn the archery bull tag for Etolin Island in February and with a plan to graduate a couple of months later from college, it was finally the year. No class to start up at the end of August to get in the way, and every job interview began with a disclosure that I was leaving for a few weeks in September. Tru, being in helicopter flight school and working



construction, managed to get the time off as well, and Brian’s schedule worked out nicely to be able to join us.

The first couple of days of the trip were pretty standard for southeast Alaska in September. Rain. Inches a day. Small craft advisory that just would not lift. The 5 a.m. NOAA weather update on the third day of waiting finally gave better news for the wind and waves. Not perfect, but better and there was hope in the rain forecast. We left right away and were on the beach mid-morning. With a brief plan re-cap and a prayer we headed into the woods. In the first fifteen minutes someone said, “It’s thicker than a hair brush in here,” and the other two of us solemnly agreed for the next twelve hours. Climbing was wet, thick, and steep but we were able to break tree line just before dark that night. We had all worked hard in physical preparation for the trip but all three of us were cramping by the time we broke that tree line. We hung the hammocks and listened to the biggest chorus of wolves any of us had ever heard in the valley from which we had just ascended.

The next morning it was cloudy, which for the mountain meant thick, thick fog. It took us just a few minutes to discover that even though we had made it beyond the tree line the night before we were a good 700- or 800 feet of elevation from where we needed to be and every inch of it was a tooth-and-nail climb up a wet, cliffed bank. Since it was the first hunting day, Brian decided to hang back at camp and glass for deer. Tru and I headed up the bank. We covered pretty good ground along the spine of a ridge but the fog was thick. With little elk sign we soon discovered the struggle of the day. The “ridge” wasn’t really a ridge. It was a drawn-out point only to end at the next embankment that required a several-hundred-foot descent and then an abrupt ascent up the other side. Each drop and rise took some figuring to work around the cliffs. A little after noon the fog began to lift and we could finally glass.

Glassing produced nothing for some time. Moving back and forth on the ridge we could see the valley below on each side. Suddenly, “Elk! It’s a bull!” I said. We watched him for a while and determined he was a small rag horn bull. Being at least a mile from him, we decided to drop down and get a closer look. The cliffs below allowed only about a 400-foot descent, but it granted the view we wanted. Below the bull in an area that could not be seen from the previous vantage point were eight cows and a bull that looked like he carried a rocking chair on his head. We thought we could count six per side but it really didn’t matter. He was a big, mature bull, but unfortunately was what seemed like a time zone away. To get to him, we would have to descend about 1200 feet and scramble through a thicket below him and the cows to attempt a stalk. It was impossible. So impossible, we took some pictures through

the binoculars of the dinosaur and headed back up the hill.

When we again got to the top, we heard what we dreamed of hearing. It was a bugle. We started glassing from some cover but much to our disappointment the bugle was coming from a couple of hunters walking down the middle of the valley below us. Disappointed by the situation, we just sat there, which turned out to pay off. The “ridge” we were on looped around to our left and came back around in front of us to form a bowl. The hunters were walking and bugling towards the bottom, but across the bowl we spotted a silhouette of a big bull watching from the ridge. He turned and

dropped over the ridge on the other side. We had seen him, he had seen the hunters below, they had not seen him, and nobody saw us. Spirits refueled, we grabbed our gear and took off around the ridge in pursuit. Though it didn’t seem that far, it took about five hours to get to a perch above where we had seen the bull watching the hunters below. Upon cresting this point the late afternoon air lit up with a bugle from the bull below us. He was in a wallow, and was calling to the hunters who had now made it to cover below in the valley. Many have experienced this, but neither Tru nor I ever had. We watched from two hundred yards as the bull wallowed, paced, and bugled, while

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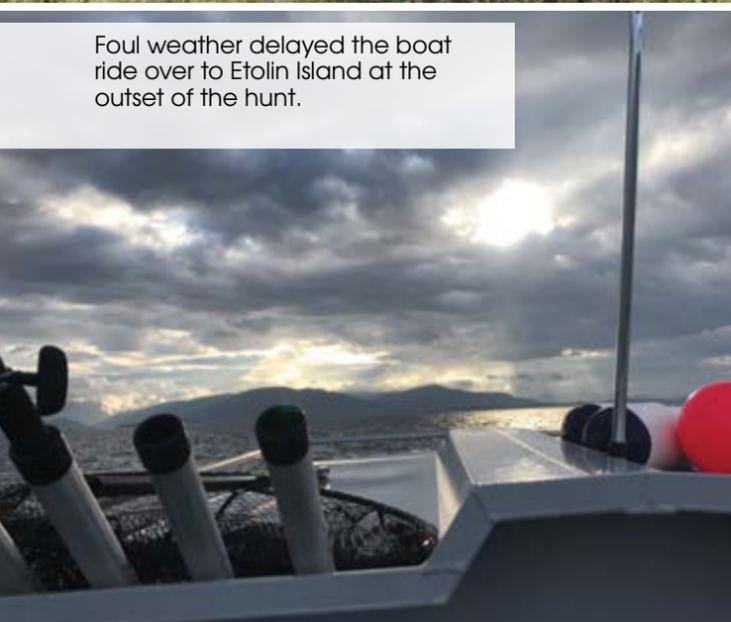
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The group managed to get the elk to the beach at about the time the plane arrived.



Author and successful hunter Jared Cook packing out the last load.



Foul weather delayed the boat ride over to Etolin Island at the outset of the hunt.

looking down valley.

The screaming drag of a running king, a big buck charging to a call in the rut, or the head shake of a big halibut all run the blood cold, but friend, this froze it.

As bad as we wanted to chase the bull we decided to lay low and not disturb the hunters' conversation with the bull. Soon the big bull started down the hill towards them. What happened next with the elk and the hunters I don't know, because Tru had spotted two more bulls in a meadow further down the ridge. Knowing that daylight was fading we started out in pursuit. The plan was to move as fast as possible without spooking the bulls, using trees as cover, and hopefully get in position to attempt a shot into the meadow where they fed.

Losing sight of them upon entering the trees we went towards where we thought they were. When we thought we might have been close I arrowed up and we decided Tru would hang back to keep movement and noise at a minimum. When our huddle was over I turned to slip up the ridge, took one step and froze. They were right there . . . feeding broadside. I stepped back and gave Tru the clear sign we had given each other on many hunts before. It consisted of shaking and pointing and mouthing "RIGHT THERE!" multiple times. He immediately understood and answered in a similar fashion.

I ranged the bulls at 75 yards which was too far for a good shot. With no cover, I could cut the distance to 65 but nothing less. Hoping the bulls would feed toward us we sat still. The bulls, of course, did not feed toward us but fed away behind an island of trees in the meadow where they were out of sight. Knowing it was now or never, I moved through the open meadow keeping the clump of trees between the bulls and me. I went as far as I could before one of the bulls spotted me through the island of trees. I froze. Just one had seen me, and through the brush island I could see the second was feeding behind him and was coming towards the gap with no idea of my existence.

I ranged the first bull at 45 yards. I drew to wait the couple of seconds for the second bull to come into the opening. I noticed upon drawing the gap in the trees was only about four feet high before the branches began. Lowering as far as I could, the second bull came into the opening and stopped. I let a well-aimed arrow loose right towards the vitals. SMACK! The arrow hit a branch on its rise between the bull and me and was redirected to what seemed to be up and out of the atmosphere. Both bulls jumped, then froze.

They froze instead of running because Tru had cow-called from the cover when he heard the commotion. With me in the wide open and with Tru's position revealed at the time of the cow call, the two bulls just stared. I remembered immediately that my quiver of arrows was on my backpack below Tru. The two bulls turned and did the worst thing they could possibly do to the two of us. They began to spar 45 yards from me, and 75 yards from Tru, two bulls from our dreams sparred a while and stared at us for a while. This went on for what seemed like forever before they spooked and ran into the valley below.

That was it, now it's over. Devastated and empty-handed, we solemnly started back towards camp. It was 3:15 a.m. when we finally arrived.

The next day consisted of letting our bloody wool socks dry, while we walked around barefoot attempting to dry our feet that had been wet since the trek began. Because of the weather delays and allowing three days to get a bull off the mountain, we knew the following day was our last day to hunt. Having seen the big six by six from a distance the day before we decided to pack enough stuff to spend one night, and head out the next morning to re-evaluate the situation with that bull. The morning came and the three of us headed back to the vantage point, and sure enough, there he was with all those cows down below us in a grown-up slide. After watching the bull for a while we decided to descend and attempt a stalk. Though seemingly impossible, it was our last chance. The descent was cliffy and knowing every step had to be backtracked to return made the 1200-foot descent even worse. Upon reaching the bottom we dropped camp



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The hunters' feet suffered through many wet and difficult miles.

with the intentions of returning from the stalk in the dark. Brian decided to stay with camp and Tru and I headed the rest of the distance to where we had last seen the bull. Getting where we had decided to go from the cliffs above, we sat in cover to wait for the herd to venture from the trees.

We waited and waited. It was almost dark and nothing had shown. Then, "It's that bull!" Tru's whisper broke the silent bug-feeding fest we had been sitting in. It was, and he was bigger now that we were closer. Shaking, we watched him and the cows feed out into the alder thicket where we could occasionally see his chocolate-colored antlers above the brush. Even though we knew the cows would probably blow our cover, we didn't have a choice but to start a stalk before it was dark. Our stalk was horribly loud and we couldn't see the elk. After about fifteen minutes of heading in the direction we last saw the bull, Tru whispered, "There's an elk . . . It's that bull!" I knew it was before he said it. We could hear his antlers dragging through the branches as he came up the bank beside us. He never saw us, and even though he was less than four yards away, there was never a clear shot before he turned. By nothing less than divine intervention the bull cut 90 degrees into the brush towards us. When his antlers hit the brush I drew. With my arm sticking out holding the bow, the distance from the bow to the

bull was barely enough for the arrow to get completely out of the bow. The bull spooked and jumped, then we spooked and jumped as the arrow went right where it needed to be. In a second we dropped down on our knees and Tru cow-called. The bull stopped about five yards out still unsure of what had happened. I knocked another arrow, drew while squatting, then stood and shot as the bull lunged off into the brush.

We heard the big bull fall up above us, but still we timed an hour before we went up to find him. He was about thirty yards from where I had first shot. In the excitement of the night, the walk back to camp and our jubilation shared with Brian was a blur.

Having had the opportunity to do plenty of packing, I don't say this lightly. The next three days were the hardest pack days of my life. We moved meat almost every hour of daylight. Having left our camp to pursue the bull there were a couple of days of just eating elk cooked on a stick over a fire because food was limited until camp was retrieved. The hunt ended as we broke out of the brush to a waiting plane with the final load on our backs.



This is the first time Jared Cook's work has appeared in Hunt Alaska magazine. He grew up an outdoorsman and guide on Prince of Wales Island in Whale Pass and his family owns Alaska's Fishtales Lodge.



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A mature Sitka blacktail buck.



THE BUCK

story & photos

with TWO LIVES

by lon e. lauber

Sometimes the second hunt
or blood-trailing process
can be more difficult than
the actual hunt.



Sometimes with bowhunting, the recovery is more challenging than the hunt itself. Such was the case on a Sitka blacktail hunt in late-fall conditions.

The overwhelming, musty scent of autumn filled my nostrils as the spongy tundra gave way under my rubber boot-clad feet. I crept along, looking for yet another rutting Sitka blacktail buck on the rugged and unforgiving island of Kodiak. Despite not seeing a buck for some time I couldn't help but smile at my good fortune.

I'd already tagged three Pope and Young-class bucks on this solo wilderness hunt and shot hundreds of images of these portly, yet attractive, black-capped deer. Everything was going great, except the weather had soured so badly my bush pilot had not wanted to risk his life and plane to pick me up from the designated meeting place. He was now nine days overdue!

Movement from a cruising buck jolted me away from my thoughts and back to the present. The mature buck approached rapidly but, unfortunately, so was the growing darkness. The whole day's effort had boiled down to this exact moment. There he was, broadside at 27 yards, totally unaware of my presence. This buck was mine for the freezer and record book, or so I thought. What happened next still boggles my mind all these years later. I swear this

buck had two lives!

A split second after releasing the arrow, I watched the orange and green fletches zip through the buck's chest—low and tight to his front shoulder. Upon the arrow's impact the buck jumped, like a Brahma bull rocketing out of the rodeo chute, and he sprinted off. I even saw the arrow fall to the ground on the far side of the deer.

"Yes, I got him!" I thought excitedly. After a short sprint, the buck slowed to a walk and plopped over—legs flailing in the air. He was down in less than 40 yards!

My normal routine upon shooting any animal with an arrow is to watch closely and listen carefully to everything that happens next. These sights and sounds may make the difference in recovering your quarry should the need for a detective-like job of tracking arise.

The next step is to find the arrow and garner as many clues about what and where the arrow hit. Over the years, I've learned what people think they saw in regards to arrow shot placement and what actually happened are frequently very different scenarios. It's difficult to prevent your ego from altering reality. However, be honest with yourself. If you made a bad hit, accept it and do your best to find the animal quickly, dispatching it as humanely as possible.



Though diminutive in stature, blacktails are challenging to hunt and taste delicious.



Since I had seen the arrow pass through the deer's lower chest, I planned to pace off the shot distance, pick up my arrow and then step off the short yardage the buck had gone before collapsing. I find it important to record such details to further my knowledge about blood trailing and game recovery.

After taking two steps toward the arrow, my excitement and satisfaction of killing a dandy buck turned to astonishment and gut-wrenching disbelief. I watched, stunned, as my buck stopped flailing and stood up! His body language (head held low, wobbly legs) proved he was hurt badly but there was no mistaking the fact that he was certainly not dead!

"Ok, forget that arrow over there, I better anchor that buck. Besides, you're in brown-bear country and leaving him overnight is not the best option."

Quickly, I nocked another arrow but by the time I took aim the buck had turned directly away from me, offering no second shot. "Ah, he's dead and just doesn't know it, he'll drop any second. I know I made a good shot."

Much to my dismay, the buck didn't drop; he walked off and lay down a short distance away in the brush. With dwindling daylight and Kodiak Island's frequently soupy weather and brown bears on my mind, I scurried ahead, anxious to get



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another arrow into my buck. I was doubting my recollection of the shot placement with each step. "Maybe I hit him farther back than I thought? Maybe it's a liver hit? Maybe the arrow just skimmed along his brisket?"

I approached the buck hastily, bumping him out of his bed. He ambled away through the brush, again offering no shot. After three more fruitless attempts at anchoring the deer, darkness cloaked the Kodiak landscape. It was now too dark to shoot and my once-shot buck was still very much alive. In fact, he'd traveled at least a quarter mile from where I'd shot him. Very much out of character for a mortally-wounded deer.

There I was, a lone bowhunter in the remote wilderness of Kodiak Island, home of the largest brown bears in the world, with an unrecovered, wounded deer and it was now dark!

Even with the blanket of night upon me, I located the alert buck with my 10x40 binos. I could see the dark shape of him lying in the tawny grass of the open tundra—not 50 yards away. But there was nothing I could do except wait for the buck to expire. I remember thinking about the old adage, "When you're lost or waiting to trail a wounded animal, take your boots off. The time it takes to remove boots and then put them back on may give you enough time to settle down and make a more rational decision." That was a good idea except the Kodiak tundra was soaked like a kitchen sponge after doing dishes. So instead, I decided to leave my boots on and eat a snack to chew up some time.

As I peeled the wrapper from an energy bar, the buck heard the wrinkling of the foil wrapper and out of the corner of my eye, I saw him stand, looking in my direction! Moments later, with the aid of a binocular, I watched the trophy-class buck stroll away and vanish into the darkness. What began as a good day of hunting and a well-placed shot had morphed into a sleepless night of haunting questions and confidence-draining doubts.

I marked the last spot I'd seen the buck by tying a white game bag to the alders. Then, with the aid of a headlamp and hiking stick, I slowly slogged two miles over the uneven tundra where a lonely camp awaited all my uncertainties and me.

"Where did the arrow actually hit the deer? What internal damage occurred? Why did the buck fall over dead and how did he revive himself? Should I have pushed him? Will it rain tonight and wash away the blood trail? Will a brown bear find the buck before I do? What if the bush plane finally shows up and I'm two miles away looking for that buck?"

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Like Alice and her Wonderland, things just kept getting “curiouser and curiouser.” After a fitful and sleepless night, in the predawn I hoofed it back out to where I’d left the game bag. Instead of barging in like my sleep-deprived mind yearned to do, I decided to climb a low ridge gaining some perspective on my problem. At the first hint of daylight, I glassed up three bucks bedded within an arrow’s toss of where I’d last seen my buck the evening before. Upon closer scrutiny, I determined two of the bucks could not be “my” buck. Their antlers were too small and shaped differently.

The third buck, however, looked like the one I’d hit. More questions rattled through my confused brain. “Could he have survived

the night? Would other healthy bucks bed close to a wounded deer? Maybe none of these are mine but if my buck were dead nearby, would these three spend the night close to their dead brethren? Maybe my buck isn’t close by?”

I decided to sneak in on the live bucks for a closer look. At about 80 yards, I ran out of cover and the jig was up. But not before I got a thorough look at the biggest buck. There was no blood showing on either side. He ran off like any healthy deer. That answered some questions. My buck had to be dead somewhere nearby.

Sometimes, as I said in the beginning, the second hunt or blood-trailing process can be more difficult than the actual hunt.

“Okay, Lon, be smart, be diligent with this fog, wind and impending rain; you’ll have to do your best detective work ever.”

I hiked to the game-bag marker left from the night before and began the search. Within 20 yards of the marker I saw dried crimson dots in the light-colored grass. Then, I found the buck’s bed from where the noise of my snack wrapper had spooked him.

Had the time and weather conditions allowed, I would have returned to the original shot site and recovered the arrow. I recommend finding your arrow first and foremost in most all archery hunting circumstances. The arrow can provide many clues: The color and consistency of blood, say, pinkish and frothy indicates oxygenated blood from lungs or a large artery; thick, dark reddish brown blood may indicate a liver hit. Lots of “normal” red blood may prove to be a flesh wound. The presence of fat and green rumen (stomach contents) reflects a gut shot.

Even the color and texture of hair on the arrow or on the ground near the shot site provides valuable clues. Depending on the type of animal being hunted, white hair on most deer species may reveal the broadhead cut the animal’s belly or brisket. On bull elk, their belly and brisket hair is nearly black. Study photos, life-sized taxidermy mounts and other specimens of your target species and learn what color and texture of hair grows on ALL parts of their body. This little bit of knowledge just may provide enough information to make the right choice on whether to push or leave a wounded animal alone for a longer duration.

But in the case at hand, with rain clouds about to bawl, decreasing visibility and the fact that a bush plane and pilot were now 10 days overdue to pick me up, I needed to find that deer before the rain diluted all the clues.

Shortly, the easy-to-follow blood in the yellow grass turned to ant-sized specks in the dark, moist, mossy tundra. My tracking pace slowed to a literal hands-and-knees crawl. I stayed off to one side of the trail so as not to further obliterate the scant trail.

Occasionally I marked his path with toilet paper (it biodegrades, unlike surveyor’s tape). When the blood trail finally petered out, I looked at the line of “TP” to get a sense of the buck’s travel route. In many cases this aids in rediscovering the blood trail. Occasionally, the buck changed direction and the back trail of paper didn’t help me determine his future path. When this happened, I slowly circled the last blood drops in ever-widening loops, all the while looking for blood on ground vegetation, brush at deer-chest height, in deer tracks and even on over-turned leaves that may have flipped from the deer’s momentum.



The shape of the blood splash can provide a vital clue as to a buck’s direction of travel.

Occasionally, I found a speck or two of blood the moist tundra hadn’t disguised and my hopes soared.

Once, I’d crawled 20 yards without seeing any blood. My guts tightened. Then a splash of red luckily landed on a willow leaf. The shape of the splash held a vital clue; the buck’s direction of travel.

Instantly, my mind rewound to my indoctrination as an International Bowhunters Education Program student and then as a state-certified instructor. In this course I learned, among other things, that blood splashed in the direction in which the animal is traveling. Thus, the bigger blob hits first and the smaller splashes and specks dribble the direction the animal is traveling.

With this newfound evidence, I pressed on. Little by little, agonizing step after agonizing step, I made progress. Additionally, past experience gave me confidence to carry on. Just because there was very little blood on the ground did not mean I hadn’t made a vital hit.

Through the years, I’ve learned to expect the unexpected. Once I shot a mule deer doe in the midsection. I would have sworn she was perfectly broadside and I’d hit her too far back. However, there were two, three-foot-wide swaths of pink, frothy blood on either side of her tracks in the snow.

Upon recovery, I determined she was actually slightly quartering away and thus the arrow hit the back, top lobe of one lung. Furthermore the broadhead had sliced an artery in the lung and most of the blood loss was external. On another occasion, I double lunged a fat young Sitka buck. Due to his healthy condition (fat clogging the arrow’s wound channel) nary a drop of blood left the deer’s body. Fortunately, this buck expired in view and no blood trailing was necessary.

Additionally, I’ve shot animals in nearly identical scenarios and had one dash 100 yards spraying life juice everywhere and another animal barely react to being hit, only lifting its head to the sound of



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the bow shot and walking a few paces before expiring.

The point is every bowshot animal involves a very unique set of circumstances. Jumping to conclusions will undoubtedly cloud your judgment. Be disciplined. Base your actions on actual facts of the current situation and then apply past experience to determine your next step in recovering your quarry.

Since the blood trailing of this deer was going so slowly, I had plenty of time to review the clues: One, the buck humped up like a heart-shot animal. Two, I saw the arrow impact low and tight to the shoulder crease. Three, the buck went only about 40 yards before flopping over like a well-hit deer. Four he stood back up and was able to walk but held his head low and bedded frequently (the signs of a mortally-wounded deer). Five, he'd traveled several hundred yards, which is not indicative of a heart- or double-lung hit. Finally, very little blood escaped his body cavity.

These clues did not jive, particularly where the arrow hit and the distance he'd walked after the shot. Most of the clues indicated a good hit but those two factors led me to believe I hit him farther back than it appeared. This would explain why he covered more distance than usual. However, through experience, I've learned to fairly accurately "call the shot" and mentally record the animal's body position (i.e., broadside, slightly rear-quartering, and so on). And, on this buck I was quite certain he was almost perfectly broadside and the arrow passed through his chest about where the heart is located.

Regardless of whether I had hit heart, bottom of the lungs or liver on this buck, it was now 19 hours after the fact. I was certain he was dead. I just had to find him.

Unfortunately, the blood trail didn't get any easier to follow. Actually, I'd only made about 100 yards total progress from the game-bag marker. And my overdue pilot finally circled his plane over my camp numerous times.

The weather worsened. The wind howled with a vengeance, ocean

Sitka blacktails are portly, yet attractive, black-capped deer.



waves crashed and frothed way up the beach. When the plane didn't land I knew I was stuck another day.

That was good and bad. Good because it gave me more time to recover my deer. Bad because God only knew what the weather would bring or how much longer my involuntarily extended trip would last.

These details distracted me from the task at hand. Also, it began to spit rain—as if the gusting wind and patchy fog weren't enough to contend with. Eventually, the sky opened the floodgate and washed the blood trail completely away. No matter how diligently I looked, no more blood could be found. There was only one thing left to do, physically and visually search the area for the deer's body.

I carefully marked the last blood spot, made a best-guess estimate of which way the buck was headed based on the path of least resistance and began walking in grids. About an hour later, I literally stumbled over my buck. He was stiff and cold. He'd probably died just minutes after I'd seen him vanish into darkness the night before.

Oddly, I found him 163 paces from the last drop of blood I'd found. Upon closer examination, some of the mystery was cleared. The broadhead had sliced through the bottom lobes of both lungs about one inch behind his heart. Loose skin and fat had clogged both entrance and exit wounds.

I'm not a veterinarian or a coroner, but the best I can surmise, this is what happened: When the arrow blew through the deer, its lungs collapsed causing massive cardiothoracic failure and temporary hypoxia (lack of oxygen-rich blood getting to the brain), thus causing the deer to topple over. However, and this is just a guess, when the buck landed on its back, gravity pulled blood back into his lungs and brain. This gave the deer enough life to right itself and walk a couple hundred yards before expiring.

Regardless, the buck with two lives was a valuable lesson in recovering a big-game animal. He now hangs in my office as a prideful reminder of what it sometimes takes to recover your game.

Because my pilot couldn't land in the crashing waves on the beach, he called the Coast Guard for a search and rescue helicopter to pick me up at camp later that day. It was a wild ending to my 23-day solo hunt. But that's another story!



Lon E. Lauber is a full-time professional photographer, writer and bowhunter. He is a nine-time Alaska state archery champion and has taken 52 Pope- and Young-class animals.

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TEN-FOOT TRUMPS FULL CURL

Story & Photos by
Billy Molls



"I pulled out a front pad and put my hand against it. As I further pried the front leg, the bear's massive head flopped at my feet. It was then that I figured it was a record-book skull."

Lonnie Cook with his 10' 1", 28 2/16" all-time Boone and Crockett record book brown bear. Billy estimates the bear was 15- to 18 years old.

The bear's longest claw was 3 3/4 inches.



"He's the one we want," I declared, as I unhitched my spotting scope from my tripod and began gathering gear. "We gotta go now!" Lonnie's pack was already cinched and his rifle slung. I pointed out the ridge I intended to climb. "You can head out. I'll catch up."

By the time I caught up to my client, the sow and her two cubs were racing up the mountain. The old boar however, was in no hurry. He had played this game a hundred times before. He didn't even bother to look ahead. With his nose in the lead he plodded after them with the nonchalance of an old man strolling to the mailbox. We lost sight of both

parties when we reached the base of the mountain. The stars were going to have to align for this stalk to come to fruition.

An hour into the stalk we were ascending the gut of a sheer, high-mountain drainage. Moss and icy spring runoff made the rocks treacherous, but with an endless jungle of tangled alders on either side, the narrow stream bed offered the only chance to catch up to our quarry. The narrow gorge opened up into an amphitheater of towering peaks and granite walls. I was drawing a drink from a tiny rivulet when a gust of wind whipped into the basin above. "Thermals are switching," I spat.

As we charged ahead the sow and her two-year-old cubs spilled over the top into our view. They soon caught our wind and fled with the surety of mountain goats across a narrow ledge that led out the very head of the canyon. Not knowing how closely, or even if the boar was still following them, Lonnie and I clawed up the mountainside until our lungs and muscles could go no further. If the boar was still on their trail he would pass by within 200 yards. We stacked our packs and set Lonnie in a prone position and waited.

After several minutes of waiting—when the likelihood of my heart exploding passed—I climbed further up the mountain in order to see over the ridge. What I discovered is that apparently the pursuit of the opposite sex is just as tiring and confusing in the bear world as it is for us humans. I hadn't gone 100 yards before discovering the boar sleeping on the backside of the ridge, just out of our sight. With no feasible means to approach him, all we could do was sit and wait. If he stood up and took two steps in our direction, Lonnie would have a perfect shot. Of course, love and hunting never go as one plans.

Lonnie and I were still fresh into this safari, but we'd already had a sizable dose of excitement, disappointment, and all the stuff that today's modern hunters pay big bucks to endure. Day one brought blue skies and bear sightings galore. Day two offered the humbling reminder that we were hunting on the Alaska Peninsula. Wind, rain, and snow plagued us the entire day. We spent the day huddled under a tarp sipping tea and hot water to

The original bed where the boar laid for over an hour.

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After leaving the bear overnight, Billy makes the initial cuts for skinning.



stay warm. Late that evening, when the very marrow of our bones was beginning to freeze, out of the fog waltzed a long, dark boar across the open valley before us. "That's a big bear!" I gulped in disbelief.

Our scent was blowing directly toward him. I expected the all-too-familiar nose in the air signaling our defeat, but to my surprise the old, limping beast stopped, licked his gimp paw, and laid down right in the middle of a cinder blow. We gave a hurried chase, but the wind was dead wrong. We backed out halfway into the stalk, hoping we might get another opportunity at that bear under better circumstances.

Whether it was the same bear or not, Lonnie spotted a bear bedded high atop an outcrop first thing the next morning. It had a boar's snout, but because it was curled into a ball, I was uncertain how big it was. We watched a sow and her cubs feeding on the mountainside below. The game changed when they passed by 500 yards below and upwind of the slumbering mystery bear. I knew the instant he stood up and started lumbering downhill, this was indeed a mature boar.

At this point in the saga, all the dark, shaggy brute had to do was stand up, follow the sow's trail, and he was as good as in the salt. But as big critters so often

do, he didn't follow the script. He stood up (all we could see was his head), looked around for a few seconds like he wasn't entirely sure how he got there, turned around, and went back where he came from. "Dang! I thought we had 'im," shrugged Lonnie.

At 65 years old, Lonnie Cook is as fit and nimble as they come. A seasoned sheep hunter, he was well-suited for my ambitious, if not impractical plan. He and I circled the high, broad basin to the uppermost ridge. From there we traversed down each spur in search of the wandering boar.

Seven hours after losing sight of the chocolate bruin all we managed to find was a wayward porcupine. Late in the day, with no idea where he might be, we decided to cut our losses and head back to camp. As I started to load my pack a silhouette on a distant ridge of a high-shouldered brown bear caught my eye. "There he is!" I hissed, as the bear ambled over the backside. "Let's go!"

Back to the top we raced. Alder thickets, folds, hidden pockets, and gorges were endless. After a long, fruitless search, I selected a high point from which to glass.

As the sun faded behind the distant peaks, so did our hopes of ever finding this bear. We decided to make one last swing

around the mountain as we descended to camp. The first draw we came to was mostly barren and looked rather lifeless. That notion quickly vanished as I spotted movement in the waist-high bush below. "Is that him?" Lonnie snapped.

"I'm not sure," I admitted.

Lonnie and I slipped into position and studied the bear as it weaved in and out of the stunted alders. Facing us, he walked out on to an open scree slide, scent-checking a well-used trail. I was all but certain it was indeed the same boar. "That's a good bear," I assured Lonnie. "Get ready."

As the bear continued toward us Lonnie found a seated position that suited him. He wrapped his rifle sling around his forearm and sucked the butt of his .375 H&H to his shoulder. "You tell me when to shoot."

Finally, at 60 yards the glossy-haired chocolate stepped clear and broadside. He looked larger-than-life. "Take 'im," I whispered.

"Boom!" roared Lonnie's magnum. The massive bear growled, swung his head, and bit at the wound.

"Hit 'im again," I insisted, as the great beast regained his composure and fled for cover. He disappeared before my hunter could fire a second round. "Stand up,"

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I instructed. "He's gonna come out the top."

As Lonnie and I trotted ahead the wounded bear burst out in front of us. A second shot was low. Even though I could see the bear was losing strength, I ordered him to take one more shot. "Take your time."

"Boom!" Lonnie drilled him high in the shoulder, which sent the massive ball of hide, limbs, and claws tumbling inertly into the abyss below. "Oh no!" Lonnie moaned with a nervous smile. "No telling where he might end up."

"Ugh . . . Nothin' we can do it about now," I shrugged with a smile, as I offered him a handshake. "Congratulations! Let's go see what we got."

Scree rock made it easy to get down to the bear. He was nothing but a balled-up mass of fur wedged in the rocky stream bed when we arrived. He didn't look at all as big as I had expected. I pulled out a front pad and put my hand against it. As I further pried the front leg, the bear's massive head flopped at my feet. It was then that I figured it was a record-book skull. "He's a good one, alright!" I beamed.

We admired the bear, took photos, and laid it on its back for skinning the

following day. As we shouldered our packs Lonnie was gazing at the sheer slopes in every direction. "I don't know how we're going to get out of here tonight, much less how we're going to pack a hide out of here tomorrow," he groaned.

"That makes two of us," I muttered.

We literally bear-crawled out of the canyon. Completely exhausted, we stopped for a breather before our final push to our tent. An easy-natured, mild-mannered man, Lonnie didn't even crack a smile when I joked that we might have to cut the hide in half to get it out.

It was dark by the time we trudged up to our ocean-side camp. After a huge supper, we enjoyed a long, fitful sleep.

We set out at noon the next day to walk around the cape at low tide. My hope was that we'd enjoy a leisurely stroll up the drainage to retrieve Lonnie's bear. The plan went swimmingly for the first hundred yards, at which point the drainage gave way to three-story waterfalls, granite walls, prickly devil's club, and alder-infested vertical slopes. By way of the creek it was no more than a mile-and-a-half to the kill site from the mouth of the creek. It took us two hours to get there. "Well," I sighed, "there's no way I'm going to be able to haul this hide

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taking either of the routes we've already tried, but I eyeballed a spot on the way up here I hope'll work."

I stumbled and swore as much as skinned, but finally that backbreaking job was over; a new one was soon to begin.

With the sopping-wet hide draining otop a clump of bushes, Lonnie and I enjoyed lunch, and a well-deserved rest. Tired of speculating about it, we loaded the skull and all my excess gear into Lonnie's pack. We rolled up the bear skin as tight as we could and stuffed it into mine. "It barely fits," I grinned. "If it fills this bag, he'll probably go 10-foot."

We followed the creek bed downstream for 100 yards before turning uphill. The slope was sheer and muddy, but fortunately the alder limbs were just numerous enough to grab hold of, yet sparse enough that one could wriggle between them. We didn't dare stop for risk of tumbling back down to the bottom. With gritted teeth, we gripped, growled, and grunted until finally the climb from hell was over. As we lay against our packs in a thorn thicket gasping for air Lonnie laughed. "What do you suppose would've happened if we would've slipped back there?" he asked.

I offered a nodding chuckle. "If I've learned anything guiding in Alaska all these years," I huffed to catch my breath, "it's that it's amazing what a guy can accomplish when it's do or die . . . I don't know that we would've died, but I damn sure didn't want to find out."

Lonnie and I were still far from done. We fought our way through a mile of thorns and alders before finally coming to a well-used bear trail. We followed that trail to the edge of a 50-foot seawall. Cutting through that seawall was a

The bear died in extremely rugged terrain. The pack out wasn't very far (2.5 miles) but much of it was uphill and sidehill. Billy packed the hide, while Lonnie packed the skull and most of Billy's gear. Back in town after the hunt, the hide (dry) alone weighed 120 pounds.

centuries-old drainage ditch. I studied it against the mile of alders that stood between our camp and us. "You up for it? If we can get down the beach it'll save us a ton of brush bustin'," I lobbied to my client.

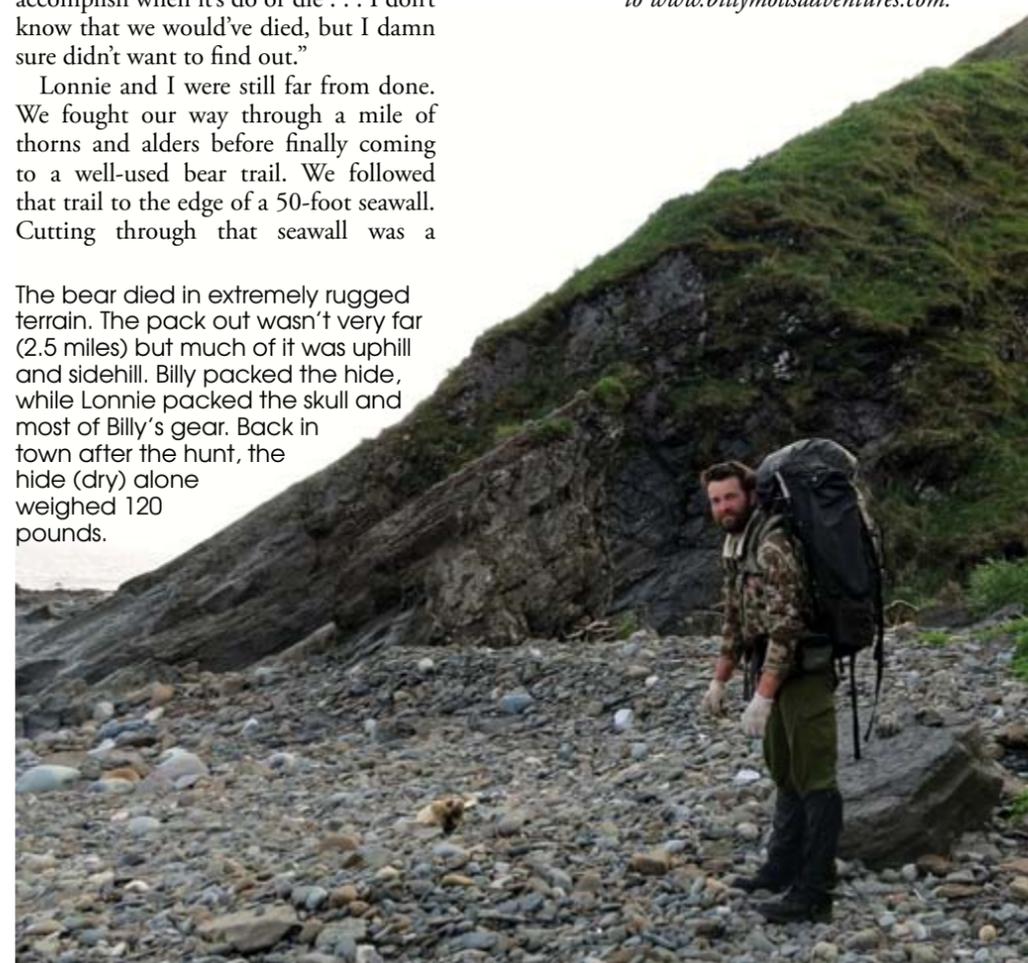
"Your pack is heaviest. I'll follow you," Lonnie shrugged.

It was every bit as steep and every bit as slippery, but with fewer alders to cling to as the slope we climbed earlier. We offered a lot of blank stares, prayers, and head scratching, but in the end, we made it to the beach without major incident.

As the gravel crunched under our boots with each slow, laborious step, the tension of dangers faced slowly melted away. The challenge we took on and the obstacles we were forced to overcome along the way made it one of the greatest adventures of our lives. "This was tougher than any sheep hunt I've ever been on," Lonnie asserted with a smile. "The mountains here are just as high and just as steep. But this was more dangerous . . . My pack is heavier . . . and I got a feeling the whiskey back at camp is gonna taste better too."



Billy Molls is an author, public speaker, registered Alaska big-game guide, and producer of The Modern Day Mountain Man DVD series. For more information go to www.billymollsadventures.com.



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Ingredients:

- 2 pounds elk tenderloin or backstrap
- ½ cup Smokehouse Cherry BBQ Pellets
- 1 cup red wine
- ½ cup balsamic vinegar
- ½ cup orange juice
- 2 tbs soy sauce
- 3 cloves garlic

Directions:

Trim any excess fat from the meat and cut steaks into your preferable size. Mix the red wine, balsamic vinegar, orange juice, soy sauce and chopped garlic cloves in a bowl. Add the steaks to the marinade and refrigerate for approximately 24 hours.

Remove the steaks from the marinade and place them on the grill without turning on the heat. Attach your Smoke Chief to your grill (often through the rotisserie hole) and turn it on. Fill the Smoke Chief with ½ cup of Smokehouse Cherry BBQ Pellets. Close the grill as the smoke begins pouring out of the Smoke Chief. Smoke the steaks for 20- to 30 minutes, then remove the meat from the grill.

Turn on your grill to medium-high heat. Place your steaks back on the grill and cook approximately 5- to 6 minutes on each side (depending on the thickness that you cut the steaks). Flip your steaks only once. Mix up your favorite salad (with smoked peppers) for a nice side dish. Easy and delicious . . . Enjoy!



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Kodiak Tightrope

Story by Mac Lightfoot

Sniper earned his nickname honestly. He and Mac were on the stalk of a nice blacktail deer and needed to close from 500 to about 200 yards before attempting the shot. The problem was that the deer was sitting on the hillside looking down at the pair as they side-sloped their way towards the wary buck. They agreed that Mac would shoot first at this deer, but both hunters knew that if the deer was to start moving away, that either man should fire.

Sniper and Mac got within easy range for the .300 Win Mags they carried. When the deer stood up, Mac had time to get the rifle shouldered and the deer in the crosshairs—maybe two seconds—when he watched the hair blow out from the exit hole as Sniper's single shot ended the stalk. The deer simply piled up and rolled a little down the hill.

Wow, that was a good shot, shooting offhand at 225 yards, stone-cold dropping the animal, all within the span of two heartbeats.

Mac, Eagle and Sniper enjoyed glorious weather and good hunting for the first three days. Weather like this doesn't happen very often in places like Kodiak Island, so the trio knew that the other shoe would eventually drop. For Sniper, that happened when the front of the cabin was adorned with game bags holding the field-dressed sections of six Sitka blacktail.

For starters, Sniper's wheels were in less-than-perfect shape. Having been thrown from one of his horses six weeks earlier, his hobbled walk and knee brace spoke of a man who was surprised to have made it to the hunt. Mac had a game plan to fill the eight deer tags that the trio brought to the island. That plan included plenty of hiking, hill climbing and meat packing, and didn't account much for human ailments.

So on the first evening, the trio entered the bowl approximately 500 vertical feet and a horizontal mile behind their cabin and took the first deer possible. Eagle watched while Mac and Sniper attempted to jump a pair that were three-quarters to the top of the ridge, only to barely miss intersecting with the deer after a steep climb up the downwind side. Eagle watched the effort, only to shoot a deer that walked right to him. All were happy and feasted on fresh deer that evening, but the abuse on Sniper's body had begun.

Day two saw the trio further up the same bowl, and without bear interaction with the carcass from the previous day's deer, the three felt a false sense of comfort that perhaps the bears were still down in the river feeding on salmon. They took the next doe at the top of the bowl and continued up the ridge to the west to eventually shoot the buck that earned Sniper his name.

With two deer in tow, the trio slowly worked their way back down the hillside towards the cabin, slightly buckled from the weight, but willing and able to take a third deer should the chance arise. Mac spotted a candidate across the bowl on a protruding bluff, but figured the doe was not worth the effort of the climb. In falling light they returned to the cabin, weary but elated from another successful day. In the closing mile of the descent through the interlocking alder stands, Sniper further aggravated the knee by hyper-extending it in the alder thicket.

On day three they ventured across the lagoon in search of new deer. Having glassed at least a dozen from the front deck of the cabin, they felt like today would be a good day to take three deer. With three days left and five tags to fill, they felt good at the prospects of filling all the tags. After dropping one doe, the three spotted three bucks on the move. Mac and Sniper headed to the east while Eagle went west. Mac turned the corner to see two nearly identical forks. He dropped the first while Sniper dropped the second. Sniper's deer piled up, while Mac's rolled about 50 yards down the hill. Both men patrolled the hillside for the next 30 minutes trying to locate the light brown deer in the light brown grass. They finally located both animals, hauled them to common ground and commenced with pictures and celebration.

About an hour and a half later they started down the hill. Mac and Eagle shouldered the brunt of the load in an effort to reduce the abuse to Sniper's knee. Eagle also was sporting a bum wheel, but he pushed through the distraction. Mac simply lived up to his nickname of Pack Mule and attempted to carry a pack that surely exceeded the manufacturer's specs.

When the three met up with the big boar that had either been close by all along, or came to investigate the sound of the gun shots, also known at this time of year as the Kodiak dinner bell to the area's brown bears, they were straining their bodies to the edge of their abilities. The mock charge and subsequent retreat were amplified in the minds of the weary hunters. In the waning daylight, the three began to see more bears heading their way.

Sometime in the middle of the night, Eagle woke the other men. A big bear paced at the outskirts of their electric fence, the smell of six blacktail deer filling his nose, no doubt entertaining thoughts of breaching the defenses in his huge, thick skull. By morning, a huge brownie lay within a stone's throw of the cabin's outhouse, which also lay outside the safety of the electric fence.

Mac could start to see the strain on Sniper's visage. He tried to prod the Minnesotan, who had spent a full decade living in Alaska, to head back out into the country to fill the last two tags. The efforts were in vain. The men convened and determined that the only way to relieve the bear pressure was to call in the air taxi service for a meat run. And as soon as the deer took flight for home base in Kodiak city, the bears simply disappeared.

Mac convinced the pair that now was the time to fill the last two tags. But the damage had already been done. A half-hearted hike, highlighted by over-stimulated nerves and damaged joints, was the last time the trio ventured into the field during this journey. For many years since, Sniper has shared the story of walking the Kodiak Tightrope without a net.



Mac Lightfoot often finds himself in interesting situations while in pursuit of fish and game in Alaska. Some of the tales of his other exploits can be read in the blog section at www.fishalaskamagazine.com.



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