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SUMMER 2019

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© Scott Haugen

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COVER / John Whipple with a beautiful Kodiak goat. © Micah Ness

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# Hunt Alaska

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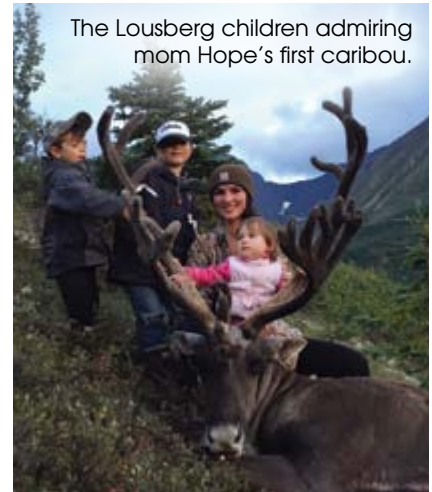
[ HUNTING FOR A COMPLIMENT ]



Briony Marshall, 5, and Graham Marshall, 3, showing their excitement for their first spruce grouse hunt.



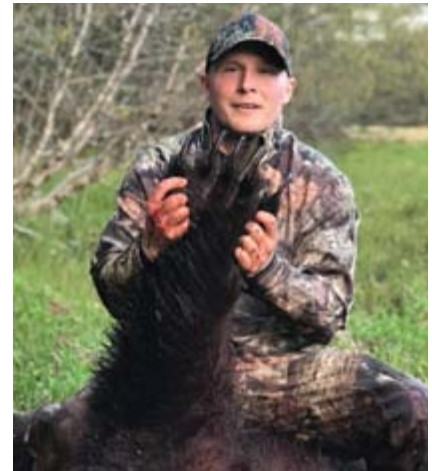
Rubye Foldager took her first bull caribou in the Talkeetna mountains in September 2018.



The Lousberg children admiring mom Hope's first caribou.



Cheyenne Gillham, 5, practiced all summer and took her first ptarmigan on the annual family moose hunt.



JG got his first Alaska brown bear in Hoonah.



Jordan Craig took her first moose outside of Tok.

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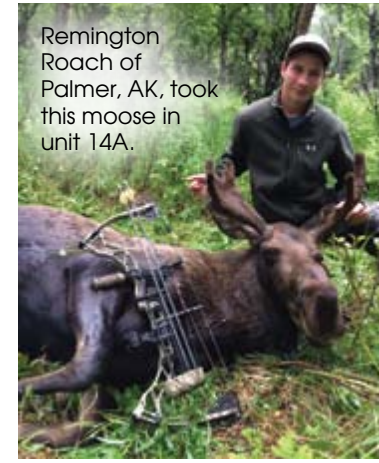
Jeff R. of Ketchikan, AK, and Justin H. of Soldotna, AK, pose with their caribou north of Nome near Shishmaref, AK.



Howie Kent of Soldotna, AK, harvested his first moose in 2017 near the Yukon River.



Doug Wood of Abingdon, MD, harvested his first brown bear in May 2018.



Remington Roach of Palmer, AK, took this moose in unit 14A.



Tim Gorham of Houston, AK, took this sandhill crane in 2017.



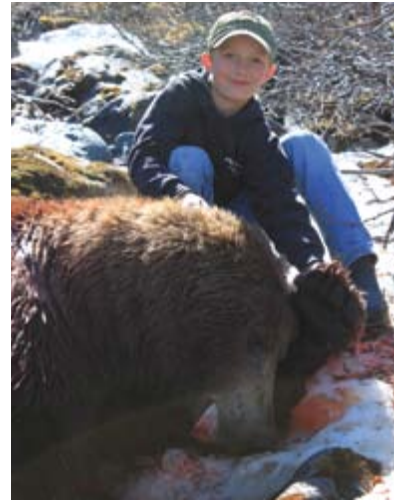
Mike Wheat took this Dall sheep during a late-season hunt in the Alaska Range.



Eric Flood of Chugiak, Alaska, took this black "berry" bear to fill the family freezer on his last day of leave before deployment, while hunting the Kenai mountains.



Willie Barnes of Sterling, AK, with his Unit 15A bull measuring in at 61 inches.



Lane Petersen, 9, with his brown bear.



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Teresa Larry of Fairbanks, AK, with her first caribou taken during the Fortymile hunt.

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[ONLINE]

Summer is finally here! That means the fall hunting season is just around the corner; get prepared with the year's best gear, trophy shipping tips, and more!

### Summer Highlights:

➤ We know you're browsing gear this time of year to prep for fall. Find all of our Editors' Choice Awards plus expanded reviews and bonus online-only awards.

➤ Needing to get your trophy to the Lower 48? Nicholas Ploesser, owner of AK Trophy Expeditors, gives online readers some helpful tips on how to keep the cost down in a blog on our website.

➤ May is Better Hearing month. Hunters rely on their hearing in the field and are subject to firearm noise; that's why we'll be teaming up with Alaska Hearing & Tinnitus Center on our social platforms to help spread awareness and encourage hunters to get their hearing checked.

➤ Don't forget to enter the 2019 Leupold Optics Contest! Prizes include a pair of Leupold BX-5 Santiam HD 15x56mm binoculars for the Overall Winner, and the Photo Contest Winner will receive a Leupold VX-3i 3.5-10x40mm scope! Both winners will also receive a lifetime subscription to *Hunt Alaska*. Details and entry info online.

➤ Check back this Summer as *Hunt Alaska* online adds more great content and expanded bonus features for subscribers.



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## Izembek Waterfowl Extravaganza

Story and photo by Scott Haugen

When the words Alaska and hunting are mentioned, minds typically envision big game. But Alaska is home to some of the world's best waterfowl hunting, and when it comes to Alaskans hunting ducks and geese, it's one of the most under-utilized opportunities and resources. If you want to get into hunting, gearing up and heading out for waterfowl is one of the best ways.

True, reaching areas where prime duck and goose hunting exist isn't always easy, or cheap, but neither is accessing most of Alaska's big-game haunts. Bottom line, it just comes down to whether or not you want to bird hunt, and knowing what's out there might just convince you it's time to pick up the shotgun and hit the marsh.

I've been fortunate to waterfowl hunt much of Alaska, from Barrow to the Panhandle, and in a few places in between. While many destinations are species-specific hunts, there's one place that has it all.

Last September my father, Jerry Haugen, and I traveled to Cold Bay to hunt with good friend and outfitter, Jeff Wasley. I've been fortunate to hunt with many avid waterfowlers over the years and Wasley is among the best of the best. A former waterfowl biologist, Wasley's passion for duck hunting is contagious. His knowledge of the birds he hunts, and the land where he makes his living, is unmatched. Even throughout the Lower 48, Wasley is regarded as one of the best waterfowl outfitters in the country, and tops when it comes to Alaska. What's more, he's one of the best, safest boat captains I've been with, and the only licensed outfitter who can take clients hunting on Izembek Lagoon via boat. This opens up a great deal of remote access where you never see another hunter.

I've hunted with Wasley before, both in Cold Bay in November, and in January on Saint Paul Island. Each time Wasley shared stories of the early-season duck and goose hunting on Izembek Lagoon, it made me want to go. Then one of his clients shared a video with me, one they'd taken on a prior early-season, fall hunt with Wasley. That's when I decided to go.

The day Dad and I arrived we'd planned on taking it easy. But when Wasley picked us up at the Cold Bay airport, he informed us the brant decoys and two-man layout boat were loaded and ready to go. "We have a perfect tide this afternoon, and I want to get you guys into this one place," Wasley shared.

It was the second week of September, and Wasley kicked off the season with a bang, getting all his hunters their possession limits of ducks and geese during the first week of the season. "The number of brant in the lagoon right now is incredible, about the most I've seen this early in the season, and more keep coming every day."

I love hunting brant, as they decoy unlike any goose I've seen. They're also my favorite eating of all waterfowl.

Soon, we had three strings of brant decoys out, and Dad and I were lying side-by-side in the roomy layout boat. Once the tide shifted, wave after wave of brant started moving. The horizon was black with flocks of geese, and their sound was deafening as they approached. Shooting our three-bird-each limit happened quickly; too quickly. Wasley joined us and got in some shooting himself, a rarity for a guide.

Before we knew it, we were back at camp,

feasting on fresh, grilled brant for dinner. "This is incredible, the best eating birds I've ever had," smiled my dad, a waterfowl hunter of over 65 years. This was his first brant hunt in Alaska, though he'd hunted them in California and Oregon.

The following morning the tide was right to hit the shoreline. Hopping into Wasley's boat, we headed across the lagoon, coming to a secluded creek mouth about seven miles from where we'd launched. Here we set out duck, brant, and Canada-goose decoys. A biologist joined us that day and in only a few hours we all had our limits. A four-person limit of eight ducks, six Canada geese and three brant—that's a lot of action, and some great eating meat. Early season waterfowl in this part of Alaska are delicious, about as good as it gets.

The following morning, we had a change of pace and headed out for some silver salmon fishing in tiny, remote streams. Catching a five-fish coho limit was easy, and fun. Later that day we hiked a small, crystal-clear stream and caught and released numerous Dolly Varden on soft beads.

We also saw our share of brown bears on this trip, 11 in all. Another morning found us heading to a different place in the lagoon in search of ducks and geese. As we motored across the semi-foggy bay, Wasley smirked. "Oh, man, do you smell that?" The stronger the smell grew, the more curious my mind became as to what it was. I figured it was a dead whale. "Walrus, lots of walrus," Wasley noted. Soon we were silently drifting by more than 100 walrus that had hauled out onto a sandy island. Of all my years of living in and traveling throughout Alaska, this was the first time I'd laid eyes on a pod of walrus. The big-toothed pinnipeds were mesmerizing to watch, a moment I didn't want to end.

That morning culminated with more limits of ducks, geese, and brant, all of which aggressively dumped into the decoys. It was the best waterfowl hunting Dad and I had ever experienced, and perhaps the most "Alaskan" adventure we could ask for.

Fishing, hunting, wildlife viewing, and searching for glass floats on the beach, made this a trip Dad and I will never forget. Alaska offers the earliest general waterfowl season in the country, opening September first. If you want to experience the action, it's waiting for you, all you have to do is go.



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 [scotthaugen.com](http://scotthaugen.com).



Scott Haugen and Jeff Wasley with a day's limit of puddle ducks, Canada geese, and black brant. Early-season waterfowl hunting doesn't get any better than this.

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## [AFTER THE SHOT]

### Ready for Bear

Story and photos by Paul D. Atkins

The bugs were eating me alive, even though my makeshift head net was pulled down tight over my collar. After spending all night in a tree with nothing but a sleeping bag and a couple of pee bottles I was ready to get out. Contemplating all this, I looked up at my guide wondering if he was ready to do the same, and then it happened. Like most black bear hunts, or at least any I've been on, a bear appeared where only moments before there wasn't one. A nice six-footer with what looked to be an awesome hide had just materialized in front of us.

For most of us, the hunting season never ends, especially here in Alaska. If we're not hunting, we're thinking about hunting. Late winter and early spring are rough times for some of us, but once the first real rays of sunlight start to show in March, we start to get the itch. Melting

snow and ice does that, and if you're like me, it's the time to start thinking about the upcoming hunts and what the season will bring. It's time to start thinking about black bears!

Planning a black bear hunt, and then actually going on one is, in my opinion, about as much fun as a hunter can have. The anticipation of hunting something dangerous, in country that is usually breathtakingly beautiful, with great odds of taking a decent bear, make it one of the best hunts for the money in my opinion. Black bear hunts are also great for a father/son or father/daughter adventure or even the entire family.

Having the right gear and the right mindset are the keys to a great hunt, before and after the shot. Whether you plan to bait or spot-and-stalk you'll need to make sure you have chosen the right weapon for the job. I love bowhunting, but I have never turned down a rifle hunt, either. I've done both with equal success, but the key was choosing the right bow or rifle that could do the job. Let's start with bow and arrow.

Bowhunting black bears is big fun especially from a stand or platform. For me, it's a very relaxing way to hunt that's somewhat different compared to how we hunt most animals in Alaska.

Instead of having to be overly cautious of movement, most black bears that come to bait will pay little attention to the hunter in the tree. You'll need a bow that you shoot well and is easy to draw from a variety of positions. You don't have to pull a 100 pounds, either. Flat shooting, quiet bows, with arrows armed with sharp broadheads, will do the trick. The other key, which is just as important, is accuracy. Black bears are notorious for taking a hit and disappearing into the bush, never to be found again. Bowhunters need to take into consideration the angle and placement of the arrow. I learned this the hard way many times.

Rifle hunting is no different; shot placement and accuracy are still number one when taking down a bear. As far as calibers go, I will leave that to those that choose to bear hunt. As for me, I've had

great luck with both my 7mm and also a .300 Win Mag. They both provide enough knock-down power for even the biggest bruin at a variety of distances. I personally use Nosler ammunition, but any high-quality ammo made for big game will work. Just make sure you're sighted in and have practiced with the rifle. You'll really appreciate it after the shot!

There are other gear items that will make your bear hunt more successful, if not more comfortable. Bug protection should be a high priority and if you make lists like I do, words like bug suit, head net, and insect repellent should be at the top of any bear list. Springtime or early summer in Alaska means bugs and our state has plenty of them. Mosquitoes and no-see-ums will make your life miserable without proper protection. A head net is a must, and bug dope will help fight back the slaughter.

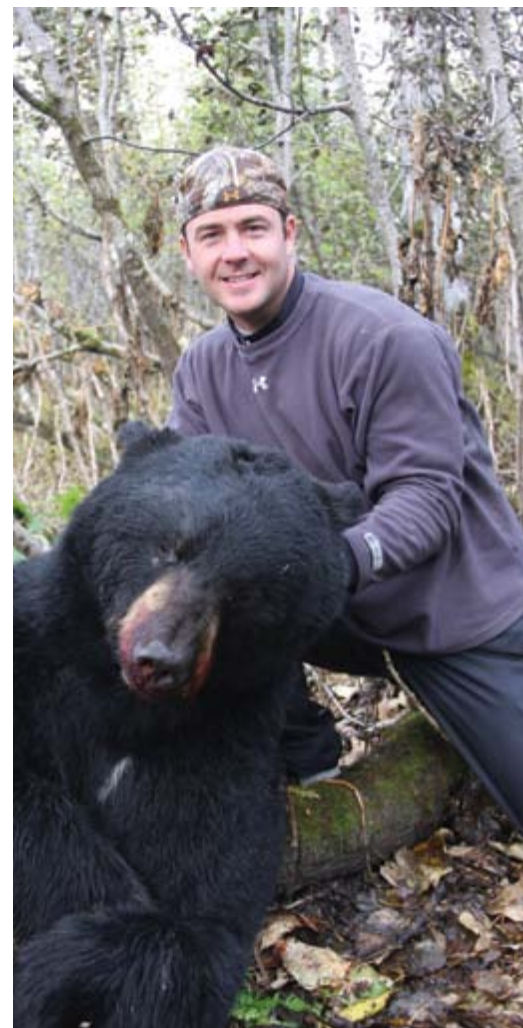
A good, sharp knife, camera, and game bags should also round out your pack and if you plan on staying on stand for a while, or even during a glassing session from your favorite spot, make sure you have plenty of water and some food.

The bear that appeared out of nowhere stood and watched us for a few minutes then turned back to the bait, ignoring us altogether. I drew back the BowTech, placed the pin where it needed to be and made the shot. The bear didn't go 20 yards. Black bear hunting is like that. You sit on a stand over bait for hours or what eventually ends up being days, waiting for that one moment when a cautious bruin will hopefully approach, and then, like magic, he's there. It's incredible actually, something you will never forget.

Black-bear hunting is a treasure in Alaska and if you haven't thought about going, you should. Whether you use a guide or plan a DIY hunt, or maybe even one of those hunting/fishing combos that Alaska is famous for, you won't have a better time anywhere, I promise.



*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 Contributing Editor to Hunt Alaska magazine.*



My good friend Brad Sparks and his big black bear. Brad is an avid bowhunter and took this bear last spring on his annual bear hunt. Brad says proper shot placement is the key and if you do it right your follow up will be short.

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## BALLISTICS & AMMO

### Have You Seen The New . . .

Story and photo by Randy Flickinger

The conversation always starts with, "Have you seen the new (insert cartridge design here)? Boy, it is a game changer and brand new." I'm never sure how to answer that question, until I read more. Believe me, I am not saying I am an expert by any stretch, usually saving my opinion for later. Why? If you are a follower of old gun magazines or collect old reloading manuals like me you find that some of the new cartridges are really similar to older designs from even as far back as the 1920s. Gun guys today forget that the gunsmiths and shooters back then custom-designed cartridges—mostly wildcat—to fill a niche and to make a name for themselves. Because of these innovators, I would venture a guess that 90% of all cartridges today are derived from a commercially available parent case that early shooters felt wildcatting, to improve design or velocity, was a hole that needed to be filled.

At the last sales show the conversation started with, "Have you seen the new .300 PRC? It's a game changer for shooting long distance. It was chosen by the DoD as the new sniper rifle for the military." I looked at my good friend Travis Pollack, Hornady rep and a true ballistics guy, telling him I heard and that I have a similar cartridge at home designed around 1910 that is the same case and ballistically similar. No, he said the .300 PRC is based off the .375 Ruger and has a unique parent case. I started to plead my case but



Comparison of the .300 PRC, left, and the .30 Newton, right.

did not have all the facts in hand.

Around 1900, a lawyer named Charles Newton left his practice with a desire to spend his time designing cartridges and building a rifle-manufacturing company to handle the higher pressures of his new designs. Developing several cartridges along the way, with Newton as part of the name, cartridges like the .256 Newton developed into the now named 6.5/06. Others designed by Newton were the .250-3000 SAVAGE, .25 Special (now named .25/06), 7mm (.280 Remington) and .35 Newton, to name a few. Most writers and gun aficionados refer to him as a ballistics genius and ahead of his time. Later that title was passed on to P.O. Ackley, an innovating gunsmith and designer of high-velocity wildcats. Being credited with over 30 wildcats to include the "Ackley Improved" or AI, added to the name. Ackley is best known for the .30/06 Ackley Improved and the new favorite on the market, the .280 Ackley. Ackley improved designs by changing the shoulder angle, thereby creating more powder space.

The aforementioned cartridge for which I did not have the facts in hand is the .30 Newton. Designed in 1913 by Fred Adolph and Charles Newton, it is a beltless case originally made from the 8x68S and for lack of a better explanation is a mirror design to the beltless .375 Ruger, only in a .308 diameter case mouth. I have not shot the .30 Newton in years, but I do remember driving 200-grain projectiles over 2,900 fps. In fact, I still have three boxes of brass made by Speer "Forged from Solid" in .30 Newton made sometime around late 1940s or 50s and prior to WWII. Loaded cartridges were once offered by Western Cartridge Company, transitioning from wildcat to factory.

In comparing the .300 PRC to the .30 Newton you will find some differences. Namely, the overall length of the case for the .300 PRC is 2.580" and holds 96 grains of water. The .30 Newton is 2.520" long and holds 89 grains of water. Case capacity in grains of water weight is subjective in that all manufacturers of brass are different. The method of calculating grains of water is to use a fired case, weigh empty, fill to the mouth with water, repeat weighing with the water, and subtract the difference. An example is the original .30 Newton brass from the 40s holds 89 grains of water. Using .375 Ruger brass fireformed to the Newton, results in about 91 grains of water. Some subtle variances, but that's about it.

The .300 PRC is listed on the Hornady website to drive a 200-grain ELD-X around 3,000 fps. When you look at the .30 Nosler, and compare it to the PRC and Newton, the .30 Nosler parent case is a .404 Jeffery case measuring 2.556" long and holding 89.8 grains of water. It is also a beltless magnum and was designed for a standard-length action just as the PRC and Newton were. According to Nosler they can drive a 210-grain Accubond Long Range bullet around 3,000 fps.

For hunting inside of 500 yards, I do not think there is a lick

of difference in the .30-caliber magnums if all are pushing a 200-grain bullet approximately 3,000 fps. Where does the similarity change? Balance, efficiency, powder charge, bullet design? I've read that the PRC's advantage is its longer head height and throat for extremely long, high-ballistic-coefficient bullets. Although designed for a standard-length magazine, I think an advantage would be a magnum-length action to increase overall length of the cartridge. With modern propellants I imagine you could stretch out the .30 Newton and get another 50- to 100 fps and nip at the heels of the PRC. All the information I am finding behind the .300 PRC is that past 400 yards is where it becomes significant. Winning a recent DOD military contract is evidence that it performed exceptionally well and beat out the .300 Norma Mag as well as others beyond 2,000 yards.

With modern components, a barrel length of 24 inches, and a 1:10 twist (the original .30 Newton design was 1:12), I think the Newton could be a contender for excellent long-range shooting. All three mentioned are true long-range performers with the Newton being over 100 years old. Why did the Newton fall to oblivion if it is so like the new wonder .308s? Who knows? What I do know is if you are unable to find .30 Newton brass you can easily make them from .375 Ruger brass.

So, with all that explanation Travis and I are both half right. The .300 PRC is new, and it all started 100 years ago with the .30 Newton.



Randy Flickinger was licensed as an assistant guide in Alaska for 18 years and is currently a manufacturer's representative for Federal Ammunition. He teaches reloading, shoots competitively for SAVAGE Arms, and resides in Oregon.

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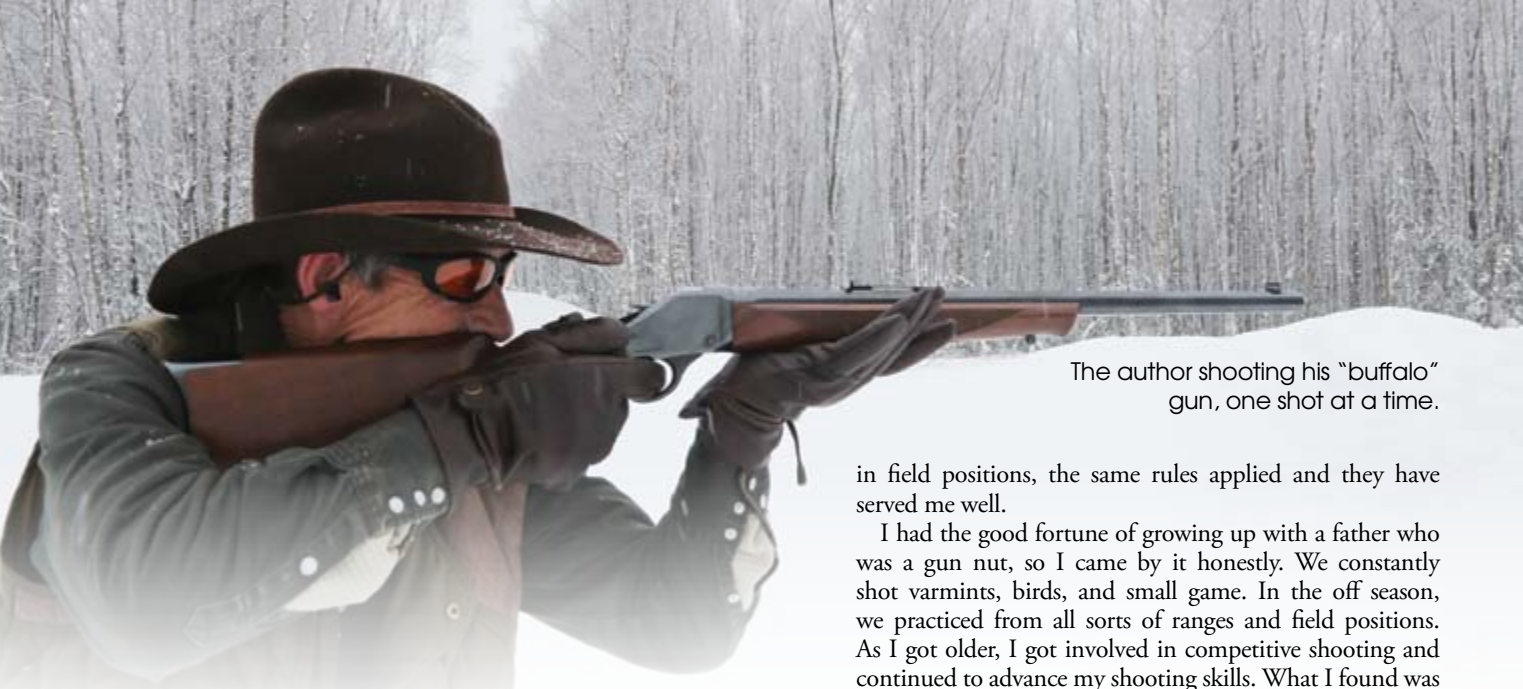
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The author shooting his "buffalo" gun, one shot at a time.

## [ SHOOTING FOR THE FIELD ]

### Firsts

Story and photo by Steve Meyer

We humans take a lot of stock in firsts. First love, first vehicle, first job, first hunting dog, first rifle, first shotgun. We're supposed to carry these things in our heart, with fond memories and longing into the afterlife. I don't know about you, but I'm damn glad my first love didn't work out, my first job was awful, and I don't miss my first vehicle, a ratty-looking station wagon in which no self-respecting young woman would be caught dead. What might have been a fond memory of my first dog is tarnished with the image of him being nearly cut in half by the blade of an old cable a D8 Cat dropped just as he ran under it.

My first rifle, a magazine-fed, bolt-action Winchester, sits in my gun safe—a good rifle that I have long since moved on from and rarely think about.

That leaves my first shotgun, a single-shot 20-gauge which now resides at the bottom of a river. More likely, in the 45 years since, it simply rusted and rotted back into the landscape. That's a first I have fond memories of, although it would be some years before I realized the special place it had in my development.

So that brings me, in case you are wondering what the hell I'm talking about, to the most valuable of all firsts, the first shot. Your second love is almost guaranteed to be better than your first; your second shot on a game animal is almost guaranteed to be worse.

That single-shot shotgun forced me to learn the gun mount, the timing, and the trigger press that amounted to a successful game shot. Shooting at a flying duck that would only be in range for a moment taught me that the gun mount must be fast and precise. It never varies. No matter the circumstance, the speed of the mount is always the same, like the draw stroke of a holstered pistol.

The hardest part to learn was the decision point—that nanosecond when your brain tells you the shot is good, and you press the trigger with lightning speed, or you pull the finger off the trigger, and wait for the next opportunity. If I blew the first shot, no matter how much I practiced reloading, there was no chance of a second shot on those ducks or pheasants.

Those early days with the single-shot taught me a life lesson that I have carried with me ever since: "You cannot miss fast enough to catch up."

In my youth, most of the hunting I did was wingshooting, which is a first love that has never wavered. When I started shooting big-game rifles

in field positions, the same rules applied and they have served me well.

I had the good fortune of growing up with a father who was a gun nut, so I came by it honestly. We constantly shot varmints, birds, and small game. In the off season, we practiced from all sorts of ranges and field positions. As I got older, I got involved in competitive shooting and continued to advance my shooting skills. What I found was the first shot in competition set the stage for every shot that followed. If I blew the first shot at a match, I knew it was going to be a long day. I didn't have many long days.

As I aged and could afford to buy the guns I wanted, I shot repeaters in the field. Mostly O/U shotguns for wingshooting and bolt actions for big game. I didn't give much thought to single-shot rifles until about ten years ago, when I thought I should have a cheap .223 to carry on my trapline and to just have in the truck for those occasional opportunities for a coyote. I found a New England Firearms single-shot with a heavy, 22-inch barrel that was a near copy of the single-shot 20-gauge I used so many years ago.

I've shot more game with that gun than any other centerfire rifle I've ever owned; partly because I have used so many different rifles and calibers over the years and partly because I have it with me so often when opportunities come along. I've killed half a dozen coyotes and the same number of otters. All that has been required is a round in the chamber.

I fell in love with that little gun. It's four inches shorter than my 22-inch-barreled .375 H&H, the weight is balanced slightly forward and shooting it offhand is a joy. So, why not a single-shot big-game rifle, I wondered.

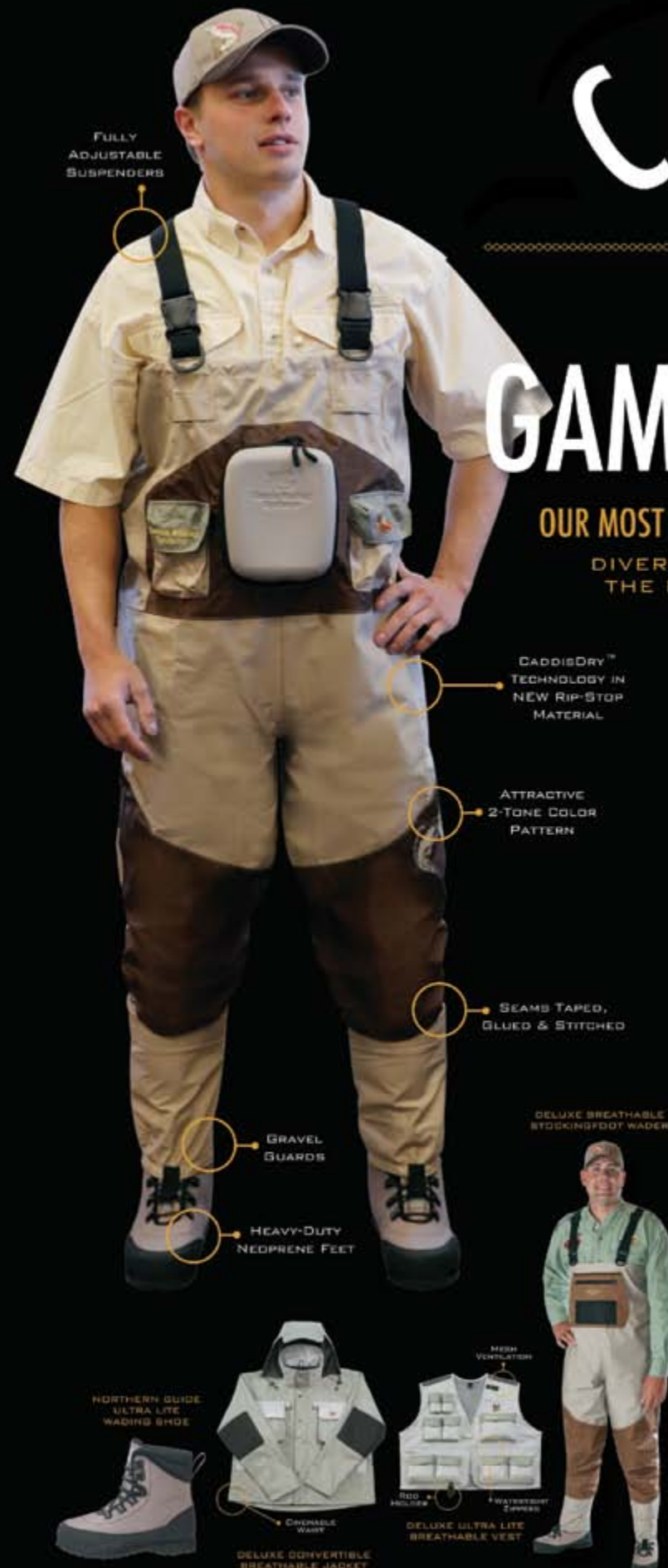
I hold out hopes of someday drawing a permit for bison, and I've always thought that if I do, I will want a more traditional buffalo gun for the job. Namely, a single-shot .45/70 designed in the 1800s.

I found a Winchester M1885, High Wall in .45/70, the modern version that is a copy of the original with better metallurgy. With a 22-inch octagon barrel, it is about the same overall length, and feels a lot like the little .223. I didn't draw a bison permit this year, but I think the gun will make a fine moose rifle.

In almost 50 years of shooting big game in Alaska, I have had to use a second shot, well, never. Part of that is a lifetime behind the trigger, but more important, and perhaps is the best kept secret of folks you know who are great game shots: They know as much about when the first shot is bad as when it is good, and they don't take the bad ones.



Steve A. Meyer is a 47-year Alaska resident and outdoor writer. Most days he can be found following his English setter, Winchester, in the Kenai mountains.



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## [ LIFE ON THE LEDGE ]

### It's All About Shot Placement, Baby!

Story and photo by Lon E. Lauber

From campfire conversations to online bowhunting forums to chatter at the local archery shop, less-informed bowhunters frequently get caught up in somewhat frivolous banter about archery tackle when their energy would be better spent learning to be a better bowhunter, better archer, and being more selective about when and where they shoot that arrow!

Don't get me wrong; having high-quality equipment, choosing the right arrow/broadhead, sight, and so forth is really important. However, none of these equipment choices are as important as shot placement.

Currently, there is a big fad in bowhunting to shoot super-heavy arrows with an extreme amount of Front of Center. FOC is the amount listed in percentage that the arrow balances in front of the arrow's true center. And yes, just like equipment choices, having some extra FOC does help with momentum, kinetic energy, and penetration. A little extra FOC can help with broadhead accuracy, too. However, when you hit the animal in the right place, penetration is rarely an issue.

To keep it simple, if you have approximately 150- to 200 grains of weight up front on the arrow, including your insert, collar, and broadhead, you'll probably have enough FOC to get the job done—when you hit the animal in the right place...I believe at least 10- to 15 percent of FOC is enough. Others are going way beyond that. Their thinking is if they make a bad hit the extra penetration will make up for inadequate shot placement. I suppose there are a few instances where this might be true. However, I'd rather just hit 'em right in the first place!

I keep saying hit them in the right place, shot placement is more important, etc. So, let's delve into this aspect. Killing a big-game animal with a bow and arrow is different than hunting with a rifle and bullet. The former kills via hemorrhaging or massive blood loss. The latter kills by hydrostatic shock.

To get the most blood loss in the shortest amount of time, a bowhunter needs to put a razor-sharp, broadhead-tipped arrow through the animal's lungs. This means broadside or slightly quartering-away shots are best. Every other shot angle slightly to significantly reduces the chance of severing both lungs. Yes, you can kill Alaska big game with a heart shot or a liver hit, but the lungs are the biggest vital organs and with just the hide, ribs, and a little meat to pass through before reaching the vital tissue, this is the path of least resistance.

The cool thing about aiming about 1/3 to 1/2 way up from the brisket and just slightly behind the front shoulder crease is it gives you the most margin of shot-placement error to still make a clean kill. If you hit a little low, you still hit the heart. If you hit a little high (but not much) you still hit lungs. If you hit a little bit forward, there is a sideways "V" shaped area that is just shoulder muscle and not bone, and you still hit the front of the lungs. If you hit a little bit back, you still hit lungs or the liver. No other shot placement comes close to this much leeway for shooting errors.

Besides shot placement, let's talk about the two other areas I believe are more important than equipment selection.



This ram is in near-perfect position for the best possible shot placement—an arrow through both lungs.

They are becoming a better bowhunter and becoming a better archer.

Nowadays, there are so many ways to become a better bowhunter, it's almost easy. I still believe experience is the best teacher, so bowhunting more is still the best option. Tell your significant other that Lon says you need to bowhunt more. It won't be the first time I've been called the instigator!

You can also research online and find all kinds of how-to videos, stories, and adventure shows to learn to become a better bowhunter. However, the problem with the Internet is there is no filter. You must discern if the information is viable or if it's bunk. That can be daunting. I suggest you find just a few sources you know and trust and stick with them. Otherwise you can easily become overwhelmed and confused with contradicting information.

Back to actual bowhunting, I honestly believe intentionally hunting with others who are better and more experienced bowhunters is a real advantage. It takes some confidence to intentionally put yourself in a vulnerable position, but if you ever have the opportunity to hunt with one of those guys or gals who is consistently successful while bowhunting big game, you would be a fool to not jump at the chance.

Regarding becoming a better archer, this might be the area where so many bowhunters fail. Learning really good archery form, or relearning excellent form to rid yourself of bad habits can be daunting, but is usually well worth the effort. Same as researching bowhunting online, information on relearning archery form is readily available online, too.

In the midst of my Alaska bowhunting days, I had a terrible case of target panic/buck fever. I'd make a great stalk and then botch the shot! Talk about frustrating. So, I went to some of the best in the business and re-learned how to shoot a bow properly. Man, did it take a lot of effort to re-program my mind and body to shoot properly, but boy was it worth it!

Yes, I still miss and still make an occasional bad hit but most always I put that arrow right through the animal's lungs and all the other chatter about equipment means didily. It's all about shot placement, baby!



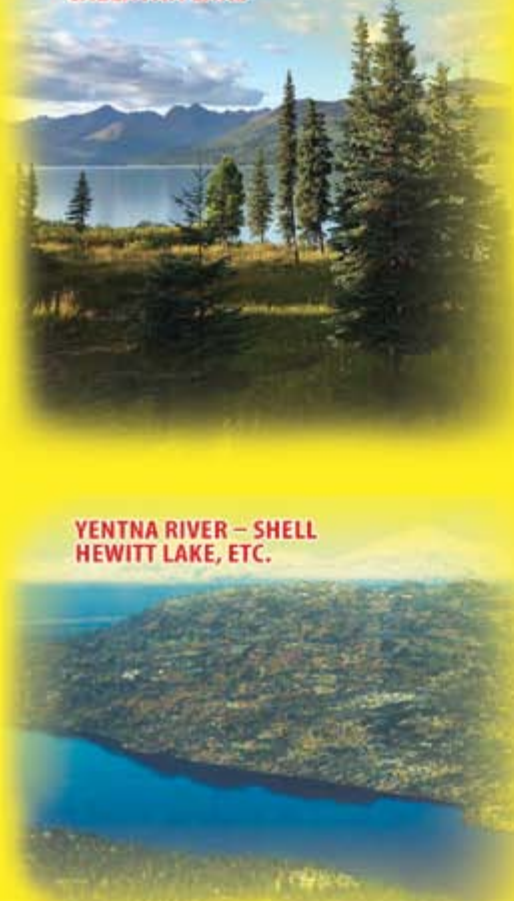
*Lon E. Lauber is a freelance writer and outdoor photographer from Spokane, WA. Lon lived in Alaska for 17 years and has returned several times to continue his passion of bowhunting. He is the author of the book, Bowhunter's Guide To Accurate Shooting, a nine-time Alaska state archery champion and the holder of 52 Pope and Young record-class big-game animals. Most of those are Alaska specimens. Lon also spent 28 years being a paid, professional archer.*

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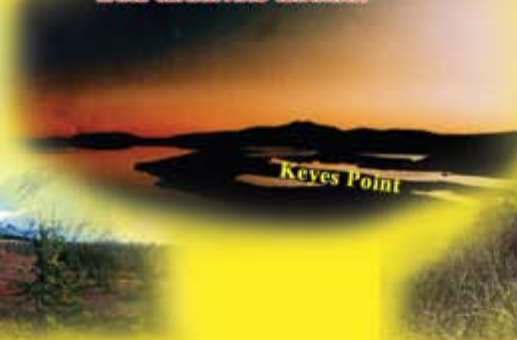
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## [ RED GOLD ]

### A Walk in the Woods

Story and photo by Bjorn Dible

I listened as a deer snorted, and then bounded through a clump of bushes without offering so much as a glimpse of hide or hair. I got goosebumps when I found its tracks and saw that it was probably a decent-sized buck. It was late December and I was taking my rifle for a walk on Douglas Island in northern southeast Alaska. The island sees a lot of hunting pressure by man and wolf, so I didn't have high expectations of getting a buck. This would be my last "hunt" of 2018, and mostly, I just wanted to use the day to reflect and say goodbye to the season. I didn't need another deer, but I had one last tag and had a couple buddies with ample room in their freezers. It was late in the day to try to track down the buck, though. Strange things happen in these woods after dark, and even more worrisome, I hadn't begun the list of chores MC wanted me to do before our child was due to be born in less than a month. I'd tried to set her straight the night before.

"Look, all the baby really needs is a stout cardboard box so it can't escape and a good supply of newspaper for poo and pee," I'd told her.

MC had yelled something unintelligible,

then threatened to gut me like a salmon if I didn't stop using the changing table as a skinning bench. She had developed the temperament of a feminist grizzly with a toothache since she'd gotten pregnant. After a few bluff charges and pepper spraying her without much result, I promised to clean my beaver snares and other outdoor equipment out of the baby dresser. I felt like a bad dad, since I was sure our kid would appreciate all my cool stuff more than diapers, plastic toys, and onesies decorated with lambs and other domestic critters doomed to live terrible lives that would end in industrial slaughterhouses. I brought the morbid nature of baby fashions to MC's attention, but she didn't see it that way. I was worried about our relationship if she kept acting so irrational. I figured the best thing to do for both our sakes was to go hunting and let things cool down.

I studied those buck tracks dotting the soft blanket of snow and came to the quick conclusion it would be insane not to follow. There are worse things than being caught out in the dark and risking the chance of being abducted by an emotionally needy female sasquatch. Hell, it might even make MC jealous and shift the power dynamic in my favor. I trailed the deer for an hour until its tracks led me to one of my favorite honey holes. The last time I was here a month ago, I called a doe and two bucks to within yards of where I'd been crouched behind a hummock. I had eaten the meat of one of those young



This late-season Sitka blacktail's antlers fell off when it dropped to the forest floor after the shot.

bucks for breakfast and lunch today. Call it premonition or what you will, I got the feeling the buck I'd been trailing was near, so I chambered a round. A minute later I spied a deer moving through the snowy woods above. I took a hasty rest against a small hemlock tree, and when it appeared a moment later, perfectly blended in the shadows except for the red shine of its antlers, my shot shattered the quiet. A couple minutes later I stood over the deer. Its antlers had fallen off and lay in the blood-saturated snow. Twisted and towering trees stood like sentient beings in the low light as I began butchering.

When I was a kid the rainforest both scared and fascinated me. There were bears

and worse haunting its darkness—even the trees and vegetation seemed predatory. Juneau, where I grew up, was surrounded by wilderness with a capitalized W. Admiralty Island, just a couple-mile skiff ride away, likely has more brown bears than all the Lower 48 put together. I was now 36 and the wilderness that once seemed to go on forever was feeling increasingly small and vulnerable. A few months prior, Governor Walker's administration successfully petitioned the U.S. Forest Service to initiate a state-specific roadless rule-making process. Their hope is to exempt the Tongass and open much of the region's designated and protected roadless areas to old-growth logging and the construction

of new roads, all heavily subsidized by our tax dollars, as well as new development and resource extraction. If the Forest Service and Department of Agriculture do away with the Roadless Rule, we'd essentially be footing the bill for corporations to benefit in exploiting and further fragmenting much of the last old-growth forest—all critical habitat for Sitka blacktail deer, bears, and salmon.

I thought about this as I plowed down the mountain. I'd felt an impending dread about the future and wondered what sort of southeast Alaska my kid was going to inherit. One of the best and worst things about hauling a heavy pack a long distance in the dark is that it gives you ample time to reflect. Instead of dwelling on more roads being built through wilderness and some of the last old-growth watersheds falling prey to the chainsaw, I switched to thinking about hunting. I did the math and guessed I'd spent close to a year of my life centered around hunting Sitka blacktails. I'd lost track of the number I'd shot. Deer—accompanied with bear, goat, caribou, and moose—have been my primary source of red meat since I was first fed solids by my parents. Salmon, deer, and what the forest provides will be my son's food. Hopefully it will be his kid's main source of sustenance, too. I walked along the ocean, feeling my way along rocks in the darkness and listening to waves gently lap on the shore.

It was dark when I got home. I called a

good friend who values wild meat but had been too busy with work and family to get many deer this season and offered him half the animal. He showed up a short while later with the frozen bones of the one deer he'd shot and gave them to me to make stock. I gave a good chunk of the deer to another friend, who offered a bag full of delicious Taku River sockeye salmon. That evening I baked deer bones, sawing them in half after they cooled and then set them to simmer in a couple big pots overnight. In the morning I canned the broth. I filled my pack with bones and whatever animal scraps I could find in the freezer and walked into the woods. I followed a deer trail to a muskeg, and beneath an old, gnarled shore pine, left the animal parts to be reabsorbed by the forest. In my last gesture, I apologized to all the animals I had killed that season and thanked them for becoming food for me and the people I cared about.

I went home, read MC's list, and began preparing for the new addition to our family.



*Bjorn Dible is a Juneau writer. He is 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](https://facebook.com/BjornDibleauthor) or [instagram.com/bjorndible/](https://instagram.com/bjorndible/).*



## Hunt Alaska MAGAZINE

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## What Do You Really Need For Food?

Story and photos by Larry Bartlett

Food is one requirement on your hunting checklist that is worth a discussion. Cutting weight and condensing bulk makes best sense for the backcountry, but you still must bring enough food to fuel your efforts as a hunter for 10- to 14 days. Energy—essentially food, is required to pack, drag, and carry your provisions daily in the field. Calories matter for energy; the foods that provide them must be high quality, store well, and transport efficiently. Diet complexities are affected by body type, age, gender, metabolic health, athleticism, fitness levels, training routines, and personal goals leading into a hunt scenario. We have yet to devise a magic menu formula that will satisfy the needs of everyone, because how much of what food depends on the demands of the hunt plus the variety of parameters above.

To realize a smart field menu, I have spent nearly two decades minimizing my food kit with nutrient-rich foods. I am also collaborating with cutting-edge science professionals to refine our understanding of condition-specific nutrient requirements in the backcountry. These exercises have given me important knowledge to share that will help you accomplish your load carriage and nutritional goals.

The food that we take on a backcountry hunt should be selected with three considerations in mind: expectations of calorie expenditure, calorie-to-weight ratio, and nutrient quality.

### Calorie Expenditure

How many calories does it take to hunt for moose and caribou? That's the first question that must be answered to judge bulk-food requirement. Prior to our first backcountry health study in 2017, expectations for caloric expenditure were based on non-specific prediction equations developed in a controlled lab instead of a field setting like a 12-day float hunt. Now we have specific information about our caloric needs and physical exertion in the field, and are using this information to develop a lighter food kit with higher nutrient quality.

We now know that our study participants burned an average of 4,326 kcals per day over a 12-day hunt period, consumed an average of 2,174 kcals each day, and remained effective in the field with positive, healthy outcomes. The average body fat weight loss was seven pounds per person. These hunters expended twice the number of calories they consumed each day. Half their daily calorie supply came from food they brought, and the other half largely came from their own fat reserves. Science fact: One pound of body fat equals about 3,500 kcals. Had these study participants taken enough food to fully support their caloric demand, each of them would have packed an additional 25- to 30 pounds of bulk food weight. When comparing the efficiency of packed food volume to body fat reserves, a 4:1 ratio (food-weight energy to body-fat energy) is revealed. This ratio suggests food is less efficient as a calorie delivery system than our own body fat. Our study showed seven pounds of body fat delivered roughly the same energy supply as 28 pounds of bulk food (24,500 kcals). Let that sink in.

### Negative Caloric Balance

While backcountry hunting it is likely we are often in a negative caloric balance; more energy is expended than consumed. We are fortunate that our stored body fat is a calorie-rich fuel source. Theoretically, a male hunter weighing 175 pounds with 8% body fat has 49,000 kcals of available fuel, or 24 days of "fat fuel," based on the results of our recent study. Body fat is stored energy from excess dietary consumption, which means less food requirements in the field if you can afford to lose. That's the first and easiest strategy to shed weight on food. I prefer to limit my weight loss on hunts because I'm lean and athletic. To avoid packing too much or too little food, we must identify our body weight, field readiness and field performance needs.

Our analysis suggests that operating at a 50% caloric deficiency coupled with 3- to 7 hours of physical activity each day for 10- to 12 days can significantly improve metabolic health and preserve skeletal

muscle. This gives me the confidence to take less food in the field without a concern for loss in operational performance or muscle mass. The key is to specifically target the amount and best types of food that meet our performance goals. Now that we have a benchmark of an average calorie expenditure for middle-aged men in the range of 4,000- to 4,500 kcals per day on a moderately physical float hunt, our target could be to provide 2,000- to 2,300 kcals per person per day with an expected weight loss, or up to 3,000-3,500 kcals per person per day for just minimal weight loss.

Participating in this health study identified my personal caloric expenditure on two different hunts. Now that I know my true caloric demand on a moderate and difficult scale, I can dial in my specific nutrient needs down to the ounce for a 14-day hunt without a concern for drastic weight loss. Within limits, calorie deficiency is smart and healthy and does not necessarily compromise performance. But if you plan to shrink your food kit, you need a working knowledge of the role macronutrients play in endurance events like hunting.

### Macronutrients and Nutritional Timing

What and when to eat in the field should match the day's events, but we are required to bring a predetermined supply of food so we must go prepared. Nutritional timing is a crucial factor in maintaining our blood-sugar levels and helping to restore tired muscles. Surveying the physical work of any given day and eating particular foods at the right time to match our activity demands requires an understanding of how the body breaks down nutrients (food) into usable energy.

Food is separated into three categories of fuel called macronutrients: carbohydrates, fat, and protein. Carbohydrates and protein each contain four calories per gram, whereas fat provides nine calories per gram. A balanced macronutrient profile for mild hunting activities is 45- to 60% carbohydrates, 20- to 35% fat, and 20% protein. If 2,000 kcals per day is the goal, then 900- to 1200 kcals should come from carbohydrates, 400- to 700 kcals from fat, and 400 kcals from protein sources. These amounts won't cut it for a strenuous hunt, as energy expenditures climb as does the need to repair muscle. When operating in a negative caloric balance, your body needs targeted macronutrients.

### Carbohydrates

The more active or intense the activity, the more carbohydrates we need to consume. Carbohydrates are digested in less than two hours, faster than fat and protein, which is why carbs are used for immediate energy. Eat a carb-rich snack like figs, dried mangos, or a candy bar about 30 minutes before and after an event for your best performance. The two types of carbohydrate are simple (sugar) and complex. Simple carbs burn the fastest and offer a quick spike in energy and insulin. Insulin has unwanted side effects, so complex carbohydrates are a better choice because they burn slower, which extends energy output and helps maintain performance efficiency and insulin reaction. Excess carbohydrates from each meal get converted to triglycerides and stored as fat if not immediately burned, so eat enough carbs for energy but don't overeat them. Stay mindful of total fat and protein needs when factoring your daily caloric consumption. Carbohydrate needs will vary from 5- to 12 grams per kilogram of body weight per hunting day. Generally speaking, a hunter that weighs 175- to 190 pounds is also 80- to 86 kg, and that hunter would need greater than 900 grams (3,600 kcals) of carbohydrates each day on a moderate- to difficult hunt.

Whole-wheat pasta, quinoa, couscous, and brown rice are all great sources of complex carbohydrates that typically take longer to digest and provide a more stable source of carbohydrate availability. Bagels, oats, and legumes are also good sources but bulkier. Even the consumption of simple sugars from sources like dried fruit and candy bars may be helpful in accelerating the rate of muscle and liver glycogen immediately after physical activity. Candy bars are also high in fat that helps improve the calorie/weight ratio needed for high levels of movement efficiency.

### Fat

Dietary fat is important for vitamin absorption and essential fatty acids, but fat also provides flavor and texture to our meals. In a static environment like office life, much of our fat requirement is provided in the plethora of foods we consume each day. However, backcountry activities require sustained energy, stable body temperatures, and abundant slow-burning calories. Fat-rich food does this for us. Remember, you are not in a gym trying to impress the mirror—you are working, exerting, and

Three ounces of smoked salmon and two slices of pepper jack cheese delivers 300 kcals, 20 g fat, and 31 g protein. Salmon also is high in sodium (50% daily suggested allowance), so drink extra water and choose this snack on sweat-laden days to restore electrolyte loss.



Judge your energy bars for macronutrient value (1 ounce = >100 kcals). These choices offer good payout for calorie-to-weight ratios. You want a snack bar high in calories and protein. These choices are also high-protein bars, and they are best eaten during and after moderate activities.



Learn how many kcals in nuts fills your palm for an easy know-on-the-go measure of calorie intake. My hand holds 320 kcals of cashews and almonds. I drink 1/2 quart of water to support absorption, and I eat this snack daily with duration tasks midday and early afternoon.



Dried fruit offers quick carbohydrates in the form of simple sugars, which make them great field snacks for quick spurts of intensity. Eat 20 minutes before rigorous exercise, drink 20 ounces of water, and bust a move! The next snack should be high in protein and fat, to balance insulin reaction and blood glucose levels.



Divide your butter by practice so you know what 100 kcals looks like cut off a stick of butter. Bagels offer complex carbohydrates and butter offers fat. One bagel and one ounce of butter offers 470 kcals, 25 g fat, and 9 g protein, making it my #1 pick for best breakfast foods in the field.

surviving in the backcountry using dietary strategies that have already been blueprinted by evolutionary or intelligent design.

Fat takes the longest to digest, 4- to 6 hours, because it must be converted to triglycerides to be used as fuel, essentially co-functioning as immediate and slow-burning fuel. If carbohydrates were gasoline, fat would be diesel! Most enthusiasts recommend a ratio of at least 100 kcals per ounce of food. Fat ramps up this ratio as clearly noted with pure butter at 200 kcals per ounce. While butter would be a mess in our pack, this is one of the reasons that "cooked bacon" at 153 kcals per ounce, peanut butter at 165 kcals per ounce, and pistachios at 162 kcals per ounce represent great sources of fatty energy. Coconut oil is exceptionally rich in calories to weight at 248 kcals per ounce. Butter, coconut oil, avocados, cashews, almonds, cheese, olive oil, salami, and peanut butter are great sources of fat.

### Protein

Protein provides the essential amino acids our muscles and cells need to recover and repair, which our bodies cannot supply from internal sources. All proteins are not the same in terms of their ability to help our bodies recover from exertion or stress. The term "protein quality" is used to confer the most beneficial sources of protein and represents the rationale why so many people turn to whey protein as a protein source, offering superior absorption of amino acids. Protein does take longer than carbs to digest, offering 2- to 3 hours of feeling full and stabilizing our glucose and insulin balance.

How much protein do we need? The recommendations for vigorous activity in a well-trained person are 1.5- to 2.0 grams per kg per day. This equates to 500- to 650 kcals per day for an individual weighing 175 pounds. We know from our existing data of males that we can increase our energy expenditure to over 4,000 kcals daily to maintain muscle and ensure operational effectiveness in a 14-day hunt scenario with minimal food provisions. We are still working on specific results in females from our 2018 study effort.

Fish, meats, eggs, and dairy products all provide excellent protein quality that truly represent a greater level of rebuilding efficiency for the weight carried. Ranking eggs, lean meats, whey powder, wild meat, wild fish, cheese, jerky, fatty meats, protein bars, nuts, and peanut butter in order of highest to lowest protein quality are good rules to follow.

### Hydration is a Separate Sustenance

The importance of water cannot be understated. In 1981, Irish hunger strikers lived 71 days without food, consuming only water. Our need for water is much greater due to alterations in temperature and activity, even altitude in some scenarios. Hydration is key to sustainable movement and survival. Without water, you have just a few days to live. Every cell, organ, chemical, nutrient, muscle, system, and bone in our body relies on our commitment to drinking fresh water often enough to keep our pee the color of straw. Dehydration happens fast in the backcountry because we forget how much we're moving, deep breathing, working, walking, rafting, and sweating. If we're not diligent to recognize the onset, we get tired, develop muscle cramps, headaches, dizziness, infrequent urination, constipation, unstable body temperature, and the list goes on. Dehydration also wrecks the immune system and digestive performance, slowing the absorption of key nutrients to fuel our day-to-day hunting efforts. Drink water and lots of it!

How much water a hunter needs depends on the intensity and duration of the day, but the best identifier we have is the color of our pee and frequency of urination. A well-hydrated body will release light yellow or clear urine every couple of hours. If you haven't peed in two hours, drink 30 ounces of clean water every hour until you're back on track.

As an experiment to monitor hydration, I weigh myself before and after a one-hour ski or run. A common weight loss after one hour of moderate exercise is two pounds. This represents the loss of one quart of water (one gallon of water equals eight pounds). If my hunt requires three- to seven hours every day of physical activity, I must consume roughly one quart of water every hour of activity to maintain adequate hydration. Alaska hunters experience much more evaporation and convection dehydration because of our arid climate. Hydration is literally more important than food.



Larry Bartlett is the owner of Pristine Ventures based in Fairbanks, Alaska, and is an avid, hardcore outdoorsman. Pristine Ventures offers a slew of resources for backcountry hunters and fishermen like selling top-quality packrafts and canoes that can hold loads needed for outdoor activities. Larry also helps plan hunts for DIY hunters and provides equipment rentals.



For much of last year, editors at *Hunt Alaska* magazine were busy in the field, putting the products presented before you to rigorous tests in the torture chamber we know as Alaska. From guns and ammo, to optics, field accessories, and apparel, testers used a range of items needed for successful hunts. Be it a new pack, an upgrade to your tent, a new caliber rifle, or changing your brand of bullet, our gear guide can help you make the right choice.

## Firearms and Ammunition

### Savage High Country Rifle

savagearms.com  
This rifle is built to maximize accuracy with a spiral-fluted barrel and bolt, as well as the Model 110 action secured three dimensionally along its entire length within the AccuStock internal chassis. The AccuFit system lets hunters customize length-of-pull and comb height of the TrueTimber Strata synthetic stock. Plus, the user-adjustable AccuTrigger offers a crisp, clean pull, which is critical for making precise shots at extreme distances. The low-friction, coyote-brown PVD coating on the barrel, receiver, and other critical parts is hard and protects against corrosion and heat. At just 2- to 4 microns thick, the coating does not interfere with the rifle's tight tolerances. It is available in 11 calibers from .243 Winchester to .300 Win Mag.



### Black Hills Ammunition Black Hills Gold .243 WIN 95-grain Hornady SST Bullets

black-hills.com  
These bullets shoot flat and produce tight groups. They have enough knock-down power for well-placed shots on blacktail deer. They leave the muzzle with a velocity of 2950 fps with an energy of 1835 foot-pounds. Black Hills Ammunition produces a wide range of great ammunition and we've appreciated the consistency and performance of their bullets. The Hornady SST bullet (Super Shock Tip) is designed to provide substantial shock on impact and to expand on entry. It features a polymer tip that drives into the lead core to initiate expansion.



### Weatherby Mark V Sporter

weatherby.com  
We tested the Weatherby Mark V Sporter in a .300 Wby Mag; this rifle was a real pleasure to shoot. Our tester felt confident about this gun's accuracy as he was able to consistently shoot three shots within the size of a quarter. He said he fired shots that put holes in the holes he had already made with the target using Weatherby Select Plus Ammunition in the matching cartridge. That's congruent with Weatherby's SUB-MOA accuracy guarantee (.99" or less 3-shot group at 100 yards when used with Weatherby factory or premium ammunition). A 26-inch hand-lapped chrome-moly barrel with field crown with a sleekly designed stock define this Mark V. A 9-lug Mark V magnum action and LXX trigger makes for smooth precision. It's available in .257 Wby Mag, .270 Wby Mag, 7 mm Wby Mag, .300 Win. Mag, and .300 Wby Mag.



### Blaser R8 Rifle

blaser-usa.com  
Contributing Editor Steve Meyer had this to say, "I didn't warm to the non-traditional appearance of the R8, until Christine brought one home, and I started shooting it. In short, it is a remarkable accomplishment in the gun-making art, with innovations of design too extensive to do it justice in a brief manner. Being an old M70 guy, it doesn't come easy to say that this rifle is a shooter, welcome in my gun safe. Perhaps as important, I've gotten to know the Blaser company a bit, and they represent hunters and shooters in the best way it can be done. Have a look, you won't be disappointed."

### Kimber Mountain Ascent .300 Winchester Magnum

kimberamerica.com  
Contributing Editor Casey Dinkel shared, "The Kimber Mountain Ascent has quickly become my favorite rifle. It's one of the most lightweight factory-production rifles on the market today. I make this point since weight is a very big deal to most mountain hunters, myself included. Kitted out and chambered in .300 Win Mag, my Kimber only adds 7 pounds, 14 ounces to my pack, a full pound lighter than my previous mountain rifle in a smaller caliber! In my opinion the .300 Win Mag is also well suited for all Alaskan big-game species. From brown bears to blacktails the .300 Win Mag can handle them all. Thus far, I have embarked on several fly-in hunts employing my Kimber and put it through the rigors of the harsh Alaskan climate. The tough, carbon-fiber stock and stainless hardware stood up to everything Alaska has had to offer, staying deadly accurate while I successfully harvested a moose, grizzly, and Sitka blacktail deer during the fall of 2018. The Mountain Ascent is an excellent rifle and I would recommend it to any North American big-game hunter."



### Hornady .30 caliber 200 grain ELD-X Bullets

hornady.com  
We asked Contributing Editor Casey Dinkel to tell us his ammunition preferences, "As a big-game guide, I believe there are several criteria that need to be met when selecting a projectile, all of them of equal importance. A bullet must fly straight, perform well, and be heavy enough to swiftly dispatch your quarry. The Hornady ELD-X or Extremely Low Drag-eXpanding bullets have done exactly that from my experience. These bullets fly exceptionally well and with very little tweaking of hand loads, my Kimber .300 Win Mag will place a sub one-inch group at 300 yards on a good day at the range. Performance has been no exception either, as I put the 200-grain projectiles to the test, taking a moose, grizzly, and Sitka blacktail in the fall of 2018. From moose to blacktail the ELD-X caused maximum damage with high weight retention and pinpoint accuracy. The real proof was when the ELD-X dispatched an interior grizzly at 309 yards with ease, breaking both front shoulders of the bear. With excellent ballistic coefficients, high weight retention, and great expansion, this is one of best projectiles I have ever tested. The Hornady ELD-X is my new standby and an excellent option that I recommend for big-game hunting."



### Stoeger M3000 Shotgun

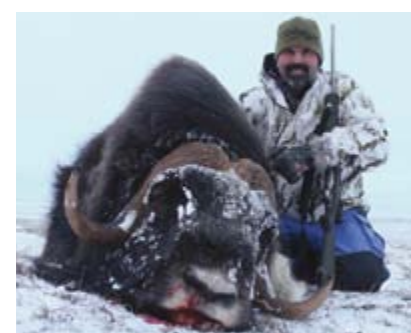
stoegerindustries.com  
Contributing Editor Paul Atkins stated, "This solidly constructed M3000 shotgun will more than fulfill your hunting needs. It's the perfect choice for waterfowl in Alaska, plus grouse and ptarmigan. For reliability and performance, no other semi-auto in its price range compares to the rugged, practical M3000. My good friend and hunting partner, Lew Pagel, uses this shotgun on all bird hunts. It's reliable even in the toughest conditions and priced right!"

### Savage 110 Wolverine Rifle

savagearms.com  
Chambered for the straight-walled 450 Bushmaster cartridge, the Savage 110 Wolverine offers both precision and power for big game like Alaska's bears. Its AccuFit system lets you easily tailor the length-of-pull and comb height for a perfect fit, while the user-adjustable AccuTrigger offers a crisp, clean pull. Together with the AccuStock, which secures the action three-dimensionally along its entire length, the 110 Wolverine provides the fit and function of a custom rifle—right out of the box. It features a Magpul AICS magazine, as well as an 18-inch carbon-steel heavy barrel with a ported muzzle brake and 11/16-24 threading. A one-piece, 0-MOA rail mounted on the receiver makes it easy to set up the rifle to your unique needs.

### Blaser F16 Game Gun O/U Shotgun

blaser-usa.com  
Contributing Editor Steve Meyer offered input on firearms worthy of an Editors' Choice Award. He shared, "When Christine insisted I try her Blaser F16 Intuition on clays she said: "Shoot it until you miss." After breaking 30, she took it back, shaking her head. When she offered it up in the field, hunting wild birds, the result was the same. The F16 Game Gun, in whatever version you choose, presents the classic O/U look with innovative design features too numerous to mention here. After carrying and shooting it in the field for a couple of seasons, I'll say it is to the modern shooter what Browning's Superposed was to the wingshooter in 1931. I cannot imagine a better endorsement."



### Nosler Trophy Grade Long Range Ammunition

nosler.com  
Contributing Editor Paul Atkins rifle hunts more than most and each year he relies on what his rifle can and cannot do. Since switching to Nosler ammo, he started to see the difference in his groups and the knockdown power that he gets from using Nosler ammunition. The ammunition's consistency and precision give him confidence no matter what species he is hunting.



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## Apparel

### Kryptek Bora Jacket and Pant, Altitude

kryptek.com

This is a superior hunting jacket and pant for the active hunter, and for our team, as we spot and stalk game across the Greatland. This set is very comfortable, quiet, and technically advanced. The material is windproof and water resistant, and incorporates schoeller's revolutionary fabric technology c-change. When you are actively on the stalk and generating body heat and moisture, the membrane in the fabric opens to allow both heat and moisture to escape. When you sit still and glass, or wait for an animal to emerge, then the fabric contracts and traps in your body heat. This is an incredible solution to a problem we often encounter in Alaska: getting warm and sweaty while moving and then getting cold when you sit still. Kryptek makes incredibly good products for Alaskan hunters. Contributing Editor and float-hunt expert Larry Bartlett shared, "The Altitude Bora soft shell system is the perfect combination of technology meets durability. Schoeller c-change nylon fabrics create a windproof, water-resistant, and breathable system that goes on every extreme hunt I pursue! The camo pattern has proven itself effective for concealment and versatility in any vegetative environment."



### Carhartt Stormy Woods Camo Jacket

carhartt.com

This breathable jacket is super-light, waterproof, and highly packable, which make it well suited for spot-and-stalk hunting in the Greatland. We stayed dry in moderately rainy conditions and liked that the jacket is quiet. It's cut large, so your normal sizing will give you adequate room underneath for layering. It features fully-taped waterproof seams, a full-length waterproof zipper, adjustable hood, and both the chest and front pockets have water-resistant zippers.



### Marmot Featherless Hybrid Jacket

marmot.com

The jacket sports 3M Thinsulate Featherless Insulation which is an alternative to down. It works when wet and has the warmth of 700 fill power down. It's very lightweight and not bulky. This is a great packable layer. It works perfectly as a layer under your rain jacket. Our tester wore this a lot in 2018 and it was one of his favorite items.



### Marmot Eclipse Pant

marmot.com

These pants are truly hydrophobic and kept our tester dry in some nasty weather in 2018. They are comfortable as well, and breathable, which came in handy on several long hikes. We like the ¾-length side zippers for venting heat and making it super easy to put on the pants while wearing boots. The pants are 100% seam-taped, and feature an elastic waist with snap closure and adjustable belt.



### Sitka Kodiak Jacket

sitkagear.com

The Kodiak jacket by Sitka is a very good rain jacket. After a rough season of use it still looks and performs like new. The additional length is fantastic for shedding heavy rain and snow and is great for added wind protection too. If you don't need the full length, just tuck it up and snap it in to wear it as a normal length jacket. Our tester even used it as a makeshift sleeping bag when he spent the night with the moose he shot in September. If you are looking for a piece of rain gear that will handle anything Alaska can dish out, this is it. It's available in sub-alpine or open-country patterns to suit the terrain you're hunting.

### Sitka Gear Women's Cloudburst Jacket and Pant

sitkagear.com

This high performance rain suit by Sitka Gear is the answer to rain protection for women hunters in Alaska. It is totally waterproof and breathable and packs away well. It's an essential choice for women spending time outside and worth the investment. We are pleased with the fit and mobility of this suit as well.



### Slumberjack Arctic Cloak

slumberjack.com

Tired of freezing while you're sitting on a stand or glassing for hours on end? This just might be what the doctor ordered. It's more or less a sleeping bag that you can wear. With an open bottom and arm holes, getting in and out of it is a snap and staying warm is a given. It is available in several camo patterns to suit the conditions you're hunting and it is fairly weatherproof. We've used it on several cold-weather predator hunts and put it to use on some LONG sits for spring bear in a ground blind and stayed toasty warm the entire time. The magnetic closures on the arm slots let you seal in as much heat as possible but still quickly and quietly get to your firearm or bow when the moment arises. This is a great option for anyone who struggles to stay warm in the outdoors.



### WingWorks Game Vest

wingworks.biz

Contributing Editor Jim McCann spends a large amount of time in the field hunting upland birds. He had this to say: "I've collected more than a few different upland hunting game vests as I searched for the perfect vest to contain my shotshells, extra gear, and any gamebirds I was fortunate enough to shoot. About ten years ago my search ended when I purchased my first WingWorks strap vest. With comfortable shoulder straps and waist belt, the vest is adjustable for wearing over different clothing layers, and it distributes the weight



nicely. Two bottles of water for my dogs are carried in pockets on each side of the vest. A roomy game pocket allows me to carry several birds comfortably."

### Sitka Timberline Pant

sitkagear.com

Contributing Editor John Whipple shared the following, "There is a lot of high-tech clothing available in the hunting space these days from big brands that demand big prices, and frankly, in many cases I feel that the extra cost is just not warranted. Often you can find an alternative piece of gear that may not be name brand, but that does as good a job, or better. A glaring exception to this is the Timberline Pant from Sitka Gear. At \$229, they are anything but cheap, but I will gladly pay this price any time for these pants. They are worth it. They are the best hunting pant I have ever worn. These pants show thought in every detail. There is nothing unnecessary or flashy about them. Every feature is functional, from the water-resistant, quick-drying, stretchy fabric, to the reinforced waterproof knees and seat, to the flat-taped silent zippers and silent snaps, to the built-in suspenders (a life saver when wearing a pack with a hip belt). These are the closest thing I have found to a perfect hunting pant yet."



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# QuickLock Holsters



## QLH Kydex Chest Holster

www.QuickLockHolsters.com

- Built-in elastic band—unsurpassed comfort without sacrificing a secure fit and tight draw.
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quicklockholsters@gmail.com

## Field Accessories

### Garmin inReach Mini

garmin.com

We used this device to send emails while off the grid. It worked well. It's light and compact, but packed full of features. It provides 100% global Iridium network two-way messaging and interactive SOS plus basic navigation. Online location tracking using the Earthmate app helps people keep track of your whereabouts, and weather forecasts help you know what to expect. This is a handy device, and another means of staying connected and safe while in remote locations.



### QuickLock QLH Chest Holster

quicklockholsters.com

Safety while in the vast expanses of the backcountry holds lifesaving value to many hunters when dangerous game is present. Such is the case with the QLH Chest Holster from QuickLock Holsters. Form fit, lightweight, and paired with a .44 mag that was carried over the course of a 2018 moose hunt above the Arctic Circle, the QuickLock was secure and comfortable. It is easy to slip on and buckle in while packing not just daily gear, but also when packing moose quarters. In addition, the feeling of safety that at any second, the pistol could be easily drawn for protection from brown bears or other dangerous game gives the holster high marks. While hiking and stalking, our tester found the holster tucked snug against the chest at all times. The adjustable straps appropriately adjusted with little effort, leaving no rub marks on clothing or person and while often overlooked, removal of the holster was just as simple after a hard day. After testing many such sidearm devices on dozens of backcountry hunts, our tester stated that the QLH mold-formed chest holster should become an essential part of a hunter's gear bag.



### MaxxDry Boot Dry

maxxdry.com

This boot dryer uses air warmed to 105° and thermal convection to dry boots, shoes, and gloves. The machine operates silently using 30 watts and has no moving parts. It's got a drip tray to catch excess water and muck. It can dry boots up to 16 inches tall. We have several boot dryers from MaxxDry and in a household of four boys, they are in use most of the winter.

### Spyderco Cara Cara 2

spyderco.com

This everyday carry is light, sleek, and sharp. It features an ambidextrous one-hand opening, lanyard hole, and pocket clip. The lightweight, value-packed knife has been reengineered and includes upgrades like a full-flat-ground blade, for better edge geometry and cutting performance as well as an FRN handle for increased grip. We like that it's light, sharp, comfortable, and is really well priced.



### Black Diamond Carbon Whippet

blackdiamondequipment.com

Although it was designed as a self-arrest ski pole, the carbon whippet takes trekking poles to the next level for serious mountain hunters. The self-arrest feature came in handy several times while traversing nasty sheep country and the carbon fiber sections make this pole light enough for even the most weight-conscious hunters. Although not intended to be used as an ice pick or a climbing aid, our tester caught himself using it more and more to reach up and steady himself on a few gnarly climbs in the rocks. This is one piece of gear he won't go without in the high country from now on.

### Coast FL60R Rechargeable Headlamp

coastportland.com

This rechargeable LED headlamp is super light and easy to wear; it's a 450-lumen headlamp with a wide-angle flood beam in a 2.8-ounce package. The rechargeable lithium-ion battery will run for about two hours on high and 10 hours on low. The lamp can also run on three AAA batteries. It's got three output options: low, medium, and high. At high, a user can see out to 100 feet. It comes in four color options.



### Bait Em 907 Bear Attractants

baitem907.com

Our tester shared, I was using a handful of different commercial products along with dog food and getting, what I thought, were okay results. Then I got my hands on some stuff from Bait Em 907. While their list of is too long to list here, there are two products that I would highly recommend every bear hunter in the state adds to their bag of tricks: Bruins Brunt ground cover and Attitude Adjustment burn formula. After I applied the cherry-scented Bruins Brunt the increase in activity at the bait site was unreal. The number of bears and frequency of their visits tripled. The burn formula (I used the blueberry and honey scents) pulled in multiple bears and was far easier to use and longer lasting than real honey. It pulled in several bears on the first burn; unfortunately, when the big guy I was after showed up and finally offered me a shot, I clipped a small branch I had missed with the machete and he got away unscathed. Bait Em 907 offers a wide variety of bear attractants that will make your bait station more productive than it has ever been."



### Bait Em 907 Moose Lures

baitem907.com

This is another top-notch product from Bait Em 907. We used the bull urine gel and spray to make a fake rut wallow about ¼-mile from spike camp and hung a trail camera on it. One day later a decent bull and a couple cows arrived, and the site was visited several more times over the course of our two weeks afield. Our tester gave a friend of his the remaining supply of cow urine gel and spray that he wound up using in a rut wallow he had started. After having several sub-legal bulls in bow range, he finally got a shot at a 58-inch bull on the final day of season. He was standing in the wallow with his nose on the bag of urine gel when the arrow was turned loose!

This stuff works, period. Use it at the right time of the season in a travel route and the moose are going to check it out if they smell it. If you're moose hunting during the rut, don't leave camp without it."



### Work Sharp Pocket Knife Sharpener

worksharptools.com

This handy little sharpener was priceless on a moose harvest last fall. It quickly touched up our blades multiple times throughout the long night of butchering. It's lightweight, compact, and perfect for tossing in your backpack to keep an edge on your knife after a successful hunt. With a coarse diamond side to quickly restore an edge, a fine ceramic side to polish it up, and the angle guide that makes it virtually foolproof, this sharpener has earned a permanent spot in our pack for years to come.



### Plano Waterproof Case Plano Waterproof Case

planomolding.com

We tested model 145000, which has external dimensions of 9 inches long by 4.875 inches wide by 3 inches tall. It sports a Dri-Loc O-ring seal combined with a strong polycarbonate case to provide waterproof and crushproof protection. We used it to store our phone, wallet, license, and keys, and it works perfectly.



### Red Mountain Gear Vari-Leg Tripod Base

xploreak.com

Hardcore mountain hunters spend hundreds, if not thousands, trying to shave ounces off their gear. Here's a great way to shave off a few pounds. The design of the tripod base allows you to use trekking poles, tent poles, or whatever else is handy for tripod legs. It comes with three lightweight aluminum legs that are rock solid, but a bit short for some applications. The base had zero issues solidly supporting spotting scopes with 80mm objective lenses. The amount of weight and bulk this little piece of gear shaves off your pack is well worth the performance trade-off of a full-size tripod and pan head. It took a little time to get used to using the VLT, but now that we have, our tester stated that if you pack a spotting scope anywhere off the beaten path, this is a must-have piece of gear produced right here in Palmer, AK.

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## Field Accessories

**Bushnell Trophy Cam HD**  
bushnell.com  
With a host of features and settings to suit just about any situation, this camera is about as



versatile and reliable as they come. The picture and video quality are both outstanding and the battery life is second to none. We ran this camera at a fairly active bear bait for a few months and then shipped it to Washington to set up on a feeder for deer; the camera is still using the first set of lithium batteries. The blackout flash keeps bears from picking up on the camera's presence during low light and nighttime situations, which really helps reduce damage or loss. We mounted this one about six feet high looking down at the bait and not a single bear took notice of it. If you want a reliable, full-feature trail camera that won't break the bank, look no further.

### Ultimate Predator Stalker Decoy (Moose with Antler Attachment)

ultimatepredatorgear.com  
The decoy easily attaches to your bow via a couple of velcro strips and can be attached or removed in a matter of seconds. Use it as a seductive cow moose or get that old bull riled up at the sight of a smaller intruder. Our tester stated, "I spent a fair amount of time practicing with the decoy attached to my bow and it had no effect on my accuracy unless I

was shooting in the wind. If it is windy you can use the loop at the top to hang it in a tree or a buddy can hold it by hand. The decoy and antlers pack down tightly and add minimal weight. I even used it as a ground cloth when we spent the night out away from camp. This decoy is a great trick to have up your sleeve to pull that big old bull moose those last few precious yards for that perfect shot."



### Coleman BatteryGuard 425M Flashlight

coleman.com  
This flashlight will provide three hours of 625 lumens reaching 425 meters (465 yards) on high and 200 hours of 20 lumens reaching 50 meters (55 yards) on low. It sports BatteryGuard which provides 25% more battery life. The outer casing is tough and waterproof.



### Mountainsmith Halite 7075 Trekking Poles

mountainsmith.com  
These are well-made, collapsible trekking poles that break down to 16 inches and can fit right in your pack. Our tester appreciated the quality grips and hand straps, as well as the locking mechanism that kept these sticks sturdy on rough terrain. They come with a hiking basket, replaceable rubber boot tips, and a carbide tip.



### Stealth Cam DS4K

stealthcam.com  
Associate Editor Scott Haugen put the Stealth Cam DS4K to good use in 2018. He had this to say, "One of the tools I depend on year-round is a trail camera. I have quite a few units, and am always looking for the best, especially when it comes to video quality. I learn far more about animals, animal behavior and animal movement through video than I do still photos, and this is where the Stealth Cam DS4K instantly caught my attention. The quality of both day and nighttime video this camera captures is flawless. It's the world's first 4K digital trail camera, and the NoGlo infrared flash range is 100 feet. The fast trigger speed means you'll not miss capturing high-quality still shots, either. I've had great success with the DS4K for tracking deer, elk, bears, turkeys, waterfowl, small game, and a range of predators."



## Optics



### Nightforce NX8 1-8x24 F1 Rifle scope

nightforce.com  
We like how this low-profile scope can be used in a variety of situations. With a smaller objective lens, the field of view is larger at close distances. And with a magnification range of 1 to 8, hunters can sight in animals easily at close range and also have the ability to reach out and get the crosshairs on big game hundreds of yards away. It's a good combination to use in places where heavy growth inhibits sight lines and in places where you might bump into a moose or bear at close range. We also like that it is compact and light, coming in at 8.75 inches and just over a pound. Like all Nightforce products, it's as tough as they come.

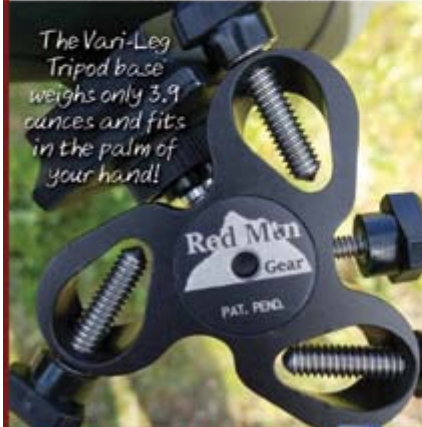


## Red Mtn Gear

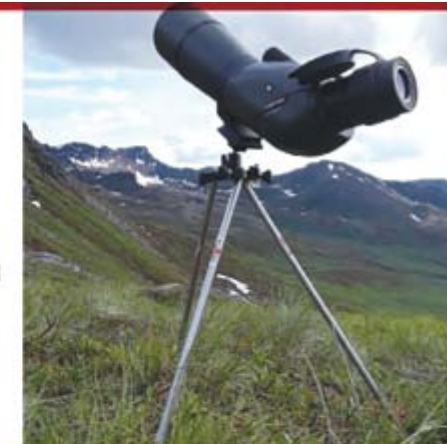
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### Trijicon MRO

trijicon.com  
"If you're a predator hunter looking to build a close-range rifle or shotgun setup, another versatile scope option is Trijicon's MRO, which stands for Miniature Rifle Optic," shared Scott Haugen. "The MRO is a red-dot sight that's rugged, lightweight, and waterproof. There's virtually no tunnel vision commonly seen with other red-dot sights, thanks to a shortened optical length. Mounting the MRO is simple; treat it just as you would a riflescope, including the bore sighting and actual sighting-in process. What I love about the MRO is its infinite eye relief, which makes it easy to quickly acquire game that's moving off to the side, or at unexpected angles to your shooting position. The MRO has eight brightness settings and the 2032 battery offers five years of continuous use. The bright, 2-MOA dot is crisp and the ideal size to optimize target acquisition, and it's also parallax free."

### Vortex Diamondback 3-9x40 Riflescope

vortexoptics.com  
Contributing Editor Bjorn Dihle shared this, "I used this scope on my .338 in 2018 and was impressed. It was the easiest scope I've ever sighted in and didn't move during the entire season of grizzly-country wanderers and deer, moose, and goat hunts. Don't be skeptical because of its affordable price. This is a great scope."



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## Optics

### Vortex HD LH 3-15x42 Razor Light Hunter (LH) Rifle Scope

vortexoptics.com

Contributing Editor Casey Dinkel had this to say, "In the past six years I have utilized Vortex Optics on over twenty fly-in hunts throughout Alaska. They have withstood everything Alaska and I could throw at them and more. The 3-15x42 Razor HD LH is no exception to that rule. Currently mounted on a Kimber Mountain

Ascent chambered in .300 Win Mag, the 3-15 Razor provides the option of an ultralight optic without sacrificing lens quality. The Razor boasts some of the best glass that money can buy at an affordable price. Additionally, its 3-15 magnification range works well for up close situations when hunting brown bears or zooming in for a longer-range shots on a Dall sheep or mountain goats. The Razor's simplistic parallax adjustment has also come in handy when shots past 300 yards are necessary. Last but not least, this scope will also accept a custom dial turret for any hand-loading long-range shooters, like myself. Everything about this optic is built specifically for the big-game hunter. If you're looking for a lightweight, bulletproof, crystal-clear optic that won't break your wallet, I would recommend taking a hard gander at the Vortex Razor HD LH 3-15x42 rifle scope."



### Leupold VX-Freedom 3-9x40 CDS Rifle Scope

leupold.com

Associate Editor Scott Haugen shared, "I recently put this scope, with a duplex crosshair, on my wife's .260 custom Nosler rifle, which was shooting 125-grain Nosler Partitions. We gave the folks at Leupold our specific ballistics and what yardage the rifle was zeroed in at, and they made us a custom dial turret. The custom dial, dubbed the CDS (Custom Dial System), is installed in the top turret position once the rifle is sighted in. The CDS eliminates the need for holdover, as it's a turret that's marked with specific distances out to a maximum yardage. Simply sight the rifle in as usual, replace the top turret with the custom dial, and you're ready to shoot. It worked perfectly, as my wife made a clean, one-shot kill the first time out, on a blacktail deer. The VX-Freedom 3-9x40 CDS scope is not only the hottest scope in the hunting world right now, it's one of the most affordable, high-quality scopes in the industry."



### Bushnell Elite 20-60x80mm ED 45 angled Spotting Scope

bushnell.com

This is a full-size spotter that performs well above its price point. The ED glass makes for crystal-clear viewing across the entire zoom range and the angled eyepiece is comfortable for long days glassing the countryside. We spent hours evaluating bears on distant hillsides and we were seriously impressed with how this spotting scope performed. One feature we came to appreciate was the long focus knob that made it easy to operate with gloved hands and provided precise control. The Elite comes with a built-in sunshade to knock down annoying glare and heat waves. Anyone looking for a quality spotter that won't break the bank should take a serious look at the Elite.



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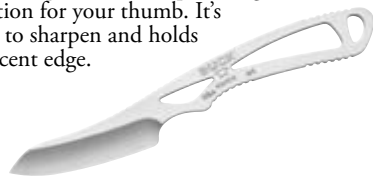
### Spyderco Shaman Plainedge

spyderco.com  
This is one awesome knife. Super burly, we used it to split open two dozen little-neck clams one day; yet precise and sharp, as needed on another day when one particularly nasty splinter needed attention. Later in the year we used it to do a delicate caping job on a deer. The knife is big, which adds heft and fits well in our tester's large hands yet is well-balanced so it performs exceptionally well. Since it's a folder, the knife is compact and can be carried on any adventure. It's made from CPM S30V stainless steel showcasing a full flat grind. The handle features contoured, matte-finish G-10 scales that lock into the hand. The stonewashed, four-position pocket clip provides left- or right-side, tip-up or tip-down carry. This is one of our everyday carries.



### Buck 135 Paklite Caper

buckknives.com  
This is a good knife to use to process small game and as a caping knife for detail work on big game, especially on hunts where weight is a concern. The handle is skeletonized to remove weight, yet the handle and blade are strong, made from 420HC stainless steel. The handle fits nicely in the hand and the grooves on the top of the knife provide good traction for your thumb. It's easy to sharpen and holds a decent edge.



### T.A.G. Bags

pristineventures.com  
The first thing that struck us about these bags was how compact and lightweight they were...our tester actually had to open up the storage sack and make sure there really were six full-size bags in there! Other than a bit of trim meat, we fit all of a moose into the six bags and hung it for several days waiting to be flown out. The fabric is as tough and breathable as it is lightweight. There were no issues getting the meat chilled the first night and keeping the bugs off when temperatures climbed in the mid-day hours. Pristine Ventures makes these bags in a few sizes so you can mix and match them to suit your needs for each hunt. We highly recommend that you pick up a set of these for your next hunting adventure.



### Diamondblade Pro Series Summit (293FG)

diamondbladeknives.com  
This is a high-end knife made with the patented "Friction Forging" process recently featured on the Science Channel's TV show *How It's Made*. The extreme forces used in this forging process produces a cutting edge from the D2 steel that is significantly sharper, tougher, and has been proven to hold a shaving-sharp edge longer than any other knife. This allows a hunter to easily break down an animal without having to change knives or re-sharpen the edge halfway through the job. We tested the Suregrip rubberized handle and found it comfortable and easy to grip when your hands are wet and slippery. Our tester commented that his bottom three fingers fit nicely on the ergonomic handle, while the index finger fits in the finger choil and thumb rests on the thumb ramp. The classic drop-point design has a blade length of 3.75" and weighs 4 ounces. It comes with a lifetime warranty and a molded Kydex sheath.



### Caribou Gear Moose Magnum Pack

biggamebags.com  
Everything you need to properly bag and tag a moose is in this pack, including zip ties and tags for labeling the contents of each bag. The quarter bags are large enough to handle the biggest moose quarters with the bone in. The pack comes in a handy storage sack and includes eight bags altogether: four quarter bags, one cape bag, one rib bag, one trim-meat bag, and one camp-meat bag. Also included are a pair of nitrile gloves and a plastic bag that can be used for a variety of things. The reflective tabs make locating them in the dark a breeze and the drawstring cinches up tight to keep bugs out. The material is lightweight and breathable but impermeable to flies and other bugs that could otherwise contaminate the meat. Best of all, they are reusable and will last for years with proper care. Once we got home, we just gave them a good cold-water soak and washed them in the washing machine. They came out looking brand new and ready for another hunt! The Magnum packs are available in species-specific sizes.



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## Packs and Cases



### Stone Glacier Sky Guide 7900 Expedition Backpack

stoneglacier.com

Contributing Editor Bjorn Dihle offered the following, "There's a lot of hype surrounding Stone Glacier's packs. After using the Sky Guide for a few late-season hunts I understood why. Ultralight and built tough, this will be my new hunting and expedition pack. I work gear hard—for a while I'd destroy an expedition backpack every year—but I'm convinced Stone Glacier's Sky Guide will accompany me on adventures across Alaska for years to come."



### Rokman Gear Extreme Combo - Pack System

rokmangear.com

Our tester was pretty pumped after using this system, "I'll just come right out and say it...this is hands down, the best pack system on

the market, bar none. The guys at Rokman gear killed it when they came up with the Extreme Combo Pack. It is waterproof, durable, extraordinarily versatile, and most importantly, it is comfortable. I've owned or used virtually every top-end brand of pack on the market, and there are plenty of great packs to be had, but if you are looking to buy one system that will cover you on everything from a fly-in, float-out moose hunt to a strenuous high-country sheep or goat hunt, this is the answer. I even use the 2500 and bino harness for fly fishing. A rigid external frame is virtually a must when handling heavy moose quarters and the carbon frame handled them with ease. One of my favorite features is the built-in field/camp seat. When you're a couple-hundred miles from nowhere, those little creature comforts are worth their weight in gold and having a dry seat with back support for long day of glassing and comfortable spot to kick back by the fire at night is priceless. The bino harness can either be used on its own or can clip right into the Core-Flex Harness."



### Sitka Mountain Hauler 6200 Pack

sitkagear.com

Sitka hit a home run with this pack. When first taking it out of the packaging it seemed to be a bit technical, but after getting it opened up and messing around with it a little bit it was obvious how much thought went into designing and building this pack. It is as comfortable as any pack on the market and getting it adjusted to fit your torso is a cinch. The main compartment expands from 4000 to 5000 cubic inches when needed. The detachable lid and the center-zip rear pouch make organizing and accessing your gear a snap. When it's time to haul your trophy off the

mountain, all the critical components for hauling meat and attaching antlers are colored in Sitka orange, making it easy to load the meat inside the pack and get the antlers securely attached for the trek out. The internal sling keeps the meat close to your center of gravity and separates the lower compartment where you can store your gear in Sitka's dry bag to keep it clean on the hike out. The waistband allows for the attachment of a hip pouch, holster, or bear spray. With all the packs on the market, this one is right there at the top and is a great choice for anyone looking for a backcountry pack for Alaska.

### Watershed Animas Backpack

drybags.com

We became interested in Watershed dry bags after reading a blog written for *Hunt Alaska* by our trusted friend Larry Bartlett. Since Larry is a float-hunting and float-fishing expert, it stands to reason he knows what makes a good dry bag. We love this Animas Backpack. It's completely waterproof and has an excellent backpack-strapping system that can be removed. Their most popular pack, the Animas, has space for a couple days' worth of gear.

We were even able to stuff the Pelican case containing our DSLR camera and spare lenses in the Watershed Animas Backpack.



### Slumberjack Deadfall 65 Pack

slumberjack.com

We found this pack to be comfortable to wear on the back, shoulders, hips, and waist. It's also versatile due to the adjustable carry system that expands to accommodate large loads. We crammed an entire quartered deer into the pack and hauled it out of the woods. On other excursions, we packed light and cinched down the straps to reduce the pack size. There are tons of pockets for storage, with an emphasis on pockets to hold optics, and a carry system that accommodates both bow and rifle. The internal storage capacity of the pack is just shy of 4000 cubic inches.



### Sagebrush Dry Gear Waterproof Gun Case

sagebrushdry.com

We used this case to keep both rifles and shotguns dry in the field during 2018 and it worked well. The case features a removable padded liner, haul handle, shoulder strap, urethane-coated waterproof fabric, and beefy waterproof zipper. Color options include green, blue, and black. This is the third item we have tested from this company and are very impressed with their durability and truly waterproof performance.



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## Archery

### Hoyt REDWRX RX-1

hoyt.com

Our tester stated, "Over the years I've shot and owned my fair share of bows but I think my search for the perfect hunting setup has ended. The RX-1 has it all. While the list of technologies put into this bow is lengthy, all you really need to know is that it is smooth, quiet, fast, and built with Hoyt's legendary toughness. I had it shooting bullet holes through paper after making one small adjustment after the initial setup. The 32-inch axle-to-axle length is perfect for archers like me who like a shorter bow for easier handling in tight situations but like the stability and accuracy of a longer axle-to-axle. At my 30-inch draw length I am launching a 585-grain arrow at 295 fps, more than enough KE and momentum for any critter in Alaska, or any other part of the world when tipped with the right broadhead. New bows come and go every year, but I plan on hunting with this one for a long time."



### Easton Deep-Six 4 mm FMJ Injexion Arrows

eastonhunting.com

Easton FMJ arrows have been a long-time favorite of many bow

hunters. The Deep-Six FMJ's take performance one step further. These micro-diameter shafts fly true and deliver outstanding on-game results. The aluminum outer makes removal from targets easier than any other shaft on the market and it also makes them silent when drawn across a fleece-covered rest, a major plus when trying to draw on wary critters. The one thing that sets these shafts apart from others is weight. The 280 shafts we shot weighed in at 12 gpi...as much as 5 grains per inch heavier than other micro-diameter shafts. This added weight equates to better penetration, less wind drift, and better down-range energy. They come with Easton's proprietary Deep-Six inserts that require the use of Deep-Six specific heads, or you can use Easton's titanium half outserts and shoot any standard broadhead on the market.



### Sevr Broadheads

sevrbroadheads.com

Expandable broadheads aren't necessarily the best option for all types of game in Alaska, but they do have their place. If you liked the old Ulmer Edge, you're going to love the new Sevr heads. With a properly tuned setup these things will fly exactly like your field points. Our tester

shot them out to 80 yards and there was no difference in accuracy or point of impact from his field points. The titanium ferrule and blade-locking feature make these heads both tough and dependable. Our favorite feature was the practice locking system that allows you to lock the blades in the closed position and shoot the same heads you're going to hunt with without dulling the blades. With a 2.1-inch cutting diameter, their on-game performance is devastating.

### Easton Titanium Half Outserts

eastonhunting.com

Like the idea of shooting the ultra-slim FMJ's or Injexions from Easton but don't want to give up your favorite broadhead for the limited selection in the Deep-Six line up? Well here is your answer. These half outserts will allow you to use any standard broadhead on the Deep-Six arrow line up. We topped off a half-dozen FMJ's and put them to the test. Every single one of them spun absolutely perfect, just make sure you or your pro shop guy squares the end of the shaft before installing the outserts.



### Valkyrie Archery Jagger Broadheads

valkyriearchery.com

The broadhead category is filled with gimmicks and hype, but it is tough to beat a well-made, three-blade head, and the Jagger heads take performance to a whole new level. No gimmicks, just a rock-solid head that performs like it is supposed to. Designed as a proprietary system to be used with Valkyrie's aluminum or stainless-steel centerpin sleeves and Valkyrie Reign shafts, the Jagger broadheads deliver outstanding on-game performance, pinpoint accuracy, and come with a zero-failure-on-game guarantee. We shot the 200-grain Ti series head with a stainless centerpin sleeve. That combination gave our tester 20% FOC and he experienced no shift in the point of impact from previous arrows. He had no problem shooting sub-AMOAs groups out to 80 yards—the furthest he could shoot on his home range—with both the broadheads and Valkyrie target points. Valkyrie's centerpin system provides precise shaft-to-point alignment, superior strength and durability, and the fine threads and O-ring keep the points from rattling loose. If you're an Alaskan bowhunter, there is no better broadhead on the market.



### BowTech Realm SS and Realm SR6 Bows

bowtecharchery.com

Contributing Editor Paul Atkins had this to say, "I'm a serious bow hunter, whether it be here in the great state of Alaska or elsewhere. The bow I use must not only be accurate, fast, and quiet, it also must handle the rigors of hunting throughout most of the year. This year's bow lineup offered by BowTech Archery, specifically the Realm SS and Realm SR6 meet those needs—Smart technology for smart bowhunters."

### Valkyrie Archery Reign Shafts

valkyriearchery.com

Valkyrie Archery strikes again with the Reign shafts. Boasting a straightness of +/- .001", the quality is undeniable. There is nothing fancy or gimmicky about these things, no unnecessary graphics, no shiny finish, just an ultra-straight shaft made for hunting. The 100% hi-modulus carbon shafts provide incredible stiffness-to-weight ratios that allow hunters to maximize the weight-forward potential of their arrows without increasing overall finished weights and sacrificing trajectory. The Promax vanes and turbulator tape work together to offer maximum stabilization in a small package that reduces drag on passthrough shots. The quality and on-game performance of the Valkyrie system in unmatched.



### Buzzkill Silencers

buzzkillsilencers.com

Want to add a custom touch to your bow and make it as quiet as it can be at the same time? Then check out the options offered by Buzzkill. You can custom order a variety of styles in an endless combination of up to four different colors. With all the advances in archery in recent years, it can be tough to find a product that actually makes your setup noticeably quieter, but these limb dampeners definitely make a difference. We shot them on several different brands of bows and everyone raved about the great look and the difference in noise level compared to the factory and other aftermarket dampeners. The material is soft but tough and does not "melt" over time like other brands do. Each set is poured by hand in custom molds to meet customer specifications and takes 2- to 4 weeks for delivery. Pick up a set, you'll be glad you did! Available for both split and solid-limb bows.



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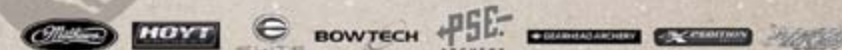
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## Camping

### Hilleberg Niak 2 Person Tent

us.hilleberg.com

We asked Contributing Editor John Whipple about some of his essential gear items and he said, "My number one backpacking tent for solo and two-man trips is hands down the Niak by Hilleberg. You would be hard pressed to find a tent maker that has more attention to detail or a higher standard for quality than Hilleberg, and in my opinion the Niak is the best pick for a lightweight, early-to-mid-season ultra-light tent. It is a no-frills, one-vestibule, two-man tent with a full rain fly and strong but simple two-pole design that keeps the weight to 3 pounds, 12 ounces while still being robust enough to handle Alaska's wind and rain."



### Hilleberg Allak 3

us.hilleberg.com

This new model is strong, light, and versatile. We like that it is freestanding, has two vestibules for gear, and two entrances. We appreciate the 43-inch height of the tent which gives you plenty of head space when sitting. The dome construction is designed to handle a snow load. It is comprised of an inner and outer tent, which can be pitched in tandem or independently. It weighs 8 pounds, 3 ounces, so is a good choice for basecamp or for backcountry trips. The tent provides lots of room for two hunters.



### Alaska Tent and Tarp Arctic Oven 12 with Vestibule

alaskatent.com

This tent is a super choice for a hunting basecamp, family vacation, or expedition. We like the roominess in the main tent with a 7'2" peak and 152 square feet of space. The vestibule adds 46 square feet and provides ample room for gear, and a good place to take off wet footwear. We partnered the tent with the Alaska Deluxe Stove package, footprint, and floor saver. The stove kept the tent toasty warm and the footprint and floor saver protected the floor of the tent both on the bottom and top. It's easy to set up and has many high-wind, tie-out points and stake-out points. This is a great-size tent for four hunters sleeping on cots.



### Camp Chef High Output Single Burner Cooker

campchef.com

This adjustable, high-output, cast-iron burner puts out 60,000 BTUs and is a good choice for cooking for a large group at hunting basecamp. It has reversible legs which makes for more compact transport and storage. It has a 15-inch diameter cooking grate, is made from steel, and weighs 15 pounds. We paired it with Camp Chef's 42-quart aluminum pot and boiled gallons of water quickly.



### Camp Chef Mountain Series 4-piece Cook Set

campchef.com

Made from anodized aluminum, this 4-piece set includes a 3-liter pot, 7½-inch fry pan, a common lid, and carry bag. The heat ring on the pot increases efficiency so you use less fuel. Handles are insulated. This light-weight set was in our packs on several mountain hunts.



### Big Agnes Copper Spur HV UL1 Tent

bigagnes.com

After using this product our field tester contributed, "I've always liked packing a small, lightweight tent for hunting. I don't need a lot of room, just somewhere to sleep and store my gear. The first trip out was on a remote 14-day moose hunt and seeing how this was my first experience with Big Agnes tents I was a bit nervous, but it performed flawlessly. It was over a pound lighter than my previous tent, even after adding additional stakes for anchoring it in the tundra. Setting this tent up was fast and self-explanatory. There is plenty of head and shoulder room to sit up and get ready in mornings and there is enough floor space to store a decent-size pack and a weapon inside. The vestibule provides more than enough additional storage for larger packs or other bulky items. The interior has several mesh pockets to keep small items organized and you can add a gear loft for even more storage space. Everything stayed dry on the extended hunt, even with the condensation and consistent morning frost. This 3-season tent performed well beyond my expectations and will be my go-to tent for many more hunts."

### Jetboil Flash II Stove

jetboil.com

Contributing Editor Larry Bartlett has this to say, "The Jetboil Flash II is my new go-to field stove. I like it because it boils water nearly twice as fast as my MSR gas stoves of the past, and its lightweight, compact features allow me to minimize bulk in my pack, have immediate heat for quick warmth or for boiling water, and the most efficient fuel consumption of any other stove I've tried to date. Lastly, it may be a fluffy extra, but the heat sensor display allows me to combine quick tasks while water boils for dinner. When the "flame" turns from black to yellow at the tip, 212 degrees F is reached, and water is within seconds of boiling."



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## Camping

Stanley French Press

stanley-pm.com  
Our tester uses a French press daily, so this item was sure to be put to the test. Stanley is serving the needs of coffee drinkers by making this durable, trusted, insulated, smooth, coffee-making vessel that requires nothing more than coffee grinds and steaming-hot water to make a good cup of joe. That's a really good way to start the day before heading out on the day's hunt.



MSR Trail Lite Duo Cook Set

mrgear.com  
Weighing in at a mere 21.6 ounces, this 2-person cook set is comprised of a 2-liter aluminum pot with a clear strainer lid, as well as a pair of bowls and cups, made from polypropylene. This is a solid solution for a backpacking trip where our customary diet consists of dehydrated food, pasta, oatmeal, coffee, trail mix, and jerky. We like how the set nests together, the lids on the mugs, and the volume indicators in the mugs that are from 2- to 10 ounces in 2-ounce increments.



Katadyn Hiker Pro Microfilter Water Hydration System

katadyn.com  
Contributing editor Paul Atkins shares, "Water filters come in a variety of shapes and sizes, and I've tried many of them on numerous occasions. But what has worked best for me over the years are those made by Katadyn. They're simple to use, pump water effectively and are 99.99% germ proof even in dirty water. They also fit nicely in your pack, plus they work for both hydration packs and water bottles. The easy-to-use pump is fast and efficient, and will give you good clean water in no time. Get one for your next adventure!"

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## Footwear



### Kenetrek Bridger Ridge High Boots

kenetrek.com

These boots offer superior traction through a grippy, beefy sole. The padding on the collar and tongue make for a super-comfortable fit. We also appreciate the reinforced toe and heel when hiking in rocky terrain. We wore the boots in some wet conditions on several fall trips and they did an admirable job of keeping our tester's feet dry. These make good upland bird hunting shoes.



### Kenetrek Alaska Super Heavyweight Over-The-Calf Sock

kenetrek.com

These merino-wool socks are awesome. They keep your feet warm even when wet, breathe very well, are very comfortable on the feet and lower leg. Our tester hiked many miles using these socks inside Kenetrek Mountain Guide 400 boots and remained blister free. These socks are available in a range of men's and women's sizes.



### Chota Tundra Hippies

chotaoutdoorgear.com

Contributing Editor Troy Buzalsky shared, "While gearing up for an 11-day float trip in remote Alaska chasing rainbows, Dolly Varden, and coho, I brought a pair of Chota Tundra Hippies along for some serious testing. The Tundra Hippies are a lightweight hip wader made with a neoprene stocking foot to accept standard wading boots or shoes. I wore the Hippies from dawn-until-dusk, crawling in and out of the raft, while fishing ankle to mid-thigh water, dragging the raft through shallows and around log jams, setting up and taking down camp, and trekking the tundra while viewing caribou, moose, and bear. The Hippies are 100% comfortable, 100% waterproof, 100% practical, and they are very compact, making them ideal for remote adventures."



### Kenetrek Safari Boots

kenetrek.com

For those that need sure-footedness when pursuing Alaska's game, we strongly recommend these boots. Kenetrek's Django outsoles provide awesome traction; the midsole is comfortable and provides extra padding which we appreciated when hiking out with heavy packs of meat. The 2.5 mm leather uppers have a Cambrelle lining that breathes, wicks, and keeps your feet from overheating when on the stalk. The boots are comfortable to wear and provide an incredible amount of ankle support in a 7-inch tall boot, which we find mission critical when carrying heavy loads.

### Koflach Degre Boots

koflach.com

Contributing Editor John Whipple had this to share: "If I could only have one hunting boot in Alaska, it would be the Koflach Degre plastic mountaineering boot. They have a full plastic outer boot, with an inner removable bootie. Due to this design, they can do things no other boot can do. They are truly 100% waterproof. They are very stiff and strong, providing full protection against rocks and shale, while adding the needed support for hiking in the mountains, where I do most of my hunting. Because there is an inner bootie, they prevent blisters, as the friction is between the bootie and the outer shell, not your foot and the boot. At night, I can remove the booties and put them in my sleeping bag to dry (I sweat a lot and any boot I wear is damp by the end of the day). This means boots that are dry and warm every morning, a feature that is particularly nice on nights that are below freezing. Frozen boots are no fun. They are crampon compatible. They do not require a break-in period. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, you can remove the bootie and wear the shell to ford streams and rivers, then simply wipe out the plastic shell and replace your dry bootie and carry on with your hunt! They are also compatible with the Glacier Sock, a lightweight hip wader that you can put on over the bootie, but inside the plastic shell for a light-weight, convertible, hip wader."



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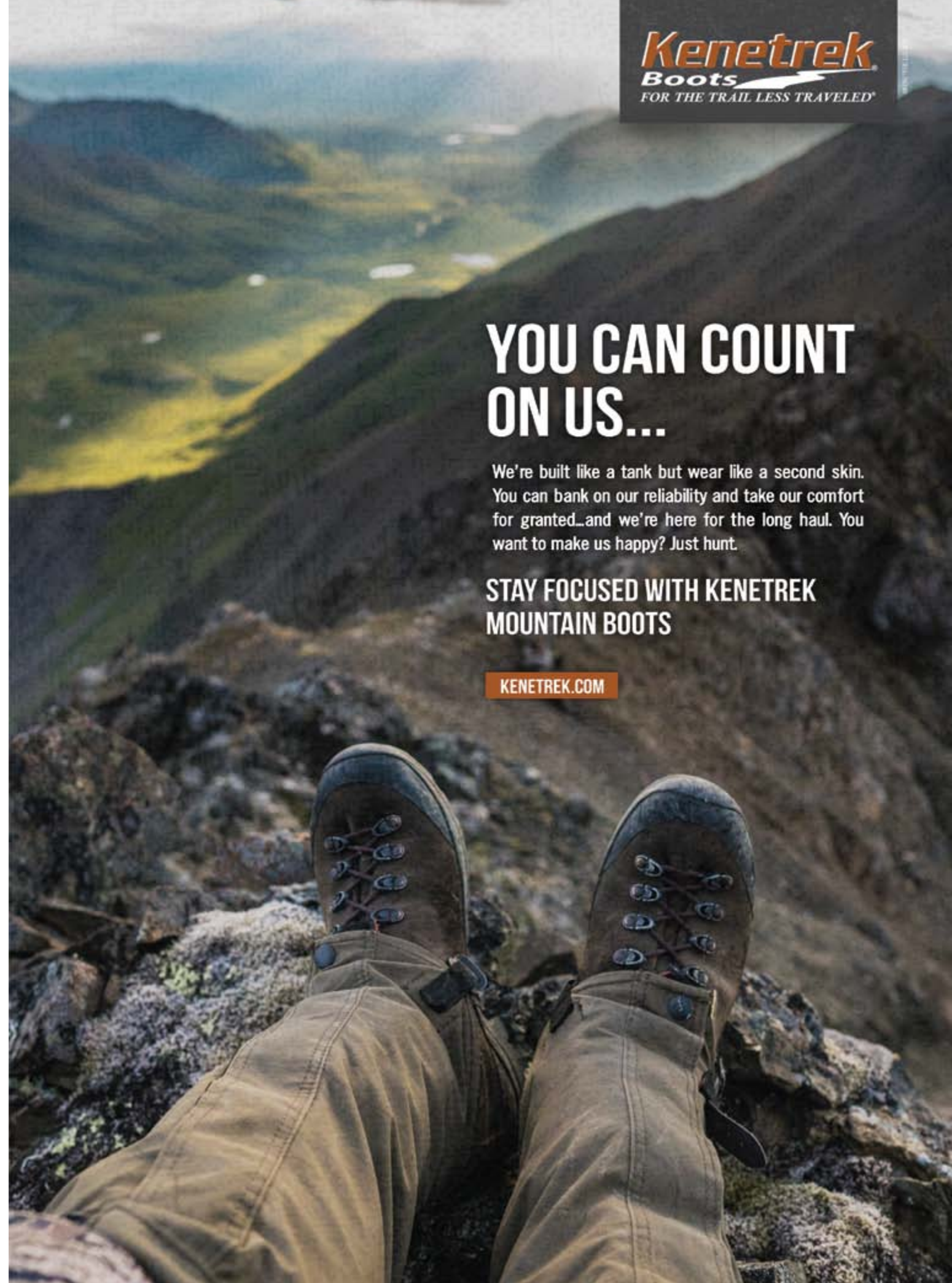
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## Guns & Ammo

Here's a preview of some of the new items that could make your time afield more enjoyable and productive during upcoming 2019 hunts. We cover guns and ammunition, optics, field accessories, game processing and cooking, camping, apparel, and watercraft from some of our most trusted manufacturing partners.

### Black Hills Ammunition Black Hills Gold 6 mm Creedmoor ELD Loads

black-hills.com

Black Hills Ammunition is loading 6 mm Creedmoor, adding more velocity and long-range performance to their precision rifle lineup. Loaded with two accurate, high-ballistic coefficient bullets from their industry partners at Hornady, a 103-grain ELD-X hunting bullet at 2950 fps and a 108-grain ELD-M match bullet at 2900 fps. Both are very accurate whether you're competing or looking for an effective, flat-shooting hunting load.



### MKS Supply Barnaul Ammunition

barnaulammo.com

Starting in 2019, you can purchase authentic Barnaul ammo. It has been available in the past, but packaged for various U.S. brands. With over 70 years of manufacturing experience, Barnaul Ammunition Company offers a broad range of ammunition including handgun and rifle cartridges for sporting, hunting, and self-defense. Current offerings are in polymer-coated steel cases as well as traditional lacquer-coated rounds.



### The Henry Long Ranger

henryusa.com

Available in .223 Rem, .243 Win, .308 Win, and 6.5 Creedmoor, the Henry Long Ranger provides bolt-action performance with the speed of a lever action and stretches the effective distance that limits more traditional lever guns. The geared action drives a chromed-steel bolt with a 6-lug rotary locking head into a rear extension of the barrel for a strong, consistent lockup. The free-floated sporter barrel, checkered American Walnut furniture, and the drilled and tapped receiver make this a fully capable hunting rifle. It's a trim powerhouse that won't weigh you down when packing out on your hunt.



### Federal Premium Shorty Shotgun

federalpremium.com

New Shorty shotshells offer similar patterns, energy, and accuracy as full-size counterparts, yet their 1¾-inch length greatly increases the capacity of standard tube magazine-fed shotguns. Now available in 8 shot, 4 buck and rifled slug loads.



### FGS Customs M1 Guide Gun

falconglobalsupply.com

FGS Customs M1 Guide Gun utilizes the battle proven M1 Garand receiver to give the hunter or guide a reliable and accurate firearm that is perfect for the Alaskan bush. The M1 Guide is offered in hard-hitting calibers such as .338 Federal, .450 Bushmaster, .35 Whelen, 9.3x62mm Mauser as well as traditional .30-06 and .308, with an 18-inch barrel. Other options include hydrodipped stock, Red Dot mount or Picatinny scope base. FGS Customs also offers their clients a full line of custom bolt-action rifles utilizing the action of your choice.



### Federal Premium Barnes Triple-Shock X

federalpremium.com

Federal Premium has brought back the immensely popular Barnes Triple-Shock X. This proven all-copper hollow point groups tightly at

long range and delivers consistent, lethal expansion. The monolithic design retains more than 99% of its weight on impact to penetrate deep, and its grooved shank minimizes barrel fouling and improves accuracy. Available in 18 different loads from .223 Rem to .300 Win. Mag.

## Apparel



### Kryptek Njord Collection

kryptek.com

The Njord collection is designed to be warm, quiet, windproof, and highly water resistant. It is built with Kryptek's specially bonded, brushed tricot with high-pile backer for warmth and stealth. 10/10 lamination keeps the water and wind out. The collection includes jacket, pant and vest. The garments include many pockets and advanced features for comfort, performance, and heat retention.

### XTRATUF Leather Ankle Deck Boot

xtratuf.com

These waterproof, leather boots provide slip resistance and traction on or off the boat. They are tough enough for working on the boat while stylish enough for a run into town. The Leather Ankle Deck Boot will be available this fall.



### Kenetrek Wildland Fire

kenetrek.com

Born out of the same lightweight mountaineering design used for their Mountain Extremes, Kenetrek built their Wildland Fire boots for a singular purpose: To keep firefighters on their feet through brutal conditions without ever having to worry about boot failure. Kenetrek started with their heat and flame-tested K-73 FIRE outsoles, utilizing Kevlar Hot Zone stitching and laces on fire-resistant, 10-inch, full-grain leather uppers that mold to your feet. The result is unmatched lightness, unwavering support, Kenetrek's renowned durability, and all-day comfort. The Kenetrek Wildland Fire has been tested by an independent laboratory and is certified to meet all NFPA 1977 Standard Requirements on Protective Clothing and Equipment for Wildland Fire Fighting 2016 Edition.



## Apparel

### Caddis Zippered Deluxe Plus Breathable Waders

caddiswaders.com

New for 2019, Caddis is releasing several new breathable waders. The Model CA16901W features two zippered pockets, fleece-lined handwarmer pockets, 4 mm neoprene stocking feet, seams that are glued, stitched, and taped, CaddisDry Breathable Technology, and waterproof full-length zipper. It includes a wader belt and repair kit.



### Chota Outdoor Gear HYFT-700 Hybrid High-Top 14 Felt Soled Boot

chotaoutdoorgear.com

This hybrid boot is a wading boot that is as light as a wading sandal. The High Top 14 has a padded ankle collar that provides ankle support and protection. Large micro screen panels on both sides of the uppers allow for instant and complete drainage. The synthetic uppers won't hold water keeping the boots feeling light even on the long days. They feature a reinforced toe and heel area for extra durability and abrasion resistance. The dark gray polypropylene felt sole is bonded to the PU midsole for extra durability. Dual lace hooks make these boots easy to put on and take off while the Chota QuickLace System help provide a secure fit. Our dual insert system allows the boots to be worn with regular socks, stocking foot waders, or wading socks. They are available in men's sizes 8- to 14.



### Muck Boot Company Fieldblazer Classic

muckbootcompany.com

The Fieldblazer Classic is the finest waterproof boot in its class. 100% waterproof, this boot keeps feet dry while out in the field, and the construction of the boot offers the fit and performance hunters have grown to love. Refreshed with a Realtree Edge camouflage pattern and a new Blaze-orange lining package that acts as both a safety and comfort feature. The Fieldblazer Classic will be available this fall.



### Arctic Shield Heat Echo Jacket and Bibs

arcticshieldoutdoor.com

This 100% waterproof, windproof, and breathable hunting apparel is perfect for the active hunter. It's designed and created with Retain Active heat technology for added warmth and the fleece outer shell is quiet—perfect for the stealthy hunter who wants to remain unheard and unseen. The jacket is constructed with a three-piece hood with drawcord adjustment, and full-length front zipper which extends to the hood opening for further weatherproofing. Two large-capacity, zippered chest pockets and two lower pouch-style hand-warmer pockets provide storage. The jacket

features an inner stretch wrist cuff to provide a snug fit to seal in heat and keep cold out. The jacket has an adjustable drawcord bottom hem and extended dovetail rear to keep out wind and rain. The bibs have a two-way zippered fly with snap and storm flap, two zippered hand-warmer pockets, zippered front thigh pockets, thigh-high zippered leg zippers for easy on/off, and an adjustable bottom cuff to protect from wind and rain.



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## Optics



**Vortex Optics Fury HD 5000 10x42 Laser Rangefinding Binocular**  
vortexoptics.com  
High-quality optics and extreme long-distance ranging capability come together in Vortex's all-new Fury HD 5000 10x42 rangefinding binocular. Convenience, speed, efficiency, and valuable dual-purpose functionality are the advantages of this rangefinding binocular. Capable

of ranging reflective targets to an impressive 5000 yards with an improved, lightning-fast readout, hunters and shooters can quickly get distance data needed to effectively execute shots. Distance readings are displayed with .1 increment accuracy out to 999.9 yards/meters for ultimate precision. Calling out ranges for your hunting or shooting partner while reliably watching for impacts is easier with the Fury HD 5000. Critical visual cues are better observed (hit, miss, perfect shot, too far back, last location) and mentally cataloged to aid in decision making after the shot. Illuminated right-barrel display can be set to yards or meters. It features angle-compensated, as well as line-of-sight modes to match user preference and application. Scan mode gives readings as you pan or track a moving animal. The all-new last mode gives the range reading of the object furthest away, but still within the targeted area—ideal for sceneries where the subject you intend to range may have interfering objects in the foreground. Right-side controls are simple to use and easily manipulated with a single hand—leaving your other hand free to hold your bow, rifle or other important piece of equipment. Dialectic, fully multicoated prisms and XR fully multicoated HD lenses serve up impressive views. The rubber-armored housing provides a solid grip in all weather conditions as well as extreme durability. Multi-position twist-up eyecups are comfortable and offer customized eye relief. Smooth center focus wheel and left-eye diopter ensure optimal image focus.

## Skinner Sights Scope Mount with Integral Peep Sight

skinersights.com  
Skinner Sights has developed a scope mount with integral peep for the Marlin 1894 and Henry Big Boy rifles. Models are also available for the Marlin 1895 / 336 and Henry large-frame lever actions. No gunsmithing is required; wrenches and mounting screws are included. These mounts use Talley Quick-Detachable Scope Rings and the scope maintains zero when remounted. The mounts are machined from solid-steel bar stock and carry a lifetime warranty.



## Leupold BX-5 Santiam HD Binocular, 8x42, 10x42, 10x50, and 12x50 models

leupold.com  
The BX-5 Santiam HD line is purpose-built for the relentless hunter who may need to glass for hours on end. Leupold has added 8x42, 10x42, 10x50, and 12x50 models to the BX-5 Santiam HD Binocular Line. The entire BX-5 Santiam HD line features Leupold's Twilight Max HD light management system which combines exceptional light transmission and glare management to provide vivid images and top-of-the-line optical performance in low-light conditions. This allows users to glass longer from predawn hours to well past dusk. A durable, lightweight housing is shrouded in a rubber armor coating that helps protect the binocular and ensure it's easy to grasp. A large, tactile focus dial is easy to use and find, even with gloved hands. A diopter focus paddle is included to allow precise focus, compensating for differences between eyes. Lens coatings shed water, dirt, oil, and fingerprints. A generous eyepiece is ideal for long glassing sessions. BX-5 Santiam HD binocular models will be available in Shadow Gray and Sitka Subalpine finishes.



## Nikon MONARCH M5 Scope

nikonsportoptics.com  
The MONARCH M5 is the all-new patriarch of the Nikon hunting rifle scope family. The MONARCH M5's highly efficient 4x zoom optical system was created specifically to deliver a brighter, sharper, higher-contrast sight picture for the times you vitally need it. MONARCH M5's rugged and robust 30 mm main body tube not only protects the rifle scope's optical system—but also increases its internal adjustment range. This new product also includes the new option for a MK1-MOA reticle for greater adjustment along with their BDC reticle options.

## Archery

### VIKING CenterPin System

valkyriearchery.com  
This innovative system allows archers to connect micro-diameter shafts to broadheads. In the past, that connection was the weakest point and sometimes accounted for bent components and/or broken shafts resulting in wounded and lost game. The revolutionary VIKING CenterPin System eliminates that problem and creates a connection that is far superior, delivering a stronger and more accurate arrow system. Now hunters can maximize the benefits of lightweight micro-diameter arrows without worry of broadhead/component failure on impact with even the largest game. Valkyrie Archery has simply made it better... A lot better!



## Leupold SX-5 Santiam HD 27-55x80mm Spotting Scope

leupold.com  
Designed with the most diehard hunters and shooters in mind, the SX-5 Santiam HD will be available in both a straight and angled model and is built to redefine top-tier spotting scopes. A generous eyepiece means premium edge-to-edge clarity and unmatched sharpness and definition, while fully-multicoated lens coatings eliminate color aberration and distortion throughout the entirety of the magnification range. A rugged, lightweight armor and DiamondCoat 2 and Guard-Ion scratch-resistant and water-shedding lens coatings ensure the SX-5 Santiam HD spotter can handle anything you can throw at it. Its Porro prism construction, ultra-fine center focus wheel, adjustable eyecup, and indexed rotational tripod ring deliver the features that hunters and shooters have been asking for. The SX-5 Santiam HD Spotting Scope features Leupold's Twilight Max HD light management system to allow users to glass longer and combines exceptional light transmission and glare management to provide vivid images and top-of-the-line optical performance in low-light conditions.



## Field Accessories

### Garmin GSPMAP 66st

garmin.com  
Navigate your next outdoor adventure with the GSPMAP 66st. Whether you're hiking, hunting, climbing, geocaching, kayaking, or mountain biking, you can explore more with this premium, rugged handheld with a 3" color display. It features access to BirdsEye Satellite Imagery subscription with direct-to-device downloads to help you find your way plus preloaded TOPO U.S. and Canada maps. And it offers multi-GNSS support as well as wireless connectivity for Active Weather, direct downloads, and Garmin Explore compatibility.



### Man Gear Alaska Holsters

mangearalaska.com  
Man Gear Alaska is proud to produce Made-In-America products, and their line is continuing to expand. Their Gen2-MTU-MOS holsters have a patented design and provide the capability to carry a handgun with a small RMR-style optic, or reflex sight. These holsters are manufactured so that the handgun can be carried with or without the optic. The Gen2-MTU-MOS line of holsters can be purchased in three colors: black, coyote brown, and universal digital camouflage. Their two-mag pouch option was specifically designed for the Glock Model 40 MOS with the 6-inch long slide, but also works just as well with most other shorter-barrel handguns.



### ROKMAN Side Kicks

rokman.com  
ROKMAN Side Kicks were designed with the ultra light-weight pack system in mind. These packs integrate into the existing straps on their Carbon Fiber Pack Frame or the side straps of any ROKMAN pack. The Side Kicks give you the extra space you need while still being lightweight and streamlined.

### Quick Lock Holsters Single and Double Mag Pouches

quicklockholsters.com  
The new Quick Lock Holsters single and double-magazine pouch is universal and able to fit most double stack 9 mm/.40 magazines. The magazine pouch is of ambidextrous design—wearable on the right or left side of the body. The rounds can be turned around to face forward or backward without any adjustments. Both the single and double-magazine pouches have an adjustable retention device for the perfect fit.



### Counter Assault Magnum 290 Bear Spray

counterassault.com  
This is the first bear spray on the market that can reach 40 feet for eight seconds. The 10.2-ounce canister incorporates a trigger with a glow-in-the-dark safety wedge with tie string; the canister won't discharge until you remove the wedge and you can see the wedge at all light levels. This product meets the requirements of the EPA Significant New Alternative Policy (SNAP) of the Clean Air Act relating to ozone-depleting substances.



### Simply Rugged Holsters Chesty Puller Suspension System with the Sourdough Pancake Holster

simplyrugged.com  
Simply Rugged came up with the idea for this product while fishing on the Russian River in Alaska. A brown bear crossed the river to check out the stringer. While reaching down inside neoprene waders for the .44 mag, the idea came about: The gun and holster should be up where it can be reached easier. This chest harness is very handy while wearing chest waders or a back pack, worn with life jackets while boating, and under a coat in the winter. This is a set of straps to suspend one of their pancake holsters on your chest and it is rugged, comfortable, and versatile. The straps connect through the belt slots on your pancake holster (three slots required) and the strap that loops around your belt is included. This item will fit a wide range of folks from 5'6" and 130 pounds to 6'3" and 325 pounds; 64-inch chest is the widest it can accommodate. You can add on a 15-inch extension. It's named in honor of one of our nation's most highly decorated and truly heroic Marines, General Chesty Puller. The rugged Sourdough Pancake Holster is made from 8- to 9-ounce Hermann Oak beef hide. It is tightly molded to the gun and does not require a thumb strap for retention. The gun is positioned so that the back of the trigger guard is exposed, while the trigger remains covered, ensuring a good grip every time you reach for your pistol. They can make the holster to fit almost any length of barrel. This design securely holds the revolver with the opposing tension of the offset belt loops and can be carried either strong side or crossdraw.



### Frontiersman INSIDER Bear Safe

sabrered.com  
Easy to pack and comfortable to carry, the Frontiersman INSIDER Bear Safe from SABRE is air tight, scent proof, and water resistant, helping to prevent bear confrontations. The ergonomically tapered design offers superior comfort, portability, and high-capacity storage for extended trips or family outings, yet conveniently fits inside backpacks 45 L or larger. The high-contrast orange color makes it easy to locate from a distance. Tested at the Grizzly & Wolf Discovery Center (GWDC) in West Yellowstone, Montana, by the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee's (IGBC) bear-resistant products testing program, this safe is certified to keep bears out.



### SPOT X

findmespot.com  
SPOT keeps you connected to family, friends and emergency responders as well as protects your most valuable toys from theft. SPOT X two-way satellite messenger is the newest addition to the SPOT family. This handheld device features a full keyboard, paper-lit screen, built-in rechargeable batteries and allows you to have direct communication with emergency services. Its unique phone number allows friends and family to contact you regardless of cellular coverage. The IP67 rating comes with all the functionality of the original SPOT products including GPS tracking, and check-in.



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## Game Processing and Cooking

### Spyderco Native 5 Salt



The Native 5 Salt is the combination of the best-selling Native 5 Lightweight platform and the amazing corrosion-resistant qualities of a nitrogen-based blade steel. The knife showcases a full-flat-ground LC200N blade in either the PlainEdge or SpyderEdge. The blade is mated to a lightweight, fiberglass-reinforced-nylon (FRN) handle

with a high-strength back lock mechanism and four-position pocket clip that supports all possible carry options. The handle is high-vis yellow and incorporates Spyderco's Bi-Directional Texture pattern to give you a solid grip in all conditions. The knife is 6.95" when open, 4" when closed, has a 2.95" blade length, and weighs 2.4 ounces.

### Spyderco Endura 4 Wharncliffe



This new Endura series blade has been designed to help you tackle extreme cutting chores and detailed work, thanks to the cutting power and versatility of the Wharncliffe blade. The perfectly straight cutting edge of the Wharncliffe cuts with full power along its entire length, and is available in either a PlainEdge or fully serrated SpyderEdge format. The VG-10 stainless-steel blade features a full-flat grind for low-friction edge geometry that enhances the ability to cut. The high-performance blade is backed by a lightweight, ergonomic handle that includes a sturdy back lock mechanism, skeletonized stainless-steel liners, injection-molded fiberglass-reinforced-nylon scales, Spyderco's high-traction Bi-Directional Texture pattern, and a four-position pocket clip. It sports an overall length of 8.76", a 3.78" blade length, 4.98" closed length, and weighs 3.4 ounces.

with a high-strength back lock mechanism and four-position pocket clip that supports all possible carry options. The handle is high-vis yellow and incorporates Spyderco's Bi-Directional Texture pattern to give you a solid grip in all conditions. The knife is 6.95" when open, 4" when closed, has a 2.95" blade length, and weighs 2.4 ounces.

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Fish Alaska EDITORS' CHOICE AWARDS 2019

### LEM MaxVac Pro Air Chamber Machine



The same quality award-winning machine now has some improvements. The unit is now all digital and includes three preset functions for the sealer's convenience. The top is flat instead of having a tray for much easier cleanup. It also makes attaching the sealer bar easier.



### Bradley Smoker 1019 Professional Smoker

bradleysmoker.com  
Bradley built the 1019 Professional Smoker for the pros. Larger cooking space, higher and more flexible temperature controls, built-in iSMOKE technology using Bluetooth to control, and selective program cooking and smoking. It features an enclosed bisquette smoke generator, PID temperature controls, and many more features.

## Camping

### Hilleberg Tarp 5 and Mesh Tent 1

This is the ultimate minimalist shelter solution for summer scouting trips and warm weather, fast and light hunts. The combination of the two products weighs just 1 pound, 10 ounces while offering both exceptional protection from flying and crawling insects and adjustable weather protection. The 15-ounce Hilleberg Mesh Tent 1 offers breezy, versatile, very lightweight protection against mosquitoes, no-sees-ums, and other bugs, and its sewn-in floor keeps both ground moisture and crawling animals out. It can be pitched with trekking poles, tree branches or the like, or by suspending the ridgeline from trees or other fixed supports. The Tarp 5, weighing only 11.3 ounces, is designed specifically to cover a single person while also providing extra room for gear. It pairs exactly with the Mesh Tent 1, and its shape makes it easy to get into and out of. It can be pitched fairly high off the ground for the full, airy, tarp experience, or with its edges nearly, or even fully on the ground for a remarkably protective refuge from bad weather. It is made from Hilleberg's very light, yet strong Kerlon 1000 and features their remarkably strong, yet light, proprietary 2 mm guy lines.



### Yukon Rack Single Cot

The Yukon Rack Single Cot is a durable, collapsible cot. Built in Alaska, their cots perform exceptionally well at the campsite or at home. The new 15-inch-tall single cot uses the same rugged construction methods as their bunk bed cot. It can be purchased as a stand-alone unit or can be made from one of their bunk cots. Simply purchase a 15-inch leg kit and use one of the cots from your bunk. The Yukon Rack Single Cot packs down into one carry bag that doubles as a side storage compartment after assembly. Design features allow the cot to be set up in just a few minutes. Whether throwing it in a bush plane, ATV, boat, or at home, their cots will provide a stable sleeping platform.



### Jim Shockey Signature Series by Arctic Oven Tent

Arctic Oven Tent and Jim Shockey have teamed up to create a tent design that is unique to the industry. They have modernized the traditional "teepee" design to allow for ample interior space using specialized lightweight materials. Designed for the traveling outdoorsman, it is quick to set-up, lightweight with room to spare, and has all the stay-dry features of an Arctic Oven tent. Two size options will be available for pre-order starting in May 2019.



### Stone Glacier Chilkoot Sleeping Bags

With a focus on warmth-to-weight ratio and packability, the Chilkoot 0° & 15° sleeping bags utilize industry-leading materials to achieve an overall weight and temperature rating that is best-in-class. A Pertex Quantum shell adds water and wind resistance to protect the 850+ fill power goose down HyperDRY insulation. The bags are designed with an articulated footbox and differential cut to provide warmth and maintain loft around the body regardless of sleeping position. An articulated hood boasts a uniquely designed insulated neck cuff with an elastic and magnetic closure to seal in heat. A weight conscious 2/3-length reverse coil YKK zipper is paralleled by Dacron tape to reduce zipper snagging. When all put together, the Chilkoot 0° & 15° are high-performance ultralight sleeping bags designed specifically for the most discerning mountain hunter.



## Watercraft

### Rogue Jet Boatworks Landing Craft

The Landing Craft by Rogue Jet Boatworks has become an all-around favorite for sporting and utility applications throughout the Pacific Northwest. Designed specifically to accommodate logistics' needs for sporting activities, the Landing Craft has fast become the favored choice to bring home the payload. Capable of hauling heavy loads, the drop bow hauls it all, and with plenty of free board; the boat can be used for a multitude of applications.



### SeaArk Boats EasyCat

The all-new SeaArk Boats EasyCat is the perfect combination for a fun day on the water or for a serious day fishing. Equipped with two lounge seats, walk-thru windshield, two captains' chairs, a rear 80-gallon livewell and more, the EasyCat provides the best of both worlds. Built tough from heavy-gauge aluminum and rated for 300 hp, there is nothing this 26-foot boat can't do.

### JETECH Solar 420 Vega Series

The driving factor in designing this new series of boats was to make one lighter that is more suited to aircraft travel. With the great majority of Alaska only accessible by air, this new boat should give unparalleled access to remote country for backcountry hunters and anglers. We think it could be a game changer. It's lighter, more compact, and well-suited for use with a 20 hp jet.



Find LEM products at Three Bears Alaska®



# SO YOU WANT TO HUNT A MOOSE!

Story & photos by Scott Haugen

Scott Haugen has been hunting throughout Alaska for nearly 30 years, and ranks moose hunting among the most physically demanding hunts the state has to offer.



**“CAN YOU GUYS GIVE US A BOAT RIDE TO TOWN?” PLEADED A TRIO OF HUNTERS FLOATING BY OUR MOOSE CAMP. “WE’LL EVEN PAY YOU \$1,000!”**

The three hunters were crammed into a rubber raft. They were soaking wet following a couple days of intense rain and high winds. It was their first do-it-yourself moose hunt, and three days into their hunt, they called it quits and were headed downstream to the nearest village. They wanted us to give them a ride in our sled, but with the big tide changes coming, we’d lose two days of hunting.

We chatted with them for a bit, making sure they were okay. While they were obviously scared, their situation wasn’t life threatening. They had plenty of food, but all their gear was drenched. Worse yet, the second raft they were provided by the air service that dropped them off wasn’t closely checked. The frame didn’t fit it, meaning there was no way to row it, which rendered it useless on the big, winding river.

They could have toughed it out, dried their clothes in one of our tents and got back to hunting the next day, but they’d already checked out. “You can’t even hunt this river from a raft,” one man voiced. “It’s so brushy and so flat, you can’t see anything unless it’s standing

Optics are required tools for a moose hunter. A spotting scope allows you to efficiently cover ground with your eyes and size-up bulls from a great distance.



in the river. All the sloughs are so boggy and deep, you can’t walk anywhere.” That’s why we were perched atop one of the few hills on the river in an effort to locate bulls, hopefully in a position where we could make a move on them.

The hunters were less than 20 miles from the nearest village, and the high water would see them getting there in a few hours’ time. My buddies and I declined the money, reassuring them they could make it. Before sending them on their way, we pointed out where other camps were along the river, in case they needed help.

We went on to kill three moose in that camp and saw several other big bulls during our 10-day hunt. The hunters we met were in a great spot; they just weren’t prepared to hunt moose on their own in remote Alaska.

## Planning Your Hunt

Moose hunting in Alaska requires a lot of work and pre-planning. Start by being honest with yourself, and others in your party, making absolutely certain your outdoor skills are to the level where you can survive in the wild under any conditions, through any circumstances. If bears, freezing weather, snow, mosquitos, and being out of touch with civilization make you nervous, then a guided moose hunt might be more to your liking.

The next question you must ask yourself is, “How good of shape am I in?” Moose hunting can be extremely tough, especially when you get a bull down. Hiking across the tundra, through bogs, over snow, and in rivers, is the norm. One recent moose hunt I went on with a buddy found us carrying waders, knee boots, and hiking boots in order to efficiently negotiate the variety of mountainous and boggy terrain we’d have to hunt. We used all three pairs of boots.

Once you know you can physically handle a moose hunt, decide on a place to go. Thoroughly research your options, making sure

there are moose in the area you plan to hunt. Decide if you’re going on a river hunt or a mountain hunt, or maybe a combination of the two habitats.

On a river hunt, you’ll likely get dropped off by an air charter in one spot, then picked up 7- to 10 days later at another spot. Here, you’ll navigate rivers in a raft, so be certain you’re comfortable doing that with all your gear and 800 pounds of moose. On a mountain hunt, you’ll probably stay in one camp, hiking and glassing each day. If you get on a big bull, you might spike camp out for a few days. Make sure you can physically handle hiking in the terrain you’ll be hunting in, can survive with minimal rations, and can navigate in fog, snow, and other conditions that may pop up, because once you’re dropped off there’s no turning back.

## Gearing Up

As for gear, I regularly see people taking too much on a remote moose hunt. My rule of thumb when I pack is to lay out all I want to take, then cut that in half. On my last 10-day moose hunt, I wore the same outer clothes every day, and I wore some of those on my flight into Alaska on the commercial airline. I hunted in Dry-Plus waders every day and took a medium-weight rain jacket. A few pairs of socks and underwear, thin gloves and a stocking hat, along with a couple base layers, and that was about it.

If renting your camping gear from a bush service, tell them you want to go through it all before it’s loaded into your plane for the drop. In addition to the wrong raft frame being given to the group mentioned earlier, I’ve heard of rafts with holes in them and tents that didn’t hold up to high winds.

Some air services even pack all your food for a hunt. This can be a big time saver when flying out of remote villages with no stores, or very limited, pricey selections. However, make sure the food is what you want, and that it’s included. I spoke with two hunters at the



Shooting sticks assure a solid rest on unstable ground, and double as a valued walking stick on the uneven tundra.

airport one time who looked terrible. They explained that when they unpacked their camp on the mountain where the bush plane dropped them, their grub box was empty. They had no satellite phone, thus no way to contact the air carrier. For the next 10 days they ate berries and some fish they caught in a creek they had to hike to. Unfortunately, they didn't see a legal bull, but they did pack a little fishing rod and some lures, which allowed them to get some protein.

Perhaps the best piece of gear in which you can invest is a satellite phone. If there's an emergency, you want to get out. If there's a storm coming, you may want to relocate. This happened to a buddy and me on a moose hunt, but during our relocation effort to avoid a massive storm, our plane engine blew. Luckily, we made an emergency landing on a gravel bar that was below us, but our hunt was over. Sometimes, simply surviving a remote hunt in Alaska means the hunt was a success; filling a tag can quickly become secondary.

One packing tip that works great for me is putting all my gear into a single, large dry bag. I then use three, five-foot-long LoopRopes to lash it to my pack frame. Now I can check it in as one piece of luggage with the commercial airlines and use the LoopRopes and pack frame to haul meat. It works great.

Moose are big, but not overly difficult to bring down. A well-constructed bullet fired from a .30-06 is perfect. My last bull fell to a pair of 150-grain Nosler Partition bullets fired from a .270 Weatherby. As with any big game, shot placement is the key to efficiency, and that's where a solid rest and reliable shooting sticks come in handy. A sturdy tripod serves as a nice walking stick on the tundra as well as a valued shooting rest.

#### The Hunt

Smart moose hunting comes down to gaining elevation, glassing, glassing, and glassing some more. The goal is to spot a

#### The Cost of Moose Hunting

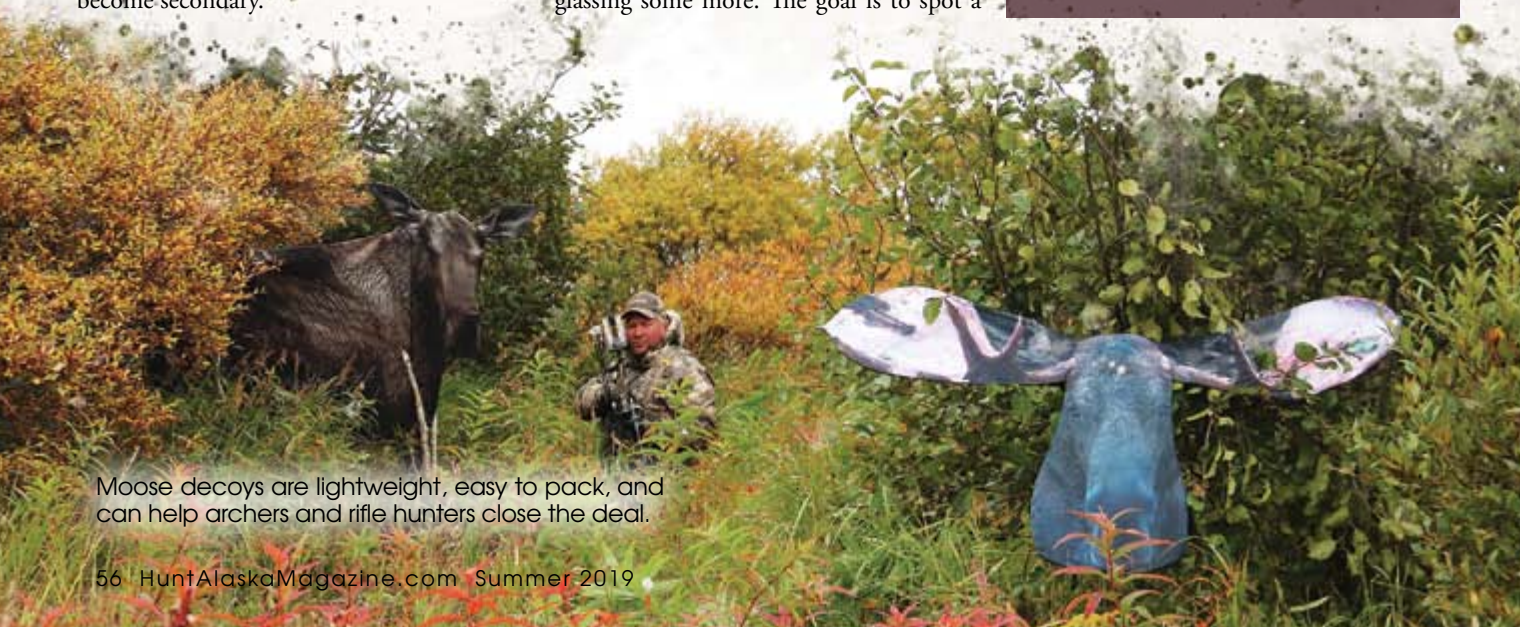
In the early 1990s, the cost of a guided moose hunt in the best places in Alaska ran about \$3,000. Today, guided moose hunts in those same areas are going for over \$20,000. Some high-end outfits are charging more than \$30,000 and are booked out to two years in advance.

While the cost of a guided moose hunt can be pricey, know that do-it-yourself moose hunts aren't cheap, either. The cheapest DIY moose hunts take place along the road system. These are usually meat hunts, and some places require getting a tag through a lottery system. Where you stay and how you travel determines these hunt costs.

Most hunters choose to fly out and get dropped off for their moose hunt. For an air-taxi service to supply your gear, complete with tents, cooking gear, and a raft, and haul you in and out of the field, along with your moose, the starting cost is around \$3,500. The more the transporter provides, like food and survival gear, the costlier it becomes. There are multiple transporters in Alaska's hub villages, and they can be contacted for options and price quotes.

Then there's the cost of getting the moose out of the field, packing it, and sending it on to Anchorage or Fairbanks, then home. Those costs can total up to \$2,000. If you want to ship the antlers and cape home for a mount, that's another \$800 or so.

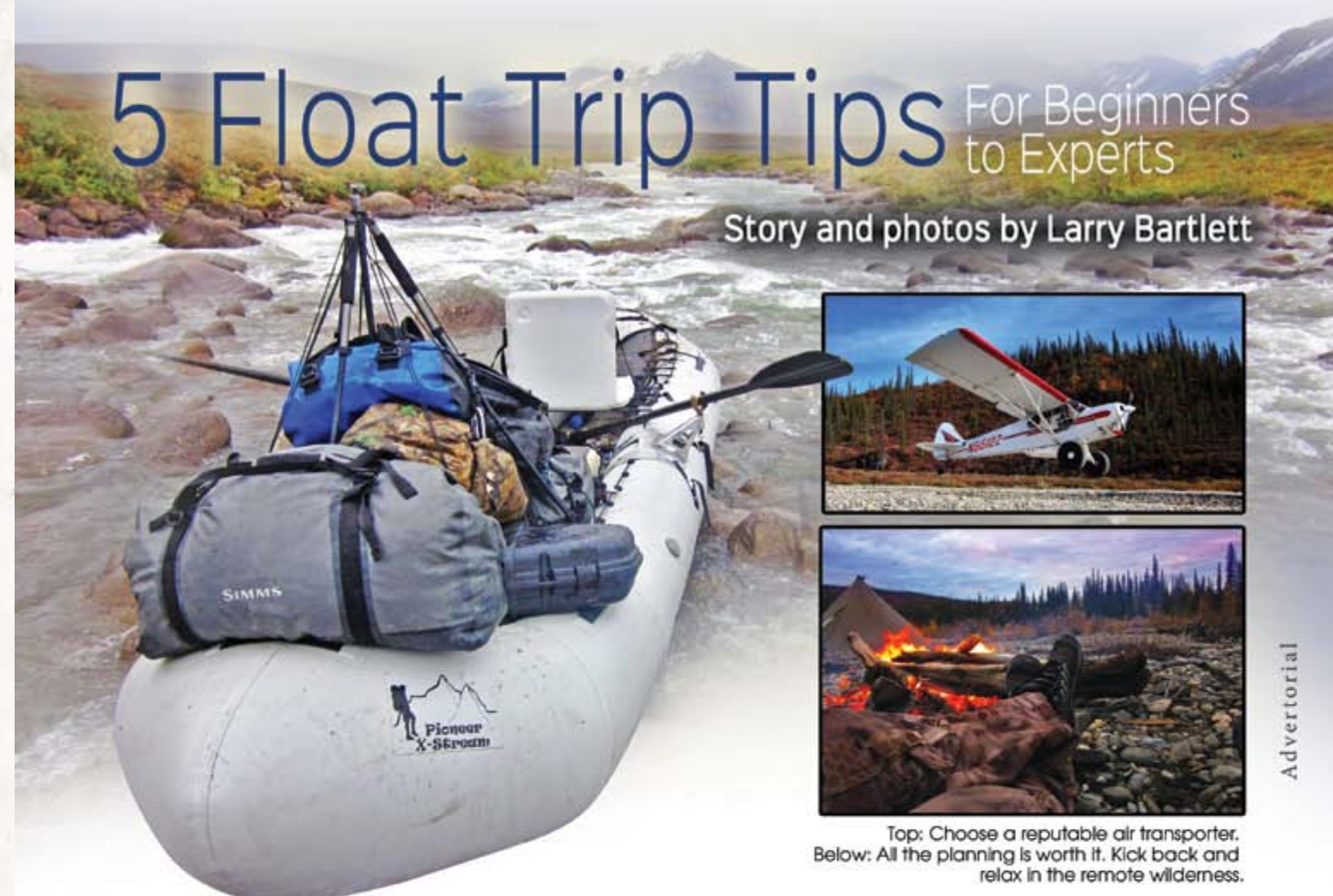
The current cost of a nonresident hunting license is \$160, plus \$800 for a moose tag. If you want to pick up a wolf tag, that's an additional \$60; \$350 for a wolverine tag. Always leave room for incidental costs that might pop up.



Moose decoys are lightweight, easy to pack, and can help archers and rifle hunters close the deal.

# 5 Float Trip Tips For Beginners to Experts

Story and photos by Larry Bartlett



Top: Choose a reputable air transporter. Below: All the planning is worth it. Kick back and relax in the remote wilderness.

Advertorial

**My** favorite fishing and hunting experiences are always remote float trips. Wild and free in Alaska is my creed—I live to spend time in the outdoors. The fish found on these remote wilderness float trips are eager biters, unscathed from pressure and so is the land. A special trip is being able to explore a niche of Alaska that inspires me to care for its grandeur. A special place is worth never discussing by name in fear someone else will rediscover its location and devalue its appeal.

I wrote my first book about float hunting in Alaska more than 19 years ago. I had a lot of knowledge and real-time experience to share then and I have a plethora more now. Every aspect of my business is founded in the float fishing and hunting worlds and caters to those seeking wilderness floats. From decades of hardcore backcountry float fishing and hunting do-it-yourself experience, these are the tips I've narrowed down that serve both beginning- and expert-level remote float fishing and hunting enthusiasts:

#### 1.) Planning is Everything

Make a list, then check it ten times. Find ways to carve the list down. Choose just the bare necessities. Pack and then repack and practice to make sure it all fits.

#### 2.) Work as a Team

Make team decisions on crucial details like how long of a float to choose on which river. Divvy up responsibility for various planning tasks from food planning to interviewing transporters.

#### 3.) Reduce Weight

To perform efficiently in remote locations, I've used technology to reduce weight and bulk and trained myself to find comfort without the burdens of pleasure in gadgets.

#### 4.) Know Your Limitations

Know what you are getting into. Prepare yourself for the worst. Have a true idea of the river you are floating and the skills to match its difficulty level.

#### 5.) Have the Right Gear

From a high-quality tent and rain gear to the right packraft for the job—research, ask the experts, and make a good investment. In the backcountry, only the best will do.



For more information on packrafting in Alaska or the PR-49 packrafts contact Larry Bartlett at 907-388-2477 or go to [PristineVentures.com](http://PristineVentures.com).



Once a bull moose is down, the work begins.

# TOP Taxidermists

## Alaska's Masters of Game Mounting

Visit [HuntAlaskaMagazine.com](http://HuntAlaskaMagazine.com) this fall for tips on field care from these trusted taxidermy experts. They'll offer vital information on everything from skinning and how to store hides to mount care for making the most of your memorable Alaska hunt.

shooter bull, then figure out how to get to it. Cover as much ground as possible with your eyes, rather than your feet. You can walk several hours a day on tundra and through bogs, which is some of Alaska's most challenging terrain to negotiate. If you do walk, get from point A to point B fast, as you want to spend time looking for game, not looking at the ground as you walk. If you can set up camp and glass directly from there, that's ideal.

A spotting scope and good tripod are a moose hunter's best friends. Take a stout, lightweight tripod that will hold steady on the tundra in high winds and rain. I like a thick, carbon-fiber tripod, as it's sturdy and light. A quality spotting scope is necessary to size-up bulls to make sure they're legal, and it can also be used to study the terrain to plan a stalk.

One of the most overlooked tools a moose hunter can have is a call. The September rut is a time when a lot of bulls are on the move, and a cow call can help bring bulls out of unnavigable terrain, into a shootable position. Get a call and practice with it. A Montana Decoys Moose II cow decoy can work great, and teaming that with a Moose Rack decoy, even better. Because bulls are coming out of velvet in early September, tape some white towels or paper towels over the antlers of the Moose Rack decoy, to increase its visibility. Decoys and calls are more than worth the effort to pack.

Once a bull is spotted, the hard part is figuring out a way to get to it. If you don't want to call, then you've got to figure out a way to get within shooting range and sometimes that's simply impossible. On my last moose hunt, we spotted a giant 70-inch bull, but he was in a deep swamp surrounded by deeper water and tall willows. There was no way to get to that bull with a raft or by wading, and he wasn't responding to the calls or decoys; such is moose hunting.

A lot of hunters think they can float a river in a raft and bulls will be standing around every corner. These hunts can produce, but the number of moose that are standing just out of view is surprising. Spend some time glassing these river bottoms from an elevated vantage point and you'll see more moose. Be sure to maximize the visibility of the habitat you're hunting, and you'll see more bulls, period.

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### After the Shot

For first-time moose hunters, the most surprising moment comes when they walk up on a downed bull. A big bull moose can stand over seven feet tall at the shoulders and weigh 1,500 pounds. You'll get about 700 pounds of boned-out meat off a big bull. If you're going to have your bull mounted, add at least another 150 pounds for the antlers and cape. They're massive animals, and once down, require a lot of work.

Be sure to have the proper tools to handle a downed bull. The same knife you use on deer will work fine but be sure to have a sharpener. If hunting near water, having a one-man inflatable raft is a great way to pack out moose meat. If not, then make sure your pack frame is a good one.

Start with quartering the animal, then remove the backstraps, rib meat, neck and brisket meat and secure it in game bags. All shank meat and the tenderloins must also be taken. Alaska meat salvage laws are very clear, and there's no hiding a moose carcass from troopers patrolling from the air, so make certain to abide by the regulations and recover all the required meat. Some GMUs require that the bone stays in the quarters and ribs when you pack out your bull.

Prior to finalizing your moose hunt, make sure you have a plan to get the meat out of the field, all the way home. A couple seasons ago

Packing out moose meat sometimes takes longer than the actual hunt and being prepared to tackle this project takes serious planning and a lot of effort.



three buddies filled their moose tags. They weren't planning on that much success, but it happened. Six plane loads later, their meat was out of the field and it took two more loads to get the hunters and their gear. That cost them nearly \$6,000 they'd not planned on, and they still had to get the meat and antlers home from there.

A do-it-yourself moose hunt can be one of Alaska's most rewarding adventures. It's far from easy, or simple, which is what makes it so appealing. Nonresidents don't have to hire a guide for moose hunting, as is required when hunting brown/grizzly bear, Dall sheep, and mountain goat.

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*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 scotthaugen.com. Follow Scott on Instagram, Twitter & Facebook.*



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Base camp in its pre-storm condition.



Casey with "The Terminator."



John with his second goat, taken in the last hours of the last day.



A big part of hunting is being reminded of the simple pleasures, like a hot meal and a good view shared with friends.



Goat country is God's country.



A man who has found a good hunting partner is a lucky man indeed. Casey (left) and author John (right).

# KODIAK GOAT HUNTING

## *A Study in Humility*

STORY BY JOHN WHIPPLE PHOTOS BY MICAH NESS AND JOHN WHIPPLE

The route to where the goat had fallen was typical: a steep slope carpeted in layered boulders, culminating in a Mordor-esque peak. I had shot the goat as it lay in its bed. It had a good view of the whole valley from its position, and the only reason we were able to get within range were the car-sized boulders strewn across the lower part of the hillside that provided some cover. My first shot connected, but in typical goat fashion, the billy had taken off running, seemingly unfazed by the hole through its lungs. I did not lead the second shot enough and it sent a puff of rock dust just behind it. For my third shot, I held just in front of it, putting a round right through its eyeball and ending things in dramatic fashion (never mind I had been aiming for the lungs again). This was day six of an eleven-day hunt and we had just taken our second goat of the trip, but we were about to find out that the real adventure had yet to begin.

My hunting partner Casey Dinkel and I really enjoy goat hunting; we think of it as sheep hunting without all the pressure. Mountain hunting, and in particular sheep hunting, has grown in popularity and prestige in the hunting community by leaps and bounds in recent years, and the industry and hype that has grown up around it is perhaps unique in the history of big-game hunting. Don't get me wrong, we have the bug too and we hunt sheep every year, but it seems to us mountain goats don't get the credit they deserve. The terrain and techniques used to hunt them are much the same as with sheep, and while their headgear is not as impressive, you do not have the stress of whether or not it is a legal, full curl before pulling the trigger. In most areas of Alaska, you may harvest any goat that is not accompanied by a kid, though the taking of billys is generally encouraged. This

This is what it is all about.







John (front) and Casey (rear) set out in search of mountain goats on Kodiak Island.

means you can hold out for that record-book billy or take the first delicious little two- or three-year-old you find. It's up to you! An added bonus is the hide. Mountain goats harvested in late fall and winter have a thick, white coat with hair as long as six- or eight inches that makes for about the nicest area rug a fellow could want. There is a catch though. Mountain goats, by their nature, tend to live in the steepest, gnarliest, rudest country possible in which to set up a shot. Because of this, goat hunting is one of the more dangerous hunts you can go on in Alaska. So much so, that if you are a non-resident, you are required to hire the services of a guide so that you are a little less likely to get yourself badly hurt or killed!

For this particular hunt, we were leaving our home in Palmer and heading south to Kodiak Island. While we do have some good mountain goat hunting in our area, it is nothing compared to what can be found on Kodiak. Mountain goats were introduced to Kodiak back in the early 1950's, and they took to the harsh, wet climate like a duck to water. They have done so well over the years that currently the bag limit has been increased to two goats per hunter, and the taking of nannies is actually encouraged to help curb the population. The chance to harvest four goats in one trip was too hard for Casey and me to resist, so we began planning. We settled on going the first week of October, as we would be done with our sheep and caribou hunting by then, and the goats would be starting to get their winter coats. Theoretically, the really bad winter storms wouldn't quite be arriving yet (boy were we wrong about that). Accompanying Casey

and me would be Micah, a good friend and skilled cameraman who would help us capture the experience. The next step was to call our air-charter service and lock in the dates.

When traveling in the Alaskan backcountry, choosing your pilot is one of the most important decisions you can make. It takes considerable skill and judgement to fly in the Alaskan bush, and a good pilot will know where the best hunting is, and where to drop you off for the best chance of success. In our case, we were flying with our good friends at Island Air, a well-established charter service on Kodiak Island with a fleet of planes and a wealth of knowledge at their disposal.

On October 3rd the hunt began, and one jet and two bush planes later the three of us found ourselves standing at the edge of a small, alpine lake suspended high in the mountains, surrounded on three sides by steep mountains, and dropping off a steep cliff to a valley far below on its fourth. As he left, our pilot Taj told us that to pick us up, the wind had to be between 5- and 10 mph and blowing from the mouth of the lake, or he would not be able to get the plane back in the air. He also warned us that if the lake froze over while we were there (a possibility that time of year), we would have to hike out 10- or 12 miles down to the ocean to be picked up. A rather unpleasant task if you happen to have a few goats on your back...

The terrain where we would be setting up our base camp was awe inspiring in its beauty and at the same time a little threatening and inhospitable. We were far above the grassy slopes. These mountains were made up entirely of cliffs and steep

boulder slides. In other words, perfect goat country.

The first few days were about as idyllic as one could ask for under the circumstances. On the first day of hunting, Casey harvested a nice billy in a neighboring drainage, just before sundown. We spent the following day retrieving it. The next two days were spent covering country in search of a mature billy worthy of punching my first tag. We covered a lot of country, saw a lot of goats and made a few stalks, but it wasn't until day six that I was able to connect.

It was a nice, 8.5-inch mature billy with reasonably heavy bases and an amazingly full winter coat. As we admired the animal and began to take some pictures, the weather took a sudden, and very noticeable turn. The forecast had called for a storm, and we could see it building throughout the afternoon, but its arrival still came with jarring suddenness. Where only moments before we had been able to see for miles in every direction, now our visibility was reduced to a murky 30 feet. The wind which had tugged insistently at us throughout the day now reared up and hit us with its full force, gusting to what we estimated was 70- to 80 mph and bringing with it the rain. Not just a little rain. All the rain. We were all soon soaked to the skin.

By the time we had the goat broken down and in our packs, darkness had fully descended and the task of making our way off this jagged mountain peak in the storm was starting to feel pretty harrowing. Our headlamps reflected off the thick clouds, making it impossible to see more than a few feet in front of us. We carefully worked our way down the boulder field, trying to avoid the two good-sized cliffs we knew were below us...or was it three? Once on our way down, a particularly strong gust actually knocked Casey over. This was bad.

Around 1:00 a.m. we made it off the first big mountain and found ourselves in a little hanging ravine, still far from our lake and base camp, but the first flat ground we had seen all evening. The storm was showing no signs of abating, so we made the decision to set up a spike camp and wait it out till morning.

We had brought with us the rainfly and poles from one of our tents, knowing that we would be pushing pretty far from base camp that day. It took all three of us to set it up in the wind, but we managed and crawled gratefully beneath its shelter. We were all soaked to the bone, but relieved to have at least some respite from the storm. We chuckled halfheartedly at our semi-predicament, chalking it up to type-2 fun, which seems to be the type of fun of which most goat hunting consists.

About 4:00 a.m., the wind and rain began to slack off just a bit, and at first, we were relieved. In its absence, however, we began to hear another sound, a distant roar that seemed to be growing louder. We looked outside the tent. The ravine in which we had taken shelter, the only flat spot within half a mile, was now being filled with a healthy little river via flash-flood! In a matter of minutes the river was rushing past our tent door, then, inch by inch, it began to rise into our tent, which, because we had only brought the fly to save weight, had no floor. We all three pressed against the far wall of the tent and watched as the water continued to rise, creating a nice little current in our tent. Though the storm had subsided somewhat, it was still blowing a good 30- to 40 mph and the rain had not slacked off one bit, so we did not want to abandon our shelter unless we absolutely had to. Thankfully, the water never crept in past the midpoint of our tent, leaving one side of it relatively dry. We huddled there until morning.

When daylight finally broke around 8:00 a.m., the wind had subsided, and the rain had come to a stop, making for a relatively pleasant trek back. When we finally got back to the lake, we quickly moved our base camp from the more picturesque lake's location to a more sheltered location up against the hillside. We took extra care to put big rocks on all the tent stakes, and to make extra guylines from paracord to prepare our two tents as much as possible for any stormier weather. That evening, the storm returned in full force, but this time we sat it out in the relative comfort of our two-man tents, relieved to have an actual floor and sleeping bags. We felt quite comfortable in contrast to the night before.

By noon the following day, my bladder insisted that it was time to get out of the sleeping bag, storm or no storm. Just as I was crawling out of the vestibule, I spotted a goat on the hill just behind camp! A quick look through binoculars confirmed that it was a billy, and that it was less than 800 yards from our tent. It took some convincing to get the guys out of their beds, as the wind was still gusting to 90 mph and the rain was coming in sideways. However, we all knew that days like this were normally chalked up as a loss on a hunting trip, so a goat this close to camp was a gift not to be ignored. We set out.

The mountain behind camp was steep. Really steep. The kind of mountain where you climb it as much with your hands as you do your feet. If we did not have at least three points of contact with the ground at any given time, we ran the risk of allowing the wind to pull us right off the mountain. Twice we stopped to debate the

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Casey works to bone out his first goat of the trip.

merits of calling off the stalk and heading back down, but the thrill of the hunt kept drowning out our better judgement, and we pressed on until we were within 100 yards of the billy.

Casey shouldered his .270 WSM and put a 130-grain AccuBond right through the boiler room. The goat started to run. Casey fired again, this time hitting it high in the shoulder, breaking its back. It should have been over right then and there, with shooting like that, but as if the reputation of mountain goats everywhere depended on it, this goat lurched to its feet and began to stumble straight towards a 500-foot cliff only 20 yards away! We both opened fire. Casey shot his last bullet, and I let three rip in rapid succession. All four bullets struck home, and the goat collapsed just three feet from the edge. Goats are tough. Casey and I have been on a lot of hunts together and taken a lot of game, but I don't think we have ever rejoiced over a harvest quite as much as this one. The emotions that had built up from the hardship of the last couple of nights combined with the day's harrowing climb in hurricane-like conditions all released in a series of whoops and hollers and big ol' hugs.

We pulled the goat back from the edge of the cliff, and then stopped a moment just to take in the view, as we were quite high up and could see for miles around. Suddenly, Micah asked, "Is that a goat in our camp?"

We all looked. Casey, who had immediately pulled up his binoculars exclaimed, "Wait, where are our tents!"

We quickly realized that the white spot in camp was not, in fact, a curious goat, but one of our bags that had been under our tent vestibule. Except now there was no vestibule. There was no tent. Both of our tents were nowhere to be seen! We all began to scan the mountainside with our binoculars for any clues. Had a bear got in to our camp and tore everything down? Surely the wind couldn't have done this, as we had been so careful to secure everything. Finally, we spotted the tents, about 100 yards down the hill, collapsed amongst some rocks.

We were now in a bit of a pickle, with a goat to process and a camp that was strewn across the mountainside, getting wetter and wetter with every passing minute. Micah volunteered to run down the mountain to check on camp while Casey and I remained to skin and butcher the goat. Micah happens to run ultramarathons in his spare time and was down and back up the mountain in the time it took us to process the goat. He reported that the wind had ripped both tents out of the ground and strewn our belongings all across the mountainside. He had collected everything he could find and stuffed it in to a couple of large dry bags we had brought along to keep it from getting any wetter than it already was.

When we all three got to "camp" and surveyed the destruction, it was a bit sobering. We had taken extra care the day before to reinforce each tent, to use extra tie-downs that were secured to rocks the size of basketballs, and to place more rocks

on each and every stake to prevent them from being pulled out. Not a single one of these precautions was able to withstand the wind. Every stake had been uprooted, and the extra 550-pound paracord lines we had tied to rocks had all snapped. Both tents had holes in the walls and the poles were all bent or broken. The lighter of the two tents was split fully in half, right down the middle. We don't use cheap gear; these were top-of-the-line tents that we had used on many mountain adventures, but they were three-season models, just not designed for days of 80 mph gusts.

It was now 4:00 p.m., and we had about three and a half hours of daylight left. We were soaked to the bone, and tired from having slept little the previous two nights, but we knew we needed to get to work right away creating some type of shelter. The storm was forecasted to last several more days, so there would be little hope of us getting picked up early.

We started by clearing a flat space big enough for one tent to fit right up against the hill. The tent had not been able to withstand the wind before, and now it was ripped and broken, so we began to build a horseshoe-shaped rock wall around the flat spot. We then collected moss to fill in the holes and to cover the rocky ground where the tent would be. This all took the better part of two hours, and during that time it rained so hard that the wall we built began to act as a dam, and we soon had more of a swimming pool than a windbreak. We pulled all the moss back out and created irrigation channels for the water to drain, then found enough big, flat rocks to build a platform to get the tent up out of the muck. We then replaced the moss padding and were left with a rather ridiculous, but serviceable, tent site. We then pieced together one Franken-tent from the remnants of the two original tents, and got it set up. Micah employed my small sewing kit to patch some of the larger holes, and the three of us piled in to the two-man tent, once again grateful for the relative protection from the raging storm.

We lay on our sleeping pads, drip drying as we made weak jokes about our condition. It is times like these that can reveal a man's true character, and I was thankful to be with Micah and Casey, who are both the kind of men you want standing beside you when things go sideways—the kind of guys who can keep their heads in an emergency, and do it with a smile on their faces.

As we lay there, we began to take stock of our equipment. About the only things that were dry were our sleeping bags and our insulated "puffy" pants and jackets, which were all stowed in dry bags. We opted to leave our sleeping bags rolled up and dry,

a last defense in case our situation got any worse. We took off our wet outer layers and put them in the vestibule, letting our body heat slowly dry out our under-garments. That night we put on our puffy pants and jackets to help fend off the cold night. The warm coat and pants were a simple but exquisite pleasure after spending so much time being wet and shivering.

We spent the next three days like that, and during that time the storm never subsided. Every ten minutes or so you could hear the really big gusts building at the head of the valley, then come roaring down towards us like a freight train. We would all "man our stations," reaching out to brace the walls against the incoming blast. Entertainment consisted mostly of napping, and figuring out a good system for rotating three guys in a two-man tent so each fellow had his turn by the door, where you could pee out the open zipper into the running stream created by all the rainwater that babbled its way through our vestibule and then out via our irrigation channel. Our indoor plumbing also provided a constant source of fresh water for drinking and cooking, further reducing our need to venture outside.

On the day before we were scheduled to fly out, the storm began to break. We crawled out of the tent, so thankful to be

able to stand up to our full heights again, and to be able to start stretching our legs after laying in the tent for so long. With one tag left to fill, I decided to try my luck and spend the last day hunting. We agreed that Casey and Micah would stay to look after the tent, but that if they heard a shot, one of them would come looking to help.

It was still raining softly, and the wind was blowing between 15- and 25 mph, but in contrast to the previous week it might as well have been 70°F with blue skies, and it felt good to be out and moving again. I soon spotted a likely bunch of goats at the head of the valley.

Over the course of the afternoon I was able to work to within 150 yards of them. There were no billies in the bunch, but there were several lone nannies, and one of them looked like it would could go 11 inches on the horn. Two quick shots through the vitals and the last of our four tags was punched. Micah and Casey both responded to the shots and it was easy enough to locate me on the bare, rocky hillside. We took photos, then finished skinning and packing out in the dark, arriving back at camp late, but thankful for the opportunity to get out of the tent that day and get some exercise, not to mention get our fourth goat in the eleventh hour of our trip despite all its hardships.

The eleventh day brought with it honest-to-goodness blue skies and a light, 5- to 10 mph wind—perfect conditions for our pilot to land in our little alpine lake. When he arrived, he told us that the storm we had just weathered had broken the record on Kodiak for the most rainfall in 24 hours with an impressive score of six inches. We had little trouble believing him!

As we took turns flying out in the one-passenger Super Cub, I thought about the trip and the lessons learned. One of my favorite things about hunting is that it teaches you as much about yourself as it does about the wilderness. You learn what your personal limits truly are, and if you push hard enough against those limits, they can keep growing. At the same time, no matter how tough and well prepared a fellow thinks he is, it is really still nothing compared to the raw power of nature, and that is not a bad thing to be reminded of now and again. Also, when hunting in October on Kodiak, bring a four-season tent!



*John Whipple is an avid outdoorsman and co-founder of the Alaskan film and photography company 60th Parallel Adventures. Read more articles by John and follow the 60th team's exploits at 60thparallel.com.*

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# PUNCH 'EM IN THE NOSE

Story & photos by Steve Opat

"You're not going to believe this," Ian said, just twenty minutes after we shoved the raft from shore that day. "I just heard another one growling right up that hill!"

"Okay, what do you want to do? We should go kill him, right?" I replied with some hesitance. Then I suggested, "Should we call him down into this slough?"

*"No. I want to walk right up there and punch him in the nose!"*

Those were the commanding words of an epic Alaskan floating adventure when I was present in the woods at the moment when the true magic of the rutting season revealed itself. The small creek is intimately familiar to us and we have an efficient and soul-soothing routine from previous floats down its course. It begins with an evening of northern pike domination on the lake. That night, we fry them up and wash them down with cheap beer. In the morning, we oar to the exit creek and head downstream to visit our established camps: Kill Camp, The High Bank, Rip's Hill and a couple new ones every year. As peaceful as the autumn woods and serene stream always are, there's that perpetual feeling of anxiety while float hunting—day-dreaming of how a bull could be standing on the bank around the next bend.

When we pulled into Kill Camp the first night, a familiar

young bull greeted us. He came from the same slough across the creek and followed the same trail through camp as he had the two previous floats. Someday he'll fall victim to the camp's name. The next night at Rip's Hill, we were dancing with another young scrapper. I was happily occupied, hooking feisty rainbow trout in the deep bend below when Ian "the moose whisperer" said, "I hear one...he's coming." He was right. The young hat-rack appeared as the sun hit the trees and teased us with incomplete views of his antlers. "Is he a legal fork horn? Man...I just can't tell!" We'd relocate. He'd relocate. And that's how the dance went until darkness ended the ball and for the third straight evening we said, "No matter what happens, this trip was worthwhile."

The next camp downstream introduced us to a bull that tested our emotional fortitude. We called him Hammerin' Hank because of the resounding crack he'd send our way each time we called. "Paul Bunyan" may be more appropriate since nobody has ever seen him and his size gets bigger every time someone tells the tale. But the smack of Hank's antlers against a tree, resonating through the whispers of the autumn leaves and the trickle of the rapids below was reminiscent of a slugger hitting a long ball in front of his hometown crowd. It was his way of saying, "I hear you over

"Bring the camera! There's a 60-inch bull just five yards away that doesn't even care that I'm talking in this loud of a voice..."

There's a certain mystique we feel just looking at this photo.

there. I'm THIS big. If you're big enough to bother me, come get me. I'm here in the thicket with all the hotties." And that's where he stayed for two days. Though a sub-legal paddle horn was tough to get rid of, Hank only visited at night; working the slough and waking us each morning with guttural grunts before returning to the willows prior to daylight. I was convinced that persistence would enable us to catch him in a moment of weakness. "Just focus and improve every day and spend as much time in the woods as possible." That's how you'll succeed.

Our own float hunting rules mandated that we keep floating in order to reach our extraction point on time. So, after two days we somberly began floating and lamenting at how much it sucked to leave such a worthy opponent. Forty yards downstream we simultaneously jettisoned from the raft and said, "This is ridiculous. We can't leave behind a big bull. Let's hunt him one more day and paddle like madmen tomorrow."

It was a decision we don't regret despite its lack of desired results. Hank teased us for a final day and left us looking at a menu of "tag soup." We drank ourselves to sleep, then awoke to the last day of the

season. There was a realization of the overly ambitious itinerary ahead but the process of breaking camp and hitting the water was routine and we efficiently started the final day's float. As we solemnly left Hank behind us and looked at the last day of the season and too many miles ahead of us, we debriefed on how we could have done things differently.

"Maybe we should have just went right at him. Snuck into that thicket and punched him in the nose!" I said. That was one of the most impactful discussions of my hunting career.

What happened thereafter only happens when you spend too much time in the woods. Ian pointed to the ridge above us and said the words that began this article.

"Should we try to call him down to us?" I replied, knowing that we wouldn't make it out on time unless we could seduce the moose into the raft.

"No! We're going right up that hill and punching him in the nose!"

I didn't need any convincing. I just needed to know that Ian was okay with missing extra days of work. "You're right. I'll be the back

The author has learned to respect log cabins like these for they have seen more winters and more animals than he ever will. There are cabins like this all over the Alaskan bush.

legs. You be the front legs. We'll do the moose walk up that trail." I replied.

We instinctively peeled off our noisy rain gear. Our quiet layers were already turned so the colors most resembling a moose were turned outward. Ian gave some guttural grunts as we walked together at the cadence of a moose; placing our feet at the same rate and distance as an investigative satellite bull. We walked up the hill into what we would term "the Lion's Den."

The bull's antlers were visible as we crested the hill and he grunted and growled with a tenacity of which even I could hear. We growled back and I raked away some obstructive brush and readied an arrow. A face to face battle was about to ensue!

Then there was only silence. He never showed. But we couldn't hear him storming off either.

"Punch him in the nose!" I commanded.

Ian led the charge without acknowledging me. He didn't need to. He gave a grunt and we continued our moose march towards the bull. We emerged through the brush to see that everything to our downwind was open

and couldn't have concealed a bull moose. If he had escaped through there in that amount of time, we would have heard him trotting. Escaping through the dense brush upwind would certainly elicit some noise. We couldn't fathom how he had eluded us. Then magically my nose was filled with that sweet musk of a rutting bull moose.

"I can smell him, dude! He's somewhere upwind. We are right in the Lion's Den!"

I proceeded to think aloud and said, "He knows these woods and obviously has a trail through that thicket and he used it to make a silent exit...Let's bird dog him!"

Another revelation donned on me and I further whispered, "The only trick we haven't tried all trip is your Comer Family Special; the old "bull following a cow" trick." Everything culminated in that moment as Ian glanced at the woods one more time. We saw the same things; the worn trail we walked up that connected to a highway along the ridge. There was a huge moose-rubbed tree adjacent to us and a urine-wallow beyond it. The whole woods smelled of rutting moose. We had just discovered the hidden secret to finding bulls on this drainage but we had to capitalize to prove it. We both knew it.

"You're right. I'll be the cow. Just give me about 30 yards or so and then follow behind with the canoe paddle. Rake and grunt real softly."

He gave a seductive cow call and started fox-walking through the



Ian poses with his well-earned moose.

brush. As I waited and dissected the woods with my eyes, I noticed the secret trail just as Ian did. He winked at me, gave another cow bleat and followed his nose along the trail. I continued the song and dance with a quaint grunt followed by some soft brush raking with the canoe paddle and then I started my prowling further into the fire. Moments later I watched as Ian's focus locked forward and he leveled the .45-70. He contorted his body down and to his left to find the opening he needed and then swooned me with the canon blast.

"He's huge! He's huge!" he screamed as he threw his hands out wide to depict the size of the bull he just rumbled. "As soon as you grunted, he came over that hill gunning for you!"

Frankly, it was a little bittersweet for me. That year I had told myself, "I would kill my first grizzly and then kill my first moose. I would spend every minute possible in the field to create the greatest opportunity for the magic to happen." I arrowed a grizzly in late August and then spent 15-plus days moose hunting. Though it was Ian who punched his tag on the so-cliché last afternoon of the last day, my longing for a moose took nothing away from my excitement for him and I eagerly initiated the post-kill ritual.

As per tradition, the first thing we did was yell in exuberance and talk at full volume. After ten full days of being quiet and whispering, my voice needed a cathartic blare. I started with a ritual poke in the ribs towards Ian and soon we were singing Creedence. We acknowledged that we had just fumigated a bear-infested woods with the smell of blood and that this is equivocal to chumming shark-infested waters. That cacophony of John Fogarty impressions and F-bomb-laden congratulatory statements was our shark cage.

Our charisma continued to manifest through our efficiency at breaking down that old beast. Ian tolerates my poor hearing mostly because of my aptitude at cutting and then packing absurd amounts of meat through the Alaskan wilds. We were on pace to have everything loaded with time to raft a few more miles. With only the antlers and one hind quarter remaining, the true magic of my persistence revealed itself.

We were filleting the meat from the pelvis when Ian perked his ears, turned his head, stood and said in disbelief, "You're not going to believe this Steve! I hear another one!"

Dumbfounded, I quickly started calculating how I'd handle the situation if another bull presented itself. Ian solved the dilemma when he commanded, "Get the gun, dude! I heard him again, he's real close!"

I peeled off my blood-soaked gloves and scrambled for the gun, then looked up and saw a monster bull sauntering through the brush ahead. Shocked into paralysis, I completely forgot to raise and shoot the gun.



The author is all smiles after successfully taking this bull.

# HONDA

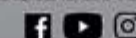


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“Oh, he’s DEFINITELY over 50 inches!” I proclaimed. Ian’s incomprehensible mutterings indicated his agreement. I snapped-to and leveled the iron sights on his heart just as the bull entered a thicket with no window to his vitals. His antler tops bobbed above the willow tops and then he disappeared altogether. Ian and I were shoulder to shoulder, speechless. I swung the gun through the brush at the pace of the bull, never taking my eyes off the front sight. I heard the sound of brush crashing beyond the thicket. Recognizing the rare opportunity and the amount of work ahead if we killed another huge bull, Ian broke our silence and asked, “What are you going to do? See if he circles around downwind?”



“No. I’m going to march right through that brush and punch him in the nose!”

With a guttural and snotty growl, I bull-marched through the thicket, uprooting alders as I did. The moose’s side profile and full right paddle were waiting for me on the other side of the thicket, 40 yards away, right where I last heard that brush cracking. The first shot thundered straight through the heart. He bolted ahead a few steps and stopped. The second shot impacted just inches above the first. In seconds, his head went limp. As he fell to his side, his antlers squared towards me and revealed something alarming.

“That’s not a 60-inch bull,” I thought to myself. “I may have just ruined the whole trip!” Despite that feeling of unease, I yelled, “WE DID IT! WE KILLED TWO MOOSE!”

When I turned around to head towards my bull, the big boy was staring at me; roughly five yards away, careless and

When you choose a moose-hunting partner, be selective and look for somebody like Ian. He is savvy in the woods and handy with the steel. He can carry his body weight in meat and also intimidate a bear. Yet, he is quick to grin and eager to laugh when things become arduous.

uninterested in my presence. He ambled by as I picked up my jaw and hollered to Ian, “Bring the camera. There’s a 60-inch bull just five yards away that doesn’t even care that I’m talking in this loud a voice. The one I shot is not the big one. Bring the camera!”

Did we get lucky to shoot two bulls? No. There was no luck involved. We danced the line between persistence and insanity and were present when magic happened. When the situation dictated, we acted and capitalized. It was our constant reflection on each encounter that allowed persistence to prevail. Luck came only when we found the three brow tines necessary to make my bull legal. It was an emotional rollercoaster that cannot be forgotten. The adventure continued its remarkable nature.

We camped across the creek to keep a moat between us and all that damned bear bait. The first raindrop fell as we washed the blood from our hands that evening. As we drank some island anesthesia, cooked tenderloins, and rehashed the amazing day, the sound of the drops increased in frequency and amplitude and carried their rhythm through the night. In the morning, we ambitiously finished bringing both bulls down the hill and then feng shui’d the raft to fit two moose and our gear. I’ll never forget



The author later learned that those two bullets destroyed the best bartering item in that drainage. At right: If you’ve ever wondered whether a Pristine Ventures Pioneer XStream can float two guys and two moose; it can if you’re thrifty. Ian and the author are proud Eagle Scouts and were grateful to put their skills to the test.

how satisfying it was to take that final photo. In a manner perfected on previous trips, Ian and I dominated the creek that day. I beefed the oars while he rode the stern and powered the “mighty Norseman” (A broad-bladed paddle that once won a whitewater kayaking world championship). It took constant muscling to control the inertia of the heavily

laden vessel but the champ performed exceptionally. By the light of our headlamps, we arrived at our ol’ trapper cabin late that evening.

The fire was ready-made, so the flick of a match was all it took to ignite an inferno inside the old Blaze King stove and warm the cozy log cabin. Its age is evident, but it continues to serve us well and we give it extra care each time we arrive. The big ol’ fat rain continued to fall, forcing Ian and I to entertain ourselves in the cabin for three more days while waiting for the squalls to subdue, the skies to clear, and the bush planes to start flying again.



*Steve Opat is a hunting nut-job, medevac nurse, and story writer from Fairbanks, Alaska. As a transplant from Minnesota, he understands people’s mystique with Alaska’s wild lands. He focuses his stories on the emotion of new big adventures and also the humbling learning moments from DIY excursions. He is a field editor for the Journal of Mountain Hunting and contributes to multiple outdoor publications.*



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# BOWHUNTING CARIBOU

Story and Photos by Lon E. Lumber

I first bowhunted caribou on Adak Island when I was a young Navy photographer stationed on the remote Aleutian island back in 1985. I can remember it like it was yesterday. I had a salty, old Navy Commander, Tom Cockcroft, who was a veteran Adak outdoorsman as my mentor.

The fog was so thick I could barely see the tip of my bow right in front of my face. Tom's glasses were coated with foggy dew, but man did he know how to navigate. Since I could see and he couldn't, he'd bark out compass coordinates and name specific landmarks from memory that I was supposed to find in the "cloud soup." Somehow Tom managed to direct us through the foggy mountain pass and when the skies cleared, we could see miles of undulating, emerald-green tundra but not many caribou. Eventually, we did see a small bunch of chocolate and gray-colored "bou." I don't ever recall being more thrilled about seeing big game in my life! We tried a stalk in the open terrain and were promptly busted. They trotted off in majestic fashion and vanished into the wilderness as if they were ghosts, and so it goes when bowhunting caribou.

#### **Caribou Behavior**

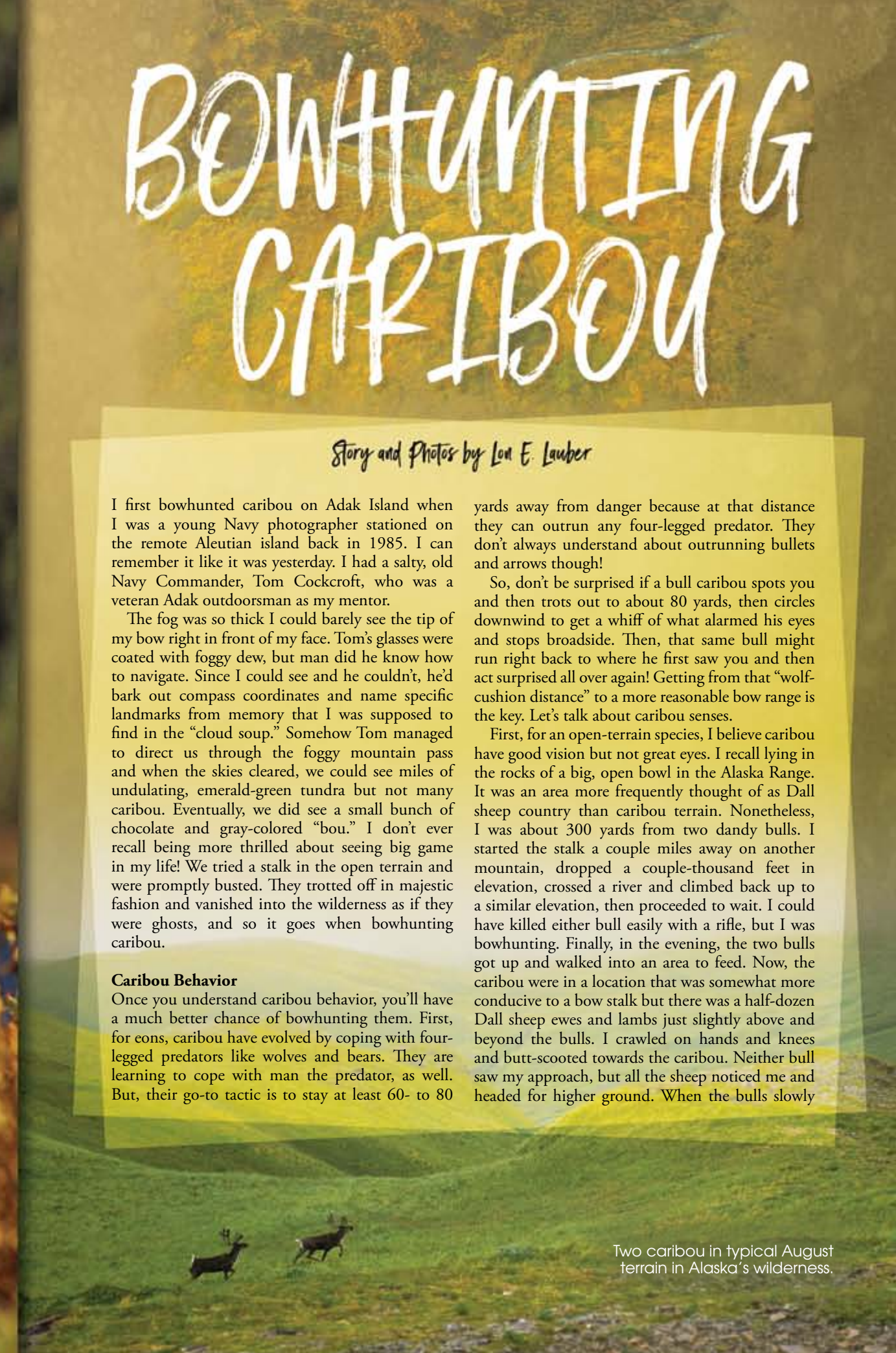
Once you understand caribou behavior, you'll have a much better chance of bowhunting them. First, for eons, caribou have evolved by coping with four-legged predators like wolves and bears. They are learning to cope with man the predator, as well. But, their go-to tactic is to stay at least 60- to 80

yards away from danger because at that distance they can outrun any four-legged predator. They don't always understand about outrunning bullets and arrows though!

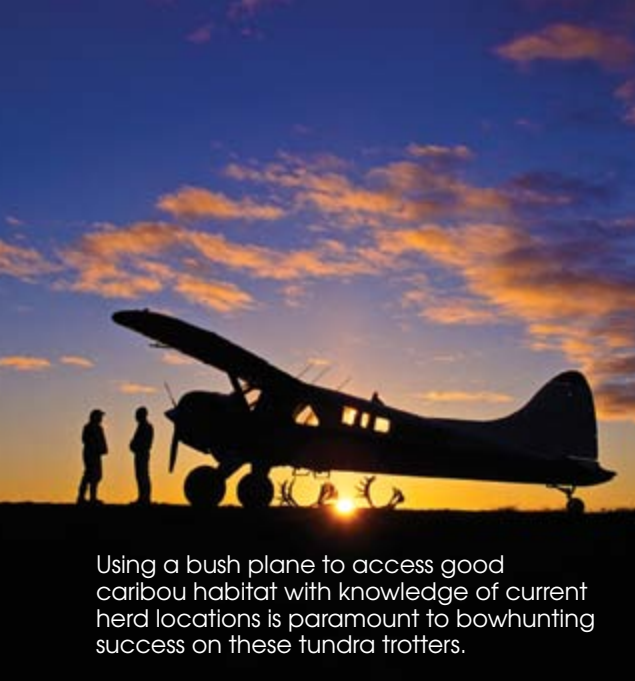
So, don't be surprised if a bull caribou spots you and then trots out to about 80 yards, then circles downwind to get a whiff of what alarmed his eyes and stops broadside. Then, that same bull might run right back to where he first saw you and then act surprised all over again! Getting from that "wolf-cushion distance" to a more reasonable bow range is the key. Let's talk about caribou senses.

First, for an open-terrain species, I believe caribou have good vision but not great eyes. I recall lying in the rocks of a big, open bowl in the Alaska Range. It was an area more frequently thought of as Dall sheep country than caribou terrain. Nonetheless, I was about 300 yards from two dandy bulls. I started the stalk a couple miles away on another mountain, dropped a couple-thousand feet in elevation, crossed a river and climbed back up to a similar elevation, then proceeded to wait. I could have killed either bull easily with a rifle, but I was bowhunting. Finally, in the evening, the two bulls got up and walked into an area to feed. Now, the caribou were in a location that was somewhat more conducive to a bow stalk but there was a half-dozen Dall sheep ewes and lambs just slightly above and beyond the bulls. I crawled on hands and knees and butt-scooted towards the caribou. Neither bull saw my approach, but all the sheep noticed me and headed for higher ground. When the bulls slowly

A mature bull caribou cautiously coming up a hill near a lake in the Alaska wilderness, showing their typically larger, curving antlers that are so impressive.



Two caribou in typical August terrain in Alaska's wilderness.



Using a bush plane to access good caribou habitat with knowledge of current herd locations is paramount to bowhunting success on these tundra trotters.



The author's good friend and hunting partner, Phil Lincoln, glassing for caribou on a cold autumn morning in the Alaska tundra.



Caribou bull silhouetted against the blue sky.

fed over a ridge and into a steep but lush gully, I sprinted to close the gap. When I peeked over the ridge the bigger bull was broadside at 45 yards, so I shot him. It was exactly 12 hours from when I started the stalk!

Regarding their noses and ears, caribou have a good sense of smell and it's just a matter of what they choose to do with human odor. I've seen caribou react to human scent like they touched their

noses to an electric fence. I've also seen them barely respond to the odd human scent. Regardless, being mindful of wind direction is always paramount to bowhunting success. In comparison to other big-game animals, caribou have relatively small ears, but they can pick up the slightest unfamiliar sound like a nylon pack scraping against brush, or a metal zipper, and will alert on odd sounds.

Overall, I believe caribou have less-

acute senses or choose not to utilize them as much as other species. I'm not saying caribou are easy to hunt with a bow. On the contrary, but they are fallible to a stealthy approach.

It's also very crucial to caribou bowhunting success to fully understand just how effortlessly they cover ground. A walking, feeding, or just milling-around caribou can easily out distance a marathon runner! Caribou have large,

round hooves that help them not only stay on top of the tundra and snow, but help them swim well, too. I remember my good buddy, South Cox, on his first caribou hunt with me. We glassed up a small herd with a really nice bull amongst the handful of animals. I instantly noticed they were doing their typical walking and feeding behavior. And, I knew how difficult the tussocks that make up tundra are for humans to walk in. I told South I'd meet him back in camp and that there was very little chance of him catching up with them. Regardless, South took off full of hope and enthusiasm. Several hours later, South slogged back into camp, drenched in sweat, exhausted and with his head hung low. I asked how it went just for kicks. He said he never got close! I recall his eyes getting big and explaining how exhausting and challenging it was to traverse the damp, soft tundra that caribou call home. I don't remember exactly what he said but I'm pretty sure it was an echo chamber of what I said before he took off!

#### How to Bowhunt Caribou

The best way to hunt caribou is to find a single bull or a very small group of caribou with a mature bull amongst them that are stationary or almost sedentary, and in terrain that is ideal for stalking with a bow and arrow in hand. I'd rather hunt steep terrain, or rolling, broken terrain with gullies and small patches of willows, than wide-open expanses. I'd also rather hunt single or small groups of caribou rather than a large herd. Since caribou tend to like open spaces and are very gregarious, this can be difficult at times.

Thus, current, up-to-date aerial scouting is paramount to bowhunting success. I've been on a fly-in caribou hunt where I saw

Shot placement is only one small part of a successful Alaskan Hunt. Having the right gear at all times in the bush is **essential**.

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20-yard wide paths littered with caribou tracks, droppings, and hair that looked like a giant rototiller had gone through the area. It was actually caused by a large herd of caribou. Despite all the sign, I never saw a caribou, for days. Here yesterday but gone today!

Spot-and-stalk is my preferred method to bowhunt caribou. I believe with the vast expanses they call home, letting your eyes do the walking is prudent. Glass and move, glass and move until you find a small bunch that is in an ideal location to get within bow range. It usually takes a number of blown stalks in too-open terrain to fully understand just how challenging caribou are to bowhunt. But, with patience and perseverance, you can do it.

Waiting on trails for migrating caribou to filter by is my second favorite way to bowhunt caribou. My largest bull caribou to date was taken along a trail where an early cold snap and snow had the caribou filtering out of the mountains into lower-elevation habitat. For mid-September, it was hovering around 0°F with blowing snow, and the caribou were on the move. I still-hunted my way along a bench above the river drainage, trying to intercept caribou as they moved in small groups to less-snowy ground. After a couple hours of close calls but no shots, I finally caught two bulls on a sidehill in chest-high willows. When the bigger bull stopped at 33 yards with just a small window to shoot through, I shot him quartering away. In the snow, tracking the bull was quick and easy.

My third favorite way to hunt caribou is to use a boat on long, large lakes or to jetboat up rivers to find spots where throngs of caribou are crossing the water. This is very similar to both spot-and-stalk hunting and still-hunting along trails, but using the boat to cover more ground. Eventually, with all three of these tactics, you end up waiting on a trail or closing the gap via stalking to get a close bow shot.

#### Where to Bowhunt Caribou

Alaska covers more than 500,000 square miles and despite some myths there isn't a caribou behind every bush! I can't state how important real world, current herd locations and population trends are to bowhunting success. I could sit here and tell you about all the great places to hunt caribou, but it won't help one bit if the information is not current. Having a bush pilot who flies your intended hunting ground regularly and just prior to your hunt is absolutely paramount to improving your odds. Yes, you can hunt traditional caribou habitat and kill

them with a bow; but I'd have a lot more confidence if a bush pilot just saw them from the air. Remember, you cannot fly and hunt the same day for caribou.

The North Slope, Galena, Kotzebue, the Mulchatna River and the Nelchina areas have been traditional caribou country. Check with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game for recent population trends. Also, check the regulations and look for areas with very generous bag limits. That's a clear sign the area does not have a lot of hunting pressure and/or has a high caribou population.

#### When to Bowhunt Caribou

I've successfully hunted caribou in August, September, the end of October, November, and December. I hope you noticed I said the end of October. You may want to avoid late September and or early October because this is when caribou rut. Normally, when bowhunting, I'm all about taking advantage of a species when they are distracted with breeding. However, I've heard too many stories of how strong and nasty caribou meat is when they are rutting. I have always avoided hunting them during this time frame.

I generally like to eat well-cared-for caribou meat and I don't want to change that opinion. I remember flying back into Anchorage after a successful September caribou bowhunt and grilling a rump roast with chopped garlic and McCormick's Montréal steak seasoning. It was one of the best samples of game meat I've ever eaten!

#### Archery Tackle to Hunt Caribou

I'd say this is a simple one. Use whatever bow and arrow combination you would use for deer, elk, sheep, bear, etc. I would also suggest you use the heaviest and fastest arrow you can shoot accurately, with the emphasis on accurately. But I would say the same thing for all big-game species.

It's not that you need a super-hot setup to kill caribou, but there is no downside to a fast arrow (shorter flight time to be affected by wind, shorter time for the animal to react to the arrow, and flatter trajectory). And there is only one downside to a heavier arrow and that is a more-arching trajectory that can lead to misses and high or low hits. The upside of a heavier arrow is a quieter launch, better penetration, and more likelihood of an exit wound that may lead to a more obvious blood trail. But, and I'm not stuttering, but you must be able to shoot this combination accurately! I currently shoot just 60 pounds of draw weight and a 400-grain arrow at my pathetically short, 26-inch draw length and I would confidently hunt any big game in Alaska with this set up

because it's all about shot placement, baby! Please read my column in this issue about shot placement. Furthermore, I would implore you to make use of a modern laser rangefinder. Nowadays, they are affordable, wickedly accurate, and most have built-in inclinometers. I've shot caribou as close as seven yards and out around 60 yards, with most of the shots hovering around 35- to 40 yards. Being able to accurately judge distance or better yet, knowing the distance exactly will greatly improve your chances of filling your caribou tag.

#### The Time Needed to Bowhunt Caribou

I've killed a couple caribou with a bow and arrow on the first day of the hunt, but usually I like to have at least ten days and preferably two weeks for any Alaskan big-game bowhunt. Due to weather that makes it almost impossible to shoot an arrow, to bush plane logistics, to needed boat repairs, etc., plus the time to pack meat and antlers back to a pick-up spot, I'd rather have as much time afield as possible to bring the bowhunt to fruition.

On Alaskan wilderness hunts, it's not unusual for flight delays due to weather. And then, sometimes the bush pilot gets backed up and you are stuck for several extra days. I had one Kodiak caribou and Sitka blacktail deer hunt that was scheduled for 14 days but due to inclement weather, I didn't get out of the field until the 23rd day! Longer hunts give you more time to hunt, a little less pressure to tag out, and time to take a break without feeling pressed for time. It's better to plan a slightly longer trip than a slightly shorter trip, considering the cost of an Alaska caribou hunt in the first place.

In closing, some of my fondest memories of bowhunting Alaska occurred while chasing caribou. Their stiff-legged trot and those swept-back antlers are a sight to behold against the crimson-colored tundra of Alaska's backcountry. If you ever get the chance to pursue caribou with a bow, don't think about it; just go. It'll be an experience you'll never forget!



*Lon E. Lauber is a freelance writer and outdoor photographer from Spokane, WA. Lon lived in Alaska for 17 years and has returned many times to continue his passions of bowhunting and wildlife photography. He is the author of the book, Bowhunter's Guide to Accurate Shooting, a nine-time Alaska state archery champion, and the holder of 52 Pope and Young record-class big-game animals. Most of those are Alaskan specimens. Lon also spent 28 years as a paid, professional bowhunter/archer.*

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RECIPE

### Margherita Moose Burger and Italian Sausage Deep-Dish Skillet Pizza with Mixed Greens and Basil Vinaigrette

by Wayne and Melissa Norris

#### Ingredients:

- 1 medium pizza dough
- 1/2 pound moose burger
- 1/2 pound Italian sausage
- 1 cup pizza sauce
- 1 cup mozzarella cheese
- 1/2 cup parmesan cheese
- 1/4 cup fresh tomatoes, chopped
- 1/3 cup fresh basil, chiffonade
- 1/4 small sweet onion
- 1 tbsp olive oil

#### Make-Ahead Pizza Dough

If your local pizzeria sells pre-made dough, grab some of that. If not, here is a favorite pizza dough recipe our family has used for years.

- 1 package rapid rise yeast
- 2 tsp salt
- 2 cups warm water
- 5 cups flour

Mix water and yeast and let sit until it bubbles.



Start with 3 cups of the flour, mix in salt, then mix in 2 more cups flour. Add the water with yeast next. Mix then knead the dough. Place in a well-oiled bowl, cover, and let rise for two hours at room temperature (70- to 75°). Knead 5- to 10 times before cutting into 4 parts then place on a well-floured baking sheet. Cover and place in the fridge over night. Let dough stand at room temperature for one hour when it comes out of the fridge. Knead it 2- to 4 times, then roll out for use.

#### Pizza Sauce

- 1 can tomato sauce, 15 oz
- 1 can tomato paste, 6 oz
- 1/2 cup shredded parmesan cheese
- 2 tbsp Summit Spice and Tea
- Italian Blend seasoning
- pinch of salt and pepper
- pinch of brown sugar

Mix all pizza sauce ingredients in a small saucepan and let simmer for 20 minutes. While that is simmering add one tbsp olive oil to a medium skillet, add chopped onion, and sauté until translucent. Add the moose burger and Italian sausage (remove casing first) and cook until browned and done.

Heat oven to 500° or the highest temperature your oven reaches. Heat a 12-inch cast-iron skillet on a gas stove top until hot. Sprinkle the hot pan with a mix of flour, corn meal, and sugar. Stretch or roll your dough into a 14-inch round, and press it carefully into the hot skillet. Spread pizza sauce around the dough, then top with a layer of mozzarella and parmesan. Spread a layer of the moose burger/onion/Italian sausage mix. Then top with another layer of mozzarella and parmesan. Place in oven for 12- to 15 minutes or until done. Top with fresh tomatoes and fresh basil. Serve with mixed greens topped with basil vinaigrette.

#### Basil Vinaigrette

- 2 cups fresh basil
- 1 shallot, chopped
- 1 garlic clove
- 1/3 cup olive oil
- 2 tbsp rice wine vinegar
- pinch of sea salt
- pinch of black pepper

Puree all in mini food processor for one minute. Toss mixed greens in dressing. Dressing keeps in the refrigerator for about 3- or 4 days.

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