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Gear for 2020

SUMMER 2020

Hunt Alaska

2020 ANNUAL GEAR GUIDE

10 Sheep-Hunting Tips

A Bruin of a Lifetime

DIY Yukon Moose

2020 Editors' Choice Awards

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5 Common Bear Spray Questions, Answered

1. How do I properly use bear spray?

If a bear is charging you, hold the can firmly and remove the safety clip by placing your thumb in front of the clip and pulling back. Press the trigger and direct the spray cloud downward at the front of the bear. Continue spraying until the bear diverts its charge. If a bear is charging from within...

- **60 feet**, spray 30-40 feet in front of you. The bear will meet the cloud almost simultaneously at that point.
- **30 feet**, spray downward at the front of the bear until it diverts its charge.
- **15 feet**, try to spray the bear but be ready to lie face down on the ground, protecting the back of your neck while holding the can and randomly spraying the area.

2. Is all bear spray created equal?

"No, bear sprays are not all equal," says Chuck Bartlebaugh, Executive Director of the Be Bear Aware Campaign. He recommends bear sprays with the maximum level of capsaicin and related capsaicinoids of 2%, at least 7-8 seconds of spray duration, and 30-40 feet of spray distance. Counter Assault bear spray is formulated to provide additional time and spray distance to compensate for windy conditions, accidentally spraying too high, or more than one charging bear.

3. How will wind and cold temperatures affect my bear spray?

For wind, you will need to adjust your spray angle so it drifts in front of the bear's path. Longer spray durations allow additional time to make adjustments. Cold temperatures have been known to affect bear spray's efficacy, which is why Counter Assault includes additional chemicals to compensate for cold weather.

4. How will bear spray affect me?

When being charged, focus on the bear and spraying. Wind and blow back can cause you to feel the spray effects, but your adrenaline will help you focus. Once the bear diverts its charge, quickly move to fresh air. Wash your eyes and mouth with cool water; do not rub. The tearing effects, runny nose, and coughing should dissipate in about 30 minutes. Asthmatics may require special care.

5. How can I avoid bear encounters?

Bear spray is not a substitute for vigilance or following proper safety precautions. Stay on established trails, hike during daylight hours, and store all food properly. Be aware of your surroundings and call out in non-threatening tones to alert bears of your presence.



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Dall sheep hunting is one of the most prestigious and demanding hunts in Alaska. Billy shares years of experience with these 10 tips to help you be a better sheep hunter, whether you're a beginner or experienced.

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Casey Dinkel relives the joy of helping his father, Gene, take a mature brown bear on Unimak Island—a hunt which Gene had dreamed of for 50 years. The three-man team of Casey, Gene and John Whipple wisely planned 14 days for this hunt at the base of the Aleutians.

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Even DIY hunters can score big on moose in Alaska. Danny Stotler and hunting partner, Mark Thonhoff, were dropped off in lower Yukon country and managed to bag trophy bulls of 59- and 63 inches.



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© John Whipple



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COVER / Danny Stotler embarked on a DIY moose hunt and came home with a true trophy and memories to last a lifetime. © Danny Stotler



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Hunt Alaska

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[THE OPENER]

The Roadless Rule and the Future of Southeast Alaska

Story and photo by Bjorn Dible

On an August afternoon in 2019, my pal Ed Shanley and I belly crawled toward a fork-horn buck on a mountain on Admiralty Island. Ed levered a round in his old .308, took a rest and pulled the trigger. A few minutes later, my friend knelt over the animal, thankful for the delicious meat it would provide for his family. We picked a rendezvous point where we planned to camp for the night, then I continued hunting by myself. Mountains, only occasionally interrupted by ocean or glaciers, stretched in all directions. It was so hot I didn't expect much action until an hour or so before sunset when it would cool off, so I let my mind wander as I slowly scoped different nooks and crannies. I thought about how lucky it is to be able to hunt and how public lands can make even a poor man rich. When I was a kid I accepted those things as being basic, inherent rights. Now, I know we're going to have to fight if we want public lands and good hunting opportunities for future generations.

Theodore Roosevelt established the

Tongass National Forest in 1907. It comprises 16.7 million square acres in southeast Alaska. A few years before that, Roosevelt had recommended that Admiralty Island and the neighboring ABC islands (Admiralty, Baranof, Chichagof) be set aside as a brown bear preserve—an idea that got shot down. Roosevelt believed that we could have both economic development and wilderness, but we'd have to plan with care to assure a balance.

I grew up eating Sitka blacktail and salmon, the lifeblood of the Tongass. Now, I feed these same foods to my own family. The reasons I, other Southeast residents, and visiting sportsmen have the hunting opportunities we do is in large part because of protections from the Roadless Rule. Established in 2001, the Rule protects inventoried roadless areas across America from road building and old-growth clear-cut logging. In 2019, the U.S. Forest Service, after pressure from Alaska's governor and congressional leaders, and pressure from President Trump, decided to abolish the Roadless Rule in the Tongass. If this happens it'll open up 185,000 acres of southeast Alaska's last old-growth rainforest for clear-cut logging and destroy critical habitat for bears, salmon, deer and other wildlife. A stand of trees in the Tongass, once cut, takes up to 200 years before it again becomes ideal old-growth habitat. Until then, trees are the

same height, choking out the understory and essentially creating a dead zone.

Despite what Governor Dunleavy and Senator Lisa Murkowski say, the majority of southeast Alaskans are staunchly opposed to axing the Roadless Rule. Some opponents to the Roadless Rule says it hurts communities by preventing development that will benefit locals—this is simply untrue. An exemption for every project that was applied for, including community interties, hydroelectric projects and mines, has been approved. Axing the Roadless Rule is all about getting the last of the Tongass's productive old-growth timber to market. The heavily subsidized timber industry amounts to less than 1% of southeast Alaska's economy and employs about as many people as a single Walmart. I'm not against logging—I wouldn't mind seeing a timber industry developed in the Tongass based on second-growth timber that utilizes the thousands of miles of existing Forest Service roads, built and maintained by your tax dollars—but opening up our last old-growth timber makes no sense on an economic or conservation level. The loss of old-growth habitat will hurt commercial fishing and tourism, which make up the lion's share of the region's economy. In 2020, visitors to the Tongass—who come to witness its natural wonders—are expected to spend nearly \$800 million in the region.



A brown bear and Sitka blacktail buck on Admiralty Island in the Tongass National Forest.

Without the Roadless Rule, hunters, fishermen and the Alaskan way of life will be negatively affected for generations to come. The woods and mountains my family have utilized for three generations may no longer be huntable.

A young doe appeared in a grassy ravine just yards below. I was crouched on a small cliff and, had I been a bear, I could have had her with one leap. There were a couple salmon streams and mud flats three thousand feet below. The salmon run had been so poor that I expected to see more evidence of bears up high. I guessed they were mostly in the thick salmonberry and blueberry brush on the steep slopes near tree line. The deer looked up at me, more curious than anxious, too young to understand what I was. I moved on, hiking to the back side of the mountain and thinking how hunters are the paramount conservationists.

When the Forest Service, state government and logging corporations wanted to clear-cut and build a network of roads on Admiralty Island—a battle that lasted nearly 80 years and, early on, included talk of eradicating the island's incredible brown-bear

population—it was hunting guides and hunters who fought tooth and nail to keep it from happening. Because of their efforts, I enjoy the opportunities I have today.

A buck appeared but I was busted. I jacked a shell in the chamber and whistled, hoping the deer would pause and offer a shot, but it was too late.

I thought about the future as I hunted my way back toward Ed. What public land and hunting opportunities would both of our young sons have? Would there be salmon, bears and deer for them? What economic opportunities would they have? Will they have to leave southeast Alaska to find work? We need smart resource development, but not the sort that compromises both a region's economy and lifestyle.

I crawled along to the edge of a steep slope and was rewarded with the sight of seven bucks all within easy shooting range. I picked one of the bigger deer, then waited for it to present a clean shot. Ed clambered to join me as I finished loading my backpack with the last quarter.

We ascended a steep slope, coming across a grandfather trail—where hundreds, even thousands of brown bears have stepped in the same place—on our way back to the tent. These trails always make me think of both the past and the future. One thing is certain: Without good habitat that can support healthy wildlife numbers, we hunters don't have much of a future. I wish people would get as riled up about their public lands as they do about the 2nd amendment. Roosevelt would have—and, he, without hesitation, would have also supported keeping the Roadless Rule intact in the Tongass and rest of the country.



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://www.facebook.com/BjornDibleauthor) or [instagram.com/bjorndible/](https://www.instagram.com/bjorndible/).

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THE HUNT

Preparing For The Hunt

Story and photo by Scott Haugen

Welcome to “The Hunt,” a new column which I have the honor of writing for *Hunt Alaska*. Honestly, in the past few issues, my mind has been shifting from my previous column focus, dubbed Technical Talk, to capturing more of the hunting experience. Thus, “The Hunt” was born.

I’m not much of a gear junkie or a tech nerd, and felt myself running out of motivating ideas on such topics, mainly because I’m not into keeping up with trending gear. Most important, I found myself wanting to share experiences from what I’ve learned in my decades afield.

So, what do I consider to be my three biggest pieces of advice when it comes to big-game hunting in Alaska? No matter if you’re a longtime resident or a first timer traveling to hunt here, the item of most importance is to be in shape. A fit hunter stands a much higher chance of success, period; especially when it comes to tackling Alaska’s rugged country.

I’ve had the best success maximizing my level of fitness by eating a healthy diet and exercising six days a week. Lately, my workouts have varied between high repetition weight routines, core strength development, yoga, and cardio. I try to devote at least one hour a day to rigorous exercise, but cardio and yoga can extend that time. Yoga is great for not only core and back strength, but for maintaining flexibility.

Three steps that have also helped optimize my fitness are not eating junk food, no eating after 7:00 p.m., and making sure to get plenty of rest,

something the body greatly needs but is so neglected in our hustling world.

Being physically fit isn’t the only kind of “fit” I’m talking about, either. A mere glimpse at Alaska’s rugged terrain is enough to strike doubt into the minds of many hunters. Being mentally fit is very important when it comes to hunting in Alaska. You’d be surprised at the number of hunters who fail to fill a tag due to being mentally defeated before the hunt even gets started.

This brings us to tip number two, and that’s knowing the limitations of your outdoor survival skills. It’s crucial to be honest with yourself because your life—and the lives of your hunting partners—could depend on it. I’m not just talking about basic outdoor skills like cooking, navigating, building a fire or knowing how to weave a few stitches on a gash. I’m talking about having what it takes to survive when you’re stuck in a tiny tent high up in the sheep mountains where heavy snow incessantly pounds you and thick clouds bring your prized hunt to a screeching halt. I’m talking about having the ability to navigate flooding rivers on a moose hunt gone bad, how to deal with sunken boats or rafts, and how to stay alive should something happen to your bush plane. I once spoke with a resident who, in the 1970s, was dropped on a solo brown-bear hunt on Kodiak Island. The bush-plane pilot forgot about him, but the hunter survived, alone, for 54 days before being picked up. Fortunately, with communication services the way they are today, such a case is highly unlikely. Then again, this is Alaska, where anything can happen.

Finally, research your hunt area before applying for a tag or committing to a hunt. Last winter saw some of the heaviest snowfalls in many years throughout

parts of the state, and incessantly cold temperatures—we’re talking -40°F and colder for extended periods. Just because an area was red hot for moose last season, or Sitka blacktails the past few years, doesn’t mean it’s going to be the same this year, or next.

Start researching your hunt area by calling a regional Alaska Department of Fish and Game office. Inquire about winter conditions in the drainage you plan to hunt, not just the game-management unit. This is because one drainage or a small part of a mountain range can get smothered with high snowfall, yet a few miles away, very little snow may have accumulated. Also, seek information on winter-kill surveys that may have been conducted. It can take big-game populations years to recover from devastating winters, so plan your hunts accordingly.

This marks my 30th year of hunting and fishing throughout Alaska, and while I still have a lot to learn, I also feel I could write a helpful guidebook on what it takes to prepare for big-game hunting in the state. However, since writing another book isn’t in the cards at this time, I’ll do my best to bring helpful tips and experience-based knowledge to the pages of *Hunt Alaska*, because when it comes to hunting, the preparation and the learning never stop.



For signed copies of Scott Haugen’s best-selling book, *Hunting the Alaskan High Arctic*, visit scotthaugen.com. Follow Scott’s adventures on Instagram and Facebook.

Not all days are spent glassing under clear skies. Are you mentally and physically prepared to face the challenges that can arise when hunting in Alaska?

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[TRIP TIPS]

Don't Forget Your Buff

Story by Sarah Stallone

Photo by Tony Stallone

I gave a thumbs-up sign as Tony rolled past me, down the steep bank and onto the trail. It was afternoon on day four of a week-long caribou hunt in central Alaska and we were moving camp. Our stealthy morning hunt had produced three oblivious cow moose and a few small groups of cow and calf caribou wandering through the frozen valley behind our camp, just like the last three mornings. It was time to try a different valley. We were over 50 miles away from the nearest highway as the crow flies, and far enough back to where we weren't seeing any other camps or hunters. The area felt like ours and we had definitely put in the effort to find game, hunting hard. I glanced back for a final check. Just a flattened rectangle showed where the tent had been.

My upbringing had never involved motorized hunting. I had a lot to learn, and for this hunt I was more than grateful for the reliable 4-wheeler, as our trip meter had just ticked over 110 miles. Sometimes you just have to ride further, climb higher,

hike harder, or glass longer than the other two-legged predators seeking to fill freezers of their own. My husband, Tony, has hunted this area on and off for two decades and many successful hunts have filled his freezer over the years. This was his first time bringing me along. As all of you hunters know, that's love. I should keep this guy.

With the separation of the famous Nelchina caribou herd and necessary tag restrictions, hunters were forced to change up their tactics. If it had been any other year, we would have been tagged out in 10 minutes on opening morning with a cow that appeared behind camp. She stood at 52 yards for over a minute before grazing over the spotting hill to join her girlfriends on the other side. Frustrating for sure, but we were up for the bull-only challenge.

Stopping a little further ahead to glass, I spotted a few 'bou and peered through the binos checking visible anatomy in hopes of spotting something legal. I felt more like a proctologist than a hunter. "All cows," Tony whispered as he moved along.

Lightweight, versatile gear is required for this type of hunting—a week's worth of camp and gear had to fit on the back rack, leaving the front open for fuel cans and recovery equipment, both for game or for our machines. We had packed light and our system had been working great. However, in 24 years of hunting, 10 of which have been

in Alaska, I was completely unprepared for one new factor; this element on this hunt had never before been encountered. Never have I ever prepared for September hunts to be this hot! It was unbelievable! Dawn would find us hiking in the dark up to a spotting hill behind camp with a vantage overlooking hundreds of acres of valleys, ridges, and creek bottoms. The sub-30s overnight temps had frozen water puddles and heavily frosted everything in sight. But with sunrise came a melt line as the bright sun rays thawed their way down the mountainsides. By 11 a.m., ambient temps reached into the 70s and cloud cover was scarce. I've never packed sunscreen on a hunt and quickly regretted my error.

If you've ever adventured with me, you know I'm never without three gear items: a knife, a lighter, and a Buff. That thin tube of jersey material bunched around my neck has served as a wind break, camo face mask, neck warmer, signal flag, fish net, air filter, winter hat, and occasionally a snot rag among many other things. Adventures from snowboarding to backyard campfires are accompanied by this universal piece of gear. It's surprising how much warmer you feel when drafts can't make it down your neck.

For the first time, this trip found me using my favorite Buff as a sun shield, attempting to wrap every inch of my exposed face in its protective cover. My nose kept slipping out—it was tough to keep the Buff seated under my dust goggles, and I think I'm still peeling. Never have I had a worse sunburn in Alaska. I'm grateful that the rest of me didn't get burnt. As you pack for your next adventure, throw in a Buff. You'll be surprised at how many uses it has.

Multi-functional indeed, Buff is a simple and brilliant piece of gear, but try as it might, it couldn't magically produce a bull caribou for our freezer. But we made memories anyway! I learned to start planning better, even for sun, and we thoroughly enjoyed our caribou adventure together. Check out Buffs at Buffusa.com.

Pro Tip: Keeping your head warm on chilly nights is important. The Buff pulled over your head seals in warmth, and pulled over your eyes helps block early-season light for better sleeping.



Sarah Stallone is an avid hunter, firearms instructor, and Leupold Optics representative. She's grateful to be living in Anchorage, AK, enjoying the outdoors whenever possible. Learn more at AccurateAdvantage.US.



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Sarah trying to keep from getting sunburnt, using her Buff for the first time as a face shield and sun protector.



[AFTER THE SHOT]

Adventures in Photography

Story and photos by Paul D. Atkins

Most hunters who come to Alaska come for one reason and that is to capture some of the magic that our great state has to offer. If you live here already, then you already know. If you're like me, you will strive to see it all, and I know how hard that will be considering the scope of Alaska. Some save for a lifetime to see it, while others are immersed in it. One way or the other, it will be etched in your mind forever.

Memories are all we have anyway, and those memories will be cherished for years to come. Whether it's the big moose on the wall or the bear in the den, they're there to remind us of that time we spent in the Alaskan wilderness. However, one thing that is sometimes overlooked is the photos we bring back from the field.

When I was younger I didn't really care about photos. I wanted horns and claws and the experience of the hunt itself. Like many, I still do, but since those days I have found that good photos are as important to me as the trophy itself and the meat in the freezer. They are not used to brag, but to remind me of that time when I hunted hard to bag that big caribou, or musk ox, or whatever I was hunting at the time.

Photography has come a long way in the last 20 years. When I first came to Alaska back in the 90s, digital cameras weren't even invented, and the old Kodak was as good as it got, especially those disposable ones that you dropped in a box



My advice? Take a tripod with you everywhere you go. They are easy to use and if your camera has remote capabilities it can and will produce some of your best photos.

at a retail store.

The first digital camera I bought in 2002 was an amazing invention; small, slick and easy to use, but quickly those same cameras became obsolete. Today it's DSLRs (Digital Single-Lens Reflex) with multiple lenses, Wi-Fi technology and everything you need to capture that truly great photo, provided you know how to use the camera itself. In the right hands the photos they produce are truly amazing.

Not all digital cameras, however, are created equal. It's pretty much a personal preference as to what a person uses and likes, but if it's

producing good photos, use it. I have always had great luck with the Canon line. They're simple, easy to operate and take great photos, even if you're a novice. I would recommend buying one that you can handle at first and then upgrade through trial and error.

With the invention of the smartphone, taking photos has taken on a whole new meaning. They're easy to use, and for most of us are accessible at all times. Everyone has a phone on them, it seems. Whip it out, press a few buttons, and bam, you not only have great photos, but videos too. They're truly amazing pieces of



Action shots of wildlife are big business. With the right equipment and know-how you too can take that photo of a lifetime.

technology that seem to get better each day. I have used phone pictures for entire articles before and they turned out just as good as those taken with a high-priced camera.

The biggest problem I see with photography has little to do with the camera, but how the photo shots were set up. Proper preparation is the key to great photos. Here are a few tips to make your photos better and to really bring home the memories that all can enjoy.

Take a lot of photos. Don't be afraid to take hundreds of photos. Once you start processing your animal and getting him on the frame pack, there is no going back. You can never have enough pictures and even if some don't turn out the way you like, you will have plenty more to choose from.

Take the extra time to set up the shot. Depending on the size of the animal, try to position him in a spot that not only provides a great background, but also pays respect to the animal itself. Tuck his legs up under him and clean off as much blood as possible. Do whatever it takes to make

him look natural. I always carry wet wipes or paper towels for this. Also make sure the animal's tongue isn't hanging out.

Positioning yourself. When people look at your pictures you want them to see a happy hunter or hunters with their hard-earned quarry. Take the time to clean your hands and tidy up a bit. Also remove any extra gear that might make its way into the photo like a backpack or extra clothes that you might have shed. Remember, anything that is not part of the habitat will stick out. Also, never sit on an animal; it will look disrespectful to some. The best shots are those that typically have the hunter behind the animal, but not too far back. Most like to hold the antlers or at least be touching the animal in some way.

Pay attention to the sun. If it's midday and the sun is out, a cap will shade the hunter's face. Take several photos with and without the cap. A person can also use the camera's flash to eliminate the shadows. I've been on a lot of hunts where I lucked out in the middle of the day and using the flash created some of my best photos.

Taking the photos. Usually you will have one of your hunting partners taking the photos. This may seem simple, but I have seen more fails than successes. First, your buddy must be familiar with your camera. Take a few moments and show him how the zoom works, the flash, and what button to push. You'll also want him to take several photos from different angles, but the best results usually come from those taken at ground level. Have him lie on the ground and get as close to you and your animal as possible. Think close and low for these shots. If you are alone, bring along a tripod and position it as low as possible; just make sure you check for twigs and stray strands of grass that may be in the way. I always take a small tripod just in case.

Trophy photos are not the only things on which you should focus. Take some of camp, the surroundings, live animal shots if possible, and if nothing else, the little things that make the adventure memorable. You'll be glad you did.

There are a lot of other techniques, but these six basic tips will have you on your way to producing top-notch photographs. Remember it's all about memories, and the photo you don't take is the one you'll wish you did.



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

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BALLISTICS & AMMO

Things That Go Bump in the Night Can Be Bad

Story and photo
by Randy Flickinger

It seems like I always lean towards conversations I have with fellow nimrods to generate ideas to write about. Recent topics from customers at the SHOT Show and other events have been all over the map. From new cartridge designs, new bullets and new loadings for existing cartridges to “Ya, but I figured out how to exceed the loading manual and I have no signs of pressure.” Or my favorite: “I loaded up a bunch of ammo for my buddy and I think the dies I used were bad.” Oy vey.

In the interest of not pointing fingers I tried to think of some of what we might call “indiscretions” I may have had over the years and remedies to not repeat them. I call these “Notes from the bench and the field.”

Case Trimming

Check used and even new brass before reloading. Every manual has the recommended overall length for brass suitable for reloading. Arriving at the range, or worse, the field, and not paying attention can be disastrous. Buy a trimmer and overall length gauge to ensure you are setting up top-notch brass to shoot. Why waste powder, primers and projectiles



The author's reloading room.

with iffy brass? I skipped this step once and it brought to mind an indiscretion I will never repeat.

I loaded some rounds, arrived at the range, closed the bolt, and pulled the trigger. The results did not seem normal. I tried to load the second round and the bolt would hardly close. So, I stopped short, opened the bolt, repacked the loads and brought them home. Needless to say, they were way over length. It was a custom .270 Winchester with a tight chamber.

Recently I forgot my “never repeat this issue” with an AR-15. I chambered the round; or thought I did. The case stuck and shut me down for the day and took some time to remove. Case in point: Always check your brass for overall length. Additionally, during this step inspect the brass for cracks, and look for bright rings near the base for possible separation or any imperfections.

Crimping

Crimping is not used often in centerfire-rifle loading, but for pistols it is required most of the time. Due to heavy recoil in wheel guns or semi-auto loads not crimped, projectiles can move forward, or worse, slide into the case. Try to get the cylinder to turn with a bullet jammed against the crane or the barrel, and you'll have issues. If the projectile has a crimp ring and you are going on the hunt of a lifetime...use it. From the above case-trimming explanation, overall length needs to be on the perfect side to set the crimp on projectiles. Trimming to the proper length for crimping, the dies will be set at a certain length. If all sizing/trimming on the brass and overall length is off, your crimp will be off.

Crimping can be a matter of life or death in some hunting situations. My indiscretion was on a bear hunt near Wide Bay, Alaska. There was no crimp on the 300-grain Nosler

Partitions for my .375-.338 and I was already at the mercy of loading the projectile way out to get accuracy. I shot it several times after arriving in the field. Making sure I practiced as if it was a real situation, the rounds in the magazine were impacted with the recoil, moving the projectiles forward. The bottom round in the magazine got stuck and had to be removed with the blade of a knife and cleaning rod. It would have been a bad time if facing a brown bear. Needless to say, I never forgot this and the two rounds in the magazine were useless in the field. Checking the remaining rounds I found five that were too long. At least I was smart enough to bring another rifle. My backup .458 Winchester with 500 grainers was punishing to shoot so I had yet another reason to always remember to crimp.

Primers

If you do not have a primer pocket uniformer, get one. Like most reloaders, I used to clean out the primer pocket before setting primers with a brush or scraper. Cleaning primer pockets this way will work, but uniforming the depth of the pocket with a brass cutter will square the bottom and make all the pockets uniform. This step is another chance to inspect your brass.

Years of loading has shown me that velocity, pressure and inconsistent primer ignition are factors affecting accuracy. Remember, all things being equal, the results will be equal or consistent. Uniform depths repeat uniform

velocity and accuracy.

Some time ago, I discovered my favorite method for seating primers is with a hand-held priming tool. My favorite is the RCBS Universal Priming tool. It does not require changing out shell holders and works on virtually all cartridges. I have two set up. One for small-base cartridges and the other for larger bases up to .45-70. I know there are other priming tools that loaders prefer but this one suits me. It offers me the sensitivity or feel to set the primers with the same consistency. I typically do this only for quality precision reloading. For quantity (progressive press) I let the press set the primer. That is my mantra.

Miscellaneous Past Indiscretions

Foulers: Cleaned your firearm? Shoot a fouling shot, two or three at another spot on the target before shooting for groups. For ARs, shoot at another spot with the first chambered round. This round won't seat the same as rounds fired from the actuation of the AR. Once done, shoot from a cold barrel. It is important to see where your first round will land.

Seat Depth: Work up hunting loads that are close to cartridge overall length (COL). I never hunt with rounds that are loaded long. I do this not only to fit the magazine (remember the crimping story) but also so the bullet is not too close to the lands. Should there be a particle of dirt, or in one case, ice, the bolt won't close. Ice is another whole story.

It should be mentioned to make sure you have enough neck to hold the bullet. I have on occasion (only at the range) pulled back a chambered round, not fired, only to get powder everywhere and the projectile stuck in the grooves. That reminded me to always having a cleaning rod handy.

Testing: I have gotten into the habit of loading and testing rounds as if it was dire in the real world. Before going to the range or the field I test every round. Explained, I visually inspect every completed round before I go to the range. All should be exactly the same, using touch and sight. For hunting I only use “new brass,” and powders, primers and projectiles that are proven. Once my hunting rounds are constructed I take them to the range and make sure every one of them functions in the rifle, magazine, and are clean.

Keep a log of everything you do for reloading. It may not seem important now, but ten years from now it will be. It's all about eliminating surprises. It's best done without using someone else's handloads. Oy Vey.



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, Bushnell Scopes and Blackhawk Tactical. He currently resides in Oregon.

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[SHOOTING FOR THE FIELD]

Does Your Rifle Fit?

Story and photo by Steve Meyer

The bull moose, not big enough to be a contender in the breeding season that was just getting started, nevertheless was headed toward two cows on the west end of a long swamp. My hunting partner and I were on the south side of the open expanse of muskeg, perhaps 90 yards wide.

The bull was moving slowly along the edge, through sporadic clumps of stunted black spruce. The openings between the stunted trees offered some clear shots. This would be my partner's first moose, and I stood with my rifle slung, waiting for the shot. And waiting, and waiting, until the bull turned north and disappeared into thicker cover.

We had hunted hard that season, moose were anything but plentiful, and this was the first opportunity we had. I was not happy, and not particularly diplomatic. "What the %&#@ is wrong with you? You'll never get a better shot than that."

Staring down at the stagnant pool of swamp water at his feet he muttered, "I couldn't find him in the scope."

His rifle, a run-of-the-mill, bolt-action .30-06, was fitted with a 4X scope. We had been to the range together, where he zeroed the gun. But all his shots were from the bench and evidently he had never practiced anything but that sort of controlled shooting that allows all the time in the world to find the target.

That episode caused me to vow never to hunt with anyone I hadn't seen shoot fast, from field positions. It would be years, thousands of rounds fired on the range and in the game fields, coupled with



Custom-built stocks that fit correctly allow the hunter to find game quickly, even with high-powered scopes.

similar stories from other hunters, before I realized how indifferent folks tend to be when it comes to how a rifle fits the hunter.

"The gun must shoot where you look," has been the premise for successful wingshooting. The bead on the end of a shotgun barrel, if the gun fits correctly, is not required. One mounts the gun looking at the target and slaps the trigger when the proper lead is achieved. In rifle shooting, the sights are aligned (or crosshairs superimposed) on the target and the trigger is carefully pressed.

We often refer to wingshooting as art, and rifle shooting as science. It's true, to a point. The precision required to hit game with a single projectile is more demanding than the shot charge from a scattergun. However, should the fit of the gun take a back seat just because with a rifle we can, and often must, crane our neck to see through a high-mounted scope, and thus lose the cheek weld so important to good shooting? Or have to scrunch down on the stock to find open sights when the comb is too high for the configuration of the gun and sights? There are a myriad of ill-fit issues with over-the-counter rifles

vision reasonably well.

Some seem to do this better for most, for the broad spectrum of human variations. The lever guns designed by Winchester and Marlin are timeless; their popularity, after over 100 years of service, if anything, is rising. These guns simply point well for most people. They are fast to get into action, and repeat shots are quick, although if the gun fits right, the need for follow-up shots diminishes.

We have heaped a lot of value on rifles that shoot a minute of angle, and fire cartridges designed to kill in the next time zone. That's fine as far as it goes, but the truth be told, not necessary for 99% of big-game hunting.

With the proliferation of hunting rifles

available, most likely one can be found that will fit you—a rifle that when brought to the shoulder, does not catch on clothing, that has a grip configuration that allows comfortable reach to the trigger and safety mechanism, and when mounted, the scope or sights intersect where the shooter is looking. It may not match the description of the perfect rifle as described by some, but it doesn't have to. It only has to be the perfect fit for you. That's what a game gun is.



Steve Meyer is an outdoor writer who has spent the past 49 years hunting and shooting in Alaska.



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that, while they can be adjusted to with practice, aren't necessary if the gun fits right in the first place.

Some years ago, a friend came upon an unexpected windfall, and being a student of the early-to-mid-1900s era of professional elephant hunters, spent a small fortune on a .450 x 3¼-inch Nitro Express double rifle that John "Pondoro" Taylor had slayed elephants with during his reign of elephant poaching.



Taylor, besides killing big, dangerous game in numbers that stagger the imagination, was one of the few of these tough men who was a serious student of firearms, and the successful use thereof in real hunting conditions. In his book, *African Rifles and Cartridges*, penned in 1948 and which remains a classic reference for hunters headed to the Dark Continent for dangerous game, he speaks of the importance of rifles that shoot where one looks—game guns, perfected primarily by British craftsman of the time.

Being aware of my fascination with that era of Africa, my friend invited me to shoot the big double. Its appearance befit a lifetime of service in the bushveld. There was little bluing left on the metal work, the engraving was worn nearly flat, the stocks marked with scars from who knows what. The bores were dark and pitted.

Accuracy of the rifle suffered from the poor bore condition, but damn, it was like mounting a fitted shotgun. The gun came up fast and one needed only a flash to confirm the sight picture. In fact, shooting it like a shotgun, ignoring the sights and just looking at the target, one could punch two shots on a target at 40 yards about as fast as you could shoot a fast-rising double on partridge.


If you think about it a bit, why shouldn't your hunting rifle point like a well-fitted shotgun? There is no advantage in being the hunter who can't find an animal in the scope, or has to hunt for the sights to line them up.

We're all alike in some ways, and different in others. One pair of boots doesn't fit everyone any more than one gun fits everyone. But with a bit of effort, one can usually find a rifle that fits, if not like a custom-built Holland & Holland, at least one that comes up and aligns with your



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Hunting’s Most Important Attribute, Mental Toughness

Story and photo by Lon E. Lauber

There is a lot that goes into becoming a consistently successful hunter. At the top of that list has to be mental toughness. This is especially true when talking about hunting in Alaska. I’ve had the good fortune to hunt in 29 different states and in six different countries around the world. And, without reservation, I can say hunting in Alaska requires the most mental toughness I’ve experienced.

Alaska’s harsh terrain, inhospitable weather and dealing with bears, insects and cold all pile on to make hunting extremely challenging, to say the least!

So, how does a person become mentally tough regarding hunting? Well, there is no teacher like experience! I’d say my mental toughness started in eighth grade through my senior year of high school when I was a wrestler. Those arduous practice sessions forced me to squeeze out every ounce of physical energy I could muster. I had to dig deep down inside mentally to endure the physical exertion. In hindsight, the best I can determine is those grueling practices and wrestling matches formed the foundation of my mental toughness and that has parlayed into my Alaska hunting success.

We all have different life experiences, so do some soul searching and think back to anything you’ve endured in life (physically, mentally, emotionally, family drama and so on) and try to draw from those experiences to improve your hunting mental toughness.

In the meantime, here are some suggestions to become mentally tougher. Like I said, experience is the best teacher so get out there and get some experience. Start out small with an overnight adventure close to home with minimal camping gear and perhaps light on the food. Then, do a weekend adventure, then a three-day trip and then move on to week-long, ten-day

and then two-week trips.

You can also get mentally tougher through preparation. The more physically fit you are, the easier it will be to deal with the steep terrain when hunting sheep or goats. Physical fitness will give you the energy to slog through swamps in search of a bull moose and having toned muscles will help you be less uncomfortable in lousy weather and when sitting in a ground blind or in a tree stand.

You can also learn to be mentally tough by reading about backcountry hunting and watching hunting videos of long, demanding hunts. Don’t just read or watch. Pay close attention to the details of how the hunters behaved and their attitude when things got tough. Try to put yourself in those demanding conditions and think about how you would handle a similar situation. Also, if you have the opportunity to do a rugged hunt with a more experienced backcountry hunter, you will see how they cope with all the adversity.

I remember from my Navy days (I was a photographer, not a SEAL) the SEALs would say, “Get comfortable with being uncomfortable.” That motto can really help with mental toughness in hunting, too. Get comfortable with being tired and sore. Get comfortable having blisters and strained muscles. Get comfortable being wet and cold. Get comfortable eating fewer calories than you think you need. Get comfortable walking farther than you think you can. Get comfortable carrying a heavier pack full of dense moose meat farther than you can imagine and carrying that load in soft, spongy tundra!

This next statement may come across as bragging but that’s not my intention. It’s to point out just how important mental toughness is to hunting success. The three guys I’ve spent the most time in the Alaska wilderness with are Bob Ameen, South Cox and Phil Lincoln. These guys are as good as it gets when it comes to backcountry hunting and I’m honored to have hunted extensively with them. All three of them have said the most important thing they learned from me was mental toughness. It wasn’t that I was so much better as a hunter or an archer; it was just my bulldog determination to take whatever Mother Nature dished out, and to prevail, which led to my consistent bowhunting success.

You might say I’m somewhat of a control freak but when

it comes to mental toughness and hunting in Alaska, you must accept you can’t control everything, so save your mental and physical energy for what you can control. Here is an example: You can’t control the weather so make sure you have the gear, clothing and fitness to deal with the toughest weather you can imagine. One time I spent 23 days alone in the wilderness bowhunting Sitka blacktails. The weather in November was so severe that my pilot couldn’t safely or legally fly to come and pick me up. On the 23rd day of a 14-day hunt a Coast Guard helicopter was summoned to pick me up. Mental toughness helped me endure. I’d also say my seven years of living and hunting on Adak Island prior to that trip had helped me experience hunting in really nasty weather. Note to self, previous experience...

Also, learn from your mistakes but don’t allow those blunders to thwart your efforts. It’s all in your attitude. Analyze the mistake, learn from it, and move on. If you must dwell, dwell on all the positive things that surrounded the error.

We all have one or two little voices in the back of our minds. It’s a matter of choice if we listen to the one that says, “It’s getting late, you better head back to camp now so you can be comfortable,” or if you listen to the voice that says, “You’ll never kill that big Dall ram by walking away. There’s still enough daylight to make this stalk come to fruition!”

I’d say being flexible and adaptable will really come in handy regarding hunting and being mentally tough. I’ve yet to do an Alaska wilderness hunt that turned out the way I had planned or anticipated. Always, the weather, the animals’ behavior, the terrain or the travel logistics threw a curveball or changeup. With the proper attitude you roll with the changes and make the best of the situation as it unfolds.

Additionally, I’d suggest you stay positive about the physical demands of the hunt. Stay positive about your hunting skills. Stay positive with your archery- or rifle-shooting skills. Stay positive even when it’s snowing in August or a river is freezing around your raft in September. Appreciate the nuances of your adventure. Pat yourself on the back for a stalk that almost panned out instead of beating yourself up. Parlay every almost success into a favorable experience instead of a bummer.

Make sure you have a sound and consistent practice regime with proper technique and a good attitude whether that is with fitness, shooting or equipment preparedness. If you do these things, you’ll be well on your way to becoming mentally tough.

In closing, I would encourage you to take Webster’s definition of confidence and make it a part of your daily routine. And that is, “The fact of being or feeling certain.” That feeling of certainty will lead to mental toughness and that leads to hunting success, particularly in Alaska.



Lon E. Lauber is a full-time freelance writer and outdoor photographer from Spokane, WA. He lived and hunted extensively in Alaska for 17 years and he has returned many times to continue his passions of bowhunting and wildlife photography. Lon is a nine-time Alaska state archery champion, and the holder of 52 Pope and Young record-class big-game animals. Lon also spent 28 years as a paid, professional archer and bowhunter.

A solo sheep hunter pauses on a steep ridgetop above a lake. The physical demand of climbing up from the lakeshore is just the first step of being uncomfortable on a wilderness hunt. The mental toughness with climbing, glassing, stalking, shooting and eventually packing meat and horns will all be required to bring this hunt to fruition.

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The Mark

Story by Bjorn Dihle and photo by Reid Dihle

It's a well-known fact that the greatest hunters in history all bear "the mark." My two brothers and I have the mark—I actually have a couple, both of which are more pronounced than my siblings, which I guess makes me the best hunter. Simply put, the mark signifies a covenant with the wild beast. No one knows exactly why a hunter receives the mark. I believe it has something to do with learning how to hunt with your heart and it comes with a great weight and responsibility. Most hunters who are lucky enough to receive it are only given it once and count it as the most spiritual experience of their lives. I, on the other hand, receive the mark almost every year.

I'll tell a story from 2019 to illustrate how the mark works. I was clambering through the mountains of northern southeast Alaska, intent on bringing deer flesh home to feed MC, the woman with whom I share a blood pact similar to what binds a pair of mated wolves together. Most of the time our relationship is pretty chill, though she angers easily, frequently breaks dinner plates against the wall and tells me she'll leave me if I fail to bring home venison.

Suddenly, I noticed two Sitka blacktail bucks running away. Sitka deer have small racks, but one of these bucks had headgear like an elk. Maybe a small elk, but still...I've spent about a year of my life centered around hunting Sitka blacktails, but I was still dumb enough to take a 200-yard head shot at a running animal. My only excuse, which I admit is not a good one, was that I figured that if I brought that small elk of a buck's antlers home my woman might acknowledge my presence in a way besides breaking wind on me during long, cold and lonely nights.

My shot echoed across the mountain, the unscathed buck continued running and I cursed myself. I was thinking how I was unworthy of being a hunter, how MC was going to leave me and how I should throw my rifle off the mountain and devote myself to a masochistic existence of vegetarianism when I suddenly realized that I had been marked! Blood trickled down from my eyebrow into my eye socket and onto

my cheek. Just like that, I was redeemed! My hands tingled with primordial power coursing through my veins. I wondered what it was about me that was so special.

Having such a prominent mark, in my case one that never entirely heals from one season to the next, comes at a price though. It gets old being chased by fans who want an autograph, a picture, or a sample of my hair, saliva or stools for religious purposes. I'm not knocking anyone's beliefs, but I'm getting really tired of being swabbed by strangers. Even worse are the constant phone calls from that *MeatEater* guy Steve Rinella, who keeps inviting me to share an ice cream sundae with him to talk hunting. It's offensive because I'm lactose intolerant and I'm pretty sure he just wants to stare at my mark. Rinella and everyone else should know that it doesn't matter how badly you want the mark, the mark has to choose you.

When I returned to town I stopped by the grocery store to pick up flowers and candy for MC. She's less violent if I gift her something immediately after a hunt from which I don't bring an animal home. A two-year-old girl, riding in a grocery cart being pushed by her mother, pointed at me and jeeringly said, "Mom, look! That guy scoped himself! What a lousy hunter!"

"Honey, it's not polite to point," Mom said.

I'm not embarrassed about being marked. I want the truth to be out there so other hunters who scope themselves don't fall into a depression and suffer bowel and erectile disorders—all things that I did before I realized the mark was a gift. For too long we have lived in shame! I say no more! Be proud of your scar—hell, decorate it if you like. I predict more hunters scoping themselves on purpose in the future so they can enter the covenant. I think it's our duty to educate the youth so they understand and appreciate the mark. The little girl kept pointing and insulting my masculinity, so I took it upon myself to enlighten her.

"Look, kid, scoping yourself—I mean, receiving the mark—is the hunting equivalent of a priest crossing himself, or professional wrestler Ultimate Warrior wearing makeup, or getting a teardrop tattoo after making a prison kill..."

The mother elbowed me and pushed her shopping cart rapidly away in the opposite direction.

I hate to say it and realize I'll probably catch hell, but I'm pretty sure receiving and understanding the mark is a gender thing. For instance, over the last several years I've gone hunting numerous times with my older brother Luke's girls. One interesting observation I've made—and I plan to write this up as a paper and submit it to a scientific or university journal—is that girls don't ever receive the mark. No matter how intense a stalk is, or how worked up Luke or I get, when it comes time for those girls to shoot they just don't ever get scoped. I think it's a sort of gender inequality thing. Since I am a feminist, that makes me angry. I'm working on a song to express my feelings.

I went home with flowers and chocolates. MC looked over at me and shrugged.

"Scoped yourself again, huh?" she asked.

"Silly woman," I said. "You'll never understand the mark."

The next thing I knew I woke up three days later in complete darkness, freezing cold, starving and chained to a wall. After I got done screaming for help and nobody came, I felt around and found a hacksaw lying nearby. She's always funny like that.



Bjorn Dihle 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/BjornDihleauthor or instagram.com/bjorndihle/.



The author celebrates after being marked.

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BACKCOUNTRY NUTRITION

The Aging Hunter

Story by Larry Bartlett

I was 28 years old when I launched a career in the hunting industry, and nothing slowed me down. Today I am 48 years old and feel those decisions in my bones and joints. That twenty-year span can be described as two important phases in my life cycle: youth and middle age. Like many of us, I recognize that my nutrition requirements have changed, response to stress is different, and my physical strength and resilience are not the same as in my twenties. On the upside, my blood chemistry (i.e., cholesterol and triglycerides) and total body composition have continued to improve with age in response to my active outdoor lifestyle. Thanks to ongoing scientific collaborations with Dr. Robert Coker and his team we have direct evidence of physiological improvements that can be largely sustained using the power of physical activity, sustainable dietary strategies and stress mitigation. I am living proof of the positive health benefits of the backcountry-hunting lifestyle. Nonetheless, several questions remain for those who want to maximize their long-term potential, maintain their bodies as part of their hunt kit, avoid attrition/injury, and contribute to the organizational fabric of their hunting group.

Is there truth in the rumor that old age = muscle atrophy and physical limitations? Well, before we jump in neck deep, let's review the scientific evidence, some general terminology and put this question in a backcountry perspective. Let's focus on muscle, since we all need strong ones as we get older.

There are two types of aging when it comes to our muscles; primary and secondary. Primary aging refers to the age-related decline in muscle metabolism and our absolute strength. Secondary aging is often reflected by additional changes in the structure and function of muscle largely influenced by diseases, unhealthy lifestyle choices, and unanticipated accidents on the overall function of our bodies. We have very little to no control over primary aging (unless we could pick our parents and stack the genetic deck in our favor) but we can manipulate the heck out of secondary aging. I know this just by comparing the physical ability of my friends who take care of themselves to those that do not. I also know that the type of activities they choose seem to influence their backcountry physical kit.

One of the most challenging aspects of aging is characterized by the loss of skeletal muscle

called sarcopenia. Combined with excess food intake and low levels of physical activity, a condition called sarcopenic obesity or "skinny fat-man syndrome" can occur. Of course, the combination of these two is central to the loss of functional ability with many individuals saying "I can't do that kind of hunting anymore" in the early-to-mid 40s or maybe even earlier. This is a real shame that can preclude their ability to share backcountry experiences with children or friends.

One of the best ways to combat sarcopenia is resistance training in combination with the ingestion of high-quality protein. In the last issue, we detailed the inherent nutritional value of wild game on maximizing our ability to maintain whole-body protein. Research from Coker's laboratory has demonstrated that even the acute ingestion of wild game may have real advantages in the fight to keep our muscle throughout our lifespan. Since our efficiency of protein ingestion to muscle-protein synthesis is reduced with aging, eating high-quality protein with a highly anabolic amino acid (i.e., wild game instead of beef) profile helps tip the scale back in our favor. Overloading the muscle with resistance or weight training will synergize with these nutritional strategies to substantially reduce the loss of strength with aging, even into our late nineties or longer. There is no real need to be a powerlifter but simple routines like stomach crunches, push-ups, pull-ups, and leg squats are effective. Is this why we relish consumption of meat in the field right after a harvest? It would certainly make sense.

The utilization of training principles will dictate the adaptations gained from physical activity. We also know that skeletal muscle is "programmable" in that physical training performed in the prime of our life basically establishes a molecular code that can later be revived or translated with greater efficiency. Scientists call this "epi-memory" in that our muscles literally retain positive programming that respond more effectively to beneficial adaptations elicited by activity. On the flip side, a sedentary lifestyle will write a dysfunctional code that makes beneficial training-induced changes more difficult as we get older. The point: Write the best code early, and maintain it thereafter. While recovery from a hard workout or a difficult day in the mountains may get more difficult as you age, establishing a powerful epi-memory will embolden your ability to live the backcountry lifestyle for decades.

Specificity is one of the most important training principles and a big reason why the best way to train for sheep hunting is to walk up and down and all around. A LOT. Yes; you need strength in your legs but endurance is far more important. Fortunately, we can maintain our ability to exercise over long periods of time pretty well. This is largely due to highly malleable changes in the number and size of mitochondria that increase in proportion to the aerobic demands on the muscle. These little organelles are constantly adjusting to ensure adequate conversion of fats, carbohydrates and even proteins to

something called adenosine triphosphate (ATP), which is basically the fuel currency in our bodies. Long-duration activities build mitochondria like Warren Buffett builds his bank account. Keep them working with optimal efficiency by incorporating long, slow distances into your training. The principle of progressive overload (i.e., setting benchmarks, hitting them and raising them by a few percentage points) will help muscles continue to improve and these kinds of adaptations seem less dramatically affected by secondary aging. Of course, this assumes that we are not negating these benefits by poor lifestyle choices.

Consistent with the principle of specificity when it comes to training, nutrient delivery should also be considered relative to the activity itself. While some backcountry hunting might involve long, sedentary periods well suited for consumption of nutrients while resting, mountain hunting can be exceptionally strenuous. As a result, many older hunters opt out for reasons previously mentioned and due to challenges with recovery. Research can help in that regard. For example, studies have demonstrated that eating at least 50 grams of carbohydrate and 5-10 grams of protein at breakfast can decrease protein breakdown and minimize muscle damage. In addition, consumption of as much as 1 gram of carbohydrate per kilogram body weight, and 0.5 gram of protein per kilogram body weight within thirty minutes after an intense day, and a high-carbohydrate meal within two hours, can accelerate recovery. These strategies should not be viewed as absolute requirements but rather nutritional guidelines from the International Society of Sports Nutrition. As such, it is important to recognize that nutrient needs to maintain muscle and resilience are much different than the requirements for muscle hypertrophy. Most backcountry enthusiasts are focused on recovery and maintenance of function, not growth or mass, so our approach should be specific.

As you may know from previous articles, my collaboration with Dr. Coker and his team has examined energy intake and energy expenditure, blood chemistry, total body composition, bone density, liver fat, and lean muscle mass in response to 7- to 12-day backcountry hunts. The information revealed is enlightening! Stay tuned for data updates that have been directly collected from hunters in real, backcountry scenarios. This information will shed new light on the amount of energy and the threshold of protein intake needed to maintain skeletal muscle and physical function.



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.

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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It's that time of year! All year long *Hunt Alaska* editors test gear in Alaska's rugged environment to identify the best of the best, and we showcase these items in the Editors' Choice Awards section of the Summer issue. If you're in the market for new gear, whether it's a rifle, shotgun, tent, boots, apparel or something else, be sure to look through this year's ECAs before you buy. If it won an ECA, you can bet that it will serve you well.

FIREARMS AND AMMUNITION



Henry Long Ranger

henryusa.com

In 2019, we tested the Henry Long Ranger chambered in .308 Win. It shot tight groups, was reliable, quick handling, and an all-around solid choice. The lever-action rifle sports a classic look that is reinforced with an oil-finished American walnut stock, iron sights, and blued-steel, free-floated barrel. With its 20-inch barrel length, we like this 7-pound rifle for bear defense and for shooting big game at shorter distances in

cover. It is drilled and tapped for a scope mount, giving you the ability to reach out for long shots. With a four-shot capacity, the steel-bodied, flush-fit magazine is sturdy and releases with a steel button that is built into the receiver. We like how the gun sits on the shoulder and that the recoil pad absorbs the shot and keeps the gun in position for the follow-up shot. The sighted model we tested features a front sight that is a ramp with a .062-inch ivory bead and a fully adjustable, folding rear sight. We hope to never have to shoot a charging bear, but this is the type of rifle to have to fire precise shots with speed.



Henry All-Weather Lever Action, .45-70

henryusa.com

As its name suggests, Henry now makes a lever-action rifle built for the harsh climate conditions we often face in Alaska. Henry chose a different route to make the All-Weather less susceptible to weather. Instead of stainless steel, Henry chose to use a low-gloss, hard chrome plating on all metal surfaces (except springs and sights) and a durable, industrial-grade coating on the hardwood stock. It comes in two calibers: .30-30 and .45-70. We tested the .45-70. Thankfully, it comes with a black ventilated rubber recoil pad. In .45-70, this is a good match for moose and bear to moderate ranges, and is a great choice for bear protection.



Henry U.S. Survival AR-7 .22 Long Rifle

henryusa.com

Our youth tester loves shooting this rifle and has spent many hours punching holes in targets. It is highly portable—it weighs just 3.5 pounds and breaks down to fit all the components into the stock of the rifle, which is 16.5 inches long. Assembly is quick; attach the receiver to the stock, insert the barrel, and screw on the nut. No tools are required for assembly and it takes about a minute and a half to assemble. This is a great option for small-game hunting in Alaska and would be our choice for a small-game caliber to put in a bush plane. It comes standard with a sturdy steel barrel covered in ABS plastic with a protective coating for corrosion resistance, incorporates an adjustable rear sight and a blade front sight, and is available in three finishes: Black, True Timber Kanati Camo Pattern, and True Timber Viper Western Camo Pattern. We added a scope to the rifle and it's a perfect gun for small game and target shooting.



Winchester Super-X .45-70, 300-grain Jacketed Hollow Point

winchester.com

This round is designed for hunting deer, elk and black bear. Super-X Jacketed Hollow Points feature rapid, controlled expansion that is designed to penetrate thin skin, light muscle and bone. This ammunition is new production, non-corrosive, in boxer primed, reloadable brass cases. This is not a hot round, dropping a little over 12 inches at 200 yards, but matched to the aforementioned species, it's very capable.



Winchester SX4 Universal Hunter – Mossy Oak Break-Up Country

winchesterguns.com

Looking for a superb, versatile shotgun for both waterfowl and upland birds? The semi-automatic SX4 Universal Hunter might be the one. The main differences between the SX3 and the SX4 are improved ergonomics. The SX4 is lighter, the pistol grip slimmer, and the balance point has been moved forward slightly to provide a more fluid swing, better target tracking and smoother follow-through. We tested a 12-gauge model that can shoot 2¾", 3" or 3½" loads. This makes the SX4 suitable for everything from ptarmigan to large geese. Some of the features our tester likes best are the large safety, oversized bolt and bolt release button, large INFLEX technology recoil pad and length-of-pull spacers to customize the fit of the shotgun. Additionally, the chrome-plated chamber and bore makes the surfaces more resistant to wear, rust and corrosion.



Winchester M1885 High Wall

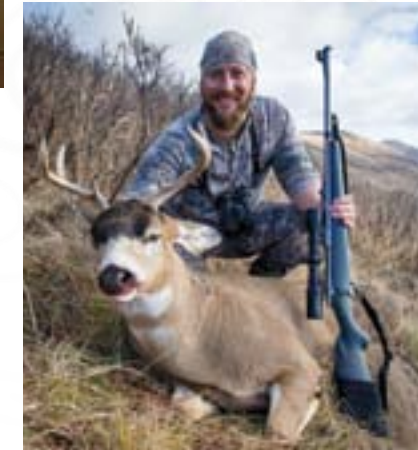
winchesterguns.com

We asked Contributing Editor Steve Meyer what products he thought were worthy of an ECA this year and he had this to say: "For going on fifty years I've been applying for a bison permit. Should I ever draw one, I told myself, I'll be using a single shot chambered for the .45/70, to honor the tradition of the plains hunters of the 1800s. I decided to put the cart before the horse and get the gun first, maybe change my luck. I chose the Winchester M1885, better known as the "High Wall." It was firearms design genius John Moses Browning's first firearm invention, 142 years ago. Little has changed since Winchester introduced Browning's masterpiece in 1885 and many shooters referred to it as the strongest, most accurate, and best single-shot rifle ever built. When Winchester brought the M1885 back from a long hiatus in 2005, it retained all of the beloved characteristics of the original in a finished rifle that lives up to the reputation in every way. I chose the Traditional Hunter model, which sports a 22-inch octagon barrel, straight grip buttstock, buckhorn sights, and a flip-up tang sight for longer range work. My tired old eyes demanded a scope, and once mounted I found the M1885 lives up to its accurate reputation and the strength of the action allows handloading to velocities that make it more than adequate for anything that walks the planet. I've fallen in love with the High Wall, and even if I never draw a bison permit, this gun with its point-ability that challenges the great British game guns, will be my hunting rifle for moose, bear, and deer, taking a step back in time as it were, a priceless quality these days."

Kimber Talkeetna Rifle in .375 H&H Magnum

kimberamerica.com

Contributing Editor and hunting fanatic John Whipple offered the following: "When hunting game in Alaska, you need to be able to count on your rifle. The Kimber Talkeetna has become my go-to when firepower and reliability are paramount. Based around the legendary 8400 action, it offers the security of controlled-feed loading and has the strength to handle the stiffest bear loads. It is all stainless steel, designed to withstand Alaska's inclement weather, and after several years of hard use I must say I have yet to experience any rusting, which cannot be said of some of my other stainless-steel guns from other rifle makers. The stock is reinforced carbon fiber, resulting in a tough but lightweight chassis. The entire surface of the stock is textured, providing a good positive grip, even when wet. I have



noticed that this surface seems to show scratches and marks easily, but they are cosmetic only and do not affect the rifle in any way. The recoil pad is the Pachmayr Decelerator, which does a reasonably good job of mitigating recoil. It comes with adjustable express sights, which is something I wish more guns offered. Scopes are great, but it's nice to know those back-up irons are there if something goes wrong with your optic while in the field. It is chambered in the venerable .375 H&H Magnum, a personal favorite of mine as it is such a hard-hitting round that is available in a wide variety of loads and can be commonly found in remote villages and hunting camps should you need to restock in a pinch. Finally, it shoots well, it is not picky about what you feed it, and can produce 1 MOA accuracy consistently. If you decide to take this rifle with you into the field you will be in good company indeed."

OPTICS



Vortex Optics Razor HD 27-60x85mm Angled Spotting Scope

vortexoptics.com
We appreciate the crisp, high-definition imagery viewed through this spotting scope, especially during first and last light when game are usually most likely to be on the move. With a 27-60x magnification range and 85 mm objective lens, the scope allows you to see animals that are miles away, and dissect cover to find those animals that really blend in. We used it to find blacktail deer on Kodiak Island and it eliminated a lot of wasted hiking, and helped us find way more animals. If you aren't using a spotting scope, you aren't seeing all the animals out there, and this is one that you should highly consider.



Vortex Optics Fury HD 5000 10x42 Rangefinding Binoculars

vortexoptics.com

Nick Ploesser from AK Trophy Expeditors tried out these binoculars in 2019 and had this to say: "The Fury binos worked out great. They are on the heavier side but worn with a bino harness were easy to carry. The clarity is really nice and the rangefinder had a fast response time. Having both in the same unit while glassing was handy because I didn't have to keep moving around. Also, with the Vortex warranty you can be worry free when using them out in the field. If you spend a lot of time glassing and looking at animals these are a must-have."



Vortex Razor HD 4000 Rangefinder

vortexoptics.com

Feature article contributor Eric Hershey shared this: "New in 2019, Vortex introduced the Razor HD 4000 Rangefinder to add to their popular Razor high-end optics lineup. This rangefinder cuts through the fog to capture long distances. It's very affordable and loaded with features including angle compensation for archery hunters. It will easily range animals well over 1000 yards in the field. It was crucial during a recent mountain-goat hunt in Kodiak to tag a goat at 350 yards through the thick fog."

Leupold RX-1300i TBR with DNA Laser Rangefinder

leupold.com

We asked *Hunt Alaska* magazine contributor Sarah Stallone what products she'd recommend and here's what she had to say: "Rangefinders have been measuring distance for a long time; with the RX1300i you can also judge width. All you moose hunters should be coming out of your chairs right now. Trophy Scale is a feature that lets you pre-set the width of a bracket in your display that accurately adjusts in size with distance. Let's say you've pre-set the bracket at 50". From distance, (1300 yards!) you can get a general idea of whether you need to make the stalk or go find another moose, or deer, or elk, etc."

Read that again. A rangefinder with a width bracket! With 6x magnification and lenses that are fully multi-coated just like your favorite Leupold riflescopes, detail and low-light clarity is guaranteed. This tiny, 7-ounce unit shouldn't be able to house this many features! True Ballistic Range offers angle compensation in seven ballistic categories (you don't have to do math!), and Line of Sight, Rifle, and Bow modes accommodate all your ranging needs. The unit is fully waterproof, can float (ask me how I know...) and has years of battery life even in AK temps (takes a CR2 battery). Available at almost any local sporting goods store, go check it out!"



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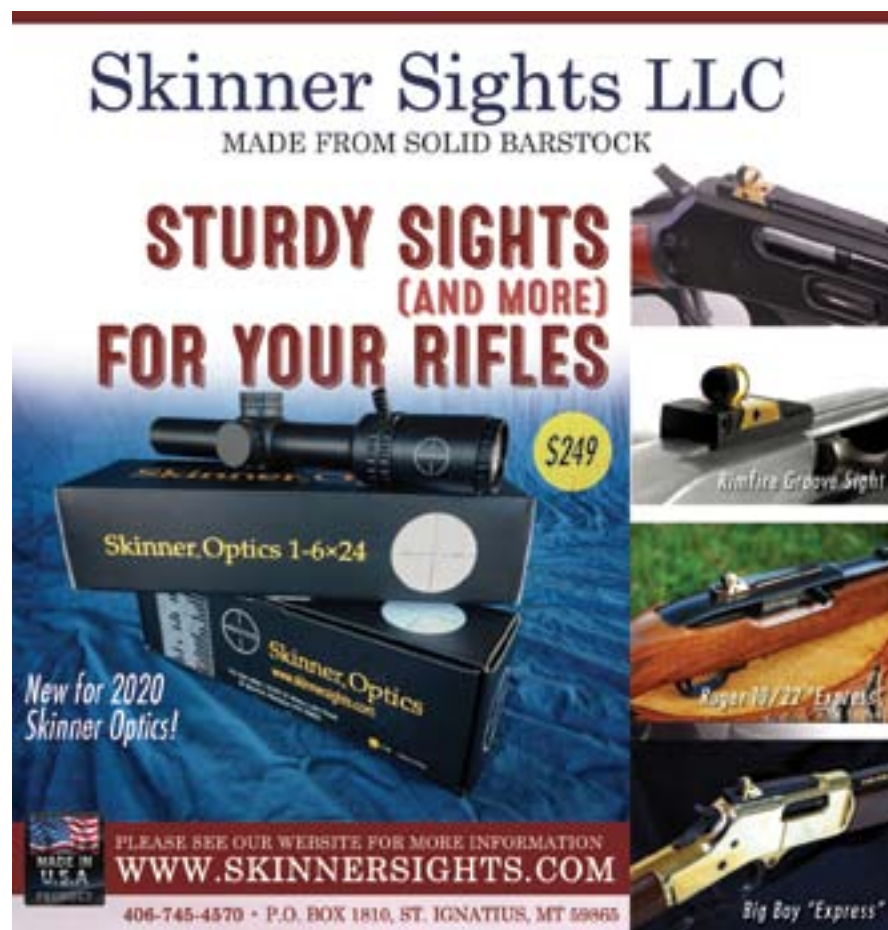
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OPTICS

Skinner Optics 1-6x24 Riflescope
skannersights.com
Known for the high quality of their sights, Skinner has entered the optics market with a 1-6 magnification scope. The scope features a 30 mm tube and 24 mm objective and is suitable for many different rifle platforms. Other features include easy, crisp click, covered turret adjustments, and the Skinner Specified Reticle with 1 MOA lit dot. The brightness of the dot is easily adjustable through a range of settings by simply turning the left turret. It also has a BDC marked crosshair for easy range holdover. It has built-in lens covers, too. We mounted it on a Henry All-Weather .45-70. The view through the scope is bright and clear, and eye relief is 3.7 inches. It comes with a 5-year warranty.



Nikon MONARCH M5 3-12x42SF Matte BDC

nikonsportoptics.com
Our tester reported that this riflescope was very clear and easy to sight in. The turrets made sighting in and making small adjustments very easy. The BDC inside the scope was nice for shooting at different yardages. In the colder weather the scope didn't fog up as fast which was nice. Our tester also noted that the scope is easy to operate with gloves on, and that he could zoom in and out without having to remove his gloves.

Leupold SX-4 Pro Guide HD Spotting Scope

leupold.com
Here's another great recommendation from Sarah Stallone: "This spotting scope is everything I've come to love about the clarity of the BX-4 HD binos now in a higher magnification with a wider field of view. This mid-weight spotter has a grippy, ultra-smooth focus adjustment ring, a large, forgiving eye box for comfortable long-term viewing, and all the familiar Alaska-proof features such as fogproof, waterproof, dirt and water shedding coatings. All in neoprene-wrapped, Sarah-proof ruggedness. Leupold's Twilight Max HD lens coating gives you additional clarity at low light (face it, the best hunting is during the least light) and extra definition to see those dark brow tines even against the black timber backdrop. Backed by Leupold's lifetime guarantee, this scope is worth its weight in the field!"



A lifetime guaranteed HD glass spotter for a reasonable price? Check. Designed, machined, and assembled right here in the USA! This spotter will make a great partner on your next hunt."

KNIVES AND CUTTING TOOLS

Spyderco Endura 4 Titanium Damascus—PlainEdge

spyderco.com
Stunningly beautiful and wickedly sharp, this folder is a beauty and a beast. Like all of Spyderco's products, we are enamored with the design, function, usability and performance of this knife. The blade is made from D.P.S. 15, which is a blade material that consists of VG-10 stainless steel sandwiched between two outer layers of Damascus steel. Each Damascus layer is comprised of 15 layers of forge-welded steel which is patterned and etched. The result is an awesome, eye-catching knife. The handle scales are made from 6AL-4V titanium, and the knife is assembled with stainless-steel parts including back spacer, liner tube, hardware and clip. Clip configuration allows for left- or right-side, tip-up or tip-down carry.

DiamondBlade Knives Folding Summit

diamondblade knives.com
This knife is super sharp and stays that way. Made using DiamondBlade Knives' proprietary Friction Forging process, trust us when we say this knife is razor sharp and holds an edge for a long time. We used it to take apart several deer and a moose and it performed amazingly well. This folding version of the Summit is easy to carry, and is capable of taking apart any animal. The black G10 handle is comfortable in the hand and is designed with a finger groove for the index finger, giving the user superior blade control. The drop-point blade is 3.375 inches long, made from D2 high-carbon tool steel, and features a 4.5° wedge grind with a 16-18° sharpened bevel.

Buck Knives 536 Open Season Guthook/Skinner Knife

buckknives.com
We took apart several deer with this knife and liked the feel in the hand and performance of the blade. The 4 1/2-inch drop-point blade is sharp and a good shape for skinning and butchering game, and the inclusion of the gut hook helps in starting the skinning process. It sports a full tang, holds an edge and is easy to resharpen. We also used the boning and caper models and really liked how the three worked together to completely field dress and butcher our deer.

Work Sharp Micro Sharpener & Knife Tool

worksharptools.com
This ultra-portable tool allows you to sharpen knives in the field and features two angle-guided (25°) rods: medium-grit diamond and fine-grit ceramic. We used it to put an edge back on our knives when cutting up Kodiak blacktails last October. The handle incorporates ridges which allow you to firmly hold the sharpener, even when your hands are wet. The tool also includes size T6, T8, and T10 torx bits so you can do field maintenance on most folding-knife pivot hinges and pocket clips.



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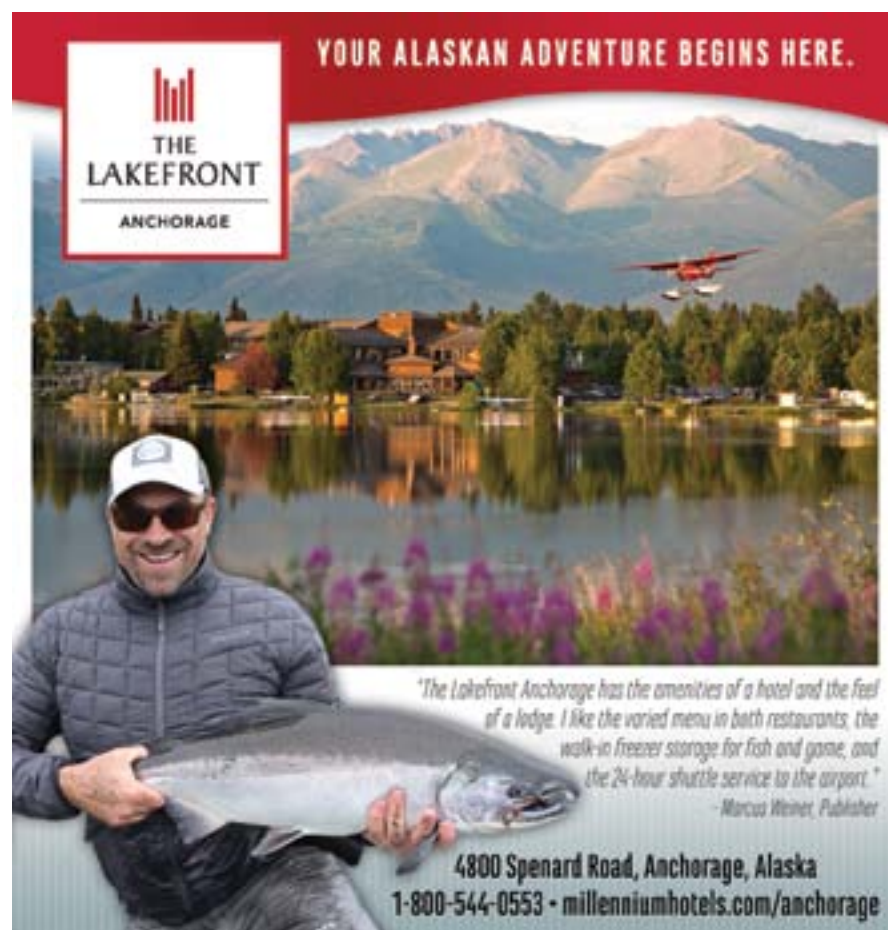


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KNIVES AND CUTTING TOOLS



Spyderco Zoomer G-10 Black

spyderco.com

The Zoomer is a 10-inch, fixed-blade knife created specifically for bushcraft and wilderness survival. Designed by Tom Zoomer, it features a broad, 5.2-inch drop-point blade crafted from Crucible CPM 20CV stainless steel. The knife is both sharp and ultra-tough. The handle is crafted from two mirror-image pieces of solid G-10 and machined to be truly comfortable in the hand. We used it to process game in 2019 and found it to be very effective. The heft and sharpness of the blade combined to allow the tool to slide through game quarters like a hot knife through butter, and it is very comfortable in the hand. We like the leather carry sheath that includes a small storage pouch.



Spyderco Genzow HatchetHawk

spyderco.com

Razor sharp, light in the hand, comfortable, and formidable, we found this to be a very handy camp tool for splitting rounds, chopping up branches, and pounding tent stakes. It holds an edge and is well designed. The hammer head also allows you to pound onto it to more easily split stubborn rounds, adding wedge, in addition to hatchet and hammer, to the list of tools that it provides. The head is drop forged from 5160 tool steel and heat treated; the result is a tough and dependable tool. The handle is comprised of a rigid aluminum inner core beneath a polypropylene-plastic, injection-molded outer layer. When not in use, the HatchetHawk is housed in a handcrafted heavy-leather sheath with a snap-fastened leather strap. A loop on the back of the sheath allows convenient belt carry, while grommets in the sheath body will accept a cord or strap for over-the-shoulder carry.



Work Sharp Guided Sharpening System

worksharp.com

We asked avid hunter Nick Ploesser what he thought of this product. He stated, "This system was amazing. We deboned two moose and the Work Sharp Guided System helped our knives stay sharp during that process. It was very simple to use and the bottom grips made the system very sturdy. While sharpening the knives I didn't have to worry about the Work Sharp System sliding or tipping over. Also, this system can come apart so if you just want to pack a certain piece you can. This system can sharpen a lot more than just knives which makes this a nice addition to the gear list so I don't need multiple sharpeners. Another thing I liked about the system is it has the sharpening angle right on it which helps out a lot. Overall this is a great, must-have product."

Kershaw Taskmaster Saw

kershaw.kaiusaltd.com

Contributing Editor John Whipple offered this advice: "In Alaska, we rarely have the luxury of loading our big-game harvests into the bed of a truck and taking them home to process. Hunting is typically far from the nearest road, and field-dressing equipment often has to be small and light enough to carry in a backpack yet strong enough to withstand hard use. Enter the Kershaw Taskmaster. I started using this saw in 2012 and have never looked back. At 9 ounces, it is light enough to justify bringing it on a backpack hunt, but with a 7.25" razor-sharp blade and 9.25" handle, it is big enough to handle breaking down a moose or saw a skull plate off. Usually available for around \$25, this piece of gear is a no-brainer!"



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KNIVES AND CUTTING TOOLS

Havalon Piranta

havalon.com

Contributing Editor Paul Atkins shared, "I was once skeptical when it came to knives with replacement blades. In the old days I did have an off-brand model, but was never satisfied with its performance, especially when it came to cutting tough hides, like moose and bear. I couldn't get the blades on right, especially when it was cold, or time was an issue. In the end, I always laid it down and grabbed my old drop point. Now I know many still prefer their old hunting knives and that's fine, but you really need to try a Havalon if you haven't already. Introduced to me on a recent goat hunt, these knives come in a variety of sizes and are tough as nails. I prefer the smaller version for skinning, where it has performed well, especially on recent hunts, like muskox and grizzly. The blades are tough, easy to replace, and razor sharp. They even come in bigger versions, which are ideal for cutting meat and even fish. Buy one and try it, you'll be impressed!"



FIELD ACCESSORIES



Rural Energy Solar Charger 13W, Camouflage

ruralenergy.com

We found this to be a great solution to allow us to recharge our portable devices like cell phone, laptop, GPS, etc. It recharges 5V batteries through the two external USB connections. It only weighs one pound, which makes it ultra-portable, and it has an ultra-high conversion rate of sunlight into power (22%). It can

charge devices at up to 1% per minute. We like the book-style design, magnetic closures and built-in stand.

Skinner Sights Express Scope Mount '95 Stainless with Integrated Peep

skannersights.com

This Skinner Sight is made for a variety of lever-action rifles including the Henry All-Weather Lever Actions. It is a high-quality peep sight grooved for Talley medium height Quick Detach rings. The standard aperture is .096 inches, but other apertures are available. We installed it on a Henry All-Weather .45-70 and used Talley rings to also attach a Skinner Optics 1-6x24 Riflescope. With this setup, we can hunt with the scope, or take it off and use the iron sights. Made in the USA.



HatPoint Target Stand

hatpointtarget.com

Associate Editor and hunting expert Scott Haugen said the following: "I do a lot of shooting year-round with rifles, rimfires, and numerous shotguns. One of the biggest time eaters for me is making and setting up targets. I've pieced together target stands that have served their purpose over the years, but when I tried the new HatPoint Target Stand, things changed. The HatPoint Target Stand is versatile and easy to set up. The framework allows for easy anchoring, be it with the provided spikes, or by placing rocks, wood, or sandbags on the frame when shooting on hard ground. Wooden slats can be placed in the frame that offers multiple target widths, but what I really like is HatPoint's polymer slats that take errant pellets from heavy shotgun loads, without compromise. HatPoint Target Stands save time, and if you do a lot of shooting, are a great investment that will save money in the long run. This stand is also easy and quick to assemble and disassemble, making it ideal for the public land hunter/shooter to carry afield and keep things clean."



Talley Quick Detachable Ring w/Levers

talleymanufacturing.com

We used these rings to attach a Skinner Optics 1-6x24 Riflescope to a Henry All-Weather .45-70.

These rings are thought by many to be the best quick-detach rings on the market. We mounted them to the rifle via Skinner Sights' Express Scope Mount '95 Stainless

with Integrated Peep. In our limited testing to date, the scope/rings have maintained zero after detaching the scope a few times. These rings are available in 1 inch, 30 mm, 34 mm and 36 mm, in heights from low to extra high, and in a variety of finishes. These rings make it easy to hunt deer in open country with the scope, yet allow you to easily remove the scope and use iron sights while ghosting through the thickets or for situations where you prefer the iron sights.

Weego Jump Starter 66

myweego.com

This multifunction tool is a portable power pack that allows you to jump start your vehicle; recharge phones, tablets, GPSs and laptops; powers 12V accessories; and functions as a 600-lumen flashlight that will run for up to 30 hours. It's easy to use and comes with instructions. The jump-start function has multiple safety features built in including anti-spark, reverse-polarity recognition, overheating and power-surge protection.



Switchview Throw Lever

switchviewusa.com

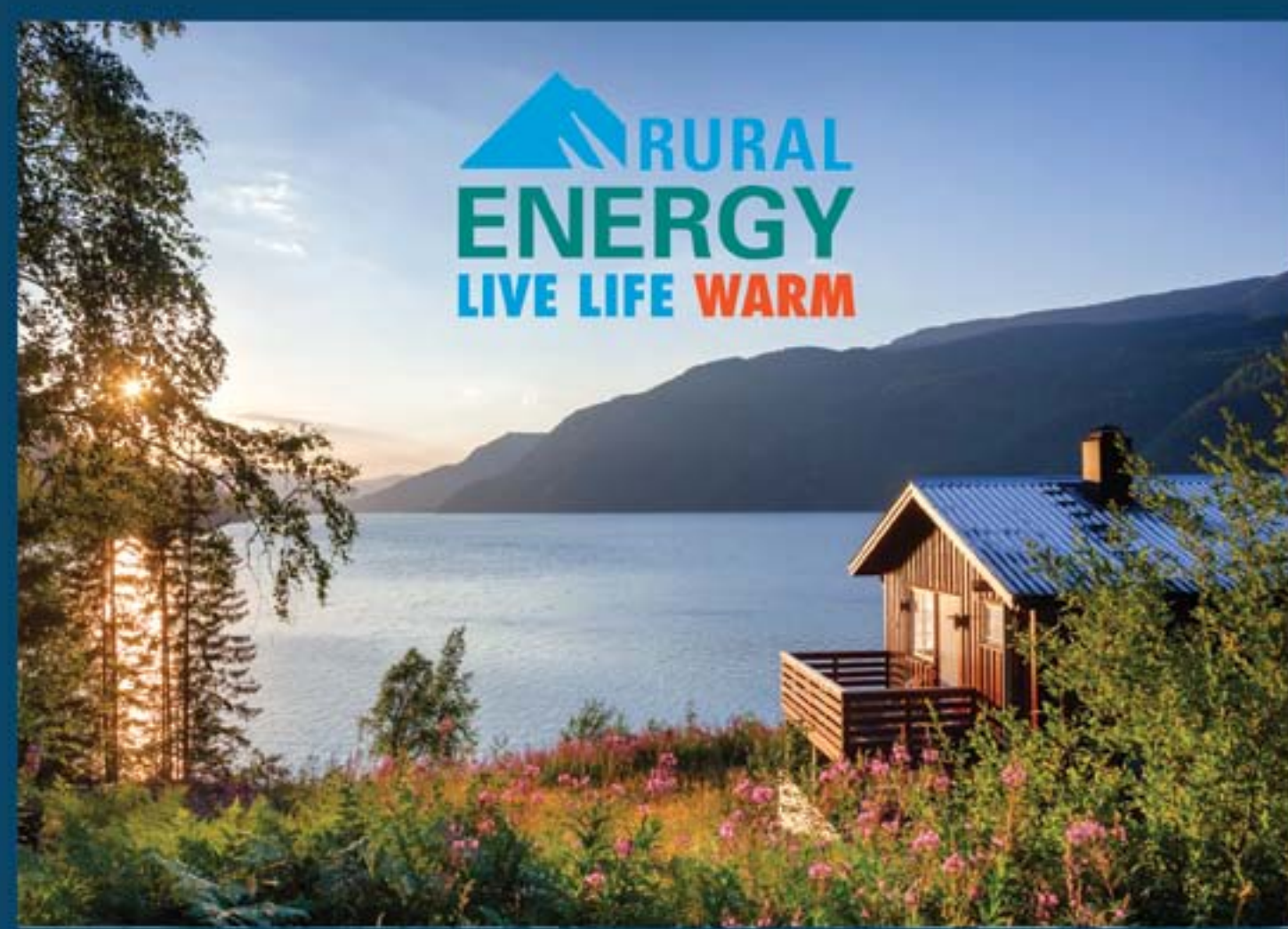
Associate Editor Scott Haugen offered the following advice: "If looking to maximize the efficiency of your riflescope's magnification dial, consider a throw lever. Popular with competition shooters and varmint hunters, quick-zoom levers are also nice for hunters when looking through the scope at animals on the move. Scope dials are supposed to move slowly, requiring considerable force to budge them, at times. This is normal, for these moving parts must also keep the scope waterproof and prohibit dust from penetrating the scope. The challenge of efficiently operating scope dials comes when a quick, big range of movement is required. In order to more easily and quickly move my .22's scope magnification dial while tree-squirrel hunting, last fall I equipped it with a Switchview lever. Soon, I put Switchview levers on nearly all of my riflescopes, that's how impressed I was with their performance. Made in the USA, Switchview levers are easy to install and made to fit a multitude of riflescopes."



Otis Technology 11" x 17" Cleaning Mat

otistec.com

This mat is small and portable, and provides a work area to clean your firearms. It's got a rubber, non-slip backing so it won't move and gun oil won't penetrate the mat. It's lightly padded, so it won't mar the surface of your firearm and is gentle on gun components. We used it when cleaning our revolver, rifles and shotguns.



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FIELD ACCESSORIES



Howard Leight Impact Sport Electronic Earmuff

howardleightshootingports.com

The Impact Sport Electronic Earmuff provides comfortable, effective hearing protection with its noise-reduction rating of 22dB. Built in directional microphones amplify sounds to a safe 82dB so you can hear range commands and converse, yet they actively listen for sounds exceeding 82dB and stop amplification when it occurs. Other features include low-profile earcups, adjustable headband, and a compact, folding design for easy storage. The earmuffs have an AUX input and 3.5 mm cord to attach to your music or other audio source. Includes two AAA batteries. Expected battery life is 350 hours, and an automatic shut-off feature activates at four hours, preserving battery life.

Novagrade Phone Adaptor

novagrade.com

Associate Editor Scott Haugen shared these insights: “I’ve been digiscoping for years—using adaptors for cell phones to take photos and video through spotting scopes—but not until recently was I truly happy with my results, and all thanks to Novagrade. Novagrade is designed, machined, and assembled in my home state of Oregon, and is the most durable, rugged, reliable digiscope adapter I’ve ever used. The technology applied in the Novagrade allows it to quickly fit any cell phone, and a range of available adapters will fit any spotting scope or binocular eyepiece. When in place, the Novagrade is so secure you can grab the device and lift up any spotting scope and tripod setup, and it won’t budge. Whether you’re looking to take your field judging of big game to another level, survey fields being used by waterfowl from a safe distance,

or simply want to photograph and video wildlife, the Novagrade will help. Thanks to its sturdy design and solid framework, every photo you take will be rock solid, optimizing the capability and clarity of what your cell phone is capable of doing.”

Pacific Eyewear Shooter’s Edge OTG Shooting Glasses

anglers-edge.com

These shooting glasses are very light, with high temples that allow them to be worn over your prescription glasses, or by themselves. The high temple also makes these glasses very comfortable to wear even with ear protection. The glasses have an anti-fog lens coating, provide 100% UV A & B protection and have an ANSI safety rating of Z87. Currently, these are only available at shooting ranges.



Stealth Cam DS4K Ultra

stealthcam.com

Scott Haugen is an expert hunter and spends many days in the field each year. His hard-earned advice is worth listening to. “Last year I started using Stealth Cam’s new DS4K trail cameras. The quality of video this trail camera produced was unmatched, and I’ve been using trail cameras for many years. Recently, Stealth Cam released their latest version of the DS4K, with an impressive upgrade. The new and improved DS4K shoots ultra 4K HD video and 32-megapixel images. It also features a 100-foot infrared range and new adjustable-burst interval options. Personally, I learn a great deal about animal movement and behavior by capturing action on trail cameras set to video mode, not just pictures. Throughout this fall and winter I’ve been using the new DS4K exclusively in southeast Alaska’s rainforest. Here, heavy rain, intense fog, snow and freezing temperatures are the norm, yet this camera prevailed in every situation. It’s the best trail camera I’ve ever used.”



WATERCRAFT



Aire Lion 18' Cataraft Tubes

alaskaraftandkayak.com

Aire cataraft tubes are durable, tough and well-suited for Alaska’s harsh conditions. These tubes are 18 feet long, with a 27.5-inch tube diameter, weigh 110 pounds and have a 2000-pound load capacity. They draft very little water, and therefore are a fine choice for floating shallow, backcountry rivers in Alaska, as well as any other river that you want to float. Alaska Raft and Kayak is the Anchorage dealer for Aire, as well as several other manufacturers, and also builds custom rowing frames to fit Aire pontoons. Tubes are available in multiple colors and come with a ten-year warranty.



Alpacka Forager Packraft

alpackaraft.com

Contributing Editor Bjorn Dihle spends many days in the field and contributed this Editors’ Choice Award. “Packrafts are a revolutionary tool for the backcountry, however most of the standard models are a little cumbersome for hauling any real amount of gear and meat, especially on rivers with whitewater or weird eddies. Alpacka’s Forager, however, weighing in at 13 pounds and with a weight capacity of 1,000 pounds, is ideal for hunts. It can be used by two people or one person with a lot of gear/meat. It handles tricky rivers better than other packrafts and provides a more comfortable ride. It also handles seas remarkably well—I used a Forager on a 30-mile ocean paddle with my infant son strapped to my chest and my old lady in the bow. One of my favorite things about the Forager and other Alpacka packrafts is how durable they are. Short of a grizzly chewing on one, it’s incredible how much abuse the Forager can withstand. If you’re looking to go on a remote hunt where you’ll need a boat, consider the Forager. It’s not cheap, but the lifetime of use and adventure it’ll offer you will be priceless.”

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APPAREL



Kryptek Njord Pant and Jacket

kryptek.com

This set is warm, comfortable and quiet. These are features that helped us sneak up on game in 2019. Additionally, the garments are made with a water-resistant fabric and treated with DWR, which helped to keep us dry when it got stormy, which it inevitably does during hunting season. We found the set to give our tester protection from the wind and rain, while keeping him warm in conditions not far above freezing. The athletic fit allows for full range of motion and promotes noise reduction.



Sitka Gear Women's Heavyweight Hooded

sitkagear.com

This garment is multi-functional; either use it as part of your layering system on cold days, or as a top layer during dry, warmer days. It's breathable and wicks moisture, and the fleece also retains heat. Our tester said it is comfortable to wear and kept her warm, and that she likes the feel of the fleece, fit of the hood and the functionality of the half-length front zipper and the stretch thumb loops.

Lowa Renegade GTX Mid

lowaboos.com

Crafted for any terrain, these boots provide good traction and repel water. Our tester appreciates the quality of these boots. They are attractive, durable and easy to lace. The



craftsmanship is excellent; they are made to last. These boots are great for hiking in a variety of weather conditions, and are comfortable and breathable. We also tested a pair for our youth hunter and he reported that these are great boots. He loves the comfortable fit after many miles of hiking, and that his feet stay dry even when hunting in wet and soggy conditions like he found when targeting deer in 2019.



Kenetrek 10" Grizzly Boot

kenetrek.com

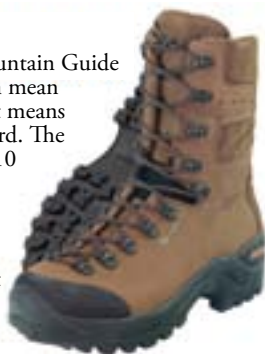
The first thing our youth tester said is that these boots are comfortable when hiking and warm when he sat glassing for game. Our youth testers often have cold feet, so this is a real positive endorsement. He said that his feet stayed dry even when hiking through creeks and wet terrain. Among the many features of these quality boots are the removable 6 mm liners that have three

layers of materials quilted together. Kenetrek starts with a layer of Cambrelle, which is a durable and excellent wicking material, then adds 400 grams of Thinsulate insulation which provides warmth without bulk, and finishes with 3 mm of wool felt for insulation even when damp. These liners are more durable and much less bulky than traditional felt liners, and the reason our tester's feet stay warm and comfortable. Other features include snug-fitting leather uppers made of heavy-duty 6-ounce oil-tanned leather and incorporate a snug-fit lacing system with the Power D-ring that secures the ankle area of the boot for maximum support. Handmade natural-rubber bottoms with supportive steel shanks are scent free and waterproof and the Kenetrek Talon outsole utilizes the finest rubber compounds to give you the grip, durability, and support you'll need to climb anything. The deep relief and open tread pattern give serious bite in snow, mud, or dry ground. The Grizzly is available in 10" or 13" heights and can be completely rebuilt when the bottoms wear out.

Kenetrek Mountain Guide 400

kenetrek.com

At *Hunt Alaska*, we've been fans of Kenetrek boots for years. The Mountain Guide 400 is another of their very high-quality boots. Hunts in Alaska often mean miles of hiking over varied, rough terrain, and when success comes, it means packing heavy loads. Our advice is to buy the best boots you can afford. The Mountain Guide 400 boots would be a great choice. The uppers are 10 inches tall and made of thick, premium full-grain leather with one-piece construction. They are double and triple stitched, waterproof and insulated with 400 grams of Thinsulate. Boot hardware is of the highest quality, and it swivels instead of breaking. One of our favorite features, the 7 mm nylon midsoles provide extra support that you will really appreciate on a moose pack-out. The custom K-73 outsoles have deep lugs and provide excellent traction and durability.



Muck Boots Men's Arctic Ice Mid

muckbootcompany.com

These are quality boots, sturdy and well-made for year-round use. Our tester appreciated the comfort in summer and warmth and great traction in the snow and ice. These boots are fleece lined and very comfortable; the shorter length makes them well suited for a wide variety of applications. The neoprene top is especially appreciated by our tester for comfort and ease of removal.



Under Armor Ridge Reaper Raider Pants

underarmour.com

Quiet, waterproof, windproof, and comfortable, these pants are a fine choice for outdoorsmen in Alaska. Our tester loved the fit of these pants and found them to be very easy to move in. Articulated knees and four-way-stretch fabric contribute to the functionality of this garment. Pockets are adequate and properly placed.

Wiggy's Lightweight Waders

wiggys.com

Hunt Alaska Contributor Eric Hershey shared this wisdom: "Wiggy's Waders are an absolute necessity for every sheep hunter. Weighing only 10 ounces, these



over-boot waders add very little weight to your pack and can be shared between a pair of hunters. After the first person crosses a creek, just roll them up and toss across to the other guy. They grip the wet rocks well and are fairly durable considering their weight."



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-Randy Newberg, Host of Fresh Tracks

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Arctic Shield Heat Echo Sherpa Jacket and Bibs

arcticshieldoutdoor.com

This cold-weather system is awesome and the way everything fits is great. The bibs and coat are large for the sizing, so layering underneath is easy. This system makes glassing in cold weather or just sitting around very comfortable. Also, the outer fleece fabric makes it very quiet when trying to move around. If you are going to be in very cold weather or just need a nice system to stay warm while being outdoors, this is it.

Darn Tough Socks

darntough.com

Contributing Editor John Whipple shared:



"Every outdoorsman worth his salt knows that if you don't take care of your feet, you won't have much of a hunt. Through the years I have tried most if not all the major sock brands, and have decided that Darn Tough socks are the best in the business. They are available in merino wool and synthetic fibers. Fit is excellent. They are snug and do not slip or bunch, yet they are not so tight that they are restrictive. They wick moisture admirably well, and true to their name, they are tough. They last for an incredibly long time, and if and when you manage to wear them out, they will send you a new pair free of charge!"



Sitka Gear Women's Merino Core Lightweight Bottom

sitkagear.com
This base layer features merino wool spun around a nylon core, giving you the best properties of both materials. Our tester said she appreciates the yoga-style waist and athletic fit, and loves the warm and moisture-wicking properties of the merino wool.

GAME BAGS, HOLSTERS, PACKS, CASES, AND KENNELS

Alaska Game Bags GBM 1675 Game Bag Roll

alaskagamebags.com

This 16-inch roll (stretches to 54 inches) is 75 feet long, and allows you to create whatever size game bag you need. We simply tie knots at the open ends after cutting to the size required. We like the flexibility of this system and the roll provides enough game bags for many hunts.



Alaska Game Bags Alaska Pack

alaskagamebags.com

Our tester had this to say: "These bags were nice to have out in the field with me. They are lightweight, and easy to pack. The bonus part was the extra stuff that comes in the package. Having a pair of latex gloves and tags makes it really easy to stay clean and keep bags organized. Also, when dealing with quarters it was nice to just roll the bags down the meat. Overall the bags are durable and handy to have."



SealLine Pro Dry Pack 120L

seallinegear.com

Totally waterproof, built tough, with lots of capacity; this is an ideal pack for transporting your gear to Alaska and then to use it in all weather conditions on any adventure. We especially like using these bags on float trips, since they are bulletproof, waterproof and float,



and over the years we have learned how to easily fit 50 pounds of gear into this size bag. Testers still remember watching one of these packs float down the Kisaralik River and disappear, only to be found floating downriver several miles later.

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planomolding.com
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Plano Field Locker Mil-Spec Pistol Case Large

planomolding.com
The Field Locker Mil-Spec Pistol Case is a heavy-duty case designed to protect your handguns during transport. Features include high-density, customizable foam; reinforced padlock gates; over-molded, heavy-duty handle; heavy-duty waterproof Dri-Loc gasket; pressure-relief valve; extra-wide latches, and is stackable and can interlock with other Field Locker Series cases. This is a very robust case that can carry two typical handguns.



waterproof, dustproof, and lockable. Inside, it has a removable divider that splits the main compartment in half, plus a removable, divided tray for smaller items. It also has the Pack Attic storage feature in the lid. All told, this box allows you to organize in ways previously unavailable. Heavy-duty hinges and latches, handles on all sides, Bearfoot non-slip feet, tie-down slots and more make this box extremely useable and versatile, both for hunters and anglers as well as other adventurers.

Gunner G1 Kennel Series

gunnerkennels.com
Scott Haugen, Associate Editor and hunting dog aficionado, brought us this wisdom: "No kennel on the market offers what a Gunner Kennel does when it comes to safety and protection of your hunting dog. Gunner Kennels are the only dog kennels on the market that have passed and dominated the many intensive and comprehensive crash tests they've been put through, earning these travel crates the first 5-Star Crash Test Rating from the Center for Pet Safety. They've been tested to withstand over 4,000 pounds of force, a blast from a 12-gauge shotgun at close range, an impact of over 600 pounds dropped on them, and they've been tossed off 200-foot cliffs and made it. But some of the most impressive testimonials of Gunner Kennels come from hunters who've survived vehicular crashes, as have their dogs. To hear some of these stories gives you chills, but to see pictures capturing the severity of the wrecks, and how the dog and kennel survived, leaves any serious hunter who travels a lot with their dog, realizing what their next kennel purchase should be. Gunner Kennels come with a plug and specially designed floor for draining, aftermarket accessories, a lifetime warranty and a range of sizes."

Yeti LoadOut GoBox 30

yeti.com
Touted as "The Cargo Box That Knows No Bounds," The LoadOut GoBox 30 is about as technical and feature-packed as a cargo box can be. It's super tough and impact resistant, plus it's waterproof, dustproof, and lockable. Inside, it has a removable divider that splits the main compartment in half, plus a removable, divided tray for smaller items. It also has the Pack Attic storage feature in the lid. All told, this box allows you to organize in ways previously unavailable. Heavy-duty hinges and latches, handles on all sides, Bearfoot non-slip feet, tie-down slots and more make this box extremely useable and versatile, both for hunters and anglers as well as other adventurers.



GAME BAGS, HOLSTERS, PACKS, CASES, AND KENNELS

Primos KennelUP Dog Kennel

primos.com
Many bird hunters share the field with their dogs. Associate Editor Scott Haugen shared his insights on kennels. "For bird hunters who have a dog as a hunting partner, you know there are many kennels on the market. I've tried a number of kennels and seen many more in use by fellow hunters. When it comes to picking a kennel, only you know what's best for your dog. Recently I've used the new KennelUP by Primos. What I like about this kennel while traveling the many logging roads I hunt in southeast Alaska—often amid rain, snow, and mud—is its lightweight yet durable construction, which makes it easy to handle in less than ideal situations. From summer training travel to snow-packed conditions on winter hunts, my dogs are very comfortable with the new Primos KennelUP Dog Kennel. Weighing just 37 pounds, this kennel is easy to manage thanks to its heavy-duty handles and streamlined design. The single-walled, one-piece, roto-molded kennel features rubber feet and integrated aluminum tie downs which ensure it stays secure in the truck, meaning it's a safe ride on those bumpy gravel roads. The built-in drains of the KennelUP are great during waterfowl season, and the adjustable vents are perfect on hot days. The vents can also be closed to hold in heat on chilly outings. A comfortable, clean ride, that's what the KennelUP has to offer."



Diamond D Leather Rifle Butt Cuff Holster

diamonddcustomleather.com
Here are more insights from Contributing Editor Steve Meyer: "On a single-shot rifle, having spare cartridges readily accessible is a must. The Diamond D Leather Rifle Butt Cuff fills the bill nicely. It is a lace-up cuff that works perfectly with straight stocks, as it is intended. This is a robust cartridge holder, with double stitching at stress points. Once broken in a bit, the cartridges are held securely, and the design allows one to push up the cartridge from the bottom and then grasp it to remove from the top. From the drop of the falling block to eject the spent cartridge, the hand moves easily to the spare cartridges, making quick reloading possible. The six-round capacity is more than enough for any big-game hunting. The build of this piece suggests I will be long planted before it wears out."



Diamond D Leather Alaska Hunter Hip Holster

diamonddcustomleather.com
We used this holster with our .44 Magnum Ruger Redhawk and it worked perfectly. The holster provides a snug fit and it is streamlined so that it sits on the hip but is not in the way. Craftsmanship of the holster is first rate. There are three screws on the back of the holster, and this feature enables the user to either slide their belt through the loop, or unscrew the three screws and wrap it around a backpack or any other strap. The standard loop will fit up to a 1 3/4" belt; remove the two upper screws and it can accept up to a 2 1/2" strap/belt. Diamond D Leather offers this holster for many different makes and models of pistols and revolvers and offers other customizable options for the holster.



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CAMPING

MSR MiniWorks EX Water Filter

msrgear.com

If you are a backcountry angler, hunter or hiker, then you know the importance of having a good water filter when traveling in the wild. This is a good one. It's compact and lightweight, and can filter a liter of water in 60 seconds. It's 99.9999% effective at removing bacteria like E.coli and salmonella, as well as protozoa including giardia and cryptosporidium. The system is rated to filter 2000 liters in its lifetime, which far exceeds what most of us will do with it. The filter combines a ceramic surface and carbon core; the combination removes dirt, silt, bacteria and protozoa while maintaining the taste of the water.



Big Agnes Anvil Horn 0° Sleeping Bag

bigagnes.com

This sleeping bag is a must-have. Our tester really liked how his body stayed warm throughout the whole bag and not just in certain pockets. Having the option to insert a sleeping pad in the bottom was nice. He stated that he is a toss-and-turn sleeper and by having the air pad attached to the bottom of the sleeping bag that falling off was very hard to do. This system came with multiple storage bags which is nice when storing. The larger net bag was used to keep the bag fluffy while storing. The smaller bag is handy when needing to pack it away. When put in a stuff sack, the sleeping bag compresses to a very small size and is lightweight. The zipper system is also very well constructed, and snags were minimal. In the regular-size bag, there was plenty of room for our tester to move around.



Sea to Summit Expander Travel Liner

seatosummit.com

This sleeping-bag liner is handy to have while camping. It can make your sleeping bag warmer and it's soft and comfortable. During warm nights, you can use the liner as your blanket. Most often, we'd use the liner as a bottom blanket and drape the sleeping bag over the top.



Hilleberg Nallo 3 GT

hilleberg.com

This 3-man tent offers tons of vestibule space and is very lightweight for an all-season tent, weighing only 6 pounds 13 ounces. It's made with Kerlon 1200 fabric and has 9 mm poles. We like that Hilleberg tents perform great, are easy to set up, and are built to handle bad weather.

I choose Hilleberg tents.

Kevin Dana

Regular guy. Dedicated mountain hunter. Sheep specialist, with both rifle and bow. Hunts 50+ days a year. Born and raised in Alaska. Works a real job, but lives to hunt. Uses the Hilleberg Akto.

"On a recent sheep hunt in the Alaska Range, our Super Cub was nearly brought down by severe weather before setting down at the base of a glacier. I set up my **Akto** in winds in the 40 mph range and driving rain and snow. As the storm worsened, I faced winds exceeding 50 mph and rapidly accumulating snow. The storm finally broke 48 hours later. The **Akto** took everything mother nature could throw at us. It is a phenomenal tent."



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HILLEBERG
THE TENTMAKER

CAMPING



SJK Slumberjack Tough Cot

slumberjack.com

This cot is solid and sturdily built. It is easy to set up. It provides a firm rest as is; or can be used with a sleeping pad if desired. It is quiet, comfortable and a great choice.

HydroFlask 128 oz Oasis

hydroflask.com

This extra-large container allows you to transport enough liquid for many people, and keeps liquids cold for 24 hours and hot for 12 hours. We like the two integrated lids feature—the larger one makes it easy to fill and clean the vessel, while the smaller one allows you to pour liquids into drinking vessels. It weighs five pounds, comes in several colors and is supported by a lifetime warranty. Make a pot of coffee in the morning, go on a morning stalk, and come back to basecamp and enjoy hot coffee.



Katadyn Vario Filter

katadyn.com

This filter eliminates all the things you don't want to drink in your water: sediment, bacteria, protozoa, cysts, algae, and spores. It improves the taste of the water by removing impurities and chemicals, and most importantly makes the water safe to drink. It fits directly onto a Nalgene bottle and filters about one liter per minute. It uses a ceramic filter that is rated for 2000 liters, and is lightweight and portable. We never head to the bush without a filter like this. This is one of the best personal water filters on the market.

SJK Nightfall 1 Person Tent

slumberjack.com

At 3.45 pounds, this lightweight shelter is a nice option to have on backpacking hunts. The three-season tent provides 17.4 square feet of space with a 44-inch-tall peak, which is plenty of space for one person. The vestibule gives you another nine square feet of space for gear, and we like that the rain fly stretches all the way to the ground. You can also disconnect the inner tent body and just pitch the outer shell (rain fly) for an even lighter shelter. The tent packs down to a slim 19" x 5".



HUNT
CAMP
OVERLAND

www.SJKhunt.com

BOWHUNTING

Gold Tip Velocity Valkyrie Arrows

goldtip.com

We asked Paul Atkins, one of our bowhunting experts, what products he felt helped him succeed in 2019 and he said the following: "Arrows have come a long way since the old days. Carbon and aluminum are still the primary choices, and each can be found wherever archery gear is sold. You'll have a ton of choices, but remember, when it comes to selecting your arrow, you'll need to select one with proper spine and thickness that will fit your bow and the poundage you're shooting. There are hundreds of brands out there, all claiming to be the best. I personally shoot those made by Gold Tip, which are popular with not only hunters, but target archers as well. The new 4-fletch Valkyries are some of the best I've shot and have helped me take several animals of late. Accuracy and straightness are the key, and with the right setup, they're screaming fast! I've actually shot my best groups shooting these arrows and distance didn't matter. They come in a wide range of options in the 300-600 spine and in a variety of vane colors."



BowTech Archery Revolt

bowtecharchery.com

Contributing Editor Paul Atkins is an avid bow hunter and had this to say: "The Revolt is a high-quality bow. Touted as 'smart technology for smart bowhunters,' it is super smooth, accurate, easy to adjust and fast. It's a real pleasure to shoot."



COOKING

Camp Chef Pro90X Three-Burner Stove

campchef.com

This unit is an indispensable tool for cooking for a large group in basecamp. The three burners are powerful, putting out 30,000 BTUs each, and allow you to cook multiple items at once. The three-sided windscreen aids in protecting the burners from wind, and the matchless ignition makes it quick and easy to light them.

We like the leveling feature in each leg and the folding side shelves. It's built well, and some might consider it heavy at 59.5 pounds, but the legs fold in and the whole unit becomes compact and fits in a carry bag. We're sure that this stove will be the foundation of our base-camp kitchen for many years to come.



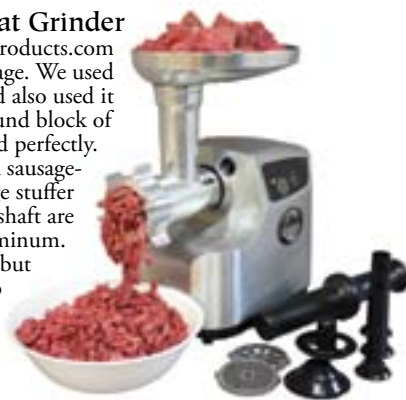
Smokehouse ¾ HP Meat Grinder

smokehouseproducts.com

This grinder packs a lot of power into a small package. We used it to grind deer and moose for chopped meat, and also used it to grind salmon for salmon burgers and a 5-pound block of cheddar cheese to make shredded cheese. It performed perfectly.

It comes with fine and coarse grinding plates, and a sausage-stuffer plate which works with the included sausage stuffer tubes. The cutting blade is stainless steel, gears and shaft are metal, and the case and grinder mechanism are aluminum.

It is light enough to store in a kitchen cabinet, but powerful enough to reduce a boned-out blacktail into a year's worth of burger.



Smokehouse Big Chief Drying Screens

smokehouseproducts.com

This is a must-have for those that like to smoke their own fish and game, and for those chefs who like to cook fish on the grill. Safe to 550°F, these screens are nonstick, dishwasher safe and made from PTFE Teflon. We used them when smoking salmon in 2019 and they worked great. In the past, our smoked salmon strips would stick to the racks, and it would take a bit of time to get them clean. Using these screens has eliminated the cleanup, and the fish strips slide easily off the screens. We have yet to use them in making jerky, but will soon.



GPS AND COMMUNICATORS

Garmin Rino 750

garmin.com

This unit is great! One of the best features of this 2-way radio/GPS navigator is the ability to see the location of the other people who are using Rinos on the same channel, and this works through all models of Rinos, so older Rinos can see newer ones. Garmin continues to add features to their units, and there are way too many to mention. Choose the ones that

you use most and customize your home screen with icons for those applications. Next time you go on a remote trip in Alaska, we'd recommend that each member carries one of these units and then you'll be able to see each other's location, as well as talk to each other on the unit's radio.



Garmin inReach Explorer+

garmin.com

This unit allows you to access the global Iridium satellite network for two-way messaging and email. It also provides GPS navigation with preloaded TOPO maps, allows others to track your progress, receives weather forecasts, and allows you to send an interactive SOS. This is a very handy tool for use off the grid in Alaska and we highly recommend that you bring a device like this on any remote adventure.



ZOLEO Global Messenger

zoleo.com

We've been using this new product for the last few months and are impressed. It allows us to use an app on our smart phone to connect with the ZOLEO device that accesses Wi-Fi, cellular, and the Iridium satellite network and allows us to send texts and emails from anywhere. ZOLEO assigns you a unique email address and SMS number and you use the simple and intuitive app to text and email. It also includes a weather forecast and SOS alerting. We like using the functionality of our smart phone to text and email.

HUNTING IS A TRADITION THAT GOES BACK GENERATIONS.
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THAT'S FROM TOTALLY RIGHT NOW.



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COOKING



Salmon Sisters Taco and Fajita Seasoning

aksalmonsisters.com
Our tester likes the flavor produced from this combination of salt, garlic and chili. Try some the next time you want to make game-meat fajitas. It is comprised of cayenne, chili flake, mild chili powder, coriander, cumin, garlic, oregano, paprika, salt, and Malabar pepper, and comes in a two-ounce resealable package.

GSI Outdoors Glacier Stainless Base Camper Medium

gsioutdoors.com
This cookware stacks together neatly in a mesh bag. It is very light and portable, and imminently packable. The lid and pot handles are well insulated and stay cool to the touch. These stainless-steel dishes clean up very easily. The vents on the lid are designed for draining pasta on the spot.



Santa Fe Black Beans and Rice entree as well as the Banana Berry smoothie. The Santa Fe Black Beans and Rice includes black beans, rice, corn, carrots, red and green bell peppers, onion, garlic and jalapeño. It's both healthy and delicious. If you are going to chase after big-game animals in the mountains, then dehydrated food is a necessity, and this brand makes good food.

Coleman Guide Series 424 Stove

coleman.com
Contributing Editor Bjorn Dihle shared these insights: "I've tried just about every camp stove on the market and all have their pros and cons. The Coleman Guide Series 424 Stove, with a double burner, wind block and with the option of burning white or unleaded gas, is ideal for trips for larger parties where weight isn't crucial. Think moose camp or any sort of hunt that doesn't involve



miles of backpacking to get to your basecamp. I use mine for river trips, car camping and when I'm with larger parties where cooking on a single-burner camp stove is impractical. Easy to use and control temperature, with a five-year warranty, the Guide Series 424 Stove will have your belly full of good eats and hot coffee wherever you take it."



Stanley Adventure Stay Hot Camp Crock | 3QT

stanley-pmi.com
Contributing Editor Steve Meyer shared this wisdom: "Perhaps it is advancing years, but these days when returning to hunting camp after a cold, wet day of brush busting, the last thing I want to do is cook. While predator hunting in the cold months, moving from stand to stand, a hot meal in between is priceless. For that matter, any sort of outdoor activity that finds you hungry upon return, a ready-made hot meal is welcome. The folks at Stanley have answered this old man's prayers with their Camp Crock, a double-walled stainless-steel, 3-quart insulated pot. With a lid that is as wide as the pot, scooping out piping-hot chili, clam chowder, or whatever you might want, is an easy task. The lid is secured with four snap downs that seal in heat, and a handle on top for ease of carry. We make our favorite dish during the mid-day lull, or the evening before, dump it in the pot and have hot meals whenever we want. At 3.4 pounds, one wouldn't carry it sheep hunting, but there are few other places where this pot wouldn't be a welcome addition to any outdoor endeavor."



Backpacker's Pantry

backpackerspantry.com
We've been eating Backpacker's Pantry meals for many years and they make many meals that taste better than the traditional freeze-dried fare. Part of the method that elevates their end product is to use good ingredients and they state that those ingredients are not cooked together until you add boiling water. We enjoyed the Beef Stroganoff in 2019.



LEM Backwoods Breakfast Fresh Sausage Seasoning

lemproducts.com
Over the past three years, we have migrated to mixing our ground game with pork; it's easy to find a pork shoulder or Boston butt at the store, and the fatty meat adds good flavor to the ground game. We mix at about 80% game to 20% pork. This becomes our staple ground meat, and then when we want to make breakfast sausage, we do it a pound at a time. This seasoning has a nice flavor, which is confirmed when our tester's four sons eat the entire pound every time he whips up a batch. Simply combine 2½ teaspoons of the seasoning into 1-ounce of water and then mix with your pound of meat. We let it sit in the refrigerator for a day to incorporate the flavors before forming into patties and cooking.



LEM Products Big Bite Digital Stainless Steel Dehydrator

lemproducts.com
This 10-tray dehydrator helped us make some delicious jerky in 2019. With 16 square feet of drying space, you can process a lot of meat to create snack sticks and jerky out of the game you bring home. You can use this appliance to dehydrate all kinds of food products—vegetables and fruits will last a long time once dehydrated and vacuum sealed. We are impressed with how quiet the unit is, which combines a fan and heating system to facilitate even drying. The digital display is easy to read and use.



COOKING



LEM MaxVac 250 Vacuum Sealer

lemproducts.com
This unit works well to vacuum pack fish and game. Our tester used it extensively in 2019 and reported that the seals are looking good on frozen fish. The unit is designed to seal up to 250 times without stopping, has a locking lid that you only need one hand to operate, has both automatic- and manual-sealing modes, and includes both a roll holder and cutter.



LEM #12 Big Bite Meat Grinder

lemproducts.com
We ground about 50 pounds of deer with this grinder in 2019 and it worked flawlessly. It can grind about 11 pounds per minute and is equipped with a ¾ HP motor. We like the large diameter entry hole which allows you to grind larger chunks of meat. The meat pan is large, which allows you to get several pounds of meat in position at a time. It is quiet and powerful, and chewed through the meat with ease. We used both the coarse and fine plates to grind meat and both work well. The stainless-steel grinder components are industrial grade and the grinder motor is heavy duty.

LEM MaxVac Quart Bags

lemproducts.com
These 8" x 12" bags are well suited to accommodate a pound of game. They are made from tough, 3.5 mm, puncture-resistant plastic and are reusable. This size bag features an easy-open tear notch. Bags will work in most sealers (not chamber machines), and feature a parallel channel design which helps remove all the air when vacuum sealing. Bags have a space for labeling date and contents.





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Find LEM products at Three Bears Alaska®





Here's a preview of items that you should consider when planning your 2020 hunts. From new guns and ammo, to optics, knives, field accessories and watercraft, there's something in the following pages that can help you close the deal on more game. We're excited to get out and test these items over the coming year and will report back next year where you can expect to see that some of these items have earned coveted Editors' Choice Awards.

GUNS AND AMMUNITION



Hi-Point Firearms New Crimson Trace Red Dot Carbines
hi-pointfirearms.com
Hi-Point Firearms is pleased to announce an upgrade in their carbine/red dot (RD) packages. The new RD CT package features the Crimson Trace CTS-103 Electronic Sight. The CTS-103 is a 4 MOA red- or green-dot reticle for both quick and precise aiming. One of the many advantages to the CTS-103 is that it will co-witness with all models of their Hi-Point carbines. Previous red-dot packages required removal of the iron sights on the 9mm carbine. This firearm is available in the following calibers: 9mm, .40 S&W and .45 Auto.

Black Hills Ammunition All-New Dual Performance Lineup
black-hills.com
Dual Performance projectiles are precision-machined, monolithic copper projectiles that immediately expand upon impact to form a large temporary cavity exceeding that of conventional bullets. Once the large primary cavity is created, the petals release from the projectile's body to cut separate wound tracks through the stressed tissue. The body of the bullet, still retaining a substantial portion of the original weight, but now free from unnecessary drag, penetrates deeply to ensure maximum effect on the target. Dual Performance is available in 5.56mm with a 62-grain projectile at 3000 fps from a 20-inch barrel and .308 caliber, 152-grain projectile at 2800 fps from a 24-inch barrel.

Federal Premium HammerDown Ammunition
federalpremium.com
Make your lever gun run like never before with the industry's only ammunition truly designed for optimal cycling and overall performance from the time-tested rifle platform. Velocities of Federal Premium HammerDown loads are customized to produce superior ballistics and terminal performance through lever-action barrel lengths. The construction of the molecularly bonded soft-point bullets has also been adjusted for the best accuracy and expansion at those velocities. The geometry of each round's case, bullet and cartridge ensures flawless cycling through tubular magazine and typical lever-action feeding systems. The ammunition was designed in partnership with Henry Repeating Arms and is available in the following caliber options: .357 Magnum 170-grain, .327 Federal 127-grain, .44 Rem Mag 270-grain, .45 Colt 250-grain, .30-30 Win 150-grain, and .45-70 Gov't 300-grain.

Henry Lever Action X Model .45-70 Gov't
henryusa.com
The Lever Action X Model .45-70 from Henry Repeating Arms borrows all the deeply ingrained American nostalgia from a lever gun and crams it into a feature-packed, modern big-bore rifle that begs to be put through the wringer. Whether you're in need of a lightweight brush gun, rugged game gun, dedicated truck gun, or all the above, you will be hard-pressed to find a better option. The lever-action .45-70 has been around forever, but that doesn't mean it needs to stop evolving to meet modern needs.



Winchester Deer Season XP Copper Impact Ammunition
winchester.com
Deer Season XP Copper Impact ammunition provides devastating terminal performance on deer with increased weight retention and deeper penetration. It is now available in even more popular calibers including 6.5 Creedmoor, .270 WSM, .300 WSM and shotgun sabot slugs. This ammunition features an oversize hollow-point that initiates rapid expansion on impact, protected by a polymer tip in flight for an improved ballistic coefficient. The solid-copper construction of the bullet offers improved weight retention over standard jacketed lead-core bullets which leads to deeper penetration and more consistent pass-throughs. The 6.5 Creedmoor bullet is 125 grains and has a velocity of 2850 fps, the .270 WSM bullet is 130 grains and has a velocity of 3215 fps, the .300 WSM bullet is 150 grains and leaves the muzzle at 3200 fps, while the 1-ounce, 12-gauge slug and the ¾-ounce, 20-gauge slug both have a velocity of 1600 fps.



POINTER .410 Halibut Buster
legacysports.com
This new .410-gauge, single-shot shotgun is a great solution for saltwater anglers who target halibut. It features a black, synthetic, thumbhole stock and 18-inch barrel sporting a nickel finish. Priced right, it retails for \$189. In Alaska, you can find this new gun at Three Bears Alaska. It's been our experience that big halibut, say over 50 pounds, are amazingly strong, can do damage to your boat, and hurt anglers if they manage to get struck by the fish. We highly recommend shooting halibut over 50 pounds that you intend to keep.



BOWHUNTING

Full Curl Archery Mountain Extreme Bow
fullcurlarchery.com
This new bow is a collaboration with Anchorage's Full Curl Archery and PSE Archery. They are producing a sheep bow fully set up and ready to go at less than four pounds! It features 332 fps arrow speed, 70-pound draw weight, draw-length range of 25- to 30.5 inches, 90% let-off, a brace height of 6.125 inches and axle-to-axle length of 32.125 inches. This bow is based off PSE's Carbon Air Stealth Mach 1 with improvements for sheep hunters.

OPTICS



Gunwerks Revic BR4 Ballistic Rangefinder
gunwerks.com
Available in summer 2020, the BR4 ballistic rangefinder sports enhanced ranging capabilities and incorporated ballistic solutions for come ups and wind holds with Bluetooth connectivity to the Revic PMR scope and BHD ballistic handheld device as well as other third-party devices.



Nightforce NX8 Riflescopes
nightforceoptics.com
Their newest product offering, NX8 riflescopes have evolved from their classic NXS series—scopes proven over two decades in the hands of the U.S. Military, hunters and competitive shooters under the most demanding conditions on earth. NX8 riflescopes build upon this hard-earned reputation with new technology and a remarkable zoom range, razor sharp at every setting, a challenge that has vexed optical designers for years. Consider that problem solved. They are proud to have released the new NX8 2.5-20x50 F1 and 4-32x50 F1 to the NX8 product line.



Vortex Razor HD LHT Rifle scope
vortexoptics.com
From thick timber to wide-open spaces, the new Razor HD LHT is the one long-range hunting optic you need to fill those faraway tags, and it's among the lightest in its class. Built on an incredibly lightweight platform, the Razor HD LHT combines stunning HD clarity with sharp resolution for an optical system that's as clear at first light as it is at high noon. An intuitive reticle with push-button illumination makes the LHT intuitive and versatile. Here's what really pushes the Razor HD LHT into "must-have" territory: A locking elevation turret, and their exclusive RevStop Zero System, which gives you a rock-solid return to zero so you can dial as much as you need to. The RevStop Zero System is one of the fastest and easiest to set zero stops available on the market.

KNIVES AND SHARPENERS



Knives of Alaska Fisherman's Combo
knivesofalaska.com
Recently selected in our March '20 *Fish Alaska* Editors' Choice Awards, Knives of Alaska is now offering their Fisherman's Combo with orange handles to provide you

with the perfect, high-visibility, fish-cleaning system. The Steelheader works great for smaller panfish, bass, walleye, or crappie-sized fish, while the Coho is designed for larger fish including salmon. Both knives come packaged together in a quick-drying, ballistic-style, nylon sheath lined with Kydex, perfect for transport in your tackle box or gear bag.



Work Sharp Pivot Pro Knife and Tool Sharpener
worksharpools.com
The Pivot Pro Knife Sharpener has quickly found a home among outdoorsmen who want a quick solution for dull knives while in the field. The carbide slot quickly restores an edge on fillet knives and other soft steels, and the ceramic slot hones that new edge and keeps your super-steel skinning blades razor sharp! The large handle provides enough room to use the sharpener while wearing gloves and gives you a great place to hold onto if your natural grip is compromised.



Spyderco Endela
spyderco.com
Sized to literally split the difference between the iconic Spyderco Endura 4 and Delica 4 Lightweights, the Endela proudly offers all the highly refined, time-tested features of each in the perfect "in-between" format. Its full-flat-ground blade is crafted from VG-10 stainless steel and proudly sports a fully accessible trademark Round Hole for ambidextrous one-hand opening. Available with either a PlainEdge or SpyderEdge, the blade is supported by a sturdy back-lock mechanism, skeletonized stainless-steel liners, and injection-molded, fiberglass-reinforced-nylon (FRN) scales. Spyderco's trademark Bi-Directional Texturing pattern ensures a nonslip grip and a four-position pocket clip offers all carry options.

WATERCRAFT

Hewescraft 290 Adventure
hewescraft.com
Hewescraft set out to create something new, something serious fishermen would use for more than a trip to the salmon grounds. The 290 Adventure is not simply a larger version of another Hewescraft, it's a completely new design. Built with fishing in mind, the Adventure provides a huge deck and 245 gallons of fish storage. The spacious interior cabin is designed with 6'4" of headroom and is nicely appointed for cruising, cooking, and entertaining.



Hobie Mirage Pro Angler 360 Series
alaskaraftandkayak.com
This new series features 12- and 14-foot models packed with tons of features. The Pro Angler 14 with the MirageDrive 360 and Kick-up Fins delivers power in every direction for unprecedented maneuverability and control. This kayak hits all the marks—total control, power, stability, performance, stealth, comfort and a multitude of features. Its wide, rock-solid standing platform comes decked out with noise-reducing EVA traction pads. The all-new Kick-up Fins automatically retract upon impact, letting users more easily investigate shallows, kelp beds, rocky shorelines, etc. The adjustable Vantage ST Seat is comfortable, keeping kayakers out longer on the water. The Pro Angler 12 with the MirageDrive 360 and Kick-up Fins gives you the competitive edge with full-circle power and maneuverability. The Pro Angler 12 features six rod holders, the Vantage ST Seat, extra-wide hull, and stain-resistant EVA padding. In Alaska, visit Alaska Raft and Kayak in Anchorage to explore Hobie kayaks, as well as a wide range of other boats and accessories for paddle sports.



CAMPING AND COOKING

LEM 2 Stage Grinder Head Attachment

lemproducts.com

This unit fits on LEM's Big Bite Grinders and allows you to get two grinds in one pass, therefore saving time and effort. It comes in two sizes; the #8 fits the size #8 and #12 grinder motors and the #22 fits the size #22 and #32 grinder motors. It includes a 2-stage grinder head, BB3 auger, auger bushing, 2-stage auger stud, 2-stage cutting plate, 2-sided grinder knife, 4.5 mm plate and a retaining ring.



SJK Youth Boundary 30 Sleeping Bag

slumberjack.com

The all-new Youth Boundary 30-degree sleeping bag is designed to fit your little cubs perfectly. With a wide design and now available in youth sizing, this sleeping bag will give your young one the space they need to stay comfortable all night long. The unique "flip over" hood can be turned inside out for the option of a contoured hood that keeps the heat in when you need it. This sleeping bag is now available for the whole family.



Smokehouse Mimi Moto Infrared Heater Accessory

smokehouseproducts.com

The Infrared Heater Accessory is specifically designed to be used with the Mimi Moto Ultimate Wood-Fired Cookstove. The wood-fired flame from the cookstove heats the inner mesh of the heater accessory creating a red-hot glow with temperatures up to 1800°F. Use the heater on a table or on the ground to enjoy the nice warm glow while sitting around your new wood-fired infrared heater. It generates over 20,000 BTUs, is clean-burning, efficient, and designed for outdoor use.



Hilleberg Anaris

hilleberg.com

Hilleberg's new Anaris is a very light, wonderfully roomy, two-person ridge tent constructed to pitch with trekking poles or by suspending its ridge ends. Weighing just 3 pounds, 1-ounce, it offers a generous 28 square feet of interior area, two spacious vestibules, front and back mesh inner tent walls, and Hilleberg's very light Kerlon 1000 outer tent fabric, which has an impressive 17.5-pound tear strength. Linked inner and outer tents allow either simultaneous pitching or separate use, vestibule doors can be partially or fully rolled away, and either one or both outer tent side walls can be rolled away for maximum comfort customization.



BAGS AND CASES



Grizzly Gear Game Bags

threebearsalaska.com

New this year from Three Bears is a favorite among Alaskan big-game hunters, the Grizzly Gear moose/elk quarter and caribou/sheep quarter game bags. The bags are lightweight, durable, and are made out of 190T polyester. Available in two sizes, the moose/elk quarter bags are 28" x 48" and the caribou/sheep quarter bags are 18" x 32". They have an adjustable drawstring with cord lock, double-stitched seams for added strength and durability, are washable and reusable, and include a storage pouch. Available in either packs of two, four, or five.

Kryptek Aegean Waterproof Rifle Slip

kryptek.com

This packable, 100% waterproof gun slip is a must-have for the serious hunter. Fully welded 600D poly fabric is PVC laminated inside and out, creating a waterproof and nearly indestructible shell. It features a German-engineered TI-ZIP zipper for absolute waterproof protection and fits Kryptek Aeron and Centurion rifle and shotgun cases.



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Tested by the U.S. Department of Defense

FIELD ACCESSORIES



Adventure Medical RapidPure Pioneer Straw
adventuremedicalkits.com
Introducing RapidPure, the new water-purification line from Adventure Medical Kits that takes backcountry water safety to the next level. Available in a bottle, gravity system, and straw, RapidPure lets you stay hydrated using the water around you with protection from pathogens 100x

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Frontiersman 9.2 oz Bear Spray with Belt Holster
sabrered.com

The Frontiersman 9.2 oz Bear Spray with Belt Holster contains the strongest formula allowed by the EPA (2.0% major capsaicinoids), all tested by an in-house HPLC lab to ensure maximum heat. The spray has a range of up to 35 feet. Frontiersman bear spray rapidly deploys the heaviest fog of 1.84 oz (52 grams) per 1-second burst. This creates the largest barrier of protection between you and the bear. The holster has no cumbersome straps, so it does not obstruct the firing mechanism or alarm the bear with Velcro noises. This spray gives you further confidence to be in the wild with bears, which is a likely occurrence when traveling in much of Alaska.

Skinner Sights Weaver/Picatinny Rails for the Henry Big Boy and Marlin 1894 rifles
skannersights.com

Skinner Sights now offers Weaver/Picatinny rails for the Henry Big Boy and Marlin 1894 rifles. Machined from solid-aluminum bar stock, and black anodized to blend well with the rifles' finish. Accepts standard

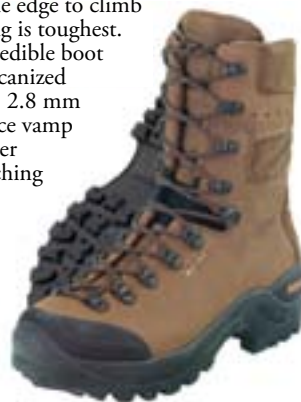
Weaver and Picatinny mount rings and low enough to see the factory sights with the scope removed. Fits the factory drilled and tapped holes on top of the receiver. Mounting screws and wrenches are included.



APPAREL

Kenetrek Mountain Guide
kenetrek.com

These boots have been the state-of-the-art for mountain hunters for many years. They offer unsurpassed ankle support and give you the edge to climb steep terrain and carry out heavy loads when the going is toughest. Kenetrek has made recent additions to make this incredible boot even better. The new version features a one-piece, vulcanized rubber K-73 outsole. Other features include: 10" tall, 2.8 mm thick premium full-grain leather uppers with one-piece vamp construction with no seams down the tongue for better abrasion resistance; reinforced double- and triple stitching in high-wear areas; anti-corrosion boot hardware that swivels instead of breaking; protective rubber toe cap for extra abrasion resistance; Windtex waterproof, breathable, flexible membrane that keeps water out but allows perspiration vapor to escape; and two options of insulation—choose from 400 grams of Thinsulate for warmth without the bulk or the non-insulated version for use in warmer weather.



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zoleo.com

At only \$199, this is the most affordable device on the market that provides SOS, SMS and text emails. Service is provided by Wi-Fi, cellular, and the Iridium Satellite Network and monthly plans start at \$20 per month. Two-way messaging is possible with the free ZOLEO mobile app. This device will allow you to use your smart phone to send texts and emails when you are off the grid. You can get this unit at Surveyor's Exchange Company (tse-ak.com) in Anchorage, as well as satellite phone rentals and Garmin inReach rentals.



Otis Long Term Gun Storage Kit

otistec.com

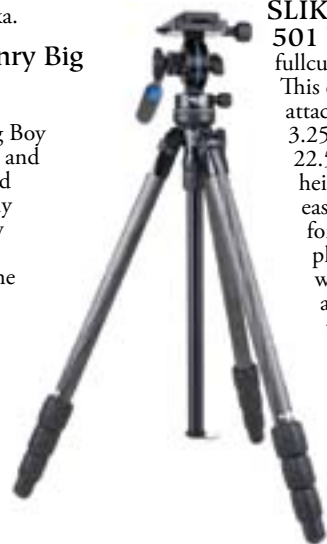
The Otis Long Term Gun Storage Kit is perfect for use between hunting seasons, while on deployment or preserving collectible firearms. This kit provides the necessary gear to protect and store your firearm for an extended period of time while keeping it in peak condition. It includes Rust Stopper Rust Prevention Gun Storage Bags (3 pistol, 3 rifle/shotgun), microfiber towels (3), chamber flags (6), an all-purpose receiver brush, Shooter's Choice MC-7 bore cleaner (2-ounce bottle), FP-10 Lubricant Elite (4-ounce bottle) and Rust Prevent (6-ounce aerosol).



SLIK Pro CF-634 SVH Kit with SVH-501 Video Head

fullcurlarchery.com

This carbon-fiber tripod with video head attachment is super light, weighing just 3.25 pounds, and folds down to a compact 22.5". When fully expanded, its maximum height is 66.7". This lightweight tripod is easy to transport, and is an excellent option for hunters using spotting scopes or for photographers/videographers capturing wildlife images. Having a tripod like this is a must-have for solo hunters who want to take pictures of themselves with their game animal. The minimum operating height is 11", making this a useful tool to get great photos when an animal is down. As Paul Atkins points out in his column in this issue, taking pictures of an animal and subject when level to the animal (he suggests that the photographer lie on the ground) makes for better photos.



Muck Boots Apex

muckbootcompany.com

100% waterproof and coupled with breathable mesh linings to provide elite protection and moisture management, the Apex is a high-performance hunting boot for hunters looking for a more athletic silhouette. The upper features a lock-down zipper closure system, a natural screen collar, and lightweight performance for great comfort and fit. Available in Black/Grey, Brown/Mossy Oak Break-Up Country, and Moss/Tan for men, in sizes 7-15. Available in Black/White, and Moss/Tan for women in sizes 5-12. The boots will be in stores in July 2020.



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10 Tips to MAXIMIZE YOUR Sheep Hunting EXPERIENCE

Story & Photos by
Billy Molls



Billy finds two trekking poles invaluable when packing heavy loads, particularly down the mountain.



At 60 years of age, with two artificial knees, Barry Barton (right) finally realized his dream of hunting Dall sheep in Alaska.

On discussing his quest of developing the incandescent light bulb, Thomas Edison said, "I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work."

While I'd like to think I'm still well short of 10,000 ways to louse up a sheep hunt, my 20 years of leading hunters into the Brooks Range in search of full curls has been similar to that of the great inventor.

The first sheep hunt I was ever on, I was the guide. I was 21 years

old. I had my short lifetime of hunting experience and a few successful guided hunts under my belt, so I was reasonably confident what I lacked in experience could be overcome by ambition and work ethic. How my 55-year-old hunter didn't die of exhaustion, or why he didn't shoot me in the back out of frustration, I'll never know.

My inaugural venture into sheep country started off with promise. Weather was fair and the first evening we spotted a band of four rams, one of which was definitely legal. We "put them to bed" as I would a turkey back on my parent's farm, but when we woke the next morning I was reminded this wasn't Wisconsin, and we weren't hunting turkeys.

The wind howled and snow flew for three straight days. After that, temperatures plummeted into single digits. When it finally cleared, we were post-holing through 18 inches of snow. Soon all the creeks flooded. Much like my tragic endeavors of trying to figure out women, every move we made led to more frustration. On Days 6 and 7 it snowed another foot and became bitter cold. Finally, on the 10th and final day, after countless miles and missteps, we found a legal ram.

As we narrowed the gap from two miles to 600 yards, my confidence soared and my ego swelled. We had ‘im!

The ram didn't know we were there, but we were exposed. My hunter wanted to get within 300 yards for the shot. We could either wait until he fed out of sight, or wait until he turned away from us and dart—fully exposed for roughly 30 yards—to the other side of the drainage, which led to a perfect hidden approach. I opted for the latter. Well, that estimated 30 yards turned out to be more like 60 yards and, you guessed it, the ram spotted us. He bolted.

We followed him until his tracks led to a sheer, ice-covered face. As green as I was, even I knew it was suicide to try it. Our hunt was over. It was a long, quiet 10 miles back to camp.

I've blundered plenty since then, but I'd like to think I've learned a few things along the way. Here are 10 tips I hope will help you be more successful on your next sheep hunt, and also enjoy the experience more.



In snowy conditions the author spends more time glassing than hiking. Billy pays particular attention to sunny slopes and focuses more on spotting the tiny shadows made by sheep tracks in the snow, rather than the sheep themselves.

1. Focus on Efficiency and Adaptability

If you look at nature, it's the most efficient and adaptable organisms that survive. In my early guiding years I would often do “day hunts” from camp. This certainly worked sometimes, but often led to worn-out hunters. These days I almost always carry camp on my back. While our packs are obviously heavier, it typically cuts our miles down by 20 to 30%. I find it to be more efficient and easier to adapt to the countless variables of a Dall-sheep hunt by carrying camp.

2. Live With the Sheep

Whenever possible, I camp in the heart of sheep country in a spot with good visibility. There have been many times where we went to bed with no sheep in sight only to wake up to a band of rams nearby.

3. Start Early

I like to get up between 3 a.m. and 5 a.m. and start hunting at first light. From the hours of 6 a.m. until noon, rams are likely to be on their feet, feeding, rather than perched on a promontory scanning for danger. Spotting a ram early also allows you more daylight to stalk.

4. Beware of the “Bed-Hop”

When rams bed down in the late morning, they most often get up within 20 minutes and reposition themselves. Sometimes they'll only move a few yards, other times they'll move to another ridge. Once they bed a second time and it's after noon, I'm confident they will stay there until at least 3 p.m. if it's cool, or 5 p.m. if it's hot and they're in a shady spot. This is my preferred time to stalk a ram.

5. Smoke a Cigarette

The first time it happened was a fluke. It was late in the hunt. My client and I had hiked up a basin, only to discover it was empty. It was around 11 a.m. We had been going since 6 a.m. We dropped our packs to rest and drink. After a few minutes I shouldered my pack to leave. As I did, I noticed my hunter had taken his boots off and was smoking a cigarette. I figured he'd earned it, so I sat down beside him and soaked my feet in the creek. Thirty minutes later we loaded our gear and started heading out the drainage. As we set out, I glanced back to see a ram pop over the top of a saddle into our basin! One by one, seven rams filed in. Two hours later we were butchering a 10-year-old double-broomer.

That hunt made me realize how many times I'd seen rams relocate great distances to different areas in the late morning/early afternoon. A couple years later, after hiking several miles into a long, dead-end canyon, my hunter and I did the same thing. An hour into our lunch/glassing break, a lone, full-curl ram came trotting down the mountain. He taped over 37 inches. Whenever prudent, I now sit, rest, and wait at a good vantage point until afternoon before exiting a canyon.

6. Know Before You Go

If at all possible, determine the ram's legality/size before you stalk. So often, stalks don't go the way we anticipate. The last thing any hunter wants is to be surprised when the animal isn't where they expected it to be, thereby being forced to make a split-second decision of whether or not to shoot. I find it easiest to judge animals one- to two miles away. I tend to be more objective and accurate on my assessment. Critters often look bigger than they really are as you get within shooting distance.

An obvious caveat to this rule is to count growth rings. However, in doing so, one should always exercise extreme caution and be certain before shooting the animal.

7. Make Hay When the Sun Shines

Looking back on my first Dall-sheep hunt, we should have gone after those rams that first evening. In my inexperience, I was too cautious. When in doubt, I always say a hunter should err on the side of aggression. That's ultimately the only way we learn in hunting, as well as in life. If we're too passive and afraid of making a mistake we'll never accomplish anything noteworthy.



Lightweight, dependable gear makes for an enjoyable sheep hunt.

As it did on Day 2 of the aforementioned hunt, adverse weather has spoiled many a sheep-hunter's plans. When conditions are right, I find it best to push oneself to go the extra mile or two and peek in one more drainage. That said, when weather is marginal, I find it best to ride it out: Read a book, rest, relax, heal, and drink lots of water. When conditions are favorable, get back at it.

8. Get the Right Gear

Hunters are fortunate to have so much exceptional gear available. That said, it can also be a curse, because it's often very expensive, and how does one choose what to purchase? My suggestion is to look at

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guides' and outfitters' recommendations. They don't rely on their clothing and equipment for 10 days every fall; they live in their gear for months on end. They can't afford to use sub-par gear. Below is a list of the 10 items I find most important on a Dall-sheep hunt.

Boots. Sore feet is probably the biggest issue I see on sheep hunts. What brand works for one, may not work for another. Unfortunately, the only way to find the best boots for you is to try different makes and models. When you find a boot that works well, I suggest buying a second or third pair before they discontinue or alter the model. Quality socks and foot-care products are also imperative.

Trekking poles. Unless your hunting area is extremely brushy, I highly recommend bringing a set. Many guides prefer using only one. Practice and choose for yourself.

Sleeping pad. Roughly 1/3 of your hunt will be spent on it. Get a good one.

Sleeping Bag. If you're planning a hunt of seven days or more, the value of quality rest cannot be overstated. I prefer wicking down to save weight.

Pack. Quality, comfort, weight, and versatility are the most important factors to consider.

Rain Gear. Do the research. Buck up and spend extra money.

Optics. I recommend focusing on spotting scope, binoculars, and riflescope—in that order. Good optics will last you a lifetime. Countless sheep hunts have been foiled by internally fogged optics.

GPS/Map. One or both of these are a must. I actually prefer paper maps, but that's probably because I'm a technological idiot.

Base layers. Wool or synthetic. I use 100% wool against my skin. Everything else is synthetic.

Hunter, Mike Spencer with guide Billy Molls, and a fine 11-year-old ram.



Shelter. Quality and weight are paramount. I recently switched to tipis, because they are lighter than tents and offer more headroom.

9. Prepare the Body

In my experience, weight lifters and marathon runners struggle in the sheep mountains. Meatheads lack balance and endurance. Lean, fit, road warriors who take the same stride thousands of times over and over again also have poor balance and lack the strength to support a weighted pack on extended hunts.

Running and weightlifting are great, but sheep hunting is very much a cross-fit sport. Every step you take is different from the last. Muscle/body coordination is key. Imagine your body as an X. The intersection is where you need to focus. My off-season training focuses on lower back, hips, and abs. Mobility and agility are equally as important as strength and endurance. Hiking with a pack, swimming, yoga, Pilates, cross-country skiing, and snowshoeing are great—anything that strengthens and coordinates the upper and lower body. P90X is good, as long as your joints don't explode while doing it.

Billy Molls and friend/client John Madok, along with personal trainer, Craig Valency, collaborated to produce *Fit For Alaska*, a workout system specifically designed for big-game hunters. Mobility, agility, strength, and endurance are the cornerstones of all three workouts, which can be done at home with minimal equipment. Perhaps best of all, as you perform each movement you will be captivated and inspired by an Alaskan big-game hunting odyssey as you're on the hunt with Billy and his clients for brown bear, grizzly, moose, caribou, Dall sheep, and wolf. For more information go to billymollsadventures.com/product/fit-for-alaska/.

10. Prepare the Mind

When President John F. Kennedy asked the head of NASA, "What will it take to put man on the moon?" His response was, "The will to do it."

You don't have to be Superman to hunt sheep. Many "average Joes" do it every year. Preparation, determination, and a positive mindset are key to not only getting a shot at a full-curl ram, but also enjoying and cherishing the experience.

This may sound arrogant, but if you can't stand the thought of going sheep hunting and not killing a ram, don't go. Reason being, you will be stressed, worried, and miserable the whole time. I've guided roughly 50 sheep hunts. Without question, my favorites were the ones where we faced the most challenge and adversity. I've also found it's the hunts on which we don't take our game that teach us the most about nature, the sport of hunting, and ourselves.

Sheep hunting is like riding a roller coaster. If you're not a little bit intimidated, pee your pants a little bit, or feel like you're going to vomit, you're not doing it right.



For the past 22 years Billy Molls has guided across Alaska for brown bear, grizzly bear, Dall sheep, caribou, and moose. He's also an author, freelance writer, renowned public speaker, and filmmaker of the award-winning Modern Day Mountain Man video series. You can find him on Facebook, Instagram @themoderndaymountainman, or go to billymollsadventures.com.

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Towering above us, the sleeping volcano (Isanotski) keeps a watchful eye on our camp.

A BRUIN

of a Lifetime

Story by Casey L. Dinkel
Photos by John Whipple

Gene's smile says it all as a 50-year-old dream finally comes true!

When my father was a young man of 18, he stumbled across a story in a magazine that would change him forever. He read of a man in Alaska that embarked upon a brown-bear hunt. The man unfolded his adventure of pursuing a monstrous bruin that led him through many ups and downs, ultimately with the man taking the bear with a pistol as it charged him. This story really lit a fire within my father, as he told the story over and over again for many years. Every time a brown bear entered a conversation, my father's eyes would light up with excitement and I would chuckle as I knew the story that was to follow. Over the years his dream of hunting a brown bear never came to fruition and as time passed my father began to believe that it would never happen. Fate however, had a very different plan that neither my father nor I could have predicted.

Several years ago my parents uprooted their life and moved to Alaska. I had been living in Alaska for about six years and convinced the empty nesters it was time to start living their life. It didn't take much persuading and in the summer of 2016 my parents hit the ALCAN with new adventures on the horizon. However, as we made our way toward the Last Frontier there was a bittersweet feeling over all of us. About a month prior to the move with their home already sold, my father was diagnosed with a highly aggressive prostate cancer. As you can imagine it had taken us all by surprise, but in his typical good spirit my father stayed very positive as we made our way north. Once in Alaska, his treatment started almost immediately with little to no time for my parents to enjoy their beautiful new surroundings before the cold, dark, Alaskan winter set in.

My father's prescription was to undergo radiation treatment three times per week for no less than nine weeks. That November during his last week of radiation, I approached my father about his desire to pursue brown bears the following year. "Well, I'm not dead yet," he replied when I asked him about applying for several coveted draw tags throughout the state. After a few hours of mulling over options he applied for moose, muskox, caribou, and of course brown bear.

During our discussion I explained to my father that all the tags he applied for had very low draw odds of less than 5%, with brown bear being the lowest at 1%. In fact, I knew several local hunters who had applied for this particular brown-bear tag most of their lives and had not been fortunate enough to draw it. We both knew it was a long shot but I figured, "What the heck, someone has to draw it."

On the morning of February 17, 2017, I awoke and immediately grabbed my phone to check the draw results. My eyes still blurry, I scanned over each tag several times hoping to see a YES in the successful column. Unfortunately, I had drawn a big goose egg. My father, on the other hand, had been awarded a highly sought after Unimak Island brown-bear tag. Later that morning after breaking the news to my dad, he was in a state of disbelief. With such low draw odds and only a handful of tags handed out each year, it was crazy to think that he



From the blonde on his back to the chocolate of his legs, the mature boar was a beautiful sight to behold, and the bear of a lifetime.

had drawn on his very first attempt. Whether it was luck or fate, we felt very blessed and I couldn't have been happier for my father. However, drawing the tag would be the easiest part of this adventure and a lot of preparation would soon follow.

Since the tag was for the spring of 2018, I would have a little over a year to help my dad line everything out. This was great, since planning a trip to Unimak

Island can be a logistical nightmare and considerable time would be needed.

At 72 miles wide and 59 miles long, Unimak is the first island on the Aleutian chain, separated from the mainland of the Alaska Peninsula by a sliver of water called False Pass. Unimak is trapped between the Pacific Ocean and Bering Sea. The island is mostly a barren landscape with little cover in most areas. It is also within the Ring of Fire and boasts several active volcanoes across its 1,571 square miles. Unimak is known for its extreme weather and occasionally holding its visitors hostage for days on end. It's not uncommon to encounter 100 mph winds, sideways rain, freezing fog, or be covered in volcanic ash should an eruption occur. Last but certainly not least, Unimak is home to caribou, wolves, sea lions, walrus, and of course some of the largest brown bears on the planet. It is an adventure-hunter's paradise and my dad was holding the golden ticket. After more than 50 years, he was finally going to get the chance to embark on his dream hunt.

Fast forward to May of 2018 and I found myself staring into the north face of Isanotski, the second-tallest volcano on Unimak Island. As I admired the 8,025-foot peak, it was hard to believe that we were finally here—that all the preparation, planning, and anticipation was finally over and it was time for the adventure to begin.

Several months prior I had asked my good friend and hunting buddy John Whipple to join my father and me on this little getaway. John happily accepted the invitation and teamed up with us. Having John along gave us the extra muscle needed to help my father through all aspects of the hunt. Working as a team not only made us more efficient hunters, but it added an extra level of safety that was reassuring in such a remote environment. Unimak was not the place you wanted to get seriously injured. Even if the weather was good enough for a rescue attempt, the island is so remote that help might not make it to you in time.

The three of us had been traveling all day, taking several flights and a boat ride to reach our hunting location. In my research over the previous year, I had stumbled upon an area that looked to be a natural funnel for wildlife, especially bears traveling in the spring. As we set up camp, my research was already paying dividends. We spotted two bears about a mile away, one of which looked to be a large boar. Tired from travel, we elected to eat dinner and catch some much-needed rest. With so many bears on the island we knew that we would see more bears in the days to come. We had allotted two weeks on the island if needed. After all, my father had been waiting his entire life for this hunt, so why not take the extra time to enjoy it!

The next morning I awoke to the distant sound of waves crashing on the nearby beach and the smell of



A mature sow and her cubs comb the beach during low tide for any tasty meals that might have washed ashore.

saltwater in the air. As I rolled out of my sleeping bag and exited the tent, I found John taking photos of the volcanoes behind our camp. On the day of our arrival most of Isanotski was covered in clouds. Overnight the clouds had lifted, not only revealing the rest of Isanotski, but completely unveiling a second volcano as well. As John captured some photos of camp, I began to glass a large, open basin about a half mile away. The sun was just peaking over the horizon when I spotted a sow with three cubs making their way across a small river that cut through the basin. I knew my father was probably still exhausted from the previous day's travel, but I woke him anyway. The morning scenery and action was just too good and I didn't want him to miss it.

After spotting several bears on the other side of the basin, the three of us decided to grab a protein bar and made our way to a small cliff about 300 yards away. From the cliff we could see a much larger area and could watch a distinct trail that bears utilized to access the beach. As we sat and ate our breakfast, it didn't take long for John to spot a nice boar following a blonde sow about a half mile away. Unfortunately, a bear's walk is comparable to a human running and the boar followed the sow as they switched direction and moved into the brush line away from us.

We continued to glass until noon, seeing a few more bears across the valley, too far away to pursue. Brown-bear hunting is a waiting game and we knew that there would be a lot of sitting and glassing. One mistake that a lot of hunters make when brown-bear hunting is hiking all over the place and tracking their scent around. I had learned this lesson the hard way several years prior, when a large boar caught my scent on a trail I had walked five days prior. When the bear cut my scent, he looked up, popping his jaws in distress and literally ran the opposite direction as fast as possible. We didn't want to make the same mistake on my father's dream hunt, so as painful as it was for me to sit for long periods and glass, that's exactly what we did.

Around 8:00 p.m. the bears started to move around again. Typical bear behavior is to be active in the early morning and late evening, while laying low in the middle of the afternoon. That evening we

Gene and Casey slowly glass the vast landscape for any sign of a traveling bruin.



spotted a smaller bear that was working the trail at the base of the cliff below us. Even though the bear was in shooting range, we let him pass by since the bear was likely a three-year-old adolescent. I did, however, use this opportunity to teach my father how to judge a small bear from a larger mature adult.

Around 10:30 p.m. the sun dipped low enough behind the mountains in the distance that we decided to call it a day. It was still light enough to shoot a bear, but I didn't like the idea of chasing a wounded bear in the brush at night. We ate a late dinner and crawled into our sleeping bags. Still a little tired from all the excitement day one had offered, I dozed as the ticking sound of the electric bear fence rocked me to sleep.

The next morning, we waited patiently on our cliff lookout for the sun to rise and shed some light on the valley below us. The sun had no more than broke the horizon when I caught some movement about 600 yards down the hill below us. First, a bleach blonde, almost white sow appeared from a small alder patch and just like clockwork a large boar was in tow directly behind her. The two bears would be in striking distance if they stayed put long enough for a stalk. We quickly grabbed our packs and proceeded down the hill about 200 yards.

Before we could get any closer, the boar and his girlfriend turned and started walking away from us. Knowing that we would never catch them once we left the high ground, we abandoned the stalk. However, we continued to watch the giant bruin through the spotting scope for the better part of thirty minutes. It was a true pleasure to watch him court his female mate. At literally double her size, he swaggered back and forth across a sedge meadow letting every other bear in the area know he was in charge. Giving the scope to my father, I watched as a smile grew upon his face. My father watched the bear for several minutes in awe of its sheer size. "They are like modern-day dinosaurs," he said as he watched the bear.

A few minutes later John was taking his turn watching the bears that were now about a mile out, when the unexpected happened. "He's fighting a wolf!" John said, looking through the spotting scope. In disbelief I pushed John aside and looked to confirm his ridiculous statement. Sure enough, the giant boar of more than nine feet was indeed fighting a large,



As a potential shooter bruin approaches, emotions run high.



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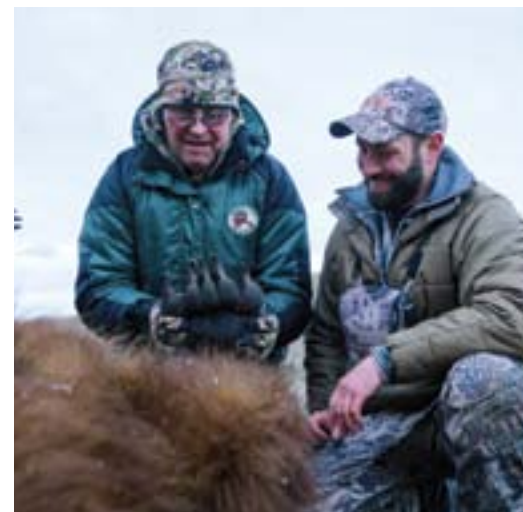
gray timber wolf. We all took turns watching them spar for nearly 10 minutes as the wolf buzzed around the bear, lunging in every so often to bite the boar wherever he could. The large bruin tried to swat the wolf but he was too slow, as the two danced around and around. It was like watching a heavyweight boxer fight a featherweight. Eventually, the giant brownie became tired of being bit and slowly backed away, giving victory to the wolf. The three of us had certainly never seen anything so amazing in all our travels.

After the street brawl was over, my stomach told me it was getting close to noon. To my amazement it was about 3:30 p.m. when I looked at my watch. The wind had picked up slightly and we were all a little chilled from sitting all morning, so we decided to walk back to camp for a snack and a midday nap.

I was jolted awake by the sound of John's voice: "Hey Casey, there's a good bear walking down the beach, get your dad over to the cliff!" Shaking off the haze of sleep, I leapt from my tent, grabbing my rifle and pack. My dad, still fast asleep in a separate tent, had no idea of the chaos that was about to take place. Unzipping his vestibule, I shook my father awake and calmly told him "Get up! There's a giant bear coming down the beach!" I guess in hindsight I could have been a little more diplomatic in my approach. But I was quite impressed by how fast my dad collected his gear in the heat of the moment.

We sprinted roughly 300 yards to the cliff's edge where we spotted the bear about 600 yards out and closing the distance fast. In relatively fluid motion, my father and I moved across the cliff face and set up for a shot. Ranging the bear, he was now at 280 yards. The bear paused and sniffed the trail for several moments, allowing me to get a good look at him and confirm that he was a mature boar. "Whenever you're ready, Dad." I had no more than muttered the words when the shot pierced the air, the bullet striking the bear low and behind the shoulder. The boar turned and began to run away as if not fazed by the 250-grain bullet from my father's .375 Holland & Holland. A second round struck the bear behind the opposite shoulder, this time bringing him to a stop temporarily, where he began to thrash and roll. The third bullet gained purchase in the bear's chest, hitting his center of mass. Again he began to run as he displayed an uncanny refusal to expire. With the fourth and final shot, the giant boar crawled to his final resting place and a brief silence fell over the three of us. For almost a full minute my dad stared at the motionless bear, as if in a state of total shock of what had just transpired. This moment had been a long time coming and emotions ran high as I shook my father's hand and hugged him. "Congratulations, Dad! You got your bear!"

With only a couple hours of daylight left, we didn't waste much time celebrating. The cliff being too steep to descend, we were forced to walk around the back side of the hill



Father and son enjoy the moment, as Gene admires his beautiful bruin.

in order to reach the bear. My father spotted the boar about 75 yards away. The ridge of his back displayed the massive hump upon his shoulders just above a small rise. As a safety precaution, we approached the bear cautiously, each with a round chambered in our rifles. At the bear's side my father stood quiet, looking at the beast. "Well...Put your hands on him Dad," I instructed. My father ran his hand over the bear's fur, picking up his head, and then the bear's massive paw. The bruin was absolutely beautiful. His fur was blonde upon his back, transitioning to tan, then chocolate colored on his legs. My dad's smile said it all as we took photos of him and the bear.

John and I worked into the night skinning the boar, taking our time to carefully flesh the hide. Dad stood guard with his rifle, on the lookout for other bears that were out searching for a late-night snack. It was around 3:00 a.m. by the time we got back to camp. It had been a good day but we were all ready to turn in for the night.

Even though I was completely exhausted, I had a hard time trying to find sleep. My mind kept playing the moments of the evening in my head over and over again. It had been an amazing adventure and an experience of a lifetime. After all, it's not every day that you get the chance to share something so special with your father. I am forever grateful for our time spent together.



Casey Dinkel lives and breathes hunting. He worked in Wyoming as a hunting guide for the better part of a decade until 2010 when he moved to Alaska. As an agronomist for Alaska, Casey works on large-scale, erosion-control projects statewide. His day job keeps him busy, but Casey is also an assistant big-game guide in Alaska and co-owner of a media production company named 60th Parallel Adventures. Between guiding, filming, and fighting erosion, Casey keeps the candle burning at both ends.

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The author and Mark Thonhoff in Bethel after an amazing hunt.

DOUBLE-DIY SUCCESS

2,800 Miles from Home



The author admires his 63" bull.

Story and photos by Danny Stotler

As the float plane took off from our remote lower Yukon Valley unnamed lake, Mark Thonhoff and I took in our surroundings with a sense of awe. After three years of planning every inch of detail through meticulous weighing of gear, recommendations of other hunters, as well as our own personal experience with years of remote elk hunting, we felt ready for the upcoming 14 days on our own chasing Yukon moose. I had one DIY Alaska hunt under my belt years earlier, so I did bring some knowledge to the table, but was certainly far from an expert in Alaska.

The plane's engines drowned out and we took in the solitude. Our busy normal lives of work and family commitments put on hold for a brief time, we took to setting up camp and acclimating ourselves to our surroundings. After camp was erected, water filtered, and food properly stored, we sat down to review the provided aerial map of our location.

We were camped on the west side of a relatively skinny, long lake running for roughly a mile. On each end of the lake were sloughs that wound snake-like in each direction for miles. To the west of the lake was a large patch of dark timber, and to the east another, smaller patch of dark timber outlined by bright, golden, fall-leafed alders. Several other kettle-pot lakes surrounded our area and would allow for great calling and glassing points, but overall the contour of land was flat as a pancake.

Our plan was to stay near camp for the first few days, calling and being patient. Per our outfitter, and many hunters we spoke with, staying near camp and not disturbing our immediate area was a great way to kill a bull. We were in an "any bull" unit, therefore we did not have to worry about the 50-inch width or brow-tine restrictions that other Alaska units carry, though

both of us were going to do our best to hold out for something 50 inches or better. A flip of a coin decided that I would be the shooter on day one, then we would rotate days going forward.

We woke the first morning to a cold, damp drizzle. We set up roughly 200 yards above camp at the west end of the lake where we could see well, but were back into the willows to hide our outline. Completing one Alaskan DIY moose hunt prior to this hunt provided some useful lessons. One of those was to bring a lightweight Jimmy Tarp to quickly create a lean-to in order to stay dry and comfortable. We secured the tarp, set up our chairs, cow called a few times and waited. We sporadically called, glassed, and waited throughout the day with no sightings. As dusk fell, we were packing up for the evening when a bull began grunting followed by splashing as he crossed to our side of the slough directly behind us. Though the bull was only a couple hundred yards from us, the darkness, as well as the thick willow cover, would not allow for a stalk. We backed out as quietly as possible, hoping to not spook the bull for the morning's hunt.

On day two we again set up in the same spot, sticking to our plan of being patient. Mark was up as the shooter and I began calling just before first light. The bull from the prior evening must have moved through as we never heard nor saw him. The rains would move in and out and we kept to our game plan.

In the afternoon during waves of fog and rain, Mark shook my shoulder to wake me up from a brief siesta because he thought he saw a flash of antler in the timber across from our location through the fog. I immediately cow called and a bull materialized into an opening at roughly 150 yards. This was the first moose we had seen and he initially looked great. After glassing him we determined that his antler spread was roughly in the mid-40-inch range. Mark decided to pass, hoping this would not be regrettable. Light faded to close day two but we went to bed optimistic.



Mark Thonhoff poses with his 59" bull.

We decided to hunt near camp on the morning of day three, and if nothing materialized, we would inflate the raft and use the 5 HP motor to head east down the lake. Several large meadows were located on the east side of the lake that looked like a great place to start branching out. The morning was slow but on our walk back to camp Mark spotted moose at the east end of the lake. A cow and calf were lazily feeding in the sun as the weather had improved. The cow and calf slowly moved out of sight.

After lunch we inflated the raft, started the motor, and slowly motored down the lake. We parked just short of where the moose had entered the thick cover. We were pretty sure that a bull was not with them, as they fed for quite a while, but wanted to be sure. A thin line of willows separated our lake from the large opening to the north of our position. The east end of the slough was on the far side of the large opening, but could not be seen due to the thick willows and timber. We snuck into the opening, sinking at least ankle deep in the spongy tundra with every step, and set up for the afternoon. We called until dark but nothing transpired.

Early on the morning of day four, Mark was up as shooter and we headed back to our spot from the night before. We made it to the location but before we could begin calling a cow showed up in the timber across from us. This was followed by several bull grunts. To say we were excited was an understatement. We called to the bull many times, with grunts, a couple cow mews, and tree thrashing but we could not get him out of the timber. When they stopped calling we assumed that they had bedded for the day. At roughly 10:00 a.m. we slowly snuck as close as we could. We had planned on

waiting as long as it took. We ate lunch, read, and listened for the moose to move throughout the day.

Nearing 3:00 p.m., the cow let out a whiny mew several hundred yards from where we had last heard them followed by several bull grunts. They were located on the far side of the slough. As we breached the edge of the slough I spotted a cow and calf several hundred yards to our left. The bull was still up in the timber grunting but as soon as he broke the edge we knew this bull was big. Mark, utilizing his late father-in-law's rifle, steadied for the shot as I started recording video. The bull finally presented a perfect opportunity and the rifle's report was followed by a solid thud. The bull lurched forward as the cow and calf stood alertly.

After one more shot for insurance, and in an attempt to put him down before he died in the water, the bull thankfully tipped over on mostly dry ground. The bull died on the far side of the slough and we had to find a way to cross the water. Even with chest waders it was nearly impossible to cross but we finally made it utilizing a beaver dam. As we approached the downed bull we were both astounded at the sheer size of the animal. After high fives, congratulations, filming, and pictures we began methodically piecing out the bull. We packed the meat up onto the slough's edge and hung it in a small patch of timber just before dark.

The next day started beautiful with sunny skies. We had no idea that it would turn out to be the most exhausting day either one of us had ever spent in the woods. We beached the boat at the far end of the lake and had to deflate, roll, and pack the boat roughly a half a mile to the slough. Once it was reinflated, we paddled our way across and packed the bull onto

our side of the slough. We then deflated the boat once again and began to pack everything to the lake's edge as the weather took a serious turn for the worse. The wind whipped up to roughly 50 mph and a constant downpour steadily beat down on us for over twelve hours of packing. With the heavy packs, we would sink shin to knee deep in the soft tundra, making every step in the storm excruciating. Mark and I have packed out numerous elk over steep, mountainous terrain but that did not hold a candle compared to this bull moose on the tundra.

We finally had the last load packed to the lake's edge as the day was coming to an end. We quickly reinflated the boat, threw on the engine and motored back to camp. The high winds were still whipping but if we kept the boat close to the edge of the lake we were able to avoid the dangerous white-capped waves. We made it back to camp completely drenched and exhausted. We called the outfitter and he said he'd have a pilot there the next morning as the storm was supposed to blow through during the night. As we made dinner in our borrowed Kifaru 8-man tipi, soaking up the warmth from our titanium wood stove, we could not have been more satisfied with our accomplishment from the prior two days.

The next morning we slept in, ate a good breakfast and boated down to the bull. The weather had cleared and the pilot was right on time. He congratulated Mark on a great bull and quickly flew back to Bethel. We had ten days to fill my tag and I was eager to continue the hunt.

That evening we set up on the edge of the west-end slough and spotted a cow and calf roughly 600 yards down the slough as daylight came to a close. We knew where we wanted to be the next morning as we trudged back to camp.

On the morning of day six, we packed the boat and motor to the west-end slough and began slowly motoring towards the spot the moose were the previous evening. After reaching the area where the pair had been the previous evening, we pulled over and called. It did not take long to hear a bull responding to our calls and I readied for a potential shot. We could hear the bull's paddles raking against willow branches as he approached our location. When the bull finally broke through the willow tangles across the water from us, I knew he was not the bull I wanted to shoot. It was fun watching him thrash trees, grunt, and posture until he decided to swim across to our side to investigate the calling. We let him land on our side of the slough and snuck to our boat and motored farther down looking for more moose.



Backcountry hunters are always trying to find ways to cut weight from their packs

Ways to Reduce Load Weight for Backcountry Hunting

Story and photos by Larry Bartlett

Most of our hunting involves packrafts like the PR-49 or Kork we sell at Pristine Ventures. These sturdy boats are the first piece of gear we pack to get remote and away from crowds, plus they provide the luxury of floating a heavy meat haul out of the backcountry. We are dropped off by airplane to remote rivers, then we camp and hunt our way down. While the rafts themselves can handle a huge payload you have weight constraints with the aircraft flying you out. Weight also counts when we hunt by foot away from base camp.

Share the Load

Most everyone hunts with a buddy or a spouse. Plan to split up the items you can share. One takes the stove, the other takes the fuel. One takes the tent, the other takes the poles and stakes. You can share a spotting scope and tripod. Look through your pre-planned items and see what is duplicated that needn't be.

Lose the Packaging

Shed a few ounces by removing items from their packages. Also consider your actual pack. There are some very sturdy, lightweight hunting pack frames available on the market these days. You have to be able to haul a heavy load of meat but you can shave ounces or pounds by researching and investing in a modern-made pack.

Replaceable Blade Knife

Instead of the traditional butchering set with an assortment of blades consider switching to a replaceable blade knife. There are some very high-quality knives that make haste of the work.

Food Items

Some food choices weigh less than others. Protein powders and supplements weigh less than power bars, as does oatmeal and

other dried foods. Food weight is reduced as the hunt goes on but consider switching a few heavier items for light to see how that helps your pack weight.

Boots

Instead of traditional hunting boots consider a solid, waterproof hiking boot just above the ankle that weigh a bit less. You may sacrifice some stability, protection, and warmth, but you will appreciate it step after step.

Yourself

If you've been reviewing the Backcountry Nutrition articles I've been writing for *Hunt Alaska* this year you may have seen that I am a proponent for packing less food and being prepared to lose weight in the field. Our studies show performance does not suffer and it's a surefire way to reduce weight both going in and coming out. Most of us have a pound or two we can lose without worry.

As you can see from our photos we are loaded up with plenty of gear on packrafts. We camp comfortably and don't have to skimp too much on luxuries. The truth is hunters in general tend to prefer things basic and simple. We seek the solitude for a reason and roughing it is part of the draw.

Larry Bartlett is a combat veteran, author, film maker, and hunting innovator whose professional mission is to collectively raise the health and intelligence of his community. His latest entrepreneurial branch will serve in areas of health, fitness, and nutrition DBA Industria Imperium with Dr. Trey Coker, PhD.



Back at the lake waiting for pickup.



For more information on packrafting in Alaska or the PR-49 packrafts contact Larry Bartlett at 907-388-2477 or go to PristineVentures.com.



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We pulled the boat to shore just shy of a blind corner and snuck around the edge, glassing as we went. As we were sneaking a bull grunted ahead of us and we hurried our pace. We spotted the grunting bull and he turned out to be a small paddle horn. He continued walking away from us and led us to one of the most outrageous moose ruts I could have ever imagined. In total we saw nine moose together, three of which were small bulls. Several cows and bulls were calling in the dark timber beyond the visible moose. We videoed and watched until nearly dark hoping one of the other grunting bulls would show. None did, and we quietly backed out knowing where we would be in the morning.

At sunup we were back, this time on the side of the slough the moose were located the evening before. It was slow going until mid-afternoon when the moose got riled up again. I have never heard such sounds in nature. Several cows sounded like they were screaming instead of mewing and the same bulls grunted every several seconds. We abandoned calling because it was simply futile and snuck towards the rut.

We were on the edge of the slough in a small depression when we heard a bull thrashing willows across the water from us. Mark took several steps up to see across the slough when I saw his facial expression change. He gestured for me to hurry while getting setup to record video. I rounded the edge to see the largest bull I had ever seen standing less than 100 yards across the water. I pulled up my Tikka T3 Lite .300 WSM and pulled the trigger. The gun made an empty click and I realized I had never chambered a round. I frantically chambered a round, pulled up the rifle, and shot. At the rifle's report, the bull lunged forward as I jacked in another shell. I steadied my scope towards a clearing he was about to enter, and as soon as he cleared the willows I shot a second time.

Mark yelled, "He's down!" Everything had happened so quickly that I did not have time register how big of a bull he was but Mark assured me that he was huge. We walked back up the slough to our boat and motored down as far as we could before beaver dams stopped our progress 200 yards from my bull. Once we made it to him we were in awe. His massive brow palms were giant scoops on each side, and the main palms were large with many points. He was on dry ground and perfectly positioned for pictures and processing.

Since we had one bull under our belts, the second bull was much easier to break

down and get into game bags. We left the bull to cool, hanging in some large willows and boated back to camp knowing that the next morning we would be back to pack out the entire moose. Darkness fell as we motored back to camp. We did not talk much as we soaked in our surroundings and simply enjoyed the moment.

The next morning we packed the bull out, making two trips. Buy 11:00 a.m. we were done packing the bull back to the lake. We called the outfitter to tell them the news and they stated they would be there to pick us up the next day.

We spent the remaining time at camp enjoying life. We had both successfully killed trophy moose on a very remote DIY hunt. Mark's bull measured 59 inches wide and mine just over 63 inches. The sun came out for the remainder of the day and we brought our chairs to the lake's edge to enjoy our last evening in Alaska. As we were relaxing, we heard a bull grunt just across the open meadow from our camp. We moved behind a patch of willows and cow called. A very nice 50-plus-inch bull emerged from the timber and lumbered to within 50 yards of our camp. He hung around for roughly ten minutes as Mark took some incredible pictures that capped off our hunt.

It took about an hour and a half to fly to Bethel the next day. During that time I reflected on what had transpired during the past short week. We had accomplished a lifelong dream of safely and successfully completing a remote, DIY, Alaskan Yukon moose hunt. I am thankful for the life that I have. From my incredibly supportive wife, loving daughters, and some of the best friends a man could have...Life is simply good.



Danny Stotler grew up and lives in Salida, CO, with his wife, daughter, and step-daughter. When he's not outdoors he co-owns a tax practice that keeps him busy during the off-season.

The boat was full on the last trip back to camp with Danny's bull.



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RECIPE

Venison Breakfast Sausage Sandwich

by Marcus Weiner

When we bring game home from the field, we will grind up to 50 pounds and store in one-pound packages of ground meat. Over the last few years, we have migrated from mixing the game meat with suet to using pork—either a shoulder or Boston butt. We use about 80% game meat to 20% pork when we run it through the grinder. The pork meat and fat gives the game meat good flavor, especially important when serving wild game to more delicate palates. When we want to make sausage, we simply defrost our ground meat and mix with seasonings. Otherwise, we can use the ground meat to make chili, tacos, meat sauce, burgers, etc.

We like the taste of LEM Backwoods Fresh Breakfast Sausage Seasoning. We mix it a little lighter than the recipe calls for. The following recipe makes eight sandwiches.

Ingredients:

- 1½ pound ground venison (80% venison/20% pork)
- 1¼ tbsp LEM Backwoods Fresh Breakfast Sausage Seasoning
- 1 tbsp canola oil (for cooking sausage)
- Canola cooking spray (for eggs)
- 1 package of Pillsbury Grands Southern Homestyle Buttermilk Biscuits
- 8 eggs
- 2 cups shredded cheddar cheese

Directions:

The day before you want to make this recipe, add the LEM seasoning to 1½ tbsp of water and combine. Mix the seasoning slurry thoroughly into the ground meat. Put into the refrigerator and let the flavors combine for 24 hours.

Start by preheating the oven to 375° and bake biscuits for 11- to 15 minutes. We use a nonstick pan lined with parchment paper. While the biscuits are cooking, divide



sausage into eight equal patties and sauté in canola oil for about 15 minutes at medium heat, flipping halfway through, until fully cooked. We like to cook sausage until it is medium-well done, and no pink is visible internally.

In a different sauté pan, begin cooking eggs. We cook these individually to order, as some people want their egg runny and some want it cooked hard. Spray the pan with canola oil spray first so that the egg doesn't stick to the pan. Once you've reached the required egg doneness, add ¼ cup of the cheese to the top of the egg and cover, removing from heat. The latent heat will melt the cheese.

Plate by cutting the biscuit into two halves, then add a sausage patty and top with the cheesy egg. It's a quick and delicious breakfast sandwich which incorporates wild game and some delicious seasoning from LEM.



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- Gear is here, but also *there*—find all of *Hunt Alaska's* 2020 Editors' Choice Awards online complete with larger photos and links to your favorites! Many of these recommendations can help make your time in the field more productive in 2020.
- Our friends over at Henry Repeating Arms have written a couple blogs for the site. Find the first one online mid-May, and keep an eye out for the second later this fall.
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Ahtna, Inc. is an Alaska Native Regional Corporation based in the Southcentral Interior of Alaska.

ABOUT THE APP

The Ahtna Land app is designed to provide users with the ability to check land ownership while hunting, fishing, or recreating in the Ahtna region. Major landowners are identified by name and unique color. The user can select a variety of base maps including topographic and aerial imagery maps to aid in navigation and identification of landmarks. Major roads and mileposts are also included to aid the user.

APP FEATURES



LAND BOUNDARIES

A great tool for showing property boundaries, public and private landowner names and more - empowering you to adventure responsibly.



YOUR LOCATION

See your current location in relation to the property boundaries, landmarks, major roads and mileposts. Check if the land you are on is private or public land.



PLAN AND RESEARCH

Check to see if your planned adventure takes you across private land. If you need to cross Ahtna land, purchase of an Ahtna land use permit will be required.



PROTECT AND PRESERVE

Help protect and preserve the lands in the Ahtna region by using them responsibly and ethically. Using the app will help you be an informed land user.

DOWNLOAD THE AHTNA LAND APP

iOS
DOWNLOAD ▶
Scan this code



Android
DOWNLOAD ▶
Scan this code



GET A LAND USE PERMIT

Please remember that Ahtna lands are private lands. We welcome you and hope you have a safe and wonderful visit; we only ask that you respect this land as it is our home. To access our lands, a Land Use Permit is required at all times: permits.ahtna.com

CONTACT
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WWW.AHTNA.COM/PERMITS

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