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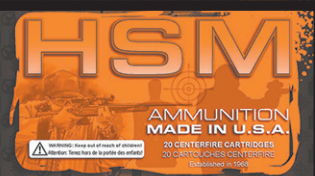




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Season Strategies For Private And Public Land Whitetails

By Jake Horton

Originally published at **GOHUNT**  GOHUNT.com

Whether you are chasing whitetails with a bow, muzzleloader or rifle, there can be some great challenges to overcome — even if you are lucky enough to hunt on private land. These challenges come from whitetail behavior, changes in their patterns, hunting pressure and landowner boundaries. Learning how to overcome these challenges and hunt creatively will be the difference between you coming home with a buck in the back of your truck or tag soup on the menu. Below are some early, mid and rifle season tactics to hunt whitetail bucks on public and private land.

Early Season: When Food Is King

When it comes to early season, the most important thing by far is finding the best food source that many bucks — or at least the biggest bucks — are frequenting. Most of the time these bucks are found on private land in some of the most lush agriculture there is. If you can gain private land permission to hunt this area that is the ideal situation; however, if you cannot, there are still plays that work, depending on the situation. First off, if private land permission is gained, then try to pinpoint where the buck is exiting and entering the agriculture. Next, head behind that and hang a treestand downwind of the travel corridor. If you cannot get private land permission, then you must determine if there is a chance that this buck is bedding on public land that is adjacent or approach a different land landowner who might give you permission. Some bucks might bed 100 yards from their feed — just inside the cover — while other bucks might travel a mile or more to prime bedding areas. Overall, you want to find a spot on private or public land between the food and the buck's bed. If you can be there, you will have an excellent shot at harvesting the buck you are chasing.

Mid-season: Know When to Follow the Sign

When speaking of mid-season, I am referring to the time after the early season. This is when the weather is getting cold, agricultural fields are harvested and the rut may or may not be underway. Early on in mid-season, bucks might be making rubs and scrapes, but chasing and rutting has not turned on full blast yet.

They may still be using the same agriculture fields or they may have switched to different ones for various reasons. Your job during this time of year is to hunt the fresh sign from the downwind side. The hunting is starting to get good and anything is possible during the mid-season. Bucks may adventure off of private land during this time of year in order to start checking for receptive does. If you have private land permission, then hunt between food and bedding along fresh scrape lines; however, if you do not, then hunt the fringe of private land. Hunting the fringe or edge of private land can be effective, especially when doing some rattling and grunting sequences. As the rut increases and bucks begin to cruise and chase more and more, you can change your strategy from hunting around food to hunting near bedding areas and pinch points. You are trying to find spots that bucks will go in search of does or spots that they will be funneled through naturally while searching or chasing does. If they find a doe that seems to be coming into heat they may harass her throughout the day, which will cause the doe and the buck to move through a pinch point, and, hopefully, you are there waiting.

Rifle Season: Hunt the Pinch Points

Whether rifle season is during the rut in your state or not, you can still treat it the same. Try to hunt on pinch points, saddles or escape routes, especially during the opening weekend of season when deer are the most pressured. Hunting on private land can be very effective though hunting on public land escape routes near the same private land can be just as good. Whitetails are skittish animals and it will only take a gunshot or two to get them off of their summer and fall home and into the sagebrush public land that surrounds it. I have also had very good luck still hunting the public land around private property a few days after the season opener. Time and time again, I have found that bucks that escape the pressure on private land will cross the boundary line and bed down in a place where they feel safe — even if it is public land. If you take your time and keep the wind in your face, you can really have a good chance at harvesting a buck by walking public land that surrounds prime private land.

Hunting whitetails in the West can be a challenge and a blast no matter when you chase them. Though they do not inhabit every mountain and basin they are in good numbers along the river bottoms and near agriculture fields. If hunting early season, you will have to rely on patterning deer as they head from food to bedding and back. Once the rut starts, the bucks will change their patterns and can be easier to call in; however, wind direction and proximity to their areas will still be super important. By the time the rifle season starts, any escape corridors or hard to get to spots would be a perfect place to be sitting on or off of private land. If you can get private land permission, then you will be in great shape, but if you can't, then hunt the adjacent public land and wait for a buck to make a mistake. Sometimes, this can happen organically and, sometimes, another hunter on private land helps push a deer to you. Either way, chase some whitetails this fall and bring home some venison and a nice rack as well.



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Preparing For The Moment Of Truth

By Dave Barnett

Originally published at **GOHUNT**  GOHUNT.com

It's hard to believe...many hunters will be heading for the hills in the coming weeks as archery seasons open across the West...

In the following sections, I will cover some of the most obvious—and not so obvious—methods in preparing yourself both mentally and physically for the upcoming season.

Perfect Practice

Accurate and consistent shooting stems from a few key areas; however, in my opinion, the most important is muscle memory. Muscle memory is where your entire shot sequence is stored and is the place your body will go to when a rut-crazed bull elk is screaming at you from less than 20 yards and your conscious mind is totally incapacitated.

While shooting at various distances is always good the biggest factor for successful practice comes from good shot execution on every shot—no matter the distance. In recent years, my number one piece of advice for anyone while shooting is to only execute perfect shots. This may seem like an oxymoron at first, but a quick rundown on the thought process to this can shed some light.

No matter how long you've been shooting every archer has been presented with the same situation: you've just reached full draw and, as you settle your pin, you notice that something just isn't "right." Your bow is shaking more than normal, your bow arm is tired and you're standing funny. Suddenly, the urge to rush the shot grows stronger and stronger until you finally punch the release and send the arrow towards its intended target. In this situation, sometimes the arrow hits home; however, generally, it's going to be off to some degree and the bad habits exhibited on the shot are now becoming part of the norm for your shooting style. While practicing, if this situation becomes a reality, I'll let down on my bow, reset myself for the shot and try again.

Obviously, while we are hunting the number of goofy shooting positions that can be presented will be endless and impossible to predict. It's just the simple truth that shots on animals can often be from uncomfortable positions and the reality of having enough time to let down and re-draw on an animal is unlikely. Still, since making this part of my practice regimen, I've found myself able to concentrate on the shot sequence more—even with unnatural shooting positions. Additionally, I have found that my mind will subconsciously take a quick inventory on my shooting options prior to drawing on an animal and I'll inadvertently set myself up for more comfortable shooting positions.

The Cold Bore Shot

Once I start getting inside a month or so of opening day one of my favorite practice methods is a single cold bore arrow from a realistic hunting distance or position to start my practice session. An unplanned shot on a body that isn't warmed up to shooting can provide hunters a quick glance at where their shooting skills are at, what needs to be worked on and can also allude to your maximum effective range. The objective here is very straight forward- pick a random yardage, walk out and execute the shot.

The One Arrow Method

Along with a single cold bore shot, another one of my favorite practice techniques is only firing a single arrow for each set.

**When shooting at longer distances
I often find myself shrugging off
less than ideal shots
simply because I still have a few more
practice arrows left to shoot—I can
make the next one count, right?**

**In hunting, it's rare that hunters
are ever given a second shot
and I like to emulate this
with my practice.**

With opening day closing in I'll force myself to shoot one arrow and retrieve it before shooting again. This practice really forces me to focus on each individual arrow and also allows me to pay close attention to my shot execution on every shot.

Real-world Practice

When bowhunting the mountains of the West one thing is fairly common: no two shots will ever be the same. The terrain is uneven and not always solid, which means that hunters will need to practice for these awkward encounters. Archers often get stuck in a rut while practicing during the offseason; every arrow is shot from the same known distances and with perfect footing. While we always strive for the best shooting positions as possible it's just a simple fact of bowhunting that this is rarely the case.

**With the season closing in, one of my
favorite practice routines is to randomly
pick various shooting locations, angles
and distances.**

While doing this, I'll look for shots where I may have to shoot under or over branches, through gaps or while kneeling. Additionally, I very rarely shoot at even yardages (20, 30, 40, etc.) and, instead, shoot in between yardages that will force me to pin gap with my multiple pin sight. While practicing with this method, I will also adhere to my other self imposed rules of only firing a single arrow from each location and focusing on perfect shot executions only.

If available, heading to the local 3D range is excellent for this; however, when this isn't an option, I like to head to a local piece of public land with a portable target. I like to look for a small draw or canyon to place my target in and, from there, I'll simply walk around the target and look for various shot opportunities. I feel like this practice also prepares me for the mental side of always being on the lookout for shot opportunities when an animal is in range; a perfect broadside shot will not always present itself.

Broadheads

Your bow has been shooting great all year, your field points are flying dynamite out to 90 yards and your confidence is at an all-time high. The season is a week or two away so now most archers will throw on their broadheads to make a quick accuracy check. Suddenly, your confidence is gone as your broadhead-tipped arrow porpoises and corkscrews downrange and hits the target 10" from your practice arrow. Now what? The pro shops are packed and you will be lucky to even have your bow back by opening day.

Shooting broadheads doesn't have to be a year-round activity—not that there's anything wrong with that—but regular shooting of broadheads will keep you and your gear in check. Any slip in tune or lapse in shooting form on your end will be directly reflected on the flight and performance of your broadhead, particularly fixed blade heads. This can be a great way to not only keep yourself honest, but to also keep tabs on how your bow is shooting and performing.

Shooting with Your Quiver

This may seem very rudimentary to most, but its simple importance is worth mentioning. A fully loaded quiver attached to the side of your bow is going to change how things feel and shoot; that's a lot of extra torque on one side of your bow. Practicing with both field tips and broadheads with a fully loaded quiver is very important and something every archer should be doing.

The Daydream Technique

At first glance, this practice routine is silly (almost laughable), but it has helped me immensely and something I'm constantly doing. I've always been a firm believer that our subconscious minds control a lot more of our shot sequences than our physical shooting form will. When stuff starts hitting the fan and a shot is about to be presented I want to know that my mind will take over and allow my body to continue through my shot sequence while my conscious self is slowly losing his mind with excitement.

I daydream about shot scenarios constantly whether I'm watching a hunting video or laying in bed at night. Unless you're in a treestand or a blind it can be very hard to predict exactly how a shot will be presented and being mentally prepared for curveballs can be game changing. Daydreaming about shot opportunities allows me to run through situations that I may or may not ever experience without leaving the comfort of my own head. Crazy? Maybe, but this practice has helped me and others a ton.

(continued on page 32)






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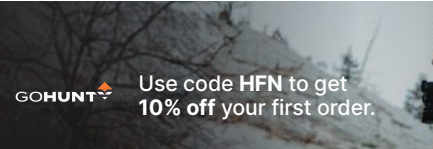
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8 Packing Tips For High Country Mule Deer & Early Archery Elk

By Ryan McSparran
Caribou Outdoor Equipment Co. www.caribougear.com

There's something special about being at timberline at the end of August or early September. Here in Colorado, timberline is usually between 10,000 and 12,000 feet. Perched on a lofty ridge and surrounded by rocky peaks, there's nothing like spotting a big mule deer buck or hearing the bugle of an elk in one of these high alpine basins.

Hunting these high lonesome places is breathtaking (literally). The first challenge is often just getting there. There's a fine balance between being prepared and keeping your pack light. You need to be ready for what the mountain will throw at you, but every ounce is an ounce you'll curse before the hunt is over.

As you pack for your next high country mule deer hunt, or early season archery elk hunt, here are a few tips to consider:

1. Start With Good Boots

A mountain hunt should begin with good boots. If you're backpacking into the high country, a quality pair of boots is mandatory. Even if you're setting a base camp at your vehicle and doing day hunts, you should still plan to invest in a great pair of mountain boots.

We can't say enough about Kenetrek boots. I have a pair of Mountain Extremes (non-insulated) that are going on their fifth season in 2019. They are supportive and have protected my feet in rugged terrain from Alaska to Arizona. With proper conditioning and care, they are still in great shape. For a nominal fee, Kenetrek will even resole and refurbish them.

Additionally, be aware that the best boots in the world won't function properly if you're wearing cotton socks underneath. In fact, that goes for the rest of your base layer clothing too. Get a quality pair of synthetic or merino wool blend socks, like the ones from Kenetrek, that help move moisture away from your feet.

When it comes to your feet, don't make compromises. We've seen failed boots end hunts early. This is an all too common mistake. Don't let it be you.



Photos courtesy Caribou Gear at www.caribougear.com

2. Cut Weight With Dual-Purpose Items

Whenever possible, pack items that serve more than one purpose to cut down on weight. For example, a lightweight and packable down jacket provides warmth while you're glassing on a windy ridge. But it can also add warmth to your sleep system. With this in mind, you could carry a lighter sleeping bag with a higher temperature rating than you otherwise would.

Likewise, look for other ways to use items for multiple purposes. Make a few wraps of duct tape around your water bottle, and electrical tape around your lighter. Bring one tripod that you can use for a shooting rest, spotting scope, binoculars and camera.

If there's an item in your pack that only serves a marginal purpose – ask yourself how badly you really need it. Because when you're climbing for a steep ridge above timberline, you'll feel every single ounce.

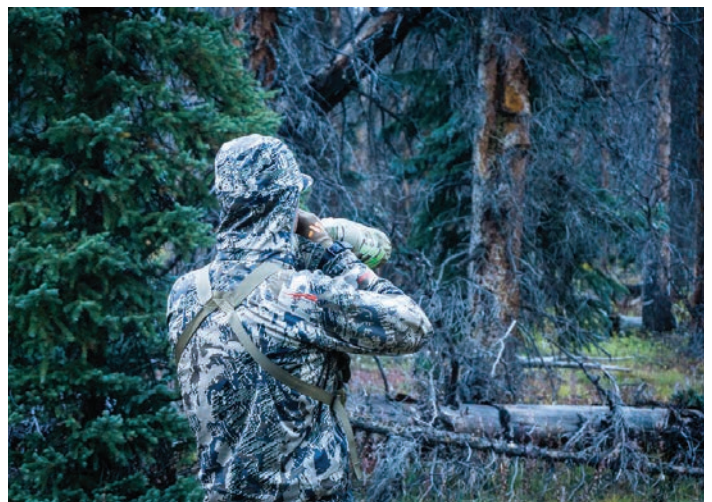
3. Don't Forget Your Rain Gear

When you're hunting mule deer above timberline, or chasing elk in early September, this is monsoon season here in Colorado. Afternoon thunderstorms can be expected almost every day. In addition to being aware of lightning, you should certainly be prepared for rain.

Rainstorms here usually don't last long, but they can be intense. Your rain gear might spend more time in your pack than it does on your back, but it still needs to be solid.

There's a fine line between ultralight and storm-proof. And walking that line with quality rain gear usually isn't cheap.

For a typical high mountain hunt, look for a quality rain jacket that's breathable and weighs in somewhere in the 12 to 16-ounce range. Don't be surprised if a jacket of this quality ranges between \$250 and \$350. However, quality rain gear is worth the investment.



In addition to protecting you from rain, breathable rain gear also blocks wind. That means it's perfect for keeping you warm on a cool morning, or when glassing from a windy ridge. We already mentioned bringing dual-purpose items. Good rain gear meets that mark.

4. Use Compression Sacks

When packing for a mountain hunt, use compression sacks wherever possible. Any item that's compressible should probably go in a compression sack. Water resistant and even waterproof compression sacks are ideal.

Forget the cheap stuff sack that came with your sleeping bag. Instead, use a waterproof or at least water resistant compression sack. This will reduce your sleeping bag to a much more manageable size in your pack. Just know that you shouldn't store your sleeping bag in a compression sack (or any stuff sack) longer than necessary.

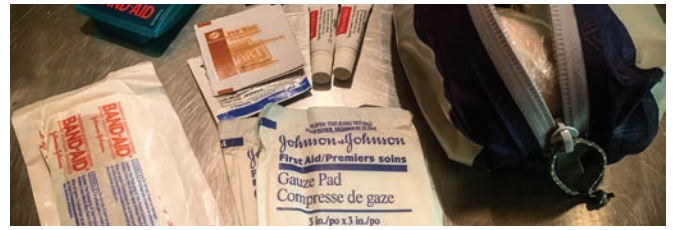
Additionally, pack your spare clothing, rain gear and anything else into a compression sack to reduce the size it takes up in your backpack.

5. Build Your Own Emergency Kit

When you purchase a first aid kit or an emergency kit off the shelf from a sporting goods store, you're inevitably adding items to your pack that are not customized to your specific adventure. For example, the kit we'd carry to Alaska is going to be much different than an emergency kit we'd pack for an alpine hunt here in Colorado. Customizing your kit will help you be more prepared, without taking unnecessary items.

We recommend building your own emergency kit. For starters, most first aid kits come in a handy nylon bag. While nice for keeping things organized, they are usually full of pockets, zippers, mesh dividers and other weight-adding features. So, ditch the pack that

your first aid kit came in, and start with an ultralight pouch or even a plastic sandwich bag.



Next, add items that you need and nothing that you don't. You might add a basic selection of bandages, antibiotic gel, gauze, wire splint, and blister pads. It's also a good idea to carry blood clotting treatment or similar items in case you cut yourself on a broadhead or knife. You might also carry a whistle, a lighter, a backup compass, a spare headlamp like the Petzl E+Lite, and iodine pills in case your filtration system fails.

6. Know How to Care for Meat in Warm Weather

When you're hunting mule deer or elk early in the season, the weather can be hot. Even at timberline, temperatures can get very warm in early September. Don't wait until you have an animal on the ground to begin making a plan. Your planning for early season meat care begins now.

Of course we'll be the first to tell you that quality game bags are essential. You need to keep your meat clean, protected, and get it cool as soon as possible. Our Caribou Gear High Country series is perfect for backpack mule deer hunts, and early season archery elk hunts. (continued on page 38)



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Idaho's Top Spots For Big Fish; Here Is Where The Lunkers Lurk

Idaho Department Fish & Game <https://idfg.idaho.gov>

These waters are known for producing trophy-sized fish.

Whether you've been fishing a day or a lifetime, we all dream of landing a lunker. Yes, big fish capture every angler's imagination. But why stop at dreaming? Idaho has many destinations that have produced record fish, both state and world's records, and though we can't guarantee you'll catch one, we can point you to some places that are capable of producing trophy-sized fish.

This list isn't comprehensive, but big fish of these species are commonly caught at these destinations during spring and summer, which also happens to be when many of these fishing spots are at their best.

So, without further rambling, here are where the big ones lurk.



Photos courtesy IDFG <https://idfg.idaho.gov>

Rainbow trout

Lake Pend Oreille: Lake Pend Oreille is kind of a ringer for rainbows and probably produces more 20-plus pound trout than anywhere else in the state.

In fact, it was such an undisputed reigning champion that Fish and Game officials split Lake Pend Oreille's "Gerrard" rainbows into a separate classification in its state records program to allow a sliver of the spotlight to shine on other places that have regular-sized rainbows.

The lake's record rainbow also eclipses the state steelhead record. So yeah, if you're looking for a pot-of-gold rainbow fishery, this is it. Now the fine print. You're probably not going to catch one with a bobber and worm from the bank. Most of the big trout are caught while trolling from boats, so take that into consideration.

Runner up

American Falls Reservoir: This massive reservoir consistently produces larger-than-average rainbow trout, and other large species of fish. Part of the fun is not knowing what you will catch, but knowing it could be big.

Chinook Salmon

Clearwater River: This could lead to fisticuffs between Lewiston and Riggins because both are popular salmon fishing destinations, but it's hard to argue against the Clearwater River. You get the fish right as they're entering Idaho, and the Clearwater anglers consistently catch big, ocean-fresh Chinook salmon. The fishing starts in the spring and depending on the run sizes, you can have back-to-back-to-back fishing for spring, summer, and fall runs of Chinook salmon, not to mention the occasional Coho salmon as well.

Runner up

Salmon River: You can't overlook it. Riggins is a fishing town, and you can make a strong argument the Little Salmon River is a better opportunity for bank anglers. The Salmon River is also the mileage champ with Chinook salmon fishing waters in hundreds of miles of river that stretch from Hells Canyon to Stanley available for fishing, depending on the seasons.

A man in a white shirt and cap is in a boat, holding a fishing rod. In the foreground is a large white cooler with the Siberian logo. The background shows a river and hills. Text on the right side of the image reads: **SIBERIAN COOLERS**, **PROVEN BEYOND**, **SIBERIANCOOLERS.COM | 844.782.COLD (2653)**, **FREE SHIPPING WITHIN CONTINENTAL USA**, **CAM LATCH SITS FLUSH TO THE BODY FACE. KEEPS FLY LINES FREE AND ENABLES YOU TO PACK THE COOLER TIGHT WITH OTHER GEAR.**, **REVERSIBLE EZ SLIDE-NON-SLIP RUBBER FEET**, **IGBC CERTIFIED BEAR RESISTANT**, **WHITE | GRANITE | SAHARA TAN**, **FREE ACCESSORIES**, **LIFETIME WARRANTY**, **"BE THE ALPHA... OWN THE ALPHA"**, and social media icons for Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. There is also a circular seal that says "BEAR RESISTANT" and "GRIZZLY BEAR".

Largemouth Bass

Lake Coeur d'Alene: This is another North Idaho heavyweight that has more in common with Lake Pend Oreille than difficult spelling.

The lake has excellent largemouth bass fishing with lots of fat-bellied mouth breathers looking like they were transplanted from one of those states with funny accents. To make this destination even more enticing, you also have the option of fishing one of the chain lakes above the lake if you prefer smaller water.

Runner up

Lake Lowell: While not known for producing monstrous-sized bass, it's a consistent producer of good largemouth and just a short drive for nearly half the state's population. Sensing a little Treasure Valley bias? Duly noted. Let's move on...

Smallmouth Bass

Dworshak Reservoir: Another perennial state-record producer—and it seems it's rarely a case of whether it will produce another record-breaker, but when? This reservoir just grows big smallmouth bass (aka, "smallies"), which is always fun to say, thanks to a steady diet of other fish, mostly young kokanee.

Runner up

Snake River: We might be fudging a little here, since the Snake River isn't known for huge bass. But, it makes up for it by offering high catch rates and a ton of fishing opportunity, stretching from Pocatello to Lewiston. Big smallmouth are often found along the way in Snake River reservoirs including Brownlee, CJ Strike, and Lake Walcott.

Lake Trout

Payette Lake: Your grandpa may have heard stories from his grandpa about how big the lakers were in Payette Lake, and guess what? There may be fish in there as old as your grandpa there, and no surprise, they're big. We're talking potential 50 pounders.

And when you consider even half that size is still a trophy fish, lake trout make a very interesting fishing opportunity. Expect to devote some time staring at a fish finder to locate them, and there's still no guarantee they will bite, but they're out there. Catching them is up to you.

Runner up

Priest Lake: When a lake produces a 57.5 pounder (1971), you're going to hear about it for decades. While it's not known for the monster macs of the past, it's still a popular laker fishery that will keep you busy with mid-sized fish, and you never know what lurks in the depths.



An advertisement for TrailHead River Sports. The main image shows three people and a dog in a yellow inflatable raft on a river. The person on the left is wearing a green shirt and hat, the person in the middle is wearing a blue shirt and hat, and the person on the right is wearing a light blue shirt and hat. A dog is sitting in the middle of the raft. The background is a lush green riverbank with trees and hills. The text "TRAILHEAD RIVER SPORTS" is in the top right corner, with "Missoula, Montana" below it. The phrase "Moving at the Speed of Life" is written in a large, stylized font across the bottom of the raft. Below the raft, there is a row of seven blue diamond-shaped icons: a life preserver, a compass, a fishing lure, a boat, a fishing rod, a fishing net, and a fishing hat.

2505 S. Garfield St., Missoula, MT | 406.543.6966 | TrailHeadRiverSports.com

Idaho's Top Spots For Big Fish; Here Is Where The Lunkers Lurk

(continued from page 9)

Cutthroat Trout

Bear Lake: This unique lake not only has big cutthroat, it's a big cutthroat restoration success story thanks to Fish and Game biologists and many, many partners. This sparkling, big lake straddles the Idaho/Utah border and produces salmon-sized cutthroat trout. After a major restoration project, wild, naturally spawning Bonneville cutthroat populations increased from just 5 percent of the fish population in Bear Lake to a whopping 70 percent, and allowed anglers to catch and keep wild cutthroats from the lake for the first time in more than 20 years.

Runner up

Henry's Lake: OK, maybe a little explanation is in order. Henry's Lake has rainbows, cutthroats and hybrids. But they all grow big, so we don't mind if you catch a big trout with a red slash on the jaw and call it a cutthroat, even if it's technically a hybrid. Just enjoy catching a big trout.



Kokanee salmon

Anderson Ranch Reservoir: This is the upper most of the Southwest Idaho's affectionately named "silver triangle" of reservoirs that attract lots of kokanee anglers. The other two, Arrowrock Reservoir and Lucky Peak, can provide some good fishing as well, but Anderson Ranch has earned its reputation. Be forewarned, kokanee are very cyclical, so don't expect big fish every year, but you have a good chance of finding some there.

Runner up

Payette Lake: It's really turned on in the last decade and average sizes can be pretty solid with some real beasts mixed in.

Yellow perch

Lake Cascade: In case you haven't heard, let us bring you up to speed. Perch virtually disappeared from Lake Cascade in the 1990s, and Fish and Game did an extensive restoration project that succeeded beyond the most optimistic biologist's expectations. It now routinely spits out trophy-sized perch, including numerous state and world records, and it has become a national ice fishing destination.

Lucky for you, the ice melts, and the big perch remain.

Runner up

C.J. Strike Reservoir: Lots of other places have perch, but C.J. is the second-most popular perch fishery in the state, so it gets the back-up spot.



Sturgeon

Hells Canyon: Legend has it a fisherman once prayed to God to grant him a fish so big he wouldn't have to lie about what a big fish he caught, so God gave us sturgeon. Maybe a stretch, and ironically, the best place to catch these freshwater leviathans is in Hells Canyon. If you don't have jetboat and some savvy whitewater skills, an outfitter is your best option.

Runner up

C.J. Strike Reservoir: This fish factory has a good population of sturgeon, and it's easily accessible by your average lake boat, and you can also catch them from shore right below C.J. Strike Dam.

Channel catfish

Brownlee Reservoir: Unless you were raised on a steady diet of hush puppies, you may not be familiar with Idaho's channel catfish. Well, they're abundant in Brownlee Reservoir (and upstream in the Snake River), and they typically dwarf their fellow fish with two exceptions: flathead catfish, and sturgeon. Channel cats commonly run 2 to 10 pounds and some larger, but few smaller, and you can catch them by the gunny sack full. There's no size limit or bag limit, and here's a shocker, they're shockingly under fished. Harvest rates on channel cats are so low that we humans may be getting outfished by otters.

Runner up

Snake River: The only place that even comes close to Brownlee Reservoir for catfishing is the Snake River. Channel catfish are common from C.J. Strike all the way to Brownlee, and cats can be caught from the shore and from boats, especially in the spring months prior to spawning.

9 Tips For Meat Care On An Early Season Hunt

By Ryan McSparran

Caribou Gear Outdoor Equipment Co. www.caribougear.com

It's that time of year! When hunting...on any early season hunt, caring for wild game meat can be a serious challenge. Warm weather, long daylight hours and insects all create challenging conditions for keeping meat in great condition.

The longer it takes meat to cool, the higher your risk of spoilage over a shorter period of time. Gamey meat is contaminated meat. If it tastes gamey, something went wrong with your field handling.

On your early season hunting adventures this year, here are some tips to help you come home with better tasting wild game meat:

1. Come Prepared with Ice in Your Cooler

The best thing you can do for your meat during periods of warmer weather is to get it in a cold cooler immediately. Of course timelines will vary, depending on how far you are hunting from camp or your vehicle. But no matter where you're hunting, or how remotely, be prepared with a cooler that's already filled with ice.



Photo credit Ryan McSparran courtesy www.caribougear.com

Start with a large enough cooler with plenty of ice. On a long hunt during hot weather, you may need to drive into town and refresh your ice after four or five days. If possible, it's well worth the effort. Because the more quickly you're able to get the meat on ice after the kill, the more easily you can avoid any spoilage.

If you have a large chest freezer at home, fill gallon-sized plastic jugs with water and freeze them before your hunt. These will last longer than bags of ice. Make sure you leave a few inches of head space, since they will expand in the freezer. **And be aware that it can take several days for a gallon of water to freeze completely. Don't wait until the night before your hunt.**

When you load up for your hunt, place the frozen jugs in your cooler and close the lid. Then, avoid opening the cooler until you're ready to use it. If possible, you might even bring a separate cooler for groceries so that you can avoid opening your meat cooler constantly.

(continued on the next page)



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9 Tips For Meat Care On An Early Season Hunt

(continued from page 11)

2. Know the Primary Risks for Spoilage

Before you begin, take some time to consider the greatest risks for spoiling meat. Of course warm temperatures and flies immediately come to mind. But consider other factors that can encourage spoilage.

With an animal on the ground, the first thing to consider is the hide. We occasionally hear a hunter tell us that they don't use game bags. They simply remove quarters with the hide on to keep the meat clean. This makes us cringe. Even in cold weather, the insulating power of a deer or elk hide is tremendous. **Failure to remove the hide immediately is a recipe for gamey meat.**

Next, consider the form in which you'll pack out your meat. Typically, loose meat like backstraps and neck meat will be the first to spoil. When you place loose meat into a game bag, it forms a ball that prevents air from circulating around it. This is also true of boned out meat. When the weight of boneless meat presses itself against the bottom of a game bag, it embeds dirt, hair and other debris and prevents circulation.

Whenever possible, pack out bone-in quarters and cover them with loose-fitting game bags to allow maximum circulation.

Of course, it's sometimes necessary to bone-out meat on very remote hunts. In these situations, do everything you can to promote circulation and then get the meat to a cooler as quickly as possible.

PRO TIP: If you need to make several trips to pack out an animal and you plan to de-bone the meat, only de-bone what you can carry in the first load. Leave the rest hanging bone-in until you come back for it. This will allow it to cool with maximum air circulation. When you come back for the second load, then again only debone what you can carry on that trip.

3. Use High Quality Game Bags

Ok, we're biased. But this is exactly why we spent nearly a decade researching, designing, and perfecting Caribou Gear Game Bags. Our bags are highly breathable, lightweight and extremely durable.

Stocking-fit game bags will embed the dirt and hair into the meat. After it dries, you'll be forced trim it, causing more loss of meat. The wide mesh on these bags will also allow flies to land on your meat.

Many companies now offer nylon game bags. **Please know this: nylon bags do not breathe.** Using a nylon game bag would be only slightly better than using a trash bag – which by the way, is a bad idea.

Not only are trash bags non-breathable. They are also treated with chemicals that are certainly not safe for human consumption.

Our game bags breathe like cotton, offer the strength of a synthetic fabric, and promote excellent moisture management. They are loose-fitting to promote circulation...

4. Use a Tarp to Keep Meat Clean and Dry

A Hunter's Tarp laid on the ground may be used to place un-bagged meat in situations when you'll be boning it out.

Otherwise, we always recommend immediately covering it with a game bag, and then placing it on a tarp to stay clean and dry.

With your animal on the ground, be ready to place your meat in game bags as soon as it comes off the animal. Then, you can place it on a tarp to keep the bagged meat clean while you continue working.

Back at camp, we also use the Hunter's Tarp to care for game meat.

Suspend a tarp over your meat to keep it dry, and to provide shade. **However, make sure that a tarp is never lying directly on top of your meat. This will inhibit circulation.** Always suspend the tarp above your meat pole.

5. Use Citric Acid Spray for Added Protection

Citric acid has been proven to deter bacteria growth, act as a natural preservative, and keep bugs away from meat.

On warm weather hunts or extended hunts, citric acid spray is an important part of our meat care routine.

On particularly hot hunts or in places where flies are bad, we recommend spraying meat immediately upon skinning. In these situations, we will often spray the meat as we skin the hide back.

Citric acid spray can also be applied after you return to camp on extended hunting trips.

In these situations, apply the spray a day or two after the kill. In the evening, after bugs have disappeared for the day, remove your game bags and spray the quarters with citric acid spray. Let it dry overnight, forming a glaze on the meat. Then re-bag the quarters early in the morning, before insects reappear.

Ideally, you'll also wash your game bags and let them dry overnight while you're applying the spray. But we'll get to that here soon...

6. Label Each Game Bag of Meat

Once each quarter or piece of meat is placed in a game bag, use an ID tag to label the meat. This will allow you to keep track of what's in each bag.

Additionally, you should also note any bags that contain bloodshot meat. This way, you can spend additional time carefully trimming that meat back at camp.

We provide ID tags with our Magnum Pack Series of game bags. These durable ID tags can also be purchased separately.

They include check boxes for sex, species and bullet damage, as well as hunter information and donation details if necessary for transport or butchering.

7. Do Your Part to Assist in CWD Research

If working in an area with Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD), or if transporting your meat home from a CWD area, follow all transport laws and do your part to help with CWD research by submitting samples to local game and fish agencies for testing.

Some game management units in Colorado require testing. Whether or not it's required, this is critical information that can help our biologists learn more about CWD.

In these situations, remove all edible meat first. Only then should you remove the head or skullcap.

Consider using a disposable blade for this work. Havalon knives and saws are perfect. You can easily separate blades that have been used to cut through brain or spinal tissue, and then dispose of them at home.

8. Keep Your Meat and Bags Clean on Extended Trips

If you find yourself in a remote camp without access to a cooler, we prefer to hang bone-in quarters from a meat pole with our loose-fitting game bags.

How long you can keep meat in camp without a cooler depends largely on nighttime temperatures.

If temps at night get the meat cool enough, that it can stay cool in the shade through the following day, you're in good shape. If meat is not cooling down sufficiently at night, you're on a ticking clock to get it to a cooler.

To keep your meat in the best condition possible, hang quarters by the shank using Paracord Game Meat Lashings. Then, cover the quarter with the game bag. Use the drawstring to keep it cinched down tight and protect it from insects.

Now, your quarters can dry and form a glaze. Debris will fall to the bottom of the bag. Using this method, the game bags can be periodically removed to check on the meat.

On the second day from the kill site, we recommend that you remove bags from each quarter. Wait until the evening when most insects have disappeared. Gently wipe any remaining debris from the meat, and spray it with citric acid as described above.

Meanwhile, it's time to wash your game bags.

Using camp dish soap or a backpacker's soap, wash your game bags in cold water and rinse them thoroughly.

You might be surprised how clean they'll get using cold water and camp soap. Once they're clean and rinsed, hang them to dry overnight.

In the morning, replace the game bags early before bugs begin to reappear. This process can be repeated if necessary.

Even on extremely long hunts in remote parts of Alaska, this method has allowed us to keep meat in great condition for as long as 10 to 15 days.

9. Wash Meat in a Natural Solution Before Butchering

Finally, you've made it home from your hunting adventure with the real trophy – a cooler full of excellent wild game meat!

Whenever possible, process your own meat.

When you put this much work into keeping your meat clean and cared-for, you want to know for sure that the end product is yours. It would be a shame to have your meat ground and processed along with someone else's, which doesn't reflect the same effort.

Before butchering your meat at home, take the time to carefully wash it.

Removing any hair, dirt and other contaminants is extremely important. Don't skip this critical step.

We recommend washing your game meat using a vinegar-water solution. It's natural, edible and won't leave an off-taste on your meat.

Combine a 1/2-cup of vinegar per gallon of water. Carefully wash all parts of the exposed meat.

In addition to getting your meat clean and decontaminated, this washing process will rehydrate the outer rind that has formed.

This is very much edible. At the very least, it can be used for jerky or ground meat. In most cases, there's no need to trim off that rind and throw it away.

Be Prepared and Enjoy Your Early Season Hunts

With these tips, we hope you find yourself in the field this year feeling well prepared and ready for the challenge of early season meat care.

If you have questions, please feel free to reach out. Be safe and have fun out there this season!

Visit us at www.caribougear.com.



Photos credit Jillian Sanford courtesy GOHUNT at GOHUNT.com

From Field To Plate: Elk Breakfast Biscuits Recipe

By Jillian Sanford

Originally published at **GOHUNT**  GOHUNT.com

Growing up, I am sure everyone had their favorite recipe that mom and dad used to make; for me, it was my dad's famous breakfast biscuits.

A quick and easy breakfast biscuit that always left big smiles on everyone's face, even my little sister who is the pickiest of eaters.

When I was young, my dad used to make these biscuits with pork sausage, but today we will be using elk sausage...With this recipe, you can use any kind of meat, whether it is antelope sausage, mule deer sausage, javelina sausage, whatever you might have in the freezer works just as well.

This recipe is another great example of what the term field to plate actually means to me, to us as hunters.

Whether you bowhunt, or just strictly rifle hunt, hunting is hunting.

The hunt, the chase, is what is shown the most, but the aftermath of that kill is as equally important.

We, as hunters, pride ourselves with the meat we bring home to our friends and family, and feeding those people comes with a joy unlike any other. That feeling is one of the many reasons why I hunt.

Another great thing about this quick and easy biscuit recipe is that you can make a couple of batches and throw em in your pack for a weekend shed hunting trip or for an entire week of mule deer hunting.

The best thing about these little biscuits is that they are one of the best snacks to have up on the mountain; you get all those good nutrients while you are up there hiking your butt off.

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Ingredients

2 ½ cups Bisquick pancake mix
1 ½ cups shredded cheese
2 cups cooked and drained ground sausage
1 egg (optional)
¾ cup milk or water (add as needed)

Step 1

Preheat oven to 450 degrees.



To get started, we are going to combine our Bisquick mix with our cheese and sausage. Gently fold everything together.

Step 2

Next, we are going to add our milk or water and our egg. This is the messy part; mixing this is going to be tough but do your best to combine all the ingredients. The dough should be sticky but well combined.



Step 3

With your oven preheated, spray an oven sheet with a nonstick spray of your choosing and begin taking small handfuls of dough, a little bigger than a golf ball, and place them on the sheet.



Bake them in the oven for about 10-12 minutes until golden brown around the edges and on the bottom. Remove from oven, and in less than 20 minutes you have breakfast served.

In Closing

This recipe is a people-pleasing breakfast treat. I hope you guys enjoy the finished product; they were a huge hit at the GOHUNT office in Vegas.

Asking The Right Questions To A Biologist

By Jake Horton

Originally published at **GOHUNT**  GOHUNT.com

I am assuming that you have asked to speak with the most knowledgeable person on hunting the animal you are after in the area you are planning to hunt. Now, it is time for you to be calm and collected so that you are able to retrieve as much information out of this person without only getting generic answers from them. To achieve this goal, you will need to let them know that you have done your homework and that you have basic knowledge behind your questions. It will be beneficial to you to have your questions written down so that you can keep the conversation moving since their time is as valuable as yours. When you get in contact with the right person and they begin talking about the unit, area or drainage, you might be surprised at the information that they share with you. You could walk away with facts and statistics about a unit that you have never even seen with your eyes.

10 Questions For a Biologist

When you know that you have finally reached the best individual and begin to talk to them about your plans and experiences, it's time to begin delving into all of the right questions to retrieve as much information as you can.

Here are 10 of my preferred questions to ask and what information I hope to gather during my phone call.

Most people you talk to are not going to give you an exact drainage area to hunt.

Be cautious if they start easily “spilling their guts” about a certain drainage area, knowing that they probably tell everyone about this area, which means it will be overrun with nonresidents.

Instead of asking them where to go, I like to circumvent the questions and, in turn, pick their brain in a way that helps me in my e-scouting to uncover my own special drainage. Though each of these questions is easy to answer individually, you are building data. At the end of your conversation, you should have a pretty good idea of where you should be able to find animals, where you probably do not want to go and what your hunt should be like while hunting animals during your specific season.

1) What Elevation Are the Animals at During This Season?

The first question I like to ask is an easy one for them to answer. Although each year is different, someone who is knowledgeable about the area should be able to tell you where to find them under all situations.

(continued on page 28)



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“GOOD WEEDS”

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As a young angler, I hated weeds of all kinds to the point of fishing anywhere else I could to avoid them. They seemed at the time a needless frustration of fishing. As bluegills captured my interest, and eventually bass, walleyes, and a host of other species, I came like most anglers to develop more of a love/hate relationship with them. I observed times when they were crucial to finding and catching fish, though they still seemed an impediment to the actual “catching” part. Fast forward to today, and they’re vegetation, mostly because it does away with the negative connotations of the other terms, and embraces them as a collection of fishy habitat. Yet, not all veg is created equal and depending on your species of interest, there are definitely some preferred types over others.

Pads – There are a number of floating-leaf plants in freshwater that most anglers refer to as “lily pads.” Rightly so, as the majority of them have a flowering lily as a portion of the plant, though the pads are what provide the shade and haven that bass and panfish species enjoy. These broad, green floating platforms serve as the perfect rest or ledge for frogs, weedless-rigged plastics, and other topwater presentations, while the gaps in pads provide the perfect ambush point for all species. Edges of pad fields also provide valuable ambush points for predators and serve as great locations for early morning or evening crappie and bluegill fishing. Make no mistake about it, pads equal fish throughout the entire spring and even summer warm-water periods.

Anglers can focus on vacant holes of any kind of pad, as fish focus on these edges and variations. Many lakes are studded with them, putting even more focus on gaps in them, or inside turns and points on the edges of them. Some lakes even have them along sunken humps or mid-lake structures, making those spots even more valuable than back-bay portions because of their access to deep water. Consider braided line options, even for panfish to make snags even less of an issue. Spring anglers should remember that even when pads are not present at the surface,

their underwater jungle gym of roots can be prime places for bluegills and early-season crappies. The black-bottom bays they tend to inhabit will warm more quickly than other portions of the lake, giving spring panfish both the cover and the warmth they need.

Coontail – As opposed to pads, coontail is a submerging type of vegetation often associated with deep weed edge growth, but will grow in all depths. It has a long pliable stalk, with tips that look bushy like a raccoon’s tail.

Coontail can grow as deep as the 20-foot range in clear water bodies and is a favorite of mine for walleyes and bass on the deep edge.

It can grow densely, which does cause problems in shallow water, but that wall of weeds on either the outside (deep) or inside (shallow) edge will hold fish. That’s especially true near steeper breaks or well-defined edges of the vegetation.

Like many favorable vegetation species, it’s a holder of all kinds of biological life. Certainly, more life equals more food for gamefish of all sorts.

Many times I’ve seen crayfish along its edges in shallow water and found all kinds of invertebrate species inside its mats. Young baitfish and gamefish alike use its cover as a haven from predators, making important nursery habitats as well.

That said, it can be tougher to fish around, as coontail is somewhat more “snaggy” than plenty of other types of weeds. That makes weedless rigging inside coontail more essential or fishing on edges primarily.

Cabbage – Perhaps the all-star of vegetation in terms of fish and fishing is cabbage of any kind.

Green and red varieties dominate many of the lakes I fish, and both have some serious fish-holding capacity. Their stalks are a bit harder than that of coontail, and the cover they provide for gamefish of all kinds is second to none.

If I had to pick a favorite, it would be cabbage by a long shot, and that’s because of all the species that seem to use it.

Walleyes at depth, crappies on the shallow and deep edges as well as bluegills, and not to mention bass, musky, pike, and really anything else that swims. In fact, you can often find a single cabbage bed holding different fish species throughout the various parts of it, each taking advantage of the rich invertebrate life, cover, and shade it provides.



Dense beds of it hold fish at depth, and during windy days, those same fish will rise towards the tops and be ready to eat. Walleye anglers that learn to love it fish spinners and other live-bait rigs behind small bullet-nose weights, where windy-day walleyes will swim up to smash anything offered just over their heads. Bass and pike are often doing the same thing on those days. Like with any weedbed, inside

turns, dense pockets, or broad openings within can really be spots on the spot, and areas to focus on for fishing.

The deep edge of cabbage or even the sparse portions towards that outside edge are great for rigging walleyes as well.

Musky anglers burn blades over the tops or bring a variety of topwaters over these cabbage beds throughout the summer, or key in on deeper dense edges and points with big plastics as the water warms.

It's important to note that the lake's top predators are there for a reason too; both food and cover.

Honorable mentions include both emergent cattails and bulrushes (pencil reeds). These emergent and tall-standing species can be indicative of certain bottom content which may attract fish, along with the cover they provide.

In the case of cattails, these plants are often found in soft-bottom, marsh environments, and the immediate edge can hold panfish and bass. In the event of bulrushes or simply "reeds," these species often prefer sandier, hard bottoms which hold crappies in the spring, and bass or muskies throughout the summer.

I find both cattails and bulrushes to be better in a big wind, where you can even find walleyes off the edges during low light periods, no matter how shallow they grow.

Whether you target any or all of the gamefish mentioned here, it makes good sense to know your aquatic vegetation. Rarely do any of them exist without some other form of vegetation nearby or borders, and it's exactly these junctions that can hold fish. Being observant of small variations in the density, speciation, and shape of aquatic vegetation can be a big factor in getting a bite out there, so the sooner you learn the "fishy weeds," the better.







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The Easiest Way To Get Bit During The Dog-Days

Northland Fishing Tackle www.northlandtackle.com

There are a lot of ways to catch fish during the dog-days of summer, you know those lazy summer months, but it's worth remembering that fish are pretty fat and happy right now. Weedlines are well defined, bait is plentiful in most lakes, and warm water temps mean fish are at peak metabolism. While they need to eat often, it's not hard to find a great place to get dinner. The menu options are varied as well, so it tends to take most fishing patterns and nullify the amplitude of their effectiveness.

What do I mean by that? Well, in any one lake there can be a top one or two ways to catch walleyes for example for any given season. What happens in summer is that with such a wide variety of bait, at a number of different zones and cover types, rather than one or two techniques, you often have about 5 of them which all produce, just not gangbusters as they might've during other parts of the season. That's why I like to employ tactics that cross over to a number of different species and work well in a variety of situations.

Spinner fishing, pulling crawler harnesses, bottom-bouncing – whatever you want to call it – is to be among the best of the best for maximum action no matter where you fish. I was just talking with Ted Takasaki, noted tournament angler and Hall of Famer, about pulling spinners. “I pull them everywhere I go, from Erie to Winnipeg, to Sakakawea, and I've won tournaments with them over the past few decades everywhere in between.” Ted was also quick to point out that it's a big-fish technique too, and he readily uses them to target trophies as well.

While Ted was talking specifically about walleye-fishing, we both agreed that some of our best panfish catches have been on spinners. Largemouth and smallies both love to eat 'em, and while it can be frustrating, pike will clip hooks and readily slam a spinner as well. If it swims, it'll eat a crawler or leech rigged behind a spinner and weight system. That includes rough fish which to many folks aren't of interest, but really put up a fight and make for some action-packed days when other species aren't going...

The question I think has less to do with “if,” but “why?” Ted chimed in here too, saying that “It's tough for most fish to pass up the combination of live bait, presented at some speed, with the attraction of vibration, flash, and color.” Spinners really have a lot going for them in that regard, as few lure classes check as many boxes as these live-bait delivery systems can. Vibration draws fish from distance, and so does flash or color, while live bait seals the deal for a strike.

Color can be an overlooked portion of the system, as there are plenty to choose from, as well as standards like hammered nickel and gold. Yet, in a bug hatch situation for walleyes, it's nice to match the hatch, with browns, greys, and other subdued colors with a copper or hammered gold blade really being a top producer. Again, worms really help elicit strikes, as lots of fish will follow baits without striking, especially at sub-1 mph speeds.

Regarding pace, it's nice to pull standard spinners at that 1 – 1.5 mph GPS speed, but it's even nicer to pull polycarbonate “butterfly” style blades at whatever speed you'd like. I'm often glued to the electronics, pulling along at a decent pace, then see a glob of fish to slow down on. If dropping it in their face isn't getting the job done, I'll actually try picking up the pace to see if faster doesn't create some more urgency and elicit reaction strikes.

I tend to use bottom-bouncers as the weight of the choice, especially in water deeper than 15 feet, as they're relatively snag-proof and really easy to use. A good bottom bouncer rod and some hard-line (braid) will telegraph bottom composition up that steel wire and to your fingertips, giving you valuable information on the underwater real-estate. As a general rule of thumb, 2 oz bottom bouncers are good in that 18-25 FOW mark. Feel free to go up to 2.5-3oz. weights in depths to 30 FOW, while pulling out the smaller ones only in 10-15 FOW.

In those instances, however, most often I'm fishing around weeds, where I like to use simple bullet-nose sinkers. Whether after gills and crappies, or walleyes in the weeds, anytime there's standing cabbage or coontail, I'll be using bullet-nose bass-style weights to meander through stalks. If it's walleyes, I'm looking for wind-blown cabbage areas with sparse pockets and patches. I'll pull right through it, and you'd be amazed at how walleyes will come up and out of the weeds to hit an overhead bait.

In smaller natural lakes with all kinds of weed growth, I just try to use a heavier style bullet-nose weight and stick to the outside edge. Here, you'll find all kinds of roaming predators, some of the biggest panfish in the lake, and all kinds of species you may have never thought would eat a spinner. So get a cooler to keep those crawlers cold, and employ as many lines as you can to go through various colors, sizes, baits, and styles while sticking to the outside edge of a break or weedline. Fishing doesn't have to be complicated during the dog-days of summer, and sometimes just getting bit by anything is the order of the day.

Summer Trolling Tips

By Joel Nelson

Northland Fishing Tackle www.northlandtackle.com

Trolling balsa baits could be the number one tactic for getting all kinds of fish to eat, during any open-water season of the year. Whether long-lining on braid or raiding the depths behind some leadcore, the Northland Rumble Series Baits are made to elicit reaction bites while withstanding everything from heavy cover to vicious strikes. That durability and “fishiness” are on display each time you put a Rumble Series Shad, Shiner, or Stickbait behind the boat. That said, here are some summer trolling tips to help you get bit with greater regularity. Here are a few items to take into consideration the next time you’re pulling a Rumble Series Crankbait.

Depth – Especially for bottom-dwelling fish like walleyes, dive depth could be one of the first variables to tackle when considering which Rumble Series Bait to pull. Different series run differing depths with the Rumble Stick diving deepest, the Rumble Shad patrolling moderate depths, and the Rumble Shiner running shallowest. However, within each of those models are different sizes, which each have its own running depth. That makes it possible to cover some depth ranges with multiple baits of differing sizes.

Electronics – It’s best to pull over fish that you’ve already found, so putting in some time with your electronics will help set up your trolling run rather than going in blind. Use a combination of side-imaging, 2D sonar, and down imaging to locate schools of fish you’d like to target, then drop some waypoints on the largest or most consistent clusters. In open basin scenarios, that may be bait pods with suspended feeding fish. On shoreline breaks, that could be a weed-edge with features that attract bait and resulting fish. Mark your milk run, then execute it.

Structure – Not all structure is conducive to pulling crankbaits. When long-lining, we’re talking about large features with relatively consistent depths. That’ll help keep your baits in the zone and in front of fish for the longest time possible. Scattered fish along large structural elements are much preferred over tight pods of fish on small rock piles for example. You want your bait to be live for miles, not meters, anytime you put a Rumble Crank back behind the boat.

Boat Speed – Conventional wisdom has most people pulling crankbaits in 2.2mph – 2.8mph GPS speeds. That’s not a hard and fast rule, however, as wind and low-light will allow faster speeds which should be interpreted as more water covered. Bright conditions or neutral fish in deeper water may like it a little slower, all the way down to 2.0mph. The key point to realize though, is that boat speed affects dive depth, so whatever combination of crankbait model and size, paired with line behind boat, depth, and speed, should be remembered to replicate any success you may find.

Boat Control – This could also be referred to as depth control, which means keeping your crankbaits just above the bottom and on a consistent track. S-curves can be useful to trigger fish into biting but can be tricky, especially with leadcore. Baits that repeatedly dredge bottom or are fouled, can start to roll and make their way to other lines.

A good driver monitors electronics, drops waypoints, and keeps baits from being tangled by keeping a good track that avoids other boats, cover, and water that’s too shallow.

Line-Counter Reels – Line counter reels are crucial when cranking to be consistent with your sets. Typically, there’s a “magic” combination that results from proper depth, speed, and bait – but all of them are dependent upon the amount of line back behind the boat. Too little and the bait won’t achieve its full diving depth. Too much and you may be fouling on the bottom, though there are times in clear water where lots of line out can have its advantages. The bottom line is that you need to experiment with different amounts of line out per reel at first, catch some fish, then replicate success on all reels in the boat.

Line Choices – For most anglers, simple mono is a great material to pull crankbaits on, as it’s forgiving with a fair amount of stretch. That’s also its downside, so it can be more effective to pull crankbaits on a braided line type. A better feel of the bait’s “wobble” will ensure your Rumble Series Crankbait is running true without weeds or other fouling, and less stretch afforded by braid means a positive response when trolling. Of course, this can be too much of a good thing (see Rod Considerations below). Leadcore trolling employs a special line type on a line counter reel that’s hollow in the center and filled with a single strand of lead. That lead sinks the line and brings the bait to deeper diving depths. In this scenario, it’s often wise to let line back until you’re hitting bottom, then reel up a few turns such that you’re only randomly ticking bottom from time to time. For walleye especially, this is important. Because of the bow in leadcore line, keeping consistent depth, trolling speed, and bait types employed will be paramount to your success.

Leaders – In ultra-clear environments, especially for open water basin trolling, fluorocarbon leaders up to 30’ may be employed. In river systems with sharp rocks or zebra mussels, it can be wise to use nano braid style leaders to stand up to the abuse.

Rod Considerations – It’s important to utilize a slower action rod with more of a parabolic bend to it when pulling crankbaits. These are often inexpensive rods, but especially on hard lines like braid, the effect is crucial. Slower actions allow fish to get the baits completely in their mouths before tension slowly drives those hooks home. A fast rod with a braided line simply results in more fish lost, despite sticky hooks and lots of them.

Snap – Snaps are simply the best way to run your crankbaits, no matter what style you’re pulling. Easy open and close wire offers quick changes between baits, and perhaps more importantly, the large wire loop at the end allows for maximum travel when the bait wobbles side to side. You could tie each bait directly, but you’d have more work into each bait change, and less action to show for it.

No matter where you troll crankbaits, they’re effective tools for both finding and catching fish. There are many times when starting off on a new lake, especially on big water, that crankbaits should be your first and primary consideration. Covering water and finding active pods of fish can help inform you of new spots, and better techniques to target them too, allowing your reconnaissance to be often as productive as your end-game strategy.



Photo courtesy Caribou Gear at www.caribougear.com

What's In Our Kill Kit

By Ted Ramirez

Caribou Gear Outdoor Equipment Co. www.caribougear.com

You just made your first kill. You cautiously approach the downed animal from its back and, with the tip of your arrow or the tip of your barrel, nudge at the rump or eye to see if there's any sign of life.

Congratulations all around, or if you're by yourself, you're a happy hunter, silent or not; congratulations on a job well done.

As this utopia wanes, you start thinking about the work ahead, and it doesn't matter if it's a small deer, yearling elk, or massive bull moose. Okay, the moose is a different story! However, the procedure is the same, with a few added tools to complete the job.

For the first-timer who has never gutted big game, the person who has done it once or twice before, and the seasoned hunter, the chore is either awkward, unsure or just a prideful, relaxed passing of time.

You begin by unloading the rifle chamber of a spent or live round, gently leaning your rifle against a tree, removing your backpack from your shoulder, and pulling out your tag and the following tools to process the animal.

Before we discuss what's in your kill kit, let's consider what makes a good kill kit.

What is a kill kit

A kill kit is an essential tool for hunters who need to gut and quarter an animal in the field. It contains all the necessary items conveniently stored in a single bag for easy access.

What items are typically included in a kill kit?

The contents of a kill kit can vary depending on the individual's gutting and quartering method, experience level, and personal preferences.

However, common items found in a kill kit may include:

- Game Bag
- Writing pen
- Trail marking tape
- Electrical tape
- Gloves
- Paracord 50'

The point is that a kill kit is a personally assembled set of tools. You can buy a gimmicky set that contains a storage bag, a pair of gloves, a small piece of cheap trail tape, electrical tape, and a pen.

Making your custom kill kit begins with a good storage bag and a select set of tools.

You probably already have many of the items in the garage. Trail tape can be purchased at any major sporting goods store for a few dollars, and it will likely last you a lifetime of hunting. Suitable Nitrile Gloves can be bought for under \$20.00 for 100 gloves.

Caribou Gear makes a water-resistant storage bag called the "Ditty Bag". It has a durable YKK zipper, easy-to-locate tabs, signature light-reflective tabs and a reflective bar for labeling content.



Ditty Bags are available in three sizes and colors. They are convenient for organizing loose items in your pack, such as clothing, trail food, granola energy bars/drinks, jerky, and toiletry items. They are also excellent for isolating damp or dirty gear from your pack or suitcase.

Purchase Caribou Gear Outdoor Equipment Co. items at www.caribougear.com

Here's what's in our kill kit and why

- Camp meat bag
- Hunters Tarp
- Writing pen / with electrical tape
- Small knife sharpener
- Nitrile gloves to protect hands from blood and bacteria
- Small cotton washcloth (rag)
- Clean wipes
- 550 paracord 50'
- Big Game ID Tags
- Knife

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Caribou Gear Camp Meat Bag—This small 12"x21" game bag is made to cleanly transport meat back to camp or isolate the tenderloins and backstraps for your evening meal. The package contains a plastic bag and twist tie.



Hunters Tarp "Colorado"—For keeping meat clean and meat transport, and orange for safety when transporting meat and rack. If you must leave your game meat overnight, hang the tarp at two corners, allowing it to move in the breeze. This motion serves as a bear and coyote deterrent.

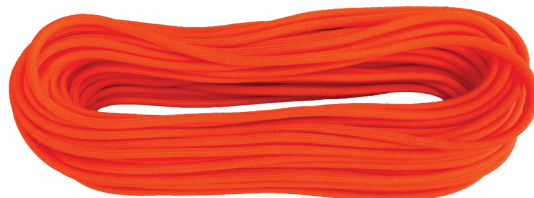
A Writing Pen—For filling out your tag will also serve as your electrical tape dispenser.

Small Knife Sharpener - Sharpen your knife periodically; don't lose your sharp edge. It takes more work to get it back.

Nitrile Gloves—We usually have at least six pairs. This, too, depends on what you're hunting and the length of time. On remote hunts, thoroughly washing your hands is not always possible. Nitrile gloves help keep your hands blood-free, keeping minor cuts from getting infected. Blood will excessively dry out your hands, causing them to split. Also used for isolating a severely cut finger, one five-finger glove will keep a cut finger dry for five days while your finger heals.

Small Cotton Hand Towel— For cleanup.

Cleaning Wipe Packets—The Klean Freak brand is individually packaged for convenience.



550 Paracord by Caribou Gear—A 7-strand high-quality cord that is strong and durable for outdoor use. 50' will do. 550 Paracord is great for making a shelter or strapping down your game meat while transporting and hanging quarters. For convenience, we also sell a pre-made lashing made of 550 Paracord.



ID Tags by Caribou Gear—With more hunters in your party, the ID Tags make it easy to identify your game bags and bag content. Worse yet, you donate the wrong meat bags because you need to identify the game bag content. It is also convenient for fish and game officers or when sending your meat to public refrigerated storage.
(continued on page 31)

Develop An Effective Game Plan For Scouting Antelope

By Darren Choate

Originally published at **GOHUNT**  GOHUNT.com

...Scouting for Antelope Success

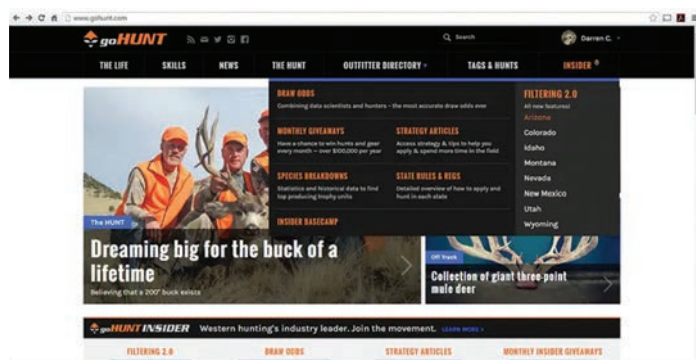
As hardcore hunters we know that scouting leads to success, but sometimes we are guilty of internalizing the scouting process. In other words, we fail to actually follow a process other than just "scouting." Don't beat yourself up-this is true of many of our daily activities, too. However, the most successful individuals often follow a process or set of habits that they have either created on their own or have adopted from another. You've probably seen a headline like "5 Daily Habits of Highly Successful People." That is what I am referring to. For hunters, it becomes a certain number of dedicated habits while scouting to become a more successful hunter. Believe me, there is not a one-size-fits-all plan and you probably already have a routine in the back of your head that you've been using.

To scout more efficiently, lay out a plan to prepare for your upcoming antelope hunt. This will allow you to externalize a process; call it what you want, I call it a game plan. To do that, here are a few thoughts to make the most of your scouting this summer and fall.

Expectations Needed before You Scout

First, get a realistic perspective of the unit you will be hunting and the quality of bucks that reside there. Knowing what to expect of the unit(s) you will be hunting will pay dividends while scouting and during the actual hunt. There is no reason to hold out for a 90" antelope if there aren't any to hold out for. Once you have realistic expectations, you can set your harvest goal(s). There are several tools at your disposal to get a better handle of the trophy-caliber of bucks in your hunt area.

Using Hunting and Scouting Research Tools



Images courtesy GOHUNT at GOHUNT.com

There is NO better place to start the scouting process than right here on GOHUNT, utilizing the Filtering 2.0 tools that are found on Insider. On the GOHUNT website under the INSIDER navigation section, simply click on the state that you are preparing to hunt. From there, you can select the unit(s) you have a tag for to begin your research. As you likely already know, you can

gain a quick perspective of the unit's features including terrain, vegetation and access as well as historical weather data and patterns.

Here, you will also see a general size or score of bucks found in the unit, and, more importantly, what the trophy potential is in the unit...

Shop Local for Hidden Information

To expand your research on trophy potential, collect information regarding past hunts by "shopping" local. On a scouting trip, make it a point to stop in at a local sporting goods, archery shop or gun store. Most stores have a "bragging board," with successful harvest photos.

Strike up a conversation with one of the store's employees to find out about trophy bucks taken over the last few years in the unit you will be hunting. Additionally, these people may know about others' unsuccessful hunts. Find out all that you can regarding these hunts, too. On top of it all, they may know about a buck or two that made it through the past year's hunts, which is nice to know.

Note: Don't expect to gain anyone's secret spots. Be mindful that these people live and hunt here too and are unlikely to give away many details.

Taxidermists Offer a Wealth of Hunting Information

Another stop you should consider is to a local taxidermy shop (or two). These professionals don't just hear the stories; they may have the actual trophies in their possession. Again, stop by and ask a few questions. With a little luck, you may get to put your hands on a trophy buck taken in the past year or two. If a taxidermist knows the exact location of an individual's harvest, they are still unlikely to part with that information, especially to an outsider. Again, don't expect to acquire this info.

Contacting Biologists

Last, and certainly not least, plan to contact a game biologist that works in the region that you will be hunting. In addition to some of the same information you've already collected, they are likely to have specific data related to herd conditions and population numbers.

Additionally, in most cases in the West, these professionals are employed by public agencies, and, therefore, should be able to be a little more open with the information that they can provide.

Keep in contact with these biologists leading up to the hunt so you stay current on any last minute information that might be crucial to the scouting process and/or hunt...

After performing a little online research of your own and having talked to several knowledgeable people, you should have an idea of the type of buck you can expect to have a crack at. Set your goal(s), and move to the next step in the process.

(continued on page 36)

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Stephen Spurlock packing out a bull elk.
Photo courtesy GOHUNT at GOHUNT.com

The 30 Day Plan For A Successful Hunt

By Stephen Spurlock

Originally published at **GOHUNT**  GOHUNT.com

Each year I divide my hunt preparation into three major categories: shooting, conditioning and field-related skills (field judging, glassing, calling, etc.). Since nearly 1,500 miles separate me from my hunting area, I take a nonconventional approach to my pre-hunt prep.

Approaching the 30 days prior to your hunt with proper preparation will be critical to your success. Here are some tips on how to approach this critical preparation period.

Consistent Shooting

Now is the time that I like to refer to as “perfect practice.” Every arrow or squeeze of the rifle trigger counts. Every shot should be approached as if it is “the shot.” This means less quantity and more focus on quality. Incorporating realistic hunting scenarios into your practice is critical. In my experience, I very rarely get shots in a hunting situation that are on a level surface from the standing position or in situations where I am under no physical duress.

As frequently as possible, I try to get in long distance shooting.

For me, this means three to four practice sessions per week at distances greater than 60 yards if I’m preparing for an archery hunt or 400 yards if I’m preparing for a rifle hunt. I have also found that practicing at double your intended hunting distance is a great way to achieve accuracy. I hope I find myself within 30 to 60 yards of my quarry this fall. This is why during practice, I try to focus on shooting between 60 and 120 yards with my bow. I try to keep the volume to a minimum. I shoot no more than five arrow groups at 10-yard increments from 60 to 120 yards for a total of no more than 25 arrows shot. I also integrate simulated fatigue into my shooting practice to accurately replicate hunting situations. Jumping jacks, push-ups and burpees between shots will help prepare for the most realistic “hunting” shots.

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The biggest differences between eastern and western shooting are shot distance and angles. Most eastern hunters are used to taking downhill shots as they are very similar to shots taken out of a treestand. Make sure that you try different shot angles before you head out west! With such a different terrain, severe uphill or downhill shot angles are possibilities! While practice regimes will vary from one hunter to another, it is important to find a system that fits you. Do not forget to practice from different hunting positions since you never know when you will get the shot out in the backcountry.

Conditioning for Your Season

This is just as an important part of your hunt prep as shooting. I am not an expert in this field, but I highly recommend finding a gym or personal trainer that is. As far as adjusting your conditioning training for the 30 days leading up to hunt, I turned to Stuart Shaw at CoreBlend Training and Wellness. Stuart holds a Bachelors of Exercise Science and is a Doctoral candidate in Physical Therapy at Nova Southeastern University in Florida. Aside from his expertise, he is a nice guy and a pleasure to work with. Stuart designed a two-phase program to help me with my pre-hunt conditioning. In phase one, we focused on building strength using primarily high weight and low reps to increase overall strength. In the section below, Stuart describes how he structured phase two of the program.

Tips from Stu When It Comes to Fitness

Conditioning

As you approach the 30-day mark before a hunt, I recommend that you change up your style of training to a more steady state muscle endurance style workout. Switch gears from heavyweights with low reps to low weight with high reps.

By working with lower weight and higher reps, your body will increase its threshold for developing lactate, thus allowing you to work harder for longer periods of time. This adjustment will help you as you rise to the challenge of the hunt without fatigue, soreness, cramps and all things associated with exhaustion.

Emphasis on Recovery

With the decreased amount of heavy lifting in the last month, your body should be able to fully recover for the coming hunt. It is extremely important to allow your body to recover because nothing will make a hunt more miserable than having a nagging injury. The last few weeks before the hunt make sure that you spend 10 minutes before your workout and 10 minutes after your workout using a foam roll, to thoroughly, stretch and really dig into those tight trigger areas. The last few weeks are critical to work out any nagging pains in the shoulder, hips, knees and lower back.

Nutrition

Throughout this process, be sure to feed your body with the proper nutrients it needs to maintain adequate strength and energy. Make sure that you are getting adequate amounts of clean protein, carbohydrates, and fat. You can make dieting as complicated as you would like, but I find that keeping things simple is the most realistic way to go.

Remember to get in your greens, lean proteins (fish, chicken, wild game) as well as good fats. Fats are going to play an essential role in fueling your body during the hunt. An example of good fats would be nuts (almonds, cashews, peanuts). A good percentage for your daily consumption should be 30% fats, 45% carbohydrates, and 25% protein. This would allow your body to start storing some good fat to be burned during the long cardio during a hunt. It is also important to add that since we are not doing a lot of heavy lifting during this prep to also decrease protein consumption.

Field Skills

Field judging, glassing, and calling may play a role in your hunt. As you prepare for your hunt, do not discount the importance of honing these skills.

Field Judging

For me, elk are the hardest animal to judge. I enter every elk hunt aware of the reality that at first, every bull I am going to look at is going to be huge (they are all bigger than whitetails after all). I relish this, but I want to be sure that I am prepared to field judge animals accurately...I rely on scoring guides found on Jay Scott's website <http://jayscottoutdoorspodcast.com> for my scoring practice. This is a great resource as bulls of all shapes and sizes are covered...

For whitetail hunters, judging mule deer will come much easier than field judging elk. To start out, make sure you are aware of how mule deer are scored. Before going on the hunt, try to have a mental image of what each size range of mule deer looks like.

This is best accomplished by looking at harvest pictures with posted scores. Be careful with this, as, like many fishermen, hunters may exaggerate scores slightly.

When it comes to field judging, try to enter your western hunts with a clear goal in mind. Adjust your goals based on the unit or area you are hunting and try to be realistic. For me, I always set my goals based on the principle that I want to pursue animals in the upper 10% of whatever is available in the unit.

Glassing

Glassing can be one the most important strategies for any hunt. Well before your upcoming hunt, you'll want to become very proficient with how to use your glass and your glassing techniques...

Calling

If you're hunting a season during the rut, you'll definitely want to practice well ahead of the season to learn the ins and out of calling strategies. Elk, for example, are extremely vocal animals. Learning the ins and outs of calling can help make your hunt more successful. In order to properly replicate elk sounds, I once again refer to resources on Jay Scott's website.

Closing Thoughts

For me, preparing for one big western hunt each year provides me with year-round activities. The preparation 30 days leading up to any hunt are critical. To be successful on the hunt, a combination of shooting skills, physical conditioning, glassing and field skills are required...

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Photo courtesy Caribou Gear at www.caribougear.com

Locating And Calling Elk On Warm, Early Season Hunts

By Ryan McSparran
Caribou Outdoor Equipment Co. www.caribougear.com

There's nothing in the world like hunting elk during the rut in September and early October. We look forward to it all year long. But as much as we love talking to elk, early season weather can be cruel. Snow is always a possibility, and we've experienced our fair share of it. But more often than not, early season elk hunts can be a battle with hot weather conditions.

The rut makes bulls vulnerable. But when the temperatures are warm, locating elk is no easy task.

Here are three tactics you might consider for early season elk hunting:

1. Rely on Glassing

Hot weather is even less comfortable for the elk than it is for you. Hiking around in the bright sun while sweating isn't what you want to be doing – so don't expect elk to do the same. Get to a glassing point well before daylight. Pick a spot where the rising sun will be at your back. Get there early! You want to be set up and ready to glass as soon as it's light enough to see.

These early morning hours are the critical times to spot elk when they are on their feet. You might only see them for a few minutes before they disappear into the timber. But that's all you need – once you've located a herd, you can make a game plan to close the distance.

On any elk hunt, locating elk is a large part of the battle. If you can spot elk in the morning, try and watch where they bed. If you have a good idea of where they bedded, get as close as you can before you set up to call. Otherwise, follow the same routine in the evenings. If you can spot elk just before dark, that gives you a good idea of where you need to be in the morning.

2. Find the Cool Zones

Cool air tends to settle in deep ravines and along creek bottoms. Additionally, the north sides of mountains offer shady, cool relief from the midday sun.

As the temperature rises, elk will drop into these thick drainages to find shade and cold water sources.

If you didn't locate elk with your eyes in the morning, don't go back to camp for the afternoon. You can still find them. With afternoon thermals coming uphill, it helps to be above the elk. Walk ridges above these creek bottoms or north-facing slopes and use location bugles to try and locate elk in these refuges.

If you get a response from a bull, make a game plan to close the distance. Pay close attention to the wind, lines of sight, and the fact that he may be surrounded by bedded cows.

3. Sit At A Wallow

If you find a well-used wallow or water hole, you may consider creating a makeshift blind, and sitting during the hot hours of the afternoon. If you're confident elk are in the area, this can be a great strategy. Even a large herd bull will often get up from his bed and leave his cows during the heat of the day to go wallow.

Set up close enough to the wallow that you're in range. Pay close attention to the wind. And as you conceal yourself, make sure you can draw your bow and that you have good shooting lanes. Once you're set up, cow calling and raking can be effective ways to draw in a curious elk.

Here are a few elk calling tips to keep in mind during the rut...

Pressured vs Unpressured Elk

The difference between pressured and unpressured elk is significant. Elk that see very few hunters are often more responsive to calls and the element of other callers working the same herds is not an issue. That doesn't mean pressured elk are not responsive to calls. But they are certainly more wary and adaptive to the calls of hunters.

Be extra considerate of the circumstances surrounding the hunt and look for other hunters and vehicles at trailheads to assess pressure. If you are not alone on the mountain, consider a more passive approach using glassing, cow calls and silent stalks rather than aggressive bugles. Running around bugling in high-pressured areas is a great way to call in other hunters.

Single Person Passive Approach

When you're hunting solo on public land with other hunters in the area, consider a passive approach. Drive around the area at night and throw out an occasional bugle as a locating methodology. Pressured elk still bugle and will do so heavily at night during the rut. After locating an active area, hike the morning and pay special attention to wind while moving slowly with intermittent cow calls. You know elk are in the area and this passive game is highly effective.

The Challenger Approach

Some bulls simply can't turn down a challenge from outside suitors. When bulls are working to build a harem, a challenger presents a risk to their breeding rights.

But in order for a challenge to be effective, the caller needs to be close – very close! Bugling from a distance may not get the bull fired up. Or he may just round up his cows and leave. However, if you can get extremely close and then announce your presence, there's a good chance you can make him mad.

Bugle aggressively and wait for the bull to return the call. After a round or two, cut off the bull's call. This will get him fired up. Be aggressive in your movements as well. Break sticks and branches to sound like a bull crashing through the forest. Ideally, the bull will move to you. But in some cases, making a move to close the distance is required.

Team Calling

Utilizing multiple callers delivers a major advantage in the field. It adds a realistic dynamic with two or more callers representing several bulls and cows. Using multiple callers to represent a group of cows is also a great approach. A greedy bull will view the calls as an opportunity to build a harem. Try this early in the season as they are just beginning to gather cows. A team approach also works well for vocal bulls that will not close the distance to the call. One caller can challenge and distract while the shooter closes the gap silently.

Wind and Approach Still Matter

Even when a bull is fired up, playing the wind and making a strategic approach remain essential. A bad breeze can send the bull running.

And a poor position can cause the bull to hang up out of range. Take your time and make a game plan before calling. Make sure the wind is right. And pick a setup location that requires the bull to come within range if he wants to see who is making the noise.

Recommended Elk Calls

The gear we carry here in the Caribou Gear Store are items that we personally use in the field. And that's true of our elk calls. We carry diaphragms and bugle tubes from Rocky Mountain Hunting Calls. These high quality elk calls offer great consistency and durability. Different diaphragms fit each person's mouth differently. If this is your first time, we recommend trying a few different ones before you decide on a favorite and stock up for the season.

A Note About Meat Care

Calling in a bull during the rut is about as exciting as it gets! But if you are successful this season, that's not even the hard part. Next, you'll be faced with the challenge of taking care of your wild game meat in warm, early season weather. After the rush of excitement wears off and you confirm the elk has expired, it's time to get to work. During September when the weather tends to be warm, it's imperative to get the hide off and get quarters into game bags as soon as possible. 3 things we always carry include game bags, citric acid spray, and a Hunter's Tarp.

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Asking The Right Questions To A Biologist

(continued from page 15)

They might say something like, "During archery season, expect to find them above 10,000' until snow hits the ground, then they always drop onto private ground." This information is super valuable to have beforehand so that when you e-scout and arrive to hunt, you are using your time wisely and not wasting it. This allows you to plan a hunt above 10,000' during your early season, but, also, know that if you get early weather, you need to look lower in elevation and near private land boundaries.

2) Where Is the Most Pressure At?

I always like to ask this question because most game wardens and other personnel will know exactly where through past hunting seasons the majority of hunters will be migrating to hunt at because they patrol these areas. When there are a lot of hunters congregating into a certain area that is usually signifying that there are animals there, but that doesn't mean that I will be hunting there. I use this information to find out where hunting pressure will be, which will dictate where the animals are going to be coming from. Then, I find the sanctuary basins they get pushed into by said pressure.

3) What Is Most of the Pressure like Week by Week?

I also like to ask what the pressure is like week by week because this will allow me to either hunt with the pressure by using it to my advantage or avoid the pressure and hunt a different week. They can usually tell you trends from what they have seen over the past years and what you can expect.

4) Weather Expectations

I always need to take into consideration what the typical weather is at the beginning of the season and at the end of the season. To determine this, I ask about the last few years during the time I am planning on hunting. Of course, this can change, but this knowledge will help me plan my gear and my hunt.

5) What Is Access Like?

Though GOHUNT Maps has plenty of road and trail information that is super valuable, no mapping service can tell you what roads are drivable with a truck, car or only with an ATV. I have been out in the mountains on a road only to find that it was so unmaintained that ATVs were not even able to maneuver up them. Look at roads and do not hesitate to ask them the condition of the road and if it is accessible with a car, ATV or only by foot.

6) Any Migration Corridors?

I always like to ask about migration corridors and understand as much about them as possible. There are units that I hunt that have well known migrations and other units that have no migrations. There are some tools on GOHUNT Maps that mark these migrations when the information is available, but a lot of states do not track or publicize this information.

7) Any Private Land Contacts?

I always find it worth it to ask if there are any private land contacts or owners who allow access. Most of the time they are not aware, but I have, in the past, obtained some information and felt like I had hit the jackpot; however, this is a rarity. A lot of this depends on how friendly your conversation is and how connected the person you are talking to is in the community. Don't be afraid to ask if there are trespass fees or landowners who open trails to cross private land. Any little access helps!

8) What Is Animal Quality Like?

I like to ask what type and quality of animal I should expect to harvest there. It is always important to ask this so you can set your expectations appropriately. The last thing you want to do is to pass on a 300" bull on the first day in a unit in the hopes of finding something bigger only to find out later that the bull was a rarity and you normally would not see a bull of that caliber. Understanding what the average harvested animal is and what you should expect is very important in getting the most out of your hunt.

9) Ask Them About Your Spots

Without going into the nitty-gritty of your exact spot, do not be afraid to ask them what they think of your top drainages. What you might expect to see in regards to the predator situation and the popularity. They might tell you that your unit is over-hunted or the population is lacking, which can save you days.

10) Ask Them If It Is Okay to Follow Up with More Questions

The last thing I like to do is thank them for their time and ask them if it is okay to follow up with them if I have more questions via phone or even email. Most of the time, you will find that if you were respectful and friendly the answer is almost always yes.

These questions are some of my 10 favorite generic questions for each new unit I hunt.

I often call a few different people in the area to find out if the information is aligned or if it differs.

Once you have these questions answered, it might be beneficial to do some research and write down 10 more questions. Then call back the same people and continue to gain this information.

Though boots-on-the-ground knowledge is difficult to obtain, it can be obtained if you talk to someone with that type of experience in that unit. Remember to be knowledgeable and understand that their time is valuable.



Photo credit brent_1 | depositphotos.com

Always take the information you receive with a grain of salt and make your own decision. Sometimes people are generic or tell the same information to everyone and this is the info I try to determine and disregard.

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8 Great Muzzleloader Deer Hunting Tips

By Mike Hanback Big Deer Blog www.bigdeerblog.com

The popularity of blackpowder hunting is making a comeback! Here are 8 things to remember when you go out to smoke a buck this fall.

- Pour a measured charge of your powder of choice down the bore of your .50-caliber rifle, or drop in 2 or even 3 50-grain Triple 7 pellets in modern rifle that will handle 150 grains, like my trusty 700 Ultimate Muzzleloader. Some rifles shoot best with 2 pellets (9100 grains), while others like 3 pellets (150 grains), so do some range testing.
- Insert your bullet of choice at the muzzle, and start it down the bore with a short starter. With your ramrod, seat the bullet firmly all the way down and on top of the powder, but don't tamp it or beat it hard. You just want a good, firm seat.
- Once fully loaded, leave the ramrod in the barrel and mark it with a Sharpie. Check the "fully loaded" reference mark each time you load to make sure you seat the proper amount of powder and a bullet. Consulting your Sharpie mark makes sure you'll never double load!
- Never prime, or cap, a loaded rifle until you are in the timber and ready to hunt. When using a tree stand, climb up, secure your harness, sit down and rope up your rifle (muzzle down).

Only then should you prime it. Always remove a primer or cap before roping your rifle down to the ground.

• With today's high-tech muzzleloading systems, after an uneventful day in the woods, I feel confident leaving a rifle loaded with powder and bullet (but no primer cap) for 2 or 3 days. If I don't shoot at a deer any longer than that, I'll unload the rifle by shooting it into a target or into the ground, clean the bore and reload with a fresh powder charge. I know people who leave their rifles loaded for a week or more or even a month before shooting and reloading. It generally works out, but I still recommend a fresh load every 2 or 3 days.

• In the hands of a good shooter, a scoped, .50-caliber in-line with 100 to 150 grains of powder is capable of dropping a whitetail out to 150-200 yards. But to me, even the most advanced muzzleloader is a relatively short-range arm. Try to hang stands or still-hunt where shots at bucks will be 120 yards or less, 50 to 75 yards is perfect.

• Always reload after shooting a buck, even if you see him lying motionless, and be ready for a quick follow-up shot if needed.

• After shooting a buck with a muzzleloader (by its design a relatively low-velocity weapon), sometimes you'll find only cut hair and little or no blood at the point of impact. I have had this play out dozens and dozens of times on my hunts! But never think you grazed or missed a deer! Follow a buck in the direction he fled. Seventy to 100 yards out on that line you're apt to pick up an ample blood trail that leads to your buck a few more yards up ahead.

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What's In Our Kill Kit

(continued from page 21)

Electrical Tape—A few feet of electrical tape will do. We usually carry a few feet of electrical tape. Take this and wrap it around your pen. You will need around 15" when attaching your tag to the antlers. Some States require that you keep your tag attached to the carcass or hide. (Read your State Hunting Regulations).

Trail Marker Fluorescent Tape—Trail tape used to mark your way to the kill site or a known trail out. If the area is heavily marked with trail tape from years past, use your pen and initial your tape. This is to make sure you're following the correct marker. Please remove your tape when leaving the area, and, if possible, pull all the other forgotten tape.

The above content will easily fit in the small Ditty Bag. A more extensive list of items can be housed in the medium or large Ditty Bag.

What's not in our kill kit but in our possession

- Game Bags complete set
- Game Bag Meat Spray
- Knife(s)
- Pack Saw (small)
- Razor knife



Caribou Gear Game Bags—You can build your own custom set of game bags and house all the game bags necessary in your ditty bag kill kit. Or purchase our readymade complete game bags set for mule deer, elk, moose, high mountain sheep & much more. We have the largest selection of game bags for whatever it is you hunt around the world.

Game Bag Meat Spray—The Caribou Gear game bag meat spray is an antimicrobial food-grade formula, it's made to kill bacteria and retard bacteria growth. Use after rinsing any intestinal fluids from game meat, and if hanging game meat for any length of time, spray the meat at the last hour of daylight and allow it to breathe overnight. Be sure to re-bag before sun up.

A good 5-inch fixed-blade knife is for all big game. A folding knife can accidentally close and is much harder to clean. We include the fixed-blade and moose knife set below for convenience and ease of use

A good knife(s) set / for moose—We carry a two-blade knife set by Knives of Alaska. The set contains a stiff blade and a flexible deboning blade. The stiff blade is perfect for cutting thick meat parts, and the flexible blade is ideal for cutting around those tight inner joints and deboning. Yes, it's a fishing knife set, but it serves very well for cutting meat.

Saw—Packable wood and bone saw blade

Razor Knife—We carry one but hardly ever use it when gutting meat. Simply because it's too sharp, it is difficult to glide the knife between the membrane of the hide or cut around the bone. Using this type of knife can be dangerous when feeling and cutting inside the rib cage cavity. Go slow and be methodical when using such a knife. A small razor knife is excellent for delicate capping!

THE ABOVE is what you will find in our kill kit. We judge the quality, sensible use, and need of everything we do or carry. It's just like when you hunt. You assess the line of sight to the actual path of least resistance.

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Preparing For The Moment Of Truth

(continued from page 5)

Practice like You're Hunting

This one seems so obvious, but oftentimes gets overlooked by many. Shooting in your backyard in your basketball shorts and a t-shirt is a lot different than being in the mountain while wearing a sweatshirt, gloves and a pack. Load up your hunting gear and try taking some shots. Did anything change or feel drastically different? This is something that can make a huge impact when the moment of truth arises and can easily be done in 10 minutes of shooting at the range.

Conclusion

There are so many factors working against us in the mountains and being prepared for as much of it as possible will only lead to more frequent successes. No matter how much you practice there will be factors that will simply not be overcome from time to time—that's just part of bowhunting. Still, a shot that goes errant due to an element in our control can be haunting and is generally preventable. Perfect shots are created from perfect practice, not the number of arrows fired.

Learn more or join at GOHUNT.com.



Photo courtesy Trail Kreitzer and GOHUNT at GOHUNT.com

Tips For Executing The Perfect Shot With A Bow On A Bull Elk

By Trail Kreitzer

Originally published at **GOHUNT**  GOHUNT.com

To be completely honest, the amount of effort required to get within range of a bull elk with your bow in hand is significant.

In my experience, opportunities to get within range of a bull elk are so rare, and the sinking feeling of a failed shot—or even worse, a wounded bull—is devastating. So my answer to that...just don't miss! Here's how I tackle that challenge.

Equipment and a well-tuned bow

I make sure that my bow is well-tuned, and that I know my equipment inside and out. I know that my pins are sighted in. I know that my sight's second and third axis are dead-nuts dialed and level. I know that my arrows are straight and that they spin true with broadheads.

Practice with all your gear. For example, pulling, ranging, and putting your rangefinder back into the case seems easy—and it is—but make sure you've done it enough that it's a seamless act with no noise, no interference with clothes or anything else.

Most importantly, I know where my broadheads are going to hit because I have shot every arrow with a broadhead out to my effective range. Nothing builds confidence like knowing your equipment on a very detailed level.

Knowing the range

If you do not know the range, it's easy to misjudge the distance to a screaming bull elk and whiff on a shot. Bull elk are big animals and they cover ground rapidly.



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Several times I have had a bull come in and go from 60 yards to 20 yards and back out to 45 before offering the window for a shot. That scenario is a nightmare to process when you are rattled already, but there are things you can do to handle it better.

One, always carry a rangefinder and use it to pre-range rocks, trees, a wallow or anything to give yourself some reference beforehand. Once that bull walks in, it's often very difficult to actually get a range on the bull itself, which makes pre-ranging critical.

Two, practice, practice, practice...as you are practicing and hunting, estimate the distance to an object and then truth it with your rangefinder. Over time, you will get much more comfortable and accurate with estimating range.

Three, remove as much of the guesswork from your setup as you can. For that reason alone, I hunt elk with a five-pin sight. I do not have to wonder where I should hold a single pin on an approaching bull and hope it's close. I'm also an advocate of shooting an arrow configuration/weight to offer ample penetration that is still in the 280 to 290 FPS range to provide some cushion if I misjudge the distance by a few yards.

Picking a shot on a bull elk

Picking a specific spot on a bull elk to aim at is key, but I would also state that picking your window to take a shot is equally important. I see a lot of shots taken on bulls that are walking or shots that are taken through trees or vegetation or even at distances that might tempt us beyond our comfort zone. The point is that you almost always have more time than you think. Don't rush it, and exercise some patience. If a bull is coming in and he's unaware of your presence, it's worth passing up a decent shot at 60 yards for a sure shot at 30. Also, anticipate the windows of opportunity. As he is approaching, anticipate his direction and pick out those moments where you will have cover to draw and use a cow call to stop him precisely in that perfect shooting lane. The more you can control that moment, the more successful you will be. We have all heard the saying, "take the first good shot." I'd alter that a bit and suggest that you take the first sure shot. Pick your spots, then pick a spot.

Nerves... and bugling bull fever

I've been bowhunting elk for 20 years, and even still, I get "the fever." I have been able to find success, though, by adhering to a series of steps.


It goes without saying, but the more you practice, the more muscle memory and mental confidence you develop. In order to execute under pressure, it has to be almost subconscious, and you only get that from repetition. So, shoot every single day. Even if you haven't been, start now!

The second tip to keeping it together is to build a shot sequence and build a habit of going through it every single shot. It's essentially a mental checklist that I go through: stance, grip, bow arm up/draw smoothly, anchor points (nose, corner of my lip, hand to jaw bone), relaxed bow hand, peep alignment, bubble level, build rhomboid tension, stare at the spot, stare at the spot. A shot sequence will build the habitat of checking off all the steps to make an accurate shot.

Visualization is key

I have a boy who loves basketball, and when he is at the foul line, you will regularly hear me in the stands reminding him to "see it." What I mean by that is that I am a firm believer in visualization, and there is science to back up the fact that visualizing the full sequence and outcome is beneficial in executing. I also find that I feel less anxiety when I visualize the shot and outcome. When you find yourself in tight quarters with an 800 lb screaming bull elk, "see it" before you even drawback.

Hopefully, something here will help you capitalize this September. I can't wait for my favorite 10 days of the year. They're approaching and I'll be ready... will you?



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Procrastinator Alert: Start Your Shooting Practice Now

By Ryan McSparran

Kawdy Outfitters www.kawdyoutfitters.com

To all the procrastinators out there who've been busy planning summer vacations, graduations and other distractions...hunting season is around the corner! If you've taken a break from shooting your rifle or bow this winter, it's time to get back out there! The clock is ticking down to the start of the hunting seasons. Now is the time to get in some serious shooting practice.

Assuming you're already sighted in, here are a few things that you should be working on before your next big hunt:

Step Away From the Bench

With your rifle or bow sighted in, it's time to get a little more realistic shooting practice. Be sure you practice shooting from different positions and angles. Try sitting and kneeling. If you plan to use a bipod, shooting sticks, or other aids in the field, practice with those now. Make sure you can operate them quickly and effortlessly.

Most hunting guides can tell stories of missed opportunities because the hunter was messing around with a new bipod or shooting rest that they weren't totally familiar with. Don't let it happen to you. No matter what type of support you choose, practice, practice, practice.



Elevate Your Heart Rate

Finally, get in some practice with an elevated heart rate. When it comes time to take that ultimate shot, you may have climbed a steep ridge or you may be experiencing a serious case of bull fever.

Do pushups or run a quick sprint. Then pick up your weapon and steady yourself for the shot.

You've been planning this trip for a long time and you want to make that shot count. Whatever you do, don't wait until the week before your trip and take a few shots from a bench rest. Get out there and get some real practice before your hunt!

Learn more about our hunts at:
www.kawdyoutfitters.com.



Photos credit Kawdy Outfitters at www.kawdyoutfitters.com

Put On Your Gear

You won't be hunting in a t-shirt. Don't just practice in one either. Put on that jacket, rain gear, and any other clothing you'll be wearing during the hunt. Make sure that you are comfortable shooting in all your layers.

The same goes for your binocular harness, daypack, and anything else you plan to use on the hunt. Do you have a rifle sling on your backpack that you plan to use? Practice taking your rifle on and off until it's second-nature.



Develop An Effective Game Plan For Scouting Antelope

(continued from page 22)

Divide and Conquer



I find it helpful to put in some computer work prior to spending time in the field. To initiate that step, I prefer to sub-divide the unit(s) I will be hunting to make scouting more manageable. To do this, I take full advantage of GOHUNT's Filtering tools and mapping features...

Using the INSIDER Google Maps imagery, you can also catalog points of interest like good glassing points, water sources, access roads, and many other resources. Once you have a few manageable hunt areas and some points of interest loading into your GPS, it's time to put in some "boot time."

Get in the Field

This is the no-brainer step, but I'm sure you will have time constraints. It's best to start now and make several trips to the unit you have a tag with at least one trip to each of the subunits you created earlier, if possible. If you can't spend several days in the field leading up to your hunt, try to take advantage of a couple options.

One Scouting Idea

Plan a short vacation with your family. For example, Arizona's Unit 7 is within an hour's drive of Grand Canyon National Park. Plan some quality time with the family, but also plan time to get in the field at least a few times. Get up early, while everyone else is still sleeping in order to get a few hours of fieldwork in or instead of taking the paved road, take a "shortcut" through a county or forest road to your vacation destination.

Stop a few times to check out the area; midday stops are ideal to check potential water sources for tracks and antelope sightings during the day are far more common than other big game species. Worst case, leave a day or two early for your hunt to scout or take enough time off for your hunt to "scout" the first couple of days during the hunt.

That said, scouting should be more than driving through your hunt area and/or checking for tracks. With the goal of finding a few trophy-caliber bucks to hunt, at a minimum, I suggest covering the following while in the field.

Glass More — Walk Less

In this case, get in some "seat time." There is nothing more valuable than sitting behind a quality pair of optics attached to a tripod overlooking antelope habitat. And, for antelope, you can do this almost any time of the day. Don't just look for animals; hone in on their movements with the goal of discerning some pattern. Perhaps there's a specific time and place they are moving to water, a particular location they cross a fence line, or a travel routine from one location to another. If trouble arises, it may provide a hint about the escape route used by a particular group of animals or within a particular terrain/topography, too.

Note: You can even spook animals to see where they go to escape danger, if it's not too close to your hunt to have a negative impact. Keep a journal with notes about your observations so that it is easier to recall and utilize them later.

Waiting Bucks Out at Water Sources

Sitting over water is a viable option for all big game species, but this is especially true for antelope hunting. Antelope may visit a water source any time during the day, and maybe even multiple times during a single day. When the hunt rolls around, sitting water will be an option for those that are patient enough to make it one. I am not suggesting that you sit for a day over water while scouting, but, rather, pay close attention to water sources while scouting. While glassing, pay attention to water sources in the area and try to pinpoint the water sources that antelope are using. Remember to note when they are using the water sources, too. If needed, move to a new vantage point to close the distance to get a better look at bucks using these heavily-used water sources. If you find a water that you plan to sit come season, make sure you find time to place your ground blind well before the season begins so that animals are used to it.

Increase Your Scouting Efforts with Trail Cameras

Most hunters associate trail cameras with whitetail deer hunting; however, trail cameras work well for all big game species, including antelope. Of course, there are a few differences in the wide open spaces where antelope are found. Fence lines are a great place to put a trail camera and, in many cases, may be the only solid option to mount for a camera. Fence lines are an effective means to find locations where antelope cross from one pasture to another.

Hint: If there is a man made crossing — PVC pipe on the bottom wire — start here. Water is also another spot to put a camera. Again, you may have to get creative to install a trail camera in the openness of antelope country. Try a nearby T-post on a fence or encase the camera in a pile of rocks. As always, place the camera facing north or south to limit the effect of the sun's positioning for the most effective picture capture.

Assemble Your Hunt Plan

Now that you have a handle on what can be expected of the unit and you have made some observations on your own, hopefully you have found a few bucks to hunt during the season. (continued on page 38)



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Develop An Effective Game Plan For Scouting Antelope

(continued from page 36)

If possible, list out three to five areas with a buck or two to hunt on any given day. Having a few options will make it easier to have a quality hunt, especially if you end up spooking a specific buck one day or another hunter is hunting the same location you were going to try out.

Based upon your observations, you should also be able to identify the best locations to hunt during a specific time of day. Check your journal, look for any patterns in location and direction of travel that you may have observed. List out potential vantage points to glass from during different times of the day. Remember that it's always best to have the sun at your back.

If everything goes well, you should be able to make three to five stalks per day during the hunt — perhaps even more! Alternatively, if you have the patience, you can make a plan to sit water during a break for lunch, a morning, or an afternoon. It's all based upon your observations in order to find the best times to be at specific locations.

Remember to continue to take notes during the hunt so you can continually fine tune your game plan.



Antelope hunting success. Photo credit Jesse Parker

Final Thoughts

Take advantage of your antelope tag this year by scouting more efficiently. You don't have to follow the steps that I follow precisely to be a successful antelope hunter. Rather, you should develop a process that fits your own comfort zone and hunting/scouting style. Try to externalize your process by writing down the steps you follow while scouting. Spend as much time in the field prior to the hunt as possible and, above all else, enjoy the hunt.

8 Packing Tips For High Country Mule Deer & Early Archery Elk

(continued from page 7)

Our High Country series comes in three sizes. This includes the Muley, designed for mule deer and similar sized game, and the Wapiti for elk. Each pack includes four long quarter bags and one meat parts bag for backstraps and other loose meat...



7. Consider A Satellite Communicator

When you're planning a hunt in remote and rugged country, you shouldn't rely on your cell phone. You might sometimes get a signal on random mountaintops here in Colorado, but don't count on it. It's a great idea to carry a Garmin inReach or other satellite communicator. In addition to saving your life in case of injury, it's nice being able to text and update your friends and family back home.

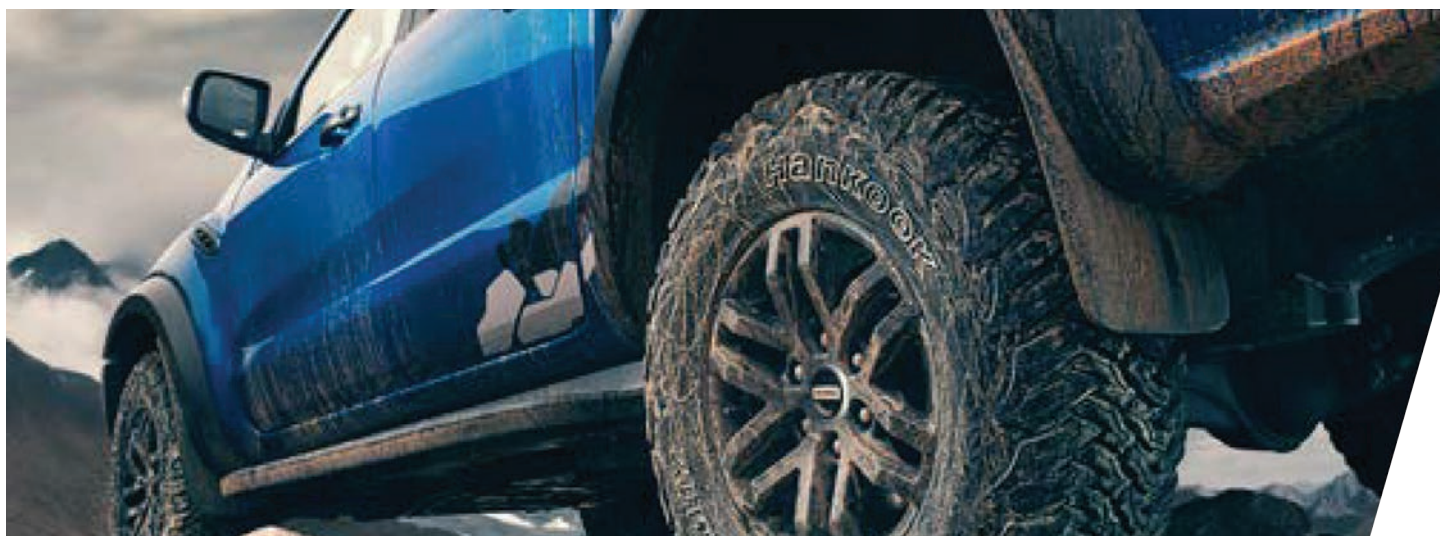
The Garmin inReach pairs with an app on your smartphone, allowing you to text from your phone, without using the clumsy interface on the device itself. When your inReach is activated, you'll pay a monthly fee. When you don't need it during the off-season, you can simply deactivate the device, and pause billing.

8. Gear Up For Early Season Hunts

As you prepare for an early season hunt in the alpine or open tundra, check out the rest of our gear in the Caribou Gear Store. The products we carry are the same items we personally choose to carry in the field throughout years of testing.

If you have questions about these items, or any other gear questions, please don't hesitate to reach out. We'd love to help you gear up for your next high country hunting adventure!

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