

WESTERN HUNTING & FISHING NEWS

NOVEMBER 2025



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DAIWA's newest addition to the PROREX family, the 2025 PROREX MQ LT spinning reel, was created for anglers north of that line...

Why? Because the Northeast, Midwest, Pacific Northwest and mountain states, as well as the whole of Canada, have genuine cold water periods, but never had a series of spinning reels catering specifically to frigid conditions.

"There are design elements you can implement to make a reel perform better in temperatures below the 50-degree mark," said DAIWA Field Marketing Manager, Chris Martin.

"We went with lower gear ratios, to ease that resistance," said Martin. "When it's cold, that grease thickens, with lower gear ratios, it takes less effort to rotate the handle. Plus, the lower gear ratio better accommodates cold weather fishing techniques." (The 2000 size has a 5.1:1 gear ratio; 2500 size 6.2:1; and 3000 and 4000 size 5.2:1.)

For largemouth, smallmouth and spotted bass, cold water and weather demand slower, more meticulous techniques like dropshotting, wacky worming, slow hopping Ned rigs, and jigging with hair. Same goes for walleyes and perch, with anglers relying on a jig and minnow or soft plastics or slowly dragged bottom rig with a live minnow. All these techniques are better employed with a lower gear ratio.

DAIWA's new PROREX MQ LT sports numbers of other advanced DAIWA technologies as well, ones shared across the board with other premium spinning reels. Martin said AIRDRIVE® DESIGN is one of those difference makers. "The concept focuses on making our spinning reels lighter, exceptionally smooth, and highly responsive by DAIWA reimagining the front end of the reel." (More on AIRDRIVE DESIGN below.)

Martin went on to highlight PROREX MQ LT's refined drag system. "Our ATD (Advanced Tournament Drag) Type-L was developed for lighter lines where the drag payout needs to be especially smooth and methodical. It keeps you from pulling out or bending out finesse wire hooks when a fish runs."

Lastly, Martin spotlighted PROREX MQ LT's pioneering drive system. "We digitally designed TOUGH DIGIGEAR™ and use sophisticated aircraft grade aluminum gears," said Martin. "The shape, thickness, and tooth profile are like no other, delivering unmatched rotational movement, smoothness, and power, all while extending the life of the reel."

MSRP: \$219.99 TO \$229.99

ZAION® V MONOCOQUE BODY

DAIWA's advanced, proprietary, single component, high-density carbon fiber ZAION V MONOCOQUE (MQ) Body is extremely lightweight, rigid, durable, and corrosion resistant. By removing the traditional

screws used to attach sideplates, MQ maximizes internal space for larger diameter gears. These larger gears – DAIWA's TOUGH DIGIGEAR – yield improved power, torque, and leverage, while promoting the life of the reel.

ZAION AIRDRIVE® Rotor

The smart design lessens weight, provides even rotary balance and stress distribution, and reduces vibrations, all while maintaining strength. Delivers a more precisely balanced reel performance than competing brands and models.

AIRDRIVE® Bail

Innovative bail design features a hollow, tubular stainless steel bail that delivers maximum rigidity and strength with minimum weight. The smooth protrusion-free construction lets the line easily flow to the line roller for trouble free line control. (continued page 17)



2025 Fall Mack Days on Flathead Lake

Sponsored by the Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes

Cash and Prizes-bonus amounts, lottery prizes, tagged fish

More Entries per angler=Higher Payout for that angler

(1)-\$10,000 & (3) \$5,000 & (5) \$1000 + over (9,000) \$500-\$100 Tagged Lake Trout



Thursday-September 4th to Sunday-November 2nd

(Contest may end earlier if total harvest exceeds the payout limit-prior notice will be given)

Fish one day or several days-every fish gives you a chance to catch a tagged lake trout, receive bonus \$, and/or win in the lottery drawings!

Bonus \$ amounts (Mon-Sun) **increase as your total goes up**-bonus amounts and tagged fish amounts are estimated-anglers who enter 11 or more lake trout receive bonuses-examples: 11-30 lake trout entries- \$45, 31-50-\$88, 51-75-\$150, 76-100-\$205,205-225-\$518, 301-325-\$813 on up. No pooling of fish is allowed. Lake trout are to be entered the same day as caught. See bonus chart at www.mackdays.com

Friday- Sunday-competitive Mack Days-lottery prizes, tagged fish, and bonuses-ends Sat 11/1
Top ten angler prizes: Pick your best 18 days/26 possible-Friday-Sunday-11th place-20th based on totals. Check out pick up sites on the website or turn in at Blue Bay from 11 till ½ hr. before sunset

Monday-Thursday- 9:00 am to 5:00 pm deadline to turn in fish at Blue Bay – 4-\$50, 2-\$100, 4-\$250 lottery drawings plus bonus dollars -33 days-totaled with Fri-Sun totals at the end of the event

SUNDAY NOVEMBER 2nd –SEPARATE DAY ALL ENTRIES IN BY 3:00-only AT BLUE BAY
All prizes & lottery drawings will be done on Sunday morning 11/3 and posted for awards ceremony at 3:00. Cash Drawings for Sunday will be-\$400, \$350, \$300, \$200, \$150, \$100-Ladies-\$100, 70 & Over \$100. Largest lake trout under 30" \$100-1st \$75-2nd & \$50-3rd totals count for bonus awards
All it takes is one ticket (one for every lake trout under 30") to win a lottery drawing

Lottery drawings **\$2,000- \$400** all lottery drawings & prizes end Saturday 11/1

Top twenty angler prizes **\$950-\$200** totals

Top lady anglers **\$300, \$200, \$100**-by total fish entered

Smallest lake trout **\$250**-(2 prizes) Largest lake trout **\$500**

Youth anglers- (17-13) 1st- **\$200**, 2nd-\$150, 3rd-\$75 (12 & under)-1st-\$100, 2nd-\$75, 3rd-\$50

Weekend Prizes-4-\$100 & \$200 per weekend-9 weekends

Golden Angler (70 & older)-**\$300 & \$200, \$100**-determined by total fish entered

Bucket Days-3 days of single/team-heaviest 4-fish 9/19, 10/11, & 10/26

Fish the entire lake-Check in stations and times listed on mackdays.com (subject to change).

Check the rules, prizes, bonuses, check in sites in emails or send an email requesting information

Email entries to cindy.benson@cskt.org with name, mailing address, telephone #, m/f, and age.

Applications are free and available at:

Zimmers Tackle-Pablo

Walmart-Polson

Sportsman's Warehouse-Missoula

FWP-Missoula and Kalispell

Westland Seed-Ronan

Sportsman & Ski Haus-Kalispell

Bob Ward & Sons-Missoula

Snappys Sports Senter-Kalispell

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How Glassing Can Increase Your Success

By Steve Barker

Originally published at **GOHUNT**  GOHUNT.com

When it comes to hunting, I grew up on an old school method of thought, "The harder you work and the farther you hike, the better the results you will have." Although this method is not incorrect in certain areas of the country and times of the year, as I have gained more experience hunting using different methods I have found that this may not necessarily be the best option to increase success on my hunts.



Photos credit Steve Barker courtesy GOHUNT.com

Ten years ago, I was standing on the frozen ground of a Colorado ridge top in November looking through my binoculars trying to locate a mule deer buck. It was my first time hunting the aspen and sage covered slopes that blanket many of the units of the Centennial State. I was new to the game of glassing. I fought the conflicting thoughts that I was "just sitting there" looking for bucks when I could instead be out hiking around making something happen. But before long, I located a beautiful 4-point buck roughly a half mile away feeding on a bitter brush ridge. For an hour, I watched the buck with my spotting scope and admired him in his natural setting, thinking that it was too good to be true.

The next morning, after watching him until dark, a good friend, Garth, and I arrived on the same ridge I glassed from the night before. Sure enough the buck was not far from his position the night before. A plan was quickly formed and an hour later we were standing over an awesome Colorado mule deer. A year later, a nearly identical situation occurred for me and four of my friends. Slowly, but surely, this glassing game was starting to make sense and was quickly becoming my preferred method of hunting. Year after year, I've noticed an increased success in my hunts thanks to glassing.

Glassing is relatively simple but there are some methods to use that may increase your success in locating game whether you are scouting or hunting. Whether glassing for sheep, mule deer or elk in a high mountain basin or in search of an antelope in an arid sage covered flat, hopefully some of these methods will assist you in locating more game.

Preparing to Glass before Your Hunt

There are many tools available to help with glassing before you even leave your home. You can use topographic maps, talk with hunters that previously hunted the unit or biologists from the area and utilize computer animated tools on GOHUNT's Insider. Google Earth has changed the scouting game and proper use of the software can also change the way you hunt and glass. Hours spent on the ground searching for miles for that perfect glassing spot can now be accomplished from the comforts of your own home.

All of my hunting partners and I have spent hours scouring Google Earth for glassing areas and vantage points to locate game. We occasionally will take a screenshot or email an image of these areas to each other. This allows us to use them as a reference on our GPS or phone once we have reached our hunting area.

Using these tools not only saves you time, but also fatigue on your legs caused from searching the area for the perfect glassing spot. Look for areas animals may use to bed, feed, water or for areas that may be transitional routes from these types of locations. Gaining this knowledge at home is not only easy, but can also quickly become very addictive.

During most of the off season, I spend time on Google Earth looking over areas and units that I am interested in glassing and hunting.

Don't Leave Home Without It

You have probably heard it before, but getting the best optics you can afford can help you locate more game, especially in the early morning and late evening hours when light is at a minimum. There are many good optic companies out there so get the best you can afford and get to glassing...



A good quality tripod cannot be overlooked. Using a good tripod and fluid head combination will help when moving your glass and will keep you from getting a headache due to rapid or jittery movements...

Glassing with binoculars attached to a tripod is a great way to improve your glassing skills. Purchasing a binocular attachment for your tripod is relatively cheap and is one of the most important if not most underutilized tools used for glassing.

(continued page 36)



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Photos credit Brady Miller courtesy GOHUNT.com

Selecting The Right Late-Season Stove For Your Tipi Shelter

By Brady Miller

Originally published at **GOHUNT**  GOHUNT.com

Late season hunts are finally here! Recently, I returned from a cold, snowy, and downright tough hunt in the mountains of Wyoming. One piece of gear that continues to shine on a hunt like this is a quality lightweight wood-burning stove.

Some might say that a stove is a luxury rather than a necessity, but having a stove on a late-season hunt like this is a gamechanger! You could have the correct sleeping bag for the job, but when you're on a long hunt in the snow and below-freezing temperatures, the benefits of a stove greatly make a difference, and the extra weight is worth carrying. Do you need heat every morning or night? Maybe or maybe not—that depends on you, but I will say, once you use one, you'll be glad you have one.

What Size Stove Should You Get?



When it comes to warmth, it should go without saying that the bigger the fire, the warmer the fire. The same can be said for the size stove used in a tipi shelter when the temperatures drop. However, another consideration should be the burn time and amount of wood you can keep in a stove.

My first late season hunt in a tipi shelter was on a 2nd season Colorado mule deer hunt using a Seek Outside Lil' Bug Out. I loved the shelter! It was very lightweight and perfect for just me or for two when we were looking to save a little weight.

At the time, I purchased a medium titanium stove made by Seek Outside (I'm an ounce counter after all, so saving some weight intrigued me) for this shelter. Yet, throughout this hunt, I really wished I went for a bigger stove! In my opinion, the lightweight medium stove would be perfect for the September hunter looking to dry their clothes off from a rainy hunt, but late-season hunts call for a different program. So, after this hunt, I went back into research mode...

Factors behind My Switch to a Bigger Stove Size



On that October hunt, I packed in a foldable hand saw, but I preferred to break sticks with my feet. Breaking sticks with your feet is a great way to get wood fast, but the sticks that we broke ended up being a little too long for the medium stove, so I had to use a saw more than I would have liked (even though I was warming myself twice). Note: a great way to break thicker sticks is to set up a little stick-breaking station. To do this, just take two bigger sticks at least 2" in diameter and place them 12" apart. Then place your wood on that and stomp on it with your foot. Most sticks should then break around the perfect size for the stove you are using.

Back to the part about wanting a bigger stove. The great part about a larger stove is the bigger the stove, the bigger the wood you can use. Also, the bigger stove generally has a larger opening that enables you to place oddly shaped wood in the stove. The large wood also helped in providing a longer burn time. I haven't really calculated burn times because a lot of factors, such as the type of wood and the size of the wood can impact burn times, but I feel I can easily get 1.5 to 1.75 hours with a good coal base, the right wood and the dampeners set correctly.

Keep in mind that even after most of the wood has burned up, the coals in the bottom are still putting out a small amount of heat and they are great for getting a fire going again in the middle of the night. Keeping your stove dampened correctly will allow the wood to burn longer.

In my opinion, the weight difference is so minimal between a medium or large stove, which is why I now run a large Seek Outside stove. I've used the large stove in a Cimarron and Redcliff with phenomenal results! On our recent Wyoming trip, we were able to test out the 8 person tipi to give us a little more room for gear and a larger wood pile due to the cold temperatures and snow we were expecting. In doing so, I upgraded

to the SXL Titanium Wood Stove. I think I'll continue to use this stove on all late season hunts and just swap out the stove pipe depending on which tipi I run.

Most tipi shelters are made with some sort of silnylon material like 30 denier and are a lot different than canvas wall tent shelters so they do lose heat when it's really cold and the wind is blowing.

This is why I feel you shouldn't assume that, because you have a wood-burning stove, that you can get by with a 50-degree sleeping bag. Stoves will make a tipi hot, but to keep it at that level, you'll have to wake up constantly to keep it stoked. So don't skimp on sleeping gear even with a stove.

Some Tips

If you want to have some heat in the shelter while sleeping, first, have the stove rolling hot to get a good coal base. Then when getting ready for bed, load the stove full of wood and then turn down the dampener to let the wood slowly smolder.

Getting a good burn is all about controlling the airflow. If you have the vents open and the wood is in flames, it will get very hot...but will also burn the wood faster. So, at night, I like to turn it back a little so it gives off a slower burn and the heat will last longer.

In Summary

A stove might be a complete luxury on a September backpack hunt, but then it starts to tip the scales it's

needed in early October and downright essential in November.

Keep in mind that using a stove will add a little work at camp each night. You'll need to camp in a spot with good wood and take time to collect and cut/break the wood.

Maybe I'm just getting older, but it sure is nice to wake up 30 minutes earlier on a cold hunt and get the stove roaring hot when getting my gear ready in the morning. Also, it's great to not have to instantly jump in my sleeping bag at night. I can lay on my bag, read a book, joke around with friends and enjoy the evening a lot more.

Another great benefit to a flat-topped wood burning stove is melting snow for water, heating up a cup of ramen noodles or crisping a tortilla.

I feel that if you don't have a stove on late-season hunts, you might be beaten down at night mentally after a hard day of hunting and hunt less effective the next day. A stove has the ability to not only dry out clothing, boots and other gear items, but it warms the body and the mind, keeping you ready for the rest of your grueling hunt.

In the end, it is up to you to determine if a stove is worth it to you and what size and options you prefer. But I know one thing... a stove is a gamechanger!



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Photos credit Bryan Campos courtesy GOHUNT.com

A Fire Starter Kit And Why It's Essential In The Mountains On Hunts Or Scouting Trips

By Bryan Campos

Originally published at **GOHUNT** GOHUNT.com

Have you ever found yourself in the mountains, craving a bit of extra warmth or a morale boost on a cold, slow day of hunting? Maybe you've faced an emergency where a fire was crucial to make it through the night? In any case, having a reliable fire starter kit is essential for late-season hunts.

The outdoors can be unpredictable, especially while hunting, which is why being prepared is key.

For years, I managed without needing to start a fire on the mountain, but over the last five years, I've found myself making a fire at least once a year during my late-season hunts — whether it's for a hot tent stove in the backcountry of Wyoming or deep in a freezing canyon in Colorado.

A good fire starter kit isn't just a luxury; it's a necessity.

What should you include in your fire starter kit?



Items needed to have a proper late-season fire starter kit for emergencies and survival.

I personally like to have more than one way to start a fire on the mountain. Essentially, I like to have a backup to my backup and then another backup. There was a hunter last year who got snowed in and stuck deep in the mountains at high elevation, and all three of his Bic lighters failed him, making it impossible to start a fire.

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Not being able to make a fire in that kind of situation can escalate the danger level and can decrease your odds of survival. Fortunately, he made it out alive with the help of his Garmin and a Search and Rescue team. The truth is that this can happen to any of us when we venture out in the mountains, which is why it's important to be prepared for anything, especially when it comes to your fire starter kit. Make sure you have different options as a fail safe to when it comes to starting a fire.

Starting with the basics, it's good to have some waterproof/windproof matches in your fire starting kit. They don't weigh much and they can work well if you have good kindling and structure to start a fire. The problem is that once you are out of matches, that's it, and sometimes they don't ignite upon strike. Another common component to most fire starter kits are lighters. They can be convenient and work great, but as stated above, they can also fail and it can cost you big time. They can fail in the wind, they can get crushed on a hunt, they can malfunction and, sometimes, the elevation can impact ignition as well; however, I do still like having at least one in my kit. I have carried a blast match, which is a flint-based fire starter. I have started fires with it, but mine is bulky and not real lightweight, so it doesn't always make it into the kit. I have a small flint and steel tool that is much smaller and lighter that I keep in my kit as my final back up. One comparable product that I haven't tried, but would like to, is the Pyro Putty MINI Mega Inferno Ferro Rod that is sold in the GOHUNT shop. Lastly, I always have some napkins or paper towels and dryer lint in a ziplock to use as dry kindling as part of my kit.

Modern fire starters

A more advanced option to consider adding to your kit is the Pyro Putty Elite Rechargeable Dual Arc Lighter. Lightweight at only 1.9 oz, it features dual arc technology that is windproof and will start a fire when you need it. It's rechargeable, and you can get 300 lights on it in one charge! I have personally used this on multiple hunts and, though I like having the bigger flame of a Bic lighter, the plasma lighters do work great. GOHUNT has multiple plasma lighters to choose from, including the Pyro Putty Elite Rechargeable Dual Arc Lighter, the Tricer Arc Lighter and the Dark Energy Plasma Lighter that even comes with a 120-lumen flashlight. If you haven't tried one, they don't weigh much and you'll have some peace of mind knowing you have another option to start a fire if needed. They also make great gifts to keep those around you prepared.

What about wet wood?

When it comes to wet conditions and wet wood, you need something that will burn longer than a match flame or some dryer lint. You need something more substantial. That's where Pyro Putty or the Survive Outdoors Longer Fire Lite Fuel Cubes come in. You can portion either of these products out as you need to start the fire however best you see fit or use it all at once. Both options provide a clean burn and provide that critical burn time to get past any dampness in your kindling and start spreading the fire to get you warm and dry.

The burn time that these two products are capable of is what really sets them apart from normal kindling, which can burn up too quickly. The burn time on the Fuel Cubes is eight minutes for the full cube or two to three minutes per a 1/8 of the cube. The Pyro Putty's burn time for a quarter sized ball is 15 minutes and six to 10 minutes for a nickel-sized ball. Both the Pyro Putty and the SOL Fuel Cubes are lightweight, they light up easily and work in wet conditions. It's a no-brainer to include one or both of these options in your fire starter kit.

Real life experiences with needing a fire starter on hunts

I've relied on Pyro Putty in the backcountry of Wyoming to ignite fires in our hot tent stove on several nights after cold, snowy days of hunting, and I've used it to start a fire during a snowy blizzard on the mountainside to keep us warm as we waited out the storm. Getting a fire started without it would have been quite a challenge, especially with the mix of wet wood we had on hand. We also tried petroleum-dipped cotton balls, which worked decently, but they were a bit messy and didn't burn as long or as efficiently as the Pyro Putty.

Last year, in Colorado, I shot a bull deep in a hole, and temperatures dropped when the sun went down. My friend's toes were hurting pretty bad from the cold and we needed to pause processing the animal and get a fire going. All the wood was wet from the previous day's snowstorm, but I had both my Pyro Putty and my fuel cubes, and we got it lit right up. Initially, there was a lot of smoke from the wet wood, but soon we had a decent size fire that gave us some relief from the bitter cold. My other friend was also able to locate us around 11:30 at night as he saw the primal caveman fire from the distance as we continued to work on the animal deep into the night.

Having a fire that night was a real lifesaver as the temperatures dropped to 9 degrees before we packed out the elk at 1:30 a.m...I imagine we would have needed to partially process the elk and hike out earlier that night without a fire. The pain from the cold was becoming unbearable, and we risked frostbite if we stayed out too long without a fire.

Even this year, when processing my son's first buck, our headlamps, and phones were dying on the mountain, and we still had a lot of deer to cut up, but I had my fire starter kit ready to go if the headlamps died. If needed, I would have made a fire just to have light to finish the job.

Closing thoughts

In closing, even if you don't think you'll need to make a fire, take a fire starter kit. You may need to signal for help, you or someone else may be injured, or you may have to spend the night on the mountain next to a warm fire. You may need to cook up some fresh backstrap or tenderloin before a long pack out.

Whatever you do, do it prepared.

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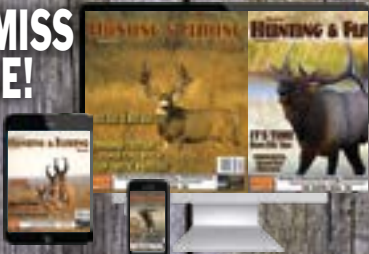
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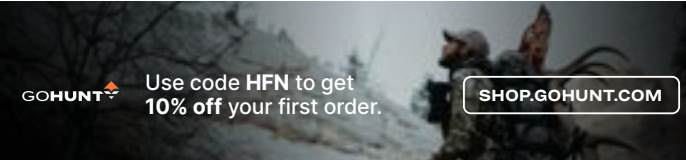


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Layering Tips: Late Season Hunts

By Ryan McSparran

Caribou Gear Outdoor Equipment Co. www.caribougear.com

Late-season hunts for both elk and mule deer can be very productive, often boasting higher success rates. But there's usually one big catch – the weather. Late season hunting is about staying in the field, staying comfortable and focused even when the weather is terrible. In this article, we'll offer a few of our tips to stay comfortable on a late season hunt.

...We've got a few ideas for late season layering. Of course it's important to remember that there's not one right answer. There are many ways to approach a layering system for cold weather...

In recent years, there has been an increase in the popularity of archery elk hunting. And for good reasons. Those early season hunts can be a lot of fun. The weather can be mild and the elk are bugling. There's a lot to love about hunting earlier in the year. But if we had to put our money on one hunt to fill the freezer each year, it would probably be the late-season hunts.

When I'm planning a late season hunt, I actually pray for cold weather. Cold weather means that animals will spend less time hiding in dark timber. Instead, they'll spend more time on their feet, in open areas, and on south-facing slopes where food and warmth are available. Plus, when the weather is bitterly cold, it may reduce pressure from other hunters. If you can be the one out there hunting from before daylight until after dark, you'll certainly be at an advantage.

With proper equipment, boots and a solid layering system, hunting in cold weather can actually be a lot of fun. Here's how we like to approach a layering system for those late season hunts...

What to Expect on a Late Season Hunt

When it comes to preparing a layering kit, we actually find these late season hunts a bit easier than the mid-season hunts. In large part, that's because it's more predictable.

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During October, you might experience 70-degree days or 10 below zero. It's hard to prepare for such variability. But for the most part, you can expect these late season hunts to be cold.

In November in the Colorado high country, we might get highs into the 50s. But anything above that would be unusual. Unless you're hunting at low elevations (some late season mule deer hunts could fall in to that category) it's probably wise to prepare for temperatures that are consistently below freezing.



Photo credit Ryan McSparran courtesy www.caribougear.com

The other thing to consider when preparing for a late-season hunt is that these hunts often require a lot of glassing – and that means stationary time. Whether you're hunting bachelor bull elk off by themselves, or rutting mule deer bucks cruising for does, this time of year usually requires a lot of effort behind the glass. When you're sitting still for long periods of time, you need clothing that can keep you warm.

Another consideration on any late season hunt is weight. The colder the weather, the heavier your pack gets. Be careful to focus on layering pieces that have a high warmth-to-weight ratio. Otherwise, your pack can quickly become very heavy. For example, high quality goose down (800-fill or better) is your best friend on late season hunts. Nothing is warmer for so little weight. But beyond just a down puffy jacket, focus on high-loft items that are warm for their weight.

Pack Thermal Base Layers

Staying comfortable in extreme conditions begins with quality base layers. Consider packing thermal weight merino wool long johns, top and bottoms. Merino wool is highly breathable, naturally odor resistant and retains its insulating properties even when wet. So even if you need to charge up a mountain and work up a sweat, wearing a single, thermal-weight base layer top is a great way to go.

Over my long underwear bottoms, I'll usually wear just a normal mid-season hunting pant. This is largely personal preference. But even on late season-hunts, I don't prefer insulated or soft-shell hunting pants. I'd rather be able to add and remove long johns to adjust, rather than be stuck with a pant that's always lined or insulated. If conditions are extremely cold, I'll add a pair of zip on/off puffy pants for stationary glassing sessions.

Pack Highly Insulating Mid-Layers

When packing for a late-season hunt, your mid layers are absolutely critical. As mentioned above, focusing on high-warmth items that are lightweight is critical. Absolutely no material, synthetic or otherwise, has a higher warmth-to-weight ratio than quality goose down.

We say "quality" goose down because not all down is created equal. Look at the fill number on any down product. A higher the number basically means that it takes fewer feathers to achieve the same amount of loft. For example, a down jacket made with 800-fill down is going to be much more compressible, easier to pack and usually lighter than a jacket made with 600-fill down.

On an average late-season hunt, I'll pack a heavily insulated puffy down jacket for glassing and periods of inactivity. This is also great for hanging out at camp at night. When temps are very cold, I will also bring a pair of puffy pants to wear while glassing. Over top of these I'll often wear my rain gear (we'll cover that below).

While down is great when you're stationary, it's no good when you need to hike any distance. With so much insulation and a nylon face fabric, down jackets are not breathable. Take a walk in a big down puffy and you'll be sweating almost immediately. With that in mind, I also pack a mid-layer piece that's better for periods of more strenuous activity. Usually this is a fleece hoody, or a soft shell jacket. I often prefer synthetic fleece because it's more breathable.

But breathability comes at the expense of not stopping wind. So if I know that conditions are going to be particularly windy or cold, a soft shell jacket can be a great option on those late season hunts.

Pack Heavy Duty, Breathable Rain Gear

Out of everything in your late season layering system, rain gear is going to be the most expensive by far...this is an absolutely critical piece of your kit. Investing in a set of quality, heavy duty, breathable rain gear will go a long way toward keeping you comfortable in extreme late season conditions. In fact, if I had to prioritize everything I wear in order of importance, rain gear would be at the top of the list along with my boots.

Even when there's no precipitation in the forecast, rain gear is an important part of any layering system. In addition to being waterproof, it is also your wind-blocking layer. When you're sitting on a windy ridge glassing, you may be shocked at what a difference it makes when you're wearing both a rain jacket and pants. Convective heat loss takes a very serious toll on your body. Stopping that wind will make an enormous difference.

Rain gear also adds a layer of protection over your puffy down jacket and pants. Down items are usually the most delicate pieces in your kit.

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Minimalist's Guide

A modest and strategic hunting plan to whet your waterfowl whistle.

By Noel Vick Traditions Media <https://traditionsmedia.com>
for Hardcore <https://www.hardcorewaterfowl.com>

Ask an ex-waterfowler why they bagged (pun intended) the sport, and a likely response is that it got to be too much work, especially for hunters longer in the tooth. With all the decoy upkeep and untangling, deployment and retrieval in the cold and dark, perpetual boat and trailer maintenance, and that two-bit lazy dog that hasn't seen a dummy in months – well, that last one is on you...dummy. Anyway, you can sort of understand why folks retire from waterfowling.

We of course know those fellas miss anxiously watching-their-watch while shapeless shadows buzz overhead in the blackness, not to mention that fireworks show aroma of a freshly emptied chamber.

But what if there was a simple way to stay in the game and still get that duck hunting high?

Let's call this minimalist approach, "duck hunting light". It necessitates a condensed and controllable mindset to both hunting strategy and the gear involved. With the proper plan, you can hunt small and successfully, even before or after work or school. And it begins with site selection.

Riverine Environments

Access is everything. In fact, statistics indicate that one of the top contributing factors to the decline in waterfowling is having limited or no access to property. And what about those few public places? They get pounded, while every landowner's door has been knocked into splinters, leaving you in the cold.

Moving water to the rescue. Open Google Maps and identify the rivers and streams inside 30-minutes of your home and outside city limits. Next, go to the satellite setting and take note of uninhabited stretches– the green and brown stuff without buildings.

Then, switch over to your onX Hunt smartphone app – a must for the minimalist hunter. onX offers the most accurate and current landownership data.

Between the mapping, researching, and your personal knowledge of public places, you should be able to select a river or stream with instant to reasonably swift access for blitzkrieg hunts. Oftentimes, you can hunt within minutes of your vehicle, be it parked on a gravel road, at a boat landing, or even a park nearby a huntible stretch of water.

Walkable banks are another upside of most riverine environments. You're more likely to have to break some brush than trudge through gumbo muck. And, if it is muddy, keep in mind the human-duck-retrieval factor. Can you get to a fallen bird? More on that in a minute...

Specific site selection is important, too – no different than refining a spot on bigger water. Points are profitable. Look for nice big river swings and bends that apex into a tangible point, even better if the river narrows off the tip. That's how you cut ducks off at the pass.

Concealment is typically a cinch, too. Nature provides its own build-a-blind workshop. A few hearty broken branches in an A-frame superstructure woven with whatever ground cover is available and you're golden. Combine the freshly constructed flora blind with a Hardcore camouflage uniform and you're virtually invisible.



Scouting

I don't, however, advise pulling up on a virgin hunting spot based solely on digital research. You need boots on the ground, too, and without a shotgun in hand. Walk the bank and find the perfect shooting position with the best access. Eyeball the fixings for building that blind, too. Heck, go ahead and assemble it in advance so it's ready to rock if you're gunning at sunrise.

Hunker down a while, too. Take it all in. Watch how birds zip through. Are they winging upstream or downstream? Low or high? Nearer your bank or across the water? It's all prized information to feed the mental computer. You might find locational adjustments are necessary to effectively intercept birds. Maybe it's a poor stretch in general and a wholesale recalculation is in order. Or, hopefully, it's perfect.

But perhaps the most important aspect of scouting is determining where the ducks are coming from and going. To that, it's advisable to scout a day or two before the hunt and sit the spot until sundown-ish. This provides the best intel for what direction the birds are overnighting or feeding as you track their flightpaths, whether they're burning along the surface or crisscrossing overhead. Then, before darkness, and with that directional data in mind, jump in the truck and see about finding that roost or field. Could be a nearby lake or marsh. Might even be a bay or wetland attached to the same river. All valuable information for selecting that cherry spot.

Think about your days scouting and hunting like LEGOS. Each outing produces another block of information about the area's waterfowl innerworkings, like seasonal flight path changes, rotation of available species, times of peak activity, etc.



Hardcore Rugged Series Full Body Mallard field decoys can be repurposed for hunting the shallows.

Ducks and Decoys

The minimalist mindset applies to decoys as well. A half dozen birds in a bag and you're good to go. The goal isn't trying to get a full-blown flock to lock wings and land, but rather influencing those scratch doubles and triples to swing in your direction or at least throttle back from light speed flight. Occasionally, however, a loner or pair will commit to land. And don't be surprised to see a single paddling upstream to join your fake family of fowl.

Besides positioning the half dozen dekes for attraction and optimal shooting, you must also consider depth. This is hip-boot and wader country. DO NOT float decoys deeper than you're willing to wade. Same goes for shooting. It doesn't do any good to fold a bird in unretrievable water. That's a demerit and should be counted toward your daily bag.

To that, consider the current. It's a waste to drop a bird downstream if you can't get to it. That's a five-minute major in the duck hunting penalty box.

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Current must also be considered when anchoring the decoys. Think 6-ounce or heavier if there's any degree of current. Keep the cords short, too, just enough to anchor the decoy and hold the cord at a 45-degree angle between the weight and bird. Extra line causes floaters to zig, zag, and ultimately collide and tangle with the other decoys.

Subjectively scatter the decoys per usual, giving it a loose lollygagging feel with generous space between singles and doubles. If the shoreline offers swaths of sand or gravel, drop a bird or two at water's edge, keels pressed into the substrate.

Match those select six decoys to the season and predominant species at hand. Think a half dozen mallard floaters for all-round applications; 6 teal or wood ducks for early season; and some divers for the end of season. And, with such a modest number of decoys necessitated for the minimalist approach, you can splurge a bit on quality.



Parting Words

This is be-on-your-toes hunting. Birds will seemingly materialize out of thin air, so keep your head on a swivel. The shootable range might be tight, too, yielding only seconds to unload. Throw in the fact that it's a short window time-wise, and you better be glued to that shotgun. Put the phone away. Eyes to the skies.

Riverine environments are especially important to northern waterfowlers that hunt till season's end. Likely, the ponds and smaller lakes are glazed over. Probably some shoreline ice on the big lakes, too. But those rivers? There'll still be water pumping somewhere. And any ducks procrastinating migration will be around.

33 Tips For Hunting The Deer Rut

By Mike Hanback Big Deer Blog www.bigdeerblog.com

When November 10 rolls around in most states, you can pretty much throw your best-laid schemes out the window. Who knows when and where a muscle-bound, gnarly-racked buck drunk on testosterone is apt to show up dogging a doe in daylight hours? Throw in the hunting pressure you'll likely have to deal with, and any grand big-buck plan you have will go south in a hurry.

Here's my theory. Instead of trying to implement a big, complex, tightly woven strategy, we ought to focus more on small, quick-strike tactics, like the 33 gems found here.

1) Don't tell Joe down at the gun shop where you just saw a 10-pointer running a doe. And for heaven's sake, don't let him see where you go to hunt that buck. Sneak into your secret spot well before daylight, and wait until 11:00 a.m. or so to hike out, when old Joe and his cronies have left the woods for work. Protect your honey hole and you might drag a big deer out of there year after year.

2) If you were a horny buck which sound would you run to? The clatter of antlers, a grunt, or the meeeaa, meeeaa, meeeaa of a doe ready to mate? You won't hear the estrus bleat very often (I've heard it only a handful of times) but it's worth a shot in the peak of the rut. Try a can call; simply turn the can upside down to fill the woods with sexy bleats.

3) One morning you hear loud, deep-pitched gurgles in a thicket. Man, get ready! A buck has cornered a doe, and he's talking to her with what I call "gargling grunts" (biologists call them tending grunts, but gargles sounder cooler). If the gal is not quite ready to stand and breed, she might soon bust out of the cover with the crazed boy on her heels. Shoot if you can.

4) In the rut I often hang out at the local watering hole. Not Molly's Irish Pub, but a small, secluded pond or slough. When does and bucks run and chase, they get thirsty. While hunting over water is an obvious tactic for a hot, dry rut, try it during cold weather as well. "A few years ago in mid-November it was cold and all the waterholes in my area were frozen tight," says whitetail expert Dan Perez. "One afternoon I busted a hole in a pond and climbed into my stand. Just before dark does and three good bucks trotted in for a sip."

5) Is that \$15 bottle of eau de doe you bought last October still steaming? If you didn't open it, and if you stored it in a cool, dark place over the summer, it should be okay. But you probably carried the lure in your daypack and used it a few times. Chances are light, air and heat broke down and ammoniated the urine. Toss it and buy a fresh bottle.



Photo courtesy Mike Hanback Big Deer Blog www.bigdeerblog.com

6) Only a stud with a big rack and a neck like Mike Tyson's can gouge, thrash or even snap in half trees four inches or larger in diameter. "Violent rubs" are the sign of not only a good buck, but also an aggressive buck, the kind you want to hunt. A brazen, dominant deer will prowl far and wide for does and with unbridled energy. Which means you have a pretty good chance of seeing him on his hooves in daylight hours.

7) "I once spotted a 140-class deer in a thicket, tending a doe and trying to run off two smaller bucks that wanted a piece of the action," says celebrity hunter Mark Drury. "I picked up my rattling horns and clicked them lightly three times. The buck charged within 12 steps of my tree stand and stomped his foot. He winded me, but I was at full draw and took him. You don't have to overdo it. Sometimes a few clicks or grunts are all it takes."

8) One November morning I smoked an 8-pointer with my muzzleloader. His hocks were black as clumps of coal, and he reeked so badly I choked as I gutted. Pop, pop, pop in the leaves. I looked up and saw a 10-pointer boring down on me, eyes wild and tines held low! The intruder marched to within 20 yards; I feared an attack and all I had was an unloaded rifle.

The buck stopped, studied the dead deer I crouched behind, detected no threat, and turned and walked away.

It was my coolest hunt ever and it taught me something. Dominant bucks are drawn to the musk of one another late in the pre-rut. Play off that and set a mix of buck urine and tarsal near your stand. And be on your toes. A 200-pound buck homing in on the smell of an intruder is one bad dude.

9) Follow a rub line to a spot where it cuts a doe trail. There you should find a cluster of thrashed saplings, as well as a fresh scrape or two. Play the wind, hang a perch and look for the buck working the intersection.

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8 Best Days To Hunt Deer In November

By Mike Hanback Big Deer Blog www.bigdeerblog.com

...Regardless of weather, moon or other environmental factors, the vast majority of does in the northern two-thirds of America will be bred between November 6 and Thanksgiving. That was true 10 years ago...will be true this season...will be true 20 years from now.

November 5-8

Historically over many years, November 5-8 have been some of the top days to shoot a giant buck. A random check of the record book reveals that in some years, 10 to 15 Boone and Crockett bucks have been killed on November 8 alone. That many monsters are apt to be killed November 5-8 this year, so get out there soon if you can!

Why so hot? Most bucks haven't bred a doe for a year. They wander around in a testosterone stupor, rubbing trees, checking scrapes, acting ornery, waiting on that first wave of does to pop into estrus any day now. These four days are some of the best of the year to see a giant on his feet in daylight. Take off work if you can!

Best weather: The cooler the air better, with a light to moderate wind out of the north or west. But since the bucks are out of their gourd and the sweet smell of does is so powerful, you are apt to see a big deer on his feet even if it's in the 70s.

...**Go-to tactics:** While scrape hunting is always iffy, these are good days to try it, especially if you have recent cam pictures of bucks hitting a really hot scrape in daylight. It's prime time for rattling, which works best in the mornings. Grunt at any buck you see, and he might turn into range. Hanging hot-doe wicks can't hurt, and will help cover your scent.

November 15-17

If you're off the week of November 9-14 hunt like mad because you might spot a big buck cruising or chasing anytime. It's the rut man, and it's all good! But these are the days of major "lockdown" in many places. Older bucks hook up with does and seem to go underground to have fun for 3 or 4 days. Shooter buck sightings decrease noticeably. If you hit it wrong, the woods can be like a tomb. I think you're better off to push your vacation back a few days if possible, until the 15th. Bucks that were locked down with does begin to free up and start roaming again. November 15 is when we start seeing a lot of bucks move here...

Keep in mind, though, pressure. This is a big hunting week in most areas. There will be a troop of bowhunters in the woods in some areas, and an army of gun hunters out in other places. Obviously, the less pressure in your spot the better your chances.

Best conditions: At risk of sounding like a broken record, you want it cool to cold. But don't let a heat wave stop you. One November in South Dakota I hit this rut phase just right.

(continued on page 24)



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Photo courtesy Oregon Dept. Of Fish & Wildlife <https://myodfw.com>

Fishery Emerging In Oregon Population Center

Jay Remy, ODFW <https://myodfw.com>

Something unique is happening in the most populated part of Oregon - the emergence of a new salmon fishery.

Coho in fishable numbers are relative newcomers to the upper Willamette and its tributaries with opportunities growing to pursue these silver rockets. And unlike coho below the Falls, these fish are not listed as Threatened.

Anglers may now get a two-rod endorsement to fish for them where coho retention is allowed above Willamette Falls all the way through the end of 2025. This marks a major expansion of opportunity and perhaps a doubling of the odds for some lucky salmon anglers.

Coho fishing is already allowed under permanent rule in several locations above Willamette falls (Tualatin R, Gales Creek, Yamhill, parts of the North Fork and South Fork Santiam). Last year, ODFW opened coho in more reaches of the upper Willamette Basin from October through the end of the year by temporary rule. While no in-season changes have been made this year, starting in 2026, there will be a permanent change to the regulations to allow coho fishing from October through the end of the year in more areas of the upper Willamette Basin including the mainstem above Hwy 20 bridge, the Coast and Middle Forks, and parts of the McKenzie River

It's too early to know the size of this year's return but as of early October it is coming in lower than last year. Then again, 2024 saw the largest run in recorded history above the falls. More than 53,000 adults and 7,000 jacks passed to the upper river.

The 2024 returns shattered the all-time record set the previous year when a whopping 40,000 silvers passed the falls. The 29,000 adults were most exciting to see in the short term with 11,000 jacks indicating future run strength that indeed occurred the following season.

Exponential growth is great, but fishery managers expected a leveling off at some point and it appears to be happening this year. As with all salmon runs, numbers will fluctuate from year to year.

The 2024 jack return of 7,000 was similar to the 2022 count, which was followed by 29,000 adults in 2023, so while things look pretty good for 2025 managers don't expect a repeat of the 2024 record.

Boat anglers should focus on the mainstem where tributaries enter. Fish tend to stack up at the tributary mouths until the first significant rains. A big downpour can nearly end the fishery by drawing the fish upstream to the spawning grounds. The best weather scenario would be intermittent showers bringing pulses of new fish in, without sending them to their final destination all at once.

Key tributaries to consider are the Molalla, Tualatin, Yamhill and Santiam. Biologists say the Santiam is the only tributary big enough for coho to enter without rain. Bank access on the Santiam is good at the I-5 rest stop between Salem and Albany.

Bank anglers stand a smaller chance of catching coho away from tributary mouths. However, it is possible to hook one just about anywhere fishing is allowed on the Willamette.

So far, nothing stands out as the go-to lure or method. Anglers use many types of lures in a variety of colors. Fly anglers use streamers in pink, purple, white and silver as well as egg patterns.

In 2023, coho were documented passing above Leaburg Dam on the McKenzie River for the first time ever. Coho runs set records elsewhere the same year including the Clackamas River (3.5 times the 10-year average or the modern-day record for early returning stock coho).

Coho populations did not historically occur above Willamette Falls and these coho are likely the result of colonizers from hatchery coho stocking efforts that ended in the 1990s as well as coho from other areas in the lower Willamette and Columbia rivers.

The upper Willamette was historically inaccessible to coho (unlike winter steelhead or spring Chinook) as the Falls, a natural waterfall, mostly prevented upstream migration of coho during summer and fall low flows. Even once the first fish ladder was built at the Falls in 1885, there was no apparent natural colonization by coho upstream.

Then the Oregon Fish Commission started hatchery releases in the first half of the 20th century and may have produced adult returns at the Willamette Falls fish ladder as early as the 1920s. Records indicate hatchery coho were in the Molalla and Tualatin rivers in the 1940s. A more systematic introduction program started in the 1950s with tens to hundreds of thousands of juvenile hatchery coho releases, peaking in 1965 with nearly 10 million j released. Yet coho abundance above the falls averaged less than 1,500 fish annually during the 1990s when coho runs were relatively low in coastal rivers and other native habitats. The last major hatchery coho releases in the basin occurred in the mid 1990s. Since then, ODFW's hatchery practices have changed as fishery managers worked on rebuilding listed spring Chinook and steelhead populations...

Cold Cranking Power

(continued from page 2)

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The AIRDRIVE SHAFT creates smooth, quiet rotation and provides anglers with enhanced torque and power. Additionally, both ends of the pinion gear are supported with bearings to transmit the crank power from the handle to the rotor with enhanced efficiency. By adding high quality collars to the main-shaft, rotational noise has been greatly reduced.

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Everything You Need To Know For Pheasant Hunting In The Panhandle This Season

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

Hunters can again enjoy another year of pheasant hunting at two wildlife management areas in the Panhandle

Whether you are a new hunter or a seasoned veteran, pheasant hunting opportunities this fall will not disappoint!

Introducing hunting to youth or adults who are new to the sport can be challenging. Pheasant hunts, however, are the perfect gateway—they are active, enjoyable and often result in plenty of shooting opportunities and success. Get out and give it a try!

Youth opportunities...

Youth must be accompanied by a licensed adult (18 years or older), but do not need an Upland Game Bird Permit. All hunters must wear hunter orange above the waist in areas where pheasants are stocked.

New hunters who have never had a license and have not completed hunter education can still participate through Idaho's Hunting Passport Program.



Rules to know about pheasant hunting in the Panhandle Region

There are two rule sets for hunting pheasants. One rule set applies to hunting pheasant outside of stocked areas, and the other rule set applies to hunting areas that are stocked by Idaho Fish and Game.

Stocked areas

- Bag limit is two cock pheasants/day
- Shooting hours are 10 a.m. PST to ½ hour after sunset
- Upland Game Bird Permit required

Non-stocked areas

- Bag limit is three cock pheasants/day
- Shooting hours are ½ hour before sunrise to ½ hour after sunset
- No Upland Game Bird Permit required

In the Panhandle, resident hunters 18 and older may hunt pheasants Oct. 11–Dec. 31. Nonresidents may begin on Oct. 16.

Important reminders:

- There is no season for hen pheasants.
- Wearing hunter orange and carrying an Idaho hunting license is required.
- Shooting from or across a roadway is unlawful.

For full rules, see pages 11-13 of the 2024-25 Idaho Upland Game, Turkey and Furbearer rules book at <https://idfg.idaho.gov/sites/default/files/seasons-rules-upland-game-2024-2025.pdf>.

When and where pheasant will be stocked in the Panhandle

Pheasant will be stocked at two locations in the Panhandle—Boundary-Smith Creek WMA: (<https://idfg.idaho.gov/visit/wma/boundary-smith-creek>) and the Lane Marsh parcel: (https://idfg.idaho.gov/sites/default/files/r1_strobellanemarsh.pdf) on Coeur d'Alene River WMA: (<https://idfg.idaho.gov/visit/wma/coeur-d-alene-river>).

Approximately 50 pheasants per week will be released at each WMA from the week of Sept. 28 through Nov. 30, with one final stocking during the week of Dec. 14. Each WMA will receive a total of 601 birds for the season.

Full stocking schedules are posted at: <https://idfg.idaho.gov/hunt/pheasant/stocking>.

Both WMAs have small, naturalized pheasant populations. Hunters may encounter hen pheasants, which are illegal to harvest.

Visit: <https://idfg.idaho.gov>.

Boundary-Smith Creek WMA

Located at the Idaho–British Columbia border, this 2,000-acre WMA sits in the scenic Kootenai River Valley and features wetland, forested and upland habitat.

- **Bear awareness:** Grizzly bears frequent the area. Carry bear spray.
- **Shooting restriction:** No shooting within 100 yards of WMA headquarters.
- **Youth hunt:** Birds will be released in fields north and south of Smith Creek and west of the headquarters.
- **Parking** is available nearby. Birds may disperse, especially later in the hunt.
- **Regular season:** Birds will be released across the WMA.

Maps: (https://idfg.idaho.gov/sites/default/files/wma-map-r1-boundary-smith-creek_0.pdf) and detailed stocking plans are available on the Pheasant Stocking Program webpage: (<https://idfg.idaho.gov/hunt/pheasant/stocking/boundary-smith-creek-wma>).

Coeur d'Alene River Wildlife Management Area

This WMA spans over 8,500 acres along the CDA River from Rose Lake to CDA Lake, featuring wetlands, uplands, forests and lakeshore habitat.

- **Only the Lane Marsh parcel will be stocked.**
- An Upland Game Bird Permit is required to hunt the Lane and Strobel Marsh parcels. No permit is required outside those parcels.

- Hunters should note that private lands are interspersed with WMA parcels. Always verify your location to avoid trespassing.

Maps: (<https://idfg.idaho.gov/sites/default/files/wma-cda-river-map.pdf>) and detailed stocking plans are available on the Pheasant Stocking Program webpage: (<https://idfg.idaho.gov/hunt/pheasant/stocking/coeur-d-alene-river-wma>).

Additional resources

- Purchase a license or Upland Game Bird Permit:
- Online (https://license.gooutdoorsidaho.com/Licensing/CustomLookup.aspx?_gl=1*pspjve*_ga*MjAzMjU1ODg3NC4xNzQ4MjAxNTM5*_ga_SVSTB7KFYD*cze3NTkyNzA2MDIkbzM3JGcxJH-QxNzU5Mjc0MjMxJGo1OSRSMCRoMA..)
 - Regional office (<https://idfg.idaho.gov/offices>)
 - Authorized vendors (https://license.gooutdoorsidaho.com/Licensing/LocateAgent.aspx?_gl=1*1bqmjg7*_ga*MjAzMjU1ODg3NC4xNzQ4MjAxNTM5*_ga_SVSTB7KFYD*cze3NTkyNzY2NjckbzM4JGcxJH-QxNzU5Mjc2NzlwJGo3JGww-JGgw)
 - Use the Idaho Hunt Planner: (<https://fishandgame.idaho.gov/ifwis/huntplanner/>) to scout and plan your hunt.
 - Contact the Panhandle Regional Office at (208) 769-1414 for questions.
 - Follow the Panhandle Region Facebook page for updates.

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POLARIS

Why Late Season Elk Hunting Is Underrated

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

Late season hunts are some of the most underrated elk hunting opportunities. In recent years, archery elk hunting has dominated the conversation. And here in Colorado, the first rifle season has become very popular. Meanwhile, our third and fourth rifle season hunts are often undersubscribed.

If your goal is to put elk meat in the freezer or to have an opportunity at a big bull, you might want to consider bucking these trends.

Why The Focus on Early Season Hunts?

It's no secret why elk hunters love the September archery seasons. Hunting elk in September is something special. There's nothing quite like calling in a bull elk. We certainly can't argue with that.

It's also easy to see why many rifle hunters here in our home state of Colorado have gravitated toward the first rifle season. This year, first rifle season opened on October 15th. The rest of our rifle seasons don't happen until the very end of October and run all the way into late November. When it comes to weather and vehicle access, we can see how those dates in mid-October seem like a much safer bet.

However, we'd argue that the later rifle seasons offer a much better opportunity to fill the freezer and even find those bigger bulls that tend to disappear after the rut.

Of course late season hunting comes with its own set of challenges – namely, colder weather and more difficult access with the potential for snow on the roads.

But on the other side of those challenges can be some very productive hunting.

Why Attempt A Late Season Elk Hunt?

1. Better Hunting Weather

First, late season hunts can provide more favorable weather than earlier in the year. And by "favorable", we're talking about sub-freezing temperatures and snow.

During cold weather, elk will spend more time on their feet during the day. It's not unusual to find them on sunny, south facing slopes where they can graze.

It's often much easier to locate elk this time of year than during the mild days of October when they often stay bedded in heavy timber throughout the day...

2. Hunt Bulls on Their Own Terms

November can be a great time to pursue bull elk. Removed from the pressures of the rut, bulls will drift off alone or in bachelor groups. Without a dozen set of eyes and noses around, this is a perfect time for spot-and-stalk hunting tactics.

Even as cows migrate toward winter range, bulls will often stay high on the mountain or in places where they feel safe. Don't assume that a late season hunt means hunting on winter range. Bull elk will stay in their high elevation haunts or on steep canyon walls as long as the snow allows. Find vantage points where you can glass timber edges, old burns, or the edges of aspen stands. Focus on steep slopes where bulls have both food and safe cover.

It's often a game of patience and persistence to glass up a late season bull. When you spot one, it's time to plan the stalk. Late in the season, bulls aren't likely to move far if they are not bumped. Just this year during Colorado's 4th rifle season, we watched a bachelor group of six mature bulls follow the same routine each morning. This late season behavior provides great opportunities to plan and execute a stalk.

3. High Success Cow Hunts

When hunting cows during a late rifle season, you may focus on the transition zones toward their winter range. Spot and stalk hunting tactics will also serve you well. Find vantage points where you can cover ground with your optics. Where you find one cow this time of year, you'll likely find a bunch.

These late season cow hunts often boast higher success rates than hunts earlier in the year. With the onset of cold weather and migration out of rough country, cows often become more visible, spending more time on the open, south-facing slopes.

Consider these things when planning a late season elk hunt:

1. Accessible Public Land

When planning any late season hunt, first consider areas that offer accessible public land throughout the elk's migratory transition zones. For example, if a unit's public land is all above 9,000 feet and the valley floor is entirely private, this could be a concern. It might be fine for hunting bulls if there's little snow. But it might be difficult to hunt cows in December. Units with accessible public land in a variety of habitat zones will give you more options, depending on weather, snow depth, and other seasonal variables.

2. Quality Cold Weather Gear

Next, you'll need to consider the necessary gear before attempting a late season hunt. Quality boots, quality clothing, an adequate tent and sleep system are all factors that you'll need to think about...Hunting during cold weather is a ton of fun if you're prepared for it. If you're not prepared, it can be miserable.

3. Don't Forget Game Bags

Occasionally we hear hunters say they plan to leave the hide on their elk quarters during cold weather. If you like your game meat, this is a bad idea. Don't underestimate the insulating power of an elk hide – even if the weather is cold.

On your late season hunts, you don't have to worry about insects. But you certainly want to remove that hide and get your quarters into protective and breathable game bags as soon as possible. A quality game bag will allow the meat to cool fast and form a protective rind.

Where to Find Late Season Hunting Opportunities

Here in our home state of Colorado, there are some excellent late season hunting opportunities for both bull and cow elk. Montana also offers some great late season dates.

Here a few late season elk hunting opportunities to consider:

1. Colorado's 4th Rifle Elk Season

Here in Colorado, elk licenses for the second and third rifle seasons are unlimited and sold over the counter. No application or drawing is required. These rifle seasons provide a great deal of opportunity. But they're also known to attract big numbers of hunters. Hunting during the later fourth rifle season is a great way to avoid some of that pressure and catch elk moving during cold weather.

The fourth rifle season dates are later in November and offer a great opportunity to hunt bulls alone or in bachelor groups. And since this season is limited by drawing only, you'll be competing with fewer hunters than you would during the OTC rifle seasons.

Even though you must apply for a limited tag, all but just a handful of Colorado's fourth rifle season tags can be drawn with fewer than two preference points, even if you're a nonresident. In fact, many units can be drawn with no points at all. Next year, consider applying for one of these late bull elk hunts.

2. Late Season Cow Hunts in Colorado

If your priority is bringing home elk meat and you're willing to give up the chance at a bull, Colorado offers some antlerless late season hunts. These late season cow hunts often boast high success rates compared to the regular rifle seasons. The season dates vary from one unit to another, but many of these late season hunts extend into December or even January.

Like the 4th rifle season in Colorado, late rifle seasons require hunters to apply in the annual big game draw... But don't let the application process deter you. Even as a nonresident, many of these late season hunts can be drawn with no preference points. If you're willing to save a preference point or two, you'll have even more options.



Photo credit depositphotos.com

Additionally, cow elk permits may be available in cases of game damage on agricultural lands. These can be great opportunities for kids or first-time hunters. Check with local landowners about these depredation tags, or contact your local game warden for possible opportunities.

3. Montana's General Rifle Season Dates

Montana offers some of the most generous season dates of anywhere in the west. With a general license, you can hunt during the early archery season and then return for the rifle season if you haven't filled your tag. If you're able to take the time away from work and family, this offers the best of both worlds. What's more, Montana's general rifle season runs to the first of December. This provides hunters the chance to hunt solitary, post-rut bulls after the cows have drifted toward winter range.

To draw a general license in Montana, you must apply. But with such a long season to hunt, it is worth the effort. Your general license in Montana even includes your upland game bird and fishing licenses...If you're a nonresident, there's a good chance of drawing a Big Game Combination License or Elk Combination License with no preference points. However, the demand seems to increase every year.

Don't Overlook Late Season Advantages

We know; it's fun to hunt during the rut. And purchasing an over-the-counter rifle tag here in Colorado might be the easier thing to do. But consider applying for a late season opportunity. You might just find fewer people and some great elk hunting conditions.

33 Tips For Hunting The Deer Rut

(continued from page 14)

10) When rattling or “grunting blind,” set up with the sun at your back and against thick cover. You’ll be hidden in the shadows—an incoming buck will be easy to see if sunlight hits his antlers or hide. Also, you need to trick a buck into thinking deer are fighting, tending or breeding in the brush 50 to 100 yards behind you. That forces him to keep looking, listening and moving... maybe into bow or gun range.

11) Crack horns the last few days of the pre-rut and into the peak, when bucks are stoked to come to the sounds of two rivals fighting for the favors of a doe. In my experience, rattling works best in the morning near a doe-bedding area or in a funnel that leads to it. A still, frosty dawn is perfect.

12) While you probably won’t rattle a big buck away from a hot doe you should still whack horns periodically throughout the peak and last throes of the breeding season. You might catch a good buck between does, and he might roll over to check out your ruckus.

13) It’s November 15 and the weather is perfect, overcast, calm and with temps in the low 30s. You hunt all day and see neither hide nor hair of a good buck. Well, it’s likely the big boys are holed up in thickets and having their way with does. Keep hunting your best stands back in the timber. In a day or two the bruisers will start cruising for new gals again.

14) In his book *Way of the Whitetail* noted whitetail photographer and researcher Leonard Lee Rue III wrote: “I have found that most deer breed about every four hours, and you can almost time it. As a doe is in estrus for 26 to 28 hours, the buck will breed her on the average of about six times.”

15) If you’re gonna bowhunt over a decoy, it ought to stink just right. Smear estrus lure on a doe, or hang a scent wick nearby. If you stick a plastic rack on your fake, smear buck urine or tarsal on its hind end. After setting an “intruder decoy” climb into a tree stand and grunt like a market hog every 30 minutes or so. A buck might stroll by, think your rank imposter is talking trash and saunter over to kick some booty.

16) One November afternoon Harold Knight, the call maker and deer-hunting legend from Kentucky, heard a fawn bleating forlornly. “The little deer must have bawled 50 times,” he says. “I figure a doe that was just about ready to breed had just kicked out the young ‘un. You don’t hear fawn bleating a lot, but listen for it. It can tell you the does are just about ready to come into heat.”

17) A grizzled 8- or 10-pointer is a night owl. He generally waits until after dark to go on the prowl for does, and he tends to stay up late into the wee hours. One morning the sun rises and the buck finds his big self a mile or more from his bedding area. As the deer sneaks frantically back for his sanctuary, you might get a crack at him from a stand on a ridge or in a funnel. That’s another reason I think mornings are best during the rut.

18) If you hunt in the East or South you can generally hunt a buck within 500 acres of a crop field where you spotted him back in September. Contrary to what many hunters believe, that holds for the big, open West as well. “In late summer I watch big bucks every day,” says Joe North, who hunts and guides along the Milk River in Montana. “If I spot a 160-class deer in an alfalfa field, he’s usually nosing around does within a half-mile or so come November. Even if a buck leaves a ranch for a couple of days, he’ll be back. Why hunt anywhere else?”

19) Find a swamp, clear-cut or other cover in heavy timber where does bed. When archery hunting, play the wind, move in tight and hang a tree stand in a fringe. Back 75 to 100 yards off the cover when using a muzzleloader or rifle. Hunt that stand enough and you will see bucks prowling around the gals.

20) Hang a gun stand on a ridge where you can cover two or more draws, ditches or creek drainages below. The thicker the cover on the ridge and in the funnels, the better. You’ll expect to see deer chasing down in the funnels and you sure might. Ah, but check around and behind you too. Bucks love to travel and bed in ridge thickets. You might be glassing 150 yards below when a big deer pops over the ridge and walks right into your lap.

21) Every year, from around November 6th to 20th in central, northern and western states, bucks have a ball, chasing down and breeding does. This season, when the orb waxes full the week of November 5, focus on the midmorning hours. Big deer that were up rutting all night in the yellow glow typically bed down at dawn, but some of them get back up and start prowling for does again between 9:00 to 11:00 a.m. Hang tough in a stand and you might whack the deer of your dreams during the “off hours.”

22) In my best Mr. T voice (remember him?) I bark, “Don’t set up on top of that scrape, fool!” It’s smarter to hang your tree stand 75 to 100 yards downwind of it, which reduces the chance that deer will see or smell you. When archery hunting set up within arrow range of a trail or thicket’s edge where a buck might prowl into the scrape from the downwind side. With a muzzleloader, slug gun or rifle simply set up where you can see far and bust a buck that cruises through the breeding commune.

23) Get out of that cool, shady draw or bottom where the wind swirls. Rather, set up on a hillside or ridge point, where the wind and thermals are steadier and more predictable. That’s good for a buck as he sniffs for does and tries to sort out their travels. It’s good for you as you try to cut his heated mission short.

24) Hoo-ah! The scent of a woman! Set some of that doe-in-heat on the upwind side of the doe trail you’re watching. You want the lure to blow down and across the path. If a buck comes along on the downwind side and likes what he smells, he might veer up to the trail and give you a shot.

(continued on page 24)



Photos credit Joseph Romano courtesy GOHUNT.com

Elk Stroganoff Recipe

By Joseph Romano

Originally published at **GOHUNT**  GOHUNT.com

... This is a great and easy meal to prepare and place in the slow cooker in the morning and enjoy it that evening when you get off work or back from the field.



Makes 8 servings

Cook time: 8 hours

Ingredients

- 2 lbs cubed elk stew meat
- To taste salt and pepper
- 2 (10.75 oz.) cans condensed golden mushroom soup
- 2 whole chopped garlic cloves
- 1 cup chopped onion
- 1 cup chopped celery
- 1 tbsp Worcestershire sauce
- 8 oz. cream cheese
- 1/4 cup water
- Pasta egg noodles
- To garnish thyme and parsley

Quick Tips:

- * Cube the meat into small bite-sized portions.
- * Add a small amount of olive oil to the cooked egg noodles to prevent them from sticking.

Directions:

1. Cut up celery, onions and garlic.
2. Cube the elk meat into 1/2" pieces.
3. Add seasoning to cubed elk meat.
4. Add elk meat and chopped vegetables to a slow cooker.
5. Add condensed golden mushroom soup, Worcestershire sauce and water to the slow cooker.
6. Mix all the ingredients together in the slow cooker.
7. Cook on low setting for 8 hours, or on high for about 5 hours.
8. Cook egg noodles in boiling water with a slight amount of olive oil until al dente (roughly 10-12 minutes).
9. Drain the egg noodles.
10. Add a small amount of olive oil to prevent the noodles from sticking, stir in cream cheese and serve the ingredients over the egg noodles.
11. Garnish with thyme and parsley and enjoy.

Enjoy!

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33 Tips For Hunting The Deer Rut

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25) Lay a long scent trail from your truck to your stand or blind and a no-so-funny thing might happen. A buck might cut your path, take a wrong turn and end up at your truck! Start out with boot pads soaked with fox or skunk scent to cover your tracks. Two hundred yards from your stand, remove those pads, tie on a drag rag doused with doe or buck lure and sneak the rest of the way in. Now if a buck cuts your trail he has only one way, the right way, to turn and go.

26) Biologists say the grunt-snort-wheeze is the most aggressive call in the whitetail's vocabulary. A dominant buck doesn't want other bucks around him or his does during the peak of the rut, so he grunts, snorts and pffttfeeezzzees at them. Try mixing snort-wheezes with grunts or rattles to challenge an alpha male and bring him in (M.A.D. makes a call for the job). The intimidating call can and will spook subdominant bucks.

27) Find scrapes every 50 yards or so and you'll think you've hit the mother lode. But an immature buck feeling his oats might be doing all that excavating. Mature bucks tend to paw fewer, and larger, scrapes. Look for thick rubs and big tracks nearby; they seal the deal that you're onto a good deer.

28) One day a 150-inch buck chased a doe past my perch. I grunted with my voice and the deer slammed on the brakes 22 yards away. Er, but amid all the excitement I forgot to draw my bow! When I tried to pull the buck jumped and bolted like he'd been poked with a prod. Keep your wits and remember to draw before you grunt, whistle or yell to stop a buck.

29) Tie a scent wick three to four feet off the ground and eye level to deer, rather than six feet up on a limb. If you set your scent too high, a buck might come in, tip back his nose to whiff it, look past the wick and see you moving or drawing your bow in your tree stand. Busted!

30) Everybody hunts the rut, so you'd better be ready to deal with the pressure. New York hunter Dave Streb, who hunts national forest land in the Northeast, offers some tips. "Check topo maps and aerials for remote areas other guys might miss," he says. "Drive around and monitor roads that have been locked for years. If the Forest Service opens a road this fall, few people might learn about it right away, and you can find good hunting back in there. The crowds subside with each passing day, so hunt deep into the second week of gun season if you can. Sit in a tree stand or blind all day. You never know when a buck will run by with a doe, or when some guy on the next ridge will scare a buck into your sights."

31) Research a few years ago by Dr. Karl Miller, Larry Marchington and Matt Knox gives us some good skinny on rubs. The highly regarded biologists found that when an area is blazed with a noticeably large number of rubs, the peak of the rut often occurs earlier than normal. The theory is that by depositing gobs of "priming pheromones" on all those trees, the bucks stimulate the does into early estrus. So if you find twice or three times as many rubs as usual in your hunt zone this fall, you might want to take off work a week earlier than you normally do.

(continued on page 38)

8 Best Days To Hunt Deer In November

(continued from page 15)

With the sun burning the prairie at 80 degrees, I stalked and sweated and shot a 5½-year-old 8-pointer tending a doe out in the open grass at 2:00 p.m. When you hit it just right, the power of the rut is amazing.

Top stand: Look for a timbered ridge flanked by a crop field on one or two sides and CRP, a cattail marsh or other heavy cover on the other sides. The more buck sign on the ridge the better. Heavy cover near your stand is crucial, because with any pressure at all in the area, old bucks will move in or near the thick stuff.

Go-to tactics: I back off rattling now because bucks have heard clashing antlers (both real and fake) for weeks. But keep grunting because those calls won't spook deer, and to the contrary might pull a buck anytime. Don't freeze out or burn out too early.

Plan on getting to your post by 8:00 a.m. and hunt till dark; remember with the full moon, bucks should move best from 11:00 o'clock on, either on natural movement or pushed by a hunter. Be ready.

November 27

Most does have been bred, and bucks are tired and run down from chasing and eluding hunters. But those survivors know the chance to breed a doe won't come around for another year. They prow! for the last five percent or so of does that might still be receptive. They move mostly at night and in cover, but a good buck might slip up at dawn or dusk, so be out there.

The day before Thanksgiving is one of the biggest hunting days of the year as family and friends get together and fan out across the woods. This is another reason to hunt. You never know where and when that pressure might drive a giant into your lap.

Best conditions: Hope for daytime highs in the 20s to 40, with lows in the 20s or teens. Light snow would be great.

Top stand: You'll likely have a cold west or north wind, so set up on the east side of a hill or ridge where the wind is right, and where you can cover a wide swath of thick woods, marsh and/or a weed-choked field below. Watch for a buck cutting from one thicket to the next, hoping to run across a last hot doe—or sneaking from pressure.

Go-to tactics: Keep your grunt call handy. But now the best and only real tactic is to get set and be ready. Stay positive and poised to react the second you catch a flash of thick tines in the cover below. Your chances of tagging out on the 8th best day of November are better than you think.

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Photos credit Brady Miller courtesy GOHUNT.com

DIY Taxidermy: European Skull Mount

By Brady Miller

Originally published at **GOHUNT**  GOHUNT.com

Do-it-yourself Taxidermy Mounts:

With the cost of everything on the rise these days, more and more hunting-related projects are becoming do-it-yourself projects. We spend a lot of time, energy and money in harvesting deer, and it is a shame to not finish the job right. Once you get that buck on the ground, it is time to decide what to do to preserve the memory.

Shoulder mounts look great on the wall, but add the cost of paying a taxidermist to finding room on your crowded wall and soon enough you will start looking for other options. Personally, I find European mounts a great option. They have a certain kind of visual appeal on your wall, and with new mounts on the market that allow multiple poses, they quickly have become my go-to option.

Here is how you can do your own European skull mount, with a few items easily found in your local outdoor or hardware store.

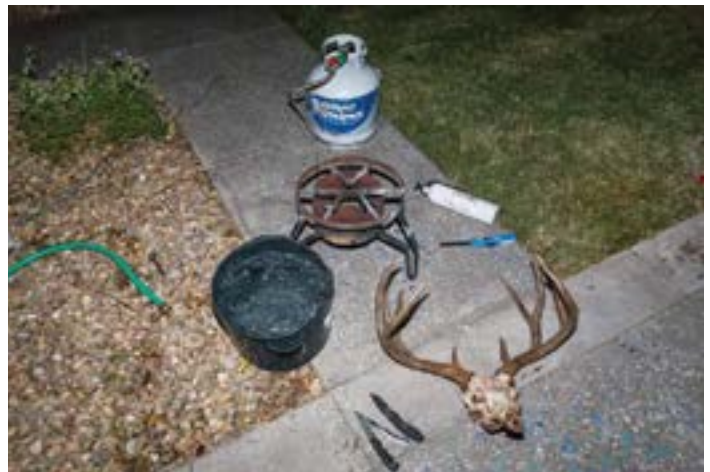
Basic tools required:

- High-pressure burner
- Large pot
- Propane tank
- Lighter
- Box of baking soda
- High strength soap
- Basic White
- Volume 40 Cream
- Electric heater
- Detailing paintbrush
- Bubble wrap
- Masking tape
- Garden hose
- Rubber gloves
- Knife

In-the-field Preparation

After deciding that you are not going to do a shoulder mount, the first step shortly after harvesting your deer should be to remove the entire hide from the skull. I normally do this right after I take a bunch of harvest photos; it is way easier at that point. Trust me, the last thing you want to do is leave the hide on the skull and place the skull in a shed for a period of time, or freeze the skull with the hide on. Leaving the hide on can increase the chance for grease spots on the skull.

After removing the hide, it is time to remove the lower jaw and eyes, and attempt to remove the brain in the field. I say "attempt" because it can be difficult. The brain is another spot that can cause grease marks in your skull if you leave it in after the harvest for a long period of time. If you have time, it is a good idea to trim up some of the muscle on the skull.



Simmering the Skull

Once you get back home, it is time to let the propane burner go to work. Start off by adding a generous amount of high-strength soap to a pot of water.



I prefer soap on the first round to help pull grease out of the skull.

Bring the water to a boil, then turn the dial back a small amount until the water is at a simmer. I cannot stress this enough: **DO NOT BOIL THE SKULL.** Boiling the skull will greatly increase the odds that your skull will become brittle and may cause some teeth to fall out. If this happens you will need to super glue the bones back together at the end of this process.

Leave the skull in the water for at least an hour. After an hour the skull will be ready for some scraping with a knife.



Next, grab the skull and cut & scrape the remaining meat from the skull with a stiff knife blade. You should notice large chunks of meat and tissue starting to peel from the skull and become very easy to remove. At this time I will also pop out the ear bones with a screwdriver. Some people leave the ear bones in, but they are very difficult to clean the meat off of, and they don't add any looks to a finished skull.



After going over the skull for a while, drain all the water to start fresh again. Starting with a new pot of water is best to avoid having the skull sit in the grease from the first round.



On the second round, I will use one box of baking soda instead of soap. Baking soda works wonders at finalizing the skull. Bring the water to a boil once again and dial it back to a simmer. Leave the skull in for another 45 minutes to an hour. After this round, at least 90% of the meat should be off the skull.



Once you take the skull out of the pot, place it in a tub that is full of hot soapy water. This helps finish the skull and is another method to remove additional grease. It is best to use a tub outside, but a sink can be used in a pinch. Leave it in the hot water for 10 minutes while you scrape the small amounts of meat off.

Finally, take a garden hose and use a high-pressure setting to blast all the loose meat and nasal tissue out of the nose. Periodically place it back in the soap and blast the skull with the hose in the tub of soapy water. Caution should be used here so you don't break the fragile parts of the skull. On elk and moose I have used a pressure washer to blast the skull clean.

The pressure from the garden hose will free up all the remaining tissue and leave your skull clean on the inside. Then place the skull back in the soapy water and give it one last blast of water. This is also a great time to use a knife to scrape any remaining meat from the skull.

(continued next page)



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DIY Taxidermy: European Skull Mount

(continued from page 27)

Whitening

Now, thoroughly dry the skull in front of a heater. Take the skull and place it as close to the heater as possible (this is why I prefer an electric heater).



After 20-40 minutes, it is time to whiten the skull.



Start by mixing the Volume 40 and Basic White until you reach a thick "yogurt" type consistency. These two products will create a whitening agent that will do wonders to your skull.



Now, brush on the mixture in every corner and crevice on the skull. The key takeaway here is the more the better. Don't be shy with the mixture, just avoid getting the mixture on your hands and on the antler bases. It is best to wear rubber gloves because the solution can slightly bleach your skin.



The next step is to wrap the entire skull in bubble wrap. Use masking tape to secure the bubble wrap. Try to get the skull wrapped up completely to prevent the whitening agent from drying out.

Place the skull in front of the heater and rotate it every 20 minutes to ensure you have applied heat to the entire skull. After roughly an hour to an hour and a half, remove the bubble wrap and wash the skull off with clean water. Place the skull back in front of the heater for another 30-40 minutes to dry it out, rotating every so often.



You should now have a finished skull worthy of showing off in your house. There are a lot of great mounting options out there. I prefer to use a Skull Hooker mounting bracket which allows for multiple skulls angles.

There are many methods for creating a European skull mount. This method I have modified through the years from friends and local taxidermist information. No matter the method, European skull mounts take time to complete, but you will be pleased with the outcome when your animal is on the wall.

To learn more or join GOHUNT visit GOHUNT.com.

Volunteers In Eastern Montana Establish New Chapter Of Pheasants Forever

Pheasants Forever <https://www.pheasantsforever.org>

Pheasants Forever (PF) volunteers have chartered a new chapter in eastern Montana. The Great Plains Chapter will cover Fallon, Wibaux and Carter counties — where members hope to positively impact local habitat, benefiting a variety of wildlife species.

Unique among national conservation organizations, chapters of Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever retain 100 percent decision-making control over fundraising dollars, allowing volunteers to support impactful wildlife habitat projects, public access initiatives and conservation education programs throughout the uplandbirdrange. PF's Montana regional representative, Chad Harvey, will work closely with the new chapter to support the organization's vision to sustain abundant populations of wild pheasants, quail and other wildlife.

"It's great to have a chapter in southeastern Montana," Harvey said. "This group will be serving a territory that has so much potential for upland birds and wildlife habitat."

According to the chapter president, Henry Hastig, the chapter started when a few like-minded people started to discuss how they could improve local wildlife habitat.

The volunteers all agree their main goals are to facilitate habitat conservation for birds and pollinators, provide conservation education for youth and new members, and to make a difference in their community.

"We're here to make a positive change for habitat, wildlife and conservation efforts in our community," Hastig said.

To learn more about the Great Plains Chapter of Pheasants Forever, contact Henry Hastig at hhivhabitat@gmail.com.

For more information about Pheasants Forever in Montana, contact Chad Harvey at CHarvey@pheasantsforever.org.

About Pheasants Forever

Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever make up the nation's largest nonprofit organization dedicated to upland habitat conservation. This community of more than 480,000 members, supporters and partners is dedicated to the protection of our uplands through habitat improvement, public access, education and advocacy. A network of 754 local chapters spread across North America determine how 100 percent of their locally raised funds are spent — the only national conservation organization that operates through this grassroots structure. Since its creation in 1982, the organization has dedicated more than \$1 billion to 580,000 habitat projects benefiting 28.8 million acres.

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BOONE AND CROCKETT CLUB'S

POACH AND PAY PROJECT



A CRYPTIC
CRIME
4%

of Poaching Cases in
the U.S. are Detected

THE CONSERVATION COST

WITH A "DARK FIGURE" OF UNDETECTED
POACHING AT 95%

\$302.6 MILLION
in fines

\$1.13 BILLION
in animal replacement costs

MINIMUM NATIONWIDE LOSS EACH YEAR

\$6.1 MILLION
in fines

\$22.7 MILLION
in animal replacement costs

AVERAGE LOSS PER STATE EACH YEAR

POACHING IS NOT A VICTIMLESS CRIME

Poachers downplay their actions saying there is no victim or argue that their actions are victimless crimes because they do not harm anyone - they may even say that they are the victim! But poaching is not a victimless crime this is a loss of wildlife on the landscape as well as the lost value of a public resource.

This is more than the \$1.185 billion allocated from the Pittman-Robertson federal excise tax on firearms, ammunition and archery equipment in 2023, and the \$1.015 billion in gross revenue for hunting licenses for all states.

Boone And Crockett Club Research Identifies Dark Figure And Conservation Cost of Poaching

Boone And Crockett Club <https://www.boone-crockett.org>

At a press conference held in Washington, DC, the Boone and Crockett Club announced the findings of the most comprehensive research project on poaching in this country. Using a Bayesian statistical framework, the Poach and Pay research determined that only about 4% of poaching incidents are detected. Setting a conservative estimate of what criminologists refer to as the “Dark Figure” of crimes that are undetected or unreported at 95%, the research found that the minimum conservation cost of poaching through lost fines and replacement costs for animals is \$1.4 billion annually. The research also outlines the results of detailed interviews with stakeholders, typologies of poachers, barriers to prosecution of wildlife crime, and outlines specific actions that can be taken to reduce the amount of poaching in this country. The Boone And Crockett Club and partners will continue the Poach and Pay project to implement these actions with the goal of reducing the Dark Figure of poaching.

We have long known that poaching is a major problem in the United States, but we didn't truly understand the magnitude of the problem until this Poach and Pay research,” noted Boone And Crockett Club chief executive officer Tony A. Schoonen in his comments at the press conference.

“With this defensible assessment of the Dark Figure, we can clearly describe the conservation cost of poaching and prove that poaching is not a victimless crime—not only do we lose individual wildlife, we are also losing a valuable public resource with a high cost.”

The Poach and Pay research involved extensive surveys of fish and wildlife agency law enforcement officers, hunters, landowners, and convicted poachers, as well as interviews and focus groups with prosecutors and judges. Researchers also conducted a literature review and utilized survey and interview data to develop a better understanding of the typologies and motivations behind illegal wildlife activities. After accumulating this data, the researchers used a Bayesian statistical framework to estimate the detection rates of illegal take using diverse datasets from various published research papers, along with citation, hunter, and officer numbers, survey responses from perpetrators, enforcement statistics, hunter landowner reporting, and wildlife telemetry studies. Using criminology theory, the research also provides specific policy and outreach recommendations to help reduce the amount of illegal wildlife crime in this country.

“It's critical to differentiate between legal, Fair Chase hunters and poachers,” Schoonen concluded. “By quantifying the Dark Figure of undetected crime, identifying judicial bottlenecks, and presenting a structured deterrent framework, the research equips state and federal wildlife agencies with data-driven strategies to reduce illegal take and protect America's wildlife heritage.”

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Thank you for your continued support!

www.boone-crockett.org





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

Put A Wild Turkey On Your Thanksgiving Menu

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

Forget the checkout lines. Fall turkey hunting opportunities are still available in Northern Idaho

As hunters notch their deer and elk tags, grind up burger, and line up their fleet of duck decoys, it's easy to forget about one customary fall tradition. ...The chance to serve a wild bird at your next holiday feast is still an opportunity in Idaho's Panhandle and Clearwater regions.

"Hunting turkeys in the fall can be just as exciting as in the spring," said Jeff Knetter, Fish and Game upland game and migratory game bird coordinator. "Plus in some places, you will likely have the woods all to yourself."

Fall turkey hunts in Idaho have expanded over the years as turkey populations have increased. Quality hunting can still be found on both public and private lands in the Clearwater and Panhandle regions...

See the 2024-2025 Upland Game, Furbearer and Turkey Season and Rules here:
<https://idfg.idaho.gov/rules/upland>

Hunting on private land

Finding a place to hunt can be as easy as looking at a map or asking a landowner for permission.

Private land hunting in particular is an excellent way to harvest a wild turkey just in time for the holidays.

Because it is not uncommon for several hundred turkeys to congregate on or near private property where livestock is fed or crops are being stored, the damage and nuisance they can cause can quickly become a headache for landowners.

Providing additional harvest opportunity, particularly in the fall and winter when the birds are concentrated, is the best way to address landowner concerns.

"Many landowners will welcome hunters because they want turkey flocks reduced on their lands," Knetter said. "But it's critical that hunters always ask for permission first, and if allowed to hunt, always follow the landowner's wishes."

It always seems to be a bit of a joke (at the hunter's expense) when turkeys take to private lands during fall turkey season. If you happen to see a rafter of turkeys (yes, that is what a group of turkeys is technically called), consider politely asking the landowner if they're having any bird-related issues on their land and if they would let you assist in alleviating this issue.

Fall hunting strategy and safety

Fall turkey hunting and spring turkey hunting are two separate animals. Hunters will need to adjust their hunting tactics during the fall season, as there is little or no gobbling activity and turkeys congregate in small groups. The basic hunting strategy is to find and break up a group, scattering them in all directions. Hunters then wait as near as possible to the spot where the group was first encountered. Younger birds will usually return within an hour while an old gobbler may take three to four hours.

Fall turkey hunting also presents some unique safety concerns as turkey hunters dress in complete camouflage, make the sound of a turkey and often conceal themselves in dense vegetation. They also share the woods with camouflaged big game hunters in some areas. Hunters must always be certain of their target and what is beyond before pulling the trigger.

To the victor go the spoils

So you successfully bagged a fall turkey – now what? The next step is processing the meat and finding a clever (or cleaver), or perhaps tried and true, way to serve your hard-earned bird to your friends and family. There are several ways to utilize the five most useable cuts of the bird: the breast, the tenderloins, the wings, the thighs and the drumsticks.

Set it and forget it with a slow-cooker. Or maybe go with a classic herb-rubbed turkey breast. Remember wild turkeys are different birds than the store bought varieties, and you will probably want to cook them differently.

And for the traditionalist looking to wow their guests this Thanksgiving or Christmas with a classic, golden-brown whole bird that didn't come from a grocery store, you can't go wrong with a perfectly brined, oven-roasted turkey recipe.

Hunting fall turkeys in Northern Idaho is a great opportunity to get outdoors, to take youth or new hunters out for an experience to remember, and one last chance at putting some game in your freezer or on your dinner table. By understanding the rules and regulations you can take comfort knowing that you're participating in turkey hunting the appropriate way.

Best of luck.



Bill Cooper photos credit author Tom Cooper.

An Old-timer's Best Elk Years

By Tom Cooper

Brother Bill has had some really good elk hunting years. Just ask him if you don't believe me. Like most of us, he has also had some really non-spectacular (is that a real word?) seasons. My purpose for this story is to document what I believe are his two best (consecutive) elk years. At this point, his hunting life covers over 60 seasons in the field. Of course, from my brotherly, but critical perspective, 50-60 years to record two good ones is not necessarily a Grammy award winning performance. But that could be because I haven't put together two consecutive elk seasons that compare. Bill celebrated his 70th birthday in 2019. Ok, let's get on with my version of Bill's best seasons, 2020 and 2021.

Background

Over the years for our opening day, actually the initial 3-4 days of the season, typically we hunted a combination of public hunting districts 335 and 380 out of Helena. We were more successful hunting spikes and cows in 380, better-known for its trophy bulls, than we were in 335, where only our over-the-counter bull tags were valid, but rarely filled. I scouted south of Rimini (335) frequently, and observed legal bulls each summer. As a result, most years we made 335 our opening day hunt. However, if there was a foot of snow above Rimini and/or one of us had a cow tag for 380, by day three, we headed for the south end of the Elkhorn's.

2020 Season

2020 began like most seasons, Bill traveled from his home in the Bitterroot to Helena. We hunted for three days in 335 and 380, but couldn't find a legal elk. Bill returned to the Bitterroot to try a couple of his well-scouted locations. His first hunt was on the north side of Lolo Canyon, a spot he named "Jeff's Flat" because his son, Jeff, shot his first deer there when he was a young hunter. It was still dark when he parked; it was also snowing. He knew any tracks would be very fresh. He hiked the half mile to Jeff's Flat in the dreary pre-dawn visibility; it was still snowing, and his flashlight said there weren't any fresh tracks. He spent 20 minutes sitting on his favorite deadfall waiting for daylight. When the snow stopped, he watched a Whitetail doe and fawn walk by.

Since his "hot spot" wasn't hot, he followed an old logging road up the ridge and glassed hillsides in all directions.

By late-morning he hadn't seen an elk or a track. He hunted back to Jeff's Flat and crossed a single elk track in the snow. It was fresh because his earlier boot tracks looked melted compared to the elk track. He followed for a hundred yards, where the track joined 6-8 more elk.

It's Got Brow Tines

Since it was well past noon, Bill decided to leave and return another day (and, he probably needed a nap).

He waited two days. Again, he followed his trail to Jeff's Flat, and sat on his well-used deadfall log. Shortly after daylight, a cow and a calf magically appeared from a small grove of Fir trees. Several minutes later another elk appeared. This one had brow tines. Although he knew his shot was a solid hit, the bull didn't fall. But also, he did not run. He dropped at Bill's second shot.

Now it was time to leave his comfortable log and go to work. Using the no-gut process, on the ground, it took almost three hours.

Bill started his hike out with the backstraps and tenderloins in a cloth bag tied to his hunting pack; plus he was carrying both shoulders tied together, with one shoulder in front and the other hanging down his back.

A third of the way to his truck, the shoulders were too heavy; 3 hours of pulling, lifting, and cutting had taken its toll. He tied the shoulders to a branch and continued to his truck.

When he reached Lolo and telephone service, he called me suggesting I meet him in Lolo the next morning, and I should bring my game cart. Needless to say, I was on time.

Arriving at Jeff's Flat, we secured both hams, already in cloth bags, onto the cart and made the easy pack out. Of course we had to stop and add two shoulders to our load. Over the years, Bill tagged several Whitetails around Jeff's Flat, this was his first elk. (continued on page 35)



Brother Bill (l) and Tom (r)

How To Make Amazing Venison Brats

TUO Gear <https://www.tuogear.com>



Photos courtesy TUO Gear <https://www.tuogear.com>

What makes a good bratwurst?

Making amazing venison brats is much easier than you might think. Follow this recipe and you'll be a deer camp hero. A good venison bratwurst should have a balanced meat and fat ratio to ensure a juicy and flavorful sausage. Venison isn't the most fatty meat, so adding some fat in is key (we like to use bacon fat, because of its rich smokey flavor)

Using high-quality venison meat is key, as it provides a rich, delicious flavor. The addition of spices such as salt, pepper, nutmeg, and marjoram, in the right amounts, brings out the natural flavor of the venison without overpowering it. The use of natural casings, like sheep or hog casings, helps to hold the shape of the bratwurst and adds an enjoyable snap when bitten into.

To prepare venison bratwurst, you'll need a meat grinder to finely grind the meat and fat, a sausage stuffer to fill the casings, and a smoker or grill for cooking. These factors all contribute to the flavor and texture of the bratwurst. The meat and fat ratio ensures juiciness, the spices add depth of flavor, and the natural casings and cooking methods contribute to the overall texture. The result is a delicious and juicy venison sausage with a satisfying snap.

Keys to delicious venison brats

To make delicious venison brats, start by grinding the venison meat with a meat grinder, using a coarse grinding plate. Mix the ground venison with pork fat to add moisture and flavor. Season the mixture with a blend of spices like garlic, onion, sage, and pepper, to enhance the taste of the brats.

To ensure cleanliness, keep the work area tidy by wiping down surfaces and washing hands frequently. Use sharp knives for cutting the meat and fat, as they will make the process easier and safer.

Keep distractions to a minimum to focus on the task at hand, as making brats requires attention to detail.

After seasoning the meat, stuff the mixture into natural hog casings using a sausage stuffer. Twist the stuffed casings into individual brats, and refrigerate them for at least 12 hours to allow the flavors to meld.

By following these key steps and emphasizing cleanliness, sharp knives, and minimal distractions, you can create delicious venison brats that are sure to be a hit at any gathering.

Instructions:

To make homemade bratwurst, start by mixing the spices. In a small bowl, combine salt, white pepper, nutmeg, ginger, coriander, and caraway. In a large bowl, mix ground venison and pork fat together. Gradually add the spice mixture and water to the meat, ensuring it's thoroughly combined (it's best to use your hands for this). Cover the bowl and refrigerate the mixture for at least 2 hours.

If using natural casings, rinse them well and soak them in water for about an hour. Using a sausage stuffer, fill the casings with the meat mixture, being careful not to overfill, then twist or tie off the sausages to your desired length. You can either grill, pan-fry, or boil your bratwurst. If grilling or pan-frying, cook them on medium heat until browned and cooked through. If boiling, simmer them in water or beer for about 10-15 minutes, then finish by browning in a pan or on the grill if desired.

Serve hot with your favorite sides and condiments.

Quick Tips for Cooking Brats:

Key tips for cooking deer brats include ensuring the meat is thoroughly thawed before cooking and using a high-quality brat seasoning for flavor.

Properly preheating the grill or pan before cooking the brats is essential to ensure they cook evenly and do not stick to the cooking surface. This also helps to avoid overcooking the brats, as they will cook more quickly and evenly on a preheated surface.

It is important to use a meat thermometer to ensure the brats reach an internal temperature of 160°F before serving. This helps to ensure that the brats are safe to eat and are cooked to the desired level of doneness.

Overcooking deer brats can result in dry and tough meat, so using a meat thermometer to monitor the internal temperature is crucial.

By following these tips, you can ensure that your deer brats are flavorful, moist, and perfectly cooked. Properly thawing the meat, using a high-quality seasoning, preheating the grill or pan, and using a meat thermometer are all important steps in achieving delicious deer brats.

World-Class Venison Bratwursts

Ingredients:

2 lbs venison, ground
1 lb pork fat (or fatty pork cuts), ground (we love bacon fat here)
1/4 cup cold water
1 tablespoon kosher salt
1 tablespoon ground white pepper (black pepper can work too but we like white pepper best)
1 teaspoon ground nutmeg
1 teaspoon ground ginger
1 teaspoon ground coriander
1/2 teaspoon ground caraway
Sausage casings (preferably natural)

Instructions:

Mix Spices: In a small bowl, combine the salt, white pepper, nutmeg, ginger, coriander, and caraway.

Combine Meat and Spices: In a large bowl, mix the 2 pounds of ground venison and pork fat together. Gradually add the spice mixture and cold water to the meat, ensuring that it's thoroughly combined. It's best to use your hands for mixing.

Chill Mixture: Cover the bowl and refrigerate for at least 2 hours, or overnight. This helps the flavors to meld together.

Prepare Casings: If using natural casings, rinse them well and soak in water for about an hour.

Stuff the Sausages: Using a sausage stuffer, fill the casings with the meat mixture. Be careful not to overfill. Twist or tie off the sausages to your desired length.



Cook: You can either grill, pan-fry, or boil your bratwurst. If grilling or pan-frying, cook them on medium heat until they're browned and cooked through. If boiling, simmer them in water or dark beer for about 10-15 minutes, then finish by browning in a pan or on the grill if desired.

Serve: Serve hot with your favorite sides and condiments.

Enjoy your homemade venison bratwurst! Remember, you can always adjust the spices to suit your taste.

An Old-timer's Best Elk Years

(continued from page 33)

2021 Season

2021 began like 2020, Bill traveled from his home in the Bitterroot to Helena. We hunted for three days in 335 and 380, but could not find a legal elk. He returned to Stevensville. This time he hunted on the south side of Lolo Canyon, on a 2-3 mile long ridgeline he refers to as West Butte. Naturally, by daylight he was well up a small canyon leading to his ridge.

Near a saddle on the ridge he spotted a "ragrack", yes, a very legal bull elk. He didn't have a decent shot because he was looking straight uphill, without a solid rest, and the bull was in and out of thicker timber. Within a couple minutes two cows appeared, obviously watching Bill; he couldn't move. Then all three disappeared down the far side of the ridge. Unfortunately, that side of the ridge is covered in deadfall as a result of fire some years ago. He hiked to the saddle and found the elk tracks. Rather than follow and hope to catch up, he decided to head home and return a couple days later.

It's the Same Bull

Bill was even earlier on this day because he wanted to be closer to the saddle before legal shooting light. However, literally from the same spot as before, he saw several cows and "his" bull. This time the bull was not hidden by timber and Bill decided to take the shot. After the fact, he determined his first shot was a kill shot. Maybe just a bit high, it had hit both lungs. However, Bill wanted the bull on the ground and not racing into the deadfall jungle over the ridge. So he fired a second round. While hitting the bull hard enough to knock him down, the bullet caused little damage, creasing a front shoulder and bouncing along the outside of the rib cage under the skin before disappearing into the flank. Again, I received his phone call and was just absolutely tickled to arrive the next morning and help cart out the rest of his bull.

Two Bulls in Two Years

Bill killed two bull elk in two years, both on public land; he processed them by himself, using the no-gut approach with the elk on the ground. He is proud of those accomplishments, and should be. Wrestling a 400-500 pound animal on the ground is hard work, and requires plenty of patience, but he showed all of us a 70-year-old can do it.

For me, the most memorable part of Bill's two years is I received two calls to bring my game cart and help recover his bulls. Naturally, I also enjoyed a share of really good elk meat. Oh, for those of you who keep track of such things, his second 2021 round reappeared when I processed the ham I had brought home. It was barely below the surface, near the tail, after a long journey that ended under the hide on the hind quarter. The slug had traveled the full length of Bill's bull. As a gift for calling me, I gave the slightly mangled slug back to him.

How Glassing Can Increase Your Success

(continued from page 4)

Getting Setup to Glass

Locate a place to glass from, preferably on an elevated position, and start to glass.

Rule number one: always set up quietly and never, ever skyline yourself.

Nothing will ruin your day more than walking over a ridge to see an animal on the run only to realize you were skylined and blew the animals out of the area. Try and utilize the terrain and vegetation to keep your silhouette off the skyline or get as low as possible as you cross to your glassing area. While setting up, do your best to break up your background by sitting in the shade and placing yourself with vegetation or terrain behind you.

Getting Comfortable

After you have found “the spot” it is important to get comfortable. A few weeks ago, I was on an elk hunt with a friend and after glassing a shooter bull in the early morning I did not leave my glassing spot until dark. As silly as it may sound, packing in a “butt pad” of some sort can really help make a frozen piece of ground or a rocky slope much more comfortable.

If possible, find something such as a rock or tree to lean back on or put a pack behind your back if you know you are going to be glassing from the same spot for a long period of time. Although this is not critical, it can really help with backaches. Do whatever you can to make yourself comfortable and your glassing sessions will be a lot more enjoyable. You will want to stay longer and will more than likely locate more animals. Listen to music on your headphones, take a quick nap, stretch out or move a short distance to get a slightly different view. Do whatever you can to stay longer. It is also a great idea to stand to stretch in the middle of the day. Numerous times I have seen game I had no clue was in the area four or five hours into a glassing session.

An Effective Glassing Method

Over time and after many glassing sessions, hunters will learn the terrain that appeals to them for different types of game and observe habits particular to specific species. No matter what type of game you are glassing for, there are many different methods of glassing.

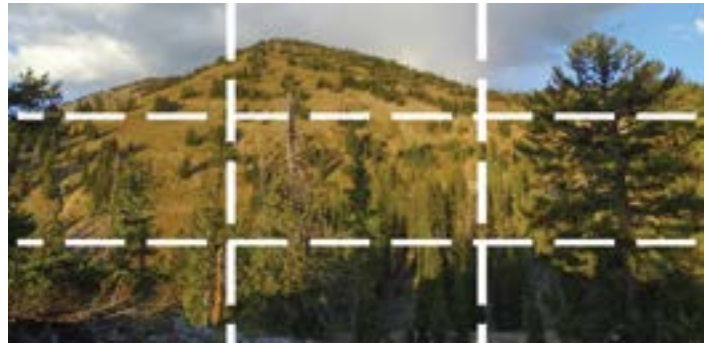
Here is what I have found that works best for my glassing sessions.

1. Quick Scan

After arriving at my spot, I complete a quick scan of the area. I like to start close and move away from where I am sitting. This quick scan can sometimes last for thirty seconds but depending on the country you are glassing can last quite a bit longer.

Look quickly for any obvious game that may be out in the open feeding or moving to bedding areas.

2. Slow down the Pace



Typical mountain setting for rule of thirds glassing.



Rule of thirds gridline for glassing high mountain desert terrain.

After clearing all of the open areas and completing a quick scan, I shift to a slower pace of glassing.

I like to use the photography “rule of thirds” and break up my glassing area into six sections. Breaking the glassing area up into these six boxes helps me keep track of the areas I have glassed and ensures that I am not missing any areas that a buck or bull may be hiding. I typically start in the lower left corner and I glass that area thoroughly with a set of binoculars on a tripod. After glassing this box completely, I move into the lower middle box and continue this cycle going counterclockwise until I complete my glassing of the six boxes. During my initial glassing, I am looking at smaller open areas and shadow-covered openings.

After completing all six sections, I move back to the first section and start a methodical search of tight spots where animals may be bedded or tucked away for longer periods of time. I focus on patches of trees, brush, rock outcroppings, cliff edges and anywhere an animal may bed. This portion of the glassing session can last for hours because I am looking for finer details such as a leg, an antler tip or the flick of a tail. Each section of the glassing area may take hours to clear. During this phase, I use both a set of binoculars attached to a tripod as well as a spotting scope to verify anything that may be an animal. This portion of glassing can be tough to do day after day, but it can bring great results.

(continued on page 38)



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How Glassing Can Increase Your Success

(continued from page 36)

Yearly Glassing Knowledge

Learn the game you are hunting. Year after year, game tend to be in the same terrain and areas. Take notes, pay attention to where animals like to bed, where they feed, water or how they transition from these areas at certain times of the year. While glassing for mule deer, for example, I like to put more focus on bitterbrush and oak covered ridges during the early spring and summer. As the bucks are in their bachelor herds with velvet-covered antlers, I focus on higher elevations on grassy slopes and shady timber patches. During the late season, I focus on quaking aspen patches and sagebrush flats. These deer may be located in different areas, but over time, and after learning certain habits, it is important to locate areas bucks like to be so that you can concentrate on that area. Stay flexible, utilize other animals and the way they act to locate other game. Numerous times we have used other hunters that are out pounding the hills to locate game. As they have pushed the ridges deer have slowly moved away undetected from them and bedded in a new location. Utilize whatever elements and situations you can to locate more game.

No matter what, finding a systematic approach to glassing is important. Get the best optics possible, a good tripod, a solid head, and find a method that works for you. Glass hard, save your energy and stay out longer than you thought, covering those “gamey” areas thoroughly and I guarantee you will find more game.



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Layering Tips: Late Season Hunts

(continued from page 11)

Putting on a rain jacket and pants over those items while you glass will not only help retain the heat – it will also protect them from getting sliced on a rock or a sharp stick.

The Extremities: Hats, Gloves and Footwear

Finally, don't forget that keeping your head, hands and feet warm are essential to staying out all day on a late season hunt. A warm, thermal beanie is so important, that I'll often keep a spare in the truck. In case one gets wet or gets lost, it's nice having a backup. The same goes for gloves. If a pair of gloves gets wet, having a backup pair is critical. I also like to bring different glove options for glassing and for hiking. A pair of down glassing mittens is great for sitting behind the binoculars. And a more breathable pair of merino wool gloves is ideal when on the move.

Last, it would be difficult to over-emphasize the importance of a great pair of boots on any late season hunt. Here at Caribou Gear, we're all big fans of Kenetrek boots. They are built to handle the most extreme conditions. The Mountain Extreme 400 is an insulated mountain boot that will take me through almost any conditions. If it's going to be extremely snowy or cold, then I'll pack my Kenetrek Grizzly Pac Boots.

And we've mentioned this several times before, but don't forget that the best boots in the world won't function properly if you're not wearing quality socks underneath. A merino or merino-synthetic blend sock is essential. Don't wear cotton under any circumstances. Not only do I keep spare socks back at camp – but I actually pack a pair of extra socks in my daypack on late season hunts. If your first pair gets sweaty or wet, it can feel amazing to put on a fresh pair of socks halfway through the day.

33 Tips For Hunting The Deer Rut

(continued from page 24)

32) Say you're stalking on the plains one day in November, and a doe jumps up in a grassy draw. Jog over to a tree and rest your rifle, or drop your shooting sticks and get ready. A shooter buck is apt to stand up anytime. If one does, don't bang off a wild shot. As long as the buck keeps the doe in sight, he'll stand there, tongue lolling and gawking. You should wait 5 or 10 good seconds at least to align your crosshair and drop him.

33) My calling locations have evolved over the years. I've started to set up less on big sign and more on the terrain and any visible structure in an area. I like to hang a stand where I can see a lot of country, like a big hardwood bottom or a wide hollow. When I see a buck on the prowl or dogging a doe, I try to pull him close with a few rattles, grunts or bleats.

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