

BACKCOUNTRY JOURNAL

Magazine of Backcountry Hunters & Anglers

Winter 2014

**Sage Grouse:
A Western Tradition**

**Rendezvous
with BHA**

**Hunting
Photo
Tips**

**Wild Lands,
Wild Trout**

Elk Tracks



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TONY HECKARD

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

By Land Tawney

Bloody the Rock

Earlier this fall, my sister's wedding was held at the Teller Wildlife Refuge. The setting was spectacular. Nestled in the heart of Montana's Bitterroot Valley and framed by the Bitterroot and Sapphire Mountains, the Refuge is truly a gem among gems. It is home to spring creeks that hold trout and waterfowl, fields that are home to pheasants and deer, an occasional moose, and a host of incredible species like sandhill cranes and osprey. The Bitterroot Valley was home to the first white settlers in the state, and has been a fertile productive landscape for generations. As of late, the valley has seen some of the most rapid growth in Montana, second only to the Gallatin Valley near Bozeman. Ratcheted development has gone unchecked with little or no zoning and wildlife habitat has suffered. To say the Refuge is a much needed respite for wildlife is an understatement.

All week the weather was rainy and cold, especially nasty for September in Montana. Yet, on the day of the wedding we awoke to sunshine and a slight breeze. All was right. Along with my stepfather, I was privileged to walk my youngest sister down the aisle, coaching her the whole way. It felt like she was my own daughter. Like many fathers of the bride, I saw her life flash before my eyes. She was 10 when my father passed; this untimely passing created a deep bond between us that is like both brother-and-sister and father-and-daughter. We share something else as well: a deep desire to carry on the conservation legacy started in our family by our mother and father. Whitney is currently a lobbyist for Ducks Unlimited in our nation's Capitol and is a true warrior for waterfowl. She will accomplish more things in the name of conservation than I ever will. I truly believe that. She has the talent, experience, and heart to kick some major ass. I said so in my toast to wedding attendees and ended with a declaration that someday soon she and I would "bloody the rock together." This drew a large gasp from the crowd – and so I had to explain.

My father helped set aside the Teller Wildlife Refuge with the financial help and vision of Otto Teller. Otto first came to the valley in pursuit of trout and quickly fell in love. Our family has roots in this area that go back to the 1870s. My father grew up hunting some of the very same sloughs on the refuge and as a lawyer with the gift of gab focusing on conservation easements, it was only natural that he and Otto worked together to set aside a pearl in an ever-developing landscape. Every year these visionaries' contribution to conservation is celebrated at the TnT (Teller and Tawney) Dinner and Auction. Our family grew up recreating on this hallowed ground – picnics, hunting, fishing – we had the run of the place. Today the Refuge serves



The author pays tribute to his father and his vision of conservation by visiting the rock where his ashes are buried after each successful hunt.

the local community through education, volunteer opportunities and recreation. Our father's ashes are buried under a large granite rock that overlooks a spring creek on the Refuge. Every time I hunt the property I ritualistically take the ducks and geese we have harvested and visit his rock. I then proceed to rub some of the blood from these creatures on the rock as a way of saying hello to him. Bloodying the rock!

After dark on the night of my sister's wedding, my father's three siblings and their children or as I like to call us, the next generation, visited the rock. On the drive down on a windswept gravel road we spied a great horned owl sitting with purpose on a fence post. When we got to our destination, we were in complete darkness and the stars reflected on the creek. All of us were silent. Then we started to talk, remembering my father and missing him dearly on this special day. No blood from waterfowl was rubbed on the rock that evening but instead the blood of grapes through a bit of merlot. I couldn't think of a better christening of such a wonderful day.

My commitment to conservation has never been stronger. I'm guessing that we all have similar stories that inspire us to carry on the legacy of those great leaders, mentors, and everyday hunters and anglers that came before us. Cheers to doing just that.

Onward and Upward, Land 

Being 'on call' for the Backcountry

One November morning I was working in my office when I got an email. It was from a friend who was hunting and came across a smoking hot set of bear tracks in the new snow. He sent me a picture and asked if I thought they were black bear or grizzly.

"Grizzly," I emailed back. "Better hunt the other direction."

Thinking back, it was nearly 20 years ago when I first encountered this new phenomenon: use of a cellular telephone on a hunting trip.

Three of us had mountain-biked deep into the Big Belt Mountains. One of my partners said, "I've got a phone if you want to check in with your wife tonight."

I was dumbstruck. I was a newlywed and missed my wife, but the idea of calling from hunting camp seemed utterly foreign. But another time, I was glad someone in my party had a phone and enough battery power for one call. Four of us were climbing above timberline when we ran out of daylight before we ran out of mountain. Rather than risk miles of terrain strewn with cliffs, grizzlies and marmot holes, we decided to sit out the night. That one phone call saved our wives a sleepless night full of worry and probably prevented them from alerting Search and Rescue.

Recently, Backcountry Hunters & Anglers asked our Facebook audience if they text, email or use a cell phone when outdoors. Answers were mixed and opinions ran from "hell no!" to "all the time."

I'm old fashioned. I don't think the phone works where I hunt but I have no intention of testing it. What's the point of getting away from it all if you take it all with you? But I also realize this is personal choice and a mobile device can be a handy, lightweight piece of equipment with lots of functions. In the future, more people will be carrying them outdoors and more places will have coverage. Still, if you depend on a cell phone for survival or rescue in the backcountry, you're in for a rude surprise when the battery dies.

At BHA, we know good communication is key to achieving our mission. We invest heavily in many communication tools, including the one you're holding in your hand – BACKCOUNTRY JOURNAL. Editor Kevin Rhoades has made this an excellent publication with a tight budget.

I grew up reading Ted Trueblood and Jack O'Connor in the magazines of the day. Youngsters today, though, are following online and televised outdoors heroes like Steve Rinella and Randy Newberg.

So BHA has to adapt and lead the way. We touch nearly 50,000 people a week on Facebook, while many also follow our Twitter feed, blog posts, visit our website and read our email newsletters. Tim Brass, of Colorado, gets major kudos for nurturing those conversations. What's particularly engaging about social media is the instant feedback from our members, supporters and detractors.

BHA is particularly proud of Backcountry College, a series of short videos on our website that demonstrate the fundamental skills of safe and enjoyable backcountry travel: How to start a fire, make a shelter and other things we should all know. The host, Clay Hayes, of Idaho, is a skilled woodsman and captures it all on video. These are aimed at the novice outdoorsman, but veterans will learn something, too.

Of course, BHA is still active in traditional media such as newspapers and magazines. One week this fall, journalists from the *Missoulian* and the *Washington Post* interviewed BHA representatives in the same week. Increasingly, journalists see BHA as a credible source on conservation issues affecting sportsmen.

This all helps fulfill BHA's mission of educating others about America's wild public lands, waters and wildlife. But there's still no replacement for one-on-one communication, or talking to small groups of people. Any advertising executive will tell you the best advertising is word-of-mouth.

That's where we need you. Whether

you're sitting around a campfire or firing off a comment on a national blog, keep us in mind.

Please help spread the word about the value of America's backcountry and the value of BHA. Our momentum and influence are at all-time highs, and have great potential for the future. But it's all based on grassroots, boots-on-the-ground by our members – by you. 🐾

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Sage Grouse: A Western Tradition

By John C. Tull

As an upland bird hunter living in Nevada, I've enjoyed the great tradition of an early season outing in search of sage grouse. It's perfect for warming up me and my dog for the more arduous, later-season challenge of chasing chukar. Sage grouse are generally found in landscapes of rolling, sagebrush-covered hills and benches, locations that are more forgiving on out-of-shape leg muscles.

It was the last weekend in September, and my friend Kyle Davis and I had been planning this hunt for months. Each spring we discuss whether the coming fall will be the last time we get to hunt sage grouse in Nevada.

By 2015, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will decide whether the bird should be listed under the Endangered Species Act. A listing will likely result in public outcry to halt hunting everywhere, even though this is not the reason these birds have faced such drastic declines over the past century.

But that fall day, we left Reno in mid-

afternoon, racing the sun to our preferred campsite in the Sheldon National Wildlife Refuge. Our plan that first night was simple: pitch our tents, cook a quick meal and enjoy a few beers before bed so we'd be well-rested for the morning hunt. Kyle and I got up with the sun Saturday morning, but not with a burst of energy. Those couple beers the night before may have stretched out to a couple more, and then my coffee stash was lost somewhere in my duffel bag not to be found again until I unpacked back at home.

Luckily, my French Brittany, Jaca, had enough enthusiasm to recharge all of us. Before long, we were off to one of the best places on the planet: the home of sage grouse. The particular home we visited also happened to be in a Wilderness Study Area on Bureau of Land Management lands that measures in at just over 100,000 acres. Massacre Rim WSA flanks the southeastern periphery of the Sheldon National Wildlife Refuge, providing a large piece of our National Conservation Lands as a buffer between

the Refuge and the Black Rock National Conservation Area to the south.

The decline in sage grouse that has led to potential federal protection is the result of many factors. The most prominent one in Nevada at this time is mass conversion of large areas from sagebrush communities to monocultures of cheatgrass. In other areas, like the Great Basin, cheatgrass has rapidly adapted to out-compete native grasses, serves as a fine fuel to carry wildfire, and rapidly takes over entire landscapes once burned. But in cooler and wetter regions in Nevada, typically at higher elevations or latitudes, cheatgrass has not completely claimed this advantage. The Sheldon National Wildlife Refuge and Massacre Rim serves as one of these strongholds for sagebrush habitats and sage grouse.

And yet it was there that Jaca, Kyle and I found ourselves on Saturday morning. The sagebrush ocean was vibrant. Water from recent storms was still pooled in the basalt rock formations scattered across the landscape and sage grouse

By 2015, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will decide whether the bird should be listed under the Endangered Species Act. A listing will likely result in public outcry to halt hunting everywhere, even though this is not the reason these birds have faced such drastic declines over the past century.





were plentiful. Within 40 minutes of leaving our truck, Kyle and I hiked up several-hundred feet in elevation and found a wide, flat bench typical of the breeding habitat used by sage grouse. We had a good, steady wind, and soon Jaca was acting birdy and working a narrowing back-and-forth clip ahead of us. With no more warning than that, a group of 20 sage grouse rose 50 yards ahead of us, leaping from the ground like winged footballs, quickly heading out of site across the bench. The game was afoot!

Kyle decided to go a different direction, even without the aid of a dog. I thought that a 20-bird group might be the only sage grouse on this entire bench, so Jaca and I continued in pursuit of the flushed birds.

Jaca continued to cover ground at a rapid pace, and her instincts beginning to drive her into a frenzy of 100-yard dashes back and forth ahead of me. I love seeing dogs work on a bird hunt, and I was enjoying this until she ran through a group of a half dozen birds well beyond the reach of my trusty 12-gauge. I brought her back

in and we started afresh, secure in the knowledge that the small group she broke only flew a quarter mile or so upwind.

As I began working with her in that direction, I heard what sounded like a firing squad off in the distance. Apparently Kyle had no trouble running into birds without a dog after all. Within a minute, another volley was firing off in his direction. I knew we had this broad landscape to ourselves, so I was hoping he remembered the limit was two birds. I also started to second-guess my dog's abilities.

As if she knew my thoughts, Jaca worked into another group of sage grouse. Four birds popped up from three different spots all within a 20-yard spread ahead of her, and about 35 yards from me. She held, having found a strong scent that instinctively locked her in place, tail stump pointing up, ears slightly lifted, looking proud and urging me to take notice so we could complete the deal. I worked in toward her. A sage grouse she found jumped up and took to wing as I lined up my shot, pulled the trigger and then watched it tumble. Jaca ran over and

struggled to mouth the bird that was bigger than her head. She pulled it off the ground and dutifully brought it to me.

At these moments, I know why I love the upland bird hunt. I looked ahead to where I had marked that earlier group of birds. I had already seen about 50 birds by this time and I knew Kyle was finding his own based on the steady stream of gunfire I heard. So I decided it was time to regroup and see where we stood. As I worked toward him, I lost the wind advantage and another dozen or more birds broke out in front of Jaca on two separate occasions. I crested a rise and just caught sight of Kyle swinging on and dropping a bird, which turned out to be his second and last. I suggested that before heading back to the truck, we make one more looping run up to some cover that had not been explored.

We worked toward a patch of taller sagebrush amongst the black sage. Jaca seemed interested but really didn't have a good line with the wind that had picked up. I was loping along, not paying attention when a bird not more than 15 yards



away rose and literally hovered in place, stuck while trying to fly away from us and into a gusting wind. But what did I do? I fumbled around with my gun, pulled up high and fired clear over the bird right as it caught the wind and powered off away from me. Of course, I tried to make up for my blunder by following with my barrel and losing my second round on target. I never got myself back in line even though I fired off that second shell in some blind hope that my steel field shot would somehow magnetize itself to the bird and restore my pride.

Kyle wasn't nearly as abrasive with criticism of that foul up as he could have been. I asked him how many shots he fired for his two birds and he told me he left the truck with a full box of shells, but was returning with only 13. Neither of us had a strong claim on marksmanship at that moment, and we both fell silent as

we resumed our walk back to the truck.

And as all great bird hunts go, right as I had resigned myself to not getting another grouse, Jaca came up hard on a point. I walked in on her and dropped this bird on my second shot. Limited out, we worked our way back to the truck having seen over a hundred birds between us.

We got back to camp and we all slept for about an hour. Mildly reinvigorated, we set to cleaning our haul from the morning hunt. We cooked two birds and packaged the other two to bring home. Sage grouse are big and we had more than we could possibly eat in one sitting. We threw together our sage grouse stew to simmer as we enjoyed the late afternoon calm before the gale force winds set upon us and marked the arrival of the predicted weather front.

That night, the horrendous wind blew so strong that tent poles were collapsing

inward, causing the tent fabric to push against my face, making for a very poor night's sleep. Let's just say that Kyle's budget tent fared worse. Frankly, I was very surprised to see any vertical structure to his tent when we crawled out to happily break camp at first light.

We were tired and worn out, but still had the morning hunt on the way out ahead of us. We followed the same path as the day before and worked into the wind. Unfortunately, it was a steady 15 mph wind with 35 mph gusts coming frequently. This made for a tough go at the sage grouse, but I learned something new about the bird. From my observations this day, sage-grouse show a heightened level of vigilance in a heavy wind. Fortunately, a few birds decided their plan was to hold the ground and hope that whatever was concerning their sage grouse companions was going to pass by them unnoticed.

The sage grouse decline has been on everyone's radar for quite some time. It wasn't until the specter of a sage grouse listing by the Fish and Wildlife Service became clear, that people began to fully realize what federally protected sage grouse might mean.



One of these graced my dinner plate back in Reno for my wife and two daughters, all of whom enjoyed the taste of fresh Nevada sage grouse that week.

Less fortunate was Kyle. He seemed a lot worse for the wear from the short night's sleep. Not unlike the day before, we were working the top edge of the bench on our way out when Jaca stood on point. Sadly Kyle struggled to find his safety and, too late, proceeded to hurl steel pellets in vain at a long-distant sage grouse.

Back at the truck, I praised Jaca and examined our bird. We set off for home with thoughts of soft beds and pillows, warm spouses, and a really good night's sleep ahead.

All told, we harvested four juveniles and one adult hen that, according to Shawn Espinosa, Upland Game Specialist for the Nevada Department of Wildlife, had produced a clutch of birds that year. All of this he was able to glean from

a few wings, a signal of the value of wing data for monitoring sage grouse populations in areas still hunted in Nevada.

The sage grouse decline has been on everyone's radar for quite some time. In Nevada, conservation efforts began in earnest in the late 1990s. By 2000, former Gov. Kenny Guinn had established a team of people representing diverse interests to develop a Governor's Sage Grouse Conservation Plan. This plan was completed in 2002 and mobilized the efforts of many researchers, biologists, ranchers, conservationists, members of industry, and local, state and federal government agency personnel. Sadly, little of this plan was implemented, primarily due to a lack of funding at both state and federal levels. It wasn't until the specter of a sage grouse listing by the Fish and Wildlife Service became clear, that people began to fully realize what federally protected sage grouse might mean for

Nevada and eleven other Western states.

A number of people are again hard at work trying to derive a solution that will keep the sage grouse on Nevada's landscapes for perpetuity. It will require that we find places where we are comfortable with allowing activities that have economic and other non-conservation benefits. This solution will need a mechanism to provide adequate funding to work on restoring and maintaining those best places that need assistance. And it will require cooperation between entities at local, state and federal levels to pull off all the necessary pieces for success.

With an approach that involves teamwork and a commitment to success, we should be able to realize a greater outcome for hunters, for sage grouse and for the exceptional landscapes in which sage grouse and other wildlife thrive.

John Tull is a BHA member hailing from Reno, Nev. 🐾

Sportsmen do not want sage grouse to be listed as an endangered species. According the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, sportsmen's dollars contributed at least \$130 million to sage grouse management and conservation between 2000 and 2012. BHA chapters are actively involved throughout the West in sage grouse conservation to make sure we make good on that investment. Read more at www.backcountryhunters.org.

My Favorite Hunting Partner

By Mark Penninger



September 1996 was my first hunting trip to the Last Frontier, and three months later my first child was born. Little did I know that this newborn would be a young woman and a favorite hunting partner some seventeen years later.

Each trip north I was accompanied by competent adult companions, in pursuit of caribou, moose, salmon, and Sitka black-tailed deer. My next (ninth) trip would be much different. My hunting partner would be a 16-year-old girl, barely 99 pounds and 5-feet tall. When my daughter Bailey isn't fiddling, dancing, or studying, she's hunting with me.

One of my goals as a father is to share wild places with my children. Backpacking and hunting offer a means to show them wild places. We've backpacked Oregon, Wyoming and New Zealand, and have a long bucket list to work on.

A few years ago I began thinking about how little time I still have with my children at home. Bailey would be dispersing for college in just a couple of years. Before that, I would take her on an adventure that would instill a love and respect for wild places that cannot be found any way short of being there.

In late August 2013 we embarked on



The author wanted to take his daughter on an adventure that would instill a love and respect for wild places – an Alaskan caribou trip.

a father-daughter, do-it-yourself caribou hunt in the interior of Alaska. She carried her diminutive Ruger Model 77 Compact in 7mm-08, while I relied on my longbow and quiver of Douglas-fir arrows.

Bailey claims that her sights are set on a career in wildlife biology, in my

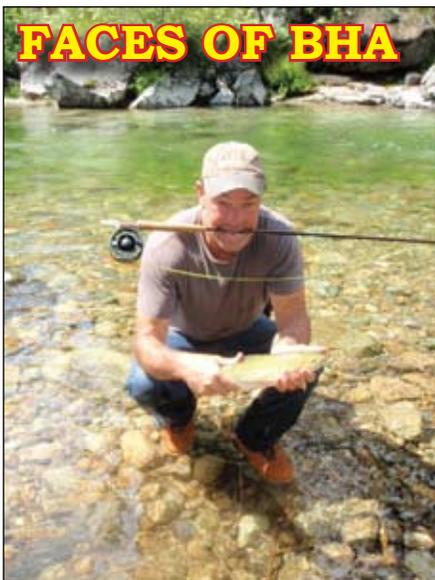
footsteps. Although I would support her in almost any career path she chooses, it is satisfying for her to show interest in my chosen field. Besides hunting, she would experience remote Alaska up close, and I wanted her to see it all and soak it in.

She was all smiles as the Super Cub bounced to a stop on the gravel bar. "I saw Dall sheep and caribou!" she exclaimed. I had already pitched our tipi tent and began organizing camp in the 3.5 hours it took the pilot to retrieve Bailey from Fairbanks.

The next eight days dished out colder weather than we ever expected. It rained, snowed and socked in. We talked, glassed, hiked, hunted and smiled a lot. Bailey took a great bull caribou, with spectacular tops. The loads of meat, cape and antlers that we packed on our backs the 1.5 miles and 1,000 feet down to camp was strenuous, but satisfying. We saw a pack of nine wolves, plus another that jumped the river right at camp. A beautiful grizzly kept our senses keen.

My longbow never loosed an arrow at a caribou on this trip. However, I brought home something more meaningful than meat or antlers.

Mark is a BHA member hailing from La Grande, Ore. 🐾



'We are the carriers of the fire. We need to be sure this elemental fire doesn't go out.'

Hal Herring: Fighting Indifference Word by Word

By Holly Endersby

Hal Herring has long been a denizen of the woods, swamps and rivers of America, from Southern bayous to craggy Western peaks. His unique voice and passion for America's backcountry makes him a perfect match for speaking at the 2014 Backcountry Hunters & Anglers North American Rendezvous.

Herring got his first 20 gauge when he was nine and has been toting a firearm ever since. A native of Alabama, Herring grew up spending afternoons combing the woods and fishing for smallmouth bass in the many rivers.

"My dad didn't hunt," he shares, "but my parents always helped me out with ammo and guns at Christmas. And back then, whitetails were just coming back and people weren't jealous of property lines. I could walk and hunt just about everywhere."

Not liking the high school scene, Herring quit at the end of his junior year. "I

wandered around with a rifle and a fishing rod when other kids were in school."

But that wasn't the end of his education. Besides his backwoods schooling, Herring went to college early in Tuscaloosa, Ala., where he noticed a real lack of public land for hunting.

"When you lack public land, you lack opportunity," Herring says.

While he was in his last year of college, Herring and a friend formed their own tree planting company. "Timber companies were leveling the southern hardwood forests for chip mill fodder," he recalls. "We were hired to replant with loblolly pine, a species that has a 25-year cycle, to feed the pulp mills of the South."

Herring saw the ruined rivers and devastation that is the hallmark of shortsighted management philosophies.

"When the timber companies wanted us to poison all the trees along the creeks because they weren't supposed to harvest in the riparian zones, that was the clincher for us. We just couldn't be part of that destruction."

After college, Herring started writing fiction. But his thoughts began to turn more and more to issues in the real world. At age 25, he attended a writer's workshop in Montana. The following year, he moved to Montana permanently, working as both a forestry contractor and as a manager of a small ranch in the Bitterroot Valley.

"The ranch wintered 110 head of elk and the following year when I became a legal Montana resident, I hunted elk on public land behind the ranch and got one. I have been obsessed with elk ever since."

It was at this time that Herring discovered he could make a living writing.

"I won a story contest that paid me \$500. At the time, we were getting \$800 a month for managing the ranch and it dawned on me that writing could help pay the bills."

But like most freelance writers, Herring took on other jobs to take care of himself and his family. While he worked on a graduate school degree, he thinned timber and worked on mine reclamation projects. His big writing break came with an article on game farms and the

destruction of the Bitterroot Valley that was picked up by *High Country News* and from there expanded to several national magazines including *The Atlantic*. *Bugle* magazine became a regular outlet for Herring over the years and today Herring is a contributing editor for *Field & Stream*. He has published hundreds of articles dating back to 1997.

"Nonfiction gave me the chance to write about what I was fascinated with and the life I was living," he explains.

Today, Herring's writing often focuses on the threats he sees to public lands. He lists the selling off of federal public lands as a pre-eminent threat to our hunting and fishing heritage, along with a declining number of people who value public lands. For Herring, public land is the foundation of America's outdoor heritage and way of life.

"There is a price to be paid for this splendid isolation we love," Herring says. "We must oppose those who would end public land and end what we love. We have to fight to keep what we treasure."

Herring speaks proudly of the white-tail bucks his son killed in Montana and he talks about the need to pass our passion for wild land and hunting on, or, he fears, we will see it slowly disappear. After 15 years of writing about hunting, fishing and conservation, Herring knows that each of us is responsible for safeguarding our public land and water and working to ensure hunting and angling continues for generations to come.

"We are the carriers of the fire," he says of BHA members. "We are the repository of 30,000-40,000 years of human passion and drive to hunt. We totally evolved to live this way. It's deep, it's blood, it's cold, darkness and rough terrain. Then back to blood again. We need to be sure this elemental fire doesn't go out."

This year, Herring was the recipient of the National Wildlife Federation's 2013 Special Achievement Award for his continuing work in conservation. Herring will be keynote speaker at the 2014 Backcountry Hunters & Anglers North American Rendezvous in Denver this March, where he is sure to inspire and challenge us to continue carrying the fire. 🐾



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Friday Night Sportsman's Night Out
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"Parade of Tents"
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Backcountry Hunters & Anglers has become a vocal leader for sportsmen that value hunting and fishing in landscapes that are quiet, wild and challenging and decision makers at state and national levels are listening to our opinions. Whether you hunt or fish on wild public lands, or are simply interested in learning more about it, we invite you to join us at this year's national gathering in Denver, Colorado.

We hope to see you there!



*The Sportsmen's Voice for Our Wild Public
Lands, Waters and Wildlife*

COVER PHOTO BY TONYBYNUM.COM

SCHEDULE:

Friday: Dinner followed by the Backcountry Bash! We'll have drinks, slide show, opening remarks, etc.
Saturday: Seminars, Parade of Tents, Banquet Dinner, Auction & Raffle, Outdoor Exhibitors, and our keynote speaker, Hal Herring.
Sunday: Breakfast and wrap up!

COSTS:

Weekend Ticket: \$130 – kids under 16 are free. This includes Friday Backcountry Bash, Saturday Seminars & Activities, Lunch Provided, Saturday Banquet Dinner with speaker Hal Herring and Auction.
Friday Dinner: \$30
Friday Backcountry Bash Only: \$20
Saturday seminars & dinner Ticket: \$100
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To purchase tickets, make donations, become a sponsor or reserve booth space, visit us online at:
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BHA CHAPTER NEWS



BHA recently set up camp in Washington, D.C., to advocate for backcountry protections.

BHA goes to Washington, D.C.

This past September, eight BHA “boots on the ground” volunteers and four staff descended upon Washington, D.C. While most of you were chasing grouse, scouting, or stalking a big bull, 12 dedicated individuals took their boots to the halls of Congress, exemplifying our grassroots, public land hunting and angling philosophy. Our smash up team included: Bob Mirasole (Wash.), Brian Jennings (Ore.), Derek Farr (Idaho), Chris Mero (Nev.), Jay Banta (Utah), Jerry Egge (Wyo.), Oscar Simpson (N.M.), Sean Clarkson (Md.), Erik Jensen (Minn.), Tim Brass (Colo.), and Caitlin Twohig and Land Tawney (Mont.).

All told, over the course of two days, the group conducted 35 meetings up on Capitol Hill. Their goal was to educate on behalf of full funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund and the difference between the House and Senate versions of the Recreational Fishing and Hunting Heritage and Opportunities Act. Both solidify hunting and fishing as a priority in the U.S. Fish and Wild Service, U.S. Forest Service, and Bureau of Land Management land use management plans which BHA supports; but the House version contains provisions that attack the Wilderness Act and National Environmental Policy Act, while the Senate version does not. BHA supports the Senate version.

John Gale, BHA board national member, was able to partake in the trip. He said, “I witnessed a unique reaction to BHA’s presence in D.C. that surprised even me. Having lived there for many years, I can say I’ve seen and conducted my fair share of fly-ins but never were there so many great member meetings with so many new credible and authentic voices. I remained in D.C. through the end of the week on other business and I’m happy to report that there was a buzz on the Hill well after BHA folks were back in their planes heading home. Offices were talking about it in really fantastic ways as were key folks in the administration.”

BHA chapters with boots on the ground are looking out for our backcountry

ARIZONA

Backcountry Hunters and Anglers (BHA) is proud to announce the formation of a new chapter in Arizona. The official BHA roster lists 30 members for Arizona, and the chapter is already growing fast. Twelve of these members unanimously voted to form a BHA chapter during a meeting at the Sportsman’s Warehouse in Tucson on August 10, 2013. The members also elected four individuals to board positions:
Co-Chairs: Kurt Bahti & Ross McCollum
Treasurer: Jim Littlejohn
Secretary: John Windes

The chapter organization, in addition to the elected board, will also include an advisory board and/or board of directors, as required, to address topics and issues that are of interest to BHA.

CALIFORNIA

The California Chapter has continued to see steady membership growth since our formation. We are planning on having a booth at the International Sportsman’s Exposition in Sacramento on Jan. 9-12, 2014. Additionally, we are trying to coordinate hosting of the Hunting Film Tour at the same time to continue to boost Chapter membership.

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife has been conducting scoping meetings throughout the state for their State Wildlife Action Plan. The SWAP is updated every 10 years and is highly complex given California’s 840 miles of coastline. We are planning on attending the final meeting in Sacramento in De-

ember to determine if there are areas we can be involved in going forward.



Colorado Backcountry Hunters & Anglers is working with Trout Unlimited, Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership, Bull Moose Sportsmen and other conservation groups to pass H.R. 1839, the Hermosa Creek Watershed Protection Act. This bipartisan legislation is widely supported by sportsmen and other public lands user groups. The Act would designate 68,289 acres as the "Hermosa Creek Special Management Area" and approximately 37,236 acres as the "Hermosa Creek Wilderness."

BHA Executive Director Land Tawney and BHA Southern Rockies Coordinator Tim Brass organized Hunter Happy Hours in Paonia and Gunnison to get local hunter-angler input on a Gunnison County collaborative conservation effort. We got maps out on the proposed conservation areas and received valuable input from those who hunt and fish this area, while building membership and awareness of BHA in Gunnison County.

Colorado BHA submitted comments on a number of resource management plans in support of non-motorized habitat and hunting opportunities on public lands both on the West Slope and Front Range. We have also been working with Colorado Parks and Wildlife on developing draft regulations which ban drones for any hunting or scouting; serving as a sportsmen advisory board representative for the State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan; actively engaging and commenting on the department's strategic plan; and have several members involved with the State's Sportsmen Roundtable.



BHA and the Idaho Department of Fish and Game are partnering to pilot a reward program on the Craig Mountain Wildlife Management Area near Lewiston. Stickers promoting BHA's reward program for people who report motorized traffic restriction violations will be placed on gates in the area. Hopefully this pilot program proves successful and we will be able to expand this program to the rest of Idaho going forward.



Minnesota BHA continued its efforts to fight proposed sulfide (i.e., copper-



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nickel) mining operations on the periphery of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness in the Superior National Forest and in watersheds that drain into Lake Superior, publishing an op-ed, "Sportsmen: Nothing 'green' about sulfide mining," in the Grand Rapids (Minn.) *Herald-Review*.

We also had a great first annual rendezvous Sept. 6-8, 2013, at Darrell Spencer's cabin along Third River near Dixon Lake in the Chippewa National Forest. The weekend included successful youth duck hunting, target shooting and other activities. See our chapter page on BHA's website (www.backcountryhunters.org) for a short report including photos from the weekend's activities, and stay tuned for information on our second annual rendezvous.

MONTANA

Montana BHA has suggested that Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks substantially improve their current management of Spotted Dog Wildlife Management Area near Deerlodge. Recently purchased for elk winter range and other resources, the WMA includes a legacy of damaging grazing practices and high density motorized routes that degrade the fish and wildlife values of the WMA. Photos detailing riparian and stream damage and deteriorated rangeland were submitted in support for significantly changing management of this important WMA.

Gayle Joslin, a BHA member from Helena and retired FWP biologist, recently received the Len and Sandy Sargent Stewardship Award for her lifelong work on behalf of Montana wildlife resources. The award allowed her to designate conservation groups to receive grants, and as a result, Montana BHA recently received a \$1,000 Sargent grant to help us move forward on Montana issues.

At the request of Montana BHA, MDFWP has drafted drone regulations. Please support prohibition of drones for scouting or hunting activities in Montana by speaking at a meetings or writing FWP on this issue.

Thanks to those who stepped up to the invitation to take a stronger role in Montana BHA; we are organizing a stronger and geographically diverse Montana BHA board.

NEW ENGLAND

In early November, the New England Chapter held its first face-to-face board meeting and discussed a number of current and potential initiatives. In addition to submitting public comments on several conservation-related matters in recent months, the chapter is working toward state bans on the hunting-related use of aerial drones, starting with Vermont. Another objective will be recruitment of new members. To keep in touch with current members, co-chair Corey Ellis has begun sending periodic updates and news links to the chapter email list.

OREGON

On Nov. 26, 2013, the O&C Lands Act, sponsored by Sen. Wyden, was released at a press conference in the governor's office. This bill would manage timber harvests on 2.1 million acres of federal land in an ecologically sustainable manner. Oregon BHA members worked with the senator's staff to identify and protect areas important to sportsmen, and ensure that language reducing open-road densities was included in the bill. Among the bill's highlights:

- Requires timber harvests mimic natural forest processes.
- Sets aside nearly a million acres for conservation and recreation.
- Creates six new backcountry primitive areas.
- Increases protections on riparian areas.
- Reduces road densities.

This landmark legislation that puts conservation first shows how the voice of sportsmen can influence federal land policy, and helps position BHA as a significant force in the conservation community.

UTAH

Over the winter, Utah Backcountry Hunters & Anglers continued its participation in Rep. Rob Bishop's Public Land Exchange Initiative. Much of Utah BHA's effort has been working with legislators, county commissioners and other decision-makers to make sure that the voice of sportsmen who value roadless backcountry is considered when the future of our public lands is at stake.

Working with other stakeholders that include conservation and sportsmen's groups, energy development interests and agency officials, Utah BHA's top priority has been to urge land exchanges

that will result in the acquisition and permanent protection of the extraordinary wildlife habitat in the Book Cliffs Roadless Area in east central Utah.

While the Book Cliffs roadless parcel has received much attention in this process due in part to proposed leasing of the area by the Utah School Institutional Trust Lands Administration for energy development, Utah BHA has also been working to determine if additional areas in the state may yet exist that are equally worthy of protection.

To help make sure that decision-makers are aware of our concerns, Utah Coordinator Ken Theis has been developing short video clips of BHA members and other interested sportsmen to convey their personal messages based on the simple question: "What would you say to our political leaders and resource managers if you only had one minute to tell them about the public lands you most care about?"

WASHINGTON

The Washington Chapter members spent the fall actively combing the countryside looking for projects, as well as chasing deer, elk, bear, cougar, and feathered and finned quarry. Members have continued support of NEWFC and the Yakima Project and have also attended meetings for the Columbia Treaty (fish ladders on Grand Collie Dam as well as Chief Joseph) and the planning meeting for planting Springer's in the Okanogan.

As always, the chapter leadership is looking for any project the membership feels passionate about, and we are also still looking for someone to take on organizing a winter and summer gathering.

To contact BHA Chapter Chairs:

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NewEngland@backcountryhunters.org

Field & Stream honors Buzz Hettick of Wyoming as 'Hero of Conservation'

Sportsmen and conservationist Buzz Hettick of Laramie, Wyo., was recently recognized as a "Hero of Conservation" by the venerable national magazine FIELD & STREAM.

The magazine recognized Hettick for leading efforts to restore and protect habitat on Forest Service land which was degraded by illegal motorized traffic. Hettick led the effort as chairman of the Wyoming Chapter of Backcountry Hunters & Anglers.



A forest researcher by day, Hettick also serves as a volunteer on Wyoming Fish & Game's Governor's Auction tag committee and is actively involved with sportsmen-related issues at the state legislature. He also helped found the Wyoming Chapter of Backcountry Hunters & Anglers.

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The Mentor Phase

By Barry Whitehill

It was noon on a cloudless Nov. 1 general elk opener in the Blue Mountains of eastern Washington. This is a landscape where roads cling to the ridge tops. Since my first successful elk hunt at age 14, I learned that my greatest chance of tagging an elk meant leaving the road and dropping into a canyon abyss. This strategy helped add several other elk to my tally by this, probably my 11th year of elk hunting. Asotin Creek Canyon was the new “honeyhole” I chose to try out that year.

Before first light I had picked my way into the drainage to point where I could see the creek bottom and some promising ridge clearings within shooting range. Unfortunately, it was too nice of a day. Nothing much stirred, not even a breeze. Being one that never sits still for long, I decided to hike back up the ridgeline to have lunch at my rig.

I hadn't gotten far before high-powered round slammed into the ground within 10 feet of me. Without hesitation I hit the deck. From my prone position I scoured the surrounding ridges. I was determined to return fire with my 7mm mag. Fortunately nobody was visible so I edged up to my feet. After just two steps, another round called me back to the ground. There was no mistaking their intent since I was wearing a bright orange external frame pack on a totally exposed hogback. Whoever shot was having fun at my expense. While lying there for the second time, I promised myself that if I got out of my predicament alive, I would become hunter education instructor so I could help influence those I shared my hunting grounds with.

That was 35 years and four states ago. In a way I am thankful for the nameless idiot who pushed me to be proactive. Since then, I have been involved in teaching hundreds of hunter education students in Washington, Idaho, Nevada, and for the past 20 years, in northern Alaska. Long enough to often get recog-



In the mentor stage, one finds satisfaction in contributing to a new hunter's success.

nized when grocery shopping or receive an invite to dinner in a remote community like Arctic Village, not to mention the satisfaction of working to be a positive influence on an activity that my life has revolved around since an early age.

In their research, Drs. Bob Jackson and Bob Norton from the University of Wisconsin-LaCrosse found that hunters move through several phases during the course of their hunting “careers.” Initially, the shooting stage is where a new hunter wants to shoot at something, though I don't think shooting at people is what they had in mind. The next stage is the limiting out phase where the developing hunter measures hunting success by

taking their limit. That is followed by the trophy stage where a hunter takes pride by killing selectively; for example, only taking big bulls and long-bearded turkeys. That progresses into the methods phase, where technique becomes the important factor. The type of equipment is essential; kills are made in order to hunt, rather than hunt to kill. Finally, Jackson and Norton found that a hunter reaches the sportsman stage last, where satisfaction is the measure of the hunt, whether or not game is taken.

However, I believe that the researchers missed an even higher level that a hunter can progress to: the mentor phase. With this stage the enjoyment of the hunt

is defined by the satisfaction found in contributing to a new hunter's success.

As a mentor I am also probably one of the last people left in the United States who can still enter a school with an armload of gun cases and not even raise an eyebrow as I march down the hall to class. That has been my niche for the past few years – teaching the Alaska hunter education program to all seventh graders in a Fairbanks charter school that is made up primarily of Alaska Native students. It has become part of their school curriculum.

Unfortunately, the course I teach over a three-week period is rarely taught in Alaska anymore. Evidently, some in the shooting sports community felt that

I think BHA member and writer Dave Stalling has said it best: 'We don't need more hunters, we need better hunters.'

extended hunter education classes were an impediment to recruiting new hunters. To compete against a full schedule of soccer practices and video games, a hunter education student should only need to fill out a workbook at home, then demonstrate

safe gun handling and shooting proficiency. Now hunter education instructors in Alaska, and I suspect elsewhere, have little to instruct during the standard hunter education classes as they just check a box when a student demonstrates a skill set. However, I think BHA member and writer Dave Stalling has said it best, "We don't need more hunters, we need better hunters."

To that end, creating a class where we can spend quality time learning through such activities as cleaning birds, listening to a guest speaker describe their experience of nearly dying after accidentally shooting himself, along with sharing their homework assignment of turning a prescription bottle into a survival kit, and discussing topics such as "what it means to respect wildlife," I feel will contribute to a new generation of better hunters. And at least I am upholding a promise I made to myself decades ago. 🐾



Bullseye

Forward by Barry Whitehill

In preparation for my recent hunter education class at the Effie Kokrine Charter School, seventh grade teacher Alicia Kangas challenged her class to develop games as a fun tool to help learn hunter education concepts. This game, "Bullseye," was particularly effective in preparing students for their hunter education final test. The creator of Bullseye is seventh grader Deanna Falkner who used the old Battleship game concept. Give it a try and see how successful of a hunter you are.

Bullseye, the game

By Deanna Falkner

Objective: Answer hunter education questions correctly in order to kill all of your opponent's animals on their grid.

STEPS TO PLAY

Mark your animals anywhere on your grid:

Moose = MMMMM

Bear = BBBB

Caribou = CCC

White-tailed deer = WWW

Duck = DD



One player picks a question card and asks the other player the question developed from the hunter education workbook such as:

Which shooting position is generally least steady? (Standing)

What generally causes animals to go extinct? (Loss of habitat)

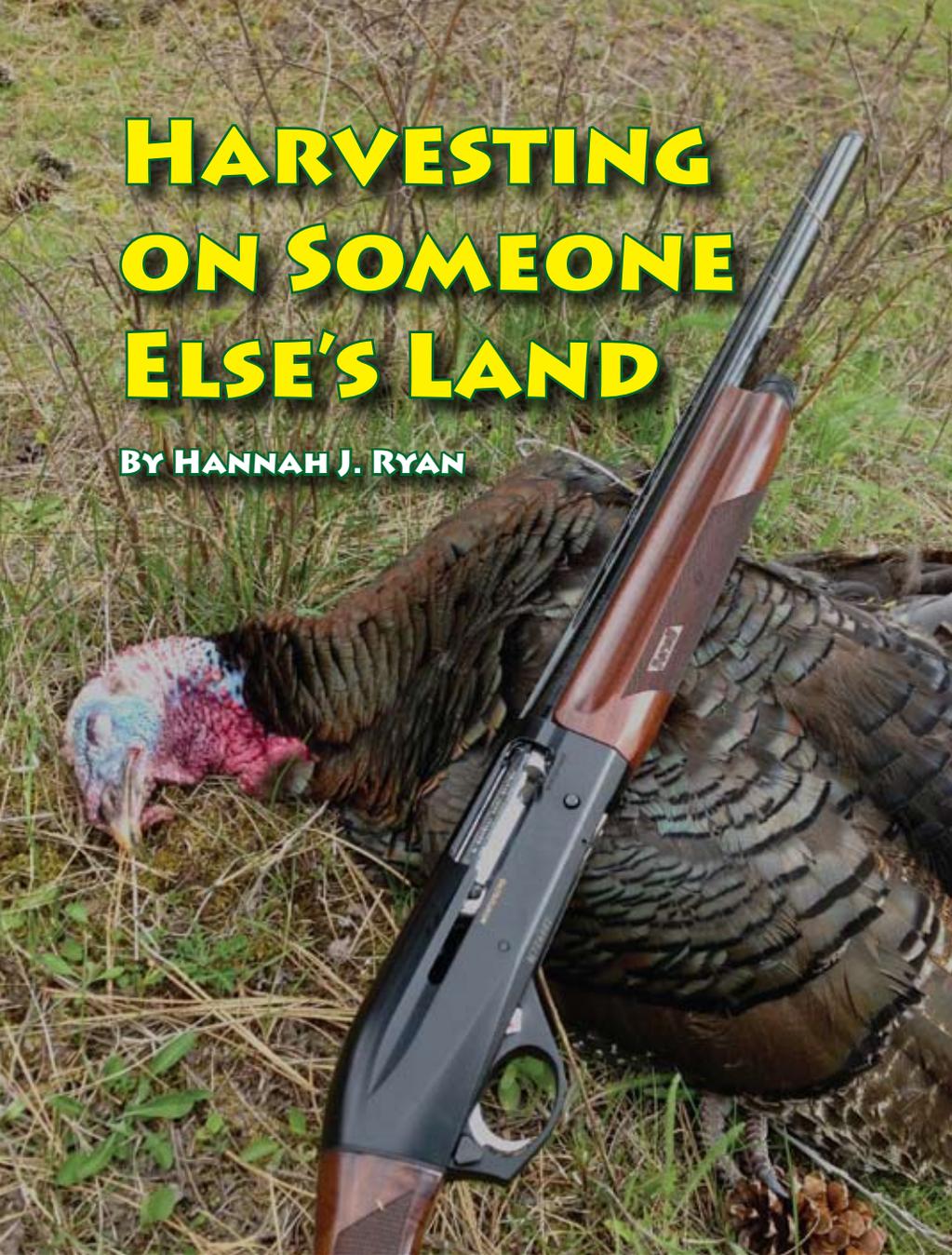
If the player's answer is wrong, they can't call out a coordinate to "shoot" at the other player's animals. They then randomly pick a question card to ask their opponent.

If the answer is correct, the player who answered calls out a coordinate of fire. The person then marks the coordinate they called on their grid and if an animal is shot that has to be revealed.

When all of your opponent's animals are dead, you win!

HARVESTING ON SOMEONE ELSE'S LAND

BY HANNAH J. RYAN



Frozen dew on last year's grass made a soft swishing sound as our boots brushed by. Peering up through the trees in the growing morning light, we looked for the dark forms preparing to leave their night roost. We were listening for a turkey's yelp, but only silence filled the woods.

Last spring I drew the first week of the season on a limited access Block Management Area (BMA) in western Montana. In this private lands access program, landowner participation is voluntary and most hunters appreciate the access to prime wildlife habitat. However, funding for the program has stalled

in recent years and hunter support is all the more crucial to keep this opportunity around.

On opening day I hunted the allotted area with my boyfriend and he coached me about the wily ways of the wild turkey. I marched in his boot steps as he whispered about the type of habitat to find them in, their different calls and other wisdoms.

"They have remarkable eyesight, so pull your face shield down... Let's sit here and call a few times..."

But for all his expertise we didn't hear a single cluck.

However, the area did support a

bounty of other wildlife. On the edge of a small meadow, a dozen cow elk foraged. Bumped whitetails bounced ahead of us with little anxiety. We fantasized about returning to this place in six months for the big game season.

I went out alone the rest of the week but those "hunts" were more like nature walks with a shotgun. The spring snows had melted and the arrowleaf balsamroot were blinking into the crisp spring sunshine. Bluebirds were returning, their azure plumage a delightful sight after a gray winter. My enthusiasm waned as did the likelihood that there were any gobblers in the limited area. I even thought about pulling out my field notebook to do some sketching. But then, on the day before my access to this BMA ended, I saw poop.

The wild turkey scat, still wet, stared up at me. Snapping back into hunting mode, I crept up the trail the scat rested on, and lo and behold there was a turkey head bobbing away from me down a grassy draw. With my heart leaping into my mouth I moved tree to tree, then crawled to within 200 yards of the half dozen hens and three toms, one significantly more mature than the others. I let out a few clucks with my mouth reed and was horrified at the noise it produced. It sounded nothing like the calls I had practiced from YouTube videos. To my utter surprise, the toms displayed and gobbled back, but made no advances.

My ensuing clucks became desperately dreadful as saliva filled the mouth call. The hens apparently didn't like what they were hearing and began moving off with the toms in tow. As the birds rounded the foot of a hillside and disappeared from view, I jumped to my feet and sprinted over the hill's crest in a final attempt to get in range of the boys.

I came over the top and stopped short with no turkeys in sight. Then, the females, having climbed higher to distance themselves from my previous calls, now rounded the slope at a trot and were within 20 yards. They spun at the sight of me, turning back down the hill. The toms began to follow, all bunched together with no clear shot at any of the three. I made a final "puck-puck" call and, miraculously, the mature tom paused and displayed.



The author took her first tom via a program that opens private land to public access.

One shot and I was standing over my first turkey.

The true beauty of this hunt was not only in this take, but also in the land that raised this animal. It was in the green vegetation and rose hips in the turkey's crop. It was in the other wildlife that watched me take one of their own. It was that this hunt happened because a landowner partnered with Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks to allow me on their land.

For the 2013 hunting season, approximately 1,240 landowners have enrolled about 7.8 million acres of land in the Block Management Program. But the rise in Block Management acres has halted. Since 2012 funding has not been available to enroll new acres, said Bart Morris, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks Block Management Coordinator, also a member of Backcountry Hunters and Anglers.

Hunters support Block Management through their sportsman dollars, Mor-

The true beauty of this hunt was not only in this take, but also in the land that raised this animal.

ris said, and by conducting themselves in a way that is respectful to the land and land's managers. They can also be active in comment periods to voice their support of access programs like this.

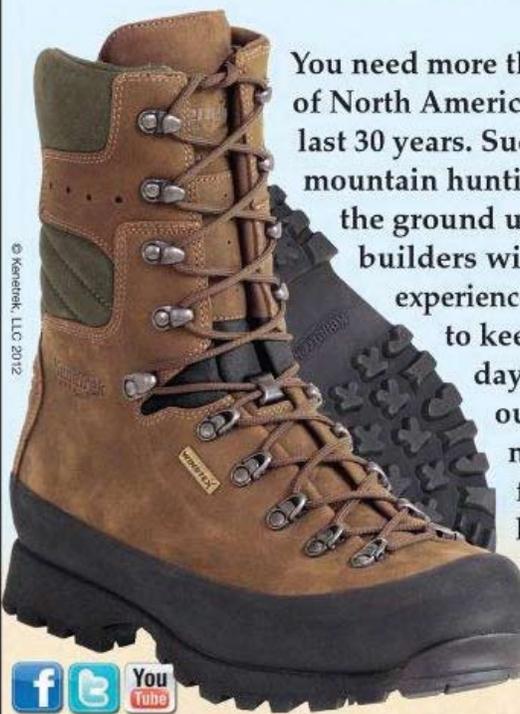
"Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks helps connect the hunter with land," Morris said. "And most BMAs in Region 2 are walk-in areas that provide a type of backcountry experience on lands that people wouldn't normally get to hunt."

Block Management and this area's landowner presented me an opportunity and helped deliver my first solo kill. I sat there watching the brilliant blues and reds fade from the tom's head. With no one there to replay the stalk and chase, the only thing to do was snap a few pictures of the bird where he fell, send out a silent thank you to the animal and landowner, and pack the bird home.

Hannah is a BHA member hailing from Missoula, Mont.

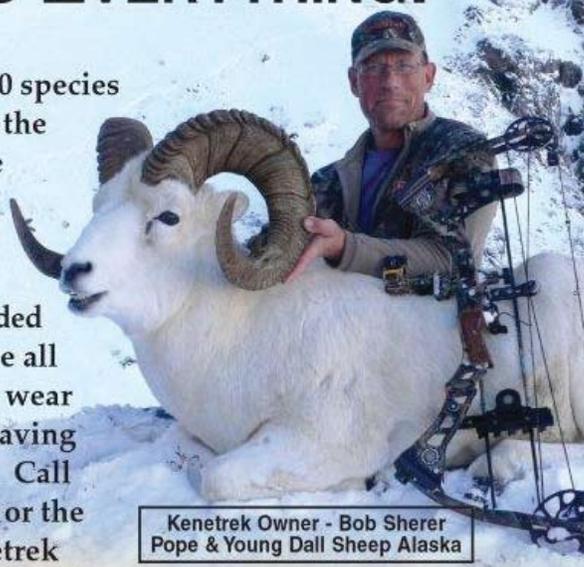


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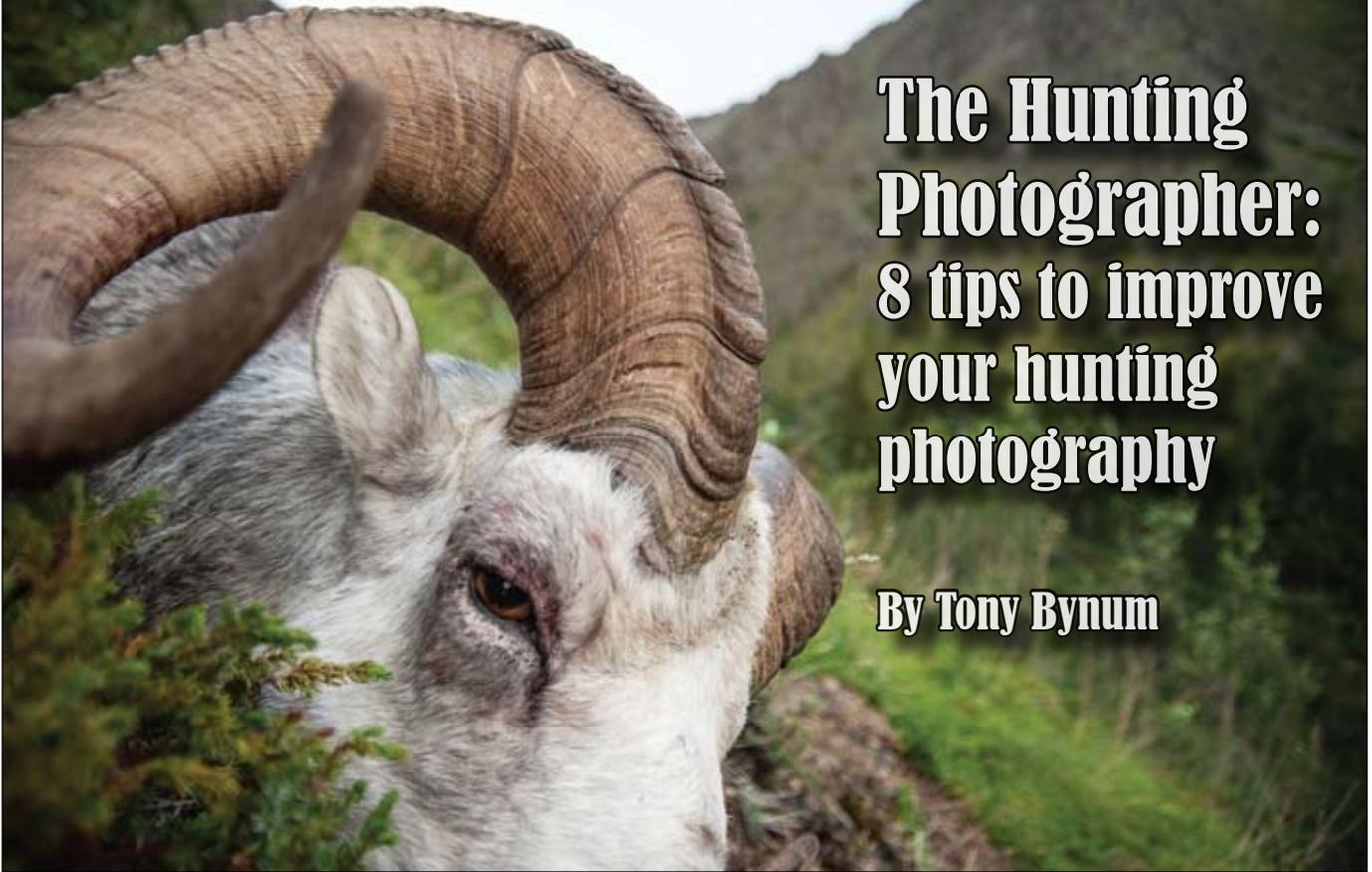
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The Hunting Photographer: 8 tips to improve your hunting photography

By Tony Bynum

As a Montana-based photographer, photographing hunts is part of my regular yearly routine. I'm often hired to take photographs of people's hunting adventures. Here are some tips on how to photograph your next hunt.

Capturing more than just the usual "grip-and-grin" photograph

Whether you're hunting a mule deer buck to photograph or to put on your table – or both – try telling your story through your photographs. Hunting, in most places around the world, begins in the fall when the colors are splendid and the weather tends to be warm in the day and cool at night. Nice weather, fun times, the great outdoors and your adventure can be told through photographs.

Over the centuries, our hunting stories have been inscribed into rocks, painted on walls, shared around a campfire with family and friends, written down in journals, and photographed (more recently of course). We are visual creatures; we like to see the world in pictures. Pictures stick with us longer than words and we're more likely to remember a photo than a paragraph. Today, photographs and the digital age make sharing your story easy.

There's no doubt that most of you pack a camera on your hunts in anticipation of photographing the typical grip-and-grin shot. This year, consider telling a more complete visual story of your hunt. Snap photographs of real, authentic outdoor and hunting experiences. I'm not saying go crazy and strap a GoPro to your head (although it's fun, and you should try it sometime) and one on your rifle. I'm saying begin by taking photographs throughout the entire hunting experience.

Photograph some simple images of things that are often heard about but seldom seen. Get personal. Think about what

you do to prepare for the hunt. Include a photo of that knife your grandfather gave you as a kid and other significant heirlooms or important pieces of your hunting heritage. Show us those remarkable treasures. Take pictures of maps, your notebook, your gun and ammunition, and by all means, your friends!

Some other thoughtful photos could include the reloading bench, cleaning your gun, sorting out your gear as it's spread across the entire man cave or living room, images of you exercising, or even your food. Not only will these things make great additions to the hunting story, some might even come in handy for insurance purposes. Photos of guns and gear can be helpful if, heaven forbid, there's ever a theft or catastrophe.

Next, while you're in the field, take some photos of the actual trip. Capture simple but essential elements of your adventure. I've always liked photos taken while fueling up. Images of the old market or store that's been there since your grandfather was a kid make great photographs and even better memories. If you still have to reset the mechanical pump, and the store owner still lives by the honor system that requires you to actually go in and say hi, then by all means document that place and if you can, the people that run the it!

Other photo opportunities can include the process of hiking in and setting up camp. You don't necessarily have to take photos while you're stalking that trophy buck, but try to document the hunt as much as you're comfortable with and have time for. Whatever you do, make it fun and show the little details that often make hunting so important, and memorable, to us as individuals. So, this year, why not be a hunting photographer – tell your hunting story with your images!

**This year,
consider
telling a more
complete
visual story
of your hunt.**

8 tips for capturing usable photos of your hunting adventure

1. Remember you're trying to show simple elements. Don't try to show everything in a photograph. The best ways to do this are to get close so that no one can mistake the subject of the photograph and to make the subject a single element.

2. Use a wide aperture like f 2.0 (the widest aperture your camera has). A shallow depth of field blurs the background and makes the subject stand out better. This is a simple way to make sure the viewer knows exactly what you're trying to show them.

3. Photograph some elements that put a person in their environment. Show the weather if you can. Show some background. You don't have to show the ridge that will tell everyone on earth the location of your favorite hunting grounds; but a few canyons, some far off trees or nearby meadows help to add some context to the photo.

4. Make use of early morning and late evening low-angle light; both the quality and angle of light are unbeatable at those two times of day. This is the best time to shoot environment and outdoor human interest photos as the light is easy on skin tones. Generally, if you shoot during these periods it's almost impossible to take a bad photograph.

5. When the sun gets high in the sky, use shadows and trees to shade your subject. Often times you can get better shots of your gear or a person from a shadowed location.

6. Don't be afraid to turn on the flash, even if it's sunny out. Most cameras these days will allow you to manually engage the flash and smarter cameras will read the ambient light (the light that's naturally around you) and adjust the flash according to how much light the camera thinks is needed for a proper exposure. This is often referred to as fill flash. Remember, this is a function that most cameras have, but you have to deliberately and manually engage the flash. Some units even allow you to turn the power of the flash up or down – check out the specifics for your camera model in its instruction manual.

7. Use slower shutter speeds like 1/50th or 1/30th of a second to show motion. Often times, adding a little motion blur really brings your audience into the image. It evokes your other senses and helps make the story more real. Motion techniques



Sometimes showing an average activity or subject from a new perspective makes it more interesting.



A shallow depth of field blurs the background and makes the subject stand out better.

include either holding the camera steady and allowing the subject to blur, or you can move the camera with the motion of the subject (called "panning") which results in blurred background and hopefully a sharp subject. This technique requires some practice, but is fun. Give it a try.

8. Try unique angles. Get low, or below eye level. Sometimes showing an average activity or subject from a new perspective makes it more interesting.

Post production and sharing

After you have the photos in your camera, the obvious next step is to make prints and share the photos. I like to share my hunting photography on my Tony Bynum Photography Facebook page. But it's hard to tell a story with one image. So I suggest you make a book or slideshow.

I've used many sources for book publishing and right now my top two are Blurb and My Publisher. I've gone back and forth between the two online platforms and right now I'm leaning back toward Blurb because of its simple interface with Adobe Lightroom. I can edit the photos in Lightroom, then plop them into a simple yet customizable layout and send it directly to Blurb, all from within one program.

For slideshows, I like to use ProShow. It's not free, but it's a great program for making slideshows that you can put on disk, make into screensavers, or share online.

Here are a few more helpful tools: Picasa and Gimp are good free online photo editing programs. SmugMug and Flickr offer great platforms for putting some of your photos online.

Cotton Carrier makes a great solution for carrying a camera. You can strap the simple harness to the shoulder strap on your pack and keep your camera in reach.

Check out Tony's work at www.tonybynum.com, or follow him on Facebook at www.facebook.com/tonybynumphotography, and twitter @tonybynum, or Tony Bynum Google+. 



Wild Lands, Wild Trout: The Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness

By Jack Ballard

Minnesota touts itself as the “land of lakes” but the title equally captures the aura of the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness. A mass of granite and glaciers, icy streams and azure pools, this designated wilderness sprawls across nearly 1 million acres of northwestern Wyoming and Montana. Over 1,000 lakes liven the landscape, appearing as small dots on the map, but looming large in the minds of anglers who understand the effort required to reach the best of them and the outstanding fishing that awaits at journey’s end.

Of these natural reservoirs, over 300 have stocked or self-sustaining fish populations. Crimson-jawed cutthroats are common residents as are bright little brookies. Rainbows, some as fat and feisty as those on the lowland rivers, scour the shorelines of remote lakes in search of a late-summer hopper. Elusive golden trout fin the depths of a few backcountry ponds, but few anglers possess the fortitude necessary to engage them. Factor a dozen or so lakes with arctic grayling into the equation and it’s simple to see that the variety in species is as appealing as the hauntingly beautiful waters in which they swim.

Nearly 20 years ago, a mid-summer backpack trip introduced me to the finned bounty of the Absaroka-Beartooth wilderness complex. Departing from the Mystic Lake trailhead with an odd entourage of four adults, three children, a witless spaniel and a baying basset hound, we slowly ascended the six miles to Island Lake. After ferrying a flailing sausage with short legs and long claws over a log jam near the lake’s outlet, I quickly concluded that basset hounds make poor canine companions in the backcountry.

Scratched arms notwithstanding, I pitched a tent on the shady skirt of a verdant meadow and rigged a rod. Four hours and more than three times that many trout later, Larry and I poked aimlessly at a glowing fire with smoking sticks and made big talk about fishing. Mostly I quizzed him about other wilderness destinations and the prospects of enlisting his guidance in sampling their trout. That’s when I found out there were literally hundreds of similar lakes in the Beartooths.

“Wouldn’t it be great to fish every lake in this wilderness,” I blurted with the uninformed enthusiasm of a youth fresh out of college. Larry laughed at me. A bit rudely, I thought.

“At ten new lakes a year it’d take about a lifetime to do it,” he replied.

For a couple of summers, I nearly made the quota, religiously marking visited lakes on a tattered map. Perusing the results on frigid winter evenings as the northeast wind whipped tendrils of snow around my living room windows, the names were as mystical as the waters so labeled: Lake at the Clouds, Twin Outlets, Echo, Fossil, Ouzel, Rainbow, Moon, Lady of the Lake, Medicine and a host of others with mundane monikers like Elk, Russell, Shelf, Elaine and Glacier.

After my ambitious start, I’ve long since abandoned the plan of fishing every lake. But not because the dream was impossible. The larger problem was discovering wilderness nuggets that only a fool would fish just once, leaving less and less time to strike out on fresh adventures.

One of these gems is a smallish, off-trail jewel in the Boulder River drainage. Perched on a bench beneath the stony summit of an imposing peak, the lake harbors Yellowstone cut-

throats which achieve impressive size for trout in country where lakes remain ice-free for just a few short months. Late one June, in the company of a much finer wilderness traveler than the departed basset, I set out to find the lake. Two miles into the climb, we found the route blocked -- by a grizzled, lumpy form nipping succulent vegetation in a clearing. Is it worth an encounter with 600 pounds of *ursus horribilis* to net a two pound *oncorhynchus clarki* specimen? I thought not, though the greyhound at my side, a retired racer, seemed more than willing to play the odds against the grazing grizzly.

Some seven years later, I ascended to the lake. The hike was tough, but not without its own rewards. In a spongy meadow dimpled with wildflowers, a shaft of sunlight illuminated a downed tree surrounded by what were likely the towering offspring of the massive old evergreen. Although the limbs had long since rotted from the trunk, the skeletal shaft of the ancient fir still measured well over six feet in diameter, a long-passed giant in mountains where living specimens seldom achieve one-half its width.

Excepting one summer when a leg injury scuttled trekking altogether, I've returned to this lake nearly every season. I've never encountered a stranger on its shoreline, though the discovery of a decaying cinch strap and a rusting horseshoe betray



'Drop any dry fly in the path of these water wolves, and at least one member of the pack will come rushing to make the kill.'

the presence of souls who ferry their gear on backs other than their own. The solitude of this place infuses honey to the soul.

But the fishing is equally outstanding. Fat, fleshy cutthroats cruise the shorelines in pods of three or four, eyeing the lapping film overhead for the tiny plop of an errant insect. Drop any dry fly in the path of these water wolves, and at least one member of the pack will come rushing to make the kill. As the water below is as untainted and clear as the eternal blue sky overhead, the form of a seventeen inch cutthroat, purposefully rising to fly, is easily seen as it shoots from the shaded depths toward the sunlit surface. For this angler the wait is unnerving. A guidebook for setting the hook might read like instructions for dousing a grizzly bear with pepper spray. To be effective you must wait, wait until the gaping jaws seem hopelessly near before mashing the trigger on the can or heaving the rod butt to engage the hook.

My lengthy history with this particular lake underscores several factors pertinent to angling in the Absaroka-Beartooth. The first has to do with the ying-yang of access and opportunity. Like other places, the best fishing is typically found on waters inhospitable to the casual hiker. Lakes adjacent to, or at the end of a trail sometimes boast very fine angling. But the real jewels are those that take a map and compass to find. As few users venture from wilderness trails, a lake requiring a cross-country hike of just a mile or less may receive significantly less pressure than another six trail miles from the nearest access.

I'd tell you more, but this is an article, not a book. In my wilderness wanderings I've found a frightening canyon with beautiful lakes – and golden trout – in its depths. I could also direct you to a nearly 3,000 foot scramble in the East Rosebud drainage culminating at a breezy tarn holding positively large rainbows. But in reality, one of the greatest thrills of angling the Absaroka-Beartooth wilderness is poring over a map and researching data to find that perfect, alpine lake that seems to have all the necessary ingredients for first-class fishing. When a big, speckled cutthroat rises to a fly on a lake of your own discovery, you've found the best of the Beartooths.

Jack is a BHA member hailing from Red Lodge, Mont. 🐾



PHOTOS BY THE AUTHOR/WWW.BALLARDSTOCKPHOTO.COM

Literally getting off the beaten path can put you on the trail to some tremendous wilderness trout fishing.

TRACKING THROUGH TIME

By Scott Stouder



RAY G. FOSTER/FOSTERSFOCUS.COM

The packed snow where he'd lain was the only tangible image I'll ever have of the bull elk.

The truth is, when I first saw the huge, blunt tracks in the snow that morning where he'd crossed the pack trail, I knew the odds of catching him were slim.

The pounding sleet had softened the impressions, but it was clear they'd been made the night before.

I tied my horse, followed the bull's tracks across the valley, and spent the remainder of the morning separating his trail from another herd that had fed on the lower slopes during the night.

November daylight is short-lived in Oregon's northeastern mountains. By the time I'd unraveled his trail it was mid-afternoon. I was an hour from my horse and another two hours from camp. But the line of pie-plate prints leading up the mountain beckoned like a novel I couldn't put down.

For the next two hours I followed his path, scrambling over avalanche chutes peppered with scrub pine and threading across slick rock ledges. Where he rested, I rested. Where he scraped the snow for grass, I leaned back and sucked air. Where he stopped and watched the valley, I stopped and thought about this animal.

His life was marked by hunting seasons. Each fall when the blue haze of campfire smoke hung above the timber, he left the valley. He was alive because he stayed high on the mountain and only ventured down to feed on the slopes at night. But mainly he was alive because he'd lived long enough to learn how to survive.

Over 90 percent of the bull elk born in his birth-year were gone. The first to die were the newborn whose mothers didn't hide them well enough from hungry bears fresh from winter hibernation. That first summer and winter, the small, weak and slow ones fed hungry cougars that prowled the rims. The next spring and summer, driven by the first itch of testosterone and territory, other teenagers died from the misjudgments and recklessness of youth.

But during the autumn hunting season, after the young bulls had polished their first spike antlers to a mahogany sheen, the selection process reached a climax. Those who still sought safety in numbers were the first to fall. Then, any who lingered on open slopes after daylight or languished in a patch of sun fell with the aspen leaves.

The young bull watched elk tumble down hillsides after the heavy slap of bullets followed by thunder echoing from

rock-walled canyons – and he remembered.

His knowledge grew with his antlers the following summer. But the most valuable lessons in survival came in his third year after the breeding season when he followed the larger herd bull up the mountain.

The post-rut duo only ventured down to the grass-covered slopes after dark. Later, when the campfire smoke returned to the valley and the canyons echoed with the thunder of rifles, they slept little. Even when snow fell like feathers and covered the mountains beneath a deep white blanket, wind direction and sounds were constantly monitored. A pungent odor or the crunch of a footstep propelled the bulls through a brushy canyon lip into a string of trees where they followed a narrow draw over a divide ridge into a darker jumble of rocky, timbered canyons. There, they circled back with the wind, either above or across a canyon from their trail where they stood, and watched for hours before lying down.

And so it went.

Now, after six seasons, the bull was in the prime of his life. His cream-colored body would push a thousand pounds after a summer of eating sun-ripened grass. Two thirds of that weight rippled

in the muscled neck and shoulders supporting massive antlers that reached back over the length of his body. His daylight hours were spent alone or with one other bull. Cougars, bears, accidental falls and winters were no longer a threat. His entire focus of survival was now directed toward evading humans.

I stepped in his tracks with no illusions; the odds of ever seeing him were slim. But I never questioned why I was there. I was there because I hunt, because hunting is an unbroken link in my genetic heritage and because I refuse to shield myself from the certainty that death sustains life. The elk meat I'd eaten the previous night grew from the native bunchgrass and willow leaves on this mountain. The energy it supplied connected me to this place, time and activity.

For those reasons I knew why I was on the mountain with a rifle in my hands. But as I unwove the bull's trail, a question kept tugging at me. Why this elk? Any elk would give me meat and energy. Why wasn't I searching for a younger one farther down the slope? It would have been easier.

What was it that stirred deeply in me when I thought of this seasoned life honed to a genetic pinnacle? What primal hand squeezed my heart as I crested each ridge, gripped by the image of his ivory-tipped tines in deep shadow?

I thought about those questions as I trudged uphill through the snow, but the answers seemed as elusive as the bull. Maybe it wasn't a primal hand that

tugged at my heart at all. Only in recent years have mature, big-antlered trophies become a common and prevalent passion among hunters. Maybe I was simply a result of my time – a commercial product that connected big antlers on the outside of magazine covers to the Marlboro man on the inside pages.

I don't know about all of that. What I do know is that I've listened to the arguments surrounding trophy hunting: that careful selection of older animals has less impact on genetic continuity and herd structure and that fewer animals die. Whether or not those arguments are true, I can't accept them for the reasons I hunt. They reflect an arrogance – an acceptance of dominance – over nature that increasingly repels me. It's the approach, not the science, that I reject.

Conversely, even though my family and I live on wild meat and I'm as satisfied strapping the backstraps from a spike as a six-point bull to my pack, I can't say I hunt for sustenance.

Whatever the reasons I hunt I've felt a change taking place in me, a shift in how I approach hunting. Part of that change is attributable to a greater understanding of the complexities of the wild world, and the effects of humans on that world.

I was thinking of those effects as the bull's tracks turned east under the crest of the mountain and traced the foot of a tree-studded rim. I was thinking of them as I struggled up a snow-choked chute leading to a low saddle over the moun-

tain. I was still thinking of them when I felt a cold breeze on the back of my neck followed by the icy chill of realization.

The bull had doubled back on the rim above his trail before bedding down in a thick knot of lodgepole pine.

As I approached the packed circle of snow, the scene seemed surreal. A line of widely-spaced tracks led from his bed, through the snow-filled saddle, and vanished into the white mist that hugged the mountain.

I stood over the spot where he had lain only minutes before, holding the tattered strings of connection, and feeling the distillation of perceptual and sensory excellence. I hadn't heard him rise as my hot sweat rode the canyon thermals and a cold eddy sucked a faint hint back along the rim. I hadn't seen his ears swivel toward the distant, synthetic sound of my boot scraping a windfall. I could only imagine him mentally mapping his escape route before he spun from the rim and disappeared into the fog.

As I looked back into the cloud-shrouded valley, I understood more clearly my desire to hunt this bull. Certainly I was here for the meat and the challenge, but there was more. Hunting is not an end in itself; it's part of a natural process. And for that process to continue it must be reciprocal; hunters as well as elk must evolve.

I blew on my hands for warmth and pictured the elk miles away watching his backtrail, testing the wind and shelving another lesson in survival. Part of that lesson would be passed on when a younger bull joined him later that winter and part would be passed on during the next breeding season.

But part of that lesson had been passed to me and would be passed on from me. I couldn't know it then, but later that same year my daughter would kill her first elk. The scene and place would be different, but the set and the cast would be the same.

As a predator in the natural world, my life revolves around hunting. But hunting is changing. Radios, motors and high-tech toys change hunting faster than we evolve as hunters. More frequently nowadays what we pass on as hunters is more weighted to what we've brought

The odds that the hunter and the hunted will survive in a world overwhelmed by humans who have no knowledge of either are enhanced each time we encounter each other as predator and prey and both walk away.



from the department store than what we've brought home from the mountains.

We have the power to change the world fast today – probably too fast. We block rivers with concrete, alter their flow and temperatures and suck the water from them before we even understand how a salmon finds its way home. We block migratory routes, alter forage balance and change wildlife populations before we know how vital a thousand-year pattern is to a species.

As I stood looking down the valley I realized that, in my life today, it's as important that I don't kill as it is that I do. Evolution is a constant and the gift of life is found as much in building a life through experience as it is in breaking a life for sustenance.

The odds that the hunter and the hunted will survive in a world overwhelmed by humans who have no knowledge of either are enhanced each time we encounter each other as predator and prey and both walk away. Those experiences keep us both alive and wild. They're as important to the evolution of a species as they are to the survival of an individual.

As I turned and started back down the darkening mountain I smiled.

I liked those odds.

Scott lives on the edge of the Rapid River Roadless Area in central Idaho adjacent to the Hells Canyon Wilderness. He works for Trout Unlimited and is an avid hunter and horse and mule packer.



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BHA Award Nominations Welcome

As Chairman of the BHA Awards Committee, I solicit your assistance with identifying worthy recipients for the awards we will give out at the 2014 North American Rendezvous. If you know of a good candidate for any one of them, please send me an email on a potential recipient and why you think he or she deserves an award. Please include your contact information. I am also looking for an additional member to join BHA Co-Chair Ben Long and I on the Awards Committee. Let me know if you would like to fill that important role.

Here are the awards we will give:

- **The Chairman Mike Beagle Award:** This award is given to a BHA member who has gone above and beyond promoting BHA and its core values.

- **The Aldo Leopold Award:** Given to an individual or a group who has done meritorious work on preserving backcountry values and land habitats.

- **The Sigurd Olson Award:** Given to an individual or a group who has done meritorious work on preserving backcountry values and aquatic habitats.

- **The Ted Trueblood Award:** Given to someone in the world of journalism and media who has been particularly eloquent and effective communicating BHA core principles.

These awards will be announced and presented at the 2014 BHA Rendezvous.

Thank you! —Jay Banta, Chairman of the BHA Awards Committee, groverite@gmail.com.



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The advertisement features a background image of a person standing on a rocky ridge overlooking a vast, snow-capped mountain range under a cloudy sky. The text is overlaid on the bottom half of the image. The Sitka logo is a stylized orange and white shape resembling a bird or a wing. The background also features white topographic map lines.



Practical Marksmanship

By Ben Long

JACK BALLARD

Expert marksman Wayne van Zwoll gives BHA member Jack Ballard some tips at the shooting bench.

Let's get one thing straight: I am no expert marksman. I'm an average shot with a rifle, below average with a shotgun. I'm no one to look for expert advice. But I am a better, more confident, rifle shot than I was a decade or so ago.

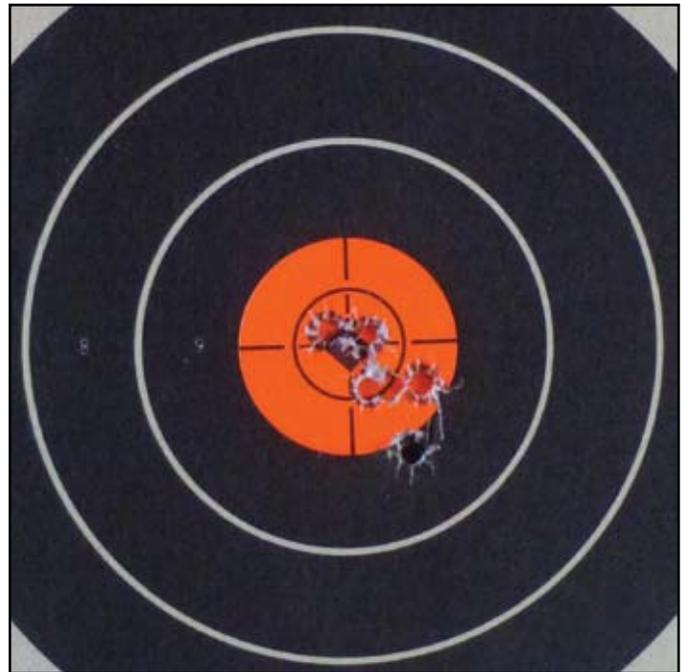
That wasn't by accident. I strive to be a better, more humane hunter. So here are some habits that have helped me become a better shooter and better hunter.

Get a .22 and burn up ammo. My .22 is a bolt action Ruger, with a similar action and safety mechanism as my big game rifle. Both are scoped with similar optics, the same magnification and reticle. I took both to the gunsmith and had both triggers set at the same, 3-pound tipping point. The .22 is fun to shoot – a lot easier on my shoulder and on my wallet than my hunting rifle. I toss it in the rig with a box of shells and one of those spinner targets, when I go fishing or berry picking.

Take a shot when you know you can hit the target; pass if you have doubts.

Dry fire your hunting rifle. Forget the old saw about dry firing being bad for your gun's firing pin. It's not. It's actually a good way to improve breath control and your trigger pull, which are two critical components of accuracy. So get your gun out of the closet, make sure it's empty, and practice mounting it to your shoulder and finding the sight picture. Pick a tiny spot on the wall, hold the crosshairs steady, flick the safety, pull the trigger and work the action.

Get off the bench rest. When you do take your big game rifle to the range, don't spend the entire time at the bench rest. Bench rests are great for making sure your rifle is sighted in and you've got a load that complements your gun. But you're



'I don't shoot many groups like this, so I took a picture.'

not going to lug a bench into the mountains. Practice at various ranges in the kinds of positions you're likely to encounter while hunting. Keep it real.

Join a friendly shooting club. One winter, a neighbor talked me into taking part in the local small-bore shooting club. I met great folks and got a lot of great advice. I never could compete with the experts, but I learned a lot. I took part in small

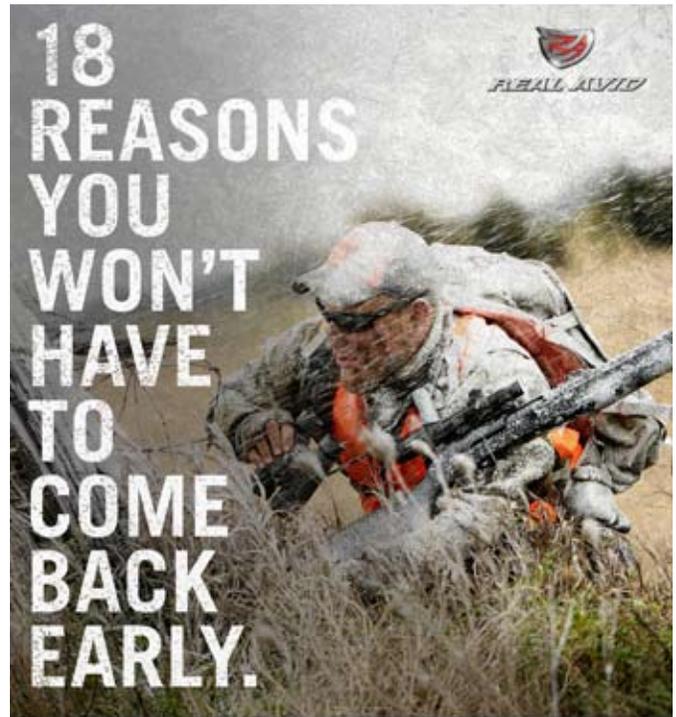
bore, four-position shooting league. (Prone, sitting, kneeling, offhand.) When you count up the scores, the No. 1 lesson for me was just how much harder it is to hit something shooting offhand, compared to the other positions. That's a great lesson— shoot offhand only as a last resort.

Pick a spot. This is drilled into the heads of archers, but a lesson lost on many rifle shooters. The easiest way to miss a big game animal is to shoot at the entire animal. Instead, focus on one spot – such as the crease behind a rib behind the shoulder. Imagine yourself shooting at a stop sign. Don't just aim at the sign — aim at the red circle inside the O in the word STOP. That kind of focus makes a big difference.

Learn big game anatomy. The best, quickest kills come when a bullet zips through both lungs of the target animal. But where are those lungs, exactly? What about the heart? The liver? Do you want to hit the shoulder bones or avoid them? What happens when the animal stands at an angle, quartering toward you or away? Study how animals are built, especially when you are butchering your game. The Internet has many good diagrams of big game anatomy.

Exhibit discipline. Shooting a living animal is a huge responsibility. All hunters should pledge to make clean kills, as humanely as possible. Part of that is skill and familiarity with your weapon. But I think a larger part is discipline, knowing your limits and sticking to them. Take a shot when you know you can hit the target; pass if you have doubts.

I do these things, and I still miss sometimes. We're all human. Happily, that means we all have room for improvement. 🐾



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Kids' Corner

Winter is Owling Time!

By Holly Endersby

When the long, dark nights of winter arrive, it is the perfect time for kids and their parents to go owling. The early nightfall means you can be outside, maybe even past your bedtime, to hear and look for owls.

Most owls are active at night. But a few species of owls sometime hunt in the daytime, usually at dawn and dusk. One species you might see hunting during the day is the great grey owl. In Far North Alaska, short-eared owls and snowy owls hunt in daylight during the summer when nights are so short. When owls are not out hunting, they hide in cavities in trees or, in nests abandoned by eagles, hawks or ravens. Sometimes owls will build nests on top of snags, on tree branches next to the main tree trunk, or in barns or caves. Burrowing owls nest in tunnels dug and abandoned by rodents.

All owls are carnivores: they eat other animals or insects. Owls have feathers that are different from other birds. The leading edge of each feather is soft and the surface of the feather is fuzzy, which reduces the sound they make when flying. This allows owls to hunt without making sounds to alert their prey. Most owls eat their prey whole, although they might first bite off the head. Except for snowy owls that eat their prey in the open, most owls swallow their prey and go back to hiding in trees or shrubs. Instead of digesting bones, hair, or exoskeletons of insects (the hard shell of a beetle, for example), owls spit up a pellet of indigestible food each day. Pellet piles can be used to find places where owls usually roost.

But why is winter a good time to see owls?

Unlike most birds, owls mate in win-

If you give a hoot about owls, you can hear them hooting more during the winter.

ter, usually in January or February. So, in December, they become more vocal, hooting a lot at night in hopes of finding a mate. Several species of owls such as great horned owls and eastern screech-owls will stay together and be mates for life. Other owl species, like the snowy owl, change mates each year.

By listening to the hoots, you can find an owl and if the moon is full, you will be able to see it as well. When you get to know owls you will be able to tell what kind of owl it is by the hoots it makes. Like all birds, owls each have their own special sound. A pair of great grey owls has nested in the woods behind our house for years. Each December we hear the male's deep hoots— up to ten of them in a row — as he calls to his mate. The female answers with a whistle-like “eeeWEW.”

Each species of owl lays a different

number of eggs. The time it takes for eggs to hatch varies, too. When an egg hatches, the baby bird needs the adult pair to feed it. Some owls, like the elf owl, feed chicks for four or five weeks. Larger owls, like the great horned owl, will feed chicks for up to three months. Smaller owl species usually start to fly earlier than bigger owls. Sometimes a young owl, called a fledgling, will leave the nest before it can fly and will spend time sitting on a tree branch until it is ready to fly. The parents will keep feeding it until it is ready to fly and find food on its own.

We like to look on winter nights, with a full moon and white snow on the ground, for the great grey owls that live near us. They often sit on the fence posts, hooting in the bright moonlight, making it easy for us to find them.

Ask your parents to take you owling this winter: it is a lot of fun for everyone! 🐾



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