

# THE ETHICS OF FAIR CHASE

## Too Much Technology, Not Enough Hunting



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I always wanted an Olympic gold medal. As a young person, I learned that this achievement requires an astounding amount of time, effort, and phenomenal natural talent. This is why an Olympic gold medal is so highly coveted.

National pride aside, owning the effort and experiencing the competition is what it is all about.

I don't have an Olympic medal. I did not earn it. I didn't do the training, and I was never on the team. I have heard that you can buy one every once in a while, but I don't know why anyone would. Without owning the effort, it is counterfeit and you would always have to explain the circumstance by which you acquired it. It would be interesting but nothing to brag about.

I don't have a "book deer" either, and I'm perfectly fine with that. What I do have are years and years of great experiences, countless hours of self-fulfillment and a measure or two of skill and knowledge which I picked up along the way. My experiences are worth more than gold to me, and each and every one of them is worthy of campfire, classroom, or convention. I aspire to put one in the book someday, but I don't measure my hunting life in antler inches. I revel in the fact that I have been there, done that, and I assure you my heart is full. Perhaps most importantly, I can look my sons, my father, and my friends in the eye when I talk about my time in the field, and I know they know how precious it is to me. I have behaved with honor and integrity; the animals I chased and the wild places I visited were treated with dignity and respect.

To this day, I simply cannot fathom why anyone would want to cheat or shortcut one of the most fundamental reasons we go afield. At one of its most basic levels, the point of the hunt is that it is difficult, challenging and the outcome is uncertain. It is in the pursuit that we justify our place in the great circle. Why would anyone want to lessen that? What is the point of lowering the standard? Who wants the "trophy" without the experience?

Enter our old friends, ego and technology. When ego requires one to get the

trophy at all cost, the sanctity of the hunt is forfeited. When one is willing to forego the effort, manipulate the odds or change the circumstance, the end product is a fake.

The mechanism to cheat the equation is technology. A sure thing in the least amount of time becomes more important than the satisfaction of the challenge and respect for the animals. With technology, one can speed it up or increase the odds. With a little more, one can compensate for his or her lack of skill and knowledge. With

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even more technology, a hunter can make sure it is the biggest ever. For what? So one can brag about what he or she did not achieve? It is an artificial scenario, and for an increasing number of people, it is replacing the real thing.

Ok, ok . . . enough ranting. The real question here is how much technology is too much? Let's clear up a few things first:

Is technology inherently bad? Absolutely, positively not!

Are innovative advances resulting in making a clean kill a bad goal? No way! Are the makers or sellers of the technology the villains? They certainly are not.

For some, there is already too much technology. For these folks all I can say is bully for you.

So, where is the line? Each of us has to make our own determination and live with it, but there are some guidelines worth considering.

When a particular technology allows a hunter to disregard a typical or normal hunting skill (think extreme long-range shooting equipment), you are getting warm.

If a technology decreases the game animal's opportunity to elude or escape detection (think trail cams with live time, cellular capability), you are over the line.

If the use or application of a

technology changes the natural circumstance of the hunt (think genetic manipulation), you probably aren't even hunting anymore.

These are a few of the manifestations we now face, but by its nature, technology will create new capabilities and therefore new issues. The simple truth is that when technology changes the natural circumstance, replaces skill and lessens challenge, we are moving away from the nature of the hunt.

Regardless, there is an extraordinary business responding to this ego-driven market. We are besieged with shortcut technology. The absolute necessity of skill and knowledge, much less the burning desire to put in the effort, has become secondary for some. The value of the antler inch is greater than the satisfaction of a great effort.

In the end analysis, we are hunters. We are a knowledgeable, skilled, and relentless bunch. We value the aesthetic of nature and adventure. We embrace the challenge and accept the consequences. We have an extraordinary relationship with wild things and places based on dignity, respect, integrity, and honor. This relationship delineates the difference between hunters and the counterfeiters.

Often no one else is there with us at the moment of truth. No one else knows how we conducted ourselves. The satisfaction or the disappointment is so intensely personal that I simply do not comprehend how one could shortchange that experience. ■

