

POINT

THE NO DOG OPTION... IT DEPENDS

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SOME OF MY BEST FRIENDS ARE HOUNDSMEN. IN FACT, THE SINGLE OUTDOORSMAN WHOM I RESPECT MORE THAN ANY OTHERS IS A HOUNDSMAN. SO WHAT'S WRONG WITH HUNTING BIG GAME WITH DOGS?

I HAVE PONDERED THIS ISSUE OVER AND OVER AGAIN AND HAVE CONCLUDED THAT THE USE OF DOGS FOR HUNTING BIG GAME DEPENDS UPON THE HUNTER AND THE QUARRY.

FIRST LETS LOOK AT A FEW CASES IN POINT.

SELWAY-BITTERROOT WILDERNESS, Idaho. Gene Alford is the hunter's hunter. He is the outdoorsman's outdoorsman. He is also a houndsman and a cougar hunter. He has spent a lifetime hunting and guiding in the place he loves most, the Selway-Bitterroot. Gene is not the ordinary cougar hunter. Gene is an expert at the most interesting and sporting method of hunting cougars. He trains and hunts lions with a "strike dog." This method of hunting involves taking your dogs to a hunting area and turning the dogs loose much like one would when hunting for grouse. Then the hunter and the dogs hunt through the woods in search of a lion track. The skill of the hunter and the skill of the dogs merge into one, for they are a team. The hunter knows the habits of the cougar so he leads the dogs to the river valley, ridge, or mountain where he wants to begin the hunt. Then he turns the dogs loose. "One dog is all it takes to hunt lions this way," says Gene. "But I like to use two, in this case Scratch, who is mostly blue-tick and Kelly who is a Kelpy stock dog." "They keep each other company," he says. While hunting in this manner Gene carries a daypack with crampons, flashlight, essentials to survive a night in the wilderness, cameras, and of course, food. The crampons are essential because of the ice that is everywhere in this area in February due to the thawing and freezing of the snow at this time of the year.

Gene has hunted the Selway from a remote fly-in camp each February for 33 years looking specifically for Boone and Crockett record book lions. He knows the area like most people know their back yard, if not better. His hunting routine involves walking the Selway's deer and elk winter ranges, all the time accompanied by his dogs. He knows the lions that frequent the area from their tracks. He has treed many of them time and again looking for that one special tom. Lions have a habit of traveling in circles through their territory. Some of them make the circuit every two weeks

but during the winter it varies depending on the lion and the country. Gene's hunting method is simple but smart. He has learned the lion crossings in the area so he and his strike dog work these areas looking for scent.

Gene began hunting cougars in Idaho in 1959 after having learned to hunt them with strike dogs in California where one is seldom afforded the luxury of snow for trailing lions. Gene had the good fortune of taking two large toms in 1961 using his strike dog method of hunting. (At that time there was no bag limit on cougar in Idaho). Both of these lions matched the then world record lion taken by Theodore Roosevelt in 1901. Roosevelt's lion measured 15 12/16. After the official drying period and the panel scoring Gene's lions both measured 15 11/16. Interestingly enough one of the skulls had the back part of the skull damaged due to a misplaced .38 caliber bullet. This skull would otherwise have exceeded that of TR's lion.

Gene was disappointed, but not discouraged. He simply went out to find a bigger one. Early in the morning of February 26, 1988 Gene, Scratch and Kelly hit a lion scent in a saddle above the Selway River. No tracks were visible in the frozen snow so the first task was to be sure it was not a bobcat. Next Gene had to be sure that Scratch was going in the right direction after the lion. Lion scent is "heavy" so a strike dog may take the trail the wrong way for some distance before the scent fades out on the backtrack. In this instance they were going in the right direction as Gene located a track in some fresh snow after an hour on the track. On other occasions Gene has told me of having just the opposite happen!

Three hours into the chase the hunter and his dogs crossed a 6,000 foot ridge where the track dropped off the other side. Gene who was 66 years old at the time simply took it all in stride even though it had been a grueling climb and he knew he would not get back to his camp until after dark. About half way down the north face of the 6,000 foot ridge Scratch jumped the lion. Some time later Scratch and Kelly had the lion treed.

When Gene reached the tree he knew this lion was the one he had been looking for over the past 27 years. It was the largest lion he had taken to date scoring 16 4/16 and equalling the number one B&C lion taken by Douglas Schuk in 1979 in British Columbia.

Gene's lion was panel measured at the Boone and Crockett Club's 20th North

American Big Game Awards Program in Albuquerque, New Mexico, in June 1989. It measured 16 3/16, again just missing the World's Record but because of the extraordinary sportsmanship exhibited by Gene in the taking of this cougar Gene Alford was awarded the Sagamore Hill Award, the Club's most prestigious award.

Since that time I have made two backcountry pack trips with Gene. Each time we covered about 100 miles of the Selway-Bitterroot backcountry. My daughters ages 10 and 13 at the time accompanied us on the most recent trip. They both adore Gene, his dogs, and his mules. He is one of a kind as are his animals. Scratch died the winter after my first backcountry trip with Gene. Since then he has been training a new pup and with Kelly at their side they still hunt the Selway every February, even at the age of 73!

"OKANOGAN FOREST, Washington—Bernard Paque seldom smiles. But a wide grin creases his features now as he shuffles through a foot of fresh snow and four baying hounds to chuck a snowball at a snarling mountain lion perched in a short pine one leap away.

For 23 years, almost his working life, Mr. Paque (pronounced puh-KAY) has made his living behind his pack of hounds, primarily running down and killing black bears to minimize timber damage. As the sole remaining professional hunter for a timber-company group (Washington Forest Protection Association), he has a life style as primitive as the old frontier, and often as violent.

Benefits abound. The 52 year old Mr. Paque goes to work along old trails that are often shrouded in the bewitching beauty of silent dark pines heavy with fresh snow. The air is fresh. Deer, grouse and other wildlife abound. The job is exciting and Mr. Paque loves it. He is also good at it. By his own count he has bagged 2,300 bears, 550 bobcats and 73 mountain lions or cougars over the years.

But "Bernie's days as a professional hunter are numbered," says his boss, Ralph Flowers. For one thing, black bears, his main quarry, aren't in surplus in the Northwest anymore, so are no longer hunted year-around without limits."

"The thought of abandoning his work depresses Mr. Paque. "I've had a lot of fun," he says. To bridge the change, he is trying to build a livelihood out of guiding sport hunters; that mountain lion he just chucked a snowball at is "reserved"

for a client. But there is no certainty that Mr. Paque can convert an obsolescent occupation into a modern means of support.

He didn't plan a career of running hounds. . . . His success in the 60's as a bear hunter because of his skill with dogs became a Northwest legend. "Those dogs were like a machine," recalls his boss, Mr. Flowers. "When they hit a bear track, that bear was dead." Mr. Flowers was supervisor of animal damage control for the Washington Forest Protection Association.

"His transition to guiding hunters hasn't gone smoothly. "Bernie worries about clients not getting game—he works hard for them," observes Frank Sanderlin, Mrs. Paque's stepfather, a 235-pound lumberjack.

"The seven-foot, 135 pound mountain lion in that short pine has been treed for 28 hours waiting for the client, who is overdue from Alaska. Finally, the client arrives and, before moving on to the other game, shoots the cougar.

Some hunters, Mr. Paque concedes, would reject such a setup as unsporting. "It depends upon the client," he says, "but few hunters would pass up a full-grown tom like this one."

Probably Mr. Paque's biggest hurdle to success at guiding is his lack of business instinct. "Bernie's totally honest, and that's fine," Mr. Flowers says, "but he's too easygoing. Some clients take advantage of him."

Bears are more numerous than mountain lions, and Mr. Paque guarantees a bear hunter a bear for a \$600 fee. But sometimes, after the dogs have cornered a bear some distance away, the client will say the guarantee isn't fulfilled because he is physically unable to climb the rough terrain to shoot the animal. In one case, Mr. Paque says, he treed three bears for a client over three days, providing food and a room and didn't collect a fee. "Its disappointing," he says.

While mountain lions are magnificent animals with powerful bodies, long claws and awesome teeth, Mr. Paque considers them "sissies." His real love is chasing black bears. "You get in a tree with a bear and he's liable to climb down and whip you," he says. "Their personalities vary so much you can't tell what one will do."

"Hunting with friends, two rigs and CB radios is fun," Mr. Paque says. "But when I'm chasing through the woods, just me and the bear and the dogs, now that's a bear hunt."

The above article, written by Ken

Slocum, first appeared in the Monday, February 2, 1987, edition of The Wall Street Journal.

THESE TWO STORIES ARE VERY DIFFERENT, but also similar in many respects. Both of these men have spent years working with their dogs and countless hours studying their quarry as they have honed their outdoor skills and their ability to locate and track big game with dogs. However, there is a fine line that separates the two in the eyes of hunters and non-hunters alike.

It is a line which is not easily drawn as it involves local customs, hunting ethics, and individual preferences.

Many hunters and non-hunters alike view the use of dogs as an unsporting method of hunting big game. They argue that there is little sport in shooting a bear or a lion after dogs have forced the exhausted animal up a tree or bayed it on the ground. Opinions differ when it comes to pursuing bears and cougars with hounds. Bears can be hunted very effectively in some areas by using the spot and stalk method. Dogs are not required in these instances for hunting black bears. In fact, states such as Montana have had rules on the books for years prohibiting the use of hounds for hunting black bears.

It can be argued that hounds may also separate a sow bear from her cubs, exposing the cubs to predators. Hounds may chase a sow bear for hours causing reproductive failure in a female bear through stress and energy expenditure. Because the use of dogs is very effective for killing bears it is often viewed as being unsporting. According to a 1991 Idaho Department of Fish and Game study, black bear hunters using hounds represented only 5% of the black bear hunters and yet killed 18% of the bears.

These days most hound hunters fit dogs with radio collars and monitor the signal. When the signal emits from a stationary point, the hunter knows the dogs have treed a bear. The hunter then can follow the signal to the base of the tree and shoot the bear at point-blank range. Although the use of radio collars and telemetry for locating lost dogs is considered by the Boone and Crockett Club to be "fair chase" the use of such means to locate dogs who have treed bear or cougar is not.



GENE ALFORD IN THE SELWAY-BITTERROOT WILDERNESS WITH HIS DOGS, SCRATCH AND KELLY. GENE RECEIVED THE PRESTIGIOUS SAGAMORE HILL AWARD FOR A COUGAR HE TOOK DURING THE 20TH BIG GAME AWARDS.

Those opposed to hound hunting argue that hounds randomly chase other animals, stressing the animals, which may lead to their death through exhaustion. Obviously well-trained hounds don't chase "trash" but some hounds do.

When it comes to using dogs for hunting cougar the opinions are somewhat different. Some people just do not believe shooting a treed lion is fair chase. Those who have hunted cougar know that it is the exception to take a cougar without dogs. Here again the lines can be drawn regarding the use of radio collars and the taking of lions in the manner described in the story about Mr. Paque.

So what's the answer? Which side is right? In those states that have put this question to the voters the No Dog option has prevailed. If we are to continue the use of dogs in the pursuit and taking of big game we have to deal with what is objectionable about this hunting method to the general public as well as other hunters. If we don't, all of our states stand the risk of having the voters say No to the use of dogs for big game hunting. California and Oregon are examples of what can happen. Washington and Idaho are currently in jeopardy of this happening either in their legislature or at the polls. The bottom line is that we hunters need to work together to refine our hunting methods so they will be more and more socially acceptable as public values change or we will lose them one by one to the uninformed, unsympathetic, or anti-hunting voters who appear at the polls year after year in our country.



THE AUTHOR, GEORGE A. BETTAS, WITH A MOUNTAIN LION TAKEN IN THE BLUE MOUNTAINS OF SOUTHEAST WASHINGTON IN 1991.