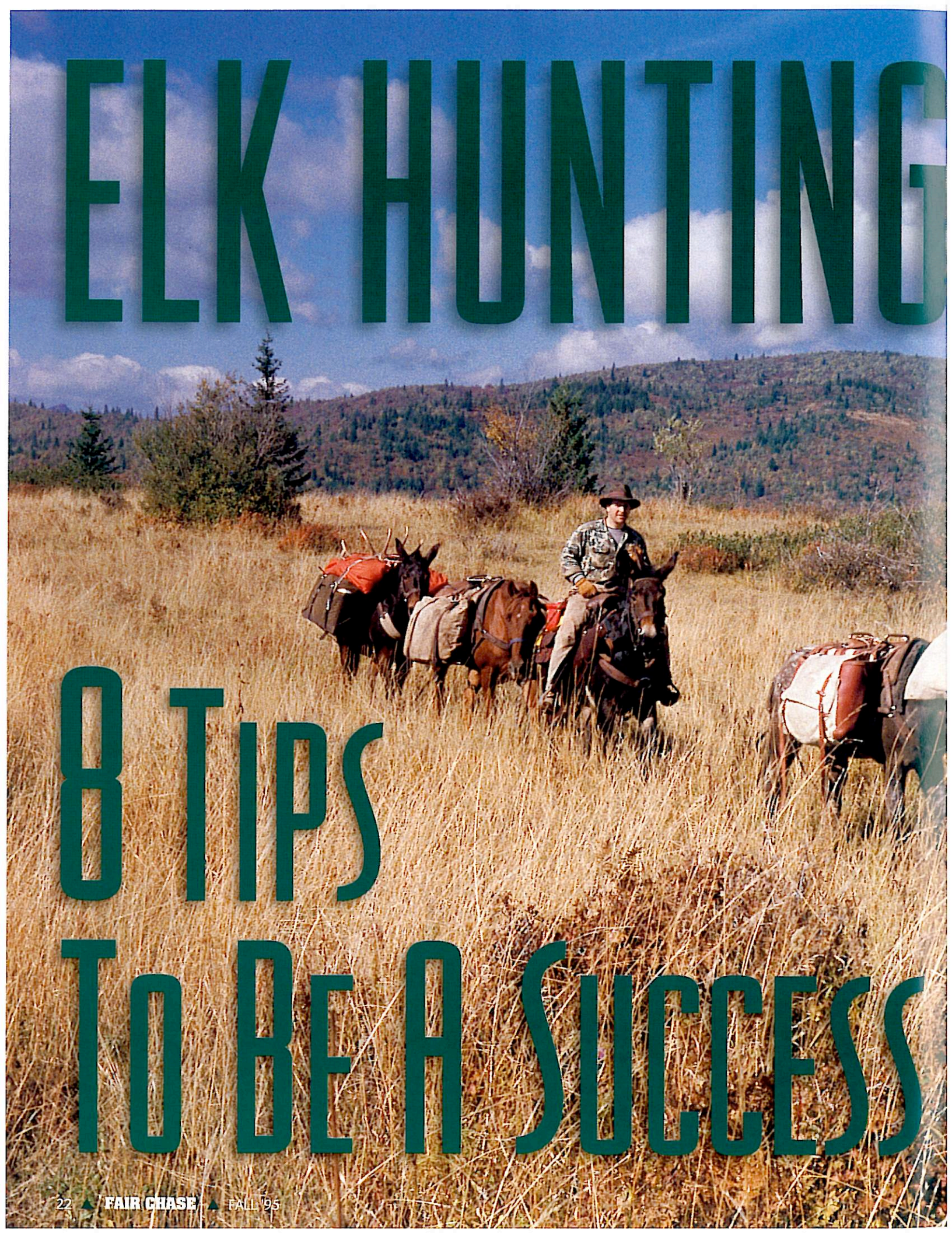


ELK HUNTING

A man wearing a hat and camouflage jacket is riding a dark horse, leading a pack train of several other horses through a field of tall, golden-brown grass. The horses are carrying various packs and gear. In the background, there are rolling hills covered in dense evergreen and deciduous trees under a blue sky with scattered white clouds.

8 TIPS TO BE A SUCCESS

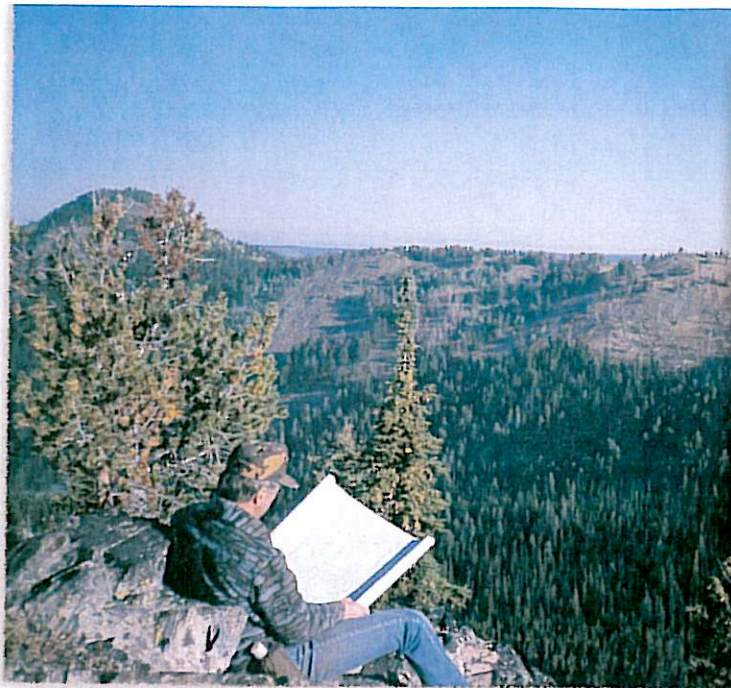
1. Good elk hunting begins with good information.

As with anything we do in life, the better prepared we are the more likely it is that we will succeed at what we set out to do. So it is with elk hunting, the quality of the information you have before you start will significantly influence the quality of your hunt. As soon as elk season is over one year I begin planning for the next, adding information I have learned during the current elk season to assist me with the next year's plans. Over the years I have accumulated countless maps, notes, and other tidbits of information. In order for information to be useful you must be able to access it. Catalog your maps and hunting notes so you can find the information you accrue. You may even want to consider using a computer data base to manage this information.

Sources of information are constantly growing. I suspect we will be seeing list services for elk hunters soon on the Internet. The Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation National Convention is currently the most comprehensive source of information on elk hunting techniques and equipment you can find today. The amount of information one can obtain while there is seemingly endless. Excellent sources include wildlife professionals who work with both federal and state agencies. As increasing numbers of hunters have learned to query these folks, they are becoming more and more protective of their elk resources and tend to give more general information. If you call and ask where you can find a big bull elk you will probably not get much good information. However, information such as bull to cow ratios, age structure of the elk herds, general population numbers, data related to



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Left: TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS CAN TELL YOU A GREAT DEAL ABOUT HABITAT, TERRAIN, WATER, ELEVATION, ROUTES IN AND OUT OF AREAS, AND MORE. I USE THESE MAPS EXTENSIVELY AND HAVE HAD A GREAT DEAL OF SUCCESS.

Middle: I HAVE TAKEN MOST OF MY BEST BULLS EITHER JUST AFTER SHOOTING HOURS IN THE MORNING OR JUST BEFORE SHOOTING HOURS END IN THE EVENING. THIS MEANS BEING IN POSITION TO HUNT VERY EARLY IN THE DAY OR VERY LATE. THIS BULL WAS TAKEN IN IDAHO JUST BEFORE THE END OF SHOOTING HOURS.

Right: ELK MOVE AWAY FROM HUNTING PRESSURE. I FOUND THIS BULL IN A SMALL POCKET NOT FAR FROM A MAIN TRAIL BUT JUST FAR ENOUGH FOR HIM TO AVOID HUNTERS WHO PREFERRED TO STAY ON THE TRAIL INSTEAD OF CHECKING THE OTHER SIDE OF THE RIDGE.

degradation or winter kill, harvest data, and hunting pressure are likely to be available and constitute important pieces of information you need to assess the quality of the area you plan to hunt. The locations of outfitter base camps and spike camps are available from U.S. Forest Service Regional Offices if you ask for them. Having this information allows you to avoid hunting where outfitters are hunting and gives you an idea of where other hunters may be in the area. Knowledge of these camp locations can also be helpful in case of an emergency. Conversations while afield with other hunters, outfitters, etc. are invaluable as are conversations which occur over the course of the year. My hunting partners and I constantly discuss new tips and pieces of information, in search of that one very special elk hunting area which epitomizes all of our dream hunts rolled into one!

2. Know how to read a map.

U.S. Geological Survey maps are essential if you intend to hunt unfamiliar areas. Knowledge of how to read these maps is invaluable. The 7 1/2 minute topographic maps show elevations, roads, trails, timbered areas, creeks, some man-made structures, etc. Topographic maps can tell you a great deal about habitat, terrain, water, elevation, routes into and out of

areas, etc. Bureau of Land Management and U.S. Forest Service maps are also helpful as they show the most current roads, keyed to numbers posted on the roads themselves as well as other features. Land status maps show private and public land areas also important for determining how to access public land. I use maps extensively and have had a great deal of success

hunting in areas where I had never set foot before simply by studying the maps ahead of time and combining the information from the maps with other information I have gathered. Combining information from a topographic map with elevations from a properly calibrated altimeter gives you additional insight in locating springs, trails, roads, and terrain features. Sometimes water sources originate at a common elevation. Knowing this and the fact that these areas often contain elk wallows will give you insight into where to hunt on a mountainside, especially during the rut and during hot, dry, weather. Knowing how to use topographic maps will enable you to identify pockets where elk are likely to go in order to get away from pressure. On a number of occasions when I have spotted elk at long distances, knowing how to read a topographic map has facilitated me in executing a stalk in unfamiliar

country that would not have been possible otherwise. Elk like to travel on the contour. Finding the location of a "saddle" by using a map has helped me actually drive elk to a hunting partner waiting in the saddle or just above it. Coupling what you can interpret from the map with your knowledge of elk behavior can make the difference between a big bull or no bull at all.

Know and understand elk behavior.

To be a consistently successful elk hunter you need to know and understand elk. Where do they like to bed? What do they eat? How do their behavior patterns change before, during, and after the rut? Much of this information can be obtained from the many books and video tapes on the market today. If you know how elk respond to all kinds of natural and man-made situations you will be able to capitalize on situations presented in the field. Other information may not be so easy to obtain. For example, how do the elk respond when they are spooked by hunters. In some more open areas elk will run for miles seeking hiding cover void of hunters. In other areas where the cover is thick they may run only a few hundred yards. How do elk respond to snow in the area you plan to hunt? In certain areas of Washington State where elk are





The advent of modern elk calls has changed early and mid-season elk hunting significantly. Many areas are hunted during the rut, first by archers, then black powder hunters before the modern rifle season. Bulls in these areas often become "call shy" and do not respond readily to elk bugles, cow calls, etc. In addition to practicing with my elk calls and knowing how to use them in different situations,

I like to look for areas which are not open to other methods of hunting before the hunting season in which I am participating opens. In these areas I have found that bull elk will respond to calls more readily than in areas where they have been called by hunters. New calls are constantly being developed so keeping an eye out for one that sounds different and works is also a good practice. I learned this long ago while calling coyotes. It works for elk too.

conditioned to being fed hay on winter feeding grounds the elk begin to move to lower country as soon as it begins snowing. If you get an early snow and pack into the high country for an elk hunt you are likely to not see very many elk even if the snow has melted. Whereas in Montana I have hunted elk that were walking and feeding in snow up to their bellies!

Knowing what elk do once the hunting season begins is important. Studies of radio-collared elk in the Selway area of Idaho illustrate how elk will move many miles from their early fall habitat to rough terrain in remote areas where they are not disturbed by hunters. Knowing where hunting pressure will come from early in the season will enable you to position yourself strategically in order to intercept elk moving away from hunting pressure. Later in the season this knowledge will enable you to find undisturbed elk.

4. Be physically and mentally prepared.

It makes no difference whether you are hunting on your own or with an outfitter, if you are not mentally and physically prepared you will likely have a disappointing hunt. Elk inhabit some of the steepest, roughest inaccessible country as well as

some of the most accessible, flattest country in the U.S. Trophy bulls can be found in both types of areas. Being in good physical shape is talked about a lot whereas little is said about mental conditioning. Elk hunting can be very difficult, hard work, especially when the weather is bad and you are hunting in steep country. When you are hunting in the backcountry the difficulty is compounded.

Having pre-set goals before going elk hunting will make for a much more enjoyable hunt. You may decide that if it gets wet and cold that you prefer to sit in the tent by the fire, sipping on a cup of hot buttered rum. That's fine if you have that in mind before you find yourself in tough hunting conditions. If you are not mentally prepared and willing to endure hardships and discomfort you will likely quit your hunt early and be disappointed if you encounter such. Personally, I have never killed a bull elk while sitting in my tent by the stove. On the other hand I have killed many fine trophy bulls by pushing my mental and physical envelopes to the limit and giving my hunt a 100% effort in both categories. This is not to say that you should take unreasonable risks. With the modern lightweight mountain and survival gear available today one can be safe, reasonably comfortable, and take on all of the

Bottom: ELK HUNTING CAN BE DIFFICULT, HARD WORK, ESPECIALLY WHEN THE WEATHER IS BAD AND YOU ARE HUNTING IN STEEP COUNTRY. WHEN THE AREA YOU ARE HUNTING IS IN THE BACKCOUNTRY THE DIFFICULTY IS COMPOUNDED.

Inset: BIG BULLS ARE NOT DUMB. THEY KNOW HOW TO AVOID HUNTERS BY FINDING REMOTE AREAS THAT MOST HUNTERS AVOID. BACKPACKING IS OFTEN THE ONLY MEANS OF ACCESSING THESE AREAS



challenges old mother nature can dish out while hunting elk.



Hunt the edge of 5 night and day.

I have taken most of my best bulls either just after shooting hours in the morning or just before shooting hours end in the evening. This makes sense because that is when the elk are most likely to be up and about. I like to be in the area where I believe elk to be feeding at the crack of dawn in order that I can intercept a bull in a feeding area or when he is moving from

just before a storm, just after a storm, or when it is very cold elk may be found on feeding areas later than usual in the morning and earlier than usual in the afternoon. This means being in position to hunt very early in the day or very late. This requires the ability to negotiate all kinds of terrain using a map and a compass or simply the stars in the dark hours of the morning or night. Since I never know where or when the day's hunt will end I carry a day pack and am prepared to spend the night somewhere out on the mountain on any given day I am hunting. Take some time and research the equipment hunters are using in the area you plan to hunt and then buy what you need as you can afford it. Finally, practice with your gear so you will know how to

Horses and/or mules are almost essential for hunting elk successfully in the remote areas of the west. Even if you hunt with an outfitter or a friend who owns livestock it would be wise for you to learn as much as you can about horses and if you are really interested learn about mules! At least learn how to saddle your own horse. It makes the hunt more rewarding when you understand what your outfitter or packer is doing and it will make your friend happy if you can do more than watch him saddle your horse for you!

Llamas and goats that are trained to pack are becoming popular "alternative" means for transporting elk quarters and camp gear into the remote areas of elk country. Every elk hunter does not have access to

livestock and others prefer not to have to deal with livestock on an elk hunt. Often this will mean backpacking into an area in order to get away from other hunters with other means of transportation into the area. The backpack hunter can access areas where



Top: HORSES AND MULES ARE ALMOST ESSENTIAL FOR HUNTING ELK SUCCESSFULLY IN THE REMOTE AREAS OF THE WEST. WHETHER YOU HUNT WITH AN OUTFITTER OR NOT, IT WOULD BE WISE FOR YOU TO LEARN AS MUCH AS YOU CAN ABOUT HORSES AND IF YOU ARE REALLY INTERESTED LEARN ABOUT MULES.

Inset: SHORT OF HUNTING PRIVATE RANCHES, MANY OF THE LIMITED ENTRY DRAWING AREAS LOCATED THROUGHOUT THE WESTERN STATES PROVIDE SOME OF THE BEST TROPHY ELK HUNTING TO BE FOUND. THIS EXCEPTIONAL BULL WAS TAKEN IN A LIMITED DRAWING AREA IN OREGON.



his feeding area to a bedding area. Depending upon the area in which you are hunting, the stage of the moon, the time of the year, etc. this will vary. Hunting pressure, hot days, and full moons generally mean elk are more likely to move to bedding areas earlier than usual. On the other hand

prepared for when you need to do it unexpectedly while hunting.

6. Getting into elk country & getting your elk out.

use it properly and effectively. Better yet, go out and spend the night by yourself with a minimum of gear during the summer in familiar surroundings in order to be mentally prepared

even hunters on horseback can not go. If you choose to do this, be prepared to bone out your elk and backpack the meat to an area where you can have someone pack it to the trailhead on a horse or mule. Another option is to be prepared to backpack the meat all the way to the trailhead. A quality backpack which is suited to carrying heavy loads is essential if you choose to hunt like this. You do not have to be a super athlete to backpack your elk. My good friend, Bob Wallace, and I drew muzzleloader elk permits in Washington two years ago. We took a nice elk some four miles from the trailhead and Bob at age 80 backpacked his share of the elk off the mountain. If you have backpack gear you do not have to go great distances. You just have to go far enough to get away from other hunters. This may

Right: OUT HERE IN ELK COUNTRY WE CAN LEAVE OUR EVERYDAY LIVES BEHIND AND ENJOY THE TIME WHEN TALK IS WITH CLOSE FRIENDS. WHERE WE CAN FIND THE PEACE, QUIET, FREEDOM AND FRIENDSHIP THAT CAN ONLY BE FOUND IN ELK COUNTRY.

Bottom: WHEN YOU ARE HUNTING ELK YOU DON'T NEED A LOT OF "STUFF" BUT YOU DO NEED THE RIGHT STUFF. MY FRIEND, DAVE ZANG, HAD THE RIGHT STUFF TO ACCESS THE AREA WHERE THIS IDAHO BULL HAD BEEN HIDING OUT FOR MOST OF THE SEASON.

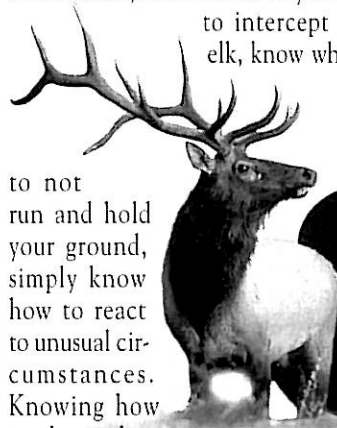
be just a short distance into a very rough area where you can not ride a horse or it may be an "in-between" area which is just beyond the point where "day hunters" from the road are reaching and short of the areas where hunters who pack in with horses are going. With the light weight gear which is available today you can be a very effective backpack hunter.

7. Putting it all together on the ground.

You can be in the best elk country in the U.S. and have the best gear that money can buy but if you cannot put it all together at the "moment of truth" you will likely be having track soup for supper. When faced with a hunting situation that demands something out of the ordinary many hunters are unable to capitalize upon the situation at hand and make it happen. I can recount many situations where I was able to take a bull elk because I reacted to the situation properly; like calling the right play



in football to take advantage of a situation which is presented. You may have to run across rough terrain, shoot up or down a steep slope, shoot from an awkward position, shoot through thick timber, know which way to run to intercept an elk, know when



to not run and hold your ground, simply know how to react to unusual circumstances. Knowing how to plan and execute a stalk, judging ranges to the target, and reading the wind, are other situations which confront elk hunters which you can practice during the off season. I learned to judge distances and shoot at long range by hunting rock chucks. My friend, Duane Sidler, who lives in Penn-

sylvania walks several miles every day and shoots weekly at ranges from 100 to 400 yards preparing for his trips to Idaho and elsewhere in the west to hunt with me. When he gets here he is physically and mentally ready to hunt elk. The thing he cannot practice at home is walking on steep hillsides and he constantly reminds me of how easy I make it look. Of course, I have been walking on hillsides all my life!

8 Finally, don't forget to enjoy your time afield with your hunting partners.

All elk country is beautiful. In an elk camp with friends there is a refreshing sense of our relationships with each other, with the land and with the elk. What the elk hunter sees, feels, and appreciates is much more than the relative instant involved in taking an elk. Out here in elk country we can leave our everyday lives behind and enjoy the time when talk is with close friends. Where we can find the peace, quiet, freedom, and friendship that can only be found in elk country!

Editor's Note: Hunting in Idaho's elk country was an annual event for B&C Associate, Dave Zang, (bottom left) of El Paso, Texas. Dave retired from the U.S. Army after a severe heart attack in 1975 at the rank of Command Sergeant Major. His love for hunting, fishing, shooting, and the outdoors sparked more than 20 years of volunteer work with many conservation organizations. Dave was the "heart and soul" of the Fort Bliss Rod & Gun Club and provided the leadership and energy behind the many programs sponsored by the club.

Dave Zang was one of those unique people whose zest for life and hunting was equalled only by his love for new challenges and his willingness to help others experience the hunting and fishing activities he loved so much. This past May, while hunting black bear in Idaho, Dave suffered a heart attack at the Kelly Creek Ranger Station. In spite of the heroic attempts of Clearwater National Forest personnel to revive Dave, he died... doing what he loved to do in a place he loved very much.

