

TO HUNT Or

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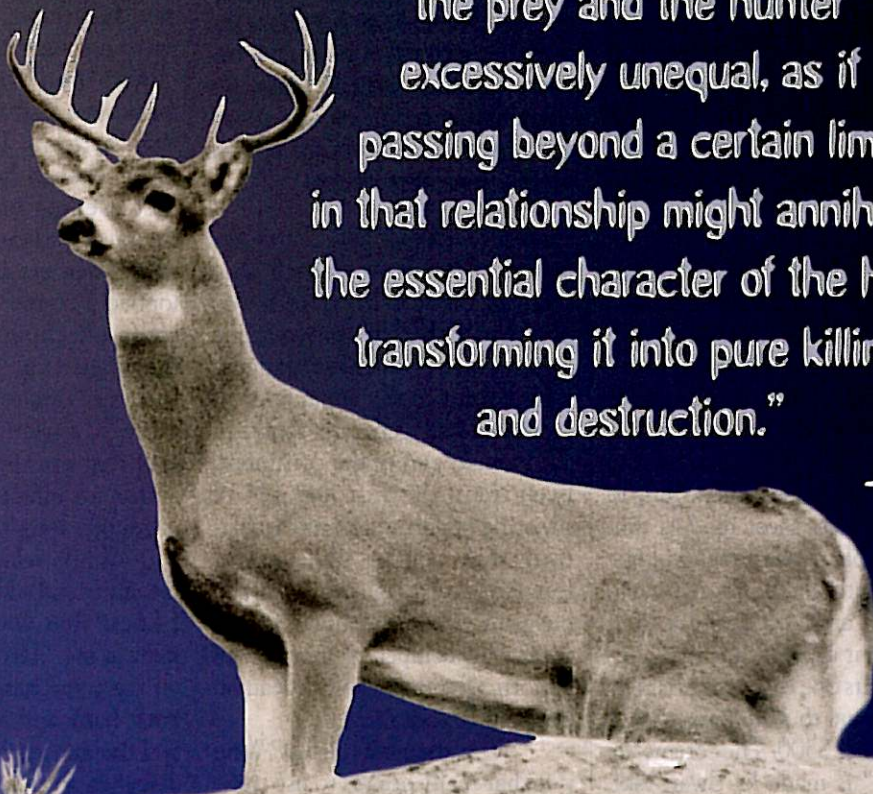
Ah, technology — when applied to what we do does it bless us or curse us? Or, both — often at the same time and with mind numbing capriciousness? A personal case in point — I faced a medical emergency twenty-one years ago and, without the advent of modern computerized technology I would have died a quick (read that, three days or less) and painful death. I literally owe my life to that technology. Yet today the aquifer that supplies my ground water is contaminated with the residue of the very same computer technology that earlier saved my life, now threatening it. I am endangered by that which saved me.

It is this thought that first came to mind when I was asked by Fair Chase to assemble a few thoughts regarding the use of laser range finding devices in big game hunting. Further reflective thought regarding technology brought to mind an editorial that I read in an automobile magazine over thirty years ago. Its author made one point that structured a framework for contemplation of the true meaning of technology to people, one that has stayed with me to this day. He pointed out, in a hypothetical example that, while in the past it may have taken us three weeks to travel from Point A to Point B, with a modern automobile and appropriate roads the same trip might only take three hours. Many, if not most, of us assume that we are really quite smart because of the time we have saved. Yet, the author stated that our true measure will be in "... how well we use the time that we have saved."

...TO KILL

“...as the weapon became more and more effective, man imposed more and more limitations on himself as the animal's rival in order to leave it free to practice its wily defenses, in order to avoid making the prey and the hunter excessively unequal, as if passing beyond a certain limit in that relationship might annihilate the essential character of the hunt, transforming it into pure killing and destruction.”

- Ortega Y'Gasset



Restated, this view of technology carries with it the weighted responsibility that if technological change does not lead to enhanced life quality perhaps it should have been left in the scrap bin. I believe this must have been what Aldo Leopold meant when he said the following over half a century ago in *A Sand County Almanac*, "...Our tools for the pursuit of wildlife improve faster than we do, and sportsmanship is the vol-

untary limitation in the use of these armaments. It (sportsmanship) is aimed to augment the role of skill and shrink the role of gadgets in the pursuit of wild things."

hunting situations. Either the range between hunter and hunted is so close that their utilization is

tive role in the development of a "system," as he refers to it, for effectively using this technology for big game hunting. It consists of the range finder itself, a special customized wildcat rifle, high powered rifle scopes with the ability to be adjusted and then returned to absolute zero, and high quality optics equipment for first spotting the game. He also advocates intensive, extended practice with his system in order to gain the necessary proficiency for hunting use. Total price for the uninitiated to purchase the full array of gadgets to fuel up for this type of shooting is around \$8,000. Yes, I said \$8,000!



THE AUTHOR, MIKE CUPELL, WITH AN EXCEPTIONALLY LARGE-BODIED MULE DEER TAKEN ON THE NAVAJO INDIAN RESERVATION IN NORTHEASTERN ARIZONA. THIS BUCK WAS SPOTTED OVER A MILE AWAY WITH HIGH QUALITY OPTICAL EQUIPMENT AND THEN STALKED UNTIL I COULD GET A SHOT AT A DISTANCE OF LESS THAN 100 YARDS. NO LASER RANGE FINDER OR ANY OTHER ELECTRONIC DEVICE WAS USED ON THIS HUNT — NONE WERE NEEDED!

More important than what he assisted in developing — at least, to me — is why my friend did so. It seems that the two of us, independent of each other and before we became friends, were pursuing the same extraordinary non-typical mule deer buck on a Kaibab hunt in northern Arizona. I never saw the buck, though he did. It was the last evening of the season and the buck was out of his effective rifle range even though he still lobbed a couple of shots its way. Upon checking, the hunter determined that this "buck of a lifetime" was about 525 yards away. My friend vowed on the spot that evening to develop the ability to effectively kill at exceedingly long ranges.

While relating this story to me, my friend added, "... and Mike, I know that you would feel the same as me." His opinion was that all big game hunters who hunted both hard and selectively would feel the same as he did. It was first disbelief and then with shocked amazement that he dealt with my telling him how wrong he was to assume that I envisioned this the same as he did. You see, my friend saw his "buck of a lifetime" and was devastated by the fact that he

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an unnecessary redundancy or the action of the hunt so swift that there isn't time to bring them into play. Or, both. The only realistic applicability of these gadgets would occur in the arena of open range hunting generally found in the western part of the continent. Even then, the vast majority of shooting opportunities are at relatively short ranges — 300 yards or less. A properly sighted in, scoped big game rifle in the hands of any reasonably competent shooter will perform effectively with a dead on hold out to that range.

Why, then, all the fuss? Who is it that really desires to use these gadgets and why are they desiring to do so? One of the leading proponents of the use of laser range finders in big game hunting just happens to be a good friend of mine. He has also played a forma-

Laser range finders are simply not needed in most big game

could not kill it, could not possess it, simply because it was out of his effective range. His view was that "...I saw a buck that I wanted and I could not get him and I will not let that happen again." My view would have been that "...I saw 'the buck of a lifetime' and could not get close enough to make an effective shot and that's okay!"

One of the many benefits of growing older is that we "...circle the bush often enough to begin to recognize its branches." I am now aware that when a man speaks voluntarily and passionately about any topic he feels deeply about, we should listen carefully and with a discerning ear. We will always learn more about him as a person than we will ever learn about that which he speaks. I learned much about my friend during this conversation, and even more about myself.

Reinforcement of this point came to me soon after that conversation when I happened upon a passage by the Spanish philosopher, Ortega Y'Gasset, in his famous book "Meditations on Hunting." Ortega stated "...as the weapon became more and more effective, man imposed more and more limitations on himself as the animal's rival in order to leave it free to practice its wily defenses, in order to avoid making the prey and hunter excessively unequal, as if passing beyond a certain limit in that relationship might annihilate the essential character of the hunt, transforming it into pure killing and destruction."

I am a proponent of what Ortega so forcefully states. The quality of my hunting experience supersedes my necessity to kill. Therefore, I will not be spending \$8,000 on a specialized "sniper" rifle and a high dollar laser range finder. I will instead concentrate on honing my hunting skills, as well as my ability to gracefully accept the limitations that keep some semblance of equalness between me and the animals I attempt to prey upon. I will be humbly grateful when I do kill and at least as much so when I do not.

There is no doubt whatsoever in my mind that the various state wildlife agencies will choose to NOT address the issue of use of laser range finders in big game hunting. The mold was set long ago that these bureaucracies would be minimalist when dealing with technological advances, that they would refuse to limit the use of such technology until problems of epidemic proportion's grew from such use (read that misuse). So, in the narrow sense of what is minimally legal, laser range finders will be legal to use. Those who feel comfortable to use these electronic gadgets in their personal hunting will be free to do so. No doubt they will.

However, should one choose to hunt rather than to kill, viewed in the context of both Leupold's and Ortega's words, then the ethic of the hunt demands that he preclude from the use of this gadget in his own personal hunting. To do less speaks aloud much more about who that man is than about what he may or may not be doing.

The Boone and Crockett Club's rules of Fair Chase currently address the issue of the use of electronic devices — Leupold's "gadgets" — by prohibiting the entry of any animal that exceeds minimum entry standards that was taken with their aid. There is pressure on the organization to revamp this stance. My understanding of the ethic that has guided the Boone and Crockett Club since its inception is that it parallels the ethic of both Leupold and Ortega.

Should the Boone and Crockett Club redefine the rules of Fair Chase to accommodate gadgets such as laser range finders will do far more than merely yield to advancements in technology. In my opinion, it would do much to erode the philosophical underpinnings of the Club, itself. The use of technology simply because it exists has no redeeming merit for, in the end, we will all be judged by "...how well we use the time that we have saved."

On the flip side...

I'm sure that anyone associated with sport hunting and the Boone and Crockett Club would agree that one clean, killing shot on game is a goal that all hunters should strive to achieve. We at Swarovski Optik feel strongly about this issue and it is one of the primary reasons that we are offering Laser Range finders.

As I'm sure you will agree, these devices in no way violate or impinge on the B&C Rule of Fair Chase. Laser range finders cannot attract, locate or observe game (not beyond what a normal binocular, rifle scope or mechanical range finder will do) nor can they in any way guide the hunter to the game. Laser range finders can only help insure that the hunter will take an accurate shot within the limits of his rifle and his personal ability.

These instruments are not for everyone and are not for every situation, but we do feel that they have a place in certain critical circumstances where terrain and lighting conditions make the distance to game measurement difficult if not impossible even for a trained, experienced guide. At these legal times the hunter can inadvertently take a long shot beyond his ability to place it accurately thus missing or much worse wounding the animal.

Most of us can accurately handle a shot out to 250 yards if we know the range and the ballistic performance of our rifle. Yet, most of us are also poor judges of range under nearly all circumstances. An accurate range finder can be very important in giving us the correct information. Moreover, when the range is greater than 300 yards, some measuring device is indispensable. Many experienced, ethical hunters already use "artificial" or mechanical means for gauging ranges, even if it is merely the subtensions on their scopes' reticles. Laser range finders are different from such means only in being more accurate. We, in fact, feel that the most important role of a good range finder is to tell us when not to take a shot because the range is beyond our capability.

As a matter of record, we at Swarovski Optik abhor the use in sport hunting of high tech electronic devices, such as night vision aids, which we also make for law enforcement and other professional use, sound amplification devices, aircraft, GPS devices used to mark the location of game, radios, etc. However, we strongly feel that like accurate rifles, scopes and ammunition, laser range finders help to make us better and more humane sportsman and women and have a definite place in the sporting environment and a favorable place in the Boone and Crockett rule book.

We hope you will share these views with the members of the Records Committee because we are very interested in knowing how they and other sportsmen and women feel about this issue.

Yours in sport hunting,

M. James Morey
President
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America, Ltd.