

HUNTING TO SURVIVE

By Bob Newman

THE tremendous cow moose stepped out from the spruce thicket into the tote road that my hunting partner, Pete and I were crouched along the side of. We had seen the beasts moving through the dense understory and had taken up position behind a small fir about 25 yards downwind from them. We knew there were at least two moose, but were unable to tell if one was a bull, because of the extremely limited visibility.

Pete, an expert marksman and sound all-around outdoorsman, drew a bead on the big cow astride the road and paused, waiting to see if a bull stepped out behind her. His Ruger No. 1, chambered in .270 Winchester, was rock steady as the crosshairs of his scope found the mark. I was directly behind him.

"Hold on," I whispered softly. "Wait for the other one."

A moment later the other one appeared. A slightly smaller cow.

"Take her." I whispered.

Pete's .270 spoke with authority and the unseen round sped towards its target, a spot right between the giant moose's eyes. It impacted precisely where Pete had directed it. And bounced right off her sloped forehead.

To say that we were surprised at this annoying turn of events would certainly be an understatement. We had both seen a chunk of fur and some bone fragments fly off her grazed head, but it was clear the round did not penetrate more than a couple of millimeters, since the critter was still standing in front of us.

She and the other cow wheeled and bolted back into the thicket from whence they came. I managed to get off one poorly placed

shot at the fleeing moose, but the round flew high and found nothing but air.

We stood in stunned silence for a few minutes before either of us spoke. Neither of us had ever seen anything like that, in our combined 45 years of hunting.

Pete spoke first, "I don't believe that! I nailed her right between the runnin' lights!"

"The round bounced clean off 'er. Let's see if we can cut some sign;" I replied, and we both cautiously moved into the thicket. No need to pursue her at close quarters. A wounded moose is not the creature of choice to get up close and personal with in situations such as these. Their broad, slashing hooves and impressive size have sent many a woodsmen to his grave.

We spent the next 90 minutes searching for sign, finding only a few spots of dark blood among the widely-placed prints in the soft earth. For more than a mile we trailed her until finally the blood disappeared altogether. It was painfully clear to us that she was barely scratched and had no intention of slowing down. Incredible but true. A quirk in ballistics and the sloping forehead of the moose had cost us a freezer full of tender meat.

Not five minutes after we dejectedly clambered back into Pete's venerable LandCruiser we spotted another huge cow feeding in a bog. Pete chambered a round and scampered along the side of a knoll to get into firing position.

As the gargantuan animal lifted its head from the murky mire Pete let 'er fly, the round catching the cow just behind and below the right ear. She went down like an Iraqi bridge.

We would have that tender meat in the freezer after all. Five-hundred pounds of it to be exact.

That memorable excursion in the pristine mountains of western Maine, near the village of Rangeley taught me an important lesson in survival hunting: Expect the unexpected, even the seemingly impossible. And don't get "down in the mouth" because something didn't go as planned. Press on! Your luck will change. It's just that you have to make it change.

Be An Animal - That's right. Be an animal! After all you are one. Man has been hunting for survival for eons, literally. Sure, he was a bit hairier and somewhat more attuned to his environment when he was what anthropologists call Cro-Magnon or Neanderthal. He had to be in order to make it. But that doesn't mean you can't be just as adept a survivor as your forebearers.

You've got what it takes to be an efficient survival hunter. You were born with it, "it" being survival instinct. We all were. What you have to do though, since man has become a creature who is what a buddy of mine calls a "slave to comfort;" is relearn what modern man has lost.

So how do we go about this reeducation? A number of ways, the most effective of which is hands-on training. In other words first-hand experience. Hook-up with someone whose expertise in the art of survival hunting is known to you. Every time he - or she - steps into the wilds to hunt, you be right behind them. Ask questions. But not when your mentor is about to dispatch the grizzly they have been tracking for seven hours and is now mere yards away from. Wait for a more advantageous time.

Read. Read everything you can get your hands on pertaining to hunting. And don't just stick with the more modern books, either. The works of old are often intriguing and exceptionally well-

written. A few of my favorites are Osborne Russell's Journal of a Trapper Wm. O. Pruitt Jr's Wild Harmony Animals of the North Stalking in the Himalayas and Northern India, by Lt. Col. G.H. Stockley and David Attenborough's The Living Planet. Not exactly what you expected? Trust me. I have gleaned reams of information from books such as these. Information that has proven invaluable to me time and time again.

Other excellent books include The Audubon Society Nature Guide series, which is jammed with myriad bits of useful information, The Audubon Society Field Guide Series, which is outstanding, and Harper & Row's Complete Field Guide to North American Wildlife. You would do well to have these in your personal library.

Own a TV? Your local PBS channel may offer one of the best nature shows on television: Nature Scene. If you get it, don't miss it. Another worthwhile production on your PBS station is Nature.

L.L. Bean, which I teach a wilderness survival workshop for in their Outdoor Discovery Program, offers one of the finest series of hunting videos available. For a list of all the videos they have available, write to L.L. Bean at Freeport, Maine 04033.

There are also a wide variety of magazines on the market that publish a plethora of information on hunting. Don't make the mistake of buying a magazine for its eye-catching cover, though. Buy the magazine for its instructional value, not its aesthetics.

If you are in a genuine survival situation, common sense dictates that you must take what you find. The rules go out the window when it's between you and Mother Nature. Keep in mind, however, that when you are "practicing" your survival skills, ethics dictate that you must stay within the realm of the law.

Those laws may seem bothersome to you from time to time, but they are the reason we still have game to hunt in this country.

It goes without saying that different animals have different habits. One factor remains a constant, though. Everything an animal does is directly influenced by its need for food and water, shelter from the elements, self-preservation or procreation. If you approach survival hunting with these things in mind, you will already have taken a giant step forward in being a successful hunter.

If you are impatient, stop being so right now.

There now. That was easy, wasn't it? The most proficient hunters are patient almost to a fault. They can - and do - lay in a "hide" for hours on end without so much as twitching. They will stalk or track their quarry until they take it, regardless of how long it takes or what the conditions are. Patience means determination.

And they are intimately familiar with the habits of their prey. They do not guess. They calculate. They do not take risks. They weigh the odds and take the necessary action. They hunt intending to kill. They mean full well to come out on top.

In survival hunting, it's not how you play the game; it's whether or not you win. If you win, you live. If you lose, you don't live.

Deer such as the revered white-tailed (*Odocoileus virginianus*) are one of the most wary mammals on the continent. Becoming an expert at successfully hunting them takes years, even decades. They are elusive beyond belief at times, but still find their way into tens of thousands of hunter's freezers every year.

These hunters know that deer, like any other animal, crave sex, though probably not for the same reason humans do. They use buck "grunts" to lure in rutting males. They smear the vegetation around their hides and stands with chemicals that imitate doe estrus. They take note of sign that indicates the presence of an active buck, such as scrapes and rubs.

They also know that deer love apples, acorns and a remarkable variety of other foods. They put this knowledge to good use by taking up a shooting position between resting and feeding areas.

And they are very aware of the fact that deer have exceptionally keen senses. Their sense of smell and sound are incredibly well-tuned.

Curiosity is one of their shortcomings as well, besides their sometimes overpowering urge for food and sex. On several occasions I have snuck up on deer that were lying on hillsides, looking down onto a road, watching the cars go by.

Waterfowl, on the other hand, do not display this blatant sense of curiosity. Ducks and geese are known for their skepticism and shyness. They do, however, have a strong desire for companionship. They can be lured into a decoy set if you place the blocks correctly and use your call in the right manner.

Both of these skills takes practice, as you might expect. After more than two decades of water fowling, I am just now beginning to get quite good at the use of decoys and calls. Then again, it may be that I am just a tad slower than the next guy.

Ducks and geese have fantastic eyesight. Perfect camouflage means more birds for the survival hunter.

Upland game such as rabbits and squirrels are frequently - almost always - easier to come by than big game like deer and moose. There are generally more of them in a given area, and they are usually much less wary. Woodchucks, prairie dogs, badgers, marmots and other burrowing mammals make for easy pickings if you are good with a flat and fast shooting varmint rifle such as the .220 Swift or 15-06 Remington. Look for woodchucks in the early morning and late afternoon in rocky fields, especially those with a bit of slope to them.

Start boning up now for the time when survival hunting is no longer a pleasant diversion on a perfect weekend, but a "do or die" situation when you least expect it.

Unlikely? That's what the Filipinos and Japanese thought, until volcanoes started going off in their backyards.

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