

LESSONS

In 1989 the author was still-hunting along the dense brush of a salmon stream when he arrowed this massive Alaska brown bear at only 12 yards.

"Experience is the greatest teacher," and nowhere is this statement more true than in the sport of bowhunting.

Text and photos by Chuck Adams

LEARNED

EDITOR'S NOTE: *NORTH AMERICAN HUNTER* "BOWHUNTING" Columnist Chuck Adams holds more official Pope and Young Club record-book animals than any bowhunter in history—122 at last count. Adams has also held five P&Y world records, more than anyone else. Here, in his own words, are seven lessons learned from 4 decades of bowhunting success.

Lesson No. 1: Hunt The Hotspots

I've had my share of bumner bowhunts since I started archery hunting at age 13. The absolute worst was the time in 1976 when I took some bad advice about choosing an outfitter for hunting goats, moose and caribou. After 12 days in northern British Columbia, my most vivid memories were seven horses that died on the trail of malnutrition. The guide that got drunk and fell off his steed into a rushing river was also something I'll never forget. The guy "came to" 8 hours later with a terrific headache.

The whole hunt was a headache for me. I shot a puny nanny goat, and never saw a moose or caribou. It was poor planning on my part, and I mainly blame myself.

Through the years, I've learned to research bowhunting areas more carefully. I never believe one source, because people sometimes exaggerate, lie or simply don't have a clue when it comes to accurately field judging an animal.

One guy's hotspot is another guy's bad spot. You should decide what you want, and find that sort of honey-hole.

When I started bowhunting elk 35 years ago, I wanted to see lots of animals. I called the game department in every elk state, talked to taxidermists and hunt-book agents, and purchased a large stack of topographic maps. I ended up in Colorado's Flattops Wilderness Area, and I saw more

than 200 elk per day. No big ones, mind you, but all I wanted was a chance at an elk with antlers. Mission accomplished.

Today, I prefer big elk. They are rare and a special challenge to bag. I study the record books, call state game officials, and try to hunt where good genetics, proper nutrition and light hunting pressure coincide. Sometimes it works with a bull such as my 2000 Pope and Young Club former world record from Montana. Sometimes it doesn't: In 2004 I hunted my fanny off and never drew my bow on an elk.

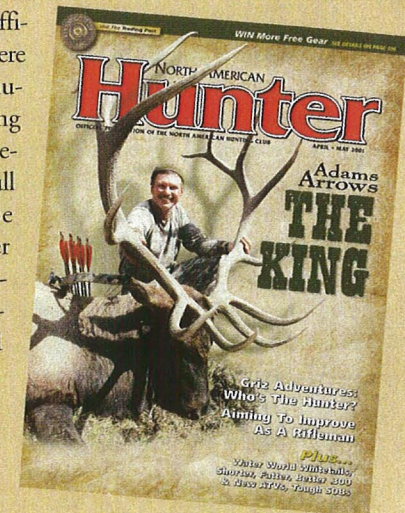
Aside from doing lots of research and logging lots of telephone time with game biologists, I've also learned to scout before I hunt. I devote the beginning 25-35 percent of every trip to covering terrain and locating concentrations of animals. It's tempting to hit the ground running—and as a result hunt the wrong places during an entire vacation. You're better off scouting hard and hunting fewer days in the prime spots.

Lesson No. 2: Equipment Counts

Two things contribute to consistent bowhunting success: You've got to be a decent hunter, and you also need to hit what you shoot at. Many archers are good at one or the other, but the best bowhunters excel at both.

Half the battle in shooting is proper equipment. The bow must match your physical size and strength. Arrows must match the bow. Bowsights, release aid, broadheads and other accessories should be tested and chosen with care.

One friend of mine hunted whitetails last year in a genuine hotspot in Iowa. When the largest buck he'd ever seen walked under his tree 25 yards away, he drew, aimed ... and watched in horror as his bowsight slipped from the bow and



The author made a perfect double-lung shot from 39 yards on the former world-record typical elk; the bull was featured on the April/May 2001, cover of *North American Hunter*.



After three fun but unsuccessful bowhunting seasons, the author finally punched his first archery deer tag at age 16 in northern California.