

Preparation

PAYS OFF

Knowing where to look eliminates the guess work

By **BILL LESLIE**
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The snap of a twig gave away the bull's location. Little did Mark Eisenzimmer know that he was just seconds away from drawing on a 310-class Pope and Young bull.

This was a familiar moment for Mark, who has hunted for decades, having grown up with a father, Frank, who introduced his son to deer hunting at a young age.

"Dad loved to hunt deer with a rifle," Mark recalls. "He taught me to love the outdoors. I know I'll be a hunter for life."

Unlike his son, Frank gave up hunting while he was in his 30s, opting to set his rifle aside in favor of picking up a brush to create wildlife art.

Over the years, Frank has completed dozens of wildlife portraits, some of which appear in the lobbies of Cascade Athletic Clubs, of which Mark is an owner.

Mark, and his friend Doug Gabbert were in their mid-20s when they were introduced to archery hunting. Their interest was sparked when they met Leroy Duke, an archer who had joined Cascade Athletic Club.

"Leroy's a great instructor, and Doug and I learned to love bow hunting," Mark said. "Leroy competes at the national level, and he invested a lot of time in us."

Mark has gone on to participate in archery hunts almost every year, with a success rate of about one out of every three trips. That's a phenomenal record when compared to an Oregon average of one success every 15 years.

"We have opportunities virtually every year," he said. "But you don't bring home a big elk by shooting the first one you see."

Mark is accurate out to 60 yards or beyond, but his ethics won't let him risk a long shot.

"I'll pass on a shot over 35 yards. Closer is better, and I'd rather pass on a shot than wound an animal that I can't find," he said.

Mark and his hunting buddy, Greg Osburn, typically hunt in Central Oregon, although they've ventured as far as Idaho and Wyoming in pursuit of big game.

It was on one of their trips to Central Oregon when Mark placed himself in perfect position to take down this bull (see the accompanying photo on this page) on the second day of the 2014 season.

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ARCHERY

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"I spent some of the first day 25 feet up in a tree stand, bugling and listening," Mark said. "I couldn't see them, but I could hear a bull talking to several cows wallowing in a mud hole.

"I had a pretty good sense of where they were, about a mile off the nearest road. The next day we were in position before dawn," he continued.

Reading the wind, Mark and Greg positioned themselves so the elk would not catch their scent. With Greg having pulled a muscle in his arm — finding it difficult to draw his bow — it's Mark who would have the upper hand on this day.

From 400 yards out, the bull responded to a cow call.

Then came the long wait.

"Too often, people over-call and scare the animals off," Mark said. "I'll sometimes wait 20 minutes between calls."

This went on for about an hour, and then the bull went silent. Mark soft cow called several times, and a spike and three or four cows spooked and ran past him, about 15 yards away.

"We wanted the herd bull, so we waited about 20 minutes longer. A cow milled around and looked my way, but she couldn't see me. Seeing the cow was a good sign; there was sure to be a bull around."

Finally, the sound of snapping twig behind Mark's position betrayed the location of an approaching animal.

"I slowly turned my head," Mark said. "When I saw the size of his horns, I was pretty sure I'd have the chance to take a shot, so I slowly pulled back to a full draw, and waited for him."

Mark uses a Matthews Drenalin 75 pound compound bow. His arrow of choice is a Beman carbon fiber arrow tipped with Montec G5 three-blade broadheads.

"(The bull) came into view, moving from my right to my left. If he kept moving to the left, I'd lose sight of him in the trees, but he turned back to the right again, trying to smell me. I had one shot,



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO: GREG OSBURN

Mark Eisenzimmer and Greg Osburn display a bull Osburn shot during a 2013 hunt in the Walla Walla Unit of northeast Oregon.

through a four-foot gap between trees, and I took it, catching him right behind the shoulder. He crashed away through the bushes and I lost sight of him."

Mark and Greg waited about 45 minutes and then followed a blood trail for about 50 yards. The bull, estimated at 7 years old, scored 310 points on the Pope & Young system.

Mark and Greg packed out the meat and antlers, no easy task as the bull fell more than a mile from the nearest road.

"Greg didn't get an elk that week," Mark said. "But he got a nice one the following week."

Mark Eisenzimmer offers the following tips to bow hunters:

SCOUT THE AREA IN ADVANCE

■ If you show up the night before the season opens, your chances of finding elk are slim.

STAY IN SHAPE

■ "Elk country is steep, and high. I often hunt at 7,000 feet or higher. If you aren't in shape, you'll end up eating tag soup." Mark bicycles more than 2,500 miles a year to stay in shape.

DON'T OVER-CALL

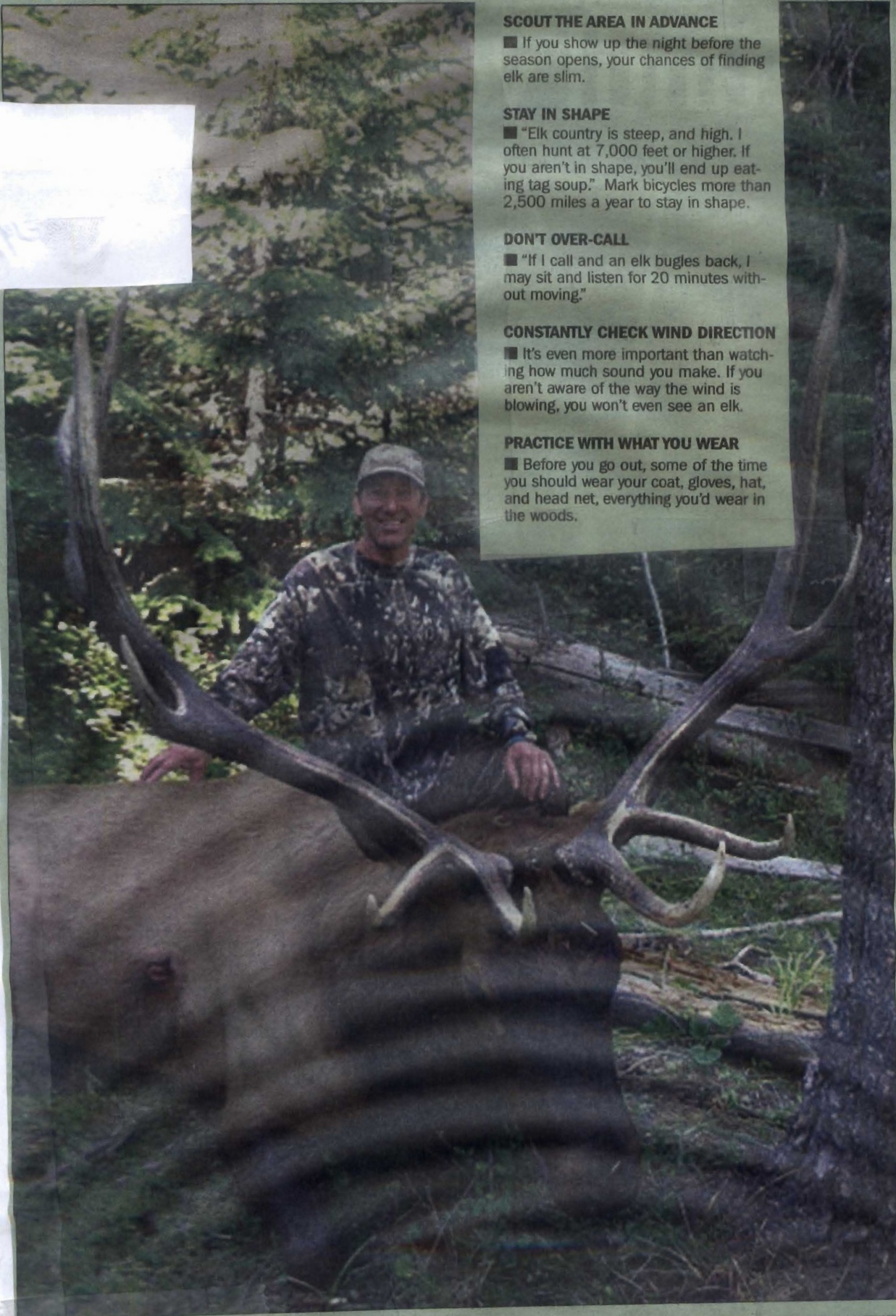
■ "If I call and an elk bugles back, I may sit and listen for 20 minutes without moving."

CONSTANTLY CHECK WIND DIRECTION

■ It's even more important than watching how much sound you make. If you aren't aware of the way the wind is blowing, you won't even see an elk.

PRACTICE WITH WHAT YOU WEAR

■ Before you go out, some of the time you should wear your coat, gloves, hat, and head net, everything you'd wear in the woods.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO: MARK EISENZIMMER

Mark Eisenzimmer poses with the bull he tagged during the 2014 archery season.