

Preparation for your hunt

We are very excited for you to share your Western hunt with us. We want to help you prepare as much as possible for it. To that end, I would like to get you thinking about your preparation activities so that physically and mentally you have optimized the aspects of the hunt that you can control.

On our end, there is a huge amount of prep work on all aspects of a back country camp that begins at full speed in April, several months before your hunt commences.

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We do everything we can to optimize the hunting variables within our control. Things like camp prepped, hay hauled, stock prepped, hunting trails opened, wood cut, &c. It takes a lot of work to get our hunting camps ready for you, and we love it. We are also particular about our staff. The guides are multi-talented with skills at big game hunting, knowing the area well, packing meat, stock care, and many other things. It takes a rare individual to excel at this kind of thing and we really work at getting the best people available for the hunts.

There are things we cannot control, and those include weather, wolves, elk herd movements, and other elements in the back country that can affect the hunt.

Then there are things that you control. The most critical of these are shooting proficiency and physical preparation. Having the appropriate gear is important but less so. I don't say this flippantly, but the reality is that there's been a lot of elk killed by guys in blue jeans and a heavy wool shirt. If you don't have our gear list, let me know. If you have questions about gear, I'd love to hear from you.

Shooting proficiency preparation:

Distance: You need to be proficient with your rifle at 250 yards. By this I mean you need to be very consistent at shot placement in an elk kill zone at this distance using a rest of some sort. Every year I have shot misses at this distance and closer because guys have not gotten as comfortable with their rifle as they should be. You may have opportunities at 100 yards, and you may have opportunities at 350+ yards. For longer distances it becomes a judgement call between your guide and you as to whether it is a good shot to take. By far, the most shot opportunities we get are 250 yards and less.

Rifle caliber: I like 30 caliber rifles. Almost any sort will do. I like 160-180 grain bullets, but I've heard reasonable arguments for larger bullets (the trade offs start to matter with distances). If you have questions or want to dig deeper, let me know. I'd rather us both get comfortable now than until the hunt starts.

Confidence: This is hard I understand. But it is important. It is not unusual to have an opportunity with a bull elk at 140 yards, and you need to take an off hand shot.



You may have 20-30s to get a good shot off. Elk have big kill zones and while I do not expect anyone to be able to drive nails off-hand at this distance, you should be able to hit a 6ft square area (which is the effective vital area on an elk). Conversely, if you stalk up on an elk and get to 250 yards with a rest, plenty of time, and the elk broadside, this should be meat on the ground every time.

Shot placement: There is rarely a perfect shot, but when we get elk broadside or slightly quartering to or away, I really want to see shots right behind the front shoulder in the ribs. Most of the missed shots are OVER the animal. I think this is often because people are aiming at the back of the neck or “high shoulder”. Those are risky shots and generally do not work.

Shooting questions: Some common questions I get are around bipods and shooting sticks. I do recommend either of them. They are bulky, heavy, and not really necessary. If we have time for any kind of set up for a shot, we have trees, rocks, downfall, stumps, backpacks, etc to get a good shooting rest. Practice shooting in the knee position. Other questions I get are around scopes. I’m not particular, but I shy away from having to “dial in” a scope for a shot. If you have time its great, sometimes you will not. You should have some confidence in your shots at around 150yards with minimal time (20s) to get a quality shot off. This usually excludes dialing in a scope.

Physical Preparation:

Elevation Gain: Wherever you are, do whatever you can to hike up and down hills. Do it a lot. Elevation gain is utmost important, distances less so. We don’t hike very far during the day, maybe 2-3 miles. Wherever we go is most up, down, or sidehill. The best you can find would be something without a trail, where you have to do some “off-roading”. This will help your feet and legs get used to uneven landscape while exerting. You will frequently be climbing over downfall, crossing scree fields, crossing small streams, and often going through brushy country. Getting feet and legs used to that kind of resistance while climbing will be invaluable to you.

Cardio: Anything you can do to improve your cardiovascular work is going to help you. Almost any cardio work out is going to benefit you - bikes, stair step, rowing, or just plan fast walking/climbing are all great. We experience a daily cadence of high exertion, then an hour or 2 of glassing, then another period of high exertion, then glassing, &c. The more you can do to help get your heart, lungs, blood flow used to that cadence now will pay off in the fall. This will also contribute to faster breath and heart recovery when, for example, you are climbing and you bump some elk and have to take a quick shot. The faster your heart rate and breather recover will greatly improve your shot placement and confidence.

Your cardio preparation will also help you with something neither you nor I can do much about – terrain elevation. The air is thinner up here. We’ll be mostly at 6,000-8,000 feet. It’s really impractical to prep for thinner air, but the cardio and climbing practices will greatly assist your recover and speed adaptability to this terrain elevation.

Hydration: This is easily overlooked but I see that as an unforced error. We have a relatively dry climate. Our ambient air moisture is around 14%. You will lose a lot of water through sweat and expiration from lungs and skin. You should plan on drinking far more water than you ever have. This should be tied into your work outs – drinking a lot of water. There are additives to help with hydration, and I'm mixed as to their effectiveness. In any case, additives are not a substitute for volume. Plan on (and practice now) carrying water and drinking it often.

We're very excited to have you join us this year. I've assembled an excellent team and they are energized and ready. Let me know any thoughts or questions. I look forward to hearing from you.

Joe