

Top Elk Outfitter Shares Hunting Secrets

S.L. Merriam - FISHING & HUNTING NEWS

Jay Mitchell is the owner and top guide at Action Adventures Guide Outfitter, based in Montrose. Mitchell has guided big game hunters in Colorado for over 23 years. He's managed at least a 70 percent success rate on trophy bull elk (5x5 or larger) over the last 10 years, including record-book trophies. Mitchell specializes in deer and elk, using bow, black powder, and rifle. His hunts take place on private land and public timberline, including horseback and drive-to hunts.

F&HN: Are these hunts draw only?

JM: The elk areas I hunt have over-the-counter bull licenses available. Deer is draw-only, of course, but I can get landowner tags on private land. My hunts are popular. I book up about two years in advance, both for residents and non-resident hunters.

F&HN: What do you think is the main difference in the big game hunting knowledge between a guide and the average weekend hunter?

JM: I know my job as my customers know their livelihoods. I know the territory, the terrain, and the game far better. Elk are gypsies that move with the feed, weather, breeding and harassment. The trick isn't to know where they are ... but to know where they're going, so you can meet them there.

F&HN: What's the single most important factor in elk hunting?

JM: It's got to be smell. If a bull sees you at a distance three times. Then he's gone. If he hears you twice, then he's gone. But if he smells you once, he is long gone.

F&HN: What kind of fire power do you recommend for elk?

JM: A 30/06 or larger, with a 180-grain bullet. I prefer the magnums. Like the 7mm and 300 magnums, due to the size of the elk. Elk are difficult to stop, and you can't overkill them.

F&HN: What's the most common shooting mistake you see hunters make?

JM: Not practicing enough before the hunt. You really have to practice-practice-practice with your rifle. I've put hunters on huge bulls after an hour of stalking, just to have them miss an easy shot. Practice longer shots, smaller target shots, shooting off-hand and lying down.

F&HN: What are the lessons you've learned by hunting and bagging the biggest elk?

JM: Record book elk don't get that way by standing around and doing stupid things that risk their lives. They are fully alert, and only if they drop their guard romancing a cow elk do the odds ever turn in your favor.

F&HN: You offer a variety of hunts, right?

JM: That's right. I have father/son hunts, hunts, for seniors, and handi-capped hunts on private land. These are less physical than horseback and pack-in hunts, and still have a high success rate. At the other end is the extreme pack-in deer and elk hunt.

F&HN: Do you have recommendations for non-guided, public land hunting?

JM: There's a lot of good public hunting land available in Colorado, in national forests like the San Juan, Arapaho, Grand Mesa, Gunnison, Pike, Rio Grande, Roosevelt, Routt, San Isabel, San Juan, Uncompahgre and White River. Colorado has a wealth of public land to hunt.

F&HN; What's the secret to successfully hunting; public land for big elk and deer?

JM: You really need to pack in, to get to where the people don't go. And hunt where the elk stay each year during different times of the year. You have to know where you're going in these large expanses- the elk are in one place usually, and nothing is everywhere else.