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Rifle Hunting vs. Bow Hunting: The Hunter's Weapon of Choice

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Hunting to bring home the "bacon" can be traced all the way back to the Stone Age. It's not just about eating, but many traditions have steamed from this time-honored sport of finding and killing the biggest and best animals to stock the freezer. In the world of hunting, there are two weapons that are commonly used; the bow and the rifle. The avid hunter has their own preference when it comes to hunting, but there is no right or wrong answer. There are pros and cons to each method, and cost and time are always a factor. The dual between the bow and rifle is an age old battle that doesn't seem to have any resolution in sight.

Rifles Provide Deadly Accuracy

When first branching into the hunting scene, many people automatically take a rifle as their weapon of choice. Since guns have been used for more than two centuries, rifles are so omnipresent that most people don't realize what their other options are. A rifle is mechanical in nature, and because of this, they are better than bows in many respects. A rifle is very easy to use, and the ammunition is transportable. They can target animals at a much greater distance, and the long range options give a better chance at a sure kill.

Learning how to shoot a gun is relatively simple. It only takes a few practice shots to acquire a talent for hitting the target with ease. Those who don't have a great deal of time love the simple nature of a gun. Bow hunters must be stealthy and crafty; something the rifle hunter doesn't have to worry about. Another big advantage is that the rifle user can shoot his target from several hundred yards away while the bow hunter has to be within 40 yards to get a clear shot.



The rifle is much more accessible. It has been the weapon of choice for so long, and there are many traditions build around this method of hunting. Some families believe that when a boy hits thirteen that it's time for him to have his own rifle. Some pass down their rifles through the generations as tradition. Guns definitely increase in value so they an asset to have. They are considered family heirlooms and a precious piece of the past.

Breaking Down the Costs Between Bows and Rifles

Rifles have been considered the superior hunting method, but there is a large market for bows too. One of the negative aspects of bow hunting is the initial expenses involved. Those who want to try their hand at hunting might not want to pay so much up front; especially if they are not sure if it is a sport they will like. A modern bow and equipment setup will cost anywhere from \$1-\$2 thousand dollars. The cost of bows is significantly more than ammunition for a gun too. Once an archer shoots a few arrows, it's clear that they are easily lost in the woods.

For around \$1,000, a hunter can get a rifle with tons of accessories. The costs can be shocking for the bow alone, add in all the gear and it's the price of a beater used car. A good archer will have cameo gear, clothes that are scentless, and other gadgets to get them in close proximity to the animal. The only expenditure isn't money; time is something that must be considered too. They must learn how to use the bow and have deadly accuracy, which takes much time and a great deal of effort.

The Art of Bow Hunting



EXHIBIT I



Bow hunters must be more skilled to get their animal and that skill isn't something they are going to develop overnight. Rifle hunters don't need to be as careful in the woods, their gun does most of the work for them. It seems that nearly every hunter starts with a rifle first and then switches to a bow at a later point. They like the thrill of being able to hunt at different times and using diverse methods. It can take years to become proficient with a bow, and some hunters don't have the time or patience for that. However, once they conquer the art of bow hunting, it's a feat that brings bragging rights.

Why Bow Hunting Is Such A Challenge?

Just because it's a little difficult, costly, and time-consuming doesn't mean there isn't a big market for bow hunting. It is estimated that more than 75 percent of those who use a bow to hunt also use a gun. A shotgun can reach a further distance, but they don't need to hide and blend in with their surroundings so much. The bow hunter must try to be incognito to get the prize catch. They must also get to know the animal and their behaviors. It requires getting into the animals' head and trying to figure out their next move.

A rifle hunter doesn't have to put so much work into their game; they just point and shoot. They don't require the tip-toeing through the woods that the bow hunter requires. Still, most say that it really just comes down to preference. Both types of weapons get the job done, it's just what the person prefers, what their forefathers preferred, and what their budget and time schedule dictates.

Why The Bow Hunting Craze?



The [U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service](#) estimates that there are 13 million hunters each year in the US. Of those people, 33 percent of those people choose to hunt with a bow. The popularity of the bow has drastically increased, and it has quickly become the object that everyone needs for their hunting collection. A well-rounded hunter can use either a bow or a rifle to hunt. The bow has really gained in popularity over the past couple decades and many view it as a newfangled way to peruse the hunting game; however, bow hunting is the original method. At least 67 percent of hunters use a rifle regularly, but most will, at least, try to bow hunt at least once in their lives.

Many say that bow hunting feels like a natural way to hunt. It reminds some hunters of how the old-timers used to hunt before there were expensive guns and rifles. Cavemen didn't have such elaborate toys, they had to make things like bows and arrows to kill their prey. They had to really know what they were doing because they wouldn't eat if they didn't come home with a catch. They didn't have the scented

clothes and all the extra gadgets that are available now; they had to use their own ingenuity to catch their food. Rather than looking through a telescope at a deer 200 yards away, a bow allows you to get up close and personal with the animal. Some say it is how hunting should be done. Bow hunting gives an adrenaline rush that using the rifle doesn't offer.

Bow Hunters Have An Advantage On Allowable Hunting Times

One of the reasons why many hunters are picking up a bow is because of the generous seasonal times. Most states allow more hunting time and limits for bow hunters. In the state of Minnesota, those who hunt with a bow will get to hunt for several months. However, when it comes to hunting with a gun; hunters only get two weekends. Some say they will use the bow during bow hunting season and their rifle when it is in season, which allows them to have the best of both worlds. Bow season usually gets an earlier start than gun season. Bow hunters have another advantage too. When gun season starts, many animals go into hiding. The guns cause quite a stir in the woods and the animals will stay out of sight. The bow hunter isn't making a great deal of noise and the animals are more likely to wonder about the woods freely. Some of the biggest bucks ever shot were done by an angler.

[Bowhunter-ed.com](#) took a survey of hunters and their love for bows. When asking why the hunters preferred to use a bow to hunt, they responded that it was because they got to hunt first and longer than rifle hunters. Whether intentional or not, it seems that bow season occurs at a time when there is more plentiful game. Muzzleloader and rifle season usually don't have the same luxury of time.



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Bow Hunting Strengthens Various Skills

One aspect of bow hunting that cannot be avoided is the fact that it provides great exercise. The majority of hunters are men and nothing is better for building those biceps than pulling back on a bow. Guns require no effort to shoot. Though they may kick a little, they are not going to help build strong muscles anytime soon. The bow, on the other hand, will do just that. Depending on the draw weight, it can really develop chiseled arms. The bow also has the ability to work on target-directed motor skills. That's why 58 percent of hunters polled said they liked the workout that using a bow provided and the challenge really fed into their male drive.

Speed and Range Means Everything To A Hunter

A long range rifle can shoot effectively up to 1,000 yards away, but the modern bow can only kill an animal from up to 40 yards. A bullet's speed can be greater than 3,000 feet per second, while the arrow tops out below 400. The bow is meant to be a short-range hunting tool. The ideal distance for a bow hunter is around 30-40 feet; the closer the better. Hunters lose their composure the further distance they have to shoot. So it provides for a greater victory, and sense of accomplishment, when getting an animal with a bow.



Tip Toe through the Woods- The Quiet Nature of a Bow

Everybody knows that one of the most important aspects of hunting is being quiet. Unless the animals are really tame, any slight noise is going to send them running for cover. True, a gun doesn't require the hunter to get super close for a shot, on the other hand, the bow does. One thing to consider is that a stealth mission requires real skill. Even with one of the best silencers on the market, the rifle is still going to be loud. The muzzle flash is what gives most hunters away. Animals within that general area are going to run for cover.

The bow is whisper quiet. The only thing that is heard is the twang caused from an arrow loosening from the bow. The bow hunter is in camouflaged clothing and blending in with nature, so once again the animals aren't alarmed. The swift silence of the bow isn't going to disrupt the woods like the load echoing gunfire will.

Human Skills against Animal Instinct

Some hunters feel that for hunting to be a real sport the animal has to have an even playing field. In rifle hunting, the animal doesn't stand a chance. The animals' chance of survival is pretty limited due to the distance a gun can shoot and its deadly precision. An animal has a better chance of survival when a bow is used to hunt. This means the hunter must have skills, and it becomes human skills against animal instinct. A gun takes away the animals skill set and does nothing to enhance the hunters.

Take for instance a deer that is standing one hundred and fifty yards away. A rifle equipped with a scope won't give the animal a chance to escape; they are as good as gone. If a bow was used, the hunt would be much different for the animal. The hunter must have better skills and some say it's the only fair way to hunt.

Is Bow Hunting Unfair To The Animal?

Many studies have been done to see how quick an animal dies when shot with an arrow, as opposed to being shot with a bullet. What they found is that a gunshot almost always kills instantly, no matter where on the body the shot occurs. However, when it comes to the bow, the animals may need to be shot up to 14 times before its dies. In between those shots is pure misery for the animal.

A recent study done by [Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks](#) found that 54 percent of animals struck with a bow were left wounded and had crippling injuries, but they never died. Sure, there are plenty of animals brought out of the woods and tagged, but for everyone one that was caught there are many who ran off wounded and will die hours, days, or even weeks later. This leaves the animal defenseless against further attacks by other natural predators. A shot with a bow doesn't ensure that the animals will die, and that doesn't always set right with animal activists.

Some hunters are against a bow and arrow method of hunting because some say it is borderline impossible to kill an animal at such a short range. Even Olympic class archers can only hit the bull's-eye when the target isn't moving and there is no foliage between them. It's hard to hunt with a bow.

A group called Fins and Feathers did a study of 2,370 hunters who were seeking elk. The hunters' reported that 1,161 were hit with their arrows, but only 49 percent of those animals were retrieved. That means that more than 50 percent of these animals laid in agony before dying. Their prolonged death was for naught, as the hunter didn't benefit with the meat and the animal died anyway. Even if the animals were able to wander off, they are likely to have an infection or peritonitis set in a week later.

Rifle Hunting vs. Bow Hunting: Which is Better?

The rifle is by all accounts the superior weapon, but it doesn't give the hunter the same experience. They don't have the same feelings, and it's not the same hunting with a rifle as it is a bow. The weapons are each different and which one a person prefers is based on many factors. Some look to tradition for their current methods, while others look to convenience. There are those that are out for the pure thrill of it all.

Getting so close to a deer that you can nearly taste the deer steaks is right where some hunters want to be, and a bow is a weapon that will put you in the center of the action. When it comes to the preference, it has a lot to do with how much time a hunter wants to put into their game. New bows have increased the distance that an angler can get from the animal and also the precision of the shot. It's worthwhile for a hunter to know how to use both types of common hunting methods and to perfect each art. Guns and bows both have their place.

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