A LIFESTYLE MAGAZINE FOR MODERN OUTDOORSMEN

& HOOK & BARREL

ANNIVERSARY ISSUE! | JULY-AUGUST 2020

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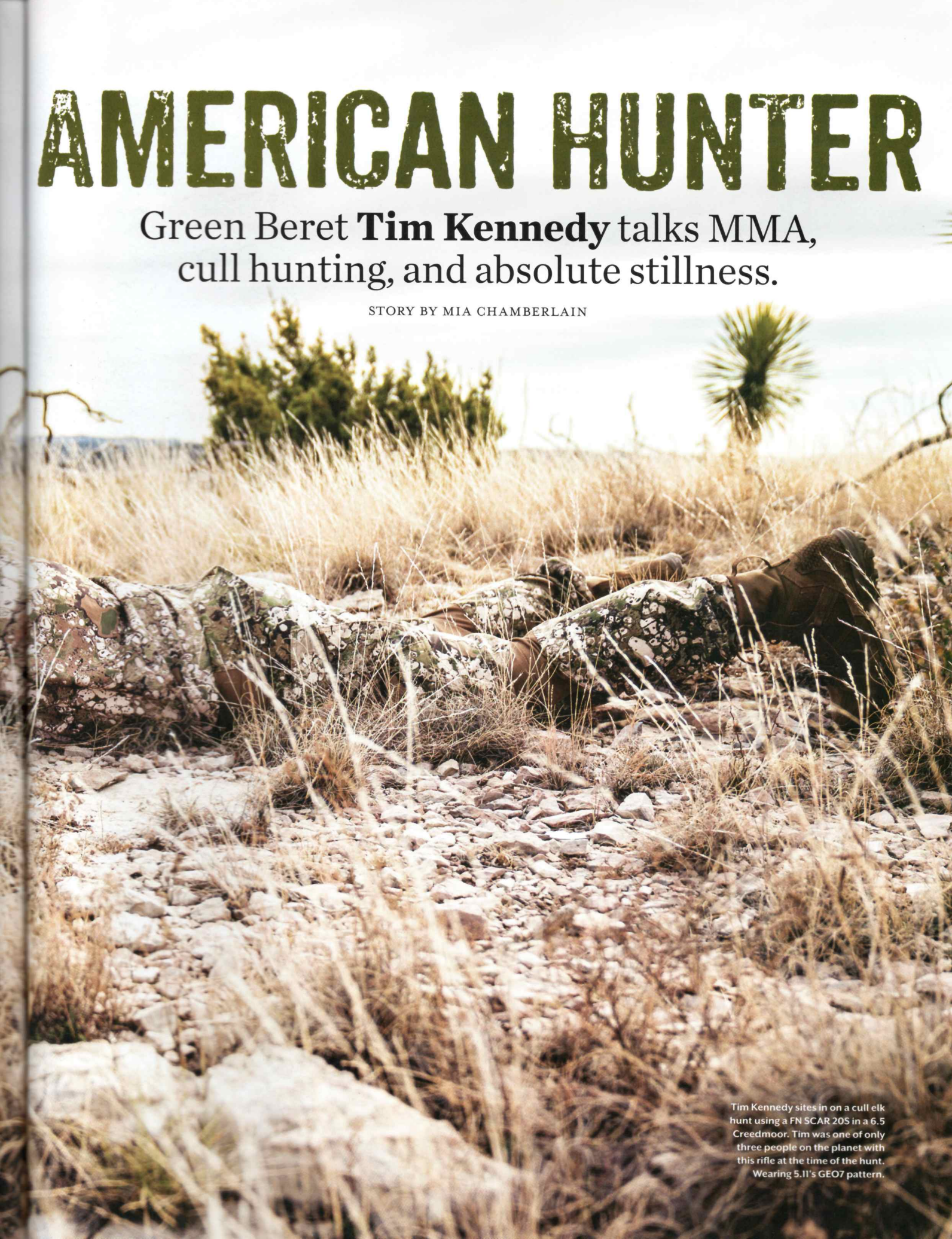
AMERICAN HERO,

AMERICAN HUNTER

Green Beret **Tim Kennedy** talks MMA, cull hunting, and absolute stillness.

STORY BY MIA CHAMBERLAIN



Tim Kennedy sites in on a cull elk hunt using a FN SCAR 20S in a 6.5 Creedmoor. Tim was one of only three people on the planet with this rifle at the time of the hunt. Wearing 5.11's GEO7 pattern.

TIM KENNEDY

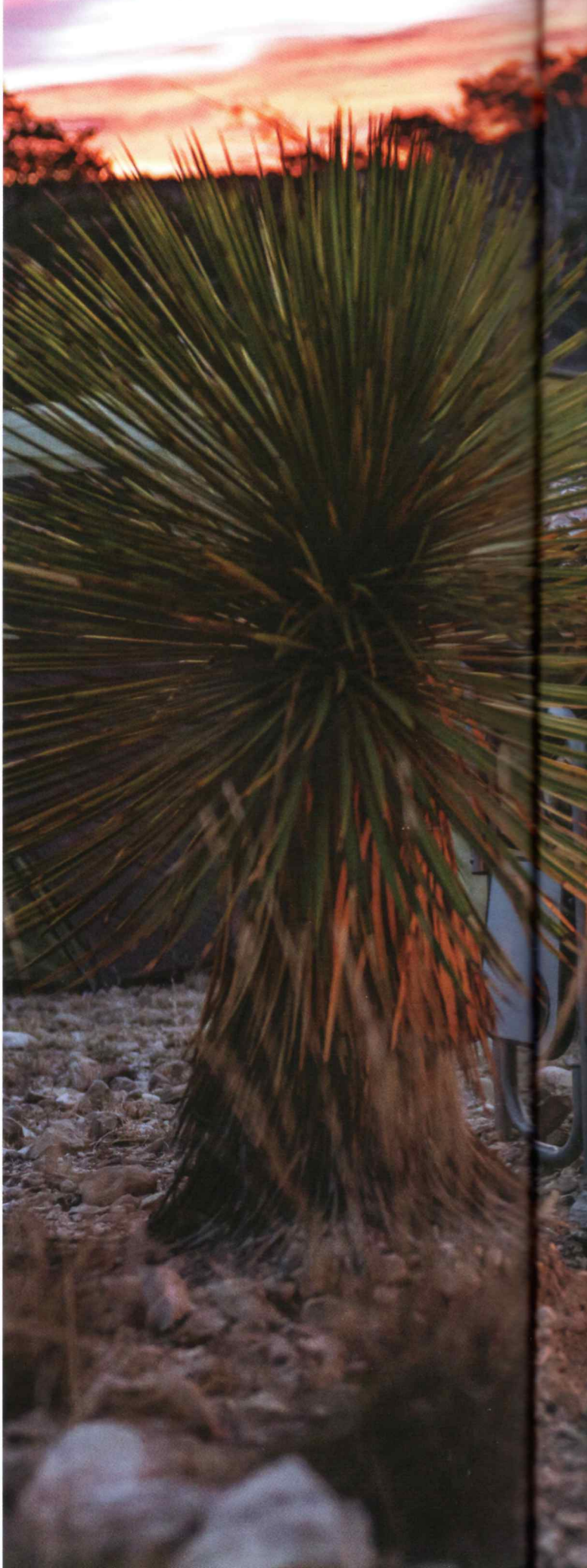
has more strength in his pinky than most people do in their entire body. Just picture a Spartan Warrior—excellent physique, unmatched in combat, unyielding in dedication, a feared warrior—this is Tim. Now, combine that arsenal of physical strength with an acute mental toughness, and you have the premier soldier we want on the front lines fighting for our freedoms. Tim is a world-class athlete who turned pro in Mixed Martial Arts during college, becoming one of the most feared fighters in the Octagon while simultaneously serving the United States Army National Guard.

A straightup badass, Kennedy has had a multitude of experiences that have not only shaped his outgoing personality and ripped physique but have encouraged him to pursue his passions in his everyday life. He's a decorated soldier, a sniper, a black belt, a successful entrepreneur, a published author, an avid outdoorsman, a father, a husband, and a true American patriot.

Recently, I had the chance to talk with Tim about his military service, MMA career, and love for the great outdoors. Here's what he had to say:

HOOK & BARREL: **You've selflessly and fearlessly served our country as a Green Beret, an Army Ranger, a sniper, a sniper instructor, and you've been recognized with awards and distinctions including a Bronze Star. You're the first to admit your ego got the best of you in college, and then a wake-up call made you do some self-reflection. What was this personal transformation like?** **TIM KENNEDY:** 9/11 happened, and it was a wake-up call. I joined the Army on 9/11 as a Special Forces recruit and delayed enlistment so I could finish grad school. I had every opportunity—an amazing family, hard-working parents—and I was wasting it all. I don't know if it was desperation or realization. Living on the West Coast, viewing a live stream of the Twin Towers, I watched a guy jump to his death. His choice was, am I going to burn alive, or am I going to jump to my death? A wake-up call, I had to change.

When you join the Army, they "break down" the civilian so they can "build" the soldier. You were just out of college, your MMA fighting career was taking off, and our country was at war. Coming in as a Special Forces recruit means being the cream of the crop with top-notch intelligence and physical strength. Tell me about your first few years in service. How did you balance your military and fighting careers? In the Special Forces community, they paid attention to people who could shoot and people who could fight. While I was going through training, people had their eyes on me because when I enlisted, I was Top-10 in the world as a fighter, a former college athlete, and a



This region of Texas, located near Big Bend, is known as one of the most outstanding places in North America for stargazing.

"One of the coolest things is hunting at sunrise. You almost sneak into a world that doesn't know you're coming. You get there, and they don't realize you're there yet. It's like peeking behind the curtain into a world that most humans don't get to see." –TIM KENNEDY

competitive shooter. I took about a year and a half off of fighting for basic training, Airborne School, then selection. I started fighting again in low-level, semi-pro fights when I was in the Q-course. Then, there was this tournament within the military called the Modern Army Combatives. A grueling, four-day tournament. I entered the light heavyweight division. (Which he won three years in a row.) Being in Special Forces kept me in really good shape. This made it easy to do both at the same time.

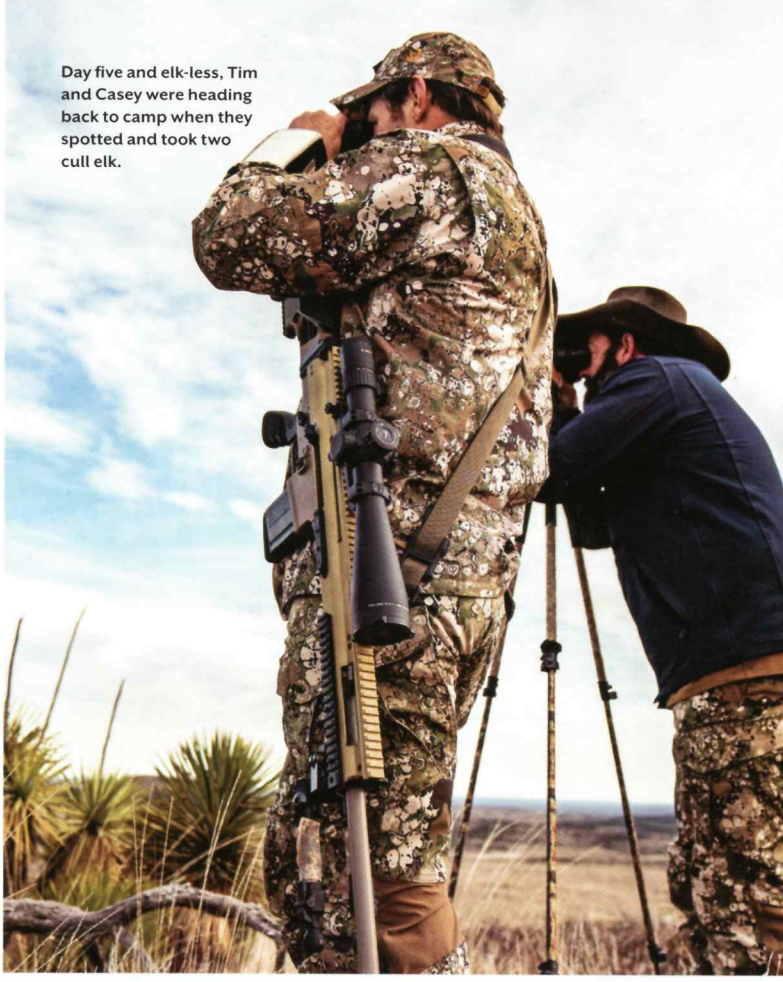
You spend a lot of time outdoors in nature. You recently participated in an elk hunt. Tell me about your experience. I work like a madman January through October, so when hunting season kicks off and the weather is good, I can get my hunts in. In early January, I got a call from my friend Casey Smith who invited me to come down to his ranch in southwest Texas for a cull elk hunt. So of course, I said yes. Cull hunting is not to be confused with trophy hunting. Culling allows hunters to remove genetically flawed animals out of the breeding cycle and counteract the selection force of trophy hunting toward certain traits, such as "large antlers." This facilitates sustainability for game populations. Looks aside, the meat on a cull elk is just as delicious as any elk.

With endless gadgets and nifty gear to supplement pursuits in the wild, there's no question, now is an exciting time to be a hunter. But the truth is, hunting is hard, and hunters will make every effort to prepare and improve their chances of finding success. How did you prepare for this hunt specifically? For this hunt, I was testing out the brand new FN SCAR (Special Operations Force Combat Assault Rifle) 20s in a 6.5 Creedmoor caliber. A very high-end, precision, gas-powered sniper rifle, with a very high-end, precision-caliber bullet. Prior to the hunt, I took the rifle to get Dope (Data of Prior Engagement), learning how the bullet travels under certain conditions such as altitude, temperature, wind speed, and distance. All hunters should have a comprehensive Dope book because otherwise, you're basically guessing where that bullet is going. Understanding how the bullet travels is paramount to successfully killing the animal in a humane manner and preserving the quality of the meat.

For the last 25ish years, hunters around the world have relied on the art of the unseen, and manufacturers of purpose-built tactical gear to help them naturally blend with their hunting grounds.

A skilled marksman without the appropriate hunting gear and equipment faces a significant disadvantage in the wild.

The fine line between success and failure often rides on choosing the equipment that will give you optimal performance and reliability in the field.



Day five and elk-less, Tim and Casey were heading back to camp when they spotted and took two cull elk.

Now, more than ever, companies are competing to meet these needs. With so many options out there, what's your trusted go-to? 5.11 Tactical. I used the 5.11 Cable Hiker boots, the backpack, and their newest camo line. Historically, they're known for engineering battle-ready, field-tested, functional, comfortable, and lasting gear. For this hunt, I tested out their new camouflage pattern. One of the cool things about the 5.11 digitally engineered geo-pattern is that it's a balance between the human random and the digital random. Having the right pattern on the right material is super hard, and it makes a huge difference. Think of a herd of elk. That's 40 sets of ears and 40 pairs of eyes and 40 noses, all communicating and on guard of being defensive. Even from a sound and smell perspective, the clothes you're wearing can really screw you over.

Much has been written outlining the skills, qualities, and tried-and-true traits it takes to be a successful outdoorsman. Arguably this list would be interchangeable with that of a soldier. Patience, ethical judgement, persistence, mental agility, skilled marksmanship, the list goes on. What can you pull from your professional experience to help you be successful while hunting? Going hunting is almost cathartic. There's so much active thought happening. All the things about the military and MMA, if leveraged the right way, make you better at each. Discipline, time-management, attention to detail, teamwork, all learned over time from coaches and teammates. My attention to detail, the fact that I knew my rifle so intimately, I had all the DOPE, I had everything loaded in my ballistic calculator, and I knew how to make a wind call, and I knew how to do snapshots, that all came from the military. That all helps me be successful while hunting.

Hunting means being immersed in wildlife and off the grid from dusk to dawn. Why do you choose to be an outdoorsman, and what does hunting mean to you? It's important for me to provide my family the right things, and that starts with knowing where our food comes from. We've been watching these herds in Southwest Texas for years. These people are culling and caring and not only making sure they have the right genetics, but also access to the right food and water supplies. Hunting here means I know how this animal lives, and I know how it was killed... quickly. From the moment it felt a twinge in its side, it was dead one second later. I know it was cleaned, field dressed, and packed within 20 minutes and put into a cooler cruising straight back to camp. No one knows their food the way I know the food I am providing for my family. Humanely ushering it to death. I know my elk tacos on Friday night are farm to table.

Combining emerging technology with boots on the ground experience, and a good dose of common sense (which is in short supply), is the recipe for navigating a successful hunt. Tell me about your success on this hunt and any challenges you faced along the way. Well cull hunting basically means finding the "freaks" of the herd, and that's a challenge. If 100 elk are on the property, there's probably only five or 10 trophy animals, and maybe two cull. The first four days of hunting, we didn't spot one cull. Day five, I was elk-less, and my wife was calling to ask when I would be picking her and the kids up from the hotel. We were literally headed back to camp when we spotted two cull. Now, I have plenty of meat in my freezer.

You often post pictures to social media fishing, hiking, exercising, and of course hunting. What do the outdoors represent for you? If you know what you're looking for, the outdoors is the most busy and active place on the planet. Right now as we're talking, I'm sitting outside at my homestead and hear the birds and I see the butterflies, the dogs, the chickens. I hear a plane in the distance. At the same time, there's complete nothingness. I think that's what I love about it, you have to really look to see how busy it is, but if you don't look, it's just absolutely still. One of the coolest things is hunting at sunrise. You almost sneak into a world that doesn't know you're coming. You get there, and they don't realize you're there yet. It's like peeking behind the curtain into a world that most humans don't get to see. &