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■ A Best Kept Secret Revealed

most often catch pike from 2-8 pounds.

THE RIG

Typically, Paul sets out a series of tip-ups trying to pick areas where pike will be cruising around searching for an easy meal throughout the day. He will spool the reel with 20-pound braid and then use a Bigtooth Rig made by Clam Outdoors with a chub for bait. "With the clear water, I like the gold blades the best, but I also will use red. If it is shallow water, shallower than 10 feet, I will not use a leader, but in deeper water I will use a 3-foot Fluorocarbon leader (20 pound test)."

Paul takes the chub and takes one treble hook and gets one of the hooks secured just under the skin just behind the dorsal fin on one side. He does the same thing with the other treble hook on the side. To help attract the pike, Paul will clip the tail off where the tail meets the body of the chub. "This gives a 'blood' scent trail, and if a pike is in the area, it'll come to the chub." It's not necessary to get the bait on the bottom because pike often cruise up off the bottom.

THE STRIKE

The Bigtooth Rig is a quick strike rig, so Paul stresses not to wait a long time to set the hook. "When the flag trips, get over there and lift the tip-up out of the water, letting the pike take the line (you don't want them to feel resistance). As I do this, I strip off some extra line so that I have extra in case I need to give a big pike line when it makes a run. I tell my clients to set the hook when the fish is making a run. Then work the fish toward the hole. If we are keeping pike, I will have a gaff handy in case, but if not, we'll get it coming up the hole and then grab it under the gill. Just make certain to be careful. I suggest having a glove to protect your hand."

Paul does one more thing to heighten the northern pike experience for his clients. "I will have a tip-up ready with an already hooked lively chub in a bucket of water. When we see a pike enter our fishing area, we'll take the chub and put it down the hole. This will often trigger a response from the pike. What a rush when you see it take the bait!"



The Bigtooth Rig.

AS THE SEASON GOES

Things change as the ice season goes. "By mid-season, I often find the bigger pike moving into deeper water, say a rock pile

or a deep weedline up to 20-feet or so. It's here that we get the chance to catch pike over 10 pounds."

At late ice, things change again. Pike are getting ready to spawn, often times spawning beneath the ice. In preparation, they will move to areas where water is flowing into the lake. "On Spirit Lake, this means the Buffalo Run area, Little Spirit area and Hale's Slough."

THE SECRET IS OUT

Catching pike on West Lake and Spirit Lake has been a best-kept secret, but the secret is out...that is if you take the time to target these toothy critters. Paul says, "These fish are so plentiful and such great fighters. They are also excellent eating. Anglers have the opportunity to fish the best of both worlds at the same time: quality panfish and quality northern pike!"

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LONG RANGE SHOOTING BASICS

BY MICHAEL WARE

"HOW FAR can you shoot?" my friend asked me the other day. I answered by saying, "how far can you see?" Yeah, right I wish I had that kind of talent, but I'll have to keep practicing. There is a lot of talk either way about shooting, but when you boil it down, there is really no way around it — true marksmanship is a perishable skill and if not routinely used and polished it will fade. I'm reminded of this daily by our training staff and they are certainly correct.

We recently held a long-range shoot not far from our shop in Baxter. Early November is a great time of year for this. The farmers are mostly out of the fields; you have clear days, and plenty of changing wind. The temperatures are a bit forgiving too. While brisk, you can do some great work as long as you dress appropriately. The warming impact of the sun on your cheeks tends to negate the occasional chill.

Iowa provides a really good platform for long distance shooting. We have all the negatives you'd want in long distance shooting. Yes, I wrote 'negatives you'd want' and you read it correctly. We're close to sea level in terms of elevation. We're not short on humidity. Last but not least, we're choked full of wind and plenty of it. Being light

on elevation and heavy on humidity we have a tougher time pushing spun stabilized projectiles through the air. Couple that with ever changing winds in terms of speed and direction, and we have a fascinating opportunity to train and practice in admittedly less than stellar conditions.

When you master shooting in Iowa, it only gets easier elsewhere. Take your skill to 10,000 feet around the tree line in the Rockies and your weapon's trajectory chart will be null and void. Your lobbing

artillery will shoot like a proverbial laser out west and you'll look like the hero of the day to your buddies.

I've practiced and shot in every temperature, altitude, and precipitation imaginable and I thoroughly enjoyed it. Even a soaking wet day shooting beats 14 hours under an array of fluorescent lights, so let's get started with some items to consider.

We really need to define what type of shooting we're going to do, or at least have a rough notion of what we seek to accomplish. If you want to hunt from long distances, there are serious considerations to make. I always avoid long shots that don't provide a perfect scenario, as I don't think taking a poke at medium and large game at distances is ethical or moral.

I shot a deer once at 1068 yards, but there was no wind, and unluckily for the buck he was standing broadside about eight feet from my daily use target. I was setting in my favorite 'hide' and had practiced from that position to that distance under those circumstances routinely. If that deer hadn't quite literally taken the place of a paper target at my range, would I have taken that shot? No way. I had supreme confidence I could make that shot as I'd done it literally hundreds of times. If you were to change just one or two things and ask me to do that in another area, I wouldn't even consider it. I know my limitations, and you have to as well.

HUNT OR TARGET SHOOT?

Are you going to hunt with this weapon or are you just going to shoot to UKD? "UKD" is an acronym for unknown distance and refers to scenarios where you set up a target or stands and find a perch from which to shoot. You then use your equipment to detect the range of the targets, find the winds with their speed and directions, and apply it to your weapon trajectory data to know what adjustments need to be made to send a few correctly downrange.

Most weapons that lend themselves to peak consistent accuracy tend to have heft. While we build light and heavy rifles with some having what we'd refer to as a medium taper barrel, most are heavy profile barrels commonly referred to as 'bull' barrels. Many barrels this large in diameter are fluted. Flutes are the deep grooves cut into the barrel to remove some weight, and according to many make them more cosmetic in appearance.

We build more heavy barrels than medium for dual-purpose use, and folks simply suffer the heavier weights out in the field. I can promise you that you'll only take a bull-barreled rifle to high altitude one time for an

elk hunt. That extra two pounds of barrel weight on your walk to the truck from the Iowa range feels more like 35lbs when you're hiking through snow at 9,500 feet sucking in every molecule of oxygen you can find. There are always trade-offs, and I'd submit that a lightweight hunting rifle for altitude use in a magnum chambering isn't what I'd recommend for learning high volume shooting here in Iowa, but we have people who do it.

CHAMBERING/ACTION TYPE

We can narrow the choices a bit pretty quickly if we choose wisely what our chambering will be. Magnums are great and I like them a lot, but they eat a lot of powder and that means the powder will eat the throat out of your barrel quicker. I like magnums due to the slightly flatter trajectory you get from them. A 300 Winchester Magnum when compared to the venerable .308 Winchester spansk it pretty hard. Both are .30 cal projectiles, but the 300WM will fly faster, farther, flatter, and hit harder than the 308 yard for yard. However, that comes at the cost of a barrel that will likely be consumed two or three times faster and the 300WM will eat nearly twice as much powder and cost much more per round to shoot than the non-magnum 308.

I recommend non-magnum chamberings for the beginner. Why? Because they come at a much lower overall cost and don't add extra variables, or at

least a lesser impact, into your shooting. The magnums tend to boom quite a bit and this imparts more felt recoil. Each one of us responds to this recoil differently, but the short story here is simple — heavy recoil tends to be a huge problem that manifests itself primarily through poor trigger control. Without the ability to attain proper trigger control, you might as well hang it up.

Non-magnums are usually far cheaper to buy loaded ammunition for and also consume less of your components if you hand load for your weapon. With fewer booms, less recoil, lower cost, and a more manageable overall weapon you'll see success quicker and avoid forming bad habits in anticipation of recoil. To be brutally honest, if you can master trigger and basic weapon control, I believe you're 80% of the way there. It sounds silly, but we've built weapon packages that exceeded \$25,000.00 and even the best equipment available won't do jack if you jerk the trigger. I've handed over a package like that to a customer and watched him pull and push that weapon all over a target at 100 paces with disgust. After you have the genuine basics under your belt, a magnum will really help and give you a greater tactical and strategic

A QUALITY SCOPE CONTAINING A LOWER MAGNIFICATION WILL SERVE YOU BETTER OVERALL THAN A CHEAP HIGH MAGNIFICATION SCOPE.



advantage if you want it. It will also really help at what I consider to be extended ranges such as 1,200 yards and beyond.

I have used several weapons over the years, and I'll admit that the advantage of building ultra cool stuff helps me use and handle things a bit more rare to find at the local gun shop. However, the basics are present everywhere. I have a few favorites worth mentioning. I really like the 50BMG. They make a lot of noise and aren't cheap to shoot, but there is just something about a 50 cal you can't deny. Along with costly boomers like the 50 are the 408 CheyTac and the 338 Lapua Magnum. Both are first-rate chamberings, but they both require very large actions and come in at relatively high cost overall. Something more common in magnum chamberings would be traditional belted magnums like the 300WM and the 7RemMag. I like them both a lot. If I were going to shoot factory ammunition, I'd run the 300WM, as there are some excellent offerings in match ammo for it. If I were hand loading I'd run the 7RM. I have a soft spot for long chambered barrels in 7RM set up to run 180gr VLDs. Those little suckers are literal javelins hurdling through the air at sizzling speeds.

"VLDs" are Very Low Drag projectiles and tend to be very long and sleek. Compare the shape of a toothpick to that of a small roll pin—same diameter, much different length and plenty of bearing surface to spread the drag over. Then we have the non-magnum crowd including things like the 308, the 243, 6.5 Grendel, and the 223 in some cases. My personal favorite is the 6.5 Creedmoor. While the 6.5CM is nearly identical to the .260 Remington and 6.5 x 47 Lapua, I give the nod to the Creedmoor for availability to first-rate match ammunition from Hornady and others at reasonable costs. On a side note, the factory 140gr AMAX match ammunition from Hornady has been so good; I quit reloading for my bolt-action 6.5CM. When I can attain routine sub MOA (minute of angle) performance with five and ten shot groups under 1" at 100 yards with factory ammo that runs about \$1 a round, I'll skip the time at the reloading bench.

There are many others, of course, and some

we occasionally see are the .30-06, various "Ackley Improved" chamberings, and the 6.5 Swede. I really like the 308 though, since great match ammo can be found all over from plenty of reputable makers for reasonable costs. Most come in at roughly \$1 per round. To give you an idea, the match ammo for the 300WM is a bit more than double that figure, coming in excess of \$2 per round. Many of these ammunition makers are using polymer tipped projectiles, which in some cases can be a really huge plus for us. Every now and then we get lucky and find a bullet that will be great for both long range flight and also serve as a great hunting round with good terminal ballistics as well. Shop carefully, as they exist.

We can achieve our goals with bolt-action weapons and that is what most people choose. However, AR15 and AR10 chassis weapons are commonly used as well. I like to use the 6.5 Grendel in AR15s and 308s and 6.5CMs in the AR10 chassis weapons. Granted, the velocities out of the 6.5G aren't going to set the world on fire, but the high ballistic coefficient of the sleek 6.5mm bullets tends to give it plenty of breathing room.

"Ballistic Coefficient" gets thrown around a lot and is often misunderstood. There is a long definition full of gobbledygook I can barely remember, but the short version is this: BC is a body or unit of measurement of a projectile's ability to overcome resistance or drag in flight. The higher the value, the less negative acceleration (or slowing) we experience. With high BC we'll be able to push projectiles through the air more efficiently, which usually ends up being higher velocity coupled with the ability to resist being pushed easily by wind.

It has long been my feeling that driving a gas gun like the AR15 or AR10 is a bit tougher than driving a bolt gun. There are moving parts not within your control on the gas-operated weapons, and less control leads to variables. The fewer variables we have the better off we'll be in our quest for 'control'. Of course, our follow up shots aren't nearly as quick, and we have to disturb our shooting position quite a bit to cycle a bolt gun. Thus, we're back to tradeoffs for each. See a pattern

emerging here? There is no free lunch. When you gain one positive attribute you can possibly lose another.

I prefer magazine fed weapons. They make for easy resupply of ammo, can be loaded and ready to go, and can also have different loadings in each magazine if you need. Also, with ever increasing scope sizes in terms of scope tube diameter and windage knobs, top loading through the ejection port becomes tougher, especially with gloves and/or large fingers. While a bolt action rig with a great stock, vertical or thumbhole grip, and magazine feeding are ideal, these are all attributes the AR weapons already have, so other than a means of cycling, the bolt and gas guns both have similar configurations.

There has been a long-standing myth that the AR weapons cannot achieve top accuracy. Simply put, this is false. While they aren't as forgiving with forcing neck-only resized ammo, the real part of the weapon that is doing the work is the barrel, along with its installation, orientation, etc. and the trigger itself.

This portion of the decision making process is very individual of course, just like the rest, so I recommend either choosing the platform you're most comfortable and familiar with or defaulting to the bolt action platform as it tends to be a bit more forgiving.

OPTICS

The optics are key to the success of your shooting. Whether you're shooting a chambering that has the trajectory of a rainbow, or one that is more akin to a laser, it won't matter if you don't have reliable and repeatable optics that offer viewing clarity. There are two basic types of scopes we need to touch on right out of the chute. Front Focal Plane scopes (FFP) and Second Focal Plane (SFP) set-ups. FFP means the reticle is located in front of the zoom mechanism. This means no matter what your magnification setting happens to be, you're always in calibration with what you're seeing through the tube. What this means to us is really pretty simple. Everything we see through the scope magnifies together. If we dial up the magnification, both the image and the reticle get larger. When we dial down, both get smaller, thus they are always true to one another.

In SFP, as you adjust the magnification power, your reticle remains the same size as the image you see either shrinks or grows. When shooting at known distances in competitions of the same range, SFP works very well. When ranging with your scope is needed, along with using the reticle for leads

and movers as well as wind adjustments, the FFP is a clear choice. No matter what magnification you use, your calibration is set. The SFP scopes have a single point of calibration instead. This can be at a medium power and that sounds fine in theory, but when you're in a prone position on the ground trying to cut through mirage, the only thing you can do is dial your parallax knob and drop the magnification down. Now your reticle isn't accurate and you aren't calibrated. I love FFP and won't give it up.

We see about half and half when it comes to MIL or MOA as our customers are pretty evenly split. I prefer MOA, but I'm working hard to hone my skill on MIL. Minute of Angle is a bit easier for me overall, but you have to understand we're not talking about linear values here. We're actually talking about angles. One MOA is close to one inch at 100 yards, 2 inches at 200 yards, and so on. When I see a power pole or the brisket area of a deer, I usually think 11" and not 3 MIL. One MIL is 3.6" so you can see the distinction. My mind

is so used to thinking of things in inches, I manage to fudge it into MOA. However, to be honest, MIL is probably the best, since it is based on the power of ten, it makes math much quicker and easier on the fly when it is a necessity. Considering one MOA isn't truly an inch and is actually 1.047", the further you shoot the farther off you'll be in your calculations.

"MIL" is short for milliradian, which is a trigonometric unit of angular measurement. I have a vivid recollection of Mr. Lager's high school mathematics classes. I remember dragging my feet and thinking to myself how I was never going to use anything beyond Pythagoras' Theorem in the real world. I've got news for you. If you were thinking as I was, your teacher was right and you were wrong!

The most important part of which measurement you choose between MOA and MIL, is the fact that with either choice comes the necessity to have a matched set within your scope. As nutty as it sounds, there are plenty of scope manufacturers out there who offer a MIL reticle and promptly install MOA turrets. Why? Heck if I know. I think the machines they have set up to relieve all the small parts in the erector assemblies are set up to machine in 1/4MOA gradients for hunting scopes, so they run what many would argue is an industry standard. Sorry folks, but we're not falling into 'industry standard' shooting; we require something more suited to our needs. Oddly, the military actually specified this for many decades. While you can do it,

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it simply adds another step and more math, so there is no reason to settle for a mixed batch. Either choose MIL/MIL reticle and turrets, or MOA/MOA reticle and turrets, or skip the scope entirely that contains a mixed bag.

The magnification range of your scope is a great consideration. I prefer to use a minimum of 1x power per 100 yards. In essence, I need 10x for 1000 yard shooting. While I use high power at lesser ranges, you'll never see my scopes set higher than 20x very often. I simply don't buy scopes with magnifications over 25x as I know I won't use them in the field.

I enjoy having some low magnification when I'm spotting and surveying the landscape. When I'm shooting I do dial in a bit, but even at nearly a mile, 25x is a lot of magnification and the slightest movement of your scope will make your reticle dance all over the place when viewing an object that far away. I've seen guys roll up with a 60x power scope and try to use them and they fail. You cannot keep it still enough and your eye starts to hurt chasing that image all over the place. Two things happen in this situation. You get eyestrain and possibly a headache, and more importantly you end up quickly chasing the reticle as it passes over your target. As a result you jerk the trigger real quick, which is the exact opposite of what you need to do when shooting at such a distance. The result will



manifest itself in a wasted shot, with barrel life eroded, a bad habit formed, and probably a headache for all your trouble.

It should also be noted that any quality scope capable of 60x is so costly and large, it will look like the Hubble Telescope mounted atop your rifle. When I say costly I mean well in excess of \$5K. A quality scope containing a lower magnification will serve you better overall than a cheap high magnification scope. While there are few certainties in this world, you can bank on that one.

Other scope features include illumination, side focus, and other occasional trinkets. I do like side focus. Since you'll be using it a lot, I like a side focus over the objective mounted focus rings. They are easier and quicker to use

and they don't tend to push you off your view when you utilize them. Illumination is great if you hunt or shoot in low light scenarios. There is only a half hour out of the day at dusk and dawn where they hold much value to me. When shooting at night with the moon and snow on the ground they are great. If you don't think you'll utilize that feature, then don't worry about buying it.

If the scope you want is illuminated, so be it. If it isn't I'd not get in a twist over it one way or the other. I've seen scopes with an internal level bubble and various other things, and I don't usually get a lot of extra value out of them. I'd rather choose a really great reticle design. The old mil dots are fine, but with the advancements in reticles, there isn't a compelling reason to have little dots and footballs to mess with. The other end of the spectrum offers reticles so busy they look like a big Christmas tree exploded inside your scope. I'm not a big fan of those either. Unless I'm in a field absolutely plagued with prairie dogs, I choose a less busy reticle. I like reticles with several stadia lines and some sub tensions so I can 'bracket' known sized objects and figure my range quickly. They'll also help me with holdovers, hold-unders, leads for movers, and windage corrections. If they are labeled too that helps. So if I see an "8" at the eighth hash mark, I know that is 8MIL, etc.

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