

# Study, practice essential for long-distance hunting

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Special Contributor

In the last few years, long-distance shooting and hunting have become more popular, especially in mountainous areas. The National Rifle Association has sanctioned matches for 1,000-yard shooters that can really test marksmanship skills.

If you plan on shooting big-game animals at long distances, I highly recommend you learn the basics from this type of paper shooting first. Even magazines and television programs are showing big-game animals being taken at tremendous ranges.

Not long ago I was watching a television show where an elk was shot at 1,600 yards. The show, however, also was advertising its own custom-made rifles and optics for this type of hunting.

If you want to get into extreme distance big-game hunting, let me offer a rundown of what you will need:

- a place to practice at that distance.
- a rifle and ammunition capable of half-inch groups at 100 yards.
- a caliber capable of flat shooting and an extended terminal velocity.
- optics and mounts capable of adjustments to that range.
- a complete understanding of the ballistics of the rifle and ammunition in all

conditions.

- a rifle rest of some sort; you won't be shooting off a bench in the field.
- a range finder for long distances.
- a good spotting scope with tripod.
- a hand-held weather station.
- a PDA to calculate all the weather, ballistic and distance information needed.
- software to compute this information to ascertain elevation and windage settings.

If you add the cost of these items, not including reloading equipment, a conservative estimate of the expenditures is more than \$6,000.

Long-distance shooting is really an art form that needs to be studied and practiced. You cannot go out with a deer rifle, binoculars and a range finder and make reliable 500-yard shots on deer.

Reading the wind where you are and where the deer stands is very important. Knowing the ballistics of the rifle and ammunition also is crucial.

If you sighted the rifle in at 90 degrees, and it's 30 degrees when you shoot, the velocity difference can be off enough to miss the deer completely.

If you change the bullet to another of the same weight, again everything will be off.

Altitude, barometric pressure, humidity, elevation and angle of the shot all can

have disastrous effects on your shot. That is where the weather station, PDA and software are necessary.

The caliber you shoot is something else that will help determine how successful you are going to be in the field. The 6.5mm currently is the favored caliber because of its high ballistic coefficient rating. The BC is basically a rating of the aerodynamics of the bullet. A higher BC makes the bullet flatter shooting, with less wind deflection and more retained energy.

The 7mm comes in next in the ranking. The round will need to be in the Magnum class, again to keep up the terminal velocity.

My longest shot was made with a Remington rifle in .308, shooting ammo I loaded to NATO specifications. The scope was a Swarovski sniper scope 1-4 power. It did not have a crosshair, but instead there was a circle and a dot. The scope was calibrated for the NATO round. All I had to do was dial in the distance and windage.

I knew the exact distance, and I estimated the wind. I took one shot and hit the doe. She ran about 25 yards and went down.

Upon examination, my only mistake was estimating wind drift. I was off by about 5 inches on impact. This was not crucial in this harvest, but if the wind had

been blowing the other way I would have missed or wounded the deer. I had no idea how to judge wind speed, which I learned is a definite ability needed by the long-range hunter.

That will be my last long-range shot, even though I have several rifles with scopes capable of that distance and far beyond. By the way, the distance was 468 yards. Now my personal limit is 300-350 yards, depending on the rifle I am shooting.

As hunters, we owe the game we shoot a clean harvest. If you hunt long enough, you will wound a deer that you cannot find. I know because it happened to me once.

In my mind, shooting at these extreme distances is not hunting but shooting. If you still want to try your hand at this, at least go to a school and learn from capable instructors how to master the skills needed.

Another long-range shooting game that is extremely fun and challenging is steel silhouette shooting. This involves shooting at steel cutouts of different animals set at predetermined distances. It sounds easy but believe me, it is not.

Know your limitations, and no matter how big that buck is stick with them. Hunt ethically, and hunt safe.

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