



Cow call draws elk like crazy

Inventor took bull with bow and arrow in just 40 minutes

By MARK HENCKEL
Billings Gazette

GARDINER — They say if you build a better mousetrap, the world will beat a path to your door.

Don Laubach found the same thing to be true if you build a better elk call. And the elk hunting world will find your door even if it's tucked away in Gardiner, Mont.

Laubach built the better elk call, exploring a new concept in luring in big bulls, spikes and cows by imitating the sounds that cows and calves make.

Just how effective is his new Cow Talk call?

Effective enough that it took him just five hours with a prototype in the 1985 archery season to take his bull.

Of course, that was a poor performance compared to this season.

"There were four of us out on opening morning and I got the first bull that bugled to me within a quarter-mile of where we started hunting. It took about 35 to 40 minutes of hunting in total to call two six-points within shooting range," Laubach said.

"By the sounds, there were 10 or 15 cows and five bulls, but only two bulls we got to see. We had everybody blowing cow calls and we sounded like a whole herd of elk. Then I squealed on a bull call and the six-point came to within 40 yards and gave me a broadside shot.

"It was a six-point between six and eight years-old with a 43-inch inside spread."

While he admits that no one should expect any call to work that well, in a way, it was a good thing Laubach's bull came so quickly this year. With the way his call business has grown in just five months of operation, he couldn't have spared much more time for hunting.

Between orders for his \$9.95 Cow Talk call, his \$12.95 Larynx Bull Call and an hour-long \$24.95 instructional video he worked up with Powell, Wyo., cinematographer Gordon Eastman, Laubach's Gardiner home has been a buzz of activity from early morning until midnight when the phone finally stops ringing.

"We're shipping out 700 to 800 calls a day and I'm still two weeks behind in my orders," he said.

"I've got about 200 dealers in just about every part of the U.S. where there are elk.

"We've had over 200 phone calls on the peak days. You'd

hang up the receiver and before you got your hand off of it, it was ringing again.

"One day I got nine-and-a-half pounds of mail. We had to get it in a garbage sack. All of it was orders.

"And Ralph Staton, he started the project with me, has been working hard every day. Now his wife Carol Jean's working. His daughter is working. My wife Dee is working. All my kids are working.

"I wanted to build an elk call that would be marketable and would accomplish my goals. If I had any idea it was going to go like this, I probably wouldn't have done it. I would have gotten my shovel out, dug a real big hole and buried that elk call."

Instead, his calls and the video were instantly successful.

Laubach and Eastman formed their corporation, E.L.K. Inc., got a mailing address of Box 85, Gardiner, Mont. 59030 to accept orders and got an office phone number of 848-7655. They made their debut at the Safari Club International dinner last spring and sold everything they brought to Billings.

The calls and video sold well during the summer, too, but really took off when Cody, Wyo., outdoor writer Jim Zumbo did a feature on them for the September issue of *Outdoor Life* magazine.

Since then, Laubach's life and home have undergone drastic changes.

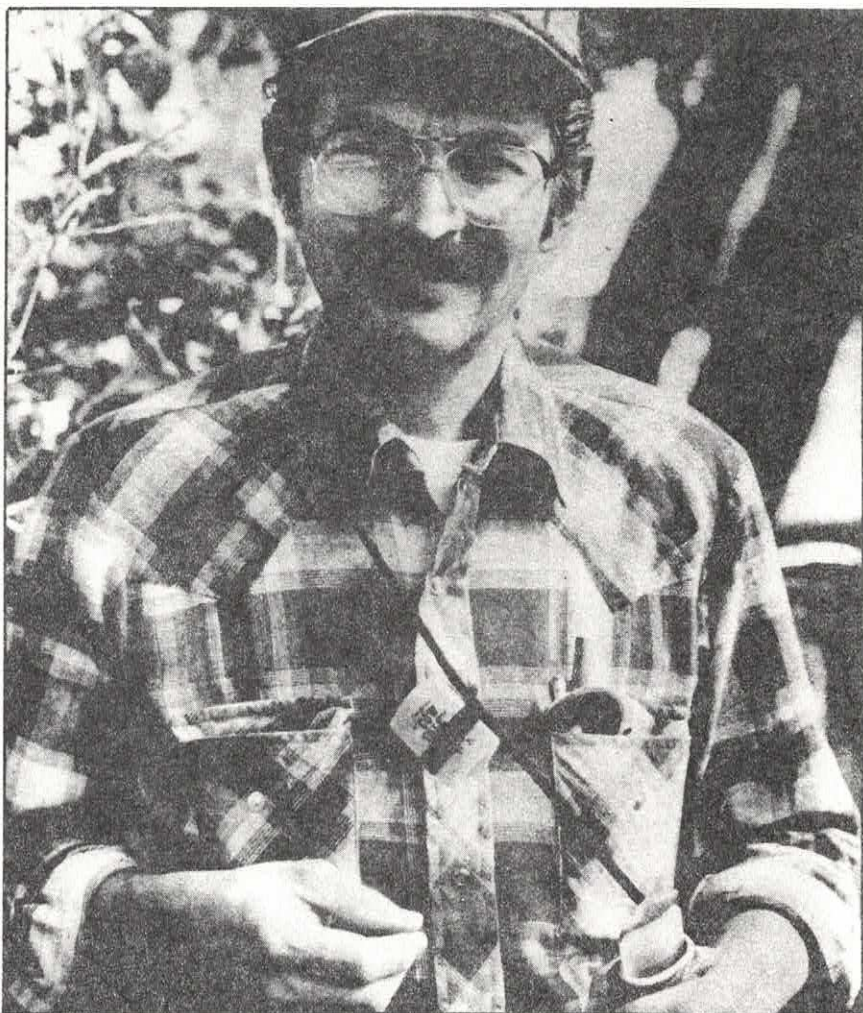
Much of his house has become a production and packaging plant for calls. His days start early, end late and are filled with trying to catch up with back orders.

His enviable problem is that the calls, especially the cow call, are radically new and work well.

And he admits he's not exactly sure why the cow call is so effective. The "he-ow" mewing sound of the plastic, tape and rubber band creation is just something that the elk respond to.

It sounds like a cow elk, somehow reassures other elk and can even stop a running bull in its tracks.

"The biggest thing is that it doesn't scare them. It's a way of communicating with them. They are inquisitive enough that when you make this sound, they think it's another elk in there," he said.



Archery hunter/inventor Don Laubach.

"It's a sound they react to. It's almost like a 'come over here. I'm here.' I've seen cows come in at a dead run.

"One guy in Oregon called in a calf elk that still had spots on it to within eight feet of him.

And after it smelled him and ran off, he called it again and it came within 20 feet of him.

"And it thoroughly confuses bull elk. He just can't believe that there's not an elk there. They think that there's a cow there."

The surprising thing about it is that the call seems to work in all seasons, unlike the bugling bull calls that work only during the rut.

"Billy Hoppe, an outfitter up here, called in two dozen bulls after the bugling season with the cow call," Laubach said. "It works real well, especially for rifle hunting.

"If you jump some elk in the timber, when you blow that call, they'll stop. Usually during the rifle season, the guys don't give them a chance to come in. If you stop at elk at 100 or 200 yards, you're not going to give them a chance to come in. If they get a standing shot, that's all they need."

During the rutting time of the archery season, Laubach uses his cow call in combination with a bull call.

"If I've got him answering and he's doing a lot of talking, I'll use the bull call more. But if he's bugling spasmodically, I'll use the cow call more. And if he isn't answering my bull call, I'll use the cow call. The cow call works all the time," he said.

"I call a lot. I try to be as aggressive as possible. Using a cow call, that doesn't seem to disturb them."

The future of the Cow Talk call seems bright in other ways, too.

Laubach's early feedback indicates hunters experimenting with it have called in such diverse species as deer, antelope and black bear with it, too.

All that, however, has been a bonus. The real success has been with elk.

"You can do all the advertising you want, but the proof of the pudding is when the layman or the hunter who goes out calls in an elk and gets it," Laubach said.

"I don't care what they tell you. If they can't take the call out and get an elk with it, it doesn't do you any good. I've had guys call me on the telephone and say it's the best thing that's ever happened to elk hunting. With it, a layman can go out and call like the big boys."



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