



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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locate elk, then bring them to within a few yards of a carefully-engineered "setup." He tells when to bugle and how long, when to move and how fast, what equipment he prefers and why. He draws on the experiences of other top elk hunters, too: Larry Jones, Mike Cupell, Doug Kittredge. There's talk of alligator bulls, instructions for making your own bugle, a table of weight conversions for elk. Camping, trophy judging and meat care are also covered. 9x6, 162 pp, hardcover #5125 \$15.50, softcover #5124 \$10.50.

Hunt Elk by Jim Zumbo.

Zumbo is one of the best-known contemporary hunting writers, and in this book you'll get good writing with good advice. Here's how to choose an outfitter, how to condition yourself for the hunt, what to bring, where to go to find the big ones. There are sections on hunting elk in crowds and the "do-it-yourself" trip, as well as a state-by-state elk guide. Zumbo devotes separate chapters to rifle, bow, and muzzle-loading hunters, and to early-, mid- and late-season hunting. A thorough book, it's well illustrated in black and white. 6x9, 259 pp, hardcover #5428 \$19.50.

The Hunter's Guide to Montana by Mark Henckel

This book serves as an introduction to hunting in Big Sky Country. Its

concise format allows the outdoorsman a chance to view Montana a piece at a time. By dividing the state into eight separate geographical regions, then dividing these regions by species of game available, the reader can learn what to expect from each area. Information from local and regional experts has been condensed into each section enabling the hunter to make plans to hunt a specific area. Augmented with 19 game distribution maps and 70 photographs, a helpful agency address list is also included. 212 pp, hardcover #5802 \$18.95, softcover #5801 \$11.50.

Season of the Elk by Dean Krakel II.

In his year of studying the elk of the Jackson Hole country, Dean Krakel took 8,000 photographs. Ninety-four of those are reproduced here, in color, to supplement text that describes the history of elk, their life cycle and habitat. There's a visit to a Wyoming elk camp, a discussion of elk management problems. In the 40,000 elk of northwestern

Wyoming, Krakel sees a population on the defensive, crowded on all sides, closer all the time to being compromised. His philosophy and his narrative complement each other and the fine photos. 9x10 pb, 117 pp, hardcover #5320 \$27.00, softcover #5321 \$17.00.

Horse Camping by George Hatley (photos by Lewis Portnoy).

Clear black and white photos and line drawings illustrate this manual for horse packers. Here is what you need to plan a back-country horse trip: advice on gear and tack and how to prepare your animals. There's a section on horse hauling, too, and one on packing both Decker and sawbuck saddles. Hatley tells how to deal with hazards on the trail, what to do and bring for that perfect back-country camp. 10x11 pb, 152 pp, softcover #5701 \$12.50.

Elk of North America, Ecology and Management, compiled and edited by Jack Ward Thomas and Dale E. Towell.

The most complete book on elk available, this is the standard re-

ference work for biologists as well as hunters. Some chapter topics: classification, historical perspectives, behavior, physiology, disease, migration, habitat, nutrition, population characteristics, management. Prepared by several noted students of elk, this book is at once scholarly and interesting - and well illustrated by charts, tables, photographs.

8x10, 698 pp, hardcover #5228 \$43.00.

The Old Guide Remembers & the Young Guide Finds Out by Joe Back and Vic Lemmon.

There's advice here: "Don't brag when you get a new set of teeth." And there are observations: "Hard saddles and sore hind ends." Some chapters have simple titles that are obscure: "Flaxie." And some are long but clear: "Horse with No Hair on His Tail." There are no photographs, and you may care nothing for hunting elk at midnight, but the writing here is good, the stories compelling. You get a part of the West with this book, a piece of a way of life that you'll never have, something good to think about when good thoughts are scarce. 6x8 pb, 168 pp, softcover #59510 \$11.50.

Review: ELK TALK

by Don Laubach & Mark Henckel

Innovation, when it comes to elk hunting, is often met with resistance harbored in tradition or experience. New methods or products must be discovered, practiced, and then proven, often by a skeptical individual who considers attempting them in the field. Tried and true tactics are seldom abandoned. New methods are rarely adopted. In the last ten years bugling has become extremely popular, tandem with the growth of archery elk hunting that began in the 60's. Many say that because of the proliferation of bugling hunters, today's elk are call-wise. They are harder to call and do most of their rutting at night. It is widely perceived that taking a mature bull is getting harder and harder each year.

A couple of years ago, word began to filter around hunters' campfires about a new calling technique called "cow talk." It was said that by imitating the sounds of a cow elk, or making herd noises, calling in a bull was more likely. The idea here was that these sounds were both intriguing and calming and would enable a hunter to bring in a bull that would not otherwise come in to a bugle. Some claimed it would even stop a bull in flight after being struck by an arrow, shot or shot at, or even startled by human scent. Since then, the commercial availability of the cow call, plus film footage and

testimonials, have proven these claims to be true. Cow talk really does work.

Don Laubach of Gardiner, Montana, is responsible for this new technique. Don has lived among the elk all his life. He takes an elk every year, hunting with a bow. He does it with a cow call he designed, combined with a technique he developed for using the call. In **ELK TALK**, this revolutionary method of call is covered in depth, with Don's hunting and calling expertise thoroughly explored by the skillful writing of outdoor writer Mark Henckel.

ELK TALK extensively covers the technique of calf, cow, and bull talk. With the information supplied in its 202 pages, plus a call, a reader should be able to have the technique mastered by this coming season. Imagine being able to lure in a bull that normally would not respond to a bugle, a bull during the general season, or calming an alarmed bull. It may sound too good to be true, but **ELK TALK** will tell you how it can be done. The reader will also find many useful bits of information that do not relate directly to calling—enough to justify the purchase of **ELK TALK**. If you come home from hunting empty-handed more than you would like to or are interested in a new dimension of the proven bugling method, **ELK TALK** is written just for you. — D.V.

ELK TALK is available through the Foundation Library. Hardcover #57511 \$21.00, softcover #57510 \$14.00. Prices include postage.