

Outdoors

When a step back is a stride forward

It is the nature of mankind to enjoy a challenge, and hunters are no different. This is why some deer hunters turn to the so-called “primitive weapons” — archery or traditional muzzleloading rifles.

Success with these tools does demand more skill — not only a higher level of skill, but more different kinds of skills compared to the typical modern scope-sighted, centerfire rifle. Filling a deer tag with one of these, therefore, produces a deeper sense of pride and satisfaction and, in some circles, greater prestige for the successful hunter.

I know the feeling. I am no twanger, but I have hunted whitetails, mule deer, elk, black bear, pronghorn antelope, boar and various species of exotic game with traditional black-powder rifles, and many of these with handguns, mostly open-sighted single-action

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revolvers. I think the latter really should qualify as semi-primitive arms since their effective range and power are no greater than a good flintlock rifle's ... and they're harder to shoot well.

Now I wish to propose yet another class of “primitive” weapons for the challenge-seekers: the iron-sighted, lever-action .30-30 carbine! Yeah, I know it's a centerfire repeater burning smokeless powder, but take a moment to think about it.

Both the Winchester Model

94 carbine and the .30-30 cartridge are 110 years old, and many modern hunting writers disdain the combination as at least semi-obsolete. Note that those same things can be said of a muzzleloading rifle. What degree of primitiveness is necessary? If the muzzle-loader is primitive, why not the carbine? Is it the repeater's magazine? Well, if that bothers you, you can always load just one round at a time, you know. All my hunting rifles these days are single-shots.

The real key to the primitive designation, it seems to me, is wrapped up in that phrase, “iron-sighted.” I know lots of hunters, some of them edging into middle age, who have literally never in their lives fired a shot with a big-bore rifle that was not equipped with a telescopic sight. Most of the boomer generation seems to regard a



Photos by John Wootters

Wootters contends that anyone who finds deer hunting too easy with a modern rifle with a telescopic sight should try still-hunting with an iron-sighted lever-action .30-30 carbine before making the big jump to archery gear or traditional muzzleloaders. Most of those who have used nothing but scoped high-powered rifles before will find the carbine quite “primitive” enough.

rifle with no scope as incomplete, maybe even inoperable. They're missing out on a huge amount of challenge ... and fun.

Try this: if you don't already have one, pick up a secondhand M94 Winchester (with more than seven million manufactured, they're plentiful and cheap) or a Marlin M336 carbine, in .30-30 chambering. If the barrel-mounted factory sights don't suit you — and they probably won't if you're over 40 — replace them, but not with any kind of glass sight. Receiver- or tang-mounted peep sights are the ticket. Ignore the fact that they don't appear very precise. Sight the rig in and shoot it enough to convince yourself that the sights are at least usable. You will most likely be astonished at just

how accurately you can place bullets with those primitive old-style “imprecise” sights. The next astonishing thing you will discover is the speed with which you can aim and fire, accurately, at relatively short ranges — 100 yards or less.

The little carbine's shape, weight, and balance make it handle like a feather, and since the stock was originally designed only for use with iron sights, it points as naturally as your forefinger.

You may even gain some insight into why M94s are still being made and sold, even with seven million already out there (more than any other sporting rifle in history).

Now take it hunting. Don't go near a stand, blind or feeder. Just get out in the pasture on foot and try still-

hunting. Discover that you actually can stalk within range of a whitetail deer, although it isn't easy. That's the point: easy things do not produce the same sense of accomplishment and satisfaction as not-so-easy things.

That's why you started looking around for a “primitive weapon” in the first place, remember?

John Wootters is a semi-retired outdoors writer with more than 30 years experience. He was editor of Peterson's hunting magazine and author of the monthly column “Buck Sense” and has written the all-time best selling book on deer hunting, “Hunting Trophy deer.” He has served on the Board of Directors of the National Rifle Association, and written for “Shooting Times,” “Rifle,” “Handloader,” “Guns & Ammo” and Peterson's “Hunting.”