



Know Before You Go

DO-IT-YOURSELF HUNTING

Guided hunts and using a licensing service can certainly improve your odds at taking a trophy animal, as well as make your big game hunt a more carefree experience. But for the ultimate self-reliant hunter or for a guy looking to simply save some dough, do-it-yourself hunts can be fun, cost-effective and surprisingly successful. Here are a few tips from Mike Schoby, author of "Do-It-Yourself Dream Hunts" on how to begin planning your next self-made adventure.

Choose a Hunting Partner

Unless you are a true lone wolf with extensive backwoods skills, it will increase the level of safety and fun of your trip if you choose a hunting partner or two to join you on your adventure. It can also reduce the overall cost of your hunt by providing someone with which to share costs such as gas, groceries and even gear.

When considering with whom you'd like to plan your big hunt with, go beyond who is simply your good buddy. While sharing the outdoors with a good friend or family member is what the great tradition of hunting is all about, it will take more than just compatibility (while very important) to make for a successful hunt. You will also want somebody whose skills and expectations compliment your own.

When considering a venture such as a backwoods elk or mule deer hunt, look for somebody who has taken part in a wilderness hunt before and has considerable woodsmanship skills. Likewise, find somebody whose ethics and drive to succeed match yours. With parallel hunting goals, you and your hunting partners' will inspire each other to find the success you seek. Or, if a more laid back escape-to-the-wilderness experience is what you're looking, it won't be much fun if your hunting partner is pushing you on against your will.

Pick Your Game, Pick Your Spot

The next step is to decide what you want to hunt and where you want to hunt it. If you've always dreamed of hunting remote sections of the Rockies for a big muley buck, this could be your chance; or if a physically less demanding hunt that can be done over a long weekend is more suitable for you right now, maybe you want to consider a hunt for pronghorn. Picking what you want to hunt will probably be the easiest decision you make. Deciding where will be a little trickier.

Begin your search by going online and checking state game department Web sites for season dates, licensing requirements and tag application deadlines (where applicable) for the species you wish to hunt. Search for data on the various hunt units where the species to be hunted is found and check for the availability of tags in that unit as well as the availability of public land. Look to see if there are any agency-supported land access programs that might provide the chance to hunt private properties open to public hunting. You can also check to see how many hunters are successful compared to how many tags are sold for the area, as well as if the area produces any trophy animals.

Once some areas are narrowed down, take the time to call biologists or field supervisors with the state and talk to them about where the best hunting opportunities are for the species you seek in their state. They may be able to offer insight on less-hunted lands that still carry good odds for success. Once you've decided on a location, then it's a matter of securing your tag.

Scout From Afar

Once you have drawn a tag, or if you plan to purchase an over-the-counter license which makes getting a tag guaranteed, then you need to begin scouting out your area. Since few hunters will ever be able to travel to the area they plan to hunt until they are actually there for the hunt, jump online again to look at and purchase maps and aerial photographs of the area you'll be hunting. Study them and come up with a handful of the best looking spots. Look for pinch points, saddles on ridges, benches or other key features in the terrain that will serve to funnel or attract game.

That call you made to the state biologist, along with asking about his or her suggestions on the best places to hunt, you should also ask about resources such as campgrounds or camping restrictions, game processing, taxidermists, hotels, bed and breakfasts and other resources you may need in the area.

Visit Web sites such as Nexthunt.com to network with other hunters who've been to the same area, read reviews of where others have hunted and what they experienced or visit outdoor sites with active message boards and ask questions from those who may have hunted the same area you plan to.

Gear Up

Finally, make a good checklist or use ours ([click here](#)) to get you started, and begin gathering the gear you'll need for your trip. Get everything together well before you plan to leave and replace any broken or missing items. Make sure firearms or bows are in good working order and that you've practiced well before your trip. Organize tents, sleeping bags and cooking utensils if you'll be camping. If a hotel or friend's house will serve as a base camp, focus on what you'll need there to make life comfortable. If you plan on driving to your hunt, you might be dollars ahead buying the food you'll need now at a place like Sam's Club or Costco rather than waiting until you are in a small town with only one grocery store. Likewise, if you're flying, with the high cost of excess baggage now charged by most airlines, you might want to look at shipping your gear to your destination via UPS or FedEx.

Planning a do-it-yourself hunt can be a huge undertaking, but when you are smiling into the camera next to your trophy, you'll have the satisfaction of knowing you did it all on your own and you did it your way.