

Big Game

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shed hunting was not carrying binoculars. A good set of 8X42mm binoculars can be a shed hunter's best friend, especially when hunting for antlers alone.

By utilizing binoculars, I can make wider passes across open crop fields and look at suspicious objects from greater distance without having to investigate more closely. Simply,

binoculars help save time and energy.

A bone saw or hacksaw comes in handy when a dead buck is found with antlers. Without a saw, a shed hunter might be forced to leave a rack behind or drag a large smelly carcass out of the woods. Remember, it's illegal to possess the rack of an untagged deer. It's a good idea to speak to the local game warden before re-

moving the antlers of any deer found dead.

My GPS unit is also a tool I don't leave home without when shed hunting. Not only can I use its track function to keep me from overlapping ground I've already covered, I use it to mark rubs and scrapes when I find them. As insurance, carry extra batteries and a compass as backup when searching lands that are unfamiliar.

The final piece of equipment I carry with me isn't high tech at all. In fact, it's all natu-

ral. It's the object of my desire. I carry a shed antler. From time to time, while searching fields and forests for other bones, I toss the antler in front of me blindly. I know it's there somewhere and I've found it trains my eyes to look for the specific shape and color of other sheds. Since incorporating this simple technique, my success rate has increased dramatically.

Shed hunting is a great pastime. I especially enjoy doing it in April on bare ground. There are no bugs to chase me out of the woods.

Temperatures rise high enough that I don't have to dress in bulky layers, either, and it's great exercise. I'll need it before turkey season.

When searching for antlers, I get skunked far more often than not, but I keep searching. The possibility of coming across a massive matched set of antlers lying on the forest floor, bleached slightly by the sun's rays, is too much to resist.



Shooter's Bench

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new life to the rather staid and formal world of skeet-and-trap shooting. As with skeet-or-trap shooting, serious competitors in sporting clays do require specialty guns built to maximize success in that particular game. However, most fans of sporting clays use it to sharpen skills for the field, and favorite field guns often find their way onto the sporting-clays course.

On the downside, sporting-clays courses often require more land, wider range fans and additional labor costs over traditional trap-and-skeet facilities. The numerous launchers involved with a complex sporting-clays course most often require human operators, which makes for a more involved range day. Still, sporting clays offered the most realistic experience for replicating game-bird hunting. That is, until now.

One of Maine's most experienced wing shooters recently invented a new shooting game specifically for hunters, and, so far it is available only in Maine. Brad Varney of Varney's Clay Sports and the "Have Gun – Will Teach" shooting school in Richmond invented a clay-target game he calls super clays.

New Game

No stranger here at "The Shooter's Bench," Brad is a friend and mentor with a gift for teaching and a deep concern for Maine sportsmen and

wildlife. With upland season in the rear view mirror, Brad recently invited my son and me to come up and visit his Langdon Road home and shooting facility to experience super clays firsthand. Checked out by Mooney, the tall, handsome German short-haired pointer and fortified by steaming cups of coffee and Alyss Varney's cookies, we did just that.

From first clay bird to last, we found super clays close, fast, and incredibly realistic for any upland or waterfowl hunter. We also found it both exciting and humbling. Our field guns received a real workout.

Built on a skeet field, but not at all like skeet, super clays

uses 10 stations with five shots fired from each station for a total of 50 shots comprising a complete round of targets. Designated by hula-hoops scattered on the ground, the stations can be arranged in endless combinations, but they generally follow a straight line across the field instead of the arc that skeet or trap shooters use.

Super clays uses four launchers arranged high and low to the left and right flank of the shooters. Targets fly in combinations of high and low, left and right, or both. To quote Varney, "Pre-mounting the shotgun is not allowed. The ready position is with the butt stock below the armpit. The targets may be launched immediately or up to a three second delay."

Varney further states, "I'm so confident that perfect scores

will be next to nonexistent...I'm considering offering \$1,000 for a perfect 50X50."

There were no perfect scores for us – not even close, but the practical knowledge gained is invaluable. And my son's old Mossberg 500 pump broke just as many targets, including doubles, as the Beretta stack-barrel I used. Both of us came away pleased with this new shooting experience.

Shooter Shuffle

Station 10 really defines super clays. This station requires the shooter to begin the engagement with only one foot inside the ring of the hula-hoop, and it is the opposite shooting foot. Right-handed shooters have their right foot in the circle and left-handed shooters their left foot.

So, when someone calls

the target, the shooter must step into the ring, regain balance, take the gun off safe, mount the gun, acquire the target, track the target, establish the appropriate lead, fire and follow through.

Now, add in the effects of the wind, a bright morning sun in the face, glare off the blowing snow, targets that skirt along a dark hemlock wood line, and the result is first-class training and entertainment.

Whether novice or expert, anyone calling themselves a wing shot ought to consider taking on several rounds of super clays before the upland-hunting season comes again to Maine. March is a fine time for making plans to become a more proficient shot.



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