

ERS FOR BIG BUCKS

BY TROY SPOONER



Left: Aaron Davis tagged one of Michigan's largest bucks using a corner tactic.

Right: Author Troy Spooner with a cornered buck.

Some of the best terrain features are also some of the most obvious

Itightened my safety strap, removed my headlamp and then settled in, anticipating the morning sunrise. As my eyes adjusted to the gray-light of dawn, I heard a rustling in the tall grass and then the unmistakable grunt of a buck. The sounds were getting closer to my position and I silently prayed that the Earth's rotation would somehow speed up and shed more light on the situation. From the sounds of it, a buck was tending a doe and fending off lesser suitors in the process. He would snort-wheeze and crash off only to return and commence his advances on the receptive doe. Two-hours later the cat and mouse game played on, with an eleven-point buck owning the doe and a big 8-point trying to sneak in on the action. Several times I thought it was going to happen, but to no avail. The group eventually worked their way into the swamp behind me and out of sight. No chances to get an arrow into either buck, but definitely a great start to what proved to be an eventful week of rut hunting in Michigan. My inside corner location was showing promise.

When November 15th rolled around and I was scheduled to be in the Upper Peninsula

for a wilderness rifle hunt near Curtis. I knew the bucks in the opening paragraph were frequenting the section where I was bow hunting, so I talked one of my close friends, John, into sitting the stand to see if he could catch a glimpse of one of the deer.

At first light John could hear the shuffling of footsteps behind him. He stood and peered around the tree he was in and saw antlers making their way through the thicket. As the buck drew closer, he shouldered his Remington 11-87 and scoped the buck. It

was definitely the big 8-point and John wasted no time in dropping the brute on the spot. It was a very respectable buck for state land and John deserved a chance at the buck. John and I had hunted the section hard throughout the early bow season and had seen several bucks, but after passing numerous small bucks, hadn't been able to get a real shooter within bow range. I knew if the conditions were right he would get a chance at a buck while hunting the stand. His opening morning success lent evidence to the credibility of

hunting inside corners.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CORNERS

Corners exist everywhere we hunt deer. They can be very obvious or can be subtle and often overlooked. Farm fields most often have "inside corners" that are very obvious and easily accessed. A wilderness cutting may also contain corners that are worth hunting. A mature forest may have an area where differing densities



of cover converge to serve as a corner. The best example of a corner would be the far back corners in a rectangular field. The opposite would be where the edge of the field makes a 90-degree turn and keeps going straight to the next field edge or road. This serves as an example of an "outside corner".

Inside corners are usually more productive due to their funneling ability. Think of a deer that wants to go from one side of a field to the other without exposing itself. They work their way around the field and pass right through the back, inside corners, as they work their way around. They may choose to "cut" the corner and enter the field for a short distance or they may skirt the field edge just inside the cover of the timber. Either way, they pass at a close distance to the inside corner while doing so. Oftentimes these corners end up with several trails converging or at least coming close to one another as the passing deer skirt the open.

Inside corners are an excellent place to look for primary scrapes during the rut (I often find licking branches being used year-round in these areas) due to the abundance of deer utilizing these locations during their routine travels. Rub activity also seems to happen to a greater extent just inside the woods from an inside corner. Bucks recognize the abundance of activity that takes place here and want to visually mark and leave signpost scent in the area for other bucks and does to see and take note of. Some hunters refer to these areas where a high abundance of buck sign exists near a food source as "staging areas" where bucks hang up just inside the timber before entering the field.

"Outside corners" are usually not as productive as the inside corner situations. Locate any outside corners and be sure to check them for signs of deer activity such as rubs and scrapes (you should be able to tell with a quick scouting trip to the area if your

outside corner is worth hunting). I have used them with a high degree of success in areas where logging is taking place. Deer are accustomed to utilizing trail systems to travel from one place to another and the abrupt logging of an area may catch traveling bucks off guard. A mature buck may have used a particular funnel the year before to check doe groups in areas outside his core home-range. If the forestry took place in the spring or early summer, then the deer may still be adjusting to the changes in cover. Some deer will likely still use their old trails that now just dump out into the open. A traveling buck is ambling along on his old swing to check the area and now suddenly ends up at the edge of the open cutting. Confused, he begins to follow the edge of the cut. Guess what happens when he hits the outside corner? You got it! He ends up exposing himself as he contemplates making his way across to the other side or turning and follow-

ing the edge toward the inside corner.

INSIDE OR OUTSIDE?

Each type of corner has its advantages and disadvantages. One huge advantage to an "outside corner" setup is that the winds are more manageable due to the straight-line travel of their currents. No eddying or swirling of the currents takes place since the corner is slicing the current as it enters the woods. This is not usually the case when contemplating the inside corner. As the winds blow down the edge of the field they experience resistance and develop different velocities as they make their way to the corner. When they meet at the forest edge, they tend to do what is called eddying (like a trout stream after a bend where you get the whirlpool effect) and the winds tend to swirl your scent. This makes the location great for a deer entering the field since they can get a very thorough scent-check of the field corner from this location, thus making these spots challenging for the hunter.

When setting up in an inside corner, you are best to place the stand back in the woods to utilize the currents that have straightened out and have a more deliberate direction. The other option is to setup a slight distance away from the corner to try to get just outside of the swirling effect and catch the straight-line winds. Keep in mind, once you get up in your tree stand, the winds may differ slightly from the perceived direction on the ground. Carrying a bottle of lineman's chalk or unscented baby powder can assist with watching the wind currents while on stand. A quick puff of either powder into the breeze will allow you to follow the dust's cloud as it blows in the wind. You may be surprised at how it goes one direction and then abruptly turns and heads in another. Be sure to test the wind from your stand location and erected height to find out.

PARALLEL OR INTERSECTING TRAILS?

Two types of trails can affect your success hunting inside or outside corners. The first is a right angle or "intersecting" trail that ends up dumping out into the field. These are used by feeding deer to enter and exit the field. They are most often used by dif-

ferent doe family groups to enter and exit the location, based on prevailing winds and their choice of bedding areas. For example; on a normal west to northwest wind, the doe group may use the trails on the west side to exit the field and approach their bedding area quartering into the wind. In the evening, the same group of deer exits their beds with the wind at their back and then travels crosswind to the northwest inside corner and then loops to enter the field in the northeast inside corner. This allows them to utilize the wind to their advantage during their travel to the feed source and also allow them to scent check their proposed feeding area before stepping out to feed.

The parallel trails (trails that follow the edge or "parallel" the field or cutting) will be used to skirt the field edge and allows the deer to loop to get the wind in their favor. These same parallel trails are key ambush locations for bucks during the rut. The bucks will utilize them to loop the field and check for does that may be receptive. Big bucks know that they can cover the whole field by looping on this trail to check for receptive does feeding without entering the field and exposing themselves. Any doe that crossed into the field had to cross the parallel trail on the way there. I often find scrapes where the two types of trails (parallel & intersecting) cross at right angles. These same parallel trails will show rub sign sporadically along the route where trails cross, with heightened activity on the inside corners where multiple trails converge. Once you find the area you feel affords you the best opportunity to take advantage of the wind direction and deer travel activity, it is time to hunt.

A PLAN COMES TOGETHER

In 2005 I scouted a large cutting during firearms deer season and found a great combination inside/outside corner setup. The deer were traveling across the back of the cutting utilizing an inside corner, while further down the edge was an outside corner that they had been coming out of the woods on. You could plainly make out where the deer followed the edge and then looped out into the cut, then back towards the inside corner. I

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found a great looking stand site out in the cut where I could watch the inside corner and also survey the edge that led to the outside corner.

The first morning I sat the cutting was bitter cold. No wind to speak of, just bone chilling cold to contend with. I wrapped up every inch of exposed skin to try to stay as warm as possible. I sat facing the outside corner and had a view of the inside corner to my left. With my rifle in hand, I could just about cover the entire area, should an opportunity present itself.

At 8:30 a.m., I spotted movement along the edge of the cut. A deer was headed down the edge, right towards the outside corner and would be in plain view in just moments. I turned slowly and readied to see if a buck was approaching. When the deer came from behind some small spruce trees I could make out a nice rack atop its head. My 7mm-08 roared and the buck sped off into the cover of the cedar swamp. After a short tracking job I was running my hands over a nice and dark 11-point rack.

SUMMARY

Cutting corners for bucks is a sure way to take advantage of traveling bucks' habits and be in position more often to score. These locations can be good for both bow and gun hunting if you know your limitations and place your stand location accordingly. If you are hunting with your bow, be sure to hunt within your self-set limitations and be as precise as possible when choosing your stand site. You don't need to see everything, just the magic circle you need your buck to come within.

Now, if utilizing your firearm, make sure you take advantage of the maximum range and effectiveness of your chosen tool. Be selective and shoot straight.