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Recommended Rifle Season Equipment List

General Considerations

The best gear you can bring is a pair of lungs and legs in the best shape possible. All the money in the world can't buy gear that will replace fitness. If you smoke, try your best to quit before your trip.

Use all your gear before your trip. This especially applies to boots, day pack and safety equipment. New, not-worn-in boots can ruin a trip. Making sure your day pack fits well will make your trip more enjoyable.

If you are coming with a group that is hunting in the same camp, do not duplicate items. Work with each other to organize who brings what. Everywhere we hunt requires pack stock. We want to avoid packing unneeded weight.

Guns will be packed in scabbards on riding stock. We will not pack hard gun cases on our pack stock.

The weather in October and November is unpredictable and cold. Nights can be below zero and days can be anywhere from zero to 55 degrees. Snow can come at any time in a serious way. Be prepared for snow and don't let it bother you once it starts coming down. We monitor weather and will do our best to not get you in a situation where snow threatens your camp.

Stay away from cotton, i.e. Carhartt, blue jeans, cotton socks, etc... When cotton gets wet it is useless and it will exacerbate suboptimal weather's effect on your body. Focus on wool and synthetics. There is a lot of newer technology clothing that is lightweight, packable, warm and dries quickly.

We recommend brands and models of specific gear in our lists. Do not construe these recommendations as the only option. We use these items personally. Because we do this for a living, our choices are on the more expensive end of the spectrum. There is always a range of prices on gear that will get the job done.

At the end of this list, we include a list of what our guides carry that can be shared. If you are on a guided hunt you can choose to not carry/bring these items yourself.

Don't hesitate to give us a call about any specific gear questions.



A Note on Rifle Marksmanship

It is imperative that you shoot your rifle at the distances and angles you plan on hunting within, on the type of rest (shooting sticks, backpack, etc...) you plan on using in the mountains. Do not consider yourself the exception. Beyond zeroing your rifle, flat 100 yard bench shooting is worthless for prepping for our hunting conditions. In the past few years, we have seen a dramatic increase in misses and poor shot placement on our hunts. Please practice before arrival.

Marksmanship is a variable that you can control.

Most of our shots during rifle season will be 150-350 yards. A proficient 350-yard-shooter can hold a 4" group at that range, in an angled environment, while shooting off a field rest (backpack, shooting, sticks, etc...). To achieve this takes dedicated practice.

If you want recommendations on shooting courses that are geared towards the mountain environment, give Cliff a call.

There isn't a place to shoot/zero your weapon at our facility. However, there is a fantastic public range only 40 minutes away in Gypsum, CO. Take a right at the only Hwy 70 Gypsum exit and follow the signs. The range has 100-250 yard flat lanes, in addition to 300-800 yard angle shots at animal profiles.

Boots and Footwear

1 Primary pair of waterproof hiking boots.

- If we have indicated to you that we will be hunting our high camps, a mountaineering type boot is best. We use Hanwag Alaskas, Kenetrek Mountain Extremes, Scarpa Fuego or Wrangell, Lowa Tibets, and Meindl Alaska Hunters.
- As a less expensive option, many hunters are happy with Danner boots.
- Try to visit a retail location where you can try on different boot models. Fit is essential.
- In steep terrain, the rigidity of the sole is more important than the boot height. Wearing boots that are uncomfortably high can cause “shin bump”, an uncomfortable sore spot on your shins.

1 Pair of Pac Boots (Optional)

- An insulated pac boot is your best option once snow starts dropping. You will be hunting lower, less steep country. Your primary needs will be warmth, comfort, and waterproofness.
- Muck Boots work well, as do Kenetrek Pac Boots or Schness.
- On packin and packout, you will have to wear your hiking boots. Pac boots won't fit in stirrups.

1 Pair of camp shoes

- Something light and easy to pack like Crocs

5 Pair sock liners

- Thin liner socks will help you avoid blisters and allow you to pack fewer pairs of primary socks.
- We prefer ultra-thin, silk liners. Merino wool and synthetics will also work well.

3-5 Pair primary socks

- Best option is heavy wool.

Gators (Optional)

- Great in snow and/or rain. Also great when dealing with high, frosty or dewy vegetation
- Keep your boots and feet dryer

Base Clothing

2 Pairs of long underwear sets

- Synthetics and merino wool are best
- Bring mid-weight and at least one pair of heavy weight

Because of the hunter orange requirement, you don't necessarily need camouflage gear during rifle season. A lot of times you can save money by purchasing clothing that has the same traits as hunting clothes, but is sold to the masses and is not camo.

Bring quiet gear. If it goes "swoosh" when you move, don't bring it.

Daily Layers

All rifle hunters are required to wear at least 500 square inches of orange while hunting. You need to wear an orange hat.

2 Mid-weight hunting shirts

1 Pair warm weather hunting pants

- Sitka, Kuiu and other brands also produce great pants. Focus on cold weather class pants.
- Quiet pants used for snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, etc... work well.
- We don't find them the most comfortable, but older styles of wool work.

3 Layer Outerwear System

1 Lightweight fleece or soft-shell jacket

1 Insulating jacket/vest layer

- Down and PrimaLoft will keep you the warmest.
- We have a preference for PrimaLoft because it retains its insulation attributes when wet.
- Pantagonia Nano Puff, Mountain Hardware Compressor, Kuiu insulating layers, and Sitka insulating layers are good options

1 Heavy hunting jacket for cold weather

- Wool or wool/synthetic is best.
- Cabelas Outfitter's Woolmite/Windshear Jacket is a good option. Kuiu's guide jacket.
- Needs to have wind stopping attributes.

1 Full set of rain gear

- If you see yourself hunting a lot in the rain (not just waiting it out), purchase the more expensive Sitka or Kuiu. It does a good job, is comfortable and is not noisy. We guide using Kuiu Yukon rain gear, but you can get away with lighter weight options.
- Don't forget rain pants!

Other Clothing

2 Pairs of gloves

- One light weight and one heavier (wool is best) pair of gloves is optimal.
- We prefer glommits because they allow us to use our fingers. Cabelas Big Game Glommits are a good choice if you get them large enough for a wool liner.
- You can also wear dark pig skin leather gloves with separate wool liners for insulation.
- Learn to quickly/safely remove or shoot your gun with your chosen gloves. Sometimes this means removing the trigger finger part of your glove and/or glove liner.

1 Warm hat and/or baclava

- We usually wear wool beanies, but this is personal preference
- Stormy Kromer Rancher hats in blaze orange are a guide favorite. Very warm and comfortable.

Hunting Gear

Rifle and all accessories

- Review the Colorado regulations to make sure your equipment is compatible with the state's caliber restrictions.
- Your scope is more important than your rifle.
 - Fog proof, waterproof and lowlight performance are most important
 - We prefer adjustable 3x-9x-40. 2x-7x and even fixed 4x work fine. Don't skimp on low light capability for a huge zoom. The animals we hunt are large so you don't need extreme zooms. Extreme zooms with small objectives are worthless.
 - Use high quality mounts. Getting into these areas can be a rough ride and your gun/scope will probably take some bumps.
- .270 is the minimum caliber we like to see people shoot. .300 calibers and above are most common.
 - The most important thing is that you are comfortable and accurate with your gun.
 - In our experience, large calibers cause more inaccuracy because people train themselves to flinch.
 - If you can't sit down and comfortably shoot 15 rounds, you are using too large of a caliber for you.
 - Sight your gun in at 2 inches high at 100 yards. On flat shooting rifles this means you can hold right on for any distance between 100-300 yards. Mule deer and elk have a large enough vital area to accommodate the minimal bullet drop.

Elk calls

- Learn how to use a cow call well. During rifle seasons, a quick cow call is the best way to stop a running elk. Other than the first rifle season, trying to call in elk is marginally effective during rifle seasons. Bugling is generally not a good idea.

20 Rounds of ammo

Wind indicator

Do not bring a pistol. It is just added weight and will not protect you any better than your rifle.

Tool Gear

1 Head lamp

- A light with both a red and white light is best. Having multiple bulbs in the lamp is a good backup and red is better while riding because the horses/mules are more comfortable with it.

1 Small flashlight

1 Small GPS (Optional)

- Simple GPS's are fine. We use eTrex models that are small, easy to use, economical, and waterproof.

Extra batteries and bulbs for all equipment

Topo map and compass

- Check your compass to make sure it is pointing to North
- Do not store your compass near lead fishing weights or similar items. It is easy to reverse polarize today's cheaper compass. A reverse polarized compass will take you in the exact opposite direction.

Binoculars

- Your optics are the second most important piece of gear, right behind boots.
- We have had good luck with the top models from Nikon. Swarovski and other euro glass optics are worth the money if you plan to use them for years of hunting.
- Low-light performance is the most important variable.
- Nikon Trailblazer 10x50s that are waterproof and Leupold Compacts are good mid-range options. SLC and EL Swaros are good high-end optics.
- Cliff guides using 8x42 ELs because he prefers the light gathering of a 5mm+ exit pupil.

One of the best high-end optics dealers on the planet is Jaret Owens in Ojai, CA. Jaret has a lifetime of guiding under his belt, has unbeatable pricing and treats people well. Give him a call at 805-551-6815 and tell him Colorado Cliff sent you.

Binocular Harness

- The original Alaska Guide Creations bino harnesses are great. Kuiu and others make great harnesses, too.

Spotting Scope (optional)

- On hunts where we will be scoring animals, your guide will have a good scope
- A guide favorite is Vortex's Razor 20-60x85 or Swaro Modular ATX 85mm
- When not scoring animals, tripod compatible binoculars are generally better than a big scope for finding animals. If going this route, 15x56 Swaros are a worthy lifetime investment.

Rangefinder (optional)

- The best thing you can do is practice with an elk-sized target at known distances
- Do not practice with a whitetail or smaller target. This will cause you to underestimate the distance of live elk and mule deer
- Vortex makes an economical, high-quality range finder. Several of the European glass brands have nice range finding binoculars.

Knives and game cleaning

- Knives we can recommend –
 - Replaceable Blade Knives - Not having to sharpen and carry sharpening tools is a huge plus. Havalon or Razor-lite.
 - Fixed Blade Knives – If you know how to field sharpen, fixed blades are better all-around knives for bushcraft and you avoid having to replace blades in the field. Kestrel Ovis, Buck 113, Buck Omni Hunter, Benchmade. Carry a field sharpener. Small rods work best.
- Some of us use axes for quartering, but your guide or drop camp will already be supplied with them.
- Small bone saws are not necessary. It's difficult to saw an elk pelvic bone with these small saws. Learn to short quarter elk (gutless method).

(Not needed on guided hunts. Having a good knife on you is always a good idea, but your guide will perform your field dressing for you.)

6 Game Bags

- We can hang your quarters in game bags at base camp in our cool cabin facility.
- Handful of surveyors tape to mark downed game, blood trails or signal your location
- Bags by T.A.G. Bag are pricey but awesome for long-term use. Lightweight too.

(Not needed on guided hunts. We provide game bags in our guided camp.)

Day pack

- A comfortable pack in the 1,600-2,200 cubic inch range

Camera/Smartphone

- Bring your charger and/or spare batteries
- The cold can quickly uncharge a charged battery

Two way radios if you are coming with a group

- Many of our guides carry these radios. Keep in mind that their range is limited in steep terrain.

Water bottle and/or hydration bladder

Water purification tablets or water purifiers

- Many of our guides carry water purifiers, but carrying a light weight personal purifying method makes water stops quicker and easier.
- The most common way we sanitize water is by boiling. However, on long day hikes when you need to refill your water bottle in the field, having a lightweight purifying mechanism is great.
- Electrolyte tablets, like Nuun, improve the taste of purified water (tablet purified, filtered, or boiled) and add an energy boost.

A small hand stove (optional)

- An easy to use and light stove like the JetBoil are nice to have for quick water purification or making up a hot cup of tea or instant coffee in the field. You can also start a hell of a fire with them if you get into a bind.

Personal Gear

Sleeping bag

- For rifle season a -20 degree rated bag or warmer is best.
- We prefer non-mummy type bags for comfort, this is personal preference

Personal Hygiene and Medication Items

- Make sure you have enough of any prescriptions
- If you have had anaphylaxis (allergic reaction) to bees or other insects, please carry an Epi-Pen at all times.
- Pepto-Bismol and other routine medications can be helpful
- Altitude medication if you have a history of altitude sickness
- Carry personal Aspirin as an immediate treatment for heart attack or pain.
(We carry extensive first aid kits in our guided camps. These include basic medication like Ibuprofen, Aspirin, Pepto, Imodium)

Baby Wipes

- No better bathroom wipe around

Chapstick and Sunscreen

Bug spray

Couple pairs of latex or equivalent gloves for cleaning game or first aid

An extra pair of eye glasses or contacts if you wear them

Soft duffle bags to pack most your gear in for packing on mules. Dry bags are best.

- Each bag must weigh less than 50lbs a piece
- Water, camera, clothing layers are allowed in saddlebags. Other gear is not allowed.
- Wearing day packs while riding is prohibited on packin and packout

Super absorbent personal towel

- REI sells lots of good options that are packable, dry quickly and absorb an astonishing amount of water.
- Another good option is the ShamWow towels. The price is right too!

Garbage bags for trash (Only non-guided hunts)

Safety Gear

Design a method to carry the bare essential safety gear on your person at all times. We carry small fanny pack type bags with this gear.

Fire starting capability

- Being able to start a fire quickly, without inducing yourself into a panic, can save your life.
- We use wax covered cotton balls or wax covered dryer lint as tinder that we always carry. These hold a flame for up to 15 minutes in the worst conditions. Always carry tinder that you are confident using. **Do not depend on starting a fire from solely natural material.**
- Storm matches and water proof matches are good for starting fires here. High altitude can drastically affect the reliability of lighters.
- Have more than one way to start a fire on your person at all times

2 Heavy Duty Garbage Bags

- 2 mil+ 55 gallon contractor bags are best
- These bags work better than the thin, shiny safety blankets you find in first aid kits
- Cut a hole for your head and wear as a poncho to keep yourself warm and dry
- Heavy duty emergency bags (usually called emergencies bivvys) are a good alternative

Extra Batteries and Bulbs for your Devices

Water purification tablets

Communication device (Only non-guided hunts)

- In our contracts, we mandate that our hunters rent or we rent on their behalf, a satellite phone or satellite message system (Spot, InReach, etc...)

Parachute Cord 15-30ft

Whistle for signaling

Small 8x10 Tarp (optional)

- Can be bulky but great to put in the bottom of your day pack until the day you need it. Fantastic for extra warmth or a quick shelter from elements.

Zip ties

- Useful for a ton of different things from emergency shoe laces to making a quick shelter

First Aid Kit

Our guides carry first aid kits and our camps have first aid kits in them. Do not waste weight by carrying first aid items you won't use or do not know how to use. For example if you don't have any wilderness medicine training, a zip lock bag with Band-Aids, gauze, Neosporin, tweezers, Benadryl, Moleskin, soap and Ibuprofen is plenty.

If you are at risk of a heart attack, bring Aspirin.

Bring an Epi-Pen if you are allergic to any insects. You must get these via doctor's prescription.

Paper Work

Hunting license and tag

Fishing license if you plan to fish – Non-resident tags are also a fishing license

Anyone born after Jan. 1, 1949 MUST have a Hunter's Safety Card to buy a Colorado hunting license. You must also carry your card with you while hunting!

Any remaining payment for your trip

- **We will not pack in hunters who have not completely paid for their trip.**
- Cash preferred. Cashier's checks are OK. **We do not accept personal checks or credit cards for the remaining balance.**

Important Items Our Guides Carry (Only applicable to guided hunts)

Knives

Radio or other communication

Fire starting capability

Tarp

Bivy bag or contractor's garbage bags

Rope or Parachute Cord

Compass

Surveyors' tape

Elk calls

Game bags

Garbage bags for trash

Game field dressing and quartering equipment

First Aid Kit:

Gauze pads, Combine dressing, Band-aids, Roller gauze, Occlusive dressings, Triangular bandage, Elastic wrap (Ace bandage), Sam splint or Wire splint, Exam gloves, 1 CPR Pocket mask, Blister kit (moleskin, second skin), Splinter tweezers, Medical tape