

BIKING... for Bucks

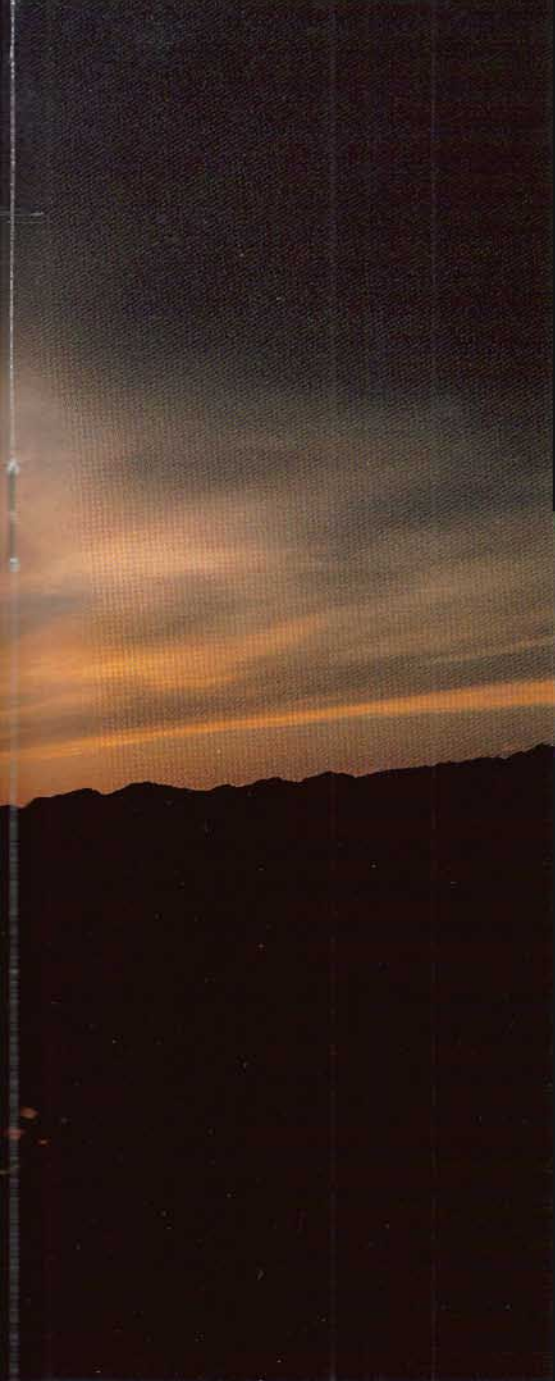
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Climbing up the steep gradient of the rugged jeep trail, I crest the ridgeline in my fully customized 4x4 pickup. I catch my breath in wonder as the canyon unfolds below me. The new lift-kit and "rock-eater" tires have allowed me to go farther into this remote area than ever before. There are no tracks from other vehicles, and I haven't seen a soul in the past two hours. My mind is reeling over the thought of all those bucks that must be living to a ripe old age here, without ever seeing a human being.

"Let's go!—It's 6 o'clock 'n you're gonna be late for work!" Dang, was that

a dream? I look out the window for confirmation only to see the sun rising over my dilapidated two-wheel drive Toyota pickup—the one with ground clearance you can measure with a 6-inch ruler and tires that don't leave tread marks.

A few years ago, while carrying a deer for two miles to reach my Toyota, I decided there had to be a better way. I enjoy hunting far away from the most accessible areas, but my "Toy" doesn't do well on anything that lacks a painted centerline. And I couldn't even consider buying a 4x4 pickup unless Ed McMahon pulled up in front of my



With the use of his mountain bike, the author has found a way to access remote areas in search of deer. At the same time he is able to enjoy the peace and solitude these rugged, back country areas provide.

house with a handful of balloons and a big piece of poster board with a bunch of zeros painted on it.

I have spent the dark predawn hours of many mornings walking to a good glassing location far from any roads, and then, still before sun up, an equal amount of time walking out. It wasn't until I saw a group of mountain bikers in a TV commercial for *Mountain Dew* that it hit me. Why didn't I think of it sooner? The guys on TV were riding recklessly over terrain that would make a mule hesitate.

If you have longed to get far back into areas, where you can hunt the less

accessible bucks, but have lacked the vehicular ability to do it, consider a mountain bike for the upcoming season. A mountain bike fits easily in the back of a small truck or car trunk, so you can drive on four wheels as far as you feel comfortable and then unpack your gun, day pack, and bike to continue on up the rough part of the road. Having the bike along has eliminated my tendency to try "one more wash" before walking—it was always in that "last" wash that I buried my truck.

Of course you can't spend all day riding around on a bike and expect to see deer. The key is to use the bike to get into remote areas and then to move swiftly from one glassing location to another.

I've learned from my experience biking in the rugged terrain of south-eastern Arizona to always carry a small tool kit and hand air pump for minor repairs. You may also want to carry a bike lock in case you decide to leave your bike for part of the day to check out a ridgeline or hike down into a canyon. The chances of having a bike stolen are pretty slim, but better safe than stranded.

Packing game out is not as hard as it might seem. With the increased mobility of the bike, you can tag and dress your animal, make a run back to your vehicle to drop off your equipment (binoculars, tripod, sporting

scope, day pack, rifle, etc.), and then, depending on the terrain and the size of the game, you can probably pack the animal out in another trip or two. An old backpack frame is very useful for packing out mule deer quarters or even whole whitetails. Just make sure you've tied everything securely to the pack frame to prevent any shifting that could throw you off the bike at an inopportune time (watch out for those dense stands of Cholla!).

Mountain bikes can be purchased for \$80 on up to more than \$1,000. As with anything, you get what you pay for. Buy as good a bike as your budget allows. For safety's sake, it's recommended that you spend a minimum of \$200 to \$300, if you plan to do any serious off-roading. You'll need a sturdy bike, especially if you plan on packing a heavy load. If your problem is getting back into the less accessible areas, you'll improve your odds more by buying a good mountain bike than by paying an extra \$100 or so for higher quality glass in your scope.

Remember that designated wilderness areas are off-limits to all mechanized travel, this includes mountain bikes. Also, laws prohibiting shooting from a roadway still apply.

If you'd like to get away from the crowd this fall, hunting or not, give some thought to the mountain bike—it may be the your smartest investment in outdoor equipment. 🐾