

SCALING BACK

GETTING BACK TO BASICS

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I was recently scanning an outdoor catalog looking at some of the newest equipment that was available for purchase. In several instances, I was stunned at the cost of some of the products that were being offered.

Maybe it's because I had found myself amongst the unemployed for a number of months last year that these issues of equipment costs have occupied my thoughts. Though I have always been relatively frugal when it comes to my equipment purchases, the focus of what I really need to spend had become even sharper in the light of the current economy and how it impacted my own life. Will I catch that many more fish if I spend \$5000 versus \$500 on a fish finder? Will I shoot bigger bucks if I buy that \$1000 rifle scope? Probably not.

I have no intention of picking on the producers of outdoor sporting goods. The market is extremely competitive and more expensive products often bring higher profit margins along with their advanced features. The manufacturers were also just following the trend that had been gaining steam for the last 20 years in the outdoor marketplace; people were willing to shell out big bucks for new or high tech equipment.

Probably the best example of this trend was seen in the boating industry. It was not that long ago that an 18 foot boat with a 150 horse outboard motor was considered big. Nowadays, a boat is not considered big unless it is over 20 feet long and it carries a 250 to 300 horse motor. Such a craft does not come cheap with prices often surpassing the cost of the trucks towing them.

Considering that hunting and fishing now are basically recreational activities, expenditures on such pricey items have taken a hit in this economy. It's hard to justify plopping down \$200 on a new spinning reel when one costing a third as much will get the job done, albeit with a bit less refinement and maybe some reduced quality. Boat sales have certainly hit the skids with the industry reeling from the impacts of buyers unable or unwilling to purchase watercraft that were flying out of showrooms just a couple of years ago.

In the face of all of this economic mayhem, people are likely reevaluating what equipment they really need in order to partake in the outdoors; maybe that is not such a bad thing.

I think many of us, me included, looked too much towards new and better equipment as a substitution for increased knowledge and better skills. Instead of learning more about seasonal movements of fish and animals, we have spent our time trying to figure out all the features on the newest gadget or wandered store aisles searching for a magic fishing lure or deer scent that would bring us instant success.

In the same regards, sometimes we spend so much time staring at fish finders and GPS units that we miss the natural scenery around a lake or fail to see wildlife as we walk through the woods.

Maybe it's time we learn how to get the most out of the equipment we already own. Many of us have boxes filled with fishing lures we rarely use, all replaced by newer models that we thought would bring with it fishing nirvana.

Again, I have no intentions of turning this into a rant against sporting good manufacturers. They produce products that help me enjoy my time in the outdoors and I can honestly say that some of those products have meant the difference between having a productive versus unproductive outing. However, a well known fishing writer, who is sponsored by some large outdoor firms, once told me that sporting goods are just tools. I think we need to make sure the costs of these "tools" do not get in the way of our outdoor pursuits. That is unless someone really does invent the magic fishing lure, then go ahead and buy it.

A RETURN TO BIRD HUNTING
HUNTING AT THE BLONHAVEN HUNT CLUB

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