

A person wearing a jacket with a bold black and white geometric pattern is seen from behind, standing in a forest of tall, thin, bare trees. The ground is covered in dark, fallen leaves. The scene is backlit by the sun, creating a warm glow and long shadows. The title text is overlaid in the upper half of the image.

OKLAHOMA TRADITIONAL BOWHUNTERS

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Oklahoma Traditional Bowhunters shooters of the year, 2024



President's Update

As we move through the heart of summer, I'm proud to share just how much ground we've covered together this year — and where we're headed next.

First off, I'm excited to announce the official launch of our new website. It's designed to be a hub for everything OTB — event updates, mentorship connections, photos, articles, and more. It's taken some time to get it right, and I want to thank everyone who helped shape it into something useful and easy to navigate.

We also just wrapped up our first-ever quarterly newsletter, and you're reading it now. This has been a goal for a long time — a way to keep our members informed and engaged between shoots and banquets. It's just one more way we're staying connected as a statewide community.

Looking ahead, we're gearing up for our membership drive at the McAlester Army Ammunition Plant shoot in August. If you're planning to attend, swing by our booth. We'll have information, gear, and good conversations and we'd love to welcome new folks into the OTB family.

We're also planning a public land members' hunt this fall, with groups heading out to various WMAs and OLAP properties across the state. There's no better way to build friendships and sharpen skills than by spending time in the woods together. Keep an eye on our site and Facebook page for more info and how to get involved.

I also want to take a moment to ask for your help. As our organization grows, so does our need for passionate leaders at the officer and regional levels. If you've ever thought about stepping up and helping out — whether that's organizing events, handling logistics, or just being a voice for your part of the state — we'd love to talk. Please reach out to any current officer if you're interested.

One of the things I'm most proud of this year is the success we've seen at our partnered 3D shoots across Oklahoma. While attendance numbers are down in many parts of the country, our events are holding strong — and in some cases growing. That speaks volumes about the strength of our community and the shared values we all bring to the range.

Lastly, as we prepare for the fall issue and our annual banquet, we're putting together a harvest photo slideshow. If you've had success in the field — or know someone who has — send in your pictures. Big game or small, we'd love to celebrate those moments with the community. Photos submitted will be considered for the fall newsletter and featured during the banquet presentation.

Thanks again to each of you for being part of OTB. The strength of this organization lies in the people who show up, pitch in, and pass it on. See you on the range — and hopefully in the woods this fall.

— Bruce Duncan

President, Oklahoma Traditional Bowhunters

Sticks, Strings & Spirit

By Bruce Duncan

In the heart of Oklahoma's wildlands, where the wind whispers through blackjack oaks and the deer tread softly through prairie grass, a quiet tradition endures—one that reaches back generations and binds together a community of hunters who choose simplicity over technology, instinct over automation, and heritage over convenience.

Traditional bowhunting in Oklahoma is more than a method—it's a way of life. Long before compound bows and modern optics, hunters here relied on the elegance of the selfbow, longbow and recurve, tools that demand patience, practice, and a deep connection to the land. For many, like the late Johnny Pappan, a Kaw Indian who received his first handmade longbow from his grandfather at the age of six, this tradition is woven into family and cultural identity.



Featured to the left, Johnny Pappan "Founder of Oklahoma Traditional Bowhunters"

The roots of organized traditional bowhunting in Oklahoma trace back to the late 20th century. In 1983 the Oklahoma Longbowmen organization was born. In 1988, the Southern Plains Traditional Archery Championship was born, originally organized by the Oklahoma Longbowmen. Held at the McAlester Army Ammunition Plant, the event quickly became a cornerstone of the traditional archery calendar, drawing hundreds of archers from across the region. The championship was more than a competition—it was a celebration of skill, camaraderie, and the enduring appeal of the 'stick and string.

When the event faced uncertainty in 2001, the Backwoods Bowhunters of Canadian County stepped in to preserve it. Their dedication ensured that Oklahoma's largest traditional shoot would continue to thrive, offering a 25-target course that mimics real-world hunting scenarios—complete with kneeling shots, tree gaps, and the ever-present challenge of threading an arrow through the brush.



Group of OTB members at target 25 of the Southern Plains Traditional Archery Championship course.

Today, organizations like the Oklahoma Traditional Bowhunters, the Oklahoma Longbowmen and the Oklahoma Selfbow Society carry the torch, fostering a community where newcomers and seasoned archers alike can share knowledge, hone their skills, and uphold the ethics of fair chase. Through workshops, 3D shoots, Rendezvous' and conservation efforts, they ensure that the values of traditional bowhunting—respect for wildlife, mastery of craft, and stewardship of the land—are passed on to future generations.



A group of kids after receiving their free rattan selfbows, built by members of the Oklahoma Selfbow Society at the annual OJAM event.

As we look ahead to another season, let us remember that every arrow loosed from a traditional bow carries with it the spirit of those who came before us. In every draw and release, we honor a legacy that is uniquely rooted in tradition, guided by respect, and aimed at the heart of the wild.



OTB member enjoying the range at OTB partner club Duncan Bowhunters.

Please join Us at one of our upcoming events posted on the Oklahoma Traditional Bowhunters website, the upcoming summer rendezvous put on by The Oklahoma Selfbow Society June 14th and 15th in Pawnee, OK or join Us at the annual Southern Plains Traditional Archery Championship in McCalister, OK August 2nd and 3rd.

Opening the Door: A Texas Archer's Take on Oklahoma's Public Land

By Matt Branstine

When I talk with folks about my love for traditional archery and bowhunting, the first thing I'm usually asked is, can you help me get started? And that part is easy. For a few hundred dollars, I can get someone set up with a good starter bow, a handful of arrows, and a solid understanding of the basics. I know a guy who reworks affordable bows to shoot like customs, and I always point people his way.

I've got targets in the backyard, and I've welcomed many new shooters to come over, learn, and practice. Some of them stick with it. Some even get proficient enough to shoot local 3D tournaments and that's when the bigger question usually comes up: Can you take me hunting? Now, that's a harder ask.

I live in Dumas, Texas, where public hunting is nearly nonexistent. Most of the land around us is private and locked up in expensive leases. And unless you've already got a foot in the door, it's tough to find a place to take someone new. There's Lake Meredith nearby federally managed and full of red tape but opportunities are limited and not beginner friendly. That's why I keep pointing folks toward Oklahoma.



Most people don't realize Oklahoma has roughly 3 million acres of public land, scattered across the state. While the Panhandle doesn't have many large Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs), it does have something even better for traditional bowhunters: OLAP the Oklahoma Land Access Program. OLAP properties are leased from private landowners by the state and opened to the public for walk-in access. Most of them are archery- or shotgun-only, which works out perfectly for our style of hunting.

The small size of these parcels, typically 40 to 160 acres makes them ideal for introducing new hunters to the woods. They're manageable, intimate spaces where you can teach someone how to scout, hang a stand, or still-hunt for small game without pressure or overwhelm. And here's the kicker: I've never had another hunter show up on an OLAP property while I was there. Not once. You'll need a Land Access Permit in addition to your regular hunting license, but that money goes directly back into leasing more land. OLAP properties are open from September 1 through May 16, and all are walk-in only, with designated parking spots. If you're wondering about the opportunity some OLAP parcels out here in the Panhandle are open for pronghorn hunting and even hold mule deer.

OLAP Map Directory



OLAP FY22 Public - OLAP_ICONS_08292021

- Walk-In Hunting Archery & Shotgun
- Walk-In Fishing Seasonal
- Wildlife Viewing
- Limited Access
- Stream Access
- Walk-In Fishing Annual
- Other

OLAP_Access_08292021 - Limited Access

- Limited Access

OLAP_Access_08292021 - Public Access

- Walk-In Fishing Annual
- Wildlife Viewing
- Walk-In Hunting Archery & Shotgun
- Controlled Hunt
- Walk-In Fishing Seasonal
- Stream Access
- Temporarily Closed
- Removed

I've come to see OLAP land as one of the best teaching tools we've got. You can bring a new bowhunter out, walk a parcel together, and explain sign, stand placement, thermals, or ground blind setup. It's not overwhelming like a massive WMA, and it creates the kind of confidence that only comes from real-world exposure.

If you live in Texas or another state where access is limited, Oklahoma's public land might just be your best shot at growing into a traditional bowhunter. And if you're an Oklahoman reading this, don't take it for granted.

You've got an incredible resource just outside your door. Let's use it and let's use it to teach the next generation. It also shows new hunters that public land hunting doesn't have to mean fighting crowds or trekking miles into some wilderness unit. It can be local, accessible, and welcoming, especially here in Oklahoma. I bought my lifetime license back in 1993.

Best \$300 I've ever spent.



Chaplain's Corner: Straight Arrows & Narrow Paths

By Curtis Smith

"Blessed is the man whose strength is in You, whose heart is set on pilgrimage."

— Psalm 84:5

There is something sacred about slipping through the woods with a stickbow in hand — no scope, no cams, no shortcuts. Just you, the Creator's handiwork, and the humility it takes to get close.

It reminds me a lot of our walk with Christ. Like traditional bowhunting, discipleship is not the easy path — but it is the one that draws us closer.

Drawn by Hand, Not by Hype

In today's world, hunting is often about the quickest way to get a grip-and-grin photo. High-speed gear, long-range gadgets — even in the outdoors, we are tempted to trade depth for convenience.

But when we choose to go afield with traditional equipment, we choose intentionality. We trade fast for faithful, easy for earned, shallow for sacred.

Discipleship is the same. Jesus did not call us to speed through life with comfort and shortcuts. He called us to follow Him — one step, one lesson, one act of obedience at a time.

"Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me."

— Luke 9:23

The Quiet Pursuit

Hunting with a traditional bow requires patience. It is not flashy. You sit more than you shoot. You listen more than you move. And sometimes, you walk away empty-handed — but full-hearted.

That is what a life of faith often looks like.

God does not always move in obvious ways. Often, He moves in the whispers — in the still woods, in the long waits, in the prayers offered under a cold morning sky.

Discipleship is about the quiet pursuit of Jesus, not just the mountaintop moments.

A traditional archer spends hours practicing before the hunt. We study form, tune arrows, and build muscle memory. Why? Because we know that in the moment of truth, we will not rise to the occasion — we will fall back on our training.

The same is true spiritually. Are we in the Word? Are we in prayer? Are we walking with other believers? Because when life's broadside moment comes — temptation, grief, conflict — we will not suddenly become strong. We will draw from what we have built in secret.

"Train yourself for godliness."
— 1 Timothy 4:7

Be a Guide, Not Just a Hunter

Just as seasoned bowhunters pass on their skills to new shooters, mature believers are called to make disciples — to walk alongside others, not just shoot solo.

If you are further along in your faith, ask yourself: Who are you mentoring? Who are you helping learn to “shoot straight” in life?

And if you are new to both the bow and the faith — welcome. You do not need to have it all figured out. Just be willing to walk, learn, and listen.

Final Word

Every time we step into the woods with a traditional bow, we're reminded: this way is harder, slower, and more beautiful.

Every time we step into Scripture or a quiet moment with God, we're reminded: so is following Jesus.

Let's be hunters who walk humbly, live faithfully, and aim true — both in the field and in the faith.

May your arrows fly straight, and your path stay narrow.

In Christ,

✚ Curtis Smith

Oklahoma Traditional Bowhunters Chaplain



Starting Young: How to Involve Kids in the Offseason

By Bruce Duncan

The offseason is when many hunters hang up their gear and shift their focus. But if you've got kids — or grandkids — interested in traditional bowhunting, the offseason is actually the perfect time to begin.

It's a slower season. A time to build skills, create memories, and lay the foundation for a lifelong love of the outdoors. Getting kids involved now means they'll be better prepared (and more excited) when the fall woods call.

1. Start with the Bow — Not the Hunt

The first step is getting a bow in their hands — something manageable, light, and fun. It doesn't have to be expensive. A simple 10–20 lb longbow or recurve with a safe backstop can do wonders.

Make practice playful:

Use 3D foam animals or balloons for targets,

Let them help set up the range,

Celebrate form and focus, not just hits,

For young kids, even 10 minutes of focused shooting is a win.
The goal is joy and safety, not precision.

2. Teach the “Why” Before the “How”

Kids ask questions — and that's good. They're not just learning archery; they're learning ethics, responsibility, and respect for wildlife.

Use the offseason to talk about:

Why we hunt traditionally,

What it means to take a life responsibly,

How we practice honoring the animals we pursue,

These conversations build character, not just skill.

3. Take Them Scouting — Even If You're Not Hunting

The offseason is full of teachable moments. Deer tracks, old scrapes, feathers in the leaves — kids are naturally curious, and they'll notice things adults overlook.



Turn every hike into a mini scouting mission:

Look for sign and talk about what it means,

Teach them how wind is affected by terrain features,

Show them how animals move through different terrains,

They'll learn woodsmanship long before they pull a bowstring in-season.

4. Get Hands-On with Gear

The offseason is a great time for DIY projects that kids can help with:

Fletching arrows,

Waxing bowstrings,

Painting targets,

Building a bow rack or quiver,

Even simple tasks give them ownership — and a sense of being part of the tradition.

5. Make It About More Than Archery

Sometimes, the best way to build a young bowhunter is through shared time, not lessons.

Camp in the backyard,

Build a fire and tell hunting stories,

Read books about archery or outdoor skills,

Visit 3D shoots or expos just to watch and explore, let them fall in love with the lifestyle, not just the shot.



The path to becoming a traditional bowhunter starts long before a child releases their first arrow in the woods. It begins in the backyard, in the shed, on the trail — wherever someone takes the time to say: “Come with me. I’ll show you how.”

Start now. Start small. But start. Because the best tradition we can pass on isn’t just how to shoot — it’s why we do it.

When the Rain Breaks

By Bruce Duncan

The rain had finally let up to a soft drizzle by the time I eased into my stand that afternoon. It was just after 2 o'clock on November 18th, and the clouds still hung low and heavy. Everything was soaked — bark, leaves, even the green field below me shimmered under a thin gloss of moisture. But the woods had that look about them — the kind that makes a bowhunter settle in with high hopes and quiet patience.



A few does were already scattered across the field, nibbling the edges and moving cautiously between breaks in the cover. Behind them came the younger bucks, nosing around like teenagers trying to impress someone. Then, the most mature buck I'd seen from the stand all season stepped out — moving with purpose, clearly reading the scene and acting while younger bucks hesitated.

He worked his way through the doe's, scent-checking them and running off younger bucks. I gave him a soft grunt. He stopped. Looked. Then he turned his attention back to the does. Three or four minutes later, I grunted again and followed it with a snort-wheeze. This time, he snapped his head in my direction. After a pause, he turned and left the field to the north.

I knew what he was doing — circling downwind to scent-check the other end of the field. What he didn't know was that while the wind was out of the south, the thermals were pulling downhill, right to where I sat tucked against a fencerow bordering a thick cutover. The stand was placed for exactly this scenario.

Sure enough, a few minutes later I saw him coming — ears pinned, head low, stiff-legged march, closing the distance fast. At about 18 yards, just slightly quartered to me, I gave a quiet mouth grunt to stop him. He hesitated just long enough. I hit anchor and let the arrow fly.

The Black Widow PSA with a draw weight of 53 pounds sent the 620-grain arrow with authority, the arrow buried through the right scapula, exiting low behind the left





form of breathing.

shoulder. A perfect shot — the kind that doesn't require thinking when you've already done the work.

And the work matters.

I spent the spring and summer flinging arrows with my family — 3D tournaments, backyard shooting, fun shoots. All of it adds up. Somewhere between foam deer and laughter, I tuned my setup until broadheads flew like field points and confidence followed every release. I switched to my hunting gear early, made sure everything was dialed, and didn't stop practicing until drawing and shooting was just another

Because when it counts, we owe the animal that much — and we owe ourselves, too. If you're going to hang stands, scout travel corridors, study wind maps, take time off work and time away from your family — then make sure you're ready to capitalize on the moment you've worked so hard for. Tuning to the point of obsession might sound excessive, but it pays for itself when the buck of the season walks into range and your body takes over without hesitation.



But all of that still pales in comparison to the peace that comes with just being out there. The quiet, the solitude, the stillness we chase all year. It's in that space — between frost, wind, and the whisper of deer hooves — that we get to appreciate what we've been given. God's creation is on full display in November. And if you slow down, you'll find that bowhunting gives you more than venison and memories. It gives you space to reflect — on where you are, on where you've been, and on the giants of this lifestyle who came before us.

People like Ralph Renfro (*Left*). Men who paved the way for this passion to grow into a community, a tradition, and a way of life. Look for more about Ralph in an upcoming article — his impact on our sport and our organizations is one we should all know.

For now, I'm just thankful the rain broke when it did, and I was in the stand when the woods came alive.

Please take a moment to reach out and thank our sponsors for supporting Our organization.



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MAR 29-30 PAWNEE BOW RANGE

APR 12-13 DUNCAN BOWHUNTERS

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