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Gary Sandor of Utica points to the ideal target for nobbing a deer during the archery deer season, which runs through Nov. 14. After two-week break for firearms season, the bow starts up again Dec. 1 and continues to Jan. 1, 1988.

By Bill Parker
staff writer

Archery's appeal is at high point

In this day of high-powered firearms one of man's earliest and most useful weapons often is overlooked. It is believed by many experts to have been man's first machine. The first tool with the ability to store energy. The bow and arrow.

When early man roamed the earth the bow and arrow was a very primitive weapon.

The bow usually was constructed of a green branch. A thin vine would be strung from one end to the other until the branch was slightly bent. This style of bow is known today as a recurve or long bow.

The arrows used then were made of a long, straight stick notched at one end and pointed at the other. Since the days of the early recurve the bow and arrow has come a long way.

Today, limbs of the bow are made of fiberglass, wood or a combination of graphic and plastic. Strings are made of dacron with a heavy wax base, and the arrows usually are made of aluminum, although wood and fiberglass also work well.

And the list of accessories is endless. Many of today's archers use sights, weights, balancers, silencers, finger tabs, forearm guards, bumper buttons (a button on the bow that adds to the accuracy of the arrow's flight), even scopes. The quiver, or instrument used to carry the arrows, is made of plastic and attaches to the bow.

AROUND 1965 a new style, the compound bow, hit the market. Up until that time the recurve was the only style available.

"With a recurve or long bow, the further you pull the bow back, the harder it is to pull," explained Tom Featherstone, president of Michigan Bow Hunters, a statewide organization founded in 1947 to promote and preserve bow hunting in Michigan.

"On a compound bow, wheels have been added to both ends. About halfway through the pull the wheels turn over and reduce the pull weight 50 percent.

"It used to be quite a job to pull back a bow with a heavy pull weight. The compound has made that job much easier. It opened the field for people that didn't hunt with a bow."

Compound bows made a big hit in Michigan around 1972-73, and the impact on bow hunting was felt immediately.

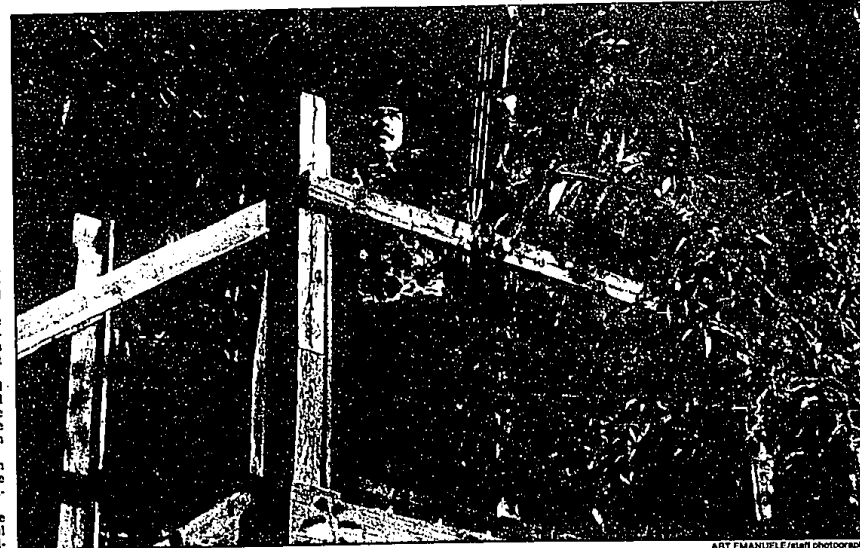
According to statistics of the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, there were 69,540 licensed archery hunters in Michigan in 1970. By 1975 that figure had nearly doubled, jumping to 120,700. The whitetail deer is the animal most Michigan archery hunters seek



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Paul Young of Pinckney checks his shot with Doug Merithew.

ON TARGET



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Doug Merithew, president of the West Bloomfield-based Detroit Archers, displays a more modern bow compared to the ones first used by man which consisted of a branch with a vine tied at both ends.

although some also hunt bear, turkeys, rabbits, squirrels even pheasants and partridge.

Bow fishing is also a popular pastime of archers. In Michigan there are special regulations governing the use of a bow and arrow to fish, but carp, suckers, gar and bow fin are all legal takes.

The Great Lakes Bow Fishing Championships are held annually in Saginaw Bay. Last year a world record was set when 250 two-man teams harvested 72,000 pounds of carp in two days.

THE POPULARITY of archery hunting took another huge leap forward in 1977 when the DNR passed the two-deer law. This law allowed hunters to take one deer with a bow and arrow and one deer with a gun. Before that, hunters could only take one deer, either with a bow and arrow or a gun.

By 1980 the number of licensed archery hunters in Michigan had increased to 204,550. Last year there were 226,970 licensed archers in Michigan, and the state set a national bow record harvesting 57,950 deer.

The archery deer season in Michigan begins annually Oct. 1. The season is 75 days long running initially through Nov. 14. The season takes a two-week rest for firearms deer season, resumes Dec. 1 and continues to Jan. 1.

Doug Merithew, president of the West Bloomfield-based club, the Detroit Archers, will be one of those hunters in the field this year.

"The first half of the season is the perfect time of year to be in the woods," said Merithew. "The weather is warm, the colors are beautiful, and there isn't an army in the woods like it sometimes seems during the firearms season."

"Hunting with a bow you have to get much closer to the game than with a gun. You have to be much more patient. It's a waiting game, and much more challenging (than hunting with a gun) in that respect."

Featherstone agrees. He feels the challenge of bow hunting is the drawing card of the sport. "The bow is a short-range weapon. It's self-limiting, hand-held, hand-drawn and hand-released," said Featherstone.

"It's a challenging sport. It's not so much how far you can shoot but how close you can lure the game in."

"That is an incredible challenge. The national average range of a shot by a successful archery hunter is just 18 yards."

If you're an archery hunter and have yet to bag a deer, don't feel frustrated. The average success rate across the nation is one deer in seven years.

Wonder what the success rate was with a branch bow?