

Gun Hunting

Guide

2023



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Ryan Kilsdonk of rural New London watches as his father, Dan Kilsdonk of Kimberly sights in a Remington 7400 semi-auto rifle in .270 Winchester in preparation for the coming gun deer season.

ROSS BIELEMA

Sighting in doesn't have to be a chore

By **ROSS BIELEMA**
Correspondent

It all comes down to one shot.

It might be a chance at a fat doe for the freezer or the buck that only lived in your dreams until this morning, but that one shot depends on

your preparations before that day. Sighting in your rifle or slug shotgun is a huge part of that prep.

If you are an iron sights hunter, perhaps favoring Grandpa's old lever-action rifle to a bolt action, more power to you. You don't have many options, other than a Lyman or

Williams receiver sight or a simple tweak of the buckhorn elevation "ladder" of the factory rear sight. Keep your shots under 75 yards, just like Granddad did.

Scopes, and their more modern offspring, red dot sights, are the norm for most hunters. If you want a

more precise way to hit your deer or other game, or if your aging eyesight makes iron sights difficult, you need a scope.

I recently helped Ryan Kilsdonk, 32, of rural New London and his father, Dan Kilsdonk, 62, of Kimberly, to get their deer rifles dialed in one



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late October afternoon at a nearby private gun range.

The duo have hunted on Marinette County forest public land near Crivitz for years, spending time in a nearby trailer and sharing time in the woods chasing deer just as more than 500,000 of us will be doing on opening day.

Although Dan's father, Clarence Kilsdonk, gave up deer hunting with them three years ago (he's 85 now), his favorite Remington 7400 semi-auto .270 Winchester will be Dan's gun this season. And Dan has an identical gun of his own that now sports a new gray laminated stock for his backup weapon. The gunsmith who installed the new stock also put on a new scope.

Ryan was dialing in a Rock River Arms AR-10 in .308, a mild-shooting semi-auto that his wife, Megan Kilsdonk, enjoys hunting deer with.

Regardless of the type of rifle or shotgun you are sighting in, you need some large targets (if you can't see where your shots are hitting, you are wasting ammo), a sturdy bench, some sort of shooting rest (home-made or store-bought) and a place to shoot at least 100 yards. A spotting scope or binoculars is handy if you don't want to walk to the target every few shots (personally, I need the exercise). Magic markers or target pasters are handy to keep track of your shots on paper. A small notebook and pen help you keep track of what you've done to each gun's sights or scope.

You don't need an expensive portable shooting rest to dial in. A bunch of sandbags or bean bags work great. A duffel bag of clothes or some old pillows work, too.

If you have a bolt-action rifle, sighting in can be as simple as firing three shots. First, remove the bolt (normally there's a bolt release somewhere on the rifle). Get your gun locked into the rest or sandbags, look down the bore and then adjust your new scope with windage and elevation clicks until the crosshairs are lined up on the target exactly where the bore is pointed.

Your first shot should be on the target at 25 yards. If not, re-check your base and scope screws. If they are loose, tighten them (a bit of removable Lock-Tite is always a good idea on base and scope screws). Move the target to 100 yards and see where the next shot hits. Once again, with the crosshairs locked on the shot, turn the crosshairs (windage and elevation as needed) so they are now resting on that shot. Your final shot at the bullseye should be on the money. Fine-tune as needed.

This YouTube video explains how to get a bolt-action rifle sighted in with three shots: www.youtube.com/watch?v=mYhu5wSsOIU.

If you have a pump, semi-auto or single-shot rifle, follow the same instructions minus the bore sighting.

You can buy an electronic bore sighter or a cartridge that emits a laser to do rough bore sighting at close range before firing your 100-yard rounds.

Follow the instructions with your scope or red dot for adjustments. Most scopes use arrows on their turret adjustments to show which way to turn them to move the shot right or up, for example. Keeping track of all your changes is crucial. Some scopes can be re-calibrated to zero when done so the markings won't be confusing later and you can quickly see if something has bumped your turrets.

All rifles shoot bullets in a parabola, or arc. This means that common deer calibers like a .30-06, .270 or .30-30 will strike a bit low at about 25 yards, a bit higher on the way to their sight-in distance and finally settle at 100 yards. Depending on the velocity and weight of a bullet, you can look at a chart or ammo box and determine where the round will hit at various distances.

Common practice is sighting in at 100 yards and allowing the round to strike about 4 inches high so that the shot will hit about dead-on at 200 yards for common deer rounds. But if you are hunting in thicker woods where anything beyond 100 yards is rare, then sight in so you are dead-on at 100 yards. In the event that you see a deer at 200 yards in an open field, for example, just hold a bit higher. I prefer the "dead-on at 100 yards" method to guessing about future long shots. Slug shotguns with even higher parabolas can be sighted in to hit dead-on at 75 yards.

Dan Kilsdonk quickly found out his scope bases were loose. After about an hour of effort, both were struggling to dial in. I noticed they were leaning at awkward angles over the bench, so we used a chair to put them in a more natural position. After that, the bullseyes came easy.

Once your firearm is sighted in, protect your scope and gun in a good padded or even hard case to keep it from getting knocked out of alignment. If you drop your gun in the field, be sure you clean the dirt and snow out of the barrel (never try to shoot it out as you will explode the barrel) and check your scope again with a few test shots.

Good hunting to you all.

White-tailed deer hunting facts and stats

Win some bets with your hunting buddies or at least learn something new with these deer facts:

White-tailed deer:

Scientific name: *Odocoileus virginianus*

U.S. population: (Alaska and Hawaii do not have white-tailed deer): 35.2 million

U.S. population (1890): 300,000

Wisconsin population: 1.66 million

Diet and behavior:

Deer can run up to 30 mph and jump up to 25 feet. They have been known to eat up to 600 different plants. Deer eat 8 pounds of vegetation per day per 100 pounds of weight.

A fawn can stand within 20 minutes of birth, walk within 60 minutes and run within 24 hours.

At 5 days old, it can outrun a human.

Sense of smell: Deer have 300 million olfactory sensors, or about 60 times more than a human.

Lifespan: 2-5 years in the wild; up

to 20 years in captivity.

Wisconsin hunting history

First closed deer hunting: 1851

Game laws published in pamphlet form: 1888

First bag limit for deer: 1897 (2 per season). Resident license \$1; 12,000 sold

Hunter safety program begins: 1967

No deer season fatalities: 1973

Blaze orange clothing required: 1980

Largest Wisconsin deer harvest from 1960 to present: 2000: 615,293 deer (including 212,332 bucks)

Most gun-deer licenses sold: 1999 (694,712)

1930 archery season: 22 Wisconsin counties open and 77,284 tags sold

First archer to shoot a deer: Roy Case, Vilas County (spike buck, 112 pounds field dressed). Shot Dec. 6, 1930; ran 50 feet.

Bow used: 61-inch, 54-pound Osage orange longbow, cedar arrow and Case Kiska broadhead.

— Ross Bielema

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Progressive
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Optics in the crosshairs

Choosing a quality hunting scope takes a little research

By **ROSS BIELEMA**
Correspondent

A few hunters with keen eyesight or a yearning for the nostalgic will be in the woods this fall with an iron-sighted lever-action rifle or maybe even an old slug shotgun with open sights.

The rest of us will be toting a shooting iron with our favorite scope or red dot sight, because we just don't see that well anymore or we just got tired of missing so much.

A scope won't solve all your deer hunting problems, but it will definitely increase your odds of putting a deer down when compared to a notched rear sight and a steel post up front.

There have never been more optics choices than now. A classic metal fixed-power scope is almost a relic today, although there's nothing wrong with a vintage scope in the 2- to 7-power range. Most hunters now opt for a variable-power scope, giv-

ing a choice of magnifications with the twist of a dial.

The new kid in town is the optical sight, typically a red dot display (not to be confused with a laser sight, which is illegal for deer hunting and not a good choice anyway). These ultra-light sights are usually dependent on a battery but are much faster on target and generally have no magnification.

I'll give you my 2 cents on scope selection, from 50-plus years of scope use, selling scopes five years at a Gander Mountain store and editing a Krause Publications book "Sporting Optics" with Wayne Van Zwooll.

He and I share one thought that can't be overstated: You will almost never need a scope with more than 9 power, but you are more likely to miss with too much magnification, even when hunting out West.

Benchresting prairie dogs aside, you'll find a 2-7 or 3-9 power scope more than adequate for Wisconsin deer as far as you can see one. I

much prefer a 1-4 or 1.5-4.5 scope any day, as you have a brighter and wider field of view at low power.

If you have a scope cranked to say 9 power and a deer shows up at close range, you will waste precious seconds trying to find him in the scope or cranking it lower. Instead, keep it set at the lowest magnification for fast shots. A scope is merely an aiming point and you will not be any more accurate at 9 power than 3 power. Hunters have a hard time understanding this.

Here's Van Zwooll on the topic: <https://gundigest.com/gun-reviews/wayne-van-zwooll-get-the-right-scope-for-the-right-rifle>.

Don't skimp on a scope. The biggest problem with cheap scopes is they look the same on the outside as the good ones, but when it comes to adjustment and holding zero, the \$50 scope usually fails. Leupold, Weaver and Eotech are still made in America, and I also like the higher-end Bushnells. Most Burris scopes

are now made in the Philippines, but they have a high-end model that uses Japanese components that is assembled in the United States. Wisconsin-based Vortex has one high-end model made here, but most of their scopes are made in China or the Philippines.

You will waste time, ammo, effort and much frustration on a cheap scope, so plan on spending \$150 to \$500 on a decent one. More money means better light-gathering ability (if you are on a \$10,000 elk hunt and need to make a shot on a trophy bull in fading light, you'll be glad you bought a premium scope).

Why do some scopes cost so much? Most basic scopes are waterproof and nitrogen filled to make them fogproof, but the big money goes into the cost of the glass and coatings. These coatings allow more light transmission, so, in theory, a \$1,000 scope will be brighter and clearer than a \$100 one. There is a point of diminishing returns; how-

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ever, and I've never spent more than \$300 on a scope.

Red dots and other optical sights are the latest sighting tools. Most depend on batteries and in cold Wisconsin weather, you will find they tend to fail when you need them most. Carry spare batteries in a warm pocket. Some red dots combine batteries, fiber optics and tritium crosshairs for a fail-safe combo that won't leave you hunting blind.

Great brands include Trijicon, Aimpoint, EOTech, Bushnell, Leupold and TruGlo.

Handgun shooters are switching over to optical sights in droves, as these red dots are getting smaller and smaller. Brands like Sig Sauer, Holosun, Vortex and Bushnell who make pistol red dots are turning out some featherweight versions for rifles, too. Plan to spend \$100 to \$500 on a high-quality dot sight. Those with "shake on" technology (the sight detects movement and turns itself on) help you extend battery life to years. Some versions are designed to stay on for months or longer on a single set of batteries.

I look for a red dot that allows battery replacement without removing the sight from the gun.

Not all do that.

Adjustments are similar to those of a scope, with both windage and elevation clicks.

The military has been using optical sights for decades now and they are proven in battle as the fastest on-target system out there. You can do almost as well with a low-power scope. Some scopes of course use batteries to make the crosshairs glow, which is perfect during early morning and dusk when the deer are moving. Again, bring extra batteries, although a scope will allow you to see the crosshairs even with dead batteries.

Be sure to do some research to determine if the red dot sight you like will stand up to your rifle's recoil. Contact the manufacturer if you have doubts.

Some hunters love "see through" scope mounts so they can "co-witness" their iron sights with their scope by looking under the scope. Most gunsmiths cringe as they install these beasts. You want to mount your scope or red dot as close to the bore as possible (check bolt clearance with your scope rings before tightening everything down), so see-through mounts are generally a no-no for serious hunters.

You are either going to use a scope or open sights, not both. Some AR-15 rifle sights mount above the scope to co-witness, and that's a different story.

What scope or red dot does your favorite deer rifle carry? Drop me an e-mail and tell me why you love that choice. Better yet, send me a picture of the deer you shot with it.



Choosing a scope or red dot for deer hunting can seem like a daunting task, but spend enough to get a reliable brand that will hold zero after sighting in. Freelance writer Ross Bielema favors low-power scopes that offer a brighter and wider field of view, light weight and speed on target. Red dots generally offer no magnification but are the fastest way to drop a deer.

ROSS BIELEMA

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