

Ask Bowhunter

Q My first elk hunt is coming up, and I'm wondering about using facepaint or a facemask. I see a lot of debate, and some ridicule of those who use facepaint. What's your take?



I removed my facepaint for this photo, but my cameraman, Bob Theim, did not. He disappears in the shade, while my face shines brightly in the sunlight.

GEAR

SPECIAL

A WELL, YOU CAN ALWAYS FIND someone shallow enough to ridicule others, but that doesn't change the value of covering your bare face and hands. Successful bowhunting is about getting close to game without attracting attention. Occasionally an animal can look right at you without detecting a threat, and some bowhunters take that as license to avoid covering their face and hands. Trouble is, the very next animal to take a close look might pick you off and ruin your day.

We strive to resemble natural habitat — trees, brush, or a stump — and not look like a predator. If you've hunted from treestands for whitetails, you know it's smart to avoid eye contact with a passing doe. Stare into her eyes, and you look like a predator with bad intentions. It's best to look away until she walks off. Which vision do you think would look more threatening, a dull, totally camouflaged form in a tree, or a bare, shiny face with bright, penetrating eyes?

In ground blinds, it doesn't make much sense to wear black so you can melt into the darkness if your face is shining like a beacon. Or your bare bow hand gets close to the window as you come to full draw. Yes, a blind can make up for mistakes at times, but why take a chance that the next animal will pick you off?

However, it's when you're hunting on the ground, in your case for elk, that facepaint or a facemask is most valuable. Anything that *can* catch the eye of an elk, *will* catch the eye of an elk. If you're in dark timber, set up and trying to call in a bull, I guarantee your bare face increases your risk of being

spotted. Even a bare hand waving a bugle tube or cow call around can easily catch the eye of a nervous bull elk, even before he's close. Certainly, when you're sneaking across open prairie, face camo may not help much. But once you're tucked into sagebrush, waiting for a bull or muley buck to stand up, you'll be glad you don't have a shiny face.

Elk hunts demand so much effort and preparation, why take the chance a bare face or hand could ruin your one opportunity? Eliminating that risk is easy and economical. The right facepaint stays on when you sweat, and comes off easily when the hunt is over. I use CarboMask, because it dries on and comes off with just water. I prefer facepaint because it doesn't change my anchor or obstruct my peripheral vision or my vision at full draw, it's cooler than a facemask, and I hear better without a facemask. If you're an eyeglass wearer, you know a facemask can make your glasses fog up. Facepaint won't do that. In a treestand or a ground blind, when it's cold, I will wear a facemask. But if it's warm, or I'm on the move, I stick with facepaint. I will put facepaint on my hands in hot weather, but I usually opt for thin gloves instead.

One other major factor must be considered — shade. Nothing makes bare skin shine like a ray of sunlight, and any experienced elk hunter knows you avoid sunlight like a vampire. Deep, dark shade is your friend.

Make no mistake, getting close to big game animals is all about avoiding conspicuous movement, and there's nothing inconspicuous about bare human skin in the woods. Ignore the tough talkers and cover up — just to be safe. <<<