

JUDGING DISTANCE

How's your range estimating ability?

Judging distances may be an instinctive or 3-D archer's most important task. No matter how well you shoot you need to know the distance to hit your mark. Even with today's fast shooting bows we only have a few yards error between our perfect hit and a marginal one. We owe it to ourselves, as well as the animals we hunt, to work on our range estimation.

Carrying a rangefinder is not enough. There are times when you cannot use it, an animal comes in unexpectedly you move and suddenly he's on alert, probably not a good idea to risk the movement to range him. If you are confident in your range estimation you won't have to risk anything. Range estimation is a lot like you're shooting, in "that" you have a maximum effective range. Once you know your effective shooting range learn to estimate yardage to that distance, you can work on farther distances later. If you can be within three yards plus or minus, out to forty yards you will be a much more successful hunter. With better ranging comes more confidence, and that always means better shooting. It's ironic, but to improve your ranging skills you need some type of a ranging device. It does you no good to guess distances if you have no way of knowing if you are right or wrong.

Judging distances on flat ground is not too hard once you practice for a while. The most common approach is to move your eyes in ten or twenty yard increments to the target. Pick a spot ten yards away from you then pick a spot ten yards from that and so on. Just be careful not to judge distances by how far your quarry looks to be. From shooting 3-D tournaments I've learned the size of an animal can throw your estimations off unless you stick to the ten or twenty yard routine. You might shoot two or three deer targets in a row at forty yards then they throw an elk up in front of you; he looks to be the same distance as the last three deer you've shot at. You shoot and you miss low. How could you be off so far? The size of the deer vs. the size of the elk, although the elk looks to be the same distance it's really his greater size that makes him look so close. Rule of thumb, smaller targets look farther away and larger targets look closer than they are. Since most of us practice shooting at deer size targets we need to remember this when heading into the woods.

Up or down hill shots have perplexed many archers. You look at an animal and think he's 35 yards away and then miss low or high. Again how could you be so far off? For example, suppose you were twenty yards up in a tree stand and a deer is directly beneath you, so he is twenty yards from you but your arrow will need to cover only one yard to reach him. You shoot him as if he were only one yard away. If he were ten yards out from the base of your tree you would shoot him for ten yards although he looks and actually is farther from you. Gravity has the same effect on an arrow whether it is flying across flat ground, up or down a hill. One tip on shooting down hill if there are trees, look to see which tree he is standing by, then follow it up level with your vantage point and range the tree. This is also hard to do with nothing between you and the tree but it is better than trying to guess yardage down hill.

Judging distances across ravines with no terra firma between you takes practice then more practice. It can be done but there are no shortcuts. This is when taking consideration of the size of the animal is most important. A great place to practice your ranging is at your local 3-D shoots. You will be

able to shoot at numerous animals of various sizes at different yardages. Most of the shoots try to mix they're shot selection so your not shooting on flat ground each shot. If you are not shooting for competition most of the smaller tournaments will let you take a rangefinder on the course with you. Be sure to ask when you sign up and pay your shooting fees. By taking a rangefinder with you you'll be able to guess how far the shot is, then check yourself. When doing this please be courteous and don't say the yardage out loud. Remember there are other people around who don't want to hear what the yardage is or may be competing.