

WILLIAM ALOYSIUS YEAGER



**" I LOVE TO HUNT, I LOVE THE OUTDOORS,
BUT AT THE SAME TIME, IT'S A BUSINESS."**

BY CATHY MCGILL, DOUG MCGILL, VINNY GRILLO, JOE ADAMO

William Aloysius Yeager III, known by most as Gimpy, is truly a man of the wilderness. His crazed, tough and knowledgeable outlook of frontier life makes him interesting, entertaining, and respected by all who know him. We learned from talking with Gimpy that he has hunted, fished and trapped since he was eight years old. He is now a guide and outfitter and guides for hunting, fishing, photography and sight-seeing. not to push them too hard. They have to be able to go up and down a mountain a couple times a

"Personally I take twenty hunters for deer season and twenty for elk, mostly men, because some come to get away from their wives. I'd say 50 percent come back every year. A lot of the hunters don't come back because it's a once in a lifetime experience and they can't afford it. But the others, that's all they live for all year, just to go hunting.

"I get hunters from New York, Texas, California, and other places. Some of them aren't used to the altitude, so I have to be careful

day, and that's the most critical part. You know, you've got to feel your hunters out.

"The preparation of the camp is the hardest part. First I have to lease the land and set up camp. I lease 25,000 acres. I need tents, firewood, 4-wheel drive vehicles, horses and finally guides and a cook. After it's all set, the enjoyable work begins.

"The guides and I get up about 3:00 A.M. and the hunters get up at 4:00. Then after breakfast, we leave camp to reach various points within the lease and get in position before daybreak. The deer and elk are moving and feeding at either end of the day (weather permitting), and the hunting is slow about midday. A lot of time is spent getting the kills back to camp. With the elk we sometimes have to skin and quarter it and carry it to the road. If it is within reasonable walking distance, we bring it back in a truck. Otherwise they have to be packed out with horses. Moving a 600-1000 lb. animal with as little dirt and bruising as possible is no small matter. Once the kills are in camp, they are hung and skinned, if this hasn't been done before quartering. We hunt until the light is gone then return to camp for supper and finally sleep.

"It's really rewarding after a year of corresponding and talking to prospective clients to see the camp rise out of a meadow and the hunters filling out their licenses. The physical labor required by such an operation lasts but two months of the year then it takes the better part of a year to get a group of hunters together for the following fall hunts.

"I've never had any guys that shoot too far or anything like that. A lot of these guys from the East have never seen a deer from further than 100 feet. If they shoot further than a football field it'll go right on the turnpike or something worse. I had a friend from New York who had shot all kinds of things, but when I showed him an elk only 200 yards away he missed it twice.

"The cooking is also very important to the camp. This is done by Diana, Gimpy's wife. She loves it and works as hard as anyone. She chops firewood, hauls hay, plus handles all correspondence. Diana used to butcher all the meat that came into camp, but that got too hectic. Now coming to camp almost guarantees you either a deer or an elk. The last three years have been the best anywhere.

Gimpy explains further, "I had a 100 percent kill in '76 and a 100 percent in '77 and last year I had 95 percent kill with 65 hunters. It costs \$500 to hunt deer for five days and \$800 to hunt elk. During combination which is eleven days it costs \$1,100. As you can see it's expensive, but you're sure to get what you came for. The hunters pay 50 percent deposit for the booking, and after the first of June, if something happens where they

can't make the hunt, they'll get their money back. After that it is forfeited because I lose the chance of filling up their spot with another hunter. The other outfitters are usually filled up.



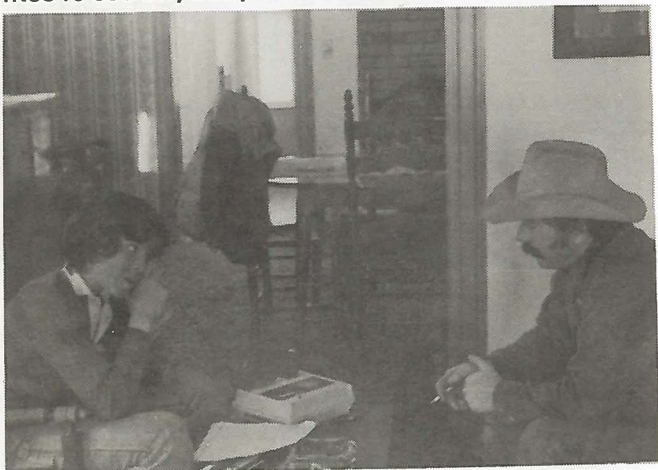
FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: BOB ALVAREZ, GUY STEES, DOYLE CAPRA, WILLIAM YEAGER, STEVE ROSSI, MITCH ROSSI

"It may seem that being a guide and outfitter would have excellent pay, but there are a lot of expenses. I have to pay for all the tents, horses and saddles, the four-wheel drive vehicles and gas, and land leasing. I tear up at least one vehicle a year. I lease 5 to 10 horses for the hunting season. So I have to keep putting money into the business, to keep it going."

"Like any business, headaches go with it. The only bad part about the camp is taking it all down. There's almost always snow. Now that all the fun is over you've got to pull everything out. Just being in the woods on a day like today (a beautiful fall day) and being here on nights like this past week, it makes it all worthwhile.

"One thing I like to see is when it gets cold. You get enough moisture and frost on the leaves so that you can go through the woods and be fairly quiet, like when you go bow hunting, you have to be quiet also. I used to bow hunt back East in Vermont, I haven't gotten back into it here. I shot a buck one time right through the heart. He ran about two miles and there was blood all over. When, I finally found him he was laying there screaming. It really turned me off, because I didn't like to see him suffer so much. There is nothing wrong with bow hunting if it's done right. For a lot of guys 75 percent of the hunting is done in the morning and at night. A lot of guys that hunt don't know how to track and shoot around dusk. They seldom go and find it unless it dropped right there on the spot, which hardly ever happens with a bow. So by the time

they return the blood's dried and the tracks are washed over by the other game. There is no snow that time of year, so it's just wasted game. Any outfitter's main concern is wasted game. Nobody likes to see anybody be wasteful.



VINNY TALKS WITH GIMPY

"I usually don't guide for bow hunters because bow hunters are better off by themselves. If there were two hunters that would be too much noise. I'd only do it on a drop-camp basis. That's where I take someone in and have camp all set up and pick them up in two or three days."

Stealthy, knowledgeable hunting is essential in the woods. Gimpy told us about some important hunting tactics. "In the morning for the first two or three hours it's just still hunting. After that you start moving around and finding out where the game is. By this time they've already been shot at a few times. They usually move into the black timber, so you work the black timber to drive the elk down to the hunters. The guides do the driving while the hunters take a post and wait for the elk to come by."

Hunting is a seasonal sport, yet for the guide or outfitter there is more to the business than just the well-known fall hunting. Gimpy has another camp where he spends time with fishermen and photography enthusiasts.

"I have two months of actual pack trips where I take people up in Mt. Zirkel to fish and photograph. I never know when I can set up my summer camp because it all depends on the winter. A lot of the times I can't get in there. Like last year I tried to get up there in the middle of July, and I could only get about three quarters of the way up, there was still so much snow. That cuts the season short, so by the time I set up camp, I have to tear it down and go set up hunting camp."

Like most experienced hunters Gimpy has many a fantastic tale to tell about exciting adventures while stalking game. "I have a friend, Chuck Griffin, that is the top lion and bear hunter in the state. I do an awful lot of lion and bear hunting with him. Last year he got 35 bears and

19 lions. We hunt in the Paonia National Forest near Montrose, Ring City, Rangely and all over. There are quite a few bear. Chuck has dogs which he breeds himself. He takes 15 dogs out at a time. They do most of the work, run the bear or lion for up to 25 miles. Sometimes the hunters have to run to follow the dogs until they finally tree the animal. Then the hunter shoots it. There is not much sport in it, but it's fun. Anyway, Chuck has a lead dog named Thunder that he's been offered \$15,000 for. He puts the dog on the hood of his truck and puts a big quilt over him. The dog has a bolt on his collar that bolts him to the truck top. Chuck drives down old logging roads, and the dog picks up the scent of a cold track from the hood of the truck. When he does this we stop and turn the dog loose and off we go. It's pretty exciting going through the woods after a bear with the dogs barking."

With all the trouble and activity of a hunting expedition many who reap the end product have difficulty in understanding the essence of what they have obtained.

"If the meat is going to be gamey it's gamey. A lot of these old-timers used to let their meat hang for three or four weeks until it turned green on the outside. So I let mine hang for two or three days. I also bone my elk because bone has a lot of gamey stuff in the marrow that goes into the meat. It's not the cooking that matters, it's the aging process and how you butcher it. Sometimes you get a big ole bull and it doesn't make a difference what you do it's just gonna taste gamey. The older and the bigger they are, the gamier they are. Your best eatin' is the young bulls, cows, and calves. The older bulls just seem to be real tough. You get an old bull that's been rutting and running around, and there ain't nothing you can do except make hamburger out of him."



THE HEAD OF A NICE 6 POINT

Animal mating is important for the guide hunter to understand. There might be a certain amount of knowledge learned from their habits.

"During heavy rutting you can sometimes bugle in a bull. I've had them smash down trees and come running out, foaming at the mouth. They reach down into the dirt and rip sod out of the ground.

"A lot of people think the cold weather brings them into the rut, but it's not that. It's the lack of sunlight during the days. The days start getting shorter and it sets off their glands in their eyes. It's a natural thing."

All of us have heard tall tales from fishermen. Hunters tell them too.

"I'll tell you a funny story, when I freaked out one guy. Last year I had a hunter who shot a five point bull and was really happy and jumping around. It was snowing and really cold. I said, 'You know what you have to do now, don't you? Since you killed your first elk?' 'What's that?' he said, 'I don't know.' Well, I picked that liver up, took a big bite out of it. It was all gooey and blood ran down my neck. That guy just freaked and ran all the way back to camp. Back at camp he said, 'That guy is nuts, I'm never going back there again. He's sitting up there eating the whole liver raw.'

"Sometimes we make them take the heart out when it's still pumping and bite the tip off. Also we cut off their shirt tails. That's an old tradition. I've got a box of them. They never throw their shirts away. They go back home and someone says, 'What happened to your shirt?' 'That nut.' They're so happy you could do anything to them anyway.



DOUG CHATS WITH GIMPY

Being an outfitter is very gratifying. "Like I say if you're not an outfitter, and you hunt as much as I do, you go get a license and then shoot your elk. Hunting season is all over after that. There's no more to do; that's it! When you're



THIS YEAR'S CAMP

guiding and outfitting you're out all the time, doing everything but shooting. You're putting the hunter right on the game, showing them where it is, showing them how to get it. All the hunter does is pull the trigger. You're the one who is actually killing it, but he's pulling the trigger, and you're doing everything else. So I still get the same satisfaction. It's different from going out the first day and shooting an elk and then having the thrill all over. I get satisfaction out of filling out the hunters and watching them get something. The joy that they get out of a successful hunt, and just being out in the woods is good enough for me."

Gimpy has a feel for hunting and the wilderness that we have all felt in our sensitive moments. "It shouldn't make any difference on the trophy, it's the hunt that makes the trophy. Where you go, the birds and everything in the woods go together. You stalk the game till you knock the animal out. You may want the game mounted. Although the kill is not a Boone and Crockett, it's something he can remember for the rest of his life, how you got him and the way you walked through the woods. You remember every tree, every rock, everything for the rest of your life. That's what makes the hunt! It's not just the kill and size of the animal, but the moments of being there."



GIMPY'S CAMP AT MT. ZIRKEL