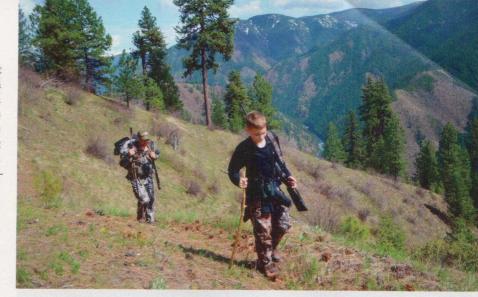
pines above I'm thinking you just can't count on anything. You can even get run over by a Jeep in your kitchen. But you can have a say in how you take it. Greg is rolling with the punches. He has just the right level of realistic optimism to adjust and still take his boy on a father-and-son hunt in the wilderness—something neither will ever forget.

I stop asking about Jeeps in the kitchen when we notice wolf tracks in mud on the trail. We have wolf tags so we're awfully interested. As Idaho has struggled to come up with a strategy to control the introduced wolf population, they've made it easier to get tags and have lengthened the season.

"The wolves cleaned the elk almost entirely out," Arby says as he kneels down for a closer look at the tracks. "In elk season there used to be a dozen elk camps back along the trail we rode in on. All filled with hunters, too. Now maybe a few guys come out just to get away. The elk are mostly gone. The mule deer are way down too."

The elk, he then explains, used to be on top. He points to far-off grassy parks. Up there in the open country big packs of wolves had an easy time encircling and killing elk. So the elk that survived learned



to stay in densely wooded, rough terrain in the middle of the mountainsides. A few survive that way today, Arby says. Now since the elk herd crashed the wolves have dispersed. Some are still here, of course, but their packs are smaller as their prey base is a puny percentage of what it was. The others are off reducing herds elsewhere. These changes make me wonder if the elk can make a comeback and find a better balance with their predators, both four-legged and two-legged.

No doubt the ecosystem here was

thrown out of the balance it found without wolves. Now the state is struggling to find a new balance that still includes a healthy elk population and wolves. Idaho, being a mostly rural and therefore sensible state, sees hunters as an economical and natural part of that balance. This is important, as some would like to cut humans right out of the ecosystem. They don't think humans belong, even though people have always hunted. Even this big, rough country is shaped by everything we do—or, perhaps, don't do.