

To GRANDMOTHER'S HOUSE WE GO

by Lee Lamb

*Over the river and through the woods,
To grandmother's house we go;
The horse knows the way to carry the sleigh,
Through the white and drifted snow, O!*

Maybe you've heard this old carol, or even sung it a time or two. You'll probably never hear an elk bugling the tune, but every fall they act out their own version.

GRANDMA KNOWS BEST

When snow piles deep in the mountains and temperatures nose-dive, cows, calves and young bulls herd up and hit the trail. Together they migrate down, down, down, across rivers and through woods. And almost always, they follow in the footsteps of a wise old female called the lead cow. Like the horse in the carol, this grandmother of the group knows the way. That's because she's heading to a place she's called home every snowy season of her life: winter range.

SWEET & LOW

Winter range stretches across the valleys and low foothills, where the air is warmer and the snow shallower. Dried grasses usually poke above the snow here. If not, elk use their strong legs and sharp hooves to paw away the white stuff, or munch on shrubs instead.

Slopes that face south get the most sunshine in winter. Snow melts fastest there, leaving grasses uncovered and offering the warmest daytime spots. Elk like to lounge on these slopes, soaking up rays and storing the warmth in their thick, hollow hairs for the long night ahead.

WHAT ABOUT THE BIG BOYS?

Mature bulls may not migrate at all in winter. If they do, they probably won't go far. Instead they hang out in small bands higher up. Being a third bigger than cows helps them cope with deep snow and cold. And toughing it out in the high-country gives bulls a better chance of dodging hunters and predators.

In the spring, the rest head back to the mountains. Then they all follow the melting snow uphill, gobbling the rich new greens and slowly making their way to their summer homes among the peaks.

CAN YOU FIND THE HIDDEN OBJECTS?

SNOWY MOUNTAIN SUMMIT

SNOWFLAKES (6)

GRANDMA'S HOUSE

LEAD COW

SUN



