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Treatmonk's Guide to Rangers in Pathfinder



Rangers were a class that struggled to find its place in 3rd Edition Dungeons and Dragons. In 3.0 the Ranger was a one level class, the quick way to give your rogue two weapon fighting. In 3.5 the Ranger gathered a bit of dignity, but still tended to have difficulty finding a place where he excelled. Yes, he was sneaky, and could shoot a bow, and spot things, but so could a Fighter/Rogue, and the Fighter/Rogue was the better combatant. The Ranger's spells weren't very good, his animal companion was a complete waste, and even Druids were better trackers.

However, come Pathfinder the Ranger has something exciting, actual options to be effective. The new Ranger is an effective melee combatant, an effective archer, unchallenged as the best tracker in any party, and finally can put aside his nostalgia for 1st and 2nd edition.

The Builds: A Pathfinder Ranger has two mechanical options, the "archery" path and the "Two weapon fighting" path, but when it comes to optimization, these actually aren't your best build-theme options. I think from an optimization standpoint there are two viable Ranger Styles if you aren't multiclassing, and neither are two weapon fighters. I will also suggest what to do if you are interested in a Two Weapon Fighting build, which in a nutshell, is don't be a straight Ranger.

The Guide to the Guide: In this Guide we will be discussing a lot of options, because Rangers have many choices. Therefore, in order to provide my advice on these

choices, I'll be Color-coding and rating them. I will also color coat the Ranger abilities, just so you know which ones are great, good, or just flavoring.

ONE STAR * This is a choice I don't recommend - keep clear

TWO STARS ** This option is good, but not great

THREE STARS *** I recommend this option

FOUR STARS **** I highly recommend this option - practically a "must have"

Simple enough, like a movie review. So lets move into the Ranger skills and abilities:

Favored Enemy *:** Now a +2 bonus right from 1st level, also, now gives a bonus to hit (in addition to damage and a few skills). Favored enemy is tougher than ever, but, unfortunately, as always, it is circumstantial. It's very hard to pick what your favored enemy will be, because what you are going to be fighting all the time really depends on the campaign. If you have no idea, then these are the favored enemies I think are pretty safe bets: Humanoid (human), Undead, Outsider (evil), Magical Beast. These are all pretty common enemies, but if your DM will give you a suggestion, take it.

Track **: WOW, Rangers are once again the best trackers in the game. Add half your level to your survival for your tracking rolls, which means, really, nobody else in your party needs even bother taking survival.

Wild Empathy **: Diplomacy for animals. The great thing is you get this (basically maxed out) for free, the bad thing is that it is based on CHA (a dump stat). Nevertheless, it is handy to have, and a great ability to use in conjunction with Charm Animal, allowing you to move the animal from your worst enemy, to your loving companion forever.

Combat Style **:** 5 bonus feats over 18 levels, what's not to like? Much improved in that you can actually CHOOSE which feat to take, in addition, as always, you can avoid prerequisites, which means a Ranger with a moderate Dex score is still quite viable.

Endurance *: The Endurance feat as a bonus feat, yippee. This is the feat that nobody takes unless it's given, but nevertheless, I'll take it when it's given.

Favored Terrain **: A new ability for Rangers (we saw similar abilities in 3.5 Prestige Classes), you get this at 3rd level, and over your career you will get a total of 5. The bonus begins at +2, and like Favored Enemy, increases with each additional favored terrain. The bonus isn't to anything too impressive, but it does add to initiative (which is nice), and some other skills. Rangers leave no trail in favored terrain, but can still be tracked by scent we assume, so Pass Without Trace is still going to be a good spell.

Hunter's Bond *:** Now the Ranger gets a choice whether he wants an animal companion, or the ability to share his favored enemies with his allies. Here's the quick rundown for you. The bond with the companions gives 1/2 his favored enemy bonus against a single target only, as a move action, for as many rounds as his wisdom modifier (so likely 2 rounds). Yuck. The other is to get an animal companion far improved from Rangers of 3.5 (now it's your full level -3 advancement). Get the animal companion. I know, animal companions for Rangers have always sucked before. Not anymore, and the alternative really does suck. **Get the animal companion every time.**

Woodland Stride **: Move through overgrown terrain (as long as it is natural) at full speed. Very, very circumstantial, but hey, I'll take it. A good way to lose pursuers as well.

Swift Tracker **: Track at higher speeds. If you use track a lot, this is going to be quite helpful, especially if you are tracking something that specifically is trying to get away from you.

Evasion *:** A wonderful ability to have. You have to wait until 9th level, but a very handy ability to have. Enemy wizards love to blast.

Quarry *: Provides a small attack bonus and automatic critical confirming to one enemy per day (at 11th level). If he tries to run, god help him, because you can track him in your sleep. Not a huge ability, but basically an offensive output buff, which is always nice, however, it takes a standard action to activate, which means that quite often, this simply will not pay off in the long run. If your enemy attempts fleeing, slap this on, otherwise, not worth it most of the time.

Camouflage **: Granted at 12th level, this is basically Hide-In-Plain-Sight for all your favored terrains. Obviously this will be trumped when you get the real hide in plain sight, but until then, hide in plain sight is a nice ability to have.

Improved Evasion *:** Wade into fireballs and cones of cold without concern. Even a failed save means you will take reduced damage. If you happen to have Resist Energy up, you are all but immune to wizard blasting.

Hide in Plain Sight *:** Not granted until 17th level, Hide in Plain Sight means you can use stealth anywhere at any time. In an open field in daylight with a horde of guards specifically staring at you? No problem, goodbye.

Improved Quarry *:** You can now use your Quarry ability as a free action, which suddenly makes this ability quite a bit more useful. Also, his bonuses double, and he only has to wait 10 minutes between new quarries, which means probably one quarry for every combat.

Master Hunter **:** In most campaigns you will never see this ability, and in the few campaigns you do, you won't see it until the end. Yes, it's a great ability, as capstone abilities often are, but they are level 20 abilities for a Reason, to give you something you can always look forward to. Once you get this, there's nothing left.

Spells *:** For anybody who gets these, this is a big advantage. Naturally, if you multiclass, you should expect to give up the lion's share of this advantage. You can live without, but, when you do have it, you'll be glad for it. I have a detailed spell section after the builds.

Recommended Skills:

Handle Animal *:** If you get an animal companion, and as mentioned before, you should, handle animal is very necessary for proper training. Furthermore a Ranger who doesn't have Handle Animal simply can't be a Ranger anymore, sorry.

Intimidate **: Not 100% necessary, and based off a dump stat, but you don't have a lot of skills allowing you any advantage when interacting with humanoids, so you may find this useful for that. You can live without it, but nice to have.

Knowledge (nature) *:** Of the knowledge's you have, this will be the most useful. Lots of creatures are identified through the Knowledge (nature) skill. **Knowledge (Dungeoneering)** should be considered as a secondary option of you have the room.

Perception **:** Simply the most used skill in the game period. Also, what kind of scout doesn't have perception? This is absolutely the most useful skill, the most iconic skill, and your #1 priority. No Ranger should not have perception, are we clear?

Ride **: This is a definite maybe. If you plan on having your Ranger mounted (which is a viable option), then this is necessary, otherwise, it may be occasionally handy, but can be lived without, or with just a couple levels.

Stealth **:** I would max this out every time. Scouting requires you to be sneaky, so you have this as a class skill for a reason.

Survival **:** You use this for tracking, and you are a Ranger. It's also used for survival in the wilderness, and you are a Ranger. A must have.

Climb **: I would never max this out, but taking 1 rank at level 1 will give you a decent chance at modest climbing, a cheap investment for something that may come in handy

Swim **: I would never max this out, but like climb, 1 rank is a good investment. It will give you the ability to swim decently, which normally will be all you need.

Favored Class Bonus: For the archery build, you are probably OK with the extra skill point, but for any build entering melee, you probably want the extra HP.

Animal Companion Choices: Your bond should be an animal companion, here are your choices:

Badger **: Not a terrible combat option, gets Rage for 6 rounds/day. Doesn't have a great Str score, so until you get to 7th level, it will have a pretty light hit. Does get both burrow and climb which can be handy. Also has scent and low light vision, also both handy.

Bird **: The obvious advantage here is the ability to fly. The cost is the ability to fight. Birds are small, so large enough to threaten, which means large enough to flank, and they get 3 attacks per round, so they aren't entirely useless in combat, but without animal growth, you will likely find their hits to be pretty unimpressive. They will eventually have a high enough Str to qualify for Power Attack, this is a must have.

Camel *: Clearly a mount option for specific types of campaigns. Generally a worse choice than a horse, so even in a desert campaign, I would normally choose the latter.

Cheetah/leopard **:** Not any faster than a horse or camel, and the damage is poor. However, has a great Dex which means that you can get weapon finesse for a nice chance to hit. Also the sprint ability gives it short range bursts of speed that will be impressive. Agile maneuvers will allow you to use the dex modifier towards combat maneuvers, and these get a trip attack with a successful bite attack. Specifically an archer might find that handy to keep the enemies at distance. Gets scent as well, which is handy to have.

Dire rat: There aren't stats for the dire rat in the base book because Dire Rats appear to not be an option for Druids. I wouldn't expect much more than a potential disease attack (which tend not to be to great), so probably no big loss.

Dog *: One obvious advantage is that a dog is going to be welcome in pretty much any city, but otherwise this is purely a weaker option than the Cheetah or Leopard.

Horse *:** If you plan to be a mounted Ranger, this is likely your best choice. Horses are actually pretty tough in combat with decent STR scores and large size. At 7th level it

will become war trained as well. The horse also has scent, making it just as good at tracking by scent as a dog. Horses, like dogs, are going to be welcome in any city. A good choice.

Pony *: Pretty much worse than the horse in almost every way. If you are small size, you may need a smaller mount, in which case this is an understandable choice, otherwise, there is no reason to go this route.

Shark: Aquatic campaigns only, in an aquatic campaign, it's really the only choice, in a non-aquatic campaign, it's a non-choice.

Snake, constrictor *:** The point of this guy is to grab and constrict, something he won't be doing on medium foes until 7th level, after that, he's OK at it. Note that the snake is also a swimmer, giving you that versatility as well. Snakes get the scent ability too.

Snake, viper *: Like the constrictor, but give up all the combat stuff for a poison bite, which won't cease to let you down. If you want a snake, go for the big one.

Wolf *:** Very iconic choice, and very competitive with the Cheetah/Leopard. Stats are very similar and both have the tripping ability. Both advance similarly at 7th level as well. The Wolf does not have the sprinting ability, and it uses the single attack rather than the triple attack, so in the end, probably slightly weaker.

Deadly Aim except that it is normally better to use deadly aim than not to. This can change if either: Your base damage before deadly aim happens to be very high (eg. you are fighting a favored foe), or your to hit number is very high. Always apply Deadly Aim "to hit" modifiers before deciding whether to apply Rapid Shot.

Archery Basics:

As a Ranger, expect that using a Bow is very often going to be part of your character. It may be your main focus, or it may be just one aspect of the whole. However, some changes have occurred to archery in Pathfinder (mainly for the good), but sometimes it's hard to know which feats you should be applying to which shots.

Vital Strike: If you want to play hit and run, this is really your only archery option to increase your damage. Make a full move, fire with Vital shot, do more damage. Period. Vital Shot is NOT for full attacks, and when you can get a full attack, it is almost always better to take it than to use this feat.

Rapid Shot: Rapid shot is available right at level 2 with an Archery style, and level 2 is when you get the biggest bang for your buck. Essentially you double your arrow output for a -2 on each arrow. When do you want to use Rapid Shot? If Rapid Shot or firing a single arrow are your choices - then the only time that the single arrow is better is if you need to roll an 18 to hit before adding Rapid Shot (so RS brings you to an even 20 to hit). Any other time, rapid shot is the better choice.

Manyshot: Absolutely a must have for Rangers, gives you an extra arrow without any minus like Manyshot. Always better than firing a single arrow. If you have Manyshot and Rapid shot, always use manyshot on a full attack, and use Rapid Shot as well whenever your target number "To Hit" is 15 or less, if you need more than a 15 to hit before adjusting for Rapid Shot, then don't bother with it. Once you get a 2nd attack at level 6, reduce that number to 13. 14 or higher to hit, don't use Rapid Shot, 13 or lower, use it.

Deadly Aim: No hard and fast rules for when to use this because it changes based on the pre-existing damage bonuses you have. Suffice it to say that Deadly Aim is USUALLY going to be a good choice. If you need extra damage to punch through DR, it's going to universally be a good choice. If you find you are doing lots of damage without (because of Favored Enemy for example), or you find that your to hit number is really high (18 or so - though this can vary based on arrow damage), then it MAY not be the best option in those cases. However, if in doubt, my suggestion is to use Deadly Aim.

The Archer Ranger ***



The Archer Ranger is a dedicated archer, and pretty darned Iconic too. He likely owns a melee weapon...somewhere, but make sure to wipe off the dust before you use it, he gave up using it by 3rd level. In reality the archer Ranger has several different weapon options: Enchanted, Cold Iron, Alchemical Silver etc. The Archer Ranger is best to stay out of melee, he doesn't aid the battle tactically, instead he simply fires arrows. If you make a character dedicated to firing arrows, he must deliver damage consistently and reliably, otherwise, he's just a spectator. This build concentrates on ensuring your Ranger does more than fire arrows, this build ensures those arrows are constantly dropping opponents.

3.5 had a hate-on for archery. I don't know why, but they just did. In the end it meant that archery builds were hard to make effective...you could shoot a lot of arrows, you could make those arrows hit, but reliable damage was a problem, not just a problem, it was a big one. Pathfinder has added options to make archery good again. Thank you! When you are talking about a Bard, you are talking about Arcane strike. For a Ranger, it's Deadly Aim. This feat is not an option, and if you play an archer without it, you'll know why after you wipe away the tears of frustration.

Ability Scores:

Dexterity is the primary stat for archers for a reason. A Ranger can avoid several Feat required attribute levels, but Dexterity still determines your "to hit", your AC bonus, and your Initiative, all important. **Strength** allows you to deliver damage, which with archery, is very important since damage bonuses are a bit harder to get. **Wisdom** affects your ability to cast spells, as well as the duration on one of your potential abilities, so a bit is needed, **Con** affects your HP, which are less important since you won't be in melee most of the time, not a dump stat, but not all that important. **Int** affects your skill points, which is nice, but you have a decent amount of skills already, so not too important. **Cha** is your only true "dump stat".

Race:

When choosing Race you want something that is going to boost your Dexterity, or at least your Strength or Wisdom. A movement score of 30 is definitely a nice to have, though not primary. Expect to fight at range, so torchlight just won't cut it, making Low Light vision or Darkvision nearly a must have, or at least, a huge bonus. Remember that small size races will be using Shortbows, not the end of the world, but it will reduce both damage and range moderately.

Half Elf *:** The ability bonus can be put in DEX, and low light vision is good to have. The skill focus feat is nice for stealth or perception (if you put it in perception that will stack with the racial +2 bonus). The elven immunities are decent as well. The multiclass bonus may be helpful too depending on your build

Half Orc *:** The ability bonus can be put in DEX, and Darkvision is very helpful (better than low light in dungeons when scouting). Not much else specifically suited to the role, but that alone makes the Half Orc a decent choice.

Elf *:** +2 to Dex is great, while the Int and Con modifiers will likely cancel out. Low Light vision is very helpful, as are the bonuses to Perception and enchantment. The Spellcraft and Spell DC bonuses likely won't have much impact. Overall a strong choice, on par with the Half-elf.

Human *:** +2 goes into DEX, and the bonus feat is very handy, especially at low levels. The extra skill point will come in handy. Having no special vision type hurts, but it isn't the end of the world, eventually you can get spells that will do the job. At very high and very low levels, I think this is the best choice. At mid-later levels, but before you get the darkvision spell, you may find the lack of special vision to be a liability.

Feats:

Well, naturally you are going the archery route, so some of your feats will come from that, but beyond the archery combat style feats, the rest of your feats need to also concentrate on archery. Fortunately, there are plenty of choices:

Point blank Shot **: The obvious first choice. A first level archery Ranger needs to be willing to enter melee, but when firing his regular bow, that +1 to hit and damage will be significant.

Rapid Shot *:** Getting 2 arrows in the air is a big deal. Essentially you are doubling your offensive output. Once again, be prepared to draw a sword once everyone enters melee, but until then, twang twang!

Precise Shot *:** Now you are a dedicated archer. Hopefully by this time you are using a mighty composite bow, and now you have no penalties for firing into melee, you should be able to deliver damage steadily and reliably

Deadly Aim **:** This is a great deal, -1 to hit for +2 damage is good, and it gets better as levels increase. Your arrows will be mighty painful at this point. You absolutely need this somewhere down the line. Certainly by 9th level if you haven't taken this yet, get it.

Manyshot **:** You can now put 2 arrows into the air with a standard attack, or at least one extra on a full attack, and they all should be delivering very nice damage.

Weapon Focus **: If you have a weakness in archery, it's all the to hit penalties, so even a +1 is handy

Improved Critical **: You are only improving the threat range by one, but Archery criticals are very nice (and all your bonuses multiply) so this is worth it

Improved Precise Shot *:** Cover bonuses come up all the time in archery (often by the positioning of your own allies), so eliminating them is terrific

Critical Focus *: By itself nothing special, but it opens up all the nice critical options

Staggering critical *:** Staggered is a devastating effect, and it also prevents enemies from charging you.

Vital Strike*:** This feat only helps you on a Standard attack, which generally you want to avoid in archery. However, if you want to use your move action on the same round you fire, then Vital Strike simply improves your damage for no penalty to hit. Costs you a feat, but if you like that tactic, then this should be a standard for you.

Other Feats you may want to consider:

Fleet **: Extra movement is good, it helps positioning, and gives you control over range. Even 5 feet is helpful

Mobility **: Allows retreat from adjacent foes with less chance of being pounded.

Mounted Archery **: Prerequisite: **Mounted Combat**. Mounted Rangers are a definite option, and it's great for maneuverability.

Multiclassing:

The Archer Ranger doesn't need to multiclass, but one option would be to take one level of rogue; That gives you not only a 1d6 sneak attack (for your first round of combat if you win initiative, which you often will), but also gives you the ability to detect traps. This can be a handy skill for a Ranger to have.

Prestige Classes:

The obvious choice is Arcane Archer. In order to qualify you are going to be an elf or half-elf (no problem, good choices anyways), and you are going to need to be able to cast 1st level arcane spells (oh.) Your best bet is to take a single level of Wizard to qualify. If you do this, your original build should favor Int over Wisdom. A 14 starting INT should suffice, and Wisdom of 10 will do you fine.

The Two Weapon Fighter * (Or "Help me make a 2xScimitar Drow Ranger, but he's not a Drizzt clone, his name is Drazzt")



Why the hate for the TWF Ranger? Glad you asked, because he isn't very good, that's why. At least as a single class he isn't. Allow me to explain:

A Ranger has full selection of Martial Weapons. Lets take paired short swords for a hypothetical Ranger, then let's take an Archer Ranger and give him a Greatsword. Lets say each Ranger has a Strength score of 18. Level 2 arrives, and the Two Weapon Fighting Ranger now has the feat. So who is better in melee?

The Two Weapon Fighting Ranger attacks twice per round of full attack. His final attack bonus is +4/+4 (2 BAB, -2 TWF, +4 STR). His damage with his primary weapon is 1d6+4. His damage with his secondary weapon is 1d6+2, if he hits with both, that's 2d6+6, assuming no DR.

The Archer Ranger attacks once per round with full attack. His final attack bonus is +6 (2 BAB, +4 STR). His damage with his primary weapon is 2d6+6 (sound familiar? In this case 2d6 for greatsword, + 1 1/2 Str bonus). So he does just as much damage, but hits more often.

It gets worse if there is movement involved. If a standard attack is taken, the TWF Ranger gets only one attack, while the Archer Ranger also gets one attack, but the Archer Ranger hits just as often and does nearly twice the damage.

Every time the TWF Ranger gets the next level of TWF (improved, greater), it basically gives him one attack with his off hand for every attack he had with his primary hand, at the same chance to hit. The Archer Ranger is still hitting more often, for the same overall damage, consistently. In the end, with all those feats, the TWF Ranger is actually WORSE than the Archer Ranger who took out a Greatsword.

Now Pathfinder has some options to make TWF a bit better. You can now power attack with small weapons, which gives only 1/2 damage for the off hand weapon, so again, no advantage to the TWF, and Double Slice, which will give you 2x str bonus to damage, rather than the 1.5. However, you are eating up feats like crazy, and considering the 2 handed Ranger didn't need to spend those feats, and had +2 to hit right from the beginning, the TWF Ranger is not faring well in comparison.

Finally, Two Weapon Rend should carry the Two Weapon Fighting Ranger's damage above the 2-handed weapon Archery Ranger. This is only after taking 5 feats to do so. Ugh.

So what do you do if you WANT a TWF Ranger? My suggestion is to multiclass with Rogue. A 1/2 Ranger, 1/2 Rogue TWF gets full sneak attack bonus on both weapons, and counts on that sneak attack for damage. Rogue skills mesh nicely with Ranger skills, so you will find yourself still an effective Ranger-type of character. I'm just going to breeze over this build, since it's not a dedicated Ranger...

If you do this, you can reduce your Wisdom stat requirement, a 12 will do you fine, even long term.

Race: My suggested race would be Half-Elf. Get the your full money's worth out of the multiclassing bonus, and skill focus acrobatics will be of use.

Attributes: I would make Dex the highest priority, followed by Wis, Con and Int. Str can be moderate, as can be CHA.

Feats: Weapon Finesse is a must. Then pump up your two weapon fighting and maneuverability options.

The Switch Hitter **** (Saving the best until last)

This brings me to my highest suggestion for a Pathfinder Ranger build, I was quite excited when I started to play around with some builds, and found to my surprise, "Hey! This actually works!!!". I would NEVER recommend this for a 3.5 build, there are just too few feats to pull this off, but for Pathfinder, this works nicely. The Switch hitter uses the bow at range, then switches to a single melee weapon for melee.

I know, I know, who ever heard of a Ranger doing that? Not what you picture when you think of an Iconic "Ranger"...



Ahh...right. Forgot about him. Doesn't get more Iconic than the original and most well-known Ranger.

The Switch Hitter isn't quite the Archer that the Archer Ranger is, but he's close. Furthermore, the switch hitter is a melee character, ready to wade into melee whenever the chance presents itself. You know those video games where you can switch between archery and melee fighting and be good at both? That's the Switch hitter in a nutshell. A fighter can pull this off too, but wouldn't you rather have all the skills, all the spells, the animal companion, the class abilities, excellence in archery, and excellence in melee? Sound too good to be true? It's not, and I'll prove it.

Tactics: At first level you are just a melee fighter. Grab a greatsword or a longsword and shield if you prefer and bash away. You'll find that high strength melee builds are always optimal at first level, and the switch hitter is no exception.

When you can afford a mighty composite longbow, get one. You should have quick draw early on, so you'll be firing a bow at range, and when the range drops, you drop the bow and draw your melee weapon. At this point don't be using a shield, you just don't have time to get it on. Therefore, your melee weapon at this point should be two handed, beyond that, whatever you like.

When you get to 6th level you will notice that your arrows are really quite deadly. With Deadly Aim, Manyshot, and Rapid shot, you can fire 4 arrows in one round for pretty nice damage potential. Then when you drop your bow and enter melee, you should be having a to hit and damage that rivals pure melee builds. This is in addition to all the skills and the spells you are starting to receive. The animal companion is just gravy in the mix.

By upper levels your arrows will continue to rival a dedicated archer's, and your melee ability should rival a dedicated melee. The pure fighter will outshine you in melee eventually, and the Paladin will outshine you vs. evil, unless you are fighting a favored enemy, which will tilt the scale in your favor, but you will always be competitive, with the archery ability as a pure bonus.

Combat Style: The combat style of the Switch Hitter is Archery. The Switch Hitter doesn't use TWF, he uses a two handed weapon instead. His skill in archery is gained through the combat style class feature, while his skill in melee is gained through his regular feat selection.

Ability Scores:

Strength is the primary stat for the switch hitter. The Switch hitter doesn't need a high Dex to qualify for Archery Feats because combat style allows you to bypass stat requirements. Strength however will determine the strength of the mighty composite longbow (damage), and determine to hit and damage for a 2 handed weapon (utilizing a 1 and 1/2 bonus to damage on the weapon). **Dexterity** will affect your to hit with archery, as well as affect your AC. It's not as important as Str, because you've got a great BAB already, so those arrows will have a pretty good to hit anyways. That said, jump on Dex stat bonus items when they become available. **Wisdom** affects your ability to cast spells, as well as the duration on one of your potential abilities, so a bit is needed, **Con** affects your HP, which are nice to have, but you have a good base already. **Int** affects your skill points, which is nice, but you have a decent amount of skills already, so not too important. **Cha** is your only true "dump stat".

Race:

Remember the Archer Ranger? Remove Elf, and put the +2 stat into Strength for the others. That's it.

Combat Style Feats to choose:

2nd: Rapid Shot

6th: Manyshot (for a Ranger, this is just better than Rapid Shot)

10th: Improved Precise Shot

14th: Your Choice

18th: Your Choice

Why no precise shot? If you think about it, precise shot is worthless to the switch hitter, because when melee breaks out, he's in it, and you don't need it to qualify for Improved Precise Shot, because you are a Ranger...yay! Why no Point Blank Shot? Because he doesn't need it. Ranger's can avoid prerequisite feats for their combat style bonus feats. The only other archery feat you'll be taking is deadly aim, and Point Blank Shot isn't required for that either.

Regular Feat Selection:

Level 5: At level 5 you will select **Deadly Aim**. Its the one archery feat you will select with your regular feats, and it's absolutely a necessity, so just do it.

Quickdraw **:** In order to make the switch from Bow to Two Handed Weapon, this is a must. Level 3 at the latest.

Power Attack **:** An excellent deal with two handed weapons, grants +3 damage for -1 to hit. As a Ranger you have a great chance to hit, so this is a great deal

Cleave *:** This has become a nice skirmish feat. Move into position where you threaten two enemies, attack one, and if you hit, make an attack on the other. Nice.

Great Cleave **: Harder to set up than Cleave, but if you can, it's almost like pounce, except you don't need to charge.

Step Up **: A good way to hound archers and spellcasters who use the "5 foot step back and cast or fire arrows" tactic. Force them to give you an attack of opportunity instead.

Improved Sunder **: I like this feat for a two-handed weapon strength build. You have a really nice chance of destroying the weapon.

Lunge **: A handy feat for someone who is a skirmish meeler. Also works nicely with Cleave (to improve the reach for threatening foes).

Dodge **: Nice to have, just for the AC boost.

Vital Strike*:** A nice feat for skirmishing, because it adds damage to standard action attacks. Also, this feat is adding to both your ranged and melee attacks. If you have two potential targets in Melee, Cleave is better, but if you are fighting a single target, then Vital Strike is just extra damage.

Heavy Armor Proficiency *:** A good expenditure of a feat so you can wear Mithril Full Plate

Improved Critical (Falchion) *:** Here's where you start to specialize in a specific weapon. The Falchion works very nicely with Improved Critical

Critical Focus (Falchion) **: Obviously just one in the chain...

Blinding Critical (Falchion) **:** Take advantage of the Falchion's nice crit range to blind foes. Rangers have full BAB, and mesh well with the critical feats.

So how does this turn out? Lets take an example build. Say a 10th level Switch Hitter Ranger, how good is he?

Human 15 point stat buy

Str (+2 racial): 18 (10)

Dex: 13 (3)

Con: 13 (3)

Wis: 13 (3)

Int: 10

Cha: 7 (-4)

Raise the Dex at level 4, the Con at level 8, the Wis at level 12, and Str at levels 16 and 20.

Level 1: Feats: Power attack/Cleave: At this level the character is a Greatsword Wielder. With a Breastplate he has a 17 AC, and 12 HP (for first level not too bad). His to hit with his Greatsword is +4, and damage is 2d6+9 (pretty good)

Level 6: Add feats: Quick Draw, Deadly Aim, Manyshot, Rapid Shot Dex has been increased to 14 at level 4: Equipment: Now the character is using a Greatsword and a Mighty Composite Longbow (+4 str). When enemies are at range, the ranger can take his normal move and fire 2 arrows, each at +7 to hit (1 attack roll, both hit or miss), or take a 5 foot step and attack 3 times, each at +5 to hit. Damage with each is 1d8+8. This is without any magical bonuses. Not bad eh?

The enemies close, he drops his bow, quick draws a greatsword, and in Melee he is now doing 2d6+12 on two attacks, or even on three with a move action if he plans it well. Welcome to the switch hitter.

Keep those feats concentrating on melee, archery will take care of itself now. Rapid shot and Many Shot will ensure you get all kinds of arrows in the air, and Deadly Aim will ensure they hit with a deadly punch. When melee comes, drop the longbow, and switch to a two handed weapon. Eventually a Falchion may be your best bet to take the best advantage of critical feats.

The Switch Hitter and Multiclassing:

Really, the Switch Hitter is a single class character build. A single dip into Rogue is always a decent option for Ranger, but not required. Fighter dips are also possible, but in the long run, you aren't going to see the payoff for what you give up.

Your best Switch Hitter plans on 20 levels of Ranger.

The Switch Hitter and Prestige Classes:

Again, not really the way to go with a switch hitter. Keep him Ranger all the way, use the bonus feats to keep his archery top notch, and his regular feats to ensure his melee ability remains great.

The weaknesses of the build: There is only one that I can see, and only at lower levels. It is the Armor Class. The Switch Hitter needs to concentrate on Strength, which means his AC, considering he wears only a breastplate, will mean a moderately lower AC than a fighter two handed weapon build. Heavy Armor Proficiency plus Mithril Full Plate should eliminate this weakness entirely at higher levels. Otherwise you have a ranged

capacity far better than a focused melee build, but aren't facing much disadvantage in melee, you have spells, skills, an animal companion, class special abilities galore, favored enemies, favored terrain...can't complain!

Rangers and Spellcasting:

Spellcasting is an important part of the Ranger package, but it is by no means the most important part. For a Ranger, spellcasting is a convenience, merely an enhancement of his current abilities (and many of the Rangers spells specifically work in this manner). There are a few things to remember when it comes to spellcasting as a Ranger:

- 1) Rangers no longer use 1/2 their level as their spellcasting level. Instead they use their level -3. This means that defeating SR is no longer an impossibility with a higher level Ranger, and many spells you may find useful longer. Overall, this is an important powerup that needs to be considered when memorizing spells.
- 2) Rangers have no zero level spells, which means all their casting is limited in times/day. Rangers get few spells, even at high levels, so Spellcasting isn't going to be anything you do often
- 3) Rangers are Wisdom based casters, so you will eventually need a Wisdom of 14 to take advantage of the full spellcasting selection. Also note that Rangers get "0"s on their spellcasting chart, which means, unless you have bonus spells of that level, you won't be able to cast that level spells. In most cases, that won't prevent 1st or 2nd level casting at the appropriate levels, but it is fairly likely you will be waiting until 11th level for 3rd level spells and 14th level for 4th level spells. This isn't a big deal, certainly not worth putting too many important stat points into Wisdom.
- 4) Rangers are divine prepared casters, so you can alter your spell selection daily. This means the most circumstantial spells are only a day away when needed.

1st-Level Ranger Spells

Alarm: I like this more for Rangers than for other casters. Who but a Ranger is going to be scouting alone, and need to take a rest without a rotating watch? Level 7 is when you can get a full 8 hours (Thank you new Ranger-caster level mechanics!).

Animal Messenger: I also like this more for Rangers than for other classes. The Animal Messenger spell again works specifically well for a scout getting information back to his allies quickly and efficiently. Also note this is early entry, Druids and Bards get this as a 2nd level spell.

Calm Animals: Rangers sometimes need to be sneaky, and I specifically see this as a helpful way to get past guard dogs quietly. Pretty circumstantial admittedly. Anyone else have handy uses for this one?

Charm Animal: Want a new pet? Maybe that Dire Bear over there...Start with Charm Animals to make it friendly, then Wild Empathy to make it helpful, and now it "woves you fowever". Handy enough? In addition, animals and high will saves just don't go together.

Delay Poison: Delay Poison, which in certain circumstances can be more useful than Neutralize Poison, and early entry as a first level spell. Very handy to have on short notice.

Detect Animals or Plants: Maybe if you're looking for Herb. "HERB! HERB?", I know, your sides are splitting. Sorry, trying to think of a good use for this spell...not succeeding.

Detect Poison: Forget the detecting, memorize Delay Poison instead. This spell is actually LATE entry for the Ranger. (Normally level 0)

Detect Snares and Pits: I'm kind of surprised this spell still exists. It was a way to give a Druid a kind of "natural" alternative to Clerics and Detect Traps. Who wants a spell that detects natural traps only? Seems like only getting half the job done to me.

Endure Elements: Allows you to endure hot or cold climate, but does not provide any energy resistance. Potentially useful in circumstantial circumstances. Good to have on the list, but something you won't want to memorize unless you know you'll need it.

Entangle: Even the Druid, with 9 levels of spells, finds this spell to be potentially the best for its level on their entire list. Rangers are fortunate to have it as well. Not early entry, but still very handy. Excellent battlefield control, and can also be used for a quick getaway when scouting.

Hide from Animals: You can get the whole party past animals with this spell. I don't know how often you need to do that, but, when you do, this spell is on the list.

Jump: Gives a flat bonus to jump checks with acrobatics. Not the kind of bonus that has you leaping in a supernatural manner (you likely won't clear the high wall for example). Honestly, I can't see the point of using a memorization slot for the very off chance you'll need it, and by the time you could memorize it, the need will likely have passed or an alternative found.

Longstrider: Increase your base speed by 10 feet. Mechanically inferior to expeditious retreat? Nope, look at the duration, this is a hour per level kind of buff. Cast this when you begin your day of adventuring, and depending on level, it may last the whole day. By the way, extra movement for scouts and skirmishers is very handy to have.

Magic Fang: Turns one natural weapon magical (+1 enhancement) for 1 min/level. The main use is for your animal companion or a summoned animal to be able to bypass DR/magic. That is pretty circumstantial, but perhaps handy occasionally.

Pass without Trace: Get the whole party through an area without tracks, or even leaving a scent. Probably circumstantial, because lets face it, there's always one guy in the party determined for a head-on fight with anything, but I still think this is handy, and very Ranger-appropriate. Also, this can work for just you to sneak past anything that would normally detect you with a scent ability, not just animals. Edit: Maybe not, this spell keeps you from being tracked by scent, but not necessarily detected by scent.

Read Magic: Ranger scrolls may not be common, but they do exist, and you need this spell to read them. Fortunately, it's on the list, there if you need it. Don't memorize it regularly though.

Resist Energy: My personal favorite spell for dealing with energy attacks (because it has no limit before it disappears), and not only does the Ranger get it, they get it early entry. In addition, the new mechanics for caster level serve you well here.

Speak with Animals: Allows you to play Dr. Doolittle. Personally, unless you want to ask about the group of orcs that may have passed by the area, direct verbal communication with animals isn't required beyond the handle animal commands.

Summon Nature's Ally I: I do like summoning, but Rangers come too late in the game for this to provide much use in combat. Honestly, a Riding Dog when you are level 4 isn't much value in a fight. There are some utility uses to summoning, but they are reduced with the nature's ally line, and more suited to the summon monster line.

2nd-Level Ranger Spells

Barkskin: A decent duration buff that's value will largely depend on the availability of magic items in your campaign. Natural Armor doesn't stack, so if you have magical items that provide the bonus, this isn't much use, if not, it's a valuable AC boost with a decent duration.

Bear's Endurance: I have the same problem with all the stat boost spells. They don't stack with the most common stat boost magic items in the game. If magic is rare in your campaign, these might be handy (but note a limited duration), otherwise they may be useless. Special note about Bear's Endurance is that it can also work as an emergency replacement for healing. Throw 4 points of Con on a wounded ally and they get 2 hp/level. It's not really healing, but it may provide the same benefit in regards to surviving the combat.

Cat's Grace: See Bear's Endurance.

Cure Light Wounds: This is late entry for the Ranger and not recommended for memorization. That said, whether 2nd level or 4th level, it's helpful for this to be on the spell list, because it makes you able to use the very cheap and immensely recommended Cure Light Wounds wands.

Hold Animal: With Animal Empathy, Pass Without Trace, and Charm Animal on the list, why are you still fighting animals? This has to be pretty rarely needed I would think.

Owl's Wisdom: See Bear's Endurance

Protection from Energy: This isn't my favorite energy protection (see Resist Energy above), but it does overlap with the latter for increased protection, and it is early entry.

Snare: Creates a snare trap. The upside is that it is permanent until triggered, therefore having this on your spell list is a boon. The downside is it's pretty circumstantial.

Speak with Plants: Me no likely. As the spell description points out, plants are stupid and have no reason to be friendly with you. Perhaps useful for getting some very basic information, though Speak with animals will probably serve as well for the same purpose.

Spike Growth: Ahhh...now we're talking. Intended as an inconvenient trap spell, in fact, this spell is battlefield control. Choose the squares to be affected, and those moving over make a saving throw or are slowed. Not as good as slowing like the spell slow, but still, halving their movement. There's some minor damage as well. Also, the squares you trap are DC 27 search check to reveal, and unless your enemies are using Search during a battle, that means they won't see what's coming. A good way to slow down fast moving enemies.

Summon Nature's Ally II: Still too weak for the level to be used in combat, but summoning elementals has utility purpose. The Earth Elemental can glide through the wall and let you know what's on the other side. Fire elementals can start fires, while Water elementals can put them out. Air elementals of course fly at perfect, so can be handy scouts as well. The duration isn't long, so small jobs only.

Wind Wall: Wind Wall is an effective battlefield control spell, even for Wizards who get this at 3rd level. However, also note that Wizards use this spell to block conventional weaponry while they fire spells through it. You however rely on conventional weaponry. Instead use this so the wizard doesn't have to, then leap into melee.

3rd-Level Ranger Spells

Command Plants: This is essentially "Charm Plants". Needs of course plant creatures to be effective (and they tend to be not all that common). Probably too circumstantial to ever memorize.

Cure Moderate Wounds: Late entry for one of the less impressive cure spells. Not a cheap wand either, so lacks the "good to have on the list" aspect of cure light wounds.

Darkvision: This is late entry, which hurts (and not sure why?). However, Ranger's can benefit greatly from this spell when scouting pure-darkness environments. The duration is good as well.

Diminish Plants: Very circumstantial. Can be used to dispel nasty plant spells like entangle, or cause a drought (you jerk!), or allow you to pass overgrown plants more easily. I'm not sure that this is worth a 3rd level spell, or even a 2nd level spell.

Magic Fang, Greater: This spell increases the value of the enhancement of Magic Fang, but even more importantly, has 60 times the duration. You probably want to memorize this every day (at least once) for your animal companions natural weaponry.

Neutralize Poison: I still wonder if this spell is actually better than Delay Poison most of the time, and furthermore, Ranger's get Delay Poison early entry, and this one isn't.

Plant Growth: Interesting how Pathfinder nerfed Solid Fog, but left the same mechanic alive with Plant Growth? As a battlefield control (when the plants are handy) this is absolutely amazing, and there is no spell resistance or saving throw.

Reduce Animal: Late entry spell that makes an animal smaller for a long duration. In most cases, making an animal smaller really isn't that useful. Perhaps if it is

scouting...but how intelligent do you need to be to scout effectively? Probably smarter than most animals I would think...

Remove Disease: Pretty circumstantial, and not worth a memorization slot, but good to have on the list. Usually curing someone the next day will be good enough.

Repel Vermin: This is early entry for you, but is also circumstantial. If you are going somewhere where vermin are almost certain to be swarming (the sewer for example), then this is a good buff to have up (the duration is pretty decent). Keep in mind that you only repel 1/3 your CL, which means big swarms may just walk on through.

Summon Nature's Ally III: Pretty much all combat forms, and I've explained the problem with Rangers summoning for combat.

Tree Shape: Late entry for Rangers and works as advertised. Congrats...you're a tree. If you are in a forest and looking for a safe way to rest, there could be value in this, otherwise, really, what are you using it for?

Water Walk: Have you and your allies walk on water. The obvious use is to pretend to be Jesus, but beyond that, there is utility value as well.

4th-Level Ranger Spells

Animal Growth: This should not be confused to be "enlarge person" for animals. The bonuses an animal gets with this spell are pretty impressive. It will turn your animal companion from a slight boost to your combat ability, to the main attraction. At one minute/level, this isn't an all day buff, but it will last at least one combat, and maybe a few.

Commune with Nature: This divination spell gives you information about the surrounding natural area, including where there is water, what kind of life exists, etc. You can use this (with reduced range) in natural caverns as well, to find out if the cave is inhabited by Orcs or a Red Dragon. Potentially useful, and early entry for the Ranger.

Cure Serious Wounds: Your "best" healing spell. Late entry, and not worth memorizing in my opinion. Rangers just aren't magical healers beyond the cure light wounds wand.

Freedom of Movement: I'm wary about the wording of this spell, it's vague, and I've had arguments with my GM in the past whether things like an Air Elementals vortex, Gust of Wind, or other factors that technically could be considered to hinder movement. However, the value of this spell is certain regardless of the interpretation just from the examples given in the spell description alone.

Nondetection: I'm not a fan of using spell slots to try to evade scrying. If someone capable of scry wants you spied on, you are going to have trouble stopping them. This spell certainly won't on its own.

Summon Nature's Ally IV: Mephits occasionally have useful SLA's, but by the time you get this, not really. Too little, too late.

Tree Stride: First of all, this spell trumps "Tree Shape" giving you absolutely no reason to use that spell ever. However, the main purpose of this spell is to give you the ability to teleport short ranges. Alone, not all that great, but being able to do it as often as you like for 1 hour/level is all kinds of useful. Travel across the world in a couple days, scout out far distances, make quick escapes, unfortunately, you can't cast this on anyone else, which is the biggest drawback for actual gameplay use.

Equipment Choices for your Ranger:

Armor:

Breastplate: Breastplate may not be full plate but it is a solid armor. Good AC bonus with decent Dex bonus and non-crippling ACP. Masterwork it, then Mithril it.

Mithril Full Plate: The great hope for the Switch Hitter

Animated Shield: You have shield proficiency, but will almost never use one, so an animated shield just means pure win. Get one if you can.

Shadow Armor: +5 competence bonus to stealth checks, a natural plus for Rangers
Shadow, Improved: The +5 becomes +10
Shadow, Greater: Now +15
Celestial Armor: For the Archer Ranger, this has to be pretty much the crown jewel.

Weapons:

Mighty Composite Longbow: The standard of the archer Ranger and the Switch Hitter

Holy: +2d6 damage to the most common enemies

Seeking: avoid concealment miss chance

Energy: Any energy bonus damage is really nice. Get it on the Bow and every arrow bursts for extra damage.

* If you are a Switch Hitter - make sure you have a backup ranged weapon. Being a skirmisher, you are going to be dropping your ranged weapon when you enter melee, a second ranged weapon (certainly which should be nothing near the value of your primary), gives you a ranged option in those cases. Either a Str bow, or thrown weapons should do the trick.

Arrows:

Cold Iron: Dirt cheap, always have them on hand

Silver, Alchemical: Also dirt cheap, no excuse for not having them. You do one less point of damage, but they are SOOO much cheaper than mithril

Adamantium: Super expensive. Buy some, and only use them when needed to bypass DR.

Melee: For the Switch hitter it can be any two handed melee weapon. Greatswords, Greataxes, and Falchions are all good choices.

Dancing: Let it go, quick draw another weapon, go to town

Holy: Most bad guys, are, well, bad.

Mighty Cleaving: Improve on your Cleaving ability. Might be overkill

Speed: An ability made for two handed weapons

Rapier of puncturing: Rapier isn't your weapon of choice, but I only mention this weapon as a warning to DM's. This is broken, broken, broken. Notice that there is no save DC for the Con damage ability? This is clearly an oversight, but I didn't see anything in errata for it either (and I looked). This item needs a DC to avoid the Con bleed, without it this simply shouldn't exist in any campaign...you've been warned.

Wands/Staves/Rods/Scrolls:

Metamagic Rods, lesser: Will enhance all but your 4th level spells. Specifically the **extend rod** is an excellent deal and very useful for you.

Scrolls: Really only for those spells that you only need once in awhile, but when you need them, you need them: Remove Disease, Repel Vermin, that kind of spell

Wands: Cure light wounds. Super cheap, super good, especially because you don't want to memorize it.

Staves: What, you're a Druid now? Staves are a bit heavy hitting for a recreational caster

Rings:

Protection: Obviously one of your two rings is protection, the more the better.

Mind Shielding: Detect thoughts is a great way to detect the hidden, unless they have this ring

Invisibility: When you are a sneaky scout, sometimes invisibility is just another layer of stealth, but a welcome layer.

Freedom of Movement: An excellent effect to have, and a ring is always there when you need it.

Misc. Magic, minor:

Universal Solvent: One shot item that tends to find itself being very useful somewhere along the line. A cheap investment, get 2.

Feather Token, Tree: Instant ladder, Instant cover, Instant Tree Stride, cheap.

Cloak of Resistance: Kind of a staple...for a reason

Pearl of Power, 1st level: Use this to get extra Delay Poisons, Resist Elements, and they are cheap. A great deal.

Efficient Quiver: Get your Cold Iron arrow when you need a Cold Iron Arrow.

Amulet of Natural Armor: Not super important, as you can cast Barkskin, but, still worth it

Handy Haversack: If you don't know why you want this, you've obviously never played D&D before.

Boots and Cloak of elvenkind: Be sneaky, be real sneaky

Chime of opening: You can't pick locks, so this could be handy when on your own.

Belt, Stat bonus: For the switch hitter, Str is prime, Dex secondary. For the Archer, the reverse.

Headband, Stat bonus: Probably Wisdom is your best choice, for spellcasting, survival, and perception

Slippers of spider climbing: Exceptionally handy exceptionally often, shoot arrows down from a high ceiling for example.

Archery Bracers: Whether greater or lesser, a bonus to hit and damage with your bow is going to be a nice bonus.

Boots of striding and springing: +10 feet to movement is great, but note this does NOT stack with longstrider :(

Boots of Speed: Mainly for the Switch Hitter, all two-handed-weapon fighters should want this unless they have their own personal mage

Boots of Levitation: Mainly for the archer ranger, a great way to stay out of melee