



WHITETAIL SPECIAL

NOV/DEC 2022

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THE #1 HUNTING MAGAZINE

Logan Burk and his
190-class dream buck P.20

THE BOYS *Of* NOVEMBER

A FAMILY HUNT TO REMEMBER
THE TREASURES OF PUBLIC LAND
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UNDERSTANDING RUTTING BUCK PATTERNS

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EDITORIAL

CURT WELLS | EDITOR



No matter where you hunt, or what technique you use, there's always a chance you'll tag the buck of your dreams.

WHITETAILS—LET ME COUNT THE WAYS

THERE ARE MANY WAYS TO FIND YOURSELF GRASPING THE ANTLERS OF THE CONTINENT'S MOST POPULAR BIG GAME ANIMAL.

THERE IS NO question that the whitetail deer, particularly a mature buck, is the most sought-after big game animal in North America.

There is also no doubt that a mature whitetail is one of the most challenging animals to pursue with a bow and arrow. And, this great species also happens to be the most accessible game animal on the continent. What a combination of truths!

But there is another. The number of scenarios in which a bowhunter can find success in tagging the whitetail buck of their dreams is astounding. There are many paths to glory, and "it" can happen anytime, anywhere, and even without warning.

Here at **Bowhunter** Magazine, we have always made an effort to publish bowhunting stories written by some of the most experienced bowhunters on the planet. But we make the same effort to find stories from the everyday bowhunter who, through hard work, perseverance, or even pure luck, manages to arrow an exceptional animal. This is especially the purpose of our *Whitetail Special*, which includes stories that illustrate the diverse ways in which whitetail bowhunters can find success.

One of our bowhunters hunted his family farm last fall and was focused on a particular 150-class buck, until he encountered a giant buck he didn't even know existed. Another bowhunter penetrated deep into public land and hunted

solely on the confidence he got from finding a large deer bed — and it paid off. Then there is the story of a buck that was monitored for a year with trail cameras and the hunt ended on October 2, in the middle of the so-called "October lull." Don't tell that bowhunter not to hunt that time of year.

You'll also find a story about the out-fitted pursuit of the big whitetail bucks of Saskatchewan, and one on the action-packed, in-your-face technique of decoying rutting bucks using both bow-mounted and 3-D decoys.

And then there is the rare whitetail story from the eastern part of the country. We know there are countless bowhunters pursuing deer in the East and Southeast, yet we very seldom hear from them. Obviously, the Midwest dominates the whitetail world when it comes to big bucks, but the term "big" is relative to where you hunt. You might pass on a 140-inch buck in Kansas, but you'd be accomplishing a real feat to take such a buck in the Southeast. We would like to see more articles like the one written by Connor Boothe on page 62. If you have a good story and good photos to share, we would love to take a close look at your article.

If these stories do nothing else, they should give you the hope and confidence you need to fuel your determination and drive to get up in the morning, hunt early, hunt late, and even hunt all day. Those magnificent whitetails are out there, waiting to challenge you. **BH**

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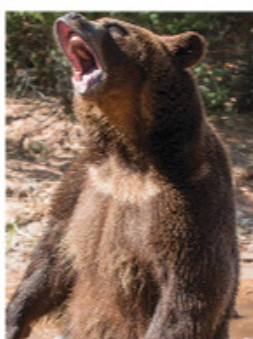
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It was a perfect late autumn day in the northern Rockies. Not a cloud in the sky, and just enough cool in the air to stir up nostalgic memories of my trip into the backwoods. This year, though, was different. I was going it solo. My two buddies, pleading work responsibilities, backed out at the last minute. So, armed with my trusty knife, I set out for adventure.

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TRIED AND TRUE

BRIAN K. STRICKLAND | EQUIPMENT EDITOR



We all look forward to the whitetail rut. Just make sure to arm yourself with quality gear prior to this magical time.

LAST-MINUTE ESSENTIALS

GIVE YOURSELF AN EDGE THIS SEASON WHEN THE WHITETAIL RUT KICKS INTO HIGH GEAR.

FOR MOST OF US, the weeks spanning the end of October through mid-November are what we live for. I know that sounds cliché, but even for a guy like me who lives in Colorado and has antelope, mule deer, and elk out his back door, truth be told, chasing mature whitetail bucks is my bowhunting passion.

With that said, there are a lot of moving parts before and during a hunt that lead to a successful outcome. Although luck is always a welcome factor, it really comes down to minimizing mistakes, choosing the right spot, and capitalizing on a given opportunity. All those elements take years and countless hours

in the field to master, but with the right tools, you can certainly enhance your opportunities and limit those mistakes.

Take scent control, for example. Obviously, we should always set up when the wind gives us an advantage, but mature bucks rarely follow the script, so having a little help can certainly give you

an edge. For 15 years now, **Ozonics** (ozonichunting) has been providing that edge, and their new [1] **HR500** (\$599.99) is taking ozone technology to the next level. The HR500 is quieter than previous models, and Bluetooth technology and an app provides users with hands-free control to minimize movement. Besides operational control, the app also gives you info on current local weather and the unit's battery life.

Making scent-elimination even easier while also adding an element of sanitization is one of the latest products from **Scent Crusher** (feradyne.com/scent-crusher/). Dubbed the [2] **+Plus** (\$299.99), it's 5X more effective and generates a clean mist that engages Scent Crusher's patented Ozone Activated Technology. Simply fill the reservoir, toss it in any enclosed container, and let it go to work. It's compatible with any of Scent Crusher's bags, lockers, and trunks.

With **Dead Down Wind's** (dead-downwind.com) [3] **Dead Zone System** (\$299.99), keeping your duds as scent-free as possible is made virtually fool-proof. Completely portable, it couples its Ozone Generator with a weather-resistant Gear Bag to offer a two-step, odor-killing process. The integrated UV light kills bacteria, while the proven 360-degree Generator eliminates odor. The Generator features four stages of scent-elimination power and is completely rechargeable, so you can juice-up the unit in your truck while you're in the field.

The effectiveness of **ElimiShield** (elimishieldhunt.com) can't be overstated, and with their [4] **Field Spray and Body Foam** (\$28.98), you can eliminate your scent and save money in the process. The genius behind it all is its ability to neutralize existing malodors through six different chemical processes. With just one application, human odor is controlled before it exists for up to 60 days.

Lethal's (lethalproducts.com) new [5] **360 Field Spray** (\$7.99) features a pair of elements that quietly eliminate your scent. It uses OdoBan technology with a special activating agent that amplifies

the spray's effectiveness. Its ultra-fine mist can be applied at any angle.

Scent attractants can make or break a hunt at times, especially during the phases of the rut, and **Code Blue's** (codebluescents.com) [6] **Rope-A-Dope** (\$19.99) is their latest attempt to match wits with a whitetail's ultra-sharp senses. Combining long-lasting Rack Rub gel with a weather-resistant, cotton-synthetic blended rope, it effectively amplifies scent in a given area to bring bucks into bow range.

Wildlife Research Center (wildlife.com) adds [7] **Buck Nip and Golden Scrape w/Scent Reflex Technology** (\$19.99) to their pressurized-scent lineup this season. Offering easy application with less risk of leaving your own scent when applying, Buck Nip is a curiosity scent that can be used throughout the season, and Golden Scrape w/Scent Reflex Technology is a must-have when the calendar flips to November. It's a blend of Golden Estrus Scent, intruding Buck Scent, Territorial Musk, and Fresh Scraped Earth designed to stimulate buck activity.

Tink's (tinks.com) #69 has been a fan favorite for eons, and their [8] **Synthetic #69 Doe-In-Rut Hot Shot Gel Stream** (\$12.99) is sure to attract the faithful. Blended to mimic the luring effectiveness of the original, Synthetic #69 creates a strong sexual attraction by simulating the natural smell of a doe in peak estrus. With its long-lasting gel stream that can reach out to 10', you minimize the risk of leaving your scent when applying. The Hot Shot Gel Stream Synthetic series is also available in Trophy Buck and #1 Doe-P.

RAW Frozen Scents (rawfrozen-scents.com) certainly has a loyal following, and their [9] **30+ Peak Estrus Rut** (\$69.99/4-pack) is a can't-miss attractant once the calendar flips to November. To guarantee the best possible scent comes in each bottle, they flash-freeze the urine immediately after collection. This not only delivers the freshest possible scent, but with no preservatives or water added to change the scent's profile, it's like a hot doe just dropped a "scent bomb" in front of your stand.

With CWD cases on the rise every season, bowhunters should be doing their part to limit transmission. [10] **CWD-Free** (\$12.97 ea.) from **Inventive Outdoors** (inventiveoutdoors.com) is an effective urine-based scent line that eliminates the risk of spreading CWD. Using their patented urine neutralization and conversion system, they've created a true urine-based "hybrid" deer attractant that includes whitetail estrous, buck, doe, and tarsal scents that will take hunters from the early season to the last bell.

Adding yet another gem to their lineup this season, **Mystery Ranch** (mysteryranch.com) unveils the new [11] **Treehouse** (\$229-\$299) pack line. Designed with the treestand hunter in mind, both the Treehouse 20 and Treehouse 38 feature a fuzzy, water-resistant polyester-laminate outer shell that's backed with a quiet Nylon fabric. The top-loading design with dual zippers completely opens the face of the pack for easy access, while its rigid construction with multiple sleeves and pockets holds its shape for quickly finding and organizing your essentials.





Another pack designed for those long sits is the [12] **Impulse** (\$229.99) from **ALPS OutdoorZ** (alpsoutdoorz.com). With over 1,850 cu. in. of storage, it offers plenty of space with room to spare. Plus, its soft, Dead Quiet fleece outer shell is waterproof. It's equipped with multiple organizational pockets and has a rigid construction to hold its shape while setting it on the ground or hanging it from your stand tree.

Although hunting from an elevated perch is still the most effective way to kill

a mature buck, today's hub-style blinds have seen their share of success. One that is sure to get some attention from hunters this season is the new [13] **See-Through Blind** (\$249.99) from **Rhino** (rhinotreestands.com). Two sides of the blind are equipped with a one-way "see-through" mesh, and with the black interior, you'll be ghost-like to passing game. Its adjustable windows with mesh netting can be configured to your shooting preference, while the oversized zipperless door is quiet.

Born to agitate and not intimidate is what best describes the new adolescent [14] **Scrappier Buck** (\$149.99) decoy from **Flambeau** (flambeauoutdoors.com). Based on a carving by award-winning sculptor Chris Schiller, it will certainly fool a wise buck. And with its inferior size and rack, it will bring them in to run off the interloper. The Scrappier's ears can be adjusted to produce a "seeking" or "alert" look and also features a faux tail that moves with the slightest breeze. **BH**

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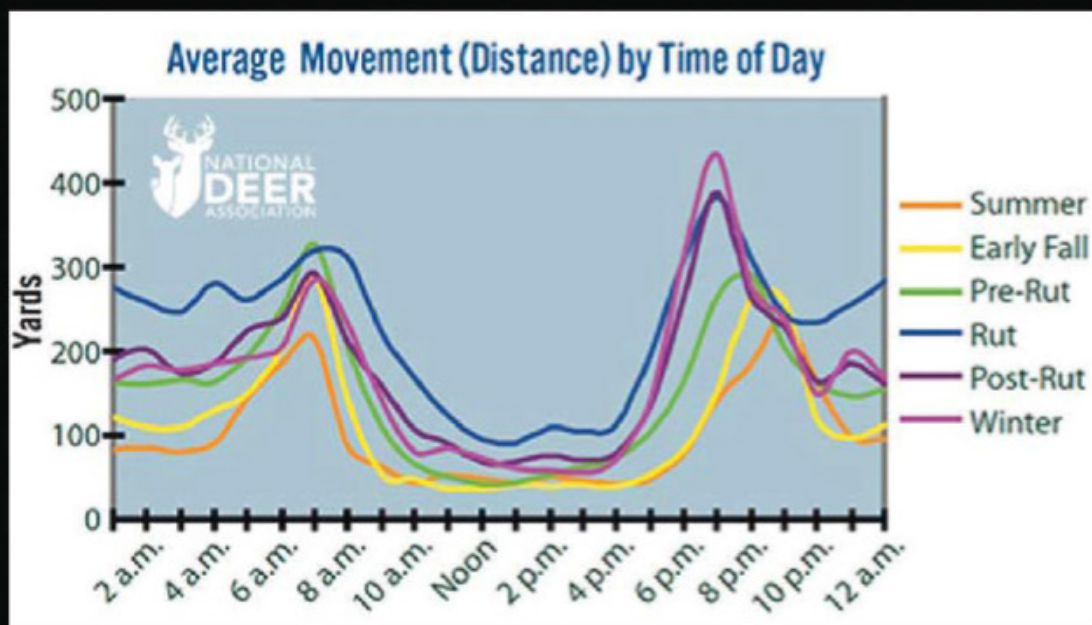
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HUNTING WHITETAILS

C.J. WINAND

Average Daily Movement: ANNUAL



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Tomberlin et al.

HUNTING BUCKS DURING THE RUT

RESEARCH HAS SHOWN BUCK MOVEMENTS DURING THE RUT ARE MORE CALCULATED THAN ONE MIGHT THINK.

LAST YEAR, I found my old hunting logbook from 1978. Although many of the hunts are no longer remembered, the common denominator was I would hunt until noon and then have a buddy silently push deer toward me.

At the time, this plan seemed like a great idea, but my notes indicated hardly any deer were seen from my homemade, wooden treestand. The exception was my first archery kill — an adult doe taken on November 9.

In those beginning years, tipping over any deer with a bow was something very few of us succeeded in doing, and I was more than proud of my accomplishment. Although successful, my notes indicated very few deer sightings, and only one shot taken. *What could I be doing wrong?* I wondered.

Back then, the only avenues for whitetail knowledge were hunting buddies and magazines like **Bowhunter**. So, I contacted my old hunting partner and shared with him my memories written down long ago.

Even though my buddy remembered more specifics about a few of the hunts we shared, he questioned whether I was still “stupid” and taking does during the rut, and whether I still hunted during the midday hours? My answer wasn’t from the notes of a teenage hunter who made countless mistakes, but from a biologist’s point of view.

The hourly and seasonal data on deer movements from Maryland researcher James Tomberlin shouldn’t be a surprise to any hunter. Bucks are more active at dawn and dusk, but compared to the rest of the season, hunting during the rut’s midday hours gives you the best chance of harvesting a buck.

Where the hunting regulations allow you to harvest two or more deer, I regularly shoot does during the rut. Is this stupid? Have I ever screwed up and wished I’d let the doe walk because a buck was following? Although this can happen, it hasn’t happened to me...yet.

We now know that whenever we take out adult does prior to the rut, bucks will then have to travel further and compete more for the fewer number of available does. Competition for the remaining does, and the increased distance traveled during the rut, translates to your seeing, and hopefully shooting, more bucks during the rut. This is one reason why many outfitters (and biologists) urge hunters to fill their antlerless tags early.

Biologists know that getting the sex ratio down to a 1:1 basis is extremely hard to do, and even harder to maintain. The takeaway message is whenever you get the chance to help reduce a skewed sex ratio, you should go on autopilot and kill a doe. Additionally, it’s important to know that an average 100-pound deer will consume roughly a ton of vegetation per year, so taking does early in the season will ultimately leave more food for the remaining bucks and does to forage on in order to better help them survive the winter.

We know that bucks are individuals. This means some bucks will have large home ranges and move very little, while others have small home ranges and move all over the place. Obviously, the latter are the bucks we target and see multiple times on our trail cameras. We also know that some mature bucks will move all over during the rut, while other mature bucks will have minimal movements. Why the variations? No one really knows — it’s simply a matter of individuality.

Various research has shown that just because a buck is older, doesn’t mean

his home range will be larger. In fact, an older buck's home range and core area are almost always smaller than younger bucks. Many biologists believe this has to do with a buck's learned knowledge of his shortest route to safety. This familiarity with his home range also reduces his risk of encountering predators — both four-legged and two, once we hunters start invading the woods.

One study by Pennsylvania deer researcher Andy Olson, showed a buck's (2½+ years old) average home range was 323 acres, and his core area was only 66 acres. This data suggests you don't need access to thousands of acres in order to consistently hunt mature deer — great news for those who are limited to small parcels of ground.

By creating proper habitat within your property, the deer will respond. This is especially true if deer in the surrounding areas are deficient in, say, bedding cover. Deer will readily adapt and respond to the resources available within their home range, so long as you provide them with what they're lacking. As they say within the real-estate profession, "It's all about location, location, location."

We all have hunted long enough to know some bucks simply disappear during the hunting season. But what happens when you know for sure no one has killed your target buck, yet he doesn't show again until the next year?

Some interesting data in Texas has shown a buck having two separate home ranges, 3.3 miles apart. If you're hunting the one area and your target buck disappears, this may be one reason why. Another study in Louisiana showed a buck with two home ranges, leaving his one home range on the exact same day, two years in a row. Go figure?

The other question my hunting buddy asked me was whether it was worth hunting during the noontime hours?

One Texas study showed a buck's nighttime and daytime movements increased during the rut. No real surprise here, but nighttime movements were still double that of his daytime travels. Another study in Maryland compared the midday movements between the seasons. And just like the Texas study, daytime buck movements during the rut in Maryland were significantly higher than at any other point during the season. If you can physically and mentally prepare yourself for an all-day sit during the rut, I strongly recommend that you do so, because there is no better time of year to kill a mature buck during midday hours.

C.J.'s Summary: You can argue deer do four things to survive: feed, breed, sleep, and avoid predation. But, all this changes during the rut. Oftentimes, hunters are accused of hunting too aggressively in trying to predict a buck's movements during the rut. One reason why this occurs is because during the rut, a buck will move his core area on a weekly basis. Although the temptation during the rut is to stay in a stand where you just saw a good buck, there's a better-than-average chance he's already moved his core area.

This may sound counterproduc-

tive, but instead of sitting one stand all week, you might want to consider moving to another stand within one to two days. Rut data has shown a buck will stay in a rather small area called a "focal point" (less than 60–140 acres for 20–28 hours), before he then revisits another focal point. And many of these focal points have multiple bucks utilizing the same area. Presumably, bucks aren't making random movements but rather repeating a pattern of visitation between multiple focal points (or doe groups) in search of receptive females. **BH**

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DEER CONSERVATION

DR. DAVE SAMUEL | CONSERVATION EDITOR



Some bucks have good potential but average phenotypes, while others have good phenotypes but fail to pass those traits to their offspring.

DEER MANAGEMENT 2022

WHITETAIL SCIENCE IS VITALLY IMPORTANT, AND HERE ARE THE LATEST FINDINGS COMPILED BY “OUR” GUY.

FEBRUARY 2022 found the Southeast Deer Study Group’s 45th annual meeting done via Zoom for the second straight year. No, it wasn’t quite the same as an in-person meeting, but we were treated to 33 major paper presentations and a number of student posters as well. Below is a summary of a handful of these presentations, which I’ve selected because I thought they would be of the greatest interest to *Bowhunter* readers.

Kip Adams was one of the opening-day presenters and, as always, he had impressive numbers to share. Kip summarized the economic benefits of deer hunting in 15 Southeastern states. Hunting license sales exceeded \$251 million, and deer hunting supported 168,700

jobs. Hunters spent \$84 million on wildlife plantings and paid over \$1 billion to lease land that was primarily used for deer hunting. The data presented is Phase One of a three-phase collection of data that will end with the production of public-service announcements done

via various media outlets to educate the public on the benefits of deer hunting. We know how important deer hunting is to our wildlife programs, and this work will take that information to nonhunters — an approach that’s long overdue.

We hear hunters talk about genetics all the time. Cole Anderson, a graduate student at the Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Research Institute, investigated the relationship between a sire’s antlers and his male offspring. They looked at the antlers of 329 buck fawns sired by 18 bucks in deer-management permit pens from 2007 to 2020. The fawns were caught and tagged, and then released into a 989-acre fenced enclosure. Every fall, these bucks were captured and their antlers were scored. The breeding value for each sire was calculated as the difference between the average antler score of his sons at 5.5 years of age compared to the population average for that age class. There was a relationship between the antler scores of

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sires and their breeding value, but it was weak.

I discussed this with Cole and found his answers interesting. He noted that it's difficult to design selective harvest strategies based strictly on genetic potential, because phenotypes don't always indicate genotypes. Some individuals have good potential but average phenotypes, while others have good phenotypes but fail to pass those traits to their offspring. As an example, he noted that he had one sire that had a maximum Boone and Crockett score of 200.5 inches. But his offspring, at age 5.5, only averaged 145 inches. Interesting.

One presentation I found particularly fascinating was given by Luke Resop from Mississippi State University. In recent years, various research has suggested that bucks are very individualistic. I guess they are sort of like people in that respect, because from a behavior perspective, we're all a bit different.

This study showed that based on home-range characteristics, bucks have "personalities." Luke and his coworkers looked at home ranges of 30 bucks that were fitted with GPS collars from 2017 to 2019. Based on their movements, Luke delineated two general buck personalities: "sedentary" and "mobile." Sixty-eight percent had a sedentary personality, as indicated by having one home range (mean size of 600 acres). Even though they had one home range, sedentary bucks went on excursions, which are relatively long-distance, usually straight-line movements outside their home range, and taken especially during the breeding season. Mobile bucks also took excursions, but sedentary bucks took six times more excursions than mobile bucks did.

Thirty-two percent of the 30 bucks had a "mobile" personality, as indicated by the fact that they had multiple home-range segments where they would spend their time. They averaged five different home-range segments totaling around 12,000 acres. For mobile bucks, the mean duration spent in a home-range segment before traveling to another segment was 85 days. So, the mobile bucks just moved between their home-range segments rather than take excursions outside of their home ranges. Here's where it got even more interesting.

Researchers identified two subpersonalities of mobile bucks: "shifters" and "bouncers." Shifters were the homebodies of the mobile bucks and stayed in a home-

range segment until shifting to their other segment. Over half of all mobile bucks were classified as bouncers. Bouncers did a lot of pinballing back and forth between home ranges, and these bouncing movements primarily took place at the tail-end of the breeding season — most likely in an attempt to find breeding opportunities in both home ranges.

Bouncers and shifters averaged three shifts between home-range segments per year, and these segments averaged 4.4 miles apart. They had one buck that had segments 18 miles apart, and his segments were separated by the Mississippi River.

This presentation shows just how difficult it is to pattern bucks. If only we could figure out which personality type the bucks we're targeting have without using GPS collars (impossible, and illegal)...

In recent years, various research has suggested that bucks are very individualistic. I guess they are sort of like people in that respect, because from a behavior perspective, we're all a bit different.

Tristan Swartout, a graduate student at Auburn University, looked at a doe's history to determine whether she was successful at rearing fawns. What factors determine whether a doe will be successful at raising fawns? That's not an easy question to answer. To do this, Tristan looked at genetic samples and other data from 474 deer collected at the 430-acre Auburn Captive Facility from 2008 to 2019. He and his coworkers found that the ability to recruit fawns increased with age and peaked at 5.5 years of age. Body size was not associated with recruitment. They also found that does that recruited a fawn the previous year recruited 1.4 times as many fawns the subsequent year, compared to does that did not recruit a fawn.

During the study, 47 percent of does were consecutive breeders (raised fawns two years in a row) at some time in their life. These does recruited 75 percent of all fawns raised and 78 percent of all twin and triplet litters. This study shows the importance of older does in a population and suggests that a small percentage of high-quality females are responsible for the majority of fawn recruitment. My thoughts are that you probably don't want to harvest a doe that has a fawn,

because those does are probably going to raise fawns the next year.

John Kilgo, with the U.S. Forest Service, also looked at some long-term data to learn more about fawn survival in South Carolina. Sample sizes were small, but in general his results were the same as those of the previous study.

For example, Dr. Kilgo found that the age of the doe had a slightly positive affect on her successfully raising a fawn. Does that failed to raise a fawn during the first year they were monitored were 40 percent more likely to fail in the future, while those that were successful in the first year of monitoring were 22 percent more likely to be successful in the future. The conclusion of this study was that some does have innately successful behaviors, and that does without these behaviors may not learn them through experience.

Researchers in South Carolina also looked at fawn survival and used GPS collars to examine doe-fawn interactions during the first 21 days of the fawn's life. We know that does will leave their young fawns for long periods of time, then return. They defined a visit of a doe to its bedded fawn if the doe came within 55 yards of her fawn and then stayed near the fawn for over one minute. Although their data has not been fully analyzed, they found that the more the does visited the fawns at night, the higher the risk of mortality. The conclusion here was that good mothers don't visit when coyotes are most active (at night). They also noted that as the median distance between the doe and her fawn decreased, mortality also decreased.

Coyotes are a problem for fawns in regions of the Southeast. Jordan Youngmann and others from the University of Georgia used GPS collars to track 41 resident coyotes from Alabama, Georgia, and South Carolina during 2015 and 2016. They identified foraging areas where individual coyotes repeatedly returned to locations. They learned that resident coyotes preferred open-land cover throughout the year, while also avoiding roads. They stayed out of forests and selected forest edges except from April-June, when they foraged within interior forests away from edges. They noted that during spring foraging coyotes may select forest cover where fawns are more vulnerable to predation.

That's a quick summary of some of the studies going on around the country. If there is deer research going on, you can bet you'll hear about it at this annual meeting. Next February will be the 46th such meeting, and as always, **Bowhunter** will be there! **BH**



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THE BIG KAHUNA

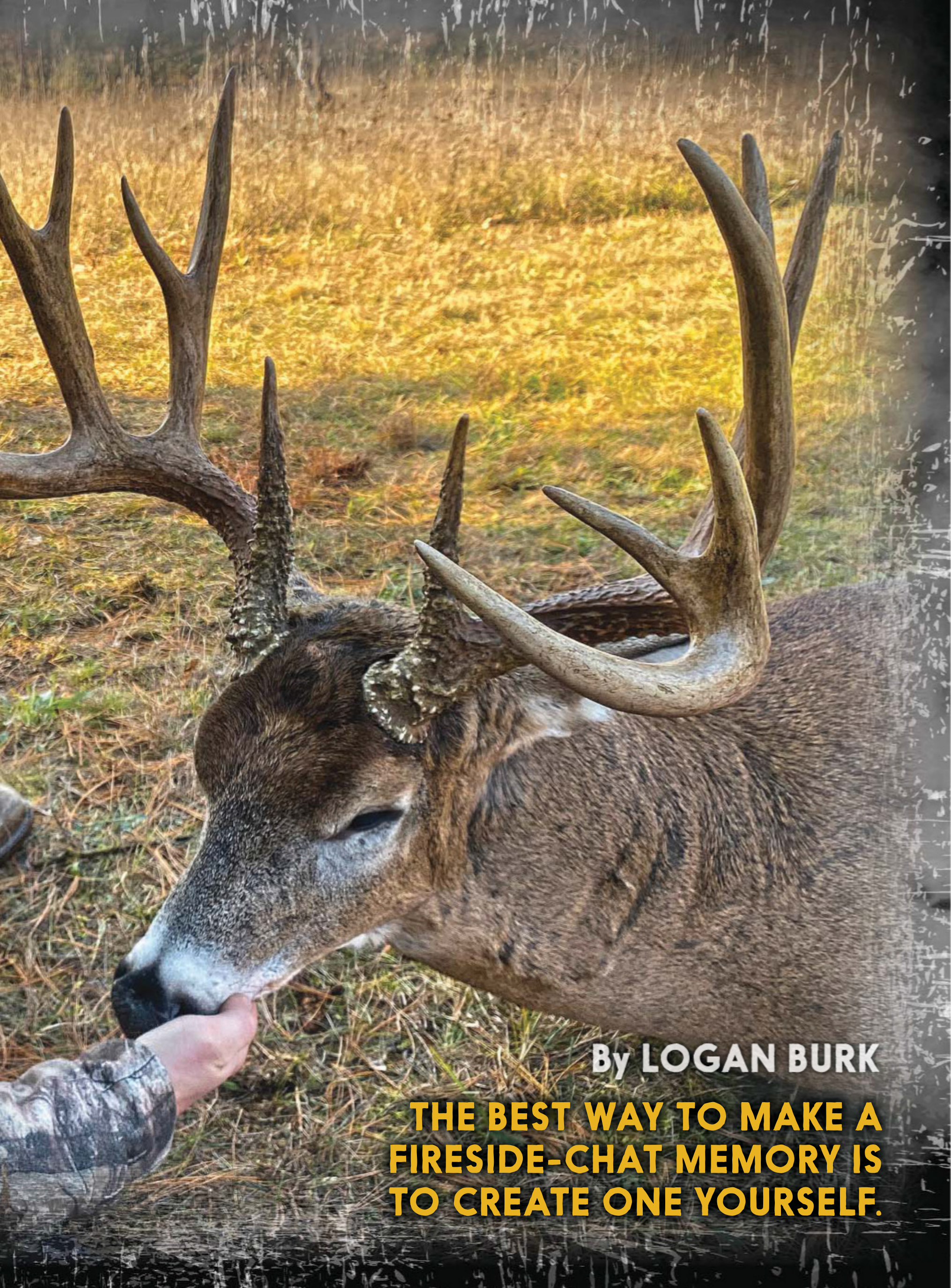
THE HUNT FOR THIS DEER BEGAN IN 1973, when my Uncle Bob and Aunt Pat purchased an 80-acre parcel of land “up north” in central Wisconsin. Every October, Uncle Bob, along with my dad, grandpa, and other family members and friends would set out in search of a buck they’d call “The Big Kahuna.”

This was back in the days before trail cameras and nick-naming deer. My family wasn’t looking for any deer in particular; they were just looking for a buck to bring home that might earn them top honors as the biggest buck taken that season by participating family members. Some years, it would be a 10-pointer; other years it would be a button buck; and still

some years the trophy might go unawarded for lack of shooting a buck altogether.

Not long after “The Farm” was purchased, an annual family reunion was started. Its purpose was to gather all family members who had dispersed across the country a chance to get back together and maybe put in a little treestand time each fall.

Before I had enough muscle to draw a bow capable of killing a deer, I fondly remember anxiously waiting for dark so I could listen to the stories being told by those hunters coming back from the woods. Successful or not, I was jealous of their ability to go out in search of the Big Kahuna, and I dreamed of the day when I’d get to tell my story by the campfire.



By **LOGAN BURK**

**THE BEST WAY TO MAKE A
FIRESIDE-CHAT MEMORY IS
TO CREATE ONE YOURSELF.**

THE BIG KAHUNA

Time flies, and before I knew it, I was sitting 20 feet up in a treestand with bow in hand, in pursuit of a trophy of my choosing.

Since I had tagged out on a buck in Missouri on opening day of the 2021 archery season, I was eager to get after rutting Wisconsin bucks the first week of November. I had e-scouted different pieces of public ground with my onX app weeks before the trip and already had a handful of spots near the farm that I wanted to check out.

Arriving at the farm, I spent the next several hours catching up with family over food and football — too many hours in fact, as the result was a late start on the next day's morning chores, like purchasing a hunting license in town.

Getting back to the farm around noon the next day, my uncle told me that I should go to a spot he had picked out in the far northwest corner of the property. Like all ethical bowhunters should do after lengthy travel, I shot a few arrows just to make sure all was well with my archery setup before heading out for the afternoon's hunt.

The sandy four-wheeler trail I was using to access my uncle's suggested hunt area was littered with scrapes and other sign made by rut-crazed bucks in search of receptive does — further adding to my confidence and excitement. Upon reaching my destination, I immediately realized why my uncle wanted me to be there: It was a south-facing hillside thick with seedling oaks, briars, scattered white pines, and other cover, which eventually opened up to a hardwood flat. It was the perfect funnel for a mature buck cruising to find a doe.

After finding a few main trails that connected the open hardwoods to the cover of the thickets on either side, I started



My dad John Burk (left) and Uncle Bob Skiera (right).

searching for the “right tree.” With the majority of the deer travel patterns running east and west, and with a northwest wind, I elected to hunt from a big red maple tree located on the south side of the flat.

I had quite a few deer funnel past me that evening, including a doe that I was fortunate enough to make a good shot on. I called my dad to bring his ATV out to help me recover her, and after we got her loaded, we grabbed the SD cards out of the two trail cameras that my uncle had out.

My uncle said he wouldn't be hunting the next morning, so fueled by the excitement of the previous night's success, combined with multiple trail-camera pictures of a mature 11-pointer, I was up well before sunrise the next morning and hiked



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THE BIG KAHUNA

back out to the same stand. I wasn't disappointed by my decision.

It was a cold and frosty morning, the kind where the air stings the inside of your nostrils with every breath. It was exactly the kind of weather to get a mature buck on his feet and looking for the first receptive does. Before it was light enough to see, I could hear deep grunts coming through the woods, accompanied by the sound of crunching leaves. I could barely contain my excitement as I anxiously waited for enough light for my

eyes to verify what my ears were already telling me was going on.

Eventually, I saw a doe running in from the southeast with a young buck matching her step for step. Behind them were two other bucks that decided to stop and fight each other about 80 yards away.

Around 9 a.m., it started to snow, and about an hour later I heard something walking to the west. Immediately, I recognized the bone-white antlers of the 11-pointer that we had studied pictures of the night before.

The buck was 60 yards away, and he was on a path that would lead him to



I shot this doe the night before from the same stand.



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within 40 yards of me. But as quickly as he came into my life, he was out of it, and I found myself watching the buck slowly slip over the hill and out of sight. I rattled and grunted at him in an attempt to bring him back into my life, but I got no response. I climbed down an hour later and headed back to the house for lunch.

When I got back to the house and shared the morning's experiences with my dad and uncle, I could see their excitement for me — the same excitement I had for them upon their return from the woods when I was a kid. I tried to get my uncle to go hunt the stand that afternoon, but he gave me too many reasons as to why he was busy and insisted that I go back out there. I have no doubt that he wanted to go, but I could also sense that my killing the buck would mean more to him than his killing the buck...and I can't thank him enough for that.

Soon after lunch, I found myself back in the same stand. It was still cold, with a light and variable wind, but the barometric pressure was rising, and along with it, so was my confidence.

It wasn't long before a small eight-pointer approached from the southeast, along with a doe cautiously coming in from the northwest. When the pair got to within 15 yards of my tree, the young buck pinned his ears back and snort-wheezed at the doe, and then promptly chased his unwilling date back in the direction from which she'd come.

It was fairly quiet until sunset, but in typical rut fashion, that quickly changed.

I heard a deer to the northwest of me on the trail that a lot of the previous deer I'd seen had been using. Light was fading, but I could see the deer's body coming over the hill about 100 yards away and its steps sounded much more confident than those made by the younger bucks that had previously wandered by.

Through my binoculars, I could see

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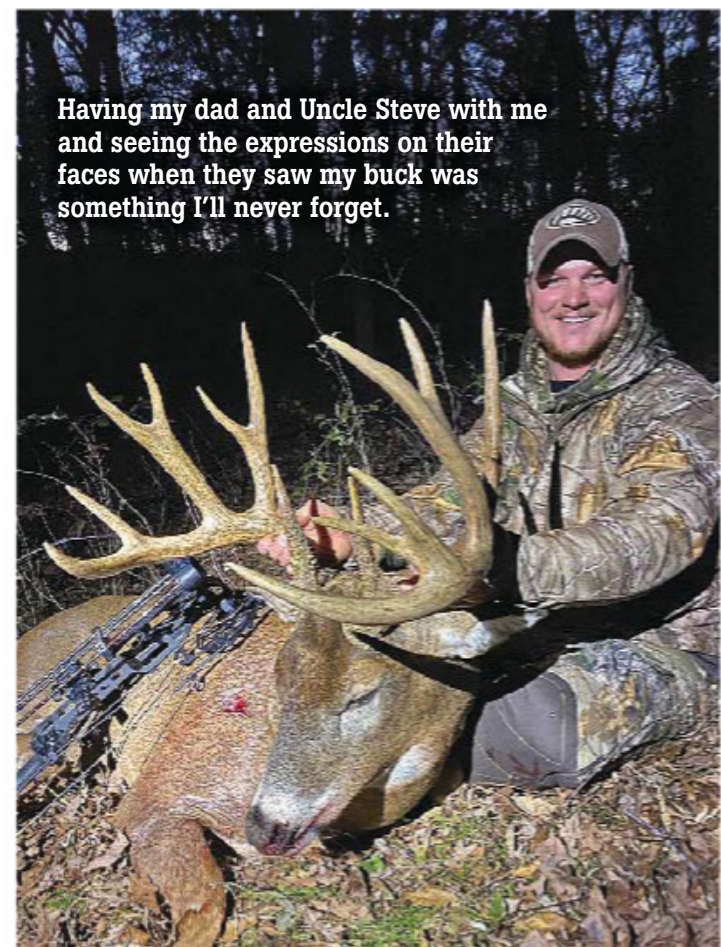
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THE BIG KAHUNA

I had to sit down next to my buck and take a minute to fully process what had just happened. This was the first picture I took of him.



This thicket made for a perfect ambush.



Having my dad and Uncle Steve with me and seeing the expressions on their faces when they saw my buck was something I'll never forget.

the right half of his rack. He had foot-tall, split G-2 and G-3's on that side. I knew it wasn't the 11-pointer from the trail cameras, but there was no doubt that he was a shooter.

I immediately reached for my bow and rangefinder. Guessing what trail he would take, I ranged a tree next to it where I would have a shot opportunity and got a reading of 42 yards. I had consistently practiced out to 60 yards and felt extremely confident with that shot distance, but he was moving so fast that instincts took over and I made the typical "meh" sound used by many hunters to stop a moving deer... Except I hadn't drawn my bow back yet. I froze.

To my relief, the buck dropped his head and continued on the same path. This time, I drew my bow before trying to stop him. It was still well within legal shooting light, with plenty of light for me to see how big his antlers truly were, but I composed myself enough to ignore that fact and instead focused all my attention on the spot behind his shoulder. The buck was just beyond the tree I'd ranged at 42 yards, so I buried my 50-yard pin on that spot and released my arrow.

I watched as the orange glow of my lighted nock hit the buck square in his shoulder and about six inches higher than where I had been aiming...and he dropped!

I've never climbed out of a tree so fast in my life. As soon as my feet touched the

ground, I took off running toward him. Knowing spine shots usually require a follow-up shot, I promptly sent a second arrow into his chest as quickly as I could.

That's when my brain let my eyes see



what had grown on top of his head. The buck's massive rack had 14 points and later measured 189 P&Y-style inches. I was awestruck and in total disbelief that I'd had so many encounters the first two days and then ended up killing this giant buck none of us knew existed.

I sat down next to the buck for several minutes, shaking while continuing to try and catch my breath. Then I pulled out my phone and called my dad.

I could hear the excitement in Dad's voice as he asked for details, but between my inability to think straight and a weak phone signal, I simply told him, "Bring the buggy and get out here as soon as possible!"

I sat and stared at my buck, while also thanking God for the opportunity and my late Uncle Bob for putting his nephew's desires before his own and

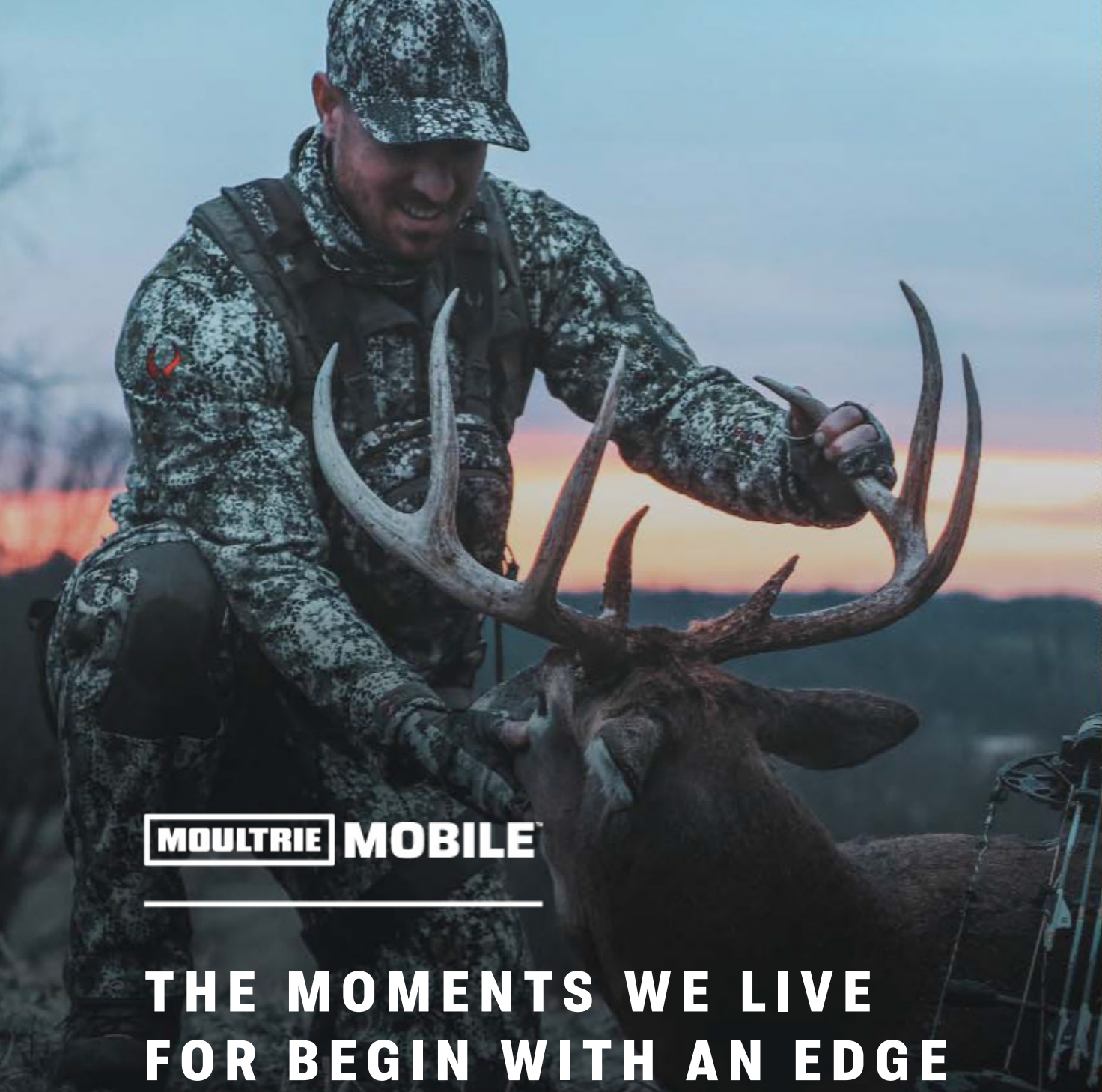
sending this magnificent animal my way. Uncle Bob had passed away 17 years ago, but his ashes were spread along the same hillside where I now sat.

When my dad and Uncle Steve arrived, the celebration really got started. They couldn't believe their eyes either, as no one who hunted the farm had ever seen a deer of this size. Countless pictures were taken, and again, I could see the same excitement in their eyes for my success as they'd probably seen in mine for theirs over the years.

There was a fire going when we finally got back to the house. We sat around it and told stories while watching the fire's glow reflect off my buck's antlers. I now had picture-perfect memories to last a lifetime, and a "Big Kahuna" story of my own that I'll tell forever! **BH**

The author lives in Fulton, Missouri, with his fiancé, Kristen, their two dogs and a cat. He works as an ag sales specialist for Ranch and Farm Ag Services and White-tail Properties.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: My equipment on this hunt included a Mathews V3 bow, Easton 5MM FMJ arrows, NAP broadheads, Nocturnal lighted nocks, Carter release, Summit Viper SD stand, Nose Jammer spray, LaCrosse boots, Realtree camo, Vortex binoculars, Bushnell rangefinder, Primos calls, and knives from Outdoor Edge.



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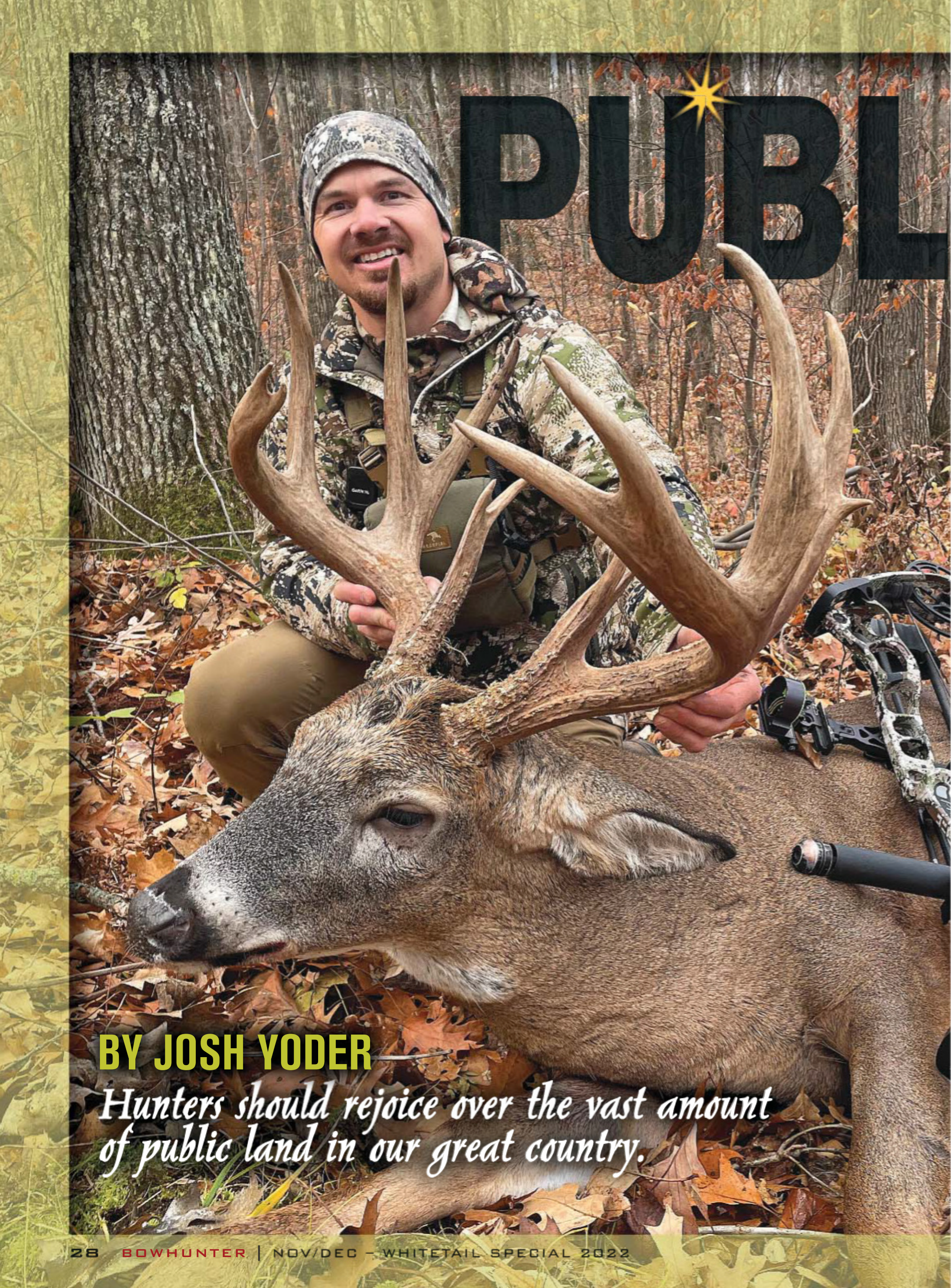
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PUBL

BY JOSH YODER

Hunters should rejoice over the vast amount of public land in our great country.



IC-LAND Magic

**I WANT TO PREFACE THIS STORY
with a shout-out to public lands.**

We are all fortunate to have this resource in our great country. I'm also very grateful to private landowners who contribute much to wildlife habitat, but public land gives all of us an opportunity to pursue our hunting passion. My favorite days are spent wandering the wooded hills and swampy forests of Northern Wisconsin, a place with so much public land to enjoy exploring.

My bowhunting career started in my early teens, when my brother and I found my dad's old Bear bow in our basement. The flame was lit immediately, and before long we were both shooting Dad's bow with borrowed arrows. Amazingly, I remember both of us killing deer our second year into it — I shot a button buck, and my brother shot a doe. Those first deer were real trophies to us, and the meat could not have tasted better!

I am far from a trophy hunter and have always been more than excited to put my tag on the first buck with at least eight points that was unfortunate enough to walk within bow range of my setup. I've always enjoyed sharing this bounty with family and friends.

But like most of you, I've also in awe of big deer. So, let me tell you the tale of a public-land buck I named "Magic."

It was late-August, and after a scouting mission that day, something about the upcoming season felt different to me. In fact, I remember telling my wife, Rachael, "I've got a good feeling that I'm going to kill a massive buck this year."

Smiling, my wife jokingly said, "Don't say that...you probably won't even fill your tag now."

While preseason scouting, I try to force myself to not run the same ridges and bottoms as every other hunter. I believe if you told a hundred people to walk through a forest section and look for deer activity, most would end up leaving a very similar GPS track. I have never run many trail cameras, but rather I rely on finding buck habitat and, more importantly, their bedrooms. On that aforementioned August day, I remember forcing myself to double-back against the natural contour of the public land so I could work my way to a thicket I'd found. Instinct told me that

PUBLIC-LAND MAGIC

the contour of the land there would afford a bedded buck nearly 360-degree protection from predators via his senses of sight, hearing, and of course, smell — particularly given the predominant west wind in that area.

As I cautiously made my way into this “island,” I soon found a gigantic bed on a tiny rise that commanded authority of everything that surrounded it. Up to that point, I’d seen limited buck sign, but everything around the bed I’d just found was destroyed! Clearly, a buck’s velvet had met its demise on the alders and small saplings surrounding the bed.

Once I found that bed, the challenge was on. Only one problem: I simply couldn’t creep into this location without getting busted.

I planned my first approach on an early October hunt, because the wind was perfect and the ground was wet and quiet from recent rain. I snuck into the bedding area to set up, but my lack of patience got the best of me, and I pushed in too close.

My next approach came a couple weeks later, and my plan was to hunt the southern edge of the buck’s core bedding area. That morning’s hunt was uneventful — not to mention windy. On my way out, my curiosity got the best of me again, and I tried slipping into the bedding area. Big mistake! Based on the fresh, deep tracks I found there, it was obvious that I



All I could do when I finally found my buck was stand there dumbfounded over his size.



Thank goodness my brother, Caleb, was able to borrow our buddy’s game cart.

had busted a truly massive buck and multiple other deer out of their beds.

Fearing that I’d completely blown any chance I may have had at killing the buck my gut told me had made the bed, I left that area alone for a couple weeks. Then, on October 30, the wind was right, and I had the green light to go hunting from both the weatherman and my wonderful wife. It was a gorgeous Saturday morning, and the almost unnoticeable wind was blowing in the right direction.

I got up early and parked nearly a mile from my stand location, looping far around to avoid making my typical approach. I set my stand coming off a doe bedding area and in a corridor that led to the buck’s preferred bedroom.

When the sun came up, I loved the location I’d selected in the dark, but I was a little concerned about the lack of shooting lanes to my left. About 20 minutes after shooting light, I heard something coming from my left. It was a giant buck, and when he finally cleared the ravine, he was a mere 50 yards away!

I immediately told myself to stop staring at the giant rack with split brows! I had little doubt this buck was the owner of the bed I’d found, which was only 150 yards away. The buck slowly approached, clearly on a course he’d traversed before. I’d told myself not to look, but couldn’t help but be in awe of the buck’s size and thought my eyes were playing tricks on me.



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The buck walked to within 20 yards on my left, but the brush was too thick for a shot. As the buck navigated the cut in the hillside, he had to hook around a deadfall, and when he did, I was ready and stopped him with a mouth bleat.

I released my arrow, and upon impact the buck mule-kicked and then whirled and took off. He ran up and over the rise, at which point I lost sight of him. Seconds later, I heard what sounded like a tree falling in the direction he'd gone. I fell back onto the seat of my stand and sat there shaking with nervous excitement, like I do every time I release an arrow at an animal.

I got out my phone and texted my wife, "I just hit a monster...like, massive!"

Her response was, "Like, 10-point massive, or record-book massive?"

I then realized I didn't know how big he was, but I did know he was the biggest buck I'd ever seen while hunting. My response was, "I don't know, but much bigger than 10-point massive."

We made a plan to have my mom come down and watch our kids, so Rachael could share in the whole exciting experience with me. She's the one who sacrifices the most for my hunting adventures, and sharing success with your best friend always makes it taste even sweeter. I then texted my brother and asked for help. He said he'd be there after picking up Rachael and borrowing a game cart from a mutual buddy.

During the long wait, I kept glassing the ground from my stand, hoping to spot blood or my arrow, but I couldn't spot either. About 30 minutes into my wait, a large maple tree mysteriously fell

I was happy to have my lovely and understanding wife, Rachael, with me as part of my recovery team.



within sight. I guess it finally caved from rot, but why on a dead-calm morning, and why now? Since the felled tree made more noise than anything I could do, I decided to climb down and slowly walk to the impact site. Immediately, I found my arrow — and it was coated with bubbly blood!

I still had to wait for my help, so I continued glassing the surroundings from my seat on the forest floor. From my new location, I could now see over the rise of the ridge. Before long I'd caught sight of what looked like a dead deer about 70 yards away. When my wife and brother



Given the buck's size and the amount of gear I had, I knew I was going to need help getting him out of the woods.

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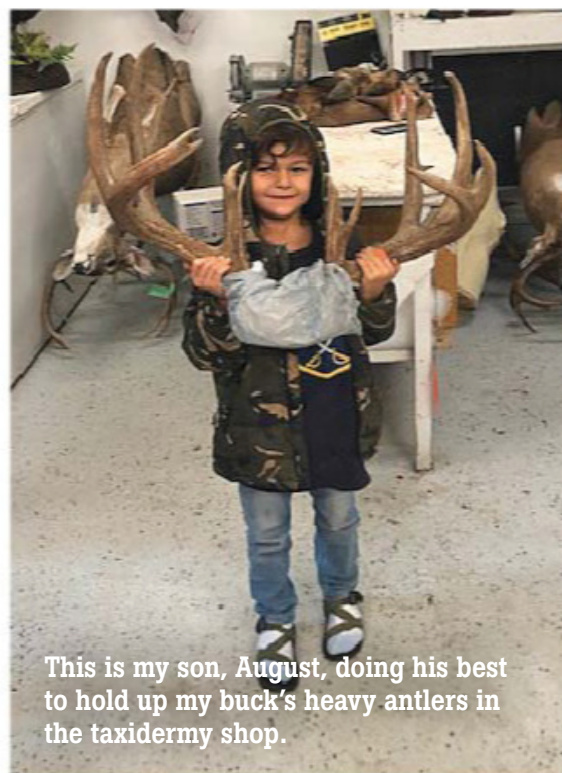
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This is my son, August, doing his best to hold up my buck's heavy antlers in the taxidermy shop.

arrived, I had them look through my binoculars, and they both confirmed that it was definitely a deer!

So we made our way directly to the giant animal, which had a huge chunk of bark still stuck in the base of his antlers. Apparently, he had slammed full speed into a maple tree, which would explain the loud crash I'd heard!

I was in awe of the behemoth. He was a true warrior that had managed to avoid hunting pressure on public land for many years. Judging from where the buck was bedding, he likely didn't have the luxury of a diet enriched by agricultural or manicured food plots, but rather he lived his life foraging oak ridges, logging slashes, and whatever else the big contiguous woods of Northern Wisconsin offered on the menu.

The buck ended up weighing-in over 250 pounds, and he green-scored 196 $\frac{7}{8}$ Pope and Young-style points. I'm not sure what made the buck more Magic, his managing to grow to that size in the big woods, or the fact that I was able to catch him on his feet. Maybe it's both!

I'm already looking forward to next season and getting boots on the ground. Maybe I can find another giant. But, I'll be just as excited to notch my tag on one of the small, basket-racked bucks that are more common on the public ground I choose to roam. **BH**

The author is a home-building contractor who lives in Hayward, Wisconsin.

Author's Note: My equipment on this hunt included a Prime Logic bow outfitted with a Ripcord rest and TightSpot quiver, Easton Axis arrows, Iron Will broadheads, and a Summit climber.

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A True HOLLYWOOD



I'M NOT SURE EVEN THE BEST OF WRITERS IN TINSEL TOWN
COULD COME UP WITH A SCRIPT THIS COOL!

By Bailey Pattin

STORY

My brother, Brock (left), was in the stand with me when I killed Hollywood. I was happy to have my other brother, Blaine (right), with me for the recovery.

The story of this buck I named “Hollywood” started with a single trail-camera picture in 2020. It was a good year for my brothers and me, and we had all tagged out. But when we got the first picture of this deer, we immediately turned our attention to the fall of 2021.

The farm that Hollywood called home is great 150-acre mixture of thick timber, creekbottoms, CRP, food plots, and ag fields. In the summer of 2021, we focused on strategically placing food plots and stand locations just for Hollywood. When we finally got our trail cameras out in early July, we couldn’t believe our eyes when he was the first deer to show up! Hollywood, along with four or five other bucks in his bachelor group, were living on the farm. We got multiple pictures every day throughout the summer, including hundreds of daylight pictures. It was extremely rewarding to see all the hard work that we had put in during the summer months already paying off.

Using the intel from our cameras, we formulated a game plan to hunt the edges of Hollywood’s core areas, because we didn’t want to spook him before the rut. Our biggest issue was that the farm we were hunting was over an hour away from where we live, but I threw all my chips in on this deer.

Once September rolled around, Hollywood was still showing up daily on our cameras. We knew that he hadn’t left his summer range, yet we were worried that he may leave our farm to rut since he didn’t show up until late season in 2020.



Incredibly, my trail cameras captured what seemed like hundreds of daylight images of Hollywood in the months leading up to the season.

A TRUE HOLLYWOOD STORY

My younger brother, Brock, and I hunted him the second weekend of the season, and we didn't see him. We still had pictures of him, but he was starting to get more nocturnal.

Our second hunt for him was in the middle of September, and we had a good feeling about it. The wind was good, and we got into our big food-plot stand undetected. We couldn't believe our eyes when Hollywood was the only deer that we saw that night, and he was in bow range.

He made his way into the field through the CRP and worked all the way in to 34 yards — but he was facing us the whole time. He fed for about five minutes, and then he turned and walked back into the CRP without ever offering me an ethical shot. We were upset because he was so close, but we knew we didn't need to take any chances that early in the season. We also were blown away by how big he looked on the hoof.

With our hopes high after that evening hunt, we were already looking forward to getting back in the stand. We had prior commitments the next weekend, but we had marked-off our calendar for the first weekend of October.

We left for the farm on October 1, knowing we would not get there in time to hunt that evening. On our way to the farm, we got a notification from our cell camera that turned our stomachs upside down: Hollywood was right in front of our stand in daylight, and we were still driving to the farm.

We were extremely optimistic about the following day, but we knew that a morning hunt would be a bad idea because we had zero chance of slipping into the stand we wanted to hunt without pos-

sibly bumping Hollywood in the process. With that in mind, we decided to sleep in.

Our hearts sank the next morning when I checked the camera and saw that Hollywood was once again in front of our stand in daylight. The good thing was that we knew he was headed back toward his bedding area, just like he had done the day before, so we were excited to get into the stand around 2 p.m. on the afternoon of October 2.

Our stand was situated in a hedgerow that separated fields of standing corn



My trail camera captured this image of Hollywood and a doe the day before I killed him.



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This is the view from my stand, which I hung in a hedgerow separating two major food sources.



and beans, and the hedgerow ran directly into the bedding area that we knew Hollywood was using. As the evening went on, the does started making their way closer to us, and we knew that if any of them busted us, the gig would be up. So, we sat there motionless for around 30 minutes until the does continued to move on toward their destination field.

With 15 minutes of legal light left, I spotted some deer 150 yards away and

moving toward their food source. I threw my binoculars up to glass them, and as I panned through the group of deer, I was relieved to not see Hollywood — or any mature bucks for that matter.

Just as I turned to tell my brother the “good news,” we heard a stick break right underneath our stand. We both looked down and couldn’t believe our eyes: It was Hollywood, and he was standing only 10 yards away and feeding down the

hedgerow! To this day, neither of us can explain how that buck was able to sneak in so close, undetected...but he did!

At that moment, I was completely focused on getting my bow ready and getting into a position where I could get drawn without spooking him. From my brother’s point of view, Hollywood appeared to be standing perfectly broadside at 10 yards, with nothing but air between us. But the view from my stand was different: I had a large, leafy branch in my way, and all I could do at that moment was pray that Hollywood would walk another five yards down the hedgerow and give me a clear, ethical shot.

For several minutes, Hollywood stood motionless and feeding on some natural growth in the hedgerow. Finally, the buck lifted his head, scratched his back with his tines, and then started walking even closer to our stand.

When he ended up in my shooting lane, he was quartering toward me at spitting distance, and I was hooked up and ready to draw whenever he gave me the opportunity. He finally turned and took another step down the hedgerow, which gave me about a five-yard shot, quartering-away.

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A TRUE HOLLYWOOD STORY



Hollywood's antler score is impressive but pales in comparison to the time I got to spend hunting him with my family and friends.

I pulled my bow back as smoothly and quietly as I could and got my anchor points settled in. I ranged him with my Garmin Xero sight, which set the pin that I needed, and then I took careful aim before squeezing off the shot.

My arrow's impact was loud, and Hollywood took off like a bolt of lightning back down the hedgerow toward the thick bedding area where he'd come from. It was an immediate celebration between my brother and me, and we really had no words to describe what had just happened.

I immediately called my family and friends to let them know that I had just got an arrow into the biggest deer that we'd ever hunted. Brock and I sat until it was pitch-black, and then we snuck down to investigate the impact site. We found blood immediately, and then we went straight back to the cabin because our flashlights weren't the greatest and we didn't want to risk bumping Hollywood out of his bed.

After talking with my dad and a cou-

ple of my buddies, I decided we were going to wait until morning before tracking him. I always like to err on the side of caution, because I know how strong these whitetails are. I tried my best to get some sleep that night, but it was nearly impossible; I've never been so anxious for daylight!

The next morning, my parents, my two brothers, my girlfriend, and our farmer friend all set out to track Hollywood. When we got to the impact site, we immediately got on a good blood trail.

Hollywood's blood trail continued straight back down the hedgerow and into the thick bedding cover, like we thought it would. After about 150 yards, the trail left the bedding area and went into the standing corn, and we found him 50 yards later!

I will never forget the feeling that I had when I walked up to Hollywood for the first time. It was all hugs and high-fives at that point, after which we took him to a nice spot for pictures. It was so awesome to be there in that moment, surrounded

by my loved ones, and it created a memory none of us will ever forget.

When we put a tape measure on him, I couldn't believe it when the final tally was 201 inches. I was in such disbelief that I had three of my buddies measure the buck — and they all came up with the same original score.

The 200-inch mark is labeled as the "pinnacle" for whitetail bucks, but for me, this story isn't about inches of antler; it's about time spent with family and friends in the great outdoors, and it's why I'm so passionate about hunting.

I can't wait to get back out there and put in all of the hard work it takes to make such lifelong memories together with family and friends. **BH**

The author works for Garmin and lives in Baldwin City, Kansas.

Author's Note: My gear included a Mathews Triax, Easton arrows, Nocturnal lighted nocks, Bloodsport Gravedigger broadheads and a Garmin sight.

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WHY DIDN'T I *become a golf writer? Why am I not spending my time in a beautiful clubhouse, strolling across green, manicured fairways and enjoying fine meals after a day of leisurely searching the woods for my golf ball?*

Despite being a tragically unskilled golfer, those illogical thoughts have crossed my mind countless times over my 40-year history of bowhunting.

I've asked myself those questions as I belly-crawled for four hours in a drizzling rain, trying to get within bow range of seven bedded mule deer bucks.

Those thoughts came to mind when the floatplane landed

on Earn Lake in the Yukon as I began my eighth moose hunt, still looking for my first moose.

And, as I was in my seventh hour of climbing the mountains of British Columbia with a 65-pound pack, working toward the remote possibility of getting close to a mountain goat, at the age of 67, those same questions nagged at me.

If you spend a significant amount of time in pursuit of big game with a bow and arrow, you've probably asked yourself: "What is wrong with me?" Or, "Am I really ready for this kind of challenge?" Or, "Am I too old to be doing this?" Or, "This stalk is never going to work, is it?"



By CURT WELLS, Editor

If you haven't asked yourself those questions, you either haven't bowhunted long enough, or you need to try harder. Every bowhunt has the potential to make you question your sanity.

Flashback to 2014, when I booked a December whitetail hunt in Saskatchewan with Fred Lackie at Candle Lake Outfitters. I expected cold temperatures, but when my weather app called for low temperatures of -18 degrees and highs of only -10 degrees, all week, and the hunt plan was to sit in a ground blind from dark to dark, it made me wonder what the weather was like on a golf course in Florida...

If you're familiar with hunting deer in Saskatchewan, then

you understand the need to sit all day. Nonresidents cannot hunt in the southern agricultural country of the province; they are restricted to the heavy timber country to the north. These areas are almost limitless expanses of timber, and much of the terrain is relatively flat, so you can't hunt ridgelines, funnels, draws, or other features. The deer there move randomly for the most part, making their travel patterns unpredictable.

However, deer populations still must be managed — even in the “big woods” — where forage can be scarce compared to agricultural country. Hunter densities are also low, thus the need for hunters and outfitters to use some type of bait — typically alfalfa

GRIT IS COMPULSORY

— to pull the deer from the deep timber and establish some kind of pattern.

Baiting is a controversial subject and is a practice that can cause all sorts of problems. In some states where “baiting wars” break out, it can be a huge problem — particularly for public-land hunters who don’t own property. That’s because baiting is illegal on federal land and is often banned on state land, so the public hunters must sit and watch all the deer hanging out on the private land where baiting is legal. Every location is different and comes with its own set of consequences, but some places are better off without baiting.

In Saskatchewan, though, it works. In fact, with low deer and hunter densities, using bait to attract deer is about the only way to manage the herd. You’ve heard all the arguments about alfalfa being no different than a food plot or a waterhole to attract thirsty pronghorns. That’s arguable, but most of us use some kind of “advantage” to get close to big-game animals, whether it’s a set of rattling antlers, decoys, or some sort of technology.

So, back to the Saskatchewan hunt plan. Years of experience have shown that the deer there tend to hit bait sites at all times of the day, with midday, say from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., being most active. Since you must be there for the early morning activity, and the “magic hour” before sundown, you’re compelled to sit all day. Lunch happens in the blind or treestand. It’s a brutal fact of life, but if you hope to maximize your chances of killing one of those husky, chocolate-antlered Saskatchewan beasts, you will need to conform.

This is where the challenge of bow-hunting Saskatchewan makes its de-



It was a tight squeeze for cameraman Bill Owens and me, but this blind setup worked perfectly.

mands on your body and mind. No, you’re not hiking a 10,000-foot mountain or belly-crawling on a bedded grizzly, but you will be challenged. You’ll have to stay warm and comfortable, focused, and alert all day long. No lapses or quick naps. Opportunities can be fleeting. And, of course, you’ll need the most common word in a bowhunter’s dictionary — patience. But even that’s not enough at times. Perseverance, otherwise known as “grit,” is a must.

Put simply, perseverance is what is needed when patience isn’t working. And sometimes you need perseverance right off the bat, as was the case last fall on my second hunt with Fred.

It was mid-November and not as cold as my 2014 hunt, but the snow was piling up in the woods and I knew the entire week was going to be cold — “chilly” by Saskatchewan standards. Contemplating and accepting the possibility of spending a week of 10-hour days wrapped in snow and cold air requires perseverance from the moment you lay out the clothes you’ll be wearing the first morning. Anyone who believes such a hunt is “easy” because you’re hunting over alfalfa, is sadly mistaken.

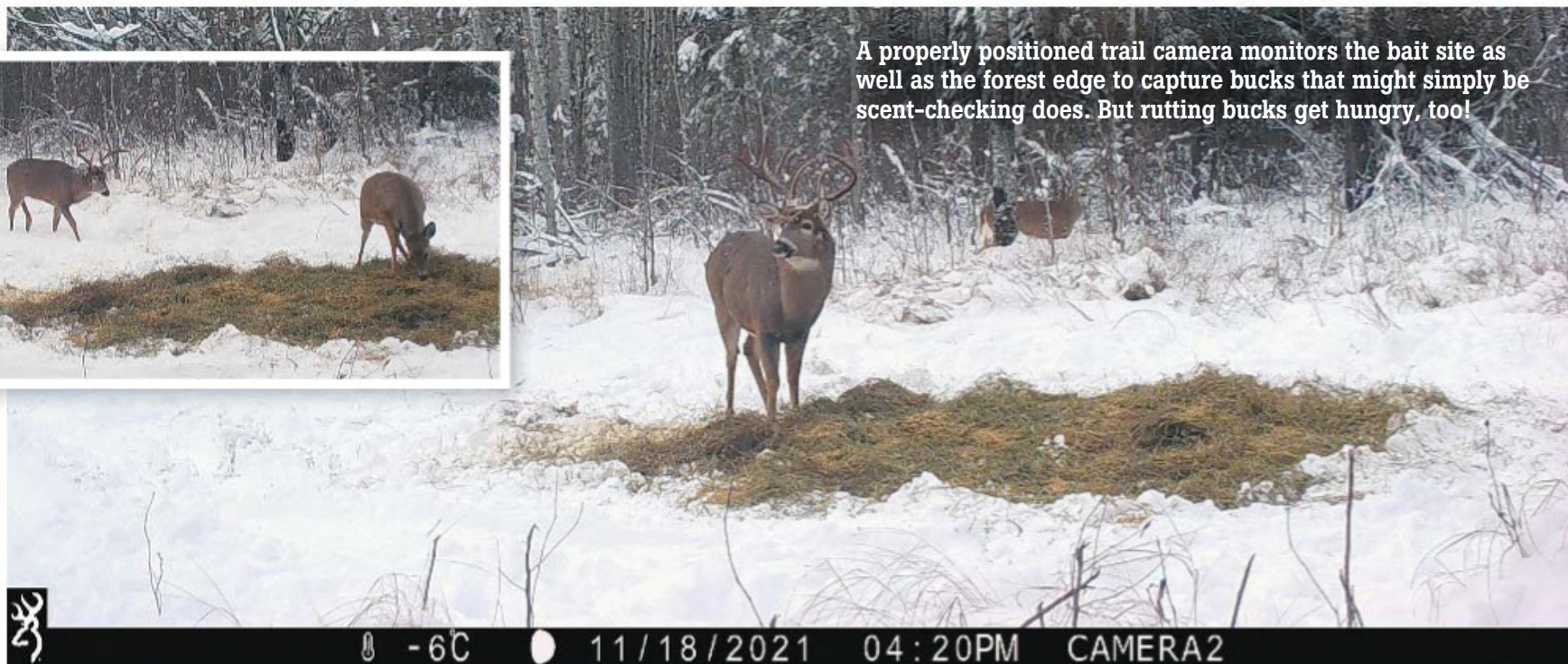
The first morning began with a UTV ride through several miles of snow-laden spruce trees. So much snow had fallen overnight that we weren’t sure we could make it to the blind, but we plowed our way through and crawled into the blind well before daylight. Driving right up to the blind offered the advantage of not having to hike our way in, working up a sweat that would make staying warm difficult. Also, most bowhunters, guides, and outfitters have learned that a motorized vehicle of some kind is far less alarming to deer than a walking human.

Once the timber swallowed the UTV’s red taillights, cameraman Bill Owens and I were pretty well settled in for the day. Warm clothing and boots, plus chemical warmers for our hands and feet, and a massive lunch prepared by Fred’s wife, Collette, ensured we would endure the long hours in comfort. A good cell signal helped as well.

Daybreak delivered several does and fawns to our ambush site, but we did not see a buck until 2:45 p.m. He was a miniature version of the typical Saskatchewan whitetail buck. His body was well-built for a 1½-year-old, and his chocolate antlers were small but heavy for a buck of



A properly positioned trail camera monitors the bait site as well as the forest edge to capture bucks that might simply be scent-checking does. But rutting bucks get hungry, too!



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GRIT IS COMPULSORY

his age. Should he survive another three or four years, I had no doubt he likely would make some deer hunter's heart race wildly one day.

That was it for Day One. No evidence of rutting activity, which was strange for November 15. One assumes that the rut tends to be earlier the farther north you go, but Fred said there hadn't been much chasing going on just yet...but it was coming.

Day Two was a carbon copy, with pretty much the same visitors slipping in and out of the dense forest. You hardly ever hear them coming, even though the woods are typically so quiet that if your stomach growls, you fear it will spook the deer.

Not one to allow his clients to suffer from boredom, Fred decided to move us to a different blind for the morning of Day Three. At our new location, the Browning trail camera had captured a good buck that appeared to be harassing the does in the area. We got another dump of fresh snow that night, so the early morning ride in was quite the spectacle with the ATV's headlights dancing off the sparkling fresh snow that hung



Once I shot my buck, it didn't take Fred and guide Emmett long to arrive on the scene.

heavy on the tree branches, pushing them near the breaking point.

This blind was smaller than most, so Bill and I had to strategically place our gear and squeeze in. With everything ready, and my gloved hand wrapped around an insulated mug full of coffee, I sat back in my chair and pondered the implications of the full moon shining through the trees directly into our shooting window. This prompted the age-old question: How does the moon phase affect the movement of big game and other wildlife? While I enjoy hypothesizing about the influence of the moon, I don't have a clue how animals react to the lunar

phase. Just when I think I have a pattern or theory, it ultimately gets destroyed by reality. I don't believe anyone knows the answers, which leads me to the conclusion that the best time to hunt is whenever you can — moon phase be damned.

Case in point... Just as I was thinking the full moon likely would mean very little action until midday (a common theory), a large shadow suddenly ghosted toward the alfalfa. I probably wouldn't have even seen the buck were it not for the snow-white background. My binoculars helped me discover this was the buck Fred had captured on his trail camera — at least I thought so.

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The buck sniffed around the alfalfa without taking a bite, likely searching only for the scent of a doe. He dallied around long enough that we were within eight minutes of legal shooting light. I hoped he would stick around, but with just three minutes to go, he turned and retreated into the snowy timber.

After about 20 minutes of feeling sorry for myself and thinking that was the last I'd see of the buck for a while, I was surprised to see the buck return and follow a young doe to the alfalfa. I con-

firmed the curved right brow tine this time — it was definitely the buck from Fred's photo.

I slowly reached for my bow and waited for a good shot angle. The buck pivoted back and forth and never really settled down. I didn't have a shot I liked. Again, the buck walked back into the timber. Within minutes, I could see and hear the buck chasing a doe along the edge of the timber.

Another doe came from the left and caught the buck's eye, and for a third time he approached the bait. I carefully drew my Hoyt, and when I did, I felt



In the frozen bush, a good ATV is invaluable for transporting hunters and recovering deer.

my top cam just touch the blind's roof. I leaned forward as far as I could, but failed to remember the roof of the blind also angled downward. When the buck finally turned broadside — the explosion happened!

Snow and pine needles flew everywhere! It took me a second to realize what had happened, because my focus was on the deer. My arrow struck high, but as the buck ran off I could see the snow was being painted red by profuse arterial bleeding. I had hit the descending aorta that runs along the spine, and the buck was down in seconds.

I inspected the blind's roof for damage, but it was fine. The cam-to-roof impact had caused my bow to kick up, thus accounting for the high hit. In hindsight, I was fortunate to have hit the buck where I did.

I sent a text to Fred, and only minutes later he and the guide, Emmett, showed up for the short tracking job in the fresh snow. It was a fine, long-beamed buck I was happy to tag.

This hunt lasted only 2½ days, so I didn't have to dig too deep for the perseverance or grit that would have been needed for the six-day hunt. I was ready to tough it out, but thankfully, this time I didn't spend a second thinking about golf. **BH**

AUTHOR'S NOTE: On this hunt, I used my Hoyt RX-5 bow, Easton Hexx arrows, Rage Trypan broadheads, Spot-Hogg bowsight, Browning clothing, Ozonics, and Lumenok lighted nocks. If you'd like to book a deer or bear hunt with Fred Lackie at Candle Lake Outfitters, you can contact him at candlelakeoutfitters.com, or call (306) 491-9750.

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I was set up along a field edge, right where the uncut milo transitioned into lush winter wheat. On several occasions I'd watched from a distance as deer emerged from the milo and fed out into the wheat. Several times I had set up a few hundred yards away near a community scrape where I captured photos of a couple of big, mature bucks, but the deer never seemed to make it down that far before the end of shooting light. Today, however, I decided to take

a chance and move farther out into the open, closer to where the deer emerged from their beds.

With a Dave Smith 3-D buck decoy positioned about 30 yards out in the ankle-deep winter wheat, I tucked myself into the first row of uncut milo with a Stalker whitetail doe decoy on my bow. When bucks see this setup, they typically assume the 3-D buck has a hot doe pinned down in the brush, and they approach with bad intentions. When using

this ground-decoying system, I don't usually place the 3-D buck that far away. This time, however, I felt it needed to be farther out to maximize visibility, and to hopefully give bucks room to walk between the decoy and me.

The first buck to emerge did so right on top of me. He was less than 10 yards to my left when he popped out of the milo. Upon seeing the 3-D buck, he bristled, but it startled him when he looked right and saw me with my bow-mounted doe at close range.



A Quick Scramble

WHEN PLANS A AND B TURN OUT TO BE A BUST, YOU BETTER SCRAMBLE TO ESTABLISH PLANS C AND D.

By Danny Farris, Contributor



My Plan A spot in Kansas has been a consistent producer. I took this buck at 13 yards there and have had many more close encounters since. Arriving on this hunt to find all the cover mowed down was devastating.

That's exactly what I don't want. I want bucks to see my bow-mounted doe from a distance. When they do, they typically write her off and focus on the 3-D buck, giving me ample opportunity to draw and shoot. After being startled, however, this buck didn't stick around.

A short time later, another buck appeared in the winter wheat, but this time farther out in the field. It was a buck I had on camera, and one that I had already decided to take if given the chance.

He spotted my fake doe from a distance as he approached the 3-D buck. With ears pinned, he acted like he was going to follow the script and walk right between the buck decoy and me, but at 30 yards he suddenly changed his mind and turned right at me. I drew my bow as he approached — 25, 20, 15, now 10 yards! He was close enough to be looking down at me, and the milo stalks hiding the turkey chair I was sitting on were no longer providing cover! When he stopped at

nine yards and gave me a skeptical head-bob, I had to make a decision.

I often struggle in situations when things don't go exactly according to plan. When bucks walk in as intended, I typically execute well. When one makes an unanticipated move, especially in the closing moments of truth, I sometimes panic and make less-than-ideal decisions. Strangely enough, this intense moment wasn't the one that made me panic on this hunt.

A Quick Scramble

I've been bowhunting Kansas for over a decade now, and each year it's one of my most-anticipated trips. I hunt on my own, mostly on walk-in areas I've learned over the years. When I first began hunting Kansas, walk-ins seemed to be a well-kept secret. I seldom encountered other hunters and literally had the run of most properties. Over the years, however, due to publicity generated (at least partly) by big-mouthed outdoor writers like yours truly, competition on walk-in areas has become more significant. Most areas that offer traditional deer habitat where stands can be hung, typically have trucks parked at them, so I started concentrating my efforts on sparsely timbered, open areas — I basically hunt pheasant ground.

Of these open areas, there are a couple of hidden gems that I've come to rely on for much of my success. Plans A and B for me are two small walk-in areas that most bowhunters drive right by. Unless you've ever taken the time to actually get out and walk them, you'd never know the treasures they hide.

My Plan A spot features a deep, weedy bottom where does love to bed.



PHOTOS BY CHRISTIAN HOFFMAN

My Plan B spot is typically just as productive as Plan A. I took the biggest buck of my career there, and then two years ago I grunted this buck in to just six yards. This year however, I arrived to find the spot full of cattle and completely devoid of deer!

It's devoid of trees, except for a couple of cedars overlooking the bottom. In 2017, I used my 3-D buck/bow-mounted doe decoying system to arrow one of my biggest bucks to date at just 13 yards. Since then, I've returned just about every year, and have experienced some of the best deer encounters of my life as a result.

My Plan B spot is completely devoid of trees and looks like an ordinary low-growth CRP field. In the middle of that field, however, is a depression that hides a deep weed patch. The weedy bottom is about the size of a football field, and deer come from quite a distance to bed there.

In 2018, I spotted a wide-framed buck (that I initially mistook for a mule deer)





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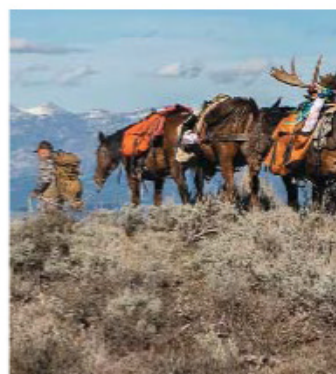
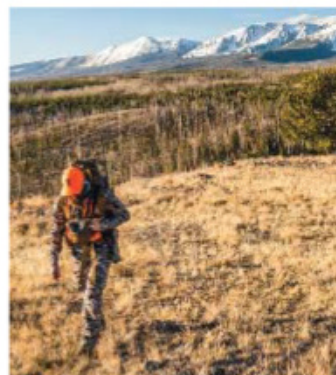


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A Quick Scramble



Plan C turned out to be a wide-open CRP field where I'd seen bucks cruising in the past. It turned out to be a productive spot. This is a shot of the big 10-point I missed on this hunt as he was approaching my decoy set.



bedded with a doe in that weed patch. Cameraman Mike Emery and I snuck in on that buck with a Stalker doe decoy on my bow and a Stalker buck decoy on Mike's camera. We stopped within earshot, and I used a grunt call to pull the buck out of the weeds. When he spotted our fakes, he marched in for a 16-yard shot. He remains the biggest buck of my career. Two years later, I blind-grunted another buck out of that weed patch, taking him at just six yards from behind my bow-mounted decoy.

So, here's how my Kansas routine typically goes. Since I rarely have time to take a dedicated scouting trip, the first thing I do is hang some game cameras. I like to set them on established scrapes that I've located over the years. Bucks are typically hitting these scrapes regularly, and it allows me to take a quick inventory. What I don't do, however, is hang cameras on my Plan A and Plan B spots, because I know they are reliable producers and that I'll be hunting them regularly throughout the trip. Some of the scrapes are close enough to capture bucks that might be coming and going from them, but I don't head to those spots until I'm actually going to hunt them.

Last November, I arrived midday, spent the afternoon hanging cameras, and prepared to head for my Plan A spot the following morning. I arrived predawn, and as I started carrying my 3-D buck out to where I always set him, I noticed something odd: The grass where I normally put him was less than ankle deep.

As the sun lit up the eastern horizon, I was horrified to see that the entire weedy bottom that made the spot a treasure had been mowed. *Crap!* I thought to myself. My morning was wasted, but worse than that, Plan A was off the table for the rest of this hunt. Without the weeds, the spot had nothing to offer. On to Plan B.

Because Plan B is quite a distance from Plan A, I spent the rest of the morning glassing and checking some of my cameras. That afternoon, I parked my truck at the access point and started the lengthy walk in. As I crested the hill overlooking the depression with the weed patch, I began seeing cows. *What the heck is this?* I thought, as I'd never seen cows there before, and now there was an entire herd bedded in and around the weed patch.

I proceeded to take a closer look, and I soon discovered that the cattle had mashed most of the weeds down. There was no way deer were hanging in there now. My entire first day was ruined, and now Plan B was off the table, too!

That's when I started to panic. Here I was, seven hours from home, and my two primary spots were a bust!

I had some other spots to choose from, but I wasn't nearly as experienced with any of them. I needed to gather some intel — and fast!

I'd taken for granted how things change from year to year, and when you're a traveling DIY hunter, there's typically no one to tell you what's going on. Crops get rotated, cows get moved, and farmers apparently decide to mow their best deer-holding weed patches for some ungodly reason!

The good thing about hunting wide-open terrain is that bucks have relatively few places to rub and make scrapes. When a field has only a couple of trees, it's usually a good bet that one of them will have a scrape under it, so I spent the rest of the afternoon on my first day finding scrapes and hanging more cameras.

While giving my cameras time, I spent the next few days in another spot I'll call Plan C. It's a large CRP field that doesn't have isolated bedding areas like my Plan A and B spots, but I had seen

bucks cruising for does there on several occasions. Again, it was completely devoid of trees, and it's a bit of a crapshoot trying to decide where to set up. I wound up choosing the most visible spot on the property for my 3-D buck. It was near the top of a hill, where a small erosion terrace provided me with some cover to sit with my bow-mounted doe decoy.

My first morning there ended up being a good one. Three young whitetail bucks and one mule deer buck ended up making appearances at different times. The first whitetail buck crested the horizon with a doe, right out in front of my setup, and all went according to plan. The pair strolled right between my 3-D decoy and me, hung out for a few minutes, and then departed without ever really spooking. It was a great encounter. The mule deer buck came from the same direction and followed the same script, and I was thrilled to see how well the setup worked on that species. The final two whitetail bucks had to be rattled-in, but when they saw my decoy set, both came in and offered shots, had I decided to take them.

I returned to Plan C full of confidence — maybe a little too much confidence. I set up in the same spot, and just as the sun was coming over the horizon, I spotted a nice 10-point walking through the CRP. He approached in that golden light of morning, and everything went exactly according to plan. After spotting my setup from a distance, he then focused his full attention on the 3-D buck.

I drew my bow as he began his stiff-legged march toward my decoy, and when he turned broadside at just under 20 yards, I released. Only problem was, I never saw my arrow. I didn't know where it went. The buck bolted, and I just about blew a gasket!

After several hours of trying to figure out what happened, I discovered that my unzipped outer layer had pressed against the fletching on my drawn arrow, causing it to come up off the rest during the shot. I never found that arrow. I assume it's somewhere in Nebraska.

Plan D materialized when I checked my game cameras. Two of the properties where I'd placed cameras weren't producing, but one had three mature bucks hitting scrapes. I immediately refocused my attention there.

Two nights later, I found myself in the position described at the beginning of this story — at full draw, with one of the bucks staring at me at nine yards. My pin was buried in the middle of his

chest when he gave me the suspicious head-bob. I'm pretty deadly at that distance, and he didn't have time to move. Seconds later, he was belly-up in the lush winter wheat.

I'm always amazed at how much gear ends up in the back of my truck when I head out on my Kansas hunt. Sometimes I feel like it's overkill, but that's what it takes to be consistently successful on DIY hunts. Even on ground you feel intimately familiar with, things can change from season to season, and you must be ready to shift gears on the fly if things change.

When it comes to DIY bowhunting, success or failure is all on you! **BH**

Author's Notes: On this hunt I was shooting a Hoyt RX-5 Ultra with Easton Sonic 6.0 arrows tipped with Rage Hypodermic NC broadheads. Other equipment included SIG SAUER KILO 3000BDX rangefinding binoculars, Browning apparel, Browning Trail Cameras, a Dave Smith 3-D buck decoy, and a bow-mounted Stalker Decoy from UltimatePredatorGear.com. Watch for this hunt on a future episode of Bowhunter TV!

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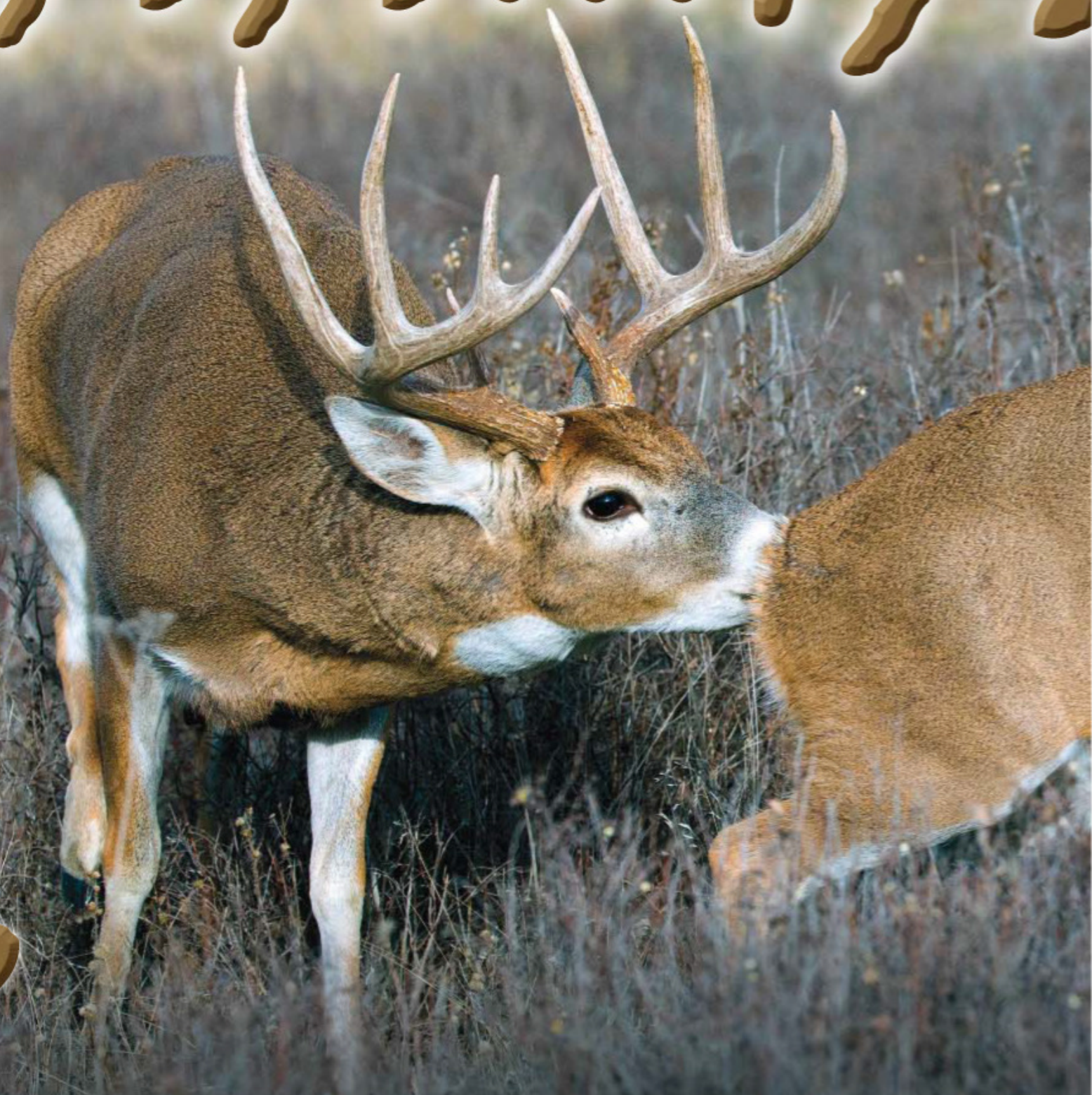
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W

HEN IT COMES TO bowhunting trophy whitetails, there's no other time during the season that can quite compare to the rut. Of course, the number one reason for this is that even the most mature bucks often become more active in daylight, which makes them more susceptible to ambush. A past Midwestern bowhunt is a perfect example of what I'm talking about.

I'd climbed up to my treestand about 10 minutes before daylight on a chilly November morning. Although I was eager to grab my rattling antlers and let go with a sequence right at first light, I decided to wait until about a half-hour after daylight...and, man, am I glad I did!

Within a few minutes of finishing that sequence, I heard a loud and deep grunt emanate from the thick patch of willow brush located 100 yards straight out in front of my stand. Seconds later, a forkhorn buck walked out of the brush.

Now, I must admit to being somewhat confused initially, as I would have sworn the grunt I'd heard sounded too deep and loud to have come from an immature buck. However, any confusion I might have harbored disappeared instantly when from the willows emerged a big 10-point, trailing directly behind the forkhorn.

It was immediately apparent that the two bucks had

The Rut!

THE WHITETAIL RUT DRIVES BOWHUNTERS TO DO WEIRD THINGS...
MUCH LIKE THE BUCKS WE'RE PURSUING.



DEER IMAGE: DONALDMJONES.COM

By GREG MILLER

heard my rattling sequence and were approaching to check things out. I slowly grabbed my bow from its hanger and got into position for what I was positive would be an upcoming shot opportunity.

Long story short, after stopping briefly one time to make a scrape, the 10-point ended up walking to within 15 yards of my stand. The hit was pretty much picture-perfect, and the stud whitetail ran less than 100 yards before cashing it in.

The rut had just kicked into gear when I managed to lure this big Midwestern 10-point into range with a couple soft "toots" on my grunt call.



AHH...THE RUT!

Decoying During The Rut

Although I enjoy every aspect of hunting for rutting whitetails, my absolute favorite rut strategy is to wait in ambush over a buck decoy. And while a fair number of my successful rut decoy hunts have been captured on film, there are equally as many that weren't. This is because I first began employing decoys on my rut hunts long before a cameraman was watching over my right shoulder.

One such hunt remains forever vivid in my mind. That hunt occurred back in the mid-90s. Deer decoys had just come onto the scene, and the manufacturer of a newly formed decoy company had reached out to inquire if I'd be interested in trying one of his products.

I must admit, my initial reaction wasn't very positive. In fact, I told the guy flat out that I didn't have a real good feeling about hunting over a decoy. But after giving it a bit more thought, I told him to go ahead and send me one. It proved to be a wise decision on my part.

Earlier in the year, I'd planned a November bowhunt to a county located in west-central Illinois. Believing I had nothing to lose, I hauled the decoy along on that hunt. Another very wise decision.

My primary treestand on that hunt was located along the edge of a large, freshly harvested soybean field. After a bit of consideration, I decided to set my decoy in the field approximately 20 yards straight out in front of the large oak in which I'd hung my stand.

Over the course of the first three days of my hunt, more than a dozen different bucks walked in to check out my

decoy. To say I was impressed would be a vast understatement. But I was even more impressed when, at midday on the fourth day, a very mature eight-point made the mistake of challenging the bogus deer. That Illinois buck achieved the status of being my first-ever decoy kill. And the encounter forever sold me on the effectiveness of using decoys during the rut.

Another more recent and memorable decoy rut bowhunt took place a couple years ago in South Dakota. While I've long preached that hunting over a decoy is a visual thing, and that they should be placed in open areas, on that day I opted to place mine in a stretch of riverbottom cover.

My decision to do so had been prompted by the fact that the underbrush in the area had recently played host to a heavy amount of grazing by a large herd of beef cattle. As a result, there was very little understory cover remaining, which had dramatically increased visibility in the bottoms.



Although I strongly suggest using decoys in open areas whenever possible, I did manage to take this South Dakota buck over a decoy placed in some riverbottom cover.

Anyway, after doing a bit of scouting, my cameraman, Matt Tande, and I decided to place our portable stands in a tree located in a spot that would allow us to take advantage of the upcoming predicted wind direction. On day three of our hunt, a mature 5x3 whitetail heard one of my rattling sequences and then made the mistake of challenging my decoy.

Buck Or Doe?

I can't remember the exact number of bucks I've managed to lure into bow range with decoys since that first Illinois hunt in the 90s. But if I had to guess on the number, it would be several dozen. Oh, and I should add that I always use a buck decoy and NEVER use a doe decoy.



My absolute favorite rut strategy is to use a buck decoy in conjunction with rattling.

My reasoning for doing so is because, over the years, I've found that antlerless deer, especially mature does, don't like other antlerless deer they don't recognize. And this oftentimes results in a lot of stomping, blowing, and ruckus-raising — which is never a good thing.

On the flip side, it has been my experience that mature does and other antlerless deer are far more tolerant of a buck decoy. Fact is, I can't recall the last time an antlerless deer had a hissy fit upon spotting my buck decoy.

Calling During The Rut

If I could recommend a single piece of advice regarding calling during the rut, it would be: Do it, and don't be afraid to do it often (like every 15 or 20 minutes). Remember, the landscape is constantly changing this time of year. Put simply, mature bucks always will be out on the prowl in search of receptive does. So, it only stands to reason that calling more often (within reason) can only increase your chances of experiencing some big-buck action.

I well remember a rut bowhunt in southwest Kansas from some years back, where calling played a huge role in my success. Upon arriving at my destination, I discovered that the area had been subjected to weeks of record-high temperatures and extremely dry conditions.

After taking this factor into consideration, I decided my best plan of attack would be to concentrate my efforts near a small river that flowed through the area. I did a bit of scouting, and eventually placed a portable stand in a large cottonwood tree that stood along the very edge of the river.

Although I knew it was most likely a futile decision to do so, I climbed into the stand several hours before dark. I then waited until the sun was just beginning to slip below the western horizon and the temperature was starting to drop, before grabbing my grunt call and letting go with a few subtle "toots."



This is the very first mature whitetail I took while hunting over a decoy during the peak of the rut. The hunt took place in west-central Illinois back in the mid-1990s.



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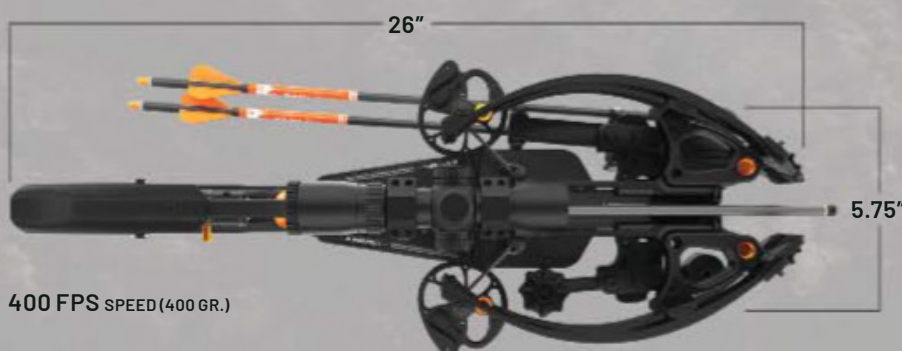
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AHH...THE RUT!



Due to a stretch of warmer-than-normal November weather, I decided to place my portable stand in a large tree that stood along the banks of a small river. I then used my grunt call to entice this dandy 10-point to within 15 yards.

A few minutes later, I spotted a good buck heading in my direction. The 10-point eventually walked to within 15 yards of my stand site, where I promptly put an arrow through his vitals. He made it less than 100 yards before going down for good.

Thirsty Bucks

I can't stress strongly enough just how much rutting bucks desire and need water. Put into the simplest terms: During the rut, water becomes much more of a necessity than food. Anyone who has pursued whitetails for any length of time realizes that mature bucks typically lose a significant amount of body weight during the rut. That's because they will often forego eating for days at a time.

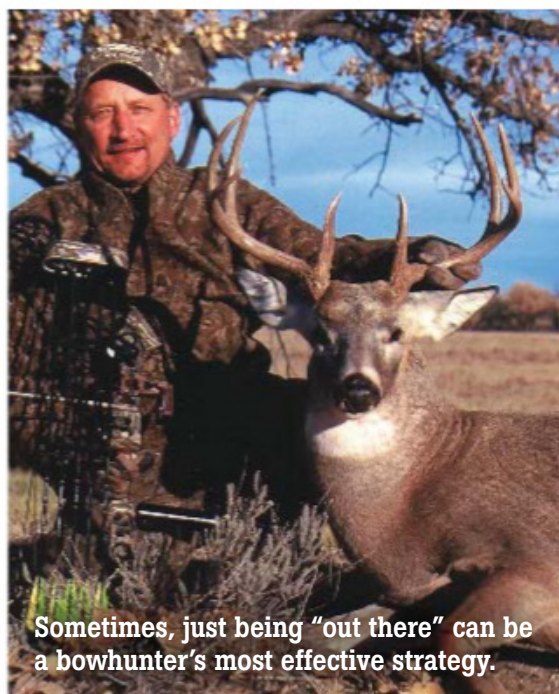
But while rutting bucks will often lose their interest in food, they absolutely need to remain hydrated! Therefore, water often becomes their top priority,

Rutting bucks need to remain hydrated, which makes pinpointing watering spots a top priority.



and you need to keep this in mind... much like I did on a past rut bowhunt.

My stand site was located within a stone's throw of a small pond I'd discovered earlier in the day. Even though I knew the higher-than-normal temperature that day was going to make for an uncomfortable sit, I decided to get on stand well before sundown. This turned out to be a smart move, as a big eight-point buck



Sometimes, just being "out there" can be a bowhunter's most effective strategy.

sauntered in to get a drink just minutes after I'd gotten settled. My arrow found its mark, and I had the pleasure of watching the stud deer crash to the ground after running only about 75 yards.

Those Times...

But while calling, decoying, and setting up near antlerless-deer bedding areas and water sources can be effective strategies during the rut, it also bears mentioning that sometimes just being "out there" can prove to be the key to success. Another successful rut bowhunt of mine is a great example of what I'm talking about here.

I'd climbed into my treestand just as daylight arrived that morning. And while I was expecting to see some rutting action fairly soon, I wasn't quite prepared for just how quickly it happened. Truth is, I barely had time to get my bow in my hands when a solid 10-pointer came running in hot on the tail of a smaller buck. Fortunately for me, the two whitetails stopped almost directly under my stand.

While I could clearly see that the buck's rack didn't possess much in the way of an inside spread, his impressive mass was obvious. As it turned out, the buck's inside spread was only about 14 inches. However, the circumferences of his bases ended up measuring just under six inches, and this impressive mass was present throughout his entire rack.



This narrow but exceptionally heavy-horned 10-point whitetail strolled within bow range just minutes after I got settled in my treestand.

The point I'd like to make here is that I'd decided not to hunt near a food or water source but selected instead to set up in one of those random spots that, after thoroughly scouting the area, just "felt good." I'm sure some of you know exactly what I'm talking about.

So, after many years of bowhunting rutting whitetails in a bunch of different states and a couple Canadian provinces, I've come to some conclusions. First, despite what some people believe, whitetails don't behave exactly the same way in all parts of their vast range across our country — a fact that especially rings true during the rut.

It's my opinion that the biggest reason for these significant behavioral differences has to do with one simple factor — hunting pressure. Put simply: Less pressure translates into mature bucks being more "daylight active" during the rut, while more pressure almost always translates into less daylight activity.

But in any event, there's also something to be said about spending as much time as possible occupying your stand sites when bucks are obsessed with their innate desire to pass on their genes to any and all receptive does. You never know when that magical moment might occur. It could be at first light, last light...or just about any time in between.

And that, my friends, is exactly why bowhunting for rutting whitetails can be so challenging and frustrating at times, but so very rewarding when things go your way! **BH**

The author shares his whitetail know-how from his home in the Badger State.

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MOUNTAIN

“ALMOST HEAVEN, WEST VIRGINIA” — there really isn’t any other way to describe my home state. I love almost being lost in time here. I live in Monroe County, which is a primarily agricultural county located in the southern part of West Virginia. We do not have a single stoplight in the entire county. The running joke is there’s more head of cattle than people, and personally, I hope that never changes. It has rolling hills and valleys, creeks, but also the mighty Peters Mountain. That’s where I grew up and learned to hunt, trap, and fish.

Peters is steep, rugged, and full of limestone, greenbriers, and mountain laurel. Bowhunting this mountain is very difficult. There aren’t many pinch-points or ridges that bottleneck, the wind is constantly shifting, and there are no easy paths to get to where the deer are. I tend to chase the food when hunting it. Some years, acorns will be high on the mountain, so I hunt high. Some years, there are no acorns, but the grape vines are full, so I’ll hunt the grapes. Some years, an early frost plus a dry summer will leave us with no mast crops at all, so I hunt thick areas with lots of browse.

This is where the story begins. It all started with a picture in early October. One blurry picture of a decent 10-point. My family and I had never seen this buck in person, which isn’t uncommon on the mountain. Each year we get good bucks on camera, and then they disappear. The deer that are there in the summer leave during the rut, but new deer always show up at the same time.

The following year, we got a couple more pictures of the 10-point during the exact same week in October as the year prior, but still none of us encountered him in person. The next year, my cousin saw the buck pushing a doe, but no shot was offered. Last year, my dad, grandfather, uncle, and cousin all encountered the deer, but the only shot on him was in rifle season...and I missed! Every time we spotted the buck, it was within a 1,000-yard radius. This is where he would make his daylight appearance.

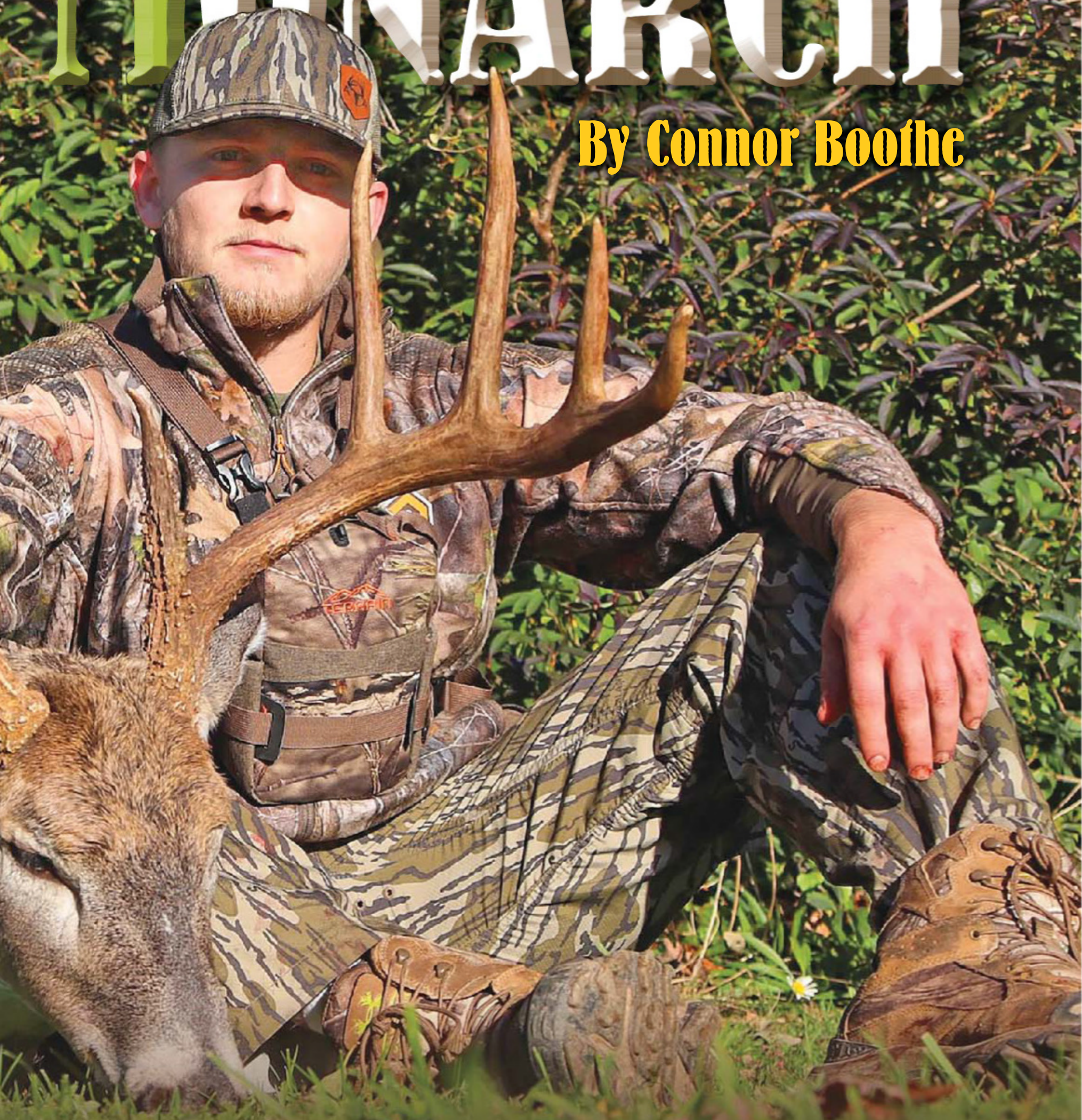
My grandparents have a big picture window looking out over one of the only fields on the mountain. They have a spotting scope and watch out the window every day. My Gram was looking out the window one morning and spotted something in the snow. It was one of the buck’s sheds. We never find sheds on the mountain — like ever. We knew he had made it through all the rifle hunting, as our private land borders the Virginia National Forest and many, many people hunt there. The following month, my Uncle Dave found the matching side nearly one mile away! Gram and my uncle decided to share the sheds, and to this day the sheds make the centerpiece on my grandparent’s kitchen table.

I knew the following year the buck would be an absolute giant. In our area, deer don’t tend to make it to full maturity. With heavy rifle season pressure, if a deer makes it to 3½ years old, he’s very lucky. The only thing that allowed this buck to reach maturity was the mountain. This deer would bed high where he could watch everything. He would always be traveling with the wind in his nose. He was a true ghost deer.

A Tale Of A Mountain

MONARCH

By Connor Boothe



Man And The Mountain Whitetails He Loves To Pursue.

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MOUNTAIN MONARCH

He quickly became well-known around the area just like any big buck does. People started talking, and I started to get nervous. This deer is a true once-in-a-lifetime deer for our part of the state. With the history my family had with him, I felt like he belonged to us, and no one else. I also had a gut feeling that I was going to be the one to kill him that year.

Our entire family was almost certain where the buck spent most of his time from late October through December, but I wasn't convinced. We got him on camera the night before I hunted, and he was doing the same thing he'd done in years past. Based on the most recent photos, and other pictures of him from the past, I made the decision to try something different: I went low on the mountain with my climber on my back, ending up about a half-mile from where the previous night's picture was taken, and closer to where I knew the buck was most likely bedding.

Just like Del Gue in "Jeremiah Johnson" says, "Well, keep your nose in the wind, and your eyes along the skyline." That's exactly how I hunt.

I walked into a very secluded area and immediately found large rubs with the saplings broken off chest high. I went a little farther in this area and found three very large, fresh scrapes. I checked my wind again, found a tree next to one of the scrapes, and got set up.

My chosen ambush offered very limited visibility, as well as small shooting lanes. I checked my yardages around me and made mental notes of them, plus any lanes I could get a shot through.

The first animals to show up were two coyotes. A little later in the day, I heard a noise above me followed by a grunt — not just any grunt, but a growl — and I heard it again and again. It was clear that the buck making said noises was agitated and wanted any and all listeners to know it.



Gram (Donna Boothe) with the buck's massive shed she found the year prior.

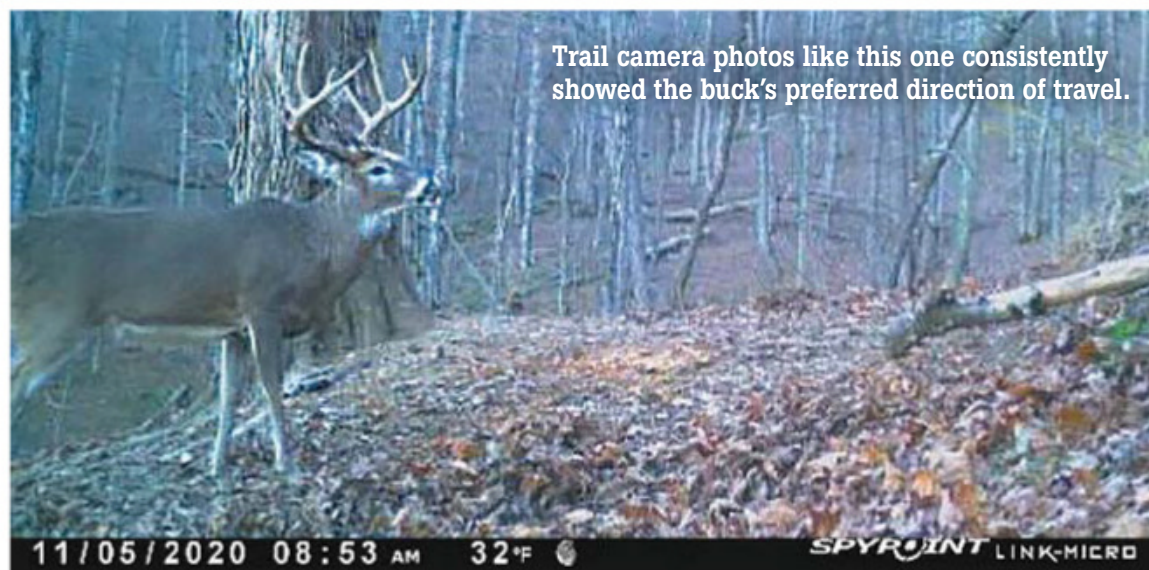
Then I spotted him — the buck I had hoped would walk in front of me, or one of my family members, that fall. He was there, and he was walking right toward me. There was no doubt he was the King of the Mountain.

When the buck reached the first scrape, he pawed the dirt, broke off a small tree, and then he made another grunt-growl. I slowly reached for my bow in preparation for a shot as the buck inched closer to the next scrape, which was just 30 yards above me.

I tried to settle my nerves as I drew my bow, and when the buck checked that scrape, he offered me a broadside shot. I settled my pin, took a deep breath, and released the arrow. It struck home! I centered the buck's shoulder, but my setup cut through it like butter. The old buck took off, but he only made it 30 yards before nosediving into the dirt.

Now, as every successful hunter knows, the moments that follow experiences like mine usually involve a ridiculous case of the shakes! As a result, I had to wait several minutes before even climbing down out of the tree.

Once I got down, I practically ran to the fallen buck and grabbed the antlers of



Trail camera photos like this one consistently showed the buck's preferred direction of travel.



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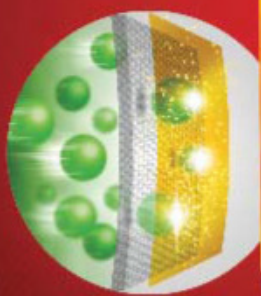
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a true West Virginia giant. I sat there for several minutes, just admiring this beautiful buck while soaking in the experience. Then I called my dad, and I could hear the emotion in his voice. My next two calls were to my fiancé, Maggie, and my Gram.

It was then that I realized I was literally in the middle of nowhere — basically the abyss of Peters Mountain — with a 6½-year-old whitetail, and I needed help to get him back home. My grandfather (aka “Poppy”) was out of town, my dad was at work, as was my cousin, Tyler, and my Uncle Dave. So, I called Gram again, as she was the only one home.

So, without hesitation, my 73-year-old grandmother made the hike to assist me. She was thrilled at my success, and while I labored to drag my buck off the mountain, Gram proceeded to carry my trees-stand and bow for a half-mile! We finally made it to the house, beyond exhaustion, but still excited. After several phone calls and pictures, reality truly set in for good... I’d finally killed a bona fide West Virginia “Mountain Monarch!” **BH**

The author lives in Lindsie, WV, where he works as a project manager for State-son Homes.

AUTHOR’S NOTES: My equipment on this hunt included a Mathews V3 bow, Victory RIP arrows, QAD Exodus broadheads, and an X-Stand climbing treestand.

There are four bowhunting-only counties in West Virginia, and every year giants are taken there, including the last two state records. Monroe County, WV, isn’t known for big bucks. That said, for the past five years I’ve been blessed to take bucks that scored at least 130 P&Y-style inches off the mountain.

Monroe County has a three-buck limit, and with our property bordering public land in Virginia, it’s hard for a Monroe buck to live past two or three years of age. My family practices quality deer management the best we can, but it can be very difficult. We plant year-round food plots and try to create natural cover to protect fawns during the spring. We pass multiple bucks, but we do shoot does to fill our freezers with meat to feed our families.

I love to see giants come out of West Virginia, because it shows the potential we really have. My story is proof that there are big bucks out there — and, if you do the right things as a steward of the land, you can make it happen.

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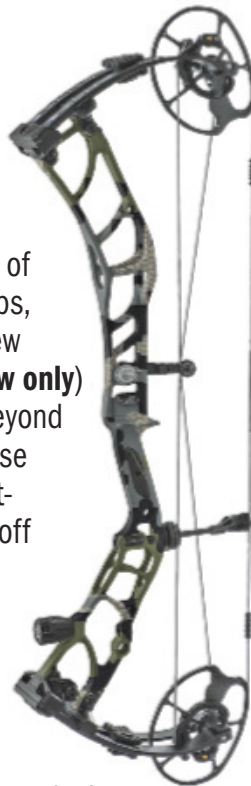


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SCI's preferred hotels for the 2023 Convention include Grand Hyatt Downtown, Hilton Nashville Downtown, Hyatt Place Downtown, JW Marriott Nashville, The Westin Nashville, Renaissance Nashville, and Omni Nashville. Please mention "SCI2023" or "Safari Club Room Block" when booking hotels over the phone to receive discounted pricing.



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Assistant Editor Brian Fortenbaugh took this nice droptine buck. Age is a big factor in droptines. The buck was aged at 6.5 years.

The cause for double main beams is something totally different, because genetics is not involved. Almost certainly, a double main beam is caused by an injury to the pedicle. Let me review what Curt wrote in his article in our October issue. The pedicle is the bony projection of the frontal bone where the antler develops. It has a special cell layer on it where the new antler grows. Research has shown that if you take some of those special cells and move them, a new antler tine often develops. In fact, years ago a researcher in Canada grafted some of these cells on the leg bone of a deer, and an antler tine grew there. In the case of “Slingshot,” those cells moved to the center of the frontal bone — yielding a “unicorn” buck.

But for double antlers, the cells move just as a new antler is starting to grow. At that time, if the buck bumps that area of his head, he may displace some of those cells right beside the base of the pedicle. When that happens, a second antler may start to grow there. If you look at photos of bucks with a double main beam, that second antler’s base is right beside or against the pedicle. When these special cells end up at the base of the pedicle, you may not get a second antler. There are times when the pedicle is bumped just as the antler starts to grow, in which case you just get a jumble of smaller tines around the base of the original antler. But on rare occasions, you’ll get a whole new antler.

Such bucks are not genetically inferior; they just have an extra antler. It will shed when the normal antlers shed. And it will most likely grow there the next year because the specialized cells that form the spot where the antler grows are still there.

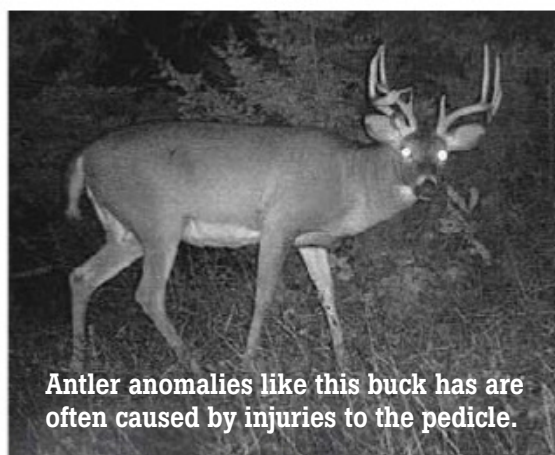
The trauma to the pedicle, just as the antler starts to grow, can be caused by most anything. The buck may just bump his head on a tree limb or by sparring with another buck. Growing antlers are subject to damage that affects the resulting antler, and double main beams is one such outcome. **BH**

Q I READ Dr. Dave Samuel’s explanation of why “Slingshot,” the buck in Curt Wells’ October 2022 article had an extra antler sticking out of his forehead. Could Dave explain how droptines and double main beams occur in whitetails? *Craig S., via e-mail*

A THERE IS NO QUESTION that older bucks tend to develop droptines more readily than young bucks, and usually genetics is involved. The genes for droptines (and sticker points and extra points) tend to be expressed when bucks get older. The fact that we don’t see many bucks with droptines in the wild is because we kill lots of younger bucks before they can manifest their full potential. Some biologists believe that almost half of all bucks have some genes for nontypical points that would become visible if the bucks lived long enough. Proving this would be difficult, but it sure appears to be true.

Another factor that complicates the impact of genetics on droptines is the doe. Her genes most certainly play a role

here, and some have suggested that her role is even more important than that of the buck. Again, that would be hard to prove, but deer-game farmers keep track of all their breeders — bucks and does. And they can and do breed for big, older nontypical bucks because such bucks bring in more money.



Antler anomalies like this buck has are often caused by injuries to the pedicle.

TOP PHOTO: BRIAN FORTENBAUGH; BOTTOM: AUTHOR'S PHOTO

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