

BEYOND MADE IN U.S.A. 7 | 8 | P.R. APP'D. 9 | 252 Tc the SCORE

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11-11-11 Kansas Buck By Randy A. Reeves

Hunting has always been a major consideration in my life. My college sweetheart took her first whitetail almost 35 years ago at the beginning of our romance. We married a few years later and spent our honeymoon on a bear hunt in Montana.

If I could hunt only one species, the choice would be an easy one: whitetail deer. Growing up in Texas, "Opening Day" meant whitetail deer hunting. The preparation and anticipation of deer hunting still excites me. Mom and Dad expressed several times they wished I had the same enthusiasm for school as I did for hunting.

My brother Wayne and I had bows and arrows as long as I can remember. Wayne was three years old when he shot me in the back of the leg with a field-tipped arrow. I was five. Without thinking, I shot back, intending to shoot close to his foot. He moved, and my arrow broke his toe. Trouble! He still has a crooked toe. We grew up shooting simple recurve bows or longbows that we played with year-round. I always appreciated the simplicity of a single string and light-weight bow. Building my own bows and arrows has increased the satisfaction I get from bowhunting.

Full of optimism, Wayne and I were

on the road to Kansas in 2011. It was November 4th, and we each had archery licenses in our pockets. This would be our fifth season to hunt the same patch of woods. With the previous years' experience, we were familiar with deer travel patterns, rub lines, and favorite scrape areas. Shooting lanes and approaches to stands had been taken care of in late summer. We had already made the trip to Kansas twice earlier in the season.

November is the time of year we eagerly anticipate from the last day of the previous deer season. Early November is one of the best times of year to match skills with and take advantage of mistakes a mature buck might make during the rut. Mature deer that have survived coyotes, hunters, cars, dogs, poachers, and injuries every day of their lives for four or more years are going to be smart.

Driving all night, we arrived just in time to unpack, change, and climb into stands before dawn.

It felt good to climb into the thick cedar. After nocking an arrow and hanging up my bow, I nestled back against the cedar trunk. My fleece collar felt good in the early morning air. Hen turkey yelps on the ridge west of me followed by flapping wings landed the birds 60 yards in front of me. Other than a doe followed by her fawn and a few blue jays and cardinals, it had been a still morning. Thinking there might be a gobbler in the bunch, I slowly placed my bow across my lap.

In front of me the turkeys fed, when suddenly they spooked as a pack of coyotes came trotting through the brush toward them. The flock took to wing, clucking noisily. Two of the birds flew directly overhead, wind rushing through their wings as they

After years of whitetail hunting, all the practice and preparation paid off for Randy Reeves when he took this non-typical whitetail. He was archery hunting with a recurve bow in Linn County, Kansas, with his brother Wayne. The buck scores 220-2/8 points.



This column is dedicated to those trophies that catch our eye as they come across the records desk at Boone and Crockett Club's headquarters. Some score high, some are downright entertaining, and many are just unique.

rose above the trees. The coyotes reminded me of a skirmish line as they continued toward me, strung out about 30 yards end to end, hunting in formation. As they neared, I lifted my bow. One of the dogs passed behind me. I focused on the second in line as he moved into range in front of me. Trotting left to right, the coyote never saw me. At 15 yards, my arrow struck him low in the chest, behind the shoulder. He yelped, changed gears, and took off. I could hear him growl and fight the arrow in the brush behind me, then all was quiet.

After recovering my arrow, I pulled the used SD card from the trail camera behind the cedar, put in a new one and headed to camp. On the way back I noticed an area where the ground was tore up. Lying in the middle was about a 4-inch piece of antler. I picked it up and shoved it in my pack. Checking the card, we saw several interesting bucks. Windy, warm weather was forecast.

Back at the cedar that evening, a 5x4, a 3-point, then right at dark, a heavy 8-point that might be a shooter later in the season came by. All the bucks that evening stopped to rub their antlers on a tall, slender Osage tree as they passed by. Two cedar trees blocked my view of the deer as they rubbed the tree. All I could see from my stand was the top of the tree, about 10 feet tall, whipping around, then the buck would appear. This whipping action took place all week long. Several times the tree moving was the first indication that a deer was near.

By Monday evening the only mature buck I had seen was the heavy, dark-horned 8-point, not the type of deer I would tag this early in the hunt. Where were the deer we had seen late last year and in 2009? We had seen several mature bucks on trail cams in January. We knew these deer survived hunting season but where were they now?

Wayne and I hunted several stands since Saturday morning. The weather had been unsettled, warm and windy. About 7:30 it began to rain. Thunderstorms rumbled after midnight and rain blew hard against the windows; I dug deeper in my sleeping bag.

Three inches of rain fell Tuesday overnight, washing the woods. We hoped the change in weather would get bucks moving to freshen up scrapes. New scrapes and rubs were appearing daily from overnight activity. Wayne had seen two nice bucks that needed another year. Leaves burnt yellow from earlier frosts were falling quickly in the strong wind. The windy, warm temperatures were far from ideal for bowhunting rutting whitetails. Yellow leaves from bois d'arc and hackberry trees littered the forest floor near my stand. Bright yellow/gold colors were a marked contrast against dark green grasses.

The rain continued into the morning, not as hard while on the stand, but too hard to enjoy hunting. It was in the 50s, with dark skies and high winds. Two small bucks passed under the cedar to the whipping tree, then I saw a bigger deer at a distance. A group of Canada geese honked as they passed overhead. Most of my time on stand was spent watching birds and squirrels.

About 3:00 p.m., Wayne saw a mature 6x5 as the buck made a scrape within bow range. The buck was scarred on both sides and along his back. Wayne passed up the buck, wondering who he had been fighting with. The ladder stand I chose was on an old fence line at the corner of a cedar bottom and CRP (Conservation Reserve Program) field. Just north of the stand is farmland the deer feed in during evenings. The ladder was tied to a tall hackberry, which swayed like a rope in the gusty southwest wind. I wasn't comfortable. By 3:30 p.m. I was thinking about changing stands to get out of the wind. Taking a last glance around before moving, the flick of an ear 15 yards away caught my eye. Several does followed by a spike, a small 3x3 and a heavy 5x4 in single file were headed my way.

A little after 4:00 p.m., the weather changed drastically. The wind switched directions and blew from the north. The

temperature began to change immediately. The deer fed and milled around near me until dusk. As light faded, the deer crossed the CRP field heading toward a wheat field. As I snuck down the ladder, coyotes howled at the full moon.

Late Wednesday a strong front was blowing in and a north wind dropped temperatures with each gust. The weather change we had hoped for gave us renewed enthusiasm.

Thursday morning was bright and clear, with moonlight casting my shadow as I walked to the cedar stand. Heavy frost crunched under foot, noting a big change in weather from only 48 hours ago. Climbing into the stand, the morning transitioned from moonlight to dawn. Deer filtered through early; too dark to count points, but grunting sounds let me know bucks were in the area. At 9 a.m., a nice 4x4 in the 140-inch range came by. I took some quick video and watched as he fed off. I don't think he was over 4½ years old. We had photos of this buck on our trail cam but hadn't seen him in person until this morning. The fact that one or two different bucks showed up daily is one of the reasons I kept coming back to this area.

Friday morning made it a full week of hard hunting. It was the coldest morning yet; no noticeable wind, clear, and the moon was going down. Before I could nestle into my stand, a deer moved by in the moonlight. I quietly nocked an arrow and hung up my Greywolf recurve.

By 9:00 a.m. I had seen several immature deer. Since this was our last day to hunt, Wayne and I agreed that as long as we were seeing movement, we would stay out. A little after 9:00 a.m., a mature big-bodied deer moved to my left. His white antlers stood out against the dark surroundings. He looked like a 5x5. A doe and yearling were feeding to my left, and he seemed interested. After several minutes of staring to the southeast



Randy and his brother Wayne hauling out his buck. After 41 years of harvesting whitetail it was good to be together to share this moment.

past the doe, he turned and headed back the way he came. Deer were moving, but it was frustrating not to see any better deer during the week.

I glanced at my watch—almost 9:30 a.m.; deer were still moving, so I sat tight. A doe was feeding off to my left. I decided to stay another hour or so. Two small bucks moved down a trail toward me. A fawn joined the doe and they fed within 20 yards. Movement toward the whipping sapling caught my eye. Long white tines moved through the jungle of Osage, then suddenly stopped. I raised my binoculars, glancing at the doe still feeding head down, fawn at her side. Through the binoculars, the first thing I could see was one long white tine, then another. When he moved his head, I knew he was huge—no doubt about this one being a shooter. Until he turned, I thought it might be the 5x5 I had seen earlier. I was completely surprised by his size. The buck started to walk. With mass and lots of points, he moved my way. Like most other bucks coming from that direction, he passed behind the cedar to the whipping tree. I took that opportunity to pick up my video camera. Camera up, I waited, watching the sapling. The buck appeared from behind the cedar. Recording light on, I had him, preserved and captured so everyone could see him. Head down, he came under a low-hanging Osage limb. I looked over the camera as he raised his head. There were points everywhere; a double row of points off each beam. I made no effort to count points. Glancing above the camera again, I realized he was coming fast and my bow was still hanging up!

The buck was about 25 yards and closing, quartering to me from my right. Thank goodness for good back cover in the cedar. The buck was at 22 yards, coming almost directly to me. I turned slightly to give myself a better shooting position. The buck turned quartering to me, looking at the doe 10 yards from him.

The crown of antlers was huge. I didn't look at the antlers again. I was calm, not believing this opportunity was happening. At 21 yards quartering to me, I had to wait. There was simply too much that could go wrong with that angle. The doe moved away to my left, a step or two, just enough to get the buck's attention. Turning slightly, he was broadside but his left leg was covering his heart. Fingers tight on the string, I waited. When the doe moved, he turned, moving his left leg forward. As his leg came forward, I drew, anchored, focused on his mid-body straight up his offside leg and released. The green nock flew straight to the spot I concentrated on! My yellow fletching planted tight behind his shoulder, halfway up his body in the crease!

He lunged and spun. The arrow shaft snapped as he ducked to dive around an Osage and a cedar. He was gone. I listened, trying to pick up any sound. Nothing. It was 9:32 a.m. Hanging up my recurve, I was in disbelief at what just happened. Leaning back against the tree, I sat tight for an hour. I wanted to do everything right to ensure finding the deer.

I slipped out of the stand, quickly checking for sign. Finding none, I headed to camp to tell Wayne. Wayne was in the kitchen frying bacon.

"Why so late?" he wondered aloud. "What did you see? Anything good?"

"Yes!"

"Did you get a shot?" Looking at him, I smiled, saying, "Yes, I hit a big buck."

"How big?"

"Huge!"

"How big is huge?"

Pausing with certainty, I answered, "I don't want to guess, but over 200 inches." Wayne looked up and smiled. After he heard the story, we discussed what to do. We decided to have breakfast, since he had already started cooking.

Later, Wayne found the fletched end of the arrow a few yards down the trail. Two steps further was the Zwickey Eskimo 4 blade

and 10 inches of the shaft. About 10 more inches of the shaft was missing. Complete penetration of both sides, mid-chest in the crease behind the shoulder, I was feeling confident but anxious. We weren't finding much blood. After 10 minutes we found a speck of blood, giving us confidence in direction. After crossing an old barbed-wire fence, we lost his trail. Getting worried and frustrated, we decided to search in small loops. Wayne went north and I went south. After the first loop, I hung a small piece of survey tape for reference. About 60 yards into the second arc, kneeling to see under cedar limbs, as I leaned to look around an ancient Osage trunk, there he lay. A wave of emotion came over me. In disbelief, I looked in awe at the mass, tine lengths, and points. He was huge. Touching the antlers, the moment was surreal.

Calling softly for Wayne, there was no answer. Heading his way, whistling quietly, he answered. It was good to be together to share this moment. This was my 41st year of harvesting whitetails. All the hunts, practice, stands, and conversations about the "big one" were only dreams until today. I called my family and a couple of close friends to share the excitement.

The closer we looked at the rack, the more we noticed the uniqueness of the magnificent antlers. There are 21 points, dark color, mass, the longest beam is 26-4/8 inches, long brow tines, a double row of tines off the heavy beams, three points erupt around a hole in the end of the left beam. The rack is very symmetrical for a non-typical. Live weight was 265 pounds. The buck ranks in the All-time top 10 with a recurve bow or longbow.

After helping me hang the buck, Wayne headed to his stand for the last hunt of the week. And after weighing and cleaning the buck, I decided to sit in the cedar the last afternoon and just appreciate the sunset. Reflecting on the day, I thought about friends and hunting partners who would be excited to hear my story. Thinking also of hunting friends departed, it was easy to imagine their smiles and feel their support.

By the way, the antler piece found earlier in the week belonged to him. The broken point matched up with his right beam tip perfectly. Next year I would like to meet the deer he was battling when the tip broke off! ■