

# BEYOND THE SCORE

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It wasn't until I stepped aboard the Caravan aircraft that was to take me from Anchorage to King Salmon, Alaska, that it really set in: I was going to hunt Alaska moose. It was 2006, and I was fresh out of college. A temporary construction job had put a little money in my pocket and in contact with the guys I would be meeting in Alaska to spend a couple weeks chasing moose on the Kenai Peninsula. They had an acquaintance there who would loan us a boat, and we would strike out across Tustumena Lake to one of the forest service cabins where we would stay during the DIY hunt. While I didn't know it at the time, this hunt would test and ultimately beat me, as well as put me as close as I have ever been to walking in the footsteps of the founders of the modern-day conservation movement.

On November 21, 2013, the Boone and Crockett Club received an entry from the Royal Gorge Regional Museum in Canon City, Colorado. The bull in question was taken on a hunt near the headwaters of the Kasilof River, which originates out of Tustamena Lake, in 1897. Included with the entry was a copy of the hunting story that appeared in the first issue of *Outdoor Life* printed in January 1898. The story began with the hunter sitting alone, high above the lake in a lean-to, staring into a fire and reminiscing of campfires he had shared with his friends over the years. The story was a reprint of a letter William Dallas "Dall" DeWeese sent them on his expedition. While he doesn't outright say he was scared, he mentions that he shared the country with only one other man who was 12 miles away. My thoughts flashed to my time on the shores of the same lake nearly 110 year later.

When we arrived at the cabin, I was instructed on how to properly tie up the boat. A small inlet fed the giant lake where we would camp. The vista I took in as I stood on the lakeshore staring across the valley appeared to have remained unchanged. The lake was surrounded by rolling hills which gave way to meadows appearing out of the dark spruce forests;

Excerpt reprinted with permission from *Outdoor Life*. The original story was printed in *Outdoor Life*, January 1973.

then my sight picture climbed to the glacier and snow-covered peaks that fed the lakes and rivers below. As I read Dall's words, I imagined him penning his letter to his comrades far away from one of these very meadows.

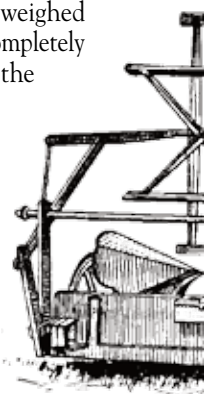
The stream mouth where we camped was teeming with spawning pinks, and the smell of rotting salmon hung in the air as we moved our gear towards the cabin. I began to realize I was in a very precarious situation. Being about as green as one gets in terms of moose hunting, I had wrongly assumed that those I would be hunting with would be prepared. My suspicion of a lack of preparedness for the hunt had been growing since arriving in Alaska, and it was confirmed when I asked about water filtration. I was mocked and told this is Alaska, nothing in the water here will hurt you. Realizing early on that my presence was quickly turning to being viewed as a hindrance, I elected not to elaborate on the faults in this statement. Soon three brown bears made their way down the far bank appearing unconcerned. One of the 2-year-old cubs relieved itself in the water, and I came to the conclusion that this trip might have been a huge mistake.

The first day in camp the group went out to hunt while I stayed back to cut firewood, prepare dinner, and on my own accord, boil some water. As I busied myself with camp chores, the bears we had seen that first day were never far from my mind. The cabin they had reserved could only sleep four, and there were six of us. Being a last-minute invite—there more for my back than my hunting prowess—I was relegated to the lowest duties and sleeping quarters which included sleeping in a two-man tent with the cooler of food. Again, not wishing to hear any of my opinions, I was mocked at the suggestions that the food be kept in the cabin rather than in my modest sleeping quarters outside.

While I was chopping wood, the bears did appear in camp. Fortunately they had yet to discover the cooler of food as the stream of dying salmon had their full attention. A strong wind from the west had come up and the chop on the lake was building. The sound through the trees had masked the noises as I worked around camp, and the bears were unaware of my presence. As the mother and two very large cubs approached, I picked up

my .338 Win. Mag. and my thumb instinctively found the three-position safety. When I read Dall's story of the amazing power of his new Mannlicher Rifle, I assumed it was in an 8mm with ballistics similar to a .30-30. I can only imagine my experience may have been tenses had I not possessed significantly more firepower in my hands. I watched them cross the creek and as they neared the camp I decided their proximity had violated my personal bubble. I slowly walked towards them and calmly started encouraging them back across the creek from where they emerged. While they showed no aggression they were in no particular hurry to leave either. They would turn, look back for a while, and then go a ways further. Finally, they disappeared down the beach and downwind from my position. After this encounter, I kept my head on a swivel, though the raw power of nature brought a slight grin to my face. The swell on the lake had continued to build, and the rest of the group had not returned as darkness began to fall upon the lake. I built a fire and kept myself busy with cooking, all the while preparing myself for a night alone as I hoped they had sought refuge in another cabin after seeing 4- and 5-foot waves building on the lake. If they had troubles, there was nothing I could do without a boat.

Similar to Dall, my thoughts went to other hunts and camps I had experienced, and the enormity of the country weighed heavily on my mind. Daylight was completely gone when out of the wind I heard the whine of an outboard working towards the light of my fire. When Dall speaks of the relief of finding his companion, I can relate. Fortunately for Dall DeWeese, his hunt went far better than mine turned out. He employed the same still-hunting tactics as we did, though he called in a "small bull" whose antlers would have been just at or shy of the current legal minimum 50-inch spread of the area today. He let the bull go by, and later that day, while hunting through the areas I would tromp over a century later, he killed what at the time was rumored to be the largest bull ever taken. Currently it ranks 576 with a score of 224-4/8 and a greatest spread of 67 inches.



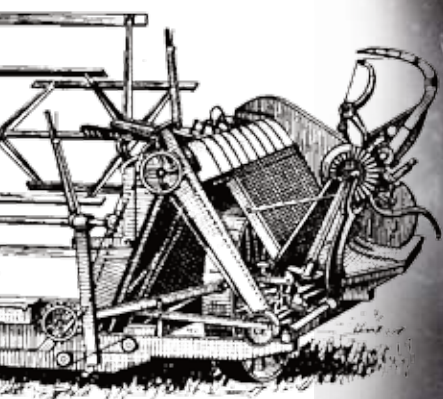


This column is dedicated to the system that supports the public hunting of public wildlife for all fair chase sportsmen, and the stories and trophies that are the result. Theodore Roosevelt strongly believed that self-reliance and pursuing the strenuous activities of hunting and wilderness exploration was the best way to keep man connected to nature. We score trophies, but every hunt is to some extent a way of measuring ourselves.

This trophy was taken 52 years prior to Boone and Crockett developing a scoring system to rank trophies, though the guide he hired was the known record holder, according to *Forest and Stream*, and he said that Dall's bull was better. On my hunt we worked hard for days, though I could never get anyone to follow me more than three-tenths of a mile from the lakeshore as they did not want to endure the hiking. I knew there was no way I could butcher and haul a moose alone across this ground. We found over 30 moose paddles in an hour's time, but never did we spy a bull while we hunted. After the first week we were going to move to a different area. After discovering I was to go it alone, and that I was far under prepared in skills and equipment, I decided to call the trip early and return home. Here is Dall's account of his hunt surrounding his tremendous moose.

*About 10, while still hunting through rolling ground with patches of spruce and tall grass, I sighted a cow, lying down within eighty yards. I looked carefully, knowing the velvet was now off and a bull might be near, and after crawling a rod or so I saw the wide white blade of a bull between the trees close to the edge of the timber. I put my glasses on him to look at his horns but it seems he had sniffed me and a startled glance showed his big horns. The cow ran to my left—the bull to my right, quartering and a little downhill. My first ball caught him in the short ribs on the right side and stopped at the skin in front of the left shoulder; he stopped and swung around broadside. I sent another clean through him. He headed off again and I pitched another one into him. He again stopped broadside and coughed hard and when his great sides would heave I saw the blood spout from the wounds. I knew he was done for, and while he stood there with lowered head I ran around and below him*

*as I had heard a terrible rolling through the tall grass (four feet high) below him, and thought it must be a bear making off. I could see nothing and returned to the moose expecting to find him down and dead; but imagine my surprise when on coming up a little raised I found myself within thirty yards of that great brute on his feet and coming toward me with his head lowered, shaking those massive antlers. I can't tell how I did it but as I afterwards found I sent a ball at his head, which caught him in the brisket. Still he came and my next ball was better aimed and stuck between the eyes. That stopped him and he sank down upon his limbs but did not roll over. Boys, I am frank to acknowledge that I was startled. I am cold yet—never have I had even a grizzly give me such a feeling. As he came through that tall grass breathing the blood and tossing those wicked antlers, truly he looked like an old McCormick self-binder.*



**Editors Note:** Above is an image of a McCormick self-binder. This is the visual DeWeese describes as the moose came through the grass.



ONE DAYS SPORT

A RECORD MOOSE HEAD  
OF THE WORLD 69 INCH SPREAD  
KILLED IN ALASKA  
BY DALL DE WEESE CANON CITY COLO.  
1897  
COPYRIGHT

While my tale is neither harrowing nor exciting in comparison to Dall's, I relay this purely as an example of what the early works of B&C protected and allows one to visit and experience today. As Dall returned to his home in Colorado, he penned a letter to Theodore Roosevelt asking for the creation of a reserve on the Kenai Peninsula to save the largest moose in the world. According to an article on the Refuge Establishment link on the U.S. Fish and Wildlife's page for the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge, Dall DeWeese returned to hunt in Alaska again in 1899 and 1901, and he continued his call for wildlife preservation. In a letter to the new president, Theodore Roosevelt, in December of 1901, DeWeese wrote:

*"This is a subject that appeals to every 'true-blue sportsman,' every lover of animal life, and all those who see beauty in nature, embracing forests, plains, and mountains throughout our entire country, and while the woods, plains, and mountains are naturally beautiful, we all agree that they are much more grand and lifelike when the wild animals and birds are present. There are now several organizations doing work toward the preservation of wild animal and bird life. There is much yet for us to do; to resolve is to act. Let us be up and at it."*

Someone must have been listening, because Roosevelt's new forestry chief, Gifford Pinchot, sent a young forester named William A. Langille to make a reconnaissance of the Kenai Peninsula in 1904. Langille traversed the peninsula from Seward to Seldovia, and during this trip he realized the unique value of the land as a wildlife and hunting preserve.

In his 1904 report, Langille expressed the opinion that on the peninsula, "there is room for the frontier settler and fishermen on the shore land; there let them abide in peace and prosper, but keep out the fire and wanton game destroyers."

Today the hunters can still pursue the giant Alaskan moose of the Kenai Peninsula, and while some areas require a draw or are set aside, many allow over-the-counter hunts (though as I learned, preparedness and a solid

group of hunting companions are not guaranteed with the purchase of a license). After my brief trip approaching a decade ago, the lands have called to me, and when I close my eyes and feel a cool fall breeze across my cheek, I long to be standing in the headwaters of the Kasilof. Out of all my hunts, this was the only one I consider a failure; not that we didn't harvest a moose, but rather the stupid decisions that could have cost us our lives. This is why Boone and Crockett keeps trophy records, why we fight legislatively for wildlife and its habitats, and why we support research and conservation education. These experiences and places are what we strive to conserve, the same desires as those who hunted the same lands more than 100 years ago. Thanks to our forefathers of conservation, I will return and hunt the largest moose in the world. ■

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This photo was taken by Justin Spring on the shores of a lake further to the North on the Kenai Peninsula.