

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

JUSTIN E. SPRING | ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF BIG GAME RECORDS

## Lion Story

### Hunter: Christina L. Pope Told by: Doug Pope

Early on a Sunday morning Charlie Cecchini and I went out to Monitor Valley to check his traps. We made it halfway up the first canyon when, across the meadow near the far edge I spotted something lying in the meadow. I grabbed for my binos to take a closer look and said to Charlie, "It's a dead elk." Charlie said to me "No, it's a rock." (Charlie really needs new glasses.) We argued for a few minutes, then decided to walk across the meadow to see who was right. It was a small 2x3 bull elk that had been dead for about a day to a day and a half. We finished checking all the rest of Charlie's traps, and when we got back to town I loaded my truck and headed back to the kill to put my trail camera up. I was curious to see if a lion was still feeding on the elk.

The next day I went back to see if the lion had come back; he did at 2:30 a.m. I reset my trail camera location because the lion had drug the elk out of camera range. I went back the next day and did not get any photos but saw where the lion had moved the elk another 30 feet. I reset my trail camera and staked down the elk so the lion could not move it any further. He was moving it closer to the sagebrush, and I wanted to continue to get good photos of him coming in.

Wednesday afternoon a cold front came through and put about 2 inches of snow

down. The next morning, my daughter Chrissy and I loaded up our dogs and headed out. We arrived at the kill at about 6:00 a.m. I headed to the trail camera to see if the lion had come back that night. It showed the lion had just left at 5:30 a.m. I ran back to the truck so happy to tell Chrissy that the lion had just been there feeding on the elk.

We decided to drive down the road to put the tracking collars on the dogs. We didn't want to spook the lion because the dogs get a little excited when we start pulling them out one by one to put the collars on. We drove back up to the kill and parked. We walked the dogs across the meadow and before we could even get them unleashed they had a good smell of the lion. Dogs were off. By the time I walked back to the truck about 150 yards, the dogs had blown out of site and over the hill—no sound of them whatsoever. Chrissy followed the dogs, and I ran back to the truck to grab packs and guns.

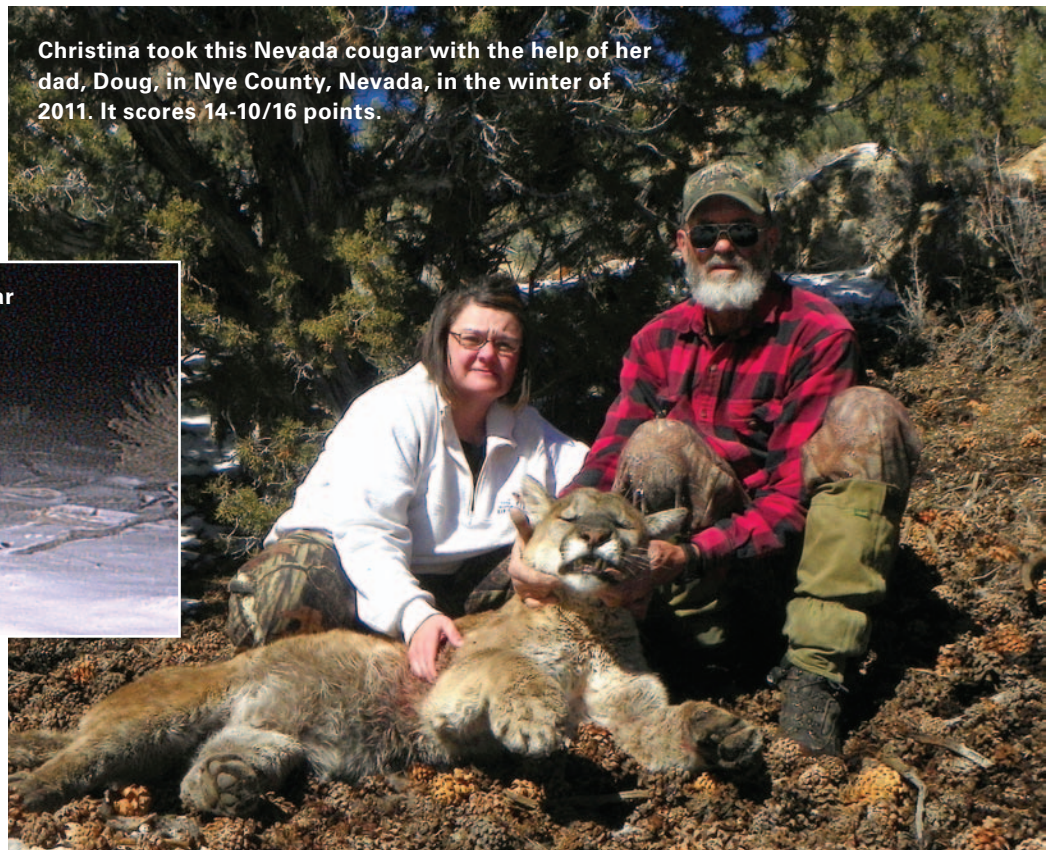
By the time I caught up with Chrissy on the first ridge, we still could not hear anything. We found ourselves overlooking a

large, cliffed basin. At that point we continued on the lion and dog tracks through the top of the next ridge, and we still could not hear the dogs. We then crossed the top of the basin and could hear, off in the distance, a roar that sounded like a jet. After we walked about 100 yards, the sound got a little louder, but there was a high-pitched sound of one dog off in the distance. About another three-quarters of a mile, we were at the head of another cliffed basin, and underneath us straight down was the sound of the dogs, but we still could not see them. We decided to back-track a few hundred yards and go through the top of the basin, then come down the ridge above where we thought the dogs might be.

When we reached the ridge we figured the dogs were right below us about 100 yards. We picked a path to get down—of course it had to be the steepest side of the ridge! We sat down on our butts, and down we went, sliding over icy rocks and tumbling over sagebrush. A few times Chrissy slid into me, knocking me over, and down the mountain

**Christina took this Nevada cougar with the help of her dad, Doug, in Nye County, Nevada, in the winter of 2011. It scores 14-10/16 points.**

**Doug was able to get photos of the cougar feeding on an elk on his trail camera.**



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.

I would slide more. When we got to the tree where the dogs had tracked the lion, it was so steep we crawled up to the tree so we could get some photos. I knew this was a big lion by the size of the track, the trail camera photos, and also because he took down a bull elk. We leashed up the dogs and got Chrissy positioned for a kill shot. She was using my .357 lever action rifle. When she shot, the lion leaped from the tree and down the steep ridge he went. We stumbled up to unleash the dogs and to grab backpacks. Off the dogs went once again.

We got down the ridge about 100 yards and found the dogs pouncing on the lion. I looked over to make sure all our dogs were there and alive. They were in good spirits and proud, so Chrissy and I turned our focus on our victory.

"Damn, what a big lion!" I said to my daughter. I just could not resist. I had to try and lift this lion. I could barely lift him off the ground. Then I just had to set up my



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camera and take photos of Chrissy and I with this big cat. I have been lion hunting for 20-plus years in central Nevada and have never seen a lion this big.

After celebrating with photos, aching and oohing over this large lion, I knew we needed to get the dogs back to the truck and figure out a way to get this lion out of the canyon. I knew I couldn't just throw him over my back and walk out. We got the dogs to the truck, and I unloaded my ATV. I was able to get my ATV within 100 yards of the dead lion. It took everything Chrissy and I had to drag this lion to the ATV, then lift him up on it. We drove back to town with

smiles and a story to tell all—a three-hour, 3.8-mile, rough-terrain, rocky canyon chase of a lifetime!

When we got to town, the first person we contacted was Tom Donham, a Nevada Department of Wildlife biologist. First thing out of Tom's mouth was, "that is the largest lion I have ever seen." The lion weighed 175 pounds and was 7 feet 4 inches long. After we skinned the lion and removed some flesh from the skull, we got a green score of 14-12/16. After the drying period, the final score is 14-10/16.

What a great successful hunt! Happy Hunting! ■

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