

Return to Ricardo

BY GEORGE COOK
PHOTOS BY GEORGE COOK
AND PAT LANCASTER

What a dandy bull, I thought, as I watched the 6x6 bull hurriedly work several groups of cows about the meadow known as Mud Park.

"Tough bull to pass up," whispered guide and outfitter Pat Lancaster. Indeed, this was a fine bull and as I peered downrange through my scope the moment of truth was at hand.

October of 1993 would mark my third consecutive hunt on Bobby Hill's Ranches of Ricardo. Forty-eight thousand acres of pristine, elk and deer country nestled in Colorado's Sangre De Cristo Mountains. My December of '92 hunt would be a hard show to follow having collected a 6x6 bull scoring 341-6/8 B&C along with a mule deer that scored 189-2/8 B&C.



GEORGE COOK WITH HIS 1993 HILL RANCH HIGH COUNTRY 6X6 BULL WHICH HAS AN UNOFFICIAL B&C SCORE OF 321.

The 1991 hunt was a high country affair in early September that culminated with the harvest of an 8x3 bull 12,400 feet above sea level.

The Ricardo ranch lands, along with approximately twenty-one other ranches throughout Colorado are part of a unique hunting and wildlife management program, Ranching for Wildlife. Developed by the Colorado Division of Wildlife, the program has come about as a co-

operative effort among landowners who become participants to develop and maintain wildlife populations and habitat on their respective ranches. The program offers landowners the opportunity to become actively involved in the management of the public wildlife.

The Division allocates elk, deer and antelope permits to landowners on the basis of herd composition. Landowners are assured a share of these permits with a percentage of the allocation earmarked for the public through state drawings. Those successful in drawings for public tags are provided access to these outstanding ranches. Landowners through division guidelines and harvest objectives set ranch and public hunt seasons.

The drive from Denver's Stapleton airport to Ricardo headquarters was a chance for Pat and me to catch up. "Already we've taken one bull over 365 B&C and three others 350 plus. Right now our average stands at 338 B&C with our smallest bull coming in at 308," Pat added, "Our ranch manager has seen a bull that should go 380 plus." As if this wasn't enough, the mule deer tally was equally impressive with a 210 B&C non-typical along with a 186 B&C typical leading the way.

Day one and two were nothing short of an elk hunter's Shangri-La.



AUTHOR, GEORGE COOK, WITH HIS 1992 BULL WHICH UNOFFICIALLY SCORED 341-6/8 B&C.

We sneaked about such famous Ricardo haunts as Devil's Park, Ponderosa and Poacher's Park. Bulls? We saw plenty, twelve the first day, fifteen the second. Several would score in the 300 to 320 B&C class. We were tempted by an exceptional 6x5 on day two.

Back at camp, Colorado hunter, Bob Centa, along with guide, Mike Lancaster, reported similar results having passed on two different 320 B&C class bulls. Dinner time greeted us with the arrival of Texas hunter, Bob Schnee along with guide Mike Powell. They had taken a good bull in the low country the day before.

As I peered into the pickup bed I was simply dumbfounded. There, before us lay a bull of a lifetime, make that ten lifetimes! When my turn came, I estimated the bull to score 392 B&C. I truly wanted to say 400. Four hundred B&C? Could it really be? Mike Lancaster's unofficial green score tally would tell the tale of the tape...404-6/8 B&C.

During the 1993 season there would be, not one, but three record

class bulls taken on Ranching for Wildlife programs. Crazy French Ranch was rumored to have produced a 400 unofficial B&C bull. Nearby Tercio got into the act with a bull scoring about 387 B&C. These combine with the above mentioned Schnee bull go a long way to demonstrate that Colorado's Ranching for Wildlife is working and building a stellar reputation for sound herd management along with tremendous trophy potential that benefits both public (draw) and ranch (guided) hunters alike.

With the moment of truth at hand I steadied myself behind my .300 Winchester Magnum. At the crack, the 180 grain nosler partition found its mark as the bull lunged forward to his final resting spot in majestic Mud Park.

The next four days would become devoted to finding a good mule deer. The days featured warm, sunny weather, while nights hosted a menacing full moon. There was no doubt that our work would be cut out for us.

Scattered, uneventful sightings of various small bucks consumed the first three days. Our fourth morning,

Pat was ready for a change. At dawn we headed down into the low country.

Sunrise brought with it continued warm temperatures, yet a change of luck as we successfully stalked a group of four bucks. One nice 4x4 held our attention briefly before we backed out undetected. That afternoon, we switched gears and enjoyed some superb fly fishing on several area lakes. Beautifully colored rainbows came to our hopper patterns with vigor and great frequency. It was great fun.

Evening once again found us searching the classic oak brush lined canyons of the low country. Just before dark we located a trio of bucks bedded in a canyon flat. One tall racked mule deer deserved closer scrutiny. A short stalk revealed him to be an estimated and respectable 170 B&C.

"We'll get back in here manāna. We're bound to come across a big dude if we just stay at it," stated Pat, as we made the trek back to camp. Having hunted with Pat on numerous occasions I knew from experience that his skill and knowledge, combined with a confidence of



THE AUTHOR WITH HIS 1993 MULE DEER BUCK FROM HILL RANCH WHICH UNOFFICIALLY SCORED 183 B&C.

persistent determination, would eventually go our way. Hunters the world over know this "never-say-die" attitude is an integral part of fair chase hunting.

"The one on the left is about 25" but has weak forks," I whispered.

"His partner is a solid 170 B&C," added Pat. Again we backed off to continue the quest.

Five minutes later found us intently spying upon the best mule deer of the hunt. The stately buck sported a 26"-wide rack. Undisturbed, he provided me ample time to set up for the 275-yard shot. Soon, my opportunity materialized as the buck stepped into the clear from the surrounding screen of oak brush. Once again the .300 barked, again Pat and I would shake hands over our good fortune. This time in the form of a hard earned, last day buck with an unofficial B&C score of 183.

Upon returning to camp we found guide Mike Lancaster putting the final caping touch to Bob Centa's 313 B&C, 6x6 bull elk, collected that morning.

When I awoke that final morning I was greeted by the shrill bugle of a bull that bugled from his hide in nearby dark timber. No doubt, this would serve as a fitting farewell to my return to the ranches of Ricardo.

For information about hunting on the Ricardo Ranch, Pat Lancaster can be reached at:

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BOB SCHNEE OF IRVING, TEXAS WITH HIS 1993, 6X6, "BULL OF A LIFETIME" WHICH UNOFFICIALLY SCORED 404-6/8 B&C.