

# The Ultimate Big Game Trophy

BY PAT SINCLAIR

Tom Sather and I have been hunting together for 13 years now. It seems whenever we get down to serious hunting talk, the conversation always ends up on mule deer. Tom and I share the opinion that a giant mule deer buck is the ultimate North American trophy. We've both taken good mule deer in Montana. A few of our bucks were in the 30-inch B&C class and scored 175 to 180 points, but nothing in the caliber that would approach the all-time Boone and Crockett record book. A few years ago we started applying for permits in other states. During the spring of 1991, we sent in applications for a controlled hunt in Idaho. As luck would have it, we drew the permits! The season dates covered the peak of the rut in our unit. We were told this area had not been hunted during the rut since 1977. We both knew this could be an opportunity for a chance at a super buck. Knowing this, we decided to hold out for a 185 point buck or better for the first few days of our hunt.

Tom made a trip to the area for the opening day. I was busy guiding my last hunting client for the year and couldn't get away. On this trip, Tom saw three bucks that he thought to be in the 180 B&C class, but could not get within range before the bucks moved into heavy timber.

After hearing what Tom had spotted on his first

trip, I was more than ready to go look for myself. It was November 15th when Tom and I loaded up and headed west for Idaho.

After driving to the top of a high timbered mountain in our hunting area, we parked the trucks and walked down the ridge about a mile and waited for daylight. We nearly froze waiting for good glassing light. I had to get up and move

around to keep warm. When I got back to our glassing spot, Tom was hot footing it down the ridge. As I caught up, he said he had spotted a big buck on the open face to the south. We decided to split up. I stayed on the main ridge, Tom cut off on a side ridge parallel to the hillside to buck was on.

We could not find the buck anywhere, so I decided to keep hunting the main ridge I was on. I was taking my time, going slow, doing lots of glassing. It was a great day to be hunting...no wind, with light clouds, making for excellent glassing conditions.

I soon picked up two deer in my 10x40 glasses. They were standing in a small saddle about 400 yards below my vantage point. One was a doe, the other was a buck that looked to be 25 inches to 26 inches wide with deep forks.

I watched them feed into a patch of scrub fir trees. I stayed put for a minute or two, before I decided to drop down the ridge a few hundred yards. I kept to the backside for concealment, and came out on a point directly above where I'd last seen the two deer. When I reached the point, I sat down below the skyline to have a look. I took off my day pack, and checked my shooting position to make sure I could shoot accurately without moving.

I knew those deer were somewhere directly below me, so I sat still and waited. Soon I saw a doe feed out in a clearing about 100 yards away. Then I spotted a big buck coming out of the timber about 20 yards to the left of the doe. I had only a split second look, but I saw that his right antler had a cheater point coming off the back fork. That was all I saw before he disappeared behind a big Ponderosa pine. I was waiting for him to clear the tree when I saw a second buck coming toward the doe from the right. He was in the open so I got a good look at him. I estimated him at 30 inches wide with good mass, good forks - a nice buck! I centered the Lee dot on the buck's shoulder, flipped the safety off and almost fired. I hesitated at the last second as I was curious about the buck behind the tree.

The deer were unaware of my pres-

ence, so I felt comfortable waiting for him to appear. It took only 15 to 20 seconds before the buck came into full view. It was a sight I'll never forget. Both bucks were in my rifle scope at the same time. I could tell right away the buck that had moved from behind the Ponderosa pine was much larger than the other buck! I put the cross hairs on the buck's right shoulder and fired. He never knew what hit him. The other buck ran about 30 yards then stopped and gave me a classic mule deer pose before he disappeared over the ridge.

I nearly broke my neck scrambling down the steep rocky hillside to reach my buck. I knew when I saw his antlers this was the finest big game animal I'd ever taken. I couldn't take my eyes off the rack! I spent a full hour taking self-timed photos in hopes that one or two would turn out.

During the remainder of our hunt, the weather turned mild and the rut seemed to slack off. Tom and I believe the more severe the weather is, the more intense the rut is. Possibly because the does are more active staying out to feed, making the bucks more visible. At any rate, we hunted hard and covered a lot of miles on foot. On the last day of the hunt, Tom connected on a fine 5x5 that was 27 inches wide, 26-inch main beams, scoring in the mid-170's.

On February 3rd, 1992, official Boone and Crockett measurer, Fred King, from Gallatin Gateway, Montana, put his tape on my buck. Here is how it came out: 209-3/8 gross, 8-1/8 of abnormal points, bringing the final net score to 195-2/8 points. Had the buck been a clean 5x5, it would have netted 203-3/8 points.

I'll be the first to admit there is a tremendous amount of blind luck involved in taking a trophy mule deer of this caliber. But one can increase his odds by having a good positive attitude, being in top physical condition, doing extensive research and scouting, and familiarizing yourself with your equipment year around. Sooner or later you'll be in the right place at the right time for that once in a lifetime trophy.

