

# POACHING ON THE PAUNSAUGUNT

## ILLEGAL KILLS MAY SPELL DOOM FOR UTAH'S TOP TROPHY MULE DEER

BY GREG THOMAS

THIS TROPHY PAUNSAUGUNT MULE DEER WAS TAKEN BY GILBERT T. ADAMS IN KANE COUNTY, UTAH. THE BUCK SCORES 204-4/8 POINTS AND WAS TAKEN IN 1993. OPPORTUNITIES LIKE THIS HUNTER HAD MAY BE ELIMINATED IF THE POACHING PROBLEM IN THE PAUNSAUGUNT UNIT IS NOT CONTROLLED.

A trophy mule deer – a truly monster buck that scores 195 Boone and Crockett points or better – might be the toughest

to exist anymore. And, that's exactly why south Utah's Paunsaugunt unit is so special; it ranks as one of the best places in

the state to qualify for the records book. But, before you plan a south Utah trophy mule deer hunt realize there are a couple problems to deal with; you have to draw a limited entry permit to hunt the Paunsaugunt and by the time you get lucky enough to do just that, poachers may have already annihilated the herd.

That's right, poaching is so rampant on the Paunsaugunt, wildlife managers worry about the future of deer hunting within the unit. It's estimated that half the deer taken on the Paunsaugunt last year were taken illegally.

"It's fair to say this is one of the best trophy mule deer areas in the nation," says Doug Messerly at Utah Division of Wildlife Resources. "We try to manage



an animal to bag on the face of this continent

It's true, plenty of B&C bucks have been killed at 50 yards staring back at a hunter. But, most of those bucks were taken in the "good ol' days." Today, you don't find many stupid bucks – especially those that might gain entrance into the record book.

One reason why trophy mule deer have become so hard to find is the fact that very few trophy ar-

chives exist anymore. And, that's exactly why south Utah's Paunsaugunt unit is so special; it ranks as one of the best places in the world to shoot a huge mule deer – one that might carry a massive 4x4 or better rack stretching 25 to 40-inches wide! In the Boone and Crockett Club's book, Records of North American Big Game, 10th edition, 12 bucks are listed from the Paunsaugunt and three of those bucks were taken during the 1980's. And, biologists agree, there are a number of big bucks running around the unit right now that carry antlers big

for quality and that draws hunters, both illegal and legal, from all over. We found 23 poached deer last season and we figure we only find about 10 percent of the illegally taken animals. If that's the case, there were about 230 mule deer poached in the unit last year. That's a substantial amount. And, I have no idea how big those bucks were because all of the animals I find have the antlers cut off."

# PAUNSAUGUNT



TOP: PAUNSAUGUNT BUCK SHOT THROUGH THE BACK, ONE ANTLER WAS BROKEN OFF. THE CARCASS WAS LEFT TO ROT.  
SECOND FROM THE TOP: PAUNSAUGUNT BUCK SHOT THROUGH BACK, HEAD AND CAPE REMOVED. AGAIN THE CARCASS WAS LEFT TO ROT.  
THIRD: ANOTHER PAUNSAUGUNT BUCK SHOT THROUGH THE HINDQUARTERS. WILDLIFE ENFORCEMENT OFFICIALS BELIEVE IT WAS LOST BY POACHERS.  
BOTTOM: THIS PAUNSAUGUNT BUCK WAS SHOT THROUGH THE NECK, THE ANTLERS WERE REMOVED AS WELL AS THE BACKSTRAPS AND THE CARCASS WAS LEFT.

# POACHING HOT-LINES

**NORTH AMERICAN WILDLIFE SAFEGUARD**  
NATIONAL POACHING HOT LINE 800-800-WARDEN

<b>ALABAMA</b> 800-272-4263	<b>ALASKA</b> 800-478-3377
<b>ARKANSAS</b> 800-482-9262	<b>ARIZONA</b> 800-352-0700
<b>CALIFORNIA</b> 800-662-5400	<b>COLORADO</b> 800-332-4155
<b>CONNECTICUT</b> 800-842-4357	<b>DELAWARE</b> 800-292-3030
<b>FLORIDA-NW</b> 800-342-1676	<b>FLORIDA-NE</b> 800-342-8105
<b>FLORIDA-C</b> 800-342-9820	<b>FLORIDA-EG</b> 800-432-2046
<b>GEORGIA</b> 800-241-4113	<b>HAWAII</b> 808-587-0077
<b>IDAHO</b> 800-632-9999	<b>ILLINOIS</b> 800-252-0163
<b>INDIANA</b> 800-847-4367	<b>IOWA</b> 800-532-2020
<b>KANSAS</b> 800-229-4263	<b>KENTUCKY</b> 800-252-5378
<b>LOUISIANA</b> 800-442-2511	<b>MAINE</b> 800-253-7887
<b>MARYLAND</b> 800-835-6124	<b>MASSACHUS.</b> 800-332-8076
<b>MICHIGAN</b> 800-292-7800	<b>MINNESOTA</b> 800-652-9093
<b>MISSISSIPPI</b> 800-237-6278	<b>MISSOURI</b> 800-392-1111
<b>MONTANA</b> 800-847-6868	<b>NEBRASKA</b> 800-742-7627
<b>NEVADA</b> 800-932-3030	<b>NEW HAMPSHIRE</b> 800-344-4262
<b>NEW JERSEY</b> 800-222-0466	<b>NEW MEXICO</b> 800-432-4203
<b>NEW YORK</b> 800-847-7332	<b>N. CAROLINA</b> 800-862-7137
<b>N. DAKOTA</b> 800-472-2121	<b>OHIO</b> 800-762-2437
<b>OKLAHOMA</b> 800-522-8039	<b>OREGON</b> 800-452-7988
<b>PENNS.-W</b> N-800-533-6764 South-243-8519	<b>PENNS.-C</b> N-800-422-7551 South-7554
<b>PENNS.-E</b> N-800-228-0789 South-0791	<b>RHODE ISLAND</b> 401-277-3070
<b>S. CAROLINA</b> 800-922-5431	<b>S. DAKOTA</b> 800-592-5522
<b>TENNESSEE</b> 800-255-8972	<b>TEXAS</b> 800-792-4263
<b>UTAH</b> 800-662-3337	<b>VERMONT</b> 800-752-5378
<b>VIRGINIA</b> 800-237-5712	<b>WASHINGTON</b> 800-477-6224
<b>W. VIRGINIA</b> 800-538-4263	<b>WISCONSIN</b> 800-847-9367
<b>WYOMING</b> 800-442-4331	

The poaching problem on the Paunsaugunt is nothing to blow off. Loss of a mule deer, left in the field to rot, is a grotesque, inexcusable waste. And, according to Lynn Chamberlain, a biologist for Utah DOW, a good head mount from a big Paunsaugunt mule deer is worth thousands of dollars on the black market.

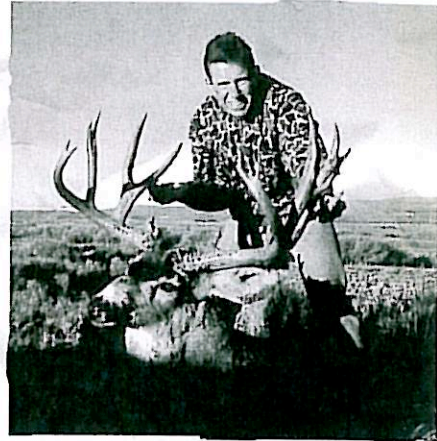
"The chances of a poacher getting caught are about one in a hundred," Chamberlain says. "And when a person does get caught they usually get about a \$1,000 fine and maybe the loss of their rifle. For a professional poacher who has the market and can kill 100 deer a year and not get caught, a \$1,000 fine is not much of an economic incentive to quit."

Which leaves Chamberlain and other biologists wondering how they can preserve the quality of mule deer on the Paunsaugunt if poachers receive just a slap on the hand when they appear in court. Should they step up patrols on the massive 6,000 square-mile unit or should they turn to the public for help?

"We really can't start increased patrols because it takes enforcement away from other areas," Chamberlain indicates. "We really only have one officer patrolling the area and I don't think if we hired five more officers it would give us a handle on the situation. What we need is public involvement. Someone other than the poacher knows about every one of those poaching cases. Seventy to 80 percent of the cases we have on file were told to us by the public. We can beat this problem if people realize the magnitude of the problem and start calling our poaching hot-line (800.662.3337)."

Poaching puts a substantial dent in the quality of bucks on the Paunsaugunt and it also hurts the local economy, including ranchers who hold landowner title within the unit. Landowners are allotted permits for the unit each year and they can sell those permits to the highest bidder. Currently, trophy hunters are doling out between \$6,500 and \$8,000 to purchase Paunsaugunt permits. But, if heavy poaching continues, those permits will drop in value.

"I'm very worried about the future of the unit," Chamberlain said. "It's such a unique opportunity to hunt in there - I've seen some monster bucks in the 30 to 35-inch range and some that are bigger. Somebody who's hunting the area and spends some time can find a 30-inch plus buck without much trouble. But, these poachers are taking the best animals and removing them from the gene pool. It may



THIS NON-TYPICAL PAUNSAUGUNT MULE DEER SCORING 241-3/8 POINTS WAS TAKEN BY AIVARS O. BERKIS. THE DEER WAS ENTERED DURING THE 20TH AWARDS PERIOD.

ruin the potential to produce future generations of monarchs."

Although the Paunsaugunt may never again produce the numbers of records book heads it did in the 1950's and 1960's, when James D. Perkins alone was able to kill three bucks that qualified for the B&C records, it remains one of the best areas, if not the premiere spot, in North America to shoot a trophy muley. To see this unit fall from its current status due to poaching would be a tremendous, ugly loss to the state of Utah and every wildlife enthusiast alive. According to Chamberlain and Messerly, only public involvement will save the Paunsaugunt.

Messerly concludes, "There has to be enough peer pressure on these poachers to make them quit. When it's no longer socially acceptable to poach a deer and brag about it, it won't happen."

Until that happens, south Utah's Paunsaugunt and its trophy mule deer tread on shaky ground.