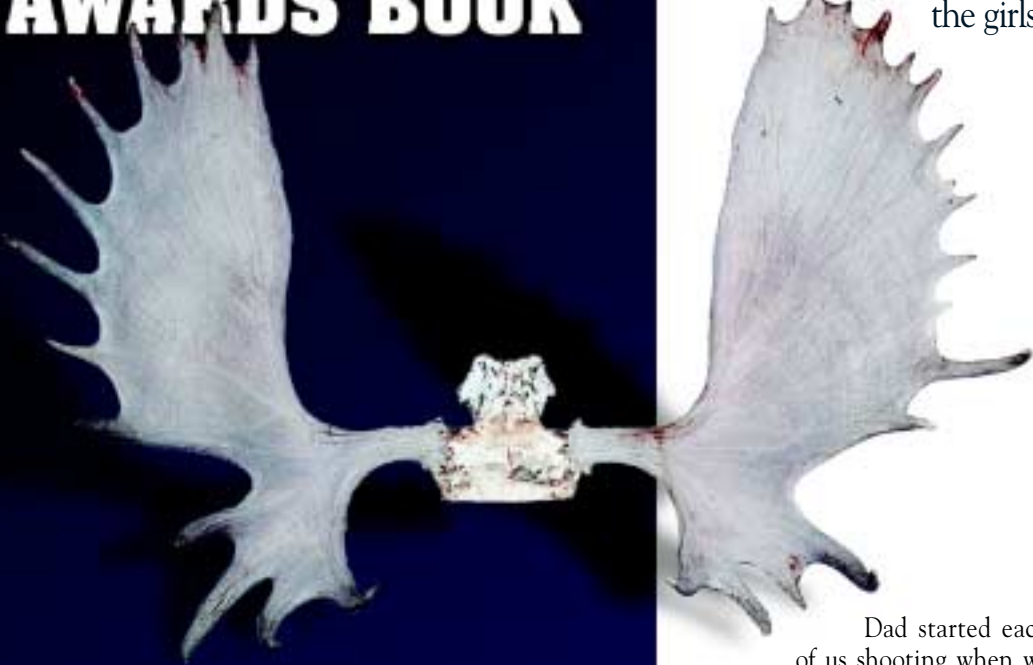


FEATURE STORY

FROM THE 24TH BIG GAME AWARDS BOOK



WYOMING MOOSE
First Award

SCORE

185-5/8

GREATEST SPREAD

48-5/8

LENGTH

(R) 35-4/8 (L) 36-3/8

WIDTH

(R) 13-6/8 (L) 14-7/8

NORMAL POINTS

(R) 13 (L) 14

LOCATION

Bonneville Co., Idaho - 2000

HUNTER

Mary A. Isbell

RACK WEIGHT

38 lbs.

STORY AND PHOTOS BY MARY A. ISBELL

Hunting has always been a very important activity for our family. My grandpa Isbell taught my dad how to hunt and the tradition has continued through the generations. Our family consists of my mom, dad, and four daughters. I'm the youngest of the girls.

Dad started each of us shooting when we were about five years old with .22s and used various firearms working up to a bolt action, scoped .22 Long Rifle. We've all spent countless hours practicing shooting. Once we reached ten years of age, we started with hunting rifles. We all started with the same .243 and then progressed on to our .270s and .30-06 rifles. Shooting isn't all; we just love the outdoors and the wildlife. We ride our horses, hike, study animals, and then when we're home, we pour over books and videos.

The hunt for my moose took place when I was 12 years old. Even though this was the first trip I was the hunter, I'd been going for years when my sisters and dad were hunting. I've hiked with them over some of the most difficult country in southeastern Idaho that you could imagine. My dad loves the steepest, roughest, and rockiest mountains he can find. My sisters and I have given them names like "Death Mountain,"

"Heart attack hill," or "Heart-stroke Mountain." I actually shouldn't complain, though, because we've been very successful in finding our game.

In Idaho each hunter can apply for special controlled permits for hunting. If you apply for moose, sheep, or goat then you can't apply for special deer, antelope, or elk permits. Each year seems to be a ritual in deciding what each of us wants to apply for. My quest for moose actually began in late summer 1999. On a late August morning, my dad and one of my sisters had gone on an early morning hike while the rest of us stayed at our cabin. When they returned, my dad was almost speechless. He claimed that he had seen a moose bedded about a mile away that appeared to be a top-end B&C class animal. They had hiked down reasonably close to the animal and studied it through the binoculars. As I listened to the excitement in their voices, I could tell that this one must be very special. Dad is very objective and knowledgeable about evaluating trophy game and doesn't usually get as easily excited as he was this time. Right then and there it was decided that all of us would apply for moose, hoping that someone could draw a permit while this special animal was still alive. None of us had drawn in 1999, but one of our close friends did. She took a gorgeous bull, but it wasn't the one that Dad had seen.

As the year 2000 approached, we did the traditional application scheme. We'd check on the Internet each evening until the results were posted. When the results were out, we couldn't believe it. Even though drawing odds are low, my older sister Becky and I, along with our close friend Craig Heiner, had drawn! The quest for the giant moose began.

It was traditional in our family that I would use my grandpa Isbell's .30-06 for the hunt. It is a Model 70 Winchester that he bought in 1945. My dad had a custom stock made for it in 1982 and had developed some handloads with 165-grain Nosler Partition bullets. It shoots very well and my older sisters had taken great game with it including trophy Wyoming moose. Dad had me practice all summer with the rifle in anticipation of the hunt. My sister, Becky, would also use the rifle since it wouldn't be

likely to have us both see two great bulls together at the same time.

Summer is a hard time to find trophy bull moose. They are in the thick timber bedded during most of the day and we didn't see very many large bulls on our scouting trips. We did spend a lot of time scouting by hiking, by horseback, and by riding in the pickup. About two weeks before the hunt, our close friend, Bob Hudman called. He could hardly speak. When he started telling us about the moose, I could tell it was the one we had hoped to find again. I could get a good impression of the size of the animal by listening to my dad and his friends. When they seem uncontrollably nervous, then I know it's special. As he described this great animal and its location, we decided that we'd all try to keep an eye on him until opening day in August 2000. We tried to keep track of the animal, but he seemed to disappear a few days before the hunt. We were afraid that something had happened to him or that he'd just left the country. Even though we hadn't seen the moose for four or five days, opening day was a must. After some discussion, it was decided that I'd have the opportunity on opening day and my parents arranged for me to miss school. I must thank our dear friend Craig Heiner. He was present and helped on the hunt, and didn't even bring his rifle so that it would be my day.

We all met at Hudman's cabin near the Tex Creek Wildlife Management Area on opening morning. Our group included my mom and dad, Bob, Sandy, and Charity Hudman, and Craig and Debbie Heiner. This was one big moose expedition. We traveled by ATVs to a place where we could glass. It wasn't 30 minutes until the monster was spotted. He was back in the exact spot where Bob had seen him two weeks earlier. We immediately maneuvered in front of him, but couldn't get a shot. We watched him through binoculars as he went into the next canyon and into an aspen stand. Then we crept over the ridge above him and I prepared for the shot. The wind was howling, blowing a light drizzle of rain and the range was about 250 yards. All in all, it was a perfect moose day. My dad got me set up on a large rock. Bob and Craig were using sepa-



rate video cameras so we'd be sure to record the event. The rifle seemed to jump around uncontrollably with the wind and the pounding of my heart. It seemed like a long time, but my dad told me to wait until there was a break in the wind and then take the shot. When the wind slowed, I carefully pulled the trigger. Immediately after the shot, Bob exclaimed, "You got him! You don't realize how big of a moose you just shot! He's going high in the records book!"

This really got me shaking. All of a sudden the moose stood up again, Dad and Bob both told me to hit him again. As I squeezed the trigger for the second shot the bull went down for good just as the shot went off. The next few minutes were pure chaos. My dad, Bob, Craig, and Sandy were all acting almost crazy with the excitement of this great animal. They hiked down to the moose first, leaving Dad and me on the ridge in case the moose got up.

As my dad and I hiked down to him, I can still hear Craig almost screaming what a monster he was. He was everything we'd imagined and more. Bob and Sandy went to get the remainder of the crowd. Dad, Craig, and I simply marveled at the size of the animal. Not only were his antlers huge, but his body was immense. We all discussed this, and later when the carcass was weighed at the meat processor, they confirmed how big he was. The photo session went on for a long time. There was video with both cameras

and several rolls of film from three different 35mm cameras. After the photo session, I really learned how big a large moose is. With all eight of us helping, it was a real chore to take care of and pack out a large animal like that. When we checked my moose in at Fish and Game the excitement rose again. It was a continuous emotional high.

Our moose hunting didn't end that day. For the next two months we hunted every Saturday, several weekdays and after school for my sister Becky's and Craig's moose. We spent those days hiking, riding, and checking out several trophy bull moose. There are many unique stories about those two other great bulls—like the day my sister got hypothermia, but that's another story. They both did get their trophy animals near the end of the season.

After getting this bull, we took him to one of the premier taxidermists in the west, Jay Ogden, in Richfield, Utah. Even though he's mounted some amazing trophy animals, he was excited about the opportunity to mount this magnificent specimen and will create a mount that compliments my trophy. We have already chosen a spot in our home for him.

I'll probably never take another animal as large for its species as my first bull moose. This day will be with me forever; the memory of the hunt, the family and friends, and the privilege to be in the great outdoors hunting. ▲▲▲

The author with her First Award Wyoming moose scoring 185-5/8 points. Mary and her older sister Becky both drew Idaho moose permits in 2000.