

FIELD

When hunting for a potential records-book moose, finding a bull that has what it takes, while not simple, may be the easiest part. It's after the shot.... you may really have to earn your trophy moose.

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JUDGING

By Jay Lesser

MOOSE THE SEVENTH IN A SERIES

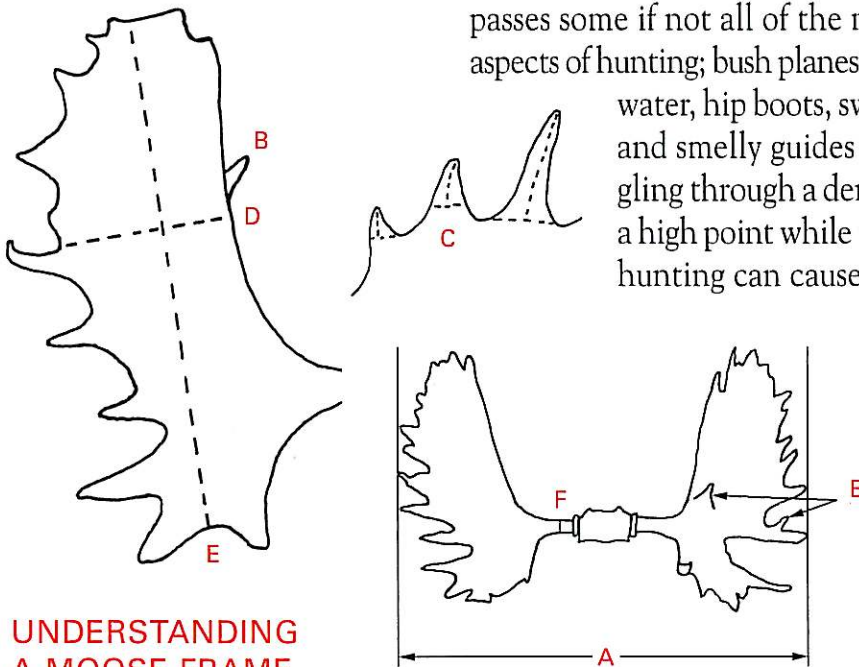
Few other animals have the ability to galvanize a hunter's resolve like the magnificent moose. Moose hunting usually encompasses some if not all of the more or less exciting and troublesome aspects of hunting; bush planes, leaky boats, finicky boat motors, white-water, hip boots, swamps, bugs, bears, horses, pack frames, and smelly guides to name a few. Whether you're struggling through a dense swamp in hip boots or glassing from a high point while the black flies dine on your flesh, moose hunting can cause people to ask themselves, "Why am I

doing this?" However, that question can be quickly answered when you find yourself shivering with excitement as a trophy bull swaggers toward you with his huge antlers swaying from side to side. Moose look big when they are alive, but when you walk up to a downed moose, they are absolutely immense, and

you can't help but be in awe of their tremendous size.

Alaska-Yukon moose grow the largest antlers of any member of the deer family with a rack that may exceed 60 pounds. Its Canadian cousin can develop a rack that may exceed 50 pounds and even the smaller Wyoming (Shiras) moose has been known to grow a set of antlers that can top 30 pounds.

Some of my most reflective moments have occurred when I have had 100 pounds of moose meat lashed to my back. Struggling through swamps and alders with a mixture of sweat and insect repellent running into my eyes, while a cloud of insects droned out all other sounds, I have been able to contemplate my life and my sanity at length. That is once I quit thinking about the fact that I have at least six more loads to carry out and I'm a walking bear bait! Usually my mind drifts from my family and friends, to what I might have been when I grew up if only I had listened to my parents and gone to college. Then I get to



UNDERSTANDING A MOOSE FRAME

- A - Greatest Spread
- B - Abnormal Points
- C - Normal Points
- D - Width of Palm
- E - Length of Palm
- F - Circumference

FIELD JUDGING

thinking about those unfortunate people who have steady jobs and who are probably sitting in their offices at that very moment and suddenly my load seems lighter and the trail seems shorter and I kind of like moose hunting again.

The Boone and Crockett Club recognizes three categories

of North American moose. These are the Alaska-Yukon moose, which is the largest bodied and the heaviest antlered; the Wyoming (Shiras) moose, which is the smallest; and the Canadian moose, which falls somewhere between the first two in both body and antler size. The general conformation of the antlers for all three is the same.

When assessing a moose's antlers we are interested in five features. They are:

Greatest Spread

Moose are the only antlered species recognized for entry in the Boone and Crockett Club's Award Programs where the greatest spread is added to the final score. This is also the measurement that you often hear bantered around when someone is describing a bull moose's rack. While the spread is only one of the five features measured for inclusion in the Boone and Crockett Club's records book, it's a very important one and it's a good place to start when field judging a bull moose. Generally, we are looking for a spread that exceeds 40 inches for a Wyoming (Shiras) moose, 50 inches for a Canada moose or 60

From a broadside view, the palm length can be estimated by comparing it to the length of the moose's head. This will be about 26 to 30 inches from the back of the ears to the end of the nose, depending on which subspecies you are looking at.



Using the width of the forehead method you'll find that a bull with 2 to 2-1/2 forehead widths of antler on each side of his head will meet the minimum criteria that we are looking for -- 60 inches for the Alaska-Yukon moose --and would certainly warrant further scrutiny.



inches for the Alaska-Yukon moose. There are very few moose listed in the records book in each of these categories with narrower spreads than these. To accurately estimate the outside spread of a moose's antlers, you must see them squarely from the front. When viewed in this way we can use the moose's ears and head to help us estimate the spread. Moose tend to hold their ears fairly high when alert or intently looking at something. However, it's not difficult to imagine where the tips of the ears would be if they held them horizontally. In a horizontal position the tip-to-tip ear span will be 26 to 28 inches for a Wyoming moose, about 30 inches for a Canada moose, and about 32 inches for a large Alaska-Yukon moose. Another method for estimating spread is to use the width of the moose's forehead between the eyes, again viewed directly from the front. This measurement will average 8 inches for a Wyoming moose, 9 inches for a Canada moose, or 10 inches for the Alaska-Yukon moose. Using the width of the forehead method, you'll find that a bull with 2 to 2-1/2 forehead widths of antler on each side of his head will meet the 40, 50, and 60 inch minimum criteria mentioned above and would certainly warrant further scrutiny.

This is a good time to note that if the skull on a moose rack is split, the moose cannot be entered in the records. Also, the length of an abnormal point cannot be included in the greatest spread.

Length of the Palms

The length of the palm is the next most important measurement. Length of palm including the brow palm is taken in contact with the surface along the underside of the palm, parallel to the inner edge, from dips between points at the top to dips between points (if present) at the bottom. If a bay is present, measure across the open bay if the proper line of measurement, parallel to inner edge, follows this path. The line of measurement should begin and end at the midpoint of the palm edge, which gives credit for the desirable character of palm thickness. However, be aware that if there is not a multi-pointed brow palm or at least a forked brow palm on each antler, the bottom of the palm length measurement will terminate at the edge of the bottom of the main palm, not at the end of a single brow point. Therefore, it's apparent that we should be looking for racks with a multi-pointed brow palm on each antler, or at least a forked brow palm protruding from the bottom of each one. As with most other measurements there are deductions for asymmetry. Naturally, the taller the antlers are, the better they will score

Don't shoot – Long points generally indicate the lack of the palm material. Each point only counts as one no matter what the length.

and you can use the head and ear measurements to roughly estimate this height if the moose is facing you. This works best if the moose's head is down in a feeding position because the antlers tend to angle back and will appear shorter with an upright frontal view. From a broadside view, the palm length can be estimated by comparing it to the length of the moose's head. This will be about 26 to 30 inches from the back of the ears to the end of the nose, depending on which subspecies you are looking at. Generally, a moose that has a good spread with antlers that give it a tall boxy appearance from the front will have good palm length, but be sure to check for multiple brow palm points.

Width of the Palms

The width of palm is taken at a right angle to the inner edge of the palm at the widest dip between points above the main beam. The measurement is begun at a spot between point dips along the outer edge of the palm and continues in contact with the palm's under surface to the midpoint of the inside edge of the palm. This measurement is taken around the backside of it and is best estimated from the side or from slightly behind the bull. It can be estimated using the length of the head as a reference. It should be noted that when you see a moose with long points they really catch your attention since that's one of the things that we look for when we are judging other antlered game species. But be aware—moose antlers with really long points generally tend to have much narrower palms than moose antlers with shorter points.

Number of Points

The number of normal points on a moose's antlers are added directly to the score, one antler point is the equivalent of one inch. There are deductions for asymmetry between the total number of points on each antler, but the points do not have to be symmetrically located straight across from one another. The Boone and Crockett Club states "Rather than having their length measured, points on moose are simply counted. The reason point lengths are not recorded is that moose with well developed palms with short points are considered more desirable trophies. Long points develop as a result of lack of the palm ma-



terial. Including point length measurements would thus discriminate against the more desirable character of well-developed palms. To be counted a point, a projection must be at least one inch long, with the length exceeding width at one inch or more of length. Point width is taken perpendicular to the axis of the point." This point definition is why those short, wide-based projections generally found near the top of the palm do not count as points. This isn't really a problem though, because you usually can't see them well enough to count them as points when you are field judging anyway. It's only when the trophy is down that some people try to count them as points.

Abnormal points, while not common on moose antlers, are considered deductions when present. These usually grow from the palm face on the front or back surface, from the main beam, or along the straight inside edge of the palm.

Circumference of the Beams

This is simply the measurement of the circumference of the beam between the burr and the palm. It is the least critical measurement on the moose's rack with the difference between a thin and a heavy beam only amounting to a few points. Generally if a bull has good palms and good antler width it will also have a good beam circumference.

When hunting for a potential records-book moose, finding a bull that has what it takes, while not simple, may just be the easiest part. It's after the shot has been taken and the shakes have subsided that you may really have to earn your trophy moose. ■