

Non-Typical Monster

We were back in northern Saskatchewan. Dan Stevens had put us onto this area four years earlier. Dan is a hunter to the core, willing to sleep a month in his truck, eat frozen salami and milk, and lay on a beaver dam for 10 hours at a time in sub-zero temperatures, all in an effort to get the deer he is after.

By Earl Braun

Photos courtesy of Author

Our expectations were high. Francis Kyle, Rod Smith, and I have been hunting together for eight years and we knew that one of us was going to connect on a huge whitetail sooner or later. Francis and Rod both have taken very respectable deer over the years, but nothing cracking the magic 170 mark. Rod took a whitetail in 1993 that unofficially scored 169-7/8 net points. He is a close friend as well as my Captain at the Swift Current Fire Department. He taught me a good deal of what I know about hunting, as well as put up with my mistakes early on in my hunting career.

The months prior to hunting season were filled with building blinds and tree stands, lining up bait, and studying aerial photographs and landowner maps in an effort to improve our chances. Two trips to our area were made during the muzzleloading season to renew old friendships with landowners and gain permission with new ones as well as spot, look for sign, set up blinds, and of course, get in a little hunting.

Several years back, Rod had talked me into getting a muzzleloader, assuring me that I would love it, with the belching smoke, thunderous sound, additional inherent challenge, and the benefit of no hunting pressure during that time of year. I purchased a Remington ML700 and was quickly addicted. A year later I put my high power rifle away for good. I felt that having to harvest my animal with a single, close shot, would force me to become a better hunter and to focus on the quality of the hunt rather than solely on the size of the antlers. That was one of the best decisions I made.

We were excited as we were seeing up to 50 deer, along with seeing a couple very respectable bucks, in individual fields around our area that spanned approximately 10 by 4 miles. I was also on the lookout for a deer that I had spotted two years earlier. It was the biggest deer that I had ever seen alive, a huge, jaw-dropping typical. I saw it on a Sunday, which is a no-hunting day in Saskatchewan, and I didn't see it for the rest of the hunt. That spring, one shed was found that measured 84 inches. I found a landowner who said they had seen the buck last year, so I was trying to narrow down its home base and hopefully get a shot at it. Incidentally, I was able to gain permission in posted land due to the fact that I was hunting with a muzzleloader.

The week of the rut finally arrived, and so did we, along with some fresh snow and temperatures of approximately minus 10 degree Celsius during the day. The deer on the fields had all but disappeared as the other hunters had been pressuring them for a week and a half. We weren't discouraged though because we knew that they would be driven deep in the bush, closer to our blinds and ambush points.



Dan Stevens and Rod Smith building a ground blind along a cut line.



Earl Braun with his non-typical whitetail deer taken in northern Saskatchewan. The buck unofficially scores 239-1/8 inches.

ical deer I had ever seen alive. There was no decision to be made. I aimed and shot in what seemed an instant. It felt like a good shot. When the smoke cleared, I saw him running at an angle away from me. As it disappeared over a small rise, I saw him stumble.

I tried to calm myself down and collect my thoughts. "Okay Earl, gather your gear, reload, and give it time to expire." Easy to say. My heart was pounding and my hands were shaking so badly between the barrel and film canister, which held my power load, that I could hardly get it poured down the barrel. I quickly went over to the area where I saw the buck stumble and saw it lying in the snow. As I got closer, its horns got bigger and bigger. I lifted the head and let out a whoop of joy that Francis heard from nearly a mile away. I couldn't believe it. The deer of my dreams was in my hands. I tagged my buck and went for the truck. There was no way I was going to field dress this deer without lots of pictures.

I got back and tried to lift the hind end into the back of my Suburban. There was no way. It was as heavy as any mule deer I have ever had to load. It tortured me to leave it there, but I tore back to camp to get our low bed trailer. I nearly rolled the truck, but I got back in record time and loaded it up. I pulled into camp right behind Rod and Francis. I got out and nonchalantly informed them that I got a deer a bit better than last year's. When they got to the trailer, they couldn't believe it. There were hugs and shouts of joy, followed by lots of pictures, and the happy task of caping and quartering. The right side has an 86-inch typical horn with a 28-inch beam, plus over 10 inches of non-typical points. The left side is weaker typically, but carries a whopping 48 inches of non-typical with two daggers measuring over 17 and 13 inches. Unofficial scoring revealed a score of 219-5/8 points, including over 60 inches of abnormal points.

I still tingle recounting the story even though I have told it over and over to my family and friends. I would like to thank my wife for her support, my hunting partners, and the landowners who were generous enough to let us hunt on their property. ■

The first three days came and went. We saw lots of bucks, but nothing over 140 points. When Saturday came, the temperatures rose to near the freezing point with winds out of the south. This screwed up our plans for several locations because 85 percent of the time we have a northwest wind and that is what we set our stands for.

The morning hunt was uneventful. I decided for the afternoon I would try a spot that really intrigued me on the aerial photographs and looked like a favorable location for the wind conditions. It was a strip of bush that was 800 yards long and 400 yards wide at the widest point. It funneled down to 100 yards at one point and created a corridor to a choice piece of whitetail real estate. It was this funnel feature that I figured would make a great spot to catch traveling bucks. A local farmer and avid bow hunter later confirmed this. I walked into a thicker area of the strip along a trail, rattled and waited for about an hour without a response. I decided to move to the funnel at the field's edge, wait for last light, and see if the buck would rattle in at that location. The wind was good. I sat down and leaned against a tree to let things settle down for a while. About an hour later, a buck and doe came out 350 yards away. It was in the high 140s, not my dream buck, but it was starting to look tempting after the fourth day of hunting. I had my bipod down and the butt of my muzzleloader was resting against

my shoulder in his direction. I took my rattle bag in one hand and slowly ground the rods together with an intermittent snap to see if I could get him into range. Dan was skeptical about this piece of hunting gear and often ribbed me about it, claiming that it was guaranteed for 120 to 130-point deer. Anyway, the deer's head snapped up and away from the doe he was bulldogging and began a slow trot in my direction. My heart rate elevated instantly. He had come another 100 yards toward me when the doe realized she was free from his persistence and took off. When the buck noticed this, he must have figured a sure thing was better than a fight over territory because he made a beeline on the doe's tracks.

I thought my chance was gone and I may as well head to camp since there was only another 25 minutes of light left. I thought about leaving and then reconsidered. I made all this effort so far, I wasn't going to leave until the last minute of light. The wind was right and I could handle the temperature. It wasn't 10 minutes later when I saw a huge-bodied buck step out of the brush, 100 yards from me, posturing like he was ready for a fight. The dark trees behind him were hiding his rack. I took a look through the scope, which was still in position. It was then that I saw the incredible typical right side. I was getting ready to shoot when its head twisted a little and showed off the 45 inches of non-typical horn on the left side. This was the biggest non-typ-