

CHILDHOOD DREAM  
BECOMES  
REALITY

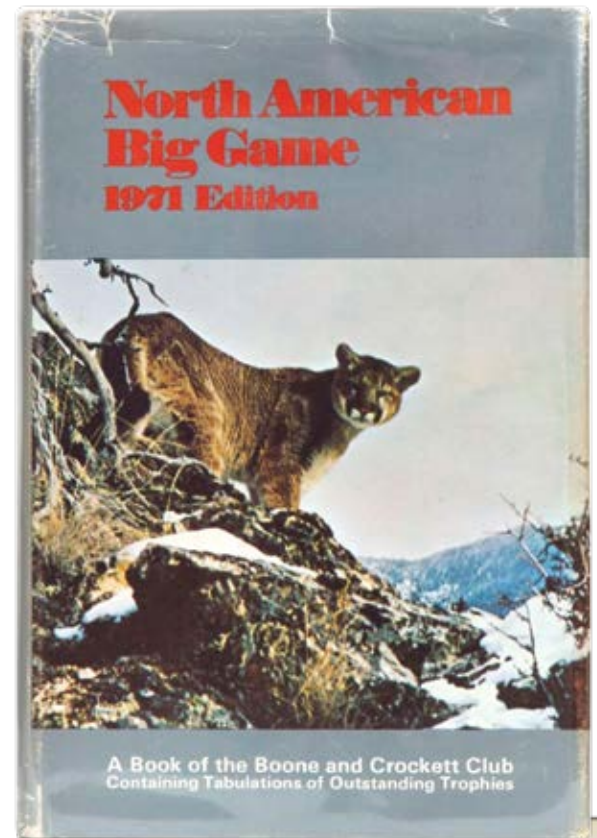


GARY ENGLISH

B&C OFFICIAL MEASURER  
Photos Courtesy of Author

As a young boy of maybe 9 or 10 years old, I can fondly remember paging through my father's 1971 Boone and Crockett records book looking in awe at the photos of the incredible trophies inside. I read that book from cover to cover so many times that the pages started falling out. I was worried that when my father discovered I had worn out his B&C book there would be serious consequences. In my mind, it was in the same category as breaking my mother's heirloom china with a misguided baseball. I gathered up those loose pages, along with all the courage I could muster, and showed them to my dad. I was well prepared to receive a stern lecture, but, to my surprise, he saw my passionate interest and told me I could hang those photographs on the walls of my bedroom. Most kids that age have posters of their favorite Disney movie characters adorning their bedroom walls. Not me. My room had photos of the top B&C animals. What I didn't know was that my father laid the groundwork for a lifetime love of big game hunting and adventure for me.

While scouring the pages and immersing myself into "The Book," two animals kept drawing me back with great intrigue, the Alaska-Yukon moose and Alaska brown bear. As I gazed at the pictures of the top-scoring moose, I couldn't help but stare in disbelief. It seemed so unimaginable that an animal was capable of growing such an incredible set of antlers. Similarly, when I turned my attention to the Alaska brown bear records, something really caught my eye. Eight of the top-10 bears, including the World's Record, came from some place named Kodiak Island. I thought to myself, where is this bear-infested island that was home to the world's largest bears? As quickly as I could pull out a map and find Kodiak Island, I told myself someday I was going there to hunt for one of those giant bears. To this young boy, the great state of Alaska seemed like a far-off, distant land that was so remote I would never be able to go there. I did however, resolve to myself that someday I would hunt moose and brown bear in Alaska and see my name listed alongside all those other very fortunate hunters.



As a child this 1971 edition of *North American Big Game* records was one of Gary's favorite books. The World's Record Alaska-Yukon moose at the time was taken by Bert Klineburger and scored 251 points.

Through the years, while I learned more about the Boone and Crockett Club and the Club's principles of conservation, education, and Fair Chase, I quickly became an admirer of Teddy Roosevelt, one of the Club's original founders. Teddy's writings and the stories of his hunts inspired me and fueled my motivation to become an adventurer and to be more involved with B&C. As an adult, I was appointed an Official Measurer for the Club, measuring numerous animals that come through the doors of my taxidermy shop every year. Over time, I pursued my childhood dream of hunting Alaska brown bears and Alaska-Yukon moose, making numerous hunting trips to "the Great Land."

In April 2013, I found myself on Kodiak Island searching for giant brown bears. This mystical hunting place of my childhood dreams was everything I imagined it would be: steep snow-covered mountains, dense alder jungles, salmonberry brush, devils club, and yes, huge brown bears. My guide, Brian Peterson, and I spent numerous days sitting on the side of

a mountain, painstakingly picking apart the terrain with binoculars, searching for an elusive 10-foot bear. Each time we saw a bear, we pulled out the spotting scope for closer inspection, only to decide to keep looking. On day seven of my 10-day hunt, we spotted a huge bear across the bay about 600 yards above the waterline. Big bears just look different, and you immediately know it when you see one. This bear looked like he had a hinged joint in the middle of his body and resembled a piece of heavy equipment with articulated steering as he side-hilled the mountain looking for a sow in heat.

We immediately decided this was the bear we were seeking. So, we quickly packed up our gear, jumped in the skiff, crossed the bay, and climbed the steep hillside to where we last saw the bear. He had entered a thick alder patch about the size of a football field and didn't come out. Perhaps he bedded down and took a nap. Finally, after three painstaking hours of waiting with no sign of the bear, I could faintly make out the image of his face in the brush just a mere 30 yards in front

of me. We had good cover and a strong wind blowing straight at us, and the old boar had no idea we were there. Unfortunately, the brush was so thick there was no shot opportunity, either.

As the bear moved about in the alder thicket, I frequently lost sight of him. On several occasions, I heard him test the wind for the scent of a sow in heat. As he exhaled, it sounded eerily similar to the sound a bus makes when it stops, and the air is released from its brakes. Each time the bear did this, the hair uncontrollably stood up on the back of my neck. He was close, very close, but I still couldn't see him. As I sat shoulder to shoulder with my guide Brian, the giant bear slowly emerged from the brush right in front of me, perfectly broadside at only 15 yards. Brian slowly leaned over and whispered in my ear, "He's yours; take him." As the 225-grain Swift A-frame bullet found its mark on his shoulder, the massive 1,000-pound, 10-foot bear collapsed and rolled several times down the hillside, coming to rest motionless on his back. It was hard to contain my emotions as I approached

the massive bruin. He was everything I dreamed he would be. I couldn't believe it; I had just achieved the first half of my boyhood dream, and this bear was nothing short of magnificent.

Last September, I had the opportunity to hunt the famed Koyukuk National Wildlife Refuge of western Alaska in a quest for a truly giant Alaska-Yukon moose. This was an area that I was very familiar with, having hunted there twice previously and taking beautiful bulls on each of those trips. After landing in the tiny Athabaskan village of Huslia, we traveled by boat 60 miles upriver to access the remote hunting area. The following day, we started searching the area for a giant bull in the rut. After six days of hunting and traveling over 100 river miles, slogging through sloughs, pushing through dense willow thickets and calling at every opportunity, my luck changed. We tied the boat off at a beautiful bend in the river and hiked to a grassy opening with an amazing backdrop of aspen trees. This spot had abundant moose sign with numerous broken and rubbed trees. It



Gary with his Alaska brown bear, scoring 27-5/16 points, taken in 2013. Read the entire story of Gary's bear hunt in the Summer 2014 issue of *Fair Chase*.



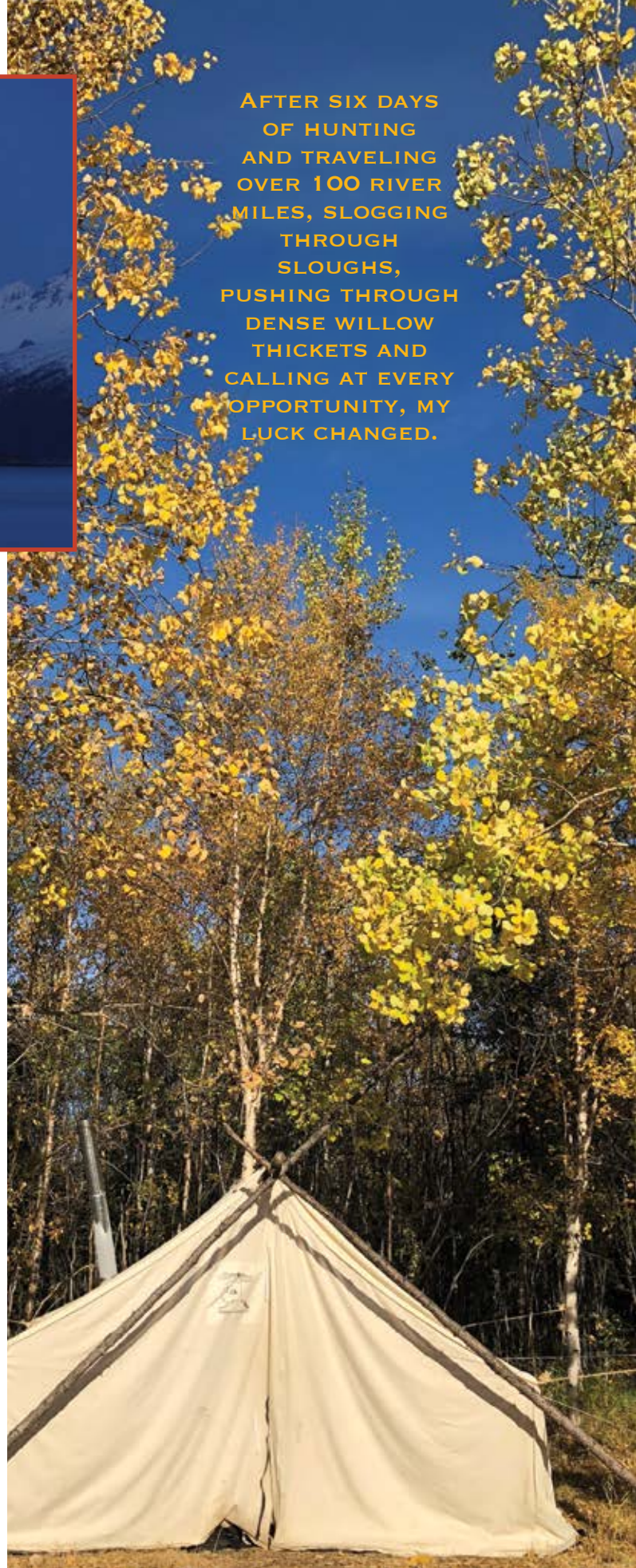
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looked as good as any spot we previously hunted and called. I had found a shed moose antler on a previous stalk and decided to use it to rake trees and brush while calling. I thought to myself, nothing could sound more convincing to a rutting bull than a real moose antler. As I raked that antler on the brush in front of me, I immediately got a response about 300 yards away. The more I called, the closer the bull came. Although I hadn't seen him yet, I could see the tops of the willows violently shaking as he responded to the call. When he emerged from the willows, I stared in disbelief as the giant bull headed directly toward me—and definitely looking for a fight. At each calling sequence, the bull continued his approach, tearing up every sapling that stood in his way. At each turn of his head, I saw the powerful muscles ripple in his neck. He stood directly in front of me at only 26 yards, slowly tilting his massive 64-inch-wide antlers side to side, trying to intimidate me as if to say, "I'm your Huckleberry." I felt pretty helpless crouched down with only a small patch of brush between me and 1,800 pounds of rutting bull moose. Finally, the bull turned and presented me

with a broadside shot. As I squeezed the trigger, the huge, old bull collapsed and gave up the fight.

I couldn't believe what had just taken place. As I approached the magnificent beast, it was obvious to me he was in his prime. I dropped to one knee, admiring this beautiful animal that just gave his life and made my childhood dream come true. After a moment of thanks and a quick photo session, we started the daunting task of skinning, butchering, and packing my moose back to the boat. I brought a quarter of this wonderful moose meat home to share with my family and friends. The other three quarters I donated to the elders in the Athabaskan village of Huslia. It gave me great pleasure knowing the moose I harvested helped so many families that depend on this meat to subsist. As for the antlers and hide, I will be doing a full body mount to honor the animal and be a constant reminder to me that childhood dreams do come true and that anything is possible as long as you stay focused on chasing those dreams.

Not only were both of these hunts amazing adventures, they had been on my bucket list since the day I first



opened the cover of my dad's Boone and Crockett records book some 40 years ago. Both of these magnificent animals were large enough to meet the B&C minimums and have been officially entered. My Alaska brown bear is entered in the 29th Awards Period with a score of 27-5/16 and my Alaska-Yukon moose is entered in the 30th Awards Period with a score of 212-6/8.

The success of these two remarkable hunts were a direct result of the conservation efforts of visionaries such as Teddy Roosevelt and George Bird Grinnell, founders of the Boone and Crockett Club, as well as the implementation of the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation. As recently as the late 1930s, moose were virtually nonexistent in the Koyukuk River drainage of western Alaska. After years of sound moose management techniques, this area has become one of the premier trophy moose areas in Alaska, making it one of North America's greatest conservation success stories.

As far as the brown bears on Kodiak Island, retired Kodiak bear biologist Dr. Larry Van Daele writes in his book, *The History of Bears on the Kodiak Archipelago*, that during the early to mid-1800s, market hunters were killing bears at an alarming rate for the sale of their hides. Between the years 1821-1842, the Russian American Company exported 5,355 bear hides from the Alaskan colonies. By the early 1840s, Kodiak witnessed a sharp decline in its bear population. Brown bears continued to be commercially hunted until 1925, with the average value being \$8.63 per pelt, considerably less money than the average beaver pelt, which brought \$10 during the same time period. Bears and cattle ranchers have waged an ongoing battle for the past 200 years on Kodiak Island. As early as the 1930s, biologists and ranchers were exploring ways to reduce the number of cattle killed by bears. At one point in the early 1960s, bears were shot from a Piper Super Cub airplane configured with

exterior mounted 30-caliber M1 Garand semi-automatic rifles in a secretive program initiated by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game. In August 1964, *Outdoor Life* magazine published the story titled "Kodiak Bear War" which brought to light the aerial shooting of bears on Kodiak. All active efforts at bear control in Kodiak ended in the mid-1960s. Today there are about 3,500 bears on the islands in the Kodiak Archipelago, a density of about 0.7 bears per square mile, more than at any time in recorded history. Thanks to the early efforts of conservation groups such as the Boone and Crockett Club and the millions of dollars generated annually by the Pittman-Robertson Act through the sale of hunting and fishing licenses and equipment, the good old days of moose and brown bear hunting in Alaska are right now. ■

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Gary admiring this beautiful Alaska-Yukon moose that just gave his life and made Gary's childhood dream come true. This bull scores 212-6/8 points.

