

Generation Next: Essay

Submitted by: Rylan Rudebusch

Age: 14

Trophy Type: Shiras' moose

Location: Larimer County, CO

I knew we were close, but where was he? The willows were so dense that making out anything more than a few feet away was nearly impossible. Then, in a blink of the eye, he appeared. The first features that came into view were the incredibly long palms. They were a magnificent sight, reflecting the sun well above the willows. Next, the massive, dark body came into view at less than 50 yards. He was on a mission, making tracks for the other side of the drainage. I couldn't figure out why he was running. This was the only bull that Rylan had shown any interest in during our entire summer of scouting. There was no way he could have seen or smelled us, so what was it?

"What happened? You didn't shoot," I said, half asking and half stating. Sometimes things happen pretty fast in the field, especially to a 14-year-old. My youngest son, Rylan, had drawn a coveted Colorado bull moose tag in 2007 at the age of 14—the first year he was eligible. I started putting him in for points when he was 11 and boy did it pay off! Here's Rylan's account of his hunt.

My dad is really into hunting, and he got me into it too. One day I came home from school and Dad told me that I had drawn a moose license. It was only my third year hunting, but I knew that this was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, literally. I was nervous. In the past, Dad had told me stories about people getting hard-to-get licenses but not getting anything or shooting something just to put a tag on it. If these experienced hunters couldn't find the animals they were looking for, then how was I supposed to? Luckily I had Dad to help.

One of the first people Dad called was a good friend, Scott Limmer, owner of Comanche Wilderness Outfitters, (my dad guides for Scott). Scott and his crew have guided numerous moose hunters to their trophies in Colorado, and he was pretty excited to hear of my good fortune. He knew the potential of this unit in Larimer County and told us of a big bull that had been eluding his hunters over the past two seasons. Scott also said he would loan us two of his guides, Mike Williams and Fred Sell, to help out.

Late that summer, Dad and I helped Scott pack in and set up high-country elk camps for the fall hunting season. While en route to designated campsites, we would get the lay of the land and Scott would show us where he and his guides had seen some pretty nice bulls in the past. I'm not much into riding horses, so instead of riding, Dad and I hiked. This made for some pretty long, tiring days, but it was worth it.

We made several scouting trips into my unit. On one trip we hiked high up on a mountain together, and it wasn't long before I spotted a bull across a basin. Dad said, "That looks like one! What do you say we run over there to get a better look and some film of him?"

I thought for a second and said, "How about you run over there, and I'll stay here and keep an eye on him in case he moves?" So off Dad went.

I kept an eye on Dad until he was out of sight. I then took in the scenery and glassed until I finally saw Dad making his way back. When he got back, he was excited, telling me how close he got and the film he took of the "good" bull. It always seemed like every bull Dad saw was a "good" bull—still is, for that matter.

The next morning, I slept in while Dad went out to check a new drainage. A few hours later he returned and was again pumped about what he saw. He showed me some film he took of a couple bulls and pointed out a "good" one! For the first time, I agreed with him. It really was a good bull, and I made this my number one choice. We later found out this was the bull that had eluded Scott and crew. They had named him "High & Tight." As his name suggested he wasn't the widest bull, but he had super long and wide paddles, a lot of points and huge brows.

When hunting season finally arrived, the plan was for me to hunt for three days, then go back to school for two. Mom agreed to this part of the plan, but I didn't tell Mom the part about hunting the rest of the season if unsuccessful, and Dad wasn't about to say anything.

We headed out early, two days before the season. It seems like every time we do anything outdoors like camping, fishing, scouting, hunting, or anything else, Dad seems to think we need to get there before daylight. This time, we arrived where we wanted to be right at daylight, but it was raining, so we drove around scouting until it stopped. Mike Williams went up a couple days earlier to secure our camping spot at the edge of a big park. This enabled us the opportunity to hunt right outside of camp.

Not much later, my Uncle Marlyn showed up to tag along for the hunt. He had never seen a moose, but Dad said his strong back would be needed later. Marlyn's day job is construction, but he was going to be my cameraman. I later found out that he swings a hammer better than he runs a camera.

On Sunday morning, we still had one day of scouting left. Fred Sell rolled into camp, ready to do some scouting. Marlyn went with Fred to check out some of the areas with less hiking so he could get used to the altitude. It had snowed a few inches and it was still moving and blowing around the landscape.

We headed up the drainage into the hidden basin we had scouted in August. Once we were close to the head of the drainage, we started seeing moose. We glassed a bull until he went into the timber and Dad said (you guessed it), "That's a good bull. That could be your No. 1 bull."

After lunch, we brought Marlyn with us so he could see the bull. Out of nowhere, we came face-to-face with a bull. He dropped his head and gave it a shake at 30 yards. Dad stepped back and told us to get some pictures. I fumbled for the camera and Marlyn snapped a few with his while the bull came forward. Again, my dad instructed us to "Get some more pictures." I finally got my camera going and the bull took a couple more steps forward, cutting our distance to him in half. I turned around and saw Dad running for cover, so Marlyn and I decided that it was a good idea to follow. The bull proceeded to move past us at 15 steps. You guessed it; Dad said, "Hey that was a pretty good bull!"

Dad wanted to see the pictures so Marlyn set his camera up but found out his card was full and hadn't recorded one picture. He told us that he borrowed the camera from my other uncle, Larry. The thought of him being my cameraman didn't seem that great. Whose idea was this—Dad?

Opening day finally arrived. Mike and Fred headed to check a drainage not far from where Dad, Marlyn, and I were headed. The morning was cold, really cold.

The vegetation was very tall and made a lot of noise as we walked through it. Finally, we cut through a little section of timber and emerged into an open park. From there we moved up the drainage to where it narrowed, staying just inside the timber, popping out now and then to glass.

The sun was just beginning to rise above the mountaintops. After a few hundred



yards of hiking the drainage, we stopped to glass. Immediately we saw the sun illuminating two huge palms just above the willow tops. We ducked into the timber, moved up another 100 yards, and the next thing I saw was a bull running across the drainage at close range.

Dad set up the shooting sticks and said, "There you go! That's your bull!" I was caught off-guard.

Later, Dad said he knew the first time we glassed him that this was my bull, but he didn't want to tell me because he didn't want to get me all worked up. I quickly got the gun on the sticks and got him in the scope but the shot just didn't present itself. I didn't want to take a shot just to shoot, no matter how much I wanted him. I also had the sun in my shooting eye.

The bull made it across and into the timber. "What happened? You didn't shoot," Dad asked.

I told him and he said, "You did the right thing. Good job; it's okay. We'll move up a little and set up again."

A little further up the drainage, Dad said, "There's a cow and a calf. That's why the bull went running across, to check out that cow!" Within a few seconds I heard Dad say "Here he comes, there's your bull Rylan." Dad ranged him at 167 yards. "Let him come. Get on him, 142 yards."

The bull stopped, turned, and looked right at us, his head held high and proud like he was king of the valley. Despite how cold I was, I was sweating. I put the crosshairs on target but I was shaking, so I took a breath and let it out easy. The sun was in my eyes, so dad took a step forward and blocked the sun. Now I could see him clearly. I took another breath, let it out, and fired.

At the sound of the shot the bull was off and running. He only went 10 yards and stopped, so I shot again. This time the bull only took a step and lifted his front leg. I fired

Rylan Rudebusch with the Shiras' moose he harvested in Larimer County, Colorado. The bull's final score is 180-2/8 points. Rudebusch's moose was recognized with a Second Award at the 27th Big Game Awards Banquet held in 2010.

again and the bull did a 360 and down he went. I put another round in the chamber, ready to fire again, but he couldn't make it to his feet. All three of us watched intently to make sure he was done, but no one said a word. We just looked at each other in disbelief. Finally, Dad said, "You did it! That's your bull. That's the big bull. Great job!"

In no time Mike and Fred joined us, and Fred's first response was "Awesome! That's him, High and Tight."

The caping, quartering, and packing process were tough, but we had him all back to camp in two trips. Dad and I couldn't have been happier. I accomplished my goal and my dad was proud of me.

I would like to thank Scott Limmer of Comanche Wilderness Outfitters and two of his guides, Mike Williams and Fred Sell. Also, thanks to my uncle for taking time away from his job. He did a great job filming my hunt except for a couple sky shots. Finally, thanks to my dad, who made it all possible. ■