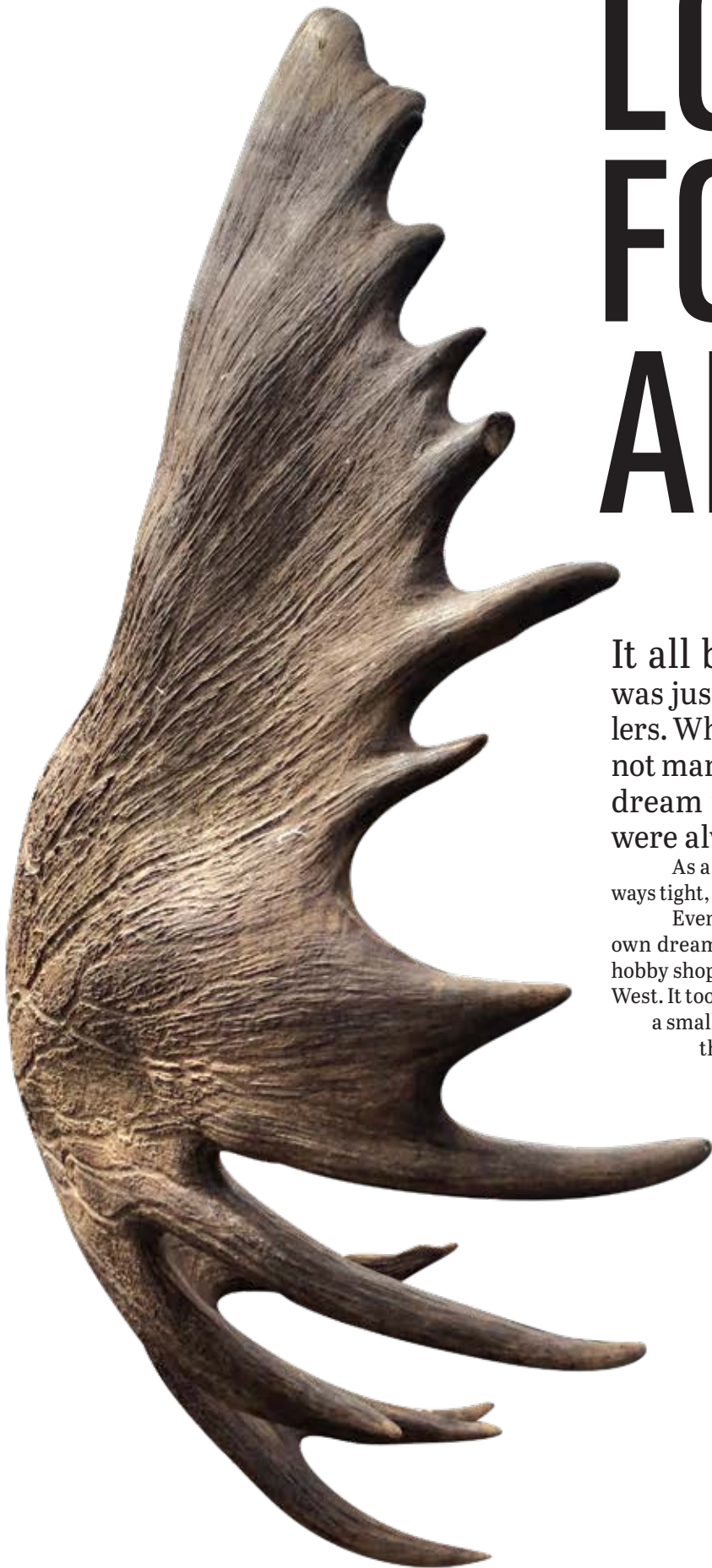


# LONGING FOR BIG ANTLERS



It all began many years ago when I was just a teenager: the longing for big antlers. While living in West Virginia, there were not many options—whitetail mainly, but the dream for the big one, like elk and moose, were always there.

As a disabled veteran raising five children, money was always tight, but we managed. I would hunt when and where I could.

Eventually, the children would grow up and follow their own dreams. Now finding odd jobs working in my taxidermist hobby shop, I began to finally save enough money to venture out West. It took four agonizing, empty trips before I could tag an elk, a small 4x4, and a notable mule deer to boot. Still lurking in the back of my mind like a scratch you can't reach, I longed for the big one, the big Alaska-Yukon moose.

While serving in the U.S. Army for 10 years before becoming disabled, I had requested an Alaska duty station on several occasions, but was never chosen. My duty was to serve in several U.S. duty stations as well as overseas in Germany. Finally, at the age of 62, while youth was still within my sight, an opportunity presented itself: a 3-tag 14-day trip to Alaska. Without hesitation, I booked it. I would be hunting moose, grizzly, and wolf. I also added a halibut fishing charter as well as a sightseeing trip around Denali National Park. With Alaska being the last state to visit in my lifetime, I wanted to do all I could manage while I was there. I immediately began training. A recent knee replacement, a failed shoulder replacement, rods in my back from a military accident—nothing could discourage me from my lifelong dream, not even

This column is dedicated to the system that supports the public hunting of public wildlife for all fair chase sportsmen, and the stories and trophies that are the result. Theodore Roosevelt strongly believed that self-reliance and pursuing the strenuous activities of hunting and wilderness exploration was the best way to keep man connected to nature. We score trophies, but every hunt is to some extent a way of measuring ourselves.

## BEYOND THE SCORE

Rick Adkins

Photos Courtesy of Author

the fact that I was still recovering from a ladder fall resulting in more hardware in my neck. I did months of as much walking with my two Shih Tzu puppies as I could handle. Then two weeks before my trip, I ended up with Bell's Palsy, having trouble eating, drinking, and even seeing out of one eye. Nonetheless, I was still determined to hunt in Alaska to chase my dream.

Upon arriving in Alaska, my halibut fishing trip paid dividends. I caught an amazing 32-pound and a chubby 82-pound halibut. And not to sound cliché, but a huge

king salmon broke my line after a long fight—I plan on returning to catch that salmon. I tried to see all I could while I was there. One never knows when his time here on Earth will end. Now with a tour around Denali accomplished and fish in the freezer, the only thing left to do was tag out.

My hunting guide met me the following morning at my hotel. We headed to the airport and jumped a small plane about 100 miles into the Alaska wilderness, then switched planes for a Super Cub that would take us 25

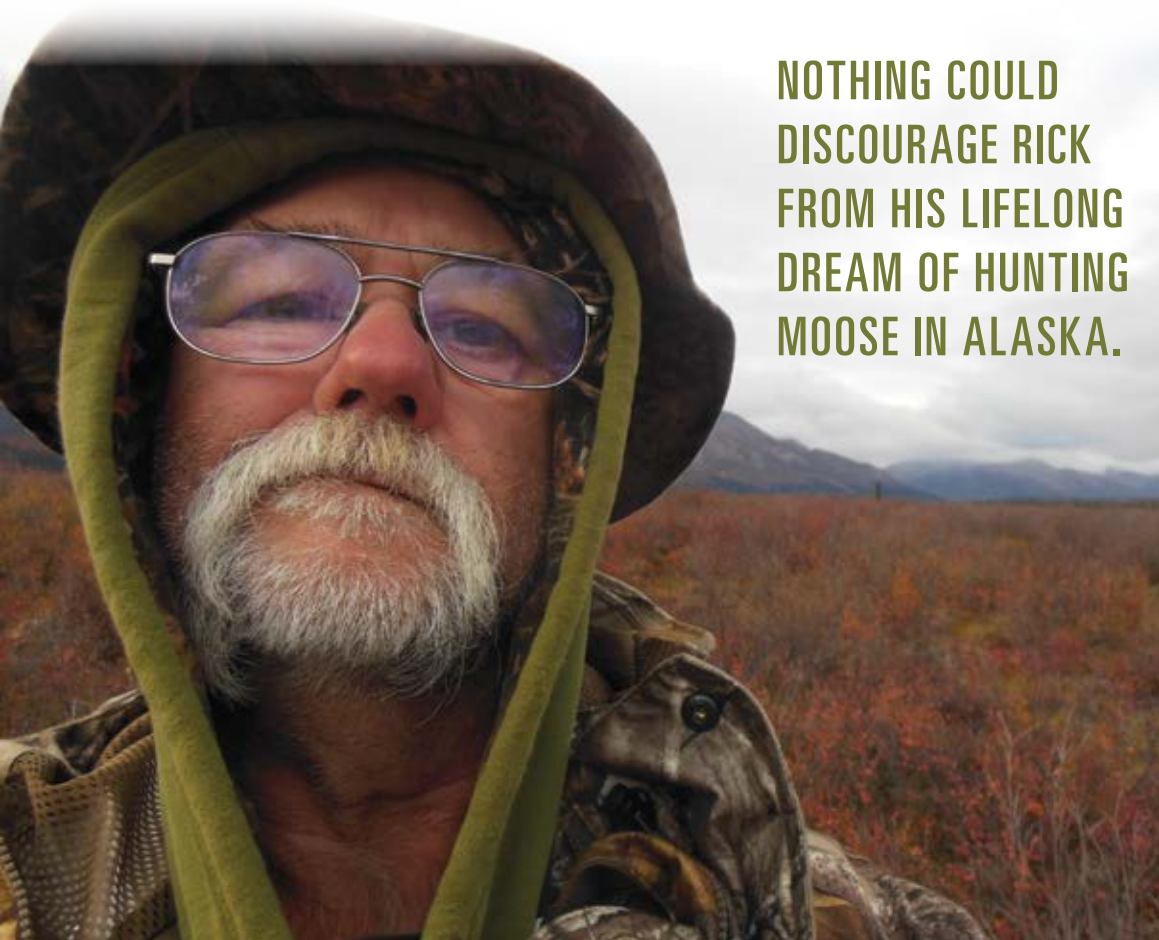
more miles north along the Post River, where my adventure would begin. That afternoon we set up camp, and as expected, I was gleaming with excitement. We were surrounded by moose signs as well as grizzly tracks in the mud. The first morning we would start by climbing a steep embankment roughly 100 yards up. It was like climbing stairs. This proved to test my new knee—vigorously. We glassed for just a few minutes and saw two large bulls about three to four miles away. The first moose I saw we guessed to have around a 65-inch

spread. I was ready to go after him, but my guide Don Kann advised me that his paddles weren't very wide. The second moose was much wider and older, and somehow our paths would soon cross again.

Day two started out like the first, back up the 100-yard stairs and through the thick brush. While glassing, we spotted two bulls pushing each other and a third one miles away. We called, raked brush, and grunted, but they were not interested and came no closer. Day three, it was pretty much the same five bulls, all two to three miles off and once again, a huge bull.

Day four we decided to move camp a few miles upriver to get closer to the big one we had seen on the first day. That evening we went after him. We called, he grunted; he broke trees and raked the ground, but he was 400-500 yards away and never came out of his thicket. The morning of day five we tried again; this time he was out about 200 yards in his pine thicket. And, same as before, we would call, he would grunt and charge back and forth. But he would never peek out so we could see him to get a shot. That evening we decided to roll the dice. We set up within 100 yards from his bedroom. We'd call, he answered immediately. We could hear him tearing up the trees and charging back and forth. I was ready with my .375 Ruger resting on my shooting

**NOTHING COULD DISCOURAGE RICK FROM HIS LIFELONG DREAM OF HUNTING MOOSE IN ALASKA.**



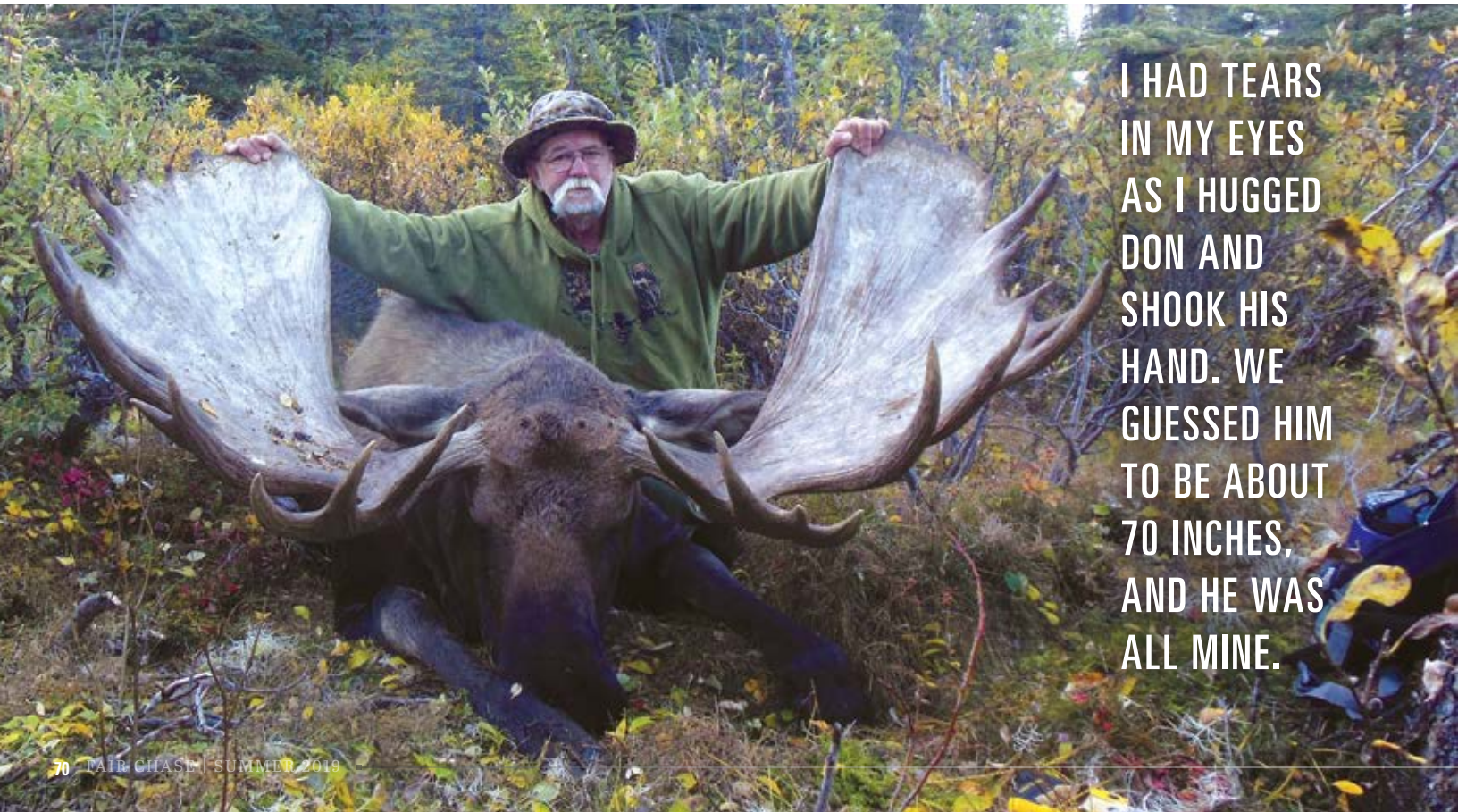
sticks. All of a sudden, he ran into a small opening in the pines, my guide called, and the big boy stopped and glanced over his shoulder. Bang! I took a shot, and everything went quiet. Don asked, "Did you hit him?" I said nervously, "Of course... I think so. I was on him." My U.S. Army rifle team training had paid off. From the time we saw him and I took a shot was about 10 seconds, and he disappeared back into his thicket. We then slowly approached the pines, loaded and ready for a fight. It was needless, because there he met his demise about 30 yards from where I had shot him. I had tears in my eyes as I hugged Don and shook his hand. We guessed him to be about 70 inches, and he was all mine. He measured just over 69 inches. After several pictures, the work began. We cleaned him from the top down and quartered him before dark. Being about two hours from camp, it took us two days and a morning to pack him out, another day and a half to fly the big boy back to civilization. By then, I only

had one day left to tag a grizzly, and with trouble getting transportation, I decided to fly out on day nine. I can't wait to return to finish the rest of my adventure.

On a side note, I believe I was very lucky to even get a chance at this monster bull. There was a small yellow plane that flew slowly up and down the river for a couple of days. As we were getting ready to go after the big bull, a six-wheel Argo came up the river past our camp, stopping at the bottom of the hill where the big boy moose was living. We witnessed two hunters trying to call him out. They had no luck. When the Super Cub pilot came to fly my bull and antlers out, he advised us that they, too, were after the same bull. They were spotting from the air and hunting the same day. After all I endured, I found this appalling in every way imaginable.

Once home, I had my bull officially scored by Boone and Crockett after a 60-day drying period. He tallied up to 235-6/8, ranking 155 in the All-time B&C record book. ■

Rick Adkins at his home in West Virginia with his Alaska-Yukon moose antlers, which scores 235-6/8 points.



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