



FAIR CHASE

THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF
THE BOONE AND CROCKETT CLUB



COLUMBIA BLACKTAIL

BY JAY GATES
B&C OFFICIAL MEASURER

Top Five Columbia Blacktails

182-2/8 ▲ Lester H. Miller
Lewis County Washington

170-6/8 ▲ Clark D. Griffith
Elk City, Oregon

170-1/8 ▲ Woodrow W. Gibbs
Linn County, Oregon

170 ▲ Wayne Despain
Jackson County, Oregon

169-3/8 ▲ Thomas Gogan
Lewis County, Washington

Minimum Scores

Awards Records Book- 120

All-Time Records -130

Characteristics

The Columbia blacktail measures up to 60 inches long and is around 38 inches high at the shoulder. They weigh up to 150 pounds with a few rare exceptions that can weigh even more.

This deer closely resembles the larger mule deer species with the shape of its antlers which have a main beam that is evenly divided at the first fork, yet it has its own characteristics that make it distinct. One of which is its tail. The shape is broad at the base and tapers down to the tip. The top side is black and is white underneath. It is also important to mention that it is uncommon for a Columbia blacktail to have an antler spread of more than 30 inches.

The Columbia blacktail feeds mainly on leaves, and twigs. It prefers mistletoe, as well as the twigs and leaves from dog wood, raspberry, huckleberry and elderberry bushes plus other common vegetation such as cedar, hemlock, and oak trees. This deer rarely feeds on grass.

COLUMBIA
BLACKTAIL DEER
AREA



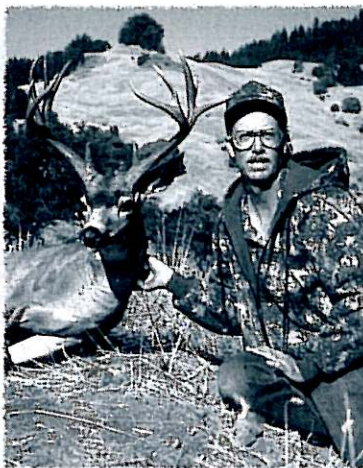
I have been very fortunate in my hunting career to be able to hunt many great areas for the five species of North American deer. I've hunted Kodiak Island and Afognak Island in Alaska for Sitka blacktail, most of Canada and six states west of the Mississippi for whitetail. Mule deer have taken me to eleven western states and two provinces of Canada. Coue's deer are isolated, found only in Arizona, New Mexico and Old Mexico.... and, yes, I've hunted them in all these places. Hunting Columbia blacktail is a different story since I've hunted only one place - Northern California.

Like Coue's deer, which remain largely unaffected by crossbreeding, Columbia blacktail are relatively isolated. The result, is a very pure breed, whose only non-typicals are those produced by environmental or subtle genetic changes. Boone and Crockett doesn't even have a non-typical category for them yet. The species has a great chance of retaining its purity because the management of herds is carefully done, and enough breeding-age animals remain to prevent severe inbreeding.

In general, the Columbia blacktail deer boundary starts in northwestern British Columbia at its border with Alaska and extends south to Washington (See map). In Washington, the boundary runs from the northern border of the state down the west boundary of North Cascades National Park until it intersects with Skagit County, from this point it proceeds nearly due south to the Oregon border with the exception of a jaunt around the north, west and south borders of Mt. Rainier National Park. From there the boundary line continues through Oregon, beginning at Multnomah Falls on the Columbia River, runs south along the western boundary of the National Forest until it intersects with Highway 227 and continues south through Medford to the California border. In California, the boundary line continues south to an area just south of San Francisco. A detailed description is included in the Boone and Crockett Club's, Measuring and Scoring North American

Big Game Trophies (pages 20-22).

Blacktail found along the southeast coast of Alaska and on the Queen Charlotte Islands of British Columbia are classified as Sitka blacktail, which are much smaller in size than Columbia blacktail. Deer on the east side of the line are mule deer, or mule deer/Columbia blacktail crosses. Bucks taken from the east side of



AUTHOR, JAY GATES, WITH A RARE NON-TYPICAL COLUMBIA BLACKTAIL. JAY IS AN OFFICIAL MEASURER FOR THE BOONE AND CROCKETT CLUB.

the line cannot be entered as Columbia blacktail in the Boone and Crockett records program.

While a deer can and will cross this boundary, you won't see much natural migration into the Sacramento and San Joaquin Valleys, and into California mule deer habitat. On the west side of the line, lies the Pacific, and to the south, habitat becomes choked off by civilization and natural barriers such as Monterey Bay.

The bucks I've taken and seen from the extreme west coast, which are normally called coastal blacktail, are typically much smaller in body weight than animals I have hunted for the last 13 seasons. Antler conformation of coastal bucks is fork-horned or three-points for the most part. I believe less than ten percent of bucks taken in California are four points or better, yet there are some areas where bucks seem to have dominant four point genes.

I have personally taken five typical

blacktails which score from 130 to 140 points. I have also taken two non-typicals.

Hunting Columbia blacktail is a special treat for me. The beautiful country in Northern California that they call home is incredible in the middle of September. Elevations run from sea level to 7,000 feet, with many live streams and excellent feed for the deer to live on. Habitat ranges from tall redwood forests to madrone covered hills. Many types of oak, grass hillsides, manzanita, and Douglas fir make up some of the prettiest deer country in the world.

I hunt blacktail about the same way I hunt other deer species. Which means mostly spotting animals and then stalking them to put myself in a good shooting position. Usually early hours of the morning and in the evenings are the best times to hunt for blacktails. During hunting season, the weather is warm, and more often plain hot, so glassing from high vantage points is by far the most productive.

I have hunted public lands also. My last Columbia blacktail hunt was a grueling backpack affair, but very successful as I took a Boone and Crockett buck.

So, as you can see, whether hunting private or public hunting lands, the good bucks are there to be taken. Hopefully all you serious deer hunters will some day get an opportunity to try your hand at a Columbia blacktail. Whether it be in Northern California, Oregon or Washington. They are a real treat.



JAMES L. CONNER TOOK THIS COLUMBIA BLACKTAIL SCORING 130-3/8 POINTS IN COWLITZ COUNTY, WASHINGTON, IN THE FALL OF 1993.