

Trophy Elk

Guy Powell
Hunts for
Alaska State
Record Roosevelt's Elk

Guy Powell remembers the hunt as if it happened yesterday. He can feel the late August sun beating on his back; he can hear the annoying buzz of flies and mosquitoes as they hovered around his sweating face; he can see that gigantic bull elk standing proudly on a mountaintop on Raspberry Island.

The hunt didn't happen yesterday or last summer or 10 years ago. It was in 1959, when he was adjusting to his new job in Kodiak as a biologist for the Alaska Territorial Department of Fish and Game. The agency later became known as the Alaska Department of Fish and Game.

For many years Powell proudly displayed the rack at sporting goods stores in Kodiak and Anchorage. The large, symmetrically perfect rack elicited comments like, "Look at those antlers!" "Where did the hunter get that elk?" and, "What a piece of work." When Powell shot the elk that day he knew he had taken a prize. But only recently did he have it scored by a Boone and Crockett Club Official Measurer. The rack measured 275-7/8 points — the highest scoring elk in Alaska.

Powell was 26 years old when he took the elk. He had recently moved to Kodiak from Colorado to take a job as a king crab research biologist. He would frequently don his neoprene rubber wet suit and explore the depths of local bays studying king crabs of all ages and sizes, taking underwater pictures. His research helped answer questions about the crustacean's population, eating habits, reproductive capability, growth and migration patterns.

Through his work he got to meet many of the local fishermen, including Lloyd Cannon, a pioneer in the emerging king crab fisheries. Like many of his fellow fisherman, Cannon enjoyed going out to the hunting grounds whenever the fishing slowed down. He invited Powell to go with him to Raspberry Island for an elk hunt. Powell was always happy to see new country and do some hunting. He had hunted rabbits, squirrels, and pheasants while growing up in New Jersey, but never dreamed of going after a massive creature like an elk.

Like Powell, the elk were transplants to Kodiak Island. They originated from a herd of eight Roosevelt's elk that were released in Litnik Bay on Afognak Island in 1929.

By Mike Rostad

Photographs courtesy of Guy Powell



Lloyd Cannon, commercial fisherman who took us elk hunting. We wanted to get off the boat and hike around. We didn't see any elk until we arrived at the top of the mountain.



LEFT: Guy Powell with his Roosevelt's elk scoring 275-7/8 points. **ABOVE:** Red Heitman packing out elk meat. The uphill packing was slow going.

eagerly prepared to go ashore. "They wouldn't go up on top of the mountain. Only us two stupid young toughs would do that," Powell said.

Powell and Heitman threw a couple of bananas and sandwiches in a bag, filled a thermos with coffee and started up the mountain behind the old abandoned Port Vita herring plant. The "young toughs" were armed with machetes to clear the brush away and Powell's Model 70 Winchester .30-06 to take the elk and keep the bears away. However, the bears had no interest in the hunters or the elk they pursued. They were far away from the mountain, catching salmon in the streams below.

The men waded through grass that was taller than they were, hacking away at salmonberry bushes and prickly devil's club and alder with their machetes. They were teased and taunted by annoying little bugs that hovered over their heads and occasionally crawled into their ears. But this was a price they were willing to pay for the chance to harvest an elk.

Heitman told Powell that all the intensive training he went through to be a track star didn't fully prepare him for the rigorous climb up the mountain. They hiked for three hours and as they reached the summit at 2,000 feet, the grass was thinning out. The air was much cooler and the bugs were gone. They laid the rifle and machetes aside and ate lunch. Periodically Powell looked through the binoculars. It was about two in the afternoon. The air was cool and still and it was so quiet that Powell began nodding off to sleep, but he roused himself to grab the binoculars. He reminded himself that they were here for one thing: elk.

The men glassed for about an hour. Suddenly Powell noticed a herd of elk

The animals, which came from the Olympic Peninsula in Washington State, were exchanged for Rocky Mountain goats according to a program approved by the Territorial Governor of Alaska in 1925. In 1930, the herd produced five calves and within three years, the number of elk on Afognak increased to thirty. According to aerial surveys conducted in the late 1940s, the herd grew to well over 200. In 1950, elk hunting was officially opened for the first time when the Alaska Game Commission recommended that 50 bull elk be taken in a permit hunt. Twenty-seven bulls were actually harvested that year.

That initial herd at Litnik had expanded to other parts of the archipelago, verifying a Commission report that the elk have a "tendency to wander and break up into smaller groups until it is impossible to secure an accurate check on them." By 1955, elk hunting opened in areas other than Afognak. By that time they were sighted on Raspberry Island, the place where young Guy

Powell would take his trophy animal.

Powell invited his boyhood buddy, Warner Heitman from New Jersey, to come along for the hunt. Heitman was only too happy to come along as a packer. He assured Powell that he could handle the arduous climb up the mountain. After all, he had been a track star in high school and ran in the Madison Square Garden marathon for four years for Villanova University in Pennsylvania. He figured years of running and subjecting himself to rigorous exercises would prepare him for the workout, but he would find out that Alaska hunting was unique.

Powell and Heitman left Kodiak on one of those warm, still days in late August, traveling on Cannon's boat, the Juno, along with two of Cannon's friends. Cannon and his Alaskan friends were veterans who knew the knobs, notches, and nooks of the mountains and gullies. They knew them so well that when the Juno anchored up near the old herring plant at Port Vita they opted to stay behind while Powell and Heitman

grazing on a knoll about a mile away. There were about 87 animals, and the group was gradually making its way toward the hunters. Aching from the rigorous climb and wanting to make the hike down the mountain as easy as possible, Powell half jokingly tried to figure out a way to divert the herd toward the beach so they wouldn't have to carry the elk so far once it was shot.

The men slowly made their way around the herd, hoping they could scare them in the direction of the boat, but the herd bull didn't want anything to do with it. Instead of running away from the hunters toward the beach, the bull elk picked out a spot he wanted to go to. The herd scattered into a great circle, panting and milling away. Then they got into a single file, following the bull, which trotted along a gravel mountain ridge.

"They ran right by us, about 150 yards away," Powell recalled. "I could see they weren't going to let us move them down toward the boat." Powell had just seconds to act. He aimed his Winchester at the majestic lead bull and squeezed the trigger. Bam! The animal went down with one shot. The rest of the elk continued to run along the ridge and disappeared down the other side of the ridge. "You got him dead on," Heitman congratulated him. As the men walked over to the fallen elk a Coast Guard C-130 circled low. "He obviously saw us and was probably saying, 'Hey, good going. You guys got a big elk.'"

Powell had no way of measuring the rack, but as he and Heitman admired the massive size and remarkable symmetry of the antlers, he had a hunch that it was trophy status. The antler points—six on each side—corresponded perfectly to each other and were sharp, smooth and ivory white. Pity the poor man or beast that got in the way of these sharp antlers. But they were no threat now. They were a trophy Powell would hang in his living room once he got married, settled down, and bought a house with a door wide enough to accommodate the antlers. Fact is, maybe it would be better to build his own house so he could have the branching rack within the house's confines before the frame even went up.

But dreams were for future days. Right now the men had to tend to the messy job of skinning and quartering the animal and severing the rack. They intended to pack every bit of the kill to boat and utilize everything. There is a lot of meat on an elk and wasting wild game violates strict "wanton waste" laws. Packing out the elk was going to be more than a day's work. The ani-

mal must have weighed at least 800 pounds, they speculated. They needed to get as much done as possible so they could head for the boat by five o'clock. The hunter's motto is "You never want to be in the woods after dark." They figured that it would take at least three hours to get to the Juno—that is, barring any unforeseen detours or obstacles. In late August, it started to get dark by eight o'clock.


If only they could find a shorter, smoother trail! Powell jokingly said they should pack the animal to Iron Creek, which was much closer, and have the boat move over there to pick them up. But they had no walkie-talkies with which to contact Cannon and tell him the plan, no cell phones, no carrier pigeons. They butchered the animal and each man packed a hindquarter on his military pack board, carrying about 80 pounds. Even though it was downhill, the hike was difficult, especially in the lower parts where there were heavy alder thickets. "The pack got hung up in all those bushes, and we just fought ourselves to death," Powell said. But they made it with plenty of daylight left.

The next day the happy hunters got up bright and early and headed for the mountaintop again. They did some more butchering and took the front shoulders and back straps. On the third day they took the ribs and on their final trip they got the antlers and the rest of the meat. The men did their work at a leisurely pace. "Why hurry," said Powell. "You might as well enjoy yourself!"

When Powell got back to town after that hunt in 1959, he went right back to work as a researcher, gaining the title of "Mr. King Crab." There has been no king crab fishery on Kodiak Island in 20 years, but Powell's research continues to be valuable as biologists seek to explain the reasons behind diminishing crab stocks. The elk population, on the other hand, has not gone the way of the king crab. Larry Van Daele, Alaska Department of Fish and Game wildlife biologist for the Kodiak archipelago, says that the herds have multiplied on Raspberry Island. The estimated population size on Afognak and Raspberry today is 745 elk. The Raspberry Island herd—most likely descendants of the herd Powell and Heitman spotted on their hunt—has shown continued progress towards recovery from a devastating population decline in 1999 and has stabilized, according to Van Daele.

Powell keeps saying he'll go back to Raspberry Island for another hunt. If he does, he'll have to go to great lengths to take another elk like the one he took in 1959. He just might be up for it. ■

Better Hearing!



**Bob Walker
Illinois, 2002**


Better Hunter!

Walker's Game Ear has been the #1 Selling Sound Amplification with Hearing Protection device for over 13 years!

THE PRO'S CHOICE
Worn and endorsed by more professional hunters than all other amplifying with hearing protection devices combined!

- Wayne Carlton
- Paul Butski
- Ray Eye
- Harold Knight

Weights less than 1.4 oz.
Rests comfortably behind either ear with or without eye glasses



Game Ear	\$172.95
Game Ear II w/AFT	\$227.95
Game Ear III W-C w/AFT	\$324.95
<i>(with wireless voice communication)</i>	
Digital Game Ear w/DSP	\$489.95
<i>(with digital signal processing)</i>	

Add \$10.95 S&H • PA. residents add 6% sales tax

WALKER'S GAME EAR II & III features Adjustable Frequency Tuning (AFT) which allows hunters to tune in specific sound frequencies and "custom set" their Game Ear II and Game Ear III to match their individual hearing needs, while protecting them from muzzle blasts.

Field Tested and Recommended by NAHC

Walker's Game Ear, Inc.
P.O. Box 1069, Media, PA 19063
(800) 424-1069 • (610)-565-8952
www.walkersgameear.com