



THE LOST ANTLERS

AN AMAZING TALE THAT ENDS WITH THE
DISCOVERY OF THE #9 WHITETAIL OF ALL-TIME

they had been stowed away for many years the antlers were stolen. How Wayne got the antlers back ten years later is another bizarre mystery.

Here's my story of how Wayne shot the buck and finally recovered the lost rack after 35 years, still intact and how it ranked in the top ten of the all-time records book when it was finally measured.

When Wayne Stewart, a 15-year old farm kid from northern Minnesota, aimed his rifle at a whitetail buck in November of 1961, he knew it was by far the largest buck he had seen during his young hunting career. Wayne had just had the opportunity that most hunters dream about having just once in a lifetime. But, it wouldn't be until the fall of 1994 that he would find out how big his deer, a thick beamed, high, typical whitetail, really was. It was then that Wayne's whitetail became the number two ranking whitetail in Minnesota.

Among typical whitetails taken in Minnesota, Wayne's buck ranks second behind the John A. Breen buck taken in Beltrami County in 1918. Breen's buck scored 202 B&C points. Among whitetails currently listed in the

Boone and Crockett Club's all-time records book, Wayne's deer presently ranks as the ninth largest typical whitetail buck ever taken that has been officially scored using the B&C scoring system.

Wayne, now in his 50's, had a large set of whitetail antlers stored in his garage at a time when very few hunters cared about deer racks, knew very little about big game records, scoring systems and antler collecting.

Back in the 60s, most of the local newspapers usually ran a short column in the fall about the weight of a large deer, but hardly anything was said about how large the antlers were or whether it was a buck or a doe. Why Wayne decided to save his deer antlers is a question he's not sure of today.

The 1961 deer season in northern Minnesota was a nine day season, but being rural farm kids, Wayne and his brother Bobby were only able to hunt on the two weekends during the season. They were kept busy during the week with their daily farm chores plus going to school.

It was to be Wayne's fourth deer season in Minnesota and he would hunt with his father, Glen, and brother Bobby. Glen liked to hunt by putting his sons on a drive

By Keith D. Anderson
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Many of the stories about the really big bucks taken these days contain an element or two of secrecy and mystery. Wayne's big buck is no different, as it has a couple of twists in its own right. It was shot in a somewhat normal deer drive. Wayne had no idea the buck was there and hadn't seen it before the day he shot it some 36 years ago. It was pure luck that the buck turned around and ran straight back toward Wayne after his brother missed it twice.

Why Wayne kept the deer's antlers and stowed them away in a garage for many years is a mystery. How the antlers escaped the mice and other critters that chew on antlers for the calcium and minerals in them is also a mystery.

When Wayne finally decided to have the antlers mounted after

or on a deer track and then circle ahead of them and find a place to stand. Glen would wait for the boys to push a deer out to him. Many times the thick brush and scrub willows caused Wayne and Bobby to get turned around and lost. But this style of hunting taught Wayne many lessons about whitetail deer hunting that have added to his success and enjoyment ever since.

It was Sunday of the first weekend and they planned to hunt in the northern part of the state, a great distance from their farm. Wayne, Bobby, and their dad did the daily farm chores early that morning and left to go hunting in their 1956 Chevy pickup. The three of them hunted on a stand for a while near their Uncle Bill's farm before moving to a spot Glen had hunted many times previously.

BOONE AND CROCKETT CLUB'S TOP TEN TYPICAL WHITETAIL DEER

1	213-5/8	Milo N. Hanson	Saskatchewan	1993
2	206-1/8	Jame Jordan	Wisconsin	1914
3	205	Larry W. Gibson	Missouri	1971
4	204-4/8	Mel Johnson	Illinois	1965
5	204-2/8	Stephen Jansen	Alberta	1967
6	202-6/8	Bruce Ewen	Saskatchewan	1992
7	202	John Breen	Minnesota	1918
8	201-4/8	Wayne A. Bills	Iowa	1974
9	201	Wayne G. Stewart	Minnesota	1961
10	200-2/8	Pete J. Swistun	Saskatchewan	1983

It was now mid-morning with no snow on the ground. Slight winds were blowing from the southwest and it wasn't really cold as the heat of the morning sun had melted the light frost and had started to warm the mid-day. Wayne was using a Model 95 Winchester, lever-action rifle in a .30-40 caliber that he borrowed from his Uncle Donald. Glen had taken a stand about a mile south

of the two boys. Wayne and Bobby were walking a ridge of willows and scrub brush toward their dad when Wayne jumped two deer. At first, all he saw of the two deer were their tails as they ran through the brush. Wayne continued to walk into a slight wind and didn't go far when he heard his brother shoot twice. Bobby then shouted to Wayne, "Here comes a big one, Wayne." As a result of Bobby's shouting, the buck turned and ran back toward Wayne.

A few seconds passed before Wayne caught a glimpse of a large deer disappear into the willows. After three or four long jumps, the same deer reappeared in a small opening about 100 yards from him. As Wayne raised his borrowed rifle to shoot he quickly realized it was a very large buck. At Wayne's first shot, the deer turned giving him a second shot as the deer passed at a slight angle. His second shot made the deer stumble, but didn't bring him down. The deer regained its stride and silently disappeared into some very thick willows and heavy grass cover.

Wayne knew he had hit the buck, but he wasn't sure where. A few moments passed and Bobby came out of the brush over to where Wayne was standing. Bobby said, "Your second shot sounded like a hit."

Wayne answered, "I made the deer stagger, but it didn't go down. It ran off into the willows over there."

They began searching near where Wayne had last seen the deer and found a blood trail. After following the blood trail about 40 yards, Bobby hollered, "He's laying over here."

Wayne walked through some thick willows to where Bobby was standing. Wayne beamed with pride when he saw the large deer lying in the thick grass. He had indeed made a good shot. Wayne examined the deer and was surprised by the size of the antlers although he didn't think they were particularly large because of the narrow inside spread of the rack. The relative size of the antlers

would be unknown to Wayne until 34 years later.

Wayne remained with the deer while Bobby went to get their dad to help with the field dressing chores. They guessed the field dressed weight to be between 190 and 200 pounds. In those years in Minnesota, a buck that dressed out at 250 pounds or more was considered to be a big buck as opposed to a deer with a large set of antlers. Considering the weight of the deer, Wayne didn't consider his buck to be as big as others he'd heard about. He admired the rack, but didn't say much about the antlers to anyone else for he believed it was only an average deer. Wayne, Bobby and their dad spent the rest of the afternoon dragging the deer out through the thick brush and heavy grass. In 1985, Bobby passed away. After the funeral, Wayne was going through his garage and he came across the antlers that had been stored under the workbench and somewhat forgotten about for the past 24 years. Memories of that hunt with Bobby renewed Wayne's interest in the antlers. He pulled them out from under the workbench and began cleaning them, thinking of the hunt with his dad and Bobby.

As Wayne was cleaning the antlers, his brother-in-law, Terry came into the garage. Terry asked him what he planned to do with the antlers. Although Wayne had never mounted anything he decided to get a cape and have the buck mounted as a memorial to his hunts with Bobby.

Terry returned to the Twin Cities with the antlers to have them mounted. Terry's friend, Greg, recommended a taxidermist who had done some work for him previously. Greg, who was a co-worker of Terry, took the antlers to the taxidermy shop for an estimate of the cost to purchase a cape and do the mount. Greg was given a written estimate for the total cost to do the mount.

The shop told Greg they couldn't do the mount for at least 6 months so Greg left the estimate and the antlers in Terry's unlocked

Suburban. Terry found the estimate and assumed Greg had left the antlers at the taxidermy shop. Terry didn't talk to Greg for a while because they were working different shifts. The company where they worked was sold and their jobs terminated. Greg moved to take another job. In 1986, a year after Greg had left the estimate in the Suburban, Terry called the taxidermy shop to see if the mount was done. The shop told Terry that they had no mount under Terry or Greg's name. Terry hadn't kept in contact with Greg and couldn't ask him where the antlers were. The antlers were written off by Wayne as lost, perhaps never to be seen again.

In 1993, Greg moved back home and ran into Terry. He asked Terry how the mount had turned out. Terry replied that he had never gotten the antlers back from Greg, and the taxidermy shop didn't have them either. Greg thought about where the antlers could be. He recalled another individual that asked him where he could have a large set of deer antlers scored. Greg had recommended the same taxidermy shop that he had recommended to Terry.

In December of 1993, Greg and Terry went to the shop to talk to the owners. The shop took photographs of the work they had done though the years and recorded the owner's name and address with the photos as part of the records taxidermists are required to keep. They also record the hunting license numbers of the hunters for whom they do taxidermy work.

Greg, Terry, and the owners went through all the pictures and recognized the antlers because of their size and uniqueness. Very few taxidermy shops get a chance to work on deer of this size and the taxidermists remembered the antlers. They were able to find the picture of the person who had the antlers scored and mounted. The person was a former co-worker of Terry and Greg.

When this new information was obtained, Wayne gave it to his brother Garrylle, an attorney. Garrylle investigated the laws of Minnesota concerning stolen



**B&C ASSOCIATE,
WAYNE G. STEWART
WITH HIS TROPHY
WHITETAIL DEER TAKEN
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RANKED NUMBER 9
AFTER IT WAS FINALLY
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201 POINTS.**

property. A letter was sent requesting an immediate return of the antlers. They were finally returned to Wayne's possession on September 21, 1994.

When the antlers were returned to Wayne in 1994 it was the first time Wayne had seen the antlers since the spring of 1985. Shortly afterward was the first time I was able to see the great rack. As the owner of a Boone & Crockett whitetail buck myself, also taken out of northern Minnesota, I was very impressed. I told Wayne he should have the deer rack scored by the Boone & Crockett Club. Wayne had very little knowledge of the B&C scoring system or where to get an official measurement. Wayne was referred to Mr. Dave Boland, an official measurer for the Boone and Crockett Club, and arrangements were made to have the antlers scored. Some of the special qualities that make this an outstanding trophy whitetail is

an inside spread of 15-5/8 inches and a greatest outside spread of only 18-1/8 inches on the main beams. That makes this one of, if not the narrowest inside spreads of any large typical whitetail, ever entered in the B&C record books.

The official Boone & Crockett score of Wayne's magnificent whitetail buck is 201 points.

After visiting the spot where Wayne took the large deer, it was good to see that very little had changed, and if anything the brush and trees have grown thicker and taller and still provide food and shelter for wildlife. Someday this area may produce an even larger whitetail. The proper management and conservation of our wildlife resources and their habitats are leading to an ever increasing whitetail deer herd nationwide. Such efforts will provide whitetail deer and other wildlife for many future generations to enjoy.