

BEATING THE ODDS

New South Dakota State Record Mule Deer

Scott Sharpe

192 typical mule deer ■ Pennington Co., SD 2003

As "The Big Day" approached (our wedding) on April 12th, 2003, I asked my fiancée where she wanted to go for our honeymoon. I figured she would say any place but South Dakota, which was already planned for our hunting trip. She surprised me when she said, "Let's make it our honeymoon trip as well."

In 2002, Laura and I had hunted with White River Outfitters. We were both successful in taking two good animals. I took a fair 5x5 mule deer scoring in the 150s, and Laura took a nice whitetail with a 425-yard shot.

For this hunt, I had decided to be more selective. I was hoping for something in the 170s. Laura, meanwhile, had her sights set a little more realistically. She would be satisfied with anything in the 140-150 range.



Scott Sharpe is pictured here with the new South Dakota state record typical mule deer. The buck officially scores 192 points.

Day one of our hunt began at 4 a.m., with coffee and a half-hour drive to the ranch. The strategy this day, like most of the days, would be trying to catch a deer moving from feeding areas to bedding areas in the mornings and glassing in the afternoons. Day one ended uneventfully; not a shot was fired although we glassed many good bucks.

On the second day, we split up to increase our odds of finding a good buck. My guide Pete and I jumped a nice 5x5 buck out of a cedar canyon, but he wasn't quite what I wanted on only the second day of the hunt. We bedded the buck down and then decided that Pete would

go find Bruce and Laura, so that she could make a stalk on this buck. I stayed behind to watch the deer in case he decided to move.

Pete found Laura and Bruce, and when they returned the buck was still in his bed. Laura stalked up to 150 yards, but the tall grass and the short bipod prevented her from getting a comfortable shot. The buck decided not to hang around any longer and bounded over the hill, not to be seen again.

While moving back out of the area, we spotted another 5x5 that looked promising. We put the spotting scope in him and Laura decided that if she could make a successful stalk, then he was the buck for her. She circled downwind, got within 175 yards, and made a great shot on her first mule deer, a nice 26-1/2-inch spread 5x5.

The next day Pete and I hunted alone, as Laura decided to take the day off and sleep in. We hunted most of the day by glassing cedar draws, looking for that 170-class animal. By late afternoon, we decided to set up overlooking a winter wheat field where we had previously seen a number of deer.

As the day was wearing down, we noticed ten deer getting out of their beds and feeding on the same sagebrush in which they spent the afternoon. They were over a mile away, but we could tell there was a good buck in the bunch. We needed to get a closer look, but time was against us. We only had about 45 minutes, so off we went in a big hurry. At this point, running was the only option. Our lungs were burning and sweat was pouring off us like we had just gotten out of the shower.

I stopped Pete for a suggestion about halfway there. We had one more draw to encounter and I knew that time and trying to shoot at any long distance was going to be a big question mark on this stalk.

I said, "Pete, let's back off for today and come back first light tomorrow morning. This buck has his bunch of does, so I don't think he will move too far tonight. Plus, with the wind not in our favor, we could blow them out of the area. Also, if I have to make a longer shot, this draw that we have to drop into and come out of will never allow me a quick clean shot before shooting time runs out."

Pete agreed. We stood there wiping the sweat off our faces and trying to put oxygen back in our lungs. The weakness in my legs and the burning in my lungs was phenomenal. This feeling was still making me smile.

"This is what makes me return here year after year. This is what it is all about; nothing's easy," I said to Pete.

As we stood there catching our breath, I noticed four does topping a small saddle to our right about 400 yards away. I lifted my binoculars and was shocked. A gigantic buck was trailing with them. This was not the same buck that we had been running after.

"Pete, look at this one!" I pointed out to him.

He took a quick look and his jaw dropped as far as mine. This was a giant, for sure! His antlers dwarfed his

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body like nothing I had ever seen. His lumbering stroll was as picturesque as his antlers.

We crawled about 50 yards to the edge of the draw. Pete was on my right side and was still trying to get his glasses and binoculars defogged.

"Can you still see him?" Pete whispered

"Yes! He's pushing his does our way!" I replied.

The sight of him throwing his head back and smelling the does with that lip curl made a feeling come over me that is indescribable.

"How far is he?" Pete asked.

"I think around 300 yards," I whispered back. "I can't take this anymore, I'm taking him."

I was thinking about lack of time and other factors that could cost me another chance to harvest this magnificent buck. I looked down the barrel to make sure nothing was going to affect this shot of a lifetime. The gun barked, and he dropped like I had pulled the ground out from under him! The next moment found us at his side in awe.

"What a buck!" Pete exclaimed.

With a high percentage of antlered game, ground shrinkage takes effect, but not with this animal. His deep forks, symmetry, and mass were all breathtaking. I was speechless.

With some quick photos and rough estimate, Pete commented, "This will score in the top ten of the state, maybe even the top five!"

Later, we put a tape on him. We were starting

then to see that this buck might break the 50-year-old state record of 190-6/8. At that point, the 60-day drying period seemed to take forever.

January 18, 2004, the score was final. He scored an amazing 192 points. It was a new State Record for South Dakota, and shot on our honeymoon! It was a great week of hunting with some great memories.

The only thing that could have made it better would have been to have my father, Everett, with me. He was the person who instilled in me the desire, drive, and love to hunt. Also, I hope that every hunter that goes afield can experience such an awesome feeling as only the taking of such a trophy animal can bring.

Lastly, thanks to my wife, Laura, What a hunting/honeymoon trip! The memories of our trip and of the Honeymoon Buck will last forever. ■

New #4 Manitoba Typical

Jason R. Price ■ 189-1/8 typical whitetail
Shell River, Manitoba, 2003

For a full week, Jason Price waited patiently for a good opportunity. He saw plenty of sign, but the full moon had all of the activity happening between dusk and dawn.

He had seen three small bucks, but was holding out, hoping for something in the 150-class. His patience paid off when, on the second to last day, a giant whitetail suddenly appeared only 45 yards away.

A shot from an uncomfortable position missed, but the buck quartered toward him, unaware of where the blast had come from. A second shot found its mark at 30 yards.

Jason Price's exceptional whitetail is the fourth-largest typical whitetail ever recorded in Manitoba. The provincial record, a 197 B&C typical, was taken by Larry H. MacDonald on the Assiniboine River in 1980.



#11 All-time Mountain Caribou

Valerie Drummond

442-5/8 B&C ■ Canyon Lake, Yukon 2003

For several years, hunting of the Aishihik River mountain caribou herd was closed, with the intent of letting numbers rebuild. In 2002, limited entry permits were issued. One year later, Valerie Drummond was a lucky recipient of a tag and would be going on her first mountain caribou hunt.

Drummond was thrilled, and was accompanied on her hunt by her husband Dan, a local conservation officer (B&C measurer), their daughter-in-law Danielle, and their yellow lab pack-dog Harley. They hiked into the area the day before the season opened in pouring rain. At 11 p.m., in the late-summer evening light, they saw five bulls. One was a massive bull that towered above the rest.

Early the next morning, her husband spotted the bulls they had seen the night before. One of the bulls had magnificent antlers covered in chocolate-brown velvet. They quickly donned wet boots and gear, and the stalk was on. They got within shooting distance, but a hasty shot missed. Drummond watched helplessly as her dream bull led the others away.

The hunters hiked back to camp, regrouped, and hiked the rest of the day without seeing another caribou. As they settled into camp that evening, Harley let out a bark. Everyone looked and saw a large bull cresting the horizon 800 yards from their tent. It was skylined in a regal pose in the fading light, a truly magnificent sight. It was, without a doubt, the same bull she had missed in the morning.

As the light was fading, they had to respond quickly. They grabbed a couple of empty packs and the rifle, and performed a round-about stalk to ensure the wind was right. Valerie set up the rifle and bipod at 125 yards. Her first shot was a solid hit and the caribou was down.

Valerie Drummond's great mountain caribou is the eleventh-largest ever recorded. It is the largest ever taken by a woman, and the largest taken in its category since 1989.



Pennsylvania Top Twelve

Thomas J. Young

22-1/16 black bear - Pike Co., PA 2003

The second morning of the Pennsylvania deer season found Thomas J. "T.J." Young and some of his family members at their hunting camp, known as Dippy Dell. They were conducting a deer drive in a familiar patch of woods known to them as "Death Hollow."

At 8:30 a.m., T.J. took a stand on the other side of a massive blowdown that a tornado had leveled a few years prior. Once the drive was underway, a few does came out. Shortly thereafter, a large solitary black object appeared. It was moving in his direction. It emerged from a stand of hemlocks with its nose in the air, checking the wind. The animal was trying to locate T.J.'s cousin, who was pushing him from the safety of the blowdown and swamp.

T.J. had no doubts this was a giant bear, and at eighty yards, he squeezed the trigger on his .280. The bear was hit hard but continued on at a fast rate right toward him! Two more shots to the vitals finally dropped the bear 30 yards from the excited hunter.

T.J. and his cousin approached the bear and were shocked at the animal's size. They guessed the bear's weight to be close to 500 pounds. His official weight was later determined to be a staggering 664 pounds.

Pennsylvania is producing the biggest black bears on the continent right now, and T.J. Young's bear is a prime example of great genetics. It is the twelfth-largest bear entered in the records book ever taken in that state. ■



New # 4 Kansas Typical

Chris E. Unrein

190-7/8 typical mule deer - Trego Co., KS 2003

Oversleeping and rushing to get to your hunting spot is not a textbook way to bag a big mule deer, but don't tell that to Chris Unrein. After arriving late to his chosen location, he was lucky enough to find this great buck following a doe.

Unrein says of the encounter, "I was shaking with excitement. I had just taken the deer of a lifetime. It was truly a God-given gift."



Highest Scoring in 26th Awards

Aaron Kelly ■ 173-6/8 Dall's sheep
Chugach Mountains, AK 2004

Aaron Kelly's first trip to Alaska netted a nice Dall's sheep. His second trip, in September 2004, held high possibilities and higher standards. Kelly would be hunting in the Chugach Mountains for mountain goat and another Dall's Sheep.

Kelly started the hunt looking for a goat, and found one. It was a beautiful, mature billy with horns longer than nine inches. After that opportune start, Kelly and his guide were able to concentrate on looking for a great ram.

They flew to a new location and began their hunt on the opening day of the season. They quickly found a massive ram feeding in the moraine, below the steep cliffs that most sheep call home. A tense staredown that left Kelly's legs cramping ended with the ram walking away unscathed.

After another hour of glassing, they spotted him again. He was a mile away, and feeding with two other rams. The animals proceeded to spar and feed for an hour before bedding down. After watching this ram next to these other two full-curl trophies, there was no doubt which one he wanted.

They attempted another stalk that ended with the big white ram diving out of sight over a cliff. After several tense minutes of looking, Kelly's guide said, "There he is!"

The ram was a half-mile away. They quickly closed the distance, and then Kelly had to make a great long-distance shot to bring down his prize.

Kelly was so excited that he yelled out loud, and even bear-hugged his guide! Kelly says of the pack-out, "Three hours in the dark over rocks and ice never hurt so good." ■

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New #3 All-time Taken by 10 Year Old

Jack F. Nelsen

255-4/8 B&C Alaska-Yukon moose - Anvik River, AK 2004

Ten-year old Jack Nelsen goes to fifth grade. He likes to hunt, fish, and do most other things 10-year-olds like to do. In his spare time, he also does things like taking the third-biggest moose in recorded history!

Moose hunting is something he had always dreamed of, ever since his dad brought home a big moose. Finally, the younger Nelsen would get his own chance. His dad, Dean, had invited him to go along with him and his hunting partners on an Alaska moose hunt.

Nelsen met his dad in Anchorage, and the next morning they boarded a small plane, arriving in Aniak an hour later. From there, they hopped on a single-prop plane and headed to their "middle-of-nowhere" destination.

On the first day of the hunt, the party split, with Nelsen and his dad walking downriver. Dean called for moose as they walked, but received no responses. All they saw were wolf and grizzly tracks.

Dean called one last time and got a faint answer. The son didn't hear it, as he was preoccupied with skipping rocks on the river. The second time, however, he heard the bull grunt. They ran back up to the top of a small cliff just in time to see the bull come over the mountain on the other side of the river. He was huge! Jack started to get very excited as the bull came toward them through the trees.

Ten minutes passed, and they thought the bull might have vacated the area. Suddenly, he started grunting again, this time raking his massive rack on trees and tearing up brush. The bull got quiet again, and then gave one soft grunt. Dean answered back. That did the trick, and the bull came walking toward them, pushing over trees as he moved. Jack was so overcome with excitement that he was bouncing up and down. At that point, Dean had to not only keep tabs on the big bull, but also keep his boy's excitement in check.

The bull stopped on the edge of the river, now less than 100 yards away. They couldn't find a rest for the gun, so Dean grabbed Jack's beaver-chewed walking stick for height and instructed Jack to shoot off of his arm.

Jack placed his rifle on the rest and peered through his scope. He says at that point, the moose looked very big! The moose took a drink of water, looked up, and started to cross the river. Jack placed the crosshairs right between his quarry's eyes and pulled the trigger. When the smoke cleared, the gigantic moose had dropped in its tracks and lay at the river's edge.

Jack says that he doesn't remember much about the next few seconds. Dean says that Jack gave him the gun, then started jumping up and down and screaming something about a big moose!

The logistics of the situation didn't permit them to go directly to the animal. Instead, they had to go back to camp, change into their waders, and float back down with a raft. As they arrived, the hunters were speechless as they pulled the tape past the 76-inch mark. Jack tried to help with the field-dressing, but the moose was so big that he wasn't much help. So, while Dean and Rod (another hunter in their party) cleaned it, Jack went fishing.

As Jack reflects on his adventure, he says that he really wants to go moose hunting again soon, but he'll have to wait. Dad says it's his brother Ben's turn next. ■

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Illinois, 2002

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New #3 All-Time

Patrick Brewer - 94 Pronghorn
Coconino County, AZ 2003

It took Pat Brewer fourteen years of patient waiting to draw his coveted Arizona tag. In the end, all the waiting paid off, and Brewer would finally have the opportunity to hunt in some of the best pronghorn country in North America.

He decided to hire a guide, and they began scouting the area. Thirty-two miles later on a dusty two-track, they found an enormous pronghorn buck. It was the day before the opener and Brewer was excited.

They camped in the area, with no other intention but to go after that one trophy. As first light bloomed, they were astounded to see that they could actually see their quarry right from camp! They put on a tension-packed stalk, as Brewer tried not to let the thought of those massive horns ruin his shooting skills.

Finally, Brewer touched the trigger on his .270. He missed! He watched as his dream buck hastily put some serious real estate between them.

Eventually, they found the buck in their sights again. They watched as he bullied a lesser buck, beating him up until the little guy gave in and fled. Brewer still had no shot as he watched the buck start to follow a doe.

Finally, a decent shot presented itself. He used his bipod to gain a steady rifle barrel and connected on a great shot. Fourteen years of waiting had given Brewer a trophy far greater than he had ever hoped for. ■



New Delaware State Record

Jeffrey K. Foskey - Sussex Co., DE 2003
202-3/8 non-typical whitetail

Jeff Foskey and twelve of his friends decided to lease a property for their annual whitetail adventures. For Foskey, it paid off in ways he had never imagined.

Opening morning came with high expectations, windy conditions, and no results. He relocated for the afternoon hunt and was watching a small buck with a doe when he heard something crashing the brush. The sound continued until, finally, a heavy-racked buck appeared at 45 yards. Foskey waited until the deer went behind a tree and then raised his shotgun. As the buck reappeared, Foskey made good on the most important shot he will likely ever take.

Jeff Foskey's 202-3/8 non-typical whitetail is the largest to ever come from Delaware, and one of only two from that state to ever make the All-time records book.

The other, a 197 B&C trophy, was harvested only two months later, by Robert P. Reeves, Jr., in Kent County.



First Ever All-time Entry from Pennsylvania

Albert C. Erich - Elk Co., PA 2004
385-3/8 B&C non-typical American elk

According to Tom Toman of the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, the current population of elk in Pennsylvania is a result of transplants that took place from Yellowstone National Park from 1913-1926. While RMEF has helped with habitat enhancement and relocations of elk within the state, all elk found there now result from those very early transplants.

Pennsylvanians seem to either love the elk or hate them, without much middle ground. Count Albert Erich in with the bunch that loves them. His bull, taken in November 2004, becomes the first All-time records-book entry for any elk category from Pennsylvania.

It all started for Erich in September, when he found out he was one of twelve lucky recipients of a bull tag. He says 22,777 people applied for the tag. His exact number in the drawing, which he will likely never forget, was #4.

He soon did all he could to obtain permission to hunt various properties in the area. Erich says that the herd in his unit often inhabits reclaimed strip mines and private ranch holdings. It is a rural area, with hemlock cover and food plots and natural browse.

He scouted far in advance and had found three good bulls by the season opener. He watched their movements and learned their habits. Finally, on the night before the opener, he put them to bed.

On opening morning, Erich's son, who is also named Albert, Rodney Pistner, and Paul Gillen went out to enjoy a Pennsylvania elk hunt. Erich was the only tag-holder, but the experience was too much to resist for the other three.

They eventually spotted the elk, which had moved a significant distance from the evening before. A rafter bull had given away their location; the herd was bedded in deadfall. As Erich moved in, he was soon busted. A large bull stood up, and he and Erich had a fifteen-second staredown. The bull finally gave in and took a step forward, allowing Erich his much-needed shooting lane. One shot with his 7mm and Erich had a prize as unique as any ever taken in his state.



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Kevin Halbmaier 218-2/8 B&C non-typical whitetail Monroe Co., IA 2003

Kevin Halbmaier would like to tell you that he has hunted for 30 years, or that he was after this particular deer for 5 years, or perhaps some other grand hunting story. But as a humble Halbmaier talks about his experience in the field, he says, "I'm just a beginner."

A big buck was not at the forefront of Halbmaier's mind. There was a big buck running about, or so the rumors had said. Someone even had a picture of it, supposedly, but not Halbmaier.

Halbmaier only started hunting about 5 years ago (he is now 50). He had just recently purchased 100 acres, of which better than half is timbered. Beginning some sort of hunting on his property seemed to go hand in hand. Until the fall of 2003, Halbmaier had taken two deer in that short hunting career, both of which were does.

On the last day of the second season, he and some friends were out chasing deer. His friends pushed the timber, and it wasn't long before a giant buck popped out of heavy cover. Actually, he says there were about ten deer in the bunch, but he scarcely remembers the rest of them.

Halbmaier shouldered his Remington 870 pump shotgun and took the 80-yard running shot. He had no doubt it would be the most important shot of his life. As

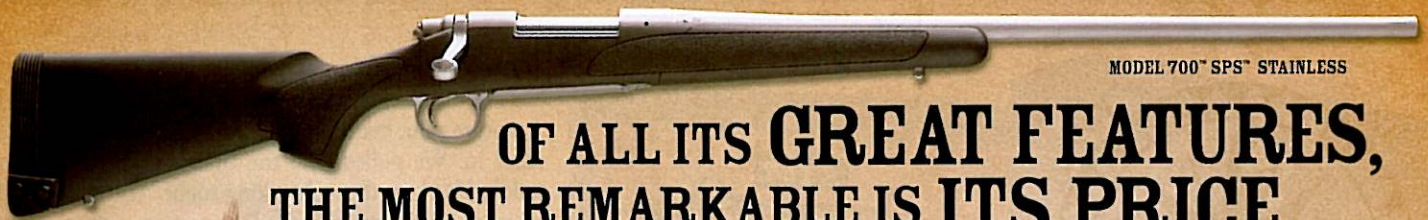


Iowa hunter Kevin Halbmaier had only been hunting for five years when he harvested this non-typical whitetail scoring 218-2/8 points.

if drawn on paper, the slug struck home, ending the reign of one of the biggest bucks in the area.

We say "one" of the biggest bucks, because another one taken in the area is Tony Lovstuen's 307-5/8 non-typical, which stands as the largest hunter-taken whitetail in history. But Halbmaier isn't too worried about that. He is happy with his first buck, and he is continuing to learn how to deer hunt. ■

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