

LIVING THE DREAM

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Suddenly, the buck of my dreams appeared, walking precariously down a narrow disked strip of dry, red South Texas soil right toward me. At the distance of 20 feet from my elevated blind, the unbelievably tall-tined buck paused behind a large mesquite tree. Within moments of satisfying himself all was safe, he gingerly placed his antlers into an aromatic lime prickly ash bush and began angling his rack to and fro for close to 15 minutes. Fortuitously, the buck remained in a static position for a considerable time, enabling me to estimate just what this bruiser actually scored. A small opening in the brush afforded me a narrow window of opportunity to scrutinize his right antler, but his left antler remained ambiguous because of his position.

I had a problem. The bush this animal was rubbing prevented any chance of seeing both sides of his rack simultaneously, even with my 10x40 binoculars. I attempted to field judge the size of the buck's antlers.

As I feverishly evaluated his antlers whenever visible, I tried to remain calm, as it suddenly occurred to me that I was looking at a

buck that would gross score in the 170's. At that moment, my right leg began to tap uncontrollably, and all moisture parted my lips. Abruptly, this buck jumped forward, possibly in response to a feral hog I had observed earlier, and darted out to a sendero a scant 30 yards away.

There he paused and instinctively, my 7mm was up. The quiescent evening was interrupted momentarily by the rapport echoing from my rifle. The buck collapsed, and I accomplished a life-long quest that seconds before was only a dream.

The unique thing about this buck was that I had the privilege of seeing

him the year before and hoped that our paths would cross once again. Thanks to my good friend and hunting partner, David Shashy, my second meeting with this majestic buck became a reality.

It all started when David returned to Texas from his home in Ocala, Florida, on December 3, 1993. Within a few days of hunting together in Dimmit County, David took a buck with a tremendous rack that scored 168 points. Hunting nearby but in different blinds, we attempted to relocate my old acquaintance.

"The brush country of South Texas not only affords deer cover, but more importantly, high-quality forage which enhances trophy antler production."

On the very first evening, the tall-tined 12-point appeared before David on a barely vegetated strip of oats. Excited is a poor choice of words. Ecstatically, David informed me of the sighting. Arriving at my blind, David could barely speak he was so excited. Without hearing a word, I knew what he had seen. The deer's appearance impressed David so much that he drew the rack on one of his business cards. By dark, we found ourselves deliberating as to what the buck would score, and more importantly, where we would

hunt in the morning. The hunt of my lifetime began the following day. I had a co-worker, Shance Tyson, sit in my blind while I sat along with David at the blind from which David had seen the buck.

The morning hunt concluded with David and me seeing several nice deer, but Shance, who was only an observer, enjoyed a terrific view of the 12-point as it established several scrapes around his blind. For the next few days, my time was spent in my original blind. On the 14th of December I returned to David's blind where I took the Boone and Crockett whitetail.

As I walked up to my trophy, I was excited, yet I experienced, as always, the remorse that precedes the collection of an old monarch of the brush. After locating the deer and heading back to camp, I was greeted by one of my hunting companions of many years, David Morris, former editor of *North American Whitetail* magazine. Without hesitation, Dave said, "Congratulations, Bob, I believe that one's going to make it!" 'Make it' to any serious trophy hunter means the Boone and Crockett record book.

Several busy weeks later, Rodney Glaze, one of my wildlife intern students working on one of the ranches I manage took my rack

into Cotulla to be measured for the Los Cazadores Big Buck contest. Rodney called me by phone that evening to notify me that my deer was leading the contest for the highest net score, 171-4/8 points. I contacted my friend and official Boone and Crockett measurer, John Stein, to schedule a time when he could score my deer.

Once the 60-day drying period passed, John and I met and confirmed that my deer would qualify for the Boone and Crockett Club records program. The ever-so-

symmetrical 12-pointer also won the Los Cazadores net scoring division and it was also confirmed to be the second largest buck ever taken in Dimmit County and third highest scoring deer in Texas during the 1993 season. It was quite a way to climax a hunting season, yet confirm in my mind that the size of the hunting experience must, always be placed in a much higher position than the size of the animal. It's obvious that I will continue my quest for bigger and better whitetails, for, after all, that's my nature. The important thing is that I will admire and cherish any deer I take, regardless of size as long as it fits the experience, which to me can only occur through fair chase under natural conditions. Big deer are very special to me because I realize how difficult it is for them to exist. Taking one of these cherished trophies is simply one part of my life I will never ever forget.



BELOW: THE AUTHOR, BOB ZAIGLIN, WITH HIS OUTSTANDING 12-POINT WHITETAIL BUCK THAT SCORES 171-4/8 POINTS TAKEN IN SOUTH TEXAS.

INSET: HUNTING PARTNER, DAVID SHASHY TOOK THIS TREMENDOUS WHITETAIL EARLIER IN THE SEASON.

