

NORBT WHIT

By Rodney Allen
B&C Assoicare

It was a good feeling to hear the rocks ticking in the wheel wells of my truck as I pulled off the last of the paved roads. I was on my way to join two friends on a deer hunt in the south Peace country near Hudson's Hope, British Columbia.

I was following a well-drawn map into the area, and four hours after leaving my home in Mackenzie I arrived in a setting typical of the beauty found when the prairie meets the Canadian Rockies.

After an enjoyable drive off the paved road I was greeted by my two partners in camp. Seeing a small mule deer buck just a mile back before arriving in camp got my expectations up. When I arrived at camp my expectations were boosted even higher by my partners descriptions of the deer and elk they had seen earlier in the day.

There were about two hours left before dusk when I arrived so we wasted no time. I quickly changed into my hunting gear and with rifle in hand I walked toward the ridge ahead of me. This was new country to me and I knew I would have to cover a lot of ground to get familiar with the area. I felt the promise of a new adventure as I tuned into my new surroundings.

One inch of crusty snow announced my arrival to a cow moose. As I watched her retreat I noticed the silhouette of a deer behind a willow thicket. It was a tall antlered mule deer momentarily frozen in its tracks. Quickly he vanished in a step never offering a clear opportunity for a shot.

I returned to camp that night impressed with the events of my short walk.

Although we didn't get a deer to take home on our 1993 hunt, our success was in our discovery of the abundant big game the Peace country has to offer. Plans of returning were already in the making the day we broke camp. We left with great expectations of returning next year.

Our 1994 deer hunting trip began in the same area as our 1993 deer hunt. The weather was about the same as the previous year, with a trace of snow on the ground and temperatures ranging from ten to thirty degrees Fahrenheit. The mid-November weather was perfect for the seasonal activities for both species of deer. The elk were retreating from the high country this time of year and like the moose they were no longer facing hunting pressure since late October when the seasons had closed for both species.

We had four days of hunting ahead of us and I planned to hunt the higher ridges for mule deer. British Columbia has imposed a four points on one side minimum for mule deer in most hunting management units. I was hunting in a four-point antler restriction unit that left me frustrated after several days of hunting. I was forced to skip over

more than one deer because I never had an opportunity to observe their antlers carefully enough to tell if they had four points on a side before the deer disappeared. With two days gone and two to go, I decided to concentrate on whitetails, so I left the higher ridges to try to find a spot more likely to interest whitetails.

After a lot of footwork trying to find a good mule deer, I was glad to be heading out on the third day for a whitetail hunt that would call for a little more patience and a lot less walking.

My hunting partner, Kerry, had offered to let me use his rattling antlers. I accepted the offer as I was interested in trying this tactic for the first time. While I had never applied the rattling technique in the field, I did have some knowledge on rattling that I had gained from videos and magazines. I felt confident and eager for my first attempt at rattling and I had just the spot in mind to try it.

I started my hunt on a game trail that I had walked earlier, on a weekend scouting trip. The trail ran along the base of a lower ridge, and had several good rubs showing. With fresh tracks and rubs along the trail, it gave me the feeling that I was walking in a mine field of whitetails waiting to explode with every step I took.

I carefully walked the trail a ways until I found a spot that of-

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ferred some natural shooting lanes. I settled in and started my first attempt at rattling with my heart pounding with anticipation. After two hours and three stops, within about three hundred yards, my mind was jerked back to reality by the blowing snorts of whitetails and snapping branches.

Feeling that the deer had heard me rattling, I knew that I had been discovered. I decided to advance on the deer, hoping to get a glimpse of the does that blew my cover. After about fifty careful steps that's exactly what happened. My belief that the deer didn't go far was right. As they made their next dash for safety I raked a small spruce tree. I hoped the strong sappy scent would help conceal my presence, I then made an aggressive rattling sequence.

No sooner than I had made the sequence, a buck ran in a broken gallop past me only fifty yards away, running left to right, trailing after his does. I could clearly see three tall tines, but I couldn't attempt a shot as he moved through the thick timbered bush.

"I'm right in his bedroom," I thought to myself. I raked the spruce again and started with another rattling sequence, lightly tapping the antler tips together, knowing that he was still close. The buck took his bearings and pranced in stopping fifty yards away, right behind a large spruce.

I planned on shooting as soon as he passed that particular tree, but he stopped just behind it.

With my gun held in position, I dropped my trigger hand and reached for the rattling antlers that were on the ground between my knees. I lightly tapped one antler on the other and made ready for the shot. The buck stepped forward at the very moment. He gave me a slow moving broadside shot. I never hesitated. The buck fell in his tracks from a heart shot from my 165 grain 7 mm Remington magnum. It felt as though every trail I had ever walked in the field led to the buck that was down before me. All the efforts of every unsuccessful day hunting were repaid to me in a way that only a person who loves to hunt can appreciate. I was given the opportunity to take a trophy of one of the most beautiful big game species North America has to offer, and I didn't take it lightly.

I could now see something that I hadn't focused on prior to walking up to the buck. The size of his antlers was now very clear to me. The buck's antlers had over 25-inch beams and a 22-inch inside spread.

That night we relived our experiences in stories told as we stood around the fire. Although mine was the only deer taken on

our 1994 hunt, we all had a fantastic trip. Once again we talked of returning again next year as we headed for home.

A local Boone and Crockett official measurer, Rick Berrith, scored the deer at 167-2\8 points after the 60-day drying period. Although the deer had deductions totaling 3 inches, dropping it below the all-time minimum, Rick advised me to enter the buck in the 23rd Awards Program.

I was grateful to Rick for making me aware of the Awards Program and taking the time with me to share our common interests.

I am now a Boone and Crockett Associate and I'm glad to be involved with a club that is unsurpassed in the concerns and conservation of wildlife.

B&C ASSOCIATE, RODNEY ALLEN, WITH HIS TYPICAL WHITETAIL DEER THAT SCORES 167-2/8 POINTS.

