

WAYNE C.
VAN ZWOLL

B&C PROFESSIONAL MEMBER
Photos Courtesy of Author

Rifles That Rewrote the Records



Early rifles bring history, add challenge to any hunt. A 1909-vintage Savage 1899 in .25-35 took this pronghorn for Wayne with one 90-yard shot. No record? No problem!

Hunters needn't fire as far as they can see with glass. Iron sights have packed the records books!

The arc, accuracy and power of bullets put few animals “in the book.” Credit hard hunting, good shooting—and extraordinary luck!

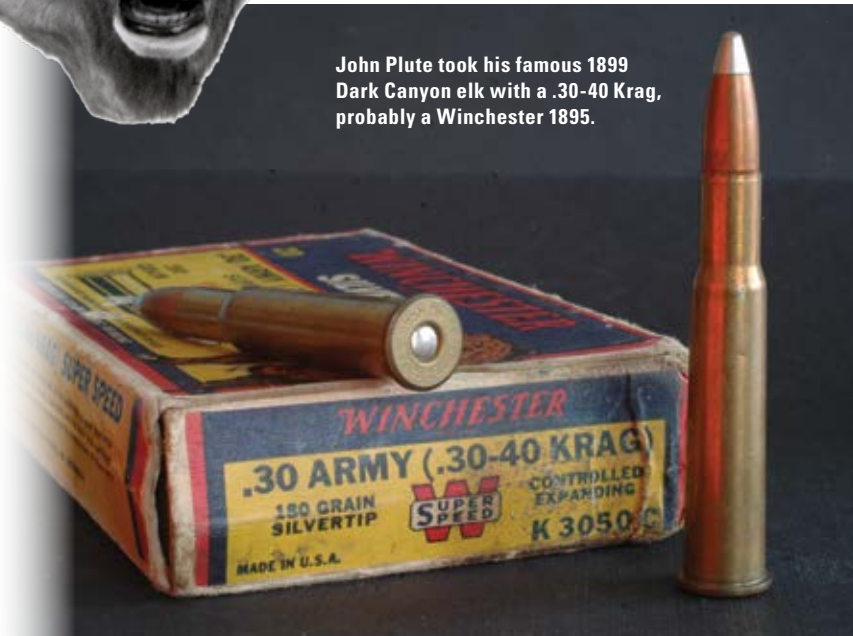
Steel tape measures only bone; it tells nothing else about the hunt. Time, circumstance, weather and effort remain only in the hunter’s memory. Much of what defines the hunt, including the urgency of the shot, dies with him. Usually a record of the rifle remains. Advances in the shooting industry put ever more powerful, sophisticated arms afield. But Boone and Crockett lists include many outstanding animals taken with ordinary, arguably primitive rifles—and outdated loads with short reach and anemic punch.

Whatever you carry, a hunt’s reward has little to do with the hardware in the crook of your arm.

Someone may know of the rifle John Plute used when in 1899 he took an elk whose antlers would top records lists for a century. It was evidently a .30-40 Krag. The only photo I’ve seen of this enigmatic bachelor with a rifle shows a Winchester 1895—one of few rifles so chambered. Less likely possibilities: the military Krag-Jorgensen bolt-action that introduced this smokeless round in 1892, and Winchester’s High Wall 1885 single-shot, the first commercial U.S. rifle for a small-bore smokeless cartridge. The .30-40 also appeared in Remington-Lee and Rolling Block rifles.

John Plute’s Dark Canyon bull was declared a new World’s Record at the Club’s 10th Competition in 1962. The bull scored 442-3/8. This elk was bumped to No. 2 in 1998 by the surfacing of the Alonzo Winter’s bull taken in 1968. Only 2/8 inches separates these two Monarchs.

John Plute took his famous 1899 Dark Canyon elk with a .30-40 Krag, probably a Winchester 1895.



Details of Plute's ammunition—probably 180- or 220-grain softpoint factory loads—have been lost. The shooting was likely close. Scopes were rare, and neither the Krag-Jorgensen nor the iron-sighted Winchester with Plute in the photo readily accepted optics. As the tale goes, when he returned to his home in Crested Butte, Colorado, from nearby Anthracite Creek, onlookers didn't believe his story of a big bull. So he rode back and retrieved the antlers he'd discarded. Later they would go to John Rozich, who owned the Elk Saloon, to settle a bar bill. Ed Rozman, Rozich's stepson, eventually acquired the saloon. In 1955 he measured the antlers. In 1961 an official B&C score of 442-3/8 touted them as the World's Record.

A Slovenian immigrant, Plute has been described as a coal miner, a mountain man. He lived in a boarding house and reportedly drew from dwindling game herds to supply venison

to the Elk Saloon. One night in 1922, riding back from a party at a ranch, he was pitched from the saddle. He died two days later.

Winchester's Model 1895 was preceded by the Model 1894, which appeared in October of that year in .32-40 and .38-55, both black-powder rounds. The new, smokeless .30-30 and .25-35 joined them a few months later when Winchester introduced nickel-steel barrels. The .32 Special, announced in 1902 and dropped in '73, outlived all but the .30-30 in this rifle. Initially loaded with a 160-grain bullet at 1,970 fps, the .30-30 got friskier with age. Current listings: 150-grain bullets at 2,390 fps, 170s at 2,200. The 94 lasted 112 years before leaving Winchester's line in March 2006 when the New Haven plant closed. It has reappeared and remains the most popular lever-rifle ever—more than 6 million have been produced!

Hunters who could have reached farther with

.30-06 bolt rifles favored the 94 carbine because it was easy to carry, quick to point. One day in 1941, Coloradan Jack Autrey drove his 1935 Plymouth into the hills near his home and hiked to a ridge. Movement behind a bush caught his eye. No! *The bush* was moving! Two shots from his Winchester 94, a .25-35, killed the biggest deer Jack had ever seen. With 32 points and scoring over 297, Autrey's buck ranks 26th on B&C's All-time list of non-typical mule deer.

The short, flat-sided 94 carbine is a natural fit for scabbards. Late on an October

morning in 1972, Mike Blehm and a friend saddled up for a deer hunt in Colorado's Soapstone Hills. They spotted a fine buck. Mike slid off his horse, yanked his .30-30 free and dropped the deer with one shot from 125 yards. It was a huge animal—300 pounds field dressed, by Mike's estimate. Its antlers taped a whopping 195 inches, putting it solidly into B&C's All-time listings for typical mule deer.

The Model 1894 came late in a series of firearms designed by John Browning for Winchester. In 1883 a salesman brought to



ABOVE: Jack Autrey's non-typical mule deer was taken in 1941 in Larimer County, Colorado. LEFT: A beauty but not records-book, Wayne's buck fell to a .25-35, as did Jack Autrey's 297-point muley.

Slim and quick in hand, Winchester's 1894 (now 94) has sold over 6 million copies. It's still a star!





TOP: Jim Jordan's rifle may have looked like this Winchester 92. The .32-20 and .25-20 don't hit very hard. ABOVE: The .25-20 is dwarfed by even the modest .30-30. The great Jordan buck fell to several .25-20 bullets.

BELOW: Jordan Buck Key Measurements:

- 53-7/8 inches of mass/circumference measurements
- 30" mainbeams, even on both sides
- G1s - G4s: 7, 13, 10 & 7 inches
- Only 3-2/8 in symmetry deductions



Winchester VP Thomas Bennett a second-hand single-shot rifle "of interest." Bennett saw it as competition for Winchester. He traveled immediately to Ogden, Utah, and the "biggest gun shop between Omaha and the Pacific." It was staffed by four brothers barely out of their teens, John the eldest. "Ten thousand dollars," he replied when Bennett asked to buy all rights. A fortune! Bennett got it for eight and hurried back to New Haven. Winchester put the rifle into production as its Model 1885. For 17 years,



Browning would work exclusively for Winchester. Eleven of his 40 designs appeared before 1887. Browning adapted the vertically sliding lugs of his single-shot to a new Model 1886 lever-action. Bennett paid him \$50,000 for that, then offered John \$10,000 for a short-action version "if you deliver in three months." John replied. "The price is \$20,000. You'll have it in 30 days, or it's free." It wasn't.

In .44-40, .38-40, .32-20 and .25-20, the lithe Model 1892 scaled as little as 5½ pounds but held up to 17 rounds. It became a hit worldwide and lasted until 1941. With half-magazine variants, Models 53 and 65, more than a million shipped. It may have been a Winchester 1892 that 22-year-old James Jordan carried on a deer hunt along Wisconsin's Yellow River, November 20, 1914.

Jordan and hunting pal Eachus Davis walked the Soo Line rail from their hometown of Danbury, steps softened by a carpet of new snow. They'd crossed the bridge when Davis discovered he'd forgotten both his knife and 50-cent deer license. After Jordan shot a doe with one of his five cartridges, he loaned Davis his knife to field dress the deer as he took the trail of a buck with "a lazy hoof" back toward town. Jordan was nearing the bridge when a train approached. Several deer burst from brush beside the rail bed. From 50 yards, Jordan fired three times at the enormous buck.

His .25-20 launched an 86-grain softnose at about 1,460 fps. Muzzle energy: just

405 foot-pounds, or one-sixth that of the .30-40 Krag's. Though the deer was hit, it didn't falter. Jordan stayed on its track, at last dropping it with his one remaining bullet fired across the river. He waded the icy, waist-deep water but couldn't move the animal. Enlisting help in town, he returned to find the river had carried it downstream.

In Danbury the huge-bodied buck caused a stir. Admirers included taxidermist George Van Castle from Webster, 10 miles away. He offered a shoulder mount for \$5. Jordan paid. The deer left with Van Castle—who, seeking medical care for his ailing wife, soon moved to Grindstone Lake, near Hinckley, Minnesota. When Jim Jordan went to Webster to retrieve his deer, he found neither it nor the taxidermist.

Van Castle lost his wife. Within three years he remarried and moved to Florida. His Grindstone Lake house would stand vacant 40 years, selling for taxes in 1959. That year, Minnesota DNR forester Bob Ludwig found in a second-hand store a crude mount of an enormous whitetail. He bought it for \$2. Months later, he taped the antlers and sent the tally to B&C measurer Bob Fashingbauer in St. Paul. The score, concluded Fashingbauer, must be wrong! He found Ludwig and the deer and came up with a net 206-1/8 inches, just a half-inch shy of Ludwig's total. Highest ever for a typical whitetail!

By this time, Jordan and his wife had also moved and were operating a bar on Highway 48 near St. Croix. When word spread about the big buck, Jordan invited Ludwig to show the antlers at his bar. Immediately he recognized them as from the deer he'd shot 35 years earlier. But Jordan, a renowned storyteller, didn't convince everyone. Ludwig kept the antlers. In

Rifles That Rewrote the Records



Ed Stockwell killed his No. 1 Coues' deer with an iron-sighted Savage 99. This one has a tang aperture.

1965 B&C listed the deer as the World's Record typical whitetail—taken by an “unknown” hunter in Minnesota.

Jordan's insistence that he'd killed the deer kept the debate alive after 1968, when Ludwig sold the antlers for \$1,500. In December, 1978, B&C concluded the evidence favored Jordan's claim. Alas, two months before a new listing credited him with the buck, Jim Jordan died.

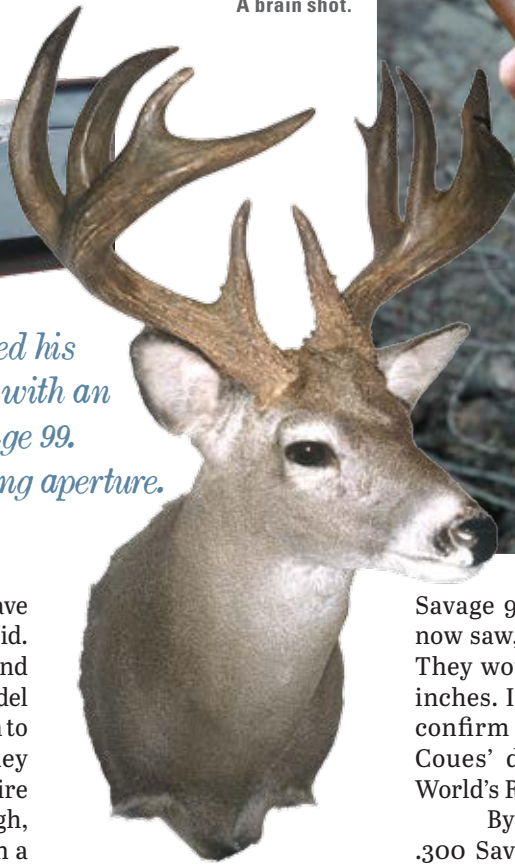
This extraordinary whitetail would hold top spot in B&C records until 1993, when Milo Hanson downed a buck scoring 213-5/8 near Biggar, Saskatchewan. But no whitetail story will likely ever trump that of the giant deer killed by a young James Jordan with the last cartridge in his .25-20!

Their marginal performance on deer limited sales of the short-action .25-20 and .32-20. The .30-30 and .32 Special in Winchester Model 1894 and Marlin Model 1893 lever-actions (and Models 94 and 336 that followed) dominated in whitetail camps. The .32 Special's 170-grain .321 missile is a ballistic twin to the .30-30's same-weight .308 bullet.

But some hunters have favored the .32. Ed Broder did. On November 25, 1926, he and two pals herded a 1914 Model T 100 miles from Edmonton to Chip Lake, Alberta. They stopped at a saw-camp to hire a team of horses and a sleigh, reaching the lake cabin in a foot of snow. Broder immediately set out, rifle in hand. Outsized tracks led him a half-mile to a fresh bed, then into a jackpine swamp, where two moose had crossed. “I had to choose: moose or deer.” The moose would take longer to reel in, and little daylight remained. Ed stayed with the deer. In a clearing he spied the buck, facing away “I had to take a spine shot. So I waited until the animal raised its head, then fired my .32 Special.” Walking up to the buck, Broder gawked. Ninety years later, his non-typical mule deer still tops the records lists, with a B&C score of 355 2/8.

In 1947 Leupold announced its first rifle scope and Weaver its K-series. Lyman's Alaskan was by then nearly a decade in service. But despite brisk sales of bolt rifles that tapped the potential of optical sights, lever-actions remained popular. In 1953

RIGHT: No stopping rifle, Winchester's 94 carbine did drop the huge Turner grizzly at six feet! A brain shot.



ABOVE: Current World's Record typical Coues' whitetail deer scores 144-1/8. It was taken in Pima County, Arizona, by Ed Stockwell in 1953.

Winchester presented its *two-millionth* Model 94 carbine to President Eisenhower; Marlin added the .35 Remington to its Model 336 roster; Savage's hammerless 99 was slated for the .308. That fall, Ed Stockwell and his partner hunted in Arizona's rugged Santa Rita Mountains. One day they split at the foot of a ridge, Ed taking the high route. Climbing, he flushed two Coues' bucks. In a blink they vanished near ridgetop. Ed raced after them, but soon stopped, gasping and despairing. Turning back, he glimpsed movement behind an oak 60 yards off. When a buck stepped clear, Ed killed it with his iron-sighted

Savage 99. The antlers, he now saw, were exceptional. They would score over 144 inches. In fact, B&C had to confirm this was indeed a Coues' deer! It's still the World's Record.

By that time the 99 in .300 Savage had become a mainstay of deer and elk hunters. But its more noteworthy chambering was the .250/3000, a cartridge designed by Charles Newton in 1913. Its 87-grain bullet clocked 3,000 fps, a veritable rocket in that day! In 1939 Bill Goosman carried such a rifle into the Beaver Flattops. Still-hunting through thick timber, he caught elk scent and eased toward it. Suddenly a bull elk appeared. Bill took quick aim through his aperture sight and fired. That 45-yard shot brought him antlers that, at 400 inches, would easily make B&C's non-typical records list, established in the 1980s.

Modest cartridges can indeed down tough game.

“The summer of 1957,” wrote Jack Turner, “the year we came to our present place on the Atnarko River above Lonesome Lake, my wife Trudy...surprised a sow grizzly



Newton's .250, left, gave way to the .300 Savage, but in 1939 brought Bill Goosman a 400-inch elk.



and two young cubs” tearing the garden apart. He started sleeping in the garden, .30-30 at hand. So began Jack Turner’s battle with bears.

Later, after reluctantly firing at one of the cubs in hopes the sow would take the other and leave, he encountered her in a thicket. She charged. A 170-grain soft-point dropped her at 35 feet.

The Atnarko is a major salmon stream. “Runs start in September, with sockeyes and humpbacks first, followed by the cohos. When the salmon appear, the grizzlies start coming” Jack figured that on average, 10 to 12 adult grizzlies ranged within six miles of his homestead.

One morning in May 1965, Turner left the house at daylight and started up the Atnarko to repair a log fence. He carried an ax. Nylon cord suspended the Winchester 94 across his back. The trail wound through a copse of cedars. Suddenly, in a glade beyond a bend “stood the biggest grizzly I had ever laid eyes on.... [He came] in a savage rush without so much as a growl or a single popping of his teeth.” Jack dropped the ax, whipped the Winchester off his back,

levered a round into the chamber and thumbed up the peep sight. He’d have time for only one shot.

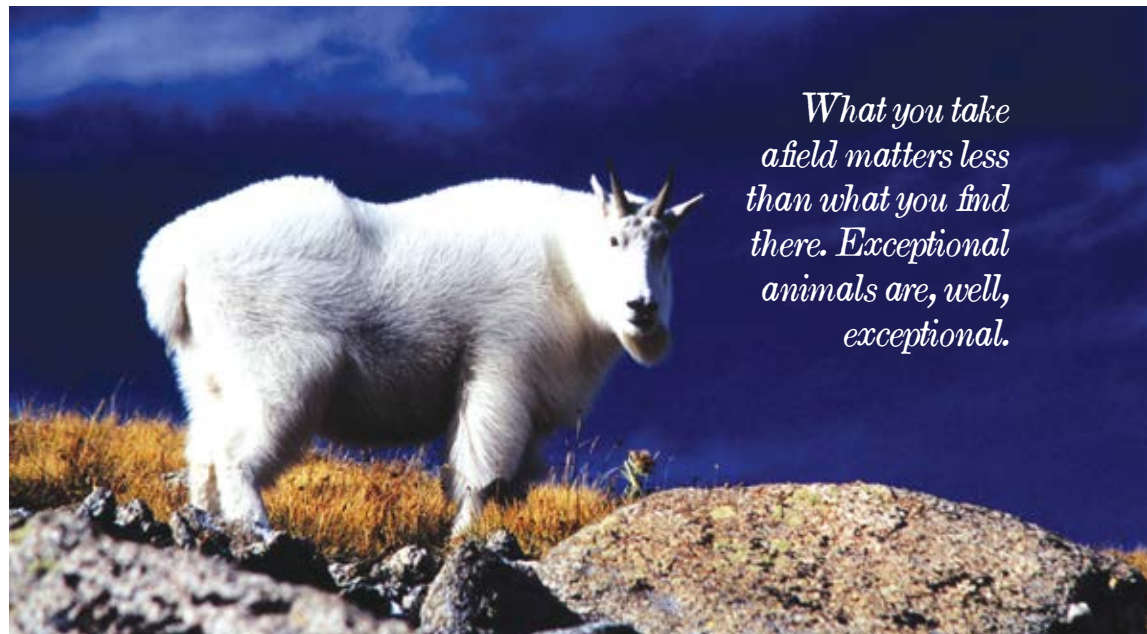
“I hit him dead center between the eyes...his head went down between his forelegs, and he fell almost straight down.” After making sure the bear was dead, Jack returned to the cabin to fetch Trudy for help with the skinning. When he returned, he picked up his ax just six feet from the carcass. The shot had been that close!

What led to the charge?

Turner couldn’t say. The bear was a male, with nothing nearby to defend.

Cleaning the skull, Jack wondered whether, because of its size, this bear might be a cross between an inland grizzly and a coastal brown. He sent the skull to Ian McTaggart Cowan, an authority at the University of British

Columbia and a Boone and Crockett Club member. In May 1966, Cowan declared the animal a true grizzly, not a cross—and that the fragment of bone blown by the bullet did not preclude accurate measurement. The B&C score: 26-10/16. No bigger grizzly had ever been recorded! While subsequent entries would



*What you take
afield matters less
than what you find
there. Exceptional
animals are, well,
exceptional.*

drop Jack Turner's bear to 11th in All-time lists, he concluded as he hung the huge hide on his barn that it was bear enough to meet a casket-length away!

As the 20th century spooled out, more records-book animals fell to bolt-action rifles. But not all were modern magnums. In 1961 Melvin Van Lewen took

to the Colorado hills on an elk hunt. Fresh snow soon showed him promising tracks. He trailed the bull through a day of flurries and eventually earned an 85-yard shot. Melvin's Swedish Mauser in 6.5x55 dropped the elk with one bullet. Tragically, Van Lewen would die of carbon monoxide poisoning just a few years later on another elk hunt.

While rifles with a Mauser stamp date to 1868, the Model 1889 was Paul's first successful action for smokeless ammo. The Model 1892 introduced the stout, non-rotating extractor since—widely hailed as the most reliable ever—controlling each cartridge from the stack. Paul's staggered-column, fixed magazine came in 1893. The 1895 action would be perfected as the 1898. In 1894 Sweden ordered 12,000 Mauser carbines. Later, Sweden's Mausers would be produced in-country by Carl Gustaf's Stads Gevarsfaktori. They fired the 6.5x55 Swedish cartridge. The Model 1896 Swedish Mauser had some bolt modifications, including three gas vents and an anti-bind slot inside the bridge, to accept a rib on the bolt body.

A 6.5x55 ended one of my most memorable elk hunts

when a bull jumped in Wyoming timber. I had only a quick offhand shot as the bull paused at 80 yards in a gap. The 140-grain softnose landed well. No, it wasn't even close to a records-book elk. It didn't have to be.

Just about any rifle works for shooting a bayed cougar. Cats have been pulled from trees by .22 rimfires. Hunting cougars isn't so easy—certainly not the way young Lowell Hayes did it in the winter of 1952-53. The Darby, Montana, native abandoned his trapline for a month to hunt cougars with the hounds he'd trained. In the vast Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness which drapes the Idaho-Montana border, he wrote, "You could line out for 50 miles in most directions without crossing an open road." The appeal to this kind of hunting? "It's like prospecting—not so much finding the gold as just looking for it..."

Near the start, on Nez Perce Pass, a blizzard slowed Hayes's progress. But the snow meant good tracking. "Breaking trail over the fluffy whiteness with snowshoes was hard work, but I felt free, fresh, and vigorous. That night the dogs and I stayed in an old prospector's cabin."

The next morning before dawn they were on the trail. The first 11 miles were tough, as warming air had turned the loose snow to "doughlike balls" that clung to his snowshoes. The next night, hunter and hounds stayed in a brush shelter. Rain commenced. It would continue. Hayes subsisted on rice, tea, jerky, and citrus juice. His dogs ate meat from elk killed by lions, and those that had died of scabies. Prowling the drainages with his pack, Hayes lost track of the days and missed his 19th birthday.

There was plenty of cougar sign, but the cats stayed no more than a day on

a kill. Chinook winds bared the ground and turned snow to water, confounding the dogs. Early in February Hayes and his pack crossed the Selway-Bitterroot Divide toward Montana's Blue Joint Creek. And his luck changed. After a month afield, his hounds were in full cry on big, fresh tracks! He hurried to a rise, listening to each voice as the hounds circled. Soon he reached the tree.

Not far up the short fir, a tremendous cat rested, its sides heaving. "I couldn't help admiring such a fine animal," Hayes said later. He loaded an auxiliary cartridge into his .30-40 Krag. It accepted a .32 S&W Long cartridge, whose 98-grain bullet at 780 fps wouldn't ruin the hide.

"The big cat didn't flinch as the bullet struck him. The dogs quit their barking. The silence was complete. A trickle of blood ran from the hole in the lion's chest. As I reloaded, the smooth action of the old Krag seemed to rattle like a boxcar [as the cat] hit the ground stone-dead."

Hayes measured the giant animal at 9 feet 8 inches. He couldn't lift it. On snowshoes for 22 miles and over two mountain passes, he backpacked the heavy hide to Darby.

It had been a month of trial. Hayes recalled, "There'd been cold, hunger, and always the rain. It drenched my lonely fires and soaked the wood..." In that wet, dreary month, he figured he'd walked 300 miles. He had also killed the biggest cougar in 52 years. At 15-11/16, its score missed by one-sixteenth of an inch that of a cat shot by Theodore Roosevelt in 1901. Lowell Hayes's now ranks 19th on B&C's All-time list.

I've yet to read of a tougher hunt—or of an animal in the records book taken by a .32 S&W Long from a .30-40 Krag! ■



ABOVE: To prevent pelt damage to lions, Lowell Hayes used an adapter to fire .32 S&W Longs in his Krag. BELOW: The Swedish Mauser, bottom, is much like the 1898. Such a rifle took Melvin Van Lewen's big elk.

