

STILL GOING STRONG

AN ELK HUNTING ADVENTURE AT 80

“Here comes your bull,” my guide exclaimed. I could see this bull had heavy beams, possibly Boone and Crockett size, which fit my criteria for a trophy. He drifted through the pinions and junipers with 20 cows though never passing through an opening.



At the age of 80, William finally had the opportunity to go on an elk hunt in Colorado.

We finally spotted him moving away toward the ridge and into the setting sun. I raised my rifle...

This hunt actually began many years ago as I realized each day can bring another exciting adventure. New and continuing passions dominate my many adventures. My passion for elk hunting has remained strong for 50 years since I first started hunting at age 30. I was born and raised (until age 30) in New Jersey in a non-hunting family. My family was quite large and mostly Italian immigrants. The closest anyone came to the outdoors was an uncle who tried taxidermy and mounted a whimsical squirrel, which I still have.

In 1965 I was stationed in Igloo, South Dakota in the U.S. Army. Within a few days, my sergeant asked me to join him on an antelope

(pronghorn) hunt. My excited comment was “What is an antelope?” I then spent the next few weeks shooting at the range with a borrowed .264 Magnum and learning as much as I could about ballistics. I went hunting, and an antelope with 7-inch horns was my trophy and my initiation into hunting.

Fast forward 50 years and triple bypass heart surgery. Now I live in Colorado, and after many preference points, I drew an elk tag in GMU 40 and hired Biggerstaff Outfitters to guide me.

I looked through my scope and all I could see was the glare of the setting bright sun and rare glimpses of an elk body moving away. No shot taken. In the remaining amount of legal shooting time, we never relocated the elk. We did a lot of hiking and glassing over four days—in

the scrub oak, in the pinion-juniper forests and on the flats. The country was stark but beautiful with oak, sandstone buttes and multiple overlooks. We saw many elk within shooting range, although not exactly what I was looking for. Thank the Lord that I am still able to hike well, but not like I was 20! My spirits were high as always. The journey always inspires renewal of the soul, and killing an elk only adds to it. During the hikes, I relived my previous hunting adventures and give thanks to Mother Nature and her creations.

Days two and three produced success for my partners, Matt and Rick, which included two mature heavy antlered brutes. On day four we headed out on a dark crisp morning. We hiked past a small pond devoid of elk. Three hundred yards later we

This column is dedicated to the system that supports the public hunting of public wildlife for all fair chase sportsmen, and the stories and trophies that are the result. Theodore Roosevelt strongly believed that self-reliance and pursuing the strenuous activities of hunting and wilderness exploration was the best way to keep man connected to nature. We score trophies, but every hunt is to some extent a way of measuring ourselves.

BEYOND THE SCORE

William J. Ciccone
Lifetime Associate
Photos Courtesy of Author

turned around and saw about 40 elk at the pond—a mystery as to where they came from. In this group was an exceptionally wide 6x6. With 10x binoculars and closer inspection, I suspected he had a skull injury at the base of the right antler which allowed the antler to grow at an extreme angle. Not my elk!

We returned to the cabin for lunch, napped and regrouped in mid-afternoon. This time we hiked through a thin pinion-juniper forest and seated ourselves on a small vantage point where we could glass. Nature responded by producing a scenario

where a bobcat and a coyote took turns feeding on a previous kill, a wonderful example of wildlife sharing necessities. Just before sunset, a cow elk appeared at about 150 yards slightly above us. Within five minutes, 10 cows appeared and proceeded to jump and play joyously in the hidden pond. A deep bull bugle sounded off in the dense scrub oak. It was getting darker. Slowly a bull appeared with heavy antlers but the view was somewhat obscured by the scrub oak and the playing cows. A minute later the bull wandered into an opening and I shot. He stumbled

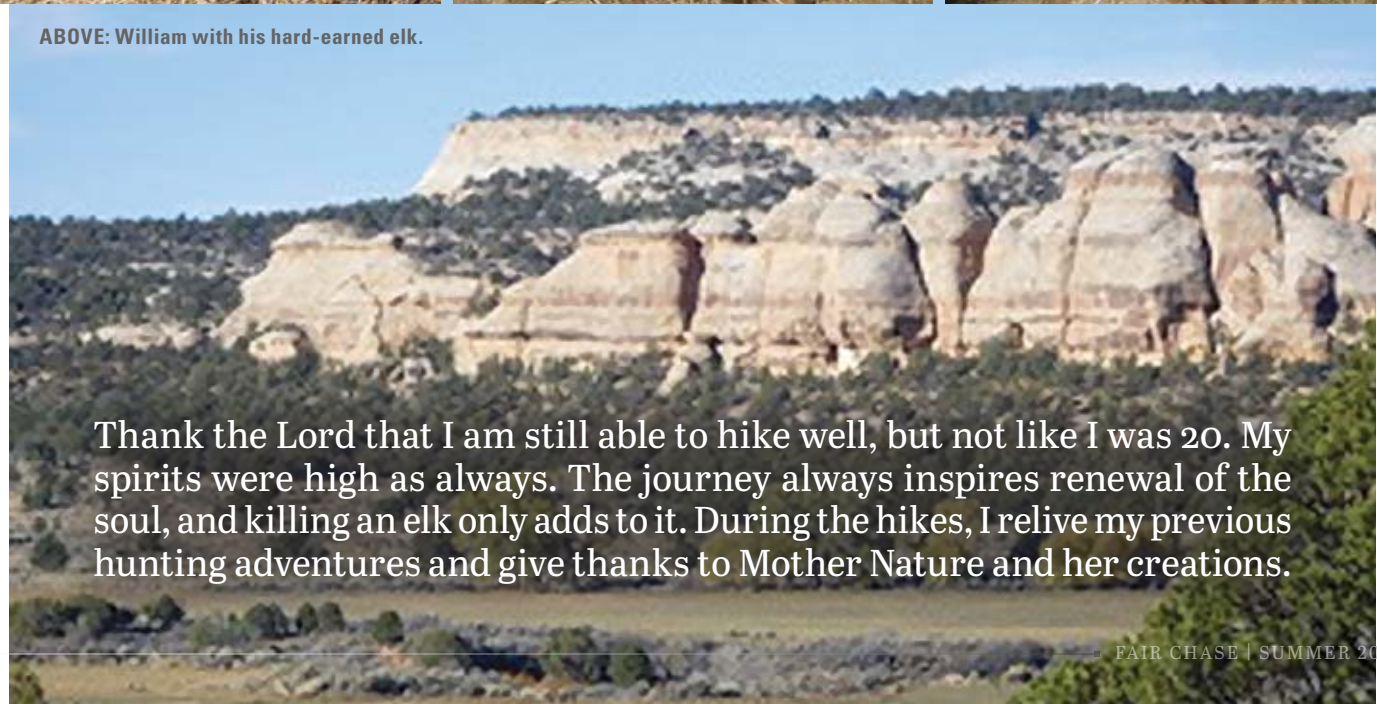
and a second shot put him down. By the time we walked to him, it was dark. With flashlights and headlamps beaming, he appeared massive with top palmation and bilateral broken G-3s. A grand old warrior! I was very satisfied to conclude my hunt with him.

Life presents challenges but excitement and passion should keep the engine of positivity running.

Thank you to my beautiful wife who endures my passion for hunting. I love her deeply and I must admit my passion for her is eternal. ■



ABOVE: William with his hard-earned elk.



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