

EVERETT HEADLEY

B&C OFFICIAL MEASURER

Photos Courtesy of Author and  
Kyle M. Lehr

# WASHINGTON ROOSEVELT'S ELK



This series has been a true pleasure for me to write. What started as a rough idea that we hoped folks would enjoy morphed into a full-blown series we plan to continue. The comments I have received are very appreciated and, in an effort to keep the information useful and ensure enough time on the development of the articles, we have reached out to a few guest authors to produce content for the series.

While there will be some changes in the format and stories appearing in the column, I trust readers will glean information that they will find useful in their pursuits. As you read these remember that many states receive a major portion of their license revenues from non-resident hunters. Not only are you afforded the opportunity to experience new places and interact with new species, you are stepping up and funding wildlife conservation as hunters have always done.

In this issue's article we hear from Official Measurer Everett Headley about his Roosevelt's elk trip to the state of Washington with our Assistant Director of Big Game Records, Kyle Lehr. I hope you enjoy this piece and if you have any DIY hunts you would like to see featured in the column, please reach out to me or the managing editor of *Fair Chase* Karlie Slayer. Even if it may be the same species or a little different location or type of hunt, the idea is to show readers that a successful DIY hunt is attainable if they put their mind to it. A different perspective with different experiences is what this column is all about so we hope to hear from you.

- JUSTIN SPRING  
DIRECTOR OF BIG GAME RECORDS

I go to the memory of that week often, as many of us do when something we desired to find eludes us. It becomes something more in our mind than just a hunting trip and draws us to return.




Thinking of my latest trip to western Washington to pursue Roosevelt's elk, a thought from a Spanish philosopher long since past echoes in my mind. Jose Ortega y Gasset said, "One does not hunt in order to kill; on the contrary, one kills in order to have hunted. If one were to present the sportsman with the death of the animal as a gift he would refuse it." And while the trip had many successes, cutting the notch on my license was not among them. Yet, I go to the memory of that week often, as many of us do when something we desired to find eludes us. It becomes something more in our mind than just a hunting trip and draws us to return.

**AFTER WATCHING CLEAR CUTS FOR SOME TIME I DECIDED TO TRY MY HAND ENTERING THE DENSE WET FOREST THROUGH A BEAR TUNNEL ONLY TO BE TURNED AROUND BY AN IMPENETRABLE WALL OF DEVIL'S CLUB.  
- KYLE**

Roosevelt's elk are one of the three subspecies of elk in North America. They were not high on my list until meeting Kyle Lehr, assistant director of big game records for the Boone and Crockett Club. His desire to substitute the arid mountains of Montana for the wet rainforest of the coast was contagious. There was no singular element that drew him; it was about the entirety of an experience. This is a feeling Ortega y Gasset would agree with and one that resonates within myself. While the kill is part of sum, it is not the

total or even the ultimate goal of hunting.

We began preparing two years before our hunt by researching Roosevelt's elk along the coastlines of Washington. Washington requires a hunter to select which half of the state to hunt and the method they will use. At the time, Kyle was not an archery hunter (he has since picked it up) so we selected the rifle season in November. The unit we chose was over-the-counter, requiring no points or prior applications. Other units can have lower hunting



The forests of this area are infamous for being thick, dense, and wet. There can be abundant feed in young growth areas, but they would also be extremely difficult to move through or spot elk.

pressure or easier access, but they will also require years of building up points. Looking to add an experience to our hunting career we took the most expeditious route with a general season elk license. Knowing that the bear population was robust, I made sure to put one of those tags in my pocket as well.

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife has two excellent resources as starting points for planning a hunt. The hunt planner dials in Game Management Units (GMU) based on your specific criteria. This generates a list that is further

whittled by looking at the game management reports. These reports are compiled by the biologists working year-round in their areas of responsibility. Parsing these reports for the past few years can help you find trends on harvests, populations and ratios. The unit we settled on had low public land but highly accessible private areas, increasing elk numbers, and a good number of branch-antlered bulls (a three-point minimum was required in the unit we hunted). We also opted to pay an access fee to a timber company for a key to open 100,000 acres. While

this increased the cost of our trip significantly, it also helped to relieve hunting pressure in a general unit.

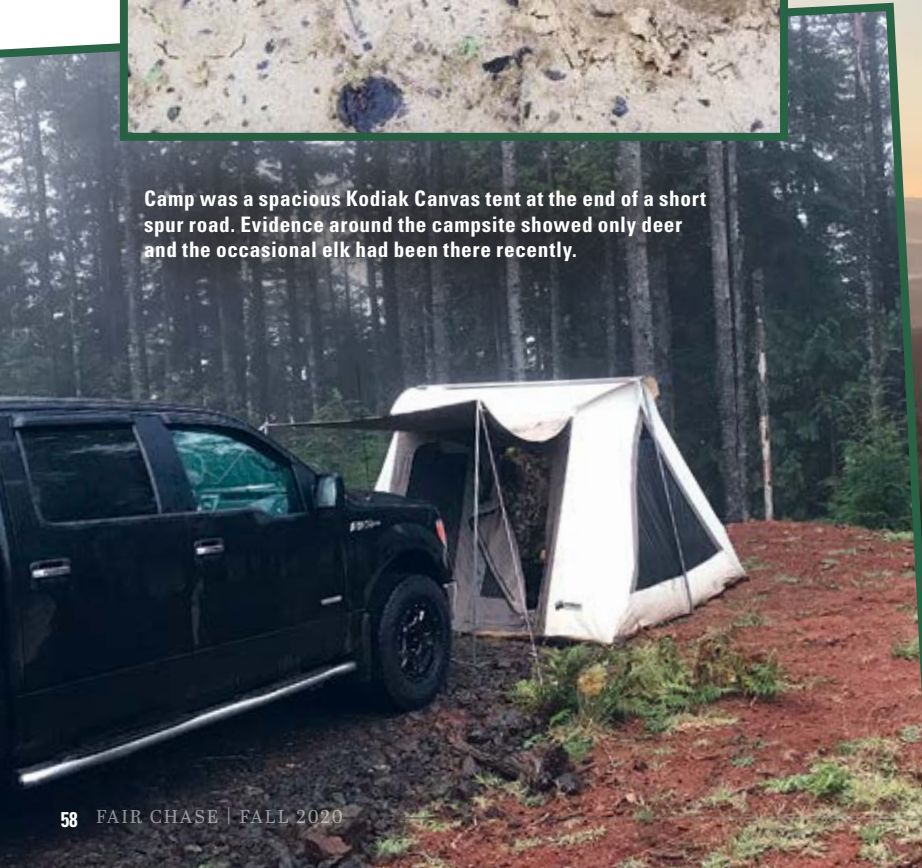
Now that we had our “spot,” we had to find the spots on the spot. This ultimately came down to two things: what would concentrate the elk and how could we find them. The forests of this area are infamous for being thick, dense, and wet. There can be abundant feed in young growth areas, but they would also be extremely difficult to move through or spot elk. The old growth stands have canopies that prevent the sunlight from hitting the floor, which keeps them open but dark and without grass or forbs for elk. The solution was to find clear cuts that were 2-4 years old. That would give elk open areas for feed with nearby security of standing trees—and us the ability to see the Roosies and maneuver into position. A unique benefit to hunting timber company land is that they employ their own

biologists. With less area to cover, they are keenly aware of movements and behaviors of the game on their properties. It is almost like having someone scouting for you. Based on generous feedback from one such official, along with the promise of beer when we got into town, we were given direction within the access area to focus on the movement of elk and their general patterns. Utilizing internet satellite imagery, we identified several areas that would have a high likelihood of holding elk. All that was left was to put boots on the ground.

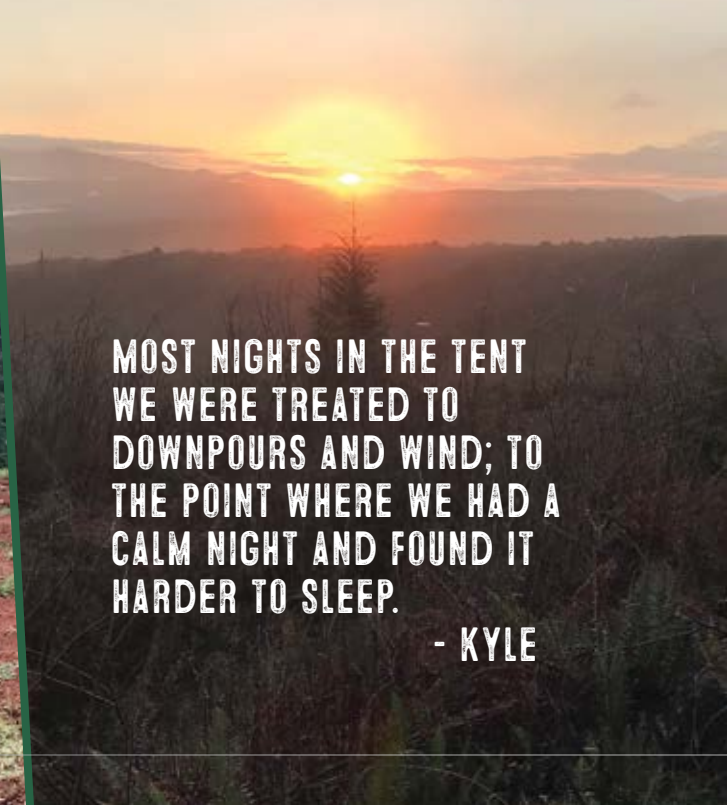
Entering the western slope of the Cascades was exactly what I was hoping; everything seemed foreign, otherworldly. Opaque fog followed the contours of the ridgelines. It was present every day, but it also did not last long. Everything was bathed in dampness, keeping green things growing. The new growth on trees would stretch



Camp was a spacious Kodiak Canvas tent at the end of a short spur road. Evidence around the campsite showed only deer and the occasional elk had been there recently.



We used the day to drive the roads looking for recent logging activity and open areas to glass. There were many promising areas with recent sign, and that evening we had a game plan.



**MOST NIGHTS IN THE TENT WE WERE TREATED TO DOWNPOURS AND WIND; TO THE POINT WHERE WE HAD A CALM NIGHT AND FOUND IT HARDER TO SLEEP.**

**- KYLE**

In a rare absence of trees along the top of a ridge, we could glass down the draw and watch open rectangular patches of cleared mountainside.



**ABOVE:** Everett's Browning X-Bolt Hell's Canyon Speed is Cerakoted which was great protection from rust. Also, electrical tape at the end of the barrel kept rain out.

**RIGHT:** Everett with a chocolate-phase ruffed grouse, which provided a bonus opportunity. **BELOW:** Kyle taking a break from the action to check on the family.



over 14 inches indicating a long growing season. Camp was a spacious Kodiak Canvas tent at the end of a short spur road. Evidence around the campsite showed only deer and the occasional elk had been there recently. Very tall, mature conifers surrounded us, providing a wind break as well as a serenade of short, high-pitched creaks that made us wonder if a good storm might give us unwanted excitement. We would not have to wait long to find out.

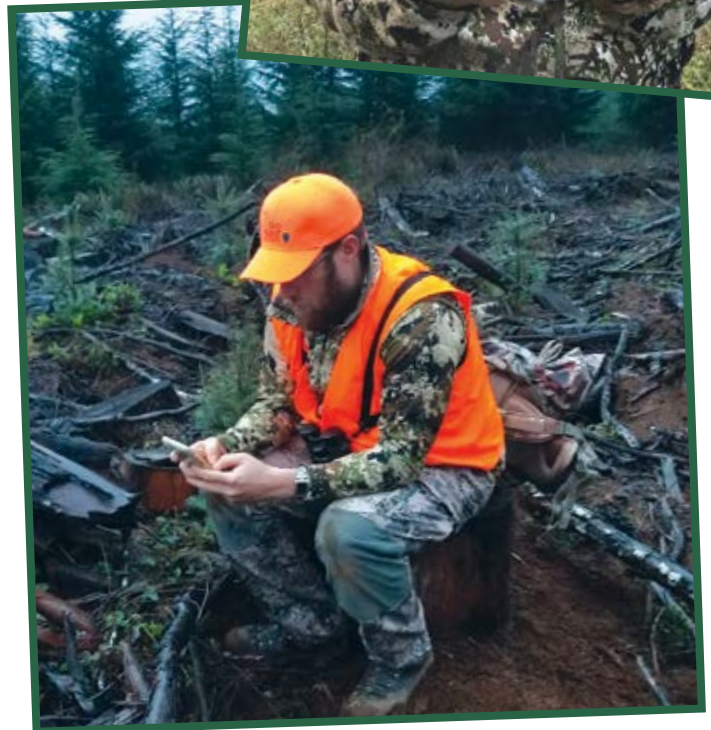
We were expeditious in setting up camp, which allowed us an extra evening to scout. Traveling within the timber company land was easy. The roads were marked to show the routes that active logging trucks would take so we would avoid those. We were into elk within a mile of our camp. In a rare absence of trees along the top of a ridge, we could glass down the draw and watch open rectangular patches of cleared mountainside. A small herd, maybe a dozen, of cow Roosevelt's elk fed up a spur road and into the dense forest. For 10 minutes we watched through a spotting scope and binoculars, studying and

hoping to see a bull. None presented itself, but an instant satisfaction was felt in so quickly locating a species we had never before hunted.

That would be our best view of elk our entire week.

The next would be our only day for scouting. Our intention was to walk through several clear cuts and young-growth trees looking for fresh sign. The growth we found at a few stops was actually several years older than our satellite photos showed. Since timber companies closely guard where, and more importantly, when they cut, we did not have any other real-time maps. This dynamic made us completely rethink how we viewed the unit. Our overall strategy was sound; local knowledge had prepped us to locate elk. We used the day to drive the roads looking for recent logging activity and open areas to glass. There were many promising areas with recent sign, and that evening we had a game plan.

Opening morning was preceded by a significant wind event; trees fell somewhere around us overnight, which made a predictably restless night even more so. It was



raining steadily. This was expected, and I had bought new Sitka Cloudburst raingear and put a new coat of wax on my boots. The entire week we only saw a few hours of sun. Kyle and I setup in our first opening and waited. Instead of seeing elk, blacktail made an appearance. While it wasn't quite what we wanted, it was still a new experience for both us. The deer moved back into the green curtain of trees, and our opening morning was quiet. Our evening hunt likewise provided the same experience. However we were treated with constantly shifting rainbows as the fog moved through the saddles and deeper into the hills. New views would open and close leaving us wondering if an elk would simply appear. They never did. On our third night we passed three bulls feeding in the area we hunted on day one. It was past shooting light, but for Kyle and I, our strategy and planning had been validated.

The end of our trip found us with tags that would later serve as bookmarks instead of identifying Roosevelt's elk steaks. Yet, we found what we were looking for: adventure. The experience was the drive that took us further west than we had been before, and it was multifaceted. Each species has its unique challenges that cause a hunter to rely on past hunts for the skills and tactics learned, not the memory of where animals were found.

And hunting teaches us much more than just pursuing animals. It also shows us how we pursue the life we want. It is rare when something unfolds how we envisioned it in our mind. Instead of causing us to fold when pressured, we focused and discovered that we could adapt. I'm not certain when I will return, only that I will. I want to see my world fade away again and hope for a Roosevelt's bull to oblige me. ■

## **COSTS**

**WASHINGTON NONRESIDENT ELK TAG: \$497.50**

**LODGING: 10"X10" KODIAK CANVAS TENT**

**WEYHAUSER ACCESS: \$350 INCLUDES MOTORIZED TRAVEL AND FREE CAMPING.**

## **GEAR:**

**MYSTERY RANCH METCALF**

**BROWNING X-BOLT .300 WIN. MAG. WITH VORTEX VIPER HST SCOPE**

**NOSLER E-TIP 180-GRAIN BULLET**

**VORTEX VIPER 10X42 BINOCULARS**

**VORTEX VIPER SPOTTING SCOPE**

**SITKA TECHNICAL CLOTHING (ESPECIALLY THE CLOUDBURST)**

**ALASKA GUIDE CREATIONS BEAR CUB BINOCULAR HARNESS**

**CABELA'S MEINDL PERFEKT BOOTS**

**ALL FOOD WAS PREPARED BY EVERETT'S WIFE, TE ATA, VACUUM SEALED AND FROZEN**



**WE WERE TREATED WITH CONSTANTLY SHIFTING RAINBOWS AS THE FOG MOVED THROUGH THE SADDLES AND DEEPER INTO THE HILLS.**

**If you have any DIY hunts you would like to see featured in the column, please email Justin Spring or Karlie Slayer for details.**

**Justin Spring - [Justin@Boone-Crockett.org](mailto:Justin@Boone-Crockett.org)  
Karlie Slayer - [Karlie@Boone-Crockett.org](mailto:Karlie@Boone-Crockett.org)**