



# FIRST MOOSE: A SOLO HUNT

Alone, on the mountain, with my first bull moose.

Ever since I was a young boy growing up in the 1950s, I have been fascinated by moose antlers. In 1938 in Quebec, my grandfather shot his first moose and the mount had taken a position of prominence in the hallway of our rural Pennsylvania school. I would look up at it in awe every time I got to walk up the big stairs from the elementary classrooms to the main corridor of the high school. Not many kids these days go to school with such a dramatic centerpiece, let alone one shot by their hero. I was so proud of that and hoped to one day shoot a moose myself.

As the years went by, I would see moose on rare occasions—once on a trip to Alaska when I was 21 and again on canoe trips to Quebec's lake country.

In 1985 I took a teaching position in New Hampshire and now lived in moose country. Soon after I moved there the state began a moose season. Tags were awarded via a lottery, and after nine years of applying I was finally drawn.

In 1994, at the age of 44, I drew a permit. Hikes into the backcountry finding moose sign took on a new importance. I would stare at a moose track, and I would again become a teenager in the Pennsylvania woods following deer tracks and dreaming of hunting big game in the Yukon. It was exciting to have such

deep-seated feelings adding to the moment. I was actually scouting in moose country, with a moose permit for the October hunt.

Most moose hunters in New Hampshire bring out the moose whole after field-dressing it. They employ all means of skidder, ATV, winch, horse, buggy—you name it. Folks really like that photo of a hanging moose and the official weight recorded. Sometimes you get lucky and bringing out a whole moose can be an easy task, however, most of the stories I have heard involved quite a bit of work. I had no mechanical assistance, and I was hunting solo. I figured I could shoot the moose, field dress it, then hike out to my truck, drive two miles to the house, and call a few friends to help pack it out.

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.

Frederick Prince  
Photos Courtesy of Author

With a plan I assembled packframes and gathered supplies such as knives, a good bone saw, a come-along, rope, and a list of folks to call if I got one. I had a small hunting pack and a larger pack with gear in the truck. It seemed like a good old-fashioned plan.

In our neck of the New Hampshire woods, the early and mid-1990s were good years. There was moose sign everywhere, even in our backyard. In fact, even my wife was chased from the vegetable garden by a mature bull.

There was an old timber cut I liked to hunt. For lack of a better name, I called it the "big cut," and the animals loved it, including other hunters. Hunting alone, on foot and carrying an iron-sighted rifle, I wanted to avoid the competition, but I did really want to hunt the big cut. At dusk before the opener, I drove a few miles to an isolated spot not known to many other hunters. I didn't get far walking up the tote road when I heard the distinctive sound of a moose walking. I stopped. The moose, a bull with small palms, stepped into the road and stopped broadside. Darkness was closing in, and the bull hadn't noticed me. I quietly backed off.

I was at that spot the next day 45 minutes before daylight. To my utter surprise, a bull, perhaps the same bull, was in the exact spot! I couldn't see at all, but about 60 yards away in the darkness, the bull was violently raking the brush with his antlers. It was an awesome and intimidating sound coming from the blackness, stars shining brightly in the 20-degree air.

For more than a half hour, I stood waiting and listening to a 1,000-pound teenager with a testosterone rush. It felt good to have a rifle in my hand.

As dawn broke, his form appeared blacker than the retreating darkness of the night. It was the same bull! I had my gun up, trying to find the heart-lung target in the iron sights, but it was still tough to see well. I hesitated, and the bull moved out of sight into the thicket, still making a racket. Now I had decent light, but I couldn't see the bull.

I slipped off my pack and slowly retrieved my bull call. It was the old coffee can with a string outfit. I was nervous but used the call anyway. Now, years later, I know to mouth the hollow grunt of a bull, but I was new to the game and slid my fingers along the taut string. In a way, it didn't seem right, but it's worked for many a moose hunter. I did feel a little silly crouched in the semi-darkness, holding an empty coffee can, hoping that bull would step out of the woods.

Straining to see the bull, I could make out nothing. I could hear nothing. My senses were focused on that spot in the thicket. Eventually I became aware of chipmunks and birds in a direct line away from me. It finally registered that the bull slipped away silently. The call had worked! I was the big bull and scared that young bull away. Nice work, I thought sarcastically.

Two days later, all was quiet except for the flowing creek as I crossed a narrow log on the way up to the big cut. The narrow, steep, and rocky log road went straight

## "The old coffee can with a string outfit"

### HOW TO MAKE A MOOSE CALL WITH A CAN

#### Materials needed:

- Tin can with lid removed or one end cut off
- At least two feet of string or leather strap
- Duct tape
- Nail or hole punch
- Water



1. Wrap the outside of can with duct tape.
2. Punch a hole in middle of the bottom of the can.
3. Pull the string through the hole and tie a knot bigger than the hole.
4. Wet the string, or cover it in sap.
5. Pinch the string with forefinger and thumb close to the can and pull back, allowing the string to slip through your fingers. This will create the sound.



up the mountain, and I placed every step with care. I constantly looked ahead to the place where I had a panoramic view of the big cut. With the thick woods to my left and second growth to my right, I was closed in until it all came into view at once. I was pessimistic of seeing moose since a group of ATVs had taken a big bull up in the area yesterday. Still, it felt good to be alone in this big country.

Although the sun was still behind the mountain ahead, light was coming fast. As soon as I reached where I wanted to be, I saw a jet black

bull perhaps 200 yards away, across and up the cut. I was surprised and excited. I made up a little ground toward it, put the .308 to my shoulder and fired offhand.

The bull cocked his head to the sky and stared upward to the heavens. It was a clean miss! The bull was looking for the military jets, which roar over the ridges as they practice hunting in pairs like winged coyotes. Better calm yourself down, I thought. The moose was still there, so I got low and closer.

I stood and fired at the broadside bull. A shudder

went across his body from the shot, and I fired again as he was making his first step. He collapsed and disappeared into the low growth of the cut. My God, I just shot a bull moose!

I made my way across the cut, but, as I got close I was shocked to see him standing 40 yards away, staring at me. His breath steamed in the cold air, and he looked strong as an ox.

But, was this indeed the same bull? The bull fell with such finality after that second shot. The bull standing in front of me certainly looked like the bull I shot. The unpalmated antlers spanned the same distance, but there did seem a subtle difference. I also noticed a ravine coursing through the cut, which was deep enough to hide a moose from the vantage from where I shot. I was frozen in thought. The bull glanced over to his left, then started trotting. He looked

strong with rippling muscles. I let him go. As he disappeared I wondered if I just made a big mistake. But, again, the bull had dropped with such finality. I continued moving through the low vegetation and within a dozen steps I saw the antler sticking up 40 yards away. It was right where the other bull had taken that quick but studied glance.

I made my way to him. The rising sun was still behind the mountain. The bull lay in the shadows, his jet-black body stretched out with an oak-colored antler angling toward the sky.

From where I stood, the mountains to the west were aglow with the morning sun. I didn't notice the subfreezing temperature. It was quiet. I knew I had much work ahead, but for the next few minutes, I silently soaked in the moment, alone, on this mountain, with my first bull moose. ■

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After many years of waiting, Fred finally made his dream of hunting moose a reality.