



GLENN ST. CHARLES MEMORIAL AWARD

GHOST IN THE MIST

NON-TYPICAL
COLUMBIA BLACKTAIL
175 — 1ST AWARD
TAVIS D. ROGERS

Blizzards, icy roads, COVID restrictions, and canceled flights were all part of the initial adventure just to get from my home in Colorado to southwestern Oregon for a Columbia blacktail deer hunt. I questioned my sanity to go all that way with just an over-the-counter deer tag—especially when I stepped out of the airport into a downpour. These conditions were not good for my traditional wooden bow and arrows, either. Regardless, I was determined to make the most of it!

The rain forced me to sit in a cold, soggy ground blind for my hunt. Each morning, I crawled into the blind an hour before daylight and dumped out several inches of water from the chair inside. I was glad to have good rain gear over my wool because the old blind leaked like a sieve. I waited patiently and enjoyed the steady drip of rain from the trees, the smells of the wet, mossy woods, and the rustling of unseen things moving around my ambush.

My thoughts drifted to the big 3x3 buck I had already stalked while on this hunt. I had managed to get well within my effective range. When the buck stood up, the shot sequence was solid and arrow flight perfect until the arrow took a hard dive and buried in the mud beneath its feet. An unseen branch had foiled that chance at a solid Pope and Young buck. I was upset about missing but anticipation was high that I would redeem myself the next day.

A gray dawn slowly unfolded beneath the clouds and persistent rain. Mist and fog swirled silently through the moss-draped trees, bringing thoughts of ancient spirits of the hunt. I thanked the Lord just to be able to witness a new day.

The early morning light finally revealed two groups of does feeding under nearby oaks along with one very amorous spike buck. The yearlings would run from its advances, but the older does viciously lashed at it with their front hooves. The young buck was persistent. Love was in the air, and maybe a mature buck would show.

Something caught the deer's attention up the hillside. I glanced in the direction they were looking, and a dark shape materialized from the forest, slipping through a small opening in the big Douglas firs and thick undergrowth. I took a quick look with the binoculars, and I was stunned. I immediately had trouble breathing. Surely *that* was not real! The apparition only showed itself for an instant. It soon vanished back into the mist and poison oak-infested forest from whence it had come.

My mind and the mist must be playing tricks on me, I thought. There was absolutely no way a blacktail buck could be that big! After shaking it off, I relaxed and settled in to wait for a real buck, not some fog-induced fantasy.

Out of the corner of my eye, I caught a slight movement in the thick underbrush. I slowly raised my binoculars and picked out a flickering ear below dark branches. The apparition was real. I was hit with a wave of nausea.

The phantom slowly materialized, and it moved into an opening in the trees. The buck's attention was on the other deer flitting around, and I got a good look. This was a giant beyond my wildest dreams.

My entire body started shaking. I started hyperventilating. I had to look away. I stared at the moss-covered tree trunk on the other side of the blind in hopes of calming down. My body was still trembling when I stole another glance toward the buck out of the other side of the blind.

My heart felt like it was going to blow right out of my chest. I forgot how to breathe—again. Although always excited to see game, I have never been prone to buck fever. I had a double dose now. If I couldn't get myself under control and make a good shot, no one would ever believe that I had seen a blacktail buck like this.

My next glance revealed only the tips of dark antlers above the understory moving along the trail toward my shooting lane. It was trotting after a doe with its neck stretched and upper lip curled. All opportunities to settle my nerves were gone. Whatever was going to happen was going to happen in the next few seconds. I was a total wreck.

As it entered my shooting lane, I came to full draw and anchored. The big buck stopped broadside at 25 yards, posing for his doe. I picked a spot low on his chest, pulled through my release, and the arrow was away. The fletching vanished into its ribs—but high.

My years of bowhunting experience told me that

the shot I landed could result in a lost deer. My heart sank, and I was hit with waves of nausea. The chances of finding a poorly hit deer in the rain are slim. I also knew that a razor-sharp broadhead might find a sweet spot that leads to a quick death. Hunting with a traditional bow and arrows, I've learned to be the eternal optimist.

When the nausea subsided, I called my hunting partner and told him I had just shot a deer. He asked what kind of deer, and I told him, "A giant, an absolute giant." I told him it might even score 180. After a long pause he replied. "Come on. Blacktails don't get that big. I'm on my way!"

I eased out of the blind as my partner slogged his way toward me. The arrow had passed completely through. Close inspection of the arrow provided positive reinforcement that it was a lethal hit. We decided to follow the sign a short distance to get a line on his escape route before the rain washed any sign away. The buck left deep imprints in the mud that led to the bottom of a draw and then disappeared in tall grass. I stuck the arrow in the ground where we lost tracks, and we eased out to give it some time to expire. The thick cover and rainy conditions combined to make for an almost impossible tracking job.

We waited a few gut-wrenching hours and returned to take up the trail. We found nothing as hours rolled by. Every place we checked was one less place for him to be, and my heart continued to sink.

The landowner joined us after noon, and we went



LEFT TO RIGHT: Eldon "Buck" Buckner, Tavis Rogers, Jason Rounsaville, Pope and Young Club Executive Director, and Mike Opitz, Big Game Records Committee Chariman.

SPONSORED BY



"Pope and Young Club created an award to recognize the most outstanding archery trophy killed during an awards period. It's called the Pope and Young Glenn St. Charles Award in honor of the founder of the Pope and Young Club. Our board of directors looks carefully at all the archery-killed trophies invited to the Boone and Crockett awards, and then we choose what we think is the most outstanding specimen from that award period."

I am proud to present the second Pope and Young Glenn St. Charles Award to Mr. Tavis D. Rogers and his outstanding non-typical Columbia blacktail."

**- JASON ROUNSAVILLE
POPE AND YOUNG CLUB EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

back to the last sign from the morning. We found nothing past where I had planted the arrow. We worked together and worked a grid on a large area. We found nothing. With no additional sign, I sank deeper into depression, thinking that there was a high probability of losing this buck. Even so, I was determined to stick with it.

Late in the evening, we had spread out in hopes of finding anything in any direction. I was drawn back to an area that had held tracks earlier. There were several downed fir trees and a small pond surrounded by manzanita brush about 200 yards from the blind. I had walked by the area twice already. I decided to give the area one more good look before calling it for the evening.

As I slowly eased up the hill toward the downed trees, the strong musky scent of wet deer hit me. Another step and I looked down on the tips of chocolate antlers poking up through the boughs at my feet. There it was! From my lungs burst a primal roar, fired by an emotional rollercoaster.

Shaking, I dropped to my knees in awe. Gratitude and relief washed over me. I was trembling and tears

welled in my eyes. I thanked the Lord and the spirits of the hunt. I had found my buck—a huge 4x4 mainframe with double brow tines on both sides. The beautiful chocolate-colored antlers had unbelievable mass. There were sticker points from both back forks. The antlers just kept growing.

Back at the hotel, I caped it out. My hunting partner and I cooked the tenderloins on the grill, celebrating an amazing deer and the hunt. I sent in teeth for aging and DNA samples to the Boone and Crockett Club to learn everything possible about the buck. I wanted to be sure that he was a true Columbia blacktail and not a mule deer or crossbreed. The DNA confirmed that he was, in fact, a Columbia blacktail, and the tooth placed him at 6 ½ years old.

The reality of the experience has been slow to sink in. This Columbia blacktail was my last North American deer species. Having chased mule deer, whitetails, Coues' deer, and Sitka blacktails, I certainly had no expectation that I would kill a buck of this magnitude. And now, even months later, I am still having trouble wrapping my head around it. ■

Tavis with his non-typical Columbia blacktail deer that received a First Award.

