



HUNT FAIR CHASE AWARD MEGA BULL

ROOSEVELT'S ELK
391-6/8 — 2ND AWARD
MATTHEW S. COLLVER

Mega was a nomadic bull. Apart from a distant sighting in 2019, I knew of this bull mainly because of my brother, Evan. He's a hunting and fishing guide and the owner of Coast Land Outfitters. Evan had a few encounters with Mega over the years and had shared photos of him with me. I'd also heard rumors from others of a giant bull being seen in some far-reaching places and, from the descriptions, I assumed it was him.

In September alone, he had been observed traveling seven miles between herds of cows in a single day. He came and went quickly and was difficult to pattern. Challenging topography, nearly impenetrable brush, and a checkerboard of land ownership made him tough to hunt. The fact that he lived long enough to become such a monster still surprises me. Bulls close to his caliber are extremely rare in the country he called home. His instinct to keep moving along with his seemingly unusual intelligence (and probably a little luck), all must have contributed to my good fortune on that late September day.

September 26, 2021, was the last day to fill my general season Oregon archery elk tag. Hunting had been tough that season. Despite numerous interactions and a couple close calls, my girlfriend and I were both clutching to unfilled tags. Being her first season chasing Roosevelt's elk through the thick brushed-in timbers of the Oregon coast with a bow,

Jessica was humbled by the difficulty of the challenge. We had spent multiple weekends tracking and pursuing elk that didn't want to play. It had been a physically and emotionally draining season. The previous day, after hiking six miles chasing bugles and ending up in a claustrophobic thicket, tensions ran high. I broke the camel's back when I turned back to search for my quiver and arrows that had been ripped off my bow—lost somewhere in the thick brush behind us. To better our odds (and for the sake of our relationship), we decided to hunt solo the last day.

I headed for different ground—an area close to home where I'd had past success. I got an early start. After hiking about a mile, I had ascended 650 feet and could see the valley floor behind me. It was still dark when I looked back and could see headlights at another access point. Annoyed and not wanting to deal with competition, I pushed deeper. The closest logged units, where I generally like to be at first daylight when spotting and stalking Roosevelt's elk, were another two miles. After hiking a mile or so more, I got to the first spot where clearcuts could be seen through an opening in the large surrounding timber. The sun had risen just enough to illuminate an elk. Despite low light and the elk being almost a mile away still, I knew instantly I was looking at a good bull.

I spent the next two hours methodically sneaking in relatively open country with at least a dozen set of eyes watching in all directions. I'd somehow managed

to place myself in the middle of the herd. As I anticipated, Mega was coming up a small brushy draw in my direction, following his cows as they were slowly exiting the clearcut into the adjacent big timber patch. Initially I was only able to clearly see the white tips of his massive antlers over the brush. I expected he would eventually turn and head uphill toward the timber and his cows, passing a relatively open window of shooting lanes. I was still too far away, though. I needed to close a gap of at least 20 more yards—and quickly. I made a dash through an opening where I could set up for a shot. One cow caught the movement and made a sprint for the timber. Mega followed. I let out a cow call to stop them. Quartering away, they both froze at the edge of

the timber for a better look. My rangefinder displayed 86 yards—too far. After a frustrating moment of regal stillness, Mega and the cow turned and hit the timber, leaving me mesmerized and heartbroken. I'd never seen such an impressive bull! Hearing loud crashing and one final bugle, I figured Mega was pushing his herd to safer country. With the general rifle season approaching, I realized that might be the last time I would see Mega.

Crushed by defeat and still dumbfounded by it all, I called my brother to break the news of my failed stalk. "What an incredible bull!" I repeated multiple times. After doting for a few moments, we agreed it was likely the herd was looking for new country. My new goal for the day was

Matt with his Roosevelt's elk scoring 391-6/8 points.





LEFT TO RIGHT: Richard Hale, Big Game Records Vice President, Matthew S. Collver, Christian Hogg, Director of Marketing for Fiocchi, and Justin Spring, Director of Big Game Records. Matthew's Hunt Fair Chase Award plaque was inscribed with, "This certificate is in recognition of a hunt that best represents the determination, self-reliance, and respect for the game that embodies the tenets of fair chase set forth by Boone and Crockett Club founder Theodore Roosevelt."



to hike an adjacent road and get ahead of them. Pursuing spooked elk from the rear with a bow had never worked out well for me in the past. I was going to try anyway.

After walking roughly a mile of gravel, uphill, and parallel from where the herd entered the timber, I knew the herd had not crossed the road. Eventually, curiosity pulled me downhill off the gravel. Each time I thought I'd found a decent path to follow, I'd inevitably hit thickets of brush and downed trees that would push me in another direction. I wasn't having fun. Beating through eye-high ferns and crawling under and over downed trees of all sizes, I occasionally let out soft cow and calf calls. If there was any chance of intercepting the herd, my best move was to convince them that I was an elk—not a clumsy, frustrated hunter. If they ever responded, I never heard them.

I came to an open bench in the timber where I could finally see ahead. I was so relieved to be out of the brush that I took a short break for a moment. After taking a break for five minutes, I continued in the direction I had last seen the herd leave the clearcut. At this point, I figured I was 300 yards from where they entered the timber. I was really surprised I hadn't cut any new elk tracks. I was moving

slowly, scanning the ground in all directions and zig-zagging up and downhill as I went. The timber was fairly open at this point, and I began thinking that it was likely the herd had fanned out, making them much more difficult to track. I moved another 100 yards and still couldn't locate new tracks. I was expecting to be able to see the clearcut through the timber and was scanning to find my best route out. As I squinted and looked around, I suddenly saw the slightest movement 120 yards away through the dark timber. I eventually made out the silhouette of at least two elk and realized I had seen the twitch of an ear. It had been about four hours since my morning stalk, and the elk were nearly right where I left them!

They were standing on high alert at this point. I was convinced they had heard or smelled me. Regardless, they didn't see me. They settled, turned uphill, and began moving slowly to my right in single file. After seeing a few of them begin to feed, I felt confident I would have a chance, but I needed to move. Mega was toward the back, but his size and superiority made him easy to see among his cows. His movement enveloped my full attention as I began to strategize. Instead of going straight at them, I

followed a line where I thought we might intersect. The majority of the cows moved slowly out of sight, providing fewer eyes to contend with. One cow was in clear view beside an old growth stump, and I watched her bed. Mega was behind her but hidden by trees and brush. As I continued sneaking in her direction, Mega stepped into the picture and pushed her out of her bed as if he was claiming his throne. He was still about 90 yards out and most of him was concealed by trees and brush. He was facing slightly away and preoccupied with raking some small vine maple.

The ground was loud, but fortunately I found a downed log running in his

direction. The log provided me with a quiet path to walk, though it had me perched an uncomfortable four feet off the ground. The next 30 yards took me 15 minutes to travel. I would freeze each time his head turned my direction. I hit a dead end when I came across a much larger downed tree crossing mine. At this point he was facing slightly in my direction, but there was a perfectly placed fir tree between us, blocking his view. I could see most of his body and one antler on each side of the tree. I ranged him at 60 yards and vividly remember thinking to myself, *Oh my god, I'm actually going to get a shot!* That's when my heart really started racing! I took 30 seconds to calm

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ABOVE: Matt celebrating with his friend Greg McCarthy (left). **RIGHT:** Boone and Crockett Official Measurer David Heffner (left) and Pope and Young Official Measurer Joshua Knoebel (right) scored Matt's bull.



ABOVE: Matt's brother, Evan, helped pack out the huge antlers. **BELOW:** Left to right: Eldon "Buck" Buckner, Matthew Collver, Jessica Herborn, and Mike Opitz, Big Game Records Committee Chairman.

myself then drew my bow. My eyes focused on two small branches about halfway between Mega and my arrow, which left an opening of about a foot. By partially doing the splits, I was able to set my 60-yard pin right at the bottom of the opening. He was quartering slightly toward me so I carefully settled right at the crease of his front shoulder and squeezed. Despite hearing my arrow make an odd noise (probably touching a leaf in its path), the arrow appeared to hit where I was aiming. Mega exploded out of sight and then silence. I heard a few quiet rustlings in the

brush but never heard the familiar sounds of a spooked elk herd or a falling bull. I stood there in shock for a few moments before cow calling and slowly moved forward to assess the scene. There was blood and lots of it. I sat down, made a phone call, and began the long, restless wait.

Two hours later, my brother Evan and a friend helped me take up the bloodtrail, which turned out to be a short one. Mega had fallen only 60 yards from where I hit him. The experience of walking up on him, especially with my brother and friend who had taught me so much

over the years about hunting, was amazing. We hugged, high fived and did the usual celebration. We all knew that this one was something special. Everything about this bull had us shaking our heads in disbelief. His body was huge—as are most bull elk—but his antlers were like nothing I had ever seen. Being in the woods with those two great guys and Mega was a dream come true.

Mega has since been officially measured at 391-6/8 B&C points, making him the new Oregon state archery record for Roosevelt's elk. ■

"My fiancé and I had a wonderful experience at the 31st Big Game Awards. Not only were we blown away by the venue and events, but the people we had the opportunity to meet there were incredible.

We are glad we chose to attend the event, and very grateful for the recognition provided by Boone and Crockett Club."

- MATT COLLVER

