



CANADA MOOSE



It is funny how a hunting season can change course and shape up differently than planned due to circumstances outside of one's control. For 2020, I had initially planned to go back to central Asia (Tajikistan) for a crack at a mid-Asian ibex. Unfortunately, Covid grounded essentially all air and land travel. Since I would be home in October, it was time to cash in my 10 priority points for a bull moose close to the city (2½ hours), where I would have the opportunity to sleep in my own bed but be at my hunting spot before sunrise for an archery moose hunt.

Nothing like bow hunting during early season.



PATCHES OF POPLARS AND WILLOWS WITH PONDS AND OPEN SPACES IN BETWEEN: IDEAL MOOSE HABITAT.

I doubt if there is a more majestic big game animal than the Canada moose, nor one that represents my beloved Canada more profoundly. Moose often show up in cartoons, movies, commercials, etc., as part of the Canadian culture or brand. This largest member of the deer family calls our prairies, boreal forest, and even at times, our mountains its home. The bulls generally are loners and will only congregate with cows or fight with other bulls in late September to mid-October when the rut is in full swing. They do look goofy, but their sense of hearing and smell is unsurpassed. They are frightened easily by human beings and all human activity. They can and will charge if wounded, cornered, or if a cow's young calves are threatened.

Without tackling moose taxonomy, it is my opinion that all moose are the same in that the body/antler size is determined by their growing environment, including

access to food, thermal stresses and predation pressure. For arguments sake, let's just call the moose in my hunting area the "Western Canada moose" and not the perceived Shiras' variety, which their boundary supposedly lies just 50 kilometers straight south as the crow flies.

On a personal note, I don't find hunting moose with a rifle very challenging because of their sheer size and their relatively poor eyesight. With a bow, however, the rules of engagement change considerably. I don't consider myself a very seasoned archer, even though I have taken a dozen or so big game animals with my bow; yet, never a bull moose. This year however, since I knew my chances of drawing a tag were 100 percent, I started shooting my 12-year-old compound bow on a regular basis from July onward. By mid-September, I was comfortable shooting out to 40 yards and I set that distance as my longest practical limit.



This is the patch of poplars where I arrowed the bull from!



Following the bulls' trail "gingerly" one hour after the shot.



Our blood spoor helped track him despite the lack of snow.

On Saturday, October 3, I headed with my friend Jack, who has killed four bulls with his bow, to my area to look for a bull. We called, glassed, sat and waited and moved locations several times during the day but saw only a small paddle bull that approached us from behind, winded us and escaped to live another day.

The following Friday, just before the Canadian Thanksgiving, my buddy and archery mentor Troy joined me as we returned to my area to try our luck. This time, however, I took my friend Terry's advice and borrowed his homemade decoy. When we arrived it was drizzling. We parked the truck, walked to a high knoll, got set up and started calling upwind. The calling, glassing and the waiting game lasted till 10 A.M. with no action and with us changing locations a couple of times. The wind shifted at this point, and we started walking north. As we approached an abandoned corral, Troy

noticed the tip of some willows which had been nibbled on, and, just a few yards past them, I saw a pile of fresh moose dung. This was good and reassuring that they were close or had passed through recently.

This area consists of rolling hills with patches of poplars and willows, ponds and small openings in between—in other words, the perfect habitat for moose. Just as we climbed a small knoll and came over the rise, I picked out a big bull bedded at the edge of a patch of poplars with his head turned away from us. We kneeled to the ground immediately. We were downwind of him and were extremely lucky he didn't see or hear us. We backtracked, set up the decoy close to the edge of another set of poplars and started calling. Forty-five minutes went by with no bull showing up. Had we spooked him? Had there been a swirl of wind that we didn't notice that had given our scent away?

At this point, we decided to go back up the hill and carefully peek over. Well, the big bull was nowhere to be

GOD BLESS ALBERTA AND ITS "BADLANDS"!



seen but then a smaller bull was feeding in the same patch. My hunch was that the big bull had not spooked or else he would have taken the smaller bull with him. I pondered whether they were unable to hear our calls due to the calm wind and the terrain obstacle between us. We then decided to skirt the area they were feeding and stay to their east in a small ravine that would allow the sound to travel better.

We then set up next to a patch of dry poplars with Troy behind the decoy and yours truly to the side. My shooting window was very narrow and physically, there was no other location for me to stand in order to avoid the wind and be able to shoot. We started calling for a few minutes with no results. Having a shed moose antler along, I started thrashing while Troy made bull grunts at the same time. Then we heard breaking branches where we estimated the bulls were holed up, and sure enough, the bigger bull started heading for Troy's call. He was trashing willows on his way to us, interspersed with

low grunting, and had decided to skirt us to the north, which put a small pond between us. This was not good, as he would soon enter our scent plume just past the pond.

Troy made another bull grunt that stopped him instantly. At that moment, he saw the decoy and quickly changed course, basically beelining straight for the decoy. That is when my heart rate shot through the stratosphere. Nevertheless, I was very calm as I had replayed this moment in my head many times. The bull finally stopped at 24 yards from us, but he was facing us straight ahead. He was fixated on the decoy, and we were stone silent and motionless.

This staring game lasted a good (or bad) 60 seconds as the bull got ever more anxious, sensing something was not quite kosher. He was about to depart. I came to full draw and just as he went broadside to flee, I put my single pin on his vitals and launched an arrow loaded with a 100-grain fixed-blade broadhead towards his boiler room. At that moment he was slightly

quartered away from me. Unfortunately, the sun was in our eyes and neither of us could see exactly where the arrow had struck, but we both heard the impact. One thing was for sure—the arrow had not exited the bull.

Troy and I were still in awe having watched this magnificent beast come to our call and were both praying that my arrow had found its target in a most effective and humane way. The right thing to do was of course give him at least an hour, and we did. We went back to my truck, sat down to have lunch and thought about our strategy to go after him. That one hour certainly felt like eternity as we were both eager to see if he had expired or not.

We got back to where we took the shot and with an arrow nocked started slowly

following his exit-route. There was no snow to easily show us a blood trail, but after about 75 yards, we started seeing drops of blood. More dark red blood, some with foam (a good thing), and some with thin strands of hair followed. We walked slowly and methodically, making sure we would not accidentally bump him if he was wounded and had laid down. He had gone through that patch of bush and had exited to the south, climbing a small hill. Our blood spoor disappeared at this point, and I was worried that my shot had not hit his vitals. Troy was slightly ahead of me and on top of the hill as I backtracked looking for where we lost the blood trail.

All of a sudden, I heard Troy's whisper with a signal showing his index finger slide across his neck and with his



As good as it gets!

THERE HE LAYS, THE KING OF THE DEER FAMILY.

other hand pointing forward, signaling that the bull was down. This gesture warmed my heart to no end and I ran to him in seconds. Sure enough, the bull had climbed the small hill, traveled due west and had piled up in the open, roughly 250 yards from where I had shot him. We both jumped in the air in jubilation and thanked the good Lord for having helped my arrow find its target for a lethal shot with minimal suffering. We cautiously approached him and once there, realized how beautiful, symmetric and massive this bull, in fact, was. I sat down and sent a prayer to the Creator, thanking Him for this gift as it truly was a gift. I had come here with low expectation of seeing any bull, let alone arrowing one of this caliber.

We took our time enjoying and examining this fine

bull for over 30 minutes. We took pictures from many angles, knowing well that we won't get this chance again. The weather was absolutely spectacular, and I was down to my t-shirt for the butchering work. Then the big task of breaking him down started. With all the meat extracted, including his heart, liver, tongue and of course his tenderloins, it took over two hours. Fortunately, my truck was only 600 yards away, and after fetching the game cart, three round trips completed the pack out.

The drive home through Alberta's rolling ranch country with our quarry in the back and the sun setting over my beloved Rockies was simply epic. We talked, relived the adventure, and arrived to Troy's parents' acreage where we would hang the unskinned quarters for a

couple of days to cure and mature. While there, I cut his upper skull together with his beautiful and heavy antlers to make a true European skull mount. A couple of days later, my friend Dave, who is an official P&Y measurer, stopped by and put the tape on him for curiosity. His antlers were 46 inches wide with deep palms and had a green score of 156 inches, which indicates he will certainly reach the minimum Pope and Young score of 135 after the 60-day drying period. In addition, my dear friend and mentor Dr. Valerius Geist visited us a few weeks later, and under his keen eyes, we sliced through the bull's incisor and aged him at 7 years using the cementum annuli aging technique. I was elated knowing I had harvested a mature specimen.

I cannot begin to express my gratitude and to

admit how lucky and blessed I was to experience such a wonderful hunt mixed with the thought that I didn't deserve it as much as many of my archer friends who have hunted moose for years without taking a bull in this class. What made it even more special was the fact that we did it all on our own, and I shared the experience with my buddy Troy who planted the seeds of bow hunting in my karma 12 years ago. Thanks buddy, you da best! And I hope to be your helper next year.

I want to also thank our fish and wildlife officials for their game management strategies and the Province of Alberta for providing opportunities for both its citizens as well as those visiting from other places to enjoy wild game hunting and harvests. Long live Canada and its natural resources! ■



Yours truly with a gift of a lifetime from my home province of Alberta.

GEAR:

BOW: DIAMOND EDGE, COMPOUND, SET AT 59 LBS

SIGHT: BLACK GOLD SINGLE PIN

REST: QAD ULTRA

ARROWS: MAYHEM

BROADHEAD: MONTEC G5 FIXED, 100 GRAINS

ARROW SPEED: 240 FPS

OPTICS: LEICA TRINOVID 10X42

PACK: EBERLESTOCK X2 WITH EXTERNAL FRAME

DECOY: HOME BREW, COURTESY OF TERRY BREW!

ADVENTURE
AWAITS

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

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