



TYPICAL WHITETAIL DEER 197-2/8 — FIRST AWARD **CHASE R. COOPER**

The buck I nicknamed “Big Boy” first appeared on my trail camera on January 17, 2017. As soon as I checked my camera, I knew he was a buck I’d never forget. Despite having hunted extensively in the area where my camera was located, I’d never seen the buck on the hoof. I didn’t know where he’d come from or anything about his habits. But at that moment, I made it my mission to find and bag the monster.

My dad and I spent the remainder of the winter looking for the buck’s sheds, but we never found them. It was as if the giant had vanished as quickly as he’d appeared. I continued to run multiple cameras in the area, but he failed to pose for another shot.

With nothing more than the single picture as evidence, I racked my brain trying to figure out where and how I needed to hunt him.

I graduated high school in May, then left to study at Missouri Welding Institute. Away from home and working most weekends, I had virtually no time to get back into the woods to scout. It wasn’t until June that I had a weekend off work to return home. You can bet the first thing I did was check my trail cameras.

When I pulled the SD cards and sat down to look at the photos, I was floored to see Big Boy standing in front of the camera in full velvet. Just looking at the photo was enough to get my heart racing, and all I could think of was the mid-September bow opener.

As summer dragged on, I worried that the buck might again disappear. The area I hunt is subject to numerous floods each year, and that summer, the farm was under

water for some time. I was fearful the water would push the buck out of the area, but the situation was out of my hands. All I could do was hope the water would recede by fall, allowing the buck to return.

I graduated from welding school in early October, and when that happened, my focus shifted entirely to bow-hunting. I was miserable not being able to hunt when the season opened on September 15, and I was constantly worried that the neighbors would kill the giant before I could get out there. Looking back, I was so focused on harvesting this buck, it’s a wonder I even passed my courses.

As it turned out, immediately after returning home, I was offered my first welding job in Iowa. The job was scheduled to last five weeks, and it was an opportunity I simply couldn’t turn down. I’d worked hard for the chance to pursue my career, so it was time to get to work.

Leaving home and the illustrious Big Boy in my rear-view mirror, I headed north. During the next few weeks, I proceeded to work 12 to 14 hours a day, seven days a week. Needless to say, I didn’t get to hunt that month.

I finally convinced my mom, Meredith, to check my cameras because my dad refuses to use “high-tech” equipment. Much to my surprise, my mom sent me an excited text message with pictures of the buck. And believe me, he was more impressive than ever. It was hard to wrap my head around how much antler he’d put on from the previous year. But as stunned as I was, I was even more floored by the fact he’d stuck around through the major summer flooding.

Work didn’t allow me time to hunt during the October bow season, but soon before gun season opened, I completed the project I’d been assigned and prepared to head

Cooper’s mom checked his trail cameras for him while he was out of state working. When she sent him the photos, he couldn’t believe how much the buck had grown from the previous season and that he was even still in the area.



READ MORE STORIES LIKE THIS IN THE CLUB'S NEWEST RECORD BOOK, *BOONE AND CROCKETT CLUB'S 30TH BIG GAME AWARDS.*

home. I packed my bags, pocketed my checks and hit the road! It was finally time to go after Big Boy.

I arrived home with one day to prepare for the opening morning of firearm season. Fortunately, Dad had set up our blinds a week before I returned home. Everything was ready to go, all I needed to do was hunt. Knowing the buck was in the area, I couldn't wait to see how the first hunt would unfold. I think my dad was actually more excited than I was, if that was even possible!

As dawn began to break on opening morning, Dad and I split up to hunt stands in different areas. When legal shooting light came, I was on the edge of my seat. Every snapping twig and distant noise caught my attention. I'd waited all year for my chance to harvest the monster, and that morning it seemed I was looking over my shoulder constantly, waiting for him to appear.

Around 8:30, I received a series of frantic text messages from my dad. He'd spotted Big Boy at 80 yards in front of his blind. My mom had sent Dad a text message minutes earlier, asking for an update, and just when he'd begun to respond, Big Boy had appeared. Dad had a clear look at the buck, but the encounter had been fleeting and hadn't allowed for a clean shot.

In a matter of minutes, I spotted movement and Big Boy appeared in my area. I caught a brief glimpse of the buck walking behind me, but despite my best efforts, there was no way to get a shot. Although Dad and I stayed in

our stands until dark, the buck never appeared again. In one sitting, the cunning old brute had eluded both me and my father.

We hunted hard the next day, but never spotted Big Boy. Every distant shot I heard made me cringe. The woods were alive with deer hunters, and I felt certain someone else would get a crack at the giant.

When Monday rolled around, I was back in the woods before daylight. I saw a lot of deer that morning, but never the one I was looking for. Finally, just before dusk, my hope was restored when I spotted Big Boy in a distant crop field. He was out of rifle range, but I at least knew he was still alive. Just seeing him restored my faith in the hunt. I was still in the game.

Tuesday's hunt proved disappointing and uneventful. Due to my dad's work schedule, I hunted alone. When he returned home from work and asked how I'd done, I assured him that he hadn't missed much.

We hunted together on Wednesday afternoon in the same area where I'd last seen Big Boy. It was a balmy afternoon, but deer were moving. Hoping to get within range of where I'd spotted Big Boy in the open field, we positioned ourselves on a large blowdown.

As Dad and I scanned the woods for movement, we noticed a large bobcat slinking through the brush. We watched as the predator stopped and crouched down for a bit, then saw him sprint forward into the woods.

The area instantly blew up with deer. Amidst the



Chase R. Cooper (center) received his plaque and medal at the 30th Big Game Awards Banquet, shown here with Chairman Richard T. Hale (left) and Vice President Eldon L. "Buck" Buckner (right).

commotion, Dad and I watched as four deer came crashing toward our position. And amazingly, Big Boy was the last one in the group!

My adrenaline kicked into overdrive when I spotted the monster running directly at me. As the front two deer disappeared into the woods, Big Boy and a small four-pointer suddenly stopped in the brush, out of my view. Seconds seemed like hours as Dad was spotting for me. He could only see glimpses of the giant's antlers protruding through the brush. I, on the other hand, couldn't see a thing.

I was growing impatient. The whitetail of my dreams was standing within range of my rifle, but he was behind brush too thick for me to get a shot through. My dad tried desperately to keep me calm as we waited for a clean shot. Finally, the small four-pointer stepped out into an opening. If Big Boy did the same, I'd have a perfect broadside shot.

Dad whispered to me that he could see Big Boy's

rack moving through the woods, but I still couldn't see anything. Dad told me to stay steady and keep watching the opening.

Finally, in what seemed like a dream, Big Boy appeared in my scope! I had a split second to make the shot. I steadied my Remington 700 and slowly squeezed the trigger. Bang! The shot rang out through the woods, and I spotted the flash of the buck's tail in my scope.

The woods were eerily quiet after the shot. I looked at my dad for confirmation that I'd hit the giant buck. With big eyes, he gave me a thumbs-up. He reassured me that the shot had looked perfect but reminded me that we needed to wait at least 20 minutes before approaching the spot to look for blood.

Well, that sounded like a sensible plan—but I don't think I lasted three minutes before convincing Dad we had to go look!

We eased to where the buck had been standing at the shot. I soon found

churned-up leaves indicating where the deer had been standing. We searched and searched for blood, but not a drop could be found.

I felt sick to my stomach and began to question the shot placement. I continued to circle the area, looking for blood, but was soon stopped in my tracks when I heard Dad yell for me to come toward him. When I got to where he was standing, he stretched out an arm and pointed. I could clearly see a wide, tall rack jutting up from the ground.

As we approached the dead deer, I was shaking so badly I could barely hold onto my gun! The .300 Winchester Mag. round had cleanly broken the deer's shoulder, and the buck hadn't gone more than 30 yards.

My dad and I stood side by side in disbelief at the sight of the monster whitetail. He was simply stunning to behold, with great tine length, solid mass and an awesome spread. After ten months of patiently waiting for my chance to hunt this trophy buck, it was an

amazing feeling to finally lay my hands on him.

After final scoring, the buck proved to be just as impressive on paper as he was on the hoof, including the mega 24-5/8-inch inside spread measurement and an official B&C score of 197-2/8 points. That amazing score makes Big Boy one of the biggest typical whitetails ever

taken in Missouri. The buck was honored with a First Award at Boone and Crockett Club's 30th Big Game Awards Banquet held on August 3, 2019, in Springfield, Missouri. But more important than the buck's rank or score is the fact I was allowed the opportunity to hunt with my father. For that, I'll always be even more grateful. ■

Patience paid off for Cooper. After waiting for almost a year, he finally harvested the buck he had his eyes on. This typical whitetail scored 197-2/8 points and was honored with a First Award at B&C's 30th Big Game Awards Banquet.

