

Reliving the Moment

Fond hunting
stories told by
our devoted readers

Lady Luck for a Buck

Being in the right place at
the right time brought together one
special hunting moment.

By Stephanie Rainey

My hunting buddy Andy bent down to pick something up, looked up at me and said, "Here's your arrow, there's blood from top to bottom, it must have went clean through the buck." For the fourth or fifth time, I can't remember exactly how many times for sure I asked, "Do you think it was a good shot, I mean do you think we'll find it, did I do all right, we'll find it right, it was a good shot, I think the shot was a little high, do you think it was a good shot?"

I was a little excited with the concept of killing my first buck with a bow and the adrenaline was surging through me each time I spoke about it. Andy did his best to reassure me that we would find the deer. "Sure, we'll find it; we'll just follow the blood trail," he said, "But first we have to find some blood." Those words made my heart sink to the pit of my stomach; it meant he wasn't finding any blood. An hour had already passed since I shot the buck and the sun was straight above us, beating down; the temperature was rising and so was my fear and dread of losing my first buck.

On opening day of Arizona's archery mule deer season I sat alone near my favorite hunting spot, on the crest of a pine-tree-covered mountain, staring off in the distance, listening intently for any kind of movement or sound. The only noise I heard though was the sound of some

nearby white-breasted nuthatches chirping *wer-wer-wer* as they searched for their breakfast. The sun was just coming up, and I could feel the warmth on the right side of my face as I thought to myself, "Gonna be another hot one today."

I had been sitting at my favorite little honey hole for about an hour without seeing a thing other than the nuthatches flying back and forth from tree to tree. The birds' constant chirping was beginning to annoy me, so I decided to get up and walk around the other side of the mountain. I hadn't gone far when I heard the crashing noise of hooves against dry, dead leaves. I looked up in time to see a buck running up the mountain back in the direction I had just come from. I decided to head back to my original spot and set up again.

Up the hill I trudged until I made it to the top. I was just below my original spot when I noticed a well-used game trail. I said to myself, "This is as good a spot as any for an ambush." I pushed away all the dead branches and oak leaves and dug in beside a pine tree. I began notching an arrow when I heard a branch snap to the left of me. I slowly turned my head and watched, but nothing appeared. A thought entered my mind, "What if it's a bear?" I had seen two or three black bears in this area throughout the years, so I knew the possibility of what was coming towards me might just be one.

All of a sudden out of the trees jumped a doe. She began walking down the game trail right in front of me. She was so close; I could've touched her with an arrow. Just as she was approaching me, I saw something else come out from the trees. It was the 4x4 buck; he was in velvet and was the biggest buck I had ever seen in the woods. I stopped breathing for a second and waited for the doe to pass. I waited and waited for what seemed like eternity but in reality was only seconds. The buck passed by some trees and was coming toward the only shooting lane I had.

As he approached the open area, only 20 yards away, I drew back. He must have heard me as he turned his head to look, but the weirdest thing happened; he turned his head and looked in the opposite direction. I knew it was now or never, so I pulled the trigger of my release and the buck bolted.

I sat for a few seconds and collected my thoughts. After seeing the size of the buck I knew I'd need some help. That's when I called one of my hunting buddies, Andy Laird. "Hey, Andy," I said on the phone, "Whatcha doing?" He said, "I'm deer hunting, what are you doing?" I told him my location and that I had just shot a deer and I wondered if he could come help me track it? He said, "I'll be there in 45 minutes."

I showed Andy the spot where the buck was when I shot him, and we began our trek from there. First, there was only a drop of blood, then nothing, then more and more blood. We had walked close to 200 yards tracking the buck, when finally I looked up and saw him. He was

Editor's Note:

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The author poses next to her first big-game animal—a lovely velvet-racked Arizona mule deer.

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lying up against a tree—dead. I was excited, to say the least and Andy was happy for me. After looking the buck over, I found out why the buck had turned his head in the wrong direction when he heard me draw back. He had a very large hole in his right ear; it appeared to be from a muzzleloader bullet. I believe that the hole in his ear prevented him from hearing on his right side, which provided me the opportunity for the shot.

Not only was this my first kill with a bow, but also, the buck turned out to meet the requirements for the Pope & Young record book. Lady luck was with me on that day, and I truly believe she brought me that buck. My only hope is that she bestows me the same blessings on all my future bowhunts.

Long-Awaited Antelope

Ten long years of waiting and more than 10 days of hunting all added up to one heck of an adventure.

By George Ovalle

Finally, after 10 years, I drew my second archery antelope tag in Arizona and it was tag number 1. My first archery buck in 1995 came easy after only three days of hunting. That buck gross scored 79 4/8 inches. So my goal was to harvest a buck bigger than my previous buck. So I started scouting heavily to fulfill my goal. During my scouting trip I saw some great bucks. During one of my trips I found a tank that had no roads going to it and the area nearby was covered with tracks. I thought I would put a ground blind on that tank and have my buck by opening weekend. While that was not the case, I sat that blind for 14 hours a day over three days, and nothing came in.

On day four and five I decided to spot and stalk the nearby hills. The action was great. I got a few shots followed by a few misses. Day six found me back at the tank. Again, nothing came in. Day seven, I sat another tank but I had zero action there, too. On the eighth day, I decided to spot and stalk once again. This time I located a huge 85-plus-inch buck. After a careful stalk, I got within range and released an arrow. The shot looked good but then a branch jumped in the way. The next time, I tried my luck again stalking but I didn't have any luck, so I went back to the first tank. I spent my entire 10th hunting day there with no action.

At this point I was tired and mentally beat down. So I went back to the office to get some work done and cure my wounds. While I was working I couldn't stop thinking about the game the antelope were playing with me. When I was sitting the tanks they would always come to the one where I wasn't sitting. I could not get it right. So on the last day of the hunt I decided to drive out there and sleep in my truck and sit the original tank one last time.

At 8:30 am on the last day of the hunt I was in the right place at the right time. A buck I had seen during my scouting trip was drinking 20 yards from my ground blind. I drew back and released an arrow, and this time it found its mark. The shot erased 10 long and sweat-filled days. My goal came true after I scored the buck at 81 2/8 inches gross. It just goes to show that it is never over until the hunt is done with—and sometimes all your hard work and luck pays off. I would rather be lucky than good any day. I would like to thank my best friend Chris Romero and Scott D. for their support over the years. In closing, due your part and introduce someone to the sport of hunting. ←



Ovalle hunted for more than 10 days before he drew down on this trophy—certainly a trophy worthy of the wait.