

An intense hunt with a former NFL star produces a trophy elk.

Well-Earned BULL

We had been walking for more than an hour before the first light of day began to break. Now well above the snow line, we stopped to watch the sun rise and listen for that haunting sound of a bull elk's bugle. A storm had set in and although it was raining in the low country, we had faced a stinging mixture of sleet and snow every since we had passed above about 7,500 feet above sea level.

As I sat trying to catch my breath, one of the most pristine valleys I have ever seen came into view below. Elk

sign had been abundant on the hike up and even though all was silent, my hopes were still high. My guide had said the rut had been over for more than two weeks, and we would spend much of our time walking and glassing the rugged canyon country that made up the incredible Broadmouth Canyon Ranch.

After a short break we began to work our way higher into an area where there had been a big bull elk spotted in the week prior and where the open high country would be more suitable for glassing. The terrain

**STORY & PHOTOS
BY BLAKE SHELBY**

Well-Earned

rugged areas that elk usually inhabit, and has the resources to use trucks, ATVs or horses to accommodate these hunters. I, unfortunately, had made the mistake requesting a more rugged hunt that would take me to the more remote areas of the fenced portion of the ranch in order to find a trophy bull. Although I had considered myself in pretty good shape, a saddle horse would be a welcome sight to a Southern boy who was not in nearly as good of "mountain" shape as he had thought.

we were returning to the lodge, we had glassed a mature 6x6 bull through a spotting scope feeding along a ridge on the opposite side of valley. After only a short break and a hot lunch, we set out to hunt that area from horseback.

We were no more than an hour into the hunt when we heard the distant crack of a rifle across the valley. A call soon came over the radio that another hunter, a rancher from Texas, had taken a tremendous 7x7 bull that would

would no doubt make a fine trophy. But as I searched for a solid rest, he disappeared into the brush and presented only marginal shots as he worked his way away from us.

We continued to hunt hard that afternoon, and late that evening we spotted a group of three mature bulls on a distant ridge. Although there appeared to be a trophy bull in the group, it was difficult to tell in the fading light, and there was no time left in the day to try and close the

There was about a 30-foot bluff just below them that would make a stalk virtually impossible.

gap. We decided that our best option was to gamble that in the harsh weather the bulls would stay in the same area; we'd try to find them in the morning.

Rulon woke me early next morning. We had already eaten breakfast and were heading out afoot as the other hunters in camp began to stir. An hour later, as the morning light began to illuminate the mountain, we were glad to see that the bulls were not only in the area but virtually in the same spot as the evening before. Even more fortunate, there was a trophy bull in the group. The only downside was that they were in a difficult spot.

They were on the very top of the mountain; it

was not only extremely steep, there was about a 30-foot bluff just below them that would make a stalk virtually impossible. Our only option would be an extremely long shot from the opposite ridge.

We worked our way as close as possible and decided to try to bugle in an effort to draw the bull off the ridge into the timber below so that we could close the gap. That turned out to be a mistake. When we bugled, the massive 6x7 bull simply turned and faced us. He stood motionless as he studied the valley below looking for the bull that had made the bugle.



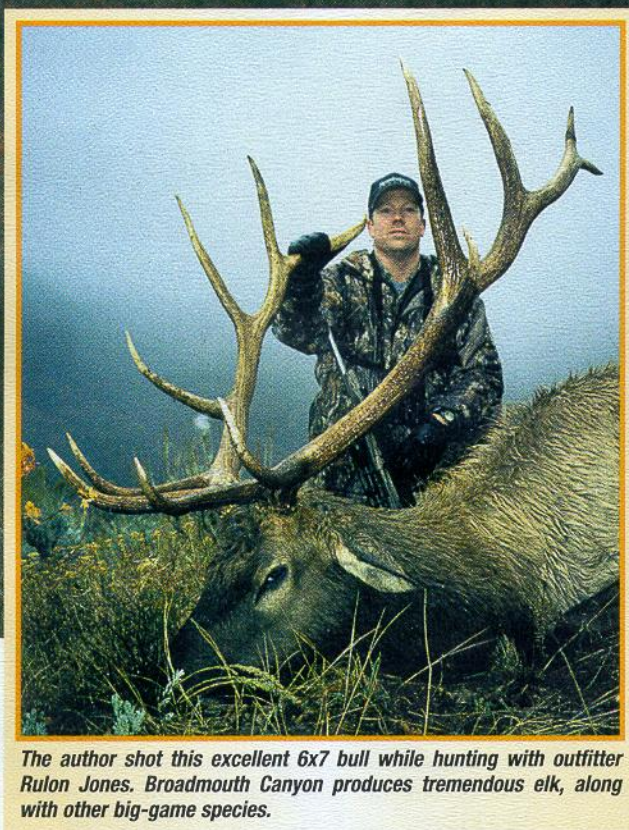
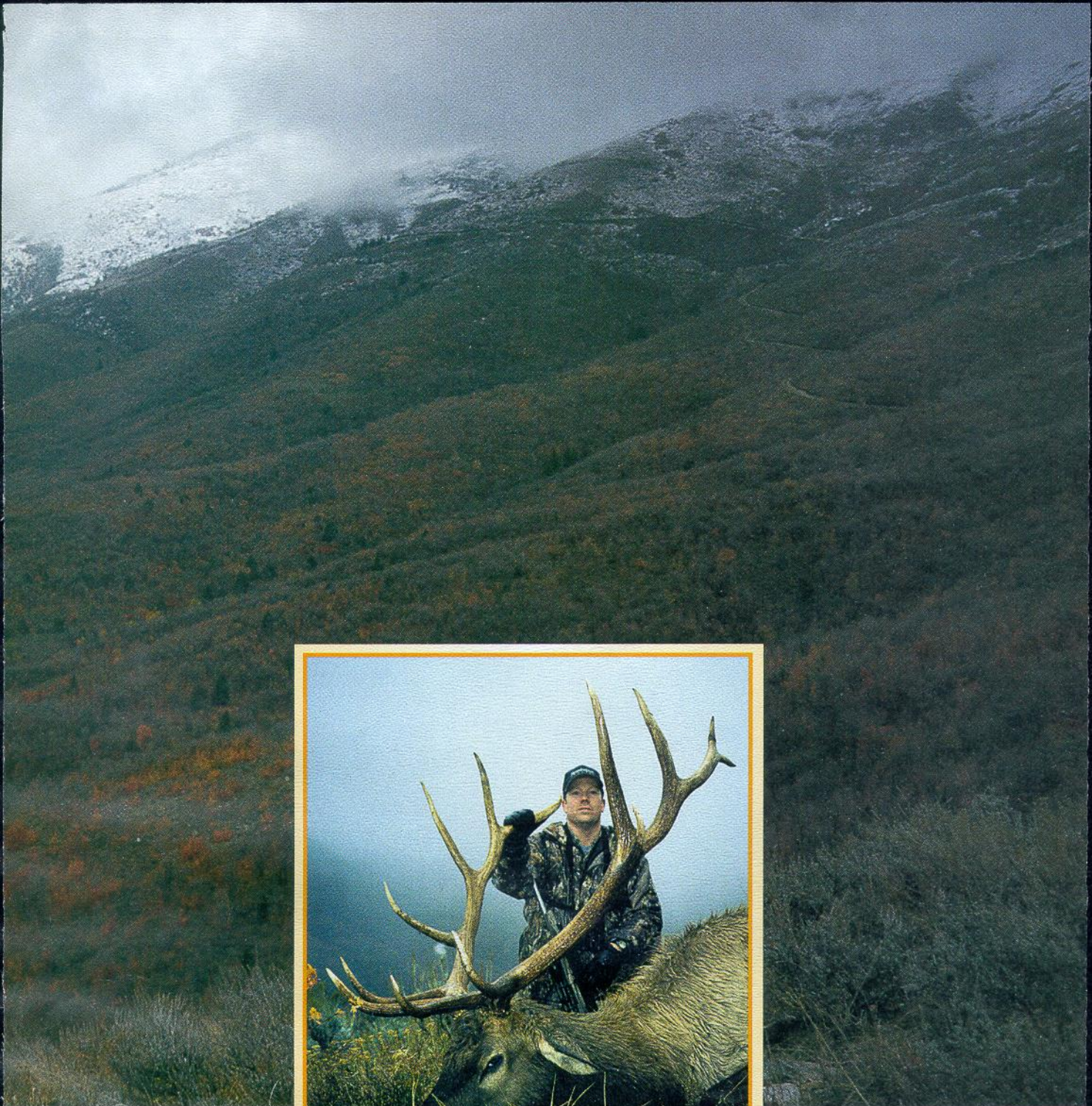
Former Denver Bronco All-pro defensive end Rulon Jones grew up in the mountains of Utah and is a lifelong hunter.

We had hunted hard until well after noon and spotted plenty of game. But despite a great morning of hunting, I must say that I was glad to see the beautiful and rustic lodge finally coming into view below. During the morning hunt it had become apparent that the harsh weather had pushed the big bulls down into the lower country, just below the snow line. As I met up with the other hunters in camp to hang our clothes to dry over the fire and trade stories of the morning hunt, the guides formulated a plan for the afternoon hunt.

Rulon and I hunted an area in the far northwest corner of the ranch, and as

score well over 370 Boone and Crockett points. No sooner than we had heard the news, we spotted our 6x6 bull feeding in a meadow not more than 500 yards from where we had seen him that morning. Unfortunately, the bull must have caught a glimpse of the approaching horses before we caught a glimpse of him because he quickly moved into heavy cover.

We tied the horses and began to slowly stalk closer to the area where we had seen the bull. We had made our way to within 250 yards when he briefly moved back into the meadow. He was an excellent bull with tremendous bottoms and



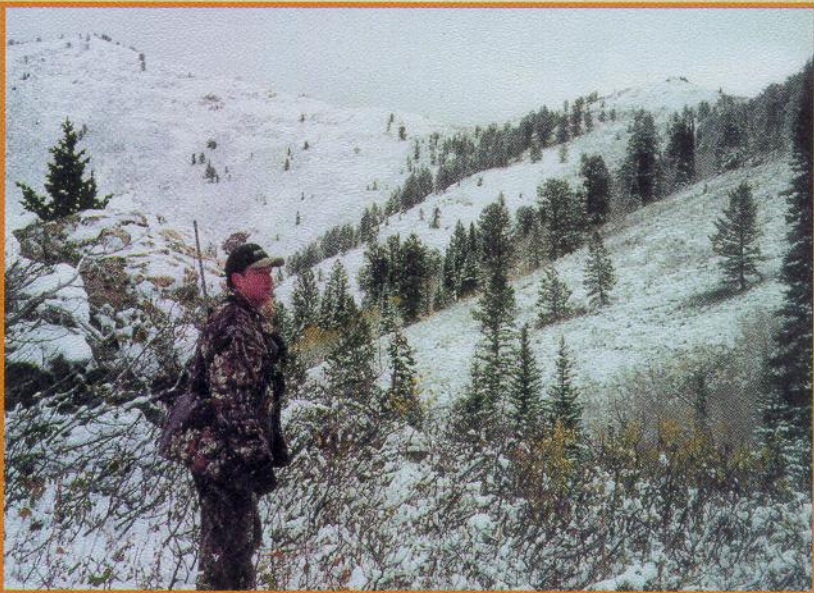
The author shot this excellent 6x7 bull while hunting with outfitter Rulon Jones. Broadmouth Canyon produces tremendous elk, along with other big-game species.

was steep, and the conditions were icy and slick. It took more than four hours of hiking almost straight up to reach our vantage point atop of one of the highest mountains on the ranch. As we topped 10,000 feet, I realized that I was in for one of the most intense elk hunts that I had ever done.

I had long looked forward to meeting the ranch owner and former All-Pro Denver Bronco defensive end, Rulon

Jones, but quickly realized that I had a better chance of keeping up with a frightened mountain goat than walking step for step with this incredible athlete. Ten years of playing in the NFL had not taken a step away from this man; in fact he is probably in better shape than any guide I have ever encountered.

I knew that Rulon takes great pride in being able to cater to hunters who are physically unable to hunt in most of the



Elk country is big country, and the author had to contend with slippery, snow-covered slopes. The comfortable lodge and excellent meals make meeting those challenges much easier.