

'Butt buster buck' well worth the effort,

memories will last a lifetime

BY JERRY HELM
September, 2000

For 25 years I have dreamed of hunting and harvesting a "trophy" mule deer. For many years I have hunted mule deer, even taken a few, but not the one that met my expectations of the dream buck.

We had been hunting elk in the Broadmouth Canyon area of Utah all week. After several days of climbing and walking I took a massive 6X6 bull elk with a 40-inch spread. My guide and I were tired but excited and filled with anticipation.

On Wednesday morning the anticipation was overcome by reality. My guide, as well as my friend, was Rulon Jones, the former Denver Broncos All Pro Defensive End. We started well before daylight because we had some serious climbing to do in order to be on top by daybreak.

We arrived at the top and looked into Sunlight Basin just at daybreak – what a beautiful sight. Sunlight Basin was named because the light that signals a new day in the Wasatch Range arrives in this basin first.

We saw deer – both bucks and does – in the bottom of the basin, but none that we were interested in taking. We slowly moved around the top of James Peak. We moved without making any sound and constantly looking for that buck I had only seen in my dreams. We had seen and taken close looks at about 30 animals, some quite nice, but not what we were after.

Then Rulon said to me very softly, "That's a nice buck. No, that's a real nice buck."

Having hunted with Rulon before and never having heard this level of excitement in his voice, I knew we were on to a real trophy buck.

The buck was located about 300 yards straight below us at about a 70-degree angle. I had what would be a very difficult shot, but one that I had full confidence I would make.

I set up on the steep downhill slope, placed the crosshairs squarely on the buck's shoulder and fired. The buck jumped slightly, but did not go down.

I had missed. I made the basic of mistakes when shooting downhill. Always aim low.

The buck moved out and up the side of the canyon further and further away. We then went slowly down the side of James Peak to an outcropping called Red Rock, trying to get into position for another shot.

This morning that was not to be. The buck continued moving and bedded across the canyon. We would only see its head while bedded, but we could tell that it was indeed, "A real nice

buck."

We waited until it got up again, making certain it was not injured and then decided the best thing to do was to not disturb or spook it, and to get out of the canyon as quietly as possible. We would then come back the next morning with this buck as the focus of our hunt.

The climb out of the canyon and back up the side of James Peak was brutal. More than that though was the frustration that I felt for having missed. I replayed the shot many times in my mind and decided that I would take the same shot again, making only the adjustment for the extreme downhill.

By the time we had gotten to the top of James Peak my frustration was gone. I knew what I had done wrong. I knew the buck was still in the canyon and that we had not spooked him. The hunt for this beautiful animal was not over.

That night and the next morning when I awoke I said prayers. I am blessed in that my prayers are most often answered. I had not prayed about the weather and the wind was blowing heavily.

Rulon and I started early again, but this morning we went directly to the top and head of Wolf Creek Canyon without stopping to glass for other deer. We were going after the beautiful buck we had seen the day before. The wind was blowing about 40 miles per hour at the top of the canyon. Everywhere we had seen deer the day before there was nothing.

The wind died down slightly as the light and warmth from the sun crept into Wolf Creek Canyon. Then we spotted a nice buck. After looking him over very closely in the spotting scope, we decided that he was worth the effort of going after.

There was only one little problem – the deer was between a half and three-quarters of a mile away and three thousand feet below us.

Rulon turned to me and said, "Jerry, this is going to be a butt buster." Many thoughts went instantly through my mind, though none were fear. I was in, hoping that it just might be the same animal.

The downhill was steep, covered with chaparral in places, rock slides in others, and shale that easily gave way and signaled we were on the stalk. We covered the three thousand foot drop in 30 minutes. We were very quiet and confident we did not give away our position.

We had arrived at a large outcropping of rocks. This was to be where we crept over and hopefully had a clear shot into the valley floor.

Quietly and without being seen, we looked over the rocks. The buck was nowhere to be seen.

After being absolutely certain we had not missed seeing the buck, we quickly moved back and down to another rock outcropping. We were now lower and had a different view of the canyon's sides and floor.

Rulon quietly said to me before going up on the rocks, "If you see him, it will be over quickly."

I gently laid my rifle on the top of the rock outcropping and pushed myself up over the rocks and behind my rifle.

There he was.

The buck was sneaking up and out of the canyon about six feet from a stand of pines. It was thrashing its antlers in a small aspen tree and I knew that this was my only chance before it disappeared into the pines and out of my sight forever.

In the frame of about five seconds I made certain that it was

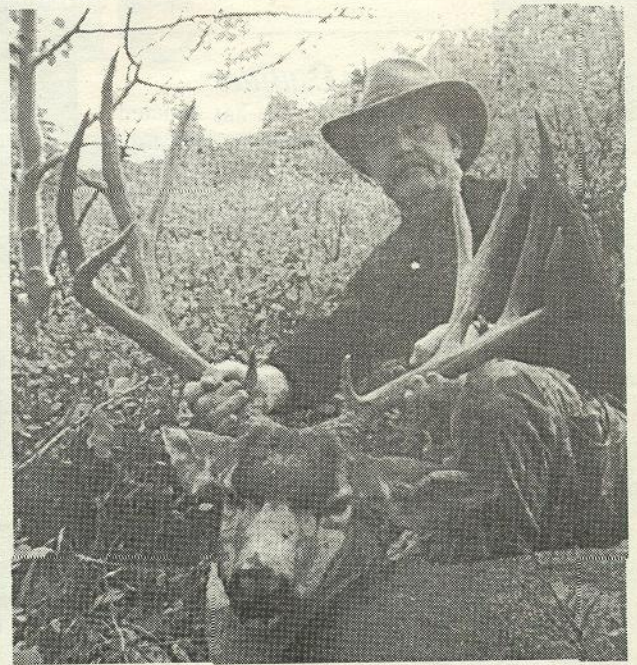




VOL. 2 ISSUE 2

Mule Deer Chronicle

The Official Monthly Publication of the Mule Deer Foundation
Conserving The Deer Of The West



While the elk, below left, was a great trophy, I had finally connected with the mule deer of my dreams.

the buck that we had come after. The crosshairs of my rifle's scope gently settled on his body – a lung shot was my choice.

No second looks, no thoughts – no time.

The trigger squeeze was so smooth and the focus so intense that I did not even hear the rifle's report. The shot was perfect and the buck took two steps and fell into a stand of aspens, already turning yellow with early fall.

Rulon and I were both very excited and happy, but this was neither of our first bucks. We checked the distance of the shot with my range finder – 310 yards – a great shot we both agreed.

We then went to my buck and to our surprise it was the same beautiful buck from the day before. We are certain of this because of the same antler spread, color and large eye guards – which are not that common.

We gave thanks.

This trophy buck is a 6X6. Its antler spread measures 27 inches. Because of the toll mountain lions are taking on the mule deer population, bucks like this are becoming rare and hard to find.

After taking pictures and quartering up this magnificent animal, Rulon and I finally relaxed, sharing a Poweraid drink and eating a ham and egg biscuit.

We had to take a different way out of Wolf Creek Canyon to avoid climbing up the way that we had come down. We walked about six miles to the base of the canyon and to the road.

Along the way we relived the morning several times and enjoyed it even more. We talked of other hunting adventures, and our shared respect for this beautiful trophy mule deer of my dreams.

I wrote this to share how I feel. Hopefully all the emotions I felt come through.

I wrote this also so that I never forget. Growing age nor the passing of years can ever steal away the feelings and memories of this morning in Wolf Creek Canyon and the "Butt Buster Buck." 🍄