

Finally!

2024 marks the fifth time I hunted this area. Obviously, I have a lot of time, online research, boot leather, etc. invested in getting to know it. As a result, I know exactly where I want to start this year. I arrive at my campsite about 4PM on Monday afternoon and quickly throw up my tent figuring I will have more time later put my camp together so I can hit my “easy spot” right away.

This spot is in the very corner of my huntable area with elk sanctuaries on two sides. Due to neuropathy in my feet and an issue I have with my Achilles’ tendon, I have spent many hours in this “easy spot” in previous years and have had a surprisingly amount of close encounters. It is a half mile hike up a steep hill to a place where I have literally carved out a hole in the oak brush overlooking a canyon feeding up from one sanctuary area outside my boundary through a small corner of public land into a large section of private land, a small corner where elk sometimes move through briefly.

The good news is the sanctuary to the north is a sanctuary in the sense that it is an elk unit with very, very tags. I can’t hunt it, but I can retrieve an elk if I am ever fortunate enough to hit one on my side of the boundary. The area above and to the west, however, is private and completely off limits. Therefore, my ambush spot is 100 yards south (above) the unit to my north and 300 yards below the private on my west.

I bring a two-pound camp chair from Costco with me as it surprisingly comfortable and helps me stay hidden, yet in a shooting position. I have trimmed the oak brush, so I have three 50 yard lanes for getting a shot off as the elk move through.



View from my chair

I settle into my chair around 6PM and begin some light calling. However, as with most “easy spots,” I’m not the only one who knows about it. There is a large finger meadow behind me to the south where I have had many hunters come in while I’m working a bull. So, around 6:55, when I hear a cow call behind me, I am 99% sure it is another hunter. To

this point, I have only heard one faint bugle, and it seems a long way to the north and isn't showing any interest in my seductive pleas.

When I hear the cow calls behind me, I ramp up my calling in the hopes of communicating to the other hunter that I am here. He calls a couple more times, but then seems to back away.

At 7:04, about the time I think the evening is going to be a complete bust, I look down and to my left and see horns. Light is starting to fade but I'm able to pull up my binos and see it is decent 6 X 6. He's a shooter anywhere in this public area, but especially in my easy spot. I initially range him at 64 yards. He continues to move up the drainage, but unfortunately, not through any of the lanes I have previously trimmed and stops at 54 yards. There is a bush covering his vitals, but that bush is at 41. I know the trajectory of my arrow will clear the brush and drop into where I want it. I draw, release and hear a solid "Thump." My first thought is, "I can't believe that just happened. I can't believe my hunt could be over even before I have my camp set up."

The bull whirls and I see my green lighted nock flopping around above his body on the opposite side. I don't think anything of this point until later. I'm running out of daylight, but I clearly see the path he takes and watch him clear at least 200 yards past the boundary. Light is fading fast so I go over to start investigating. I find his tracks from where he whirled and have a solid idea which path he has taken. I carefully follow the path to the unit boundary but do not see any blood, and I am starting to get nervous.

I backtrack multiple times but don't find any blood. By now it is completely dark, and I leave my bow on my side of the boundary, just to be safe. I carefully follow the path I saw him take and find two small drops of blood about 250 yards from where he was standing when I shot. I spend the next 30 minutes searching with my headlamp without finding any more. However, when I look high on the hillside to the northwest, I see a green LED light about $\frac{3}{4}$ of mile away. My first thought is "Can that be my lighted nock?" I quickly blow that off thinking there is no way I could see it that far. Through my binos, I see the light move and disappear and then reappear and then go away completely. I decide it must be a person with a green headlamp, "But what in the world is someone doing all the way up there at night?"

I know I must wait until morning when I can search more effectively, so I go back to camp and come back before first light. I sit in my perch and watch and listen. The draw is once again quiet. About sunrise, I begin easing down the bull's pathway once again. This time I am being even more methodical, checking out other pathways he could have possibly taken, hoping to find some evidence on my side of the boundary. To my frustration, I don't find anything.

After about 30 minutes, I decide I need to go to the spots I had found blood the night before. I look around and find a tree I know I will be able to find again. I hang my bow on it and ignore the voice in my head telling me to make a waypoint—because after all, "There aren't that many dead pine trees amongst the oak brush," and "I'll be able to find it easily." (You can probably guess why I include this obnoxious detail)

Anyway, I proceed to the blood I found last night, start moving slowly down the trail, and begin to find a sparse blood trail. A drop here, a drop there. No bubbles, no hint of anything significant. However, by going slow, leaving an arrow at the last blood and then hop

scotching back and forth, I'm able to follow the faint trail for 578 yards before it completely peters out in a direct line towards where I had seen the green light on the hillside. I am still in disbelief I could see a lighted nock from that distance, but begin to put the pieces together. I.e. the reason I saw my nock over the top of his back as he ran away was due to a lack of penetration.

With his trail marked well in my GPS app, I backtrack all the way back to where he was standing when I shot. Sure enough, about 10 yards on my side of the boundary, I find two drops of blood, which of course is a relief for me in case I am questioned. I take pictures of them, mark them, and then return to where I had lost the trail.

By now its 10:30 in the morning, and it has started to rain lightly. I know the odds of finding the bull have gone down to practically nothing, and I've begun to believe that my arrow dropped a little further than I had intended, that I had hit him in the leg or the ball of the shoulder.

I follow the game trail up to the area where I had seen the green light but don't find my arrow or any more blood. I had taken a compass bearing the night before on the green light and made a waypoint that I knew had me at least in the vicinity. I search the area without seeing or smelling any sign of a dead bull. "Ugh! I should have aimed higher!" At the same time, I feel some relief as I am 95% sure the bull will recover.

By now the rain has progressed from a mist to a light but steady rain, and I'm wanting to get back to camp to dry out and regroup. I hike back to the boundary to grab my bow. However, remember that "obnoxious detail" I mentioned earlier? Well, I spend the next hour going from tree to tree to tree searching for my bow.

I can't believe I can't find it. I'm standing in the rain, walking around in circles telling myself what an idiot I am for not making a waypoint, what an idiot I am for not being able to remember the trail, the tree, etc. It's not a large stinking area! I do a grid search, looking on the side of every tree. I pull out my binoculars in the rain multiple times to check out trees 50 yards away. This is absolutely ridiculous! After about 45 minutes, I'm starting to believe someone must have seen me out here searching and come in and stolen my bow! At one point, I'm seriously considering hiking out to my truck and going down to the main camping area and start asking guys if they saw anyone else up here and even filing a police report.

Finally, I slow down enough that my brain kicks in. I start walking 100 yards east and then west from the trail the bull took right at the boundary line. On my second pass, I see a 10' stump of a tree with the top broken off, and sure enough, there is my bow. I am both relieved to have found it and aggravated at myself for the needless frustration of the last hour when I was already frustrated about making a bad shot on the bull.

I drive to where I can get cell coverage and look at the radar. It looks like the rain is mostly done, though there is a small patch possibly coming my way. I decide to go back out and hike up into a drainage that will give me a different view of the bowl where the bull went into and glass for elk, crows, bears, etc., anything that can give me clarity on the bull. I hike the 1.5 miles to my vantage point and begin glassing. After about 20 minutes, the rain starts back up. I had brought an umbrella with me and the radar from two hours earlier only showed a small patch of rain, so I decide to not mess with digging my rain pants out of my pack, assuming it will just be a quick shower. Well, that small patch on the radar grew into

45 minutes of an absolute downpour with lightning and wind that turns my umbrella inside out on multiple occasions.

Finally, the rain breaks, the sun comes out briefly and I think I am good. My pants are wet, but they will dry out since the sun is peeking through the clouds and of course, the wind is still blowing. I move to a place in the sun and keep glassing for any signs of my bull. After about 20 minutes, I look up and see the clouds getting dark once again. At the first burst of lightning, I say, "forget it!" I'm not riding out another one and start heading to my truck. The sky opens up and it pours on me the first 1.25 miles of my 1.5-mile hike back. By the time I get to my truck, the sun comes back out again. However, I am toast. A wet, sloppy piece of toast that wants nothing but to get dry, so I go back to my camp, strip down, dry off, and put on clean, dry clothes. I warm up a burrito and am in bed by 8.

In bed, but certainly not asleep, as I continue to wrestle both with what happened with the bull and what to do going forward. I am convinced my shot had to be low and in the ball of the shoulder. If that is the case, the bull will be sore, but eventually ok. I decide to go into my deep spot for the morning, and then go glass the bowl again tomorrow afternoon.

Wednesday morning, I am on the trail a little before 5AM. It is 3.5 miles to the wallow and I want to get there before the sun hits the canyon. However, my path to my "deep spot" is somewhat tricky. I take a main trail for a mile and then hop off the trail a couple hundred yards to what I've come to call my "200 yards of hell." Its 200 yards of climbing up a cliff through a wicked combination of large rocks, thorn bushes, oak brush and enough stickers that I often must stop on the other side and scrape my pants, sleeves, etc. before continuing my hike. I had intended to do it the first time on an afternoon hunt where I could find it in the daylight, but here I am doing it in the dark.

By going in the dark, I miss my entry point. So it is a wrestling match with the brush for me until I find the barbed wire fence. I know there is a semblance of trail on just the other side of it. So, in the dark, I climb over the fence, through the crap and then eventually make it to the top where things open up again.

I get to my drop-down point right at first light, and as I move to the edge of the first meadow, I see an elk rump. Sure enough, there are two cows grazing about 50 yards out. They are oblivious to me, so I stay on the edge of the meadow against the oaks and scan for more. Two turns into eight cows plus two spikes, but no bull. I watch them for about 45 minutes as they stay between 50-120 yards away. I bugle a couple times thinking if there is a bull, he will come charging in to protect his cows, but even the cows barely look my way. Something moves into the other side of the oak brush about 25 yards from me after my first bugle, but it is so thick I cannot see what it is, and I think it catches my scent. I hear it turn around and head back the other way.

Around 7, one of the cows gets downhill from me enough to catch my scent, gives out the dreaded warning bark, and starts heading through the oaks in the general direction of the wallow I want to sit, so I head down to the creek bottom to start making my way up. This creek bottom is a royal pain. Lots of blow down, multiple places where the trail disappears, and numerous times I have to climb over and under logs. The recent rains have also made everything super slippery and every bush I bump into rains on me from above.

Shortly before I get to the wallow, I hear my first bugle. It seems close. The wallow is about 100 yards below a finger meadow that is about 70 yards wide for the first 100 yards

then opens up to about a 400-yard diameter grassy plain and then turns north with another small finger off the main meadow. The problem, however, is the meadow is at the end of the OTC hunting unit and the next is a very limited draw area. On two previous years, I was able to call from the wallow and bring bulls down from the meadow. I don't want to push them into country I can't go, so I set up and start calling. By now, the sun is up but my wallow spot is completely in the shade and everything I have is wet from the previous day's downpour and from walking in that morning, so I decide to move up to the edge of the meadow where I can stretch out in the sunshine. Oh does that feel good.

I empty my pack and get almost everything dried out. The sun also makes it possible to get a great 30-minute nap. Man did I need that. By now it is 10:30 and the woods are quiet, so I go back above the wallow. However, the wallow isn't really a wallow this year. It is still the start of the creek, but there isn't a hole there anymore. The place I sat last year has no view of what little water there is, so I spend a few minutes creating a new blind with the initial plan of sitting the rest of the day there.



A few minutes after sitting down in my new and improved blind, I look up in the meadow, across the canyon and see a rather large black bear looking right at me. I range him and he is 62 yards away with the ravine between us. Not sure how much of my movement he has seen but instead of coming into the water as multiple bears did last year, he slowly walks down the meadow and presumably waters further down the creek. I stay in my blind until 12:30 but keep thinking about the bull from Monday evening. I am 95% sure he will be ok, but the bad hit continues to bother me. Finally, I have all I can take and decide to hike back

out and go sit in my “easy spot” to glass for crows and see if I can see any sign of a dead elk back there.

This of course means a 3.5-mile hike back to my truck which includes the 200 yards of hell drop down off the cliff through the stickers, thorns and brush, but which I thankfully do in the daylight. As I come through, I find a straight shot, that while still a pain, is by far the best path I had ever found through. When I get to the opening at the bottom, I find a small piece of flagging in my pack and mark the entry for future passes.

I make it back to my perch on the hillside about 5PM. The sun is shining, and I spend the rest of the afternoon glassing for crows. There are a few here and there, but no circling or concentration of them. The bull would have had to have continued on the path he was on for at least a mile and a half to move out of the bowl, so I finally feel mostly released to continue my attempt to fill my tag.

Thursday morning, I decide to make one more run at my easy spot, in part to look again for crows, and in part, because my wife is coming for a couple days. The way I hunt mornings in my “easy spot,” is to hike up to the bottom of the large finger meadow, arriving at least 30 minutes before first light. From there I listen for bugles and wait to move up so my scent stays out of the draw coming up from the limited tag area until the bugles are above or even with me as well as not messing up the meadow above me. This meadow is about 75 yards wide and about 400 yards long and is public land.

I’ve had multiple crazy encounters with large bulls in this meadow despite it only being ½ mile from a road in a heavily hunted area. The first was three years ago and it’s an encounter I’ll never forget. I forgot to set my alarm and woke up to sound of another truck leaving the camping area. “Crap!” I jump out of bed, throw on some clothes, grab my stuff and take off in record time. I arrive at my parking spot just before first light. “Crap! I should already be at the bottom of meadow! Crap! Crap! Crap!”

I jump out of the truck, zip up my jacket with my binos and range finder inside it and start up the hill as fast as I can. It’s not a long distance, but it is steep. When I get to the top, I’m burning up and out of breath. I stop just long enough to catch my breath, and then hit a couple light cow calls. Nothing. No bugles, not even from either of the sanctuaries, so I think it’s going to be a quiet morning.

However, as I look up to the top of the meadow, I see horns heading my way. I watch as a super tall, super heavy 6 X 6 strolls down the middle of the meadow straight at me. I pull out my range finder to start trying to get some distances. Only my range finder is completely fogged over from being inside my jacket and the light is still dim. Finally, I’m able to get a reading of 45 yards, only I’m not 100% what it was on when I got the reading as I was having to point, click and then point it to the sky to try to make out the numbers through the fogged-up lenses.

Sure enough, he walks right to the bush I thought I had ranged, put my 50 yard pin a little low, and let an arrow loose. I watch it fly perfectly until the last instant when it dives right under his chest. (Upon recreating the shot later, he wasn’t at 45, he was at 54.) The bull spooks, turns around, trots back up the meadow and disappears into the oaks. “Crap!” I had a golden opportunity and blew it.

As he is trots off, I instinctually hit him with multiple hard cow calls in a desperate attempt to bring him back. I watch helplessly as he leaves, looking at my range finder, that

has now finally cleared up, shaking my head and all but kicking myself. To my great surprise, I look up and see more horns headed my way. They are all the way at the very top of the meadow and coming down the same path as bull #1. I make a quick decision to move up and over 30 yards to a spot I call 3 Pines because, you guessed it, there are three pines growing right together.

I'm able to move there unnoticed, and if the bull follows the same path as the previous one, he will walk by me at 30-35 yards. I'm on one knee against some oak brush when I notice that it isn't one bull coming down but two. The one in the front is a 7 X 7 and the one behind is a 6 X 6. Whether the 6 X 6 is a new bull or the first one returning, I have no idea. However, I am in an incredible spot as both bulls have their attention fixed on where I was standing when I was calling after missing bull #1. It is an almost perfect set up.

I watch anxiously as the two bulls walk slowly, but steadily down the draw. 125 yards becomes 110, then 90, then 80. I'm on a knee struggling to not shake and tremble when suddenly, I catch a flash out of the corner of my eye and see a coyote trotting down the trail right in front of me. He comes down from my left, clears the oak brush I'm up against, passes by at six feet and then stops suddenly and looks back at me from 5 yards away. He gives me a look of, "What the heck are you. You weren't there yesterday." I'm kneeling in a standoff thinking, "I should just shoot you because you are going to screw this up, aren't you?"

Sure enough, after a couple seconds, the coyote does a 180, whirls, and runs straight back at the two bulls who are now only 60 yards out. Naturally, they spook, turn and start heading the wrong direction. I have no choice but to start cow calling at them. They stop, turn around, and seem interested. However, they can see exactly where the calls are coming from, but there's no cow in sight, so they aren't about to take another step my direction. I range them and the 7 X 7 is now 75 yards, the 6 X 6 is 80 and both are out of my effective range. They have me visibly pinned down. I can't move, and they certainly aren't going to come to me, so I watch them helplessly for a couple minutes before they turn around and head up to the private property. Stupid, stupid, coyote! It makes me root even harder for Road Runner.

Later that morning, I pull the card from a game camera I have set up about 75 yards from where I started the adventure and find a picture of what I am confident is bull number one that morning.



The pic is time stamped 13 minutes before I would have started calling and, as you can see, is a beautiful bull. I am both thrilled and sickened when I see the picture. However, that is hunting, especially bow hunting and it is part of what keeps me coming back.

Speaking of coming back. A year later, I'm back at the bottom of the meadow once again. Only this time I'm there at 5:25 with first light being at 6:12. I sit down on a log and am enjoying the stars and the cool night air. Sure enough, at 5:27, I hear a bull bugle to the north outside the unit boundary, right where he usually is at first light. Next, a bull answers from directly above me to the west and I'm confident he is at or just above the top of the meadow. Now, I have a dilemma. If I stay silent, he is likely to keep moving up and into the private land. If I call, he might come down in the dark before I can see my pins.

I decide to give an extremely light cow call to which the bull at the top of the meadow responds immediately with a classic "Come Here Cow" bugle. The other bull also bugles at the call so I know I have their attention, but I must be careful.

I decide to start inching up the meadow to be in his hip pocket when first light finally arrives. Over the next 35 minutes I slowly creep up about 250 yards giving about five super soft, single cow calls along the way. Each time I call, both bulls fire off from their respective positions. At 6:05, I am as high up the meadow as I dare, standing at the edge of a circular clump of mature oaks, 55 yards from the upper end of the meadow. I can hear the bull moving in the brush just above the meadow and 6:12 seems to be taking forever.

I look at my watch: 6:07. Five more minutes. I look at my pins, still can't see them. I look again at 6:10. Still can't see my pins. I can hear the bull moving about slowly in the brush, and I'm fearful he is about to start heading up into the private. Finally, it's 6:12 but in the shadows of the oaks, I can't fully make out my pins. Oh, this is killing me. Finally, at 6:15, I can make out my 20, my 35, and brightest of all, my green 50-yard pin. Perfect!

I hit him with a quick series of high pitched, hot cow calls and immediately hear the brush busting. In the dim early light, I see a beautiful 6 X 6 pop out at what I know is 45 yards. (Yes,

my range finder had been out, and I was sure it was clear this time. While waiting that last ten minutes I ranged every bush multiple times. I know exactly how far he is.)

I take a deep breath, come to full draw, but when I try to put my 50-yard pin low on his chest, I can't find it. In fact, I can't find any of my pins. What in the world? I just checked. They weren't shining brightly, but they were shining enough, and it is now several minutes after first light. I'm thoroughly confused. Finally, in complete frustration, I let down my draw, a movement the bull catches and starts staring at me nervously. I look down at my bow and my pins are shining clearly. It still makes no sense, until I look at my string and see that my peep is turned sideways. Remember the 200 yards of hell I mentioned earlier? I had just been through that coming and going the afternoon and evening before. My peep must have caught in the brush and pulled out of its proper position. My brain kicks into gear and now that I know what is happening, I decide to draw again and try looking to the side of the string and aiming a little right. However, the bull is now nervous, so when I draw the second time he bolts back up into the brush. "You've got to be kidding me. Two years in a row in the same meadow?!"

Well, guess where I go year three on opening morning? Yep, I'm a sucker for punishment and I'm persistent. As I'm in the bottom of the meadow, I hear multiple bulls going off both above me in the private and to my north outside the boundary. Sweet, maybe this is finally going to be my year here. It seems clear I'm not able to call anything into the meadow at first light, and I'm hearing calls from the south that I'm pretty confident are other hunters, so I decide to move up to my hole in the oaks. As I arrive, I bump into a pair of hunters, let's call them "Jim" and "Jane." I talk with Jim, and we decide to work together to see if we can call up one of the bulls from the west side of the boundary.

I have a hot cow sequence I heard on an Ed Sceery cassette tape, (yes it was at least 30 years ago) where he records a cow in heat calling for 20 minutes before a herd bull finally comes to get her. It is a sequence I have used many, many times, and with which, I have called in numerous bulls. Sure enough, the bull starts answering my calls and seems to be getting closer. Then his bugle changes in a way that I know means he is coming. I start hearing rocks rolling and seeing the oak brush move about 75 yards away. They are coming to me on a string. Just as I get my first glimpse of horns, I hear noise and catch movement to my right. Jane tries to jump in front of me to shoot the bull. Really? If she stays put, she is just as likely to get the shot as I am, maybe even more likely, because he is coming right to me and she is 30 yards downhill and to the side of me. An elk sees and/or hears her move and lets out a warning bark. Chaos breaks out and that is the last we see or hear of that herd. Crap! I keep calling for the next thirty minutes and we hear lots of bugles from both areas we were not allowed to hunt, but nothing else comes into our view.

Once the commotion dies down and it is clear we are done for the morning, I ease back out to the edge of the meadow where I find Jim. We sit there for 45 minutes visiting about hunting, about how to work together, and what we want to do for the evening. Attempting to be civil, I don't say anything about Jane moving at the exact wrong time. I also want to give it at least one more shot and figure cooperation is the best bet. I tell him I will be back this evening and he says they will as well and that we could work together.

When I get back, I find out Jane is irate with me for "running all the elk off the mountain with my constant calling." She is irate and convinced that if I hadn't of crashed in on their

spot, they would have killed an elk that morning. When I ask why she thinks it is “their spot,” she says

“Because we were here first.”

I respond, “What do you mean, we were both here before first light and bumped into each other as we moved towards the bugles.”

“No, we spent the night up here and you came barging in on us.”

“What? You spent the night up here?”

“Yes,” she replies and then takes me to their tent in the oaks about 50 yards from my ground blind where I almost called the bull.

I am dumbfounded. Who spends the night in a tent less than a half mile away from the parking/camping area to claim an easily accessible spot? Especially since they put their tent on the ridge which means their scent flowed down the draw the elk travel through all night long. It’s amazing I almost called a herd up it in the first place.

I just shake my head, walk off and start looking for other places to hunt which is how I ended up finding my “Deep Spot.”

I go back up the hill a couple more times later in the week to see if they are still there. I don’t see their tent again, though I do see them across the meadow the second time. I’d be shocked if they did any good, but you never know.

Anyway, back to 2024. It is now Thursday morning, and my wife is coming up for a couple of days, so I decide to go up and see what things are like in my “easy spot”. One of the things I love about it is that the bowl outside my boundary has an amazing wallow in an open meadow where I have glassed elk, deer and bears on many occasions. When the elk are in that drainage, which is often, I always get lots of bugle responses to my calling, so even if nothing comes in, it is very entertaining, and I want to give my wife that experience.

I start in the bottom of the meadow at first light. I’m not hearing anything but decide to give three hard cow calls from the bottom and then quickly move up to “3 Pines.” I’m standing there looking across the meadow when I see an “elk bush.” You know, those bushes, especially from a distance or at first light that look an awful lot like an elk but aren’t? Well, there is one of those that I don’t remember being there, but I shake it off and don’t bother checking it with my binoculars. But then I look at it a second time and it looks even more “elky.” So, I’m staring at it, still convinced it’s a bush, when it starts moving and I realize, that’s not an elk bush, that’s an elk.

I pull up my binos and have just enough light, I can see horns. He is slowly moving towards where I had just called. Perfect. On that line, he will be 30 yards broadside when he goes by me. I check my watch and it’s legal shooting time. I check my pins, and I can see them clearly. I check my peep and it’s in its proper place. Then I glass him again, and with a little more light, in the middle of the meadow, I can see he is just a raghorn, and I’m not going to shoot a raghorn on the morning my wife is coming in so I pull out my phone.

I decide to shoot video instead of pictures because I have a 5-year-old granddaughter I know will enjoy the video. However, when I hit record, it turns on my light and that startles the bull. He freaks out and starts heading back where from whence he came. I hit him with a cow call, and he turns around and comes right back.

He comes back to about 40 yards and stands in the middle of the meadow looking for the cow. When she doesn’t show, he starts doing the “show yourself” bark. Oh, and I forgot to

mention, there is another bull somewhere behind him bugling every minute or so that I want to try to call in. By this point, I just want the righthorn to leave, so I move just enough to send him trotting back up the hill. When he goes out of sight in the brush, I give the other bull a series of cow calls and guess what? The righthorn comes running back a third time. This time, he does have enough wits about him to stay about 75 yards out, however, if I had been a muzzle loader hunter, he would have been an easy shot.



Barking Righthorn Who Won't Go Away

For the next 30 minutes, I can hear the other bull sound off every little bit, and I think he might be callable. However, no matter how long I wait, every single time I cow call, the righthorn starts barking at me, so I finally give up and go silent for 15-20 minutes and ease into my little hole in the oak brush.

I don't see or hear anything more that morning, but I continue to glass the basin across the boundary for crows without seeing any of the telltale signs of a dead animal. I'm feeling more and more confident that my Monday evening bull is still alive and chasing cows somewhere.

Thursday evening, I hike into a water hole where I almost got run over by a bear in 2021.



He is about 8 yards from me here

(see my [YouTube video](#) on that one. I would tell the story, but it's much better to watch the video without knowing what's about to happen!) It is a great looking water hole, but this is the fourth time I've sat it and the only thing that has ever come to it are ducks and that psycho bear. At least it is a peaceful and dry evening. I hike out and go into town to meet my wife at the hotel.

Friday morning we are on the trail at 5:05, only 5 minutes later than my goal which is great since we had the extra drive of not being in camp. We do the first 2.75 miles and drop into the meadow where I had the eight cows on Wednesday right at first light. No elk this time. I make a couple calls without any response, so we head towards my ground blind over the wallow. We start hearing bugles coming from that area when we are about ¼ mile out. Sweet!

We make it to my ground blind about 7:45 and for the next two hours have a constant chorus of bugles. In hindsight, I screw up by not pressing up into the big meadow. On multiple occasions, we could tell when different bulls come down at least to the bottom third of the meadow to try to find the hot cow. However, their pattern is to move through the meadow early and then on up to their beds up high and outside the boundary. I am being extra cautious (probably too cautious) about not pushing them out of my legal hunting area.

I keep thinking that surely one of them will get curious and come check us out. About 8:30 a raghorn finally does. He comes into the same meadow the bear did and is interested in my seductive cow calls. However, I certainly am not going to shoot a raghorn that far in with my wife there. Truth be told, she just wants to see and hear some animals. Cutting one up isn't really her cup of tea. The only thing I will shoot today is a 6 X 6 or a unique bull of some kind. Anyway, he disappears behind the oaks and when he doesn't pop right back out, I think he has left and am fiddling with something in my pack when he suddenly reappears. It's a good thing I have already decided I am not shooting him, or I would be ticked at myself for moving at the wrong time. He has me pegged and is on high alert while quartering

towards me at 35 yards. We stare at each other for about 45 seconds before he decides to go back the way he came. He does, however, spend about 15 minutes in the meadow across from us and allowed me to snap a few pictures.



A little later, a nice black bear starts coming into the water. However, this time, my wife is fiddling with stuff in her pack. He catches her movement and backtracks so we only see him for about 30 seconds. Still a cool sight. I ask her if seeing the bear makes her nervous. She replies, "You never seem nervous about them so I don't think I need to be." I laugh to myself because I would probably be wise to have more fear about bears as the previously mentioned video demonstrates.

We stay above the wallow until around 2PM, hoping something will get thirsty or curious and come back down. We hear an occasional bugle both above and below us. I conclude (rightly or wrongly, we'll never know) that the bugle below us is likely another hunter as it seems to be coming from downwind of us. However, no other hunters appear. At 2, I go down, hang a game camera, dig out the wallow spot, make a makeshift dam with rocks, logs, etc. in hopes of improving the spot for the days ahead, and then we head out.



My "Improved Wallow"

We make it back to the truck about 4 and go into town for an amazing Sonic burger, tots and drink. May have been the best burger I have had in years. (Yes, I was really hungry!)

She encourages me to go back out without her, but the places I want to go are too far to get to that late in the day, and I know I have the rest of the next week to hit it hard, so we go back to the hotel, enjoy the hot tub and call it an early night.

Saturday the weather report calls for rain all day. I know that all day rains are rare, so I tell her I will wake up at 4, look at the radar and decide what we will do. Figured we could get a hunt in at some point in the day, just not sure when. At 4, the rain is still a ways off, so we get up, get all our stuff out of the hotel (we are spending Saturday night in the tent) and head up to my easy spot.

We get to the meadow just before first light. We hear a couple bugles from their usual place north of us across the boundary but nothing from the direction where I sometimes call bulls into the big meadow, so we head to my little hole in the oak brush. We hear a few more bugles, but it is eerily quiet. No wind, no bugles, no crows, just a few small birds. However, the fog is below us and it is a beautiful morning to enjoy the quiet woods.

About 9:30, I say, "Let's call it," so we pack up and head down the hill. Couldn't have timed it any better as we had no sooner climbed into the truck when the sky opens, and the rain starts to fall. I had enough wet on Tuesday and my wife hates being cold and wet, so I concede the day. We drive to the next town over, hit Walmart, get a good Mexican food lunch and then take a drive through some higher country looking for color change. The aspens have just started to turn, and the clouds are just high enough for a beautiful drive. I will admit part of me knows it is a great day to be out between the rains. It is cool and the mule deer are all out beside the highway, so I know the elk are out as well.

Sunday morning, my alarm goes off at 4:15—not the one on my phone—the one in my bladder. (I'm sure every guy over 50 knows exactly what I'm talking about.) I go out of the tent to take care of business, and to my dismay, it is still raining, well misting at least. Crap! I'm pretty much done with being wet after Tuesday. At first, I crawl back in my sleeping bag and seriously considered skipping the morning hunt to see my wife off, but she prods me saying, "You know you'll regret it."

I am once again on the trail to my deep spot at 5AM. I hustle and blow through the first meadow in the dark, only stopping briefly in case a bull wants to bugle and head up to the wallow, and then on up into the lower edge of the meadow. Sure enough, when I am about ¼ mile away, I start hearing the symphony of bugles that makes September special.

As I get to the edge of the meadow, I give a couple short cow calls that are immediately answered by calf chirps and a calf running out of the timber straight at me. Obviously, his mother has ditched him, and he is not a happy camper. I have to stop calling because I don't want him in my lap in case there is a bull around. The calf keeps pacing back and forth about 15 yards from me chirping every few seconds as if to say "Mommy! Mommy! Where are you?"

After about a minute later, a second calf comes out from behind and above me and the first calf calms down. I hit a couple hot call calls and get a bugle from the direction from which the second calf came down. I keep hammering the hot cow call. A minute or two later a cow appears and both calves immediately go to her. The bull is now responding every time I call, and his bugles tell me he is getting more and more fired up. I use my range finder to identify distances around me and have a pretty good sense he's about to come in.

Finally, I hear him bugle in a way that I have learned through the years means he is coming. I know it in my bones, but for some inexplicable reason, I decide that I need to be on the uphill side of the oak brush I am against instead of the downhill side. I have no idea why, but I start moving around the back of the bush to get to the other side when I hear hooves and see a bull locking up 30 yards in front of me with the oaks blocking any chance I have to get off a shot. He's seen my movement and has me pinned down.

"CRAP!" I can't believe I did that. I knew he was coming. If I hadn't of moved, he would have continued down the middle of the meadow and a cow call would have stopped him at 25 yards broadside for an easy shot. But no, I needed to be on the other side of the bush. We stand in a stare down for about a minute before he decides to back away.

I then give him some pleading cow calls, and he looks my way very interested, but without seeing a cow, isn't coming. He, the cow and the two calves then proceed to eat and hang out in the meadow at 127 yards for the next fifteen minutes. He tries to mount the cow on one occasion, but she obviously isn't ready and spurns his advances. Oh, well, at least I got to see him up close, hear him bugle 20 or more times, and take some long-range pics of him with my phone. Ugh!

Here they are in the meadow:



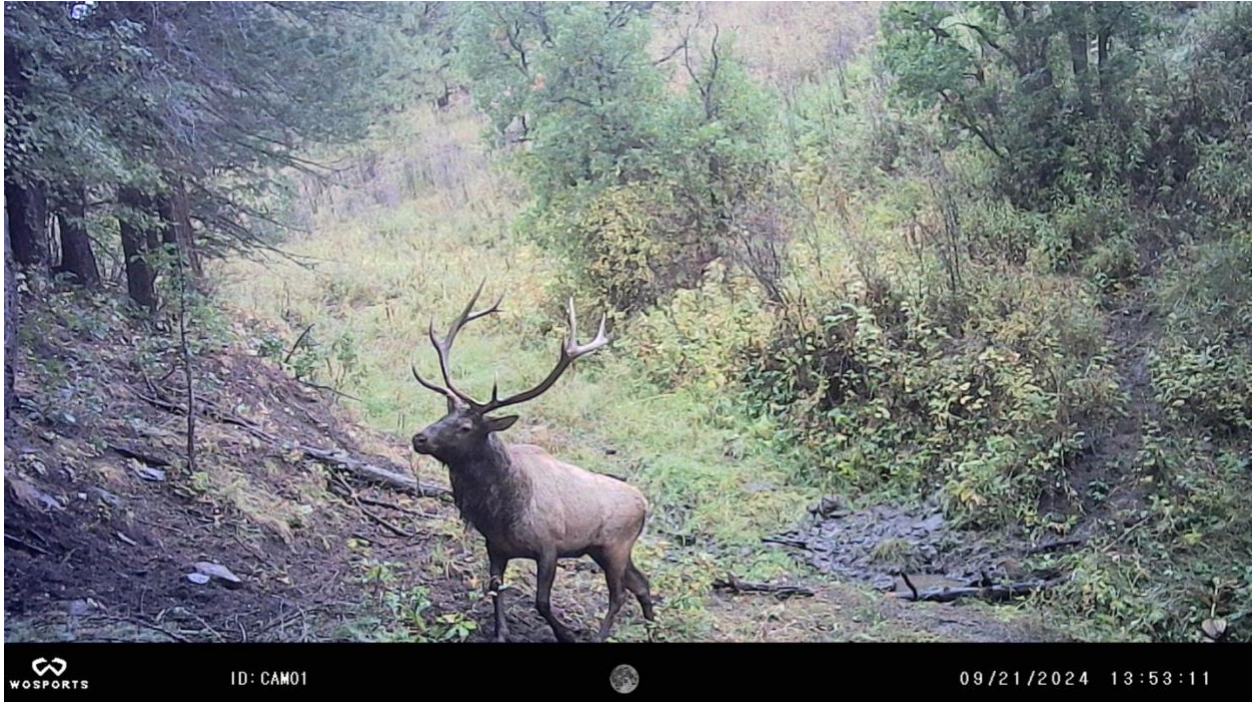
6 X 6 at 127 Yards After My Screw Up With The Oak Brush

Once they finally leave, I decide to backtrack to the wallow in the hopes something else will be thirsty or curious. Again, numerous bugles—not as many as Friday, but enough to keep me encouraged and entertained. On my way back to the wallow, I swap out the SD card and sure enough there are pics of several bulls, including one really nice one since we were there on Friday. Despite blowing a second chance at a 6 X 6, I'm feeling good about my chances to finally fill a Colorado OTC tag.

However, nothing comes into the wallow that morning and I have a hard time sitting it because quite honestly, I am freezing. This steep north facing hillside stays at least 10 degrees cooler than the rest of the area. You can feel the temperature drop when you step into it from the meadow or the opposite side. I am also dealing with wet clothes, boots, etc., and I didn't bother bringing my jacket because it still has not fully dried out.

I sit on the wallow until around noon when, to my dismay, I see a guy hiking through the meadow across from the wallow. I say hiking because he doesn't have a bow or a muzzle loader, but he does have a pack that looks like it has stuff in it. What? I cow call at him, he stops and looks at me waving at him and appears to give hand signals of "Sorry, but I have to go this way." I attempt to signal back, "Fine, do what you have to do." It is public land after all.

About 15 minutes later, I start hearing voices coming from the meadow and begin putting the pieces together in my head. Sure enough, I head up to the meadow to see the hiker and another guy standing over a carcass in the top of the meadow that I hadn't seen in the excitement of the morning. (about 50 yards to the right of the previous picture) Turns out Saturday evening his buddy had shot the 6 X 5 with a broken brow tine that I had on my game camera.



While of course, I'm frustrated someone else is "in my spot," I can't do anything but tip my hat to anyone in this deep who gets the job done. I congratulate him and help out by showing them a better way back to the main trail (not going down through the nasty creek bottom), carrying the head and horns part way, and giving him the phone number of the rancher who owns the adjacent property to see if he would allow them to save two miles each way by packing out through his place. (Still can't believe I share that last bit of info. However, I am afraid he is going to kill himself as his friend only has time to make one trip and it is going to take him at least three more. I can see he is already struggling.)

I go back to my wallow for an hour or so but decide it would be better to clear out as I don't think anything else will come down after all the ruckus of the morning. By now, I've gone from incredibly excited about my chances to being utterly discouraged thinking, "I've blown two opportunities, and now someone has killed a bull in my deep spot." The worst part, however, is that I have begun doubting myself. The little help I give the successful hunter has me questioning my physical ability to get a bull out of here. The bull he shot has a huge body, and even moving the little bit I do, takes more out of me than I expect. The 3.5 mile hike back to my truck seems especially long and the neuropathy in my feet and tendinitis in my Achillis just magnifies my concerns. I end up just going back to camp, getting warmed up, eating a bite and crawling in my sleeping bag before it is even fully dark.

Monday, I go back to my “easy spot.” I know I can get an elk out of here by myself. I start hitting the hot cow call around 7 and hear something coming up the draw from the north through the oaks. I don’t see horns or hear a bugle, but I’m confident it is a bull coming to my hot cow calls. It gets to within 60 yards and then suddenly does a 180 and goes back where it had come from as the morning thermals were carrying my scent straight down the draw towards him. Good thing for him, (and, I think ultimately for me) he got my wind because at this point, after the disappointment and disillusionment of the day before, I would have shot any legal elk.

Monday afternoon, I hike up to a water hole 1.5 miles in. I’ve hunted it in the past but have never seen anything. It is in a great spot and everything in my 35 years of elk hunting experience tells me it should be productive. However, the water hole is dry this year, even with the rains of the past week, but it is also at the bottom of a large basin and has several major trails converging on its edge, so I figure it is as good of a place as any to sit, watch and listen. I do some calling but not much. I’m hoping a bull will fire off on his own and then be more responsive to my calls. At 5:44, I hear a bugle from below me. Could be a hunter, though I’ve never encountered anyone else in this area, so I believe it’s real. Over the next 10 minutes, he bugles three more times, at least once in response to my calls. I have a good wind at the moment, but I know anytime now, it is going to change and the evening thermals are going to send my scent directly his way. Sure enough, I feel the breeze change direction and I hear nothing but crickets the rest of the evening.

The good news, however, is that the time sitting on Monday and the relatively easy day of hiking, gives me a boost in moral. I take some extra time on the way back to camp to drive to cell service, check in with my wife and call a good friend and lifelong hunting partner who reminds me that my best chance at a bull is back in my deep spot, and that I’ll find a way to get it out if I kill one. Therefore, Tuesday morning, I’m up and at it early.

When I enter the first meadow off the top, I get a very strong whiff of bull elk. A bull has trashed a tree on the edge of the meadow within the past few hours. I think briefly about waiting there until first light but decide to press on to the wallow. I make it there right at first light. I don’t hear any bugles, so I move up to the bottom edge of the meadow and finally start hearing them in the distance. I hit a hot cow sequence, and it is nonstop bugles until about 8:00 and then a fair amount until 8:30. There are at least two bulls above me, likely just past the boundary. Another bull fires off a few times below, but he is downwind and I’m fearful he could be a hunter.

At 8:30, I decide to slip back to my blind. It’s cold again and breezy. I am dressed better, but still feeling the cold as I worked up a good sweat hiking in. Again, I am almost out of real estate and plan on sitting tight on my wallow.

At 8:33 I hear something across the draw, and I see a hunter move past me headed to toward the bugles, right up into their bedding areas. I cow call to him, he looks my way as I’m waving, but he just keeps going. There isn’t any way he doesn’t see me.

Crap! Now we know why the elk have moved on to the next unit. On top of me calling in the 6 x 6 and the guy killing the broken brow tine bull, we have the Texas boys (There’s a truck with Texas plates at the trail head that hasn’t moved in several days and later that afternoon, I find pictures on my game camera of two different hunters, so I start thinking of

as the “Texas boys”) pushing up into their bedding areas. Now I’m almost positive he is the bugle I have been hearing below me.

A few moments later, I hear a sound that must be a bear woofing below. I don’t think he’s happy with the hunter’s scent and/or possibly mine. I’m guessing he wants to get on up to the gut pile.

I move on up towards the top of the meadow, hoping to catch up to the other hunter and plead with him to stay out of their bedding area rather than push everything past our boundary. Of course, I don’t see him, so I decide to just spend some time there. After all, my game camera doesn’t have any daytime activity since I was there on Sunday afternoon. It does, however, have nice bull at 8:29 PM on Sunday which gives me hope there is still something in the area.



I’m thinking that maybe I can call one back from across the boundary in the evening. However, I stay until sundown without seeing or hearing anything so I hunt my way back in the hopes that maybe something might be in the area where I saw the cows on my first day back and where the bull left his distinct scent last night. Unfortunately, the evening ends uneventfully, and I am even more discouraged than I was the day before.

However, early Tuesday afternoon, I had done an “Immanuel Prayer Journaling” activity. It is a process I have used for years that helps me connect with Jesus. I had poured out my frustration, my fears about being able to take care of an animal as well as some especially hard things I have been working through outside of hunting. Honestly, it was probably some of the most difficult emotional work I have done in years. I’ll spare you from the details, but I experienced a sense of Jesus joining me, right there on the hillside and bringing great comfort in a place of deep pain. I also sensed Him inviting me to meet Him in the very last corner of the meadow tomorrow morning. It felt like a very clear call, to be where the

meadow splits off to the north and gets narrow just before petering out. At this point, I don't think it will amount to much as I am sure the "Texas boys" have pushed the elk across the boundary, but I know if I follow His leading, He will meet me there and it will be good regardless of whether any elk show up.

Wednesday morning, I am on the trail about 4:45 and get to the bottom of the big meadow at first light. I take off my pack to put on some more clothes and get ready to move towards the finger of the meadow I feel Jesus has called me to when I look to the top of the main meadow and see an elk. At first, I think it is a cow but when I pull up my binos, I see horns. I think it is a raghorn but then, with a little more light, and when he turns his head, I can see he is at least a decent 5 X 5 and is in the same spot (127 yards away) as the bull in the picture from Monday. He has already looked my way several times, so I think he has seen some movement and is wary, but not vacating the area.

I nock an arrow and hit him with a couple of cow calls. He hardly even looks up. "Dude, what's wrong with you. It is September 25th, cows are in heat. You are by yourself, and you don't even bother to investigate?"

He moves about ten yards into a low spot, so I think, "Fine, you don't want to come to me, I'll put a stalk on you."

I slide on my butt, across 15-20 yards of wet grass (always a fun thing on a cold morning) until I have enough cover to get up and start moving towards him. I cut the distance down to about 75 yards and move in behind some oak brush. I briefly lose sight of him and think I am safe to move closer when I look up to see legs running off. I had lost sight of him, but he obviously sees or hears more of me than he is willing to tolerate.

"Oh well, I don't think he is a shooter this far in anyway."

I think momentarily about going back for my pack, but I am already halfway to the finger of the meadow so I move on up and that is when it the excitement really starts.

I break a few branches off a pine tree to hang my bow on with an arrow nocked and ready. I make some cow calls and get an occasional bugle response from the other side of the boundary. I ramp up my cow in heat sequence around 7:15 hoping to persuade a bull back to the meadow. I hear a cow call behind me. "Crap it's the guys from Texas." Sure enough, a minute or two later, I hear a bugle from the same direction. Now I'm positive it's the Texas boys.

I call more just to be sure and possibly to call them in so we can visit about a plan to stop messing each other up.

Another bugle: "Great they are serious." Then I hear huffing, a deep guttural huffing of a bull trying to breed a cow.

My initial thought is, "Wow! These Texas boys are getting creative." Then more huffing. Then almost a constant roar of huffing that goes on for at least a minute, maybe two. I'm finally getting the idea this is real.

Next, I hear branches breaking and rocks tumbling. OK, now I know for sure it is elk coming down the hillside as no hunters are that loud. It's real and it is happening now!

Limbs cracking, rocks rolling and a constant huffing for about two minutes. It seems like forever until I finally see three cows on the other side of the patch of oaks headed to my opening. Then, behind them, comes a strange, super tall horned bull pushing a fourth cow. They are on the other side of the brush and finally pop out into the opening at 30 yards. The

bull clears the brush as he is trying to mount the fourth cow. I draw but must wait for one of the first cows to clear from in front him. Finally, she takes a couple steps to clear him, and I let my arrow fly. The cows bolt and I start calling like a mad man. The bull seems confused but continues walking back up the hill they came down at a slow pace. I don't see him fall, don't hear any thrashing. However, through the openings in the oaks, I can see a good blood spot on his right side which is the entry point of my arrow.

Once catching my breath, I check my watch: 7:28. I leave my bow on the tree and go back to my pack. Here, I take my time to calm down, make notes in my phone and process what just happened. From what I could see, my shot is a little further back than I'd like, but height is perfect. I also can't picture if he was perfectly broadside, slightly quartering away or slightly quartering towards me. If he was slightly quartering away, it's a great shot. If broadside, I might have some lung but definitely liver. If quartering to me, it could be liver and possibly a gut shot. I am confident it's a clean pass through as I couldn't see my arrow, but I'm concerned about it being too far back, so I eat a bite and take my time before heading back the quarter mile back to look for my arrow, blood, etc.

At this point, I'm picturing him coming through the oaks and popping out in the open. He's kind of a funky bull. Super tall. I'm thinking he's either a 5 X 5 or a 6 X 6 and I know I have a heck of a lot of work ahead of me as I'm a long ways in.

I remember praying, "Jesus, help me. This was awesome, please don't let the enemy spoil it by not finding him."

At 8:10, I begin to slowly, quietly and carefully, examine the area where he was standing when I shot. However, I can't find my arrow, but I have found a little blood. I also realize I can't think straight now because my bladder is about to burst. While taking care of that issue, I look about ten feet to my left and see my arrow laying on the ground.



Examining it confirms it was a clean pass thru. I shoot the old-style big snuffer broadheads and in this case it is still very sharp, so I didn't hit anything solid, not even a rib. There is also only bright pink blood on the arrow and no sign of any gut material which is

encouraging. I'm seeing more blood now, and my first thought is it must be a liver hit. I will need to wait and be patient. I decide to stop, take off my thermals and give him extra time. The last thing I want to do is bump him and send him on a long death run.

About 9, after replaying every second over in my mind, I decide I will climb up to cell coverage, call my wife, my lifelong hunting partner, and possibly others to help pass the time and get additional perspectives.

The closest place I know of for cell coverage is up a gas line cut that runs parallel to the initial direction of the blood trail. I remember seeing the cows turn and go to the right and I assume he followed them. The gas line cut is to the left so I think it will be safe. However, about 100 yards on way up to find cell service, I get a strong whiff of bull elk. I look to my right and 10 yards away is my bull laying down under the oaks, looking right at me. Instinctually, I slowly pull an arrow from my quiver, nock it and proceed to put an arrow through both lungs. He struggles to stand up, but finally gets to his feet. I nock a third arrow and am ready to shoot again if he shows any inkling of taking a step. I can't believe how long he stands there. I debate about shooting again, but I can see blood pumping out his side and know he is a dead bull standing. I don't want to do anything to give him a burst of adrenaline and start him on a death run. Even with my many years of hunting, and having experienced it on at least three other occasions, it is still hard to watch an amazing creature breathe his last breath. Finally, he simply kneels and appears to peacefully give up.



When he lowers his head, I think he is done. I quickly snap the photo above and move towards him. Suddenly, he starts thrashing about and rolling down the hill. I have to jump out of the way to not get rolled over on or gouged by his horns. An oak catches his antlers, stops him from rolling any further and it is finally over. I take a knee, a few deep breaths and thank God for such an amazing experience.



I am surprised that he is only a 4 X 4, but I am not the least bit disappointed. He isn't a 4 X 4 raghorn, but instead a mature herd bull who has great mass and good length.



In fact, I am more thrilled with him than the trophy 6 X 6 that hangs in my basement. This is a bull I worked multiple years for, put everything I learned in 35 years of chasing elk,

hunted solo, and now am going to have to bone out by myself and possibly even pack out by myself.

It is a hunt where patience and persistence has paid off. Where my hard work and God's blessing have come together.

It was over 90 minutes between my first shot and when I accidentally found him. I think if I had gone up the gas line cut any sooner, he would have run off, and if I found him, it would have been an even longer pack out. I snap a few pictures, hike up to cell coverage and call the rancher, my wife, my lifelong hunting partner and a friend I know who is currently unemployed and lives a few hours away who thankfully agrees to come help me pack it out. I leave a voicemail for the rancher and follow it up with a text, praying he gets back to me so I can access through his property.

Now the real work begins. I know I am far enough in, even with the rancher's permission to drive on his property, that I want to bone him out completely. I nick my left index finger in first couple minutes. A little pressure and some super glue, and I am back to cutting. It's probably a good thing as the cut reminds me to slow down and be extra careful. I am on my own. I have no cell coverage, and I am a long way from help. I'm glad I have six game bags in my kill kit as it allows me to not fight them as much and makes them probably average 40-45# each.



I move the meat bags away from the carcass to some oak brush that is both shaded now and will be in the morning. Then I hike the almost 4 miles out. Once back at the truck, my watch says I have hiked 10.39 miles for the day with 1528' of ascent. The hiking has been the easy part; cutting up a large bull by myself, not so much. In fact, I was quickly reminded about the difference between cutting up a young bull or cow and cutting up an old bull. Old bulls have incredibly thick neck hide. I typically use a snap off razor blade knife for the initial skinning work. It allows me to set a proper depth and just zip a line down the back from the top of the neck to the base of the tail and then skin from there. Well, that knife was not going through the neck of this boy. It was super thick and tough as boot leather.

Thankfully my hunting partner had given me a Benchmade knife a few years ago with which I could crank up the pressure.

Since he was an old bull, I didn't bother to quarter him. I just started cutting the muscle groups off and putting them in the game bags. I also spent most of the time either sitting on my butt or laying beside the bull as I whittled away. I took it slow, but bit by bit got as much meat off the bones as I could and trusted the shade and the breeze to do the job of cooling the meat down properly.

I had my saw with me, so I was going to just cut off the antlers, but I couldn't do it. He was a herd bull that I called down a mountain and took on the best hunt of my life. I am going to do a European skull mount. He will be a center piece to my barn when he's done soaking and the skull is clean!

Thankfully, my friend was able to drive down (something that was never in question in my mind after talking with him because I know his wife and know there is no way she would tell him not to come) and first thing the next morning we drove to the rancher's gate, and after some confusion over which gate was his and why the combination he gave me wasn't working, we were hiking into the canyon to retrieve the meat and the antlers.



We were able to get the meat out in two trips, and actually got the head a little more than halfway, on the second one. However, I made the decision to drop the head before the long hill that climbs out of the canyon and just get the meat up to the coolers and on ice. When we got the last bag of meat in the cooler, I told my friend, "I'm done! I'll come back for the head in the morning." Wisely, he said, "Let's just rest a few minutes and then make that decision." He was right, we took a break, then headed back for the head. We sat down in

the shade and I took a little weed pulling tool I picked up at the local grocery store the night before and started digging the brain out so I could transport the head back to Kansas.

The hike down to the head was a piece of cake and we spent about an hour sitting in the shade while I trimmed off more meat off the head and did the surprisingly not as gross of a job as I thought it would be of digging the brain out of the skull. By 3PM we were in town getting drinks at McDonalds and headed to get a shower. It was quite a day but it felt incredibly satisfying. Despite what I felt like on Sunday, I was able to handle a bull by myself, and even if my friend had not been able to drive down, I think I could have gotten it out. I would have done my first load Wednesday evening, three more on Thursday and then back for the head on Friday. It would have been a misogi (see Michael Easter's *Comfort Crisis*), but it would have been worth it. I didn't break his rule #1 "Don't die," but I certainly pushed myself further than I would have thought I could with my bad feet, bad Achilles' tendon and more years on me than I care to admit.

When back at my truck, I texted my wife and a few of my guys "Done". It was the most satisfying hunt of my life. Not my biggest bull or highest scoring antlers, but the hardest, and smartest I have ever hunted. A hunt that ended with calling in a herd bull down a steep hillside, hearing him huff the whole way down, watching him push his cows with him, try to mount one right in front of me, taking the shot and then deducing correctly that I had made a liver shot, but then getting to finish him from close range. What an amazing hunt.

Thank you Immanuel!