

My 2026 hunt begins under a tight timeline: my mom is scheduled for a pacemaker, so I only have one week to hunt.

I reach my campsite around 3 p.m. and quickly set up in the rain, hoping to make a short run toward my primary hunting area, glass from the ridge, and stash extra water for the day I tag out.

However, when I get to the ridge, I see two small wisps of smoke coming up from the canyon next to mine. I have one bar of cell coverage so I call it in and hope the wet ground will allow it to burn itself out. I don't see or hear any elk, but I am still about $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile from my main area, so I am not concerned.



I get back to camp, eat a quick bite and try to sleep. My alarm is set for 4, but I am awake at 3:40 and get an early start. There is a sweet meadow about $\frac{1}{2}$ mile before my wallow where I have had numerous elk encounters in the past, so I stop there before first light and listen. I don't hear anything, so I give a location bugle, but no response, so I press on towards my wallow and upper meadow.

As I walk, there is one or two-day old elk poop on every trail, so I'm super excited about the week. At first light, I hear a bugle in front of me and my confidence grows even more. I continue to ease up through the canyon expecting to see or hear elk at any moment. I set up and do some calling at the base of the large meadow, a spot I've called in bulls in previous seasons, but nothing comes or replies. As the sun starts to hit the meadow, I move on up to the boundary, and sure enough, there's a bull bugling right where there is always a bull bugling—about $\frac{1}{4}$ mile past where I can legally go. He and I have a conversation, but he isn't willing to come my way.

I'm thinking, "No big deal. It's only September 2nd, so it's not surprising I'm not hearing much and there's plenty of sign." I continue calling and keep my eyes peeled in all directions for any bulls coming in silently. Finally, around 9, the bull stops responding so I ease back down to my perch over my wallow.



There are only a few tracks around the wallow, but with yesterday's rain, I'm not too concerned. I am just glad that in a drought year the wallow has some water and mud in it. Being my first day in the woods, I have a difficult time sitting. I am antsy but determined to stay until 6PM as I have had elk and bears show up here at all hours of the day. However, this day is as quiet as I've ever heard in my canyon. The good news, however, is no other hunters have come by, so I believe I have it to myself. However, about 3, I start hearing a helicopter down at the base of my canyon. Man, those things are loud in a tight space. I'm glad they are working the fire but surprised how close it seems and assume it has the animals on high alert and sitting tight. I make myself sit there until about 5:00 and then I still hunt my way back to the meadow below my exit, make a few calls and watch it until 5:45. Nada. I don't see anything moving or hear any elk sounds. All I can hear is the blasted helicopter, so I hike on out to see what I can learn about the fire. Sure enough, the daytime winds have pushed the two small wisps of smoke into dozens of flame points with smoke engulfing an entire hillside. I watch the helicopter a bit and then hike back to camp. Day one is uneventful elk wise, but at the same time, a day like I've never had in the elk woods.

Day two is pretty much a repeat of day one. Up at 4 and on the trail by 4:30. I'm halfway anticipating an "area closed due to fire" sign at the trailhead. Thankfully there isn't one, so I head on in. However, when I'm up top and able to see the area the lightning hit yesterday, I see the fire has grown significantly.



(How the fire looked hiking in on day 2. My area is $\frac{3}{4}$ mile to the left)

I continue on only this time I skip the first meadow and make it to my perch above the wallow by first light. I spend a few minutes listening but don't hear anything. I ease up a couple hundred yards to my calling spot at the base of the meadow. I like this spot because it is hidden at the bottom of a finger meadow. From my calling spot, elk must come around a bend and get within 50 yards before they can see what is making the noise. I have been calling about five minutes when I hear a bugle from the hillside above and to the left of me. He seems interested in my calls, and sure enough, I look up and see two cows and a calf coming on a string towards me. I'm guessing the bull is close behind them.

At about 60 yards out, they stop and start looking around. I give them some more high-pitched pleas, and they look like they want to come, but something has them nervous. I see the lead cow stick her nose in the air at the same time I feel an ever so slight breeze on the back of my neck. I realize that the morning thermal, that had been so steady, has suddenly changed direction. Crap! Sure enough, they make a hard left turn and head in the opposite direction. They don't bark and they don't run, so they didn't get a full hit of human scent, but enough they aren't going to investigate any further. I never get a glimpse of the bull.

While the wind has shifted, it is still enough of a cross wind for me to ease up to the boundary edge and try to call the bull that always hangs out on the other side. I hope it is early enough this time to get him more interested. However, when I get to the saddle next to the boundary, he doesn't respond. I sit down, eat a bite, drink some water and debate what to do next. Finally, about 8:30, I hear him bugling about ½ mile down the draw, so I start a conversation. At one point, he comes within 100 yards and may even be on my side of the boundary, but I can't see him. While my calling is directed to the bull who is talking, I am constantly scanning for others sneaking in silently. There isn't a cloud in the sky so the sun heats things up quickly and by 9AM, he has moved back to his usual place and only responds occasionally, with weak bedded bugles. The wind is starting to pick up and began to shift directions rapidly, so I know I need to get out of there before he also smells me.

I spend most of the day sitting in my perch above my wallow. About 2PM, I start hearing a helicopter and think, "Here we go again." There are no new tracks in the wallow, and I'm convinced the helicopter is sending the elk to other water and wallowing places, so I hike out, go into town for a shower and to call my wife.

I hunt the evening in my "easy spot" where I shot my bull last year. I have a place I've cut out of the oaks that overlooks a large basin in the adjacent area. That unit has very limited tags which makes this spot always at least entertaining from a hearing bugles perspective. Not this night, however. It seems like it is far enough away from the helicopter to not be an issue, but maybe not, or maybe it's just too early in the rut.

I decide to hunt a couple other spots on day three, in part because of the frustration over the fire and helicopter, and in part because they are easier to get to, and my body can use a break. Again,

no elk sightings or bugles in either place. The evening does at least have a mule deer and a coyote come to the water hole I am sitting just before dark. Unfortunately, I get careless with too much movement, and the coyote bugs out before I can get a shot off.

By now, I am starting to get frustrated. However, the mountain is drying up and my perch, that I've sat on for many years now, is 35 yards above (steep enough it requires shooting with my 20-yard pin) the highest water in the canyon. Historically, there have always been elk there, and I think there's a chance that even the elk on the other side of my boundary sometimes come down to wallow and water here, so I once again get up at 4 and hike to my back corner.

A little before first light, I drop my extra water, bow sling, umbrella and rain gear off at my perch to lighten my pack and ease up to my calling place at the edge of the meadow and decide to just sit, watch and listen. Almost immediately, I see three cows sprint across the meadow about 75 yards above me. I give a calf in distress call, and they stop just inside the trees on the other side of the meadow. As I'm glassing them, I see at least five additional cows, but no signs of a bull. With no way of moving any closer without being seen, I decide to give a bull calling cows bugle in the hopes the herd bull is close. The cows move a little closer to investigate, but don't leave the protection of the trees. I don't see or hear any signs of a bull, and they move on up into the oaks on the steep and thick hillside.

Once I'm sure they have moved completely out and nothing else is trailing behind them, I slip over to their side of the meadow and consider trying to trail them. However, the hill they went up is a nasty one and with everything dried up, I know the only thing I would do is push them if I follow anymore. Therefore, I decide to move on up to the edge of my boundary and see if the bull is in his usual place.

When I'm about 150 yards from where I usually call to the bulls outside my boundary, I make a decision I figure I will regret. At about a 45-degree angle from where the cows went is a gas line cut that goes almost straight up the hill. I know I have cell coverage there, so I decide to climb it to see how far I can get before hitting the boundary. Sure enough, from the top, I can see a long way in three directions. I sit down, text my wife and start thinking. "Where are they watering?" I pull up the topo layer on my OnX and sure enough ½ mile away, just past my boundary and up on the top is a dirt tank. I switch to the aerial layer and can see that it is a deep tank with a large dam. I get a compass bearing on it and sure enough, from my high point, I can see a clump of trees where the tank must be located.

I then remember finding a major highway through the oaks, just below the canyon rim, and sure enough, it is a straight line from where I saw the cows, through my highway waypoint to the tank. That's where they are watering, especially now that the helicopter is making so much noise in my canyon. About that time, I hear the bull go off in his usual spot on the other side of my boundary, so I start up a conversation.

He seems more responsive and more interested today than previously so I set up on the edge of the gas line cut knowing if he comes, he will pop out within 20 yards, likely head on. He seems to like the fact that I'm higher up and closer to the bedding areas and continues to sound a little closer with every bugle. I decide to drop down a couple hundred yards for a better set up and to make it easier for him to get to me, when I hear something coming from the other side of my boundary.

Unfortunately, it isn't the sounds of hooves, but the sound of a vehicle proceeding to drive up the closed road that runs right on the other side of the boundary. I never get a good look at it, but I know the gate is locked at the bottom on the other side so I can only assume it is some sort of government vehicle. Regardless, the bull goes silent. I hang out there for an hour or so hoping he might try to come check out what the calls were about, but at 10:15, I slip back down to my perch over the wallow. On my way back, I look up and see a beautiful cinnamon colored black bear meandering his way towards me. He comes to about 25 yards before turning up into the oaks. Unfortunately, my phone is buried in my pocket and by the time I got it out and camera app open, he has slipped into the brush.

When I get to the wallow, I find it still has a couple inches of water, but, once again, no fresh tracks. We have had several days without a drop of rain, so I'm still hopeful something might come down for a drink or for a roll in the mud.

I journal for a bit, continue thinking about the water tank above the canyon and where I have seen cows the past two mornings and come up with tomorrow's plan. I go back to the meadow and find a spot 35 yards off the trail I have seen them use two mornings and create a natural blind, clear some shooting lanes and feel hopeful about tomorrow morning.

By now, my brain and body have slowed down into what I call my mountain mode. I'm able to return and stay at my perch until 6:45 and then still hunt my way to the exit meadow. Once again, I climb out of my canyon without seeing or hearing any hint of elk. My frustration level is growing, but at least I have a plan for the morning.

Day 5 and I feel the clock is ticking as I need to be on the road driving home in two days. I'm down to two mornings and two evenings and the last evening is somewhat questionable to get home in time to help my mom with what she will need. I'm up a little before 4 and on the trail by 4:20. I want to be at my ambush site before first light and it's a full 3-mile, mostly off trail, hike. I make a quick stop at my wallow perch to unload a little weight, catch my breath and at least slow down my perspiration. I get to my ambush spot about 10 minutes before legal shooting light.

The woods are quiet, but I am hopeful. The water hole on the rim must be where the elk in the area are drinking and there is no way there are that many cows without a bull. The morning thermal is coming down the hill as it should be, and I'm 35 yards below the trail the cows have used both mornings that I have been able to see into this meadow. Surely, they will be back and have a bull in tow. I decide to play it silent and hope to simply ambush the herd as they go by. Tick

Tock. Tick Tock. . . It's amazing how long the last ten minutes of night holds on. I keep looking at my bow sight as legal shooting and seeing my pins almost always occurs simultaneously unless I'm in dark timber. Finally, I start to be able to see my green pin and then a minute or two later, I can see all of them. I just need the herd to appear.

I love first light in the woods. The clouds this morning are that perfect combination where they allow enough light in for many colors, but not enough wash things away. I have a clear view to the east and watch in awe as morning does what I believe only a God who loves beauty can create. I find myself going back and forth from scanning the meadow to my West for elk and looking back at the gorgeous sky to my East. About forty minutes later, I get my first glimpse of the sun as it begins to creep over the ridge. While I hate the fact that it will heat things up and shut down the elk movements, I'm at least momentarily relieved as I have started to shiver and the sun feels delightful. Unfortunately, there are no elk in sight, and I haven't heard a peep all morning. Again, I'm the only one in this area. The past two years, I've had other hunters to compete with and still had lots of elk here, but this year, they are gone. Each day as I've hiked the trails, I've paid careful attention to the sign, and each day every bit of sign I see is just another day older. Absolutely zero new sign that any elk other than ones I have seen have been in the canyon since I arrived. Did I push them out on day one or were they already mostly gone? I don't know what to think at this point.

I go ahead and ease up to the gas line cut by the boundary, make some half-hearted calls at the bulls on the other side and decide to just hang out there for a while. I hear a few bugles from a half mile away in the direction I can't go and begin to reconcile myself with the fact that I may be going home with an unfilled tag this year. I even begin to scheme about a way I could come back for the last few days of the month, though I know that would be difficult.

About 10:30, I head back down to my wallow perch, pull out my phone and begin to journal. I have a form of journaling, called "Immanuel Prayer Journaling" that I have done and taught others to do for many years. It is a way of connecting with Jesus interactively that has been incredibly impactful for me and others. If you are interested, I have a simple guide for it at www.newhope4si.com/ipj Anyway, here is what I wrote:

Frustrating morning. Was at my ambush spot before first light and sat there for about an hour. Didn't see or hear anything.

Climbed up the gas line cut and started hearing a bugle from the other side of my boundary. He was interested but wasn't coming that far.

Now I need to decide if I'm coming back up here this evening. I know that bull is in earshot, but would he come over? I've not tried to call up here in the evening. Would evening make a difference? There is just no sign of any elk in my usual area.

Jesus, thank you for my supportive wife who lets me come do this and takes good care of mom at home.

Darrell, yes, you have a good one. Her heart to serve and care for people is beautiful.

Darrell, we see you sitting in your perch frustrated. Seeing the amount of one week old sign is understandably maddening for you. The elk were here and while the helicopter explains some of it, it is understandable why it doesn't make sense to you. No, you didn't push the large herd out your first time in, it was something else.

Darrell, we hear you wondering about what to do this evening. We also hear you going back to yesterday's thought, "you haven't promised me an elk, but you have promised your presence." We also hear you wrestling with that, in part because you really want an elk, and in part because you aren't satisfied with our connection yesterday. We hear the frustration that you tried to connect and there were some good thoughts, ideas, etc. but nothing overtly and clearly from us for you personally.

Darrell, we feel how big this is for you. You lead others to connect with me in ways that seem deeply felt and transformational while your own connection often feels tentative, vague or made up. Again, trust what you explained to Karl many years ago, just because you don't feel it deeply doesn't mean it's not from us. Keep pursuing us and you will continue to see us at work.

Darrell, we feel how big this is for you. You hear Eldridge and others speak of hearing from us and it sounds so clear. We get why that's confusing for you. However, many hear you talk about connecting with us and in their minds, it seems just as clear to you.

We are always glad to be with you and are delighted you stopped to connect before heading out.

Go to the oaks tonight. We'll meet you there.

I feel like I made that last part up, but it is what popped in my mind when I expressed confusion about where to hunt.

So I hike my way back to camp, drive to where I can get a shower, call my wife and then head back for the evening.

I wrestle with where to go. I have had tremendous success calling bulls from their beds in the late afternoons in the past and I have not called in my back area except in the morning. A very large part of me wants to go back and give it one last evening shot.

I decide to trust my journaling and head to the oaks. However, on my way there, I stop at another trailhead and visit with a guy sitting on his tailgate. His buddy shot a bull that morning and asked him to meet him there to help him pack it out. He shows me pictures his friend sent him, and I know exactly where he's at. He shot a bull but has pics of a larger 6 X 6 and has been in elk every morning and evening. It also makes sense because the place he is at is on the other side of the "Helicopter wall." I.e. it's where I have been thinking the elk might be that are often in my drainage. My guess is they went down low before or during the storm that started the fire but haven't been able to get back to their other area because the helicopter and fire crews are blocking the way. Everything within me wants to just grab my gear and head up to that area. However, I tell my people all the time, when you get a sense of something God calls you to, do it, even if it doesn't make the most sense.

So, I drive the rest of the way to another trailhead and head in. I get to my spot in the oaks about 6PM. I'm seeing some sign and feeling a little hopeful, but far from confident. I make it about 50 yards past where I had a bull come head on to me at 10 yards last year, sit down, clear a lane back towards the highway trail that runs from the upper bedding area down to the lake below, knock an arrow, give a couple calf calls, and then pull out my phone to journal again. Here is what I wrote:

Jesus, thank you for this time and for the reminder of last year's encounter.

Darrell, we are glad you hold the encounter with fondness. There was a time you would have just continued to "what if" and "can't believe I didn't draw when he was coming down" yourself to death and not enjoyed it for the amazing encounter it was.

Darrell, we see you sitting in a spot you have fond memories of. While you didn't see an elk in your time sitting across from where you are now, you enjoyed your time in the oaks. (Several years ago, I spent multiple afternoons sitting on the opposite side of this trail)

Darrell, we hear you second guessing yourself about sensing this is where we called you tonight. You heard correctly and we delight in your willingness to come up here by faith. Again, the promise is not an elk, but our presence. We hear you thinking "but an elk would certainly confirm that I did hear from you,". We get that, but we have called you to walk by faith and not by sight.

We also hear you wondering if you should just pack up tomorrow and head home. You certainly can and that would be ok. However, Deb and your mom have both released you to stay so you can also give it one more shot tomorrow.

Darrell, we feel how big this for you. You want to trust what you think you hear from us. You do a great job with that in your counseling and especially your Immanuel Prayer work with others. We know you long to have greater clarity on that personally. We hope you can feel our delight in you acting by faith tonight when the thought of going to the other places was pressing on you as well.

Darrell, we have compassion for your weakness. We know the place with your mom is a hard one. She does and says things with Deb that she doesn't to you and that often puts you in a difficult place. We also understand the struggle you have right now of looking towards the freedom you will have when she passes. That is understandable and does not make you a bad human or even a bad son. You are loving and caring for her well and we know you will continue to.

Darrell, we are big enough to see you through this stage of life. Stay present and allow yourself to enjoy the blessings of now and don't get focused on what could be. It's ok dream and even make some plans, but don't waste the todays while looking for a someday.

Then I put my phone down and made a couple more calf calls.

About 6:45, I hear a bugle from straight above me. Can't be more than 150 yards away. The oaks are thick and the wind has been blowing all afternoon, so he must be close. I hit him with a couple calls, and he immediately responds with another bugle. I hit him again and he bugles back a third time. I grab my bow, attach my release and get ready.

Sure enough, I hear hooves and see a flash almost simultaneously as two cows and a calf come flying by me at racehorse speed. The trail I'm sitting 15 yards from is an almost perfectly straight trail from the top of the canyon all the way to the lake and they are on a dead run to water. Ok, where's he at?

Then I hear more hooves, so I draw my bow and three more cows go flying by. "Come on boy! Where are you?" Then a few seconds later, I hear even more and see horns flying down the same trail. I hit a hard cow call with the diaphragm in my mouth, and he stops on a dime right in front of me. Almost as scripted, there's a three-inch oak five yards in front of me that is perfectly covering his vitals. I lean to my left, clear the tree and let the arrow fly. I see the lightednock stop at the top of his shoulder and immediately think, and I believe even say out loud, "Crap! Crap! Jesus, you gave me my opportunity, and I blew it" as I think my shot is too high.

The bull whirls, makes a hard right turn, goes around a clump of oaks and presumably heads back up the canyon. While all but kicking myself for what I believe is a high shot, I hear him on the other side of the oaks. I'm wondering if my shot is better than I think or if he is working on trying to get the arrow out.

I force myself to stay seated and give him a few minutes by satellite texting my wife, my long-time hunting partner and a couple others "Just hit a big bull. Hit him high. Don't feel good about it, but I can hear him not too far away. Pray for me."

I am starting to run out of daylight, so I decide to ease over to where I last heard him. I come around the oaks, up a small rise, following what I think might be his tracks, when I see him piled up in front of me only about 50 yards from the trail he came down. Guess my shot was better

than I thought. He is a beautiful chocolate horned 6 X 6. I let out a shout and then just keep repeating "Thank you, Jesus! Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!"



At this point, I'm putting everything together. I remember that when he came down, he seemed almost black, and now I can see he must have bugled from a wallow up above me as he is muddy from horns to hooves. The light is getting low, it's starting to sprinkle, and I'm by myself, so I hang my bow and pack on a tree, prop my phone up in a locust bush and try to get a few pictures. Wish I would have thought to have positioned my headlamp for additional light as my pictures come out very poor.



With pictures taken, I feel a deep desire to talk to my wife and remember that in previous years, I've gotten cell coverage just a little bit higher in the canyon, so I head out to climb a little higher. As I'm leaving I look at my bow hanging in the tree and have a thought, "I should turn on one of

my lighted knocks,” but that would have required taking 5 steps in the wrong direction, so I just head up the hill.

Now a part of my story you don’t know is that I have spent the past 37 years hunting elk almost every September. I lived in New Mexico for ten years after college and did a ton of scouting, hiking, turkey and horn hunting in the spring, etc. plus the many days each September beating the bush trying to find elk. The past ten years, I have spent at least a week and often as many as four weeks in the mountains of Colorado and Wyoming during the summer. I have found countless mule deer sheds, whitetail sheds and this summer, I even found a moose deadhead. Yet in all my time in the woods I have never found a single elk shed. The past couple years it’s been a point of emphasis for me every time I’m in the woods. I’m incredibly overdue.

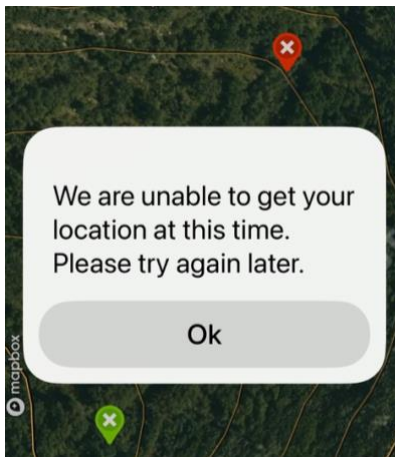
Well, a couple hundred yards from my bull, when I’m looking down at my phone to see if I have coverage, I see something white on the ground. At first, I think it’s a broken antler or possibly another mule deer shed, but when I pick it up, I realize it is the world’s smallest elk drop. I laugh and say out loud, “Oh, Jesus, you have a strange sense of humor.”



(World’s smallest elk shed. It isn’t broken or chewed up, just tiny)

Unfortunately, I don’t find a signal, it’s getting dark and it’s starting to rain, so I head back to my bull. However, it’s super thick, almost dark, and guess what? I can’t find my bull. 😊 I know I’m close so I’m not worried and worst-case scenario, I could hike down to the open meadow and follow the highway back up, but my rain jacket is in my pack, and I need to get going on breaking down my bull. No biggie, I have the spot marked on OnX, so I pull out my phone to use it to get back.

However, touch screen phones suck when wet and while I was touching OnX, my phone pulled up another app and no matter what I did, I couldn’t get it to go away. Finally, I turn my phone completely off and do a restart as I know OnX is on the main screen. All the while the rain is picking up and I’m trying to find shelter under the oaks. When the phone finally comes up, I’m able to open OnX and even see the waypoint for my elk. However, when I hit “Go To” it tells me I don’t have gps signal, so it doesn’t know where I am!



(Screenshot of my OnX GPS App)

Oh my! I don't know whether to laugh or just shake my head at this point, so I make another attempt at finding my elk in the dark, in the rain in super thick oak brush. Realizing the stupidity of that attempt, I stop and satellite text my wife to let her know I found my bull. (Leaving out my current state of not being able to find it as I know it's only temporary) Before I even get my text to her out, I get one from her saying she is at the ER with my mom who is having chest pains. Ugh! What do I do now? I'm 700 miles away, I have an elk on the ground and realize there is nothing I can do for them. I know my mom often has chest pains when she gets anxious and she's just a couple days away from getting a pacemaker, so I thank my wife for taking good care of her, say a prayer for both and ask Jesus where's my elk. (When I checked back in a little while later, my wife confirmed my sense. It was just severe heartburn, likely caused by anxiety.)

At this point I switch back to OnX and my phone finally finds me. I hit "Go To" on the waypoint and it tells me my bull is 73 yards SE. When my headlamp shines on my bow hanging in the tree, I think how I would have certainly seen a lighted knock if I had just listened to the prompting as I was leaving.

So now the fun begins. I'm by myself, in the dark, it's raining and I have a mature bull elk on the ground. Well, there is nothing to do, but to start cutting.

I put my rain jacket on and go to work. This guy is a muddy mess, and the rain does not help. I process all my own meat and pride myself in keeping it as clean as possible. I take out a trash bag to use on the ground to keep the meat clean, but it's impossible. Every time I touch his hide, it gets my hands muddy. Then when I touch the meat, that mud transfers.

The rain relents momentarily, so I take off the jacket and keep cutting. Then the rain starts again and I put it back on. By the third round, I just say "Forget it. I'm soaked anyway" and just hang my jacket on a branch. When the lightning gets intense, I can't help but think about the two hunters who were killed last year by a lightning strike. There really isn't any place to go at this point, so I just keep cutting. In lieu of anyone to help, I rig up a rope system to the trees to support the hind leg while I skin and then cut from underneath.

Despite the rain and mud, I manage to get both backstraps as well as the front and rear quarters off one side before the batteries in my headlamp give out. No problem, I have a spare headlamp. However, right after I get him rolled over to start working on the other side, my spare headlamp starts cutting out on me. Bright one second and then dark. Ugh! I'm soaked to the bone, tired and now handicapped by lack of light, so I make the decision to peel the hide off the rear quarter so it can cool better overnight, load up the backstraps, and hike out to my truck.

It's about a three quarter of a mile from the kill site to a main trail so I navigate there by the lights from my Garmin watch and my cell phone. At the main trail, my headlamp decides to work perfectly the rest of the way to my truck. Go figure!

I make a quick stop by my camp to change into dry clothes and grab an empty cooler, run into town to call my wife, find out my mom is fine and that they will hopefully send her home in a bit. I buy sixty pounds of ice and head back to my camp to try to get a few hours of sleep and hope to find help for in the morning.

I crawl into my sleeping bag at 12:23 and it takes a bit to wind down and go to sleep. Then at 2:07, I wake up with both my legs knotting up from intense muscle cramps. Finally get them calmed down and back to sleep until 4AM.

There are a father and his two sons camped close by who have offered to help me if I have an elk down, so I get up to start organizing my stuff for finishing the cutting and bringing down the meat. I keep looking over to their trailer expecting a light to come on. My plan is to catch them before they go out for the morning, give them my kill location and hopefully the three of them can help me bring it down after their morning hunt.

However, they don't have a light until after 5 because his son killed a bull about the same time I killed mine, and they didn't get back to camp until after 2. Well, there's goes plan A.

I get my stuff together and head out to the parking lot of the trailhead. Thankfully, one of the guys camped there decided to take the morning off and said he and his buddy could help me out.

So, I hike back up, find the two quarters hanging in the trees and the bull on the ground untouched by bears or anything else in the woods. Then, in the cool of the morning, in perfect conditions, I get the rest of the quartering done, wondering, how in the world did I do this by myself, in the dark, and in the rain. I have way more dirt on the meat than I have ever had on any animal in my life, but by a little after noon, we have it all off the mountain.



What a hunt. It was frustrating and maddening until suddenly it wasn't. It was a great time in the woods with Immanuel, and I'll never forget how he sent me to the perfect spot, at the perfect time, despite my objections.