

A Big Buckeye Buck



Along the Pennsylvania – West Virginia boarder in the hills of far eastern Ohio lays some prime whitetail habitat. Quaker City hosts the Ohio Hills Festival in July and is a sportsman’s paradise during the hunting season. In the surrounding hardwoods and farm fields, many a trophy Whitetail buck may be found and not coincidentally, is where Dakota Outfitters may be found as well. Not far from Dakota Outfitters is the historic boy hood home of the famous American adventurer and astronaut John Glenn. Adventure has always been part of our American culture and Senator Glenn’s experiences in outer space are surly part of his fond memories. Hunting trophy whitetail deer can also be quite an adventure that produces many fond memories, as a young man from South Carolina was about to find out.

Brian has always had a love for the outdoors and living in the deer rich state of South Carolina helped cultivate his passion. A serious form of brain cancer called Medulloblastoma had dealt a blow to his dreams of harvesting a trophy whitetail buck. Numerous chemo therapy treatments had caused Brian to loose over 100 lbs and he was constantly sick from all the treatments. It was beginning to look like bagging a trophy buck was to remain simple a dream, not a reality. Fortunately, that

possibility was about to vanish as concerned sportsmen were about to step in.

After hearing a spot on the John Boy and Billy Big Show on the radio, Brian’s mother called Brigid O’Donoghue of United Special Sportsman Alliance. Brigid called Steve Laughlin of the Ohio Deer Association, who contacted Dean Borntrager about the possibility of setting up a hunt for a challenged youth. As the co-owner of the famous 418” High Roller buck featured in Texas Trophy Hunter Journal some time back, Dean knows big bucks and where to get them. Soon afterwards the 2 South Carolina trophy hunters were headed to Dakota Outfitters in search of a huge Ohio buck.

Dakota Outfitters is a 1300 acre facility that features a variety of excellent habitat. Large areas of mast producing hardwoods are dotted with open meadows which contain a variety of highly nutritious food plots. The well managed deer herd makes some excellent hunting opportunities for trophy hunters nation wide as Brian was about to find out first hand.

After arriving at Dakota Outfitters, ranch manager Eric Stoneciepher and his wife Amy took the pair of hunters to an area Cabalas and ordered a pizza before returning home to feed the deer at the ranches breeder facility. Those who have never seen a well managed facility are amazed at the size attained by whitetail bucks under intensive management systems. Helping feed the deer only intensified the anticipation of the hunt to come. Ranch owner, Jim Moses affectionately called Brian “Kiddo”, a handle that was going to stick with him the rest of the hunt.

Friday morning finally arrived and Kiddo and the crew hit the woods early, with much anticipation. The morning was a cold rainy one, and seemed to get colder as the day went on. The weather front seemed

to negatively affect deer movement. Although not a single deer was seen, Kiddo's enthusiasm was undeterred. Eric was guiding Gene, Kiddo's hunting partner, while Jim and Kiddo were going to hunt another part of the ranch. Sound "Trophy deer" deer management programs often require selective harvest of high quality individuals that are unlikely to become high end prospects. Soon, a nice 8 point showed up to begin an afternoon of browsing in the rolling hills. Jim asked Kiddo if he was ready to do his part for the ranch selection process. One shot from his .270 Remington Model 700, confirmed that antler trait selection was an active part of the ranches management system.

After the congratulations were joyfully exchanged, the nice buck was dressed and returned for processing later that evening. Jim and Kiddo returned to the woods in search of a trophy buck, the type we all dream of!

Later that afternoon, a shot rang out in the direction of Gene and Eric's stand. Gene had shot a Fins 8 pointer that had apparently hurt his antler sometime during velvet. The distinctive look was unlike any he had ever shot, and was going to occupy a special place in his den as well as his dinner table. By all hunting standards, today had been a day to remember.

Kiddo and Jim has taken a stand overlooking a clover field that huge bucks were known to frequent. The cold, damp weather was made more tolerable by a blanket and small heater in the blind, which helps minimize shaking before the big buck is spotted. Jim spent the afternoon using a grunt call and some discretionary rattling as well. As the sun hit the tree line to the southwest, the Ohio Hills were filled with shadows. Just then a huge buck made it's way down to the clover field.

Kiddo's .270 Remington was ready to rise to the occasion as Jim gave the nod of

approval. With the crosshairs of his Leopold scope dead on the shoulder, Kiddo squeezed off his shot, and the buck whirled around. Not one to leave anything to chance, Kiddo shot him again, and dropped the magnificent creature where he lay. Jim was elated, and jumped for joy at the events that he had just witnessed. With his first trophy buck on the ground, Jim felt a new nickname was in order for Kiddo, so Kiddo became "Dead-Eye Dick" for the efficiency he handled his .270 Remington.

Hunts like this often touch the lives of donor as much as the recipient. Jim was impressed by his upbeat attitude; while feeling compassion for what he was going through in life. In return, Brian said that "being accepted by Jim regardless of my disability" was impacting to him as well. It is a prime example of the importance of fellowship in promoting hunting for generations to come.

While a hunting a trophy whitetail may not be as adventurous as the trips into outer space that astronaut John Glenn was involved in; it shares much of the same excitement for us all, especially our countries challenged or disabled hunters. Like the astronauts of the 60's who pioneered space exploration for future generations, concerned sportsmen are also taking steps to secure the sport of deer hunting for generations to come.

I would like to thank all those who helped make Brian's dream come true. Dakota Outfitters is truly a place where dreams of a trophy Whitetail do come true. Proper hunting gear is also an important part of any successful trip and we thank the local Ducks Unlimited chapter for outfitting Brian with the necessary clothing. Finally I would like to thank Texas Trophy Hunters for their part in bring awareness of deer hunting opportunities to all Americans, regardless of their challenges.

Gubbs O'Toole