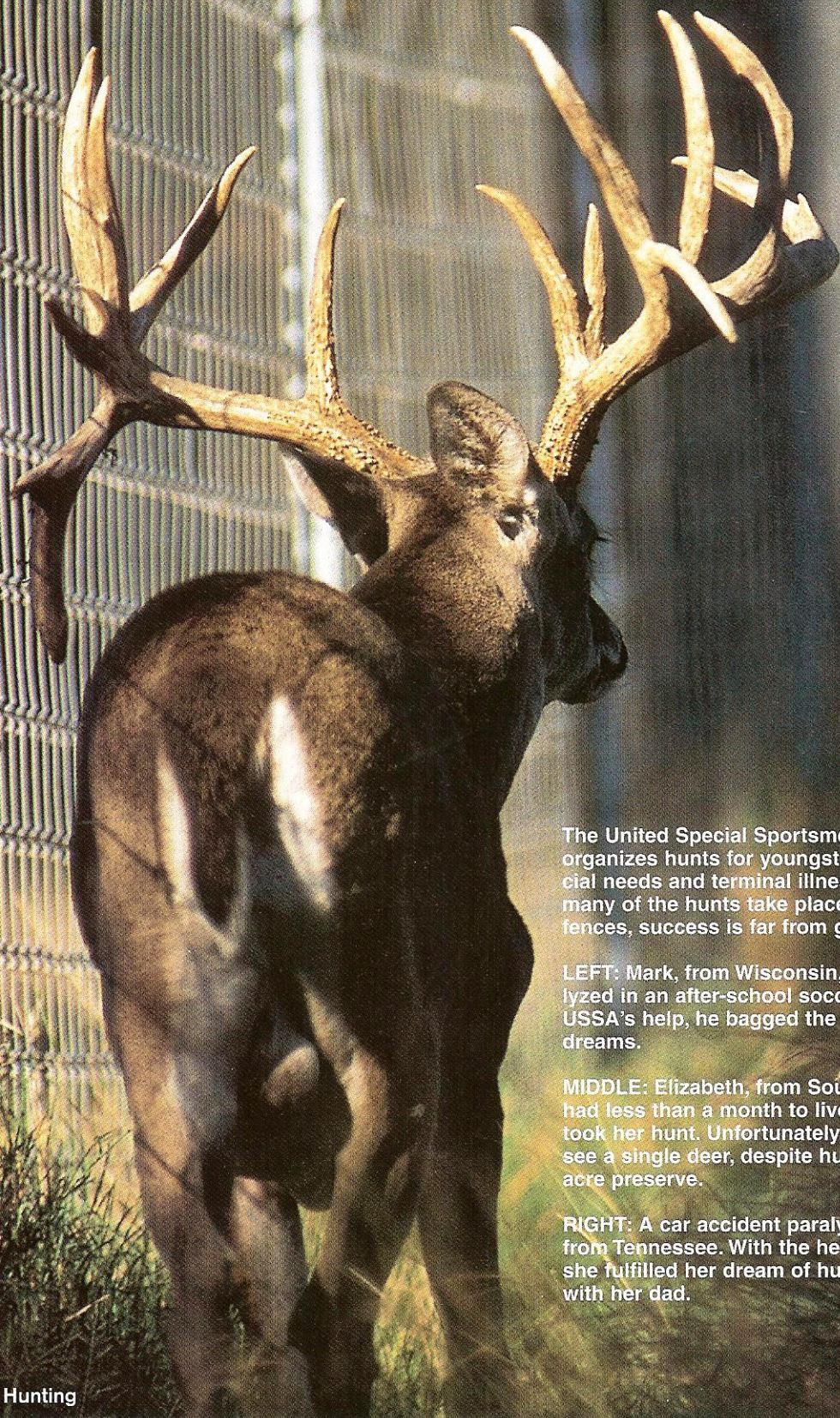


Editor's note: This article is a counterpoint to John Trout Jr.'s feature, "You Call THIS Hunting?" which appeared in the November 2003 issue of D&DH. Although it has been our policy not to allow counterpoint articles to appear after the fact, we decided Brigid O'Donoghue presented a strong enough case to warrant this exception.



The United Special Sportsmen Alliance organizes hunts for youngsters with special needs and terminal illnesses. Although many of the hunts take place behind high fences, success is far from guaranteed.

LEFT: Mark, from Wisconsin, was paralyzed in an after-school soccer game. With USSA's help, he bagged the buck of his dreams.

MIDDLE: Elizabeth, from South Carolina, had less than a month to live when she took her hunt. Unfortunately, she did not see a single deer, despite hunting a 500-acre preserve.

RIGHT: A car accident paralyzed Ashley from Tennessee. With the help of USSA, she fulfilled her dream of hunting deer with her dad.

■ By Brigid O'Donoghue

**IN THE
AUTHOR'S
OPINION,
FAIR-CHASE
DEER
HUNTING
CAN EXIST
BEHIND
HIGH
FENCES.**

Is our house divided? With all the bickering between deer hunters lately, it certainly seems that way.

When signing the Declaration of Independence, Benjamin Franklin said, "We must all hang together, or assuredly we will all hang separately."

He was right. The new-world colonists were a diverse group from all economic and social walks of life. Franklin was calling for unity within this diverse group and prophetically warned of the consequences of division, if their differences could not be internally reconciled!

Like Franklin's fellow colonists, deer hunters are also a diverse group. We hunt with bows, rifles, pistols, shotguns and muzzle-loaders. We use various tactics like stalking, driving, still-hunting and stand-hunting. Additionally, we rely on high-tech products to help us enjoy the

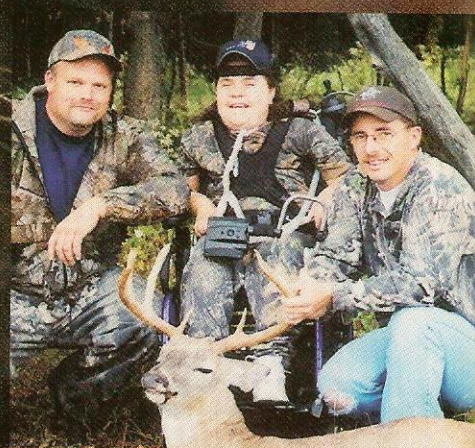
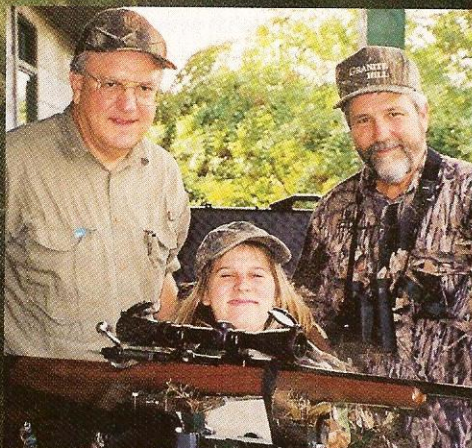
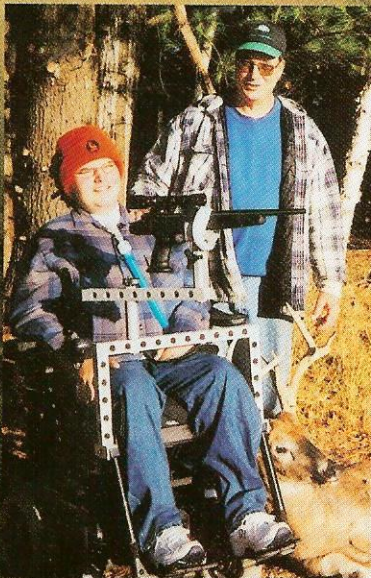
hunt even more and, hopefully, improve our odds.

Our worlds collide, however, when we pit ourselves against each other and debate the merits of various legal hunting methods. I fully realize that *Deer & Deer Hunting* has often been a forum for intelligent discussion among hunters. From debates on cross-bow usage to the ethics of hunting over bait, *D&DH* has never shied from controversy. I must admit, however, that I was more than surprised when I opened my November 2003 issue and read John Trout Jr.'s article, "You Call *THIS* Hunting?" in which he criticized the practice of hunting deer behind high fences.

Those who know Trout say he is one of the most honest and upstanding whitetail hunters in North America. That might be true, but what deeply concerns me is the tendency of some self-appointed morality purist to

OPINION

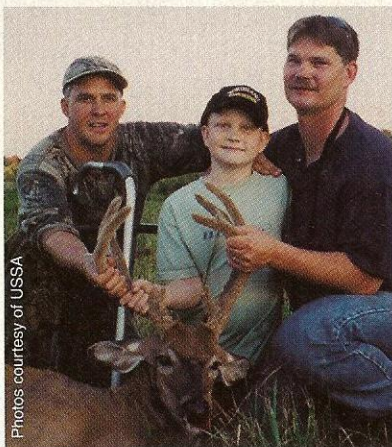
YES, WE DO CALL THIS HUNTING!



Photos courtesy of USSA

LEFT: Michael, from Michigan, was terminally ill with cancer when he experienced his first successful deer hunt.

RIGHT: Despite terminal illnesses, Ryan, from Georgia, and Susan, from Kansas, found the strength to fulfill their dreams by hunting big bucks in Texas. The youngsters were accompanied by deer biologist James Kroll.



Photos courtesy of USSA



publicly engage in factually-devoid, emotionally-charged finger-pointing sessions at those who hold different beliefs than his. In my opinion, such debate only fuels animal activism. To throw ice water on the activists, one must examine the essence of the complex issue of fair chase.

A Case of Semantics?

What is fair chase? As president of United Special Sportsmen Alliance, I deal with such questions daily. Every sportsman and sportsman's organization has different ideas on what constitutes fair chase. Is there any common ground and similar concepts we can all agree on? For simplicity's sake, I propose fair chase relates to the difficulty of completing a successful harvest of the selected quarry.

Many folks try to reduce fair chase to a single major issue: the existence or absence of fences. Fence detractors point to the impossibility of escape in any fenced situation. I would agree that, all variables being equal, a larger escape area is definitely more sporting.

What many hunters don't realize, however, is that most hunting preserves abide by minimum acreage requirements. Further, most preserves offer hunting conditions that meet or exceed those on the other side of the fence. Shooting a deer in a true "pen" is as illogical as it is despicable!

Hunter density is also an important factor in the fair-chase issue. Hunter density effectively reduces the escape area of a pursued deer. A mature buck might have a million unfenced acres in which to escape, but is his escape likely if there's a hunter every 20 acres? Probably not. What about one hunter every 80 acres? Can wildlife biologists control hunter densities? No. Should they? Definitely not! Can a private hunting

preserve control hunter density? Yes!

Of course, fair chase goes beyond deer and deer hunter densities. What about terrain? Trees, brush, grass, hills, ravines and crop fields can all affect a hunt's success. A mature buck can easily elude a hunter when it can hunker down in small areas of dense, impenetrable cover. The same buck has a higher chance of being killed when roaming large areas of sparse cover.

Whitetails are masters of concealment and can seemingly vanish even in metropolitan conditions. Most of us have experienced the frustration of hunting whitetails in dense cover and swamps.

Older Bucks Are More Elusive

When you examine the characteristics of the quarry, a new picture arises. Assuredly, a faster rate of travel and more irregular movement pattern make a successful hunt far less likely.

More important, the age structure of the quarry has significant impact on the hunt's difficulty. For example, laws protect children from unscrupulous adults. Deer aren't afforded juvenile protection. In most states, yearling bucks account for more than 80 percent of the annual buck harvest. Contrast that with a fenced situation in which 95 percent of buck harvests include animals 3½ years old or older.

Volumes have been written on the elusiveness and adaptability of old bucks. Some hunters even call them "unkillable" and "a different species." Barometric changes and moon phases affect deer movement on both sides of the fence. A mature whitetail's uncanny ability to detect and respond to human pressure allows these animals to routinely escape death.

Fenced bucks are often said to be as wary as a Holstein cow. Not true. Let's examine how well these so-called Holsteins react when exposed to public

hunting conditions.

During a recent audit by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, 671 farm-raised white-tailed deer escaped into the wild over the past few decades. The escapes were blamed on storm damage to fences, dog incidents and gate failures. Over that period, 235 deer were either returned live by the owner or shot by hunters or game wardens.

I have done extensive research on this topic and learned that six of the 235 recovered deer were shot and killed by wardens, and just two were killed by hunters. In other words, those supposedly tame deer — most of which were mature bucks — certainly relied on their instincts and survived quite easily outside the fences.

When comparing the 33 percent harvest rate of Wisconsin's free-ranging deer to the 0.8 percent harvest rate of farm-raised deer, it's clear the "Holstein" theory has little merit. Instead, it is probable that a mature whitetail is actually more able to pattern hunters and can use that knowledge to avoid human contact.

High-Fence History

Society and the American family have changed drastically over the last 50 years. Climbing divorce rates have spawned single-parent families. Tough economic times have necessitated both parents working and some parents even working two jobs. This effectively eliminates valuable scouting time.

Depressed commodity prices cause farms to be sold or leased to affluent hunters, anti-hunters and non-hunters. Our population is aging at a record rate, and we have more elderly citizens and sportsmen than ever. The elderly, critically ill and disabled sportsmen cannot undergo the physical rigors of a back-country experience that many young hunters take for granted.

Some well-intentioned state wildlife agencies provide special seasons and regulations for disabled hunters, but they're generally less flexible than hunts offered by the private sector. People cannot choose the time of their infirmity, nor can they handle weather situations associated with state seasons. Wheelchairs and snow make poor hunting partners!

During the 1940s, Wallace Byron Grange pioneered the game farm industry by helping open the 9,000-acre Sandhill Game Farm in central Wisconsin. The enclosure provided countless unique research opportunities to explore game management and led to Grange writing his 1949 book, *The Way to Game Abundance*. This book was one of the most advanced compilations of its day and is now recognized as a classic tool for modern deer biologists.

Deer were trapped live and shipped out of state to replenish decimated populations. Additionally, deer harvested from the game farm graced the tables of restaurants from Chicago to New York.

In 1963, Wallace sold the game farm to the Department of Natural Resources. Special hunts are still held at the enclosure. However, this wonderful program adheres to the state's general deer hunting regulations and, therefore, lacks the flexibility to accommodate children with special needs. Wisconsin's legal hunting age is 12. Hunting licenses are not needed in the private sector, so there is no age limit.

Tell Them It's Not Hunting

My main argument that supports high-fence hunting revolves around my work with terminally ill children. Over the years, many children have contacted us at the USSA to share their dreams of experiencing what could be their first — and in many cases last — deer hunt.

Words cannot describe the emotions I have seen these children express after their first close encounter with a white-tail. Successful hunts raise that bar even higher. In most cases, these precious experiences would have never been possible without access to hunting preserves.

Given the human factor in hunting — waiting for the opportune time to shoot and making the shot — can any hunt ever be “guaranteed?” My answer is a resounding “No!”

What most folks fail to realize is that many high-fence operations that adver-

tise “100 percent success rates” often include shot opportunities in their final figures for “successful” hunts — even if the hunter fails to get the deer.

Some of our hunts have been hosted on public and private land, and, sadly, several have been shattered by the intervention of animal-activist groups. Most dream-wish charities have bowed to the financial clout of these animal-activist groups.

After coordinating more than 275 hunting and fishing trips in 2003 alone, I can truly say, sportsmen on both sides of the fence are volunteering in droves to help provide this valuable community service. Taxidermists have donated more free work than we have children in the program, and food banks and locker plants provide free services for financially strapped families. In short, high-fence hunting operations are a year-round source for this necessary public service.

Conclusion

Please question the wisdom and philosophy of politically aligning yourself with groups seeking to eliminate any form of hunting. The divide-and-conquer tactic is quite effective. What do you have to gain by publicly airing your philosophical differences? In my opinion, there's much more to be lost, including the only hunting opportunities many terminally ill or physically challenged individuals might ever have.

I can only pray we find unity within the hunting fraternity. Habitat loss, land fragmentation and social-economical conditions are irreversibly changing the hunting landscape. Supporting animal activists' agendas can only make complex matters worse for all in the long run. Respectful dialogue, free from inflammatory slang phrases like “canned hunts,” is required if a comprehensive management plan is to be discussed and initiated for this century and beyond.

Let's follow Ben Franklin's advice and launch a new era for our outdoor heritage.

— *Brigid O'Donoghue is the president of the United Special Sportsmen Alliance, an organization that specializes in providing hunting adventures for terminally ill children. For more information on the organization, visit www.deerfood.com, or call (800) 518-8019.*



The Sacred Hunt Is Where You Find It



■ Ted Nugent

It was a beautiful, sunny fall afternoon, Sept. 10, 1975, yet another spectacular day on the mystical, wildgrounds of the famous Uncompadre National Forest on Colorado's western slope.

I quietly slithered up the mountainside, following legendary guide Jerry Byrum's expert instructions. Before I attained my designated position, the hillside nearly exploded as a trophy mule deer raced past me. My Bear take-down bow came back as if a part of me, and my Razorhead sliced into the galloping beast's chest. I didn't have a nanosecond to think, I merely let my lifelong archery training take over.

It was beautiful.

I knelt beside the gorgeous buck and reflected on the thousands of hours I had bow-hunted with no such luck and how, most poignantly, it happened so fast this day. That high-fence hunting adventure seemed way too easy. Of course, it wasn't.

That wonderful moment, like so many others just like it, is tattooed on my spirit. After all, there's no other function available to mankind as pure, perfect and absolutely tooth, fang and claw as hunting.

Nothing.

Jettison forward 28 years to my 2003 hunt season on the hallowed grounds of Jack Brittingham's 5,000-acre South Texas Rancho Encantado. Although I was bow-hunting the most prime time possible at an intersection of killer habitat, I wrapped up my second year without getting a shot.

I've heard the presumptuousness of ignorant critics against such high-fence operations as they condemn them as shooting “fish in a barrel,” and I chuckle at such foolishness. What drives these knee-jerk critics to be so close-minded, particularly during this cultural war against hunting, is beyond me.

I hunt about 200 days a year, and seek varied and diverse adventures. This includes the wildest of wildgrounds on both sides of fences. I demand genuine “fair chase” and scoff at the notion that high-fence ranches or the use of bait, scents, calls, drives, optics, scent-proof clothing, ultra-high tree stands or loud rock 'n' roll on the truck stereo are somehow unsportsmanlike. Balderdash.

The bottom line? It's up to the individual to choose his preferred method of legal hunting. To condemn a landowner for upgrading the quality of his herd and subsequent hunting with a deer-proof fence is intellectually bankrupt. I have never had a fence come into play in helping me ambush a deer. The main role of a fence is to limit outside impact on the herd, not vice-versa.

Ethics are intensely personal. To each his own. Go for it.