

"WYOMING BOW ELK HUNT"

by CLARK LEWEY

IT WAS THE FINAL MORNING of our bow hunt for elk on the expansive ranch and trophy hunting ground of Wagonhound Outfitters. As usual, by best friend and hunting partner, Rusty Hagensick and I were waiting for our guides to arrive with high enthusiasm of the day to come. We knew we would enjoy this last day as much as the first!

As we began the first climb of the morning, I reflected back on the terrific week I had spent with Dax McCarty and his crew of guides and support staff. The first morning Dax set our pace and let me tell you, it was not easy. As a veteran of 15 mostly successful years bow hunting elk DIY on public land, I can say that sometimes guided hunts have a way of pushing you a little harder because the other aspects of the hunt are so exciting when the outfitters bring their A game.

My lungs were starting the familiar struggle to try to suck enough oxygen in and keep up to Dax. To try and boost my energy, I start to go over the pictures I have etched in my mind of all the beautiful sights and bulls we had encountered during the week.

Dax was signaling to hurry up about the same time I was silently cussing myself for not adding a couple more bigger rocks to his pack this morning to try and slow him down to warp speed. Of course, the serious look he gets in his eye when he moves in on elk is addictive. He could sense the elk were going to be moving back to their beds earlier than normal and wanted to insure us flatlanders did not arrive to the show too late!

Finally getting to the top of our rise, we had to negotiate a most enjoyable climb down through a maze of giant boulders and rock outcroppings. The entire way down we could hear the bulls screaming at each other to stay away from their girls. As we neared the end of the rocks its gave way to a grove of pines that sloped into the grass valley that the elk where travelling up to get to their bedding grounds.

As we moved into position 20 yards from the end of the pines, we begin to take a look at the serious contenders. With elk all over, and many nice bulls within 300 yards we began to focus on a massive bull across the valley from us around 250 yards away. He had a very unique bugle, and a sincere hatred for any other bull. His bitterness may have been due to him being taken off his heard by a better



contender. During the battle, our prospective bull had a large portion of his left side broken off. I know this because of the pictures I had seen of this hit list bull from the week before.

We got down on our knees as Dax started the battle calls! Every other bull coming up the valley was making sure to give this monarch plenty of room. As soon as the first bugle rips



finished, the bull turned our way in disbelief and screamed back a scary reply that was filled with bad intentions! After trading insults the bull had it, and headed our direction. He had to pass through a ditch that worried us about him being ornery enough to cross and make the climb up to us.

As soon as he hit the bottom of the ditch, another bugle from Dax had him charging up the bank. At the same time, another bull was headed towards us. As soon as he saw the big bull step out of the ditch he cut directly behind us. Although I think that bull got our wind, it did not change his direction as he was more

worried about getting a long way away from old grumpy, who was now bearing down on us from 95 yards away.

Now the bull headed directly to us. We were behind some small brush, with a fairly large pine tree directly between us and the bull, about 20 yards from us. We had now been on our knees in a precarious position for over 20 minutes and my one leg was getting numb from the rock I was kneeling on.

I said I need to get up! Rusty said no – he's at 80 and coming! Then he called off the yardage as the bull marched in. 68, 54, and when he said 45 yards, I drew my bow. Then the bull made it to the pine tree between us – only 20 yards – and decided he would try to knock it over in-route to us!

I was still at full draw as he thrashed, snorted, bugled and took his aggression out on that tree, then it looked like he was ready to come our way and was trying to decided which way around the tree he would come

to find us. First to the left, then the right, back to the left, and finally to the right and directly to me at 18 yards and closing. Trying to keep the pin steady while kneeling on a bed of steep rocks while an elk with a bad attitude is bearing down on you is not easy. Trying to do it after holding the bow for that length of time is also a thing that must be practiced!

A slight quarter turn was all I needed to let the first arrow fly. Too low! The fatigue may have caused bow drop or who knows, but my mind instantly registered to reload and prepare to fire again. The elk turned to my left and directly away from me. At 35 yards, I prepared to draw for the second shot when my release miss fired and launched the arrow 20 yards into the dirt. At 60 yards, I had a perfect angle to drive an arrow into the liver and hit the mark perfectly. This turned the bull and as it came back by me, I put my 4th arrow through the top of the shoulder and into the top of the lungs.

Now the bull lumbered about 100 yards away and bedded behind a rock structure, in plain sight of us.

We perched above the bull for an agonizing 3 hours before he lay his majestic head on the ground for the last time. With respect to our quarry, and the men who took us on this adventure, I said my prayers of thanks as I pulled out my knife and anxiously began the work of bringing this bull home.