40 Feet Of Antlers In One Season!

For me, the 1993-94 whitetail season was the kind dreams are made of, as I shot three bucks averaging Boone and Crockett scores of almost 160 inches. And to make it even better, all three monsters came to rattling!

The summer of 1993 was progressing normally. Our research on nutrition, population structure and herd health at the Institute for White-Tailed Deer Management and Research demanded the usual 20-hour work days. I was as tired as I could be. Walking around our farm on a late-August Sunday, my wife Susie turned and asked: "Well, what kind of season do you think you'll have?"

To that very moment, what the coming season might have in store had never entered my mind. "To be quite honest," I confess, "for the first time in many years, I don't have any expectations!"

I stopped in my tracks; those words sounded familiar. When and where had I said them before? We stopped to admire some of my research deer, when suddenly it all came back. It was 1987, and just as in '93 I had been extremely busy — too busy to practice much of what I preach about preparing for deer season. In fact, I did not even get to hunt seriously until late in the year.

For over 20 years, I had conducted research on deer in the mixed pine-hardwood forests of East Texas, radio tracking and studying movements and behavior of wild bucks and does. Under my direction, the North Boggy Slough Hunting and Fishing Club had been transformed from one of the worst managed deer herds in North America to a premier trophy management area, largely through selective harvests.

Because I had missed the prime rut for the Pineywoods of East Texas, by Dr. James C. Kroll

An afternoon rattling session in a northern Alberta staging area brought this 158-6/8-point buck to the author's gun in mid-November. Photo by Dave Bisgo.

Using a grunt call, I made a couple of teasing grunts. No sooner had I made the first call sequence, than a monster buck roared out of the dense pines and stopped, glaring down at me from not more than 20 yards away. That was one of the finest days of my career. The buck scored in the 190s, Boone and Crockett as a non-typical, better than 8-inch bases and four drop tines.

Reality slowly returned as I relived sitting alone with my trophy buck in a pine plantation in East Texas. "On the other hand, it may be another 1987?" Susie smiled. She has more confidence in me than I deserve.

ALBERTA, MID-NOVEMBER

Dave Bisgo's ever-smiling face greeted me and my friend Kenneth Sutton at the Nisku Inn near Edmonton, Alberta. Dave and I go back a long way. Together, we have had some great times over the years. Almost 20 years my junior, and an ex-motocross and hockey player, he is often difficult to keep up with, even for one who has spent his life in the woods. I probably have never known a better hunter than Dave. He and his partner, Terry Birkholz, have written Alberta Guide (1990) and have been part of the Alberta Guide hunting network ever since.

On that particular day, my goal was not to take a big whitetail of my own, but the bull elk that I knew was a potential world-record buck. I had one of the biologists drop me off near a heavily used buffalo track about 200 yards away from where the bull had been seen the previous day.

Dave and the field biologist were taking the bull elk pictures, so I was free to go and try to rattling. I heard a slight rustle and a noise, so I knew the bull was there. I then began to rattle a bit stronger and louder, trying to worry the bull. The bull started to come through the brush, and I could see it clearly. I slipped into a spot downwind from my target area.

This buck, shot on the Diamond H Ranch in Dimmit County, Texas, on Dec. 21, walked to within 10 yards of the author after hearing his rattling sequence. Photo by Gordon Whittington.

Dave realized his dream of taking an Alberta whitetail, a beautiful buck scoring in the 150s. My friend was sitting on a portable stand near a carefully researched travel corridor, just after daylight. Glancing aside, he spotted a buck he describes to this day as being "as big as a Hereford bull," coming methodically through the aspen. I thought he was going to walk right over me, but I went to the other side to meet him. I then volunteered to the excited hunter, who dropped the buck in his tracks.

Meanwhile, I was sitting on a cutline overlooking a popular travel corridor on a large drainage system. Over the four-hour morning hunt, I called in several bucks, but none big enough. Dave arrived around lunch to tell me about Kenneth's buck. We decided to go shoot some photographs. It was late afternoon before we met up again for a hunt. This was my first day in Alberta, and there was no hurry. I had had good luck calling that morning, so we decided to try a rattling session. We drove over to an area we had hunted before. It is a classic staging area, made up of scrubby pines and sand hills above a feeding area. As we slipped into position, I glanced at my watch. Nearly 3 p.m.; it wouldn't long before dark.

Our setup was classic. Heavy rub marks and scars on several large

pines clearly indicated a serious staging area. We decided to use my favorite calling technique, with the call sitting about 20 yards upwind of the shooter. We carefully chose the right spot for using this method. If the buck responded, he would have to show himself to my right or left before getting downwind of Dave. Just as the Boggy Slough non-typical had charged in on the very first call, one tickle of the antlers by Dave brought instant results.

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Angling from my left, the buck came in so quickly I could not get into position. The next day was a repeat, only nature added something new — fog. I set up on the upper end of the creek and regrouped with the guys to plan a new strategy. We saw eight bucks come to water, and the truly big boys failed to make again. They just outdistanced the house for a sandwich and a majik pow-wow. Mike and Gordon were happy to be home. For years, I have written about midday hunting. Frankly, I have taken more bucks during this time than any other. I had found a sanctuary on a small island in the dense wolfpack of the San Roque marsh three years earlier. I had shot a nice buck, and I have traded a few one-shot kills. Two hours later, I had shot an enormous, high-racked buck as he charged a doe near the sanctuary. Why not try it again?

I slipped into position about 12:30 p.m. on the north side of the creek. The wind was blowing right from the area, so I knew if a buck appeared he would have to circle to the wind on me. The type of buck I was after was not the kind to expose himself in the open country. This buck would have to be "up and personal." Backing into a motto of mesquite, I began my stalking sequence with an antler thump on a tree, followed by bark raking with the antler, a more careful call, until finally, intense rattling. If I were to call any mature buck from the sanctuary, every trick in the book would have to be used.

I completed the calling sequence, put down the antlers and waited! My watch read 12:52 p.m. Five, 10, 15 minutes passed. The only sound was that of a Mexican green jay circling overhead. "Dun-s :</p><p>Author photograph by D. J. Gobley. The 1993-94 season will be remembered as one of the most challenging seasons I've had. But it was the culminating scores of my bucks that made it so? Now that I h</p><p>South Texas, Dec. 21

I woke that morning and thought God I choose to be a whitetail biologist. What other profession would I choose to be spending every day of the year with whitetails? But just as rewarding is getting to work as I often do with landowners, helping them achieve their management goals for trophy whitetails.

One such landowner is not an individual, but rather, an estate. H.H. Coiffed was a self-made man who built an empire in the tradition of the Texas fashion. His hunting estate had a 10,000-acre ranch near Catarama, which lies in the heart of the best whitetail country there. The Diamond H Ranch, the San Roque Ranch, and the Nueces River make up the entire property.

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