

BREAKING TRADITIONS

I have learned from going on hunts where extensive travel is involved, to predict the success of the hunt by the events of the actual travel to get there. In other words, if there were problems in getting there, it was going to be a crappy hunt. This has been very accurate, at least for me, over the past 21 years. As I sit on the plane during the last leg of my flight to Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada, I pray that this rule does not apply to this elk hunt.

We left my house thirty one and half hours ago to catch a 6:00am flight. I had misplaced my passport and brought a copy of my birth certificate instead. The year before, Dayna Master, my pro staff guy and cameraman, had gotten into Canada with just his drivers license. I had my driver's license, a copy of my marriage license, a copy of my birth certificate, my medical and auto insurance cards, and my voter's registration card. With all this, they still would not let me on the plane headed to Canada.

It appears that now you must either have a passport (current or expired), or both a drivers licensee and an original birth certificate with a raised letter seal. I only had a copy. I had to drive all the way back home, three hours one way, and tear my office apart to find that I had left my passport in a file holding all the paperwork for a previous hunt. I then traveled back three hours to the Atlanta airport, to catch a later flight. Now I am sitting on this plane wondering what other "Coker Moments" we were about to experience while on this hunt.

When we finally got through with baggage, customs and rental cars, it was after midnight. We still had a five hour drive to the lodge. Even though I rented the car, Dayna agreed to drive, since he stayed behind in Atlanta and slept while I was on my round trip home looking for my passport. At about 3:00am, he had an encounter with a bear, Smokey the Canadian Police Bear. Dayna was driving 127km in a 70km zone. For some reason the police felt compelled to report to the rental car company I was not driving the car, which costs me a lot of grief and time. Twenty-five minutes later and only a warning, we headed once again to our final destination, Bear Valley Lodge. We finally arrived at 5:20am with some serious jet lag.

We slept until noon, and force ourselves out of bed. After getting a bite to eat, we sighted our bows to find that the airlines had knocked my sights off. If I had not had a sturdy whisker biscuit rest, it would have been knocked off as well. If this had happen, I would have had to totally retune my bow. Thank God, it was just my sights. After resetting my sights, we loaded the guide's truck with all our gear. Just before taking off, we noticed the truck had a flat tire. At this point, I was thinking just one more "Coker Moment" and I am packing up and going home.

Then my fortune took a turn for the better. Our guide Rex told us of a huge bull he had spotted two days earlier. He said the elk was traveling with a bachelor group on the west end of the ranch. Rex let us out on the west end of the ranch where he had last seen the monster bull. He showed us an alfalfa field the bull had been known to graze in the afternoon. It was still a little too early for him to be in the field, so we scouted the field and planned how to hunt it, if the bachelor herd were to feed the same as they had two days earlier. We checked the wind and determined which head of woods would be best for our ambush. We scouted these woods and found the perfect spot ten yards deep from the edge of the field. This spot gave excellent cover and afforded two different shooting lanes to the field. To ensure that the elk would stop in the right spot, we sprayed some Whitetail Formula Bow hunters' Secret lure on a tree limb and it's leaves in one shooting lane right at the edge of the field and on the ground twenty-five yards out into the field in the other lane. We decided to stay in the woods and cow call, throwing in a bugle every hour or so.

After about two hours, we spotted a bachelor herd of bulls. They were feeding in the field along the edge of the tree line. We were wearing our shaggy gillie suits, so we knew we could get within range, as long as they did not smell us. After checking the wind direction, we headed to our predetermined spot. We had been watching the elks' movement through a head of trees, and could not really get a good look at any of the bulls. We were not even sure that the big bull Rex had mentioned was in this group. They were in the field and traveling the exact way that Rex had seen them do two days earlier. The brush and trees were extremely thick, but thanks to my

whisker biscuit rest and the fact that we were able to take our time, we were able to stalk with a fully loaded bow, right to our spot.

We soaked down with Whitetail Secret Formula's scent eliminator and waited. After about thirty minutes, we could see brown patches through the trees and they were headed our way. They were feeding as they walked along the tree line. After what seemed like two hours, but was probably thirty minutes, we got our first good look at one of the bulls. It was a mature 6 x 6 that would have scored at least 350 Boone & Crockett points. If I didn't know Rex better, I would have guessed this to be the dominate herd bull. He was huge. But Rex had told us that the dominate bull was over 370 Boone & Crockett points. I know from previous hunts with Rex, that he knows what he is talking about.

As each bull became visible, I scrutinized each detail of their antlers, using my seven power range finder. I could only see one bull at a time through a small opening just in front of me. This made it difficult to do a good comparison. All these bulls were within twenty Boone & Crockett points of each other.

It takes a skilled trained eye to determine less than a ten percent difference between bulls, without having them in view together, side by side. Once I allowed a bull to pass through the opening, there was no second chance. He was gone with no opportunity to second guess. The third bull stopped in the middle of my second shooting lane and began to lick the tree branch I had sprayed with the lure. This allowed me to achieve a thorough antler evaluation. He was the last bull, and very impressive.

As I studied the antlers with impeccable scrutiny, I felt the first bull was slightly larger. This was the first afternoon of a ten day hunt, as I debated shooting this bull, or chancing the possibility of getting a shot at the other bull on a later day. Then the bull began to thrash and rub the limb with his antlers, which is usually a sure sign of dominance. A dominant bull will rub limbs to leave his scent and to scare off subordinate bulls. Many thoughts were running through my mind. "This must be the dominant bull! Not necessarily, he may not be showing dominance at all. The estrus scent I sprayed on the limb

may be more than he can resist, and he is trying to get the scent on his antlers, rather than trying to put his scent on the tree limb.”

I decided to take the shot. Just as I was about to draw my bow to take the thirty-seven yard shot, I caught movement out of my right eye. I soon learned that I only thought this bull was the last of the bachelor herd. Bringing up the rear, several yards back, there was no question or debate. This was the bull Rex had told us about. I immediately lost interest in the other bull, and focused all my attention on grandpa.

He was feeding from my right to my left, directly toward my first shooting lane. As he slowly fed towards the opening, he got a whiff of the Bowhunters' Secret Formula and literally lunged fifteen yards forward and plunged his nose right in the middle of where I had sprayed the formula on the ground. His lunging movement startled the other bull, that by now I had totally forgot about. The other bull was still licking, rubbing and eating the sprayed tree branch just seconds before grandpa startled him and caused him to trot off out of sight.

Grandpa ran over to the tree branch as if to see why grandson was so intrigued. Everything was happening so fast, I had not had a chance to get my composure together enough to take a shot. When grandpa got to the sprayed limb, he sniffed it, curled his upper lip and swallowed the aroma. After about a minute of flemming, grandpa began to thrash the branch with his antlers.

I eased my range finder to my eye with as much caution as possible, by a knee knocking, heart pounding bowhunter. After ranging grandpa, I read the distance to be thirty-seven yards. I knew that! I thought, “You dope, he is standing exactly where the other bull was which you ranged just a few eternities, I mean a few minutes ago.” Anyway, now I need to lower my range finder and raise my bow without detection before grandpa moves out of my shooting lane.

As I raise my bow, grandpa stops thrashing the tree. I freeze. Grandpa tears into the tree limb again, eating and licking where I had sprayed it. I got my bow up and drawn without grandpa knowing the wiser. Looking through the peep, I thought how lucky I was it was not

a scope, or it would have been fogged up from all my heavy breathing.

I gapped between my thirty and forty yard pins. I aimed ever so slightly high of the arm pit and slightly back. As I touched off my release, I could see my arrow flight as though it were in slow motion. Grandpa was so intrigued with what he was doing; he never heard the bow release and did not know the arrow was on its way. The arrow penetrated the bull all the way up to fletching. The sniper broad heads being pushed by Easton shafts are a deadly combination.

The arrow struck grandpa just right of his arm pit but slightly higher than I had expected. Gapping the thirty and forty yard pins was a good idea, but I should have aimed right where I wanted to hit, as opposed to holding high. Although I had totally missed the heart, I did double lung the bull. He bolted forward then wheeled one hundred eighty degrees to his right running back the way he had come.

Things were no longer going in slow motion. On the contrary, before I could even look at Dayna, the bull was running back by us from right to left. He had made a complete large circle and had now caught up with the rest of his herd. As he charged off into the brush on the other side of the field, the rest of the bulls were in hot pursuit. They had no idea what had happened, but they knew their leader meant business.

Although there was not much blood to follow due to the high hit, the tracking was still easy, since there were four eight-hundred pound animals running at full speed on soft ground. There were a couple of times during our half mile tracking adventure, where we got off track, but soon were back on good sign. Finally, there he laid a magnificent animal. Grandpa was the trophy of all trophies. The mass, the tine length and the width all combined for an unbelievable Boone & Crockett score of 417 points. Our life in this world is good, and I thank God he has given me dominion over it.