

FINAL DESTINATION

A Classic Mule Deer hunt in Kansas

Hunting mule deer in Kansas is always a lot of fun, but there's nothing more satisfying than watching a good buck grow into a monster. And to top that off, because the buck in this story had become so smart at thwarting our efforts, it was especially rewarding to put him to rest once and for all.

We first spotted this buck in October of 2011. He was a big deer—we guessed him to score around 190—but we also thought he was young and had potential to grow. These decisions are always difficult; letting a nice deer like this walk is a gamble, and one has to hope he won't get shot by another hunter or inexplicably never be seen again.



By mid-summer 2012, my brother Jerad, and I were beginning to doubt our decision. After months of scouting, he was nowhere to be found. I was agonizing over letting him walk the previous year, when just a few days before the September muzzleloader season, Jerad thought he caught a glimpse of him. It was questionable because he was a long ways off and it was after sunset. But there was hope.

I spent a couple days concentrating my search for him in that area, and lo and behold he showed himself the day before season. But once again, it was well after the sun had set. I knew he was big and there was no question that this was the buck we would pursue.

On opening morning, we set up on the highest hill in that general area with our first hunter. Our hope was that we could find him before he bedded. Shortly after first light, we had him spotted...things were going smoothly, for the time being anyways. After watching him make his morning bed, we made a picture-perfect stalk, getting to within 40 yards! However, because of the tall sage, we couldn't see the buck. I told the hunter to get ready so he could take the shot when the deer stood...but unfortunately, he rustled the sage with his bipod, spooking the deer. Just like that, game over.

The next day we found him again, but the hunter missed him at about 200 yards. We hunted that buck for a total of five days and had several other close encounters, but luck was never on our side.



“ We were close enough to take a shot but there was a rise between us and him blocking our view of his body. His impressive rack was all we could see. ”

When long-time client, Dennis Stroth, arrived in camp, I told him about the buck we'd been chasing. I warned him that this buck was either very smart or very lucky. Dennis said he was up for the challenge.

On the sixth day of season, we gave it another go. The morning proved fruitless without even seeing the buck. But he showed up again that night right at dark.

On Dennis' second day of hunting, the buck completely eluded us and we didn't see him the whole day. At this point, I thought we'd put too much pressure on him and he'd either left the area or become completely nocturnal. But we were fueled with determination, and so, we pressed on.

We glassed the same general area hoping he would turn up again. Sure enough, Jerad spotted him bedding down that morning with a group of bachelor bucks. Unfortunately, he was also amongst about 20 to 30 does that bedded down on all sides of him. We studied the situation for about an hour and finally decided that we

might be able to sneak around the does and get close enough to possibly get a shot. With belly-crawling being the only option of travel, Dennis and I finally got to the hill where we thought we needed to be. Again, we were met with disappointment as we discovered the bucks were feeding away from us, well out of shooting range. We continued to watch them but they disappeared over a hill.

That afternoon we got on the other side of the herd so the wind would be right and were able to spot the group of bucks. We slowly worked our way toward them. Now it's important to remember that we were crawling through sagebrush in this extremely arid, desert-type area with no surface water for 30-plus miles. So you can imagine our surprise when all of a sudden, out of nowhere, we spooked up a mud duck out of the sage. I am not sure who was more surprised, us or the duck, but its loud quack rang out like a gunshot and Dennis and I were both sure that it had spooked the deer.

Amazingly, we slowly peeked above



This photo shows Jeremy and Jerad Gugelmeyer [left and right] owners of Sagebursh Hunts LLC, posing with their hunter, Dennis Stroth and the very cagey and elusive 210-inch Kansas buck they finally put on the ground.

the sage to find the deer still contentedly bedded. After 30 more feet of crawling, we unbelievably spotted a coyote, who may or may not have been trying to sneak up on the lost duck. Naturally, it jumped up and ran straight for the deer causing them to rise and trot over the hill. I seriously could not believe what was happening! Cursing our luck, we hustled to a vantage point, hoping Dennis might be able to take a shot. But the now extremely lucky and extremely elusive buck was already over the next hill and out of sight...again!

Deciding all we were going to accomplish was pushing them farther and farther away, we headed back to camp. At this point, Dennis said that the buck was just too smart and the only way he would even have a chance to take a shot was to coordinate an elaborate "deer drive". Although his idea elicited a chuckle, I placated Dennis by telling him to give it one more day before going to any extreme measures.

Now on day four of Dennis' hunt, we glassed the buck up not long after

ing our view of his body. His impressive rack was all we could see.

Dennis had to get higher to take the shot, so he started crawling toward him to get higher on the rise. I stayed back to keep an eye on the buck. By the time Dennis crawled about 50 yards and could see, the buck had already laid down. Finally, luck was on our side and Dennis got into shooting position just in time for the Kansas giant to stand up. Boom! Dennis made a perfect shot with his muzzleloader at around 130 yards to drop him right there.

So many days of hunting had culminated into this exciting moment and it was all we could do to wait a few minutes before we put our hands on him. When we got to the buck it was plain to see that this was a giant. Measuring 32 1/2 inches wide and grossing over 210 inches, this was the biggest mule deer Dennis had ever taken in his lifetime of hunting. It was especially exhilarating for Jerad and I because we had spent so much time focused on this one deer. It was truly a great hunt!



GROSS SCORE: 210 | POINTS: 7X8 | SPREAD: 32 | LOCATION: KANSAS