

# SKULL

AN OUTFITTER'S JOURNAL

GETTING CLOSE  
KEEPING YOUR COOL  
MAKING IT HAPPEN

NEIL EMICK'S  
**BIG**  
UGLY

A SANDY HILLS HUNTING PUBLICATION

SHHC  
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# WHERE LAND *embraces* THE *sky*

At times bowhunting is inherently beautiful and feels effortless, yet at others, it's a lead weight that comes to settle less than gently on your chest. As a bowhunter, I have found that success isn't found alongside any one particular skill, but instead, a combination of skills linked to one's ability to endure seemingly endless discomfort and boredom just long enough for the desired result to manifest.

Western bowhunting is all of that, but here, the traditional thoughts of men tethered to trees along cornfields hoping the buck of their dreams sticks to script and passes below them drift into a vast openness and are swallowed by this stark land. It is here that successful bowhunters are sorted from would-be archers; where luck seems to hang somewhere off in the distance refusing to join you in your quest and instead forces a more deliberate

style of hunting. This is the land of spot and stalk; a love affair of raw elbows, awkward positions, light movements, pure intention, and total awareness. This is the land of the mule deer. This is where I learned to bowhunt.

At the time, I didn't know anyone who had filled an archery tag in this country. I was born in eastern Colorado to a rifle hunting family, and while I appreciate their hunting style and everything they taught me, I was just simply born a bowhunter. It's clear to me, however, why the plains lend themselves to riflemen. This land is long and drawn out, and by no means is it suited for archery equipment. Even today, I step out of the truck, bow in hand, and wonder if what I'm about to attempt is indeed possible. The task of sneaking up on a mature deer in this country, or any deer for that matter, is something that might make anyone question their sanity.



6:45 am - November 24th, 2019

I utter the words of good friend Jeremy Fiscus over and over. "He's just a deer, man." While I find absolute truth in his statement, it doesn't remove the hollow fluttering feeling in my gut. Jeremy is nothing short of unique when it comes to killing giant mule deer with a bow. When everything is on the line, he's the guy I call believing that in some strange way I might inherit some magical powers. If nothing else, he has a way of reeling in the massive emotional monster before it devours your confidence, and instead keeps you present in the moment.

8:30 am - "Son of a bitch!" No, not Nancy Pelosi. I had gotten sloppy, made an assumption, and misjudged the location of the buck and his does ending my stalk before it began. Just moments earlier, I clearly remember thinking - "You've got one shot at this

deer...use your head and don't rush." As quickly as the thought came to me, it seemed to follow the buck up and over the horizon as if it had never truly settled in my mind. I had broken my own golden rule of spot and stalk: never assume anything.

11:30 am - I stand, eyes pressed into my binoculars, searching for the best route to an already spooked buck and his does; especially the lead doe who had now positioned herself on top of a terrace in an old, derelict CRP field. In my mind, she might as well have been laying on top of one of the pyramids of Giza. For a moment, I sat praying that some natural disaster might take her out...a meteor, lightening, T-Rex...anything. You know the moment where you sit and plead with God to grant you one wish and you'll never ask for anything again...yep, I was at that point in my hunt.





11:35 am - Despite thoughts of natural disasters and the earth somehow opening up and swallowing his does, the reality of my situation remained unchanged; there would be no easy approach; there would be no T-Rex. Instead, the foot game had ended and I would have to crawl the remaining 1500 yards towards a group of spooked deer that would certainly stand up every 5 mins, check their surroundings, and probably flip out at the sight of grass blowing in the wind. Momentarily, I feel defeated but my experience assures me that I've been under similar circumstances many, many times and still found success. I kneel behind a terrace, check my gear, ask God why he didn't come through on the assassination, and begin my stalk.

12:30 pm - "Damn, I wish I woulda brought a Snickers." I drift and hear my wife scolding me for thinking about eating a Snickers; telling me how much sugar it contains and that it's probably not non-GMO. I find myself structuring a rebuttal and assuring her the only "non-anything" I'm concerned about at the moment is a big non-typical. The fact is: I'm hungry, tired and once again the pace must change. I'm now laying 300 yards from the buck and forced to leave my faithful companion - the terrace. It might just be me, but it seems during every stalk I develop some unique relationship with everything that aids me along the way; a clump of tall grass, a cluster of yuccas....the terrace. What is often overlooked now seems to be a gift from God as he conspires with us on our quest. It's a game of connecting the dots and I'm reminded the route is always there - you just have to find it.

1:30 pm - What started as a crawl is now a slither. Facedown, inch by inch, I weave through grass hardly capable of disguising the smallest of predators, much less a 6'-3" man and his bow. I'm close, and although the pace has been excruciatingly slow, I am forced to





even finer, more deliberate movements. I'm 62 yards from the buck and can go no further. Movements once measured in seconds are now measured in minutes and I position myself simply by rolling from my stomach to my back. I nock an arrow and I wait. It is here, in this moment, that I find success and survival somehow related. It's a moment not much different than it was thousands of years ago; I lie silent, flat on my back with my bow extended to my side. It's 25 degrees and a 15-20 mph wind slides painfully across my body - I'm miserable but ready.

2:15 pm - A doe stands and thoroughly examines her surroundings. What seems like hours takes only minutes. Satisfied, she wanders the terrace in his

direction and catches his eye. She slides slowly past much like a woman in a long red dress. Slowly, his antlers turn as if she's a magnet and experience tells me he's moments from finding his feet. The hollow fluttering feeling in my gut returns. Eventually, his head tips forward and I rise to a sitting position as he begins to find his feet. And, although I'm possibly only a second ahead, he's a second behind.

This deer possesses two things I may never see again in my hunting career, much less on the same buck - 30"+ main beams and 46 7/8" of mass. The buck grosses 214 7/8" with a point broken off his right side and has a 27 1/8" inside spread at the main beams.