

SKULL



AN OUTFITTER'S JOURNAL



HAYLA'S
BIG
NON-TYPICAL

HUNTING WITH PREMIUM GUIDES

SHHC
FEBRUARY 2021

BEFORE THE STORM

In 2020, I decided to entrust my rifle hunt to Sandy Hills Hunting Company. I have known one of their guides for quite some time and have watched them take numerous world-class mule deer over the years. If I was going to be guided, it would be by SHHC.


The summer prior to my hunt, my guide, Russell sent me pictures of numerous bucks. Two of the bucks were the world-class deer I mentioned above. One was a beautiful clean typical; the other, a big non-typical with numerous kickers and in-lines. If you've ever received summer velvet photos from your guide, I can assure you, it messes with your mind. The anticipation was now killing me! It would be nearly 3 months before I would have a chance at the buck of my dreams!

October 24th finally came and I found myself sitting at a table across from Russell making a plan for the first morning of our hunt. He was extremely excited about the bucks he had been scouting and we spent

time reviewing numerous pictures of them, but I knew which one I would want to pursue - the big non-typical. The bucks were still in bachelor groups and holding a pattern. This would be a huge advantage to us. With a large storm forecasted, we knew the first two days would be our best opportunity to hunt before the weather likely change everything.

Opening morning found us on a high vista glassing for the bachelor group that contained the big non-typical. For the first hour of sunlight all we were able to turn up were does and small bucks. Then, Russell was able to glass up a couple of the bucks that had been hanging with the big non-typical. To our horror, they were on a neighboring property that was being hunted by the landowner and his family. Luckily, we were able to glass the big buck laying in some scrub brush 200 yards off to the side of the main group of bucks. He was so well hidden we didn't feel anyone else would be able to see him. At around 8:30 we backed off of our vantage point and decided to go check another property for the big typical.



A woman with blonde hair, wearing a blue jacket and a blue baseball cap with "SANDY HILLS" and a logo, is smiling and posing next to a large deer head with impressive antlers. A man in a camouflage jacket and a grey baseball cap is standing behind her, also smiling. The deer head is lying on the ground in a rocky, wooded area with green trees in the background.

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ensure my success.”

As soon as we got to the other property Russell spotted a bunch of deer. We quickly got glass on them as they were feeding through some pinon country - they were all bucks. After several minutes of glassing Russell turned up the big typical laid up just beyond the group. He was a slick 4x4 nearly 28 inches wide and pushing the 185” mark. Talk about an opening morning dilemma! We closed the distance and got within 300 yards and set up for another look. I knew he was a hell of a deer, but I just couldn’t get the big non-typical off my mind. Go big or go home, right!? We backed out and left the buck there knowing he would most likely be in the area in the days to come.

That evening we returned to our glassing point where we had turned up the big non-typical early that morning. Sure enough, he



was still bedded in the same place we had left him. We stared at him for the entire afternoon hoping that he would move onto property. The other hunters came and went throughout the afternoon but never left their vehicles. As big bucks do, he never moved an inch all evening. It gave me a whole new respect for how smart large Mule Deer bucks are, he was truly magnificent to watch.

The second morning of the hunt we woke up to a dense fog and anyone that has hunted mule deer knows that isn't exactly a recipe for success. Undeterred, we headed to the ranch to look for the non-typical. It was pretty evident that long range glassing was not going to work as visibility was about 150 yards. We decided we would work into a draw on the backside of a hayfield along some thick pinon country and see if the bucks had lingered on the field a little longer than usual due to the fog. As we were making our way up the draw Russell suddenly

dropped to one knee! He turned and whispered that the big non-typical was 100 yards in front of us just on the edge of the pinon trees. I quickly chambered a round and rested the gun on Russell's shoulder. The buck was quartered to me and getting ready to bolt! I put the crosshairs on the point of his shoulder and squeezed the trigger. As soon as I squeezed the trigger, I heard that beautiful "whap" we all love! My dream buck ran 60 yards and was down!

As we walked up to the buck, I don't know who was more excited, me or Russell? These guys truly love what they do. The non-typical is a buck of many lifetimes! He had everything you could ever want in a mature mule deer. As we sat there admiring him, the snow began to fall and it seemed as if all was right with the world. I want to thank SHHC for the amount of work these guys put in trying to ensure my success. It goes without saying, "I'll be back" attempting to do the impossible and top this buck!



JON JOHNSON
Leupold Machinist - 24 Years



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