

SKULL

HUNTING JOURNAL

JOHN'S
WIDE
196"

4 YEARS
ONE BUCK

A SANDY HILLS HUNTING PUBLICATION
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KEITH STONE



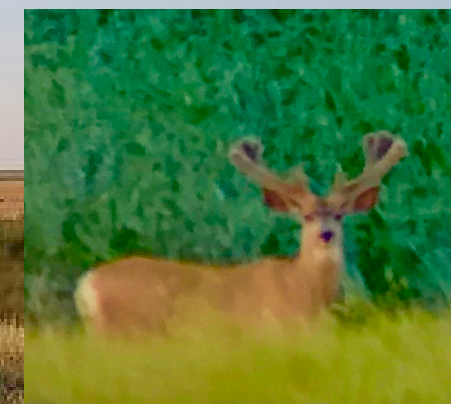
2016



2017



2018



2019

Keith Stone is one of those deer that you just never forget, but not solely because of the incredible set of antlers he was packing year in and year out. It is the long history of headache and heartbreak that make this deer so unforgettable.

Rewind to August of 2016... I got a picture from Jeremy while he was scouting of a deer with a frame that made my jaw drop. We kept an eye on him the rest of the summer and each time we would find him would just get us more anxious for October 1st to arrive - the opening day of the Eastern Colorado archery season. Over those next two months he was relatively visible and seemed to stick to a pattern. Everything seemed to be aligning for the fall hunt.

September 30th had arrived and so had Jeremy and my first archery clients. Keith was still sticking to the script and we were excited for the next morning. Every hunter knows, if there's one night the entire year that you were practically guaranteed to not get much, if any sleep, it's the night before the hunt when you know the following morning you're headed out after a big buck. All I could focus on was how the next day, two days and possibly even three days would unfold. I was confident with the weather forecast and all the intel we had on this buck that if we were patient it wouldn't take any longer than a few days to put Keith Stone on the ground. Little did I know, I was about to receive the first lesson in humility from the buck.

The time had come, he was there, we were patient, the wind was right and my client and I made a great stalk to get inside 30 yards. As we were getting set up to take a shot I peeked around the row of corn stalks just in time to see the Keith stand up. I started to get a little nervous since we were slightly exposed. I knew anything could happen from this point forward. I kept still and watched him stretch as he looked around to check his surroundings, then take two steps and lay back down. I couldn't believe what just happened. When he laid down, not only was his head and neck sticking into the next row of corn, but he laid down facing upwind, looking straight away from us. My confidence was now higher than Willie Nelson at a Willie Nelson concert. I know what you are thinking, I was thinking the EXACT.

SAME. THING. Slam dunk.....right? NOPE! My client missed just high. That year Jeremy also had an encounter with him in the corn, but could never get a shot. That was the last time we would see Keith in 2016.

Fast forward to August of 2017. I was out scouting, when from the same hill, looking over the same field and almost in the exact spot he was a year earlier, lay Keith. Was I surprised? Not even a little bit to tell you the truth. There he was, just laying there chewing his cud, planning his next Houdini trick. That year Jeremy and his client had 2 opportunities early, but neither were successful. Something else always seemed to spook Keith before they could get a shot. My client and I also had a single encounter,



but it ended in a miss. He jumped after the arrow went right over his back, then turned and ran directly towards me down the row of corn I was in, cornstalks bouncing off both sides of his antlers, my mouth wide open and my entire body frozen as I was in absolute awe of just how big he really was. At about 5 yards he finally saw me, turned, and ran out of the corn up and over the hill. Another thing that Keith does regularly is after he knows that you are hunting him, he disappears after a few encounters. 2017 would roll on without another sighting of Keith.

2018 came and would be another repeat of previous years. Almost as if it was scripted, every summer there he was, without fail, using the same bedding areas, walking the same trails, doing the same thing he had been doing for years. That year 2 of my archery clients had a chance at Keith. Neither would succeed. John Franek also hunted with me later that year and although we looked, we never found Keith. That year we experienced some technical difficulties with John's bow, but were able to put it together on the last day when he made a great shot on a heck of a buck. That year John decided he wanted to try for a muzzleloader tag the following year and would return if he drew.

2019 would be a little different for Keith and I. Jeremy and Neil had worked hard to add some amazing new elk leases to the Sandy Hills Hunting Company offerings, so I would spend September chasing big bulls. I was ecstatic to have the opportunity once again to spend my September in elk country. We ended up having a blast, met a bunch of great guys and great hunters, made a bunch of memories, learned a few lessons, ate like kings, hunted hard and loved every minute of it. The only downside was that I was away from my old buddy, Keith for the entire month. But honestly, you could almost set a clock to his pattern, why on earth would he change anything now?

My last elk hunt had come to an end and it was time to transition to hunting the plains. I had two guys coming in for a muzzleloader antelope hunt, then had a couple days before archery deer season and what I had hoped would be the next dance for Keith and I. On my way home from elk camp I made a little detour to look for Keith. I was relatively confident that he would still be there, but then again, he has made a mockery of my confidence level how many times now? Today, however,



would not be one of those days. I had not been staring through the glass long when I was able to pick him up in a patch of weeds. That put my mind at ease and instilled an eagerness for October 1st to arrive. The next few days I was focused on antelope and just as I was finishing with that hunt, I received bad news and would have to postpone my archery deer hunter for the season opener until the following year. Keith and I's next adventure would also have to be postponed as I had rifle antelope hunters coming in and then an archery deer hunt in a different unit. It would be muzzleloader season with John Franek before I would be able to hunt Keith again. I tried to keep an eye on him as much as I could as season went on, but my time was limited and we were entering uncharted territory. Keith had never stayed in that area that late into the year. One could easily argue that yours truly had something to do with that, but none-the-less this was about to all be an entirely new situation.

John drew the muzzleloader tag he had hoped on

drawing the previous year and returned for the 2019 season. The first day started out before daylight on the same perch as usual, hoping to catch Keith coming out of the partially picked corn. I was a little discouraged when that never happened and although we stuck with it we were never able to lay eyes on him the first day and a half, which was starting to make me question if Keith had moved on as he had in years prior. We decided to give Keith another shot though, but we wanted to get a different view the second evening and moved to a different perch which gave us a new perspective. Just before dark, I saw a deer which looked like it had a wide and heavy frame coming out of some uncut corn. I couldn't tell for sure as it was dark enough that our glass wasn't gathering enough light,....but could it be? After another sub-par night of sleep, we found ourselves eagerly awaiting the sun to rise. My eagerness would soon start to fade however, as I was unable to find the big buck from the previous evening. With the sun getting higher we decided to make our way to the original glassing spot and try to find him while



we still had some time. As we were making our way around the field, we spotted a big deer just before he slipped into a patch of uncut corn. After a quick look through the binos I knew it was my old buddy, Keith Stone. We were obviously relieved and very excited that we had finally confirmed he was still alive and in the area, however I was keeping myself in check as this wasn't the first time I had high hopes before a stalk on old Mr. Stone. That morning we had the wind in our favor, so we made our way towards him and although I didn't know exactly where he went, I was hoping we would get there quick enough to find him before he bedded. We got to the edge of the corn near where we had last saw him and got ready. I started peeking around the rows of corn hoping to just catch a glimpse of him or his antlers. You can imagine how surprised I was to see that Keith had only made it about 70 yards into the field and laid down. Everything was in our favor and after a quick discussion about his position, John got his sticks ready. Keith was still completely unaware of our presence as John snuck around the corn row, settled

on the sticks, cocked the hammer on his smoke pole and squeezed off a shot! I was amazed at how quickly it happened as I watched the big buck jump up and take off. We lost sight of him almost immediately, but had both heard the thud of the bullet.

I jumped up and ran a hundred yards or so to the edge of the field to find Keith about 150 yards away in some neighboring CRP and still running. I was seriously starting to question hearing the thud as I was pulling up my binos to get a better look. Almost immediately I saw a good blood spot and let out a sigh as I knew that the saga of Keith Stone had finally come to an end. John had got to me about the same time that happened and the words "GREAT SHOT" had no more than gotten past my lips when Keith stumbled and went down. Next thing I know, I am in a monstrous bear hug being shaken like a rag doll as apparently John had also witnessed Keith fall.

Congrats to John on his biggest muley to date and we tip our hats to the legend, Keith Stone.