

SKULL

AN OUTFITTER'S JOURNAL

*A PERSONAL
BEST BULL*

A SANDY HILLS HUNTING CO PUBLICATION

SHHC
SEPT 2021

a COW CALL away



As I was sorting out the possibilities for the 2020 archery elk season I called good friend Clay Owen for advice, “Man, if you get a chance to make it happen, you ought to try Sandy Hills Hunting Company. Awesome private ranches, great guides, and a chance to take a really nice bull in Colorado”, Clay prodded me. I had hunted with Clay successfully last year, and new him to be a great guide and guy to be with in the field. He said he was guiding for them this year and though he couldn’t promise to be my guide, he was very high on anyone I got put with. I chatted this up with a few buddies and we decided to pull the trigger! They all knew

Clay from previous hunts, and if he was fired up about the place, so were we!

After a successful hunt for both my wife and I for archery elk in Idaho, we made our way down to southeastern Colorado, home of Sandy Hills Hunting Company. After getting checked in to our comfortable lodging, we launched a few arrows to checked our gear, then got our hunting assignments for the 5 day hunt. My friend Darren and I were paired with Clay and we were fired up! We enjoyed a catered dinner and readied our gear for the morning. From the moment we left our rig, elk bugled in the

meadows above us. As we laid eyes on the elk, we could see getting on them would not be easy. They were in an open meadow with no way to get close to them. With the benefit of hunting large private ranches, we didn’t have to pressure the animals and do anything stupid and blow them out of the country. We tried to keep the wind right and get on the path the elk would take on their way to bed. As often happens elk hunting, they had other ideas on their way out of the field and we never caught up to them. That evening we had much of the same as they came in from a different route and got in the field without an opportunity for us.

Day two had much of the same except playing cat and mouse with a bull in the evening. It seemed we were getting their patterns a little more nailed down and opportunities were getting closer. I have taken a dozen or so bulls with my bow, but Darren, relatively new to archery, had yet to take one. As we eased up a ridge on our third morning, bulls were bugling ahead of us to the left and right. Soon a cow crossed from the left in front of us and headed to the bunch on the right. Seeing more coming, Clay got Darren placed next to a tree, then he and I dropped back. A beautiful 6 point bull sauntered right up the trail and as he hit the opening, Clay let out a soft cow call.



The bull stopped broadside at 25 yards. Perfect! Well...we all know there is no such thing as perfect in archery until the tag is on the antlers. Darren had ranged a spot ten yard farther up the trail where the earlier cow had crossed. With that distance in his mind he touched the trigger and my heart broke as I saw the arrow hit too high. The bull ran off a short distance and stopped again as Clay called. With no follow up shot possibility, we watched the bull move off. We ate some food and gave the bull some time before we started to look for sign. A few scant drops of blood were present and as his tracks melted into the tracks of a herd of elk from the morning, and after a grid search of the area, we were at the realization that unfortunately this elk was not going to be recovered. With a "Hit it, it's yours" policy, Darren's hunt was over unless we could identify and get on this bull again. I felt sick for him. To be so close to your first bull and have it turn out like that, it's heartbreaking.

That evening, I was up to bat. After hearing bulls bugling in the meadow above us, we moved in for a look. Two massive bulls were at the head of the meadow battling it out for the herd of cows scattered throughout the meadow. We eased our way up the battling monarchs but started running out of cover. The bulls, both over 350" were frantically pacing around, glaring at each other and taking their aggressions out on young willows. The bulls bounced around at 70-80 yards, but never stood still long. Although I had practiced at these ranges, in hunting conditions, I wanted one under 65 yards. With Darren's tough lesson fresh in my mind, I passed and eventually the bulls followed the cows into the middle of the meadow and dusk fell. We'd be there next morning! Well, at least that's what I thought. We got assigned to the same ranch, but a different location. I was a little heart-broken until just after leaving the vehicle, we heard bulls bugling above us. After just a quarter mile, we could see a few elk in a sliver of a meadow above us. A nice bull and cow were paired



up just 200 yards above us. Clay let out a couple soft cow calls to gauge their reaction...and darned if that cow didn't start making a bee line for us. I hunkered up to a juniper and made sure I could draw my bow unobstructed. Clay and Darren fell back to hopefully stop the bull and draw his attention off of me. The elk read the script perfectly and the cow crossed a trail 28 yards above me. She froze when she saw something not right and I was sure she was going to blow up and go back where she came from, taking the bull with her. As fate would have it, she trotted forward and the bull stepped out in her place. This no doubt was a shooter. Clay gave a soft cow call and he stopped, heavily quartering towards me. The angle was steep enough, I felt I could slip the arrow in front of his shoulder. At the shot, the 525 grain arrow tipped with a Silver Flame broadhead from Alaska Bowhunting Supply slipped right where I was aiming and exited through his off side lungs, still razor sharp when I found it. He spun around 180 degrees and sprinted, but within 20 yards you could see his legs weakening, and he fell dead in sight at 30 yards! We were ecstatic

and all over each other like a bunch of high school cheerleaders who's team just won the championship! After marveling in our trophy, we called some other members of our group who were nearby and we all gathered for pictures.

Sitting next to this bull was the highlight of my hunting career. I've always been an "If it's brown, it's down" kind of guy, but not on this trip! This was the animal I came for, the elk of my dreams. The bull is now at the taxidermists and I've got a spot at home waiting for him. On a bittersweet note, Darren and Clay did see his bull again the next day with a sore shoulder, but still chasing cows. Unfortunately, they could never close the distance again.

I'd really like to thank Jeremy Fiscus, Neil Emick, Clay Owens and the crew for a truly memorable hunt on some beautiful ranches and special thanks to my friend John Petlansky for helping make all this happen for our group. Like Arnold said in *The Terminator*..."I'll be back!"