

SKULL



AN OUTFITTER'S JOURNAL



200+
GNARLY
BUCK

A SANDY HILLS HUNTING PUBLICATION

SHHC
MAY 2022

mr. gnarly

My introduction to Sandy Hills Hunting Company came in October of 2020. Jeremy, my father, and myself hunted until last light for six days, but luck wasn't on my side and I came home empty. However, my father was able to connect on a nice 190" class buck that year. Their work ethic, scouting, and abilities as hunters were never in question so when I was offered a spot for the following year, I jumped at the chance.

I anxiously watched the calendar, waiting for October and my chance at a trophy mule deer. This year we would be hunting in the Northern plains. We met Tim and Jordan the evening before first day of rifle season and they informed us of a big deer that would go over 200". My father, who was accompanying me on the hunt, graciously allowed me to hunt this deer since he had connected the previous year on our hunt with Jeremy.

The following morning, we made our way to my hunting unit about an hour from Sterling with my father opting to tag along rather than chase his own trophy. We opened the gate to the property and drove about a quarter mile to our first vantage point to begin glassing at daylight. Jordan spotted a small buck bedded at the edge of a corn field almost immediately. He continued to scan and about 15 minutes after daylight on the first morning of the hunt he spotted the target buck. What I lacked in luck the first year was being made up in spades this year. At 1500 yards, we could tell this deer was a big, non-typical, and worthy of going after.

The deer was bedded, and Jordan informed us they typically get up and move a couple of times each morning, so we opted to patiently wait and observe. On cue, the deer got up and moved about 100 yards closer and bedded again. About two hours later, the



deer again moved about 60 yards closer and bedded. Again, luck was on our side and the wind shifted such that it would be in our face for an approach. We decided to make our move. Due to his location and the wind, we were able to walk almost directly to the buck. As we neared his location, we were on our hands and knees to avoid being skylighted as we crested a hill. Jordan crawled ahead about 60 yards and spotted the tips of the deer's antlers above the tall grass. We crawled the 60 yards to Jordan, and he spent the next five minutes patiently explaining the deer's location until I was able to pick up his antlers at about 60 yards. I readied myself for a shot on the top wire of a barbed wire fence on my knees, as this was the only option in the tall grass. Then the waiting began. I remained in this position for better than an hour waiting for the deer to stand. When he finally rose, there was not a clear shot. As he began to move, I tried to follow on the top wire of the

fence. As I moved, my folded bipod kept hanging on the barbs, forcing me to try to reacquire the target with each barb. We watched as he disappeared over the hill never being able to fire a shot. We crawled, paralleling the fence, to the hill the deer disappeared over but could not locate him. We knew he didn't go far, and we decided that he bedded just after topping the hill. We sat for 30 minutes glassing, trying to pick up antlers but could locate nothing. Jordan crawled to the next hill paralleling the fence, about 100 yards away, and within a minute he was signaling that he had located the buck. He motioned for us to crawl closer and stopped us about 50 yards from his location. We glassed, but from our vantage point the deer was not visible. After 15 minutes of searching, Jordan crawled back to us, and we decided to move to his vantage point up the hill. Upon reaching the hill, Jordan again explained the buck's location and I was able to pick up the tips of his antlers above





the grass at about 80 yards. And the waiting began again. I readied myself for a shot on my knees, but after 45 minutes in this position I had to switch to a seated position on a backpack, again resting on the top wire of the fence. Another hour elapsed, with every ear twitch and head shake rattling my nerves. The deer finally stood, and I fired. He was solidly hit but continued to walk and Jordan advised a follow up shot which again struck the buck. We watched as he slowly walked over the hill he had just come from. We moved quickly over the hill and there he was 20 yards over the crest. As we walked to the deer it became apparent exactly how much “trash” this buck was sporting. He was massive with multiple splits and kickers totaling 22 points. We had spotted this deer at 7:15 in the morning and killed him at 2:00

in the afternoon with the entire hunt taking place within 1500 yards of sand hills on the first morning. How is that for good luck? I can honestly say it was one of the most enjoyable and nerve-racking hunts of my life.

After high fives and pictures, we loaded the deer and headed back to Sterling. On the way home Jeremy called to congratulate me. After I relayed the story of the hunt to him, he said, “Congratulations! You just went on a bow hunt with a rifle.”

As a foot note, my father was able to connect on a mid-180s mule deer in his unit two days later with an equally fun and challenging stalk. But that is a story for another time.