

From the article "Win Big, Hunt Big" Oregon Bowhunter Magazine, March/April 2011

One would expect to read a story about a bow hunt in an issue of the Oregon Bow Hunters magazine. When Jack Elbert, editor of the OBH magazine, found out about my good fortune and the unusual opportunity presented to me, he asked me to write an article even though I was going to be hunting with a rifle. I assumed anyone willing to read a bow-hunting story would probably be interested in my adventure too, so I agreed. Here is my experience.

I was the extremely lucky recipient of a Washington Special Incentive Permit (tag) for east side elk. My season would be 4 months long and any weapon could be used. The only exception, I had to use a bow during general archery season and a muzzle loader during that general season. It was okay to use a rifle during any other time of the four-month period, beginning September 1st.

After researching where I wanted to hunt, my choice became clear, it would be the Washington Blue Mountains. After my first scouting trip it became obvious that this was not going to be an easy hunt. The Blues are all straight up and straight down, with lots of thick cover and not very many roads. After three separate scouting trips I began to get a good feel for the area and where to concentrate my hunting efforts. At the end of my third trip I finally spotted a real trophy. It was a beautiful 8x8 that I estimated to score around 400 gross points.

I had arranged for my father, son, and friend Dave to join me for my first week of the season. I had until general archery opened on the 7th to hunt with rifle. I have been an archery hunter for Oregon elk since 1997, but for the size of a bull I was looking for, I did not want to limit my shooting distance by using a bow.

On the first morning of my hunt it was raining so hard and the visibility was so poor we just stayed in bed. That afternoon the weather had cleared and my son, Michael, and I decided to hike out a ridge trail. We ended up calling in a nice 6x6 but it was not the size I wanted to shoot. This was my son's first experience with a bugling bull call-in, so he was quite thrilled. After the call-in we ended up spotting the 8x8 I was looking for. We actually were able to spot him several more times in the next few days, but in all situations he was too far away to pursue.

I finally got an opportunity to make an attack after he was spotted by others in my group. By the time I got to the location, the big bull and his herd had just moved off. Even though I could no longer see him, I was able to initiate a chase as the bull was bugling to keep the herd together. I headed down the steep and brushy mountain side. I finally began to catch up when all of the sudden the mountain went crazy! I had just busted some elk. I waited a few minutes and I moved again, as the bull continued to bugle. More crashing and I saw some spike horns go flashing by. I heard two more bugles and then the mountains went silent. I figured the big bull would be trailing the herd. It never occurred to me that he might be out in front. I sat on the side of the hill in a state of depression and angry with myself for being so aggressive.

It was a week and a half later when my next hunting partner, Brian, joined me. Upon our arrival at camp, I decided to check with a few archery-tag holders I had met early in the season. One had hunted hard, for 19 days, and came up empty. Two others had tagged small bulls. The

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other, from Vancouver, had bagged a nice 6x6 with great "whale-tails" and a score in the 370 range. He and his crew had hunted 18 days.

Just like the first day of the season, we woke up the next morning to heavy rain and fog. That evening, while out spotting and doing some calling to a few bulls, I turned around to speak with Brian. Surprise! Standing ten yards behind us was a great big spike! I asked Brian to turn around and we both started laughing. The remainder of the week we were unable to spot the 8x8 and had no opportunities on bigger bulls.

My friend, Doug, would now join me. He had been on an earlier scouting trip and was returning from a week in Colorado, archery hunting. The beginning of our first morning we spotted a herd of cows and then, the big 8x8! At this point Doug thinks I am a genius and world class guide! We tried to make a hunt on the bull, but were unsuccessful in closing in to spot him again. We ended up spending 8 hours down in the bottom of a deep bowl, waiting to hopefully find him that evening. In the late afternoon we began calling and got a couple of bulls to respond. One, we believed to be the 8x8. The other, we were able to call-in. He was a beautiful 6x6 with "whale tales" that I guessed to be around the 350 class. It was hard to pass on that bull but I wanted the big 8x8!

As we continued with the calls, darkness was setting in fast. We are just about ready to leave for the night when I looked across the draw on the far side of a burn. "Here he comes," I whisper excitedly! Doug replies with "Wholly cow, he's huge... shoot him, shoot him!" I had ranged some distances earlier and guessed he was about 275 yards away. My only problem was a good rest. We were downhill, I had a side angle and there was tall brush in front of us. My only option was to set for an off-hand shot from the knee. He was moving through the trees as I was trying to find an opening. Things were happening fast. The bull stopped. I settled in and squeezed the trigger... he went down! He got back up and began to walk back to where he had come from. I was now desperately trying for a good opening and steady hold for a follow-up shot. The bull was now stopped behind a tree and all we could see was the faint outline of his rump. He then walked straight away and out of sight. We felt that I must have shot him in the shoulder, and if so, taken out at least one lung. The first bull we called in continues to bugle and it was now totally dark.

By the time we had reached the spot where I had shot, a good 45 minutes had passed. Doug and I searched for almost 3 hours, and were unable to find any sign. Both of us expected to walk over and find him lying on the other side of the ridge where we saw him disappear. My heart was sick, I was dehydrated, hungry (all I had eaten for the day was an apple and a bagel) and I was obviously tired. We climbed out of the basin and arrived back at the truck at 11:00 pm.

The next day we discovered I had missed him clean. We found a perfect bullet embedded into a small tree directly behind where he had been standing when I shot. No blood and no hair. I shot right over his neck! I was relieved to finally know what had happened and angry that I had missed the shot.

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As Saturday morning arrived, we had only one day left before we needed to return home. We were glassing and I spotted a big herd of elk feeding on a ridge about a mile and a half away. Even from that distance, I could see a good set of horns on the bull overlooking the herd. Forty-five minutes later, we arrived on the ridge where we last saw the elk. There were tracks everywhere. I decided to make an assumption as to which direction the elk had gone. My instincts turned out to be right, as I then heard a distant bugle. He sounded big and down deep into a draw. As we continued to stalk, I spotted cows down below us. I took a quick range reading while watching the cows, 200 yards. Next, I heard that unmistakable "glunking" noise moving up toward the cows. My first quick look and I saw that he was big, wide and very heavy. I immediately decided that I would shoot. Before I got set, he had disappeared. Soon he was back and walking straight away. I was starting to panic, not wanting to shoot him from behind. Suddenly he turned, giving me a quartering away shot. I shot and he went down! After a few seconds he got back up. I was now having some trouble getting my rifle bolt to latch. I quickly decided to eject this round and chamber another. It worked and I settled in for a second shot. Down again and he got back up! He is now stumbling and I quickly chambered my last round and shot again. The bull had now lost his balance and is sliding down the hill out of sight.

My heart was racing as I quickly reloaded the rifle magazine and chambered another bullet. Suddenly Doug says, "Here comes the bull!" We look, and it is a big 5x5. I try to recall what had just happened and I am sure I had not shot at a 5x5. Then, to my surprise, Doug calls out, "Here comes another bull and he is a 6x6!" I was now in a state of confusion. I quickly look at this bull and thought, "The one I shot at was bigger." With everything happening so fast, there was still that doubt in my mind as to what had just happened.

We eventually moved down the hill and recovered this beautiful and extremely heavy 6x6. My emotions began to overwhelm me, the hunt was finally over! In true herd bull fashion, he was a fighter and was missing a tine and had one broken. His antler bases measured out at eleven inches, his inside spread was 41 inches and a main beam length of 48 inches! I was very satisfied.

To finish this story I want to give a wholehearted thanks to Dave, Brian, Doug and my son, Michael, who all gave up vacation time to help me fulfill a dream. I want to thank my father and mother, who are always in my corner and have given me such a great opportunity in life. In addition, thanks to my wife, who has been so understanding about my passion for hunting and particularly supportive about the opportunity I had this year.

For more details on this hunt and my comments on hunting in the Blue Mountains look for a link at the OBH website: www.oregonbowhunters.com

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Your OBH web administrator and lifetime OBH member