



A Tale of a Bull

by Larry Weishuhn

Get down! There's a bull less than 60 yards away in the oaks," whispered Ronnie West my outfitter/guide. We all obeyed and hit the dirt. Ronnie raised up ever so slowly and peered through his 10X Swarovski binoculars. "He's got six good, long points on his left side, but his right main beam is missing." He hesitated then continued, "He hasn't seen us, he's moving down the draw to where the bull we're after is bugling. Let's sit tight for a while and see what unfolds next."

There had been a plenty "unfolding" going on opening morning of the 2000 New Mexico elk season. Actually, it had all started the evening before when my cameraman, Herman Brune, West Outfitting guide Keith Wyatt and I had scouted a basin only a couple of miles west of the area we hunted opening morning. While scouting, Herman, Keith and I had spotted no less than nine different sizeable bulls in one not so big basin. All were bugling, chasing cows and trying to keep satellite bulls away from their harems. It had been a sight to behold, and one to be remembered. That afternoon we had located at least a couple of bulls that would have scored in the 300 to 310 B&C range.

We filmed several bulls, including a huge 5 by 5 that seemingly bugled with every breath. We were excited over the prospects of opening day.

That same afternoon Ronnie West had scouted another area. When we picked him up for the return trip to camp, he was wide-eyed and obviously a bit extra excited. I've known Ronnie West for several years and I knew by the look in his eyes and slightly higher pitched voice that he had found something special. "Nineteen bulls! I didn't even count the raghorns. Nineteen mature bulls with at least five points per side, and most of them good 6 by 6s. I've been hunting elk for a long time, in some of the best elk country in North America and I've never seen a sight equal to this afternoon!" said my outfitter, shaking his head as if still in disbelief. "I should have had Herman with me. A 340-class bull was less than 25 yards from me, screaming his head off. It was unbelievable!" He hesitated, "I know where we're going to start off in the morning."

With that we returned to camp for a delicious meal prepared by J.R. Hudson, West Outfitting's camp chef/cowboy historian and sometimes guide. That night many notes were compared and it was decided that opening morning we indeed would hunt "bull basin."

That's how at first light Ronnie, Herman, guide G. T. Nunn and I came to be where we were.

Even well before daylight we could hear

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more bulls bugling than we could individually identify. This from the moment we left West's pickup well before daylight. It was still too dark to film when we nearly bumped into the broken main beam bull. Thus we sat tight for several minutes until Herman gave us the "go ahead, there's enough light" signal. While sitting, propped against a comfortable rock I recalled the past several days. The first leg of my fall elk hunt had taken me to Colorado to hunt with Richard Petrini's Tri-State Outfitters (Dept. DSC, 75 Hwy. 348, Delta, CO 81416, telephone 970-874-1882 or email at tristateoutfitters@hotmail.com) where I hunted for a mature 5 by 5 bull on Richard's Bijou Springs Ranch. I hoped to help Petrini "cull" a mature 5 by 5 bull from a high-fenced elk herd. The trip proved successful and I was able to take an extremely old bull with five points on one side and six on the other using my Thompson/Center 209 x 50 Magnum muzzleloader. It was far from easy! Guide Bridger Petrini, cameraman Herman Brune and I spent considerable time looking over bulls, stalking, then turning down younger animals before we finally found

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one that appeared to be old. But talk about great fun!

That first leg of the trip had also helped me get in a little better shape to tackle the higher mesas in northern New Mexico while hunting with West Outfitting.

When the light was finally good enough to film, we started creeping ever closer to the edge of "bull basin". The sights and sounds were unbelievable. I could identify no less than 10 or 11 bulls by their bugles and locations. Ronnie had told me he had seen about a 340 bull, a 320 bull and one that was about 310 or so, plus several that were right at the magical 300 number. While I hoped we could get onto the largest bulls, I also knew that if I saw a 300 class bull and he was within reasonable range of my T/C Encore handgun chambered for .30-06, I was going to be sorely tempted. While I truly wanted to shoot the best bull possible, I also planned on taking a bull "on camera" for the new television show I was doing, "Realtree Presents Larry Weishuhn, Hunting the World" which will air on the Outdoor Channel beginning in July of 2001. That meant the first 300 class bull that presented a good shot, after the appropriate filming, would be my target.

About 300 yards away, just over the cusp of the next ridge a bull was bugling with every breath. By the sound of his gruffness he had to be a mature bull.

Ever so slowly we crept to the edge of the canyon, making certain not to skyline ourselves. We changed positions several times, literally crawling on our hands and knees. I looked back at Herman to be sure he was close. He was. His years of experience of guiding elk hunters in Montana's wilderness areas, made him a valuable cameraman particularly on this hunt.

Ronnie was in the lead by a couple of legs. He stopped, raised up slightly, then turned and waved me forward. "They're about 200 yards away. I can see three cows and the bull's backside. Can't see his antlers, but by the size of him he should be pretty good. Let's get in position in case he's a bull you want." Then queried, "How close do you

have to be with that handgun?"

"If we can get within 200 yards of him, if I can get a good rest, I think I can take him from there." I commented, thinking of the days I had just spent at the range and in the field shooting at milk jugs at 300 yards, using Federal Premium 180-grain Sierra GameKing BTSP loads. That same handgun had helped me account for moose in Alaska and Wyoming, as well as caribou in Alaska and plains game in South Africa. I had great confidence in the Encore handgun and my ability with it.

We crawled a bit closer to the edge. As we did the bull stepped out from behind a juniper. I could

see he had what appeared to be six good points on one side, and five long points with a short sixth on the other. He was also quite massive. "He's not the biggest in the basin, but if he's got all his points he should go around 300 B&C. It's your call. If you want to pass him we'll go see if we can find another. It's just the first morning and we've got plenty of time left," whispered West, while I peered through my Swarovski 8.5 X 40 Elts.

The temptation was great to pass him, for I knew there might likely be an opportunity at a larger bull, and my best elk ever. However, the setup was perfect, the bull was bugling and he was gorgeous! I turned to Herman, "Get plenty of footage of him. When you feel you've got enough let me know and I'll set up to take him." Herman nodded an affirmative.

The bull continued bugling and pranced back and forth before I got the go ahead from the cameraman. With that I eased forward to an area that provided an open shooting lane. There I set up my Stoney Point telescoping bipod shooting sticks (which I refuse to go to the game fields without) and laid the big handgun in the crux of the sticks, took a deep breath and centered the crosshairs on the bull. When the sight picture looked good, I gently pulled the trigger. At the shot the bull flinched and then followed a cow behind a wall of junipers. Hurriedly, I reloaded and waited. Moments later the cow walked out followed by the bull. He stopped and bugled. By now I had moved forward just a bit to get on to steadier ground and a better rest. When I gently tugged at the trigger this time, the bull dropped in his tracks. I reloaded once again and sat there at the ready should the bull make any move. He kicked a few times then lay still. All the while there was a celebration going on behind me. The primary words I was waiting for at the moment was "Got him!" coming from Herman.

When I was sure the bull was down for good I too joined in, shaking hands, whispering prayers of thanks and thanking Ronnie West for a most successful elk hunt.

It took quite a while for us to get my bull.

He had died in a bulldozer track on the opposite side of the canyon. But, the canyon was deep and steep. While we worked our way to the downed bull, G. T. headed back to the vehicle and then to camp to return with his mule string to help pack the bull out of the hills.

After photos, more footage for the show, field-dressing chores and quartering the elk, then getting the meat in the shade I visited with Ronnie West about his elk hunting operation. West hunts some of the best elk country in New Mexico, both in the northern part of the state and also down in the Gila Wilderness Area. On a muzzleloader mule deer hunt the previous year with West Outfitting I had seen numerous outstanding bull elk, enough so that I knew that some day I was going to hunt with Ronnie in his southwestern New Mexico area. Besides elk he also outfits for pronghorn, mule deer, whitetails in Texas and bear and lion in Idaho.

About midday G. T. arrived with his string of riding and pack mules. The pack-out took a couple of hours, and was a most enjoyable part of the trip, especially since we didn't have to "mare's shank" the delicious elk meat back to camp.

Before our hunt was over Raymond and Mike York of Laredo had taken two excellent bulls Raymond's a 300 class bull and Mike an excellent 320+ class bull (which Herman was able to film after finishing my hunt). Dr. Glenn Ellisor of Kingwood, a West Outfitting regular, also took an excellent 300 class bull. All in all the hunt had been a huge success.

If you'd like more information about hunting with Ronnie West's West Outfitting, contact him at West Outfitting, Dept. DSC, P.O. Box 360, Winnsboro, Texas 75494, call him at 903-629-3678 or e-mail him at outwest@peoplescom.net. You can bet I'll be hunting with him again! I've got a date with one of those 320+ class bulls! **GT**

