

HAPPY ANNIVERSARY

At times I feel as though I'm cheating when I go out of my way to be sneaky. There's this small, 1.5 acre, food plot surrounded by approximately 400 acres of mature timber I bowhunt. Although I have nothing against food plots whatsoever, the primary reason this one exists is to allow deer to feed evenings before they drop down to the cultivated crop fields to the west. The hidden plot just discourages drive-by shootings that otherwise might tempt passing vehicles from the county road. If the truth be known, I have never killed a deer in a food plot in my life that I recall. As stated, I have nothing against them, I just prefer to ambush them to and from the plots themselves.

In this particular scenario there's an old farm two-track dropping down through the timber to the plot at the bottom of the ridge. It appears to be a no brainer to access the bottom by just dropping down the road into the plot. This leads to another undeniable fact that in-the-field scouting times will teach you things you can't learn via aerial maps or photos. Over the years I noticed after the foliage dropped whenever I entered the food plot via the farm road I would see white flags running across the flat and up the ridge on the other side across the plot. You could get away with entrance/exit when there were leaves on the trees but not after fall foliage opened up the timbered view.

I've always been a big fan of hunting undisturbed deer. By doing so, we hunt them in their normal patterns rather than altered, defensive movements. So, rather than risking any disturbance in the area, when I first top out the ridge, using the directional air currents to my advantage, I swing wide and quietly make my decent by slipping unseen down through the timbered ridge rather than walk the two-track. After dropping into the creek bed at the bottom, remaining out of sight by walking the dry creek bed itself, I loop around and across a weedy flat entering the stand via "the back door". It's hundreds of yards out of the way but well worth it. When I point it out it's a very obvious no-brainer. But most guys are either too lazy or do not even consider it in the first place. These are the little secrets that dictate your potential for success and what your hunt will produce.

So it was on the afternoon of November 21, 2016. The name of the stand is Grand Junction because it sits where two old internal fences, a hedgerow and a bend in the creek bottom come together. To add to the positive mental side of things, I have personally seen at least four B&C class bucks from the stand over the years.

When I have to cross a main deer trail in order to get into my stand I always make sure I do so in a shooting lane so if any approaching deer happen to cut my track they will do so in a precise spot where I can take them if wanted.

The afternoon was beautiful, partly cloudy, 50 degrees and the winds at 8 MPH out of the southeast. An hour into my sit, the first deer I saw was a great two year old up and comer non-typical. He had a neat, twisted rack with several extra points. He's one of those you look at and dream what he'll

turn into at full maturity. He was about 100 yds. away on the flat across the dry creek. I filmed him as he dropped down into the creek and disappeared from my sight. Two minutes later and two hundred yards away I watched a bigger buck come off the food plot and drop into the dry creek bed. He appeared to have decent mass and width with a honey-blond colored 4x4 rack. It was obvious he'd made eye contact with the young non-typical as the 4x4 was all puffed up with his ears laid back in an aggressive posture. Unfortunately for me they were now down over the bank and out of my sight. Five minutes later, up out of the creek 200 yds. away came a 3x2 that I'd seen several other times previous.

Just then, movement caught my eye. On the flat at 150 yds. was a really good buck, a shooter for sure. He had pure white antlers and appeared to be a basic 5x4 with the body of a bull indicative of a fully mature stud. The direction he was headed would not bring him anywhere close so I decided to wheeze. He walked behind some slash and I couldn't see him anymore. I gave him another slap in the face with a second wheeze. I still couldn't see him and wondered if he could even hear my calling. Suddenly two does broke out of the dry creek bed with flags flying. I wasn't sure what was going on as I had a good steady wind and none of the bucks were chasing them.

For some unknown reason I looked behind me and standing 40 yards directly downwind, opposite all the action, was another great buck. It struck me he'd apparently heard me wheeze, looked over and saw the movement of the does, and was deciding what action to take. He was just standing there as I said a little prayer. Instantly, here he comes at a fast trot. He jumped the old fence 5 yards to my right. As soon as his hooves hit the ground on my side he broke into a slow run/gallop.

I haven't shot a running deer for decades but instincts took over. He was less than ten yards. I drew and swung with his steady gait. The instant I released I knew he was mine. The arrow disappeared right behind the shoulders broadside for a perfect double lung pass-through. Running about 70 yards, he crossed the dry creek. As soon as he topped out he stopped. I could see he was having a hard time standing. He was flicking his tail around wildly, which experience has taught me is a very good sign. Taking my eyes off him for literally a second, I looked back and he was gone. I wasn't sure if he stepped forward behind some brush or if he went down. It ended up he did both.

Making a long story short, as I approached him I can't ever remember seeing a buck die in that position. He was flat on his back looking like a dog wanting a belly rub. This buck meant a lot to me and will go down in my memory as one of my all-time favorites. As luck would have it, I happened to get him on the 57th anniversary of the day I killed my very first deer ever. And a beauty he was. He has a basic 5x4 frame plus spilt brow tines on each side. He ended up measuring 161 2/8 inches with heavy bases of 6.5" on his right and 6.25" on his left and 25" main beams. Although I didn't weigh him I'm sure he dressed well over 200 lbs.

The other reason this one was so special is because of my open heart surgery and subsequent cardiac rehab all last summer. I easily could have missed the entire season or worse. The fact is I could hardly draw a 35 lb. bow back on Sept. 1st. I borrowed an old 40 lb. recurve my brother had and left it strung and lying on the dining room table. Every time I walked by I'd draw it back a couple times. Long story short, the day before our October 1st. opening day I put three arrows in a 3 inch circle at 18 yds. with my #61 lb. Tall Tines recurve. Even so, I vowed not to shoot at one over 15 yds. And, I must brag I kept my word when a potential Booner walked by me at 27-28 yds. the last few days of October. I just didn't feel confident with the shot so I let him walk.

Now "the rest of the story", two days later I was pulling chips from my trail cameras. Low and behold, there was a picture of my buck on a camera a half mile away. In all honesty I didn't recognize him at first because the time/date of the photo was after I'd already killed him. But on closer examination the time/date obviously had to be off as it's definitely the same buck. I'll admit I really lucked out on the lighting and focus. As you can see from the front cover of this magazine issue the photo came out looking like a great Andrew Warrington painting.

I just wanted to thank everyone who helped me get through this past year. Whitetails are cool for sure, but the love and support of family and friends is stronger. I'm really blessed. That's my story and I'm sticking to it. Thank you all!

Barry Wensel