



A Sawtooth Wilderness Elk Hunting Adventure

Bruce Brown • Idaho • 2006 • Public Land • Guided

It was the end of September, and my good friend and hunting partner Steve Wilkinson and I found ourselves making the journey from California to Idaho for our second elk hunting trip together.

A year had passed since our last quest for trophy Rocky Mountain Elk in the Sawtooth Wilderness of Idaho and we returned to this area again with our good friend Chris Korell, who is the owner of Korell Outfitters in Emmett, Idaho. After hunting with Chris last year we knew we had found a great spot with lots of bulls. Steve and I both had shot opportunities five minutes apart and in the same spot. Unfortunately we were not successful. We were humbled after our misses, but we kept on going, and joked about our shortcomings. Chris and Cody Korell along with last years guide Jake Bigelow called our close encounter, "The Battle of Little Big Horn."

This year, about two weeks before our hunt, I

received a call from Chris, who had good and bad news for Steve and I. I took the bad news first. Chris informed me that the area we hunted the previous year had become the victim of fire, and we would not be able to return to that location. The good news was just that, "GOOD NEWS." Chris had recently acquired outfitting rights to an area west of where we hunted last year. Chris had been a guide for the previous outfitter who had the rights to this land over ten years ago and he knew it well. Chris mentioned that big bulls were taken from this area and there would likely be little to no hunting pressure from other hunters since it is remote. This sounded too good to be true. To top that off, Chris was bringing an experienced bowhunter to guide us, Terry Larimer from Prineville, Oregon. Larimer has taken sixteen bulls with bow, and has called in as many for friends. Neither Steve nor I were all that good at calling, but we had improved our techniques from the previous year.



We sure could work our Hoochie Mamas like the best.

We met with Chris and Terry in Emmett and followed



them up to base camp. We met with two hunters from West Virginia who hunted with Cody Korell. After wishing them luck and loading up our horses we headed to camp. Along the way we listened to my good friend, Jim Horn's Aggressive Elk Calling Techniques CD. This was actually our third time listening to it on our trip. We were fired up by Jim's motivating and informative CD and we were ready to go.

Once our gear was secured to the mules we got on our horses and made our way to camp. There was still snow on the ground along the north slopes and under trees from a storm that moved in a few days before we arrived. During the ride we saw numerous fresh rubs, tall grass that was now flat near creek bottoms, and elk tracks galore. There were obvious signs that elk were here. After setting up camp we gathered in the cook tent and planned our day one hunt.

The first day we headed out on foot as a group. We did not go further than a mile and a half from camp when we started to bugle and listen. Terry, with ears like a mule would pick up on the

back end of a bugle or a grunt from the bottom of a draw and then point to the area where it came from. Chris who is a logger in the off season said, "You're hearing things." Steve and I knew when Chris made that statement, that there's a bull near by.

The bulls were not fired up yet, but just letting us know that they were there. There was not a lot of activity yet, but the week was young and we were in God's country living the dream.

Day two brought us to another area not far away. We traveled on horses and would stop and bugle along the trail. We heard the back end of a bugle, and then a full bugle that was near by. There were two bulls, one on each side of us. We decided to go after the bull on our right. This bull was vocal and continued to bugle as we made our way to a point.

Once the horses were secure, Terry bugled one more time when we were ready to pin point the bull's location. The bull with his raspy low bugle answered twice. We walked to the edge of a ridge





and started glassing the mountain across from us. All of us immediately spotted him. He was a nice 7x7, with a smaller rag horn and cows in his company. After planning our approach, we took off. We crossed the top and worked our way to another large saddle near the bull.

Terry directed me to the edge of the saddle while he and Steve stayed close together. As I moved to my spot, I was stopped by the sound of running elk. There were more elk present that we did not see. Terry started bugling and the bull answered immediately. I felt some ease by his answer. The bull however did not come closer, but he did not appear startled by the other elk leaving. The bull and his cows were now working up where we had just crossed.

We immediately started a hasty backtrack. Steve and Terry were now directly above the bull. I

ended up getting too close to the creek we crossed and my scent went right to the bull and the bull walked off. I was upset with myself after ruining Steve's chances at this bull. The bull and his cows crossed within 30 yards of our horses where Chris was sitting, watching the events unfold.

Day three brought us back only a quarter of a mile from the last location we saw the 7x7 leaving with his cows. We were just hoping that the big bull would still be around. We did not hear anything along the ride, but as soon as we got off our horses an unexpected and familiar





bugle rang out across the mountainside. The bull was only 300 yards away, and boy did he sound up-



Terry began bugling and cow calling when we were set up on what we thought would be the path the bull would take to get to Terry. The herd bull was now furious and was trying to bugle over the top of Terry. I could hear the bull tearing up a tree, but I could not see him yet. Within five minutes of Terry bugling and cow calling the herd talk was getting louder and I could hear the cows moving our way. These cows wanted to see who the new bull on the block was and worked their way side hilling 30 yards to our right. Boy did this make the bull even more angry.

set. Bugling every few seconds as if he was running a smaller bull off or keeping his cows close to him. There was no doubt we were going to get in close again since he was worked up.

We stalked to within 100 yards of the bull. As we got closer, the "herd talk" was amazing. Steve described it as having every cow call made on a table and someone blowing or squeezing each one at the same time. There were so many different sounds being made. This was only my third elk hunt, but it was the first time I heard "Herd Talk." It was really exciting and an experience of its own. Steve and I went toward the elk, Terry and Chris stayed back calling.





The cows were in a single file line heading directly toward Chris and Terry. I made a huge mistake by not moving toward the cows. Having mainly hunted deer, I was not accustomed to making any move when game was near. After the cows had crossed I could hear the bull getting closer, bugling every five to ten seconds. I saw the bull approaching so I came to full draw, I had a three foot window to thread the needle through, but the bull was moving too quick for me to make a shot. I moved to my side to try to get a better shooting lane, and as I did I had 36 eyes looking right at me. The bull was now quartering away from me, but was out of bow range. The bull

did not know I was there so I ran to Terry and Chris who were waiving for me to get to them quickly. When I got to them the cows and bull were on top of the saddle we crossed. Some of the cows went over the top and the others went back down

the draw they came from. The bull stayed on top of the saddle and looked around with disgust. The bull turned and ran straight down hill and out of sight. At least we had this spectacular event on video.

Steve followed the second set of cows and I followed him. Steve intercepted the cows as they continued to move, but the bull was gone. Steve and I moved along the top of the ridge trying to cut the elk off from where we thought they were heading. We dropped off a steep incline and started moving down the slope. Steve was about 150 yards to my left.



When I was a quarter of the way down the hill side I found myself between the elk. I could hear the herd bull bugling below them and another bull bugling to my left toward Steve's location. The elk either saw or heard me coming and ended up walking right into Steve. Two cows crossed 80 yards below Steve so he went to where they crossed and got ready for the bull that was following the cows. With a four foot wide shooting lane a nice 5x5 bull appeared and stopped. With no time to range the bull Steve visually estimated the bull to be 50 yards away. Due to the steep, downhill, angle Steve shot at the bull splitting his 40 and 50 yard pins. The shot went high and only cut the top of the bull's back. After being hit, the bull stopped, faced Steve and bugled. There was no blood to be found and the arrow was now somewhere in the bottom of the

canyon. Steve and I met up and I could see that ol' so familiar look of frustration we had last year. But hey we got back into the elk again and we did what

we were just taught.

Day four we traveled to an area we had not yet been. After a long horse ride, Steve and Terry decided to work down the mountain toward a place Chris and I would meet with them. Chris and I rode for 30 more minutes to a ridge where we found a large fresh bull track. Chris bugled as we walked to the west edge of the ridge and two bulls answered immediately. The bulls were 400 yards to our left and slightly down hill. We started down and bugled again. The bulls answered and we were now within 100 yards of their location. I moved out in front of Chris but there was not a lot of cover on the hillside.



The bull silently walked into view and was only 60 yards away. I could see that he had at least 7 points on his left side, and at least six on his right. This was another awesome bull on public land.

After looking from behind the tree the bull slowly turned and walked away. I moved even closer and then I



heard him popping branches as he approached. I dropped to my knees and he appeared about 35 yards in front of me. He was looking right at me, but I believe he was looking right over me as I was motionless. The bull walked in 20 yards away from me, but he was now facing me. I was hoping the bull would move to his right and go behind a tree to start his circle around Chris, but he did not. The bull looked toward Chris, but the bull did not see an elk, so he turned and started to walk away. I did not take a shot as the bull was not broadside. As the bull turned, I quickly went to full draw but he did not present a good shot. I felt the agony of defeat once again, but I still had two more full days to hunt and we were having close encounters with Pope and Young bulls daily.

Day five came and we headed out again. Steve and Chris stayed on one side of the mountain as Terry and I descended to the bottom after a bull

grunted. Terry and I ended up running into a bull that was much closer than we expected, or was it the same bull? The bull turned and ran to the bottom. Chris bugled from the top and sure enough it was a different bull. The winds were now changing and were no longer in our favor. We stopped, had lunch and waited until 2 o'clock when the winds shifted back in our favor. We started our slow and quiet approach to where we thought the bull was bedded. We knew we were

near when we saw a newly demolished young tree and caught the scent of elk in our faces. We thought we were in a prime spot to start calling and bugling. The bull did not answer the cow calls, but as soon as Terry bugled he answered, and I could hear the other elk with him moving away from us. The bull was coming closer and heading straight toward us. After that the bull was text book, he made his circle to go above us, caught our scent and he was gone, bugling a few times as he left to let us know he won the game.

Terry and I ended up getting into several more bulls that day, but not one bull wanted to play, they just bugled and moved their cows. We were surprised that not even the satellite bulls were coming in. Later that evening we called in a bull I named, "Diablo." This large, wide framed



6x6 had fire in his eyes as he came toward us. We were in an unfavorable position with a



cutback between us and the bull. The bull started moving up hill on the other side of the cutback. I was exhausted but I had get across the cutback for a chance to get this beast. As soon as I was in his tracks I saw that the bull crossed back over the cutback, so I started to go across, but slid down a six foot slope and ended up popping a tree branch in the bottom. I was now within 40 yards of his cows. As soon as the branch snapped Diablo appeared. With his head down almost touching the ground he looked toward me and let out a fierce bugle, then moved. I had no chance at getting a shot at him, but I was in awe of his size and beauty.

We could still hear Diablo bugling, but he was now 400 yards in front of us slowly moving away. We all sat exhausted a mile and a half from camp. We decided to take a break and have some fun. As soon as Diablo bugled again Terry bugled over the top of him. Wow, I wish we had at least a half hour more of sunlight, because this fired Diablo up. Diablo turned and started a quick approach toward us. The bull got within 80 yards of us and challenged us to a good ol' Rocky Mountain Elk fight. We decided to get up and slowly leave the area, a good thing because it was now too dark to shoot and we needed our head lamps. We had a great time talking about this encounter around the dinner table that night.

Day six we decided to go back to where we saw Diablo. We did not hear or see him again. We had a few bulls bugling below us. Steve and Terry started moving toward them and soon they ran into the sound of a hunter bugling below. They laughed as they mimicked the sound of the hunter. I was not laughing too much as I would probably have sounded the same. The morning hunt ended and we decided we were going to pack up and ride to base camp with one day left.

It was now the 29th and a little after 6:00 P.M. We were on our ride out of camp when Chris turned to Terry and told him to bugle from his horse. We were only three miles from the trailhead. As soon as Terry bugled Steve heard two bulls bugling 100 yards from the trail below us. We rode 500 yards up the trail and tied up the horses, and Chris continued with the pack mules back to the trailhead.

Terry bugled a few times to locate the bulls and they were closing in on us quickly. I got to a short bench and knelt down. Steve flanked to the left and stopped 80 yards from me. One bull bugled below the bench in front of me. I saw the top of the bull's horns and went to full





draw before seeing his eyes. That was the last time I looked at his horns as I knew I was going to shoot this bull. The bull bugled one more time and came to the edge of the bench and stopped about 19 yards quartering toward me. Terry was only six yards behind me, but completely hidden by two large trees that had grown together. Terry stomped his feet, snapped branches and bugled, which caused the bull to step to the side leaving me a broadside shot at 17 yards. At full draw I felt a feeling I had not felt for a while, my sight window was shaking and I could hear my pulse in my ears. I let the arrow go and I saw it disappear. As the bull turned and ran away, I could see the broadhead sticking out his right side, with blood seeping out.

Terry came out from the trees and started bugling at the bull that was now staggering. After hearing the bull pile up Terry came over to me and said his favorite phrase, "Dead bull." Terry, Steve and I celebrated my shot and followed the blood trail 60 yards where we found the fallen bull. After so many close encounters with trophy bulls we were excited with the ending of our hunt, and my first bull elk. He was a nice 6x5 that's 40 inches wide. Talk about taking it down to the wire. For the longest time I dreamed of taking a bull elk with my bow, and now the sense of accomplishment sat in.

I want to thank my good friend Wade Derby with Crosshair Consulting (www.crosshairconsulting.com) for introducing Steve and I to Chris and Cody Korell. My wife Stacy, and our two sons Vince and Ethan for putting up with my elk calling in the house and countless hours watching hunting videos. My good friend, Steve Wilkinson for sharing such an experience with me, and to Chris Korell and my guide Terry Larimer for making my hunt successful.

