

Outdoors

Moose are boring ... not!

A hunting magazine editor once remarked to me: “Moose are boring!”

This offended me a little, seeming to disrespect a game animal that had lost his life. I could hardly argue because at that time I hadn’t hunted moose, but I’d hunted other game in moose country and had found them interesting and impressive animals.

When at last I decided to hunt a bull moose for myself, I found those impressions had been accurate.

When planning a trip for a new game species, it was my habit always to find out as much about the creature as possible. I learned all I could from the literature about its lifestyle, habits, food, breeding, habitat and temperament.

My research on the moose told me they frequent low-lying, marshy areas with heavy willow thickets bordering rivers and lakes. In thinking back, however, this contradicted some of my own observations of moose above timberline where I was hunting mountain sheep and goats.

Spooking mature bulls in high meadows, I’d watched them race up steep grades to disappear over mountaintops instead of charging downhill into timber, like any self-respecting deer. Moose, of course, are deer – the largest species of true deer on earth.

And, yes, I had sometimes found them in and around lakes and rivers ... when I was fishing. In fly season, however, moose seek refuge above timberline where cool winds help repel the voracious, blood-sucking flies that plague the north country in late summer and autumn.

Well, game is where you find it. If moose like mountain tops instead of river valleys, that’s where I’d hunt.

That’s where my guide and I found them during a September hunt in British Columbia. The flies were bad and the moose were enjoying the autumn breezes on the bare upper slopes. This made it easy to locate several bulls,



Wootters poses with the Canadian bull moose that proved that moose is not a boring game animal. Moose is also some of the tastiest wild meat in North America ... and there's so much of it.

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with their newly-stripped, snow white antlers, and to evaluate trophy quality from a single vantage point.

But it complicated stalking. Most of the bulls were in places where they could watch any of the vistas across which we might try to approach. My rifle was an accurate, flat-shooting .338 Magnum, but the terrain made it difficult to get within range unseen.

We finally selected a bull and plotted our campaign. I would ride diagonally toward the bull’s position, trying to look innocent. With luck, the bull might allow me to get within range. Meanwhile, my guide would drop down the hillside and let the bull see him, hoping to distract the moose and perhaps nudge him toward me.

When we began our pincers movement, however, that bull put on the most astonishing display of ducking, dodging and hiding that would have done justice to the smartest old whitetail buck in Texas! How a 1,400-pound animal standing seven feet tall could make himself scarce in cover that seemed too scanty to conceal a middle-sized jackrabbit was a mystery, but this bull managed it.

We played the game for almost an hour before the

moose finally made one mistake and showed himself broadside at about 200 yards.

I dismounted, jerking the rifle from its scabbard as I swung down. It occurred to me as I pushed the safety lever forward that I had no idea about my horse’s tolerance for gunfire. Some hunting horses are relatively calm around a big rifle, while others tend to go home ... and “home” to this horse was a ranch about 30 miles away across wilderness mountain terrain. Regardless, I had no time to worry about it at the moment. It was now or never on this moose, so I dropped the reins and started shooting.

Moose are tough and often show no reaction even to a fatal hit, so the rule is: keep shooting until he drops. My moose didn’t drop until my third shot, although later examination indicated that any of the three should have sufficed.

By that time the hoofbeats of my faithful steed were fading in the distance.

When he died, the moose was standing at the head of a shallow draw scooped out of the mountainside. His col-

lapse was spectacular, nearly three-quarters of a ton of moose, tumbling, rolling, and sliding 50 yards down the mountain, a literal avalanche of moose.

Being afoot and with no idea of my guide’s whereabouts, I walked down to examine my moose and wait for him there. While waiting, I thought back over all the surprises this animal had given me and wondered how anybody could ever have thought that moose are boring.

The guide showed up fifteen minutes later, leading my runaway horse. Then the hard work of butchering and boning began. That part was indeed boring.

John Wootters, of Ingram, is a semi-retired outdoors writer with more than 30 years experience. He was editor of Petersen’s Hunting magazine and author of the monthly column “Buck Sense” and has written the all-time best selling book on deer hunting, “Hunting Trophy Deer.” He has served on the Board of Directors of the National Rifle Association and written for Shooting Times, Rifle, Handloader, Guns & Ammo and Petersen’s Hunting magazines.