

Outdoors



Photos by John Wootters

A small portion of the old Lone Star Brewery collection of whitetail antlers suggests the almost limitless variations possible.

One-of-a-kind whitetails

As this hunting season unfolds, hunters with a little imagination can amuse themselves on slow days by mentally cataloging the variety of antler shapes, sizes and variations of whitetail bucks.

The range of forms taken by these bony outgrowths on bucks' brows is almost infinite. Just about any shape you can imagine antlers taking (and probably some you can't) has already occurred somewhere, sometime.

The accompanying picture was taken many years ago of a wall in the old Lone Star Brewery's Hall of Horns in San Antonio. I've heard that this extraordinary collection of whitetail heads has been moved and/or changed ownership, but I have no information as to where (or whether) it may be on public display now.

The photo actually includes less than half of the wall as it was, and the variety of the heads on the other half was just as extreme as these.

A couple of these trophies deserve a bit of comment. The big rack in the lower left corner of the scene is the Basil Dailey buck, shot in a stock tank in 1906 in Frio County. The last time I checked, this was still the third highest-scoring typical rack ever taken in Texas and ranked #27 on the all-time world record list.

Remember, in 1906 there was no such thing as a game-proof fence or commercial high-protein deer feed. This was a completely natural, free-ranging wild buck, officially scoring 192 1/8 points under the Boone and Crockett Club system.

The weird head at far right in the middle row is the only animal ever to hold both first and second places in a B-&-C list. This is the Jeff Benson trophy shot near Brady in 1892, scoring 286 and, to the best of my knowledge, still the best Texas non-typical whitetail of all time.

In my 1977 book "Hunting Trophy Deer," I called this

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the unbeatable record, but at least two or three non-typical racks from Canada and the Midwest have dropped it a few spots in the world record rankings ... but it's still Texas' all-time biggest non-typical.

The striking thing about it is that the shed antlers of the same deer from the previous year were mounted and later entered in the Boone and Crockett competition. Measurers weren't as careful about fakes in those days as they are now, and the rack actually went into the book at #2 behind ... himself!

Eventually, the fraud was discovered and thrown out, and the furor caused a wholesale reevaluation of the "book" heads of all big game species. As a result, Boone & Crockett Club records today are probably as trustworthy and genuine as it's possible to make them, and steps have been taken to see that they stay that way.

Take a few minutes to study the other racks in this picture, and notice that there seem to be no limits on the forms the growing bone can assume.

It isn't simply a matter of how many times a buck can



This is Wootters' "double double-beam" buck, sporting two beams on each side and a brow tine on all four beams. Inquiries suggest that this head may be unique.

grow and where he grows them, but overall conformation.

The third buck from right on the bottom row has a double beam (at least) on his right side. As the other photo shows, I shot a buck a few years ago that carried double beams on both sides, with a brow tine on all four beams. For years I've made inquiries among whitetail biologists and taxidermists and have never heard of another similar rack anywhere.

The point of all this is that a hunter never knows what may step out of the brush next. It may be just another mediocre eight-pointer, or it might be something that literally has never been seen before.

When I shot my double-double-beam buck at 110 yards with a pistol, I knew there was something very

strange about his antlers but couldn't make it out until I ground-checked him. Then I found myself looking at the most remarkable of all the hundreds of whitetail bucks I've collected over more than 60 seasons. Many were bigger — or wider, heavier or with more points — but this was one in a lifetime.

I'll never understand how anybody can get bored in a deer blind.

John Wootters is a semi-retired outdoors writer with more than 30 years experience. He is 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.