

# “INCREDIBLE JOURNEY”

by Mattie Nobles

BIG GAME HUNTING

Growing up hunting, I was never after the trophies. I was out there to enjoy the land, the serenity and the time with family.

I arrived just before opening day of the Mule Deer season in 2015 - excited to hear Jess would again be my guide. I unpacked and promptly got my gun set up on the range. My first shots were way off target. There was a camp dog barking with each shot, I quickly became panicked. Jess took the sled away, spoke a few calming words and set his pack up to mimic a true hunt. I hit the mark.

The next morning, we took our time, delighted by the morning, the world coming alive as it had since the beginning of time.

We stopped inside a valley with hills all around. In the middle of it all, prairie chickens! I had never seen the chicken dance. As Jess glassed the hills, I glassed the chickens. I was enjoying the melodic moves when Jess said; “We’ve got a non-typical with a couple extra tines at each side. You might want to take a look.”

My heart leapt into my throat and I turned my attention to just between the Juniper trees and watched as he disappeared into a finger of the hills. We waited. Hoping to see him re-emerge farther down in the drainage. No luck. Jess made a judgment call. We circled around to the adjacent hill.

As we came at the crest of the adjacent hill, we relocated the Buck and Jess set up the spotting scope to take a better look and slid over so I could take a peek. We had to take this shot and eased over to get into a clear shooting position. My mind was dancing with the unbelievable image of our Buck up close.

I got my gun propped up on Jess’ pack and began to track our Buck through the scope. In the distance, a dog was barking – just like we had practiced the night before. I took a seep breath, only a few more steps, he’s in the clear at 300 yards.



The pinnacle of hunters’ success- a perfect shot from 300 yards away on a beautiful, mature animal.

For me, hunting is a success in the experience. The prize is when things line up just perfectly, you make a clean hit, and you get to go home with a healthy and mature animal.

“Wow, Mattie. He is massive!” My Dad exclaimed, “Would be interesting to know what he scores.” “Yeah but we don’t care about the score. Just look at him!” I responded as we all stood and gaped at the 8x11 Non-Typical Buck of many fantasies.

Out in the wilderness where phones don’t buzz with updates and even AM radio is fuzzy- news on a monster Buck travels fast! “You’re not going to believe this Buck!”

The next morning we took him to be measured by SCI Master Scorer Mary Scott. She was meticulous in her additions; she ran them several times before announcing the final count. “238 and 5/8ths.”

To me, the trophy was not in the final addition of tines but in the incredible journey we took to find that success. Packing out more than we packed in means success, but that doesn’t need to be quantified in meat or measurements. 🦌



The pressure was mounting, but I have never been so calm in my life. My dream Buck was a perfect 300 yards away, in the clear, I could take the shot.

In that moment, I could feel my heartbeat, tha-thunk... tha-thunk. Time had slowed and tunneled down into this exact moment. I pulled the trigger.

