

Onlos sentiliam terfere notim
acchuit, Catusators etium
hui sene mo autella riveheb
atiliam nora

BRITISH COLUMBIA

TUCHODI DREAMING

A HORSEBACK JOURNEY INTO THE NORTHERN ROCKY MOUNTAINS

TEXT AND PHOTOS: BEN SALLERAS



As the twin-engine Islander roared and we gained speed along the grassy airstrip, the realisation that this hunt was drawing to a close hit me hard. A tear came to my eyes as the plane left the ground and banked to the west. It was taking me away from a hunting utopia in the middle of the mighty Canadian Rocky Mountains. About to re-enter into the ‘real’ world, I pondered just how on earth I would be able to retell my amazing hunting tale.

GETTING THERE

After losing a big bull moose during a trip to Alberta in 2012, and not laying eyes on a single bull elk, I was cut pretty deep. The memory of that big bull haunted me for months. I knew there was only one remedy – to have another go. Through much research I already knew exactly where I wanted to hunt – the untouched wilderness in the northern Rocky Mountains of British Columbia. It wasn’t long before I booked a hunt with Tuchodi River Outfitters. They offer horseback hunts across a vast expanse of the Northern Rockies. Another year passed quickly, and before I knew it September arrived, and I was on my way to Canada.

After a couple of days travelling it was finally time to head into the wilderness. That morning thick fog blanketed the surrounds of Fort Nelson, and the temperature was not much above zero. My pilot, Peter, picked me up from the hotel on the way to the airport, where I soon met up with two other hunters from Texas, Ken and his son Phil. The three of us would spend the next twelve days hunting together. Little did I know at that point, but we would share an amazing experience and become great friends. After the fog cleared we lifted off. Peter pointed the plane west and we flew about a hundred kilometres to the base camp in the wilderness.

There was a real buzz around the camp after we landed. I had a good chat with Larry and Lori, the owners of Tuchodi River Outfitters. They explained the plan for our hunt. Ken, Phil and I would fly out to one of the furthest outposts within the hunting zone, and meet up with two guides and a wrangler who had been out there for a couple of months. From there we would hunt and ride all the way back to base camp. That we would travel more than two hundred kilometres of trail was hard for me to comprehend. After getting tags and some paperwork sorted out, we jumped back into the bush plane to fly further west, further into the mountains.

The second flight was even more spectacular than the first. I just stared in awe out the window and tried to absorb as much scenery as possible, contemplating what the next twelve days might bring. About half an hour later we descended into a large valley. Peter pulled off a perfectly executed landing on an ‘airstrip’ which was basically a reasonably flat section of riverbed devoid of large trees. We were greeted by our guides, Lawson (head guide), Josh, and Colt. We were finally here.

The rest of the day was spent getting the twenty horses in camp ready. This particular hunt was the last of the season and involved bringing in all the horses that had been out here since July. We would also be tidying up and preparing various camps for the oncoming winter.

By about noon the following day we finally had the horses ready. As we set off up the trail Lawson explained that we had about ten hours of riding ahead of us. The trail led through an incredible range of scenery. There were rivers and lakes, thick pine and spruce forests, open rolling fields above tree-line, and barren moon-like landscapes at the very peak of our climb, which led us across a pass into the next valley. It was only a few hours before we saw our first grizzly. He was a solid brute feasting on berries out in the open. I spied plenty of huge rubs, some of them visible from a kilometre away. I couldn’t wait to lay eyes on the creatures that were responsible for those rubs.

We didn’t have to wait very long, because as soon as we dropped into the valley small brown and cream dots appeared on the open hills far below us. There were elk literally everywhere. A nice 5x5 bull watched us from about two hundred metres, as twenty horses rode past in single file, but didn’t seem overly concerned. Only minutes later we watched a young bull moose harassing a cow in the middle of a river. They also paid us little attention. The amount of game was mind-blowing. For the rest of the day, we never went longer than five minutes without spotting some kind of animal. There were many elk, plenty of moose, a sprinkling of goats, a couple of wolves, and enough grizzlies to make us slightly nervous. We rode into camp at about 10 pm, with aching butts and cramped legs, but with extremely high expectations for the next day. After the fifty kilometre ride, sleep came easily.

ELK

The unmistakable smell of pancakes wafted through the tent as I climbed out of my sleeping bag. It was freezing cold. That, along with the fact that today I would be hunting, made me shake almost uncontrollably. I could hardly string words together. We gathered in the kitchen tent and enjoyed a Canadian hunter’s breakfast while discussing plans for the day. Lawson explained that he would guide Ken and Phil (Phil was hunting, Ken was accompanying as photographer), and that Josh would be my guide. Josh was only twenty years old, and although he’d been out in the wilderness for the past few months assisting, this was his first time guiding. I was his first hunter.

Around daybreak Josh and I readied our trusty steeds and headed off upstream, up the same valley we’d ridden down the night before. It was a beautiful clear morning, and listening for bugling bulls was an amazing feeling. It was surprisingly quiet for the first hour. We heard a few distant bugles but didn’t see any game. Eventually we spotted a bull elk high up the mountain with



Onlos sentiliam terfere notim acchuit,
Catusators etium hui sene mo autella
riveheb atiliam nora



Onlos sentiliam terfere notim acchuit,
Catusators etium hui sene mo autella
riveheb atiliam nora

his cows. They were literally up at sheep level. A quick assessment with the spotting scope confirmed that he was a very solid 5x5, but not quite what we were after. Only ten minutes more up the trail we heard a bugle from quite close on the opposite slope. We glassed the area and eventually spotted the bull about 1,500 metres away. I'll never forget the look on Josh's face when he turned around from the scope to give me the good news, "Dude, that bull is a PIG!" I checked him out – twelve points and good mass. There was no contemplating this decision, he was an excellent bull and I was going to stalk him. We went into serious hunt mode and hatched a plan of attack.

The bull was about a quarter of the way up the mountain in fairly open willow country. Willows are a bugger to try to stalk through. They're gnarly, thick and loud, and usually aren't tall enough to hide in properly. We climbed up the mountain to get to approximately his level. The wind was inconsistent, but mostly in our favour. The bull continued to bugle occasionally. The bugles became louder the closer we got. Adrenalin was coursing through my veins. I couldn't believe I was stalking a quality bull this early on in the hunt!

We couldn't see the bull but knew he was near two small patches of spruce about six hundred metres up the mountain. We crouched amongst the willows when we reached a good vantage point and located him again with the binoculars. He had two cows nearby that were busy feeding. We followed the contour of the mountain towards him, hoping to work an angle in close. As if by some divine intervention from the Hunting Gods, the two cows decided they'd had enough to eat and slowly moved away, over a

ridge into some thick aspen, leaving the bull by himself. We took advantage of this situation and quickly moved down towards him, using the first patch of spruce for cover.

Josh let out a few cow calls, which caught the bull's attention. Initially, he just bugled back, hanging back near the furthest patch of spruce and not showing much interest. As we crept closer, Josh intensified his calling, and suddenly the bull turned and was heading our way. When he was approximately three hundred metres away I split from Josh and speed-stalked down the hill towards the bull. My intention was to get into the first patch of spruce.

Fortunately, I made it, but unfortunately it was a gnarly tangle of twisted limbs and branches, certainly not ideal! I managed to poke my way through the maze without making much noise, knowing that I didn't have time to muck around. Finally, I broke through to the other side, and caught a momentary glimpse of the bull passing through some small spruce trees only eighty metres away.

He angled down the hill towards me. I had very few gaps to try to shoot through, and the bull was approaching fast, moving toward Josh. I didn't have any time to get nervous, or use my rangefinder. I just pulled out an arrow and hoped the bull would come close enough for a shot. As he passed through the only reasonable gap in the spruce trees, I tried to make a cow call. The sound that came out sounded more like a dying cat than an elk, but it didn't matter because he stopped dead in his tracks. Thick spruce branches covered most of his body, but with a quick shimmy to my right, I found a window to his vitals and let the arrow fly. I guessed the distance at about twenty metres.

The bull lunged forward. I was sure I heard the arrow hit, but couldn't see anything due to the thick spruce. He trotted about thirty metres across the hillside above me, and blasted out another huge bugle. I didn't take that as a good sign, and searched for another window of opportunity. Josh cow called, and the bull stopped again. I again guessed the distance at just over twenty metres, and searched for an opening. There was one small hole in the spruce about the size of a shoebox. I managed to thread the needle perfectly, and again thought I heard the sound of a solid hit. At the shot the bull turned around and bolted in the direction from which he had come, disappearing over a ridge and out of sight. I noticed a small patch of blood on his side that looked a little too low.

High on adrenalin I made my way up the hill to find Josh. He hadn't seen anything, his view blocked by the patch of spruce, but he had heard both shots. I told him what had happened, and we sat down to give the bull some time to expire. At moments like this time drags.

After only five minutes I decided to sneak a peek over the ridge. We climbed up to the spot where we'd last seen him, and found a few spots of blood. As we crested the ridge, the view opened over a wide expanse of willows below. A bull elk was off in the distance, but it wasn't my elk. There was also a small group of moose, but no sign of my bull. "If he were still running or walking, we should still be able to see him, shouldn't we?" I thought to myself. There



Onlos sentiliam terfere notim accuit,
Catusators etium hui sene mo autella
riveheb atiliam nora

Join for free

- or become YWH Club Member 95€/year (130 US\$) and
- Receive Hunter's Path published quarterly
- Get priority booking & discounts for exclusive trips
- Enjoy access to restricted areas & extra functionality
- Benefit from special offers from our partners
- Help securing the future of hunting

Join our international network with
>14.000 globetrotting hunters from >85 countries

Arrange private hunting swaps,
participate in exclusive YWH hunting trips

Share & discuss diverse hunting topics,
discover selected companies worldwide

Receive our e-newsletter every fortnight



Jagdzeit Hunter's Path

“One of the world's finest
hunting magazines”

- A unique, highly collectible, hunting journal published quarterly
- Filled with exceptional hunting stories from all over the world
- Featuring a wealth of outstanding photography
- Quality, hardcover format – 128+ pages
- 75 €/year (99 US\$) incl. worldwide shipping

YESWEHUNT.COM
HUNTERS-PATH.COM

wasn't much cover for a bull to hide in. A feeling of pure dread started to creep over me.

We both stood there and glassed intensely, scouring every nook and cranny. Minutes passed, and every possible scenario flew through my head. Then I focused in on something that didn't look quite right, and there it was, a few ivory coloured points sticking out of the yellow willows, about two hundred metres away. The bull was down.

I shook Josh's hand and dropped to the ground, almost in disbelief. I can't really explain what that feeling was like. I was on top of the world, in more ways than one. It was easily the single best moment of my life so far. Just when I thought things could not possibly get any more magical, a heavy snowfall moved in across the valley, as bull elk continued to bugle at each other in all directions. This was living.

A couple of hours later we had the bull photographed and butchered. Upon assessment of the shots, I discovered both had hit almost at the same point, quite low in the chest, but at different angles. I had misjudged the distance in the rush and what I thought was twenty metres must have been well over thirty metres. During the caping and butchering we were only interrupted once, when another nice 6x6 bull responded to Josh's occasional cow

calls. That bull approached to within thirty metres, and would have also been a prime target. The footage I shot of him closing the distance and bugling his head off is simply amazing.

GRIZZLY ENCOUNTER

We had literally just finished the butchering when I spotted movement in the willows about two hundred metres down the hill. The movement quickly took the shape of a bear moving rapidly through the willows. "Josh there's a bear down there," I informed my guide. Josh jumped up and grabbed his .45-70. "Where?" I grabbed my video camera just in case we were about to get some good action. "I just saw one cruising through the willows down there, it was definitely a bear." Josh yelled his loudest into the valley below, breaking the silent serenity, "Hey bear!!" A big square head popped up out of the willows. "There he is, over to the right." The camera continued to roll. Then a second bear's head popped up. Then a third. The .45-70 barked a warning shot, but none even flinched. The rifle boomed again, but still no reaction. The bears were sniffing the breeze; they clearly had fresh elk meat on their minds.

"Let's get the hell out of here," announced Josh. I turned the video camera off, threw it in my pack, handed Josh my bow, and



Onlos sentiliam terfere notim acchuit,
Catusators etium hui sene mo autella
riveheb atiliam nora

Onlos sentiliam terfere notim ac-
chuit, Catusators etium hui sene
mo autella riveheb atiliam nora



grabbed the one thing I definitely wasn't leaving out there; the elk cape and head. I threw it over my shoulders. Josh and I then made a hasty retreat towards our escape vehicles – the horses.

A few crocodiles have given me a fair fright over the years, but this feeling was different. These things were on land, and I couldn't run to save myself. Josh was clearly very worried about the situation, so I knew this was serious. We slipped and slid through the snow on the way to the horses. It was definitely a relief to get back to them. It was a bit much trying to load myself and the antlers and cape onto my horse. Steamer wasn't having a bit of it, so I loaded the head onto the saddle and led him all the way back to camp. It's not as though my feet were touching the ground anyway.

It was almost surreal arriving back at camp with a beautiful 6x6 bull on my horse. The vibe went to the next level when the other three returned a few hours later. Phil had taken a dream moose! He made a perfect shot from about twenty metres. Phil and I had both taken our primary targeted species on the first day of the hunt. You can only imagine what the atmosphere inside the cooking tent was like that night!

The following morning I awoke to a winter wonderland. The landscape had turned completely white. Six inches of snow covered everything. Coming from Australia I hadn't seen snow like this before. It was incredible. I spent the entire day in the cooking tent caping my elk, while the others recovered Phil's moose, which was a full day's job.

THE CHALLENGE

A day later, day five, we resumed hunting. Lawson, Ken, Phil, Josh and I went back up the main valley. As usual, there were animals everywhere. We glassed several and eventually Phil decided to attempt a stalk on two nice 6x6 bulls. Josh and I continued further up the valley in search of a legal moose. A legal bull must have either three brow tines, or at least ten points on one side. Though we found a few bulls, none of them were legal. It was frustrating to get within forty metres of huge mature bulls, and not be able to shoot because they only had nine points on one side.

Early on the sixth day I saw a band of stone sheep rams for the first time. It was an amazing experience watching those rams, and hunting for them will surely bring me back some day. Less than an hour later, while leading our horses through some steep rocky country, we spooked a huge grizzly out of his bed at close range. Fortunately, he decided to flee. Later in the day we were in a rarely hunted valley called Muskwa Draw. The trail was very difficult to find and follow. Eventually, we reached a point where the entire trail had been covered by a huge landslide. About two hundred metres of the trail were buried. The loose soil seemed solid enough to cross, so we dismounted and led our horses across the slip. It honestly felt perfectly safe. I wasn't overly concerned and neither was Josh. He reached the other side and got back on to more stable ground. Just as I planted my first foot on solid ground I felt the reins rip backwards out of my hand. As I swung

my head around to gauge the situation, Steamer's head disappeared under the rest of his flailing body, as he cartwheeled backwards off the slip. He didn't stop rolling until he hit the river below.

I was in shock, and slid down the slip as quickly as I could to look for him. He had rolled about twenty metres. Steamer managed to get back on his feet, but his reins were entangled in a tree. I jumped into the river and got him free, before leading him to safer ground. Josh arrived just seconds later, and we checked over the horse for injury. He was clearly shaken up, and had plenty of gashes and cuts in various places, but didn't seem to have suffered any major damage.

I then checked the state of my bow. My prized Hoyt Vector Turbo was inside my soft bow case, inside a bow scabbard, which



Onlos sentiliam terfere notim acchuit,
Catusators etium hui sene mo autella
riveheb atiliam nora

was strapped on to the right side of my saddle. From the outside we could see it had suffered some serious impacts. I slowly unzipped the soft case, and carefully removed my bow. Pieces of arrow immediately fell to the ground, not a good sign. It wasn't good. The guard on my drop away rest was bent sideways. The string stop had snapped at the riser. The entire sight bracket was bent almost forty-five degrees. The quiver was broken in half, and unrepairable. And, five of the six arrows were broken. There wasn't any obvious damage to the riser, limbs, cams, cable, or string, so theoretically the bow could still be shot. The feeling of seeing my bow like that, on a hunt half way around the world, is indescribable. Was my hunt over? Could we fix the bow? Countless possibilities went through my head. The mood on the ride back to camp was dark and sombre.

Some good old bush mechanics were called for. I enlisted the help of Colt, who had some fancy gadgets available, including horseshoe nails, and a shoeing hammer. I was able to get the arrow rest sorted out without much trouble. The string stop and bow quiver were abandoned. I was down to five arrows, just enough to do the job. The sight was the killer. Over the course of two hours we undid, sanded, gouged, filed, carefully hammered horseshoe nails into, straightened, hammered some more, and eventually, got the sight back into an acceptable condition to use. I'll never be able to fully explain the complexities of that operation. When the moment of truth finally came, I asked to be alone. I'm not a religious man by any means, but as I walked out to the slight lump in the ground that we called our target butt, I looked up to the sky and prayed. I placed a leaf on the lump, walked back to twenty metres, drew, aimed and shot. I hit the leaf. This was repeated at thirty metres. At forty metres I missed by only a few inches. I couldn't believe it, we were back in business. What a relief. The last thing I did was fashion a back quiver from a plastic arrow tube strapped onto my daypack.

MOOSE

The seventh day of the hunt passed without finding a legal bull. Day eight was upon us, and it suddenly dawned on me that we had only two hunting days left. We still had a huge distance to cover to reach base camp, complete with some challenging mountain range crossings. The weather also seemed to be deteriorating. That morning we headed up the same trail we had travelled many times before. About an hour into the ride I spotted two light coloured patches in some willows about two kilometres away. The spotting scope was quickly set up for a closer look. Sure enough, a bull moose was lying in the willows. "Could this be the one?" I thought to myself. Josh got him to stand up after quite a few calls, and though quite impressive, he was just shy of the legal requirements once again. On we rode.

About twenty minutes up the trail Josh suddenly jumped off his horse and set up his tripod. I waited for his assessment. Suddenly, he announced "Yes, he's legal!!" and gave me a high five. The bull was lying on a small hill about three hundred metres above us. There were eight cows feeding around him. Amazingly, he happened to be almost exactly where we had tied up the horses on the day I shot my elk.

We hastily dealt with the horses. Josh grabbed his axe, which he used to rake trees and hold over his head like antlers. Hunting moose in the rut is a very different type of hunt. If you try to stalk them quietly, you're basically wasting your time. They have incredible hearing and are super sensitive to the sound of anything trying to be quiet – they think wolf and disappear quickly. Thick willows make it almost impossible to stay completely silent in this type of terrain. Instead, we made as much noise as possible, Josh grunting like a bull, and both of us trampling loudly on the ground.

As we got closer to the bull we somehow lost track of his location, due to the thickness of the spruce and a few intertwining gullies. With moose cows standing about thirty metres away, but

Advertisement

Wolfgang Schenk Taxidermy

Propr. Erik Schenk
Häusges Mühle
56412 Daubach · Germany
Tel. +49 2602 90456

www.schenk-taxidermy.com
Schenk-Taxidermy@t-online.de







Onlos sentiliam terfere notim acchuit,
Catusators etium hui sene mo autella
riveheb atiliam nora



Onlos sentiliam terfere notim acchuit,
Catusators etium hui sene mo autella
riveheb atiliam nora

clearly not wanting to run, we circled in an attempt to locate the bull, while grunting and smashing trees to sound like a rival bull. Finally, we found him, about a hundred metres away amongst some spruce. He was so unconcerned about our presence that he wouldn't even turn around to look in our direction.

Leaving Josh, I stalked straight in behind the bull, getting easily to within twenty-five metres. He was facing directly away, and I didn't have a shot. Patiently I waited, but he walked away, down into a gully. I shimmied around the patch of spruce, as Josh continued to call, rake branches, and film all at the same time. For a few minutes it was a game of cat and mouse. I almost drew back a couple of times, but I just couldn't get a clear lane to his vitals.

As I reached the edge of the gully the bull suddenly appeared from behind some spruce at forty-two metres. After all that had happened, I was probably a little too eager to let an arrow fly. My first shot fell just low of the mark. I cursed, and quickly re-ranged him at forty-six metres, as he walked slowly up the opposite bank. I watched the arrow disappear into him slightly further back than I had intended, but the bull was quartering away. He instantly bolted out of there.

I knew the shot wasn't perfect, and cursed again as I pulled another arrow out of my homemade back quiver and charged up the hill toward the bull. Josh followed. About a minute later I rounded a patch of spruce, and peered down into the gully below, and there he was standing still only thirty metres away. I drew,

aimed and released in one very swift and smooth motion, and watched my arrow centre-punch the huge beast's lungs. At that moment I knew my quest was finally over. The bull crashed up through the spruce another thirty metres before expiring. I was overcome with joy and relief as we sat next to my bull admiring his incredible size, and celebrating the special moment.

We spent about two hours butchering him, hid the cape and antlers in a tree away from the carcass, and headed back for camp to grab a couple of pack horses. I left a tenderloin with Colt to prepare for dinner, just in case there was nothing else left when we got back to the kill. Josh and I arrived back at the moose about three hours later, and were thankful that grizzlies hadn't discovered it. After much effort, we eventually returned to camp safely with the meat, cape and antlers late in the night.

CROSSING THE PASS

Celebrations ran late into the night, as we enjoyed a moose feast, and finished off my single bottle of Bacardi 151. The others had finally had some more luck as well. Phil took a very nice 6x6 bull elk. We had tagged out and the team was completely and utterly stoked. The atmosphere was electric. If life gets any better than this, I can't wait to experience it.

After a day spent in the kitchen caping my moose, it was time to head back to base camp. We furiously packed the twenty horses, and by 2:00 pm were on the trail, with about sixteen hours and

Onlos sentiliam terfere notim acchuit, Catusators etium hui
sene mo autella riveheb atiliam nora



eighty kilometres in front of us. Oddly, we saw little game that day, though I did spot a mountain goat and a black bear. It was quite a drizzly, foggy afternoon in the mountains, and not long after dark Lawson made the decision to pull up for the night, rather than try to cross over the pass in the dark. After tending to the horses, we gathered around a small fire and enjoyed another fine bush meal.

We were up early the next morning and after a quick breakfast we commenced repacking the horses. By 9:00 am we were again on the trail, with another ten hours of riding ahead of us. If everything went as planned we would arrive at base camp that night. We climbed higher and higher through a pass which would eventually lead us into the Tuchodi River Valley. There was a foot of snow in some areas. Stone sheep and mountain caribou highlighted the crossing. Eventually we made it through, and commenced our descent. The going was extremely steep, and we led the horses for about four kilometres, because it was simply too slippery and dangerous to ride.

Just at dark, six weary figures and twenty hungry horses strolled back into base camp. We were treated to a lovely meal around a huge table in the kitchen cabin. There were quite a few other hunters and guides in camp, and the storytelling was excellent that

night as you can imagine. Josh and I had a chance to have a good few celebratory drinks in the guides' cabin. It was great having a chat with the other guides about their experiences hunting the various species of North America, a part of the world I hope to hunt a lot more during my life.

I awoke the next morning struggling to believe it was all about to come to an end. Ken, Phil and I caught up with Larry and Lori. We swapped photos and sorted out the administrative details. They had received word that bad weather was on its way, and that the plane would be in to pick us up earlier than expected.

I'll do well to ever repeat a hunting experience of this quality and magnitude. In bowhunting, you've got to put yourself in the right places, and I know I was definitely in the right place this time around. I still find it very hard to explain to people just what this trip was like. It had absolutely everything you could hope for on a true wilderness bowhunt: the scenery, the animals, the people, the extreme highs and a few scares. I can't wait to return one day on a quest for a Stone sheep ram. Every day I find myself Tuchodi Dreaming.



Onlos sentiliam terfere notim acchuit, Catusators etium hui sene mo autella riveheb atiliam nora



norma®

No matter where you hunt, NORMA has your back!



AFRICAN PH

When only a bullet stands between your life and death... You better make it count! Norma Precision Ammunition delivers the right combination of accuracy and energy to stop a charging bull at full speed.

NORMA's established African PH & Solids offer the finest dangerous game ammunition available. Each round is meticulously loaded under the most rigorous inspection standards in the industry. NORMA's full line of African PH & Solids calibers range from 9.3x62 to the .505 Magnum Gibbs.

YOUR COMPLETE LINE of
RELIABLE ACCURACY & ENERGY
for MAXIMUM PERFORMANCE.



VISIT US ONLINE AT www.norma.cc



Professional Hunter