

Kinda Makes You Think First Traditional Archery Hunt

Brian Campbell



My phone rang. I answered the call and was met with, "You're our Grand Prize Winner"! After some quizzing and the inability of the caller to answer my specific questions I thought my friends were trying to pull one over on me. I had not entered any contest to win a hunt in Montana nor was I aware of anyone entering my name in any contest. It was not until Dale Karch of 3Rivers Archery in Indiana called me the next day with details that was I convinced that I had, in fact, won their 2005 Customer Appreciation Give Away to hunt on Archery Outfitters' Montana property with Dale himself.

What a wild ride! In preparation for the hunt I contacted the owner of Archery Outfitters, Nickie Roth, at his home in St. Petersburg, Florida. I found this somewhat ironic as I live about twenty miles from Nickie's house in Florida and the hunt was in Montana. It was also strange that I had not met Nickie nor had he met me as we frequent the same haunts and archery clubs. It was due to one of the clubs that this whole adventure began.

In 2003 I had taken my two children to the Pinellas Park, Florida, Wyoming Antelope Club's Wild Game Dinner and exhibition. I am a competitive pistol shooter and the group with which I shoot was exhibiting our discipline for the attendees. Other disciplines were also providing exhibitions and one of them was the Traditional Archery group. I knew many of them from the club and the National Wild Turkey Federation's committee, of which I was an active member. It turned out that my kids LOVED the traditional archery. That was all I needed to get me to outfit the family with traditional archery equipment. Unfortunately, I did not know what to buy or where to buy it.

Chris Brodeur of the club was a great help. He directed me to 3Rivers Archery to get what I needed. I hit the web and quickly realized that I knew less about archery than humanly possible. I called 3Rivers Archery and told them how excited my kids were, that I knew nothing about archery and that I wanted to outfit the family, for as little money as possible. After all, kids' interest tends to be a little fickle at 7 and 9 years of age. (Does that ever change?)

Todd at 3Rivers was great. He directed me to the minimum to outfit the kids and a great starting recurve bow for me. I told him that I was cheap but I wanted something that I could use to hunt, if I ever had an opportunity. A few hundred dollars later, a bunch of practicing and a number of local and state 3D shoots led us up to North Carolina for the summer 2004 shoot. I knew I was in trouble when my, then 8 year-old son won the 50/50 pot.

Unfortunately, our local club had to move our shoots to Sunday mornings and we were not able to participate due to timing conflicts. The bows and arrows started to gather a little dust. We would bring them out occasionally and shoot in the back yard or at the lake.

Then...my phone rang, "You're our Grand Prize Winner"!

I was in trouble! I'd never gone hunting with a bow and arrow. If it was not made of Styrofoam and part of a 3D shoot, I had not thrown an arrow at it. In fact, I had never gone deer hunting in my life. I had always wanted to hunt deer but it just never happened. I had done a bit of bird hunting with a shotgun but what's a "Flu-Flu"?

I needed to do some more research to know what to do. I learned that Dale Karch was the owner of 3Rivers Archery and a pretty knowledgeable guy about hunting with a longbow. He had written some books, produced some DVD's and, most importantly, designed exceptionally high quality bows. I thought it might be a good idea to get one of his best bows and beg him to outfit me with whatever I needed to hunt deer in Montana. Dale was very willing to give me product guidance and setup a bow for me. I received my new Tomahawk Diamond "SS" Takedown about one month before we were to be in Montana. WHAT A BOW!! I went from hitting 7 out of 12 at 25 yards to hitting 12 out of 12; just from an equipment change! I was throwing 100 arrows every night the week before our scheduled hunt. I couldn't miss.

I arrived at the Montana hunt site early Sunday morning. The guides, Kevin and Connie Wyatt made me feel right at home. Connie made me breakfast while Kevin finished up cleaning a deer harvested the day before. After a hearty breakfast I practiced shooting. It looked like I had never practiced before. I'm chalking it up to performance anxiety.

Dale came into camp later that morning. Nice guy. He was very encouraging and understood that I had NO CLUE what I was doing. I asked Dale to sign my bow as it was his design and a great memory. Dale said, "You've got to get blood on it first"; sounded fair to me.

We went into town to pick up a couple of Mainers (guys from Maine) who would be hunting with us for the week. They were compound shooters who love ScentLock and were a great couple of fellows. I was surprised at how supportive everyone was when they learned that it was my first time in the woods.

Listening to the table talk about all the 10 and 12 pointers on the property made me feel that I should have a chance to harvest something. My plan was to get my buck in the first couple of days, get two gobblers in the middle of the week, a doe at the end of the week and finish off the trip with a couple of Pheasant on Saturday when Pheasant season opened...all with my longbow. I was confident.

Sunday evening at dinner, when I told everyone that I had let a 4 pointer go by, all conversation stopped! "WHAT? This is your first deer hunt. You should take a shot at anything with antlers that is in range!" I felt a little strange with the whole table staring at me in disbelief that I would let a buck just go by without taking a shot. I made a promise that I would not do that again. "If it has horns and is in range, throw an arrow".

After I missed a 6 pointer on Monday and never got a good shooting lane on an 8 pointer on Tuesday, I figured Wednesday would bring me a nice 10 pointer. Well, the 10 pointer never showed up on Wednesday or on Thursday. I saw a HUGE number of does and fawns but never got close enough to a buck. I did learn how to stalk and ground hunt a little. I felt pretty confident when a couple of does came within 4 feet of me a couple of times.

I also learned that no matter what you wear, if a deer is downwind of you it will smell you. I think that the ScentLock stuff I was wearing was for my fellow hunters rather than the deer. The deer still winded me a number of times but none of my fellow hunters said I smelled.

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Unfortunately, Dale had to leave early Saturday. I figured my hunting trip was pretty much over and said as much to Dale on Friday night. His response caught me a little of guard, "It all can change in 5 minutes or less. Let me sign your bow." Dale signed my bow and I promised to hunt it exclusively until I "got blood on it".

I got up before sunrise on Saturday and put on my new ghillie suit that I had bought off of Dale's back the night before. I setup on the ground at the cow pen and the deer came right by me. I'm talking about 40 plus deer walking right by me! All were does and fawns except the HUGE 12 pointer that came to the top of a small rise and stood watching all the activity. He came down off the rise in a flash and stopped about 45 yards from me. I drew my longbow back when he turned his head and, THWAP! My arrow sailed directly towards his chest and fell right in front of him. He looked at the arrow, looked up and was off. That's when I knew my hunt was over. All those deer and such a huge buck on my last morning just sucked out what optimism I had left.

I went back to the cabin for another of Connie's wonderful breakfasts and to reflect on all that I had learned that week. No matter how many deer, or how good the hunting location, everyone misses. That was the big lesson. I had only thrown three arrows at deer all week. I had missed everyone. During the down time when Dale and I practiced he coached me. The big message was to be consistent with my anchor point and make it as close to my eye as possible, but be consistent. Tim and Reggie, the Mainers, also provided great insight. Tim's big message was "get out there". Kevin and Connie were also great sources of learning. Their big message was "not everyone gets a trophy but you should at least try".

It was the last day of the week-long hunt. I had finished breakfast and was lamenting not harvesting anything. When I spoke with my wife that morning, she said, "Don't come home upset. It would be nice if you could come home with something but don't be upset if you don't. Just enjoy it."

Taking the advice of those around me I decided to ask Kevin to take me back out to where I had seen the 4 pointer on the first day of the hunt. As I got out of the truck his last words to me were, "make sure it's got horns".

I climbed up into the ladder stand against a small Oak tree and set up. Twenty minutes later two does came within 10 yards of me and bedded down. It was about 11:00am. I can only sit completely still for so long and after about an hour I HAD to move. No other deer came in I made just enough movement for them to get up, look around and then move deeper into the woods.

About two hours of sitting, I saw a few deer passing through the woods into the Sugar Beet fields about 100 yards to my left. I saw a nice buck with them. "DANG IT! Out of range AGAIN!" I decided I would get down and use the stalking skills that Dale taught me to ground hunt. I got about half way to were I was going to conceal myself when all the deer in the field tore-off into the woods. I looked up and was face to face with a large doe about 50 yards away. I was stuck. What to do now? If I continue to move to my chosen concealment spot she would alarm any deer that I had not yet run off. If I go back to the stand, any deer that come back out will be well out of range. What to do?

The last day of the hunt, discouraged and beaten. I decided to return to the stand where Kevin would get me at dark. I figured I would just sit there and count how many deer passed by out of range. I was holding my bow with an arrow nocked as Dale had made it clear that you should always be armed and ready when in the woods, "in case a stupid deer walks by". A large doe came out of the deep woods and approached my stand at about 30 yards, then a second one behind her. A fawn followed the second doe and behind the fawn was a nice buck. YOU'VE GOT TO BE KIDDING!

The buck stopped before getting within range; typical of my whole week. I thought, "LAST CHANCE", and drew down on him. After holding at the ready for about 30 seconds my arm started shaking. There is no let-off on a longbow and 58 pounds of pressure starts to add up. He took about three large steps forward out from behind a tree and hesitated. I loosed the arrow. THWAP! The buck heard my bowstring release and lurched forward. "CRACK-POP!" A gush of red showed up on the buck's hind quarter. I HIT IT! I HIT IT!

The buck tore off behind me! I watched him run along the fence line until he was hidden from view. I got down and looked for my arrow to be stuck in a log as the sound of the "CRACK-POP" was the same as when stump shooting. I found my arrow in the dirt, completely red. Hmm... I stuck the arrow in the ground where it lay and walked back to the cabin in the opposite direction that the buck had fled.

Kevin, Connie and Tim were surprised to see me back at the cabin before dark. Kevin asked, "You alright? You get one"?

"I hit a buck but I'm not sure that it was a good hit. I was aiming at his heart but hit his hind quarter. My arrow was covered in red."

"Well, let's go take a look."

Tim, who had harvested a Pope and Young 150 class buck earlier in the week, drove me down to the field in the small white 4x4 stick-shift beater pickup with Kevin and Connie right behind in the nice truck. I instructed Tim to stop at the field gate so we could more easily walk along the fence line to my arrow. Just then Kevin said, "Here's your deer".

There he lay, about 75 yards from where my arrow passed through him; a magnificent 9 pointer. I had cut his femoral artery with my Wensel Woodsman broadhead tipped Carbon Express arrow. We collected my arrow and calculated that the shot was about 27 yards.

I took the wound blood and dabbed a dot on the riser of my bow. Now, there's blood on it. I was pleased.

Postlude:

Upon calling my family to share my news, my 9-year-old son asked what time I had harvested the buck. "Around 3:00pm", I told him.

"Wow! That's before we prayed for you to get a deer, Dad."

"What time did you pray that?", I asked.

"About five", he responded.

Interesting; the time difference between where I was hunting in Montana and my family in Florida was two hours.

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| Kinda makes you think...

From my website:



My first deer!

I took this 9-point Whitetail at Archery Outfitters' Montana property on October 8, 2005. A 27 yard shot with my [Tomahawk Diamond Take-down "SS"](#) longbow and a [Carbon Express 150](#) arrow tipped with a [Wensel Woodsman](#) broadhead. The arrow passed through this magnificent buck so fast he wasn't sure what happened. He ran about 75 yards to the field gate where he finally fell. It was the last opportunity of a week long hunt which was sponsored by 3Rivers Archery.



Montana 2005 at Archery Outfitters with Dale Karch of [3 Rivers Archery](#). 3Rivers sponsored my week-long hunt as I was their Grand Prize Winner of their 2005 [Customer Appreciation Give Away](#).

Thanks Dale!

Links:

[3Rivers Archery](#)

[Archery Outfitters](#)

[Suncoast Archers](#)

[Wyoming Antelope Club, Florida Chapter](#)

[National Wild Turkey Federation](#)