

Live from my Solo Elk Hunt

Pat Lefemine, 9/19/97



All photos brought to you live via digital camera, like this meadow that I spent two days hunting in.

The Bowsite broke new ground by attempting the impossible - live updates from a hunt. Thanks to the magic of modern technology, we were able to share our hunt with you. We hope you enjoyed it and we will be doing this again in the future. Thanks for sharing this difficult, grueling, two week solo hunt with me in Idaho's Mountains.

Sunday 9/7

I backpacked to the top of Canyon 1, the same canyon I called a monster bull out of two years ago. The four mile hike took eight hours and covered three thousand vertical feet. I set up my campsite and decided to stroll down the valley a bit to try and stir up a bugle. I put my bow down on the ground and cow called just once, a beautiful 6x6 bull literally ran up to me just seconds after I called. My bow still on the ground with all my arrows quivered, the bull stood less than ten yards away! My hunt could have been over in the first ten minutes - I would never make that careless error again.

Monday 9/8



This picture shows the area that I hunted the next morning. Talk about thick, this is where the elk hang out after they feed in the meadows. Bugling was not working, but I managed to cow call a silent 5x5 up to 15 yards - and passed him up. He soon winded me and will not be so quick to run up without checking the wind. It felt good passing him up. Another bull was behind him that I didn't see and all the

commotion caused the herd bull to blast out a raspy bugle. I hunted that area hard and never saw another elk.

Went back to the meadow and no bugling, no elk, nothing. I decided to pack up camp and move about two miles to the intersection of a more secluded canyon that only holds one small herd. I setup camp at the intersection of the two canyons and hiked into the secluded canyon for two miles, calling every few

Tuesday 9/9

canyons and hiked into the secluded canyon for two miles, calling every few hundred yards. I found an area that was torn up by a bull, fresh rubs were everywhere, so I (learning from my previous mistake) set up, and then cow called. A crunch from above caused me to peak through some pines. I could only see the chestnut body of an elk fifty yards uphill from me. I started to get a little pumped, then he moved downhill slowly, I got a lot pumped. He was a monster 6x6 that I guessed to go around 320 P&Y. But, unlike the immature 5 pt. this bull moved to check the wind, then he slowly moved off. I tried cow calling again, then bugling and he just stayed his course. Moving to the canyon head, I found the source of his interest. Five cows fed at the head of the canyon in the greens, I moved right into the cows - actually trailing them twenty yards as they moved through broken timber. It was getting dark and I had to make a move or lose them. I bugled aggressively, hoping to get the bull upset that another bull was with his cows. It didn't work, and the cows spooked, taking the bull with them. It was a very long walk back in the dark.



Wednesday 9/10

My walk back the night before kicked my butt, so I slept in till 7:30 am and hunted around my campsite before packing up and heading to another canyon a few miles away. I bugled once, and immediately got a response about three hundred yards down the trail. I boogied as fast as I could to catch up, but the bull had cows and was high-tailing it away. By the time I gave up, I was at least a mile from camp. When I returned, the weather started to turn sour - real sour. I spent three hours in my tent waiting for the storm to pass. It finally subsided in time for me to get in a quick evening hunt watching a trail with lots of fresh sign. No elk, tomorrow I had to move.



Thursday 9/11

The weather deteriorated through the night and I spent the early hours after midnight waiting for my tent to be ripped apart by hailstones the size of buckshot - or be lit up by the incessant lightning. Morning came slowly after what had to be one of my most unpleasant nights ever afield! The weather stayed nasty so I packed up my camp in a downpour and hiked out of the canyon. I'm now on my way up to another canyon where several herds usually reside.

Update Continues....





Friday 9/12

I headed up to canyon #3 where I had a hot time with five bulls in '95. This was one of my most difficult climbs because there are no clear trails to get up to the high country and the hike gains 3500 feet of elevation over four miles. The hike is also obstructed by approximately a mile and a half of extremely steep terrain which is littered with blow-downs. The hike took five exhausting hours so I took a short nap and headed out at 6:00 PM. Not 300 yards into my climb above camp, I heard the distinct sound of a bull elk rubbing and breaking branches from a tree. As I moved closer, I also heard cow mews to my left in the thick brush and a faint bugle beyond them. As the sound grew more clear, I began to



see movement above me. The image of a bull sharpened into a very respectable, but not trophy-quality 6x5 that had good mass but was short on brow and bez-tine length. No matter, I wanted him. The bull was so caught up in his rubbing that I made the decision to stalk this bull. At fifty yards, I removed an arrow, and moved closer with carefully planned steps. At thirty yards it was all coming together. I now had a clear shot at him

but I wanted closer, I moved diagonally toward him and was now at twenty five yards but the bull moved away from the tree and the once-favorable wind swirled directly at the bull. He stiffened up and headed out through the brush. I tried cow calling, then bugling, but the bull was gone. I found the cows and followed them - bugling while I trailed. The other bull was gone as well.

Got up before dawn and headed up to the canyon head where several large meadows dot the flattened basin at 9,700 feet. On my way into the meadows, I pushed out a cow and calf that were bedded a few hundred feet below the meadows. I reached the meadows as the sun was poking above the mountains and bugled. Nothing. As I moved around the canyon bugling, I saw little fresh sign and was becoming increasingly disappointed. The weather was cooler, and



it was quite early. I moved quietly through the higher elevations of forests around the meadows and bumped into a very nice mule deer at fifteen yards. He crashed off and I continued up into a series of flat benches at 10,000 where I spooked a very small bull. I spent that entire day watching a meadow with a fresh wallow, from a 10,000 foot perch from which I could see the entire valley meadows. I was treated to watching a

nice billy goat above me for a few hours but no elk. I headed back to camp. The evening hunt was spent watching the area where I spooked the bull. Nothing.

Saturday 9/13

Headed back up to the meadows in the morning and saw, nor heard, anything. I

went back to the area that I spent the evening in and again, no sign. I decided to leave the canyon and drive three hours to my second major area, unit 50 in the Challis National Forest. This was my ace in the hole - having spent over a week here before, and knowing all of the secret pockets where the bulls hide. I hiked out of the canyon and headed to the area called the Big Lost River.



Sunday 9/14

As my car approached the area I knew well two years ago, I began to feel sick. Unlike two years ago, my quiet, no pressure area was now dotted with one campsite after another. ATV's buzzed by my truck and horse trailers were everywhere. I wondered if I took a wrong turn and was now at the county fair? But against my better judgment, I decided to head up to my secret areas, which were only accessible by backpacking and just maybe, the elk were pushed there from all the pressure below in the canyon. On my way to the high country, I ran into two guys looking around, another two guys who lost their horses, and a Mexican sheep herder who was looking for his dog. My God! I reached camp feeling like I was wasting time here but I decided to stay anyway. I watched a meadow until the sun went down and the full moon came up - no elk, no bugles.

Up before dawn, and headed to the high peaks where my secret places produced numerous elk two years ago. On my way through a meadow, I saw movement above me. Hundreds of little white sheep were moving rapidly through the high country surrounded by dozens of sheep dogs. The sheep dogs spotted me then went ballistic, running at me, barking, yelping. I headed into the timber and moved away from the noise which never seemed to stop. An hour later, convinced that there was no possible way of seeing any elk, I headed up to the real high country. As I moved past 10,000 feet, I began to see a little sign. I cow called and bugled and then heard a noise from below me. From the trees below the meadow came the Mexican sheep herder on a horse, followed by a dozen dogs. They moved past me and I headed even higher. The wind picked up and at 11,000 feet, I found myself in a high country blizzard. That was neat. The blizzard ended quickly and I moved down toward a lake. Movement again caught my eye, but it was not a sheep. It was an absolute monster mule deer. He was a 5x6 with a ten inch drop tine, very massive, and about a 30" spread. It was the biggest mule deer I had ever seen, P&Y for sure and maybe B&C. The wind was perfect and the blustery condition made stalking conditions perfect. I moved cautiously down the mountain, moving only when he was feeding or behind a bush. After a half-hour stalk I was within 20 yards and had a clear, quartering away shot at a superb trophy mule deer. There was only one problem, I never bought a deer tag! That evening I headed across the stream to a very steep, North facing slope, nothing.

Monday 9/15

Woke up to a dusting of snow, hunted around camp a bit, then packed up for another area - just where yet I did not know. The hike out didn't take very long and I was soon looking for a new area.



The president of the Idaho State Bowhunters had mentioned about meeting up at an area not far from where I was hunting. But I had difficulty finding them and gave up after a couple hours (and a 4x4 rental that somehow got stuck in 4 low). I was getting that



creeping feeling that the gods of the hunt were no longer with me. Desperation was creeping in. I ended up doing what I

Tuesday 9/16

vowed I would not do; go back to my original area and hunt a canyon which showed little sign two years ago. It was also my most dreaded hike, taking me three thousand feet in four miles - of nearly all blow downs. The hike took me all that day and I reached a camp by 5 P.M. The only sign was of a moose, where he had busted up the area I was camped in. With only a couple days left, I would hunt this area hard and hope that some pocket of elk were somewhere in this canyon. Nothing that evening either as a terrible storm blew in, further complicating my last few days.



With spirits sagging, I dragged my butt out of bed and hunted hard for twelve hours straight with no food or water. I did find an area that was hot with elk a

few days ago but they were gone now. The wind was picking up again and turned into gale-force conditions. I got back to camp after dark and had two scrumptious freeze dried meals. The winds whipped my tent around as two different trees crashed to the ground within thirty yards of my tent. I tried to sleep but there was no way. The rain began shortly after three in the morning which was a blessing - because the winds

Wednesday 9/17



ceased.

Thursday 9/18

I hunted around camp that next morning but there was no elk there. I climbed to the top of the canyon wall and just sat there enjoying the magnificent scenery. The storm had white-capped the surrounding mountains and the red morning sun glistened off those peaks. My hunt was over - I hiked out of that canyon that day.

In Retrospect

Now that my Elk hunt is over, and I am sitting in a motel room in Hailey Idaho, I have had time to reflect on my last two weeks, what I did right and what I did wrong. I thought it might be helpful to look at the situations that I encountered, and the other options that could have changed the outcome of this trip. The trip was, in my mind, a complete success. This was a real-life elk bowhunt that provides a realistic look into what people can and do experience in a typical public-land hunt. I hope you found it interesting - it was fun to share it with you.

Situation 1 - Bull runs up quickly to my cow call (9/7)

I should have set up prior to calling, moved behind a tree, nocked an arrow, and then cow called.

Situation 2 - Bull presents a shot at 15 yards, another bull behind him (9/8)

I could have continued cow calling after I passed up the first bull and he ran off. Though I think there was little chance of pulling in that second bull, I never tried and should have. I also should have raced across the meadow to where the herd bull let out a scream and pressured him with aggressive bugling.

Situation 3 - Big Bull moves toward cow call, but hangs up at fifty yards (9/9)

Perhaps this bull could have been followed, or stalked, as he moved off. I could also have aggressively bugled at him when I noticed his indifference to cow calling. I feel I was hasty giving up on this bull directly and pressuring him through his cows instead. I gambled on getting him fired up, and my gamble lost. This bull was not worked up enough to attempt this, another week later - maybe.

Situation 4 - Bull responds to bugles, but moves off quickly (9/10)

I should not have pressured this bull as much as I did. I could have tried to move quicker to keep up with him, or possibly get in front of him. Once I was close enough, I could have tried cow calling or stalking.

Situation 5 - Bull in range at 25 yards - raking a tree but winds me (9/12)

I don't think, given the response of these bulls, that cow calling or bugling could have brought him in to range. I could have moved faster when the bull was aggressively raking, or I could have taken the shot at 25 yards. If the wind had not swirled, I would have had this bull.

Situation 6 - Trophy Mule deer at 20 yards (9/15)

Next time I'll Spend the \$200 extra dollars and buy a deer tag.
ARggggghhhh!!!!