

The **Huntin' Fool**

A Guide to Western Big Game Hunting



Featuring
California 2008
Kansas 2008
Montana 2008
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Quest for a Giant Whitetail

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About 13 or 14 years ago, I was planning an elk hunt and made a phone call to Dunn's who at the time helped book clients with outfitters. I spoke with Garth Carter for the first time. It was obvious that Garth had similar passions and the western big game knowledge that I lacked. A short time later Garth left Dunn's and started Carter's Hunter Services. After hounding Dunn's for Garth's phone number I became one of his first "Huntin' Fools" of Carter's Hunter Services. I didn't know it at the time but I believe that was the single most important step in my pursuit of many big game trophies.

In my years of hunting prior to meeting up with Garth I had one or two animals that would make the big game record books. After joining Carter's Hunter Services I have made regular phone calls to Garth and Jason for information I needed to plan my hunts and since joining I have 25 official record book animals! All of these trips were "guided" with the assistance of my friends at *The Huntin' Fool*. I'm not saying I'm the great white hunter, it's just a testament to the importance of reliable information and knowledge combined with my passion for hunting.

This particular story began in 2004 with a phone call to Carter's Hunter Services seeking help finding a November hotspot for giant Whitetails. We talked about Michigan, Iowa, Kansas, and Illinois and I was given Jerry Meacham's phone number and spoke with him at great lengths. I quickly discovered his knowledge and passion for Whitetails was closer to an addiction level. He said all the right things, but I didn't want to waste a week of rut with Caney Creek Outfitters unless I was comfortable with the Whitetail potential in his Kansas areas.

I suggested that we pre-scout his areas and we agreed to fly in while Jerry was guiding his spring gobbler hunts and scout the ranches and look for sheds. When we arrived at camp, I was pleased to see a family of four had already tagged out on nice gobblers and Jerry would be able to show us around.

We spent the next 3 days scouting numerous private lands and I was amazed at the vast prairies of giant bluestem that dropped into river bottoms with black walnut, burr oak, and plum thickets.

As we scouted these ranches, I was impressed at Jerry's extensive network of treestands in funnels and draws between feeding and bedding areas, which I could see would allow bow hunters excellent opportunities and the stacks of giant shed antlers that greeted us in the main bunkhouse really got my blood pumping. We committed to returning in early November for our first experience and made tentative commitments for years to follow.

In November 2005 I nicked a 175" class deer and was devastated to have not successfully harvested the buck. Two weeks later I got a phone call from Jerry who said they saw my deer alive and chasing does—I couldn't wait until next year. We returned again in November of 2006 and saw a B&C deer at 60 plus yards, my partner, Dennis Nichols, missed an opportunity at a real giant and I came home with a nice 11 point 130" class Kansas Whitetail.

Having witnessed the potential of Jerry's ranches I was once again excited to return in 2007. I had been following the rainfall in Kansas and the prairies had been consistently receiving ample spring rains and numerous summer storms. We all know what that means: good grazing creating more mass. November couldn't come quick enough and it almost





killed me when at the last minute I had to delay my trip by several days.

On day one the wind was blowing about 28 miles per hour and I decided to sit in a treestand situated in a canyon with limestone bluffs that would block the southwest winds. When the wind blows about 15 miles per hour in Virginia, you might as well stay on the couch because the deer barely move, but Jerry quickly educated us in 2005 that if the deer in Kansas don't move or feed when it's blowing they might not eat for weeks so they have to move. I was hoping they would stay low and move through the canyon river bottom littered with oaks, thickets, and small grassy meadows. It turned out to be a very active day, I saw everything from bucks chasing does to sparring little bucks, and several 2 1/2 - 3 1/2 year old bucks, but not the giant I was hoping for.

On day two we woke at 5 am to a disappointing rainstorm with 30 mile per hour winds and decided to hold up in the cabin for a while. We ate a large breakfast and after only a few minutes watching one of those big buck videos the buck fever took over and we packed our scent block raingear and headed out to the stands. We had our choice of over 25 stand locations but I decided to stay in the canyon. In a string of bad luck, as I reached my stand I saw the tail end of a doe that had just passed by and as I reached my perch, which was 30' up, I began to pull up my bow that was tied to a lanyard just as a 150" plus deer passed within 15 yards. I'm now a firm believer that Kansas deer move in the wind and rain!

After cursing myself for staying in camp that extra 20 minutes to eat a second helping of bacon and eggs, I was startled by a small 6 point that appeared from nowhere. I

grabbed my new toy, a Canon HD camcorder, to capture him browsing around my stand. The wind was blowing and I didn't hear the other deer approach. The first time I saw the buck was at full 10x zoom in the viewfinder. My heart jumped and I thought I might fall out of the stand as a monster 11 point deer's antlers entered the frame. I carefully traded my camcorder for my bow and as I drew back, I did a major double take. The giant buck had disappeared. I was still looking at a small 6 point and a decent sized 11 point, but he sure looked bigger at 10 power. I started to chuckle, my heart calmed, and my one power eyes overruled the 10x optics of my camcorder. When we viewed that footage later, my 11 point monster was maybe a 2 1/2 year old 125" deer—everyone else got a good chuckle as well.

Later that morning, I was filming three does playing and grazing in a meadow above the canyon at 300 yards when I spotted a large bodied deer with its nose to the ground trailing the three does. He raised his head enough for me to identify him as a Kansas giant mainframe 10 point. He was tall and heavy! He chased his does across the bluestem prairie and vanished.

I was back in my stand an hour before sunrise the next morning as the sun crept above the horizon and the relentless cold November wind blew across my face. I filmed several deer sneaking through the canyon unaware as I stood motionless from my perch. About an hour after sunrise, a single doe appeared about 100 yards upwind. I watched her raise her tail and show signs of being in heat.

My palms began to sweat with anticipation to see what might be following her. I didn't have to wait long before I

began to see movement in the brush. I raised my camera to film the incoming deer as he lowered his head to identify the fresh marking left by the doe. I saw his huge mass and quickly replaced my camera with my Matthew's Switchback—the arrow already knocked. He was the buck of my dreams, a giant Kansas Whitetail!

He identified the scent and followed her trail never stopping, and then turned toward my stand apparently trying to pick up her scent. At 30 yards there was still no shot presentation. My mind was in overload. My pendulum sight was dialed in at 20 yards and I had to stay motionless. His nose was in the air, sniffing my direction—still no shot opportunity. He turned away and I thought this was the chance to dial my pendulum to 50 yards and hoped he would pick up her scent on the bush. He tailed away from me, followed her steps, and stopped broadside to identify her scent on the bush. I set my 20 yard pin about 10" above the power plant and watched my arrow hit a little high.

The buck raced off with the arrow penetrating his right shoulder about 10". He acted like he wasn't injured, just mad. In 20 yards, he ran behind some heavy brush and didn't come out. I quickly grabbed my binos expecting to see him run up the meadow and across the prairie. After glassing for half an hour, I never saw him cross the prairie

and was sure the shot was too high so I waited 2 hours in the treestand for the deer to bed and die.

When I couldn't take it any longer so I climbed out of my treestand, gathered my bow, and knocked an arrow expecting to jump a wounded deer. I walked out to the spot of impact and followed his exact direction of travel with great disappointment. I couldn't find one drop of blood. I rounded the corner where I last saw him pass by a heavy brush, and there he was, laying dead 20 yards away! There was no ground shrinkage. He was wide, tall, and massive.

I called Jerry on the cell phone and told him that I had killed a deer with my bow that would make Boone and Crockett! He congratulated me and said he would come right away to load the deer up and take him back to camp. A photo session followed in the field and I immediately called and gave the news to my friends at Norm's Taxidermy in Gloucester, Virginia that they would be doing a full body mount. After that it was back to camp. As I skinned the deer Jerry and I guessed at just what this deer might score.

We could not wait to clear the table of the dishes and break out the measuring tape! We agreed that it was a 190 class mainframe 10 point with 7 additional scoreable points on the right antler. The inside spread was 20 ⁵/₈" and the first circumference measurements were 7 ¹/₂". The main beams were almost 32" long! The typical antler scored 98" alone! Our best efforts led us to a rough gross score of 228 ⁷/₈". After the drying period Jerry Thomas officially scored the buck. It netted an amazing 209 ³/₈". I can't wait to get back to Kansas next fall—who knows lightning might strike twice!

