

## **Montana Archery Elk Hunt**

By Rocky Ferraro

This year I applied to several different states for an elk and or deer tag. I was fortunate enough to draw a Montana Combination Elk Deer license which as a bonus included are fishing and upland birds. Now the question was where to go? When I was drawn for the general tag I also applied for the special draw tags which can only be done once you are successful with the general tag. I was not successful with the special draw so again the question arose where to go. When you draw a Montana hunting license you are allowed to hunt in about %90 of the state and usually for either sex! Also Montana, as I'm sure some of you know, is a vast state with many forests. I had decided from the start to try my hand at archery elk since it was at the beginning of September and I would have the first opportunity to call these elk before the rifle season started but if I couldn't go early for some reason I had until the end of November to do this and I could have gone for elk with a rifle as well. The general tag you draw for Montana is like drawing a supper lottery hunting tag in some states, you can go just about anywhere. While trying to find a guide I discovered that a majority of them were either already booked or where shutdown due to fire. I was lucky enough to try the North Western part of the state where there were no fires and the drought that's affecting most of the west is minimal. I had never been elk hunting before and I was able to eventually talk to an outfitter that real helped me decide where to go and what to do. The Outfitter's name was Len Howells and his company is called Silver Bow Outfitters out of Libby Montana. Len said "This is your first time elk hunting and when you arrive school is in session" and he was right I had a lot to learn. Len gave me the best opportunity available to shoot an elk. He did not limit me to just one area but used his many years of elk hunting experience to guide me to some of his best spots. I was in elk everyday of this trip! That's six days of calling to and hearing elk starting September 9. Since I have a few stories to tell I will spread these out in the coming months but here is the first.

### **Broken Arrow**

It was a cold clear morning with the temperature in the mid 30s but I was snug and warm in my bed near a wood burning stove. Five AM came fast and as I splashed water on my face and threw my hunting clothes on I was ready to go and could almost taste the ham and egg breakfast cooking next door. It was still dark when I walked over to the main cabin; the stars were in all their glory blanketing the sky. I poured myself a cup of coffee and greeted everyone one good morning. By the smells in the air breakfast was almost ready and the excitement of the day ahead lay before us. We said grace, as is the custom before all meals, ate our breakfast and were out the door before I knew it. I through my pack and bow into the Dodge Diesel four by four and off we went. As we were driving Len gave me a brief history of the area and how the road had been freshly graded just before I had arrived. We were driving on logging roads that have survived too many winters to recount. On the way to our hunting spot I was amazed by a few of the sites. Some of the virgin timber and stands of cedar were so thick that without a chain saw they would be impossible to squeeze into by a majority of us. I have never seen stands of trees this thick. Also they have what they call micro bursts of wind that depending on their strength willnock down a big bunch of these trees. So as we were driving there would be spots were trees had been blown down in the most unusual spots. As we got to our destination and I closed the door of the cab ever so silently I was amazed at how the timber had opened up on this section of the mountain.



We walked for a few miles in silent mode and Len had me set up near a sapling while he moved to another location to do some calling. He blew his bugle and we immediately heard a response. I was ready for a bull to come in but it became evident after a while this was the herd bull and he was not coming out from where he was. Len called me back in by giving me a signal and we were off to another location. We walked about a mile and then up a hill through something called Mount Mahogany. This is a plant or tree that grows out in thin branches and makes for slow going. Len brought me in to the elks bedding ground but they were no longer close by. We did another set up where I found some shooting lanes and he called a ways away from me. This time we got no response. In a while we hiked back down this hill and walked past the spot we had originally set up. As we walked past this spot we heard not only the herd bull we had previously heard but now a bull challenging the herd bull coming across the ridge as well. Len picked up on this immediately and with a fire in his eyes he had me set up in the same spot while he again moved off about a hundred yards behind me.

This time the bull responded dramatically different to a cow call as he immediately started to come in. I was standing there with an arrow knocked behind a sapling pine the bull that was stirred up by a cow call was crashing through small trees, various foliage and impassible Mount Mahogany. I soon discovered how big and strong these majestic monarchs of the forest are. There was little that was going to stop this bull! As I first saw him I remember what I had been taught by Len. "Just stay still, you are camouflaged, they can't see you, you just need to be cautious of your movements". Elk have about a 270 degree field of view so if you make sudden or wrong moves you will be spotted. They also have an un-canny sense of smell and actually put their nose up to catch the scent in swirling winds and they will scent you. This morning we had the wind blowing in our favor. Suddenly the sound of the crashing bull was real close, I had ranged the upper most visible portions of the mountain where I thought I would first see a bull and it was about 70 yards. I had also ranged different spots where I thought I would have my best shots. You have to remember I don't know where that bull will exactly walk so give or take 10 yards is probably the best I could hope for. With a rifle 10 yards does not mean much but with a bow it can make all the difference in the world, especially the further you are back from your target. Suddenly I saw this magnificent bull crash through the brush, raise its head and bugle his head off, yes he was hot for that cow!! It all happened so fast but when I was there it was as if time had stopped and it was me against him, he had 6 points on each side, what a rack! My heart was beating about a zillion times per second, the adrenaline was flowing like a river and my senses were at their highest level, WOW what a rush!! Down he came crashing through brush bugling his head off. I shot at what I had ranged as a 50 yard point but the arrow flew just over his back. He heard the twang of my string and turned his head. I froze and luckily my guide saw what had happened and cow called again getting his attention and still further down he came bugling again. I knocked another arrow and loosed it using my 30 yard pin sight. This time I stuck him where I thought the heart was but actually I was further back. From the arrow placement I also thought that I had a lung shot? After the shot the bull took off down hill and a little to my surprise was standing about 100 yards down hill from us in some trees.

I walked over to where my guide was hiding and shook his hand. I was really stoked and at this time, my heart was still racing, my arms were shaking and I still believed I had a heart shot. We walked over to where the bull had gone down the mountain and spotted the bull standing there. I readied another arrow incase he was coming back through but in doing so I slipped on some shale, the bull raised his head spotted me and walked off down hill. We sat down and waited for about an hour so as not to chase him.



In the mean time Len found the broken piece of my arrow, about 15 inches was left. There was still over 15 inches of arrow in that bull and the blood left on the broken arrow put the total arrow penetration at just over 20 inches but you have to remember these animals are as big as a horse. Later we walked down to where he was originally standing and found 2 large puddles of blood. Some of it was dark but the top layers were pink and bubbly. I had probably shot the liver or gut along with the back of his lungs. As we continued to trail the wounded elk we came across another set of smaller puddles of blood and some liquid from it's internals it became evident that I had a gut shot animal with lung blood as well. We eventually jumped the bull again and he was off further down and side hilling away from us out of sight. We continued to trail the bull down steep terrain and unfortunately the blood trail started drying up. There were times where the bull would travel 80 yards with not a drop of blood. Thanks to Len we were able to go further but after a while we could find no more blood. We decided that we could no longer trail this bull; after a while and with the heat of the day the bull would soon die. We would now have to wait for the ravens to circle the dead animal to get a fix on it and retrieve it.

As we walked back up to the spot we had come down the hill we were disappointed not to have found the bull. Len vowed to find it and bring out the horns and ivories for me. Hopefully he will find it soon as there was another bull killed later in the week that scored about 285 and Len said that mine was bigger.

If you are interested in going to Montana for Elk, Deer, Moose Grouse or fishing I can recommend Len Howells of Silver Bow Outfitters.

They guide both archery and rifle.

Tell Len Rocky from Foster City Rod and Gun Club Sent you!

Len's Contact Information is as follows:

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