

UP CLOSE & PERSONAL

Calling rutting moose

By **Stephen P. Boyer**
Guest Writer

Surprisingly, after all my formal education in the U.S., I was surprised on how little I knew about Canada.

To help those non-Canadian readers of my article, according to Wikipedia, "Alberta is located in western Canada, bounded by the provinces of British Columbia to the west and Saskatchewan to the east, the Northwest Territories to the north, and the U.S. state of Montana to the south."

I was prepared for a bull moose hunt in northern Alberta, from September 29 to October 7, 2012.

I flew from northwest Arkansas to Edmonton in the Alberta Province. Edmonton, the capital city of Alberta, is located near the geographic center of the province. By the way, center is spelled "centre" in Canada.

After researching Alberta Outfitters, I decided to sign-up with Ghost River Outfitters in the Little Smoky River



Courtesy photo

Writer Stephen P. Boyer bagged this bull moose in Alberta, Canada, during the rut with Ghost River Outfitters.

area of Alberta. I found that Ghost River Outfitters provides professional, personalized guided hunts. Their outfitter facilities are located northwest of Edmonton and southeast of Grande Prairie and bounded by the Little Smoky River for excellent moose habitat.

I hunted with Dan Moore, the owner of Ghost River Outfitters in the Boreal National Forest. The Boreal Forest Region comprises 48 percent of Alberta.

On September 29, I landed in Edmonton. Since it was a late evening arrival, I stayed the evening at one of the local hotels on the west end of Edmonton. As planned

earlier with Dan, my guide and outfitter, he informed me that his son, Travis, who lives in Edmonton, would be picking me up at my hotel around 8 a.m.

After Travis and I had breakfast, we packed up and headed for Dan's home in Little Smoky. The drive took approximately three hours, we traveled northwest of Edmonton on Highway 43. When we arrived in Little Smoky, Dan's wife, Danielle, was preparing lunch for everyone including Ken, another moose hunter, from Wetaskiwin, Alberta.

Ken and Dan had been hunting the past two days and had seen where the

moose had been traveling near the rivers in the area.

To my welcome surprise, Dan informed me that Ken would be hunting from a well-traveled ground stand this afternoon and we would head out for Bull Ridge near the Little Smoky River. Dan stated he was going to try and have me in the field as much as possible since the rut was in full swing.

After lunch, I quickly unpacked. Dan, Ken, and I drove approximately twenty-five minutes to drop off Ken at the ground stand where there were several rubs and nu-

merous tracks. All three of us had cell phones, and to my surprise, had very good reception. Dan then took me to private land near the Little Smoky River where he had permission to hunt.

When we arrived, we locked up his one-ton Dodge and headed into the forest. During the next hour, we traveled several trails and ridge lines near the Little Smoky River. I asked Dan if I could take a few pictures because I never saw an evergreen and spruce forest so beautiful in all my years of hunting.

It was not long, and we started to see massive bull moose tracks and rubs. Dan told me we were headed for Bull Ridge, which received its name due to his encounter with several large bulls over the years.

After moose hunting in Newfoundland in 2010, I had expected to be walking in six to eight inches of water most of the time. This was not the case in Alberta. This was a very different moose habitat than Newfoundland.

As we entered into the Bull Ridge area, Dan kept pointing out to me all the fresh moose sign. When we came to the top of Bull Ridge, Dan was approximately ten yards in front of me and was waving to me to come forward quickly. I remember I bent over and tried not to make too much noise as I moved forward rapidly toward Dan, as he was slightly bent over also.

When I reached Dan, I could not believe what my eyes saw. I was facing straight ahead at a huge bull moose at approximately twenty-five yards. The top of his back was seven feet tall. I distinctly remember seeing his antlers and palms. The bull moose was looking directly at me and not moving.

Dan then whispered in my ear to get ready! He started calling the bull and racking the bushes in front of us. The bull kept looking straight at me as I carefully raised my 340 Wetherby Mag on my single-pod trigger stick. After Dan finished calling and racking the bushes, he quietly told me that the bull would be moving toward us shortly and to be ready. I could not believe this hunt was happening so fast.

As the large bull moved, I saw a second smaller bull and cow within twenty-five yards. As Dan expected, the larger bull moved up toward us within eighteen yards of where we were standing. To my surprise, I stayed calm because I could not believe what I was seeing at such a close range.

This was truly an up-close-and-personal significant emotional hunting event of my lifetime. Especially with an animal that was towering over me. I remember watching this kind of an encounter with a moose happen on a bow hunting show on TV while sitting in my recliner at home. Now, I was witnessing it first-hand.

Since I did not want to shoot this magnificent bull in the head, I decided to wait until I had either a broadside or quartering shot at the bull. Dan kept racking the bushes. As the bull started to move toward us, he moved around a large tree on the top of the ridge where

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we were standing. As I looked through my scope, I saw the bull's massive paddles coming toward us.

Dan stated quietly, "Let me know when you are going to shoot."

No sooner did he get those words out of his mouth, the bull turned broadside, and I shot. Immediately, the bull dropped in its tracks. I was overwhelmed with excitement and immediately apologized to Dan for shooting so fast. I told him as he was talking, the bull gave me an excellent position to take the shot.

Since we were only ten to fifteen yards from the fallen bull, Dan started walking and looking directly at the second bull which was coming forward to start fighting the larger fallen bull. It seemed the second bull did not want to leave. I whispered to Dan to be careful since the second bull was within twelve yards of us. The cow was approximately twenty-five yards away and holding tight also.

At this point, I remember attempting to grab my camera from my back pack. We really needed to video this encounter. As I watched Dan, it seemed like he and that second bull were mentally connected. I remember seeing Robert Redford in the *Horse Whisperer* movie. Dan reminded me of a moose whisperer.

Finally, as Dan moved closer toward the fallen larger bull, the second bull backed up and started moving away. It was at this point, Dan said he wished Ken was there to take the second bull. As I looked at this massive fallen bull moose, I could not believe how these events happened on the first day and first hour of my hunt. After hugging Dan, I just stopped to take-in this whole experience. This was definitely a hunt of a lifetime for me. I was looking at a full-grown 17-point bull with huge palms that I only dreamed about over my thirty-five years of hunting in the field.

Dan then looked at me and said, "Now the work starts."

At this point, I started to really appreciate the outfitter's resources that are used to pack this moose out. By the time we finished moving the moose back to our camp, Dan used a side-by-side vehicle to ratchet the moose's head up off the road and towed the moose over three miles out of the bush to his Dodge and a sixteen-foot enclosed trailer.

Once we arrived at camp, Dan used a front-end loader to hoist the moose for capping and skinning. He had all the necessary tools needed to handle the process. Dan's skinning and capping skill sets were the best I've seen. Both Dan and Ken taught me a great deal on how to process a moose.


On the second day of the hunt, I told Dan I would like to sit in a box stand and take pictures of the game I see during the day. When Dan drove up to the stand on a four-wheel ATV to drop me off, once again, I could not believe my eyes. I saw four elk and one was definitely a nice bull approximately 500 yards away, according to Dan's range finder.

I remember mentioning to Dan that Alberta has it all — moose, elk, bear, muleys, 200-class whitetail deer, etc. I remember wishing I had a bull elk tag.

On my third day, I was back in the same stand and saw grouse, five whitetail deer including two were bucks, two coyotes, and a red fox.

As day five started, Dan was starting to feel the pressure of doing his best to find Ken his bull. As hunters, we know that weather, the capabilities of the hunter and sheer luck play a huge part on your success in the field. As luck would have it, the afternoon of Ken's fifth day of moose hunting would prove to be successful.

As Ken and Dan were walking an old cut line, Dan saw a nice bull getting up out of its bedding area. Dan and Ken immediately grabbed their gear, and callers and started moving in on the bull. As Dan called, the bull moose turned around to look back. The bull immediately dropped from a 225-grain Barnes Triple X from his .35 Whelen. Both Ken and I were fortunate to drop our bulls right in their tracks. Once again, Dan called in his oldest son, Skyler, for assistance to harvest Ken's bull from the field.

Dan had two clients this week, and both of us were successful. Ken harvested a 12-point bull with a 39-inch spread. Both Ken and I appreciated the personalized guide service. I now call Dan the "Moose Whisperer." 

Dr. Stephen Boyer, D.P.A., is a marketing/management consultant and sportsman writer that works with professional outfitters. He can be contacted at 863-944-3663, via email at drsboyer@aol.com or visit his web site at www.gmmsc.com

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inch-class deer, and this was the one I wanted.

Pretty soon the bucks were in my face and I couldn't tell which one was which. My range finder was all fogged up and soaked from the wet grain. "Alright," I thought to myself, if I can shoot a 3D course without a range finder, quit messing with it and get ready to draw." I saw the tips of the velvet forks walk into a matted down area of grain and I went to full draw. I estimated twenty-five yards and stood up. The buck was walking. With a grunt from my mouth, he stopped and I released. As my arrow passed through the buck, I looked behind me to see the 170-inch buck looking at me at thirty yards. My heart sank as my Pope & Young mule deer bounded away. If only I had remembered my binoculars!

As I walked up to my downed buck I realized I shot something very unique and very quickly forgot about the larger buck. The buck I shot had four standard points on the right side and just one huge diameter main-beam on the left side. This buck was cool looking, like a fork and a knife. I knew it would make a very nice full-velvet European mount, not to mention of a lot of cheese smokes. What a great hunt to kick off my archery season. 