

The Elk Hunt an Incredible Drama

This is an incredible story. Let me begin by introducing the names of the players involved and some Elk terminology:

- The Rut – the time of the year when the only focus of the Bull Elk is mating
- Bull Elk – the one who collects a herd of Cow Elk for mating. The Bull Elk is usually a 5x5 or larger animal. The size of the herd collected by the Bull Elk can range from a few Cows to as many as 35.
- Cow Elk – the object of the Bull's affection
- Satellite Bull – a “lesser” bull usually a Spike (two point). The Satellite Bull circles the perimeter of the herd with the hopes of taking a Cow Elk away from the Bull Elk.

The following drama played out starting at 6:30AM. It was a warm morning, about 42 degrees and it was the last morning hunt of a 10-day Elk hunt. I was setup in a pocket of a few trees with the sun rising to my back. I was located on a ridge top. To my left I could overlook a hill side and directly in front of me was a small meadow. I could hear the sounds of an Elk bugling to my right. Then the action began... Two Cow Elk came into view on the other side of the meadow, approximately 150 yards away. Then two more Cow Elk came into view. Then a Spike Bull followed by a couple of more Cow Elk came into view. They were milling around feeding on the grass. Then the 5x5 Bull came on the scene. He was herding the Cows around the ridge top, stopping to feed a few minutes before he would herd them to another location. This was exciting to watch. The old Bull would grunt and bugle as he would chase the Cows around. When the Satellite Bull came too close for the old bull's liking, he would lower his head and charge the “lesser” bull. Of course the young bull wanted no part of this action so he ran away from the herd. I watched this happen twice. This was very amusing to watch the elk and how they play their various roles. Ok, back to the hunt. It was my hope that the Bull would push the herd my way. 20 yards directly in front of me was a small pine tree. The tree was about 10 feet tall and had wide branches for a tree this size. The bull started pushing the herd directly towards me from the other side of the meadow. Once the Elk's view was blocked by the pine tree I planned to raise my bow and draw the arrow back, getting ready for the shot. All was going as planned when the unexpected happened. As I was aiming my bow with the anticipation of the elk coming into view from behind the pine tree, I picked up movement from the peripheral vision of my left eye. Keeping in mind that I was all ready for the shot, I turned my body to the left to see what was coming towards me at a very fast pace. All I saw was an elk coming straight at me. At about 3-4 yards, I released my arrow. As the elk ran past me, I could see the vanes of my arrow dripping blood. I immediately realized that this was the Satellite Bull which had been circling the herd. From the time I drew my bow with anticipation of the elk coming from behind the pine tree, to the time I saw the Spike run into the woods with my arrow in his side took only 2-seconds. This entire drama played out in a very short amount of time! No time to think, no time to analyze what was happening, only time to react! I did not have time to aim the arrow. All I did was point and release. Ok, you may be asking, were you frightened? No, no time for emotions at all. Next I could see that the old bull was pushing the herd to my right. The old bull did not discern what just happened. All he knew was that the Satellite Bull just made another run at the herd.

In hind sight I figured that the Satellite Bull was not charging me. He was just running where I was standing. As I explained this story to my wife she asked if I was scared. I said with great manliness, no it was just a Spike Bull weighing only about 450 pounds.

Ok, after the shot, one should wait at least 1-hour to give enough time for the animal to expire. The idea is to allow the animal to lie down and bleed out. Pushing an animal too soon could cause the animal to run off and thus making finding the animal much harder.

After waiting for 1 hour and 10 minutes, I decided to start back to the truck and get my son to help me track the Spike. Since I'm “color blind” seeing blood on ground is not easy for me. I started “still hunting” back to the truck. This technique of hunting requires the hunter to take 2 or 3 steps and look all round before taking the next few steps. It is a very slow walk with lots of looking. About 75 yards from where I shot the Spike, I looked down and saw blood on a stick. Then I noticed blood on a bush. I was on the blood trail. Going very slow, I was able to track to the location of the expired Spike Bull. He was about 300 yards from where all the drama began.

Ok, now for the really weird part of the story...For a hunter, all the excitement is over once the animal has been located. Then the work begins. I was walking back to the truck when my heart started beating very fast. I started to feel very tired so I decided to sit down and rest. I was hunting at 7,800 feet. I was walking slightly down hill when this condition with my heart started. I made it to approximately 100 yards short of the road when I could not go any further. I rested for about 45 minutes and my heart continued to beat very fast. I decide I had to make it to the road. If the worst happened, I need to be found. By

the time I made it to the road my heart was beating faster than ever. I started to get very warm followed by cold flashes. Laying down I looked towards the sky. I could see the beauty of God's handy-work. The trees and the clouds were very peaceful to watch. I decided to pray for God's intervention. As I prayed, I could feel warmth starting from my right to left side of the body. A few seconds after I prayed my heart returned to a normal pace. I got up and walked to the truck. I returned to camp and told Marilyn (my wife) and Michael (my son) what happened. After a quick breakfast, we loaded up Michael's quad (4 wheel ATV) and started back to retrieve the animal.

Ok, I know what you are thinking, with much preparation, many hours in the woods hunting, risk to your life, and lots of hard work in retrieving the animal; why would anyone want to go hunting? Answer - it is for those few seconds of the most incredible drama that makes it all worth while!!!



Mike