

1000

 Inches of Antler ,  Down Under

By
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As Northwest flight 222 lifted of the tarmac from Detroit Metro Airport, we were on our way to New Zealand, the "We", meaning my wife Sue and I. We have been married 21 years, our children, Carly and Shane, now considered adults, (though sometimes I wonder), and though I've gone on many hunting trips, mostly in the US and Canada, sometimes by myself, the times I asked her if she would like to go along, she would mostly look at me as though I just escaped from the local mental asylum, and say "I don't think so".

I guess it all started from the Detroit Chapter, Safari Club International Wild Game Dinner a couple years ago. There were many Outfitters there with pictures and video's running of the hunts they offer. I was talking to people from Africa, Australia, Europe, along with many from US and Canada. While walking by an outfitters table from New Zealand, we both had to just stop and stare, totally entranced by the incredible beautiful scenery we were seeing on the video. My wife Sue turned to me and said, "How come you never go hunting any place like that? I would go there!" So I kind of dismissed it, saying, "It's not no \$2500.00 deer hunt, and probably really expensive". But in my mind I could see us both, Sue with the cameras, stalking Red Stag, Wapiti (which is what they call Elk) and Fallow Deer. I've always wanted a really nice Elk, and though I've been to the "Hotspots" in the US & Canada, I've come home empty handed, seeing only small Bulls, and the outfitters would always say, "Should have been here last week".

After a whole year of secretly scrimping and saving, I brought it up again one night at dinner to my wife, Sue, I said, "You know we're not getting any younger, if we don't start doing things that we've always dreamed of but always thought we couldn't afford to go, or it was too far away, or who will watch the kids, or a million other excuses we find not to ever just go". Before I could finish she cut me off, "What do you have planned?" I told her, "What would you say if I told you I sent in a deposit for a 7 day bow hunt in New Zealand, and a week of sight seeing?," "I thought you could tag along hunting with me, or the Outfitter, Gary Herbert, of New Zealand Mountain Hunting LTD, would have his mother in-law, Rayleen, act as a tour guide and take you around the south Island of New Zealand, as I hear it is one of the most scenic places on Earth, and show you the sights". Sue said, "I can suffer through the hunting part, besides I can always go sightseeing".

The Flight went smooth as silk, just long, with the layovers some 23 hours from start to finish; we touched down in Queenstown, New Zealand approximately 9,000 miles from our home, north of Detroit, Michigan



Queenstown is a lovely little tourist town located on the sparkling turquoise water of Lake Wakatipu, snow capped mountains surround Queenstown, lots of shopping for souvenirs, and fine restaurants. They have fishing for Salmon and Trout, Jet boat rides up the rivers that run into Lake Wakatipu. For the outdoor enthusiast there is hiking, camping, biking, mountain climbing, ice climbing, bungee jumping, hang gliding, anything and everything associated with the outdoors, and the great part is you don't have to bring anything; all the equipment can be rented. It is really an outdoor adventurer's paradise. We only spent one night there as our guide Stacy picked us up the following day at 1:00pm, to take us 150 miles west towards the Southern Alps to our lodge located outside of the cozy little town of Wanaka. During the ride Stacey informed me that the outfitter was concerned that I was bow hunting, forewarning me that it would be a tough task to get within rifle range, let alone 20-30 yards needed for bow hunting, as the animals like to hang out in open alpine meadows, where they can see danger approaching.



Southern Alps

We arrived in Wanaka and were the guests of Ken and Patsy Domonkos, owners of the Maungawera Lodge, located a short drive from Wanaka. They are transplanted Canadians, who left Canada some 20 years ago to live in New Zealand, plus we were all hockey fans, me and Sue growing up watching the Redwings.

We unpacked our hunting gear, I pulled out my Mathews Switchback Bow, screwed on the Steelforce Broad heads onto the 29", white crested, feathered fletched PSE 200 Carbon Force arrows, which I have hand made for me local pro shop, they spin and weigh dozens to find 12 perfect arrows for me. Believe me, I know if I miss, its not my equipment, as he tunes my bow and arrow setup so those 200 Carbon Force arrows, tipped with Steelforce Broad heads traveling at 319 f.p.s. fly like laser beams.

After a fine dinner, followed by dessert and a glass of fine New Zealand wine, I grabbed my Mathews Switchback and shot a few practice arrows. Satisfied that all my gear was in order, we headed off to bed; tomorrow we would hunt Elk, and Red Stag.

The alarm sounded at 5:00 am, I could smell the aroma of fresh brewed coffee coming from the Kitchen, our guide Stacy and Patsy already had breakfast on the table when we came out of our bedroom. After breakfast, I pulled our Scent Lock Camo Suits from the dryer, and the three of us jumped into the truck. We had a hour drive up into the mountains west of Wanaka, where we would begin our hunt on New Zealand Mountain Outfitters property that they had only purchased a year or so ago. The section of land

encompassed some 11,000 acres of land, a mixture of rolling hills, with numerous crystal clear rushing streams, too numerous to count. The streams had thick cover on both sides, sometimes more than 100 yards wide in areas, with numerous stands of thick brush, surrounded by emerald green pastures, this was elk and stag paradise!!



The orange glow of the morning sun was just peeking over the snow capped mountain range to the east as we left the truck, for the long climb up to the high country. A short hour later, huffing and puffing Sue and I and our guide Stacy were sitting on top of one of the highest points in the area, where our guide, Stacy pulled out the spotting scope and tripod from his pack. Even with just my 10X42 Nikon Binoculars, I could see many Red Stag, and numerous Elk, all around us, from maybe ½ mile to 2 miles away. I mean there were nice bulls everywhere! The Stags where all roaring there challenges to the world, sounding not unlike the sound a African lion makes, a deep raspy roar that seems to vibrate right through you. The Elk were also bugling, when we spotted a nice Red Stag with a 6X6 Bull Elk traveling together, which is common, as they will

sometimes cross breed, producing an animal with incredible looking set of horns. I sat there and stared at them from ¼ mile away as they headed for the creek, to bed in the heavy cover along the creek.



Stacy turned to me from his spotting scope and said, "The good news is I think we can get close to one of them, I lost them in the brush along the creek, I can see the whole section from up here, they must have bedded in that section about 100 yards long. I asked, "What's the Bad News", our Guide replied, "We have to go way down to the bottom, a mile south of them, climb over the top of that mountain, then down to approach that creek bed from the down wind side!" I looked at Sue and said "you ready", she said, "You guys go ahead", "I'll find a high spot to video the stalk".

When we finally made the top of the mountain, I could not believe how out of breath I was, God, I thought to myself, and I trained pretty hard for this in the months leading up to this hunt, my Kiwi guide, Stacy, wasn't even breathing hard. Then it dawned on me, Michigan is really flat, it's hard to find a hill more than 100ft tall, let alone a mountain a mile high! All the hundreds of miles I jogged in preparation for this hunt was on pretty level ground, I thought to myself, "Geez, I should have been climbing stairs at some stadium somewhere".



New Zealand guide ,Stacey and Author Glassing for Game

As we glassed the creek bed trying to find the bedded dual, even though we couldn't pick them out in the brush, Stacy was convinced that the 2 animals were still bedded there. So he said he thought we should army crawl the last 250 yards as it was pretty open and he thought either of the animals might see us descending down the side of the mountain. So off we crawled, at least it was down hill! Stacy stayed above the creek bed to give me hand signals should he spot the Elk or Stag.

As I entered the brush along the creek, I looked back at Sue, videoing us from a small knoll some 200 yards away. A quick glance at Stacy, I could see him waving to me, I pulled the Nikon Binoculars up to see him pointing to my right. I wasn't sure if it was the Stag or the Elk, but they were both nice animals

anyway, and given the opportunity, I would take the first shot that I was given.

As I nocked an arrow and looked ahead down the creek bed, I saw what appeared to be a tree pivot around, not just a branch, but what appeared to be a whole TREE MOVING! It had to be the Red Stag; at the top of the ridiculously huge antlers was a cluster of numerous tines, slowly swiveling back and forth every few minutes. As those antlers would turn away I would take a few steps, and stop when they swiveled back my way, I was almost in bow range when it happened, I could feel a slight breeze on the back of my neck. That was all it took, as the massive beast rose from its bed and trotted up the creek bed, breaking cover and heading straight up the mountain. What an incredible view, as that monstrous Red Stag trotted up into the morning sun, you could see the steam from its every breath, there in front of all 3 of us, man!, I was so close! I stared at the ground dejectedly for a few seconds when I realized there was a very big Bull Elk in here still! I looked back at my guide Stacy he was pointing across the creek from me, it must be the Elk. I silently picked my way to the creek, this was good, as the noise from the rushing water would cover any small sound I happened to make. Then I spotted the tops of the big 6X6 rack, crawling forward, I got to within 30 yards, checked the yardage through my Bushnell range finder, snapped my Winn Free Release onto the bowstring, and decided to wait for him to move. It just was minutes, when suddenly he rose from his bed, what a huge rack! I don't remember pulling back the bow; it was like I was a spectator watching, as the 30 yard sight pin settled just behind the front shoulder. It was a surprise as the Mathews bow gently recoiled forward, "Thwack! ", the PSE Carbon Force arrow flashed through the Bulls rib cage in an instant and out the other side, clattering through the brush. The Bull leapt forward, mortally hit through both lungs, he fell a scant 30 yards from where he was hit. All I could think to do was raise my bow over my head, and stare up to the heavens, probably not unlike early man did thousands of years ago.



I raced my guide Stacey to the big Bull, I just grabbed the enormous rack, and I could not believe the size, 20" brow tines, a spread of over 4 feet, what a trophy! We field dressed the Bull Elk, and removed the cape and head, Stacey loaded it up on his pack, and we headed for the truck. Once at the truck, we drove a few miles until we got a cell phone signal, called the local rancher, gave him the location of the bull, he would pick it up with his Helicopter shortly, as there was no way to get a vehicle back in there.. We where back at the lodge in Wanaka for dinner. What a perfect end to the first day of hunting, to say the least.

The following day we hunted a different concession, as this new place held a few more Red Stag than the previous spot, plus it had a lot more cover, as this mountain range was almost entirely forested, with only small clearings scattered throughout.

As we left the car that morning in the light of a full moon, we could hear the stags roaring from the mountains, God, it sounded like 15-20 Stags up there. We reached the top, as Sue,myself and our guide sat there waiting for dawn, I couldn't

help smiling as the stags roared, and from a distant mountain, an Elk bugled, if ever there is heaven on earth this was it!



Our plan was simple, Stacey knew of large wallows, there had to be 20 of them in this ravine, we would set up my Double Bull Archery Blind on the downwind side of the wallows, and wait for the stags to come to drink and wallow in the mud. Hopefully we would get a chance at a nice one. We had hardly got situated in the Double Bull Blind, when the first group of 3 Red Stag Bulls came down the trail, roaring all the way. What a sight, suddenly a Pair of 14 point stags started fighting right in front of the Double Bull

Blind! Finally they walked off. Although they were all nice, I decided to pass them and wait for better light.

As the stags roared in the distance, one seemed to be getting louder, I nocked an arrow. Stacey saw him first and whispered, "Where do you want him to stop for a shot"? I whispered, "Just to the left of that sapling 20 yards in front of us". As the Stag approached the sapling, I nodded to Stacey; he let out a soft moaning sound, mimicking the Stag. It froze, and stared our way, but too late the arrow was already away, slicing through both lungs. The Huge Stag kicked its back legs up like a bucking bull, hooking its horns into the ground, almost flipping head over heels, but righting itself, it tore up and over the hilltop some 400 yards up hill. Are these animals tough, we found him over the hill at the bottom; he must have died just over the top and rolled some 300 yards down to the bottom. What a beautiful trophy! The thickness of the antlers, and length of tines and spread, is incredible! Sue and I just stared at the Stag; I couldn't stop touching the rack. After pictures and field dressing, Stacey was packing out another one.



Author with New Zealand Red Stag



This carcass was also hauled out by Helicopter. That left us with 4 days to hunt Fallow deer, as that is the last of the 3 different deer type animals in New Zealand. The following day I just couldn't keep my eyes of the beautiful Red Stags, so that night when the outfitter, Gary Herbert, called to see how everything was going for us, I asked him, "I just love the Red Stags, and would like to try and stalk and shoot one with my bow", he said, "No problem, what ever you want". I would dearly love to have 2 Red Stags for my trophy room. So Stacey and I made our plan to return to the same piece of property in the morning, to try for a second stag.

As we climbed to the top of the high ridge in the frosty moon lit darkness of the early morning, we could already hear the Stags roaring, this would be exciting.

The first couple of stalks, the wind swirling did us in, finally around mid day, my wife Sue spotted a tremendous Stag bedded in a small hollow between two ridge tops, just perfect for a stalk, as we could get to within 60 yards unseen.



The stalk went perfectly, as I crawled the last 30 yards, drew my Mathews Switchback while still laying down, I slowly rose to my knees, as The Giant Stag rose from his bed spotting the movement. He trotted 10 yards, and stopped. I settled my 40 yard pin behind his front shoulder, and touched off my Winn Free Release. The white crested arrow tipped with a Steelforce broad head, disappeared perfectly just behind the front shoulder. Hit through both lungs, he kicked his back legs high in the air. The Stag never made the top of the ridge only 30 yards away, as he tumbled back down the ridge.



Celebrating a Perfect shot!!!



I let out a loud, "WAHOOO!!!", and ran to the fallen Monarch of the Mountains. At the time I didn't realize, I had just taken over 1000 inches of combined antlers in a little more than 5 Days!



Author with 3 New Zealand trophies



Nice stringer of New Zealand Trout

The balance of the hunt was spent fly fishing the pristine rivers for trout and salmon in the 2-6 lb range, with the occasional 10 pounder, and field hunting Paradise Ducks, and Canada geese, the fishing and waterfowl hunting were unbelievable. We rented a car and spent another week sightseeing and sampling the incredible fishing opportunities for Rainbow and Brown Trout, and also



Author with Paradise Ducks

Salmon. The Glacier region of the west coast in the Southern Alps of the South Island is a must see, the scenery is as breathtaking as is driving on the left side of the road, and where guard rails are non existent. The Farm Stays as they are called there were like typical quaint Bed and Breakfast style accommodations, which I highly recommend, as the locals are more than happy to inform you on where to fish.

The South Island of New Zealand is unique as far as wildlife and terrain The Red Stag, or Red Deer as it is known is similar to our elk, probably weighing in at 400 lbs, they have a coat ranging in color from deep auburn red to a chocolate brown. I've always

thought they were very beautiful, with their massive antlers, as big around as my calf at the base, spreading up and outward, ending with a cluster of points at the top, called the “Crown”. The Red Stag is probably one of the most majestic beasts on earth. They were transplanted from Europe to New Zealand in 1861, along with the Elk, as New Zealand was void of any type of Big Game animal for thousands of years, probably from before the ice age. On the western side of the South Island, lies the Southern Alps, which is the lofty home of the Tar, and Chamois.

The other novel thing is, there are virtually no predators. So the survival rate of game animals is very high, combined with mild winters, insures almost 100% survival rate for new born fawns. And I mean no predators, No wolf or coyote, bear, lion, raccoon, skunk, all they really have is the Bushy Tailed Possum, which was planted there from Australia some 100 years ago to establish a fur market. The New Zealand Possum’s is not at all like the opossum here in the States, the New Zealand Possum’s fur is much like a mink, same color, and texture, and is used to make coats, sweaters, hats, gloves, moccasins. They also blend it in with merino wool, making a fabric much like Cashmere for sweaters, and vests, and so forth. Although a valuable resource, they are considered a pest, as they breed out of control, and have to be poisoned off through feeding stations set up by the Government, although they are hunted relentlessly by the local ranchers and shot at night year round, the population still cannot be kept under control. It will always be a problem that the New Zealand Government will have.

Tips for Traveling to New Zealand:

- 1 You will need a current Passport
- 2 If taking a firearm, you will need a Firearm form available from the Outfitter
- 3 If bow hunting, make sure you have a setup that shoots very fast, my Mathews Switchback @ 72lbs, shoots PSE Carbon Force 200 arrows at 319 F.P.S. as ranges can be long, similar to hunting the western states, I am a firm believer in cut on contact broad heads like the Steelforce, for complete pass through penetration so vital in putting down big, tough, and very expensive big game animals, (yes you do pay for wounded game).
- 4 Make sure you scrub all footwear before leaving, as you will be fined by the New Zealand Government if there is any dirt or mud on your boots.
- 5 Book your air fares through a competent travel agent, I used Philip Wilson of New Zealand Travel, you can contact him via e-mail, philipwilson@airnz.co.nz Our trip went like clockwork, I highly recommend them.
- 6 Temperatures can range from frost in the early mornings to sunny 80 degree temperatures in just a few hours.

If traveling to New Zealand for hunting or outdoor adventures contact, Gary Herbert, New Zealand Mountain Hunting LTD Rr1 Waimete New Zealand for the “Hunt of a Life Time”, as the quality of game animals, guides, food and accommodations are

second to none. Among the animals hunted are: Red Stag, Wapiti (Elk), Fallow Deer, helicopter access only hunts for Tar and Chamois near the Fox and Franz Josef Glaciers in the West Coast of the South Island of New Zealand. Also offered, world class Waterfowl hunting and trout and salmon fishing

Equipment:

Mathews Legacy Bow

PSE Carbon Force 200 Arrows

Steelforce Broad heads (blade, 90grain)

Bushnell Rangefinder

Nikon 10 X 42 Binoculars

Scent Loc Camo

Double Bull Archery Blind

Mad Dog Rain Gear and Back Packs

Sony Digital Camcorder and Camera



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