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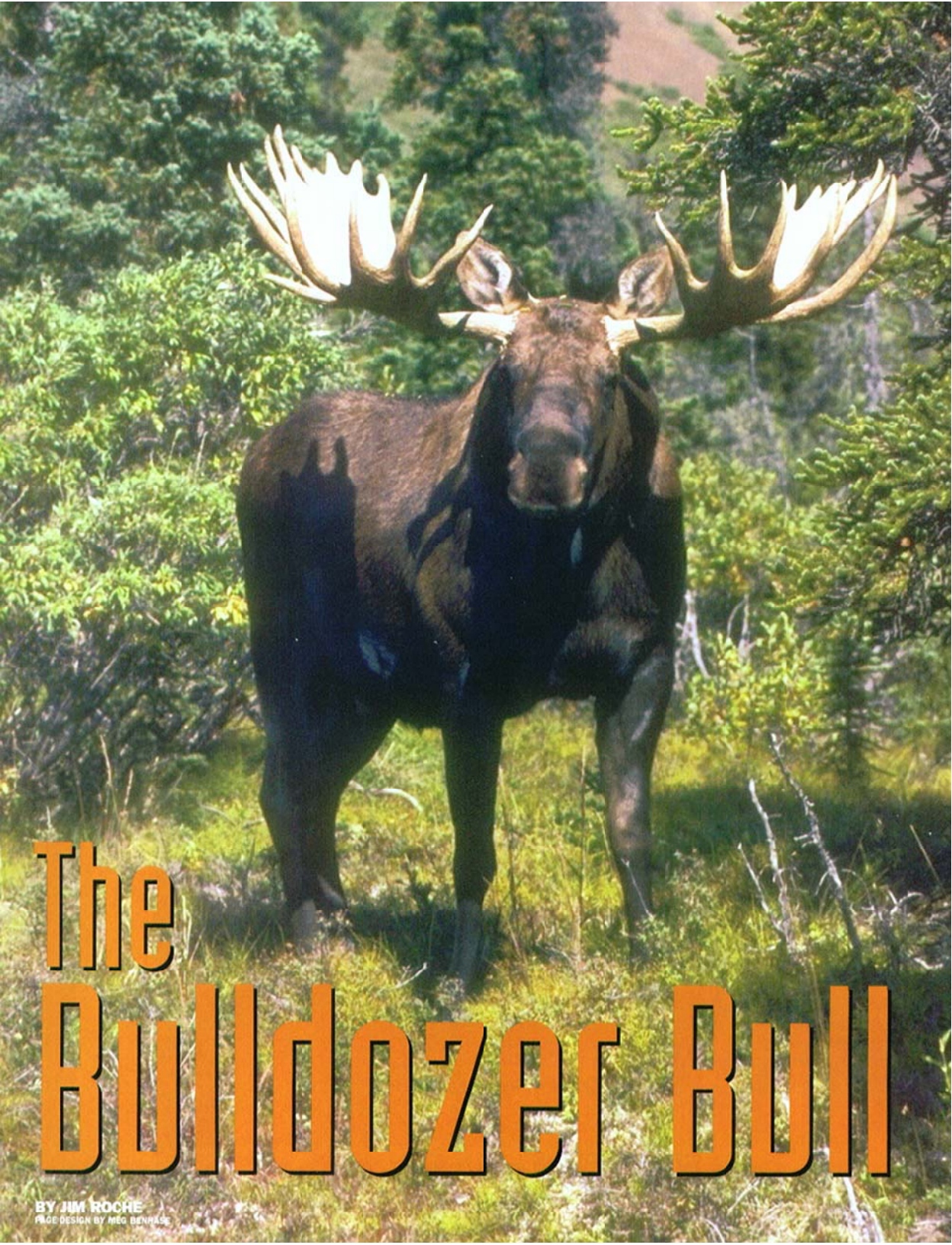
THE JOURNAL OF BIG GAME HUNTING

OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF SAFARI CLUB INTERNATIONAL

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2006

\$8.95





The Bulldozer Bull

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For four full days, the wind blew down the back of our necks as we faced the timber-lined river a couple of miles below. Next to me sat my Alaskan moose hunter, Dave Wiessner, quiet but impatient as he waited for his chance to stalk into the golden birch and green spruce trees below that hid his bull. The weight of the unsaid was heavy on my shoulders.

Dave had saved his pennies for quite a while to book this trip, and now the wind's direction was preventing us from pursuing the big bull. We had seen him twice – once when we first flew into camp and then a couple of mornings later as he meandered across a small clearing far below our camp. The sight of his huge antlers tilting slowly from side to side as he crossed the muskeg was vivid in our memories.

We both knew that the worst thing we could do was lose patience and start walking down the hill with the wind at our backs, blowing our scent right to him. The pressure of knowing the season would end in three days wasn't helping, either. As the sun

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Author with his bulldozer bull

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began to lose its glow, I felt almost a sense of relief that the day was about to be done and that we could look to the promise that tomorrow might provide our chance to stalk the big bull.

We awoke the next morning to clear skies and the much-anticipated wind shift we'd spent days waiting for. It was now or never, so we quickly struggled into our Cabela's freighter packs and headed downhill toward the river. The first mile passed quickly, and our flushed faces were beaded with sweat in the brilliant morning sun. We paused to catch our breath and pop off our scope covers. We each chambered a round and then began a methodical single-file stalk into the timber. There was no way of knowing for sure whether Dave's bull was still in there, but I had that special *Yes!* feeling you get from years of hunting.

We slipped carefully through the tree-scattered perimeter and into the bull's living room – the same muskeg clearing he had crossed a few days before. The big animal's tracks were now filled with water and dew-covered spider webs. My pulse quickened a little, even though I knew the tracks were not fresh. I checked my watch, pulled out my compass and took a careful bearing. For more days than I cared to remember, I had carefully studied this patch of timber through my Swarovski binocular and had noticed a faint thinning of treetops toward the center. I hoped it indicated a small clearing hidden beneath the leafy canopy of gold and green. It had appeared to be about a half-mile from where we now stood. At stalking speed, it would take us approximately 20 minutes to reach the clearing, where I hoped to call Dave's bull into our laps.

I picked out an individual tree standing along my compass bearing,

and we eased into the dark and almost impenetrable forest. Visibility was only a few feet, requiring frequent compass readings. Carefully, we crawled over fallen logs, all the while searching for brown legs or a flash of antlers. My ears strained to pick up the sound of a branch breaking under a heavy foot or the distinctive thump of a moose hoof against a fallen log.

Twenty-four minutes later, the forest floor began to brighten as we approached the hidden clearing. We quickly surveyed it, found a suitably positioned spruce tree and knelt beside it. After letting things quiet

down, I cupped my hands, pinched my nose shut, took a deep breath and gave my best rendition of a cow moose in heat. Dave had never before heard the mournful wail of a cow moose in heat, and he shot me a startled glance.

A few minutes later, I repeated the call. In the distance, a branch broke! I quietly asked Dave if he'd heard it. He hissed an excited "Yes!" Suddenly we could hear the *plunk, plunk* of hooves striking downed logs and the sharp pops of dead limbs breaking free after being struck by large antlers. The once faint sounds now thundered in our

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ears, and the ground literally shook as if a runaway bulldozer was charging us. A birch tree about 14 feet tall shook violently, and golden-green leaves showered down.

Suddenly, not 20 yards away, stood four brown legs. My entire body shook from the adrenaline overload. I did my best to regain my composure and made a soft call. The long, seemingly unattached brown legs began to circle our hiding place. After what seemed an eternity, a huge, swollen neck with wide-sweeping antlers appeared out of the tangle. I counted four brow tines on one side, making him legal, and gave Dave the go-ahead.

The bull swung his big rack and was starting to leave when Dave's .300 Winchester Magnum shattered the moment. At the shot, the bull took a quick sidestep, then put his head down and plowed ahead. Dave fired another shot at the retreating bull, and so did I. A short foot race ensued, followed by three more shots. The mortally hit bull spread his legs, stood his ground for a moment, then toppled, his huge antlers impaling the decaying forest floor. Dave and I said a short prayer, took some photos, and called Dave's wife on my satellite phone.

The fun was done, and now it was time to get to work. We rolled up our sleeves, reloaded our rifles (this was bear country) and started skinning Dave's bull. That done, we removed the heavy quarters and placed one in each of our packs. I used my GPS unit to mark the kill site, then we helped each other shoulder our 150-pound loads. The shoulder straps from our heavy packs cut deep into our shoulders, making our hands tingle. The occasional hole and fallen log tried to twist or break our ankles, but we made the river.

By the time we returned for our second load of meat, darkness was engulfing us. Not far from the kill site we found a fallen tree, its large root wad giving us protection from the wind. I had brought along a small tarp just in case we had to spend the night. We positioned our rifles and flashlights at the ready, then rolled up under the tarp. Sleep came quickly – we were both exhausted. Around 4 a.m. we both awoke, shivering uncontrollably. A heavy frost had formed, riming our breathing and dampening our clothing under the tarp. Hypothermia was close at hand, so we went to work gathering firewood, constantly scanning with our mini-flashlights to check for the reflection of a bear's eyes. Before long, we had a warm fire to curl up

to, and we fed it until dawn.

Cautiously, we made our way to the kill site. No bears were on our meat, so we loaded up two more quarters and headed for the river. After a third trip, we finally had 900 pounds of meat, cape and antlers on a gravel bar suitable for landing my Super Cub. I turned on my GPS, pulled up the camp's coordinates 2 1/2 miles away, and we made our way back there, our legs burning and our backs aching, arriving exactly 34 1/2 hours after we had left. Food was not even given a thought – we headed straight for our sleeping bags.

The next morning, after a healthy breakfast of Motrin and granola bars, I unzipped the tent and went outside. The morning air was crisp and clear. The sun was just topping the distant mountains, and fingers of light explored the shadowed valley below. I gingerly shuffled on my sore, stockinged feet to my personal observation spot and paused to enjoy the moment. Not 200 yards below stood a 62-inch bull moose. I called Dave out of the tent to share the view. After a couple of dumbfounded minutes, we turned to each other, smiled and shook our heads. 🐻



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