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"SERVING THE HUNTER WHO TRAVELS"

OUTFITTER CRITIQUES

(This section of The Hunting Report is based entirely on subscriber-written Hunt Reports received in our Miami office. It is designed to provide accurate, reliable reports on what's actually happening in the field. Our policy on Hunt Reports is as follows: We mention in the newsletter all Hunt Reports as received and exert no censorship except in cases when agents or outfitters submit reports on hunts they have a financial stake in, or when we have good reason to believe there are ulterior financial or personal motives on the part of anyone submitting a report. All critical Hunt Reports are sent out to the affected agent/outfitter/PH for rebuttal comment and a reasonable amount of time is allowed for that comment. The Hunting Report does not seek to pass judgement on the validity of any conflict reported in a critical Hunt Report, but merely indicates in its pages that the conflict exists. Subscribers who think their hunting plans might be affected by the conflict are urged to write in for all the relevant correspondence. We think this prior-notification policy coupled with a neutral-comment policy is as fair a system as can be created for the airing of conflicts about hunts. It goes without saying that the existence of a conflict is not necessarily reason to avoid an agent/outfitter/guide. That determination can be made only after reading the comments provided by both parties to the conflict. We think all seasoned hunters will be able to sort out the claims and counter-claims and make better decisions about where to hunt and who to hunt with as a result of our Hunt Report Program.)

Now here's an opportunity you probably haven't considered. How about a trophy hunt for free-range elk? On private land? With no set report on just such an opportunity in West Texas. Miller hunted with Jim Roche of Magnum Guide Service (325-853-1555; www.magnumguideservice.com) and gives him an across-the-board excellent rating. In a note Miller included with his report, he writes: "I've hunted this ranch with Roche three times now. It's near Marathon and has lots of water, so it holds quantities of animals, even in a drought. Whitetails inhabit the lowlands; the mountains hold large mule deer (5-1/2 years old and up) that are hunted once only each year; and there are free-ranging aoudad and a herd of free-ranging elk. Roche takes only one bull elk each year from this ranch, so the trophy quality is excellent. Elk are not considered game animals in Texas, so there are no seasons. That means you don't have to draw a permit, and you can hunt the bugle without interference from other hunters. They have huge elk, 6 x 6 and better. "Last year I took an elk 6 x 5 on the last day of my hunt. I went back this past season to hunt the mulies. The rut was very late. We saw many young bucks with the good mature bucks appearing only on the last day. Bucks taken were mostly 5 1/2-year-olds with one 7 1/2-year-old buck in the group. "The aoudads on this ranch are of superior quality, and the hunting is challenging and fun, all spotting and stalking. The three other hunters with me stalked and took mature free-ranging aoudad from a herd of hundreds. I'd taken a 32-inch aoudad the previous year. The access is on good roads." "I have hunted over 20 years with Roche. He is always hard working, dedicated and successful. He is also one of most ethical people I know. His hunts are a great value, as he is very selective with his leases. He researches properties well and helps landowners improve the habitat. He will be honest with you on the trophy quality available and season and no tag to draw? There are even additional opportunities for mule deer, javelina, feral hogs and predators, including mountain lion how hunting is done." Intrigued by the mention of free-range elk in Texas, we called Jim Roche at press time to check the details. He says elk are indigenous to West Texas, all of the panhandle and mountain region. These are the same elk that once roamed the prairies. Now they are confined to small pockets south of Fort Stockton down to Marathon and west to about Vanhorn. Within that triangle, pockets of elk have been wild for years. Roche says a herd of 50-60 elk freely roam the property he hunts. Elk season is year round, with the rut running from late September into October. Hunters may use a rifle, bow or handgun. Roche charges \$2,500 for a 1 x 1 hunt for four nights and three days, plus a \$5,000 trophy fee for an elk. A mule deer hunt is \$4,950. Add on aoudad for \$2,500. The over-the-counter license costs \$45 and is good for elk, aoudad and javelina. Mule deer require a \$300 tag that is good for whitetail too. Roche says he runs close to 100 percent success on mature bulls that typically score in the 285-325 range.