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APPLEGATE OUTBACK: MY OPINION

Elk hunt

BY BOB FISCHER



It was early November and the tree leaves had turned brown. I could feel a sharp bite in the air as it blew across the mountaintop that I was sitting on. I could see an eagle soaring beneath me looking for a meal.

I was on the Montana, Idaho border in the Selway Bitterroot Forest in the Clearwater area. My hunting partners, Gil Smith, John Kilroy, Dick Pearce and I were elk hunting in an area called, "Death Creek." In this area deep in the forest live, black bear, mountain lion, grizzly bear, elk, deer and an abundance of other furry creatures, some dangerous and some not so dangerous.

It was four in the morning as I made my way across the Clearwater River. I could hear in the distance the haunting call of a bull elk. This was the same elk I had been tracking all week. Gil Smith and I called him "Hank Aaron" because he was batting a thousand with us. Every time we would get to within shooting range he would suddenly disappear, then reappear about a thousand yards away on the next mountain top calling his ladies to him.

The rifle I was carrying could reach him, but the accuracy at this extreme range is questionable, one mistake could cost you a loss of the animal. So I continued each day to try to get closer to him.

The day before, Dick Pearce had spent the night on the trail in hopes of finding him before he went deep into the woods.

Dick had returned to our base camp the next day a little quiet, not wanting to talk about where he had lost his sleeping bag.

A grunt and a growl snapped me back to reality. A small black bear plunged through the brush off to my right side. He probably was just as scared as I was, suddenly coming across each other.

I continued hiking up the trail, which leads to a small saddle between two mountains and on to the area where old Henry Aaron hangs out. As I approached the saddle I slowed and looked around at the blanket of feathers covering the trail and foliage. It looked as though a large bird had put up one hell of a fight. Then I found Dick's sleeping bag behind a downed tree. The bag had this large hole in the bottom of it. Later I would find out Dick had shot his down-filled sleeping bag.

I left his bag there to be picked up when I came

back and continued slowly working my way into the valley. I found myself partially surrounded by a small elk herd feeding and unaware of my presence. I saw small spike bulls and females, but no big regal bull elk. Then I heard him call from about 200 yards away in some deep brush. I started working my way towards him.

The herd became aware of my presence and suddenly elk were plunging through the trees and brush in every direction. In a matter of minutes they were gone, and then I heard the call. I got to a clearing looking up on his mountain to see old Hank come trotting out of the forest about 500 yards away into a clearing. He stood broadside to me, his head held high looking down on me.

His herd? They were slowly trotting out towards him. I sat down near a tree stump and watched him through my scope. I adjusted my scope for 500 yards and set the cross hairs on his chest. I watched him for several minutes marveling at this magnificent animal. I lowered my magnum rifle and smiled.


Old Hank had earned the right to live out his life with his ladies. He had found an area that most hunters would not attempt to climb through the 30-foot deep brush and fallen trees that surrounded his mountain. It acted as a barrier of protection for him.

I sat and watched him for about a half hour, then slung my rifle over my shoulder and headed down the mountain with Dick's sleeping bag.

Back at camp Dick told us that he had bedded down in his sleeping bag and was putting his rifle inside it. Dick said he pointed it down the path in case a bear was coming up the path. In putting the rifle into his bag he accidentally pulled the trigger. Feathers went everywhere.

I spent the next week chasing elk across the mountains and valleys. It was turning cold and snow clouds were moving into the area. Gil and I had been out about three weeks now and decided to head back to the big city. Although on this trip all I was bringing home was one deer, this trip, as most of my hunting trips are, I never came back empty handed. Seeing the country and being close to the wild animals is enough to make it all worthwhile.

Bob Fischer • 541-846-6218

C.A.T.S. 

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Shelter Locations: 104 N. Ross Lane
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Bob's hunting tip #101



Always leave the tailgate down on your pickup truck. When the deer jump in, sneak up on them and shut the tailgate real quick before they can jump out.