

Ol' Ornery

CALLING IN AN 8X8, 380-CLASS BULL

Story by Greg Dyson for the Blue Mountain Eagle

It was early in the third week of a rainy elk season. We always get wet in September, but this year was extremely wet.

Obviously, elk breed no matter what the weather holds. It just seems to be crazier and louder when the elk days are hot, dusty and dry. Wet seems to suppress the rut to a wet blanket feel.

A couple "out of staters" were fortunate, though, just a few days in the season, to tag out on a couple of not-so-cautious branch bulls. The excitement in new elk hunters returning their first branch bulls is a great and exciting time.

It was the third week, and usually by that time, I have located a couple bulls in the 350 class.

One extremely rut-crazed bull had shown some interest in loud and lonesome cow calls, but showed no interest when chuckled and grunted at. This bull we named "Ornery" because of the no-tolerance attitude and the torn up young re-prod he enjoyed shredding with his not-yet-seen eight-by-eight 380-class rack.

Plenty of elk hunters are quick to point out the 10- to 12-foot rake marks on trees, but usually a bull elk that is really a raker and lives up to the name can bend a three- to five-year old re-prod pine over, and that accounts for the 12-foot high rake marks we see.

Either way, most September bow hunters are easily and readily hunting that adrenaline rush that keeps us all looking to the heavens and asking, is it September yet?

I had been on the hunt for Ornery for the last couple days with no luck. It's not uncommon to lose herd bulls from time to time, as they can cover 5 to 7 miles like we go check the mail.

I had not yet put eyes on Ornery, but had had him under a hundred yards a couple times.

My luck was fixing to change, though.

I like to get out early, 3 a.m. some mornings, and head for the big meadows, as later in the month more of the big boys turn up there, looking for a

chance to steal a few cows from younger bulls who forget their age and their rank in the pecking order.

It didn't take but a minute to hear Ornery had stepped up his game, as his bugles were now mostly warnings to any other bulls that might dare to bugle, grunt or chuckle on his watch.

I had harvested seven Pope & Young Club book bulls at this point of my bow-hunting career and made a commitment to shoot a bull that was at least a 340-class Wapiti.

As I stayed within bugle screams of Ornery, I just really wanted to put eyes on him, as I was pretty sure he would cover the 340-class minimum.

After crossing the third cold creek in the last quarter mile, I was pretty much praying for daylight so I could see Ornery for the first time.

Every once in a while, you get lucky and your soaking wet trail somehow pays off, and this was the case because right at first light I got to witness Ornery chasing off a 320-class bull from his own cows.

A couple cow elk were not too happy with their new herd master, but after Ornery hooked a couple new members of his harem, the cows stopped squealing and realized they had a brand new leader.

I kept looking and counting tines because an eight-by-eight, over-360-class public land bull elk doesn't come along every day!

After 10 minutes of researching Ornery, he and his couple dozen cows disappeared over the ridge and were headed for the north face and their elk-bed haven for the day.

A great advantage to hunting the same area for years is the ability to draw off past hunts and knowledge of the different ridges, and know how the elk use them for their advantage. Wind direction and air thermals change with the temperatures throughout the day.

It was 6:40 a.m., and I had been up and tagging along with the elk for over three and a half hours. I was soaking wet, and the temperature when I parked my truck that morning was 28 degrees.

I knew I couldn't get ahead of 20-plus elk hellbent on getting to bed, but I had just sized up

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Greg Dyson poses with Ornery, a 380-class bull elk.

the biggest bull I had ever laid eyes on, and adrenaline is a bow hunter's best friend.

I made good time back to my truck, and with a change of socks and my dry bag, I was a new man and getting closer every half-mile to where I hoped and prayed my elk herd was heading for their daytime bedding area.

Fresh rain made my hurrying less noisy, but when I arrived Ornery and his cows were not exactly where I was hoping to find them. However, being aggressive and extra loud with my cow sounds finally made Ol' Ornery let out a raging warning bugle and step away from his herd to round up whatever cow was wandering around.

As soon as the mountain monarch came into sight, this old bow hunter's heart skipped a beat at the sight of the largest bull I had ever called in.

He came cruising through a small meadow and paused at around 42 yards. As I hit the record button on my camera, things were looking pretty good.

Like all big bulls, you could sense his nervousness as he was staring right at the spot where he had expected to see at least one cow elk.

His luck and good fortune must have been screaming at him to run because something wasn't right with this situation, but as he turned to leave, he paused once more for a last look, and that's when I aimed at his chest and touched my three-finger thumb release.

The arrow flew as perfectly as it could have and made a hollow sound as it cut through both lungs.

Old Ornery ran about 50 yards before nearly falling but made it another 70 yards before finally toppling.

I made my way to the ridgetop to get a good vantage point and watch this monarch take his last breath.

My camera had caught all the action, and I was very pleased at what had transpired, allowing me to walk up on an eight-by-eight 380-class mountain monarch we called Ol' Ornery.

I've been most fortunate to harvest two 380-class bull elk along with my P&Y book bulls. To walk up on such a massive animal is humbling, to say the least.

Greg Dyson is in his 14th year of being an ambassador and pro-staffer of Bowtech Archery.