

From Tragedy To Triumph

By Lee Phillips

It was a nice, early October day as I enjoyed the 1.5 hour drive from my house to Buckeye Whitetail Quest in Russellville, Ohio. I've known the owner Brett Cooper for several years through email conversations. He had invited me down on a couple of occasions, and I decided this year I would give it a try. Buckeye Whitetail Quest has over 3,000 acres for free range hunting, and another 300 acres dedicated for preserve hunts. I checked out their current trail cam pictures from their website, and they certainly had a bunch of nice looking bucks. I gave Brett a call, and my hunting dates were set.

I arrived at the lodge and was greeted by Brett and lead guide Camp Newcomb. I unloaded my bag target and got my gear put away in my room. There were also a few hunters in camp, so I made the rounds for introductions. It was now after 4:00 pm, and I had just enough time for a couple of practice shots with my crossbow. It only took two shots to confirm that my CAMX 330 was spot on at 20 and 30 yards. I enjoyed a nice ham sandwich for dinner, watched some football on TV, and now it was time to discuss the plans for tomorrow's hunt.

One thing I found appealing about Brett's operation is that they have many elevated box blinds in their hunting areas. I prefer a box blind since it allows you to have greater

movement while reducing the chance for wind thermals to carry your scent under a buck's nose. They offer both morning and evening sits but they encourage evening-only hunting. Many of their blinds are at the ends of long fields, and driving 4 wheel Gators to the stands could spook deer standing at the feeders in the darkness of early morning. I decided for evening-only hunting, and was looking forward to my turn the next day.

Camp and I talked that evening, and decided we would leave at 1:30 tomorrow for the evening sit. The next day, it was a half hour before time to head out and I decided to do couple of last second practice shots. I touched off the crossbow at the 20 yard target, and I couldn't believe my eyes! The arrow hit a foot left and a foot high. I retrieved the arrow and tried again – and got the same result. My mind began to elaborate on how bad this was as I certainly could not go to the field with a bow shooting like this, and that my first day might be ruined. I unscrewed the cover on my scope to make some adjustments. Then I had another thought that maybe that arrow was just a “flier” since it was from extras that I ordered for the trip. I examined the arrow and screwed the cap back on my scope. Unfortunately I wasn't paying attention and screwed the cap on extremely tight without threading it properly. I couldn't get the cap loose, and to make matters worse – my efforts ended up with me having the entire adjustment knob in my hand! Luckily Brett and Camp were

close by, and they took a look at it. They were able to get the cap off with some tools, and Camp got the adjustment knob back on the scope. Camp used one of the arrows that came with the bow, and had it re-sighted in and ready to roll in 5 shots!!

We immediately headed out in Camp's truck to another section of property which was a couple miles down the road. We finished the trip with a half mile ride on a Gator, and pulled in at an elevated box blind at the end of a long field. I liked the spot as it was secluded with no sounds from traffic or anything else – just nice and peaceful. As I settled into the blind, Camp drove off and said he would be back at the end of legal shooting time. This blind was very nice with sliding windows, a nice comfortable chair, and a feeder 15 yards in front of it.

Now it was time to get down to some hunting. I got my range finder out of my pack to double check some yardages, and I soon discovered that it wouldn't display; another bad surprise to the day! My wife and I just checked it a couple of days before, and it was working fine. It wasn't so significant on this hunt, but it might be very useful if they put me in other stands over the next few days. I put it back in the pack and got ready to see some deer.

I had set for a couple of hours when I noticed movement out in the middle of the field. A doe and two fawns were making

their way to the feed. I slowly eased up out of the chair to get ready as I would have to stand to shoot out of the window. I watched them as they ate for about 10 minutes and slowly walked off in the direction that they had come from. That was an enjoyable start and maybe a nice buck would walk in right at dark. This was not to be the case – no buck on this day, but I did see a total of 12 does, so I was encouraged with the first outing. As darkness got closer, Brett was back with the Gator to pick me up. On the way back to the lodge, Brett was happy with my deer sightings and told me we would try a new spot the next evening. It was now time to get a bite of dinner and watch some Monday Night Football.

The next afternoon I was off with Brett in his truck. We were back at the same spot as yesterday to pick up a Gator, and then we were off to a new section of the property. We arrived at another elevated blind at the end of a long, narrow field. This time the feeder was out in front at 30 yards, and I again liked the spot – very secluded and peaceful. Brett said that most of the deer cross from left to right in front of the blind. He left with the Gator and I got settled in. This blind also had a comfortable chair, and I would be able to rest my bow on the window ledge to take a shot if one presented itself. At 4:00 I saw a deer at about a hundred yards, but it was walking and never came my direction. After a full 6 hours that was the only deer I saw, and now Camp was back to pick me up as darkness was arriving. Back at the lodge, Camp said that we

would drive around the preserve property to look at some deer before heading out to the hunt tomorrow afternoon. Now it was time to have a bite of dinner and relax with some TV.

The next morning, we left the lodge on a Gator headed to the preserve. We drove around the 300 acres and we saw several bucks – some really big and some younger ones. We did see one that caught my attention as it had several points and an extra third beam sticking out. We finished the ride around and went back to the lodge as it would soon be time to go for the evening's hunt.

This was the last evening of my scheduled trip, and I was back in the blind that I had used on the first evening. It was now down to it and would a shooter buck walk in? I hunted hard over the course of 6 hours, and I did have a few sightings that totaled 8 does – but not one antler was spotted. I'd seen 21 does in three evenings of hunting, but this time a buck was just not to be. Overall I was pleased with how things went.

Back at the lodge, I talked with Camp about the possibility of hunting that preserve buck with the extra beam. I still had an extra couple days of vacation – so the hunt was on and we would begin tomorrow morning.

We rose early the next day to a pouring rain. Camp checked the weather forecast and it looked like it would blow over in about an hour. After the rain stopped we rode over to the

preserve and parked the Gator in a secluded spot. We quietly slipped along for 100 yards and climbed into a box blind with the feeder at 26 yards. Now the wait was on. Over the next couple of hours we had plenty of sightings; around twenty does, a couple of smaller 8 points, and two shooter 10 pointers – but not the one I was interested in. Camp quietly whispered that we would go for lunch soon and try again this evening. Just then we saw a deer over 100 yards away out in a bean field. Camp looked through his binoculars and whispered...."Here comes your buck"

The deer was walking straight toward us and when he was 60 yards out I could tell he certainly had a head full of antlers. As he approached the box feeder I could clearly see that extra beam sticking out. This feeder was an upright box and he was behind it on the other side preventing any shot. Camp said that when he stepped out to shoot him, and that would be 30 yards. He finally did take a couple of steps but I did not shoot; I was hoping he would make his way around to the other side for a nice broadside shot (and a few yards closer).

To our surprise, the buck did not go for any more feed but started walking up the hill right towards us. I was already in position. I had my scope crosshairs on him when he stopped at about 18 yards. I squeezed the trigger and he bolted forward going about 20 yards before stopping. He stood there for around 20-30 seconds, and then was down for the count!

Camp and I were ecstatic.....just when we thought we were going to leave the buck we were after comes straight for us!

We got down and recovered the arrow. The CAMX blew the WASP broadhead right through him and it was sticking in the ground. Then we went up to the buck, and all I can say is what a dandy! He had a little bit of everything – an extra beam, a bladed brow tine, some palmated points, and 3 drop tines. Although he was not overly wide, he did have 17 scoreable points and came in with a score of 161 7/8.

Camp videoed the hunt and Brett said after viewing it everything worked out perfect; and I would have to agree – sometimes something big can come in a “smaller” package!!

And as an extra, all of meat on this deer was professionally cut and donated to a local food pantry. This was so gratifying as we were blessed with a great hunt, and we also had the opportunity to pass the meat on to others!!