



## The Crown Jewel Hunt



This story started long before we pulled out of our yard and headed to British Columbia on the 10<sup>th</sup> of August, 2013. It actually started seventeen months earlier at a Safari Club dinner/auction.

We have attended the Northeast Michigan Safari Club dinner and auction for many years. Safari Club is a great organization that truly fights for the right of the hunter and it is a great couple of nights to catch up with outfitters and friends that you haven't seen in a while.

For the past few years the local chapter has held what is called The Crown Jewell Raffle and Scott and I each buy a ticket for this raffle. For two weeks we thumb through the hunts and quite often joke about "which hunt are you going to pick". Right up until the drawing we are quietly ribbing each other about which hunt we will pick when they draw our name. Little did we know one of us had to choose this year.

For those of you that have never been to a Safari Club dinner and auction I recommend that you attend one. It is so exciting to walk around and see the mounts and visit with the outfitters. There are pictures to view, videos of hunts, raffle items and a room full of knowledge of hunts of every kind. Not only are there outfitters from right here in the USA but also Canada, New Zealand, and Africa. It is a wonderful couple of evenings and I am sure you would enjoy.

After dinner and a couple of small raffles they announced that they were going to do the Crown Jewell Raffle. Scott has been bidding on a red stag hunt for two years and was never the successful bidder so I was sure that was what he had his eye on, me I had no idea. Once they choose a winner, you have 5 minutes to make your choice of hunts. You can choose any hunt in the auction items with the exception of the sheep, grizzly and brown bear hunts. With everyone staring up at the stage they draw the ticket and this year's winner is.....Scott Black!

I wish I had a camera to capture the look on his face. He has never won anything and here he is the winner of the hunt of his choice. I nudged him with my elbow and said "hey, that is you, you have to pick". Like ordering off a menu he said to the Safari Club member waiting to hear his decision "I'll have the wilderness moose hunt with Christina Falls Outfitters" and then later like getting dessert, he bought a hunt so I could go too. And so the adventure begins.

Packed up and ready to roll we pulled out of the driveway August 10<sup>th</sup> 2013. We had bought a motor home and were pulling a trailer with a freezer and our gear in it. Being optimistic I told Scott that I hated the thought of leaving all that meat behind should we be successful in our hunts. He agreed so we decided to drive and that way we could bring home the meat and the capes. We were on our way.

We arrived in Fort St John at 7:30 and found an RV park. We got the coolest site in the park. We walked around the park and then took a much needed hot shower. While sitting outside we met a man walking his dog and he stopped to chat. He was 74 years old and left Arizona on the 27<sup>th</sup> of June. He drove to Alaska to fish and was now headed home. This was his 16<sup>th</sup> time going to Alaska and thought this might be his last time driving there, thought he might fly from now on. He was headed home to go on an elk hunt. I thought to myself, geeze hope I can do all that when I am 74 years old.

The next morning we traveled to Hudson's Hope BC where we spent the night in the outfitters yard and then were picked up the following morning. We stopped to get camp groceries, picked up two other hunters and we were off to the airstrip. I was about to take my very first bush plane ride and if I told you I wasn't nervous, I would be lying. A great friend told me to take a Bonine a half hour before we flew so I had it in my pocket, just waiting for my turn.

"You're next Judy when I get back" so I chewed my Bonine and waited for the plane to return. Once on the ground we loaded up my gear, I climbed in and before I knew it we were up in the air. I chatted with Dennis the pilot and even snapped a couple of pictures along the way. I watched as Dennis turned a crank on the side of the plane and wondered why he was rolling the window down. I later

figured out that he was adjusting the flaps for landing the plane. The ride was only a half hour long and soon I was in moose camp and the next trip would bring Scott into camp as well. We were finally here and the real adventure was about to start.

The three members of camp were all smiles when I landed, said they had a secret and wouldn't tell until Scott arrived. CJ, a local kid that takes two weeks off from his full time job to guide and Steve and Jamiee, two kids from New Zealand would be in camp with us for the next 10 days. Before Scott arrived I made sure that both guides knew this was Scott's hunt. If it came down to "someone" going after a bull, he was the one that was going. He won this hunt and I wanted him to get a bull. Now with Scott now on the ground, it was time to let the cat out of the bag. They were excited as about a 48" moose came into camp the night before. They had plenty of pictures and video of the bull, now if that didn't excite you, nothing will.

For the next ten days our alarm would be the generator starting and the horses bells letting us know they have been brought up for use. Breakfast was at 4:30 then enough time to change your clothes, grab your gear and mount up. The first morning not knowing where I was going, I wore leather hiking boots and the best clothes I had for riding and hunting in the rain. We headed out shortly after 5 and I was in for the surprise of my life.

We rode down the runway and then turned right through some willows. I had my bow in a Primos sling but there was nothing that protected my sight so with the reins in one hand I covered my sight with my free hand. Soon the willows turned into the nastiest, thickest bush. As we rode we navigated around trees that were so close they threatened to knock you off your horse and had low hanging branches that could easily clothes line if you weren't careful. We crossed several creeks and mud holes that the horses lunged through so they didn't get stuck. All this time, I am guarding my sight like it is my first born child.

From a distance Steve pointed up a hill and I could see a black bear run down the hill and then back up. It disappeared into the trees and Steve turned and said "that is right where we have to tie the horses". There was no sight of the bear

once we got there so we tied up the horses and then began our walk. We crossed a bog that was moss and mud holes but not too bad for my short boots. We walked a few more feet and I watched as Steve crossed a creek where I stopped short. He turned around and looked at me like "what" and I said "I guess someone forgot to tell me that we had to walk across a creek". But, I had to cross it so in I went and then I stood at the base of a mountain thinking, you have got to be kidding me.

The mountain was about 200 yards up and it was littered with moss that gave way under your feet, mud that threatened to take my boots (not possible as they weighted 10# each because they were creek water drenched) and slippery roots that your boots would slide off of without notice. Part way up I stopped to catch my breath and gave Steve the "give me a minute" finger and then I started up again. Once at the top we had to walk about another 100 yards before arriving at the blind. Steve had put some camo fabric between two pine trees on the edge of the lick. It was a great stand and I was super excited to see what came in, they had trail cam pictures of a few bulls that had been in prior to our arrival. We were settled in at 6:30 and I was sure that Scott and CJ were already in their stand as well. For 14 hours I sat in wet boots and socks and never saw an animal, now it was 8:30 pm and it was time to go back down the hill, across the creek and the bog and mount up to ride the 45 minutes back to camp. I was thankful that Jamiee had a fire in our cabin and pasta for supper. With a full belly, it was off to bed.

Day 2 we decided over breakfast that we would like to leave just a bit earlier. With rubber boots on this time I mounted up and we rode out of camp into dew soaked willows. I was a little slow out of the gate this morning so it was still 6:30 when we arrived at the blind. At 7:05 Steve quietly told me there was a cow coming in to the lick from behind me. She came in and drank from the lick right in front of us so we got to watch her for quite some time. Knowing something wasn't right; the cow circled around us and came out on another lick to my left. Eventually she came back and fed right in front of us, entertaining us until 8:00. At 8:55 a caribou and a calf came in but didn't stay too long. I was excited as I have seen my very first caribou. We left the blind around 10:30 and the plan was to be back by 4.

The time in the blind was amazing as we saw lots of game. I was surprised we saw the animals we did as it rained the whole time we were in the blind. Caribou, cow moose and the squirrels were so entertaining. They chattered and chased in the trees above us dropping pine cones on our heads, then scurried around the ground close to where we sat. When it was time to leave, I dreaded the ride back as it was pouring rain. The lights of camp were a welcome sight and so was the hot bowl of soup that waited for us.

The third morning it was raining and I was feeling the results of my fall off Stupid. My clothes were still wet and I just didn't have it in me to make the ride in the rain to the blind. I told Scott to tell them at breakfast that I was not going this morning but would be ready for the afternoon hunt. The three guys ate breakfast and headed out to hunt. I took the time to clean up, rest and spend time with Jamiee.

The guys came back around 11:30 and we had lunch. The plan was to leave around 3 so we decided to have a short nap. A knock at the door startled both of us as we were sound asleep. The outfitter's daughter was on her way to camp with a pack horse and supplies and had spotted a bull moose just outside of camp. "So, if one or both of you want to go after it" Steve said. Without hesitation I said to Scott "there is your moose, go get it". He threw on his hunting clothes and off he went. He took a gun as it would be in thick willows and with them trying to stalk up on the bull it probably wasn't going to work with a bow. I silently said a prayer as this is what I hoped for.

Trish arrived at camp at 2:00 and told Jamiee and I about her encounter with the bull. The first shot came at 2:20 and I celebrated but the silence on the radio made me uneasy. The second shot ten minutes later echoed through the valley and then there was another, followed by another and then another. I kept thinking that Scott never misses, that must have been a heck of a stalk. The radio remained quiet through all of that and then it came to life. Bring horses, packs, cameras, and knives. "Thank you Jesus, I shouted" and then ran to gather my camera and a knife.

I was so excited and cried when I saw Scott standing over his trophy. This was what we came here for and it felt so good to have one on the ground. Pictures were taken and then the work started. Skinning, caping and the meat was deboned and loaded on to packs that were then put on the horses. The guys stopped at the creek to wash off the meat and then put it into cheesecloth bags. It was left in the river to cool and then would be brought back up to camp and tied on a pole for the night. Four hours had passed since we headed out to see the bull. Trish skinned out the head and the hide was laid out to cool. Tomorrow Trish and CJ would ride 4 hours to the base camp to freeze the meat and prep the hide and antlers.

Since Scott had taken his bull he was going to go to the blind with Steve and I this morning and I couldn't have been more excited. He was going to see firsthand what I did to get to the blind every day, twice a day. We had overslept so we were fifteen minute late for breakfast and a half an hour late getting out of camp as I forgot my quiver and had to return to the cabin. We were still in the blind by 7:00.

Scott spotted the first caribou at 7:40 and just minutes later he spotted a lynx hiding in a brush pile at the edge of the lick. The lynx started stalking the caribou and actually chased it but must have realized that it was not going to be its breakfast and returned to the brush pile. Steve had reached for his video camera and the lynx caught his movement and soon the hunter, became the hunted. The lynx stalked to the crotch of two trees twenty yards from the blind and sat there hunched up ready to pounce. He would creep towards the three of us and then slowly backed up to the trees. Realizing what we were, the beautiful animal walked off, disappearing into the bush. I could not believe that I had just seen a lynx at 20 yards as like the other game we have seen, some will never see in their lifetime. We left the blind around 10; the plan was to head back out around 3 for the evening hunt.

We arrived at the blind at 4:45 and surprise...it is raining again! As we sat in the blind you could watch the rain come across the mountains. The wind had picked up so I wasn't sure we would see much on this sit, and we didn't. Rode back in near

darkness and I am not a fan of that. With the wind came colder weather so cold and wet would be the way we rode tonight.

We didn't hear the generator start nor did we hear the bells on the horses and it was 5:30 when we woke up. It was pouring rain and it was decided over breakfast that we would not hunt the morning and hope it cleared off by afternoon. The guys had planned to go set up that new blind so they decided they would head out around 9, it wouldn't take long as this site was a little closer to the camp. I used the time to wash my hair and sweep the cabin. I stoked the fire to dry out my boots as they had not dried overnight. The rain continued and at times it came in sheets. It would clear off, the sun would come out and then it would rain again.

We arrived on the far side of the lick where the new blind was located and there was already a cow moose on the lick. We waited for her to leave before crossing the bog that led to the blind. Once there, we each got situated making sure that I was able to shoot over the camo curtain that was hung in between two trees. We sat on a washout on the edge of the lick, it was a perfect spot, and the longest shot would be about 33 yards. Now all I needed was a bull to step into the lick and my bow to cooperate when it came down to taking a shot. And the rain continued. We packed up at 9 pm and headed back to a nice, warm camp.

The sixth day we got to the blind around 7am. Steve and I went to the original blind and at 8:15 a caribou came into the lick and it was still all in velvet. It fed in front of us for 10 minutes and then ran to the lick on the left of us and then into the bush. Suddenly a bigger bull appeared and he ran the same path that the smaller one took into the bush. I noticed as the bigger bull was running through that he had all the velvet on one side rubbed off. They were both just beautiful animals. Nothing else came so we headed back to camp.

We were back on the trail at 2:15 and in the blind at 3:15. It rained the entire time we were in the blind but we watched a mother porcupine and her baby for a long time. I have never seen porcupine the color of the ones up here. The mother was a bright yellow, she almost glowed. The baby would come to the lick and then climb up the hill within a few yards of Steve and me. Nothing else came

until 8:30 when a cow moose came and fed 20 yards from the blind. She knew we were there and at one point spooked and ran off but returned to feed in front of us. She looked at us with wide eyes and she looked like she was about to charge but she didn't. We broke a couple of sticks to get her to move off as it was getting dark and she did move but only to the other side of the lick. When we walked out, we could still see her standing watching us leave.

Day 7 and I slept in. I had told Steve the night before in the blind that I had three days left and only one hunt per day left in me. I was not going to quit but we would choose either the morning or the evening hunt and this morning I was happy with my decision. I felt rested when I got up at 8:15 and went in for breakfast and my spirits lifted when I walked outside and saw the sun and no rain. It is amazing how mentally draining it can be when day after day and night after night it rains. The sun seemed to breathe new life into me and I was excited for the evening hunt.

I thought before we left that I should probably shoot my bow, we had thought about taking the rifle but dang it, I came on an archery hunt. I set up the target, stood at 20 yards and released my arrow. Bullseye! Moved back to 30 yards, released my arrow. Bullseye! What are the chances that my nonfunctional arrow rest miraculously became functional? I smiled as I said, "I came on an archery hunt and by golly that is what I am going to finish on".

We arrived a little late at the blind but it was an absolutely beautiful day, blue skies and sunshine. There was a porcupine in the lick when we arrived but we didn't have long before the first moose arrived. The cow came in from my right and dropped down into the lick and stood feeding at 11 yards. It was 5:30 and we still had several hours to hunt, I remained hopeful of a bull making his appearance. At 6:00 the cow heads back up the hill where she came from.

I heard a commotion behind me and I turned to see a caribou 3 FOOT from where I sat. It stuck its nose right down under the tree where I sat. I had my journal lying open on the ground and had he taken another step, I would have had his foot print in my journal. I think I scared it as much as it scared me because for a brief moment we just stared at each other, eye to eye. "How cool was that" I

said to Steve as he looked at me in disbelief. At 6:40 another caribou came to the lick and this one had a huge rack on it, in velvet. I sat in awe as I had no idea how beautiful these animals were. I was super excited sitting there as I had already seen some really beautiful animals but I had no idea what I would witness in the next couple of hours.

At 8:30 another cow came in and I assumed it must have been the one from the night before as she was wary of the blind. She was pacing on the opposite side of the lick, looking in the direction of the blind quite often. At 8:55 a cow and a calf came across the bog. The little one stayed very close to mom as they entered the lick and though she knew something was different, they pair cautiously fed about 11 yards from the blind. At 9 another cow came from the right of us and entered the lick. The mother, protective of her calf kept it on the opposite side of herself than the approaching cow. The lone cow entered the lick and wanted to feed but the mom made it clear she was too close by pinning her ears.

From 10 yards you could feel the tension mounting and to be honest, I was very uncomfortable. I looked around for an escape route in case a fight broke out and there was none. The two cows took a stance and then they squared off. With ears pinned back, one cow laid her neck against the other cow and pushed. The mother cow was facing the blind and I could see anger in her wide eyes as she pressed against the second cow, neither of them moving. I must have blinked because as quickly as it started, it was over. The lone cow ran from the lick with the mother only a few steps behind. The baby still stood in front of Steve and I and the mom soon returned. The retreating cow stood on the grassy bank of the lick, defeated.

Sharing the story over supper I realized that I had witness something that many never would. I was amazed at the standoff in the lick as there were no sounds, no movements, just two animals putting pressure on each other. It was then that I realized that if I was unsuccessful on this hunt, the sights that I had seen were worth the money spent on the hunt. I also realized again how truly blessed we are.

The eighth day was pretty uneventful in the blind. It was warm outside and the fact that the lick was crystal clear led us to believe that no animals had been there that day. The birds were singing and a pesky squirrel sat high in the tree above us dropping pine cone pieces on our heads. We patiently waited and finally at 6:30 a lone cow came to the lick. She was wary so she stood on the opposite side like a statue for several minutes. Soon she took a few steps and started making a grunting sound. I was confused as this was the sound they made during the rut but she continued making the sound until she was out of sight. We left just before dark and on the ride back I thought, 4 more mounts, 4 more dismounts. Tomorrow was day 9, I still remained hopeful.

We woke up to a beautiful day that looked like it could be rain free. Seven straight days of rain was enough! We had pizza for lunch and then headed out to hunt. Scott was going with us but he was going to sit so he could overlook a valley. If he spotted a bull, he was close enough to get our attention and then we could pursue it. In the blind and ready to hunt at 4:30, there was a porcupine in the lick and the squirrels were dropping pine cones again on my head.

At 4:34 a beautiful woodland caribou bull came in. He fed in the lick at 30 yards for about 15 minutes and then moved off. On and off for an hour he would come in, eat and then leave again. He knew we were there and at one point stood on the bank and snorted. Steve got some pretty good footage of him, I was fortunate enough to get some great photos. The bull left and a cow caribou came to feed. She only stayed a short time and then left crossing the bog in front of the lick.

At 8:05 I heard something walking above us; I slowly turned and saw a cow and calf coming down the hill. They walked within a few feet of Steve and I and entered the lick to feed. The baby ventured off and disappeared up the hill to our right and the mom followed shortly and stood above calling for the calf. Soon the mom came and fed on the opposite side and it wasn't long before the little one came and joined her. They came and left three times and each time they kept getting closer and closer to the blind.

While Steve was getting some pretty amazing video I sat there worried that they were just too dang close. Once again I looked for an escape route, nothing

had changed and there just wasn't one. Now the cow and calf were only two strides away and that must have finally been too close for Steve. "Move that" he said pointing at my bow. He scanned the ground looking for something to toss in the lick so the duo would move off but all we could find was pine cones. I guess the movement was enough as they did move to the opposite side of the lick and then disappeared into the bush.

While all of this was going on with the cow and calf, I was trying to keep my eyes on them but I heard noise to my right. I hesitated taking my eyes off the lick but was thankful that I did as a porcupine was headed straight for me. My sudden movement made it veer off at the last minute. About the same time a mouse came out of a hole in the bottom of the washout. My bow with an arrow nocked was lying across the washout and he just sat there looking up at Steve and I. What an incredible night! I saw animals big and small and I saw them very up close and personal.

Once on the horses headed back to camp we talked about the events in the blind. Scott said he could see the caribou and the moose action and told us that he saw fresh grizzly tracks on the trail he was sitting on. Now, riding thru the tall willows I was just a little uncomfortable knowing there could be a grizzly bear hiding in them. The lights of camp were a welcome sight and my thought as I got off my horse was 2 more mounts, 2 more dismount. I remained hopeful but there was more rain moving in. All I could think was ugh!

We woke up to rain and it looked like it may stick around all day. Jamiee and Scott are going to the blind with Steve and I tonight if the rain does hold off. Jamiee has heard all of the stories and wants to see firsthand the animals that come to the lick. At 1:00 we were still playing cards but the rain had stopped. Two mounts and two dismounts and my wilderness moose hunt would be over. I remained hopeful and looked forward to the company in the blind.

We had planned to leave around 3:30 but the rain moved back in and it literally poured. I kept looking out the window for a break in the clouds but there just weren't any. I knew I should go but I hated the thought of riding and sitting in the rain. At 4:00 with the rain coming down in sheets I made the call to not

hunt that night. We continued to play cards until nearly midnight and then it was off to bed, my final night on a cot, in a sleeping bag in the British Columbia wilderness. I fell asleep that night with mixed emotions, sad that it was over, happy to be going home.

We got up at 7:15 and cleaned up, had breakfast and then finished packing. As I stood there looking around I started to cry. I told Scott I would like to think that I was crying because I was leaving two of the most wonderful kids I have ever met but I knew I was partially crying for ME. At the end of ten days on one of the most challenging hunts I had ever been on, I was able to say I DID IT! Now it was time to say my goodbyes and climb into the bush-plane that would start my adventure back to Michigan, back to my family, my dog, my friends and my life.

I learned a lot of things on this trip, a lot about myself, life and what I would do differently on my next trip. The old saying that what doesn't kill you will only make you stronger is very true and I came out of this a much stronger hunter than when I went in. I thought perhaps I would share with you what I learned while on this wilderness hunt.

I learned that;

\*\* The ones that went before us cut the path for us to follow. My only hope is that they make the path wider next time.

\*\* If your horse is named Stupid, it is for a reason. Ask.

\*\* If you think it looks like it might rain, it is going to pour. Good rain gear is a must, make sure you pack it.

\*\* Leave the leather boots home, chances are there will be water to cross and cold feet are no fun for 13 hours.

\*\* Even the best equipment fails, check it often.

\*\* When you think you can't, dig deeper than you ever imagined and you will find that you can.

\*\* Never be afraid to ask for a leg or a hand up. I cannot tell you how comforting it was to look up and see Steve's hand offering me help.

\*\* Never, ever forget where you are. 911 is just a number on a cell phone with no service.

\*\*Thank your mom for you being able to survive without a shower for 12 days.

\*\*Trust in God to get you through the tough times. He really doesn't give you more than you can handle.

\*\*And most of all, don't be disappointed that you didn't get the animal you hunted. Be thankful for the experience and what you did get to see. Tomorrow is not a promise so be thankful that you were blessed with today.

Judy Black