

# Big Muleys in Alberta?

**That's right – Alberta.**

**BY BOB ROBB**

PAGE DESIGN BY MEG BENHASE

**F**or decades, Alberta has been a haven for serious white-tail hunters. Today, its reputation as a mecca for high-quality mule deer is growing by leaps and bounds.

Alberta. Among serious deer hunters, the very name conjures up visions of whitetail bucks with bodies the size of a small cow and multi-tined antlers with bases as thick as your wrist. I have been hunting there off and on since the mid-1980s, sitting in a tree stand during the November rut, trying to survive air temperatures of anywhere from 0° degrees F to minus 35° degrees F, driven even lower by strong north winds. I've even killed a buck or three, all dandies, and seen many more that didn't quite give me the opportunity to take them on a ride in a farm truck. It's a part of Canada that gives me goosebumps every time I think about hunting there.

So when my friend Wade Derby of Crosshair Consulting – one of the most ethical and well-informed hunt-booking agents I have ever worked with – told me he had a sleeper spot for good bucks in Alberta, I was ready to hear more. It was when he said it was for mule deer, not whitetails, that I became all ears.

Having grown up in the West, I have been something of a muley fanatic since high school. I've closely watched the changing face of mule deer hunting and seen populations decline, hunting become more difficult and the trophy quality in many areas once known for whopper bucks reduced to stories of yesterday. Of course, big-buck potential remains good in some areas, but to hunt most of these you must either draw a limited-entry permit often requiring more preference points than you have fingers on both hands, or open up your wallet and purchase a landowner permit costing several thousand dollars. And if you want to rifle-hunt an area with true trophy potential during the rut – the time when monarch bucks drop their guard just enough to become vulnerable – the odds of drawing a tag become about as easy as winning the Powerball jackpot.





The author and outfitter/guide Andre van Hiltten pose with the dandy buck.





The author used a custom Brown Precision Pro Hunter built on a Remington Model 700 action chambered for the .300 Win. Mag., and loaded with factory Remington Premier ammunition featuring the 180-grain Swift Scirocco bullet. The rifle carried a Swarovski 2.5-10x40 scope set in Conetrol mounts.

### Rut-Hunting Alberta

Enter Alberta and Willow Creek Outfitters.

"In southern Alberta you can hunt the rut with any legal firearm you choose, be it rifle or muzzleloader, except a handgun," Derby told me. "There's no special draw for tags or any other restrictions of that nature. The rut period here coincides with the Rocky Mountain West's, with the bucks starting to get interested in the ladies in late October and really rocking in another week or two."

But I'd seen western mule deer herds hammered by, among other things, uncontrolled rifle rut hunting before most states finally came to their senses. So my first question was about trophy quality, and whether such unrestricted seasons would eventually lead to the same problems in Alberta. That's when I called Andre van Hilten.

Andre and his brother Hans – a pair of studs in their late 20s who have been guiding professionally in British

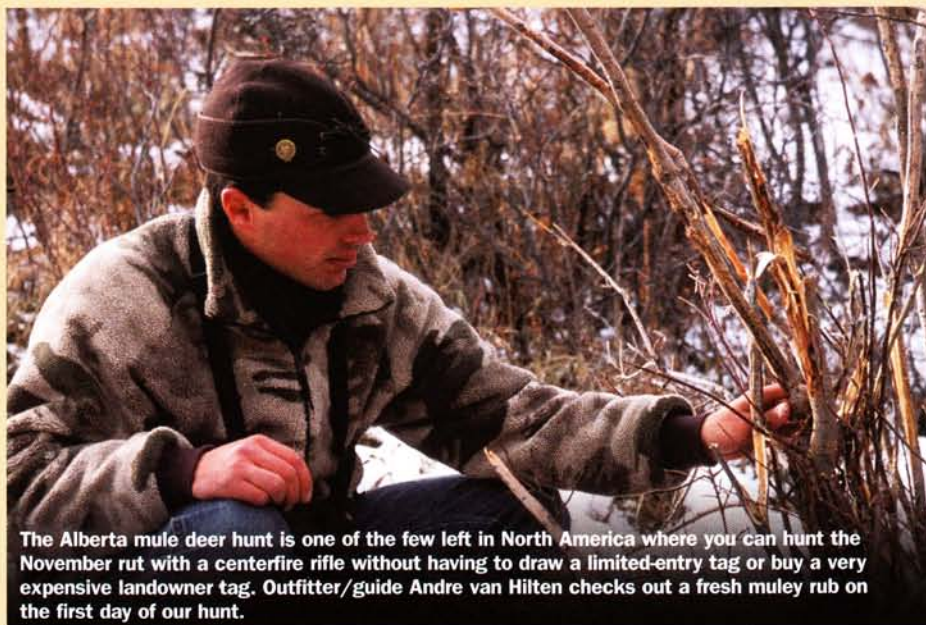
Columbia, Yukon Territory and Northwest Territories since high school – run Willow Creek

Outfitters based in Nanton, Alberta, a little more than an hour's drive east of the Calgary airport in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains. Their specialty is Dall sheep, but they have lots of experience in both hunting and guiding for deer.

"One of the good things in our guiding area for non-residents," Andre told me, "is that the local residents are on a draw system for tags. Right now, it takes us three to four years to draw a tag to hunt mule deer ourselves. This seriously limits local hunting pressure and harvest. However, non-residents who hunt with an outfitter can get a guaranteed tag every year. This is one of the few places anywhere that you can rifle-hunt muleys in the rut without drawing a tag."

"Hans and I agreed when we started this part of our guiding business that we would limit the number of bucks our clients take, so that the

*continued on page 157*



The Alberta mule deer hunt is one of the few left in North America where you can hunt the November rut with a centerfire rifle without having to draw a limited-entry tag or buy a very expensive landowner tag. Outfitter/guide Andre van Hilten checks out a fresh muley rub on the first day of our hunt.

### The Nitty Gritty

**What:** Trophy mule deer hunting.

**Where:** Western Alberta, Canada. Outfitter will pick you up at the Calgary airport.

**When:** Rifle season runs October 25-November 30; bow season is September 1 through the end of October. Sunday hunting is not permitted in Alberta.

**Firearms:** Centerfire rifles and muzzleloaders are legal during gun season. No bows allowed in gun season. Canada allows no handguns of any kind. Shots can range up to 400 yards, so flat-shooting rifles make sense. I used a Brown Precision Pro Hunter built on a Remington Model 700 action in .300 Win. Mag., topped with a Swarovski 2.5-10x40 scope set in Conetrol mounts and loaded with factory Remington Premier ammunition featuring the 180-grain Swift Scirocco bullet.

**Gear:** Top-end 10x binocular is a must, and having your own spotting scope helps. Either a bipod or shooting sticks are most helpful, as is a laser rangefinder. Bring a daypack to carry extra clothes, lunch and hunting gear.

**Clothing:** Layer up for below-freezing temperatures and a constant wind. I wear Under Armour underneath for its warmth and sweat-wicking properties, ending with a layer of either Gore-Tex or Windstopper fleece for both quiet and its ability to block 100 percent of the wind. No blaze orange is required. Warm gloves and a warm hat that covers your ears are recommended. Bring a well-broken-in pair of hunting boots with an aggressive tread. Disposable heat packs, like those from HeatMax, are always with me.

**Hunt Method:** Spot-and-stalk after accessing the area via truck or horseback. You may walk four to six miles a day over relatively easy ground; the better you are able to do this, the better your chances at a top-end buck.

**Success Rate:** Near 100 percent.

**Cost:** Six-day one-on-one mule deer only, \$4,500; two-on-one, \$4,000 per hunter; one-on-one mule deer/whitetail combination hunt, \$6,400. Hunting license/deer tag, \$300 U.S. each.



## Big Muleys in Alberta?

continued from page 48

trophy quality would not just remain as it was when we started but hopefully increase over time," Andre said. "As locals, we have exceptional relations with the area's landowners, which in turn has made it possible for us to gain permission to exclusively hunt some of the area's very best mule deer ranches. In the off-season, I cowboy for many of the ranches we guide on, which helps in this regard. Unlike the U.S., Alberta law strictly prohibits outfitters from leasing private land for guiding or hunting, so nurturing these landowner relationships is critical.

"As an extension of that, by having exclusive permission to guide on a place, and with the locals having to wait several years before drawing tags, we can control the number of deer taken on a given property," Andre added. "Because Hans and I personally guide all our mule deer hunts, we make sure our clients only shoot top-end bucks, and that we don't kill too many off any single property."

That personal control is a big factor in the improvement of the local deer. "When we first started on our own six years ago, guiding for mule deer, whitetails and black bear, the average score of the muleys taken was not what it is today," Andre said. "Last year, for example, we had 100 percent success with an average SCI score of 169 points. This year, it is in the mid-170s, and we think it will creep up a bit more over time. Right now our largest bucks score in the 180s, and every season we take a couple that large."

### Rough Camp

When I think of trophy mule deer hunting, I think of a wall-tent camp set at a relatively high elevation, trying to stay warm at night in below-freezing temperatures and cooking on a Coleman stove. There's none of that on this hunt. Mule deer hunters stay in the superbly comfortable Changing Seasons Bed and Breakfast in downtown Nanton, sleeping in comfortable beds, showering in a real shower and eating a big breakfast and supper while packing along a sack lunch for the day's hunt. If you choose to hunt both muleys and whitetails on a combination hunt, you'll stay in the rancher's home.

My hunt was conducted out of Andre's truck, though on some

## Imagine Returning Home From the Hunt to Succulent Smoked Meat, Fish, Game and More



Now imagine preparing it yourself with ease in a **Cookshack**

**Introducing the AmeriQue, a revolution in barbecue.**

Featuring a **digital controller and meat probe**, program in the cooking time and temperature and walk away. Using the meat probe, smoke-cook to desired **internal temperature** before the smoker drops automatically into the hold-cycle.



Cookshack  
Recommendations

### Smoked Pheasant

- 2 cups kosher salt
- 2 cups brown sugar
- 1 cup honey
- 1 cup molasses
- 4 cinnamon sticks
- 2 tablespoons minced garlic
- 1/2 cup apple juice concentrate
- 1 cup soy sauce
- 2 gallons water
- 2 pheasants

**COOKSHACK**

In a large non-reactive glass or stainless steel pot combine all ingredients except pheasants and bring to a boil. Remove from heat and refrigerate until cool. After the brine has cooled, add the pheasants, cover, and refrigerate for 18 hours. Preheat the smoker to 225°F with 2 ounces of cherry wood. Place the pheasants in the smoker and smoke-cook for 3 hours.

**1-800-423-0698**

Cookshack, Inc. • 2304 N. Ash St. • Ponca City, OK 74601  
[www.cookshack.com](http://www.cookshack.com) • [sales@cookshack.com](mailto:sales@cookshack.com)

## Wendell Reich - Hunter's Quest International Worldwide Hunting Consultant



C. Honaker - Tanzania '05 - 65 lbs.



L. Irvin - Namibia Caprivi '05

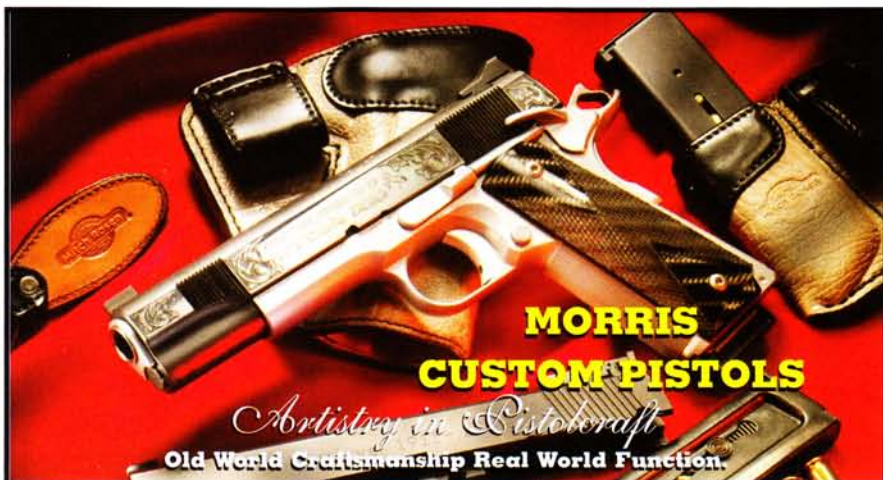


T. Shupe Tanzania '05 - 70 lbs.

Namibia  
Tanzania  
Zambia

(214) 692-8769 Toll Free (866) 209-7346  
[www.huntersquest.com](http://www.huntersquest.com)  
[wendell@huntersquest.com](mailto:wendell@huntersquest.com)

Botswana  
Zimbabwe  
North America



**MORRIS  
CUSTOM PISTOLS**

*Artistry in Pistolcraft*  
**Old World Craftsmanship Real World Function.**

"The Ferrari of handguns, hand-built for high performance." Massad Ayoob  
"Mark Morris, is a man of pride and skill. This man builds handguns a personal weapon of molded and manipulated steel, precisely for you. In short, something very, very special." Clint Smith

**509-476-2425**

65 Westlake Rd. Oroville, WA. 98844  
[www.morriscustompistols.com](http://www.morriscustompistols.com)

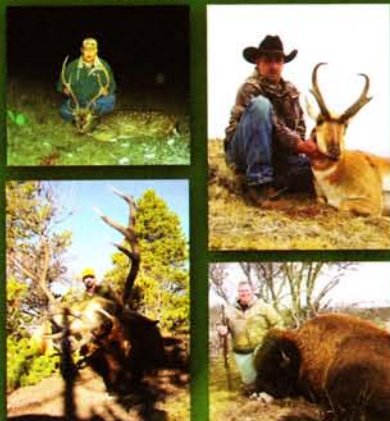


# BnB

## Adventures, LLC

Here at BnB Adventures, LLC, we specialize in whitetail deer hunts, wild boar hunts and exotic hunts. We pride ourselves on working hard so you and your hunting companions can leave relaxed.

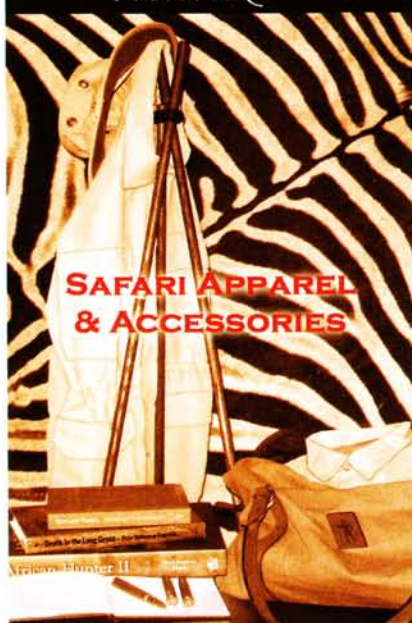
BnB Adventures  
(337) 436-2941 (Office) (337) 513-9751 (Cell)  
Booking trophy hunts of a lifetime!



For prices and special hunts, please check out the website for BnB Adventures, LLC, at [www.bnbadventures.com](http://www.bnbadventures.com). All prices are subject to change without notice.

# LONG GRASS

## OUTFITTERS LLC



Long Grass African Shooting Sticks  
As seen on SCI's Expedition Safari  
with host Mike Rogers

BOOKS - BELTS  
MEN'S CLOTHING



BAGS - GAITERS  
WOMEN'S CLOTHING

[WWW.LONG-GRASS.COM](http://WWW.LONG-GRASS.COM)

210.408.6402

email: [inquiries@long-grass.com](mailto:inquiries@long-grass.com)

hunts, horses may be used to access areas located far off the road. "We can do it any way a client is most comfortable," Andre said. "We like to start hunting from the truck, which is, of course, the most comfortable but also allows us to cover more ground in a given day. But if we're not seeing what we like from the truck, being able to saddle up opens up a lot of new country to look at."

### Let's Go Hunting

The morning broke crisp and clear, the air temperature a tad below freezing and the wind blowing steadily from the northwest at about 15 mph. Here on the plains, you can expect the wind to be a constant companion, making wind-blocking clothing essential.

Accompanied by Bill Owen, a videographer sent along to film the hunt for a 2006 segment of the "Gore-Tex Outdoors" television show, Andre and I left the truck and hiked a quarter-mile to a deep cut in the rolling prairie. "I saw a couple of really nice bucks here while scouting just before the season," Andre said as we set up and began to glass. Broken patches of snow made picking up the deer a little difficult, but by the time the sun peeked over the horizon, we had spotted several, including a couple of medium bucks harassing small groups of does.

After a couple of hours, we hadn't seen anything we liked, so we slid up the draw to look over some new country. And just like that, we found one.

The buck was trailing four does, and his tall, heavy antlers made him worthy of a second look. "That's definitely a top-end buck for this area," Andre said after looking him over through his spotter. "Not the biggest buck we have, but one that's hard to pass up."

Say no more. We were off in pursuit, trailing the deer as they made their way out of sight in the rimrock-studded south slope of the canyon wall. We picked up their tracks in the snow and moved as quickly as we dared, glassing down into the canyon and along the rims. After a quarter-mile we had not found them again - something that always perplexes me when hunting mule deer. I mean, the country is relatively open, and you'd think that with no place to hide, the deer, well, couldn't. But they always do.

After a couple of minutes, I spotted a lone buck in the canyon bottom, but a quick check with the 10x42 showed that it was not the one we were looking for. But then, like magic, there he

# NEW ZEALAND

## TROPHY HUNTING LTD



One of the oldest and established game estates in NZ



Experienced guides and 5 star lodge accommodation

Record class red stag trophies  
Two No. 1 World Records to date



Species include: Red stag, Wapiti, Tahr, Chamois, Fallow, Arapawa Ram, Goshawk & Waterfowl



Chamois



470+ SCI Wapiti

### New Zealand Trophy Hunting Ltd

Ph INT - 64 3 436 0680 Fax INT - 64 3 436 0681  
Email: [info@newzealandtrophyhunting.com](mailto:info@newzealandtrophyhunting.com)  
Website: [www.newzealandtrophyhunting.com](http://www.newzealandtrophyhunting.com)

"THE ULTIMATE NZ HUNTING ADVENTURE"

# TRANS-PECOS

## GUIDE SERVICE

Full Service Hunts on  
Managed Properties

### West Texas Mule Deer & Whitetail Hunts

December & January  
"Rut" hunts for whitetail  
and desert mule deer

No Draw Required

Five Animal Hunt  
Packages starting at

**\$3995.00**

Limited Availability

Wayne Zachary  
522 Rosinante Road  
El Paso, Texas 79922  
Home: (915) 833-9840  
Cell: (915) 525-0472  
Email: [tpgs@elp.rr.com](mailto:tpgs@elp.rr.com)



Management  
Mule Deer  
& Whitetail  
Hunts also  
Available.  
Call for  
details!

[www.huntinfo.com/transpecos](http://www.huntinfo.com/transpecos)



was, also in the canyon bottom but without his little harem.


As the buck moved along, we made our own move, slipping and sliding down the canyon face, doing our best to use the rocks and willows for cover. The buck, obviously frustrated that none of the does had been receptive to his amorous advances, climbed a short way up the other side before stopping in a patch of willows and beating the snot out of one particular bush.

"Now's our chance," Andre hissed. "When he rakes the bush, he can't see us, so let's go!"

We positioned ourselves so that we were coming up from the buck's blind side, and his determination to thrash that willow allowed us to close the gap. At 250 yards, we stopped, and I took a sitting position, using a set of Stoney Point shooting sticks to get a rock-solid shooting rest. Bill got his camera set up on the tripod and began filming, and when everything was just right, I turned the scope's power up to 10X, flipped off the safety and squeezed the trigger. When the .30-caliber, 180-grain Swift Scirocco bullet from the Remington factory load hit the buck, he dropped in his tracks.

Less than four hours into it, my Alberta mule deer hunt was over.

And what a dandy buck he is. With heavy antlers and good, deep forks, the buck scores right at 176 SCI points. As Andre said, he's typical of the trophy quality they're finding for their clients. I have hunted mule deer for a long time, and while I have been fortunate enough to take a handful of true monsters over the years, I know how difficult it is to find a buck of this quality in most areas today. Making it even more enjoyable was the fact that I was able to break out my pet .300 Winchester Magnum and experience the joy of hunting the rut with a rifle without having to wait years to draw a tag or spending huge dollars on a private landowner tag in the states.

We spent the next couple of days finishing up the filming work and driving around, looking at the hunting area and checking out the deer. Hard as it might be to believe, I saw several bucks as good as the one I shot and a couple that were better. What I saw here has me believing that when it comes to mule deer hunting, southern Alberta is coming on like a freight train. It won't be long before the rest of the hunting world is hip to what the area has to offer. 




# Jan Oelofse Hunting Safaris


**Jan Oelofse Hunting Safaris**  
Established for more than Twenty Years in Namibia  
More than 25 species available - see our website

Jan Oelofse Hunting Safaris  
P.O. Box 81 Kalkfeld 9000 Namibia  
Tel: +264-67-290 175 / 306 344  
Fax: +264-67-290 172  
e-mail: [jan.oelofse@iafrica.com.na](mailto:jan.oelofse@iafrica.com.na)  
website: [www.janoelofsesafaris.com](http://www.janoelofsesafaris.com)


## NORTHSASK 2005




Ross McClintock  
CA- 184 SCI




Victor Pickett • Utah- 484 4/8 SCI



Jim Grassi  
Idaho- 415 SCI



Mike Darden  
TX- 358 SCI



Harry Kerr  
TX- 202 SCI

### LOVE, SASKATCHEWAN CANADA

Rick Green: 306-276-5745 • Dave Nowlin: 306-276-2313  
<http://www.northsask.com>



## CLEAR SPRINGS RANCH

The Premier Texas Hill Country Hunting Ranch



40 species of Exotics



47" Bull

**830-796-9100 • 210-289-4907 • [www.ClearSpringsRanch.com](http://www.ClearSpringsRanch.com)**  
Fax: 830-796-9117 • 8930 State Hwy. 173 South • Banderà, Texas 78003





NEW ZEALAND

## SafariAdventures

HUNTING • FISHING • ADVENTURE TOURS • ACCOMMODATION

**New Zealand Safari Adventures**

Tangihau Station,  
Private Bag 7631,  
Gisborne,  
New Zealand.

Ph +64-6-8670872 Fax +64-6-8675043

email - [info@nzsafari.co.nz](mailto:info@nzsafari.co.nz)

[www.nzsafari.co.nz](http://www.nzsafari.co.nz)

## Ultimate New Zealand Hunting