

Even though it brought much hardship and the personal family losses of my father-in-law and my aunt – both to cancer, 2015 is a year I want to remember positively. Instead of focusing on frustrations with the stock market, political candidate nonsense and sensationalized world reports, I will choose to remember 2015 for the successful hunts – particularly some special bow hunting moments with great friends and family.

Kicking the hunting year off in early spring, I was fortunate to take my 100th archery-killed turkey, an old Osceola Tom, in the swamps of Florida using my 53# Black Widow recurve. It was an incredible hunt because I accomplished a major hunting milestone and personal goal.



# A YEAR TO Remember

BY STEVE BROWN





In early fall, I traveled to Alberta, Canada with a close friend, Brian Montgomery, and we shared a great week of fellowship, laughter, and celebration when Brian took his first mule deer buck – a very nice velvet-antlered, Pope & Young muley.

After much practice in the backyard with her bow that I gave her as a Christmas gift in 2014, my wife and I traveled to Montana to hunt antelope. We always have a great time together especially when we are able to get away into the Big Sky country from our daily schedules and pressures. This trip was special because I was once again reminded of how blessed I have been to be married to this patient woman, who not only supports me while I follow my passion of bow hunting but will occasionally join me. Together we have shared successful hunts through the years, and this trip was no exception when she was successful in taking her very first animal with a bow – a great antelope buck which qualified for Pope & Young.

As the Mississippi bow season

neared, I was excited to have game camera pictures of several nice bucks on my property in Noxubee County. One in particular, was a really nice 8-point that I had gotten pictures of in 2014 and had spent quite a bit of time hunting him but never saw him in person. Through the summer, I got pictures of him regularly and enjoyed seeing his antlers develop into an even better buck than he had then during 2014. He was a year older now, and I really wanted to get him – or at least catch a glimpse of him.

On opening day, October 1, I got my chance at the buck. Not expecting to see him at all, I was enjoying being back in a deer stand and had several deer feeding around me that afternoon. I certainly was not expecting the 8-point to come from downwind of me without detecting me, but I heard the snap of a stick and realized a deer had slipped up right behind me.

As I slowly turned my head just enough so I could see what was behind and right below me, I saw him – the 8-point I had hunted last year and had

been watching on camera all summer. He was 3 yards from the base of my tree – his antlers red and bloody from the velvet that he had obviously shed within the last couple of days. He didn't blow out, but he instinctively sensed something was just not right. Even with other deer near, he turned and slipped away never offering me a good shot. "At least I finally saw him," I thought. But the realization set in that we just don't get many chances at a mature buck like him, and I figured that I may never see him again much less get an opportunity for a shot.

The buck's appearance that day provided me some very valuable information for my hunting strategy. Based on the direction he came in, I had been wrong about where he was bedding and about how I was hunting him. I knew that if he was not spooked too badly and continued on his routine, I just might could get another opportunity.

Twelve days later, with a wind direction that I needed and the hope that he was bedding where he had been on October 1, I was back in the tree hoping for one more opportunity at this buck. The afternoon was beautiful with early fall sunlight bouncing off the leaves. I was excited to be immersed in the season. I patiently waited all afternoon and was thrilled when my instincts about his routine were spot on. About 20 minutes before dark, he came through the area in which I was hunting and gave me a 24-yard broadside shot, which I took and sent my Gold Tip arrow laced with a Rage Hyperdermic broadhead right through both lungs.

The arrow passed completely through and stuck into the base of an elm tree as the buck mule-kicked and took off on a death run. He made it about 65 yards, and though I couldn't see him, I heard him crash and take his last breath. I knew he was dead, but I tried to wait for 30 minutes just

in case; however, I could not stand the excitement and climbed down from my tree stand after about 10 minutes. I inspected my arrow which was covered in blood, and from there, I easily followed the blood trail to my buck. I was super excited to have gotten a successful opportunity at the buck I had been after for two years.

Quietly, I thanked the Lord for the opportunity to enjoy the great outdoors and be able to pursue my passion of bow hunting. I picked up Jake Beck who was hunting with me on the other side of the property that day so I could tell him the story. We loaded up the buck, excitedly drove back to Starkville, and stopped by Brian Montgomery's house so that we could share the successful hunt with him.

Brian and I have shared many

successful hunts and assisted each other several times on the tracking and recovery of some really nice bucks. Brian loves to bow hunt mature whitetail deer and is always excited for his friends' successes. Over the last two years, Brian and Jake both had looked at a lot of game camera pictures of this buck with me. They both not only understood my obsession with the buck but also knew how hard I had hunted this particular deer so it was quite a celebration!

This deer wasn't the biggest buck I have ever killed, but he was a mature 8-point that was a solid Pope & Young, and I'd specifically set out to kill this particular deer and achieved success. I'm sure those who have had similar experiences can certainly relate to my enormous feeling of accomplishment which was enough in and of itself to make my Mississippi season one to

remember so vividly.

However, to make my Mississippi season even sweeter, thirteen days later on October 26, I took another much larger buck that is currently my best Mississippi archery deer in 40 years of bow hunting. Starting out the year, I had no idea I would mark the 2015 season with two Pope & Young whitetails in Mississippi in the same season all before I left for my annual Midwest bow hunting excursion!

I had some incredible hunting moments during 2015. It is a year like this one of bow hunting that seem to keep me focused, positive, and ever reminded of why I fell in love with this sport so many years ago. Thank you, 2015, for the hunting memories! I cannot wait to share the successes and disappointments of the 2016 season with everyone in the next magazine.

