



# JACKPOT!

BY VIRGIL MURRAY  
PHOTOS BY TRAY DONALDSON

I did something I thought I'd never do this year, kill a great buck on my own place! The late October cold front put him on his feet and I happened to be in the right tree. I have been after "Jackpot", a name given to him by the man who sold the property to me, Jack Bales, since I bought the property. He showed up on camera

mid-November last season and seemed to set up camp in the middle of the property. Periodically he hit the plots at night, gave me daylight pictures only one time, and of course, was never seen.

He has been at the forefront of all our plans, from how we set-up to how we hunted the property. We

didn't plant a couple smaller plots this year, as he would pop up randomly it seemed. Instead, we expanded the plot he liked to hang out in from one acre to two and a half acres. No small task there. I had him on a solid feeding pattern for the opener, but he never showed. In fact, after almost daily pics since July, he disappeared

after my first hunt there. Deer were entering the field from the north, but to my surprise, the bachelor group was actually bedding on the southwest side of the plot and walking all the way around to enter from the north. Opening night a couple does did just that, and while they didn't spook, they caught enough of my scent to put them on high alert. Several other deer, likely the bucks, were mulling around on that ridge as well, but never came into the plot.

I hunted there one other time, but stayed out as the weather was hot and the wind was not great. It was hard not to go down there during my vacation mid-October! I knew where I was going when the temps started dropping October 28. I set up in a climber just off the south side of the plot this time. When I set up, I forgot my limb saw (still in the old turkey vest!) and had to trim limbs with a 1-1/2" Swiss Army knife saw blade! But it did the trick!

I was on some water oak acorns they were tearing up. The plot was starting to come up as well. A spike fed in and out of the north end of the plot early. The wind swirled and he was gone. At 6:30, a 3-4 year old 8-point showed up in the southeast corner of the field, 30 yards away. He headed straight for an oak 40 yards away and munched on acorns until dark. It was tough to let him pass since we still had not taken a buck here yet, especially with my bow. A spike joined him shortly after walking right down the road. As I questioned my sanity for passing such a nice buck, a big-bodied deer popped out at the edge of the plot. I couldn't tell much about him because he was behind a tree and light was fading fast. When I caught



a glimpse of his left side through the branches, I knew he was a shooter and I thought (hoped!) he was the one I was after! It was one of those 'half a second glimpses then grab your bow'

moments! He did not join the other two bucks eating acorns under the oak, but instead headed straight to me and was quickly inside 20 yards. I turned to get a shot and some mud

from my boots fell to the ground, causing him to pause. I still can't believe he did not spook. The other deer in the plot did something at just the right time to shift his focus away from me. I came to full draw but he turned facing me and came in to 15 yards. He shifted back quartering to me a bit headed to the other deer allowing me to settle my pin and make the shot. The arrow thumped him and he headed towards the creek. He did not crash, but the other buck blew as he headed that way also. I eased down and checked my arrow. Very little blood and some gut. I backed out and we came back 4 hours later. He wasn't far. My buddy had come with his dog and we found him 80 yards away. The first time I put my hands on him, I realized how impressive this kind of mass is. 6" bases and incredible palmation. He was a 6x5 last year, but this year his 2 & 3



on one side combined into a common base split G2. Several kickers on his bases and one on his other G2. We weighed him at 230 pounds and aged him at 6 1/2+. We hunted this deer

carefully and it paid off. I didn't think he would slip up, but I am glad I was able to make my shot count. He scored 160 1/8". I hope I am lucky enough to hunt another one like him again!

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