

SPRING PREPARATION FOR BIG **WHITETAIL** SUCCESS



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PHOTO BY DEB ATWOOD LOGAN

January 6, 2001 found me sitting in a shovel dug pit blind in the middle of a tree farm on Yazoo National Wildlife Refuge. The wind was exactly what I'd been waiting for in the January archery hunt on Yazoo and the anticipation was extremely high going into the hunt. One of my hunting buddies was in position to the north about ½ a mile away in a tree stand overlooking an overgrown grass field. We knew a good buck was using the area through sign and intel from other hunters, but I hadn't seen him yet. The buck was supposed to be a 22" wide 8 point that would make your eyes pop out and the source was reliable! I was in "the hole" an hour before daylight at the tree farm. Anyone who's walked through one of these oak tree farms knows that in a tree you can only see straight down but at ground level you can see and shoot a long way, and that should answer at least some of your questions so far.

Anyway, the morning was cool and crisp with a light breeze from the NW, exactly what I'd set it up for and I hadn't seen the spot since the spring of 2000. I could hear deer walking all though the darkness as I set in the hole, my anticipation was running wild envisioning the giant 8 point in my dreams. As daylight broke, my nerves were just about on end, I've never hunted from a hole in the ground before and I had no idea if it would work or not, this was the maiden voyage!

I spotted my first deer coming down the trail. It was a nice young 8 point buck. I sunk low in the hole with only the brim of my hat above ground level. The buck breezed right by inside of 15 yards and never even checked up! It was on now, I had confidence my trap that had been set for almost a year was solid. Over the course of the morning I had no less than 15 deer come within bow range and not a one of them caught me! This was awesome! At 11:05 my buddy radioed me, (before cell phones

kids) and his voice was broken but I understood enough to gather "the big 8 is headed your way!" I was beside myself with excitement and even though there were a hundred trails he could take, I just knew he would come my way. About 20 minutes later I hear something to my right and look, there he is making a rub on a sumac bush on the small ditch where the trail crossed. The buck was only about 30 yards away but had lots of brush between me and him. I told myself to just be patient, the wind was right and

he was on the trail that would put him either at 20 yards or 8. I hoped for the 20 yard crossing but to be truthful, I just wanted a shot. It seemed like an eternity but he slowly made his way down the ditch on the trail and as he approached I can remember as clear as if it was yesterday hoping he would just keep walking and give me the 20 yard shot. But, here he comes. He crossed the small ditch and just like that he's at 10 yards and closing. I just needed him to look the other way. My bow had been laying on the ground prior to seeing the buck and when I saw him I picked up my bow and put it in the hole with me to be ready. Do you remember the old TM Hunter style rests? Well, the buck walked a couple more steps to 6 yards, stopped broadside and looks the other way as if he knew he was as safe as the President surrounded by The Secret Service! I rose slowly from the hole and drew smooth and quiet, but almost through the draw cycle I heard a loud "clank" and there I was, 150" 8-point on public land in a hole with my arrow off my string. In all the focus on the buck, I'd let my arrow lay between the rest and the riser of the bow and forgot to re-set it. The

buck didn't even blow out, he just swung his head around and looked to see what he had heard. It was the most humiliating moment in my bowhunting career to date. I let down to attempt to make the correction but that was all he could stand from 6 yards and he was gone! The buck and hunt of my dreams were over. Sick doesn't describe the emotions I felt and it causes serious depression to this day. It's a true story, but the point is not to discuss all the coulda shoulda's of the hunt but to focus on what led to a successful encounter, PREPARATION. The April prior to that hunt found my buddy and me physically carrying a 4x8 sheet of plywood almost 3 miles with shovels to dig that hole.

This spring can be the key to your success next fall if you will stay focused on what you have learned this year about your hunting area. That hunt for me transpired based on information I had acquired in the January hunt of 2000 when I found a giant set of tracks crossing a road. I followed the trail to the very ditch crossing the big 8 stood on when I had the encounter. The information you have learned this season is your best

advantage going into next year. It's easy to get focused on turkey season, crappie season, or 3D tournament season, but if you're a serious whitetail archer, now is the time to make those investments in time for next year. In the spring and late winter deer sign is extremely visible. Buck rubs and tracks will help you identify where that mature buck will be next fall. Another key project is to set up that stand site you wanted to be in this season but didn't because of the disturbance you would cause during the season. Go ahead and cut out the tree and shooting lanes and pull the stand. The most impactful part of setting up a new stand is cutting limbs and small trees for shooting lanes. Also go ahead and plan the approach to the stand. Entry and exit are very important for a stand to be effective. Use creeks to access stands to keep the disturbance at a minimum. I often use ropes to get in and out of creeks. With a good rope in a creek you can climb a pretty steep creek bank even when it's wet. Be creative, make good observations and use this spring to be ready for next fall.

