The bull got up from his midday nap in the thick juniper trees and eased down the open grassy hill, feeding slowly. He did not seem to be worried about much except for getting his belly full. As he wandered down the slope feeding rigorously, I saw Michael slip ever so close to fulfill one of his lifelong dreams. The day was September 16th and we were hunting elk in Arizona. The rut had been sluggish due to dry monsoons, but we were still optimistic about our chances for Michael to harvest a great bull. It was the fifth day of the hunt, and even with several different mechanical failures on our vehicles, Michael just laughed and said it was all happening for a reason. He shook the calamities off with a smile and kept us on task. The task was finding elk Number 42 that Michael could harvest with his bow and arrow.

Rewind the tape to 1997. I was sitting under my jacked up Ford Ranger truck because the brakes went out. I could hear a truck coming down the dirt road at a rapid pace, so I climbed out from underneath to see who was coming, but all I could see was a dust cloud being made by a truck with a huge elk rack in the back. I rubbed my greasy hands on my pants and made it to the road to flag them down. They stopped and I immediately drooled into the back of their truck. At that point, two guys got out and introduced themselves as Casey Brooks and Michael Park from Oregon.

They pulled the elk rack out of the back of their pickup to show me and it was huge. Casey had just harvested his 400+ bull and was still on cloud nine. Little did I know, but I was in the presence of two elk hunting legends. At that point they had probably harvested 25 bulls apiece with their bows.

We talked for awhile and hit it off right away. As it turned out, I ended up hunting with them for a few days and Michael shot a nice bull that scored roughly 350+. I was fortunate to tag along and video the whole hunt. When I say these guys are good at what they do that would be the understatement of all time. I learned more in those days with them than all of my years of elk hunting before combined. I would describe their approach to elk hunting as extremely aggressive. I was able to finally see first-hand how the “pros” did it. I could tell these guys were natural born killers; predators in their own right.

Fast forward a few years. Both Casey and Michael had been down Coues deer hunting with my hunting/guiding partner Darr Colburn and I, and we forged a good friendship. Both guys are extremely dedicated and hard-working hunters. When the time for applications came, I made some last minute recommendations and as fate would have it, Michael drew his second choice archery elk tag. He was pumped about his draw when we talked on the phone and the hunt was on!

I arrived in the unit on September 1st, which gave me ten days of scouting before Michael’s hunt began. Michael arrived five days later to put his time in also. Pulling into the unit, I immediately noticed how dry everything looked and was a little worried about the conditions. It then proceeded to rain 12 out of the next 15 days and the country greened up and started to look a lot better. One bit of positive news was that the elk antlers seemed to be pretty good. We scouted high and low and found some nice bulls throughout the unit and were excited about the chances of locating a great bull to harvest.
Joining us on the hunt were Cody Nelson and Cody Goff (the Codys), Josh Flowers, and my wife Jeanne. To cover as much ground as possible, Michael and I would head out to hunt one area while I sent the other guys to look around in other areas. We hunted for a few days and things were progressing nicely, but it seemed as if the rut was a little behind that year. We received word on the second day that Darr and his archery elk client, Tim Allen, had harvested a giant 400” bull in another unit. We were very excited for them and ready to find a bull of our own.

On the fourth morning of the hunt, we were almost back to camp when I got a text message from the Codys saying to call them. I called them, but only got bits and pieces of pure excitement and broken digital phone sound so we made a plan to find them. We came back to camp and got our scouts some extra food and water and were off. Upon arriving at their location, we could tell from their smiles that things were about to really swing in our favor. I got my tripod out, attached my binoculars, and sat next to the Codys as they described their morning events. I said, “How big?” and they both said, “Huge!”

They had the bull bedded across a canyon. I could see his front points from where I sat and knew that we were looking at a big bull. He was in a great place for Michael to slip in while he was bedded. The Codys said he had bugled a few times and had one cow with him on the hill. I was confident that Michael could slip over to him and get in close. We watched as Michael did just that. The bull got up and was raking his antlers, but it was too thick to shoot. Michael was at 21 yards for way too long. He had
no shot, and then the wind swirled and the bull spooked as if he knew he was Number 42. He ran over a ridge, so Michael came back to us and we made a plan to split up and try to relocate the bull. We were unsuccessful that night but our spirits were still high. We talked about how much the bull would score and the consensus was around 410-415”.

The Cody’s had to leave the next day after the morning glassing session due to work and it was just killing those guys to think they might miss the madness. I glassed the bull up at about 8:00 in the morning. He slowly made his way out of the bottom of a draw, feeding the whole time with his head down. He angled into a jungle of thick juniper trees and I could tell that he was looking for a place to bed for the day. He was on the sunny side of the hill, but managed to find some extremely thick cover to take his nap.

At around 5:00 that afternoon, the bull finally got up and was angling downhill, feeding towards the bottom of the draw where he could drink from some puddles. Michael slipped along, seeing that the bull was feeding heavily and positioned himself in the bull’s path. As I watched, it was as if the bull had read our script and performed his role right on cue. He managed to feed right by Michael’s position and I watched as Michael drew his bow and centered his pin on the bull who was quartering away at 57 yards. Michael released and hit the bull perfectly, right through the heart. The bull stumbled over his last 40 yards and went down. Number 42 was a reality.

With the giant down, I was very excited to get my hands on that awesome rack, as was Michael. Upon reaching Michael and his bull, I could see that he had even shed a few celebratory tears. It was really cool to see his respect for the animal that we so love to hunt. We set up for a few photos and just savored the moment as darkness fell.

When we guessed the bull would gross 410-415”, we were way off. The 7x8 ended up officially scoring 435 4/8” gross and netted 416 4/8” non typical. He had over 64” of mass, a 35” inside spread, main beams of 54 3/8” (L) and 52 2/8” (R), and nearly 12” of extras. Truly, Michael was blessed with the opportunity at such a great bull, but as icing on the cake, he returned to Oregon and harvested elk Number 43 with his bow about three days later.

Editor’s Note:
To read more about Jay’s hunting adventures go to his blog at www.jayscottoutdoors.blogspot.com.

Gear Note:
Michael and I were using the Wilderness Athlete bars, gels, and hydrate and recover drink mix throughout the hunt. We both commented on how energized we felt and how much we liked the taste of the products. Kudos to WA for making such great products!

– Jay Scott, Field Editor

Photo Caption

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