2017 Utah Elk Hunt 11/19/2017

After not drawing a deer or elk tag in Utah for many years including the 2017 draw, I opted to buy a spike only bull elk permit which would allow me to hunt a fair number of areas in Utah where I could pursue a spike elk. I went to the local store to acquire an over-the-counter spike permit and when the permit printed out it was a resident any bull permit, which limited the places available to hunt. I looked at the permit and was going to ask the clerk to reprint a permit for the spike only areas, but decided what the heck, I’ll just go where I could hunt the areas open for any bull.

My next step was to acquire area maps and overlay them with state regulations to see where there were areas for me to hunt, not too far from my home in Northern Utah. After a close review of the areas available I began the process of scouting in search of potential hunting sites. Much to my disappointment, the majority of open areas were privately owned and available only through “expensive” special permits. Having a good friend and neighbor, I inquired of him if he knew any areas that might be available. We discussed areas and landowners but came to the conclusion that my options were very limited, with the exception of the Monte Cristo area west of the famous Deseret Land and Livestock Ranch. Fortunately, my good friend did own a very small parcel of land amongst these large landowners. He graciously offered to let me hunt his property. He agreed to be available for and accompany me on the hunt on his land.

In late August we began to scout his small parcel for signs of elk in the weeks preceding the opening of the hunt. We found no sign that elk were on or anywhere near his property. His property was adjacent to a very large private ranch that only permitted limited access. He informed me, if I was to shoot an elk and it got onto the private ground we would be challenged in retrieving it. The bad news in our scouting efforts were that there was zero sign of elk on his ground right up to the day of the hunt, so my expectations of success were not very high.

The opening day of the hunt was Saturday, the seventh of October. After work on the Thursday before the hunt I stopped by our local Sportsman’s Warehouse to pick-up a bottle of cow elk estrus scent, hoping to use this to attract any bull elk in the area that may still be rutting even though it was late into the rut.

Some may not believe in Devine intervention, but our prayer was that if we were to be successful that we would need some help. The reason this was important to my friend and I was that a very dear neighbor of ours had passed away a few days earlier and his funeral was schedule for 11am Saturday morning, soon after the hunt was scheduled to open. On the evening before the start of the hunt we traveled to his property. A stiff breeze was blowing and I placed some camouflage mosquito netting in a couple locations and sprayed the netting with the estrus scent I had purchased at Sportsman’s Warehouse.

After a meal of homemade beef soup and a warm campfire we retired for the night. Soon after we had gotten into our sleeping bags I heard the familiar sound of a distant elk bugling. I was then set not to get much sleep that night. I remained awake all night as the bugling intensified and came closer and closer. The night was one of those nights with a full moon and the air was crisp and cool. I had parked my pickup truck about 15 feet from our small camp trailer and had placed the bag containing the estrus scent in a 5-gallon bucket in the bed of the truck because of the intense smell. About 3am a bull elk bugled in camp at the back of my pickup. That certainly had us awake. About 5am I arose to use the facilities and I could see a bull elk about 50 yards away, standing in the sage brush and bugling.

To say the least I could not wait for the sunrise to give us enough light to hunt. At about 6:45 we arose and began to walk the road to a large sage brush meadow where we had heard several elk bugling during the night. We walked slowly and quietly on the road and spotted 4 deer several hundred yards away near a small aspen grove. We heard an elk bugle from the aspen grove but there were no other signs of elk anywhere. We continued slowly walking down this road when an elk appeared from the aspen grove headed for private ground. I said to my friend “big bull”. As the bull quartered away from us I was able to stoop over and keep pace with him as he steadily approached private ground, I knew I had but one chance to intercept him and take a kneeling shot as he crossed a small grassy area. I was so excited and shaking, but knew I could get a good shot into a vital area at the 200+ yards. As the shot rang out I immediately knew that I had been successful.

By 9am we had the elk cleaned in the pickup and on our way back to town in time to clean up and make our good friends funeral.

The events of this hunt affirmed that prayers are answered!!

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