

A Record Day

By Marlon A. Holden



The deer we hunt are called Pacific Hybrids. They are small in stature at about 140 lbs on the hoof fully mature with racks tending to be more like a Sitka Blacktail than a Mulie. The distinct advantage archers have in hunting hybrids comes with the rut which begins in late September and can extend all the way through November.

The hunt began after a steep hike up a spine to one of the areas I thought would be good to glass from. Perched from a good lookout, lying down against the hillside, I began to pick apart the valley below, bundled with anticipation. After switching positions a couple times to get a better angle, I found a glint of antler bobbing up and down, although he wasn't feeding! He was flehming, raising his head up and down chasing two does around at about 1,000 yards out. He was a decent buck considering the year and poor growth. What made him stand out was the fact that he was a 4x4. In hybrid terms a 4x4 is like a winning lotto ticket, extremely rare and the chances of getting one is slim to none! So the stalk ensued. I made my way to where I last saw him. The sun was already beating down and not much stirred aside from a couple surrounding birds echoing throughout the canyon. I eased over each fold in front of me as if on cue that I would need to make a quick, close shot. After putting an imaginary sneak on the last three

fold in the land, I caught his antler tips bedded up ahead and across the short steep cut. He was facing me and I was positioned behind a scrub oak bush. After a quick inspection of the lay of the land, I could summarize that this was as close as I would be able to get without kicking him out.

Ranging him at 63 yards, I felt extremely confident that this would be a great opportunity. I eased an arrow from my quiver and pulled it tight to the bowstring. As the buck shook his head from an insect that was pestering him, I took the moment to slide out and in front of my cover giving me an even 60 yard shot. As I drew back, he caught my movement and focused on my position. I released the arrow on a shot that literally took him out quick, as he did not get up from his bed but rather solicited his final throws where he lay from a perfect heart shot. I ran up to him and held his perfect 4 point rack, admiring how cool he was and thinking to myself how small his body really was, maybe 120 pounds on the hoof! After packing him into my trusty Badlands pack, I began the trek out, extremely fulfilled on yet another awesome trip into the California mountains.

Although its hard to believe it gets better and I couldn't possibly imagine how! Skip forward a few weeks. The fall was drawing to an end and winter was approaching. We



were hunting a new spot and I had no idea what to expect other than I'd seen a ton of sign but nothing good yet. The day was cool and drizzling, there were deer milling about and as I sat down to glass, I immediately picked up three does about 600 yards off. They were feeding and I thought to myself that they had to have a buck with them. After finding several other groups of deer and no good bucks, I glassed back to the first group of does to see a buck... Oh wow... He was a real good buck! He looks like he's 24"-25" wide! I thought for a moment I was seeing things or over-judging him based on looking at too many out of state deer, but there was no mistaking him-he was a monster hybrid!

I immediately took up a stalk route and without any further thought was off to go harvest this buck. I covered ground quickly as it was fairly wet and quiet. The wind was in my face and blowing up canyon. As I neared the top of the finger he was on, I nocked an arrow on my new Z7. I snuck downhill slowly into the wind and right below me on a slight bench, there were the does. Then he popped out, nose in the air, head and rack tilted to the side! The whole time I kept telling myself to keep it cool. I was admittedly shaking as the adrenaline was coursing through me and he was standing there at 90 yards. A doe took notice of something out of place which made the others look in my direction



1st Buck



2nd Buck



too. They stared me down for several minutes before one doe had enough and blew! With that, she took three bounds away and the other does started to follow. The buck was looking at the does and I ran quickly downhill to the front of a laurel bush which caught the buck's attention and he queued in on me. I ranged him at 68 yards, drew my bow, and settled in! It's now or never, I told myself, you may never see this deer again! I squared up my shoulders, locked my hips, and centered the pin on the sweet-spot and let 'er rip..... KARAAACK!!! He was hit... He was hit good! I got him! My arms were flailing in the air like a kid that just got his first bicycle! I was pumped! The buck took off over a small hump and went down into the drainage, where I found him lying no more than 50 yards away. He was massive! He is 138" gross, 134" net green score and 25 1/2" wide! He appeared big enough to take a top 10 spot in the

California record book at the present time. There's been a lot of hunters taking good bucks lately but I'm thinking he could be my biggest local deer for a long time to come and I'm good with that.

With California allowing for a two deer per year harvest, I am stoked to be able to pursue these beautiful creatures for a good portion of the year. Even though giant Mulies tend to run through my dreams on a nightly basis, I will always leave room for hybrids to roam. Finally I would like to thank Garth and Jason Carter of *The Huntin' Fool* magazine for a terrific publication and John Petersen the Art Director for *The Huntin' Fool* for doing such a fine job in bringing all of these stories to life and sharing his great field tips! Happy hunting everyone!