

On July 31, 1999, Dennis Landwehr and I returned to the alpine areas described in the article featuring our hunt which yielded the number one Sitka blacktail in the Longhunter record book (See North American Hunter Magazine, October 1999, Grueling Hunt Nets World Record Sitka, pp. 86-87). Again we chartered a boat ride to the beach and hiked up from the beach to the alpine. This year however we avoided the alder avalanche chute and opted for the timbered cliffs to gain access to the alpine. The 8-hour grueling climb of last summer took only six hours, climbing at a much leisurely pace. We had water all the way and used machetes to improve the route through the devils club and brush. We reached our last summer's camp spot to find a black bear had used it for a bedding spot. We cleared the areas of the bear's sign, pitched our tent and relaxed, preparing for the mornings climb and hunt. The weather forecast was for the temperatures to reach the high 70's or possibly the low 80's, a real scorcher in Southeast Alaska. We knew that we would have to be up at first light, for with such temperatures the deer would be bedded in the subalpine timber by 7:00 a.m. We left camp at 4:30 a.m. and climbed the hour to the alpine. The abundant deer of the past summer were nowhere to be found. We reached the site where I had shot my deer last summer and we split up. I hunted east and Dennis west towards the only deer we had spotted. I worked across the broken ground as the sun began to show itself above the distant ridges. I came across a fresh deer bed and tracks which lead to a saddle. As I entered the saddle, I spotted a buck feeding 60 yards distant. It was a good buck with wide, tall velvet antlers. He blocked the rising sun. His reddish summer hair produced a reddish-golden outline surrounding the black silhouette of the buck. He never saw me. I laid I the grass, placed the front bead behind his shoulder and fired. The buck went down, kicked once, and moved no more. I approached the buck, paid my respects and sat in awe of the land, the animal, and the experience. It was 5:45 a.m. Dennis arrived and helped bone the animal. We found a snow bank to bury the meat under, and we hunted the remainder of the afternoon. Conditions had changed from last year. Where we had seen over 30 deer, mostly bucks there were only seven deer seen, four of which were bucks. We saw at least 9 bear this one alpine basin. The snow had just come off the alpine and the forbs, grasses, and browse were just sprouting. It is possible that the previous year's winter snows had taken a toll on a percentage of mature bucks. The unseasonably warm weather, the lack of food for the deer, the presence of so many bear all combined to cut our hunt short. We returned to our camp that evening with my deer and the experiences from a day in the alpine of southeast Alaska. Experiences that are always cherished. The following morning we descended the mountain, and camped in the forest near the beach waiting for our pickup the following morning. Our 6:00 a.m. scheduled pickup was delayed a couple of hours by thick fog that slowed the progress of our charter. Waiting to be picked up on the beach, a wolf hunted along the shoreline, working its way towards us until it scented out camping spot. It then paused for a few photos and disappeared into the forest. Our ride eventually arrived and we returned to our regular lives and family, taking time to reflect on our experiences during the long boat ride home. The buck's rack gross scores 95 0/8" with only 4 7/8 " deductions for a final score of 90 1/8" under the Boone and Crockett scoring system. It was a shame I did not hunt this buck two to three weeks later when his antlers had fully developed, I bet he would have scored closer to 100" of measurement. There is always next year...!