

## **My Second Boone and Crockett Buck and #2 Longhunter Sitka blacktail**

I was incredibly fortunate to harvest a great Sitka blacktail buck on Saturday, October 30<sup>th</sup>, 1999. Friday the 29<sup>th</sup>, it rained buckets and it blew all night. Of course this was somewhere about the 45<sup>th</sup> day of consecutive rain/wind/and gale that we had seen in Southeast Alaska. Saturday morning, October 30<sup>th</sup>, about 4:00 a.m. the winds shifted to out of the north and it began to snow up high. Roy Morris and I decided to hunt the change in the weather. Actually, based on the forecast of improving weather we had planned to hunt that morning and the forecast was right! We hunted the glacial scoured valleys close to Thorne Bay. The valley walls rise steeply from the rivers that meander across the valley floor. Forested wetlands, low-forested ridges, muskegs, beaver pond complexes and the riparian areas of the creeks occupy the low areas. The valley walls are forested except where timber harvest has created openings. We hiked closed logging roads hunting clearcuts, muskegs, and the forests, hoping that the weather change would jump-start the rut. After a few morning snow flurries the sun came out and stayed out for most of the afternoon. We had found several does out feeding with the weather change but no bucks. The second place we hunted required a one and a half-mile hike down a road completely grown closed with alder. In past years I had seen a lot of great buck sign in the area but never any bucks. That morning, the area showed a lot of promise with a number of fresh rubs and a lot of deer sign. These were in fact the first rubs either of us had seen so far that fall. We came across a freshly rubbed alder with saliva still dripping from a broken limb on the tree. I told Roy to be on the alert! That buck had to be close. At about 12:30 p.m., after covering some 400 yards from the fresh rub, we crept onto a landing above a great bedding spot now in the sun. I crawled down the logging slash below the landing, since you could not see beyond a cliff below the slash and landing. First I glassed then I blew on the deer call. Nothing. About the fifth time I called on the deer call a buck rose from his bed and stretched. The buck was partially hidden in a patch of hemlock second-growth. I found the animal in my binoculars and nearly dropped them upon recognition of his size. At that time the buck was about 130 yards down below me. I was in awe at the animal's size and forced the emotions down. "Don't look at his rack", I screamed inside my head. I had practiced at such distances but that's a long shot and the angle complicated the shot (Frankly the buck complicated the shot!). I took a few brief moments to calculate the shot. I rested across a stump, thought about my load, trajectory, and drop and/or rise, held my breath, and fired. Nothing! There was no indication that I hit him. The buck walked 20 yards. I blew on the deer call and he stopped. I asked for Roy to lend me his muzzleloader, actually I yelled at him! In coming down the slash he slipped but managed to pass me his rifle. The buck was still standing there, broadside, looking up so I took careful aim and fired again. He jumped and ran about 10 more yards, I called and he stopped never giving indication that he was hit. Roy had gotten to my side in time to see the buck trot away and we both watched as the huge, massive buck moved to the edge of the timber. He gave no indication of being hit. I stood there with the two empty muzzleloaders, helpless. He stopped and glanced once more over his shoulder at us as if to say, "You have seen me and that is enough!" We both believed that I had missed both shots and that he was going to shortly disappear into the timber. Then the miracle happened, his front legs wobbled, he collapsed, kicked once or twice, and was down for good.

The first shot had been good, through the lungs up high exiting below the left front shoulder. Later I found out that the second shot had hit him in the right shoulder but not fatally. It took me 20 minutes to get to him and took us 4 hours to bone, cape him, and pack him out. He was huge, both in mass and antlers. It was all I could do to move the buck as Roy returned for the packs. He is a symmetrical 4 X 4 with eye guards, nearly 18 inches wide and very tall. The buck's rack gross scored 112 7/8" with only 3 2/8 " deductions for a final score of 109 5/8" under the Boone and Crockett scoring system. He should be the number two Sitka blacktail in the Longhunter Record book after my Dall Island buck that I took last year (See North American Hunter Magazine, October 1999, Grueling Hunt Nets World

Record Sitka, pp. 86-87). He should also score as #2 in the Sitka Blacktail/Muzzleloader records for SCI scoring 116 2/8", besides securely finding a home in the Boone and Crocket Records.

Even a blind sow finds an acorn once in a while, but God sure must have had a hand in guiding that round ball. I do not brag about shooting game at such distances, I believe that muzzleloaders are 100 yard or less firearms. My shot was based on a lot of practice and familiarity with my load, rifle, and personal ability. The rifle I used was a custom .54 caliber H.E. Leman Trade Rifle by John Donaldson, made from Track-of-the-Wolf parts. This was the first deer that it has shot at...what a way to break a rifle in. The rifle was loaded with a .530 cal. round ball and .015 pillow ticking atop 100 grains of FFg. Roy's rifle was a kit built CVA .45 caliber Kentucky Rifle loaded with a .440 cal. patched round ball on top of 70 grains of FFg. Maybe I should hang the Leman Trade Rifle on the wall and not shoot it again...not.



