

# ARIZONA MONARCH

By Marlon Holden

There are few words to describe the excitement I have for archery hunting the rut in pursuit of big southern Arizona Mule deer. Every year I look forward to the moment that I load the truck and begin my trip to the desert. I want a big one! As a DIY hunter on public land, trophies are few and far between although in December of 2007, I was looking through my glass and laid eyes upon a true monarch: tall, heavy, and deep tined. As I put my 20x65 Swarovski spotter on him, his character came alive and I could tell he was the boss on the hill.

My wife, Alisha, and I traveled to southern Arizona on December 26<sup>th</sup>. She is my greatest supporter for my passion of bow hunting and oftentimes she out spots me. We always start our morning checking the regular spots looking at the doe groups to see if anyone respectable has tried to lay claim yet. It was on just such a morning when I spotted him, the sun had just started to crest the horizon when I was able to ascertain the glimmer of a rack against the low catclaw and mesquite brush. He was standing broadside at 700 yards and motionless, almost as if he knew that something wasn't right and he wasn't about to blow his cover by moving. Minutes later he bedded and I began a stalk. Six hours into my stalk a doe busted me and the buck bounded away!

The sight of the buck haunted me badly enough that I had to go back in January of 2008. This time Alisha could not make the trip with me due to school obligations, so I asked

my dad if he would like to go. He is a non-hunter but he sees my passion and loves the outdoors. My dad is responsible for my first bow, back in 1993 when he gave me a Browning Timberwolf and lit the fire. He wanted to join me, so we got him all geared up and were off once again.

We left southern California at 1 am on Friday the 11<sup>th</sup>. The trip went quickly as I was constantly thinking about the hunt. Upon arrival to our destination that afternoon, I was compelled to do an afternoon hunt which resulted in a stalk opportunity on him that lasted for 3 hours, however it was short lived due to his watch dog "does" busting me. The next 2 days resulted in little aside from seeing a glimpse of him at 1,500 yards 30 minutes before last light. Needless to say I just watched him through the spotter, as his rack bounced up, down, back and forth as he fed up the steep hillside. Then it was dark! I almost kicked myself for not at least trying for him but I knew it was no use and I'd probably just push him out of his living room.

We awoke at o'dark thirty and drove to the spot. After a short hike we set up and started glassing. It wasn't long before I started picking up deer on the hillsides but they were all does. I turned my attention to a distant butte that I hadn't looked at yet and feeding along its base was my boy! I got a surge of energy that pulsed out of control through me. The buck was accompanied by a good 3 point that was in the mid 140's along with five does.



A plan was made on the stalk and my dad stayed behind to watch from our vantage point. About 700 yards into the stalk and with 350 to go the wind decided to switch directions and I sat in a catclaw thicket busted. The does started to blow and stomp their hooves. Great! I thought to myself another blown chance and on my last day! Well as it turned out the 3 point got out of his bed and started to push the does, though they weren't interested in him, he pushed them enough to start feeding. The does worked up to the top of a low knuckle and bedded while the big buck bedded skylined just ahead of me with the wind in my face.

At 140 yards I took my boots off and continued on. It was 4 hours before I reached the 80 yard mark and the does knew something was not right. They had me pinned with the buck at 50 yards bedded in a depression with no shot. The buck

got out of his bed and fed up to the does which were at full alert, he quickly adopted their nervous state and the next thing I knew they were off on a dead run down the butte out 1,000 yards weaving into the mesquite thickets below me. At this point I was pretty much mental mush but not ready to go home even though I knew it was over. Or was it? The lead doe was turning her way back up the side of the same butte I was on, just 600 yards to my right! I couldn't believe this and I ran back to get my boots on. Quickly I got back on the deer and found them to be bedded up again. This time I had no cover aside from sparse prickly pear, yucca, and mesquite. They were at 375 yards and it was now 12:30 pm. I was supposed to be on the road home already! Well so much for that! I wasn't going to let this opportunity pass me by.



This time the stalk was going to be downhill, so I immediately went to my stomach and moved slowly with every breath of wind that blew, concealing my movement. As I edged closer I would move my bow in front of me then advance inches at a time. Three hours later I was at 90 yards and behind a young mesquite shrub. The buck was still bedded and I could see he had his eye's closed chewing his cud. I had a 46 yard stretch of short dry grass above the coarse lava rock before I would come upon a prickly pear about 2' tall. Every movement was calculated and all of my muscles were trying to control my weights distribution over the loose rough rocks. I slipped! And a rock made a slight clack against its neighbor but the deer hadn't heard it...Whew! That was too close.

I was so mentally psyched out stalking in on this buck with no cover and six other deer in plain view, I about melted into the rocks! As I finally made it to the cactus I rested for a few minutes, gaining my composure and calculating the shot. He had a small mesquite branch blocking his vitals and I didn't want to risk a deflection but the wind was blowing good and I thought that could keep them bedded for some time, so I glassed him with the aid of my 7 power Leica range finder and saw that he was at 44 yards with his eyes closed, still chewing his lunch. I slowly shuffled to my feet.

Squatting behind the prickly pear with an arrow nocked, I took three steps to the right, stood completely upright, at the same time coming to full draw. I lined up my 40 yard pin high and smoked him where he lay. He busted out of his bed and stopped 12 yards from his initial position, his ears went back, he faltered, and tipped over. I couldn't believe it! I had done it. He was down. The remaining deer lunged from their beds and started blowing unknowing of what had just taken down their fellow comrade. The other buck stepped a foot or so from the big boy and stomped several times before leaping away taking his reclaimed harem with him.

I sure hope I see my buck's children in the years to come. He made my hunt a hunt to remember and one I will always be proud of. Thank you to my dad, Randy, for sitting in the setting sun with me taking pictures and boning him out, I will always cherish the moment. Also I want to appreciate my wife, Alisha, for loving the outdoors and always being by my side on our crazy adventures where big deer roam.

