

# Seven Treacherous Miles

It was the middle of October, and it was finally time for my long awaited moose hunt. I have waited ever since I was a little girl for this opportunity, and it was finally here. So, my father and I packed up our stuff and left the warmth of Phoenix. We were leaving the "Valley of the Sun" and headed for a place called Wyoming. After two days and fourteen long hours of driving, we made it to our hunting unit.

The mountains were tall (11,000 feet +) and covered with bright powdery snow. It was like nothing I had ever seen before. I was eager to set-up camp and prepare for our nine day hunt. But, Dad said that we had to drive around and check out all the good places, just to make sure that we were in the best area. This was partially understandable, but since I am a teenager I'm not supposed to understand anything! So, we spent another several hours driving. We went up and down through the mountains and then we saw it. The spot was beautiful; it was right on the edge of a vertical drop-off, overlooking everything. It was like paradise, but colder!

We set up our camper and got everything ready to go for morning. Sooner than I knew it, morning came and that annoying alarm clock was ringing in my ear. I slowly dragged myself out of bed and got ready to go on yet another driving/scouting trip. This would be our first opportunity to really look around and see what these mountains had to offer. We spent several days really scouting the entire unit, and we had seen several decent bulls. Finally, the evening before opening day we spotted the best bull yet, and he was right by the jeep trail! I decided that he was the one I wanted. He was with a cow and a calf, so we thought he would probably be in the same area in the morning.

Well, I thought the day was going to go exactly as planned; drive to where we had last seen him, then harvest him, and have a photo shoot. Unfortunately, it went nothing like that. First, it was so cold that our alarm did not work. I would never have guessed that I could get ready for a hunt in 15 minutes! Of course, that did not leave time for breakfast, or even coffee for Dad. We still made it to our spot by daybreak. We parked behind some trees about a half mile from our last moose sighting and started stalking closer. We were nearly to the Moose spot when we heard another vehicle coming down the trail behind us. We thought for sure that no one would be so un-sportsman-like that they would just drive by us and start shooting. It had to be obvious that we were stalking that Moose. But just in case, we hurried it up and ran down the trail. As we turned the corner, we saw the pickup stopped in the middle of the trail

and the hunters were below the road glassing and talking loudly. And right across the gulch in front of them was my moose with the cow and calf.

Things were just going great! I thought for sure that they were going to shoot my Moose. But my dad wasn't going to let that happen. We ran right by the truck and set-up in the nearest spot we could see the Moose. It was a pretty bad position and I was basically laying backward in the middle of a bush trying to get steady. The other hunters were kneeling down and looking through their scopes. My dad could not believe his eyes and all he said was "shoot, and make sure you get him". I figured he knew what he was doing so I didn't complain. I took the shot, but the moose barely even jumped. I reloaded my gun, which takes me about a minute with the .50 caliber muzzleloader. In the meantime, the other guys started to yell over to us with the Moose standing right there. They were asking questions about which animal we were shooting at. They said to not shoot the cow because she had a calf with her. We had read the Wyoming hunting regulations, so we knew that was illegal. We would not have shot at her even if it was legal !

Dad explained that his teenage daughter was after the bull and was trying to take it with a muzzleloader. One of the guys turned to the other one and said "shoot the cow". The guy was kneeling against a tree and the cow was only 75 yards away. He shot and the cow started running across the gulch. Well, we didn't waste any time since the bull had started walking quickly after the cow. Dad got on his hands and knees and I shot by steadying the gun on his back. It was another fast shot, but I was afraid I had wounded the bull with my first shot and I did not want him to get away. The Moose did not seem to notice my shot and he just kept on going.

Well, when the other guys had seen the look on my dad's face, and that he was thoroughly mad, they packed up and drove off. They did not even check to see if they had wounded the cow or not. So my father and I went down to see if there were any blood spots. As Dad started to walk across the bottom, he got extremely wet by accidentally stepping in the river. So we decided that it would be best if we went back and retrieved the pickup and put on our wading boots.

The water and snow were too deep to get to where I had shot the Moose. So, we circled around to the top part of the hill where we saw him running away. When we got up there, we found their tracks but didn't see any blood. We decided to keep on the tracks just to make sure and to see if there might be a chance of us seeing them again. After about a mile we were debating whether it was worth chasing them, since we had not seen any blood. For some

reason Dad looked down, and there was one drop of blood in the spot he had been standing on. There was about a foot of snow here and it had been snowing all morning, which had covered the blood drop. Since the cow, calf and bull had been running together we could not tell which one was wounded. From then on, we would find one drop of blood about once per mile, right in the bulls track. I was very determined now; I shot and possibly wounded the bull and I was not giving up until I found him. After three more miles of tracking, according to our topo map, we had descended from 9,000' elevation to about 7,500'. Then our confusion and tough tracking really started; our three Moose had joined another bull, cow and calf ! And, this group had spent several days in this same secluded area, so there were tracks everywhere.

Dad looked at me and asked if I would like to keep going or go back to the pickup and circle around to see if there was the slightest chance that we would find him. Well, I figured that we were already on a set of tracks, which was much better than starting out with nothing. So I told him that I wanted to keep going. I wanted to find my bull really bad. This was a tough decision because my feet were hurting. We had not expected to find this much snow and water, so we did not buy me a pair of rubber boots. I was wearing Dad's old hip waders !

We eventually made sense out of the tracks and followed one set of three out of the area. Dad thought he had "profiled" the habits of the bull we were after and he thought we were on the correct set of tracks. So we kept going, and we must have done something right, because after about another mile we found another drop of blood. So I hurried my pace up and so did my dad. The moose had circled and were heading back up the mountain.

After three more miles ( 7 total ), we were at 9,500'. I have to admit, I was so tired that I did not even notice the lack of oxygen! The sun had come out and melted the snow pretty good. Now it was starting to get cloudier and the wind was picking up, so we knew our faint set of tracks could be completely erased. But Dad said he thought the moose would be bedding down soon. He said that if the bull was wounded seriously, he would make a sharp circle and walk downwind. That way he could watch and smell any predators that were on his trail. While Dad was trying to stay on the faint tracks, I looked up and saw a moose. I only saw this little speck of dark movement in the brush. But I was sure excited to see it! I nudged Dad and showed him where they were. But by then they had disappeared in the brush. Dad pulled out his cow call and started calling. Immediately, he received a cow call back. After a couple of calls, we actually were kind of apprehensive, since the cow calling back to us

sounded exactly like our call. We were afraid it was another hunter and he would mistake us for a Moose!

We decided to stalk slowly and quietly along the set of tracks we were on, and keep a close eye out for the bull that had probably circled around downwind. We saw the cow and she moved farther uphill. Dad called again and she called back, but we could not see the bull. Then, after 50 yards of stalking the wind shifted. The cow and calf smelled us and they started to spook. As they ran off, the bull stood up from where he had been bedded down. I told Dad, "I see the bull ". Dad did not even look; he just dropped to his hands and knees and told me to shoot off his back. I hardly even realized what was going on. I just sat down, looked through my scope and pulled the trigger. The Moose was just standing there, which I told Dad. He still did not look at the Moose, he just helped me do the fastest reload on record and then he dropped to his hands and knees again. After that shot, I looked up and the moose was plunging belly first to the ground. Dad finally looked over at the Moose and jumped up with tons of joy.

When we did our autopsy, we found that my first or second shot had hit the Moose in the chest, but it was a little high in front of the lungs and behind the brisket. All of his bleeding had been internal. An inch either way would have made our tracking job a lot easier. But then I would not have had such a great story to tell! We also found that my third shot with the 300 grain hollow point went through the moose and took out both lungs. My final shot broke his spine and dropped him in his tracks.

They say that the easy part of moose hunting is up until you pull the trigger. Well, if this had been the easy part, I did not want to know what the hard part was. Then, six hours later, I understood! Actually, we finally had a lucky break; a half-mile before we caught up to the moose they had crossed a jeep trail. So, after we de-boned the Moose, it only took us four hours of packing fully loaded pack frames to get him to the road.