

# MULLE

STALKING CANADA FOR

# DEER

Wayne from New York with his mule deer buck.





The author with his prized mule deer trophy.

## On his fourth trip to North America, a tireless Tony Pizzata braves the cold front to bag a trophy mule deer.

**O**f all the hunting destinations in the world North America would have to be one of my favourites. Elk, moose, bear, ram and literally dozens of other species means you could almost hunt a lifetime and still not complete a grand slam in one of the world's most picturesque last frontiers. Having already made three trips to Canada, I had been successful on bear, buffalo and whitetail deer, not to mention small game like coyote, fox and a few other varmints.

As a moose and mule deer combination hunt was next on the agenda, I rang friend and outfitter, Lloyd McMahon, of *Great White Holdings* with whom I had hunted before. Lloyd runs three camps in Alberta, Canada for whitetail and mule deer but also takes clients for black bear, elk, sheep and a host of other species. But it is his whitetail and mulie camps that are renowned in both the United States and Canada for exceptional world class bucks. He calls this part of his operation "The Sportsman's Club" and over the years he has guided clients to some of the biggest, heaviest racks in the record books.

After a lengthy conversation with him he assured me a mule deer was a sure thing if I could shoot. The Canadian moose weren't as big as the Alaskan heads, but he assured me I would see moose where I'd be hunting and definitely had a good chance. He also pointed out that

for the cost of a whitetail tag it would make good sense to buy one just in case I saw something bigger than I'd shot the year before.

As my priorities were mule deer and then moose, I booked my hunt for the month of November 2000. This was the mulie and whitetail rut while still offering a strong chance for a late season moose. A mate, John Vasillimis, of Wollongong, New South Wales had also met Lloyd on his visit to Australia and had decided to book a hunt with me.

Our departure date came around fast and before we knew it we were back in Alberta, Canada for 10 days hunting. Lloyd and Glenda were there to greet us and in no time we were on our way to camp. Lloyd explained we'd be spending our first night in Two Hills where I had hunted the previous trip and then head south to the mule deer camp.

On arrival at Two Hills, we were greeted by Bullrider, my old hunting guide. "Popsicle, you're back for a moose and mulie," he shouted. After lots of catching up and a few drinks we called it a day and decided to try to grab some much-needed sleep.

The following morning Lloyd and Glenda took us to the mule deer camp situated in Metiskow, about two hours south. After a brief introduction to our guides both John and I were ready for action. I'd be hunting with Jack, a renowned mule deer guide, who knew their traits well and to date had a 100 per cent record on guiding for them.



Pizzata and guide,  
Jack, with his  
whitetail buck.

After lunch Jack took me for a run to sight-in my gun and make me familiar with the type of terrain mule deer live in. They seemed to like rolling hills, drawers and the timbered areas around the many scattered lakes. The plan was to drive to the top of the highest knoll in the area we'd be hunting and sit, wait, glass and hopefully spot and

stalk a big buck. That afternoon we saw plenty of mule deer and a few young bucks, with the odd whitetail thrown in as well. Returning to camp, John and I met up with other American hunters who were also after mule deer. There was Frank and Wayne from New York, Richard from Memphis, Tennessee, Terry Skinner and several other

**“Mr Big decided to come out in the open and chase a few does about. His swollen neck was stretched out, with nose in the air as he frantically gave chase. Jack rolled the vehicle out of sight and quickly motioned me to grab my firearm.”**

hunters, each with their own guide. I already knew most of the guides from my previous trip which made settling in very easy.

The following morning our guides and the camp cook had us up around 5am. After a big breakfast and our lunches packed, we all headed off in separate directions. As first light approached, both Jack and I kept a close look out for deer as we cautiously made our way up a dirt track to one of the blocks we'd be hunting. Within minutes Jack spotted two mule deer bucks feeding out in an open paddock. Screeching to a stop, we both lifted our binos for a closer look. As the bucks were at least 500-600m away, they had no idea we were there. Jack new instantly they were both excellent trophies and later explained that at a glance through the binos they were a lot wider in antler than the span of their ears and certainly had plenty of length. As my tags were allocated to this wildlife management unit (WMU) and we had permission to hunt there, Jack suggested we park the vehicle up a little further and take a closer look.

Leaving my pack behind we headed off with only my binos and rifle. I was carrying my new take-down Blaser in 7mm Remington Magnum. It features a synthetic stock and detachable scope mounts which made transporting the firearm overseas much easier. The Blaser was shooting 50mm high at 200m, as I knew from previous experience, long shots were common on deer in this country.

Crossing the fence, we both headed off in the direction we had seen the deer. A series of small hills and scrub kept us out of sight. Jack suggested we head around them for a closer evaluation. I immediately followed, knowing exactly where the bucks were located. As we neared the area they were in and rounded a nearby bush for a look, the breeze suddenly changed direction. We both shook our heads at the same time knowing what this would do. As both bucks became visible at a little more than 100m, they lifted their heads and didn't even look back towards us, but instead began prancing off in a series of bounds as mule deer do. As I chambered a round and shouldered my rifle, Jack whispered they were both excellent heads. Following the last one with my scope, I squeezed the trigger at around 200m but clean missed.

Working our way back to the vehicle through knee-deep snow, Jack explained how to evaluate a trophy. I wasn't disappointed at missing as I had only been hunting for a couple of hours.

About 4km down the track we veered off to a secondary track and up a small open hill, coming to a complete stop. The view from here was awesome. You could literally see for miles all around. Jack said this was where we'd glass from and within minutes I found myself sipping on hot coffee and glassing for deer. According to the record books, Alberta is home to the largest non-typical mule deer of all time – the Chip Lake buck. They get their name from their large mule like ears and being slightly larger than a whitetail they can exceed 140kg in weight. As a good covering of snow

blanketed the entire area we were glassing – even the scattered lakes we could see were iced over – picking up a deer shouldn't be hard if they were on the move. Again, Jack was first to spot one. It was a doe and her off-spring. A closer look in surrounding bush revealed several others but no bucks. By lunchtime we had spotted lots of other deer and a few coyotes, but nothing worth stalking.

Later that afternoon we drove to a different area and saw a few whitetail and a young mulie buck. Jack wanted to return to the previous area though, as he was sure there had to be a big buck with all those does we had seen in the morning.

A couple of hours before dark we returned to the large frozen lake we'd visited earlier, and as we crested the hill at a crawl we saw the does up high on the side of an adjacent hill and sure enough, Mr. Big had decided to come out in the open and chase a few of them about. His swollen neck was stretched out, with nose in the air as he frantically gave chase.

Jack rolled the vehicle back out of sight and quickly motioned me to grab my firearm. The buck was so involved in his harem he hadn't seen us and the does were so busy trying to keep out of his way that they also were oblivious to our presence. Jack said we had plenty of time to plan a stalk. Our best bet was to stay put and just watch until they moved out of sight, as there was nothing but open country between us and them. About 10 minutes passed before the buck finally



**Lloyd (left) with John and his hard-won whitetail buck.**

chased his girls into an adjacent drawer which gave us an opportunity to make a move. Shortly after covering about 300m we waited patiently in front of a small bush for the buck to show. Although he was out of sight it would only be a matter of time before the buck would emerge from the gully below and skyline himself for a shot.

We were less than 200m from where the buck supposedly was and could get no closer. By now I had chambered a round into the Blaser. I was using Winchester Supreme ammo, packed with a 160gn Fail Safe projectile. Suddenly a doe emerged at a trot up the hill; I knew the buck would be following her. Stretched out like a steam train with nose held high, he slowly emerged head on to us. Holding the cross-hairs on the buck's chest, I slowly squeezed the trigger to the report of a *whack*. The buck lurched up on his hind legs and fell to the ground. My mulie was down. Does erupted from everywhere and gathered on top of the hill before slowly mowing off and disappearing.

Rushing over to my trophy, eager for a closer look, Jack said he was a good one. A closer inspection revealed brow tines on both sides, which is not common on mule deer. After lots of photos and video footage, we field dressed the animal and headed for home.

That evening I caped him out and later celebrated my good fortune with the boys back at camp. John had seen a huge whitetail and unfortunately missed, while Frank from New York had connected on a buck and the others had seen lots of deer but hadn't tagged out.

I phoned Lloyd the following day, who had business to attend to at one of his other camps and said I had tagged out on my mule deer. As he couldn't get to where I was until the next day, he suggested I hunt whitetail until he arrived and then he'd move me to his moose camp.

With plenty of time up my sleeve, we tried a different area for the day. By mid afternoon, we'd seen more shootable mule deer bucks but only a handful of whitetail does. I was content to get a few photos here and there and ended up having an easy day.

On day three Jack suggested we do a morning hunt and get back for lunch for my pick up to the moose camp. Heading out, Jack explained he knew of an area where a decent whitetail buck roamed but couldn't guarantee success. I was happy enough with that. Heading off we soon reached our destination and opted to drive around for a while for a look at what was about first. Sure enough we were seeing plenty of whitetail and the odd mulie also. Certain areas seemed to be all mule deer while others contained only whitetail.

I suppose it had to do with the type of terrain they preferred and the prevalent food sources. Leaving the vehicle we walked for a while and soon cut the tracks of a buck. In Alberta, a good guide can pick a mature buck by his print size and by touching the base of the print in the snow, he can tell you how fresh the track is. If the base of the track is soft, the print is fresh, if it's iced over, it's an old track. Heading back, we spotted a large object slowly moving across an open field. Our binoculars revealed it was a mature whitetail buck with nose to the ground and hot on the tracks of a doe. The rut was certainly in full swing and the bucks were frantic, paying little attention to anything else but does and competing males. Both Jack and I could see the buck had lots of mass to his head gear; a quick decision had to be made. I decided to shoot. The buck was, as we later found out, 400 paces away. I quickly took aim using a sapling to help me hold steady.

At this point the buck decided to face away and with nose to the ground stopped for a moment. As the buck lifted his head I decided to hold on the tips of his antlers and hope for a Texas heart shot at this distance. I slowly squeezed the trigger, all the while thinking I had no chance of securing this buck as he was too far for me. But today was my last day in this camp so what the hell! The gun went off, as I let the shot and recoil purposely surprise me. As true as I stand here today, the bullet struck the buck in the base of the skull, dropping him instantly. "You \*#%^\*## hit him," exclaimed Jack. I couldn't believe my eyes, as I'm not all that good a shot.

Rushing over to my whitetail, I couldn't help but think it was just one of those trips where nothing could go wrong. I'd had my share of hard luck hunts over the years so perhaps this was to be my lucky trip.

Returning to camp almost as happy as a Tatts Lotto winner, I wasn't surprised to see a few other hunters had scored as well, including John with a nice mulie. Later that afternoon, Lloyd took both John and I to his moose camp, where John would continue to hunt for whitetail and I for moose. This time I'd be hunting with Lloyd's nephew, Tyler whom I had met on my last trip. John elected to do some tree stand hunting and with everything in place, prepared our gear for the next day's hunting.

The following morning John headed off with his guide and I with my old mate, Tyler. By lunch we cut moose tracks, but only a cow and calf. That afternoon we continued our fruitless search. The

following day was Sunday. As no deer hunting is allowed, I decided to give the fox whistle a go and perhaps call in a coyote or two. My little button whistle certainly attracted them, but not close enough for a shot. I did manage to shoot a couple of prime winter foxes, though.

With three days to go, Tyler and I gave it our best shot for a decent moose and although we saw lots of animals, I had my heart set on a minimum of 127cm (50-inch) spread and it did not eventuate. The one good bull moose I saw after legal shooting light one evening was nowhere to be found the following day. We followed his tracks for several miles but lost him in a patch of spruce timber later that afternoon.

I wasn't disappointed though, as I had secured two exceptional trophies for the trip and had something to return for next time. John ended up shooting a representative whitetail on the last day. He'd had bad luck on the many stands he patiently elected to sit for whitetail. It appeared the area contained a large population of wolves that had pushed the deer around, making hunting them near impossible.

For anyone interested in a hunt with Lloyd McMahon of The Sportsman's Club, he can be contacted on 0011 1 780 875 0488. ●



Frank with guide, Radar, and his buck.