



DREAMING OF SAMSON

BY SUE TAYLOR

Susan Taylor of Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, stands beside the gigantic whitetail she took in that province in November of 2010. If you like seeing wide deer, then this buck is exactly that and more. Greatest spread is a whopping 26 2/8, and the inside spread is still in the WOW category at 23 6/8 inches. Main beams are 25 and 22 3/8, with brow-tines of 4 5/8 and 5 3/8. The tines are shorter than most big trophy whitetails, but not to worry, it makes up for that real quick. G-2s, G-3s and G-4s are pretty well all over eight inches. After 7 3/8 inches of side-to-side deductions, Susan's buck still nets 161 typical points. Now this gnarly 21-point whitetail also decided to grow a number of abnormalities totalling 30 4/8 inches. Adding that to the typical portion, this wicked whitetail's final score is 191 4/8 non-typical points. All photos by Doug Hildebrand.

On November 21, 2010, I shot the deer of my dreams. I had actually been dreaming about this buck for weeks but never, in my heart of hearts, did I really think I would get an opportunity to shoot him.

I have been hunting whitetail deer since the early 1990s, but as the years have passed my preferred style of hunting has changed. I used to relish the excitement of hunting in a group, pushing bush and hoping that a monster buck would appear at a dead run and I would make a great shot with my .270. I've shot some nice deer that way, but once I discovered still-hunting from a blind with my muzzleloader, I was hooked and quickly changed my approach. These days I spend all of my deer hunting time alone in my blind close to home, watching deer. I get to know the deer in my area and enjoy watching their interactions. When I shoot a buck, I have often hand-picked him as a mature or unique deer and may have previously seen him in person or on the trail camera. In fact, I did not shoot a buck at all in 2008 or 2009 because the right deer never came along at the right time. That streak ended in 2010 when "Samson" waltzed into my sights.

We first saw Samson on one of our trail cameras on October 1. My husband, Garry, and I always have three trail cameras set up on well-used game trails on our property and our neighbour's property. Early in the season we check the memory cards about once a week. When I arrived home from work one evening, Garry had left a

printed picture of Samson on the kitchen counter. I went crazy when I saw him – I had never seen such a deer – and certainly never expected to see one in our area given the high hunting pressure. This magnificent buck had used the trail near Garry's permanent blind between midnight and 4:00 a.m. two mornings in a row. He was an amazing animal, a rugged and wide non-typical 9x12 with very distinctive forked and multiple brow-tines. We named him Samson and the hunt was on.

Garry, who is retired, spent nearly every daylight hour in his blind. I am a veterinarian and professor, so my hunting time was more limited, but I logged many hours after work and on weekends in my blind about a half-mile south. We both saw a lot of extraordinary and interesting deer that fall, perhaps a result of the wet year and lush vegetation. We were, however, holding out for Samson. Neither one of us dared breathe a word about this deer to our friends and neighbours, but we were reassured once or twice a week that he was still alive when he would appear on our trail camera late at night or in the wee hours of the morning.

One day in mid-November, Garry had already been in his blind for a few hours. It was early afternoon, and there was a strong east wind and a heavy snowstorm. He was sure he was wasting his time; deer were unlikely to be moving on a day like this and he could barely see the 100 yards to the trail. All of a sudden Garry looked out and there was a big wide buck walking along the trail, head

Susan with the buck they called "Samson" not long after she anchored him on the frozen terrain.



Garry and Susan Taylor with their 2010 whitetails.

down. A quick look through the binoculars confirmed it was Samson! He waited until the deer was broadside, and when the monster buck paused, he squeezed off a shot. The primer fired but nothing happened. The wind was howling so much the buck did not hear the shot, allowing Garry to put in a second primer and fire again. Nothing. Realizing he probably had wet powder that was not going to fire, he had no choice but to watch the great deer slowly walk away down the trail.

That next weekend was my last opportunity to hunt. I had been busy at work until nearly dark every day during the week, so I planned to spend all day Saturday and Sunday in the blind. I had decided the only buck I would shoot was Samson, even if that meant this would be the third year in a row for me with no buck. I was OK with that – I had seen lots of very nice shootable deer and had been on the edge of my seat the whole season imagining that Samson was just over the hill. Garry offered to let me use his blind since he

had already “had his chance” at Sampson, and I readily took him up on the offer, though I really didn’t think he would make an appearance.

I spent virtually all day Sunday in the blind, starting before daybreak with a short break from 11:00 a.m. until 1:00 p.m. It was a cold, cloudy, windy day with occasional snow flurries, but the wind dropped off in the early afternoon. Nothing moved near the blind until about 4:00 when I saw a couple of does. They were closely followed by a nice 5x5 that I had seen near my blind on a number of occasions. He chased the does around the bushes and tree bluffs for awhile. About 30 minutes after they disappeared from sight, a young doe wandered down the trail, crossed the fence, and hung up about 150 yards northeast of my blind.

I was looking to the northwest, concerned about the impending dusk, when on the horizon, about 400 yards away, I saw some movement. As he crested the small rise, I saw his wide spread. Even before I raised the binoculars to confirm his gnarled brow-tines, I knew it was Samson. My heart was pounding so hard I was sure he would hear it in the suddenly still evening air. Realizing I was holding my breath, I took some deep breaths and tried to settle myself down. Surely I could not miss this opportunity.

Samson was walking fast down the trail with his nose down on a path that would bring him right past my blind. When he was near the point that I had previously measured to be 100 yards, I grunted once using my voice. Samson stopped broadside, raised his enormous rack, and casually glanced in my direction. I did not want to have to track this brute, and daylight was fading fast, so I held high on his shoulder with my Thompson/Center Encore .50-calibre muzzleloader, let my breath out slowly, and squeezed the trigger. The bullet hit true and he dropped like a stone where he stood. I quickly reloaded and walked out to deliver a killing shot, then just stood and admired him for a couple of minutes; he was every bit as impressive close up as he had been in the photos and in my



This photo shows the bark on Samson’s antlers. Looks like he certainly did a lot of rubbing on the trees in his territory.

dreams.

I ran back to my blind, found my cellphone, and dialed Garry. When he answered, all I could say was “I got him – I can’t believe it – I got him!” Garry was busy helping our good friend Doug Hildebrand skin out a mule deer buck he had shot an hour earlier. Garry told Doug, an avid amateur photographer, that I had taken a whitetail that would be worth taking photos of. Doug ran home to grab his camera and they both arrived at my blind about 20 minutes later. We spent a long time taking pictures and recording this occasion, with a trophy that was truly shared between me and Garry.

Samson is a 9x12 that scores 197 7/8 gross and 191 4/8 net non-typical points, even with a broken off left G-5. He is a real character buck. We took Samson to Michael Mose at Northern Taxidermy and are very pleased with the end product. Our amazing trophy now graces the wall of our den, reminding us daily of the wonders and beauty of nature and a deer hunting season that most can only dream about.