



CASPER

BY DAVE SWIFT

Ryder Swift of Medicine Hat, Alberta, holds up the colossal sheds of a huge whitetail picked up in the spring of 2013. Longest main beam is 24 long inches with one of the brow-tines reaching a whopping seven inches. Longest G-2 is 11, G-3 11 5/8 , G-4 9 5/8, and G-5 4 5/8 inches.

It's too bad the G-5 on the other side was broken off. The antlers ended up with a gross score of 185 and a final net score of 174 1/8 typical points. Dave Swift photo.

It was November 23, 2012, and I had been hunting hard with my bow for almost a week trying to put my tag on a nice whitetail buck. The morning's hunt was pretty uneventful, so I had headed home for some warm lunch and to try to get some feeling back in my body. Being perched in a tree for hours on end in sub-zero temperatures and waiting for the right buck to walk into

range can almost drain the life out of you!

The rut was in full swing, so as soon as I could get feeling in my fingers again, I headed to a different stand for the afternoon hunt. As I was driving past my hunting grounds, I looked out into the field and nearly hit the ditch upon spotting one of the biggest deer I've ever seen on the hoof. The magnificent creature was standing

Dave Swift holds the sheds he found from a great Alberta whitetail he called "Casper." Dave is an avid hunter who loves pursuing big whitetails and also enjoys hunting other species with his archery tackle.

Dave admitted to me that his one big passion is looking for big sheds, and when he mentioned that to me, well, we must have talked for an extra hour on the phone about the fine art of shed hunting as it's definitely a true passion of mine too. Standing beside Dave is his dog, Boone, and you just have to wonder how Dave ever picked a name like that!

Dave runs and owns Non-Typical Taxidermy out of Black Diamond, Alberta, and therefore gets to see some impressive animals from all over that province.

Text by Garry Donald.



proudly with a hot doe in the wide open and only 200 yards off the road. The really crazy thing was that it was one o'clock in the afternoon.

I pulled over, grabbed my camera, and started taking pictures of the buck, then quickly called my brother Brandon to tell him what I had just seen. He could tell by the excitement in my voice that it was a big deer. He just said, "What are you taking pictures for? Go get him!" Easier said than done, I thought, because the situation wasn't ideal with no cover at all.

I watched as the two deer bedded in a low spot in the field just as snow began to fall. My only option was to use the land and the increasing snow to my advantage. Over the next two hours, inch by inch, I belly-crawled along the frozen ground, numbing my body even more to the point I thought if I did get close enough I wouldn't be able to pull my bow back.

At last I could see the tips of his tines as I slowly inched my way forward, finally getting into range for a shot. I decided just a few more yards and then it was time to get real serious. I ranged the bedded buck at 48 yards and all I had to do was get myself into shooting position now and wait. While shifting myself around, all of a sudden the doe's ears perked up and before I knew it she was on her feet and staring right at me. I was busted. I quickly drew back my bow knowing it would just be seconds before the buck would do the same, and then he too was up and standing broadside. I picked my spot and soon the

arrow was slicing through the cold Alberta air. Sadly I watched as that darn arrow sailed just under his chest and into the snow behind him. In seconds they were gone, leaving me in a terrible state of mind.

I retrieved my arrow and slowly walked back to the truck, knowing I had just blown my chance at a true Boone and Crockett whitetail for sure. I was disappointed that I had missed but also happy and thankful to have had such an experience with the brute.

Later that night I was looking at the pictures of the buck, wondering where he had come from and why I hadn't seen him before. With no trail camera photos, he was a ghost buck. I have spent a lot of time in the last seven years shed hunting and have picked up antlers from most of the deer in my area. Suddenly my brain kicked into overdrive and I realized I knew this deer – I had his matched set from two years earlier when he would have been around 3 1/2 years old! I began digging through my pile of antlers and pulled the set out, it was him! I also had an antler from him the year before that. I knew right away when I had picked up these sheds that if he made it a couple years he would be a king buck. It sure looked like my prediction was right.

I continued hunting after that encounter, but like big bucks often do, the ghost disappeared. I figured a fitting name for this ghost buck would be "Casper." Soon the season was over, and



Michael (left) and Brandon Swift were on this memorable trip when Dave found the sheds of the buck he had missed during the hunting season. Also pictured is Brandon's young son, Hudson, and of course Boone, the wonder dog. Michael is holding a shed picked up in the same area where the big set was found. If the other side was the same, it would gross 170 inches. Brandon is holding the sheds that his brother found. Michael lives in Calgary, Alberta, while Brandon, Ryder and Hudson call Medicine Hat home.

you guessed it, I never saw Casper again. With two days left in the season while hunting with my dad and brother-in-law, I was lucky enough to harvest a beautiful 140-inch buck that followed his girlfriend past my stand that morning. It was a great way to end the season, which had its share of so many amazing memories. Of course in the back of my mind I was already thinking about looking for Casper's sheds in the coming months.

When January of 2013 came to a close, I began to watch the deer herds, always keeping a close eye on where they were feeding. I had spotted the ghost buck on one of these occasions as he fed with the other deer and was able to get more photos of him. February came and so did a

chinook with its warm wind that eventually melted all the snow. Now the deer were everywhere, making it hard to pinpoint where he would shed.

March was time to hit the trails and begin looking a bit more seriously, but there was still the odd buck packing antlers. With that in mind, I avoided most of the bedding areas in order not to spook Casper out of the area, so I just concentrated on the fields. Shed hunting is a family affair for us, and between my parents and brothers we managed to pick up some real nice sheds but still not the ones I was really after.

When April came, I felt it was finally safe to go into the bedding areas. Every chance I had I was out looking, and after putting many miles on my old boots, I was starting to realize that I may never find them.

It was nearly the end of April when my brothers and I got together for one last day of



Dave snapped this photo of Casper's sheds just how they fell off his head. Any closer and they would have been on top of each other. Take a look at those neat brow-tines as both have the exact same curve on the top. Dave Swift photo.

shed hunting together. The weather was great, so we brought along my two-year-old nephew and we each took turns carrying him around the woods while we looked for sheds. We had picked up a handful of nice antlers already, and as I made my

way back to the truck, I decided to check out some bush that I hadn't searched yet. Over the years this bush had never produced an antler for me, but oh well, I figured I would just walk through it anyway.

As I made my way through the willows, I nearly tripped over what had eluded me for the last two months. My eyes focused on the most beautiful site a shed hunter could ever hope for. Casper's antlers were lying side by side, and I started hollering to my brothers. It was such a great feeling to at last put my hands on his antlers after my arrow had missed him months earlier. Soon my brothers were there and we were all in awe at

the size of the sheds. It sure was a great experience to share that moment with them. We took some photos and left the woods a happy group of shed hunters!

Back at the house, we put the tape to him and came up with a gross score of 185 and net of 174 1/8 with a modest 18-inch spread. I'm hoping that next year Casper gives me another chance, but if not, I will once again be looking for his sheds. I really do owe a big thank you to the landowners that allow my family and me to hunt and look for sheds, for without them I wouldn't be able to share this story with you. 🍀