

JOURNEY FOR THE

Over the years I have been fortunate to have met up with many colossal whitetails and mule deer. As the prime photographer for this publication for 24 years now, I have captured thousands of photos. Each one of these magnificent animals has shown me just how cagey they can be. I guess I have to thank these big brutes for keeping me young at heart with a deep passion that burns within.

In 2009, I spent a great deal of time in the outdoors. It was a cold day in November when I spotted a big-bodied mule deer standing within the treeline. A few minutes ticked by when a doe finally headed across an opening. Soon the buck came out of his hideout and my video camera focused on his double drop-tines. What a great buck, and the tape was rolling as the two of them cleared a rancher's fence with ease. I was excited



Kelsy Claypool of Delisle, Saskatchewan, holds the impressive sheds that Garry Donald found in 2011. The big Saskatchewan mule deer grew just over 30 inches of drop-tines alone. Garry hunted hard for this buck in the 2010 hunting season but was unsuccessful. It still worked out great when he picked up the sheds four months after the season ended. Photo by Cody Robbins, Delisle, Saskatchewan.

TRIPLE DROPPER

BY GARRY DONALD



Here is the Triple Dropper in all his glory. As you can see, the 2010 rut had worn out the old fellow from chasing does and fighting off rivals to his domain. Garry Donald photo.

to see him, but wondered if he would survive the chronic wasting disease kill-offs.

One week later Bill Longman and I were out in a friend's pasture. I told Bill to take my still camera and I would push the terrain towards him. I grabbed my video camera and he drove off with the truck. I waited for a few minutes to let him get into position before starting my push. I had gone less than 100 yards when I unexpectedly found myself smack in the battle ground of some very mad bucks. Suddenly the dropper showed up with ears pinned back and walking sideways like a vehicle that had just hit black ice. Comical indeed. My Sony video camera caught the performance of a lifetime. One buck nearly trampled me, and when he took off, the whole group of madness left with him. I had quite a story to tell when I eventually met up with Bill.

In 2010, with the government going back to the draw system, I put my name in for the area where the dropper lived. I was successful, so plans and hopes were made. My scouting trips in both July and August didn't produce any sightings or information on the elusive mulie.

In the third week of September, I decided to do another walk where I figured he might be. Halfway into my stalk, three bucks jumped up and quickly began chewing up real estate. Luckily I still managed to snap three pictures.

At home that night when I put my card into the computer and enlarged the image, I was floored. It was indeed the

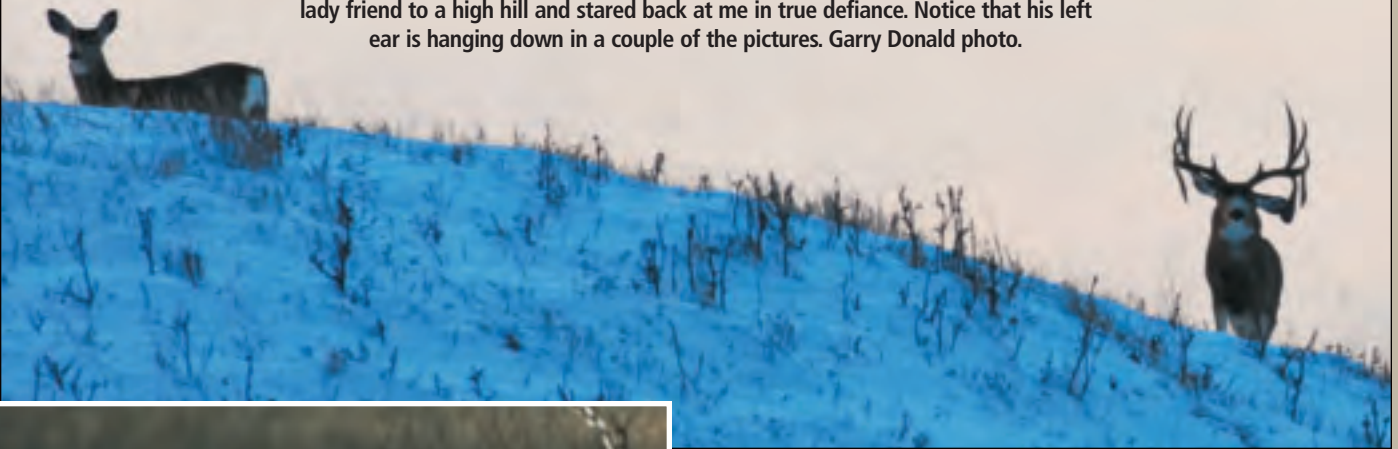
dropper, but he had grown into a drop-tined marvel. He now had three very long drops, with one of them being a humongous club. More often than not, king bucks like this seem to vanish into thin air and the dropper did exactly that.

A break in the case finally came in late October when Bill saw him feeding in a field. I was the only one allowed to hunt mule deer on this property, so I was pumped. Then the landowner moved some cattle around and put a bunch of them in this field, and the monster stopped coming. I guess he had something against cattle.

The two-week rifle season was a bust. The biggest buck I could have easily taken was a 180+ typical, but I decided to pass because I already have a couple of bucks like that mounted on the wall. Soon the season was over, and of course my tag was still in my pocket.

When whitetail season started, I hunted in the mornings and late afternoons. That gave me about five hours per day to pursue mulies with my cameras. One afternoon I spotted a pretty nice mule deer and decided to try to get close to him. The wind was perfect and I closed in quickly, but suddenly I had that stinking feeling that something was staring at me. I looked over to my right and the Triple Dropper had me pinned. My video camera went into action as he gathered up his lady friend and literally headed for the hills. I charged back to my truck and pointed it west. I ended up with more footage and also got a few pictures.

Here is a neat photo I took in November of 2010. The Triple Dropper had pursued his lady friend to a high hill and stared back at me in true defiance. Notice that his left ear is hanging down in a couple of the pictures. Garry Donald photo.



This is the photo that I got as the Triple Dropper jumped from his bed that fateful day in late September of 2010.



just like a bad dream, the Triple Dropper walked out of a depression, still packing his left antler. Let me tell you, it was a long trip back to Saskatoon and I was starting to wonder if I would ever find the mate.

In spite of terrible weather on Friday, I took off once again, making Elaine question if I had indeed lost my marbles this time. When I got to the farm where my ski-doo was parked, I loaded two more bags of feed for the deer. Arriving in the area, for the first time I couldn't find the bucks at all. I looked hard for the shed and deer but to no avail.

After a couple of hours I decided to call it a day, and as I was leaving I spotted a buck standing on a hill in a different pasture. Thankfully my Tundra ski-doo doesn't make much

Here is the Triple Dropper's left antler where it landed. It was a long six-day journey before he at last parted company with it.



Three days later I found the giant again as he weaved through a stand of poplars. When he disappeared, I went to another spot and waited. My good luck and knowing every inch of the land paid off when he came right out on the hill and glared at me. This time I had my camera ready and I took at least eight pictures before he pulled up stakes. It wasn't the best day for photography as the sky was dull and overcast with snow falling. Little did I know it would be the last time I would lay eyes on him in 2010.

The winter of 2010/2011 proved to be a harsh one for the mule deer herds. One day I decided to haul a couple bags of oats to a small herd of mulies. As I put up my trail camera and spread the grain, I hoped I could save a few of them. While leaving the area on my ski-doo, I spotted fresh deer diggings where they had pawed down to the creeping cedar. That's when I saw what looked like a tip of an antler sticking up. Walking up to the spot, I couldn't believe it as I stared down at the Triple Dropper's right antler. I looked for the other side but didn't spot it until I found the buck, and he was still wearing the left antler that had those two big drops hanging from the beam. I thought for sure I would pick up the shed the next day, but boy was I wrong. I made the hour-long drive on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, and each day I found him the left antler was still attached to his noggin.

On Thursday I figured this would definitely be the day. I found the group of bucks and two of them had shed out. Then,

noise and the deer just stand and stare at the funny machine. I am sure by this time they were getting used to me and wondering just how stupid this idiot really was.

Arriving where I had last seen him, I spotted the small group along with another buck that had lost his antlers. This one had a ripped ear and a double throat patch and I knew the elusive and hard-earned shed was at last on the ground. The search was on, and 20 minutes later I topped a small rise and scanned the frozen terrain with my Vortex binoculars. I spotted

something black, but it sure didn't look like a shed to me. Regardless, I headed over to it and nearly did a backflip when there, sitting in a snowbank, was the long black club pointing toward the sky. My journey had now come full circle and it will be an adventure I will remember for a long time.

At this time I am not sure if this buck made it through the winter, but I do know one thing: he was looking pretty rough the last time I saw him. Time will tell. His sheds ended up scoring over 200 non-typical points. 🍂