

Dayne Majeau of Drayton Valley, Alberta, with the extraordinary whitetail he took in 2010. Main beams reach out to 25 2/8 and 24 6/8 with super brow-tines of 8 7/8 and 8 inches. This Alberta buck has a great inside spread of 22 3/8 inches. The gross score is 204, and after many deductions it still nets 190 7/8 non-typical points.



"T"HE BAKER BUCK

— BY DAYNE MAJEAU —

In the summer of 2009, Troy Baker and myself discovered something every hunter dreams of: a true 200-inch monster whitetail. We spent the entire summer observing and documenting the buck's every move. He was a massive 5x5 with eight-inch brow-tines, several non-typical points, and a distinct drop-tine on the left side, hence his name.

By the time opening day rolled around, we were confident we had the deer fully mapped out, and stands were placed in preparation for the first hunt. A coin toss put Troy in the shooter's stand the first evening with me right behind him holding the video camera. That evening "Drop-

tine" did everything he was supposed to and ended up presenting us with a 40-yard shot. Troy drew, settled in and released the arrow, only to watch it sail slightly over the buck's back. The deer jumped a bit, trotted out of range and resumed feeding. Troy was really disappointed with the miss and I could feel his pain. We knew the buck hadn't spooked, so another opportunity was a good possibility.

Two days later I found myself in the shooter's stand, with Troy running the camera. The evening played out exactly the same: first some does, then small bucks, and then Drop-tine. The buck was on a steady path to give me a 30-yard broadside shot, but at the last second he turned,

This view really shows how magnificent Dayne's whitetail really is. With good tine length and an excellent frame, you just knew the numbers would add up fast.



quartering away at a steady walk. I drew my bow, settled on his side, and let out a quick bleat to stop him. At that second, the buck halted in his tracks and looked directly up at me, poised and alert. I found the spot and touched the trigger on my release. Troy and I both watched in disbelief as the arrow hit the buck high. Now I don't know if he ducked or I pulled it, but he ran off again like nothing happened, stopped in the middle of the field, and eventually wandered off into the timber. It was a massive disappointment for both of us again, all that preparation only to miss on both opportunities. We searched for the deer for days with zero sign of him. Sadly, little did I know this would be my and Troy's last hunting experience together. Troy passed away tragically a week after our last encounter with Drop-tine.

The summer of 2010 found me slacking on the bow season scouting. My now-wife, Danelle, and I were getting married in August and planning the event took up free time. One evening I joined a couple friends, Landon and BJ, to go out for a spin and see if any good whitetails were around. I decided it was time to swing by and check on the property that Drop-tine had inhabited the previous year. As we approached the field, I couldn't believe my eyes: from a quarter-mile away, I could tell it was him, standing in the exact spot where the events had unfolded the previous bow season.

Setting up the spotting scope, it was obvious he had grown from last year. The massive 5x5 rack was still there with the exceptional brow-tines and a few extra points, plus the distinct drop-tine on the left. I was looking at a ghost and couldn't help but feel like this was meant to be. For the rest of the summer, I shifted my surveillance into high gear. By opening day I had Drop-tine mapped again, but he had definitely wised up from last year. His movements were less predictable and more nocturnal.

After a couple mornings and evenings of sitting in a few different select stand locations, I figured I had narrowed down the spot. However, sightings of him occurred too late to shoot, so I had to move in tighter to his bedding area. I found my spot in a cluster of poplar trees alongside a creek crossing I had learned Drop-tine was using sporadically every couple days.

On the second evening at the creek crossing, it happened. First a nice 5x5 walked within 20 yards of me with Drop-tine not far behind, set to pass right into my shooting lane. It happened so perfectly: he stopped, then turned his head the other way as if to allow me to draw my bow. I was nervous but confident that this was it. All the practice and prep came down to this one moment.

I locked my index finger into the familiar spot on my cheek and peered through the peep sight at Drop-tine's vitals, 23

yards away. At the shot, the buck whirled around and disappeared in the direction he had arrived. I could see my arrow lying on the trail where he had been standing. Although everything had happened so fast it was hard to recall the events, I felt like it had turned out as planned.

As I approached the arrow, my heart sank. It appeared the arrow had impacted the deer a bit too far forward and not penetrated his vitals. Having struck his leg bone square-on, only half an inch of arrow and the broadhead were in the deer – a lesson for anyone who uses expandable broadheads and shoots too far forward.

Once again I made the long walk back to the truck with the massive weight of disappointment on my shoulders. I just couldn't understand how that had happened again at such a close distance. I went through the routine of looking for the deer and found



Alberta keeps producing trophy-class whitetails every year. The 2010 season produced many Boone and Crockett whitetails across the Prairie provinces.

give it a go. At the crack of the rifle, the deer spun and disappeared much like the two attempts prior. How often do you get to hear the phrase, "Yeah, I missed a 200-inch again on the third attempt!"

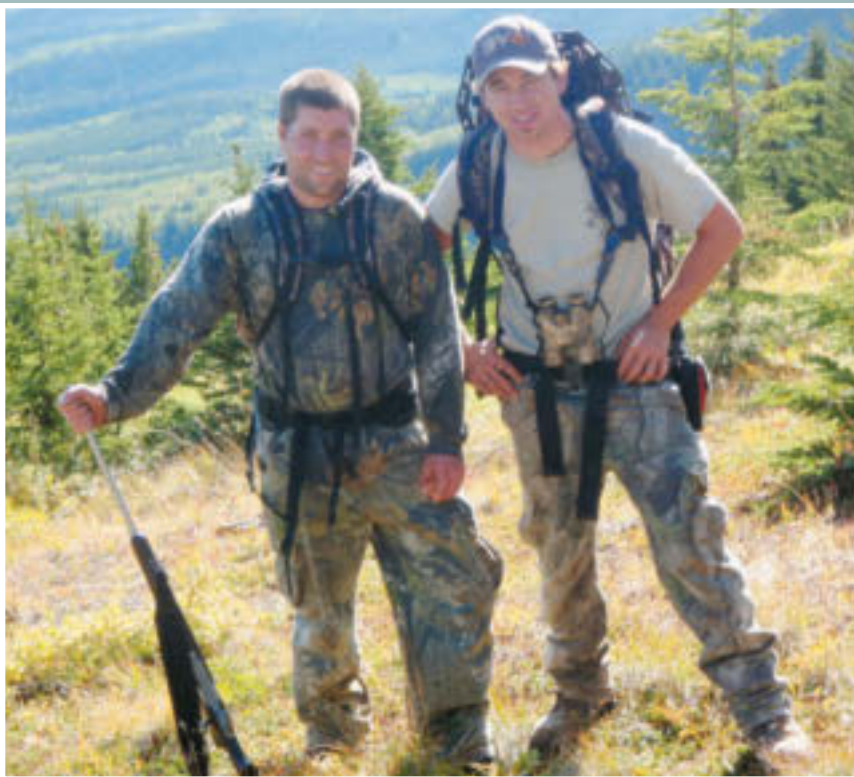
Approaching the area where Drop-tine had stood, it was obvious I had grazed his brisket. White hair everywhere, not a drop of blood. This was getting downright ridiculous. Another long walk back to the pickup in the dark. Strike three, definitely won't get a fourth opportunity.

November 5, back in to check my cameras. To my surprise, he was still in the area! However, all the pictures of him were in the cover of darkness.

November 15, 2010. My alarm clock seemed much more distant on this morning. The pursuit of Drop-tine was starting to wear on me, both physically and mentally. He occupied my thoughts and dreams, not in a good way. The visuals of misses and botched opportunities played over and over. My

morning continued with the same routine of so many mornings before. I found myself creeping up to the field in the darkness with an added element against me: it was pouring rain. November 15 and pouring rain, not optimum trophy whitetail conditions. Needless to say, my spirits were low. To top it off, a couple road hunters had spooked all the deer off the field before I could get a look at them.

Around 9:00 a.m. I made a drastic decision, one which I hadn't attempted yet. With time running out, I made a move into the dark spruce the buck called his bedroom. With the heavy rain coming down, my movements would be silenced by the wet



The late Troy Baker and Dayne on what would be their last hunting trip.

nothing, but I didn't give up hope.

Two weeks later I checked one of my trail cams. There was the ghost himself again! For the last two weeks of October, I found myself in the stand every single evening. Although I had several sightings of him, a couple within bow range, it was just too late to shoot. He had become almost completely nocturnal.

November 1, gun season. Away went the bow, out came the 7-mm magnum. Long story short, I had another shot at Drop-tine. This time it was a bit farther away than I'm used to, 300 to 320 yards. With him broadside and looking directly at me, I had a decent rest but the light was fading fast, so I decided to

ground. *Perfect*, I thought, *this might work out all right*. I knew of a small break in the timber, so I entered the dark spruce and slowly still-hunted through it with the idea of ending up at that opening for the afternoon.

About an hour into my slow stalk, things began to happen. First I caught movement directly in front of me. Slowly I positioned myself to have a rest in case of a shot. I lifted my rifle to look through the scope. Massive brow-tines filled the eyepiece! It was him, at 80 yards and working about five does through the underbrush. With definitely no shot available, I watched the buck for a full hour pestering the does in front of me, hoping one doe would pull him my way for a clear shot. The buck eventually disappeared.

For the next four hours I sat, afraid to move and possibly spook him. Around 2:00 p.m. I made a slight move up to a bit of an opening, one which would give me a better shot if the ghost appeared again. So here I was, leaning against a tree, stretching my legs, now completely soaked to the bone. My thoughts drifted to past events, and I think I had really come to terms with the fact that this probably wasn't going to happen, and that I was out of time.

I lazily scanned from my right to left, and just as quickly as he had left earlier, Drop-tine reappeared at a steady walk in my direction at a mere 25 yards and closing. Instinctively I threw my safety off. I had to think quickly; the path he was on would put him right at my feet in a matter of seconds, but to my benefit he would have to pass behind a large spruce.

The second his head disappeared behind the massive tree I shouldered my rifle and found the spot in my scope. Without missing a step, he came out from behind the spruce tree, cleared the limbs, and presented me with a head-on shot at a mere 12 yards. I centred the crosshairs on his chest and pulled the trigger. I was shocked to see the deer once again whirl and quickly

disappear in the direction he had come from. "There's no way I missed that shot," I told myself. I decided to wait 20 minutes before checking for a hit.

Since it was still pouring rain, no sign of blood could be found. I walked in the direction Drop-tine had disappeared. 100 yards and nothing. I felt numb walking back to the original spot. And then there he was! I had walked right past him in my haste to find some sign of a hit.

The massive flood of emotion and excitement I felt at that very moment are impossible to describe. I approached my trophy and finally put my hands on the massive set of antlers Drop-tine had grown. It was overwhelming yet bittersweet that such an adventure had come to such an abrupt end. I couldn't help but feel a bit sad that Drop-tine had finally expired. The relationship I had developed with this deer is hard to explain. The cold rain falling had no effect on my spirits at this point. On the way back to the truck I don't think my feet touched the ground, unlike so many long walks before. I was on cloud nine as I made all the important phone calls to the people on my list who knew of my pursuit of Drop-tine.

Landon Cox and Evan Kluk were at my house in no time to help recover my buck. A good 1 1/2 hours later we had retrieved the deer from the deep dark timber he had called home. It didn't take long for word to get out, and we had a small crowd gathered at home for Drop-tine's arrival. After lots of laughs and high-fives, we came up with a rough gross score of 204 non-typical inches.

I'm extremely proud of this deer and feel incredibly fortunate for having spent so much time not only pursuing such an incredible animal, but sharing the first year of the adventure with Troy. He will forever remain in our hearts and memories. In honour of my dear friend who was with me at the beginning of this amazing adventure, my buck will be known as the "Baker Buck."