

UNBELIEV



Landon Cochrane of Birch Hills, Saskatchewan, with the truly magnificent mule deer he took on November 2, 2011. It ranks as the 10th largest non-typical ever taken in the province. I photographed this monster at Graham Jensen's farm just after Landon took it, and I noticed it had broken off a huge abnormal point on the left antler.

It would have been the match for the 12 6/8 abnormal on the right antler. If it was the same length, the buck would have netted 280 inches, making it the fourth largest for the province. In Saskatchewan, only residents are allowed to hunt mule deer by a special draw tag. I believe that for this very reason Saskatchewan continues to produce some of the highest scoring mule deer taken in North America. Text and photo by Garry Donald.

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BY LANDON COCHRANE

“Unbelievable!” That’s all I could say as I stood there looking at the biggest whitetail I have ever seen lying dead in the snow.

It was deer season in the fall of 2010, and after a couple years of heading down to my cousin Graham Jensen’s farm near Rosetown, Saskatchewan, to chase mule deer with my bow, I figured it was perhaps time to return the favour and have him come up to my place in Birch Hills to go after whitetails. I made the mistake of emailing him a trail cam picture of what I thought was a near 180-inch 6x5. His immediate response was that “he was coming up to shoot it.” I told him, “Whatever, we will never see him, but come anyway. I guess anything can happen.”

He pulled into my yard the following Friday at about 3:30 p.m. and by 5:30 he had done just what he said he was going to do! We hadn’t even been out hunting for an hour and a half before he was putting his tag on a deer that I considered to be mine! I made sure to let him know that he owed me one heck of a mulie the next fall.

That spring over Easter weekend a few good buddies and I met at Graham’s place to go quadding and pick up any shed antlers along the way. Not long into the ride we found one lying

Carie Jensen shows us some colossal sheds from this buck. Graham Jensen and Landon were out looking for sheds in the spring of 2011 when they found the huge right antler. They looked hard for the match, but Max Coben had already found the left side. The footage Garry Donald captured of the big dude in 2010 is included in his new Blu-ray DVD called *A Wildlife Journey*. These antlers gross 235 inches. Garry Donald photo.





Graham Jensen (left) and Landon with their mule bucks from 2011. Graham was drawn in a different zone.

right in the middle of the trail we were on, and it was HUGE! It was the biggest shed I have ever seen. After spending half an hour with six of us looking for the other side, we gave up and continued on our ride. Later that night we scored it at roughly 102. If the other side was a match and the spread was average, we were looking at a buck that should score somewhere around 230 non-typical points! I told Graham this was the deer that would make us even again, and I would be down in the fall to go after it. Even though I never really thought we would see it, I figured if he could call the deer he would end up shooting, then I could too.

As luck would have it, another cousin of mine, Tim, who was present when we found that shed, and I were both drawn for mule deer in that zone. I had a full 2 1/2 months to try to catch up with that giant buck, with the advantage of being able to use a rifle for the last couple weeks.



Another view of this world-class buck. Garry Donald photo.

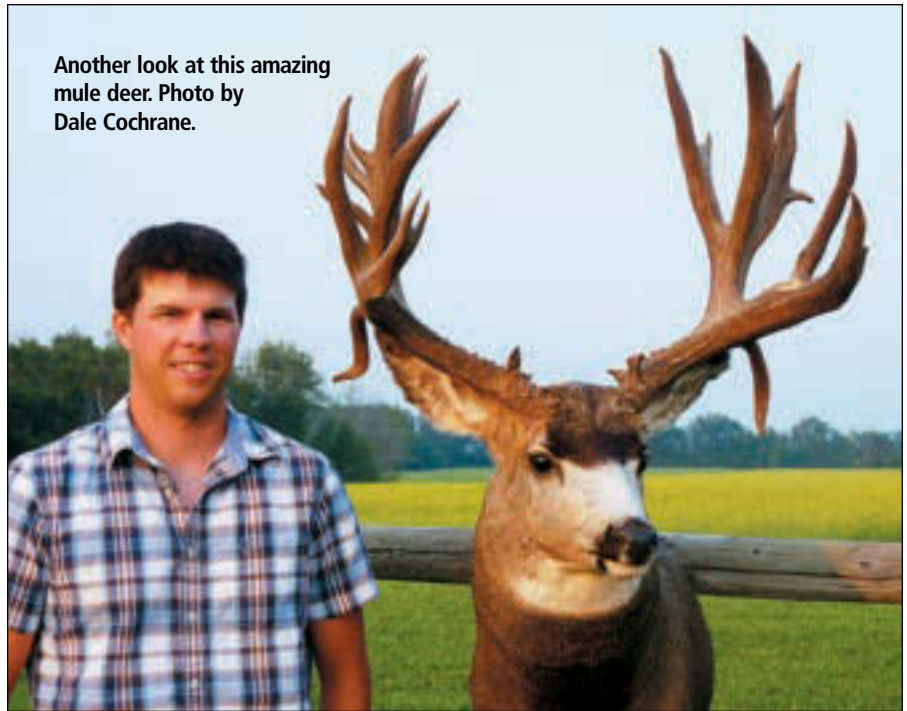
With harvest rolling along so smoothly that fall, I wasn't able to get away at all in September. In fact, the first time I got down there was Thanksgiving Sunday. I had three days to scout and, if an opportunity arose at a nice buck, hopefully get a shot away with my muzzleloader. Although several nice bucks were seen that trip, one which I would've been more than happy to shoot, Graham wouldn't let me, saying, "That deer isn't big enough." I'm not sure who thinks a deer pushing 190 typical inches "isn't big enough," but he did, and for whatever crazy reason I listened and ended up heading back home empty-handed.

I returned for the last three days of muzzleloader season and was pretty much there to stay until I had filled my tag. Every day was spent glassing as we drove from one vantage point to the next, hoping to find a buck that Graham would be satisfied with. Again we saw several I would've been happy to take, but I was always met with the same response, "No, there are bigger deer out here." I have to tell you that watching all those big bucks and being told not to shoot was starting to get to me.

Two days before I finally got to pull the trigger, we ran into Bentley and Max Coben while on our usual morning scouting trip. Having seen a couple of Bentley's hunting movies, I was happy to get to meet him. After talking for a bit, we discovered they had picked up the other side of the big shed we had found that spring. They also told us it was bigger than the side we had! Before continuing on our way, Bentley suggested we keep our eyes on a certain field a couple of big guys were frequenting. I thought it was pretty nice of him to give information like that to someone he had just met, and I sincerely thanked him. Later that night I walked through that field, but only a couple smaller bucks were out there.

The next morning was the rifle season opener, which saw Graham and me parting ways to hunt on our own because he had been drawn in one of the bordering zones. At 8:00 that morning I watched what I thought to be at least a 200-inch non-typical walk into and bed down in a small bluff. So I called Graham and asked if he would push it out to me when he got back, to which he said, "Yes." I sat there for four hours, watching the bluff in case the buck decided to move to a different spot, wondering where Graham was. Finally he phoned to say he had shot a buck and needed help loading it. Although I didn't want to, I had to leave the deer I was watching. Besides, I was curious to see if Graham had held himself to the same standard he had set for me. I knew that if he was, there would be a very impressive deer on the ground out there.

As it turned out, he had gotten tired of waiting for me. I got a phone call when I was about halfway to him, saying he had managed to load it himself and would meet me at his farm. When he finally pulled into the yard, I looked in the back of his truck and found he had indeed held true to the same standard, for there was a 216 non-typical back there! The bar had been



Another look at this amazing mule deer. Photo by Dale Cochrane.

set and now I had to try to outdo him.

By 2:00 his deer was taken care of and we were on our way back out to where I had left the buck I had been watching that morning. I got set up in a good spot and Graham walked around to push him out. It didn't take long for a few deer, including the big guy, to come out and run right by me. Finally I had my chance to shoot without anyone standing beside me telling me not to, but I didn't. I'm still not sure why I let him go. He was the only good buck I saw that day, but little did I know what would happen the next day.

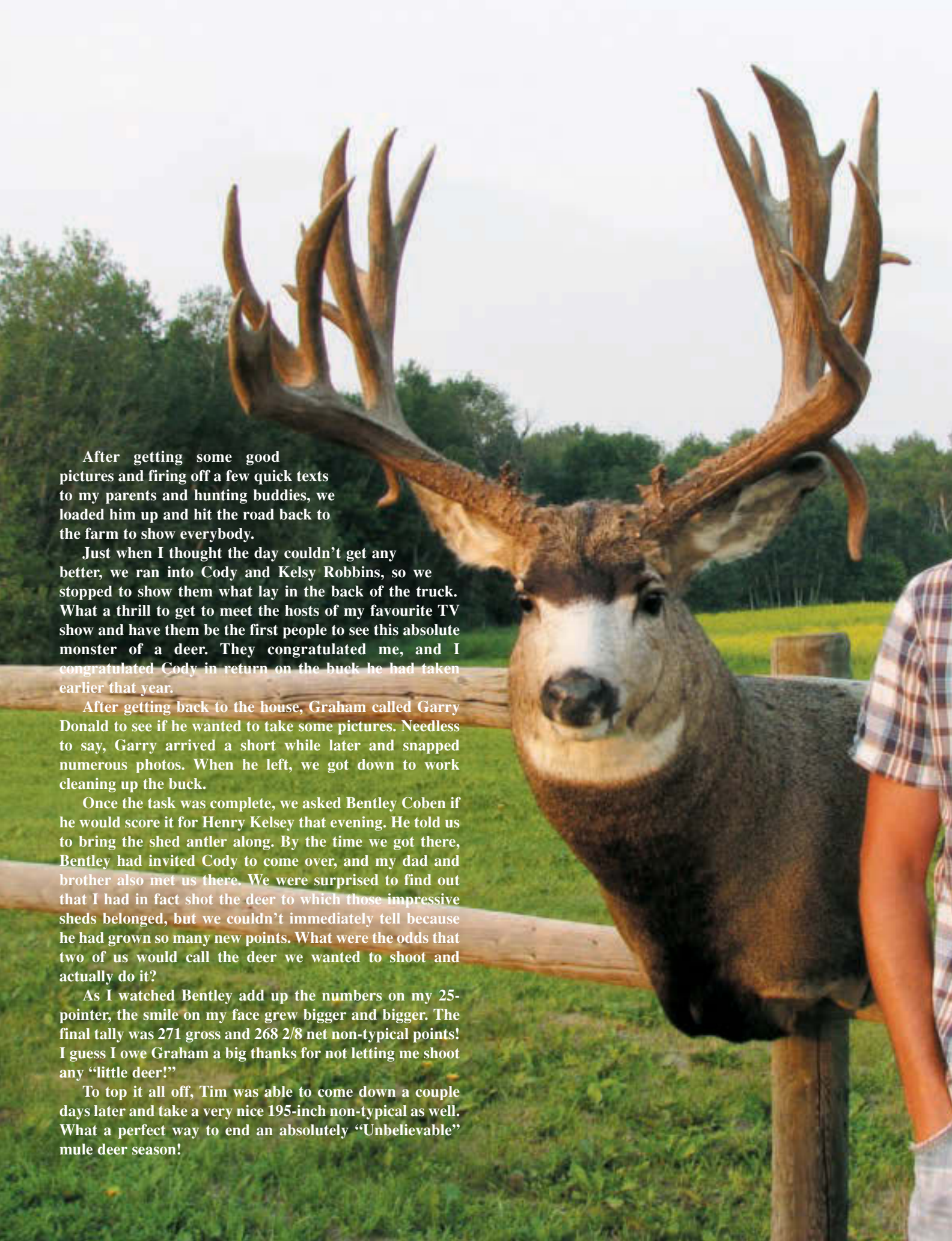
The morning of November 2, with my guide back in the driver's seat, we headed to the first look-out point we hit every morning. After five quick minutes of glassing and seeing no new bucks in the area, we moved to the next spot. Nothing there either. On to the next, the one Bentley had told us to watch. All of a sudden Graham hit the brakes and said, "There's a good one, get out!"

I scrambled out, not even seeing the deer he was referring to. Although I quickly located it standing in tall clover, its head was down feeding. For all I could tell, it was a doe standing out there. I got lined up on the deer and was ready for the shot, but its head remained down. I asked Graham, "What should I do?"

He replied, "Shoot him!" Now I wasn't about to shoot a deer without getting a look at his headgear for myself, but as luck would have it, the buck heard Graham's high-pitched voice and finally lifted his head and looked our way.

Antlers filled my scope! I could see points everywhere. I bet I didn't look at him for more than a second before I sent that bullet on its way. And it's a good thing I didn't look longer because the "fever" would have set in and I would have missed him for sure! We heard the *THWACK* of the bullet hitting the deer and watched him run about 100 yards before piling up.

I couldn't believe it when we picked up his head and it had way more points than I had seen, including a set of drop-tines! We guessed he would gross somewhere around 250. Turns out we were almost 20 inches too low!

A large mule deer with impressive, multi-tined antlers stands in a grassy field. The deer is facing forward, and its head is resting on a wooden fence. The background shows a line of trees under a clear sky. A person's arm in a plaid shirt is visible on the right side of the frame.

After getting some good pictures and firing off a few quick texts to my parents and hunting buddies, we loaded him up and hit the road back to the farm to show everybody.

Just when I thought the day couldn't get any better, we ran into Cody and Kelsy Robbins, so we stopped to show them what lay in the back of the truck. What a thrill to get to meet the hosts of my favourite TV show and have them be the first people to see this absolute monster of a deer. They congratulated me, and I congratulated Cody in return on the buck he had taken earlier that year.

After getting back to the house, Graham called Garry Donald to see if he wanted to take some pictures. Needless to say, Garry arrived a short while later and snapped numerous photos. When he left, we got down to work cleaning up the buck.

Once the task was complete, we asked Bentley Coben if he would score it for Henry Kelsey that evening. He told us to bring the shed antler along. By the time we got there, Bentley had invited Cody to come over, and my dad and brother also met us there. We were surprised to find out that I had in fact shot the deer to which those impressive sheds belonged, but we couldn't immediately tell because he had grown so many new points. What were the odds that two of us would call the deer we wanted to shoot and actually do it?

As I watched Bentley add up the numbers on my 25-pointer, the smile on my face grew bigger and bigger. The final tally was 271 gross and 268 $\frac{2}{8}$ net non-typical points! I guess I owe Graham a big thanks for not letting me shoot any "little deer!"

To top it all off, Tim was able to come down a couple days later and take a very nice 195-inch non-typical as well. What a perfect way to end an absolutely "Unbelievable" mule deer season!

Let's take a look at Landon's impressive mule deer. Main beams reach out to 27 and 27 $\frac{3}{8}$ inches, longest G-2 is 14 $\frac{6}{8}$, both G-3s go 11 $\frac{5}{8}$, and G-4s are also even at 10 $\frac{4}{8}$ inches. Circumferences are all over 5 inches with the largest going 6 inches. After only 2 $\frac{6}{8}$ inches of deductions, these antlers net 195 typical points. Now this is where Landon's buck shines as this cactus giant also grew 73 $\frac{2}{8}$ inches of abnormal for a final score of 268 $\frac{2}{8}$ non-typical points. Photo by Dale Cochrane.

