

## Booner Bucks of October

Normally a down month of whitetail activity, two archers take three bucks over 200. *Is October the best month of the year?*

By Joe Byers



“I had just finished a rattling sequence when I saw a buck running through the nastiest of thickets,” said Phillip Vanderpool, his heart racing as he relived the excitement of the moment. “The rack was large and wide and then my heart nearly stopped... **a double drop tine buck**. It came in downwind, passed through my scent stream without alarm and looked at the decoy, yet did not approach. I snort-wheezed and the buck turned with its vitals behind a patch of brush. I knew the range, but didn’t want to risk a deflected shot at such a magnificent trophy. Then it just walked away.”

Vanderpool heart sank as the buck disappeared, yet just seeing such a majestic animal quickly rekindled his spirits. The Hunter Specialties Pro-staff member had been using his favorite pre-rut tactic which almost closed the deal. “Pull tactics work for me,” says Phillip Vanderpool, “and it’s my favorite way to hunt.” The morning of October 25<sup>th</sup>, he headed toward a transition zone of thick hedge apple trees, a corridor that led from a large alfalfa field to a patch of dense bedding timber. Typical of the tactic, Vanderpool avoided deer trails and bedding spots, opting to hunt “near” deer and pull bucks to his stand. In this way, he rarely bumps deer on a morning’s entrance, leaves a minimum scent, and can play the wind to his advantage. Using a summer-hung stand along the edge of the corridor, he set out a Delta deer decoy, climbed in, and waited for daylight.

“I began grunting and rattling at daylight and several bucks came in, but none of the monster bucks, we had seen earlier in the year,” he remembers. Then suddenly, the double-drop tine monster showed up. Vanderpool did not release an arrow, but was encouraged by the aggressive buck behavior.

After hunting the spot on consecutive days, Vanderpool backed away until the 29<sup>th</sup> when he walked nearly an hour in the wee hours to approach with the proper wind direction and set up a new stand. Instead of a field edge, he chose an open flat in the heart of the timber. Half an hour before dawn, Vanderpool was in position, an opportunity to mentally prepare.

“I began rattling and grunting on a morning so cold and still you could nearly blow smoke rings with your breath, he said. “Suddenly, I heard a loud **crack** followed by a flash of brown in the timber. It was that double-drop time

buck running right at me. It slowed as it came nearer and bristled up, ears back. "When I saw the double drop tines, my heart began racing... the buck of my dreams... something I had always wanted to take"

When the buck stopped at 35 yards and behaved cautiously, the archer came to full draw at the first possible moment. Then, the buck turned toward the stand, moving slowly and cautiously. "I eased off the bow and thought I had better let down now, rather than keep holding, he thought."

The aggressor saw no fighting bucks or grunting deer, the commotion that lured it in. For the next, six minutes (actual time), Vanderpool stood like a statue anticipating the moment of truth. Finally, the deer turned to leave and the archer drew, aimed and released."

"I don't know how I kept my composure," remembers Vanderpool, his knees nostalgically weakening with the experience. "I was so thankful to my cameraman Josh Wright who got the entire segment on tape and my good friend Steve Snow who allowed me to hunt on his property." The big buck scored 201  $\frac{3}{8}$ <sup>th</sup> with an inside spread of 23  $\frac{5}{8}$ <sup>ths</sup> and 9  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch drop tines.

## Steve Snow's Incredible Double



October 13<sup>th</sup> was anything but unlucky for Iowa farmer and dedicated bowhunter, Steve Snow. An all night rain put a halt to his farming chores, so he and his son Isaac went bowhunting. Steve had a 30-foot high stand hung on the edge of the timber where deer often traveled from cover into an alfalfa field to feed. Before climbing into the stand, Snow noticed a fresh scrape along the edge of field, perhaps the 214 3/8ths monster that came by in late afternoon. The huge whitetail fell to one well-placed arrow and proved to be an outstanding trophy.

A week later, Snow climbed a stand he calls “the valley point stand” because it sits atop two ravines which form a natural travel corridor from feeding

to bedding. Snow likes to pop-up a tree stand and will enter his area two hours before daylight to provide sufficient time to hang the stand and allow things to quiet down. However, this stand was hung in late summer because of its proximity to a bedding area where a set of sheds 5 ½ year-old sheds had been found. Shortly after dawn, Snow caught movement on the horizon when his dream came true, scoring 204 4/8ths. With 20 score-able points, the rack was a larger duplicate of the three sets of sheds found in previous years.

For sheer excitement, this article could end here. I mean how many guys bag one 200+ inch deer, much less two? Neither of these men used a guide, high fences, feeders, or any external factor to take the deer and each specimen was the hunter's personal best. However, to borrow a line from Paul Harvey, ***What's the story behind the story?*** What kind of farm were they hunting? How did they locate their stand sites? What hunting tactics did they use? And of course, how can I have this kind of opportunity?

### **Down on the Farm**

Steve Snow bought 1,000 acres in Iowa, perhaps the nation's most fertile antler soil. Half of the property was wooded including about 160 acres of steep thick ravines that made a sanctuary of sorts. Although the farm was hunted during the shotgun season, most locals made a push or two, insufficient pressure to dislodge the oldest bucks. The property had enough agriculture potential to make a living and enough cover for quality deer management.

Once purchased, Snow and his son searched for sheds and began patterning deer movements- Where they bedded, traveled, fed, and other travel

tendencies. Snow invited Vanderpool to visit during summer and video-tape the crop fields to develop an inventory of “what was out there.” Using spotting scopes and long range optics, they studied deer and pinpointed movements. Even before the season, the duo agreed they would not hunt bedding areas to avoid pushing deer from the property or changing their movements. Stands would be hung on fringe and edge areas only.

After working together, Vanderpool characterized Snow as, “the absolute best whitetail hunter I have ever been around. He understood deer movements and knew stand placement,” as his pair of October Booner bucks attest.



## Different Strokes that landed Success

Their growing friendship and a series of big buck sightings led to great optimism for the fall season, yet their approach was totally different. “Steve uses geography to his advantage like pinch points, funnels, and deer trails,” says Vanderpool. “I like to pull deer to a fringe stand and use decoys, rattling, grunting, calling, and any trick I can muster to bring a buck to me.”

The “pull stand” idea is a bit novel and warrants more elaboration, yet Snow and Vanderpool had another similarity. “We try to do everything right before we go to a stand,” Vanderpool emphasized. “Even though we spray down with Scent-Away, we play the wind and get there at the right time. If we are late, we don’t go. Every stand we hang, we believe we can kill a big deer.”

Vanderpool finds that the pull-stands are particularly advantageous for morning hunts. “I’m looking for an area where I’m actually making it happen, he says, “rattling grunting, and wheezing. I’m pulling that deer which minimizes scent where deer are frequenting. This means I can hunt it several times without bumping deer.”

Timing is particularly important for this tactic, according to Vanderpool. “It works well in the pre-rut, before that first does begins breeding and any time there is a hot doe in the area.”

Decoys are part of his strategy and require a field edge, open patch of woods, or other area with good visibility. Bucks often hang up when they come to a mock fight and see no deer. In this case you want the buck to see the decoy from as far away as possible. “Keep in mind that, every time, the buck will come from down wind,” says Vanderpool. “Set your decoy up so that the buck will

come down wind in a place where it will not catch your wind. They do it every time, especially big deer.”



### **Advanced Aggression**

Aside from the double-drop buck in Iowa, Vanderpool killed two other bucks in Kansas and Illinois, each in late October with a decoy. In addition, he

often has a dozen or more bucks approach his pull stands, most of which get a pass. Here's his advice on aggressive tactics.

"A decoy can give you that extra drawing power," he says. "Some will come in and posture to it and paw the ground. Dominant bucks will come to the head of my small-buck decoy. Sub-dominant bucks often circle and sniff the tail area. The main thing about decoying is to set up in a area where it can be seen. Once the deer has its focus on the decoy, you can get away with a lot (Like drawing your bow).

A 145-inch Illinois buck approached his decoy set-up head on, an angle that didn't offer a good shot. "The buck touched the antlers of the decoy and then crushed it, knocking it off the stake. It spooked out to 20 yards, but stopped and looked back. Big mistake!

Vanderpool places dominant buck urine under the deer like it just peed. "I think it holds them for a shot," he says. "When he smells it he stops and offers an easy shot."

Finally, don't underestimate the rutting drive of a mature buck. Vanderpool's pulse escalated as a bruiser Illinois buck came to his pull-stand setup. Unfortunately, half of one main beam was broken. As Vanderpool left the stand that morning he passed a wheat field with evidence of a commotion. Investigating the freshly ripped-up vegetation, he found a beam section that matched the buck he'd passed earlier in the morning. "You know that buck got its butt kicked the night before, yet still came to my rattling and grunting, looking for more."

**Sidebar: Six Lessons learned or Confirmed**

- *"The older a buck gets, the more it sticks to its core area,"* says Vanderpool. I'm not surprised that Steve took his 204-buck in the same area as three sets of sheds.

- *The first time you hunt a stand is the best.* “All three deer were taken the first time a stand was hunted. Regardless of scent precautions, repeated use of a stand will lead to contamination.
  
- *You never know what’s out there.* Despite Snow’s presence in crop fields virtually year round, the first time he saw the 213 was the day he shot it. Also, another buck with palmated antlers was seen during the summer (but not during the season) and is probably still out there. With 200-ish antlers, even in Iowa, the word of a harvest would have surfaced.
  
- *Morning Stands can work.* Vanderpool walked nearly an hour to approach his stand site from a totally down wind direction. Snow invests the extra hour in darkness to assure he is positioned well before daylight.
  
- *October can be awesome.* Often viewed as a “slow” month, strategically placed stands work early in the month and rutting tactics become hot the last week of October.
  
- *Pull stands work to your advantage-* If you have a problem with other people using your stands, hang a pull stand that is away from the greatest activity- where other hunters will likely post. Pull stands position you with a favorable wind and allow you to lure bucks from their haunts.

Captions for “Booner Bucks of October”

