

# GET UP!

STORY BY CORY MCLAUGHLIN

**G**et up! The grass on windblown hillside danced as each gust taught it a new step. I was sitting down thinking, wondering really, what had happened? A small red dot shown on a rock brightened by the soft morning sun. It was the end of the trail in one way but also the beginning of a question that would go on forever. Where did he go? Get up! My mind told me again and I rose to my feet. I was standing at the end of a blood trail with my hopes and dreams dead at my feet. My bull was nowhere to be seen.

Steam poured from the coffee pot as I filled my cup. Phillip killed what was left by dumping it into a thermos. It was the 17th day of my hunt and I was getting nervous. The bulls had been acting strange all season, rarely talking, and not following the usual September routine. I had changed locations the night before and was working on a hunch that I might again find elk in one of my spots that had been the main focus of my preseason scouting. I knew that there were at least 3 shooter bulls in the area and that none had been taken. This was the Dayton unit in south eastern Washington and it is one of the premier draw only bull tags. My sights were set on shooting a solid 6 point and from what I had seen that was a very real possibility.

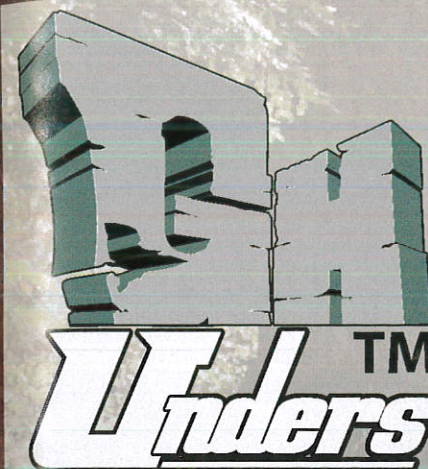
Phillip sipped his coffee and turned the keys. We geared up and started walking. From what I had learned we had about a mile to go before we got to "elk country". Bulls are the rock stars of the woods, hitting the high notes and getting everybody pumped. The problem was they forgot it was show time. I had a ticket to their September show and it was like being on an empty stage. We walked on, hearing only the sounds of our footsteps on the

dry ground. After about a mile and a half Phillip and I stood on the edge of a huge canyon and out of the corner of my eye I watched the cow call move to Phillips lips. A short time later through the wind I heard the tail end of a bugle. Show time! It was starting and we had tickets in the nose bleed section. It didn't take long to realize that we needed to move down.

Like two crazed groupies we moved downhill closer to the stage. The bull was in the middle of a solo when Phillip called out to him. Obviously, playing hard to get he gathered his entourage and moved them down the hill. Obsessed with getting a better seat we followed suit. Moving over a large piece of basalt we finally got a look at the herd. The star of the show was being bashful and stayed hidden as he again moved the crew downhill.

The show was over. Nothing but the wind was talking now. Phillip and I decided to make an attempt to follow the path the elk had taken and try and sneak backstage. We walked slowly and had just emerged onto an open face when I noticed a cow looking right at me. Security! We were busted, or were we? I slowly went to the ground and waved Phillip back. What to do now? I had a pine tree in front of me about 20 yards and a group behind me at 15. Phillip, understanding the lure of a female, fell back about 60 yards behind me and got into position. So here I sat on an open hillside for all to see and not sure what my next move should be. I sat there thinking about what to do when I heard Phillip begin to sweet talk the bull.

Forward or backward, what to do? Apparently impressed by Phillips "sweet nothings" the bull began his encore. I needed to make



## High Performance Base Layer Apparel

Grays Harbor Unders

GHUnders.com

717 K Street

Hoquiam WA 98550



**Keeps your skin  
dry during any  
outdoor activity.**

Men's, women's,  
and youth  
garments available!



Accessories also available!  
The Dryside Gun Skivvy  
keeps your guns dry and  
clean in storage!

**A full line of base  
layer garments made  
in Grays Harbor!**



a move and fast. I moved back into the clump of pines and got set. The flirting went on for what seemed like hours. This ancient game of cat and mouse was not working. It was time to try a new tactic. If love could not bring the bull into the crowd maybe anger could. Phillip waited until the bull hit a high note and then sent out his own. Silence. Had we scared him off? I turned to look down the hill and see if I could locate their escape route. The bull obviously irritated beyond measure rushed past security and came right at the crowd. It worked!

My head snapped back forward as only 40 yards away behind a small pine I heard the bull start his envoi. This was his swan song and he didn't even know it. He came forward into view, bright against the green back drop. It was and will always be one of the most magnificent moments in my life. "How dare they interrupt me!" I could see it in his eyes. He was out for blood and looking for the imposter who dared to steal his solo. Using everything he had left inside he pulled all the stops, hit the high notes and smashed on the whammy bar. It was beautiful. Then he came, moving with a purpose. 90 yards away from him was his enemy and he was ready for the fight. The problem for him was that I was only 30 yards away. The bull walked on oblivious to my presence behind the pines.

Whoosh, whoosh, whoosh. It was all I could hear, my pulse drowning out all other worldly sounds. 17 days hiking in the steep Blue Mountains had me beat down but in good shape and my bow, now at full draw, felt good in my hands. I watched as the bull came closer and in my mind I counted down the yardage much like a football announcer. He's at the 30, the 20, the

10! At 8 yards I couldn't contain myself and I made a cow call. The bull stopped as if he was wearing metal boots on a magnetic floor. He was uphill from me and silhouetted against the 8'oclock morning sun. I found my pin amidst the bright light and brought it to rest. Now came the crescendo.

As if in slow motion everything happened all at once. My breathing slowed and I released the arrow. The impact was clear and followed by that ever so familiar "Smack". I noticed that the fletching kicked down a little on impact but I was very comfortable with my shot. The bull wheeled and ran down hill stopping at about 70 yards trying to understand what happened. He then slowly walked around the hill and out of sight.

Phillip came over to me as soon as I cow called and he was smiling. "Did you shoot him?" he asked me. I smiled back and said yes. I told him it was a good shot and at only 8 yards. 8 yards how could you mess that up? I thought. We took a seat on the hillside and both nursed a bottle of water as we let the cool morning breeze dry our sweat. There is not much in this life that moves slower than the hand on a clock after you shoot an animal. We waited an hour and then got up and started to work out the blood. The trail was a good one light red blood and steady. Phillip and I moved slowly and methodically marking the blood as we went. After about 100 yards or so we saw a cow. Security had again busted us. And then as if in a movie the bull walked up onto a small basalt cliff and looked down at the two of us.

I was dumbfounded, and flat out confused. How was he still alive? We watched as he turned and walked right out of the



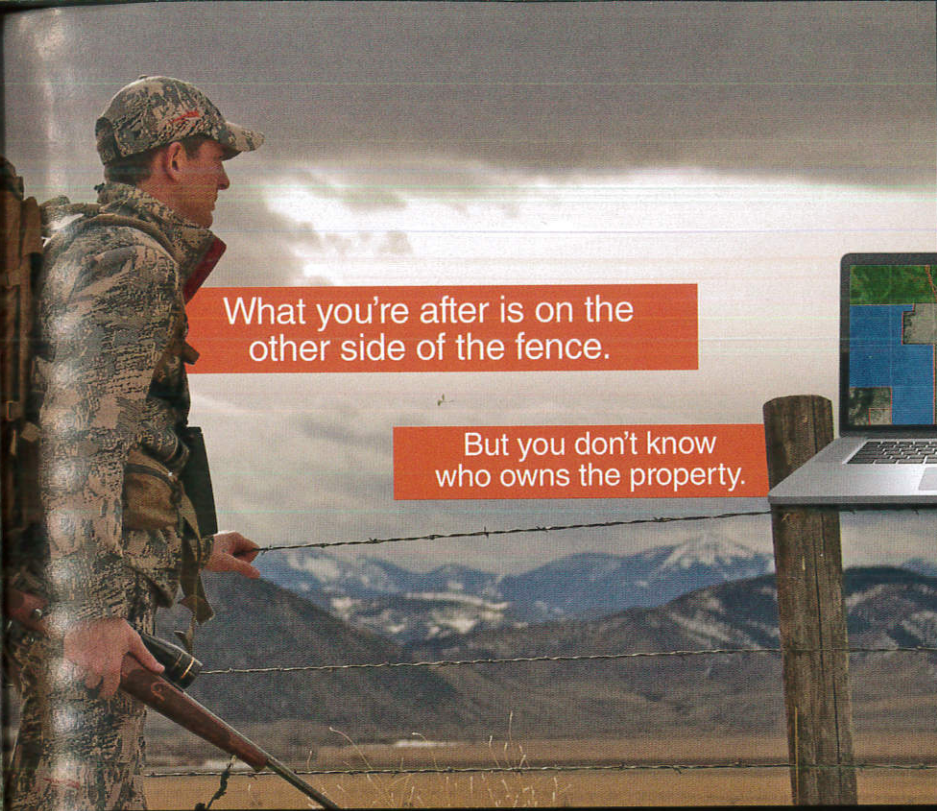
drainage and over the top where green meets blue. He left his security guards in place. Knowing that if we pushed the cows we would push the bull we waited them out and let them feed out of sight. It took us about another hour to make it through the willows and buck brush eventually ending up at the last place we had seen the bull. The hill we are on ran left to right and was steep as a cows face. We were traveling side hill through large saddles that ran down the hill. As we walked across the top in-between saddles I could see that the bull was not in what we were about to go through. I was absolutely confused. How was I not already holding this bulls rack in my hands?

We cleared to top of now our 2nd saddle and came to the top rolling over into the next. The sun was high now and the bright light made the blood hard to see on the red dirt. We had been seeing pools every so often and the blood still looked good. Good that is until it stopped. There on that open face hidden within the broken basalt there had to be another drop of blood but it was playing hide and seek and it was winning. We marked the last drop and tried in vain to find the rest of the trail. After half hour or so we sat down at the last blood and didn't say much. I could tell Phillip was seriously doubting my shot and judging by what we were seeing I began to as well.

Get up! It rang clear in my mind this was not going to happen. I could not accept that this was the end. I was going to find more blood and I was going to find my bull. In front of me was a large saddle full of pines and little to no underbrush. I told Phillip I was going through it and that I could not stop until I found more sign. I meticulously searched each trail leading down and while I did find several fresh elk tracks I had yet to find any blood. Down in the bottom I found a plethora of beds. This was definitely the after-hours party zone. I searched the beds looking for sign and found none. A large trail lay in front of me and to me seemed the only clear path to take. A long clearly blown over from some great past windstorm lay in the trail and as I crossed this casualty of the ancient war of storms and mountains I noticed a single drop of blood. 350 yards from my last drop and now I was looking



hornsandbooks.com



What you're after is on the other side of the fence.

But you don't know who owns the property.

# HUNT

BY ONXMAPS GIVES YOU INSTANT COLOR CODED LAND OWNERSHIP MAPS FOR:

GPS DEVICES

SMART DEVICES

COMPUTERS

➤ Determine public land type (including BLM, State, US Forest Service, State Wildlife Areas, Tribal Land, Walk in Access, CWMUs and more); find little-known seldom-hunted public land

➤ View PLAT data/private property boundaries; get landowner names so you can request access

➤ Identify big game unit boundaries, section lines/##s, roads & trails, lakes, rivers, streams, etc.

ONXMAPS  
**HUNT**  
HUNTINGGPSMAPS.COM

SCAN FOR A 7 DAY  
FREE APP TRIAL



at blood. My heart fluttered and I thanked god for helping me get back on track. Several cow calls brought Phillip back down to me and back to the scarlet trail to victory.

The blood was good. Good for what it was we had gone nearly a mile and the next saddle was deep and steep. There was water running in the bottoms and we could hear it clearly. A 40 foot basalt cliff lay just off to my right and Phillip suggested that I go stand watch while he made a little more headway on the blood. A short time later Phillip turned and walked up to meet me. He left a marker on the trail and said the blood was good. The bull was stopping every 30 yards or so and tennis ball sized pools of blood were on the trail. Decision time. The bull had gone over a mile and showed little sign of stopping until now. There was cover and water in this draw and that is what he must have been looking for. So, keep following the blood or pull out? Phillip and I are cautious men and have been up the creek a time or two. We knew that if we bumped this bull there was little or no chance that we would ever find him. The decision was made to leave him until morning and give him time to die.

The walk out was a grueling 2 miles the hardest being walking out of the drainage we were in as it was a 1000 foot elevation change in just over half a mile. Back at camp I wiped my face with a napkin and then finished the last of my sau-

sage. I found cell service and called in the cavalry. After several calls I had 6 good guys coming up the hill to meet up at first light. The rest of the evening was spent as usual prepping gear for the morning, shooting my bow, and cleaning up. I had been lucky to harvest a nice 4x5 whitetail buck a few days before and tonight seemed as good a night as any to eat the tenderloins. Phillip and I sat down with Jesse, who had just arrived to camp, and we all ate well.

My bed was comfortable and sleep came surprisingly fast. I did wake early after having a dream that I had bumped the bull and he ran across a meadow that went on forever and I watched as he ran out of sight. It was right then that I woke up. Not a good omen but I've never really been one to believe dreams.

The silver grey on my coffee pot matched that of the early morning sky. And the warmth from the Coleman stove was nice. Slowly the crew started trickling in and as the eastern clouds started to catch fire we were all ready. The crew was made up of good men. Nick, Jesse, Tim, Jordan, Jeremy, Mike, Phillip and myself. All proven hunters and all solid trackers.

The decent was fast but cautious. We moved right to the blue tape that marked the last known blood. It took only seconds to get back on the trail and moving single file just





to one side of the blood we began to follow it downhill. The trail was rough taking us over rock slides and through thick huckleberry patches. The blood at times was hard to detect but never for more than a minute or so. We had gone around 300 yards when the blood seemed to stop. Leading the pack I began to walk a circle about 10 yards down from the rest of the gang. I noticed a small bench with a bed near a little scrub pine. Blood! And lots of it. There was a pool about the size of a basketball and the ground was torn up and thrashed around. I looked back at the guys and waved them to me. After only one step I saw him. "He's right here Boy's!!!!" I called out and like I was running from a bear I started down the hill. I slid into home triumphant and proud and wrapped my hands around my trophy. What a trophy he was too. Everybody was around and we counted points 1, 2, 3..... 8x8. It was an 8x8! Thick dark beautiful horns accented by brilliant white tips and character for days. This was a moment 17 days, 20 pounds, and countless hours had all lead up to this moment and I was ecstatic. My first bull was down and he was a stud. There is no way to put to words the sense of pride I felt at that moment. It was just surreal.

My shot had been good but unlucky. The bull was slightly quartering towards me when I shot. One of the blades had hit the back side of the front leg causing my arrow to deflect and turned what would have been a great lung/liver shot into a solid liver shot. Archery is a game of inches and if my arrow would have been half an inch to the right it would have never deflected. I knew he was hit hard and patience and persistence paid off. You owe it to the animal to make the BEST effort you can to recover them. It's a big responsibility when you make the

decision to kill something and you better be ready to take that on before you do.

The work went as it had with elk before. Each one of us getting right to work cutting and filling packs. Nick, who is a graduate of taxidermy school, jumped in and began to cape him. The others cut quarters and boned them out. Soon all 8 of us had packs on our backs. Phillip continually informing us he was the "old man" took the first pack and got a head start on us all. Old man...Ha! He could walk circles around most 20 year olds I know. The accent was tough, crawling in places and fighting windblown trees in others. The 2.1 miles that was to be covered to get to the truck was no Sunday stroll. My muscles burned as I climbed but the euphoria was still with me and it carried me up that hill as if somebody on cloud 9 threw me a rope and dragged me up. Each of my friends cussed me for making them work so hard but they did it with a smile and I knew they all were happy to be there. At the truck a cooler full of ice cold beer waited and in all my life a beer has never been as good as that one was.

My season was over. Jesse cooked us all a good breakfast. Camp was packed and soon I was on the way off the mountain and back to my life. I had a beautiful, understanding, and patient wife waiting with two beautiful little girls who missed their daddy. I pulled into the yard victorious. I was home, I had succeeded, and I was surrounded by those I care most about. There are those moments, though they are few and far between, where I sometimes feel that heaven is on earth.