

## Deer 2021 September, New Mexico

### 1 Corinthians 9:24

**“Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it.”**



“I’d rather be lucky than good.” This is a common phrase among many hunters. I’ve always thought it sounds trite and it’s typically tossed around by those who wish for something to fall into their laps without putting out much effort. I suspect some of my acquaintances think I’m just lucky when it comes to hunting. But I’d rather be good than lucky any day. Luck is fickle, luck is random, and luck is unreliable. And believing in luck attempts to remove God from the equation. He spins the entire universe; nothing happens without Him allowing and orchestrating it. Although sometimes we may not understand it, He’s in control. All the time. Like many verses in the Bible, 1 Corinthians 9:24 has more than just one meaning. The most obvious is to run or compete or live one’s life with intention, in order to receive the prize of heaven. But the verse also relates to more mundane activities. Do everything with intention; don’t just float along at work, with your family, or when hunting. Lots of people “hunt”, but there’s a huge difference between the actions of the weekend warriors or road hunters and those of us who prepare diligently and passionately. And the corresponding results typically aren’t a matter of “luck”.

For the past few years Brian and I have been hunting together and rapidly building a track record of successes. We don’t count on luck. Instead, we diligently plan, discuss, study, scheme, scout, hike, prepare and work toward a common goal. It’s all for one and one for all: my success is Brian’s, and Brian’s is mine.

At face value our fall deer season may sound brief and “lucky”; however, the back story is Brian invested hours, days and weeks exploring, scouting, and glassing to narrow down several likely areas for our hunt. I joined Brian a couple times as my schedule permitted and when September rolled around, we had a solid game plan, plus a backup plan...and a backup-backup plan.

Opening morning found us on a knoll ready to glass the opposite hill for a group of bachelor bucks Brian had identified as our priority. As the dawn broke Brian picked out the faint shape of a deer, but in the low light neither of us could discern whether it had antlers. We kept tabs on it as we continued to scan the surrounding slope, but eventually confirmed it to be a doe, plus a yearling doe that materialized nearby.

Soon I picked out a buck, and it was a good one! We watched it feed in oak brush, which had produced a bumper crop of acorns this year. We would be visible for any approach,

so kept our optics glued to the buck with the intent of watching until he bedded for the morning and then making a stalk. However, the buck slowly meandered up a small ridge and began to disappear over the top. When we lost sight of his antlers above the skyline Brian suggested we hustle over and try to relocate him while he was still up and moving before he bedded and became a lot more difficult to find.

We shouldered our packs and quickly made our way to a boulder and dead tree we had identified as landmarks. I told Brian since he had put in the lion's share of scouting, he should be the designated shooter, so he took the lead as we crept forward.

Suddenly I spotted antlers moving above the brush, and they were close! I quickly ranged the distance at a tad over 50-yards. Thick brush precluded any shot, but also kept us hidden. Brian nocked an arrow and we eased forward, searching for a shooting lane. The buck began to angle downhill toward us, and Brian drew his bow as I prepared to range the distance when he stepped into view. "43-yards," I whispered.

Whoosh...thud. The buck lurched into the brush. "Dead buck," I whispered excitedly. "What? No, I missed. I was too excited and think I aimed for 50-yards" Brian lamented. "You didn't miss, I saw the arrow pass through him right where it should, trust me, he's dead on his feet," I reiterated. Brian refused to get his hopes up too high, but I was certain he'd just killed a whopper!

We used binoculars to observe the buck's antlers, barely visible through the brush. They swayed and the buck bedded. Brian worried about his shot and felt he should attempt to get another arrow into the deer. I suggested he stay ready, but that we just sit tight for a few minutes. Suddenly the buck lurched to his feet, stumbled a few yards downhill, and then face planted with legs kicking in the air. "He's down for good," I proclaimed. We waited a few more minutes before slipping closer to confirm he had expired.

Brian was in shock. "Did that just happen?" Indeed, it had. Brian had killed a monster buck, his biggest to date, and in fact the largest one he had laid eyes on while scouting. And by 7am on opening day! Praise God for quick success! Our planning and preparation had all been worth it.



A tremendous buck!

The buck was thoroughly entangled in thick brush and the best nearby location for photos and butchering was uphill about 30-yards. We heaved but could barely move the beast and settled for a mediocre spot about 10-yards horizontally and made the best of it. Butchering went smoothly and we split the meat and carried it out in one trip.

We spent midday putting the meat on ice and discussed my options for the afternoon and evening. Without enough time to move to any different areas it made the most sense to stay in the same vicinity and then move elsewhere the following day, so we shouldered our packs and headed out to glass again. Rain clouds loomed as the remnants of hurricane Ida swirled throughout New Mexico. A few years ago, Brian recommended leaving rain gear at camp and we got dumped on, including hail, so since that episode our standing joke whenever the chance of rain is in the forecast is “No need to pack raingear.” Overcast skies provided a comfortable temperature and good conditions for glassing.

We each sat on opposite sides of a ridge to maximize the area we could scan. Within an hour of sitting behind our binoculars sporadic raindrops began to fall and we were thankful for the raingear stashed in our packs. Brian spotted only does and one small legal fork-antlered buck. I didn't see anything for quite some time until I spied a doe tucked low in a steep-sided ravine, followed by a dandy buck! I whistled to Brian and studied the surrounding bushes. By the time Brian reached me I had picked out another nice buck also feeding on acorns in the ravine. The brush was so thick we suspected there were other deer in the group.

The rain began to build in earnest, and we donned raincoats and pants, and covered our binocular lenses. We had an easy route to approach to about 200-yards directly across the main canyon from the ravine the deer were holed up in. By the time we reached that

point the rain was coming down in sheets and the wind had whipped up. The good news was we located a total of 5 nice bucks plus the lone doe, all grouped tightly below some tall brush.

Brian felt he could best assist me by sitting at that location and keeping an eye on things while I stalked. I'd be able to see him during the bulk of my approach and he promised to signal if the deer moved. Given the pouring rain and their relatively protected location, we hoped they would hang tight for a while. Brian cinched his hood and wished me well before I backtracked to a ravine on our side of the drainage that would serve as a way for me to reach the bottom of the valley while out of view from the herd.

The downpour overpowered all sound and scent, and the wind shook the vegetation, which allowed me to just charge downhill without a care. Once at the bottom of the drainage my initial plan was to follow it to the ravine in which the deer were tucked, and then creep up it to get within range. However, as I followed the drainage, I realized I would be exposed and also encountered a bunch of deadfall while yet far out of range. I backed off and reassessed. My only other option was to ascend the opposite slope in hopes of being able to shoot across the ravine.

The rain continued to pound me as I scrambled uphill through the tangle of brush and over occasional deadfall. When I reached the elevation of the herd, I ranged the distance at over 100-yards. They were all standing together, seemingly resigned to waiting out the downpour. I did my best to remain hidden throughout my final stalk and hoped the storm overloaded their senses. Once I reached 80-yards I began to believe my chances actually possible. At 60-yards I reached a rock outcrop, which allowed me to easily steal another 10-yards. From then on it was only a matter of moving slowly and shaving off whatever additional distance I could.

I had studied the deer and the biggest buck was quartering toward me, while the other 4 bucks were standing broadside. The doe had disappeared. I angled toward them to get a broadside shot on the larger one and took a final range reading of 43-yards, "coincidentally" the exact distance of Brian's shot earlier that morning.

I drew, focused, and released. The big buck lurched downhill, obviously hit hard. I quickly ranged him at 31-yards and put an insurance arrow through him as he stood. His legs grew weak, and he nosedived under a fallen log. Yes! I could hear Brian's victory whoop from across the canyon despite the beating rain. I was in shock that another stalk had succeeded with ease. The remaining bucks alternately stared toward their fallen leader and me as if wondering what had just happened. I relished the moment and snapped a few photos. Indeed, we would be butchering and packing out another deer this day!



The remaining bucks acted confused before slowly meandering away



My buck as he had fallen



I was in awe to be blessed with a huge buck of the caliber Brian had taken!

By the time Brian arrived the storm had diminished to a drizzle and we were grateful when the rain ceased altogether, allowing us to take photos and butcher sans raingear. We made short work of the activities, loaded our backpacks, fired up our headlamps and floated back to camp on cloud nine. We put the second batch of meat in another cooler, ate a hot meal and hit the sack. As I snuggled into my sleeping bag, I couldn't help but reflect on God's blessing! No matter your endeavor, "run" with your eye on the prize and a goal to obtain it!



My biggest buck to date!



Prepare! Don't rely on "luck"!