

Be Careful What You Wish For

Arizona's desert proves it's both
dangerous and heavenly

MARK MANNING • ARIZONA • 2008 • GUIDED • PUBLIC LAND

Don't shoot the small one. Do not shoot the small one. This advice rang through my head as I prepared for a shot at the deer of a lifetime. It was the Coues' deer I had dreamed about for years, and now was not the time to shoot the small one. The small one was a deer that anyone would consider a trophy, but the big one - well, he was in a class all his own...

Time and maturity gives opportunity to modify our dreams. For me, the dream of finding and taking a 100-inch Coues' deer became a goal. It wasn't going to just happen by itself; it was going to require some extra work on my part. Knowing the "Ghost of the Southwest" is one of the most elusive animals in the desert, my preparation needed to include more intensive physical conditioning, time and rounds at the rifle range, and finding the best outfitter for the area. Then, of course,

it's just a small matter of waiting to draw a tag for one of these areas that holds big bucks.

This year it all came together with a tag in the borderland area of southern Arizona. I chose Rincon Outfitters to help me with my quest. Rom Dryden, the owner and a good friend, hooked me up with Jimmy Seay, one of his best guides. At 20-something, Jimmy can out-climb a mountain goat and knows his Coues' deer. At 60, I had no hope of keeping up, but my spirit was willing.

The country we hunted was classic Sonoran Desert, with plenty of cactus, loose rock, and plenty of steep hills to give your back and legs a workout. The desert includes an eclectic collection of ironwood and Palo Verde trees and a wide variety of cacti like the saguaro, yucca, prickly pear, lechaguilla and barrel cactus.

Hiking in this country is much like having something biting at your ankles at

every step while walking on marbles. In spite of the wild temperature swings from over 100 degrees to below freezing, it's home to a wide variety of animals including lizards, rabbits, mice, snakes, and an unprecedented array of birds. However, the prize of this desert is the Coues' deer.

Getting to camp was a four-wheel-drive adventure that ended in an hour-long trail ride on ATVs - and I use the term "trail" loosely. There is a good reason that big deer live here; you can't get to them without going the extra mile, or in this case, the extra ten or so miles.

The first day progressed with several deer sightings - most of them small bucks and does. We found one good buck late in the afternoon, but light faded quickly and forced us back to camp. The bright red and orange sunset was worth the effort it took to get there.

After a good night's sleep under a Southwestern star-filled sky, it was time to hike,



Mark's equipment: Rifle: Browning .270 WSM Scope: Leupold VX-III 4.5-14x40 Ammo: Federal Premium Binoculars: Cabela's Euro 10x42 Boots: Danner Camera: Sony Shooting sticks: Harris BI-Pod
About the author: Mark and his wife, Fay, live in Mesa, Arizona. They have three children and nine grandchildren. Mark is a marketing manager for a manufacturing company in Chandler, Arizona.
Mark will receive a BOGgear TAC3 Bog-Pod for his story. For details, see p. 4.

BOG-POD

glass, climb, glass, and then do it one more time. On more than one occasion, Jimmy would perk up and point to an area in the far-off distance and talk about a deer being on a hillside or several deer walking down a canyon.

"Just look under the Palo Verde; the one about a mile or so away." Most of the time I would nod and answer, but honestly, I couldn't see anything but rocks and cactus.

On the second day, around mid-morning, we found a great spot to glass from atop a mountain. We were inspecting the canyon and mountain across from us when Jimmy's look and stature changed noticeably. He then said, "I've found your monster."

This buck was a mile and a half away and fighting with a smaller buck, and according to Jimmy, was tossing him around like a rag doll. "It's time to go...now, while he's still busy."

It took us more than 30 minutes of hard hiking to reach a steep drop into a large box canyon like you'd see in an old western movie.

Our buck was milling around with several does and smaller bucks just over 250 yards down into the canyon. As we looked in awe at the size of this buck, all I could hear from Jimmy was, "Do not shoot the smaller one."

Trying to set up my shot and calm the

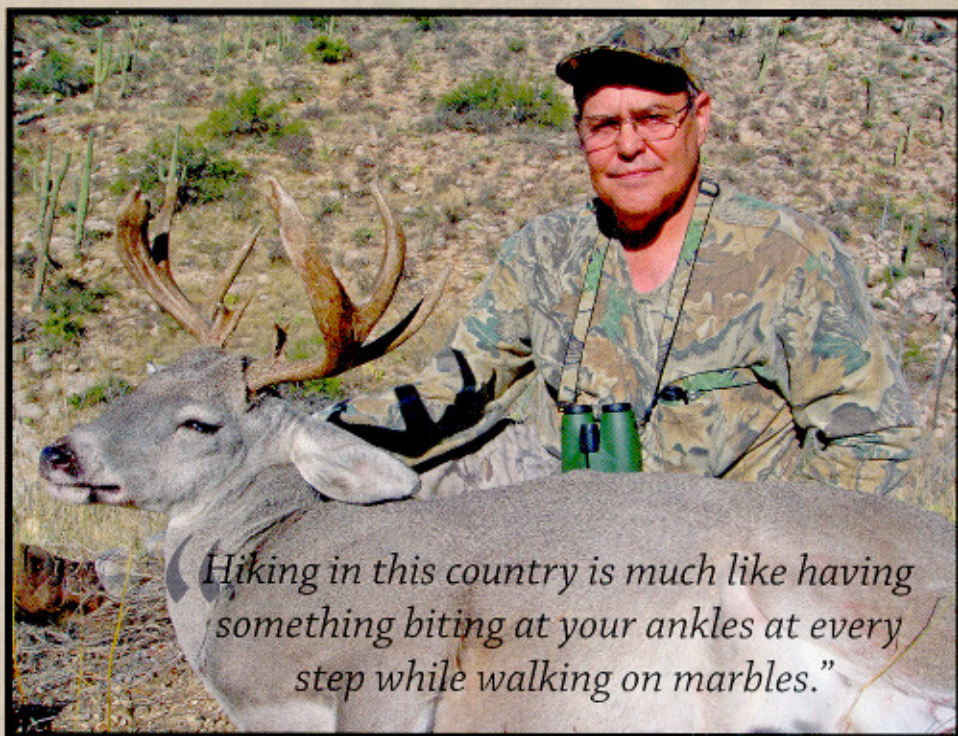
adrenaline rush, his words kept replaying. A squeeze on the trigger and a single AccuBond bullet put him down on the spot. Then I heard, "You have no idea what you just did! Now the real fun begins."

It was more than 30 minutes before we got to where he had fallen, and the sight was beyond expectation - much bigger than I had expected. The adrenaline rush hit me again

from the excitement of looking at the largest Coues' deer either of us had ever seen on the ground (and Jimmy had harvested a 111-inch Coues' himself last year). He assured me this one was much larger than his.

It took over three hours to pack the deer out of the canyon and get back to camp, stopping to rest now and then and admire this beautiful animal. We kept saying that the buck actually grew every time we stopped.

My massive Coues' deer managed to make the all-time B&C record book with a net score of 111-4/8. I will be forever grateful for this hunt and for good times spent with good friends.



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Mark's super-heavy buck is any Coues' deer hunter's dream. It makes the all-time B&C minimum with a score of 111-4/8.

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