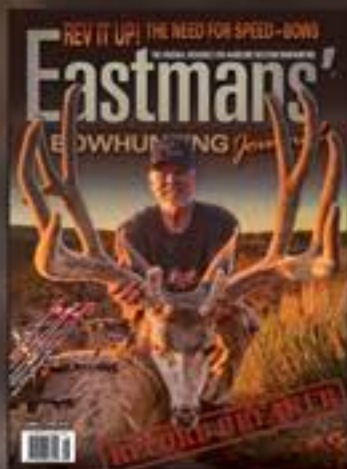



JOHN MCCLENDON - AZ - GD - PL

# Record BETTER



COVER STORY





**L**ast year I was guiding mule deer on the Arizona Strip for my son Travis and his partner David Pereda with Arizona Strip Guides. I had my client Henry on a huge non-typical muley we dubbed "Wally." Henry had a couple shots at Wally but just couldn't close the deal. We were both disappointed, but toward the end of the hunt he was able to connect on a very nice 4-point.

My disappointment on that hunt turned into joy when I was notified in 2014 that I drew the same coveted archery mule deer tag. The first thought that came to mind was, "Yes! I'll have a chance to hunt Wally!"

I figured the hunt was going to be a spot and stalk hunt so I geared up accordingly. I did a lot of shooting and became amazingly accurate. I did my homework before the season and knew right where Wally would be hanging out opening morning.

bucks to hunt, so it was time to cowboy up and move on. My son, Travis, had another whopping 210" typical buck located, so we regrouped and got ready for round two.

Travis and Mark Young would get into position to glass for the buck and I would move into position before daylight to try and catch him before he entered the thick trees. The first two mornings I got close to the buck but not quite close enough for a shot. He would beat me to the heavy tree line then disappear into his sanctuary. The third and fourth morning he didn't show up at all so I switched gears and decided to hunt a buck we called Bert.

Travis, along with one of his guides, Josh Corbin, had been watching Bert for the past three years. They had trail cam pictures of him from 2012, 2013 and 2014. Josh and his wife spent a lot of time on the Strip looking for sheds, setting up and checking trail cams and consistently saw two bucks hanging out together, so Josh's wife Britiani decided to name them Bert and Ernie.

It's amazing how much bone a Strip deer can put on in just a year. Ernie had also grown quite a bit, but not as much as Bert. These bucks lived on a plateau thicker than dog's hair. The only chance

to harvest this awesome typical buck would be to sit over water. There was some rain prior to opening day but fortunately it was starting to dry out.

For the first four days he never showed up to water. As the potholes were drying up and water was becoming more scarce, we saw that Bert and Ernie watered the fifth night and every other night thereafter. My only chance was for Bert to make a mistake and water during daylight hours.

Travis had two days with me before having to journey back home for his daughter's birthday. On the 13th day of my hunt, Travis sat with me but Bert was nowhere to be found. We headed out early the next morning with great anticipation that this would be the day Bert would show up.

We were in the blind well before daylight and after sitting for five hours it was getting late and I was getting restless. I figured the deer were probably bedded by now and the window of opportunity was shrinking fast. There was a small rise about 50 yards beyond the water. Although the deer would come in from different angles, I started looking at the rise, just hoping and praying they would show up. Roughly 15 minutes later, to my surprise, I could see the tips of antlers and my heart started beating

Sure enough, just as the sun was cresting the horizon, I found him. He was running with seven other beautiful bucks – what a sight to see!

Wally was bringing up the rear as the deer were heading to their beds. I knew I had to get a move on, so I got the wind right and started for their bedding area to prepare for an ambush. Everything seemed perfect. I thought this was going to be it. I was going to hammer Wally opening morning!

Boy, was I wrong. To my surprise and disappointment, another hunter had spotted this magnificent herd of bucks and arrowed Wally seconds before I had my chance. My heart sank and my hopes of harvesting this monster non-typical buck were shattered instantly. I was quickly reminded of the same distraught feelings from 2013.

Fortunately, when you're hunting on the Strip, there are several monster



fast. I nudged Travis, who was sitting behind me to set up to film an over the shoulder shot.

The majestic buck continued up the rise and the more he did the more antler I could see. Finally, I could see a giant rack with a 4" kicker on the right antler between the G2 and G3. At that moment I knew it was Bert.

Drooling over Bert's massive rack wasn't going to help with my shot, so I focused my eyes on the lower half of his body and watched him step by step as he cautiously approached the water. Once he reached the water I waited until he put his head down and started drinking. This was the time to draw my bow and pick an imaginary red dot behind his front leg. I knew this was it – this was the time all the practice, patience, perseverance and experience would pay off.

I took a deep breath, honed in on the imaginary spot, then released the arrow. Bert jumped and whirled from the hit and ran into the thick cover. I couldn't believe what had just taken place. I was ecstatic and so was Travis. I had just arrowed the biggest deer of my life and my emotions were all over the board. The arrow flight was so fast I couldn't see where I hit but the release felt good and it sounded like a good hit. I asked Travis if he could see the hit and he said no, so we reviewed the video and it looked like Bert had jumped the

string and my hit was a tad back.

After remaining in the blind for a while, we ventured out. Once we got out we started following the tracks, but there was no blood to be found. Our excitement quickly turned into concern.

Travis found the arrow about 30 yards from the shot and we could see it had dark red blood on it. Within 75 yards we jumped him from his bed. We decided to give him some time before taking up his trail again.

During the break in action we went back to camp and picked up Mark and brought him up to speed. We took Mark with us to film the tracking and hopefully the post kill. We followed Bert's tracks across a big flat with still very little blood. After crossing the flat, Bert started to head downhill. As he traveled downhill, the internal blood moved forward and began dripping out onto the ground, making our pursuit much easier and giving me a glimpse of hope. I had a feeling he was close, so I nocked an arrow and was ready to shoot. I told Travis to stay on the blood trail and I would look ahead.

After covering another 75 yards Travis let out a war whoop and shouted, "Dan, you killed a monster!"

Talk about an emotional roller-coaster! I was instantly elated and beside myself. The three of us were so excited and full of emotion. This whole scenar-

io seemed like a dream come true. We paused for a minute and said a short prayer and gave God the glory for allowing me to harvest such a majestic animal.

In my 55 years of hunting and nearly 40 years of guiding this was the highlight of my hunting/guiding career. Just to think how blessed I am to harvest a world-class deer and for my son to be with me filming the shot - it was just such a blessing, I couldn't ask for anything more.

We knew we had a monster and wanted to put a tape on him right away. We quickly scored him and figured Bert would score in the top five in the world! I've pursued this type of animal my entire hunting career and can tell you, it's an amazing feeling to harvest such an outstanding animal. I am so blessed!

Currently the world record scores 205 0/8 and was harvested in Mexico. I recently had Bert panel scored for Bowhunting in Arizona's record book. After the 60-day drying period and stripping his velvet he scored 207 5/8.



*Editor's Note: John's bucks rank is currently in limbo. It could be a new P&Y world record. I spoke with John last week and his buck's final score is pending the result of a P&Y board meeting. We will let you know the final result as soon as it becomes official. - Daniel Turvey, Jr.*

#### John's Equipment:

Bow: Mathews EZ7  
Arrows: Carbon Express Maxima  
Broadheads: Shuttle T  
Sight: Black Gold Ascent  
Rest: Whisker Bisquit  
Release: Rhino XT  
Binoculars: Swarovski 10x42  
Clothing: Realtree MAX-1  
Boots: Browning  
Rangefinder: Bushnell  
Knife: Havalon  
GPS: Garmin Vista

#### Outfitter Info:

Arizona Strip Guides  
[www.arizonastripguides.com](http://www.arizonastripguides.com)  
1-928-300-6755

#### About the Author:

John is a lifelong hunter with a passion and dedication to chasing trophy big game in Arizona. He has harvested three state record book animals with a bow.

Gear Giveaway see pg. 4



We make it visible.

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the hunt on

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SUBSCRIBE to the Eastman's channel for exclusives and news!

