

Best of Eight

 **Kansas bowhunter's eighth record book deer, his best yet, wasn't afraid to come into the light.**

By Dennis Dahlke

I am very fortunate to own property where the neighbors share my desire to harvest only mature bucks. The practice is obviously working, since a dozen great whitetails were taken within a 2-mile radius of my 160 acres last year.

At least three shooters roamed my land in 2015, and I was fortunate to arrow one of the most shy.

I retrieved only a few trail camera photographs of the buck I wound up taking, and most of those were a year old — from the second rut in late

December 2014. This deer managed to steer clear of cameras before then, and it didn't step back in front of a lens until Oct. 25, 2015.

It had grown considerably.

Within five days of its sudden reappearance, the buck was consistently showing up in the mornings and a few times at night. I decided to hunt that spot for the first time on Nov. 1. The deer had passed through there several times as late as 10:30 a.m.

I was in my stand long before daybreak, prepared to stay aloft until 11:00. The morning got off to a slow start. I saw only two does and a spike by 9:30. At 10:00, however, the buck came in downwind of me, very relaxed and browsing.

When I first saw the deer, I was a basket case. But I had time to calm down and to turn on my camera.

BTR SCORESHEET

TAKEN BY: DENNIS DAHLKE

DATE: 11/1/15

PLACE: LINN CO., KS

HARVESTED WITH: COMPOUND BOW

ANTLER CLASSIFICATION: TYPICAL

SCORER(S): JERRY D. SMITH

TROPHY MEASUREMENT DATA

	RIGHT	LEFT
TOTAL POINTS PER ANTLER	7	6
NO. OF IRREGULAR POINTS	2	1
TOTAL IRREGULAR INCHES	3 1/8	1 1/8
LENGTH OF MAIN BEAMS	27 2/8	27 4/8
LENGTH OF 1ST POINT	6 7/8	6 5/8
LENGTH OF 2ND POINT	9 4/8	10 5/8
LENGTH OF 3RD POINT	10 7/8	10 6/8
LENGTH OF 4TH POINT	8 4/8	5 1/8
LENGTH OF 5TH POINT	-	-
LENGTH OF 6TH POINT	-	-
LENGTH OF 7TH POINT	-	-
1ST CIRCUMFERENCE (C1)	5 6/8	5 5/8
2ND CIRCUMFERENCE (C2)	5	4 7/8
3RD CIRCUMFERENCE (C3)	5 4/8	4 4/8
4TH CIRCUMFERENCE (C4)	4	4 3/8
SCORE PER SIDE	86 3/8	81 1/8
INSIDE SPREAD	19 6/8	
PERCENTAGE OF IRREGULARITY	2.5	

OFFICIAL SCORE 167 4/8

COMPOSITE SCORE 187 2/8
(INCLUDES INSIDE SPREAD)

187 2/8
BTR COMPOSITE
Kansas

The buck was soon at 23 yards, and I shot it when it finally turned broadside.

I originally felt the shot was great, but when I reviewed the footage, I was surprised to see I'd hit the deer high and back. I was relieved when I checked the bloody arrow 45 minutes later and smelled no odor.

Even so, I left the scene and went to show the footage to my hunting partner, Joe. By freezing frames, we deduced the arrow hit the liver and at least the far if not both lungs. We decided to wait seven hours before taking up the trail.

After looking hard and finding only one drop of blood, Joe and I had to

start all over again. The second time, I discovered a blood trail that lasted about 30 yards. While I followed it, Joe checked out a thick spot we'd missed.

When Joe returned, he said, "I think I saw your buck walking into the overgrown pasture," which covers 30 acres. Rather than pursue it, we stopped and made plans to return about 11:00 the next morning.

There was no sign of the deer, however.

Not knowing if the buck was dead or alive, I decided to wait a few more days and to monitor my cameras to see if it would show. I also

called two neighbors, just in case they ran across the deer.

I didn't get any photographs of the buck, and nobody reported seeing it.

On Saturday, Nov. 7, Joe and I checked some new ground. We split up, and I went toward a pond.

When I saw some crows flying up from the ground, I waited for Joe to join me, and then we headed for the crows. The buck — or what remained after the coyotes and other scavengers had had their fill — was lying in a creek bed, next to the water.

I will never know if the buck Joe saw walking was this one, or if it traveled

(Continued)



Dennis Dahlke of Bonner Springs, Kansas, would rather go home empty-handed than affix his tag to an adolescent buck, which is why he's been able to paper his wall with record book certificates. This is his eighth book deer.



This 13-pointer was the shyest of three whitetails Dennis was targeting in 2015. He arrowed it the first time he hunted the animal's favorite path.

straight to where we found it.

I called my neighbor, David, and left a message that I'd found my buck. Joe also sent him a picture. David texted back and said: Shucks. That's the buck I was going to hunt tomorrow morning.

He had just come in from out of town.

Turns out, David had a history with this whitetail. He'd hunted it in 2013 and 2014, and he had its sheds.

He came over, and we traded sheds. I got the ones worn by my deer, which looked to have grown about 20 inches a year.

He took home two sets of sheds from a 9-year-old buck we called Buckwinkle. We had both hunted Buckwinkle in the past, and he was last seen on David's property.

All the time and anxiety spent looking for my deer would have been avoided if I'd concentrated more on where to put my arrow. But this is my largest, and I feel blessed. ♦

Editor's Note: This is Dennis Dahlke's eighth and largest buck (by composite score) to qualify for the BTR. One appeared previously in Rack, and another was featured in Buckmasters Whitetail Magazine.

Hot Off the Press!

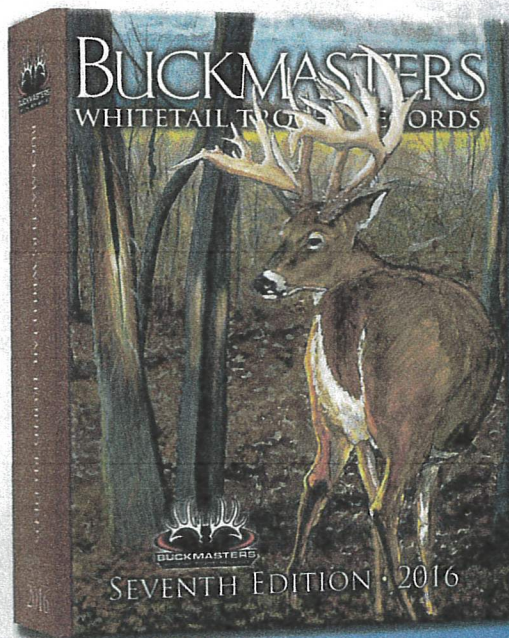
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HOME ON THE RANGE

BY DENNIS L. DAHLKE

This hunt began three years ago in east-central Kansas. It was late September as I lay on a pond dam glassing an oak ridge. At just about sundown, I spotted a mature buck looking my way. I put out a trail camera but failed to get any shooter bucks on it.

The next year, in 2010, I got pictures of an 11-pointer that I began to hunt in early October. I had numerous photos of him at different locations, but failed to see him until mid-November, when he presented a 20-yard shot. By then, he had broken off his P1 and P2, so I let him walk. I found one shed of his sheds in the

same area in early February, so I knew he hadn't been taken by another hunter.

I started working on that buck in early July of last year. I put out mineral blocks, protein pellets and cameras in five different locations. I began getting pictures of a shooter buck at three of them.

First I thought it was a different buck. But after comparing photos and the shed, I realized it was the same deer, but with six additional points.

Since I was getting photos of him on three cameras, I thought it would be easy to take him. I began bowhunting in September and made sure to hunt during

every cold front, always with the right wind. He was showing up two or three times a week at any of the three locations, most often during shooting light, both mornings and evenings.

My favorite setup was best with a north wind. I had hunted it many times, yet by mid-October I still hadn't seen the buck. It was like he could read my mind and knew not to show up when I was going to be there.

The weatherman predicted a north wind again on Nov. 3, so I headed back to my favorite stand.

I started thinking



Despite being shot at twice, this mature buck refused to leave his core area.

PHOTO COURTESY OF DENNIS L. DAHLKE

HOME ON THE RANGE

about leaving at about 6 p.m. I would have done so, but the does were feeding on acorns below me, and I didn't want to spook them.

I continued to watch them and noticed they kept looking back to the edge of the field. I looked that way and saw the 17-pointer working a scrape.

It was an anxious time, waiting to see if the buck would come into bow range before shooting light ran out. But it wasn't long before he made his way into one of my shooting lanes.

I placed my pin just behind his shoulder and let go. When the buck ran off, I noticed the arrow flopping high from his opposite side. I decided to wait until morning to look for him.

It was a long night, and I couldn't help wondering why I had shot so high.

The next morning, I decided to shoot my bow before heading out after the buck. I discovered a bit of rust on my quiver bracket was causing a creaking noise when I shot.

I filmed the hunt, and after examining the video in slow motion, I realized the arrow went where it was supposed to, but the buck dropped about 10 inches before it hit.

Based on the video and the lack of a

blood trail, I concluded the buck was not fatally hit — and that I had blown a perfect opportunity on an awesome buck.

My melancholy didn't last long, however. Upon checking my trail cameras at about 11 a.m., imagine my surprise to see he had been at spot number two at 8:10 and 8:40 that very morning.

After several more hunts, I hadn't seen him or got any photos at my favorite spot where I had taken the shot. He continued to show up at the other two, and he seemed no worse for wear.

The buck was back to his mind-reading ways and never showed up while I hunted my two other setups, so I figured it was time to change things up. I opted to hunt a fourth location I hadn't visited since early October.

On Nov. 11, at about 6 a.m., he appeared right in front of me like a ghost. I didn't see him coming in; he was just there.

I turned on the camera and waited until he got nearly broadside. As I drew my bow, he turned and looked right at me. I got buck fever like never before and pulled the shot high right, missing completely.

The buck ran into the valley below me and snorted as if to say, "That's twice

that you blew it!"

I was totally beaten and left with zero confidence. I began to question everything about my hunt preparations and decided there would be no more coffee before a hunt. I also practiced, working on concentrating and on creating a slow, step-by-step progression into a slow trigger pull. I also decided I needed a new stand setup near location number two. I spent two hours after a morning hunt setting up a new stand.

The next day, my hunting partner, Joe, started getting his first photos of the buck. It was much earlier than Joe had gotten pictures the year before, and I think the buck moved because I had dirtied up the area setting up the new treestand, not to mention shooting at him twice.

I decided to try the new stand on the morning of Nov. 18. It had been about six days since I set it up, so I thought things might have settled down.

The best movement in that area seems to be between 7:15 and 8:45 a.m. Starting about the usual time, I saw a 1½-year-old buck, three does and a dozen turkeys, but it was pretty dead by 8:30.

Then, about 40 yards through the tree limbs, a mature buck walked into view, stopped and stared toward my stand.

Don't move! Game On! I thought.

Dennis Dahlke knew he had something special when this buck began showing up on his trail cameras in 2011. The buck had added 6 points and lots of inches since 2010.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF DENNIS DAHLKE

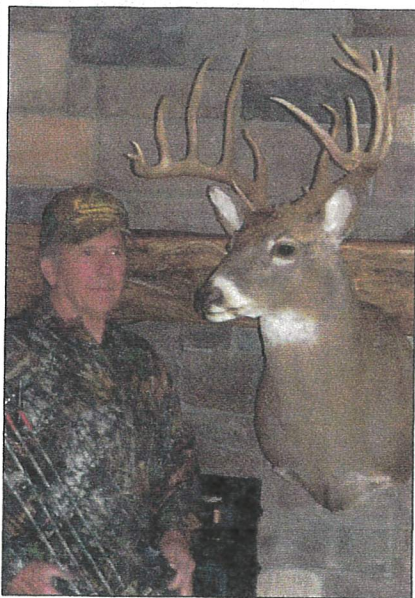


PHOTO COURTESY OF DENNIS L. DAHLKE

Dennis Dahlke says he believes he was hunting this 17-pointer's core area, which is why he got several chances at it.

Several minutes later, he moved 10 yards closer, still staring at me. Minutes passed, and the buck turned and went north and out of sight. I couldn't tell if it was the 17-pointer because of the brush,

but it was a shooter all right.

That evening, I set up a ground blind near spot number three along a trail the buck used only occasionally. I figured if he was being extra cautious, the buck might start using some of the less-worn trails.

Not long after settling into the blind, a doe walked by with the 17-pointer in tow. Although the video camera was on the correct shooting lane, I opted not to fool with turning it on. I needed to concentrate on the shot and stay calm.

This time, everything went as it should and my arrow zipped through both lungs and exited the far side!

Four hours later, Joe, who had left a note that he had gone home, returned to help track the buck through the cedar thicket.

I let Joe take up the trail while I followed with the video camera, dropping pieces of toilet paper on each spot of blood.

After about 60 yards, we found the buck. He was huge, and I was thrilled to see he hadn't broken any tines.

I don't think many people get three

chances at the same buck.

I am very fortunate and realize how blessed I am to have experienced such an amazing turn of events.

Looking back on all the clues, I believe I was hunting the buck's core area, which is why I got so many chances.

My neighbor had a few nighttime photos of the buck, and Joe had only two or three. Also, 98 percent of my photos were in the daytime. Plus, even with all the pressure I put on him, he remained in the same general vicinity.

Every day and every hunt is a learning experience. I won't likely encounter another mature buck that uses a 40-acre area so exclusively, but if every buck was the same, hunting wouldn't be so fun.

I will continue to put out cameras and mineral blocks on the 320 acres I hunt and try to go head to head with another mature buck. Whether I get him or not, I win every time.

Editor's note: Dennis had his buck measured for the *Buckmasters Trophy Records* book, and its composite score, which includes spread, was 180 $\frac{1}{8}$ inches.

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182^{7/8}
BTR COMPOSITE
Kansas

 **Don't be too quick to judge a buck from a photo.**
By Mike Handley

Dennis Dahlke would rather go home empty-handed than affix his tag to an adolescent buck, which is why he's been able to paper his wall with record book certificates.

Because he knows the bucks he hunts in Kansas routinely pack on another 20 or more inches of antler a year, especially after they've reached 4 years of age, the man from Bonner Springs passes up deer that would make other bowhunters drool.

Today's 160-incher can be next year's 180, he reasons. And his neighbor feels the same way.

Dennis often knows and sometimes

nicknames the bucks roaming his land. He and the adjacent landowner run trail cameras. He also plants food plots, walks the perimeter in search of buck sign in the fall, and he scours the property for shed antlers in the spring.

His resolve paid off in 2011 with a 17-pointer, which he might never have taken if he hadn't allowed a very handsome 12-pointer to keep on trucking. The neighbor shot the 6x6, which scored in the 170s, the following year.

Of course, that same resolve meant Dennis didn't notch his tags in 2012 and 2013. But his dry spell

ended last year when he reconsidered a deer after examining the footage of it he'd filmed the previous day.

He knew the buck before that, too.

Dennis retrieved trail cam photos of a 12-pointer in the summer of 2013. The following November, he videoed it rubbing trees, making a scrape and challenging a long-beamed 8-pointer. By the time he collected photos of the buck in hard antler, it had broken off one of its P4s and both brow tines.

He found the deer's sheds on the edge of a food plot on March 7, 2014. After putting his hands on the antlers, which looked much more impressive in the summertime photos,

(Continued)

PHOTOS COURTESY DENNIS DAHLKE



BTR SCORESHEET

TAKEN BY: **DENNIS DAHLKE**
 DATE: **10/31/14**
 PLACE: **KANSAS**
 HARVESTED WITH: **COMPOUND BOW**
 ANTLER CLASSIFICATION: **TYPICAL**
 SCORER(S): **JERRY D. SMITH**

TROPHY MEASUREMENT DATA

	RIGHT	LEFT
TOTAL POINTS PER ANTLER	6	8
NO. OF IRREGULAR POINTS	0	2
TOTAL IRREGULAR INCHES	0	3
LENGTH OF MAIN BEAMS	26 1/8	25 1/8
LENGTH OF 1ST POINT	3 7/8	2 3/8
LENGTH OF 2ND POINT	6 7/8	6 2/8
LENGTH OF 3RD POINT	8 2/8	9 5/8
LENGTH OF 4TH POINT	9 4/8	10 2/8
LENGTH OF 5TH POINT	8	5 6/8
LENGTH OF 6TH POINT	-	-
LENGTH OF 7TH POINT	-	-
1ST CIRCUMFERENCE (C1)	5 7/8	5 4/8
2ND CIRCUMFERENCE (C2)	4 1/8	4 2/8
3RD CIRCUMFERENCE (C3)	4 4/8	4 2/8
4TH CIRCUMFERENCE (C4)	4 1/8	4 1/8
SCORE PER SIDE	81 2/8	80 4/8
INSIDE SPREAD	21 1/8	
PERCENTAGE OF IRREGULARITY	1.8	

OFFICIAL SCORE 161 6/8

COMPOSITE SCORE 182 7/8
(INCLUDES INSIDE SPREAD)

when they were covered in velvet, he decided to give it another year.

"My neighbor thought it was a 4½-year-old and would grow more," he said.

On Oct. 28, Dennis drove to his

Dennis Dahlke knows a mature buck when he sees one, or at least he thought he did until this rascal fooled him on Halloween. Now the hunter from Bonner Springs, Kansas doesn't put quite as much stock in judging the age of whitetails from trail camera photos.

property in eastern Kansas to check his cameras and to walk the edges.

"In three days, it had gone from no scrapes or rubs to several of both around my food plot," he said. "But after checking my cameras, I had gone from three mature bucks to one: the 6x6. I believe it ran the other two off, since its previous year's rack showed it was aggressive."

Two days later, Dennis climbed into a food plot stand he'd set up in September. That was his first time to hunt from it.

"At daybreak, several does came in and began browsing close to me. About 8:30, the 12-pointer appeared on the other side of plot, about 70 yards away," he said. "I videoed it checking scrapes. It paid no attention to the does."

"The buck stayed on the other side for about 20 minutes, and then walked back into timber," he added.

Dennis left his stand about 10 a.m., and he returned around 4:00.

The 12-pointer arrived at 5:30 and

wound up feeding within 20 yards of Dennis.

"I videoed it again for about 15 minutes before it left," he said.

"After reviewing the footage that night, I realized I might never see that buck again, and that it was much bigger than it looked in the trail camera photos," he continued. "I wasn't able to contact my neighbor, but I decided if opportunity knocked again, I would answer."

"I returned to the same tree the next morning. I saw the 12-pointer browsing just before daybreak, but it disappeared into the woods before shooting light," he said.

About 9:00, a young buck chased two does in the timber behind Dennis. About 15 minutes later, he saw the familiar 12-pointer scent-checking the area where the trio had do-si-doed.

While it was walking away from him, Dennis grunted. The deer circled back and was in the food plot a few minutes later. After turning on his camera, he concentrated on the task at hand.

"I took the quartering-away shot, and it looked as if the arrow hit a little high, though it might also have pierced both lungs and clipped an artery," he said. "I was shocked when the deer fell over after walking only 10 yards."

It took its last breath within 40 yards of where Dennis found its 2013 sheds.

"As I approached the downed buck, I immediately thanked it for its sacrifice and the Lord for the provisions," he said.

"My first call was to Joe, my hunting partner, who was eager to help me photograph and load the buck. My second call was to my neighbor. I told him the buck had grown much more than we had thought. His response was, 'Good job. You deserve it!'"

"After I had the buck scored, we measured the previous year's sheds," he continued. "Estimating the worn-down brow tines at 1 and 1½ inches, equating the broken P4 with the one from the other side, and narrowing the current spread by an inch, we came up with 164 inches. That meant the deer had packed on almost 19 inches from one year to the next." ♦

EDITOR'S NOTE: The 17-pointer Dennis shot in 2011 was featured in the October 2012 issue of Buckmasters Whitetail Magazine.

www.BUCKMASTERS.com