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Kansas Whitetails Just Keeps Getting Better

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The bedded buck became restless and his head began to waver. The afternoon sun had stolen his shade and his body became tense. Concern had grown as estrus filtered through the air and more and more bucks dared approach the doe he had been tending all morning. He rattled his head and then snapped still, slowly he raised his hind

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Atkinson Expeditions guide Scott Engstrom and Shawn Monson from Full Moon Productions with a beautiful Kansas 10-point.



Bear Mountain Lodge,
Home to the Nastiest
Creatures to Ever
Stalk a Hunter



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quarters and came to attention ready for a fight. He paused, looked to his doe and then violently his body slammed down. He lunged 20 yards and cautiously stopped, careened to his left then swung right. His neck fully extended he began to stagger, head low the brush swallowed him up in a cloud of dust. I looked back at Anthony and could see his grin peak out from behind the camera, there was no doubt as to what we had just done.

There is for the Western whitetail hunter a destination of which the mere mention ignites primal instincts, instantly taking him to his happy place. The destination is more a paragraph than a word, more a culture than another tag to apply for. It's become sacred because no matter how impossible it seems for that many giant bucks to come from one state they just keep coming. Every year the legends pile up, and unlikely heroes are born, not because they are the best hunters in the world, not because they have discovered a secret weapon, but because they have discovered Kansas. That's right say it again, slowly now..... let the word mean what it means to you in you in your gut.....Kansas. Bucks with drop-tines bigger than your arm, mass,



Anthony Dixon of FMP with his Kansas monster after a great stalk.

kickers, split brows, swollen necks and attitude that makes you consider looking over your shoulder. Bucks of age, intellect, and measurable IQs, bucks that know more about trail camera set-up and directions than you do. Bucks that have even convinced campfires that the stories really are as big as they sound.

So truth is I had always pondered destination Kansas but had never really had the opportunity to discover it for myself. Life has a way of making ponderings a reality and my opportu-

nity came the day that Anthony Dixon from FMP called and said we were to meet Jonathan Hart, president of Sitka Gear, David Brinker, marketing director of Sitka Gear and Curt Wells, the equipment editor of *Bowhunting Magazine TV* in Southeast Kansas for an archery whitetail rut hunt. We would be hunting with Wes Atkinson, owner of Atkinson Expeditions, and I was excited to hear that Atkinson Expeditions had over 15,000 acres of prime whitetail habitat and that we would have the option of hunting these bucks spot and stalk or traditionally from a treestand or ground blind. Over the next couple months I found myself frequenting www.atkinsonexpeditions.com to see what new bucks had been hitting their trail cameras and sure enough there were several that I was willing to let the air out of.

Upon arrival we were met by Atkinson Expeditions head guide Scott Engstrom and quickly formulated a plan. Scott had over 30 set-ups in hot-spot locations but made a decision to improvise and put up a new set-up where he had seen a couple of great bucks for two days in a row. That morning we would sit an existing set and in the evening we would slide into the new one. That afternoon we had shooter bucks trying to get shot while we were hanging the stand. Evening came and there was no shortage of ac-



Shawn Monson discovered the legends of Southeast Kansas are a reality.

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tion, bucks were everywhere—and shooter bucks, and then there was a giant ten point and I needed one more step and then he was gone. That night as we loaded up a doe we discussed our options—we could either sit the stands in the mornings or drive the other 15,000 acres in search of a buck that presented a stalk. After much debating and great encouragement from Scott we agreed that spot and stalk would be our method. The bucks were in the sequester, quarantine, and breed phase of the rut and they were tending their does in small isolated batches of trees. The bucks were visible and vulnerable . . . so, it was time to work some magic.

On the third morning we found ourselves patiently waiting for the sun to rise so we could eventually see the silhouettes moving in the distance. The light began to fill the Nikon field scopes to which our eyes were glued and distant objects became identifiable. With a bit of discussion and a small plan we were out and running to our destination. It looked to be about a good mile so it left no time—we were on a dead run bouncing from bush to bush. We soon stopped at our last brush marker, no taller than my bow, barely wide enough for Anthony, my cameraman, and myself. When we arrived we carefully looked for the buck. With the doe no more than eighty yards we knew the buck would be close. We glassed every branch and finally picked him up tucked just inside the timber about 65 yards out.

Over the next hour I patiently sliced off yardage and worked an angle so I could make the shot. Holding my Hoyt bow vertically, sitting in ankle high brush, I checked and rechecked my SureLoc sight to make sure I had the correct yardage. My shot window was tiny and there was no room for error. I struggled through the pain of biting cactus and muscle cramps as the buck became more and more agitated. The buck's head turned from side to side and I could tell he was ready to stand. As effortlessly as he stood, I drew



Curt Wells and Wes Atkinson with another great Kansas Whitetail.

my bow, he canted his body, I settled my pin and released the FMJ.

There are moments of realization that Anthony and I have had throughout the history of FMP, we had just added one more! We had come to Southeast Kansas with spot and stalk in mind and accomplished it. We gathered our stuff, marked the spot and called Scott to tell him we were done!

Adrenaline pumping hard, I don't remember how we got back to the truck. Upon arrival Scott was on the phone with Wes sharing the excitement, as Wes was still in Colorado guiding a mule deer hunt. Wes knew exactly which buck I had killed as Scott

and Wes had stalked the buck with the previous group of hunters the week before and due to the bad attitude of the buck had named him "Grizz". Nothing like celebrating a 162 inch, 26-1/2 inch-beamed ten point Kansas whitetail! I was no longer pondering the legends of Kansas—I had just added one more.

Little did we know what the week had in store. With Wes's arrival and a full camp we still had many options awaiting us. We sat anywhere from 18-30' off the ground to actually sitting on

the ground in invisible ground blinds. As the week wore on and the friendships grew it was obvious that the Atkinson Expeditions staff would do anything to help us succeed. While Jonathan Hart, David Brinker and Anthony Dixon were licking their wounds from misses earlier in the week, Wes and Scott were frantically searching for a hot set for Curt Wells, whose terrible luck had started to be a joke in camp. No one ever stopped working though and on day four Wes and Scott saw a super tall eight-point drop into a power line cut. They slid in and set a double set for Curt and his cameraman, Ross. Two days later Curt made that eight point famous and we were all smiles and celebrating again. Jonathan and David had to head back to California to sell some gear, so with two days left it was all about Anthony.

At first light we found ourselves set up in the same treestand in which I killed my doe and Wes, Scott, and Miles headed out in search of a buck to stalk. Sure enough the call came in that Scott had found a shooter and Miles was there to pick us up. We arrived at the bedded buck's location and with almost no conversation Anthony and I headed off, creeping within range of another Kansas monarch. And how glad we are that buck sat tight just long enough for

the camera to capture the incredible stalk and Anthony to make a perfect shot. That made us over 100 percent on shots for the camp, 3 for 5 on Pope & Young bucks, one of the most successful archery camps I have ever been a part of and FMP took two awesome whitetails on the ground, Western style.

A lot of people out West for whatever reason have a hard time doing a hunt with an Outfitter. I see it as yet another opportunity to hunt unpressured land where giant bucks live and create new relationships with guys that are just as crazy about this as I am. What a great way to expand your hunting season and educate yourself on other techniques and styles. I am a DIY hunter and I prefer to spot and stalk, but mostly I just love to hunt so I accept the challenge of working with others and enjoy the friendships and unique opportunities that arise from expanding my hunting season. Once again, thanks to the Atkinson Expeditions staff for setting the table for another successful Full Moon Productions experience, and thanks to all the guys that were in camp, see you in Kansas again someday.

Note: Both filmed hunts will be available with *Sportsmans News Television* and Full Moon Productions (FMP). 🐾

