

A WHITETAIL BUCK HUNT OF A LIFETIME

Saturday morning, October 18th, 2008, was bright, clear and chilly in a side canyon of the eastern Washington State's Snake River gorge. We had been out stalking for several hours from first light and had just returned to our tent camp in the valley for some rest and refreshment. At about 9:00 AM 12-year old Austin Wittman and his father Lowell spotted a whitetail buck some 850 yards distant and uphill from camp.

The animal was lying beneath the crest of the canyon rim, surveying the entire valley below.

Lowell Wittman was glassing that distant rimrock when he first spotted the buck. Once the buck was spotted Lowell brought out the spotting scope which revealed him to be a good-sized four-point white-tail. Immediately we formulated a plan to stalk the prey, deciding to approach the buck from above and behind. It was Austin's turn to shoot, so he and his father got into their four-wheel drive and moved down the road then turned off and ascended to the top of the bluff. They made a path that would allow them to advance on foot behind and above the buck. They were able to move quietly so the prey had no clue of their presence. All the while Austin and Lowell climbed the buck remained stationary beneath the rim crest.

My son Trevor and I were still in camp and were signaling the buck's position by hand to Austin and Lowell so they could maneuver exactly into a good shooting position.

Their vantage point turned out to be approximately 60-feet above the buck on the edge of a nearly vertical rocky cliff. The animal's tawny color blended well with that of the rocks; father and son had to look carefully to locate the buck on that ground. Footing was treacherous on loose rocks at the rim of the steep outcrop. Young Austin was shooting a Weatherby Vanguard 308 and was wary of the recoil effect and mindful their precarious perch on the cliff edge. His father,

Lowell, was balanced on the rock and securely holding Austin. He whispered assurance to his son that he held him tightly and wouldn't let him fall.

Austin thought he could see the buck clearly, took aim and touched off a round which instead caught the edge of the cliff and exploded rocks a mere 3-feet below them. He thought he'd aimed perfectly, but they were showered with rock fragments. Amazingly, the buck wasn't startled by this shot and remained in the same position below them. Lowell assured Austin that he should move forward slightly and give himself a fuller view of the buck through the scope. Austin had reloaded and was preparing a second shot when the buck stood up. At such range, about all Austin could see through the scope was hair. Balancing on the ledge and steadying the rifle for an off-hand shot was a challenge for Austin – his vantage was 25-feet behind the buck and 60-feet above, the cliff was sheer beneath him and keeping the rifle trained took strength and nerve. Nonetheless, he was able to touch off his second round which hit the buck between the shoulders with sufficient impact to slam the animal straight to the ground. The trophy was instantly dispatched.

Austin's 308 Weatherby Vanguard when coupled with a 3-9 Nikon scope proved an excellent rifle for this task. 150 grain Federal power shot cartridges were used to down the buck.