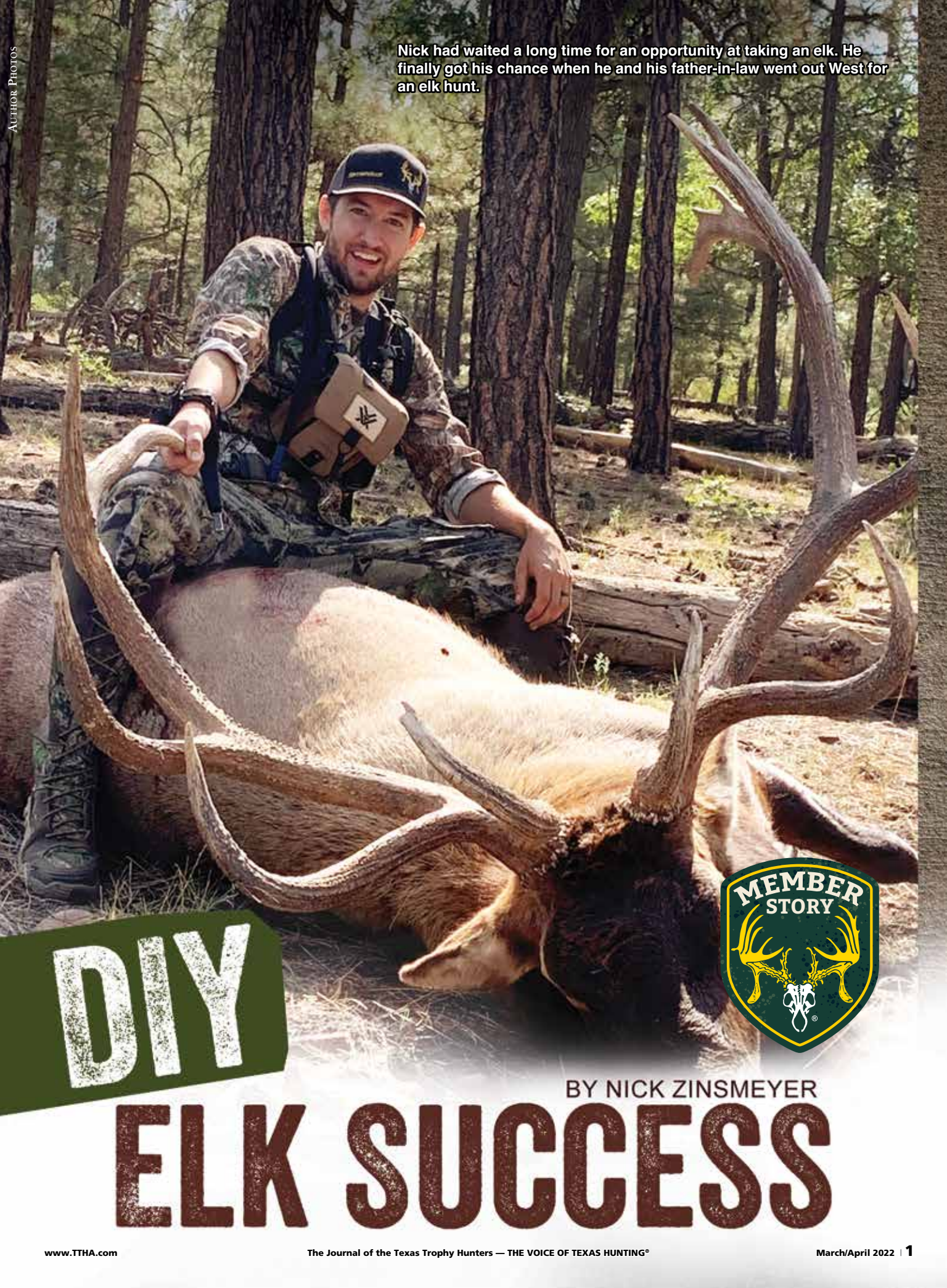


Nick had waited a long time for an opportunity at taking an elk. He finally got his chance when he and his father-in-law went out West for an elk hunt.



DIY



BY NICK ZINSMEYER

ELK SUCCESS

I had always wanted to experience the thrill of hunting bugling bull elk, but the opportunities to do this in Texas outside of a game ranch are few and far between. After seven years of putting in for archery elk draws with no luck, my father-in-law Dan and I finally got lucky and pulled a tag for a September 2020 archery elk hunt out West. This would be my first archery elk hunt, but neither Dan nor I had ever taken a bull with our bows before. This was a bucket list item for him after a lifetime of hunting and I was extremely excited to experience early season elk hunting for the first time.

We have both always been the do-it-yourself type of hunter and we would not get a guide or outfitter for this hunt, so our trip planning started immediately. We looked at every map of the unit we could find, but we knew we couldn't decide on an exact area to hunt until we got out there and got eyes on the unit before the hunt. Dan would go out a few days before me and meet up with his uncle, cousin, and brother who only lived a few hours away from the hunting area. They would get a head start on scouting, pick a place to set up camp, and have everything set up for the start of the season.

September finally arrived and we headed out West to try our luck. The weather forecast showed warmer than normal

days with evening lows only dropping into the 40s. Regardless of weather conditions, we were prepared to go after the elk and put in the miles to give ourselves the best opportunity for success. We set up camp, did some scouting, and decided on two areas where we wanted to focus on to start the season. We wanted to get out, cover some ground, and see what we could find.

The season started off strong the first morning. We split up in two different areas we had scouted. I started up a rugged mountain trail through the tall pines about half a mile from our camp and hit the bugle for the first time at about a full hour before first light. I had an immediate response to my first call, and it sounded like the bull was about 300 yards or so up the trail.

I then got a response from another bull on my right. I set up probably 50 yards off the trail and hit my bugle every five minutes or so until it just started getting light enough to see. I saw a cow elk moving in front of me at maybe 80 yards and saw something large moving through the brush maybe 50 yards behind her. I hit my cow call a few times and he stepped out maybe 80 yards in front of me in some brush.

The bull stared my direction, and then looked at the cow. I lightly hit my cow call again, and he slowly turned and followed the cow back into the brush. I couldn't see his entire rack, but I knew he was a solid bull and definite shooter. Not bad for the first two minutes of shooting light on opening morning!

I tried to get back on that bull all morning as he headed south. I would get to within what sounded like 200-300 yards of him several times but could never get close enough to get eyes on him through the trees. After about 2 hours, I felt like I was finally making up ground on him. I looked up and found myself at the fence marking the boundary between the national forest land and the Indian reservation at the southern border of our unit.

I had traveled about 2 miles from where I had started, and it seemed like the elk were retreating to the reservation. We figured they would move into the unit at night to feed, then retreat to the safety of the reservation at first light. Dan had a handful of responses to his calls as well that day, so we knew we were in good areas. We decided



Nick's father-in-law Dan got himself a fine elk, too.

to venture out a little more in the unit, but no other areas had heavy sign like where we were the first morning, so we focused our efforts in these two areas.

On the third morning of our hunt, Dan, at 63 years old, marked off the top item on his bucket list. His cousin called in a 6x6 satellite bull off the herd and got him within 20 yards while other bulls were trying to herd cows all around him. The bull came charging in looking for the cow and Dan arrowed the bull while it quartered towards him. Dan kept a smile on his face for about the next month after taking this bull.

On day five, I went back to the area I hunted the first day with Dan's cousin who would help me call. I would get 600-800 yards off a forest road into our unit an hour before first light and try to catch the bulls heading out of our area to the southern border. At about first light, we heard a bugle about 400 yards east of us, so we hurried over to get in front of the bull and get set up. We started cow-calling and heard cows call back, but they weren't getting any closer.

After about 10 minutes of calling, I heard another funny sounding bugle and decided to move towards it. I crept in and sure enough, two other hunters were the ones answering our calls. Because of this, we decided to head farther into the unit at a northwest bearing. We walked about 800 yards and I heard a deep bugle that sounded more like a growl 200 yards in front of me in some pines.

I knew by the deep bugle it was a mature bull. The wind was blowing right towards him. I tried to circle around to get in front of him and catch him before he caught our wind. I eased in by myself to minimize the pressure and our scent.

I got eyes on him about 100 yards in, but he was about another 100 yards in front of me down wind. He was a nothing short of a monster. I hit my cow call, then he turned and looked for a second. He started trotting off due south, right towards the reservation.

I knew he winded me, but he didn't run off full speed. My only chance would be to run and get in front of him to cut him off. I started off sprinting slightly downhill and running parallel to him. I looked over to my right and saw him trotting right along with me about 100 yards off with several pine trees between us.

A small ravine lies about 150 yards in front of where we were heading. If I could get there before him, I knew he would have to slow down going down the hill. He slowed down and I got to the ravine edge before he did. I knelt for a split second and nocked an arrow.

I cranked my single pin sight down to what I thought was the 70-yard pin slot. Before I knew it, he was in front of me and stopped for a split second looking at me. I guessed he was at about 60 yards. I aimed low and let my arrow fly.

Right as I released, he moved forward. As soon as I shot, my heart

sank. I saw my arrow hit him way back and high. He took off and bolted straight back towards the reservation.

I saw a cut mark on him right in front of his tenderloins where my broadhead went in. I looked down at my sight and saw I had accidentally stopped it at 55 yards. If I had actually set it to 70 yards, the arrow would have been a foot over his back. It turned out he was about 45 yards away when I shot him.

The shot was a clean pass through, and I went and found my arrow quickly. It was dripping with bright red blood. I decided to back out and go to camp. I shot at 6:30 a.m. and told the guys not to let me leave camp until 9:30 a.m., so we could give him at least 3 hours to die.

Four of us returned right to where I had shot the bull. We found good blood within minutes and tracked it. He bled out of both sides, heading back to the reservation and we were maybe 500 yards from the boundary fence. We tracked him down a small canyon, up the other side and then came up one more ridge and saw him dead 75 yards in front of us.

I hit the bull right in front of the tenderloins and the arrow exited about 8 inches out his other side in front of his hind-quarters. He died approximately 100 yards off a national forest road and 150 yards from the unit boundary and the reservation, a perfect spot for packing him out. I used my TTHA membership Buck knife to get him dressed and out of the woods.

The bull was a 6x8 and had 61-inch main beams, a 41-inch spread, and 21- and 22-inch fronts. Four months later I had him officially scored at 373" and a net score of 358", enough to easily qualify for the Pope & Young record books. 🏆



Nick shot the elk with his bow at about 45 yards.