

The journal of the

Texas Trophy Hunters



PROP TUNE

HUNTING
FROM A DISTANCE
Spotting Scopes

PRONGHORNS BY BOW
MATCHING WITS WITH
America's
SPEED GOAT

**SPECIAL BLIND &
TREESTAND SECTION**
WHAT TO BUY, HOW TO BUILD,
& WHERE TO PLACE THEM

July/Aug. 2008

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HUNTERS EXTRAVAGANZA

SAN ANTONIO | HOUSTON | FT. WORTH
July 11-13 | August 1-3 | August 15-17

American
Trophy Hunters
TV Show



There's a Place in

Dream a little, relax a little, and then go out and shoot a giant bull elk. It's all possible at Rocky Mountain Elk Ranch.

FEATURE • FEATURE • FEATURE • FEATURE



Nestled in a valley on the backside of Sugar City, Idaho, lies a special place for hunters and their families. It's the Rocky Mountain Elk Ranch, the dream child of Jeff and Alana Lerwill. Jeff's in local real estate in this area of gorgeous country, but he and his pretty wife, Alana, along with their three small boys, wanted more than just the daily grind of a traditional job. See, Jeff's an avid hunter, and living where he does, among some of this U.S.'s most breathtaking scenery, the wild calls to him pretty hard. So when he and Alana had the chance to purchase and expand a small, private, high-fenced elk ranch, it seemed the perfect opportunity. It was, likewise, the perfect opportunity for me to experience what the couple has to offer, when they invited me to stay with them and take on a hunt.

I have to admit, much as I hate flying these days, I never mind it so much when I land in Jackson Hole, the most practical access point to get to the Lerwill's place. Alana picked me and my cameraman, Razor Dobbs, up in her Suburban and we headed over the mountains toward Sugar City. If there's any place on earth that describes "breathtaking," I think it's here. With the aspens turning yellow, the low lying brush taking on new dimensions of ochre, plum, and pumpkin, the dozens of gurgling, crystalline streams winding their ways through patches of regal evergreens, and the

IDAHO

By Jennifer L.S. Pearsall, Editor

AUTHOR PHOTOS



unmistakable vista of the Grand Tetons looming always just over a shoulder, it is all nearly too much for the eye to take in. I love this place.

As we draw nearer to Sugar City, a little more than an hour or so from the JH airport, Alana told me a little about her place, how she and Jeff had slowly been working on the lodge, improving the elk herd, and how places like theirs were becoming more prevalent and accepted, even in this wild, relatively remote and rural country; they still shut down the schools during potato harvest so the kids can help out in the fields. Truth is, not everyone can tackle a hiking or horseback hunt for bull elk in the Selway-Bitterroot. Doesn't mean you don't still want an elk. It's a philosophy the Lerwill's and many others are taking to heart, that you don't have to be a modern mountain man to appreciate a quality hunt, that such experiences can be garnered and appreciated on a variety of levels.

Take the rather, and I hate to use this word, but "elderly" couple in their seventies who had visited the ranch earlier in the season. The gentleman

was simply no longer physically capable of taking on the back country, either on a do-it-yourself hunt or with a guide, but he still had a passion for the outdoors and hunting big game. He hadn't been in the company of the Lerwill's for 24 hours when he shot his bull, and the gentleman's wife, who'd come along merely for the company, was so excited for her husband she went and shot an elk, too.

"They were so very happy," Alana told me. "And even though they finished their hunt quickly, they spent the next couple days just relaxing in the lodge and enjoying the views. I think it was one of the best vacations they'd ever had."

It wasn't hard to imagine why that couple might have been so happy with their experience when we finally swung through the lower gates deep in a gully

pocket, wound our way far up the hillside, and caught the first view of the lodge in the distance—and elk right in front of us.

Bulls, a half-dozen, crowded around a harem of cows, shaking antlers at each other and moving their rather annoyed women-folk around. Well, at least until the dominant bull had enough. Maybe it was the other bulls, maybe it was the Suburban, but this was one unhappy herd male. We watched as he left his own harem high on the hillside to charge towards the lower group and run the other males off. Back he'd run to his principal



There's no mistaking when you find the place where rutting bull elk are taking out their frustrations.

group, then forward again, agitated and wanting the mother lode of mothers to be his alone. It was a spectacular sight, and we watched them, heads screwed around and looking out the back windows as Alana pulled nearer to the lodge.

And what a lodge. It is a huge structure of spectacularly gigantic logs, one of those "cabins" most of us who have any desire at all for a luxurious wilderness living experience dream about. We are not disappointed at the insides, Razor and I, with two-story windows on the living-room's backside providing one of those views to the surrounding valleys and hills that you can look at for hours on end and think only minutes have passed. We haul our luggage up to our rooms and break out the bins.

Ha! In the first minute on the deck outside, I think I've got a bear spotted. A big black, roly-poly chunk of something is shuffling slowly through the small pines and brush on the hillside opposite the lodge's back deck. Razor and Alana come to join me at the railing, each with an optic in hand. The figure clears a small evergreen, and we finally see that it's not a

bear at all, but a moose! I think we all take it as a portent, a talisman, for how this hunt will go.

And indeed it is, because sometime late the next afternoon I have a fine bull elk on the ground, Jeff telling me it's probably the biggest taken that year, he must go to a full 1,000 pounds or more, and he'll likely score somewhere in the 340s. Honestly, I think Jeff may have been happier about the elk than I was.

He's very proud of his animals. I've watched his face as he glassed the property's lower herd, the one that likes to hang in a pasture of waving gold grasses. "Aren't they beautiful?" he'd asked of me more than once.

It was a question that didn't need an answer. The pride in the ranch owner's voice said it all. Jeff's and Alana's elk are beautiful, especially mine, but then maybe I'm prejudiced. Or maybe it's because the bull

took the shot well and died fast where he stood, barely knowing what had struck him. I liked that, for he is a handsome, regal animal, and he deserved that, and knowing that, I am at peace posing for pictures, the warm Indian summer sun giving a pretty glow to the fading day, the musky perfume of the still warm animal reaching my nose. The aspens quake a bit in the light breeze. It is a fine day, indeed.

We watched as he left his own harem high on the hillside to charge toward this lower group and run the other males off. Back he'd run to his principal group, then forward again, agitated and wanting the mother lode of mothers to be his alone.

Editor's Note: Jeff and Alana Lerwill are two of the most gracious hosts I've met in a long time, as enamored with the splendor of their countryside and their big, beautiful elk as I was—as you will be. Their lodge offers comfortable, spacious accommodations and delicious



The author and the 1,000-plus-pound 6X6 bull she took on Jeff and Alana Lerwill's Rocky Mountain Elk Ranch near Sugar City, Idaho.



Indian summer at the Rocky Mountain Elk Ranch in Idaho is a vibrantly colorful time of year.

home cooking that will leave you undoing that top button on your trousers, even if you don't go for dessert. As for the hunting, Jeff will tell you it can be as hard or as easy as you like it. You can hike the hillsides or ATV it, though I strongly suggest you be in shape if you're going to rely on your own two legs—there's more than a couple ATV trails up in those hillsides that'll dizzy you looking back down them and have you praying fervently that the brakes hold. In fact, while I shot my bull in a canyon that was relatively easy to access, getting him out took the biggest four-wheeler on the ranch, a trailer, four men, and even all that horsepower almost didn't get him out of there. Several times the sheer weight of the animal on the trailer came dangerously close to dragging the works—machine and men—over the road side and into the creek bottom. Exciting? Most certainly.

For more information on booking a hunt with the Lerwills and Rocky Mountain Elk Ranch, call 208-356-0972 or 208-351-7300. Alana built their website, www.rockymountainelkranch.net, and it's well worth a visit. 🐾