

# Buck -of-a- Lifetime



## COVER STORY — KALEN JOOST • 260" MULE DEER • ARIZONA

For as long as I can remember I have loved hunting. I harvested my first Mule deer when I was 12 years old. It was a small 4x3, but when I had my hands on him for the first time it was a trophy to me. The rush and excitement of that day is something I will never forget. Fast forward 25 years and I'm still that little kid inside, but I look at hunting in a whole new way. It is not only about the thrill of the chase but also about the time I get to spend outdoors with my friends and family.

Whenever I draw a tag I call my favorite hunting buddy — my dad. I couldn't wait to tell him the good news that I was drawn for the best Mule deer rifle tag in Arizona. We were going to hunt 13B, the Arizona Strip. The unit was over 9 hours away from where I live, and I didn't have enough time to scout it. I also realized that this tag doesn't come around that often and I needed to make the most of this opportunity. I decided to hire Travis McClendon of Arizona Strip Guides. He had sent me some trail cam photos and showed me videos of several giant bucks that we were going to hunt. One non-typical in particular was a massive

deer they nicknamed "The Wall." If you love non-typical bucks, this was the kind of deer you dream about. He had a huge main frame with a ton of mass and several points shooting straight up like a wall. I had told Travis I was really hoping to find a big non-typical buck on this hunt, and The Wall was my first choice.

Opening day was finally here. The trick tank that The Wall was hitting had eight trail cameras on it, and it was clear that I wasn't the only hunter after this monster buck. We didn't see much that day. In fact, we only came across five does and a bunch of hunters. We were driving back to camp after checking some trail cameras when I asked Travis about a dirt tank right by the road. There were no cameras on it, and we noticed a lot of deer tracks around it. Fortunately Travis had a couple cameras in his truck, and he set them up to see what was coming in.

Day two was nothing like opening day. We were starting to see some bucks, and another hunter in camp killed a great 206" typical. After we got lunch and watched photos being taken we made the rounds collecting memory cards from the trail cams. Going through the photos, we saw a picture of a non-typical buck that had a split off the front of his



**KALEN WITH HIS 260"  
ARIZONA MULE DEER**

main frame and some trash on his back forks. He came into the dirt tank at night, so it was hard to tell how big he was. No one had ever seen this buck before, but he was definitely over 200". He quickly became my second choice.

That evening we had planned to sit The Wall tank, but some other hunters had already beaten us to it. We quickly changed plans and went to a high point to do some glassing. Not long into our glassing we got a call of a possible shooter at the dirt tank. We were in hot pursuit and drove over there as fast as we could. The deer turned out to be a 5x5. He was a great buck, and we guessed him to be somewhere in the high 190's. He was less than 100 yards from me, but I decided to pass. It was only the second day, and we knew that there were bigger deer in the area.

Day three had us hunting an area where The Wall had been spotted the night before. We didn't have to hike far before we jumped up a group of does with a big buck. He was a big 4x4 typical, and Travis had guessed him to be in the low 190's. He was another deer that was well within my range, but again I decided to pass. It was still early in the hunt, and he wasn't what I was looking for with this tag. We left camp early that evening to make sure we would

not be beat to the trick tank. I wish I could say we saw The Wall that night, but the only thing that came in was two hunters. The good news was we got a call that there was a shooter at the dirt tank; the bad news was we were at least 20 minutes away. I can't tell you if I was truly scared for my life or excited from the rush of being in hot pursuit with Travis behind the wheel. Somehow we got there in one piece and in record time. Unfortunately we didn't get there in time to see the buck. He was pushing two does and made his way into the thick trees.

Day four started off slow. We went back to the area where we saw the 4x4 but only came across does. I was given the option on where I wanted to hunt that evening – The Wall tank or the dirt tank. Of course I wanted to hunt The Wall, but so did every other hunter in the area. After talking about it with my dad we both agreed that the dirt tank seemed like the place to be. There were two little hills on both sides of the tank, but the trees were too thick to get a good vantage point. We decided to stay in the truck and back in from the road close to the treeline. We were about 150 yards from the tank and in good position. There was maybe an hour of light left when I heard Travis say that magic word, "Deer." To the left of us we saw some does



and a buck moving through the trees. We didn't get a good look at him, but Travis said to sneak out and get ready. I saw a doe, then another doe, and then the buck. He was about 70 yards away, broadside, with his head down. As I was looking through my scope the buck stopped, lifted his head up, and turned to look at me. The first thing that popped into my head was "Whoa!" I quickly put my crosshairs behind his shoulder and heard Travis say, "Shoot that buck." I pulled the trigger and could tell right away it was a good hit. The buck took a couple of steps and started to stagger. I was confident I got him with that shot, but I heard Travis say, "Shoot him again." I sent another round into him, and before I could reload the buck was down. Everything happened so fast, but I knew I had killed a really big deer. What I didn't know was just how big. It was the big non-typical from the trail camera, and the picture of this buck did not do him justice at all.

As I walked up to him I was in shock. I couldn't believe all of his points and his mass. I had dreamed of getting

a non-typical buck, but this deer was beyond anything I could have imagined. I guess you could say I felt like a 12 year old boy again who was putting his hands on his first trophy, except this time I was holding an 8x9 monster. At first glance we thought this deer to be somewhere in the 230's. Once we got a tape on him I went from shock to utter disbelief when I heard them say 260". Most hunters will never see a buck like this, let alone have the chance to harvest one. I never did see The Wall, but at that point it didn't matter anymore. I already had my hands on a buck-of-a-lifetime.

I first have to thank my wife, Dana. Having your support means the world to me. Also, I really can't thank Travis and everyone at team ASG enough for all of their hard work. I would highly recommend them to anyone lucky enough to draw this tag. Special thanks to David, Tyne, Cliff, and, of course, my dad. Having my dad there to share this moment with me is a memory I will never forget.



**KALEN & TRAVIS MCCLENDON WITH  
KALEN'S ARIZONA MULE DEER**



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