

Island friendship and the eclipse buck!

As the box plane touched down on the dirt runway I had to pinch myself just to make sure I wasn't dreaming again, the pain confirmed I was awake and that my Santa Rosa Island Mule Deer hunt was finally underway! Santa Rosa Island is eighty four square miles of unfenced, rugged hillsides, deep canyons, sandy beaches, vertical cliffs, and big beautiful Mule Deer. This would be my third trip to "the island" in the last five years with each trip being a different and rewarding experience.

Accompanying me on this trip would be my beautiful wife Angeliquea, an accomplished huntress in her own right. My guide would be none other than Wayne Long, founder of MUM. (multiple use managers) Wayne had been my guide in 2003 when I was fortunate enough to harvest a magnificent 33" 5x5 Muley buck which grossed 216! To this day that is still the greatest "spot and stalk" of my hunting career. Wayne showed me a great time on the Island in 2003 and I consider him a friend, he has been involved with Santa Rosa Island since approximately 1979 so his knowledge of the island and the wildlife that inhabit it is unmatched.

When you are with Wayne on Santa Rosa Island you not only have a great hunting guide, you also have a great tour guide, knowledgeable historian, and top notch wildlife and habitat biologist.

Day one was spent renewing old friendships, taking in the beauty and relaxing atmosphere of the island and, oh yes, glassing several nice Mule deer and Roosevelt Elk! That night there was a spectacular full eclipse of the moon, what a treat to be able to view it through a spotting scope from the island! Always the eternal optimist, I saw this as a sign of good fortune.

Day two dawned foggy with limited visibility which actually gave us the opportunity to have some real "up close and personals" with a number of good bucks however none were "the one" I had in mind. We hunted throughout the morning with the fog burning off around 10:00 A.M. Around noontime we happened upon a group of bedded bucks about 250 yards below and away from us. One buck looked to be a shooter with incredible bases and a definite 30" plus spread. He was a solid 4x4 with 1" eye guards, however, no matter how hard I tried, I could not convince myself he would score over 200. Since it was only day two, I begrudgingly passed on him and proceeded to take some great photos of him through my spotting scope. (another hunter saw the photos I had taken and harvested that buck two days later, the buck scored 194 and was 31" wide. Great Buck!!)

They say good things come to those who wait and about 30 minutes later a buck we had never seen stepped into view. I knew immediately that this was "the one"! He was well over 30" wide and looked to be a 7x7 with great character. The buck was over 450 yards and there was about a 20 mph crosswind.....no hero shot for me. Anyone can "throw lead" from great distances with a high powered rifle, but why rush it? Why not prolong it with a challenging and exciting stalk?

Unfortunately the big buck had us pegged and wandered out of view up under some drop offs. After two hours of intense looking over edges and ledges and seeing many bucks none of which was mine I was becoming concerned that the big buck had disappeared into one of the deep draws or cuts or brushy ridges that dominate so much of the island. Wayne felt that we should continue “peeking and peering” and that we would run into the big buck, he was right.

Angeliquea began frantically motioning to Wayne and I to come to her vantage point. I knew immediately she had found the big buck, proving yet again that she has great eyes in more ways than one! The buck was with four other very nice bucks and they were all up and leaving over the top, I ranged the buck at 334 yards on the move. I quickly set up for the shot knowing that it was now or never and when my buck was clear of the others I touched off my 270.

The buck was hit hard and turned back downhill toward the ocean. After a short chase and a finishing shot my Santa Rosa Island trophy buck was down for good! The big buck actually came to rest with his left antler hanging over the edge of a sheer cliff that dropped over 100 feet straight into the Pacific Ocean! This made for some great albeit quick pictures as I was in a hurry to move the buck back from the ledge. Talk about lucky me! The buck was exactly what I had hoped for, he was a 33” wide 7x7 with great character!

We spent the next few days of the trip enjoying the beauty of the island and looking for a Trophy Roosevelt bull for Angeliquea and if we were lucky, a management buck for me. Each day Wayne chose a different part of the island for lunch and a siesta, each spot was our own private beach! We swam in the surf, photographed Elephant seals and enjoyed everything Santa Rosa Island has to offer.

Hunting trips are about so much more than just harvesting an animal. There is the scenery, the varied wildlife, the camaraderie, newfound friendships and so many other things. There are some hunts where it takes a great effort on the part of the hunter to gain the “full experience” of a trip, on Santa Rosa Island it happens easily if you just slow down and open your eyes.

Thanks so much to Wayne Long and the whole island gang. The hardest part of this adventure was trying to SLOW IT DOWN!!! Angeliquea ended up taking a magnificent 7x7 Roosevelt Bull that scored over 310! She made a great running shot on the bull at over 250 yards with her trusty Rifles Inc. “pink camo” 270! Thanks Lex, great rifle! I was fortunate enough to harvest an incredible 36” wide (wow!!) 3x3 mangement (???) buck on our last day of hunting!

Thank you Wayne for your great hospitality, you are a knowledgeable conservationist, a great guide, & a wonderful entertainer. Your efforts really put the trip “over the top” for Ang & I! Thank you to the vail and Vickers family for bringing such beautiful animals to such a beautiful place& thanks to mum for doing such a great job of trophy management on such a magnificent renewable resource! In the end like all truly great adventures I blinked and it was over. Angeliquea and I had seen all the incredible sights and harvested 3 truly magnificent trophies from this unique, treasured place that is Santa Rosa Island!