



**THREE
BULLETS**

**—THREE
BUCKS**

Art Pearce's trophy Sonoran buck was taken with Chad Smith's Vaquero Outfitters. The buck is over 32 inches wide!

January of 2009 opened with much trepidation and financial turmoil, so when January 7th came and it was time to head to Mexico I was more excited than usual to leave some of the worries behind and travel to the remote desert ranches of Sonora, Mexico for an annual deer hunt.

My name is Art Pearce. I was born in Arizona and grew up hunting throughout the entire state. For the last twelve years I have been fortunate to have the opportunity to hunt in Sonora, Mexico, primarily for Coues whitetails. The last two of these years I have hunted with Vaquero Outfitters, Inc. owned by Chad and Shawn Smith of Chino Valley, Arizona. I have known both Chad and Shawn for many years and especially have had some great elk hunts with Chad in Arizona.

Chad's Mexico hunt offered a combo hunt, including both mule deer and Coues whitetail during the same week. In 2008 I took a truly nice, heavy, mature, four-point mule deer, but unfortunately, I didn't spot a whitetail of interest to me. Being from Arizona, I have become very particular and choosy when hunting for Coues deer, as Arizona has its fair share of superior specimens. Chad uses a couple of expert, young guides- twins named Jason and Josh Whitaker of Pueblo, Colorado whom during the last two years I have gotten to know quite well. In spite of their relative youth, both are very experienced hunters in their own right and have successfully guided many hunts both in the states and in Mexico. It is very apparent that both of them love what they do, know what they are doing when it comes to hunting, and also are a kick to be around. Both years I hunted with Vaquero Outfitters I was teamed up with Jason.

— by Art Pearce —

Traveling into Mexico with rifles has always been a carefully planned procedure but with the recent battling between Mexico's drug cartels and its federal, state and municipal governments, considerable tension has grown over the last year. When Chad suggested we travel across the border as a caravan I was pleased with the idea, even though it meant I would be going down a few days before my hunt actually started.

Everyone met on the Arizona side of the border in Nogales. We checked our rifles and optics with the U.S. Customs Agents, crossed the border, obtained our visas and proceeded to the military base in Nogales, Mexico to have the rifles inspected by the Mexican military. After this we received our final travel documents. Having filled out all the paperwork accurately and thoroughly, all went remarkably smoothly, so in a little over an hour we were on our way towards Hermosillo, Mexico.

In view of arriving early for my hunt, I had called my good friend Cesar Carranza, a rancher and businessman in Hermosillo, and arranged to spend a few days with him before beginning my hunt. Although Cesar was happy that I was spending a few days with him, he had previously-scheduled business appointments and meetings and invited me along. They included a family meeting and a Cattle Feeders Association meeting with the president of the Cattle Growers Union. As my command of the Spanish language is minimal, he knew that any confidential information would not be compromised.



Following the meetings, Cesar and I went to one of his ranches north of Hermosillo. The ranch is private, as almost all property in Mexico is, and kept securely locked. It is a beautiful, Sonoran Desert ranch with three homesteads owned by Cesar and his brothers. The ranch was purchased by Cesar's father and has been improved over the years with water and buffalo grass for the registered herd of Charolais cattle. There are many large mule deer and Coues deer on his ranch, and in previous years I have hunted there for both. Spending the next couple of days with Cesar was very relaxing. Experiencing Sonoran hospitality is unquestionably one of the finer things in life.

On Saturday, in Hermosillo I met the group with whom I was going to hunt and we drove to another ranch. It took us a couple of hours to travel there. After I arrived at camp, Jason showed up a short time later with a positive report from his three days of scouting the ranch prior to my arrival. Jason had sighted a great number of muleys and Coues deer with a few sizeable bucks. We decided to pack lunches and hunt all day instead of going back to the ranch house around noontime. Our plan of attack was to hunt mule deer in the mornings and evenings and sit at waterholes to hunt Coues deer during midday while it was hot.

On the first morning of the hunt we saw some nice mule deer bucks but none were of interest to us. Around ten o'clock we headed to a waterhole where Jason felt we could successfully harvest a trophy-class Coues deer. We sat on the southwest side of the waterhole. Earlier Jason had built a blind out of tree limbs to break up our silhouette and keep us in the shade. With the wind in our face and most of the deer approaching from the north it seemed like the perfect setup. Deer started filtering in almost immediately after we were settled. We saw quite a few deer, five of them bucks. Around one o'clock, as I sat fidgeting with my digital camera I heard

Jason say, "Right there, Art, shoot him." When I looked up I saw a buck at the water with his head down. I had no idea what he was, but Jason whispered again, "Shoot him, Art." Trusting my friend's judgment I raised my gun, found the deer in the scope and squeezed the trigger. The buck immediately went down with his head submerged in the water.

The celebration started, but I still wasn't sure what I had shot. Jason told me, "GET YOUR BUTT UP AND LET'S GO!" I asked, "Is he good?" The look on Jason's face, however, said it all! On the walk over to the downed buck, Jason looked at me and said, "Art, you just shot a freak of a whitetail." When we got to the buck Jason pulled his head out of the water and I could not believe my eyes. He was more than I ever could have dreamed of taking. The buck was an immense non-typical with an extra main beam and other unique features. Fantastically enough, this was just day one of my six-day hunt.


After a big photo session we took the buck back to camp and skinned it out for a life-sized mount. Then it was time to concentrate on a big mule deer, so the next morning we were back at it again. We hunted all morning, spotting quite a few mule deer. Seeing nothing I wanted, we headed to a different waterhole to possibly spot another Coues or mule deer around noon. We ended up seeing many deer including a Coues deer cactus buck. This is hugely rare for this species and really interesting to see, but he wasn't quite big enough to harvest—yet seeing him was a unique experience. That evening we were hard at it again for muleys. Jason had a spot he wanted to hit just before dark where he had seen a good buck a few days earlier. About 30 minutes before dark we were slowly moving through a big cholla patch when I looked up and saw some does. The deer were unaware of our presence so we just held our ground and waited in hopes that a big buck would follow. After a few minutes Jason spotted a buck moving from right to left, heading



Art Pearce and Jason Whitaker with the non-typical coues buck that grossed 136" and netted 121 7/8" net.

towards the does. I was set up with a solid rest, waiting for the thumbs-up from Jason. But the buck wouldn't give us a good view because of all the thick brush. Thinking the deer was a shooter, we patiently waited until the buck moved behind some thick brush which allowed us to move closer. When the buck stepped out, he gave us the look we were waiting for. After a few seconds Jason told me to take the buck. Right at the same moment he started to leave, so I took the shot and down he went. The buck was a five by six non-typical and was over 32 inches wide, making him the largest muley I have ever taken. Wow! Two days and two bucks and I still had another Coues deer tag in my pocket!

The next day we were back after another whitetail. After killing a monster Coues and a muley in two days, Jason inquired what kind of Coues deer I would be happy with. The chances of finding one like the giant I'd killed on the first day would be slim to none. Telling him I would be happy with a 105+, the hunt was on for deer number three. We returned to the first waterhole where we'd killed the non-typical and set up for another wait. After a couple of hours and getting closer to dusk, Jason spotted a nice buck through the brush, just standing there looking at some does at the waterhole. The buck was slightly obscured by a big tree limb and a barbwire fence. Hoping I could miss these obstacles and sneak one into his vitals, I took the shot and the buck simply dropped. As I walked up to this third buck I excitedly realized I had just shot three trophy bucks in three days with three shots. This had clearly been the three best days of hunting in my life!

After the official, 60-day period the three trophies were scored by Ralph Stayner, an official Boone and Crockett scorer. The big, non-typical Coues taped out at a whopping 136" gross and 121 7/8" net. My mule deer scored an amazing 201 2/8" gross and 193 2/8" net and my other Coues deer scored 107 4/8" gross and 103 2/8" net. This truly was a dream hunt for me. I give many thanks to Jason and Josh Whitaker, Chad and Shawn Smith, Augustine Hertado, and the rest of the crew for making this experience in Mexico one for the books. 



Gear List

SPOTTING SCOPE: Swarovski 4-12x50

OPTICS: Leica 10x42 binoculars with range finder

CAMERA: Minox digital camera

BINOS/RANGEFINDER: Leica 10x42 binoculars with range finder

TRI-POD: Outdoorsman's mini tripod with extender & pistol grip.

RIFLE: .270 mag made by Rifles Inc.

AMMO: 140-grain by Superior

Hunter Hills Journal



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Art will receive a backpack from Badlands a mini field journal from Hunter Hills Journals for his story. See page 39 for more information.



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