

My good friend Andre van Hilten of Willow Creek Outfitters called me last summer to ask if I would be interested in hunting whitetail deer in Alberta that fall. I had hunted with Andre on three previous occasions and was delighted he had invited me.

When I arrived in Calgary, Andre informed me that he would be able to lease a mule deer tag for me from his friend Tyson if I desired, since all his mulie tags were fully booked. I had hunted mule deer with Andre the previous fall during the rut and had taken a 164-inch buck, my best so far. I graciously accepted the tag, and now with a whitetail and mule deer tag in my pocket, I was eager and ready to hunt. This area is managed and therefore gaining a reputation for its big mule deer. Residents can only hunt there once every three to four years.

During my previous hunts with Andre, the first hour or two of each day was generally spent driving the truck around and stopping frequently to glass. Mid-morning, we would usually hike into a honey hole, then still-hunt and continue glassing. This is prairie country in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains, with lots of draws and coulees, poplar and willow thickets, and mile after mile of grazing land. Andre has secured hunting permission from an amazing number of ranchers, enabling him to hunt enormous chunks of real estate.

Our first morning of hunting found us in a coulee, half a mile from the road. Andre had seen a nice eight-point whitetail while scouting this area and felt it might be living in this cover. Andre drove the bottom after I got set up on top. I was distractedly watching a red fox that Andre had pushed out, when I looked in the field above the coulee and saw a buck running across it. By the time I got him in my scope, he was too far away for a legitimate shot. I was sick that I had missed him when he first came up and out of the draw. When I met up with Andre, he said that he had seen the buck, and it was not the one we were looking for, which made me feel a little better.

In the late afternoon, we were glassing from a rock outcropping, covering a lot of country, when Andre spotted bone in the brush a mile and a half away. I could barely see the two deer with my binoculars, but Andre thought they were whitetails. It was 5:20 p.m. with dusk fast approaching. We thought about coming back tomorrow, but "knowing where they were now," we plunged off the canyon rim and up the other side, using a dry drainage as cover.

We closed the distance to 360 yards. The deer were up and feeding, and we made a final move to 230 yards. With shooting light fading fast, I took a shot but missed. To my amazement, the deer just stood there, not knowing where the shot had come from. I shot again and this time heard the "whack" of bullet hitting deer, and he was down!

The buck is my second biggest whitetail in 45 years of hunting, a splendid 148-inch typical eight-point whitetail. After pictures and back slaps, caping and butchering, we realized we did not want to go back to the truck the way we had come. Thanks to great cellphone coverage, we called Andre's brother, Hans, and arranged a pickup point just half a mile south of the cellphone tower's blinking light that we used as a beacon on this dark but star-filled night. We were home by 10 p.m., celebrating our good fortune.

The week continued with good weather and good hunting. Although the hunting was pre-rut, we saw dozens of deer each day, including many in the mid-160s.

On the next to last day of our hunt, I spotted a couple of deer about a mile away. After looking at them with the spotting scope, we determined a closer look was needed. An easy half-mile downhill trot and a harder half-mile walk uphill found us in an aspen copse 300 yards from a mid-160-class deer. After 30 minutes of deliberation, I elected to pass on the buck. After all, we had another day to hunt and a nice whitetail was already in the bag.

On our final day of hunting, Andre spotted a buck that required the spotting scope, but from a mile away, we

where the **Prairie**



Latham Myers, who hails from West Virginia, took this great 4x4 whitetail in 2008. The antlers carry long G-2s and G-3s and above normal brow-tines. The Alberta whitetail scores 148 inches.

meets the Sky

BY G. LATHAM MYERS II



needed to close the gap. At 1,100 yards, what had looked like a typical 4x4 buck turned his head and revealed some sticker points. Now the stalk was on! Using a coulee as cover, we continued closing the distance. Three hundred yards from the bedded buck, we busted two does that ran away from the buck and us. We quickly left the coulee to gain a sight advantage, and there went our buck, trotting across an open field at 400 yards. I was prone on my daypack with a shell in the pipe when Andre said, "Shoot him!"

I squeezed off a shot and missed high. By now the buck was 450 yards out, and I missed again. I chambered another round, but Andre said, "Don't shoot!" When the buck disappeared over the horizon, we made a wild half-mile sprint. Andre, who is 32 years old, was 100 yards in front of me (56 years old), but he skilfully slowed down and allowed me to catch up. I turned my scope down to 4.5 power and approached

a small ravine, 40 yards wide by 50 yards long, that was choked with willow brush. Andre stepped aside as the buck busted out of the cover, and I managed to put a Barne's TSX in the buck's back end. By the time I got through the thicket, my buck was finished. This great deer has lots of character and later grossed 186 non-typical.

I would like to extend many thanks to Andre, Tyson, and Hans. Only in my wildest dreams did I anticipate harvesting two deer of this quality in six days of hunting. If you have similar dreams, I would encourage you to call Andre and book your hunt in the beautiful foothills of the Canadian Rockies, where the prairie meets the sky.

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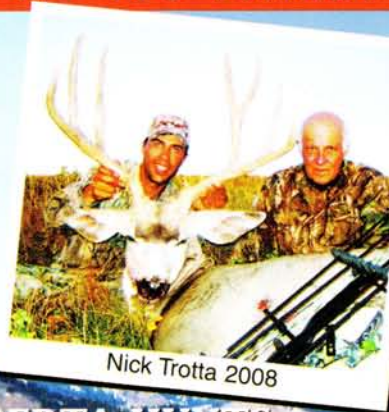
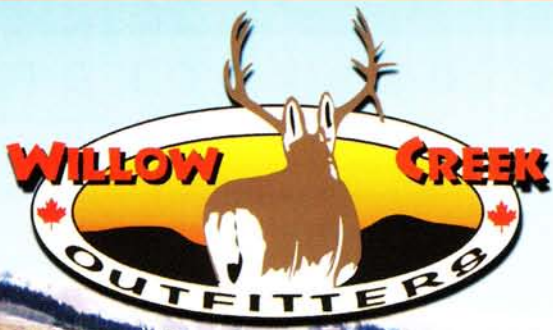


Latham and outfitter Andre van Hilten with the impressive mule deer that Latham got a few days after taking his whitetail. The unique trophy has deep forks along with three big abnormal points. The mule deer grosses just over 186 inches.



This is some of the fantastic country that is in Andre's "Willow Creek Outfitting" territory. All photos were taken by Andre van Hilten, Nanton, Alberta.

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Nick Trotta 2008



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