

Jeff Robins of Sundre, Alberta, with the trophy mule deer he arrowed in 2009. Main beams reach out to 25 2/8 and 24 6/8, and G-2s are long at 16 7/8 and 17 1/8 inches. Largest circumference is 5 1/8 inches. Inside spread goes 19 1/8, and the greatest spread is 25 5/8 inches. The antlers gross 206 7/8 and net an even 200 non-typical points. Sugar Creek Taxidermy out of Red Deer, Alberta, did the great shoulder mount.

The fall of 2009, my fourth Alberta archery season, started out hot with above normal temperatures. My father and I hunted hard for almost three weeks with each of us trying to kill our first elk. We came close a few times. I finally tagged a 5x6 bull on the evening of the day that my father flew back to Ontario. I was extremely happy because this was my first bowkill since moving to Alberta back in 2006. I had shot numerous whitetails and turkeys back in Ontario, but no other big game.

I am fortunate that my job allows me lots of time afield each season, and I also use vacation time during the archery season. I have always considered myself a bowhunter first and gun hunter second, but in the past three seasons here in Alberta, I was never able to close the deal on any game animals with my bow.

Now with an elk down, I could concentrate on trying for my first mule deer. I have hunted them a bit around home, but not of the calibre of buck I was going to end up running into. I had to return to work for one week and then I would be off for another three weeks. Yes, I know it's tough.

When I returned home, the bottom had fallen out of the thermometer. We even had a good amount of snowfall to the west and around home. I planned on doing some driving through the mountains and foothills to look for something decent. By "decent" I mean something close to 140 inches or larger, which I thought would be a great first mule deer. I put on some miles in the mountains not really knowing where to look. I ended up putting the stalk on a group of bucks that I was excited to find after days of looking. I wasn't able to get in close for the shot, though, which ended up being a good thing.

Now, in the past, an uncle of mine had introduced me to a friend of his but only once. This friend farmed and had lots of land down south and east of where I lived. I always kept this information in the back of my mind, but never really thought about when I would look him up. I finally asked my uncle for the number and called the landowner. It was Sunday, October 11. He remembered me and said, "No problem." He was more willing to grant me access due to the fact I was bowhunting. He also informed me that there was one other hunter, but that he wasn't having any luck. The short phone call ended with him giving me directions to his place.

Up early on the morning of Tuesday, October 13, I had at least three hours of driving if not more due to the wind and

snow. I packed an overnight bag just in case I found some good deer. I thought if I spent the whole day hunting and scouting this new area, I could go after them again the next day.

I finally made it to the landowner's house. Although later than I wanted to be, at least I got there. He wasn't home, so I called him. He directed me as best as he could over the phone to a couple areas he thought would have some mule deer. One area was a large coulee that led to a river. This is where I started my hunt.

To this point I hadn't even seen a deer, and looking at the wide open prairies and rolling hills, I thought, *Where could they possibly hide?* I stuck to the existing trail with my truck as instructed and didn't dare try anything funny as far as off-roading. It was wet and muddy with a skiff of snow, but not as much as I had left behind me earlier. A steady breeze from the southwest made it feel colder than it was.

The time was 11:30 a.m. when I left my truck and made

my way towards the edge of the long coulee. My plan was to still-hunt the top edge of the coulee towards the river. This was perfect as the wind was blowing right in my face. Stopping to glass occasionally up ahead, across and down the coulee, was a new way for me to hunt, so I treated it like a scouting trip. As I came to a turn-up high on the coulee edge, I peeked over and down partway. This was also my first feel of prairie cactus! I noticed right away, not more than 150 yards below me, a rack in the low brush. It was a 135 to 140 buck bedded with a doe. I only needed to glass him for a moment before deciding to go after him.

I made a stalk from up above the coulee edge and circled from behind and above him. I made sure to leave my pack up top so nothing would get in my way during the stalk. Closing the distance to 33 yards from the buck (I paced it out later), I drew my bow and then tried to whistle, with a frozen top lip, to get him to stand. The doe stood up first, then him. Just as I was settling the pins behind his shoulder, they bolted. Oh well, I laughed and thought it was great just to get so close in the first hour of hunting.

Making my way back to my pack, I glassed farther down the coulee as I climbed up. With my naked eye, about half a mile away and halfway down the opposite side of the coulee, I spotted the white rear of a single deer walking. The glasses came up, and WOW! The first thing I thought was, *My buddy Jay would shoot this one!* Jay always teases me about what I think is big. He's taken some good ones, I haven't! I was

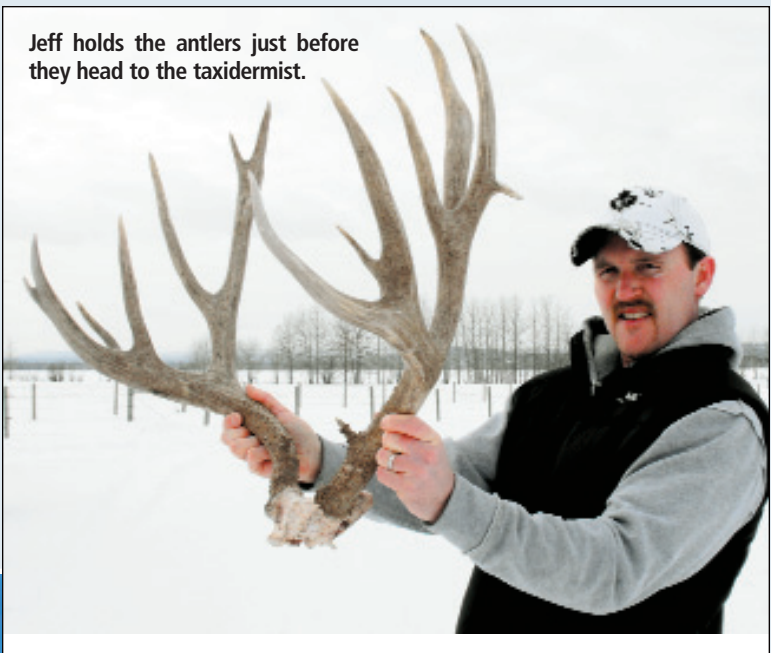
# ON CLOUD NINE

BY JEFF ROBINS

having trouble determining how to make my move. I ended up backtracking 15 minutes once I realized I needed to go back the way I had started from, then go down and across to the other side, and up to the top of the coulee.

Once on top, I sprinted towards the deer. The wind was good and there was nothing to make noise. I dropped my pack and nocked an arrow, then began peeking over as I walked along the top edge of the coulee. Descending wasn't an option because it was really steep and the low brush would definitely make noise. I finally spotted him bedded, but I still had to go farther down the edge. I backed up, walked down, then peered over again. *Where is he?* As I glanced to my right, there he was, staring right at me. I stepped ahead,

Alberta has produced magnificent mule deer over the years. Now you can add Jeff's buck to the list.



Jeff holds the antlers just before they head to the taxidermist.



knelt down and drew all in one motion. *Fifty yards*, I thought, *but straight down?* He stood at the same moment I put my 50-yard pin low on him and released. He disappeared, and I thought I heard the arrow hit, then he reappeared, sliding down the coulee. I hit him high; I guess I should have put my 40-yard pin right on him. After watching for a moment until he stopped moving, I called my wife, "I just shot a MONSTER!"

I didn't realize what he had until I actually put my hands on his rack: good mass, really long G-2s, and extra points. The antlers gross score 180 3/8 and net 173 4/8 typical points. Adding 26 4/8 of abnormal results in a net score of 200 non-typical points. The buck gross scores 206 7/8 non-typical, not too shabby for a first mule deer. I'm still floating on "Cloud Nine!" I'd like to thank Sugar Creek Taxidermy Studio in Red Deer for the great work done on the mount.