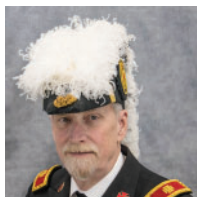




## New Mexico Supplement



H. C. Sky Olsen  
Grand Commander

Sir Knights,

I hope this finds you and yours in good health and happiness.

Hunting Roosevelt elk in the coastal rain forest of northwestern Oregon was an annual ritual for me. It is quite different from New Mexico. It was usually raining and sometimes blowing 80 miles per hour as storms rolled in off the Pacific. The hunting ground was the Coast Range, a rugged area of steep hills covered with a patchwork of forest and clear-cuts connected by gravel logging roads. The clear-cuts were immediately replanted with trees and were soon growing all sorts of elk food. It was ideal elk habitat. Plenty of water, lots of food in the clear-cuts and cover in the forest. It was so ideal that getting an elk tag was a sure thing.

At about 3:00 AM opening morning, three of us drove out to an area where Chuck, who worked in the woods, had seen a herd with two bulls the previous evening. They needed to have three points or better on one side to be legal and he couldn't tell in the fading light if they were.

The spot was typical of the area. It was a steep sided bowl which had been clear-cut on one side about five years before, with a road running along the upper edge to a landing from which the felled logs were pulled up to the road and loaded onto trucks for the trip to the mill. The replanted trees, and everything else, grew very quickly with 100 inches of rain each year and the trees that had been 18 inches tall when planted, with a paper cap on the tip to keep the elk from browsing them off, were now chest high. So were the ferns, salal, blackberries and everything else.

We pulled off the road a few hundred yards before the clear-cut and suited up in our rain gear and grabbed our rifles and binoculars. We quietly walked along the road in the dark and rain. We could hear the elk moving around below us. They are not very graceful; they break branches and knock stones together in the creek beds. It sounded as though they were spread out calmly feeding.

We spread out along the fishhook shaped road, with me at the barbed end. It was still dark and raining and nothing was visible below, so I decided to get closer to the elk I could hear. Being at the end of the road, I was where the forest met the clear-cut. It's generally easier to move through the big timber because it shades out the underbrush that grows in the rare sunlight open areas. The forest floor has dead branches, old-growth stumps and ferns with a thick carpet of needles and dead wood mulch. The main difficulty was the darkness, and it was very steep, so steep that I had to move from tree to tree, so I had something to hang on to.

It took half an hour to move 150 yards down, and I do mean down. It always seemed odd to me that country where you never saw exposed rock outcrops could be so steep. I've heard it referred to as "mud with a hard-on".

I fetched up against a tree trunk and noticed I could see shapes out in the open as the dawn gradually lit the cloud cover. The slope below my tree was too steep to descend in a controlled manner, so I wrapped my left arm around the tree and watched the clear-cut brighten.

The rain momentarily eased, and the elk were suddenly visible. There were half a dozen in a fold of the ground just below me. The one nearest me, about 75 feet away, appeared to be a bull, because of his lighter color, but his head was down as he fed, and I couldn't see his horns. (I know they're antlers, but everyone thereabout calls them horns.)

It was then that I heard the popping of gravel as a vehicle rumbled up the road. I couldn't see it, but it was coming to the end of the road by the sound of it. Elk don't usually pay much attention to vehicles until after opening morning, but I thought my bull might raise his head to take a peek, giving me a look at his horns. Wrapped around the tree as I was, I brought up my rifle, flipped off the scope covers and aimed at the bull. I heard the vehicle stop above me and car doors and voices. The elk was still absorbed in his browsing and didn't raise his head.

I heard a 'pop', 'whack', and a cloud of mist enveloped the rear of the bull as a bullet smacked into his soaked hide, followed by the sound of the rifle. I saw he was a four point, as his head jerked up. Immediately, there followed another seven or eight shots. The 'pop' as the bullet broke the sound barrier as it went by, the 'whack' as it struck, followed by the 'bang' of the rifle from 150 yards away were a fascinating combination of sounds.

The bull took a few steps away from the shooters and I shot him through the chest and he went down. The others shot a few more times.

Elk hunting on the north coast is highly competitive and every year you would hear of fights over who had rights to an animal, sometimes with guns pointed and threats made. Avoiding an altercation that could cause real damage seemed like a good plan, so I cut through the trees to my companions and we hunted elsewhere.

The same method is a good way to avoid violating the masonic rule against discussions of religion or politics, something especially important in the current political climate. Do not contribute to something which could tear apart a commandery or a lodge. Walk away from such discussions.

Courteously,

H. C. Sky Olsen  
Grand Commander

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