



# Wisconsin Archery Elk: A Challenge and Success

By Bill McCrary



Dan Evenson, 38, of Cambridge, **Wisconsin** and a WBH Life Member, went elk hunting on October 15th, 2022 near Clam Lake in Ashland County.

In the late afternoon, while Evenson watched a small herd of elk work towards a rye field, a mature bull stepped clear from the herd and presented a shot opportunity. Evenson made the shot with his compound bow and watched as the bull fell within sight after running about 100 yards. Evenson's bull now occupies the coveted position of being the first to be taken with a bow and arrow in the modern era of bowhunting in Wisconsin. As an official Pope & Young measurer Evenson rough scored the bull's 6 x 7 set of antlers in the 280's. They will be officially scored



after the required drying period and will be listed in the P & Y records. Both Evenson and the bull will be recognized by the WBH and the WI DNR for their unique place in bowhunting history.

I was able to speak with Evenson within two days of his taking the elk and quickly learned he was a modest individual who presents himself as just one of many and an everyday sort of bowhunter. He doesn't pretend to be anything different than that. Yet I learned very quickly he was quite the accomplished bowhunter. Turns out some years ago he challenged himself to take all 29 of the North American big game species. As of this writing he has only 5 species to go! He's taken multiple examples of a number of the species and shows no signs of slowing down. Evenson's success is the sort bowhunters dream of and it's an understatement to call it a tremendous accomplishment!

I thought the same thing as we discussed his taking of the Wisconsin bull elk and wanted to know more. His answers to my questions were edited for this article.

**Bill:** How'd you get started in archery and how long have you been bowhunting?

**Dan:** My aunt and uncle, Carolyn and Stan Godfrey, are well known in Wisconsin bowhunting circles and they have been my mentors and source of encouragement for many years. As a kid I learned from them. Stan coached me in my shooting and at 12 years of age I first bowhunted on his property in Buffalo County; since I first started I haven't missed a year of bowhunting. I honed my skills under Stan's guidance and have sought his counsel many times over the years. I can't thank him enough for what he has done for me. Carolyn and Stan have both been inspirational people who have left a lasting mark on this bowhunter's life. Most of my dreams and life goals were brought on staring at the walls of their home and the many species of animals displayed there. Without the love and attention of Carolyn and Stan I would not be the person I am today. I thank them from the bottom of my heart.

**Bill:** What sort of archery tackle do you use?

**Dan:** I'm presently shooting a Hoyt RX7 compound bow set at 70# with Black Eagle carbon arrows. I took the elk with a Slick Trick 4-blade, fixed blade broadhead sharpened to a razor's edge. All in all, the set-up is a deadly combination!

**Bill:** On a general basis, what can you tell me about elk hunting in Wisconsin?

**Dan:** The last native elk in Wisconsin was killed in the mid-1800s and our state had been completely devoid of them for nearly 150 years. Beginning in 1995 and continuing intermittently to 2019 our WI DNR introduced small herds to the Clam Lake area in northern Wisconsin and to Jackson County in the central part of the state. A total of 199 elk have been



brought in from Michigan and Kentucky in an effort to reestablish a huntable population in our state. These efforts are paying off and at this time limited hunting of the herd in the Clam Lake area is allowed. Elk hunting permits are limited to residents only and are awarded through an application and drawing process. Every year tens of thousands of applicants try for a permit but only eight elk permits are allocated. Four of these go to the tribes representing the indigenous people of Wisconsin, one goes to the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, and three are awarded to members of the public who win them in a drawing. The permit allows the purchase of an elk license. The DNR requires all hunters to attend an elk hunting orientation session to familiarize themselves with Wisconsin's unique elk hunting regulations and conditions. Hunters may use the weapon of their choice, be it a firearm, crossbow or bow and arrow. The season dates are set by the DNR and occur after the mating season. This is intentional and helps reduce any possible negative impact of the hunt on the herd. While a small number of elk are taken from the herd by hunting the overall goal is to protect the population. At this time expansion of the herd seems slow and there are obstacles in the way. However, steady progress toward a sustainable population offering additional hunting opportunities in the future is being made.

**Bill:** The drawing process and your elk permit, what can you tell us about your experiences?

**Dan:** In 2018 when I first heard the state was allowing a limited elk hunt I applied for a permit right away but was not drawn. The same thing happened the next year and then the next two years. Like most applicants across the state I was challenged by the drawing system yet knew it was my only chance. I had to go with the flow and hope for the best from lady luck. I applied again in 2022 and was on an out of state bear hunt when I got a call from my wife telling me I'd been drawn for an elk permit. I was ecstatic! My chance in my home state had arrived and I promised myself to make the most of it. I felt honored and proud to receive the permit; and was humbled to have been so lucky. I vowed to hunt with a bow and knew this was a unique opportunity. My feeling is that very few people ever get the chance to put their name on something, especially in a sport they love. Were I to be successful this would be the first bow & arrow elk in state history, I knew that but tried not to let that be my main focus. Rather, I just couldn't get over how lucky I had been to be offered this opportunity.

**Bill:** Did you have to make any special preparations for this hunt?

**Dan:** To start with, as just mentioned, there was the application and drawing process all prospective hunters had to go through. And for those who drew a permit there was the orientation session. In addition, I made three scouting trips from my home in southern Wisconsin to the Clam Lake area. I met and got to know a number of locals who helped in locating the elk herds in the area and keeping track of their movements. Plus, I had to make inquiries and get trespass permission from landowners. In some regards some of the farmers



were eager to have the elk herd hunted; they lose thousands of dollars each year to crop damage caused by the elk.

**Bill:** Let's hear about the actual hunt, how'd it go?

**Dan:** The season opened on October 15<sup>th</sup>, a Saturday, but I was in the area a few days early. My goal was to locate the herd on Thursday and Friday, and then keep track of their movement so I could be on them right away opening morning. Sure enough, at daylight on Saturday morning I located a small herd bedded in an agricultural rye field and made a stalk. There was one pretty nice mature bull in the group, a couple satellite bulls, and a number of cow elk. Some of the elk eventually got on their feet, milled around, and I was almost busted by one of the satellite bulls. Luckily, that didn't happen. Eventually the herd bull stood. He was broadside at 60 yards and offered a shot I knew I could make. I took careful aim, shot, and watched my arrow fly three feet over his back! The herd moved off a bit but I was able to intercept them, and the herd bull again presented for a killing shot. Once again I aimed, shot, and watched my arrow fly three feet over his back! This time the herd took off and I saw them disappear into a distant wood line. It was disappointing to realize I'd missed two shots, both within what I considered my effective range. I wondered if I'd somehow damaged my bow or what changed to alter my shooting. By late afternoon I was back out searching the ag fields for the elk herd, only this time I carried my back-up bow. By 6:00 PM I'd re-located the herd about a mile and a half away and set-up on a fence line crossing ahead of the herd's line of movement. With only minutes to spare I watched the herd coming closer and got set to shoot. Again, I picked out the herd bull, drew and aimed, and then watched my arrow arc into the chest of the bull. It was a good hit, I knew it, and I watched the bull on his death run. He went down in the field, and quietly passed away. It was all over in ten minutes! It was hard to believe that my quest and the challenge were over! I had friends with me along on this hunt and they were watching from a distance with binoculars and saw the whole event unfold. They were with me in minutes to help celebrate the successful climax of this hunt. Next I called my wife and my mentor, Stan. With all of my heart I wanted them to be part of this experience. They were.

**Bill:** About this kill, what part of the experience means the most to you?

**Dan:** I know I'm going to surprise people with my answer to this question. Yes, I know drawing an elk permit in Wisconsin is a rare event and I was one lucky bowhunter to have that experience. That's certainly meaningful. And for sure I am aware the taking of a nice bull as the first elk bow kill in modern archery history is not only a once in a lifetime, but a once in Wisconsin bowhunting history event. I can certainly appreciate the significance of that and I know that in the future when there's talk of who took the first deer, bear, turkey, wolf, and now elk with a bow in Wisconsin, my name will be mentioned. But honestly, what meant the most to



me about this entire event is that I got to experience and go through it and share it with a number of my closest friends, with my forever mentor Stan, and with a small group of new friends I met along the way. A number of my buddies traveled with me this past summer on my scouting trips to the Clam Lake area. And then some helped during the hunt in locating the herd and were there to watch with binoculars as I missed two shots and then made the third. And then there's Josh Spiegel, the DNR elk biologist whose enthusiasm and assistance given to this bowhunter after an elk seemed unbounded. And of course my loving wife for the support she has offered over the years. I know that right now and in future years my name will be attached to this elk and I will be forever remembered as the hunter to take the animal, but I also know I could not have done it alone. This is what means the most to me about this event and I can assure each and every one of my comrades of the hunt I am grateful beyond words for their assistance.

\* \* \* \* \*