

# COUES' #0001

*Giving up a chance  
at the Strip to  
bag a giant desert  
whitetail*

**MARK THOMSON • ARIZONA  
2007 • GUIDED**

I had been building up bonus points for deer in Arizona in hopes of someday hunting the big mulies of the Strip. At least that's what I thought, but something about the diminutive Coues' deer of the desert kept calling to me.

Back in 1995, on my first-ever guided hunt, I had taken a nice Coues' buck with Rom Dryden of Rincon Outfitters in Tucson. Even as that hunt ended, I knew someday I would have to return to the beautiful desert country of southern Arizona to chase those elusive little deer again. Why not "burn" my points and hunt the ghosts of the desert now? With eight bonus points, there was no question that I would draw, but I was very surprised to see that I had also drawn permit #0001 for my first choice December hunt. The permit number had a nice ring to it. I took it as a good omen for my upcoming hunt.

I called Rom and we got my hunt set up for opening day of the December season. I was very excited when Rom called and told me of a large shed they had found, as well as two very good bucks they had seen in the 110-115 class in the area I would be hunting. Finally, mid December rolled around and we were on our way to Rom's "secret spot." Rom and his guides had already had a good 2007; all of his hunters took big bucks in the earlier seasons.

The "road" into the area we would be hunting was nasty. In numerous spots, we were forced to put my 225 pounds of "highly toned, raw muscle" to good use by having me lay across the front of the 4x4 "mule" to keep it from flipping over backward.

As we set up camp and I poked around a little, I found that I remembered the lessons in Arizona flora that Rom had given me back on my 1995 trip. I could still recall most of the names of the prickly, stickery, pokey plants that call the Arizona desert home - cat claw, lechuguilla (shin dagger), ocotillo, the beautiful saguaro cactus, jumping cholla, barrel cactus, century plants, and, of course, prickly pear. If my previous hunt was any indication, I



Mark's monster Coues' was unofficially scored at 112 gross, 108 net; it's no wonder he's all smiles!

*"Something about his body and the way he carried himself told me he was a big one."*

knew that I would be poked and jabbed by all of them countless times before my adventure ended. It seems I have a talent for forgetting where I'm at, grabbing where I shouldn't be grabbing, and sitting where I shouldn't be sitting.

Opening morning had me paired with guide Jimmy Seay, while Rom headed out in a different direction with Craig, the other hunter in our camp. Jimmy and I had hunted together once before, when he helped me take a B&C pronghorn the previous year. Jimmy is only 21 but, as a hunter, he is wise way beyond his years and has mastered the optics skills one needs to spot the tiny dove-gray deer.

We left in the dark and headed to the top while Rom and Craig headed down low. We might just as well have slept in, because Jimmy and I were in a cloud bank until about 10 a.m., when the fog finally lifted. We began scouring the hillside with our tripod-mounted binoculars. Of





Scouring the rugged, unforgiving desert terrain for evasive Coues' deer requires a hunter to be in top physical shape and completely focused mentally.

course, Jimmy spotted the first deer; in fact, I figure he beat me by about five to one in finding the camouflaged little guys.

If you've never hunted Coues' deer, I can tell you that you'll be amazed at how well they blend in with their surroundings. You can glass the same hillside over and over for hours and see nothing; suddenly, there they are, standing exactly where you had looked at least ten times before. You have to be persistent and have faith that they're there - you just have to find them.

We hunted until dark and spotted many does and a number of bucks, but nothing I was interested in trying to hang my tag on. The bucks were acting "rutty" and I knew that would help my chances of finding a big one.

When we arrived back at camp, we were happy to find that Craig had taken a nice heavy buck. It was his first Coues' and he was extremely pleased. As I worked on pulling stickers out of various appendages, Rom told us about what he and Craig had seen during the day. It was apparent they had definitely spotted more deer down low than we had been seeing at the higher elevations, so we decided to begin the next morning's search in the lower country.

The night was cold and the wind

pounded our tent relentlessly; we all slept only intermittently. The gray dawn found Jimmy and me glassing the lower country in a cold, howling wind - definitely not the best of conditions for hunting Coues' deer. We had the early rut working in our favor, though, and hoped that the December hormones would keep the deer moving in spite of the wind.

It wasn't long before I spotted a doe up high across the canyon three-quarters of a mile away. I also saw a fleeting glimpse of what I was pretty sure was a buck chasing her. I motioned Jimmy over. He said he had seen the same thing from his glassing perch. At least I had tied him on the spot!

We both locked our binoculars on the doe and began picking the area apart. It wasn't long before we found a couple more does and then the buck! His body was noticeably larger and more muscular, and he was occupied with chasing one of the does. We still hadn't had a decent look at his antlers, but I was excited. Something about his body and the way he carried himself told me he was a big one.

Our count was soon up to six does. We watched and watched, and then finally caught a brief glimpse of the side of his right antler as the sun caught it just right.

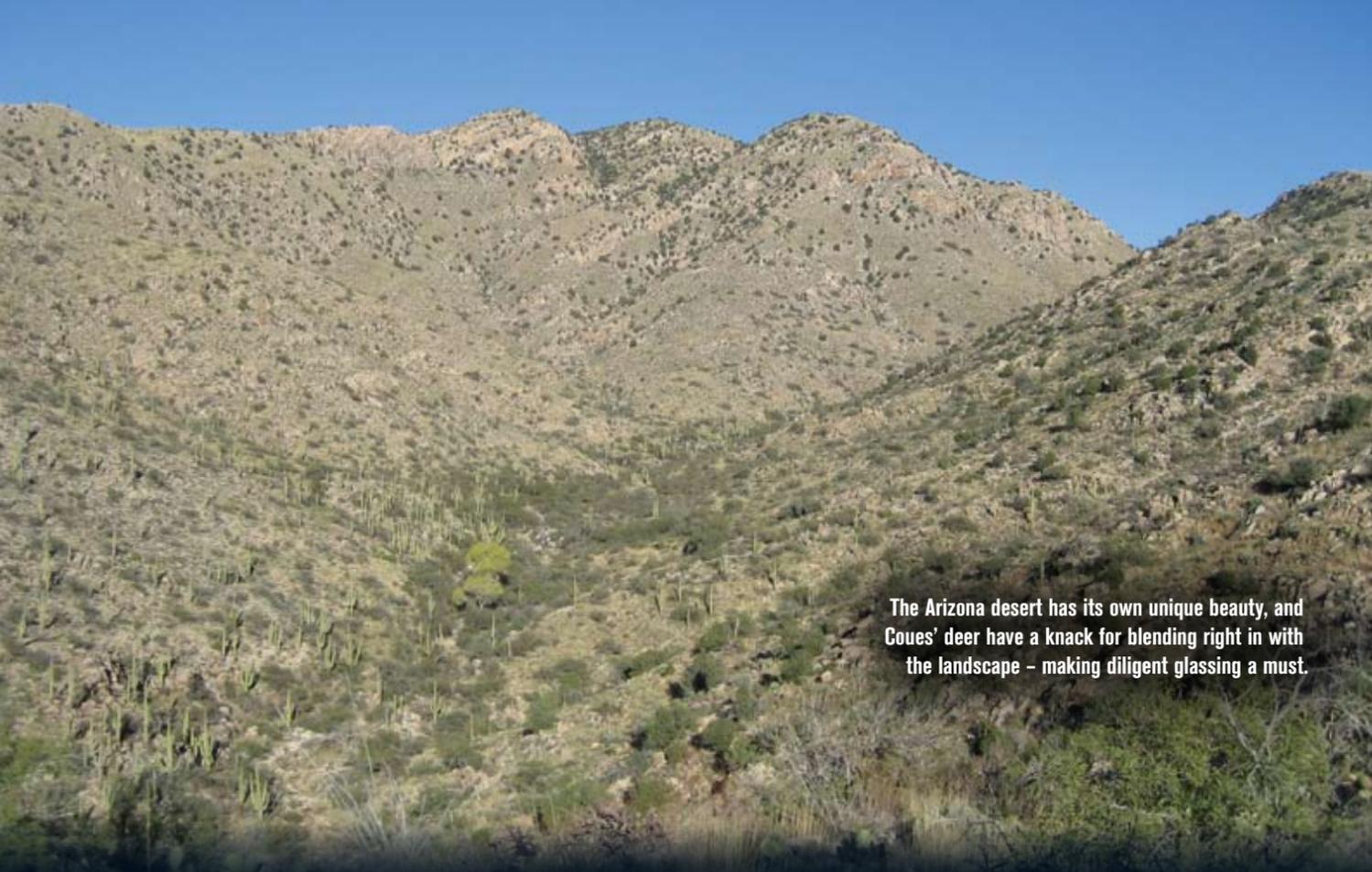
Those two seconds were all that I needed; I knew he was a good one. Although I really didn't have time to actually count points, I just felt there was too much there for him to be the "standard" eight-point. I looked at Jimmy and could tell that he thought the buck was something special, too.

We continued to watch, and finally caught a view of him going away; he seemed very wide. Rom joined us about that time, but the three of us could never get another really good look at him, even though we all watched the deer for a couple more hours. We hoped they would bed before we began our stalk, but the buck seemed to be energetic and was keeping the does moving as he disappeared in and out of the thick brush. We had seen enough; Jimmy and I decided to make our move.

It was after 10 a.m., and we had a long hike to the bottom of the canyon and up the other side. As we started the hike, I hoped the buck would still be there when we arrived. I also hoped he would be the one I had dreamed about placing tag #0001 on.

We had been glassing in the cold shade all morning but, as we crossed to the other side of the canyon and began our

# BLASER



The Arizona desert has its own unique beauty, and Coues' deer have a knack for blending right in with the landscape - making diligent glassing a must.

climb, the sun quickly seemed very hot. As we neared the boulder where we had determined we should be in range for a shot, I asked Jimmy to slow down just a bit so I wouldn't be too winded and shaky when we got there.

At the boulder, I removed my pack, promptly got jabbed by another plant, and chambered a round as Jimmy tried to locate the buck in his binoculars. Suddenly, Jimmy's mood took on a sense of urgency. He said, "Get up here, quick!"

I could tell he had found the buck, and the deer must be on the move. I threw my pack over the boulder and began trying to find the buck in my scope. "How far, Jimmy?"

"Three hundred yards, and to the right of that white rock."

Luckily, he stopped. I settled my crosshairs on his shoulder, squeezed the trigger, and, through the recoil, heard Jimmy say, "Nice!" I looked up in time to see the buck cartwheeling over backward down the steep mountainside. Ten seconds later and he would have been over the top,

and we would have missed him altogether.

It took us a good 20 minutes to work our way over to where he was and another ten minutes to find him, because he had tumbled farther down the mountain than we realized. When we found him, all I could think was what a great buck he was! He was a perfect ten-point, nearly 17 inches wide outside, and with good mass. Back at camp, we scored him just shy of 112 inches gross and 108 net. Without a doubt, he is #0001 in my book.

If you have never hunted these petite and beautiful deer, you should really give it a try. They're a unique challenge, and the desert country they inhabit has its own special beauty. For a great Arizona hunt, I can highly recommend Rincon Outfitters in Tucson. Rom is well organized, hard working, loves what he does, and most of all is fun. What more could you want?



**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:**

Mark, 50, lives in Thornton, Colorado with his 12-year-old identical twin

sons, Evan and Tanner, both of whom are well on their way to carrying on the hunting tradition in the Thomson household. This spring, Mark will be getting married to his beautiful fiancée, Bev, who "swears" she will support his hunting addiction.

Mark will receive a Boyt BB220 Large Backpack for his story. For details, see page 4.



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