

# THE *Ghost* OF WAPELLO COUNTY

By Troy Spooner

Scott Simmons of New Sharon, Iowa, with his Boone and Crockett buck taken in that state. The 2002 buck has super main beams of 26 6/8 and 27 3/8 inches. The longest tine reaches out to 12 inches and the inside spread measures 21 3/8 inches. The antlers gross 179 6/8, and after deductions they still net 172 6/8 typical points.

To the casual observer, Scott Simmons seems to be just your average, everyday nice guy. Little does the public know that deep down inside hides a maniac, a whitetail maniac! Not just a man who likes to hunt a couple of weeks each year, but a bona fide year-round whitetail fanatic who lives and breathes to hunt big whitetail bucks. And what better place to live when afflicted with such a deep passion than in rural Iowa.

Born and raised in the farm belt of America and introduced to hunting by his father at a young age, Scott knew that hunting was in his blood. He started hunting at the age of ten and knew from day one that this pursuit would develop into a lifelong obsession. He enjoys every opportunity he can get to sneak out and hunt. As a matter of fact, he enjoys hunting so much that his pursuits have taken him from Iowa into Ontario for black bear and to Quebec in search of trophy caribou. However, it is his home state of Iowa that is his choice when it comes to trophy whitetails. And who

can blame him? Iowa is one of the leading producers of top-end whitetail bucks in North America.

Scott hunts a stretch of river bottom in Wapello County in the heart of Iowa's farm country. The bottoms provide the local deer population with an ample amount of cover for a cagey old buck to literally hide out undetected and stay out of harm's reach. Knowing that fact is what prompted Scott to venture into these tangles to try to find a suitable location that might afford him a shot at a rocking-chair racked buck.

During his pre-season scouting, Scott found a valley leading from the agricultural fields down to the river, which appeared to be a major funnel linking the bedding area to the feed source above. Sporting several large rubs and active scrapes, the valley looked very promising for the upcoming early muzzleloader season. Scott wasted no time in setting up a ladder stand and vacating the scene, so as not to disturb the area and alert the deer to his

presence. All he could do now was wait for the early muzzleloader season to open.

On the first morning of the season, Scott decided to rendezvous with a couple of friends to try some small drives in areas where they had also spotted nice bucks prior to the season. The morning produced no sightings, and the light drizzle they were experiencing made Scott nervous about the reliability of his muzzleloader under such conditions. Being his first year of hunting with a muzzleloader and hearing the horror stories of misfires because of moisture, he was very careful to try to keep the action dry and the muzzle pointed in a downward direction. After getting soaked to the bone, the group decided to call it a day and head home to see what the evening's weather would bring.

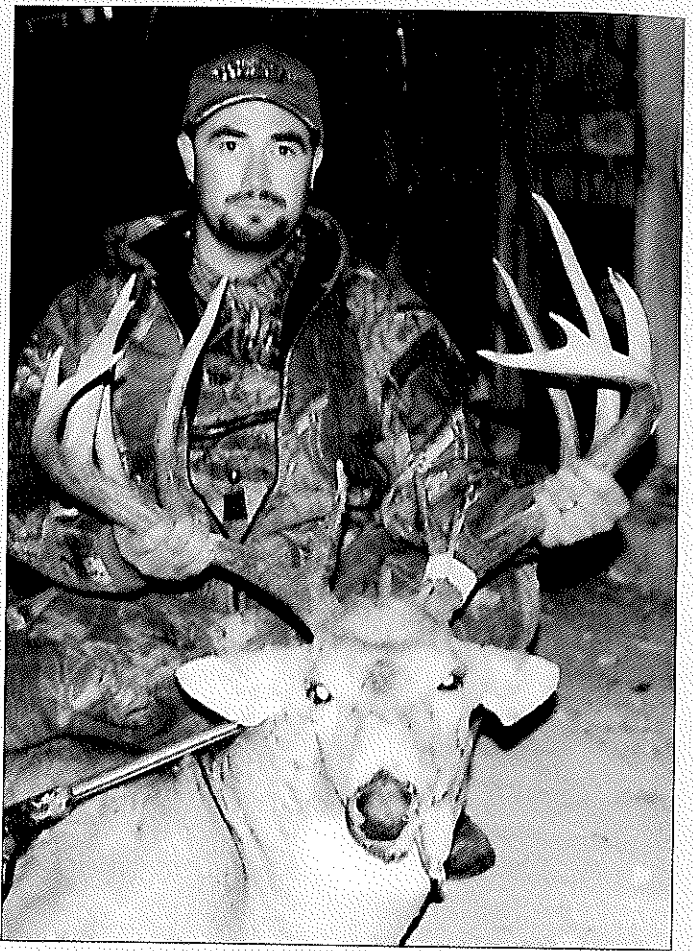
The weather cleared up somewhat and the rain stopped, so Scott felt that an evening hunt in the valley would be in order. The change in the weather and an approaching cold front were sure to have the deer up and moving to fill their bellies. His careful approach to the stand took him down a fenceline and across the edge of the timber to the valley, where he made his way down to his stand. The winds were perfect for the setup, and his confidence was riding high. After a check of his watch revealed 5:30, he sat back and hoped that a big buck would use the funnel before dark.

An hour into his vigil, Scott heard an approaching deer. The shuffling of feet in the leaf litter was coming from up towards the farm fields and heading his way. Not exactly the direction he expected a deer to be approaching from in the evening, he had to stand up and adjust his position to get ready for a shot. The first thing he could see was a set of legs coming, and then as it drew closer, a nice rack appeared atop the deer's head. Appearing as though it would score somewhere above the 150-inch mark, Scott's heart raced as he readied for the shot.

When the buck stopped in an opening at 20 yards, Scott eased the safety off and squeezed the trigger. The cap snapped and the gun paused for a brief second (but long enough for Scott's sights to leave the buck) before firing. A misfire or hang-fire! He couldn't believe what had just happened. A clean miss! The buck took a couple of bounds and just froze. It was as if he had heard the sound but didn't know what it was or where it came from. Since he hadn't spotted Scott, the hunter started to reload his gun for a second chance at the big buck. Just as he was reloading the rifle, he heard another set of feet shuffling in the leaves and looked over his shoulder to see an even bigger buck making its way down the valley, towards where the first buck was standing. The shakes were really setting in now and Scott was having trouble getting the gun ready for a second shot. That's when things got really interesting.

The second buck saw the first buck and started walking stiff-legged towards it. His hair was bristled up on end and he was looking for a fight. The first buck postured in the same manner and a fight ensued. The two bucks crashed and thrashed back and forth in front of the shaken hunter as he desperately tried to get his wits about him and reload his gun. Once reloaded, he tried to pick an opening to get a bullet on its way towards the huge buck that had come to do battle.

After what seemed like hours, but was really maybe only a couple of minutes, the bucks separated and stood their ground,



Scott with his Iowa whitetail.

ready to go another round. Scott picked an opening to the buck's vitals and tried a shot. This time the gun belched on cue and black smoke poured out into the evening air as the big buck tumbled to the ground. The smaller buck wasted no time in high-tailing it out of there.

Scott had hunted this particular stretch of river bottom for 10 years and had never once laid eyes on this particular buck or even heard mention of a giant like this. As he knelt next to the fallen monarch, he wondered how a buck of these proportions could have eluded his hunting party for so long and never been seen. He thought it must have been living in the creek bottoms like some type of ghost... the Ghost of Wapello County.

The Ghost is truly a sight to behold. He has a huge typical frame and is very symmetrical. His main beams possess tremendous length at 27 inches and the rack has nice long tines jutting skyward. The inside spread is just over 21 inches. Being a very clean 6x6 typical, his gross B&C score of 179 6/8 has only seven inches in deductions from side to side. An impressive buck indeed considering he was aged at 4 1/2 years.

Congratulations to Scott Simmons on such an impressive buck, and a special thanks to Rodney Throckmorton for not only putting us in touch with Scott, but for defending the freedoms of our country by serving in our Armed Forces in Iraq. It is our Armed Forces who make it possible for us to enjoy the freedom to possess firearms and the freedom to live and hunt as we choose. Our hearts go out to our soldiers; you truly are "our heroes." God bless! ☘