

IT DOESN'T GET ANY BETTER THAN THIS!

Like many avid whitetail hunters, Steve DeWitt was looking for a better mousetrap. So he traveled to Illinois, bought a farm with his brother-in-law, and ended up shooting one of the biggest bow bucks of the 2006 season!

BY TROY SPOONER

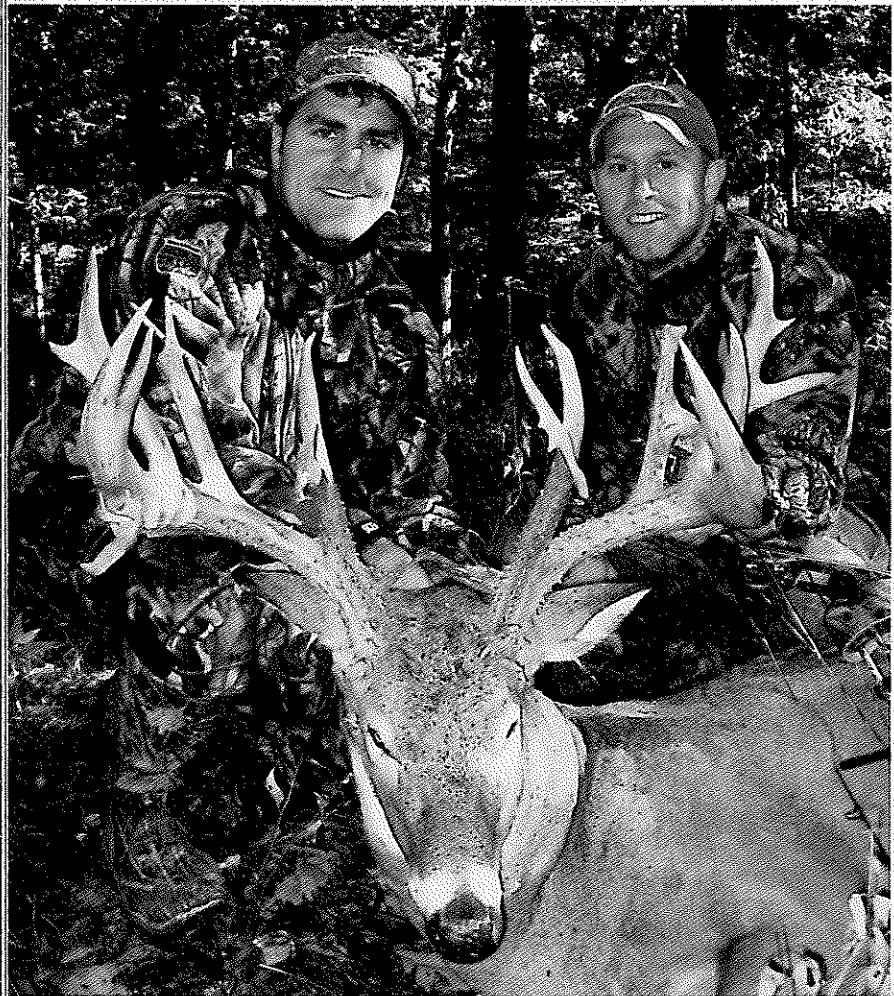


PHOTO COURTESY OF STEVE DEWITT

Steve (left) and his brother-in-law Ryan Berghorst show off Steve's massive 28-point non-typical, taken on Oct. 7, 2006, in Adams County, Illinois. The buck netted 226 7/8. Photo courtesy of Steve DeWitt.

Steve DeWitt of Zeeland, Michigan, wasn't looking to hang his tag on a buck of legendary proportions when he ventured to west-central Illinois last October. He simply wanted to enjoy his passion for hunting and share some time with friends and family. He knew that the possibility always existed of seeing some nice animals, but he never dreamed he would meet up with what would turn out to be the second-largest bow-killed bucks taken in North America in 2006.

Back in early 2005, Steve and his brother-in-law Ryan Berghorst made the trek from Michigan to the fertile lands of west-central Illinois to try to find and purchase a tract of deer hunting land. They searched and found their little "slice of heaven" in Adams County. After signing the closing documents, the two men wasted little time in learning the travel patterns of the local whitetails and setting up tree stands on their newly acquired farm.

The inaugural season turned out to be a good one for Steve. He harvested a 150-class 10-pointer during shotgun season. It was his largest whitetail ever, and it was a great way to christen the hanging pole at camp. Other members of Steve's party also saw several nice bucks, and Ryan scored on a respectable 8-pointer. The 2005 season was considered a great success, thus setting the stage for bigger and better things to come.

IMAGES OF A ROYAL CROWN

In June 2006, Steve, his brother Jim, his grandfather Marvin, and Ryan all traveled to Illinois to do some scouting. Because of the heat and the bugs, they toured the farm one afternoon in the comfort of an air-conditioned truck cab, driving around the field edges, glassing as they went. As they drove around an overgrown ditch line, a huge buck with velvet points seemingly protruding from every angle suddenly leaped up from the weedy cover and sprang for the woods.

All four men were in awe as the buck gave them a quick 40-yard stare before disappearing into the cover of the hardwoods. A simple glance was all it took — even Steve's 87-year-old grandfather knew he was viewing a very special whitetail. During his lifetime, Marvin had viewed many exceptional whitetails, both alive and dead, but he had never laid eyes on a buck with such a crown on its head.

Steve and Ryan were practically speechless as they headed back to Michigan. *It's one thing to see a buck of this size during the off-season, Steve thought, but the chances of seeing him again and actually getting a crack at him during hunting season must be astronomical.* Still, the memory of the giant buck haunted Steve's dreams until the following October. At that time, the dream of a lifetime was about to become a reality.

A GLORIOUS NEW SEASON

Steve, Ryan and two good friends arrived at their cabin on the evening of Oct. 6, 2006, for several much-anticipated days of bowhunting. After unpacking and making preparations for the next morning's hunt, the four men settled in for a restful night.

Saturday, Oct. 7, dawned clear and cold, a perfect morning to be in the deer woods. After Steve settled into his stand, his ritual of saying a morning prayer while waiting for first light was interrupted by the sound of footsteps shuffling in the frost-covered leaves. Steve opened his eyes and tried to discern the object that was headed his way. In the dim light, he watched as a trophy 8-pointer made its way into a wooded hollow where it would likely spend the day.

As the buck went out of sight, Steve settled back and finished his morning prayer. Then he waited for daylight. The shuffling of leaves once again grabbed his attention. A mature doe and a young buck passed by at 20 yards, unaware of Steve's presence.

"I always try to take every precaution I can to minimize human scent," Steve said. "And since I was wearing rubber boots and carbon-activated clothing, the close encounter helped boost my confidence that I had done several things right that morning."

A SHOOTER FOR SURE

A few more minutes passed when Steve caught movement and saw a deer coming down the same path the big 8-pointer had taken. Grabbing his binoculars, Steve could see long tines and a heavy right main beam. He immediately had a flashback of the big velvet buck he had seen in June. At 90 yards, he couldn't be sure that this was the same buck, but there was no question that this buck was a shooter. Steve readied his bow and double-checked his arrow and rest. The path the buck was taking would bring him by Steve's stand at about 40 yards, right on the very edge of Steve's comfort level.

"Although it was not a shot that I would have readily taken, I had practiced at that range and I had the confidence to make the shot if I had to," Steve said.

Steve made a mental note of the only two openings in which he could make a clean shot. If the buck stopped in

THE STEVE DEWITT BUCK

Scorable points	28 (14R, 14L)	Total length	
Tip-to-tip spread	14 7/8	of abnormal	
Greatest spread	27 7/8	points:	55 7/8
Inside spread	20 0/8		

Areas Measured	Right	Left	Difference
Main Beam	26 6/8	27 4/8	6/8
1st point (G-1)	8 5/8	10 2/8	1 5/8
2nd point (G-2)	8 7/8	8 5/8	2/8
3rd point (G-3)	9 1/8	10 1/8	1 0/8
4th point (G-4)	3 3/8	7 2/8	3 7/8
1st circ. (H-1)	5 1/8	5 2/8	1/8
2nd circ. (H-2)	4 2/8	4 4/8	2/8
3rd circ. (H-3)	5 0/8	5 0/8	—
4th circ. (H-4)	4 6/8	4 5/8	1/8
Totals	75 7/8	83 1/8	8 0/8

Gross typical score	179 0/8
Subtract side-to-side differences	- 8 0/8
Add abnormal points	+ 55 7/8
FINAL NET NON-TYPICAL SCORE	226 7/8

Taken by: Steve DeWitt **Date:** Oct. 7, 2006
Location: Adams County, Illinois

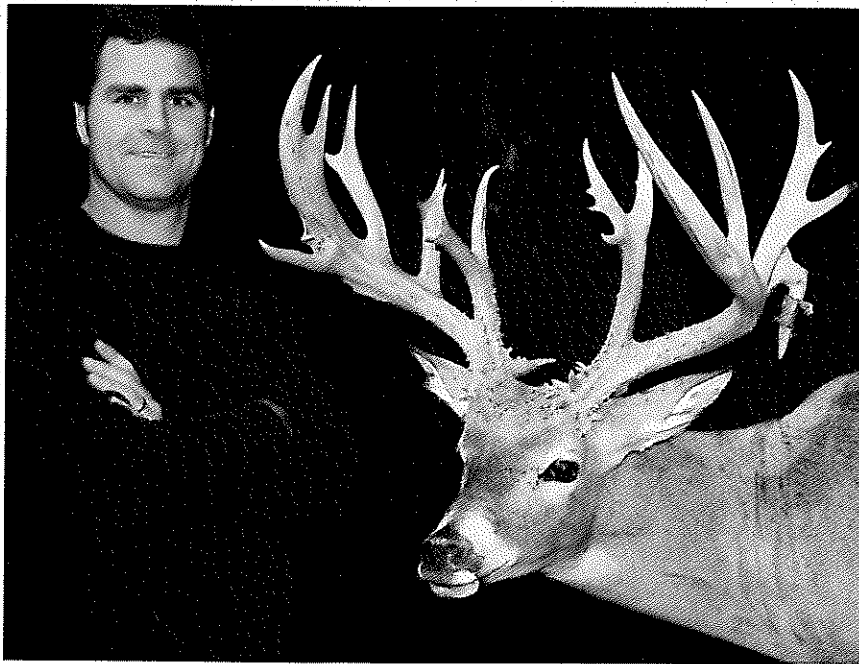


PHOTO COURTESY OF STEVE DEWITT

Steve was so thrilled with his awesome "dream" buck that he had it mounted lifesize. Now, the story of traveling to Illinois, building a cabin, and shooting the buck of a lifetime will be told for generations to come, at least in the DeWitt family!

either opening, he would go for it. As the buck approached the first opening, Steve drew his bow and steadied his pin. The buck never broke stride as it passed through the first window. Steve quickly adjusted his point of aim and readied himself for the second opening. When the buck's shoulder eased into that opening, Steve steadied his pin and whistled. The buck stopped instantly, and Steve released his arrow. The arrow flew true, and a loud *whack* resounded through the woods. Then the buck spun around and ran out of sight.

"Thank goodness that everything happened so fast I never really had a chance to see how much bone he had on top of his head," Steve said. "If I had gotten a good look at his rack, I probably would have been too nervous to get off the shot."

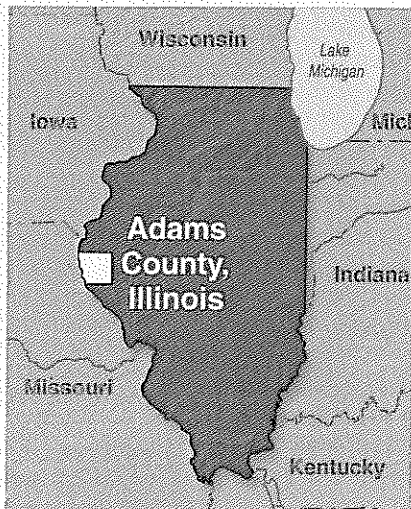
Now the adrenaline was running and the shaking and nervousness set in. *Did I hit him or did I shoot over his back?* Steve wondered as he tried to control his nerves.

A THIRD BIG BUCK?

While waiting and trying to figure out what had happened, Steve heard what he thought was the sound of his buck going down. But he couldn't be sure. Less than five minutes went, by and Steve was still standing in awe

when, all at once, another large trophy buck came strolling down the same trail that the previous two "shooter" bucks had used. As soon as this third buck of the morning reached the spot where Steve had made the shot, he stopped dead in his tracks, sensing that something was amiss. While Steve was watching, he suddenly spotted his arrow lying on the ground a few feet in front of where the big whitetail stood.

Steve grabbed his binoculars for a closer look. Then he saw what every bowhunter yearns to see after the shot — a bloodstained arrow! The buck paced back and forth for several minutes and finally vacated the area.



Steve carefully climbed down from his tree stand and began to walk toward his arrow. About halfway to the arrow he looked up the hill in the timber, and he could hardly believe his eyes. There sticking up at least two feet off the ground was a giant rack attached to the carcass of a huge deer! Steve stood speechless for several moments, staring at the massive rack. Never in his life had he imagined harvesting a buck with so much bone on its head. The buck had run less than 10 yards before piling up. *Wow! Can this really be happening?* Steve wondered.

Not knowing what else to do, Steve hurried over to find Ryan and his other hunting buddies. When he found Ryan, he said, "You're not going to believe the buck I just shot. It's the giant we saw in June!"

TOO MANY TO COUNT

As Ryan approached the 28-point brute, he, like Steve, could hardly believe his eyes. "If you put yourself in a good area like Adams County, Illinois, there is always a chance that a real giant will show up," he had always insisted. Now those prophetic words had proven true.

When Steve got his wife on the phone to tell her the news, she asked, "How many points does he have?"

"Around 25, I think," Steve answered.

"Well, can't you count them?" she replied, thinking the deer was an average 8- or 10-pointer like you might see in Michigan.

"No," Steve answered. "There are points going every which way — too many to count!"

FINAL TALLY

The huge non-typical rack has a total of 28 points, 14 on each side. With a typical 5x5 frame that grosses 180 inches and nearly 56 inches in abnormal growth, the Adams County giant scored a whopping 226 7/8 non-typical P&Y points. Steve's great buck was the largest buck by bow taken in Illinois during the 2006 season. For an avid bowhunter like Steve, being able to buy a small piece of deer hunting heaven with close friends and hunting in one of the best spots in North America was special. Shooting the buck of a lifetime was icing on the cake. It doesn't get much better than that! ■