

BLUE ICE BULLS

FEATURES



Few places on this planet could be considered a new opportunity for bowhunters. Greenland is one.

MY BOW

wasn't made of wood or pulled into a taught arc by sinew. My arrows weren't willow, and my broadheads were steel rather than stone.

But my eyes were seeing the same things he saw. I smelled the same scent as he. Heard the same grunts. Felt the same rocks poking through the soft tundra below me.

Unlike prehistoric man, the continuation of my life did not depend on my actions in the next few moments. He hunted to survive. I hunt because, deep inside me, the fires of his life still burn.

Had I lived in his time, we'd have been hunting partners, surviving together. We'd both be cautiously stalking the wooly muskox bull, a truly prehistoric animal that somehow survived the mysterious Pleistocene/Holocene extinction event when others, like the wooly mammoth and saber-toothed tiger, perished. We would be using the same large boulders for cover and carefully monitoring the wary cows. We'd be feeling the same cool, salty breeze coming off the iceberg-studded bay along the coast of Greenland. While my primitive brother is long gone, I felt his presence as I hunkered behind a rock, waiting for an opportunity to get closer to a beast whose primordial lumbering gait and long, wind-blown fur left no doubt this animal was nothing like any I'd ever hunted.

STORY & PHOTOS BY

Curt Wells, Editor

While some might say I bear a resemblance to prehistoric man, my hunting partners on this hunt, in this century, do not. New York bowhunter Tom Hoffman and Connecticut bowhunter Bob Delaney, both highly experienced, world-traveling bowhunters, joined me, as did Denise Lowrie of Colorado, a relative newcomer to bowhunting.

The adventure began with extensive travel that took us through Reykjavik, Iceland, and then on to Narsarsauq, Greenland. As our plane approached the massive island, it seemed like another world. Every valley was filled with an active glacier, and the deep fjords were dotted with icebergs ranging from ultra-white to deep blue in color.

Outfitter Frank Feldmann, of Bowhunting Greenland, is largely responsible for getting bowhunting for muskox legalized in Greenland in 2012. After meeting Frank at the airport, we loaded our gear into his boat and spent two hours weaving our way through icebergs until we arrived at the quaint Inuit village of Qaqortoq, where we spent the night. The next morning we took off for muskox camp. It was a spectacularly scenic four-hour boat ride along the coast of Greenland. Camp was a comfortable cabin built by the parents of our Inuit guide, Knud. We had heat, a bathroom, and plenty of fresh water close by.

After coffee and breakfast the next morning, we headed for a fjord to glass for muskox and quickly spotted a herd flanked by a lone bull. It was ladies first, so Denise prepared for the stalk as we pulled the boat up on shore. Using boulders for cover, Denise, Frank, and Tom slipped in on the unsuspecting bull.



For centuries, muskox bulls like this one have hidden in the willows.

While Denise stalked the lone bull, the herd of eight or so, with a good bull in their midst, moved up against a rocky cliff and assumed their defensive mode by closing ranks in a tight circle to ward off attackers. The lone bull paid them no mind, and Denise was able to sneak in and make a 25-yard shot, downing the bull within the first two hours of our hunt. It was a fine specimen, and the first muskox ever taken by a woman bowhunter in Greenland.

The village of Qaqortoq is quite scenic and quaint. At just 3,400 residents, it's still the third largest community in Greenland, a country mostly covered by icecap.



Colorado bowhunter Denise Lowrie may be new to bowhunting, but she's the first woman archer to take a muskox in Greenland.



We skinned and quartered the bull and hauled him back to the boat, but instead of going back to camp, Frank steered his boat into a long, narrow fjord to look for more muskox. Tom Hoffman was up next, and he is no stranger to muskox. Tom is the third bowhunter to achieve the Super Slam, and the first to have all species in the Pope and Young Record Book. He's traveled the world in search of wild sheep, completing the World Slam of sheep, and he needs just one more desert ram to complete his *fourth* Grand Slam of North American sheep with a bow.

We could see muskox in every direction, feeding in the sunbathed willows along the fringes of the fjord. Tom and Frank disappeared as they stalked closer into the willows, but the muskox sensed something was amiss and nervously negotiated the centuries-old trails, heading for higher ground. They didn't get quite high enough and Tom's perfectly placed arrow sent the herd bull running. The second muskox of our first day collapsed just 40 yards from my vantage point.

With two muskox bulls loaded in the boat, we headed back to camp. We worked hard recovering those two bulls and a hot meal in a warm cabin was an inviting thought.

The next morning I deferred to Bob Delaney. At 76 years old, Bob is a stud who has bowhunted several continents and arrowed Cape buffalo, African lion, brown bear, polar bear, and many other species of big game. Few of us can even hope to be as active a bowhunter as Bob is at that age.

We zipped just across the bay and hiked a short distance into the mountains. It took only minutes to locate a group of muskox with a very good bull. I hung back with my still camera as Bob and Frank intercepted the feeding muskox. The bull walked right into them, and Bob made good on the 22-yard shot. It wasn't long before Knud was skinning the bull while Frank went for the boat. We were back in camp for lunch with the biggest bull so far.

That afternoon, Frank and I took off for a nearby valley, and within an hour we were immersed in the stalk that evoked the thoughts of my prehistoric brethren. It's a good thing my survival did not depend on that particular stalk, because the bull picked us off and took off in a stiff-legged, rocking horse-like trot as if a saber-toothed tiger was trying to run him down.

No big deal. A quick look around revealed a herd of muskox bedded in the sand on the top of a boulder-strewn ridge. Within a half-hour, just as we were closing in, we saw dust fly. Rutting activity! The bull chased the intruder over the ridge, and the cows and calves followed. So did we. Once on top, we spotted the herd browsing in the valley below. As we pondered our next move, the cows started coming back up toward us.

This isn't Tom Hoffman's first muskox, but Tom loves adventure and his smile tells you how much he is enjoying his first hunt in Greenland.



I stayed back with my still camera and telephoto lens and captured Bob Delaney as he stood up from a kneeling position and arrowed the bull in the lower left.



The bull would be close behind, so we hugged a rock wall and waited for the herd to come through a gap in the rocky cliffs.

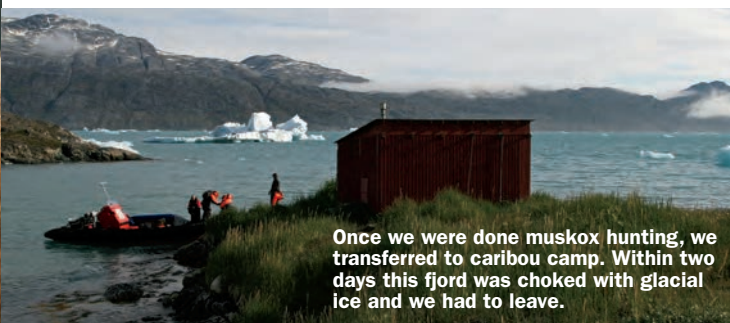
The cows showed up first, at just 20 yards, followed by the cute but strange-looking calves. The lead cow spotted us, trotted up the ridge a few feet then turned to stand her ground.

Frank, who had a better look at the gap, whispered, "Draw!"

The bull and my 20-yard pin came into focus at the same instant. Catching us in his peripheral vision, the bull bolted up toward the cows but stopped broadside. That's when my arrow zipped through his chest and into the sand beyond him. The bull whirled to face us, but there was a massive stream of arterial blood pouring out of both sides. In 33 years of bowhunting I've never seen such catastrophic blood loss, yet the bull stayed up as he stumbled toward a 200-foot cliff. I knew a second arrow might cause him to bolt over the edge so I remained still and dumbfounded as the bull dropped to his knees and then got back up — twice. What should have taken seconds with that shot and any other species I've hunted, took minutes. I've never witnessed such strength, such tenacity, or such will.

It took a while for the cows to leave the scene. One old biddy approached us menacingly, but she finally backed off so I could recover my bull, a beautiful specimen with long, wavy, grizzly-colored fur, and heavy bosses and horns curling up to his eyes. I couldn't have been more pleased with my muskox hunting experience. No snowpack. No snowmobiles. No frostbite. Just a great stalk, in a wild, new, bowhunting land.

But we weren't done. Since bowhunting for muskox in 2012 was such a success, Frank was able to convince Greenland game managers that bowhunting for caribou should also be allowed. They made that decision in the summer of 2013. So, with all four muskox down in just two days, our focus turned to caribou.



Once we were done muskox hunting, we transferred to caribou camp. Within two days this fjord was choked with glacial ice and we had to leave.



We broke camp the next day and boated five hours west to another fjord and cabin. That night we enjoyed a supper of some of the tastiest meat I've ever had — muskox backstraps!

The next morning we hiked right out of camp but saw only a couple of young caribou. That night, as I lay in my bunk, I thought I heard thunder. I looked out the window and saw only stars twinkling in the super-clear arctic sky. The next morning we jumped in the boat and headed deeper into the fjord. That's when we came upon the source of the thunder — the Sermiligarsuk Glacier. The face of the glacier rose at least 200 feet above the water and it was very active, calving giant chunks of ancient ice that rumbled into the sea every few minutes. It was a sight, and sound, to behold.

Knud dropped Tom and Denise off in a valley about a half-mile from the glacier, and then he moved closer to drop Frank and me off where the face of the glacier met the mountainside.

There are at least two species of caribou in Greenland. One is a domesticated feral reindeer that was introduced from Europe in 1952. The other, the one I was hunting, is considered to be the Central Canada barren ground species. They are very nomadic, and for reasons unknown the herds were not where Frank anticipated. The hunting was tough, but as we picked our way along the glacier, glassing the surrounding mountains, Frank spotted a good bull — at least by Greenlandic caribou standards — and that was good enough for me.

Alone and feeding his way through the draws that rose up from the glacier, the bull still managed to spot us, but we froze and he eventually resumed feeding. The bull dropped into a small draw and didn't emerge, so I knew he was bedded and immediately went into stalk mode. When I finally relocated the bull, he was bedded at 70 yards. Before I could plan my next move, he got up spontaneously and started to feed down the draw. On hands and knees, I paralleled his course but on my side of the ridge.

A fortuitous gap in the rocks on the crest of the ridge allowed me to get set up and nock an arrow. I wouldn't even have to crest the horizon, just shoot through the gap. When the bull grazed into the opening, I ranged him at 28 yards and came to full draw. With the glacier as a backdrop, I sent my arrow into the first barren ground caribou ever taken by a modern bowhunter in Greenland.

By the time we took photos and broke down my caribou we were two hours late for pickup at the dropoff point. While we



Hunting buddy Bob Delaney arrowed this massive bull at just 22 yards. It was the largest bull of the group.



My first muskox was gorgeous with heavy bosses, deep curls and long, flowing fur. A very unique animal that outfitter Frank Feldmann and I were both happy with.

were gone, the glacier had been calving heavily and the fjord was clogged with ice. Knud, Tom, and Denise had been bobbing around in the sea waiting for us. Knud's 18-foot boat was built to handle ice, but he still had to navigate slowly, pushing the smaller ice chunks aside. It took us more than two hours to negotiate the five miles back to camp.

By morning, the entire fjord was full of ice. It was Knud's judgment that we leave while we still could. When an Inuit guide makes that call you listen, so we returned to muskox camp where my hunting partners searched for caribou for a couple of days. They had some action, but were unsuccessful.

Even so, it had been a spectacular adventure in a gorgeous land. The sights and sounds of Greenland rivaled any that I've



The glacier in the background of this photo renders the size of my Greenlandic caribou's antlers irrelevant. It was one of my favorite stalks of all time.

experienced. During the boat ride back to Qaqortoq, I again thought about my prehistoric predecessor. Although we are different in countless ways, both of us harbored the same undeniable instinct to hunt.

It was in his DNA, just as it is in mine. <<<

AUTHOR'S NOTES: In Greenland I used my 70-lb. Mathews Chill, Easton Deep Six FMJ arrows, both Muzzy and Rage broadheads, Zeiss optics, Spot-Hogg sight, Scott release, Sitka clothing, and Kenetrek boots.

If you're looking to add muskox to your list, contact Frank Feldmann at mail@greenlandoutfitters.com or visit his website at www.bowhuntinggreenland.com. Frank is the only outfitter licensed in Greenland. He'll take good care of you, and you'll have an unforgettable bowhunting experience.

ARROWS, BROADHEADS MAKE A DIFFERENCE



ALTHOUGH I knew muskox were extremely tough, I underestimated how tough. Greenland wildlife managers were wise to restrict bowhunters to fixed-blade broadheads when hunting these heavily-built, long-haired beasts. For this reason, I chose Muzzy Trocar broadheads for my muskox hunt. These 100-grain heads feature a strong, stainless-steel ferrule with a bone-crushing tip and three extremely sharp blades. I consider sharpness the number-one attribute in a broadhead, and the Trocars are scary sharp.

I was also concerned about penetration, so I chose a prototype of the new Easton Deep Six FMJ arrow shafts. There are two primary reasons. These shafts weigh 11 grains per inch so that gave my set up plenty of energy and momentum. The second reason is the ultra-microdiameter shafts, which present less surface area, thereby less resistance. If you doubt this increases penetration, think again. Or ask my muskox. My Trocar-tipped Deep Six FMJ blew through that bull like he wasn't there, and created blood loss like I've

never seen before.

I used the same arrow shafts on my caribou but I switched to the new Rage Hypodermic broadheads. Mechanicals are legal for caribou in Greenland, and again my arrow zipped through the bull and stuck in the tundra on the other side. The bull ran as fast as he could for about 100 yards before he crashed onto the rocks just above the glacier.

We all use the equipment and accessories that give us confidence, and I can tell you I couldn't have asked for better performance from my arrows and broadheads in the Land of the Glaciers.

