

On Wisconsin Outdoors

With the Dick Ellis Experts

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Hunting Marsh Bucks

Blood Brothers DVD focus on public land

By Dick Ellis

Lee Gatzke stood bluff-high over Buffalo County valley country and pointed out the mid-winter puzzle pieces of the trophy buck hunter. In streaked sunlight that came and went, rubs jumped out periodically among the saplings that had sprung up in the wake of a logging project carefully planned to provide whitetail browse and cover. Rolling acres of standing corn sprawled over the plateau top before blending with the surrounding hardwoods.

Two man-made water holes pocketed the ridges, which ended at sharp, high points where this 54 year old landowner of 200 prime acres knew the biggest bucks liked to bed. Where one glacial backbone fell off into a steep valley, the half-rack of a 140-class buck lay in the February sun. North, just two miles as the crow flies, the now-famous Buffalo County monster buck first showcased in a Field & Stream video had fallen to a Wisconsin archer during the 2008 rut; more evidence that we stood in the best big buck county in the best big buck state in the nation.

Wisconsin claimed more entries into the Boone & Crockett and Pope & Young record books from 1995 to 2005 than any other state, according to the most recent Quality Deer Management Association national statistics. Wisconsin also dominated the top-50 county



This monster buck, taken by Blood Brothers Outdoors partner Dan Infalt of Rome, Wisconsin, could not be weighed on a certified 300-pound farm scale because it was too heavy even after being field dressed.

table, with 26 counties. And Buffalo County, bordering the Mississippi River in the west central part of the state claims the title as the highest ranking county in the nation with 520 total entries.

Gatzke, of Lake Mills and "Blood Brothers Outdoors" partners Dan Infalt of Rome, Wisconsin and Jarrod Erdody, of Plainwell, Michigan add their share of contributions to the book. Col-

lectively, the trio has notched about 50 P&Y record book bucks. Blood Brothers Outdoors operates a website and produces DVDs that teach the hunter how to find and hunt big bucks...with a huge, appealing asterisk.

Although all three hunters own or lease property in regions with reputations for producing big bucks, they also hunt public land extensively. They spend more time

on public land than private property in pursuit of big bucks. And they show you, the hunter usually without the luxury of access to special private property, their secrets learned by paying dues over decades of hunting on public land. No catches.

"We're hard core guys who scout hard and hunt hard accordingly," said Gatzke. "We think outside the box in our hunting and scouting and look for things we had not been taught and that we don't see written about."

Blood Brothers Outdoors first DVD, available through their website and other locations including Gander Mountain stores, is "Hunting Marsh Bucks". "Big Woods Bucks", "Hunting Hill Country" and "Farm Bucks" are in the planning stages.

"We let people know what works for us," Gatzke said. "We hunt the cattail marshes a certain way. To those who have struggled with it, our methods help make them successful. We're not afraid to tell other hunters how we do it. We hope that they're successful. But they won't always be, so what do they do next? Deer learn how to avoid you. So you always have to be scouting, always have to be working."

Problems facing the hunter and tactics detailed in "Hunting Marsh Bucks" include locating

tracts of public terrain large and small, wind and scent, off-season scouting, locating bedding grounds and specifically buck beds, approaching the stand, stand placement and height, ground stands, and how often to hunt stands. Cattail marshes, Gatzke said, offer big bucks and other pressured deer a sanctuary with potentially huge payoffs for the patient hunter.

“When we hunt elk we don’t pick up a bow for days because we’re scouting,” he said. “That’s how we approach the cattails. We scout this time of year real heavy. Get in a tree, glass and find out where you want to hunt. With these long seasons we have right now the deer get chased into the cattails. If deer are pushed

It takes a lot of research.”

What it doesn’t take, surprisingly, is advertisers to bring the Blood Brothers message to the masses. Gatzke, for example, shoots an old bow and doesn’t endorse any one scent cover despite labeling the wind the hunter’s biggest enemy.

“We use the products we believe in,” he said. “We use Lone Wolf treestands. We’ll buy another treestand when we think someone builds a better one. We have had success as hunters because of our mistakes of the past. And we have all kinds of horror stories. We think the fishing industry is light years ahead of the hunting industry and that’s where we’re trying to go with Blood Brothers Outdoors. We’re trying to educate hunters. In hunting videos today guys are just up in a tree whacking something. They’re not just regular guys anymore, they’re celebrities.”

Gatzke, Infalt and Jarrod are regular, but very successful hunters. Gatzke will return often to Buffalo County to hunt. He calls it a place for family. But, his heart and most often his time, is spent on the wild places that belong to all of us.

“Some guys with private land right next to public acres right never step on the public land,” Gatzke said. “When they do it becomes obvious real quick that the public places with the thousands and thousands of acres where you can just keep going is so much more fun. It’s true. That’s a real hunt. That’s what hunting is; the chase.”

“You have to be so careful on private land. You manage wood lots to create thick bedding and browsing areas. You plant food plots. Everything you do is meant to hold the deer. It’s almost like they’re your deer...but they’re not your deer.”

Scouting on public land beginning right now in mid-winter until green-up when all clues left by deer last fall will be erased he



Lee Gatzke of Lake Mills found this half-rack from a whitetail buck while showing the writer his Buffalo County property February 7. Gatzke, a partner in Blood Brothers Outdoors, helps produce DVDs showing how to hunt big bucks on public property.

stressed, is the most important time of the year. Because of the scent trails a hunter lays down and the wariness of a big buck and his instincts to survive, Gatzke will only hunt areas discovered now several times a year.

“So you have to find a lot of places to hunt,” he said. “Too many hunters think public land is bad. But there are many public places that are just awesome. You can kill big bucks on public land. We’ll show you how we do it.”

To learn more, or to purchase “Hunting Marsh Bucks”, connect with www.bloodbro.com. The DVD is also available at many Gander Mountain stores. *W*



In their first video entitled Hunting Marsh Bucks currently available at www.bloodbro.com and at Gander Mountain stores, Jarrod Erdody (shown) and Blood Brothers Outdoors partners Lee Gatzke and Dan Infalt show hunters how to locate and hunt big bucks on public land.

deer are going to go where they can survive.”

The worst enemy of the hunter, Gatzke said, is wind. Playing wind including approaching and as importantly exiting stands is vital. Another key to success in hunting public marshes is having enough public terrain to hunt to ensure individual bucks are not pressured into changing patterns. The Blood Brothers use topographical maps, plat books, googleearth.com and terraserver.com satellite sites in part to help them locate terrain and initially determine how to get in and out of bedding and security cover.

“You’re going to scout new areas and add to existing areas you hunt,” Gatzke said. “I hunt dozens of areas in Jefferson County alone.



Lee Gatzke examines another buck rub on his Buffalo County property February 7. In their first video, ‘Hunting Marsh Bucks’ currently available at www.bloodbro.com and at Gander Mountain stores, Blood Brothers Outdoors show hunters how to locate and hunt big bucks on public land