

Being prepared isn't always enough to be a successful deer hunter.

# First Buck

Story by Tracy Rowe  
Photos by Adele Hodde

**W**hen the alarm went off all I could think was that this had to be the coldest morning of the season.

The temperature gauge read 28 degrees Fahrenheit. I climbed back into bed, thinking it would be warmer that night. I laid there for a few minutes and thought "why did I buy all these cold-weather clothes if I'm not going to use them?" I got back up.

I took a scent-free shower with scent-eliminator soaps, shampoos and lotions. Scent control is important when you are hunting whitetail deer as they rely heavily on their keen sense of smell. Unfortunately, I have witnessed this first-hand when deer have approached my stand, seemingly relaxed, only to have them stop in their tracks and look directly at me. Not a muscle I'd moved, but they picked me off the tree by throwing their nose in the air and waving it around.

At the woods I climbed out of the truck into the bitter cold and slid into



**Deer season often means cold season—bitter cold. Yet archery hunter Tracy Rowe dressed for the weather and hit the woods.**

the rest of my hunting clothes—washed in scent-free soap and dried using dirt-scented dryer sheets. Storing clothing in a plastic tub helps eliminate human odors from getting on them, and inside my tub is a scent-wafer that smells like dirt to keep my clothes smelling more like the outdoors than the garage or truck. I also have put my clothes in a garbage bag filled it with leaves and







sticks as almost anything from the outside will help mask human odors.

I loaded up my stand with all my carry-on baggage—buck grunt and doe bleat calls, rattling bag, extra clothes, boot covers, video camera, scents, snacks, rangefinder, and hand, feet and body warmers. And an extra release—I'm sure I am not the only hunter to have to climb back down to retrieve a dropped release. My friends and family say I look as if I am moving into the woods. I want to be sure I have everything needed just in case I need to stay all day.

I was set up by 5:50, nearly a half hour before shooting opened, giving the woods just enough time to settle around me. It was a beautiful morning, with just a slight northwest wind, but it was a wind that wasn't good for that stand and caused me concern. My scent was blowing directly in the direction I believed the deer would come.

Alerted to some crunching behind me, I turned to see a couple of does walking up the draw—not where I expected them but a route I knew they traveled based on sign I found while scouting. Watching them, I heard some more walking and behind them approximately 50 yards was another doe.

A buck was on her tail. A big buck. The biggest buck I'd had a chance at was 100 yards behind me in the draw where I did not expect him to be.

The first rule in deer hunting is: "Always expect the unexpected."

Why weren't they in the shooting lanes in front of me? Why, today, did they decide to come up the draw? Why, oh why?


**Hauling hunting gear while dressed for the cold can result in overheating.**

**Removing a hat and gloves until they're needed can help maintain proper body temperature.**

Then it happened. The doe turned in my direction and started up the hill, passing within 20 yards of my stand. The buck was 10 yards behind her. I came to full draw while he was behind a tree, forgetting about the doe. Thank goodness she didn't catch me drawing or the gig would have been up. Waiting for the buck to step into the opening, I gave a soft mouth bleat to get him to stop. Already at full draw, all I had to do was hit the release.

I watched my illuminated nock disappear into a field of brown. There was no doubt this was a good hit, and I retrieved my buck less than 100 yards from my stand. He lay so majestic in

leaves covered in a light dusting of snow from the night before. It was one of the most exhilarating moments of my life.

That was the moment I had been bow hunting for. Although I have harvested does with my bow, 6 years had passed without the opportunity to harvest a nice buck. It doesn't happen overnight and I'd spent a lot of hot, cold and wet days in the stand. All that being said, bow hunting is something I don't foresee ever giving up. 

Tracy Rowe is an avid deer, waterfowl and turkey hunter and lives in rural Sullivan.

**The author with her first buck, a hard-earned and beautiful Illinois whitetail.**

