

Benjamin's FIRST ELK

— LARRY'S SHORT STORIES #276 —

When you're 160 miles south of Albuquerque, New Mexico on I-25—headed toward El Paso, Texas, you're a long way from anywhere. That's one reason the White Sands Missile Range is located just to the east. This was serious "Indian Country" before the 20th century—Apache. But today it's private land elk country, just east of the Gila National Forest, and it was elk they were after—Benjamin, his dad and grandma, Brenda.

Brenda had hunted here many times before and this was the second trip for son Russell; but it was the very first elk hunt for 17-year-old Benjamin. I still remember my first elk hunt, in Colorado; I was a lot older than 17. Benjamin had shot several white tail deer, and invested thousands of dollars of his parents' money on shotgun shells,

chasing clay pigeons and a few live pheasants; but Elk is big game and it fits into your brain differently than white tail deer or pheasants.

2020 was the year of "COVID,"

or at least the first year. Remote learning was pretty much the standard, so on Thursday and Friday, Benjamin was in New Mexico on a Zoom call to his school in Illinois during the morning, and his hunting was limited to the afternoons.

The Ladder Ranch is mostly open hills, with scattered timber in the draws and valleys, and light brush in the meadows; the hunting is controlled by the private landowner, so the pressure is very low. The hunting plan is mostly driving around in a pickup or ATV in the early



If you hunt with "grandma," you might get to go to a special place with really big elk. Right royal is broken on this nice 6x7. Benjamin, dad Russell, and grandma Brenda.

mornings or late afternoons, looking for elk on the hill tops. Once spotted, it's a matter of glassing, then stalking to get into position for a shot, if there's a good bull.

On Saturday morning, school was out, and the full day was available for hunting. Grandma Brenda had shot her elk the previous day,

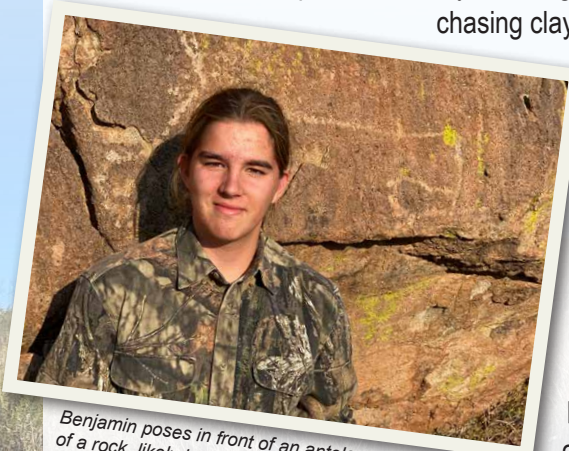
so was also along for the hunt. At a half mile distance, they spotted the herd they had

"... it fits into your brain differently..."

seen the evening before. The stalk was through scattered brush and finally Benjamin got an open, standing shot at 125 yards—from the tripod. So, how does a 17-year-old feel after he shoots his first elk? "Excited and relieved" are the best descriptive words; but then, those are the same two words that apply to all hunters, after a successful shot. Congratulations Benjamin!

Larry Potterfield

The Ladder Ranch
Caballo, New Mexico
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Benjamin poses in front of an antelope carved on the face of a rock, likely by the early native inhabitants of this area.



Brenda shot her elk the day before and was able to be with Benjamin and his dad, Russell, on his hunt.