

Reese Blakeney
Age 13

It Was Big Enough

Kaboom!! A bullet came from the barrel of my Remington model 700 heading for the skin and bone of the biggest deer I had ever seen. As the trees moved out of the way of my bullet, doubt raced through my mind, "Was it big enough? He never looked at me, so I never got a good look at him." I was worried because Jackson Point has a strict 15-inch rule.

Jackson Point is a "Sportsman's Paradise" that my grandfather has been a part of since the 1980's. It is a fertile piece of land nestled between Lake Mary and the Mississippi River. At about 2,000 acres, this land has plenty of room for deer to move around. Not only does Jackson Point have loads of deer, but hogs overrunning the property. There are also lots of turkey, squirrels, and fish. The trees are very old and loaded with all kinds of acorns and fruit for the deer to eat. The woods are made up of hardwood trees including white oak, persimmon, and lots of cypress growing along the banks of the lake. I have seen three times more deer at Jackson Point than I have ever seen in all my other hunts combined.

Every year after Christmas, my grandfather, uncle, cousin and I go on a hunting trip to Jackson Point. We drive four hours to Fort Adams, a small, historic settlement with boarded-up churches and a gas station that is decorated with deer antlers. But we still have one more leg of the trip ... the leg that seems to take the longest, the 12-mile dirt road through the woods and off the grid. This part of our journey never goes smoothly. If we aren't getting stuck in a giant, slippery pothole, then we are wondering if the dirt bridge is even there anymore. Nicknamed "The Dump," this flimsy excuse for a bridge has a soul-sucking dark, muddy water of doom on each side, and we fear that the truck and all of our belongings will slide in. Old oil wells and other junk line the last two miles of the road, and at this point Papaw always mentions how close Angola Prison is and how he hopes no inmates have recently escaped. When we finally get to Jackson Point, we breathe a deep sigh of relief.

On our first morning there, we all got up at five o'clock in the morning and dressed except for my younger cousin Ty, who was the hardest to wake up out of all of us. It was like waking up a log. The four of us crammed into Papaw's Kubota and road off into the dark woods. It was cold and pitch-black, except where the headlights shone. A mixture of excitement and adrenaline filled us as we came to our first hunting spot.

Uncle Tim and Ty jumped out and went to their stand, and we to ours. The frost was on the leaves, and I could see my breath. As daylight broke, we heard song birds chirping, crickets humming, and Papaw farting. I told him there wouldn't be a deer within a mile of here as he pulled out of his pocket a meal fit for a king: an apple, two Nutrigrain bars and a pack of Stage Planks. He was like a chipmunk pulling out nuts from its cheeks. Now, for all of my hunting seasons, I've been told not to bring snacks, not to pass gas, and not to pee, but Papaw did exactly those three things in the little time we sat in that stand. He told me that deer are attracted to his urine, not driven away from it. I was a little skeptical when he went out the door of the stand to urinate. I heard the trickle of urine, and then I heard the snapping of twigs. A yearling walked out sniffing the air as it went as if it were intrigued by the smell of fresh urine on the ground. Papaw came back into the stand and said while laughing, "I told you so."

We decided to try a different spot a couple of hours later because Papaw had another place in mind. We walked four hundred yards away from our previous stand to a new stand that

had deer sign everywhere. He put me in the stand, handed me my rifle and left some fresh "deer attractant" at the base of the stand. Then, he was gone.

There were animals everywhere, birds and squirrels. I was in the stand for not fifteen minutes before I saw a flash of horn two hundred yards away. Two four-points and two does walked in front of the stand, but this time I was not looking for the does; I wanted a big buck. So I waited. Those four came and passed. I saw a hawk swoop for some sparrows but miss. He landed in an old, gnarled oak tree in front of me. Before long Papaw was back, and it was time to make the short ride to the lodge for lunch.

We rode out for an evening hunt that afternoon when Papaw dropped me off at the stand. The surrounding area was full of white oaks and other food trees. Papaw had told me that deer love white oak. I heard some turkeys, but I never saw them. I was in the stand for forty-five minutes before two does walked out. I decided that if I could get a shot, I better take it. I only had one hunt left, so I waited for them to come to a clearing, which took probably an hour. Right before I was about to squeeze the trigger, I heard twigs breaking to my right. I turned slowly to find a spike standing in the brush with one of the earlier four points. "If it's an 8-point, you can shoot him," the words my grandfather had told me echoed in my head.

Disappointed, I turned my head as far as it would go to find to my surprise, a large deer standing thirty yards from my stand. He looked big. He looked very big. He looked big enough.

I was kind of worried how big the deer actually was, because it never turned towards me. I looked through my scope. Thoughts ran through my mind like a runaway train. He paused behind a large tree. All I could see was his head. It was excruciating to watch him from behind the tree. After what felt like hours, he moved. Figuring it was a large deer, I took the safety off my rifle, took rest on the wall of the stand, held my breath, squeezed the trigger, and prayed for the best. As I felt the kick of my rifle, memories came to my mind of the hunter's safety course one year earlier. "After you fire that shot, you can never take it back," the voice in my head told me. The deer trotted slowly, tumbled around, and came to rest under a tree fifty yards from my stand.

Immediately, I called my uncle Tim on the radio and whispered, "Eight point!! Eight point!! On the ground!!"

Uncle Tim replied, "Attaboy!"

I watched the other deer scatter in all directions, until the only one left was one little doe, who looked lost and confused without her mother. She came right beside my stand and darted off to the side.

After a few minutes, I heard my buck breathe his last. I got down from my stand and walked very slowly to where he was. To my surprise I discovered he was not an eight-point, but a nine-point! I sat and counted the points over and over until I was sure I was right. He was old. He had a fat face, which suggested his age. His twisted antlers were large and tall. The surface of his antlers felt like tree bark, rough on the bottom and smooth on the top. Uncle Tim, Ty, and Papaw rode up in the Kubota to see the monster I had sitting at my feet. He was so heavy, I struggled to hold his head up for pictures.

It took three of us to load him into the Kubota. I was just happy we didn't have to drag him all the way back. As we shifted his weight to the bed of the vehicle, it tipped backwards then steadied out.

We skinned the deer and saved his head to mount. He weighed in at an astonishing 230 pounds with whopping twenty-five inch main beams, and a sixteen-inch spread. It was the biggest deer I had ever seen. In the following hours, I relived the shot over and over in my mind.

It all happened too fast. I wished I could have enjoyed it longer. I had just experienced "buck fever" as my cousin Ty calls it.