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Show-Me Big Bucks
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THE WORLDWIDE OUTDOORS MAGAZINE OF TEXAS

TEXAS SPORTING®

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Life in
the Shortgrass

Wading for
Peacock Bass

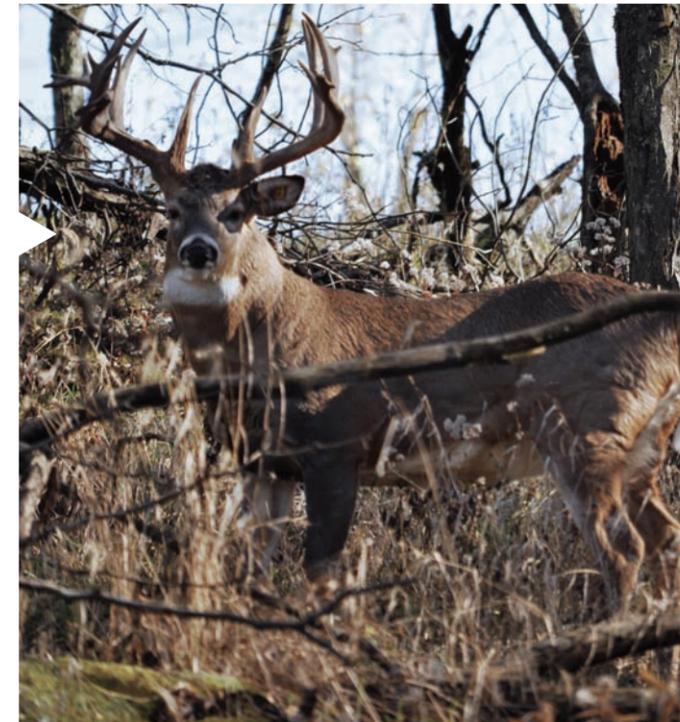
A Pure Trophy
Whitetail



Dove Dogs



Show-Me
BIG BUCKS by Jim Miller
*Missouri's Oak Creek
Whitetail Ranch*



LEFT: Jim Miller, host of "Great Southwest Outdoors" TV show, is shown here with a 10-point, 157" archery buck he took at Oak Creek Whitetail Ranch the last week of October 2009.
TOP: A nice 220 class Oak Creek 3-year-old.

WHEN I FIRST HEARD ABOUT A PLACE IN MISSOURI where serious Texas trophy hunters go to find their buck of a lifetime, I was skeptical and had to see it to believe it. Show me!

Donald Hill showed me alright and I am a believer.

Hill's Oak Creek Whitetail Ranch in central Missouri was once a family hunting property, producing quality domestic whitetail deer. In 1992, Oak Creek was fenced and the domestic whitetail deer were herded off. Like a lot of Texas properties, Oak Creek Whitetail Ranch is an intensely managed property, 1,800 acres of prime wildlife habitat managed for superior genetics and superb forage. Oak Creek has been successful at importing some of the best genetics in the country, including large-bodied, heavy-antlered Canadian whitetail deer during the last 18 years, and they are thriving.

Each year for the past four years, Oak Creek hunters have taken some of the largest typical and non-typical deer in the world. In fact, during the 2009 season, Oak Creek hunters took 22 whitetail bucks, that when all are certified, all will rank in the top 25 SCI whitetails of all time...seven of which should make the top 10 typical list. Given its second-to-none habitat and trophy management program Oak Creek takes 20 to 30 big-framed, big-bodied whitetails with inside spreads of 25-30 inches in the 200-plus class every year.

Last year, I was fortunate to get a chance to sample some of the bounty and film a show for my "Great Southwest Outdoors" television series on the Pursuit Channel.

The only thing standing in the way of what I envisioned as a hunt of a lifetime and the filming of a prime TV show was the rain. It seemed like a black cloud had been following me for months. In April during the Clay County Turkey Fest, it poured every day. In August, I ventured to southeast Colorado for an



📷 The Great Room at Oak Creek Lodge. Owner Donald Hill, left, Jim Miller, center (in hat), and Larry Weishuhn's cameraman, Blake Barnett, reviewing footage from the day on Oak Creek's big screen TV.

antelope hunt and we got hammered by six inches of rain during a three-hour period. In September, I stayed home and worked on the TV show and it rained, breaking a South Texas drought in biblical proportions.

Now it's October, and I'm headed to the Ozark Mountains with my cameraman, Kris, and it's pouring down rain AGAIN! We arrived on a Sunday evening as the rain continued to pour. When we arrived to camp, my hunting partner, Larry Weishuhn, was already there, smiled and stated, "Well the rain man has arrived."

Weishuhn has hunted Oak Creek before, taking a 200 6/8-inch buck in 2008 that ranks as the No. 1 typical handgun whitetail by Safari Club International. As Weishuhn told me, Oak Creek is simply the finest big deer hunting operation in North America, and he has hunted most of them. So I was excited!

We were hunting the pre-rut, and the bucks were on the prowl, and the does were starting to show some interest. Our initial game plan was to focus our hunt along funnels, food plots and edges of fields. The ranch has numerous fields of standing corn, soybeans, milo and red clover. Oak Creek also has sanctuary areas where hunting is off limits.

On the first morning, after a couple cups of coffee and not eating any food as I was still stuffed from supper the night before, I walked out of the lodge and of course it was still raining. Temps were in the low 40s. The silver lining to my dark cloud; my guide on this



📷 Donald Hill says this 5x5 is just a 3-year-old and estimates him to grow to at least 210" typical.

hunt, Keith Sallin, is a bowhunter. We talk the same lingo. We made our way to the hunting area Keith selected and we crawled into a ground blind to try and stay dry as the rain poured on. We sat until around 10 a.m. but didn't see a deer. We saw turkey hens come through feeding on acorns and watched several squirrels as well, but no deer movement.

After some discussion (about 10 sec-

onds), we decided to return to the lodge to dry out. As we were driving out of the woods, we got stuck and I MEAN STUCK! Out of the truck and after a phone call, Donald was on his way to pull us out. Donald arrived with a four-wheel-drive tractor, and he needed it.

That afternoon, we returned to the same area we hunted that morning. We hunted until sunset—that is if we could have seen sunset! It was still raining, so we lost our video shooting light early and the camera was shut down. We sat until dark just to see if the deer would move. We didn't see a deer that afternoon.

That night came a real "toad strangler." I was afraid that it had rained so much that we would not be able to cross Oak Creek, but when we went out to our hunting area the next morning, the creek was up but it was safe to cross. The early morning light was a long time coming as it was STILL raining and low overcast. We even had some thunder and lightning. The gobblers let loose and gobbled several different times. Morning came and went and we never saw a buck. We finally gave up and returned to the lodge to dry out our equipment, cameras and clothing. Funny thing about hunting in pouring down rain—the ultimate test is put on you and your equipment, as in "How do things change in extreme weather?" During lunch, we decided to move our blind and hunt a different area.

That afternoon it stopped raining for a while, so we went out and set up our blind in a new area, and right away we started seeing improvements. First, we saw several young eight-pointers. Then a really nice buck that would most likely go in the 170s came out, but none of them came close to the blind. By the time we were at the end of legal shooting time, our camera light was long gone. One thing about hunting with a camera over your shoulder is you lose some of the best hunting time, as in the last half-hour after sunset, which is still legal shooting time in a large number of states.

During this time, we were sitting and watching what might come into the field when out of the timber, a huge eight-pointer came out. This buck had about 198-plus inches of bone, a real pig! We guessed his G-1s to be longer than 12 inches, his G-2s at longer than 14 inches, his G-3s at better than 12 inches long and his main beams to be greater than 26



📷 Larry Weishuhn, left, took this magnificent 200 6/8" buck with a handgun in 2008 at Oak Creek, making it the new No. 1 SCI handgun whitetail. Owner Donald Hill, right, said he wished Larry had waited for an even bigger buck. Larry saw several bigger during his stay.

inches long! His inside spread was at least 22 inches, with maybe 24 inches of circumference on each main beam. This was one heck of a buck. We could only sit and watch, but man did we watch until it was black dark.

The third morning leaked in as the rain-water ran down the sides of our blind. It was pouring and our blind sat in a swampy quagmire of soupy, sloppy mud. But we sat back in our chairs and waited for the deer to come, and did they ever come.

We had a couple of two-year-old bucks that were big "buddies" who pushed other

deer around. They tag-teamed the other bucks. Then a three-year-old buck came in and the buddies ran him off. We saw all kinds of buck activity all morning, and just when we decided to leave for the morning, a really nice buck walked by our blind. He stopped and looked at our blind that had been heavily brushed with two cedars, plus plenty of cedar boughs. The buck didn't see us. He stared in our direction for a couple of minutes, which felt like hours. The buck decided to walk off, and as he got about 60 yards from us my guide Keith said, "Watch this."

Using his deer call, Keith gave out a grunt and stopped the buck; then he let out a snort-wheeze call and the buck was

IF YOU GO...

Oak Creek Whitetail Ranch is dedicated to making sure every guest has the best experience possible. They're not just a hunting preserve, the amenities will appeal to the whole family. In a bed and breakfast style setting, the folks at Oak Creek cater to your every need, including three fabulous meals per day. Their extraordinary 6,000-square-foot lodge is perfect for relaxation, enjoyment and/or corporate hunting retreats/business meetings for your customers, managers or sales personnel.

Each whitetail deer hunt at Oak Creek Whitetail Ranch is individually tailored to accommodate each deer hunter. Experienced guides assist in fulfilling the deer hunt of a lifetime. Oak Creek Whitetail Ranch offers many conveniences for its deer hunters, including waterproof tree stands equipped with comfortable seating and heaters. For the serious bow hunter, there is a modern supply of lock-on tree stands in order to get deep into the whitetail bedding areas. If you like an exciting whitetail hunt to really get your heart beating, Oak Creek Whitetail Ranch offers an unbelievable whitetail rut hunt. During the rut, they provide whitetail hunters, who are physically able, with the opportunity to venture into the timber and rattle up some of their record book deer. Hunters will experience what it is like to see mature whitetail deer fighting for dominance, while deer after deer respond at one time to the rattling of the horns. Deer hunting season is September through January.

TO BOOK A HUNT:

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Jim Miller scouting an oak ridgeline looking for a nice tree to put his ground blind under the next time it starts raining!

on his way back. The buck walked to within 30 yards of us, and I put an arrow through the boiler room. The buck ran maybe 80 yards, and it was all over.

It's amazing how you can hunt your butt off and put in many hours during all kinds of weather and never see a shooter buck, and then on the last day of the hunt a 10-pointer with three sticker points walks right in and gives you the shot of a lifetime. The buck was really a great buck, scoring 157 inches. To say I was happy is an understatement.

What a place, once SCI certifies all the 2009 scores, Oak Creek Whitetail Ranch will have re-written the top twenty typical and non-typical record books, all off one seasons harvest. These records won't last long though. After my hunt was all said and done, I wound up seeing some of the most impressive young deer that I have ever seen. There should be some absolute stompers next year! ☘

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