

As Told By...

Stories From the Membership

BONUS!



My Journey with Pope & Young

by
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I'm not sure how I got lost. Well, not so much lost as separated. Either way, I was alone in the middle of the desert and only 11 years old. But I knew Dad wasn't too far away. And more importantly, there was a buck much closer.

I was hunkered behind a cactus watching the 3x3, when I saw a mule deer doe pop over the ridge 40 yards away. I drew, aimed and sent an arrow through the heart of my first big game animal. It was the morning of my first deer hunt--I had never been happier.

Thus fulfilling my qualifications for membership in the Pope & Young Club.

Dad had joined the club before I was born. He always believed in supporting a club that had bowhunters' best interests in mind. And he frequently entered animals into its records. All my life I looked at trophy mounts on the wall. Beside these heads were framed certificates from the club. Each a record of achievement for matching wits with a wise old animal and besting him.

Looking at those certificates, I wanted one of my own. Not because I needed a big animal. Because even at a young age, I knew that the pinnacle for a bowhunter was to go up against a mature animal and outsmart it. That's what I wanted. The certificate would just be the culmination of the experience.

Thus beginning my interest with the Pope & Young Club.

Alongside my parents, I continued to bowhunt. And I continued to be successful. A deer in Idaho. Then an elk. A Coues' deer in Arizona, where I shot my first deer. Then a blacktail in my home state of California. It was obvious that bowhunting was in my blood.

One Christmas I opened an envelope in my stocking to find an associate membership card to the Pope & Young Club. It was not from Santa. It was from Dad. He was the only one who knew how much it meant to me; how much it would mean to me moving forward.

Thus beginning my involvement with the Pope & Young Club.

For a decade, I chased several different species in many different states. Along the way, I was fortunate to arrow a couple dozen animals--many of them mature representations. I learned invaluable lessons about the outdoors, wildlife, bowhunting and myself. The outdoors was a magical place that allowed me to be alone but never lonely. Not as long as I had my bow.

Every trip, every hunt, quenched my thirst for up-close interaction with wildlife and nature. The type only a bowhunter can appreciate. But as I returned home, one thing was always missing. I had yet to best an animal that cleared the bar set by the Club. It had no bearing on my enjoyment of the hunt. I always loved bowhunting regardless of the result. However, it was a goal I had set for myself that was yet to be achieved.

Thus began my concerted effort to take an animal to make the Pope & Young Club.

Up to this point in my hunting adventures, I had passed very few opportunities on game. I stalked nearly every legal animal. I shot at most of those in range. There was a major part of the hunting experience on which I was missing out--passing animals.

A major part of the conservation process lies in selective harvest. The taking of mature animals is not only good for the species it allows a hunter to spend more time in the woods--a win-win for the die-hard bowhunter. To this point, I had yet to employ this philosophy. But I was going through an evolution as a bowhunter.



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My first experience with letting an animal walk undisturbed was memorable. I was in Arizona hunting mule deer. I glassed a group of deer 500 yards away and began working toward them. I crawled through cactus to within 25 yards of a small buck and watched him feed for 20 minutes before he moved on. I remember thinking the experience could not have been anymore enjoyable if I had arrowed him. It changed the way I viewed success while bowhunting.

Last year I was fortunate to take three mature bucks. Two of them netted above the Pope & Young minimum. I had achieved a decade-long goal and I was ecstatic. The reason I was so thrilled was because like so many others, I had experienced the competition between predator and prey at its highest level. Hunter-wise bucks are some of the most difficult animals to outsmart. I knew it was possible and now I had certificates to prove it.

Thus beginning my inclusion in the records of the Pope & Young Club.

Last year, while browsing the Club's website, I came across a call for volunteer writers. Since I love to write, and spent the time to get a bachelor's on the subject, I took my shot at writing for the Club. The first article was published on the website, and I have since viewed it as my greatest honor with the Club.

Thus beginning my service with the Pope & Young Club.

Writing the article has only made me more interested in the Club, prompting me to look for other ways to become involved. The next step was to fill out an application to become an official measurer. I also began seriously looking into attending the biennial banquet. And although Denver's banquet came and went without my being able to attend, it was not without my regret.

The future is uncertain. I'm not sure where this life will take me; what rivers I'll ford; what mountains I'll climb; what storms I'll endure. But one thing is for certain: I've been instilled with the right principles. From the time I received my first bow at four months old until the time I finally hang up my boots, I've learned from my parents what it means to be a good man and from Pope & Young what it means to be an ethical bowhunter.

Thus guiding me in future endeavors with the Pope & Young Club.

