

## **Jeff Sutich's 11/7-11/2024 Jarbidge Elk Hunting Trip**

### **Thursday 11/7/2024**

Got up at 3:30 to get packed up, have breakfast and drive to Derek Metz's place in South Reno where I met Jeff to throw my stuff into his truck for the 4 ½ hour drive to Elko. When we get to Elko we pick up Derek's dad's pickup to drive up separately to the Cottonwood Ranch which will be home base for us for the five days we'll be hunting. Derek has to go back on Saturday to spend an early Thanksgiving with his family and will come back to join us on Sunday the 10<sup>th</sup>.

We make the 1 ½ hour drive through Wells and turn off on the Oneil Basin Road and are now in Area 074 where we can start hunting. We can now split up and drive separate roads to the Cottonwood Ranch to start glassing the country and looking for Elk. Derek has introduced us to the onX mapping app which is really an amazing tool and super helpful finding roads, routes, land ownership, springs and a whole bunch of other features to help with our hunt.

Jeff and I drive through the Cold Springs/Black Mountain area while Derek takes a more direct route to the Ranch. We don't see any Elk, but lots of antelope and deer.

When we get to the Cottonwood Ranch around 6:30 we meet up with Jeff's other boyhood friend, Shane Santistevan and his son Heston. Shane has his large camper all set up which I'm thankful for because it's well below freezing. We make introductions, have dinner and make plans for an early start in the morning.

### **Friday 11/8/2024**

We got up at 5:00 a.m., had some reheated breakfast burritos and got ready to hit the road before daylight. Again, we're thankful to be in a camper because it 7°F outside. Shane and Heston had to go back to Elko and are coming back with their side-by-side for us to use on Saturday. The country is huge, wide open with nothing but "salt roads" spiderwebbing through it. It's really not the place for low ply/light truck tires and nice paint jobs.

After driving most of the southern part of area 074, we drive east out of the Cottonwood Ranch to hunt the eastern part of area 072. With Jeff in the front, Derek riding shotgun and me behind Jeff in the back to help spot while he drives, we tour this amazing country stopping occasionally to break out the binoculars to double-check something in question. We see all kinds of antelope, deer and a few horses and cows, but no elk.

This country is beautiful as the rolling hills give way to the steep canyons and ridgelines that grow into the Jarbidge Wilderness Area. We first hunted lower on the front range driving from ridgeline to ridgeline and hiking up to good vantage points to "glass" the countryside. I use my binoculars, and Jeff uses my spotting scope.

About midafternoon we drive up and around the lower breaks to the upper plateau south of Pole Creek. On our way up there, Jeff hits a rock the wrong way and blows out the sidewall of his left rear tire. We are not in a bad place to change a tire, but when we go to do so we find out that we have no jack handle

or lug wrench. Thankfully we have cell reception to call Shane to rescue us when he arrives at the Cottonwood ranch with his side-by-side.

We then notice other hunters a few hundred yards away and wave them down to come over. They are driving a Toyota Tacoma so we're hoping their tools will be the same as Jeff's Toyota Tundra. We find out that the jack handle is, but the lug wrench isn't. At least we can get the spare out and jack up the truck so when Shane arrives with the right tools we can quickly change things out.

While we're waiting for Shane, we take advantage of the situation to hunt the ridgeline above us. The hike is short, and the views are great and a perfect place to glass. We see lots of deer and then Derek spotted eight cow elk bedded down. This is hopeful for us and sets the stage for our plans tomorrow.

It was starting to get dark when Shane was almost to us, so we headed back to Jeff's pickup to change out the flat and head back to camp. Derek will take the flat back to Elko tomorrow in his Dad's truck to get it repaired.

### **Saturday 11/9/2024**

Again, we got up at 5:00 a.m. for an early start to hit the high country again but this time with Shane and Heston in their side-by-side. I understand better now why side-by-sides are so great to hunt in especially in country as big as this is.

It is again cold (13°F) and dark when we leave the Cottonwood Ranch at around 6:00 a.m. but not as cold as it was yesterday. The side-by-side is great but a bit noisy with the motor right under the cab. That said, we can go to many places much faster than you can in a pickup which makes it great getting from one glassing vantage point to another.

We are soon high on the eastern slopes close to where Derek saw the eight cow elk the day before. We traveled along the Jarbidge Wilderness Area going up one ridge, glass, then over to another and on and on including Cottonwood Creek, Canyon Creek, Sheep Creek and Pole Creek almost to the Idaho border. We saw lots of deer, two cow moose with a calf, and a nice bull moose.

Around 8:00 a.m. at the top of Middle Fork Canyon I spot two bulls, one a righthorn and the other quite a bit larger. I only got a brief view of the bigger bull because he was behind a grove of willow bushes but am quite sure it was a decent six point. Jeff and Heston saw them as well and none of us saw them leave the willows and assumed they had bedded down.

So, we decided that Jeff and Shane would stalk down from the top (they were about 1,400 yards below us) and Heston and I would go to a good vantage point on the opposite side of the valley to spot for them and communicate with 2-way radios.

We thought we would be able to see all movement around the willow grove but as it turned out there was a steep gorge we couldn't see that they apparently went down, and we lost them. At least we got to see a couple of good bulls and not downing one may have been a good thing because it would have been a lot of work packing one out. As it was, it was a very steep slog through deep snow getting back to the side-by-side.

From there we had a bit of lunch and continued on going from vantage point to vantage point glassing this beautiful country. We saw even more deer and a few other hunters who had not seen any elk either.

Late in the day as we were drifting back to the Cottonwood Ranch Shane noted a “clicking” in the drivers’ front wheel bearing. We were probably eight miles from camp and we all had our fingers crossed that it would hold together until we got back to camp.

We did make it back, but the last couple of miles the front wheel and tire were being held on by only the brake disc and caliper. When driving into camp Shane drove it right onto his trailer -- the side-by-side was done for this hunting trip.

When we did get back to camp there were quite a few new hunters that were likely going to hunt the same country we had, so we decided that tomorrow’s plan would be to go out to new country in the north portion of Area 074. We would have to go out in Jeff’s pickup again and we were all hoping that we wouldn’t get a flat because we now had no spare until Derek came back with the repaired tire from our first flat.

### **Sunday 11/10/2024**

We headed out in Jeff’s pickup around 6:00 a.m. and headed north up the O’Niel Basin Road to cover the broad expanse of the northeastern parts of Area 072 and northern 074 almost to the Idaho border. We drove to and glassed huge swaths of country around White Elephant Butte, Elk Mountain, Bear Mountain and Ellen D Mountain. We drove through high meadows and deep, sagebrush choked valleys and went places that tested Jeff’s pickup.

At about 10:30 as we were making our way up a steep road along a fence line below Ellen D Mountain when Jeff hit another rock and blue out the sidewall of the driver’s front tire. As soon as it blew, both Shane and I said, “get to the top of the hill” which was about 50 yards in front of us. Jeff made it, but this time we were stuck without a spare. Good news was I had cell reception and we were able to get ahold of Derek. He was just leaving Elko and we were about 5 miles directly east of the little town of Contact which meant at least two hours before he could get to us.

Unlike where we had gotten our previous flat, this area wasn’t as good of a place to find elk, but we did glass it anyway. We didn’t see anything until a small herd of Bighorn sheep showed up on the ridge across from us. One of them was a very nice 1 1/8 curl ram.

This happened right after Shane shot Jeff’s rifle a couple of times to check it’s zero. Jeff was glassing a hilltop for a longer ranging shot and shouted, something’s moving up there!” I quickly looked through my low powered range finder and at first thought they were Elk because of their coloring, but with better glass I was kind of disappointed when I realized they were sheep. That said, it was still great getting to see them. Heston was excited to see his first Bighorn Sheep and took pictures of them through his spotting scope.

Shane and Heston also borrowed Jeff and my shotguns to do a little Chucker hunting while we waited. They didn’t see any but had a good walk. When back we did a little “rock/trap” shooting which was fun.

Derek showed up about 3:00 and we put on the tire he brought us. We then we convoyed back to the Cottonwood Ranch where, on the way, we did run into a couple coveys of Huns. Derek and Heston shot a couple and they made a great dinner snack.

### **Monday 11/11/2024 (Veteran's Day)**

We got up again around 5:00 a.m. for our last day of hunting. Shane and Heston headed back to Elko with their camper and Jeff and I jumped in Derek's truck to drive to the end of the road going up Cottonwood Canyon where we continue to hike upcanyon in hopes of yet finding Jeff an elk.

It was a beautiful day and it felt good to get out and walk. The country quickly becomes steep, but the trail is good with amazing views in great habitat. We stop frequently to glass the country as we came to a ridge or right before stepping out of a grove of trees. We see more deer but, unfortunately, no elk.

At about 9:30 and four miles of hiking we turn around and head back to the pickup to drive back to the Cottonwood Ranch to pack up and head back home. Shane and his son are long gone pulling his camper back to Elko. We hook Derek's pickup up to Shane's flatbed trailer with his side-by-side loaded to take it back to Shane's place.

Jeff and I follow Derek down the dirt roads back to the highway where we leave him to get back to Elko to find a replacement tire for his second flat. Unfortunately, there are no used replacement tires the size we need, so we get something close so we at least have a spare going home.

We meet up with Derek again at his folks' place where he is dropping off his dad's pickup to pick him and his son Hunter up (who was staying with his grandparents after their early Thanksgiving) for the 4 ½ hour drive back to Reno. We made it back to Reno safe and sound around 7:00 p.m.

All in all, it was a great trip even though Jeff didn't get his elk. It was a little hard on equipment but making new friends (whose generosity can't be understated), seeing some amazing country and enjoying the great outdoors more than offset any downside.