

I first met Rick Brazell, president and founder of the First Hunt Foundation (FHF), at a Great Outdoors event at the Missoula, Montana, Cabela's in the fall of 2016. The FHF booth caught my eye as I walked into the store carrying my Official Measurer equipment just before their opening hour. Within the first few minutes of Rick's and my conversation, it was clear to me that the Rasmuson Wildlife Conservation Center (RWCC) and Theodore Roosevelt Memorial (TRM) Ranch would be the perfect venue for hosting a handful of first-time hunters alongside First Hunt Foundation trained mentors.

Many months and plenty of logistical planning conversations later, I designed the agenda for our inaugural "First Hunt on the Front" event. The plan was to bring in five first-time hunters, their parents and FHF mentors for five-days of action-packed, family-focused, hunting camp-style instruction. Throughout their time on the ranch we would discuss Fair Chase hunting, ethics, how to stay safe hunting in grizzly country, and of course, spend some time zeroing in rifles at the Palmer shooting range.

Prior to donning their blaze-orange vests, hunters were to meet with each of their respective landowners (five adjacent neighbors just down and upstream of the TRM Ranch) over an early morning breakfast. Next, each hunter and their mentor went on a "field trip" to their prospective property to learn the lay of the land, no-shoot zones and where not to drive. Once all ground rules were covered, hunters and mentors returned to the RWCC for lunch and a quick nap before assembling their evening hunt strategy.

As you can read from Lily's story, the long weekend was a great success! All five hunters tagged out on quality deer, most of which were "trophy does." But to me, more important than the field photos and punched tags are the lessons learned and stories that will be told and re-told for the rest of these young hunters' lives. Partnerships with groups like the First Hunt Foundation enable our conservation education program to operate on a higher level than ever before.

Facilitating an impactful system to educate youth and adults about conservation; enabling opportunities to introduce hunting to new audiences that would otherwise never get such an experience; and provide the facilities and access to an environment which lets participants witness multiple use, Fair Chase and natural resource stewardship ethics firsthand is exactly what Boone and Crockett Club's conservation education is all about!

I'll let Lily tell you the rest of her story. I hope you enjoy the read as much as I enjoyed mentoring her on this hunt!

Luke Coccoli
Conservation Programs Manager
Boone and Crockett Club

LILY'S LETTER



REMEMBER TO DO YOUR PART FOR OUR HUNTING HERITAGE AND TAKE A KID HUNTING THIS COMING SEASON.



The kids were able to practice at the TRM Ranch's Palmer shooting range.

Learn more about the programs offered by the First Hunt Foundation at www.firsthuntfoundation.org



This column is dedicated to the system that supports the public hunting of public wildlife for all fair chase sportsmen, and the stories and trophies that are the result. Theodore Roosevelt strongly believed that self-reliance and pursuing the strenuous activities of hunting and wilderness exploration was the best way to keep man connected to nature. We score trophies, but every hunt is to some extent a way of measuring ourselves.

Lily Van Grinsven

Photos Courtesy of First Hunt Foundation

Dear Rick and Everyone at the First Hunt Foundation,

Thank you for letting me come to the Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Ranch and letting me participate in the First Hunt Foundation Youth Hunt. I extremely appreciate your time. I had so much fun.

The day my dad and I got there, October 24, 2018, everyone was super nice. I felt right at home. That day, we learned about the ranch and met everyone that was there and our mentors. Then we ate dinner, which was a dutch oven dinner (so good)! When we were all full, the mentors handed us hunting bags, and in them were all the things you need to go hunting, including a nice knife, matches and other things. Then we went to bed.

When we woke up, we met the owners of the property that we would be hunting. We talked, and I learned a lot about him. Then we got in the truck and drove to his property. We didn't have to drive far. It was a beautiful place with a forest of aspens. We checked it out, and the first spot we stopped we saw two bucks, so I was super excited. Then we headed back to the lodge and had lunch. Then my dad, my mentor Luke, the cameraman Brian and I went hunting. We only saw a couple of deer; a few had fawns, and I didn't want to shoot them. Then we walked around but didn't see anything. Then as we were heading back to the trucks, my dad spotted a deer, but I couldn't find it in the aspens. He showed me through the camera, and I spotted it. I was going to try to shoot it, but I was too wobbly so I moved, [but] then I had a stick in my way. I moved again. Finally I was ready. I clicked off my safety and was just about to squeeze the trigger, and the deer ran off.

By the time the deer ran away it was almost too dark to shoot, so we headed back. When we were back at the lodge, we learned that one of the girls got a nice doe. We heard the story, ate dinner and went to bed.

The next morning we woke up pretty early, got in the truck and drove to our hunting spot. We spotted for a while but didn't see anything, so we headed down the hill and sat at this little drop-off for about 45 minutes. Then Brian spotted a buck and some does go over a ridge on the other side of the area. We decided to try to get one of them.

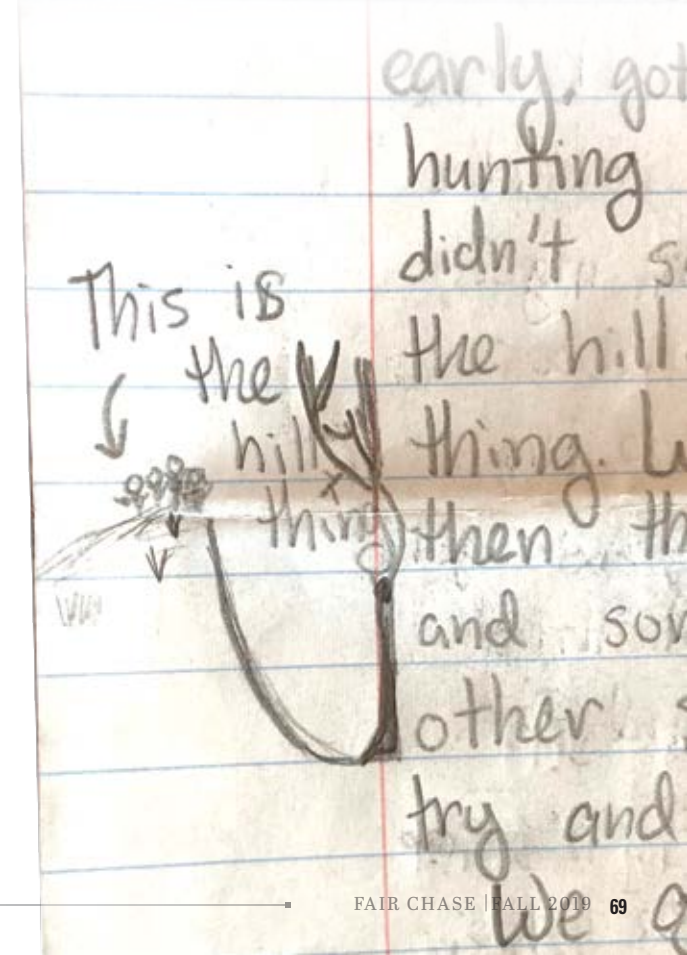
We got back in the truck and drove to the other side. Luckily the deer stopped in a little clearing down below a hill, so all we had to do was climb up the hill and I would get a nice shot at the deer. We climbed up the hill. I sat down and spotted a pretty nice whitetail buck. I got my gun ready and was just about to undo my safety when the deer ran away again! We sat on the hill for a couple of minutes and [when] we turned around to go down the hill Brian spotted two bucks in a clearing on the other side of the road. They were in the perfect spot because on the other side of the clearing was a forest of aspens.

We walked down the hill, hopped in the truck, and drove to the edge of the aspens. Then we tried to sneak toward the deer (I was kind of loud). We went through a puddle and walked into a clearing. It wasn't the original deer, but there was a buck eating on the side of the hill across a creek. He didn't even know we were there. We walked up a



The First Hunt Foundation group got to know each other over dinner at the TRM Ranch Rasmuson Wildlife Conservation Center.

Lily provided illustrations and maps along with her story. This is the drop off they sat at and spotted the first morning.



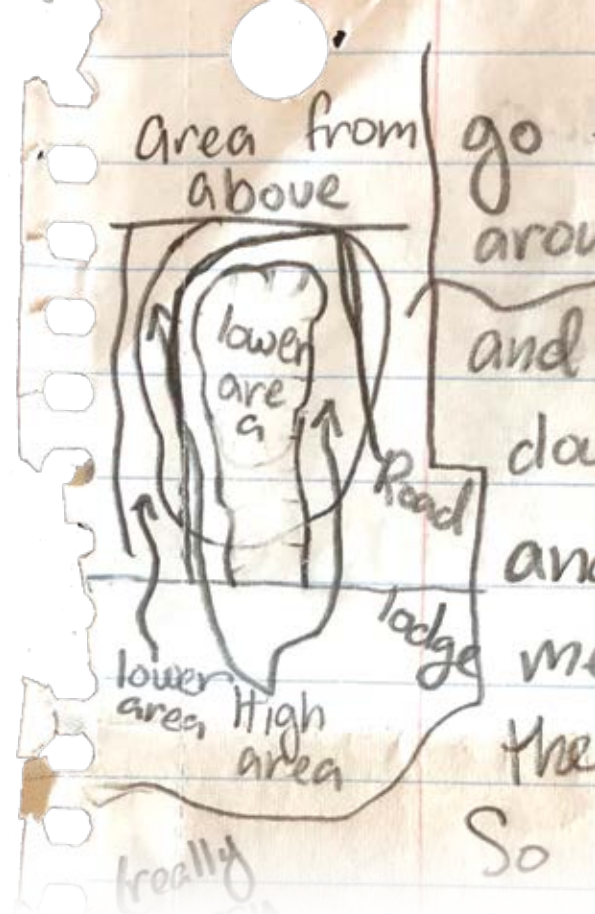
couple feet, and he kept eating. I got about 125 yards away, got settled, got my scope in line, and I waited until the deer was broadside. I undid my safety and shot. He started to run, and I thought I made a bad shot. Then he slowed down, stopped, took one step and fell over. We gave him 15 minutes, then we walked over to the creek, which was a good 10 feet wide. We decided that my dad and Brian would go across the creek to get my deer (thank you so much). When they brought him back, I got a good look at him. He was a 4x4 whitetail buck, and he had a lump on his jaw that we thought was food since he had been eating. We dragged it a little farther, and my dad asked me to get the food out of his mouth. I went over and felt his jaw. Instead of it being soft like it was full of food, it was hard like a bone. After that we gutted him, got the truck loaded and got on our way.

When we were in the truck, Luke asked me if I wanted to go for another deer or just head back to camp. I decided (with a little help from my dad) that I wanted to go for another deer. We chose this because we were leaving the next day, which was one day earlier than most people.

We headed off in search of another deer. I don't remember if I mentioned this or not, but I had two tags, one for a whitetail buck and one for a whitetail doe.

We got up to the main road and decided to look in the valley again to see if we could spot any herds of deer. We looked around for a little bit before Luke spotted a deer hiding in the bushes about 1,000 yards away. Luke passed around the binoculars so we could see, but when it was my turn I couldn't find it. Luke asked me if I wanted to go for it, and of course, I said yes. We drove around the area to where Luke saw the deer. We went down to a little clearing surrounded by tall bushes, and Luke spotted the deer again. They helped me get all set up and pointed to where the deer was, but I still couldn't see it. My dad pulled out the camera and showed me where it was. While I was looking through the camera, I saw its ear twitch.

I got it in my sight. All I could see was its head, but I decided to shoot. I barely missed, but I scared it, and it jumped up and stood right in the clearing. I was so excited to get a better shot. I got it in my sight, slowly pulled the



The map above is the valley where Lily was able to spot the second deer in tall bushes.



Each hunter and their mentor met with the land owner and went on a "field trip" to their prospective property to learn the lay of the land, no-shoot zones and where not to drive.



Lily and her dad with her whitetail deer.

trigger and boom! She ran into the trees. We gave her 15 minutes before we went looking for her. She was easy to track, and she didn't run far.

After we gutted her, Luke and Brian went and got the truck while my dad and I dragged her to the truck. We took her and the buck back to the lodge and took some pictures. One of the other boys came back with a nice mule deer. Then we took all the deer to a shed where we skinned them and deboned them. After that we headed back to the lodge for the rest of the day. We played card games, read, ate a delicious dinner, exchanged stories and went to bed. The next morning we packed up, ate breakfast, said our farewells and left.

Thank you again for letting me come. I really appreciate it, and all you guys did for me.

Sincerely,
Lily Van Grunsen



Luke and the kids would all agree that the long weekend was a great success! All five hunters tagged out on quality deer, most of which were "trophy does" and learned important lessons. This experience will be a story to tell and re-tell for the rest of their lives.

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