

MULE DEER AND SITKA BLACKTAIL

Mule deer may not have as much going on above their heads as other members of the deer family, like elk and moose, but judging them in the field can be just as tricky. Accurately field judging a mule deer buck's trophy status starts with knowing the basics of scoring a mule deer. Under the Boone and Crockett Club's scoring system, the gross score for a typical mule deer is the sum total of measurements of his inside spread, length of his main beams, length of points, and eight mass or circumference measurements. By definition, a typical mule deer will have four points per side, plus eye guards. Under field conditions we don't always have the time to pull out a calculator, however, there are a few things we can quickly look for to determine whether a buck would be a record book qualifier.

Once you've located your buck the first thing to check is his overall frame. This is the part where, "If he looks big, he is big" can come into play. A buck's frame takes into account all factors used in scoring — the inside spread, length of points, length of the main beams, and mass. If you're looking at a high racked buck with long points and a spread past his ears, you just might be looking at a buck that warrants a full evaluation. As a rule, high, wide, and heavy is what to look for, especially if you're beyond trophy and thinking record book.

After frame, try and get a clean look at the number of points, fork depth, and symmetry. Any additional or "abnormal" points are subtracted from the typical score. However, if there are enough abnormal points, a buck may be scored as a non-typical and the length of the abnormal points are added to the score. The overwhelming majority of bucks that make the book are five-point bucks (western count — four points

per side, plus the eye guards). A buck with good eye guards (3+ inches) is a bonus. If he is at least a 5x5, including the eye guards, move on to fork depth. Deep forks translate into long tines and high scores. The deeper his forks, front and back, the longer his tines will be.

While sizing up his forks, pay attention to fork symmetry. Do the back forks and front forks match their counterparts on the opposite antler in depth and tine length? In scoring, symmetry is a factor. It is common to see bucks with strong back forks but weak fronts (crab claws) and vice-versa.

Next, check for mass. The mass or circumference of the main beam is also a consideration in scoring, but it can be tough to judge in the field. Mass can be estimated by comparing the circumference of the antler to the buck's eye. A mule deer's eye will measure about four inches in circumference. By using his eye as a gauge you can visualize whether his bases and main beams are at least 4-inches or larger. Heavy bases (6+ inches) with this kind of mass carried out through his main beams (5 to 4 inches), means a buck will receive high marks in the circumference category.

Your last check is spread. By now you've already assessed his spread when checking his frame, but it will help to pin down a spread measurement before you tally everything. To accurately judge antler spread, we can use a buck's ear width as a gauge. On the average mature mule deer buck, with its ears in an alert position, he will have an ear span of 20 to 22 inches tip-to-tip. But I have measured large specimens with ear tip to tip spans up to 26 inches. However, if you always use the 20 to 22 inch estimate your buck is less likely to suffer "ground shrinkage." So with this estimate a buck's rack past his

ears by two inches means an inside spread in the neighborhood of 24 inches — more than enough to put him in the book if the rest adds up.

THE TALLY

After judging all these antler features you should be able to put your buck into one of three categories; obviously a shooter and book contender, a buck on the bubble that may require actually adding up the numbers to see if he will make 180 (B&C typical minimum), or just one heck of a nice buck. If he's on the edge, you might have to put a number on each feature that counts in final scoring and mentally add them up for a rough score to make your decision. Here, you can use his ears again to estimate each number. On most mature bucks it is approximately eight inches from the white spot at the base of the ear to the ear tip. If you visually superimpose this feature to the antler, you can accurately estimate things like length of main beam, height of the rack and length of the points.

THE TRAPS

There can be a lot of hurdles to overcome in accurate field judging. Getting enough time to look your buck over closely is one. Seeing all the angles so you can count points and access fork depth is another. There are also a few "X" factors that can throw you a curve, like antler coloration and background. Bucks sporting darker horns can appear to have more mass than a tape can give them credit for. Conversely, lighter colored antlers can appear to be thinner than they really are. Background can also trick you. If your buck is standing with snow as a backdrop, antler mass can appear greater. If he is standing in the shadows or in low light, his antlers can also appear to be thinner. Another common illusion in all field

judging is the power of your optics. If you are viewing, at fairly close range, with your spotting scope on 60x, even an average 5x5 can look like a monster. Back off your power to a reasonable setting so you can compare him to his body features.

Bucks on the move leave little time for a really good look. You may not be able to get past frame and mass before you have to make a decision. Bucks traveling away from you always appear bigger than they are, and watch for other bucks. Having other bucks in view to compare with can be helpful. They can also trick you if you don't pay close attention to how big they really are compared to the best buck in the bunch.

Also, if it's been a while since you've seen a quality buck, either from season to season, or if you have gone a few days on the same hunt without seeing one, the first buck you see may seem bigger than he really is. If you have the time, settle down and run your mental checklist.

Lastly, a 30-inch spread is the ideological benchmark most mule deer enthusiasts look for in a trophy. Often times outside spread is all that gets noticed, as illustrated by my new-found hunting buddy mentioned earlier. Keep in mind, spread looks good on the wall, but in scoring, inside spread between the main beams is all that counts and it's only one measurement. There are plenty of bucks in the record book with 25-inch inside spreads.

As with all acquired skills, accurate field judging comes with practice. The more bucks you have a chance to put a mental tape on the better you will become at judging them before deciding to tag 'em or pass 'em. Nothing beats sizing up live game under field conditions when the pressure is on. This builds confidence and speed in your assessment. But, if you are like most of us, time in the field seeing trophy-class bucks can be hard to come by. The next best thing is to estimate the score of mounted heads, then put a tape on them. You'll be surprised how close you can come with a little practice.

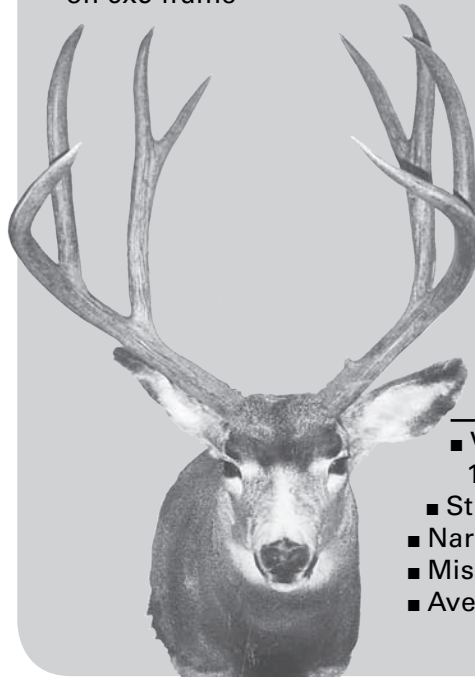
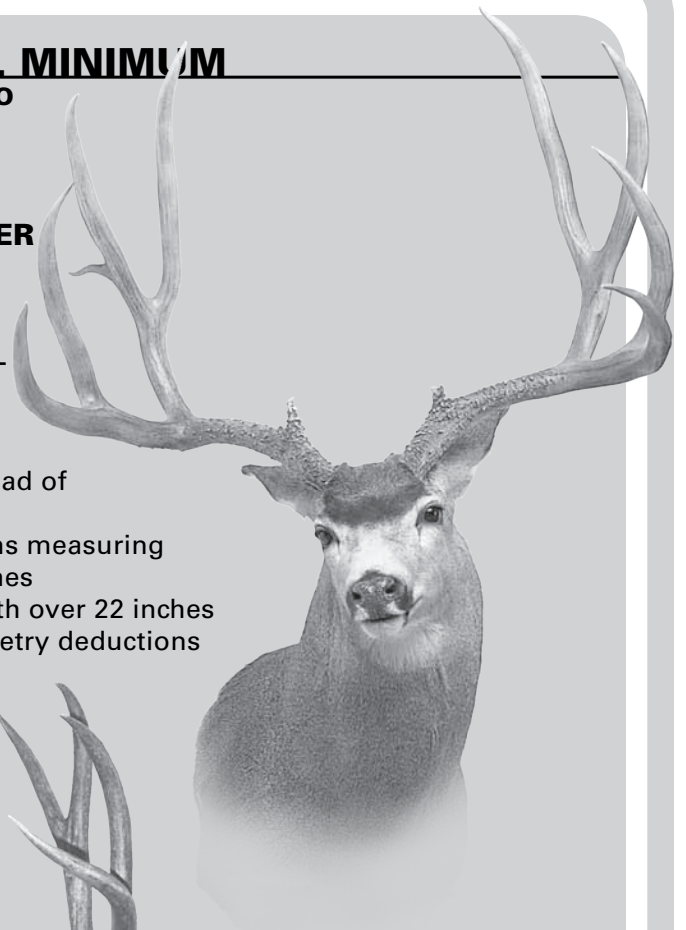
MAXIMUM VS. MINIMUM

A COMPARISON OF TWO RECORDS-BOOK MULE DEER - TYPICAL

WORLD'S RECORD TYPICAL MULE DEER SCORE: 226-4/8

TROPHY ANALYSIS

- Has it all – spread, mass, height, forks, symmetry
- Extra long inside spread of 30-1/8 inches
- Extra long main beams measuring 30-1/8 and 28-6/8 inches
- Exceptional G-2s - both over 22 inches
- Only 6-1/8 inch symmetry deductions on 6x5 frame



CLOSE TO MINIMUM ENTRY TYPICAL MULE DEER SCORE: 185-3/8

TROPHY ANALYSIS

- Very tall antlers with G-2s measuring 16-7/8 and 18-2/8 inches
- Strong front forks but weak back forks
- Narrow inside spread - just 21 inches
- Missing G-1s
- Average mass

THE BLACKTAILS

Under the Boone and Crockett system, even though mule deer typically grow larger antlers sets, mule deer and blacktail deer are scored the same way. Past this obvious antler size difference there are still a few things to look out for specific to field judging each species of blacktail.

Of the two species, in some locals, the Columbia blacktail can grow antlers comparable in size to that of mule deer. Knowing the record book history of the region you are hunting in is the first tip in field judging Columbia blacktail.

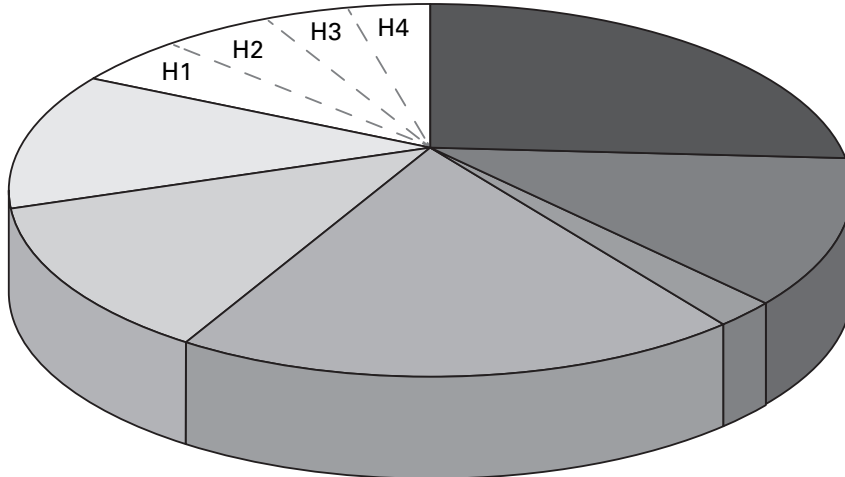
The next is 4X4, not counting eye guards.

In field judging blacktails, points are everything, even more so than the other deer species. The smaller overall antler size of blacktails means mass, inside spread, and length of mainbeams are reduced to the point that even an exceptional measurement from one or two of these areas will not compensate for less than four points or an unbalanced number of points per side.

For Columbia blacktail there are very few 3x3, not counting eye guards, in the record book. Speaking of eye guards, just like in

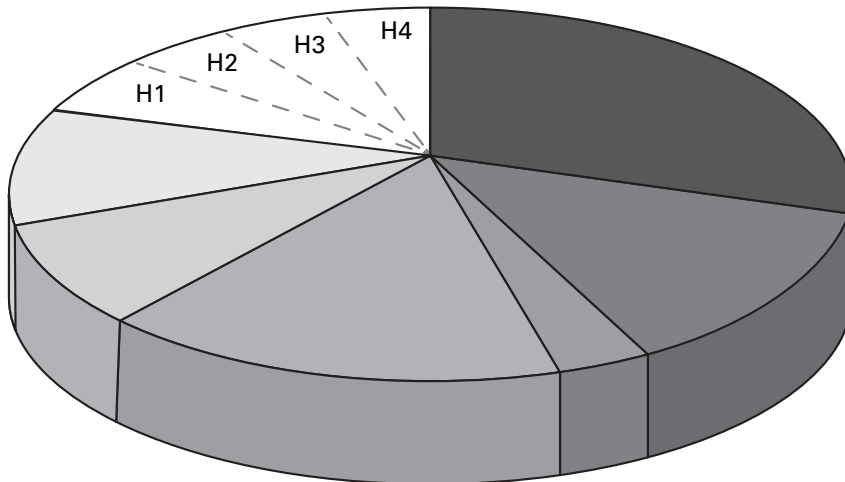
- Main Beam Length
- Spread Credit
- G1 - First Point Length
- G2 - Second Point Length
- G3 - Third Point Length
- G4 - Fourth Point Length
- Circumference Measurements Between Points
- - Indicates Circumference Divisions
- H1 - Circ. at Smallest Place Between Burr and 1st Point
- H2 - Circ. at Smallest Place Between 1st and 2nd Point
- H3 - Circ. at Smallest Place Between 2nd and 3rd Point
- H4 - Circ. at Smallest Place Between 3rd and 4th Point

TYPICAL MULE DEER



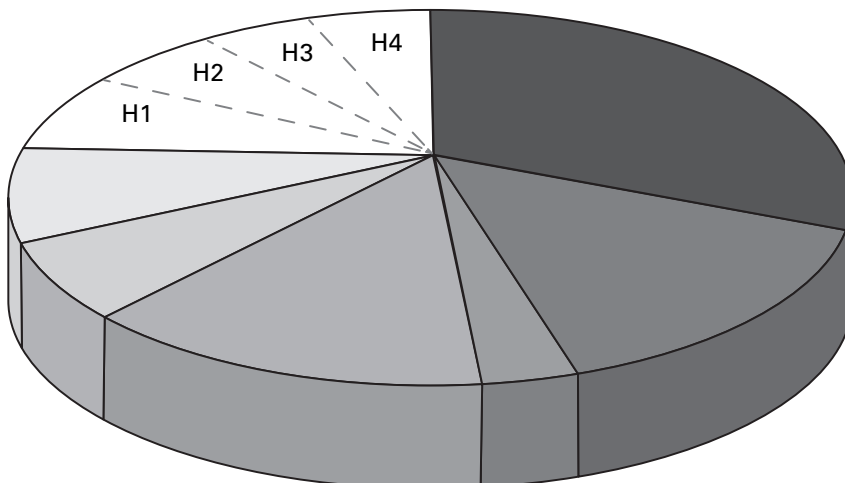
Average	Typical Mule Deer	% Of Score
25.24	Main Beam Length	26%
23.77	Spread Credit	12%
2.37	First Point Length	2%
17.12	Second Point Length	18%
11.12	Third Point Length	12%
11.22	Fourth Point Length	12%
4.98	Circ. at Smallest Place Between Burr and 1st Point	5%
4.52	Circ. at Smallest Place Between 1st and 2nd Point	5%
3.96	Circ. at Smallest Place Between 2nd and 3rd Point	4%
4.32	Circ. at Smallest Place Between 3rd and 4th Point	4%
Average Final Score		192.15

TYPICAL COLUMBIA BLACKTAIL DEER



Average	Typical Columbia Blacktail	% Of Score
20.88	Main Beam Length	30%
17.78	Spread Credit	13%
1.83	First Point Length	3%
10.72	Second Point Length	15%
5.84	Third Point Length	8%
11.22	Fourth Point Length	10%
4.34	Circ. at Smallest Place Between Burr and 1st Point	6%
3.79	Circ. at Smallest Place Between 1st and 2nd Point	5%
3.22	Circ. at Smallest Place Between 2nd and 3rd Point	5%
3.58	Circ. at Smallest Place Between 3rd and 4th Point	5%
Average Final Score		140.52

TYPICAL SITKA BLACKTAIL DEER



Average	Typical Sitka Blacktail	% Of Score
16.88	Main Beam Length	31%
14.92	Spread Credit	14%
1.71	First Point Length	3%
7.32	Second Point Length	13%
3.08	Third Point Length	6%
4.40	Fourth Point Length	8%
3.74	Circ. at Smallest Place Between Burr and 1st Point	7%
3.52	Circ. at Smallest Place Between 1st and 2nd Point	6%
2.94	Circ. at Smallest Place Between 2nd and 3rd Point	5%
3.31	Circ. at Smallest Place Between 3rd and 4th Point	6%
Average Final Score		109.82

mule deer, eye guards or G1s are not always present, even less so in both species of blacktail. If eye guards are present over one-inch, they're a bonus and will add to the final score. In some cases, eye guards can make the difference in putting a buck over the minimum entry score if everything else is present.

The record book does include 3x4 Columbia blacktails, not counting eye guards, more so than 3x3s, but not that many. For deer the antler size of blacktails, this unbalance is costly when adding up score.

The Sitka blacktail is the smallest of the three mule deer in antler size. Because of this, when it comes to score, the loss of one point on one side and no eye guards is costly. There are no 3x3 Sitka blacktails in the book. Four by fours make up only 12-percent of entries to date, with 4x5s 13-percent, and 5x5s (eye guards included) making up 66-percent.

The bottom line for field judging blacktail deer is check for four-points per side, not counting eye guards first. If you are looking at a buck with four per side you're looking at a trophy by most standards. By record book standards, past 4-points a side, the rest will need to add up just like in mule deer – length of points and mainbeam, mass, and inside spread.

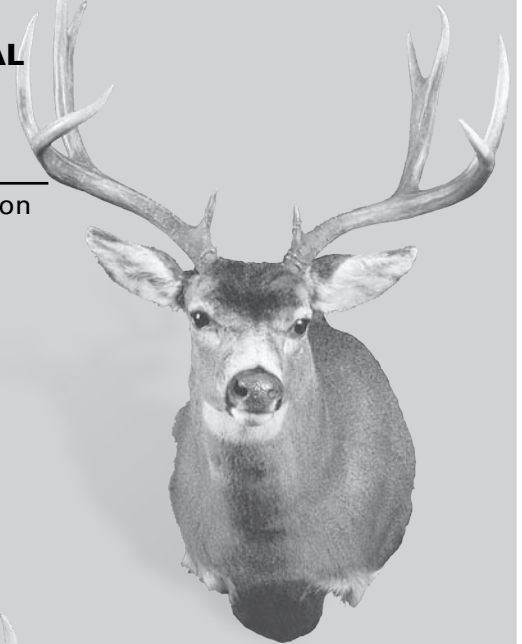
MAXIMUM VS. MINIMUM

A COMPARISON OF TWO RECORDS-BOOK TYPICAL COLUMBIA BLACKTAIL DEER

WORLD'S RECORD TYPICAL SITKA BLACKTAIL DEER SCORE: 133

TROPHY ANALYSIS

- Both height and width exception for a Sitka blacktail
- Outstanding inside spread of 19-6/8 inches - 5 inches more than the top 25 average
- Strong main beams averaging 20 inches
- Average mass - all measuring over 3 inches



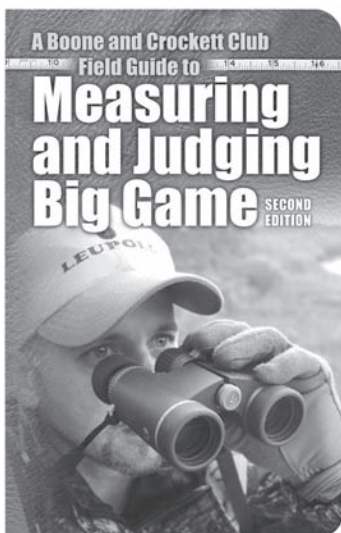
CLOSE TO MINIMUM ENTRY TYPICAL SITKA BLACKTAIL DEER SCORE: 108-4/8

TROPHY ANALYSIS

- Above average inside spread of 16-4/8 inches
- Extremely symmetrical frame - 1-2/8 inches in deductions
- Small overall frame offset by the above features
- Short G-2s - Both 6-6/8 inches

RESOURCES AVAILABLE FROM THE BOONE AND CROCKETT CLUB

Boone and Crockett Club Field Guide to Measuring and Judging Big Game, 2nd Edition



The definitive manual for anyone with a desire to learn the Boone and Crockett Club's world-famous big game measuring system is now available in this updated, convenient field guide that easily fits into backpacks.

Inside you will find detailed instructions on how to score each of the native North American big game categories recognized by the Club, including numerous illustrations to clearly demonstrate techniques for proper measurement. Also included in this field guide are techniques for evaluating and field judging the most popular species of North American big game.

Other important sections of the field guide include:

- A chapter on general measuring techniques for native North American big game
- Scoring instructions and scorecharts for all 38 categories of North American big game recognized by the Club
- Boundary descriptions for species such as elk, blacktail deer, grizzly and Alaska brown bear, whitetail, and caribou
- Table of the quarter locations for easy reference when measuring all big game categories with horns
- A chapter on understanding the dynamics of hunting and spotting optics.

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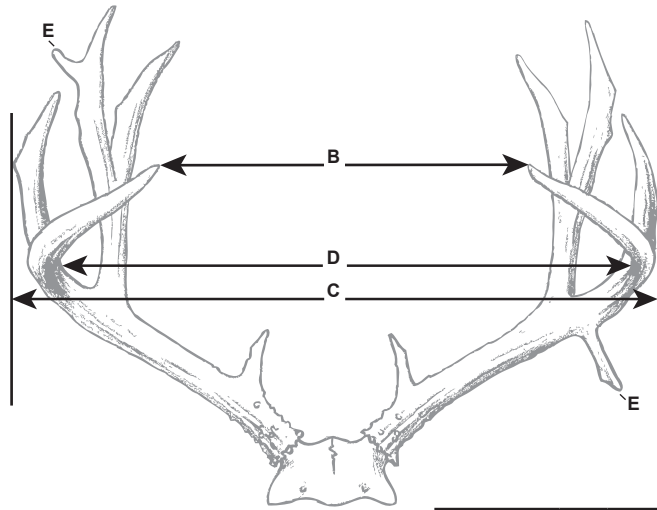
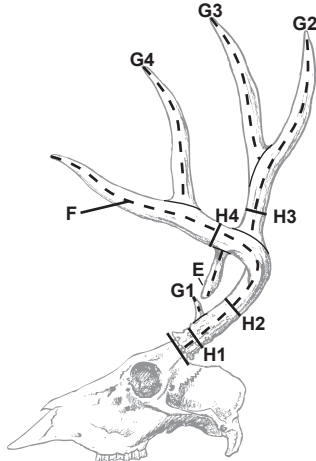


BOONE AND CROCKETT CLUB®

OFFICIAL SCORING SYSTEM FOR NORTH AMERICAN BIG GAME TROPHIES

TYPICAL MULE DEER AND BLACKTAIL DEER

(CHECK ONE):	MINIMUM SCORES	AWARDS	ALL-TIME
<input type="checkbox"/> mule deer	180		190
<input type="checkbox"/> Columbia blacktail	125		135
<input type="checkbox"/> Sitka blacktail	100		108



ABNORMAL POINTS	
Right Antler	Left Antler

SEE OTHER SIDE FOR SCORING INSTRUCTIONS

BELOW DATA (A, B, & C) DO NOT CALCULATE IN THE FINAL SCORE BUT ARE REQUIRED

A. No. Points on Right Antler		No. Points on Left Antler				
B. Tip to Tip Spread		C. Greatest Spread			SUBTOTALS	
				TOTAL TO E		
D. Inside Spread of Main Beams		SPREAD CREDIT (May Equal But Not Exceed Longer MAIN BEAM)		Column 1	Column 2	Column 3
				Right Antler	Left Antler	Difference
E. Total of Lengths of Abnormal Points						
F. Length of Main Beam						
G-1. Length of First Point, If Present						
G-2. Length of Second Point						
G-3. Length of Third Point, If Present						
G-4. Length of Fourth Point, If Present						
H-1. Circumference at Smallest Place Between Burr and First Point						
H-2. Circumference at Smallest Place Between First and Second Points						
H-3. Circumference at Smallest Place Between Main Beam and Third Point						
H-4. Circumference at Smallest Place Between Second and Fourth Points						
TOTALS						

ADD TOGETHER:	Spread Credit		Exact Locality Where Killed:*	County:	State/Prov:
	Column 1		Hunter (Legal Name):	Date Killed:	
	Column 2		Trophy Owner (Legal Name):	Telephone #:	
	Subtotal		Trophy Owner's Address:		
SUBTRACT:	Column 3		Trophy Owner's Email:	Guide's Name:	
FINAL SCORE			Remarks (Mention Any Abnormalities or Unique Qualities):		

*Geographic location (lake, mountain, river, etc.) required for trophies taken in Canada and Alaska. Boone and Crockett Club® Official Measurer I.D. Number

Mail To: Boone and Crockett Club ■ 250 Station Drive, Missoula, MT 59801 ■ (406) 542-1888 ■ www.booneandcrockettclub.com

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It is the policy of the Boone and Crockett Club to promote the guardianship and provident management of big game and associated wildlife in North America and maintain the highest standards of fair chase and sportsmanship in all aspects of big game hunting, in order that this resource of all the people may survive and prosper in its natural habitats. Consistent with this objective, the Club supports the use and enjoyment of our wildlife heritage to the fullest extent by this and future generations.

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BOONE AND CROCKETT CLUB® INSTRUCTIONS FOR MEASURING TYPICAL MULE AND BLACKTAIL DEER

All measurements must be made with a 1/4-inch wide flexible steel tape to the nearest one-eighth of an inch. (Note: A flexible steel cable can be used to measure points and main beams only.) Enter fractional figures in eighths, without reduction. Official measurements cannot be taken until the antlers have air dried at a habitable room temperature for at least 60 days after the animal was killed. The 60-day drying period for a trophy that has been frozen or boiled begins the day it is removed from the freezer, boiling pot, or submersion in any liquid.

- A. Number of Points on Each Antler:** To be counted a point, the projection must be at least one inch long, with length exceeding width at one inch or more of length. All points are measured from tip of point to nearest edge of beam. Beam tip is counted as a point but not measured as a point. **Point totals do not add into the final score.**
- B. Tip to Tip Spread** is measured between tips of main beams. **Tip to tip spread does not add into the final score.**
- C. Greatest Spread** is measured between perpendiculars at a right angle to the center line of the skull at widest part, whether across main beams or points. **Greatest spread does not add into the final score.**
- D. Inside Spread of Main Beams** is measured at a right angle to the center line of the skull at widest point between main beams. Enter this measurement again as the Spread Credit if it is less than or equal to the length of the longer main beam; if greater, enter longer main beam length for Spread Credit.
- E. Total of Lengths of all Abnormal Points:** Abnormal Points are those non-typical in location such as points originating from a point (exception: G-3 originates from G-2 in perfectly normal fashion) or from bottom or sides of main beam, or any points beyond the normal pattern of five (including beam tip) per antler. Measure each abnormal point in usual manner and enter in appropriate blanks.
- F. Length of Main Beam** is measured from the center of the lowest outside edge of burr over the outer side to the most distant point of the Main Beam. The point of beginning is that point on the burr where the center line along the outer side of the beam intersects the burr, then following generally the line of the illustration.
- G-1-2-3-4. Length of Normal Points:** Normal points are the brow tines and the upper and lower forks as shown in the illustration. They are measured from nearest edge of main beam over outer curve to tip. Lay the tape along the outer curve of the beam so that the top edge of the tape coincides with the top edge of the beam on both sides of point to determine the baseline for point measurement. Record point lengths in appropriate blanks.
- H-1-2-3-4. Circumferences** are taken as detailed in illustration for each measurement. If brow point is missing, take H-1 and H-2 at smallest place between burr and G-2. If G-3 is missing, take H-3 halfway between the base and tip of G-2. If G-4 is missing, take H-4 halfway between G-2 and tip of main beam.