


CASCADES EAST



FALL 2006

RECREATION & ADVENTURE

\$4.00

Summer Lake in the Fall

A SUBLIME ESCAPE IN THE HIGH DESERT

Cascade Lifestyles

EAT. DRINK. LIVE.

w w w . c a s c a d e s e a s t . c o m

STRONGHOLD

by GARY LEWIS

Beyond the end of the road is a canyon. Vine maple, cottonwoods and willows grow along the stream. Junipers eke out a living on the shoulders of the ridge. The rimrock hides a trickle of water that seeps out of a crack in the rock. Lichens encrust the surface of the stone and it is cool even in the warmest months.

There are tracks at the little spring. Bighorn sheep and chukar water here. Mule deer come to this water, too. At least the old bucks do. Does, fawns and forkhorns take their water and feed from the valley.

The big bucks make their beds up tight against the rock walls of this canyon for miles. Some of these bucks live out their lives in these strongholds, only glimpsed at a distance by some shepherd or cowboy looking for his stock. Sometimes the stockman tells a hunter about the wide-racked buck he saw. Mostly he doesn't.

The mule deer is the largest of the three main species of North American deer. It gets its name from its over-sized ears. Its hooves are larger and blunter than those of other deer, allowing them to negotiate snow and rugged ground. Its tail is white and thin, with a black tassel at the end.

With great spread and mass, mule deer antlers are highly prized. Typically, the main beams fork into two branches and each branch forms two tines.

Although mule deer are a common sight in eastern Oregon, the mature adult buck is a secretive, adaptive animal that makes its living largely unseen in a rugged land.

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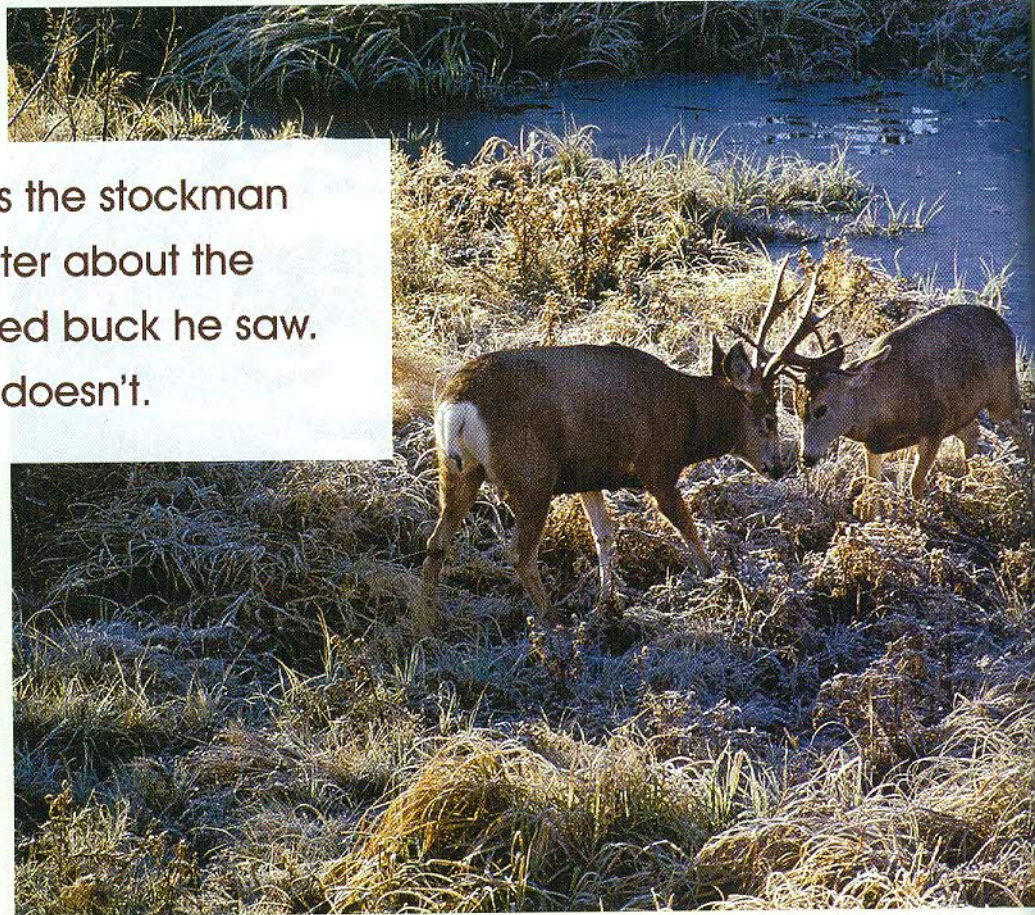


PHOTO BY DAVID REIN

Subterfuge and Strategy

Over on the dry side, where water holes are few and far between, it isn't hard to find deer sign. Spend a day scouting near water and you'll find evidence aplenty. Once you locate a buck's track, stop and look around. Chances are he's no more than a half-mile away.

We know this, but mule deer remain a mystery. Especially the big bucks that run with the herd and the outsized loners that use every trick in the book to keep from being seen.

Hunting eastern Oregon, from the Fort Rock and Upper Deschutes units to the Ochoco, Sumpter and Desolation units, we've watched mule deer bucks vanish – using cun-

ning instead of speed and distance to stay out of sight. Time after time, we've watched big bucks resort to trickery to throw us off their tracks. At the first hint of trouble, they go into crisis management mode.

Bucks use other deer as scouts to alert them to danger, or as decoys to draw the attention of predators. From a distance, we've watched mature bucks use spikes or forked horn bucks as shills. When danger nears, the buck will drive out his buddy on the tips of his antlers, hoping to draw the eye of the hunter, while he, belly on the ground, sneaks away in the other direction or lays his antlers in the sage.

