

The Los Angeles Silhouette Club

Deer Hunt with the Model 71 Winchester

By: Jim Taylor

The stars were bright in the night sky as I stepped through the corral gate. Looking around in the semi-darkness I could see the horses were standing hipshot, napping and not paying any attention to me. I stacked my gear near the barn and drug the saddle and tack out of the tack room. Talking to them gently so as not spook them I walked slowly up to the horses and put the halter on my mare. After leading her back to the barn I put some oats out for her breakfast, put some oats in the other horses stalls so there wouldn't be any bickering, and began to curry her a bit before I tossed the blanket and saddle on her back.

With the saddle on I let her blow a bit before I screwed it down tight. She wasn't bad about puffing up and making you think the saddle was tight when it really wasn't, but most all horses do that some. If you were green enough to trust them you could find yourself upside down in the saddle... not a good place to be.

I tied the scabbard on the left front, barrel down and to the rear so it would lay under my left leg. What some call the "Northwest Carry". The rope was tied on the saddle horn, my saddlebags and canteen were tied on behind and I was packed. Once all the gear was loaded I led her through the gate, climbed aboard and we were off. It was opening day of deer season and I was hunting the little Coues Whitetail Deer in Southern Arizona.

The Coues deer is the Whitetail of the Southwest. It is known as the Sonora Deer, Arizona Whitetail, or Fantail. Depending on the locality it is also locally called Desert Fantail, Flagtail, Cactus Fantail, Apache Deer, Small Mountain Deer, Gazelle Deer and Cheneche. It's scientific name is *Odocoileus couesi*... but no one I hunt with has ever called them that.

When asked how to pronounce "Coues" the answer you get depends on who you ask. Game biologists for the Arizona Game & Fish Dept. say in their booklet on the Coues Deer that it is pronounced the same as "house". The deer was named after Lt. Elliott Coues who was stationed at Ft. Whipple, Arizona and who was a naturalist of some renown. He is the first person who correctly identified the little deer as a distinctly separate species.

Others who have hunted the deer for many years and studied them say you pronounce the name "coo wees" or "cow wees". The most common pronunciation is "cooze" (as in "booze").

However you say it, the little deer is a challenge to hunt. They possess great eyesight, hearing and sense of smell. They are also masters at using the terrain to hide themselves. They are Whitetail Deer.

Field-dressed weights run around 100 pounds for the average mature deer. Some years back the heaviest deer taken in the Tucson, AZ area were between 109 and 118 pounds. They are found from sea level up to 8000 ft. elevation, as far north as the Mogollon Rim in Arizona, as far south as Sinaloa Mexico and as far east as the Davis Mountains in Texas - at least according to some authorities.

Dr. H.C. Yarrow in "Mammals of North America" described the Coues deer thus: "... imagine a Cottontail Rabbit crossed with a Whitetail Deer and we shall have a fair idea of this elegant creature..." It was this deer that I set out on that morning to find.

The mare blew a steady stream of breath out her nostrils, clearly visible in the crisp December air as we climbed the hills behind my house. We held a steady pace for a half hour, the last 10 minutes being a very steep climb. At the top I stopped and climbed off the horse and let her blow, watching the steam come off her sweating sides. The sun was rising in back of the mountain behind us and standing there on the hilltop I could see the land for 50 miles to the west being lit up by the first light of the day.

While enjoying the view I pulled the rifle out of the scabbard and loaded the magazine. The gun was an old Model 71 Winchester .348. It had been purchased by my friend Robert Smythe of the Heart Bar Ranch in Saguache, Colorado around 1937. He had owned and used it for 50 years and after he died I purchased the gun from his widow. It had been one of his favorite hunting rifles and I valued it highly. The ammo was Winchester factory 200 gr. Silvertips and I put 4 of them in the magazine, then put it back into the scabbard. Giving the horse a pat I climbed back into the saddle and we started down toward the lower ridges where I felt I would find the Coues Deer.

In about an hour I was into the area I had planned on hunting and I began a slow search. The area was cut by washes and small canyons with lots of scrub oak and manzanita and I rode easily around the edges of the hills, watching both sides and looking for deer. I had crossed 2 or 3 hills and was coming around another when I saw the white tails of two deer going over the top of the hill in front of me.

I reached down and pulled the rifle from the scabbard and jacked a shell in the chamber. I then let the hammer down to half cock and laid the gun across my lap as I guided the horse in the direction the deer had gone. We

just rode easy, the horse and I, not getting in a hurry. I figured that we would give the deer time to settle down and that they would not go too far.

We rode up the hill the deer had disappeared over and crossed the top where they had. Coming down the other side I could see the ground dropped away in front of me to some lower hills about a half mile distant. To my left was a large wash with a steep ridge going up above it. We traveled maybe 200 yards or so when I saw movement on the hillside to my left. Pulling the horse to a stop I saw two Whitetail walk out of some brush and I climbed off the horse. I could see that both were bucks as I knelt down and pulled the hammer on the rifle to full cock.

It was a fairly long distance across the canyon and I put the bead about halfway up the body of the rear buck and squeezed the trigger. At the shot both deer flinched but did not run. They were both standing still, looking around as I levered in another shell. I had seen the bullet strike under the deer on that first shot. This time I held the bead on the deer's back and at the shot it dropped, then began kicking. I watched for a moment, making sure it was not getting up, then got back on the horse and rode over to where the buck lay.

It was 3-point (Western count) buck that was about average size. The deer had been turned more than it looked like and the shot had taken it in the right rear flank and exited the left front shoulder. After cleaning it I tied it on the horse and we began the walk home. The old Model 71 had done its duty and we had made meat.

(The year was 1988. The mare is long gone now, but the rifle still does its duty. Just a couple years ago I used it to take a nice Whitetail buck here in Missouri. I suspect the rifle will still do its duty long after I am gone. - Jim Taylor)

[Jim Taylor Article Index](#) [Complete LASC Article Index](#)

[LASC Home Page](#)