

By Horace Gore

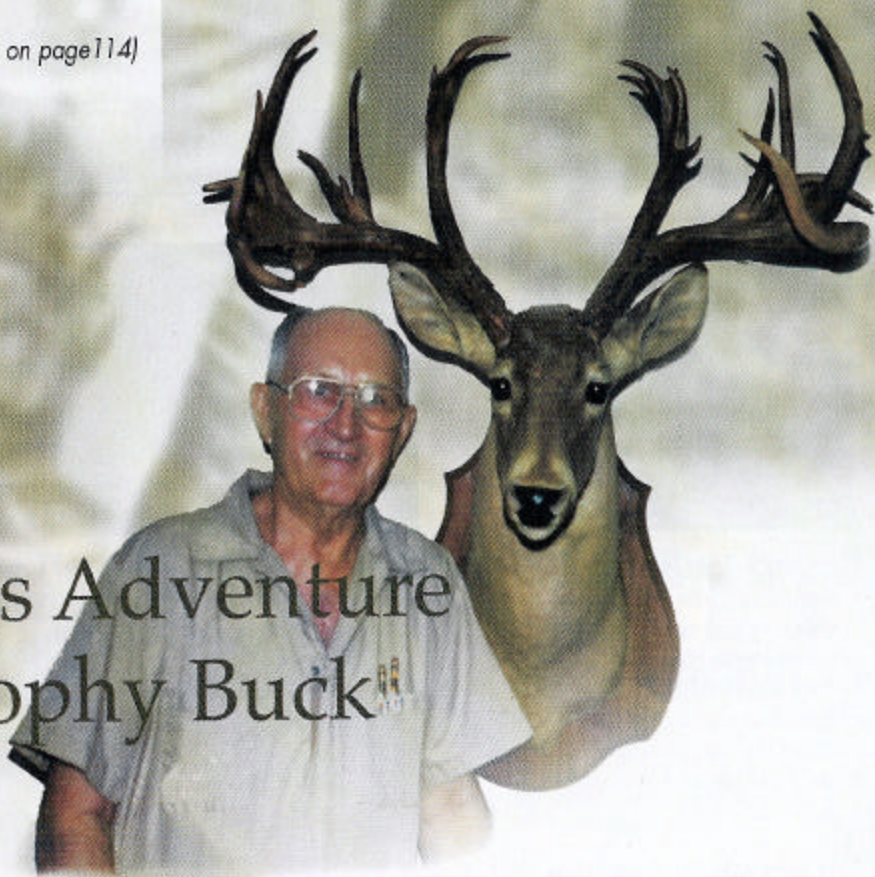
Thirty-one years ago, Ben Bienek of Houston killed a Pinewoods whitetail on a 500-acre lease in East Texas. For 31 years, the buck stood as the best non-typical taken from the wild east of the Brazos River. The 223-2/8 monster was finally surpassed last season by Tom Cole's Hunt County 228 B&C.

Ben Bienek's buck sported 31 scorable points and had just over 31 inches of outside spread. Almost as interesting as the size of the buck was where Bienek killed in Madison County!

Now Folks, I've had a lot of experience with Texas whitetails, and I'm here to tell you that finding a 31-point, 31-inch spread buck in Madison County is like finding a diamond under a goat's tail!

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## Pinewoods Adventure Yields A Trophy Buck





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Madison County straddles an imaginary line between the Post oak Savannah and Pineywoods ecosystems. The area was settled in the 1820s, partly because it was traversed by the Old San Antonio Road (Hwy 21) between Nacogdoches and San Antonio. The fertile western side of the area was plowed, planted and grazed to excess. Very little habitat existed for deer by the turn of the century. But the east side of what is now Madison County gave way to the East Texas Pineywoods, an area that has always provided good habitat for whitetails. However, today as in the '60s, less than 500 deer are harvested in Madison County most on the Pineywoods side of the county. So, it is ironic to me that the second largest buck ever taken in East Texas would come from Madison County.

Obviously, Ben Bienek (now 74 years old) waited a long time to tell us about the trophy of his long hunting career. But here it is, just as he told it.

### **Bienek's Adventure**

I, B.C. Bienek, my brother Mike, two brothers-in-law, John Lidiak and Ted Kubeczka, and a

nephew, Robert Grabarkievitz, leased a 500-acre piece of land in east Madison County in 1967 for deer hunting. The season opening was about mid-November and we were all on the lease looking for good places to build deer blinds. My brother was looking around on the lease, and came back telling us that he had seen a monster buck with at least a 30-inch spread. In Madison County! We all laughed and he backed off to 24 inches and wouldn't budge. But we still thought he was seeing things.

On opening day of deer season, Mike and I hunted all week. Of course, we were looking for the BIG buck, but didn't see him. On Saturday evening, I said, "Mike, I'm going to go sit in Robert's tree stand. He's not here and it's a good spot." But when I got to the tree, Robert was up in it. "How did you get here," I asked, knowing that we had locked the gate behind us when we came in. "You'll locked me out, but I walked in," explained my nephew from his lofty perch.

Robert got down from the tree stand. "You go ahead and hunt my stand. I'll walk over to another stand," he declared. "You're too old to be walking around in these woods." He left and I climbed up in the tree stand, thinking to myself, "43 is not that

old." I sat in that stand all evening and didn't even see a squirrel.

Just before dark, I looked behind me and could make out the outline of a deer with antlers. I knew that he was a legal buck and I was ready to shoot. I put the crosshairs of my 2-7 Redfield scope on his shoulder and squeezed the trigger. The 30-06 Remington auto belched fire from the barrel and the 180 grain bullet brought the buck to the ground. But just as quick, he was up again and stumbled a few yards before he fell again.

I got down from the tree stand and went to where I had last seen and heard the buck. The weeds were tall and I couldn't find him for a while. It was getting pretty dark when I heard the buck take a last gasp of breath just a few feet away. As I parted the weeds and saw the deer on the ground, I couldn't believe my eyes. What I had thought to be a legal buck was a monster whitetail with a tremendous set of wide antlers! I touched the buck on the back with my rifle barrel to make sure he wasn't going anywhere.

As I stared at the huge antlers, I got so nervous that I couldn't do anything except stand there. My brother and nephew came to help me field dress the deer and get him into the bed of my '65 Ford pickup. We took the deer to the Madisonville locker plant and weighed him in at 132 pounds. A.C. Schillar operated the locker. "I'll be back to get him tomorrow about 2 o'clock," I told Mr. Schillar.

The next day when I got to the locker plant, a Madisonville newspaper reporter was there. He took photographs of the buck and me in my pickup. Later on, I took the head and hide to Earl Griffith to be mounted. Stan Slaton of the Outdoor Times really did a good story, as did the Madisonville newspaper. It was a great time to be an east Texas deer hunter!

### **31 Years Later**

Ben Bienek finally had the trophy officially scored by a Boone and Crockett measurer last year. The 31-point rack (15 on one side, 16 on the other) netted 223-2/8 and will be listed in the 23rd Awards Book. The buck will also appear in the 11th all time Record Book, which should be printed by the Boone and Crockett Club next year.

The old buck will be in the top 15 non-typicals for Texas, and second only to Tom Cole's 228 buck taken last year in Hunt County—the two best bucks ever from East Texas.

Finally, Ben! 