

The Elk Trip

By Scott Berry

Well, our hunting story has to start at my Brother Eric's house on the day we were packing to leave. Eric was thinking of adding a component to his Surveying business. We had a guy there to demo a Ground Penetrating Radar unit to find buried utilities.

Our good friend and hunting buddy Rick, who works for a county public works department, was there to observe and help out and then we were going to pack up and head over the hill. Rick and I were playing with the machine in the street and found a buried storm drain line. We wanted to see if the depth reading was accurate so we pulled the manhole lid to measure depth. The only thing we had to pull the lid with was a piece of rebar. I pulled the lid up, the bottom slid into the hole and when it did the rebar came out. The lid did a full spin in the hole and flipped out landing squarely on Rick's sneaker clad big toe.

No loud clang as you would expect to hear when a large plate of steel lands on a hard surface, it landed instead with the muted "thud" and "click" of small bones breaking. Without a peep Rick limped off towards the house to find a chair and a beer.

The chair helped some, the beer none at all. Dad was near by to also observe the day's proceedings so the three of us held a quick caucus and decided that the best course of action was for Dad to take Rick to the hospital and get him checked out while I waited for the salesman to show up and finish the demo. While I was waiting for him to show up Eric called to see how things were going, the conversation went something like this;

"Well, I have some bad news for you" I said sheepishly.

"You guy's didn't break the \$20,000 GPRS unit did you?" said Eric with tinge of panic in his voice.

"No, no... Nothing that bad. Dad and Rick are on the way to the hospital" I said feeling relieved that I could give him some good news.

"What did you do to Dad now?" said Eric.

I started to get irritated with him for his demeanor but I realized he did have cause to ask that question. Dad's been out of the cast for six months and that's only half as long as he was in it but that's another story altogether and you'll have to come to my Excavation Safety classes to hear it.

So with as much patience as I could muster, I calmly replied "There's nothing wrong with Dad, I broke Rick this time". Eric seemed greatly relieved to hear that rather than taking another swipe at crippling Dad, I had injured one of our best friends and greatly decreased our chances of a successful elk hunt. It decreased our chances in the same way that loosing your best pack-mule to injury would.

We finished the demo and returned to the house to check on Rick who arrived shortly after us. Sure enough, the big toe on his left foot was badly broken. Rick went to a lawn chair and sat down to prop his foot up on the beer cooler. He realized almost immediately that it was not a very good idea to prop his broken limbs on the only cooler containing beer. After he got resettled, he watched us do all the packing and occasionally pointed or reminded us of something all the while grumbling about being "as useful as a canoe in the desert".

Eric and I managed to get everything packed up in spite of Rick's direction and supervision. When we were heading inside to catch a few hours of sleep, Rick noticed all of his left shoes still sitting neatly in a pile in the corner of the garage. "What's this?!!" he screeched to Eric who looked altogether unconcerned.

"We needed the extra room more than you're going to need a left shoe for the next couple of weeks" Said Eric. Rick kept grumbling so we threw in a couple of his left boots just to placate him. I do have to admit that Rick was a real trooper. He didn't grumble much and when he did it was about him not being able to help us set up camp or get firewood, unless he was hungry or needed another drink, and then he was in too much pain to stand.

I did a lot of bartending this trip.

He kept saying that he wasn't upset, that things happen and that he shouldn't have been doing that in sneakers even though he was on his own time.

I thought I may have detected a hint of latent hostility in his voice as I was pulling a pocketknife (my own pocketknife) out of the top of my left foot after he had thrown it there from the other side of

the tent and stuck it through two layers of leather and a quarter inch into flesh.

Just a hint of hostility.

So, in conclusion, it was just an ordinary elk hunting trip. Remind me to tell you about the interesting stuff when I see you.