

Second Try for a Regal Roebuck

BY ROBERT J. ROBEL

PAGE DESIGN BY
MEG BENHASE



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It was the second time around. Two years earlier, David Jackman, my long-time hunting partner, and I had traveled to the Tulva region of Russia in quest of Siberian roebucks. We saw very little game and were unsuccessful. The outfitter offered us a repeat hunt out of that same camp at no cost. The operation of that first hunt was satisfactory, and the guides were enthusiastic, but the lack of game concerned us.

Both of us are incurably addicted to roe deer and have killed several European roebucks over the years.

However, we always coveted the largest of the roe deer subspecies in Russia. But rather than accepting the offer of a free hunt in an area in which we had little confidence, we booked our second effort with Profi Hunt through Holland & Holland.

Professor Vladislav Melinkov, the father of the owner of Profi Hunt, met us in Moscow and accompanied us on the flight to Tyumen, and the four-hour drive from Tyumen to our hunting camp in the Kurgan region was uneventful.

Our hunting camp consisted of



My second roebuck carried a very respectable rack.

Guides stood on the tailgate and top of our vehicle to see over the tall weeds.

eight large trailers nestled in an oasis of trees. Three trailers were reserved for hunters and three for the guides, cooks, and interpreter.

We checked the zero of our rifles the afternoon we arrived. David's .300 H&H was right on, whereas my .30-06 was off to the left by four inches. A few clicks of the windage knob followed by a confirming shot set things right. We both were using handloads pushing 150-grain bullets along at about 2,800 fps.

Neither my guide, Andrei, nor his assistant, Victor, could speak English.

No problem, I couldn't speak Russian, either. Sign language got us by.

Dawn was breaking as we glassed unharvested and fallow wheat fields and forest edges for deer. We saw three roebucks (including a real nice one) and eight does. The big roebuck leaped into a dense stand of trees when he spotted us and never showed himself again. Observing that many roe deer so quickly and seeing common cranes, ravens, raptors, wood pigeons, capercaillie, hazel grouse and doves convinced me we were in good game country. It was a great morning, though no roebucks were in the bag, and we were back to camp by 10:30 a.m.

David already was there. He and his guide had seen several deer, including a nice buck with a doe, that were barely visible among the tall weeds of a fallow wheat field. As David was getting into a steady shooting position, the buck moved from the doe's right to her left. David almost shot the doe before he realized they had switched places. The deer disappeared into the brush before David could get the buck in his sights.

We learned a lesson by sign language that first morning. Siberian roebucks are spooky and don't just stand around while you look them

over. Instead of carefully searching the landscape for deer and assessing them through binoculars, you need to glass the area quickly and then examine any buck seen through the scope of your rifle. This tactic usually allows you to shoot as soon as you know the buck is suitable.

We caught some shuteye after lunch and headed out again late in the afternoon. My guide and I saw two does and a fawn while David and his guide saw 21 deer, including two nice bucks. David couldn't get lined up quickly enough for a shot at either buck. It was a bit discouraging, but at least we were seeing a fair amount of game.

Andrei and I left camp the next morning at 5:45, and I had a buck a half-hour later. I took the shot at 200 yards in an unharvested wheat field. It was a six-pointer with stubby, blunt antlers. The molars and premolars in the lower jaw were worn down to the gum line, and Professor Melinkov estimated its age at eight to nine years. Even the worn antlers spoke of the deer's old age. Not the best example of a Siberian roebuck, but it was my first.

We rested during midday and hunted again in the evening. I passed up a smallish buck, and David and his guide encountered two bucks, but

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again a good shot was not offered. David just wouldn't shoot without a solid rest, and none was available either time.

On the third morning, we started out very early, before the eastern horizon was even visible. Andrei, Victor and I saw two bucks and five does. One buck had a gigantic set of antlers but was unapproachable in the middle of an expansive wheat field. David returned to camp very depressed. He and his guide had seen a dozen deer that morning, including five bucks. He had his crosshairs on one, but the animal bolted into some brush before he could squeeze off a shot. David was halfway through his second five-day quest for a Siberian roebuck and had yet to fire a shot.

The evening of our third day, David and his guide finally spotted a cooperative roebuck standing among waist-high weeds in a fallow field. David's .300 H&H found a solid rest, and the 250-yard shot was successful. We were both elated as we shared a couple of drinks that night.

We exerted ourselves the last two days of our hunt. David spotted a real nice buck standing broadside in a fallow field with only its head and neck exposed. David tried a neck shot at 150 yards but didn't connect.

Our last day started out poorly. We were tired and tried hard to convince ourselves that one trophy each made our Siberian roebuck hunt a success. After an unsuccessful morning, we began packing after lunch because we had to depart at 2 a.m. to catch an early flight to Moscow.

Andrei and Victor were quiet as we drove out of camp a bit earlier than usual for our last afternoon of hunting. When we got to our hunting area, Victor hopped out and went to the rear of the vehicle, where he got up on the tailgate. That extra height provided him a better vantage point to spot deer in the four-foot-high weeds of fallow fields.

At 6 p.m., with barely three hours of light remaining, we drove along two-track trails through the weedy fields. In many areas, the weeds were taller than our vehicle, and eventually the radiator became clogged with vegetation, causing the engine to overheat. We lost precious time as we cleared the radiator and allowed the engine to cool.

Undaunted, we moved on. Three

thumps on the roof stopped the vehicle. Victor pointed out into the field, but neither Andrei nor I could spot anything. Andrei motioned for me to get out and join Victor on the tailgate, but still I saw nothing. Victor's 35-year-old eyes were far better than my 70-year-old pair. Finally his motions told me that only the buck's head was visible, and a minute or so later I spotted the deer through my riflescope. It was at least 400 yards away, far beyond my shooting ability.

I shook my head no when Victor whispered, "Shoot, shoot, shoot!" He then muttered something to Andrei and hand-signaled me we were going to drive across the field to get closer. I grabbed ahold of the luggage rack on top of the vehicle as Andrei left the trail. When we got within 200 yards of the buck, he bolted and disappeared.

I cursed under my breath and mentally kicked myself for not attempting the long shot. Andrei shut the engine off, and Victor put his finger to his lips. We waited in silence for several minutes. Then Andrei whistled shrilly. I scanned the weeds in front but saw nothing. Victor reached over and touched my arm, pointed toward a large clump of weeds, and motioned for me to look at it through my scope. The optics revealed the white tips of antlers, then the gray face of a roebuck staring at us. No part of his body could be seen. I steadied the crosshairs just under the buck's chin and carefully squeezed the trigger. Before I could recover from the recoil, Victor slapped my shoulder and extended his hand to shake mine. Andrei jumped out of the vehicle, ran around and gave me a bear hug.

Before we went forward to see what I had shot, a bottle of vodka and three glasses emerged from the back of the vehicle. After drinking a toast, we went forward, and that's when I really brightened up.

The buck was a super six-pointer with beautifully pearly, heavy antlers and several points extending rearward off the lower beams. My dream had come true. I'd finally killed a very respectable Siberian roebuck – during the last hour or so of a five-day hunt. To add frosting to the cake, David also killed his second roebuck that last evening.

Will we try for better Siberian roebucks in the future? Probably not, but fond memories of this trip will linger for many years. Our second try for the largest of the roebuck subspecies was an unforgettable experience. 🐾