

## The Moose Hunt (Long Version)

by  
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My friend John “Jack” Liimakka excitedly informed me that he had drawn a bull moose permit to hunt for a Maine moose. Before moving to Maine to teach at Eastern Maine Community College, Jack, along with his brother Rob, grew up in the Wakefield, Michigan area hunting and fishing. A moose hunt is usually a once in a lifetime event. Drawing a moose permit is akin to a football fanatic being allowed to sit with their favorite football team during a Super Bowl game. Drawing a moose permit is the beginning of the moose hunt.

My part in Jack’s moose hunt was the designated sub-permittee. A sub-permittee also has the legal right to shoot the moose allowed under the permit. What is legal and what is good sense are not always the same. Shooting a moose under Jack’s permit would refocus Jack’s efforts from moose hunting to hunting me.

There was a remote chance I could shoot Jack’s moose without becoming the hunted. For example, the excitement of a moose hunt has been known to cause a heart attack. If Jack had a heart attack on the morning of the moose hunt, I was prepared to load him into the passenger seat of the truck, hunt for, and shoot the moose. A person can be admitted to the hospital anytime. Moose season only lasts six days.

Some rabid hunters, desperate to hunt moose, have been known to apply for a permit drawing not only under their own name but also apply for a permit drawing under their spouse, grandparent, great aunt, etc., listing themselves as the sub-permittee. For this plan to work, the rabid hunter must use a relative or friend who qualifies for a hunting license but does not like to or can no longer hunt. If any of these individuals draws a permit, the rabid hunter can legally shoot the moose as a sub-permittee. It has been rumored that at least one rabid hunter had removed his 95 year-old blind grandmother from the elderly care home for the week to “see the Fall colors” after she unknowingly drew a moose permit with her grandson listed as a sub-permittee.

The sub-permittee has to be within view and sound of the permit holder in order for the sub-permittee to shoot a moose under the permit. This requirement has no doubt strained many a marriage where the non-hunting spouse has drawn the permit. The reader can imagine the one spouse (sub-permittee) intently scanning for moose and the other spouse (permittee), forced into joining the hunt, either sleeping or, worst, having a strong desire to talk about their “feelings” – which don’t include how happy they are to be traveling rough logging roads so that their sub-permittee spouse will be able to shoot a moose under their permit.

Preparing for the moose hunt is like preparing for a deer hunt except you need lots of ½ inch rope or cable, come-a-longs, winches, and snatch-blocks. ATVs are not

allowed so other means must be employed to move a moose. This is an important difference between moose and deer hunting. There is a strong correlation between the length of rope/cable and the distance from the road you should hunt for and shoot a moose. For example, if a hunter only has 600 feet of rope or cable available for a moose hunt, the hunter should not shoot a moose 605 feet away from a road. Moving a moose weighing between 500 to 1000 lbs just five feet is not an easy matter. It is better to have the heart attack at the road while getting the moose four feet up into the truck bed rather than suffer the heart attack moving a moose a half-mile through a cedar bog toward the road.

The first day of the moose hunt is a much-anticipated event. Even though the season doesn't officially start until 6:00 a.m., Jack and I were both awake at 3:00 a.m. It is so much more fun loading the truck in the dark at 4:00 a.m. rather than using the available light during the prior evening. It is important to leave the camp while it is still dark. A good hunter can't forego the chance that game can be harvested at night without legal penalty by hitting the critter with the truck on the way to the hunting spot. After discharge from the hospital and replacement of the wrecked truck, there is little evidence to discern between road-killed and gun-killed moose.

Aside from harvesting a moose by truck, there are two common ways to harvest a moose. One way is to drive out into the woods until the truck is nearly stuck in the mud or swamp. A bull moose is then attracted, using sex calls, to the truck that is now thoroughly camouflaged by mud. Two categories of sex calls are used. One call imitates a sex-starved female. The other call imitates a bull moose bragging that he is about to get lucky. Judicious mixing of the two categories of moose calls makes it appear to a bull moose that a moose brothel is in full operation.

The second common way to hunt moose is to drive logging roads hoping to spot the moose standing in the woods or on the road. Hunters that opt for this method go to some length to obtain an edge in order to spot a moose. Most hunters utilizing this method of moose hunting build elevated seats in the bed of their truck. One hunter erected a 12 foot tall observation tower in the back of their truck. Since men generally build these additions to their truck, seat belts are not included. So in addition to heart attacks, injuries from falls are also common for moose hunters. More than one elevated "spotter," upon yelling "moose" down to the driver has been thrown over the cab top and on to the hood of the truck resulting from the driver slamming on the brakes.

We were very fortunate to have our friend Charlie aid us during the moose hunt. Charlie not only invited us to stay at his camp during the moose hunt but also volunteered to help call moose. At 6:00 a.m. in the morning the temperature was in the low 40s with a brisk wind. Since Charlie was calling the moose and Jack was going to shoot it, it was important that I not move around or get in the way of Jack shooting a moose so I stayed in the warm truck. To keep unnecessary movement to a minimum I felt it was in Jack's best interest if I slept.

After two attempts to call moose to the brothel, it was time to move. Even when moving, it is important to keep watch for moose. Despite the cold temperature, Jack leaned out of the window into the cold wind to scan for moose. Of course, the motivation for leaning out of the window may have been related to our previous evening's meal of beans.

The poor condition of the logging roads required that my attention be focused on driving. With lots of previous experience with my driving, Jack was certain I could get stuck with or without his help so he focused on scanning the woods looking for a bull moose.

It is hard to describe to the reader the rapt attention Jack gave to the task of spotting a moose while I was driving. Let me simply say that Jack, unmarried and unattached, could not have been more observant of the woods had it been announced that Miss Finland was lost in the nearby woods wearing her bikini and willing to spend the week with the first Finn that rescued her.

As I drove along the airport, a sharp yell of "moose" by Jack caused me to slam on the breaks. Despite my best efforts, Jack managed to avoid hitting his head on the windshield and there went my last chance to shoot a bull moose on Jack's permit.

Before continuing this story, I need to pause in recounting this moose hunt in order to clarify to the reader what I mean by driving along the "airfield" lest the reader think Jack an uncivilized couth for shooting a tame moose next to the runway. The North Maine Woods is composed of 10 million acres with thousands of miles of rutted, dirty, windy, alder-clogged, logging roads. One of these logging roads is actually straight for almost a quarter of mile. This is where a plane could land in an emergency with a reasonable chance the pilot could survive the landing. Hence, this portion of the logging road is known as the airfield.

Now someone, such as Charlie driving his vehicle well to the rear of my truck, watching Jack after Jack spotted the moose, could claim that Jack was pretty excited. The distant observer would believe Jack ran from the stopped truck back to the spot along the airfield where he saw the moose. Then the observer would believe Jack ran back to the truck to get his rifle he forgot before returning to the moose observation spot. Then the observer would believe Jack ran back to the truck once again to get his ammunition he forgot previously when getting his rifle before returning to the moose observation spot. Then the observer would believe Jack did a dry firing at the moose because he forgot to load his gun with the ammunition he previously forgot. Let me put these wild rumors to rest. As the only person present during this time period, I can unreservedly say these rumors are false. His frequent visits back and forth to the truck while the moose calmly stood in the woods were merely to consult with me in regard to wind direction, bullet drop, antler size, and, of course, if the moose was within the 600 feet of rope-length from the road.

Once these critical details were dealt with, my job was to capture this ultimate moment of the moose hunt on video. Those who have viewed my video display would say that my video recording talents left much to be desired since I pointed the camera in every direction but where the moose or Jack stood. In my defense, I thought it was important to show what the sky looked like at the time, if there were any sinkholes in the airfield, whether Jack has his shoes tied, if my truck was parked correctly, and to make sure there were no bears in the woods opposite to where the moose stood. Also, I would like to take this opportunity to recommend that the video camera manufacturer build a self-ejecting lens cover that will remove itself from obstructing the lens before someone spent two minutes attempting to record this important part of the moose hunt.

Fortunately, the bull moose had never seen two humans performing a Chinese fire drill and calmly stood 562.3 feet away watching us (according to Jack's rangefinder). After carefully aiming his rifle, Jack shot. After the shot, the moose continued to calmly stand and watch us. Obviously, a second shot was warranted and soon delivered. After the second shot, the moose calmly trotted off – away from the airfield.

For the first time, Jack appeared concerned and just a little stressed. On the advice of Charlie, we waited for a half hour. During this time, Jack alternated between absolute certainty he didn't miss or demanding I give him the video camera in my possession so he could erase those brief portions of the rather lengthy video when I actually focused on him shooting at the moose. I assume his motive was to erase those portions of the video that would stand as uncontested evidence that he missed a quarter ton moose standing broadside.

After the wait, it was time to check out the location where the moose bravely held its ground when under hostile fire. Upon our arrival at this location there was no dead moose and no blood. The search continued well past 600 feet from the airport. I feared that if we found a dead moose at this distance from the road, it would be a case of good fortune while bad for our health. Disbelief that Jack could miss something the size of a car sustained our continued search. We moved farther from the airfield until we finally crossed another logging road. Twenty feet beyond the logging road lay a deceased 665 pound bull moose.

A dead moose twenty feet from the road does not sound like much trouble to load into a vehicle. In review of the events of that morning, it has become clear that it took longer to get the moose loaded on the truck bed than we spent moose hunting.

Prior to loading the moose, it had to be field dressed or, as stated among the boys, the moose had to be "gutted." Examining the moose during this process revealed a well-placed bullet hole through the lungs. Since there was only one hole visible, the ONLY possibility that could explain this situation was that he put two bullets through the same hole.

Field dressing a moose is normally something a tasteful writer can omit when describing a moose hunt. No one can accuse me of tasteful writing so I continue with this event of the hunt. There were now five of us watching Jack field dress his moose. Aside from the obvious fact that as a group we were not inclined toward hard work, Jack would not allow it. Jack knew our skill with a knife and didn't want to die of an accidental knife wound from a friend. Second, I was the video guy and my job was to do a better job of recording Jack field dressing his moose than I did recording Jack shooting a moose. Last but not least, watching Jack field dress a moose is to stand in the presence of a master. The memory of Jack crawling inside a moose cavity with only his feet sticking out will not soon be forgotten – though a squeamish viewer may have ample cause to faint before the recording has run its course.

To see Jack emerge from the cavity of the moose with a expertly field dressed moose laying at his blood-splattered feet can only give rise to the question as to why at least one woman has not recognized this unique talent coupled with Jack's rugged good looks that were emphasized by the blood covering him from head to toe and latched on to him?

To try and describe how five people loaded a moose on to the back of a pickup truck would simply sully the reputation of those in attendance – especially since two were engineers and should have known better. In our defense, no one could suspect that a snatch block attached to a twelve inch wide standing fir would cause the tree to be pulled out by its roots and fall over on the truck rather than move the damn moose one tiny inch.

The law requires that when transporting a moose, a portion of the moose must be visible outside the vehicle or trailer. Relying on my recent experience and observations gleaned from that experience, this is a law that was truly unnecessary. With the head and horns extending over one side of the truck, feet extending out the other side of the truck, and ass hanging over the tailgate, not only were the contents of the truck obvious, it was a safety hazard to pass our truck within ten feet. I have promised myself that I must identify the individual who authored this law and to ask how he or she thought it possible to place a ¼ ton moose in a truck bed so it is hidden from view?

The moose tagging station was the last official stop of the moose hunt. This is not a good place for PETA supporters. This is a collection point (along with gun stores) for individuals who devote considerable effort toward the goal of insuring humans remain at the top of the food chain. Time spent at the tagging station has revealed that it would be appropriate to change the name of "tagging" station to the name "bragging" station. If the Maine Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Department would collect stories told at the tagging station with the same vigor as they collect teeth, weight, and measurements of the moose, fiction writers would have material for decades.

This ends the story of Jack's moose hunt. May we both be lucky and live long enough to share another one.