



The author's husband looks the country over, ready to help his wife get her deer



The author and her husband just after she shot the buck. Below, she rides through high brush on the trail of the toy white-tails



# These Deer Are Smart

"YOU'LL see bucks all right," Si, the cowboy, told me, "but seeing a buck isn't getting one. Some of those big fellows up on the ridge have had a couple of hundred shots fired at them, and nobody has hit them yet."

"They must be pretty smart," I said smugly.

"Smart?" Si laughed. "Smart? Listen, lady, those are about the smartest bucks north of the Mexican border. I'll bet you those bucks already know we're going to hunt them tomorrow."

Even then I didn't half believe Si. But I soon learned. Those white-tails were smart. They knew all the tricks, and getting one was the hardest deer hunting I've done in ten years of following Jack, my hunting husband, around.

The trip was for my benefit. Jack had killed a good many white-tails, but my deer hunting had all been after

mule deer. Now it was Jack's idea that I should put a good white-tail head among my other trophies.

When I went to bed that night in the cottage of that border ranch, it all looked simple. The big white-tails were there, and, thanks to Jack's excellent coaching, I could shoot.

When I say "big" white-tails I mean they were big in comparison with others of their species, as these deer were of the small Southwestern and Mexican variety. *Odocoileus couesi*, the scientists call them. Sonora deer, Arizona white-tailed deer, and fan-tailed deer are their other names. Only the biggest bucks weigh 100 pounds, but their size doesn't match their intelligence.

When I awoke the first morning of the hunt, Jack and Si had breakfast ready, and the horses saddled for the eight-mile ride to the ridge. In a half hour, breakfast was eaten, saddle boots tied on, rifles stowed away, and the men were ready. They waited rather un-

graciously while I applied a mask of make-up that startled Si into asking if I felt well. "You're as white as a sheet," he said. I explained my method of trying to protect my complexion from the Arizona sun with quantities of heavy cold cream, covered with a layer of powder.

And then we rode, for what seemed to be an interminable distance, through the cold that comes just before dawn. The horses picked their way along invisible trails. I shivered in the saddle until Si expressed a doubt that I could take it.

By the first gray of dawn, we were starting up the ridge. "Up" means that we were riding scrambling, puffing horses up a mountain side at an angle of almost forty-five degrees. "Up" also means that the trail was so steep that horse and rider could roll 1000 feet. Though I have ridden over some very rough country, I was scared half to death.



"Fresh sign!" Jack said occasionally. "Looks good!"

"Big buck track," Si would remark, "but up on the ridge, in those deep basins and canyons, is where they really hang out!"

Then Jack said, "Look—a doe and two fawns!"

I saw my first fan-tails then. A little gray doe and two tiny, white fawns scooted up toward the head of the canyon above us. Their tails were almost as big as their bodies, bushed out, dazzlingly white. They paused at the top of the canyon, froze, and looked at us for a moment before they flitted those big, white tails once more and disappeared into the chaparral. They were dainty and beautiful, and, they made the mule deer I remembered seem lumbering and uninteresting.

Presently we were on top, with hundreds of square miles of country spread out below us—long vistas of yellow grasslands, high mountain ranges, and purple hills. The ridge before us was brushed with mountain mahogany, piñon, cliff rose, and live oaks, carpeted with knee-high grama grass. On both sides it dived into steep narrow canyons filled with brush. We saw deer sign everywhere, but I began to have misgivings, as I could see that a couple of

jumps would take a deer out of sight.

It was still early morning, and, as the deer would still be moving and feeding, Si and I took one side of the ridge and Jack the other. We planned to ride slowly down, hoping for the best. Twice Si and I saw the flash of big, white tails, as feeding deer saw us and ran. Both times they were does with fawns. Then we heard the sudden, full-throated bel-low of Jack's old Springfield Sporter. When I rode over, I found him off his horse and looking down into the canyon with a slightly dazed expression.

"Buck?" I asked.

"Yes—a big one."

"Hit him?"

"I'll say I didn't!" Then: "There he goes—see him?"

Far below me, I saw a white speck. In the glasses, I could see a buck trotting along, pausing occasionally to look back. He was 1,000 feet below us and more than 400 yards away.

"He's over his scare now," Jack said bitterly, "but he really made a chump out of me!"

"How did it happen?"

"I was riding along, when something made me turn and look behind. There, not more than twenty yards away, was that big rascal, sneaking along with his head low, keeping brush between us. I jumped off my horse and jerked the rifle out of the boot, just as he went into high gear. I took one shot at the brush he'd disappeared in. That buck isn't anybody's fool!"

As Jack said later, "White-tail won the first round."

It was my turn next. We

were still on horseback, when another buck got up and whipped around a little point so fast my head swam. I jumped off my horse, grabbed my rifle, and ran to head him off. But he was gone! For a moment, I was half convinced that I hadn't really seen a buck at all. Afterwards, by his tracks, we found he had run around the point, then turned sharply, and run down the canyon. That was round two!

We tied up our horses and hunted on foot. Or rather, we hunted on foot and by arm. Toy white-tails have a habit of lying so close in their brush that they almost have to be blasted out. I took one side of a steep, narrow canyon and Si the other. We went down, rolling and throwing

(Continued on page 77)



Mrs. O'Connor beside her kill. The buck was large for his species, but tiny as compared to mule deer

## LARGER GAME WAS EASY BUT THE TINY ARIZONA WHITE-TAILS DEMANDED ENTIRELY NEW TRICKS

By  
ELEANOR O'CONNOR

Eating lunch atop a high ridge where it was possible to see deer if they crossed an opening





## These Deer Are Smart

(Continued from page 23)

stones into every promising-looking bit of brush. After rolling perhaps 100 rocks and making more noise than an army, we had routed out one gray fox and scared up a covey of fool quail, but no deer.

Puffing and very weary, I clambered up another canyon, to meet Jack on a sunny saddle for lunch. My make-up had worn off, my nose was red from sunburn, my lips chapped, and my hair disheveled, and I had lost my lipstick and comb in my scramble up a canyon. I had long before taken off my gloves, because I refused to have anything interfering with my trigger finger if I should get the chance to use it, and my hands were scratched and dirty. "I'm afraid white-tail hunting isn't a very ladylike sport," I thought, "but I'm going to shoot one."

**D**URING the afternoon we saw no more bucks on the ridge, but we did see where a couple had run, and enough does and fawns to keep hope in our hearts.

Later, when we started off the mountain, we saw a deer humping up the side of a wide canyon. The glasses told us it was a buck and a big one.

"Think you can hit him?" Si asked.

"I can try," I said doubtfully. The buck was a good 400 yards away and moving.

"I hope you miss him," Jack said gloomily as I sat down and put off the safety of my .257 Roberts. "If you kill that buck it will take us an hour to get to him, and another hour to get him off the mountain. I don't have any yen to go prowling around in the dark right now."

And I did miss him—quite neatly. I missed him for six shots, and, trembling, gave up. For the first time, I was afflicted with buck fever. I had heard jokes about buck fever, I had seen men quake with it, but I had never felt it before. My determination to get the best of the Limestone bucks got the better of me. Let's call this round three.

But the biggest, finest, most complete fiasco of all came the next day. Si and I were riding down the ridge where Jack had seen the big buck the day before. Suddenly I thought I saw a man on horseback back of me, then I realized with astonishment that it was a buck with a fine head.

I shouted to Si, jumped off my horse, and ran toward the canyon where the buck had disappeared, as I thought, over the ridge.

In the meantime, Jack heard the commotion and came down the ridge at a dead gallop. He didn't see the deer because of an intervening oak, but he could see me and knew from the direction my rifle was pointed that I was shooting across the canyon. So he rode around the head to the ridge and tied up his horse. After fifteen or twenty minutes of careful exploring, Jack put his rifle in the boot again, and prepared to join us.

Just as Jack mounted his horse, he heard the brush crack, and, fifty yards below him, a big, old buck dived off the ledge into the thick brush below. Jack jumped off and waited for him to show up. But that wise, old deer stayed in thick brush until the last possible moment. When he finally emerged, it was only to flash across an opening about ten feet wide. (Continued on page 78)

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