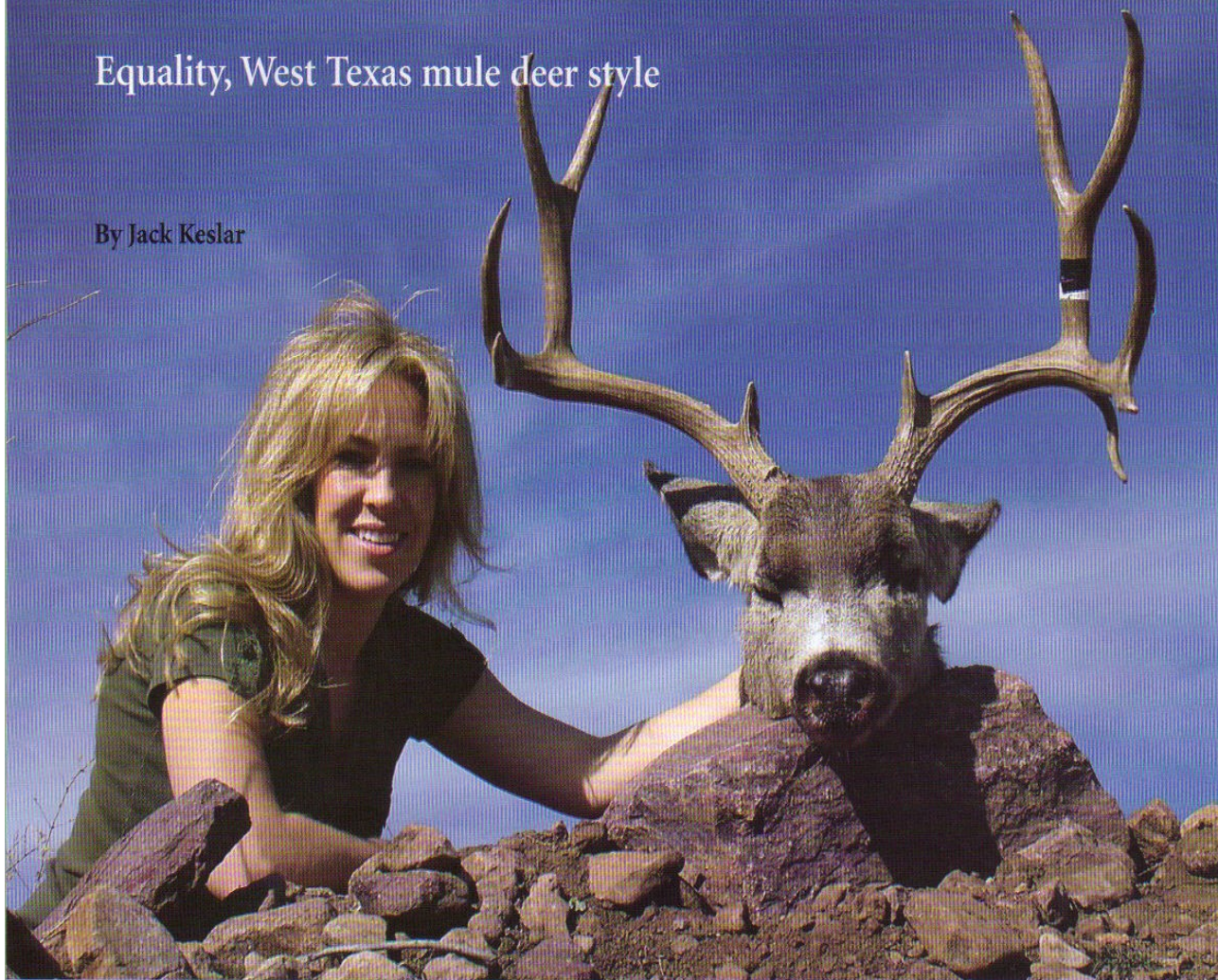


Lady and the Camp

Equality, West Texas mule deer style

By Jack Keslar



Leoncita Ranch, West Texas – This hunt started like so many other mule deer hunts – comparing notes and photos. At least 12 professional and amateur hunters had preceded us on the Leoncita Ranch, and thanks to digital technology were able to show us the big bucks they had taken. (Immediate adrenalin rush.)

Leoncita Ranch is about 175 square miles, or 104,000 acres of prime deer habitat in the Trans-Pecos region of West Texas. The ranch is home to at least 200 to 300 desert mule deer bucks, all free ranging. I had the opportunity to hunt this ranch through the family-owned outfitter Desert Safaris. The professional guide, Hunter Ross, has hunted all over the globe includ-

ing Alaska, Africa, China, Mongolia, Canada, Mexico and the continental United States, but Leoncita Ranch is his home turf.

This ranch is truly fair chase, in which I strongly believe, so the plan was 4x4, then spot and stalk. This year there will be 24 hunters – 23 men and one woman. One woman? (Adrenalin rush, again.) A woman in camp is still somewhat of a rarity, so we were a bit surprised.

Then we found out who it was – Olivia Angelloz, a formidable sports-woman on her own and wife of Cy Angelloz, a big game and wingshooting consultant with Cabela's Outdoor Adventures. My hunting partner, Dr. Bruce Mathews, and I have known Cy

Olivia Angelloz and her droptine buck – the one that didn't get away.

for years and we have read several of Olivia's articles. So we were looking forward to meeting her in person.

Now I know everyone gets tired of reading stories about mule deer hunts. Usually they are good for the first 15 lines and then it gets tossed into the bathroom basket of old magazines. It's always the same story – the huge bucks that had already been harvested, the ones that got away and always the biggest buck that was seen early and then disappeared as quickly as he came. Like deer jerky at a redneck party.

So let me introduce some of my hunting companions on this trip. First,

the aforementioned Dr. Mathews; Olivia's father, Dr. Peter Nalos; Olivia Angelloz; her husband Cy; our wonderful guide and outfitter Hunter Ross and, last but not least, your erstwhile reporter, Jack.

The list could continue but I'll leave it at that. There were some pretty good hunters and guides assembled at the ranch. I would guess that if you added up the number of big-game trophy trips this group had under its collective belt, the number would be well into three figures.

The first day of hunting I harvested a perfect 5 x 5, 25" inside spread and scoring in the 160s. Remember, sometimes it is the first animal you see. You just have to know what you're looking at and make sure it's the one you want. Hunter Ross spotted him first and said, "He's a big one," so we started after him.

Hunter has good eyes. So I knew this buck was big. We hiked about a quarter mile straight up the canyon. Hunter says, "Here are my shooting sticks. Use them." Just as he handed them to me they fell into pieces. Not wanting to miss this awesome opportunity, I reacted as quickly as I could. I hit the dirt and grabbed a big rock for support. The buck was about 270 yards uphill. Catching my breath, I

Back at the ranch after a successful day in the field. Pictured from left are professional guide Hunter Ross, Dr. Bruce Mathews, the camp cook, and author Jack Keslar.



took another look and wasn't quite sure the buck was big enough.

Hunter hit the bleat call. He stopped, turned and looked in my direction. Looking through my 12x Leupold, I saw horns, four inches on each side of his ears, and knew for sure that I wanted him.

One blast from my 7mm Mag loaded with CCPCs did the job. As Dr. Mathews would say, "Dial the phone." The first big buck taken in the first 15 minutes of the hunt, and he was mine. I couldn't believe it. This one will forever have a special place in the Wilderness Wildlife Museum in Rector, PA (www.wildernesswildlife.org).

The hunt was over for me. I filled my tag and now it was my hunting partner's turn. My roll changed from hunter to cameraman. I was set on getting Bruce's buck on video.

It was icy cold in the desert this year, colder than ever before. Unfortunately, the only morning I didn't get out of bed, the Doc scored a big 5 x 5 with a Texas heart shot at 350 yards. The other doctor, Peter Nalos, scored a big 5 x 4 that afternoon with another Texas heart shot. The competition was getting fierce.

In the first few days of camp, there is always a lot of testosterone flying around. In Leoncita, there were big egos everywhere, all assuming the next big buck would be theirs. So far, I was in the lead and loving life. But the talk of the camp was a big drop tine buck, and there was

still a chance to be the one to take him. Everyone was having a great time and enjoying what we love so much.

Then a couple of days into the hunt, Olivia and Cy arrived. Now the big time got even bigger. The lady had arrived in camp. Take it from me, people, it doesn't get any better. Little did I know Olivia would prove to us all that her hunting skills are as good as her looks. (A little side note – Olivia was Mrs. Nebraska in 2003.)

Over the next few days, Olivia proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that a woman can hunt as well if not better than a man. She and Cy set out one morning. Cy figured he would drop Olivia off at a certain point and take the 4x4 further down the ranch road so the sound of the engine wouldn't spook the animals.

Olivia climbed a knoll and waited. Sure enough, she spotted that big drop tine buck a good distance away. Not wanting to wait for Cy, she decided to stalk this big buck alone. Olivia crawled and climbed her way toward the big buck. It took her a while but she got where she needed to be. My guess is the buck never knew what hit him. Olivia's buck was a beautiful desert mule deer, a 5 x 6 drop tine estimated in the 160s by Boone & Crockett standards.

I love the big buck I got on this hunt. I'm sure Bruce and Dr. Nalos were happy. But our bucks, beautiful as they were, didn't compare to Olivia's. This was the hunt where the lady took over the camp and took home the big buck.

Back at camp, Olivia received the Team Keslar hunting award, an award I like to bestow on the best hunter of the camp as a fun way to celebrate my friends who love to hunt. We love what we do and we have shared some amazing experiences in the wild.

Now we have a woman on Team Keslar. It's about time. Olivia inspires me, and I believe there are more women out there ready to participate in the hunting and shooting sports. I look forward to our next hunt together and I hope more women get serious about hunting and preserving our wilderness.

