



Tony Smotherman

The Travelin' Hunter:



This interview brought to you exclusively from the pages of Planet Whitetail.

Over the past several months, I have had the privilege to get to know a really awesome and fascinating guy. Tony Smotherman is a fanatical whitetail FREAK! This guy is someone you would love to spend a day with in the deer woods. From the earliest days, Tony dreamt of being a professional outdoor writer and professional hunter. His admiration for professionals like Gordon Whittington, Greg Miller and Les Davenport, drove him to attain his vision. From his start with Tennessee Outdoor News to his long standing career with Knight Rifles, Tony ultimately achieved Professional status! Tony Smotherman is, "The Travelin' Hunter."



PW: At what time during your life did you become involved in hunting whitetails? What was it that took you in the direction of turning this into a career?

TS: Great question and this one might get a little windy so bare with me. Back when I was a young man rolling into my early teens, I had some family issues in my life that could have very easily sent me in a downward spiral landing me into very bad things. The only thing that saved me from a lot of

craziness was the fact that I lived on a farm and instead of spending my time on the streets and into mischief I spent it in the timber teaching myself how to deer hunt. If I was a young man that lived in town, there is no telling where my life would have ended up. The man upstairs was shining down on me by keeping my attention on the outdoors.

By the time I was in my late teens I began to realize that I might have been put through those rough years of life to use it to my advantage and help promote the great outdoors as it saved me and might just influence and save someone else that was having life issues or just needed something to keep them occupied.

My fuel to become more vocal in the outdoors was fueled by all the magazines I read with articles in them from guys like Greg Miller, Gordon Whittington, and Les Davenport. The guys kicked off what would be a long time quest of becoming a professional outdoorsman and hopefully influence someone out in the world that might be lost just like they did for me in their 1,000 word articles that appeared in some of the most premier whitetail magazines in the country. What intrigued me even more about these guys was the fact that they wrote very interesting pieces but also had a great ability to put their own advice to work and lay down some really good deer. They had my total attention for years which in turn created my fire for wanting to write hunting articles.

When I was 21 I started writing for a local magazine in my home state called Tennessee Outdoor News (TON) and started my own lawn maintenance business so that I could devote a pile of time to writing and hunting and only work the summer months. This set-up gave me the start that I needed to begin making my push towards my goal of professional outdoorsman. Both of those businesses are still in operation but I own them both now.

PW: Where did the idea for The Travelin' Hunter come from and how did you bring this idea to Life as a Pro hunter?

TS: The Travelin' Hunter came from all the miles I was logging for years on end looking for big deer. I was traveling for the better part of 6 months from state to state trying to find the big deer that all the magazines were referring to. While I was on the many interstates that flowed between the mid-western states I noticed that I was not the only non-resident that was in hot pursuit of big deer in the fall. All this was about the time that I was starting to understand the internet and email and the name Travelin' Hunter was my first email address when I used AOL.

A few years later after I landed my gig with Knight Rifles, I was sitting in a treestand in Kentucky during early muzzleloader season with a friend of mine that was filming this hunt when he asked me out of the blue why I did not have a web site telling everyone one about my travels. Over the next few sits we had worked it out to build my first Travelin' Hunter website.

PW: Given the you are the "Travelin' Hunter," how many would you say you spend on the road and in the woods each year?

TS: Taking out all of the travel days I would say that I actually sit 75 to 80 days each fall. If am really lucky and all the stars and planets line up I might be able to pull 5 or 6 good deer out of the timber each season, but if things go like they did last year that number might be down to 1. Yep, I had a bad season last year. I suppose everyone is due of them every now and then though.



PW: I know you do a good deal of deer hunting in Illinois. Do you own your own hunting property in Illinois?

TS: Heck yea brother, I have been so addicted to Illinois that I have bought two farms up there over the last few years. I still don't get to spend as much time up there as I like but I have a friend of mine that lives there and he keeps me in suspense all summer with the trail cam pics he emails to me.

PW: Who was the person in your life who taught you how to hunt deer and who was the person who introduced you to the idea of QDM and trophy hunting?

TS: For the most part I was self taught about hunting whitetails from reading a ton of magazines but there was one person that helped out the desire to shot big deer and that was my uncle Joe. Back in my younger years when I was the “brown it is down” guy he would give me tons of heat at family functions about shooting the little ones. Over all he meant well and did take me to the timber on occasion after Christmas dinner.

After years of taking his rib poking I was starting to understand what he was saying when he said I needed to let the little ones walk to get a big one. Once that theory was thru my thick skull I started on a quest to shoot my first mature deer. That trip took me over two years but I finally leveled a good buck in my home state of Tennessee. It was a 145” 11 pointer that I affectionately called “The Joe Buck”. The sad thing is that uncle Joe never got to see that buck as he passed away of a bad heart the year before I finally closed the deal on that big one. I just finished building my dream on my Tennessee farm and out of all the mounts on the wall, The Joe buck is the one I am most proud of.

PW: What is it about your love of the Muzzle Loader and how many guns would you say you own? I know from the looks of your collection, it's not a small number!

TS: In the hunting world I’m known for my love of muzzleloaders and worked for Knight Rifles for almost 14 years and now work for CVA. With that said, you can image I have a few smokepoles sitting around. I would say that I have around 120 or so hunting guns right now and still adding.



PW: What is your favorite muzzle loading hunting load?

TS: I have shot a ton of loads over the years but I must say at this point I like to shoot 110 grains of loose Triple 7 or the same with Blackhorn 209. I prefer loose over pellets as the loose is always the most accurate charge you can put in your muzzleloader. The pellets work fine but I like to have the tightest groups my gun will shoot and loose gives me that. For bullets I like to stay around the 300 grain mark. I know it sounds a bit heavy but the heavier the bullet the better it will shoot. You gotta think about it for a minute; a heavier muzzleloader bullet does not get fatter it get longer. The longer it is the more stable it will be in flight thus more accurate. Not to mention the heavier a bullet is the more kinetic energy it will produce. As a muzzleloader guy, that is what I am looking for...accuracy and energy.

PW: If you could only pick one place to hunt for the rest of your life, where would that place be?

TS: Now that is a tough one! I have seen lots of places that I could call "The" spot but I would have to say Oklahoma. It is by far a sleeper state and produces giants each year.

PW: I always ask this question in interviews, but I'd love to know. If you could only hunt one day each year for the rest of your life, what would that day be?

TS: I really cannot narrow it down to just one day. I know that most hunters would say around the first week or so of November, but for me hunting with a muzzleloader, there are lots of days that are great, early September muzzleloader season in Kansas, early October muzzleloader season in Kentucky, late October muzzleloader season in Oklahoma, November gun season in Illinois, early December gun season in Iowa, muzzleloader season in mid-December in Nebraska, and early January muzzleloader season in Ohio to name just a few day that would be at the top of my list.

I think everyone chooses a November day since they would to hunt the rut to catch a buck while he is vulnerable. With a muzzleloader all the days I mentioned have a buck at a vulnerable stage in his life, when they are bacholered up, during the rut, and when they are back on the feeding sources in late season.

PW: What would you say has been your most memorable or favorite hunt of your career?

TS: My Oklahoma hunt with my buddy Jeff Danker of Buckventures Outdoors while I was spot and stalk hunting whitetails like you would normally hunt muleys. It was late October and I shot my best buck ever...a low 160's split browtine buck. Sweet!

