

## A Natural Hobby – Jacob Seidel

The day was hot, muggy, and I was angry. After reading a guide to finding shed deer antlers, my brother and I had decided to try and find some White-tailed deer antlers on the properties that we hunt. The previous day Davey, my brother, found a very nice four point shed while I was left with nothing to show for my hours of walking. Today started off in the same fashion. My brother and his girlfriend searched our ground on the golf cart while I was stuck on foot. After trekking through the brush choked woods I came out with my hands empty and my heart broken at the sight of my brother and his girlfriend with two more antlers! I was starting to think that shed hunting was a hobby not suited for me; however, shed hunting is a game of good sight, an attentive mind, and a little bit of luck. On our way back to the house my luck changed. As my brother was driving down the road my eyes caught a flash of white laying alongside the road. I yelled to my brother, “Stop the truck there’s a shed!” With my hopes skyrocketing and the truck still rolling forward I jumped out and ran to the white object. There it lay, my first antler laying in a ditch on the side of the road. I couldn’t help shouting for joy as I proudly picked up the antler and high-fived my brother. I stood on the side of the road, antler in hand as my mood shifted from anger and frustration to utter elation. From that point on, I was addicted to shed hunting.

A lot has changed since my inaugural season of antler hunting. I only found one antler my first season, but this last season, my fourth, I found over thirty antlers. I cannot begin to describe the pure joy that ensues after finding a nice antler except that it rivals, possibly even surpasses, that of the feeling children get Christmas morning at the sight of new presents. However, shed hunting is not just a beloved pastime for me in which I seek the thrill of the next antler. Shed hunting has provided me with valuable experience and education as I have honed my woodsman skills in the quest for fallen bone. Finding productive shed hunting areas requires more than just a patch of woods. Shed hunting has sharpened my research skills forcing me to study deer patterns, utilize applications such as Google Earth, draw upon the resources of local knowledge, and practice in-field research that will surely transfer into my educational career. I have learned far more and developed a deeper understanding of Biology and nature’s ecosystems as a result of my annual adventures for antlers.

I could never have imagined that shed hunting would have become such a huge part of my extracurricular activities and a driving force behind my education both within the walls of UIS and outside in the splendor that is nature. There is one thing that constantly keeps me going after miles upon miles of walking without finding an antler, it’s that at any moment I could walk down a trail that leads to an extraordinary find. Much like our education here at UIS, we may struggle at times; however, greatness will be awaiting those who persevere and travel down the next trail.