

Two moose locked antlers in a fight, then froze together in a stream

By **Karin Brulliard** November 17 at 8:00 AM

The sight of hulking moose isn't uncommon in the region around Unalakleet, an Alaska town on the coast of the Bering Sea. But Brad Webster had never seen moose like this before.

Webster, a social studies and science teacher, was showing a friend around the grounds of the Bible camp that he helps maintain. It was early November — before the first snow, but cold enough that the slough at the site was covered in a sheet of ice thick enough to walk on and clear enough to see through. Webster's friend was new to Alaska, and it was his first time walking on ice. So they decided to go for a walk on the waterway.

The two men rounded a bend, and there, Webster said, they saw it: a large set of antlers and a hairy brown hump protruding from the ice. They got closer, and they saw another hump — and another set of antlers, entangled with the first set.

The two bull moose were lying on their sides, apparently locked in a fight to the death, and now perfectly preserved in eight inches of ice.

“We were both kind of in awe,” Webster, 33, said in an interview on Wednesday. “I’ve heard of other animals this had happened to, but I’ve never seen anything like this.”

Neither have most people. Another friend of Webster's, Jeff Erickson, posted photos of the moose on Facebook this week, and the remarkable sight promptly shot around the globe (sparking, predictably, some [metaphorical jokes](#) about politics). Erickson said even “elders” in the town had never seen such a thing.

Kris Hundertmark, chair of the biology and wildlife department at the University of Alaska Fairbanks, said in an email that male moose compete for females by clashing antlers and pushing against each other during the fall breeding season. Adult male moose are extremely strong, he said, but their large antlers often have “complex” shapes that can become so entangled that the animals cannot dislodge themselves from their opponents, he said. Hundertmark said the only ones he's seen are skulls of conjoined moose found in the wild — but not in ice.

“These two fellows were unfortunate in that they probably fell into the water while locked together and drowned,” Hundertmark said. “Then again, that is a much quicker way to go than by getting locked together in some forest and slowly starving to death.”

This past weekend, Webster, Erickson, and a few other friends — including a taxidermist — went back to the site to retrieve the two moose heads, which Webster said he wanted to mount and use as wall hangings with a heck of a backstory at the Bible camp. It took a few hours, a chainsaw and an ice pick to get through the ice, under which were about two feet of water, he said. They left the carcasses, which he said some people in town are talking about using to feed dog sled teams.

When they examined the heads, it looked as though one moose might have pierced the other’s skull, Webster said, leading him to believe that one might have died mid-battle, then pulled the other down into the water with him.

“After that one’s dead, it’s kind of like you won the battle but you lose the war, because you’ve got a whole other moose attached to your head right now,” he said.

Erickson, 57, said in an email that the sight of the downed moose, which were by Saturday covered in a dusting of white, will stay with him.

“Life in northwest Alaska can have a stark reality and brutal consequences,” he wrote. But, he added: “I was just happy to be part of the recovery. ... The view of the antlers protruding from the ice with the soft layer of snow on the carcasses not encased in the ice was such a stark and eerily beautiful scene.”

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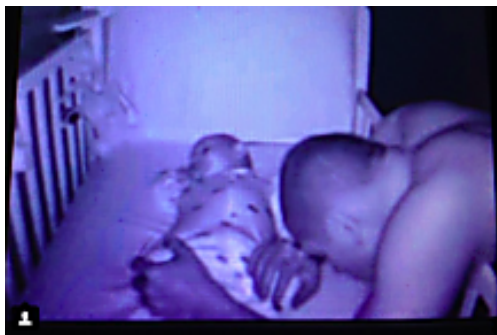
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