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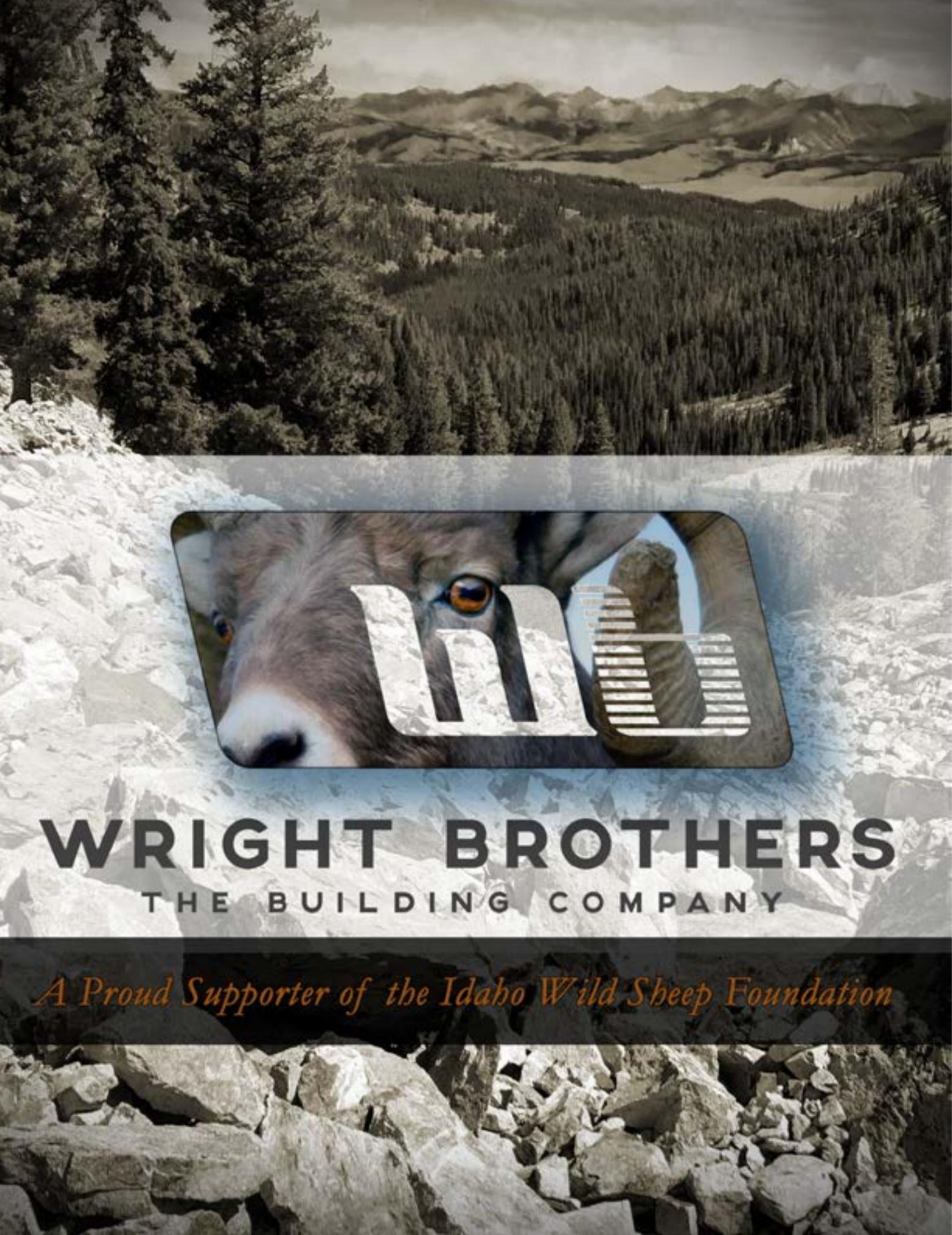
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Contributing photos, articles, stories and research pertaining to wild sheep or the interests of members of the Idaho WSF are always welcome. Contributed material will be published at the committees discretion.

All membership dues include a subscription.



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The mission of Idaho Wild Sheep is to enhance wild sheep populations in Idaho, and with partners in adjacent states, for public enjoyment, education, and fair chase hunting; to promote professional wildlife management, and protect sportsmen's rights.

HISTORY

The Idaho Wild Sheep was founded in 1982 by two dozen concerned sportsmen who wanted to "put more bighorns on Idaho's mountains." From that core group, many of which are still very active on our board and committees, we have grown to a thriving organization with over 600 committed members.

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PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

All is winding down with just a few hunts left for the 2020 season. It has been exciting to see the success for many of our members this hunting season. Thank you to those who allowed Idaho WSF to share your success on our social media!

Unfortunately, COVID-19 has continued its impact throughout all 2020. Many of our members had to cancel their hunts and our outfitters have seen a large impact to their businesses. It is with deep hope we can start to put this behind us soon and see our members get their chance at the hunts they missed and see our outfitters get back on track.

The board started out hoping to plan our annual event in March as usual. We had March 6th targeted for the date. The board strongly feels this is going to be too early to try and pull off a live event without many restrictions and limiting our members opportunities to meet COVID-19 regulations we will likely face. The board's goal is to provide a live event in 2021. We want the chance to gather together and provide some great opportunities for our members in a fun packed event. To top it off send a couple members on a sheep hunt! We are going to be monitoring things and continue to search for any opportunities to provide a live event. It is felt that our best chances will likely be in early summer. We are, and will continue to look for the locations offering us the best option for a live event whether it stays an inside event, or we have to convert it to an outside event. We will keep you posted as things move forward through email and our social media.

There have been positives for Idaho WSF in 2020, one of which has been our new online store. Since I have been involved with the board, I have heard many requests for branded items to be available. Josh Miller is our Marketing and Membership. Josh and his committee have taken these requests very seriously and put together some great options for Idaho WSF branded items. The first release of shirts and hats proved this was desired by our membership and more is on its way. It was exciting to see sales from all over. It has been the goal from the board to grow this family of members from all over, not

just with in the state of Idaho. Thanks to those who got involved and shared with us you Reppin the Idaho WSF brand!

Get in on our Ultima Thule Dall sheep hunt raffle! Everyone knows getting a chance to hunt Dall sheep with Ultima Thule is going to be a special opportunity. We are preselling 500 tickets and will have 100 tickets available for our event. Special thanks to Ultima Thule Outfitters and Don Martin for their continuous support for "PUTTING AND KEEPING WILD SHEEP ON THE MOUNTAIN".

As you look through the journal you will see the ads for those who support Idaho WSF, helping provide opportunities for our members at our event and supporting our mission. They are supporting our love and passion for wild sheep. Remember them when purchasing a gift for someone or just spoiling yourself; support those that support you!

Wishing all a fun and safe holiday season,

Jim Warner
President
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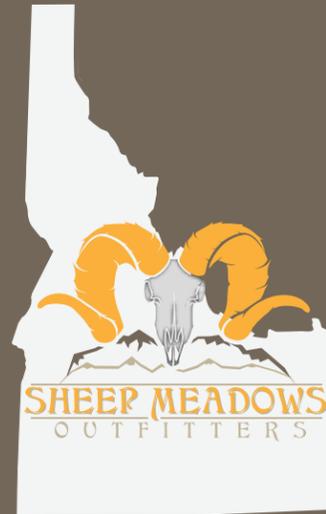
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Dall Sheep Epiphany

by Kody Rosen

My story began about three years ago. When out hunting elk with a friend I was run over by a truck. Luckily, after rushing to the ER, they were able to confirm there were no broken bones or ruptured organs. I was told that I would be sore and to go home to rest. That was the last time I remembered feeling normal. A few weeks after the accident I started feeling sick constantly. The nausea created a lot of uneasiness and got worse until it controlled every aspect of my life. Countless doctors and every test imaginable produced no satisfactory answers.

During this trial I began soul searching. This was often done on sleepless nights. To pass the time, I would resort to watching hunting videos on YouTube. While watching a Dall sheep hunt video, I had an epiphany.

We are not guaranteed anything in life, including our health. My good health, was slipping through my fingertips. It was time to think about the dreams I had.

I took my wife to dinner the next evening to share my thoughts with her. I shared my health concerns, and a Dall Sheep dream, including

the expense and time commitment. Being the loving, supporting woman she is, she immediately responded “of course”. We came up with a plan to save money, realizing that it would take us three years.

Later a friend phoned me saying that a Dall Sheep Hunt would be auctioned off at the Idaho Wild Sheep Foundation Banquet. If I was really serious, it would be a great opportunity to buy a hunt.

At the banquet, my nerves kicked in. Will I actually win the hunt? My 3-year plan had literally become a 3-week plan - am I ready? The hunt I had my eye on came up for bid. I immediately raised my paddle. After some spirited bidding, I found myself to be the proud owner of an Alaskan Dall Sheep Hunt with Dillinger River Outfitters (DRO)!

The next year was full of conversations about the sheep hunt. Everyone could tell how excited I was, but also knew I was really nervous. My health was getting worse. Life was full of constant disappointments from doctors and tests. No one was able to diagnose the problem.

The clock ticked down and the hunt got closer. I began noticing a difference in how I felt as a person. I told my wife that I could care less if I hunted that year. She listened to me carefully, and at the end of my rant, she said, “I think you are depressed”. Keep in mind this was two months before my ‘adventure of a lifetime’. After hearing this I sucked up my pride, it could be a reality. At a doctor appointment I discovered I was depressed! He said it could be medicated, and I should be feeling back to normal in a few weeks. What a relief that was, I had about seven weeks before leaving for

Alaska. However, my doctor warned that at times these meds can have an opposite effect and to be mindful of that. I accepted his diagnosis. I began to take the meds and was noticing a difference, but not for the better. It came on so gradually that I couldn’t tell exactly what was going on.

A friend noticed that something was off after being around me a couple of days. I had hoped others couldn’t tell. I was in a constant state of panic and had no clue how to handle it. Afterwards I got a text message from him asking if I was OK. That was the first time that I outwardly expressed that I definitely was not. It continued to get worse and my hunt was rapidly approaching. I knew that not only did you need to be mentally stable to accomplish such a hunt, you had to be mentally tough, which I was far from.

Two weeks pre-hunt, I realized that I was not in any state to be leaving on the hunt of my dreams. After talking with my wife, doctor, parents, and friends, I concluded that I would have to forfeit my hunt and kiss this dream of mine good-bye. I didn’t think there would be any possibility of the outfitter recouping my hunt or getting someone else to take my spot. I would simply lose my hunt and the money I had spent on it. Honestly, I could not make the phone call, so my wife volunteered to do it. I was at work when she did. My phone rang and I knew it was her to telling me ‘sorry’ but showing her support. When I answered the phone, she was in tears. Dillinger River Outfitters owner Aaron DeRose had told her there was no way he was going to let me lose this opportunity. He said to get me better and get me up there the following year, 2020. I could not believe

my ears! Aaron DeRose will never know how much his decision meant to me. I will be forever grateful to him.

I continued on the path to regain my health. There was a new determination in me. The right medication for my symptoms was identified. As the symptoms got better, so did my mind. There was constant physical and mental progression. Every morning, I put a sandbag in my backpack, and climbed a big canyon close to my home. I felt more prepared each time. I wanted to prove to myself that despite the struggles of the last couple of years, I still had it in me to do hard things.

August 7th, it was time to go. I, along with my friend Luke, were about to board a plane to a lifetime adventure. Emotions were flooding. Excitement mixed with nerves, and to be honest, a little fear

We arrived in camp after about an hour and half flight through the Alaska Range. Dillinger River Outfitters exceeded my expectations. We were greeted by everyone at camp. They all came rushing out to help with our bags and welcome us into the Alaska wilderness.



I got out my spotting scope out to look for sheep. I instantly spotted a black bear as he milled around for berries. We enjoyed conversations with the other hunters and guides. That evening Aaron DeRose and the DRO guides got everyone together to discuss who was guiding who and where. There were seven hunters in camp, with plenty of land to cover. I would be guided by Jake Long. I could tell right away that we would get along. He seemed to have a good sense of humor and loves the outdoors as much as I do. We would be hunting up the Dillinger River, straight out of the lodge - not requiring us to fly anywhere. Honestly, I was a little disheartened. I had spent the last three years gearing myself up physically and mentally to spend a solid 10 days in a spike camp in the middle of nowhere. I never imagined sleeping in a bunk house with a fire stove heating us up at night. Of course, I did my best to put on a smile and trust in the outfitter. That night Aaron came up to ensure me that I would have the hunt of a lifetime. He was putting me in a very promising location.

The next morning, I awoke to rain drops on the roof, we would not be getting out early. I asked my guide 100 times what the plan was, and when we were going to get out of the lodge. He kept replying "In about

an hour". This phrase was repeated time and time again for the remainder of the trip and made for some good laughs. Finally, the clouds broke, and blue sky peeked through.

We immediately hopped in the side by side and drove into sheep country. I could tell that our guide Jake wanted to slowly ease us into the hunt. We drove the river bottoms, eventually picked a location and glassed for hour upon hour, waiting for a mature ram to show. Unfortunately, after 10-14 hours of waiting, we had only seen two small rams. After sitting all those hours, it was very clear to me that that was not the style of hunting I wanted to be doing. Not what I pictured when I thought of my sheep hunt. In hindsight, I don't know how smart it was, but I mentioned to Jake that I would very much appreciate the full experience while I was here. When I say full experience, I meant the long grueling hikes, the spike camps and Mountain House meals, the long days of rain that will just not stop. Honestly, I wanted to suffer a little bit. The things that make us hurt and work for, we appreciate more in the end. When I made this comment, Jake looked at me with a smile and said "coming right up".

We discussed the plan for the following day which consisted of about a five-mile walk in. Two miles

on the river bottoms, crossing the river dozens of times, and then three miles up the mountain, 2,500' feet of vertical gain. On that hike that I laid eyes on my very first mature ram. At first glance, this ram seemed a no brainer. He had everything; long, heavy, flared horns. I remember my guides keeping so calm and collected. I know now that it was because of the fear of getting their hunters hopes up. At this point, it was way too late for me. Both of the guides made the call to get closer to be able to tell if he passed the legality tests. They looked to see if the ram broke the stick test, the angle test, or if the ram had reached eight years of age, which they did by counting the annuli rings on the ram's horns. I was aware of these rules, but I was not aware of how serious these guides take them. My balloon was completely deflated, hearing them say they just could not chance that he may not be legal. This was frustrating, I honestly thought on day two of the hunt, several miles into the hike, it could be over. I could be standing behind the ram of a lifetime with tears and a grin. I processed the information, tried to see the positives. One was that this hunt was not going to end so soon. After hiking 10 miles that day we headed back to the lodge. Day two was filled with tough calls, long hikes, and many laughs.

At the lodge we discussed the plans. Jake was eager to give me "the full experience". He explained that we would be backpacking up the same canyon to spend three days in the bush. I was all about this and just wanted not only to kill a sheep, but to earn it.

The next day we started the trek up. Five miles in we again saw the big, flared ram. It was at this point



that I met my arch nemesis, "Scree". I got to the bottom and looked up this chute we had to climb. It was 800-1000 feet vertically through the scree. The moment I took my first step I knew that this was going to completely dismantle me and definitely humble me. Once again, I knew what Jake was thinking, "He asked for the full experience". When hiking these mountains I found that there was no such thing as hurrying. Every step that you take is with purpose.

After an hour of making our own switchbacks, we finally summited over the ridge where we were greeted with a 400-foot cliff. I no more than caught my breath when Jake explained that we needed to be on a different ridge. You could see the life completely drain out of me. We planned our route, making sure to steer clear of the right edge where we could fall to our peril. Slowly we hiked to the ridge, sat down and took a good look around. There was

not a sheep in sight. After coming all this way, feeling like I was at the brink of dying, we decided the best plan was to head right back down to a green flat where we could set up our camp. Not seeing sheep was disheartening enough - but the fact that we had just packed our camp past where we needed to, plus all the way up the summit certainly did not help.

Day four was another beautiful day. My spirits were high at this point, despite not seeing a legal ram. The feeling of pressure had not yet hit me. I felt confident and hopeful of success. I was smiling, literally living my dream, hiking around the most beautiful country. Jake received an In-Reach message from a guide in a different area. It read, "We have spotted a no brainer ram. Our hunter does not seem to think he can make it up to him. Can your guys get it done"? Adrenaline rushed through my veins. I told him I would get to him, even if that meant crawling on my hands and

knees. We rushed out of the mountains at a much quicker pace than we had come in. To hear the words "no brainer ram" would get any hunters blood going.

At the lodge we excitedly packed for a 5-day spike camp. We flew into a landing strip camp, then hiked for a couple hours. Every night I thought of what the next day might bring; heavy packs, long hikes, sore feet, and a big old ram down.

The next morning, we hiked up the river bottom to be down wind, as well as directly below where the ram had been seen bedded down the last couple of days. The plan was to hide and patiently wait for the ram. We hiked up the mountain to a favorable spot 430 yards below where the ram was suspected to be. Waiting games were extremely hard for me. It is very natural for me to be aggressive when hunting. I am sure that I made Jake aware of the move I thought we



should make. Jake reminded me that although I have experience hunting, I did not have any experience Dall sheep hunting. It made a lot of sense when he explained that as hard as you work to lay eyes on a legal ram, you have to be cautious, more cautious than you would be on other animals. He explained that if we get aggressive and push this ram out of the area, it may be the last time we see him. If we are patient and don't let our presence known, even if he doesn't show today, we will have another shot at him tomorrow, and maybe even the next day. I tried to keep a level head.

That afternoon Jake spotted a band of rams a mile away as they were dropping onto the hillside behind our camp. After waiting on top of the mountain, in the rocks and wind for 10-12 hours, we made the assumption that the ram was not going to cooperate that day.

The next morning, we zipped open the tent to another gorgeous blue-sky sunny day. We stepped out of the tent and instantly saw the rams from the day before. One ram deserved

a second look. This required going straight up the gut of this mountain, an additional 3200 feet of vert. It was now day six and my feet, lungs, and legs were feeling it but this climb could not wait. We made our way up slowly, navigating through rocky cliffs and loose rocks. After getting to the top we quietly crested over to the other side. At every little mound from there on we peaked our heads over the top looking for the rams. On one of these occasions, I could tell by Jake's reaction that he had a visual. He slowly crept back. There was a bedded ram about 300 yards directly below us. This had to be him I thought. If it wasn't, it was one of the rams in his group. My first thought was to drop off the backside, circle around and get eyes on him. Jake had other ideas. His fear was that if we did that, we would potentially get caught by the ram that we could see. If we could see him, he could see us. That would likely blow this band of rams out of the country. Jake made the executive order to again, be patient. Again, he said, "We need to play the SMART game". Even though I did exactly what Jake asked, my inner self was jumping out of my

chest. I wanted to get this show on the road, make something happen.

For the next six hours we laid on the back side of the summit waiting for this small ram to make a move. The two options we had were that the ram would get up and feed around, allowing us the opportunity to also move around, or the big ram would feed around to where we could have a visual. In time the small ram stood up and moved around the corner, out of sight. I thought that in a few short moments I would be looking at the big guy in my scope. As we stood up, I looked down and to my surprise, 100 yards below where that other ram had been bedded, the big boy was standing. It was pretty impressive to see this ram standing in a beam of light, looking as majestic as ever. Jake quickly got his spotting scope and began thoroughly inspecting the age and curl of this ram. I decided it would be in best to get set up with my gun, ready for the thumbs up. I found a perfect sniper spot. I ranged the ram at 440 and doped the 6.5 SAUM 5 MOA. I leveled my gun and put the ram in my cross hairs at 24 power. I can't tell you how many times I pulled that trigger in my mind. I held it together though and anxiously waited for the approval. As the ram fed, I kept glancing at Jake. I could see him having a hard time keeping his spotting scope still in the high winds. This went on for a good five minutes, eventually the ram moved out of sight. At this moment the disappointment and pressure that I dreaded flooded my body. After all the long hikes and countless hours of waiting, my shot was there. For the simple reason of not getting a clear look at him, I had to watch him walk out of my life that night. My head was hanging for the first time of the trip. I instantly understood why this sheep hunting business is so hard and can be such an emotional roller coaster.

DRO owner Aaron DeRose warned us of this type of scenario and even promised us that some of us that would experience it. I was showing my emotions and frustrations I had promised myself that I wouldn't let that happen. It stung even more when we made the call to once again, back out and walk down the 3200 feet that we just came up a few hours ago.

I woke up the next morning still working on cooling off. At breakfast we found we were out of Jet Boil fuel and decided to leave the ram to hike out to the air strip to restock supplies and refresh our heads. At the airstrip Jake showed us where they had got a ram last year. We decided it deserved a good look over. The mountain range that we wanted to look at was 4-5 miles up the river bottoms, but seemed to be an easy leisure walk. I have to admit that this day was needed. We had not stopped since we got here. We had gone up hill after hill, completely exhausting ourselves. Day seven turned out to be somewhat of a rest day, which we honestly needed for the next three days.

That evening DRO owner, Aaron, flew in another guide, Jordan, to provide an extra set of eyes to help spot and judge sheep. Aaron was sparing no effort to ensure my best chance at a ram. When he landed, we showed him a video of the ram from the day before. He replied, "Jake, you need to get a second look at that ram". The look on Aaron's face said it all.

The next morning, we saw three rams crossing the face close to the summit. These rams bedded in a great location. We would be able to stalk hidden until we were 150-200 yards above them. Even though my heels were hamburger and my

legs felt like Jell-O, I knew that we were in for another 3200 feet of mountain. I had a whole new level of determination. It was day eight! The pressure was officially on. Certainly, if we played our cards right, this ram would be coming home to Idaho with me. For the next four hours we slowly, surely, made our way to the top. Once on top it was game time. All we had to do was move across the top of the skyline for a few hundred yards and come over the top of the summit. If we were able to do this we would be 150 yards above them, giving us all the time in the world to confirm he was legal and make a good shot. As we crawled over the top we noticed that there was no way to gain a visual on the ram. He was tucked away in such a tight and little crevice that we would certainly be way to close by the time he would show. Jake said it would be best to walk our tracks back 300 yards to the ridge that we just came up. These rams, of course, were in no hurry to go anywhere. By then, I was getting pretty used to this waiting game. It was six hours before they stood up.

We positioned ourselves in a perfect spot for when the rams would get up and start feeding. My heart jumped out of my chest with excitement as the rams got up and moved into a position that I could get a shot. I silently, slowly crawled to my gun, which had been previously positioned. They were 520 yards away. I knew I could make this shot. I consistently shoot 600 plus yards and felt very confident that my shot placement would be adequate and on point. I sat there, I took deep breaths, resting my cross hairs on the front shoulder of the ram. At this point I could not take my eyes from my scope. I was concentrating on calming nerves. Was he actually legal? I heard whispering. Jake asked Jordan

"Do you see that?" Jordan replied "Yes, I see that". When I heard these words, my heart began to pound. Were they confirming that he was not a legal ram, or were they finally able to see that 8th ring? Someone whispered my name. I looked to see Jake, with the biggest smile on his face, gave me the long-awaited thumbs up.

For the 10 minutes that they were looking at him, I was dead solid, completely ready to make the shot. As soon as the thumbs up was given it got real. The shakes came in full force. As I sat there trying to settle in and rest the cross hairs on this ram, I could not calm myself. After almost punching the trigger twice, I pulled myself away from the gun. I took a few seconds to completely wrap my mind around the importance of this shot. I could hear Jake to the side of me asking me if I was comfortable with this shot. He assured me we could get a little closer. I knew that I could pull this off, I was just letting the pressure consume me. I once again settled in behind the gun. I confirmed everything was right, 7.5 MOA, bubble level good, gun secured, safety off. I rested the cross hairs on his left front shoulder and gave the trigger a nice steady squeeze.

It was at that moment that every bit of preparation before and during the hunt came full circle.

I instantly heard the slap of a bullet hitting flesh. My nerves calmed, knowing that I had made a good hit on the ram; a couple of follow up shots to finish the job and it was



done. As I realized what had just happened, a mixture of emotions completely consumed me. At first a grin from ear to ear appeared, quickly turning to tears rolling down my face. As I had watched sheep hunts and saw the emotional experience it was to so many of these guys, I always wondered how that would feel. A feeling of relief came over me. For the last three years I have pictured this moment over 100 times in my head, trying to imagine how it would feel. It felt 10 times better than I had ever imagined.

I thought of all the things that I had gone through in this journey. The health and mental problems, the 5 A.M. training, the countless conversations, the nervousness, the doubt, the excitement, and the hope. I thought of the last eight days, tromping up and down mountains for countless miles with two of the best dudes I could have asked for. I thought of the frustrating calls and mixed emotions about hunting styles. I thought of the support that I had back home from my many friends and family who were all anxiously waiting for the words BRD (Big Ram Down). It was done. I have completed a lifelong dream. I can even say I worked for it and earned it. The three of us on top of that mountain immediately hugged and thanked each other. When you go through this type of a hunt with someone, you gain a special bond. Eight days before this I had never met my guide,

Jake, and now I will forever call him my friend.

I couldn't wait any longer. I had to put my hands on this ram! As we approached him, all of our jaws dropped. Although he looked good from 520 yards away, we never expected to walk up on what we saw. This ram was not eight years old; he was eleven. Not only did he meet the legal age limits, but he was most definitely full curl and carried his mass out through all 37" of his horn. I reached down and grabbed him. I soaked it all in. I asked that we take countless pictures. I never wanted to forget this moment. This was a moment that I anticipate sharing with my kids and grandkids later in life. This story will go down as one of the many highlights of my life and I had to capture it.

As we looked out, we could see the rain coming in, but with the rain was one of the most spectacular views we could ask for, a rainbow appeared. This rainbow was not like the rainbows that I was used to seeing back home. It was a three-quarter circle rainbow. It presented the absolute best back drop for pictures. I was so grateful for that. Earlier in the hunt one of the pilots made the comment to me that he felt that when a rainbow appears, it is God telling us how much he loves us. I felt God's love that day for sure. I will never take this day or experience for granted.



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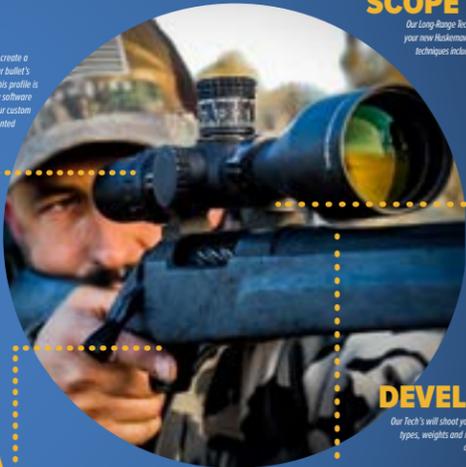
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The Definition of ‘Hunt of a Lifetime’

by Steve Covington

What is the hunt of a lifetime? I can't answer that for everyone, but I can tell you about mine. The story begins when I was lucky enough to win an Aoudad hunt at the HE Sproul Ranch in Ft Davis, Texas through the Idaho WSF. After a nine-hour drive across our home state, Bryce (my fifteen-year-old son) and I arrived at the ranch. There's no country in Texas more beautiful than the Davis Mountains. Just being there makes you feel that you've stepped a century back in time or like you're a son of Katie Elder coming home. The ranch and all the hunts are run by the owner, Roy Hurley, and his son, Hunter. As soon as we met them, we knew it was going to be

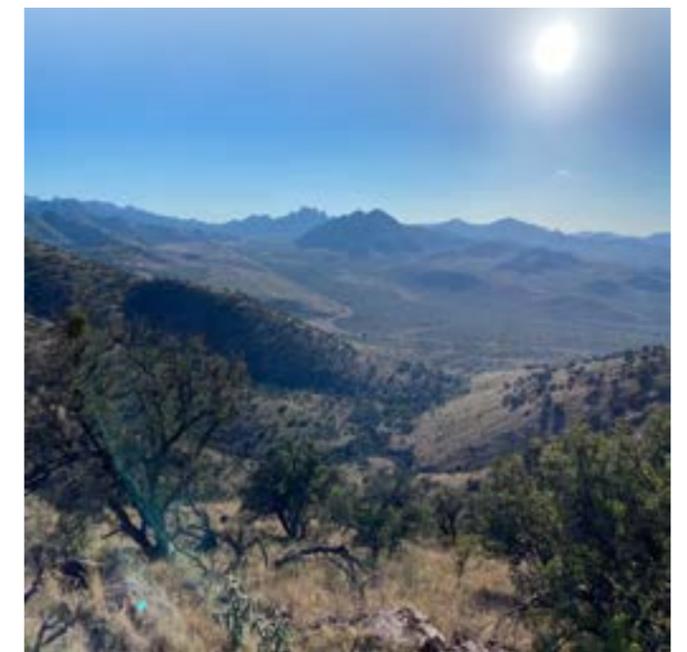
a great experience. When you can meet someone new and within minutes be talking to them like you've known them for twenty years, you know you're in the right spot. After our introductions and a few stories, we were shown to our room. The accommodations on the ranch are amazing. The rooms are great with comfortable beds and hot showers; housekeeping comes in while hunters are out on the mountain, and everything is made up and ready for the evening. It was a far cry from what we're used to, like the usual digging and clearing out of rocks to set up your tent, only to figure out in the dead of the night that you missed a couple.

After getting settled in, we headed out to look for some sheep. Our main means of transportation for the hunt was a Polaris Ranger. We spent the first afternoon riding up and down the rocky mountain roads, stopping to glass in the hopes of spotting a monster. We saw a few good rams that first day but didn't spot any shooters within a reasonable distance until just before sunset. With a good plan for the next day, we returned to the lodge for supper. That night was a typical restless night. I've spent my life dreaming of the hunts to come and the animals I'll encounter. This night would be no different; tossing and turning while every imaginable scenario replayed endlessly in my mind. To me, hunting has never been a hobby; it's something that is just as much a part of me as the blood in my veins. The challenge of hunting an animal that has spent millennia evolving and honing its senses to avoid predators draws me in and won't let go. It's the feeling inside when it comes down to you, them, and your heartbeat. Is this addiction a disease or a primal instinct that cannot be controlled? I'm not sure, but it is something that defines me and will be a part of me throughout all of my days.

When morning finally came, I found myself watching the clock on the counter, waiting for the alarm to go off. After rustling Bryce out of bed and grabbing some breakfast, we were ready to head out. The weather was nice with temps in the high 40s with a light breeze. It wasn't long until we spotted a group of sheep that contained a shooter. I set up on my sticks while everyone watched through their binoculars, hoping he'd present me with a shot. The only problem was that when the old ram came broadside with a clear shooting lane, only three of the four of us could see him. The genius with the gun couldn't pick the shooter out of the herd through his scope. I've had a few experiences like this before "as the spotter", so I knew what everyone was thinking as I fumbled around, manically trying to find him. I heard Roy say, "that's it, he's gone" as the herd made its way over the top and out of sight. It leaves an unsettling feeling in your stomach when something like that happens but it's a far better outcome than shooting the wrong animal. With that, we were on to the next one. After lunch, we headed out to a different mountain. We weren't in very deep when we spotted a fairly large herd with a couple of shooters in it. The plan was as always: get within range without being seen or winded. We were able to make

it to a group of large rocks with a good vantage point. The sheep were on the side of the mountain facing us, but there were a couple of issues. I had about a 300-yard shot from a rock that I couldn't get a good rest on, plus a ten to fifteen mile an hour cross wind. Looking through my scope, I felt that I could make the shot, but I still had a feeling that it wasn't right, and we should get a better set up. Roy and I made our way around the rock using the shadows to our advantage, but to no avail. With the first step around the rock, the sheep caught a glimpse of us and headed out like a bolt of lightning. Then came those words that I'd hoped I wouldn't hear again from Roy: "They're gone."

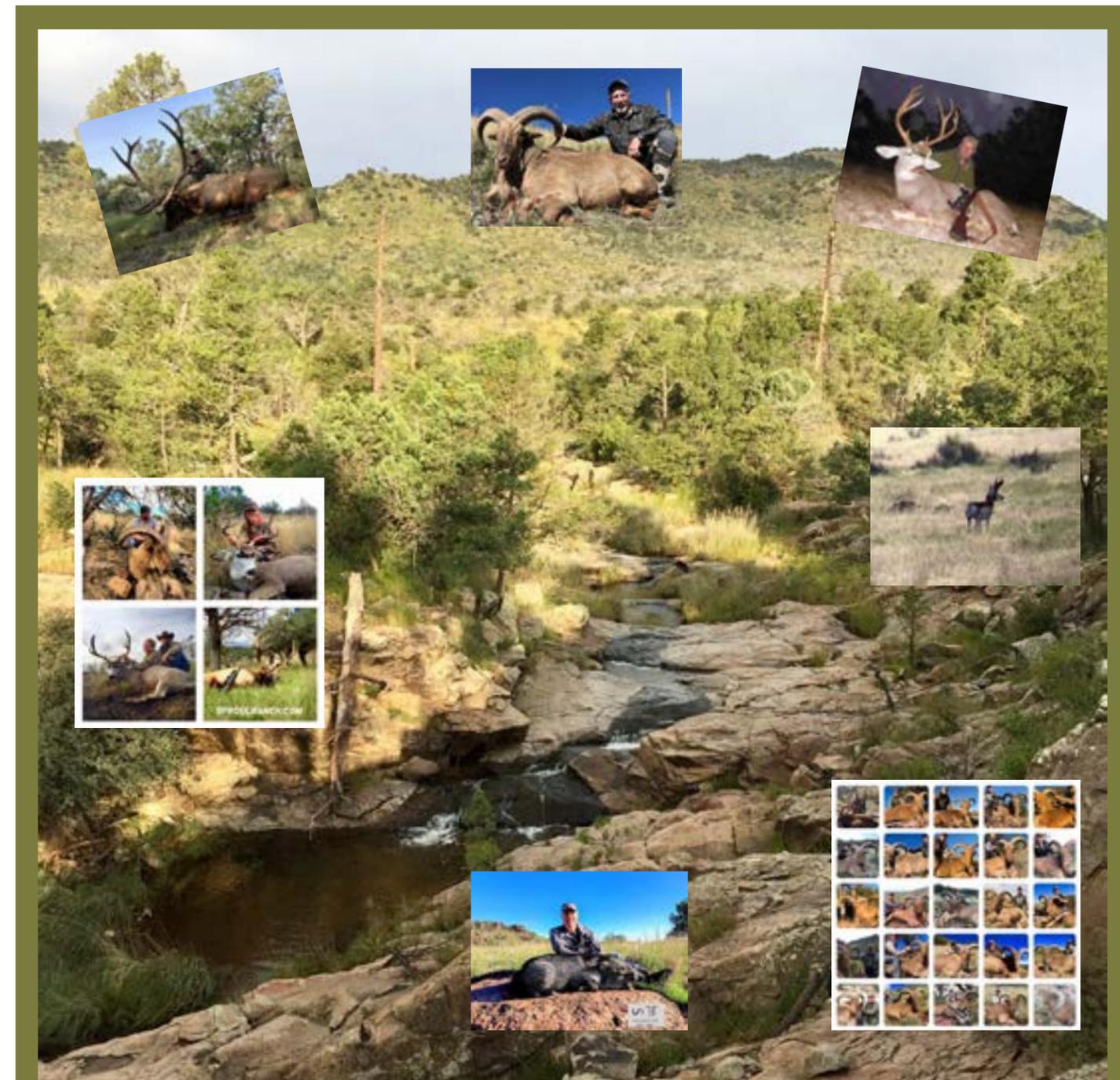
We made our way back to the quad and had a drink of water; then we set out around the mountain to see if we'd be lucky enough to find another shooter. Not too long into it, we saw a herd of sheep on a mountain ahead. First spotted at 1700 yards, we moved up to a better vantage point at around 700 yards. It's here we got a good look at them and soon, through my binoculars, I saw something familiar. It was the ram I had been dreaming about for the last three months. The old one with heavy mass, wide curls, and length. It was him; we had to find a way. Roy and Hunter quickly came up with a plan of attack. There was no way to go straight at them. The sheep were in the shade of the mountain with the sun shining in our face and a fairly unfavorable wind. We decided to leave Hunter and Bryce where we were to spot for us. Roy and I would hop on the machine and



make our way around the mountain to the top of the finger they were grazing and make our way down to them with hopes of getting in range. As we headed around the mountain, I couldn't help but think to myself that when we get to that finger the wind will be perfect, the sun is perfect, the shot angle will be perfect, there's no way this is actually happening like this. When we finally got to the top, I tried to get all the thoughts out of my mind. I just told myself: you know what you're doing, Roy knows what he's doing, just quit thinking about it and go do it. Off we went, following the ridge line of the finger, with Bryce and Hunter on the radio giving us updates on the sheep's movement and location in relation to us. Roy used a simple pop up Aoudad decoy that he had made for archery hunting. As he held it on his shooting sticks, I followed directly behind just praying that we were going to be able to close the 700 to 800-yard distance to get within shooting range without blowing the whole herd out of there. As we got closer, we continually slowed and stopped as Hunter gave us directions. The last time we stopped, Hunter had judged the group of five rams to be 100 yards ahead of us, and just far enough below us that we weren't able to see them. We stood and waited for a moment, and as we started to take a step, we spotted one of the smaller rams staring straight at us from 65 yards away. To his left, and 10 yards further ahead, was the ram we were after. His head was down and he was facing away. There is no doubt that the decoy saved us. As Roy sat up the sticks, he held the decoy up. I stepped forward and got my gun on the sticks and set my footing. Looking at the monster ram from the back, as he was walking away, was breathtaking. They always look bigger from the back, but this old guy was huge. As I clicked my gun off of safety, I'm surprised I didn't spook the rams with the sound of my heartbeat. He was walking completely straight away from



me. With the crosshairs on his tail, my only hope was that he would turn enough for me to get a shot before he stepped over the edge, out of sight, walking out of our lives forever. By grace, before he stepped down, he took a step left giving me a hard-quartering shot that I didn't hesitate to take. As the muzzle brake on the front of my .270 let out a loud crack he lunged forward and rocked back on his hind quarters, hit hard, but then craziness happened. The sound of the shot had spooked all the ewes, but when the smaller rams saw that the dominant one was injured, they took advantage of the situation. They attacked him, slamming their horns into him, making sure he was down for good. The biggest of the younger rams then hooked his horn around the old ram's neck and drug him 300 yards down the mountain and off the side of a small cliff. Roy and I couldn't keep up to see what was going on, however, we were listening to a yelled explanation of the current events over the radio as we ran down the mountain. We made our way to a 30' cliff above the rams. We had to lean over the edge to actually see them. The monster ram lay dead with four others standing around him to make sure he had nothing left. We were able to get a good video of them standing around him before they realized we were so close and busted out of there. We made it down to the ram; he was amazing! With heavy mass and a length of 34-7/8", he was an absolute monster; the trophy of a lifetime, a crowning achievement for any hunter. It took a few minutes of sitting with the ram, replaying every second in my mind, to realize what exactly had just gone down. Being able to put my hands on such a magnificent animal was a spectacular moment that I'll never forget. As I got back to my feet, we quickly took some pictures and got to work. The other sheep hadn't helped us out by dragging him to the bottom, as the sun was beginning to sink below the mountain.



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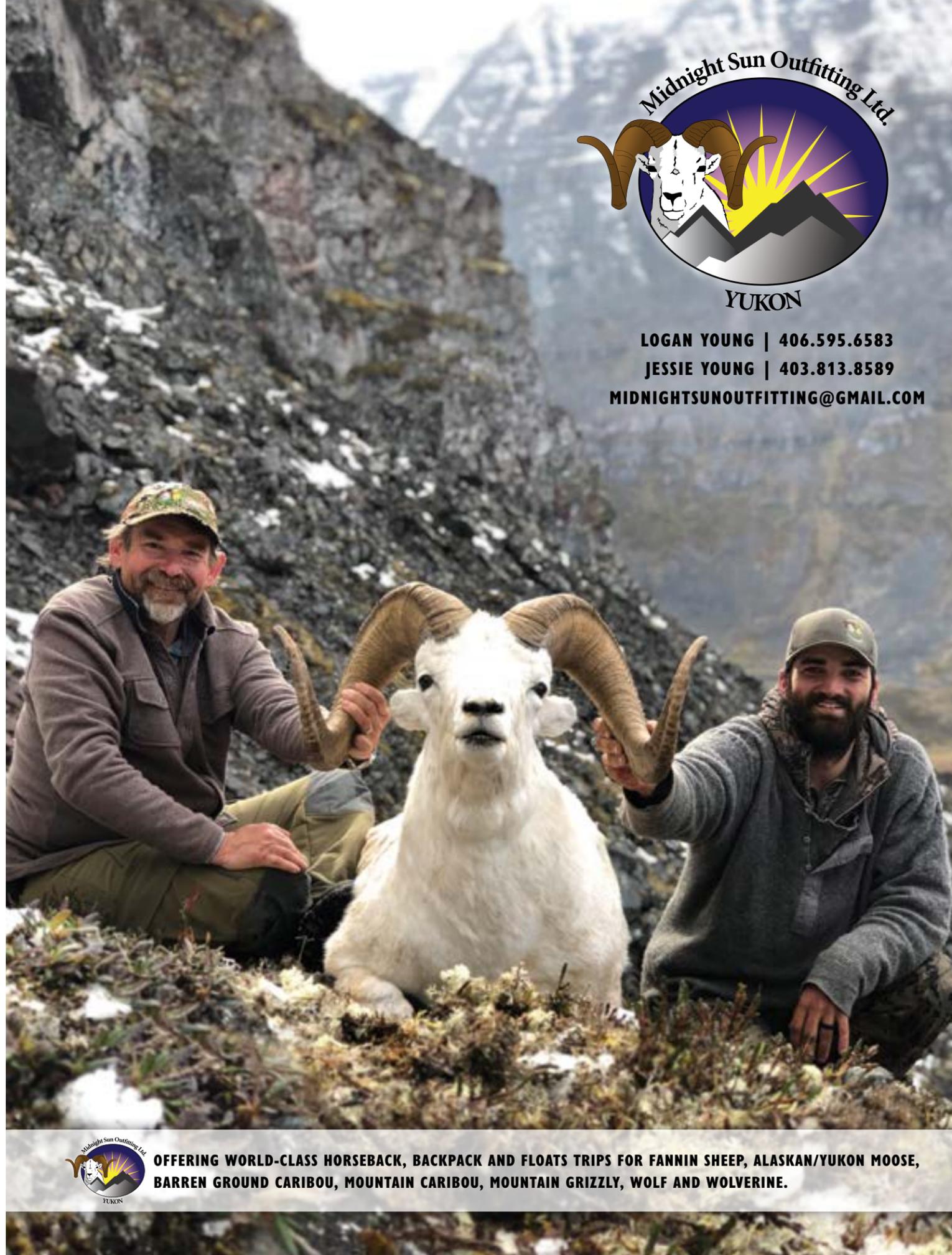
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After a hunt and pack out like we had, a good night's sleep was a little easier to obtain. The next morning we headed out to see if we could get on a good one for Bryce. The adventure that ensued is a story unto itself. I can tell you that it left nothing to be desired, and on his second day he shot a giant 32" ram. I couldn't have been more excited and happier for him. I've been blessed to have four children who share in my love of the outdoors. We've spent years climbing mountains and busting through brush, making some of the best memories a person could have. Over the years, I've learned there's no one that can irritate me more than my kids on the side of a mountain; and I've learned there's no one on Earth that I'd rather have by my side.

Being able to hunt with them and see the excitement and joy in their eyes is something that will never be taken for granted. It defines what a hunt of a lifetime is for me.

Being guided on this hunt by a father and son that share the same bond and values was a privilege that we were lucky to have. The hunt is over, but the memories are forever.



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TEN MILE CANYON UPDATE

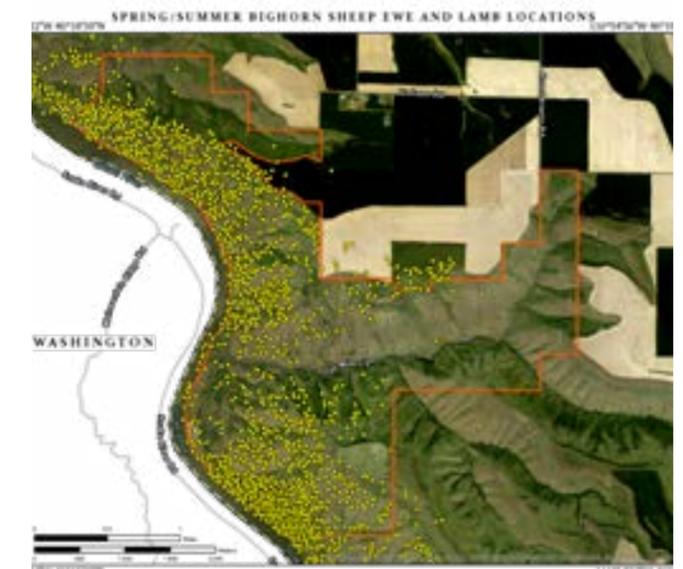
Frances Cassirer, Wildlife Research Biologist, Idaho Department of Fish and Game

In 2018, the Idaho Wild Sheep Foundation was awarded a challenge grant from the Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG) to help protect nearly 3,000 acres at Ten Mile Canyon along the Snake River south of Lewiston. This area contains important lamb-rearing and year-round habitat for bighorn sheep in Unit 11. While the property was mostly undeveloped, a two track road to the river had been paved, two dwellings constructed on the property, and much of the riverfront had been subdivided. See the article by Mike Schlegel in the Spring 2019 issue of the Idaho Wild Sheep Journal for more details.

Western Rivers Conservancy, an Oregon river conservation group, purchased the property in 2018 with the intention of working with IDFG to put a conservation easement on it. This type of easement differs from the typical real estate easement. This particular easement was designed to restrict development and prohibit domestic sheep and goats on the property. Once the easement was in place, Western Rivers would sell the property to a conservation-minded individual. Idaho WSF matched the IDFG grant with \$10,000 to go towards the easement (the cost of which was largely the purchase of the development rights). Over the next two years, the conservation restrictions were developed, baseline conditions were documented, and the easement was legally placed on the property.

This summer the property was sold. The new owner is

very interested in enhancing habitat for sheep and other wildlife on the property and, with the protections now in place, this land should continue to provide important habitat for wild sheep forever. In the future there may even be opportunities for Idaho WSF to continue to help IDFG and the landowner with improving the habitat through removal of old fences and vegetation restoration. This is a big win for wild sheep in Hells Canyon. Thanks to Idaho WSF for being an important part of it.





by Mike Schlegel, Idaho WSF Conservation Committee

Allotment Buy-Outs and Conversions:

In addition to the Risk of Contact (ROC) Model for separating domestic sheep and goats from bighorn sheep, allotment buy-outs and allotment conversions are also providing positive results. Idaho WSF, in conjunction with the National Wildlife Federation, have identified key allotments for this program. Domestic sheep operators on public and private land are contacted regarding the disease issue between domestic sheep and bighorn sheep. Options discussed include allotment buy-outs and conversions. Buy-outs involve paying the operator to terminate grazing, plus an agreement to retire the allotment from domestic sheep/goat grazing. Allotment conversions involve providing financial assistance to the operator for converting from grazing domestic sheep to cattle. Since 2016 IDWSF has contributed \$125,000, partnering with the National Wildlife Federation.

Bighorn sheep populations in Game Management Units 37 and 37A have benefited from this program. The bighorn population has increased in numbers and distribution, allowing for an increase in permits and harvest. As seen in the table below, permit numbers have increased from three in 2000, to 13 in 2019. In addition, the harvest has increased from three to 14.

In addition, we were working with Brian Bean, Lava Lake Land and Livestock Inc. on two critical allotments, Park

Creek and North Fork. Before we negotiated an agreement with Mr. Bean, he relinquished grazing on four allotments, including Park Creek and North Fork, working with the Western Habitat Conservation Fund. This is a major benefit for bighorn sheep.

As a sportsman driven organization focused on bighorn recovery and expansion into former ranges, Idaho WSF very much appreciates and applauds Mr. Bean.

Small Flock Project: The WSF chapters in Idaho, Oregon and Washington are jointly funding a program through the Asotin County Conservation District, to sample domestic sheep and goats on small parcels of land in and/or adjacent to bighorn sheep habitat for Mycoplasma. This is a voluntary program for the property owners. If they are willing to participate, their sheep/goats are tested for Movi. During this process, the disease issue with bighorn sheep is explained. To date, 484 small flock animals have been tested, 121 sheep and 363 goats. This testing identified 56 positives for Movi, 388 negatives, 27 potentially pending positive, and 13 undetermined. Also, to date, most testing has been done in or near the Hells Canyon area. Plans are underway to expand into outlying areas.

The Idaho Department of Fish and Game is conducting a similar program in the Challis area. Idaho WSF will be working with IDFG to enhance and expand this program.

ROCKY MOUNTAIN BIGHORN SHEEP HUNT UNITS 37 AND 37A TAG AND HARVEST DATA

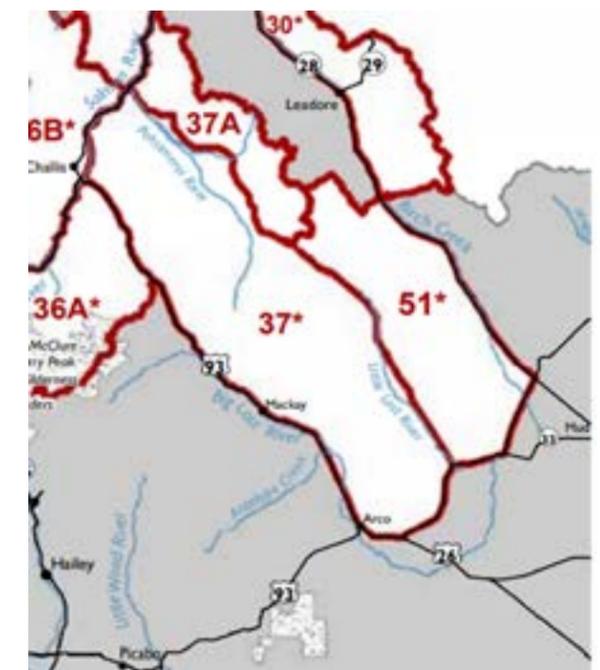
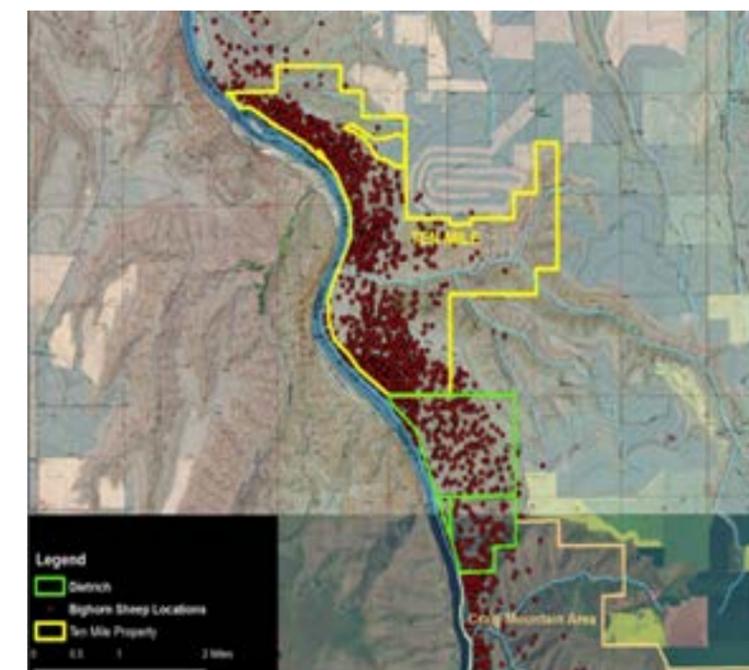
Year	Unit 37		Unit 37		Unit 37A		Unit 37AL		Total	
	Tags	Harvest	Tags	Harvest	Tags	Harvest	Tags	Harvest	Tags	Harvest
2000	3	3							3	3
2001	2	2							2	2
2002	2	2							2	2
2003	2	1							2	1
2004	2	1							2	1
2005	2	2			1	1			3	3
2006	2	2			1	1			3	3
2007	3	3			1	0			4	3
2008	3	2			1	1			4	3
2009	3	3			2	2			5	5
2010	3	3			2	1			5	4
2011	6	5			2	2			8	7
2012	6	5			2	2			8	7
2013	6	4*			2	2			8	6
2014	6	7*			2	2			8	9
2015	6	5			2	0			8	5
2016	6	7*			2	3			8	10
2017	4	4**	4	4	2	2			10	10
2018	4	6***	4	3	2	2			10	11
2019	5	6**	5	5	2	2	1	1	13	14
2020	5		5		2			1	13	

*Includes Auction Tag Harvest

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IT'S ALWAYS BETTER TO BE LUCKY THAN GOOD

by Julie Chapman

The landscape changed with every mile as we traveled the long arduous journey from the woodlands, hills, and corn fields of Southern Indiana. After day three of the drive to Idaho's majestic mountains and sparkling trout streams, I offered a blessing before a meal, and again realized how much God had blessed me. Not only for safe passage and for holding a bighorn sheep tag in such a special state like Idaho, but I was getting to share this experience with my 73 year old

Dad. The once athletic hunter and mentor now has heart issues, and a lot of old school ideals. One philosophy of his I subscribe to is that significant events in one's life, such as my son's game winning home run, my daughters first whitetail buck, or an epic bighorn sheep hunt, should be shared with someone that loves and cares about you and your life's special moments.

As the road finally changed to endless winding curves through

the mountain ranges and snaked along the crystal clear mountain streams, I marveled at the awesome and vast beauty. As we approached the Sawtooth Mountain Range, we soon found ourselves, I joked, in true wilderness, defined by a total lack of cell phone reception and McDonald's. Our final destination was Rawhide Outfitters, located in Salmon, Idaho. The outfitter is a family run business started by father John Cranney. His son, Luke, had guided my son the year before on a

successful bighorn sheep hunt draw at age 12, and now it was my turn. As I arrived a couple days before the opening of the sheep season, I spent the day, along with professional photographer Jordan Budd, checking our equipment and backpacks for weight. This hunt promised to have mountains much more rugged and challenging than previous hunts. Because of this, I had been working out daily to be in top physical condition (sheep shape), and I felt that I was ready for anything.

I had counted down the days to this hunt like a child marking off the days until Christmas.

Luke and his team had sent me some scouting photos of potential rams that had me giddy for weeks. It seems there was a story of a huge old ram that had been sighted when it and others came down to the wintering range. Our task was to try to locate this majestic ram!

Finally, with the excitement that had been building for the last few weeks, we were off with a load of horses. We made the 2.5 hour drive to the trail head. Walking behind the horse trailer, I spied what appeared to be a coin in the gravel. As I bent over to pick it up I had hopes it might be a penny, a lucky penny, heads up. But it was so muddy and scuffed up I wasn't sure it was even a coin. After a quick rub, "holy cow" it was a penny, and it was heads up. My Dad and I always joke, that no matter what, we would never pick up a penny unless its heads up. My Dad always says, "it's better to be lucky



than good". I had picked up such a penny before another sheep hunt and was successful. Could lightning strike twice? I dropped it in my Kuiu pant pocket and grabbed a quick hug from my dad, hunting legend Jim Craig and wife Leann. Final adjustments to the stirrups and packs on the horses and we headed onto the trail head for our 15 mile trip to the backcountry. From the base of the drainage it would be all backpacking, and for sure uphill. After a struggling first day of hiking in to make a base camp, the fresh cold mountain water hit the spot. As I crawled into my tent that night, my mind was racing, but found myself at peace with the stillness of the mountains, and finally fell asleep to the calming sound of the nearby stream. As the sun started to rise the next morning, so did our anticipation of the first visions of such an amazing ram. The thin air at the high altitudes had me gasping for air. Finding a favorable glassing spot, we got set up and settled in with high hopes. After an hour or so, a small group of rams appeared from a pine thicket above us. They gradually traveled to burn area and began grazing. All at once, the high

powered scope was filled with, no doubt, the king of the mountain. He posed like a bronze statue, with his nose high in the air and his chest up, as he just stood there basking in the sun light. He then quartered to us and rolled his massive horns to the side... Instantly, young Jared Cranney (13) and myself, who were both glued to the spotting scopes, pulled away from the eye piece and mouthed, "holy smokes, did you see that". It was the most majestic pose and image I've ever seen. We were all relieved to lay our eyes on him. Luke and his son Jarred had seen the big ram just one week earlier, but that is a lot of time for sheep to move. We had the pleasure of watching these rams all day long. There was to be no shot from this vantage unless they





would come down the drainage for a drink; and they did not. However, if this was to be their pattern we would set up here the next day for a shot, as we guessed they could go to water. As evening approached, we backed out and headed to camp eager for the next days sunrise. That night we all were high on emotions and anticipation of the next day hunt. Jordan, the camera girl, and I giggled like adolescents at a sleep-over, as we swapped hot Peak Refuel meals. With cautions about "blowing out" these rams by doing something stupid in the morning, we set our alarms for 4:30 AM.

Coffee at 4:45 AM was a caffeine habit not needed as I was stoked with adrenalin. Off at 5 AM my pack seemed heavy, my gun awkward, and up we all went in the dark. After climbing several thousand feet to our glassing spot at the top of the mountain, we could see the sheep where we had left them the night before. More importantly we found the target ram. However, in typical sheep fashion they were not going down the drainage as we hoped for, they were going up. We watched well past 10:30 AM and the prospect of them grazing down the burn within shooting range didn't look

like it was going to happen. Remembering the caution, "Don't blow these sheep out of this drainage... patience... patience". We sat down to regroup and cover all the possible scenarios. Shortly after they bedded down, we discussed a plan B. This would require a huge effort as you could not go up any further on this rim. I could see us playing this waiting game for days waiting for these rams to drop down into shooting range if they came to water. The wind and weather was good now and perhaps not so tomorrow. To stay completely out of sight, we backed down the mountain range almost to base camp, crossed in the bottom, and began the grueling climb up the other side of the



mountain range up to the highest point, roughly 10K feet. We left two spotters on the opposite side while Luke Cranney, Jordan Budd, and I went on our 5 hour hike up to our new glassing point. So much for all the training, I was exhausted.

Finally on top, we gathered our breath and finished off our last few sips of water. Around 6 PM they all got up and started to graze on new grass in a burn, down the drainage in the direction we had just vacated. We grabbed our packs and took off after them. Moving as quickly and quietly as we could across the rocks, we ended up directly above them. Cresting, I could see most all of the rams within the burn area and they were finally within range. I dropped my pack for a rest and lined up my rifle while Luke ranged the distance on the big ram. He ranged it 3-4 times because of limbs, branches, and logs in the burn area. I set my turret. The big ram quartered to me after a 10 minute wait as my heart almost jumped out of my chest. I had a volleyball size hole to shoot through all the tangled limbs and branches. I was sure I could make the shot. After carefully squeezing the shot off, we saw nothing. No hit, no dirt

flying, no nothing...and the big ram was still standing there. I chambered another round and changed my scope to 300 yards. I lined him up in my crosshairs and WHOP, a solid hit! He went down a few yards away. As day light was fading we decided to go to him and put another round in him. After putting our best effort into sneaking down the mountain, we ended up nearly 35 yards from the old regal ram where I put a final round into him. Then, and only then, did we exhale and begin to celebrate. Because it was such a team effort, we waited for the two spotters to join us in the jubilation and picture taking. The sun had set when they arrived but there was no way we were leaving this magnificent animal on the mountain. We field dressed and caped out this amazing ram until 2 AM. With packs over loaded we were all ready to get back to camp. Missing the preferred route down in the dark, we took the scenic tour that went everywhere

but to our tents. Step by step we slowly made it back with stomachs growling and backs aching around 5 AM. Starving but so exhausted, I fixed a freeze dried meal, took two bites and woke up the next morning with the spoon and bag in front of my face. This mountain range and the nearly 25 hour hunt pushed me to my physical limit.

The common denominator found among those who hunt sheep and goats is the self-proclamation "what the hell am I doing here". The sheer humiliation and exhaustion of attempting seemingly impossible climbs makes the sheep hunter question their own sanity. Throw in a helping of mother nature in the form of brutal winds, rain, snow and ice and the sheep hunter is asking themselves "am I an idiot?" But the prize is so very special and so rewarding and only the few with grit and a focused drive can accomplish this successfully. The serenity,

quietness, and magnitude of God's great creation of these magnificent mountains gives the sheep hunter an unexplainable "fix" like a common drug addict. The first question to me after the hunt from legendary sheep hunter (7 FNAWS), Jimmy Craig, was "would you do it again?" My response to him was, "as soon as I get my clothes washed I will be ready to go." There, I admit it, I'm a sheep hunting nut.

After showing off my prized ram to as many who mattered, I returned to the Cranney camp in Salmon to shower and do some laundry. As I emptied the washer to throw my clothes into the dryer...there it was...I had forgotten about it, but there it was...my beat up, scratched up "lucky penny". I had been feeling good about myself, thinking perhaps I'm getting skilled at sheep hunting and then...no...maybe...well just maybe I was lucky!

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My Hunt



by Marli Jeffress

I met Bill London when he was working at Idaho Wild Sheep Foundation show. He asked my sister and I if we would like to hunt deer. I was very excited when he asked if we would like to hunt. Then he asked and how old I was? I said nine years old. Then he asked when I turned 10. I said on October 8. He said the season started on October 10 and I would be able to hunt. He would try and help me and my sister if we completed a Hunter Safety class. We took a hunter safety class and learned a lot about being a safe hunter. I called Mr. London to say we both passed the class. I was very excited, and I wanted to hunt but, my sister did not.

Mr. London said good and he would take me hunting. When I heard that I would get to go hunting with Bill I was very excited, and I practiced shooting at the shooting range. When we were getting ready to go hunting with Bill I was very nervous and happy. Nick my stepdad and I arrived to meet Bill by the private property where we were going to hunt. When we drove up to the area, we started glassing for deer beds. Then we started walking to find more deer beds and spotted a really big buck, but the owner did not want us to shoot any of the big bucks. When we were glassing for more deer, we spotted a buck under a tree. We started to

bellycrawl down into the sagebrush so the buck wouldn't see us it was very exciting. We went a little closer to a tree and waited until the buck stood up.

As we were waiting until the buck stood up, we got the rifle out and waited. I was getting ready and held the rifle into my chest and the rifle was held by sticks. After a while of waiting the buck started to stand up. As the buck stood up, I took a big breath and started to pull on the trigger. I was very nervous. When the buck got shot it started walking slowly and went down. It was very breathtaking. I was very very nervous when I saw the buck go down. Bill got Nick and then we crossed a fence and went down to check on the buck and see if he was down. The buck was down and then we said a prayer to the deer. It was a three-point buck. Bill went down to get his truck and Nick dressed the deer and I helped. Nick showed me the intestines and it was gross, and he made me hold the heart. When we were finishing dressing the deer Bill brought his truck close to get the buck.

Nick and I took the buck home and hung it up for a few days. We took it to someone to cut up into meat and make pepperoni sticks. Yum! We sent the skull and antlers to be cleaned and it is in my room.

I need to thank Bill London for getting me this opportunity to hunt and for all his help!! I will never forget this opportunity to hunt with Bill. Thank you to the property owner for this chance to start hunting.



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WORKING TO CLEAR MYCOPLASMA OVIPNEUMONIAE IN THE LOWER SALMON BIGHORN SHEEP POPULATION

Hollie Miyasaki, Wildlife Staff Biologist,
Idaho Department of Fish and Game

Research and experiments in captivity and in free ranging bighorn sheep populations have identified *Mycoplasma ovipneumoniae* (Movi) as the primary pathogen responsible for triggering pneumonia outbreaks in bighorn sheep. This pathogen is introduced into bighorn sheep populations via spillover from infected domestic sheep, domestic goats, wild sheep, or mountain goats. Upon first exposure, most wild sheep are affected by respiratory disease and either die or survive and clear Movi. However, a small number of animals that survive are unable to clear Movi and they become chronic carriers that maintain infection within the population. Although we are still learning what may predispose an individual to becoming a chronic carrier, recently, removing them has been successful in clearing Movi from the Hells Canyon Population Management Unit (PMU) and from other free-ranging wild sheep populations in Custer State Park, South Dakota; the National Bison Range, Montana; and in the Snowstorm Mountains in Nevada. In Idaho's Hells Canyon PMU, as of January 2020, based on antibody and polymerase chain reaction (PCR) tests that find the viral genetic material, no Movi was circulating. Lamb survival and population size have also generally increased.

As the Hells Canyon bighorn sheep population increases, sheep have expanded their range into historic habitat that has been unoccupied for many decades, including up the Salmon River below Rice Creek (likely sheep from Game Management Unit 11). The Salmon River is a corridor for bighorn sheep movements and natural recolonization. While it is encouraging to see this expansion, ultimately it poses a high risk of contact occurring between the PMU's in the future, which will result in transmission of Movi back to Hells Canyon.

The high risk for transmission of Movi back from the Lower Salmon PMU to Hells Canyon, the ability to test hypotheses about disease persistence in a population that is representative of Idaho's core native bighorn sheep populations, and the knowledge base from recent research make the Lower Salmon PMU a very good and ambitious place to conduct the next round of disease research and management in bighorn sheep. Ultimately we want to explain how clearance occurs, either



Radio-collared ewe with other bighorn sheep. November 2020
Photo credit: Frances Cassirer, IDFG



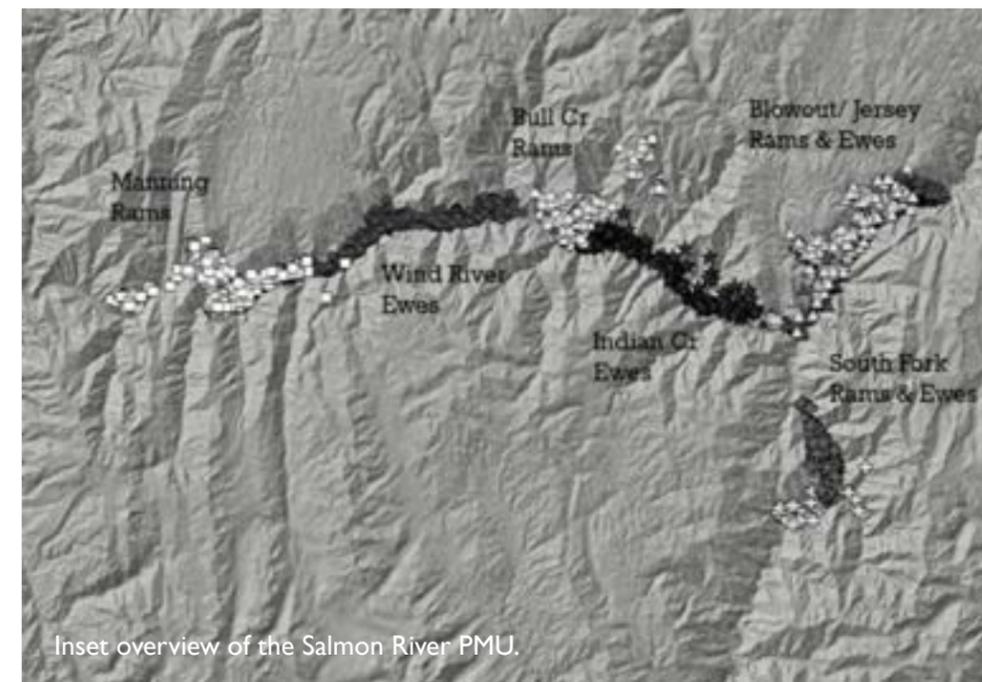
Radio-collared ewe just waking up after processing. November 2020
Photo credit: Frances Cassirer, IDFG

naturally or assisted by management, to develop the least invasive, most efficient approach to clear Movi from free-ranging bighorn sheep populations.

The clearance of Movi from Hells Canyon in Idaho and Washington and most of Oregon, after almost 25 years of infection, was remarkable and exciting! It also left us with some questions that we hope future research and adaptive management can address. With help from the Idaho Wild Sheep Foundation we began work to answer our questions and start our ambitious quest to clear Movi from the Lower Salmon PMU. Idaho WSF generously purchased radio-collars and provided additional money to help pay for capture costs. The initial capture and testing of bighorn sheep in the Lower Salmon PMU began in November 2020. We are excited about the

possibility to clear Movi from the Lower Salmon while figuring out the most efficient way to expand Movi clearance to other bighorn populations in the state. Idaho WSF has been an important partner in Hells Canyon, the Lower Salmon project, and other projects in the state. With Idaho WSF support we will continue to work towards our goal of having healthy, growing bighorn sheep populations in Idaho.

IDFG has identified several social groups of bighorn sheep in the Lower Salmon River PMU defined by agglomerative hierarchical cluster analysis: from west to east, the Manning rams, the Wind River ewes, the Bull Creek rams, the Indian Creek ewes, the Blowout Creek rams and Jersey Creek ewes, and the South Fork rams and ewes. (Borg 2014).



Inset overview of the Salmon River PMU.

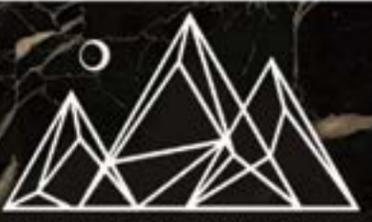


Nathan Borg (left) and Clay Hickey (right) radio-collaring a ewe on the Lower Salmon River, November 2020, Photo Credit: Mark Carson, IDFG

This summer the Idaho WSF approved the purchase of radio collars and monies towards capture costs. The \$17,568 of Idaho WSF funds, (your money) put those collars into the field. They are now collecting and transmitting valuable data from the lower Salmon river.

Likewise, in November 2020 Idaho WSF purchased 12 iridium satellite gps collars with 2-way communication and timer-controlled drop offs for \$22,703. Those collars have been used throughout Idaho.

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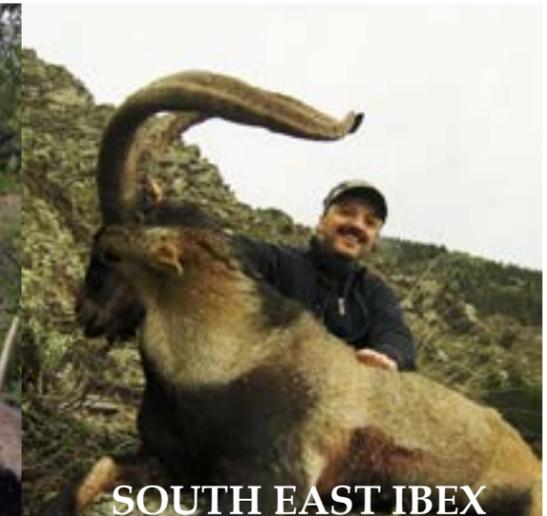
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HERB MEYR

1938 - 2020



Herb was an American Hero, serving our country in the Air Force, flying F1-11 fighter jets, achieving the rank of Lieutenant Colonel when he retired in 1984. Herb was also a staunch conservationist. He devoted 30+ years as member and past president of the Idaho Wild Sheep Foundation, plus was a Life Member of the Wild Sheep Foundation. Senator Mike Crapo appointed Herb to the board of the Owyhee Canyon Land Initiative. He also participated in the restoration in the bighorn sheep into Hells Canyon and the reintroduction of the bighorns to the Jim Sage mountains. Herb left an amazing legacy and lived life to the fullest.

LEGACY



DAVE PUTNAM

1940 - 2019



Dave was a passionate conservationist and sheep hunter. He served as a Board Member of the Idaho Wild Sheep Foundation for many years. He took his last sheep hunt in Alaska at the age of 76, accompanying his daughter Erica, on a Dall sheep hunt. Dave was the lucky winner of the hunt and donated it to Erica. This hunt was featured in Winter, 2017 Journal, "Under the Midnight Sun, A Father-Daughter Dall Hunt".



THE QUARANTINE HUNT

by Dennis Dunn

As was the case for countless Americans, the summer of 2020 was like none other in my life. In the spring of 2019, I had been fortunate enough to obtain An Arizona Commissioners' bison tag. When the 365-day season opened that year on August 15th, I was there on the Kaibab Plateau for the first five days, but a long-planned Alaska caribou hunt forced me to head north shortly after my season opened — without having ever laid eyes on a single bison of any sort. I knew that in 2020 I would return to Arizona, prepared to give the hunt my maximum effort.

For 66 days, total — in unbroken stints of 35 and then 31 days — I spent the summer self-quarantining in a Double Bull blind, sitting in an upright chair, for 12 hours a day. I was grateful to have such a grand escape from exposure to the coronavirus, but my goal was to harvest,

with my recurve bow and a wood arrow, a true “Pumpkinhead” bull bison — one near the end of his life. I wasn't sure my 80-year-old spine was going to survive the endurance marathon, but somehow it managed.

Over the past dozen years or so, virtually all of the House Rock bison herd has migrated up onto the Plateau and into the northern half of the Grand Canyon National Park — where, of course, they cannot be hunted. Because the herd has grown to over 1200 animals, by Park Service estimates, both Arizona Game & Fish (AZG&F) and the Service encourage hunting for them from blinds over salt — situated in very close proximity to the northern Park boundary. The various salt locations are stretched out over about 25 miles on an East/West axis, more or less parallel to the northern Park boundary. They are all maintained by a wonderful and

totally ethical outfitter named Russ Jacoby, of Flagstaff, AZ.

The bison are hunted year-round, and they are very afraid of being found outside the Park, since they get shot at all the time. If they so much as hear a truck engine from half-a-mile away while outside the Park, they are back across that boundary in a matter of seconds. This explains why “Spot & Stalk” is virtually impossible there, and why almost all the bison killed now are taken from blinds. It also explains why most of their visits to the salts are nocturnal.

Occasionally, however, they do give in to their craving for salt, make a mistake, and sneak across the boundary during daylight hours — especially when it is very hot, or during the dark-of-the-moon periods. That is what provides the patient hunter an occasional opportunity. AZG&F advertises the hunt in their Regs as one of the toughest hunts in the State — and definitely not for everyone.

It was on the 49th day of my 2020 quest that the Lord finally presented me with a shot opportunity at a true Goliath of an old bull. He arrived in the midst of a herd of 25–30 animals, at a time — and under conditions — that I least expected it: namely, at high noon, and during a steady rain.

Suddenly, it was sheer bedlam 10–12 yards out in front of my blind, where the four salt blocks were attracting far more tongues than could possibly reach them at any given moment. Clearly the old bull was dominating one salt, but even though his back was nearly a foot taller off the ground than any other bull or cow in the bunch, his head stayed down for many minutes before I was finally able to get a clear view of both horns at the same time. I didn't want to attempt a shot at his massive rib cage until I was certain neither horn was broken or deformed.

Once I knew for sure he truly was a bull that exceeded even my fondest dreams, another five minutes passed before a decent, broadside shot-slot opened up between the other animals constantly in motion. His vitals were only exposed for perhaps three seconds, but I was able to send my 800-grain arrow his way just in time, before the gap again disappeared altogether.

To my absolute horror, however — in the pressure and excitement of the moment — as I quickly drew my

recurve and released, I forgot I needed to cant the bow a few inches to the left, in order to avoid any potential problem with the roof of my blind. The SMACK was so loud that the entire herd instantly panicked, and in less than ten seconds every single animal had noisily disappeared back into the forest.

I was stupefied! My arrow-shaft had sailed weakly out the tent window and struck Goliath high in the back with the force of a whiffle ball. With 49 days “in the bank,” so to speak — plus five from the year before — I suddenly started shaking uncontrollably like an aspen leaf in a stiff breeze. Never had I felt so disgusted or so bitterly disappointed with myself. I sat there in the blind in utter disbelief, unable to stop shivering for nearly 40 minutes. By the time I got my nerves and emotions back under control, the rain had turned to hail, and the ground all around me was almost solid white. It was to be another 17 days before the Almighty would give me one more opportunity to fill my tag with a trophy-quality animal.

During my 66-day “quarantine” in the summer of 2020, I passed up several lesser, Pope & Young bulls — always holding out for one of Boone & Crockett quality. The bull I ended up taking on August 11th (three days before my tag was to expire) did not quite make the B & C Records Book, but it came very close and will score well up in the P & Y Records. He was, of course, nothing like “Goliath,” but he quietly appeared from nowhere just before 5 pm on my day of destiny.

I was dismayed to see him approach the salt block, so as to end up facing directly at me. For a quarter of an hour, he gorged himself — never moving any of his four hooves. I knew I simply had no shot in that situation. I also realized that, when he finally turned to walk away, I would have at most a second or two to release the arrow, while his vitals were briefly in view.

When the moment of truth arrived, my arrow had been nocked (with fingers on the string) for quite some time. The broadhead was sticking out the window of the blind, and as I quickly drew and released, I don't recall ever reaching the anchor point under my cheekbone.

Perhaps I did, but I certainly didn't hold for even a fraction of a second. With God's guiding hand, my heavy, Suzanne St. Charles' fir arrow (tipped with a 225-grain Tuffhead) busted through a rib, transfixed both lungs, and completely severed the pulmonary artery in

between them. As a result, the bull suffered instant, massive, internal bleeding and died within seconds — traveling only 18 yards.

The harvest of this bison now puts me within one, single-species “upgrade” of the first-ever, BAREBOW, all Pope-&-Young Super Slam. Tom Hoffman, Jack Frost, Walt Palmer, Randy Liljenquist, and Edwin DeYoung have recorded all 29 species in the P & Y Records, but no one has ever done it without using yardage sight-pins attached to the bow for aiming.

Being now in my ninth decade of life, I realize I’m in a race with Father Time. Next year — with God’s blessing — I hope to harvest a trophy-quality Alaska Barren Ground Caribou, to complete my quest. It will be my eighth hunt for that species.

Russ Jacoby estimated the weight of my bull at around 1800 pounds, and his age at 9 or 10 years. Was the harvest accomplished with Providential assistance? You better believe it! And I’ll accept that every time it’s offered! Now I just need one more such offering.



AT FIRST LITE, we know that our passion and business depend upon folks’ ability to get out and hunt wild game in wild places. That’s why a deep commitment to conservation is at the core of our ethos. From rehabilitating local big game winter range to educating customers about chronic wasting disease, protecting wildlife and our hunting heritage is as much a part of First Lite as making the world’s best hunting clothes.

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NOMINATIONS FOR THE IDAHO WILD SHEEP FOUNDATION BOARD OF DIRECTORS ARE BEING ACCEPTED

The deadline for nominations is February 6, 2021.
 Nominations may be mailed to P.O. Box 8224, Boise, 83707
 or emailed to info@idahowildsheep.org

Idaho WSF Bylaws state:

BOARD OF DIRECTORS:

Section III Terms of Office

The President, President-Elect/Vice-President, Secretary and Treasurer shall serve terms of two (2) membership years. At the end of two (2) years, the Officer position shall be vacated and elections made for the succeeding two year period. The President shall not be eligible to serve more than two (2) consecutive terms. President Elect/Vice President shall become President and a new President Elect/Vice President, Secretary and Treasurer shall be nominated and elected by the Directors.

For copies of the bylaws please contact the Idaho WSF office at 345-6171.

I would like to nominate _____
 for the Idaho Wild Sheep Foundation Board of Directors.

(Please feel free to copy this form and nominate as many people as you would like.
 Self-nominations are also encouraged)

PLEASE ENCLOSE A BIO OF THE NOMINEE FOR THE BALLOT!!

Signed _____

Date _____



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FROM A LINE

by Triston Warner

Ever since I was a young boy, I heard my father tell sheep hunting stories. I never quite understood the fascination with hunting this one animal, but I often found myself lost in those stories. From the places sheep live, to the long adventurous journeys needed to pursue rams, I knew from a young age that I wanted to hunt sheep. As the years went by, sheep hunting became more prevalent in my family. It seemed everybody in my family loved to hunt sheep. I guess you could say that it ran in our blood. I am from a line of sheep hunters.

In 2016, I watched my father kill his grand slam ram. Tears flooded his eyes as he walked up to that ram. I realized I had witnessed part of his life-long dream. I accompanied him on only that one hunt of his grand slam quest, and I was lucky to be a part of that final moment. My sheep fever started and grew rapidly after that day. Over the last few years, I helped on a several more sheep hunts, but continued to be unsuccessful at drawing my own tag. I was wondering when would I get my chance

to pursue my own ram.

In March of 2019, thanks to Idaho Wild Sheep Foundation banquet, I was able to walk away with the Dall sheep hunt in the Alaskan Range with Kokanee Guide Service. I could not believe what had happened. I was finally starting my sheep journey.

A year and a half flew by, before I knew it, I was on my way to Alaska. This was a solo adventure and I really wasn't sure what was in store, but I was ready. It was surreal as the plane touched down at the backcountry lodge, I was in a place that most big game hunters only dreamed of. I was mesmerized by the scenery. It was unlike anything I had ever seen before; the mountains and terrain were something every high-country hunter long for. I met my guide, Justin Dubay. We shared a needed hard drink and he told stories to ease my nerves. It was time to begin the hunt.

We were flown into spike camp two days before the season started. That is a flight I will never forget, up and down steep canyons with glaciers at the very top. The terrain and sheer size of the range itself was enough to make the largest of men feel very small. Tires rumbled their way down the top of a ridge as we landed on what would be our camp for the next two days. We had arrived at sheep camp! We saw sheep from camp, but were weathered in the next day. It was spent in the tent playing sticks and telling stories.

Opening day, we rose from our sleeping bags and were greeted with wind, rain and gloomy shades of storms in the distance. Not ideal weather for an opening day of sheep season. Regardless, we began working our way down a ridge where Justin had found a nice ram while scouting. As we peeked over every ridge and peak, my heart would race just knowing that we were going to see a ram.

Anticipation grew as we crested over a final rocky knife ridge, there we spotted two rams below us at the timber line. Justin confirmed that we were looking at not only a legal ram, but a really nice one at that. As I peered at the ram in the scope, my heart jumped; horns long and dark. He was bedded on a rock shelf giving me all the angles that make sheep look good! He was everything I wanted in my Alaskan range ram.

We worked down the ridge and got in position right across from the sheep. I peered through the glass for one last look and knew this was the sheep I wanted to take home. I had mixed emotions about shooting a ram on day one but there was no way I could pass this sheep, even on day one.

I grabbed my 7mm mag Best of the West Arizona rifle, a special Idaho Wild Sheep Banquet edition. I won this gun the same night I found out I was going to Alaska. As I began to settle in on my ram, I felt like it was meant to be. Justin confirmed the range, and I began to squeeze.

As the gun went off, I could see my bullet hit the sheep. The ram began to stumble, I held my breath hoping he would not roll down the ridge towards the cliffs below him. The ram dropped and shock set in, I could not believe that I had killed my first ram.

As I made the final steps to my sheep, the raw emotions began to set in. You could not have beat the smile off of my face at that moment. When I first picked up my ram it felt like the beginning of something I could not put

down. I had waited for this moment my whole life. The packs were heavy and the direction to camp was up, but it was worth all the pain. As I reached the top of the ridge we were camped on, I took a moment to take it all in. I thought about my friends and family back home and all of the support it took to get me to that point. Time stood still for a moment; I finally knew what it was to be a part of that special club of sheep hunters.

The rest of the trip flew by in the blink of an eye. It is a story that I will be telling for years to come.

I would like to thank my Guide Justin and packer Eli for their time on the hill. Their hard work, dedication, and company will always be appreciated.

I would also like to thank my friends and family back home. Their love and support were carried with me the whole trip. Most of all I would like to thank my Aunt and Uncle, Doug and Shelly; their passion, and drive, and respect, for these animals are what made me want to make this journey. I want to especially thank my dad, who always taught me to work hard, pursue my passion and strive for the goals I want to achieve in life. This hunt would not have been possible without him. I love you Dad, thank you inspiring me as a little boy and helping me achieve this dream as a man. I am proud to say that I have officially joined a line of sheep hunters in my family.



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2021 IDAHO BIGHORN LOTTERY TAG

GUIDELINES

- › The 2021 Lottery Tag shall be valid for use in any open controlled bighorn hunt, except Unit 11.
- › “Tickets” are controlled hunt applications.
- › Ticket purchasers and persons named on tickets must be at least 18 years old and must be eligible to hold a hunting license in Idaho.
- › Tickets are void where the ticket/tag sale is prohibited.
- › This tag is non-transferrable.
- › This tag (and hunting license, if needed) will only be issued to an eligible applicant (the person named on the ticket drawn).
- › Drawing will be conducted the last week in July, 2021.
- › **ONCE-IN-A-LIFETIME RULE IS WAIVED** for this tag.
- › Need not be present to win.
- › Additional rules apply.

Ticket prices

- 1 ticket for \$20
- 6 tickets for \$100
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- 25 tickets for \$250

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A SIMPLE APPLICATION

AND A LOT OF LUCK

by Ben Van Berkum

I have never liked writing and never cared for English class in school. But after this hunt, in a year when COVID-19 dictated everything, I believed it deserved documentation. I could have reverted to my days in college and “cut and pasted” something together. It would have been easy to do nowadays. The majority of published sheep stories start with repeated statements. For example, “I drew this tag and hired that outfitter.” It’s getting to the point that I can predict what the storyline will be. They go on to state, “I showed up in sheep shape,” for whatever that is worth. Then they wrap up the story with them killing a ram and giving thanks to whomever. Finally, they state they are forever a sheep hunter. Cool, good job, awesome ... but that is not me.

Honestly, I understand hiring a guide for a tag that took years to draw or the unit has high trophy caliber animals. But when applying for sheep, I try to apply for possible units to hunt on my own. Most have “better” draw odds when compared to other units across the west. This is where Idaho’s Frank Church Wilderness comes into play in this adventure. The Frank Church Wilderness (FCW) units are known for having “good” odds from a statistical standpoint. But it can also be where sheep hunter’s dreams go to die. It has a sick beauty of its own at almost 2.4 million acres of some of the most unforgiving terrain. Notorious for making hunters eat their tags, you can find specific units that will fit your logistical standards. But make no mistake about it, they will kick your ass, to put it politely. It just depends on how much you want to suffer because you are not going to beat it.

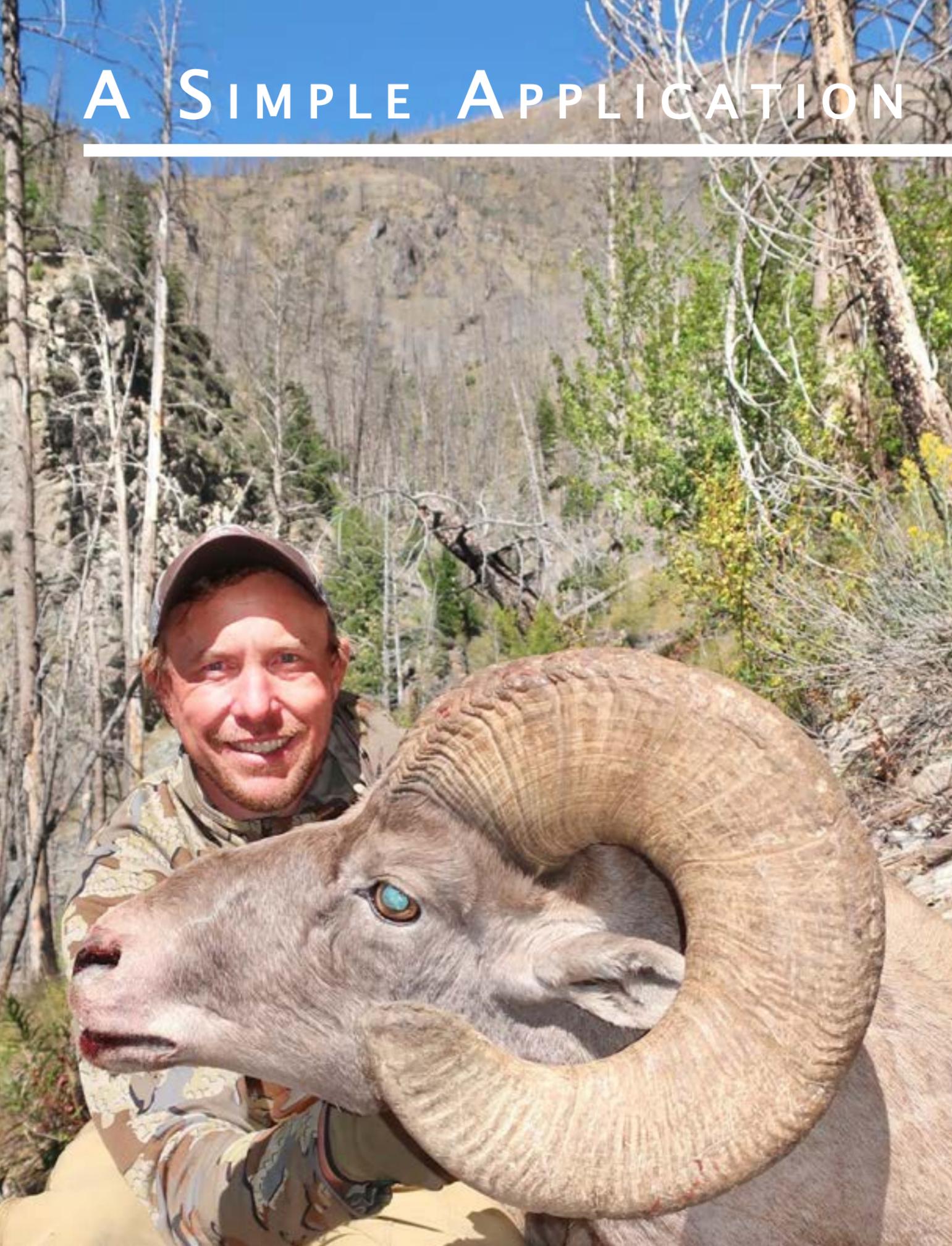
So, when I found out I drew my tag, I sent a screenshot of my results to my friends and family. Most of my hunting buddies called to ask what unit I had drawn. The ones that “know” gave me an obligatory “congratulations” after I told them it was in the FCW. “Wow, you are so lucky or good luck, buddy” was the same half-hearted reaction I was getting. But from the beginning, two of my friends, Kurt Stallings and Casey Mekelburg, were all in and didn’t care that the success rate was low. They were willing to use their vacation time to help me accomplish my goal.

Once that dust settled, and the tag showed up in my mailbox, I gathered as much information as possible. When I drew the tag, I decided to get a new rifle. Since I drew an Idaho bighorn sheep tag, I figured why not shoot him with a rifle made in Idaho? I purchased a Seekins Precision Havak PH2 in 6.5 PRC. Next, my daily routine was making phone calls and emailing anyone who had hunted or worked in the unit. I obtained maps and looked at onX and Google Earth for more hours than I would like to admit. Like any other hunt, you really don’t know what to expect until you lay eyes on it yourself. In the middle of July, Kurt and I loaded up our packs, piled into my truck, and made the haul from Amarillo, Texas, to Idaho.

We learned a lot in that short 4-day scouting trip and covered most of the area we wanted to hunt. We discovered the reputation of the FCW was no joke. Words and pictures will always fall short in giving you an idea of how vast this wilderness is. When they send your coveted tag in the mail along with your letter of congratulations, they also send a return envelope for unpunched tags. In a cocky move, without hesitation, I tossed it in the trash. After we got back, I began to second guess that decision.

The hunt was going to rely heavily on optics and patience. Covering as much ground as we could with our eyes and not kill ourselves physically in the process. As the hunt drew closer, I came up with a plan to arrive eight days before the season. I was going to cover as much country as I could until my buddies showed up.

When it came time for me to leave, California was, unfortunately, getting ravaged by forest fires. When I arrived, visibility was limited. Fortunately, the visibility had improved slightly the next morning, but not a lot. Nothing had changed since July, except the snow had finally melted away. Around 2 pm at my fourth glassing position, I could see the majority of the bottom of the drainage. I was panning with my tripod-mounted binoculars and got a sudden surge of adrenaline. In the middle of my glass was a ram, then another ram, then another! In all, there were six rams, with two being shooters. I couldn’t believe it! I immediately grabbed my Garmin inReach to let Kurt





and Casey know I found rams. I watched the rams all day. That night I was thinking no way these sheep were going to hang out in the same area for the next week.

It was like the movie “Ground Hog Day” for the next week. I would repeat the same process each day: wake up, hike in, sit down, glass sheep till dark, hike out. But it was way more fun than it sounds. I watched them but t heads, and a few seconds later, finally heard the echo roll through the drainage. I determined the pecking order and watched them show their dominance among themselves. They would bed in the craziest places and rest their horns on the ground when they would bed for the day. So, after five days, I had a pretty good idea of what their daily routine was. In that drainage, I saw anywhere from five to ten rams a day. Sometimes they would be all balled up or in little bachelor groups. As I mentioned earlier, there were two shooters in the group. The biggest or what I thought was the biggest was “Broom,” and “#2” got his name because I thought he was the second largest in the group. These two never seemed too far from each other during the day. When Kurt and Casey showed up, we still had two more days until the season opener. I was always worried these rams would vanish before the season started. But the rams stuck to their routine and did not change locations. The only thing different was there were now three sets of eyes watching them.

For me, the days were starting to drag by. Kurt and Casey were already expecting us to roll thunder on the opener. But I was not so optimistic. I just figured something uncontrollable was going to happen and bump those rams. Typically, public land drama always seems to show up where I am hunting. But it didn't, and opening morning came without a hitch. About an hour after sunrise Casey said, “I got them.” Instantly my heart rate bumped up, and I knew we were one step closer to our goal.

Kurt and I started to dump as much nonessential equipment from our packs as we could. The rams were split into two groups; Broom and #2 were in separate groups. I wanted to kill Broom, so we based our approach to close the distance on his band of rams. Casey had the two-way radio, and Kurt and I took off from our glassing location with the other radio. About three hours and two different shooting locations later, Kurt and I were in a position to take a shot. During the decent, Casey gave us updates on the sheep. The two groups had clustered up together by now. They had bedded up for the day and wouldn't move far from there for the rest of the afternoon. I handed Kurt my tripod at the second shooting position, and he attached his binoculars to them.

I set up my rifle's bipod and flattened out behind it. We settled in for what we figured would be a long wait. Kurt and I waited on the sheep to decide what they wanted to do. Watching from above, Casey kept tabs on what Broom and #2 were doing and their location. Casey also had to fend off relentless ground squirrels who were rooting around in his pack and stealing his snacks.

During this time, a small ridge hid the sheep from Kurt and me. Surprisingly, we only laid there 45 - 60 minutes before the sheep decided, one by one, to drop down and feed near the bottom. During the downtime, I ranged different yardages for different locations the rams would offer shot. Casey then stated that Broom was up and slowly working his way down, tailing #2.

Things started to happen fast. I had loaded one round in the chamber and topped off the magazine giving four rounds total in the rifle. I also staged my ammo pouch holding ten extra rounds in case things got western. Eventually, most of the rams made it to the bottom. Broom was dragging back in the rear like he always did, never offering an opportunity for a clear shot.

Rams started to spill out everywhere when Kurt barked, “there he is, do you see him?” I kind of panicked and said, “no”! Kurt replied, “he is more to your right,” as he was glassing over my shoulder. I lowered my scope power from 18x to 12x, swung my rifle to the right, and located Broom. He was approximately 360 yards away, standing broadside facing downhill. By this time, I had already dialed my dope on the elevation turret on my scope. I told Kurt I got him, and in a desperate attempt to calm and slow me down, he shouted, “is your dope good?” I said, “yup,” Kurt calmly answered with, “okay, spotter ready.”

I wanted to soak in this moment, but I had been watching this sheep for a week, and it was time to get my hands on him. So, after I heard Kurt say he was ready, I squeezed off a shot a split second later. For the next few seconds, there was confusion. The shot felt perfect, but I swore I heard Kurt say, “high.” Rattled, I quickly ran the bolt, shucked another round in the chamber. Trying to find Broom, I was wondering what just happened. In a panic, I yelled, “it was high?” and I heard, “no, it was good!” At about the same time, I found Broom, his legs were going out, and he began to roll. I got up from behind the gun and watched him roll until he stopped. Rams were scattering everywhere, and I turned to Kurt and just smiled. I could hear Casey excitedly screaming in Kurt's earbud from the two-way radio.

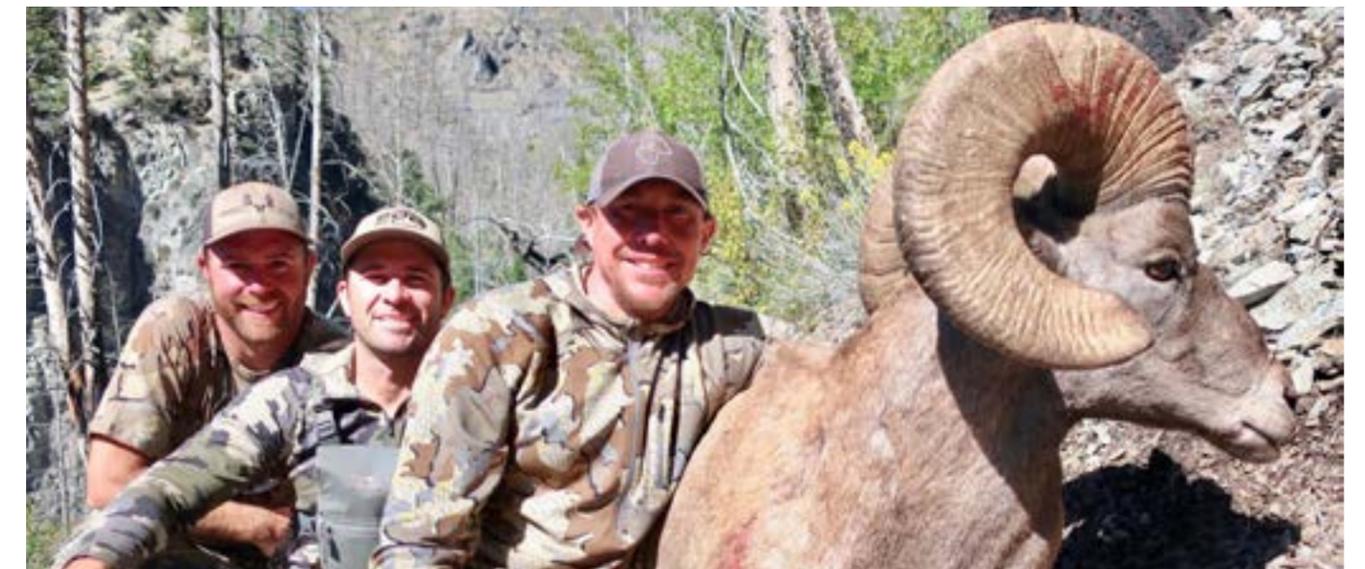
We had just crushed an awesome ram in the FCW, and it was an incredible feeling. I didn't cry, scream, yell, or jump up and down. I just walked over, fist-bumped Kurt, and heard “congratulations” from Casey over the radio.

We gathered our stuff, dropped down, and went back up to reach Broom. He stopped rolling thanks the tree he was wrapped around. We took a ton of pictures once Casey made it to Broom's final resting place. We broke him down and divided the meat. Along with my share of the meat, I loaded up the head and cape on my pack. Finally, we shouldered our packs, synched our waist belts, and completed the slow climb back to the top. Eventually, we made it back to camp around 10:30 pm. It was a long day, and we were toast. I drank one celebratory beer and called it a night. We all took ibuprofen and crawled into bed. We woke up to snow falling and strong winds blowing. With no organization, we stuffed our trucks with gear and headed to Salmon, ID.



A little sore and stiff-legged, we stumbled into the Idaho Fish and Game regional office to check in my ram. They aged him at 8.5 years and plugged his right horn. I signed the big game mortality report, got my copy, and we were finished. Regretfully, it seemed that it was over before it started. We loaded up and drove south, back to Texas.

I really don't consider myself a sheep hunter now. I am just a fortunate individual who experienced a rare sheep hunt. In a year out of control, as is 2020, I felt lucky to kill such an animal. Statistically and financially, I can't complete a slam. But I can dream and drop more money than I would like to admit on more applications and raffles; because this is how I achieved this dream, a simple application and a lot of luck.





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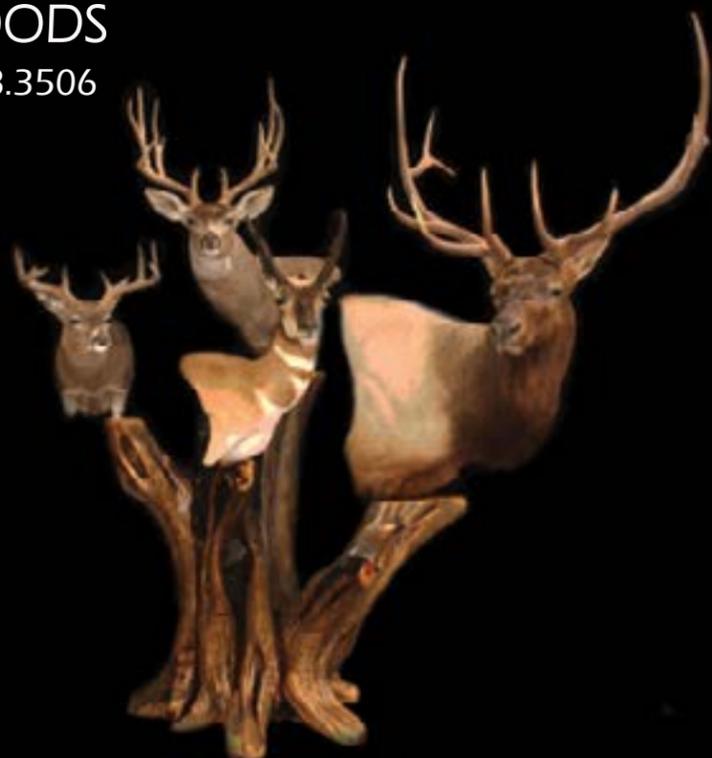
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COYOTE CACKLE ALERT

by Mike Slegers

I was working at home, per my state's COVID19 stay-at-home order, when I received the news I had been "successful" in drawing a bighorn sheep tag! The year 2020 had already been a year to remember and it was not even halfway over! I probably stared at my email for an hour, reading it several times over. My excitement was high, but I also felt a bit overwhelmed with the task of filling a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. For me to do this hunt self-guided, I knew I was going to have to give it everything I had, both in the field and off. I had no previous sheep hunting experience, and knew I was going to learn a lot in the coming months.

I spent a few months researching, conditioning, and e-scouting. Then, it was time to put some boots on the ground and start filling my optics with some rams during the scouting season. I invested in the "do the hunt, before the hunt" strategy, but still, I had no idea how difficult the task of finding rams was truly going

to be. Through five scouting trips, I had only glassed rams on one trip. Rams seemed to be scarce in my hunt unit. Even though my scout trips did not turn up lots of rams, I knew they were still productive. I put trust in my research conversations with key individuals, who reminded me that just because I did not turn up rams in this timbered unit did not mean that they were not there.

The day before the season opened, my hunting buddies, Daniel, Donnie, and I backpacked to the ridge where I had seen the most rams in my preseason scouting. On the evening of day one we spotted a band of ten rams move out of timber and into a treeless avalanche chute. Two of the rams were mature and worth tagging. Unfortunately, they were a couple of miles away and there was not enough legal daylight in the day to get into a shootable position. We glassed them till dark and put them to bed.

The next morning, we glassed the rams no further than 200 yards from where we left them the night before. We planned to traverse the face of the mountain and get to a shootable distance. A cold front was blowing in and it was starting to snow at our elevation of 10,000'. We moved on with our plan through the snow and low visibility to where we thought the rams should be, but they were not there! We took refuge from the wind and snow in a small island of trees on this rocky face of the mountain to wait out the weather. The band of rams never emerged.

A few days passed and we spent countless hours behind our glass trying to find those rams again. I finally found them late in a rocky avalanche chute one evening where I last saw them in a rocky avalanche chute. I watched them until I could not discern sheep from rocks and went back to camp to relay the news. The excitement of another pursuit jolted us with the motivation we desperately needed after not finding rams for days.

At first light, the face of the mountain was void of life. After an hour of waiting I heard a "clank" in the distance. I motioned to my friend Donnie and asked if he heard it. Within five minutes, all ten rams presented themselves from the sparse trees, including the two mature rams I was after.

I connected the dots; the "clank" was likely the two mature rams butting heads in the distance. I ranged them at just over 1k yards, however they were working their way closer to us. Just as they were getting to a more comfortable shooting distance, they became obscured by the terrain. The rams stayed hidden for an hour before they became visible again. Now they were feeding and working their way back into the sparse trees and away from me. If they made it to the trees, I would not have a play on them. I set up for a shot with my long-range rifle. I aimed at the largest ram and squeezed the trigger... miss! The shot grazed over his back and drifted left from the wind on the other side of the drainage. All the rams scrambled and huddled together under a tree. I found them again in my rifle scope, got stable, adjusted for wind and distance, and fired another shot. Miss! Over his back again. The rams all formed a single file line and trotted off into the timber.



I sat there in disbelief. Was this going to be my sheep hunt story? Was this THE opportunity of harvesting a mature ram? Knowing the rams had left the country, we returned to camp. The rest of my first nine days of the hunt were spent trying to locate this band of rams, but had no success. We packed up camp and went our separate ways, just in time for wildfire smoke to fill the skies.

Weeks went by and as I sat out during my hunt. I kept tabs on my hunt units' weather from 350 miles away. The air was filled with smoke and the visibility was low as I waited. All this time off from hunting gave me some time to ponder my next strategy and review all the intel I had gathered from my research.

I made plans to hunt the final nine days of the hunt season. During my 6.5-hour drive to my unit, I mentally prepared myself for the reality of eating the tag. I was at peace with it. I knew that regardless what happened, I had a satisfying experience – but it would be so much sweeter if I harvested.

I met my buddy Donnie at base camp. The air was filled with wildfire smoke when I arrived. It was just an obstacle I was going to have to overcome. We formed a glassing strategy that always kept the sun to our backs. My brother-in-law arrived early the next morning. As we split in different directions to glass the sheep country. I reached a vantage point in the adjacent hunt unit by dawn. The smoke was limiting my long-distance glassing, but it was getting better as the sun's rays got stronger.

Within minutes I spot five sheep - all rams - on a treeless ridge that is nearly three miles from my position. I tried to size them all up from that distance, but it's difficult with the smoke. I could tell one's body was bigger than the others and its horns are easier to see. I had a feeling those rams were part of the same band of rams I saw on my first hunt. I rushed down to the nearest road to round up my sheep hunting squad.

By mid-morning we had our gear prepared and a plan of attack. The rams were located near the skyline of a ridge, but there was a lot of country along the ridge above them. Donnie and I decided to hike up the opposite drainage and get above the rams, then work our way along the ridgeline toward the rams to get a better look. We kept off the skyline as to not expose our position on our way.

We found four of the rams bedded against some rocks



on the ridgeline. I set up my rifle in a prone position while Donnie continued to look through the spotter. We were 575 yards away, with a small drainage between us and the rams. The biggest ram was perched on a rock shelf, above the others, and he was worth tagging. All I could see was his head, though. We watched the bedded rams for three hours. They occasionally would get up to stretch and turn around, but my ram never got up. I waited for my best shot opportunity.

I had to take several breaks off the gun to stretch and hydrate. During one of my breaks I hear a coyote cackling below us, in the opposite direction of the rams. I did not think much of it. Donnie firmly whispered to me, "They're up! They're up! Get on the gun". I threw myself to the ground and slid into position. All the rams had stood up and were alert, looking for the coyote. This was my chance. My shooting rest was stable. Scope elevation turret was dialed to my yardage and ... I squeezed off the trigger. "Smoked him", Donnie said.

That coyote was the good fortune I needed! On my traverse to my ram, a wave of emotion hit me. My wife and three young children had been praying for me during the 23 days that I was absent from their lives pursuing this dream hunt. Making them proud will forever be memorable. I laid my hands on the beautiful ram I harvested. It was an unmatched feeling of complete closure to an incredible adventure.



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My son Taaffe extended a hand down to help me up the last little bit of the canyon I had just labored up. He then conveyed the news that Toad Jafek wanted us to cross back across the big valley we had crossed earlier and meet him a mile or so on the other side. Taaffe had been waiting for me to catch up and explained that Toad had spotted a side canyon and had a “hunch” that we should back track and go check it out. Toad was already on his way, and would meet us at a small mountain he had pointed out to Taaffe. Our original objective on opening morning of the 2020 Idaho sheep season was a high overlook above Big Jacks Creek. However, five miles into our hike, the hunch on my guide’s part found us making a detour to the side canyon. Little did I know at the time the hunch would cumulate several months of planning and scouting. Funny thing how hunches work sometimes.

Like most sheep hunts, this one had started out with looking over harvest reports and drawing odds and trying to decide between a California bighorn unit with a two percent chance of drawing or a Rocky bighorn unit with less than one percent. Kind of like choosing between a five-number lottery or a six-number lottery, but a point is a point, what the heck. Taking into consideration the different unit drawing odds, plus horn length and past success rates, I put in for Unit 41-2, better known as Big Jacks and hoped for the best, figuring I would just be adding another “not successful” notice to my ever-growing sheep application e-file.

Striking California GOLD in Idaho

by Tony Caligiuri

Sheep conservation and sheep hunting have been long term passions of mine and I have been blessed to hunt them on many different occasions over the years. More importantly, I get to spend most of my spare time working on sheep related conservation projects in volunteer roles as a director with the Wild Sheep Foundation, and as Vice President of Conservation for the Boone and Crockett Club. And like thousands of sheep hunting enthusiasts across North America, I have almost as much fun applying for sheep tags as actually hunting, so when a tag pops out once every 20 years or so it is time for a celebration. On May 15th Idaho Fish and Game sent out their email notices. I did not get around to reading mine notice until late in the day, and then it took a while to sink in. At that point I realized I was in over my head, as Big Jacks is a wilderness area with limited road access. I was going to need some help. A call to my friend, Jim Warner, President of the Idaho Wild Sheep Foundation, quickly fixed that problem. “War Eagle Outfitters” Jim said without hesitation. “Toad Jafek, his dad Ken and his brother Dan, really know that country and you’ll have the added benefit of KC Ramsey coming along, he can get to places in there that no one else can”.

War Eagle Outfitters was started by Ken Jafek in 1982, and is one the oldest outfitting operations in Idaho. It is a family affair with Ken, his wife Dolly and sons Dennis, better known as “Toad”, and Dan all contributing to the success of the longtime business. After talking to Toad and making arrangements to hunt the first week of the season, I knew I was in good hands. Toad, KC, and Jason Myers scouted the unit several times through the summer. Toad kept me updated on what they were finding. The last week in June, Toad had found an older ram that carried his weight really well but then he disappeared for a month.

In late July, Toad, KC and KC’s son Carson, hiked into the canyon, KC and Carson went upstream and Toad downstream. KC located the big ram, along with seven other rams, and managed to get some video footage of them through his spotting scope. Just as he did earlier in the summer, the big ram again dropped out of sight. Subsequent scouting trips showed no sign of either him, or his merry band of buddies. Smoke from the fires in California, and an unusually hot summer made for even tougher scouting conditions. However, sheep hunters are eternal optimists and our spirits were high when my son Taaffe and I left Iowa on the long drive to, planning to arrive in Idaho five days before the season was to open.

My son Taaffe, who is an accomplished hard-core hunter, and always up for an adventure, had agreed to accompany me, and would prove to be a tremendous help on the hunt. We had planned to arrive in time to help with some pre-scouting. During our drive, Toad, Dan and Ken were finishing setting up their camp just outside the wilderness area on some private land where they had secured permission. While we were driving out Toad called and said he had located the big ram again and things were looking up. He directed us to meet his dad, Ken, at his house near Malta, and follow him on a shortcut to camp. Ken could easily play the starring role in any Hollywood western movie, passing for Sam Elliot’s brother. In fact, he couldn’t remember the last time he was without this trademark moustache. “Maybe when I was in the service” he chuckled “and that was well over 60 years ago!” He is a gifted storyteller and it was truly enjoyable to hear his chronicles of everything from grizzly hunting in the Yukon, to catching a jaguar in Mexico for a research project. Lion hunting and hounds are his first love. Ken and his dogs have put hundreds up a tree, including his personal best of 46 cats treed in a single year for an Idaho Fish and Game research project. He guided his first sheep hunt many years ago, literally in his backyard on the mountain behind his house. He is a lion man first and foremost, but sheep run a close second. I was to find out that spending time with Ken was a bigger joy for me than the actual hunt.





Normally, this would not have been bad as sheep terrain goes, but the temperatures made it a bit of a challenge, and required all of us to pack plenty of frozen bottles of water. As the privilege of being the oldest, my pack was the lightest, and I was extremely thankful for having a son and a guide who are both mountain goat tough, and conditioned to the heat. I pared down to only what I knew I would need but made sure to pack plenty of high protein snacks and the ever-important water. My rifle, a light weight Bansner .300 Win Mag, was a veteran of seven prior sheep hunts and as reliable as a rifle can get. The first few miles were relatively easy going and it was enjoyable to experience a different kind of sheep habitat, not quite desert sheep country but not Rocky Mountain bighorn country either. The early morning air was cool and pleasant, but as the sun rose higher in the cloudless sky, the terrain got a little more challenging and the water started going down at a faster pace.

After crossing a long sweeping valley and gaining 500 feet or so of altitude up the other side, Toad had glassed the smaller side canyon that had, so far, been hidden from view. This is the canyon he had gotten the hunch a ram might think would be a pretty good place to go after an electrical storm. A couple of hours and several small canyon crossings later found us close to the end of our detour.

Toad and Taaffe were the first up to the edge of the canyon; I lagged behind by a few yards. I had no sooner slipped out of my pack and rifle when Toad and Taaffe begin an exchange of animated looks and hand gestures while sliding backwards as fast as they could. We had somehow managed to walk within 500 yards of a band of five rams resting in the shade of the canyon rim. The big ram was with them. A blind hunch on Toad's part to check out the side canyon had put us at third base, but the slide home was about to get difficult. We back crawled the rest of the way off the rim without the sheep seeing us and whispered a quick plan to maneuver to a rock outcropping about 300 yards above the ledge where the rams were bedded.

Toad thought that the biggest ram was somewhere in the center of the group. He also thought as soon as we got to the edge, the rams would spook and start moving out since we would be out of cover when the rams came back into view. In most sheep hunting situations, you have plenty of time to set up for your shot and get a solid rest, but that was not to be the case on this hunt. We eased out over the edge and Toad whispered "that's him, that's our big ram, second from the front" and Taaffe

whispered the range at 280 yards, but from where I was, I had absolutely no way to get into my rifle for anything but an off-hand shot. Sliding a pack to the edge for a rest was out of the question as it would have put us in full view of the already spooky sheep.

There were some higher rocks to my right where I could get somewhat of a rest, so I eased up leaned out, steadying my rifle on the rock. The rams were now walking in a line at 330 yards, stopping now and again to look back at the commotion. I shot and hit the ram. He walked another 100 yards and laid down on a ledge. It was a well-placed shot, through both lungs, he was not going anywhere. But I have a personal rule, unless a game animal is completely lifeless, it gets a follow up shot. I shot a second time, and again it passed through both lungs. Unfortunately, it also caused him to topple off the ledge straight down a half mile, into the bottom of the canyon.

A little bit of elation disappeared on the faces of Toad and Taaffe, as they realized they would soon be packing out the lion's share of the horns, cape and meat, straight up a half mile of steep canyon wall. We hiked down to the ram and admired his battle-scarred horns, the overlay worn completely off. The heavy based ram would eventually net out a few eighths shy of 170 inches after drying, making it one of the better California bighorns taken in Idaho this season. For me, killing a ram is a huge meld of emotions that only other hunters can understand. The accomplishment is diminished by taking an animal off the mountain that we work so hard to put there in the first place. But sheep hunting is also an important part of sheep conservation. Something else about sheep hunting that has always appealed to me is the opportu-

nity to age a ram to determine the oldest in a band. We knew we had been successful, as the other rams stood on the canyon rim above us, giving us a second chance to confirm our original decision.

We aged him at eight and half years old, took some quick pictures and begin the task of boning, caping and packing up head, horns, hide and meat. The heat was oppressive! Taaffe and Toad went straight back up the canyon wall, each with at least 100 pounds in their packs; I lagged behind them. I was pretty proud of both my son and my guide as that is a hard job on level ground, much less straight up a half mile of canyon wall in 95-degree heat. Drinking as much water as we could at the top, and watching the afternoon sun give away to the coolness of evening, we started the long trek back to the truck to cumulate a 12-mile day. I don't ever remember finishing a sheep hunt in the daylight and this one was no exception.

Checking the ram in at the Jerome regional office gave me the chance to meet Idaho Fish and Game biologists Jake Powell and Sierra Robotcek. I learned a little more about the sheep in units 41-1 and 41-2. California bighorn sheep historically ranged from southern British Columbia, down through Washington, Oregon and into Northern California. It is generally accepted that as late as 1920 they were also found as far east as northern Nevada and southwestern Idaho and the department determined in the early 1960's that they would be the best suited of the two subspecies for transplant in the Owyhee Desert. "Besides the fact that we believed this was historically California bighorn range, California bighorns are the lower elevation sheep of the two subspecies and they are more adaptable to arid conditions

I also learned that there is a good dose of race car driver in his genetic make-up, as Taaffe was trying to keep up with him on the way to camp. He commented several times "If I get a ticket, you and Ken are paying for it!" Pulling off the road and into camp, we were greeted by the sight of wall tents with twin beds, a large cook fly and the sound of a generator powering a freezer and a refrigerator. Besides providing the obvious comforts, the freezer was a necessity as we would need frozen water bottles for the hikes in the 90 degree plus heat. I was also insurance for keeping the cape from slipping if we were successful. The top shelf condition and comfort of the camp was the first indication of how professional the War Eagle crew proved to be. Also, it was a reflection of all the work that Toad had put into scouting and pre-planning the hunt. A little while later, Toad, Dan, and KC came in from different directions. Toad broke the news that an electrical storm the day before had split the rams into smaller groups and they again disappeared into the vastness of the big canyon.

We glassed and looked for two days without luck. Opening day found us going after another band of rams that KC and Dan had located. They were too far away to know exactly what size they were, but we were certain the big ram was not with them, as he had been in a completely different area before the electrical storm. We loaded up with water, optics, food and minimal gear for an overnight stay, if necessary. We left camp early, trying to beat the heat and rattlesnakes on the seven-mile hike to the rim of the main canyon. I had hunted sheep for 30 years but never in canyon country, so the idea of glassing down to find sheep was going to be a new experience.



The War Eagle Crew
Toad Jafek, Ken Jafek, KC Ramsey, Dan Jafek

since they rut earlier and the lambs are born when the ewes have maximum opportunity for the best spring forage” explained Powell.

The reintroduction came to fruition when 12 California bighorn sheep from British Columbia were released into Little Jacks Creek in the fall of 1967. The Little Jacks herd continued to grow to the point where the first hunting season was held in 1975. Even though the Little Jacks herd expanded in size and range, it did not colonize a Big Jacks herd as hoped. Another transplant, again using sheep obtained from British Columbia, was successfully carried out in Big Jacks in 1988. Ironically, today, individual sheep from both herds are known to cross between the two units. The total population of the Big Jacks and Little Jacks herds is about 300 total animals.

Hunters potentially thinking about applying for these units should realize that while the units do have some more readily accessible areas, much of the better sheep habitat is way back from the road and water is non-existent in much of the hunting area. In my case I could not have done this hunt without a guide. I can't say enough good things about Toad Jafek and War Eagle.

There are some other interesting twists, turns and coincidences to this hunt. Like many sheep hunters, my passion for sheep and sheep hunting started as a kid in the flat lands of the middle west reading Jack O'Connor. O'Connor was an Idaho resident and I serve on the board of directors for the Jack O'Connor Center in Lewiston. Jack's son Bradford, a noted sheep hunter in his own right, wrote an article about the first hunt for California bighorns in the state of Washington, which were also translocated British Columbia sheep and is quite knowledgeable about the early relocation efforts of California bighorns. My hunting partner, good friend and fellow O'Connor board member, Blair Hansen is a former commanding officer of Mountain Home AFB, where he flew many “missions” down Big Jacks Canyon in his F-15 looking for sheep. And though I have hunted sheep in five different decades and taken multiple Stones, Dall's, Deserts and Fannin's, I had never completed a Grand Slam. I actually never thought much about it and did not even realize it until Toad reminded me. How ironic that it happened above a creek named Jack. Hopefully old Cactus Jack was watching down and got a good chuckle out of that.



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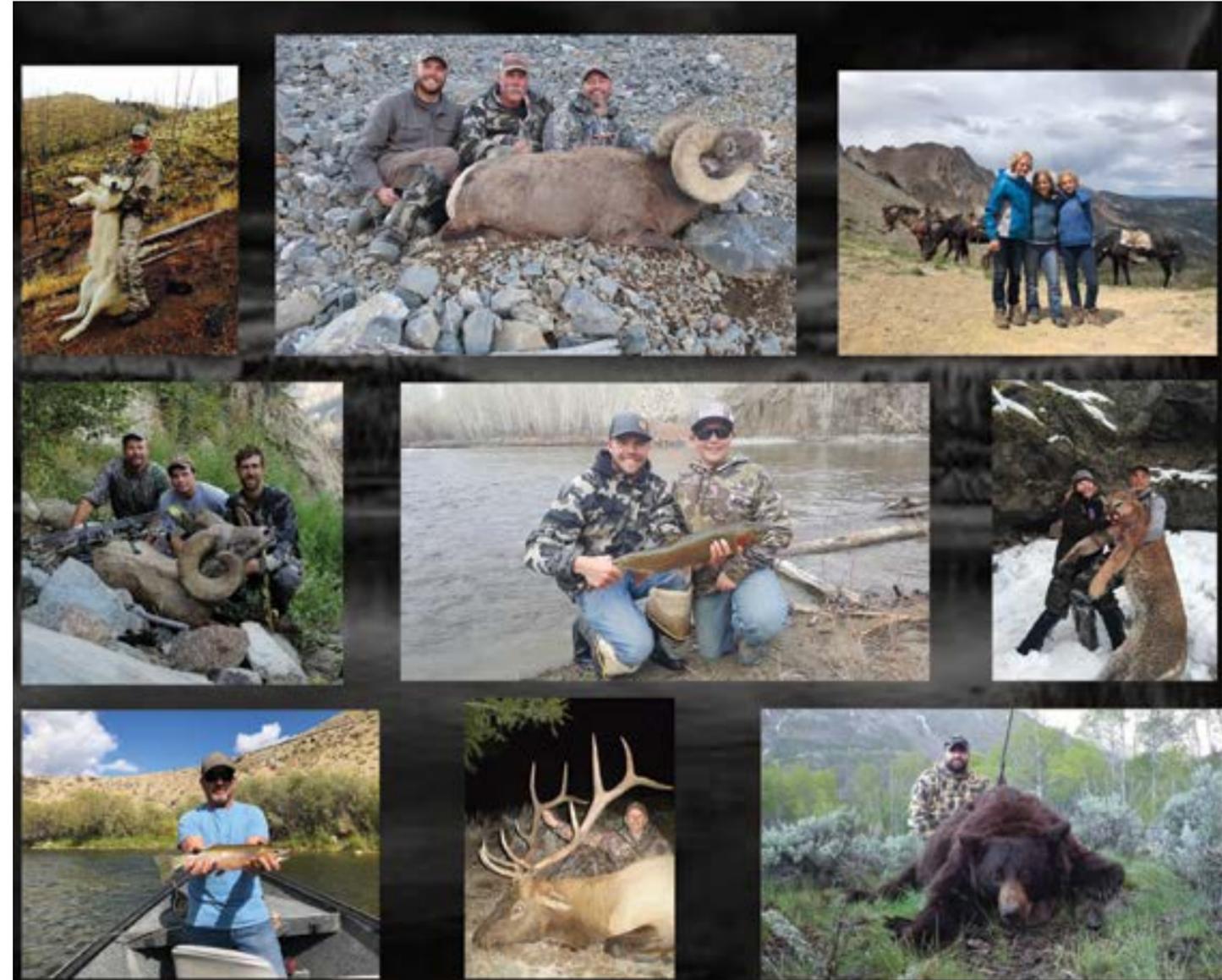
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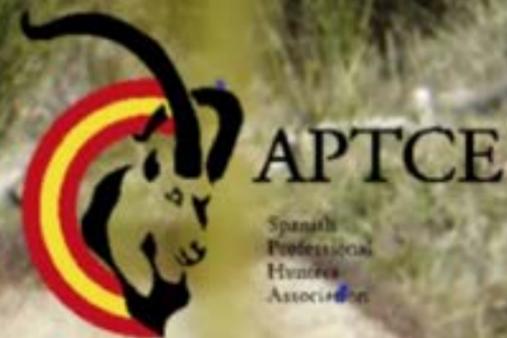
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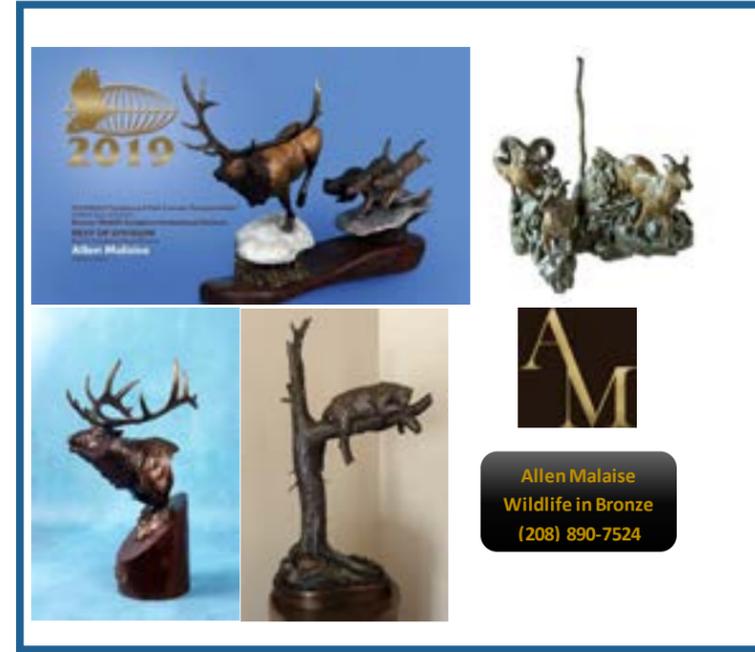
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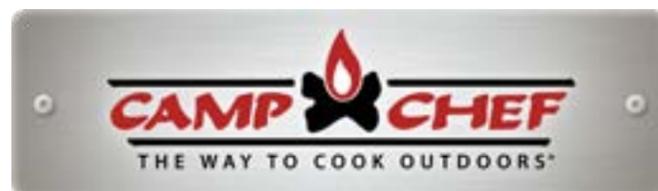
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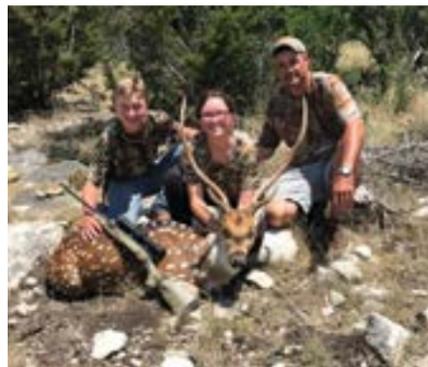
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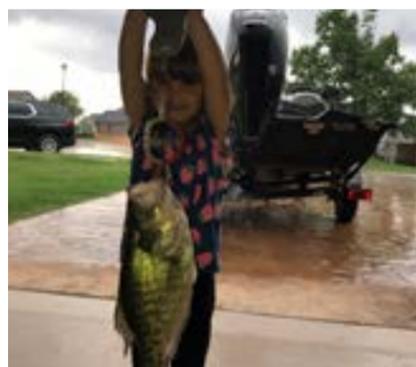
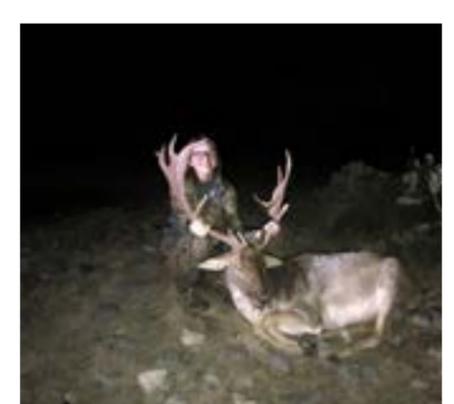
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