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SUMMER 2021

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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.

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MISSION

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 650 committed members.

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PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

As I write this address, your board is pushing for a successful first-time outdoor event to bring our Idaho Wild Sheep Family back together and put this pandemic behind us. It has negatively affected us all for way to long.

As a board we decided to sell out the raffle tickets and give away the Ultima Thule Dall Sheep hunt before the June 12th banquet. This allowed as much preparation time as possible for the winner. We are grateful for the support of getting those tickets sold out in a very short time. We gave this sheep hunt away virtually March 6th. The board has done our best to make sure these virtual events are as exciting and as real as we possibly can make them. Believe us we are ready for the real thing!

Congratulations to Don Colter for winning this hunt! Don has had the sheep bug without getting to hunt sheep for himself. Don has been applying everywhere he can and getting in on all the raffles for his chance to hunt a ram. Now he is going to get his chance. Don has never let the fact he has not had a chance to hunt sheep himself, prevent him from getting involved and volunteering his time and efforts to wild sheep conservation. Thanks Don and good luck!

A special thanks to Ultima Thule Outfitters, Paul & Donna Clause and Don Martin. They have done so much to support sheep conservation throughout our Wild Sheep family nationally and at the chapter level.

It has been fun and exciting to see people drawing tags as states have started releasing draw results. To see people's reactions or hear the excitement in their voices is a good reminder to us of why conservation is so important for the future. Get involved with conservation all you can! There is always a need for help and your involvement will make a difference.

The Idaho Wild Sheep Foundation has conducted annual board elections and appreciate all those that participated by casting your vote. It's exciting to see some new talented board members joining the team.

New board members bring in innovative and creative ideas to help us stay a strong conservation group and will help lead the way into the future. We also want to thank those past board members. All have devoted a lot of personal hours and stress dedicated to this membership and the effort for wild sheep conservation. Please take the time to thank them for their efforts.

After our June 12th banquet I will be stepping into the role of past president. Bill London will be our new incoming president. Bill has a very strong conservation mind and makes sounds decisions. Additionally, Josh Miller will step up as the incoming Vice-President. Josh has a background in natural resources and has spearheaded the ID WSF social media efforts.

We are in good hands!

It has been my honor to serve as your president!

Jim Warner
President
Idaho Wild Sheep Foundation





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BRAD MORLOCK



EDD WOSLUM



BRUCE MINCHER



PRESTON FUNKHOUSER

Volunteers do not necessarily have the time,
they just have the heart.
- Elizabeth Andrew

Welcome to the Idaho WSF Board of Directors

Matt Hansen

Michael Keady

Mitch McFarland

Tom Sellin

Carter Swain



by Boden Harker

My dad and I were on the road driving across the state for a spring bear hunt. I was listening to music on my AirPods when suddenly my dad smacked me in the shoulder. He had the phone to his ear and a big smile on his face. I pulled out an AirPod just in time to hear him say, “You just drew your sheep tag!” I couldn’t believe it. The rest of the trip was spent calling everyone I knew, telling them the good news. I was able to harvest my first bear on that trip, a beautiful chocolate brown phase bear with long thick fur. The bear hunt was great but I was already starting to think about big rams in the desert.

I love wrestling and began wrestling when I was 3 years old. I work very hard at the sport and have had the opportunity

to represent Idaho all over the country. I have wrestled for Team USA and have won many nationally ranked tournaments, including USA Nationals in Iowa. Wrestling for me pretty much goes year around and weekends are usually spent traveling or practicing. With COVID slowing school, wrestling and most everything else down in the spring of 2020, it provided me with more hunting opportunities. A week before I connected on my spring bear, I was able to harvest my first turkey and what a first he was. A very rare leucistic (smoke phase) tom.

I could not believe the spring I was having and that I still had a sheep tag in my pocket! A few years-ago my dad was able to harvest his first ram in Wyoming. I had heard stories and seen pictures about that adventure many times.

I remember my dad and uncle talking about the challenges of hunting sheep self-guided. Long backpack trips up high in to sheep country. Hunting an area you have never been in before. Knowing you only have one chance to get it right and dealing with wilderness boundaries. Mental and physical fatigue that you try to prepare for but cannot completely understand until you’ve lived it. Now add to the fact that you are smack dab in the middle of grizzly bear infested mountains of northwestern Wyoming! Of all the times I heard the story, the topic of how tough it was, always came up. My dad had told me if I substitute the grizzly bears for 90 degree plus heat and rattlesnakes more than likely I would be facing the same challenges. That is just sheep hunting.

As we made the long drive on the first scouting trip I thought about those stories and the challenges. I started to wonder if we could find sheep. Was I tough enough? Could I make the shot if that time came? I am only 10 years-old. I don’t know of or have heard of any other 10 year-old harvesting a ram. I was starting to wonder if I could do this. We were about halfway into the drive when I finally asked the question, “Dad” do you really think I’m going to get my ram?” He was quiet for a little bit then the reply came, “Boden, if there is any 10 year-old kid that can pull this off it is you! You know that in hunting there are no guarantees, that is why it is called hunting. But don’t think just because you are only 10 years-old that you can’t do this. You are in better shape than most grown men that I know. You can outshoot most of the grown men that I know. So, if you will hunt this sheep every day with the same determination and mental tough-

ness that you show on the wrestling mat and if you utilize the knowledge and shooting skills you have learned from shooting competitions, then yes. I really think you are going to get your ram. Besides you’re going to have some pretty experienced hunters in sheep camp with you. And I can tell you one thing for sure, if I was a big ram in your hunting area, I would not want you and that group of guys coming after me. End of story.” A big smile came across my face and I don’t think it left until we hit canyon country.

We got pretty lucky that evening and found a band of rams right off the bat. Three of the rams were potential shooters. We spent the next three (3) days looking in different areas but never turned up any sheep. Three more scouting trips were taken with one more band of rams being found on the opposite side of the unit. As opening day got closer we decided to try to relocate and hunt the first band of eight rams we had found.

The end of August came and it was finally time to start my sheep hunt. Day one was spent traveling to the location, getting a comfortable camp set up and getting a little glassing in. Day two was the day before the opener and it was spent glassing, getting ready for opening morning and celebrating two birthdays. My uncle Rance and I share the same birthday. Both of us couldn’t think of a better place to celebrate our birthday than on a sheep hunt.

That evening everyone was getting geared up to head out to their spike camps where they would be spending the night for opening morning. Two of my uncles, Clinton and Tyson, were on dirt bikes with backpacks stuffed so full the zippers couldn’t shut. I noticed Tyson only wearing shorts and sandals. Knowing that his boots couldn’t fit in his backpack with all his gear my dad asked him where his hunting boots were. Tyson replied confidently, “I don’t need them.” I asked him, “What if we find sheep tomorrow? What if



you wreck that bike? Those rocks will tear you up.” He pulled his sunglasses down and looked over the top of them at me and said, “Boden, lets get one thing straight. If I wreck this bike the only thing that’s going to get hurt are the rocks. Besides, Jesus wore sandals and he got around just fine!” I looked at my dad who was shaking his head as he said, “Well Jesus could also walk on water.” Tyson fired up his dirt bike and revved the motor to end the discussion. As he sat there revving his bike he yelled, “Don’t worry about it Bo, it’s reverse psychology. If I wear hunting boots we aren’t going to see a dang thing tomorrow. But if I wear sandals, you are going to kill a ram!” With that Tyson and Clinton tore out of camp like a shot out of a gun. My uncles are crazy!!

That evening my dad and I glassed up three rams but they were not the target rams that we were looking for. It was still exciting to see sheep which made it even tougher to sleep that night. Opening morning was finally here and we were all in our positions overlooking canyon country. We spotted the three smaller rams from the night before but nothing new from our vantage point. It was mid-morning when we got the signal from Eli and my Grandpa Layne that we needed to get down to their location. As we arrived we could tell they had something in their spotting scopes. They were looking at a lone ram that had a lot of potential. We got to see the ram for just a little bit and then he slipped into a side canyon out of view. The lone ram was one of the three target rams that we had seen from the scouting trip back in June. The decision was made to cross the big canyon and go after the ram. The

canyon was steep, the temperature was rising, but the hunt was on and everyone was excited!

As we got up to the opposite side of the canyon the rest of the guys hung back while my dad and I inched our way along the rim of the small side canyon where the ram had disappeared. We moved at a snail’s pace, glassing high and low, looking for the ram or possible other rams that might be in the area. The wind direction was good and we felt like the ram was tucked in the canyon shading himself from the rising sun. We were in our creep mode stock for about an hour when I heard the words I was wanting to hear. “There he is!” My dad motioned me to crawl quietly to the edge where he was sitting. When I got to him, he whispered that the ram was halfway down the canyon on a little bench in the shade, fast asleep. As I looked him over, I remember thinking he looked a lot bigger at 200 yards than at 1200 yards. He was definitely a ram that I would be happy with. My dad signaled to the rest of our sheep team and as they approached we began to set up for the shot. With the ram bedded only 225 yards away, we moved as slow and quietly as we could. I was in position with a rock-solid rest and turret dialed. All I needed was for the ram to stand. As I sat there watching the ram in my scope, I could hear whispers behind me. The concern was if the wind was to change suddenly or if the ram was to spook, the shot would all of the sudden become much more difficult. We felt like it would be better to take the shot on our terms, when we were ready. So, the decision was made to take the ram in his bed.

I had been pretty calm looking at the ram in the scope knowing that we weren’t going to shoot until he stood but now that I had the greenlight,

I could feel my heartbeat and breathing start to quicken. I got off the trigger and came out of the scope, took a few deep breaths and started over. This time the crosshairs were steady, I found my mark and I squeezed the trigger.

As the gun went off, I looked up in time to see the ram roll off his ledge and out of sight. We could hear him sliding in the rocks to the bottom of the canyon. I turned to my dad, gave him a huge hug and said, “I just got my ram!” He hugged me back and said, “Yes you did son, congratulations!! It took me 28 years to be kicked out of the < 1% club and here you are doing it in 365 ½ days!! That’s pretty awesome buddy!”

As we climbed down the canyon to the ram, I remembered my dad warning me about sheep fever. Little did I know that when I crossed the small side of the canyon I was about to find out how real it really was. We got to the ram and he was awesome. He had a little bit of everything we were looking for. 14 3/8” bases, 33” long, 7 ½ - 8 years old and some character. I couldn’t have been happier. I know I haven’t been hunting long but I have been a part of a few successful hunts. I have harvested a good mule deer buck, an antelope, a turkey and a bear. All of which was



very exciting. But when I grabbed that ram for the first time, something grabbed me right back. I don’t know how to describe it other than it was just different.

Sheep fever is real!

The next little bit was spent taking pictures and reliving the events of the morning. As I looked at all those people that helped me with my hunt, I could tell that everyone of them had a little bit of sheep fever too. We broke down the ram, filled our backpacks

and started the steep hot climb back across the canyons. On the hike back I couldn’t help but think what an awesome experience this was and how thankful I was for the opportunity to experience this adventure. It will be a hunt I will never forget. The fact that I got to do it all on my first day of being 11 was just icing on the cake. We made it back to camp that night and celebrated with cold Mountain Dew and all the tacos you could eat. The next morning half of the sheep team left camp to get back to their busy every day lives. My dad, grandpa, Tyson, Clint and I de-

ecided to stay for one more day and just enjoy canyon country.

I cannot thank the people that helped me on this hunt enough. My mom and dad, my grandpa Layne, my two crazy uncles Tyson and Clinton, fellow birthday boy Rance, Joe, Kevin, and my two new sheep hunting friends, Eli and Cameron. Thank you! I can’t wait to return the favor. Also, a big thank you goes to the IWSF. I am now a life member and hope that my little part will help put and keep wild sheep on the mountains and in the canyons.



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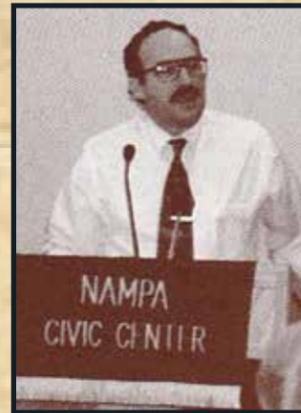
HISTORY BOOKS



1991 Idaho Bighorn Permit Sells
 Left to right: Wayne Schwabrow, Idaho Chapter President; Stephen Baarton, Director of Administration, IDFG; Bob DiGrazia, 1st Vice President FNAWS; Tom Reinecker, Director of Wildlife, IDFG.



1989
 Hayden Lambson of Pocatello took this outstanding ram while hunting with Dale Towell in Owyhee County.



1997
 Dale Towell seminar presentation Sheep Day Seminar



1996
 Lloyd Oldenburg and his wife smiling after Lloyd was presented with the 'State Statesman' Award for 1995 by FNAWS.



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.
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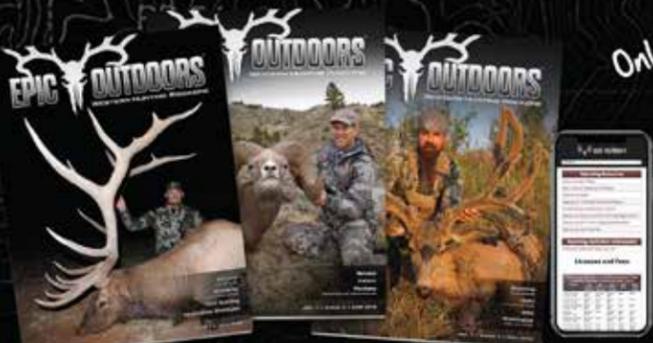
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*When was
the
Last Time
you did
Something
for the
First Time?*

by Tammy Scott

While driving to Evanston, Wyoming the words of Darius Ricker's song, "When was the last time you did something for the first time?" came on the air. Very appropriate.

I have always wanted a crossbow, and I have always wanted to hunt moose. When I drew a Wyoming Moose tag, I figured this was the perfect time. My outfitter, Big Rack Outfitters, was cool with me hunting with a crossbow. Being that I am primarily a rifle hunter, this was all new to me. Crossbow, bolts (aka arrows), broadheads, rail lube, string wax things I had never given any thought to previously. My home state of Colorado only allows a crossbow for

hunting during the rifle season, which means there aren't many crossbows sold there. When you go online to research crossbows you are quickly overwhelmed by the many choices. After talking with a lot of archery people, and crossing my fingers, I bought a crossbow and started practicing in the backyard.

Weeks before the hunting season started, Big Rack Outfitters' founder, owner and main guide, Dustin, already had four bulls that he was watching.

Sunday, opening day, I had a small army for the hunting crew, Dustin, Dusty and Wacey. We saw a previously unseen small bull in the morning. Later in the afternoon, Kade and Breegan joined us

and we saw a nice bull down in the river bottom. We decided to go after him because there were a lot of willows to help conceal us. Dustin and I climbed down the steep mountain side to the flats, leaving 12-year-old Breegan on top to guide us in with hand signals. We got to within 20 yards, set up the tripod and I was getting ready with my crossbow. As Dustin was raising his arm with the range finder the bull took off with a start. While concentrating on the bull, we spooked a cow and calf moose we failed to see. When they took off, the bull went with them. It was exciting to be that close to such a large animal without a rifle.

Monday morning Dustin picked me up at the hotel at our usual 5:45 AM

and we headed to the hunt area. While scouting, Dustin got a text from his deer hunter asking if we had gotten a bull yet, because there was a large one near where he was hunting. We headed that way and saw the bull in a hay field at an old homestead. Dustin told me to get ready while he checked out the bull. Dustin came back and said we were going after him. He was excited by its size, but was trying to not get me too excited.

Dustin and I took off in the opposite direction of the bull, crossed a couple of fences, and then headed down a fence line parallel to the bull. Dusty and Wacey stayed behind a barn watching the bull. We could hear, but not see, the sandhill cranes nested up in the field, calling as we walked through.

As we hugged the fence line, Dustin would glance at the bull, which by this point was watching us. The bull started to slowly walk towards the river. Another glance told us the bull was now trotting quickly towards the river. The bull crossed the river and shortly after, so did we. The water was mid-calf deep. By this time Dusty, Wacey and Kade took off in their trucks towards the direction the bull was headed. They got to the top of a mountain and were guiding us in with hand signals. We hiked closer to the base of the mountain, trying to keep our scent from going towards the bull when Wacey joined us. Wacey pointed to where they had last seen the bull, explaining the bull was in the thick willows. We headed that way.

As we stood at the edge of the river, we knew we had to cross it to get closer to the bull, or give up and turn around. The problem was that it wasn't going to be another shallow crossing. Dustin looked at me with an expression of "Are

you game?" and I replied with "Let's go." One never wants wet underwear, but after 20 years of applying for this moose tag, I was going to do whatever it took to get a chance at the bull.

Checking with Dusty and Kade, they guided us in closer to the last known location. We located the bull; he was still in the real thick willows. Dustin kept inching closer trying to catch a glimpse of the bull, while Wacey and I waited. Nothing. We had a choice; either wait him out, which since it was only 8:15 in the morning could mean a long day of waiting and maybe missing him sneak out, or chance going in after him. I'm not known to be timid, so I said to let's go in. Wacey waited while Dustin and I slowly crept into the willows, carefully placing our feet, step by step. We couldn't see the bull, so kept going in deeper and deeper.

The moose in this area are known for having white velvet patches on their antlers, and thankfully so, as this is what Dustin saw – the bull's white velvet. All we could see of the bull was part of his head and right shoulder. We got a little closer, Dustin put the tripod down and ranged him and ranged him at 46 yards. Since he looked a LOT closer than that, I whispered with shock, "WHAT?" and he replied "46 yards, drill him", which I did. Squeezing the trigger, the releasing of the bolt and the thwack of the bolt hitting its target all felt and sounded just like it did when I was practicing in my backyard. I quickly, as quickly as you can with a crossbow anyway, reloaded. At the impact of the bolt, the moose took off to our right, then left, then down, all within less than 20 yards and a few seconds. Success! My first crossbow hunt and my first moose!



Huge Thanks to my outfitter:
Big Rack Outfitters, Dustin Lym, 203
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Equipment used:
Mission Sub 1 Crossbow, 7 ½ lbs. physical weight, 31 ½" overall length, 3.4 lbs. trigger pull with a dual stage trigger, 200 lb. draw weight with 80% let-off, width uncocked 13.8", cocked 10.7". The 20", 320 grain Mission bolt with a Montec 100 grain broadhead was traveling at 335fps.



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Unit 11 ewes and lambs

IDFG BIGHORN SHEEP UPDATE

Hollie Miyasaki, Idaho Department of Fish and Game

HELLS CANYON BIGHORN SHEEP

The bacterium *Mycoplasma ovipneumoniae*, or “Movi”, plays a key role in bighorn sheep respiratory disease. The Hells Canyon bighorn sheep metapopulation “regional group of connected populations of a species” continues to grow after the clearance of Movi from nearly all populations. Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG), working cooperatively with the Hells Canyon Initiative committee, began intensively testing bighorn sheep for Movi in 2013 and removing the chronically infected animals in 2014 and 2015. The last detection of Movi in Unit 11 was 2 rams in February 2018. The December 2020 Unit 11 population estimate of 179 total sheep (80 ewes, 28 lambs, 71 rams) is the highest since the population was reintroduced in 1984.

BIGHORN SHEEP MANAGEMENT PLAN

An update of the 2010 Bighorn Sheep Management Plan is underway. The updated plan will guide IDFG management direction for the next six years. It will also provide the IDFG an opportunity to inform the public about accomplishments made since the last plan. Please keep an eye out for opportunities to provide input.

MOVI FREE FARM FLOCKS

To reduce the risk of transmission of Movi to bighorn sheep, the Department has been working with owners of domestic sheep and goats in the Challis area to clear Movi and maintain Movi free status for their flocks in bighorn sheep range.

We have succeeded in clearing Movi from one flock and have maintained clearance in another flock. We have also built great relationships with the domestic sheep and goat owners in the Challis area that have been willing to work with us in this program. They deserve a great deal of credit for being some of the first small flock owners to try to clear Movi from their sheep and goats. A similar Movi Free Farm Flock program in the Hells Canyon area is also picking up steam. Even if small flock owners are not ready to participate in the program, educating them about this issue and the risks for bighorn sheep is beneficial, as is building relationships, learning more about domestic sheep and goats and their husbandry, and opening lines of communication between the owners and the Department. We look forward to working with IWSF to expand this important program.

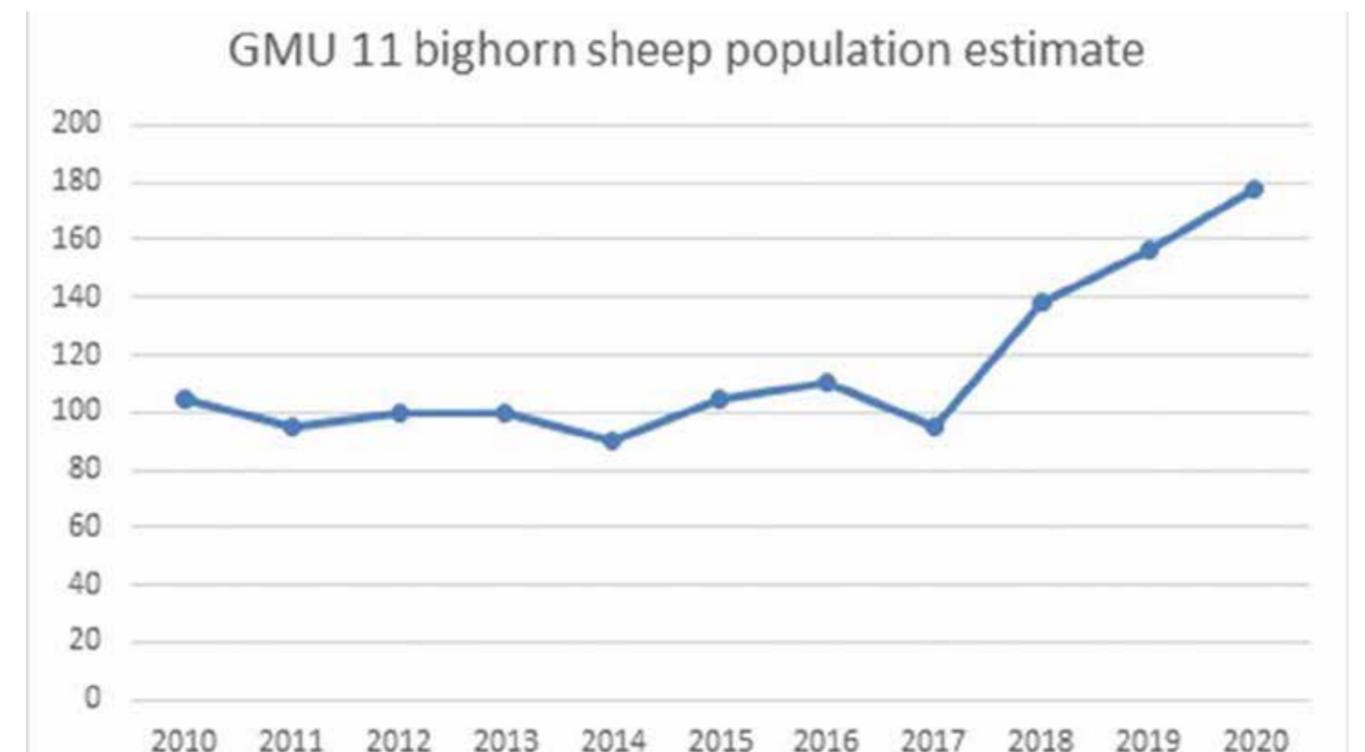
CALIFORNIA BIGHORN SHEEP GENETICS

IDFG collaborated with the University of Idaho, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, Wildlife, and British Columbia on a California bighorn sheep genetics project in part because of concerns about low genetic diversity. The manuscript entitled “Genetic Diversity and Divergence among



Sampling domestic sheep for Movi in Challis, Idaho.

Bighorn Sheep from Reintroduced Herds in Washington and Idaho” was recently accepted for publication in the Journal of Wildlife Management.



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PANIC

By Edd S. Woslum

This is not an African Story nor is it a tale of North America. It is in point of fact an anecdotal treatise intended to remind us all that we need to be scared absolutely spitless once in a while just to make sure we're still alive and alert.

Ask any 10 experienced hunters what is the most dangerous game on the planet and you will get 10 different answers, depending on the perspective and experience of the interviewee. Brown, Kodiak, or Grizzly Bear would no doubt be the response from the North American chap. Lion, Buff, or Ele would be the obvious answer from the Zimbabwean. Ask a Makorekore tracker from the Zambezi Valley and he will more than likely tell you the mosquito (anopheles) is the most terrifying creature in the world and on and on it goes. If you had asked me back in July of 1999, while suffering severely from Rickettsial Caroni (African tick bite fever), I would have no doubt responded that the damned pepper tick is the most dangerous creature any where in the galaxy. As stated previously danger is a matter of perspective.

In a recent interview with famed outdoor writer Craig Boddington, I asked the question, "What is the scariest experience you have ever had while hunting?" Expecting the answer to be something akin to a lion mauling, buffalo goring, or elephant stomp, I was taken quite aback when he related that his scariest of scary adventures took place on a sheep hunt in the Pamir Mountains of Tajikistan. After pondering this anecdote over a single malt scotch, I too, decided that my most frightening adventure was also based on the pursuit of the family Ovis.

In 2003 my hunting partner Paul and I, after considerable

planning, set off on what should have been a challenging, but relatively safe adventure, in pursuit of the great Stone sheep of Northern Canada. After a spectacular four-day automobile ride through Idaho, Washington, and British Columbia, plus an interesting one-hour flight in an ancient but capable pontooned De Haviland Beaver, we safely landed (or is it watered) on Island Lake, deep in the heart of sheep, goat, and moose country.

Within the hour, our group, comprised of senior guide Bill Lampert, registered guide Ben Dubeau, apprentice guide Hiram Swanson, Paul and I, plus nine riding and packing horses, set off on what was promised to be a pleasant ride along the Samatua River. Little did we know what bazaar twists awaited us.

The Samatua is a glacier fed body of water that can vary tremendously in depth, volume, and velocity, depending on the ice melt off. We were, however, assured on more than one occasion, that the river crossings were always fun and uneventful. Scarcely three hours after our arrival, I was leading a nice little pinto pack mare and riding a big strapping bay that had plenty of mountain experience. The weather was beautiful and life was good.

The first two miles of the ride were spent on a winding single file trail in fairly heavy timber. After about three miles the timber was becoming rather sparse and the topography was changing from woodland to riverine and eventually to sandy beach. After traversing about 200 yds. of beach frontage I got my first glimpse of the river. The 65 to 70 degree weather the previous week had accelerated the melt off and this 150 yard



Two of our Samatua guides and six of our trusty steeds

wide, swirling monster, to my eyes, was a horror show.

I grew up on horses and have, in my life, crossed a few streams and rivers. Nothing in my life experience, however, prepared me for our upcoming ordeal. For the previous hour the guides had kept up a cheerful dialogue on how much fun it was to ford the river. But being a bit of a skeptic, I was not convinced. Nonetheless, I maintained what I thought to be a fairly brave "cowboy" attitude and followed my stalwart guide without question into the near freezing river. We immediately realized that the water was too deep and fast for any of the horses to maintain their footing and we were being swept down stream at about 20 mph. I was too damned scared to even spit, and it was too late to turn back. I didn't squeal like a school girl but came awfully close. Oh, but wait, things are just now getting good.

I am now of the opinion that the literal translation of Samatua is something akin to "Death to all sheep hunters". This old west Texas goat roper isn't particularly fond of swiftly flowing, deep and cold river crossings, where one has a better than 50/50 chance of having to swim for it. I also, in my old age, don't consider it to be a great confidence builder, when on the way to camp, a pack horse flips ears over tail 200 feet down the mountain. An exaggeration one might query? Actually, during the next 10 days we completed one each of the above

mentioned horrific situations. The miracle of this millennium is that none of these events produced permanent injuries to either homo or equine.

Ten days after our spectacular river crossing Paul and I had our rams, and it was time to again head down the mountain and tackle the roaring waters of the Samatua. Except for the screaming ankles and knees of two decrepit old men, the trip down the mountain was uneventful. We were soon, however, to be in for a real shock. By the time we got to the banks of the Samatua, it looked to be even more threatening than it had 10 days previous. After a few minutes of quietly gazing at the rampaging torrent, Bill said, "This aint gonna work, we've gotta go back into the timber and try to find a better place to cross." He then set off, axe in hand, with the unspoken command to follow him into the dense piney woods. After about an hour of trudging through the heavy riverine growth, I became aware that the timber was rapidly becoming denser, the sky darker, and the ground a whole lot wetter.

At about 4 pm Bill had been leading the way and swinging his axe for more than an hour and a half, the water was now to horse ankle depth and getting deeper. We aren't sure to this day what exactly happened on the river, but the theory is that the, river in its ultra-high state, had created numerous back channels into the timber that were not visible until you were

headlong into them. Even though the cause of our dilemma was rather vague, one thing was very certain to us all, the encroaching timber into which our trail lead, made it impossible to turn around and to continue on course, into what appeared to be a black watery hole, was foolhardy. The farther we went the deeper the water became. This was rapidly becoming one very desperate situation.

Each horse's nose was now firmly implanted in the tail of the preceding animal. Splashing with every step, we trudged on through what had now become 10 inches of dark, icy liquid. Rough barked spruce and pines, stunted and dying from the continuous flow of water, were now pressing hard against the legs of both man and horse. Ten more minutes of urging the laboring animals through the 35- degree water found us to be in up over our horse's knees and creeping ever closer to stirrup height. Even though only about 5 pm, it was dark as night under the canopy of 100- foot pines.

As if on some sort of subliminal cue, all five of the lead horses suddenly began feeble attempts to stomp their feet. The two-foot deep, icy current, of course, made this impossible. Riders and mounts were now only, a half notch below full- blown panic. The animal vocalizations were rapidly increasing, as the contagion of fear quickly replaced years of training and discipline.

"Ben," I called back to the guide immediately behind me. This, while trying unsuccessfully to keep the tone of panic from my voice. "I don't like this one little bit," I croaked. "I can't see a blessed thing up front and all I can hear is that colt splashing and banging against the trees. If someone goes off into that mess, they won't last five minutes. Where's Paul? I haven't seen him in twenty minutes." This nervous staccato of questions brought back a very tight lipped "I don't know," from Ben.

"Do you think we can squeeze off the trail and maneuver around that big tree far enough to get turned around?" Try as I might, the nervousness in my voice left no doubt as to my state of mind, but Ben calmly responded, "not sure, but we've gotta try something."

The noise level at this moment was directly proportional to the rising panic among the animals. Again, as if on some pre orchestrated sign, the splashing, banging, and general mayhem, suddenly rose to a crescendo. Then the unthinkable, "My God, Bill's upside down". This cry of alarm was

soon followed by "oh no!, oh no!, I'm going off!". "We've gotta have help up here".

Even though Ben was only six feet behind me, I could barely hear him shouting above the tempest. "Try to turn your horse around", he shouted. "I'll try, but don't think I can". Two minutes later and half way through the attempted maneuver, all hell broke loose right in our face. My young Pinto pack horse, with 200 lbs. on her back, could no longer stand the stress, and attempted to raise her freezing legs above the swirling liquid. Faster than anything you can imagine, she was upside down and flailing to regain her footing. From there the already frightened out of their mind critters, quickly blew to over the top and out of control. Ben's horse immediately threw him sideways like a baseball, smack into a 6- inch scrub pine. Even though the noise level was deafening, the sudden thud was unmistakable. As I moved toward my fighting to become upright guide, it became obvious that of the eight animals that had initially entered the timber, ole spud, my 20- year old mountain horse, was the only critter still standing.

"Get the hell out of here", shouted Ben. "Dally up one of those loose horses, round up Paul and get to high ground. Start a big fire. We are really going to need it". I'm afraid the after action report is a bit muddled, as not a one of us can fully explain how we got out of that mess, but thank god we did. On the long slosh out with Paul, and later that night, after we consumed every drop of alcohol in that part of North America, I had plenty of time to hash and rehash the previous nightmare.

I have never had to deal with a wounded, large African cat, nor have I had the exhilarating opportunity to stare down a full- blown charge from a rampaging elephant. We were, however, chased all over Sentinel Ranch once by a very upset young ele bull that just wouldn't give up. Luckily, we were in a Land Rover that could out run him. If we had been on foot it would have been an entirely different story and the situation could have turned lethal in a hurry.

I have been on something like 35 or 40 buffalo stalks. This, mind you, in no way means I'm an expert, it just means that I have been lucky enough to experience a rich array of African flora and fauna. During several of these soirees afield I have been hot breath and nasal hair close to numerous potentially dangerous animals, but thanks to the professional expertise of my various PHs and trackers, I have never been on any close encounter wherein I thought it to be a "break out in a cold

sweat, run for your life" type situation.

Even though we are being protected and guided by competent professionals, it behooves us all not to become complacent. We still have a responsibility to be alert and vigil for potential danger. Remember that you may not ever see or hear the one that gets you. The tragedies of American's Bob Fontana and Nikkie Atchison are just two very unfortunate examples of what can happen in the African bush. Bob was blind-sided, and killed by a buffalo, while hunting plains game. Nickie was also blind-sided by a buffalo that she was tracking. The buffalo episode that my friend, Randy Luth, experienced in 2003 (AFRICAN HUNTER #4, 2008) is yet another good example of "you may not be huntin em, but they can get you anyway."

Thirty years ago, I gave little, if indeed any, thought to the potential danger of an upcoming adventure. In those days, the full extent of my pre hunt preparation, other than gun, knife, and bullets, was addressed at how we were going to keep the beer cold in camp. Of late however, I seem to have a bit of anxiety when thinking of all the things that can go wrong. "Will these old bones hack the conditions? Can I make the required 4 to 5 hour stalk in the Zambezi heat in order to get my bull? What if I make a poor shot and end up wounding something?" So little time, so many things to worry about.

There are quite obvious dangers when pursuing the large carnivores and ungulates of the world. buffalo, elephants, grizzly bears and big cats are quite capable of killing and/or maiming you. These danger factors however, pale when compared to the beating that Mother Nature can and often does deliver. Precipitous terrain, swollen rivers, hypothermia, dehydration, and exhaustion contribute more (by a factor of a thousand) to the perils of a hunt, than does the aggressive behavior of any wild creature.

One thing is for absolute certain, I am prepared and hopefully able to engage roaring lions and even charging buffalo, but you couldn't get me back to the Samatua River even if you paid the way!!!!

Pamwe Chete



I thought we had it made when we made it across the Samatua River, but then to get to the sheep, we had to cross the Samatua Glacier.



Authors ram from the Samatua

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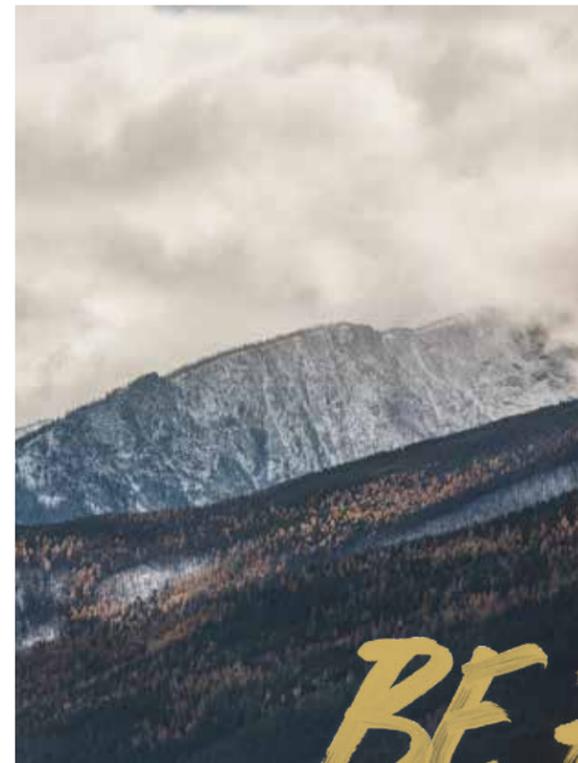


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Family Obsession

by Kevin Kotter

I looked down at the group text. The Idaho draw results were out, and texts were flying back and forth between the family. 1st text: “didn’t draw.” 2nd text: “didn’t draw.” 3rd text: “Kevin, check your results!” I pulled up the IDFG website and punched in my license number. Even though I knew the chances were slim, my heart was pounding: “Congratulations, you were successful for bighorn sheep!”

My 12-year-old son Wade had drawn

the same tag the previous year. Last year had been the experience of a lifetime. Wade had an amazing hunt and killed a special ram. Now, I would be able to live that experience again as the tag holder.

Some important background: My family is serious when it comes to sheep hunting. My mother-in-law (Shelly Sayer), father-in-law (Doug Sayer), and uncle-in-law (Jim Warner) have shared their sheep hunting experiences with

me for the last 15 years or so. Over time I’ve watched this passion for them develop into more of an obsession. Being able to share this experience with all of them was surreal.

Wade (13) and Max (9) are my two boys. These two kids are all about sheep hunting. They were just as excited about this opportunity as their dad, if not more. They made every scouting trip and every hunting trip. In their minds, missing any part of dad’s sheep

hunt was just unacceptable.

Throughout the season, we had developed a routine. We got out of bed early and loaded our packs. I would watch the kids pack and, of course they had the essentials: Kippered snacks, Vienna sausages, beef jerky, candy, Mountain House, and water. Hanging out with these boys meant there was never a shortage of food!

Along with my boys, I had a lot of help throughout the season: Doug, Shelly, Ryan, Ashleigh, Christi, Jim, Shaina, Triston, Hannah, Grant, Fae, and Chris. I was blessed to have so many.

I was over halfway through the season and my confidence was starting to dwindle just a bit. It wasn’t going bad, but I was starting to feel a bit discouraged. We hadn’t seen many rams. We had battled with the smoke and the lack of visibility caused by the surrounding wildfires in California, Oregon, and Idaho. The other issue was the heat: it was hot and we needed it to cool down.

Finally, things changed. It was late in September and the weather looked good. Temperatures had dropped. Jim, Triston, and family had taken time off from work and were committed to help scout for rams for the next several days. The dedication of their time and efforts was truly selfless.

Over the next couple of days we found rams. The boys and I were on our way to scout an area when my phone beeped. Incoming message from Triston: “Kevin, I’ve got some studs found.” It was 4pm and we were at least an hour from the 4-wheelers, then another couple of hours to where

Triston was. There wasn’t enough daylight for us to get to Triston’s location. Instead, Max, Wade, and I took advantage of the last couple hours of daylight to find the trailhead that we would use the next morning to try and come in from above the rams.

Jim was within reach and made his way over to Triston before dark to get a second set of eyes on the rams. No doubt, these were the rams we’d been looking for.

Triston had worked hard to get cell phone video of the rams through his spotting scope. That evening we sat around the fire and watched the footage. Up until then, only Jim and Triston had seen the rams. Seeing them made it real. I tried hard to hide my nervousness. Triston had located a high caliber ram for this area and the pressure was on.

We made a plan for the morning. We had confidence, but we had to approach the rams from an unfamiliar area. We knew there was a lot of things that could go wrong.

The morning came quick, and no one slept in. The trail we had found on our maps turned out to be more of a pile of thick downfall timber. It was slow-going. The minute we hit the trail head the temperature dropped and it started snowing. It took us a little over 4 hours to cover only five miles. It took a lot of effort for Max’s little legs to climb over the fallen timber, but he was a real trooper, and we never heard a complaint.

During our hike Jim had a vantage point below us, and had briefly located the rams just before the weather killed

his visibility. This was key, we knew the rams were still in the same location. The bulk of the hike was complete, and the boys were freezing. Climbing over the snow-covered downfall meant they were soaked from the waist down. The snow had let up, but the fog had rolled in. We were close to where we needed to be, but the visibility had been bad for the last couple hours. At this point, we couldn’t see a hundred yards in front of us.

Triston wanted to build a fire and wait out the fog. Not knowing how long we’d be socked in, he wanted to work on getting the kids warmed up and dried out. Just as Triston was ready to light a match, we looked up and saw sunshine. The fog was gone, and it was clear and sunny.

This was our chance. We knew those rams would be up and moving with the change in weather, so we needed to move fast. We left the boys to soak up the sun and told them to hold tight. We knew that when we crested the ridge, we needed to limit our movement as much as possible.

We got back on track and headed to the ridge where we hoped to be able to





Triston worked his way over to get the boys.

Watching those boys' race down the mountain was perfect. The excitement on their faces was priceless.

The boys really cherished this ram, I could see it in their eyes and their ear-to-ear smiles.

The grueling hike off the mountain was offset by our accomplishment as a team. It's hard to express the gratitude I have for the opportunity to take an Idaho ram. Sharing that experience with my boys and the rest of the family will never be forgotten. Looking back on this hunt and the experiences it brought helps me understand the obsession with sheep hunting; there's nothing quite like it. I look forward to the next opportunity to hunt an Idaho ram. My 9-year-old Max and others in the family are anxiously waiting their turn, and soon we'll be back on that mountain.

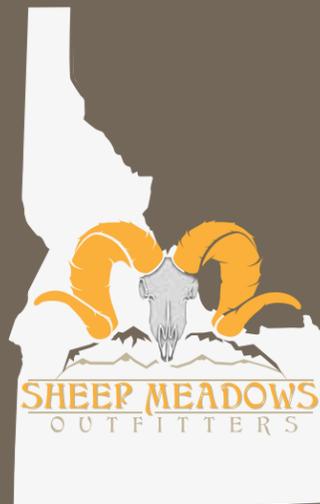
look down on the rams. In less than five minutes we were looking down into the area of the rams. Triston had the rams spotted within seconds. We had the rams found! Now we just needed a shooting lane as we weren't in a good spot. We moved quickly from spot to spot, trying hard to find the best shooting opportunity. When we finally found a small shooting lane the rams were ranged at 450 yards. The setup was challenging, but doable. I set up in the sitting position with my bipod resting on a slanted boulder in front of me.

follow-up shot.

I squeezed the trigger. The shot felt great and everything went as planned. I watched the initial impact, which seemed like slow motion. I knew the shot was fatal and reality set in fast. Ram down! I could finally relax. I looked at Triston and we celebrated. We did it!

Making my way to the ram was an unforgettable experience. I had the opportunity to savor the moment while

I wasn't comfortable, but it was our only option. I felt good about the range and my rifle, plus confident in my ability to shoot. With my heart pounding and the ram in the cross hairs, I told Triston I was ready. I was running through all the motions. I checked my range finder and dialed in the scope. I checked the bubble on my scope for cant. I took some time to calm my breathing. I knew if I missed I'd risk blowing the rams out of the area, or worse, I'd be facing a difficult



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Hunting Coyotes, making memories with my Dad

by Erika Putnam

We walked a slow mile from the truck to the top of this ridge where I am now crouched behind a rock. My fingers are starting to get cold. Snow is falling softly from the late afternoon sky. We are disguised in the desert sage that surrounds us in every direction. Underneath my camouflage woolies, I have on three shirts and a down Patagonia pullover to keep out the New Year's Day chill. Three feet to my left my dad is peaking over a boulder scouring the brush for life. Suddenly, the wailing begins. I cover my ears. I hear the shrill, frightening sound of death. Shrieking, screeching. It unravels my insides. Oh, how I want it to stop. We each have a bullet in the

chamber and are ready to fire.

Before sunrise, we were driving the back roads. The new dusting of snow made fresh cat tracks easy to spot. My dad has a buddy on call with hound dogs just in case we get lucky. I have tracked with my dad over the years, but never for cougar. This kind of tracking is new to me and I need some coaching. "They have huge paws and you can't mistake their prints," my dad says from the passenger's seat. I stopped the truck at almost every paw print that crossed the fresh snow on the road. "How about this one?" I asked him. The coyote and jack rabbit tracks were easy to identify and there was no shortage of them. He

continued to reassure me, "You will know it when you see it. Cat tracks are huuuuuge."

Turns out you have to cover a lot of territory to uncover a fresh cat track. When the rabbit tracks got thick across the road my dad decided we should temporarily abandon the lion hunt and call in coyotes.

His plan was to perch on top of a hill, hiding behind some sagebrush or a rock. From our hideout he would sneak 20 feet away and set up a noise-making contraption. This technical hunting devise is the shape of a large flashlight with a bunch of knobs and digital readouts on the side. On the

other side of the box is a post where you can attach a piece of cloth that looks like a Daniel Boone hat. The fur wags back and forth when you turn it on. Dad calls it a coyote call, I refer to it as "That damned Foxtracker noise making son of a bitch." At seventy-two years old, my dad doesn't hear well. I don't think he has any idea how obnoxious it sounds. He wants it loud for all of the coyotes in the entire valley to hear. He delightfully chimes, "It works and the yotes come running when you let it scream long enough. They come runnin' so fast they almost run right over the top of you." When he talks about hunting coyotes with a shotgun he gets to chuckling, and giggling, and is so pleased with himself. He says the look of surprise on their faces when they realize they have been suckered is hilarious. It must be funny, because he spontaneously bursts into laughter and shakes his head. Not a sick, mean laugh, but more of school boy victory laugh.

This is my first tracking adventure in the snow. We are driving around looking out the window and talking. "How much do you get for a coyote pelt?" I ask.

"Fifteen dollars." He says as he reaches over and pats my knee as to assure me it's a good enough price. "It takes me thirty minutes to skin one, but the guy at the trapping shop can do it in five."

I find out a bobcat pelt is worth eight to twelve hundred dollars. "Ooooooh," I say. "Where can we find one of thoooooosse?" Then, dad explains about another scream setting on the "Son of a bitch call" that we can use to trick in bobcats. Dad tells me a wolf pelt is worth two hundred to five

hundred dollars and that the Fish and Game report shows over sixty deer kills, likely lions, this year within two hours of our location. I keep asking questions and he enjoys sharing his hunting knowledge with me.

Dad's occupation has been farm and ranch real estate. He loves open country and the outdoors. He also had been an avid outdoorsman, hunter and hunting guide. He loves wild sheep the most. There is a small population of wild sheep within an hour's drive of his ranch. There is a problem with the mountain lions killing the wild sheep and the population is in danger. For him, cougar hunting is conservation. He has a real concern for conserving the wild sheep populations.

I enjoy his knowledge of the hunt and I know that he has many stories in him that I have never heard. I wish I knew more. I am afraid that I won't remember them. I am afraid of not knowing this man completely in the time we have left together. For an old guy, my dad is fit, healthy and can do some yoga moves I haven't mastered yet. I have no reason to worry about his health, but I am keenly aware that our time together may not be as long as I would like it to be. I want to treasure the time we have together and if this is how I get him, one on one, then a hunting we will go. Some words from the song he used to sing to my little sister and me when we were young, "A hunting we will go, a hunting we will go, we'll catch a fox and put-him-in-a-box and then we'll let him go".

On this New Year's Day, I could be taking down Christmas decorations and putting memories in red and green totes. Instead, I am patiently sitting

in the snow, in the freezing cold, with my father, listening to the scream of a dying rabbit call, hoping to get run over by a coyote. I am hoping to see delight on my father's face. I am hoping to become and rank among one of the hunting stories he tells to his friends when they stand around their campfires.

This hunting might not be for everyone. Sometimes, I am not sure that it's for me. Together my dad and I have hunted bear, caribou, deer, moose, pheasant, ducks, and geese. When I was ten, we were hunting ducks and stumbled upon a porcupine high in a tree. He wanted me to shoot it. So, I did. It was the first thing I killed. I wanted to tell it I was sorry. And, in another way I was proud. Hunting can be a mixed bag of emotions for a girl. It took me a while to understand that hunting is not about killing. My father had to teach me the difference. It's about making memories and being together in circumstances and places that are unpredictable thrilling and sometimes discouraging. It's how you weather the hunt together. It's how you show regard and reverence when you do make a kill, and when you don't. Truth be known, I have come to love the thrill of the hunt just like him.

I sense sweet winter stillness between the bawling, dying rabbit calls. There is no movement anywhere and I can see my breath. I have on a camouflage head net and I can barely see out because this is the garb you wear hiding from yotes. It is the official disguise. When we hunt, I do whatever my dad tells me to do. I am an independent forty-four-year-old woman, but in the field, I let my independence go.

I feel protected with my dad. He has directed me through a lot of unfamiliar territory. Every step I take with him on a hunting trip I feel like I am being guided. I entrust him with my safety and I succumb to following. Following, in many respects, is not my nature but, in the great outdoors with him, I enjoy this dynamic. It fills me with humility and pride at the same time. He has been my hunting guide and my life's guide, whether we take a trophy or not.

Sitting with him in this quiet closeness I am present to life's seasons, including ours. I notice that he tells some stories twice. I notice that he is more patient with life, and I notice that he is gentle. In the stillness, without the world chirping in my ear, I can take in the quiet. I can take in the day and I have time to notice the beauty of small details like the rust-colored lichen on the bottom of the sagebrush. I notice the seriousness of this hunt for my dad. And, I notice when he lets out a disappointing "ugh" when the coyotes don't run to our call. I think to myself how much he wants this hunt to be a success. He wants me to think he is a "good guide" and he wants us to take home a story about today. Perhaps, a campfire story about tracking down a cat with his daughter.

Sunset was on its way and signaled us to call it a day. It's hard to give up when you've been skunked. We were out of daylight and couldn't stay for another "ten minutes." We threw our guns over our shoulders and headed the mile back to the truck. There was only the sound of the top layer of snow crunching beneath my clunky snow boots as I walked ahead of my dad. I



began to worry about getting my truck stuck on our way out. With each step I was taking back on the cares of the world. It was my turn to guide my dad safely home.

I stopped dead in my tracks. He stopped when I stopped. The crunching snow stopped. Slowly, as if I needed to tell my hunting partner about a critter I saw crossing the ridge, I turned around and with my whole heart I said "I love you dad." He smiled a giant grin. I crunched back through the snow and gave him a huge hug. Gun to gun, camo to camo. We might not have found cat tracks, but because of him, in more ways than

one, I still believe, "I will know it when I see it."

*In loving memory of my father,
and hunting partner,
Dave Putnam, 12-11-19.*

Author: Dr. Erika Putnam, is an outdoor enthusiast, sheep hunter (Idaho & Montana Wild Sheep Member) and chiropractic physician. She resides in Whitefish, Montana where she practices chiropractic, teaches yoga, writes and hikes her dogs in the forest. She seeks inspiration and sanctity in mountains and rivers and carries a .45 for protection. You can reach her at www.thebendatwhitefish.com



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BY MIKE SCHLEGEL

DUBOIS SHEEP STATION:

A federal court ruled against a U.S. Department of Agriculture decision to reauthorize and expand domestic sheep grazing in and around the U.S. Sheep Experiment Station in the Centennial Mountains on the Idaho–Montana border. The judge stated the 2017 federal environmental analysis of the Sheep Station’s operations failed to consider the impacts of grazing on adjacent U.S. Forest Service lands and contiguous wildlife habitat; specifically, the USDA’s analysis of impacts to bighorn sheep was inconsistent, incomplete, and/or confusing.

As a result of the decision, the Sheep Station is not permitted to graze sheep on the summer pastures in the Centennials, the Forest Service’s Meyers Creek allotment or the Snakey-Kelly allotments. Grazing will be limited to the Station’s Headquarters, plus the Mud Lake feedlot.

SMALL FLOCK PROGRAM:

In addition to the Asotin County Conservation District staff working on the small flock program now includes a veterinarian, Dr. Lauren Christensen. She is currently working on the following programs: 1. Article regarding the program for the Lewiston Tribune. 2. Developing an instructional video for both owners to reference, as well as veterinarians and agency personnel unfamiliar with how to obtain nasal swabs, in both sheep and goats. 3. Working on setting up Access database to improve efficiency of data management for this project. 4. Presentations to various organizations.

Field contacts and testing are on going in Idaho, Oregon, and Washington.

BUFFALO EDDY NOXIOUS WEED ISSUE:

Dr. Christensen reported neighbors owning 7 parcels want to bring in grazing goats for fire break (outside county fire district). She and Paul Wik, wildlife biologist, Washington Department Fish and Wildlife, met with concerned homeowner and some neighbors on 4/16/21. Discussed and answered disease questions and vegetation management/fire prevention. Neighbors decided to bring Petty grazing goats in anyway. Goats are projected to be on site May 28, 2021 for 10-14 days. Petty family has not responded to any contact we have initiated in 2021, and this past

weekend the landowner said he told her he ‘was not interested in working with the fish and wildlife program’.

IDAHO FISH AND GAME COMMISSION GRANT APPLICATION:

Idaho WSF applied for a regional grant to enhance the small flock program in the Salmon and Challis area. Federal land management agencies, through the Risk of Contact model are doing well in controlling the possibility of domestic sheep/goats intermingling, leaving small, private owners the next most important source of infection.

UNIT 26, BIG CREEK:

Idaho WSF is consulting with the Idaho Department of Fish and Game to establish a spring and fall bighorn sheep ground survey in Big Creek. This will be a volunteer-driven survey to evaluate ram numbers and age, plus over-winter lamb survival.





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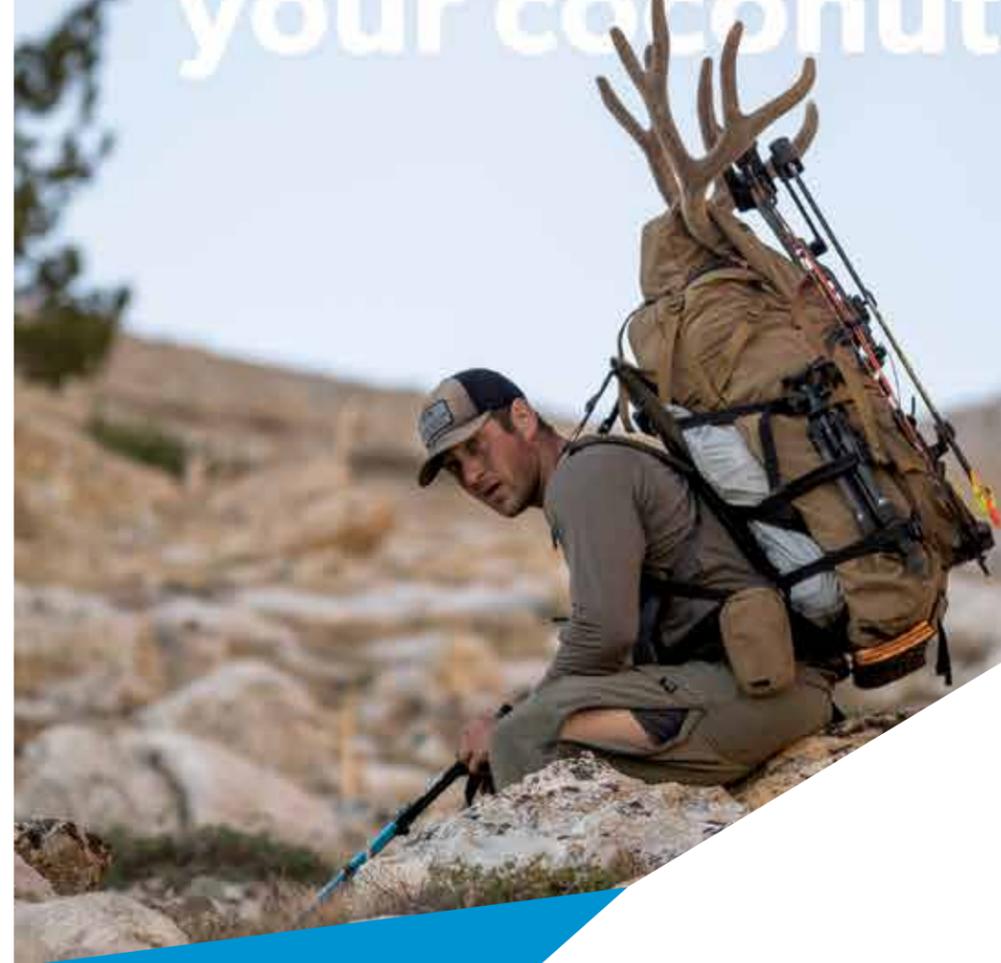
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Stone Glacier employee, Andrew Whitney, stops for a breather on a long pack-out during a successful early season archery mule deer hunt in Nevada. Photo: @jordangillphotography



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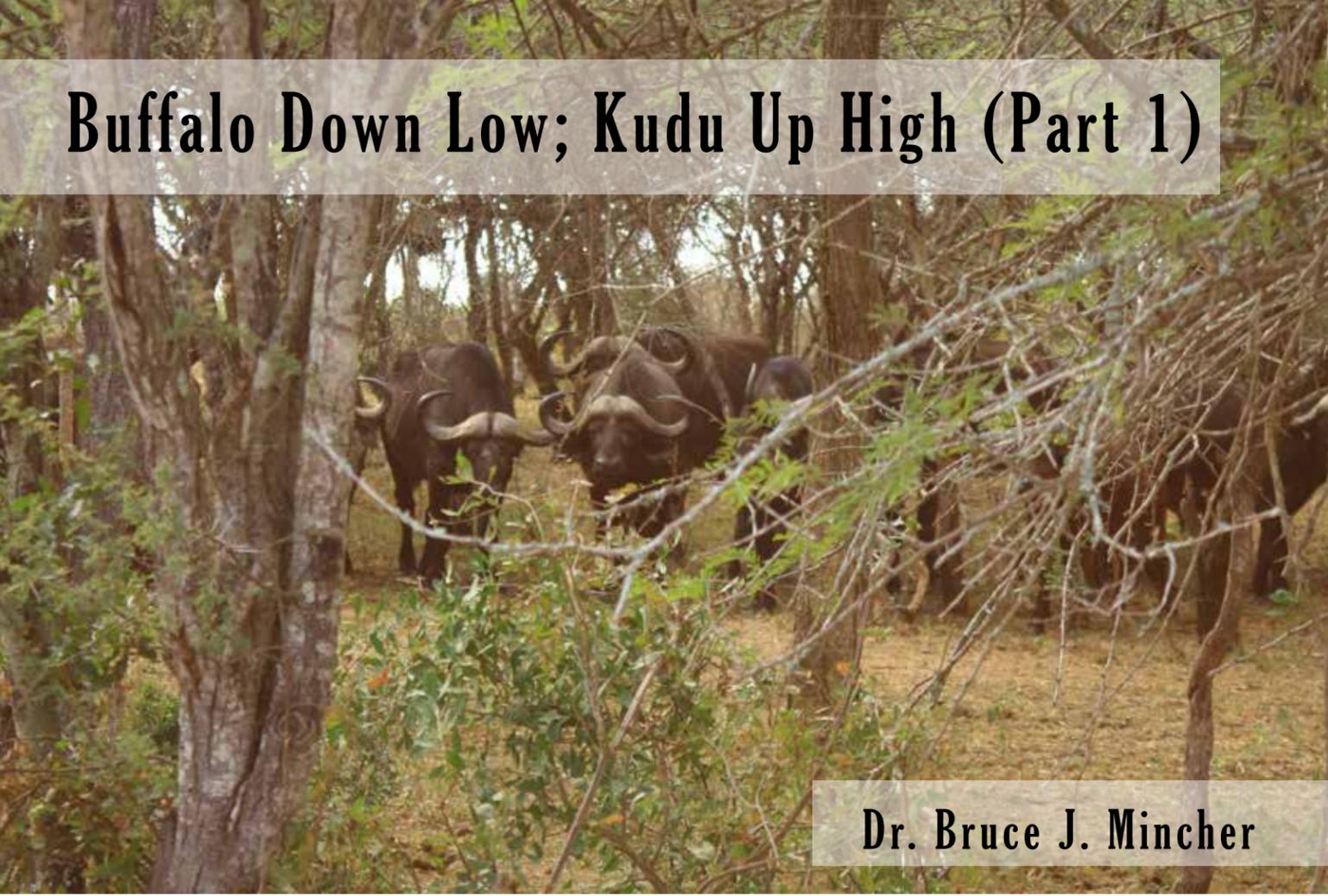
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Buffalo Down Low; Kudu Up High (Part 1)



Dr. Bruce J. Mincher

Editor Note: This exciting story of Bruce and his son Erik hunting with Trompettersfontein Safaris will be in two parts. In this issue is the “Buffalo Down Low”, our next issue will feature the “Kudu Up High” portion.

Even here in the South African Lowveld it was chilly before the sun rose. First light found us already tracking a herd of Cape buffalo along a game trail in a wet, green creek bottom. Crouched down in the watercourse we could see only straight ahead or straight behind. The banks and the shoulder-high grasses on either side obscured any view out of the bottoms. But they couldn't be far ahead. The tracks were fresh and muddy, the dung was green and squishy, and if they were there around the next bend we would be face to face. Buffalo have faces that catch your attention. Faces that demand your attention.

But the tracks led up a greasy, grassy, slippery slope, and as we crested it, Elgim, my professional hunter (PH), suddenly crouched low and I knew we had found them. I copied him and got down low right behind him. Over his shoulder I saw a dozen or more black shapes in the thorns, all looking

back at us. The element of surprise was lost. But at least they weren't down here in the ditch with us, with us having nowhere to retreat to. Before we could even set up the sticks they were off, crashing through the bush, snorting and trailing a dust cloud, leaving us standing in their wake and feeling dumb. There had been no time to properly examine the herd.

Elgim Du Preez, of Trompettersfontein Safaris had met me and my son Erik in Johannesburg for the drive to Hoedspruit in the Limpopo, near the famous Kruger National Park in South Africa. In Hoedspruit we met Steven Opperman, who would be our second PH for our cow buffalo hunt. Trompettersfontein Safaris is a consistent donor to Idaho Wild Sheep, and since I had some business in Namibia anyway, a side trip to South Africa didn't seem like too much inconvenience. I booked a hunt with Trompettersfontein because I like to support the folks who support us. We would pursue buffalo

in the Lowveld; that hot, tangled environment full of thorns and ticks and big, black grumpy cows and bulls. I had hunted buffalo bulls and cows in both Zimbabwe and in South Africa, and both hunts offer the same excitement, the same fun and the same hint of danger, but cows come at a fraction of the cost. Since proper management requires a cow to be culled now and again it's a win-win situation. We would not be far from Kruger, so we would also have a chance to hunt with the telephoto lens, once our rifle hunt was a success. After the park the excitement would continue as we crossed the Drakensberg Mountains to hunt Trompettersfontein's Highveld property for kudu and nyala; two of that family of regal-looking, spiral horned antelopes.

Our buffalo had disappeared into the thorns and we stayed on their spoor. It's an amazing botanical phenomenon that every bit of vegetation in Africa is graced with thorns. Some of them are long, sharp, white thorns. Those ones are easy to see and you can snake your way around maybe leaving only a few scratches traced across your arms and legs. Others are short and thick and you must pull them from the soles of your boots back at camp in the evening. You need pliers to do this. Still others are small and hooked, and they hide in the tall grass. Those grab you on the calves or hip, and they don't want to let go. They usually do so when you are trying to be quiet because there are animals, there in the shadows just up in front of you. Enough encounters with those little hooks and it is the hunter who leaves the blood trail. Here, only yards above the creek it was very dry; the ground was littered with leaves and crunchy stones. We followed the herd through this, through the thorns and the dry water courses and across the gravelly ground, but it was a fool's errand. They stayed well ahead of us.

So we made a big swing and tried to predict where we could intercept them again. We did this several times without them presenting us a shot. When we did catch up they milled in the shadows of the thick bush, always remaining in a tight group, cows and calves and even big bulls, making it impossible to pick out an individual cow. After a few nervous moments during which we endured their malevolent stares they would thunder off again. In these situations one never knows in which direction they will thunder, but so far it had always been away from us. Persistence is the hunter's ally. In the heat and the sweat and the thorns and after a minor run-in with the pepper ticks, a chance finally came.

When hunting dangerous game, the PH always gets you in close. Not only is that an opportunity to select the correct animal, but that first shot must count. Trailing a wounded Cape buffalo is to be avoided. My big cow finally stepped clear of the group at less than 50 yards. She stood there free of the crowd, broadside. Giving us that buffalo stare. It's a stare that says “I dare you.” The rest of the group milled nervously, with snorts and the sound of breaking branches and I knew it would not be long until they pounded off again. She stood there presenting that broadside shot we had practiced at home for months on a life-size buffalo target, 10 000 miles away back in Idaho. Elgim set up the sticks. I found her in the cross hairs of my Remington .416, and followed the front leg straight up to the point of the shoulder. This is the heart/lung shot that the books recommend.

At the shot they departed as a group, full of dust and horns and hooves and adrenaline; giant dark shapes crashing





through the bush. A buffalo rarely goes right down, even with a good shot. Had I completely missed? Worse still, had I hit poorly? Suddenly, one cow veered away from the herd. She wobbled from side to side as she tried to rejoin them, stumbled, and finally went down, her momentum rolling her over. The shot had been just right. A one-shot kill on a buffalo. The rest of the herd disappeared into the tall grass, back into the creek bottom. The books also talk about the death bellow; that mournful sound moaned by a buffalo at its last gasp, a sound that reassures the following hunter that the buffalo is no longer a threat. My cow never made that sound. I have shot three buffalo and never heard that sound. The books don't tell you everything. But still, this cow was well and truly dead. Few experiences are more exciting than a close encounter with a Cape buffalo.

We were not done with them yet. While our skinning crew worked with the cow in the bag, it was Erik's chance now to reduce a second buffalo to possession. I had seen the grass pushed aside as the herd had departed down the bank and into the green creek bottom. The animals were now invisible and there was no telling how far they had gone. Despite all the commotion, we would try to catch up with them again. We worked our way along the top, peering down into the tall grass and finally, now and then, you could see the big, white seed heads, taller than a man, moving from side to side, or maybe hear a snort and a grunt. They were safe down there for now, but they would be angry at the continued harassment. Finally we

saw them come out of the creek on the other side and go smashing through the dry thorns again.

I really wanted to be there when Erik shot his buffalo with the big .416. But after this much excitement it was decided that in no way could all four of us get close to them again. Erik and Steven would hunt them while Elgim and I would remain behind. Despite the cool start to the morning it was now downright hot. I sat in the sun, waiting with a father's nervousness. I waited for the sound of a shot, but nothing happened for a long time. And then, after what seemed hours, the report came. "There!" said Elgim with a smile. But then a second shot. His smile faded a bit. A second shot might be a bad sign. More waiting. After what seemed like eternity and after all sorts of scenarios passed through my imagination there finally was a third shot. Elgim and I glanced at each other nervously. What did it mean? Moments later came a call on the walkie-talkie. Erik had his buffalo down!

As the skinners began work on another cow, Erik and Steven would recount the excitement for us. Erik is usually a good shot and in this case he had also shot well. That first shot we heard had gone right in the shoulder, just like it should. But she had only turned to face them. I can imagine how my son felt, with a wounded Cape buffalo staring him down. He said she looked pretty annoyed. He said he thought she might actually charge. They do that sometimes. The cows too. His second shot was right next to the first and then she turned to run. They trailed her, that was when Elgim and I experienced our long wait for the final shot. They caught up to her and that final third shot put her down for good. As they walked up to Erik's buffalo Steven picked up a stick to point at the bullet wounds on the shoulder. He complimented the "nice group!" Erik had put all three shots right where the books say, but being a buffalo she had just refused to go down easily. Sometimes they are like that.

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SHEEP HUNTING: EASY-PEASY



by Mitch McFarland

1983 That's the year I harvested my Idaho Bighorn Sheep. As I transition to the sunset years of my hunting career, this hunt and its memories are still fresh in my mind. I cherish these memories and relive them frequently these days, as I look at my sheep mounted on the wall. I laugh now at how naive I was in my youth. Luckily my youth was coupled with enthusiasm and confidence.

My hunt started out lucky. I drew my Idaho sheep tag the very first year I applied! I didn't know anything about sheep hunting. In fact, had never been on a sheep hunt. Luckily, I had been working as a guide for Packer John in the Bighorn

Crags of the Frank Church Wilderness Area. Several years earlier I'd packed Stan Potts and a hunter into the Waterfall area. They spent about 30 days looking for sheep. That's when the sheep bug first bit me. I remember being in awe of Stan's sheep knowledge and abilities. Years later I had the honor and pleasure of guiding some sheep and elk hunts for Stan.

The couple years before while riding through the Crags, I'd seen several bands of rams. Seeing those magnificent curling horns and the various color phases of their coats added another sheep bug bite. I'd also seen bunches of rams in the rut along the Salmon River road when we were pulling out

camps, so I had this illusion that sheep hunting wasn't all that tough. Easy-peasy.

The summer before my hunt I was packing clients into the Bighorn Crags. Packer John was always great to work for because he let me use stock and let me do some scouting when we weren't booked. On my first scouting trip, in mid-August with my brother Pete, I backpacked into a saddle that led into a more remote part of the unit. When I hit the top of the ridge, I glassed back across Ship Island lake and spotted my first band of rams! I used a pair of compact Bushnell binoculars, 7x35's, that an elk hunting client had given me a couple years earlier to replace the old Weaver K4 scope I'd been using for my monocular. I had borrowed an old duct taped spotting scope from my cousin, but didn't have a tripod for it. So, I propped the scope up on a rock and studied these sheep from maybe 1,500 yards. There were nine rams and one was exceptional, definitely past full curl, and held his mass well. I had looked at what mounted sheep I could find around Salmon prior to the hunt, but really had no clue on judging a ram's size.

Towards the end of August, we were trailing the stock through the Crags to the mouth of Panther Creek and had to take a detour to pack out a sheep hunter drop camp from the previous year. He'd gotten snowed out and had to hike out leaving his camp. The camp was in a saddle on a ridge that was quite a ways off the main horse trail. We had to ride through an old burn to get to it. While riding along, picking our way through, I looked up and there were six rams bedded about 100 yards away! They all looked big! A couple looked really BIG! Heavy horns and one was more than full curl with three others right at full curl! They just laid there as we rode past. When we came back out, they were feeding farther up the mountain. I was afraid to stop and look too closely in fear of spooking them. Again, I'm thinking this sheep hunting is easy-peasy! This is where I'll start my hunt!

On September 2nd, I packed in solo to start my hunt, on a saddle horse named Limbo, and 2 mules, Legs and Suzie. Got into Goat Lake about 7 pm and set up camp, anxious to start hunting in the morning. I was about to start my sheep hunting education in some of the roughest country in the lower 48. I woke up really early and not wanting to drag all my stock with me or leave a lone horse whinnying on the ridge I hiked the steep mile or so to the top of the ridge and

the edge of the burn. I was headed back to where I'd seen the 6 rams. As I got close to the spot, I heard a "thunk". It sounded like something stepping on or kicking a log. I sat for maybe 15 minutes and then decided to move forward about 20 yards to a big rock that would be a better vantage point. Just as I started to poke my head over the rock, I did the unthinkable and spooked the rams! I never even got to see them, just heard them running away. So, then I went for the big hike and saw lots of sign and a few ewes but no rams.

The next morning, I did the same routine, hitting the edge of the burn at daylight. This time I dropped lower down on a finger ridge where I could look back up into the basin the sheep had been in. It was really frosty that morning. As I sat there, I heard some rocks rolling and that same "thunk" I'd heard the day before. I decided to be patient this time. I sat shivering and glassing so hard my eyeballs about popped out but couldn't see any sheep. About 10 am after the sun came out and I warmed up, the next thing you know I'd nodded off asleep! Damn, how can you do that sheep hunting? I had to relieve myself when I woke up. I stood up and took one step and spooked a ram 30 yards below me! Not again! I ran down the hill and picked him up across the canyon. By the time I adjusted from eyes from my bins and got my rifle rested and ready I never saw him again! Feeling pretty dejected I went back to camp early to feed my stock and plan tomorrow's hunt.

The next day was a bust. A couple other guys had come in





and camped in the head of the drainage I was hunting. They ended up riding their horses back and forth thru the burn where I'd been seeing the rams. Figuring the rams had been thoroughly spooked out of the country at this point, I decided to move camp to the Ship Island drainage where I'd seen the first group of rams.

I got an early start and got into camp around 1pm. After turning my stock loose to graze for a couple hours I headed up the mountain around 4:30. I had passed another hunter's camp in the head of the drainage and was worried they had seen 'MY' sheep! There was a small drainage with a pretty little lake in it that went up into the basin where I'd last seen the sheep, so I went up it and then climbed up the left side to gain some elevation to glass. About 5:30 I spotted 'MY' rams within a 1/4 mile of where I'd last seen them! All 9 of them! There was a rocky ridge coming off Aggipah mountain and they bedded at the base of it. I excitedly crossed around the lower end of the lake and climbed the face, intending to sidehill and come in above them. It turned out the mountain face was much steeper and more technical than I anticipated. After a couple backtracks to get on the right ledge, I finally peeked over the edge. They were all gone! Except for a small sentinel ram who was watching me! Jeez! Not again! I froze until he moved off then slowly

backed off and headed back to camp, afraid to push any harder.

Mr. Easy-Peasy sheep hunter was starting to feel a little frustrated. I was finding rams, but my stalking and patience skills were seriously lacking! The next morning, I returned to the same glassing spot and immediately spotted the rams 100 yards from where I'd left them, slightly higher up in the basin. This time I studied the terrain extensively and went around the left side of the lake which was heavily forested and offered good cover. There was a small rocky knoll covered with gnarly old trees that would put me across from the rams. I slowly and carefully climbed up the knoll, resting and catching my breath before I peeked over. I guessed I was about 250 yards away, at first, I could only see two rams. As I studied the mountain, I finally picked out eight of the nine rams, with what I thought was the biggest one feeding. I hesitated a minute to shoot, wanting to be certain I shot the biggest ram, but decided I'd be a fool to pass on this ram the way my luck had been. Plus, buck fever was starting to take hold and I was getting shakier by the minute. He was past full curl and although he had a tight curl, he was a beautiful ram! I got a good rest on a down log with my Winchester Model 70, 30-06 with open sights, pulled down just under the top of his back and touched it off. Down he went, and I

put another round into him for insurance and then floated on air all the way over to him!

I will never forget walking up to this gorgeous ram! Big heavy horns rubbed black on top with pine pitch, better than full curl, very symmetrical, and only slightly broomed tips. He had a really light-colored cape and hide that contrasted nicely with his black horns. The other rams stood there watching me until I spooked them with all my celebratory hooting and hollering!

Then the work began. I dressed him out, caped him up to the base of the head and loaded the head and cape on my day pack and staggered off the steep mountain back to camp. I was starting to wear down from all the hiking. I was concerned about getting the whole sheep off the mountain in one trip. When I got back to camp a fellow local was camping there with his wife and he offered to help pack out my sheep! I eagerly accepted and so while his wife watched my stock, we went up and hauled the meat off the mountain. We got back in time for me to load everything up and head back to Goat Lake, getting in just before dark.

The following morning the other sheep hunter in the area rode into camp. I was more than happy to show off my ram and get my picture taken! I put all my camp, sheep, and gear onto two overloaded mules and started the 18-mile ride out, meeting the gentleman who's drop camp I'd packed out earlier coming up the trail to check on me. I made it out about 5:30 pm and had my first celebratory beer at a now closed bar called the Outpost on Salmon River at the mouth of Panther Creek. Remember this hunt took place almost 38 years ago.

Here's my itemized list of costs:

- Tag and license: \$71
- Food: \$40
- Horse feed: \$13
- Film: \$4.50
- Gas: \$5.00
- Ammo: \$11.00, even tho I only used 2 bullets.
- Misc. \$10.00
- Total: \$154.00

I traded a neighbor down the creek some road gravel for mounting my ram and he did a great job! I hunted in

Levi's, wool shirt, cotton T-shirt, and Stetson hat. I had a Levi jacket for a coat and chaps and a saddle slicker for rain gear. I laugh now because the cost of this hunt will barely cover a pair of high-tech hunting pants these days and doesn't even cover your application fees in most states!

This hunt has become more appreciated and special as the years have gone by. I learned lifelong lessons on the trip, patience, perseverance, and that old sheep hunters never die, they just glass away! My ram is such a beautiful representative of the species, with 14 1/2" bases and 39" horns, he's not a book ram but is an exceptional ram for Idaho. After guiding a number of sheep hunters and helping a few friends fulfill their sheep dream, I feel extremely fortunate the way my hunt transpired. A humbling learning experience in some of God's most amazing country that has lasted a lifetime! Compared to some sheep hunts I've done since, it was easy-peasy!

My best friend Pat Chorn was killed in a tragic logging accident earlier in 1983 and I always felt Pat was with me on this hunt. It is dedicated to him.

Pat, my man, this ram is for you!





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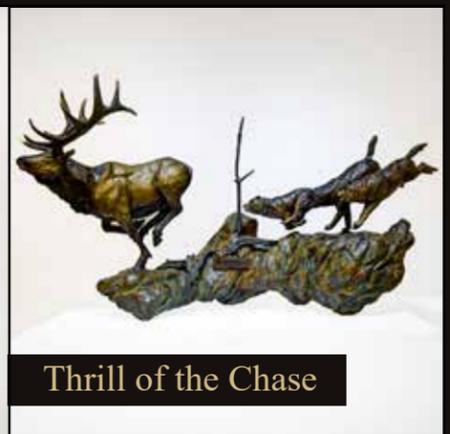


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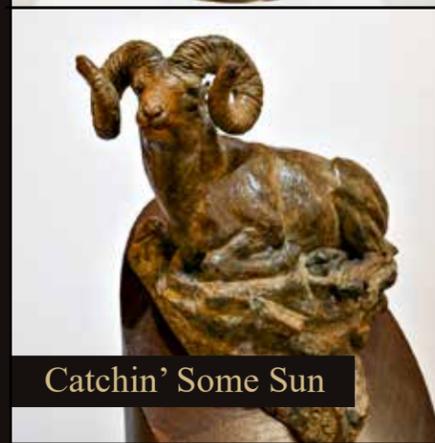
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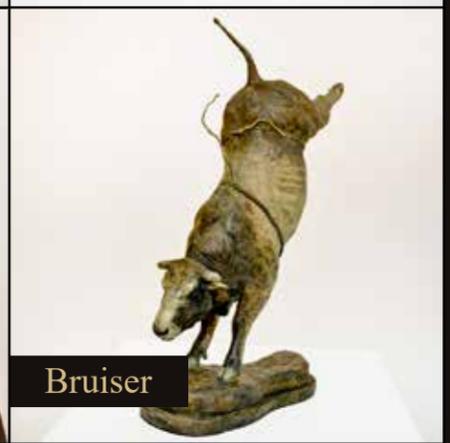
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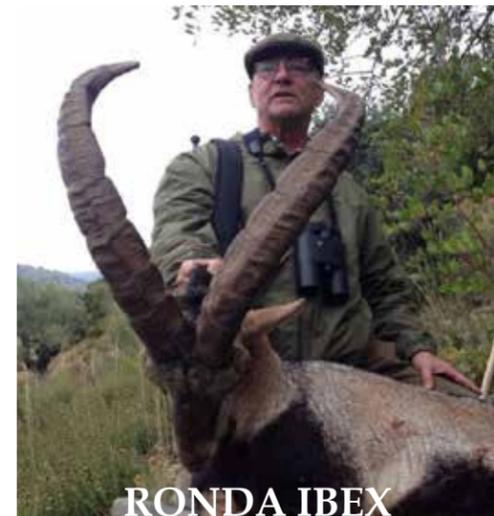
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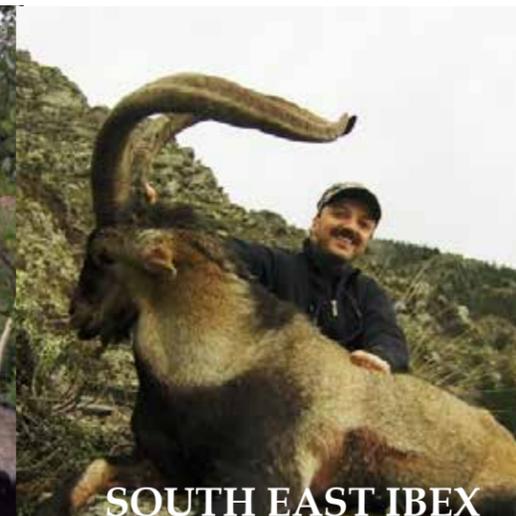
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GREY GHOSTS

BY JOSH MILLER

Growing up in New Mexico, my buddy Sean and I hunted Coues whitetail deer several times. Sean is obsessed with Coues deer and has killed several nice bucks in both Arizona and New Mexico. After both leaving NM for jobs, we still try to get together each year and do at least one hunt together. In 2020 I wanted to chase Coues deer again, but in Arizona this time. It wasn't hard to talk Sean into that idea! We came up with a solid application plan: First choice would be a hard to draw unit we had never been to. Second and third choice units were realistic and we expected to draw tags. Finally, the draw results came out and we drew our 1st choice with really good dates! We started doing some research and talking to people and came up with a few attack plans.

The time came for our hunt, we set off after work to make the long drive to Arizona. At a last-minute groceries and diesel stop in Arizona we filled up on some incredible Mexican food, something we'd both been missing in Idaho and Montana. Then we headed into the unit to set up camp. I was driving when Sean looked out my driver's side window across the canyon and yelled for me to stop. I slammed on the brakes as he grabbed his binos trying to catch another

glimpse of the deer that had run across a little opening. He got a split-second look and said, "That deer needs to die." I pulled to the side of the road and we both glassed the thick brush covered hillside for a while. I was ready to give up and go set up camp, but Sean was still glued to his binos. We talked about it for a second and decided that a good ole fashion deer drive was in order to get that buck to come out of the thick brush. Sean offered to go and let me get on the trigger. I declined, since I hadn't actually seen the deer and didn't want to risk it. I would come to regret that decision! So, I laced up my boots and wearing blue jeans and a black Stone Glacier hoody, I dropped down in the and started up the other side. About halfway up I heard Sean shoot. It honestly sounded like a miss to me, but Sean thought he hit it, so I climbed up to the ridge. He guided me in to where he last saw the deer. I made several circles and didn't find any sign or blood. Sean had started making his way over when I decided to check lower than Sean sent had me. It wasn't more than a few yards when I saw a tine sticking up in the grass. I yelled for Sean that he was a really nice buck. He was not as grey as the other Coues deer I've seen. He almost looked like a typical whitetail. Once he got up there, we got pictures taken, dressed the deer, and put the

whole buck in Sean's pack. One deer down and we hadn't even set up camp!

We made our way to Plan A camp site and found about 20 camp trailers already there. It was nearly midnight, so we just set up a tent and went to sleep. The next few days we spent backpacking into the boundaries of the wilderness glassing, glassing, and more glassing. We found lots of deer every day but never found any bucks worth even considering. It seemed like half the hunters in the whole unit were in this one big drainage. We were no longer hopeful for a good mature buck. We decided that Plan B camp on the other side of the mountain warranted a look. We loaded up camp and drove up and over the mountain to try a new area closer to where Sean killed his buck. On the way out we made a little time for a quick quail hunt. Sharing a shotgun, we were able to bag a few quail for dinner. We made it to our next camp well after dark but made quick work of setting up my new Davis wall tent.

We woke up extra early to drive to the to the trail head and be at least a mile in before daylight. The plan was to cover ground and get the lay of the land for the next few days.

We got to our first glassing knob at the perfect time for light to hit the hillsides. Good optics are essential in Coues deer hunting. These deer blend in better than any other deer I've hunted. They are a pretty sly deer and will often lay down and hide when they feel pressure. Their natural camo along with their short stature makes them tough to see in the tall grass and thick brush. Sean has a knack for spotting them though.

Almost immediately Sean spotted a group of deer down below us on the opposite side of the big steep draw. I put my 18x Mavens on the group and more and more deer started appearing almost out of thin air. All I was finding was a bunch of does and a few little bucks. After a few minutes we noticed that they kept looking up towards the thicker trees. We focused our glassing on the thick brush and could see something moving between the bushes. Then saw a flash of antler and a mature buck appeared. He had some good mass but only three points on each side, however he was significantly bigger than the one other Coues deer I'd taken. I watched him feed for a half hour then decided to put the 'spotter' (spotting scope) on him to get a better look. I confirmed he had some really nice mass and what



looked to be a cool looking cheater on one of his beams. I've never been one to base my decision to shoot an animal based on inches. I looked at that buck and the character of his antlers and decided I wanted him.

I laid down my pack, got behind my superlight rifle that Sean had built for me years ago. I ranged him at 450 yards, but with the steep angle of the shot I dialed my scope for 425. I made several dryfire practice shots on him to get calmed down. Sean got on the spotter to watch and I chambered a round. I took a deep breath, let it out, and squeezed the trigger. Simultaneously, I was able to get back in the scope to watch my bullet impact as well as the unmistakable sound of a positive hit. The buck went nose first into the ground and tumbled down the hill a little way. We made our way over to him, down slopes that were steeper than we had anticipated, then I put my hands on him. There was no ground shrinkage. He actually had two kickers on that right beam! We got him loaded up and packed him back up to the truck, then to camp. Back at camp we cooked a great meal and have a few celebratory drinks around the campfire.

Back home I wanted to test my field judging skills on Coues deer. I had guessed my deer in the mid 80's. After putting the tape on him he measured out to just shy of 89". I called Sean to tell him that he was bigger than we'd guessed and was now really curious what his measured out at. Sean ended up measuring his at over 111". I always say I'd rather be lucky than good. In Sean's case he was both lucky and good! It was an awesome trip, and I can't wait to get back to Arizona, build on my Coues hunting skills, and pursue these elusive little deer again.



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LUCK OF THE WRONG DRAW

BY RICH CARIGNAN

It all started on April 29th, 2020. That was the day I applied for Rocky Mountain Bighorn sheep again! That was the 27th year I applied for the coveted tag.

One month went by and I received a letter from Idaho Fish and Game. As I walked back from the mailbox, I thought there would be another refund check inside! When I opened the envelope, I was in total shock and disbelief when I saw the word “Congratulations!” I could not believe I had finally drawn a Bighorn Sheep tag for “The Frank Church River of No Return Wilderness.” As I sat there looking at the tag, a few tears rolled down my face. Finally! My girlfriend asked if I were okay, as I could not really talk yet. I handed her the letter; I believe she was just as happy as I was!

As I looked at the tag, still in disbelief, I noticed the unit number was different than the one I had applied for. When filling out the application, I had filled in the wrong hunt number! It was not a problem because the area I had a tag for was adjacent to the one I thought I was applying for. As luck would have it, I had worked in that area in the late 90’s for Carson helicopters, so I was fairly familiar with the area.

That day started off three months of looking at maps, Google Earth and countless calls to biologists and people familiar with the area. I started planning scouting trips with my father and scouring map after map. In the following months I hiked and ran three to four days a week until just before opening day. I was not going to let anything I could control slow me down on this hunt.

In late July I went in on foot with my father to scout the river section. We had hiked in about five miles in 90-degree heat, good thing the river was close by. We did not see much sign of live animals, a couple of small rams and several black bears. In all we spent three days on the lower river portion of the area I planned to hunt.

A couple weeks later my father and I came in from the top of the area I had picked out. When we got there, we could see a forest fire had started directly across from us. Although that fire was nearly a mile away as the crow flies, the air was thick with smoke. In August it is not uncommon for this area to be very smokey. The next few days were spent overlooking the river and the unbelievably rough country these sheep live in. Although I did not see any sheep from the top, I located likely dusting and bedding areas.

Finally opening day was only a day away! We loaded up my truck camper and left Lewiston around 5am on August 29th.

This portion of my unit had a small area that is accessible by vehicle or quad. After spending two days there, we realized that the sheep were not up that high. The morning of August 31st we awoke to heavy snow, not surprising at 8,100 feet. The next day we headed home, but we now were confident where the sheep would be.

On the morning of September 17th, I returned to my area solo. I had decided to come in from the lower end of the river, where the Southfork flows into the Main Salmon. After arriving at my destination, it was 85 degrees, I had brought a good cooler with ice in it to keep the meat in case I got lucky. After some difficult travel along the steep and rocky riverbank, I was able to skirt along the private land and onto the Southfork Trail.

The lower part of this canyon was open and hot. After going about three miles the trees became numerous. After refilling my water bottles, I continued another mile to a nice camp spot. I set up camp, ditched my heavy pack for my rifle and bino’s. I glassed the rugged country upstream; I saw no sheep. After getting more water and cooking some dinner on my Primus, I started a small fire and thought about tomorrow’s plans.

I awoke in the morning, after not sleeping well. A bear had decided to make his presence known, letting me know he did not like me being there. After breakfast I put on a much-lightened pack and headed upstream. I had only walked 50 yards out of camp, when I glassed several ewes above me. After a short time, I realized there were no rams, so I continued. The next two miles the terrain got so steep and rocky that it was just about unhunt-able. I went up a bit farther and saw that it opened up and looked better for hunting.

I spent the next couple days hunting that area, and on the 2nd morning I saw a very nice ram across the river. I thought about going after him, but it was so hot, and I was by myself. I decided to head back to camp and pack up, I would concentrate on early October. The last two weeks of the season should be cooler, I hoped. I had narrowed down my target area to about a four or five mile stretch of the river!

Upon returning home, I called my friend Steve. We have been friends for about 35 years. We had been on countless hunts, fishing trips and worked in the woods together. When I called Steve, that evening thinking he would be the perfect companion for this trip, he quickly agreed to go; he could get away for a four-day weekend.

We met up in Grangeville, Idaho at 1:00am on October 2nd then made the four-hour drive to the trailhead. From there we loaded our packs with enough gear and food for about four days. We started the five-mile hike down the river trail and reached our camping spot about noon. After making camp and eating



lunch, we ventured a couple miles further down river to start looking for sheep. We saw a couple ewes before dark, but I was very encouraged by the terrain. It looked perfect; the canyon was unbelievably steep, rocky and almost unhuntable!

The next morning found us up early. We ate quickly and headed out. The morning was uneventful. We hunted downstream about five miles, picking

apart this great looking terrain with our binos! We thought this area looked good, so we hiked about 1,500 ft up a razorback ridge and found a good vantage point. It was not long when I spotted a beautiful ram 500 yards above us. He quickly went into a rocky shoot and vanished. There was no way to approach him by going up the ridge we were on; we were bluffed out. So, we went back down to the river and

went downstream to the next ridge.

We found a ridge that would put us slightly below and across from where the ram disappeared. After reaching a good vantage point, we glassed and glassed. We picked apart every rock-slide, outcrop and crevice for about two hours, nothing! Then just as I was packing up to leave, Steve says "I got him!" Sure enough, he was bedded in a small depression with tall grass around him.

I quickly decided he was the one I wanted, I crept up to a rock outcrop slightly above me and ranged him....400 yards! At a 40-degree angle, I knew I needed to hold low. I settled in and fired, a miss. He ran uphill about 25 yards and stopped again, 425 yards. I shot again, another miss. The big ram ran out of sight, he was gone! I quickly realized why I missed; my range finder had already adjusted for the angle. So, my compensation further



magnified the miss.

I could not believe I had missed; I have made similar shots many times. I remember still feeling numb, it all had happened so fast. Not only had I a beautiful ram in my crosshairs, but I felt completely at peace with what had just happened. After all that is what it's all about anyway, the experience! We headed back down to the river trail and towards camp, the shadows of the evening were already settling in.

It was about 5:00pm now, we were going slow and glassing above us, no sheep. We had gone about a mile, when all of a sudden Steve said, "Big Ram"!

I stopped immediately and saw the ram on the opposite riverbank, which was still in my unit. I got my gun off my pack and found a rest on a nearby rock; he was 350 yards. I managed to finally get steady, heart pounding! The ram had run up the rock-slide about 75 yards and stopped perfectly broadside. I fired, the ram lunged forward and fell. He then got back on his feet and ran down to the riverbank; I fired several more rounds. He finally stumbled and went down at the very edge of the river.

I probably experienced the most emotions I have ever felt. I had to sit down and collect myself. Steve scouted out a spot to cross the river. After 27 years of dreaming about this moment, it was happening!

After locating a suitable spot to wade, we stripped down to our briefs and waded into the cold water. The current was swift, and it got deep towards the opposite bank. We finally climbed up on the other bank and put

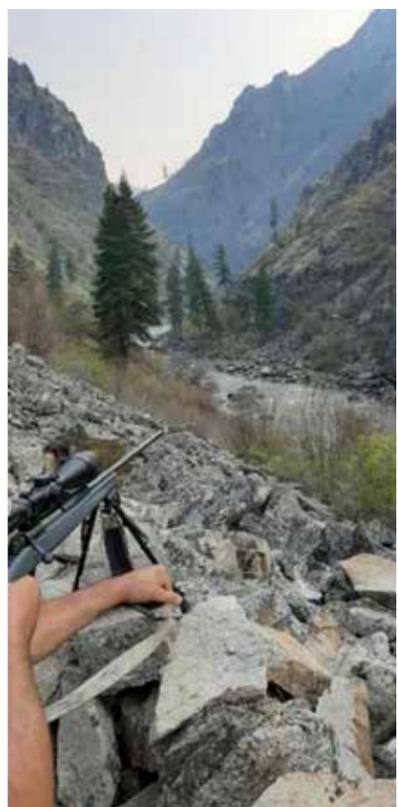
our pants back on. I started up towards my ram and when I reached him, I was in awe! He was absolutely gorgeous and even larger than I thought. As I admired the beauty of the ram and landscape, I could not help but feel so overjoyed. What a privilege to be able to harvest this magnificent animal in "The Frank" no less! After a lot of pictures and handshakes, the work began!

I collected the biological samples as requested by the Fish and Game then field dressed the ram. We then tied mule tape to his horns and rear legs. We were going to float him across the river and debone the meat on the other side before dark. When we got him in the river, surprisingly he floated well. It was all going well until we got up to our necks in the river! Swimming with a 250-pound ram was not easy. After a short swim we reached the other bank, just above a class III rapid.

We quickly deboned the meat and caped the ram. It was now 7:30pm and completely dark. It was about three and half miles up-river to our camp, this trail is not the best. After a lot of rockslides to climb over and a lot of up and down we reached our camp at 11:30pm, completely exhausted. We hung the meat up and laid out the head and cape in the very cool night air. We quickly heated up some dinner and went to sleep.

Daylight came early, we were up making breakfast and stretching sore muscles. I finished caping the ram, making it as light as possible. Steve and I then packed up our camp and began the last five miles back to the truck. With our packs weighing at least 80lbs, the progress was slow. But at 2:30 pm on October 4th we reached the trailhead.

What an incredible adventure, 27 years in the making, in the most beautiful landscape! If not for the luck of drawing the wrong unit, I would be applying again next year! This adventure was like a movie, and the theatre was "The Frank Church River of No Return Wilderness"!






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LOWER SALMON RIVER BIGHORN SHEEP CAPTURE AND HEALTH SURVEY UPDATE

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

As Hollie Miyasaki, Idaho Fish and Game statewide bighorn sheep manager, reported in the last issue, we started a project in November 2020, with support from the Idaho Wild Sheep Foundation, to improve the health of the Lower Salmon bighorn sheep population. We captured and collared 12 female and 3 male bighorn sheep over 40 river miles on the Salmon above Riggins in Game Management Units 14, 19, and 20 between Van Creek and Mackay Bar. The captures provided preliminary data to be used to design a “test and remove” action to clear *Mycoplasma ovipneumoniae* (Movi) from the population. This is similar to what was done to successfully clear Movi and respiratory disease from bighorn sheep populations in Hells Canyon, 2013 - 2020.

In the Lower Salmon population, a previous study conducted by the Nez Perce Tribe and the Idaho Department of Fish and Game from 2007 - 2013 identified 4 ewe bands, or social groups along this stretch of river. In November we captured sheep from all of these social groups. Coincidentally we recaptured 3 ewes marked in the earlier study and they were still in the areas they were in over 10 years ago, so these groups seem to be quite stable, something that will help with managing disease.

We found evidence of exposure to Movi in all social groups and detected infection in two groups: Manning Bridge and Indian Creek. Although the sample size was small, prevalence of antibodies, indicating exposure to Movi, was lower in 2020 (64%) than observed in 69 sheep tested in the same area in 2007 - 2013 (100%). Capture of at least 21 more ewes: 9 in the Wind River and Manning Bridge social groups, 8 in the Indian Creek social group, and 4 in the Mackay Bar/Jersey Creek social group is needed to sample an adequate cross section of the population in order to identify priorities for conducting test and remove to improve health and lamb recruitment in this population. We are planning to do that next fall and hope to start focusing test

and remove on the social group or groups with the highest prevalence of infection next winter. Thanks to Idaho WFS for supporting this project.



Comparison of Movi infection (PCR) and exposure (cELISA) prevalence in the Lower Salmon bighorn sheep population 2007 - 2013 and in 2020.



Eight year-old ram collared in the Lower Salmon bighorn sheep population in November 2020.



Ewe collared above Mackay Bar in the Lower Salmon bighorn sheep population.

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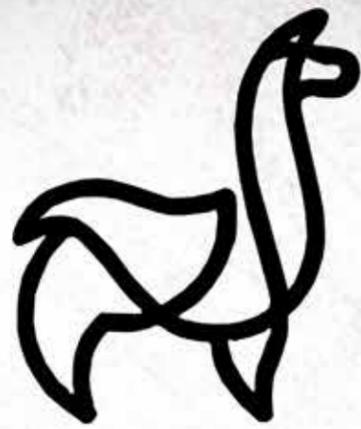
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-Jack O'Connor



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SOLO WILDERNESS SHEEP HUNT

BY BEN BRANDT

It goes without saying that 2020 was full of surprises. Hunting season was no exception. I typically apply for controlled hunts for elk and deer but thought I would try my hand at sheep. I only had a three percent chance of drawing in the unit I put in for, so I wasn't even watching for the results.

I had just walked into the kitchen when my wife informed me from the other room that she had decided not to apply for an elk or deer hunt this year because she did not want to take time away from my sheep hunt. I walked back in to explain to her that my chances of drawing were slim to none... I found her looking at an email from Fish and Game congratulating me on successfully drawing a Rocky Mountain Bighorn Sheep tag. I couldn't believe it!

Drawing this tag turned out to be a transformative event in my life. I did not realize it at the time, but the following months would culminate in a six and a half day hunt that would reinvigorate my passion for hunting and experiencing the remote places of Idaho.

I have been hunting as far back as I can remember: deer, elk, upland birds, Alaskan moose and anything else I could get a tag for. Over the years I have been fortunate to take several respectable animals, but the memories of those hunts always centered around those present, and since passed on, that I shared the hunt with. This hunt would be different.

I began to prepare right away and decided that new gear was a must. I had been wanting to replace my old pack frame for years, so this was a great opportunity. After a lot of research, I decided to go with Stone Glacier out of Bozeman, Montana. I spoke with a salesman over the phone and he directed me to the Talus 6900 on the Xcurve frame. He felt strongly that I needed a larger pack for a 10-14-day wilderness backpack hunt, so I made the purchase.

With my new pack I received a coupon for a workout program from MntTough, a gym also based out of Bozeman. They offer in-home training programs designed to help the backcountry hunter to prepare physically and improve their mental toughness, both of which are essential for a wilderness hunt. The terrain on this hunt would be a step up from anything I had hunted in before. Going into the Frank Church unprepared would both put me at risk and could impact my chances of harvesting a ram. I decided to give the workout a try and was not disappointed. The workouts were difficult and just what I needed to get ready for my hunt.

My biggest obstacle in preparing for this hunt wasn't gear or committing to a workout program. Unfortunately, I knew nothing at the time about sheep hunting. Where would I find them? The tags are hard to draw; should I get an outfitter to help ensure success? I made a few calls and my good friend, Toby, put me in contact with Jake, a friend of his who had taken a ram in the same unit in 2016.

Over the next few months, Jake and I were able to go over maps and make a few flights over some areas of interest. Jake was excited about the hunt and collected as much information for me as he could. Ultimately, I picked my area of focus based on the information I had received from Jake and observations of the terrain made from the air. Jake warned me that sheep hunting is an addiction. Do it once, and you will do everything you can to go again... truer words have never been spoken.

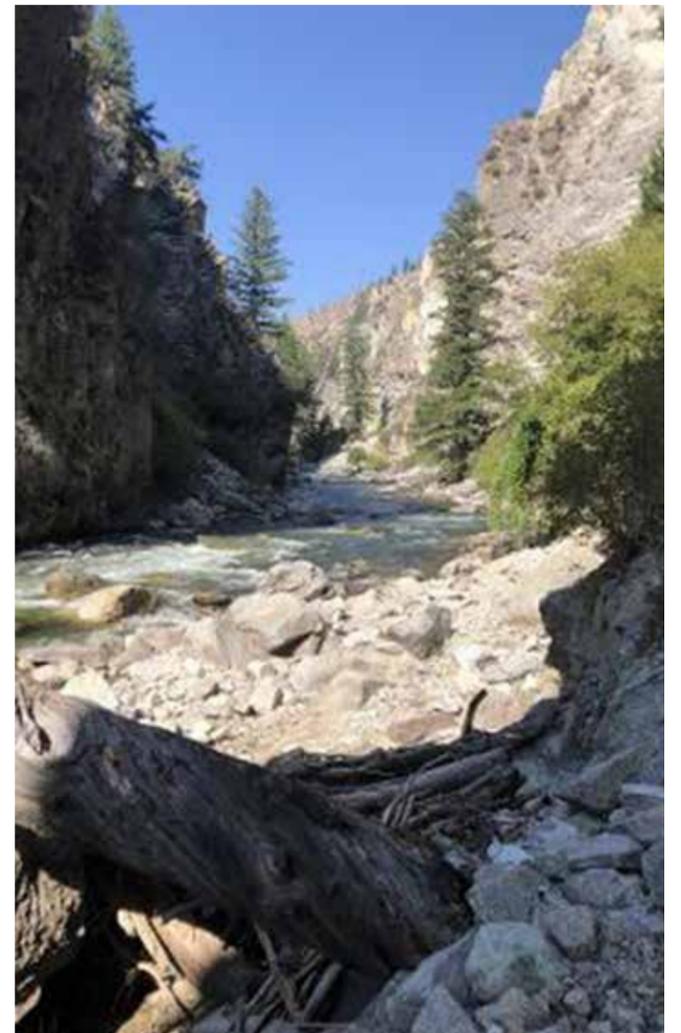
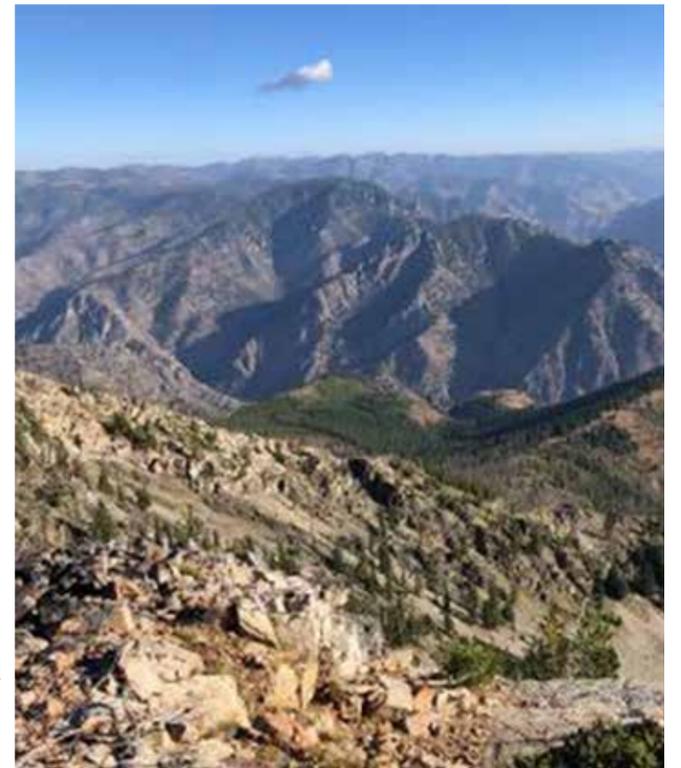
I planned to split the season into two separate hunts. The first would be a 10-14 day endeavor heading in a couple of days before the season opened, and the second would be the last two weeks of the season. Jake was only able to make one of my planned hunts and ended up choosing the latter. As it turned out there would only be one hunt.

Although I have experience flying in the back-country, I felt I needed some flight instruction for the air strip I would be flying into. Toby is the best I have flown with, but he was in Alaska and unable to go up with me. Fortunately, another friend of mine is a great instructor with a wealth of back-country experience. Matt agreed to take me in and show me how to get in and out of the air strip closest to the hunt area. We took advantage of the opportunity and landed at a couple of other strips as well for additional practice...some of them were quite a rush!

Wildfires are a yearly staple in Idaho, and this year was no exception. Due to heavy smoke, I was only able to make one of three planned scouting trips. I didn't see any sheep, but I did see a couple of beds that I thought may have belonged to them. I still can't tell the difference between sheep and mule deer tracks, but I am pretty confident that deer don't bed down on the rocky crags sheep call home!

The night before I left, I packed and unpacked my gear several times to get it just right. It weighed in at 48.2 pounds, pretty good I thought. This was before I added my gun, Garmin InReach, phone, charger, binoculars, range finder, or water... I decided not to weigh it again. What I didn't weigh wouldn't hurt me, right?

The next morning, I loaded my Super Cub and my wheels were up with the sun; I was off on my grand adventure. I couldn't have asked for better weather for my flight in. The landing was uneventful, and I was soon tied down and ready for my hike in. It took me two days to get to my planned first camp. This was a little disappointing as I had planned to spend all day before opening scouting for sheep. But no worries, I had food for 14 days!





Sunday, opening day, I saw what looked to me like great sheep country. I found several tracks and beds that weren't in places I would typically find a lot of deer. This was a great encouragement that I was in a good spot. The excitement was building. I had a plan for the next few days of hunting and if I didn't turn up any sheep I would move to the next area on my list.

Monday morning, I awoke to a light snowfall. This was good, as now I would have a better idea how fresh the tracks I was seeing were. I was perched at my first vantage point by sun up, unfortunately it had begun snowing much harder and I could only see about 100 yards. As the morning progressed it became foggy and soon visibility was reduced to about 50 yards. Rather than sit in the snow and get soaking wet, I keggered up under a tree, lit a fire and read my New Testament, waiting for the fog to clear.

Around 4:30, I decided the fog wasn't going to clear and I might as well work my way back to the tent. However, as I was descending a ridge, I emerged just below the fog line. I knew by the time I got back to camp I would be soaked, but I came here to hunt and not worry about being wet. So, even though it was getting late I worked my way to the cliffs

on the edge of the ridge to start glassing for sheep.

Before I even brought my binoculars up, I saw them. Eleven rams bedded a little over 100 yards away, nearly straight down. Suddenly the fog blew back in and hid them from view. The sheep were right at the ceiling and the fog and mist continued to blow in and out. I would see them for a moment, and then they would fade from sight.

Within five or ten minutes the fog cleared enough that I could begin to look over each of the 11 rams. One stood out above the rest. He was the biggest of the 11 rams and looked to be full curl or close, even though he was broomed off. I paused for a moment as I considered how I would get him out once I shot him. I took a few minutes to move around to get a better look at the terrain. Finally, I thought I could see a way to get him to the top of the ridge.

I laid down on the rock ledge with my Christiansen 6.5 Creedmoor, slid out to the edge so I could get the sheep in the scope, and my scope was fogged up! I had taken my scope cover off when I first saw the sheep, and in the time, it took me to look things over the drizzle and fog had collected on the lens. A quick wipe solved the problem and I shuffled back out to the edge.

The ram was laying down looking right at me. Due to the terrain I was not able to get around for a shot from another angle. I didn't want to wait for him to stand up for fear that he would roll down the hill making an already difficult hike out much worse. His head and horns were making it difficult to get a bead on his brisket or front shoulder.

I decided to try and run the bullet right down the left side of his head to shoot him in the shoulder. I was struggling to get comfortable with my rifle out over the edge of the ledge but felt stable enough considering I was only shooting 116 yards. I pulled the trigger and immediately saw feet in the scope. I knew I had not hit the shoulder and hoped I hadn't damaged the horns. I worked my way down to him as quickly as I could and saw that I had pulled the shot about two inches to the left and shot him just inside his right eye.

I was excited to have my first sheep, but I was also very aware that I was a two-day hike from my airplane, by myself, with a lot of work ahead of me! I caped and quartered him and left the meat and cape to cool overnight. I packed the head to camp, which I would not have found in the dark without my Garmin InReach. I sent a text to Jake letting him know I had taken a nice ram. Ever the sheep hunter

and good guy, he quickly sent me a text offering to drive to anywhere I could pick him up in the plane so he could come in and help pack. However, getting him to where I was would take too long; I was on my own.

I ate some dinner and tried to get some rest. Knowing what lay ahead the next day, I was unable to get even a few minutes of sleep!

For the next two and a half days I worked shuttling two loads of over 90 pounds each back toward my airplane. I would be on the trail by 4:30 am and not stop until nearly 8:00 pm. The Talus 6900 performed exceptionally well in comfort and durability, and I was grateful for the time Andrew and the team at Stone Glacier had put into making sure I had the right pack for this hunt.

Since I had first headed in for the hunt, I was worried about getting back across the creek. The crossing at the air strip is easy, but where I crossed to get to the area I wanted to hunt was deeper and faster. My first crossing had been more than I wanted with nearly 70 pounds. Now with over 90 pounds for two crossings, and no other reasonable route back to the plane, all I could do was pray God would get me across safely.

When I arrived at the creek crossing, I found that a bear had chewed on my waders. I had found them much too short the first time across, and now with holes in them there was no sense in trying to stay dry. This turned out to be an answer to prayer as I was able to find a safer place to cross. The deeper water was colder, but it was much slower, and I found I was more stable even though I had extra weight. Thank you LEKI for indestructible trekking poles!

It was tiring but I wanted to get the meat and cape out before they spoiled, so I pushed as hard as I could. I was

safely back in the hangar unloading gear from my plane by early afternoon. In the six and a half days of the hunt, I lost 12 pounds. Interestingly, I never felt overly hungry or tired. The adrenaline rush of the hunt provided me with the fuel I needed to push through.

Truth be told, although it was a solo sheep hunt, I was never by myself. From the start I had help from friends like Toby, Jake, and Matt, the guys at Stone Glacier, as well as Ara, Dustin and the team at MtnTough. Of course, my wife encouraged me throughout the preparation, helping me with my workouts, and spending hours looking at gear. Most importantly, she prayed for my safety every day. Through the six and a half days of the hunt I know without a doubt that God was with me every step of the way!



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Remembering Ron Sherer

by Mike Schlegel

I met Ron in 1972. He was a fireman in Boise, plus he and his wife Suzy operated a black bear and mountain lion outfitting business. The mountain lion had recently been classified as a game animal and the Idaho Department of Fish and Game began studies to learn about mountain lion populations around the state. Ron volunteered to help catch mountain lions. I was working in Kamiah at the time and went out with Ron to learn how to replicate the work in the Clearwater area. Because of our passion for bowhunting, we began hunting together.

I drew a Rocky Mountain sheep tag in 1987 and Ron took three weeks of work to accompany me. Ron drew in the same hunt area in 1988 and I accompanied him. We had a great time and much fun on both hunts. We both shot rams with a recurve bow. Ironically, Ron saw my ram go down, and I saw his ram go down. A story for each hunt was published in Traditional Bowhunter Magazine. I will contact the editor for permission to run the stories in our magazine.

I went with Ron and Suzy to Carmen Island for his Desert sheep hunt. In the afternoon on the first day if the hunt Ron and his guide were about 20 yards from a ram, but needed it to be in a better position for a bow shot. I was about 15 yards behind them, video camera rolling, but could not see the ram. I was tempted to move so I could video his shot, but opted not to for fear of spooking the ram. Ron made a good shot on nice ram.

In addition to his black bear and mountain lion business, Ron and Suzy spent several August and September months in Unalakleet, Alaska, guiding grizzly bear hunts. Ron was a board member of the Pope and Young Club for 16 years, life time member of the Idaho Bowhunters, plus a life member of WSF and IDWSF.

Ron and Suzy had recently sold their log home in Atlanta, ID and were in the process of purchasing a home in the Harpster area. Ron died January 13th following surgery due to complications of a blood clot. A memorial service is planned for Ron on September 18, 2021, 5:00 PM Mtn time at the Julius M Kleiner Park, Picnic Shelter B1, 1900 Records Way, Meridian, ID.



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You can cover way more miles with optics than you can with your feet, is something I learned too late in life. Quality optics and knowing how to use them can save you many miles and help you be a more successful hunter. There are many articles out there to help you learn techniques of picking apart a hillside and over time with experience you will develop your own technique that works for you. There are a few universal truths when it comes to glassing. First, you get what you pay for. I'm not saying everyone needs a pair of \$3000 binos and a \$4000+ spotter but they are priced that way for a reason. My advice is getting the absolute best you can possibly afford as they can be a lifetime investment. Look for a bino in the 8-12x range and at least a 40mm objective for light gathering. Remember though the greater the power the less stable you will be when trying to free hand. Also, the larger the objective the more light gather and the more you can see during those "magic hours" at dusk and dawn when the smart animals move the most. My personal favorite is the 10x42. Next and equally important is a good tripod and head. I don't know the exact numbers, but I would bet you are at least 10x more effective glassing when your binos are attached to a tripod for stability. Again, buy the best you

can afford. Weight does matter if you are backpacking! I can't stress the tripod enough. You can have a pair of \$3000 binos and if you don't have a tripod or a cheap one then someone with \$500 binos on a tripod will be more effective at spotting game.

Spotting Scope and high-power binoculars such as the 15-18x's are the next place to look at once you're set up with a basic glassing set up. Each piece of glass has its place depending on the hunt. Spotting scopes can be used to judge animals from several miles away before you expend the energy to hike to them as well as counting a ram's annuli to determine his age. High power bino's are incredible for picking apart a brushing hillside when hunting coues deer and you're looking for an ear, or nose, or piece of antler sticking out from a bush. My personal kit includes a 10x42 range finding binocular, a 18x56 bino, and a 25-50x80mm spotter. Each one has their place in my pack depending on the hunt. Do your research, try out as many different models, rent or borrow to help you decide what is right for you then get out in the field and learn how to use them and I guarantee you will be more successful.





DILLINGER RIVER MOOSE HUNT

By Dan Kluth

This Alaska adventure started with a business dinner conversation with David Briggs. I told him of needing only an Alaska-Yukon moose to complete my quest for the North American Super 25; taking 25 different North American big game species. He shared his interest in hunting animals other than the whitetails of Delaware and Maryland. We decided to put together an Alaska-Yukon Moose hunt. I contacted Peter Barela with Barela's Alaskan Outfitters. Peter had recently aligned his business with the new Dillinger River Outfitters (DRO) owner Aaron DeRose as their master guide. After a few discussions and contacting references our hunt was booked with DRO for September 1st

through 10th of 2020.

Although the opening day of the Alaska Moose hunting is September 1, I arrived in Anchorage on August 28th. An early arrival was planned as weather is often be an issue when flying into the Alaskan back country. David was supposed to arrive that afternoon, but due to weather related flight delays he did not arrive until 2 am. That was the first of the weather issues on this trip, but wouldn't be the last.

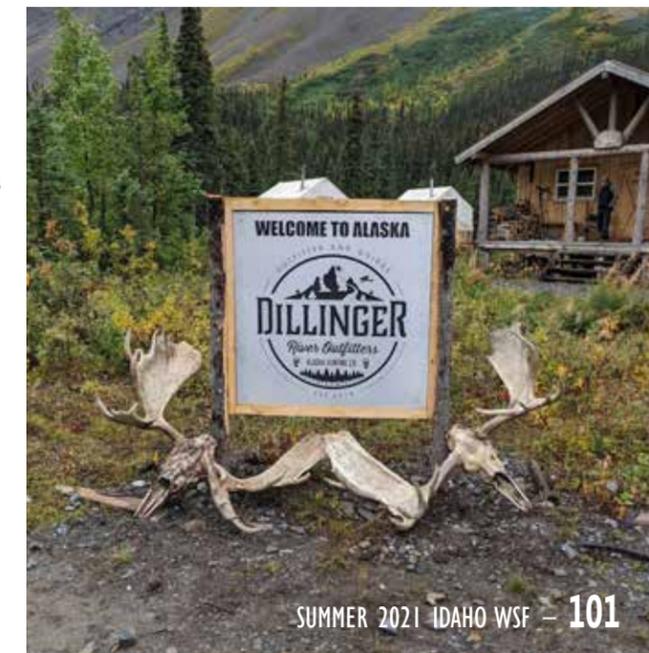
The next day we were supposed to fly into the DRO Base camp on the Dillinger River, but bad weather prevented it.

Due to Covid restrictions, there was not a lot to do in Anchorage. We did make some trips to Sportsman's Warehouse and Bass Pro Shop to help the Alaskan economy. Mostly though, we hung around the hotel and waited for the call that there was a weather window allowing flights to base camp. On the following day (8/30), our hopes were buoyed as we boarded a float plane, but after thirty minutes the pilot was advised that landing at the base camp was not possible. Frustrated we returned to Anchorage.

Finally, on the afternoon of August 31, after three days in Anchorage, we were able to get into the DRO base camp. The flight in was longer than usual. The pilot had to avoid socked in passes that he normally would fly through. It was good to get into base camp, however bad weather dropped in cancelling our Super Cub flight to the moose camp. All opening day (Sept 1) we were in base camp, waiting for the weather to clear so that we could fly to moose camp.

Mid-morning September 2, Aaron and Peter wanted to get us out hunting one way or another. They decided we would ride five hours in an Argo (tracked ATV) with guide Jake Long to camp and hunt on the way in. Their plan was good and came close to fruition. We spotted a large moose. I almost got a shot at him before he disappeared into the timber. We met our guides Steve Chmura and Bob Graham at another camp and continued in the Argo to a camp set up on a large river drainage.

Glassing from camp the next morning, we spotted a cow and bull moose about a mile away. Shortly afterwards the cloud ceiling dropped. The rest of the day, we had limited opportunities to glass only spotting one more cow. The next day the weather was much better, but after a full day of glassing, only one cow was spotted. On



the third day in camp (Sept 5), after glassing all morning and only seeing the cow moose, we took the Argo upriver to see if we could locate the bull that we saw on day one. After a steep climb up the riverbank and a short hike we were able to spot an immature, paddle-horned bull, and a few cows. Soon we were able to locate the larger bull bedded on the edge of some willows with a cow. After being scrutinized by Bob and Steve, it was determined that while he may be legal with a spread over 50 inches, it was too close to risk a shot. The decision was made to pass on that bull. Our hunt was now half over and reality set in that we had only five days to kill two moose. Steve and Bob assured us that this was still possible.

The next day (Sept 6), after morning glassing, the decision was made to move to another camp known as Blueberry Hill. We loaded up the Argo and moved camp, arriving mid-afternoon. The camp name was fitting as the hill was covered with blueberry bushes loaded with sweet, ripe blueberries. We split up to glass, with Bob and I heading one direction while David and Steve went another. Later winds began to kick up. We had to find sheltered places out of the wind to glass, just to hold our binoculars steady. It was doubtful animals would be moving in those high wind. We continued searching without success. We returned to the Blueberry Hill camp and the winds continued to blow through our evening meal.

That evening the “williwaws” hit with force. Williwaws are a phenomenon of ground winds riding over a mountain ridge that are given a kick by higher-altitude airstreams, pressure differences, and gravity. With these influences, a twenty mile an hour breeze can be amplified by four times. The williwaws would come and then fade away. Shortly after one would cease, we could hear the next gust building and roaring. They arrived like a freight train hitting the tent, straining the fabric. The gusts were so strong that at times the nylon tent would be pushed down on me pinning



me to my cot. After 20 minutes of this our tent blew apart; the nylon tearing, the ridge pole collapsing, table tipping over, pans, stove, and gear tossed everywhere. Then it started to rain.

Steve and Bob were in their own tent by ours. They helped get our gear, cots, and sleeping bags into their tent, which had also wind sustained damage. We took what remained of their tent and lowered it so that the top was just higher than we were in our cots. We hoped that the lower profile would allow us to get through the night protected from the elements, which it did. David and I slept very little that night as the nylon tent was constantly slapping our faces as it was buffeted by the high winds. The next morning, we were up at daybreak to assess the damage. Both tents were unusable.

Our emergency gear inventory included one two-man tent and a nylon fly. Now the priorities were to get another tent and to get back to moose hunting. Flights were still impossible due to persistent high winds. Steve took the Argo back to DRO base camp, a seven hour round trip, to retrieve another tent. The rest of us moved camp into a protected wooded gravel bar known as Crosscut Creek. Then we climbed Blueberry Hill and glassed until near dark when Steve returned in the Argo.

Since arriving we had seen many large black bears feeding contently for hours on the blueberries. I had a black bear tag, but did not want to disrupt the hunt until after killing a moose. That night a black bear visited our camp as we slept, sniffing David’s face, and letting out a small “woof” as it did so. Only the light nylon tent separated the two. Understandably, David was shaken by the encounter, and I doubt he slept the remainder of the night. Surprisingly, that bear just strolled around camp and did not cause any trouble.

The next morning (Sept 8, Day 8 of a 10-day hunt) we headed back up Blueberry Hill and continued our search for a bull moose. We spotted a particularly good bull moose some distance away. The clock was ticking on this hunt. Bob wanted to get to the moose in the Argo, knowing that if we did manage to kill it, we would end up sleeping in the field that night. We tried to break trail with the Argo through thick willow, but it broke down. We were only a quarter of the way to the moose. Bob and Steve again

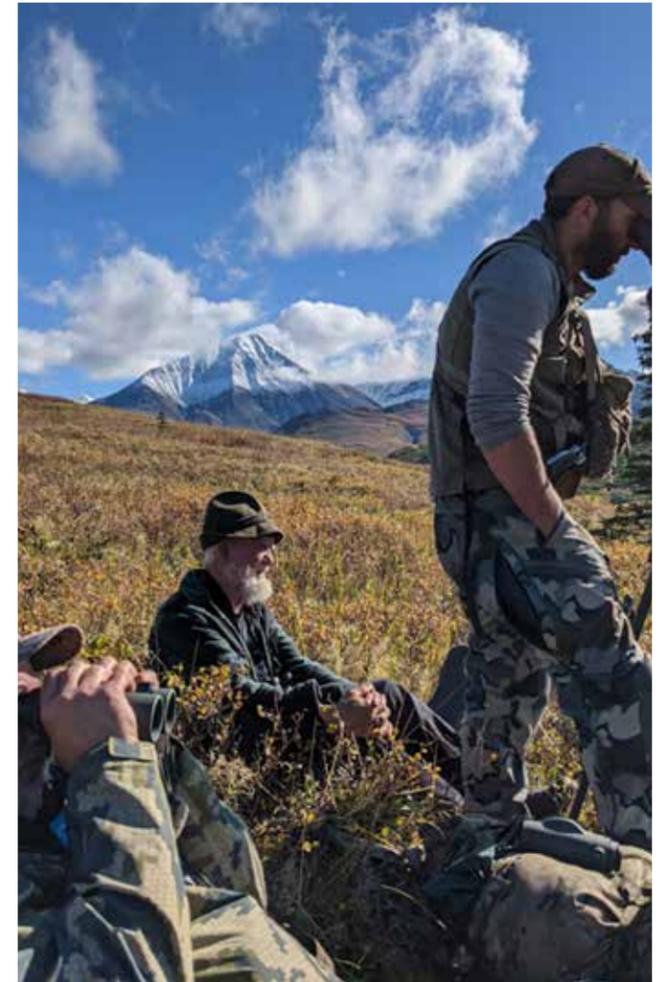
adjusted the plan to save the hunt. Steve stayed behind to repair the Argo, while David, Bob, and I headed back to a higher elevation point to glass.

A couple of hours of glassing produced another bull moose, a little over one mile away. To call the bull Bob made a low moan through a large fiberglass funnel. The funnel amplified the call. Bob also used it to strike tree branches to imitate the sound of a bull moose’s horns raking a tree. I was amazed that the moose could hear the low moan of Bob’s cow call from that distance, but I have no doubt that it did as it started walking directly toward us. The bull continued in our direction until he dropped into some trees and brush and we could no longer see him. With diminishing daylight, we needed to head back to our Crosscut camp. Bob commented that there was a good chance the next morning that bull would be in the area we had called from. I must admit that I was skeptical, but hoped he was right.

The next morning found us back there glassing. After about twenty minutes, I spotted the bull moose bedded in a sparsely treed flat about 600 yards below us. Just as Bob had predicted he had come in looking for the cow. Bob called to the moose and it rose from its bed and again moved towards us. It was fun to watch as he stopped to rake and destroy some small trees along the way. At about 400 yards, he stopped. Steve and Bob looked him over carefully and concluded that he was a good bull, well over the fifty-inch minimum. While they looked him over, the bull bedded down again. This gave me time to prepare for a shot with my Remington Model 700 in .338 RUM. Bob called again, the bull got up and moved to 296 yards. My shot hit the bull well, and after a couple of follow up shots I had my Alaska bull moose! The bull was taken on day nine of a ten-day hunt at 2:30 pm. Steve went back for the now repaired Argo and it started to rain again.

Our rifles were leaning up against a tree as Bob, David, and I began to skin and process the moose. Bob asked us if the rifles were still loaded. We replied that they were. He replied, “Good. Keep an eye out for bears”. We spent the next 4-5 hours, in the rain, getting the bull taken care of. When Steve returned, we loaded the Argo with the meat, antlers, and cape and headed to the Blueberry Hill airstrip.

The next day (Sept 10), Aaron flew in to get the meat, cape, and antlers and fly it to base camp. Even though technically there was another half day remaining on the hunt, David decided we should fly out, since we would be able to get back to Anchorage

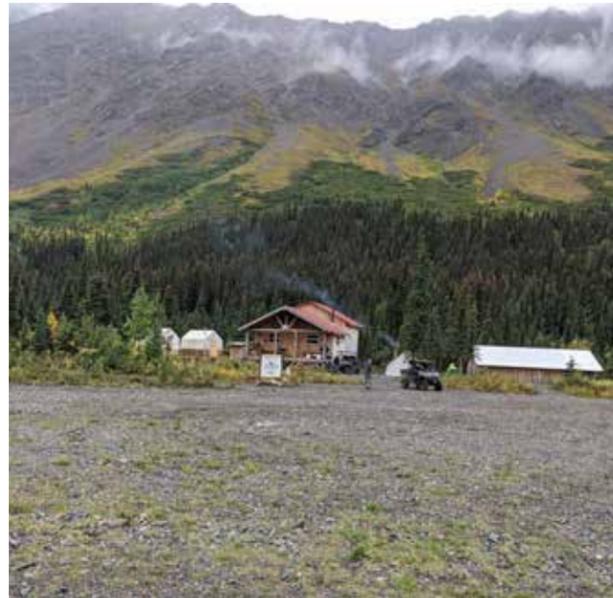


yet that day. I agreed. We were both mentally exhausted from the weather and the trials and tribulations of this hunt. At that point the last thing either of us wanted was to get caught in more bad weather and stranded in the Alaskan back country for another 2-4 days. Of the estimated 500 pounds of moose meat, I had the backstraps, tenderloins, and 25 pounds of sausage made and shipped to me. The remaining meat was donated to an Anchorage hospital.

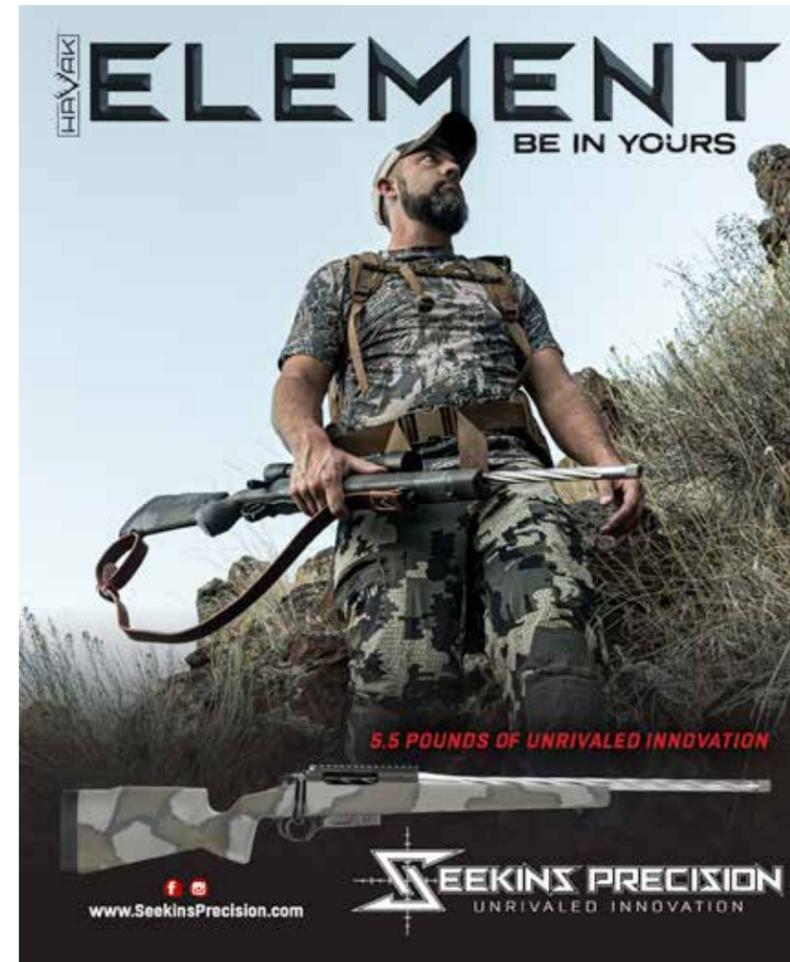
Looking back, we hunted a total of 5 days for a scheduled 10-day hunt. In addition to the bad weather the moose rut was delayed for some reason (weather likely) reducing their travel into our area. I consider myself truly fortunate to have bagged a moose on this hunt and felt badly that David did not. Of the seven moose hunters that arrived in the DRO base camp on or about September 1, four had been successful. For DRO this is unusual. In 2019 their hunters went twelve for twelve, with a 60" antler spread average. The second group of moose hunters for 2020 were 100% (6/6).

While frustrating at the time this was just one of those hunting situations that happens; when the weather and the moose do not cooperate. DRO guides, Steve Chmura and Bob Graham, did the best that they could in the difficult conditions we faced. Like many of these experiences, I look back fondly on the memories now. I spoke with David this winter, DRO is working with him to return for another moose hunt with what he considered a very fair deal. Thanks to the entire Dillinger River Outfitter staff for their perseverance and creativity during this hunt.

Sidebar: Bob Graham was one of our moose guides on this trip. Bob is a legend in the sheep hunting world. He served 23 years as a commissioned officer in the US Army working in Aviation Maintenance and Logistics and flew UH-1 helicopters in Vietnam. He moved to Alaska when stationed at Fort Richardson, and after his retirement in 1985 chose to make Alaska his home. He began guiding in 1986 and continues to fly, logging over 3,000 hours in Alaska in Cessna 180, Super Cub, and Maule M-7 aircrafts. Bob is a true international hunter, having hunted exotic species of game on nearly every continent, often multiple times. His signature hat, known as a Bavarian Jadt Hutte, is a traditional hunting garment he adopted while in Germany. Dall Sheep have long been his favorite pursuit, and his personal goal of recording 80 harvested rams for his hunters before turning 80 years old was realized just prior to this moose hunt. He has done most of his sheep hunting in Alaska's Brooks and Alaska ranges. Bob is an incredible source of local knowledge and experience, and the core of the DRO team. He is a father of 3, grandfather of 7, and great-grandfather of 8, and lives in Wasilla, AK with his wife.



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THE STORY OF THE LOST RIVER RANGE

BIGHORN

BY JIM JEFFRESS

When people daydream of escaping their routine and problems, the mind's eye will often transport them to somewhere away from the daily grind of waiting for a red light to turn green, the obligations of the day or meeting everyone's individual set of timelines. Often those mental images passively take us to a peaceful setting away from the crunch of people. The mountains of Idaho offer this therapeutic level of serenity whether people enjoy the challenge of the climb to the top or simply want to kick back and enjoy the view. The mystic name of a place like the Lost River Range (LRR), of eastern Idaho, is one such place where the door is always open to feed the soul.

The LRR is approximately 75 miles long and runs south from Challis, Idaho to the Snake River Plains near Arco, east of Craters of the Moon National Monument. This magnificent mountain range has Borah Peak, the state's highest peak, at 12,662 ft., plus six other peaks over 12,000 ft. with three more within 31 ft. of that elevation. The Lost River runs along the west side of the LRR and east of the Pioneer Mountains. The origin is high in the Pioneer Mountains, flowing south and disappearing into a basalt flow on the Snake River plains, thus the name "Lost River." It flows underground for approximately 100 miles before resurfacing along the Snake River at Thousand Springs State Park downstream from Twin Falls, Idaho. As bizarre as it sounds, these underground rivers are not unique within a number of

hydrologic basins and rivers in Idaho.

Early explorers and settlers reported observing thousands of bighorn sheep throughout most of Idaho. A population estimate of 50,000 bighorns was thought to inhabit the intermountain areas and canyonlands of Idaho (IDFG Bighorn Plan 2010). The LRR was no exception, based on the premier habitat that mountain provides, but as early as 1870 settlers started to report sick and dying bighorns and a marked reduction in their numbers. That rapid decline continued and by the early 1920's it was estimated only 1,000 Rocky Mountain bighorns remaining in Idaho. The remaining populations were confined to the remote interior of the Salmon River drainage. Speculation as to the decline centered around overhunting, competition with livestock, predation, etc. and as reported by some early observer's, mortalities after close contact with domestic sheep. Those observations were correct. As determined in recent years, pathogens from domestic sheep do affect the mortality rate of bighorn sheep and are considered their primary risk factor. It is estimated in 1890 there were 357,700 domestic sheep in Idaho, with a high of 2,418,000 in 1910 (Gem County Historical Society 2017). The opportunity to become exposed to domestic sheep was incredibly high if not impossible. A host of old-world diseases were completely foreign and naive to bighorn sheep and without any degree of immunity, the lethality was apparent by the steep decline in the

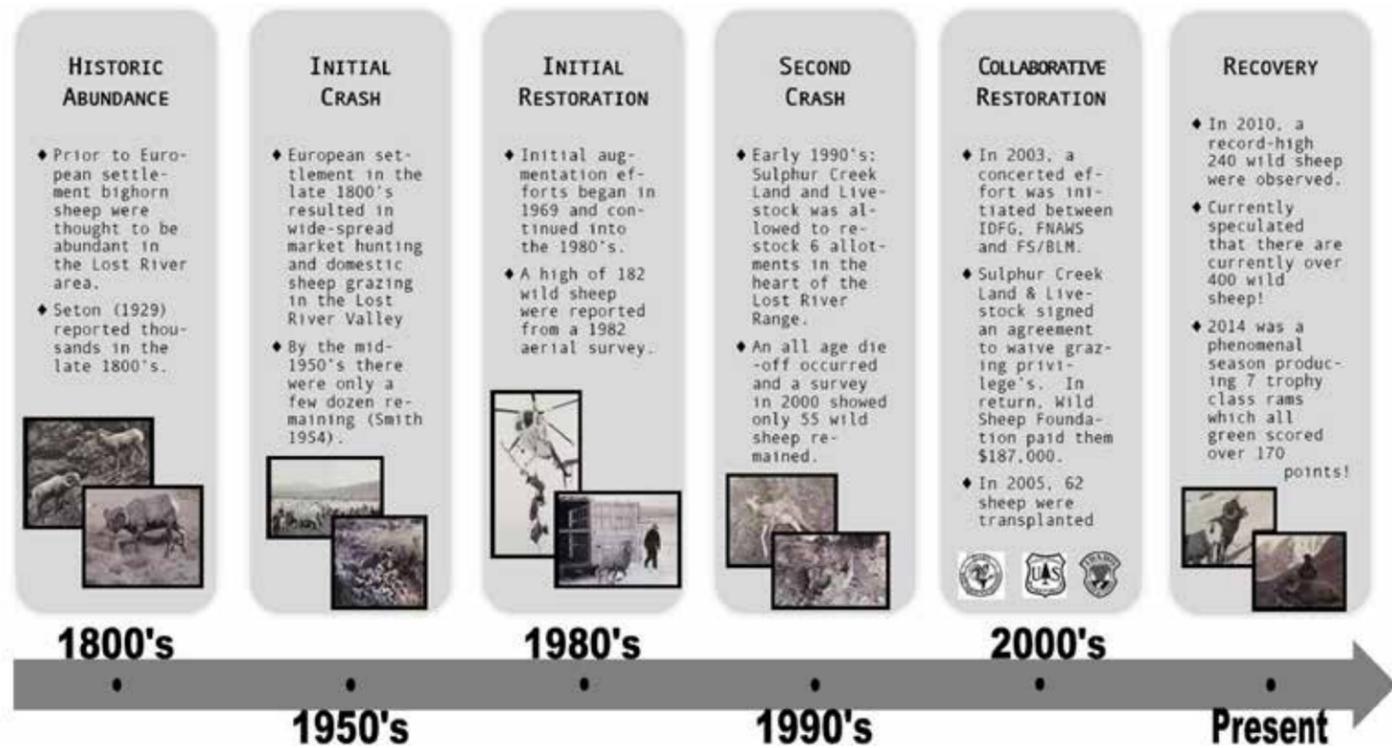
population during a 10 to 50-year period. European man's influences, in less than 50 years, almost completely decimated a species that roamed the Idaho landscape for tens of thousands of years. The federal Taylor Grazing Act of 1934 stopped these unregulated grazing practices by dedicating livestock use areas and controlling stocking numbers.

Akin to what happened in the rest of the state, by the early 1920's most, if not all, the LRR Rocky Mountain bighorn had been lost or died out. The LRR was no exception despite its steep, rugged, and remote topography. As the bighorn population's shrunk, so did the amount of available bighorn habitat. Currently, there are approximately 13,000 square miles of suitable bighorn habitat remaining in Idaho after settlement and human disturbances. Of that, only 3,670 square miles is occupied; approximately 28 % of the available habitat. The current estimate for both Rocky Mountain and California bighorn in Idaho is roughly 3,000, far below the projected potential of 15,000 bighorns in Idaho. The LRR is the "classic example" of how bighorn numbers fluctuate and lessons learned.

When assessing the tremendous habitat and relatively easy vehicle access, the LRR was selected for one of Idaho's first translocation projects. During 1969 and 1970 a total of 31 Rocky Mountain bighorns, seven from the Middle Fork of the Salmon River (1969) and 24 from Alberta's Banff National Park (1970) were relocated to the LRR. From this seed

source, the new bighorn population continued to grow with 182 bighorns being observed during a 1982 aerial survey. The population continued to increase and occupy new areas on an incremental basis until 2000. This is when history starts to repeat itself! Despite concerns about disease relationships from domestic sheep, as previously discussed, the Forest Service (FS) approved a permittee to activate domestic sheep allotments. Shortly thereafter, an all age and gender die-off occurred. Unfortunately, little tonothing can be done other than let the disease run its course. By 2000, approximately 55 bighorns remained in the LRR and their reproduction and survival rates appeared stagnant. Low lamb survival rates, following a pneumonia related die-off, impact population recovery.

In 2002, fully aware of the causative effects of the domestic sheep and their influence on this population, a plan was developed to restock the LRR with Rocky Mountain bighorn. There was a very concerted effort involving Idaho Fish and Game (IDFG), FNAWS (now the Wild Sheep Foundation), the Idaho chapter of FNAWS (now Idaho WSF), the Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management and sportsmen To developed a path forward. The WSF, plus IDWSF and individual sportsmen, raised \$187,000 toward the retirement of domestic sheep grazing permits. As a result, the FS/BLM retired those allotments. In 2003, 62 bighorns from Montana were released in the LRR and the rest is the start of a new segment of history. The recent high aerial count of 444 bighorns in 2020, portrays what can happen when sports-



men organizations and agencies work toward resolution of a problem. Considering the percent of animals observed, and the sightability rate, the population has to be conservatively in the 500+ range (that is not an IDF&G estimate, rather Idaho WSF). When considering the current statewide Rocky Mountain bighorn estimate of 2,100 animals, the LRR represents 24% of that estimate from only 12% of the available RMBH habitat in the state.

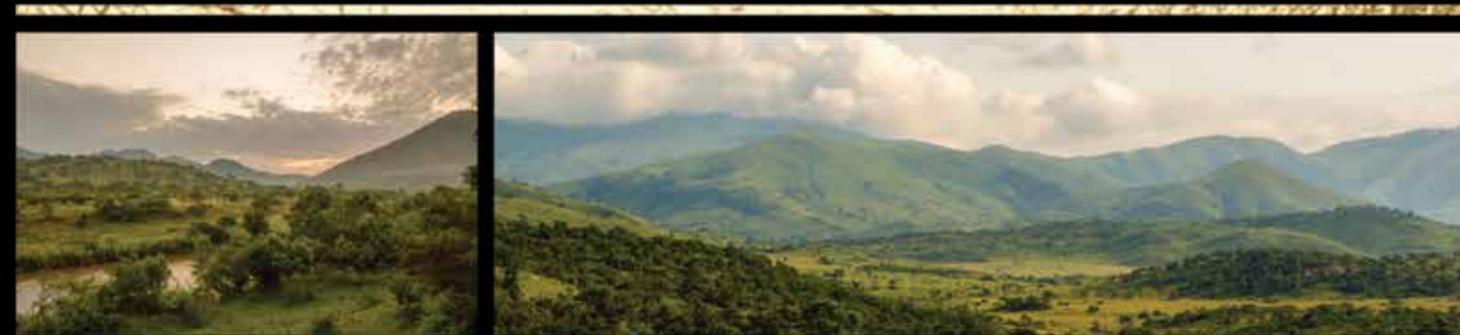
We have all heard the term “been there, done that”; well, the lessons learned from the LRR and other sites around the west lend testimony to the fact bighorn sheep need to be isolated and buffered from domestic sheep and goats! That is exactly why the Idaho Wild Sheep Foundation, in partnership with WSF, the National Wildlife Foundation, plus other chapters and affiliates, have worked so hard to secure large areas of habitat free of domestic sheep and goats. Those actions may come in the form of a land use plan decision, allotment conversion from domestic sheep to cattle or allotment retirement through a negotiated agreement. Large areas of landscape connected to each other provide room for bighorn growth and expansion into historical habitat. Until those guarantees are secured, it is pointless to transplant big-

horn into an area and repeat a LRR scenario. Providing large areas of landscape, devoid of domestic sheep and goats, is the primary goal of bighorn sheep advocates, however it is very costly thus, the need for a funding base.

We all need to be mindful of the mistakes of the past and practice proactive measures that will assure a healthy and expanding bighorn population in Idaho. A huge part of this effort is for interested sportsmen and outdoor enthusiasts to be vigilant to stray domestic sheep/goats in bighorn use areas as farm flocks still dot the area (report the same to IDF&G).

Engaging state and federal land management action plans is time consuming and boring however, it is critical work. This is an important function of your Idaho WSF Board of Directors who represent you! However, the Idaho WSF BOD relies on your support, membership, and your attendance at banquets; they are vital to our mission of “putting wild sheep on the mountain and turning talk into action!” Thank you for your continued support and see you June 12th!!!

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Bighorns and Turkeys: The Conservation Connection

By Chester Moore

As bighorn sheep go, so does the wildlife of the western United States.

Like a proverbial canary in the coal mine, bighorns are the first animals to indicate livestock intrusion, excessive predation, and pressures of human development.

Their status signals what will happen to other species like mule deer, for example, sometimes decades out.

And as wild turkeys go, so do America's forests.

No creature more intrinsically links to forest health than wild turkeys. These elusive game birds thrive in natural, open, mixed forests, but fail in thick, brushy woods where poor management makes for unnaturally dense undergrowth.

These two great game animals share a common link, and they can significantly benefit one another as pressure mounts on our wildlands, including in Idaho, that link is fire.

Making The Connection

This connection came to me on a 2019 trip to search out Rocky Mountain bighorns and Merriam's turkeys for separate photography projects in New Mexico.

Research led me to a remote area outside of Los Alamos.

The tragic Las Conchas fire, that consumed more than 150,000 acres of habitat in 2011, created an open habitat in the mountains.

This allowed Game & Fish officials to stock them there, and they have thrived since. "Fire is natural, and too much fire suppression causes problems on the range. Controlled burns can be a key part of bighorn management, and they help to lessen the chance of these massive fires we hear about that do incredible amounts of damage," said Clay Brewer with the Wild Sheep Foundation.

Fire is considered the key to turkey conservation. For example, in my native East Texas, where an ongoing eastern turkey restocking program had hit and miss success in the past, all stockings are now targeted in areas that have a prescribed burning program.

In fact, according to officials with National Wild Turkey Federation, they are excited that several of their recent turkey habitat enhancement projects actively benefit bighorns.

"Controlled burns are crucial for wild turkeys, and where they overlap with bighorns, it benefits both," said NWTF biologist Annie Farrell.

A recent example is prescribed fire and mechanical habitat treatment to remove encroaching conifer trees from shrub and sagebrush habitat on portions of the Missouri Breaks' public lands in Montana. Another NWTF projects at Spanish Peaks State Wildlife Area and Chancellor Ranch near Trinidad, Co., involved opening the forest canopy, reducing tree density, and promoting increased tender, understory. Open mountain habitat provides proper forage for sheep and turkeys, and the lack of trees offers fewer opportunities for predators.



Merriam's Turkeys & Rocky Mountain Bighorns

Although I found sheep and tons of turkey sign during my trip to New Mexico, I never photographed birds. On a trek to Colorado, however, I had an incredible encounter. Research showed a perfect spot for sheep and turkeys in an area also populated with moose and elk.

I had traversed the area for two days, and was a bit tired. While taking a break I glassed a rocky outcropping, and saw something unusual.

It was facing away from me, and I was wondering if I were looking at a vulture; and then it turned around.

Hanging from its chest was a beard. It was a Merriam's turkey, in addition, she was the super rare cinnamon color, the rarest of rare color phases.

As I made my way even closer, I saw she had a brood with her.

This area underwent a prescribed burn the year before, and it didn't just benefit the turkeys. A few hours later, I photographed bighorns just a short distance away. The link between managing habitat for these two iconic game animals was now crystal clear.

Partnering In Idaho

Wild turkey populations have taken off in Idaho since Idaho Department of Fish and Game first introduced them in the 1960s.

Merriam's, Rio Grande, and Eastern subspecies roam Idaho's public and private lands, recent estimates showing 30,000 plus birds. Although not native, they do provide excellent sporting opportunities for hunters and an ally for bighorns.

Turkey hunters are a passionate bunch who, like sheep enthusiasts, spend millions to conservation projects annually.

Perhaps teaming together on initiatives could go a long way to ensuring both the sheep and turkey prosper in the future. The amount of funding generated by the relatively small number of sheep hunters is astounding. No hunting community sector has an equal dollar for dollar impact like the Idaho Wild Sheep Foundation, WSF, and other regional groups.

Turkey hunters also stand tall for conservation and represent numbers that can impact legislature and ballot box halls when it counts.

Hope For The Future

"There he goes!" That's what my daughter shouted as a beautiful Eastern turkey hen flew from the double-thick cardboard box into a lush, open forest in East Texas. She grinned ear to ear as the bird and 15 others of its kind, moved to a new area where eastern populations were being restored. Opening that box and freeing the turkey inspired something in her to think more about wildlife conservation.

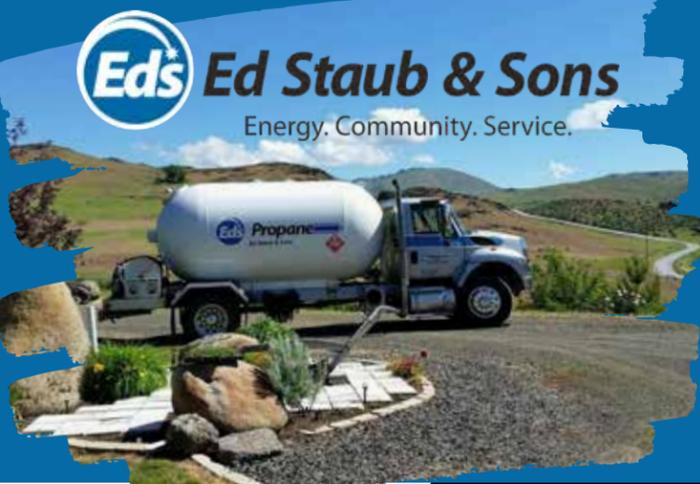
A few months later, we had the opportunity to witness a desert bighorn capture and relocation 11 hours west at Elephant Mountain Wildlife Management Area. Watching the helicopters bring sheep from the mountain and the ground team taking samples and collaring the sheep captivated this 13-year-old. On the long drive back from that trip, she said something I will never forget.

"The people who care about those sheep we saw today, and those turkeys we got to help release, make a real difference. There are going to be more bighorns and turkeys in new areas now. That's really cool," she said.

I couldn't agree more!

(Chester Moore is an award-winning wildlife journalist and conservationist from Orange, TX. He is a lifelong hunter and is an Idaho WSF member. You can follow his writings and podcast at highercalling.net)





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