

*** *Montana* ***
WILD SHEEP
FOUNDATION
KEEPING SHEEP ON THE MOUNTAIN

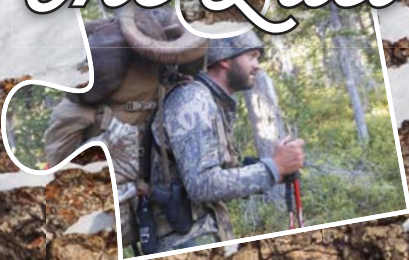
Wild Sheep

Winter 2017 | Volume 25, Issue 1



One Last Piece

page 6



25TH ANNUAL FUNDRAISER

**Dinner, Raffles,
Silent and Live
Auction and much
more!**

Check out the

Photo Gallery

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All contributed material will be published at the discretion of the Editorial Board of the Montana Wild Sheep Foundation (MTWSF). The Editorial Board consists of the editor of the newsletter, the executive director of the chapter, and the president of the chapter.

CONNECT with Montana WSF

Visit us online at www.montanawsf.org!

While there, visit the **Photo Gallery** page. If you would like to have a picture posted, email (photos@montanawsf.org) your name, the photo (jpeg format preferred) along with a brief one to two sentence description of the hunt.

You can also visit us on Facebook!



The Montana Wild Sheep Foundation will give a reward of up to \$1000 for information leading to the arrest and conviction of cases involving the illegal taking of bighorn sheep in the State of Montana. If you have information of any illegal act, contact 1-800-TIP-MONT (1-800-847-6668).

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Visit us at montanawsf.org.

President's Message

It's show season! I'm on my way to Reno for the Sheep Show right now and looking at the calendar we have many events focused on Bighorn Sheep. The first event on the calendar is **Domestic & Wild Sheep Management and Disease Symposium to be held at the Radisson Colonial Hotel in Helena, Montana on the afternoon of February 9th and the morning of February 10th, 2017.** The intent is to bring the two constituent groups (domestic sheep producers and wild sheep interests) and Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks together to develop an understanding of what each of the interests are facing. Our ultimate goal is to establish a wild/domestic sheep working group that will strive for both collaboration and support for finding solutions that can be implemented on the ground. Not necessarily a group that draws more lines on a map, or develops a new plan, but rather one that focuses on continuing problem solving. That has to start by addressing the Human to Human conflict, which is the aim of this conference. We are attempting to end the polarization, i.e. change the course of the discussion away from win/lose to one of collaboration in science and practice. Currently there are experts in Montana that are reluctant to enter into the issue due to these historic "whose science or opinion is better" discussion. The sessions will not provide an opportunity for debate, but rather a description of what each presenter knows in their area of expertise/experience. For more information and details, please email me at: bsolan.bs@gmail.com

Then the real work begins in preparation for our **25th Annual Fundraiser March 3-4, 2017 in Bozeman, MT at the Best Western Plus GranTree Inn.** It is the spot to be and there will be some new and exciting raffles and drawings focused on our new and life membership, as well as our taxidermy display. It is sure to be a great event and make sure you get your tickets early for the banquet, as we have sold out early the last two years and had to turn people away because of space limitations. A registration form is included here as well as more information on our Life Member Raffle (an Alaskan Dall Sheep Hunt!!).

Brian Solan

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Besides our newsletter, you can stay up to date on news, activities & current events by visiting our Facebook page:

www.facebook.com/MontanaWildSheepFoundation

*** *Montana* ***

WILD SHEEP
FOUNDATION

KEEPING SHEEP ON THE MOUNTAIN

25th Anniversary
Annual Fundraiser
March 3-4, 2017
Gran Tree Inn - Bozeman, MT



**REGISTRATION FORM
MONTANA WILD SHEEP FOUNDATION
March 3-4, 2017 FUNDRAISER BANQUET**

Best Western Plus GranTree Inn, Bozeman, MT

For Room Reservations call 406-587-5261

(Indicate your attendance at the Wild Sheep Convention for the group rate)

Last Name _____ First Name _____

Street Address _____ Telephone Number _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____ Email _____

I am also registering the following guests:

Name _____ Address _____

Name _____ Address _____

(Please list any additional names & addresses on an attachment)

FRIDAY MEMBERSHIP MEETING SOCIAL - No Tickets Needed

Film Festival and Spirits Tasting with Bozeman Spirits Distillery. Montana Bighorn sheep hunt films will be featured.

SATURDAY BANQUET

Prior to February 1st

After February 1st

Adult Dinner	_____ Tickets @ \$60 each	_____ Tickets @ \$70 each	\$ _____
Youth Dinner	_____ Tickets @ \$40 each	_____ Tickets @ \$50 each	\$ _____
Table Sponsor*	_____ Tables @ \$420 each	_____ Tables @ \$480 each	\$ _____

**(8) dinner tickets and a bottle of wine included with each table sponsor ticket.*

RAFFLE TICKETS

Prize

Cost

Sponsor Raffle	(1) Remington 700 SPS for every (5) sold	_____ Tickets @ \$300 each	\$ _____
Custom Rifle Raffle	Custom Built .30 Nosler	_____ Tickets @ \$20 each	\$ _____
Sheep Camp Raffle	Tent, stove, sleeping bag, etc.	_____ Tickets @ \$10 each or 12 for \$100	\$ _____

(All dinner and raffle tickets will be held for pickup at the registration table.)

ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP

Term

Cost

Regular Membership	1 Year	_____ Members @ \$30	\$ _____
	3 Year	_____ Members @ \$80	\$ _____
Youth Membership	1 Year	_____ Members @ \$15	\$ _____
	3 Year	_____ Members @ \$35	\$ _____
Family Membership	1 Year	_____ Members @ \$50	\$ _____
	3 Year	_____ Members @ \$120	\$ _____
Life Membership	Lifetime	_____ Members @ \$500	\$ _____

Total \$ _____

Major Fundraiser Items:

- Whitewater Rafting Trip - 5 Days/4 Nights on Salmon River
- Life Member Raffle - A fully guided Alaska sheep hunt!
- Guns, guns, and more guns to be given away in raffles!
- Leupold Optics Package
- Women's raffles
- Coastal Oregon Hunt for Roosevelt Elk or Blacktail Deer
- Original artwork
- Silent and live auction items

How are you Paying? Check Credit Card Master Card Visa

Name on Credit Card _____ 3-4 Digit Code _____

Credit Card No. _____ Expiration Date _____ (mo/yr)

Signature of Card Holder _____ Telephone _____

**Mail this form with check or credit card information to:
Montana Wild Sheep Foundation, PO Box 17731, Missoula, MT 59808
or register online at www.montanawsf.org**

Raffle tickets can only be purchased with check or cash.

For questions contact Brian Solan 406-461-7432 or bsolan.bs@gmail.com



2017 LIFE MEMBER RAFFLE

- All LIFE MEMBERS of MT Wild Sheep Foundation are included.
- MUST BE PRESENT at MTWSF Annual Banquet in Bozeman, March 4, 2017.
- Transferrable ONLY to another LIFE MEMBER that is also PRESENT.
- Hunt Dates August 12th-25th, 2017 with Mike Litzen Guide Service, Alaska.
- This is a great Alaska Dall Sheep Hunt with a very successful outfitter.



OFFICIAL SPONSORS:
Brendan Burns and Kurt Racicot





Eight years ago, while filling out permit applications, I discovered that Montana offers an over-the-counter Bighorn Sheep hunting opportunity.

I have been a resident of the state all of my life and this was the first I had heard of the “Unlimited” sheep districts. Hunting sheep in my home state had always been a dream, but it’s a fact that many hunters grow old applying for the lottery tags.

I immediately shared my discovery with my elk hunting partner from across the state. Equally fast, my enthusiasm was subdued when he reit-



erated what all of my initial research had uncovered. I think he even used the word “impossible”. I knew there was no convincing him to attempt such a hunt. The Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness is a raw and unforgiving place. The odds of finding sheep are slim – finding a legal ram is quite unlikely.

I wanted to hunt sheep in Montana. The idea of knowing I could get the tag and have the hunt planned all year seemed like just enough of an advantage to one day learn the country, see some sheep, and just maybe find a legal ram. Either way, exhausting myself in mountains that are nothing short of spectacular sounded like an interesting challenge.

In 2014, when a good friend drew a northwest Montana Mountain Goat permit, my backpack hunting plans fell into place. Not because I got to spend most of the season chasing Mountain Goats, but because this friend introduced me to the guy that would become my go-to hunting partner. I longed to hunt with my camp on my back in places few people would want to go. To my surprise, this Australian had the same goals. I am the only member of my family that has continued hunting over the years and I wanted to go further than good sense was allowing for solo trips.

That fall, between deer, elk and goat hunting we couldn't help but discuss the unlimited sheep hunt. We shared what little we each knew about it and carried on with the year. Sometime during the winter, as application deadlines approached, the topic was revisited. Our chance to hunt sheep in Montana was right in front of us. All we had to do was sign the application and we would draw the permit.

We had both been reading everything we could find about the hunt and the country in general. Hunting districts were highlighted, reported kill sites plotted, and winding trail systems teased apart. We made efforts to talk to people who had been there too. Hikers, hunters, locals, biologists – anyone that may provide the much needed “edge” pieces of the puzzle. The research was never ending and simply deciding on a hunting district was exhausting.

As much as we wanted to see sheep, we decided to hunt an area where the quota may not be filled that year. We needed as much time as we could get once we were in sheep country and the tales of foottraces on opening day held no appeal. On the other hand, sometimes the quota is reached in all of the districts and the

seasons are over.

We cleared our schedules for the days before and after the September 15th opener and double checked every detail we could think of. We considered a scouting trip during the summer but decided that our days off would be better spent with the season open and the sheep living where they want to be in September. The border of the unlimited sheep puzzle seemed complete. Now we had to put ourselves in the middle of it and sort things out on the ground.

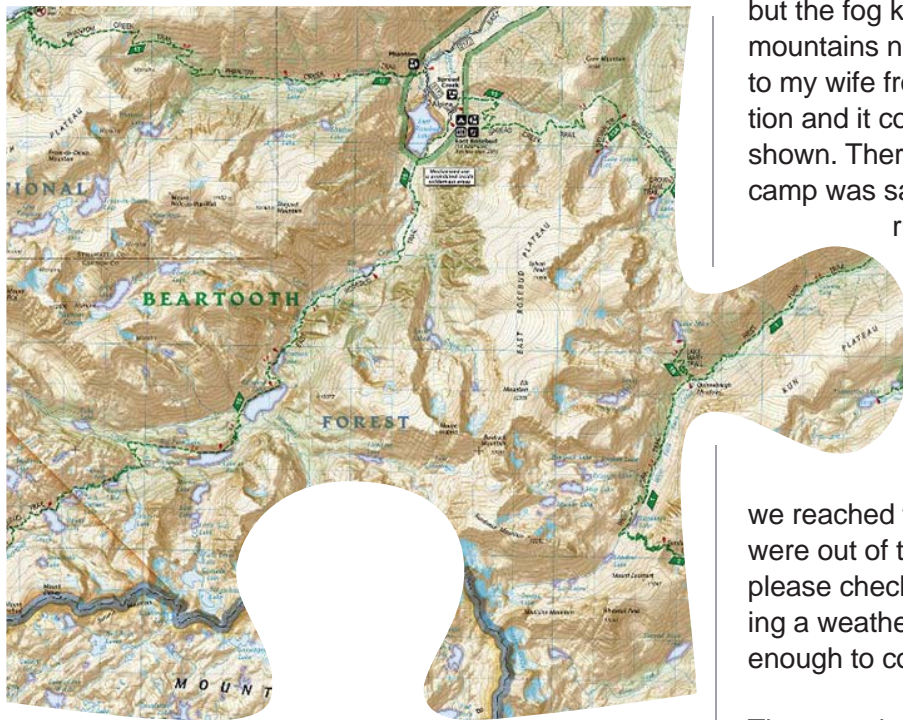
We arrived in the area where we planned to focus our efforts in the dark. Most of our hunts begin this way. We travel in the dark with our camp on our backs and hunt during the day. As the rising sun revealed mountains we had only seen on paper we finally felt like we were sheep hunting. Until this time, the Montana Bighorn Sheep tag I carried in the pack on my chest was just yellow paper and ink.

Within half an hour we saw sheep. Two ewes and a lamb crossed the trail we had just hiked within 100 yards of camp. We watched them move through the country with incredible ease and as they disappeared over a rocky ridge I wondered if they would be the only sheep we would see. On the other hand, we had just seen exactly what we had hoped to find and the season wasn't even open yet. We had the rest of the day to spend learning the country, glassing, and trying to wrap our heads around the massive challenge ahead.

We actually saw quite a few Bighorn Sheep the day before the season opened. It was a blue bird day and visibility was 100 percent. The sheep we saw ranged from the close encounter that morning to a band crossing a ridge over 4 miles distant. We even watched a group of sub-legal rams feed on a slope a few drainages away. There were sheep here but they certainly had a way of keeping a lot of ground between themselves.

We wondered if the coming weather may be partly responsible for our good luck in finding sheep. No other game was spotted, but every sheep we saw was on the move. Foul forecasts had been issued and predictions were spot on. We had rigged two lightweight tarps for a shelter and cooking area near our tents as we expected that the coming days would be wet.

The unmistakable sound of precipitation on my tent woke me on opening morning. Not heavy rain, but the



but the fog kept us from being able to see any of the mountains nearby. I sent a weather update request to my wife from my DeLorme InReach for our location and it confirmed what preseason forecasts had shown. There was no end in sight. The ground around camp was saturated and the rain was beginning to run over the surface. The trail near camp was flowing water like a small creek. That evening we agreed that unless it wasn't actively raining in the morning, we would pack up and make our way down.

I sent two more messages home when we reached the truck. One letting my family know we were out of the mountains for the time being and to please check the sheep quota and another requesting a weather update. Her response to the latter was enough to convince us to drive out.

That was the only trip we made that year but we felt it was time well spent. If nothing else, it was a good test of our equipment and a good reminder about high mountain weather. And we had found a number of sheep in places we could hunt safely on foot.

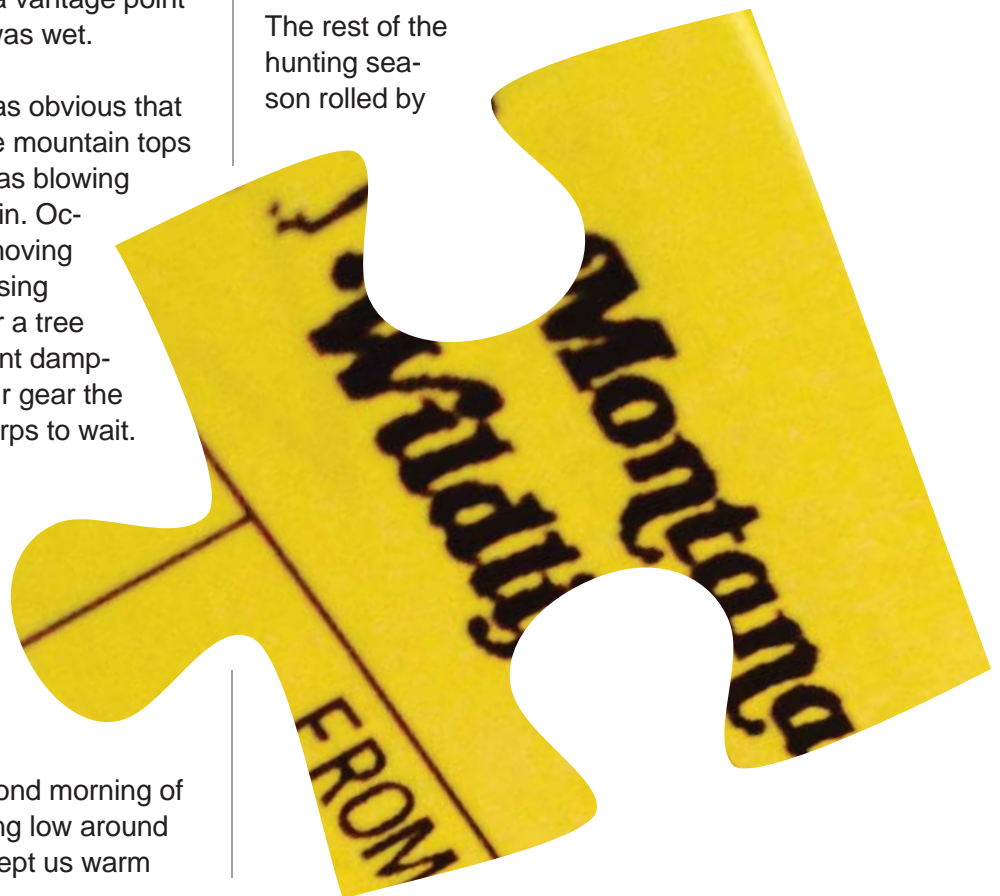
The rest of the hunting season rolled by

gentle sound of wet, heavy snow. I rounded up my gear and hustled to the tarps to get everything in order. A few inches had accumulated over night and in the dark, I could see that snow was still falling. We set out by headlamp light, in full rain gear, for a vantage point we had found near camp. Everything was wet.

As the first light of the day arrived, it was obvious that visibility was going to be very poor. The mountain tops were completely socked in and wind was blowing fog banks in and around all of the terrain. Occasionally we could see out between moving banks of fog but for the most part, glassing was not an option. We built a fire under a tree but there was no escaping the persistent dampness. Instead of completely soaking our gear the first morning out, we retreated to the tarps to wait.

The snow turned to rain and the fog remained all day. There were a few more gaps in the clouds during which we attempted glassing missions but they were always cut short by heavy rain and thick fog. We kept a fire going under the tarps and waited.

Most of the snow was gone by the second morning of the season but the heavy skies still hung low around us. The tarps kept us dry and the fire kept us warm



quickly and I found myself thinking about sheep all winter. We had been there, we had found sheep in an area that we could get to, and we had even seen some rams! The obvious choice was to buy another round.

Throughout the summer we continued our investigation. Now that we had seen these mountains we could better navigate the maps and aerial imagery. The guess work of what we would encounter and how we might be able to move through it was decreased. We were now able to further piece together off-trail routes to glassing spots, camp sites, and likely sheep haunts. We often joke about the fact that most places we end up in look a lot different on the computer screen so knowing what the ground actually looks like gave confidence when considering what we could get away with.

We set out on the familiar trail under blue sky with a promising weather forecast for the coming days. With a five day camp, the hike was a grunt. The wind on top was blowing hard and we selected our first campsite above a small saddle, tucked into a clump of stunted trees. We hollowed out the thicket, set up our tents and strung a tarp to cover both doors and offer a small sheltered area should the weather get ugly. The second tarp we decided would be better used in the field so we could have some cover if we were out and the skies got dark. We spent the remaining daylight glassing familiar mountains but were unable to spot any game. We did locate another camp and could see the hunters on a neighboring mountain.

Knowing that other hunters were looking at some of the same ground meant our season would start in the dark, hiking in the opposite direction. Snowflakes in the air and thick fog in our headlamps offered a grim reminder of how the best laid plans can be futile when you are counting on Mother Nature's cooperation. We left our camp as it was in a fairly central location but wanted to get far from other pressure to begin hunting. Sunlight in the east signaled sheep season was underway.

From high on the ridges we hunted with our eyes. The low clouds gave way to clear skies and we were able

to see more sheep country than we could cover in a five day hunt. After watching a couple nice Mule Deer bucks early in the day, we failed to spot any other animals until just before dark.

With the sun setting behind us, Nigel spotted a bear. After settling in behind our tripods, a closer look revealed a large grizzly. It was a quarter mile



or so from our camp working his way through the saddle that was our headquarters. We were far from an encounter then but if that bear had any intention of using that saddle in the coming days we could end up crossing paths.

We visited the neighboring camp that evening on our way to refill our water bottles and the hunters there said they had seen the same dark coated bear in the saddle the evening before. I knew we were talking about the same bear when I described silver markings on his shoulders and agreed that this must be a daily crossing for him. We returned to our camp knowing there was a big bear nearby. Everything was in order but judging from the direction he was moving when we saw him, we suspected he had been doing a little investigation of his own on his way past our tents. I wondered how close he had come the evening before.

I reached our morning glassing spot about ten minutes

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ahead of Nigel on the second day. Almost instantly I spotted sheep through my binoculars. He was carrying the spotting scope so I was limited, but they acted like rams in the low morning light. When he arrived I calmly told him to relax and get the scope out. I didn't know if other hunters might be watching us looking for clues, but I didn't want to call any attention to the direction we were looking. Through my binocular, I thought I could see legal-length on one of the animals.

"We gotta go!" was all I needed to hear. Of the two, one was indeed a legal ram. We took a few minutes to plan the first phase of our stalk as we watched the sheep

for the ridge above it, relocate the ram, and figure it out from there. Our hike would take us



through two drainages, so if the sheep were to leave that basin while we were in route, we would never

know it.

I hiked as quickly as I could under my full day pack and reached the ridge in just under two hours. When Nigel caught up, we dropped our packs and crept to the rim with just our binoculars. Sprawled out among the rocks, we searched. I snuck further up the ridge to change my view and turned up nothing. After 30 minutes of intense eye strain, Nigel finally spotted a white rump in a clump of trees. Then two. We had a legal ram bedded down, completely unaware of our presence. It was about 9:30 am at this point.

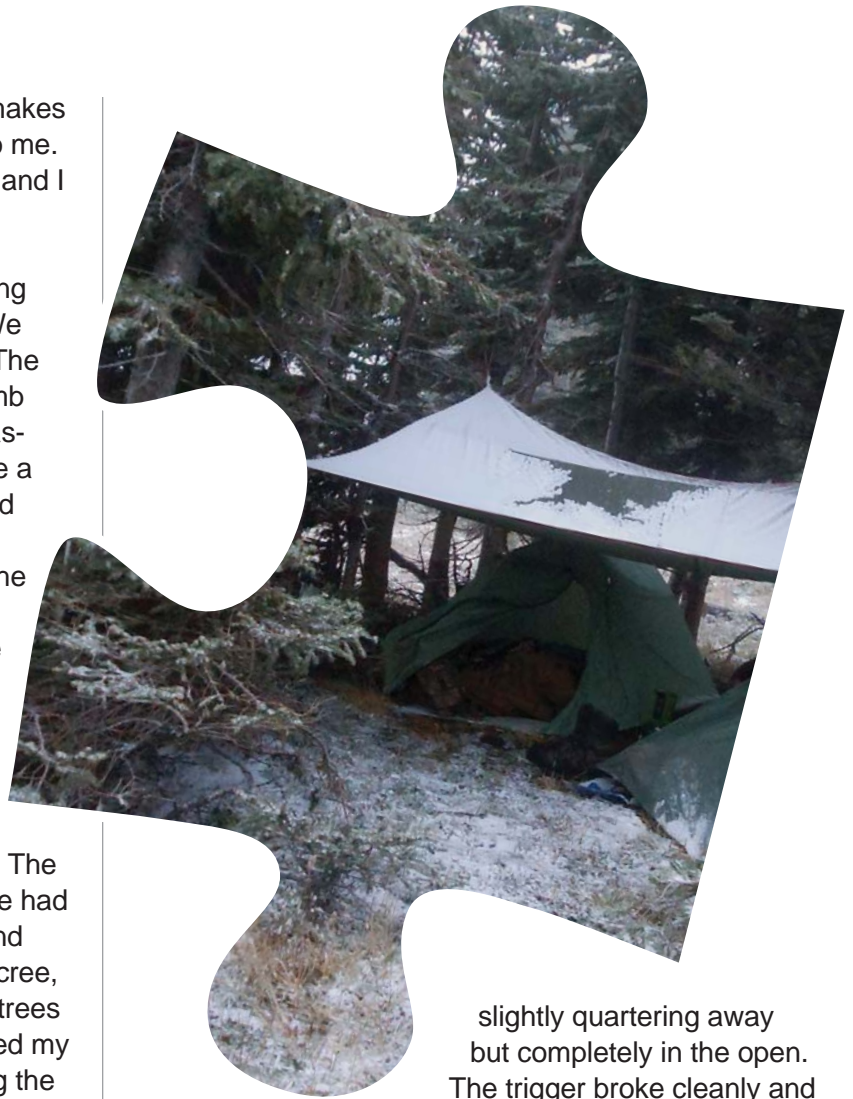
Now that we knew where the ram was and that he wasn't in a hurry to get anywhere, we took a few minutes to enjoy some breakfast and a coffee. 100 yards down the ridge from where we relocated the sheep there was a band of cliffs that made up the rim. A vertical gap about two feet wide made a perfect window into the basin on the other side. We set our tripods in the gap and hopped back and forth between our gear and our glass completely hidden from the sheep. Every few minutes one or both of us would check on the sheep that rested only 743 yards away. I messaged my wife, my parents, and my brother: "Legal ram spotted. We are inside 800 yards. Stay tuned!" My family doesn't understand my desire to go into such uninhabitable places to chase

wild animals. What they do understand is that it makes me who I am and they know how important it is to me. They knew what we were up against on this hunt and I knew they were rooting for us.

We stayed in this spot for almost 4 hours. Watching the sheep and trying to decide how to proceed. We knew it would come down to us making a move. The terrain told us it was unlikely the sheep would climb up our side of the basin when they could more easily walk out the way they had come in. There were a number of spots we could have set up my rifle and the spotting scope and the data I entered into my ballistic program all seemed to check out and fit the scene in front of me. Still, I wanted to be closer. The daytime temps were climbing and the breeze was acting like it may turn to wind.

We knew it would happen, but we were both surprised when we found the sheep on their feet. First the smaller ram fed out into an opening. The larger one soon followed. It was go-time. The direction they moved made our decision easy - we had to move down the ridge. Quickly, we loaded up and stayed behind the rim as we hustled across the scree, around another band of cliffs, and into a patch of trees right on the skyline. I dropped my pack and pushed my rifle out ahead of me on a small ledge overlooking the basin. I could see the sheep but there was no way we could set up the spotter behind me. I quickly abandoned that perch and ran down the rocks to a flatter, but more exposed area. We had cut the distance by a fair amount and I knew we would not be able to get closer. The sheep were on the move. I ripped off my chest pack and settled down behind my rifle. I ranged, entered data, and ranged again. The second reading matched the first and I dialed my scope. Nigel had the spotting scope set behind me and we made sure we were looking at the same animal. I ranged again, updated my data entry and adjusted my scope. When I finally settled the cross hairs on my ram, the seriousness of the decision I was about to make was foremost in my mind. I had watched this ram for hours. We knew for a fact that he was legal by quite a bit but I still asked for a final confirmation.

This would be our only chance and when Nigel assured me that he had the spotting scope trained on the ram, I told him I was going to take the next best shot opportunity. He cleared a small tree and turned,



slightly quartering away but completely in the open. The trigger broke cleanly and the shot felt good. As I recovered from the recoil and got back on target with my scope, I watched the ram's legs fold beneath him. He pitched downhill and rolled once coming to rest on the open slope. I remained on target for a short while but it was over.

I rolled over from behind my rifle and asked "What did we just do?!" I am not sure how many times I looked through my scope and the spotting scope at the fallen ram - it felt like I was dreaming in slow motion. Our plan had come together perfectly. I wish I could have seen my family's faces when they read "RAM DOWN!" It had been nearly a half day since my earlier message.

We celebrated briefly, but now we had an even greater challenge. We had to recover the ram, call in the kill to the Harvest Reporting Line and present the head and cape, intact, to a MT Fish Wildlife and Parks official within 48 hours of the kill. That meant cross this basin, process the sheep, pack it back to camp and get ev-

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everything out and into town. The clock was ticking.

It took over two hours to make our way across the basin. The bottom was cut with 40 foot deep ravines and loose rock. The mountains washed away more every year and it was clear that this drainage moved some serious water in the spring. We were cliffed-out and had to back track a couple times but finally crossed the creek in the bottom and started up the other side. As we hiked, we tried to figure out the best way to get out of here knowing we would be carrying much heavier packs.

We climbed right to my ram as a few key landmarks made it easy to find the kill site. I knelt down next to him and retraced the steps we had taken that day, that year, and the years prior. There were no words to express how I felt and I know Nigel felt the same so we just admired this amazing animal in silence. I knew we were looking at the final piece of a puzzle that some consider impossible. To put my hands on an animal that makes a living in this wilderness was an incredible feeling. I did my best to count the years on his horns and I knew that this ram had been in his first years of life when the dream of hunting the unlimited districts was born in me.



We butchered and caped the ram as the sun made its way across the blue sky. Our plan was to hike the creek bottom down until we were below the steep scree fields and then side hill over to a trail that we would eventually find somewhere in the bottom of the main river drainage. Then we could climb back up to camp on the trail. We hoisted our packs and took the first steps of what would be a long hike. Before we left the creek bottom, we stopped to eat some food and drink all the water we could. We figured that with a reasonable pace we could make it back to camp by dark or a little after.

Once away from the creek, we were back in the timber for the first time since our hike in before the season began. We were not on a trail at this point and all of the steep ravines we had worked through above we faced again, only now they were choked with logs. Some of the ground was fairly easy going but there was just enough blow down and rock to keep us from really stepping it out. It had been a long day by the time we found the trail but compared to where we had been, uphill the rest of the way to camp looked like easy street.

We did find cell phone service on one of the ridges near camp. I dropped my pack at the saddle and climbed up with my list of phone numbers and other information needed to report my ram. My phone battery was low but I also sent a text to my wife letting her know that we would be packing up and hiking out tomorrow. Getting the harvest report confirmation number was a relief. I either wanted the quota to fill and the hunting here be over for the season or be the only one to harvest a sheep in the district that year. We had already been discussing the fact that the only way to really make things right would be to pack out a ram for Nigel next year.

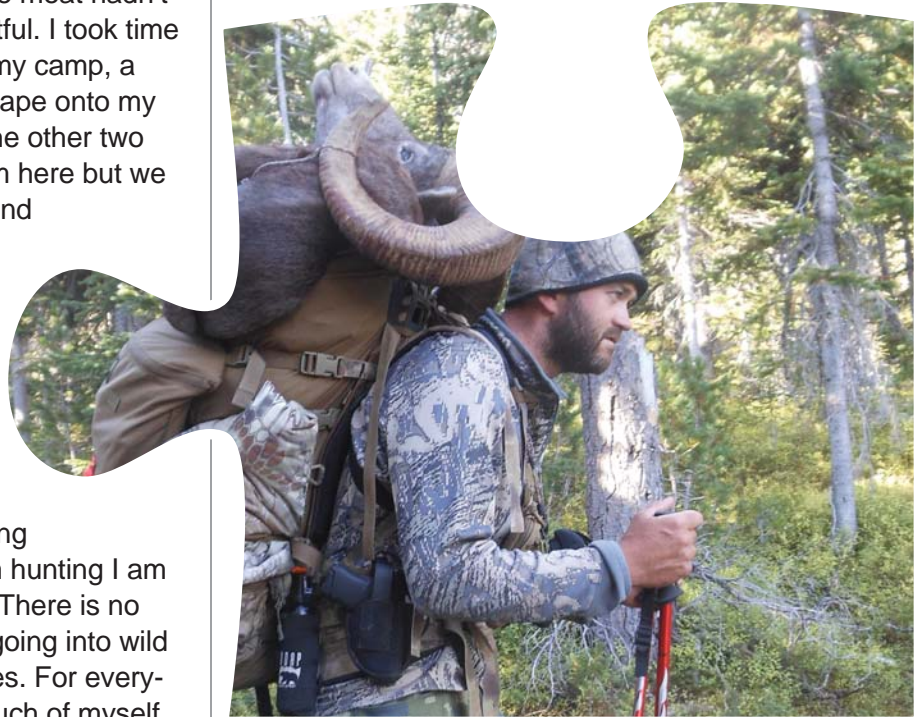
The sun was down by now and we had a dead ram with us in a camp that had likely been visited by a grizzly. I looked for places to stash the meat when I hiked down to fill up on water but the trees are so stunted that I decided to just cover it on the ground with my sweaty clothes from days of hunting. I didn't feel like we had a lot of options and in watching this particular bear, he looked pretty nervous when he crossed the trail so human scent may be

just enough deterrent. The head and cape, however, I tangled in the thick limbs of the fir tree between our tents. A few feet away from where my head would hopefully be getting a good night's sleep.

We were eating breakfast and enjoying coffee while we packed our camp before daylight. The meat hadn't been touched and the night was uneventful. I took time to take a few more pictures and loaded my camp, a bag of meat, my rifle and the head and cape onto my pack. Nigel carried his camp, rifle, and the other two bags of meat. The truck was 7 miles from here but we had plenty of time. I took a last look around and again recounted the incredible adventure that was about to become history for us.

I never like packing up camp when it's time to leave the mountains. Yes, we had been successful on a very challenging hunt but other than going home to my family, nothing about returning to the busy world excites me. When I am hunting I am part of the wilderness. I am at its mercy. There is no greater feeling of accomplishment than going into wild places and returning home with memories. For everything I bring home with me, I leave as much of myself

there on the mountain. Almost as if I am privileged enough to return, I will be able to step back in where I left off. I always say "you gotta' show up". Every piece of a puzzle must fit for the last one to fall into place but being there to put them together is the first, and often greatest, challenge. 🍷



Hunt Snapshot

Story by Gary Prevost

I experienced a very successful and exciting sheep hunt in the Breaks on opening morning. After locating the herd of 14 rams before day break, my brother Jim and I stalked within 130 yards where we could study them. An hour passed before I decided to single out one of the two largest rams. Some time passed before they all started milling around nervously and the one I selected finally separated himself enough to get a shot. At that point after being hit he quickly accelerated about 15 yards, launched himself in the air and twisted to the right and over an embankment where he rolled down about 40 yards and laid still. Just that quick it was all over with. This guy scored 188 and the other one I didn't shoot appeared to possibly score higher and he was broomed - but I liked the looks of this guy! 🍷



My Half Slam

Story by Skip Halmes



We were in immediate conflict. I'm confident that my wife, and current hunting partner, keeps a prayerful line of communication open to the Almighty. But I also knew that she wanted to treat this hunt like a expedited military snatch and grab operation. She is a registered nurse and has treated several bear attack victims from this area over the years. We were in prime grizzly country. Meditative was not her present demeanor. It was more what I would describe as "high alert."

I had applied for a Montana Big Horn sheep permit for over thirty years and I was determined to savor every moment. We were in the Sun River Drainage on the Rocky Mountain front, hunting in mid-November Montana weather deep in area 423. It was the best ram I had seen all season and I figured he was at least seven years old. I was also pretty sure it was not the ram my friend told me to look for.

I have been very blessed in my life and I don't have

much of a bucket list. One thing I always wanted to do though, was to hunt and kill a decent ram. When I was going to college in Bozeman I packed in to the Spanish Peaks to hunt an unlimited area a couple times. It was a very tough hunt but after some time I finally located a group of sheep across a huge boulder strewn basin with a barley legal ram. I spent a very arduous and challenging day getting to them, and then at last light I opted to pass him up. I had decided that if I ever got a sheep it was going to be

respectable or I wouldn't get one at all.

That was over thirty years ago and of course the odds for drawing a Montana Big Horn sheep permit are very small. The only remotely affordable option for me seemed to be a back pack Dall sheep hunt in Alaska, and it had to happen before I was too old. So three years ago I enjoyed a successful hunt in the Alaska Range south of Fairbanks.

Actually, enjoyed is a generous term. We lugged sixty pounds of gear across rock slides and glaciers for three days after a small plane set us down on a brushy strip. Then we carried it all back along with the sheep. I am a rancher and a horseman so this pack frame and boots deal was all new to me. The situation was spartan enough that we didn't even take any bourbon!

Well worth it though. At the end of the day I had a beautiful ram, and in between the rain and snow storms I experienced some of the most spectacular country and primitive mountains that I had ever seen. The guide and I had become friends and he asked me at the end of the last day.

“So what's next? Do you think you will ever go to Africa or the Yukon?”
“Nope.” I said.
“This was it for me. I have shot enough stuff and this was all I wanted. I am probably done.”

I had grown up in great hunting country and have had my share of luck. If I hadn't ever got anything else I would have had complete peace.

Two years later

I drew a Montana sheep tag. I couldn't believe it! I even double checked online after it came in the mail. I wanted to make sure I hadn't accidentally applied for a ewe permit. I had kept applying because I had all my preference points anyway and I just resigned myself to be unsuccessful in the sheep lottery until I



My Half Slam continued from page 15

was too old to go up the mountain. I always tried for the 423 district because it is pretty close to our ranch and it is more of a horseback deal. You have to ride in on a pretty sketchy trail to even reach most of the hunting and the odds are a little better than the others. My son Jake had worked for the outfitters in my sheep area, Dick and Nancy Klick, about ten years ago and he had advised me not to put in there.

“I have heard of some hunters that had a hard time even finding a sheep. They say there aren’t that many there anymore.” He said.

The Montana FW&P Biologist Brent Lonner told me I was extra lucky because there had been talk of not having the season due to low sheep numbers. I knew it wouldn’t be easy, but I had the tough part done by drawing that tag. On opening day we were packed in and ready to hunt.

Not many people like the trail by Gibson Dam. It is blasted out of a cliff that falls about a hundred feet down to the water in several places – if you’re lucky enough that the damn is full. Otherwise it’s just the rocks to break your fall, and it’s killed a lot of horses. It is bad enough on a calm morning in daylight, but I have yet to meet anyone who enjoys the ride in hurricane strength winds that often funnel out of that canyon in full dark.

I had the opportunity to experience both in my many trips to look for my ram. We put on lots of miles that first week and I did get a chance to learn the country, but after a full week of looking with my son and some other friends, all we saw were a couple ewes and kids.

“The rams will show up late in the season. Right around Thanksgiving.”

That is what I heard from several folks in the know, but it wasn’t much comfort to me. I could get snowed out. We had calves to ship, I had a full time job, and I was expected to show up and help at our own outfitting operation in the Big Belt Mountains.

Ron Jenkins—a world class sheep authority and taxidermist from Augusta— wrote me a letter and it seemed he wanted to go hunting with me. I welcomed his experience and it was lots better than going in alone.

We made arrangements to meet in Augusta with another friend of ours. A horse wreck early on the trail that morning really banged him up so only Ron and I hunted that day. On the ride in Ron told me of the old days and lots of stories about that country he knew so well. He described how the sheep numbers were much greater before a die-off about six years ago and that how lots of now viable herds around the country got their start from the transplants in this area.

“The rams usually grow lots better horns in the other places. The winters are just too tough up here for them to get as big.” He said.

Garrett Hansen was guiding in my sheep area at the K — L Ranch and he had told me where he had been seeing a good ram. We went there and spotted a couple mediocre ones and I was sure glad Ron was along. He was a great judge of sheep and also what the potential was for that area. I was feeling a bit of panic and was haunted by stories of hunters who had to eat their tag.

We spent a lot of the day glassing from a high windy ridge near where I was told to watch for the ram and his band of ewes. We saw some okay rams way off. I would have happily shot one of them but I just didn’t think there was enough daylight to get there. Toward evening Ron walked up to me and said. “I think I hear some fighting.”

We followed the sound to where the two rams were butting heads. After Ron looked them over he said “I don’t think you want either one of them.”

I had told him my time was short and I would shoot anything reasonable. I looked too. One’s horn was broken off way back and I don’t think either one was over six years old. They were all starting to look pretty good to me. We rode out in the dark and my concern was ramping up nicely.

The very next week Garrett called me back and told me of the big ram he had seen again. Two days later my wife and I were riding in. She didn’t want me going in there alone and neither one of us wanted to ride that trail in the dark, so I had made arrangements to stay at the K — L Ranch on the edge of the Bob Marshall Wilderness overnight.

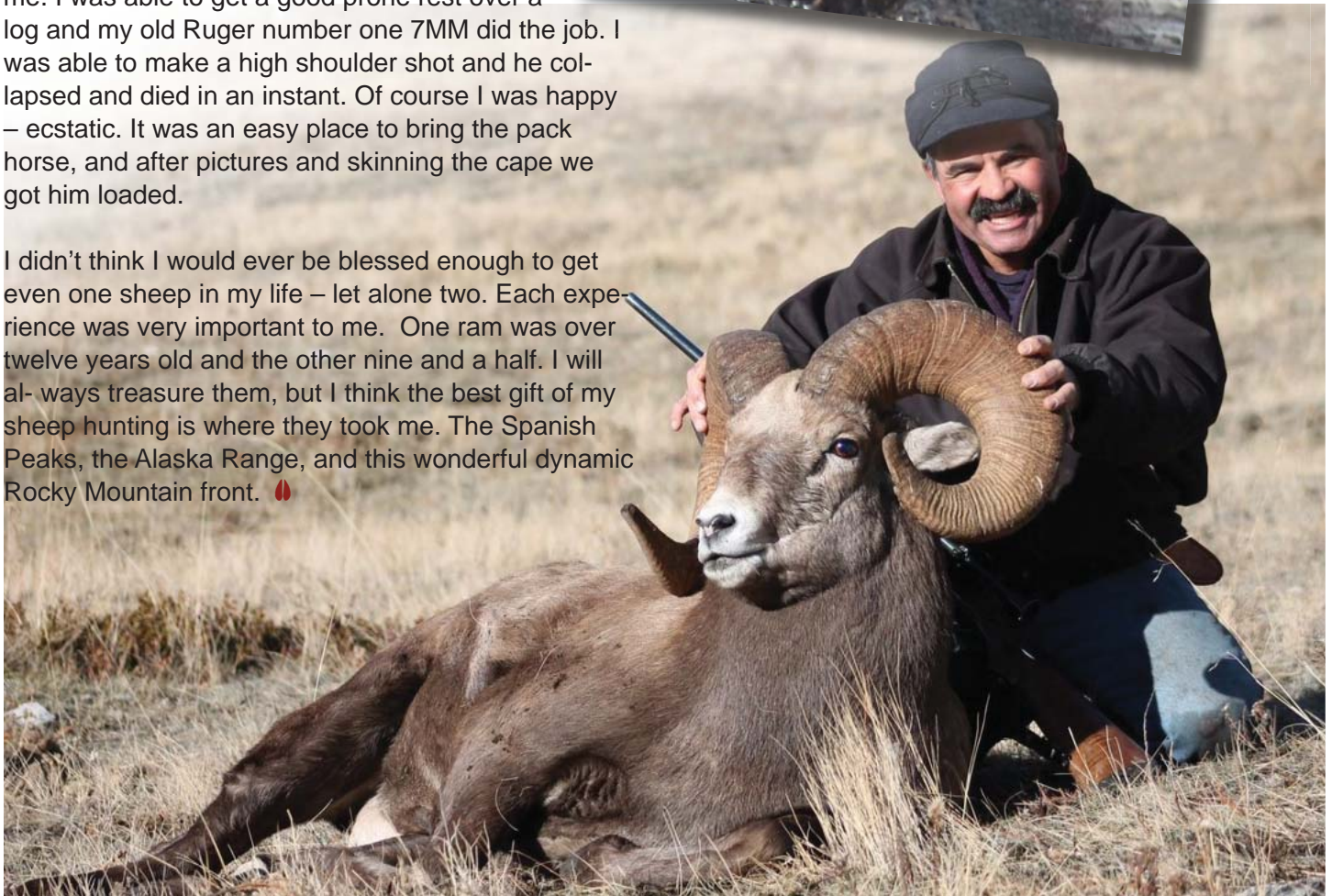
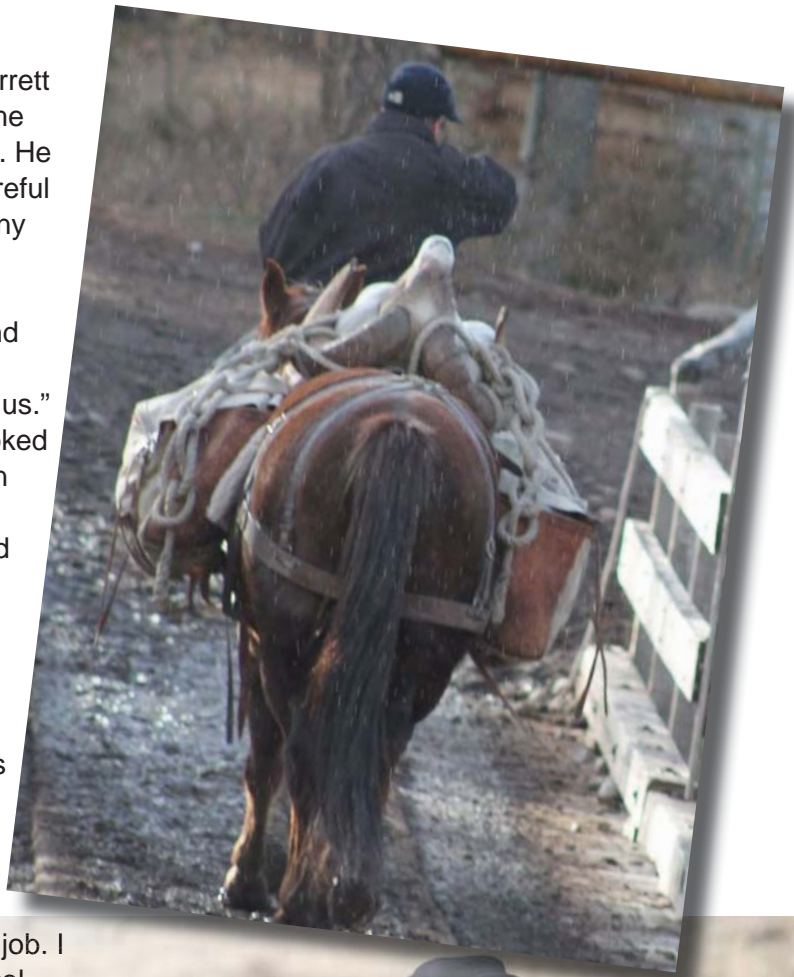
Luck was with us that morning. It was a beautiful day

for late November and we ran into my friend Garrett on the trail. He was packing meat out and told me right where he had seen the ram the day before. He directed me how to get there and gave me a careful description of the ram and let me know how many other sheep were with him.

We rode up close to where my friend told me and saw a pretty nice ram but he was alone. "It is meant to be. I think God put this sheep here for us." Holly said. I looked him over. I mean I really looked him over. It was for sure the best ram I had seen but it wasn't quite where Garrett said, and this ram was alone. After a fair bit of deliberation and debate we struck out again on our search.

It was almost a perfect set up when we found them. We were hunting up through the timber and they were on the open ridge above us and up-wind. We got within a hundred and fifty yards and I didn't need to check with the spotting scope to know that this was the ram Garrett told me about. He was definitely the one for me. I was able to get a good prone rest over a log and my old Ruger number one 7MM did the job. I was able to make a high shoulder shot and he collapsed and died in an instant. Of course I was happy – ecstatic. It was an easy place to bring the pack horse, and after pictures and skinning the cape we got him loaded.

I didn't think I would ever be blessed enough to get even one sheep in my life – let alone two. Each experience was very important to me. One ram was over twelve years old and the other nine and a half. I will always treasure them, but I think the best gift of my sheep hunting is where they took me. The Spanish Peaks, the Alaska Range, and this wonderful dynamic Rocky Mountain front. 🍷





My Adventure..a Big Horn Sheep Hunt

Story by Robert Lory

Like all sheep hunts in the lower 48 states my adventure began by receiving a letter from the state of Montana telling me that I had drawn a big horn sheep tag for area 441. I was in such shock, I didn't believe it was possible. I called Montana Fish Wildlife & Parks to confirm the reality of what I was reading.

After the fact of drawing a tag had finally set in, I began the search for an outfitter. I booked my hunt with Josh and Niki Carlbom of Sun Canyon Lodge. The operation they run is second to none and the experience that Josh has, made my hunt a success. Without Josh's knowledge of the area and the quality of horses he has, harvesting a Ram would not have been possible.

November 2nd was the first day of the hunt. We rode through two different drainages in Teton Pass which is located in the Lewis and Clark National Forest. Later that day we had spotted some ewes and rams very

high on the slope but was not able to go after them because of deadfall which had occurred after a fire had swept through the area a couple years before. The second day was spent doing a lot of glassing. Swift Reservoir would be where we would hunt the third and fourth day. While riding in we spotted ewes and lambs. We arrived at where we would camp that night, it was in the Bob Marshall Wilderness. After putting up the tent, we were back on the trail. We had spotted a lone ram, but were unsuccessful at getting to him for a shot. Once back at camp Josh prepared us a steak dinner over an open fire. As I was about to crawl into my tent for the night, I had the opportunity

to listen to three wolves howl back and forth at each other. After we packed up the equipment the next morning we glassed the mountainside around camp and spotted nine goats on one mountain. We would see a total of fourteen goats throughout the day. By the end of those two days we had seen some of the most awesome mountains and scenery of God's Creation.

Unbeknownst to us the fifth day would bring me the opportunity of a lifetime. That morning we would once again hunt in Teton Pass. We headed up the trail and when we were between three and four miles in Josh spotted three rams, and one was a shooter. Josh had gotten out his spotting scope for a closer look. We had come to a decision to put a stalk on them and get closer.

The rams had bedded up on a little ridge that had some trees which gave the rams some cover and I was not able to get a clear shot. So, Josh placed me on one side of the ridge and he went around the other with hopes they would run out into the open in front of me. Sure enough that is exactly what had happened. After the ram was down the celebrating began, and so did the work!!

I would like to thank God and the state of Montana for the opportunity to hunt such a majestic animal, and many thanks to Sun Canyon Lodge for a spectacular experience. 🍷

Photo Gallery

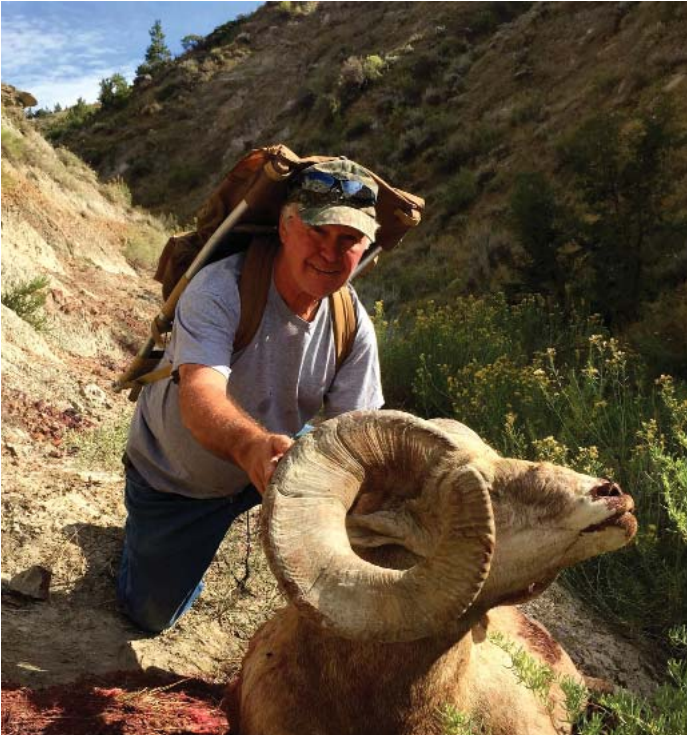


Mike DuCuennois and his ram taken from HD 482 in 2016.



Rex Williams and his ram taken from HD 203.

Photo Gallery



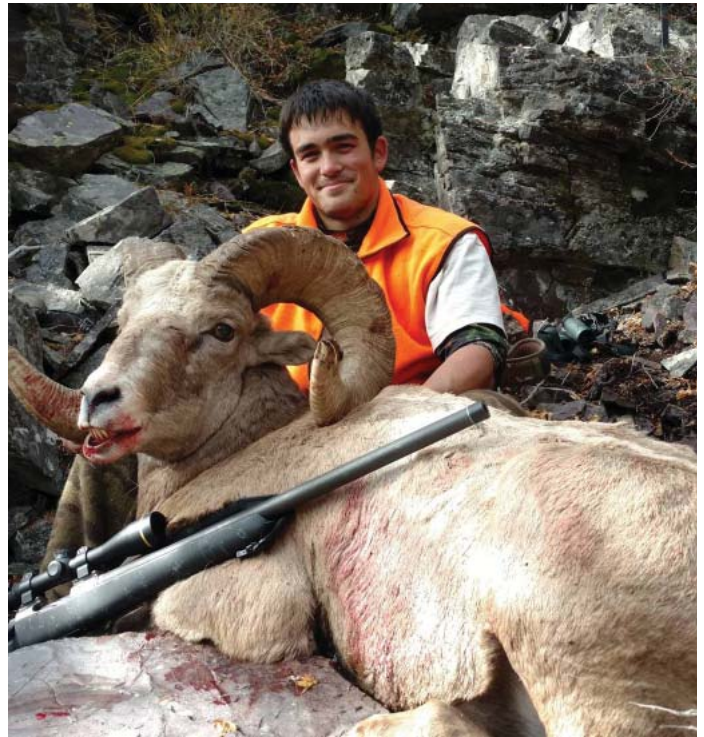
Jack Roberts and his ram from HD 482.



Brent Cotton and his ram taken from HD 680.



Willy Schauman and his ram taken from HD 680.



Jack White and his ram taken from HD 203.



Governor's Tag. Pictured is Willie Hettinger (guide) Jimmy John Luitad is the hunter.



Stephen Ketchum and his ram taken from HD 214.



Brian Brown and his ram taken from HD 216.



Jon Harris and his ram taken from HD 620.

Photo Gallery



Top Left: Shane Austin and his ram taken from HD 213.

Top Right: Frank Anderson and his ram taken from HD 213 (with Brian Solan).

Bottom: Britton Ceynar and his ram taken from HD 680.





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