

Hunting Trophies

An Adventure Story
By Dawson Smith

The best laid plans of mice and men, most, not all, usually far short of preconceived successful endings. I'm sure every

imagine, sometimes a whole lot worse. Most of us have experienced a trip that seems to fall apart from the get go, a truck breaking down, plane mix-ups or other such calamities that drive ya to drink. If all hunting trips went as

adventurous dialogue. Lifetime memories are made when emotions are peaked high or in some cases the depths of low. The art of taxidermists hanging on our walls remind us all of just how awesome the animals we hunt look like, picture



hunter loses sleep of some sort the night before a hunt begins, it's part of the hunt, and it's part of the addiction. We hunters play the hunt at hand over and over in our minds, but how many times does the hunt end up to be an entirely different hunt than the one we mused over? Sometimes the day turns out better than we

planned, perfect weather, textbook spot and stalks, successful shots, I think the lure of a hunt would diminish, or at least become less adventurous. Modern hunting is as much as having an adventure as it is the actual hunt; most guide/outfitter brochures are full of pictures depicting awesome scenery and

albums display both the hunt and the success's, but we cant lay in bed and stare at mounts or pictures. Memories are the hunters equivalent of domestic sheep to count as we lay our heads down to sleep, the nights when we are not out hunting. Memories are what we replay at social gathering

or at the local hunting supply shops, and most often as not, just like the fish that got away, we regal in our best eloquence tales of deer, ram, bear, moose, we shot and also others that we saw but just couldn't get to.

Such was one of the more memorable hunting seasons I've had, it was filled with cloud reaching highs, a huge New Mexico Antelope, bottom of the Suez canal lows, a trigger breaking as I squeezed off on a big Saskatchewan buck, and some unforgettable memories. A few memories took me as high as the antelope without actually being successful from a kill point of view. These are the perfect fodder for story telling, a five day vigil for a huge stone sheep, a remarkable stalk on a large cinnamon bear. Pictures and trophies remind me of the highs, frustration remind me of the lows. The best memories are those that could of been and would of been except for simple matters, not broken triggers as my November white-tail hunt in Saskatchewan produced, but a slip of wind, sudden snow storm, a near run for the goal line falling short, or simply, a fate of nature. These kind present the unexpected but somehow easily accepted reasons for being

unsuccessful, ones that allow me and my partners to have great trips without pulling the trigger, or as it could be seen, without bringing home the bacon.

One such memorable day was in early May, the spring bear season in British Columbia. My Dad and I had spotted a monstrous brown bear feeding about a mile away in a small freshly greened bowl. A gently wind blew straight from the bear to us, mornings sun splayed through the tree top on the ridge above, a perfect bear stalking morning. We quickly closed into 500 yards, slipping out of our boots we snuck closer, Dad stopped on a small rise while I carried on around a small rise of land. The big bruin fed peacefully on succulent spring grass; I crawled another 200 yards

closer. The bear fed into a small runoff channel in the slope and emerged another 100 yards to my left. Crawling over another small rise I closed in undetected, closer and closer I crawled as the cinnamon bear fed towards the treeline, about 50 yards away. When it fed away from me I slid my daypack ahead and rested my rifle over it. My crosshairs wavered slightly on the bear's shiny coat as I waited for the perfect broadside shot. Just as it fed around a small tree and was going to offer a clear shot it stopped and woofed.....and then woofed again ..

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A few seconds after the second woof, two woolly little cubs crawled down from the treetop above. The house cat sized cubs, one matte black, the other light brown, scurried down and bounced around the big sow. She stood as still as a statue, through my scope I watched her wet nose analyzing great volumes of air, looking, smelling, seeking danger. After a few minutes she finally, slowly, led her diminutive charges deeper into the forest. I waited until they were gone and made my way back to where my Dad sat. He had seen the cubs swinging in the pine as I closed in, he wondered if he should have warned me of the cubs but didn't want

to alarm the sow with me being so close. It was one of these moments that go in the remarkable experience vault for me, and one I'll never forget.

Another awesome adventure was had on a backpack trip for stone sheep/ mountain goat in August. Thane Davies, his girlfriend Jennifer, and I packed into a remote mountain range in North Western BC. The basins that we were heading for were a long ways back, because of that they received little if any hunting pressure. I was looking for a big wide ram that I had seen two years previously, he was short the last time I saw him and hoped he was still in the

area. Thane and Jennifer wanted to hunt goats.

Most of Northern BC had a real dry spring in 1998, most if not all of the high snow patches had melted, there were a few small remnants of glaciers on the shadowed north slopes, but even with those water was a hard commodity to come. All our food was the add water kind so we spent most of the first two days finding a water supply. On one of my water hunting treks I took a break on a high rocky point and glassed the slopes below me, as with most glassing, the opposite basins emitted an almost tangible magnetic draw. I rotated my spotting scope at them for "just a quick peek", " what's that" I

whispered to myself, and that and that.

Yellowy tinged shaggy coats glowed like diamonds in the sky; mountain goats were in every basin I looked in. Up high in one drainage two billies quietly dozed the warm afternoon away, even from across the valley they looked huge, I could see that there was little space between their horns. Panning the basin at 45 power I spotted a bunch of suspicious looking mounds on a grassy slope, at 60 power I saw a breathtaking sight. Spread out on the emerald green carpet of grass below the billies lay seven sheep. Cranking up my spotting scope to 60 power I saw horns, rams, all of them, seven rams! Water, or the need for water was forgotten, even now I can see myself squirming lower behind my exposed vantagepoint.

The big wide ram was there, my heart leaped, he lay apart and above the others on a knife-edge. As I watched he arched his head back and swayed his horns from side to side, I think I may have forgotten to breathe for a

minute or so! Another ram in the group stood up and for a brief minute was silhouetted, he appeared

heavier and was easily a full curl, but from the moment I

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looking for water, not rams, but I had walked across, or actually looked across, into the mountain hunter's version of the garden of Eden.

I'm not sure how long I laid in that tundra grass watching those rams, but it was hard pulling away from them and heading over to the north side to search for water. I met up with partners on the other side of the mountain by a snow patch, ah water.

They were glassing across another valley into a basin leading away. Below them on a flat plain four wolves strode across the tundra, two were pitch black, one white and one I can only describe as being the colour of fog. We didn't even see him until he stepped in front of a black one. Thane fell asleep in the tundra grass as Jennifer and I continued looking at nature's bounty. Before long the sun slipped low in the azure sky and we trudged

zoomed in on the wide ram I knew no other would do. I looked at the other five but somehow couldn't stay on them long enough to really tell if they were legal or not. The big heavy one started to feed and soon all the others joined in. The wide ram pushed a smaller ram away and the heavy one came down and pushed him away. I watched spellbound. I've spent days, and in a few cases weeks, in these

mountains and not seen a single legal ram or a book goat. Here it was the second day out, I was supposed to be looking for water, not rams, but I had walked across, or actually looked across, into the mountain hunter's version of the garden of Eden.

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back to camp. Over a found the rams on the saw her running towards steaming cup of soup we opposite mountain. They me? I grabbed my rifle and made our plan for the next had moved one basin further met her halfway, apparently day, Thane and Jennifer up the valley in the night. A she was just kneeling down where going to make a stalk stalk was there but the two to fill her water bottle when on a goat while I would big billies had moved as the smoke colored wolf head out after the wide ram. well and were bedded above came over the rise below. Unfortunately she missed. them on a scree slope. I laid



We awoke to a star filled sky that promised a glorious day in the mountains. Thanes face and hands where swollen up like balloons. We only could guess that he had gotten bitten by a spider while napping in the grass the day before. He took a couple of ibuprofen and crawled back into his bedroll. He stayed in camp while Jennifer and I went after a goat for her. Just before we left he said if he felt better he would meet us later at the water hole. Jennifer and I stopped on the high outcropping and soon there trying to figure out a plan of attack while Jennifer went to a snow patch for water. After a while the two big rams got up and started swinging their horns at each other, what a sight. I looked back to see where Jennifer had gotten to and saw her laying down in the tundra pointing her rifle, I looked but couldn't see what she was aiming at, at the crack of her shot a flock of ptarmigan took off. "Oh well" I thought "she's getting us a chicken for diner" and went back to looking at the sheep. I heard a yell, looking towards her I Filling our water bottles we went back to watching the rams while a coffee slowly brewed on the little stove. "This isn't normal" I was telling Jennifer, "there's not always this much game". From were we sat drinking coffee we could see no less than a dozen goats, probably half were billies, close to twenty sheep, at least two were

legal, and ptarmigan seem to be beside every rock, " this is what you could call a bonus " I told her. Jennifer had just passed the provincial CORE program

Once we got down in the basin a small ridge hid us from view; we slipped across it and crossed a small creek. I stayed put while

she was excited beyond belief. We snapped of a few pictures and set to work. Already the sun had slipped below the peaks and we had a ways to go to get back to



to get her hunting license and this was her first hunting trip. What a way to start...

We watched the rams for a few more hours then decided to leave them for another day. From a high vantage point on the other side we found a lone billie bedded down behind a boulder halfway down a rock face. We quietly slipped over the crest and followed an avalanche chute into the basin below.

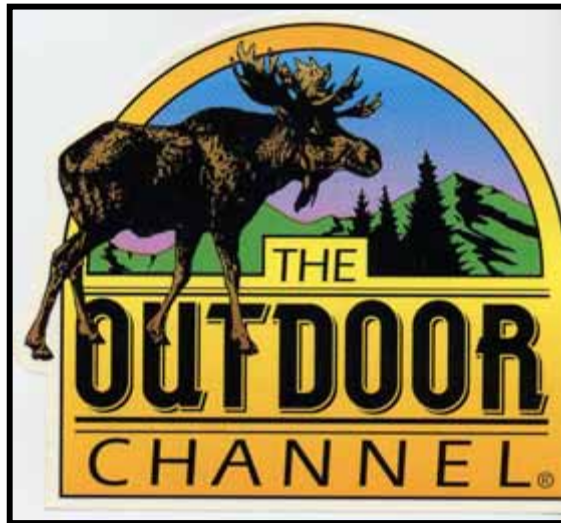
Jennifer angled up over the rocks on the goat's side. I had the best seat in the house watching as she crept up onto a small trail in the shale and closed in on the goat. The slope of rock hid her approach and she was just forty yards from the billie before it figured out that he wasn't alone on the mountain. The billie stood up and peered at Jennifer as she steadied for a shot, when it turned to go she shot and it fell. I made my way up to her and her goat, the goat was Jennifer's first "kill" and

Thane was at the water hole when we got there; we filled our bottles and headed for the tent. I had found a marmots den so we stopped and placed the meat and cape in the hole. There are a good number of Grizzlies where we were so opted to leave the meat far from camp. The next day Thane and I set out for the rams while Jennifer cooked us some fresh meat over a fire. Again the rams had moved one



basin father up but so to had the billies. We tried farther up our side but they where untouchable; the two billies acted as the ram's private sentries. Just before heading over the other side we looked down as a herd of sheep crossed the scree 100 yards below us.

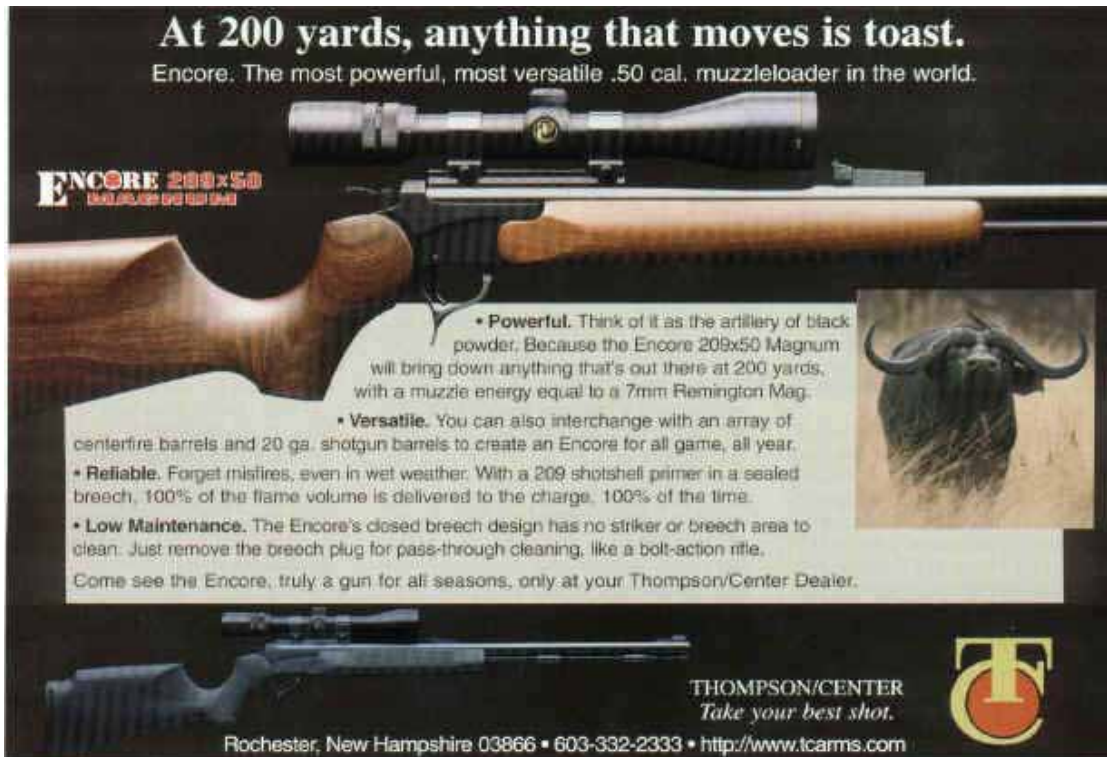
The next day we decide to look for a goat for Thane. I looked for the rams, saw them but they where in the perfect spot, I could only get within five hundred yards, sneaking back I left them for yet another day. We found a large lone billie for Thane but it was going to be tough to get to. We slipped over the top and



a harrowing three hours climb, I came out 150 yards above the goat, he wasn't alone. There were six goats all bedded down on a shelf. I waited for Thane but saw

that he couldn't get down from where he was. After a few hours I selected the large billie and shot, the 150 grain Nosler Ballistic Tip found it's mark. The other goats fled straight up a sheer wall and passed within twenty-five yards of Thanes vantage spot. Unfortunately a steep rock face and a sharp pinnacle hid them from his view. I yelled and yelled but he couldn't make out what I was saying. It was a five-hour marathon climb with loaded packs to get the meat and cape of that goat back on top but we managed. The next day I went after the

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ram's alone and looked all day but they had vanished. The next day we packed

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down to our awaiting boat. That ram was the best I've ever seen. I would have given my eyeteeth to get a crack at that ram; however, the opportunity to watch and hunt him was well worth the time spent. Somehow the fact that I didn't "get" the big ram was lost in the satisfied feelings I had packing off the mountain, we had an excellent trip, seen some incredible sights and shared memorable moments. I've spent many a minutes just before falling to sleep thinking of that magnificent animal, I sure hope he's still around next season....