

## 2015 Stones Sheep Hunt

The first time I saw a wild bighorn sheep was by Canyonlands National Park. It was a ram and I was so impressed by the way it carried its beautiful curved horns. That was in 1976 and I applied for a tag the next year.

I was lucky and drew one of two tags for a desert sheep hunt on the Potash unit. The hunt would be the most difficult in my life to that point but I would be hooked for life on sheep hunting. On my hunt I found a beautiful 8 ½ year old ram while back packing and drinking from rock tanks in the Schaeffer Basin.

Next came a Dall's sheep hunt in the North West Territories. Although it was a great hunt I learned to appreciate the do-it-yourself type of hunting where you do lots of research and scouting and go on your own with a camp on your back.

During the next thirty years I would draw three rocky tags and pack into Wyoming and Colorado for hunts of a life time. I look at these beautiful animals in my trophy room and fond memories pour into my mind of family and friends who were with me on these hunts.

Sheep hunting is best suited to younger men in top condition. And since I would turn 66 in 2015 I knew I needed to finish the "Grand Slam" with a Stones sheep hunt.

There are a lot of outfitters offering Stones sheep hunts. After some research I found a good fit in BC Safaris and Shane Black. When I told him my age he said he knew the right guy to be my guide. Keith Connors had been guiding in BC since 1977. He had owned the Turnagain Lake area at one time. He agreed to come back for one more sheep hunt. I would later find Keith to be an amazing person. He had so many stories from his experiences. I consider him to be a legend.

I also wanted to take one of my sons along and that was OK too. At the end of July we started our journey from the Salt Lake airport.

When we arrived in Vancouver we were delayed briefly in customs as they checked my fire arm. While there a guy came up to us and asked if we were going to Dease Lake. His name was Don and said that he was going to BC Safaris as well. This was his fourth trip there. On three prior hunts he had only seen one legal ram. BC Safari has a policy that when you book with them they owe you a ram. You can keep going back until you harvest. I felt sorry for this guy as most hunters tag out on their first outing.

Two days later, my son and I and Don and five members of the BC Safari team hit the trail for distant camps. We had 28 horses and gear. Each horse had a name. Pocahontas, Buttercup, and Stan to name a few.

The first day was filled with pack horses breaking off, panniers needing repacking, and logs and brush cut and cleared from the trail. We crossed many rivers. Some so beautiful my fly fishing instincts kicked in. Lunches and dinners were eaten on horseback as we made our way through dense forests, big valleys and beautiful sheep basins.

We arrived at  $\frac{3}{4}$  camp, as it was called, at 1;30 in the morning. After 16 hours of hard riding. It was pitch black and raining hard. There was a melee of chaos with horses being unpacked and hobbled and tents being set up. I was so tire I could hardly stand up and I felt like a zombie. My son soon had a tent up and I went to bed.

The next morning at 8 AM everyone was up and getting breakfast ready. Don, the other hunter, would stay at this camp and hunt. The rest of us would leave on another 10 hour day of riding to our final camp spot. There would be two things to remember about this day. One, the horse named Stan would roll down a steep mountain side three complete turns and when he finally put his feet out he landed on the lower trail completely unharmed with pack on. Secondly, was when we could not find the trail after riding up a river for a quarter mile. We were looking for a blaze on a tree but found out later the willows had grown up and covered it. We looked and looked and even hiked around for a while but to no avail. Finally Keith Connors our guide said that one of the horses had been up this trail a couple of years before. He gave that horse a free rein and within a few minutes it found the trail up river about one hundred yards and hidden in the brush. We were on our way again.

Our final camp spot was a beautiful place with wide open mountains and sheep basins as a back drop. The hunt started in the morning.

We saw several sheep the first few days. Then on day four we rode in the fog to a new spot. We tied the horses in some pines at the base of a steep mountain. We climbed for an hour and then took cover as it was raining and hailing in the strong wind. Keith, our guide, said at this point, "What do you think? Should we call it a day?" I had been in storms before and it usually clears up. I said "since we're here, let's keep going". After several hours of hiking in the fog we could tell we were on top of the mountain. Then the fog started to lift. We glassed for a couple hours as the fog cleared here and there. This mountain was pure sheep habitat. Steep cliffs at the head of green grassy basins. Places where you could sneak over to the edge and look straight down. It wasn't long before we spotted game. First, some white goats. Then three rams. Then another group of ewes. My son was spotting almost all the sheep. We hiked over to where you could see down a long ridge. About a mile away we could see two groups of sheep. All rams. One group needed a closer look. As we made our way down this ridge we saw a group of four rams that fed over the mountain and disappeared. Then they came back and laid down in the open grassy hill side. When we got about 400 yards from these rams we set up our spotting scopes again. One of these rams was definitely a full curl and legal ram. I took my rifle and crawled through a boulder field to a large rock about 50 yards away. I don't like shooting over 300 yards. My sons enjoy the long range shooting that is so popular. I guess I'm

old fashioned as my rifle is a pre-64 Winchester in .270 caliber. And I hand load 130 grain bullets.

When I finally reached my shooting spot I sat up and looked over the rock. The rams were getting up and feeding. And coming our way. At about 200 yards I put the cross hairs on the largest ram and fired.

As I walked up to this ram I realized how beautiful it was. A dark phase Stone sheep with white rump patch and white stripes running down both back legs. It was so pretty I felt badly about its death. That too comes with age. I have a great taxidermist that will help with that. Keith said this was his 11<sup>th</sup> grand slam ram to guide for.

When we got back to the lodge we found that Don, the other hunter, wasn't having any luck at all. When he gets his sheep he will have earned it. So typical of sheep hunting.

I guess I'm in the golden years of my hunting career. As I look back I can see how the outdoors have enriched my life. When done properly there is no better activity between family and friends. My granddaughter shot her first deer this year and a grandson had a chance but was shaking too much to take the shot. More memories.....

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