

# THE LAST CARIBOU HUNT

A PICTURE-PERFECT HUNT FOR A RECORD-BOOK BULL TURNS OUT TO BE A HUNTER'S LAST

**My story doesn't involve a once-in-a-lifetime tag, and there's no team of spotters with high-powered optics and radios scouring the unit. It's a simple story about a rural Alaskan hunting solo close to home to secure his family's meat for the winter. There are no airplanes, boats, or ATVs. I didn't even have a spotting scope. Because I typically target mature bulls, a spotting scope isn't needed. If it's the kind of caribou I'm after, I can see all I need with my 10-power Swarovski's. It's just the mountain, the caribou, and me, and it all happens in what I think of as my backyard, the Kenai Mountains.**

September 22 was my mother's birthday and my 12th day hunting caribou. I had spotted numerous bulls already. Several had come within rifle range on their own, no stalking required.

However, I had not seen a mature bull, so no shots were fired. One morning, after climbing 3,000 vertical feet to my favorite observation spot, I glassed up a large bull across the valley on the opposite mountain. He was almost beyond the limit for a reasonable pack out, but he was huge. I waited to see what he would do.

A little time passed before he fed downhill and joined a group of cows at the bottom of the valley. The cows crossed the creek and started traveling a route that would bring them out underneath me. The bull was behind them, coming closer with every step but still over a mile away. Based on my prior observations of caribou in this valley, I guessed when and where to set up my intercept. I had to descend about 1,500 feet and set up above the bench where the caribou were heading. I had killed my

2017 bull on that bench, and it looked like the same thing was about to happen again two years later. The wind, however, was a problem. Even with the sun out, it was a cold day with a strong downhill draft. Caribou aren't the smartest animals, but you must watch the wind carefully to be consistently successful. I still gave it a try, knowing full well the wind was all wrong,

The lead cow appeared before I reached my destination. I was caught unprepared on the steep, featureless mountainside. She was already sniffing my wind as she came into view, and I hastily attempted to get ready for the shot. As I ranged her at 334 yards and got my rifle over the pack, the other cows and the bull came into view. Just as I got behind the Kimber .300 Winchester Mag.

and chambered a round, the lead cow turned and ran, taking the other caribou over the lip and out of sight. Instead of feeling disappointed, I was happy and surprised I had almost pulled it off. Being within 350 yards of one of the biggest caribou I'd ever seen was a momentous event to be remembered.

Already most of the way down the mountain, I descended the rest of the way after the caribou. A search of the valley floor didn't turn up the cows, but the big bull was a little over a mile downstream from me in some high grass, fireweed, and alders. Knowing caribou wouldn't spend much time in such high, thick vegetation, I watched him, hoping he would move to more open ground. Soon he began climbing back up the mountain. Again, I guessed where he was

Schilling holding the antlers of his amazing barren ground caribou taken in Alaska's Kenai Mountains in 2019.



DAN E. SCHILLING

Schilling's bull has a final score of 410-7/8 points and was recognized with a First Award.

going and rapidly started climbing back up the way I had come, plotting my course for intercept.

Without seeing the bull for over two hours, I worked my way back up the mountain and across the snow-covered ridgetop to the area where I guessed he was going. It had been guesswork but educated guesswork. As I peeked over the edge, there he was! The wind was still wrong, but he was not with his genius girlfriend, so I figured I might have more time. The first range was 374 yards. If I stood, I could see and range him, but because of the sloping terrain, he was out of view if I kneeled or lay prone.

Moving down through the snow, I ranged him twice more before finding a place to shoot off my pack. The last range was 220 yards, and now I was closer, so I didn't range him again. I set up prone the moment the terrain allowed. Then I gave him a bullet through the lungs. As I approached him, I realized he was my biggest bull yet. The beauty of these bulls always amazes me, and this time was no different. After giving thanks, I did my best to capture the moment in pictures and a few movies. I didn't want to cut him open and end

the magic, but it was 7 p.m., and I was several miles from the trailhead. Reluctantly, I began skinning and quartering the magnificent old bull. After climbing the mountain twice that day, once from each side, I was exhausted and elected not to pack any meat out that night. I felt fortunate to get over the mountain and back to the trail before dark.

Over the next two days, my lovely wife Gyongyver helped me pack the meat and antlers over the mountain back to the road. I can't thank her enough for this huge contribution. She saved me considerable time and effort. Upon reflection, two things are foremost in my mind. First, we live in a country where conservation works. The quality of bulls like this one proves it. Second, we live in a country where we are free to hunt these excellent animals. We all have reason to celebrate freedom and successful conservation. ■

### POSTSCRIPT

Sadly, in July 2020, less than a year after Dan's caribou hunt, he was killed while clearing a trail about a mile behind his property. Friends and family found his body in the area where he had been working. His wounds were consistent with a bear attack, Alaska State Troopers reported.

At the 31st Big Game Awards held in Springfield, Missouri, in July 2022, Dan's wife Gyongyver accepted the award on behalf of her late husband. She (and Dan) received a standing ovation.



Gyongyver Schilling (center) with past VP of Big Game Records Buck Buckner (left) and Chairman Mike Opitz (right).



ORIGINALLY PRINTED IN THE BOONE AND CROCKETT CLUB'S 31ST BIG GAME AWARDS, 2019-2021

WANT MORE STORIES LIKE THIS? ORDER TODAY!

This 560-page book is packed full of trophy records from the Arctic tundra to the deserts of northern Mexico. We include the official B&C score and the B&C gross score for each trophy, along with additional measurements and information about each accepted entry. In addition, we list the general location and date of harvest. This research can prove invaluable for serious hunters planning their next hunt.

LESS THAN 200 COPIES REMAIN!

We understand that records aren't everything, so much of this book is dedicated to hunting tales and full-color field photos. You'll find stories about more than 20 new top ten entries and a new World's Record musk ox. Within these narratives, you'll understand what it means to persevere when the odds align against you in the middle of nowhere. You will realize that these hunters share a deep respect for their quarry and embody the ethics of fair chase that helped build the Boone and Crockett Club more than a century ago.

**BOONE AND CROCKETT CLUB'S 31ST BIG GAME AWARDS, 2019-2021**  
BR31 | \$45  
REGULAR PRICE \$75