

Generation Next: Essays

**SECOND
PRIZE
WINNER!**

Submitted by: Savanna Koebisch Age: 16

Trophy Type: Bighorn Sheep Location: Ribbon Creek, Alberta

A Lifetime of Sheep

How much was I willing to sacrifice for my trophy? Although pursuing bighorn sheep can precipitate physical hardships and mental anguish, I fully embraced the difficulty of alpine adventure. The search for and recovery of my ram concluded at midnight after a two-and-a-half day, 40-mile trek which brought me to the limits of my physical abilities. Backpacks loaded with sheep quarters and massive horns, the season was ending the next day, and my tag was finally filled after three years of hunting rams.

Since both my mother and father are avid hunters, you might say that I had it in my blood. Sharing his nearly four decades of sheep hunting experience, my dad Peter mentored me in the ways of the mountains and sheep. My education included



Savanna Koebisch, hunting with her role model, her father, took this bighorn sheep near Ribbon Creek, Alberta. This ram scores 180 points.



listening to tall tales at conventions and reading the classic, *O'Connor's Sheep and Sheep Hunting*. Now, with Alberta license and tags in hand, the Rocky Mountains became my school and playground. From sheep behavior to ballistics and gun safety, my skills grew with the entertaining curriculum. During three seasons my hiking ability progressed, my camping skills strengthened, and my fear of heights diminished. When terrain and/or weather became onerous, I learned about mental toughness. Often humbled by the serenity and majesty of the mountains and their sheep, I matured to appreciate the chase and not just the trophy. Knowing this, I didn't regret passing up two smaller, yet legal, rams in previous years. Dad also taught me sheep hunting etiquette, which includes respect for our quarry as well as fellow hunters. In retrospect, my apprenticeship had prepared me well enough for the events that were to follow.

Our initial optimism in locating this ram was swept away as quickly as the spindrift snow on the stone-clad vantage point we were approaching. We were now standing in the sheep bed where Dad had spotted a lone old ram two evenings before, a Thursday. He had never seen a bigger one. Hiking out in the dark, and arriving home at midnight, he was enthusiastic about returning with me the next day to harvest him. Surprisingly, Mom let me skip Friday afternoon classes in order to hike the many miles back to establish a strategic spike camp. We had just finished setting up the tiny two-man tent when darkness engulfed us. Sipping hot tea and sitting in front of a crackling campfire, I remembered why I enjoyed sheep hunting so much. The silence was comforting and familiar.

Now, late the next morning, the ram was nowhere to be found. Despite the temperature registering in the mid-teens, I was

sweating. Short legs and deep snow drifts might have contributed to that. There were sheep trails crisscrossing the scree slopes everywhere, but where was my ram? Suddenly, Dad spotted him behind us with his naked eye.

"Whoa, he's a monster," I whispered to Dad, who was just as thrilled as I was. Taking turns keeping him under surveillance, we formalized our final approach. He was feeding only a half a mile away. In order to avoid detection, we swiftly descended into the tree line. Although I'd been taught to use the tried and proven approach from above, a cliff band made this impossible. Hence, Plan B. Stalking through the unfortunately crunchy snow, we used landmarks to close the distance. Find him we did, though already alerted and suspicious due to swirling winds. We froze in position until he returned to feeding, obliquely above us. Under time-pressure, I quickly scooted into a sitting shooting position, and brought my Remington Model 7 into a familiar position. We ranged the ram at an easy 110 yards, but only one difficult shot possibility existed. My 7mm-08 would have to thread its 139-grain GMX bullet through three distinct plate-sized windows in three separate tree lines. As fate would allow, my ram stopped feeding directly in line with these windows. He stood, quartering slightly towards me. This was an angle I was comfortable with—one that had worked well for me on a warthog hunt previously.

My shot felt good, and the ram, unflinching, bounded out of sight. After hugging with joy, we realized the hunt was not over yet. Making our way up to where he had been standing, there was no blood to be found, only tracks remained. Fifty yards further, the ram had expired cleanly. Dad called me toward my first bighorn ram and congratulated me on a fine trophy. There was

no ground shrinkage. Cloaked in a chocolate cape, his dark body contrasted the caramel colored, broomed, full-curl horns he carried. Both breaking down in joyous tears, Dad and I reminisced on the events that had brought us to this perfect conclusion. As usual, hundreds of pictures were snapped to preserve and pay tribute to the ram's memory. In true celebration style, the Peak 1 stove was prepped, and tea was prepared.

Life-sized caping on the unstable mountainside took longer than expected. It was nighttime when our packs were loaded, and it began to snow. With Dad ahead, I had barely taken a few steps when the slippery scree shot out from under me. The weight of two rifles, our optics, and the rest of our gear catapulting me forward, I accelerated down the slope at breakneck speed. Somersaulting backwards for over two-hundred yards, I miraculously slid to a halt mere feet away from the tree line. A gash was bleeding on my forehead, but the rest of my limbs were intact. That event ended the best and scariest day of my entire life! We cached the ram, and recovery took place the next day.

Now that I had the ram of a lifetime at the age of sixteen, was I going to stop hunting these amazing animals? Not a chance! August 2012 brought another sheep opener, another self-guided backpack hunt, and this time I was the guide. As luck would have it, three unsuspecting rams charged past us at thirty yards and Dad took his fifth bighorn. The quality time sheep hunting allows me to spend with my role model, my dad, will always be appreciated. I write this essay exactly a year to the date on which my bighorn was officially measured. For Christmas, I got a Boone and Crockett ring with a score of 180 inscribed on its side. Can it get any better? ■