

Generation Next: Essays

Submitted by: Marcus Deuling Age: 15

Trophy Type: Dall's sheep Location: Whitehorse, Yukon Territory

Last Day Dall's

My long weekend of hunting didn't start out the way I had planned. My grandpa, Paul Deuling (also known as Papasheep, the name I gave him when I was 2 years old, and the name stuck) and I had just been skunked. Two sheep hunting spots were inaccessible due to construction equipment in the area and bridges being washed out. Little did I know that my luck would change drastically on an overnight Dall's sheep hunt to an old spot that Papasheep knew from previous years.

On October 7th about 7 a.m., Papasheep, his golden retriever Molly, and I arrived at the base of the mountain where we planned to hunt. We made it to the timber line at 11 a.m. and immediately spotted a group of 20 ewes and lambs, but no rams were in sight. We walked up a small creek bed and were scaring ptarmigan from the willows left and right, which was very entertaining and kept me from thinking of my heavy pack. As we neared a large, grassy plain near noon, we saw a lone ram on the side of a ridge above us. We quickly put the spotting scope on him, but he was a very small ram. Since he was all alone and young, Papasheep decided that we should set up camp on the plains because sooner or later the young ram would either go and join up with a group of other rams or the group would find him. After setting up camp, eating lunch, and keeping an eye on the young ram, around 4:30 p.m. Papasheep took a nap, so I decided to go for a walk over the ridge above camp to look into the next valley.

My walk started out with me having to climb an ice patch for 10 minutes while using jagged rocks as ice picks. When I reached the top of the ice, sheep started coming over the adjacent ridge at about 800 yards and stopped on the skyline. After a look with my binos, I saw there were rams in the group! I made up my mind in a split second and started sliding down the ice using rocks as brakes, just narrowly missing a rock at the bottom, but I made it back to camp without the sheep seeing me. When I awakened Papasheep, he and I immediately put the spotting scope on them and saw one that was definitely legal and looked very nice. We decided our plan of attack would be to walk up the ice patch again and come at the rams from the ridge above. We emptied everything from our packs except knives, the rangefinder and meat bags. I put my .270 Winchester on my pack, and we started hiking toward the ice patch. Unfortunately, Papasheep wasn't able to get up the ice so he told me to go ahead and get another look at the rams. He would hike around the ice patch and meet up with me on top. Twenty minutes later, I was on top of the highest knoll on the ridge looking at the group of rams from just over 500 yards. Most of the rams were sitting on a small bench, but there were two small rams sitting between me and the larger group—a problem, because we would have to get around the two without spooking them or the group. As I watched them, I noticed Papasheep coming from the



Marcus Deuling was hunting with his grandfather, Paul Deuling, near Jo-Jo Lake, Yukon Territory, in 2012 when he took this Dall's sheep. His ram scores 171-5/8 points.

far side of the ice patch, but 20 minutes later he hadn't met up with me, so I assumed he had skirted around the base of the knoll and missed me. I decided to walk toward the end of the hill, but a small ram that I hadn't seen appeared in front of me. I didn't want to scare the big group so I was forced to walk back toward the ice patch.

Luckily, Papasheep spotted me standing on the ice. When we met up he told me that when he couldn't find me he had assumed that I had just gone directly to the sheep, so he decided to do the same thing. As he walked along the ridge, he was busted by a three-quarters-curl ram, which he watched for almost twenty minutes. When the ram started getting used to him, he decided to make a break for it to find me while he got Molly to stay there. When I didn't appear, he returned to Molly, but unfortunately the small ram got spooked, and the whole group of rams walked away toward the west.

Sure that our hunting trip was over, we decided to walk to where Papasheep had last seen the rams. As we neared the edge of a large basin, I looked up from watching my feet and saw the whole group of rams watching us at 150 yards. We hastily threw off our packs and unstrapped my .270. Papasheep told Molly to "stay," then he and I sneaked up to a tabletop rock. The rams started walking down a steep slope covered with grass and rock slides. They stopped below me at 175 yards so Papasheep and I crawled another five yards to a cluster of boulders. As I pulled my rifle bolt back, everything went crazy! The base plate, its spring, and all the cartridges flew into the rocks making a loud clatter. I scrambled to find everything in between the rocks, but all that was there were two cartridges. I was so exasperated! My gun was in pieces, and I was sure the sheep were going to run away. Luckily, they stayed where they were. My gun was now a single shot, but I was finally able to get a cartridge in the chamber. Papasheep told me to shoot the ram at the very back.

I couldn't take the shot because a smaller ram was blocking my view. In the meantime, Papasheep decided the ram second from the front was considerably larger. As I took aim, another half-curl blocked my view for a few minutes then moved, giving me an opportunity to shoot. I squeezed off a shot and missed! Incredibly, the rams only moved a couple of yards before stopping. The big ram was in the lead so I aimed again on his shoulder and pulled the trigger. The ram collapsed, then rolled five feet and came to a halt on a grass patch. All the other rams stood still, then slowly walked off as Papasheep and I congratulated each other exuberantly. As we walked down to the ram, his horns seemed to get bigger and bigger. When I got to him, I just sat down and stared at his huge horns. I was dumbstruck. As we measured the horns, we expected them to be maybe 40 inches. Because he had such a deep curl and thick fur, his horns looked smaller than they actually were. Amazingly, the horns were just over 43 inches with bases that were above 14 inches!

By the time we had finished caping and field dressing my ram, it was 9 p.m. and getting dark. I loaded up my pack with 80 pounds of meat while Papasheep took 60 pounds of skull, horns and meat. With heavy loads and weak headlamps, the going was treacherous and there were several falls, but thankfully no injuries. This was also the only time we had forgotten to G.P.S the tent, so we had to use the ice patch as a landmark to get back. By chance, we stumbled upon the tent on our first try to locate it, even as the sky was fading from pink and purple to black. After putting the cape on a snow bank and the meat away from the tent, we called my uncle on the satellite phone to see if he would be able to meet us part way up the mountain in the morning to help pack out our heavy loads. Papasheep hung up and told me that Uncle Jarrett had agreed to meet us. Sleep came easily a few minutes later.

At 6:00 the next morning, we were awake and started packing camp. We ate breakfast and left by 7:30. After walking for half a mile, I looked back towards camp and saw a big grizzly bear walking towards us at 80 yards. Papasheep threw off his pack and started wrestling the .270 from the back of my pack. As soon as he got the gun, he fired a shot at a rock near the grizzly, but instead of running away, the bear just ambled off into a gully and came right back out. We watched it for a bit before Papasheep and I decided to put our packs on and just try to walk away. While we walked, the grizzly watched us and continued feeding up the hill. Almost one mile from camp, Papasheep asked me if I had taken the cape from the snow patch. I was confused because I thought he had it. It was then we realized we had left it lying on the snow. This meant we had to return toward the bear and endure another two miles of walking. Getting the cape wasn't a problem, other than a loss of energy. Thankfully the bear never bothered us. Two hours later, we met up with Uncle Jarrett who was astonished by the size of my ram. He had brought his pack so he took part of our load, which saved us hours of going slowly down the hill through shale and gravel. After another four hours, we crossed the river and made it back to our vehicles. It was a great relief to off-load our packs!

When we arrived at Uncle Jarrett's garage, Tony Grabowski, a Boone and Crockett Club Official Measurer, green-scored my ram at 172-2/8! A possible records book Dall's sheep and the largest sheep taken by a Deuling!

It still amazes me that I was able to harvest such a massive ram on an overnight hunt after failing to get up a mountain on two other attempts that weekend. I am really happy I to have Papasheep with me for this once in a lifetime hunt. I would like to thank him and Uncle Jarrett for helping me pack out my ram and for sharing this tremendous experience with me. ■