

THE NCHH FROM JACK RENEAU'S PERSPECTIVE

TROPHY TALK



JACK RENEAU
B&C PROFESSIONAL MEMBER
Director Emeritus

Back in 1975 I was attending graduate school at Eastern Kentucky University in Richmond, when I was seriously thinking about my future. I was married, no kids, no job—and jobs for wildlife biologists were few and far between. Frequently, there were hundreds of qualified applicants for each job.

Near the end of the fall semester, I was completing my coursework and research on incidences of lead shot ingestion by waterfowl in Kentucky when I noticed a job announcement on a bulletin board in the biology department for a hunter information specialist with the National Rifle Association (NRA) in Washington, D.C. I had no idea what a hunter information specialist was or did, but it sounded interesting and exciting to me. I was concerned, however, that I didn't know anyone associated with NRA to give me a proper introduction and get me in the door for an interview, let alone land the job.

A few months later, however, a District of Columbia bus dropped me off a few blocks from NRA's headquarters at 1600 Rhode Island Ave., NW, spewing a billowing, black cloud of diesel fumes on me as it pulled away. I stood there a moment wondering what I had gotten myself into. Harold Nesbitt, the director

of the hunting activities department selected me to fill the position.

When I walked through the doors at NRA's headquarters that day, little did I know that I was taking my first step in a career spanning nearly 40 years with Boone and Crockett Club's records program and eventually with Boone and Crockett Club (B&C) itself. I was aware of B&C, but I didn't realize it at the time that NRA and B&C were cosponsoring the Club's records program under an umbrella agreement known as the North American Big Game Awards Program or its acronym, NABGAP, a short-lived cooperative agreement between the two organizations that spanned the years 1973-1981.

Over the years since, I have processed and accepted tens of thousands of trophies for B&C's Awards Program, communicated with countless hunters and outdoor writers on the phone and via email, trained nearly 1,400 Official Measurers, and edited or contributed to more than 40 B&C books and publications. One of the most exciting aspects of my job, however, has been the opportunity to work with the National Collection of Heads and Horns (NCHH), established by Club members William T. Hornaday and Madison Grant at the Bronx Zoo in New York City in 1906.

I'm not going to repeat any more historical information already covered by Lowell E. Baier and Harold Nesbitt in the last four issues of *Fair Chase*. However, I was asked to briefly review the history of the NCHH from my perspective and involvement.

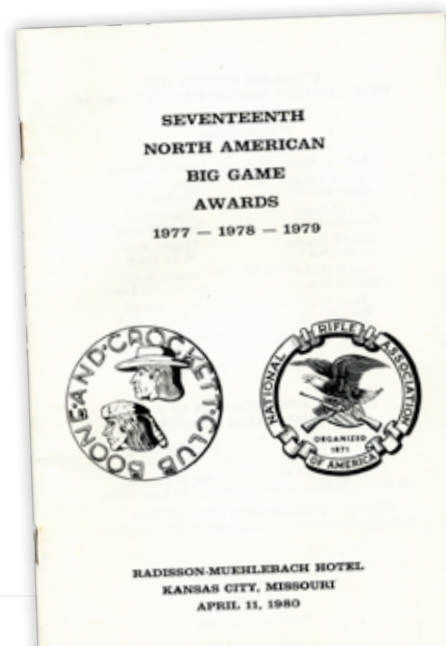
Truthfully, I had never heard of the National Collection of Heads and Horns (NCHH) until 1978 when Harold Nesbitt asked me to go with him to the Bronx Zoo to salvage the remnants of this historical collection that played such a prominent role in recovering the populations of America's native big game species that were nearing extinction at the end of the 1800s. Harold said we would meet Lowell at the Bronx Zoo.

Harold also told me that Boone and Crockett Club was taking over ownership of the 34 remaining North American big game heads in the collection and delivering them to Washington, D.C., where they were going to be displayed in the museum at NRA's headquarters. The remaining 198 international trophies were

going to Safari Club International's headquarters and museum in Tucson, Arizona.

It turned out to be a very exciting day for me. From the start, it was obvious that the display and trophies were in a sad state of neglect and disrepair. The NCHH displays behind glass had been boarded up and closed to the public for years. In reality, and according to the original log books we received with the collection, several thousand trophies, sadly, had passed through and disappeared from the NCHH. Included in this number was a magnificent collection of 23 shoulder-mounted trophies, including two bison, nine elk, and 11 moose, donated by C.H. Mackay. None of these trophies remained in the collection when Harold and I picked up the remaining trophies.

Between the years 1973 and 1981 the NRA and B&C cosponsored the Club's records program under an umbrella agreement known as the North American Big Game Awards Program or its acronym, NABGAP.



Coincidentally, an elderly Bronx Zoo security guard approached us while we were loading the North American trophies into the U-Haul. Harold and I drove to the Bronx Zoo and told us that he wondered when they were going to finally dispose of the remaining trophies. Sadly, he reported that the zoo had been hauling truckloads of trophies to the New York City dump for years.

If B&C, with the help of NRA, hadn't stepped in to salvage the NCHH in 1978 when they did, the specimens that were removed that day, including a still-standing, World's Record (WR) Stone's sheep taken by L.S. Chadwick in British Columbia in 1936 would have been deposited in the storage bins of the American Museum of Natural History in New York City and never again seen the light of day.

When we returned to Washington, D.C., the North American trophies we picked up were displayed in the NRA's museum where I refilled the humidifier weekly for several years to preserve the trophies. The NCHH was moved to the Buffalo Bill Historical Center in Cody,

Wyoming, in 1983. It remained there until 2015 when a long-term agreement was signed to move the NCHH to the America's Wildlife Museum and Aquarium (AWMA) in Springfield, Missouri. Beginning in 1991, the collection was displayed in a magnificent Adirondack log cabin especially built to tastefully display the collection. It cost Club members nearly a quarter million dollars to hire a contractor to build the cabin using real logs and reconstructing it in the museum.

One of the primary goals of the NCHH has always been to obtain—through donations or loans—the finest specimen available in each of the 38 categories of North American big game recognized by the Club's records program. When the NCHH display opens to the public at the AWMA in Springfield, there will be 39 specimens in the collection, including at least six trophies that have never been exhibited in the collection before.

I have had the pleasure and privilege of being involved with acquiring a number of trophies for the NCHH over the years. The first, the former

The former World's Record mountain caribou (466-3/8) that was taken by G.L. Pop in the Babine Mountains, British Columbia, in 1923. When we were remounting back in Dumfries, Virginia, in the mid-1980s, we discovered that it had a split skull. It was determined that the mount was ineligible for entry in B&C and was dropped out of the records book.



Andrew Daum's non-typical mule deer (304-5/8) was harvested in Elk Creek, Colorado, in 1886. It had been stolen from the NCHH at the Bronx Zoo in 1974 along with 12 other trophies. On June 24, 1998, Jack received a call from an individual who had acquired it and wanted to return it to the NCHH.

World's Record Rocky Mountain goat accepted in the Fourth Competition, was taken by E.C. Hass in British Columbia's Babine Mountains in 1949. I was sitting at my desk one day when the phone rang. It was Mr. Hass's daughter on the other end to ask me if we would accept her father's World's Record mountain goat. She said her father was in ill health, and it was his desire to donate his trophy mount to the collection before he passed. I told her absolutely yes, and the head arrived in Cody a few days later.

Perhaps, the most spectacular big game mount I was involved with acquiring is Andrew Daum's non-typical mule deer (304-5/8) that was harvested in Elk Creek, Colorado, in 1886. It had been stolen from the NCHH at the Bronx Zoo in 1974 along with 12 other trophies. On June 24, 1998, I received a call from an individual who had acquired it and wanted to return it to the NCHH. Needless to say, I enthusiastically told the caller that we wanted it back. The Daum head is one of only 22 bucks in the non-typical category that scores 300 points or more.

It was one of the

original heads in the NCHH that had been depicted in some very early B&C books before the Club created the non-typical categories and was actually referred to as a "freak head" with the hunter unknown. Interestingly, my wife and I found an original field photo of this outstanding rack at the Denver Public Museum in the mid-1990s, taken on the day it was killed in 1886. The head and antlers are perched on the side of a wall tent. As best I can tell, it is the oldest field photo of any trophy in B&C's records books.

In 2001, I again answered the phone when Roger D. Syrstad introduced himself and told me he wanted to donate to the NCHH a typical whitetail deer (192-2/8) he had taken in Pope County, Minnesota, in 1989. He had my immediate attention because we didn't have a good whitetail in the collection at the time. All we had to do was provide him with a replica of his antlers. It was a no-brainer. Jack Comp made the replica and Tom Sexton painted it with the original antlers in hand. When Tom was done, you couldn't tell the replica from the original mount.

TROPHY TALK

In 2008, we received another incredible trophy, a Dall's sheep (182-2/8) taken by Earl J. Thee at Moraine Lake, Yukon Territory, in 1948—the World's Record Dall's sheep at the time. When I located the original score chart prepared by Samuel B. Webb, I found a notation in Sam's own handwriting that indicated Mr. Thee wanted his sheep to go to the NCHH upon his death. While it took 58 years to get there, we are truly glad to have it in the collection.

Since it was decided to move the NCHH to America's Wildlife Museum and Aquarium, we have made a

concerted effort to upgrade some of the categories that were not adequately represented. **Table A** lists those trophies that have been generously donated to the NCHH or received on a long-term loan basis.

Another interesting but little-known chapter in the NCHH is that two trophies Harold, Lowell, and I picked up at the Bronx Zoo in 1978 were dropped out of the records book after the Club acquired the collection when we determined that both were ineligible for entry in B&C. The first trophy, which was accepted in B&C's Seventh Competition in 1955, was the former World's Record mountain caribou (466-3/8) that was taken by G.L. Pop in the Babine Mountains, British Columbia, in 1923. When we

were remounting it back in Dumfries, Virginia, in the mid-1980s, we discovered that it had a split skull.

The second trophy was a typical American elk (397-1/8) listed in our records books as taken by Robert Swan in Montana in 1912. When we were remounting it in Missoula, Montana, for display in Cody, Wyoming, a number of years ago, we discovered that it was actually a set of shed antlers held together with steel rebar.

We'll never know how these two trophies managed to be accepted into the NCHH, but we obviously had to follow our own policy concerning such trophies with our own heads as soon as we discovered something was wrong with them. Both were mounted before B&C acquired the

collection in 1978 and long before the current scoring system was adopted in 1950. So, there was no intentional effort to deceive B&C. It is presumed that the antlers on the G.L. Pop caribou were split to get them out of the field, a common practice still done today.

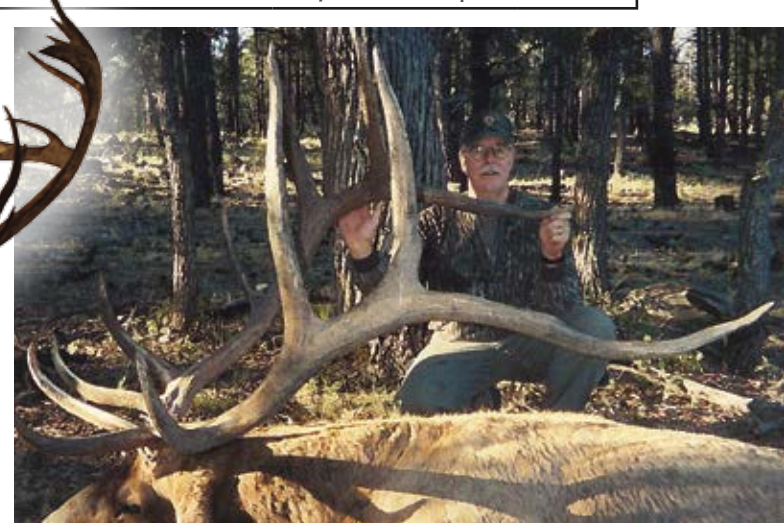
That pretty well sums up much of my involvement with the NCHH to date. However, we're not done yet. We are always in the process of upgrading trophies in the national collection. In fact, we are in the process of acquiring two very unique and exciting trophies that I can't mention at this time. So, stay tuned and I'll be announcing more acquisitions when all the paperwork is completed. ■

Jack Reneau



NEW TROPHIES ADDED TO THE NATIONAL COLLECTION OF HEADS AND HORNS				
CATEGORY	SCORE	HUNTER	LOCATION	DATE OF KILL
Alaska brown bear*	28-14/16	Larry F. O'Brian	Pumice Creek, AK	2001
grizzly bear**	27-3/16	Rodney W. Debias	Unalakleet River, AK	2007
American elk (typical antlers)***	410-5/8	Dan J. Agnew	Gila County, AZ	2003
American elk (non-typical antlers)***	409-5/8	Dan J. Agnew	Gila County, AZ	2011
mountain caribou+	453	C. Candler Hunt	Prospector Mt., YT, CAN	1998
desert sheep****	188-4/8	Picked Up	Grant Co., NM	1992

*Mount only donated by hunter.
**Mount and skull donated by hunter.
***Loaned to NCHH by Dan J. Agnew and harvested on the San Carlos Indian Reservation.
+Mount donated by hunter.
++Loaned to NCHH by New Mexico Dept. of Game and Fish.



New trophies have been added to the National Collection in Springfield. LEFT TO RIGHT: Larry F. O'Brian's Alaska brown bear, C. Candler Hunt's mountain caribou, and Dan J. Agnew's typical American elk.