

# GOLDEN ALBERTA: 1920-1970

## Bighorn Hunting History Along the Eastern Front of the Rockies

By Robert M. Anderson

An Excerpt from *Great Rams III*, B&C's Newest Book!

**F**OR 130 YEARS, IT HAS BEEN A WONDROUS NEVER-NEVER-Land for the mountain hunter. Here are the jagged teeth of great, dangerous peaks rising in the sky, soaring granite headwalls, mountain passes through tiny “notches” in high ridges far above timberline, permanent glaciers and ice fields, lower elevations of the mountains covered with giant alluvial talus fans

and, below that, long fingers of purple timber and crystal rushing streams. And here, the crown jewel of mountain hunting in the western world still lives in his brutal heaven of frigid gales, blinding snow, hail, lightning, bone-cold, racing clouds, and brilliant sunshine.

But, for the tiny fraternity of the world's sheep hunters of that period beginning at the end of World War I and continuing for a half-century, all the foregoing rhetoric could have been summed up in the simple words: *Bighorns in Alberta.*



Early day Alberta outfitter John Haggblad with a fine personal ram taken in 1920 in the White Horse Creek drainage. In the photo, the ram appears to be at least a low-book ram. It was never measured via the modern Boone and Crockett system and has long since disappeared, one more casualty to the unceasing grindstones of time and changing life priorities. Brothers John and Nick Haggblad were well-known and respected outfitters in the Luscar and Mountain Park area in the 1920s and 1930s. Beginning in 1947, John Haggblad, by then 62 years old, worked for and was an early mentor to famous bighorn outfitter Jim Babala.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY JIM BABALA COLLECTION

Far and away the most prolific and successful outfitter and client sheep hunting team was a quiet, withdrawn, incredibly shy, 24-year-old college graduate and newlywed, Donald S. Hopkins from Lock Haven, Pennsylvania, and an equally reticent young guide on his way up, 22-year-old Ray Mustard. Hopkins booked his first hunt with H. M. Mustard and Sons in the late winter of 1924. When he arrived for his hunt in the fall of 1924, young Ray, who had just received his first guide's license, was assigned to guide him. It was the beginning of a unparalleled hunting partnership and lifelong friendship between the two men.

Hopkins hunted 15 times with Ray Mustard as his outfitter and personal guide over a period of 22 years. Hopkins' first hunt in 1924 was for 21 days. Thereafter, all of his hunts were for at least 30 days. Most were for 60 days, or the entire fall season. These hunts produced three rams above 190 B&C, taken in 1924, 1927, and 1937. Hopkins certainly collected other game, but his



**ABOVE:** Ray Mustard's head guide Stanley Kitchen holds a tremendous ram killed by Donald S. Hopkins in 1937 in the Jobe Creek drainage of the Brazeau River with Ray Mustard as his personal guide. The ram officially scored 191-2/8 points. If you get the idea that Hopkins was a very camera-shy man, you are correct. Despite the great rams he certainly and undoubtedly killed, I've never seen a kill photograph of him with any ram on the mountain.

**RIGHT:** A very rare photograph of Ray Mustard, taken in front of his Southesk trail cabin in 1930. In the later years of the 1950s, after Mustard had retired from outfitting, he occasionally visited his great friend, Don Hopkins, who lived in Spokane, Washington. During these visits in Spokane, Mustard was often mistaken for OUTDOOR LIFE Gun Editor Jack O'Connor, who lived in nearby Lewiston, Idaho. O'Connor was often in Spokane, usually at the gun shop of one of his favorite rifle makers, Al Biesen. Although it's not evident in this soft photograph, the resemblance between Mustard and O'Connor was striking.

PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY JIM BABALA COLLECTION

# RAY MUSTARD

Alberta Outfitter and Guide



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total priority was bighorns, and the biggest of the big.

Photographs of Hopkins on the mountain with any of his great rams are non-existent because, I believe, they were never made. I have exactly one tiny, grainy photograph made in 1930 of the two men together. If I didn't know the circumstances of the photo and the clothing and postures of the two men, I could not identify them as Hopkins and Mustard. The photo is one of my prized possessions. Over the last thirty years and for some strange reason, I have felt an almost consuming need to learn more about Hopkins and Mustard, perhaps the two greatest hunters and greatest gentlemen of old Alberta's bighorn trails.

Gradually, the old outfitting icons of the 1920s and 1930s, such as Jimmy Simpson, John and Nick Haggblad, Curly Phillips, Ray and Bill Mustard, Jim Boyce, George and Ray Hargreaves, and the Brewsters gave way to a new group of pack train men just as professional, skilled, and successful as their predecessors. Among these were Jimmy Simpson, Jr., Felix Plante, Charlie Stricker, Jim Babala, John Ostashek, Chester Sands, Phil Temple, and others. Perhaps the peak years of outfitting for bighorn sheep in Alberta were the late 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s.

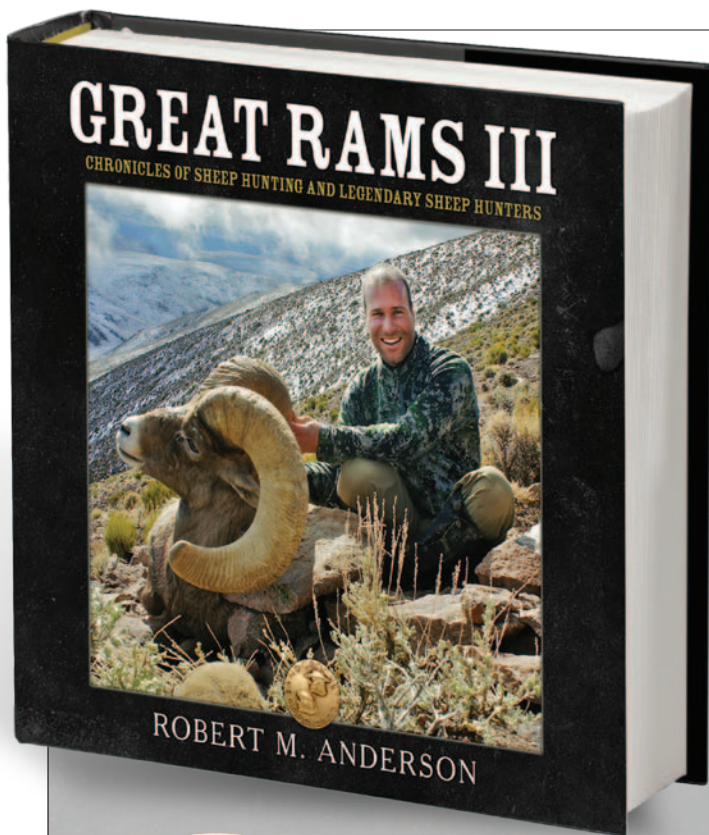
Certainly the mighty drainages, enormous above-timberline basins, glittering snowfields, and glaciers that fed the great east-flowing rivers spilling out onto the Alberta prairies were the birthing ground for the pack train big game hunting industry. For sheep hunters, these thin-air challenges were unsurpassed, and these challenges and adventures played themselves out under enormous sweeps of rock and sky. ■

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** Interested in reading more about sheep hunting? The third installment of Anderson's epic *Great Rams* series includes stories of legendary sheep hunters, colorful photographs of some of the top trophy rams taken by today's hunters, plus fully illustrated features about famous mountain hunters, sheep hunting in Alberta through the decades, the early years of desert sheep hunting in Baja, and the strange death of Tony Granata. *Great Rams III* also includes a special section B&C Trophy Sheep Archives, plus a special photo essay from the author's 50 years of collecting sheep hunting photos! See page 29 for more details about the book and how to order your copy.



Marge Hopkins, wife of famous early days Alberta sheep hunter Donald S. Hopkins, with a unique and beautifully-shaped ram she collected in 1925 in the Cardinal River drainage. Marge accompanied her husband on numerous Alberta sheep hunts in the 1920s and 1930s, taking several good rams herself.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY JIM BABALA COLLECTION



Stories of legendary sheep hunts and hunters, colorful photographs, features on historic trophy areas and conservation efforts, and a look at yesterday's—and today's—sheep hunters.

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Alaskan outfitter and guide Frenchy Lamoreaux holds the horn and skull plate of an absolutely incredible Dall's ram. The photo was taken in front of a tent which would indicate the head might have been a fairly recent winter kill and had been picked up during a hunt. The time frame of the photograph is probably the late 1950s or early 1960s. The head is so distinctive that one would think it would be well known, but I have never talked to anyone who could shed any light on it.

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