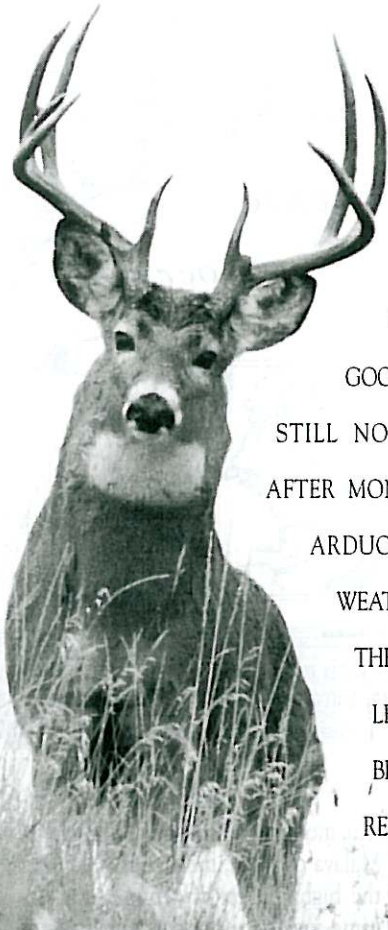


The Satisfactions of Trophy Hunting

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IF YOU CAN TURN YOUR HEAD FROM SIDE TO SIDE IN A POSITIVELY NEGATIVE MANNER, YOU HAVE ONE OF THE BASIC PREREQUISITES FOR BECOMING A BIG GAME TROPHY HUNTER. IF YOU CAN DO THIS, AT LEAST MENTALLY, WITH YOUR RIFLE SIGHTS ON A VERY GOOD SPECIMEN OF YOUR QUARRY, BUT STILL NOT OF THE SIZE YOU CAME FOR, AFTER MONTHS OF PREPARATION, WEEKS OF ARDUOUS RIDING, CLIMBING, AND BAD WEATHER, THEN YOU ARE WELL ALONG IN THE SPORT. THIS REFUSAL TO SETTLE FOR LESS IS ONE OF THE BIG STEPS TOWARD BRINGING HOME THE TROPHY THAT WILL REMAIN A GREAT SATISFACTION.

PHOTO BY NEAL AND MARY JANE MISHLER

And this step to trophy hunting can be a real hurdle! When your allotted time on an expensive trip is running out, with bad weather closing in and game sign scarce, the horns on that mountain sheep in your scope can grow an inch or two just while you study them. See, when the head is turned away how the horn tips come up past the ram's nose? It's easy to convince yourself that they will surely make forty inches! But look again. The tips are slender and tapering, not worn off and blunted, and their full curl doesn't have the massive form of the old-timer's "stove pipes." So, you win the argument with yourself, relax that trigger finger, and become a real trophy hunter.

Keep on glassing, though. Did that round rock on the ridge beyond the ram move? There's a horn tip silhouetted—a big, blunt horn tip, and then among the sheep-covered rocks you make out the outline of the body and great horns of Old Granddad himself! Now, hold the cross hairs where they belong, and collect a trophy that's really worth all the effort you've put into your hunt.

Luck can play a big part—occasionally—but it's studying of the record for the top trophy-producing areas, careful selection of excellent outfitters and guides there, assembling of a good personal outfit that will let you stay out with reasonable comfort and safety under rugged conditions; physical conditioning and shooting practice on game-shaped targets and that determination to wait for what you came for will give the remarkable consistent results that the top head-seekers produce on trip after trip.

Getting together with a bunch of good fellows during hunting season, playing poker in the lodge if the sky is overcast, shooting the empty beer cans while the guide goes out and bags a meat animal the "hunter" can take home on his license is one form of recreation. I'm for it; it sells more licenses to support the game departments, and the more fellows who stay in camp, the fewer who get shot for deer! Also, if that's the only way for one of the more adventurous-type fellows to get tired of the smoke-filled room, wander up the canyon, and run into a bust of a

buck that makes the book and opens new outdoor vistas for our friend the trophy hunter, then I'm really for it!

But he will then move into an entirely different sport. His companions will be old Mother Nature, in all her sunny or violent moods, and perhaps an Indian who may seem a little shy and awkward in town, but on a tricky rock slide moves like a ballet dancer. Maybe he'll enjoy sharing trips with another kindred soul who will, however, subtract by one-half the hunting country that can be covered from one camp! Trophy hunting is not a very sociable sport in numbers; there's

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lots of society in the city, so if that's what our nimrod enjoys hunting most, that's the place for him to go.

For my hunting, I'll take the kind of close sociability found with someone like my staunch, Tagish Indian friend, Watson Smarch. I can see him now, hunkered small in his wet rain suit over the little fire in the Yukon, roasting ribs from the Blue Stone sheep that we'd crawled for in a downpour, through the mountain meadows at the foot of the blue granite cliffs. The wet snow pelting down at timberline nearly put out our sputtering fire that night, as we dozed occasionally under the stretched poncho, and the soggy chill dawn looked

mighty good. But gazing fondly at those wet ram horns glistening in the flickering firelight brought a glow of satisfaction that gave all the warmth I needed through the night!

That's how it is when the hunter dreams of an animal in a distant, inaccessible area, till he must shape his total effort toward finding it there. Maybe this is just some form of excuse or rationalization to set up a challenge for himself, but it's the most fascinating and satisfying game I know to play.

I've always been particularly interested in noting the pattern of decreasingly sophisticated means used by today's hunter in reaching and locating his goal in such a quest. This usually begins with the highly complex, most modern jet marvel at his home airport, down through various vehicular and animal transports, to the ultimate use of his most primitive instincts and physical stamina in the final clutch.

And it's all based on the same visions that must have filled the mind of man's aboriginal ancestor with an exciting image of a great beast to be encountered and overcome. Surely the hunting instinct, above the hunger level, harks back to that primitive testing by man of his superior inventive powers and his vast satisfaction in using them to overcome other animals more fleet of foot or long of tooth. This must be a basic reason, too, for man's natural affinity for his weapons of hunting, and his delight in their perpetual refinement, which helps him overcome his clever or dangerous quarry. It is also a mark of respect for his opponent in the contest.

And it is this respect for the animals sought that, to me, is the mark of the hunter worthy of the game. Without his according proper dignity to the animal both in its life and death, a hunter's trophy means little. The value of it to him depends on how highly the hunter admires the marvelous vision of the amber-eyed ram—a vision so superior to his own—its fearless judgment and balance in leaping crevasses and traversing minute ledges; or the bulldozer power of a grizzly tearing open a mountainside for ground squirrels, and then its agility in catching them; or a whitetail deer's shrewd maneuvers in

watching its back trail. The hunter who doesn't know his quarry well—its strengths and its weaknesses—and have an abiding respect and warmth for it as another creature, gains no satisfaction above his belly in finding and besting the animal in its own terrain. The true satisfaction of hunting lies in overcoming an esteemed adversary on its chosen ground.

Built upon this base of respect is the still higher satisfaction of seeking an outstanding specimen of its type. Now, the standards of an excellent trophy are established by a definite scoring system for each species, and the recording of all of the top trophies serves as a guide. Thus the hunter has a basis for deciding whether the game animal in his sights is worthy of his efforts to bag a record-class specimen. Surely it takes some study of the records, and habits of observation in applying them, to know when a head looks good, but it's time well spent and will add a new dimension to one's hunting.

The great element of chance remains, of course, to make it more interesting. If success on a hunt could be blueprinted all the way, it would be a dull game. Still, a trophy is more satisfying if you know you gained it by doing all you could to get the controllable odds in your favor, and then stayed with the system till it paid off.

I actually wonder whether or not the biggest piece of luck that a hunter can have is to stumble onto a truly record-class specimen early in his hunting career and do a creditable job of bagging it. I know that the satisfaction of that trophy

will set the standard for his hunts from then on. He'll have new goals to guide him in what he seeks and shoots, and how rewarding they are!

But on the other hand, the

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hunter of big game who makes a long journey for a species new to him and quickly settles for a fair specimen, or even lucks into a record size one the first day out, will never have the regard that is due it for either his trophy or the species.

Consider, for instance, the case of my partner on a thirty-day Yukon hunt, made primarily for a Dall's sheep piece. The first day we reached our base camp he jumped a bunch of the snowy sheep on a hillside almost within view of the tent, and knocked over a decent but not record-size ram. Shooting a white sheep trophy thus

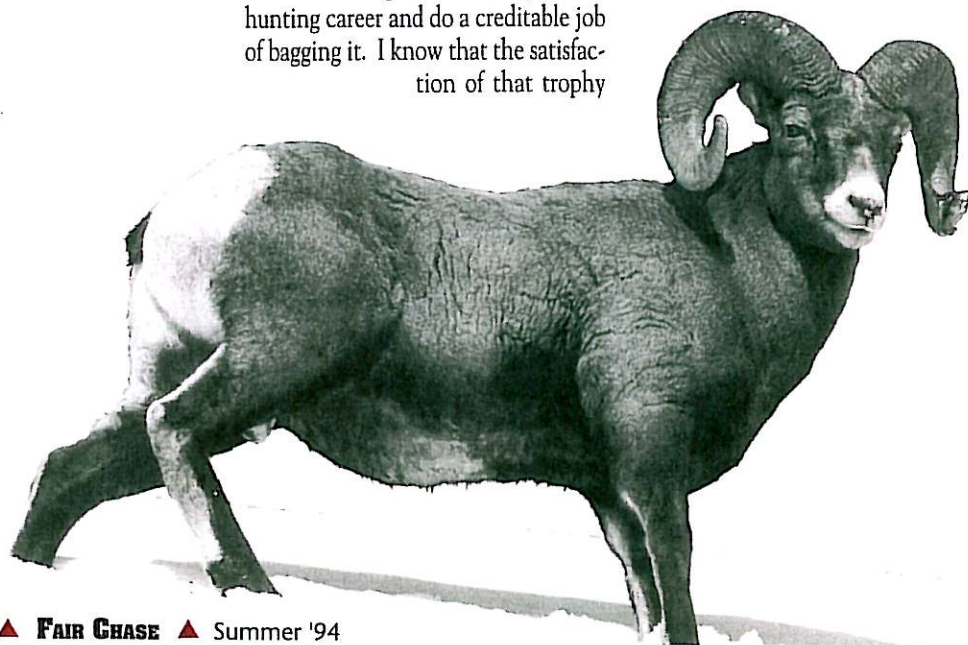
meant little to him thereafter beyond a long plane trip and a couple of days riding on a pack trail. He missed the fascinating and memorable weeks of hopefully scanning other herds, fly camping far above timber, and working up and down rock slides above the alpine meadows which I had enjoyed before finally taking my ram.

Compare his natural concept of sheep hunting from that experience, and the corresponding satisfaction in his trophy, to that of Berry Brooks, and his recent bighorn ram, for example. Berry, surely one of the kindest and most courtly gentlemen on earth, is also one of its greatest hunters. His list of rare species taken from the four corners of the earth reads almost like the complete Natural History Field Guide. Though he had taken all the four sheep species on this continent, Berry wanted a better bighorn ram. Here is his own account, condensed from his diary of that hunt, which he kindly sent me for use in this article:

"I had allowed myself thirty-five days to try for a real trophy bighorn in Alberta. On the eleventh day I glassed a big ram, forty inches or over, but my guide and I both agreed that it would be impossible to reach him there. During the next eighteen days we worked hard, combing the basins and slopes of this same territory, passing up seven shootable rams, and seeing this big one on three different days. Each time we could not figure out a way to reach him. Finally on the 29th day I got a good look at him. There was no doubt about his size then. His horns were fairly tightly curled, massive base, badly broomed but about the same length and I judged both over forty inches long."

"I said, 'We will go after him today, regardless.' We were then about 7,000 feet but had to climb another 3,000 feet before I could find a place that looked even a possible chance to descend. Night had already come when we got down to a little creek in the valley where we bedded down for the night. Fortunately, I always carried rations for overnight."

"At first light we started climbing up the jagged walls of the big peak where we hoped to find the ram on the



other side. This was a big undertaking for a man who had spent his fifty-eight years along the bank of the Mississippi River at an altitude of 214 feet above sea level. The nylon rope, and determination of both of us was all that got me up, over, and down many ledges. It took all day and all the strength I could muster to get near the top just before dark."

"Carefully peering over I saw a 38-inch ram, well broomed, and I watched him feed for about half an hour. Whether the coming of darkness saved me from finally taking him in desperation, I'll never know! Knowing the sheep were all around us we dared not move and spent a miserable night right there huddled up in the

on! The four smaller ones appeared to be 36 inches and over."

"We were pinned down right there, almost motionless, from 8:30 to 1 p.m. under most uncomfortable conditions, like flies sticking to the side of a mountain. When they fed out of sight we made for a little low willow thicket which would put us about 500 yards away from the rams. We crouched there from 1:30 to 3:20 pinned down again."

"A wolverine came within 75 yards of me and it was a great temptation to shoot it, for I had never killed one."

"The sheep were working down a little valley which we hoped would bring them within 250 yards of us. Suddenly they started running, most likely

"We got back to the little creek by dark, drank our first water of the day, made a little fire and heated some dehydrated soup. Almost immediately it started snowing and it was a sad realization that we must get over the pass as soon as possible before it froze over. I shall not attempt to describe the torture I endured. The last two hours I could take only ten steps and then rest. At 5:05 that morning I reached the 10,000 foot pass and saw the sun rising. When I looked back over this rugged country I thanked God for being so good to me, and I appreciated it."

Among all his exotic and rare trophies, I doubt that any of them gives more satisfaction to Berry Brooks than that ram from our Rockies, for it's a top

trophy of its species that was earned not only by tremendous effort and hardship but by the determination not to settle for less on the way. Also, it was of a familiar species which he had hunted before, and so knows well how to judge its quality in the field.

And that brings us finally to one of the best things about big game trophy hunting: every hunter who wants to can enjoy it. With all

the wonderful species of game animals on this continent from coast to coast, there is selective hunting nearby, available to all.

Furthermore, the "big ones" are still growing! The minimum scores for recording have also been revised steadily upward for most species because of the tremendously increasing number of trophies reported that exceed former minimum figures. Obviously more and more hunters are enjoying the satisfaction of real trophy hunting by learning what ranks as a worth-while specimen, pursuing it well, and not settling for less.

This is hunting at its best!

FRANK DVORAK, BRITISH COLUMBIA GUIDE, STUDIES A LIKELY BIGHORN SHEEP MOUNTAIN. PHOTO COURTESY OF ARTHUR C. POPHAM.



rocks, my sleet covered clothes frozen stiff."

"Cold rations for breakfast did not give much strength but the light afforded movement. Cautiously we crawled to points of vantage. It was a beautiful day and the sun was just high enough to cast long shadows when we spotted seven rams about a thousand yards away."

"Putting the scope on them I shall never forget the sight! Three of the rams would go over 40 inches. One was a wide curl, one a very tight curl, and the other had heavy broomed horns making over a full curl and turning outward. This was the one to keep my eyes

from the wolverine, and it looked hopeless. We decided to run and try to cut them off, and then saw them again as they were nearing the top."

"The big one was the second from the top and on the right. I fired almost immediately and was high, I fired again a little low and in the front, but it turned him around sideways. I heard my next bullet smack and I saw him fall off the ledge and out of sight."

"When I crawled down to the ram, he was everything I had hoped for; he was worth it all. The steel tape measured 43-1/4 inches on the right horn, 43 inches on the left with a 15-5/8 inch base each."