



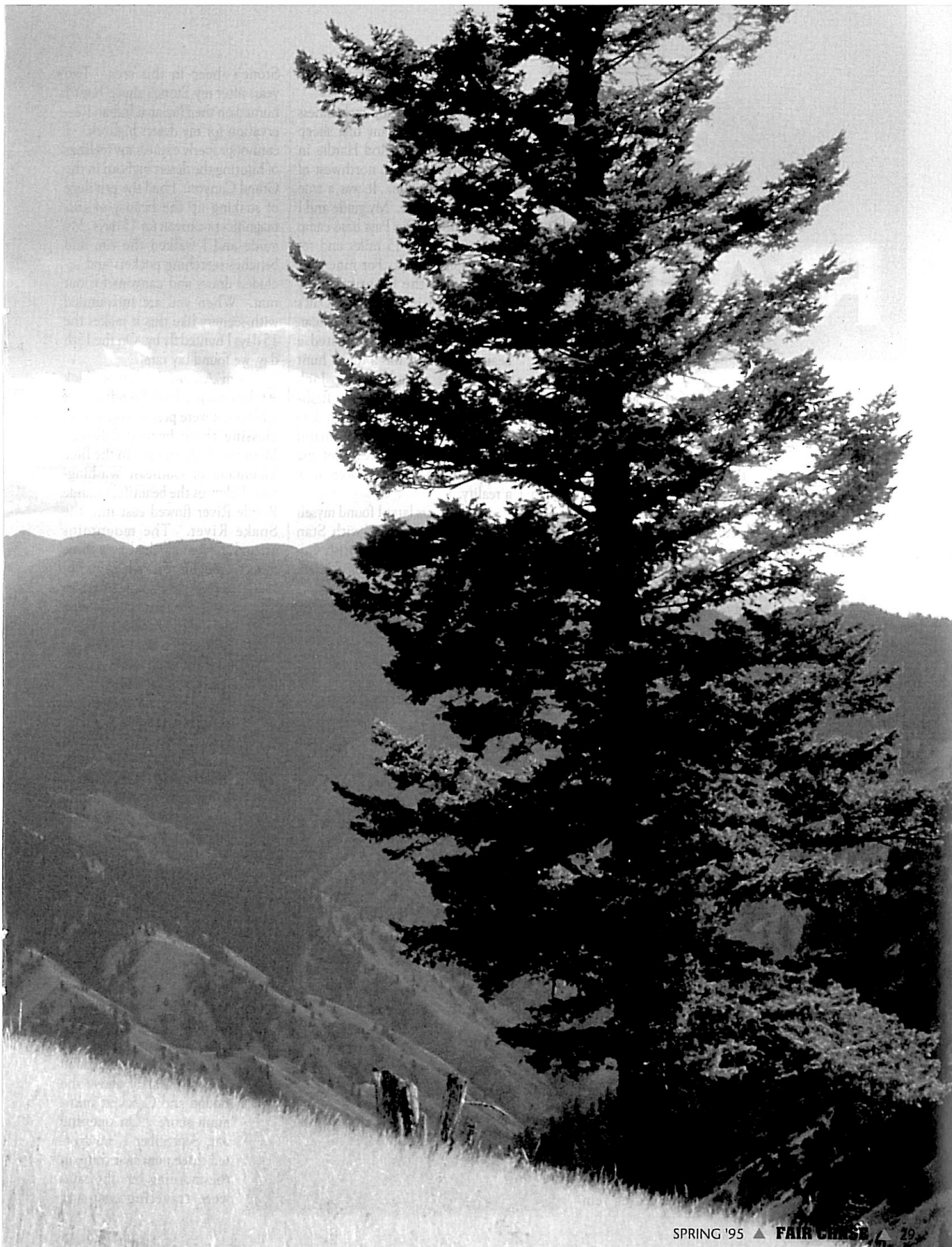
A WASHINGTON STATE RAM

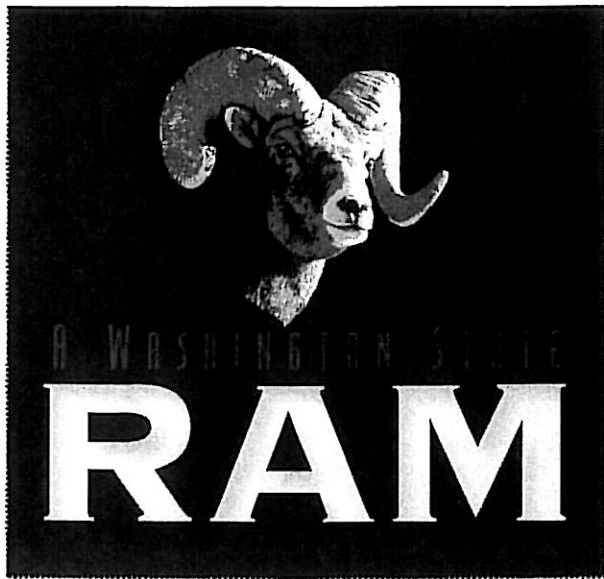
A TRIBUTE TO JACK O'CONNOR
BY TOM PAWLACYK

THE FIRST WILD SHEEP I EVER SAW WAS AT THE AGE OF 12 YEARS, IN *OUTDOOR LIFE* MAGAZINE IN AN ARTICLE WRITTEN BY THE LATE JACK O'CONNOR. UNKNOWN TO ME AT THE TIME, IN 1986 I WOULD TAKE MY DALL'S SHEEP IN THE RUBY MOUNTAINS, NORTHWEST OF WHITEHORSE, YUKON, LESS THAN A MILE FROM THE SPOT JACK O'CONNOR'S WIFE, ELEANOR, TOOK HER

DALL'S RAM. I READ JACK'S ARTICLE WHILE WAITING FOR A HAIRCUT IN A BARBER SHOP AND AFTER THAT I READ ALL OF HIS ARTICLES UNTIL HE RETIRED. I BECAME OBSESSED WITH SHEEP HUNTING BUT EVEN MORE WITH THE BEAUTY OF THE MOUNTAINOUS COUNTRY WHERE THE SHEEP LIVED. EACH MONTH I LOOKED FORWARD TO MY NEW ISSUE OF *OUTDOOR LIFE*.

BACKGROUND PHOTO OF THE BLUE MOUNTAINS OF SOUTHEAST WASHINGTON.





My father, who was self employed all his life, loved to trap. "Trapper Joe," as he was called, was considered one of the best, if not the best trapper, in Wisconsin. He loved the great outdoors as much as I do today but never once carried a gun or a fishing pole. I was introduced to hunting and fishing by my uncle. At age 12, I started duck and deer hunting with my uncle and cousin. Through high school I felt a burning desire to hike and explore the beautiful mountains as described by Jack O'Connor.

In 1960, I made my first trip out west to hunt mule deer and antelope in Clearmont, Wyoming. I'll never forget my first view of the Bighorn Mountains just west of Clearmont. During my hunt I marveled at the snow capped beauty of the Bighorns and promised myself that one day I would hunt in the mountains of our western states. For the next 25 years I made numerous hunting trips for deer, antelope and elk. My elk hunts in Wyoming and Colorado took me into the mountains for the first time. On an elk hunt in the Thorofare at the south end of Yellowstone National Park I saw my first live sheep. I watched bighorn sheep, ewes, lambs and rams bedded and feeding rein-

forced my long standing desire to hunt wild sheep.

My good fortune in business allowed me to book my first sheep hunt in 1986 with Rod Hardie in the Ruby Mountains, northwest of Whitehorse, Yukon. It was a true outdoor adventure. My guide and I rode out of our Dry Pass base camp on horseback for 15 miles and set up our spike camp. For nine days we hiked in the beautiful Ruby Mountains seeing numerous Dall's sheep, a grizzly bear and caribou. On the tenth day I harvested a beautiful ram. It was a tough hunt but very rewarding. Jack O'Connor's sheep hunts kept flashing in my mind during the ten days I walked through this beautiful country. At last, my dreams of one day being a sheep hunter were now a reality.

Two years later I found myself hunting Stone's sheep with Stan Lancaster in northern British Columbia. I harvested a beautiful dark

Stone's sheep in this area. Two years after my Stone's sheep hunt I hunted on the Hualapai Indian Reservation for my desert bighorn. I cannot properly express my feelings of hunting the desert bighorn in the Grand Canyon. I had the privilege of soaking up the beauty of this magnificent canyon for 15 days. My guide and I walked the rim and benches searching pockets and secluded draws and canyons for our ram. When you are surrounded with scenery like this it makes the 15 days I hunted fly by. On the 15th day, we found my ram.

On August 30, 1994, Jack Atcheson, Jr., Fred Hendrickson and myself were perched on a ridge glassing three beautiful Rocky Mountain bighorn rams in the Blue Mountains of southeast Washington. Below us the beautiful Grande Ronde River flowed east into the Snake River. The mountains around us were parched by a three month drought. The sheep we observed prior to opening day were concentrated on the drainage above the river. Jack and I were impressed with the abundance of wildlife in this area of the Blue Mountains. Elk, mule deer, whitetail, turkeys, chukars, California quail and ruffed grouse were everywhere. Washington's Department of Fish and Wildlife was obviously doing a great job in managing its wildlife!

Jack Atcheson, Jr., from Butte, Montana, agreed to guide and outfit my hunt and Fred Hendrickson, a Washington resident, assisted Jack on the hunt. Fred guides for Jack in the fall in the unlimited sheep area of southwestern Montana. We scouted for three days prior to the September 1 opening and found three rams at or above the Boone and Crockett minimum score. On opening day, September 1, we spotted three rams first thing in the morning but the rams were traveling east and



THE STEEP MOUNTAINOUS TERRAIN THAT SHEEP INHABIT ADDS TO THE ADVENTURE OF THE HUNT.

eventually went out of sight. One of the three rams Jack estimated to be in the 185 point class. Two more rams were spotted shortly after that and one of the two required a closer look. After stalking within 400 yards of the rams our spotting scope showed the largest ram to be in the high 170's. We left the two rams and continued our climb to the east. A short time later Jack noticed seven rams moving fast from the east to west and 600 yards from us. We hurried to high point and were able to watch the rams moving down a draw. It was obvious that someone spooked these rams because their tongues were out and they had been running for quite some time. Two of the rams in this group were very large and Jack was sure this was the last time we were going to see them.

I marveled at the
snow capped
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Later that afternoon we spotted three rams bedded and stalked to within 400 yards of them. En route we jumped a flock of about 40 chukar partridge which flew down the mountainside away from us. The chukar season wouldn't start until September 20 or I would have spent some time hunting them. Jack estimated the largest of the three rams was in the 180 class with 15" bases and 40" horns. The ram looked great to me, but Jack thought with any luck at all we

could do better. Jack's last comment of the day was, "When you see a record book ram - you will know it's a record book ram." As we prepared to leave the area we watched a large black bear work its way down the other side of Deer Creek. We admired his agility as he walked in and out of draws and washes.

As daylight broke on the second morning of our hunt we set up our spotting scopes on a ridge in the north end of Deer Creek just above the Grande Ronde River. From there we could watch a grassy basin and several canyons to the south. We were hoping the same rams we saw the day before would show up again because at least two of them were record class animals. About 9:00 a.m., Jack spotted two rams bedded at the bottom of a draw and decided they deserved a better look. After about ten minutes of staring into his spotting scope, Jack turned to me with a grin and said, "Do you want to know what a record ram really looks like?" I couldn't get over to his scope fast enough and I wasn't disappointed when I did. The ram was a mile away and looked very large in his scope. We decided to move up above the ram to allow Jack to take a closer look. We had a hard, long climb ahead of us and by noon the temperature reached 85 degrees. I am sure all sheep hunters will agree that the final stalk on a trophy ram is the most exciting part of the hunt. I thrive on walking mountain terrain and cherish every step I take. Being a midwesterner the highest points are the tassels on stalks of corn.

As we started our climb up to the rams the weather warmed dramatically. As the morning sun rose in the sky the dry air helped to disperse our sweat.

At 11:00 a.m. we were 450 yards above the ram, which allowed Jack to get a good look. After studying the ram's horns for 15 minutes, Jack estimated the ram at 188 B&C. The ram dwarfed his buddy lying next to him and with the spotting scope he looked like he had two telephone poles coming out of his head. We considered



TOM PAWLACYK WITH HIS
BIGHORN RAM THAT SCORES
184-5/8 POINTS.

a shot from this point but decided it was too risky. Shortly after noon, with a hot sun shining down on them, the rams moved a short distance into some green bushes and bedded down in the shade. Jack and I decided to climb higher to a point where we could come down on the rams. We moved very slowly up the mountain to reach the same draw the rams had been bedded in. With the wind in our face we inched down a grassy slope and by 3:00 p.m. we were in a position 250 yards above the rams. The rams were out of our sight but we decided it was too risky to move any closer. At 3:30 p.m. the rams left their beds and walked into the open. I put the big ram on the ground and ended six and a half hours of nervous anticipation. My ram green scored 188, exactly what Jack had estimated him at. He had 16-4/8 inch bases, his right horn was 42 inches and his left horn was broomed to 38 inches.

After picture taking, I sat on the ground reflecting my life long dream of taking the ram. My only regret was that it only took two days to harvest my ram. I wished that the hunt could have lasted longer so I could see more of the beautiful Grande Ronde River valley, and the Blue Mountains.