

AN AMERICAN BISON

By Shamus M. McCarthy – B&C Associate

For two years my father had entered us into the drawing for a bison hunt at Custer State Park south of Rapid City, South Dakota. The Park issues 10 permits each year for 10-year-old and older bulls. The letter arrived in September informing us that both of us had drawn a permit. It seemed strange that at 14, I might be harvesting a bull that was born the same year I was.

Our four-day hunt period from December 19 to 22, would be preceded by the ten-hour drive from Missoula, Montana, a day of skiing, and a day to see Mount Rushmore, Jewel Cave, and the Black Hills. Luckily, the regular winter snowstorms, which usually rage through the area, took place before we arrived and after we left.

By the morning of the 19th, we were ready for the bison hunt. We had completed our own tour the day before of the 200-square-mile Custer State Park to get a feel for the country and saw many deer, bighorn sheep, and of course, bison. Dad had selected three traditional rifles to bring on the hunt: his .50-90 Shiloh Sharps, and two original .45-70s (a Remington Rolling Block and a Model 1886 Winchester). He chose the Sharps with 500-gr. Barnes solids and I selected the Winchester with 405-gr. Remington factory loads. These proved to be too light for the bison. I should have used his reloads.

We met Ron Walker, the Park's resource manager, at the Park headquarters at 8 a.m. After quickly finishing the paperwork, we met Vern Ekstrom, the herd manager for the Park. He would serve as our guide and approve the selection of the bulls we chose to harvest.

It only took Vern a couple of hours to show us a group of five older bulls, but none were likely to make B&C. He then took us into a timbered area of narrow ridges and valleys where he suspected more mature bulls might be seeking shelter. Sure enough the one I wanted was there. It was noticeably larger in the body

than the other bulls we had spotted, and its horns were worn and rounded. The bull also had one bad eye, which

Shamus M. McCarthy and his guide, Vern Ekstrom pictured with the bison scoring 115-4/8 points. Shamus used an original Model 1886 Winchester to take the bull.



would make it easier to identify again. Vern agreed I had selected a great bull. Unfortunately, we could only monitor the group as the trucks used to retrieve harvested bulls could not reach our location. Once they moved out of the valley to flatter land, we could then plan our hunt.

The next day Dad and Vern started to look for a particular 13-year-old bull that Vern said, "must get hunting notices the same time as the hunters because it disappears each hunting season." This year proved to be no exception as we covered every accessible area of the park over the next two days and never located it. At last my bull moved into an area we could access with the trucks. Dad selected an acceptable bull nearby to take after I took mine. He knew it wasn't B&C but said, "It will be a great mount as long as I don't put it too close to Shay's."

The morning was sunny and very cold as we hiked up the ridge to the bulls. My bull stood out clearly with its size and bad eye. Vern advised the best shot would be a neck shot at the base of the skull, about three inches behind the ear. But

I had been making the shot in my mind for three days and was set on a heart shot. At about 65 yards the bull presented a full broad side so I took aim just back of the leg on the heart area and fired. The bull just jumped forward and stopped. I could hear Dad and Vern saying, "behind the ear!" so I placed the second shot on their mark and it landed with no visible affect. The bull started to move off into the timber, but stopped and turned back for a look at us. Dad said, "Just above the left eye, Shay." When that shot hit home the bull went down. This all took place in a few seconds, and I was glad I had taken the lever action Winchester. The Sharps had been in Dad's hand, and I was about to reach for it when the bull dropped. The size of a B&C bison cannot be appreciated until you stand next to it and try to move its head for a photo. Vern radioed the trucks, and we admired the bull until they arrived. It was magnificent and its hide would make a great rug for my room.

Dad's bison was soon located and although Dad had seen my bull's ability to take a solid hit he had full confidence in the .50-90 Sharps. He placed his shot exactly as Vern advised, and the bull dropped in its tracks. The shot behind the ear broke the spine and was a clean kill.

Our arrival back to Missoula was followed by a trip to my dad's friend, Deneen Cathy, who owns Bear Paw Taxidermy. There, he had to explain that his bull wasn't small, mine was just large. I am usually the one who gets teased and it was nice to be on the other side. I didn't join in because Christmas was only two days away and I still had my hopes up for more surprises. ■

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Good Fortune and a Little Luck

By Elizabeth Andrews-Glass – B&C Associate

I'm not sure whether you'd call it lady's luck, beginner's luck, or just dumb luck, but good fortune was with me on that September day in the plains of southern New Mexico. I'll admit feeling more lucky than good as I trudged the length of four football fields on a unseasonably hot fall afternoon. As I inched my way toward the curve of horn just visible above the grass line, I was yet to appreciate the mass and beauty of this trophy pronghorn.

Outside of a few dove shoots as a kid, I'm reasonably new to the sport. I pictured my first pronghorn hunt being in Montana or Wyoming. Pronghorn are plentiful there, but mostly modest in size. The land of the legendary monster bucks seemed financially off limits to me. Then entered blind luck.

Chris Denton, one of my hunting partners, booked a hunt with Kirk Kelso of Pusch Ridge Outfitters and I agreed to tag along as an observer. But a call one August morning changed my plans. Kirk had a last minute cancellation so I quickly jumped into the game.

Three weeks later we were driving a desolate highway into the dusty plains of southern New Mexico. This part of the Southwest is very flat, leaving little camouflage for the hunter or pronghorn.

Chris and I had spotted some small bucks on our three-hour drive from Albuquerque to Carrizozo and were anxious to start scouting. Dennis Jones, one of Kirk's guides, drove us to the area we'd hunt the next morning. New Mexico was experiencing extreme drought. We soon found a few bucks had defied the dry summer and had developed exceptional horns.

I felt like a kid in a candy shop as I brought the first big buck, then the second, then the third into the focus of my binoculars during that last hour of daylight. To someone who had never seen a truly big pronghorn, the sight was incredible. I didn't know if the morning would bring a trophy pronghorn into my sights, but I had already seen some amazing animals.

The next morning, Chris and I headed out with Billy Jones, Dennis's brother. We sat in Billy's pickup and waited for our first glimpse of white. We found it in a green grassy field stretching across a valley a mile and a half wide. A large buck with perfectly curved horns about 15 inches long stood with its harem. It was love at first sight—for the does and me. The buck was everything I wanted in a trophy. It was also a mile away with nothing to hide behind but a barbed-wire fence. We waited for it to move.

By midmorning, we had crossed eyes and sore seats from hours of staring at this buck. After determining it had no plans to leave its sanctuary, we decided to make a move.

At first I thought Billy was kidding when he told me to drape a white sheet around myself and run into the valley. But a few minutes later I was dressed like a ghost with two men hiding behind me as we crouched and ran at the same time toward this herd of pronghorn. Maybe it was the famous pronghorn curiosity; or maybe the herd just figured nothing dangerous could look so ridiculous. But for whatever reason, as we quickly began to close the gap, Cutter — as we nicknamed our buck — and company paid no serious attention to us.

You can imagine my shock when Cutter decided to cooperate completely and wandered about 150 yards downhill to graze. I couldn't see very well in the tall grass either prone or sitting and couldn't get comfortable with a shot. The buck finally got nervous and sped away with the white hairs of its rump puffed up like a rabbit's tail.

We hiked back up the hill and spotted Kirk who said we should check out a very nice buck he'd seen about a half mile away. We took his advice but my mind was less on what we might find than what we had just lost. I was on the verge of turning around to find Cutter again when we saw the "nice buck" standing on a small slope.

I barely had a chance to look before it stepped out of view. Billy turned to me with eyes as big as lollipops and whispered, "He's your buck." My heart started its pre-shot pound as I crept toward the animal.

With the buck in view, I lay down and estimated it to be about 200 yards. Just as my finger flipped the safety, it trotted out of view. So I squatted, moved, and lay down again. I lined up my shot, but again the buck moved out of sight. I slowly edged toward the animal on my belly. Suddenly, the buck's head popped up, it let out a snort and took off running. Busted again!

Billy waved at me to follow it behind the hill. He had spotted a small group of females in a field and thought the buck might join them. Sure enough while we hid out of sight, our buck trotted toward the does and settled down.

Too many brown eyes were scanning the field for us to move. I didn't have a range finder, but by the buck's diminutive size in my 3x9 Leupold scope, I knew it was way out there. Later, I marked it at 403 yards. I sat on my rear, held the cross hairs high over its back above the shoulder, took some deep breaths and fired. The does scattered, but luckily the buck dropped.

My concentration on making the shot often keeps me from being a good field judge so I tell you the truth when I say I had no idea what I had. As I inched my way toward the curve of horn just visible above the grass line, I held my breath and slowed my steps. When the buck came into full view, I was stunned. Its horns were just shy of 16 inches long, 5-4/8 inches around the base, nicely flared and symmetrically curved at the tip. The cutters were 6 inches long. It would score 81 and make the B&C Awards book. For me, it's the trophy-of-a-lifetime. ■



Elizabeth Andrews-Glass pictured with her B&C pronghorn scoring 81 points. The buck was taken in Socorro County, New Mexico, in 2002.

Four Days to Remember

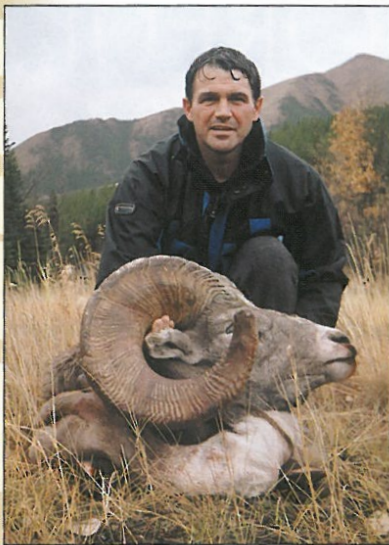
By Dale A. Fournier – B&C Associate

After fulfilling my family's Thanksgiving commitments, I decided to try my luck at filling my trophy sheep tag, much to my wife's dismay. She does not like me venturing off to the mountains by myself. My luck had been running strong, though, after filling my pronghorn and moose tags with my bow.

My destination was Area 408, an area I've hunted a few times before, where no horses or quads are allowed, greatly limiting the competition to a few of the dedicated. I packed my tent and gear to the last remaining spot of running water. It was about 10 degrees below zero, but I felt I was prepared.

The next morning I headed out bright and early, and in a couple of hours, finally broke out of the trees. I found myself in a basin that in the past has held many sheep. Several inches of snow covered the ground in which the marks of fresh sheep tracks were evident. I decided to head straight up and over to the next valley. After a few hours I was up on top of a ridge where I could glass the valley and another mountain ridge that paralleled the one I was on.

For the next two to three hours I worked my way along the ridge glassing as I went. As I neared the end of the ridge, I noticed movement. There in front of me were 18 rams. I closed the distance as much as I could, but still had a 400-yard plus shot. The rams had no idea I was there. I viewed about four rams that were just legal and a couple of broomed ones that had weight, but still not what I was looking for.



Dale A. Fournier pictured with his records-book bighorn sheep that scores 182 points.

From another cluster of four, a ram stepped out, and I could see right away this was it. The sheep was heavy with tips extending well past its nose making a full curl. I settled my cross hairs on the ram and followed its every move. As soon as it stepped well clear of the others, I squeezed my shot away and down the large animal went, disappearing over the edge. The rest of the rams just stood there unaware of what just happened. Once they started to disperse, I made my

way to the edge. My ram had slid approximately 500 meters down the talus slope! I made my way down just to touch it, to admire its horns, but suddenly off it went again sliding down another 500 meters of shale.

Again I made my way down to the ram and set to the task of caping and deboning the meat. The ravens were already circling so I took a sweater and a shirt to cover the meat putting rocks on top to keep things in

place. Since I wanted to do a life-size mount, I loaded its head and entire hide into my pack, which put the weight at 80 to 100 pounds.

It took me over three and half hours to climb the slope the ram had fallen down. As I began working my way down the ridge toward camp, darkness came early along with heavy clouds. Visibility was fading fast, and the wind was picking up blowing snow everywhere. Soon I found myself staring down 50-foot cliffs and couldn't see my way off. I took off my pack and left my rifle to search for a way off the ridge. I began to shake uncontrollably and knew hypothermia was setting in. I was in major trouble!

I made the decision to phone 911 for help. After describing my predicament, the operator asked for my address and phone number. All I could say was "you can't phone my wife" for I knew there was nothing she could do, and I didn't want to panic her. The operator assured me she wouldn't. I was patched through to the local Royal Canadian Mounted Police, but was told they could do nothing until morning as they did not fly at night. The R.C.M.P. officer did say he would have a person from the local alpine club phone me. I missed his first two calls because my hands were so cold I couldn't answer the phone. He said he thought the trail should be on the east side of the bluffs. I thanked him and he wished me good luck and told me to keep moving.

I found a small cave and tried to take shelter there, but the wind still found me and my condition was worsening. I crawled to the edge of a bluff and saw a 2-foot ledge with a sheep trail running along it. But how to get to it? Now in survival mode, I made the decision to leave my pack and gun and work my way back up the mountain. I soon came across an area I recognized—a 20-foot, straight down, hand-hold-to-foot-hold climb down to the trail, with a shear drop after that. I made my way down and worked my way toward the tree line.

Upon reaching the tree line, I phoned 911 and told them I was in the trees and knew I could survive. I also phoned my good friend and bow-hunting partner, told him of my predicament and asked if he would drive out the next day to give me a hand. Like the good friend he is, he agreed. After giving him directions to my location, I made it back to my tent shortly around midnight.

I spent the whole night staring into the ceiling of my tent, thinking how lucky I'd been. At 6.30 a.m. I was up and began hiking back to the ridge. I reached it after three hours in a howling wind. I knew I never would have survived if I'd stayed there the night before. I donned my pack, picked up my gun, and began the trek down.

I made the decision to phone 911 for help. After describing my predicament, the operator asked for my address and phone number. All I could say was, "You can't phone my wife..."

The wind knocked me flat a few times and the heavy pack made it a struggle every time to get back up. I needed to make my way through some precarious spots and waited for a break in the wind to cross these areas. Around noon, I finally made it down to the trees where I met my partner, Tim. I explained where my camp was and he agreed to pull it out for me. At 2 p.m. I made it to the truck and drove to town to get a motel room for us. By this time my 49-year-old body was beginning to break down. Both my sides were bleeding from the pack digging in and my toenails were already black and bleeding from being pounded in my boots. A warm bath was a welcome comfort. Tim made it to the room shortly afterwards and I proceeded to tell him my story. We put a tape to the ram's horns; the bases were 16 inches and the length just over 41 inches on each horn.

The next morning we awoke to more bad weather. I knew going back over the top along the ridge would be impossible, so we decided to go the back way through the valleys. We made our way through fighting a fair amount of blowing snow, but it was nothing compared to the conditions on top of the mountain. We were almost to the spot where the meat was when a large grizzly ran around us from behind, eyeing us over its shoulder. The bear ran to a spot in front of us where it proceeded to dance back and forth rising to its back legs, testing the


wind and snapping its jaws. We realized the bear had claimed my sheep meat as its prize, so we slowly backed away giving it the space it needed. As we retreated, we began to see its tracks in ours and realized it had been closely trailing us for the last 300 meters or so. If the bear had wanted to it could have had us in a heart beat, and there was nothing we could have done especially with my rifle still sitting in the motel room.

By the time we got back to town Fish and Wildlife was closed. It was Friday, and I did not want to leave town without reporting our experience and reason for not recovering the meat. Having the ultimate trophy I wanted no questions and everything done by the book. I phoned the 1-800-poacher number and told them of my problem. They in turn had the on-call officer phone me. I explained the encounter and he asked if I would stay the evening to fill out some forms. He would then also register my sheep. The officer went out of his way to help me, which only helped bring this life experience to a good ending.


They say "time heals all" and I know soon I will forget all the aches and pains my poor old body has endured. And as hard as my wife will try to remind me of all that has happened, I know very soon I will have that map stretched out and planning my next trip back up the mountain. ■

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The latest news from TrophyWatch...

California Monster Bull

This tremendous bull was reportedly taken in northern California in September of 2004. Early reports are that this non-typical American elk is a 10x11 and could score near 440 points. There were supposedly over 100 people in the taxidermist's shop the following day to look at the bull. The lucky hunter is Ron Beggs. We'll be watching for his score chart in the mail. What a great bull!

Veteran's Day Weekend Buck

This monster buck was taken on November 11, 2003, in Greene County, Ohio. Robert M. Gerleman, a captain in the U.S. Air Force, had scouted it since late summer. He had planned on hunting until 8:30 a.m. and then getting down from his stand to attend a Veteran's Day Mass service with his seven-year-old daughter. This buck showed up at 8:20 a.m., shortly after two does slipped by his stand about 50 yards. Needless to say, he never made it to church that day. The buck was standing 20 yards away when Robert took the shot. This big non-typical has 22 points (13x9), and the official B&C score is 206-6/8 points. Robert is on the right in the picture and his dad, Mike Gerleman, is on the left.

Midwestern Monarch

This field photo was submitted to us a few months ago, with the message that the buck may have been from Kansas. Whatever the state, this massive, long-tined typical is staggering. What a tremendous trophy.

Locked Whitetails

These two bucks locked together while fighting. The man who found them was going to his stand that evening, and heard a bunch of noise. He went to see what it was and found the bigger buck dragging the smaller one (it was already dead). The big buck was worn out and would have likely starved or been a victim of predation. He shot the deer with his bow and got help to load them up. At the check station, a game warden issued him a permit for the second buck. He took them to a taxidermist and is having the two bucks full-body mounted. Thanks to Al Prante for submitting the photo.

