

ETHICS

FAIR CHASE

BIG GAME HUNTING

Scouting is defined by Webster as: investigation, reconnaissance, exploration, or survey.

In hunting we define it a number of ways. Early on it was defined as "pre-season" exploring of an area by a hunter in search of game animals to hunt at some later date. Later, that definition was refined to include researching data normally tabulated on an annual basis by fish and game departments relative to the big game herds in a state or region.

SCOUTING

What is Ethical... What is Not?

The sky was bright and clear on the August morning when the 180 Super Cub bounced down the runway near Gulkana, Alaska, and lifted into the cold, damp air. Sheep season was just a week away and the two young guides were excited about what the day would bring. With two Dall's sheep hunters booked for the

By George A. Bettas
B&C Professional Member
Executive Director of the
Boone and Crockett Club

Cowboy Up

upcoming season, they were intent upon locating the two big rams they had been "scouting" for the better part of the summer. The sheep had been on one particular ridge most of the past week, and there did not appear to be much reason for them to move out of the area. This flight check would reaffirm the location of the rams and provide the opportunity to determine the logistics of how to access the ridge when the hunters arrived for the opening week of sheep season. Within minutes, they were over sheep country with high anticipation of seeing the two big rams in the valley beyond the ridge that loomed ahead. In a few minutes they were over the rams. Perfect!



The fog was lifting off Lake Pend Oreille in Northern Idaho as I stopped by a local coffee shop for a quick hamburger. At this time of the year, most of the local loggers are out working in the woods, so one can imagine my surprise when I saw my friend, who is usually falling timber at this time of the year, enjoying a burger and

The Hired Gun

fries while visiting with the local game warden. They had just ordered, so I joined them for lunch. "What are you doing in here on a day like this," I inquired. My friend smiled and told me he had an interesting new job for the summer. He then related how he had been contacted by an outfitter from Arizona and had been hired for the summer and early fall by an individual who had purchased the Montana Governor's bighorn sheep tag. His job was to find a big ram and have it located when the season opened. He had done his homework, researching where the big sheep had been taken in Montana and had gone over the sheep management data for all the various units. Now all he had to do was find the biggest ram that he could and watch it until fall. He was particularly interested in a ram he had located the week before in the Thompson Falls unit just an hour down the road from the café. His job that day was to drive down to Thompson Falls and spend whatever time it took to relocate the ram.

Washington State was not well known in recent years for the size of its elk until a huge bull was taken just outside of the U.S. Department of

Fly-Boy Bulls

Energy's Hanford Reservation a number of years ago. (Access to the reservation is prohibited, but the elk that come out on private land are fair game.) The herd had grown quietly over the years. Only a few local hunters and the landowners with orchards and croplands adjacent to the reservation were aware of the size of the herd and the bulls. News travels fast, and before long this area was the new elk "hot spot" in the state. Along with the news of the elk, came the need to "scout" for "good bulls." The flat, arid desert of the Lower Columbia basin has a few hills, but for the most part the land is arid desert and irrigated farmland. So how do you find out if any elk are out of the reservation, and better yet, are there any big bulls out there? To an enterprising local individual the answer was simple. He owned an ultralite aircraft. As the years went by his prowess at taking big "Hanford" elk became well known. The elk knew him, too, by the sound of his ultralite and took refuge under the electric transmission lines when they heard him coming on his regular scouting flights.

Oregon's huge Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep were legendary a few years

ago and the Oregon Governor's Tag sold for a lot of money at various auctions around the country. The only problem with purchasing the tag was that sometimes the big rams did not know where the border was between Oregon and Washington. Much of the time these rams were on the Washington side of the ridge, which was on the state line, and they had little reason to cross over the ridge into Oregon. That was the case until the Oregon tag was purchased by an individual who hired a "scout."

Sheep Camp on the Edge

The plan was simple, legal and with proper execution, would deliver the biggest ram to the hunter. It involved the scout backpacking up into the sheep range in late August and establishing a backpack camp just below the rams. Each day the "scout" would

The sheep had been on one particular ridge most of the past week, and there did not appear to be much reason for them to move out of the area. This flight check would reaffirm the location of the rams and provide the opportunity to determine the logistics of how to access the ridge when the hunters arrived for the opening week of sheep season.



Photograph by Milo Burcham

ETHICS

FAIR CHASE

BIG GAME HUNTING

ETHICS FEEDBACK

Message from the Editor:

Everyone here understands that hunting well is never about production. And yet, in this instance, the perception held by many citizens, including some shockingly tuned in outdoors people, is in conflict with that absolute reality. So, the thought was to begin to dial the message up a notch in these pages with deeper, tougher discussions concerning ethical hunting. If they are on target, these passages may give you cause to re-think a gray-light situation from years ago, or question an over-the-top approach to a month-long campaign featuring a prized big-game tag. Better, perhaps, it will bring you into the discussions themselves.... a magazine and the club it serves are only as good as its involved member readers.

REQUESTING YOUR FEEDBACK

We would like to encourage you to send us your thoughts about the topic featured in our "Ethics" series this quarter. We will begin featuring your feedback from the previous topic in each of the following issues. These articles are meant to make you think and certainly are not intended to make decisions for you.

Please send your comments to:
Boone and Crockett Club
ATTN: FC Ethics
250 Station Drive
Missoula, MT 59801

or e-mail with subject: FC Ethics to
bclub@boone-crockett.org

walk around the campsite and disturb the rams just enough to get them to move up the ridge. During the weeks before the season, the rams moved higher and higher on the mountain as the "scout" moved his backpack camp up the ridge, gently herding them toward the Oregon border.

Scouting is defined by Webster as investigation, reconnaissance, exploration, or survey. In hunting we define it a number of ways. Early on it was defined as "pre-season" exploring of an area by a hunter in search of game animals to hunt at some later date. Later, that definition was refined to include researching data normally tabulated on an annual basis by fish and game departments relative to the big game herds in a state or region. This data might include annual harvest data, post-season big game counts, male-female ratios, and age structure of a herd. As records-keeping programs became more universally accepted and hunters became interested in hunting for mature animals in areas that produced the largest specimens, record data was added to the research process. The availability of quality topographic maps also added to the sophistication that the individual hunter had for scouting in anticipation of a hunting trip.

As time has passed, more sophisticated and comprehensive "scouting" information has become available as our communications have become easier and interest in trophy animals has increased. Hunting reports that synthesize all kinds of data and analyze hunting opportunities for selected big game species in different states have been available for a fee for a number of years. The most significant recent change has been driven by the Internet with the ease by which hunters can investigate where their best chances are of harvesting a big mule deer, elk, whitetail, bighorn sheep, or whatever. All sorts of websites post photos of trophy animals, and chat rooms are buzzing with the latest "scoop" on where to go and what was tak-

All of the scouting practices illustrated in the introduction to this article technically are legal in the areas where the activity occurred, but in the eyes of many hunters some of these practices border on the unethical side of the ethics scale.

en there. State fish and wildlife departments have also significantly upgraded the information that is available to hunters for planning their hunts. The bottom line is "scouting" has taken on a very sophisticated mantle as technology and our changing society have had their influence.

Many of what we know as lawful hunting protocols have their origins in the fair chase doctrine promulgated by the Boone and Crockett Club a century ago and modified over time as new hunting tactics have emerged. For example, the Club's fair chase code was modified in 1963 to include "Spotting or herding Land game from the air, followed by landing in its vicinity for pursuit shall be deemed UNFAIR CHASE and unsportsmanlike" because of the availability of new technology and its use by hunters. Electronic communications were added in 1968. Laws such as the "same day flying and hunting" and restrictions on the use of radio telecommunication in the field have been derived from what we as hunters believe to be ethical. Typically these laws lag behind our self-imposed limitations, which are intended to insure the "fairness" of the chase.

The sharp increase in changes in technology and in our society during the past decade has significantly increased the gap between what we as sportsmen view as ethical and what the law reflects. As a result, we often find ourselves placing self-imposed limits upon ourselves based upon what we individually believe to be fair and unfair well within the boundaries set by law. On the other hand, many hunters choose to push the envelope in the other direction and accept what is lawful as the baseline.

This difference in individual perceptions of what is lawful and what is ethical when it comes to "scouting" creates a dilemma for guides, outfitters, and hunters, as well as governing agencies and others who have an interest in hunting practices. All of the scouting practices illustrated in the introduction to this article technically are legal in the areas where the activity occurred, but in the eyes of many hunters some of these practices border on the unethical side of the ethics scale. As the publicity around the aspect of the hunt related to "scouting" practices reaches new heights, the hunters who view these practices as being inappropriate are becoming more and more vocal.

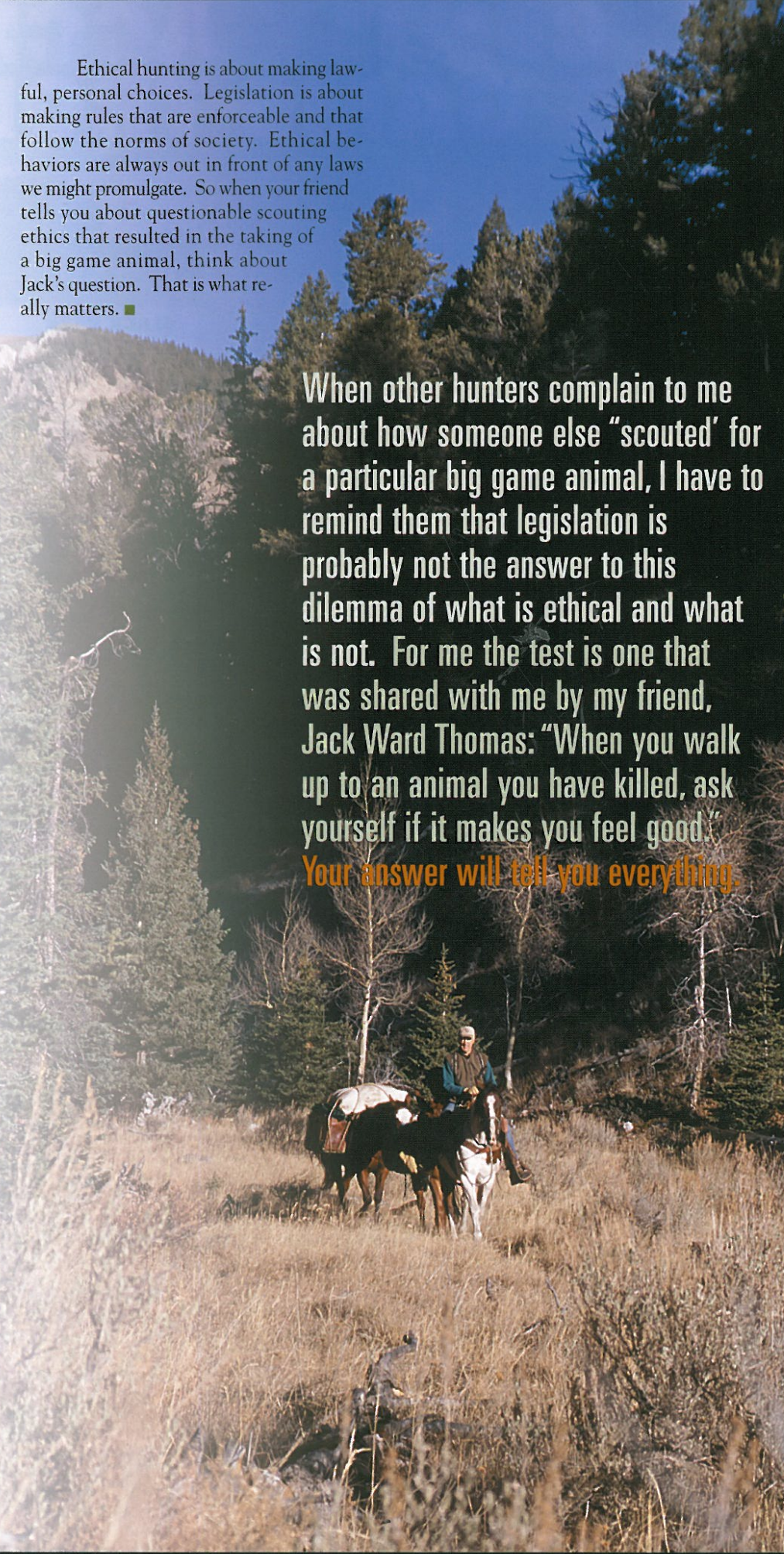
Airplane hunting is legal in Alaska, as long as one does not fly and shoot on the same day; however many hunters object to the practice of aerial scouting, landing, camping overnight, and shooting the fol-

lowing morning. The Club's Entry Affidavit, which must be signed by the hunter, clearly states that, "Spotting or herding game from the air, followed by landing in its vicinity for the purpose of pursuit and shooting" deems a trophy ineligible for entry. Hiring individuals to scout for trophy animals is legal in most hunting areas; however there are those hunters who view this practice as inappropriate, if not unethical. The use of ultralite aircraft to search for big game has recently been ruled unlawful in some states whereas it continues to be lawful in other areas. Many hunters view this practice as inappropriate and unethical.

Hunting is a very personal experience... and the practices involved in "scouting" today have ranged far from what many of us knew as young hunters. For me, the answer to this dilemma is very personal, as it is to most hunters. I hunt under a set of self-imposed ethics that are first of all well within the law, and second are acceptable to me. The "total quality" of the hunt is what makes hunting so special for me. I don't use guides or outfitters to find game for me, not because I have a bias against this practice, but because I take great personal pride in figuring it out for myself and doing it myself. Researching new areas, learning about the natural history of new species that I have never hunted, studying the technical reports of any number of fish and wildlife agencies, pouring over topographic maps in search of new ways to access remote areas, handling and packing my own pack stock, working out the logistics of hunts in far away or remote places all add up to what for me is a total quality hunting experience. That is WHY I hunt. If I could not do it myself I would probably take up some other activity. That is my choice because it makes sense to me. I also realize that I am very fortunate to live in a very special place and to have opportunities others do not have because of where they live. As hunters who love what we do and are dedicated to the future of our wildlife cultural heritage, it is incumbent upon us to do what is right for the land, the wildlife, and each of us personally.

When other hunters complain to me about how someone else "scouted" for a particular big game animal, I have to remind them that legislation is probably not the answer to this dilemma of what is ethical and what is not. For me the test is one that was shared with me by my friend, Jack Ward Thomas: "When you walk up to an animal you have killed, ask yourself if it makes you feel good." Your answer will tell you everything.

Ethical hunting is about making lawful, personal choices. Legislation is about making rules that are enforceable and that follow the norms of society. Ethical behaviors are always out in front of any laws we might promulgate. So when your friend tells you about questionable scouting ethics that resulted in the taking of a big game animal, think about Jack's question. That is what really matters. ■

A photograph of a person riding a horse through a field of tall, dry grass. The rider is wearing a hat and a vest. In the background, there is a dense forest of evergreen trees under a clear blue sky. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting a sunny day.

When other hunters complain to me about how someone else "scouted" for a particular big game animal, I have to remind them that legislation is probably not the answer to this dilemma of what is ethical and what is not. For me the test is one that was shared with me by my friend, Jack Ward Thomas: "When you walk up to an animal you have killed, ask yourself if it makes you feel good." Your answer will tell you everything.