

Desti



RANK	STATE/ PROVINCE	TOTAL ENTRIES
1	Colorado	47
1	Idaho	47
3	Montana	43
4	Alberta	34
4	British Columbia	34
6	Utah	29



matron:

Trophy Cougar

The Year-Long Chase —

As the first snows of winter settle across the West, and deer and elk seasons draw to a close, the season on mountain lions is just beginning.

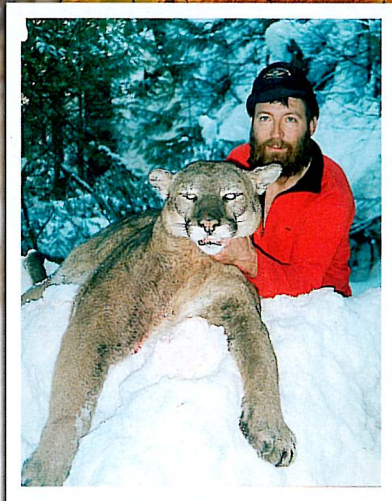
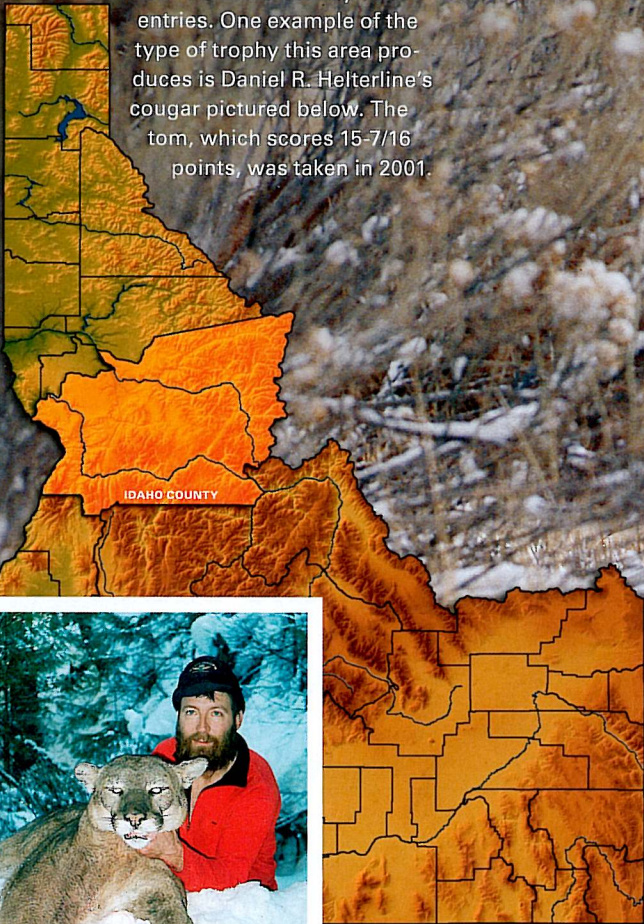
Once upon a time I was tough enough to hunt mountain lions. I could haul my girth up and down the rugged canyons of cougar country, following the pad impressions laid in snow of cat and his canine pursuers, their enthusiastic bellows echoing through the stillness of timbered draws. My legs and lungs burdened by mile upon mile of knee-deep snow and the dead-fall logs hidden therein, the impossibly thin air of 10,000 feet reducing my lungs to raisins.

By A.E. Walsh

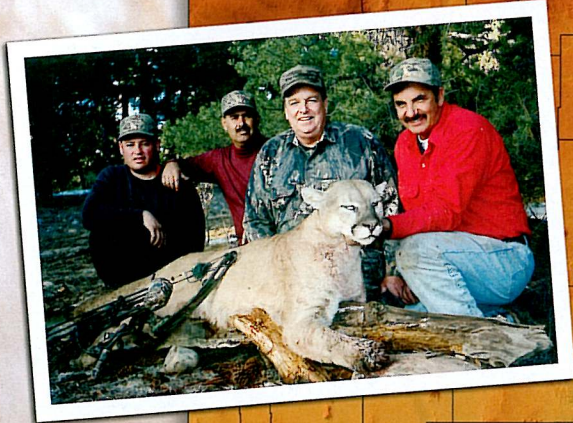
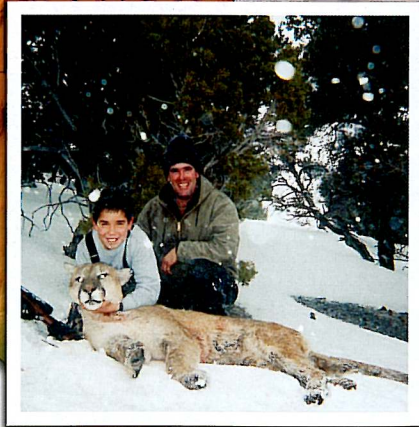
TABLE 2: TOP 6 COUGAR COUNTIES (1996-2006)

The county with the single highest contribution to the records books is

Idaho's Idaho County with 17 entries. One example of the type of trophy this area produces is Daniel R. Helterline's cougar pictured below. The tom, which scores 15-7/16 points, was taken in 2001.



RANK	STATE	COUNTY
1	ID	Idaho County
2	NM	Rio Arriba County
3	MT	Missoula County
4	CO	Rio Blanco County
5	CO	Archuleta County
6	NV	Elko County



Rio Arriba County, New Mexico is the second-ranking county for cougar entries with 10 since 1996. This tom, scoring 15-1/16 points, was taken by James E. Vance in 1999.

Michael A. Algerio took this cougar in Nevada's Elko County in 2002. The tom scores 15-2/16 points.

I've hunted these devil cats all across the western states. While the probability exists that you'll turn dogs out and tree a cat within a short stroll of the freshly cut track, chances are greater it will be the most difficult, physically demanding pursuit you'll ever have.

Mountain lions are not for the lucky, rather the prepared, trained, and dedicated. Few cats have been taken by the stand hunter, or because they find themselves in the wrong place at the wrong time. Lions don't often make those kinds of mistakes. For a reasonable chance of bringing a silver cat to bag, you need to be physically fit, mentally tough, and have at your disposal a collection of dogs that can track, tree, and hold at bay your quarry while you traverse this tortuous terrain, desperately trying to catch up before the cat decides to take his chances with his barking captors.

The cougar hunt, however, is not won or lost at the base of a tree. Although the season effectively stretches from the first snows of late November to the thaw of early spring, it's more accurate to consider it a year-round effort. The reliance on hounds—and the subsequent daily keep and training of these unheralded beasts—effectively eliminates the curious from the dedicated. And, while I'm as big a proponent of the do-it-yourself adventure as anyone you'll find, I've learned to respect my limitations. A real cat hunter has to be willing and able to dedicate a substantial portion of his life to the preparation of the hunt, his reward often nothing greater than the first dusting of snow on a long-since abandoned logging road. It's a special sort that can maintain that type of focus.

I met a cougarman in British Columbia once, so many years ago I can't remember, but his name, face, and passion I'll never forget. Dan Lazer was a rugged man, not nearly pretty enough for any Marlboro posters, but embodying the spirit with his fringed buckskin coat and wide-brimmed hat. He has dedicated a lifetime to developing his own breed of cat chaser, and, while the recipe is a closely guarded secret, the end result is apparent to even the most untrained observer: a wiry, finely tuned, out-of-the-box hunting machine that lives for the chase. The night I met him and his canine partners he was dragging two 150-pound schoolyard prowlers from the back of his rig; one the Mounties knew about and asked him to remove, the other a secret until his Lazer hounds caught a scent.

Another such personality cut of the mountain lion cloth is Joseph Petersen. He runs the big-game hunting operations

for the Flying B Ranch of Kamiah, Idaho, which means he plays the part of redheaded stepchild at this world renowned wingshooter's paradise. A sinewy man built for running the high country, Petersen guides his folks to some truly spectacular bull elk, whitetail, and mule deer from the public grounds they hunt, but his passion for catamount is paramount.

Kenneled alongside the fine-wine and aged-cheese pointers of this Orvis-endorsed operation, Petersen's lunch-bucket hounds are afforded all the amenities and equally appreciated for their efforts afield. Petersen loves his hounds like family, and in return

Destination: Trophy Cougar

gets a snowy season of high-adrenaline pursuit and amazing experiences for his clients. Not surprisingly, he has made his life in and around Idaho County, the single-largest producer of record-book qualifying cats over the last 10 years (17 entries, including Dave Hiatt's 15 9/16-inch cat, and Daniel Helterline's 15 7/16-incher).

The range of the mountain lion—or *Felis concolor*—once stretched from coast to coast and as far south as Chile in South



meopta[®]
A Better View of the World

High Performance European Sports Optics™

Unsurpassed Low Light Performance

Precision Adjustment

Limited Lifetime Warranty

Meopta U.S.A., Inc.
50 Davids Drive, Hauppauge, NY 11788

800.828.8928
www.meopta.com



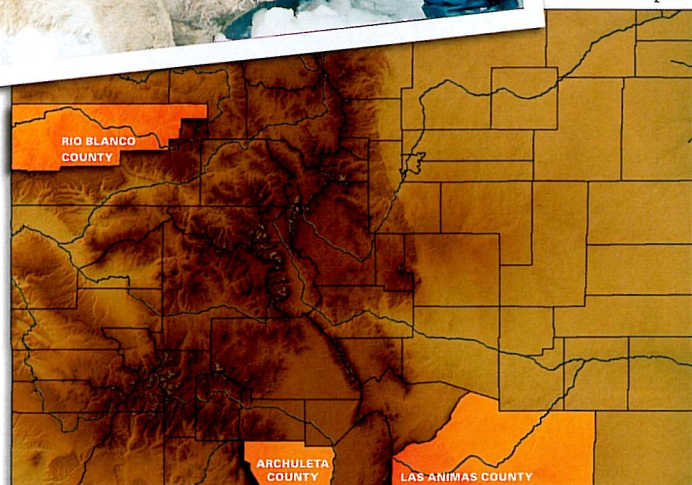
America. Despite the misinformation by anti-hunting groups, wildlife biologists generally believe the reduction in the great cat's home range is a result of urbanization, not eradication efforts. Although confirmed cougar sightings along the East Coast are increasing, the wildlife community suggests these are formerly captive cats that have found their freedom, and the wild population remains restricted to the western half of North America. The Boone and Crockett Club's Trophy Search on-line database reveals that the top five producers of record-book cats over the past 10 years are Colorado (47 entries), Idaho (47), Montana (43), Alberta (34), and British Columbia (34).

Looking at the top scoring mountain lions taken since 1996, an attention-grabbing pattern emerges: Not only are Alberta hunters killing a large number of trophy cats, they are shooting some outstanding trophies. Almost 30 percent of the Top 25 over this span has come out of Alberta, including three in the all-time top 10. Alberta should be considered the premier big-cat destination.

The Trophy Search database revealed another statistic that I would have otherwise completely missed. If you've been with the Boone and Crockett Club for any length of time, you'd know that this article is one in a series of species-specific destination pieces, relying heavily on the information available to all subscribers of the database. I typically employ a 10-season window of analysis to capture current trends and try to highlight some hot spots. One name that keeps popping up is Rio Arriba County, New Mexico. Making the short list for mule deer, pronghorn, and now cougar, Rio Arriba County ranks second by contributing 10 book-qualifying entries. I'm sure the native Rio Arribians are gnashing their teeth in my direction right now, but could there be a more consistent producer of trophy-quality game than this?

I'll leave you with a few words of cougar hunting advice, undoubtedly

Colorado has three counties in the top 10 for trophy entries. This cougar was taken in Archuleta County, Colorado by Kenneth D. Smith in 2002.



learned the hard way on a steep snow-covered canyon wall. First, appreciate the hard work and determination of the dogs leading the way. Without them you are embarking on nothing more than a miserable trek through inhospitable country.

Second, appreciate the hard work and dedication of the dog handler. At face value most hunting hounds are a rotten smelling lot and ill mannered at best. But under the guidance of their boss, they are a picture of efficient beauty and controlled exuberance. That doesn't happen by accident.

Always ask permission before you stick your hand out to pet one of these high-strung hounds, especially if they are all worked up after a successful chase. Some of them have a hard time winding down, and an equally hard time differentiating your hand from a hunk of kibble.

Pack light. You'll be on your feet most of the day (yes, even on those fancy hunts that offer snowmobiles) and most likely you'll be chasing uphill...both ways...in a driving headwind. You'll have a much better appreciation for that Thermos full of hot coffee when you get back to the rig and realize you didn't have to pack it all over Hell and back.

And prepare. Get yourself in the best physical shape of your life and recognize your limitations. Be honest with your guide at the time of booking so he can offer a realistic assessment and game plan accordingly. If you can't push yourself without fear of a medical breakdown, hunting cougars may not be for you.

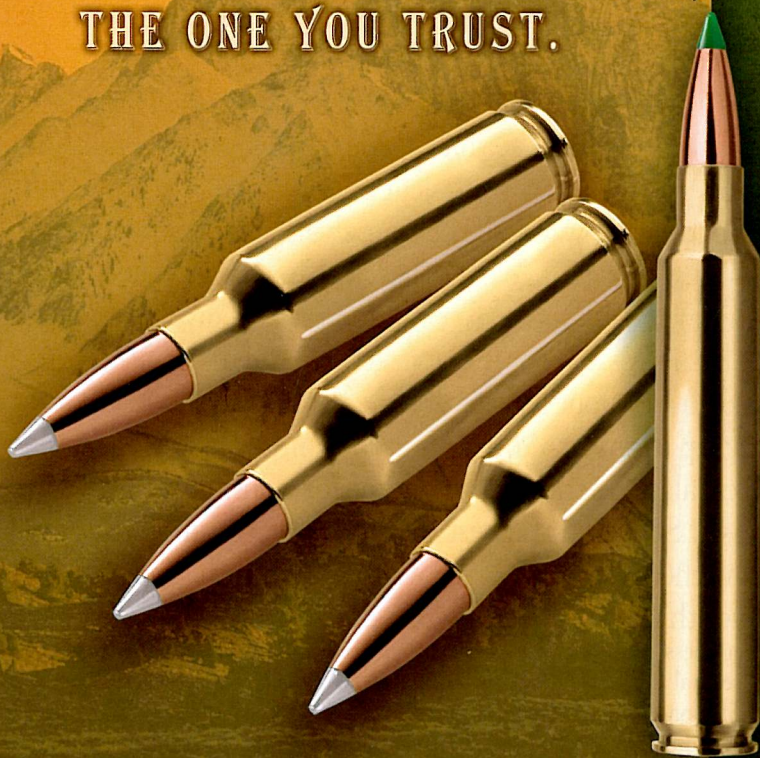
Without question, hunting cougars is one of the most demanding and rewarding hunting experiences I've had the privilege of undertaking. They are intelligent and stealthy without equal, and frankly no man on this planet is a match for their skill. If however, the weather cooperates and you can rely on the assets of a good team—both man and beast—you may find yourself staring up the tree at one of the greatest challenges you'll ever pursue. ■

Destination: Trophy Cougar



Alberta hunters have been harvesting a large number of trophy cougars. This tom, scoring 15-7/16, was taken by Roger G. Nitzsche near Bryant Creek in 1999.

HUNT WITH THE ONE YOU TRUST.



We've been custom loading ammunition for nearly 60 years. Not for sale, but for the day-to-day accuracy and ballistics testing process vital to the manufacturing and quality control of our premium Nosler bullets. Now, we're offering this same ammunition to you in NoslerCustom. Using load data developed in our Ballistics Lab specifically for Nosler bullets, we load each round of NoslerCustom Ammunition by hand. We check case lengths; size, chamfer and true case necks; check flash holes for proper alignment; meticulously weigh powder charges; and hand-inspect and polish the finished round. All to give you the ultimate in ammunition performance—shot after shot, season after season.

NoslerCustom Ammunition truly can bring your shooting to a new level of consistency—and can add a new level of confidence to your hunting.



NoslerCustom