

PLAY HOOKY RAM

PART TWO

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Photos by Author



the Adventure Continues...



OUR PACK OUTFIT FINALLY LEFT THE HORSE CAMP, WITH ROSS LEADING THE GREEN COLT AND ME LEADING THE TWO EXPERIENCED PACK HORSES. ONE OF THE HORSES WAS TIED TO THE TAIL OF THE OTHER. SUCH AN ARRANGEMENT IS OCCASIONALLY A BIT TOUGH ON HORSE TAILS, BUT THE SYSTEM WORKS BECAUSE IF A SERIOUS ACCIDENT OCCURS, SUCH AS WHEN THE TRAILING HORSE FALLS OFF A CLIFF, THE LEADING HORSE STILL HAS A CHANCE OF JUST LOSING SOME OF THE HAIR ON ITS TAIL RATHER THAN GOING ON THE SAME JOURNEY. NEVER TIE A PACK STRING TOGETHER WITH ROPE OR TAILS THAT WON'T RELEASE IN A PINCH IN TOUGH COUNTRY.

We rode past a bunch of Ross' stock, including a big black Percheron stud with a magnificent heavy black mane and forelock from under which it peered at us, past a couple of cow elk, and up an increasingly steep slope. We had to lead our saddle horses up the steepest parts, until the ridge leveled off enough to ride again. The pack stock was laboring up the steep slope and we stopped to rest them, and ourselves, every few meters. The first Stone's sheep ewe we saw was less than an hour from the horse camp, bedded on a ridge near a small band of cliffs, the site I once saw sheep before.

Stone's sheep are striking in appearance because the white rump and inner sides of the hind legs are sharply contrasted with the dark, near black color of the body and outer leg. There is substantial variation in coloration of this so-called "thin-horn" sheep, a subspecies of *Ovis dalli*. Their cousins are the pure white sheep of Alaska, commonly seen in Denali National Park and Preserve or along the highway out of Anchorage towards the Turnagain Arm. Why are the Stone's black?

The reasons postulated for melanism such as protection against the ultraviolet radiation in sunlight, and greater heat absorption, probably do not apply. My thought is that the habitat has much to do with it, reflecting my long-standing convictions that we have to place everything in the context of its habitat to understand it. Stone's sheep country substrates are dark, and the dark coloration serves as cryptic protection blending with the dark background. Yes, I know that six months or more of the year in Stone's sheep country, the habitat is white. Yes, I know that six months of the year Dall's sheep habitat is green

or brown. But when are the sheep most vulnerable to predation, what kind of predation is involved, and are Stone's and Dall's similar in this respect? Of course, this assumes that the coat color is an adaptation to predation pressure which ultimately is mediated by habitat conditions. The snow sheep *Ovis nivicola* of Chukotka and Kamchatka across the Bering Strait resembles a Stone's sheep in coloration and those rocky substrates are dark. Chromosome counts reveal that the two species are quite distantly related. Yet Dall's sheep *Ovis dalli kenaiensis* on the Kenai Peninsula are white at a latitude equivalent to that for Stone's sheep range. Well, ask the next biologist for an opinion and draw your own conclusions.

There is an intergrade between Stone's and Dall's where the two sub-

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species meet along the Yukon River, and the rather arbitrary distinction is that the beast is a Dall's if only its tail is black. The 1922 National Geographic listed a Fannin sheep which is now considered a light colored Stone's.

The trail went through a brush patch on the ridge below the ewe, into a spruce stand on a north-facing slope. My saddle horse was predisposed to not walking on the black dirt which so often turns into a viscous substance in which one sinks two feet or so, preferring to stride where no horse strode before. Small spruce trees or shrubs were simply walked over, and I decided the animal knew what it was doing and quit urging it onto the trail. The only problem was the leather scabbard which held my rifle was pointed ahead and down. If a substantial sapling came between it and the horse, my rifle was quite likely to take a

licking. But then if a substantial sapling came between my leg and the horse, I might get to ride out belly down across the saddle on the way out. I figured this situation was worth keeping an eye on, and the horse went forth.

We saw a nice bull elk, then another bigger bull, and a cow and calf on the way. One creek crossing required some trail maintenance, which Ross dispatched quickly with his ever-present ax. You can't operate in this country without an ax. We finally pulled out onto a series of "parks," or grassy meadows that paralleled the high ridge we were to hunt. Ross stopped at the furthest meadow and selected a campsite. All this time there was no evidence of any human activity after we left the horse camp except for two small blazes on trees and three axed stumps, all old. We camped where there was no sign of a previous camp.

Horses always come first, and we unpacked them, hobbled some and tethered two on long ropes. They immediately went to grazing with hobbles clinking and bells jingling. Horse bells become the focus at night. You sleep when they are dinging, and when they are silent you wake up. If the bell horses are just lazing, a soft ding will occasionally be heard, but if there is no sound for a long time, then it is time to check. The human being is a creature of conditioning, either to sound or to its absence, and that conditioning can be reversed rather quickly as necessary.

Our shelter was a long piece of canvas with two sides and a low side wall at the end called a 'cowboy tent'. It was held up between two trees by rope while the sides were held down with stakes cut at the site for that purpose. A spruce sapling with a limber top was placed in the middle of the ridge of the fly with its top bent over to keep the middle of the tent up. Then the flap extending from the ridge was further extended with ropes tied to trees 20 feet or so away. A campfire set between two chunks of wood was established just beyond the fly, reflecting heat into it. A comfortable camp.

My sleeping bag was nested along side a big root from one of the spruce trees that held up the tent. Snuggling up to a root may not have all the attributes of snuggling up to my long-suffering and patient wife, but it was going to do for the next few nights.

I was measuring the distance up

TOP: PERCHERON STOCK AT TUCHODI.

BOTTOM: THE HORSES GRAZE ON A RIDGE OVER LOOKING THE TUCHODI RIVER.



the hill to the ridge we would hunt in terms of the hill I climbed frequently last winter. There was a small group of ewes on one side that kept popping over now and then, so it was a cinch we'd see sheep tomorrow. But whether there would be rams in ewe habitat or not this time of year seemed risky to assume. Rams usually don't mix with ewes except during the rut. But Ross had seen rams on the hill two weeks before, and at any rate, we were going up. I threw the rain gear in my light pack and thought that we were finally going to be in sheep country tomorrow.

The evening dinner was left-over moose and elk, slices from a fresh loaf of homemade bread, boiled spuds and carrots, and too much hot tea for this old boy to last out the night in the sack without getting up at least once. But another rendition from the woodwind band got me up anyway. It's tough out here in the woods, with all those critters keeping you awake.

We had ourselves and the horses fed and tied, with two saddled and ready to take us up the hill an hour after daylight. The two saddle horses carried us through wet brush and deep sphagnum partly up the forested section of the slope

until it became too steep. "Let's tie up here," Ross said, "these trees will break the wind for the stock a little bit." I took off my rain gear, got the bridle off the horse, checked the saddle, and up we went, Ross in the lead.

I couldn't breath deeply enough, and thought, well you idiot, that's your penance for being too heavy. The first pitch was exceptionally steep and I had to work hard and stop often. Still, I got my legs under me little by little, and as we broke out into the alpine tundra which is the beginning of sheep country as I envision it, I began to get my breath.

However, we realized that the light patter of rain was becoming heavier, and we could see a series of snow squalls coming our way from the northwest. We walked on up the hill through the squalls for a while until Ross suggested we wait it out next to a "smudge" on the lee side of the ridge. I was beginning to get a bit damp and thought that a good idea.

Waiting out a wet, windy snow storm behind a couple of skimpy spruce trees next to a smudge on a mountain requires conversation, and Ross became voluble. Way below, a neighboring outfitter's territory was pointed to, and I inquired about how boundaries are ar-

rived at. It isn't so much a problem between the guide-outfitters, who are organized and communicate among themselves about such matters. But there are now "packers" who encroach into the guiding territories that cause serious problems. The "packers" come in with resident clients who pay them only for the services of transport, which are claimed to be different than guiding. If the clients are accompanied during the hunt, then the "packer" is acting as an illegal guide, under the rather arbitrary rules set up to regulate the guide-outfitting business. Many of these "packers" are former employees of the legitimate guide-outfitters, serving as guides themselves and thereby learning the area and how to hunt it. There is no regulation of "packers", and a client is not likely to tell the authorities that one of these renegades was acting as a guide, under the established definition of a guide, for obvious reasons. "Packers" don't charge as much for their services, can set up a camp anywhere, have no quotas superimposed upon them which regulate the numbers of sheep they may take, and can "cream" an area of the readily-taken animals and then move to another area. In my case, Ross could pack me in, tell me to walk

up the ridge myself while he waits in camp or goes back down the mountain, and he would not be guiding, he would be acting as a "packer." Or he could walk up the mountain with me with the agreement that I would not tell anyone that he did, and the chances of him being charged with illegal guiding would be infinitesimal. And then he wouldn't be subject to all the regulation, reporting, permitting, and dealings that are required of the guide-outfitter.

There is enough demand for hunts in this region for British Columbia residents, and a few nonresident Canadians, alike to be willing to risk paying a "packer" for a hunt and then keeping the transaction quiet. The guide-outfitting business has traditionally catered to the nonresident hunter, who is required to hire a guide and can afford to pay, while many residents have not had access to these mountains. This inequity was brought to a boiling point, and the guide-outfitting organizations agreed to provide services for a designated number of residents at reduced prices in order to accommodate this demand. But the renegade "packer" has taken root, tacit acknowledgment that demand for this type of hunting is virtually insatiable.

However, the resources they exploit are finite. Not only do these renegades interfere with the guiding territories, but they contribute an unknown amount to the game harvest. Mountain sheep management is based on quotas across the range of the several species, and British Columbia has developed an intricate system in the effort to ensure the continuing presence of old rams in populations. Each guide-outfitter territory has a certain number of rams that may be taken each year. Only full-curl rams are legal, which means that a ram will have to be at the very minimum, six years old, and most likely older before it becomes legal. But in order to ensure the supply, the quotas are also based on the proportion of rams over 8 years-old that are taken. If, over a three-year period, a territory takes less than 55% rams over 8, a reduction of 10% in the allotted number is imposed. If less than 50% of the rams taken are over 8, a 20% decrease in allowable harvest is imposed. Conversely, if over 60% of the rams are over 8, a 10% increase in allowable harvest is allocated, and if over 65%, a 20% increase is allowed, assuming that over

80% of the quota has been harvested over the prior three year period. In 1992, in response to increasing proportion of younger rams in the harvest, guide-outfitters agreed to a reduction of the nonresident quota by 17% along with a one ram every three years per hunter

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limit. For a guide-outfitter running hunts for Stone's sheep that costs several thousand dollars, a change in the quota means significant change in income. When a portion of the take is not identified, and the average of rams goes down as a result, the quota for that area may be reduced and the outfitter will not have had anything to do with the reason. Resident hunters are of course allowed to hunt and the quota includes their harvest. But there are only going to be so many legal rams, and as the demand for them increases, many hunters will hire renegade packers at reduced prices, and the sheep harvest intensifies.

Outfitters argue that "packers" are guiding hunters to camps where hunters otherwise would not go, or even know about except vaguely. Additionally, the packers create grazing problems with their pack stock which are poorly regulated, while the guide-outfitter is licensed and grazing by their pack and saddle stock is monitored. Essentially the "packer" is intruding into legally defined, highly regulated, and well established guide-outfitter territories, and is contributing to the harvest of sheep and other species without quota restrictions.

Areas where guide-outfitters used to observe good populations of legal rams have been "creamed" to where a legal ram has a high probability of being harvested the year it becomes legal. The dilemma for the legitimate outfitter is that they would like to keep the harvest of rams at 8 or higher, but then the poorly regulated hunting by "packers" and residents which places no premium on taking older rams undercuts the intent of the management program. Recently, a packer south of Ross' guiding territory had clients who took ten rams out of one small area, seven of which were under 8 years old. That particular population probably now has no rams over 5 or 6 years of age. The consequences of this are hard to define even with lengthy investigation, but old rams which carry traditions such as where the best range is during a severe winter, may not pass those traditions on when a long series of mild winters prevails. Then when these older rams are gone, and the tough winter comes, survival may be affected. Now I realize I may be getting a bit long in the tooth and therefore may feel more inclined to favor survival of the old ram a bit more than I once did. But we are learning from hard experience with many species that there are often unintended and unanticipated consequences of heavy harvests which cause managers to become increasingly more conservative about harvest recommendations, especially as the pressures for more hunting increases.

The British Columbia hunting community is becoming more aware of the problems that unregulated "packers" cause, which ultimately results in lower quality hunts for legitimate residents as well as for the clients of the guide-outfitters. As it stands, many guide-outfitters are unlikely to take the entire allocated quota they are given, and are able to move to areas either lightly hunted or unhunted by others so the quality of the hunting experience is not impaired. As is the case with trees, grass, and water in Idaho, the demand for bighorn sheep far exceeds the supply, and regulation of the take is complex. The "packer problem" is added to ever-increasing access and demand for sheep hunting among British Columbia residents. Given the poor access to the game fields of the region, there are only a few places that residents may hunt without the aid of the guide-out

THREE STONE'S SHEEP IN THE TUCHODI COUNTRY.

fitters. Rivers that can be negotiated with jet boats and lakes large enough to land float planes on provide the major access for residents, although a few hardy souls are willing to travel with pack and saddle stock across the muskeg between the Alaska highway and the mountains. The commonly used access points receive heavy hunting pressure when compared to other areas less accessible. The resident ram harvest is not on a quota basis, and is regulated primarily by the full curl restriction and with tacit acknowledgment by the authorities that access is also going to restrict the harvest. Eventually, the take of legal rams will have to be more closely regulated for residents, Canadian nonresidents, and nonresident aliens, which means that limited entry hunting with a drawing for permits, as is typical for bighorn sheep hunts in the 'lower 48' states and Mexico, may be necessary.

Hunting in the United States is not a growth sport. As more and more of us become urbanized and suburbanized, too busy, and opportunities for hunting are diminished, available hunting areas are overrun by hunters, which further contributes to the decline of participation in the sport. Since much of wildlife management in the U.S. is paid for by hunters, the national declines are reflected in fewer dollars from the excise taxes on firearms and ammunition, and hunting licenses. In contrast to this national trend, demand for big game hunting, especially for the larger species like elk and the less common species like mountain sheep, is higher than ever. And there is more need than ever to intensively monitor the hunt and the harvest, as the dollars become more scarce.

In Canada, wildlife management funds come from general tax revenues and must compete with other demands for public dollars. In an area so vast and remote as the northern portions of British Columbia, monitoring of the take and its effects on the resource requires the cooperation of the hunter in presenting game for examination of sex and age, and in being willing to cooperate on programs that manage access or that restrict the harvest when necessary. There is a legal requirement for hunters to submit animals for inspection, but ultimately the system runs on cooperation and trust. Enforcement of the rules of wildlife man-

agement remains largely a matter of encouraging the public to participate for the largely altruistic purpose of conserving the resource. If you want to go out and shoot a half dozen ewes and lambs in August in this country, it is unlikely that anyone would find out unless you tell. It is ironic that violators do need to brag to someone so that often the word gets out, finally to the enforcement people often enough to make folks wonder how much of this sort of thing goes on.

A guide-outfitter may not necessarily want to take the full quota of rams assigned for a number of reasons. First, if the guides are observant, which they cer-

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tainly tend to be, they will develop a feeling for how their sheep are doing and may detect trends before the official inventories reveal them. A local population inhabiting one drainage may have been hunted enough for the outfitter to want to ignore them for a few years. A severe winter may have brought a ram or two down, and the outfitter may wish to reduce the take to compensate. The clients for one year may simply not be good enough shots to take the quota even if planned. Adverse weather can affect hunting conditions and an early snowstorm may force the outfitter to abandon good hunting areas. Outfitters do not like to hunt the same drainages with hunters coming in on the following hunt, and if possible not even the same drainage more than once a year. It is probably critical for the outsider to know that a guide-outfitter has a vested interest in maintaining the quality of the hunt in his territory, since it is the only place he hunts. This may be contrasted with the resident hunter who can hunt

in many places. And the "packers", whose areas are not defined and are not regulated, are also able to shift hunting areas as conditions dictate. So the honest guide-outfitter finds himself at the mercy of the quota, a restricted amount of land in which he can hunt, and numerous regulations that don't apply to other hunters. And all of this is taking place as access to the game is constantly improving and the demand for it is never-ending.

I was glad for my rain pants and coat, which broke the wind and kept some of the warmth acquired from the climb in even as my inside clothes were a bit damp. Ross' smudge was crackling hot, and as the snow was beginning to stick, I was comfortable for the time being. My good heavy leather boots were holding out the moisture well enough, and my pack and rifle were tucked up under a little spruce tree where all was reasonably dry. One could see waves of snow flurries coming down the bare ridges, but it was getting lighter. The fire was beginning to slide downhill and we kicked the coals back up.

Finally, Ross got restless, "Well, let's see what the ridge top looks like. This light snow won't hurt us." I shouldered my pack and rifle and we trudged out of the scrubby spruce onto the ridge in 10 centimeters of new snow, to look around for sheep. As one might expect, no self-respecting sheep was loitering around on the windy side of the mountain, only us dumb hunters.

As we broke out onto the alpine tundra, I realized I was going to have to be careful about not being blown around and knocked off balance by the brisk wind. But the wind was blowing towards us, which meant that anything ahead wouldn't get a whiff.

Alpine tundra has a beauty all its own. The plant community we were climbing on was dominated by dryas, indicating its xeric status. Interspersed among the dryas were dwarfed varieties of plants whose cousins were found lower in bigger sizes and shapes, including the multitude of sedges and grasses that fed the sheep. We slowly reached the crest of the ridge, Ross being patient enough to let me rest as needed.

"Now keep your head down or the sheep will see you!" Ross spoke softly but sharply to me as he took off his hat and crouched down as he neared the crest.

WE MADE OUR WAY WITH HORSES THROUGH THE "BUSH" AT TUCHODI.

We studied what we could see for a moment, and then walked over the crest to a side draw and lateralled across the black shale to a ledge where we could hide and use our spotting scopes. My light 20 power scope is great to carry, but I found myself wishing for more power on more than one occasion. Ross had a variable 15-45 power scope which might not have been of the same optical quality as mine, but was more utilitarian because you could focus in on an object and then increase the magnification. There was plenty of moisture in the crisp air, creating some image distortion as the heat waves wafted from the melting snow on the black rock as the sun came out.

Then there were ewes and lambs below us, as well as the ewes and lambs we had seen from below to the west. I wasn't happy, because ewes and big rams usually don't mix this time of year. I said so, but Ross held his counsel. He had mentioned earlier that they were beginning to see rams in different places than usual, perhaps because the additional hunting pressure from the "packers" drove them off of the more open terrain. "Don't forget to watch the brush below us on that slope," he said, "they're apt to be down in the brush on a day like

this." The sun came out.

The horse camp is at 850 meters elevation, and we were above 2200 meters. We had climbed about 500 meters in elevation from the spike camp. The panorama of river bottom, spruce forest, aspen-poplar forest, with the variable ages created by fire, open southerly-exposed slopes, lichen-covered secondary ridges and alpine tundra spread out before us. The diversity of vegetation in this country, coupled with its vast size and the chinook winds of winter, are what make it such fine game country. It isn't well understood for its unique attributes, and I just considered myself fortunate to be experiencing it.

Ross possesses the eyes of a real hunter with long experience, and as we examined the country, he pointed out another group of ewes and lambs, then another, still yet a fourth group. There were elk below us in the spruce, that I had to concentrate on to see with the binoculars, as he pointed them out with his eyes. But I actually saw the first ram, and almost felt apologetic about having to point it out to him. It was bedded in a little shaded shelf below a ridge line, and I happened to direct the scope randomly to that spot and recognized the unmis-

takable outline of its head and horns. Ross saw it immediately after I described it to him, and we began to study its horns. A legal full-curl ram will have its horns rise above the bridge of its nose when seen from side view. This one's horns ended below its nose.

So were there more rams? As the shadows play across the ridges, different images are created. And a bedded ram may suddenly stand to feed for a moment, appearing like magic. The bull elk below us bugled. "We haven't seen the whole side drainage, and they could be anywhere." Two golden eagles soared around a square rock that topped the ridge a ways away where we had seen ewes and lambs. We descended to the horses in the fading light, on the carpet of soft snow that had fallen during the day.

"Well, I see the old bull didn't take on your stock" I said, referring to a moose that we had passed on the way up that morning. It was the height of the rut for this species, and a big white-antlered bull was with a cow, while two smaller bulls slunk around the periphery. We could hear them for some time, the plaintive "mawww" of the bull moose contrasting with the repertoire of the bull elk. "I





AN AERIAL VIEW OF TUCHODI COUNTRY.

think that one bull might be pretty good eating, maybe we can find one like him closer to camp," Ross knew I had a moose tag and would be interested in bringing home some meat. "Naw, he's way too big," I said, referring to a bull with the skimpy antlers of a 2-year old. I would only be tempted by a yearling with small paddles, spikes or forks, and only if it were easy to get him to camp.

At the spike camp, horses were belled and hobbled to feed for an hour or two. We had a fire going in short order and I was presently warming my damp pants and shirt next to the fire, and my insides with scalding hot tea. My knees had withstood the first day without any problem, and I wasn't as stiff as I thought I might be. Ross cut some pieces from a moose back strap he had packed, boiled some spuds and carrots, and we ate heartily. We watered the horses and gave each some grain, and crawled into our sleeping bags. The stars were out, there was no wind, and it wasn't that cold. I slept heavily next to that spruce root until I heard Ross stirring in the early morning darkness.

Bacon and eggs, boiled coffee, toast and marmalade for breakfast. Horses on tether and hobble to graze for a while. We saddled two different ones and packed the lunches. I walked over towards the trail, and there was the younger bull moose, just standing there watching me. He then slowly detoured around the horses and our camp, grunting with each step he took, his two-foot

long bell or dewlap dangling across the willows as he went. As we rode through the shrubs to the ridge, I realized we had seen nine different moose in the vicinity of our spike camp.

This time we found a game trail that sidled up the ridge and were able to get the horses above where we tied them yesterday. The sky was clear and we walked to the ridge without any delays other than my frequent rests. Again we examined the other side of the ridge with just our heads showing and then we went to the same ledge we had been at before when we saw all the sheep. Ross motioned me to stay down while he slowly looked over the ridge. Almost immediately he ducked back down, and whispered, "Rams!"

Carefully, we raised up again and he motioned to the ridge where seven adult Stone's sheep rams were, some bedded, some feeding. We set up our scopes and began to examine their horns. They were about 1000 meters away, but eventually it became apparent that all were less than full-curl. A ewe group had to be kept track of so we didn't scare them. We continued to examine the drainage.

As the shadows changed, the mountain revealed more sheep, some rams, some ewes. None of the rams were full-curl, the magic size, but one still finds satisfaction in being up in the mountains with them.

On an earlier trip, Ross had taken us into caribou and sheep habitat. This was in May, and I was fortunate enough to photograph a Stone's ram. Now you can photograph Stone's sheep along the Alaska highway about any time at Muncho Lake, where they come down to a lick, but there aren't many other Stone's that get photographed in May. So I enjoy the photo for a purpose even if it isn't the best photographic effort.

We started to whisper about what to do next, realizing we hadn't seen all of the drainage from this vantage. We had moved about a bit and I was getting a little bolder about appearing above the ridge line. Then Ross pointed to the birch below, and there were four rams moving away from us. They were moving slowly, and I couldn't be sure we had disturbed them, even as I couldn't see how we hadn't. As Ross studied them, I tried to get my scope set up. "Two are pretty good size. Let's let them go over the ridge and we'll try to get closer for a better look."

"They're headed right for that ewe

group," I responded, "Don't you think they know we're up here?"

"They don't look like they are spooked to me."

We spent over an hour walking across the cliffy, rocky side of the ridge, the other side being easy going on tundra, but within view of every sheep in the drainage. Every now and then we'd walk up to see over, and then drop back down. We had to keep from disturbing any of the sheep in the drainage, knowing their sharp eyes were pointed in all directions. Sheep bed down on vantage points where they can see their surroundings, and when there are seven sets of sheep eyes or so on a ridge, you can bet that anything that moves will be noticed. Whether the movement will disturb the sheep or not is another matter, but once you're located, they may stare at you for a long time.

Finally, we got to the notch on the ridge we had headed for, and peeked over the ridge. Ewes and lambs were below, feeding and bedded, but no evidence of the rams. We continued to scour the face with our glasses and scopes, finding more ewes. The rams on the other side of the drainage were still there.

A rough mountain ridge has a million places for a sheep to bed, so we had to methodically examine every bit of the broken terrain. No rams. We moved further down the ridge and they still weren't to be found. We did this until late in the afternoon, to no avail, and I was beginning to wonder if in fact they had hightailed it out on us just as soon as they had walked out of sight on the ridge that morning. Finally, we decided to move back up towards where we had last seen them.

We slowly inched to the ridge line, and I knew this would be our last place to try to locate the rams today. Perhaps they had walked out of site, then taken off across the other side and left the country. Perhaps they had known we were there after all, and didn't want to run until they left our vision. Then Ross doffed his hat, looked over the ridge and ducked back down and I knew he had seen them. He put his fingers to his lips in the shush signal, and we slowly looked over the ridge. Below in a muddy bank lay a Stone's ram. The angle was steep and we couldn't determine whether he was full curl or not, but he was at least close. Where were the others?

to be continued...

WATCH FOR THE CONCLUSION OF DR. PEEK'S QUEST FOR A STONE'S SHEEP IN THE NEXT ISSUE OF FAIR CHASE.