

RAMS ON ICE

By GARY GODFREY

AFTER FOUR HOURS OF WADING THE THIGH DEEP GLACIAL STREAM, STOPPING TO THAW NUMB, TENNIS SHOE CLAD FEET, AND FIGHTING THROUGH ALDER THICKETS, WE MADE IT TO OUR BIGGEST OBSTACLE YET. THE CANYON NARROWED WITH CLIFFS ON EITHER SIDE. THE STREAM CHOKED THROUGH A NARROW SLOT AND PLUNGED FIFTEEN FEET TO A POOL BELOW.

Mark Yohman, my long-time hunting partner looked to me as if to say, "Well partner, here we go on another one of our big adventures!" We tend to use the philosophy that if you work harder than the average guy, results should follow. Of course we've owned up to the fact that our budgets call for more inexpensive type sheep hunting. This year is no exception, we parked the pick-up and started walking.

Presently, we made the decision to climb up and around the right side of the falls donning our fifty-pound plus packs with ten days supply of food. After a few more hours of good honest sweat we made it around, then up the drainage to camp one, a grueling ten hour day. So far we hadn't seen any sheep although five goats were visible from camp. A less strenuous day tomorrow should put us where we want to be for the main camp.

With a lot less brush busting and creek wading we made it to the main camp by late afternoon. This put us in good sheep country the day before the season started. We glassed all evening above camp and finally spotted a 7/8 curl ram, and a few more goats. Opening day we decided to grade into a major saddle between two drainages and glass as much country as possible. This we did and though it was an overcast day and we were glassing in a light drizzle, we managed to spot two full-curl rams, both alone and quite far away. Neither

ram looked as big as we were hoping for but we kept them in mind and headed back to camp.

The next day we awoke before daylight, grabbed our already loaded packs, and headed toward a saddle farther above a glacier about three miles away. Two thirds of the way there we decided to stop, have a little cold cereal for breakfast, sit in the first rays of the morning sun and do some glassing. Looking to the far side of the drainage I picked up some white spots on a rock face and a white spot on the next ridge over. Looks like "spotting scope time!" It was still too far away except to confirm that they are all definitely rams. We decided to change our plans and drop down to the creek and get up the other side into some rocks for a closer look. After two and a half hours, we reached the rocks but the weather had deteriorated and low clouds were now obscuring our view of the sheep. A drizzle began so we had lunch and waited in our rain gear for some better visibility. Later in the afternoon we finally got a good enough look at the three rams to determine they weren't quite what we wanted. The lone ram

had moved some distance up the ridge into some rocks above a glacial chute. With the overcast sky and light rain we couldn't get a good look at the big ram. I studied and squinted and looked and finally by late afternoon decided I could see fairly thick horn going past his eye and into the bases. "Mark," I said, "He must be over a full-curl."

From our position the curl looked to be fairly tight so I decided to go for him. With any luck, I thought he would start moving down out of the rocks while we made our way up the back side of the ridge to intercept him. It took us well over an hour to get to the ridge top that we would peek over. It dropped off steeper on the other side than it looked. I stayed on the back side and worked my way up the ridge peeking over occasionally with hopes of spotting the ram. The drizzle persisted and a gusty glacier wind blew on the ridge top. The further up the ridge I went the steeper it got.

By now, time was becoming a factor. In my mind, I knew it was too late to give up the stalk. I was committed and focused on seeing it through. I gained another 500 feet elevation and reached a point on the ridge I had picked earlier to be above the ram if he hadn't left his bed. I let my breathing stabilize then peeked over the ridge. Below me about 200 yards I could see a white patch in the rocks. I looked through my binoculars and it was the ram looking right at me! I couldn't believe it. With a 25 to 40 mph gusty wind, plus the fact that it was raining, I was sure he couldn't have heard or winded me. He must have caught movement on the skyline. I took the scope cover off my 7mm Remington Mag and lay down where I took a rest over a rock. The sideways rain

GARY L. GODFREY WITH HIS DALL'S SHEEP TAKEN NEAR WASILLA, ALASKA. THE RAM SCORES 163-4/8.



blew drops in my scope and made it hard to see the ram. I could see enough to know this ram was big enough for me. I took my handkerchief out, wiped off the scope and looked again. Still blurry and smeared. Just then the ram stood up. I more frantically wiped the scope off again and took a sight on the ram. The scope was still somewhat smeared but I got my eye in front of it so no more rain could blow in and knew I couldn't wait any longer. I put the cross hairs low on his chest behind the front shoulder and squeezed the trigger. I heard the wump of a solid hit and saw the sheep disappear from my sight. I watched him pitch over the side and out of sight. I hoped to see him sliding down the glacial chute below but I only saw a rock rolling. I could only hope he was off of the steep rock face, I thought to myself.

It was impossible for me to get to the sheep from where I was, so Mark and I rejoined and worked our way off the ridge and back up to the glacial chute below where the sheep had fallen. By now daylight was coming to an end. We worked our way up as far as possible without crampons and still no sheep. Although neither of us had ever used crampons before, we brought them along on the advice of a Fish and Game biologist. The area is heavily glaciated. We needed them now but after putting them on and working our way up the increasingly steeper ice face, we were starting to question the situation. Without rain gear on, one slip could mean a disastrous plummet into the rocks 200 feet below. Of course leaving the sheep was out of the question so I decided to negotiate the steepest section to where ice met the rock, follow along it for a ways hoping the sheep had hung up there, then work my way down where I had seen the rock rolling earlier.

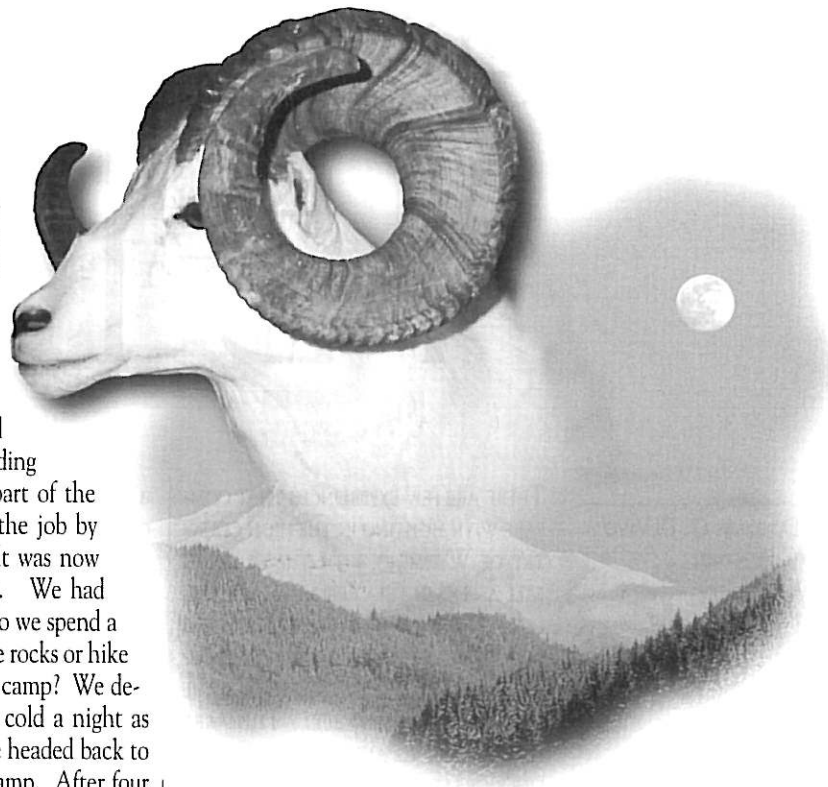
One careful step at a time, I worked my way up to the face, then slowly side stepped back down to Mark. We re-joined and with disappointment and darkness closing in, we had to head back. There was one small ice ridge I decided to get on top of and follow

down just in case. To my surprise the sheep was in a little dip just on the other side.

With some of the tension relieved, we rejoiced and hurriedly dressed out the sheep after skidding him off the steepest part of the glacier. We finished the job by use of a head lamp. It was now approaching midnight. We had to make a decision - Do we spend a damp, cold night in the rocks or hike the four hours back to camp? We decided it would be too cold a night as damp as we were so we headed back to camp with one head lamp. After four and a half hours stumbling through the dark, using the head lamp sparingly, we made it back to camp, mostly in one piece. I fell during the trip to camp and wound up with a gash and a knot on my forehead. I was fortunate it wasn't worse.

With a 24 hour day behind us and five hours sleep, we awoke to sunshine the next day - What a relief! We dried our gear while having a big freeze-dried meal for breakfast, then headed back to the sheep. We finally got there and wrapped the tape measure around the horns, forty-two inches! We couldn't believe it! I knew he was nice the night before but now in daylight, wow! I had taken a ram that was well beyond my expectations. We got a many pictures then started boning and caping the sheep. We made it back to camp at eleven p.m., just at dark.

After two grueling days we took the next day off. It started raining again. I found an overhanging rock out of the weather to flesh the cape and dry the meat while Mark read and rested in the little two man tent. The next day we made plans to get into that far saddle we had been shooting for three days ago. This we did and got a great view of the country. We set up and glassed most of the day. Sheep started to materialize here and there as the day progressed but nothing big. Finally Mark spotted a



nice ram up high in some steep precipices. We waited until late afternoon and finally the ram got up. Soon three others came into view and one looked like a good one. We worked our way down a big glacier and got into position in case these rams came down out of the rocks. They didn't and there was no way to get to them, so we headed back to camp.

Mark decided nothing we had seen yesterday was worth a major effort to go after so we loaded up our camp and my sheep and headed out. The upper creek had nearly doubled in size with the rain we had been receiving. Crossing it became a major concern. Due to this we hung to the bank which meant fighting the alders. We finally took to the hillside and ended up spending a not so pleasant night right on the side of the mountain. The next day out with heavy packs shouldered, we pressed on and by noon we were above the falls and starting down to the main creek. Finally, after seven hours of wading the swollen glacial stream dozens of times and working our way through the brush, we made it back to the truck. What a relief and what a hunt. It was a hunt to remember. An economical, do-it-yourself hunt. We got the physical and mental test we need at least once a year, and in the end, the persistence and hard work paid off.