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B&C Lifetime Associate

# hunting B of the Burr

Why the hunting gods might have wished to honor me with the taking of two magnificent Alaskan moose is unclear. If truth be told, I was at first embarrassed by my good fortune. However, when my second moose hunt ended early, there was plenty of time for contemplation. The route to this understanding took me on a journey back. So please stay with me as we follow this path and share my good fortune.



*Pegamous, 1996*

*My* father was not a hunter. He was not even an outdoorsman. Rather, he was a worldly intellectual, a cosmopolitan man who spoke six languages and loved the opera. But my dad maintained three activities that would have a decided influence. He loved to walk trails in the woods and although he never developed an interest in all the wild flora and fauna he must have seen, he relished the solitude and the escape from the bustle of city life. For a relaxing vacation, we would migrate to the charming and beautiful mountains of northern New England. And when he spoke of the most wild of the wild outdoors, the animal that would come first to his mind was the moose of northern Maine. I doubt he had ever seen one, but to him, the moose was the epitome of the distant wilderness. So, totally without knowing it, my dad generated the seeds that would germinate in my early adult years and bare remarkably good fruit in my middle age.

I never hunted as a youth, but developed a love for hiking and canoeing, and read endlessly about our pioneers and their Native American predecessors. I didn't buy my first shotgun until my late twenties, and my first hunting dog a year later. And until my mid-forties, I didn't even own a rifle. The first twenty years of my hunting life were smoothbore and wing shooting only, with a few years of bow hunting thrown in. I shot plenty of skeet and trap in the spring and summer to not embarrass myself in front of my dogs in the fall. The family took backpacking and canoe trips, but the wing hunting was always civilized, with beds at night and indoor food in the day. The outdoor seed was flowering, but except for one whitetail bow kill, the other one had not started to develop.

Ten years ago, a friend invited me to hunt deer with him in northern Wisconsin. The idea didn't seem too attractive: all those orange clad hunters running around and shooting, some even at each other. But I went anyhow, borrowed a gun and sat on the top rung of a ladder leaning against a tree, and froze. One day was enough, but I bought a gun and tried

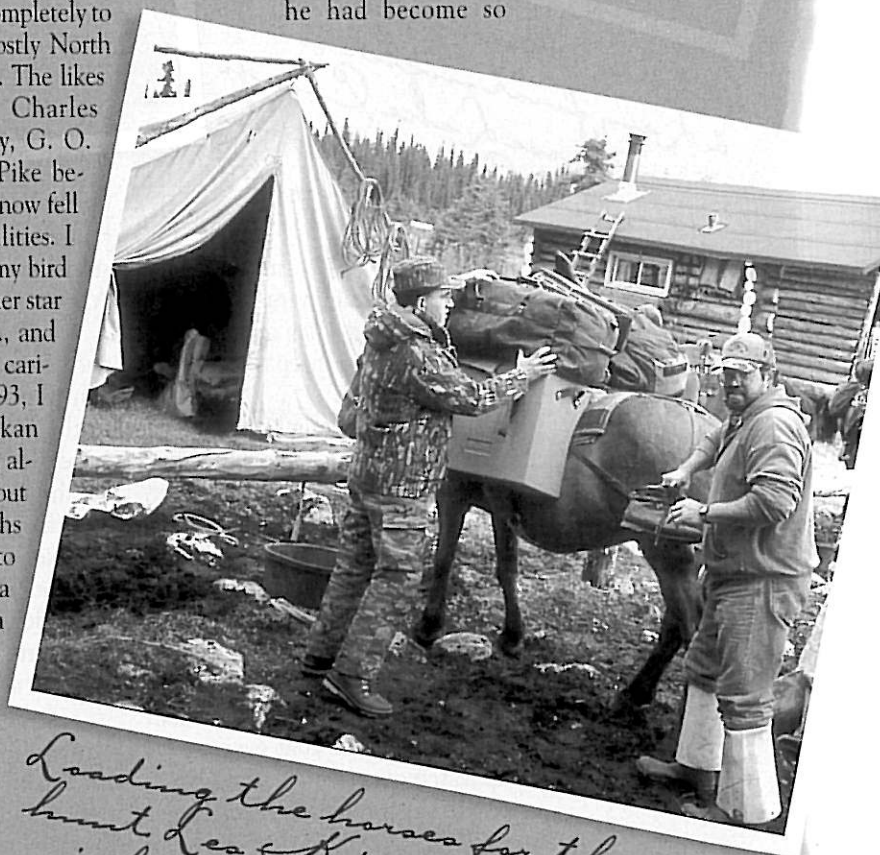
again the next year, this time for two days, and was starting to like it. The next year I built my own tree stand and even took a 6-point buck. By now I was reloading my own ammo and, as luck would have it, managed to take a nice 10-point buck two years later. About this time, another friend asked if I would like to apply for Wyoming elk and mule deer tags, and I said sure. We drew, got lucky on both, did the same the following year, and again got lucky. When we didn't draw the third year, we were off to Quebec after caribou. Big game hunting had now become my major hobby. I had for years read and collected early upland and waterfowl hunting books, and now switched over completely to the big game variety, mostly North American, some African. The likes of Teddy Roosevelt, Charles Sheldon, Prentiss Gray, G. O. Young and Warburton Pike became my heroes. Alaska now fell into the range of possibilities. I still trained and hunted my bird dogs, but there was another star beckoning me. Alaska...., and moose. Even before the caribou hunt in August, 1993, I began researching Alaskan outfitters. So that spring, already getting excited about a hunt seventeen months away, I sent my deposit to Dennis Harms of Alaska Trophy Safaris, who has a unique set-up. Horses are kept year-round at the camp. Since Alaska requires that all meat be removed from a game animal, the availability of horses for moose hunting is invaluable. When new horses are needed, they must be se-

dated and flown in. But most importantly, Dennis judiciously manages the yearly harvest of game in his area to insure an adequate supply.

In retrospect, it may have been a mistake, but I signed up for a combination hunt; Dall's sheep and the moose. I say a mistake because combo hunts would best include just one major trophy, and I had selected two. Rather than pay attention to one animal, and stick with that one

until successful, I would go back and forth between two; sheep for four days, moose for four and back to sheep for four.

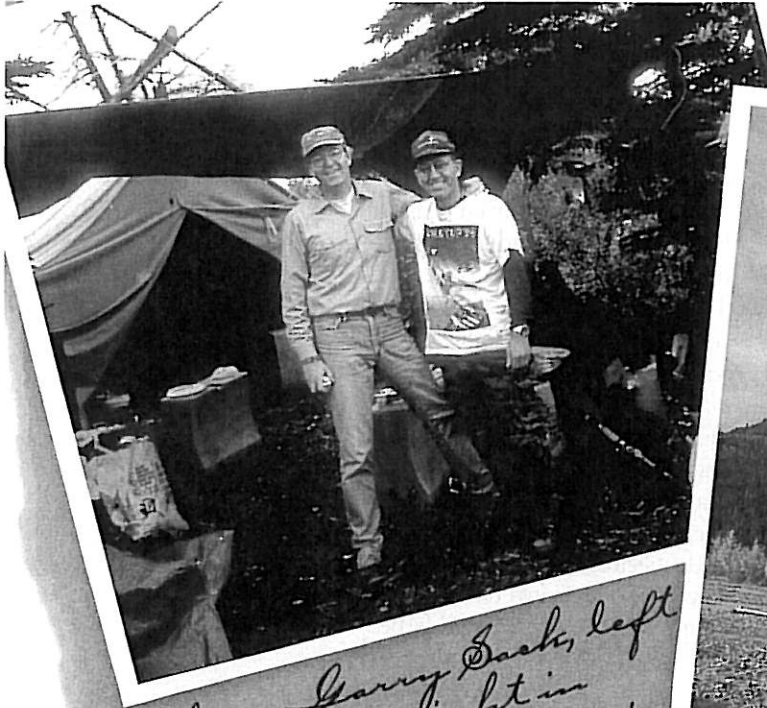
Arriving at the main camp at Bearskin Lake, I became the responsibility of Les Kinnear, one of Dennis's five registered guides, and my first contact with a "mountain man." Les had worked over fifteen years for the U.S. Forest Service, quit to become a full-time hunting and fishing guide and a part-time jack of all trades. Les is a real gentleman and highly intelligent; he had been a premed college student before finances forced him to leave. Medicine's loss turned out to be my gain. Now in his mid-forties, he had become so



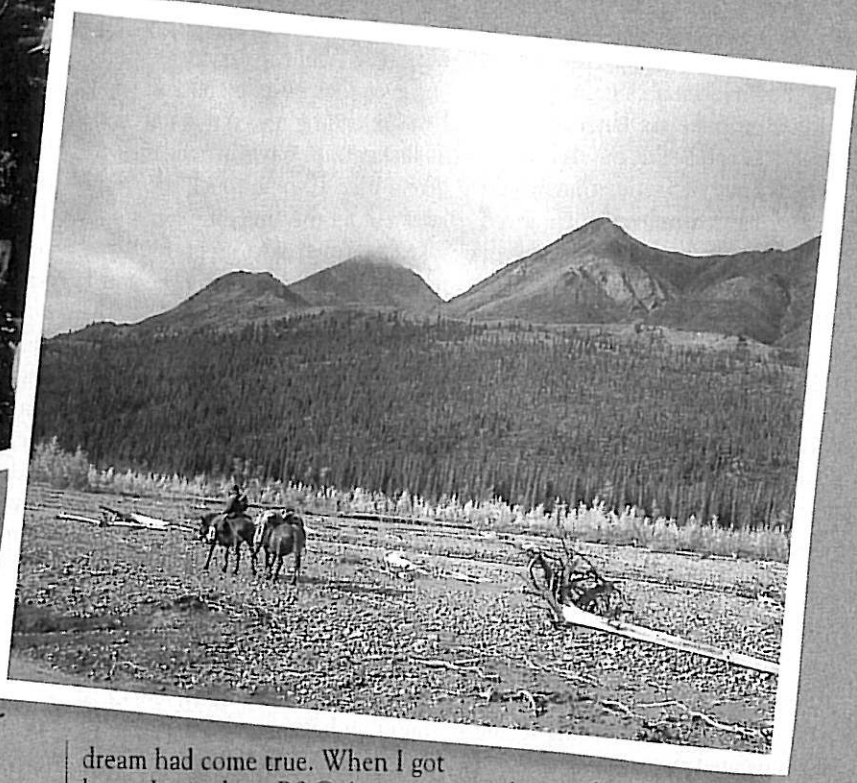
*Loading the horses for the 1995 hunt. Les Kinnear is on the right and I'm on the left.*

adept in the outdoors that I believe, if he had matches and adequate clothing, he probably could be dropped off anywhere in Alaska and survive comfortably until he reached civilization. Les was to become my mentor for a number of hunting trips.

When I arrived at Bearskin for the moose hunt I spent several days hunting sheep but was unsuccessful at finding the one I wanted. After the



*Above: Garry Sack, left & Lem, first night in Moose Lake Camp. Right: Traveling in beautiful country, 1994*



moose hunt, we again went after sheep, but never found a ram of respectable size. Obtaining a sheep is unfinished business.

We saw a number of moose the next two days and did sneak up to within 40 yards of a 58-incher, which we photographed. That evening, a rider came out to say that a big bull with a young bull and three cows had been spotted on the other side of Bearskin. So at dawn, we broke camp and headed there. We passed another 58" bull, again took photos, and that evening set up watch over a small slew. Over a two hour period, the cows came out individually, and just at dusk the two males entered the scene. The big bull stopped at my first shot, turned broadside, and went down with the second. Both bullets had unceremoniously come apart. I weighed them later to find that they had only retained 45% and 25% of their original weights. Interestingly, when I contacted the manufacturer, he said that was what they were supposed to do. That bull had a 63" spread, and was officially scored by Boone and Crockett at 224-6/8 points. I had my first record book animal....a

dream had come true. When I got home I raised my B&C Associate subscription to that of Lifetime Associate out of appreciation.

While all this was going on, our outfitter Dennis had other moose hunters in an old burn area forty miles to the south. A number of large moose had been spotted from the air, but the flat terrain with a very thick growth of young trees interspersed with wet tundra appeared impossible to hunt. No one had hunted it for years. However, Dennis thought he'd give it a try. Five bulls were taken that year, four apparently outscoring mine.

I was so intrigued by this burn area that I talked my business partner into giving a go at it, and we both signed up for the '95 moose hunt. Having taken already one B&C record book animal, I couldn't rationalize this second moose hunt, except that here was an area which had all the ingredients of a potential world record: nutrition, heredity and older animals. The truth was that here might be one of those rare opportunities for a hunter to score high in the record books, a chance which for most hunters never comes along. Here was a window of opportunity which may only last several years. I decided to delay another sheep hunt and go after an even bigger moose.

Anticipation started in earnest

within weeks of my return to the civilized world. Obviously, a new bullet was needed, and the Swift-A-Frame was selected. Before the snows fell, my .300 Winchester was sending out the 200 grain bullet at 2850 feet per second into 1-1/2 inch five shot groups. So the summer of '95 was again spent vigorously training and practicing. Like my wing shooting, I was not a naturally good shot, but became acceptable with practice.

Finally the day arrived to depart on my 1995 moose hunt. My business partner, Garry Sack, and I worked until noon, drove to Minneapolis, and flew to Anchorage.

The trip was off to a wonderful start, but the next day was a downer. The passes were all socked in. Dennis was at home because he couldn't fly out, and his other pilot, Terry Adam, was socked in at camp. We called Dennis hourly until 3:30 PM, when he finally scratched any plans to fly that day. I found a first edition of Theodore Roosevelt's **Through the Brazilian Wilderness**. Garry phoned an old high school classmate, who invited us to supper. This fellow's hunting experience dwarfed ours: he had just returned from a five week African safari. Finally, off to the motel with optimism in our hearts.

The next morning, the first scheduled day of our hunt, was more of the same. Hourly calls to Dennis finally resulted late in the morning in some encouraging news. Because of all the delays, we would fly directly to Moose Lake. We grabbed our licenses in town, threw our gear and ourselves into Terry's plane, and were finally off. The flight through the mountains was a thrill by itself. Each time we were about to come to the end of some dead-end canyon, with only steep towering mountains to the sides and front, Terry would suddenly bank the plane and slide into a new pass that we had not seen. The cloud cover began to thin and the sky had brightened. However, the fates seemed to cycle on us. There were two outstanding guides at the Moose Lake camp, Les and a fellow named Walt Rowe from Kentucky. Walt was Garry's guide, and was reputed to be one of the best. If Les was a gentleman who mixed keen intelligence with years of experience, Walt was a throwback to the days when men survived in the wilderness because they themselves possessed the instinct to think like an animal. Unfortunately, with us in the plane was a telegram notifying Walt that his father had had a severe stroke. So while Garry and I helped Walt pack his gear, Terry took Les up in the plane in order to orient him to the area, then returned to fly Walt out. Garry, Les and I settled into the Moose Lake Camp, renewed friendships, and discussed the morrow.

The good news was that a very large bull had been spotted northeast of camp and several very acceptable bulls 5 miles to the west, but the bad news was that we had but one guide for the two of us. The hopeful news was that Dennis would find a guide in the main camp who's hunter had filled his tag. Les had been assigned to me, but I suggested we flip a coin to see who would be his hunter the next day. I lost. Les would guide Garry and I would tag along while we headed northeast after the large moose which had been seen earlier.

The Moose Lake camp was plenty adequate, and very comfortable. There was an 8 X 12 foot wall tent, as well as a dome tent. Each of us had an aluminum cot. Cooking was done

with Coleman burners. There were loads of dead wood for the fire. A tarp was hung over the cooking area for shelter while eating if it rained, which of course it never does in Alaska. A meat hanging rack was built along the lake. There was grass nearby for the six horses; supplemental pellets were flown in. The main limitation was the small size of the lake. Landing wasn't too difficult, but takeoffs necessitated that there be a good wind in the lake's longest direction. Weight on take off was limited. Flights out required the use of a staging lake ten miles away where gear was temporarily unloaded. A communications radio in camp powered by an automobile battery, despite all manipulations with the wire antenna, functioned poorly.

The little lake was beautiful, but the immediate scenery disclosed only shallow ridges about 50 feet in height. In the distance, snow capped peaks and glaciers provided a wonderful frame to our solitude. The country we were to hunt consisted of low hills interspersed with broad, flat valleys, and since all hills and valleys initially looked alike, it took a while to learn the differences and orient oneself. Les was as much at home there as I am in my own backyard.

Because this area has been subjected to repeated segmental burns, the tree growth was low, usually not over 15 feet high, but of such density in spots that one could not see the horse 10 feet in front. Willow, white spruce, aspen and white birch were present, and the leaves were just starting to change colors. Wet tundra with low shrub growth allowed long distance glassing in areas. Amazingly, large antlers could be seen at times for miles and at other times be invisible several hundred yards away in the shrubs. It was also not unusual to climb a knoll and not find any spot from which to glass because of the tree growth thickness. There was not much other game around. We saw only one grizzly track. There were no caribou and a rare wolf. Walking on the ridges offered good footing, but the wet tundra was so difficult to traverse that one quickly fell in love with one's horse.

The day after we arrived at Moose Lake camp we headed with

four horses north along a ridge, stopping frequently to glass. Two cow moose were pushed ahead of us. Going was tough for the horses, and time was not well made. We frequently stopped and glassed from the ridge tops. The big bull from the day before was not there, or at least was not distinguished. Toward dusk, we headed back, again saw no moose, and arrived at camp in time to hear the distant drone of Dennis's Cessna heading our way. Dennis flew around to orient the replacement guide to the area and in short order our guide, John Edmondson, was introduced to Garry and me. Once again, Les and I would form our previously successful tandem.

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The following morning we were off to hunt in earnest. Garry and John hunted to the southwest and Les and I to the northwest. We glassed to the west from the ridge over a large expanse of flat tundra interspersed with the abominable thickets of small trees. Seeing nothing, we headed north on the ridge, glassing at every opportunity, still unproductively. Crossing northwest in the plain for 1-1/2 miles, moving a cow and her calf, we climbed a small wooded hill-ock. Immediately Les signaled with his hands above his ears in the shape of antlers, and mouthed the words "big bull." When I looked through the binoculars, it appeared that there were two bulls in the brush some 600 yards away, lying side-by-side, the antlers appearing so enormous in the bright sunlight. But there were not two bulls, just one, resting quietly in four foot brush near an old burned out

spruce, his massive antlers heaving as he slept.

The wind was blowing from the east, and this big fellow was still to our northwest, so we planned a circular stalk to his south in order to arrive about 300 yards downwind. We crept along together in open tundra, one eye glued on the old spruce and the other where we stepped, avoiding noise and quick motions. As we completed about one-half the distance, our boy stood up and looked our way... and stared. We were still several hundred yards from him, without much opportunity for a good shot. We froze in our creeping, bent over position until he finally he put his head down to browse on the brush. We continued to creep along, stopping whenever he raised his head, but he was now starting to walk and browse in the same direction we were going. We continued on, stopping if he did and hustling close to the ground when his head went down, trying to get downwind. The brush he was in angled to his left, in the direction we were headed, so that when we escaped the tundra into the brush, our pace quickened and we arrived at the spot from which we had planned to begin our approach into the wind. The moose kept on slowly coming our way, sauntering along, grunting loudly, the huge antler palms rocking slowly from side to side, trees bending or snapping in front of them.

At that moment, he was supreme, without question the lord of all he surveyed, the king of the burn. I had come too far to quit now, had made too much effort to be where I was now to not complete the task, but I must admit as I watched this almost prehistoric creature plow forward I was sorely tempted to not take away his kingdom. It was I who had invaded his domain. I was an alien whom he did not know, a member of a species he may never have seen. Yet here I was now, hidden in the brush, about to end his very existence for reasons he could never possibly comprehend. The short walk he took towards us could not have taken that long, but there was plenty of time to admire his majesty. I almost wished I had a choice, the choice being to freeze the animal in motion, walk

over to take measurements of the antlers, have my picture taken with him, unfreeze him and let him walk away. But I didn't have that choice. There is no catch and release of moose. He was 50 yards away.

He didn't go far after my first shot. Both bullets were retrieved. The first entered the right chest, traveled through both lungs and lodged in a classic mushroom shape beneath the skin. The second destroyed one of the neck vertebra and again lodged beneath the skin, somewhat pancake shaped. The bullet weight retention was 98% and 95% respectively. At last, success with bullets.

It was a short walk. We both stared, neither saying very much, steeped in reverence. We would look at each other, shake our heads, turn and look some more at the downed monarch. Finally, for something to say, Les noted he'd go fetch the horses. I just waited and looked. At that point, there was no sense of accomplishment but rather an intimidating sense of awe. It was also unreal that after all the months of training and preparation, I took my moose the first few hours of my hunt.

When Les returned, we took photographs and measurements. It was not the overall width of 67" which stunned us, it was the huge size of the palms, 51 inches long, 20 inches wide on the left and 17-1/2 inches on the right. Unlike some of the high scoring moose antlers I had seen, these palms were not triangular, but rather rectangular. The right palm edge even split, with one large point angling forward and two large ones angling back. There were many palm points and large multi-pointed brow palms. We conservatively rough measured it over 250 B&C points. It was truly unbelievable.

That afternoon we removed the cape and antlers, quartered the animal and placed all the meat in protective mesh bags. The filets, back straps and hindquarters were loaded onto the horses and, returning to camp, hung. Later that evening, Garry and John returned, having seen only cows. Following supper and the recounting of our lucky day, and the traditional smoke and drink, we retired.

The next morning, we gathered up the meat, the antlers and the cape. Arriving back at Moose Lake, the rest of the meat was hung and, while Les split the lips, fleshed the nose and turned the ears, I cleaned the rest of the cape before all was liberally salted. Garry returned shortly having seen several bulls but with unsuccessful stalks in this most difficult terrain.

After supper, it was agreed that Les would accompany Garry and John the next day to set up another spike camp 10 miles to the west. Since they would need all six horses, I volunteered to fly back to Bearskin when the plane came to transport out my moose. I wished Garry and the two guides good luck, said good-bye to Les for another 11 months and, later that afternoon, with the rack tied to the strut and my gear and me inside, Dennis flew the plane into the more civilized Bearskin Lake Camp.

Bearskin is "plush" by most standards. There is diesel generated electricity in the beautiful log mess hall. The guest log cottage has gas lights and real beds, and there are several log buildings for the guides. The outhouse has 4 sides and a roof, and a spring-fed shower is heated by wood. The view across the lake at the mountains is spectacular. I couldn't think of a more relaxed setting to think, read and write.

The next day, Terry flew the meat from Moose Lake back to Eagle River for butchering. But I was hearing nothing about Garry. Dennis did not see the three moose hunters on his scouting passes in the super cub. In order not to be faced with a problem getting two hunters and one moose out by plane on the final day, Terry flew me to Dennis's home in Eagle River on September 15.

We were to fly out of Anchorage on September 17, and it was not until that morning that we heard through the radio static that Garry had taken a bull. If my hunt was almost too easy, Garry's was most difficult, yet exciting, with far more stories than mine. He and the two guides hunted hard until the last day. The flat landscape and shifting winds made stalking difficult. There was no flowing fresh water, and the water that was drank had to be filtered

through a sock. On one of the days, 16 hours were spent in the saddle. The horses were beat, the guides were beat, Garry was beat, and all were suppressing their irritation at what was turning out to be an exhausting and futile hunt. Garry had resigned himself that he was not to be lucky. On literally the last planned hour of the hunt, as they were preparing to return to Moose Lake empty handed, Les heard a moose grunt. All dismounted and listened. Sure enough, another grunt. Les called, and the grunting came closer. Finally, when the antler palms became visible above the thick brush, and their size appeared respectable, Garry fired at the only vital part he could see, the neck, and down it went.

After all work was done, the three men and six heavily laden horses worked their way back over four hours in the dark to Moose Lake. The next afternoon, on the 17th, Garry arrived in Eagle River with rack, cape, meat, and a great hunting story. My antlers remained to be crated and shipped while Garry and I headed for the airport with his rack, our two capes, my frozen and his fresh meat, and two magnificent experiences.

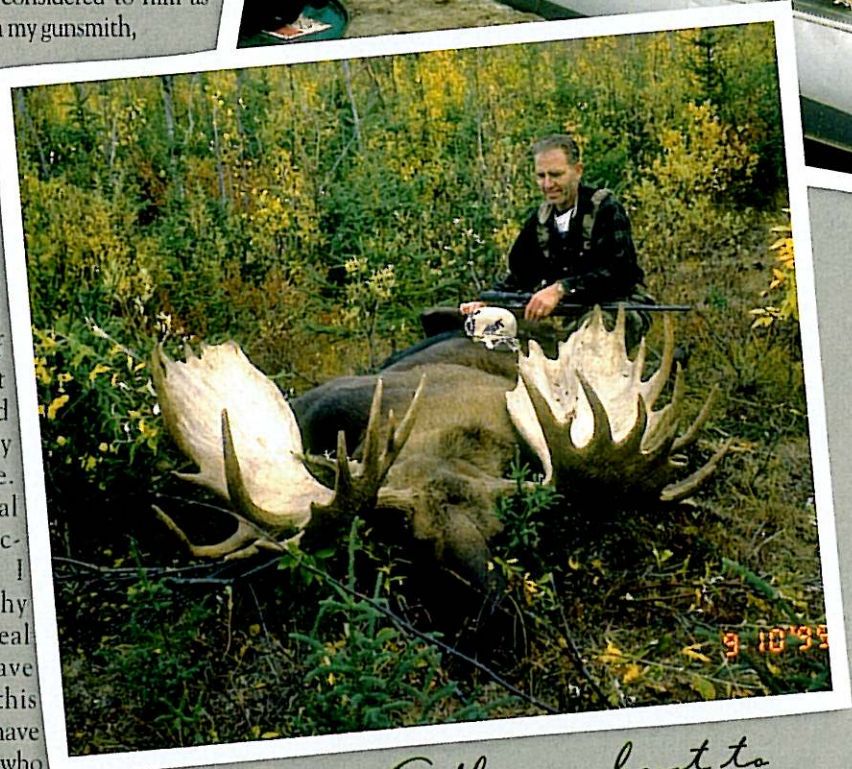
After the prescribed waiting period, measurements by an official measurer for the Boone and Crockett Club were taken. By sheer mass, it was gargantuan. With only the skull cap attached, it weighed 74 pounds, 19 pounds heavier than the present B&C World's Record. This huge animal was producing calcium so fast that there was no room on the right palm for all his points, creating a split edge with one 17 inch point that angled forward and two points, 6 inches and 16 inches long, angled back. When scored by B&C, since the outside two were determined to be abnormal, thus effecting overall width, abnormal and normal point totals and symmetry. Scoring at 246-7/8 points, it is a glorious and simply awesome trophy.

In truth, this is not my moose, it is "our" moose, and should be referred to that way. I was only one small player in this drama. Were it not for the pilot Terry flying us into the area, we would not have been there. Had

not Dennis developed his horse outfitting system to work the Bearskin area, and had he not devised a method to use the horses around Moose Lake, there would have been no hunt. Les, figuratively and literally, called all the shots, for both Garry and me. He would occasionally refer back a number of years to other animals he had taken. Such as "when I took this great moose back on the Peninsula back in 1986." He didn't pull the trigger, but probably did everything else. But to him, that was his moose, as mine should also be considered to him as his moose. Even my gunsmith, who taught me the fine art of developing loads, also refers to it as our moose.

Lastly, as I alluded to earlier, it was with a sense of embarrassment that I first told people about my good fortune. But several thoughts occurred as I pondered "why me." The ideal hunter to have collected this moose should have been someone who has dedicated his life to moose hunting, studying their habits, an expert in the outdoors, one who repeatedly passed up shots on lesser heads waiting for the big one,

preferably someone who knew of this fellow and had been hunting him for several years, and by now had given him a nickname, such as "the bruiser", or "old snowplow." However, as I read of other high record book trophies, most hunters were after any fine animal, and were purely and simply lucky, as indeed I was. It would seem most difficult for an unaccompanied amateur hunter to acquire the experience and knowledge of a Les Kinnear and the scouting ability and



*Pilot, Terry Adlam, about to fly my trophy out.  
Big moose downed,  
score 247-7/8 points, 1995*

mobility of a Dennis Harms. A symbiotic relationship has therefore come to exist. Folks like Les and Dennis benefit from hunters who support their occupation just as they are needed to provide an opportunity for an extraordinary hunt. From my perspective, I did all I could: I saved financially, read about my quarry, practiced my marksmanship, trained vigorously and chose my outfitter carefully. I did find a bunch of luck; perhaps I can now admit to myself that at least some of it may have been reasonably deserved.