

Looking Back

What is a Trophy Head?

A trophy head may mean various things to different people. To the Boone and Crockett Club Record Book, a trophy head is one that meets or exceeds the minimums established by the Club. This, of course, is merely a mathematical definition designed for the purpose of record keeping. It must be regarded as such, without consideration for the difficulty of effort entailed in securing a trophy animal, although the Fair Chase provision does insure that good sportsmanship must be observed during the hunt.

To the judges in a B&C Competition, [presently called Awards Program] on the other hand, a trophy head is not only a mathematical statistic; it is also a prize that has usually been won by persistence, great effort, and accurate shooting.

On one occasion, a world-record polar bear and a near-world-record elk were being considered for the Sagamore Hill award.

The bear had been killed after a hunter spotted its tracks from a plane and followed them from the air until he located the animal. The hunter then landed ahead of the bear waylaid it after a short stalk, and shot it.

The elk had been seen days before the kill was made, after the hunter had traveled into the country by pack train. He had hunted on horseback and on foot for this particular bull for many days after originally sighting it. On the final day he tracked it for hours and finally brought it down.

The standing of the bear exceeded that of the elk by one place. In spite of this, the judges decided that the extraordinary quality of the pursuit for the elk was so superior to that conducted for the bear, that the elk hunter deserved the highest award attainable. Certainly the judges, who were themselves all keen sportsmen and experienced hunters, were completely justified in placing sportsmanship and effort ahead of the slight mathematical superiority. The polar bear was undoubtedly an outstanding specimen, but the method of hunting made it a less valuable trophy than the elk in the opinion of true sportsmen. Probably the owner of the bear considered his animal a most desirable prize in spite of the manner in which he had obtained it. A polar bear hunter once wrote a story in a well-known

magazine in regard to his hunt. He told of having to take off and land five times in his aircraft before he got ahead of the animal in a proper position to kill it. He must have been proud of such a performance or he would not have written about it, but certainly no Boone and Crockett Club member would condone such a hunt.

A man who loves the out-of-doors and the wild game in our wilderness values a trophy head in proportion to the effort he expended in securing it. Consider the late Dr. John Hammett, one of the finest sportsmen it has ever been a privilege to know. John once told me of a dangerous grizzly hunt on which his companion wounded a big bear that retreated into thick willow brush. John went into the thicket to finish off the wounded animal. When he did, the bear charged. As he shot it at gun muzzle, the bear grabbed him by the hand. John had performed operations on such famous people as Sir Anthony Eden, Marilyn Monroe, and the wife of Emperor Haile Selassie; and his first thought was that his fingers would never again hold a scalpel to help mankind. Fortunately, however, the bear's lower jaw had been broken by the first bullet, and the animal succumbed to John's shot without being able to cripple his hand or arm. That was a trophy worth treasuring.

There is so much satisfaction in being in the wilderness hunting for a record that one can spend years seeking a superior animal and have all kinds of enjoyment, even if he never encounters it. One of the objects of my hunting career has been to secure a forty-five inch sheep head. I have never attained that goal, but I have had tremendous rewards in looking for it. May I recount one or two hunts and attempt to explain the pleasures of the pursuit?

In late August, 1937, I started out with my good friend and guide, Ray Mustard, after bighorn, with plans to scour the Brazeau and Clearwater river regions of Alberta, Canada, for an extraordinary ram. With an excellent cook, a horse wrangler, and a well-trained pack string, we left Nordegg, traveled up the Cline River, and were in ram country when the season opened. Cataract Pass and the surrounding country, which had been the home of big rams in past years, produced nothing worth a second look. We located a couple of bands of rams in the six or seven year range but encountered nothing choice. There was a

deep satisfaction, nevertheless, in a stiff climb beginning at daybreak in the clear bracing air of the Rockies, with a chance to watch healthy native male sheep feeding, playing, and occasionally banging heads in practice for serious combat in the late fall. We were always reluctant to depart from a ram basin at an altitude of eight or nine thousand feet and head for the comfortable tent pitched near timberline three thousand feet lower.

From Cataract Pass the quest lead down Nigel Creek to the Brazeau River, thence up Job Creek, down Coral Creek and through their various branches, hidden pockets and basins. Then it traversed all the sheep country near there, the Opabin, Wapiabi and Bighorn Creeks, thence south across Saskatchewan River, up White Rabbit Creek to the Siffleur, the Ram River, Humming Bird Creek and the Saskatchewan River to Nordegg. The area revealed more than a hundred and twenty head of mature rams, a wonderful reward in itself to anyone who appreciates the magnificence of a beautiful bighorn in his native haunt.

More pleasant and interesting incidents occurred while hunting this choice country. There was, for instance, the attempt to obtain three big wolves lying on an open knoll. The stalk appeared to be a certainty, for there was excellent cover to within a hundred yards of the animals. Footing was quiet after the previous day's rain. The wind was strong and steady directly in our faces. Since it was after ten o'clock on a warm sunny morning, the wolves would be apt to rest till late afternoon.

Although the approach was conducted perfectly, our prey had vanished completely upon our arrival. Had a magpie squawked or a squirrel chattered to warn these wary animals? Could a fly have landed on us and then winged his way to the wolves to give them the dreaded man scent? This may sound far-fetched, but I strongly suspect that insects landing on me and then flying to elephants have on more than one occasion given them the scent of a white man and caused them to depart in a hurry.

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MR. HOPKINS IS PICTURED HERE WITH A ROOSEVELT'S SABLE TAKEN IN 1949 IN KENYA. MR. HOPKINS BECAME A MEMBER OF THE BOONE AND CROCKETT CLUB IN 1956 AND WAS ELECTED TO HONORARY LIFE MEMBER IN 1977. HE SPENT MANY OF HIS DAYS ON SAFARIS IN AFRICA. HE PASSED AWAY IN 1984.

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