

# Mounting Memories

**A look at why hunters have their trophies mounted... from a non-hunter's perspective**

**By Kathleen Cervin**  
Photos courtesy of Author

As a woman and non-hunter, I shared a hunt-of-a-lifetime-experience with my life partner Warden Patzer and his two oldest sons, Austin and Forrest. After this extremely difficult hunt, I have a much better understanding of why hunters mount their trophies and display them for all to see. This was something I never understood until I walked in the boots of a hunter while deep in wild grizzly country.

It took 33 years for Warden to finally draw his coveted bighorn sheep tag in area 3, between Cody, Wyoming, and Yellowstone National Park. Their enthusiasm was impressive—one I did not share, although Warden kept me interested as I wavered daily whether to accompany them or not. Warden was determined to share this experience with me and

his sons whether he was successful harvesting a ram or not. This is a man who enjoys the journey, lives life on his terms and each day to its fullest. In my mind, Warden was the perfect person to go with on a hunt. His passion and priorities gave me the confidence to make the trek.

The preparation took many weeks to gather all the food, equipment, horses, mules, etc., needed for this adventure. This hunt started well before September 1, 2009, in the minds and hearts of these young men and their father, all experienced hunters and outdoorsmen, while my experience is limited to some camping, hiking, and a fair amount of target shooting.

We left Cody the morning of August 26th to begin our much-anticipated journey. With the challenge of packing the mules and the horses saddled, we finally headed up the trail. We were limited on horses so we took turns riding.

I must admit, I rode more than walked as the altitude and steepness of the trail was more than I wanted to handle. This was no trail for an amateur.

Austin and Forrest were very impressive as they walked many miles each day without complaint. I was concerned from the beginning that my lack of physical conditioning would hold these men back at some point, and it did from time to time. They handled my inability to make some of the hikes over the nine days in the wilderness with grace, which I am very grateful for.

We camped two nights under the stars before choosing the right spot. I had never slept under the stars before and found it breathtaking. The stars sparkled and danced by the thousands—a delightful change from bright lights and pollution of the city always



**Forrest, left, and the author heading back to camp in the evening after finally spotting a group of rams.**

blocking the view. We chose a beautiful spot in a lush tree-covered area close to the trail approximately 15 miles in. There were wildflowers everywhere, plenty of feed for the horses and mules, and an outcrop that made a perfect place for cooking over campfires, with a great view of Sheep Mesa to the south. The spectacular sunrises, sunsets, and fresh air alone made the trip worth it.

We spent the next several days riding, hiking, and glassing some of the steepest hills, peaks, and cliffs of Silvertip Basin and Ishawooa Pass from sunup to sundown. Through high winds, rain, and chilling temperatures, the men only saw some ewes and their lambs those first few days.

On a couple of these hikes, due to extremely steep cliffs, I stayed stationary while the men continued to scout the more difficult areas with great agility. We stayed in contact with radios for safety, and I carried a Colt Delta Elite 10mm and bear spray for protection. I was very nervous to be left alone as we came across fresh grizzly and wolf tracks daily. Past encounters from running trails along Utah's Wasatch Front proved that I have a way of attracting dangerous animals whenever I'm alone in the woods. Those stories have amused many while continuing to deepen my fears. I have been fortunate to have only been attacked by a rattlesnake that harmlessly bit my running shoe. I kept

a watchful eye while keeping my mind busy taking pictures of some incredible landscapes custom-designed by God Himself. I was never alone for long and always relieved to see the men heading my way.

On opening day, September 1st, Warden spotted five rams on a distant ridge in late evening. Our excitement grew to an all-time high, but the rams were a couple miles away and it was getting late. Being experienced hunters, these men wanted to ride over to the sheep and spend the night by a campfire. After days spent locating these rams, they weren't keen on letting them out of their site. Unfortunately, we had unattended livestock back at camp and being deep in grizzly/wolf country gave us some concern about their safety. After much debate, we decided to head back to camp to check the animals and get a good night's sleep. It was a risk that the rams would still be in the same location but one that Warden was willing to take. Being a taxidermist, lifelong hunter, and an outfitter, Warden's priority for human and livestock safety is a quality I am truly grateful for.

The following morning, we headed out at the crack of dawn toward the ridge where the rams were last seen about five

miles from camp. The trail was clearly marked as we followed fresh grizzly tracks until we crossed the river and headed into the woods leading to the top of the ridge. The trail seemed to disappear and took some time to locate. There were many fallen trees and a poorly marked trail that ran practically straight up without the usual switchbacks. Warden's keen sense of direction and experience guided us safely up the mountain to the top of the ridge. We rode the ridge as far as we dared, then completed the journey on foot for about a mile as quietly as possible as we approached the spot where we last saw the rams. After thoroughly glassing the area and concluding the rams had traveled, we

**FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: Warden and Austin glassing Silvertip. ■ The views were incredible but the terrain extremely dangerous. ■ It was another morning and I was sunburned, puffy-eyed, exhausted, and had not showered in over a week. I just smiled and kept moving.**



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**LEFT: Warden, Austin, and Forrest reaching the top of the canyon where I was waiting for them. Their smiles show how we were all feeling. BELOW: The author pictured with the ram and Warden after the hike down the steep canyon.**

walked around the ridge to the south in the direction it appeared the rams were moving the night before. We spotted one ram lying by himself about 500 yards up the ridge, but Warden decided to pursue one of the larger rams in this group.

At this point, the terrain became extremely difficult, so I chose to stay behind. Sitting quietly, I waited for either the sound of the pre-64 Model 70 Winchester firing or getting a signal to move on.

After a few moments, I heard the retort of the .270 Win. I looked up the ridge to see Austin and Forrest patting their father on his back. I knew it was a successful harvest. Extremely relieved, I said, "Thank God," as I thought the worst was over. I was soon to learn otherwise. The men waived me up to their location. With a heavy sigh and a long, slow climb, I finally arrived at the top to find the men smiling and laughing. I congratulated Warden with a big hug and kiss. I could see the happiness and joy in his eyes. I was delighted with his success, and I was very proud of him for being able to achieve this life-long goal.

Warden and his sons shared with me the events with great enthusiasm. The ram had tumbled about 200 yards down a very steep canyon to its final resting place. We had approximately a 400-yard hike practically straight down, which I accomplished mostly on my backside as the rock shale was loose and hard to maintain footing.

Prior to taking photos and everyone congratulating each other on a successful hunt, a prayer of thanks was given to honor the life of this incredible animal. The amount of respect these men showed for this animal's life was surprising, touching, and totally unexpected. It was then that I understood why hunters chose to have their trophies mounted—to immortalize the animal with pride and honor, and to retain memories of a hard hunt. The last eight days had been the hardest trekking I have ever done in my life, and I was exhausted. The preparation, effort, and hard work that it takes for a hunt like this is amazing. I would mount my trophy too! It also takes good teamwork, and I was fortunate to experience this with a great team.

The men skinned the ram, which I had never seen before. I thought I would be squeamish but much to my surprise, it didn't bother me at all. It was similar to skinning a chicken before throwing it into a frying pan. The men took extreme care of the meat

by putting it in the shade under a small nearby sapling. The hide and head were placed in a secluded cave out of the sunlight where it was cool and protected from the elements. It had taken a good portion of that day to ride/walk the ridge, harvest the ram, take photos, and complete the skinning. Because it was so late, we would have to make yet another trip back the following day to retrieve the meat and hide. (I was so thrilled to hear this news, I wanted to sob. I was so tired of these long, hard days.)

Heading back, we thought it would be easiest to skirt the mountainside instead of climbing back up the canyon and walk the ridge to get to the horses. Unfortunately it was incredibly steep with a series of ravines, and it took twice as long—the hardest hike I have ever attempted. I was ready to pack up and head home, and I didn't want to go back the next day. Knowing this was not an option, I struggled in silence with a great lack of enthusiasm.

We slept in the next morning knowing that we had plenty of time to accomplish the trek back. The morning was incredibly beautiful with blue skies and fresh crisp air—an atmosphere that can only be experienced at an altitude of 10,000 feet.

At the top of the canyon, I stayed on the ridge overlooking the beautiful basin, while the men climbed down, de-boned and packed the ram back up. As I waited for their return, I was deeply concerned about being alone with the smell of fresh meat and blood in the air. I placed myself in a location that allowed a 360-degree view, feeling confident that I would be able to see any unwanted predators approaching. The men were gone for several hours, and my imagination got the best of me. After seeing fresh tracks from a mother bear and her cub on our way up



the trail that morning, I was sure a hungry grizzly would come charging my way. Much to my surprise and extreme pleasure, nothing ever came my way. When I saw the men climbing up the canyon, my sense of relief almost gave way to a "happy dance," but I didn't want to let them know how nervous I had been, while waiting for them. I believe they knew anyway, but they never said a word and showed complete respect.

We all kept a watchful eye while returning back to camp since we were carrying fresh meat. Fortunately, the trip was uneventful. We ate dinner, planned our pack out for the following day, and settled in for the night.

We rose to another beautiful day. I was sad to leave the wilderness, but thrilled to get home and out of grizzly country. We packed up camp, loaded the mules and horses, and headed down the trail for the 15-mile trek ahead of us. I had forgotten how narrow and treacherous the trail was. The views were incredible, but the terrain extremely dangerous with exposed cliffs. Feeling the need for my feet to be on the ground, I walked many of the exposed

areas. It gave me a better sense of control. Warden admonished us to watch the packs very closely because if a horse slipped or fell, in all likelihood, the rest of the pack would follow. We did have a horse go down after a pack slipped, but luckily it was on

trailhead, I knew I was only minutes away from a hot shower and a soft bed for the first time in nine days. This trip was finally over and I had survived!

This trip truly was a hunt-of-a-lifetime and one I will never forget. While I was nervous about going, I'm thrilled I went. I was able to keep up most of the time, which many hunters who knew the difficulties of this type of hunt told me I would never be able to do. I learned a lot about tracking, hunting, life, death, honor, and how fortunate I was to be with three wonderful, experienced hunters. It really takes teamwork, staying together, and always keeping safety first to succeed at a difficult hunt like this. I was very impressed with Warden, Austin, and Forrest, and their ability to work together even when there were disagreements. I was very proud to be in the company of such wonderful men and share this experience with them.

The ram is currently in the process of being mounted, and I can't wait to see the finished product. It will be proudly displayed in our home, and our adventure is what I call building and mounting memories. ■

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flatter ground and without injury to the horse. We repacked the horse and tightened all the packs to ensure this wouldn't happen again.

We rode and walked from sunup to sundown that last day. Warden and I walked about a third of the way but rode the steep uphill areas. My knees had been swollen for days, and my entire body ached. Austin and Forrest walked the entire way out with sore feet and aching muscles. We were all feeling the pain, and I thought the trail would never end. When I saw the truck and trailer at the

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