

BEYOND MADE IN U.S.A. 7 | 8 | P.R. APP'D. 9 | 252 Tc the SCORE

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The Lost and Found Bull by Richard H. Manly

This is a story about hunting, but it is not a hunting story. It is a story about a father and son and how their love goes on forever. If it had not happened to me, I don't know if I would have believed it.

I am a hunter because my father was a hunter. He was a career military officer. In his assignments all over the world, he always explored the various hunting opportunities in the region where he was stationed. As soon as I was old enough, I went along. I can't count the number of times we went afield together. My fondest memories are of early morning truck rides, tree-stand vigils, and evening rides home. We would talk about so many things—father-son bonding at its best. My father always tried for the biggest animals, but I don't know if I would say he was a trophy hunter in the truest sense of the word. Over and over he would tell me that the best trophies were the memory of the hunt, the fellowship with other hunters, and the sheer joy of experiencing the beauty of God's creation; trophies for the heart and mind he would say, not the wall.

As an adult, my love of hunting has continued to grow. I have been blessed to hunt in a variety of places from deserts to mountains, limited only by my budget and vacation time as a high school teacher. In September 2009, I was privileged to hunt for Roosevelt's elk on the Stover Ranch in northern California. It was an almost perfect hunt: beautiful scenery, great companionship, magnificent animals, and an exciting stalk culminating in the taking of a Boone and Crockett bull. Hunting just gets no better than that. What happened next is the stuff of nightmares and family stories for years to come.

I asked my guide Gordon if he had had anyone that did taxidermy for his hunters. He said he did and that he would take care of it for me. At first the communication between the taxidermist and me was good. My bull was scored after the 60-day drying period and all the required paperwork sent to me. But after about eight months, repeated phone calls went unanswered, and all efforts to reach him failed. The months turned into almost two years, and with me being in Georgia and him being in California, I really lost faith in ever seeing my bull again.

Imagine then my surprise, when totally out of the blue in July 2011, I received a call from the taxidermist saying my mount was ready for shipping and would be sent as soon as he received payment. I could not get the check in the mail fast enough. According to the shipping schedule, it was due to arrive August 2nd, coincidentally the day teachers in my county returned to work. Therefore, I really couldn't believe it when the local shipping agent called me and said that one part of my shipment had arrived but not the other. We quickly realized the missing crate was the most important—the one containing the antlers. Immediate tracers were put out, numerous phone calls and inquiries made, but still no antlers. Only a hunter could truly understand how despondent I was.

I was reluctant to let the shipping company bring out the head as I hated the thought of seeing the head minus those antlers. After

two weeks of futile searching, the shipping company said they needed to deliver the first crate in order to file a claim on the missing antlers. I told the driver who brought out the head that this was probably the saddest delivery he would ever make.

This was all taking place on a Friday. Early that day my family had received an odd phone call. The man that had bought my sister's house a few months previous had received a letter addressed to my dad, which he brought by before I came home. After unpacking the crate and storing the head away, I walked into the kitchen and saw the envelope. The return name and address was someone I had never heard of in New Mexico. As I opened the envelope, I couldn't believe what I saw. There was a picture of my dad taken in 1965 on a ship on his way to Vietnam. The letter was from a soldier who had served under him. He said that he had been cleaning out some things, had found this picture and thought I would like to have it. He said many nice things about my dad, how much respect he had for him, and sent his condolences on my dad's passing a few years ago. As I read them, tears welled in my eyes. Of all days, I could not believe this letter had come on this day. As I looked at the picture again, I couldn't help but think that my father was saying "Son, don't sweat those antlers. What really matters are family and relationships. You had a great hunt. Remember that, enjoy. Life is too short." Laying the letter aside, my despair was gone. This was just too much of a coincidence. If the antlers showed up fine; if not, fine also.

Another week went by. Classes began. On Thursday, August 21, I checked my voicemails at the end of the day, and I had one from the taxidermist in California for me to call him. My antlers had been located in a shipment to a school in South Carolina. Incredible! The rest is anticlimactic, but you can bet I went personally to the shipping company to pick them up.

The mount looks great on the wall, but next to it very soon will be a framed letter from a man I never met and a faded picture of a man I could never forget; reminding me that the best trophies truly are those of the mind and heart. ■

Lifetime Associate Richard H. Manly recalls the journey his trophy took after his hunt in Humboldt County, California, when he took his Roosevelt's Elk, scoring 307-3/8 points.



This column is dedicated to those trophies that catch our eye as they come across the records desk at Boone and Crockett Club's headquarters. Some score high, some are downright entertaining, and many are just unique.

Montana Bighorn by Justin E. Spring

For this column I usually don't get to meet the hunters face to face. The details of their hunts are usually emailed and I write their stories. But in many cases, the hunters themselves write the stories, which are reprinted in this column. Such was not the case with Hunter J. Monroe and his 181-7/8 Montana bighorn ram, however.

The first I heard of this great sheep was when his dad, Charlie Monroe, called me to ask when I could score his son's ram. He was so proud of his son's accomplishment and wanted him to come down to the national headquarters to have it scored. Generally, we require the hunter to drop off a trophy, which we score as time permits, but his dad's excitement was enough for me to agree to score it on a Friday afternoon when the two would make the two-hour drive to Missoula.

I lay the tape on the horns, and their excitement was contagious as they followed along with their unofficial score chart. I asked Hunter what he remembered most about his experience. Like most 18 year olds, he was quite calm as he relayed the details to me and watched while I carefully measured the longer horn at 40 inches. The excitement was building, and details of the hunt began spilling out.

Seven days scouting showed the rams in this Lincoln County hunt area were obviously well away from accessibility on foot as the season began. But 20 years previous, Hunter's dad had drawn the same permit, so they pounded on, driven by both Charlie's experience and the desire to see his son take a world-class trophy. Camping and hiking the first four days of the season, they saw only young rams and ewes. The rest of the season much of the same continued in terms of seeing rams, but just nothing that Hunter felt was worthy of his tag just yet.

While he never said so, I got the feeling that his dad had set the mark to beat and hunter was determined. Finally, on November 14th the bigger rams began to show up in accessible areas. They had befriended a hunter named Damon who had been the lucky tag holder two years prior and who had offered to hunt with them. The trio was glassing a far ridge when Hunter thought he had spotted a sheep. A confirming look through the spotting scope told them this ram was worth a hike. They estimated him to be in the 185- to 190-class range and finally it appeared as if Hunter's criteria had been met.

Midway up the ascent they came across a ewe that had them pinned. The group froze and watched as six ewes appeared—followed closely by a fine ram. As they stood watching this trophy, Hunter's dad told him, "Shoot that ram!" Hunter found the shoulder and pulled the trigger only to be met with the gut-wrenching sound of "click." He quickly chambered the next round and this time the roar of the rifle echoed off the mountain.



Hunter J. Monroe, and his father Charlie, pose with Hunter's bighorn sheep. His ram, scoring 181-7/8 points, was taken on their 2011 hunt in Lincoln County, Montana.

Hunter sat, trying to collect himself as his dad quizzed him on how successful he felt his shot had been. Hunter was confident as one could be, as the gravity of taking a ram set in. As they worked down the hill to where the ram had stood, they realized he had disappeared over a 30-foot cliff, landed on a 9-inch ledge, then slid 300 yards down an avalanche chute. Hunter looked through a gap only wide enough for the ram's body, and there at the bottom lay his 181-7/8 ram.

The green score of the ram was around 184, and there was a tinge of disappointment that his official score wasn't quite as he had expected. But through the encouragement of his dad and a few approving words from my wife Becca, who is also a B&C Official Measurer, I am sure Hunter realized that the magnitude of this accomplishment was far beyond the score. He and his father have the memories of a trying season culminating in the form of a world-class trophy. ■

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