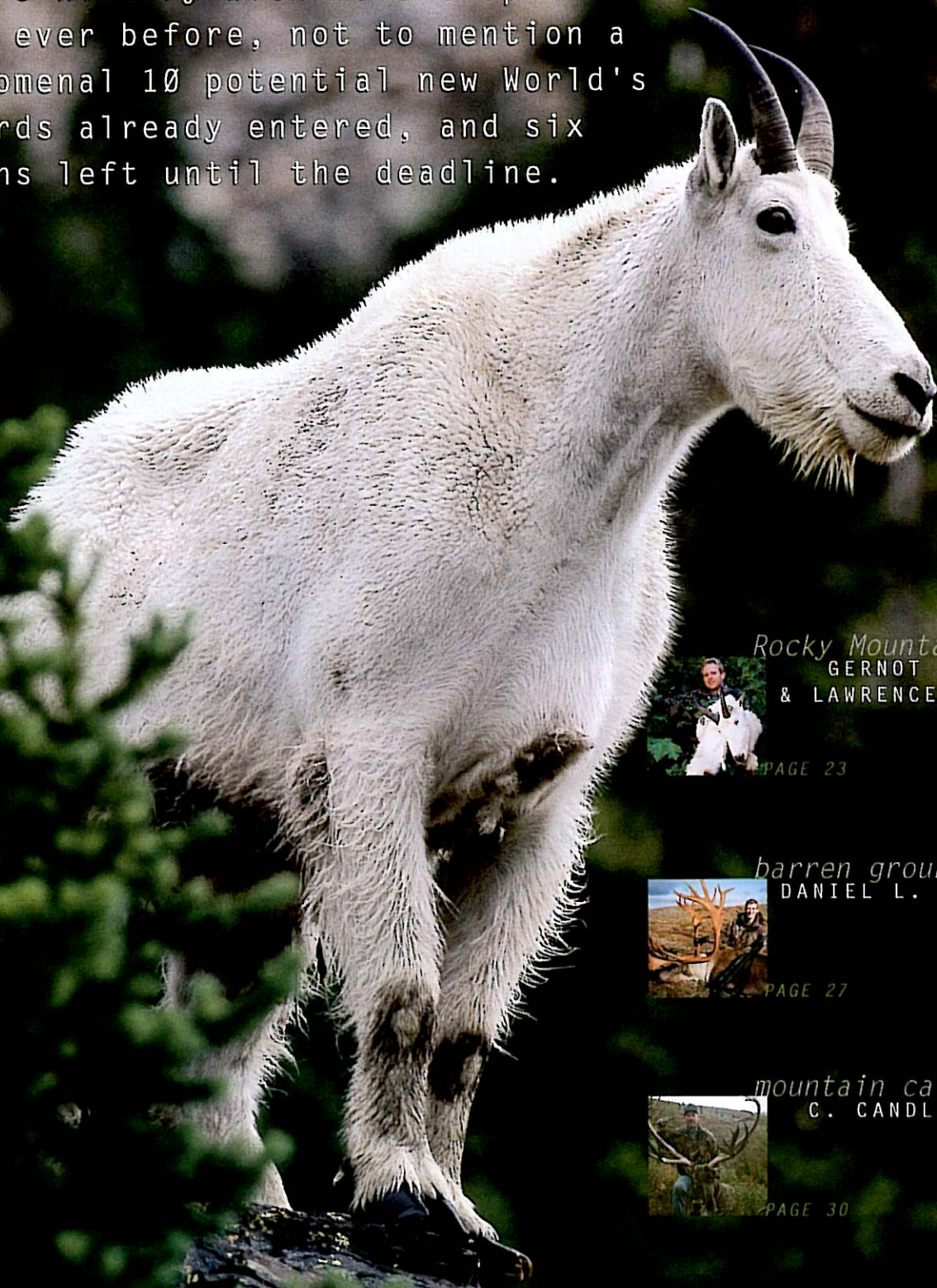


Potential New World's Records

The 24th Awards Period is shaping up to be one of the greatest in the Club's history with more trophies than ever before, not to mention a phenomenal 10 potential new World's Records already entered, and six months left until the deadline.



Rocky Mountain goat
GERNOT WOBER
& LAWRENCE MICHALCHUK



PAGE 23

barren ground caribou
DANIEL L. DOBBS



PAGE 27

mountain caribou
C. CANDLER HUNT



PAGE 30

PHOTOGRAPH BY MICHAEL H. FRANCIS

A NEW WORLD'S RECORD GOAT HUNT

By Gernot Hober

IT ALL STARTED ON SEPTEMBER 4, 1999, when Lawrence Michalchuk needed to find a new goat hunting partner after his wife announced she could not accompany him. Lawrence and I have known each other for eight years and have spent many hours hunting and fishing with one another. I was not surprised to hear his voice on the other end of the phone. "Can you leave tomorrow?" he asked me.

Work was not a problem—I had been unable to find work as a mining exploration geologist for almost six months. But how was my relatively new girlfriend going to take the news that I was leaving that afternoon to go goat hunting? I put on my most loving attitude, drove to her shop at the ski resort, and mentioned my plans. Within the hour I phoned Lawrence to tell him I would arrive Sunday noon.

I drove nearly 500 miles from my home near Kamloops to reach Lawrence's home in Bella Coola, British Columbia. Not entirely prepared on such short notice, I borrowed longjohns, a backpack, thermarest, raingear, and fleece pants to round out my skinny supplies. We packed homemade granola bars, trail mix, and Mr. Noodles packages for food, as well as a tent, small stove, and our bow hunting gear. Dividing the load between us, we each had approximately 60 pounds of gear to haul up the trail. We planned to be away seven days at the most.

From the trailhead, we slogged our way uphill for eight wet hours, climbing approximately 5000 feet over five miles of trail. In retrospect, the only pleasant fact about the hike was that it was overcast and cool, and the view as we climbed out of the Bella Coola valley was spectacular. Low clouds draped themselves along the steep walls of the green valley and fog moved up and down the slopes as

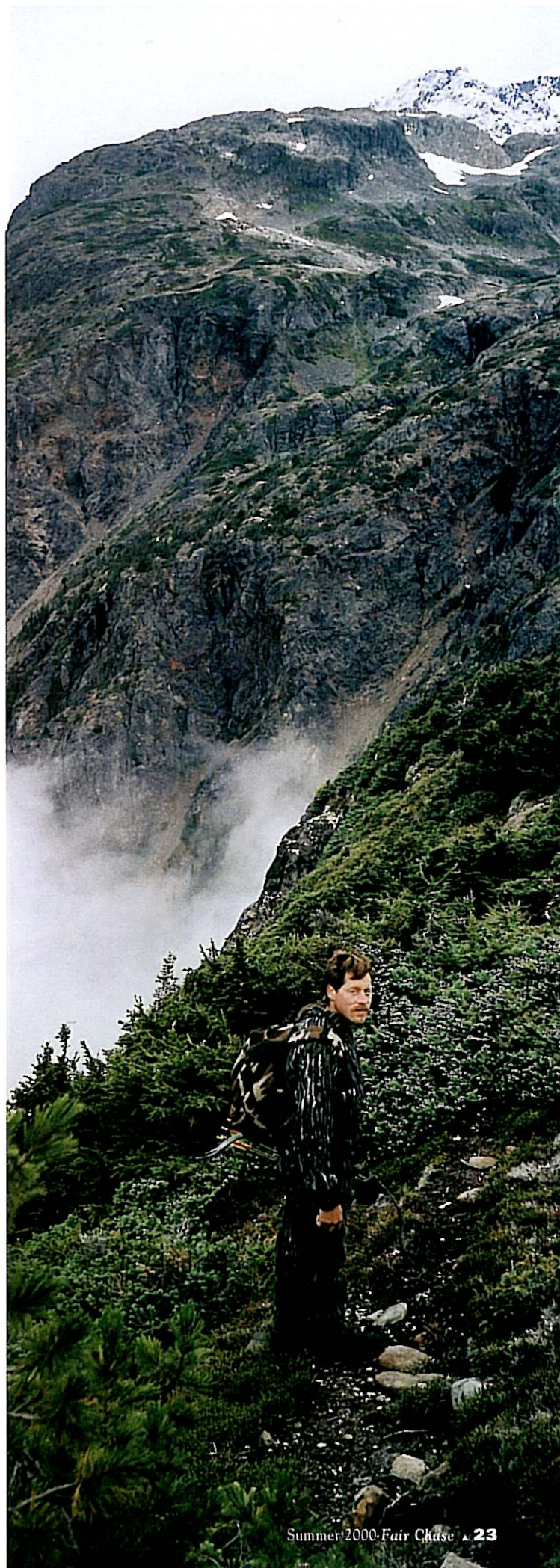
the wind changed.

The main Bella Coola valley, which is tucked into the Coast Mountains about 250 miles west of Williams Lake, boasts some of the most magnificent views in British Columbia. Lush green valley bottoms host great salmon rivers such as the Atnarko and Talchako, where grizzly bears roam freely. Rows of large mountain peaks line the main valley, rising from sea level to over 8000 snow-capped feet. Local blacktail deer and mule deer follow trails along valleys and steep mountain slopes. Recently, the cougar population has been increasing and wolves seem to be thriving as well.

Canadian heritage abounds as one hikes along the nearby Alexander Mackenzie Trail. Native petroglyphs can be visited along Thorsen Creek, and the rock where Alexander Mackenzie carved his name in granite in 1793 can be reached by boat on the Bentick Arm from Bella Coola harbor. Fishing charters on Bentick arm are popular as the local Snootli Creek federal fish hatchery, where Lawrence works, affords an excellent salmon return every year.

We pitched our tent in what seemed to be the only dry 10 square feet for miles around. Fall rains had saturated the ground and small lakes and ponds seemed to be everywhere. We were centrally located in an area that held Rocky Mountain goats, with only a few miles between the locations Lawrence wanted to check out. Lawrence had been up in this area hunting for goats numerous times and knew the terrain very well.

The author's hunting partner, Lawrence Michalchuk, standing on a goat trail along the edge of a plateau overlooking the Bella Coola Valley.





We had a few hours before dark so we pushed our weary legs a little farther, walked to the closest spot overlooking the Bella Coola valley, and started glassing for goats. Along the edge of this east-west trending valley, it is very precipitous, well-vegetated, and perfect habitat for goats. We eventually spotted what looked to be a lone goat and probably a billy. We walked a small ridge parallel to the one the goat was on until we were 150 yards away from him. Lawrence put the spotting scope on the goat and said that it looked fairly large and was probably worth pursuing.

We both backed away slowly, walked around to the top of the ridge and started down to get close to the goat. As we crept down small ledges without much cover, the goat spotted us and was staring directly at us from approximately 60 yards.

Lawrence motioned that he was going to climb back up the ledges with the hope that the goat would watch him and allow me to get closer for a shot with my bow. The ruse seemed to work as I got to within 40 yards

of the goat. I was directly above him with a steep downhill shot. As I made the shot, I saw the arrow sail directly for the goat and then deflect off a small tree just in front of him. I missed! The goat bounded down the rock walls into the steep gully.

Tuesday morning we debated whether we should go back after the same goat we had seen or try somewhere else. We decided to head north to a cirque in which Lawrence had seen lots of goat activity before. Two hours of fast walking found us along the edge of a very steep walled cirque from which we could glass a large valley. We spotted eight goats in pairs and singles on a number of different ridges and ledges well over a mile away. Several seemed quite large, although we were still too far away to be certain they were billys.

Unless we could get a lot closer, determining whether these

animals were billys would be impossible. Both sexes have black, well-polished horns; the nanny's horns are generally longer with narrow bases and a wide spread, while the billy's have larger bases and heavier overall circumference measurements. On average, body size is not a reliable indicator, either. Later that day, Lawrence made a stalk on a goat that appeared to be a billy until the very last instant. I watched him creep toward the goat, carefully trying to see over rises and rocks until he was within 10 yards of the animal. He took an arrow from his quiver, readied for the shot, and suddenly froze. I took a step forward and realized, as Lawrence had, that this was a very large nanny.

Lawrence and I are always amazed by the places we see these animals, even though we know that inaccessibility is their main form

of protection. Most predators cannot reach the incredibly sheer, steep areas where goats bed down and feed. With its superior eyesight a goat can usually spot an approaching predator, and when it feels

Knife edge ridge with the goat I missed numerous times with my bow following his escape route for the third time.

truly threatened, make a swift exit through an equally precipitous "escape route" that the goat knows well from years of living in the area. Their dazzling agility comes from specialized hooves that are the most perfect and versatile climbing equipment in existence. The cloven hooves have a soft central pad ideal for traction with a hard fingernail-like outer edge. The hard outer edge affords static grip on the tiniest bumps and ledges, and the forked toes help in loose or rotten rock.

By afternoon, we were a very long way from camp so we thought it best to head back the way we came. We stopped to see if some of the goats we had spotted earlier had moved into a more favorable position. Looking over the steep edge on our side of the valley, Lawrence noticed a goat standing in some thick brush approximately 50 feet

A NEW WORLD'S RECORD GOAT HUNT

up from the base of a cliff. As he looked through the scope, Lawrence said, "the bases of those horns are the biggest I've ever seen. Too bad we can't get to him from here." We watched the big goat for a while and then headed back towards camp. At the time, neither of us knew we had spotted a potential World's Record.

For the next two days we spotted and stalked numerous goats. I managed to deflect my arrows off more twigs and miss two shots on decent goats. At night as we cooked our meager dinners, all we could talk about was the large goat we had seen and the problems of accessing the area he was in. Lawrence was convinced that the goat was the largest he had ever seen in 16 years of hunting and I realized that thoughts of stalking it were consuming him. We discussed moving camp closer to the valley the goat was in but knew we couldn't climb down the cliffs at the headwall.

Friday morning brought a thick frost but also the promise of sun for the first time in four days. After we had dried out and were comfortable again, we started hiking back to the truck. Lawrence and I had discussed things the evening before and reached a consensus that we should go after the big goat. The only way to get to him was to head home, get rid of most of our gear to lighten our loads, and start the grueling hike up the valley from the bottom. We headed to Lawrence's place looking forward to a change of socks, a hot shower, and to eat something other than sweet granola bars and Mr. Noodles.

The next day, we thrashed up a sidehill full of slide alder and devils club for five hours to get up the new valley. Slide alder is nasty business. It grows sideways and upward 10 to 15 feet, and there is never a clearing through it—you simply climb on it or under it, often at the same time. Devil's club is aptly named for its toxic barbed needles that work their way into your skin until sufficient festering pops them out. I had dealt with these pesky bushes before during mineral exploration work, but at least I was getting paid for it then. As we had passed through a mature timber stand in the lower part of the val-

ley, we noticed grizzly bear claw marks high up on the trees and clumps of hair stuck in the sap. It made us a little nervous, and we hoped the bear was in the lower valley looking for fish.

We actually almost turned back twice when the terrain and vegetation had us asking each other just what the heck we were doing here (whose brilliant idea was this anyway?). I pushed on, encouraging Lawrence to follow, but I was soon at wit's end and very frustrated with the bushes. Next, it was Lawrence's turn to encourage me, pushing me to reach the next ridge. Finally, it appeared that the vegetation was giving way to rocky slide chutes, and we knew we were closer to our goal.

About noon, we were across the valley about a mile from the spot we had seen Mr. Big. At first we didn't see any activity but as we were eating our lunch, Lawrence whispered, "He's there!" We watched him in the spotting scope and were amazed once again at how obviously big the billy seemed. Another billy was about 500 yards up the valley from Mr. Big and we noticed that both goats had been watching our progress up the south slope for quite some time. The large billy was in exactly the same spot where we had seen him days before.

Lawrence had his bow and I had his .270 (I had given up on bowhunting.) We agreed that Lawrence would get the first shot with his bow and if he couldn't get a shot, I could try with his bow one more time or just shoot with the rifle. We dropped down to the valley creek where we cached our large packs next to some huge boulders at the base of a slide that acted as a good landmark. After crossing the creek, we climbed up the slide, staying hidden in the slide alder, then proceeded on our hands and knees for about an hour through tall wet grass and stinging nettles. About 100 yards from where we last saw the goat, we noticed numerous trails and tunnels through the grass where he had been feeding. The billy had a veritable grocery store to feed from with very little competition for the edible vegetation. As luck would have it, he had come down off his

perch and was feeding at the base of a cliff.

At this point Lawrence took the lead with his bow and we continued forward even slower, keeping a willow bush between the goat and us. We arrived at the base of the cliff and there was no sign of the billy! We stared at each other for a second, not wanting to admit that we had scared him off, then continued our stalk. Lawrence climbed up the cliff a little ways and then moved right, following some small ledges. I moved sideways and to the right, staying in the grassy talus so I could keep a larger area of the cliff in view.

Lawrence crossed above me to the right and started gesturing emphatically that the goat was right there in the thick bushes on the cliff! I couldn't see the billy yet so I scrambled up to where Lawrence was frantically pointing. I put the scope of the .270 up and sure enough the goat's vague outline at 70 yards away became slightly more distinct. I told Lawrence I had a shot, though it was chancy through a bush. Lawrence told me to keep the scope on the billy, and he was going to try and sneak around the other side and get a bow shot at him. I watched Lawrence "sneak" around to the other side and then he went out of sight. Both the goat and I heard the muffled scrapes and rockfall that Lawrence couldn't help but make on the steep terrain.

After about 25 minutes of trying not to pull the trigger anyway, I heard Lawrence yell, "just shoot him." Microseconds later the echo of the rifle shot was ringing through the valley and the goat dropped out of sight. All was silent. "Did you get him?" Lawrence shouted. "I think so," I replied, as I waited a minute longer to see if the goat was going to reappear for another shot.

As Lawrence climbed down from his perch, I crawled up on all fours to where I last saw the goat. The bed created by the goat was



huge. We could have pitched a tent on the platform created in the bushes. The billy had obviously made this home for quite some time. The view was spectacular, with a fairly unrestricted view of most of the valley. I glanced over the edge of the bed and spotted the white fur of the goat in bushes 10 feet below. I carefully scrambled down to him and poked him with the rifle to make sure he was dead.

I had not expected the body to be so large; the billy appeared to weigh between 350 and 400 pounds. The horns were bigger than anything I had seen in my short goat hunting experience. "Is it a small one?" Lawrence yelled from the base of the cliff. I knew he was being facetious—he knew it was a large billy, but just how big was the question. All I could reply was, "nope!"

Lawrence yelled back that he had just fallen 30 feet and didn't really feel like climbing up to where I was. "We've got to take the cape off up here so come on up," I shouted. By the time Lawrence scrambled his way up the cliff to where I was, I had tied a rope from a stunted spruce to the goat's head just to make sure we didn't lose it over the edge. "HOLY GOAT!" was all that Lawrence could say over and over again. "You don't know what you just shot!" was all the variation to the first theme that he could muster.

We took photos as best we could where the goat lay, as dragging the goat back up to his bed was impossible. We took the cape and the head off and let the body slip over the cliff. We clambered down the cliff to the goat's body and continued to roll the carcass all the way down to the creek in the valley bottom. We quickly deboned the hind-quarters and took out the back straps, packing as much as we could

carry. The blowflies found us right away and we had to fight to keep the eggs out of the meat. We carried the meat to our packs by the boulders and made camp under the overhang of the largest one. We started a fire and walked back to the goat carcass to pull off a rack of ribs and cut some steaks from the front end. Two hours later our socks were dry and we were feasting on what we knew was a very large goat.

Sunday morning we were well rested and ready for the long thrash back through the slide alder to get home. Five hours later, we made it

Gernot Wober
with his
potential new
World's Record
Rocky Mountain
goat taken in
the Bella Coola
area of British
Columbia. The
goat's entry
score is 57-2/8
points.

to the truck and were on our way to Lawrence's home. After unpacking, I skinned out the goat's head and we green scored the horns. Knowing that the horns would shrink a little with drying, we conservatively measured the horns rounding some of the measurements downward. After we added all the totals and took off the deductions we ended up with a score of 58 2/8".

The size of the billy we had just shot started sinking in after we realized that the goat might be in contention for the World's Record.

After the compulsory 60-day drying period, an official measurer for the Boone and Crockett Club measured the horns. With an entry score of 57 2/8", the goat is 4/8 of a point larger than the current World's Record Rocky Mountain goat taken in 1949 in the Babine Mountains of British Columbia. What is intriguing is that the left horn had 1 1/8" broken off from the tip and would have scored a total of 58 3/8" had it remained symmetrical. The next step is for the goat to be measured by the Judges Panel at the 24th Awards Program in the spring of 2001. Lawrence and I will anxiously await their final decision. And by the way, my girlfriend and I are doing fine. ▲▲▲

Potential New World's Records

BEAR DETERMINATION FOR A POTENTIAL WORLD'S RECORD BARREN GROUND CARIBOU

By Daniel L. Dobbs
and B&C Staff

DAN DOBBS' ONLY DESIRE was to take ten-foot bear. But in the end, he had so much more—a potential new World's Record barren ground caribou to be exact. You see, Dan had been dreaming of shooting a really big bear nearly all his life. He had already set aside a place in his trophy room at home for the mount. He hadn't thought much about caribou until he signed up for an Alaska brown bear hunt that included barren ground caribou.

Dan is an independent timber consultant, an occupation that takes him into the woods on a regular basis to assess the value of growing hardwood trees for landowners who want to sell them. Most of the time, he hunts local whitetails, so the bear hunt was a big undertaking for him. For years, Dan saved for this trip. In 1998, he began calling outfitters who advertised bear hunts in magazines. Dan talked to 30 to 40 outfitters about the location and logistics of the hunt. He then called 30 or 40 references that were given to him by the outfitters.

When outfitter Chris Goll sent Dan a video of one of his client's adventures, Dan was convinced this was the area he wanted to hunt. It was a short fishing video, but the quantity and size of the brown

bears in the background was very impressive. When he called to sign up, Chris Goll offered him a bear hunt in combination with barren ground caribou. The truth is, barren ground caribou held no fascination for Dan, but the combination hunt was his only choice.

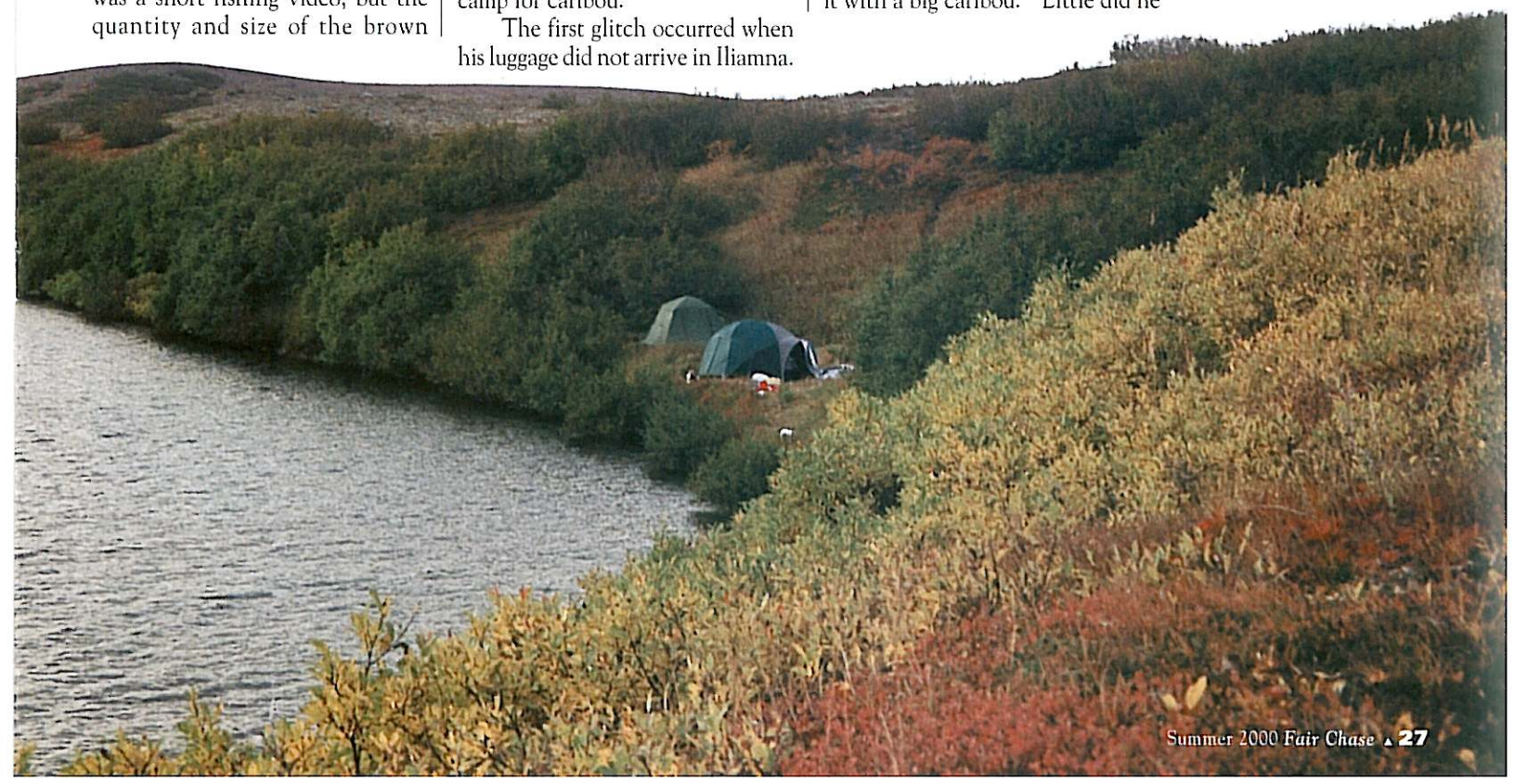
On September 16, 1999, Dan was full of anticipation and just a little bit nervous. This would be the second time he had flown on an airplane, and it was a very long flight from his home in West Virginia to Alaska. With a connection through Anchorage, Dan flew to Iliamna Lake, which is on the Alaska Peninsula. From there, he flew in a Beaver floatplane to Rainbow River Lodge to meet Chris Goll and the guide, get organized, and fly to bear camp. Dan's goal was to be hunting on September 18th, the opening day of bear season in Alaska. After the bear hunt, Dan would fly to another camp for caribou.

The first glitch occurred when his luggage did not arrive in Iliamna.

Apparently, this happens all the time due to the number of fishermen and hunters coming to the area and the huge amount of gear that the commercial airlines handle. Fortunately, his luggage showed up the next day, but high winds prevented him from flying to spike camp.

Dan harvested a lovely bear the next day. He was happy about it, even though it was not the enormous animal he had hoped for. Dan told himself that the hunt was not over, and he vowed to "make up for it with a big caribou." Little did he

The author and assistant guide Mark Freshwaters flew in to a small lake and set up a comfortable spike camp.



know what the future had in store for him.

Dan began to focus on his next challenge: harvesting a barren ground caribou. Barren ground caribou are one of several varieties of caribou in North America (the others are mountain, woodland, Central Canada barren ground, and Quebec-Labrador). Although they are all the same species, caribou have been subdivided into five trophy categories due to differences in size and antler configuration. Barren ground caribou have the largest and finest antlers. The main beams are long and rounded with very long top points. Barren ground caribou also have the highest all-time records book minimum entry score of 400 points.

Dan would be hunting animals from the Alaska Peninsula North herd, which had a population of close to 10,000 in 1998. This herd is probably an offshoot of the huge Mulchatna herd located directly to the north, which is the largest herd in Alaska (220,000 animals in 1998). Dan and assistant guide Mark Freshwaters travelled by floatplane for about 45 minutes to a small lake and set up a comfortable spike camp. Dan noticed fire pits and other signs of previous use. Mark, who relies solely on stoves, said the fire pits were probably from self-guided hunters; for guided hunts, you must hire a guide provided by the outfitter who manages the concession.

Barren ground caribou camps are chosen for their proximity to traditional migration corridors. To ensure a successful hunt, a hunter must carefully study these corridors and the timing of the migration. This is "intercept" hunting, and you have to be at the right place at the right time. In the summer, caribou are high in the mountains where it is cool and insect-free. In September, as the rut begins and the weather turns cold, the caribou move down from the mountains, in large and small groups, following well-worn trails to winter ranges along the coast. By mid-November, the rut is over and the larger bulls begin to shed their antlers. The younger males retain their antlers through the winter, as do the fe-

males. Females carry thin, short antlers of less than 15 points, which they use in winter to dig through the snow to reach lichens, their primary food source.

In addition to migration, there are other factors that can make it hard to get a shot at a good bull. Caribou evade predators (mainly wolves) by using speed and endurance, "clumping" together and leaving vast amounts of space empty, and using sudden, unpredictable shifts in position. They meander at a pace faster than any man can run for a sustained distance, and therefore trying to get in range by following a large bull is hopeless. Even rivers don't slow them down—the hollow hair of their coats makes them float like corks and their wide hooves function as paddles.

On the other hand, caribou are not very smart and curious to a fault. A caribou's eyes are as poor as a grizzly bear's, and when they see something, their curiosity often leads them closer so they can smell it. If they are spooked by the way it smells, they run off in a panic, then quickly forget what it was that spooked them, and often return for further investigation.

This type of "intercept" hunting has been described as feast or famine. For Dan and Mark, so far it had been famine. There were no caribou on the move. In fact, the only caribou that Dan had seen in the past several days were the 20 or so animals that were grazing near the campsite when the floatplane landed. The weather, which was very cold and windy, only added discomfort to Dan's disappointment.

After a couple of days, a few caribou finally began moving down from the mountains and into a draw 8 to 10 miles away from them. The two men saw some small bulls Dan could shoot, but he was trying not to settle for another average animal.

The morning of the fourth day, Dan walked about a mile from camp to the top of a hill they had been

using as a vantage point. From there, they had a good view of the draw and the broad valley where the caribou were traveling. After Mark finished washing the breakfast dishes, he joined Dan on the top of the hill. They saw quite a few caribou coming through the draw, and decided to hike another three-quarters of a mile to get a closer look.

After a few minutes of glassing, Mark cried, "there is your caribou!" The bull he spotted was a little less than a mile away. Dan studied the caribou through his binoculars. The rack was unbelievable! Dan was a little mesmerized by the sight of him. A caribou bull, many would agree, is one of the most strikingly beautiful of all American game animals.

**Daniel L. Dobbs
with his
potential new
World's Record
barren ground
caribou. The
bull scores
481-3/8 points.**

Outdoor writer Jack O'Connor in his book *The Art of Big Game Hunting in North America* (1967) may have described them best:

In the fall just before the rut their gray-brown bodies gleam as sleek as the hide of a seal,

their powerful white necks shine in the sun, and their fantastic, palmated, many-pointed antlers rise above beautifully moulded heads with long, handsome faces, and flaring nostrils. When they are frightened, they raise their little white tails and go off with a high, springing trot so graceful as to make the gait of the finest horse seem lumpish and clumsy.

There was no time for further glassing. Given the direction the bull was headed, Dan would not be able to get close enough for a shot from where they were. Mark quickly assessed the situation. In order to get a shot, the men needed to go back to where they began—on top of the hill three-quarters of a mile away. "We have to hurry," Mark warned, "or we will lose him. He's moving very fast." The two men left their packs on the ground, and ran as fast as they could back to the hill where they started. They stayed on the backside of a ridge for cover, hoping that the caribou would not see them or

change his angular course toward the hill.

It was a very demanding three-quarters of a mile sprint for Dan. Dan tried to protect his .338-378 Weatherby Magnum. It was brand new, and Dan knew it had enough punch to do the job. The rifle had a new scope, a Zeiss 3-12 x 56mm with an illuminated reticle. He tried hard to catch his breath and stay upright in the soft, wet, lumpy tundra. Dan and Mark scrambled up the hill, and dropped to the ground just moments before the bull arrived. The bull was following a ravine, and they could see the tips of his antlers just above the hill's crest. As he moved out of the ravine, more and more of the rack became visible. Dan's excitement mounted. He was very close to the large bull, but the animal couldn't see him. This time, there was no confusion about the size of this incredible animal.

At 90 yards, the bull stepped into full view. Dan squeezed the trigger and hit him in the shoulder. The bull continued to move in a circle, so Dan shot again. This time the bull dropped, and the two men were ecstatic. The rack was not very wide,

but it seemed to have everything else going for it. "This caribou will make the Boone and Crockett records book," Mark announced as the men admired the magnificent animal. "No way!" Dan responded, silently hoping Mark really knew what he was talking about.

As Mark went back to retrieve the day packs, Dan returned to camp to get his camcorder and a backpack to carry the meat. They enjoyed taking pictures and videos of the big bull, and ate lunch while they talked about the stalk. As they began caping and deboning, a couple of bears started moving toward the men. Dan took the precaution of moving the antlers and cape about 75 yards uphill from the carcass before making the first trip back to camp. As anticipated, the bears were on the caribou carcass when Dan and Mark returned for the prize antlers.

After Dan returned home and the antlers had air dried for 60 days, an official measurer for the Boone and Crockett Club gave the caribou an entry score of 481-3/8 points. This score exceeds the score of the current World's Record barren ground caribou, taken in 1987, by

BEAR DETERMINATION FOR A POTENTIAL WORLD'S RECORD BARREN GROUND CARIBOU

16-2/8 points. Dan won't find out whether it is a new World's Record barren ground caribou until the spring of 2001 when a Judges Panel convenes at the 24th Awards Program and re-measures the rack.

The Judges Panel consists of more than a dozen official measurers of the Club, who are chosen for their technical ability and extensive scoring experience. The judges are divided into teams of two, and each team is assigned a variety of trophies to measure. In the upcoming Awards Program, the judges will be re-scoring around 100 trophies in 34 categories. (To date, there are 3,155 entries in the Awards Program but the Judges Panel only re-scores the top few trophies in each category). Each of the selected trophies is measured by two different teams to ensure that the final score is accurate and consistent with the Club's scoring procedures. It is a system that has worked well for many, many years. ▲▲▲



Potential New World's Records

ALL SHEEP HUNTS SHOULD END LIKE THIS!

THE STORY OF CANDLER HUNT'S POTENTIAL NEW WORLD'S RECORD MOUNTAIN CARIBOU

As told to B&C Staff

WHEN CANDLER HUNT made the decision to hunt Dall's sheep in the Yukon Territory, he had no intention of hunting mountain caribou. Although earlier in his career he had hunted elk, bear, and whitetail, sheep hunting was now his only passion. Candler had no idea that this sheep hunt would bring him a potential new World's Record mountain caribou. But that's just the way things turned out.

Candler's sheep hunt in September of 1998 had been a wonderful experience. At home in Madison, Georgia, Candler had spent countless hours researching and checking references of outfitters. He had chosen to hunt with outfitter Tim Mervin in an area northwest of Whitehorse. For days now, Candler and his 24-year old guide, Jake Gunson, had been riding, walking, and glassing. Candler took his Dall's sheep on the fourth day of hunting.

It was a nice Dall's sheep, and Candler was thrilled to add it to his collection. As far as he was concerned, this hunt was over. Candler had harvested the animal he wanted. Jake asked Candler whether he wanted to hunt mountain caribou on the way back to the airstrip. "Caribou really don't turn me on," admitted Candler, "but I'm having so much fun, I'll give it a try." The weather had been very pleasant. Temperatures had been in the 50s and 60s during the day, and down in the 20s at night. It was beautiful country—low mountains scattered with rocks and moss. Although they were above treeline, the altitude was

less than 5,000 feet and it wasn't hard to acclimate. Besides, Candler had paid for a mountain caribou. The only Dall's sheep hunt Tim Mervin had offered him was a combination hunt.

The following day, Candler, Jake, and a young wrangler named Bradley Malfair, rested in sheep camp. While Jake was working on the sheep cape, a young bull caribou passed near the camp, but other than that lone animal, the three men did not see or hear any caribou. For the next two days, Candler, Jake, and Bradley looked for caribou, moving down slightly in elevation and in the general direction of the landing strip where a Cessna 206 had dropped them off a week earlier. In two days, they saw only a few cows and calves.

The men were looking for mountain caribou, one of four varieties of caribou in North America. Mountain caribou are the largest and heaviest animals, and are considered a variety of woodland caribou. They are found in the southern Yukon Territory where Candler was hunting, as well as British Columbia, Alberta, and the Mackenzie Mountains of Northwest Territories.

Unlike barren ground caribou that lead a migratory existence in herds, mountain caribou lead a more solitary and sedentary way of life. Valerius Geist, noted author and wildlife biologist, suggests that their physical characteristics reflect their lifestyle: sedentary life reduces activity and leads to larger body size. Mountain caribou spend more time fighting and protecting harems than do the barren ground variety, who are too busy running through the herd after females to fight as much. Mountain caribou have adapted by developing antlers with flat, broad, short beams that are better for fighting because they protect the head.

Although most people think of caribou as inhabiting open, gently rolling barrens, mountain caribou are found in high mountains, often at the same altitude as sheep. Caribou cannot handle the rocks the way a sheep can, but they are surprisingly adept at traveling in rough country for an animal so large and heavy.

In stalking mountain caribou, the hunter usually glasses the animals at a distance, then moves toward the animal, traveling upwind. Caribou have an excellent sense of smell (and poor vision). Mountain caribou do not migrate in herds, so a hunter need not try to intercept a migration corridor when the animals are on the move. Instead, mountain caribou ought to be dispersed throughout their range, as long as the temperatures stay cool and there is plenty of lichen on which to feed.

The next morning, Candler's hunting was cut short by a thunderstorm that forced them back into camp for the rest of the day. The storm broke up by early evening. After eating an early dinner, the three men rode to a high point from which they could glass the area. "I think I see a caribou about a mile away, across the valley and on top of that far ridge," Bradley said. As he continued peering through his binoculars, Bradley changed his mind. "No . . . I'm sorry, it's a moose." Candler and Jake had seen sign of moose, and decided to get a better look. They put a spotting scope on the animal, and immediately determined this was a big caribou. Candler and Jake mounted their horses, leaving Bradley on the top of the ridge to tell them, with hand signals, if the bull started to move.

It took about 45 minutes of riding to cross the broad valley. It was tough going through dense pine and willows, and they had to cross a sizeable creek, which only added to the difficulty of the thick cover. At the base of the ridge, they tethered the horses, and quietly hiked up the ridge. As they neared the top, they saw the bull. He was about 300 yards

away, almost in the exact spot they had hoped to find him. The animal was facing them, calmly grazing, and totally unaware of their presence.

Candler and Jake had little cover, so they stayed on their bellies, crawling a few more yards to get as close as they could without spooking the bull. Candler placed the animal in the cross hairs of his Ruger Model 77 featherweight .270, hoping that the animal would move into position for a side shot. "Don't look at the antlers," cautioned Jake, "and stay calm." Jake's advice was well taken. This bull was much bigger than anything they had anticipated, and Candler was having a hard time controlling his excitement. Even though Candler and Jake had little experience with caribou, they knew the rack on this bull was magnificent.

The wait was agonizing. But finally, after five minutes or so—

which felt like an hour to Candler—the bull moved and presented Candler with a side shot. Candler slowly squeezed the trigger for a 300-yard shot. The shot was good, but it was not enough to drop the big animal instantly. He fired two more shots before the bull went down for good.

Candler and Jake had plenty of practice scoring sheep, but it was no help in field measuring this bull. They tried scoring the caribou a few times, and kept coming up with a rough score of 400. They knew this was not accurate. Even expert measurers agree that scoring a big cari-

bou rack is extremely difficult unless one does it on a regular basis. Caribou require 31 separate measurements, not including deductions. There are precise rules to be followed, and many pitfalls that can lead to inaccurate scores (see "Trophy Talk" from the Spring 2000 issue of *Fair Chase*).

"I think he's too big for a shoulder mount," Jake concluded. "For something this big," Candler added, "there's no room in my house

for even a head mount! Let's just take the meat and antlers."

After the antlers had air dried for 60 days, an official measurer for the Boone and Crockett Club measured Candler's mountain caribou. It was given an entry score of 453 - 4/8, which places it ahead of the current World's Record taken in 1976 by 1 - 4/8 points.

Whether this amazing trophy will be the new World's Record mountain caribou is still unknown. Before a final decision is reached, the trophy must be measured again by a Judges Panel in the spring of 2001 at the 24th Awards Program. This means that Candler's mountain caribou, along with 100 other top entries in the 24th Awards Program, will be judged independently by two teams of two measurers each, chosen by the Club for their expertise and extensive experience scoring big game trophies. Next spring, Candler will know if he shot a new World's Record mountain caribou.

Not a bad deal for a guy who only wanted a Dall's sheep. ▲▲▲

The author and his guide spotted this mountain caribou from the top of a ridge. The bull scores 453-4/8 points.

