

DOUBLE HEADER

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Reading stories like this one has been an important part of my hunt planning. For me, the planning creates the anticipation that builds as the hunt approaches. In this case I had double the anticipation since my first trip to the Bonnet Plume country in 1992 turned into more of a survival experience than a hunt. The weather was the coldest and snowiest in fifty years. The small lake we landed on next to our spike camp froze and we had to depart two days prematurely in order to take the packstring back to base camp in time for the Otter flight out.



That experience convinced me that my original research on the outfitter and his territory was correct. Chris Widrig manages his exclusive territory for the long term. He limits the number of animals harvested to a level that can be supported indefinitely. He shifts his moose hunts into a different drainage each year or longer depending on the number of mature animals observed. Although we didn't harvest any animals on the first trip, we saw enough to know that with reasonable weather conditions we would have a good chance of taking trophy Alaska-Yukon moose and barren ground caribou.

When departing camp in 1992 I booked a 1994 hunt with Chris for the same time period, September 6 to 18. I prefer hunting the animals after they are out of the velvet and the second two weeks of September normally is good weather in the North country.

My hunting partner from 1992, John Winsor, couldn't join me in 1994 so I started looking for another hunter. In the summer of 1993 I attended my niece's wedding and bumped into a friend, Rich Brewer, who has also hunted much of North America. He immediately asked where I would recommend he take his son for a hunt, as a graduation present. We quickly made a deal for the two to join me in the Yukon. Rich would accompany his son Chris who would be the hunter.

We drove my motor home to Whitehorse, and were then flown to Bonnet Plume Lake on a three hour

Otter flight. During the flight I found myself thinking of John Jobson, the well known outdoor writer of the 60's and 70's. I read all of his articles when I was developing the urge to big game hunt. John described the Bonnet Plume country as the absolutely best of the North. The animals it harbors and the remoteness are unparalleled. There are still no roads within 100 miles of Chris' base camp. One day when a bush plane flew over, I suddenly realized how remote it really is. It is in the north Yukon and the streams run ultimately into the Arctic Ocean. Much debate is occurring about the use of planes and helicopters in the designated wilderness in the US. Some maintain that the wilderness experience is ruined by the sight and sound of a plane. In my case it served to remind me how alone we were and actually enhanced the experience.

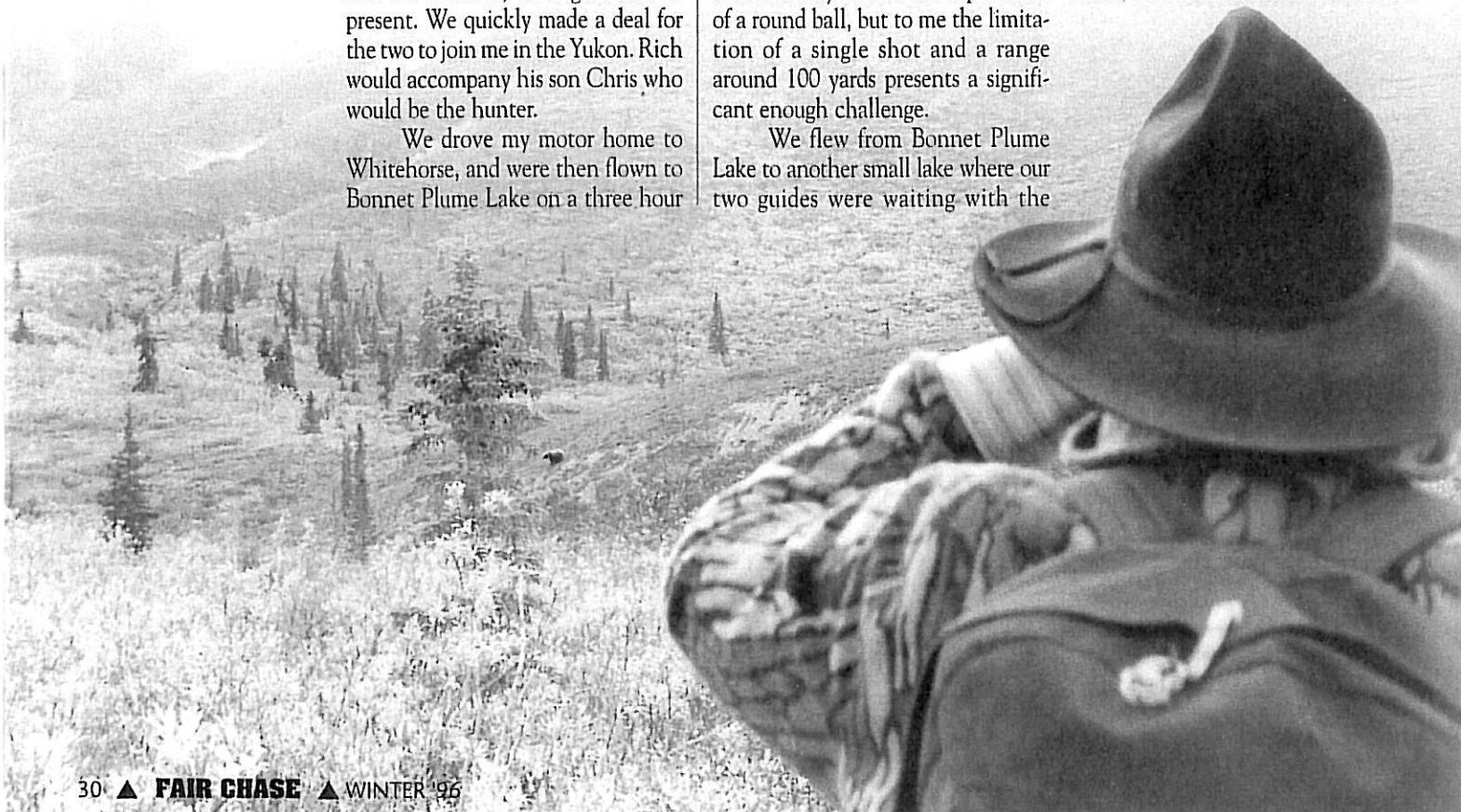
In spite of some cold weather problems with my muzzleloader in 1992, I intended to hunt with it again. I made the commitment by not bringing another gun, just spare parts for the muzzleloader. I use a .54 caliber Knight with peep sights. Some argue that an in-line ignition and other features are not really primitive. I admire those that hunt with a flintlock and stay within the capabilities of a round ball, but to me the limitation of a single shot and a range around 100 yards presents a significant enough challenge.

We flew from Bonnet Plume Lake to another small lake where our two guides were waiting with the

horses. My guide was Stacey Keeler from British Columbia. He had guided in B.C. for six years and this was his second year in the Yukon. Chris' guide was Jamis Lightfoot from Whitehorse who was also guiding his second year in the Yukon. The spike camp was only 30 minutes from the lake in a beautiful spot next to a stream supposedly full of grayling. Perhaps the ice freezing in the pole guides kept me from giving it a fair chance but I didn't catch any. There were a lot of tall willows but no serious timber so we didn't have much of a windbreak. The second day it turned cold and snowed. I had visions of another fight for survival but the weather gradually improved and when we moved into the timber after the moose hunting we were quite comfortable.

When hunting, we separated to look for moose. We considered moose as our highest priority since the guides were confident we could locate caribou later. When Stacey and I saw the first moose they were several miles up the valley. We could see five bulls and two cows scattered over a fairly small area. As we were watching them, we spotted Chris making a stalk. Suddenly the moose lined out, heading up and out of the valley. We figured out, when comparing notes later, that the cows winded Chris. He

JERRY'S GUIDE, STACEY, SPOTS A GRIZZLY BEAR WHILE GLASSING FOR MOOSE.



hadn't seen them, and also two of the bulls were hidden from his view.

We feared that the moose had left the area but eventually Jamis located one of the large bulls which Chris took with his 7mm. He had a 65" spread and very well developed palms. Meanwhile, Stacey and I saw two small groups of caribou and a dandy grizzly. We passed on a respectable caribou, expecting to find a larger animal later and not wanting to delay the moose hunting.

We spent a day helping pack out Chris' moose. I was impressed with how conscientiously the guides boned out all the meat, including the neck and ribs. The meat not used in camp or taken home by the hunters is given to the natives in Mayo where it is welcomed.

Knowing that there was at least one more large moose in the upper valley, Stacey and I returned to the area and spent into early afternoon glassing the hillsides. The willows make very effective cover for a bedded moose. Only persistence and Stacey's sharp eyesight allowed us to locate the antlers protruding through the willows. Stacey judged him to be very good and well worth going after, especially with a muzzleloader. The stalk was pretty straight forward. Once we left the horses in the valley bottom we lost sight of the animal and had to zero in on a pine that we knew was above him. When we broke out of the willows we were well above him and a little over one hundred yards away. I secretly hoped to find a moose larger than the Canada moose that I took in 1966. He had a 62" spread and scored 204-2/8 points. It seemed unrealistic so I hadn't mentioned it to Stacey. The willows were preventing an open shot when I knelt so we kept edging closer. At about 80 yards, we deliberately made enough noise to get him to stand up. From that point things happened quickly and we will never know for sure which shot did what. My first shot didn't seem to have much effect so I frantically reloaded and shot again. I remember a distinct "thunk" and am certain that shot was a good hit. The moose then seemed to panic and headed out at a full gallop. I managed another shot but at well over 150 yards. He then disappeared

over the ridge headed up the valley. My emotions moved from great excitement to deep disappointment. I started to berate myself when I realized that I needed to get moving. Jogging in knee high willows on a steep mountainside is for the young and foolish. I qualified for the foolish part. After about a half mile, I could see into the valley and expected to see the moose moving out in the distance. While I searched the area ahead, my eye



caught some white, about 125 yards below me. The bull was lying down but there was a slight movement of his antlers. I reloaded again, and placed a shot just behind his front leg. To my consternation, he promptly stood up. However, he was obviously in distress, and one last shot put him down for good. When we cleaned him we were able to determine that four of the five shots were in the chest area and two had penetrated to where they stopped just under the hide on the opposite side from the entry. Most likely one of the first two shots would have been fatal but I believe that once the animal is hit, you shoot until he is clearly dead.

You forget what an enormous animal a mature bull moose is until you get close. My emotions were a mixture of, relief that I hadn't let a wounded animal escape, sadness that comes with the end of a life, and elation at the size of the antlers. Many question the morality of what I had just done. Even though I understand the question, something inside says it is a part of our world that has always been there and should continue.



TOP: CHRIS BREWER WITH HIS ALASKA-YUKON MOOSE THAT SCORES 224-5/8 POINTS.

LEFT: THE AUTHOR, JERRY E. MASON WITH HIS RECORD BOOK MOOSE THAT SCORES 224-5/8 POINTS AS WELL. BOTH MOOSE SCORED HIGH ENOUGH TO MAKE THE ALL-TIME RECORDS BOOK.

My concern lies with harvesting animals to the point that we disturb the genetic makeup and age diversity that maintains a robust population that is able to deal with the rigors of weather, predators, and disease.

The balance of the time was spent packing meat, caping heads, moving camp and looking for a big barren ground caribou. We saw some nice caribou but gambled on hunting the animals we would see enroute to Bonnet Plume Lake. The weather genies defied us and produced an all day snowstorm that plagued us all the way back. We were happy to get to base camp for a late dinner and a dry bed in a warm cabin.

Since my moose had a 63" spread the Brewer's were a little embarrassed at taking a bigger trophy than the old man of the mountain. As luck would have it the final score was 224-5/8 points — for both moose. We both made the Boone and Crockett all time minimum of 224. The old man's moose is the new world record for muzzleloader as listed by The Longhunter Society.