

Twice to ALASKA

Decades have passed, but this hunter's Alaskan experiences aren't far from his mind.

By Helmut Dschulnigg
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After my first hunt in the Wrangell Mountains in 1966, returning to Alaska became almost an obsession. Six years later, I satisfied my yearning by planning a hunt on the Alaskan Peninsula. Hunting was a little more relaxed in those days in terms of regulations — on my Lufthansa flight, my rifle was stored in the flight attendants' coat closet! But some things never change with time — the excitement of being in the field and seeing the magnificent game animals that inhabit the unforgettably scenic state of Alaska.

The spread of this Alaska-Yukon moose rack was 73 inches, and weighed 90 pounds.

Due to friendships with several U.S. military officers, my 1966 hunt was organized by Ray Bulger, a colonel in the U.S. Air Force stationed in Anchorage. He had everything well organized, and the food and other camp necessities came from a supply depot of the U.S. Air Force. We flew deep into the wilderness of the Wrangells. When the pilot dropped us off, I was a little nervous — the pilot was the only person who knew where we actually were, and we had no radio communication.

Over the next two days, as we became familiar with the area, I shot a grizzly with a beautiful cape. We spotted a good moose, but he was on the opposite side of a small river that made retrieval impossible. On the third day we climbed the steep slopes of the Wrangells, where we soon spotted three rams. We continued our climb, and after three hours had almost reached them.

Bulger and I crawled the last few yards to the ridge, where we spotted the three rams 150 yards below us on a steep slope. We got ready to fire, but first agreed which ram was to be shot by Bulger and which by me.

Suddenly I heard a detonation behind me. Bulger, nervous, had fired.

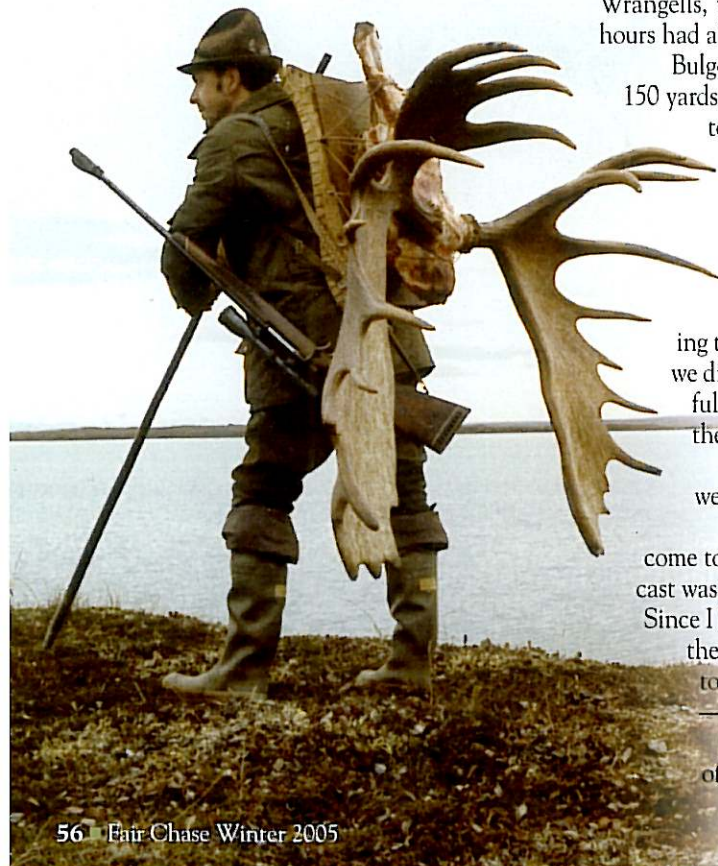
There were two more shots. The rams bolted and ran toward us. They obviously didn't know where the shots had come from. Fortunately, I had stayed calm and took a shot at my ram. The ram dropped in his tracks. Even with a bit of a circus, we both now had two beautiful rams down.

After completing the exhausting task of caping the rams and retrieving the meat, heads, and capes, we stalked a bit for a good moose to shoot. Although we did not locate a single moose, I spotted a large black bear. The animal was beautiful — not black, but sort of reddish-blond. Although the shot was difficult because the surrounding bushes were high, I used my hunting stick as a rest.

We let some time pass before we approached the motionless animal. Once we got closer, we discovered that it was an old, almost toothless, female.

Early the next morning we heard the sound of a Super Cub. The pilot had come to look for us several days earlier than we had planned because the weather forecast was bad. When we reached Anchorage, I met, by lucky coincidence, a pilot I knew. Since I had five days left before my next hunt, (a meat hunt with Bulger and six friends), the pilot was willing to fly me into moose country. There was no area to land, so he took me to a lodge at Lake Clark. I soon realized there was no reason to stay there — according to the local guides, no moose were moving in this area.

It was already dark when a pilot happened to stop by the lodge for a cup of coffee. Soon we struck up a conversation. He offered to fly me the next day to



an area where, he said, he knew "there were some big moose." So the next morning, I went off in his old plane, feeling lighter by the dollars that I had already left behind. After an hour or so, I saw three moose standing in a little lake, one of which appeared to have extremely large, massive antlers. We landed there, and after compass bearing and a short discussion as to when and where he would pick me up, he flew off. I couldn't help but wonder if he would ever find me again in this vast wilderness.

In those days you were allowed to hunt on the same day that you landed, and it didn't take long for things to get exciting.* As I looked through my scope, I saw the big bull standing near the opposite bank of the lake, at a distance of about 225 yards. The moose had massive antlers, which I could judge even without any moose experience. After I shot, the moose literally stormed out of the lake and, fortunately, fell down on solid ground. As I learned on later hunts, retrieving your big trophy in the water is very annoying.

The bush pilot found me and picked me up on time, and I happily flew back to Anchorage with the antlers tied underneath the plane. The return flight from Anchorage to Austria, however, proved to be more problematic as there was not enough freight capacity in the plane. My trophies had to be transported in the passenger compartment, which required the last row of seats to be removed. Some of the passengers complained bitterly about such an imposition, particularly when it became warmer on board and the aroma of my wonderful trophies intensified.

I kept thinking of my Alaskan hunt in the years that followed. In the end, my longing became so great that I decided to go there again. In 1972, I flew with several other European hunters to a hilly area of the Alaskan Peninsula known for large bears and moose. With excellent guides at our disposal, the friends I had brought from Europe shot some good caribou, two big brown bear, and three large moose, all with antler spreads of approximately 67 inches.

After I was assured that my friends were successful and satisfied with their trophies, I began my hunt. On a hill near spike camp, my guide, Charlie, and I were glassing the surrounding countryside when we spotted a bear at a distance of some three kilometers. I noticed that the bear kept moving in circles. Charlie said that it was guarding its kill. If I wanted to shoot this bear, Charlie warned me, "The very first shot must kill it; otherwise, it will attack immediately." Of course I wanted this bear

— its cape was unusually light, almost blond, and it appeared to be an extremely large boar. Unfortunately, it was too late to stalk the bear, so we returned to camp. I could hardly sleep.

The next morning, we reached the small clearing where we presumed the bear's kill was located. As we approached the clearing, step by step, my excitement grew. Soon I stood, in cover, at the edge of the clearing. There was no bear, but I could feel that the crucial moment was near. I was ready to fire my .300 Winchester Magnum with a 180-grain Nosler cartridge. I noted that Charlie was ready with his Italian military rifle, which would be about as effective as an air rifle.

Suddenly, just some 20 yards before me, a bush parted and the bear appeared. The wind was excellent, and I aimed a little bit behind the boar's shoulder and fired. The bear roared loudly and turned toward me. I fired a second time and the bear collapsed, but I fired once more. As I approached the bear, I was in total awe—the cape of this enormous bear measured some 11 feet.

This was not the end of my hunt, however. Several days later, we attempted to find two big moose that had been spotted in a clearing a few days prior. Stalking was difficult because the willow shrubbery and undergrowth was so thick that one could hardly spot anything. But we finally found the clearing, and considered what we should do next. A moment later, some of the twigs moved and out stepped a big moose followed by a second one. We were lucky because the wind was in our favor and the moose seemed quite undisturbed. From a distance of some 100 yards, the view of these two magnificent bulls was unforgettable.

The antlers of the second moose were larger, so I aimed at the animal's shoulder. The moose did not move after the first shot. I fired two more times before it collapsed. After waiting about 15 minutes, I approached the bull. His spread measured 73 inches, and that says it all. I proudly hauled all 90 pounds of antlers on my pack frame to the plane, where the pilot tied the antlers of this

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great trophy under the wings. Hardly a day goes by that I do not look at my Alaskan moose antlers, which are hanging in my home, and feel happy about them. ■

***EDITOR'S NOTE:** As the means of transportation improved and enabled hunters to use motor-powered vehicles and light aircraft in the pursuit and taking of big game animals, the Boone and Crockett Club added new rules to its Fair Chase code, which provided the foundation for new game laws that were developed to prohibit hunters from flying and hunting the same day in Alaska and other states.



This very lightly-colored Toklat grizzly was taken on the Alaskan Peninsula in 1972.

The author took this ram on his first hunt to Alaska. The horns measure 39 inches in length.