

# Like Father, A Family's Grand Slam Tradition Like Son

**By the Jaksick Family**

Ben Jaksick completed his grand slam at the age of 10, taking after his father, Todd Jaksick, who completed his at the age of 14. Sheep hunting runs in the family as Ben's grandfather, Sam Jaksick, Jr., is well-known for being one the greatest, well-respected sheep hunters of all time.

Ben completed his grand slam after 44 days of hunting in slightly more than a 1-year time frame. Ben enjoyed every second of all four hunts. He has always had a positive attitude and with his determination and desire to try hard to learn all he can about hunting, shooting, hiking, and camping in the wilderness, he was able to endure each of the backpacking hunts with no problems. No matter the challenge, whether rain, wind, cold temperatures, or steep terrain, Ben never whined or complained. He was happy just to have the opportunity to be outdoors, hunting with his dad, and meeting great guides and hunting partners who he now thinks of as his buddies and lifelong friends.

"Ever since Benny was very little, my wife Dawn and I have taken him with us on every camping trip or hunt," explained Ben's dad Todd. "He is always looking forward to the next time we venture out again. We always said Ben was born to be a hunter because ever since he was a baby, he has been awake and ready to go every single day before 6 a.m.! Ben has always taken on any type of challenge, whether it is getting straight A's in school or training and receiving his black belt by the age of 10."

With such strong physical and mental abilities, his parents knew Ben was up to the task of an arduous sheep hunt—several, in fact. "I started to look into some Dall's sheep hunts," Todd explained. "Around this time, Bob Anderson called and invited my dad and me down to the Las Vegas grand slam convention to pin us both for being in the 700 club. During the show, they auctioned an Alaska Dall's hunt, and that is where Ben's sheep hunting adventure started."

"I was so excited when my dad invited me to go to Alaska on a sheep hunt with him," Ben said. "My mom, dad, sister and I practiced hiking, camping, target-shooting, and learning about the Chugach Mountains in Alaska." A month spent studying and Ben passed his hunter's safety test. His marksmanship earned him the nickname of "little sniper" from Ben's dad and friends. "The day before we left, I shot a 1½-inch group at 500 yards. Dad said I was ready to go!"





On August 7, 2010, Ben, his dad, and their friend, Victor Trujillo (Vinny), took off for Anchorage, Alaska, where they met with guides Bill Stevenson, Mike, Sterling, and Cash. They caught a small hop to the backcountry where their journey began.

"Everything was so pretty when we were flying in," Ben observed. Arriving late at night, the group only hiked two to three miles into the mountains, then set camp. "It was my first night camping in those mountains, and it was totally awesome. It was cool being there, seeing all the glaciers, and how beautiful all the country was."

The next morning they packed up camp and left by 7 a.m., hiking for three more full days of backpacking to get to where the rams were.

On the fourth day, Ben passed on a 300-yard opportunity for two rams that were over 160—in hopes for a bigger, older ram the guides had scouted earlier in the area, so they trekked on. "But we couldn't find the 'big' ram—or any rams in that area," Ben explained, adding that a little excitement distracted them for a few minutes. "While we were sitting on a rock in the middle of a glacier eating our lunch, the glacier moved on us. Nobody got hurt. It just wiggled us. That was really cool."

Another area proved fruitful, however.

"Late in the evening on the 14th day of backpack hunting, we made a fun stalk down a mountain and got right above the ram" where he, and several other sheep were all lying down, Ben recalled. "I got my scope on him, my dad zoomed it in, and I was ready to shoot. But I didn't shoot. My dad kept saying, 'Ok Benny, shoot. Go ahead and shoot.' But I couldn't because the ram's horn was in the way of where I wanted to shoot him. I knew as soon as his horn moved I was going to squeeze the trigger. I was shaking, I was so excited! I think the ram was sleeping because he never moved. Then, around the corner, about a mile away, a plane was flying right at us. I was trying to keep my eye on the ram, but the plane just kept coming straight at us and made a super sharp turn right above us. (My mom wouldn't have liked the hand gestures that my dad and Cash were giving the plane for coming in that close to us!)"

But, the ram moved, and Ben shot.

"Shooting straight downhill at 180 yards, I got my Dall's sheep! He never knew what hit him," said Ben. "He rolled 300-400 yards downhill. I was so excited running down there. This was the first sheep towards my grand slam. Alaska was so pretty, and I had



Ben was shooting a custom 6mm built on a Remington 700 action with 105-grain Berger bullets during all four hunts. **LEFT:** He took his Dall's sheep first in the Chugach Mountains in Alaska. **BELOW:** Second, they traveled to Mexico's Tiburon Island where Todd transferred his tag to Ben's name so he could hunt desert sheep. Ben, with green candy stained lips, poses with his dad and his ram.

lots of fun. It rained every day on us, but I didn't care. We hiked over glaciers, ate wild berries, saw mountain goats, bears, moose, and I loved sleeping in our tent. It was totally awesome. "

Todd said when he saw how much fun Ben had and how he never complained once during the entire 14-day hunt, he asked his son if he wanted to go on another sheep hunt. "He said, 'Yeah, Yeah! When can we go?'" Todd said. Since Todd already had a tag reserved to hunt on Mexico's Tiburon Island, where he had hunted a few times previously, he contacted Bart Lancaster, Braulio, and Luis Romero with Desert Hunt, to put his desert bighorn sheep tag into Ben's name.

"I couldn't believe how differently we had to pack for the desert sheep hunt than the Alaska hunt," Ben said. Instead of packing for ice, rain, and cold weather, they had to worry about the three S's—stickers, snakes and sharks. After more planning, packing, conditioning, and practice shooting, Ben, his dad, and buddies Vinny and Mark Barlow (Señor Barlito), left for Mexico.

At first, Ben thought the hunt was going to be easy because it was on an island. When he got in the boat and crossed the ocean, he realized how big the island was as



Halfway through his grand slam Ben focused on bighorn sheep next. **RIGHT:** On the Taos Indian Reservation in New Mexico Ben learned a little history of the oldest village in the United States, then harvested his third sheep, a bighorn, at 11,000 feet. **BELOW:** To finalize his grand slam Ben and Todd headed back north to British Columbia. After taking his Stone's sheep Ben said "we were all jumping up and down! I was so excited. I had gotten my grand slam! It was the coolest feeling to know I had accomplished my goal!" **FAR RIGHT:** As a bonus, Ben had the opportunity to take Rocky Mountain goat while on his Stone's sheep hunt.



he got closer. The next morning, they hiked further to the interior of the island.

"It was amazing to me that we wouldn't be able to survive without packing that water into camp. It was so much different than our last hunt where water was everywhere," Ben said. On the first day, Ben passed up a couple of large rams, hoping to find an even better one. Over the next several days, the group hiked for most of the day to different areas and saw many rams—one that could have scored 180—much larger than Ben's goal of 168, so they stalked it. Getting to within 250 yards of the bedded animal, they saw that he had a broken tip. "Dad, Bart and Willy thought it was about a 178-180 ram, so Dad said to go ahead and shoot. But since it was only the second day, I decided to pass the ram up. I remember telling my dad when we were walking back to camp that night, that I was crazy, and that I should have gone after that one. But my dad told me not to worry, and we could probably go back if we needed to."

The next morning they spotted a big ram about three miles away. "We didn't know how big, but Bart, Willy, and Poncho all said that if they can tell at three miles away that he's big, he's got to be big! It was so exciting hiking down through all these neat canyons. We found a big ram skull and then a snake that was so cold it couldn't even move," Ben recalled. To get to this ram, Ben said the group had to hike through "the most stickery, pokiest stuff ever—it even ripped Willy's pants off! We were laughing so hard but trying to be quiet. We finally got into position at about 350 yards..." One awesome shot and the ram went down. "It was so exciting running over to the ram and seeing how huge he really was. The next couple of nights we had a fun celebration with a campfire and a great sheep meat dinner. I am so glad I got to go to this island. It was amazing!"

After getting the second ram, Ben realized he was half way to a sheep grand



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slam (Dall's sheep, Rocky Mountain bighorn, Stone's sheep and desert bighorn). "My dad and I talked about what hunt we would go on next. We decided to go on the bighorn sheep hunt. Dad said it was really tough to find a hunt for my age, but we got really lucky and my dad found us a hunt in New Mexico."

The family was planning to go to New Mexico for the hunt after a family trip during spring break, but a call from their guides G.T. Nunn, Rick Ortega, and Ben's new buddy Willy Hettinger changed that. "[They] said the weather was really good and that they had seen a couple of pretty nice rams. [They] thought that we should head out there before the weather got bad again. My dad gave me the choice to stay in Disneyworld or leave to go hunting. I chose to go hunting, so we left Disneyworld about three days early and traveled to the Taos Indian Reservation.

"Since the Taos Indian Reservation was like a huge forest, my dad asked Vinny, Mark Barlow, Victor Clark, and Willy Hettinger to come help so we would have lots of eyes looking around in all the thick trees. When we arrived, it was so cool to have the Indians show us their really old village. It is the oldest village in the United States. The chief was so nice. He specially made me a handmade medicine bag for me to pick up little items at my favorite spots while hiking in the mountains. When I asked the war

chief where we were going hunting, he pointed at this humongous mountain. He said, 'Don't worry, the rams are down low right now so you won't have to climb all the way up the mountain.'" Later that day, the group rode horses into the canyon, set up camp, and hunkered down for a cold night with a great fire and lots of helpers.

Base camp was at 7,000 feet. The first morning they hiked up to 10,000 feet and found some rams, but nothing very big. After lunch Vinny spotted a couple of rams way up the mountain, and one was especially huge. Climbing the ridge to about 11,000 feet, Ben and his hunting group got to within about 395 yards—a big ram, on a big rock in the middle of a big basin.

"I got ready to shoot but half of his body was standing behind a tree. I waited for him to come out from behind a tree, and I took my shot... He fell off the rock. I was so excited! I couldn't believe it. I turned around and looked at how high up we were and how far we had hiked up the mountain," Ben recalled the moments after the shot. "That Indian chief was definitely not right when he told me I wouldn't be climbing that humongous mountain, but I loved it."

It was an hour and a half hike through a canyon and thick trees before Ben reached his trophy.

"I raced over to see him. He was huge!

# Like Father, Like Son

G.T. and the Taos Indians did a cool ceremony over the sheep, showing how we all respect the mountain, the animal, and how lucky we all are to be healthy, happy, and out there in the field. I took some of my sheep's fur and put it in my medicine bag along with the chief's sacred dirt. It was a huge hike out that night, and we had a big celebration! I hope I get to hunt with G.T. again.

Ben's next hunt was for a Stone's sheep.

"I was really excited for the hunt because we were going with Bart Lancaster, Willy Hettinger, and Vinny again, and we have so much fun with them." Expecting much rain for the Canada hunt, they packed similarly to the Alaska hunt. In British Columbia, Bart's dad Stan Lancaster met the group at the airport and took them on a long drive to the floatplane. "When I met Stan, I couldn't believe my eyes; he was the size of a grizzly bear. He grabbed me and gave me his grizzly bear bite on the top of my head."

An hour-long flight landed them "at Bart's super-secret lake" where big rams were on the agenda. Ben—having had some experience now—set up the tent by himself and filled it with everyone's gear.

Several days of hunting brought lots of rain and lots of practice for Ben making campfires. "After a few days we saw a really big mountain goat," Ben said. "My dad and Bart totally surprised me and said that I had a tag for a mountain goat also. It was a really tough, long hike to go after the goat. We were sneaking our way through the trees and the rocks to get closer to the goat, but the closest we could get was 510 yards. Bart said that we had to get closer, but from the position we would be in, I wouldn't have a good shot. So I told Bart I would just shoot him from where we were. Bart said, 'There's no way! It's over 500 yards. We have got to get closer.' So I said, 'I know I can make that shot. I've practiced a lot at that range.' Bart couldn't believe it. I told him I knew I could do it. Then Bart said, 'OK, Benny. Go for it.'"

Lying down, Ben was in perfect shooting position.

"I squeezed the trigger and the mountain goat tipped over."

Then it was back to hunting for a Stone's sheep, but no luck finding a ram over the next several days, so they decided to call in the floatplane to go to another area. After a few of days of hunting on horseback, they found a couple of nice rams, but after scoping one of them at 500 yards, Ben decided to pass him up. Finally, on the 12th day of the hunt, Bart spotted a big ram about two miles away on the top of a mountain.

"Even from that distance, we could tell he was a big, legal ram," Ben explained. "We got back on the horses and headed in the direction of the sheep. It was crazy—some of the stuff we were taking the horses through." Riding prone through thick trees, then through a lake on horseback just to get to the base of the mountain, then leaving the horses behind for a 2,000-foot climb up the mountain to finally get in view of the ram. At the top of the mountain, rain and wind kept Ben's scope cover on until the last minute.

"The ram was at about 180 yards and I put my crosshairs on him. The guys told me to shoot. I was ready, so I shot and I got him. We were all jumping up and down! I was so excited. I had gotten my grand slam! It was the coolest feeling to know I had accomplished my goal!"

Word of Ben's grand slam triumph has spread and inspired other young hunters to shoot for their own grand slam goals. "I thought it was really cool to find out that another kid my age and a few kids a little older than me are out there trying to get their grand slam too," Ben said.

"I had so much fun on all of my hunts. I am so thankful to all the guides and friends that helped me complete my grand slam. I know that I could not have done it without all their help. They had to take time away from their families to come with me, and I know that is a big deal. So thank you to Vinny who came on all my hunts, Bart, Willy, Barlow, Grandpa Sam, G.T., Nutes, Big Victor, Mark, Cindy, Big Mike, Sam, Ricky, Cash, Braulio, the owners of the Taos and Tiburón, Tim Humes for scoring my sheep—and especially my dad, Todd. He gave me the chance to go on all of these amazing hunts and let me take his record for being the youngest to complete a grand slam!" ■

**Great memories with Todd and Ben.**

**TOP TO BOTTOM:** Glassing in British Columbia looking for Stone's sheep. During his desert sheep hunt on Tiburón Island, Mexico, and Ben hanging out at camp and at the campfire with his dad.

