

Generation Next: Essays

Submitted by: Ashley L. Doss
Trophy Type: Cougar

Age: 12
Location: Stevens County, WA

An Epic Cougar Adventure

It was an early winter morning—December 1, 2010, to be exact—and I was as excited as a 12 year old can be. It was my first day of a special-permit cougar hunt with hounds that both my dad and I had drawn tags for. After a quick breakfast of hot pockets from a gas station convenience store, we met up with my dad's friend, Moose, who had also drawn for this hunt, and Moose's friend. Then we booked up to the snow-covered mountains above Colville, Washington, to start our hunt. For many hours that morning and into late afternoon, we stared at snow... upon snow... upon snow.

We would see a faint, snow covered cougar track here and a bobcat track there, but no fresh lion tracks. That was, not until Moose talked to a cattle rancher he knew who gave us permission to hunt for a cougar he'd seen on his property.

After meeting up with the cattle rancher, we collared some dogs, put them on leashes, and went searching for tracks. It didn't take long to find some. The dogs sniffed the paw tracks and soon after, they were on track and out of there. The cat went a ways before it treed, and boy, did we have a slow, long walk ahead of us—up many hills in deep, powdery snow. Since we had to hike quickly to beat nightfall, we brought the .45 caliber pistol, which I had not practiced shooting, instead of the more familiar .243 rifle. Once we reached the tree, my dad was the one who shot the cougar instead of me. My dad's cougar weighed around 140 pounds, had the fattest tail, and had huge feet for its body. So, the day ended in an awesome day of hunting with my dad, friends, and hounds.



Ashley L. Doss with the cougar she harvested in Stevens County, Washington. The tom's final score is 14-14/16 points. Doss was shooting a .243 with 100-grain Remington Specials.

Trophy Type: Cougar
Submitted by: Mira A. Bigatel
Age: 8

While walking toward the sounds of the hounds' mountain music, I was thinking to myself, I wonder how big he's going to be? I was anticipating it was going to be small because his track seemed small. But my, oh my, I couldn't have been more wrong!

We took the cougar to Moose's house to skin it. The entire time we skinned the lion I was shaking from hunger, and my knees kept buckling from standing for so long because I was so, so tired. It was an extremely long day. Within minutes of finishing the cat, I was happy to go get food and some well-needed sleep.

December 2nd was the same process as the morning before—gas station food, meet up with Moose and Moose's friend, then off to the snowy mountains. But this day was different. We saw more deer, and fresher cat tracks—both bobcat and cougar. The big difference, though, is that it didn't take nearly as long as the day before to get onto fresh cougar tracks. By noon my dad had spotted a slightly snowed-in, small cougar track, but it was worthy enough to set Sporty, our best and main hound, and a few others on it to give it a try. The hounds went for a while, but something interfered in the middle of the race. The hounds spread apart to the point where none were still following the track, so we called them back to the truck. Moose told us to go look for cat tracks on the road above where the dogs got off-track. His instincts were right on—straight above where we called in the dogs was a fresh cougar track, so out came the dogs again.

Compared to my dad's cougar hunt, the dogs did not go far at all; the cougar treed within around 120 yards of where we let the dogs loose and only 20 yards off the side of a dead-end road. While walking toward the sounds of the hounds' mountain music, I was thinking to myself, I wonder how big he's going to be? I was anticipating it was going to be small because his track seemed small. But my, oh my, I couldn't have been more wrong! I had no frame of reference to know how to tell whether a cougar was little or huge, until I heard my dad and Moose saying, "He is a big one," and "Wow, he's a dandy!" So I knew he was big.

Before I shot, we all helped tie back dogs away from the tree. We found a good stick for a gun rest, and then I was ready for the big moment of the day. At first, the only shot I could get was a very tricky

one—I only had about one inch of space to get a kill shot. Otherwise, I would hit the tree or hit the cougar's guts, so I didn't want to take the risk. We decided to throw snowballs at the tree to get him to move so I could get a good shot. After a couple of snowballs, the cat turned around and looked at us, giving me a chest shot.

My dad and Moose told me, "Shoot below the branch." There were two branches—using the bottom branch as a guide would have ended in a gut shot, so I aimed at the cougar below the top branch. I took my time and used patience, since the cat was obviously not going anywhere, then pulled the trigger. The cat fell to the snow and was as still as still could be. My happiness could not be hidden! We walked up to the cat with smiles on our faces. They all congratulated me and then we unleashed the dogs so that they could go up to the cougar for a minute, though we were very cautious that they didn't bite any holes in the cougar's coat since cougars have extremely thin skin. I stayed back with my dad to help him hold back the dogs while Moose and Moose's friend dragged the cougar back to the truck. Not much dragging was involved though because the cat practically slid the whole 20 yards back down the mountain.

We loaded the dogs in the truck and the lion on the tailgate, then we went to find a good stump to lay the cat across to take pictures that would show his size nicely. After picture-taking time, we loaded the cat back on the truck. To have a more accurate weight of the cougar, we went to Moose's dad's garage because he had scales that were used to weigh race cars on. The cat was put on the scales, and we all waited anxiously to find out the weight of my large cougar. The cat weighed 163.8 pounds—more than I would have ever guessed. I was so excited and happy. My dad, Moose and I ate a celebration dinner after we dropped Moose's friend off at his house.

This cougar hunt was not only a very successful hunt, but one of the best two days of my life, too. ■

One day camping, me and my dad went deer hunting. While we were walking through the woods I tripped on something that I thought was a rock. I picked it up and it was the top of a skull. I shouted, "Daddy, look! I found a skull."

He said, "Cool, see if you can find the bottom part." It was only a matter of moments before I found it.

We went back to the camp site and showed our friends Eric and Rio. Eric thought it was a bear skull, but it turned out to be a mountain lion skull. My dad brought it into the Boone and Crockett Club headquarters where Justin Spring, the assistant director of Big Game Records, scored it for us. When my dad found out it made the book, he came and picked me up so I could get my photograph taken and fill out the necessary paper work.

