





WHISKEY

- AND -

CIGARS

By Edward C. Joseph

The story of an award-winning Dall's sheep from the new book, Boone and Crockett Club's 29th Big Game Awards, 2013-2015

A fifth of Jack Daniels and a fistful of Honduran cigars. That's what I was trying to sneak past the nose of my guide Hank Flatow and packer Carl Christianson as they looked through my backpack, talking about shaving ounces off my gear for the long hikes ahead.

Finally, I broke down and confessed I was hiding whiskey and cigars for the optimistically anticipated campfire celebration after we kill our Dall's ram, and if they don't let me pack them in, they may as well just take me back to the airport! Hank looked me dead in the eye and flat out told me I'm packing them in alright, and if I don't promise to share he'll indeed run me back to the airport—and right now! I knew right then we were going to hit it off. They met me at the Anchorage airport two days before opening day, August 23, 2015, with firm handshakes and quick smiles. They're both tall, lean, and tough as nails, so I was glad for all the training I did the last eight months. From the moment we shook hands, I knew I was in for a good time.

My hunt started as these special draw hunts often do, with an unexpected call from an excited outfitter with news of my luck. Dan Montgomery of Alaska Trophy Adventures outfits sheep hunters into the Chugach Mountains, the crown jewel of Alaska's best sheep units out of Anchorage, and has been doing so for many years.

He had a particular ram picked out that I would devote my entire hunt to find. He and Hank had a history with this

ram watching him grow up over the years, as they do with most of the mature rams in the Chugach units. They develop a relationship with the sheep and carefully manage them with the help of the game department.

Dan confirmed on his spring flying survey that the ram made it through the winter. This was the year he wanted a hunter to take him, and that lucky hunter was me. Dan also warned me the Chugach has some of the

toward the very back end of the unit.

That first day we hiked nine miles with full packs to our spike camp—a long hike, but not terribly difficult as the walk up the river was at most gently rolling. This put us at the base of the mountain we would climb the next day. The second day was a different story altogether. We hiked another nine miles to our second spike camp, but it took all day as most of this was up and over a steep mountain.

time. A mountain is always easier to climb when there is game waiting on the other side, and we finally made it to our second spike camp.

The third day, opening day, we started early. Not burdened by a heavy pack, the hiking that day was more pleasure than pain. We climbed the next mountain out of camp, getting to the area where the ram lived. By midmorning we made it to the ridgeline. We noticed the clouds and fog in the valley

eight rams living there, and throughout the day he would spot them one by one, scrutinizing each one through his spotting scope. By early afternoon our count was up to six rams and we hadn't found our boy yet. But this game was as much about eliminating where the big ram was not, as much as where he may be.

We were almost out of spots our ram could be hiding. It was one of the last moraines left to glass, and when Carl and I saw Hank smiling, we



RAM'S INJURED HOOF

BACK AT SPIKE CAMP,

ENJOYING A CIGAR



FINAL DAY ON THE WALK OUT



steepest, most rugged sheep country in Alaska, and just getting into the area where the ram spent his days was difficult. This unit is in Chugach State Park.

Regulations do not allow planes to transport hunters in. No Super Cub drop-off, Dan said. I would be walking in from the trail head, and the ram Dan had in mind for me was some 20 miles in,

The first half of this hike was through some of the thickest, nastiest alder and devil's club imaginable. I did my best to keep up with Hank and Carl, but I couldn't believe the physical condition these boys were in, and I can't say enough about their professionalism. The entire hunt they were constantly concerned for my comfort and safety and wanted to be sure I was having a good

were starting their predictable movements, rising with the uphill thermals that all sheep hunters know well and expect. We were where we wanted to be, on top with the wind moving uphill.

The day was spent cruising the undulating ridgelines that rimmed the numerous bowls, basins, and moraines that could hold

sheep. Hank knew there were knew he had spotted our ram. I will never forget my first view of this ram through the spotting scope. He was 600 yards downhill, bedded down facing away. I saw the back of his horns with their continued mass, and the flip of his lamb tips stretching impossibly well above the bridge of his nose. He then turned his head and I saw the deep curl go well below his jawline.

Our approach would be in plain sight of the ram, but he was facing away and Hank assured us the noise of shale breaking loose during our stalk would not alarm him as he is used to those sounds daily as the glacier he was living on was in a constant state of creaking and moaning. We eyed a lip on the rim above the ram that would put us 150 yards away.

As we began our attack, Hank was confident this was a slam dunk, but something

back. The old ram had picked his bedding spot well, in an area that defies the usually predictable midday upward wind currents. With the swirling winds he was able to detect danger approaching from multiple directions.

Carl saw it first; the ram stood and looked at us broadside. He whistled at Hank and me to get our attention, and I then realized that something that can go wrong just had. I have seen this before, a sheep gets your wind

side with his glass on the ram ready to call my shot. While putting down my rifle's bipod and dropping to a prone position, Carl, in an incredibly lucid moment at a time when panic could overwhelm us, had anticipated this and was already ranging the ram for me. I dialed my turret to 325 yards and with no time for a calm, controlled squeeze, the moment the ram steadied in my cross hairs I quickly pressed the trigger. I don't

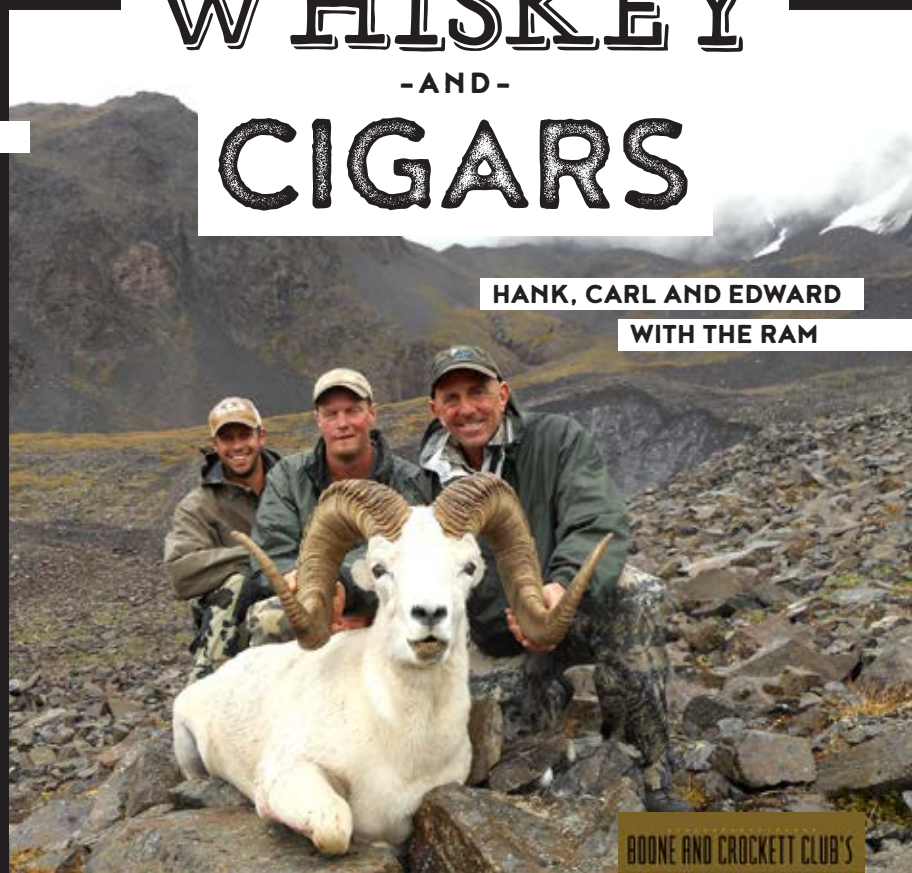
43-2/8-inch length on both symmetrical horns.

Two nights later, our final spike camp found three new friends enjoying an Alaskan campfire under the stars while eating sheep backstrap, laughing, and reliving the hunt in the telling and putting the tape on the ram of a lifetime while celebrating and toasting a great ram and a great hunt with Jack Daniels and cigars. I'm glad Hank let me pack them in. ■



3 DAYS AND 20 MILES

INTO THE CHUGACH MOUNTAINS



HANK, CARL AND EDWARD

WITH THE RAM

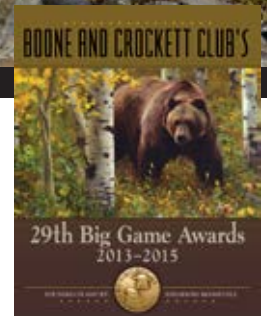
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always seems to go wrong when the setup is too perfect. During the entire stalk I kept telling myself to expect something to go wrong, and when it does, be ready. We were making good progress; Carl and I hot on the heels of Hank as we moved down the shale slide. We were about ready to make the final approach when we all felt that horrible feeling of a wind shift hitting us in the

and wastes no time leaving the country. I couldn't believe a mature, old, wise ram was still standing looking at us, but I knew it wouldn't be for long. We had to act fast. Not much was said in the next seven seconds as everyone knew the job they had to do. I immediately retreated five yards up the slope to where Carl was to find a flat spot to shoot from. Hank was by my

remember if I felt the recoil, but I do remember watching the ram run 25 yards, then fall over backwards. This was the perfect year to take this ram, as we noticed his front hoof was badly injured. Dan said when this happens a ram rarely makes it through the winter as he can't paw through the ice and snow for feed. The final numbers on this ram were an amazing

Edward's ram, scoring 173-6/8 points, received a First Place Award at B&C's 29th Big Game Awards Banquet. Read more stories like this in the new book, *Boone and Crockett Club's 29th Big Game Awards, 2013-2015*.



Flip to page 50 for more details.