

# THE VALUE OF ETHICAL HUNTING THROUGH *Storytelling*

**In 2019 the Hunter Ethics Committee concluded that one of the best ways to influence hunters to become followers and advocates of Fair Chase would be by sharing articles that highlight the value of ethical hunting through storytelling.**

We tapped into the vast collective hunting experiences of our membership and reached out to our Hunter Ethics Committee members to give us one or two paragraphs that we could use to further this project.

Below are a few questions that we presented to help jar a personal memory they could write about.

- Have you ever made a decision you regretted or that disrupted your way of thinking about hunting?
- Have you ever had an “ah-ha” moment when it comes to fair chase or ethical choices in the field?
- What was the most important/significant experience in your personal development as a fair chase hunter?
- Could you describe any early questions, discomforts or contradictions you faced in your development as a hunter?
- Can you describe any moral or ethical life lessons that you’ve learned directly from animals?

## B&C'S TENETS OF FAIR CHASE

Hunter ethics. Fundamental to all hunting is the concept of conservation of natural resources. Hunting in today's world involves the regulated harvest of individual animals in a manner that conserves, protects, and perpetuates the hunted population. The hunter engages in a one-to-one relationship with the quarry, and should be guided by a hierarchy of hunting ethics including the following tenets:

- 1. Obey all applicable laws and regulations.***
- 2. Respect the customs of the locale where the hunting occurs.***
- 3. Exercise a personal code of behavior that reflects favorably on one's abilities and sensibilities as a hunter.***
- 4. Attain and maintain the skills necessary to make the kill as certain and quick as possible.***
- 5. Behave in a way that will bring no dishonor to the hunter, and show no disrespect for the hunted or the environment.***



### BIG BUCK LOST

A passion of mine has been hunting mule deer in country far from the nearest road. I had several places that fit that description throughout Colorado and rarely saw another hunter and never saw a game warden in all of those public land hunts. In 1985, Colorado had gone, for the first time, to a 3-point antler restriction, meaning that each antler had to have 3 points in addition to the brow-tine. I had never hunted with these restrictions.

It was opening morning and I was deep in the woods when dawn arrived. As I crept along a ridge an enormous buck and I locked eyes at about 100 yards. The problem was that when a symmetrical big mulie buck looks you straight-on you see no tines and I couldn't tell if this was a massive 4-point buck or the world's largest fork-horn. He stared, I stared, he stared; I just needed him to cock his head 2 inches so that I could be sure...finally he did cock his head and simultaneously looked like he'd been shot out of a cannon. He was a giant 4-point buck as I'd guessed but he was to live another day.

I could have pulled the trigger and almost certainly would have killed this buck while he was standing statue still, but every day for the rest of my life when I looked at that buck I'd have had to remember, I wasn't sure he was legal when I pulled the trigger. Fair Chase is doing what is right even when nobody is watching, and lets you sleep a whole lot better. ■

**Tenet 1: Obey all applicable laws and regulations.**

### FULL DISCLOSURE

Full disclosure, I went against my gut. I let the pressures and repeated failures of a long campaign chasing mule deer with a bow in the open country plains of southern Alberta get the better of me.

You can find these bucks—and quality, 180-plus bucks are numerous. You can even stalk in close to some of them. Laying on bedded bucks of this caliber for hours, waiting for them to stand to present a shot, can be nerve-racking with low odds of success. If it's not shifting wind, it's getting busted trying to draw.

On my last day after seven failed stalks, I slid in on a buck bedded below a cut bank. The set up looked good—bedded facing away, full-body exposed. With the evening sun touching the horizon, I convinced myself to override my standing rule to never shoot a bedded animal, into "I can make this shot." The bad result and the suffering that took place until this deer expired is not something I would wish on anyone, nor would I ever want to live through again.

The moral of the story is, be mindful not to let the rigors of a long hunt and the desire for success undermine your own ethical standards. If it's a risky/unethical shot on Day 1, it's still the same on Day 7. ■

**Tenet 3: Exercise a personal code of behavior that reflects favorably on one's abilities and sensibilities as a hunter.**

### TWO BOOK RAMS LEFT TO GROW LARGER.

The year was 1964. Inspired by a copy of the Boone and Crockett book, *1958 Records of North American Game*, my brother and I sought to hunt and collect trophy-sized specimens of North American big game. We had hunted only whitetail deer in Texas and mule deer in Colorado. We decided we would make an effort to hunt in British Columbia. I wrote a letter to every big game guide in British Columbia. We received a response from

almost all of them. I stated that my brother and I would be collecting for the same trophy room so one specimen between us would be satisfactory and that we would like to harvest trophy-sized representative specimens. We chose to hunt with Wes Brown who managed territory near the Muskwa River; the same area where the Chadwick Ram was taken in 1936.

We drove to Trutch, British Columbia, 200 miles on the Alaska Highway, and from there flew a bush plane into his base camp. From the base camp we rode horses about fifteen miles into the heart of his territory. As we were moving along on a trail near the creek bed we were surprised by two of the largest Stone's sheep we have ever seen standing in the creek bed less than 100 yards away. They were easy targets but to those of us who had never hunted sheep before, this was not the way a sheep hunt was supposed to be. We declined to take advantage of the situation, expecting to climb mountains and encounter the animals in their more protected environment.

Over the next several days of hard hunting we both harvested good Stone's sheep but none to match those rams we encountered in the creek bed. Each of us also took moose, mountain caribou and I harvested a wolverine. It would have been an easier hunt for our guide as well as ourselves if we had taken the creek bed rams but we have never had any regrets about that decision. Wes Brown respected our decision.

He charged us \$600 apiece for the hunt. That was another day. ■

**Tenet 5: Behave in a way that will bring no dishonor to the hunter, and show no disrespect for the hunted or the environment.**