



*Our gusto soon faded, and what we thought would be a
short stalk turned into a steep, dangerous climb against time
and our remaining energy.*

YUKON

story by
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Advent

In early July I received a phone call from my good friend Chris Mckinnon wanting me to come up and film some sheep hunts on the *Bonnet Plume* in the Yukon. This would be Chris' first year as owner of the concession and he wanted to get as much publicity as possible. We have filmed with Chris a number of times in Alberta so I knew this new operation would be first class. Besides I had always wanted to explore deep into the Yukon and this was a great opportunity to see some awesome country.



On August 22nd we left Whitehorse Yukon around 9:30am on an Otter aircraft bound for the Bonnet Plume. Along for the ride was my chief editor and cameraman for The Hunter's journal, Kenneth Childres, a couple of guys I had shared deer camp with a few years prior, Tom Mattel and Leo Smith, a heavy set older gentleman we quickly refereed to as Big John, a short dentist from South Carolina we called Lil' John, a broad shouldered man from Wisconsin we called Flat Top Tom for apparent reasons, and a biker-looking dude with a bald head and a handle bar mustache named Louie. We were all about as different as you could imagine. Kenneth and I being from Arkansas can just about relate to any personality so we kept our mouths shut and settled in for the 2 ½ hour plane trip through the mountains to Chris' base camp.

When we arrived we quickly ate a cup of soup and packed our backpacks, or should I say repacked our packs after our guides pulled everything out of them that they thought we didn't need. Needless to say I had two pairs of underwear, one of which I had on, and three pairs of socks, not much more than that, other than

what I had on and some essential hunting equipment. Shortly after that, Chris and a few other pilots started loading hunters up in their Super Cubs and dropped us off in our different hunting areas. Myself, Tom Mattel, Leo Smith, a slender young guide named Leland, and an older guide named Nick set out for a three hour hike up the Slate River where we would set up spike camp 4:30pm. That night we ate Mountain House, and then Leo, Tom and I set up our two man tent and hit the sack.

We woke up around 5am the next morning and began to get dressed for the day's hunt. I got very little sleep considering it got cold that night and you could literally see through my sleeping bag. After a cup of oatmeal we filled our water bottles and headed up into the sheep country. We got out of spike camp around 5:30am. We walked through quite a bit of muskeg and lichen willows and shell as we ascended up into the basin. We stopped to catch our breath as often as we could, we had a long walk in front of us and we had to spot some rams, make a stalk and get back to camp, hopefully before dark. The terrain was treacherous and the willows were thick in places.

YUKON *Adventure* ...cont'd. from page 37

Around 3:00pm that day we spotted a nice band of rams on an adjacent mountainside. After Leland, which I nicknamed "Sweetness" - because he always said *sweet*, glassed the rams over, we decided it was worth a closer look. One ram in particular looked to have some nice lamb tips, and another was broomed pretty heavy. Tom was looking for a fancy ram and one of the rams fit the bill. Once we traversed back over to the other mountainside we started the straight up-climb to get in a position to make a good shot.

The rams were resting on some cliffs overlooking the bottom, so we would have to try to stalk from above them or hug the rock faces across from them making sure not to skyline ourselves. The walking was tough and we all gasped for air and struggled for firm footing as we tired to get into position before the rams moved away for their afternoon meal. To our dismay, there were two banana head rams in the same draw that we were coming up. We hid as soon as we saw them in fear that they would run across the canyon and alarm the older rams. Our sweat quickly turned to cold as we sat impatiently waiting for the smaller rams to move on. We just knew that Tom's ram could move over the top of the mountain at any given time.

After about an hour, Leland went down around the peak to try to take another look at the rams. When he returned, he informed us that we had to move soon or it would be a 50/50 chance on whether or not everything could work out. We all agreed to go for it. Our gusto soon faded as what we thought



NATEL (LEFT) HARVESTED THIS RAM. HIS BUDDY LEO SMITH (CENTRE) WENT ALONG ON HIS HUNT. THE AUTHOR (RIGHT)

would be a short stalk turned into a steep, dangerous climb against time and our remaining endurance. By the time we reached the pinnacle, the rams had moved but how far and how fast were they travelling? We had our doubts but we joked about how damn tired we were and pushed on as fast as we could. I must say, I was impressed with Tom and Leo's perseverance since both were in their mid 40's.

It was now 6:00pm and we had put in a full day of hiking. One ridge, two ridges, Leland kept pushing us, and just when I thought we were out of the game, we suddenly were right back in it again. As we topped the third ridge, there was the fancy ram at 200 yards, just feeding with his head down by himself. I quickly sat the camera up and Tom positioned his gun on Leland's back. Tom waited for the ram to move broadside, and as soon as he did Tom planted one shot in the center of mass. The ram turned and started uphill, then stopped where Tom buried another right in the boiler room - the ram wobbled for a minute and struggled to hold his head, than gave up the fight and fell. The video was good and Tom, Leo, Leland, and Nick all laughed and high-fived. It was almost unbelievable that the five of us pulled together to get'er done.

It was now 7:06pm and we made our way over to where the ram lay. When I initially walked up to the ram I could not believe how beautiful he was - his coat was thick and as white as snow. We measured the ram out to 39 inches with at least two inches being broomed off each side. He also had bases that were over 14 inches. We took our pictures and headed back down the mountain. Around midnight it was getting difficult to see so we slept out under the stars and cooked up some tenderloin. That's some of the best meat I've ever eaten. We all huddled up the best we could and slept for a few hours. The next morning we started walking again at sunrise. We arrived back at spike camp at 9:15am with spaghetti legs. As Leland and Nick caped the ram we joked about how nice it was to get back to camp. Five days later Leo would also take a nice ram and we would make a runway for Chris to land on a side of a mountain to pick us up. Everyone was glad to harvest two mature rams, but it's the laughs, perseverance, and fellowship that will always be remembered. ■

