

Field Reports

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It's Addicting!

by Paul Mitchell

"Just have to warn you Paul, this stuff can be addictive." George said as we sat around the kitchen table talking about a guided hunt on Kodiak Island over twenty years ago. He was right! In the blink of an eye, when work and finances allowed, I was booking a bighorn sheep hunt after an unsuccessful one four years earlier.

I had talked with André van Hilten of Willow Creek Outfitters at the ECWSF Show in Lancaster, PA many times and knew he was the one I would go with. After a few emails and conversations, the hunt was booked for his first hunt in 2022.

From Northern New York it is only a 2.5 hour drive to Ottawa, Ontario. From there I flew to Alberta and my guide, Curtis, and his son picked me up the next morning at the hotel. We drove to the trailhead where I spent the rest of the day getting my gear organized.

The next morning I met his family, cousin Martin who would be our wrangler and Jody our cook. After packing the horses we started into base camp that would take eight hours of riding. The only horse riding I do is on this type of hunting trip so there are a few muscles and tender spots that only show up at these times but all and all we had a great trip in on a beautiful day. As we were traveling in, I could see sheep country on the distant mountains.

We arrived at a well setup base camp with two wall tents and a kitchen eating area late in the late afternoon. We spent the next day resting the horses and myself and glassing the mountain around the basin where camp was in. The next morning, we rode up a drainage to where we would spike camp. Once camp was setup we climbed up across from camp to check out the valley on the other side.

Once up there we would be glassing almost 360 degrees. We spotted ewes and lambs and a sow grizzly with two cubs, but no rams. After returning to camp and having another great meal from Jody we turned in for the night.

We woke up early to another clear day. Eggs and sausage burritos for breakfast and then we got the horses ready.



We travelled further up the drainage to a low bluff where we would glass up a valley probably three miles long and a mile wide.

After a little bit Curtis spotted a group of six rams at the head of the valley. We were able to ride three quarters of the way to where we tied up the horses and finished up the stalk on foot. As we got closer we spooked some lambs and ewes and they in turn spooked the rams. As we watched in disappointment the rams topped out with two dandies leading the band.

We circled around another drainage to see if we might cut them off but they had beat us and were half way up the other side. Not giving up we followed them up to where we had last saw them, now looking into another vast valley but no rams were in sight.

After about an hour Curtis walked down the spine to our right for a few hundred yards to glass from a different angle. When he returned, he had spotted the rams right below us out of our sight, 200 yards away.

Curtis made a plan to slide down a rocky chute and keep a ridge between us and the rams and the plan worked out perfectly. As we came out of our little depression there were three different rams, not the six rams we had seen earlier. There was one laying and two standing. The one laying was the best and turned out to be ten years of age. At 135 yards we could really check them out and then one shot was made to seal the deal.

After pictures and caping the real work began. We spent over an hour climbing with loaded packs to get out of the basin. Once on top we knew it was downhill to the horses from there which was not bad except for the rain, snow, sleet, thunder and lightning and by this time it was dark as well. After a 45 minute ride back to camp we each got into our tents at 1 AM, cold and wet. It took a little bit to get warm but I finally did get to sleep after a while.

Woke up to another blue sky day with all the mountains around us freshly snowcapped. We spent the day drying gear out and riding back to basecamp and then spent another couple of days

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