



A FLATLANDER CANUCK'S QUEST FOR FNAWS!

In 2016 I went on an exploratory plane, argo, jet boat, backpack, filmed hunt with Ryan Leef in the Yukon in Shockey's territory. We got a ram on day one, but when he fell off the cliff his horn popped off. Leeper promptly found it thankfully! Now I had sheep on my mind 24/7 and it seemed to control my life.

BY BRENT MCNAMEE

Two weeks later I went to Tuchodi River Outfitters on a horseback hunt and got a one-horned Stone's ram with Monty Warren on day 11. I was beginning to wonder if I should try and get my FNAWS all with one-horned rams.

I attended the Sheep Show® in Reno that winter and proceeded to book hunts for a Rocky Mountain bighorn with Andre Van Hilten's Willow Creek Outfitters in AB, and with Clay Lancaster in Sonora, MX, for a desert bighorn, both for fall 2017.

I had set a goal in my mind to try and harvest all four sheep in 16 months and I figured best to get the mountain critters in the bag before I got too old and fat! My plan did not exactly work out to the schedule I had set. I forgot the Mother Nature factor.

Mid-September 2017, I ventured into the Willmore Wilderness area in the Alberta Rockies for a backpack, horseback-assisted hunt with veteran guide Hans Van Hilten. After several days of horseback, we woke up to over three feet of snow. The trails

were a disaster with downed trees, and the horses were not able to find enough feed. We tried to wait it out hoping it would melt off and tried to hike in waist-high snow, but no luck. I never did see a legal ram and only got two days on the mountain before we had to pull out and shut down camp for the season. This was the first-ever guided hunt that I had been on where I was unsuccessful. I knew it was going to happen sooner or later, and that it was likely with a Rocky Mountain bighorn, as they





are the hardest of all the sheep to harvest. It didn't make it any easier to accept.

I returned home to Ottawa, Ontario, and started preparing for my desert bighorn hunt that was quickly approaching. I decided to bring two good hunting buds, John Stewart and Rod Schram from Dawson Creek, BC, to join me on the Mexico hunt. They were both excellent hunters, were responsible for getting me hooked on mountain hunts, were great at spotting sheep, and most importantly, they liked tequila! We arrived in Hermosillo, and were at sheep camp that night. This particular sheep camp was not what I was used to however – we had our own beds, with a roof over our heads and a chef!

The next morning, we were instantly on rams – big rams. I recall Clay pulled me aside that morning

before we left and reminded me we had lots of time on this hunt and that first day he just wanted to do some glassing and see what kind of rams were around.

Well after watching a toad of a ram for about 30 minutes, Clay said, "We are going to go kill that ram now. Forget what I said this morning." The rest of the boys all gave the nod of approval without hesitation, so it was on!

Clay and I took off on foot and the rest of the boys stayed on the scopes. On our approach, Clay advised that he liked to take an aggressive approach on hunting sheep and that I should be ready to shoot as we would be right on top of them soon. Being a whitetail hunter from Ontario, I was no stranger to quick shots on running bucks, but I preferred having more time to set up on a once-in-a-lifetime sheep hunt!

Clay paused and signaled me to step in front of him. The last we had seen, the big ram was bedded with a young ram, and suddenly we could hear rocks falling as the rams stood up out of their beds. Then, at 15 yards the big ram popped his head around a cactus and all I saw was horn and half of his face staring at us – but I had no shot – and then he was gone! Then, on the other side of the cliff, the young ram appeared with the big ram behind him at 60 yards. I shot him once on the run, but hit him back a bit far. Clay barked at him and fortunately he stopped, and I put another round in him. He crested the cliff and tipped over! This was my first "Booner" ram, and putting my hands on those horns was surreal; so much mass! We packed him out to the truck and returned to sheep camp and an evening of ceviche, grilled sheep and tequila to wash it down!

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September 2018, I returned to the Willmore with Willow Creek Outfitters, this time with legendary guide Kelly Wiebe. I booked the early hunt this time around, hoping to avoid any snow, but now we had the smoke from the BC wildfires to contend with. When I got to camp the crew had not seen the sun in three weeks due to the smoke. In addition to the limited visibility from the smoke, we got snow, hail and high winds which forced us to camp in the timber.

We finally got a string of two clear days in a row and spotted a band of rams as they ran by us at 200 yards. We assumed they had heard our horses' Swiss bells in the valley

below us and spooked.

It didn't take Kelly long to locate the bedded rams and he confirmed there was a legal ram. I knew this was 75% of the battle, finding a legal ram, but they were bedded at 610 yards with no way to get any closer. Kelly and I debated for hours on how this could play out.

Finally, I decided to trust in the gun that I had Corlanes in Dawson Creek build for me. The 7mm Rem Mag rocky mountain rifle with Huskemaw 4-20 scope was more than capable of this shot. I just needed to do my part!

After waiting for the ram to stand, I released the lead and it hit him in the heart. He was dead within

seconds and he even hung up for us for an easier retrieval, keeping both horns intact!

It ended up taking 25 months to complete my FNAWS, but I now realize it's not about how long it takes, it's about the experience and what these sheep hunts teach you about yourself and what you are capable of. By far, they were the most difficult mental and physical challenges I have endured in my life, but the feeling of accomplishment was worth it. Now I wait until my son Cédric is legal age so I can start hunting sheep with him! Thanks to all the amazing guides and outfitters and, of course, my family who made this possible for me! WS

