

DOWN off the MOUNTAIN at Midnight

— LARRY'S SHORT STORIES #17 —

Sheep shooting can be an evening activity, especially early in the season, when the days are quite long. Brenda and I were hunting Stone Sheep on the Spatsizi plateau, way up in the northwest part of British Columbia. Our spike camp was located near a creek and each morning we climbed to the top of the plateau on horseback, tied up the horses and walked the rim looking for sheep on the sides of the escarpment.

They say that sometimes the sheep can be found just off the side and you can shoot them from the top, but the rams we spotted were a thousand yards out and 500 yards below us, so we had to stalk



Brenda in rain gear. It was really foggy that morning when we rode out, but it cleared in the afternoon.

down off the mountain to get into shooting position.

It was 8:30 in the evening when Brenda shot. Pictures, skinning, cutting and packing takes time and it was 10:30 pm when we started the climb out. Although the elevation was only 5-6,000 feet, the grade was two to one, and it took us an hour to reach the edge of the plateau, stopping many times to rest. Thirty more minutes of flat-ground walking got us back to the horses, using our headlamps for light. The guides argued a couple of times about the direction, but they ultimately got us there. Now, another 30 minutes to pull the pannier boxes off the horse, pack the meat and tie the horns and hide on top.

We saddled up and headed for the far end of the plateau, where we came up sixteen hours earlier —



Brenda with her 13 year old Stone Sheep. Her rifle is a Remington 700, built by Rifles Inc., in 300 Win. Mag.

arriving there about 1:00 am. As I now know, a sane person would have spent the night right there; but guides aren't always sane. Down off the mountain we went.

The only light allowed was the lead guide's headlamp. I was behind Brenda, and could see the rump of her gray mare out to about 15 feet, but no farther. I worked very hard to keep her in sight, so I could know where my horse was going. Fortunately, it was only 30 harrowing minutes down to spike camp.

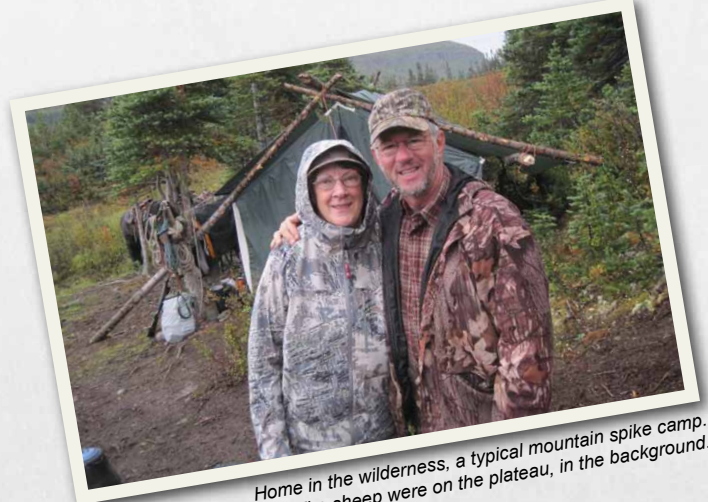
“... guides aren't always sane...”

I have never been really scared on a hunting trip, but several times I have been mildly unnerved, and coming down off that mountain in the dark was certainly one of them.

USA
Midway

Larry Potterfield

Elk Horn Spike Camp
Spatsizi Plateau
British Columbia, Canada
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Home in the wilderness, a typical mountain spike camp. The sheep were on the plateau, in the background.