

A Great SHEEP HUNTING Adventure

— LARRY'S SHORT STORIES #124 —

All three of us knew that this scheduled eleven day hunt in the mountains would be challenging – and myself especially, as this was my second trip to the area and I have a few years on the others. Every hunt is different, and none of us could possibly understand how we would relate to the many hours on horseback, the long days and late nights – and of course, the wind and weather.

A de Havilland Beaver single-engine float plane, made about 1950, flew us through the mountains from Smithers, B.C. to a nice base camp beside a small lake – a couple hours to the north. There we enjoyed cabins and hot showers, for one day.



They normally hunt in packs, but this one was alone. Wolves are a serious threat to maintaining stable populations of moose, caribou and sheep – which the outfitters depend on to book hunters into their areas.

Next morning, we saddled up and headed out – two guides, a wrangler, the three of us and six pack horses. The packs were loaded with our personal gear, tents, cooking equipment – and enough supplies to last for a couple of weeks. It was a beautiful, clear morning and quite a sight and thrill to finally get started, although it was a long way to sheep country. We took a lunch break mid-afternoon and arrived at the first spike camp location well before dark – a beautiful, and uneventful, seven hour trail ride.



Day one of the hunt; we are full of anticipation and it's a beautiful day – as we leave base camp. Jeff Larkin on the left and Matt Fleming on the right.

After breakfast, the guides and wrangler repeated yesterday's packing of the horses, leaving the wall tent set up for moose hunters, who would come in mid-September. We pressed on – the weather again was beautiful. Early in the afternoon, guide Kurt spotted a lone wolf, probably 1200 yards out and slightly downhill. Guide Esther led Matt and Jeff on the stalk and Matt took the first shot. It was a bit high, and off went the wolf. Esther gave her best impression of a wolf howl; he stopped and looked back, for the last time of his life, as Jeff's 300 Win. Mag. found its target from over 500 yards away.

"... in the ambient light of the northern sky."

Pictures and skinning took a couple of hours, then onward and upward. By now, we were at the edge of sheep country, and approached each ridge carefully, with the guides going forward first, to check the near rim – then we all advanced and glassed. From one ridge we saw five wolves down at the far, opposite side of the valley, perhaps a mile or so away and made a mental note as to how we might stalk them – if we got there before we ran out of light. Three hours later we came to a point above them, stalked down to the top of the rimrock and Matt got a bullet into the closest one. Hurrying now, we made it to spike camp just before dark.

This was definitely sheep country; but the weather was changing. Our guides knew exactly where they wanted to start, based on prior experience; so, after breakfast, we saddled up and headed south. Riding, then glassing, from one ridge to the next; we saw ewes and lambs, but no rams. Sundown was about 9:30, full dark about 10:30 and we arrived in camp at 11:30 p.m. — finishing the ride in the ambient light of the northern sky. We were cold and tired, and it was just our first day.

Sheep hunting is a process of elimination; check your favorite area first, then your second, then your third; they've got to be somewhere! The following morning we went east, to check a mountain that Brenda and I took sheep on four years earlier; but no rams this time!

Next morning we headed south again – farther this time, but with the same results. By early evening we were nearly finished with our loop and were glassing the side of the mountain above camp, when Geordie, our wrangler, spotted a single ram – a mile away. We started working in that direction, arriving above the rimrock about 9:00 p.m. — it was overcast, raining lightly, windy and cold. The ram was bedded at about 200 yards, but the light was poor, so Jeff and Matt decided to wait till morning.

Blue, partly cloudy skies welcomed us the next morning as we started up the mountain; but by 10:30, as we tied up the horses, it was starting to snow. At 1:05 that afternoon, Jeff made the shot. We climbed down to the sheep, ate our lunch then did the pictures and processing. We got back to camp early enough to catch fish for dinner.



To get to Jeff's sheep, we had to climb down the rim rock. This was the most precarious spot and it was a long way to the bottom. Geordie Collins, the wrangler (standing), and Kurt McGhie, one of the guides (below), are supposed to catch me if I fall.

the day in a boat with Reg Collingwood, glassing the mountainsides from the river. We saw lots of goats and a few ewes and lambs, but no rams. Unknown to us, Matt and Kurt had spotted a group of rams in early afternoon, made a long stalk, and shot a beautiful ram about 5:00 p.m. At 12:30 a.m., Matt walked into the cabin, woke us up and told his story. What a great sheep-hunting adventure this had been.

"How do you explain this to somebody?"



This very heavy, 14-15 year old stone sheep is the trophy of a lifetime for Jeff. Matt is on the left, and he got one two days later. Jeff's shot was about 80 yards, with his Rifles, Inc. 300 Win. Mag.

The guides were sure we had covered all of the sheep area around this spike camp and that there was no reason to look further, so the following day we packed up everything and headed south to another base camp. We got a late start, as the sheep hide had to be finished up and we had exhausted the firewood and needed to leave some for the next hunting party. At 2 p.m. we broke camp and began a 9-1/2 hour ride – arriving at base camp about 11:30 p.m. Fortunately, that was the first night of a full moon! At one point, as we were riding through the timber during the last couple of hours, Matt turned and asked "How do you explain this to somebody?"

Next morning Matt and Kurt rode up the mountain alone, as they were going to be walking the ridges and wanted to be unheard and unseen by the sheep. Jeff and I spent

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This is an end of the hunt picture from our last base camp. From L-R, myself, Jeff Larkin, Esther McGhie (guide), Kurt McGhie (guide), Matt Fleming, Geordie Collins (wrangler).