

## Rocky Mountain Bighorn 2001

It all started when I got that thin white envelope from the Department of Wildlife congratulating me on drawing a Rocky Mountain bighorn tag, one of three in the State. To say the least, I was excited! I immediately started doing research on the East Humboldt range. I called hunting partners, people that wanted to scout and hunt. I was getting married and as a wildland firefighter had a busy fire season, so I didn't get to do as much scouting as I would have liked. On the only trip I was able to make to the area, I saw five young rams, about 15 ewes and lambs. It seemed like this was going to be a good hunting area, but I knew that mountain range was huge, and sheep could be anywhere.

By September, my hunting partners Mike and Chris Dianda, Shawn Espinoza and I headed out for opening day. The weather was hot as heck – high 80's, even at 10,000 feet. I didn't have much luck finding sheep, but saw a lot of mountain goats and the Himalayan snowcock that I had hunted in the past but never had even seen. It was an experience. We had our 80 pound packs, hiked to the top of Lizzy's Basin and proceeded to walk around there for four or five days. Still not seeing much, we decided to come back when the weather was cooler.

My friend, Kenny Dewitt, a veteran of many sheep hunts with a great eye for sheep was up for the next trip. Before we left, I tried to contact one other hunter who had a sheep tag. I didn't want to be walking around the same ground he was covering. His wife told

me that he had harvested a ram the day before. I left word for him to call me as I wanted to speak to him and determine in which direction the rams took off so I could concentrate in that area. As I turned into Lizzy Basin area, I got a call from the hunter who was at a guide's house in Wells, about four miles away from my location. We took off to see his sheep at the guide's ranch in Wells on the Clover Valley side. I spoke with the other hunter only to learn that my hunt thus far was similar to his. He had been walking around for four or five days unable to locate the rams. He ended up hiring Humboldt Outfitters, Wilde Brough and Mike Morrison. The day after hiring Mike, he got a nice ram around 170 Boone and Crockett points.

My original intent was to hunt without hiring a guide. But after comparing stories of stumbling around for weeks and not seeing much and hearing about another ram he saw that was much larger than the one that he got in addition to seeing a group of about eighteen rams running together at that time, I was changing my mind. Needless to say this got me excited! The hunter pulled me aside and said, "You know what. The best thing you could do is to hire this guide to take you in there. He's got access through the Star Valley side and he'll put you in those sheep that are on the other side." To get to those sheep was about about a six or seven hour walk from the Clover Valley side over to the Star Valley side.

So, I decided to part with a little bit of money and have the guide pack us in through the Star Valley side over towards the Third and Fourth Boulder Basin area. We stayed at the ranch that night in the bunkhouse. The next morning we met the guide at the Flying J in

Wells, and we took off - loaded with a string of mules the guide provided. We packed light for about a three to four mile ride to the top. I gained a whole new respect for these surefooted animals. We made camp, went to look for sheep, and found some rams right off the bat. The big group was still altogether, and they were only about 1,000 yards away from where the other hunter had harvested his ram. They were in wide-open barren country. We tried to pull the sneak on them, but no luck doing that. This attempt actually blew them out, and they ran over to the other side where I had hunted previously, the other side of the Hole In the Mountain. Quite discouraging!

While heading back to camp I saw three other rams in basin above us. By now it was starting to get dark. I had spooked them into the drainage above, but after running to catch up to them, I was still left with a 350-400 yard shot straight up-hill. The rams stopped, I took one shot, missed, and they all disappeared over the ridge.

The next morning, we hiked up the ridge we had hiked the day before. It took us about five hours to get back to the same spot. As we topped out, the guide spotted some sheep in his binoculars. The sheep were standing on a vertical face probably six hundred yards away, the same area I'd seen a billy goat three weeks earlier. I was hesitant to shoot because of the vertical ledge. There was a nice ram in there, high 160's. As the sheep came off of the vertical face and came closer I took a shot, but it was way too far off. The sheep headed for Lizzy's Basin. I was bummed out! I had pushed all those sheep over to where I had walked earlier! With no other choice, we headed back to camp.

The next morning it was back to the top of the hill where the wind was blowing a little bit. We stowed up under a limber pine, spotted some mule deer and goats. That's when Kenny found two rams towards the Fourth Boulder Basin up on the hillside. One of the rams caught our attention - a real decent ram! He was far away but even through the glasses I could see he carried his mass all the way down. So Kenny and I started sneaking on the ram. The ram got up and started feeding downhill towards us. On a break I looked above us, and the big group of rams that I'd blown out the day before were back in the same spot. They were broken up into smaller groups and another ram was down below them that also looked decent as well. Then I was in a bit of a dilemma. Which one do I pursue? I really didn't know how big the one was that I had seen earlier in the day. Since we had already been walking for two hours, we decided to try for the ram we were currently stalking with Plan B being to sneak around and try to make a move on the rams that had been spotted the day before.

We made it to a tree line but were unable to see the sheep. Still not knowing how far away he was but knowing he was just feeding downhill, we took our time walking and used the trees as cover. When I thought we were getting close to where I had last marked him, we dropped our packs and started sneaking through the trees. I popped out of a set of trees, looked up, and the ram was standing there about 60 yards away looking at me. I raised my rifle and when he saw me move he took off up the hill and disappeared! I covered those 60 yards in a hurry. By that time the ram crossed a drainage and was heading straight up the other side at 150 yards. I sat down, got a good rest, pulled the trigger and the hunt was over.

When I reached my sheep, was I ever surprised! I knew from his size through the glasses that he was big, but I never dreamed that he would be that Big! I was just taken aback. Because my tape measure was in my pack, which by then was not on me, we used a dollar bill for measuring and started stretching it out around his horns. I couldn't believe the mass that this sheep carried and the length that he had!

The guide was watching the whole thing through the spotting scope. After he heard the one shot, he went back and got the mules. This took a couple of hours. He was able to work those mules within about 150 yards of us. We didn't have much of a pack. We took a lot of great pictures.

After all of the excitement I simply sat there and reflected on what a tremendous opportunity I'd been given and that I was able to share it with my friend and also a new hunting buddy, Mike Morrison, a legend of a man who thoroughly impressed me. I hope to always be able to get around the hills as well as he does. With the help of my friends, a guide and Tony Walsley of Nevada Department of Wildlife, I reached the goal of getting a Rocky Mountain bighorn. And certainly, my wife was on my mind. She is patient, puts up with all my hunting trips, and was especially understanding with this trip as we were expecting our first child.

We were so tired of eating MRE's, dinner that night was half a back strap. Next morning, we started down with the mules and got the sheep back to Elko where he was validated.

After the 60-day drying period, he scored 178 2/8 Boone and Crockett points – a tremendous sheep!

Since then, I've thought about this trip a great deal and have taken time to think about all the people that were looking down on me that day. I know my Grandfather was there in spirit and shared what was one of the greatest hunting moments I've ever had.