

“THE HUNT OF A LIFETIME”

BY BRAD KELLEY

MY DREAM of hunting sheep started back in the late 1980's when I started watching Gordon Eastman's videos. He hunted the long horn ram in Nevada and the Aravaipa Ram in Arizona. This really gave me the sheep bug. The years went by, and I just never got the opportunity. Finally in 2007, I meet Myron and Mike Wakkuri at a hunting show. They had a great operation for hunting sheep so I started following them in the Wyoming Outdoors Magazine. They were able to take one of the top three awards every year except for one or two. Some years I was able to put in for the sheep hunt because

I had enough money, other years I couldn't do it. Everyone knows that raising a family is expensive and my dreams would just have to be put on hold for now and just buy a point. I kept in touch with Mike throughout the years and saw his rams continue to win awards.

In February of 2020, I decided I couldn't watch from the background anymore—it was time to go sheep hunting! So I gave Mike a call to see what the outlook was for the next season. He informed me that he had seen a longhorn ram during the elk hunt that was good enough for anyone. I didn't hesitate, I reserved the first 10 days of the season with him on the spot. I told him, “Let's go hunting!”

I knew I had enough points to draw the tag and figured the odds were in my favor. I gave Mike a call to set up a time to be in camp—the hunt couldn't come fast enough. I was living every day like a kid on Christmas Eve, anticipating what might happen. The Thursday before the hunt, Mike informed me that he had found two shooter rams. My excitement grew, if these two stayed put, my sheep dreams could become a reality! I arrived on Saturday, just a few days before the hunt. Mike and I went scouting to see if we could find the rams. No Luck! Brandon Flanagan was scouting another location and found eight rams with at least one, maybe two shooters.

Mike, Brandon and I went up on Sunday to check out the herd. I wasn't quite sure we'd find them but low and behold, there they were. We watched them for about 10 minutes before they disappeared into the canyon. While we were there, we spotted another three rams higher on the mountain and one on the top of the ridge. I knew if we could keep tabs on these, this hunt could be legendary. Mike and I went back to see if we could find the two shooter rams with no luck. Brandon stayed until dark but the herd of eight rams never resurfaced. The adrenaline roller coaster I was riding was taking a toll. I had waited over 25 years for this once in a lifetime opportunity and I just hoped that everything panned out in my favor. The next day we went up and located the herd of eight. The herd contained two shooter rams—one was a full curl and the other had a long sweep curl that went below the bottom of the jaw. We took a quick assessment: both of the rams should score over 170, that's exactly what I was looking for. I was like a kid in a candy shop! We stayed on the rams all day and put them to bed. By nightfall, all the rams were laying down except for two. We



left them for the night, but not before forming a plan for the next morning.

That morning, I awoke with a nervousness like never before. It was the day I'd been waiting for two decades. This was it and ultimately it was up to our scouting skills and my shot to determine how it ends. We hiked out of camp to see if the rams were still there. Amazingly, they were, and the stalk was on!

As things go, it wasn't all perfect. That morning, mother nature treated us to Wyoming's famous swirling winds. The wind is a double edge sword. It can blow our scent away from the rams, or it could carry

our scent right in their direction. One whiff of us and they'd bolt for sure. The gambling had begun.

Hoping they wouldn't catch our scent, we scrambled over to an outcropping of rocks. I zeroed into the one I wanted to target. He was 260 yards away.

Mike turned to me, “Can you make the shot?”

“No, not with these winds trying to blow me off the rocks.” I responded. I knew at this moment that it wasn't about my pride. I couldn't risk losing my dreams, it was safer to move a little closer.

We passed on the shot and slipped down through the rocks. We let the rams out of our sight as we moved over to the next outcropping. It was risky losing sight of them, it was risky moving closer, but these were all risks we had to take. When we got to the rocks, six rams were laying down and two were feeding. What a sight to see if you have a tag in your pocket! You can imagine at this point my blood is pumping and I'm ready. The big full curl ram was laying down at an angle that didn't create a good shot. At 150 yards, I got a solid rest I just needed to have the ram stand up. I could wait. I'd waited 25 years already, what's another hour? After about 20 minutes the chill hit me— it was then that I realized just how cold I had gotten. Up until now, the adrenaline had kept me warm. I kept waiting, I could be patient. It seemed like an eternity, but the ram finally stood up.

Mike whispered, “shoot.” I didn't hesitate. I was on the ram and I shot—hit him the first shot! Mike said, “shoot him again” I hit him again and he went straight down hill for about 10 yards and piled up. He was down for good!

The 25 years of waiting had just paid off! As I made my way over to the ram, a flood of emotions swept over me. A feeling of accomplishment, a sense pride, completion— a lifetime of longing was now a reality! What a feeling to have a ram down!

Every hunter knows that any ram is a trophy, but to have a 170 plus on the ground—now that is just the icing on the cake. What a great hunt! I couldn't have asked for anything better. Wyoming Hunt Area 19 is where all my sheep dreams came true! I want to thank Mike, Brandon, Myron and Karma for all their shared expertise. Hunting is always a good time! 🏆

—Brad Kelley, Ram Hunter Extraordinaire