

WYOGA HUNTING STORY CONTEST WINNER

# "A LION STORY"

**WE PILED INTO THE TACOMA** that morning and the dash read -27 degrees, it was January 1st, and I was overly tired from partying the night before, but that's never stopped me before. We waited for the crew to show up and proceeded to head out to the usual spot to look for lion tracks.

When my dad and Jason had come to me a couple weeks prior and wanted to know if I wanted an opportunity to hunt for a lion, I had no idea what this hunt had in store. We had spent 6 days and many long hard miles in search of a track, we had come close some days prior, but the tracks weren't quite fresh enough for the hounds to pick up a strong scent or the tracks indicated a female based on the stride length.

We turned off the highway and as usual we were about 20 minutes until daylight but being early is better than being late as my dad always says. Jason laid out the game plan as we drank coffee and shared some hunting stories with the other guys that had come along as we waited for daylight. The sun had finally made its appearance, we all split up and started out on some promising 2-track roads.

It was about 10 am, with nothing to show but some bobcat tracks here and there. We decided to hit one more road in hopes of some luck, now when it comes to hunting for me it seems I have always had bad luck here and there, so the hope was running low as afternoon approached. We drove about 2 miles down the rough road and what do you know, there it laid a little blown in from the wind that previous night a decent sized tom track. My heart pounded as I realized my luck had possibly turned around.

We unloaded the truck and radio called the Hounds-men to meet us, after a couple minutes he radioed us saying he found a track just up ahead of us that crossed back across the road. We headed up to meet him and to my disbelief it was the same track but this time fresher than can be, he had crossed back over that morning and was within a very close radius to us. And just like the flash the instant we let the dogs out the chase was on, we sat and watched the GPS as the dogs got farther and farther, Jason decided we better catch up in case the lion was closer than we thought, we pulled off the road a couple miles ahead and listened for the chaos of the hounds, very faint and far away but you could hear them.

We watched some buck deer for a while until the hounds reached the end of the draw where they jumped down over the edge and the GPS chimed

that they had the lion treed. As we beat feet over to the canyon they were held up in, we drove down the canyon and there the dogs were to our right about 3 quarters up the side of a very rocky and steep hill. I spotted the dogs through my binoculars and then there laid the lion wedged up in some rocks. We raced up the hill, slipping and falling on the snow and slick rocks, until finally we were 50 yards directly below him.

As he peered over the edge at me, a scowl on his face, ears pinned back swatting and growling at the hounds the hair began to raise on the back of my neck. His head was as big as a pumpkin and his feet, now those were some feet. If I asked you what chaos sounded like, I would tell you that you haven't heard chaos until you hear hounds that have a lion held up, I couldn't hear myself think.

As I set up for a shot, I realized that I only had a shot that gave me 2 inches of his back, and I decided I wasn't willing to take a bad shot. So, we didn't waste any time and jumped over to the other side of the ledge and I set up again, as I held my scope and rifle up, I realized even here I only could see his tail hanging over the edge and his hind end. This had to be one of the most difficult shots, so Jason and my Dad told me to place my shot just right at the top of the tail and hit his back.

As I began to shake knowing this was my one and only opportunity, I knew I had to shoot now, or I wouldn't be able to hold my gun still. Jason gave the cue to pull the dogs off, I squeezed the trigger and "Boom".

As the cat laid lifeless below us, I could finally breathe and shake all I wanted too. As I looked at my dad with joyful tears in his eyes, I couldn't help myself but give him a high five as he pulled me in for a hug with tears streaming down my face. This hunt was one of the most difficult, disappointing, hardest working, and rewarding I had ever experienced. As we laid him up for pictures and shuffled him around, we realized this tom was a warrior, he had bite wounds and claw marks all over his face along with missing parts of his pads and a chunk of his ear.

After some good laughs, congratulations, and lots of pictures the work had only just begun, we drug him down the hill using dog leashes being he was so heavy no one could pick him up. We got to the trucks and took a minute to take everything in, everyone was grinning from ear to ear as we all came together and shared the moment. Finally weighed him in at 140lbs and headed home to start skinning.

From this hunt I learned that to be successful you must hold your face right and pray to God he gives you a blessing. Hunting has opened so many doors and opportunities for me, I can't count how many people I have met, and the friends made. My passion for the hunt will never die out. 🐾