

WYOGA HUNTING STORY CONTEST WINNER

# “WYOMING SHEEP HUNT”

by CHARLES WOLCOTT

BIG GAME HUNTING

## IT WAS LATE IN THE OPENING

**DAY** of the 2017 Wyoming Bighorn Sheep season. I was exhausted, dehydrated, famished, and fighting those self-doubts that creep into one’s mind after a tough day of scrambling over loose rocks after rams. As far as I was concerned the day’s hunt was over, and I had already begun that mental process of willing myself into believing that, with some good food, water and rest, I could do this all over again tomorrow.

Then, high above, the clatter of falling rocks, and over the ridge came three galloping rams. Whatever had spooked them, I could not know, but the lead ram looked darn good, with deep curls and heavy bases, and the dark, chocolate brown cape that comes only with full maturity. I quickly put down the food intended for my morning breakfast, and sitting concealed in the cool shadow of an overhanging ledge fed a shell into my mountain rifle, taking aim at the large ram charging down the broken slope.

After twenty-one years of applying, I had drawn a Bighorn Sheep permit for the Laramie Mountains of southeast Wyoming. I would be hunting with Mike Wakkuri of Elk Mountain Outfitters. Mike is a life-long resident of the area. He knows where the sheep live and where they go when pressured. And he knows many of the private landowners in the area. This is important in that Area 19 is a mosaic of public and private land, with much of the ‘private’ closed to hunting.

Earlier that day a stud ram we had been chasing had given us the slip, passing into a private area only 40 yards over an invisible property line, known only to a GPS device



bouncing signals off a satellite in outer space. To lose a ram like that after having him squarely in my crosshairs at 140 yards had been tough to take, but as sheep hunters learn, the great challenges of mountain

behaving in unpredictable ways. Things do not always work out as planned.

Then, far above, the three rams came charging over the slope! And the first ram looked big... nearly as large as the ram we had been chasing earlier that day. He was big bodied, with a dark chocolate cape and deep drop to his horns, clearly mature and full curl. I quickly fed a round into the chamber, swung on the lead ram and pulled the trigger. “Click!” What!!! In twenty years, never a misfire with that rifle! Had I loaded the chamber? To lose one ram in an afternoon to an invisible property line was bad enough. To lose a second to a freaky misfire would have been crushing!

Fortunately, I recovered quickly and worked the bolt, recognizing that I would have only one shot before the rams gained the cover of the slope. So for the second time I swung on the lead ram, and at the

shot saw the Bighorn seize-up slightly before passing from sight. I thought I had hit the ram, but did not know how well. Then, climbing into view up the mountain were the two subordinate rams, but without their leader. I



then was sure that the ram was down. Unbelievably, it had all come together. How had I been so lucky? But anyone who hunts in high mountains knows that luck often plays a large part. Fortunately, the Sheep gods had been generous to me that day.

I want to close by thanking Mike Wakkuri and Elk Mountain Outfitters for putting me into

hunting are largely mental. In the exhaustion and dehydration, the thin air, the grind of heavy packs, and vagaries of wind and weather, it is easy to get down, both with oneself, and with those around you. But to do so is ruinous. Hunting involves wild animals

position to take a great old ram, and the Wyoming Game and Fish Department for their excellent stewardship of these spectacular Bighorns. 🐐