

by Nick Erway

Hunting Mountain Goats with BEARFOOT ADVENTURES

After spending several years attending the Eastern Sports Show in Harrisburg, PA in February I finally decided to take a mountain goat hunt with Chet Benson as my guide for one of my greatest hunting adventures, a backpack hunt in Alaska for mountain goat. Having drawn a mountain goat tag on Kodiak Island, AK it was just a matter of waiting for the time to leave Pennsylvania and head to Kodiak Island. I am 59 and spent ten months getting physically in shape and lost 80 pounds to get ready for this hunt, hiking every day at least two miles with a 65-pound pack.

Early on I had made the decision that I wanted to use my TCI muzzleloader and try for a record book goat. I told my guide that I would do my best to get in shape and keep up with him so he could find us a record book goat.

We flew in by floatplane and camped just off the beach late in the afternoon to start the hunt. With binocular we were able to see some goats on the top of the mountain we were to climb the following morning. At least we knew the goats were there waiting for us. After dinner and setting up the tent we went to sleep for what seemed like a night that would never end. The nights are long in October in Alaska. The weather was really nice and was not raining, which was a great thing. Getting up in the morning at first light I was treated to my first brown bear as a small bear was trotting along in the grasses no more than three or four hundred yards from our campsite.

After a quick breakfast of coffee, oatmeal and granola bars we packed up our gear and started up the mountain. Leaving half of our food in a bear-proof ball at the beach, we began the climb up about 1,200 feet in elevation where we set up our next camp that we would be hunting from. There was a little

pool of water and a stream that flowed down the side of the mountain providing an excellent source of nice, clean, drinking water. We were not even done pitching the tent when another bear of about 500 pounds took off running from nearby and she looked back at us apparently unsure of what was intruding on her space. Well, I guess I got my chance to see brown bears. I must say I was not so sure at this point I liked sleeping in a pup tent anymore.

Leaving most of our gear at the camp enabled us to lighten our packs and we headed on up to the top of the mountain at nearly 3,000 feet. We then walked along the ridge heading along the spine of the mountain to find goats. Most of the time this ridgeline was no more than a couple feet wide, in places it was mere inches wide. A good half of the time there was a drop of about 1,000 feet straight down. If you were to slip, you were done. The other side was not quite a vertical drop, but you would have slid or rolled hundreds of feet down and would not have been in real good shape when finally stopping and probably would have wished you didn't make it. You would have been hurting real bad.

After several miles along the ridge we found a goat looking down over the side of the mountain. It was still maybe a quarter of a mile away. Every time the goat disappeared we snuck up closer. Shortly we crept up to the top of a high point on the ridge. Peering over the top there were eight goats lounging at the very top of the ridge. We were pretty close. Using the rangefinder we were 157 yards from the largest goat. I got all set up and using a pack for a rest was pretty confident I could make an excellent shot from there. Chet studied the goats and realized that there was not a billy amongst them. They were all

nannies and one kid. A couple of the nannies were quite large and would have indeed been not only legal game but quite a trophy in their own right.

Because it was the first day of the hunt I decided to go on and try to find the large billy that Chet had seen on this mountain a couple weeks earlier. Chet had been on the other side of this mountain while guiding another client and had spotted what looked like a nice, large goat over there with his binoculars. Knowing I had challenged him to find a big one if I kept up, he decided we would come back for my chance at the record book goat. We got up and started walking toward the goats, not knowing what they were going to do. Expecting them to run off down the mountain to the west or straight away and possibly scare off any other goats, they did neither. They just started slowly walking away, following the ridgeline away from us. As we followed along we all walked another mile or two and as we came around a small rise in the ridge another large goat appeared and started walking along behind the first eight that we were following. Chet was sure this was the big billy he saw, but we were still too far away.

By now the small herd was out over 500 yards and slowly getting farther away. Chet decided to try something different and put on a white painter suit. He got out in the open and made some goat sounds. The big billy stopped and looked back. He even turned and started towards us. He probably came maybe ten yards and then turned and started away again. Off we went again, trudging along this narrow ridgeline. It became more treacherous and there were some real steep sections that went up and back down again. Up and over a hundred feet at points that in some places were barely passable. We dropped our packs to be a little safer and kept following along. The big billy seemed to stop and watch us as we approached. When he looked away we would sneak up as fast as we could until he appeared again and then we'd freeze. He'd disappear again and we'd sneak up again. Finally, the rangefinder read 200 yards. He was looking at us, but I got on a comfortable rest and Chet said to try for him- it was to be our only chance. BOOM!

As I took my shot the goat just stood there and shook his head a little, then disappeared. Reloading the muzzleloader, I was going back over the shot in my mind and I realized that in the excitement of the moment I had used the 250-yard dot in my scope and must have shot right over him. Running up to the peak of the mountain we looked down and there was the goat down below us at 100 yards broadside and I got another shot off. This one hit him hard and he pitched off the side of the rock he was on and started rolling down the mountain. Rolling and rolling, he finally came to a stop on a patch of ice about 800 feet below. He didn't move again. He was down for good.

By now it was about 4:14 p.m. and we were nearly five miles from our tent. We scrambled down the steep, loose rock and getting to the goat I had only a few minutes to look him over and admire this trophy of a lifetime. We took some pictures and partially skinned the hide off and cut some of the meat to carry




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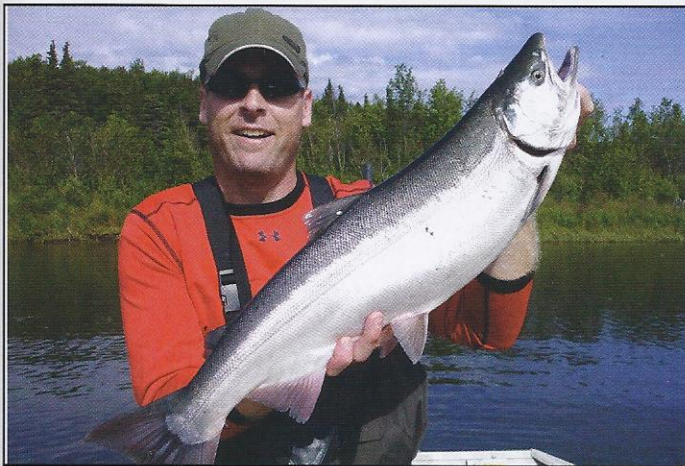
back, not daring to spend too much time as we had to get back to camp before dark. It was decided that I would take off ahead of Chet and climb back up to the top of the mountain and start back to camp. Eventually Chet caught up to me and we were able to get back just as it was getting dark.

The next day I hung out in camp and watched eagles soaring above and hunted for a nice Sitka blacktail buck. Chet went back and packed out the rest of the meat. We were to be picked up the next day by the plane. The weather still was sunny and clear and he wanted us to get out before any weather set in and we wouldn't have been able to get out. Looking at the hide back at camp, it was now that I knew what happened with the first shot at 200 yards. It had hit the goat right at the base of his left horn. That was why he was shaking his head and did not run off out of range. I had rung his bell and I am sure he was rather dizzy to say the least.

I was of course totally excited about the goat and the hunt itself. Although I think much of the excitement was severely tempered by the need to be so focused with every step and the need to be so cautious on the ridgeline to keep from falling off the mountain into oblivion. Once back to the beach the following morning it finally set in that we had indeed gotten our record goat with a muzzleloader and had made it back safely.

Once back to Kodiak we went to the Fish and Game Department- the goat was aged at 6 1/2 years old with horns 9 1/2 inches long with 5 1/2 inch bases. I will have this billy scored and entered into Safari Club International in the Muzzleloader Mountain Goat division. It will be the new #7 in the top ten. 

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