

**Donnie Young (MS)** took a mid-Caucasian tur in Kabardino-Balkariya and a Kuban (Western) tur in Karachayevo-Cherkesiya, Russia during 2013 and then filed this excellent report worthy of a Skyline Feature:

During the 2013 GSCO convention I purchased a Kuban (Western) tur auction hunt. The hunt was for one of the toughest mountain goats worldwide, ranging in the western end of the Caucasus Mountains of southern Russia. After further discussions during the convention with the outfitter, I decided to add another hunt for a mid-Caucasian tur in the central areas of the Caucasus. Dates and schedules were made for late September through early October 2013. The weather would still be good and the rut would hopefully be in full swing.

Airline tickets, Russian visa, gun permits and an invitation letter were all completed well in advance, as this would be my tenth country to hunt outside North America and I had become accustomed to checking everything twice. This included checking with my airline about carrying my rifle abroad. I thought I was well prepared when September 19 arrived.

Turmoil struck immediately early in the morning of the 19th when the gate agent refused to accept my rifle permit from Russia. He stated, "I don't read Russian and you cannot take a firearm into Russia." Two hours of conversation later, including online conversations with the gate agent, the station manager and the Russian Consulate, all the way up to the plane's departure, the unreasonable, ill-informed gate agent still refused to give me permission for my gun to be loaded. I was forbidden to carry my rifle. I have only shot one rifle and one bullet for the last five years. Now I had to overcome a great mental obstacle. The airlines had thrown me a curve.

Alexander, professional hunter for the adventure, met me in Moscow the next morning and reassured me that he would find me a suitable firearm for my use during each hunt. We took the next train into Moscow for a day trip before the following day's departure by plane to Mineral'nyye Vody, along with a drive into Nal'chik below the mountains.

My hunting partner was a Frenchman by the name of **Ludvick Petit**. When we arrived on the first evening, we experienced a joyful greeting along with celebratory vodka shots by our Russian host in the valley. We dined and shared stories of our previous sheep and goat hunts together late into the evening. Men from three different countries were all enjoying talking about their hunting experiences.

The next day took us to the southern border of the Caucasus into the Kabardino-Balkariya Republic to hunt the mid-Caucasian tur. The closer we got to our hunting area, the temperature and

visibility changed for the worse. The following day the sky began to break around 10 a.m. Alexander, Jamaal and I loaded up to go higher to the fly camp and glass. After we reached the fly camp we spotted a group of rams along the top ridgeline. There appeared to be some shooters in the group, but it was a long hike to make late in the day. We made a quick hike over 4,000 feet in elevation to less than 900 yards from the top. We could see two good rams in the bedded group but one was really special, gold medal for sure. There was only one route of ascent and it would not be an easy or quiet climb, as we were free climbing on steep tight shelves and loose rock slides. We were able to get to less than 400 yards on a narrow advantage point and could see the bedded rams. At this point I knew that if we pushed forward there was a great chance of spooking the rams. After some discussion, mainly because I was not using my rifle, we decided to push closer. We continued the stalk, climbing behind a jagged ridge just below the rams. We had

ascended to within 250 yards of the mountain peak while the sun had set behind the peak. Just as we ever so cautiously peered around a large rock, I saw all the rams bounding over the top of the peak, never to be seen again.

The next morning we sidehilled east over several ridges to a new valley, trying to find a good ram. Increasing winds were giving us a sign of what was to come, but we continued to glass through the deep canyon, only to find lambs and ewes. The night came early as the weather began its fury. Gusts were now coming with such force the canvas sang its song of a winter ballad while the temperature dropped drastically.

We awoke the next morning to a ground covered in deep snow, with howling winds making the

hunting too dangerous. The clouds just above us made visibility a negative. Day five continued with another day of intense weather that kept us in camp again. Alexander knew that we must relocate to another area where the mountains had a long deep canyon for some protection against the wind. The next day we took the first opportunity the weather allowed, packing up and heading down the mountain to the valley. Relocation was a must for our success. We traveled down the valley and into town for a quick shower, and then were introduced to a guide named Mickiel. He is an icon in the guide industry in the Caucasus, previously guiding several renowned mountain hunters to world-class trophies. We loaded up and drove to the southern side of the range, crossed over and around a river that took us up through a gorgeous deep canyon surrounded by high peaks and glaciers. We immediately made a quick hike back to the end of the canyon. Glassing all along the way, we saw more tur feeding on both sides of this canyon than we had seen the entire trip. Ewes and lambs were plentiful but the big rams were still being elusive.



Donnie Young (MS) took this mid-Caucasian tur in Kabardino-Balkariya, Russia during September 2013.



Early the next morning we hiked to the ridgeline, trying to be on top by sunrise for glassing the tur coming back up the mountain. We made the hike without trouble and we were in a good position for glassing the ridges below and across. Lambs, ewes and small rams were visible, but still no shooters. We continued our climb, heading along the ridge top. Unfortunately the sheltered canyon still had some ice and snow up high that made the free climbing on the ice-covered rocks treacherous. At times I had to extend my short legs and arms as far as they would reach just to make the next ice-covered foot or handhold.

Late in the morning, Mickiel's keen eyes spotted about 10" of a horn in a thick patch of trees just below a peak approximately 1,500 yards down the ridge, tucked in a small hook in the rocks. We stayed up high and quickly closed the gap to less than 700 yards. Mickiel's impressive spotting uncovered not only a good ram, but also three sleeping rams in a tight thicket of trees. The thicket was totally sheltered from the wind but warmed by the sun. A rock fold ran down the mountain that created the hook where the tur lay. Down the fold we eased until we were within 350 yards of the sleeping tur. Mickiel said for us to shoot on three. I wasn't using my own gun, so I knew this trigger was set from the factory and required a strong pull. One, two, bang!

I shot too quickly. The three tur quickly jumped up and onto the rocks above. The tur were in full view, with one showing a wound to the vitals but still standing down low. I quickly fired again into the wounded tur, hitting him with another vital shot. In the same time frame, Ludvick had zoomed in on the ram at the top of the peak. He quickly put two deadly shots in the breadbox. My tur stood there acting unaffected, but finally fell down the steep terrain. Ludvick's tur continued over the top of the peak out of sight. It was evident that these rams are as tough as the mountains they reside in.

The excitement that caused my quick shot did not fare well with my hunting partners. It was a tough shot threaded through the trees with only about 12" of a visible vital organ section, so I had to pull and squeeze simultaneously. Not knowing if we were both successful wasn't good. We went down and back up to the location of the first animal and then Mickiel hurried over the top to find that indeed we had both been successful. Ludvick and I had taken two SCI Silver Medal mid-Caucasian tur.

The second part of the hunt was for the Kuban (Western) tur in the far western range of the Caucasus Mountains. Ruslan would be our guide. We awoke to another day of low visibility rain, wind and sleet but we continued on to the spike camp, arriving late in the night. The weather pattern continued to get worse by adding snow to the mix. The snow began to pile up as much as three feet deep along the trail, making it impossible for us to hunt. Three more days went by without any better weather. We finally saw stars and hoped for the opportunity to hunt.

We awoke early to start our trek up to an area far up the river where it begins to flow from the glacier. The sun was sparse but the wind was definitely still high (and getting higher) while we climbed. After we passed the glacier, Ruslan stopped quickly and glassed the far ridge where he spotted some tur. We closed the distance, but only one shooter ram was in the bunch. After we made a stalk behind the peak, we came over at the top, looking down on the group just under 400 yards. I was the eldest in the

group by 15 years; therefore, Ludwick allowed me the opportunity to take the ram. I positioned the rifle and myself tight in the rocks while the wind meter was whistling between 30 to 40 mph. I knew due to the wind and the way the first tur took the bullets, I must make a perfect shot. The chances of getting the opportunity for a follow-up shot under those conditions were slim. I forced the gun steady against the rocks and waited for the wind meter to drop along with the perfect angle for the shot. I waited, waited then squeezed. It hit him hard! Ruslan shouted, "Shoot again," but the wind had increased, causing difficulty in steadying the rifle. The ram took 15 steps, then tumbled down. I made the shot.

We climbed down the backside of the peak and around to get to where we could sidehill across four rock folds that ran up the peak. In between the rocks, ice covered the grassed slopes one to two feet deep in snow. The angle was so steep, every step was extremely dangerous. We had just made it over two of the three rock folds when Alexander slipped and vanished down the slope. Before my eyes, he was going down the mountain at a speed that would not end in a good result. Seconds passed and we saw him finally stop on a flat knoll. Remarkably he stood and shouted, "I am okay." Due to Alexander's quick actions as he accelerated down the hill, he rotated his body to miss the few exposed rocks down the slope, avoiding any major injuries. We were all elated and could not believe what we were seeing.

Ruslan, Ludvick and I had one more fold left to cross. Ruslan suggested he go forward to retrieve the tur due to the dangerous ice and snow. Sure enough, about 20 steps later, right before reaching the tur, Ruslan slipped but luckily caught himself with his stick. Hugs were given and jubilation was exhibited after Alexander returned back to the group. We could now admire the tur, knowing Alexander was well. The Kuban tur was a SCI Silver Medal tur scoring 139. The window we had of semi-good weather had closed and now we had extreme winds with sleet piercing our faces like needles as we hustled down the mountain.

Unfortunately, the weather during the last two days of the hunt was more snow, wind, rain, and little to no visibility up high, which ended the hunt. This was an adventure that Mother Nature almost made impossible, but with much help it became a reality, taking two of the three tur of the Caucasus Mountains. The Caucasus is a region of beautiful scenery, tough terrain and some great strong hunters.

I would like to give many thanks to Alexander, Mickiel and Ruslan with Profihunt for all of their hard efforts. The most gratitude is given to my wife Kathy for allowing me to continue to hunt sheep and goats, and as always thanks to GSCO for supporting the sheep and goats of the world.



This Kuban (Western) tur was taken by Donnie Young (MS) in October 2013 in Karachayevo-Cherkessiya, Russia.

