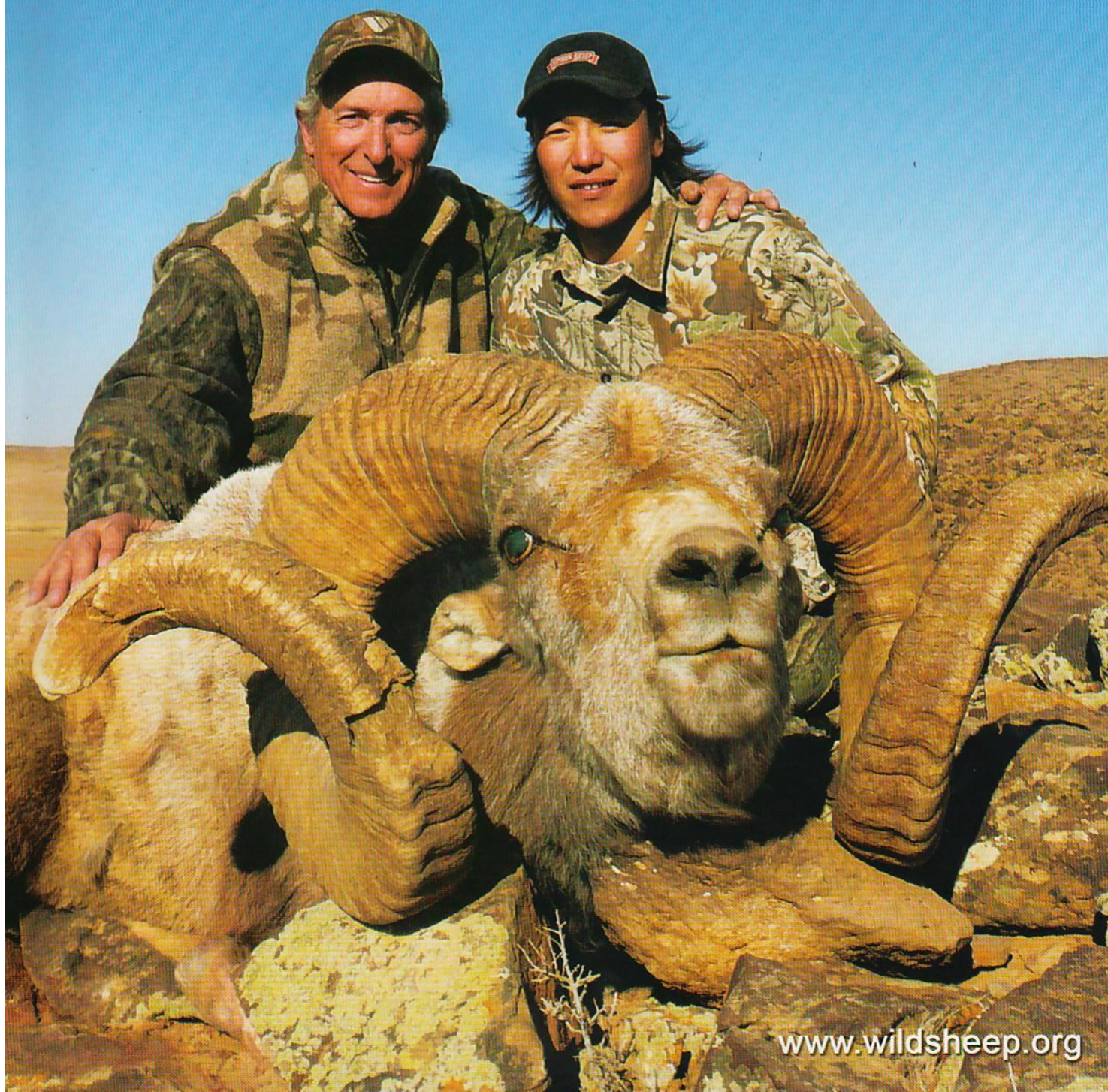




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COVER PHOTO: Gary Hansen (CO) first sent us a photo of his Gobi argali earlier in the fall, and when I saw it I thought, "Good Lord, I have never seen a Gobi that massive." Gary always makes fantastic photos of his sheep and goats, and I figured it was something he had done with the camera to make it look so big. I was dead wrong, because in late November Gary sent his SCI score sheet and it is the new world record Gobi argali! Gary's ram ended up with a final score of 226 3/8 SCI. The dimensions of Gary's argali are: L 55 4/8" x 16 5/8"; R 58 2/8" x 16 1/8". Here is Gary's story of how it all happened:

*About 11 years ago, I had the good fortune to hunt Mongolia for the Altay argali and ibex, as well as the Hangay argali, and always dreamed of going back. Earlier this year, I got that opportunity and, along with two good friends, **George Harms** (NJ) and **Bryan Tyler**, went in search of both the Gobi argali and ibex. The three of us were looking for Gobi ibex; George was also there for the Hangay and Gobi argalis; and I was also in search of the Gobi argali. We booked these hunts through **Vladimir Melnikov** of **Profi-Hunt**, in conjunction with his friend and partner, **Khurlee Ankhbayar** (**Ankhaa**) of **Mongolei Reisen Safaris**. Ankhaa set up and coordinated the entire hunt through his competent Mongolian staff and had his guides, camp and staff in place and ready when we arrived. The food/cooking was excellent, as well as the accommodations and vehicles used. The yurts we stayed in were comfortable and fairly large, furnished with carpet, stove, framed beds, table and chairs – all the comforts of home. Once you leave the paved roads of Ulaanbaatar, much of Mongolia is like a time warp back to the time of **Genghis Khan**, and the yurt design really hasn't changed much since that era.*

*The area we hunted the Gobi argali was near the small settlement of **Erdene**, in the East Gobi Province, just off the China border. My two guides, **Muugii & Bayaraa**, were both young and energetic and familiar with the area. Heading out of camp the first morning of the hunt, Bayaraa indicated to me that he had been out pre-scouting an area along the China border and had spotted a ram that appeared outstanding from a distance in both length and mass. Although most of us sheep hunters have heard similar stories, the excitement and sincerity in Bayaraa's eyes made me a believer, making my heart rate and adrenalin levels jump a bit. The first part of the hunt was slow going. The terrain we were hunting did not provide for long range glassing, so a lot of it had to be carefully covered on foot. On the second to last day, most of the day was spent driving through and*

over sand dunes that put us into sheep country only about three hours before sunset. We did a stalk on a small bachelor group to get close in on the lead ram that had good length and mass, and in my opinion was a genuine keeper, but when Bayaraa indicated he was not as good as the one he had seen, I reluctantly passed. While driving back in the dark, we ended up stuck on a sand dune and had to walk about 3 or 4 miles back to camp, getting to bed late that night. The walk back gave me a chance to reflect on both the great ram I had just passed on and our odds of locating that "outstanding" ram out there somewhere in that immense desert.

While heading out the next morning, they decided we would be better off entering the hunt area from a different direction. On the way, we had to stop and check in at a Mongolian military border outpost. As luck would have it, Bryan was able to tag along that day. This was Bryan's first international



Gary Hansen (CO, left) with Mongolian guide Bayaraa and Gary's tremendous Gobi argali taken in August 2007.

hunt and I wanted him to experience Mongolia as much as possible. By late morning we were seeing sheep. The terrain was not that high or steep and was more or less rolling, clustered with large rock outcroppings and, once again, did not provide for much long range scoping. The walking was

slow and deliberate, as we were less than a mile off the border and could not afford to bust any rams out. The rams we were seeing were in small bachelor groups of two to five, and Bayaraa and Muugii had got us close in on a few of these groups before coming upon a bachelor group containing one of the largest rams (of any *Ovis* species) I had ever laid eyes on.

To make a long story short, this veteran sheep hunter totally lost his composure. The ram was upwind, feeding broadside at about 60 yards when we came upon him and three other smaller rams. Before we froze, he must have caught some movement because he slowly raised his head, turning it toward us as he brought it up. There we were, all in a row, hunched over frozen, Bayaraa in front of me with Bryan and Muugii behind me, staring at the ram standing broadside some 60 yards away and looking straight at us. I instantly had flashes of astonishment and panic

going through my mind at the same time - asking myself how this monster got displaced from the Altay Mts. and what was he doing there in the Gobi. Thinking he would bolt at any instant, instead of simply bringing my rifle up and taking him offhand, I pulled a novice and swung my rifle up on Bayaraa's left shoulder, clicking the safety off at the same time I swung. I'm assuming Bayaraa was as rattled as I was, because the crosshairs were dancing all over the ram and the instant I pulled the trigger I knew I had shot above his back. At the muzzle report, the ram jumped, did a 180 and disappeared behind some large boulders. Knowing I missed, I instantly ran to where I thought I could get another look at him. In those 50-60 yards of running, thoughts of dejection cut through my mind - blowing

an easy opportunity at the ram of a lifetime, one that would never come along again, knowing the ram would be in China in a matter of a few minutes.

When we rounded those rocks I could see all four rams running in high gear full out, side by side about 200 yards out. They were quartering away slightly right with the big ram on their far left - all headed for China. Knowing I would never see him again and had nothing to lose, except possibly ending my hunt by hitting one of the small rams, I stood there, swung the rifle sling around my left elbow, swung the vertical hair slowly right until it kissed his rear left shank and squeezed off. With the recoil, I couldn't see a hit but I heard the whap. Next thing I knew, Bryan, Bayraa and Muugii were all grabbing

me, yelling, "You hit him!!!" Knowing I could never make that shot again in a thousand attempts, and knowing I did not deserve the ram, the only thing I could utter at that moment was that "I'd rather be lucky than good anytime." It was all over but the hugs and the pictures. What a hunt - from an all-time low to an all-time high within a matter of a few seconds! That's sheep hunting and that's what keeps us all coming back.

My sincere gratitude goes out to Vladimir, Ankhaa and their guides, Bayaraa and Muugii, whose patience and persistence presented me the opportunity at this great monarch of the Gobi.