

Author preparing
to shoot ram.



'KAMCHATKA, KAMCHATKA'

The unsuspecting Kamchatka snow sheep ram lay on a grassy spur steeply below us.

With his back towards me, the first two quarters of his horns looked massive, as they often do when viewed from the rear.

BY GEORGE LATHAM MYERS II

When he turned his head to the left, I realized I was about to shoot a "monster" ram. I allowed the time to admire the ram before ranging him, then prepared my rest and began my "shooting mantra", my hunter's "magical moment of truth" once again. As is often the case, this ram was not easy to reach.

This sheep hunt began as they do with plans, bookings, paperwork, workouts, shooting, airports and travel. I contracted ProfiHunt, a Russian based outfitter, to conduct

the hunt. I would hunt from the same camp where last year the new Safari Club International (SCI) world record ram was killed.

Two days after leaving my farm I arrived in Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky, Russia, a city with a population of 180,000 nestled above the picturesque Avacha Bay on the southeastern edge of the Kamchatka Peninsula, a land mass the size of California sandwiched between Russia's Far East and Alaska.

After clearing customs, I met part of my hunting team, Lena

Poddubnaja, my interpreter/cook, and Dmitry (Dema) Pavlov, a local hunter. We stopped at a grocery store for supplies and at 1:00 p.m. were on the only major road north to Milkova, then northeast to Dolinovka, a small village on the bank of the Kamchatka River, where I met Dema's family. His father, Igor, would coordinate my

hunt as Dema had been called to Moscow on business. After changing into my hunting clothes, we were soon organized and had our gear loaded on two sixteen-foot aluminum boats powered by 50 horse-power Japanese motors.

We raced up the first tributary that flowed into the Kamchatka, the Kitilgina River, running south-

southeast for three and one-half hours. We overnighted at an old fishing/moose hunting camp on the east side of the river where I met my assistant guide Ivan Bobrjakov and the camp dog, Boica.

The next bright, sunny day, the four of us climbed into and onto a tracked, amphibious, Volvo BM troop carrier, which pulled another tracked storage

*Racing up the
Kitilgina River.*



vehicle behind it, and ponderously started east. The country was wild, primitive, and unpopulated. The "tank" ran at a pace between a slow walk and a moderate trot through swamp, tundra, pine and aspen forests. I am not a botanist, but at times, it appeared we were in a jungle.

Seven and one-half back-jarring hours later we arrived in base camp

at the foot of the alpine; elevation 3,100 feet and 5,400 direct line miles from my farm as measured by my GPS (global positioning system). One thing for certain, there would be no resident pressure from this camp, which consisted of a large divided cook tent, individual tents for each of us, an outhouse (with seat!), and a crude, ingenious banja (sauna shack).

I organized my gear, then enjoyed a beer while I glassed the treeless, verdant, snow-patched sheep mountains above camp, then relished a nice dinner of red salmon that nine hours earlier had been swimming


up the Kitilgina River. A light rain began to fall, so I retired to my tent. With the rain pinging off the nylon and a strange Russian melody coming from the cook tent radio, I fell into a slumber that four days of sleep deprived travel had induced.

We arose at daylight, greeted a sunny, breezeless day, and left camp an hour later. We walked off the shelf where base camp was located, traveling east-southeast into the first drainage, then started to climb. As the warmth of the day increased, so did the mosquitoes; ferocious, hungry, innumerable. I was thankful that I had not forgotten my head net.



The "tank" used to reach base camp.





We side-hilled our way south, gaining altitude with every step, stopping periodically to glass. When one stopped the feeding frenzy intensified, the mosquitoes seemingly impervious to bug spray. The country reminded me somewhat of the eastern Caucasus; sharp sided, green sloped mountains sprinkled with glaciers in every direction, quite stunning.


Around 11:00 a.m., I watched Ivan approach the lip of the ridge we had climbed and start to glass. He soon turned towards Igor and

me with a big smile on his face as he made a looping motion with his hands around his head indicating he had found a ram! Due east, a steep-sided, grey monolith rose above us, a six thousand foot mountain with seven rocky connecting ridges dropping abruptly towards us, probably two miles away as a crow would fly. I could not see the ram until Igor put him in the spotting scope, a bedded ram laying with his back to us on the second shoulder to our left. I had trouble seeing the ram with my binoculars even knowing

where it lay, and only later learned that Ivan had been fortunate to watch it lie down on the skyline.

I knew we had plenty of daylight left to execute a stalk, but felt exhausted after four days of travel on that first day of hunting and wondered briefly if I would be able to make it back to camp that day were I able to make it to the ram. Igor slapped his thighs, pointed to mine, and asked, "Normal"? I lied and shook my head yes.

The ridge we were on ran north to south and more or less parallel

A misty, mountainous landscape. In the background, a large, rounded mountain peak rises above a layer of low-lying clouds or mist. The foreground shows a valley with some vegetation and a winding path or stream. The overall atmosphere is hazy and atmospheric.

with Mount Kudrijash, where the ram lay, with several hundred acres of open slopes and tundra between them. I thought the distance from the ram would allow us to drop straight off the ridge we were on and angle directly across the tundra to get beyond the sweeping, concave ridge that formed the main spine of the mountain above the ram, but my guides thought otherwise and skirted the ridge we were on well below the skyline. We made a huge loop to keep out of the line of sight of the ram, hurrying to the end of the ridge

which gradually fell into the tundra. At one exposed point, we actually ran, very difficult on the spongy arctic tussocks, but we eventually had put the sweeping ridge between us and the ram. Finally, we could move towards him.

The wind blew at our backs, which necessitated another lung-busting loop to the back (east) side of Mt. Kudrijash to put the wind in our face and the ram upwind. We crossed a small stream and started to climb, again. I struggled. My legs were about gone. Drenched

in sweat, my heart pounding, my breaths coming in jagged gasps, I switch-backed up the mountain towards a prominent notch, my cardiovascular system compelling me to stop every forty or fifty steps and my knees screaming "stop"!

Finally, I forced the final steps to the notch and peered over the ridge, but could see no ram. We glassed what we could see below us, carefully sneaking out the sheep-trodden ridgeline, stopping to glass when new ground opened up below us. Suddenly Ivan stiffened, backed



*"Monster"
Kamchatka snow
sheep ram.*

down from the edge, and motioned me to his position. As I moved to the precipice, all fatigue, bug cussing, and pain fell away. Slowly, deliberately, methodically pushing my pack in front of me, I crawled to the cliff, admired the ram as I described earlier, focused, then applied the requisite 1.5 pounds of pressure to the trigger. In the time it took me to cycle the bolt and put the ram in the scope again, he was still, never moving or even kicking; done.

When I stood beside the beast I was amazed by the size of his horns. The thick bases carried their weight well to the lamb tips which rose appreciatively above the nose. I counted fifteen annuli! I had just killed the oldest, biggest ram in my life and could not have been happier, or luckier.

It was 5:00 p.m. by the time we shouldered our packs with as much of the delicious meat as we could carry. The rest we buried in a nearby glacier, being careful to cover the cache with plenty of rocks to deter any carnivores. We were two thousand feet above, and five-and-a-half straight line miles from base camp. I worried I had not left adequate reserve of strength to make it back that day. Totally drained, spent, and feeling very puny, I plodded back towards camp.

I required more and more breaks that evening and continuously fell behind my guides. My knees hurt with every step and I would have given a hundred dollars for an aspirin.

Several hours later, as darkness fell, I finally saw light emanating from Lena's campfire just three-

quarters of a mile away, and for the first time that afternoon I had some confidence that my body would hold out long enough for me to make it back to camp. With one more painful downhill slog, then one final determined push uphill, I reached camp at 10:00 p.m., fifteen and one-half tough hours after leaving.

I forced myself to eat the dinner that Lena had prepared, as the team reflected on a day well spent. Ivan jokingly said "Kamchatka", as if to imply that I must have known how much effort would be required to be successful in this demanding country. I smiled feebly and replied, "yes, Kamchatka, Kamchatka". I washed my face, brushed my teeth, and stumbled into my tent.

I took the next day off to recuperate and allow my guides the time required

to properly take care of my trophy. I informed Igor that I wanted to carry the trophy back to the states with me, so he called Dema on the satellite phone to discuss our options.

That afternoon a friend of Dema's flew his helicopter into our camp, took pictures of my passport, visa, and rifle permit with his phone, then flew the trophy back to Petropavlovsk and stored the salted cape and horns in a freezer.

Dema returned from Moscow later in the week and secured the paperwork necessary for me to take the trophy home with me. Amazing! What's more amazing is they did not charge me a penny for the service! I utilized the banja, called my wife on the satellite phone, and relished an easy day of rest.

The next day we hunted brown bear, a perfectly bright, sunny, cool (60°F) day. We left camp and hiked the same general direction as the day before yesterday (southeast), though we stayed a bit lower, skirting the mountains just above the tundra as we watched the country below us.

After travelling four or five miles, we sat up on a prominent point and glassed for several hours. A brisk wind blew from the east which gave me some relief from the mosquitoes. We split up and glassed until 12:30 p.m., when we regrouped and had lunch. Igor indicated that we should return to the river camp where the salmon were running to hunt bear, so we headed back towards camp, holding a more eastern route than we had come. We could actually see camp and were talking with Lena on the handheld radios when Ivan spotted a bear! Once pointed out to me, I could see the grizzly bear with my naked eye, ambling towards a pristine, half-acre tarn at the base of a pyramid-shaped mountain to our north, maybe two miles distant.

We watched the dark black grizzly swim across the tarn. Igor mimed, "Do you want to stalk this bear?" We did not waste any time angling towards the tarn, and bear. We ran-walked ridiculously fast and angled slightly east to get the wind in our

favor, soon losing sight of the bear. I recklessly fell twice, but the lay of the land afforded a hidden approach. We dropped into a small stream bed which fell steeply down the hill towards the bear's location, then seven hundred fifty yards from us. I slowed a bit to get my breath and pulse rate under control. The cut created by the run was shoulder deep and emptied into an intersecting drainage just two hundred yards from the berry-grazing bear. We made our final move across the creek and up the opposite bank,

Dark black Kamchatka brown bear.



then settled in prone behind a foot-high rock about one hundred twenty yards from the unsuspecting boar. Perfect! He quartered towards me facing to the right.

I took a moment to appreciate the bear, then prepared my rest and placed the crosshairs of the scope at

the base of his neck adjacent to the right front shoulder. The shot dropped the bear as though he were struck by a violent earthquake, all four legs splayed neatly behind him, as if he had lain on his belly to go down a slide. With one shot, my

.270 WSM pushing a 130-grain Barnes TTSX bullet had killed a Kamchatka brown bear! A dark black grizzly bear with lighter brown hair on his back and shoulder hump, he would later measure eight feet in length and Igor estimated him to be twelve years old. The boar had

numerous scars on his face from prior violent encounters with his brethren and was to me, quite an exquisite trophy.

It took us two hours to remove the hide, two hours to make it back to camp, and two shots for me to tag out on this memorable hunt.

Many good times followed, including succulent sheep steaks, cheerful conversations, and the celebratory comradery that a successful hunt brings.

A few days later we returned to the "river camp", where we stayed for a couple of days to allow the rain to stop, the hide to dry, and several red salmon to be caught. Igor was building a new camp a mile down the river, bringing in building supplies with a MI8 helicopter. He later arranged for us to be flown back to Dolinovka in the helicopter. That evening Lena, Dema and I drove back to Petropavlovsk and the Avacha Hotel, my home for the next four evenings.

It rained most of those days so my touring was diminished, but I did take the opportunity to tour the town, see Avacha Bay, eat at some excellent restaurants, and tour the Natural History Museum.

What a marvelous hunt I had been given. Good times, engaging, friendly people, precious animals to hunt, and starkly amazing country to see. I am indeed a lucky man. WS