

SEVENTEEN

TEX TAKES A TROPHY

Tex recounts a different kind of trophy hunt—one in which not the size of the ram's horns, but the difficulty and challenges of the hunt make up the pay-off. He takes care to point out at the beginning and at the end that he has no time for persnickety hobbyists who measure horns and antlers as a means of ranking trophies, and he is also careful to point out that he is hunting for meat as much as for any other reason. As in other places, a strong ethical sense about the proper use of an animal's flesh and thus about the ethics of hunting informs this piece. Carrying eighty pounds of meat and a large trophy head down a mountain and then all the way home is no mean feat—it's a classic example of virtuous mountain masculinity.

—AG

TEX TAKES A TROPHY

A Pipestone Letter
By N. Vernon-Wood

—WB Ranch
Pipestone Creek, Alberta

Mr. John Lincoln
Wall Street, N.Y.

DEAR FRIEND:

I got them dope sheets you sent me, so that I can measure heads in a scientific & academic manner. An' then what?

Somehow I can't get all spraddled out about weather Bill Goofus' Elk is $\frac{1}{4}$ inch bigger than Doctor Bohunkuses, or if the specific gravity of my Ram is specificer than yours.

What I do know is that I had me one hell of a time stalkin' my Ram. He was layin' down on a ledge about a million feet above the valley when I spotted him through the old eight-powers. He'd shure picked his roost with judgment & foresight. There was an onobstructed view in nineteen different directions, an' nothin' but alpine meadow an' slide rock on both sides & below. A Rock Rabbit couldn't have crossed within a half a mile an' kept under cover.

I'm huntin' alone that day for the dual purpose of providin' meat for family eatin' an' accumulatin' a head which I can tack to the cabin wall to look at durin' the long winter evenin's. This one looks like he'll answer both

purposes, but they's a turrible lot of terra firma piled up on end between him an' the fambly skillet.

The only thing to do is circumnavigate that mountain he's picked for his meditations, an' climb over, comin' at him from behind an' above. So I picket old Baldy, tie my coat & other doodads onto the saddle, an' barge off afoot, with four-five shells, a handful of dry prunes, & a empty rucksack.

It's a axiom that the closer you are to the base of a mountain, the farther around it is.

I've got to keep to the timber until I've circled enough to get out of the Ram's line of vision, an' when I started off the day was right hot, an' the mosquitoes was makin' one last stand before the early frosts put the run on 'em.

The traveling wasn't any boulevard either, bein' mostly deadfall an' underbrush. It must'a took me two hours to get to where I could do an Excelsior, an' reach for higher & better things. It's another two gainin' altitude, an' I was perspirin' free an' copious. That ain't quite the word, either. I was sweatin' like a loco Bull.

I stopped in the lee of a big limestone rock to cool off, an' noticed that there was a big bank of black cloud comin' up from the east, an' that the wind had swung from the southwest, until it was right behind that storm, drivin' it along.

The thing to do is do it pronto, so I start to stalk down for the ledge an' the Ram. I ain't seen him as yet, but I've got a pretty good idea where that guy is. Not more than three hundred yards, I think, so I start right careful, so's not to start any rocks slidin' & racketin', stoppin' frequent to check over the terrain.

The wind held steady, blowin' across from my left, but it's gettin' a edge on it, an' instead of going round it cuts plumb through a man. Then I see the Ram. That is, I could see the back sweep of his horns, but nothin' else to make a target.

I'm in a spot. From where I'm crouched on a slab, they's nothin' but loose shale that'll rattle the minute I put a foot on it. I can't get any place by goin' down wind, because there is a gully that might be easy for the Everest expedition, but for a waddy without a rope or pitons, it's useless. So what? Wait him out, an' when as or if he gets up, slap him down agen, or scare him up, an' take a chance on plasterin' him while he's on his way?

Havin' toiled thus far, I decide to play poker, an' wait. I got into as comfortable a stance as the mountain allowed, an' reached for the makin's.

They're in my coat on the saddle, an' for purposes of consolation might as well be in a Scotchman's pocket in Auld Reekie. So I eat a prune. Did you ever eat a dry prune, when you whole system is cravin' about six drags of Bull Durham?

Then that squall snuck up on me. First it hailed, an' the wind drove the stones like BB shot. Then it snowed. Wet, juicy flakes as big as spuds, an' then it settled down to a nice steady rain. There was times I couldn't see five feet in any direction, an' I'm scared that Ovis will quit the country, an' me know nothin' about it. Just as the snow was quittin', I heard a click below on the shale, an' threw off the safety, just in time to see a shadowy form driftin' across the talus down wind. I let her flicker, an' he come down bang, an' then got up, goin' downhill on three legs and a swinger. He's hit bad, or he would've climbed, so I follow the blood trail, takin' care not to crowd him. He'll weaken an' lie down if I keep back an' let him take his time.

At that it's gettin' dusk before I locate him layin' in a gully, just above the grass lands. The next shot finished him, an' it was plumb dark when I'd finished skinnin' an' dessecting. I loaded about eighty pounds of meat in the rucksack, an' takin' the head in one hand, an' the Springfield in the other, stumbled along to where my faithful steed is waitin'.

Only he ain't. When I get to where I left him there's only a busted picket pin. An' the makins' are still on the saddle.

THE SKY WAS TURNIN' gray in the east when I finally dragged myself into the shack. The wife bawled hell out of me for lettin' that old knothed come home with an empty saddle. Claimed she was scared to death, although she shure didn't sound like a frightened woman to me.

I still got that head. Personal, I don't give three whoops in Sheol if you or anyone else has a bigger one. It's hangin' over the fireplace, an' every time I look at it, I forget how cold & miserable & smoke-hungry I was. All I know is that it was one of the best day's stalkin' I ever done. You can't put that in no record book.

I'm goin' to take a flock of dudes down to Lake Minnewanka next week for fishin'. It anythin' interestin' develops, I'll give you the low down.

Yours truly,

TEX.

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