

HUNTING ON THREE CONTINENTS WITH JACK O'CONNOR

Volume I





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Volume I

Is a collection of some of JOC's best stories that were written during the period of 1973 to 1977. This volume covers his thoughts on guns and his hunting adventures and experiences in North America for sheep, goats, and big game.

by
Jack O'Connor

Foreword by John H. Batten

Illustrated with photographs

Captions by Eldon "Buck" Buckner



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Foreword

Jack O'Connor became a legend long before the end of his working days. It is true that some of his contemporaries in the gun-writing field will also long be remembered, but none of them, I think, as well as O'Connor. This reflects his journalistic skills, of course, because as a journalist he was clearly outstanding among his peers. More importantly, however, it is a reflection of his unique qualities as a human being.

I very much doubt if Jack ever tried deliberately to impress anyone with his knowledge of firearms or with his wide experience in the hunting field. Nor did he ever suggest that his incredible command of the language was more than what one should expect from a lifetime professional journalist. Nevertheless, his reader was in fact unaware of the process of translating Jack's words into thoughts and images because his skill with words was such that the process was instantaneous and, in a word, frictionless.

Unlike some of his contemporaries who were intent on conveying an image of their personal skills and attainments, Jack O'Connor was above all concerned with transferring as clearly as possible his reactions to facts as he saw them and to situations as he knew them. Whatever image of the author was thereby transferred to his reader was purely incidental.

A similar statement can be made about Jack as a personality, whether encountered in public or recognized as a companion. It was the transfer of information or of his visualization of a situation that concerned him rather than any interest in image making.

In a personal way, Jack had the rare talent of being able to respond both bluntly and with great sensitivity. As illustrated in all his books—from his early novels through his hunting tales, his autobiographic writing such as *Horse and Buggy West*, and finally in *The Last Book*, Jack O'Connor was an extremely sensitive man, genuinely aware of the people around him. Yet this quality did not always restrain him from speaking out in a manner that at times may have seemed a contradiction.

I shall not forget an incident at the Oberoi Grand Hotel in Calcutta when the Battens joined the O'Connors on an extended series of tiger hunts in central and northern India and then on a visit with Prince Abdorreza and

Princess Parisima in Iran. The open-gated elevator door had closed just as Jack was politely trailing our wives into the elevator (I was not there). The elevator was filled with a mixture of sexes, all well dressed and, considering the setting, quite proper.

“Oh, balls!” roared Jack as the elevator door bruised his nose, almost dislodging his spectacles and forcing him back into the corridor to await a later trip. While his social conversation was normally impeccable, his personal reaction to this incident showed no awareness of a faux pas, despite his audience’s reaction of mixed mirth and horror.

As a companion on an extended trip, Jack was a delightful addition to any group, provided the others were as interested in and responsive to his always interesting tales as he was eager to tell them. One of the reasons for our friendship probably was that I could listen all night long and enjoy every word. Such verbal essays never emphasized the personal pronoun—such emphasis was really no part of Jack’s concern for communication. What he did have was a tremendous delight and a great interest in the things that he felt were of more than personal concern: his firsthand experience with many different calibers as well as with many different types of weapons; his delight in the wide variety of wildlife, which through a long lifetime he had observed firsthand and had hunted always in fair chase; people ranging from guides and normal hunting companions to some of the world’s personalities of the day. Underlying all this was a dry and puckish sense of humor. If he had a vanity, it may have lain in his delight in assigning picturesque words or phrases when describing a certain relationship. Witness the sheep-hunting addict referred to repeatedly as an aficionado, or the pursuit of the four North American species of wild sheep for increasingly fad purposes as *The Grand Slam Caper*.

Jack was, of course, a sheep hunter at heart. He loved to observe and to stalk wild sheep. He recognized them—as do many of the rest of us—as one of the outstanding quarries of our North American continent, but also as one of nature’s most beautiful creatures. Above all, he loved the mountain wilderness environment.

He was actually rather reluctant to write about his African hunting experiences because he felt that too much had already been written about

Africa and that, as a relative latecomer to the scene, he could contribute nothing particularly new. In fact he was a pioneering sheep hunter, both in respect to the desert sheep and in respect to the sheep of the far North. In the first instance, he had had extensive pre-World War II experience hunting the desert sheep in Mexico; after the war it became extremely difficult to secure a permit to shoot them. In the second instance, he pioneered the shooting grounds opened by postwar access to the Alcan Highway as well as to the Canol Road in the Yukon. These experiences were then sufficiently unique that he felt it was appropriate and timely to record them for the interest of those who had not yet had a similar opportunity.

While he did invite me to accompany him sheep hunting in the North on several occasions during the 1950s and 1960s, it was never possible for me to accept, and this I deeply regret. The only time I was ever able to make a hunting trip with him was in 1965 when we and our wives spent six weeks together in India and Iran; memories of that trip have truly enriched my life.

John H. Batten
Racine, Wisconsin
Summer 1986

On Sheep, Goats, and Mountains

Section I

Jack O'Connor, who was known to be "nuts" about sheep, started his sheep-hunting career in Mexico. Of all the sheep he loved to hunt, he loved hunting desert sheep the most, and of these he shot more desert bighorns than any other variety. Wherever he traveled, sheep always held his interest. O'Connor was, in fact, considered by many to be America's premier sheep hunter of the twentieth century, although he never hunted any of the Central Asian argalis and although some hunters claimed more "Grand Slams." Only Charles Sheldon's reputation equaled O'Connor's as a sheep hunter. Of course the main reason for O'Connor's fame as a sheep hunter was his numerous articles on sheep, for he described sheep hunting as nobody else could. Appropriately, this book starts off with the desert bighorn.

The Desert Bighorn

Chapter 1



I made my first hunt for desert sheep—in fact, my first hunt for any kind of sheep—in December 1934. Two friends from Tucson and I had heard there were desert bighorn in the Sierra Viejo in Sonora. We also heard of an American in Nogales who had been to the Sierra Viejo, who could arrange for permits, who had hunted sheep, and who spoke perfect Spanish. We made a deal to pay him ten dollars a day to lead us to those mighty rams.

We camped at an abandoned mine called El Union. One more-or-less rainproof shed remained standing, and under this we made our campfire and set up our cots. We had filled our canteens and a couple of five-gallon cans at the last ranch, which was ten or twelve miles from the mine.

A bunch of more innocent sheep hunters you never saw. Like most beginning sheep hunters, I was convinced that sheep hunting was a long-range business and that I was going to have to knock my ram off at 350 or 400 yards. My rifle was a Springfield with a custom stock and a heavy 4X German scope. The outfit weighed about 10½ pounds. In those days, there wasn't much material in print on sheep hunting in general and on desert sheep hunting in particular. I digested the chapter on sheep hunting in a book on North American big game by Col. Townsend Whelen, who afterward became a friend of mine. The good colonel recommended hobnails for climbing, so hobnails it was. I had a pair of Goeky boots. I took them to a shoemaker, who dug up some hobnails. I also had 8X30 French binoculars that cost me \$35 and were not worth 35 cents. Apparently the prisms had been put in place with chewing gum by a six-year-old cretin. The damned things were always out of alignment, and I could not use them more than a few minutes without getting a headache.

At the time, I had done considerable deer hunting, mostly mule deer but with some Arizona whitetails thrown in. In addition, I had shot a few javelinas

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and some black bears. But what I lacked in experience I made up in enthusiasm. There was a little brush of one kind or another in some of the draws in the Viejos. Used to hunting deer, I pictured the sheep bursting out of the draws and bounding up the hillsides like whitetails.

The Sierra Viejos are solid limestone, and most of the rocks are as rough as a very coarse file because some of the lime has been dissolved away. Those damned hobnails were always catching in the little cracks and crevices and making me strain my ankles. The longer I climbed around, the heavier my rifle got.

I saw a ram that day, but he was on the horizon looking at me. I saw a great deal of sheep sign, much of it quite fresh. The Sierra Viejo is a large mountain. It rises from land that is perhaps 1,000 feet above sea level, and I should imagine that the highest peak is not far from 4,000 feet. In those days, there were a good many sheep there. Sheep still inhabit the range today. Oscar Brooks, a good Mexican friend of mine, a guy who can climb like a cat and who is a good sheep hunter, got a fine ram there in the fall of 1972. I do not know the Sierras well enough to say for certain if there is permanent water there, but I suspect there is. The mountain got its name (Sierra del Viejo, or "Old Man Mountain") from an old man who used to distill sotol there. To make the mash he had to have water, and most ranges that have sheep on them, like the Sierra Viejo, also have permanent water.

The first day on Viejo was the day I got hooked on sheep hunting. In midafternoon, I stood on one of the highest peaks. All around I could see the gray and tan of the lowland desert cut with the wandering white threads of arroyos. To the west I could see the dark upthrust of the Sierra Picu and beyond it the curving red hills bordering the flat blue of the Gulf of California. All over this level desert, drab in its winter coat, I could see little bumps of whitetail hills and the sharp upthrust of sheep mountains. I was all alone in a wide, beautiful, almost untouched world. A slight breeze was stirring, the sun was bright, and the air fresh and cool.

Then on another ridge, perhaps a half-mile away and a bit below, I saw the diminutive outlines of a sheep. He was watching me, standing absolutely immobile. I got him in my funny little French binoculars. He was a good ram. He watched me, and I watched him. I hoped he was as excited and stimulated by what he saw as I was by what I saw.

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I was about to get to my feet, bid the watching ram good-bye, and head toward camp when I heard faint humming. For a moment I thought it was a distant automobile. Then I saw it was an airplane headed in my direction. It was a fairly large plane for those days. Afterward I found that it was a commercial plane that carried mail and passengers from Mexico City to San Diego. It passed right overhead, probably not five hundred feet above me. I waved, but the plane went on, giving no sign of having seen me. Whether anyone in the plane saw the lone sheep hunter or not, I have no way of knowing. When I turned my eyes from the plane to the ridge where the ram had been, I found him gone, frightened, no doubt, by the noise of the plane.

When I got back to camp about sundown, my companions were waiting. Both were tired and disgusted. "If this is sheep hunting, they can have it," one of them said. "I walked my tail off all day long and never saw a damned thing!"

"Think I'll try hunting deer tomorrow," the second one said. "I may not get a buck, but I won't kill myself."

As far as I know, neither of these men has ever again set foot on a sheep mountain. The next day they hunted deer, and one of them got a young desert mule deer buck. I climbed Viejo again, working north, watching first on one side of a ridge and then on another. In early afternoon, I poked my head over a crest to look into an interior basin. Presently I saw something move. It was the head of an animal. It could be only a sheep! At first I thought it was a ewe, but then I realized it was a young ram, three or four years old. I felt I was getting somewhere. I had seen a sheep before it saw me! I was about to move on when I made out two more sheep, also young rams. Later that day I saw a small bunch of ewes and lambs and an old ram, but they had all seen me first.

I have often tried to articulate just why I have had an affair with sheep hunting that has lasted forty years and has carried me from Sonora to the Alaskan border of the Yukon, to the hills of Africa's central Sahara, and to the mountains of the Middle East. Possibly the principal reason is the joy of being high, of being away from the ruck of humanity, of sharing the country with the sheep and the eagles and, farther north, those other mountain dwellers: the goat, the hoary marmot, the caribou, and the great, half-blind, lumbering bear. Possibly those who fly airplanes have the same feeling, but

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I'd think they would have had more of it when they flew in open cockpits by the seats of their pants. And I have always liked the fresh, untainted air, the brisk breeze.

Like all stalking, sheep hunting extends the excitement for a long time. Often I have seen rams bed down, so I have been willing to begin my stalk by 9:30 or ten in the morning and have not gotten within shooting position until three or four in the afternoon. This means five or six hours of pleasant anxiety, of suppressed excitement. Then, too, an old ram is a smart and an impressive animal, rare enough, handsome enough, and tough enough to come by to make it something to be proud of.

At the end of our second day on that first trip to the Sierra Viejo, we were just about out of water. We went to bed thirsty, but we saved enough for coffee. By midmorning we were back at the ranch called Pozo Acerno, drinking the cool, sweet water from the deep well.

I didn't get a ram on that trip, but I did learn a few things. One of them was that the reason I had been seeing those rams on the skyline was that they had seen me first. I decided I needed better binoculars and a lighter rifle. I got a 7x57 on a Mauser action. With the Lyman 1-A cocking piece sight, it weighed a bit less than seven pounds. I acquired 8X30 Bausch & Lomb binoculars, a very fine sheep-hunting glass, and it opened up a new world for me. For desert sheep I shifted from hobnails to basketball or leather shoes with composition soles.

I shot my first ram through a sort of a fluke in that I did not see him before he saw me, stalk him in the classic manner, and pick him off at my leisure. Early one morning during the late-summer rutting season, a Mexican companion and I found the tracks of three sheep—a large ram and two ewes. They were low and headed into an interior valley where there was considerable growth. The head of the valley was perhaps a half-mile from the mouth. The valley headed north. It was "U"-shaped and enclosed by ridges on each side that rose at an angle of 25 or 30 degrees and met to enclose the valley at the head. The country was decomposed granite. The footing was neither quiet nor good.

My companion and I decided that we had the ram in a barrel. My amigo would go up the ridge to the east, and I up the one to the west. We knew the

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sheep should be somewhere in the valley below. If we went slowly and quietly and kept a careful look below, one of us should get a shot.

I had climbed about three-fourths of the way to the top. Every time I paused to look into the valley or got a new prospect up the ridge, I expected to see the sheep. I had paused just under a sharp little cliff to get my wind so that if I saw something when I stuck my head over, I'd be ready to shoot when I heard rocks rolling ahead of me. My heart almost jumped out of my mouth. I scrambled up the little cliff, and just as I got on top, a ewe came tearing around a corner about forty yards away. I lifted the 7mm, then put it down. Another ewe fled by. Then here came the ram. I jerked my rifle to my shoulder, but my feet slipped on the loose stones on about a 30-degree slope. He was just about to go over the ridge into the canyon when the gold bead front sight found the dingy white of his rump. The rifle went off, and I saw a big red spot bloom like a flower on the white. Then all was quiet.

I stood there shaking for a moment. Then I toiled over to the edge of a little cliff where the ram had disappeared. At first I saw nothing, then I noticed a big gout of blood about ten feet below. Farther down, possibly fifty yards, I could see the curve of a sheep horn in a torote prieto tree (a stunted little tree found in the Sonoran Desert; it has a spicy, peppery smell). Then I could make out the whole ram through the leaves and twigs. He was dead.

Hunting the desert sheep is in many ways quite different from hunting their northern cousins. In the first place, the desert bighorn is the hardest of all North American sheep to see. He is a gray-brown animal in a largely gray-brown environment. The hills and mountains he inhabits look as bare as the face of the moon, but most of them have a good deal of thin brush of one kind or another. I have mentioned the torote prieto, which is a dwarf tree with leaves like the ornamental "pepper" trees that were planted in the Salt River Valley for shade when I was a boy. As I have said, it also has a peppery smell. Another very strange plant that breaks and bruises easily is called the *sangre grado* by the Mexicans. It exudes a white sap that turns black in the sun. My old khaki sheep hunting pants were all crisscrossed by black streaks. There are other odd plants, like the cirio (wax candle tree), which looks like an uprooted parsnip and which grows only in one range in Sonora, the Cirios south of Libertad.

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In most sheep areas in North America, horses can be used for a good deal of the climbing. In some areas, it is occasionally possible to scramble off a horse, jerk a rifle out of a scabbard, and shoot a ram. In most of the desert sheep mountains with which I am familiar, it is not possible to use horses. For one thing, the country is so rough a horse would break his neck. For another, many of the sheep mountains are a long way from wells and water holes. When I was hunting in Sonora, a limited use of horses could be made in the Pinacate because the cinder cones were smooth enough for horses, and camp could be made near natural tanks that contained water. Water for horses can be trucked in, but a horse drinks a lot of water, and for the limited use to which a horse can be put, it is usually not worth it.

When I hunted a range called the Sierra Los Mochis, I used to camp at a little well that was dug for cattle, but was abandoned because it did not produce enough water. It was nine or ten miles from the mountains, which was about a two-hour ride. However, those rides were not fruitless because the low country contained many big desert mule deer, and the rolling foothills near the Sierra were full of whitetails. Leaving camp at six o'clock, I could tie up my horse and start my climb about eight o'clock. I would try to get back to the horse by four o'clock and back to camp for a sundowner and something to eat. Horses always travel faster when they are headed for home.

In the warm months the desert sheep hunter has to carry a canteen. I used one holding two quarts. This is a heavy and clumsy burden, but the desert is so hot between April and November that a supply of water is a must. Even with two quarts, I used to have to ration myself during the hot months to have enough water for a final drink before I headed back for camp. In the cool months I learned to do without water. I would usually take a little knapsack with a couple of oranges or sometimes a small can of tomato juice.

In the winter in the Sonoran Desert, I did not take a jacket if I planned to do much climbing. I would wear only a wool shirt. The first hour or so after I left camp, I would be chilly, but when I was climbing, I was comfortable and not burdened by a jacket.

Most sheep hunting camps were dry camps; that is, all the water consumed had to be taken along. Hunting alone or with one companion, I could make ten

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gallons of water last a long time. If my wife went with me, our camps were of short duration. She was revolted by my ways of saving water. One thing she did not object to, though, was an alcohol rub. I used to take a bottle of alcohol with me to use in lieu of a bath.

In much sheep country, the bulk of the feeding is done down in the valleys between the mountains. The sheep start feeding in the first gray of dawn. They move about, taking a bite here and a bite there. When it begins to warm up, the sheep generally move up onto a mountain. Often they won't get very far, perhaps two or three hundred feet above a valley. If the weather is pleasant, they like to lie down on points or ridges from which they can have a good view of the country below. If it is raining or if the weather is very hot, they will often go into caves. The rams will generally go higher than the ewes and the lambs. They paw out beds by scraping away any large or sharp rocks. It seems to me that, for whatever reason, the desert sheep change their bedding grounds more often than do the northern sheep. I have seen favored bed grounds of Dall and Stone sheep where the dung was three or four inches deep. Big bunches of rams are rarer than among the northern sheep. I do not know why, but I believe it is more common to see lone desert rams than it is to see lone northern rams. In the desert, it is common to see three old rams together, seldom more.

In areas where there is little disturbance and little, if any, competition from cattle or wild burros, the sheep often bed down under a nice shady tree in some sandy wash. Back in the 1930s when I used to hunt in the San Franciscos, south of Sonoyta, Sonora, I had on several occasions seen sheep bedded right out in the valleys during the middle of the day. At the time, the only cattle that ever reached the "Friscos" were occasional wanderers who showed up during the winter rains of December and January. The San Franciscos consist of a series of isolated granite mountains with valleys between. Sheep were then almost the only large animals there. For some reason, deer did not seem to care for the area and were seldom seen.

The Sierra Cobabai, on the other hand, had open water developed by Mexican ranchers. There were a good many cattle there and a large number of wild or semiwild burros. There were also a good many whitetail, and desert mule deer, and some javelinas. The Cobabai is a higher range than the San Franciscos, with the highest peak going about 4,500 feet above sea level. When

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the sheep come down, they do so warily, and they never bed in the valleys. The Cobabai has permanent water in natural “tanks” worn in solid rock.

I used to get up early so that I could be out as soon as it was light enough to shoot. Then walking upwind or crosswind, I would go quietly along the edge of the hills, hoping to see rams feeding or working up the hillside to bed down. Now and then I'd stop and glass what areas of the mountain I could see. Generally, as rams go up, they stop now and then to nip off a choice bit of browse along the way. Many times I have seen them above me with my naked eye. What usually gave them away was what an old sheep hunter I knew called the “fatal white rump patch.” The white rump is the most conspicuous part of the sheep.

By the time the sun began to get warm and if nothing had developed, the thing to do was to go high, find a good place, and start glassing. Then, if I located a shootable ram, I had to plan the route of the stalk. Above all, the stalker must stay out of sight. Particularly, he should avoid parading on the skyline. Usually the best bet is to keep high and come at the ram from above. Sometimes it is possible to go low, come up behind a point, and shoot a ram on the opposite point. The desert sheep have been hunted continuously by Indians, Spaniards, Mexicans, and Americans since the sixteenth century. They can be very smart indeed. I remember spotting a ram bedded down all alone on a point, chewing his cud and at peace with the world. I went back over the ridge, worked down the far side, came up over the top so I could see the ram below me about 400 yards away. Slowly and cautiously I moved down the ridge toward the ram. I was about 150 yards away but out of sight of the ram when a cruising crow came by, saw me, and let out a startled squawk. The ram took off like a scalded cat.

But I didn't lose them all. Here is the story of a successful sheep hunt: It was springtime in the desert, and the day before, an amigo and I had crossed the border at the Mexican village of Sonoyta, Sonora, and had driven into the San Franciscos to make camp. The next morning we were up before dawn. When we had eaten, we parted—my pal to go in one direction, I in another. Not much over a half-mile from camp I came on the tracks of two rams, one young, the other an old-timer. They had been feeding along the base of a steep

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granite mountain so recently that some of the twigs they had bitten off were still damp with saliva.

The wind was right as I quietly followed the tracks. Every moment I expected to see them in front of me moving through the scant desert growth, but presently I saw the tracks swing into a canyon. The rams were out of sight somewhere above. I turned up the mountain to my left and made my climb. About this time the sun came over the horizon and instantly I could feel its warmth displacing the delicious coolness of the dawn. I was in my middle thirties then, tough and enduring, and it didn't take me more than a half-hour to get to the crest of the ridge. Before I went over, I glassed the basin below me in case there might be sheep in it, but I saw nothing.

In the saddle at the head of the canyon into which the rams had turned, there was a little sand from decomposed granite and some sheep beds. The droppings around the beds looked fresh and so did the tracks of rams. I hoped this was the spot where the rams were headed.

I fed a cartridge into the chamber of the light .30-06 I was carrying that day, put on the safety, and sat down behind a boulder large enough to conceal all except my head. I then took out my binoculars to see what I could see. Below me lay the ochre desert threaded with the wandering white lines of dry arroyos. The ocotillos were tipped with scarlet, and the palo verdes were masses of yellow bloom. Behind me a whitewing dove, perched in a low bush, was giving his deep-throated, melodious call.

I waited. It grew warmer, and on the desert plain below me the mirage began to dance and shimmer. I began to wonder if the rams had turned out of the canyon or had bedded below me.

Then, about two hundred yards below in the canyon, a vague movement behind a bush—a movement almost as much sensed as seen—caught my attention. My good 8X30 glass showed me it was a sheep. Then it moved again, and I made out the head and horns of a ram about five years old. Presently he moved out into the open and stood browsing interminably.

Once, he stopped feeding and gazed down into the plain below. I finally saw what he was watching—a coyote slinking home from its night's hunting. One moment there was one ram—and the next there were two. The other had

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somehow approached from behind the brush and boulders across the narrow canyon from his partner. At first I could see only his rump, but finally he moved and I got a look at his head. He was an old-timer with heavy close-curved horns rubbed off wide and flat at the ends.

I reached down, picked up my old .30-06, and padding the fore-end with my left hand, I laid it over the boulder, and snuggled down behind it. Much to my disgust, I was shaking a little and my throat was dry, but I waited for the ram fever to pass. The ram fed behind more brush and boulders, and I thought he would never come out. But finally he did. He stood there broadside, lithe and taut and muscular, his slender neck looking too thin and delicate to hold up those heavy horns.

I put the intersection of the cross hairs low behind his shoulder. When I completed the trigger squeeze and the rifle roared in the silent desert air, he disappeared as if the earth had been jerked from around him. The younger ram stood for one horrified moment as the sound of the shot echoed through the canyon and then came bounding uphill right toward me. I remained quiet behind by rock, and he passed within a dozen feet.

Sheep hunters reading these lines will no doubt notice that nowhere do I mention using a spotting scope for desert-sheep hunting. I did not have one of those wonderful instruments until 1946. Now on a sheep hunt I would not be without one!

The beginning hunter of desert sheep has the tendency, as I had, to go charging right up to the highest ridge, feeling, no doubt, that if he is a good boy and doesn't shirk his climbing, he'll be rewarded with a ram. The sheep hunter should take it easy as much as possible and use his binoculars more than his feet. On a good many occasions, I have found sheep in plain sight in places I thought I had glassed thoroughly. Desert sheep are the hardest of all sheep to spot, particularly when they are not moving and their outlines are broken up by thin brush. If a ram is moving, it is occasionally possible to figure out where he is going and intercept him, just as I did the two rams that were moving up to bed.

Too often, feeding rams are so unpredictable that if the hunter has to make a long stalk, he may find the ram gone when he arrives. If it is feasible,

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I prefer to watch the ram until he beds down to spend some hours in pretty much the same spot during the middle of the day. When he lies down, he may move a bit to get in the shade or to find a breezy spot where the gnats that have been bothering him will be blown away. About 12:30 or 1:00 he may get up and browse a little, to put something in his stomach, but unless something disturbs him, he'll pretty much stay put until he moves out to feed again in the cool of the afternoon.

If a ram has seen the hunter, it is sometimes possible for one hunter to make the stalk while another hunter or two keeps the ram interested by walking up and down in plain sight. One time I watched a bunch of sheep for a half-hour or so until they crossed over a ridge. I waited for five minutes or so to see if a ram would come back for a look. None appeared, so a Mexican vaquero, a companion, and I started to cross an open place to get into a canyon out of sight and make the stalk.

No sooner had we started out than a ram popped up on the ridge and spotted us. I put a couple of handkerchiefs on the ends of ocotillo stalks so they fluttered in the wind. Then I had the vaquero walk up the valley away from the other hunter and me. As the ram watched the vaquero, the other hunter and I sneaked away and made it to the canyon without his being any the wiser. The fluttering handkerchiefs and the walking vaquero had him completely distracted.

I did my desert sheep hunting in Sonora in the 1930s and 1940s. In those days, the sheep country was, for the most part, without human beings or domestic stock. Roads were few and bad. There was no enforcement of such game laws as there were. By exercising influence or by crossing palms, it was always possible to get a special permit to hunt desert sheep. I always had a special permit, sometimes a museum permit.

Two friends of mine, one of whom died about 1937 and the other of whom is still sleek and in fine fur, outfitted for desert sheep in Sonora. I never asked them the details of how they arranged permits, but arrange them they did. In addition, some outfitters operated without any pretense of legality. One American was kicked out of Sonora for poaching, and from then on, he took his clients into the desert ranges of southern Arizona where the Organ Pipe National Monument is and told them they were in Sonora.

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Today desert sheep are regularly hunted in Arizona, in Nevada, and in Baja California, and now and then in Sonora. Only 10 percent of the permits in Arizona go to nonresidents. These must be obtained in a drawing. The last I heard, a Mexican permit cost \$1,000. Getting a permit does not mean getting a ram. New Mexico and Utah have taken a few desert sheep, but permits are not available to nonresidents. Desert sheep permits are in great demand because the desert ram has become the No. 1 status symbol among big-game hunters. A member of the Arizona Game Commission told me that Arizona could sell every permit they issued for \$5,000—maybe even \$10,000.

Most of the residents of the desert bighorn states who are lucky enough to draw licenses do some preseason scouting, know the country, and manage their own shows. Their success ratio is rather high—about 33 percent. Nonresidents who secure desert sheep permits almost always engage guides and outfitters. From what I hear, most of those in the United States are competent. There are also some good sheep outfitters in Mexico.

Not a few Americans after desert sheep trophies have had some hairy experiences. Some acquaintances of mine secured permits to hunt in Baja. They came back and reported terrible food and real hardships. A few years ago two friends of mine secured Baja licenses and engaged an outfitter. I warned them that they had better go in fully equipped with their own rations.

The first day, not long out of camp, one of them, an experienced sheep hunter, spotted a good ram with his binoculars. He spoke a little Spanish and showed it to his Mexican guide. They began the stalk. They finally came to the ridge that would put them about two hundred yards from the ram. About forty yards from the top the Mexican guide rushed ahead, popped over the ridge, and yelled in Spanish, “There he is, the big ram! Shoot him!”

The ram, of course, took off. My friend ran to the top of the ridge, sat down, and opened up with a .270. The ram went down at the second shot. The guide, a young and lively character, rushed across the basin to the ram. When my friend arrived, the Mexican already had the ram cut up and half-skinned. My pal couldn't even get a satisfactory picture of his trophy. So hunter and guide carried the head, scalp, and meat back to camp. Presently the other guide came in empty-handed.

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The next day the two Americans joined forces and went out. They had been living on beans and tortillas. They saw no rams that day, but the successful hunter told the unsuccessful one to cheer up, that when they got back to camp he would panbroil some sheep backstraps and they would feast. But alas, when they got back to camp, the “cook” had cut all the delicious mountain mutton into thin strips, had salted it, and had hung it up in the sun to dry as “jerky”!

The desert bighorn is a smaller animal than his cousin, the Rocky Mountain bighorn, but the best desert bighorn heads compare favorably with those of the northern sheep. The record desert bighorn is from Baja California and is only a few points smaller than the record for *Ovis canadensis*. The bodies of the desert sheep shrank down to adapt to a desert environment, but their horns and feet did not. A skinny old desert ram looks to be all horns, hoofs, and testicles. The largest desert ram ever shot in Arizona dressed out 175 pounds, but a big old Canadian ram will dress out one hundred pounds more.

The type of bighorn heads that I have always preferred in either the desert or the Rocky Mountain species is the close curl. Heads of this type are always broomed, or rubbed. They grow close to the face, and as they come up, they block the side vision and the rams rub them against rocks. Sometimes they are rubbed off as smooth as if it had been done with a file. Often they are rubbed clear back to the core. Sometimes such horns have plainly been broken—perhaps by a fall, perhaps in fighting. The horns of desert sheep are dry and brittle. They knock chunks off when they fight. I have the head of an old desert ram with one horn sheath so broken that the core is exposed about eighteen inches from the base, or about halfway to the tip. Rams lower their heads and generally do not butt each other with the bases, incidentally. Hunks of horn are broken off and can be found at the scenes of fights. Sometimes the broken and loosened pieces do not fall off until later. I have found pieces of horns around sheep beds. They have fallen off when the rams were lying down. Rams also break horns when they fall and when they bump them into the rocks.

Anyone lucky enough to be able to arrange a legal desert sheep hunt these days should settle for nothing less than a good trophy head. This does not mean a head worthy of the record book. Any old desert bighorn with a broomed, weathered, and battered head is a fine trophy whether he “makes the book” or

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not! Since the desert sheep is smaller than the bighorn, the hunter who is used to bighorns will often see rugged-looking heads with horns that come down below the point of the jaw and come up even with the nose or above it, horns that have very tight curls and come up close to the face. Heads that if they were on Rocky Mountain bighorn would go close to forty inches around the curl will go about thirty-five inches on the smaller desert rams.

Some desert rams, mostly fairly young ones seven or eight years old, will have heads with heavy bases that taper rather quickly. A head that I took many years ago and that is listed in the 1939 edition of *Records of North American Big Game* had bases of 16 and 16¼ inches when thoroughly dry, but the longest horn was only about 36½ inches. The horns were of the droopy type. I no longer have this particular head. Inexperienced sheep hunters set great store by "perfect points." These are to be sought in sheep with wide spreads and argali-type horns, such as are common to Stones and Dalls. With the bighorns, however, the best and most typical heads do not have perfect points. The best ones are rubbed and broomed, broken and battered. They show a life of many fights and many loves, and they are something to be proud of!

