

Raven's Throat Dream Hunt

By Jerome Garcia and Shelby Wilson

Monday morning, June 3, 2019, I arrive at work, open my computer, and browse my emails. A message from "ddjienna" is in my inbox and I almost hit delete from this unknown as he goes on to mention the same old marketing propaganda, "congratulations you're the winner"... After some coffee and a little closer observation, I read it again and it says "You won the Mountain Caribou Hunt in 2020 with Raven's Throat Outfitters... That is when it hit me, I purchased a handful of tickets just prior to the raffle sale closing. I had to make sure it was not a prank from this culprit, Dijenna, sure enough, I won. When I finally overcame the shock and realized I won the mountain caribou hunt raffle, there was no way I could experience this hunt alone and knew I needed to share it with one of my greatest hunting partners, my daughter Shelby. Of course, in the previous year, 2018, my dear wife, Michele, asked me what I wanted to do for my 50th birthday. The answer was easy, I wanted to go Dall sheep hunting. The search was on, and I made out on an awesome chance in the NWT and booked into a cancellation hunt. This was thought to be my once in a lifetime opportunity, so I insisted my other greatest hunting partner, my son Justin, accompany me as a guest and we worked out a deal to add a mountain caribou for him if the opportunity presented itself. This trip alone was a stretch, and I seriously did not believe I would get to visit this part of the world a second time. So as expected, the news of traveling to the NWT to hunt a second time was tremendous. We were slated for the 8th and last hunt of 2020. The coming of 2020 brought more than we all bargained, enter Covid-19, travel restrictions and canceled hunting in the NWT. Then ultimately Raven's Throat Outfitters scheduling and commitment to their hunters made it necessary to hunt in 2022. Let me tell

you it's a tough proposition to keep the excitement level up, over that long of time. The silver lining in this story is in May 2020 I received a call from the Colorado Rocky Mountain Bighorn Society congratulating me for winning the Colorado Statewide Bighorn raffle. Needless to say, this incredible news quickly quenched the burn of delayed hunts and Covid-19 epidemic. Fast forwarding to late July 2021 I received a call from Griz Turner inquiring whether we could make the hunt in September 2021, a year early. Wanting to burst out with an absolute

Departing from El Paso, TX on September 25th, the arduous travel and suffocating Covid restrictions made getting to our jump off point in Normal Wells tasking, then snowstorms and low cloud ceiling set us back nearly two days, finally arriving at Raven's Throat Outfitters base camp on the afternoon of September 29th. The pace accelerated as we met the crew, completed some paperwork, checked rifle zero's, reorganized our packs and deployed to our spike camp and hunting destination. The entire process was professional and organized, but very quick. These hunts are helicopter supported and the rotary flight experience has never ceased to amaze me, especially with the spectacular scenery. On this journey we observed loads of caribou transitioning to their winter range. We dropped into a valley next to a frozen pond and adjacent river. The site was outstanding. Our guide was Matt Bruin, an Ontario native turned mountain man. He is an absolutely fantastic person who rounded out this experience and helped make it unforgettable. That night, tepee tents were pitched and camp duties quickly completed before dark. There was just enough time to peek up and down the valley at the many caribou in the area.



"HELL YES!!!", I chose diplomacy in our household and asked if I could call him back with a definite answer. First, I spoke to my apprehensive but supporting wife, but ultimately it was in Shelby's hands as she and her husband Sam had just moved from Anchorage back to New Mexico after nearly 4 years in Alaska. After a short discussion and acknowledging the uncertainty of everything in the world, she agreed it would be best to go this year in 2021. On one condition, she had to be back on Monday, October 10th to start her new employment. Whew! I quickly called Griz back and let him know we were in!

We made a deliberate decision to bypass a fire in the tiny wood burning box stoves. This was not the wisest decision as the frozen snow covered ground and declining adrenaline made us realize we'd be in for really cold night. In the pitch darkness I could hear Shelby tossing and turning, then I finally asked how she was doing. "Dad, I'm freezing", I passed her my down jacket and pants which helped, she was already wearing everything she had, but morning couldn't come soon enough. We enjoyed some hot burritos and coffee in the morning and hustled to a prominent glassing point to gain a little elevation and begin filtering

through the herds to find Shelby a big bull. We could see Dall sheep up on the mountain tops, caribou up and down the valley, nearly as far as we could see. There was a large boar grizzly gently feeding opposite our side of the valley and we hoped he would stay there. Mid-morning, we spotted a big bull with really good tops and a big frame. He had double shovel, double bez on one side, back scratchers, and nine points on each top. We certainly were not in a rush, but a couple of comments stuck in the back of my mind. Winter was quickly approaching and should the lake at base camp freeze we'd be in a predicament getting back to Norman Wells by way of float plane. Second, we were enjoying the greatest number of caribou Matt had witnessed all season. Lastly, as the caribou filter through, there will not be a reasonable chance to catch up once they pass. The bull we targeted was very nice and it was subtly suggested Shelby take him. We crossed the river, climbed the opposite side and snuck into a position near the bedded bull. After some time, he finally stood and she put two 143 grain ELD-X bullets into bull. Shockingly he jumped back up and rejoined the herd. They drifted a few hundred yards where we snuck in close for her final shot with dad's 7mm Rem Mag shooting 195 grain Berger's. We celebrated, quartered the bull and had the meat picked up. Dark was quickly approaching, and we headed back to camp. The gentle and partially frozen river from the morning had somehow grown during the pleasant day, water levels were much higher and swift. Matt chose to cross first, drop his pack and return for Shelby and her pack. Getting wet was inevitable, so Matt chose to carry Shelby piggyback across the river as he and I interlocked our arms and went together. Perhaps halfway across, I could feel water rushing under my gators and completely filling my boots. Both Matt and I were soaked. As darkness approached, the frozen valley started to become inhospitable. Our first task upon reaching camp was to gather enough firewood to keep the stoves going throughout the night and hopefully dry out our wet boots and clothing. That night we enjoyed some fresh caribou tenderloin, pasta, and hot apple cider. The box stoves in the tents did a remarkable job of both drying out our wet items and keeping temperatures bearable. It was a late night and we didn't turn in until nearly midnight. The sky was clear, and this was my first and only experience seeing the Northern lights (aurora borealis), indeed spectacular! I woke somewhere around 3:00 AM and thought I'd be treated to another view, but instead the clouds had moved

back in and the show was over. The following morning, after breakfast, we proceeded in the opposite direction. There were many caribou that we never really had a chance to judge. After a couple hours and what could be considered a short climb and hike we were observing multiple bulls and herds. The neighboring grizzly had moved and claimed Shelby's caribou carcass. Nearby, there was a descent bull that after closer observation was bleeding on his shoulder from a long slash. Then, Matt called out he found my bull, "Sir Bez A lot" maybe a half mile out. The bull was across a deep canyon and further yet, I spotted a big bull standing solo on a hilltop. These two bulls had potential, but the further bull turned and walked out of site never to be seen again. I really was not sold on Sir Bez A lot, but we moved in that direction hoping to get a better look. In true fashion, he not only disappeared, but reappeared 100 yards to our front. He was a bull on a mission. I set up my spotting scope to get the best look possible and there was no doubt he was genuinely nice with exceptional bottoms, good tops, double shovel, and back scratchers. Of course we all knew what he was and this was the one and only time that I couldn't get an absolute recommendation to shoot or pass. I really wasn't in a rush, but I didn't have a good reason not to take this beautiful bull. So, I alone made my decision and ended the hunting part of this adventure which was far from over. It is difficult to express my sincere appreciation and gratitude for this opportunity and experience. The bulls we harvested are gorgeous and unique. I have no regrets about the way this played out. The caribou hunt was more of an enjoyable hunt and not the tormenting grind of a hunt that others can be. We now had an opportunity to enjoy some overdue time together, stress free. Our next challenge was beating out the approaching winter and getting home in time to resume the most demanding time of the year for our business and Shelby starting her new position. We returned to camp and flew out that afternoon back to base camp. Four of the six hunters and filled their tag with great bulls. We awaited instruction for when the float plane would pick us up and return to Norman Wells to begin our journey home. Again, the snowstorms

and cloud cover prevented any flying. The next phase of our experience was getting to know Griz and Ginger Turner, and the entire camp crew. We enjoyed great meals, cocktails (Makers Mark) and card games for the next three days. The next day Griz asked us to accompany him on a survey of the hunt area. Flying for nearly two hours and only covering perhaps one third of the concession. This flight was certainly a highlight to our trip, as we observed hundreds of sheep, caribou, moose, and several grizzlies. The Raven's Throat Outfitter's Crew is top notch, among the absolute best in the business. Matt, our guide, stuck with us throughout the remainder of our time in camp. We processed the meat to return home, packaged antlers, and salted/prepped capes. It was ingrained in me when I was young that we have a responsibility to eat what we kill, and 120 pounds of prime caribou venison came home with us as checked baggage. We also brought the capes and antlers along with all our baggage. It was quite a production maneuvering through the airports and hotels, eventually arriving home on the evening of October 8th, thus ending this great adventure. Griz and Ginger Turner own Raven's Throat Outfitters and hunt an area of approximately 3.8 million acres of some of the most beautiful and truly wild country on earth. The couple are some of the very best people I have ever had the pleasure of knowing in any industry or walk of life. They are humble, capable, and honorable in everything they do. This hunt was extremely well communicated, organized, and executed equally or better than any operation I've ever witnessed or participated. Shelby and I both begrudgingly departed the camp to travel home after feeling as though we were taken into their family and world. Forever and always, we will be connected through this experience and this is said as an attempt to express the massive impression that was made upon us. Finally, I wanted to thank the Wyoming Wild Sheep Foundation, I am sincerely grateful.

