

The range finder indicated 1111 yards to the ram. We now had some distance to cover without letting him know we were on his mountain. My bighorn sheep guide took a moment before we went and removed his hat and said, "Lloyd, would you please pray and ask the Lord for His favor so we won't blow this stalk?" I willingly complied, letting him in on many prayers I had already been sending the Lord's way.

Eleven days previously on the opening morning of the Idaho bighorn season I was sneaking along at over 10,000 feet not far from the continental divide and the Montana State line on the Idaho side. Amazingly only 20 minutes into the day a nice mature ram walked around a steep bluff and into view 347 yards away. He was below us at a steep angle, and the shot would probably not have been too difficult as I had been practicing regularly out to 400 yards in case such an opportunity arose. But I did not take the shot as there was more than 1000 feet of air and scree below the ram and it was doubtful that there would have been much to salvage after taking such a fall. So we watched as he slowly walked around the ridge and out of our lives forever. As I watched him slowly walk away I had quite a few thoughts. I wondered if by passing up this early opportunity, we might well pay a price before getting another. I thought of the words of Proverbs 20:21, "An inheritance gained hastily at the beginning will not be blessed at the end."

But even opening day was not really the beginning of the saga of my bighorn ram. To get the impact of the significance of this hunt I must take you back a few months and a few miles. Being a Christian minister who believes in giving honor where honor is due, I had for some time wanted to visit a ministry couple who had faithfully served the Lord for many years in our region as well as serving as foreign missionaries to numerous nations. They lived in the mountains of Eastern Idaho and just going for a visit would take some planning. Yet I had it on my heart to visit them just to give honor to them for the things they had accomplished for others. So in the early part of 2007 I made arrangements for a visit at a time when we would all be home from various travels. We set the day for my visit in late May and when the day arrived I made the three and a half hour trip down for my visit. We had a wonderful time together sharing about the things they had done and the people they had helped and the things that were learned along the way. I had taken them some little gifts from Montana including some traditional treats made from our wild Huckleberries. I found out these were a hit when I discovered we were going to have some delicious home made Huckleberry pie after lunch. At the end of the day I traveled east after leaving their home. The mountains across the valley from where I was were so beautiful that I had to pull over and photograph them. While I live in the Rocky Mountains, I never tire of their beauty and mystery.

It was late when I arrived home and I sat and revisited the day with my wife Terri before we retired for the evening. Without warning she suddenly jumped up from the couch and said, "I almost forgot, you had a phone call and you won something!" I chuckled as she went to get her note and said to her, "I wonder if it could be a bighorn sheep tag?" When she replied that it was exactly that I was on my feet and jumping around with excitement. Drawing a permit to hunt for a bighorn ram is a very special and rare occurrence. I had been applying unsuccessfully for the chance in my home state of Montana for so many years that a few years earlier I decided to increase my chances by applying in

neighboring states. When I discovered that this permit was for the area that included the mountains I had just photographed that evening on my way home, I could not help but see the hand of the Lord in the timing and the placement of this hunt. I have learned to pay attention and learn the lessons that He may have in these types of rare events. For me this hunt was going to represent the blessings that come from honoring those who have gone before us, the spiritual fathers and mothers. I really got the point driven home when a month later, while at a minister's retreat on the east coast, pastor Rick Joyner made the statement, "We will never be able to receive a spiritual inheritance until we learn how to honor our spiritual fathers and mothers". I felt I had to explain to him what the Lord was doing to teach this subject to me through this recent experience. I took Pastor Bill Johnson, another hunter, with me to explain the significance. Although Rick is not a big game hunter he appreciated the significance of what the Lord was working through this series of events.

Although I had joined my outfitter and guides for a couple of days of scouting in late summer, my actual hunt began with my arrival a day before the season was to open on Aug 30. We packed our gear on the horses and rode up the mountain to a spot on top at over 10,000 feet. Some rams had been spotted a few days before on a nearby mountain by a hiker wandering from the continental divide trail through that area. Understandably all those rams blew out of the area. There was another small herd of rams spotted on the steep side of the mountain we were on and we planned to hunt for them in the morning. The ram we saw at first light was part of this group, but we never saw him or his companions again.

On the evening of the first day we were astonished when a herd of nine rams came over the ridge from Montana into plain sight of our camp on top of the bald mountain. We had chosen our campsite with the small herd in mind, but we were in plain sight of this larger herd and nothing was to be done about it. When they first came into view about a mile of Rocky Mountain air was between us across an open bowl. We watched one another until the western sky was painted with all the colors of sunset.

Right here I must digress yet again in order to communicate more of what had happened behind the scenes. While I was wholly involved in the hunt, the Lord had been preparing a message through the events surrounding the Hunt. A few months earlier I was ministering in New England. On my free morning I had arranged for my friend Joe to take me to Lexington and Concord in Massachusetts. Being a student of history I had always wanted to visit the birthplace of the American Revolution, and this was the place. All day as we visited the sites, I kept saying that for me this was a spiritual journey. A few days later I arrived at the minister's retreat in South Carolina and I took some time one morning to transcribe the poem by Ralph Waldo Emerson that was written to commemorate the events of that day so many years before. I had taken pictures of the poem which is enshrined on the statute of the Minute Man at Concord. The poem begins

-  
By the rude bridge that arched the flood,  
Their flag to April's breeze unfurled,

Here once the embattled farmers stood  
And fired the shot heard round the world.

I completed the transcription of this poem and then went down stairs to go to a meeting. As I did I noticed the prophet Bob Jones sitting at a table surrounded by a number of friends listening to him tell stories. I took the opportunity to join them and, as my manner is under such opportunities, began to take notes.

I was astounded when, after only being at the table for five minutes, Bob said that if the Church doesn't have a revolution soon, that it and the nation will enter very difficult times. Hearing this reference to revolution exited me as I felt this confirmed my desire to visit Lexington and Concord earlier, and that my trip was truly a spiritual journey as I had said and not only a historical visit. He continued by saying "we need another Lexington and Concord; and the Lord is raising up a new breed of Minute Men for a new shot heard round the world." When Bob was done I told him of my recent trip. Of course this was a confirmation to me that my trip to the site of the shot heard around the world was a spiritual one. But it wasn't until that night of Aug 31 as I sat on that mountain with the sun setting in the west and the herd of rams bedding down on the mountain that those events connected with these.

As I sat there admiring the views and contemplating the events of the day I pulled out a little book by Henry David Thoreau which I had brought with me to help pass the days. As I opened it and began to read I had a strong sense that these events were much bigger than simply a hunt for a ram. The first words in the book, from an essay about his adventures climbing a mountain called *Ktaadn* are, "On the 31<sup>st</sup> of August, 1846, I left Concord in Massachusetts..." I could not help the deep sense of awe as I noticed the connection of so many years having passed - exactly to the day - between his adventure to the mountain top and mine. One might notice the connection too between Thoreau and Emerson, bringing the message even more into focus. Each had written words that connected my hunt with a broader message of revolution and honoring those who have gone before, but it also may be important to note that Emerson was the journalistic father of Thoreau. A person could not put together so many "coincidences" even if you tried.

In the morning we were surprised to find that the herd had moved closer to us in the wide open rocky face of that neighboring mountain. We continued to hunt the mountain we were on, while at the same time hoping for a break with the larger herd of rams we could see from camp. For three days we watched them and they watched us, all the time hoping that the rams would make a mistake and enter a part of the mountain that would allow us to make a stalk. On the evening of the third day we thought we had our break. The rams began to move around the mountain into the saddle which climbed all the way up to our camp. Beginning with the smaller rams and ending with the three that were big enough to keep us interested all this time, they side-hilled along the mountain coming onto the part about 800 yards across from us. As the sun set we were full of anticipation for what the morning would hold. For the past couple of days, ever since the sheep came over the hill into our view my very experienced sheep guide Gary kept encouraging me to be patient

saying that sooner or later they would make a mistake and move into an area that would allow us to stalk without being seen.

But that evening the skies opened up and sent down a storm that threatened to blow our little Kelty Typhoon tent off the mountain. We were hit with high winds, heavy rain and large hail. Thankfully in the morning we were still attached to earth and still dry - a testimony to the great design of our tent. But as the morning star dimmed and the sun rose in the eastern sky so did our disappointment - the sheep were no where to be seen. We figured they could tell the storm was coming, as so many animals can, and went over into the breaks on the Montana side where there was more protection from the storm when it descended in all of its fury.

We were almost out of drinking water and totally out of food when we hunted down to the main camp on this, the fourth day. We saw plenty of ewes and lambs, and lots of elk, but not a ram could we locate. While crossing a field of scree I took a nasty fall and my rifle, which I had been carrying slung on my shoulder, slipped off and took a horrible hit. In all of my years of hunting I can not recall knocking a scope out of alignment, but this was one time I knew I had to recheck the zero of my scope. We continued our hunt off the mountain down to our main camp. After freshening up a bit I took a piece of cardboard kept around for just such situations and set it up in a spot with a safe backdrop and marked off 100 yards with my rangefinder. The old saying "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure" was never more applicable than in this situation as my rifle was shooting a bit high and about nine and a half inches to the right due to the fall! This could have caused a complete miss had I not readjusted it.

The next week was one of persistence, patience, glassing and shoe leather. Unfortunately we were not locating any rams, and very few sheep of any kind. The weather wasn't always co-operating either. A few days were so rainy that it was impossible to glass past 70 - 100 yards. When it comes to bighorn sheep hunting there are four things that anyone needs and good optics are at the top of the list followed by a good pair of boots, a good bed, and a good rifle - in that order. So when the weather takes away the major advantage of using good optics the options for success become much more limited.

On those days when the weather was clear we took advantage by riding, either by horse or by four wheel drive, to the top of a likely ridge and glassing as long as day light allowed. It was during these dry times of searching that a positive attitude and a strong will to succeed were my best friends. I had my mind set on the goal and each day, when I arose before day light and got equipped for the day, I had the feeling that this could be the day. I never once doubted that I would get my ram if I persisted. I often thought of the bible verse that two different friends sent me months earlier when they heard that I had drawn a bighorn sheep tag. "Then Abraham lifted his eyes and looked, and there behind him was a ram ... so Abraham went and took the ram ... and Abraham called the name of the place, The-LORD-Will-Provide; as it is said to this day, 'In the Mount of The LORD it shall be provided.'" Even when the tenth day, which was supposed to be the final day of the guided hunt, came and went without a ram I was not discouraged. Weary from all the work but not deterred. I had my mind made up to continue the hunt on my own as

long as I could, and even return to hunt as often as necessary until I was successful. The Lord does definitely provide even to this day and here is the evidence - Gary, the main guide, had been with me from the beginning, and he had other commitments and could not stay past the prescribed time. But the others, young men all, agreed to stay a couple of extra days.

On the eleventh day we were up early as usual and took the horses to an area that we had hunted earlier the previous week and where we had not been for some days. Leaving the horses behind the ridge we carefully crept over the rise and glassed likely spots. The first place I found myself glassing was the mountain where eleven days previously on opening morning I had let the ram walk around the spine of the mountain and out of view. From my current position I now looked at that same spot and I was convinced I had made the right choice so many days ago. I could now see clearly how long the drop off was below where that ram had been perched on that little ledge - still it is only natural to wonder "what if."

As we stood up after glassing from this likely spot we found a couple of interesting things. One was a near perfect obsidian arrow head, and the other was a stone ornament which was shaped and drilled through for wearing by some ancient sheep hunter. The area was known to have been hunted in a by-gone era by the Shoshone Tribe and they had a group, or band, known as the Sheep Eaters, because of their inclination to go after the native bighorns for a large portion of their diet. Still it was unusual to find artifacts like this so high up on a mountain and it was a special blessing to find them while hunting for my ram. This became even more extraordinary in a few moments.

We began the walk to change positions and had carefully moved about two hundred yards up the ridge when we sat back down once again to glass. Before we had even had time to really get settled in we spotted a ram on a steep slide farther up the mountain. This was the eleventh legal ram that I had seen on my hunting trip, and it was the eleventh day of hunting. I didn't immediately think of these things as I looked through the range finder and found him to be at 1111 yards. It was later when this all began to sink in, because at that moment my mind was consumed with plotting the work we had to do to close the gap and get within shooting distance of that ram. The ram was feeding all alone on a shelf below a rock face, and above a sheer drop off. He was one of the top rams we had seen, if not the top ram, and certainly he was a welcome sight after so much effort and patience.

The first dilemma we faced was to close the distance from over a thousand yards to something manageable. I had been practicing for weeks, shooting at 100, 200, 300 and 400. Shooting one shot each week at each range from a shooting bench and many others from realistic field positions gave me a feeling of confidence. After five weeks my 400 yard target had a group of five holes measuring under 3 ½ inches. This practice was all part of the insurance. I understand how different things can be in the field compared to the range and I did not want to take a shot at an unwounded animal at that distance. So we laid out a plan to close the distance and began our stalk. Closing the distance to just over 500 yards was not all that difficult as we were able to drop below the top of the ridge we were on and go forward at a very careful, but comfortable, rate.

Once coming back over the ridge was mandated by the terrain we carefully used the stunted junipers and pines to conceal our movement. It was at this point that my young guide, Evan, took off his hat and asked for a prayer for the Lord's favor in completing the stalk and the shot. Shortly the trees and other vegetation would no longer totally conceal our approach, so we had to implement a plan of one person watching the ram and giving the 'go-a-head' so the other could quickly pass an opening in the foliage to another bush or tree for concealment. We leap-frogged ahead like this closing the distance over the course of three hours to a range of 202 yards. Toward the end of our stalk the ram finished feeding and bedded down on a ledge overlooking a steep drop off. We had come as close as we were going to get - and much closer than I imagined possible. As we set up in the concealment of an ancient wind swept pine I had to calm my nerves at the possible culmination of the exertion of eleven difficult days of hunting in addition to all of the weeks of preparation and scouting.

We pulled a few small boughs out of the way to make a line for clear fire, and waited. After perhaps ten minutes I had my chance. The ram stood up, perhaps just to turn around or get a better view of the country below him. But he never got the chance. At the shot he dropped. I sent a second shot in the hopes of anchoring him and keeping him from rolling off the ledge on which he was perched. I was unsuccessful in my attempt and the ram rolled off of the ledge. Fortunately there was an outcropping of rock below him and he fell perhaps only ten feet and lay still on his back, apparently wedged in the cleft of a rock. We were ecstatic, and I admit to needing to calm my nerves at this point. We watched for a time to see if there was any movement. All we could see of the ram from this angle was the top of his head and horns. There was no movement at all for a few moments so we decided it was time to climb up and claim our hard won prize.

But events can change quickly in the wide open spaces, and so things changed again as we began our approach across the steep rock outcropping. The ram was no longer on his back in the cleft but was on his side pushing himself towards the seemingly endless drop-off just ahead of where he was. I scrambled for a steady place to shoot from, and when I was somewhat settled tried a difficult shot at portions of the ram showing between the rocks. I saw pieces of rock fly when I made my first and unsuccessful attempt to stop him. My second was good, hitting him in the neck, but just an instant too late to stop him from pushing over the cliff. Over he went, perhaps one hundred feet through the alpine air before hitting the scree slope and rolling end over end for what seemed like an eternity. He fell about another four hundred yards before coming to rest. Watching that ram tumble down the slide were the longest seconds of the whole trip. Once he came to rest we had to reverse our advance and now descended to the ram. It took a while to reach him but honestly in my memory this time seems so much shorter than watching him tumble off the cliff. Of course he was finished when we approached him, the last shot doing the job. Upon inspection the other shots were slightly high, perhaps from the sharp fall my gun had taken earlier in the trip. But the damage to the ram from the fall was negligible considering the circumstances and the fall he had taken, a true testimony to the toughness of these animals.

There was still work to do to skin the ram and bone out all the meat for the long trek off the mountain. Yet I took the time to thank the Lord for the gift of this ram and all that it had come to represent. I took the time to repeat the story of how the Lord chose to time the drawing of the tag in such a way to indicate the favor of a spiritual blessing and inheritance to those who will take the time to honor the spiritual fathers and mothers who have gone before. It occurred to me that perhaps simply returning to the fear of the Lord by giving honor where honor is due, we might be starting a revolution which would have effects around the world.

Here is a picture of my ram [EleventhHourRam.jpg](#)

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