



2004 Hunt Update

Double Trouble

One of the things many first time hunters in Alaska discover is the fact that the hunting is not what they may have dreamed of. Most guys simply believe they are going to see animals in great densities that rival the Serengeti, and they are often disappointed, with the exception of the occasional hunter who gets lucky enough to catch the caribou migration in full glory. This year would be a little different in our sheep camp! Pre-season work got under way with a scouting flight on the 6th of August, and after we viewed a very nice number of rams, I sent in the first two apprentices from my guide school. The guys were simply going to land on the same strip we had used the year before and hike the 3 mile hike up the creek to pitch camp next to the main glacier. We knew there were 10 rams in one drainage near the head of the valley, and I thought several of them looked good enough that it would require a closer look on the ground. Unfortunately that evening I received a call from my student on the satellite phone and he informed me that a hunter and a guide walked right by our newly established camp. Apparently they knew that the ten rams were in the valley just as well as we did, so they decided to get the upper hand on us. This move would prove to be to their advantage, and of course, our disadvantage.

The season opened and we found ourselves heading up the valley to get a look at those ten rams and to try and see if we could determine where the other hunters were located. It took less than a couple of hours before we spotted the two hunters moving up the side of the slope above the ten rams, and we decided that it was not going to be a profitable situation for us.



Glassing on the way to the second spike camp.

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Up Close & Personal With Brown Bear

The 2004 brown bear season saw us facing the transition from the Alaska Peninsula to the upper Cook Inlet country, south of the Yentna River. The transition, for the most part has been better than expected! Our first ever spring hunts were more physically challenging to our hunters than what anyone expected, but we did see 17 bears in 6 days, although most of these were sows and cubs. We saw 3 legal bears during this time, and one of these sat on the face of its den until Assistant Guide Derek Harbula and hunter Russell Taylor got half-way to the location, only to be doomed by a dense cloud cover that limited visibility to 50ft. Hours later the clouds lifted, and the solitary bear had....

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Special points of interest:

- Double on 39" Chugach rams
- First Archery Brown Bear
- New Brown bear area details

Double Trouble *continued from page 1*

We watched the depressing scene unfold before our eyes as the two hunters ascended way above the ten rams, so we busied ourselves with watching two other rams on the opposite slope across from the ten rams we were interested in. After several hours of frustration we finally decided that our best bet was going to be a move down the creek to the lower valley. The only problem with this of course was the fact that it would probably require us to get the pilot to come back in to the lower strip so we could shuttle down the valley.

By the middle of this first frustrated day of hunting we were down to five men; my assistant guide Derek Harbula, my one student Dan Gunderson (the other student had already escaped for the lower 48 by this point), a second year sheep hunter Blake Olson, and first time Alaskan hunter Jim Renkema. This meant that we had a pretty good spike camp to pull and move back down to the lower strip. Derek and I debated for several hours as to whether it would be more logical to try an overland route through a mountain pass to get to the desired drainage, versus a flight to a much lower camp, which would necessitate an arduous climb into the valley where several other rams had been located before season. As evening approached I made the final decision to call the pilot and plans were made for a shuttle on the following day.



Jim Renkema, Registered Guide Tony Dingess, and Assistant Guide Derek Harbula, make the journey to a new spike camp location. This photo reminds me more of the Sherpas of the Himalayans than it does of sheep hunters!

The second day of the hunt dawned with us in a rush to pull camp and make the three mile journey back downriver to the primitive airstrip. Both expedition tents were pulled along with a truckload of gear and we began the trip back down the creek. It ended up of course being a long tough day, but the connection with the pilot was made and we were able to make the shuttle down the creek and establish a new base camp. At this juncture I should probably mention the fact that the pilot flew me over the area once again and told me that he estimated that it would take about two hours to go from the strip in the lower valley up the alder covered slope to the pass that lead into the valley that we expected to hunt. I mention this just to point out the hilarious nature of Alaskan bush pilots. The facts were we were sitting at around 1,300ft. elevation and we needed to get to 4,100ft. elevation, so by the time everyone managed to make the shuttle downriver I decided that our best bet was to wait until morning before we attempted to climb the slope.

"Just about the time I cleared the crest of the ridge I spotted two rams about 500yds. off to my right, and of course adrenaline started to flow..."

The next morning would bring about a number of discussions about what might be the best possible route up the slope, but we eventually got ourselves under way and started into the jungle. It is impossible to convey to some one just how bad it can actually be in an alder thicket, but let it suffice to say that we were nearly at wits end when I made the first check on the GPS and found that we had only ascended to 300ft. in elevation. I have to say it will be a day that will always be remembered when I recount severe journeys in sheep country, for it would be right at nine and a half hours later before we reached the spot that we would make a spike camp (near the 4,100ft. elevation mark), and after a GPS check I discovered this was only 1.9 miles from our starting point; Needless to say, we were totally exhausted, so we pitched our base camp tent (the Himalayan 47 by the North Face) and five smelly, and weary men crawled in for the night.

The next day dawned with extremely nice weather, so we scrambled up the slope above the camp and began to move cautiously into the valley just over the ridge. I led the way crawling along on my hands and knees with the expectation that I was going to see sheep at any moment, and so I did. Just about the time I cleared the crest of the ridge I spotted two rams about 500yds. off to my right, and of course adrenaline started to flow. Unfortunately after about an hour of evaluating these two sheep, I concluded that they were not full curl, and they were probably not the larger rams that I had seen from the air, so we moved further into the valley. Positioning ourselves next to a prominent bluff at the head of the valley, we started glassing, and we soon found ourselves marveling at the tremendous number of sheep in this small valley. Overall I suppose we saw close to 40 rams, but of course most of these were young immature rams, but not all. We spotted one group of four rams that were hanging close together and we begin to focus our attention on these four, although we were constantly spotting new rams popping up everywhere, along with a fair number of lambs and ewes. Eventually the smaller of the four rams was forced out of the group, and we decided to try to get closer in order to get a better look. We watched the rams very carefully as we began to maneuver around the head of the valley seeing that we were not really able to get out of sight, we moved slowly and deliberately for nearly a half an hour. Finally we found ourselves at 450 yards and the possibility of getting closer was not all that realistic, so we begin to look harder at the headgear on two of the three rams. What was obvious to me was the fact that neither of the rams were likely to make a full curl, but it was also very obvious that two of the rams sported a tremendous amount of mass. At this

stage things started to get complicated. For those of you unfamiliar with Alaska law, a legal ram is defined as being full curl, broomed on both sides, or the ram is eight years old as counted on the annuli of the horn. Sounds easy enough of course, until you've actually tried to count the rings on a ram's horn at 500 yards. The truth is, it is only possible if the conditions are almost perfect, that is the light, visibility, resolution of optics, etc., and then the ram has to have horns with rings that stand out well, and all rams are not like this. Rams with dark horns are often much more difficult to see the rings on, but fortunately for us the rams were moving very little, and the rings were pretty evident. Fortunately for us, this just so happened to be one of those times, and Derek was able to evaluate what I was counting, so with constant comparison we were able to continue the stalk.

Some sheep hunters, and fellow guides will always suggest that counting rings is simply not a feasible option, and I have to disagree, but as I disagree it should be clarified that this just isn't something for the amateur to attempt, and whoever does this better be sure of what they are doing, plain and simple. We evaluated these particular rams for close to 6 hours before the shots were taken, and we spent several hours doing nothing but making certain that we were both coming up with the same ring count on each ram. We sat at around the 440 yard mark for an extremely long time, and actually set up for the shots at this range, but the movement of the 3rd ram created havoc with shot opportunities, then we got the break that every hunter prays to get; the sheep moved downhill, out of sight, beneath a low bluff. We didn't hesitate for a minute! Sprinting quickly across the slope we cut off yardage like it was nobody's business, finally slowing down right on top of the bluff directly above the rams. At this stage in the game, we didn't know if we were within 150 yards, or 50 yards, but I knew we had to keep our eyes open, and we could not afford to lose the element of surprise when we had hopes of nailing 2 rams at once.

Adrenaline began to pump through everyone's veins as we slowed down to a crawl, surveying every inch of real estate, trying to keep that vital edge. The difficult thing with being close was the possibility of getting things mixed up in the heat of the moment, seeing that we still had a 3rd smaller ram hanging out in this group. Blake and Jim were moving parallel with me, as Derek followed with the video camera in hand, then Blake motioned for us to drop and I knew he had spotted movement. As I stretched to see exactly where the group was, I discovered we were closer than what I really wanted for this 2 shot attempt. I thought 100 yards would have been great, but now it looked like we were much closer to the 50 yard mark, but the rams still didn't have a clue. At this point my concerns about a slip up were magnified, so I threw a dozen or so rock at the rams, hoping to get them to move out on their own, but they paid little attention to my pitching. Another big concern at this yardage was the possibility of being winded, and as I considered this, the dust flew into the air! We had no idea what was going on, so we hustled toward the edge of the bluff about 20 yards below us (where the dust had kicked up), and as we peered over the edge, events blurred into one swift motion. My mind focused as swiftly as possible to determine which ram was the smaller of the 3. Jim and Blake were both in position, waiting for the word when I said "the two in the back!" Someone repeated the phrase as the rams spotted us and began to pick up their pace away from us. The smaller ram was leading the way, but as they approached somewhere close to the 70-80 yard mark Blake said "On three," and the countdown began! Two shots rang out, about as close together as you're ever going to hear, and the latter two rams both went tumbling down the slope as if lightning had bowled them over. We watched both rams tumble several hundred yards down the slope to a

grassy resting place, then we exchanged high fives and handshakes, before we backtracked 500 yards to pick up the gear we had dropped on the last fast portion of the stalk.

I knew the rams were quite typical of other Chugach rams we had taken, that is to say the horn configuration and mass looked a lot like other good rams harvested nearby, but we were all a little surprised when we walked upon the downed animals. It didn't take me long to pull out a tape, for some quick measurements, and to all of our amazement, both rams were nearly identical, 39" horn lengths and 14" base circumference. The rams were 9, and 10 years old, and are representative of the great genetics found in some of the isolated strongholds of the Chugach Mountains. Two exceptional rams, fulfilling the dreams of two of my toughest hunters yet!



Blake Olson and Jim Renkema with a fantastic double on big Chugach rams!



2004 Brown Bear Country

(Continued from page 1)

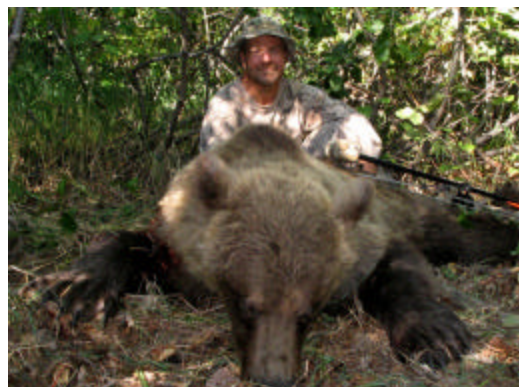
Up Close & Personal With Brown Bear

...simply vanished into thin air. The physical requirements of this snowshoe brand of hunting was simply more than any of my hunters had bargained for, but we were very pleased with the density of bears we saw, even though we were a couple of weeks behind the prime movement of the boars coming out of the dens. Although the physical challenges of this hunt are quite a bit greater than typical fall bear hunting demands, we are very much looking forward to doing 2 hunts this spring, especially since we have added two new snowmachines to the outfit. This gives us the much needed flexibility that is so desirable in the spring, and hopefully it will reduce some of the physical stresses involved, although our prospective hunters should be aware that brown bears are not going to be shot from the seat of a snowmobile! This hunt will still involve snowshoes and stalking in the mountains. My expectations for this spring hunt are higher than any bear hunts we have ever offered, and we are setting a tentative schedule of April 8th-17th to focus in on the mature boars coming out of the dens. We are currently offering this hunt at the rock bottom price of \$7,250.

Fall hunts were physically easier, and we are happy to report our first ever archery hunter for brown bear, and happier to report his success. Sean Shea took a 7ft. brown bear with us on the third day of his late August hunt. It was a classic fall hunt situation, which we captured on video, thanks to guide apprentice Jerry Starkey! The bear came out about 9:30 PM and snatched a salmon in a small landlocked channel, and returned to the alders to feed. We discussed the fact that it wasn't a giant bear, but it would probably be an excellent opportunity for a bowhunter, and Sean was eager to go for it. The bear came out for another fish, and returned predictably to the alders, allowing us time to close the 200 yard gap to the channel. Ultimately we positioned ourselves about 20 yards from the spot of the last fish kill, and in less than 5 minutes the bear returned. The adrenaline was flowing of course, but we managed to keep our cool under pressure and Sean pulled of a 22 yard shot on the bear as it turned broadside to us in pursuit of more fish. It would be the next day before we could safely pursue the bear, and after some tedious tracking we found the bruin piled up in a dense alder thicket, as could be expected.

Bruce Meyers of New Mexico connected with a pistol on brown bear while hunting with my assistant Dan Gunderson, but things got tougher as the extremely dry weather continued into September. My last hunters were 65 and 63 years old, and unfortunately for them the bears we kept spotting were 1,500 ft. up above the river on the berries, and the guys just were not ready for that physical maneuver. We worked the salmon stream, which was loaded with sockeyes and silvers, but the bears managed to beat us at that battle, always staying one step ahead of us.

All in all, we are very pleased with this new arena, and the local connections we made this past season are going to produce great results for us in the near future. Check out our 2005 outlook on page 6 for more details!



Sean Shea with his 2004 archery brown bear taken at 22 yards!



2004 Hunt Photos



Blake Olson, Tony Dingess, Derek Harbula, and Jim Renkema with the two 39" x 14" Chugach rams. As Derek says in the video, "It doesn't get any better than this!"



Sean Shea and Tony Dingess with an August brown bear taken with archery gear. Our first bowhunter for brown bear!



This is the actual location where the rams came to rest, after rolling several hundred feet down the slope.



Jim Renkema lost 48 pounds in preparation for this hunt, and he will probably still tell you if he had not done that, we would have probably performed his funeral, instead of this ram's.



220 Fowler Branch
Harts, WV 25524
Phone: 304-855-9301
Fax: 304-855-9301
Email: tony@alaskahunts.net

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2005 Outlook

As of right now, I feel the upcoming 2005 season should be the best we have ever experienced. Our spring hunts will have the decided advantage of new snowmobiles, and our 2004 season connected us with Joe and Debbie Beech, bush residents who have gone out of their way to help make our bear hunting camp a brand new thing! Joe is a professional snowmachiner, and will be assisting us with critical knowledge for the spring hunts, and I should point out that he lives right in the middle of our brown bear area, ground zero! We are finally in a position where we are not totally at the mercy of planes and pilots with the addition of the snowmobiles. For the fall, things couldn't get much better! Joe has just finished building a custom airboat which we will utilize for transport up and down the river, and this means the ability to move 10-40 miles without any major effort, and on top of this we will be bringing in a new inflatable with a jet motor for those times when we really need to be able to move a couple of miles without the noise of the airboat. Accessibility is the key, and the added equipment is simply going to make the difference this year, at least for bear. Obviously we are still going to have to hunt, but locating the hot spots on the ground is certainly going to be a lot easier. Currently we have two openings for spring, and one opening for the fall of 2005.

Sheep hunting is booked up for 2005, and we do expect another good season. Our average over the past 2 years in the Chugach has been 39" X 14", and hopefully we will be able to keep pushing the mark! Sheep hunts are now being booked for 2006, so don't wait too long.

Pricing:

Spring brown bear 2005-currently \$7,250 (special price)

Fall brown bear 2005- \$8,500

2006 Dall sheep hunts - \$8,750

Additional species are available, just call for info.



"Can You Skin Grizz Pilgrim?"