

# GLACIER RAMS



# 2003 Hunt Update

The sun was heading toward the other side of the valley, and things were getting frustrated on top of the glacier where we were piled up like so many rocks, trying to make a judgment call on a couple of rams among a group of six. It was somewhere close to 6 O' Clock in the evening, and we had spent the larger portion of the day just getting up into this glaciated mess in an attempt to get a better look at the rams we had spotted the day before the season opened. We were trying to avoid detection, but as is often the case with sheep, we were spotted, but none of the rams seemed to care, since we were still out in that 700 to 800 yard ballpark, and rams seldom feel threatened by predators that far away. Finally it boiled down to the fact that a move had to be made, either to get closer in an effort to determine if we were really looking at any legal rams, or we were going to have to head off the mountain, back down to the spike camp at the base of the glacier. The thing that was obvious to me was another trip would be required back to these same rams if we did not get the necessary look at them while we had the chance, so we closed the gap. Being out on the surface of the glacier we had little opportunity to stay concealed so we casually made our way up through a maze of crevasses and smaller boulders until one of the better rams came into view, then we simply dropped down and out came the spotting scopes for another look. One ram with thin, wide horns stood watching us as the sentinel on top of the ridge, but the ram we were interested in was bedded far below the sentinel, with another younger



*Josh & Tony with another glacier ram*

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## Peninsula Success & Failures

The Alaska Peninsula has been, to put it mildly, a tough ball park to play in, and to be quite honest the game is wearing thin. We started hunting on the Alaska Peninsula in October of 2001 on the Cinder River, and this past October made our second trip to the area, and in all likelihood our last. The Peninsula and Kodiak Island both harbor the best brown bear areas in the world, but the sad truth is most of this is tied up in federal lands that the average outfitter has virtually no access to. I started hunting the Peninsula with great expectations of finding good numbers of bear on the salmon streams, but it simply

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### Special points of interest:

- *Joshua Spor's 38 inch Chugach ram*
- *Derek Harbula's 40 inch Chugach ram*
- *Brown bear area changes*

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ram just a few yards to the right. It took what seemed like ages to me for the ram to give me a decent enough view of the side profile to determine that he would make full curl. The funny thing is there were two rams in this group that looked like genetic twins, and of course they very well could have been, and both rams had horns that appeared to have plenty of mass, but due to the substantial drop along the jaw line, the horns were just making what I considered the full curl requirement of Alaska's Fish & Game Department. Unfortunately, the "twin" was not visible, so I put the Leica Rangefinder to test, and two readings said 417 and 419 yards.

Bret Poulsen and Josh Spor had come across my two on one sheep hunt offer on the internet, and Josh had won the coin toss for the first day of hunting. The guys were informed that a two on one sheep hunt is a tough cookie to pull off, but it certainly isn't impossible, and a lot depends upon the physical and mental condition of the two hunters. Now the situation was where we had hoped, and Josh was politely offering Bret (the older of the two) the shot at this ram. Bret would have none of it, and I sent Josh forward to rest on a gravel coated slab of ice in preparation for a shot that he claimed he was quite comfortable with. Josh scrambled into position and ranged the ram again at 398 yards, double checking to make sure. Josh settled into position with his .300 Winchester Magnum, and we waited for the ram to arise from his bed, which happened within a minute or so. I peered through the spotting scope to call the shot, and then the rifle reported. Hair blew off the center of the ram's sternum as it turned toward our position, and I knew that it didn't get any better than this. The old ram actually dropped back on his knees, and I almost thought he would die right there in his bed, but one little push of adrenaline, and he tumbled several yards to the edge of the bluff below. Now things went crazy! Rams started popping up everywhere, or so it seemed, and I scanned furiously to find the second large ram, but it wasn't to be. We watched as the rams

appeared and disappeared on their way to the ridge, and after several minutes, one of larger rams was standing on the skyline at 500 yards, but I simply could not say he was legal, not to mention I would not have let Bret make the shot with his .243 anyway. The ram walked on over the skyline and the reality began to dawn on us that the ram lying up on that bluff was in a precarious place. Sheep hunting can take a guy beyond limits that have been set beforehand, and this is something I typically try to avoid, because those limits are set for logical reasons, and going beyond often involves personal risk.

Here we had one of those cases where a ram was down, but suddenly the approach to it seemed worse after the adrenaline began to settle in our veins. As bad as it looked we decided to try to get up to the ram via the 50-60 degree slope directly to the right of the downed ram. Everything was going okay until I started leading the way across a portion of hardscrabble, where the soil is baked hard from the sun and the surface barely permits a boot to dig in. It happened so quick (isn't this par for the course?) that I simply reacted with hands grabbing, feet kicking; I was sliding down the slope with a good bit of mountain along for the ride. I lost the rifle immediately as I scrambled for everything I was worth to stay upright and as I kicked frantically in an effort to slow the momentum the boots dug in and my rapid descent came to a halt. It was simply a matter of seconds, and yet there was still time to think about breaking my neck, and even dying, but apart from a decent hematoma on my shin, and some roughed up fingers, I was intact. My knees had not knocked together since a 90 MPH car crash that I was involved in during my teen years, but they were knocking together now, and my only goal was to get back onto solid ground, so I cautiously retreated back to softer soil and headed higher in an effort to avoid the more dangerous surface. I suggested the guys avoid trying to cross where I had just taken the spill and I made my way up and over to the ram, arriving a while before Josh. Looking down I could see Bret had opted to avoid my straight up climb and he made his way across the bad stuff, but not without losing his pretty walking stick. I simply admired the ram up close and it didn't take me long to realize that it was another exceptional Chugach ram. The horns had a lot of mass, this much we could tell at 1,000 yards, and the drop went quite low on the jaw line, but I didn't have the tape with me, so measurements would have to wait until we got back to camp. The shot had been perfect and the ram had landed about as good as it gets in this severe landscape; the truth was if he had rolled another 3 feet he would have rolled 1,000 feet on down the nasty slope. Josh made it up, and Bret arrived a little later, then of course the photos were taken and caping and cutting began, as the sun sank quickly beneath the western lip of the opposite ridgeline.

When we finally made it down from the life threatening portion of the slope I took a quick run back up along the base of the glacier to search for my rifle, which I had assumed would be found down at the bottom along with the pile of rubble I had kicked up during my slide, but I only managed to find Bret's walking stick. It was around 10 PM so I made the difficult decision to go on down the mountain, knowing I would have to come back during daylight hours to search for my Brno again. Mak-



*Josh Spor and his heavy horned Chugach ram*

*"Josh scrambled into position and ranged the ram again at 398 yards..."*

sion to go on down the mountain, knowing I would have to come back during daylight hours to search for my Brno again. Making my way back down to the guys, we loaded up the packs and proceeded to work our way down, and across the darkening slope before us. We only traveled about  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile before we came to a place where the slope dropped off in the dark below us, and made the decision to pile up in the rocks until it was light enough to see our way to navigate. Around 4:30 AM it grew light enough to continue on down toward camp, and we wasted little time getting the body heat generating again. After arriving in camp we measured Josh's ram at 38  $\frac{1}{2}$  inches in length, and 14  $\frac{1}{4}$  inches in circumference at the bases. I rough scored the ram around 163  $\frac{3}{4}$ , and needless to say Josh was ecstatic. Two days later we would climb around 3,000 ft. in elevation to get a better look at a couple of rams that turned out to be  $\frac{3}{4}$  curl or slightly better, and as we dropped off the mountain onto the main glacier I spotted a solitary ram in the head of the valley, and I took some extra time trying to get a better look at him through the spotting scope, though the rain and wind made it very difficult at well over a mile. The ram gave me the impression that he was big, but I just could not tell, and the day was spent with the exhaustive climb to observe the other rams, so we turned down the valley toward camp. It was around 9:30 PM by the time we got back into camp and Bret told me he was finished. His feet had blistered severely, and I knew the run on the  $\frac{3}{4}$  curls had taken its toll, nonetheless I was surprised. The following day Bret and Josh made it down to the lower valley where the Super Cub would pick them up, and I went back up into the high glacier to find my rifle. I did find it about halfway down the slope where I took the spill, and prayerfully I recovered it without another disaster.

Several days later Derek Harbula arrived in the lower camp, and made his way the 3 odd miles or so up the valley to my spike camp. Normally I would have met any other hunter there at the lower camp, but Derek was being initiated into the guide business, so to speak, since he had hunted with me before and I had plans on getting him licensed as an assistant guide. I at least wanted to know he could make a simple journey up the creek by himself. Unfortunately he got tied up in the alders of the lower valley for awhile, but he eventually made it up to my spike camp around 11:00 PM and I had to laugh a little. The next day Derek and I ascended into the small glacial valley where Josh had taken his ram and I had spotted another solitary ram in the valley before Derek came in. Now the same ram was visible again in the valley, but the only approach route was certainly less than perfect. While Dall sheep will often let an individual walk to within 400 yards, it is not the approach that anyone likes to take, although it had worked with the previous ram. This time we tried to ascend into the nasty chutes on the face of the slope, in hopes that we could get slightly above the ram, or at least at the same elevation. We had last seen the solitary sheep disappear behind one of these chutes, and now we found ourselves in a precarious position trying to catch the ram off guard. Unfortunately we did not see anything, and we failed to exercise enough patience. Rather than waiting a while, we pushed the envelope by scrambling back down the chute, and working our way across the open slope below these rough outcroppings. We traveled slowly, around 350 yards across the face, and then we were had! I spotted the ram above us, just as he spotted us, then he dropped behind a rock and was out of sight. I grabbed the rangefinder and put the location right at 400 yards, but the open slope provided nothing in the way of a rest, and the point was mute at the moment. When the ram appeared again he was well over 600 yards and heading for the ridge above us, that is to say he was basically going into no-man's land. We were busted, so we proceeded back out of the valley and spent a while glassing two other rams Derek had spotted across the main glacier earlier that morning. We watched these sheep climb across sheer faces as we made plans for the next day.

Ultimately I had planned on getting back into the head of the valley in hopes of finding the solitary ram I had spotted with Josh and Bret, but the first day brought the failed stalk, and the next day was spent watching the two rams on the opposite side of the valley go into worse terrain than we had spotted them in at the first. Now the third day had dawned and we made our way right back to a position on the main glacier and spotted the two rams again. The rams had once again moved into more hostile territory, and the sunlight in the head of the valley made it quite impossible to glass for the solitary ram. We discussed the need to make a run down to the lower camp for some needed supplies, but as we discussed the trip we caught a break. The light conditions in the valley head changed and Derek caught a glimpse of the solitary ram. When I got my scope on the sheep, it was less than 100 yards from where I had first spotted it a week earlier, and we wasted no time in making a decision to get closer. It was before noon when we started the trek to the ram's position, and around 4 hours later we were lying behind a small moraine about 800 yards away from his bed. We discussed options, and approach routes, and all the variables that might come into play, but the one thing we were sure of was this ram was not only legal, but impressive, to say the least.

The last thing an individual wants to experience on a stalk is obviously failure, so we took the patient approach this round. We could not see an obvious approach route, and there appeared little in the way of cover, so we decided that the only safe thing to do was to wait on the ram to start feeding, and move when he turned away from us. We knew it would be tough and risky, but we felt it was safer than allowing the ram to spot us. The old ram remained in his bed for well over an hour before he started his next feeding session, and we began to scramble every time he turned his rear toward us. We ran 10 yards and hit our bellies, ten more and the same, 5 yards here, and 15 yards there, and then we got another break. A small rivulet of water cascaded across the surface of the glacier, forming a 2 to 4 ft. trench, and this gave us a twisting, turning chance to get within 500 yards. Rocks weighing a couple hundred pounds teetered on frozen cornices of ice above our heads as we crouched into the glacial ravine. It was similar to a bob sled course, but with rushing 33 degree water. Now we found ourselves in a position where we would be forced to go out into the open once again, and we got our final break, a mineral lick. The old ram made his way several hundred feet down the slope and turned into what appeared to be a very small cave, and he began to feed. After several minutes we realized that the sheep was totally preoccupied with this cave and we made our final scramble to the edge of a large open area of glacier, where we found a decent rock for Derek to take a rest on. I ranged the ram at 407 yards, and then I repeated the process again. We discussed the 18" drop of his .338 Winchester Magnum at that range, and Derek settled into position. Unbelievably the ram had only turned toward us about 3 times in

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20 minutes while feeding at the mineral lick, and now Derek calmly took his time, and settled into a comfortable position. The shot rang out as I watched through my binoculars, and the ram pitched backward a moment later, and then proceeded to roll several hundred feet down the slope toward us.

Congratulations were exchanged on another great shot and then the work began. It had taken us 5 hours from the time we spotted the ram until we had him down, and it would be around 11 PM by the time we made it back to camp that night, but I could not wait to take a few measurements of this glacial ram. The tape read 40 ½ inches, and the ram carried 14 ½ inch bases, and yes we slept soundly with smiles on our faces that night in the Chugach Mountains.

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## Peninsula Success & Failures

Hasn't happened. Over the course of two fall seasons I have yet to see a bear on the fish, and during this recent season we didn't even see fish on the stream where we hunted. With the lack of available state land that is productive on the Peninsula and the unpredictability of the fish runs it has been a less than pleasant hunting situation. In addition to these difficulties we were harassed by another outfitter in the vicinity of Pumice Creek this fall, and the last hunt of the 2003 season was postponed until 2004 due to the fact that this outfitter routinely flew over our vantage point on Pumice Creek 3 to 5 times a day in a determined effort to drive bears from our area.

Thomas Butcher did take an 8 ft. bear with us on the first day of his hunt this fall, but the only other bear we saw was a 9 to 9 1/2 ft. bear on day 3, but this bear was on the run from the planes when we saw him and it quickly disappeared into the brush. With the dismal situation on the Peninsula I have decided to shift my focus for brown bear to Game Management Unit 16 which is situated off Cook Inlet. This area has great bear densities and a season that opens on August 10th, and runs until May the 30th, and this early season allows us to focus our attention on the most productive method of brown bear hunting, that is hunting the salmon runs. GMU 16 allows the harvest of one bear per regulatory year, and it does not count against the individual that wants to hunt bear in another area that is under the one bear per four year limit. The early season opportunities should be great for individuals that want to get to see a decent number of bears during a hunt, and should work well for bow hunters that especially need for bears to be concentrated as they often are on the fish. While GMU 16 does not produce the number of Boone & Crockett heads that the Alaska Peninsula or Kodiak does, it does produce a good number of bears that range from 9 to 9 1/2 ft., as well as the occasional 10 ft. bear. The fact is I would rather hunt bears in an area that my hunters can enjoy something of the wilderness experience of Alaska, and see good numbers of decent bears, rather than hunt in an area where the available state land is marginal and the competition is ruthless, and repulsive, and the experience is more akin to hunting at Chicago O'Hare airport.

At this time we are scheduled to hunt the first ten days of sheep season (August 10-19) in the Chugach Mountains, and my postponed hunt from this fall will take place in GMU 16 around August 22nd. I currently have an opening for one more brown bear hunt at this time. This will be around August 22nd to September 1st, 2004, and I can accommodate a one on one hunter, or a two on one. The one on one hunt is offered at \$7,500 at this time and the two on one hunt is being offered at \$10,000. What can an individual expect while hunting in GMU 16? You can expect to see good numbers of brown bears ranging from 7 1/2 ft. to 10 ft. on the salmon streams and we will typically hunt these streams by getting up on a vantage point where we can effectively glass a feeding area on the streams. We will typically discourage anyone from taking a bear under 8 ft. Hunters should be aware that most bears taken in late August and early September will not have a heavy winter coat, and hunters that are looking for a bear with a prime hide should inquire about hunting later in September.



*Tony Dingess with Thomas Butcher's 2003 Peninsula brown bear.*



# 2003 Hunt Photos



*Derek Harbula's ram was rough scored in the field at 167 3/4 with bases of 14 1/2 inches and first quarter measurements of 13 inches. The ram was harvested at 407 yards with one shot.*



*Tony Dingess and Thomas Butcher with an October brown bear from the Alaska Peninsula. This bear was found floating in a beaver pond the day after it was shot.*



*Joshua Spor's ram rough scored at 163 3/4 inches with bases well over 14 inches. Both rams are expected to get official measurements shortly. Josh took this ram at 398 yards with one shot.*



*Derek Harbula and Tony with Derek's long awaited 40 inch Chugach Dall sheep. The stalk on this ram was right at five hours in duration.*



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## 2004 Outlook

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As of right now, I feel the upcoming 2004 season should be a great one. While no area is beyond change when we speak of ecosystems, I am pleased with what I am seeing in the Chugach as far as sheep and goats go. Several drainages held decent numbers of rams, and I only had one Super Cub fly over my camp from August 8th to the 21st, and this felt pretty good. While we saw a limited number of lambs and ewes, we saw about a dozen rams in the upper reaches of the drainage we hunted this past August, and even after taking two of these I feel confident that the upper valley will give up a few more in 2004. Derek Harbula's ram was taken on a mineral lick which may be a hot spot for the upcoming season as well. The promising thing about this area is the fact that we are not talking about one lone drainage, but there are several drainages in close proximity that held rams in decent numbers this past August. I currently have two sheep hunters booked and there is room for one more hunt (either a one on one, or a two on one) for the early August time slot.

Bear hunting will start around August 22nd in GMU 16, and we will have our camp positioned on hot salmon runs, so we expect to see plenty of bear. Spring hunts are already booked, and we will report on these sometime after May of 2004.

Pricing:

One on One hunt for brown bear or Dall sheep, \$7,500

Two on one for same species, \$10,000

Additional species are available, just call for info.



*Glacier camp in the upper valley*