

BAREBOW!

An Archer's Fair-Chase Taking of North America's Big-Game 29

PREFACE

THE FOOD CHAIN

Predator . . . Prey. Hunter . . . Hunted. Man . . . Animal. Animal . . . Man. "Survival of the Fittest!" Nature. "*Mother*" Nature?

What IS the reality of the natural world? . . . stripped down to its barest essentials? And just where does *homo sapiens* --- a mammal himself --- fit within the larger animal world?

IN DEFENSE OF HUNTING AND THAT AGE-OLD IMPULSE

21st-century Man is inclined to think he dominates the universe, and it takes some natural disaster like Hurricane Katrina to restore his sense of cosmic proportion. Perhaps we should say, "sense of microscopic proportion!" It is my considered opinion that nothing is more certain to generate humility, and guarantee a proper perspective on one's relative insignificance in the cosmos, than spending time in the wilderness. When you are dependent for survival on no one but yourself (and perhaps a hunting companion), trusting only to your wits, and hampered by senses of sight, smell, and hearing woefully weaker than those of your quarry, and of those animals which may be hunting YOU --- becoming part of the predator-prey, prey-predator drama is not for the faint-hearted or the physically unfit.

In fact, it can be quite intimidating, and often life-threatening! The violent storm that takes you by surprise when you're still 8 miles from camp; raging rivers you can no longer cross in order to get *back* to camp; breaking through the ice in sub-zero temperatures; the boulder that suddenly shifts its weight onto the uphill side of your

ankle as you negotiate the crossing of a steep, mountain rockslide; the unseen, broken branch that jabs you in the eye as you bushwhack your way off the mountain long after sunset; rock-falls or avalanches that assault you from above; the sow grizzly with cubs in tow that just happens to be descending the same trail you are climbing! The list of unfriendly possibilities goes on and on. The pristine, natural world we tend to idealize can be unbelievably beautiful, or incredibly ugly --- and, on occasion, both at the same time.

Hunting is often referred to as a “time-honored” sport, yet not too many generations ago it was a time-honored *necessity*. For most of humankind’s existence as a species, Man has had to hunt in order to survive. Even today, such is the case for many in Africa, the Arctic regions, and numerous other parts of the globe. Urban living and modern technology have combined to dim and distort “modern” man’s perception of the workings of the natural Food Chain. They have also combined to weaken our spiritual connection with our distant ancestors, and with the natural world which provided everything needed for their survival via the hunt.

There is no more fundamental, age-old truth than the one that says, “Man must kill in order to live.” It has always been so and always will be so, no matter how much science and technology manage to change the outer aspects of our lives, or sever our direct connection with the natural world. Today, most Americans live in an urban setting and grow up with no firsthand exposure to the issue of death, unless they happen to witness a car accident, a drive-by shooting or a gang murder. Of course, our kids are fed a daily diet of lethal violence on television and in the movie theaters, and they come to view it all as fantasy rather than reality. So no wonder it never even enters their heads that the burgers and chicken strips they wolf down at the fast-food restaurants have necessitated the killing of an animal or a bird! Many adults, also, seem utterly unaware of the consequences of their actions that support death (like eating).

Since time immemorial, Man has been a natural predator, and he certainly has as much right to hunt for food as any other predator. If he has the right to eat food, he certainly should have the right to hunt and provide it for himself. It is only in the most recent part of his long history on the planet that he has had the option of *not* hunting

for his protein. Thanks to the many miracles of modern agriculture and commercial animal husbandry, it no longer takes but a fraction of 1% of the nation's population to meet the meat-eating demands of the United States. Each year, American ranchers and farmers raise for slaughter around 35 million head of cattle, 6 to 7 million sheep, nearly 85 million pigs, 400 million chickens, and close to 300 million turkeys. **(footnote.)** Since this all takes place out of sight of most of the population, we are shielded from one of life's most important truths --- *namely, that we cannot live unless we kill.*

Some people, with the aid of dietary supplements, find they can, indeed, live a normal healthy life without ingesting any animal protein. Most human beings, however, cannot. I have no doubt vegetarians are completely sincere in their religious or political beliefs, but many a "reformed vegetarian" is not at all bashful about telling of the various ways in which his or her body suffered during the protracted period when they insisted on putting "political correctness," religious doctrine, or personal beliefs ahead of their personal health. Some "vegans" become ill, and a few even die following a strict vegetarian diet. Dr. James Swan, in his outstanding book, *In Defense of Hunting*, references a stunning article that appeared in the professional journal, *Pediatrics*. In a study of poor Guatemalan school-children whose diets lacked animal protein, researchers reported "stunted growth and permanent brain damage due to low protein intake." (p. 14)

I hold a certain respect for the anti-hunter who is a vegetarian. Yet those who preach self-righteously against the "immorality" of hunting (while at the same time eating meat or wearing leather shoes) --- are they not simply hypocrites who pay others to do their killing for them? To the vegetarian, Swan poses a fascinating question.

"Whether you eat meat or not, you must have living things killed to feed you. Plants are alive and have feelings, too. And if I do not kill at least some of what I eat, can I ever truly appreciate its value in the great golden web of life?"

This principle explains why so many millions of people around the world find such pleasure in planting vegetable or flower gardens. They raise, harvest, and consume what they need --- leaving every-

thing else for other creatures (animals, birds, insects, etc.) No less than flowers or vegetables, wildlife is a renewable resource, too --- providing it is protected by careful game management and regulation.

Further on in his book, Swan makes essentially the same point again --- perhaps even more eloquently: “There is something very satisfying about catching what you eat. The feeling cannot be experienced in any other way, regardless of how much money you spend for food. More than anything, I think it makes you an honest participant in life, and not just a politically correct spectator.”

The nature of hunting is nothing less than the hunting of nature. It is also the pursuit of beauty and the seeking for truth. It is endeavoring to learn what the natural world, devoid of man, is all about. Among other things, it is a search for our roots, and for at least a part of our spiritual being.

If anyone can see the totality of this timeless, universal drama in proper perspective, it must surely be the Almighty alone. I would submit, however, that --- at least amongst mere mortals --- those most likely to have a reasonably accurate understanding of our planet’s natural world would be the men and women lucky enough to have spent considerable time in it, *seeking to understand and be a part* of this never-ending saga. As has been sagely said, you must get “into the game,” if you’re ever going to have much chance of really understanding it.

A BOOK APART (from all the rest)

The concept of this book is unique. It is both a collection of outdoor adventure stories and a fine-art, coffee-table kind of book. Although the book does contain a number of my field photographs of various hunting scenes, wild places, and wild creatures “on the hoof,” what it does not contain is any pictures of dead animals at their recovery sites. The nonhunting reader is thus spared that potential element of discomfort. Indeed, no doubt to the disappointment of some hunters, there is virtually a complete absence of “trophy pix.” I’m confident, however, that --- for most hunters, anyway --- what’s being substi-

tuted will more than make up for the omission.

I have invited one of North America's best known wildlife artists, Idaho native Hayden Lambson, together with his son, Dallen, to illustrate this book with their extraordinary art work. Each of the 29 big-game species that can be legally hunted in North America has a separate chapter devoted to it --- wherein I recount the more exciting or humorous tales I have personally experienced while pursuing that particular type of animal with my bow. Prefacing each of those 29 chapters, you will find a full-page color plate of an original oil painting by Hayden, depicting that specific species in its natural habitat.

Through the vehicle of this book, Hayden is publishing the **first-ever Artist Series** of the North American Super Slam. No artist before him has ever tackled such an ambitious project in the world of wildlife art. The beautiful, black-and-white graphite drawings are done by Dallen Lambson, and you will find many of his wildlife vignettes and other drawings sprinkled throughout the volume. Both men are hunters who have spent countless hours in the wilderness studying nature, and their love of the animals they depict is quickly self-evident to anyone viewing their remarkable art.

Pictures, of course, are visual, and the great challenge for me as the storyteller in this book is to present "word-pictures" as evocative in the reader's mind as Hayden's and Dallen's marvelous paintings and drawings are to the reader's eye. I realize I'll probably come out "on the short end of the stick" here, but I have done my best to make you feel as if you were right there with me while the adventure was taking place.

Because, as a bowhunter, I have taken somewhere close to a 100 big-game animals during my hunting lifetime, there are more stories to tell than any one book should contain. Happily for the reader, many of the less interesting or less memorable ones have already faded away into the foggy recesses of my unraveling memory bank. Now in my late Sixties, therefore, those adventures that still stand out vividly in my mind are the more dramatic or humorous ones. Those are the ones worth telling.

I wish, as a young man, I had thought to make field notes on each

hunting trip. Such a resource would be invaluable to me now, but --- alas! --- it was only a very few of my later-year sheep hunts where I actually took the time and trouble to record anything in a daily journal. Not until a few short years ago did it even occur to me that, someday, I might really want to write a book. As any veteran hunter can tell you, some of the *unsuccessful* hunts that return you home empty-handed are among those that produce the most amazing experiences and incredible memories of all. Tall tales can be born of either fiction or reality, but all the ones recounted in this book are for real --- although by no means did they all put meat on the table or trophies on the wall.

Most of the 29 major chapters of this book will be broken down into multiple subchapters, each subchapter relates to the same game species, and each has its own title and story that I hope will captivate your interest. For obvious reasons, the 29 principal chapters are necessarily going to be of markedly different lengths. I've simply had far more opportunity (and therefore experiences) hunting some animals, as opposed to others. For certain species, my very first attempt brought success. At the other extreme, it took me *seven* different hunts to claim the Grizzly Bear, and *seven more* for the Alaskan Brown Bear, before I was finally able to take the trophy specimens I wanted, and finish up the North American Super Slam in the *fashion* I wanted.

The 29 major chapters are not arranged alphabetically by species, but rather chronologically --- by order of "first harvest." (See the **Chronological Species Index** that immediately follows this PRE-FACE.) Within each major chapter, furthermore, the timeline of the stories told will also be chronological, and tales of "unsuccessful" outings will be freely mixed in with stories of successful ones.

This book also contains several dozen color photographs, selected from among the thousands I have taken in the field during my lifetime of pursuing the wilderness experience. In order not to "compete" or distract visually from the compelling fine art which the reader will find throughout the book, all the photos are presented in one sixteen-page portfolio at the very end of the book. Some are pictures of big-game animals I managed to capture on film --- occasionally to the detriment of my hunting intentions. Many are simply landscape shots

that reveal the wildness and soul-searing beauty of the places I was privileged to visit. A few are hunting scenes or camp scenes. Each photo will be coded with a reference number referring to the Chapter and specific story that was unfolding at the time the picture was taken. Within the text, a small digit (surrounded by a circle) will refer the reader to the germane photo at the back of the book.

PREACHING TO THE CHOIR AND TO THE MASSES

Most of the material and ideas presented in this PREFACE are familiar, no doubt, to the *experienced hunter*. If that term fits you, the reader, then welcome to the “choir”! As you continue to read through the introductory part of this book and find yourself saying, “Amen,” again and again, I hope that means you agree with me that we all --- yourself included --- have an obligation --- especially in this 21st century --- to pass along to others who are *not* hunters the valid concepts and very rational arguments that give hunting its total, moral legitimacy.

It is an incontrovertible fact that *non*-hunters will determine whether or not hunting remains a legal human activity in North America. I explain why and how in more detail at the end of the book in the chapter entitled, AFTERWORD. I would suggest that anyone who doesn't believe the assertion that leads off this paragraph is politically naive. I would further submit that any committed hunter who isn't already active in the education and/or recruitment of the *unconverted* is actually contributing to the possible victory, one day, of the *anti*-hunters.

If, as an avid hunter, your inclination is to skip over this PREFACE and cut right to the “good stuff” (the adventure stories), I would urge you not to --- but to stay with me here. Or, if you simply *must* take the short-cut to adventure, then I would ask that you return here later --- after reading the main body of the book. And then, if you feel I have made an articulate, convincing case in support of hunting, I entreat you --- in the interest of education --- to consider giving or loaning this book to as many *non*-hunting family members, friends, and business associates as you think you can persuade to read it! To save the right to hunt, and therefore our nation's rich wildlife populations, as well, it is truly the “masses” we must reach --- not our fellow choir members, preachers, and acolytes.

Several friends have told me they think it is basically only hunters who will buy this book. I certainly hope they are mistaken, of course, but even if they are right I persist in believing that the *potential* readership for these outdoor adventure stories is many times greater within the *non*-hunting public --- if for no other reason than that they outnumber hunters by a margin of better than 10-to-1! Due to the unique concept and format of the book, I really believe virtually everyone *except* the rabid anti-hunter will find it to be an appealing, enjoyable, and educational experience. Exposure will be the key, and --- as is the case with almost everything --- personal, word-of-mouth referral is by far the most effective marketing tool.

SO WHY DO WE HUNT NOW, IN THE 21ST CENTURY?

If modern man no longer has a need to hunt in order to put fresh meat on his table, then why do so many people still hunt anyway? I submit that the answers to that very important question are many and complex, and that a careful examination of them is in order. I have found that what hunting really is, as opposed to what it is perceived as being by most non-hunters, are two very different things. It is true, of course, that people hunt for many different reasons. Is hunting engaged in today primarily as recreation? Or for sport? Is there a difference? Just what is meant by “sport hunting”? Has “modern” hunting (whatever that means) become an art? Or perhaps a science? And what is “trophy hunting” all about? Is it more noble or admirable than normal hunting? Or is it less so?

Given the serendipity factor in all hunting (the wild game is where you find it, or where it finds you), let’s begin by agreeing that hunting is definitely *not* a science, and let’s set aside the whole issue of subsistence hunting. I can’t imagine that many residents of the lower 48 states are actually dependent any longer on hunting to survive. So what *are* the forces that draw men, and increasingly more and more women, to the hunt?

As discussed above, countless people, who don’t *need* to hunt to feed their families, nonetheless enjoy doing so, and they derive considerable *pride and satisfaction* from putting wild meat on the dinner

table. Knowing that such meat contains no chemicals, growth hormones, or steroids, they also feel good about providing their loved ones with a source of protein that is unquestionably much leaner and healthier than any store-bought meat. Much the same, of course, holds true for the age-old pastime of fishing. Wild-caught fish are also generally regarded as healthier for us than farm-raised fish. There are still, today, probably no two outdoor recreational activities that draw more participants, year-in and year-out, than do hunting and fishing.

I do think--- given the pace and stress of life in contemporary **North America** --- that the traditional “outdoor sports” are undoubtedly being embraced now primarily for their *recreational* value. When a hunter goes afield and enters the natural world of forests, meadows, or mountains, the immediate benefits include outdoor aerobic exercise, fresh air, no phones or pagers, no noise or fumes from snarled traffic, a peace and quiet that renew the human spirit, and simply getting away from the day-to-day routine and stress of job and family responsibilities.

Yet I believe there is more --- much more --- something much deeper and more fundamental --- that impassions so many people to embrace hunting almost as a way of life. Call it a primal instinct, or an impulse buried within man’s instinctual psyche, that is always seeking to surface and reconnect with what Carl Jung refers to as our “ancestral soul.” Which is to say, *with our aboriginal ancestors*, for whom hunting was a *full-time* way of life. When a hunter finds himself alone in any pristine natural setting (and assuming there is no element of fear present), his mind cannot help but be drawn to the many mysteries of Nature. Dr. James Swan puts it this way:

“[W]hen we are alone in natural places and free of fear, our normal ego boundaries dissolve and the subconscious mind becomes predominant in consciousness. Wilderness then reminds us of who we are, and the natural energies of sympathy charge us with the life force, giving us a ‘natural high’.”

John Denver called it a “Rocky Mountain High.” I like to call it a “Hunter’s High.” Once you arrest your motion completely and settle in to become a totally silent witness to the “world around you” (i.e.,

the microcosm into which you have just inserted yourself), the desire to blend in --- to merge your consciousness with the collective consciousness of all the creatures around you --- becomes powerful, indeed. It becomes difficult NOT to imagine, or conjure up, the countless generations of your ancestors who have been there before you --- in identical situations, at innumerable times and places. As birds and mammals begin to move about within the range of your limited senses, you struggle to listen, and not to give yourself away and interrupt the unfolding drama. Some sounds you can hear, but you know there are many you cannot.

Suddenly, just 30 yards away, you see a buck feeding in a spot you had looked at only moments earlier. No sound had announced his arrival, but the gentle breeze in your face assures you that, for the moment at least, he is not likely to learn of your presence. . . . unless, of course, his uncanny eyesight picks up the motion you make as you attempt to remove an irritating mosquito from the end of your nose. All at once, the breeze turns fickle, and you sense a puff of wind on the back of your neck. Within seconds, the buck departs --- as silently as he came, and you realize again (for the umpteenth time) how overmatched your sensory perception powers are, as compared with those of your quarry.

When you are finally forced to abandon your spiritual ancestors by leaving that tiny patch of timeless wilderness you were lucky enough to be a part of for a few days or hours, your return to the realities and demands of 21st-Century life usually has a way of making you wonder how soon you can revisit the “wilderness” again. There is no doubt in my mind that the more man becomes overwhelmed by the hectic stress of urban living, the ever-accelerating pace of high technology, and the constantly-expanding rapaciousness of government taxation and regulation, the more profound becomes his need --- conscious or otherwise --- to immerse himself in the natural world and reconnect with his roots. I think that is why man will always remain the hunter he has always been.

A FIRST: CHUCK ADAMS’S SUPER SLAM

Famous bowhunter Chuck Adams is the first person ever to take all

the North American big-game animals with a bow and arrow. That is to say, all 27 different species of big-game that could be legally hunted on the North American continent, and that were accepted for entry, *at that time*, into the Records of the Pope & Young Club.* Chuck completed his quest in January of 1990. Shortly before he finished the feat (one not even achieved by very many rifle hunters), Adams had the vision and "smarts" to copyright the phrase, "Super Slam" --- to describe a hunter's taking, under the rules of Fair Chase, all 27 animals. In 1993, the Pope & Young Club followed the lead of the Boone & Crockett Club and added a 28th species to their records-keeping: namely, the Central Canada Barren Ground Caribou. Chuck promptly added that to the notches on his bow and "rounded out" his stunning achievement to all 28 species. Thanks to him, those 28 now make up what is known within the bowhunting world as the North American Super Slam.

Additionally, I understand that --- sometime within the next year or two --- the Pope & Young Club is considering adding the Tule Elk from California as a 29th species. Boone & Crockett did so back in 1998. If and when Pope & Young *does* expand its Records Book to 29 species, Chuck Adams will have no need to set foot in the field again, because in August of 1990 he became the first modern bowhunter to gain a tag for hunting the long-protected species. His bull was a huge Boone-&-Crockett-quality specimen that could well be a candidate for the eventual Pope & Young World Record, once the Tule Elk category is officially confirmed and panel-measured for one of the club's biennial scoring periods.

Over the ensuing 17 years since Chuck Adams completed his Super Slam, 13 other archers have managed to reach that same goal --- and add in the extra caribou species, as well, for a total of 28. In chronological order, they are Jimmie Ryan (AL), Tom Hoffman, Sr. (NY), Dr. Jack Frost (AK), Gary Bogner (MI), Archie Nesbitt (AB), Dennis Dunn (WA), Darren Collins (CO), Dr. Richie Bland (GA), Bob Fromme (CA), Rick Duggan (CO), Dr. Bob Speegle (TX), Fred Eichler (CO), and Randy Liljenquist (AZ).

ANOTHER FIRST: THE *BAREBOW* SUPER SLAM

On September 17th, 2004, I was fortunate enough to accomplish something in the world of hunting that no other human being had ever done before. By any yardstick, completing the Super Slam --- especially by means of the bow and arrow --- must be deemed an extraordinarily difficult challenge. What makes *my* Super Slam different from the others that preceded mine is the fact that I was the first person to accomplish it without the aid of any yardage sight-pins, or other devices, attached to the bow for aiming purposes. In other words, I aim an arrow, and release it with my fingers, *purely instinctively* --- no pins, no sights, no trigger release, just 3 fingers on the string. In the simplest of terms, I shoot by “gut feel”: BAREBOW! In the course of achieving my Super Slam, I made use of all sorts of bows: virtually every type of bow, that is, except a crossbow, which --- though extremely lethal, and entirely legal for hunting in most states and provinces --- I don’t regard as a weapon that comes under the heading of archery. Although I’ve entered animals in the Pope & Young Records taken by compound bow, longbow, and recurve bow --- all three --- never have I used any sights or aiming devices attached to any of them.

I must say, however, that --- in my opinion --- Rick Duggan’s Super Slam (completed in May of 2007) and Fred Eichler’s (completed in August of 2007) have to be regarded as the most remarkable of all, because both men harvested all 28 species *strictly with a recurve bow*, and using no sights. To date, those two are the only other bowhunters to claim a *barebow* Super Slam. With mine being first, however, I guess I’m entitled to claim a bit of history --- just as Rick is entitled to do so for his first-ever Super Slam with a recurve.

Since an arrow travels quite a pronounced arc --- compared to a bullet in flight --- *not using sight-pins* for aiming* makes precision accuracy a much more demanding challenge. Some have likened the difference in difficulty to that between a Civil War musket with open iron sights, versus a modern high-powered rifle with telescopic sights. Frankly, I suspect the difference may be even more dramatic than that, though it is no doubt impossible to “quantify.”

* (For the benefit of the reader who is not an archer, sight-pins --- arranged vertically above the arrow rest --- project out from the bow for every 10-yard interval between 20 and 60 yards or more.)

As for North America's 29th big-game species, the Tule Elk, I have been fortunate enough to hunt and harvest one of those also. Other than Chuck Adams, Richie Bland, Gary Bogner, and Bob Speegle, I am not aware of how many others, among the 14 of us, may have taken a Tule Elk to complete the new North American 29.

MY EARLY ATTRACTION TO BOWHUNTING

Born in the spring of 1940, I was not delivered by the stork into a family of hunters. I had no father, grandfather, uncle or brother to introduce me to the hunter's world. It was my mother, ironically, who opened the "back door" to hunting for me by teaching me how to shoot a bow and arrow at the age of six. (She had taken archery as her athletic activity when she was in college.) In my 7th and 8th summers, I went off to camp and actually became rather proficient with a bow. At age 9, I started hunting squirrels around my home in a rural suburb of Seattle, and before long the romance of archery had captivated my heart and launched what was to become a lifelong passion for the outdoors --- and for "the chase," with a "primitive weapon."

Although it's true my biological father, Alan Kelsey, had been a hunter, my mother and he filed for divorce when I was five, and the man she married three years later --- albeit a wonderful stepdad --- had zero interest in hunting. His name was Bryant Dunn, and he was a very successful Seattle attorney. He genuinely loved the outdoor world --- as long as you could ski in it, or boat upon its surface, but that was about as far (aside from gardening) as his outdoor interests went. Consequently, my access to "big game" had to wait for the "emancipation" that age 16 and a Driver's License finally brought me. In the interim, I contented myself with pursuing small game. I remember taking it rather hard when my mother turned down my offer to make her a fur coat out of the squirrel tails I had collected over a three-year period. As I recall, my sister, Kathy, was substantially less diplomatic than my mother in rejecting the same generous offer.

It seems logical to me that I must have inherited the hunting "bug" from my real father, even though he never took me on a hunt before

the divorce came along. Admittedly, I was too young in those early years (at least without having any hunting mentor to guide me) to develop a sense of “ethics” over what I did with a squirrel once I arrowed it. As a result, I never cooked and ate any of them. Actually, I didn’t even know at the time that the meat was good to eat. I guess the callowness of youth is all that’s required to become a killer of animals, but becoming a true hunter (meaning, among other things, an ethical one) demands a kind of maturity that can only be developed over time, or expedited through the guidance of a mentor. It grows solely through repeated exposure to the drama of how Mother Nature both kills her own and nurtures her own, and it gradually becomes rooted in a profound love and reverence for every living creature in the natural world. How a hunter can take the life of a creature he truly loves is what’s known as the “hunter’s paradox,” and I intend to revisit it more fully, later on.

THE JOURNEY BEGINS

Although I didn’t realize it at the time, I guess the journey toward what my friend, Bob Delaney, calls bowhunting’s “Mount Denali” began in 1964 with my first big-game kill of a Mule Deer doe. I harvested her in the archery-only area of Nason Creek in eastern Washington, where I had missed several nice bucks during previous seasons. By the time I finally brought down my first deer with an arrow, I was 24-years-old, and the fact it was a doe didn’t matter at all. I was absolutely thrilled, and it was a real trophy to me. There are still two things I distinctly remember about the aftermath of that kill. The first is all the effort it took to drag the animal by myself two-and-a-half miles back to the nearest road. The second is how delicious my first venison tasted when I finally got it home.

About three years and several does later, with my definition of a “trophy animal” having undergone a bit of revision, I hunted the state of Utah one fall and at long last took my first buck (and my first animal to qualify for the Pope & Young Records Book). It wasn’t until early 1998 --- *more than 30 years after that first buck* --- that the goal of actually reaching the North American Super Slam ever took root in

my mind. My friend, Rick Duggan, surprised me one day with the seemingly innocuous question, “Dennis, how many of the Pope & Young Club’s 28 recognized species have you already taken?” I was, quite honestly, a bit stunned by the question. It was something I’d never even thought about before, and my reply after a few moments of silence was, “I really don’t know. Do you have a list we can look at?”

Rick reminded me that the list of animals was printed on the back of my P. & Y. membership card, so I found the card buried in my wallet, and we began to take count. The answer to his inquiry turned out to be 16. The next words out of his mouth are indelibly etched in my brain. “Well, Dennis,” he said, “You’re more than halfway there! If you really get after it, before old age overtakes you, you’ve got a chance to do something very few people will ever do --- as well as something nobody’s accomplished yet, hunting the way you hunt, without sights.”

The “bee” had been placed in my “bonnet”, the damage was done, and my life was never to be the same again. The goal gradually became an obsession, and as the quest finally came down to the final two species, 2002 and 2003 found me hunting *both* Grizzly and Alaskan Brown Bear, in *both* the spring and the fall. By the time 2004 arrived and delivered the last two successes that had been so stubbornly eluding me (14 different bear hunts in all), my wife was beginning to lose patience, and I was starting to doubt my own sanity.

THE DIFFICULTY OF THE CHALLENGE

Pursuing the North American Super Slam with a bow is -- arguably -- *the most dangerous outdoor pursuit ever established on the continent*. The necessity of engaging at *close* range (as only a bow-hunter *must* do) the various predator animals, such as Grizzlies, Polar Bears, and Mountain Lions, represents only *part* of the peril. (In addition to bears, I’ve been charged by both Moose and Muskox, as well.) On most wilderness hunts, however, it is simply the *pursuit* itself that presents the greatest danger. For a whole host of reasons, peril in many forms (totally apart from the wild animals) can

lurk nearby, quite unseen until suddenly there is no way of avoiding having to deal with it.

The vast majority of North America's big-game species live in the more remote mountains "out West" or "up North" and must be hunted largely on foot, for the simple reason that the terrain is so rugged as to be impenetrable to man's machines --- and even to horses, in many cases. Traveling the earth's wilder regions on foot presents innumerable challenges and dangers. Every step taken is made with the more-or-less conscious awareness that there may be no rescue or medical help available, should you have a mishap or get in trouble. A bad fall or a broken leg can mark the beginning of a miserable end. Dying in the wilderness is a very easy thing, and man enters that world as just another animal --- with one major difference: the other animals live there every day of their relatively short lives. Man does not, so the "playing field," so-to-speak, is anything but level. Nor is the topography! Mountain hunting often necessitates moving about on extremely steep, rugged terrain that is far more easily negotiated by four-legged animals than by two-legged ones. In fact, there is actually *no* hunting where man's mobility on foot can "hold a candle" to that of the animals he pursues.

Often, everything you need for survival must be carried on your back, and anyone who spends much time in the wilds soon learns that he or she doesn't control all the cards in the deck. You come to realize that most of the Trump Cards are held by "Mother" Nature, and the way she chooses to play her hand is frequently unpredictable. I once shared a hunting camp near Revelstoke, B.C., with a father and son who had come all the way from Norway to hunt Black Bear. The pair had arrived in camp halfway through my hunt, and the day before I started the long drive home the father had killed a really nice male bear. I didn't learn, until several weeks after returning to Seattle, that the very morning I had headed south the son drowned while trying to wade a small river swollen with heavy rain from the night before. His guide had successfully managed the crossing in front of him, but the young man had insisted he didn't need any help. When the guide reached the far bank, he turned around to see his hunter being swept downstream into some violent rapids. Despite a massive, week-long search, the body was never recovered.

Lightning, rock falls, avalanches, windstorms, floods, falling trees, blizzards, white-outs, and sudden, dramatic temperature drops are just a few of the many things in the natural world that can snuff out the life of man or beast, with little or no warning. Wild animals live “in their element” year-round, though it is seldom a very friendly environment --- particularly given the never-ending drama of predator versus prey. When modern man, however, inserts himself into the wilderness today, he is NOT “in his element.” Instead, he is entering the world of his primitive ancestors, who had only sticks and stones with which to hunt and defend themselves. However, *they*, at least, had a far greater awareness of all the dangers surrounding them because they had to cope with them every single day of their lives.

Now, I grant you, modern man possesses weapons far more lethal and sophisticated than those of the Pleistocene era, but up until just a few centuries ago, when gun powder was invented, the differences in weaponry available to *homo sapiens* over the millennia were not all that great. As Dr. James Swan points out, “All modern weapons are descended from two basic types of weapons --- the pebble became the bullet, and the stick became the spear and then the arrow.”

It is obvious that the discovery of gun powder, and the subsequent development of modern rifles and high-powered optics, have combined to increase dramatically the effective “reach” or killing range of the “pebble.” Without the aid of “firepower,” however, there have been much severer limits on how much man’s technology could increase the effective range of the thrown or catapulted “stick.” The past 50 years have seen thousands of technological advances in the composition and manufacture of modern archery equipment, but all of those advances taken together have not managed so much as to double the speed and cast (range) of a Turkish recurve bow from the 7th Century, A.D.

With all types of weapons, of course, good marksmanship is a vital part of any success in the field. Many experienced rifle hunters can consistently make clean, killing shots at 400 yards and beyond. As for the modern bowhunter, *very few* can be consistently lethal (with only one shot) if shooting from distances much beyond 50 yards. Double that yardage for the black-powder muzzleloader enthusiast,

and the same statement is true. Hence the term, “primitive weapons.” The fact of the matter is that the vast majority of all shots in archery hunting are taken at under 25 yards.

One shot opportunity is usually all you get during a specific animal encounter. Since most experienced hunters (and all true hunters) wish to see nothing less than a quick, clean kill, that first shot --- regardless of choice of weapon --- is usually taken with great selectivity, considerable care, and a high degree of personal confidence that the shot will be good. A superb rule of thumb, which all seasoned hunters come to understand through experience, is that if the shot doesn’t “feel right,” don’t take it! Any ethical shot in hunting should be more than “a wing and a prayer.”

GUN HUNTING versus BOWHUNTING

Nothing in this book should be construed as a criticism (direct, oblique, or otherwise) of gun hunters. Most of them are just as ethical and law-abiding as most bowhunters. Every group in society, however, has its “slobs” and its misfits, but the few bad apples in the barrel should never be used to distort the truth and to smear the generic group as a whole. Unfortunately, that is what so many anti-hunters try to do as they wage political war against all hunting. We need to know the facts so we can argue effectively against our “enemies,” and we must share those facts with our non-hunting friends and associates.

I, personally, have never gone afield with a rifle in hand, but it is factual that a big majority of those who bowhunt today entered the world of archery hunting from the world of gun hunting. The “migration” seems to increase with every passing year, and it is now estimated that something approaching 40 % of all big-game hunters in the country spend at least part of each season with a bow in hand. As modern rifles and sport optics become more and more powerful in their reach and scope, aiming a bullet accurately becomes less and less difficult, and hunters by the thousands are switching over to bowhunting because of the much greater **challenge** --- *and* the much more generous seasons. The modern rifle hunter today tends to boast about how *long* a shot he made on his animal; the contempo-

rary bowman tends to boast about how *close* he got to his quarry before the shot was made.

“Challenge,” however, is the key word in all of hunting. The more a hunter is willing to handicap himself or herself (by choosing a primitive weapon, for example), the greater the challenge, and the greater the natural high when the “moment of truth” is finally at hand. The real essence of the hunt is the final stalk, and the greatest thrill of the hunt IS that final stalk. It is seldom the shot itself --- which is often anticlimactic. All wild, big-game animals seem to have a “red-alert zone” that extends out to about 50 yards around them. Providing the wind is right, and visual cover available, it is usually fairly easy for the experienced, careful hunter to approach his quarry to within that radius of 50 yards. To penetrate that invisible circle much further, while remaining undetected, requires a great deal of care, skill, luck, or patience --- and usually some of all four. Unless you’ve personally “been there and done that,” no one can possibly understand how thrilling --- how truly magical --- it is to sneak quietly up to within 20 or 30 yards of an unsuspecting, wild game animal, and then to remain there for minutes (sometime even hours), *whether you intend to kill the animal or not*, waiting for that unique moment in time when the perfect shot opportunity presents itself.

Very often, that right moment never arrives --- either because the wind eventually shifts, or because the brush never offers you a clear shooting lane, or because the animal happens to feed away from you, or because you make some little mistake yourself. Any one of a thousand things can destroy your opportunity in a trice. A crow or raven may give you away. A squirrel may decide to tattle on you. You may develop a little catch in your throat, or --- even worse --- a sneeze. The evening sun may suddenly emerge from behind a cloud bank, and your long shadow may be enough to make the buck nervously wander off.

For most bowhunters, I think --- and certainly for myself --- we enter the woods or mountains each time, hoping to match our wits and instincts against those of a wily old buck or bull or ram --- *knowing* that the odds are very much in his favor. *That is the way we want it.* Yet when we do occasionally win the contest, the victory comes ever so sweetly! Obviously, if we bowhunters were primarily interested in

hunting to put meat on the table, we would be hunting with a rifle. It is a voluntary handicap we assume, and --- for many bowhunters --- the bigger the handicap, the better. Indeed, there are even some modern-day individuals who insist on hunting only with a spear!

The reason I have bowhunted all my adult life is partly because of the difficulty of the challenge involved, but it is mostly because of my love of nature, of wild places and wild creatures, and because I desire to explore the countless mysteries of the natural world up close --- and to be, in some small way, a part of it all. As James Swan puts it so beautifully: a part of “the great golden web of life.”

And it probably goes even deeper than that. Compared to modern hunting rifles, any modern bow is still a primitive weapon. Bow-hunting allows you to tap into the dawn of time; into the earliest exigencies which survival imposed upon prehistoric man; *into the first, last, and deepest mysteries of the human condition*. Whereas most people don't start wrestling with the mysteries of life and death until the latter part of their lives, every hunter --- of *all* ages --- must start wrestling with the issues of life and death from the first day he or she sets foot in the field with a weapon in hand. For any true hunter who embraces his distant past with awe and passion, hunting becomes a way of life. For the true bowhunter, bowhunting becomes a way of life: **I bowhunt --- therefore I am!**

“MOTHER” NATURE?

The more time you spend in any wilderness environment, the more reverence you come to feel for both the order and the occasional chaos of the natural world. The more you watch wild creatures interacting with each other (and with you), the greater the genuine awe and affection you seem to develop for all living things. If one spends enough time on a regular basis in the “lap of Mother Nature,” that reverence extends itself even to the never-ending drama of predator and prey, and one learns that She (Mother Nature) is often anything but maternal, warm, or “fuzzy.” Indeed, She is often unbelievably cruel to her very own.

I have personally been present at the murder of an Alaskan Brown

Bear cub by an adult male bear. There was nothing I could do at the time to prevent the “crime,” but, since nearly half of all bear cubs born meet the same fate, I plan to discuss this situation much more fully in the later “Bear” chapters of this book. In the late 1990’s, while on camera safari in Tanzania with my wife and sons, we watched (at *very* close range) a family of three cheetahs pursue and knock down a half-grown Gazelle antelope. For at least five minutes, while the family of big cats feasted voraciously on the hindquarters of their luckless prey, the pitiful animal wailed incessantly --- until finally the mother cheetah became annoyed at the racket and walked forward to seize the neck and sever the spinal cord with one chomp. Like it or not, hunting gives one “a window on the real world” as almost nothing else can.

Most wild animals that die at the hands of a *human* hunter are fortunate, indeed, because *otherwise* their natural demise in the jaws of any other predator is almost always going to be more painful and drawn out. They literally get eaten alive! Those are the simple facts. Animal-rights crusaders may object and try to argue that most wild creatures die of old age, disease, or starvation, but they are misinformed and simply wrong (in most cases). If they would simply study the natural world as it really is, they would come to understand that predators always prey *first* on the young, the weak, the sick, and the elderly. When it comes to criminal predators, it is not all that different within human society, is it? The young, the sick, the weak, and the elderly. The “easy pickings” are the first to be targeted, and, in the world of nature, almost always the first to die.

HUNTING AS “SPORT”

Returning now to our discussion of hunting as a “sport,” I must say I really have no problem with the words when they are used in the context of hunting being a recreational *outdoor sport*. There are outdoor sports, and there are indoor sports. The problem with the word, “sport,” however, is that --- increasingly today --- in their zeal to put an end to all hunting, the anti-hunting groups always use the word in conjunction with other words to create negative connotations in the minds of the non-hunting public. Hunting is described as “sport-hunting,” or as a “blood sport.”

The phrases are highly charged. Hunting IS a blood sport --- in the sense that blood flows, and creatures die. But then, so is fishing a blood sport --- and even *eating* --- for the same basic reasons. To say that people hunt “for sport” is to trivialize the experience, and that language suggests hunters place a rather low value on the life of the birds or animals they pursue. . . . Or that they venture afield to shoot at anything they find out there that walks, crawls, runs, or flies. It has been my observation that just the opposite is true. Most hunters I know take their hunting very seriously --- and their killing even more so. They enjoy observing wildlife undisturbed in its natural environment. They are *very* selective about *which* animal they decide to try for, and --- if successful in harvesting their quarry --- they often describe the experience in almost religious or spiritual terms.

I think the act of killing reminds us of our *own* mortality, and of just how fragile and precious all life really is. It reaffirms and reminds us of the “interconnectedness” of *all* life. In the words of Dr. Swan, “Seeing the death of an animal occur by your own hands makes one appreciate life even more.” Perhaps that’s because we come to understand --- on both a more conscious and more visceral plane --- that all life hangs by a thread, and that *we* might just as easily have been the one to perish.

Anti-hunters will object to the word, “harvest,” as a euphemism for the word, “kill” or “murder.” Yet “harvest” is an entirely valid word, because there is a new crop of fawns, calves, lambs, and cubs born every spring, and the resource is constantly renewing itself annually. Embraced as one of the major tools in the sound wildlife management practices of the various states and provinces throughout North America, hunting --- and most especially “trophy” hunting --- help to perpetuate the resource. Let me explain more fully.

TROPHY HUNTING

Consider the following irony: Most people who think negatively (or cast aspersions) upon “trophy hunters” do not hesitate to order lamb or veal for dinner in a restaurant occasionally. In other words the very youngest cattle or sheep that haven’t grown up yet. For reasons

grounded only in ignorance, anti-hunters reserve their greatest scorn for “trophy hunters.” It is a bad rap. The fact of the matter is that so-called “trophy hunters” should be regarded as the “saints” of the hunting world, since they make by far the biggest contributions to conserving the resource --- in *many* different ways. Some choose to enter their trophy animals in the record books, but many more do not. They hunt only for themselves. They set their own standards as to what they consider a “trophy,” and --- as they go through the various stages of life --- their definition of a “trophy” animal usually undergoes periodic “upgrading” or revision.

*Trophy hunting is all about a competition with yourself, and with a quarry whose much keener senses and greater knowledge of home habitat give it all the advantages. All, save one. Man’s only advantage is the possession of rational intelligence, and sometimes you even wonder about that --- so refined are the self-preservation instincts of the older, more mature animals you seek. As a trophy hunter, you are trying to find, and then “outsmart” a particular animal, or a particular *quality* of animal. Far more often than not, you return from the hunt empty-handed, not having taken a single shot. You have usually passed up opportunities at several (or perhaps many) lesser animals that don’t meet the standard you’ve set for yourself. Nonetheless, you come home happy and recreated from having been in the “great outdoors,” and your spirit feels refreshed from the fact that your instinctual psyche was able to journey backwards in time to the Paleolithic and beyond.*

A true trophy hunter automatically passes up all the female animals he encounters. Likewise the younger ones, as well --- of either sex. Thus, nearly all animals harvested by trophy hunters are older males --- a fact that clearly helps in the preservation of the species. When a hunter finally does decide to remove a mature “elder statesman” from the population of the species he’s hunting, it is an act that makes a significant contribution to the conservation of the resource.

Why is that, you ask? Well, for several reasons. First and most importantly, the death of that one animal will very likely mean --- during the next winter --- that two or more younger animals (fawns, calves, yearlings) will NOT die. For all prey-type creatures, winter is by far the toughest and most dangerous time of the seasonal year.

The leaves are off the trees and bushes, leaving them very little cover. Snow is usually on the ground, making it very easy for predators to track them. Food is scarce and must be pawed at and exposed underneath the snow. *But the critical thing to understand is this:* There is usually only a very limited, finite supply of food available in the winter range of wild animals, and a mature buck, bull, or ram --- being much larger and stronger than any of the females and the youngsters--- *is necessarily going to consume more of that limited food supply than any of his smaller companions.* Without adequate food intake during those hard winter months, an animal cannot generate enough energy to outrun his predators ---especially in deep snow.

Secondly, as for the horned species, like wild sheep, goats, bison and muskox, the oldest males are seldom any longer “in the loop” when it comes to the breeding and perpetuation of the species. The somewhat younger, more virile rams and bulls (the “middle-aged” ones) have already kicked most of the older ones out of the herd, so to speak. With regard to the sheep, for example, the six-, seven- and eight-year-old rams are the ones that do 90% of the late-fall breeding, and those are the genes biologists and trophy hunters, alike, want to see passed on to the next generation.

Occasionally, a five-year-old will successfully mount a ewe and breed her, but the rigors of the month-long rut are so strenuous that unless an older ram drops out of the breeding cycle altogether his chances of having enough fat left on his frame to survive a harsh winter are not good. In general, wild sheep start dying of old-age around eight years, anyway, but their horns always continue to grow larger and longer until death. A very few rams do live long enough to reach their “teens,” but I have never met a trophy sheep hunter yet who wouldn’t --- if given the choice --- opt to take a ten- or twelve-year-old ram over a seven- or eight-year-old one.

I think one other thing needs to be appreciated about this type of hunter. When he or she chooses to “take a pass” on the opportunity to harvest a fully mature ram, in the hopes of finding (and having a chance at) an even older, bigger set of horns, that choice is always made with the clear understanding that such a trophy animal will be considerably harder to locate and --- once located --- approach. Not

only are such animals simply scarcer, by far, but they are even wiser and more experienced at evading hunters during the hunting season than are the average, mature, breeding rams. Most important of all --- since they have dropped out of the rutting ritual --- their judgment is no longer blinded by their hormones, and their survival instincts are not nearly so vulnerable to being short-circuited by their procreative urges. It is really that way with all species, including man: The drive for sex during the younger, "hotter" years exacts a terrible toll on reason and sound judgment. And in the wildlife kingdom, it frequently gets you killed.

There are other reasons, as well, why the removal of a large male from the general population helps to conserve the resource. Here is one shocking, cardinal fact that very few non-hunters have any awareness of. Among the predator species, whenever a *human* hunter kills an adult male bear or mountain lion, he or she is committing an act that **INCREASES** the population of those species. The reason is simple. Wildlife biologists tell us that close to half of all the bear cubs and lion kittens born each spring get killed and eaten by the adult males before they ever reach an age old enough to leave their mothers. (More on this later.)**

**[FOOTNOTE for bottom of page]: (The negative impact on the wildlife populations by these cannibalistic, infanticidal killers is far from limited to their own species! It is estimated that adult male lions and bears are responsible for the death of up to one half of the annual crop of newborn Moose and Elk calves in North America. Wolves, of course, also take a huge toll, wherever they are present, but their ranges [despite their recent comeback in the Rocky Mountain West] are not yet nearly as widespread as the ranges of bears, lions, and coyotes." In those states, however, like Idaho and Wyoming, where wolves were reintroduced in the final quarter of the 20th century, their numbers have exploded beyond all "educated" predictions, and when the very deep snow pack of the winter of 2005-2006 came along, the Idaho wolf population took drastic advantage of the limited mobility of the elk. Idaho wildlife officials fear that *more than half of all the elk in the state* may have died from wolf predation in just those few short months.)

To sum things up: *Both fundamentally and quintessentially*, ethical trophy hunting is the highest and purest form of fair-chase hunting that can exist. Because it demands the most of a hunter in terms of self-discipline, determination, physical conditioning, energy output, self-sacrifice, *and tolerance for low odds on success*, true trophy hunting gives any trophy-class animal the highest odds of survival in the age-old contest between the hunter and the hunted.

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COME ALONG WITH US

The truly remarkable things I have witnessed throughout the wilds of North America are beyond countable numbers. They are, of course, scenes no permanent city-dweller could ever experience, and I suspect one or two of the things I've witnessed may never have been viewed by *any* human being before. I have some amazing stories to tell. Many will be told in this book. Some are dramatic in the extreme and may make you gasp out loud. Others are perhaps funny enough to get a laughing fit started. Still others, I hope, will touch your soul --- as they did mine when I experienced them.

My pilgrimage to the "holy grail" of North American bowhunting carried me at least a quarter-of-a-million miles (vehicular and airline combined). It spanned exactly 40 years. I don't have the foggiest idea, however, as to how many thousands of miles I must have ridden on horseback, or hiked on foot, during my hunting lifetime. What I do know is that more than a dozen pairs of worn-out hunting boots bore silent witness to the monumental effort involved, and my eyes have stored within my memory bank enough images of beautiful scenes and remarkable places to fill ten thousand photo albums. Some of those images will be "painted" for you in the 29 chapters that await you. To hunter and non-hunter alike, I extend the invitation to come along and witness the NATURAL WORLD of North American wildlife as Hayden, Dallen and I have perceived it --- and experienced it first-hand.

