

Fall 2010

# WILD SHEEP™

the journal of the mountain hunter and committed conservationist



  
WILD SHEEP  
Foundation

OFFICIAL SPONSOR

**Midway**

[midwayusa.com](http://midwayusa.com)

100% AND 1/2 ENGINEERING™ for Hunting



BY RON RABOUD

I don't know if it is a genetic flaw, too much testosterone or just plain male ego, but we just cannot resist a competition no matter what the prize. This competition had its beginning at different locations, separated by thousands of miles and several continents.

The first location was on the frontlines of our current wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. These frontlines resulted in the horrific injuries suffered by our "competitors" – our wounded military veterans.

The second location was here in the states, Florida to be specific, with the formation of Wounded Warrior Outdoors (WWO). WWO is a 501(c)(3) charitable corporation formed to provide therapeutic outdoor hunting and fishing opportunities for combat wounded United States and Canadian military veterans.

Our competition took place this past May on a Spring Bear Hunt with Otter Lake Guide Outfitters in Princeton, British Columbia. Our guest hunters were a Marine Scout Sniper, two Navy Seals and three Army Soldiers. All were wounded veterans injured by Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs), while protecting our freedoms far from home. Their injuries included traumatic amputation, soft tissue

damage from small arms fire, and traumatic brain injuries (TBI).

Their "prize" was a custom-made elk antler belt buckle donated by Glen Chrisman, one of our supporters from California.

One of WWO's main goals is to provide therapeutic opportunities, in addition to outdoor experiences. We selected a spot and stalk-style of bear hunt rather than a baited-style of hunt for that very reason. This style of hunting would require hiking, climbing, and daily physical challenges, in addition to being an enjoyable hunting experience.

As most of us have experienced on our own trips, sharing a camp comprised of strangers begins rather slowly and reserved. It's kind of like a poker game – a little positioning and observation of the other players. Our group was made up of all strangers from different branches of the military with various degrees of hunting experience. There was also a variety of injuries and limitations among the members. These young wounded veterans were all in their 20s, all pursuing their first trophy bear and all hoping to go home with the "buckle."

Our first day was slow, a result of jet lag and spring weather not conducive to bear hunting. It was rainy and cold; not exactly weather

that would encourage bears to leave their warm winter dens.

Day two also began slowly with limited bears being seen. Late in the afternoon of day two, outfitter Dave Wabnegger spotted a large black phase bear feeding in a secluded pocket of clover. Our hunter was off on his first "stalk." Dan is a Navy Seal that was injured by an IED just eight months prior. The explosion resulted in numerous injuries, including the loss of both legs above the knee. He was also new to the prosthetics, having only received them a few weeks prior to this trip. To reach a position that offered a shot at this trophy would take effort on Dan's behalf. After navigating tall grass, downed timber and a short, but very steep climb, we arrived at our position only to see the bear walk into the woods.

With Dan's limitations, a stalk was out of the question. Dave Wabnegger made a decision that Dan would sit and give it some time to see if the bear returned. During their sit, the weather changed from pleasant to a spring blizzard in a matter of minutes with no bear in sight. Just minutes before heading back to the truck, the big boy stepped out. Dan was ready and made a perfect shot at a distance of 150 yards, harvesting his trophy.



After high-fives and even a few hugs, we made it down to his bear. Our pictures included one happy Navy Seal and one huge bear, well over 7 feet squared. A bear of that size should easily take the "buckle," but the week was still young.

Day three had Marine Sniper Povas Miknaitis, along with Guide Jordie Cook, harvest a trophy cinnamon phase-bear. In true sniper fashion, Povas cleanly harvested his trophy with one shot at a distance of 325 yards. This was a long shot for a spring bear hunt, but a chip shot for a marine sniper.

As the week progressed, so did our hunters. A group that had arrived as strangers was experiencing the magic of hunting camp. The hunters were relaxing, establishing friendships and, for a brief period of time, escaping from their new daily routines that included surgeries, hospital visits, and daily therapy. This week their therapy took place in the mountains of British Columbia rather than treadmills in hospital basements. It also included trout fishing, as well as trash talking – who was the better shot, the better spotter of game or the better branch of service.

Going into the last two days, it did not look good for the Army. The Marines and Seals were done, tagged out and enjoying stress-free times in the outdoors following a successful hunt. No pressure, just plenty of time and opportunity to trash-talk those hunters in camp that had missed opportunities or shots. The buckle was still solidly in Dan's possession; however, that was soon to change, as was the Army's success.

On the last scheduled evening of our trip, a first-time hunter from Ft.



Lauderdale, Army veteran Jermaine Strachen, along with guide Ed Roberson, found the "Honey Hole" we all searched for. For whatever reason, they found an area covered up with bears, including two monsters. Following a blown stalk within 75 yards of a large bear, it looked like the day was over and unsuccessful, but how fast things can change. While driving out of the area, Ed spotted what appeared to be a good bear feeding in a replanted logging slash. There was just enough time for a quick stalk.

Ed and Jermaine, stalked up close and personal to within 60 yards of the feeding bear, a monster chocolate phase bear feeding unconcerned. Following a brief bit of chaos, Jermaine anchored the big boy. Dan's buckle "prize" was now very much in question with another 7-foot plus bear on the ground.

Our two remaining hunters, Pennsylvania resident Brad Fasnacht, and New Jersey resident Bob Andrzejczak were still empty handed. Outfitter, Dave Wabnegger, generously extended the trip by one additional day. Travel plans were adjusted and plans were made for the final bonus day of hunting. Both hunters harvested their trophies within the last minutes of daylight on that last bonus evening. What a week, what a hunt, what a group of hunters, all harvesting bears: two chocolate, one cinnamon and the rest blacks; all trophies, with two of record-book quality.

Prior to the beginning of the hunt, I would have gauged the success of our trip by the size and quality of the trophies our veterans harvested. Although we did indeed accomplish that task, it was not



the ultimate success we enjoyed. Watching our wounded veterans relax and enjoy the beautiful outdoor surroundings, accomplish therapeutic goals far in excess of those established by the Walter Reed Army Hospital medical staff was in my mind our greatest success.

How can you thank someone adequately for the loss of their arms, their legs or the tragic loss of their careers? The answer is that we cannot and never will. What we can continue to do with your help and support is to show them the admiration and respect they deserve. We can reintroduce or, in some cases, introduce them to the outdoor world we all enjoy and show them that even with their present physical limitations, they too can enjoy future hunts and camps, and establish friendships they can enjoy based on the freedoms they sacrificed so unselfishly to protect.

Those of us who enjoy the outdoors know well the healing capabilities it provides. I know these are never-before experienced tough economic times, but if at all possible, please help us provide future outdoor healing opportunities for these deserving young people. Visit our website, [www.woundedwarrioroutdoors.com](http://www.woundedwarrioroutdoors.com), to learn how you can help.

As for the buckle, the Army came through at the end. The large chocolate bear Jermaine harvested beat Dan out by less than one-half inch.

The buckle will continue to be our "prize" on all future trips. I hope to be able to share the story of future buckles with you for many years to come. WS