



From the Spring 2007 issue of *Wild Sheep* magazine:

John Porter's Morning Creek Outfitters

"After 12 years of anticipation, I had finally drawn a Wyoming Bighorn Sheep tag. Having maximum points as a non-resident put me in a pool of approximately 135 other non-resident sheep hunters and odds finally on my side. I called John Porter of **Morning Creek Outfitters**, to consult with which area I should apply. We agreed that Area 4 would give me better odds because most of the unit is wilderness area with limited road access. I marked my calendar for the draw date and waited. To my surprise, I got a phone call from John a week in advance of the draw date and he informed me that I had drawn the Area 4 tag. His work had already begun, he already put in requests for campsites from the Division of Wildlife as they are issued to outfitters on a first come, first served basis. The day had finally come. I arrived in Cody, Wyoming September 9th, two days before the five year anniversary of the attack on the World Trade Center. The 14-hour drive from Minnesota was reminiscent of that 9/11 day as I was traveling on business and about to pull into the airport in western Kansas when my traveling plans detoured me to a 14-hour long drive home. Upon arriving in Cody, I called my guide Brett Richmond. I expected to meet with him the following morning and head for the mountains, but was surprised when he recommended that I spend the next day hanging around Cody, going for a hike, and taking in the Buffalo Bill museum and let my body get acclimated to higher altitude. Coming from 1000' elevation in Minnesota, Brett told me several stories of flatlanders

getting altitude sickness, and even a case where a hunter died. After applying for 12 years and finally drawing the once in a lifetime tag, there was no reason to rush into the mountains and risk getting altitude sickness. Sunday, September 10, Nick Abbott, Brett's assistant guide and wrangler meets me at my hotel and we head to Brett's home where we load up six horses, gear, and food for a 10-day hunt. Three and one half hours later and 10 miles from the trailhead, our hunting expedition is deep into Area 4 setting up base camp. Having traversed streams, crossed numerous rockslides, and following trails that drop off 200 feet straight down is nothing short of a pure adrenaline rush. I try to remember that Brett says that the horse does not want to fall off a cliff any more than I do. Good thing to remember as this is only the trip into camp, which was on a trail maintained by the forest service. Woke up the next morning with much anticipation about the hunt, but was hit with a dose of wilderness reality when we had a black bear in camp for breakfast. Luckily it was only a young one that scared off easily and was the only bear that we would see throughout the trip. By 8:30 am we were headed up a draw off the main creek, which to me looked like was going to be nearly impossible. I really came to appreciate good mountain horses and their ability to climb 60 -70 degree slopes and gain altitude by 1500 - 2000 feet on a daily basis and get us easily into the high country. At tree line, we tied the horses and were on foot for the rest of the day. The basin we entered had many patches of snow remaining from the previous winter as well as numerous springs that just came out of the mountainside. There was a sheep sign everywhere. We eased up a draw, which gave us a complete view of the basin, and came face to face with six rams at only 75 yards away. We quickly ducked back down into the draw and let things settle down. After 30 minutes the six rams we busted were bedded down at 600 yards. They were all in the four to five year-old range, but none were shooters. Brett, Nick and I eased up the draw on our bellies and started canvassing the entire basin. The six rams had joined up with eleven others to form one band of seventeen at around 600 yards, and on the other side of the basin lower on the mountain there were nine more rams bedded down at 700 yards. By 11:00 am on the first day of hunting we were in a basin with 26 rams. We slowly eased back

down the draw and circled around to a vantage point where we could scope the rams undetected.

We were able to determine that three rams stood out among the others. Two would score in the mid 160's and one was close to 170; trophy caliber by Wyoming standards. Getting as close as we could without blowing our position, we were now playing the waiting game. During the wait, we watched 14 more rams enter the basin from the other side of the valley, which now increased the total to 40 rams in one basin. At 4:00 pm the sheep slowly started to get up out of their beds. Our hope was that they would feed down the mountain closer to our position and get within 300 - 350 yards.

The closest the biggest ram got was 520 yards. I normally would not attempt a shot at this distance, but I had practiced at the Cody Rifle range and hit a 500 meter or 540 yard target three times in a row with a six inch group. I had a Leopold (4 1/2 X 14) range compensating scope on my 300 Weatherby that allowed me to hold right on the target at distances of 200, 300, 400, 450 and 500 yards. It was now 5:00 pm and decisions had to be made to either attempt a shot or back out undetected and come back tomorrow. I felt confident in my shooting ability and had a good rest. I would try and try and try and try again.

Four misses over the top and one at the feet of the largest ram. I don't think I ever felt more depressed on a hunting trip. I had just shot five times at a 170-class ram, missed, and blew every ram out of the basin. Day two took us further up the main creek to the head of another basin which held the last 14 rams that crossed over the ridge the previous day. Again the country was beautiful, lots of grass, glaciers melting and forming the creek that rushed by our campsite six miles downstream. It was 90 degrees and too hot for walking. We spotted six rams very high on the mountain. There was no chance of hunting this band, as it was too late in the day to make a stalk. Day three took us back up into the basin that held 40 rams two days earlier. We were hoping that some of the sheep were not totally blown out of the country. The basin was empty with the exception of eight ewes and lambs. We proceeded to hike to the top of the 11,000 foot mountain and glass into the basins on the other side. We ran into four scattered young rams each by themselves and located a band of seven rams two miles away that were actually on the peak right above our camp. From that distance we could not tell how good the rams were, but at least we knew where we were going to hunt tomorrow. 40 rams two days earlier. We were hoping that some of the sheep were not totally blown out of the country. The basin was empty with the exception of eight ewes and lambs. We proceeded to hike to the top of the 11,000 foot mountain and glass into the basins on the other side. We ran into four scattered young rams each by themselves and located a band of seven rams two miles away that were actually on the peak right above our camp. From that distance we could not tell how good the rams were, but at least we knew where we were going to hunt tomorrow. Day four came with much anticipation. We did not want to

rush up the mountain too early and catch the sheep up grazing so we ate a good breakfast and headed up the trail at 11:00 am in hopes that we would spot the seven rams bedded which would give us the ability to look them over carefully through the spotting scopes. We slowly hunted up the mountain staying close to the pine trees to maintain some sort of cover. We did not know where the sheep were and had to be ready at all times. At 2:00 pm we were through the steep stuff, but out in the open. One step forward, glass, another step, glass; we did this for another 30 minutes and were high enough to just see the peak of the mountain. We spotted one ram sky lined on the peak, and soon located the other six rams. They hadn't moved more than 20 yards from where we put them to bed the previous evening. We were 350 yards from the rams and were able to determine that two rams were definitely shooters. Brett estimated them to be about 165+. The two rams were distinctly different. One was heavy with a tight curl and dark horns; the other was heavy with flared lighter horns. It was a matter of which one I liked better as the score would probably be very close to each other. We still needed to get higher on the mountain because no shooting lanes were available. Any shot taken from here would end up in the side of the mountain. Belly crawling for 45 minutes, we closed the distance to 250 yards. The sheep remained bedded and did not have any idea we were there. Again the waiting game was on. There was no clear shot at the vitals when the rams were bedded. We would wait for them to get up and be ready to shoot. At this same time, the weather had really turned for the worse. Thunder, lightning, rain, snow and ice showers were all around us. Lightning strikes were hitting the peaks a half-mile away and ice pellets the size of dimes were coming down.

Brett told me that the sheep would not stay out in the open long if it continued. Within one minute of Brett giving the heads up, all the sheep were up and moving around the peak. I centered the crosshairs on the flared ram and pulled the trigger. I could hear the bullet hit with a loud 'whack' over the rain,

ice and thunder. I had just completed the third leg of my grand slam. The official score of my Wyoming bighorn 168 B&C points. We pulled into camp around 9:00 pm that evening and ate dinner in a driving rainstorm. The next morning we woke to an overcast day and peaks with six inches of fresh snow. I want to thank my wife Nichol and three children for being understanding and having the patience and supporting my passion for hunting. I also want to thank my dad who died in 2004 for taking the time to take this kid hunting in his spare time. Finally, I want to thank the men and women who serve in the armed forces who protect our great country. We must not take for granted the jobs they do on a daily basis to ensure the freedoms that we have all come to enjoy and expect."

**Tony Kirsch: Chaska,
Minnesota**