

Smithers has been described as a quaint town in an alpine setting, and having been there twice, I can honestly say that it's an accurate description. The surrounding mountains, which I've always seen snow covered, and its polite residents, who slow down to let you cross the streets safely, make it an engaging place for an outdoor resort vacation.

But Smithers is also the location for the jump-off point of many British Columbia outfitters.

As before, I was hunting the remote Spatsizi Wilderness Plateau region of Northern B.C. but this time with the Collingwood Brothers. The travel to camp took place in a DeHavilland Otter from a base just outside of Smithers.

It's a cold flight (dress warmly) that takes about 2 hours to reach Bug Lake.

Bug Lake, northwest of Coldfish Lake (a larger lake more easily found on maps) is the site of base camp, one of several maintained by the Collingwoods.

The facilities at Bug Lake are comprised of permanent single room cabins, as well as a large corral and stable for the horses.

Some hunts such as moose or caribou can be taken daily from this site, others such as mountain goat usually require a spike camp for a couple of days.

This trip for me was a combination moose/mountain goat hunt, so I enjoyed both.

After the standard introductions around camp and ensuring that my rifle still fired (some call this sighting in; I believe it's an opportunity for the

guides to evaluate your familiarity with the weapon) we left the following morning on horseback to begin searching the Eaglenest Mountains for goats.

Our destination was a small cabin along Coldfish Lake that was commonly used for fishing. It was several miles from base camp, and upon arrival we unloaded our horses, walked past the beaver lodge at the edge of the lake, and immediately

started glassing. Several goats were spotted, but as our ride had taken 5 hours and daylight was beginning to fade, we decided to mentally mark their position for the following morning.

Very few goat hunts are physically easy, and none are expected to be.

Lose weight, get into shape, and more fun will be had by all.

Goats typically don't meander very far and their beautiful white coats are spotlighted against the typically grey mountainside shale by the sun's reflection.

Any bright spot of white above the tree line should be examined carefully, as it in all likelihood represents a

goat's position.

There were three of us leaving the rustic cabin that morning; myself, my guide Martin, and Martin's wife Sharon who very capably acted as our wrangler for the hunt. We rode for approximately an hour,

stopping to glass every now and then, attempting to angle closer to a point below where we had seen the goats from the previous evening. Choosing a spot and picketing the horses, we shed some layers and emptied our packs for the climb.

Unfortunately, a swampy area separated us from the start of the uphill effort, but we picked our way across the one hundred yards of water holes, downed trees, brush, tussocks and muck until the real work began.

It took us four hours to climb to the high ridge of the mountain, which Martin declared to be the steepest slope he's ever climbed for a goat.

Loose shale, juniper, and dead falls had all of us grateful for the brief momentary pauses during the climb.

On several occasions while nearing the top we encountered nannies and kids at distances of less than 100 yards.

I can only express absolute excitement and appreciation at how beautiful these animals really are.

Their white coats appear as pure as snow and practically glow in the sunlight.

But we were looking for billy's so our upward climb continued.

Once on top, we travelled the ridgeline

peeking over the side,
more often than not
actually finding goats!

Apparently goats like to
graze just below the high
ridges of the mountains.

We saw as many as 30

goats within the first two hours, including one group of nine, but unfortunately none were mature billy's. Then it happened; Martin found a billy deep in a boulder strewn gash in the mountainside.

He was laying on a ledge facing us, 245

yards away, with his black horns presented against the clean white of his body.

Creeping to the edge of the ravine and getting settled prone, we took the steeply angled downhill shot, and the billy fell 30 feet without

sustaining any
noticeable damage.

Horns intact!

We descended into the
boulders and realized
that we would not be
able to follow this path
back down the
mountain.

Three hours later, with our packs full, we climbed rock to rock out of the ravine.

This was the biggest challenge up to this point of the entire hunt.

The climb back up to where we could safely descend the mountain to

our horses was brutal.

After a 15 minute rest at the top we began the climb back down.

The severity of the grade was not appreciated until now.

Martin fell several times with his heavy pack and

once rolled 10 feet in the loose shale and gravel.

My trekking pole was indispensable as it provided a third leg of support.

It was steep going up, but dangerous going down.

When we reached the swamp at the bottom, it was dark.

Tired, tired, tired.

Going through the swamp in the dark made me wish that we had spent the night on the mountain.

But with clothing wet from exertion, a night on the mountain without shelter would have been hypothermic.

Sharon, having returned to the horses during the daylight, had a fire going for us to navigate by.

This allowed us to steer

our course directly to where she and the horses were waiting.

The flickering light of that small fire was a most welcome beacon!

Getting back to the cabin, I changed out of my still wet clothes, and climbed into my sleeping

bag.

We started early that morning, shot a goat at 4:00pm, and reached the cabin at midnight – a very long day.

My first goat!

The morning came early, and with our goat hunt finished we began our 5 hour ride back to the cabins at Bug Lake. Meals are terrific at base camp; there is a full time cook, and we had time to eat very well before our search for a moose

began. Since moose were plentiful in the immediate area, this part of my trip was to be based from Bug Lake.

Did I say plentiful?

On the first ride out from camp, Martin and I saw 25 moose, the

vast majority being
bulls in the 40-45 inch
range.

But Martin was looking
for a 50 inch bull with
triple brow tines, so we
passed on these and
prepared for the
second day of our
moose hunt.

At this time of the year, we were maybe a week prior to the rut.

Yet we were able to observe some half interested sparring which was

phenomenal.

Moose are enormous.

They like to browse
the willows, which
grow in this area to
about five feet.

The legs of a mature

moose are long enough to allow them to stand above the willows such that the bulk of their bodies can be seen practically unobstructed.

This gives them the

appearance of a
freight train boxcar!

Just a big blocky
1000lb body standing
above the willows!

On the second day
we rode out into a
snow storm.

When we reached the top of the plateau looking over Bug Lake, we were at 5000 feet with 100 yards visibility.

As is true whenever we rode, the ride up to that plateau is no picnic! Mud...s witchbacks...steep, needless to say the horses were rested several times before reaching the

top. Wh
ereas the day
before, Martin and
I were able to
glass valleys and
hills in the
distance, the
current storm
prevented us from

utilizing our
binoculars
effectively.

But while
crisscrossing the
plateau, pretty
much just
wandering around

trying not to get
lost, we
inadvertently
stumbled into
three nice bulls!

We were close,
within 100 yards,
and this proximity

surprised both
them and us.

For a brief
moment they
looked at us and
we looked at
them.

Then they left.

Just drifted away
into the blowing
snow.

But Martin and I
rode to where we
had last seen

them, dismounted,
and Martin began
to call.

Vaguely we could
see the moose
through the snow
and as we
watched we could

see them begin to circle, responding to the calling.

We quickly hobbled the horses, tied them nose to tail, and began to stalk with

intent to intercept.

The snow still fell.

Forty-five minutes
later...no moose.

We had stepped

quietly in the
snow covered
grass, expecting
the moose to be
just a little further
ahead, but when
we got “ahead”
they simply

weren't where we
thought we'd see
them.

Stopping and
wondering which
direction to try, or
how much further

to go, we looked around and saw them 50 yards behind us.

We had crossed paths in the storm and neither had

seen the other.

I whispered to
Martin, “Should I
shoot one of
these Moose?”

He replied after
several seconds,

“The one in front”.

I immediately
dropped down
onto the snow,
shot from an
improvised sitting
position, and

moments later I
had my first
moose!

A couple of hours
later (a downed
Moose is labor
intensive) he was

caped, quartered,
and we were
riding back to
Bug Lake.

Ironically after the
moose was
down, it stopped

snowing.

For more
information on
Collingwood
Brothers Guides

and Outfitters
visit their
website at [www.
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